

relaxed, and at last replaced the biped on the floor, where it stood impavolo on one leg, gazing into futurity.

Miss Leather had followed the incident with great excitement, and devoutly wished the conjurer had confined his demonstration to inanimate objects. Her very life hung upon cock crow. Even when the bird had been deposited on the floor she couldn't refrain from looking at it anxiously. If it moved she knew she would shriek.

"Now," said Nuffer, "you have seen trace of miracles. Does not that fill to repletion? Do you finally credit me? I can release, but you must be my wife."

"Sir," the lady replied with much earnestness, "I very much wish to be free, but you must forgive my natural hesitation in promising to bind myself for life to you, for I have only just made your acquaintance. We take months, and even years, to make up our minds in England." This was said with special reference to school inspectors. "I tell you frankly that had I consulted my own wishes I should have preferred to marry one of my own race."

"That is natural history," he replied. "Nevertheless, I am of Amaranth, and wish to marry you. Why, I know not, but I have always worshipped misers. When I saw you before big bully Sultan, 'alone on burning deck,' as poet sings, my heart precipitated toward you."

Swiftly came the thoughts into Miss Leather's head: "I will promise to marry him—then, when safe on English ground, I will refuse. The promise has been unfairly extorted from me. I am not a free agent."

I will give him all I have in the world, but marry him—never." The lady, you see, was very human, and severely tried.

Nuffer Chandra looked at her sternly from behind his great eyebrows. "No," he said coldly, "you will have to keep your promise."

Miss Leather blushed to the roots of her hair. The man was a wizard indeed. "I will do so," she said impulsively, holding out her hand to him.

There was a faint thud at the other side of the room. Miss Leather turned quickly and stifled a cry. The bird had lost its balance, and had fallen to the floor. But still it stared fixedly into eternity.

"Come," said Nuffer. He took off his tunic, and from himself unwrapped yard after yard of cotton cloth, such as Amaranthian women wear. This he dexterously wound round Miss Leather, covering up all of her but the eyes.

"Now, Miss, buck up and follow," said the conjurer. He opened the door gently. They passed through, and he carefully closed it behind. There was a guard outside, sunk in deep slumber.

"'Twill be an evil day for him when Manilal Dhan goes the round," thought Nuffer Chandra. "'Tis a pity, for he is a brave man. Nevertheless," he reflected cheerfully, "he must have done much wrong at an earlier date, or this would never have been permitted by Allah."

He then ascended the steps, followed by his companion. The courtyard of the palace was thronged, so it was an easy matter to pass through without exciting attention. At the gate they were not so fortunate. "Ah, Nuffer Chandra, who have you got there?" said a voice, and the officer in charge of the guard stood in their path.

"A damsel for my new trick, Cholai Bhat," said the ready Nuffer. "All Amaranth will be talking of it to-morrow."

"What do you say to a rehearsal now?" inquired the curious soldier.

"What I say matters not, though perhaps his Majesty the Sultan might have a remark to offer," responded Nuffer blandly.

"Well, be hanged to your trick; but a look at the damsel's face hurteth no one. Her figure takes my fancy," said the man, raising his hands to pull back the veil from the face of the agonised Miss Leather.

But Nuffer, the ever-alert, interposed his bulky frame. "Cholan Bhat," said he, "leave my assistant alone. If thou wishest to gaze on a woman's face, go past the bazaar thou knowest, take one turn to the right, and yelp at the green door, as thou art accustomed to. Perchance she'll come if her lord be out, or shall I tell her thou fanciest another? 'Tis easily done, Cholan Bhat, and it might save thee much future trouble."

Cholan Bhat drew back, visibly disconcerted. "Sheitan himself is thy master, Nuffer Chandra," he said. "Pass on thy way to him." And Nuffer Chandra and his companion passed.

"Buck up, miss," whispered Nuffer. "Heed not the trifling of wine-bibbers."

Miss Leather followed, as in a nightmare, through the crowded streets, up and down she knew not whither. At last they reached a more deserted quarter, and finally stopped before a door. Nuffer Chandra knocked. The door opened, and then shut to behind them.

An hour later, just before the northern gate was closed, a party of three left the city of Amaranth—a portly merchant who gave the name of Abdul Ghafur, his daughter Kara and his clerk. Their business was urgent, Abdul was careful to explain to the official in charge of the gate. They had to be at Tamur by daybreak, to look at a consignment of camelhair, and then push on to a family wedding.

"That's a busy man," said the gate-keeper admiringly, when he had let them through; then, jingling some newly-acquired wealth, "and a rich one too. But what an ugly clerk he has. So that his daughter may not fall in love with him, I suppose," and he chuckled at his own sagacity.

But the thought was unkind, for the clerk was Miss Amelia Leather, and Kara was only her servant.

Two miles out, where the roads meet, they branched away to the south, to the desolate land that lay between them and safety.

Two nights did they journey, and two days did they rest as best they could, out of the glare of the sun. There was little to eat, and less to drink, and a travelling escort of beasts of prey followed them; but Abdul the merchant was a joyous soul, and his high spirits were infectious. Many a curious story of Amaranth or of his undergraduate days in Calcutta did he relate for the edification of his intended bride, and Kara, her servant, smiled, though she understood not his words. Only once did he allow a tinge of melancholy to pervade them.

"Yes, adorable miss," he said, "I have generously remitted profits of profession to Calcutta bankers. Miracle secrets I carry in my brain-box. I have left little behind but Jemil, and I can ill spare him."

"And who is Jemil?" asked Miss Leather.

"My remarkable cockerel. He now figures in some of my best exploits. That is why I conducted him to your dungeon. I left him there in a position of suspense. He would be sorely troubled when he awoke, and found me aot."

"Why didn't you bring him with you?"

"I brought only the most necessary things. Jemil would wake within the hour. He would escape through window, and essay to follow me, but, alas! his future is uncertain, for he is not long-distance traveller. Would that I had the heart to wring his blessed neck. He was a good bird, Jemil, devoted to me from birth, with much love for his profession. A very comprehensive bird," and for a space the soul of Nuffer Chandra was much disturbed.

It was late on the third day when they made ready to resume their journey. They were all blithe of heart, for sunrise should find them within sight of British territory. Pursuit had evidently been made too late, or had been baffled, and Nuffer hummed at the thought of the Sultan's rage when he found that his captive had escaped him, and that conjuring performances were indefinitely postponed.

Singing gaily he saddled and bridled the three horses, and then called to Kara to help to arrange the baggage.

Suddenly he gave a cry of warning.

Miss Leather was rolling up her rugs amid the rocks above when she heard it. Jumping up she saw to her horror a cavalcade emerge from the defile through which they themselves had come in the early morning. It was a body of mounted and armed men. Directly they saw Nuffer Chandra and Kara they raised a great cry, and spurred on their horses. Then from the ground in front of them came an object—a bird, screeching and flapping. It was a cockerel—Jemil. With a triumphant cry he recognised his beloved master, and with grotesque strides and flaps out-distanced the horsemen in his anxiety to reach him.

One glance, and Nuffer had taken in the situation behind. Another above, showed that Miss Leather was still concealed from the enemy. "Mount!" he shouted to Kara. In another instant they were up and away for dear life,

pursued by the too faithful Jemil and the soldiers of the Sultan of Amaranth.

Miss Leather was paralysed by the awfulness of the situation. With bated breath she watched the pursuit. The last she saw of it was Nuffer and Kara maintaining, if not increasing, their lead, the soldiers enveloped in a cloud of dust urging on their jaded steeds, and, far behind, Jemil, the cause of all the trouble, with damaged wing and spur, gingerly picking his way over the rough ground, faithful to the end.

Soon the sun was down, and the earth rapidly cooling. Now was the time for travel. But Miss Leather was seized by a great terror. The loneliness of the desert, and the possibilities of wild animals and Amaranthian soldiery killed her with fear. Moreover, she did not know the way. The road, such as it was, had long since merged into a track, undistinguishable to her eyes. Compass she had none, her astronomy was shaky, and her horse had stampeded. She therefore resolved to spend

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