

The Shaving of Shagpat; an Arabian entertainment — Volume 2 eBook

The Shaving of Shagpat; an Arabian entertainment — Volume 2 by George Meredith

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THE BETROTHAL

Now, when Shibli Bagarag had ceased speaking, the Vizier smiled gravely, and shook his beard with satisfaction, and said to the Eclipser of Reason, 'What opinest thou of this nephew of the barber, O Noorna bin Noorka?'

She answered, "O Feshnavat, my father, truly I am content with the bargain of my betrothal. He, Wullahy, is a fair youth of flowing speech.' Then she said, 'Ask thou him what he opineth of me, his betrothed?"

So the Vizier put that interrogation to Shibli Bagarag, and the youth was in perplexity; thinking, 'Is it possible to be joyful in the embrace of one that hath brought thwackings upon us, serious blows?' Thinking, 'Yet hath she, when the mood cometh, kindly looks; and I marked her eye dwelling on me admiringly!' And he thought, 'Mayhap she that groweth younger and counteth nature backwards, hath a history that would affect me; or, it may be, my kisses—wah! I like not to give them, and it is said,

"Love is wither'd by the withered lip";

and that,

"On bones become too prominent he'll trip."

Yet put the case, that my kisses—I shower them not, Allah the All-seeing is my witness! and they be given daintily as 'twere to the leaf of a nettle, or over-hot pilau. Yet haply kisses repeated might restore her to a bloom, and it is certain youth is somehow stolen from her, if the Vizier Feshnavat went before her, and his blood be her blood; and he is powerful, she wise. I'll decide to act the part of a rejoicer, and express of her opinions honeyed to the soul of that sex.'

Now, while he was thus debating he hung his head, and the Vizier awaited his response, knitting his brows angrily at the delay, and at the last he cried, 'What! no answer? how 's this? Shall thy like dare hold debate when questioned of my like? And is my daughter Noorna bin Noorka, thinkest thou, a slave-girl in the market,—thou haggling at her price, O thou nephew of the barber?'

So Shibli Bagarag exclaimed, 'O exalted one, bestower of the bride! surely I debated with myself but for appropriate terms; and I delayed to select the metre of the verse fitting my thoughts of her, and my wondrous good fortune, and the honour done me.'

Then the Vizier, 'Let us hear: we listen.'

And Shibli Bagarag was advised to deal with illustrations in his dilemma, by-ways of expression, and spake in extemporaneous verse, and with a full voice:

The pupils of the Sage for living Beauty sought;
And one a Vision clasped, and one a Model wrought.
'I have it!' each exclaimed, and rivalry arose:
'Paint me thy Maid of air!' 'Thy Grace of clay disclose.'
'What! limbs that cannot move!' 'What! lips that melt away!'
'Keep thou thy Maid of air!' 'Shroud up thy Grace of clay!'
'Twas thus, contending hot, they went before the Sage,
And knelt at the wise wells of cold ascetic age.
'The fairest of the twain, O father, thou record':

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He answered, 'Fairest she who's likest to her lord.'

Said they, 'What fairer thing matched with them might prevail?'

The Sage austere smiled, and said, 'Yon monkey's tail.'

'Tis left for after-time his wisdom to declare:
That's loveliest we best love, and to ourselves compare.
Yet lovelier than all hands shape or fancies build,
The meanest thing of earth God with his fire hath filled.

Now, when Shibli Bagarag ceased, Noorna bin Noorka cried, 'Enough, O wondrous turner of verse, thou that art honest!' And she laughed loudly, rustling like a bag of shavings, and rolling in her laughter.

Then said she, 'O my betrothed, is not the thing thou wouldst say no other than—

"Each to his mind doth the fairest enfold,
For broken long since was Beauty's mould";

and, "Thou that art old, withered, I cannot flatter thee, as I can in no way pay compliments to the monkey's tail of high design; nevertheless the Sage would do thee honour"? So read I thy illustration, O keen of wit! and thou art forgiven its boldness, my betrothed,—Wullahy! utterly so.'

Now, the youth was abashed at her discernment, and the kindness of her manner won him to say:

There's many a flower of sweetness, there's many a gem of earth
Would thrill with bliss our being, could we perceive its worth.
O beauteous is creation, in fashion and device!
If I have fail'd to think thee fair, 'tis blindness is my vice.

And she answered him:

I've proved thy wit and power of verse,
That is at will diffuse and terse:
Lest thou commence to lie—be dumb!
I am content: the time will come!

Then she said to the Vizier Feshnavat, 'O my father, there is all in this youth, the nephew of the barber, that's desirable for the undertaking; and his feet will be on a level with the task we propose for him, he the height of man above it. 'Tis clear that vanity will trip him, but honesty is a strong upholder; and he is one that hath the spirit of enterprise and the mask of dissimulation: gratitude I observe in him; and it is as I

thought when I came upon him on the sand-hill outside the city, that his star is clearly in a web with our star, he destined for the Shaving of Shagpat.'

So the Vizier replied, 'He hath had thwackings, yet is he not deterred from making further attempt on Shagpat. I think well of him, and I augur hopefully. Wullahy! the Cadi shall be sent for; I can sleep in his secresy; and he shall perform the ceremonies of betrothal, even now and where we sit, and it shall be for him to write the terms of contract: so shall we bind the youth firmly to us, and he will be one of us as we are, devoted to the undertaking by three bonds—the bond of vengeance, the bond of ambition, and that of love.'

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Now, so it was that the Vizier despatched a summons for the attendance of the Cadi, and he came and performed between Shibli Bagarag and Noorna bin Noorka ceremonies of betrothal, and wrote terms of contract; and they were witnessed duly by the legal number of witnesses, and so worded that he had no claim on her as wife till such time as the Event to which he bound himself was mastered. Then the fees being paid, and compliments interchanged, the Vizier exclaimed, 'Be ye happy! and let the weak cling to the strong; and be ye two to one in this world, and no split halves that betray division and stick not together when the gum is heated.' Then he made a sign to the Cadi and them that had witnessed the contract to follow him, leaving the betrothed ones to their own company.

So when they were alone Noorna gazed on the youth wistfully, and said in a soft tone, 'Thou art dazed with the adventure, O youth! Surely there is one kiss owing me: art thou willing? Am I reduced to beg it of thee? Or dream'st thou?'

He lifted his head and replied, 'Even so.'

Thereat he stood up languidly, and went to her and kissed her. And she smiled and said, 'I wot it will be otherwise, and thou wilt learn swiftness of limb, brightness of eye, and the longing for earthly beatitude, when next I ask thee, O my betrothed!'

Lo! while she spake, new light seemed in her; and it was as if a splendid jewel were struggling to cast its beams through the sides of a crystal vase smeared with dust and old dirt and spinings of the damp spider. He was amazed, and cried, 'How's this? What change is passing in thee?'

She said, 'Joy in thy kiss, and that I have 'scaped Shagpat.'

Then he: 'Shagpat? How? had that wretch claim over thee ere I came?'

But she looked fearfully at the corners of the room and exclaimed, 'Hush, my betrothed! speak not of him in that fashion, 'tis dangerous; and my power cannot keep off his emissaries at all times.' Then she said, 'O my betrothed, know me a sorceress ensorcelled; not that I seem, but that I shall be! Wait thou for the time and it will reward thee. What! thou think'st to have plucked a wrinkled o'erripe fruit,—a mouldy pomegranate under the branches, a sour tamarind? 'Tis well! I say nought, save that time will come, and be thou content. It is truly as I said, that I have thee between me and Shagpat; and that honoured one of this city thought fit in his presumption to demand me in marriage at the hands of my father, knowing me wise, and knowing the thing that transformed me to this, the abominable fellow! Surely my father entertained not his proposal save with scorn; but the King looked favourably on it, and it is even now matter of reproach to Feshnavat, my father, that he withholdeth me from Shagpat.'

Quoth Shibli Bagarag, 'A clothier, O Noorna, control the Vizier! and demand of him his daughter in marriage! and a clothier influence the King against his Vizier!'—tis, wullahy! a riddle.'

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She replied, "Tis even so, eyes of mine, my betrothed! but thou know'st not Shagpat, and that he is. Lo! the King, and all of this city save we three, are held in enchantment by him, and made foolish by one hair that's in his head.'

Shibli Bagarag started in his seat like one that shineth with a discovery, and cried, 'The Identical!'

Then she, sighing, "Tis that indeed! but the Identical of Identicals, the chief and head of them, and I, woe's me! I, the planter of it.'

So he said, 'How so?'

But she cried, 'I'll tell thee not here, nor aught of myself and him, and the Genie held in bondage by me, till thou art proved by adventure, and we float peacefully on the sea of the Bright Lily: there shalt thou see me as I am, and hear my story, and marvel at it; for 'tis wondrous, and a manifestation of the Power that dwelleth unseen.'

So Shibli Bagarag pondered awhile on the strange nature of the things she hinted, and laughter seized him as he reflected on Shagpat, and the whole city enchanted by one hair in his head; and he exclaimed, 'O Noorna, knoweth he, Shagpat, of the might in him?'

She answered, 'Enough for his vain soul that homage is paid to him, and he careth not for the wherefore!'

Shibli Bagarag fixed his eyes on the deep-flowered carpets of the floor, as if reading there a matter quaintly written, and smiled, saying, 'What boldness was mine—the making offer to shear Shagpat, the lion in his lair, he that holdeth a whole city in enchantment! Wah! 'twas an instance of daring!'

And Noorna said, 'Not only an entire city, but other cities affected by him, as witness Oolb, whither thou wilt go; and there be governments and states, and conditions of men remote, that hang upon him, Shagpat. 'Tis even so; I swell not his size. When thou hast mastered the Event, and sent him forth shivering from thy blade like the shorn lamb, 'twill be known how great a thing has been achieved, and a record for the generations to come; choice is that historian destined to record it!'

Quoth he, looking eagerly at her, 'O Noorna, what is it in thy speech affecteth me? Surely it infuseth the vigour of wine, old wine; and I shiver with desire to shave Shagpat, and spin threads for the historian to weave in order. I, wullahy! had but dry visions of the greatness destined for me till now, my betrothed! Shall I master an Event in shaving him, and be told of to future ages? By Allah and his Prophet (praise be to that name!), this is greatness! Say, Noorna, hadst thou foreknowledge of me and my coming to this city?'

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So she said, 'I was on the roofs one night among the stars ere moonrise, O my betrothed, and 'twas close on the rise of this very month's moon. The star of our enemy, Shagpat, was large and red, mine as it were menaced by its proximity, nigh swallowed in its haughty beams and the steady overbearings of its effulgence. 'Twas so as it had long been, when suddenly, lo! a star from the upper heaven that shot down between them wildly, and my star took lustre from it; and the star of Shagpat trembled like a ring on a tightened rope, and waved and flickered, and seemed to come forward and to retire; and 'twas presently as a comet in the sky, bright,—a tadpole, with large head and lengthy tail, in the assembly of the planets. This I saw: and that the stranger star was stationed by my star, shielding it, and that it drew nearer to my star, and entered its circle, and that the two stars seemed mixing the splendour that was theirs. Now, that sight amazed me, and my heart in its beating quickened with the expectation of things approaching. Surely I rendered praise, and pressed both hands on my bosom, and watched, and behold! the comet, the illumined tadpole, was becoming restless beneath the joint rays of the twain that were dominating him; and he diminished, and lashed his tail uneasily, half madly, darting as do captured beasts from the fetters that constrain them. Then went there from thy star—for I know now 'twas thine—a momentary flash across the head of the tadpole, and again another and another, rapidly, pertinaciously. And from thy star there passed repeated flashes across the head of the tadpole, till his brilliance was as 'twere severed from him, and he, like drossy silver, a dead shape in the conspicuous heavens. And he became yellow as the rolling eyes of sick wretches in pain, and shrank in his place like pale parchment at the touch of flame; dull was he as an animal fascinated by fear, and deprived of all power to make head against the foe, darkness, that now beset him, and usurped part of his yet lively tail, and settled on his head, and coated part of his body. So when this tadpole, that was once terrible to me, became turbaned, shoed, and shawled with darkness, and there was little of him remaining visible, lo! a concluding flash shot from thy star, and he fell heavily down the sky and below the hills, into the sea, that is the Enchanted Sea, whose Queen is Rabesqurat, Mistress of Illusions. Now when my soul recovered from amazement at the marvels seen, I arose and went from the starry roofs to consult my books of magic, and 'twas revealed to me that one was wandering to a junction with my destiny, and that by his means the great aim would of a surety be accomplished—Shagpat Shaved! So my purpose was to discover him; and I made calculations, and summoned them that serve me to search for such a youth as thou art; fairly, O my betrothed, did I preconceive thee. And so it was that I traced a magic line from the sand-hills to the city, and

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from the outer hills to the sand-hills; and whoso approached by that line I knew was he marked out as my champion, my betrothed,—a youth destined for great things. Was I right? The egg hatcheth. Thou art already proved by thwackings, seasoned to the undertaking, and I doubt not thou art he that will finish with that tadpole Shagpat, and sit in the high seat, thy name an odour in distant lands, a joy to the historian, the Compiler of Events, thou Master of the Event, the greatest which time will witness for ages to come.'

When she had spoken Shibli Bagarag considered her words, and the knowledge that he was selected by destiny as Master of the Event inflated him; and he was a hawk in eagerness, a peacock in pride, an ostrich in fulness of chest, crying, 'O Noorna bin Noorka! is't really so? Truly it must be, for the readers of planets were also busy with me at the time of my birth, interpreting of me in excessive agitation; and the thing they foretold is as thou foretellest. I am, wullahy! marked: I walk manifest in the eye of Providence.'

Thereupon he exulted, and his mind strutted through the future of his days, and down the ladder of all time, exacting homage from men, his brethren; and 'twas beyond the art of Noorna to fix him to the present duties of the enterprise: he was as feathered seed before the breath of vanity.

Now, while the twain discoursed, she of the preparations for shaving Shagpat, he of his completion of the deed, and the honours due to him as Master of the Event, Feshnavat the Vizier returned to them from his entertainment of the Cadi; and he had bribed him to silence with a mighty bribe. So he called to them—

'Ho! be ye ready to commence the work? and have ye advised together as to the beginning? True is that triplet:

"Whatever enterprize man hath,
For waking love or curbing wrath,
'Tis the first step that makes a path."

And how have ye determined as to that first step?'

Noorna replied, 'O my father! we have not decided, and there hath been yet no deliberation between us as to that.'

Then he said, 'All this while have ye talked, and no deliberation as to that! Lo, I have drawn the Cadi to our plot, and bribed him with a mighty bribe; and I have prepared possible disguises for this nephew of the barber; and I have had the witnesses of thy betrothal despatched to foreign parts, far kingdoms in the land of Roum, to prevent

tattling and gabbling; and ye that were left alone for debating as to the great deed, ye have not yet deliberated as to that! Is't known to ye, O gabblers, aught of the punishment inflicted by Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khipil, the Builder?—a punishment that, by Allah!

Shibli Bagarag said, 'How of that punishment, O Vizier?'

And the Vizier narrated as followeth.

AND THIS IS THE PUNISHMENT OF SHAHPESH, THE PERSIAN, ON KHIPIL, THE BUILDER

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They relate that Shahpesh, the Persian, commanded the building of a palace, and Khipil was his builder. The work lingered from the first year of the reign of Shahpesh even to his fourth. One day Shahpesh went to the riverside where it stood, to inspect it. Khipil was sitting on a marble slab among the stones and blocks; round him stretched lazily the masons and stonecutters and slaves of burden; and they with the curve of humorous enjoyment on their lips, for he was reciting to them adventures, interspersed with anecdotes and recitations and poetic instances, as was his wont. They were like pleased flocks whom the shepherd hath led to a pasture freshened with brooks, there to feed indolently; he, the shepherd, in the midst.

Now, the King said to him, 'O Khipil, show me my palace where it standeth, for I desire to gratify my sight with its fairness.'

Khipil abased himself before Shahpesh, and answered, "Tis even here, O King of the age, where thou delightest the earth with thy foot and the ear of thy slave with sweetness. Surely a site of vantage, one that dominateth earth, air, and water, which is the builder's first and chief requisition for a noble palace, a palace to fill foreign kings and sultans with the distraction of envy; and it is, O Sovereign of the time, a site, this site I have chosen, to occupy the tongues of travellers and awaken the flights of poets!'

Shahpesh smiled and said, 'The site is good! I laud the site! Likewise I laud the wisdom of Ebn Busrac, where he exclaims:

"Be sure, where Virtue faileth to appear,
For her a gorgeous mansion men will rear;
And day and night her praises will be heard,
Where never yet she spake a single word."

Then said he, 'O Khipil, my builder, there was once a farm servant that, having neglected in the seed-time to sow, took to singing the richness of his soil when it was harvest, in proof of which he displayed the abundance of weeds that coloured the land everywhere. Discover to me now the completeness of my halls and apartments, I pray thee, O Khipil, and be the excellence of thy construction made visible to me!'

Quoth Khipil, 'To hear is to obey.'

He conducted Shahpesh among the unfinished saloons and imperfect courts and roofless rooms, and by half erected obelisks, and columns pierced and chipped, of the palace of his building. And he was bewildered at the words spoken by Shahpesh; but now the King exalted him, and admired the perfection of his craft, the greatness of his labour, the speediness of his construction, his assiduity; feigning not to behold his negligence.

Presently they went up winding balusters to a marble terrace, and the King said, 'Such is thy devotion and constancy in toil, Khipil, that thou shalt walk before me here.'

He then commanded Khipil to precede him, and Khipil was heightened with the honour. When Khipil had paraded a short space he stopped quickly, and said to Shahpesh, 'Here is, as it chanceth, a gap, O King! and we can go no further this way.'

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Shahpesh said, 'All is perfect, and it is my will thou delay not to advance.'

Khipil cried, 'The gap is wide, O mighty King, and manifest, and it is an incomplete part of thy palace.'

Then said Shahpesh, 'O Khipil, I see no distinction between one part and another; excellent are all parts in beauty and proportion, and there can be no part incomplete in this palace that occupieth the builder four years in its building: so advance, do my bidding.'

Khipil yet hesitated, for the gap was of many strides, and at the bottom of the gap was a deep water, and he one that knew not the motion of swimming. But Shahpesh ordered his guard to point their arrows in the direction of Khipil, and Khipil stepped forward hurriedly, and fell in the gap, and was swallowed by the water below. When he rose the second time, succour reached him, and he was drawn to land trembling, his teeth chattering. And Shahpesh praised him, and said, 'This is an apt contrivance for a bath, Khipil O my builder! well conceived; one that taketh by surprise; and it shall be thy reward daily when much talking hath fatigued thee.'

Then he bade Khipil lead him to the hall of state. And when they were there Shahpesh said, 'For a privilege, and as a mark of my approbation, I give thee permission to sit in the marble chair of yonder throne, even in my presence, O Khipil.'

Khipil said, 'Surely, O King, the chair is not yet executed.'

And Shahpesh exclaimed, 'If this be so, thou art but the length of thy measure on the ground, O talkative one!'

Khipil said, 'Nay, 'tis not so, O King of splendours! blind that I am! yonder's indeed the chair.'

And Khipil feared the King, and went to the place where the chair should be, and bent his body in a sitting posture, eyeing the King, and made pretence to sit in the chair of Shahpesh, as in conspiracy to amuse his master.

Then said Shahpesh, 'For a token that I approve thy execution of the chair, thou shalt be honoured by remaining seated in it up to the hour of noon; but move thou to the right or to the left, showing thy soul insensible of the honour done thee, transfixed thou shalt be with twenty arrows and five.'

The King then left him with a guard of twenty-five of his body-guard; and they stood around him with bent bows, so that Khipil dared not move from his sitting posture. And the masons and the people crowded to see Khipil sitting on his master's chair, for it became rumoured about. When they beheld him sitting upon nothing, and he trembling to stir for fear of the loosening of the arrows, they laughed so that they rolled upon the

floor of the hall, and the echoes of laughter were a thousand-fold. Surely the arrows of the guards swayed with the laughter that shook them.

Now, when the time had expired for his sitting in the chair, Shahpesh returned to him, and he was cramped, pitiable to see; and Shahpesh said, 'Thou hast been exalted above men, O Khipil! for that thou didst execute for thy master has been found fitting for thee.'

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Then he bade Khipil lead the way to the noble gardens of dalliance and pleasure that he had planted and contrived. And Khipil went in that state described by the poet, when we go draggingly, with remonstrating members,

Knowing a dreadful strength behind,
And a dark fate before.

They came to the gardens, and behold, these were full of weeds and nettles, the fountains dry, no tree to be seen—a desert. And Shahpesh cried, 'This is indeed of admirable design, O Khipil! Feelest thou not the coolness of the fountains?—their refreshingness? Truly I am grateful to thee! And these flowers, pluck me now a handful, and tell me of their perfume.'

Khipil plucked a handful of the nettles that were there in the place of flowers, and put his nose to them before Shahpesh, till his nose was reddened; and desire to rub it waxed in him, and possessed him, and became a passion, so that he could scarce refrain from rubbing it even in the King's presence. And the King encouraged him to sniff and enjoy their fragrance, repeating the poet's words:

Methinks I am a lover and a child,
A little child and happy lover, both!
When by the breath of flowers I am beguiled
From sense of pain, and lulled in odorous sloth.
So I adore them, that no mistress sweet
Seems worthier of the love which they awake:
In innocence and beauty more complete,
Was never maiden cheek in morning lake.
Oh, while I live, surround me with fresh flowers!
Oh, when I die, then bury me in their bowers!

And the King said, 'What sayest thou, O my builder? that is a fair quotation, applicable to thy feelings, one that expresseth them?'

Khipil answered, "'Tis eloquent, O great King! comprehensiveness would be its portion, but that it alludeth not to the delight of chafing.'

Then Shahpesh laughed, and cried, 'Chafe not! it is an ill thing and a hideous! This nosegay, O Khipil, it is for thee to present to thy mistress. Truly she will receive thee well after its presentation! I will have it now sent in thy name, with word that thou followest quickly. And for thy nettled nose, surely if the whim seize thee that thou desirest its chafing, to thy neighbour is permitted what to thy hand is refused.'

The King set a guard upon Khipil to see that his orders were executed, and appointed a time for him to return to the gardens.

At the hour indicated Khipil stood before Shahpesh again. He was pale, saddened; his tongue drooped like the tongue of a heavy bell, that when it soundeth giveth forth mournful sounds only: he had also the look of one battered with many beatings. So the King said, 'How of the presentation of the flowers of thy culture, O Khipil?'

He answered, 'Surely, O King, she received me with wrath, and I am shamed by her.'

And the King said, 'How of my clemency in the matter of the chafing?'

Khipil answered, 'O King of splendours! I made petition to my neighbours whom I met, accosting them civilly and with imploring, for I ached to chafe, and it was the very raging thirst of desire to chafe that was mine, devouring eagerness for solace of chafing. And they chafed me, O King; yet not in those parts which throbbed for the chafing, but in those which abhorred it.'

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Then Shahpesh smiled and said, "Tis certain that the magnanimity of monarchs is as the rain that falleth, the sun that shineth: and in this spot it fertilizeth richness; in that encourageth rankness. So art thou but a weed, O Khipil! and my grace is thy chastisement.'

Now, the King ceased not persecuting Khipil, under pretence of doing him honour and heaping favours on him. Three days and three nights was Khipil gasping without water, compelled to drink of the drought of the fountain, as an honour at the hands of the King. And he was seven days and seven nights made to stand with stretched arms, as they were the branches of a tree, in each hand a pomegranate. And Shahpesh brought the people of his court to regard the wondrous pomegranate shoot planted by Khipil, very wondrous, and a new sort, worthy the gardens of a King. So the wisdom of the King was applauded, and men wotted he knew how to punish offences in coin, by the punishment inflicted on Khipil the builder. Before that time his affairs had languished, and the currents of business instead of flowing had become stagnant pools. It was the fashion to do as did Khipil, and fancy the tongue a constructor rather than a commentator; and there is a doom upon that people and that man which runneth to seed in gabble, as the poet says in his wisdom:

If thou wouldst be famous, and rich in splendid fruits,
Leave to bloom the flower of things, and dig among the roots.

Truly after Khipil's punishment there were few in the dominions of Shahpesh who sought to win the honours bestowed by him on gabblers and idlers: as again the poet:

When to loquacious fools with patience rare
I listen, I have thoughts of Khipil's chair:
His bath, his nosegay, and his fount I see,—
Himself stretch'd out as a pomegranate-tree.
And that I am not Shahpesh I regret,
So to inmesh the babblers in his net.
Well is that wisdom worthy to be sung,
Which raised the Palace of the Wagging Tongue!

And whoso is punished after the fashion of Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khipil the Builder, is said to be one 'in the Palace of the Wagging Tongue' to this time.

THE GENIE KARAZ

Now, when the voice of the Vizier had ceased, Shibli Bagarag exclaimed, 'O Vizier, this night, no later, I'll surprise Shagpat, and shave him while he sleepeth: and he shall wake shorn beside his spouse. Wullahy! I'll delay no longer, I, Shibli Bagarag.'

Said the Vizier, 'Thou?'

And he replied, 'Surely, O Vizier! thou knowest little of my dexterity.'

So the Vizier laughed, and Noorna bin Noorka laughed, and he was at a loss to interpret the cause of their laughter. Then said Noorna, 'O my betrothed, there's not a doubt among us of thy dexterity, nor question of thy willingness; but this shaving of Shagpat, wullahy! 'tis longer work than what thou makest of it.'

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And he cried, 'How? because of the Chief of Identicals planted by thee in his head?'

She answered, 'Because of that; but 'tis the smallest opposer, that.'

Then the Vizier said, 'Let us consult.'

So Shibli Bagarag gave ear, and the Vizier continued, 'There's first, the Chief of Identicals planted by thee in the head of that presumptuous fellow, O my daughter! By what means shall that be overcome?'

She said, 'I rank not that first, O Feshnavat, my father; surely I rank first the illusions with which Rabesqurat hath surrounded him, and made it difficult to know him from his semblances, whenever real danger threateneth him.'

The Vizier assented, saying, 'Second, then, the Chief of Identicals?'

She answered, 'Nay, O my father; second, the weakness that's in man, and the little probability of his finishing with Shagpat at one effort; and there is but a sole chance for whoso attempteth, and if he faileth, 'tis forever he faileth.'

So the Vizier said, 'Even I knew not 'twas so grave! Third, then, the Chief of Identicals?'

She replied, 'Third! which showeth the difficulty of the task. Read ye not, first, how the barber must come upon Shagpat and fix him for his operation; second, how the barber must be possessed of more than mortal strength to master him in so many strokes; third, how the barber must have a blade like no other blade in this world in sharpness, in temper, in velocity of sweep, that he may reap this crop which flourisheth on Shagpat, and with it the magic hair which defieth edge of mortal blades?'

Now, the Vizier sighed at the words, saying, 'Powerful is Shagpat. I knew not the thing I undertook. I fear his mastery of us, and we shall be contemned—objects for the red finger of scorn.'

Noorna turned to Shibli Bagarag and asked, 'Do the three bonds of enterprise—vengeance, ambition, and love—shrink in thee from this great contest?'

Shibli Bagarag said, 'Tis terrible! on my head be it!'

She gazed at him a moment tenderly, and said, 'Thou art worthy of what is in store for thee, O my betrothed! and I think little of the dangers, in contemplation of the courage in thee. Lo, if vengeance and ambition spur thee so, how will not love when added to the two?'

Then said she, 'As to the enchantments and spells that shall overreach him, and as to the blade wherewith to shear him?'

Feshnavat exclaimed, 'Yonder 's indeed where we stumble and are tripped at starting.'

But she cried, 'What if I know of a sword that nought on earth or under resisteth, and before the keen edge of which all Illusions and Identicals are as summer grass to the scythe?'

They both shouted, 'The whereabouts of that sword, O Noorna!'

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So she said, "Tis in Aklis, in the mountains of the Koosh; and the seven sons of Aklis sharpen it day and night till the adventurer cometh to claim it for his occasion. Whoso succeedeth in coming to them they know to have power over the sword, and 'tis then holiday for them. Many are the impediments, and they are as holes where the fox haunteth. So they deliver to his hand the sword till his object is attained, his Event mastered, smitten through with it; and 'tis called the Sword of Events. Surely, with it the father of the Seven vanquished the mighty Roc, Kroojis, that threatened mankind with ruin, and a stain of the Roc's blood is yet on the hilt of the sword. How sayest thou, O Feshnavat,— shall we devote ourselves to get possession of that Sword?'

So the Vizier brightened at her words, and said, 'O excellent in wisdom and star of counsel! speak further, and as to the means.'

Noorna bin Noorka continued, 'Thou knowest, O my father, I am proficient in the arts of magic, and I am what I am, and what I shall be, by its uses. 'Tis known to thee also that I hold a Genie in bondage, and can utter ten spells and one spell in a breath. Surely my services to the youth in his attainment of the Sword will be beyond price! Now to reach Aklis and the Sword there are three things needed—charms: and one is a phial full of the waters of Paravid from the wells in the mountain yon-side the desert; and one, certain hairs that grow in the tail of the horse Garraveen, he that roameth wild in the meadows of Melistan; and one, that the youth gather and bear to Aklis, for the white antelope Gulrevaz, the Lily of the Lovely Light that groweth in the hollow of the crags over the Enchanted Sea: with these spells he will command the Sword of Aklis, and nothing can bar him passage. Moreover I will expend in his aid all my subtleties, my transformations, the stores of my wisdom. Many seek this Sword, and people the realms of Rabesqurat, or are beasts in Aklis, or crowned Apes, or go to feed the Roc, Kroojis, in the abyss beneath the Roc's-egg bridge; but there's virtue in Shibli Bagarag: wullahy! I am wistful in him of the hand of Destiny, and he will succeed in this undertaking if he dareth it.'

Shibli Bagarag cried, 'At thy bidding, O Noorna! Care I for dangers? I'm on fire to wield the Sword, and master the Event.'

Thereupon, Noorna bin Noorka arose instantly, and took him by the cheeks a tender pinch, and praised him. Then drew she round him a circle with her forefinger that left a mark like the shimmering of evanescent green flame, saying, 'White was the day I set eyes on thee!' Round the Vizier, her father, she drew a like circle; and she took an unguent, and traced with it characters on the two circles, and letters of strange form, arrowy, lance-like, like leaning sheaves, and crouching baboons, and kicking jackasses, and cocks a-crow, and lutes slack-strung; and she knelt and mumbled over and over words of magic,

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like the drone of a bee to hear, and as a roll of water, nothing distinguishable. After that she sought for an unguent of a red colour, and smeared it on a part of the floor by the corner of the room, and wrote on it in silver fluid a word that was the word 'Eblis,' and over that likewise she droned awhile. Presently she arose with a white-heated face, the sweat on her brow, and said to Shibli Bagarag and Feshnavat hurriedly and in a harsh tone, 'How? have ye fear?'

They answered, 'Our faith is in Allah, our confidence in thee.'

Said she then, 'I summon the Genie I hold in bondage. He will be wrathful; but ye are secure from him. He's this moment in the farthest region of earth, doing ill, as is his wont, and the wont of the stock of Eblis.'

So the Vizier said, 'He'll be no true helper, this Genie, and I care not for his company.'

She answered, 'O my father! leave thou that to me. What says the poet?—

"It is the sapiency of fools,
To shrink from handling evil tools."

Now, while she was speaking, she suddenly inclined her ear as to a distant noise; but they heard nothing. Then, after again listening, she cried in a sharp voice, 'Ho! muffle your mouths with both hands, and stir not from the ring of the circles, as ye value life and its blessings.'

So they did as she bade them, and watched her curiously. Lo! she swathed the upper and lower part of her face in linen, leaving the lips and eyes exposed; and she took water from an ewer, and sprinkled it on her head, and on her arms and her feet, muttering incantations. Then she listened a third time, and stooped to the floor, and put her lips to it, and called the name, 'Karaz!' And she called this name seven times loudly, sneezing between whiles. Then, as it were in answer to her summons, there was a deep growl of thunder, and the palace rocked, tottering; and the air became smoky and full of curling vapours. Presently they were aware of the cry of a Cat, and its miaulings; and the patch of red unguent on the floor parted and they beheld a tawny Cat with an arched back. So Noorna bin Noorka frowned fiercely at the Cat, and cried, 'This is thy shape, O Karaz; change! for it serves not the purpose.'

The Cat changed, and was a Leopard with glowing yellow eyes, crouched for the spring. So Noorna bin Noorka stamped, and cried again, 'This is thy shape, O Karaz; change! for it serves not the purpose.'

And the Leopard changed, and was a Serpent with many folds, sleek, curled, venomous, hissing.

Noorna bin Noorka cried in wrath, 'This is thy shape, O Karaz; change! or thou'lt be no other till Eblis is accepted in Paradise.'

And the Serpent vanished. Lo! in its place a Genie of terrible aspect, black as a solitary tree seared by lightning; his forehead ridged and cloven with red streaks; his hair and ears reddened; his eyes like two hollow pits dug by the shepherd for the wolf, and the wolf in them. He shouted, 'What work is it now, thou accursed traitress?'

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Noorna replied, 'I've need of thee!'

He said, 'What shape?'

She answered, 'The shape of an Ass that will carry two on its back, thou Perversity!'

Upon that, he cried, 'O faithless woman, how long shall I be the slave of thy plotting? Now, but for that hair of my head, plucked by thy hand while I slept, I were free, no doer of thy tasks. Say, who be these that mark us?'

She answered, 'One, the Vizier Feshnavat; and one, Shibli Bagarag of Shiraz, he that's destined to shave Shagpat, the son of Shimpoor, the son of Shoolpi, the son of Shullum; and the youth is my betrothed.'

Now, at her words the whole Genie became as live coal with anger, and he panted black and bright, and made a stride toward Shibli Bagarag, and stretched his arm out to seize him; but Noorna, blew quickly on the circles she had drawn, and the circles rose up in a white flame high as the heads of those present, and the Genie shrank hastily back from the flame, and was seized with fits of sneezing. Then she said in scorn, 'Easily, O Karaz, is a woman outwitted! Surely I could not guess what would be thy action! and I was wanting in foresight and insight! and I am a woman bearing the weight of my power as a woodman staggereth under the logs he hath felled!'

So she taunted him, and he still sneezing and bent double with the might of the sneeze. Then said Noorna in a stern voice, 'No more altercation between us! Wait thou here till I reappear, Karaz!'

Thereupon, she went from them; and the two, Feshnavat and Shibli Bagarag, feared greatly being left with the Genie, for he became all colours, and loured on them each time that he ceased sneezing. He was clearly menacing them when Noorna returned, and in her hand a saddle made of hide, traced over with mystic characters and gold stripes.

So she cried, 'Take this!' Then, seeing he hesitated, she unclosed from her left palm a powder, and scattered

it over him; and he grew meek, and the bending knee of obedience was his, and he took the saddle. So she said, 'Tis well! Go now, and wait outside the city in the shape of an Ass, with this saddle on thy back.'

The Genie groaned, and said, 'To hear is to obey!' And he departed with those words, for she held him in bondage. Then she calmed down the white flames of the circles that enclosed Shibli Bagarag and the Vizier Feshnavat, and they stepped forth, marvelling at the greatness of her sorceries that held such a Genie in bondage.

THE WELL OF PARAVID

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Now, there was haste in the movements of Noorna bin Noorka, and she arrayed herself and clutched Shibli Bagarag by the arm, and the twain departed from Feshnavat the Vizier, and came to the outside of the city, and lo! there was the Genie by a well under a palm, and he standing in the shape of an Ass, saddled. So they mounted him, and in a moment they were in the midst of the desert, and naught round them save the hot glimmer of the sands and the grey of the sky. Surely, the Ass went at such a pace as never Ass went before in this world, resting not by the rivulets, nor under the palms, nor beside the date-boughs; it was as if the Ass scurried without motion of his legs, so swiftly went he. At last the desert gave signs of a border on the low line of the distance, and this grew rapidly higher as they advanced, revealing a country of hills and rocks, and at the base of these the Ass rested.

So Noorna, said, 'This desert that we have passed, O my betrothed, many are they that perish in it, and reach not the well; but give thanks to Allah that it is passed.'

Then said she, 'Dismount, and be wary of moving to the front or to the rear of this Ass, and measure thy distance from the lash of his tail.'

So Shibli Bagarag dismounted, and followed her up the hills and the rocks, through ravines and gorges of the rocks, and by tumbling torrents, among hanging woods, over perilous precipices, where no sun hath pierced, and the bones of travellers whiten in loneliness; and they continued mounting upward by winding paths, now closed in by coverts, now upon open heights having great views, and presently a mountain was disclosed to them, green at the sides high up it; and Noorna bin Noorka said to Shibli Bagarag, 'Mount here, for the cunning of this Ass can furnish him no excuse further for making thee food for the birds of prey.'

So Shibli Bagarag mounted, and they ceased not to ascend the green slopes till the grass became scanty and darkness fell, and they were in a region of snow and cold. Then Noorna bin Noorka tethered the Ass to a stump of a tree and breathed in his ear, and the Ass became as a creature carved in stone; and she drew from her bosom two bags of silk, and blew in one and entered it, bidding Shibli Bagarag do likewise with the other bag; and he obeyed her, drawing it up to his neck, and the delightfulness of warmth came over him. Then said she, 'To-morrow, at noon, we shall reach near the summit of the mountain and the Well of Paravid, if my power last over this Ass; and from that time thou wilt be on the high road to greatness, so fail not to remember what I have done for thee, and be not guilty of ingratitude when thy hand is the stronger.'

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He promised her, and they lay and slept. When he awoke the sun was half-risen, and he looked at Noorna bin Noorka in the silken bag, and she was yet in the peacefulness of pleasant dreams; but for the Ass, surely his eyes rolled, and his head and fore legs were endued with life, while his latter half seemed of stone. And the youth called to Noorna bin Noorka, and pointed to her the strangeness of the condition of the Ass. As she cast eyes on him she cried out, and rushed to him, and took him by the ears and blew up his nostrils, and the animal was quiet. Then she and Shibli Bagarag mounted him again, and she said to him, 'It is well thou wert more vigilant than I, and that the sun rose not on this Ass while I slept, or my enchantment would have thawed on him, and he would have 'scaped us.'

She gave her heel to the Ass, and the Ass hung his tail in sullenness and drooped his head; and she laughed, crying, 'Karaz, silly fellow! do thy work willingly, and take wisely thine outwitting.'

She jeered him as they journeyed, and made the soul of Shibli Bagarag merry, so that he jerked in his seat upon the Ass. Now, as they ascended the mountain they came to the opening of a cavern, and Noorna bin Noorka halted the Ass, and said to Shibli Bagarag, 'We part here, and I wait for thee in this place. Take this phial, and fill it with the waters of the well, after thy bath. The way is before thee—speed on it.'

He climbed the sides of the mountain, and was soon hidden in the clefts and beyond the perches of the vulture. She kept her eyes on the rocky point when he disappeared, awaiting his return; and the sun went over her head and sank on the yon-side of the mountain, and it was by the beams of the moon that she beheld Shibli Bagarag dropping from the crags and ledges of rock, sliding and steadying himself downward till he reached her with the phial in his hand, filled; and he was radiant, as it were divine with freshness, so that Noorna, before she spoke welcome to him, was lost in contemplating the warm shine of his visage, calling to mind the poet's words:

The wealth of light in sun and moon,
All nature's wealth,
Hath mortal beauty for a boon
When match'd with health.

Then said she, 'O Shibli Bagarag, 'tis achieved, this first of thy tasks; for mutely on the fresh red of thy mouth, my betrothed, speaketh the honey of persuasiveness, and the children of Aklis will not resist thee.' So she took the phial from him and led forth the Ass, and the twain mounted the Ass and descended the slopes of the mountain in moonlight; and Shibli Bagarag said, 'Lo! I have marked wonders, and lived a life since our parting; and this well, 'tis a miracle to dip in it, and by it sit many maidens weeping and old men babbling, and youths that were idle youths striking bubbles from the surface of the water. The well is rounded with marble, and the sky is clear in it, cool in it, the whole earth imaged therein.'

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Then Noorna said, 'Hadst thou a difficulty in obtaining the waters of the well?'

He answered, 'Surely all was made smooth for me by thy aid. Now when I came to the well I marked not them by it, but plunged, and the depth of that well seemed to me the very depth of the earth itself, so went I ever downward; and when I was near the bottom of the well I had forgotten life above, and lo! no sooner had I touched the bottom of the well when my head emerged from the surface: 'twas wondrous! But for a sign that touched the bottom of the well, see, O Noorna bin Noorka, the Jewel, the one of myriads that glitter at the bottom, and I plucked it for a gift to thee.'

So Noorna took the Jewel from his hand that was torn and crimson, and she cried, 'Thou fair youth, thou bleedest with the plucking of it, and it was written, no hand shall pluck a jewel at the bottom of that well without letting of blood. Even so it is! Worthy art thou, and I was not mistaken in thee.'

At her words Shibli Bagarag burst forth into praises of her, and he sang:

'What is my worthiness
Match'd with thy worth?
Darkness and earthiness,
Dust and dearth!

O Noorna, thou art wise above women: great and glorious over them.'

In this fashion the youth lauded her that was his betrothed, but she exclaimed, 'Hush! or the jealousy of this Ass will be aroused, and of a surety he'll spill us.'

Then he laughed and she laughed till the tail of Karaz trembled.

THE HORSE GARRAVEEN

Now, they descended leisurely the slopes of the mountain, and when they were again in the green of its base, Noorna called to the Ass, 'Ho! Karaz! Sniff now the breezes, for the end of our journey by night is the meadows of Melistan. Forward in thy might, and bray not when we are in them, for thy comfort's sake!'

The Ass sniffed, turning to the four quarters, and chose a certain direction, and bore them swiftly over hills and streams eddying in silver; over huge mounds of sand, where the tents of Bedouins stood in white clusters; over lakes smooth as the cheeks of sleeping loveliness; by walls of cities, mosques, and palaces; under towers that rose as an armed man with the steel on his brows and the frown of battle; by the shores of the pale foaming sea it bore them, going at a pace that the Arab on his steed outstrippeth not. So when the sun was red and the dewes were blushing with new light, they struggled from a wilderness of barren broken ground, and saw beneath them, in the

warm beams, green, peaceful, deep, the meadows of Melistan. They were meadows dancing with flowers, as it had been fresh damsels of the mountain, fair with variety of colours that were so many gleams of changing light as the breezes of the morn swept over them; lavish of hues, of sweetness, of pleasantness, fir for the souls of the blest.

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Then, after they had gazed awhile, Noorna bin Noorka said, 'In these meadows the Horse Garraveen roameth at will. Heroes of bliss bestride him on great days. He is black to look on; speed quivers in his flanks like the lightning; his nostrils are wide with flame; there is that in his eye which is settled fire, and that in his hoofs which is ready thunder; when he paws the earth kingdoms quake: no animal liveth with blood like the Horse Garraveen. He is under a curse, for that he bore on his back one who defied the Prophet. Now, to make him come to thee thou must blow the call of battle, and to catch him thou must contrive to strike him on the fetlock as he runs with this musk-ball which I give thee; and to tame him thou must trace between his eyes a figure of the crescent with thy forenail. When that is done, bring him to me here, where I await thee, and I will advise thee further.'

So she said, 'Go!' and Shibli Bagarag showed her the breadth of his shoulders, and stepped briskly toward the meadows, and was soon brushing among the flowers and soft mosses of the meadows, lifting his nostrils to the joyful smells, looking about him with the broad eye of one that hungereth for a coming thing. The birds went up above him, and the trees shook and sparkled, and the waters of brooks and broad rivers flashed like waving mirrors waved by the slave-girls in sport when the beauties of the harem riot and dip their gleaming shoulders in the bath. He wandered on, lost in the gladness that lived, till the loud neigh of a steed startled him, and by the banks of a river before him he beheld the Horse Garraveen stooping to drink of the river; glorious was the look of the creature,—silver-hoofed, fashioned in the curves of beauty and swiftness. So Shibli Bagarag put up his two hands and blew the call of battle, and the Horse Garraveen arched his neck at the call, and swung upon his haunches, and sought the call, answering it, and tossing his mane as he advanced swiftly. Then, as he neared, Shibli Bagarag held the musk-ball in his fingers, and aimed at the fetlock of the Horse Garraveen, and flung it, and struck him so that he stumbled and fell. He snorted fiercely as he bent to the grass, but Shibli Bagarag ran to him, and grasped strongly the tuft of hair hanging forward between his ears, and traced between his fine eyes a figure of the crescent with his forenail, and the Horse ceased plunging, and was gentle as a colt by its mother's side, and suffered Shibli Bagarag to bestride him, and spurn him with his heel to speed, and bore him fleetly across the fair length of the golden meadows to where Noorna bin Noorka sat awaiting him. She uttered a cry of welcome, saying, 'This is achieved with diligence and skill, O my betrothed! and on thy right wrist I mark strength like a sleeping leopard, and the children of Aklis will not resist thee.'

So she bade him alight from the Horse, but he said, 'Nay.' And she called to him again to alight, but he cried, 'I will not alight from him! By Allah! such a bounding wave of bliss have I never yet had beneath me, and I will give him rein once again; as the poet says:

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"Divinely rings the rushing air
When I am on my mettled mare:
When fast along the plains we fly,
A creature of the heavens am I!"

Then she levelled her brows at him, and said gravely, 'This is the temptation thou art falling into, as have thousands before thy time. Give him the rein a second time, and he will bear thee to the red pit, and halt upon the brink, and pitch thee into it among bleeding masses and skeletons of thy kind, where they lie who were men like to thee, and were borne away by the Horse Garraveen.'

He gave no heed to her words, taunting her, and making the animal prance up and prove its spirit.

And she cried reproachfully, 'O fool! is it thus our great aim will be defeated by thy silly conceit? Lo, now, the greatness and the happiness thou art losing for this idle vanity is to be as a dunghill cock matched with an ostrich; and think not to escape the calamities thou bringest on thyself, for as is said,

No runner can outstrip his fate;

and it will overtake thee, though thou part like an arrow from the bow.'

He still made a jest of her remonstrance, trying the temper of the animal, and rejoicing in its dark flushes of ireful vigour.

And she cried out furiously, 'How! art thou past counsel? then will we match strength with strength ere 'tis too late, though it weaken both.'

Upon that, she turned quickly to the Ass and stroked it from one extremity to the other, crying, 'Karaz! Karaz!' shouting, 'Come forth in thy power!' And the Ass vanished, and the Genie stood in his place, tall, dark, terrible as a pillar of storm to travellers ranging the desert. He exclaimed, 'What is it, O woman? Charge me with thy command!'

And she said, 'Wrestle with him thou seest on the Horse Garraveen, and fling him from his seat.'

Then he yelled a glad yell, and stooped to Shibli Bagarag on the horse and enveloped him, and seized him, and plucked him from the Horse, and whirled him round, and flung him off. The youth went circling in the air, high in it, and descended, circling, at a distance in the deep meadow-waters. When he crept up the banks he saw the Genie astride the Horse Garraveen, with a black flame round his head; and the Genie urged him to speed and put him to the gallop, and was soon lost to sight, as he had been a thunderbeam passing over a still lake at midnight. And Shibli Bagarag was smitten with the wrong and the folly of his act, and sought to hide his sight from Noorna; but she

called to him, 'Look up, O youth! and face the calamity. Lo, we have now lost the service of Karaz! for though I utter ten spells and one spell in a breath, the Horse Garraveen will ere that have stretched beyond the circle of my magic, and the Genie will be free to do his ill deeds and plot against us. Sad is it! but profit thou by a knowledge of thy weakness.'

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Then said she, 'See, I have not failed to possess myself of the three hairs of Garraveen, and there is that to rejoice in.'

She displayed them, and they were sapphire hairs, and had a flickering light; and they seemed to live, wriggling their lengths, and were as snakes with sapphire skins. Then she said, 'Thy right wrist, O my betrothed!'

He gave her his right wrist, and she tied round it the three hairs of Garraveen, exclaiming, 'Thus do skilful carpenters make stronger what has broken and indicated disaster. Surely, I confide in thy star? I have faith in my foresight?'

And she cried, 'Eyes of mine, what sayest thou to me? Lo, we must part awhile: it is written.'

Said he, 'Leave me not, my betrothed: what am I without thy counsel? And go not from me, or this adventure will come to miserable issue.'

So she said, 'Thou beginnest to feel my worth?'

He answered, 'O Noorna! was woman like thee before in this world? Surely 'tis a mask I mark thee under; yet art thou perforce of sheer wisdom and sweet manners lovely in my sight; and I have a thirst to hear thee and look on thee.'

While he spake, a beam of struggling splendour burst from her, and she said, 'O thou dear youth, yes! I must even go. But I go glad of heart, knowing thee prepared to love me. I must go to counteract the machinations of Karaz, for he's at once busy, vindictive, and cunning, and there's no time for us to lose; so farewell, my betrothed, and make thy wits keen to know me when we next meet.'

So he said, 'And I—whither go I?'

She answered, 'To the City of Oolb straightway.'

Then he, 'But I know not its bearing from this spot: how reach it?'

She answered, 'What! thou with the phial of Paravid in thy vest, that endoweth, a single drop of it, the flowers, the herbage, the very stones and desert sands, with a tongue to articulate intelligible talk?'

Said he, 'Is it so?'

She answered, 'Even so.'

Ere Slubli Bagarag could question her further she embraced him, and blew upon his eyes, and he was blinded by her breath, and saw not her departure, groping for a seat

on the rocks, and thinking her still by him. Sight returned not to him till long after weariness had brought the balm of sleep upon his eyelids.

THE TALKING HAWK

Now, when he awoke he found himself alone in that place, the moon shining over the low meadows and flower-cups fair with night-dew. Odours of night-flowers were abroad, filling the cool air with deliciousness, and he heard in the gardens below songs of the bulbul: it was like a dream to his soul, and he lay sometime contemplating the rich loveliness of the scene, that showed no moving thing. Then rose he and bethought him of the words of Noorna, and of the City of Oolb, and the phial of the waters of Paravid in his vest; and he drew it forth, and dropped a drop of it on the rock where he had reclined. A deep harmony seemed suddenly to awake inside the rock, and to his interrogation as to the direction of Oolb, he heard, 'The path of the shadows of the moon.'

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Thereupon he advanced to a prominent part of the rocks above the meadows, and beheld the shadows of the moon thrown forward into dimness across a waste of sand. And he stepped downward to the level of sand, and went the way of the shadows till it was dawn. Then dropped he a drop of the waters of the phial on a spike of lavender, and there was a voice said to him in reply to what he questioned, 'The path of the shadows of the sun.'

The shadows of the sun were thrown forward across the same waste of sand, and he turned and pursued his way, resting at noon beneath a date-tree, and refreshing himself at a clear spring beside it. Surely he was joyful as he went, and elated with high prospects, singing:

Sun and moon with their bright fingers
Point the hero's path;

If in his great work he lingers,
Well may they be wroth.

Now, the extent of the duration of his travel was four days and an equal number of nights; and it was on the fifth morn that he entered the gates of a city by the sea, even at that hour when the inhabitants were rising from sleep: fair was the sea beyond it, and the harbour was crowded with vessels, ships stored with merchandise—silks, dates, diamonds, Damascus steel, huge bales piled on the decks for the land of Roum and other lands. Shibli Bagarag thought, 'There's scarce a doubt but that one of those sails will set for Oolb shortly. Wullahy! if I knew which, I'd board her and win a berth in her.' Presently he thought, 'I'll go to the public fountain and question it with the speech-winning waters.' Thereupon he passed down the streets of the city and came to an open space, where stood the fountain, and sprinkled it with Paravid; and the fountain spake, saying, 'Where men are, question not dumb things.'

Cried he, 'Faileth Paravid in its power? Have I done aught to baffle myself?'

Then he thought, 'Twere nevertheless well to do as the fountain directeth, and question men while I see them.' And he walked about among the people, and came to the quays of the harbour where the ships lay close in, many of them an easy leap from shore, and considered whom to address. So, as he loitered about the quays, meditating on the means at the disposal of the All-Wise, and marking the vessels wistfully, behold, there advanced to him one at a quick pace, in the garb of a sailor. He observed Shibli Bagarag attentively a moment, and exclaimed as it were in the plenitude of respect and with the manner of one that is abashed, 'Surely, thou art Shibli Bagarag, the nephew of the barber, him we watch for.'

So Shibli Bagarag marvelled at this recognition, and answered, 'Am I then already famous to that extent?'

And he that accosted him said, "Tis certain the trumpet was blown before thy steps, and there is not a man in this city but knoweth of thy destination to the City of Oolb, and that thou art upon the track of great things, one chosen to bring about imminent changes.'

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Then said Shibli Bagarag, 'For this I praise Noorna bin Noorka, daughter of Feshnavat, Vizier of the King that ruleth in the city of Shagpat! She saw me, that I was marked for greatness. Wullahy, the eagle knoweth me from afar, and proclaimeth me; the antelope of the hills scenteth the coming of one not as other men, and telleth his tidings; the wind of the desert shapeth its gust to a meaning, so that the stranger may wot Shibli Bagarag is at hand!'

He puffed his chest, and straightened his legs like the cock, and was as a man upon whom the Sultan has bestowed a dress of honour, even as the plumed peacock. Then the other said:

'Know that I am captain of yonder vessel, that stands farthest out from the harbour with her sails slackened; and she is laden with figs and fruits which I exchange for silks, spices, and other merchandise, with the people of Oolb. Now, what says the poet?—

"Delay in thine undertaking
Is disaster of thy own making";

and he says also:

"Greatness is solely for them that succeed;
'Tis a rotten applause that gives earlier meed."

Therefore it is advisable for thee to follow me on board without loss of time, and we will sail this very night for the City of Oolb.'

Now, Shibli Bagarag was ruled by the words of the captain albeit he desired to stay awhile and receive the homage of the people of that city. So he followed him into a boat that was by, and the twain were rowed by sailors to the ship. Then, when they were aboard the captain set sail, and they were soon in the hollows of deep waters. There was a berth in the ship set apart for Shibli Bagarag, and one for the captain. Shibli Bagarag, when he entered his berth, beheld at the head of his couch a hawk; its eyes red as rubies, its beak sharp as the curve of a scimitar. So he called out to the captain, and the captain came to him; but when he saw the hawk, he plucked his turban from his head, and dashed it at the hawk, and afterward ran to it, trying to catch it; and the hawk flitted from corner to corner of the berth, he after it with open arms. Then he took a sword, but the hawk flew past him, and fixed on the back part of his head, tearing up his hair by the talons, and pecking over his forehead at his eyes. And Shibli Bagarag heard the hawk scream the name 'Karaz,' and he looked closely at the Captain of the vessel, and knew him for the Genie Karaz. Then trembled he with exceeding terror, cursing his credulities, for he saw himself in the hands of the Genie, and nothing but this hawk friendly to him on the fearful waters. When the hawk had torn up a certain hair, the Genie stiffened, and glowed like copper in the furnace, the whole length of him; and he descended heavily through the bottom of the ship, and sank into the waters beneath,

which hissed and smoked as at a bar of heated iron. Then Shibli Bagarag gave thanks to the Prophet, and

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praised the hawk, but the hawk darted out of the cabin, and he followed it on deck, and, lo! the vessel was in flames, and the hawk in a circle of the flames; and the flames soared with it, and left it no outlet. Now, as Shibli Bagarag watched the hawk, the flames stretched out towards him and took hold of his vestments. So he delayed not to commend his soul to the All-merciful, and bore witness to his faith, and plunged into the sea headlong. When he rose, the ship had vanished, and all was darkness where it had been; so he buffeted with the billows, thinking his last hour had come, and there was no help for him in this world; and the spray shaken from the billows blinded him, the great walls of water crumbled over him; strength failed him, and his memory ceased to picture images of the old time—his heart to beat with ambition; and to keep the weight of his head above the surface was becoming a thing worth the ransom of kings. As he was sinking and turning his eyes upward, he heard a flutter as of fledgling's wings, and the two red ruby eyes of the hawk were visible above him, like steady fires in the gloom. And the hawk perched on him, and buried itself among the wet hairs of his head, and presently taking the Identical in its beak, the hawk lifted him half out of water, and bore him a distance, and dropped him. This the hawk did many times, and at the last, Shibli Bagarag felt land beneath him, and could wade through the surges to the shore. He gave thanks to the Supreme Disposer, kneeling prostrate on the shore, and fell into a sleep deep in peacefulness as a fathomless well, unruffled by a breath.

Now, when it was dawn Shibli Bagarag awoke and looked inland, and saw plainly the minarets of a city shining in the first beams, and the front of yellow mountains, and people moving about the walls and on the towers and among the pastures round the city; so he made toward them, and inquired of them the name of their city. And they stared at him, crying, 'What! know'st thou not the City of Oolb? the hawk on thy shoulder could tell thee that much.' He looked and saw that the hawk was on his shoulder; and its left wing was scorched, the plumage blackened. So he said to the hawk, 'Is it profitable, O preserving bird, to ask of thee questions?'

The hawk shook its wings and closed an eye.

So he said, 'Do I well in entering this city?'

The hawk shook its wings again and closed an eye.

So he said, 'To what house shall I direct my steps in this strange city for the attainment of the purpose I have?'

The hawk flew, and soared, and alighted on the topmost of the towers of Oolb. So when it returned he said, 'O bird! rare bird! my counsellor! it is an indication, this alighting on the highest tower, that thou advisest me to go straight to the palace of the King?'

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The hawk flapped its wings and winked both eyes; so Shibli Bagarag took forth the phial from his breast, remembering the virtues of the waters of the Well of Paravid, and touched his lips with them, that he might be endowed with flowing speech before the King of Oolb. As he did this the phial was open, and the hawk leaned to it and dipped its beak into the water; and he entered the city and passed through the long streets towards the palace of the King, and craved audience of him as one that had a thing marvellous to tell. So the King commanded that Shibli Bagarag should be brought before him, for he was a lover of marvels. As he went into the presence of the King, Shibli Bagarag listened to the hawk, for the hawk spake his language, and it said, 'Proclaim to the King a new wonder—"the talking hawk."

So when he had bent his body to the King, he proclaimed the new wonder; and the King seemed not to observe the hawk, and said, 'From what city art thou?'

He answered, 'Native, O King, to Shiraz; newly from the City of Shagpat.'

And the King asked, 'How is it with that hairy wonder?'

He answered, 'The dark forest flourisheth about him.'

And the King said, 'That is well! We of the City of Oolb take our fashions from them of the City of Shagpat, and it is but yesterday that I bastinadoed a barber that strayed among us.'

Shibli Bagarag sighed when he heard the King, and thought to himself, 'How unfortunate is the race of barbers, once honourable and in esteem! Surely it will not be otherwise till Shagpat is shaved!' And the King called out to him for the cause of his sighing; so he said, 'I sigh, O King of the age, considering how like may be the case of the barber bastinadoed but yesterday, in his worth and value, to that of Roomdroom, the reader of planets, that was a barber.'

And he related the story of Roomdroom for the edification of the King and the exaltation of barbercraft, delivering himself neatly and winningly and pointedly, so that the story should apply, which was its merit and its origin.

GOORELKA OF OOLB

When Shibli Bagarag had finished his narration of the case of Roomdroom the barber, the King of Oolb said, 'O thou, native of Shiraz, there is persuasion and sweetness and fascination on thy tongue, and I am touched with compassion for the soles of Baba Mustapha, that I bastinadoed but yesterday, and he was from Shiraz likewise.'

Now, the heart of Shibli Bagarag leapt when he heard mention of Baba Mustapha; and he knew him for his uncle that was searching him. He would have cried aloud his

relationship, but the hawk whispered in his ear. Then the hawk said to him, 'There is danger in the King's muteness respecting me, for I am visible to him. Proclaim the spirit of prophecy.'

So he proclaimed that spirit, and the King said, 'Prophecy to me of barbercraft.'

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And he cried, 'O King of the age, the barber is abased, trodden underfoot, given over to the sneers and the gibes of them that flatter the powerful ones; he is as the winter worm, as the crocodile in the slime of his sleep by the bank, as the sick eagle before moulting. But I say, O King, that he will come forth like the serpent in a new skin, shaming the old one; he slept a caterpillar, and will come forth a butterfly; he sank a star, and lo! he riseth a constellation.'

Now, while he was speaking in the fervour of his soul, the King said something to one of the court officers surrounding him, and there was brought to the King a basin, a soap-bowl, and barber's tackle. When Shibli Bagarag saw these, the uses of the barber rushed upon his mind, and desire to sway the tackle pushed him forward and agitated him, so that he could not keep his hands from them.

Then the King exclaimed, 'It is as I thought. Our passions betray themselves, and our habits; so is it written. By Allah! I swear thou art thyself none other than a barber, O youth.'

Shibli Bagwrag was nigh fainting with terror at this discovery of the King, but the hawk said in his ear, 'Proclaim speech in the tackle.' So he proclaimed speech in the tackle; and the King smiled doubtfully, and said, 'If this be a cheat, Shiraz will not see thy face more.'

Then the hawk whispered in his ear, 'Drop on the tackle secretly a drop from the phial.' This he did, spreading his garments, and commanded the tackle to speak. And the tackle spake, each portion of it, confusedly as the noise of Babel. So the King marvelled greatly, and said, 'Tis a greater wonder than the talking hawk, the talking tackle. Wullahy! it ennobleth barbercraft! Yet it were well to comprehend the saying of the tackle.'

Then the hawk flew to the tackle and fluttered about it, and lo! the blade and the brush stood up and said in a shrill tone, 'It is ordained that Shagpat shall be shaved, and that Shibli Bagarag shall shave him.'

The King bit the forefinger of amazement, and said, 'What then ensueth, O talking tackle?'

And the brush and the blade stood up, and said in a shrill tone, 'Honour to Shibli Bagarag and barbers! Shame unto Shagpat and his fellows!'

Upon that, the King cried, 'Enough, O talking tackle; I will forestall the coming thing. I will be shaved! wullahy, that will I!'

Then the hawk whispered to Shibli Bagarag, 'Forward and shear him!' So he stepped forth and seized the tackle, and addressed himself keenly to the shaving of the King of

Oolb, lathering him and performing his task with perfect skill. And the courtiers crowded to follow the example of the King, and Shibli Bagarag shaved them, all of them. Now, when they were shaved, fear smote them, the fear of ridicule, and each laughed at the change that was in the other; but the King cried, 'See that order is issued for the people of Oolb to be as we before to-morrow's sun. So is laughter taken in reverse.' And the King said aside to Shibli Bagarag, 'Say now, what may be thy price for yonder hawk?'

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And the hawk bade him say, 'The loan of thy cockleshell.'

The King mused, and said, 'That is much to ask, for it is that which beareth the Princess my daughter to the Lily of the Enchanted Sea, which she nourisheth; and if 'tis harmed, she will be stricken with ugliness, as was the daughter of the Vizier Feshnavat, who tended it before her. Yet is this hawk a bird of price. What be its qualities, besides the gift of speech?'

Shibli Bagarag answered, 'To counsel in extremity; to forewarn; to counteract enchantments and foul magic.'

Upon that the King said, 'Follow me!'

And the King led the way from the hall, through many spacious chambers fair with mirrors and silks and precious woods, and smooth marble floors, down into a vault lit by a lamp that was shaped like an eye. Round the vault were hung helm-pieces, and swords, and rich-studded housings; and there were silken dresses, and costly shawls, and tall vases and jars of China, tapestries, and gold services. And the King said, 'Take thy choice of these in exchange for the hawk.'

But Shibli Bagarag said, 'Nought save a loan of the cockle-shell, King!'

Then the King threatened him, saying, 'There is a virtue in each of the things thou seest: the China jar is brimmed with wine, and remaineth so though a thousand drink of it; the dress of Samarcand rendereth the wearer invisible; yet thou refuseth to exchange them for thy hawk!'

And the King swore by the beard of his father he would seize perforce the hawk and shut up Shibli Bagarag in the vault, if he fell not into his bargain. Shibli Bagarag was advised by the hawk to accept the China jar and the dress of Samarcand, and handed the hawk to the King in exchange for these things. So the King took the hawk upon his wrist and departed with it to the apartments of his daughter, and Shibli Bagarag went to the chamber prepared for him in the palace.

Now, when it was night, Shibli Bagarag heard a noise at his lattice, and he arose and peered through it, and lo! the hawk was fluttering without; so he let it in, and caressed it, and the hawk bade him put on his silken dress and carry forth his China jar, and go the round of the palace, and offer drink to the sentinels and the slaves. So he did as the hawk directed, and the sentinels and slaves were aware of a China jar brimmed with wine that was lifted to their lips, but him that lifted it they saw not: surely, they drank deep of the draught of astonishment.

Then the hawk flew before him, and he followed it to a chamber lit with golden lamps, gorgeously hung, and full of a dusky splendour and the faint sparkle of gems, ruby,



amethyst, topaz, and beryl; in it there was the hush of sleep, and the heart of Shibli Bagarag told him that one beautiful was near. So he approached on tiptoe a couch of blue silk, bordered with gold-wire, and inwoven with stars of blue turquoise stones, as it had been the heavens of midnight. On the couch lay one, a woman, pure in loveliness; the dark fringes of her closed lids like living flashes of darkness, her mouth like an unstrung bow and as a double rosebud, even as two isles of coral between which in the clear transparent watery beds the pearls shine freshly.

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And the hawk said to Shibli Bagarag, 'This is the Princess Goorelka, the daughter of the King of Oolb, a sorceress, the Guardian of the Lily of the Enchanted Sea. Beneath her pillow is the cockle-shell; grasp it, but gaze not upon her.'

He approached and slid his arm beneath the pillow of the Princess, and grasped the cockle-shell; but ere he drew it forth he gazed upon her, and the lustre of her countenance transfixed him as with a javelin, so that he could not stir, nor move his eyes from the contemplation of her sweetness of feature. The hawk darted at him fiercely, and pecked at him to draw his attention from her, and he stepped back, yet he continued taking fatal draughts from the magic cup of her beauty. Then the hawk screamed a loud scream of anguish, and the Princess awoke, and started half-way from the couch, and stared about her, and saw the bird in agitation. As she looked at the bird a shudder passed over her, and she snatched a veil and drew it over her face, murmuring, 'I dream, or I am under the eye of a man.' Then she felt beneath the pillow, and knew that the cockle-shell had been touched; and in a moment she leapt from her couch, and ran to a mirror and saw herself as she was, a full-moon made to snare the wariest and sit singly high on a throne in the hearts of men. At the sight of her beauty she smiled and seemed at peace, murmuring still, 'I am under the eye of a man, or I dream.' Now, while she so murmured she arrayed herself, and took the cockle-shell, and passed through the ante-room among her women sleeping; and Shibli Bagarag tracked her till she came to the vault; and she entered it and walked to the corner from which had hung the dress of Samarcand. When she saw it gone her face waxed pale, and she gazed slowly at all points, muttering, 'There is no further doubt but that I am under the eye of a man!' Thereupon she ran hastily from the vault, and passed between the sentinels of the palace, and saw them where they lay drowsy with intoxication: so she knew that the China jar and the dress of Samarcand had been used that night, and for no purpose friendly to her wishes. Then she passed down the palace steps, and through the gates of the palace and the city, till she came to the shore of the sea; there she launched the cockle-shell and took the wind in her garments, and sat in it, filling it to overflowing, yet it floated. And Shibli Bagarag waded to the cockle-shell and took hold of it, and was drawn along by its motion swiftly through the waters, so that a foam swept after him; and Goorelka marked the foam. Now, they had passage over the billows smoothly, and soon the length of the sea was darkened with two high rocks, and between them there was a narrow channel of the sea, roughened with moonlight. So they sped between the rocks, and came upon a purple sea, dark-blue overhead, with large stars leaning to the waves. There was a soft whisperingness in the breath of the breezes that swung there, and many sails of charmed ships were seen in momentary gleams, flapping the mast idly far away. Warm as new milk from the full udders were the waters of that sea, and figures of fair women stretched lengthwise with the current, and lifted a head as they rushed rolling by. Truly it was enchanted even to the very bed!

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ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Delay in thine undertaking is disaster of thy own making
Lest thou commence to lie—be dumb!
No runner can outstrip his fate
'Tis the first step that makes a path
When to loquacious fools with patience rare I listen