

KUNALA

AN INDIAN FANTASY



by ARPAD FERENCZY

KUNALA



KUNALA: AN INDIAN FANTASY is a new work of fiction from the pen of Arpad Ferenczy, who became known to the reading public last year by his satirical novel *The Ants of Timothy Thümmel*. In this new novel he narrates a number of Indian Buddhistic love stories. The chief hero of them, Kunala, is the personified symbol of pessimism as regards women. The theme running through his tales is the dangerousness of the female sex, the wickedness of womenkind. The stories, sixteen in number, are full of boisterous, genuine humour, and in many instances illustrate rather the stupidity of men, when they are in love, than the wickedness of their temptresses.



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KUNALA

By the Same Author

THE ANTS OF TIMOTHY THÜMMEL

KUNALA

An Indian Fantasy

BY

ARPAD FERENCZY

WITH A FOREWORD BY

C. A. HEWAVITARNE

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Foreword

BY

DR. C. A. HEWAVITARNE ¹

INDIA is the treasure-house of legend and fairy tale, and through the ages she has given in abundance from her treasure to the world. Along the caravan-routes west and east, besides her priceless silks and woven gossamers, she sent her sparkling gems of wit and wisdom of greater worth and more enduring value. Some of these have found a second home in the West in somewhat different attire, but the original beauteous Indian form can be discovered by those who seek. By far the earliest of these were the fables which were carried from India to Greece, to be spread thence, in the form given them by Æsop, to the Farthest West. Then later the Persians and the Arabs incorporated many of them in their marvellous tales of jinns and magic craft. In India the inexhaustible sources are to be found in the Mahabharata, the Jataka-tales, the Pancatantra, the Hitopadesa, the Kathasarit Sagara, the Vetala-panca-vinsati, and numerous other collections, not to mention the

¹ Secretary of the Mahabodhi Society; Editor, in Colombo, of the Sacred Books of Buddhism; and Commissioner of Ceylon at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924.

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unwritten folk-tales that abound in the village-homes throughout India.

Probably the earliest Indian folk-lore is found in the Jatakas, five hundred and forty-seven in number, which, according to the tradition, were related by the great Buddha Gautama himself. These stories are still the living heritage of the Buddhist countries of Asia, and, especially among us Buddhists in Ceylon, it is with this fairy-world that the developing child first comes in contact. These tales, the stories of the former lives of the Buddha, were intended to inculcate his own virtues and powers, such as charity, compassion, selflessness, unswerving effort, truth, patience, love, equanimity, and wisdom, which are the possession of Buddha-like personages. The falling away from these virtues was due to the roots of all evil: lust and its concomitant craving for worldly pleasure; anger, and ignorance; and the Buddha exhorted and heartened his disciples – when he noticed any of them flagging in their energy – by recounting to them one of his own experiences in a former life, wherein was overcome the folly and weakness that flesh is heir to. As in the Buddhist psycho-analysis sexuality is the chief source of moral delinquency, one of the principal motives running through these tales is the dangerousness of the female sex, the perversity and wickedness of woman.

This view, which seems so pessimistic to the modern Western mind imbued with Feminism, is

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clearly presented with a special purpose: as a lesson, or warning, to the inhabitants of monasteries who were often distracted and drawn away, by lustful thoughts, from their holy meditations, from the life of renunciation that they had entered upon, and from the ultimate goal of their saintly endeavour – Nirvana. The ideal relation of the Buddhist monk to woman should be – the Buddha said – one of respectful detachment; and in the tales illustrative of his past experiences with women he showed the perils of worldly life and the pitfalls that the guiles of women lead to, at the same time reminding his audience that it is not solely the repression of the passions that is the aim, but the substitution for it of a higher goal of mental activity and psychic development. But the great Teacher knew well that the minds of his disciples, especially of the young novices, could not be fed all the while with abstract moral philosophy and metaphysics; and that is doubtless why his stories show so much boisterous humour, not to say a comic irony, which illustrates in many instances rather the stupidity of man than the wickedness of woman.

These motives of original Buddha-legends, used by the author of '*Kunala*,' have enabled him to depict the incidents of his Indian fantasy in genuine old-Indian colours. By his method of artistic creation, though he has taken many liberties with the original legends, he has succeeded in creating a

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true Buddhistic atmosphere and given us a glimpse of the entrancing beauties of the Himalayan wonder-world, that will take us away from the commonplace of a humdrum life.

Colombo, November 1924.

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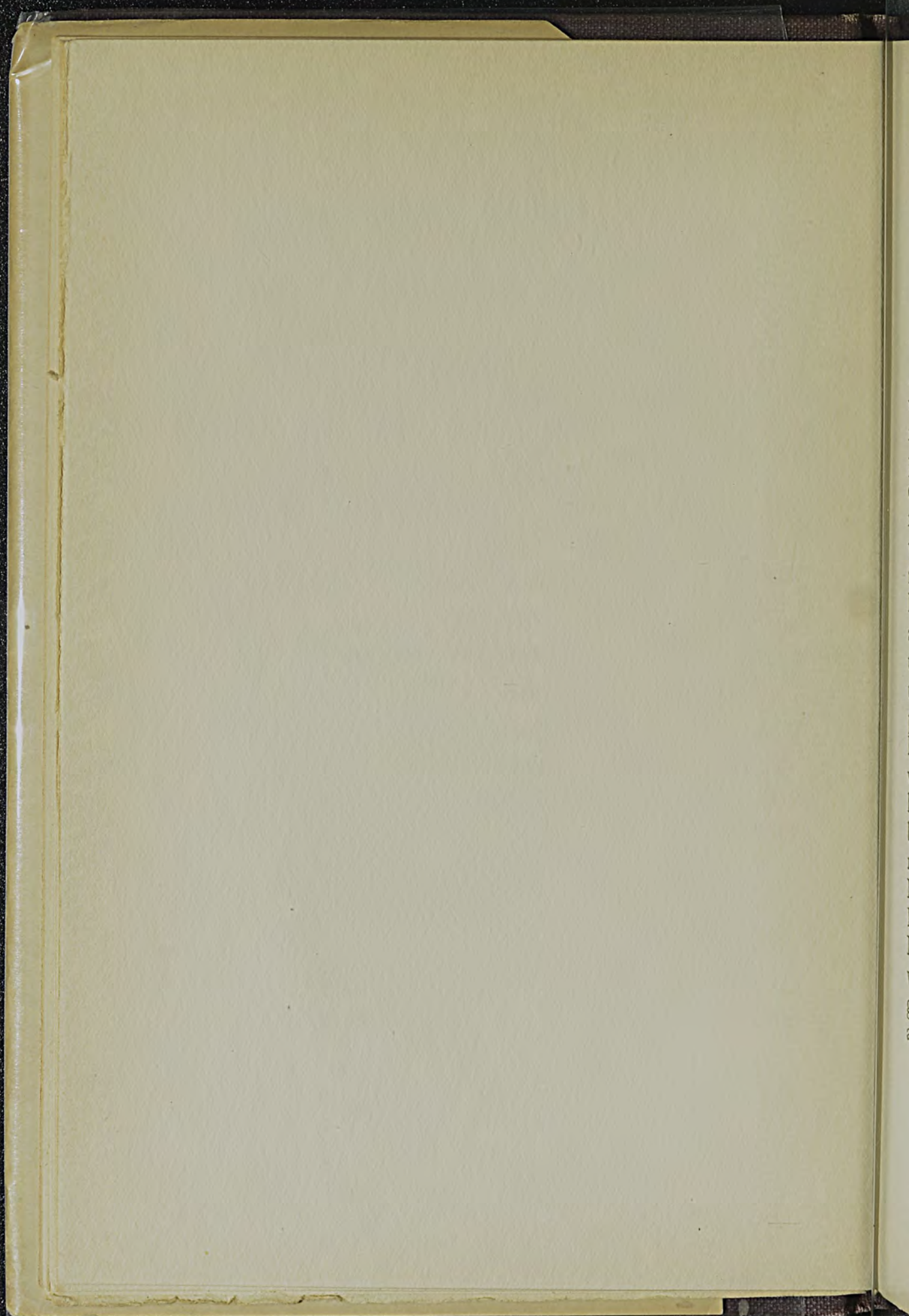
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INTRODUCTION

Kunala



Thus speaks the speaker, thus hears the hearer:—

I.

IN a beautiful forest at the foot of a towering Himalayan peak, where the ground was studded with a hundred varieties of gems and precious minerals, with diamonds and rubies, with sapphires and emeralds, with red arsenic and yellow orpiment and scarlet ochre, with collyrium, vermilion, gold and silver;—where the air was redolent with lovely odours exhaled by a myriad of fragrant flowers, and in the misty pools red lotus, blue lotus, yellow lotus, white lotus, centifolious lotus and water-lilies blazed and sparkled, and spread their ambrosial scent;—in a region populated by thronged multitudes of elephant-families and elephant-mobs, and denized by rhinoceroses, by lions and tigers, by panthers and bears, by jackals, wolves and hyenas, by gayal-oxen, yaks and buffaloes, by apes, cats and long-eared hares, and visited by Eni-stags, Kadali-antelopes and Gazelles of many kinds, as Ruru-gazelles, Passada-gazelles, Nandiya-gazelles, Vata-gazelles, Rohanta-gazelles, Kurunga-gazelles, Sakha-gazelles, Suvanna- and Nigrodha- and Sarabha-gazelles;—where the air was inhabited by gods, demi-gods and fairies, by goblins and spirits kindly disposed, but haunted also by ogres and horse-faced demons;—where it

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resounded with the caws and coos, the chirrups and twitters, the calls and chaunts of a thousand varieties of birds, all mad with joy, as sea-eagles, elephant-birds, flamingoes, peacocks, pheasants, ospreys, quails, partridges, cranes, parabutas, celawakas, bhimakaras and, above all, of myriads of gorgeously appavelled parrots -- in such a beautiful forest dwelled once upon a time a bird by the name of KUNALA.

This Kunala-Bird was the most beautiful and largest parrot of the world. Incomparably gorgeous was his plumage. His feathers glittered and gleamed with a thousand colours. The forest in which he dwelled was called the Forest of Parrots and Kunala was the king of the innumerable multitudes of parrots inhabiting that leafy paradise. His wealth was immense. Not only had he countless subjects, a legion of retainers, and enormous stores of toothsome delicacies, as plant-seeds, fruit-seeds, delicious worms and other appetizing bird-relishes, but, above all, he was rich in wives -- for three and one-half thousand and two parrot-maidens owed him obedience and devotion.

Whenever this mighty Kunala-Bird desired to fly from park to park, from garden to garden, from one river-bank to the other, from one hill crest to another, he was surrounded, guarded and attended by the entire number of his wives.

Two bird-maidens, his foremost queens, grasping a smooth stick of wood firmly with their bills

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caused their Lord to perch upon it as on a throne and flew aloft, while they thought: 'Lest our Royal Spouse, this Mighty Kunala-Bird, be overcome by weariness on this long journey!'

Five hundred bird-maidens flew below him, while they said one to the other: 'If Our Gracious Lord, this Mighty Kunala-Bird, fall from his royal perch, we shall catch him with our wings!'

Five hundred bird-maidens flew above him, while they thought: 'Let not the cruel rays of the sun scorch Our Royal Husband, the Mighty Kunala-Bird!'

Five hundred bird-maidens flew on either side so that neither the cold winds of heaven nor the dust of the earth might inconvenience their princely husband.

Five hundred bird-maidens flew ahead, while some of them thought: 'Lest Our Magnificent Lord, this Mighty Kunala-Bird, be struck by a cowherd or a cattle-drover or a grass-mower or a wood-cutter or a stick-gatherer with a piece of wood or a fragment of a broken pot or with the hand or a clod of earth or a stick or a spear or a stone'; while others of them thought: 'Lest Our Royal Husband, this Mighty Kunala-Bird, come into unpleasant contact with prickly thorns or clinging creepers or shrubs or trees or pillars of stone or ferocious winged creatures.'

Five hundred bird-maidens flew behind him and whispered tender, affectionate, sympathetic, sweet

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words into his ear, lest the Royal Kunala-Bird should weary of the dullness of his journey and become dissatisfied.

Other five hundred bird-maidens flew hither and thither without ceasing, foragers who brought their lord luscious fruits, delectable nuts, and dainty seeds from various trees and shrubs, lest He, the Mighty Kunala-Bird, should suffer from hunger or thirst.

Thus the three and one-half thousand and two bird-maidens bore their royal husband from park to park, from garden to garden, from one river-bank to the other, from one hill-top to another hill-top, from one red-apple forest to another, from one mango-grove to another mango-grove, from one cocoa-plantation to another – with the greatest celerity, thinking only of his comfort and ease and pleasure and gratification. In this most exemplary and noteworthy way these bird-maidens served their lord, the King of the Parrots; but notwithstanding their unselfish and virtuous behaviour he was never satisfied and content and appreciative. With his harsh, unmusical, discordant voice he screeched his wrath and discontent into the air, and never but with such words as these:

‘Go to perdition, ye disreputable birdlings! Cease to exist, ye scandalous parrot-maidens, ye inglorious and faithless wives! Ye be like unto all females in the world, vile, ungrateful and caprici-

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ous, who never repay aught of the superabundance of kindness, of amiability, of tenderness and love which your husband ever showers upon you; like the fitful wind, ye go whithersoever ye list, whithersoever your evil heart directs!'

With such extreme severity, with such inordinate reproaches, did the royal Kunala-Bird treat his three and one-half thousand and two high-born wives, daughters of families of rank and gentle blood.

To the east of the selfsame towering peak, the loftiest of the loftiest mountains of the world, the Himalaya, there is situate another beauteous forest, traversed by a river which springs from the verdant bosom of a wooded hillock and winds the sapphire flood through the avenues of trees in everlasting serenity.

This forest was in no wise inferior to the forest-realm of Kunala, the King of the Parrots. It consisted of a profusion of sandal-trees, ebony-trees, flax-trees, kurawaka-trees, of musalinda-, udumbara-, ingudi- and ketaka-trees, of nigrodha-, simbali-, campaka-, asoka- and sala-trees. Here in a thicket of ailanthuses, of cala-, piyanga- and cola-plants, in a spot gorgeously bedizened with wreaths and garlands of wild jessamine and nectarious dhamkarika-, sataka- and tali-blossoms, intertwined with the graceful tendrils of attimutaka-creepers and re-echoing with the chants of swans and geese and cakrawaka-ducks, above all, by the cadenzas of sweetly singing kokila-birds, cuckoos; — in a spot where dwelled crowds of devout ascetics and penitents, endowed with supernatural powers in perfection, and where the air was inhabited by gods, demigods, kindly spirits, benign fairies and celestial musicians — in such a beauteous forest lived another mighty bird-king, the King of the Cuckoos, PUNNAMUKHA.

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This Royal Cuckoo was the most well-meaning and amiable bird in the world. Though his royal robe was the pattern of simplicity, for his body was covered with unornate black feathers, yet he was endowed with an incomparably sweet and agreeable voice. Ever spoke he softly and with a tender accent, and sang dulcet tunes like any Apsara-fairy in the celestial bosket of the gods, before Indra's throne in paradise. His bill moved with loveliest grace and his eye gleamed ever with joy, like that of one who is drunken with happiness.

This Royal Bird too was ruler over many subjects, the owner of countless treasures and delectable delicacies, and the husband of three and one-half thousand and two wives, devoted and obedient bird-maidens. Whenever he desired to journey hither and thither in his verdant realm, his two principal wives placed him on a smooth stick as on a throne, and transported him in comfort and ease and perfect safety, while they thought:

'Lest our Royal Husband, this Mighty Cuckoo-King, grow weary by reason of the length of the journey!'

And the remaining three and one-half thousand cuckoo-maidens surrounded and served him in as unselfish and devoted a manner as the parrot-maidens served their own mighty lord; they too transported their majestic husband from park to park, from garden to garden, from one river-bank to the other, from one hill-top to another hill-top,

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with the utmost despatch, lest their royal master have cause to complain.

The Mighty Sovereign of the Cuckoos, Punnamukha, however, was ever grateful and appreciative, and continually praised his faithful wives with the following words:

‘Well done, ye Beloved Sisters! Excellent, ye Wives without parallel! It is indeed befitting that ye high-born ladies, daughters of gentle families, serve your Lord and Master with diligence!’

Now it happened that the Cuckoo-King Punnamukha received news of the incomparable puissance of the other bird-sovereign in the neighbouring forest, and thus he resolved to honour him with a visit. For this purpose he despatched five hundred of his bird-maidens to the sylvan palace of his royal brother to announce his coming. After delivering the message of their King, the cuckoo-maidens tarried for a time in sweet converse with the wives of the majestic Kunala-Bird. While conversing with the parrot queens, they failed not to sing the praises of their own royal master Punnamukha for the tender forbearance, the deep gratitude, the sweet words, with which he rewarded his faithful wives for their unparalleled devotion.

Soon the Royal Punnamukha himself, surrounded by all his cuckoo-maidens, was seen approaching the leafy palace of King Kunala. Like a cloud which on a clear evening reflects all the gorgeous hues of the setting sun and is wafted swiftly across the expanse of heaven, thus five hundred of Kunala's queens flew to meet the Royal Cuckoo Punnamukha, and, curving their flight at the meeting, spoke thus:

'Glorious Punnamukha, Mighty Sovereign of the Cuckoos, may the gods bless thee with long life and prosperity! May a son be born to thee en-

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dowed with such an abundance of virtues that like thee he may justly and wisely administer the affairs of the Realm of the Cuckoos! But, O Pui-sant Bird-King, deign to lend thine ear to this our fervent prayer: Our Lord and Master, the Royal Kunala, treats us, his faithful wives, his devoted queens, with unexcelled severity. No matter how tenderly we nurse Him, no matter how obediently and diligently we serve Him, He upbraids and abuses us and utters bitter words the livelong day. All our exertions, all our patient efforts to pacify, to gratify, to conciliate Him are in vain. Mayhap that your royal intercession prevail upon our Lord to speak us fair!

'Your desire shall be fulfilled, Ladies,' the Cuc-koo-King answered on the instant, his sweetly modulated voice caressing the ears of the sorrowful parrot-maidens. 'Your prayer addressed to Pun-namukha is a favour which he deeply appreciates. Perchance I shall succeed, O Royal Birdlings!'

After Punnamukha had entered the presence of the Kunala-Bird and, according to the custom of Bird-Kings, had scraped bill upon bill, he took his place at the side of the Parrot-King on the royal stick, held in the beaks of Kunala's two foremost Queens. Thus they perched side by side, suspended above the ground, surrounded by the multitude of bird-maidens, and conversed amicably regarding various serious matters of state. After the King of the Cuckoos had asked innum-

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erable searching questions concerning King Kunala's realm and people, especially concerning the nests and eggs of the hundred thousand parrots dwelling in the Forest, and had in his turn satisfied the Royal Parrot's curiosity regarding the nest- and egg-policy of his own race, he suddenly asked his host in a tone tender though grave:

'Dear Friend Kunala, may the Gods grant thee a long life! Mayest thou be a just ruler, a wise counsellor, a fearless protector of thy people for a hundred ages ! But, Dear Coz, grant me answer to this one question : tell me, why treatest thou thy high-born wives, ever obedient and kind and tender to thee, with such unaccountable austerity and harshness? Though females speak ever so unkindly, O Friend Kunala, such as we must return good for evil. How much greater thy duty to answer an amiable word with a gracious one!'

But the Royal Kunala-Bird was thrown into a spasm of fury by the well-meaning admonition of his brother-king Punnamukha, and with anger-reddened eyes screamed the following damnatory words at his royal guest:

'Perish, O Friend, thou vile wretch, thou disreputable, thou scandalous, thou inglorious Cuckoo! Cease to exist, O Friend, thou infamous birdling! For the fiery eye of heaven overhead is not more lucid than my conviction that my shameless parrot-females asked thee to admonish me, their Lord and Master and King!'

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Deeply pained and offended the Royal Cuckoo Punnamukha immediately turned his tail-feathers upon the Forest of Parrots, and, accompanied by all his three and one-half thousand and two wives, was swiftly borne back to his own peaceful home, the Forest of the Cuckoos.

Soon after this unfortunate, deplorable meeting the sovereign of the cuckoos, Punnamukha, was stricken with a dangerous disease. Writhing with terrible pain in his stomach, the amiable Bird-King deemed that death was near. When the cuckoo-maidens observed the plight of their lord they mused:

'Illness has seized our husband, the royal Punnamukha; mayhap he will recover, like enough not.'

Thinking thus they left his side and flew whithersoever they listed; some of them, however, flew across the crest of the hill to the neighbouring forest where dwelled the royal Kunala-Bird.

As soon as the cuckoo-maidens had entered the presence of the Parrot-Royalty, Kunala asked them with piercing accents:

'Where is your Royal husband, the King of the Cuckoos, my friend Punnamukha, ye despicable wretched females?'

They answered:

'Illness has seized him, O Mighty Kunala-Bird; in the throes of agonizing pain he lieth, O Mighty Parrot-King. Mayhap he will recover, like enough not.'

But the Royal Kunala waxed wroth at their indifference:

'Perish, all ye disreputable birdlings; cease to exist, ye scandalous cuckoo-maidens, ye inglorious

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and faithless wives ! Ye have deserted my friend, ye ungrateful, ye capricious jades, who never repay aught of the superabundance of kindness, of amicability, of tenderness and love showered upon you, who like the fitful wind go whithersoever ye list, whithersoever your evil heart directs !

Thereupon the Kunala-Bird, anger ruffling the feathers of his royal robe, swiftly sought the presence of his sick coz Punnamukha, the King of the Cuckoos, and screeched at him :

‘Heigh-ho, Friend Punnamukha !’

‘Heigh-ho, Friend Kunala !’ the King of the Cuckoos faintly whispered.

Forthwith the Royal Kunala lifted from the ground the helpless Punnamukha, fed him with manifold efficacious remedies and healing herbs until his disease vanished and health was restored to him.

No sooner had Punnamukha fully recovered than the three and one-half thousand and two cuckoo-maidens returned to their allegiance and service. But when the Kunala-Bird had nursed his friend to his former health and strength, he said to him :

‘Friend Punnamukha, now thou art hale and sound as of yore. Continue therefore to dwell in thy Royal Forest with thy Cuckoo-Queens. I too shall hasten back to my habitation and kindred !’

But the Cuckoo-King replied :

‘Never again, O Royal Kunala, shall I desire and

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suffer the presence of my erstwhile queens ! Ingratitude, malevolence, hardness of heart drove them from me in the time of adversity: let them forever be lacking a husband, a lord and a king !'

When the Great Being – let it be known to all that the Kunala-Bird was no other than the Great Being, Lord BUDDHA Himself, in one of his former lives, when He was born in a sylvan bird's nest as the son of a parrot king – when the Great Being had heard these words, He said:

'If it be thus, O Dear Friend Punnamukha, that thou hast anew ascertained the worthlessness of the female sex in thy present incarnation, I shall to-day again proclaim to you the Eternal Truth concerning Women, as I have frequently proclaimed it to thee during thy ten thousand former lives !'

When the voice of the Great Being was hushed, the whole Himalaya resounded with the call of all gods, demi-gods, spirits, demons, benignant fairies and celestial musicians:

'To-day, Kunala, the King of the Parrots, with all the charm of a future Buddha, will preach the Law and proclaim the Eternal Truth concerning Women from his seat of red arsenic in the Himalaya ! Let all come and listen !' And while the Royal Kunala-Bird conducted his friend, the King of the Cuckoos, to the plain of Manosila by the side of the towering Himalaya, and both sovereigns took seat in the seven-mile shadow of a

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Sala-tree upon a rock of red arsenic, all gods and demi-gods, celestial musicians and spirits, all fairies and demons, in greater numbers even than the gigantic retinue of the Bird-Kings, encamped round about them; and countless apes and serpents and vultures, yea, even human beings, hastened thither loudly announcing the great tidings.

In those times, namely, there lived in the fastnesses of the Himalaya a mighty Ape-King, called HANUMAT, with a retinue of one hundred thousand apes. In a forest he lived, the Forest of Apes. When this same powerful Hanumat heard the deafening roar of the world, he thought within himself:

'From his seat of red arsenic my friend Kunala will this day proclaim, with the grace and candour of a future Buddha, the Great Truth concerning Women. As sixteen thousand ape-maidens attend upon me continuously, it behoves me to discover the truth regarding the female sex. Thus let us hasten to the tryst!'

In those times lived in the Himalaya also a mighty Snake-King, a miracle-working Naga-Lord, KAMBALA by name, with a train of one hundred thousand serpents. In a lake he lived, the Lake of Serpents. When this same mighty Kambala-Serpent heard the trumpet-roar of the world, he thought within himself:

'As my Realm contains an innumerable host of serpent-maidens, it beseems me, for my own ad-

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vantage, to learn the Truth concerning the female sex. Thus let us swiftly glide to the tryst.'

In those times there lived in the Himalaya ANANDA, the exalted Supanna-King, with a suite of one hundred thousand vultures; on a mountain he lived, the Mountain of Vultures. When this exalted Ananda-Vulture heard the thundering roar of the world, he thought within himself:

'Never could I pardon my own negligence, failed I to learn the Eternal Truth regarding Women, from my royal friend Kunala!'

NARADA too, the Holy Ascetic, in possession of the Five Noble Truths, who, surrounded by ten thousand penitents, practised world-avoidance in his retreat among the precipices of the Himalaya, heard the call of the gods, demi-gods, fairies and celestial musicians, and thought within himself:

'My friend Kunala will this day proclaim the faults and wickedness of Women; we mortals too, I and my Atoners, though long since possessors of this Truth, will gain merit by listening to his wise instruction and benefit by his lucid tutelage'; and with his ten thousand ascetics he hurried thither, his miraculous power propelling him through the air, until he took seat at the side of the Lord Kunala.

It was a gigantic assembly that encamped round about the rock of red arsenic upon which sat Kunala, the King of the Parrots. It was a gathering, the immensity of which befitted the occasion:

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a sermon by BUDDHA Himself! When they all were seated and hushed, the Royal Cuckoo Punnamukha kissed the feet of Kunala, and spoke thus to the Royal Parrot:

'We be all assembled, and stoop to adore thy Lotus-Feet, O Wise Kunala. Proclaim to us the Truth concerning Women: instruct us, thou Lofty One!'

Being thus entreated and again entreated, Kunala, the King of the Parrots, at last oped his bill of shining gold and said:

'WOMEN ARE WICKED, O Friend Punnamukha,' thus the Royal Kunala-Bird, seated upon a rock of red arsenic in the Himalaya, began his Great Sermon regarding Women, with Buddha-Grace and Buddha-Candour. 'This is the Law and Truth according to the Great Teaching. They are depraved, dangerous, deadly and brought to bed of calamity. They are like poisoned liquor, like merchants given to self-praise, twisted like the horns of antelopes, double-tongued like serpents, treacherous like pits covered with leaves and twigs, murderous like she-ogres, tearing everything asunder like death, insatiate like hell, all-consuming like a flame, impelling headlong all things like a torrent, turning whithersoever they list like the wind, without judgment in the choice of lovers like a ferry-boat in the choice of passengers, ever bearing evil fruit like a poison-tree. Their disposition is erratic and inconstant like that of monkeys, their mind shifts to and fro like the shadow of a tree, their hearts are fickle and know no rest like the eyeball in its socket. No sooner doth mortal man, be he ever so devout and shy of women, please their fancy, than they tempt him with dulcet and mellow words and lead him at their will, as one captures and abducts wild horses with honey-coated grass. When they meet a man of wealth, they pinion him down and en-

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tangle him and his treasure as a creeper entangles the sala-tree. For money they love the lowest varlet as if he were a god, and they desert the noblest man like a stinking corpse as soon as poverty grips him: to-day they grant favour to one, to-morrow to another, as a ship favours this day one shore and another on the morrow. Wide open they are like a shop, not for one, not even for two or three, but for the entire world, and whoever dreams of a woman: 'Ah, she is mine!' – he has caught the wind in a net. They are as a river, or a road, as an inn or a watering-pond. Their falsehood sounds like truth, their truth like falsehood; as cows ever nibble unaccustomed grasses, thus they ever choose new lovers. They seduce with their gait, with their gaze, with their smile, they allure with their loose robes, they bewitch with their flattering words. No man consider they desirable, none undesirable: the unworthy one they favour as well as the worthy one, as a ship favours every port.'

The Kunala-Bird paused for a moment and the great assemblage acclaimed the Great Being with the following words:

'Ah, how fair is thy speech, O Great One ! Continue to enlighten us concerning the worthlessness of women!'

Kunala, the King of the Parrots, resumed:
'Incline your ears to me and believe my words: Four things there are which are never satisfied –

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the sea, a king, a Brahmin and a – WOMAN. The sea receives the waters of all the rivers of the world; but never will it be filled and have enough. A king may possess a great country with a hundred thousand cities, with rivers and mountains, with fields and forests, but never will he cease to strive for still greater possession; no matter how many countries he conquers, he will never be satisfied and content with his conquest. A Brahmin masters the Holy Vedas with their four distinct Parts; nevertheless, he is ever hungry for greater wisdom and more knowledge. Thus it is regarding women: even though a woman possessed ten lovers, still she would desire an eleventh: it is vain to seek to satisfy her with lovers. Sooner can ye catch the wind in a net or withdraw the waters of the sea in the hollow of your hand than satisfy, with love and pleasure, a woman! . . . Depraved deadly and calamitous are the women, Friend Punnamukha! Hear my words, All Ye Assembled: listen to the tale of my experiences regarding women during the ten thousand of my former lives!’

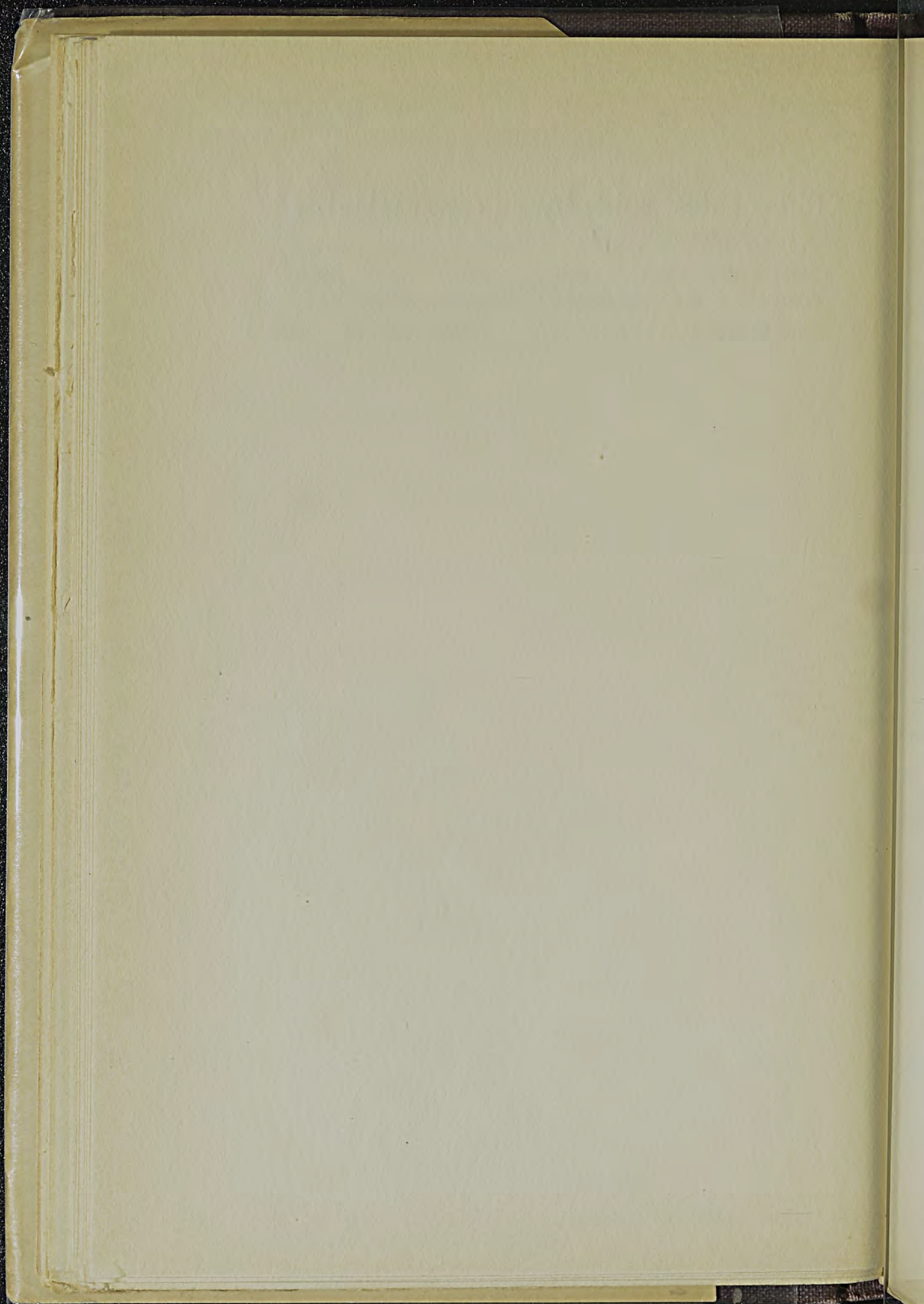
And the Great Being narrated ten thousand happenings from his ten thousand former incarnations which demonstrated for good and all the worthlessness of the female sex. His lucid mem-

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ory failed not an instant, nor did the arrow of his lofty mind miss the faintest mark.

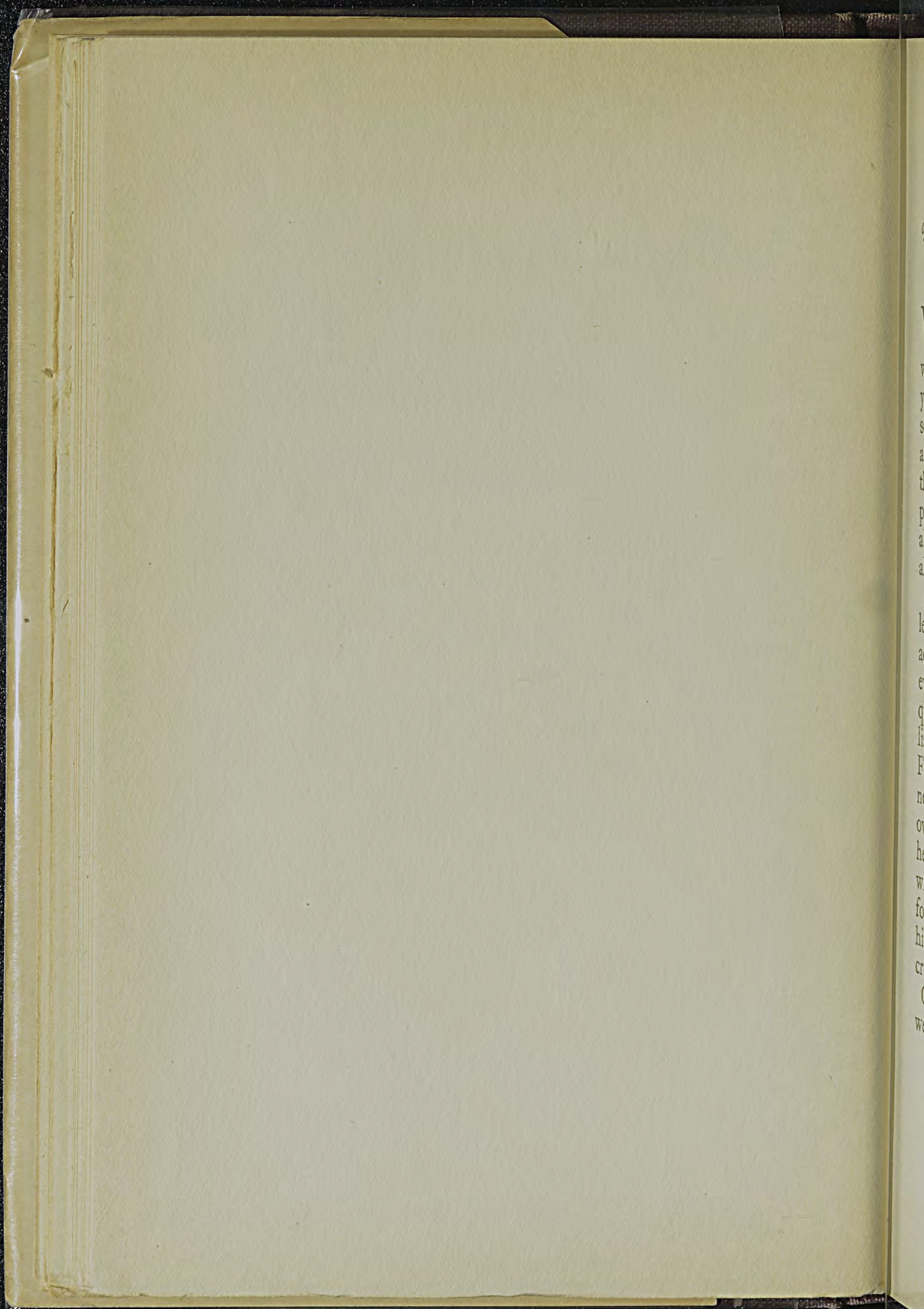
And at his side there sat his friend, the Cuckoo-King, the witness Punnamukha, companion, fellow-sufferer and recipient of our Lord Buddha's counsel throughout ten thousand former lives.

The Tales told by the Kunala-Bird



I.

The Tale of the Demon



And Kunala, the King of the Parrots, oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: -

THE TALE OF THE DEMON

WHEN ages ago the king Brahmadata reigned at Benares, his palace-priest was blessed with the birth of a son named SABBAMITTA. In early youth this son renounced all worldly pleasures, sought retreat in the wilderness of the Himalaya, and became an ascetic. Nourishing himself with the simple fruits of the forest, he led a life of such purity and holiness that in time he acquired the ability to Ecstasy, and attained all Knowledge and all the Perfections.

At no great distance from Sabbamitta's hut of leaves there dwelled a Forest-Demon, an OGRE, accustomed from the beginning of time to prefer evil deeds to good. Though this Demon frequently sought the company of the Saint, and listened to his exposition of the Truth and the Five Commandments, he could not resist the keenness of his hunger for evil deeds, and could not overcome his propensity for villainy. Day by day he lay in wait behind a rock close by the road on which travellers were wont to pass through the forest, caught them unawares in the meshes of his net of grass, and devoured them neck and crop.

Once upon a day the beauteous daughter of a wealthy merchant of Benares, who had spent

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weeks of rest at a small village on the edge of the forest in which dwelled the Ascetic and the Ogre, passed through the forest with her retinue of servants, for the time was arrived when she should return to home and kindred. When the maiden's cavalcade, surrounding the palanquin in which she reclined, slowly passed the lair of rock, the Ogre sprang forth in awe-inspiring shape. Terror-stricken, the low-born varlets dropped their weapons and fled in all directions. But the merchant's daughter, transfixed with horror, sat defenceless in her litter. When the Forest-Demon set eyes upon her, his heart was inflamed; he took her to his cave of rock and made her his wife. Nourishing her with melted butter, with honey and rice, with fishes and the tender flesh of game, clothing her in the raiment of a queen and adorning her with jewels, he lived but for her whom he had chosen as life-mate and guarded her as closely as only the female yak guards her calf, or a rich man his only son or a one-eyed man his only orb of vision. Having time and again received the Holy Ascetic's wise instruction regarding the wickedness of women, he racked his brain continuously how he could guard her without danger of failure. Finally he devised the following expedient: he wove a basket, made his wife lie in it, swallowed the basket and thus carried his beloved with him in his stomach whithersoever he roamed.

One day, desiring to bathe, he sought the cool

THE DEMON

waters of a forest-pond. When he had arrived at the shore, he disgorged the basket with its sweet cargo, delivered his wife to the light of day and the balmy air, caused her to bathe in the cooling flood, anointed her with fragrant ointment and adorned her with jewels. When she sat thus in the splendour of her womanly beauty, he himself sought refreshment in the emerald deep of the pool. But before he turned from her, he said:

'Beloved One, thou feelest drowsy after thy bath. Recline thy beauteous body among these lilies on the shore, breathe deeply the invigorating air, and wait my coming, for I too seek the cooling flood.'

Leaving her thus to sweet repose among the white blossoms on the shore, he plunged into the water. Diving deep and long, he swam far out into the lake, towards the other shore, where from a precipitous rock a torrent threw itself headlong into the lake.—'No harm can befall her,' he thought, 'for the shores of this fair pool are uninhabited by spirits, and its whereabouts are unknown to mortal men.'

While he thus disported himself, an aerial demon, the offspring of a demigod, came flying through the air, armed with poniard and sword. When the rush of air struck the soft smoothness of the maiden's cheek, she oped her eyes and, observing the winged warrior's manly beauty, not inferior to the beauty of the God of Love himself, felt an irresis-

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tible desire to possess him in love. A wave of her fair hand sufficed to call him to her side, for against her incomparable beauty there was no resistance.

'Make haste, thou Son of the Air,' the woman whispered into the demigod's ear. 'Climb within the curved walls of my willow-woven prison and tarry there till I join thee. But beware and be silent, lest my husband, the Demon of this Forest, who at this very moment cleaveth the emerald flood of this pool like any fish, hears aught, or is aroused to suspicion!'

And the woman pushed and jostled the young demon into the basket, clapped on the lid, sat upon it, and serenely awaited her husband's coming. As soon as she saw him emerging from the flood, shaking the shining drops of water like a spray from the glistening surface of his body, she arose, waved him a welcome, dived into the basket and covered her lover with the folds of her raiment.

When the Ogre arrived he thought not to examine the basket, for he observed his wife safely ensconced within its curved walls. Thus he swallowed it with a gulp, and wended his way towards his cave. But in the basket, within the very bowels of the husband, the votaries of love had their fill of pleasure.

As he passed with swinging gait through the avenues of the forest, the Ogre was suddenly moved by the desire to pay his respects to the Holy Recluse, whom he had neglected for some time

THE DEMON

since his marriage. He therefore turned from his path and hastened in the direction of the well-known hut of leaves.

When the holy Sabbamitta observed his approach from afar, his supernatural wisdom discerned that the Forest-Demon carried two people in his body. Thereupon he addressed him as follows:

'Heyday! Whence come ye, ye THREE? Be welcome to my hut, ye THREE!'

When the Ogre heard these words, he cast his gaze round about in wonderment and thought: 'Have I not come alone to this Hermit? I see no other being beside myself. He surely knows naught of the sweet burden in my stomach. And even if he knew — are not we, I and my wife, but two? Why welcometh he THREE? Perchance madness has seized his brain and he raveth!'

But coming to a stop before the log of sandalwood on which sat Sabbamitta, he bowed low in salutation and said:

'I sought thy presence alone, O Saint! No other person came with me. Why callest thou, O Holy: "Heyday! Whence come ye, ye THREE?"'

But Sabbamitta asked his visitor:

'Desirest thou, O Friend, to hear the truth? Or preferest thou to shut thy ears to it, if causing pain?'

'Yea, Lord,' the other answered, 'the truth is what I crave.'

'Then listen well to truth, thou Demon,' the

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Saint rejoined. 'The first I welcomed was thyself; the second, thy beloved wife, reclining well concealed within thy bosom in a basket. . . .'

'Yes, yes, but who was the third?' the Ogre asked. 'The third? Ah, yes, the third thou knowest not; but let me make him known to thee:— The maiden, whom thou callest "wife" and whom thou deemest safe in the impregnable fortress of thy stomach, enjoys at this very moment the transports of love in the arms of a young demon, the offspring of an aerial demigod.'

When the Ogre heard these words, he shook with fright.

'Such demigods,' he thought, 'are prone to commit any dastard deed. Carries he poniard or sword, he surely will split my belly in twain to escape.'

Hastily opening the sluices of his stomach he spilled the basket at his feet, and, removing the lid, beheld his beloved in the arms of a young lover! But the demigod, murmuring a spell, was wafted aloft, and in a trice disappeared into the blue ether.

Greatly saddened, the Forest-Demon said to the Holy Sabbamitta:

'Ah, Saintly Ascetic, thy words are proven true: Let no man put his faith in womenkind! Did I not guard this woman, Holy One, as others guard but their own lives? Did I not love and tend her as an ascetic dwelling in the forest loves and tends the sacred flame? Have I not served her night and

THE DEMON

day with unremitting zeal? I deemed that in the inmost recess of my body my wife would surely be my own, incapable of faithlessness. But, see, O Sabbamitta, Saintly Friend, she has betrayed my love, and rendered homage to another man!

And falling at the Ascetic's feet he continued: 'Lord, thou hast saved my life: for, tempted by my faithless wife, yon sorcerer would surely have riven asunder my vitals. Tell me, O Pure One, what to do? Shall I not kill this traitress vile, as she deserves?'

The Saint replied:

'Nay, harm her not, friend Demon – she cannot help her depravity, for wickedness is deeply engrafted in the soul of every woman. The odds and ends that make up woman are all iniquitous. Thus she spells greatest danger to us men; none can escape her wiles but by the help of Truth, by holding fast to the Holy Commandments. Let me deliver thee, Friend Demon: become my *chela*! Accept the Truth, receive instruction on the Five Holy Commandments!'

The Ogre thereupon turned towards his wife and said:

'Go to perdition, thou disreputable female! Cease to exist, thou scandalous wanton, thou most inglorious and most faithless wife! As a holy ascetic who dwells in the forest tends night and day the sacred flame, thus have I tended thee, thou unchaste woman! Fool I to deem that even in the

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inmost recess of my body thou dwellest safe from thy own wickedness. Steeped in iniquity, thou foundest a way to break the bonds of virtue and to give thy soul and body to another man!

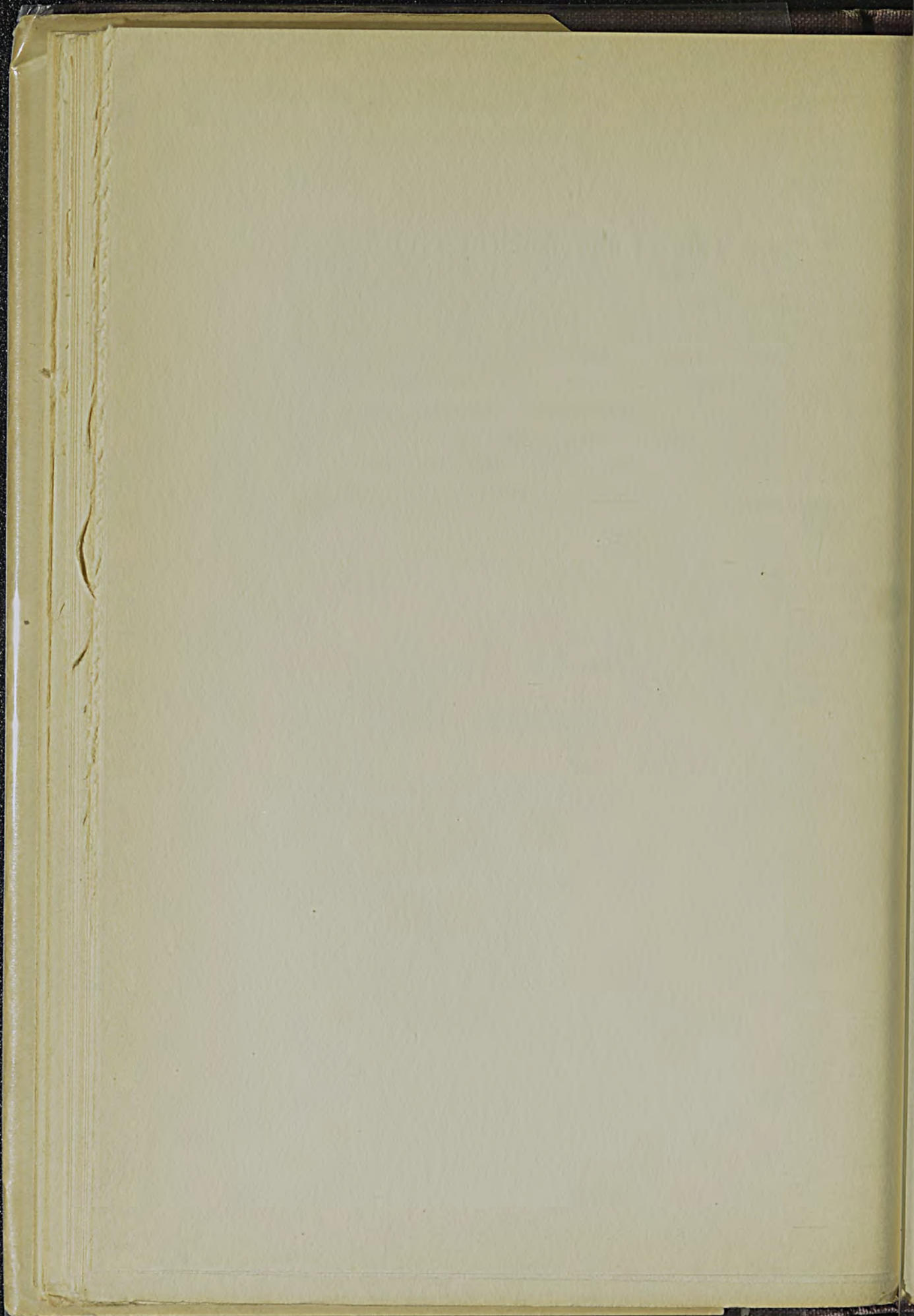
And banishing the woman for ever from his side, he became the *chela* of the Holy Ascetic. He listened diligently to the exposition of the Truth, studied zealously the Five Commandments, and obediently followed them alway. Abjuring for all time the sin of eating human flesh, he advanced to all the Perfections, and at his death passed for one hundred thousand years into the Brahma-World.

‘But in those days ’twas I who was the Holy Ascetic SABBAMITTA,’ thus did Kunala end his first tale, ‘but he, the fool, the duped DEMON, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!’

Thus reads Kunala’s First Tale concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.

II.

The Tale of the Ancient Nurse



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But He, the Parrot-King, again oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: -

THE TALE OF THE ANCIENT NURSE

ONCE upon a time there lived in the City of Takkasila a celebrated teacher named MASAKA. His wise instruction was solicited by numerous youth from the most distant countries.

His age had reached nearly one hundred years when a most wealthy Brahmin family in Benares was blessed with the birth of a son. When this son, KACCANA by name, had finished his sixteenth year, his father said to him:

‘My son, if thou desirest to pass on death into the Brahma-World, direct thy steps into the forest and seek amid its wilderness to gain the merit indispensable therefor, by adoring the exalted God Agni, as a holy ascetic. But if, on the contrary, thou preferrest a worldly life, proceed to Takkasila, receive instruction in all the four and sixty arts and sciences from the glorious Guru, Masaka, and, having acquired worldly perfection, return to home and kindred, take wives, and add to the strength and glory of our family.’

But the young Brahmin thought as follows:

‘I desire not to spend my livelong days as penitent in a dismal forest. I will not devote all my time and energies to dance attendance on a sacred flame. The joys of life are to my taste, naught

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else. Thus let me wend my way to Takkasila, where Guru Masaka will teach me all the four and sixty arts and sciences, and, being perfect in them, return to father, house and kindred, take wives, and add to the strength and glory of my family.'

And, thinking thus, Kaccana saluted his parent in farewell, took a thousand gold-pieces as tuition-money for the Guru, and turned his steps towards Takkasila. Then, when he had reached perfection in all arts and sciences, after three years, he returned to the habitation of his parents.

His father, however, who was most devout and observed his son's extremely worldly character, desired him not to choose the world, but rather tend the sacred flame in the forest. Thus, one day, he said to him:

'My son, hast thou really reached perfection in all arts and sciences, as pupil of the far-famed Guru Masaka of Takkasila?'

'Yea, Father, I have!' answered the youth.

'But, son, hast thou also received the Truth concerning Women?'

'Nay, Father, nay! Of women Guru Masaka said naught!'

Then said the father:

'O most beloved son Kaccana, if thou hast not gained knowledge concerning women, what science could the wise Masaka have taught thee at Takkasila? Desirest thou to live in the turmoil

THE ANCIENT NURSE

of the great world, and find the bridges across its chasms and avoid its pitfalls, if thou dost not even know what women are, who by a thread of silk around their little fingers guide all its chessmen? Return with haste to Takkasila and tell Masaka: "Return my thousand gold-pieces, Guru, or teach me WOMAN!"'

The youth was satisfied, and for the second time sought Takkasila.

On arrival in that city, however, Kaccana found that Masaka dwelled no longer there. The tidings he received were these: An inmate of the Guru's house had been his ancient nurse, a low-caste woman. She being one hundred and fifty years of age and wholly blind, the grateful foster-son tended her as mother tends her child. He washed and clothed her with his own hand, he fed her with a spoon, and held the cup of cooling drink to her toothless mouth. His tenderness and gratitude knew no bounds, and in his ministrations he threw aside all dictates of his caste. At first the Guru's neighbours, soon the entire city, took offence thereat, and, being filled with disgust at such self-abasement, upbraided him continually. Then thought the Guru Masaka within himself:

'Mayhap it behoves me to desert the city for the forest; for in the lonely wilderness I can continue to obey the demands of gratitude without arousing the anger and disgust of my fellow-castemen.'

No sooner thought than done. On a beautiful

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meadow, surrounded by a lonely forest of musalinda-, simbala- and sala-trees and traversed by a winding brook of clearest water, he built side by side two huts of branches, reeds, and leaves, installed his nurse in one, himself in the other, and tended the old Sudra-woman as of yore.

When thus the youth Kaccana heard this tale at Takkasila, he proceeded to the Guru's retreat forthwith, stopped at the door, and made obeisance with profound respect.

Masaka asked in wonderment:

'Why seekest thou again thy teacher, O Kaccana?'

The youth then said:

'O greatly honoured Guru, one science, and the greatest and most necessary, thou hast not taught me: the truth concerning *women*!'

'Who, O Kaccana, told thee of this necessity?'

'My father, O wise Brahmin. He is discontented and bids me say: 'Return my thousand gold-pieces, Guru, or teach me also *woman*!''

But the wise Masaka, well realising that Kaccana's father foresaw some great danger for his son if he entered the great world without thorough enlightenment concerning the wickedness of women, and moreover being unable to restore the tuition-money of one thousand gold-coins which in the goodness of his heart he had long since expended in charity, decided to fulfil his patron's will and teach his pupil this greatest and most necessary truth.

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Therefore he addressed the youth Kaccana as follows:

'Thus be it, Son! Thou shalt hear the truth, and nothing shall be hidden from thy understanding. The soul of woman shall I lay bare before thy gaze. But as no other woman dwells near our abode, thou shalt learn truth regarding women from her to whom the ties of gratitude, the bonds of a foster-son's affection, bind me, thy guru Masaka. From this day forth thou shalt take my place as faithful servitor to my ancient nurse. With thy own hands thou shalt wash and clothe her, feed her with a spoon, and hold the cup of cooling drink to her toothless lips. But when thou wastest and rubbest her hands and feet, her head and back, thou shalt ever say the words: 'Illustrious lady, though thou be old, thy body is yet so fair and plump! How incomparably beautiful it must have been of yore, when thou wast young!' Thus when thou wastest her hands and feet, sing praises of their comeliness. But, whatever my old nurse says, that report to me at once, omitting nothing and feeling no shame. In this wise, O Kaccana, wilt thou learn the Truth concerning WOMEN.'

The youth agreed; but when he often praised the beauty, grace, and comeliness of the ancient dame, the latter thought to herself:

'This young Brahmin surely is in love with me and hopes to have his pleasure with my beauty!'

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and as she mused and mused on this, her withered heart shot forth new sprouts, and sensual desire re-grasped her brain. Thus, when one day the youth again sang praises of her beauty, she turned to him and said:

'Doth my body in truth please thee, Noble Youth? Dost thou mayhap desire to possess me as thy wife?'

But Kaccana, leading her on, answered:

'Lofty One, I desire it above all things, but I am fearful of even thinking of such joy: for the Guru, thou knowest, is of inexorable austerity, iron-handed and relentless. What frightful disaster, if he should learn of our illicit marriage! perchance he would kill me.'

The ancient dame waved aside the youth's timid objections:

'If thou in truth desirest to kindle the sacred fire with me, O Kaccana, the matter is easily accomplished: wait till he lieth asleep on his couch of attimutaka-leaves, then creep to his side and . . . kill him!'

But the youth replied:

'O august dame, how could I kill my noble teacher, who formed my soul and made me what I am? It were as if I murdered him who gave me life!'

'Humph! hem! Then not!' the nurse rejoined. 'The fire of thy heart seemeth pale compared to mine. True love should know no renitence, no

THE ANCIENT NURSE

childish qualms of conscience. No matter, though! If thou swearest that thou wilt never desert me, but let me serve thee alway, I myself will strike the blow.'

The youth agreeing, they parted. But Kaccana, trembling with anger and shuddering with disgust, hastened to inform his teacher of the murderous design of his ingrate nurse.

'Well done, Kaccana,' Masaka said; 'but now make haste and take thy axe to yonder thicket and hew a stout udumbara-tree. Then shape it to resemble me — the head, the arms, the trunk, exact in size — and bring it to our hut at dusk.'

The youth speedily performed the task which Masaka had bidden him. Thereupon the guru clothed the figure of wood with his garment and laid it upon his couch of leaves, to which he tied a lengthy rope. Then he said to his pupil:

'Now take a hatchet to my nurse, and let her know that the time is at hand to kill me. Tell her: thy son lieth in his hut upon his couch of leaves, and sleepeth soundly.'

Thereupon the young Brahmin entered the blind woman's hut and said to her:

'Exalted Lady, thy son lieth in deep slumber upon his couch of leaves. I have fastened to it a rope, the other end of which I lay into thy hand. Arise, Beloved, take this hatchet, grope thy way to his side, and strike him a deadly blow.'

'Thy promise, Youth,' the ancient dame demanded

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'that thou wilt never desert me faithlessly, if I commit this deed!'

'I promise, beauteous one,' replied Kaccana.

Thereupon the blind old woman took the hatchet, rose trembling from her couch, and hobbled to the pallet of her foster-son. Running her fingers over the wooden figure, she murmured:

'His sleep is sound and deep: one blow and he will sleep for ever!' and she raised the hatchet aloft and struck a fierce blow.

'Tam' was the sound when steel struck wood.

The beldame startled: — "'Tam"? "tam"? it was not flesh and bone my hatchet hit, 'twas wood!'

Now spoke the venerable guru from the corner of the hut, where he stood in the gloom:

'What be ye about, O Mother of a grateful son?'

Now she knew that she had been duped, that she was caught in a net from the meshes of which there was no escape. With a screech she flung aloft her arms and fell dead on the floor.

But the wise Masaka said to the young Brahmin Kaccana:

'Thy father desired thee to learn the Truth concerning WOMEN, O Youth. Thy lesson is ended. With thine own eyes hast thou seen the wickedness of woman, deeply hast thou gazed into the bottomless pit of her evil soul. Yea, friend Kaccana, just as this old dame, who in return for her foster-son's grateful ministrations, for his selfless love and charity, sought his death, thus all women

THE ANCIENT NURSE

are depraved, deadly and calamitous. Return now to thy father, for thou hast mastered the cardinal science of life.'

Thereupon the young Brahmin prostrated himself before the guru, kissed his feet, and returned that selfsame day to his father at Benares. When he had reported his experience, his father asked him:

'Dost thou still desire, O beloved son Kaccana, to remain among thy kindred and lead a worldly life, or preferrest thou to leave the world and feed the sacred flame in the solitude of the forest?'

'I have chosen, O Parent!' the youth replied. 'With my own eyes have I seen the wickedness of womankind, and witnessed how lustful and vile they are. Let me but flee the world and thus escape the curse which women lay upon mankind.'

Praising his son's resolution the father blessed him, and Kaccana became a holy ascetic. In the depth of a vast forest in the Himalaya he lived in solitude, attained Perfection, and on his death entered the Brahma-Heaven for one hundred thousand years.

'But in those days 'twas I who was the wise Guru MASAKA,' thus did Kunala end his second tale, 'but KACCANA, the youthful Brahmin, to whom I

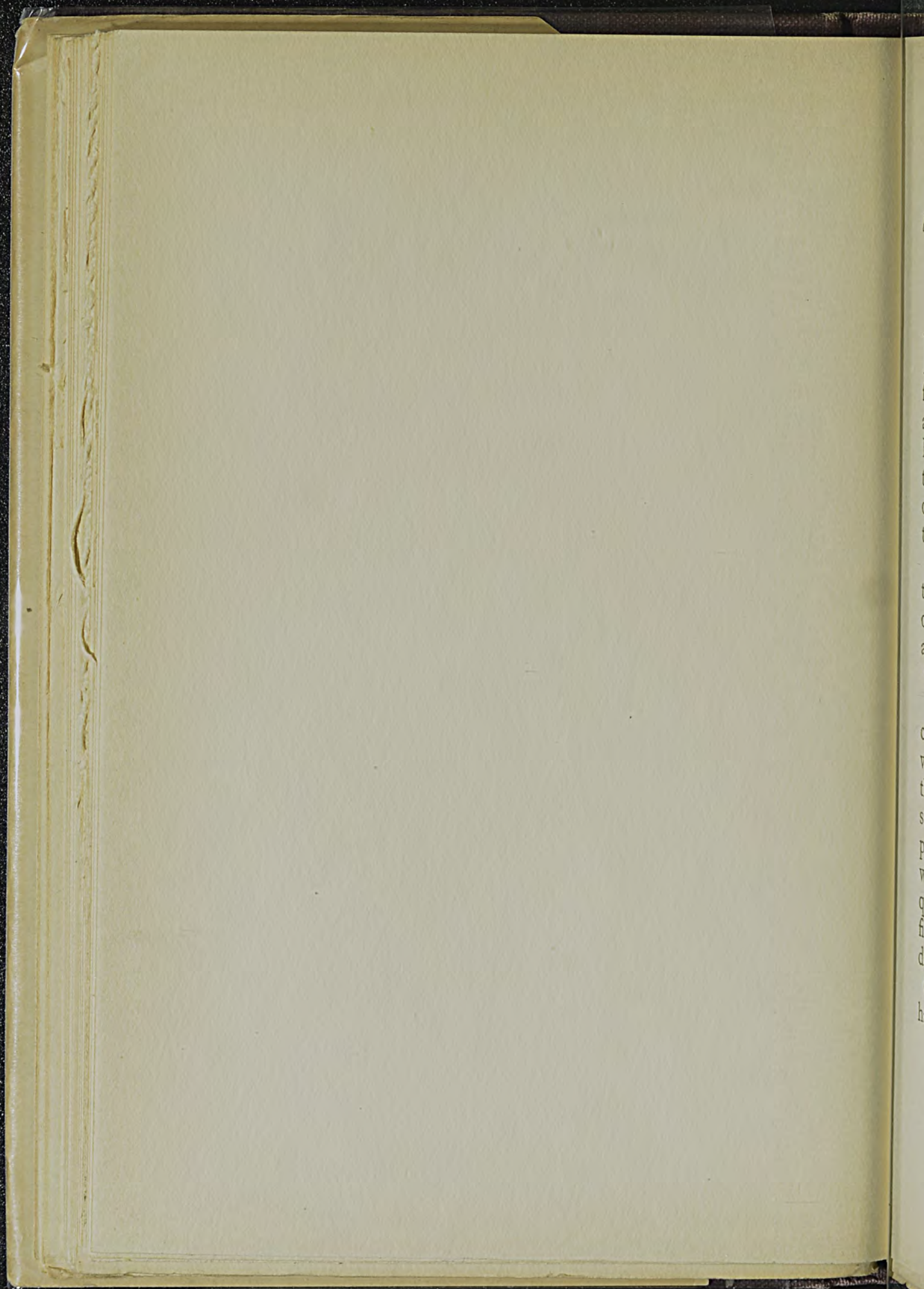
KUNALA

thus revealed the Truth regarding Women, wast
thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!

Thus reads Kunala's Second Tale concerning
Woman and Her Wickedness.

III.

The Tale of the Goldsmith and the
Nun



But He, the Parrot-King, the third time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: -

THE TALE OF THE GOLDSMITH AND THE
NUN

IN olden times, when king Brahmadata ruled at Benares, there abode in a hut of leaves on the field of corpses situate on the outskirts of the city a holy woman, a white nun called SACCATAPAVI. Most of her time she spent seated in the open at the threshold of her lowly habitation in adoration of the sun. Omitting four meals at a time, she took nourishment only every second day.

The inhabitants of Benares honoured and revered this sanctified penitent as they revered the moon or the sun, and when they sneezed it was customary among them to exclaim:

‘Adoration to the holy Saccatapavi!’

One time the goldsmiths and jewellers of Benares celebrated a great festival, which was to last one week and a day. For this purpose they erected, in the public park of the city, a pavilion, which they stocked with all manner of savoury victuals, dainty provisions and strong liquors, adorned with gay wreaths and garlands, and besprinkled with exquisite perfumes. When all preparations were finished, they assembled and caroused the livelong day.

On the very first evening of the festival, it happened that a certain goldsmith, called KALINGA,

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sneezed, and, as was customary, exclaimed:
'Adoration to the holy Saccatapavi!'

Hearing this, another goldsmith, named PANCALA, said:

'Halloo, thou blinded dolt! Dost thou give adoration to a fickle-minded woman, an inconstant female? Fool that thou art!'

But Kalinga rejoined:

'Friend Pancala, speak not thus, for such speeches will lead you to hell and earn you damnation for a hundred thousand years. Saccatapavi is a holy woman, and deserves the adoration of sinners like us.'

Thereupon Pancala said:

'Hold thy tongue, O thou blunt-witted ape, thou fool! Holy or not holy, all women are alike. There is none that is not inconstant and capricious, not one.'

'Nay, friend Pancala, thou art wrong; the holy Saccatapavi is unlike other women: she has acquired the divine Truths and all Perfections!'

'So be it,' answered Pancala. 'Let us lay a wager for a thousand coins of gold: on the seventh day from to-day I shall lead thy holy Saccatapavi into the midst of thy gay revellings; she will raise the vessel of liquor to her lips and pour the fiery brandy down her throat; she will sing worldly songs and will dance the dance of the street! Bah, thou imbecile! The worthlessness of woman will then be evident to all.'

THE GOLDSMITH AND THE NUN

Then goldsmith Kalinga was overjoyed and staked his thousand gold-pieces with gusto:

'The holy Saccatapavi drink fiery liquor, and sing and dance? Absurd! The zealous sun-adorer dance attendance on this madcap Pancala? A muddle-headed thought!'

The wager having been perfected before witnesses, Pancala went home. But on the following morning he entered the field of corpses in the habit of an ascetic and, stopping in the very centre, at no great distance from Saccatapavi's hovel, stood on one leg and adored the sun. When the saint, about to start on her daily trip to gather alms, beheld the new penitent, she thought:

'Methinks a penitent of great merit and of wondrous miraculous power! While I dwell on the edge of the field of corpses and pay my adoration in sitting posture, this holy one stands on one leg in the very midst of this plain of horrors, and glues his never-fading eyes upon the fiery orb of heaven. His heart must be full of a holy calm. I shall go to him and show him reverence.'

Speedily approaching him, she manifested her veneration by thrice circling him from right to left. But Pancala neither looked at her nor spoke one word. On the second day she repeated her manœuvre, but again Pancala took no notice of her. When on the third day she circled him, the goldsmith said, eyes cast down:

'Go hence!' and then ignored her as before.

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But when on the fourth day she paid him reverence, he, looking at her kindly, said with sympathetic tone:

'I fear thou growest weary gathering alms!'

And, as Saccatapavi departed, she was imbued with gladness, for the holy man had addressed her with kindly words.

On the fifth day, when Pancala again proved his good-will by words of gracious tenderness, she crouched happily at his feet, and gazed at him with the light of admiration in her eyes.

But when on the sixth day she took her station at his feet, the ascetic asked her:

'Sister, what sounds of revel and of music strike my ears to-day?'

She answered:

'O Saint, hast thou not heard these sounds until this day? Benares' jewellers and goldsmiths celebrate their festival with song and dance and revelings.'

'Ah, Sister,' Pancala rejoined, 'is that the noise? But say, O Holy One, how many meals dost thou omit?'

'Four meals, O Reverend! How many thou?'

'I, seven! But tell me, how many years have passed since thou hast taken religious vows and left the world?'

'Ten years! And thou?'

'I, only six. But hast thou truly reached the holy calm of saints?'

THE GOLDSMITH AND THE NUN

'Nay, Pious One, not yet! And thou?'

'Alas, no, Sister! The path to holiness is long and tortuous. I tremble lest we never gain the bliss of world-abandonment, and also miss the joys of worldly life. What thinkest thou, O Sister?'

Saccatapavi answered:

'O Saint, I must confess, I too am often sorely grieved. But what can I do? I cannot change state or condition: the world knows me for what I am: a holy penitent.'

But Pancala said:

'Who knows, O Holy One? What hinders us to live as lives the crowd? The fire of hell burns not for us alone! I do not disavow: oft do I long to doff this sombre garb. My mother is rich, and her wealth is mine too. Why should I suffer on, when all the joys of life lie at my feet?'

'Thou speakest from my soul,' the woman said. 'The flame of hell will never scorch me more than others. But still there is no hope for me. I must remain a penitent among these corpses, for I am evil-favoured, gross and haggard. Who in the world would cherish such an eyesore?'

Thereupon the ascetic took her hand and whispered earnestly:

'Speak not thus, O Saccatapavi! I call thee not uncomely. True, I know of daintier beauties, but be consoled: the world holds countless numbers of hard-visaged, uncouth, unwieldy, sightless, un-

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seemly, hideous, ghastly, foul, repulsive, horrible women! Lose not thy courage, O fair One! There are women who are beautiful because they are fat; there are others who are beautiful because they are lean. Thou, O Saccatapavi, art beautiful because thou art lean.'

But the holy woman protested:

'How can I believe thy words, O Devout One? Omitting four meals destroys e'en such beauty as mine was of yore. Thou art young and fair; the world will accept thee with joy: but Saccatapavi is doomed to adore the sun in a circle of corpses!'

Thereupon Pancala drew from his alms-pot jewels and precious trinkets of many kinds, such as ear-rings, nose-rings, finger-rings and ankle-bracelets in profusion, pressed them on her, and said:

'All these glittering trifles are thine, Saccatapavi, if thou followest me. They will make thee fairer even than the foremost wife of king Brahmadatta. My heart is enflamed towards thee. Come, let us join the mirth-loving company of goldsmiths and jewellers. They will receive us with joy, for, before I renounced the world, I too was one of their number.'

The penitent, dazzled by the gleam of gold and jewels, succumbed to Pancala's blandishments and eloquent pleadings, and followed him obediently. He took her to his house, adorned her with a regal robe and costly jewels, and finally conducted her

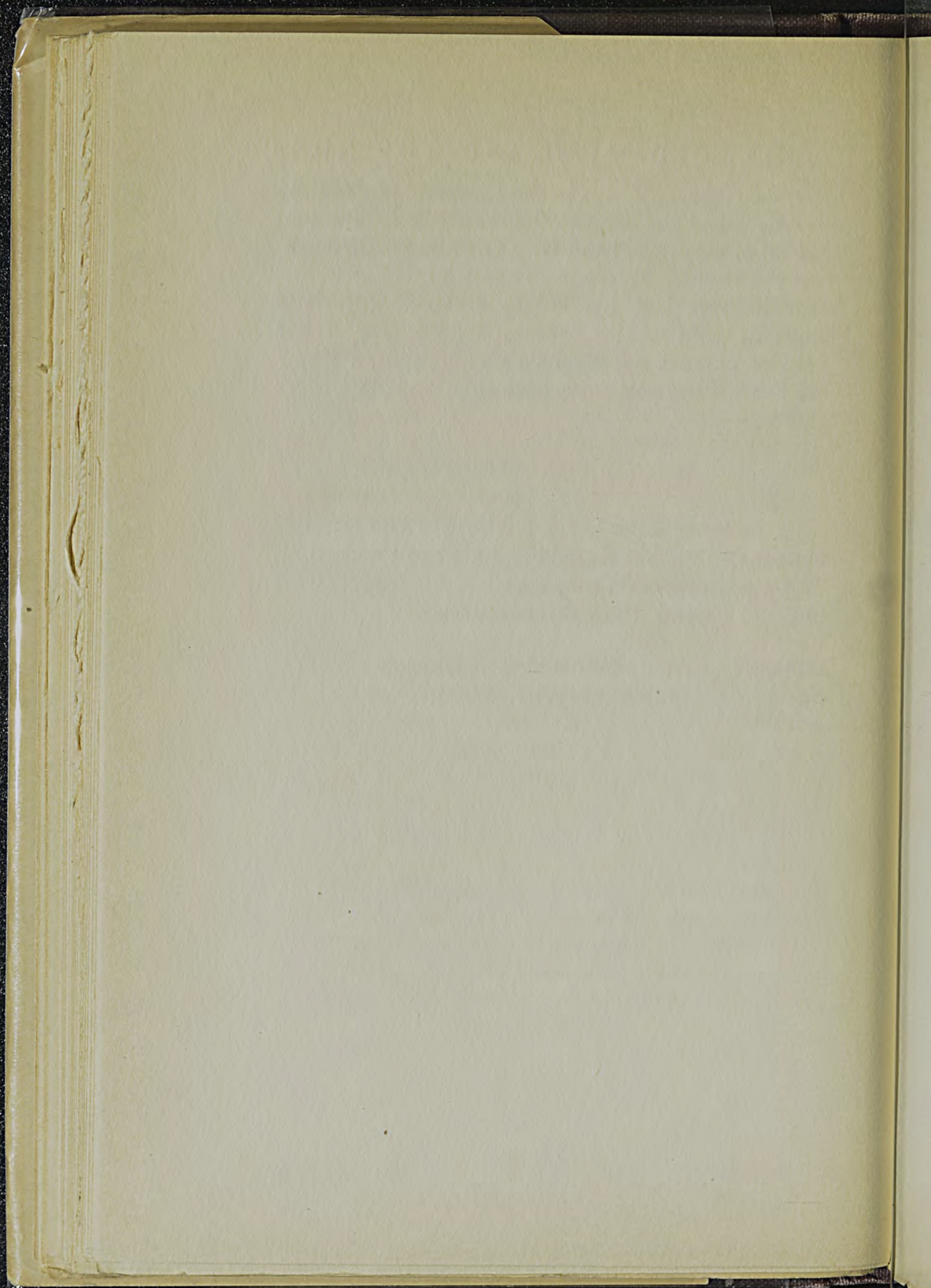
THE GOLDSMITH AND THE NUN

to the city-park, where in the company of drunken jewellers and goldsmiths the erstwhile ascetic had her fill of fiery liquor and sang and danced throughout the night.

So Kalinga lost his wager and one thousand coins of gold, while Saccatapavi exchanged her field of corpses for Pancala's habitation, became his third wife, and bore him sons and daughters galore.

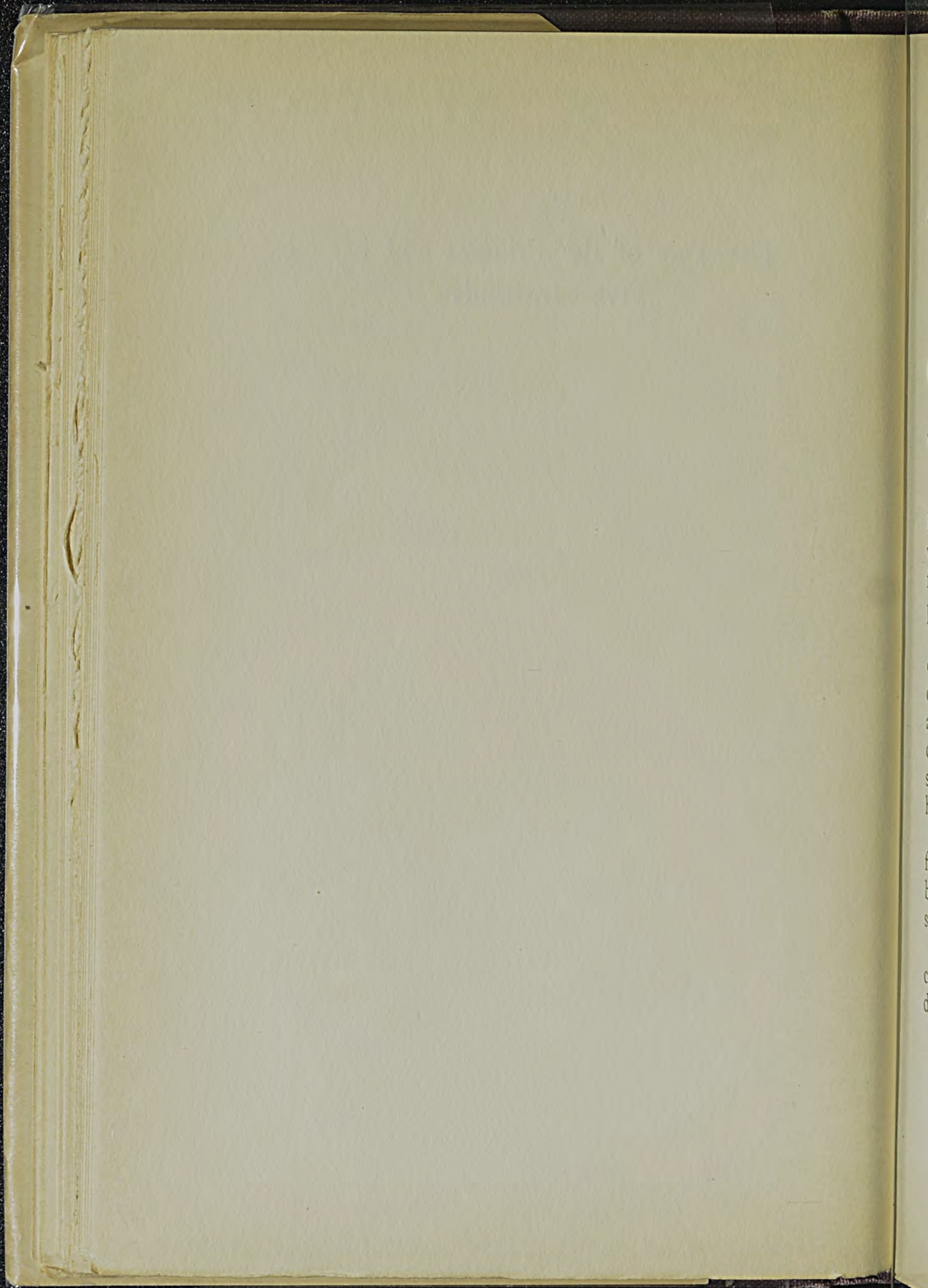
'But in those days 'twas I who was the jeweller PANCALA,' thus did Kunala end his third narration, 'but goldsmith KALINGA, who lost his wager, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

Thus reads Kunala's Third Narration concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.



IV.

The Tale of the Princess and her
Five Husbands



But He, the Parrot-King, the fourth time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: -

THE TALE OF THE PRINCESS AND HER FIVE
HUSBANDS

ONE day King Brahmadata of Benares said to his daughter KANHA:

'Dear Daughter, utter a wish! Whatsoever thou wishest, that shall be fulfilled.'

The Princess replied:

'There is naught that I do not possess, O my Father, except one thing: My only wish is to be wedded to the handsomest man on earth; therefore I crave the boon to choose myself that most perfect man whom alone I can serve as wife!'

'Thy wish shall be fulfilled!' said her father, and caused his heralds to proclaim throughout his dominions that all high-born, chivalrous, strong-armed and lion-hearted youths of the world should come to his court, where his daughter would herself choose the handsomest among them as her husband.

From that day the suitors streamed to Benares from all the parts of the globe in unlimited numbers, and assembled day by day before the golden seven-storied palace of the king.

But Kanha, with a basket of flowers in her hand, came every morning to stand at the topmost window of the seventh story of the palace, and gazed

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with critical eye upon the sea of lovers; but not one did she see who pleased her.

At that time the five sons of King Pandu, exiled from the realm of their father, dwelled at Benares to learn all the four and sixty arts and sciences from the far-famed teacher DRONA. When they had finished their course of learning, AJJUNA, the eldest, said to his brothers:

'The king's daughter has not yet found a husband to her liking among her ten lakh of suitors. How if we too seek grace before her eyes? Mayhap one of us five will please her, that she choose him as husband and make him king of Benares on the demise of her father!'

'Agreed!' the other princes replied. 'Let us join the anxious crowd on the palace staircase; mayhap one of us will find favour in her eyes and become king of Benares.'

Accordingly the exiled princes proceeded to the Royal Palace and took their station among the hundred thousand suitors in a row, in appearance like so many golden statues of Kama, the God of Love. As soon as Kanha saw them, the dazzling beauty radiating from their persons took her heart by storm; falling in love with all five she threw a chaplet of blossoms on the heads of all the five, and, turning to her father, said:

'O Royal Sire, behold these youths! No mortal mother ever bore them. They must be gods in human shape! Their beauty sheds a radiance like

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the rising moon. But, Father, see, I cannot choose between them, for in brilliant grace they do not differ. I desire therefore to wed and serve all five!

The king, being bound by his royal oath, called the five brothers into his presence, and, after he had learned their rank and station, rendered them great honour. Placing five chairs of gold beside the royal throne, he seated the princes upon them, and solemnly declared that, on the morrow, he would wed them to his daughter.

Joyfully the five returned to their habitation, but Prince Ajjuna said:

'Though it is most unusual that five men wed the self-same woman, still let us do the bidding of the King and Princess: a woman that is bound to serve five men hath not the leisure to be wicked.'

The brothers all agreed, but Guru Drona, whom they asked for counsel, had his scruples:

'Have I not taught ye, Royal Youths, what women are?'

'Yea, Guru,' answered they, 'we be enlightened: All women are depraved, deadly and calamitous!'

'But, Noble Youths, why think ye now that this fair princess, being woman, is better than her sisters, because five husbands hold her hand? Have I not taught ye that, as all the rivers of the world can never sate the ocean, no king on earth can ever quench his thirst for power, no Brahmin have his fill of knowledge, so not one woman in the world can have enough of men? Should a

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woman possess nine hundred and ninety nine husbands, still would she crave a thousandth! Kanha, the daughter of the king, is surely more insatiable than other womankind, for openly she hath chosen five husbands. My counsel, Royal Youths, is that ye leave the city secretly this very night!

'Nay, Honoured Guru, that we shall not do,' the eldest brother, Ajjuna, said. 'Just as among the million sombre ravens there are a few robed silvery white, so there are some women good and true among the wicked multitude. Fear not, O worthy Master; Kanha will serve us faithfully, and, when her father dies, we shall reconquer our own domain with her assistance.'

In vain the wise Guru besought them: on the following day they paced the seven paces around the sacred fire with the Princess Kanha, and henceforth the daughter of the king possessed them soul and body.

Thus was the Princess Kanha:

When she held sweetest discourse with Ajjuna, the eldest prince, she used to say:

'Thou art my most beloved; I love thee more than all the four together. How gladly would I spill my blood for thee! When father dies, thou shalt be king!'

But when she had amorous dalliance with another of the five, she spoke no other words. Thus every prince was satisfied, nay, happy in the

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thought: 'She loves but me alone, and none but I shall be the king of Benares!'

But the time came when Kanha grew weary of them all. Her heart was woman's heart and therefore fond of change. The very beauty of her husbands caused her pain, and day and night she longed and sighed for ugly ill-made men. And as she cast her gaze about, she spied the hunch-backed varlet of her royal husbands and in a trice loved him. Thus, when the Princes were at chase, she fondled him and kissed him, while she said: 'I love no man but thee alone. Thou art so wondrous beautiful! I will kill these five monsters and shall anoint thy feet with their blood, and then — thou shalt be king!'

One day, however, she fell ill, and her five noble husbands surrounded her couch. The eldest, Ajjuna, sat above and tenderly stroked her head. Two brothers sat on either side and stroked her hands. Two brothers knelt below and stroked her feet. But their servant, the misshapen dwarf, sat aside and wept.

Soon Guru Drona came, applied his skill, administered a healing drink and strengthening herbs, and then stood watching by the door.

As he thus watched he saw that Kanha bent her head in sign to Prince Ajjuna, while at the same time hands and feet sent messages to the four other princes. Soon he observed that her gaze of keenest longing was fixed on the misshapen var-

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let, and that he too received a message, but from her tongue. All six seemed satisfied. It was evident that each could read his sign, and drew great comfort from the message.

But Guru Drona thought:

'Heyday, a sign for each! The hunchback varlet too is honoured with a sign! Her head, her hand, her feet, sent words of cheer, her tongue sent words of love!'

Thereupon the wise Guru called the five princes from their wife's bedside and took them to the courtyard of the palace. Turning to the four younger brothers, he asked:

'Did ye observe that Kanha bent her head in sign to Prince Ajjuna?'

'No, honoured Guru, we did not observe,' they answered.

'Tell us, Ajjuna, what the sign portends?' – the Guru asked the eldest prince.

'Her meaning was, O venerable Friend,' the prince reluctantly replied, 'that me she loves and no one else, and that the Kasi-Realm will be my share.'

'Yea verily! I read aright,' the Guru said. 'What meaning were the tokens with her hands and feet, O Royal Youths?' he asked the younger four.

'The same, O Teacher,' they said in one breath.

'Know ye, O Royal Youths, that Princess Kanha moved her tongue in love towards your hunch-backed slave?'

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'Nay, Lofty Guru, nay, we know it not,' they chimed in unison.

Thereupon the wise Drona revealed to them his conviction that Princess Kanha was guilty of misbecoming conduct with the slave, but they would not believe that she – the daughter of a king – could love a monstrous baboon of a man and spurn the fairest princes of the Jambu Continent. Thus the wise teacher called the slave and quizzed him hard; and he, the cripple, knowing the Guru Veda-learned and therefore holding supernatural powers, unbosomed all he knew.

When the five brothers heard from the lips of their slave that their adored wife laid her love at the misshapen varlet's feet, and had assured him that she would kill her husbands to make him king, they could not restrain their tears. Wringing their hands in grief and despair, they exclaimed:

'How could she spurn the love of men of royal blood endowed with divine beauty, and fondle and caress a hump-backed slave! What man can henceforth trust a woman?'

But their wise teacher Drona consoled them with the following words:

'Do not lament and weep, my Friends, for what occurred is not exceptional, but normal happening; by your own experience have ye learned the truth: Women are depraved, and deadly, and calamitous! Have I not countless times sought to

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persuade you to leave the world, cursed and tormented as it is by womankind, and seek a safe retreat in the forest's leafy labyrinth, unsullied by the poisonous redolence of woman?'

Thus the ancient Guru waxed eloquent upon the truth of woman's wickedness, and made the matter clear to them just as a kindly host adds fuel to the flame upon the hearth to guide his guest towards the pallet in the corner; for dark and light are all alike for mortals blind, but he who sees can see only in light!

Soon the five brothers dried their tears and became consoled:

'Yea, honoured Teacher, thou art right,' they said. 'God wot, we ought to have obeyed thy counsels at the hour when Princess Kanha cast her spell on us! We shall withdraw from worldly life to solitude.'

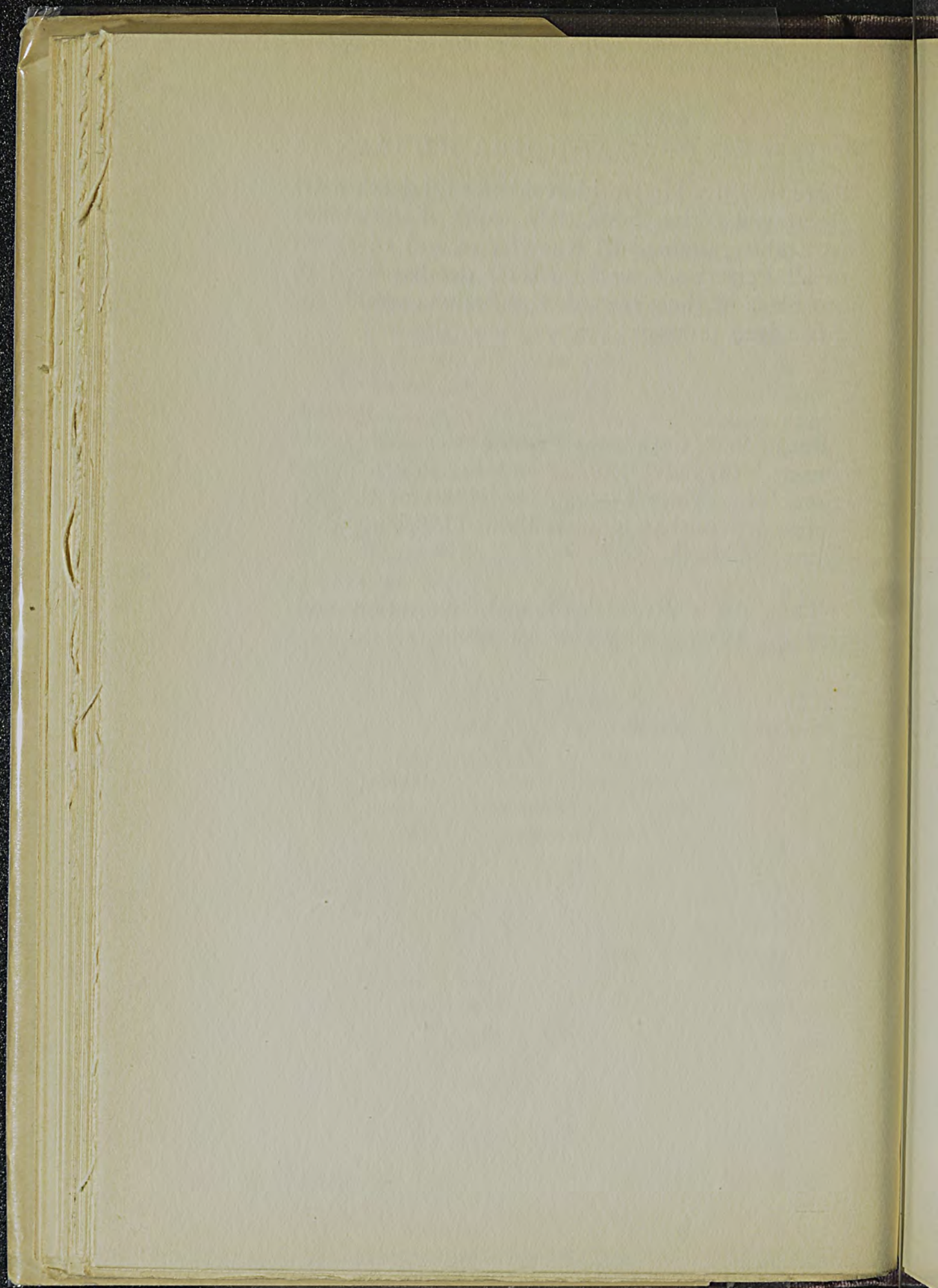
After truth had thus taken possession of their minds and turned their hearts, the five princes left their faithless wife to the embraces of their crooked slave, and with their Guru Drona ascended into the wilderness of the Himalaya. There, in a beautiful forest, where in a jungle of leaves and flowers, of trees and shrubs, hummed swarms of multi-coloured bees and sweetly sang a multitude of birds, there they found a glade of emerald turf, where from a roseate rock gushed forth a crystal spring. And in this glade, worthy to house the gods of heaven, they built six lowly huts. And

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there they lived in world-avoidance till death most rigorous ascetics. Soon they acquired the ability to Ecstasy, attained all Knowledge, and advanced to all Perfections, and on their death passed to the place of their reward, the Brahma-world, for a hundred thousand years.

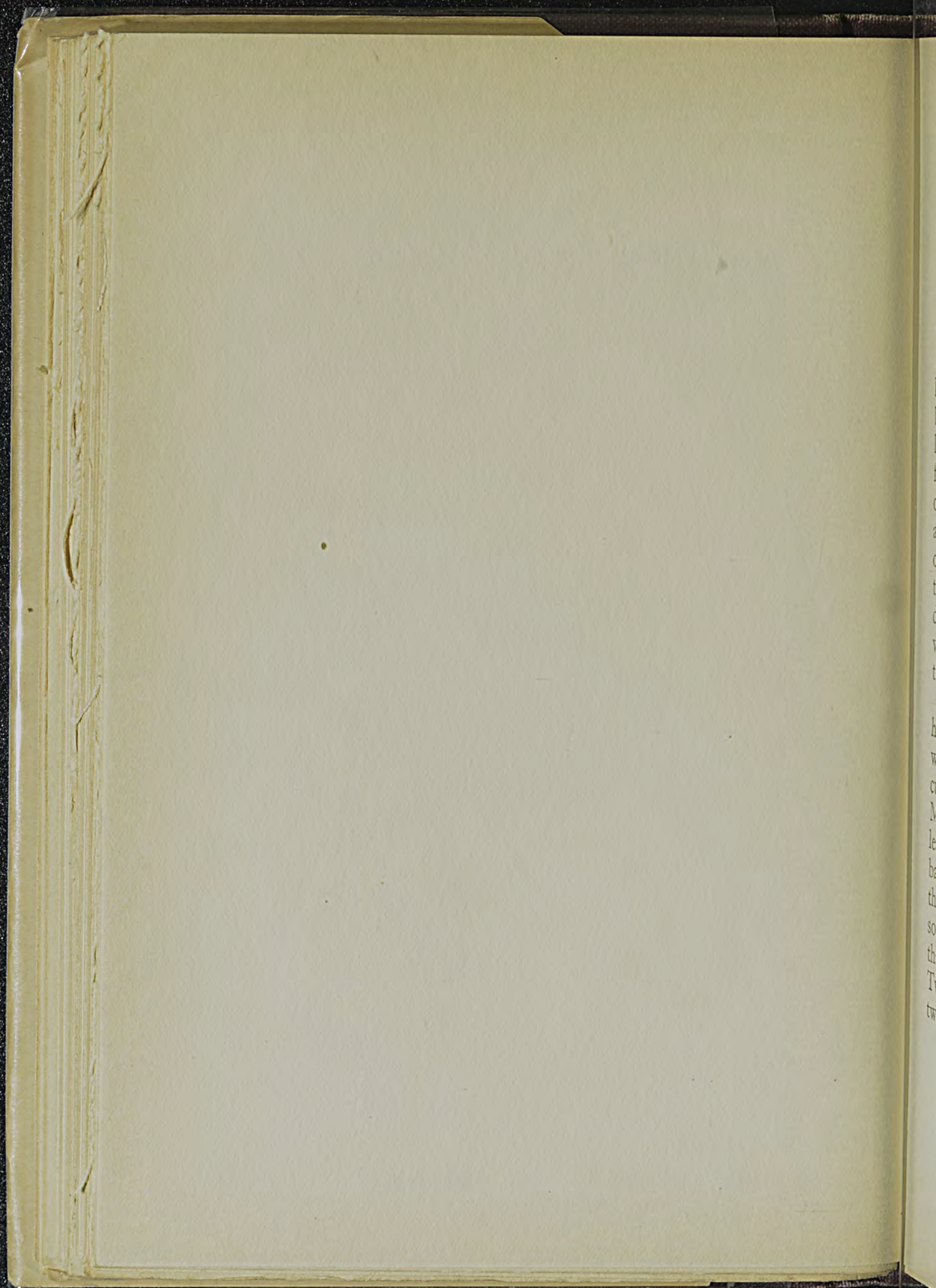
'But in those days 'twas I who was the wise Guru DRONA,' thus did Kunala end his fourth narration, 'but Prince AJJUNA, the eldest of the five defrauded husbands, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

Thus reads Kunala's Fourth Narration concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.



v.

The Tale of the Magic Charm



But He, the Parrot-King, the fifth time oped his bill of shining gold and told this tale: —

THE TALE OF THE MAGIC CHARM

IN the very centre of the towering Vindhja range, from which the two halves of India stretch out like the two wings of a bird, in a valley surrounded by precipices, lieth the Daddara-Lake. Here, below the shining surface of the crystal flood, spreads far and wide a mighty Naga-Realm, the country of the Daddara-Serpents, creatures well versed in all kinds of sorcery and magic arts. In the middle of the lake and at its greatest depth, looms high the water-palace of the Serpent-King Sura-Daddara. At an hour propitious, or not, two sons were born to him, and they were named DADDARA the Elder and DADDARA the Younger.

Daddara the Elder, or Mahadaddara, was soft-hearted and amiable, but Daddara the Younger was ill-natured and malicious; continually he cursed and maltreated his sisters, the royal Naga-Maidens. When his father, the Serpent-King, learned of his younger son's hardness of heart and barbarity, he commanded that he be banished from the Naga-Realm. But his firstborn son, speaking soothing words, turned away the father's wrath so that he granted royal pardon to his wayward son. Twice was the father's anger thus aroused, and twice his elder son stayed his avenging hand.

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But when Daddara the Younger proved his malevolence the third time, and the elder brother again spoke soothing words and pleaded forgiveness, the king waxed wroth:

'As thou, my first-born, ever wardest off the blow which justice ought to strike at him whose acts of cruelty befoul my crown, thou too deservest punishment. I banish both of you from our Naga-Realm. Crawl hence as mean, ignoble snakes, and seek Benares; there live three years within a filthy dunghill.'

In vain all tears, in vain all pleadings: the king was obdurate. The Naga-Princes were driven forth from the Realm of Serpents, and crept away as mean, ignoble snakes. And when they left Daddara Lake and touched dry land, they all at once lost the Naga-Serpent's power to assume the shape of other creatures, including that of man. Long did they crawl; but, when they reached Benares, they found at no great distance from the city and near the sacred Ganga's shore, close by the royal park, a hill of refuse of gigantic size. Therein they dwelled.

Two years had passed when one day they were creeping to and fro on the shore of the sacred Ganges, gorging themselves on juicy frogs for their tiffin. Suddenly they heard a piercing scream and many yells, and, as they raised their heads with lightning speed, beheld a crowd of village boys regarding them with hatred in their eyes.

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The hostile boys threw sticks at them and clods of earth, and cried:

'Look at these water-lizards with their arrow-tails and saucer-heads! Cease to exist, ye base frog-eaters; go to perdition, O ye wallowers in filth!' Such deadly insults did they heap upon the exiled Naga-Princes.

The younger Daddara, by reason of his fiery temper, grew angry at such disrespect and rudeness, and said to Daddara the Elder:

'O, Brother, hearest thou their insolence, the vile affronts they hurl at us? They know not who we be: not lizards, as they deem, but venomous cobras, which with one breath from their nostrils can make them lumps of clay! I can no longer bear these vile indignities. Come, Brother, let us leap and strike; these slave-brats deserve death!'

But Daddara the Elder besought his brother to refrain from vengeance:

'Nay, brother, nay! Let us be prudent! He who is driven from his home and kindred, and dwells as exile in a foreign land where no one knows his caste and worth, he may not vent his anger on such ignorance. Therefore let us condone their fault—they are but slaves and sons of slaves. Should our venom kill but one of these, his kinfolk, nay, the entire village, will with spades destroy our lair, and strike us dead with bamboo-staves!'

And Daddara the Younger realized the justice of

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his brother's words, and curbed his anger and resentment.

But while these serpent-princes suffered such indignities, the King SENAKA was taking the air among the gorgeous flowers of his park. Hearing the turmoil and espying the mob of boys, he asked his retinue:

'Odzooks! What a noise! What be these boys about?'

His servitors, stretching their necks, replied:

'The peasant rabble, running down twain monster snakes, and throwing clods of earth at them!'

The king exclaimed:

'Foil their design. Bid them to desist! Serpents are sacred in my realm!'

In this manner the two exiled royal serpents were saved from death by good King Senaka. Soon afterwards the period of their banishment was over, and Sura-Daddara, their sovereign and father, called them home. But during the festival of welcome at the Naga-Palace in the depths of Daddara Lake, the brothers twain recounted to their father their dangerous adventure at Benares. The Naga-King was highly gratified and said:

'Eternal gratitude ye, Royal Nagas, owe to this mortal king, for he has saved your life! Never forget your debt to him, but ever seek to requite his warmth of heart! Therefore return to Benares and dwell there for ever. But not in your former place of punishment, the filthy dunghill, but in the royal

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lotus-pond in King Senaka's park. There build a water-palace of a hundred tiers and found a Naga-Kingdom. One hundred thousand subjects of my realm, Daddara Serpents, will follow you. Abide for ever there, and guard your benefactor!

Joyfully the Serpent-Princes twain returned to Benares, and founded in the lotus-pond of King Senaka's park a new Naga-Realm.

Soon afterwards the two Daddaras in human form, as holy Brahmins appeared at midnight in the sleeping-chamber of the king: in both hands carried they a goodly quantity of priceless jewels, and, at their heels, there followed modestly a Naga-Maiden of ravishing loveliness. And bowing low before the king, Daddara the Elder said: 'O King of Kings, behold thy grateful servants, the Naga-Princes, the Royal Serpents, which, when banished from their home as humble snakes, were saved from death by thy benevolence! Now dwell we twain, as sovereigns of one hundred thousand Naga-Serpents, below the surface of thy lotus-pond, resolved to guard thy precious life alway. Accept, O king, these Naga-Jewels; they are a humble proof of our esteem. Take to thy bosom too this Naga-Maiden, our sister, the fairest of our race; she will attend to thy wants and guard thy sleep. If she perchance stays unseen for a time and thou desirest her, then call her by her name: Put-Put-Ba! Instantly she will bow before thee! But, Royal Senaka, grant her thy love,

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for Put-Put-Ba, our sister, is daughter of a most exalted Royal Naga-family.'

The king accepted graciously the glittering treasure and bid the Royal Naga-Maid hearty welcome. And with the Serpent-Princes he concluded a covenant of friendship.

One day the king, with the Naga-Maid at his side, walked through the park. When they approached the lotus-pond, the maid espied cleaving the green-hued surface of the pool a beauteous water-serpent. Forthwith her heart was filled with sensuous desire and longing irresistible for her own kind. Thus, at the moment when the king bent to inhale the fragrance of a rose, she doffed her human shape, and donned her serpent-skin; then diving far down beneath a lotus-leaf, she turned, dashed upwards like an arrow, sprang high above the flood and hurled herself upon the Naga-Serpent. Entwined like creepers on a Musalinda-tree, their glistening bodies, like ribbands dancing in the wind, dashed to and fro and held sweet alliance.

When King Senaka rose and turned, his Naga-Maid was gone. Deserted was the path between the beds of roses, and on the pond the lotus-leaves, like shields of emerald green, lay asleep.

The king searched long in vain. Then, mindful of Mahadaddara's words, he thrice pronounced her name. And when his call of 'Put-Put-Ba!' had sounded thrice, his eyes were opened and he saw

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the Naga-Maid as serpent in love entwined with one of her own kind.

The king waxed wroth, took up a bamboo-rod, and struck fierce blows against that serpent-maid. But she escaped into the deep, and, weeping, stood upraised, her head inclined, before the younger Daddara.

'Thy friend, O Brother' she weeping spoke, 'has struck my back fierce blows, though I never disobeyed his mighty will!'

Thus lied the Naga-Maid, showing the marks of blows upon her glistening skin.

But Daddara the Younger, ignorant of the truth, grew angry at the king's ingratitude and said:

'Dear Sister, be consoled; into the sleeping-chamber of the king I will glide, instantly, and with my venom-breath will I kill the ingrate.'

So Daddara set forth, and, when he reached the royal bower, he swiftly crept beneath the royal couch. There silently he coiled and waited for the night. But when Senaka sought his rest and with his foremost queen entered the bower, the Naga-Prince, prepared to strike, heard King Senaka say: 'O most beloved wife, my heart is sore this night: my Naga-Maid is gone! She whom I cherished next to thee, my foremost queen, left my side. Methinks I wearied her, and she prefers her own Daddara race. She swam into the lotus-pond in serpent-shape and clasped in love a serpent of her kind. I greatly fear that her account to her

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brothers, who are my friends, will put the blame on me, and I shall lose the friendship and esteem of the Naga-Kings.'

When Daddara the Younger heard these words, he instantly uncoiled and glided swiftly homeward to the lotus-pond. Then seeking Daddara, his brother, he told him all.

But he, the Elder, scolded him:

'A lucky accident, O rash and reckless Brother, has saved our friend, the king, from death! When wilt thou ever learn the steady prudence of the Nagas? Let now this shameless Serpent-Maid, though our sister, be banished from our realm! To Takkasila she shall go and choose a dunghill for her habitation.' Thus ruled the elder king, and his command was speedily obeyed.

Then Daddara the Elder swiftly glided to the palace of the king, roused him from sleep, and told him all. When he had asked the royal pardon for his brother's over-haste, he said:

'The Naga-friendship for thee, O mortal King, knoweth no bounds, for Naga-gratitude lasteth for ever! Accordingly we, Naga-Princes, be agreed to bless thee with a gift of matchless excellence: a magic charm whereby thou wilt comprehend the speech of all creatures. But never mayest thou reveal this charm to other mortal. If thou infringe this law, thy doom is sealed: a mystic fire will arise from thy heart and consume thee on the instant!'

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The king agreed with joy. Mahadaddara then pronounced the magic charm, reiterating it a score of times, and from this time King Seneka could understand the speech of all the living creatures, e'en that of flies, gnats and beetles.

When on the following day he sat nibbling rice and honey-cake, under the purple canopy upon the dais of gold, a crumb of cake, a grain of rice, a drop of honey fell upon the floor. The king then heard an ant apprise her mates of the rich find: 'Come hither, sisters, hasten! A royal honey-tub has burst, a wagon-load of mellow rice, a cart-load of honey-cake is spilled upon the floor!'—and in a trice a million ants, venting their joy with deafening noise, crawled forth from all the palace-nooks, from all the crevices, from high and low, from north and south, from east and west, to feast upon this royal meal.

The king was much amused and laughed aloud with glee. The favourite queen, however, Candavati, wondering greatly, mused:

'What saw my Lord and Master that aroused his mirth? I verily believe that he takes greater pleasure in my company this day than e'er before!'

When, later in the day, Senaka sat at tiffin, a drop of sugar-sap fell on the floor, and soon he heard a fly exclaim:

'Fly hither with full speed! Cascades of sugar-juice are rushing from the royal board, a giant pond has formed! I cannot possibly lap it alone!'

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Now roared the king with laughter, just at the moment when the queen passed to his hand a spoon of gold. But Candavati thought:

'The king is pleased with me, forsooth!'

But later, when Senaka, after his bath, sat on his golden couch, he heard a gnat say to his mate:

'Come, sweetheart, let us hug each other on the royal back!'

The other gnat replied:

'Nay, husband, let us wait! Soon will the queen perfume her lord with aromatic scent, with attar, bergamot and musk. I greatly hope that then a drop of perfume will fall upon the floor. Then, having bathed therein, my redolence will please thee, and love will taste so sweet!'

When King Senaka heard these words, his laughter was so boisterous that a scrap of crystal broke from the jewelled chandelier and crashed upon the floor.

The queen now fancied that the king was more than ever startled by her beauty. 'My pulchritude to-day is surely marvellous!' she said, as she gazed in the golden mirror by her side.

But when at night she lay beside her lord beneath the quilt of eiderdown and silk, she asked: 'What caused thy mirth this day, O Lord?'

King Senaka replied:

'Naught to concern thee, Candavati! Be silent now and sleep!'

But woman-like the queen persisted until her

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royal spouse told her the truth : that the magic charm of Daddara, the Naga-King, permitted him to understand the speech of all that walk and crawl, that fly and swim, and what he heard roused him to mirth. And, when she craved the boon, he told her what the ants and flies and gnats had said.

But Candavati, wroth for that it was not her beauty, but stupid insect-talk that had pleased the king, said to her lord:

'Tell me, O Lofty One, this magic charm!'

'Why, Love, desirest thou to know?'

'That I may be able to understand the discourse of the fleas in our bed at night!'

'Unnecessary, Dear!' the king replied; 'let me but listen and expound their words. But not a sound! The voice of fleas is soft!'

And now the king heard how a flea upon the silken coverlet called to another flea upon the floor:

'Who art thou, varlet? Who gave thee leave to enter my abode? Hop speedily away, thou blood-corsair!'

The other flea replied:

'O noble puncturer of royalty, my name is Mandavisarpini. I am the favourite flea of Karataka, the watch-dog in the court. To-day my master sneaked upstairs when all the high-born gentry were abroad, and, rendered groggy by the perfume of this room, I hopped from his tail upon

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the floor. Foolhardiness on my part, Noble Friend! When the servants came and drove my master out with sticks and whip, I was too far removed to leap on Karataka's tail. Thus I was left, against my will, and hopped under this platter.'

'This be no platter, stupid blood-marauder thou! This be the couch on which at night the Mighty Giant-King enjoys his sleep in company! And I, my wandering dog-flea from the stable-yard, I be the Privy-Court Flea of their Majesties. Blue blood I suck, naught else.'

'O Noble One,' the dog-flea pleaded hard, 'be gracious and humane. See, I am far from home, without a shelter, and so very hungry. Thy lotus-feet I worship, Lofty One; pray let me stay and have a bite. To taste of royal blood, what heavenly bliss! O, let me hop and bite and drink this once!'

The Privy-Court Flea of the King was deeply touched, his sympathy aroused by such a humility and eloquence.

'So be it, humble friend,' he kindly said, 'I am no cut-throat flea, but blue-blood raised. This once I let thee spend the night here, and permit thee sip a drop or two of royal blood. But, have a care friend, and do not bite my lord too soon: tap him when he is fast asleep, or when he dallies with his queen. But keep a sharp look-out, tap gingerly, and drill with delicate touch and gentleness!'

THE MAGIC CHARM

'O, Noble Patron! Why with gentleness?' the proletarian flea replied. 'Once only taste I royal blood; the chance will never come again! Thus let me bite with force and drink my fill!'

'Nay, nay, thou thirsty soul, this may not be! My own life were in peril. Did not my sainted uncle once concede to a stranger-flea the boon to wet his whistle with the blood of King anointed? And he, a most impulsive brute, bit with such feverish vehemence that Royalty awoke, whooped loud with pain, and yelled: "Zounds! S'death! Something has bit me!" Yea, friend, that alien flea did not deserve his luck: he hopped and saved his skin! But uncle, kindly uncle, mother's brother and my guardian, was caught and crushed between the fingers of the queen!'

The air rang with the boisterous laughter of the king, who soon informed his queen of all he heard. But she took it amiss that he, her spouse, should alone know the charm, and, flaring up, demanded of her lord the magic word.

'Ask not, my Love!' the king replied. 'The Naga-Prince forewarned me that, if I revealed the magic charm to fellow-mortal, I should die forthwith!'

But Candavati would not hear:

'If thou in truth lov'st me, O King, tell me the charm! For else thy queen must perish, for without the charm she cannot live.'

The king, loving his queen with all his heart

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and cowering under Candavati's will, could not refuse; and so he plighted his faith that on the morrow he would tell.

At the dawn of the day, when he arose, he sadly mused:

'This day the magic fire will consume my heart!' And, filled with woeful thoughts, he sought his lotus-pond and called his friend, the Naga-King, to say farewell.

When Daddara in human form appeared, the king confessed; but he, the Naga, thought: 'This undiscerning doltish mortal agrees to suffer death and be consumed, because a wicked woman so desires. I' faith, women are depraved and deadly and calamitous! But I will guide his feeble mind and wayward heart, and save his life!' And Daddara spoke thus:

'O, Friend, do not divulge the secret to the Queen before thou hearest what thy Sindhu-steed says to this ass!'

And verily the royal steed, and at his side the palace-ass, stood grazing on the meadow by the pond, gossiping merrily.

'Dear cousin,' asked the Sindhu-steed the ass, 'dear cousin, is it true that asses be so shallow-brained that their stupidity is satisfied with thistles and dead leaves?'

'Alas, thou bearer of a king, 'tis but too true; I cannot shake my ears at that! But, coz, ye horses too are asinine, else would ye, being the stronger

THE MAGIC CHARM

of the two, not bear the rein of man, but run away!

'Yea,' sighed the steed, 'faint hearts we be! My only consolation is that greater blockheads than we do exist.'

'Impossible!' the ass rejoined.

'Yea, truly, greater asses! I need mention but the king!'

'The king! And why?'

'Imagine, friend: this jackass of a king agrees to die, to be consumed by magic fire, because a worthless woman so desires! Is he not a greater donkey e'en than thou? Or wouldst thou break thy neck, because thy she-ass bids thee die?' And both raised up their heads and guffawed heartily.

Senaka, humbled in the dust, addressed the Serpent-King and said:

'O, Naga-Prince, I gave my word: a royal oath may not be broke, e'en though it costs the sovereign's life!'

But Daddara replied:

'True, Friend: a king must keep his word. But as a Naga-King owes life to thee, the Naga-King must now guard thee from death. To Yama's dismal habitation no evil woman may banish my friend. Wherefore, O King, do what I bid; thus wilt thou keep thy word, and still escape from death.'

Thus Daddara, the Serpent-Prince, instructed King Senaka, what to do, and then, assuming

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serpent's form, plunged into the lake. But he, the king, returning, called the queen and asked: 'O, fairest Queen, bidst thou me still to speak the magic word?'

'Yea, Lord!' the queen replied.

'So be it then! But first thou must fulfil King Daddara's condition.'

'What be it, Lord?' she asked.

'Twelve lashes on thy back and not a sound of lamentation!'

Devoured by her desire, the queen agreed, but when the sturdy slave applied his first scourge, she shrieked aloud and called:

'Desist, O King, I cannot bear the pain! And keep thy secret, Lord; the magic word I crave no more to hear!'

But then Senaka cried:

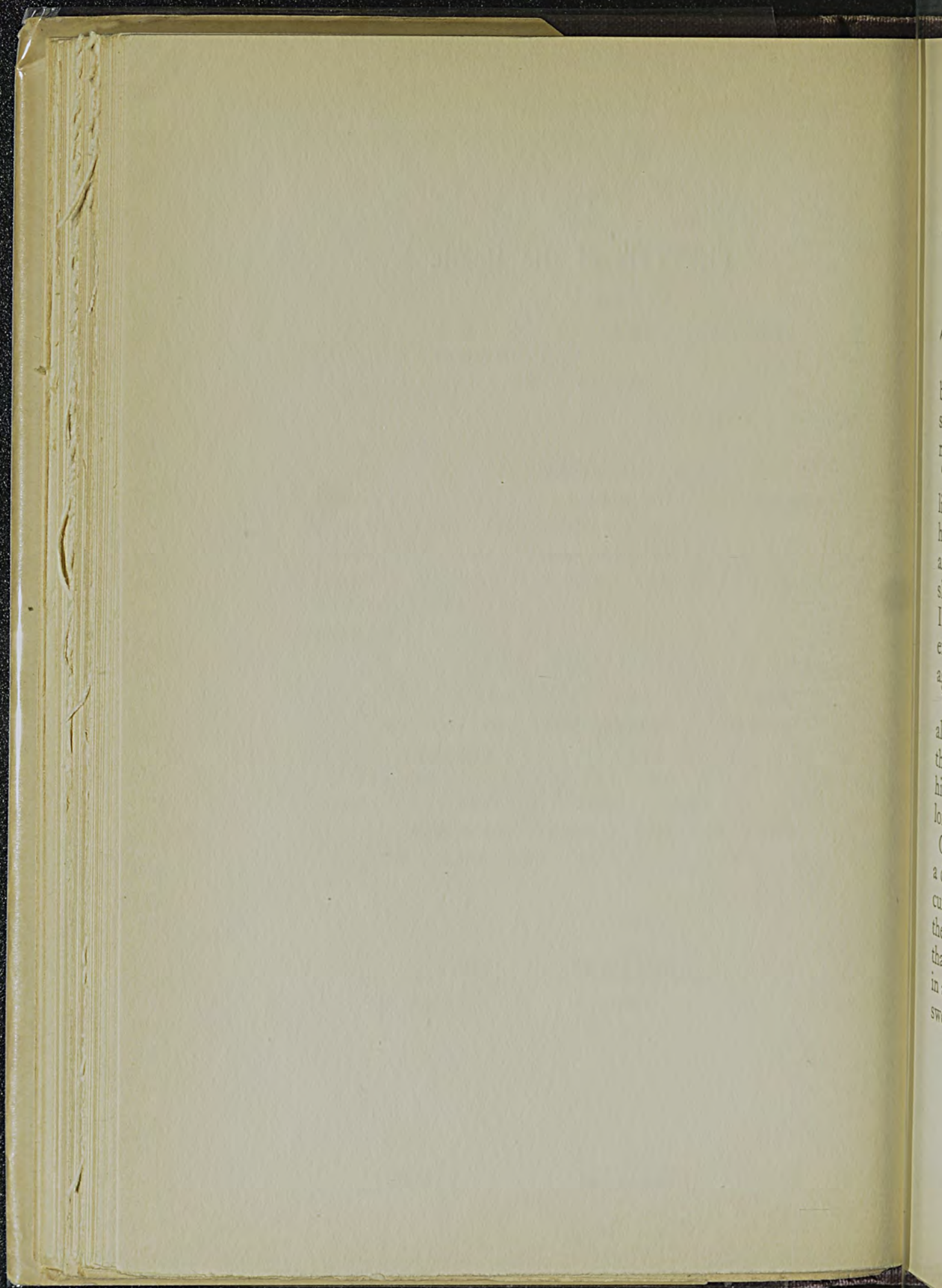
'Go to perdition, O bloodthirsty fiend! Cease to exist, O wicked murderess! For but a single word thou doomedst to death him who loved thee well! Hey, slave, lash on until her skin is torn in shreds.'

'Twas done; and thereupon Senaka drove Candavati from his palace. And the selfsame night he chose the fairest of his sixteen thousand wives to be his foremost spouse, his Queen.

Thus reads Kunala's Fifth Narration concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.

VI.

The Tale of the Beetle



But He, the Parrot-King, the sixth time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: —

THE TALE OF THE BEETLE

THE new favourite wife of the King Senaka was called UBBARI. She was affectionate, tender, beautiful and as graceful as a gazelle. Her beauty surpassed that of mortal woman and was well-nigh divine. Ubbari was wont to say to her lord: 'O King of Kings, instead of desiring thy death like Candavati, I should consider it supreme happiness to die for thee. I shall love thee even after my death. If the gods call thee before me, I shall mount the funeral pyre with thy body: but if I die before thee, I shall wait for thee in my future existence until thou followest me, to be thy wife again, to serve thee as of yore.'

With such protestations of eternal fidelity and all-exceeding love Ubbari pinioned the heart of the king to herself alone, so that he neglected all his other sixteen thousand wives and cared no longer even for his friends.

One day, however, the Queen was stricken with a dangerous disease, and in a short time she succumbed to its fierce onslaught. Her death filled the king with inexpressible sadness. Forbidding that her body be burned, he ordered it to be laid in a coffin of crystal and to be embalmed with oil, sweet-smelling ointments, and many redolent

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herbs. Then he bade his courtiers to place the coffin under his royal couch. Upon this couch he lay day and night, weeping and lamenting, and partook of neither food nor drink.

In vain the dignitaries of his court, his ministers and the Brahmins attached to his person, sought to console him with words from the Sacred Vedas like these:

'Be not so sad, O King of Mortals! Be mindful of the truth that all things living are subject to decay!'

When the inconsolable king had lain thus for seven days, his Prime Minister thought within himself:

'The King's body is wasted like that of an ascetic in the wilderness of the Himalaya; as he refuses all nourishment, he will soon die. But if he dies our Kasi-realm will fall into chaos and be destroyed; for he has no heir. Thus we must try our utmost to preserve his precious life. Mayhap his faithful friend, the wise Naga-King, can turn his thoughts from yon silent form in the crystal casket, and restore him to life.'

So the Prime Minister entered the presence of the king and said:

'O Lord of the World, I pray thee to call thy friend, the wise Naga-King, to thy side. Methinks he can assuage thy grief.'

But the King mused:

'No one can console me, neither mortal nor

THE BEETLE

immortal. Not even Indra, the King of the Gods of Heaven, can turn my longing thoughts from her whose presence was the breath of my life. Still I will bid my Naga-friend to come to me, for he is a mighty Serpent, a Cobra surcharged with deadly venom. Him will I ask to strike me with his fangs. Then I shall die forthwith, and Ubbari, my most beloved wife, will serve me in my new life, as she served me in the old.'

And he said to his Prime-Minister:

'So be it, faithful friend! Go to the Lotus-Pond and there call three times: "Mahadaddara!" When the Naga-King appears before thee as a Brahmin, then tell him of my loss, and that I long to die from Naga-venom.'

The king's first counsellor fulfilled his mission, but when the Serpent-Prince had learned of his royal friend's grief and dole, and that he longed to die from Naga-venom, he replied:

'Return with speed and tell thy Lord: "The venom of the Naga-Serpents is not for friends, but for mortal enemies." He is my friend, to whom the bonds of love and gratitude bind me. Bid him to come to me; I will impart to him the place of his beloved Queen's new incarnation.'

When King Senaka heard the message sent him by the Naga-Prince, his heart was glad, and with all speed he proceeded to the lotus-pond. And when Daddara stood before him, he asked with wistful eagerness:

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'O Mighty Serpent-King, dost know in truth the place of my beloved's reincarnation?'

'Yea, Friend, I know,' the Naga-Prince replied.

'O, tell me quickly, Noble Friend; doth she still love me? And, Daddara, good Daddara, tell me, doth she anticipate with eagerness the coming of her loving lord?'

'My treasured Comrade,' the Naga-King replied, 'it makes my heart bleed that Senaka's ship of life hath cast its anchor in an ocean bottomless. Dost thou not comprehend that women know no constancy either in life or in death? Ubbari waiteth not for thee: though barely passed from thee, she loves – another!'

'Where is the place of her rebirth? Where doth she live, O Daddara?'

'Very, very far from here, in Yavana, Friend.'

'Impossible!' the king exclaimed, 'My matchless Ubbari can be reborn only as deity in Indra's paradise!'

'Alas, friend Senaka, she lives not in Indra's paradise! Because, as queen, thy Ubbari loved only herself and her own comeliness, because her idleness and vanity were most inordinate, because not one praiseworthy deed stands in heaven to her credit, because Ubbari was – Ubbari, therefore she now dwelleth – in a sty.'

'Impossible!' the king exclaimed.

'Thou disbelievest me? Forsooth! I will let thee see her!'

THE BEETLE

The Naga-King now murmured magic words, and suddenly exclaimed with loud imperious tones:

'Let instantly appear the twain beetles, which, ten thousand miles from here, before the pig-sty of the king of Yavana, are at this time rolling a lump of filth!'

The voice of Daddara was barely hushed when twain small-beetles skurried into view and halted at their feet.

Then Daddara exclaimed:

'Look at the smaller of the twain, O King! That's thy beloved Ubbari! She thinks no more of thee, but courts another.'

Senaka looked and saw — but not his queen. — 'O Mighty Serpent-King!' he said, 'this disgusting, filthy worm cannot be my radiant Ubbari!'

'Thou doubttest yet? Then hear her speak!' the Naga-King exclaimed, and with his finger he touched the smaller beetle.

'What doth My Lord command?' the beetle asked.

'I grant thee power of remembrance,' Daddara replied. 'Give answer, O thou wallower in slough, who wast thou in thy former life?'

'I was, O Lord, the favourite Queen of King Senaka of Benares; my name was Ubbari.'

'Tell me if thou still bearest love to him who was thy former lord?'

'Ah, Gracious Lord, 'tis true I was a Queen,

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living a life of splendour and of ease. A mighty sovereign was my slave: my eyes, my ears, my nostrils and my tongue were sentient but of exquisite delights. But, Lord, what doth this former glory profit me in my new life? Nay, Mighty One, I wish to be forgetful of the past. My present bliss lies on a level far superior to my former happiness: to roll a lump of dung in company with him who is now my lover and my cherished husband is unsurpassed felicity! Ay, gladly would I kill King Senaka, my former lord, and with his royal blood anoint the lotus-feet of my present husband, my dear, beloved beetle-mate!

'Enough!' the Serpent-King replied. 'No longer will I rob thee of thy blissful life. Go back to roll thy lump of dung!' – and, in a trice, the twain had vanished from their sight.

'Believest thou me now, O Royal Friend,' Dad-dara said to King Senaka, 'that futile it were, and furthermore most stupid, to die for love of such as she? All females are depraved, deadly and calamitous, no matter what they be, – worms or queens!'

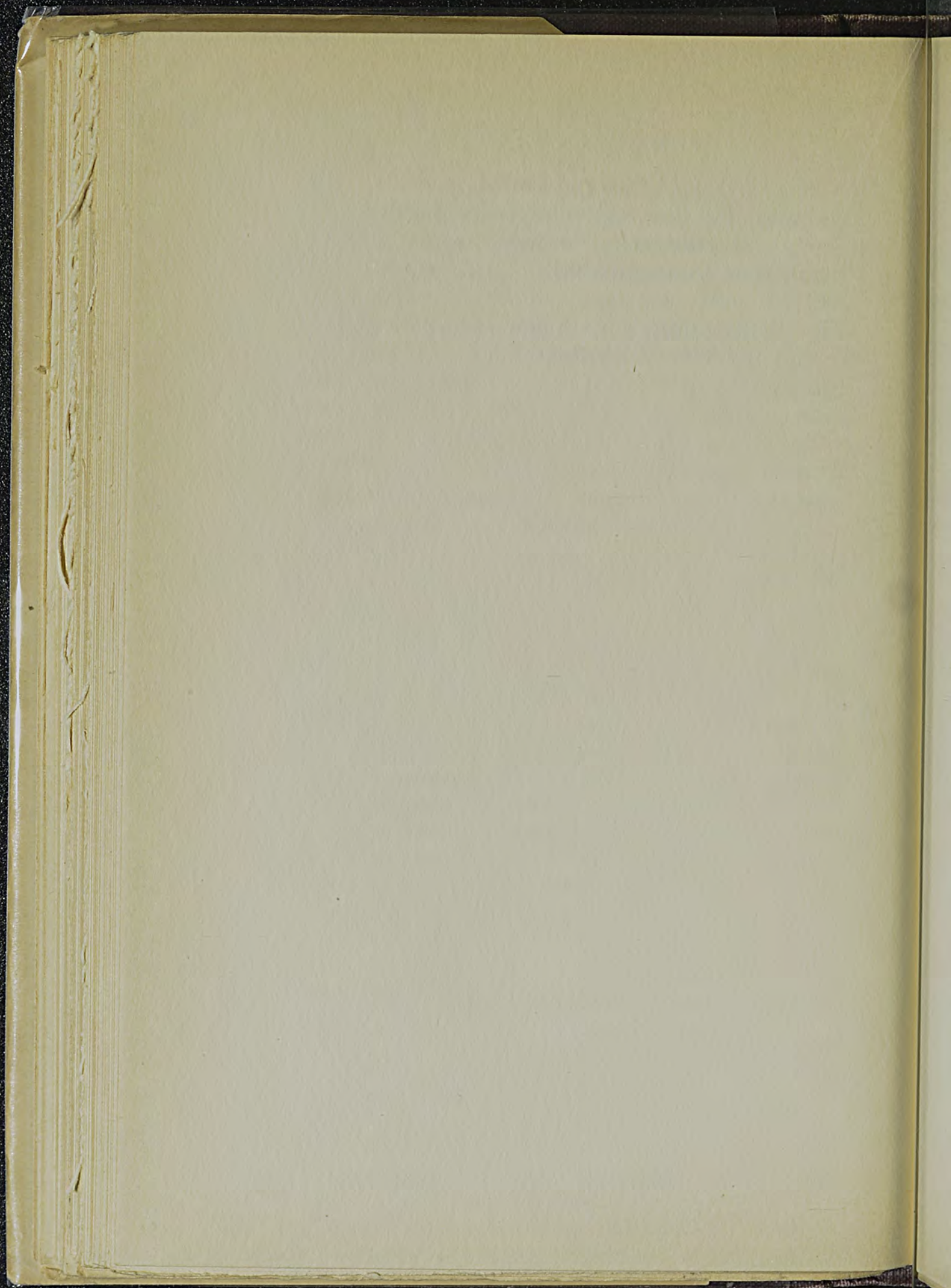
Thus did the Naga-Prince teach truth to Seneka and cure him of his sorrow and his passion, and gave him back to life. It stands to reason that the king had lost all faith in womankind.

'But in those days 'twas I who was MAHADADDARA,

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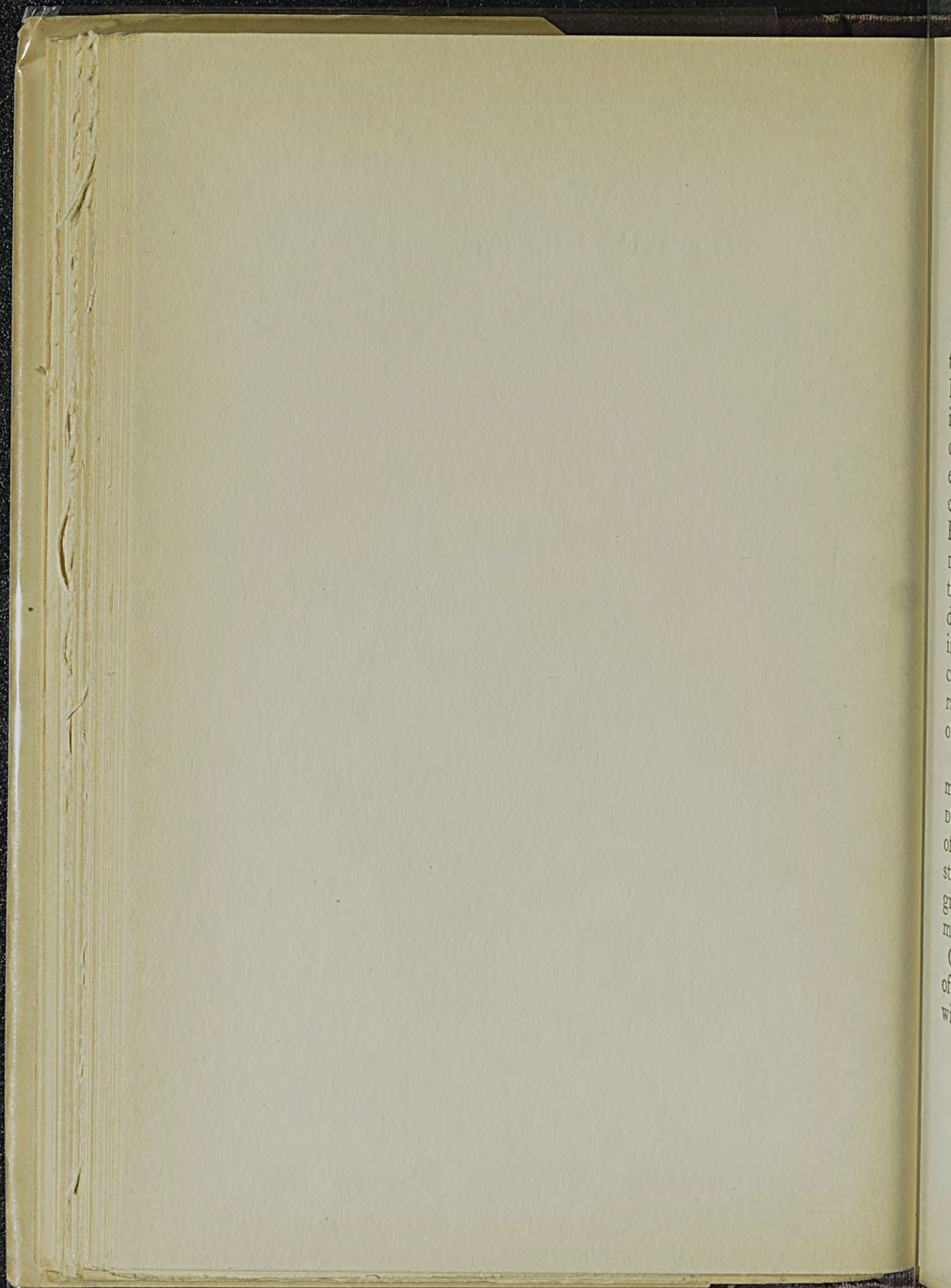
the Serpent-King,' thus did Kunala end his sixth narration, 'but SENAKA, who twice needed enlightenment concerning women, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

Thus reads Kunala's Sixth Narration concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.



VII.

The Tale of the Ape



But He, the Parrot-King, the seventh time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: —

THE TALE OF THE APE

IN times long past, when one of the Brahmadattas ruled at Benares, a noted Brahmin of that city was blessed with the birth of two sons. But the father dying when they were still mere infants, they grew to manhood without a father's care and guidance. BHIMASENA, the elder, was endowed with soberness of mind and a steady character, and thus became a learned godfearing Brahmin in spite of his orphaned state. SOMADATTA, however, the younger, refusing to acquire the learning and perfection of his caste, was devoted to the pleasures of the world. He freely indulged in strong liquors and led the life of carnality and debauchery. He was like unto a raging elephant on which the severest punishment of the mahout has no effect.

In the selfsame city there also lived a wealthy merchant, who had a beautiful daughter, called DHANAPALI. She had been wedded to a merchant of Takkasila in her seventh year, but at that time still lived in the house of her father until her growth and condition fitted her to be wife and mother.

One day this youthful wife stood by the window of her bower and beheld Somadatta conversing with other youths in the street below. Somadatta

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looked up, they gazed in each other's eyes, and each was struck with the other's beauty, like unto that of the God and Goddess of Love themselves. The young wife soon learned Somadatta's name and station, and sent her friend to him with a message. Her emissary, seeing in a moment that the youth was as blind with desire for Dhanapali's love as she was longing for him, whispered her friend's message into his ear, and on that selfsame day conducted him to her own habitation, where she asked him to tarry until Dhanapali too could be secretly conveyed thither. When at last Dhanapali entered the chamber where the Brahmin youth eagerly awaited her coming, she flung aside all modesty and maidenly reserve, and clasped him to her bosom with the greatest violence of passion. From that time forth they met day after day at this house and enjoyed the pleasures of each other's society.

Soon Somadatta's brother, Bhimasena, learned of the passion of his younger brother and strove to the utmost to lead him back on the path of rectitude.

'Brother,' he said to him, 'the Wise of all ages teach us this truth: "Women are depraved, dangerous and calamitous!" This merchant's wife of tender age has led thee astray, and thy sinful alliance with her will surely lead thee to destruction, and the Avici-hell, unless thou speedily returnest to the path of virtue and duty. Take

THE APE

these thousand gold piastres, leave the city, proceed to Takkasila, and become the pupil of my revered teacher Arthipala, who will make thee perfect in all the four and sixty arts and sciences!

But the elder brother's admonitions remained unheeded and his counsel was not followed. Somadatta's passion grew fiercer every day. One day, however, Dhanapali's husband arrived from Takkasila to conduct her to his own habitation. The young wife, almost despairing at the thought that she should be for ever parted from her lover called upon her friend and said:

'O Faithful One, save me from my great grief, which meaneth death to me unless assuaged! If yonder gloomy house at Takkasila becomes my prison and he, to whom I'm wed against my will, my jailer, I shall die! O, dearest Friend, save me from death!'

The young wife's bosom-friend was well acquainted with a sorceress, possessed of greatest skill in magic arts, in necromancy, and in all manner of witchery. To her she took the cheerless Dhanapali. The ancient dame, willing to do her best, nodded her head, and smiled a toothless smile and said:

'For one thousand coins of gold, Fairest Maid, my sorcery is at thy service and will effect thy happiness. My spells never fail: all day, all night wilt thou enjoy thy lover's company, no matter where thy jail and who thy jailer!'

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Soon Dhanapali met her Somadatta, disclosed the danger, announced her hopes and said:

'Once in my husband's house, I'm lost to thee, my Dearest: for she, his mother, would despotically rule my every step – her puppet should I be, bent to her will like elephant to mahout! But yonder sorceress declares that her dark art could well deliver us, so that we twain would ne'er be parted. A thousand coins of gold she asks as her reward.'

The youth forthwith proceeded to the temple where Bhimasena sacrificed to Shiva, and said to him:

'O Brother, faithful Friend, my heart is changed at last! My mind is fixed: to-morrow before sunrise will I join the caravan to Takkasila: there will I seek thy ancient Guru, wise Arthipala, and bid him to impart to me all his knowledge.'

The pious Brahmin, praising his brother's resolution, gave him a thousand gold piastres, embraced him tenderly, and said a kind farewell. The period of Candrayana Fasting, his service in Shiva's temple, prevented him from aiding in his brother's preparations.

But on the selfsame day Dhanapali took to the sorceress the heap of gold. Somadatta accompanied her. Now said the ancient dame:

'Two magic charms are known to me. The first is uttered while one claps a necklace round another's neck: and in a trice this one is changed –

THE APE

into an *ape*! But if one speaks the second charm while one unclasps the necklace, that selfsame ape becomes again a man. It's but the outer man that changes, not his human reason. If thou desirest, I will change thy lover Somadatta to an ape; then canst thou cheerfully follow thy husband to Takkasila, for he who fills thy life is ever at thy side.'

The youthful wife agreed, and Somadatta needed no coaxing. Forthwith the sorceress changed Somadatta to an ape, and taught his mistress the twain magic words. Then Dhanapali took her hairy lover home and showed him to her husband, saying her friend had given him to her for sweet diversion. The worthy merchant granted kind indulgence and bid a smiling welcome to the ape.

But when the sun arose, the merchant and his youthful wife departed from her father's house, and, with a giant caravan of servants and retainers, set out for Takkasila. A huge dusky slave bore Somadatta on his shoulders.

When they had wandered two whole days, a gloomy wall of forest loomed before them, and, when they entered, they beheld a multitude of apes inhabiting the forest's silent avenues. No sooner did these apes behold a fellow-ape perched on the shoulders of a slave than the forest rang with boisterous tumult. The din of screeching was so fierce that the whole caravan shuddered with fear. From every branch there hung an ape,

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on every trunk they raced in twos and threes, and crowds came running on all fours or waddling on their hind-feet to welcome their new brother. But he, the pseudo-ape, poor Somadatta, not understanding monkey-speech, could only roll his eyes and stare in silence. This strange indifference, unnatural affectedness, this most insulting silence roused the forest-apes to fury. Soon sticks and stones came flying through the air from right and left and from above, and, when their number swelled to thousands, defence became impossible. At last the furious beasts attacked the luckless slave, bit him and tore his robe in shreds, and he, in mortal terror, dropped his charge and fled; but Somadatta was their prisoner.

In vain his mistress, fair Dhanapali, screamed: 'O, rescue him, my darling ape!' — the merchant's folk could not prevail against such multitude. The apes dragged Somadatta away, and in a glade, far distant, held durbar on his fate. But when the human ape sat crouching in the midst of his tormentors, a short but fervent prayer to Him who spendeth life, restored his strength and courage. A sudden leap into the air, a savage roar of apish fury, half mixed with a human note, a rush upon the ring of startled apes, and — he was free!

Throughout the rainy season the unfortunate youth wandered aimlessly astray in that great

THE APE

forest. In utter loneliness, cold, hungry, ever fearful of attack by beasts of prey, in day-time seeking fruits and herbs to still his hunger, at night – when all the forest rang with the attacking roar of mighty beasts and with the howl of pain, the shriek of agony, the whines and squeals of creatures tortured – seeking shelter in some cave, thus Somadatta suffered judgment for his sin.

And, woe betide! – a cruel fate – nay, the avenging God – was not yet satisfied, not yet appeased. For when, one day, the luckless youth crouched high above the ground upon a lofty tree, cracking his nuts, a monster female-elephant, espying him and fearing danger for her calf, rushed at the tree, uprooted it, and with her trunk caught Somadatta as he fell. Then crashing through the underbrush, she drew up suddenly and pitched the human ape headlong upon a termite-mound. There Somadatta lay for several days, for from the sticky loam he could not extricate himself. But the white monster-ants, hysterically mad at the intruder and pilferer of their domestic peace, chewed him well-nigh to death.

Meanwhile the Brahmin Bhimasena, learning that despite his solemn word his brother had not joined the caravan to Takkasila, set out to seek the wayward lad. But neither at Benares nor at Takkasila did he find the slightest trace of him.

At last he gave up hope, left Takkasila, and returned on foot to his devotions at Benares.

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But on the way, at no great distance from the city of his birth, close by the sacred Ganga's shore, he suddenly espied, radiating from a mound of clay, two dazzling ruby-lights. When he drew near and burrowed in the earth, he found, half-buried in the clay, a living ape, the iris of whose eyes flashed scintillating rays, and around whose neck was clasped a necklace weirdly shaped. In wonderment the Brahmin disinterred the ape and put it on its feet. Then, falling at his saviour's feet, clasping his knees, the ape shed tears of joy, and human-like his lips seemed vainly to attempt to fashion words of gratitude. The Brahmin's kindly heart was touched: thus taking to his home the ape, he bid his slaves to nurse him back to health, to feed him well, and serve him day and night, as if he were his son. But never did the pious Brahmin suspect that his benevolence was showered on his father's son!

Thus Somadatta dwelled in simian comfort in his brother's house for three whole years. His heart was bereft of all hope. His human mind was in constant agony of fear that never in his life would he be a man again, when on a certain day, as he sat on the window-sill, with pensive sadness looking at the crowds which busily coursed to and fro upon the street, he suddenly espied the sorceress whose magic had deprived him of his human state. With open mouth and staring eyes he gazed for one short breath, then, uttering a fearful scream, he

THE APE

dashed with lightning speed upon the street, grasped the old dame, and deluged her with jabberings of entreaty. The sorceress knew him at once — for still he wore the chain about his neck — but, as the ape's iron grip caused fearful pain, she was forced against her will into the house and upstairs. Soon, shaking like a sala-leaf, she stood before the Brahmin Bhimasena and told him all. On his command she then unclasped the golden chain, pronounced the magic word, and changed the ape — into a man!

But the lost brother, Somadatta, fell at the noble Brahmin's feet, embraced his knees, and, sobbing, cried:

'O tender-hearted Bhimasena, Noble Brother, thou my deliverer from living death, I humbly crave thy pardon for my sin! My fearful suffering was well deserved, for never would I heed thy warning voice, but clung with soul and body to that wanton maid. My agony was a better teacher e'en than Guru Arthipala. It seared into my mind that greatest of all Truths: "Women are dangerous, depraved, and calamitous!" The world I've learned to hate: therefore let me flee its wickedness forever, and, in the forest's solitude, dwell a penitent!'

The Brahmin Bhimasena, overjoyed, embraced his brother Somadatta; the twain gave to the poor their wealth, and sought the sanctuary of the forest. There, in a hut of leaves, they lived a holy

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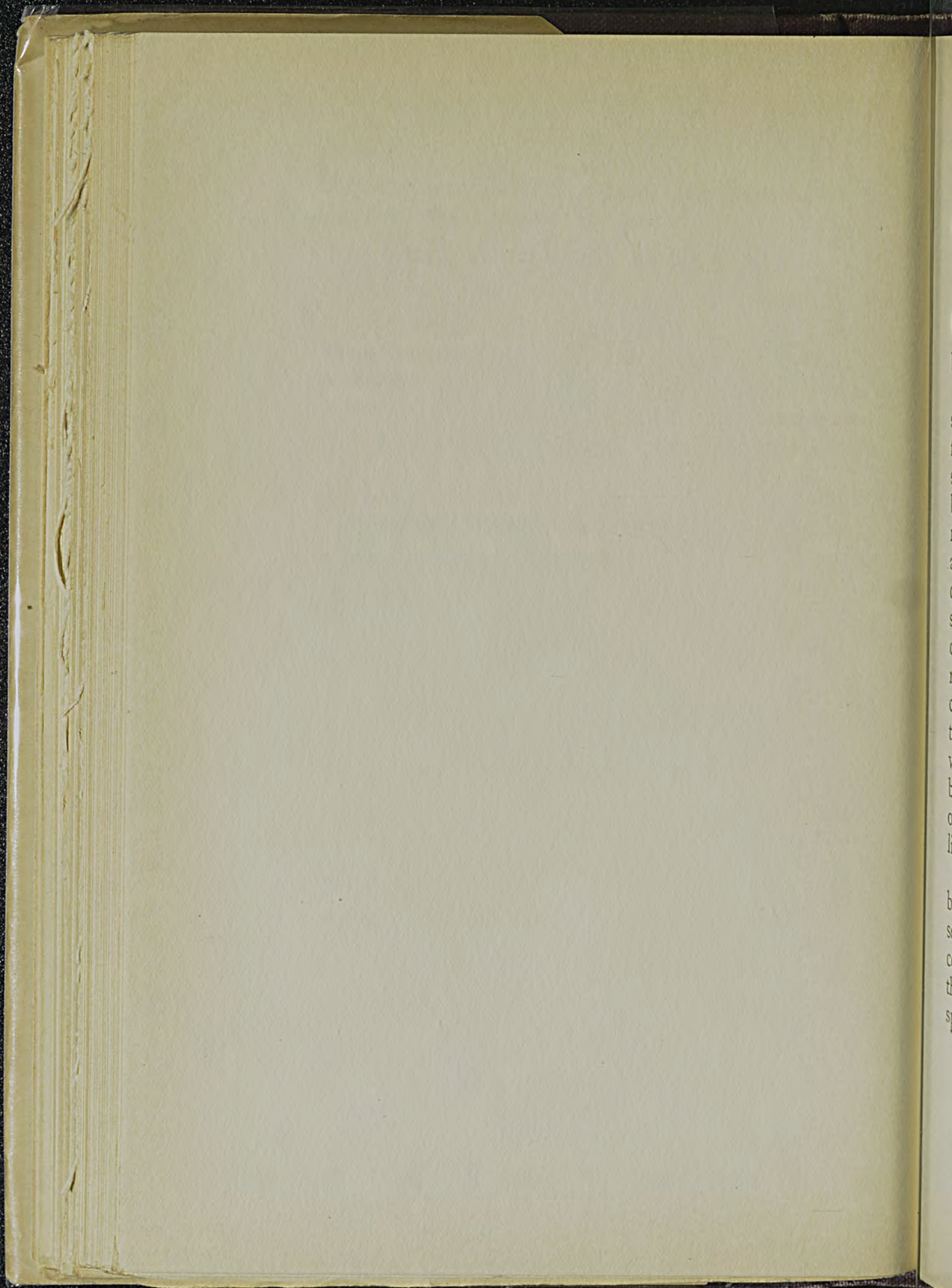
life, acquired All Perfections, and in time were taken to the Brahma World.

'But in those days 'twas I who was the Brahmin BHIMASENA,' thus did Kunala end his seventh tale, 'but SOMADATTA, he who for a woman's sake became an ape, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

Thus reads Kunala's Seventh Tale concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.

VIII.

The Tale of the Tender Hand



But He, the Parrot-King, the eighth time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale:—

THE TALE OF THE TENDER HAND

ONCE upon a time there reigned at Takkasila a king called MADDAVA, whom the gods had blessed with a daughter of incomparable beauty.

When this princess sat in the midst of her thousand adorned maidens, her beauty blazed like a flash of lightning against the black of sombre storm-clouds. She had brilliant hair, brilliant brows, brilliant eyes, brilliant teeth, a brilliant neck and shoulders, brilliant hips, brilliant hands and brilliant feet. Her slender figure, the exquisite architecture of her body, her large almond-shaped, lotus-flower-surpassing eyes would have confused the crystal-mind of a god; the mellowness and sweetness of her features could well be compared to the delicate pulchritude of the countenance of Saci, Indra's wife, the Queen of Heaven. Her lips were crimson like bimba-fruits, her breasts rounded and shining like the swelling sides of a vase of white porcelain, and her gait graceful like the gait of a young elephant.

Endowed with such incomparably dazzling beauty was the king's daughter, BIMBADEVI, who seemed born only to shed radiance upon the celestial regions, and to crown the female sex as the brow of a king is crowned with the gorgeous splendour of his diadem. All the heaven-favoured

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people who were privileged to watch her growth to womanhood exclaimed in unanimous admiration: 'Only a Deity is worthy of possessing a wife of such abundance of beauty!'

But her father thought:

'My daughter is a pearl among women, and therefore she may serve as wife only a world-ruling sovereign. Now the mightiest ruler of men throughout our Jambu World is the king of Benares. Therefore I shall offer Bimbadevi to the eldest son of King Brahmadatta: he alone of mortals is worthy of calling her wife and handmaid!'

And he said one day to his Chief Minister:

'I purpose to send a message to my Royal Brother at Benares, and offer him my daughter Bimbadevi as daughter-in-law. Of all mortals, his eldest son, Brahmadatta, the heir of his mighty throne, is alone worthy of calling my daughter wife and handmaid. But who, O trusted servant, is deserving of delivering this royal message?'

The Prime Minister answered:

'My son, O Mighty King, the Prince ARUNA!'

The king was satisfied. 'Send him to me on the morrow!' he said. 'He shall see her and converse with her before he sets out on his journey, that he may do justice to her beauty and virtues when he describes her to the Kasi-King.'

Accordingly, on the following day the son of the trusted servant of the crown, the young Prince Aruna, was conducted into the presence of the

THE TENDER HAND

king's daughter. Scarcely, however, had he beheld the lovely Maddava-Maiden, adorned with her jewels, her eyes scintillating rays of celestial light, her graceful head inclined towards him to receive his respectful homage, when his heart expanded as a gourd of leather expands when the cup-bearer fills it with the golden wine of royal vintage – and he felt that for Bimbadevi's sake he would gladly forgo the joys of heaven! And she too, the Beauteous One, was wounded by the flower-weapon of the God of Love, so that the Prince Aruna seemed to her mind an inhabitant of Indra's realm.

When the Prince Aruna arrived at home, he sank upon his couch and lay there several days refusing nourishment, and, when his anxious sire asked the reason, he answered:

'I shall not journey to Benares, Father, for I shall die!'

Soon afterwards the king asked his Minister where Prince Aruna was and why he had been absent from the court. And truthfully the father said: 'O, Mighty Sovereign, my son is ill. Since he beheld the matchless moon-face of thy daughter and listened to her silver-bell voice, he has taken nor food nor drink: love-sick he lieth on his couch, and asks the Gods for death. Eschew all wrath and furious indignation, O Puissant Lord, for no one can prevent the Mighty God of Love from striking serious wounds into one's heart! I trust that he will soon recover.'

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'Nay, faithful Counsellor, I be not wrathful that thy son could not gaze on the radiance of the sun and not become blind: but, nathless, he shall not be permitted again to cross the threshold of my royal habitation. Thy counsel now whom to despatch as messenger to Brahmadata in thy son's place!'

The king, aroused to prudence by Aruna's state, now visited his daughter, and to his great surprise found her too reclining on her couch, refusing food and drink, and yearning but to die. Perplexed, beset with doubt, and fearing death to all his hopes, king Maddava sent for his Palace Priest, keen-witted GANGAMALA, and said:

'O venerable Friend, my daughter Bimbadevi is love-sick for the youth Aruna, and I distrust the future. Mayhap he ventures to abduct her. Grant me thy counsel, O thou wisest of all Priests, how to protect this priceless jewel?'

'O Mighty Sovereign,' Gangamala answered, 'I hold enshrined, within my heart, the sacred Vedas all, the great Upanishad-books, the Puranas, the grand Mahabharata, the sublime Ramayana, the hallowed Manu-Laws. I am surcharged with worldly learning and with pious erudition. I hold all wisdom in the hollow of mine hand, I can outwit all humans, yea, all demi-gods; no difficulty which I could not overcome, but – counsel thee regarding woman – no, Mighty King, that is beyond my power: it were like weaving a rope of sand!'

And the wise priest continued:

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'I know one truth, O Royal Lord, the sum of all the truths concerning women: all are depraved, all deadly, all calamitous: thus reads the sacred word of the Chandogya Upanishad. Their cunning when they harbour ill design is limitless. There is no being that can guard a woman or keep her from committing wicked deeds; ay, e'en the infinite wisdom of the author of our being, Brahma, knew not how to guard the tiniest female worm! Or deemest thou thyself, O King, potent enough to do what BRAHMA Himself, the Almighty God, cannot do? Believest thou that thou canst guard thy daughter, keep from wickedness her who is woman and therefore craftier than a thousand fathers? Nay, Lord, try not the patience of the Heaven!'

But King Maddava placed reliance on his royal might, his father-power:

'For all that, Sapient Priest, I shall show thee that I am able to guard Bimbadevi. My Royal Self will watch her day and night until Prince Brahmadata of Benares has safely housed her in his palace.'

'Attempt it not, O My Beloved Lord!' the sage replied. 'Attempt it not, do not arouse the anger of the gods by striving to excel their might! And shouldst thou find a thousand stratagems to circumvent thy daughter's will, she would defeat them all!'

'Thou ravest, dotard priest!' the king now angrily exclaimed, and drove his ghostly mentor from his court. Another Brahmin took the place of Gangamala as Palace Priest, and he counselled the king

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to have the doors of the zanana watched all day by armed guards, and, in the night, to have the Princess sleep beside the royal couch.

Thus was the Princess watched all day by men-at-arms, imprisoned in the topmost chamber of the palace, but in the night she was carried to her father's slumber-hall where she lay, by his side, till dawn of day.

Bimbadevi, however, closed perhaps her eyes, but not the fountain of her cleverness. In truth she pondered every minute of the day and half the night how she could set at naught her father's will, and flee from Takkasila with her lover.

Thus one day she addressed her nurse with honeyed words, gave her a nose-ring of priceless worth, and said with cheerless tone:

'O honest Nurse, my heart is sad, for he who loves me lieth ill. I pray thee, Mother, go and see if he is still alive. I do not send a message to the lad, because my Royal Father disapproves, and I must never do what he forbids. But, Nurse, sing him that artless rhyme which I myself have framed: 'tis said a sick man loves a song.'

'So be it, Child; that can I do and not offend against the king's command. What is the rhyme?'

Then Bimbadevi took her lute and sang:

*The night is dark, it pours with rain,
But never let me hope in vain.
Come, silent elephant, come, tender-handed page,
To little bird in golden cage.*

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After the ancient dame had fastened in her mind the maiden's artless rhyme, she sought the presence of the Prince Aruna and sang him Bimbadevi's song. He was over-joyed, rose from his couch, and rendered homage to the nurse on bended knees.

'Ah, Mother!' he exclaimed, 'what wondrous song! A draught for my disease more potent than the magic charm of the most mighty sorcerer! But tell me, O most honoured guardian of a Queen – where sleepeth Bimbadevi?'

'Upon a bed of eider-down and crimson silk beside the royal couch.'

'Forsooth, that pleases me,' the Prince rejoined. 'A well-protected place. But, Mother, she is ill, as I was ill before her magic song dispelled my gloom. I long to be her leech, as she was mine, and to send the roses to her cheek and make her glad again. Thus, noble Dame, sing her this artless song of joy,' and Prince Aruna took the lute and sang:

*My elephant is wise beyond compare,
My page has hands of tenderness so rare,
They come and stand in stormy night;
Poor little bird, trust to their might!*

After the nurse had learned the prince's artless senseless rhyme, she hastened to her mistress's bower, sang Prince Aruna's song to her, and was rejoiced when, forthwith, Bimbadevi rose all

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smiles and most imperiously called for a plate of honeyed rice.

Prince Aruna was restored to health that self-same day. Immediately he sought and found a handsome page with tender hands, and bribed the foremost mahout of the king to train his own pet-elephant Nalagiri to stand throughout the night in silent patience. Naught else he undertook to pave the way, but, ever ready, waited for his chance.

The time was soon at hand. The lord of heaven, Indra, drove a sombre cloud across the sky above the city, and thrust his lance into its paunch: at once the rain burst from the rent and deluged Takkasila; e'en when the shades of night obscured the town, the flood did not abate.

But Prince Aruna thought:

'This is the night of which the Royal Maid has sung!'—and mounting swiftly his trustworthy elephant Nalagiri, attended by the youthful page with tender hands, he rode in silence to the royal park behind the palace. There pulling up his beast, he took his lute and softly sang:

*The night is dark, it pours with rain,
Thy song, little bird, was not in vain!
My silent elephant, my tender-handed page
Are waiting near thy golden cage!*

Thus sang the prince. And thereupon he guided his elephant close to the wall below the royal slumber-hall. There silently he waited in the rain.

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The Princess Bimbadevi, reclining on her bed of eider-down and crimson silk beside the couch on which her father lay, divined that Prince Aruna would deliver her that night, and thus lay broad awake, with open eyes and watchful ears. When suddenly that loved voice, that song of hope, assailed her ear, she rose, sighed, moaned as if in pain, and called out to the king:

'O Father, dear, my blood is seething with the heat! I yearn to let the rain-drops cool my body!'

The drowsy king, arising, said:

'So be it, Maid, so be it! Go, stand upon the window's lotus-ornament and let the rain refresh thy blood. The night is dark; no mortal is abroad in such a night. But let me hold thee by the hand — else thou wilt fall.'

Grasping the maiden's hand and helping her to mount the lotus-sculptured horizontal joist, the king stood still within the dusky room and held her safe.

But she on lofty perch in the open air but needed to let hang her other hand to have it grasped by her deliverer, who, standing upright on his elephant's back, could with his lips all but caress her lotus-gleaming feet.

Now Prince Aruna drew from Bimbadevi's fingers the glittering rings and from her arm the bracelets ruby-studded, and, bedizening therewith the tender hands of the page, lifted him to his beloved's side upon the lotus-ornament.

But now the maid, taking the page's hand, and

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laying it into that of her father, said to the king: 'O, Father, quickly grasp my other hand, else I shall fall!'

Then, like a flash, she dropped upon the elephant's back, into Aruna's arms. A low-voiced call in Nalagiri's ear, a gentle prod, and the huge beast moved with the precious load soundlessly through the park, along the silent streets, and, when it reached the plain beyond the town, rushed northward with full speed.

Meanwhile the king, holding the page's tender hand, deeming it Bimbadevi's, stood for awhile in patience, then bade his daughter to descend and seek her little bed beside his couch. He then lay down and fell asleep.

When he arose at dawn and saw in his daughter's stead a stranger boy upon the little bed beside his couch, he stood aghast and asked the boy:

'Who art thou, lad? Whence camest thou? Where is the Princess Bimbadevi?'

And thereupon the boy sank to his knees before the king, and, asking him for mercy, told him all he knew: that Nalagiri, the prince's elephant, had in the dead of night and through the driving rain brought prince and page into the royal park, close to the window of the royal slumber-hall, that then Aruna and the Royal Maid had fled, whilst he, the boy, unwitting, had been forced to take the maiden's place upon the bed.

Across the royal memory now flashed the wise

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words spoken by the former Palace Priest, the sapient Gangamala! The sage had uttered truth and he, the king, had ill requited his faithful servant's well-meant exhortation. Thus King Madava felt ashamed, and in the garb of an ascetic left secretly his capital and in the forest wilderness searched for his ancient friend. When he at last found Gangamala's hut of leaves and Gangamala at his holy meditations, he, bowing low and weeping copiously, exclaimed:

'O, venerable Brahmin, forgive thy former friend for his ingratitude and great stupidity! Thou spokest truth, and I, I would not see. The wickedness of women have I realised through my own flesh and blood. I sought to weave a rope of sand, but now I know that even the Sovereign of the Gods could not keep woman from committing sin. I' faith, the female sex is past the knowledge of all gods and men! O, faithful Friend, do not withhold thy help, but counsel me and teach the blind to see!'

'O, Mighty King,' the sage replied, 'believe my words: wise is but he who doth not strive against the wickedness of women, but takes them as they are, and as they were since the All-Father Brahma gave them being: depraved and deadly and calamitous. I counsel thee: pardon thy daughter, call her back and let her wed that youth. The time will come when Prince Aruna too will see her wandering from the path of rectitude, and with a sobered mind and saddened heart he too will flee the world.'

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This certainty, O Lord, will help thee to bear thy grief!

This time the king obeyed the priest. Throughout his realm the royal heralds loudly proclaimed the father's and the sovereign's pardon for the twain and bade them hasten home. And when they returned, King Maddava endowed Aruna with his daughter's hand and solemnised the nuptials with a regal pomp unparagoned. Then, doffing crown and royal robe, he placed the prince upon the throne as king and sovereign of all, and with his ancient friend, the Palace Priest, forsook the world and in the forest's wilderness dwelt a penitent.

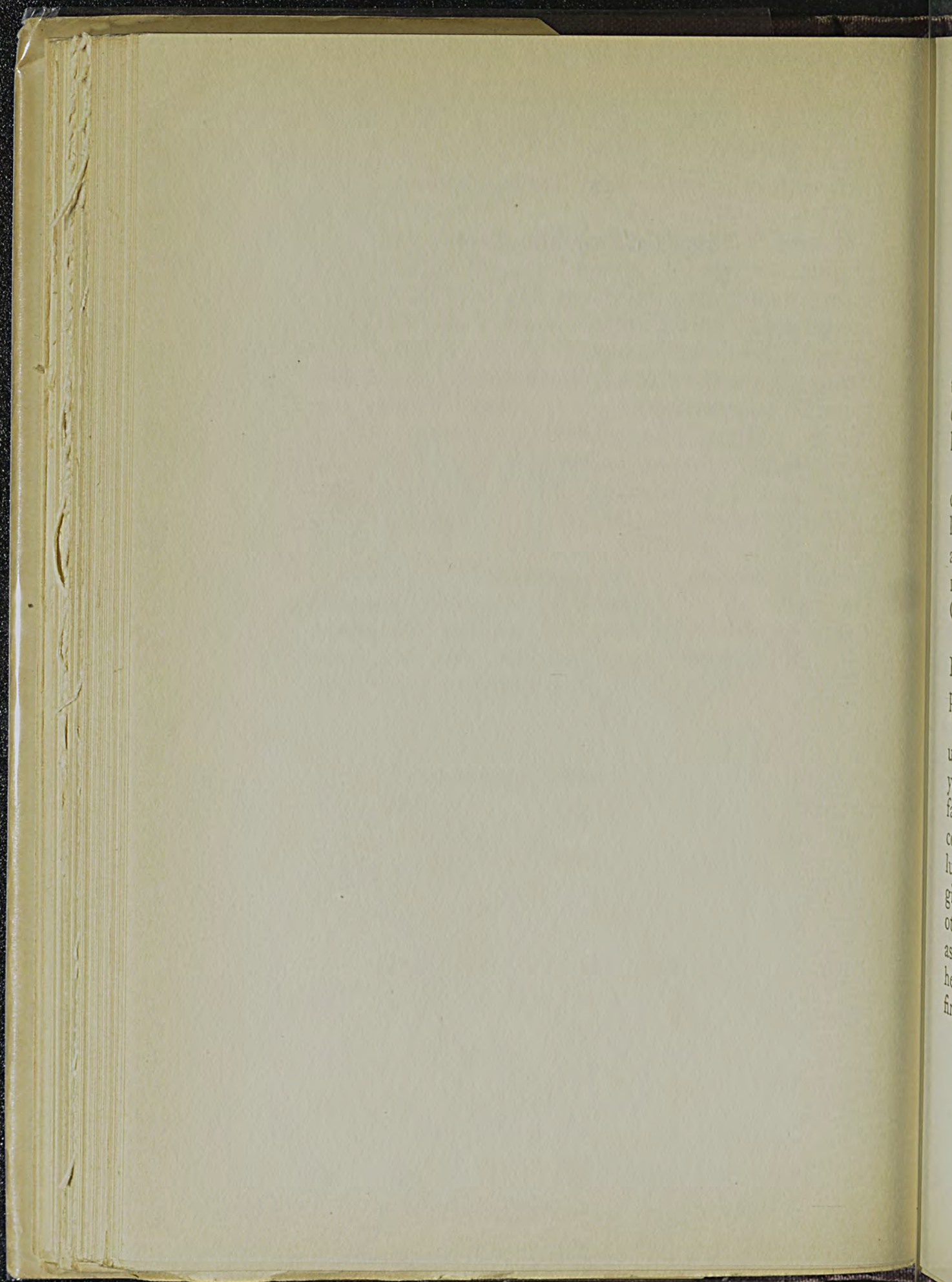
Soon Yogi Maddava arrived at All Perfections, and, when he died, was wafted to the Place of Merit, the Brahma World, where with his erstwhile priest and ultimate friend he dwelt among the gods a hundred thousand years.

'But in those days 'twas I who was the Palace Priest, the sapient GANGAMALA,' thus did Kunala end his eighth tale, 'but MADDAVA, the king of Takkasila, who learned the truth regarding women from his own child, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

Thus reads Kunala's Eighth Narration concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.

IX.

The Tale of the Net



But He, the Parrot-King, the ninth time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: —

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AGES ago, when one of the great Brahmadattas occupied the throne of Benares, there lived in that city a most wealthy merchant whose fortune consisted of fifty millions of pieces of gold. When he died, each of his ten sons received five millions.

His youngest son, CULLAPANTHAKA, was still a child of tender years when the dying father delivered him into the care of his most trusted friend, a Brahmin of surpassing wisdom, named SUDDHODANA, who became the foster-parent of the little Cullapanthaka.

When the child had reached his twelfth year, the Brahmin pondered long and hard regarding Cullapanthaka's future.

'My son has now attained the age when he enters upon the period most perilous especially for youths endowed with wealth. The most of them fall a prey to the wiles of women. The witchery of courtesans, the song of fascinating players on the lute, the radiant grace of singing and dancing-girls apparently are brought into the world for no other purpose than to serve as phantoms to lead astray the youths of wealth. How many of them, helplessly infatuated, lose fortune, health, and finally their lives, in the worship of such worthless

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idols! I shall therefore instruct my foster-child in every weighty dogma of the needle-witted sages of all times and countries concerning female turpitude – and later I shall entrust him to the cleverness of some trustworthy instructress of courtesans, who shall reveal to him the artifices of that cursed craft, that he may become invulnerable for ever.'

No sooner thought than done. Young Cullapanthaka opened his ears to all the wisdom of the wise, and learned by heart the most important, deepest asseveration of the sages, undeniable as Indra's rule: 'Women are depraved, dangerous, and calamitous!' A thousand times the youth pronounced these sapient words, until they cut a fissure in his brain deep as a Himalayan gorge.

Now Suddhodana took his foster-son to the dwelling of an aged dame, named Amara, whose renown as instructress of youthful bayaderes resounded far and wide. When they entered her hall of instruction, they heard her pronounce the following words of cunning courtesan wisdom to a pupil of yet tender age:

'Gold rules the world, my daughter – gold, gold alone produces homage, admiration. Even Brahmins are misprized when poor. But we, the sisterhood of pleasure, are to the world most despicable filth, unless we roll in gold. Therefore, my child, eschew emotional affection, let thy heart-strings vibrate but for gold, and think no thought but how to amass great treasure. Just as the roseate

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circle around the sun forebodes his hour of disappearance, so doth the blush of love presage a courtesan's decline. Therefore must thou ever merely simulate a loving heart: it is at thy peril that thou ever hold such an article in thy bosom! Excite the appetite of men for pleasure and love by dance and manual dexterity: then, when they take the bait, pull them with all their wealth to shore. When thou hast stripped them of their gold, have done with them at once and cast them — to the dogs! Just as a Brahmin through the diligent study of the sacred Vedas will reach the farther shore of the enormous ocean of all the sixty-four arts and sciences, so must the courtesan strive for perfection in her calling through sedulous application to the study of all these wise precepts.'

Suddhodana then greeted Amara as if she were a queen, though she was but an aged hag with jaw-bone like unto that of an ass, with fangs instead of teeth, with monstrous nose; and, when she had bid them welcome, he and his foster-son crossed their legs upon the tiger-skin by her side, and the Brahmin began:

'O most esteemed Dame, behold my son, who begs of thee instruction in the arts and stratagems of courtesans, that he may throughout his pilgrimage on earth escape their wiles through perfect knowledge of their countless tricks and shrewd manœuvres. A lakh of coins of gold shall be thy reward.'

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Amara declared her readiness thus to instruct the youth, receiving him as pupil, in her dwelling every day; and she took from Suddhodana's hand the bag of gold.

Twelve months did Cullapanthaka take lessons daily with this dame; and, when he had acquired all the knowledge of the tricks of courtesans, he was master of this most intricate science.

When he had reached his sixteenth year, he said to Suddhodana:

'Father beloved, honoured Father, I am a merchant's son. If I wish to live according to the immemorial custom of my caste, it behoves me to augment my fortune by means of mercantile transactions; for merchants draw the draught of honour not from Veda-knowledge, not from war, but solely from wealth and great possessions. I therefore beg thy leave to depart to the Isle of Gold, there to increase tenfold my fifty lakhs.'

Suddhodana expressed his approbation of his foster-son's desire, and, as he harboured no fear that the youth would fall a prey to some woman's wiles on the way, he delivered to him the entire fortune left by his sire.

So Cullapanthaka left Benares on a propitious day, accompanied by another merchant's son, ASTHADUTTA, and a splendid train of servants and retainers.

The tenth day of his departure had not yet ended when Cullapanthaka's caravan arrived at Kancana-

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pura, and encamped in a shady pleasure-garden near by the town. The lord and leader of the caravan, Cullapanthaka, and his friend Asthadutta, after taking their perfumed bath, anointing themselves, and partaking of their evening repast, entered the city.

Aimlessly they wandered to and fro about the winding streets until they passed the lofty portal of a temple in which a company of players were performing a sacred play. On entering the brightly illumined edifice, their wondering eyes beheld a most beautiful bayadere bending her graceful limbs in sacred dance upon the stage. Like unto a wave impelled by sportive wind, she seemed translated from the ocean of loveliness. The comeliness of her features, the radiance of her skin, the brilliance of her flashing eyes, the delicacy of her movements, were comparable only to the bodily charms of the celestial maidens who dance before Indra's throne in the paradise. From her magnificent body there flashed bewildering rays into the hearts of all men. When she appeared in the throng of her lovely companions, their comeliness lost its lustre, as the luminosity of the glow-worm fades away at the rising of the sun. SUNDARI was her name; and, as Cullapanthaka, the stranger youth from Benares gazed on her, his senses became bewitched so that the teachings of the dame Amara were erased from his memory.

Accordingly, when Sundari's dance was ended,

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Cullapanthaka sent to her a temple-slave with a wreath of artfully entwined mango blossoms, and bade him tell her of his desire to win her love. Sundari, learning that her new adorer was the son of a wealthy merchant of Benares, was by no means averse to winning his devotion, and thus accepted gladly his offer of courtship.

On the following day Cullapanthaka, instead of continuing his journey, proceeded to the dancer's house. When her mother, Makarakati, had bidden welcome to the stranger at the door, she effusively avowed that her beloved child, Sundari, would surely have rejected his advances, if she had not been deeply impressed with the extraordinary resemblance of his features to those of Kamadeva, the God of Love himself.

The livelong day the foster-son of Suddhodana, forgetful of his faithful guardian's wise counsels, remained in Sundari's habitation. When at dawn of day he left the sweetly scented confines of her sleeping-chamber, he showered gold and jewels upon her to the value of three lakhs. When Sundari beheld the enormous treasure she thought: 'Much gold have I, young though I be, drawn from the pockets of aged drivellers and beardless youths, but this stranger youth endows me with riches for the pleasures of a single day far greater than all the wealth I ever received from men. How could I chain him to me with a chain unbreakable?'

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Thus mused and pondered Sundari, and finally made up her mind to use the trick REFUSAL.

'Take back thy gold and precious stones, O Noble Youth,' said she to Cullapanthaka with dulcet tones. 'Thy Sundari loves not thy gold, but thee alone, God Kama's earthly image!'

But he, the stranger youth, called the fair one's mother, and she, with meaning smile towards Sundari, applied persuasion to her:

'If thou, O daughter, lovest him so deeply and he loves thee, what matter whether Cullapanthaka's wealth rests here with thee or there with him? Is not all that thou ownest his, and his belongings thine?'

Apparently with reluctance, Sundari finally accepted the proffered gift, and the youth from Benares, in spite of dame Amara's instruction, fell to the trick like a bird to fowler's grain, convinced that Sundari despised the gold and was enamoured of his person alone. Enraptured by her beauty, her singing to the lute, her graceful dancing, he remained two moons in the city Kancanapura, and in that time he laid at the dancer's feet wellnigh twenty lakhs.

His friend and travelling comrade, Asthadutta, was greatly vexed and sorely troubled, and, being truly fond of Cullapanthaka, admonished him with the frankness of a blood-relation.

'Beloved Cullapanthaka, my friend through the providence of the Gods, may sun and moon pro-

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tect thy course that thou mayest escape the danger threatening thee! Has dame Amara instructed thee to no purpose regarding the wiles and stratagems of courtesans? Did this fount of knowledge, which swallowed up so much gold and time and energy – did it indeed flow in vain for thee, as military science is of no avail to him who cowardly slinks from the enemy? Thou knowest well the peril threatening all men from the love of courtesans. There is no trick of theirs unknown to thee, and still, the very first occasion of proving thy skill and invulnerableness finds thee rudderless in a hostile ocean! A courtesan's love is no more genuine love than a water-pool conjured up by the imps of the air before the longing eyes of a desert-wanderer parched with thirst is real water. Thy most cherished Sundari's great love will wane according as thy treasure decreases; when that is gone, thy Sundari will shrink from thee. O Cullapanthaka, dear Brother, break asunder the chain of this unworthy love! O let us seek the Isle of Gold, true to the manly purpose of our journey! Forget not him, thy foster-father, thy aged friend and benefactor in Benares! Reward his confidence in thee!

But Cullapanthaka answered:

'No danger, Friend! I know full well that on courtesans there is no manner of dependence, but Sundari is an exception; she is no such light-o'-love! She loves me for myself alone, and would

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expire were I to shun her presence but a single day. To look askance at her, disparage, censure her, doubt her love, would be as vain a proceeding as if one were to try to dim the radiance of the moon by throwing clods of mud at it!

Asthadutta, however, continued his admonitions with increased fervour:

‘What simpletons are men who put their trust in worldly treasure, be it woman or gold! Do women not both laugh and weep for money? A wise man should keep courtesans at three arms’ length, as if they were poisonous flowers plucked in a graveyard. As changeable as the ocean waves are women, as short-lived as the glow of evening clouds their affection. Once they have despoiled him of his money, they throw the naked man contemptuously on the dung-heap, as if he were a colour-saturated rag wrung out completely. Just as on a mountain-top no lotus grows, just as an ass can never drag the freight an elephant can pull with ease, just as a grain of barley doth not produce a rice-plant, so it is forever impossible that a courtesan can grow into a virtuous woman. O thou infatuated, infelicitous Cullapanthaka! Thy hour of misery is at hand!’

Cullapanthaka was by no means wholly untouched by Asthadutta’s wise words. Awhile his mind and heart swayed to and fro, like a swing impelled by an agile hand. At last, his comrade’s admonitions being dinned into his ear continu-

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ously, he pulled the reins upon himself and said resignedly:

'So be it! Although thoroughly convinced that Sundari bears me selfless love and cares not for my gold, although my heart assures me that her smiles, her tears, her gentle words are not a wanton's stratagem, we shall depart from Kancanapura three days hence, and hasten without renewed delay to the Isle of Gold.'

Cullapanthaka's treasure bags at that time still contained nigh unto three millions.

That selfsame night the lover told his love of his resolve to wend his way towards his original goal.

The dancing-girl burst into tears forthwith, and said in woeful accents:

'My noble Friend, my Cullapanthaka, knoweth best himself the way on which his duty, longing, heart's desire drives his person. What shall I, what dare I say – poor me! Depart, sun of my life! Depart and leave me night – but I, bereft of hope, shall be covered by the pall of destiny!'

Thus spoke Sundari, nor would she be consoled by Cullapanthaka's intensified caresses. No food, no cooling draught, passed her lips; her lute, her voice, grew silent; she danced no more: the live-long day she grieved, bewailed her fate, sighed, sobbed, beat her breast, and almost burst with grief.

On the day appointed for departure, the youthful lover left the house of Sundari, whose mother

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spoke the words of blessing over him. But Sundari and she and all their household-maids walked weeping by his side until the cavalcade reached the city's outmost postern. Here, where amid the shrubbery along the road that crossed the grassy plain a ruined well lay almost hidden, they parted. But, when the lover Cullapanthaka, with grieved eyes and trembling body, turned his back on Sundari, when he had taken a score of strides to mount his elephant, a piercing scream, a mighty wail rent the air. The youth turning his head, saw naught of Sundari — into the well she had thrown herself in her despair!

'Alas the day! Our most beloved mistress!' the slave-girls cried. 'My daughter, my darling daughter!' Makarakati exclaimed.

But the merchant's son in two, three bounds was at the cistern's ruinous wall, and would have plunged headlong to join his mistress, had he not been restrained by force. Bidding his servants to descend to the well's bottom, he bent far over the rampart of stone, pronouncing countless times his darling's name.

Cullapanthaka's men, descending on a rope, soon reached the silent form.

'Disaster, Lord!' they cried. 'Fearful infliction for thee, O noble Cullapanthaka! The maiden's life has fled, she's drowned!' and, quickly hoisting her, they laid her limp at Cullapanthaka's feet.

Sundari lay as if dead indeed. But soon she

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heaved a sigh long-drawn, breathed: 'Cullapanthaka, loved One —' and opened her eyes. And he, the youth, almost frenzied with joy, lifted her from the ground, carried her to his elephant, and returned with her to the city and her habitation.

Thenceforth he knew no trace of doubt regarding Sundari's sincerity, and was convinced that her great love for him was recompense for meritorious actions done by him during some former existence. The thought of ever leaving her occurred to him no more, love's fetters held him fast, nor did his friend's appeals and warnings avail aught.

But Asthadutta pleaded with eloquence born of the fear of impending evil:

'Cullapanthaka, Cullapanthaka! This worship of a phantom-love will ruin thee! Deem not for one moment that a bayadere plunges herself into the fount for love of a man! A stratagem, a trick, a clever feint it was, a counterfeit act of despair, counterfeit regarding losing thee, the man, but genuine, ay, genuine despair at losing the rest of Cullapanthaka's wealth! Friend, poor, deluded Friend — soon shall I see thy blush of shame when all thy gold is gone!'

But the young merchant despised his friend's counsel, and, growing wroth at Asthadutta's abuse of Sundari, communed with him no more. Within one month he squandered all his gold. And Sundari was well aware that Cullapanthaka's moneybags were drained at last.

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When he knocked at her door one day, the courtesan's mother, Makarakati, received him with the following words:

'Alack, O noble merchant! Sundari must remain invisible to-day. She keeps her Uposatha-vow; accordingly she may not laugh, nor dance, nor sing. She suffers greatly through this separation commanded by the Gods, thou mayest well believe!' – and Cullapanthaka turned his back upon his heaven and sadly joined his friends.

But when the youth received the selfsame answer day after day, and many days, he sank into the stupor of utter despair, from which he could not be aroused. Fearing for his friend's reason, Asthadutta, with a score of servants, hastened by forced marches back to Benares, and faithfully reported what had happened to Suddhodana, the Brahmin.

The unfortunate youth's foster-father was fearfully distressed and lamented Cullapanthaka's fate. But soon his indignation was aroused at dame Amara, for he suspected her of having purposely taught his boy errors to bring him to calamity.

'Go to perdition, vilest hag,' he said to her, 'thou hast deceived me and this youth! If thou hast opened to his eyes the book of harlot-strategy, if he is versed in all the stratagems of courtesans, how happens it that she, that cursed bayadere, at Kancanapura, the very first of the cursed sisterhood he met, could blandish him and rob him of

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his wealth? Hast thou accepted my reward for doing an evil deed?"

The ancient dame was sore perplexed:

"What took place, Lord?" she asked "Cullaparthaka was instructed honestly by me, nor did I, Amara, withhold the slightest mark, or line, or dot, from what I know concerning courtesan-cunning. Or, thinkest thou, that I, incomparable mistress of the art of men-seduction, could fail in knowledge of its antidote? Nay, Holy Brahmin, if Cullapanthaka failed in spite of my instruction, it proves not my deceitfulness, but Cullapanthaka's unexampled weakness!"

Thereupon Asthadutta recounted to the dame the entire course of events that happened at Kancanapura, nor failed to mention Sundari's plunge into the well-pit at the parting.

When Amara heard this, she was like one demented. She dashed her head against the wall and exclaimed:

"Unhappy Amara! Unlucky youth! What vacancy of mind, what imbecile stupidity, what asinine forgetfulness prevented me from mentioning the stratagem of the "Net!" Know, worthy Lord, this courtesan-trick is time-worn, like the rock on a Himalayan summit. The crafty Makarakati had carefully stretched between the cistern's rounded walls a net of finest silk, close-meshed and soft, so that the falling girl felt scarce a jar; and, when young Cullapanthaka's men descended on

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their rope, their bodies shutting out the light of day, the maiden Sundari concealed the soft-textured fabric on her person. A hundred thousand wiles I demonstrated to thy foster-son, and this one, this very one that Sundari applied, the TRICK OF THE NET, I must needs forget! Forgive me, Lord, that I brought this distress upon thee, and reflect what awful weight rests on my brain: a basket filled with a hundred thousand courtesan-stratagems!

'But, Noble Suddhodana,' she continued, 'and thou, friend of the youth, Asthadutta, be of good cheer, do not despair! I hold the power of liberating him whom ye love, and of restoring his wealth to the last coin and trinket.'

And Amara clapped her hands in summons of her slaves, and bade them bring her ape. This ape was cleverness itself and in his eyes gleamed great intelligence. His mistress took a hundred pieces of gold, gave them handful by handful to the ape, and said each time:

'Swallow the gold, good Ala! — Swallow, swallow!' — The ape performed this feat as he was taught.

'My darling son, beloved Ala,' now said the dame, 'give to thy mother Amara twenty, to this slave-girl ten, to this noble youth thirty and to this venerable lord forty coins!'

The ape disgorged as he was bid, distributing the coins exactly as desired.

Then dame Amara said to the Brahmin priest:

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'Most honoured Sir, this ape be thine. Send it to him thou lovest; ask him to go to Sundari and say: 'My brothers have endowed me with another five millions, to make my fortune upon the Isle of Gold! When she hears this, her door will open wide; let him then enter with the ape.'

Now the dame Amara, having given minute instructions how Cullapanthaka should act in consequence, gave Ala to Asthadutta and bade him hasten to Kancanapura. And Cullapanthaka's brothers endowed him with a chest of gold to execute the plan.

Asthadutta hurried on, and soon stood on the threshold of the evil maiden's habitation — a welcome messenger of the propitious future! One thousand sparkling coins he poured into her lap as a present from her longing lover, whose brothers, as he told her, had sent him bearer of another five millions to their beloved Cullapanthaka.

When later on that youth himself came into Sundari's presence, he was received with great respect and signal honour; the bayadere embraced him tenderly, and with a deluge of honeyed words sought to dispel suspicion and regain his love.

But Cullapanthaka was on his guard. He devoted all his time to gaining the courtesan's confidence, and, when he deemed the hour propitious, he whispered to Asthadutta:

'Didst thou, O Friend, give money to the mother, the house-priest, and the slaves of Sundari?'

THE NET

'Nay, Friend, I poured a thousand coins of gold into the lap of Sundari, naught gave I others.'

'Then, Asthadutta, I pray thee fetch my ape, my darling ape!' When Ala squatted on the floor of Sundari's reception-hall, his master turned to him and said:

'Ala, my son, endow this venerable mother of my love, to recompense her for the savoury food and the cooling draught, with fifty pieces; lay at the house-priest's feet, in appreciation of the sacred rites, twenty pieces; hand to the mistress of the bath, to pay for betel and for perfume, ten pieces; and Ala, best of friends, give five pieces to each slave — their ministrations well deserve it!'

And Ala rapidly disgorged as he was bid, nor did he fail to give each person the amount that was commanded by his lord. Each day the ape spat gold, so that the courtesan and her mother became convinced that Ala was an enchanted sorcerer whose specialty was changing digested food into — gold!

'If we could but secure him,' so they thought, 'our heart's desire were fulfilled!'

So Sundari one day turned to the youth, and said: 'If thou, O Cullapanthaka, truly lovest me, give me this precious ape, this veritable wizard of an ape!'

'Beloved of my heart,' he answered, 'thou knowest not what thou askest. For Ala is a mighty sorcerer. The Krita Yuga is his time of birth; he

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was my sire's property, my grandsire held him dear, my grandsire's sire cherished him; his age, as ape, exceeds a thousand years; nine thousand further years he'll live, and then he will expire and be reborn an omniscient parrot. Such an ape cannot be given away – a thousand pieces of gold for thee as usual to day, fair Sundari!

'Nay, Cullapanthaka, nay, thrice nay, forever nay!' the bayadere gave answer. 'I must and will have Ala! Keep thy miserable gold!'

'Impossible, O Sundari!'

'I willingly return thy millions, Lord, if Ala stays with me – ay, all the treasure of my own, all my possessions,' she cried.

'And if thou gavest me the city of Kancanapura with all it holds, aye, if thou wouldst endow me with all the treasures under heaven,' the youth exclaimed with energy mixed with the faintest trace of hesitation, 'I cannot give thee Ala!'

Now Sundari shed copious tears and sobbed:

'Is this what thou, O Cullapanthaka, callest love? Thy love for me has waned; it has faded out of sight as does a drop of ink that falls into a heap of black beans. The ape, Ala, the ape, I crave! If thou refusest, I shall die!' – and Sundari fell at her lover's feet as a suppliant prostrates himself before the image of a god.

But Asthadutta, with steady gaze at Cullapanthaka, said:

'Friend Cullapanthaka, let not thy darling die for

THE NET

the sake of an ape! Let her have him, in Vishnu's holy name!

At last the youth relented. He presented Ala to his Sundari, and had a glorious day with her: she was all smiles, filled with love and tenderness to overflowing. And Ala's stomach was provided with a two-days' ration of gold — two hundred pieces.

Joyfully Cullapanthaka pocketed the millions he had squandered, loaded all his beasts with Sundari's treasures, and speedily returned home to Benares.

Meanwhile Ala spat his gold most willingly: one hundred pieces on the first day after Cullapanthaka's departure, one hundred on the second day — so that the courtesan's delight, her mother's ecstasy, knew no bounds.

But when, on the third day, the ape's stomach, being bare of gold, refused to disgorge further treasure, though Sundari and her household exerted all their eloquence, the bayadere waxed wroth and struck him a cruel blow between his eyes. Infuriated, the wizard-beast flew at her throat, and, when with teeth and claws he had lacerated her face and arms and limbs, he turned upon dame Makarakati and served her with the self same zeal. Priest, mistress of the bath, the slaves, all bled in turn until the dwelling resounded with their wails. But Ala with a parting fletching of his teeth, a farewell grin, sprang on the bal-

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cony's balustrade and with a mighty leap into the topmost branches of a tree, slid down the trunk, and soon was bounding homewards on the road to Benares.

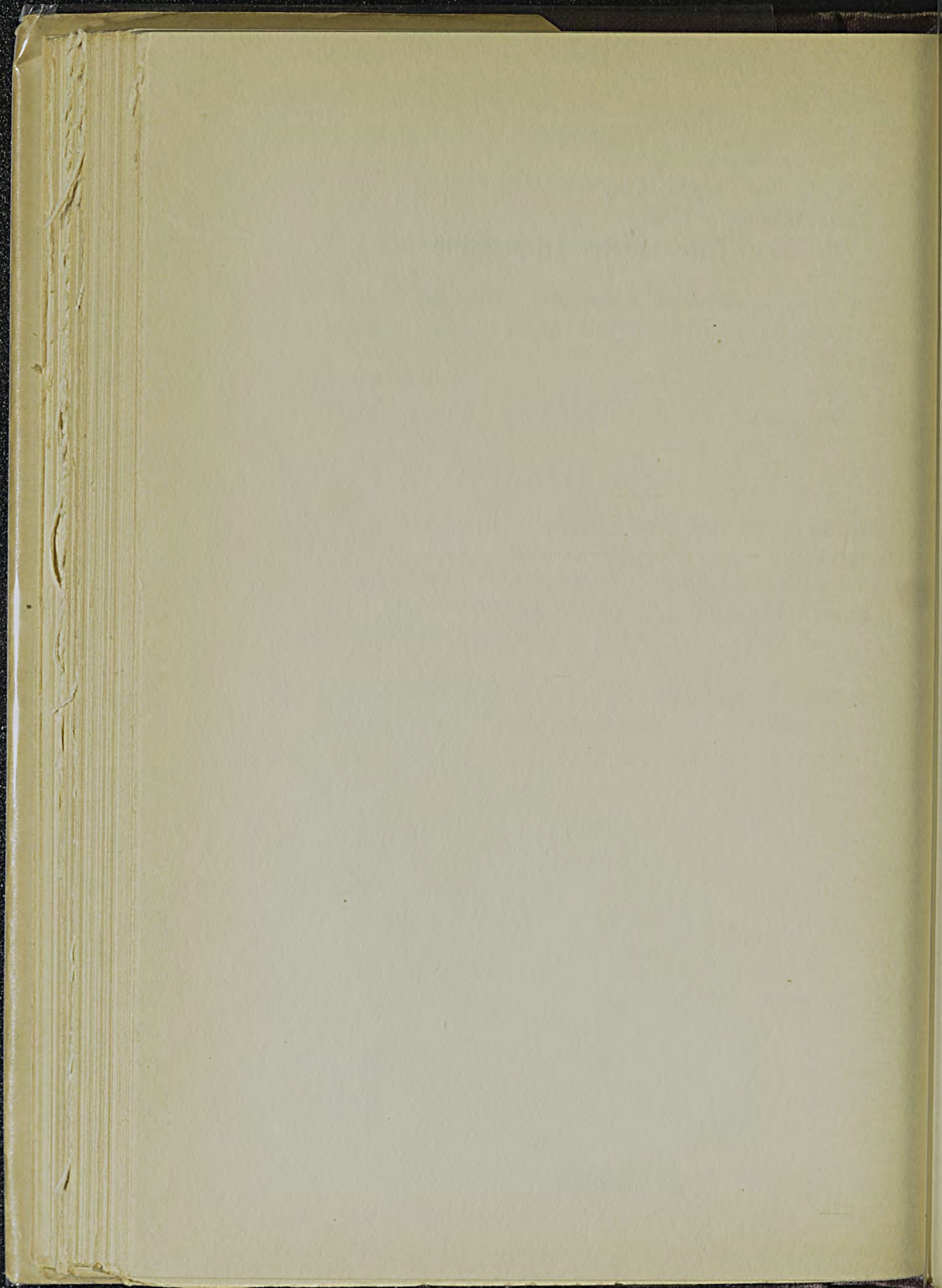
But Sundari the courtesan, and Makarakati her mother, realising that they had lost both ape and fortune, took their own lives. A hundred thousand years they sojourned in the Avici-hell, the place where recompense for evil deeds is meted out.

'But in those days 'twas I who was the Brahmin SUDDHODANA,' thus did Kunala end his ninth narration, 'but CULLAPANTHAKA, the youth, who lost his fortune through a net, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

Thus reads Kunala's Ninth Narration concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.

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The Tale of the Impossible



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But He, the Parrot-King, the tenth time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale:—

THE TALE OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

WHEN in olden times king Brahmadata ruled at Benares, his son, Prince BRAHMADATTA was brought up in company with the son of the king's Chief-Merchant, young MAHADHANA. From early childhood they played together, built phantastic castles and palaces, fortresses and whole cities, with the shore-sand of the holy Ganga, and played their childish games in perfect unity and friendship. After the death of his father the Prince ascended the throne of his ancestors, and the son of the merchant remained as before his daily companion and best friend.

In those days there lived in the city a beautiful courtesan, named AUSINARI, a lute-player of renown and the most dazzling beauty of Benares.

Men streamed to her habitation from the remotest countries, so great was the fame of her music, the prestige of her beauty, and the reputation of her fervour of heart. She was as lovely as one of the celestial maidens, when such a one deigns to grace the earth with her presence. The radiance which transfigured her body shed lustre on her very jewels, and the eyes of all men became drunken from gazing upon her.

When Mahadhana first beheld her, he trembled as one who feels a chill seize his body; for Ausinari

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seemed to him as a pond filled to overflowing with the water of comeliness. His heart became chained to her in love so passing great that he could not live but in her company. Every day he sought her presence, and every day he laid at her lotus-feet a thousand pieces of gold. Even after his father had entered Indra's heavenly city, and he had taken his sire's place as the king's Chief-Merchant, he did not forsake her, but hastened to her bower, as soon as his daily labour was ended, continued to bring her his gift of gold, and hold sweet dalliance with her. When it happened perchance that he reached her habitation belated, at a time when the roseate rays of the setting sun no longer suffused the turrets and roofs of the houses with their soft glamour, she ran to meet him and was wont to reproach him for his tardiness.

'The sun has set long since, why comest thou so late, Most Beloved One on earth? Has thy love waned? Night and day I think but of thee. For others is only the voice of my lute, but thou art the possessor of my heart and soul. Certain am I that in a former existence thou, thou only, wast my true love, mayest thou be my husband and idol in all future lives!'

With such words she deluged him with the torrent of her love, and bewitched him to such a degree that the fetters which bound his heart to her became wellnigh unbreakable – for she was the greatest player in the game of craftiness.

THE IMPOSSIBLE

The king, whose noon-day audience Mahadhana was in duty bound to attend daily, and who well knew his passion for the notorious lute-player, frequently upbraided him, and was wont to say:

'Friend, believe me: women are depraved, deadly and calamitous! A woman's heart has a double pit: here the tiger, there a bottomless abyss! Impossible to restrain are the floods of the sea of misfortune which break forth from woman's heart! But, what must then be the heart of a courtesan who is owned by the whole world, whose love is drawn from her bosom with the jingle of gold! Renounce thy musical friend, dear Mahadhana, ere it be too late, or thou wilt be destroyed body and soul!'

But Mahadhana, ever ready to defend her who possessed his heart, replied:

'Ausinari doth indeed accept my gift of gold, but only because her profession demands it. The glitter of my gold doth not touch her heart; it is I, Mahadhana, whom she adores with every fibre of her body, with every beat of her heart. She would love me, though I were a ragged beggar, though my treasure-box held pebbles instead of coins of gold!'

'O, thou poor deluded mortal!' the king replied. 'All women are fond of money, and a courtesan, like Ausinari, for money would love the lowliest mortal, and desert the noblest man, as if he were a corpse, as soon as poverty gripped him. A

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hunchback-varlet, a filthy beggar jingling his gold, wins their affection far sooner than the man who, though comparable to a god in beauty and grace, is poor. Believe me, O friend of my youth, my words are of indefeasible truth, they are like a groove deeply cut into a rock.'

Thus they frequently debated on the subject of the beautiful lute-player, and quarrelled regarding the worthlessness of women – but in vain. Mahadhana's infatuation for Ausinari grew in intensity, just as his kingly lord's exasperation at his Chief-Merchant's stupidity grew in severity.

One day it happened that Mahadhana's dispute with his sovereign lasted longer than usual, for the subject's passion and the king's anger had raised new arguments for their respective beliefs. The sun had set long since, and the turrets and balconies of the palace lay in deep purple gloom. As the Chief-Merchant descended the royal staircase and passed from the lighted hall into the dark night, he thought:

'There is no time to return to my habitation before I hasten to my love. I shall proceed to her without delay.'

So he dismissed his servants, and entered Ausinari's house.

When the brilliant-eyed courtesan saw him approach, she darted to meet him, embraced him with passion, kissed him with great ardour and tearfully murmured:

THE IMPOSSIBLE

'How happy am I, O thou Son of a Lord, that thou, chief ruby of my life, didst not desert me! I despaired of thy coming. My countenance was like unto the moon when a rain-cloud veils her lustre.'

But Mahadhana answered:

'Beloved One, forgive, I pray thee, my belated arrival. The king, my sovereign, kept me by his side, dinning into my most unwilling ear discords of reproach against thy sex. Meanwhile the twilight came and grew to night, and I, thy impatient lover, hurried straight to kiss thy lotus-face.'

The Beauty forthwith asked him with a voice ice-cold as water gushing from a Himalayan fount:

'Hast thou mayhap not brought the thousand coins of gold?'

'How could I, fairest One?' he answered. 'There was no time. How dared I make my loving queen wait overlong? Cruelty would it have been to thee, had I delayed by returning home to fetch this gold. To-morrow I shall bring thee twice the sum.'

But Ausinari thought:

'If I permit his dalliance to night without the gold, he surely will for ever come with empty hands. This may not be. I shall send him home unsatisfied.'

Accordingly she said to him:

'Lord, thou knowest well that I am a lute-player. A thousand coins of gold must be the price for rapturous gallantry with Ausinari. No goldless hands touch me. So hie thee home this night, and

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come again to-morrow eve, but in good time, and – with the gold!’

But Mahadhana, blind with longing for her love, and blind to her true character, objected to be thus dismissed, and pleaded:

‘O Lotus-Countenance – just this once let thy slave drink the draught of bliss for the sake of love alone. What do I care for gold? Twice, ay thrice, a thousand pieces shalt thou receive on the morrow.’

He pleaded long and hard, humbling himself like any veritable slave. But the heartless courtesan was obdurate. His goldless wooing wearied her. At last she grew most irate, summoned her servants, and bade them drive him from her house. In the twinkling of an eye Mahadhana stood in the street.

Poor Mahadhana’s brain surged with sharp-edged thought; numb was his heart like an elephant carved in wood.

‘More than a hundred lakhs of gold have I squandered on this worthless female,’ thus he thought, ‘and when my stress of love drives me to her once only bare of gold, she bids her slaves to treat me like a slave of slaves!’

His thoughts leapt to and fro in his brain as a flash of lightning leaps from cloud to cloud. Like unto a man who, in the wilderness astray at night, totters backwards and forwards and in a circle, and suddenly, when the heavenly flash of fire sheds light upon the scene, at last regains his sight, and

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sees before him gleam the winding jungle-track — thus Mahadhana recognised the path to truth, wisdom, and reality. As if awakened from a torturing dream, he on a sudden realised how impure, foul, unworthy had been the conduct of his life, so that at last he thought:

'Life sets my teeth on edge, grates on my ear, and makes my blood run cold. This very night shall I escape for ever from association with this human rabble and hie me to the wilderness. At last the light of wisdom begins to sparkle in my brain! At last I know the reason why the wise men of all times and climes seek rather solitude in the leafy paradise of the forest than so-called pleasure amid the noisy hordes of mankind! I fell into a slough of filth. Must I not seek to escape therefrom, especially when I behold, at easy distance, the peaceful waters of a lotus-blazing pool, encircled with a shady grove of evergreens? I am like one diseased. But if a patient ravaged by disease seeks not the wisdom of a healer, it is his own fault, and not the healer's, if he dies. Pure would I be, and sound in mind and body! I shall renounce the world and live henceforth in wholesome loneliness.'

Thus Mahadhana left the city furtively, nor did he bid farewell to the king or to his own kindred. From the city's eastern gate he followed the white road leading in a straight line across the plain to the edge of the forest, and was soon swallowed up by the green solitude. In time he reached a

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secluded spot on the bank of the sacred Ganga, where a deserted hut of boughs and moss stood in a cove between the creeper-festooned trees. There he remained and lived the life of an ascetic, resolved for ever to eschew all worldly pleasure.

His heart became in time as spotless as a linen cloth never worn. All passion ceased, all filth of sin soon disappeared through the acerbity of his will, just as the tarnish on the shining surface of a copper vessel fades through application of a styptic fluid. Henceforth his heart's sole desire was to gaze upon the celestial way and to reach the fullness of comprehension.

When the king noticed Mahadhana's absence, he was greatly chagrined, for he surmised that his lifelong friend had taken umbrage at his sovereign's well-meant upbraidings and admonitions.

At first no person was able to furnish him with a clue to Mahadhana's strange behaviour in shunning his king's company, but soon, when the courtesan's cruel treatment of her devoted lover became rumoured about the city, the Chieftain of the royal army sought the presence of his sovereign, and addressed him with the following words:

'O King of Kings, the friend of thy youth whom thou seekest has left the city for ever, and has taken refuge from the evil world, which he has learned to loathe, in the jungle-forest on the shore of the Ganga. That shameless wanton Ausinari bade her slaves eject him from her habitation, because one

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night he dared to seek her embraces without his bag of gold. A dagger in his breast at such unequalled cruelty, ingratitude, and avarice, he forswore the world and all its pleasures, dropped all his friendships, cut asunder all ties of kindred, and e'en deserted Thee, his well-disposed Sovereign, without a parting! On sacred Ganga's shore he dwells the life of an ascetic, devoting all his time, from morn till eve, to holy meditations.'

Upon hearing this report, the king called Ausinari to his presence, and asked her:'

'Is it true, courtesan, that thou badest thy slaves to throw Mahadhana, the most excellent of men and my friend, from thy dwelling upon the street, because one single time he failed to endow thee with a thousand pieces of gold in exchange for thy favour?'

She answered:

'It is as thou sayest, O Mightiest of Kings.'

Then said the king:

'Go to perdition, thou disreputable, despicable, infamous female! Proceed on the instant to the spot where Mahadhana practises world-relinquishment, and bring him safely home to me. Fail thou in this, the executioner will try his skill on thy fair neck!'

Terrified, Ausinari hurried to fulfil Brahma-datta's command. Dashing to her dwelling she adorned herself until she resembled a celestial maiden. Robed in a crimson garment and holding

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a wreath of blood-red roses, she mounted her chariot and was swiftly carried through the forest to Mahadhana's humble abode.

When she beheld him in his mean robe of bark, emaciated, pale, with sunken eyes, her heart was touched. Falling on her knees before him, and shedding copious tears, she called out aloud:

'O Noble Mahadhana, forgive my great transgression! Blinded with folly and the wanton lust for gold, I treated thee, the Best of Men, with great dishonour. Believe me, Mahadhana, most beloved, dearly cherished Mahadhana, that I shall fail thee again nevermore.'

But he replied:

'Be calmed, O Sister: no trace of anger at thee scars my heart.'

Ausinari was transported with pleasure at these words, and joyfully exclaimed:

'If thou, O Noble One without compare, forgivest my sinful behaviour, return forthwith with me. One crore of gold pieces, whatever thou gavest me, shall I return; all that I own, the contents of my treasure-chests, all that Ausinari holds in life, shall be thine!'

But he replied, nor did his eye shed aught but light of inward peace:

'Nay, Sister Mine, demand not the IMPOSSIBLE!' 'Impossible?' she asked. 'Impossible to mount my chariot, and, reclining at my side on pillows of swansdown, return to home and kindred?'

THE IMPOSSIBLE

'Impossible!' the ascetic replied. 'But come again another time.'

'Another time?' – she wondered. 'When, how soon, O most beloved Mahadhana?'

'Come, when a report reaches thy ear that cuckoos with plumage fiery-red are flying through these sylvan glades.'

'Alas,' replied the courtesan, 'that, O Mahadhana, will never be!'

'Then come when, in the centre of the royal capital, a mighty tower stands erected from myriad myriads of mosquito-teeth.'

'This too, O Noble Mahadhana, will never come to be!'

'Come, Ausinari, when human-kind weaves damp-proof garments, for the time of rain, from tortoise-hair.'

'Impossible, absurd, O best of youths!'

'Come when the mice ascend, upon a golden stair, to the moon, and gnaw her into fragments.'

'Beyond the bounds of reason, high-minded Lord!'

'Then, Sister, no power on earth can help thee to gain thy wish. If thou deemest all this impossible, mount thy chariot and return citywards, for this I maintain to thy face: Naught that I counselled thee to await is more impossible of consummation than my return to yonder world of sin, since my eyes have beheld the Path to Heaven! Return to the king and tell him: Mahadhana has forgiven Ausinari's transgression. Aye, tell him that my

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heart is filled with gratitude that through thee I am striding on the path that leads to All-Perfection. Let Brahmadata too forgive thee.'

Thus Ausinari had no choice but to return to Benares. Telling the king what Mahadhana had said, she received the royal pardon and was dismissed with favour.

But soon Brahmadata too, the king who swayed his staff of power over all the mighty on the earth like unto the God whose weapon is the lightning,¹ — the king as beautiful as the God whose weapon is a garland of flowers,² — he too renounced the glitter of the world. He joined his friend Mahadhana in the shady grove on sacred Ganga's shores. Rigid ascetics both, they soon acquired the capability of ecstasy, and after death entered the Brahma world to dwell therein a hundred thousand years.

'But in those days 'twas I who was the sovereign of Benares, BRAHMADATTA,' thus did Kunala end his tenth narration, 'but MAHADHANA, the merchant, the friend of royalty, whom yonder courtesan treated so shamefully, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

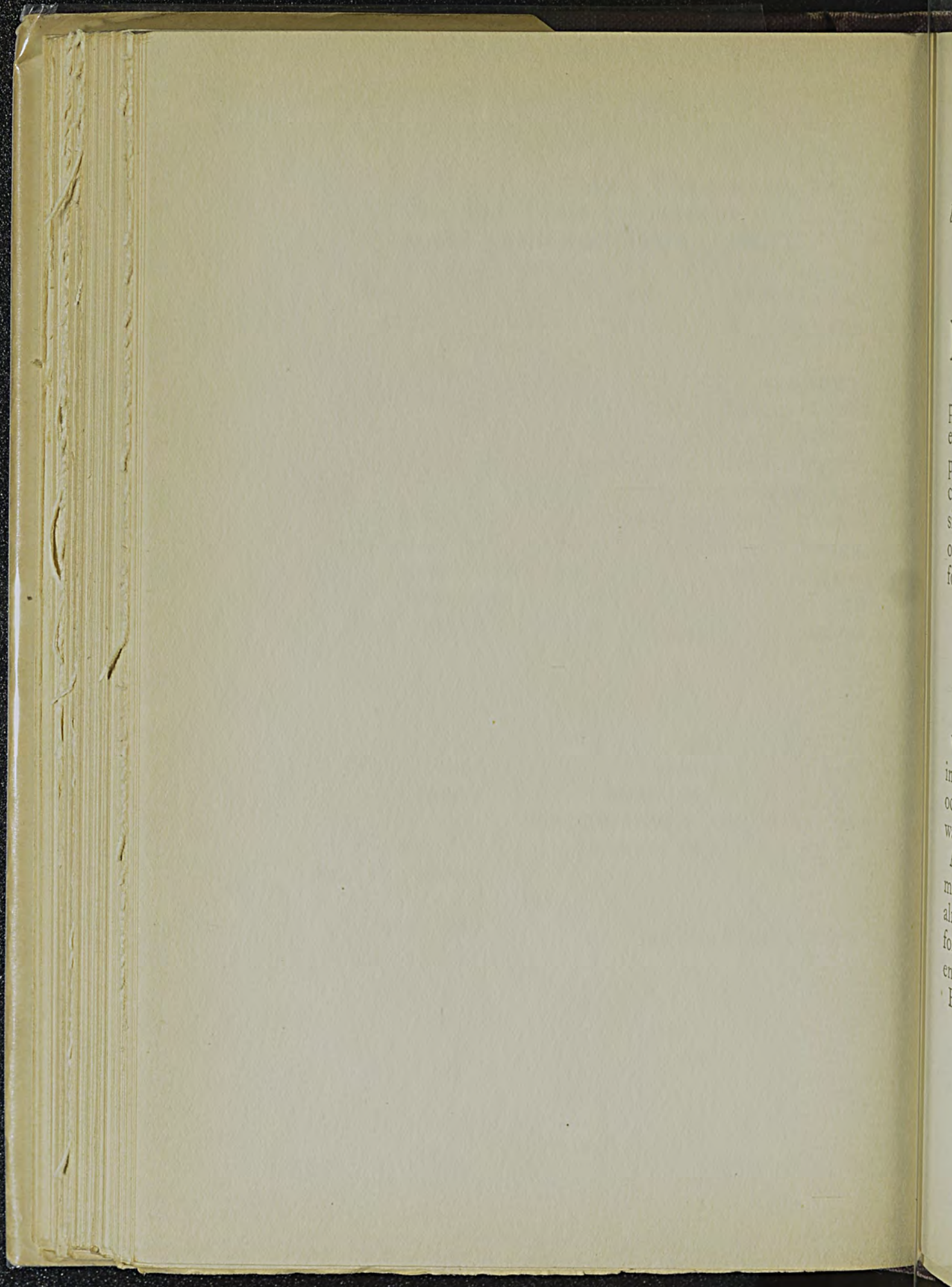
Thus reads Kunala's Tenth Narration concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.

¹ Indra.

² Kamadeva (the Indian Cupid).

XI.

The Tale of the Dicing-Song



But He, the Parrot-King, the eleventh time oped his bill of shining gold, and told this tale: —

THE TALE OF THE DICING-SONG

IT happened at the time of king BRAHMADATTA'S occupation of the throne of Benares.

This sovereign was enamoured of the pastime of playing at dice. He indulged in this amusement every day, mostly in company with his house-priest GAUTAMA. But whenever he raised aloft the cup of ebony to throw the golden dice upon the silver plate, securely fastened to the casting-board of fragrant sandal-wood, he used to hum the following song:

*Water flows in all the streams,
Trees and shrubs make up a wood,
Grasses eat the cows, it seems,
And no woman can be good!*

When he sang thus as he tossed, the dice rolled in his favour and he won; but when, as rarely occurred, he forgot to pronounce this charm, it was the house-priest who had cause to smile.

As Brahmadata's faith in the efficacy of his magic doggerel was supreme, his memory was almost ever on its guard, so that the house-priest's fortune gradually dwindled away and in time was entirely thrown to the king.

But Gautama thought:

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'My money is nearly gone. I shall be beggared by a king, 'tis true – but, by the gods, I should gladly forgo this honour! The royal lay conceals beyond a doubt a powerful charm. How could I break its magic and pilfer him as he spoliated me?'

And Gautama thought long and hard:

'It seemeth that Brahmadata's dicing-song draws its great potency from the fact that it consists of eternal truths impossible of refutation. Could I disprove but one of these four verities, the charm would break, the king would lose, and I should regain all my gold and all my sovereign's wealth!'

The longer Gautama pondered, the more profound became his musings:

'It's true – unfortunately! – that a river bare of water is no river; it's likewise true that without trees and shrubs there is no wood; no man has ever heard of cows that eat no grass, and, as to women: what greater, more irrefutable truth than that females cannot but be evil and depraved, and that nor god nor man can keep them from wickedness. If they cannot commit evil deeds, they revel in wicked thoughts!'

'But stop!' he inwardly exclaimed. 'How were it, if a female could be found who, barring her own husband, had not a single time beheld another man? Would she not lack temptation to be – the usual woman? Yea, truly, she would then remain good, sincere, and faithful! Thus I shall from her mother's womb rear secretly a female child so that

THE DICING-SONG

she never sets her eyes on *other* man but me, that when she reaches womanhood she'll think: The world consists of myriads of women and but one man: Gautama! Heigh-ho, my King! Thy magic dicing-song will fail through the wisdom of Gautama, the humble priest! — Yea, by the deity! I'll be rich again — nay, the richest man on earth!

And Gautama lost no time in carrying out his plan. Withdrawing from the royal gaming-board, he devoted all his time and energy to his one great purpose of rearing a female incapable of doing evil deed, and through her of breaking the charm of the king's dicing-lay.

Being a profound Veda-scholar, he had perception of futurity; thus, when one day he saw in the slave-mart for a sale a woman pregnant, he knew that in her womb she bore a female child. Thus he bought her, awaited her delivery, kept the infant girl, and sold the mother again.

This child he reared according to his plan. No man she ever saw, not even rooster, tom-cat, stallion knew she of; no books she read, no pictures or statues she beheld, told her of man: the world was woman's realm, and in it throned, as an inexplicable anomaly, that strangest of all creatures: Gautama, the priest!

Now in the very centre of his park the house-priest had erected a mighty seven-storied edifice, windowless, with seven balconies enclosed. Upon each balcony a watch of seven women crouched

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and held strict guard. The maiden's chambers lay upon the topmost floor, which she dare never leave. One waiting-woman served her wants, and Gautama came daily to visit her on whom depended all his future happiness.

So long as this maiden was growing to womanhood, the house-priest did not dice with Brahmadata a single time. But scarcely had she – Cinca she was named – reached the age of twelve, when he enkindled the sacred flame, conducted her to it, and called Agni, the Fire-God, to witness that henceforth Cinca was his wedded wife and hand-maid.

When morrow dawned he sought the presence of the king and said:

'O Mighty Sovereign, thou who possessest virtues in the fulness of the moon, for thirteen years I have not diced with thee. My heart longs for the game. Deign to receive me as thy partner again!'

The king did not demur, but bade the slaves prepare the gaming-table. Soon danced the dice within the ebony-cup and rolled about the silver-plate.

After Gautama had had his throw, Brahmadata shook, and threw, and hummed, according to his wont:

*Water flows in all the streams,
Trees and shrubs make up a wood,
Grasses eat the cows, it seems,
And no woman can be good!*

THE DICING-SONG

But before the dice came to rest upon the plate the house-priest murmured:

'None, except my Cinca!' and — he won the throw!

From this very moment Gautama won at every throw. Soon he had regained his eight hundred millions, and the king lost such an enormous amount of his own fortune each day that soon the royal treasure-vaults gaped with emptiness.

The king was vexed and sorely troubled, and pondered:

'How comes it that my dicing-song has lost its power miraculous? Is it possible that Mahadad-dara, the Naga Serpent-King, who once endowed my great-grandsire with this secret, holds *me* unworthy of this boon? Nay, it's impossible, for Naga-kings break not their word. I well observed that Gautama, when from my hand the golden dice roll on the silver-plate, murmurs a word or two. Ha! Can it be that somewhere in this giant-world there exists a female paragon that can commit no evil deed? Perhaps some maiden kept from infidelity by knowing but one single man? Perhaps this Gautama, as consecrated Brahmin, knows of such, and thus avails himself of this superhuman knowledge to pay me back and rob me of my royal wealth?'

Thus mused king Brahmadatta, and, greatly frightened lest he should lose his whole kingdom and be beggared, had his servants make inquiry

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round about, and soon found out the truth. 'In the house-priest's garden loomed, seven stories high, windowless, a mighty structure; seven balconies, enclosed, holding seven times seven women-sentinels; upon the topmost floor, in strict seclusion dwelled a girl who had just passed the age of childhood; no man she knew; she knew not that the world held men except Gautama, the Brahmin. Him she deemed God incarnate.' Thus stated the report.

'My brain sees clear!' the sovereign thought. 'It is indeed the Brahmin's stratagem that broke the spell of Mahadaddara's potent dicing-song! The truth exists no more: 'No woman can be good!' for yonder maiden, dwelling high above the earth, cannot commit an evil deed, not even in thought or dream – because no tempting sight or voice assails her eyes and ears.'

And Brahmadata almost lost his reason from despair. But suddenly a lucid thought, a distant hope, flashed through his brain:

'Could I but manage to undo this maiden's virtue! Perhaps my nephew Kalyana knows a way to liberate me from the Brahmin's clutch!'

This nephew, Prince Kalyana, was a master in affairs of love, and double-tongued and cunning like a serpent. He was the topmost ruby among the women-wise; his intellect was sharp as is the tip of Kusa-grass – but, above all, transcendent was his beauty: the God of Love incarnate!

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This nephew Brahmadata summoned, told him his troubles, and asked him if he could destroy the virtue of the house-priest's ward.

'So far, O Lord of Lords,' the youth replied, 'no woman's virtue could resist my skill – why should this maid withstand?'

Although the king explained the awful difficulties of reaching her, Kalyana felt good cheer:

'Nay, be not anxious, Royal Uncle!' he replied, 'I'll take good care of that! It's money that I need to reach this paragon, naught else. Have I but gold in plenty, I climb a thousand floors to reach a woman!'

The king was satisfied, gave him ten lakhs of gold, and pressed into his hand a golden image of the god Ganesa; then he dismissed him with the following blessing:

'The all-powerful elephant-headed God assist thee in thy task; may he deliver Cinca's virtue to thee with speed!'

The youth took the ten lakhs and the golden elephant-headed image, and departed from the Presence, no trace of doubt lest he should not succeed entered his mind: 'Gold and the elephant! – No possibility of failure!' Imparting his secret to two or three young courtiers, companions in his revels, he purchased flowers galore, most gorgeous wreaths and garlands; a great variety of perfumes, as attar, musk and bergamot; sweet-scented powders, as tagara and candana, both red and yellow;

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uppala-, sassiki- and sesam-oil; salves made of orange-root, cosmetic salves, all manner of incense; musk, liquid-amber, betel-nuts and orange-lead – ay, anything and everything that sweetly smells and sweetly tastes and sweetly looks. This monstrous heap of articles that women crave became his stock-in-trade in a shop opened by him in close proximity to Brahmin Gautama's habitation.

While Kalyana, the Royal Prince, in disguise, was busy arranging in his shop with delicate taste the lovely flowers in vases suitable to each, the perfumes, oils and salves in flasks of crystal, in boxes carved, embossed and painted, in silver-vessels, on plates of gold, in tubes of diamond-studded ebony and ivory – his friends made inquiry concerning Cinca's waiting-woman. They soon learned one particular which, to their mind, seemed promising if used as an opening-shot from Kalyana's catapult against the Brahmin's citadel – namely: The venerable matron's only son, the apple of her eye, had joined a pilgrim-caravan a dozen of years ago and had not given sign of life ever since.

When, therefore, in a day or too this woman approached along the street, the prince ran quickly from the shop, sank upon his knees, embraced her feet and joyfully exclaimed:

'My Mother, my cherished, darling Mother! At last I've found thee, for whom my heart has longed

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these many years! How happy I that thou still livest!

Kalyana's friends surrounded them and called: 'How wonderful! The Gods to witness for such wondrous similarity: the features – not a trace of difference! the hands – exactly like! the feet – the mother's of plastic shapeliness, the son's likewise! Ay, look! Observe their motion – see how the youth inclines his head – inimitable! – still, the honourable lady, not otherwise! The wealthy perfume-dealer, our honoured friend has found his dear mother again!'

The poor old woman's mind was all awry. Her worn-out, battered heart beat violently as she thought: 'My boy, my darling boy! My eyes have grown so dim, he's changed so much! Ten years of age he was when he took to his heels to see the world. Ah me! – Cruelly long this separation! My little boy, my Kamapala, grown up, a man, a wealthy man, an honoured, most esteemed merchant – a miracle!'

And the old woman sobbed with joy, embraced and kissed her Kamapala, who, smiling happily, led her into his shop and told her of his numerous adventures.

At last he asked:

'But, Mother Dear, what hast thou done these many years? Where livest thou? I long to see my mother's home!'

'O Kamapala, alas!' she said, 'I am the waiting-

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woman, guardian of a girl-wife, beautiful as only is an Apsara-fairy. But thither can my boy not come; there never man may enter!

'And whither goest thou at present, Mother Dear?'

'To purchase what she loves and craves: sweet perfumes and soft-tinted flowers.'

Now Prince Kalyana said:

'Look well about thee, Mother; breathe in the perfume of my shop, see yonder tender jessamine, that half-blown yellow rose, these purple violets. Let not thy eye miss aught: all this is mine to sell to strangers, but to give freely to her who gave me to the world. Take what would please thy mistress, and keep the money given to thee for purchase! Rich am I, aye, most rich. Come often to this shop to visit me, thy Kamapala, and take to her—is she not sister mine since my own mother lives for her?—take to my sister every time whate'er her heart desires!'

And Kalyana gave her bdellium and betel, a crystal-flask of attar and a score of softly tinted roses in an alabaster vase.

When the dame came into the maiden's presence and unpacked the basket in which she had carried her treasures, Cinca exclaimed with wondering delight:

'How kind, how gracious, is my husband and lord this day—what lovely scent, what beautiful roses! Methinks the festival of the God of Love is soon at hand?'

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'Nay, dear child, these things be not sent by thy Brahmin-lord; they are a gift of my darling son, lost so many years and now returned,' and she told her ward the story of her life.

And when the maiden opened her eyes in greatest astonishment, the dame, realising Cinca's ignorance of the world, told her that the earth was peopled not merely by females, but also by men, young and old, and that they were the beloved ones of the Gods, while the women were only the slaves of men.

Thenceforth the old woman kept for herself the money that Gautama gave her each day for the purchase, and, visiting her son's shop daily, was supplied by him with whatever Cinca craved: aye, bracelets, anklets, necklaces and brooches Kamapala sent to his sister, and on each day a precious gem: a brilliant, beryl, emerald, opal, hyacinth and ruby, an amethyst, a pearl, a sprig of coral — there was no limit to the young man's generosity.

One day, however, the matron found the shop closed. When she knocked, the door was opened by one of Kamapala's friends, who told her sadly that her boy lay sick upon his couch. The mother hastened to her darling's side, rubbed his aching back, and asked him tenderly:

'What aileth thee, my most beloved Kamapala?'

But he gave no answer. Then asked the dame again:

'Why answerest thou not, son of mine?'

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Then spoke the youth:

'I'm stricken with a dread disease, O Mother! Soon shall I be no more, for remedy there is none for this ill – nor may I tell you what ails me!'

The anxious matron, pressing him to tell the mother from whose womb he sprang, the mother who was his closest friend, to tell her all, the youth at last sighed deeply, shut his eyes, and whispered:

'Love-sick I am, O Mother Dear – my heart is ravaged by the poison of unrequited love! The glowing words uttered by thee in praise of Cinca whom thou servest have pierced my heart like flaming iron. I cannot eat, nor drink, nor sleep. I'm hot, I'm cold. I'm desert-dry, I'm in a sweat. I cannot stand, so weak am I; and when I lie prostrate, there's not a bone of me that does not ache. I'm dying, Mother – surely, Mother, I shall die unless I see my most beloved Cinca, sister most adorable – just once!'

The matron weeping left the room, but, after she had cooked rice-porridge for her patient, returned and said to him:

'Eat this, my son! Be of good cheer and cease to think of death, for thou shall see thy sister!'

'How can this be?' he asked. 'No man may enter there on peril of his life!'

'Doubt not, O Kamapala! Thy mother holds the power for even this!' she answered.

And, speaking thus, she packed a giant-basket

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full of sweet essences, sparkling jewels, the loveliest of flowers, and carried it away. Arrived at home, she fell to weeping and lamenting, till the maiden asked:

‘Wherefore thy tears, my Mother?’

‘Thy brother, my own Kamapala, lies in the throes of death and soon will be no more. So eloquently have I raved concerning Cinca’s loveliness that he has lost his heart to thee. Scarce have I found my darling child after so many years, and I must lose him for ever! It’s bitter fate, so bitter! But I shall follow him in death, shall follow speedily!’

Thus she lamented, and with her the tender-hearted little maid.

‘These flowers, jewels, perfumes,’ the woman said, ‘my Kamapala sends to thee for the last time. His power of speech is nearly gone; but when I left, he murmured – I could hardly catch his words! “If I could see my darling Cinca, my sister, just once – just for a moment! – perhaps I should grow well again!”’

The maiden said:

‘O Mother, faithful friend, help me to see him! He shall not die; nay, Mother Dear, he may not die through me! Has he not lavished things of joy upon me? I too should die, if ye twain leave the world!’

‘I shall reflect upon this difficult matter,’ the matron then replied, and long sat silent pondering.

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The following day she visited her son and said to him:

‘I’ve solved the difficulty, Kamapala; a simple stratagem will soon unite thee with the maid thou lovest. Thou squattest in this giant flower basket, I cover thee with roses, mango blossoms, verdant leaves, and carry thee upon my shoulders to the seven-storied garden-palace. The armed women-guards will not suspect the living freight, because this eve the Love-God’s festival is ushered in — what wonder that the basket to-day holds a heavier load of flowers and sweet scents than usual? Moreover, did not the Brahmin bid me decorate the entire seventh story with flowers for the festival?’

‘I understand, sweet Mother, aye, I understand! What puzzles me, however, is: how can I get away from there? I cannot dwell with Cinca, without discovery, for ever!’

‘That’s but a simple matter, son,’ the guardian dame replied. ‘On each third day I carry all the sweepings in a basket to the dung-heap at the gate. Two days thou hast thy fill of fond delight with Cinca, but on the third night shall I carry thee in that basket down the seven winding stairs and home!’

‘So be it!’ Kalyana cried, and he lay down in the flower-basket. His friends then bore the load up to the house-priest’s garden-gate, where they lifted the basket to the shoulder of the woman, who then proceeded on her way.

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As she laboured upstairs, the guarding women let her pass, although one or the other did not fail to express in envious tones astonishment that Gautama, the Brahmin, should 'spoil that hussy with such wondrous gifts.'

Arrived on top, nigh breathless through the exertion, the woman placed the basket at the maiden's feet and said:

'See, Little One, the wondrous flowers! Bend low and look what else is in the basket!'

The maiden looked: 'What could it be?' Pulling a mango-blossom here, a sweet rose there, uncoiling garland after garland of verdant leaves, she suddenly cried out aloud:

'The image of a god – the God of Love!' – for was it not the first time she beheld a man in the bloom of youth!

Kalyana bounded from the basket and stood before the maiden. He let his eye glide over her from the silken hair to the dainty feet, so that it whisked up and down on her like an ape on a liana. Intoxication seized him as he gazed. The lights of bliss shone from his countenance as shines the lantern in a gloomy night. His heart fizzed from love like a piece of meat dropped into a heap of glowing embers. Love paled his cheek until it illumined the chamber, as the rising moon illumines the road that leads across the plain:

'Crown-jewel among women!' he thought. 'Not through mere accident, not through the throwing

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of celestial dice, did he, the Lofty One, the Omnipotent Brahma create such superfluity of beauty, as gnawing worm by chance carves a letter into a wooden board! Nay, she is Brahma's masterpiece!' Thus mused the youth.

But she stood trembling with love-longing like a kid dragged from the stall to death. Her eyes shot rays into his – it was a meeting of two rays as when milk-drops touch swiftly running water. She swayed from eagerness and dread, as a creeper sways in a gentle breeze.

Kalyana, whom the maiden deemed as beautiful as if he were the second son of the Goddess Shri, advanced, embraced her tenderly, kissed her and whispered tenderest words into her ear – such words! – the maiden Cinca knew not that there were such wondrous words!

Soon darkness came; the two hearts melted into one, and – Cinca's virtue was no more!

Two days Kalyana stayed with her, but, when at noon and in the evening the Brahmin visited the maid, the youth hid in the closet where Cinca kept her silken robes.

But when the third day dawned, the maiden said to him:

'Beloved One, this day thou must depart. Thy mother urges that her Kamapala be carried home.'

The youth replied:

'So be it, Cinca mine! But ere I go I must perform one task, fulfil one longing of my soul that I

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cannot forgo without the greatest danger to my health!

'What be this task and longing, dear, dear Kamapala?' she asked.

'Hit Gautama, thy precious jailer, o'er his empty pate — just once!'

At first the maiden demurred, for she feared danger for her Kamapala, but when he sketched to her his plan and intermingled here and there abuse of Gautama, delight grasped her so that she readily consented.

When therefore Gautama, austere, suspicious Gautama, appeared at noon, his girl-wife said to him:

'Lord, master, husband! — is not this day the festival of spring, the honour-day of him who spendeth love, god Kamadeva? This day, thus said my mother, a woman's every prayer should be heard, and all her wishes gratified. The boon I crave is that I may make pilgrimage to Kamadeva's sacred grove, to honour him with blood-red roses and jessamine of purest white, and to bathe his feet with precious scents. I know — alas! — full well that this desire cannot be gratified, for as thou, Lord, hast oftentimes assured me, a fearful horse-faced demon seeks possession of me to drink my blood — away from my secure retreat should I soon be his prey! I therefore will eschew my heart's desire and crave a boon alike dear to me: remain thou, loved Lord, husband

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whom I adore, a longer time than usual in my company. Let us in unison and perfect harmony perform the rites prescribed for Kamadeva's day of birth! I should then place the Love-God's image into the centre of the room below the swinging sanctuary-lamp, and, reverencing it, should dance the sacred circle and sing hymns in his praise. But thee, O Brahmin, I request to play thy lute, and with thy skill to support my song.'

The maiden Cinca's wish to have his company did greatly please the Brahmin Gautama. He readily consented, and forthwith began to tune his lute. But Cinca laughed with glee, threw saffron-dust upon her aged lord, confetti, flowers, sweets; smeared salves, cosmetics on his hoary head, and almost drowned him with sweet perfume. But he, all smiles, rejoicing in youth apparently regained, played joyous tunes upon his lute.

But Cinca suddenly exclaimed:

'How if, like Kamadeva's priestesses, I dance around the God with doffed attire?'

'By all means, Love!' the Brahmin said, 'an Cinca thus desires.'

'Ay, Gautama, my Lord! How gladly should I thus show adoration to the God, and prove my gratitude that he gave thee to me to love me and protect me from the horse-faced demon! But, sweet Lord, I should be ashamed, wert thou to see me in nature's garb!'

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'I should not cast a single glance at thee!' the Brahmin quickly said.

'No? No? But, Lord – I should much rather tie a closely woven cloth about thy eyes!'

'So be it, maiden Cinca, if thy modesty demands!'

Thereupon the girl securely tied about the Brahmin's eyes a close-webbed cloth of deepest purple. And, while he played the lute, the maiden doffed her robe and danced about the statue of the God with unrestrained agility.

But suddenly she, gasping, cried:

'Lord Gautama, in all my life have I not known such joy! Tell me, O sweetest husband, is it true that on this night the slaves enjoy the boon of striking a blow upon their master's heads?'

'Yea, verily, my Love. On Kamadeva's day of birth, this one day in the year, the slaves are lords, their masters slaves. Thou, Cinca, wife and slave, desirest thou perhaps to try the power of thy maiden-arm, the hardness of thy virgin-fist, upon my head?'

'Ah, Lord, it's Kamadeva's honour-day, the God himself it is that makes my fingers itch!'

The Brahmin laughed:

'So strike thy blow – in Kamadeva's name!'

'Hard, Lord?'

'Aye, hard, fearfully hard! But take care that thou bruise not thy maiden-hand on Gautama's hard skull!'

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Now the girl beckoned to her lover. Kalyana left his place of hiding, and, softly creeping up until he stood behind the house-priest's seat, upraised his brawny fist and brought it down upon the Brahmin's head with fearful force.

Gautama's eyes protruded from their sockets, upon his hairless pate appeared a swelling like unto a mole-hill on a harrowed field, his lungs thrust out a violent cough – he was well-nigh undone!

Tortured with pain, he grasped the maiden's hand and moaned:

'The God Kamadeva has verily not lost his power of miracle! This little hand – how soft! This mighty blow – a lightning-bolt!'

After Cinca's young lover had again disappeared behind the screen, the maiden removed the purple-cloth from about the Brahmin's eyes, tenderly kissed him on the head, and gently rubbed the swelling with sesame-oil. Soon Gautama left the seventh story of his impregnable fortress, a sad, still wondering man, to kindle in the royal palace the sacred Kamadeva-fire.

But Kalyana and Cinca emulated one the other in clapping hands, in roaring with delight.

When twilight came, the youth departed in the basket. But ere he went they both agreed that, when his mother visited his shop again, she would bear Cinca thither in the eve, and hither in the morning.

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The Prince Kalyana straightway sought the Royal Presence and told the King the welcome news: 'The Brahmin-maiden's virtue is no more!'

Soon Gautama came to the palace to play his wonted game. And when the king's hand shook the ebony-cup and threw the golden dice upon the silver-plate, he murmured his accustomed dicing-song; and Gautama as usual added: 'None, except my Cinca!'

But lo! — 'By Indra's throne! — Is't possible?' Gautama lost! — Yea, lost!

They threw again, again — the fourth, the fifth time!

Gautama lost each time!

The house-priest floundered in a sea of doubt: 'The maiden Cinca? Cinca? Impossible that Cinca lost her pureness!' thus he thought.

Suddenly the king asked him the question: 'The swelling on thy head, Most Reverend — did a rafter fall on thee?'

'Nay, Puissant Lord, a slave-girl laid her fist on me, claiming her right on Kamadeva's honour-day.'

'A slave-girl? Nay, O Brahmin, woman's arm bears no such strength! Besides, such a blow on thy hard head would shatter a maiden's hand!'

'Natheless, Lord — it's true! Had I not felt the blow, did I not feel it still, my doubt would be as great as thine.'

'Thou art in error, Priest! — no woman struck this blow!'

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'There was no man about, only this girl of tender age, endowed with Indra's strength. She craved the usual boon to honour Kamadeva – I let her fly at me – how could I know the consequence?'

The Sovereign laughed and said:

'A wager, Brahmin, that a man was nathless present! Ay, let us wager that I know even who it was!'

Gautama scarcely trusted his ears.

But the king continued:

'Dost thou not know, O Brahmin, why Brahmadatta, and not Gautama, has won this day?'

'Nay, Lord of Lords!'

'Because the maiden, whom thou hast guarded from her mother's womb against the love-attacks of men, the maiden who deemed thee the only man upon the earth – because she's lost her virtue!'

'Impossible! Nay, Sire, mock me not! Through whom could my Cinca lose her purity? Dost thou, Lord, claim acquaintance with such man?'

'Ay, Priest! Look straight before thee: seest thou him?'

'The Prince Kalyana! – Kalyana?'

'Ay, Venerable Brahmin,' the Prince said soberly, and bent his head in reverence so low that Gautama's jewelled anklets brushed his forehead. 'Let me adore thy lotus-feet, Most Learned Priest! – 'twas Kalyana, the prince, who broke both spell

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and virtue! On Kamadeva's festival, wise Brahmin! In worship of the God of Love!

And Kalyana told the Brahmin all – explained with unction every detail of the stratagem.

But finally the house-priest, heaving a sigh deep as ocean bottomless, exclaimed:

'Forsooth, O Lord of Lords, defence is vain against women! The wise men of all climes and ages speak justly when they say: "The world holds not a single woman satisfied with one man's love!" The learning which we men extract from books availeth naught against a stupid maiden's mother-wit! And I, the imbecile, deemed myself wise enough to carry out a task too difficult for even a celestial king: to keep a woman from committing an evil deed! And – the ingrate hussy proved her femininity, her devilish womanhood, by making him who shamed her nearly break my head! Prince Kalyana! The maid – no longer maid! – be thine! Good riddance for the Brahmin – may the Gods save *thy* head! But thee, O Brahmadatta, kindly Sovereign, I pray: sing no more yon dicing-song! – else I shall never play with thee again!'

But the king smiled pleasantly and said:

'So be it, worthy Brahmin – it shall not pass my lips at play with thee. But, friend Gautama, acknowledge that its four truths will remain the truth to all eternity:

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*"Water flows in all the streams,
Trees and shrubs make up a wood,
Grasses eat the cows, it seems,
And," — — —*

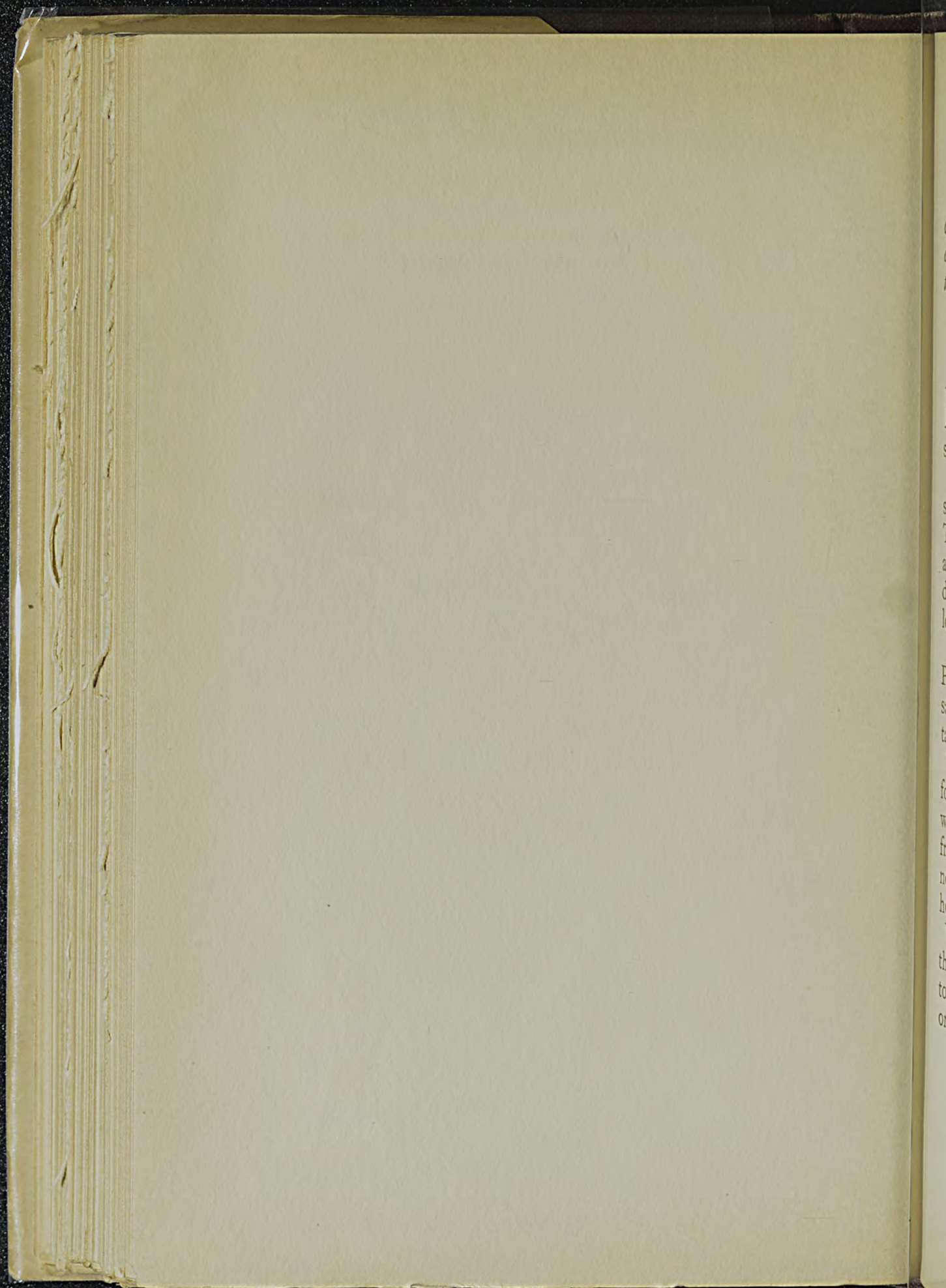
thou knowest, Gautama!!!'

'But in those days 'twas I who was the king of Benares, BRAHMADATTA,' thus did Kunala end his eleventh tale, 'but GAUTAMA, the cozened Brahmin, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!'

Thus reads Kunala's Eleventh Tale concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.

XII.

The Tale of the Brahma-Saint



*Thus did the Parrot-King Kunala ten thousand times
ope his bill of shining gold to tell ten thousand tales
concerning Woman and Her Wickedness, but his last
tale was that of: —*

THE BRAHMA-SAINT

IN times of yore there ruled at Mithila a king called Suruci, to whom a son was born, and this son was named also Suruci.

This Suruci, the Prince, when he had reached his sixteenth year, was sent by Suruci, the King, to Takkasila, in order to be instructed in all the four and sixty arts and sciences by a famous Guru dwelling in that city, who was the sunlight to the lotus of his pupils.

To this same Guru came another royal youth, Prince Brahmadata of Benares, son of the puissant sovereign Brahmadata reigning at that capital.

These princes twain met on the marble-slab before the Guru's decorated rostrum of instruction within the sacred temple. On first look they were friends and soon became inseparable comrades, nor did dissension ever cast a cloud upon the heaven of their friendship.

When they had reached perfection, they thanked their teacher, adored his feet, and left the town together. And when they came to the cross-roads, one leading to Benares, the other to Mithila, they

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lovingly embraced; and, that the merit of their friendship might be preserved for ever, they took a solemn vow one to the other: 'If son be born to me, but to thee daughter, or son to thee, daughter to me, they shall be man and wife!'

When in time, after the demise of their royal fathers, they ascended their respective thrones, a son was born to king Suruci whom he named Prince SURUCI; likewise the Gods blessed Brahmadata at Benares by giving him a daughter, Princess ROHINI.

When this Suruci, Prince of Mithila, had outgrown childhood and in the city Takkasila had likewise reached perfection in all arts and sciences, his royal sire thought to confer upon him royal dignity. But ere he chose the day on which this ceremony should take place, he conceived the following thought:

'My friend, the king of Benares, Brahmadata, has a daughter whose beauty may be likened to a light in a dark chamber. All who have viewed her loveliness say: her eyes are like those of the doe, her locks like female serpents, her eyebrows like the half-moon, her nose a parrot's nose, her two and thirty teeth like pearls on silken string, her lips like red bryonia, her neck a dove's neck, her carriage like the stride of leopard, her hands and feet like tender lotus. They say she is stately like a swan, and, when she speaks, it sounds as if the Kokila-bird were singing. They say that Indra's

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nymphs would blush for shame and envy her loveliness! Is she not worthy to be royal consort at Mithila? Yea, before I raise the snow-white parasol above the head of Suruci, my heir, I shall make her his wife!

Thus thought the king; and forthwith he sent his envoys extraordinary to Benares to ask from sovereign Brahmadata his daughter in espousal for the heir of Mithila. And Brahmadata, remembering the vow of youth, and likewise for state-reasons, was graciously inclined to do his part in consummating this desired and desirable alliance. But, ere he gave his answer, he deemed it wise to seek his Queen's opinion and approval.

'Beloved Consort of a King!' he said to her, 'if our daughter weds the prince of Mithila, it is my ardent wish that she be ever happy and content, so that she never shall regret the step and blame us parents for her dole. What, Loved Queen, what deems a woman the greatest evil? What is to a queen a wellnigh unbearable unhappiness?'

The royal lady answered:

'The greatest evil for every woman, queen or not queen, is when she has a rival for her lord's affection. There is no woman who desires not, above all else, to serve the master of her life alone and to engross his heart!'

To this the king answered:

'If this be so, My Love, I shall give our child to Prince Suruci only on condition that no other

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woman shares her husband's heart and favour; for never shall I tolerate that she, our joy, live a blighted life!

Thus learned the envoys of the king of Mithila what Brahmadata had decided, and straightway sent their report to Suruci.

The king of Mithila, however, was not pleased: conditions 'gainst his will ruffled his royal dignity.

'Do I not rule over a mighty kingdom?' he mused. 'Does not my capital Mithila cover seven miles of level plain, my realm one hundred thousand miles of fruitful land? What king on earth has greater power? Is not my sway to be compared to that of Indra, the sovereign of Gods? Should son of mine, prospective heir to such empire, make shift with but one single wife?'

Aye, Suruci was deeply wounded, and boiled with indignation.

Accordingly he summoned councillors, nobility and Brahmins, called all the viceroys from the provinces, rajas, subadars, told them the difficulty, and bade them to express their mind.

The kingdom's honourable noblemen and reverend Brahmins, the subadars, the viceroys, rajas, the royal councillors – they all were of one mind:

'The Gods of Heaven forbend that Suruci, the son of our Puissant Lord, the bearer of the crown in coming times, this youth of superhuman beauty and unexcelled virility, endowed with virtues like

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none else, that Suruci of Mithila be husband of – one wife! Nay, Lord! Such trespass on the Prince's manhood were cruel shame – 'twould dim the lustre of thy crown!

There was not one among the crowd of dignitaries whose blood was not stirred up, who did not knit his brow, scowl, growl, or grind his teeth by reason of king Brahmadata's proviso to this union.

But when the city's populace learned this particular, the keepers of the shops, of bazar-stalls, the artisans, the hewers of wood and drawers of water, the simple labourers, – the rabble on the street – aye, the multitude of beggars – all boiled with indignation and foamed with rage:

'What! What! We of Mithila, the foremost city, the proudest city, the fairest city on the earth, we should bow our necks to a king with but one wife! Be put to shame before all other towns – that they misprize us, treat with disrespect the people of Mithila, that they fling dirt at us, drag our honour through the mud, crack jokes at us, and snigger in their sleeves – never! Never shall we suffer it! At least sixteen thousand wives must Prince Suruci wed, at least as many as his sire, grandsire, great-grandsire, and all the Surucis since times immemorial!'

But he, the Prince about whose head the storm of passionate anger raged, sat, in his hand the painted likeness of Rohini of Benares, in speechless admiration of such transcendent beauty. When he

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had gazed his fill, he sought the king and queen and said:

'This maiden shall I wed, nor shall she share with other woman her nuptial duty. Rohini shall be my only yokemate and royal consort! If this desire be not gratified, I shall depart from home and kindred, withdraw into the forest's wilderness, and, dwelling in a hut of leaves, shall as ascetic practise world-relinquishment.'

In vain his royal parents' exhortations, in vain the pleadings of the reverend Brahmins, the viceroys, paladins and dignitaries, in vain the people's wrathful indignation – his mind was steadfast: Rohini of Benares should be his only queen and wife!

There was no other choice: that Suruci, the heir of Mithila, renounce the world and turn ascetic, could not be thought of! Thus king and court agreed to let him have his way.

Forthwith the sovereign bade his architects, his masons, carpenters and craftsmen build him a wondrous palace, the base of which was masonry of precious stones, of agate, lapis-lazuli and turquoise, studded with diamonds, sapphires, rubies – and on this base seven stories of burnished gold. The windows were of pellucid crystal; the woodwork carved and painted and enamelled; and on the lofty, balustraded roof a lotus-pond in a park of evergreens.

Now when this palace stood, casting scintillating

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rays of light upon the city, the king sent caravans of treasure to Brahmadata and bade the foremost dignitaries of his realm convey Princess Rohini to Mithila from Benares; and, when she had arrived, three glittering festivals were held in honour of the young pair: the Palace-feast, the ceremony of the Parasol, the celebration of the Nuptials. In parks and pleasure-groves, on public squares, the people of both kingdoms revelled and caroused for seven months. All guests were welcome at Mithila: and what they ate and drank, the robes of festival they wore, the bracelets, anklets, necklaces, the precious scents, cosmetics, salves – all this was furnished lavishly by the royal treasury.

Each day processions of the people passed through the city's streets, festooned and decorated with a million flower-wreaths each day renewed; the sounds of music everywhere: archlutes and polychords, drums, dulcimers and harps, gongs, cymbals, timbrels, castanets – it was as if the king of heaven, Indra, held his honour-day!

And in the pleasure-parks and squares beflagged platforms, supplied with swansdown-cushions, invited young and old to witness horse-races, chariot-races; cock-, quail-, ram-, elephant-fights – aye, competitions between actors, singers, musicians and poets; performances of jugglers, conjurers, buffoons. In seven quarters of the city they played continuously. The immense crowd of guests was ceaselessly amused from morn till night by won-

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drous, well-nigh unbelievable dexterity; adroitness in magic, sleight of hand and manual prowess – as play at fisticuffs, at quarter-staff and single-stick, gladiatorship, gymnastics; contests of skill at sabre, cutlass, scimitar, rapier and dirk, at battle-axe and yataghan; in crystal-tanks the dance of dolphins, on cloth of black samite the leaping on command of scorpions, trained fishes, eagles, cranes; a tiger's bosom-friendship with a lamb – a thousand breathless wonders!

There was a leaper who sprang over seven lances and never even grazed the needle-points; a juggler who swallowed a naked sword thirty-three inches long and sharp like razor-blade; another juggler who showed his skill at throwing pebbles and forming any wished-for shape: before a large-leaved Nigrodha-tree he stood, and when the people threw him cowries and other coins and called: 'Throw us a horse, an elephant, the shape of Kamadeva, the God of Love' – he quickly threw and perforated each gigantic leaf with the desired shape. One juggling-wizard – perhaps most popular among the crowd – was a master of expectoration; his skill was matchless, sovereign: he stood before a polished board, took in his mouth a round Areka-nut enwrapped within a betel-leaf, chewed little piece of Katechu and camphor, paused for the fraction of a second – and squirted with the bright-red juice phantastic shapes upon the board: kokila-birds, cakrawaka-ducks, pea-

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cocks and parrots; jackals and elephants, lions and tigers; aye, saintly ascetics, gods and goddesses; expectorating finally upon the board his masterpiece, Indra, the King of Gods, as on a celestial elephant he thrones!

One wonderful sorcerer caused to grow before the jewel-palace of the youthful royal pair, in the hours from sunrise to high-noon, a giant mango-tree, and named it 'Atula' (the 'matchless') tree: its topmost branches touched the heavens, it seemed to grow into the realm of the gods, one could not see the top. But at high-noon there came a second wizard and threw a skein of thread into the air so that it caught upon a branch in height invisible: and this thread he climbed until the crowd could see no more of him. And, as he did not reappear, the first magician followed him into the dizzy height with speed, caught him and dragged him down about a thousand feet, then drew his sword, hacked him to pieces, and threw the bleeding parts, both large and small, far down to the earth. Now another sorcerer picked up the remains, besprinkled them with water from the sacred Ganga, and lo! — the corpse became alive — dressed in a lotus-robe embroidered gorgeously with peacock-feathers.

Another sorcerer gifted with weirdest magic came forward with eleven followers, who walked into a fiercely blazing funeral pile. He himself entered not; and when but a heap of glowing

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embers smoked in place of the gigantic pyre, he besprinkled the ashes with water from the holy Ganga, and lo! – the eleven came forth unscathed, and with robes of flower-garlands adorning their persons.

One juggler played the so-called miracle of 'Half-Alive.' Standing seven feet in the air, he moved one hand, one foot, one eye, one row of teeth; thus sang he, danced, and rolled about, his body's other half resting in perfect rigidity. This spectacle was so passing comical that many a spectator fell to the ground, and quite a number died from very laughter.

One juggling-musician entertained the multitude with playing on the lute. His playing was so wondrous that the people shouted with delight and admiration. But all at once he sundered from his instrument one of the strings, which, though now severed from the sounding-board, vibrated a melody as beautiful as heavenly music. Now he tore off the second, the third, the fourth – all seven strings, and every string gave forth such wondrous melody. At last he played upon the stringless wood: the brilliant harmonies resounded throughout Mithila and hovered in the air above the town. But, of a sudden, the wizard-player threw one string into the air, and lo! – three hundred graceful nymphs came floating down from heaven and danced; and when all seven strings had left his hand, two thousand one hundred heavenly mai-

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dens were dancing in the air. But when the great magician waved his hand the dancers vanished — amid the jubilant acclamation of the crowd.

Thus pleasure-dispensing, joy-bestowing, passed this three-fold festival: the Palace-feast, the ceremony of the Parasol, the celebration of the Nuptials — which lasted seven months. Soon thereupon the old king Suruci passed into Indra's heavenly city, and Suruci, his son, the 'One-wived,' succeeded him and ruled his people with equity and wisdom.

One day a warlike border-tribe rebelled against the king's authority. The troops despatched against them, in number too inferior, could not withstand the rebels' fierce onslaught. In jeopardy of being routed, they sent to Suruci a messenger, beseeching him to take supreme command.

The king forthwith decided to hasten to the seat of war with his best troops in forced marches. But ere he went he longed to set his mind at rest on one grave matter nearest to his heart. Accordingly, he summoned UPASENA, his house-priest and chief-councillor, a sage endowed with such sagacity and wisdom that even Brihaspati, House-Priest to the Gods, would have been baffled by the problems that Upasena solved with ease.

'Most Reverend Priest,' King Suruci said, 'I must lead an army to the borders against those in-

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solent rebel-bands. But she, the consort of my crown, beloved sovereign of my heart, my beautiful Rohini, remains behind, and our time of separation may be long. Thou knowest well the tender love, the sweet affection, between us: we love as the lotus-of-the-day loves the sun and the lotus-of-the-night loves the moon. But, trusty Friend, well I remember from my days of youth the exhortation of my wise Guru in Takkasila, who dinned into my ear what he called greatest of all truths: "No woman, e'en the best, is constant in her love." I ask thee, worthy Upasena: is there no limitation to this truth? Are all women, without exception, prone to do an evil deed?

The house-priest answered:

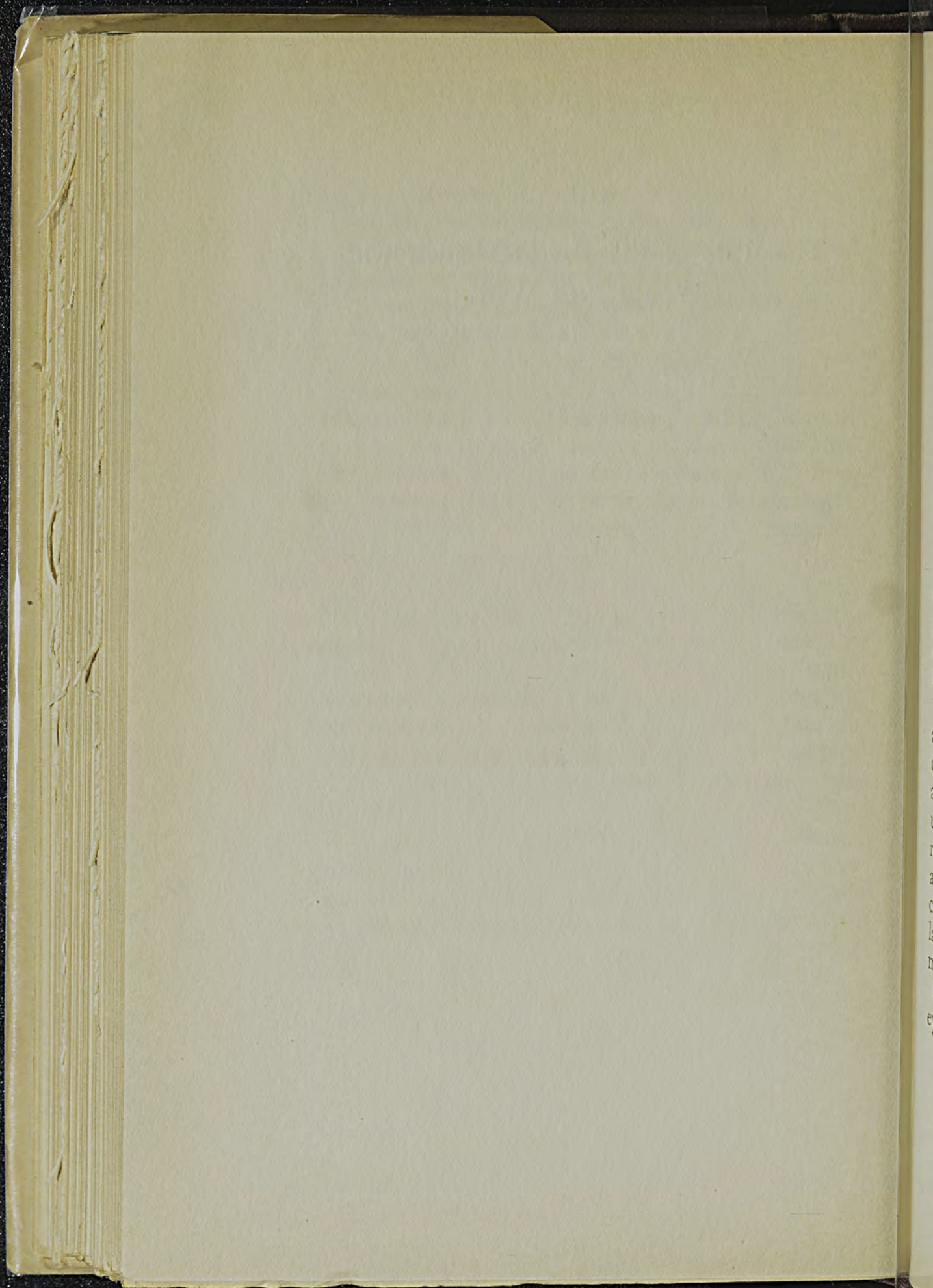
'O Glorious King of Kings, thou terror to thine enemies! The quintessence of all women inherent, natural, bred in the bone, is lust for evil; 'twere vain to seek exceptions to the rule. Thus read at least the verdict of the God of Justice, Dharma, supreme judge of the Gods, in a serious litigation on the subject: 'Are males or females more depraved?'

'Recount to me this matter, worthy Upasena!' Suruci asked.

'So be it, Gracious Lord!' the priest replied.
'Deign to incline thy royal ear to my recital of: -

XIII.

The Tale of the Parrot-Maiden who
Would Not Wed



THE TALE OF THE PARROT-MAIDEN WHO
WOULD NOT WED

MILLIONS of years ago there ruled in Hastinapura a king called Juddhittila, a sovereign unparalleled in royal virtues. This king possessed a parrot of great intelligence, named VIGDACUDA.

Juddhittila's chief wife, a Princess Royal of Benares, also had a parrot, a female parrot called SOMIKA, likewise uncommonly intelligent. These parrots twain the king and queen put into one large cage wrought of gold, in which they dwelled together day and night. Soon Vigdacuda, though Vedawise, became enamoured of this parrot-maiden Somika, which seemed to him the very paragon of parrot-beauty and gentleness. Accordingly one morning he took heart and said to her:

'Fair One, meseems 'twould be most natural if I and thou should marry according to the Gandharva-rite – without the sacred fire, witnesses, and Brahmin's blessing – according to the simple usage of us bird-folk since times primeval. Do we not occupy the selfsame dwelling, share perch and board like any married couple – though by constraint, 'tis true? Companionship so close lacks decorous correctness unless legitimised by matrimony. So let us marry, Somika, my Love!'

But Somika, the parrot-maiden, drawing the eye-lid o'er one sparkling orb, and with the other,

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opened wide, casting him a knife-edged glance, drawled out:

'I have no yearning for the married state. My spinsterhood is bearable. A husband is no gain. Are not all males wicked and depraved, dangerous, deadly and calamitous?'

'Nay, Love, thou misappliest this wisest of all sayings. This truth of truths, proclaimed by all the saintly sages since the world's creation, speaks thus of women, not of men!'

But Somika refused to be convinced, and thus they quarrelled on this point all day and through the night. At last Vigdacuda said:

'A truce to our strife, fair Somika! — Our lord, the King, is far-famed for his justice and learning throughout the Jambu-world: let him decide who's right. But if I hold the truth, thou shalt that selfsame hour marry me and be my bondmaid!'

'So be it!' said the parrot-maiden. 'But if I win, thou shalt be slave of mine!'

As Vigdacuda was agreed, they forthwith left the open cage, flew to the council-chamber where Juddhittila sat in judgment, told him the point at issue, and asked his sentence.

The King asked Somika, the parrot-maiden: 'What proof hast thou that men are thus depraved?'

'Proof irrefutable, O Royal Judge!' Somika answered. 'Grant me the boon of telling thee the story of my former life!'

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'The daughter of a wealthy merchant of Kaman-daki was I born. At five years of age my father married me to another wealthy merchant's son, eight-year-old Dhanadatta. When I was twelve, he fifteen, he took me to his father's house, where we lived happily together for several years. Our parents died in quick succession, and we became possessors of great wealth. My husband Dhana-datta soon began to lead a life of dissipation and incontinence: drank fiery liquors, played dice with dissolute men, and sought the company of courtesans, lute-players, dancing-girls, and the like. Nevertheless I loved him and served him with great fidelity, and, when he finally had squandered the fortune of the two families, gave him without a murmur of reproach my golden ornaments and jewels, as he demanded.

'At last our house held not a thing of value, except an amulet studded with sparkling diamonds, which I wore day and night about my neck in accordance with a solemn promise to my dying mother. As, notwithstanding all his prayers and threats, I steadfastly refused to yield my precious talisman to be expended in debauchery, he fell upon me while I slept and strangled me to death. Then, with the gold gained through my amulet, he fled to the isle of Lanka, where he kept up his life of grossness and lasciviousness. Of such depravity are men, O Mighty King!' the parrot-maiden closed her tale, her oval eyes suffused with tears.

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The king addressed the parrot Vigdacuda:
'What is thy argument to prove the wickedness of women?'

Vigdacuda answered:

'O Mightiest of All Sovereigns, my former life supplies a matchless proof of the truth infallible: "Women are depraved and dangerous and calamitous." Know thou, O Lord, my cradle stood in fair Pataliputra, where I was born son of the wealthiest of merchants, who drove me from his house together with my wife as, loving beyond just measure my younger brother, born of his second wife he grudged me every mite of his great fortune.'

'We wandered long and far, and finally were lost within a boundless desert devoid of water and of vegetation. The sun's heat was so great that we twain, hungered and athirst, well-nigh expired. For seven days we strayed about, I, notwithstanding my own weakness, bearing my cherished wife upon my shoulders, and keeping her alive by opening a vein above my knee, from which she sipped my blood.

'At last the Gods were merciful. We reached the sacred waters of the Ganga, built us a hut of leaves in a shady grove, and, eating luscious forest-fruit, regained our strength.

'One day a robber, escaped from his pursuers, passed our dwelling. As he had well-nigh spent his strength, we bathed his wounds, fed him, and

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sheltered him. He being but a youth and fair to look upon, the woman who owed life to me was smitten by his charms and fell a prey to her licentious cravings. The twain shamed me and shamed the Gods – and finally, persuaded by my wife, he crushed my skull. Thus served me woman, Mighty King, and thus they serve all men, returning evil deed for loving act!’

Although King Juddhittila had heard these two accounts, he was not able, in spite of his great wisdom and knowledge of the Manu-laws, to pronounce sentence in this case. Both parrot-arguments seemed irrefutable! Therefore he burnt sacrifice and sent the case on appeal to Dharma, the Judge Celestial, who in the Brahma-paradise among Gods pronounces judgment. The God, in gracious favour of the quest of man for truth, descending from the heavenly realm with all his court, gave utterance to the following decision:

‘Women, and not men, are depraved and dangerous and calamitous! It may perchance exceptionally happen that a man, inoculated with a woman’s wickedness, may commit an evil deed, but this is but an exception to the rule that man strives ever for the good. Women, however, are prone to evil from their very nature; evil is the key-note of their life. Not even I, Omniscient God and Judge Infallible, know a single instance of a woman who passed her life from birth to death without com-

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mitting evil deed at least in thought.' Thus ruled the heavenly Dharma, and forthwith disappeared.

Then Somika, the parrot-maiden, having lost her case, was sentenced by the king to marry and to serve the parrot Vigdacuda.

The Tale of the Brahma-Saint (continued).

But King Suruci, having heard this most instructive tale, said to his house-priest Upasena: 'If the truth concerning women be thus bitter and distressing, I pray thee, worthy Priest, give counsel to thy sovereign how he can keep Rohini, his most beloved wife, from doing any evil action in his absence?'

'O, Ruler of the world, Most August Potentate,' the house-priest answered, 'not e'en the Gods of Heaven can turn a woman resolved on wrong one hair's-breadth from her course? Thus 'tis not possible that I, a mortal, can give to thee, a mortal, true counsel how to solve a problem that baffles e'en the Gods!'

'True, Brahmin,' said the king, 'alas, too true! But this my majesty and friendship can and does demand of thee: whene'er thou seest or hearest aught suspicious, if thou discernest the tiniest trace of evil, I pray thee go to her, admonish her, plead with her gently, but with firmness, and

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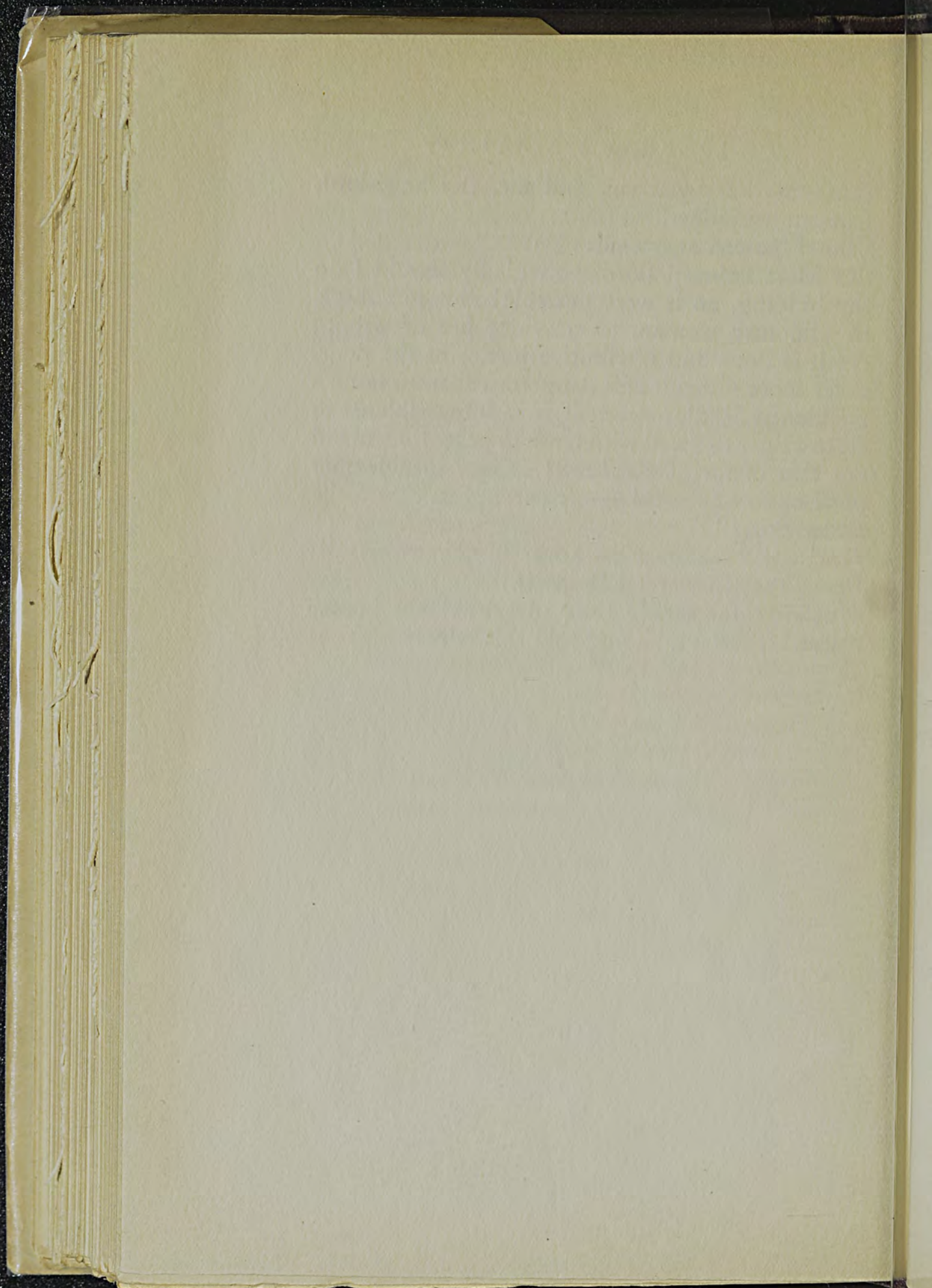
thus save her from sin, and me, thy liege-lord, from unhappiness!

But Upasena answered:

'O Most Beloved Lord, how gladly should I do thy bidding, an it were possible! But to exhort, to admonish woman, to convince her of wrong, ere it is done and retributive justice at the door, is far more difficult and dangerous than to tame a maddened Sindhu-steed; it is as impossible as to force a tiger to dwell with lamb in peace! Demand not this of me, Dear Lord! — Once in a former life I endured fearful agony through such a futile undertaking!'

'Indeed!' exclaimed the king. 'Tell me the tale, I pray thee, Reverend Brahmin!'

'Incline thine ear, O Lord of Lords!' the house-priest Upasena said, and told this tale: —



XIV.

The Tale of the Learned Parrot



THE TALE OF THE LEARNED PARROT

IN one of my former ten thousand existences, I began his tale the Brahmin Upasena, I was reborn in a parrot-nest in the forest on a Himalayan slope. Half-fledged I was when a hunter spied me helpless in a bramble-bush, caught me, and later sold me to a Brahmin at Benares. My master, being childless, grew to love me like a veritable son, and spent most hours of the day in teaching me the sacred arts and sciences. Continually he read to me the holy Vedas, and soon I knew by memory the prayers and hymns of adoration to the Fire-God. Beyond a doubt was I the most enlightened, scholarly parrot throughout the Jambu-realm, and thus it came to pass that from all countries of the globe parrots were sent to Benares to benefit from my companionship and the culture of my intellect.

The Brahmin had another son, a dog, likewise adopted. He too was most intelligent, obedient, as constant as the northern star, and incorruptible, though of the sacred Vedas he knew naught. His principal talent was to read from our master's eyes the slightest wish, and, when once thus informed, without a question he performed his task. Him named the Brahmin POTTHAPADA, but me, the parrot, RADHA.

One day our father left his home to guide a caravan of pilgrims into the Vindhja mountains,

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where in the wilderness there gushed from a rocky fissure a spring, a sacred Tirtha, which poured its tepid waters into a circular pool. Here bathed the multitude and were healed of their ills. Before the Brahmin left, he called his two sons, the dog and me, the parrot Radha, into his chamber, at a time when our mother, the Brahmin's wife, was busy in the kitchen baking cakes of rice to serve as sustenance for her lord upon the journey. The Brahmin said to us:

'My children well-beloved, to-morrow I must hence on a sacred errand. Far is the journey and difficult the way: thus will my absence be a long one. You I can trust with all my heart, and therefore I ask this boon of you with confidence: Observe your mother closely, and, when you see her leave the path of rectitude and virtue, admonish her, and hold her from her course.'

I, Radha, answered:

'Ay, Father, I will do my best!'

And Potthapada said:

'Be tranquil, Father; if it be in my power, I will hold her back!'

Thus, when the morning dawned, the Brahmin left his home, peace in his heart.

Our mother was endowed with brilliant comeliness: her eyes were large, round, and of limpid depth like mountain-pools, her figure of most perfect symmetry, and, when she smiled, the hearts of all were captivated. But in her heart

THE LEARNED PARROT

the demon of lasciviousness and lust held sway. Thus, scarcely had her kindly lord departed when she began to dedicate her life to sin, admitted strangers to her house, caroused with her gallants throughout the night, and sank into the slough of wickedness.

With great surprise I noticed that Potthapada, my brother at the door, did not refuse admission to our mother's paramours. He growled his usual growl, 'tis true, but did not use his teeth. So I flew through the open door, and, perching on the roof of Potthapada's kennel, where he lay dozing through the noon-day heat with half-closed eyes, I said to him:

'My brother, hast thou forgot so soon our benefactor's prayer and our own solemn promise? Dost thou not see that wickedness has entered here? Why dost thou not strike at our mother's gallants as they pass? Not one could enter, if Potthapada barred his way!'

But Potthapada answered:

'Dear brother Radha, Veda-learned thou art, 'tis not to be denied, but in all worldly matters art thou Ignorance herself! A royal treasury filled with a thousand millions I might perchance defend against a robber-band — but to defend a woman against her evil heart is a task impossible to achieve! If I refused admittance to our mother's paramours, she would find ways and means to drink the poisonous draught of evil

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somewhere else, but me she'd hate, and seek my death. Nay, little feathered brother, no woman can be kept from doing evil deeds, though she were chained to a rock and guarded day and night! But – this is worldly wisdom, brother Radha! – what one cannot do, one should not undertake to do! Thou, birdling, art e'en more powerless than I, the mighty beast; let me counsel thee therefore to hold thy peace!

But I, convinced of my sagacity and cleverness, did not obey my brother's well-meant counsel. I overestimated the importance of my Veda-knowledge and deemed myself endowed with greater wisdom.

Accordingly I said to the Brahmin's wife:

'Mother, wherefore indulgest thou in evil? Thou knowest well that all the world expects of thee, a Brahmin's wife, moral perfection – particularly when thy Lord is absent! But thou hast led a dissipated life since our kindly father left his home! – Cease from thy wicked course; become again a helpmate worthy of his holiness and virtue!'

Such words I spoke to her, reciting, for her spiritual benefit, the prayers I had learned.

But she turned pale with fright, flashed me a look of fear, and thought:

'This cursed bird seems clever beyond measure! The dog, his brother, scarcely growls when strangers pass the threshold of my door – but he, the saucy parrot, turns up his bill at me and flings

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reproaches at my head! I doubt not that he will betray me to my lord on his return.'

My mother's face, however, gave no evidence of anger, but, shedding copious tears, she said to me: 'My precious darling son, my favourite since I beheld thee first, thou learned Brahmin among birds, thou knowest well how I love thee far better than thy rough-haired, stupid brother. Alas, my precious idol, thou art right when thou upbraidest me! A demon took possession of my soul, and he it is who makes me what I am. Why hast thou not admonished me ere this?—But, darling son, now, from this very moment, it shall cease—I'll be my own true self again, and sin no more! Come to my bosom, most beloved Radha, sent by the Gods to turn me from my evil course—come let me kiss thy lotus-feet, thy heavenly, graceful beak. O let me gently stroke thy downy robe—!'

Called with such love-inspiring words pronounced in honeyed tone, my feathers ruffled with delight. I swelled with inordinate pride that I had turned her heart from evil to good—a task most difficult e'en for a God! I flew to her and nestled in her lap.

But—in a trice she had me by the neck and screamed:

'Ha!—ill-bred, foul-mouthed, blackguard bird! Moth-eaten, mangy, nasty, parrot-cock! Repulsive, churlish beast! Have I got thee at last!—Ha! Ha!—Insult thy mistress?—show her dis-

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courtesy? — snarl at her churlish words, thou crabbed, saucy, feathered brute!' — And with fierce violence she swung me in a circle and broke my neck; then threw my corpse into the burning grate, and later served me, roasted to a turn, to Potthapada for his noon-day meal.

'Now knowest thou, O Sovereign Lord,' so did the old Brahmin close his narration, 'why I, thy humble house-priest Upasena, cannot be guardian to thy Queen! . . .'

The Tale of the Brahma-Saint (continued).

In those days there dwelled, at no great distance from Benares, in the jungle on the bank of the sacred Ganga, a holy ascetic named HARITA who, having almost finished a thousand years of penance and world-relinquishment, was near to reaching the greatest of all possibilities — after his death to occupy the throne in the Brahma-Paradise, and to rule there as sovereign supreme. In order to prevent Harita, the penitent, from becoming the God of gods, MARA, the King of Demons in the Avici-hell, pondered long and thought following thoughts:

'The super-human virtue of yonder Super-Saint, his chastity, unsullied by one single impure im-

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pulse for nigh unto a thousand years, must be broken! Thus far all plans have miscarried, all efforts have failed. Not even Menaka, the most seductive of Apsara-nymphs, seductress of the holy Visvamitra, could turn this penitent Harita from the path of virtue: with mystic power drawing a magic triangle about his hut, none of the beautiful Apsara-maidens contrived to enter. But, but mayhap! Aye, 'tis like hazard of the die!—Still, I shall try: send King Suruci, loth to entrust his wife to her own company without protection while he makes war against his enemies—send Suruci to Harita, the Super-Saint, requesting him to guard the lotus-fair Rohini against her own frail womanhood. If yonder paragon of saints accepts this trust, he cannot dwell within the magic triangle while he guards Queen Rohini—once in her dangerous company, his shrivelled heart may shoot forth some tiniest sprout of carnal lust—enough to rob him of the fruits of a thousand years of world-relinquishment, of possibility of holiness for a hundred thousand years to come.'

Thus mused the King of Demons, and instantly imbued Suruci's mind to think this thought:

'My house-priest Upasena quivers with apprehension lest for the second time he lose his life through the vindictiveness of a woman. Thus I can gain no help from him. My final hope regarding this great difficulty, which, unless solved, will render the absence from my queen torture

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unbearable, is centred in the holiest of all ascetics, Harita. Him could I mayhap persuade to guard my loved Queen Rohini. I shall thus seek his presence and do my best to gain his favour. A thousand years of age, possessing all perfections, capable of ecstasy, wellnigh a god, he surely will not fear a woman's wiles nor deem the task of guarding her impossible!

Accordingly the king departed in his golden chariot, was swiftly driven o'er the plain and through the forest on the sandy jungle-road until his piebald stallions halted on Mother Ganga's shore. When he neared the leafy bower of the saint, he beheld him sunk in rigid adoration of the sun, the father of all life.

When Suruci had laid at the ascetic's feet his royal gift of gold and jewels and costly salves, he knelt before his holiness and said:

'All hail to thee, most godlike of all Munis, thou perfect Brahma-Saint!'

'Hail to thee, puissant Sovereign of the earth. What may be the longing of thy royal spirit?'

'O Saint of Saints!' the king replied, 'the longings of an earthly king are set on power, wealth, and woman's tender love; this thou knowest well. Wealth lack I not; the royal power hold I firm; and Kama granted me a wife of divine pulchritude. But, Harita, thou penitent of greatest merit, I must conduct my army to the border-land against the rebel-tribes: thus will my golden palace be

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without its lord, and my capital and country lack its king.'

The Saint, pleased by the mighty sovereign's homage, gave gracious answer:

'Fear not, O Royal Suruci : I will be guardian to thy people and hold thy country safe. Where Harita has built his hut of leaves, there evil demons do not prevail!'

'Ay, god-like Saint, nor do I fear despoilment of my power and wealth! But, Holy Penitent, my queen, the topmost jewel of my crown of life — it's she for whom I fear. Therefore I crave of Harita a favour that only He can grant: guard in my absence my beloved queen that she may not fall a prey to evil!'

Harita, the mirror for the wise on earth, beholding with the eye of truth the inmost nature of the universe, looked at the king with darkened brow.

'Thou askest of me, Suruci,' he said, 'none of the myriad boons that I could easily bestow upon thee, but thou cravest the *Impossible*! Dost thou not know that even Shiva, whose soul soars at the loftiest height, far over all produced of earthly matter, the God with azure-neck, could not protect a woman against the evil dwelling in her heart?' And Harita turned from the king and to his pranayama and sun-worship again.

But Suruci besought anew:

'Aye, Reverend, Holy Saint, Self-Conqueror beyond compare! Thou art right; I know, the

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guarding of a woman is a task impossible to achieve. I shall not pester thee with such an inordinate demand, but—dispenser of a myriad boons, deign to fulfil this ardent wish of mine: go with thy alms-pot on each day into my palace, ascend the stairs of ruby-studded onyx, pass through the hall of judgment and through the corridor of scintillating crystal into Rohini's bower; and demand of her the filling of thy pot! The very sight of thee, Virtue personified, will hold her to the path of rectitude!

The Brahma-Saint replied:

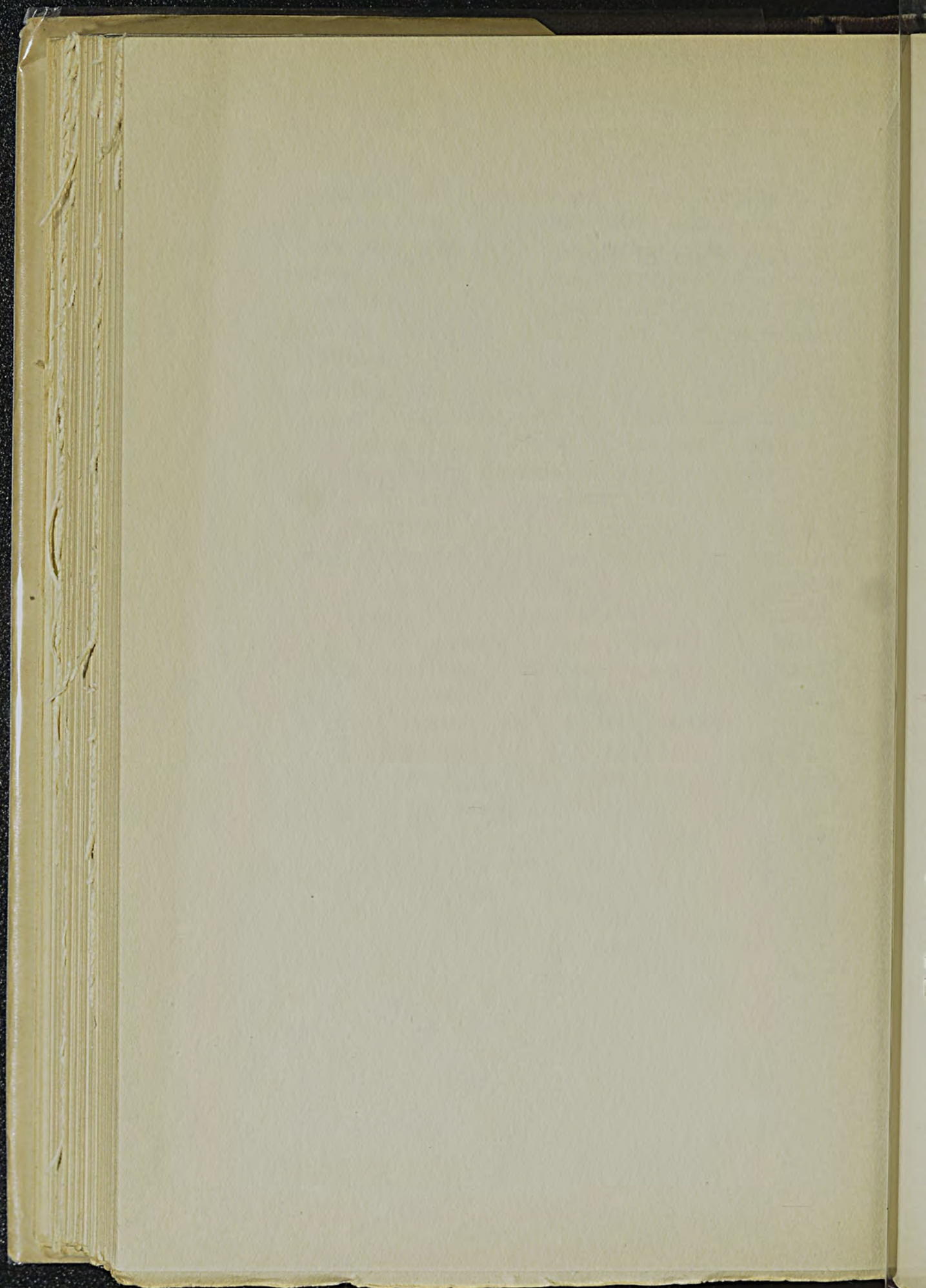
'So be it, Mighty Lord; Harita deigns to hear with favour thy petition. But, forsooth, thy royal wisdom seems not to realise that e'en the sight of woman spells danger to the soul of a holy penitent, aye, imperils the world-abandonment attained by centuries of purity. Knowest thou not, O Suruci, that countless saints, about to reach their goal, celestial sovereignty, have failed at the very gate to paradise through one last look at woman? I too, O King, have drunk this bitter cup of final failure in one of my ten thousand former lives.'

'Do not withhold this tale of thy distress from me, O Holiest of penitents!'

'So be it! Listen, O King, to—

xv.

The Tale of the Golden Peacock



THE TALE OF THE GOLDEN PEACOCK

A SCORE of million years ago, began his tale the Brahma-Saint, I was reborn in a shore-forest of the holy Ganga among the peacock-race.

The egg which held my quivering life shone with the sheen of purest gold. When I burst the shell and sunbeams played upon my downy robe, the luminous splendour of my body had surely blinded mortal eye. My eyes shone like the fruit of the Jinjuka-tree, my peaked bill resembled scarlet coral; three stripes of shining black entwined my graceful neck, and from them reached a band of purple down to my wings; between the wings a triangle of emerald green touched a triangle of ruby-red. My tail was spotted with a hundred thousand lustrous eyes, and, when I spread its gorgeous semicircle, there was no peacock-maiden dwelling in the jungle by the sacred river or in the forest which flew not thither to marvel at my radiant beauty and seek to gain my love and mate with me. When I was fully grown, the peacocks of the Ganga-forest assembled and chose me king. Ten thousand lakh of liege-cocks did my bidding, one hundred thousand peacock-maidens served my wants.

As I one day bent o'er the river's mirror-surface to sip the sacred water, I gazed into the startling brilliancy of my own eyes, and thought:

'Beyond doubt there never was, there is not now,

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there never will be peacock beautiful as I!' and in my pride I spread my train.

Another time I saw my scarlet coral-bill and mused:

'Not of the peacock-race alone, but of all feathered creatures am I the most magnificent!' – and in my heart pride grew apace.

When Ganga's shiny surface again reflected me, and I beheld the stripes of lustrous black about my throat, I was convinced:

'Not e'en the Forest King, the tiger, has stripes as beautiful as mine. I verily believe, I am the fairest of all creatures on the earth!'

Soon the desire of gazing on my beauteous self drove me down to the water's edge all hours of the day; and, when I saw the ruby triangle flanked by the triangle of emerald-green, I doubted not that of all living creatures of the world, including man, I was the most resplendent.

When I at last beheld the image of my golden train spread to the full expanse, the river's wavelets melting its hundred thousand rainbow-eyes into a million colour-combinations, my pride was boundless, and I thought:

'The author of all things created me the topmost jewel of the crown of life, nor dwelleth in the Brahma-Paradise a God my peer in matchless beauty!'

Henceforth I was convinced that e'en the Gods of Heaven could never vie with me in pulchritude.

THE GOLDEN PEACOCK

This faith in my supremacy I longed to have affirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt by luminaries of the age, by master-minds and sages. So I flew to a forest-glade where an ascetic practised world-relinquishment, and, after I had spread my train in homage of his holiness, I asked him:

'O saintly penitent, gaze on my beauty! Behold the lustre of my eyes, my scarlet coral-bill, the stripes of shining black about my throat; observe the ruby triangle, flanked by the triangle of emerald-green; and tell me: is there a peacock like me, can any feathered creature be compared to me — aye, is the forest-king or any other beast as beautiful as I? — O holy striver for the truth, dost thou not deem me fairer than the fairest mortal? Am I not topmost jewel of the crown of life?'

The saint looked long and earnestly upon me.

'Thou art indeed the most resplendent creature on the earth,' he said.

'But, sage of sages,' asked I anxiously, 'do I not e'en excel the GODS in beauty?' And, spreading wide my train, I turned to right, turned to left, advanced a step, retreated two, so that the peacock-dance revealed the fullness of my beauty.

The saint spoke not a word, but watched the dance until the purple-shadows of the night advanced across the forest-glade and reached my gorgeous robe. Then gave he answer:

'Methinks thy pulchritude exceeds the beauty of Celestial Gods — methinks, I say; but, ere I give

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thee final answer, the night must pass. Therefore I bid thee come again to-morrow before dawn.'

Enraptured, overjoyed, I sought my lair, nor could I lose my consciousness in sleep the livelong night. Long before dawn I stood before the hut of leaves and waited most impatiently until the saint awoke. At last he rose, came forth, and said: 'Let us climb to the hill-top in the forest's centre! There only can I tell whether thou art superior to the Gods in beauty.'

When we reached the brow of the hill, we saw the vapours of the night flee from all sides to the north, and in pursuit the rosy lights ascended from the east. Soon trees and glades were steeped in the softest tint of red, and holy Ganga shone like band incarnadine. There, of a sudden, I beheld a glorious Something rise above the distant line of trees, a Something indescribable, unparalleled, and unsuspected, a Something growing as I gazed, changing from ruby-red to molten gold, so that at last my eyes were blinded by its glorious sheen.

The holy penitent now looked at me; then he looked at the disk of seething gold, and said:

'O peacock-king, behold the God whose heavenly light sheds beauty on the world, without whose glittering glory the earth were doomed to death, the God which wove thy golden robe, which studied it with jewels, which weaveth it anew each day. What art thou, fairest birdling, aye, fairest earth-born creature, compared to him! Naught!

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Naught art thou, but what he made thee! Thus fail not henceforth to worship him and voice thy gratitude each day with these adoring words: "Now rises He, the Lord of Life, the Sovereign of the living world, Creator of all things, the Light immutable, the ever faithful Light, Grace, Beauty, Radiance, Gorgeousness, Sublimity herself! Him I adore, to Him I pay revering homage, Him I invoke to guard me, frail, imperfect creature, this day!" – Let this, O golden peacock, be thy daily prayer! Discard thy kingship, renounce the pleasures of the world, thrust from thy bosom pride, vainglory, seek to attain ecstatic peace, be penitent and worshipper craving only to be absorbed by the Divinity! – Then, at thy death, thou shalt be reborn in the Brahma-World a God!

Thus spoke the holy saint, and I, convinced, resolved to do his bidding. Learning from him the sacred prayers, the ceremonies of the holy worship, I turned ascetic; but, ere I built my hut of boughs and leaves, I thought the following thoughts:

'Here, in this forest where my kindred dwell, where ten lakhs of my liege-cocks and ten lakhs of peacock-maidens live the worldly life, it's inconceivable that I should attain the goal of saintliness, Moreover, does not the greed of man, most cruel seeker after temporal joy and wealth, whose gorgeous habitation flares at no far distance, threaten danger to my life? Therefore I will leave my realm, and, flying to the mountain-range I beheld

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from yonder hill at dawn of day, will seek a lonely copse in some mountain-vale, where all my life in solitude I will strive for perfection through world-relinquishment.'

Accordingly, when Night enveloped with her gloom the forest-land, I spread my wings and flew towards the north. Over three towering ranges did I pass, descending to the fourth. There found I in the forest's very centre a verdant glade and in the glade a lotus-pond; here, at the shore, where a Nigrodha-tree cast pleasing shade, I spent the day in worship. But to escape the dangers of the night I spread my bed of fragrant herbs in the farthest recess of a cave nearby.

'In this elysian spot,' thought I with rapture, 'safe from rapacious beasts, long life will be vouchsafed to me, so that through unremitting penitence I may finally attain perfection.'

When I awoke the following morn at early dawn, I flew upon the loftiest branch of my Nigrodha-tree, turned to the east, and sang my grateful hymn and fervent prayer to the Lord of Life as He rose in His glory. And when at eve the Radiant One sank to His rest, I turned to west, and, giving thanks, implored protection in the night.

This life of purity, of world-abandonment and worship, I lived nigh ten thousand years, and soon – thus thought I happily – I should be called to enter the Brahma-Paradise, God among Gods, but –

THE GOLDEN PEACOCK

'Alas! Thou didst not enter the company of Gods?' King Suruci exclaimed. 'What robbed thee of the fruits of centuries of holiness?'

'Incline thine ear to me, O King! I shall recount the story of my fall and shame!' the Saint replied.

'About the time when I, the golden peacock-saint, had almost reached the culmination of my life of perfect virtue in yonder Himalayan wilderness, a woman of thy race, thy veritable ancestress, one hundred thousand generations back, the foremost wife of the ruler of Benares, the Queen named Khema, beheld a strange vision in her sleep. A dazzling golden peacock appeared to her, and, perching on her window's casement, proclaimed to her the holy truth; then, suddenly, he spread his wings and flew away. The Queen, however, called aloud: "The peacock-king! The golden peacock-king is leaving me — let him not fly away!" Then she awoke and knew it had been but a dream. Nevertheless, her mind was fixed that such a wondrous bird existed in the world and that she longed to be its mistress.

Thus pondered she:

'If I tell to the king that it was but a fleeting dream, he will ignore the matter — no gain for me! But, if I simulate some yearning, he, knowing that I am with child, will do my bidding.'

So she lay down, and sighed, as a pregnant woman lies and sighs when overcome by yearning.

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Forthwith the king came to her side and asked her kindly:

‘My Khema, art thou ill?’

Then she replied:

‘I go with child, O Lord of Lords, I bear a Royal Prince, and in the night a yearning grasped my heart.’

‘Speak on, my Queen! What is my Love’s desire? An were it half my ocean-girded realm, thou shouldst not ask in vain!’

‘I yearn, O Royal Mate, to hear the truth proclaimed – by a golden-feathered peacock!’

The king opened his eyes. ‘Where should I seek to find a peacock with such golden plumage? There is none such!’

‘Then I shall die!’ replied the queen.

The king, greatly disturbed, spoke tender words: she should not seek to die, he would have multitudes of servitors search high and low about his realm, and, if there be such golden peacock, with learning like a holy Brahmin, she should possess it!

Accordingly he called his ministers into his presence, told them the difficulty, and asked whether there were such golden peacocks. The ministers replied:

‘O King of Kings, birds be not creatures pertinent to politics or statecraft; we know naught of the feathered tribe. The Brahmins ask: there’s nothing that the Brahmins do not know!’

THE GOLDEN PEACOCK

Then called the king the Brahmins, asked his question, and was answered:

'O Mighty Sovereign and Lord of Lords, our sacred books of magic give us news of creatures weird and strangely made; there read we that at intervals most rare such golden-coloured beings appear on earth. Of golden peacock never have we either read or heard. Ask thou the hunters of thy realm: their falcon-eyes may have observed such wondrous bird.'

Then the king summoned the hunters of his realm into his presence and asked:

'Have ye, O sons of bondaged men – have ye e'er seen a peacock with robe like burnished gold?'

And all the hundred thousand huntsmen, barring one, had never seen or heard of such a golden bird.

That one, however, said:

'O Mighty Ruler of the Earth, never have my own eyes beheld such a peacock, but, when I, a child of tender years, sat on my sire's knee, he told me that his grandsire had once seen a golden peacock perched on the topmost branch of a Nigrodha-tree in the Himalayan wilderness.'

The king rejoiced greatly and exclaimed:

'Half of my kingdom to thee, bold youth, if thou findest this paragon of a peacock and bringest it unharmed to my palace. Thou wouldst be saviour of my royal consort's life, preserver of thy sovereign's happiness!'

The youthful hunter promised to search with

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diligence, and, being supplied with a superfluity of gold from the king's treasury, left the royal presence. Long were his wanderings among the Himalayan mountains: steep slopes he climbed, o'er jagged mountain-torrents waded he, through thorny jungles did he cut his way, and lotus-lakes of vast width he swam. No golden peacock did he see! In the night, when resting in the shelter of some cave, he heard the forest-king, the tiger, roar his rage, he heard the jackal bark, he heard the cries of agony innumerable, he heard all voices of the forest; still, when he dreamed, he saw naught but the peacock-king, and heard his voice proclaim the Truth.

At last one eve, when peak and forest, lake and mountain-brook, were still suffused with crimson light, he saw upon the topmost branch of a lofty tree a wondrous bird, a peacock spreading his golden train to fullest width, so that his golden robe with ruby-sunbeams sparkled as a crown of virgin-gold blazes with jewels. His joy was great; his energy still greater; that very night he laid his traps where I, the golden peacock, was wont to pick the berries from the shrubs. But when my foot stepped on the snare, the catch failed to close: the Sun-God guarded well his faithful worshipper! This happened on each day; nor did the hunter's cleverness in three years of sedulous endeavour succeed in trapping me. At last, appreciating how futile was his labour, he left the

THE GOLDEN PEACOCK

Himalayan wilderness, and went back to Benares.

When Khema, the Queen, learned that her hope was vain, her illness grew more violent, so that she longed for death. The anger of the king was terrible:

'Shall a miserable bird, shall a vile peacock, be the cause of my Khema's death? Shall for its sake my kingdom lack a royal heir?' And, having called the hunter to his presence, he blazed at him:

'Torture and death to thee and thine, unless thou bringest me the golden-feathered peacock!'

The hunter had no choice. Returning to the Himalaya, he set his snares again, but, as before without success. Observing me from morn to night, he realised at last my saintly state. He saw my adoration of the Sun at dawn and at close of day from the Nigrodha-tree.

'This be no common peacock!' mused he within himself; 'this be a peacock-saint, a holy bird-ascetic, who in this mountain-solitude devotes himself to worship of the sun, the God of Life; his goal is elevation to the Brahma-Paradise! — But, happily, we mortals know a method to catch such precious saints, such sedulous ascetics! Has not our village-Brahmin told me of holy Visvamitra's fate? It's far more difficult to trap a fish, a bird, aye, e'en a tiger, than to catch a saint! — Wait, peacock-penitent, I will debauch thy saintship! — Ha! I shall, though stranger to the magic arts, lay potent spell upon thee, shall make thee taste

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the joys of the Brahma-Paradise on earth! Soon shall the Queen enjoy thy sight and holy exhortation.'

And instantly the youth marched citywards, and from the keeper of the royal park begged and secured the fairest pea-hen of the flock. This peacock-maiden was of dazzling comeliness. Her feather-robe was silvery like the moon when radiating its splendour from the zenith. Her eyes gleamed like the fruits on Musalinda-tree, her graceful bill relumed the sheen of pearls. Three roseate stripes encircled her fair throat, between the wings a triangle of azure-blue touched a triangle of purest white; her tail was spotted with a hundred thousand turquois-eyes: she was unparagoned in beauty!

This peacock-maiden the youth trained for a year that her accomplishments might please the taste of me, the golden peacock-saint: when he snapped with his fingers, she oped her bill and sang a lay of love; when he clapped hands, she danced a dance of amorous grace. Then, one night the youth laid his snares with the greatest care, and tethered her, the silvery peacock-maiden, to a berry-bush nearby.

When morning dawned, I, according to my wont, left my cave and flew to the topmost branch of the Nigrodha-tree to ask the spender of all life and strength for safety in the day. But at the very moment when the Celestial's brow appeared above

THE GOLDEN PEACOCK

the distant mountain-range and I opened my bill to sing my hymn of adoration, the hunter snapped his fingers so that the silver-maid burst forth in song.

I, startled at the sound, turned from the dazzling countenance of the God and cast my eyes to earth: how long had I lacked sound of such mellifluous song of my own race! There saw I dancing on the verdant turf the fairest peacock-maiden I had ever beheld, her silvery image reflected in the mountain pool.

My heart was filled with love unspeakable; the longing, asleep for ten thousand years of self-negation, awoke anew, and could not be denied. The longing for the silver-maiden's love wiped from my mind the duty to my God – I could not sing my morning-hymn of adoration to the Lord of Life.

With all speed I flew to earth to offer her my love. My foot trod on the hunter's cunning snare; it closed: I was a prisoner!

The youth made merry with my fate and mocked me in his glee:

'Ay, beautiful ascetic, such power dwells in woman! One look at her and prayers are forgot and holiness is gone! No need to strive for future heavenly bliss, when it descends to thee here and now.'

And, saying this, he took me by the wings, packed me into his giant-basket together with the

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silvery maid, and brought me to Benares to the king.

Great was the sovereign's joy when he beheld my dazzling beauty. Upon his very throne of jewel-sparkling ebony he made me perch, and, when a wealth of verdant foliage behind the throne supplied a quiet background to my scintillating brilliancy, he called the queen.

At sight of me, the queen fell into raptures, and caressed me like a babe. And that selfsame hour she was restored to health.

But I addressed the king and asked:

'Why hast thou treated me, the saint in quest of union with the sacred heart of God, with such malignity? What evil have I done thee?'

'I sought thy holy company, the constant benefit of thy most edifying exhortation, O brilliant Saint!' the king replied.

'So be it, mortal Sovereign; incline thine ear to sacred truth: For ten thousand years have I pursued a life of world-relinquishment, have sung my hymn of adoration to the Sun, the Lord of Life, and in one moment all the countless merits of my penitence are cancelled, wiped away: one gaze on yonder silv'ry peacock-maid was all-sufficient for this end of all my hopes! — The truth, O King, is that women are dangerous, depraved and calamitous! They prevent the absorption of man into the soul of God! Receive this truth, O earthly Lord and act on it! I pardon thee for thy trans-

THE BRAHMA-SAINT

gression, though I through it lost paradise! But, Sovereign of Benares, prove thy penitence by freeing me from my unworthy bonds: restore my liberty!

The king, struck by remorse and anxious to atone, heaped the greatest honour on the object of his sinful arrogance, and readily fulfilled my wish, the queen assenting. Accordingly I spread my wings, flew through the open casement and rapidly returned to my familiar Himalayan solitude. Soon afterwards I died and was reborn as man upon the earth. . . .

The Tale of the Brahma-Saint (concluded).

'Such peril hides, O King, in the mere sight of woman, aye, e'en for a god-adoring saint.' With these words did the Brahma-Saint close his narration of the Golden Peacock to King Suruci, but added:

'As I, however, am a Brahma-Saint now, and have successfully withstood the wiles of e'en the heavenly nymphs, tempting me from my virtuous course, I, of all creatures on the earth alone, am adamant to a woman's loveliness and ne'er in danger of a fall through her. Accordingly, I will protect thy realm while thou art absent, and seek the presence of thy queen each day to have my alms-pot filled by her own hand. Deign thou, O King, to order

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thy minions to erect a hut of leaves for me within the shady confines of the palace-park; thy ministers of state shall seek my counsel there each day. But thou, O Suruci, depart in peace, and conquer thy border-enemies!

Thus it was done.

Thenceforth the queen Rohini daily saw the Brahma-Saint. At high-noon, after his conference with the ministers, the holy penitent proceeded to her bower, and, saying not a word, held out his alms-pot to be filled by her royal hand. The queen, kneeling in reverence, with her own hands poured the royal viands from her golden dishes into his wooden vessel. She too performed her task in silence, abashed and humbled by his godlike sanctity.

One day Mara, the Lord of the Demons, imbued the queen's mind with the following thought:

'This Brahma-Saint, protector of our realm and people in the absence of the King, possesses supernatural power and has attained perfection. But I have often heard that female pulchritude is e'en mightier than holiness. I long to test the truth of this pronouncement. He comes to me each day and stands in silence to receive his alms – but he disregards the queen, he overlooks the woman! I long to let the flashes of my beauty play upon his shrivelled heart – mayhap I can confuse his mind and disconcert his senses!'

THE BRAHMA-SAINT

Accordingly, she did not kneel before him on the following day, but looked at him with captivating smile and said with tender sympathetic voice:

'May God prolong thy life, O Saint, another thousand years!'

The Brahmin penitent heard well the words, but gave no evidence of interest. His alms-pot filled, he left the queen without a word.

Thus, though the queen used all her womanly wit, engaged her innate skill at tender dalliance, she could not get the Saint to speak – for he was on his guard and thought:

'Some evil Demon implants the thought into her brain, through honeyed words and tender looks to rob me of the fruits of a thousand years of penitence. But never shall the poisonous draught enter my soul. Let her, the temptress, a Demon's unsuspecting tool, do what she listeth. My heart is fixed on the celestial way.'

The queen, however, thought:

'This wizened mummy of a man, this horrible ascetic, treats with scorn my radiant beauty and seems to hold me in supreme contempt.' And, being wont to hear the king's words of endearment, and to listen to the courtiers' eulogies of her surpassing loveliness, she flamed into wrath at being thus despised by an ancient penitent and wept the livelong night, so that her countenance paled like the sunlight dimmed by a bank of mist.

But, being woman, she did not therefore re-

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nounce her aim, but on each day, before the saint appeared, prepared for him the most delicious dishes, immersed her body in the scented bath, donned a soft and spotless robe, adorned her hair with tender-tinted blossoms, entwining pearls with jessamine, so that her pulchritude was like unto the beauty of the queen of heaven. In vain! She could not rouse the pure mind of the Saint to evil thought.

One sultry day, when queen Rohini had long prepared the meal, when Harita, the Saint, was overdue, affairs of state demanding his attention, the queen stepped to the open casement to let the cooling breeze caress her person and to watch the sandy path that like a band of silvery grey traversed the verdant foliage of the park. No saint in sight!

Then thought the queen:

'Perchance a royal messenger has arrived with most important news; it is possible that the ascetic will not come this day.'

Accordingly she took her ease upon the swans-down cushions of her couch of gold with loosened robe. Thus she lay still, and fell asleep. But suddenly she seemed to hear the rustling of the penitent's garb of bast. Awake at once, she rose with haste, but at this instant a violent gust of wind, an aerial Demon, sent by Mara, swept over her and tore away her robe.

Thus for a moment stood she before the Saint,

THE BRAHMA-SAINT

the splendour of her body illumining the chamber's golden walls. A veritable goddess was she like, endowed with all the five female charms: hair long and thick and silken, lips crimson like a sprig of sea-Gorgonia, teeth a double row of pearls, skin softer than the down of swan, and – radiant youth.

This fleeting moment sealed the fate of the holy Saint. Confused in mind, his senses all agog, his heart devoured by lust, which like a serpent struck her fangs into his holiness, Harita, forgetful of his quest for union with the godhead, lost his saint-hood in a trice. No longer capable of ecstasy, his body grew inert, and he stood in the presence of the queen like a crow with broken wings. When she had filled his pot, he tottered from the room, shaken with sensual greed, crept through the park into his hut, and sank upon his couch of leaves. The queen, however, jubilated o'er her victory, the victory of beauty over holiness, for she knew that his heart was fettered to her body's radiance!

But there in the hut of leaves cowered the ascetic, untouched his food, seeing with closed eyes the beauty of the queen, and babbling ceaselessly:

'How fair her hands, how fair her feet, how very fair her bosom – how beautiful, how wondrous beautiful!'

When on the following day the royal ministers entered the hut to seek his counsel, he answered not a word. At last they left. But Upasena, his

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intimate friend, the house-priest of the king, asked him:

'Why art thou silent, O Holiest of Penitents? What aileth thee?'

Then he made answer:

'Incline thine ear, O noble Brahmin, and listen to my dole — for I shall die to-day — I'm sorely wounded.'

'Wounded thou art? Where? When? What man has done this dastard-deed?'

'Nay, Friend, no arrow sent by hand of murderer has wounded me. The beauty of the queen has struck the fearful blow. I am no longer Brahma-Saint: Mara has vanquished me. I strayed from the celestial way and lost the heavenly throne.'

Then said the house-priest Upasena in reverential tone:

'Immutable, irrefutable, confirmed by god and man stands the truth of truths:

WOMEN ARE DEPRAVED AND DANGEROUS AND CALAMITOUS

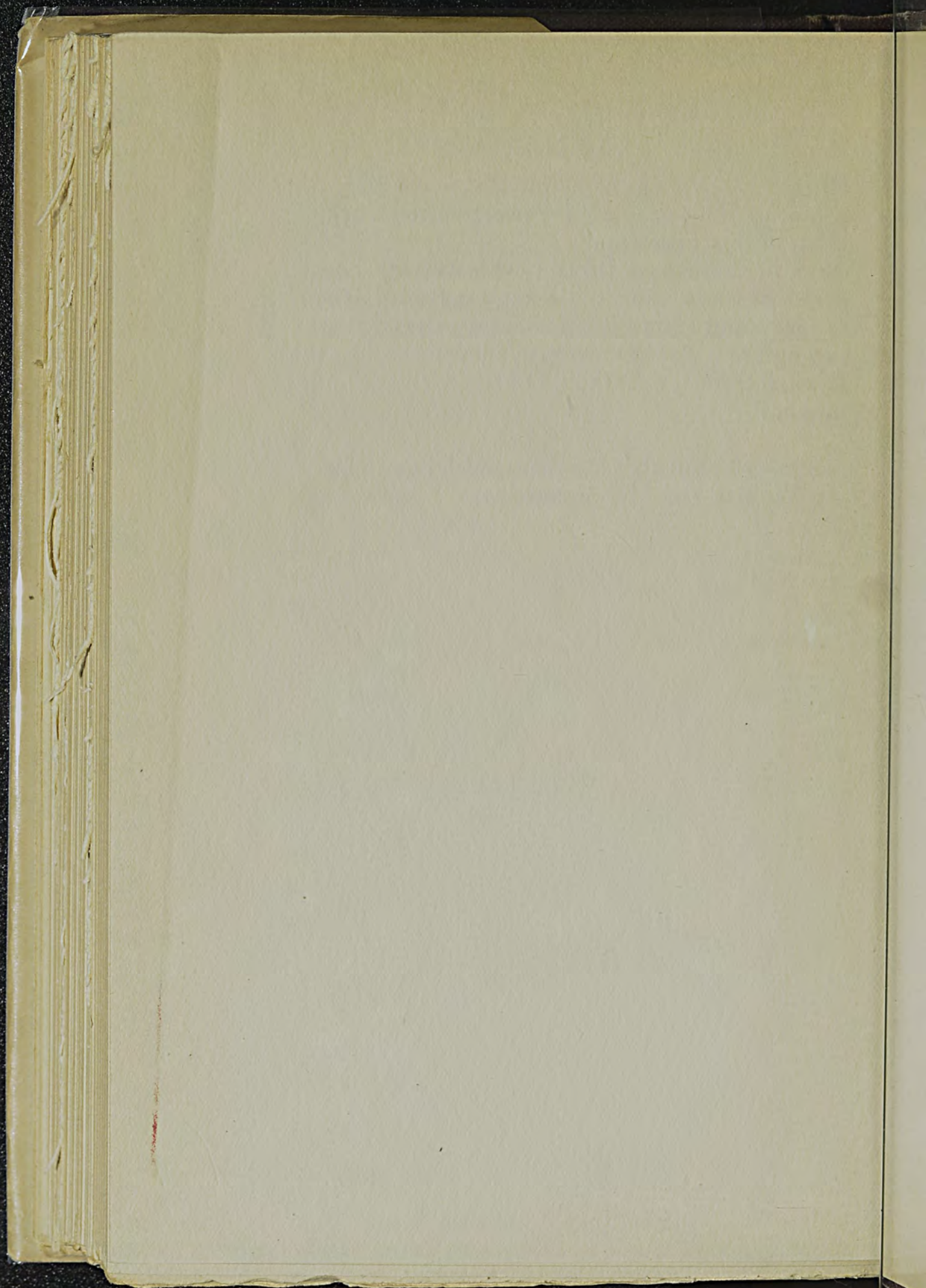
'Thus died the greatest of all Brahma-saints, Harita, so close to the attainment of his goal, the sovereignty of heaven. He was reborn as the wisest of

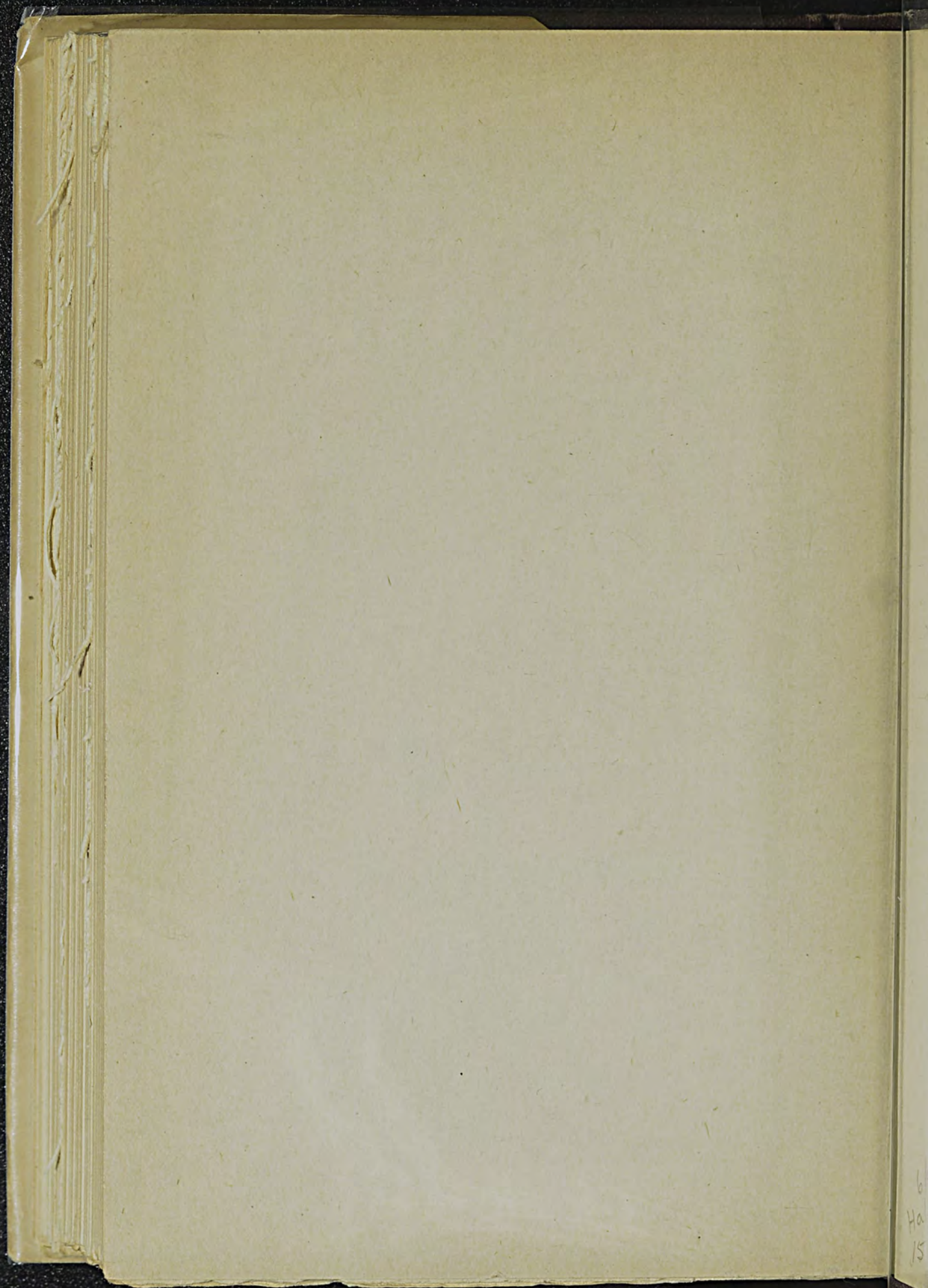
THE BRAHMA-SAINT

all earthly sovereigns, the model for his race, the protector of his people – the sweet-voiced Cuckoo-King of this Forest.

‘For in those days ’twas I who was the house-priest UPASENA,’ thus did Kunala end his last narration, ‘and yon Brahma-Saint HARITA, who through one glance at woman’s loveliness lost the celestial throne, wast thou, O Friend, thou Punnamukha!’

Thus reads Kunala’s ten thousandth tale concerning Woman and Her Wickedness.





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