

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE SHAVING OF
SHAGPAT; AN ARABIAN
ENTERTAINMENT.
VOLUME 4

George Meredith
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Arabian entertainment. Volume 4

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KOOROOKH

Now, they sped from the Cave of Chrysolites by another passage than that by which they entered it, and nothing but the light of the Sword to guide them. By that light Shibli Bagarag could distinguish glimmering shapes, silent and statue-like, to the right and the left of them, their visages hidden in a veil of heavy webs; and he saw what seemed in the dusk broad halls, halls of council, and again black pools and black groves, and columns of crowded porticoes,—all signs of an underground kingdom. They came to some steps and mounted these severally, coming to a platform, in the middle of which leapt a fountain, the top spray of it touched with a beam of earth and the air breathed by men. Here he heard the youths dabble with the dark waters, and he discerned Gulrevaz tossing it in her two hands, calling, 'Koorookh! Koorookh!' Then they said to him, 'Stir this fountain with the Sword, O Master of the Event!' So he stirred

the fountain, and the whole body of it took a leap toward the light that was like the shoot of a long lance of silver in the moon's rays, and lo! in its place the ruffled feathers of a bird. Then the seven youths and the Princess and Shibli Bagarag got up under its feathers like a brood of water-fowl; and the bird winged straight up as doth a blinded bee, ascending, and passing in the ascent a widening succession of winding terraces, till he observed the copper sun of Aklis and the red lands below it. Thrice, in the exuberance of his gladness, he waved the Sword, and the sun lost that dulness on its disk and took a bright flame, and threw golden arrows everywhere; and the pastures were green, the streams clear, the sands sparkling. The bird flew, and circled, and hung poised a moment, presently descending on the roof of the palace. Now, there was here a piece of solid glass, propped on two crossed bars of gold, and it was shaped like an eye, and might have been taken for one of the eyes inhabiting the head of some monstrous Genie. Shibli Bagarag ran to it when he was afoot, and peered through it. Surely, it was the first object of his heart that he beheld—Noorna, his betrothed, pale on the pillar; she with her head between her hands and her hair scattered by the storm, as one despairing. Still he looked, and he saw swimming round the pillar that monstrous fish, with its sole baleful eye, which had gulped them both in the closed shell of magic pearl; and he knew the fish for Karaz, the Genie, their enemy. Then he turned to the Princess, with an imploring voice for counsel how to reach her and bring her rescue; but she said, 'The Sword is in thy hands,

none of us dare wield it'; and the seven youths answered likewise. So, left to himself, he drew the Sword from his girdle, and hissed on the heads of the serpents, at the same time holding it so that it might lengthen out inimitably. Then he leaned it over the eye of the glass, in the direction of the pillar besieged by the billows, and lo! with one cut, even at that distance, he divided the fishy monster, and with another severed the chains that had fettered Noorna; and she arose and smiled blissfully to the sky, and stood upright, and signalled him to lay the point of the blade on the pillar. When he had done this, knowing her wisdom, she put a foot boldly upon the blade and ran up it toward him, and she was half-way up the blade, when suddenly a kite darted down upon her, pecking at her eyes, to confuse her. She waxed unsteady and swayed this way and that, balancing with one arm and defending herself from the attacks of the kite with another. It seemed to Shibli Bagarag she must fall and be lost; and the sweat started on his forehead in great drops big as nuts. Seeing that and the agitation of his limbs, Gulrevaz cried, 'O Master of the Event, let us hear it!'

But he shrieked, 'The kite! the kite! she is running up the blade, and the kite is at her eyes! and she swaying, swaying! falling, falling!'

So the Princess exclaimed, 'A kite! Koorookh is match for a kite!'

Then she smoothed the throat of Koorookh, and clasped round it a collar of bright steel, roughened with secret characters; and

she took a hoop of gold, and passed the bird through it, urging it all the while with one strange syllable; and the bird went up with a strong whirr of the wing till he was over the sea, and caught sight of Noorna tottering beneath him on the blade, and the kite pecking fiercely at her. Thereat he fluttered eagerly a twinkle of time, and the next was down with his beak in the neck of the kite, crimsoned in it. Now, by the shouts and exclamations of Shibli Bagarag, the Princess and the seven youths, her brothers, knew that the bird had performed well his task, and that the fight was between Koorookh and the kite. Then he cried gladly to them, 'Joy for us, and Allah be praised! The kite is dropping, and she leaneth on one wing of Koorookh!'

And he cried in anguish, 'What see I? The kite is become a white ball, rolling down the blade toward her; and it will of a surety destroy her.'

And he called to her, thinking vainly his voice might reach her. So the Princess said, 'A white ball? 'tis I that am match for a white ball!'

Now, she seized from the corner of the palace-roof a bow and an arrow, and her brothers lifted her to a level with the hilt of the Sword, leaning on the eye of glass. Then she planted one foot on the shoulder of Shibli Bagarag as he bent peering through the eye, and fitted the arrow to a level of the Sword, slanting its slant, and let it fly, doubling the bow. Shibli Bagarag saw the ball roll to within a foot of Noorna, when it was as if stricken by a gleam of light, and burst, and was a black cloud veined with fire, swathing

her in folds. He lost all sight of Noorna; and where she had been were vivid flashes, and then a great flame, and in the midst a red serpent and a green serpent twisted as in the death-struggle. So he cried, 'A red serpent and a green serpent!'

And the sons of Aklis exclaimed, 'A red serpent? 'Tis we that are match for a red serpent!'

Thereupon they descended steps through the palace roof, and while the fight between those two serpents was raging, Shibli Bagarag beheld seven small bright birds, bee-catchers, that entered the flame, bearing in their bills slips of a herb, and hovering about the head of the red serpent, distracting it. Then he saw the red serpent hiss and snap at one, darting out its tongue, and lo! on the fork of its tongue the little bird let fall the slip of herb in its bill, and in an instant the serpent changed from red to yellow and from yellow to pale-spotted blue, and from that to a speckled indigo-colour, writhing at every change, and hissing fire from its open jaws. Meantime the green serpent was released and was making circles round the flame, seeking to complete some enchantment, when suddenly the whole scene vanished, and Shibli Bagarag again beheld Noorna steadying her steps on the blade, and leaning on one wing of Koorookh. She advanced up the blade, coming nearer and nearer; and he thought her close, and breathed quick and ceased looking through the glass. When he gazed abroad, lo! she was with Koorookh, on a far hill beyond the stream in outer Aklis. So he said to the Princess Gulrevaz, 'O Princess, comes she not to me here in the palace?'

But the Princess shook her head, and said, 'She hath not a spell! She waiteth for thee yonder with Koorookh. Now, look through the glass once more.'

He looked through the glass, and there on a plain, as he had first seen it when Noorna appeared to him, was the City of Shagpat, and in the streets of the city a vast assembly, and a procession passing on, its front banner surmounted by the Crescent, and bands with curled and curved instruments playing, and slaves scattering gold and clashing cymbals, every demonstration and evidence of a great day and a high occasion in the City of Shagpat! So he peered yet keenlier through the glass, and behold, the Vizier Feshnavat, father of Noorna, walking in fetters, subject to the jibes and evil-speaking of the crowds of people, his turban off, and he in a robe of drab-coloured stuff, in the scorned condition of an unbeliever. Shibli Bagarag peered yet more earnestly through the glass eye, and in the centre of the procession, clad gorgeously in silks and stuffs, woven with gold and gems, a crown upon his head, and the appanages of supremacy and majesty about him, was Shagpat. He paced upon a yellow flooring that was unrolled before him from a mighty roll; and there were slaves that swarmed on all sides of him, supporting upon gold pans and platters the masses of hair that spread bushily before and behind, and to the right and left of him. Truly the gravity of his demeanour exceeded that which is attained by Sheiks and Dervishes after much drinking of the waters of wisdom, and fasting, and abnegation of the pleasures

that betray us to folly in this world! Now, when he saw Shagpat, the soul of Shibli Bagarag was quickened to do his appointed work upon him, shear him, and release the Vizier Feshnavat. Desire to shave Shagpat was as a salt thirst raging in him, as the dream of munching to one that starveth; even as the impelling of violent tempests to skiffs on the sea; and he hungered to be at him, crying, as he peered, "Tis he! even he, Shagpat!"

Then he turned to the Princess Gulrevaz, and said, "Tis Shagpat, exalted, clothed with majesty, O thou morning star of Aklis!"

She said, 'Koorookh is given thee, and waiteth to carry ye both; and for me I will watch that this glass send forth a beam to light ye to that city; so farewell, O thou that art loved! And delay in nothing to finish the work in hand.'

Now, when he had set his face from the Princess he descended through the roof of the palace, and met the seven youths returning, and they accompanied him through the halls of the palace to that hall where the damsels had duped him. He was mindful of his promise to the old man crowned, and flashed the Sword a strong flash, so that he who looked on it would be seared in the eyelashes. Then the doors of the recesses flew apart, eight-and-ninety in number, and he beheld divers sitters on thrones, with the diadem of asses' ears stiffened upright, and monkeys' skulls grinning with gems; they having on each countenance the look of sovereigns and the serenity of high estate. Shibli Bagarag laughed at them, and he thought, 'Wullahy!

was I one of these? I, the beloved of Noorna, destined Master of the Event!' and he thought, 'Of a surety, if these sitters could but laugh at themselves, there would be a release for them, and the crown would topple off which getteth the homage of asses and monkeys!' He would have spoken to them, but the sons of Aklis said, 'They have seen the flashing of the Sword, and 'twere well they wake not.' As they went from the hall the seven youths said, 'Reflect upon the age of these sitters, that have been sitting in the chairs from three to eleven generations back! And they were searchers of the Sword like thee, but were duped! In like manner, the hen sitteth in complacency, but she bringeth forth and may cackle; 'tis owing to the aids of Noorna that thou art not one of these sitters, O Master of the Event!' Now, they paced through the hall of dainty provender, and through the hall of the jewel-fountains, coming to the palace steps, where stood Abarak leaning on his bar. As they advanced to Abarak, there was a clamour in the halls behind, that gathered in noise like a torrent, and approached, and presently the Master was ware of a sharp stroke on his forehead with a hairy finger, and then a burn, and the Crown that had clung to him toppled off; surely it fell upon the head of the old monkey, the cautious and wise one, he that had made a study of Shibli Bagarag. Thereupon that monkey stalked scornfully from them; and Abarak cried, 'O Master of the Event! it was better for me to keep the passage of the Seventh Pillar, than be an ape of this order. Wah! the flashing of the Sword scorcheth them, and they scamper.'

THE VEILED FIGURE

Verily there was lightning in Aklis as Shibli Bagarag flashed the Sword over the clamouring beasts: the shape of the great palace stood forth vividly, and a wide illumination struck up the streams, and gilded the large hanging leaves, and drew the hills glimmeringly together, and scattered fires on the flat faces of the rocks. Then the seven youths said quickly, 'Away! out of Aklis, O Master of the Event! from city to city of earth this light is visible, and men will know that Fate is in travail, and an Event preparing for them, and Shagpat will be warned by the portent; wherefore lose not the happy point of time on which thy star is manifest.' And they cried again, 'Away! out of Aklis!' with gestures of impatience, urging his departure.

Then said he, 'O youths, Sons of Aklis, it is written that gratitude is the poor man's mine of wealth, and the rich man's flower of beauty; and I have but that to give ye for all this aid and friendliness of yours.'

But they exclaimed, 'No aid or friendliness in Aklis! By the gall of the Roc! it is well for thee thou camest armed with potent spells, and hadst one to advise and inspirit thee, or thou wouldst have stayed here to people Aklis, and grazed in a strange shape.'

Now, the seven waxed in impatience, and he laid their hands upon his head and moved from them with Abarak, to where in the dusk the elephant that had brought them stood. Then the elephant

kneeled and took the twain upon his back, and bore them across the dark land to that reach of the river where the boat was moored in readiness. They entered the boat silently among its drapery of lotuses, and the Veiled Figure ferried them over the stream that rippled not with their motion. As they were crossing, desire to know that Veiled Figure counselled Shibli Bagarag evilly to draw the Sword again, and flash it, so that the veil became transparent. Then, when Abarak turned to him for the reason of the flashing of the Sword, he beheld the eyes of the youth fixed in horror, glaring as at sights beyond the tomb. He said nought, but as the boat's- head whispered among the reeds and long flowers of the opposite marge, he took Shibli Bagarag by the shoulders and pushed him out of the boat, and leaped out likewise, leading him from the marge forcibly, hurrying him forward from it, he at the heels of the youth propelling him; and crying in out-of-breath voice at intervals, 'What sight? what sight?' But the youth was powerless of speech, and when at last he opened his lips, the little man shrank from him, for he laughed as do the insane, a peal of laughter ended by gasps; then a louder peal, presently softer; then a peal that started all the echoes in Aklis. After awhile, as Abarak still cried in his ear, 'What sight?' he looked at him with a large eye, saying querulously, 'Is it written I shall be pushed by the shoulder through life? And is it in the pursuit of further thwackings?'

Abarak heeded him not, crying still, 'What sight?' and Shibli Bagarag lowered his tone, and jerked his body, pronouncing the

name 'Rabesqurat!' Then Abarak exclaimed, "'Tis as I weened. Oh, fool! to flash the Sword and peer through the veil! Truly, there be few wits will bear that sight!' On a sudden he cried, 'No cure but one, and that a sleep in the bosom of the betrothed!'

Thereupon he hurried the youth yet faster across the dark lawns of Aklis toward the passage of the Seventh Pillar, by which the twain had entered that kingdom. And Shibli Bagarag saw as in a dream the shattered door, shattered by the bar, remembering dimly as a thing distant in years the netting of the Queen, and Noorna chained upon the pillar; he remembered Shagpat even vacantly in his mind, as one sheaf of barley amid other sheaves of the bearded field, so was he overcome by the awfulness of that sight behind the veil of the Veiled Figure!

As they advanced to the passage, he was aware of an impediment to its entrance, as it had been a wall of stone there; and seeing Abarak enter the passage without let, he kicked hard in front at the invisible obstruction, but there was no coming by. Abarak returned to him, and took his right arm, and raised the sleeve from his wrist, and lo, the two remaining hairs of Garraveen twisted round it in sapphire winds. Cried he, 'Oh, the generosity of Gulrevaz! she has left these two hairs that he may accomplish swiftly the destiny marked for him! but now, since his gazing through that veil, he must part with them to get out of Aklis.' And he muttered, 'His star is a strange one! one that leadeth him to fortune by the path of frowns! to greatness by the aid of thwackings! Truly the ways of Allah are wonderful!'

Shibli Bagarag resisted him in nothing, and Abarak loosed the two bright hairs from his wrist, and those two hairs swelled and took glittering scales, and were sapphire snakes with wings of intense emerald; and they rose in the air spirally together, each over each, so that to see them one would fancy in the darkness a fountain of sapphire waters flashed with the sheen of emerald. When they had reached a height loftier than the topmost palace-towers of Aklis, they descended like javelins into the earth, and in a moment re-appeared, in the shape of Genii when they are charitably disposed to them they visit; not much above the mortal size, nor overbright, save for a certain fire in their eyes when they turned them; and they were clothed each from head to foot in an armour of sapphire plates shot with steely emerald. Surely the dragon-fly that darteth all day in the blaze over pools is like what they were. Abarak bit his forefinger and said, 'Who be ye, O sons of brilliance?'

They answered, 'Karavejis and Veejravoosh, slaves of the Sword.'

Then he said, 'Come with us now, O slaves of the Sword, and help us to the mountain of outer Aklis.'

They answered, 'O thou, there be but two means for us of quitting Aklis: on the wrist of the Master, or down the blade of the Sword! and from the wrist of the Master we have been loosed, and no one of thy race can tie us to it again.'

Abarak said, 'How then shall the Master leave Aklis?'

They answered, 'By Allah in Aklis! he can carve a way whither

he will with the Sword.'

But Abarak cried, 'O Karavejis and Veejravoosh! he bath peered through the veil of the Ferrying Figure.'

Now, when they heard his words, the visages of the Genii darkened, and they exclaimed sorrowfully, 'Serve we such a one?'

And they looked at Shibli Bagarag a look of anger, so that he, whose wits were in past occurrences, imagined them his enemy and the foe of Noorna split in two, crying, 'How? Is Karaz a couple? and do I multiply him with strokes of the Sword?'

Thereupon he drew the Sword from his girdle in wrath, flourishing it; and Karavejis and Veejravoosh felt the might of the Sword, and prostrated themselves to the ground at his feet. And Abarak said, 'Arise, and bring us swiftly to the mountain of outer Aklis.'

Then said they, 'Seek a passage down yonder brook in the moonbeams; and it is the sole passage for him now.'

Abarak went with them to the brook that was making watery music to itself between banks of splintered rock and over broad slabs of marble, bubbling here and there about the roots of large-leaved water-flowers, and catching the mirrored moon of Aklis in whirls, breaking it in lances. Then they waded into the water knee-deep, and the two Genii seized hold of a great slab of marble in the middle of the water, and under was a hollow brimmed with the brook, that the brook partly filled and flowed over. Then the Genii said to Abarak, 'Plunge!' and they said the same to Shibli Bagarag. The swayer of the Sword

replied, as it had been a simple occasion, a common matter, and a thing for the exercise of civility, 'With pleasure and all willingness!' Thereupon he tightened his girth, and arrowing his two hands, flung up his heels and disappeared in the depths, Abarak following. Surely, those two went diving downward till it seemed to each there was no bottom in the depth, and they would not cease to feel the rushing of the water in their ears till the time anticipated by mortals.

THE BOSOM OF NOORNA

Now, while a thousand sparks of fire were bursting on the sight of the two divers, and they speeded heels uppermost to the destiny marked out for them by the premeditations of the All-Wise, lo! Noorna was on the mountain in outer Aklis with Koorookh, waiting for the appearance of her betrothed, Sword in hand. She saw beams from the blazing eye of Aklis, and knew by the redness of it that one, a mortal, was peering on the earth and certain of created things. So she waited awhile in patience for the return of her betrothed, with the head of Koorookh in her lap, caressing the bird, and teaching it words of our language; and the bird fashioned its bill to the pronouncing of names, such as 'Noorna' and 'Feshnavat,' and 'Goorelka'; and it said 'Karaz,' and stuck not at the name 'Shagpat,' and it learnt to say even 'Shagpat shall be shaved! Shagpat shall be shaved!' but no effort of Noorna could teach it to say, 'Shibli Bagarag,' the bird calling instead, 'Shiparack, Shiplabarack, Shibblisharack.' And Noorna chid it with her forefinger, crying, 'O Koorookh! wilt thou speak all names but that one of my betrothed?'

So she said again, 'Shibli Bagarag.' And the bird answered, imitating its best, 'Shibberacavarack.' Noorna was wroth with it, crying, 'Oh naughty bird! is the name of my beloved hateful to thee?'

And she chid Koorookh angrily, he with a heavy eye sulking,

and keeping the sullen feathers close upon his poll. Now, she thought, 'There is in this a meaning and I will fathom it.' So she counted the letters in the name of her betrothed, that were thirteen, and spelt them backwards, afterwards multiplying them by an equal number, and fashioning words from the selection of every third and seventh letter. Then took she the leaf from a tree and bade Koorookh fly with her to the base of the mountain sloping from Aklis to the sea, and there wrote with a pin's point on the leaf the words fashioned, dipping the leaf in the salt ripple by the beach, till they were distinctly traced. And it was revealed to her that Shibli Bagarag bore now a name that might be uttered by none, for that the bearer of it had peered through the veil of the ferrying figure in Aklis. When she knew that, her grief was heavy, and she sat on the cold stones of the beach and among the bright shells, weeping in anguish, loosing her hair, scattering it wildly, exclaiming, 'Awahy! woe on me! Was ever man more tired than he before entering Aklis, he that was in turns abased and beloved and exalted! yet his weakness clingeth to him, even in Aklis and with the Wondrous Sword in his grasp.'

Then she thought, 'Still he had strength to wield the Sword, for I marked the flashing of it, and 'twas he that leaned forward the blade to me; and he possesses the qualities that bring one gloriously to the fruits of enterprise!' And she thought, 'Of a surety, if Abarak be with him, and a single of the three slaves of the Sword that I released from the tail of Garraveen, Ravejoura, Karavejis, and Veejravoosh, he will yet come through, and I may

revive him in my bosom for the task.' So, thinking upon that, the sweet crimson surprised her cheeks, and she arose and drew Koorookh with her along the beach till they came to some rocks piled ruggedly and the waves breaking over them. She mounted these, and stepped across them to the entrance of a cavern, where flowed a full water swiftly to the sea, rolling smooth bulks over and over, and with a translucent light in each, showing precious pebbles in the bed of the water below; agates of size, limpid cornelians, plates of polished jet, rubies, diamonds innumerable that were smitten into sheen by slant rays of the level sun, the sun just losing its circle behind lustrous billows of that Enchanted Sea. She turned to Koorookh a moment, saying, with a coax of smiles, 'Will my bird wait here for me, even at this point?' Koorookh clapped both his wings, and she said again, petting him, 'He will keep watch to pluck me from the force of water as I roll past, that I be not carried to the sea, and lost?'

Koorookh still clapped his wings, and she entered under the arch of the cavern. It was roofed with crystals, a sight of glory, with golden lamps at intervals, still centres of a thousand beams. Taking the sandal from her left foot and tucking up the folds of her trousers to the bend of her clear white knee, she advanced, half wading, up the winds of the cavern, and holding by the juts of granite here and there, till she came to a long straight lane in the cavern, and at the end of it, far down, a solid pillar of many-coloured water that fell into the current, as it had been one block of gleaming marble from the roof, without ceasing.

Now, she made toward it, and fixed her eye warily wide on it, and it was bright, flawless in brilliancy; but while she gazed a sudden blot was visible, and she observed in the body of the fall two dark objects plumping downward one after the other, like bolts, and they splashed in the current and were carried off by the violence of its full sweep, shooting by her where she stood, rapidly; but she, knotting her garments round the waist to give her limbs freedom and swiftness, ran a space, and then bent and plunged, catching, as she rose, the foremost to her bosom, and whirled away under the flashing crystals like a fish scaled with splendours that hath darted and seized upon a prey, and is bearing it greedily to some secure corner of the deeps to swallow the quivering repast at leisure. Surely, the heart of Noorna was wise of what she bore against her bosom; and it beat exulting strokes in the midst of the rush and roar and gurgle of the torrent, and the gulping sounds and multitudinous outcries of the headlong water. That verse of the poet would apply to her where he says:

Lead me to the precipice,
And bid me leap the dark abyss:
I care not what the danger be,
So my beloved, my beauteous vision,
Be but the prize I bear with me,
For she to Paradise can turn Perdition.

Praise be to him that planteth love, the worker of this marvel, within us! Now, she sped in the manner narrated through the

mazes of the cavern, coming suddenly to the point at the entrance where perched Koorookh gravely upon one leg, like a bird with an angling beak: he caught at her as she was hurling toward the sea, and drew her to the bank of rock, that burden on her bosom; and it was Shibli Bagarag, her betrothed, his eyes closed, his whole countenance colourless. Behind him like a shadow streamed Abarak, and Noorna kneeled by the waterside and fetched the little man from it likewise; he was without a change, as if drawn from a familiar element; and when he had prostrated himself thrice and called on the Prophet's name in the form of thanksgiving, he wrung his beard of the wet, and had wit to bless the action of Noorna, that saved him. Then the two raised Shibli Bagarag from the rock, and reclined him lengthwise under the wings of Koorookh, and Noorna stretched herself there beside him with one arm about his neck, the fair head of the youth on her bosom. And she said to Abarak, 'He hath dreamed many dreams, my betrothed, but never one so sweet as that I give him. Already, see, the hue returneth to his cheek and the dimples of pleasure.' So was it; and she said, 'Mount, O thou of the net and the bar! and stride Koorookh across the neck, for it is nigh the setting of the moon, and by dawn we must be in our middle flight, seen of men, a cloud over them.'

Said Abarak, 'To hear is to obey!'

He bestrode the neck of Koorookh and sat with dangling feet, till she cried, 'Rise!' and the bird spread its wings and flapped them wide, rising high in the silver rays, and flying rapidly

forward with the three on him from the mountain in front of Aklis, and the white sea with its enchanted isles and wonders; flying and soaring till the earth was as what might be held in the hollow of the hand, and the kingdoms of the earth a mingled heap of shining dust in the midst.

THE REVIVAL

Now, the feathers of Koorookh in his flight were ruffled by a chill breeze, and they were speeding through a light glow of cold rose-colour. Then said Noorna, "Tis the messenger of morning, the blush. Oh, what changes will date from this day!"

The glow of rose became golden, and they beheld underneath them, on one side, the rim of the rising red sun, and rays streaming over the earth and its waters. And Noorna said, 'I must warn Feshnavat, my father, and prepare him for our coming.'

So she plucked a feather from Koorookh and laid the quill downward, letting it drop. Then said she, 'Now for the awakening of my betrothed!'

Thereupon she hugged his head a moment, and kissed him on the eyelids, the cheeks, and the lips, crying, 'By this means only!' Crying that, she pushed him, sliding, from the back of the bird, and he parted from them, falling headforemost in the air like a stricken eagle. Then she called to Koorookh, 'Seize him!' and the bird slanted his beak and closed his wings, the two, Abarak and Noorna, clinging to him tightly; and he was down like an arrow between Shibli Bagarag and the ground, spreading beneath him like a tent, and Noorna caught the youth gently to her lap; then she pushed him off again, intercepting his descent once more, till they were on a level with one of the mountains of the earth, from which the City of Shagpat is visible among the yellow sands like

a white spot in the yolk of an egg. So by this time the eyes of the youth gave symptoms of a desire to look upon the things that be, peeping faintly beneath the lashes, and she exclaimed joyfully, raising her white hands above her head, 'One plunge in the lake, and life will be his again!'

Below them was a green lake, tinted by the dawn with crimson and yellow, deep, and with high banks. As they crossed it to the middle, she slipped off the youth from Koorookh, and he with a great plunge was received into the stillness of the lake. Meanwhile Koorookh quivered his wings and seized him when he arose, bearing him to an end of the lake, where stood one dressed like a Dervish, and it was the Vizier Feshnavat, the father of Noorna. So when he saw them, he shouted the shout of congratulation, catching Noorna to his breast, and Shibli Bagarag stretched as doth a heavy sleeper in his last doze, saying, in a yawning voice, 'What trouble? I wot there is nought more for us now that Shagpat is shaved! Oh, I have had a dream, a dream! He that is among Houris in Paradise dreameth not a dream like that. And I dreamed—'tis gone!'

Then said he, staring at them, 'Who be ye? What is this?'

Noorna, took him again to her bosom, and held him there; and she plucked a herb, and squeezed it till a drop from it fell on either of his lids, applying to them likewise a dew from the serpents of the Sword, and he awoke to the reality of things. Surely, then he prostrated himself and repeated the articles of his faith, taking one hand of his betrothed and kissing her; and he

embraced Abarak and Feshnavat, saying to the father of Noorna, 'I know, O Feshnavat, that by my folly and through my weakness I have lost time in this undertaking, but it shall be short work now with Shagpat. This thy daughter, the Eclipser of Reason, was ever such a prize as she? I will deserve her. Wullahy! I am now a new man, sprung like fire from ashes. Lo, I am revived by her for the great work.'

Said Abarak: 'O Master of the Event, secure now without delay the two slaves of the Sword, and lean the blade toward Aklis.'

Upon that, he ran up rapidly to the summit of the mountain and drew the Sword from his girdle, and leaned it toward Aklis, and it lengthened out over lands, the blade of it a beam of solid brilliance. Presently, from forth the invisible remoteness they saw the two Genii, Karavejis and Veejravoosh, and they were footing the blade swiftly, like stars, speeding up till they were within reach of the serpents of the hilt, when they dropped to the earth, bowing their heads; so he commanded them to rise, crying, 'Search ye the earth and its confines, and bring hither tidings of the Genie Karaz.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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