

THE BRONZE BUDDHA



• CORA LINN DANIELS •

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THE BRONZE BUDDHA

The Bronze Buddha

A Mystery

BY

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BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1899

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University Press
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

I Dedicate

The Bronze Buddha

TO MY BELOVED BROTHER

ABRAHAM CRESSY MORRISON

HIS NAME ADORNS MY WORK AS HIS CHARACTER
ADORNS HIS NAME

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CHAPTER FIRST

A PALM of enormous height stands in a maze of pampas grass. A great vulture hovers half way down the trunk. At its base a tiger lolls lazily beside his dead prey, — a negro mutilated and bleeding sprawled in the tiger's paws. The hot sand reflects a brassy yellow light. The atmosphere seems choking with intense heat.

Such was the wonderful picture of the great Russian painter before which I stood silent and motionless. It thrilled and fascinated me. I had come upon it suddenly as I turned a corner, and its tropic splendor, its human tragedy, its animal triumph and prophecy, touched me to the quick.

As I still stood there absorbed in deep thought, a most peculiar voice, — a voice so distinct yet so low, that it would remind you of an echo in a whispering gallery, said gently in my very ear, — "If this pleases you, what do you think of the bronze god who presides over such scenes?"

I turned with a start and saw a man whose face I hope you will never forget. How nature ever made

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an American (for he was an American) to look so thoroughly like a Hindoo I cannot conceive. His mellow, liquid, deep-brown eyes, prominent and full lips, bearded with jet, his straight, well drawn nose, his oriental complexion, his dignified gait and bearing, were so unique in one whom I still saw at once to be my own countryman, that he seemed to be an emanation from the picture itself, and should have been habited in rich colors and a turban!

“I have seen no bronze god,” I answered vaguely.

“There!” He pointed to the other corner.

On a pedestal of polished marble, sat the Bronze Buddha. He was enfolded in a mantle which draped his shoulders and arms gracefully. His legs, crossed upon one another, rested upon a crouching lion; in his right hand was a lotus blossom, in his left a roll of parchment. I had seen many Buddhas. Some were seated on a lion, some had many arms, — this one was the most human I had ever gazed upon. I say the most human. That was my first impression, with the strange Hindoo-looking man by my side, still pointing solemnly at the immense figure. But in a moment I gazed straight into the face.

What came over me? What was there in that piece of carved metal? Human? Nay, divine! Divine, with a divinity of mild, persuasive power — an unutterable, an infinite compassionate love. Pity and judgment, tenderness and command, attraction beyond endurance, drawing, drawing the very soul to bow and worship, radiated from that wonderful, that indescribable countenance.

Oblivious of the place, the man, the distant flock of

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sight-seers, I went forward, forward, nearer and nearer, until I seemed to feel the breath of the noble statue beat upon my bared forehead, and with a sigh of rapture, longing and irresistible adoration I murmured, "I will be thine!"

"Is that a pledge?" exclaimed my companion, and again I was startled by the marvellous quality of his voice. His eyes were now eager, fierce, full of a tiger-like cunning. He reminded me of the picture I had just seen. He bent forward and was looking deep into my eyes, as if to enchant me.

Something within me rose instantly to arms. Yet at the same time I felt weak as a child. For an instant I hesitated, wavered, and actually swayed as I stood, but before I could collect my thought to answer I again looked at the Bronze Buddha. Straightway a warm, soft glow pervaded me where my heart had seemed shrivelled with dread, and I turned to him and said indifferently "Not to you!" A second before I was ready to go anywhere, do anything this strange being desired: now I was utterly cool and positively antagonistic.

He laughed. "I think surely you are an American," he said, assuming a slight accent.

"Well, so are you," I replied calmly, "and I have been in India as well as you."

"Oh, we all travel!" he answered lightly. "But you seemed so enthusiastic," nodding his head at the image, "I thought perhaps you might wish to know something more of this masterpiece. Of course you have seen Buddhas, in all forms, sizes and shapes, but you may not know that this is the one perfect bit of

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art in that form which exists. I do not wonder you are entranced with its inimitable lines. The Greeks themselves, surrounded in those old ages by the wealth of their supreme genius, must have paused before this great work, which was old before they became civilized! Can you imagine the age of this bronze creation? It cannot be known positively, but the priest of the temple told Solon that it was brought from an isle of the sea thousands of years before his time! For my part," he added earnestly, "I believe it was the supreme god of Atlantis."

Whether it was the antagonism which he had excited by his sudden change of manner, which now had become as equable and smiling as that of the most easy courtier, or a strong feeling of the necessity of self-defence, I know not, but this babble about the bronze god in this commonplace way irritated me as if I had seen trespass upon some sacred thing.

My artistic nature, or perhaps the poet sense within me, had been so supernaturally affected by that immortal countenance, that I was still kneeling in my soul before it, and to hear this subtle, magnetic voice chatting on about its quality made me fairly tingle with annoyance. "I regard myself indebted to you, sir," said I, "for calling my attention to it, but if you will permit me I must go, since I have an engagement." "Certainly," he said, standing back, "only, as you will not see it again,—soon, if ever,—" and this was said so significantly, so triumphantly, that it seemed a mocking devil sat within his eye.

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“Very well!” I exclaimed, shrugging my shoulders and passing out of the room without another glance, either at him or the god. But although I had not allowed him to see it, his prophecy had struck home and left me as one desolate.

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CHAPTER SECOND

WHEN I had left the great picture gallery with its wealth of color, toned lights, rich tapestries and Vereschagin's most remarkable productions and had slowly passed out on to Madison Square, the cool, brisk wind of March, the driving gray clouds, rush of carriages, brilliant crowds passing along Twenty-third Street or sauntering by the array of hotels on Broadway were at first so incongruous, so inapplicable to my emotions that I seemed to have entered another world.

I could not comprehend it. I was thirty years old, had travelled both in this country and abroad for years, had visited occident and orient, seen a hundred cities, studied art and architecture in their homes of beauty; and why, in the prosaic city of New York, in a little gallery which could be "run over" in an hour, I should find myself quite unstrung by a few simple words with a stranger, a brief look at a Hindoo god, I felt annoyed to be obliged to conjecture.

As an antidote to my exaltation I drove around to my tailor and spent an hour in conjuring with him over a new theatre coat. I do not see why a man should not dress well. Puritan by birth and under that almighty pressure of inherited desire to "work," I had been able to do leisurely and thus "with might" whatever I had undertaken.

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If some of my New England relatives had shaken their heads and declared that my father's great fortune had made an idler of me, my sweet mother, who knew me, did not agree with them. An adequate leisure united with some reach of intellect may not be wholly valueless in results.

Coming along uptown, I stopped for my customary bunch of blossoms for my mother, and at last found myself seated at dinner with her. How can I describe my beautiful mother? Her hair was white as snow, although she was not sixty. Her eyes were so blue, so blue that I will not compare them to violets, — no, nor to the bluebird's wing, nor to that blue which hides shyly beneath the outer feathers on the peacock's breast, — but rather to the opaline blue in the gem which rivals the rainbow and carries the heart of the summer sky in its bosom.

The grace, the stateliness, yet the moving kindness of her way; the wise, soft look of ever-present love, — alert for her beloved, yet all mildness and sacrifice for them! And so young, witty, gay, wholesome, companionable! Idle! say you? If I had devoted my whole existence to such a mother, I should have grandly rounded out the purpose of my birth.

She sat now in the light of the rose-shaded candles, her delicate hands, sparkling with rings, moving quietly amid the silver and china as she handed me my black coffee.

"I think," she said hesitatingly, as she looked earnestly in my face, "that something has touched you strongly to-day, Arion."

"How intuitive you are, mother. It must be in

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my atmosphere that you feel it so quickly. Yes, I have been worshipping false gods. I do not know," I added hastily, "if that is true, however. If divinity is expressed so exquisitely as to appeal to the very soul, even through material, is it not a portion of God himself, or did not his spirit animate the artist? I have seen to-day the work of some foreign genius whose age and country antedate the pyramids. We have seen the Taj Mahal, dear, gazing upon its own loveliness in the mirror at its base. We felt the godhood in it, did we not? To-day I have seen a Buddha whose face has all the majesty and radiant beauty, graced with peace, that dwells in that pearl of great price."

"Where was it?" she questioned eagerly, a soft flush burning on her cheek.

"At the art gallery, and to-morrow you shall see it too."

But when to-morrow came it passed, and so did a week before we really went to see.

I confess when I entered the doors again a sense of reluctance and doubt took possession of me. I had by no means forgotten the mysterious stranger, nor his unpleasant prophecy. Yet as the exhibition would continue another week I had no reason to believe that I should not find the god safe on his pedestal. I had not mentioned the gentleman to my mother, since I did not care to recognize his influence, even to myself.

Leaving her to rest a moment after climbing the stairs, I went straight to the corner which contained the picture of the palm tree. It was there, in its

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impressive beauty, its superb technique, and seemed to have taken on an added life, by a streak of sunlight which lay across it. Slowly I then turned to verify my fears as to the disappearance of the god.

I think that not until I leave this flesh, and go where heaven itself shall satisfy me, shall I ever again behold a sight which will give me such a thrill of unspeakable joy. The Bronze Buddha had been removed, and standing on the low pedestal, her face turned full toward me and gazing into my eyes with a look of innocent delight, stood a young girl.

She had evidently been to a reception, for she had on a gown of soft snowy silk, which glistened like frost, and was flowed over, here and there, with lace foams as of the sea. Her long velvet garment of dove gray, thrown half back, was bordered richly with a silver fur, while her gray-plumed hat caressed her rippling hair, whose wealth of gold made a nimbus around a face too fair for words.

Her look at me was one of absolute pleasure, as if she had seen something that did her very being good; and if her glance was but for an instant, it must have reflected mine like a mirror, for I know of no moment in my whole life so full, so ecstatic, as when I first adored her face.

While I involuntarily bowed my head and stood aside when she stepped softly down from the pedestal, as if a queen had moved from the dais of her throne, and passed on into the larger apartment, I again found myself drawn with an irresistible attraction after her, and as if the Buddha had reincarnated himself again in this living form of beauty, I mur-

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mured with still greater fervor than before, "I will be thine."

Following the one woman in all the world for me, I saw her go straight by my dear mother, who instantly looked at her with an expression of deep interest, and saw her approach a gentleman, whose feeble air and an extra furred wrap thrown about him indicated an invalid condition. She bent over him with a mingled solicitude and strength, as if accustomed to place her youth and sweet vitality between him and the too rough wind of the world, and in an instant I was transfixed by the tone of her voice.

If a harp is strongly struck into rich chords in a room where another harp is standing, an echo, elfin and eerie but strangely pure and delicate, will answer note for note and tone for tone. So her voice, richened and harmonized, mellowed and spiritualized and without one discordant strain in it, echoed the music of that strange organ I had heard from the stranger of a week ago.

"The Buddha is gone, dear father. Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry! But I will do all in my power to find where it may be."

The old man turned, if possible, still more pale, and a look of one at bay, baffled again and again, came over his fine intellectual features.

"Will it never be?" he asked querulously, grasping her hand and rising slowly. "Must I die and fail!"

I could see the delicately moulded lip quiver an instant, and then his daughter smiled bravely in his eyes.

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"Why, father, it was probably not the one," she said, "I should laugh to find what we have searched the world for, right in our own city! It was only a conjecture of mine, and I presume it is in some auction room even now."

"Let us go and ask at once," he said eagerly, his form straightening itself with eager impulse, and they at once proceeded to the ticket office.

I sank down beside my mother as if unnerved. I can take my training for a boat race or a football match, and have been known to win in a good round wrestle; I can swim, — I crossed the Hellespont once, just to say I had done it; some of those gracious people who enjoy calling me an idler also have indulged themselves in calling me a cowboy, since I have ranged the plains for weeks together; but there was some magic in that glance and voice, some soft, delicious languor which entered into my very sinews, which made me look into the womanly face regarding me, with what appeared to be a revelation.

"Have you ever seen her before?"

"No."

"And is the Bronze Buddha really gone?"

"Yes, and she was standing in its place. She had a look of infinite delight in her eyes, as if she heard the music of the highest heaven, and in her absorption she happened to gaze straight at me!"

"And you?"

"I loved her," I said simply.

"I do not blame you," said my highbred mother in reply, grasping my hand strongly. "I loved her too."

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Such was the atmosphere that this young girl shed around her, that her purity and goodness, the radiance of her beauty and the firm sweetness of her character, were at once impressed upon souls capable of perceiving it. The aristocracy of intellect and heart were her passport to the very sanctuaries of human approval.

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CHAPTER THIRD

I SPENT a moment dreaming as I stood by my mother and then rousing myself exclaimed, "But I shall lose her, — wait for me, dear!" and hurried toward the entrance.

Running down the stairs I was just in time to see a footman slam the door of an elegant coupé and jump up beside the coachman on the box. They drove off instantly, up Madison Avenue, and I could not see whether the carriage contained the old gentleman and his daughter or not. A horsecar had also just passed and was making its way across Broadway, but I had not been in time to see them enter it, had they done so.

Disappointed and unsettled, I stood in the doorway for some time, trying to compose myself and to think why it was that on these two occasions the art gallery had been full of an atmosphere of such intense emotion. Finally I slowly went back to the ticket-taker and said, "Where is the Bronze Buddha that was here a week or ten days ago?"

Instead of replying the young man gazed at me in a state of incredulous surprise. At length he said, "That's what those last people asked, who just went out! Are you of their party?"

I thought him insolent and answered haughtily, "I am not. Cannot you answer a civil question?"

"I never noticed any Bronze Buddha," said the man sullenly, "I don't know what you are talking

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about!" and it seemed as if he would add, "You are as mad as a March hare!"

"Never noticed any Bronze Buddha!" I exclaimed testily. "You are a pretty fellow to be placed in an art gallery. Do you know what a Buddha is?"

"Yaas, I do," drawled the man, this time with intentional insolence. "I've seen 'em in Hindoo temples and I've seen 'em in Sypher's and I've seen 'em in museums! I've been around the world some myself, and I've seen more Buddhas and gods and idols than you could cram into this hall,—but there hain't any Bronze Buddha here, an' I don't believe there has been during this exhibition, and I don't want you to talk that way, anyway!" He ended up half humorously and tipped me a wink. For a moment I was dumfounded.

"Come, my man, no joking," said I, seriously; "perhaps this will enlighten you a little," slipping a dollar into his hand. "I am really very anxious to know something of the god which was in the same room with the curiosities and ornaments. What has been done with it?"

"Dicky, you 'tend to the tickets," said the fellow to an attendant boy, "and I'll go and see what you mean," turning to me.

We went at once to the pedestal, on which so short a time before had stood the embodiment of living beauty and purity.

"It stood here," said I quietly.

"How long ago?" asked the man.

"Not more than two weeks ago. It was on the 15th," turning to my notebook.

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“Well, sir,” answered my companion, “you have made a mistake in the gallery. The statue that stood on that pedestal, and which was sold and taken away this morning, was a marble woman, called “The Bather,”—you can see it,—No. 43 on your catalogue. If the image was here at all it could not have been for any length of time, and truly, I don’t think there was a Buddha nor anything that looked like one in this collection. You and them folks that wanted to know must a’ both seen it somers else. I know, for I’ve been here every day. I’ve been a sailor and knocked around the world a good deal, so I’ve seen all sorts of things,—and honest, you’re all off.”

“Thank you,” I replied quietly, seeing he was determined to know nothing. “It must certainly have been in some other gallery. I am sorry to have troubled you.”

“Oh, sir,” replied the man respectfully, “I hope you won’t mind my chaffin’ you at first,—to tell the truth, I thought you were all crazy, the young lady was so sure of it and then you, coming along about the same thing! If there is anything I could do for you,—hunt it up, say,—I have three or four hours every morning and could look about,—”

I caught at the idea at once. “Did the young lady seem to be astonished or disappointed?”

“Yes, she did! She looked so astonished that she could not speak, and when I told her for a fact I believed that she was mistaken, the old gentleman leaned on her so hard I thought he was going to faint. ‘Then you cannot give us any information,’ says she,

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looking beautiful out of her eyes, and says I, 'No, Miss, honest, I don't know a thing about it!' The old man said 'Sold,' and she nodded mournfully, and they went downstairs."

"Had you ever seen her before?" I inquired.

"No, sir. If I had I should have remembered her, she was such a lady."

I stood thinking a few minutes and then said, "Here is my card. If you find the Bronze Buddha for me within ten days, I will give you forty dollars. That is fair pay for searching the city. Report every evening at seven."

Then I went back to my mother, who had waited with admirable patience, and detailed to her the strange outcome of my inquiries, and ended by saying: —

"If the man has been ordered or bribed not to tell to whom the statue has been sold, and has taken this odd way of concealing his knowledge, I think in ten days he will wish to receive forty dollars sufficiently to re-discover it. He seems to be a clever young Yankee, shrewd, 'sassy' and talkative, but no fool, by any means; and he either don't know what a Buddha is, or some way missed noticing it, or else is bribed not to tell. I fancy we shall get at the bottom of this mystery in a short time."

"But that sweet star!" she exclaimed wistfully; "will she ever rise again on our horizon?"

"Mamma, I could kiss you right here! We will alter our horizon — aye, around the whole world, but she shall beam on us again!" I answered.

As we entered our own carriage and were driven

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out to the park, Mrs. Estcourt suddenly closed her hand over mine.

“Arion, my son,” said she, gently but firmly, “I have thought for some time that you were ready to meet the counterpart of your soul. Do not think me to be like most mothers. I long to see you love, love so that your nature shall become rounded and complete. If we have made no mistake we have found the very soul that should mate your own. Let nothing stand between you but dishonor.”

My heart gave a leap, and I clinched my hand.

“I do not think dishonor could for one moment attach itself to her destiny,” I said; “she seems to disarm evil. But there is something else, it seems, mother mine, that you have forgotten.”

“What is that?” she asked anxiously.

“We do not know who she is. We have lost her.”

Mrs. Estcourt laughed.

“Then we will have the pleasure of finding her,” said she.

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CHAPTER FOURTH

I SPENT a week in the most earnest search, nor did I spare money where it could be used to advantage. Remembering the speech, "We could hardly expect to find it here in our own city," I concluded that my "star" was a resident of New York. Remembering her reception costume, I looked up every report of teas, dinners, receptions and weddings that had taken place on that day, and having noted the livery of the servants on the coupé, placed the description in the hands of an able detective, in hopes that the carriage would lead to a knowledge of the occupants. I felt some scruples over taking this measure, since I knew the indelicacy of "shadowing" a stranger; but as all I desired to know was who they were, I silenced my conscience and persisted in making every possible inquiry, at the clubs and among my friends.

I had little hope that the young lady would return to the gallery, where she had been so disappointed, unless, drawn by curiosity over the strange statement of the ticket agent, she might return to assure herself that she had understood correctly. "There had never been any Buddha there" must certainly have struck her as strangely as it had myself, especially as the fellow had seemed to be thoroughly in earnest, and honest.

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Still, I haunted the spot, and watched the people going in or coming out, or went in and spent hours myself, often going to look at the pedestal which had now been graced by another statue which seemed to mock me.

Obed Spear, who was always at his post in the afternoon, reported day after day that he could find no trace of the lost god. The ten days passed and nothing had been accomplished. Night after night Spear had called at the house and described the places he had ransacked, from the Metropolitan Museum to a dealer in junk on the wharves, but not one hint could he obtain of the idol. His theory was always the same; that we had all seen it in some other gallery and it had been sold to some private buyer during the two weeks which had passed, and so it had been transferred to some residence or perhaps shipped abroad. On the tenth night he exclaimed, "Well, I'll have to give it up, governor! I can't find the pesky thing, and I'm sorry."

"I suppose you feel that you have lost a pretty good sum as well as the god!" I exclaimed with a smile.

"I did n't lose no god," said he. "I know there war n't none. But I hain't found it, so I ain't entitled to nothin', as per contract;" and he took up his hat to go.

"I am sorry also," said I; "but it can't be helped. I thank you very much for the trouble you have taken. If I ever need you again I will let you know."

Obed Spear looked a little disappointed, but said

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nothing, and bidding a respectful good-night, went away.

My mother had watched these proceedings with astonishment. As soon as the man disappeared, she exclaimed, "Why, Arion! you did not pay the man for his trouble! I never saw you do anything like that before. What if he could not find it for you? I am sure he has earned his money. How strange!"

"Of course I mean to pay him, mother; but he may have counted on my generosity and still kept his secret. He may know well enough where the Buddha is, but thinks, or thought, I would pay him for his work whether he found it or not. Now I shall wait a few days, and if he does not come and tell me what he knows, I shall be obliged to conclude that he is honest, and will pay him, forthwith."

And so it happened. We heard nothing from the man for a week. I then went to the gallery and found him selling tickets as usual. "Nothing yet?"

"Nothing, I am sorry, sir."

"Obed," I exclaimed, "I believe you to be an honest man."

"I am, sir. We don't believe in lying, down round our parts; and I wouldn't lie to a man like you, sir, anyway."

"You don't think me crazy, then, do you?"

Obed hesitated: "Wall, only a little 'lucinated on one idea," he admitted gingerly.

"Then that young lady must have been 'lucinated' too!" with a smile.

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"I guess she would think about as you would," he replied shrewdly.

"Is this a permanent position of yours?"

"No; I don't expect to hev it long. I am just takin' the place of my brother, who's sick. He's coming back next Monday."

"Do you know the duties of a courier?"

"Wall, I never was a gentleman's man; but I've knocked around some considerable and seen what they do. I was on a big steamer as under-steward onct."

"If you would like the position, I should like you to learn your duties thoroughly from a person whom I know can teach you, and I will employ you — permanently."

Obed looked curiously uncertain. Finally he said, "Are you good pay?"

I laughed aloud.

"Better than I have so far given proof," I said. "Here are your forty dollars. On Monday come to the house, and I will arrange for your lessons. I have no doubt you will excel your teacher, who is English, and a master of his art."

Going again into the open air, a sense of depression, even despair, overcame me. "It is useless," I thought. "I shall never find her. She is searching for the Bronze Buddha, and I am searching for her; and 'there aint no Buddha.' Is there a girl?"

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CHAPTER FIFTH

I SUPPOSE that in the course of the following five or six weeks I became nervous. I had often heard people speak of their nerves, but the word was Greek to me. I had always had perfect health. There was, however, in this constant searching, planning, thinking, working on one idea a certain strain, a tense drawing of the life-strings over which the bow of emotion constantly swept. Fear, hope, imagination, curiosity, attraction of every soul-force toward that beautiful invisible object, drew strange music from my heart and blanched my face.

I think some of my friends grew suspicious of me and fancied I was beginning to be dissipated. "Is Arion drinking?" I heard dear old Mr. Southey say, as I passed him going up the steps of the club. "He looks out of tone!" But I was not out of tone! I never had been in tone before! My being rang with the sweetest melody that human soul can know, and within me sung itself to heavenly chords and divine harmonies. All I needed was that voice, that tender, strong, rich voice to mingle voluntarily with the splendid music of my accompanying love, to make a tone unspeakable and full of loveliness.

All of a sudden I heard it!

I was sitting in one of the windows of Delmonico's, listlessly arranging a salad, — more listlessly looking

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out on the people who passed, — caring for nothing, it seemed, for I had come to one of those strange halts of feeling which are the intervals of intense excitement.

“No!” it said, “just as I prophesied, you did not see the Bronze Buddha again.”

The strange gentleman of the art gallery was daintily poising his white fingers on the top of the opposite chair, and looking down at me with a quizzical smile.

For a moment I could have lunged out my good right arm and struck him full in the breast, his voice so angered me, — its mockery of hers, — its same quality, timbre, charm, but mixed with the cynicism, the worldly scorn, the experience and implied mischievousness of his. There was something within me that for a second time came to my rescue with this man. Instantly I was as cool as the salad so crisply adorning my dish.

“Oh, that is simply a matter of time. Won't you join me?” and I rose to express my hospitality.

He gave a warm, brilliant smile which utterly belied every expression I had ever seen on his face, and opening his card-case, replied, “Not until you have my card,” which he passed over to me. I read, “Henrich St. John Dusart, R. A. S.,” and bowing offered my own. He took it but said, “It is not necessary, I know who you are,” and with another smile, in which I actually caught a gleam of affection, seated himself and prepared his order with an air of good comradeship which disarmed every antagonistic feeling that had pervaded me.

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He too merely took a salad, as he said he expected to dine later, and for a while we ate and chatted of any and every thing in the way a man will with a new acquaintance, but we all the time knew we were studying each other to the most minute details. I first noted the richness yet absolute quietness of his attire. London cloth and American made, I decided, — and admitted that was the acme of art in man's dress.

But the more I criticised the less I could determine his age. He was young and old at once. Young men may have white hair, old men may be fair and as unwrinkled as a girl. He ate sparingly but with relish.

After a short time he looked up very graciously, as if we had met here for a certain purpose and had simply deferred it from courtesy, and remarked, "We might as well come to the point?"

At once, like magic, I became cold and on the defensive. "I suppose so," said I.

"What would you give to see the Buddha again?"

"I presume your price would be beyond my means," I responded, with moderate interest.

"I think not," he said positively.

"You bought it, then?" said I.

He laughed with a strong, sweet laughter, like big bells, just touched.

"Those things are not bought or sold. Love wins them," he answered. "Do you think you have love enough in you to really see the Buddha? Remember your pledge to him! It is yourself, nothing less."

Back came the memory, sharply, vividly, of my

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bowing my head before that strange idol and murmuring, "I will be thine!" I think I looked this strange man in the face with a fierce look, — a look a man gives when he poises himself for a "rush" at football, or when he awaits the word "Go" in a race.

Before I could utter my assent, "That will do," he said; "if we have finished shall we take a little walk?"

He turned up Fifth Avenue and moved along with the step of a great, lithe animal.

I wish I could give you a proper picture of his gait. It was stately as a ship, coming in under full sail, swinging almost imperceptibly as if in a stiff breeze, yet velvety as the creep of a panther. The broad street was quiet, for it was now nine o'clock and the rush of carriages to the theatres was over.

We had sauntered along nearly to Fifty-seventh Street when we turned through to Madison Avenue and soon went up the steps of a corner house, evidently recently built, for architecturally it was sumptuous and refined.

I was amazed at the great size of the hall, which was as roomy as one of a Colonial mansion in the country. It was also so homelike and full of a fragrance of wholesome, rich, daily life that I certainly expected to see a white-haired lady or a mother with a group of pretty children in any nook or corner. But silence, perfect, undisturbed silence seemed to have locked the household in its embrace.

A few embers glowed in the glorious fireplace, and wheeling me a great chair, my host said, "I will be with you presently," and left me to my own devices.

Soon returning, he said with a smile, "My favorite

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rooms are at the top of the house," and a little fellow dressed something like a Lord Fauntleroy took us up on the elevator. We went at once into a roof-conservatory which seemed to be at least sixty feet long. It was a wilderness of beauty, hung everywhere with electric lights in the softest shades and designs of bells and blossoms.

Having wandered about the various paths and noted some of the rare ferns, palms and orchids, we came to a spiral iron staircase, and pointing down, he said, stepping softly and just touching my hand, to invite me to follow: "Now we shall see what we shall see."

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CHAPTER SIXTH

WHEN we came to the bottom of the winding stair we stepped into a place of utter darkness. My host gave my hand a closer pressure and I felt his breath on my cheek.

“You fear nothing?” said he. I laughed. “Perhaps *you* do.” “I do!” he answered earnestly. “I fear that even now, well as I have judged you, I have made a mistake. It is hard to find in this world a man who is like crystal, — pure, clear, clean and brilliant. I would have a soul that would reflect my own!” “My dear sir,” said I, drawing back, “whatever you have fancied to show me you need not show! I have demanded nothing and claim nothing. I have not thrust myself or my desires upon you. If you do not wish my society further, permit me to go. If you are expecting anything other than the very common and very human from me, I assure you do not go on. I am no miracle!” “I expect nothing until I gain it,” he answered in a sullen tone, at the same time opening a padded door, through which not one ray of the blinding light which followed had come.

We passed into a circular chamber, domed with glass, which probably lighted it by day, and doubtless extended up far into the conservatory above. It was supported by alternate Doric and Corinthian

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columns of white and gold. On one side an immense double curtain hung from a grand scroll of silver, and was composed of royal blue velvet, studded at regular intervals with the French fleur-de-lis. I confess, on the first instant of observing this, my lip rolled a little in passing scorn and the thought "He chooses to appear imperial," crossed me.

But I was soon noting the remarkable effect of the globes which covered the innumerable electric lights that flashed in all directions, high and low. They were of flames, done in scarlet and yellows, bursting out from the walls in tongues and flaring up in jets of all the shades of fire, so that for a moment the bewildered senses might dream the whole apartment was in a blaze. The brilliant lights toned by the immense and sombre curtains had an indescribable effect of solemn richness, terror and surprise, and it was not until I had been seated that I perceived the carpet was as soft as the mosses of a sunny wood, the furnishings and decorations rare and exquisite as a dream of art.

He remained silent for some time, abstractedly gazing at the curtain and then turning to me, with a penetrating, compelling gaze such as I had never seen. I did not break in upon his silence, since courtesy forbade it and I could but involuntarily yield to the spell of this beautiful place.

At ease upon a divan heaped with pillows, and in the presence of a personage so different from any whom I had ever met, — charmed by his smile at one moment, yet instinctively on my guard the next, — I was fascinated into a mood of complacency and

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expectancy which would accept as possible even the most improbable occurrence.

In truth, behind those folded velvets I believed the Bronze Buddha to sit enthroned, and that some day, if not now, I should be allowed to gaze upon his wondrous countenance. With this thought came the remembrance of my star. Her fair, radiant countenance became to me so vivid, that I believe in that one quick meeting every line had been impressed indelibly upon my heart. She too longed to see the Buddha, — “She, with her beloved father, is seeking for it,” — I thought; and the idea that I, I should be the one to give her her heart’s desire, drove the blood in quick beats to my head and flushed me as with fever.

I had been pensively gazing at the tiger rug at my feet, waiting for Dusart to speak when I raised my head and found him looking at me with eyes of the most profound intuition. He seemed to be reading my very soul and answered my thought with a baffling, mysterious smile. “Will you look upon your heart’s desire?” said he, strangely repeating the very words in my mind. “If it please you, yes.”

A strange soft Eastern music began to creep upon our ears, as if evoked from the flames of light about us. For it did not sound as if from one point or one instrument, but in fairy-like measure came from all points at once, pervading and fulfilling the atmosphere until it seemed as if we breathed it! So ethereal and delicate were the tones that no wind-harp ever sighed so.

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If I had been transported to some sultan's harem and found myself among the fabled beauties of his palace, I could not have listened to more entrancing harmonies. I could almost see in my mind's eye the dancing feet of some houri, her tinkling tambourine, her fluttering draperies. But even in the midst of this voluptuous sound, the remembrance of one so beautiful in her unspeakable purity as to touch my spirit with instant reverence turned my imagination away to a nobler, deeper channel.

Without a motion from him that I could see, the huge velvet draperies began to melt fold within fold together, their silken linings making a rustle as of autumn leaves on a wind-swept lawn. Behind, — nothing, — nothing that I could at all distinguish. It was as if we were looking out into space. I could have thought myself a thousand feet in air and gazing from a turret on to a sea of mist, so blank was the invisible, the palpable nothingness and endlessness of the interval between those parted hangings.

The music went on, sweeter still, and then from out the utter blank of the space grew, or formed, or came, I know not which, a being so beautiful that I shall not dare describe it in cold prose.

For forth with sudden bound
A lovely woman sprang, with garments light
As thistledown or cobweb, yet her face
Shrouded in gauze as if for very shame.
Her little feet scarce seemed to touch the ground.
One brief sweet instant silent in her place
She stood, and then began to sing, and move
With gentlest, sinuous motion. Round her form
The silken tissues stole as if in love

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With her sweet-moulded limbs, so soft and warm.
Now back she fled and now she forward came
With eyes of mild reproach which when more near
Flamed down into the depths of those they met
With languorous pleading and half coy desire ;
Or soon, with slow approach, a sudden fire
O'erflushed her cheek and forehead, fairer yet
For being half-concealed, and as with fear
Or feeling uncontrolled she trembling drew
Her slender hands her unbound tresses through.
So graceful and so joyous, she seemed thrilled
With that delicious madness music makes
When in great waves of harmony it breaks
Over the answering form with transport filled.
Then as a dream she vanished, —

but not until, with a last, long, dreamy look at me,
she raised the gauze from about her lips and dis-
closed the unmistakable features of — how can my
lips utter it! — the face of my *Star*.

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CHAPTER SEVENTH

THE revulsion of feeling from enchantment to pain was so keen that for a moment I could hardly breathe. Then in blind, unreasoning rage I sprang upon him and clutched him by the throat. "This is a lie!" I cried, "a stupendous lie! a damnable mockery and insult, for which you shall give years to atone! Do you think I will bear this travesty on her! this profanation of her purity!"

But even while I spoke, he melted from my grasp, the lights went out and I found myself speaking to utter darkness and silence, and I knew myself to be alone.

I sank back on the pillows and sat there I know not how long. Not a murmur, a passing air broke the profound stillness.

Revolving the whole series of incidents in my mind from beginning to end, I came to the conclusion that I had been made the sport of a clever hypnotist. But then, I was obliged to admit the reality of the people whom not only I but my mother and Obed Spear had seen. The Bronze Buddha also, I could swear, was a reality,—and what connection could this man have with her, the image of perfection in my soul!

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He had not been present at our meeting, — he knew nothing of my search, unless, — unless Obed Spear, — now my agent, — was Obed Spear his tool, and for his own purposes had he made me take him into my service? But what could this strange man want of me? Surely with these luxurious surroundings he could not need money. So my mind travelled in vague and annoyed speculation, until I rose with a weary sigh.

I must leave this place, at any rate. I remembered that the door was immediately behind me. Opening it without difficulty I saw a broad, richly carpeted stairway before me, lit delightfully by cressets of electricity, and slowly passing down it, came at once into a grand dining-room, where, before a table spread daintily with every delicacy, by which two sanctimonious lackeys stood quietly, I beheld my host, holding out his hand and welcoming me with old-school politeness.

“That was an unpleasant dream, was n’t it?” he said kindly, giving me a look of mingled regard and esteem. “Let us forget it in a dish of strawberries.”

“Do you think that I will break bread with you?” I began indignantly, stepping back from his proffered hand.

He answered with a touch of pathos and sharp pain in his voice. “Had I not cared for you, Arion, I would not have put you to that test. Can you not trust me, since you are victorious?”

And whether hypnotized or not, I felt my anger go out of my heart and almost the memory of it out

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of my mind, — and foolishly or not, sat down and ate with him. The servants dismissed and some light wine set on the polished board, he turned to me with a look of peace and restfulness.

“I suppose you think me very wrong to have shown you an idol with feet of clay. You resent the slightest blemish in your ideal. Your reverence and tenderness, your poetry and purity, you think, have been shocked and sullied by the picture of a lily dancing, not on its own stem, but as dance those daughters of the East who are the embodiment of natural emotion.”

“I resented and I still resent the appearance, even, of evil in her, — tho’ it be nothing but a thought, a film, a subtle shadow, a dream, a reflection. Whatever it was, it *was not she*, and no man’s mind should dwell upon her beauty to make it appear, even in his own imagination, as anything but angel pure. I know, well enough, that what I resent is nothing. It was not she, she knows nothing of it, she has no connection with it, and if she knew of it her eyes would droop with terrified shame. I do not even know if you produced it, or how you did it, but I do know that while physically and morally and conventionally I have nothing to anger me, yet my spirit is enraged for her, and will seek her defence, — impalpable as it was!”

“Thank you,” he said, gently. “Every word you utter convinces me that I was just in my estimation of your loyalty and honor to whatever you may have sworn allegiance. But you speak of ‘her’ as if of a real person, some beloved and respected being whom

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I have injured. May I ask who it may be? Mother, sister, sweetheart?"

I felt dumfounded. I must have looked at him with a very strange expression. Finally I answered, "I do not know." It was his turn to look extremely perplexed. "The dancing girl you saw was some one you do not know, and yet one for whom you claim unspeakable purity? She was not an ideal? You found her a real person, whom you still do not know, yet could almost take my life for showing her to you?" He laughed cynically.

"Showing her to me!" I exclaimed, almost madly. "You do not mean to tell me she existed, — that she was really there!" and the horror of it, the thought that my Star should really be under the influence of this man, — kept beneath his roof, the plaything of his eccentricity, shook me from head to foot.

"In this mood I will tell you nothing. We simply do not understand each other, that is all. I intended to give to you the inmost core of my life. It would have been a great gift. But you must prove yourself worthy of it, and able to accept it. Go now, Arion, and let me ask you to trust me, in the going, so that by and by you will be coming also. I will not declare myself to you, whether I am good or bad, — that your own intuition or experience should determine; but I assure you of this: into your soul, at least, no harm shall ever go from mine."

He stood at the door himself for a moment, watching me walk lingeringly down the street.

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CHAPTER EIGHTH

COUCHED in one of the hollows behind those exquisite palisades of lower New York Bay, which face on open ocean and bear the twin lights of the Navesink Highlands, was a quaint and roomy mansion built by some wealthy owner of a half century ago, but kept up for all those years with systematic care.

The long French windows opening on the broad piazza, the fresh green lawn running to the solid stone wall which bounds the sparkling river waters, were full of summer sunshine before the glory of early autumn. Secluded in its own park, yet easily accessible from the highroad or by water, this refined and elegant home had been for many years a hidden but beautiful nest for the young woman who at this moment entered the large library with a happy laugh.

Stately yet graceful, tall yet lithe as an animal, her motions seemed the easy swing of flowers in the wind, yet her firm, strong step was full of animated will and perfect self-poise. In her hand was a large wreath of wild flowers, deftly woven into a luxuriant circle of color, while the snowy cloud of her draperies gave her the appearance of a nymph of the woods.

The pale and silent old man who was reclining in a large invalid-chair, musing and dreaming, looked up

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with a patient smile, filled with a painful sense of something coming of which she did not dream.

"How happy you look, sweet," he murmured gently, "how happy and how young!"

"But I am not so very young, Papa! Don't you know? This is my birthday. I am twenty-two!" As she said this she laid the wreath lovingly in his lap, and added, "This is my thanks, dear, for twenty-two blessed years."

He pulled the fresh, fair face down and gave the cheek a kiss, and then drawing her beside him, answered, "My daughter, I hope I have been a kind father to you. I do not wish to cloud your happiness so soon, and I would that it should never be, for your sake; but darling, I am not very well this morning, and I know myself so surely, that I do not think I am to stay with you very long!"

She gave a quick, frightened glance at his face and then smiled happily as if reassured. "Oh, when you take your little walk with me you will feel better!" and she began to half raise him from the chair.

"No, child, not now, not to-day. I have much else to do. You are twenty-two, quite a woman, Sylvia, and soon you must act like one. The responsibilities of your life must inevitably become your own, and I believe it is now the time to tell you what your destiny must be."

"Must be?" murmured the girl slowly. "Is one's destiny, then, so marked that one must abide by it beforehand?"

"Not always, but in your case, I think, yes. You know, my child, the object to which my whole exist-

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ence since your birth has been devoted? It is your destiny to carry it on."

She rose and walked hastily once or twice across the floor. "Father," said she gently, "I know that our life of wandering from place to place, occasionally coming back to our home here for you to gain more strength to travel, has been going on for almost twenty years, but why the pursuit of the Bronze Buddha has been such a passion with you, I have never been told, — and please give me the credit for obeying you strictly, — I have never asked."

"I relieve you of the duty of silence," he rejoined softly. "You may ask and I will answer you."

She came swiftly back to her old seat and clasping his hands tightly broke into a gay laugh. "Then woman's curiosity is to be gratified! The grand question of our existence is to be answered! I am to know! Oh, father, let me thank you! I could not have borne it much longer!"

The old man gazed at her with such fond love that tears slowly gathered in his eyes. "What confidence you place in me! How sure you are that I am good, noble and right!"

"Why certainly," she answered almost carelessly, "but that is not the point! What, who, where, why? The Buddha, father, the Buddha!"

"Give me some wine, Sylvia," he uttered quickly, a ghastly paleness creeping over the already pallid face. "I feel worse."

She sprang to obey, and he soon seemed to revive a little. Speaking rapidly he said, "The pursuit of this bronze god of the Indian people has been a life-

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work with me for reasons which you will know after my death. You have trusted me all your life, trust me now. When I am gone, let nothing deter you from the search after that statue. I have so arranged the money belonging to you that a certain income, over and above a reasonable sum quite sufficient for your comfortable support, shall be devoted by you to the purpose.

“Believe me, child, you will never regret finding the god. There is in a certain bank a sum reserved for its purchase when you find it. It must, it will be quite sufficient.

“When you find it, at no matter how many years of search or expense or trial, have it brought to this place, and in the strong brick building which you know I long ago built for its reception, with the utmost care and secrecy, shut in and free from all observation but that of persons whom you can wholly, fully trust, do that which I shall direct. Beware of trusting many and let them be well tried.”

The young girl remained silent, her head bowed in thought. Finally raising it with a quick peremptory motion full of will and character she replied, “Father, I am not willing to dedicate my whole life to this object.”

A look of anxiety almost amounting to anguish swept over his countenance. “What! shall all my time, work and life be wasted, my hopes be frustrated, my ambition killed, and by you?”

“I said ‘all my life’,” she replied. “Father, have I not seen you grow old, weary and ill, from unre-

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quited hope? Have we not hastened from one end of the world to the other, and always fruitlessly? Have we not devoted our time, thought, energy, money, and almost our feeling of being human, to this god who fascinates you? And what has come of it! I am amazed when I think of the health and money that have been lost in this strange enterprise. And if we should achieve the god and have him for our very own what possible good could come of it? It is but a curio, a bit of ancient art! And do you wish to leave this to me as a heritage? Say rather a bondage, a thralldom, an imprisonment, a burden beyond bearing! I cannot bear it! I will not bear it!"

Her father watched her with an expression bordering on frenzy, so great was its anxiety. At last, —

"Then, Sylvia," he uttered in a low tone, so humbly, so pleadingly, that it seemed like the sighs of his spirit uttering themselves, "how long will you bear it?"

She came back and looked with all a daughter's love and pity upon the haggard face before her.

"Father," she answered gently, "since you so desire it, I promise when the burden rests upon me," and her voice trembled with sorrow and apprehension, "I will bear it five years."

"Swear it!" he exclaimed with sudden energy. "Swear it, Sylvia."

She stood patiently before him and said solemnly, "I will search for the Bronze Buddha for five years, so help me God."

Sinking at his feet, pale herself and shivering as with cold, she again clasped his hands and said ear-

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nestly, "But now I am to know. Tell me its history."

"I have left it all," he muttered vaguely, "you know, — in the safe, — all written. I feel worse, — I don't think I feel so well," and then, holding her hands with a strong, sudden grasp he cried out, "I am going! going! but do not be afraid, — death is but a trifling change, an incident!" and with a sigh of utter weariness, his head fell forward on her shoulder.

Raising him quickly, she ran to the bell and calling "Doyle, Doyle," was back at his side. But young as she was, she knew instinctively that the long-tried spirit had passed away, the "incident of death" had occurred.

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CHAPTER NINTH

AFTER the necessary preliminaries to the funeral had been carefully carried out by their faithful servant Doyle and his good and sensible wife, and the soft, summer night had settled down over the silent valley, Sylvia, whose weeping had been quiet and self-controlled, sat in her moon-flooded chamber, thinking now with the hopelessness of a great grief, now with a dim hope springing from youth and health, of her utter loneliness.

From her earliest remembrance this had been her home, but rarely to its doors had come guests and never to her knowledge any relatives. For years at a time her father and she had been in foreign countries, travelling here and there, by sea or land, wherever the least seeming clue could be obtained of the bronze god who had become the ruling factor in their lives.

Educated by her father systematically and carefully, studying patiently under any and all circumstances, she had become a proficient linguist and remarkably conversant with the various tongues of the east. At home in India, in Persia, in China, in Japan, sometimes for many months in Rome or Paris, making a thousand acquaintances but very few friends from the very fact of the short time spent in any one place, or the suddenness with which they would be parted, never to meet again, she felt like a

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waif of life, left to drift alone on the well known, yet unknown sea of the world.

To her knowledge not a relative on either side of her house remained to her. Her mother, whose beautiful and distinguished face shone upon her from a portrait in the library, had died when she was born. Her grandparents had been dead some years, and of uncles, aunts or cousins, not one had ever been mentioned by her father nor in all her travels had she ever met a person whom her father had seemed to know in his youth.

A more isolated life, in the very midst of the crowds of the world, could hardly be imagined than that imposed upon this young girl by the secrecy of her father's ambition.

"Never to mention it, never to ask questions, always to listen, watch and note any possible clue to the finding of the statue," had been the rule, the discipline and the one enforced duty of her life.

Denied nothing of elegance in dress or luxury in appointments, eagerly pushed for the moment into the companionship of those people whom they met, her knowledge of society in this desultory and fleeting manner had made her a cultured, strong and able woman of the world; yet debarred by the constant changes in her existence from any intimacy or friendship with either children, women or men, she had grown up to be a great, sweet nature, unsullied by contact with many, conversant with yet inexperienced in those domestic, social and emotional phases of human nature which she could see all about her but never as yet in herself could understand.

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Old for her years yet innocently childlike in her feelings, she was on the point of blossoming, yet still fragrant in the bud. A learned woman, read deeply in old philosophy, a learned woman, read broadly in actual life, a learned woman, read keenly in every phase of cosmopolitan manners and everyday events, but unlearned in those sweet and delicate moods of womanly confidence, sympathy and comprehension which can only come with personal association with some agreeable household, whose events, memories and history had some connection with her own.

She now set herself to send out the notices of her father's death to those whose names were familiar, whose brief hospitalities had made New York a charming and beloved city, or whose business association brought them within the limits of courtesy. Few were the names she knew as being related to herself or her father, and she sighed long and deeply as she piled the little package of sad notes together.

"If I only had one relative, one lifelong friend!" she thought.

Doyle at this moment knocked gently at the door.

"Come in," said she. "Doyle, I am alone, very much alone now. How long have you been with us, Doyle?"

He shifted from one foot to the other and then said, "Ever since your father came down here and bought this place, Miss Sylvia."

"And when was that?" she questioned.

"Why, you were a little tot, Miss Sylvia. My wife was your nurse until you were five, you know."

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“And did we begin to travel when I was five?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes, Miss, your father took you away on the first journey when you were five. You did not come back until you were eight.”

“And did you and your wife stay here and keep the place as you do now, Doyle?”

“Yes, Miss, we have always been here, just the same.”

Sylvia remained silent a moment. “My father must have been very rich,” said she.

“Your mother was,” he exclaimed, and then, as if caught in a terrible blunder, he confusedly began to pull a curtain and twist a chair, his face like scarlet and his head with its bald top aglow.

“My mother!” she exclaimed in surprise. “Doyle, who was my mother? What about my mother? How many times I have wished to ask it, — how many times I have been denied! I am right to ask it now. I am alone, without friends or relatives. Doyle, tell me all about my mother!”

“Miss Sylvia,” he burst out, “I have wanted to tell you for a great many years, but I promised the master never to say a word and I would keep a promise if I died. I was in your grandfather’s family when I was a little boy. Your mother was a beautiful child, a lovely girl! and a noble woman. Left an orphan, she married your father, who was her father’s secretary, confidential man, or travelling agent, I do not know, Miss, exactly what you call it, — but he went abroad and bought goods for your grandfather. Your grandfather and his father before him had been great im-

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porters from foreign lands, and your mother inherited a large fortune, which should now be yours."

"Should be, Doyle," she said quickly; "what do you mean by that?"

Reluctance and wrath, — a sort of pent-up fury held in check but now bursting forth, — struggled in Doyle's face.

"Your father has squandered almost all of it on that damned Buddha!" he cried. And then, conscious of what he had said, conscious of the dead master lying defenceless in the house, conscious of at last betraying the secret he had kept for years, he leaned against the wall as pale as a ghost.

With simple dignity Sylvia said quietly, "I can excuse you, Doyle. I can comprehend your feelings. You may go now. I will think of this."

She sat silent for some time, pondering over this unpleasant revelation. Finally she said, with lips a little tightened, "And I am pledged to forfeit myself to this same object for five years!"

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After the body of her father had been borne to the tomb he himself had prepared on the grounds of the estate, and the few guests had departed who had attended the funeral, Sylvia was startled by a sound of footsteps on the piazza as she sat lonely and absorbed in thought in the library. She had kept herself hidden in her room during the sad ceremony, and had seen none of those who from courtesy or curiosity had come to attend the funeral. Now, with the feeling that life must begin again in some way,

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she had taken up one of her father's favorite books, and held it lightly in her hand.

As she looked up to see who was approaching, a tall, elderly gentleman stood in the doorway, his hat reverently doffed, and his face full of a tenderness and gentleness which was unaccountable to her.

"Sir?" she said inquiringly, as she rose courteously to receive him.

"Pardon me," said he, "but will you allow me to speak with you? I should not intrude upon your sorrow, but I knew your father, Miss Romaine, and I also knew your mother."

He presented his card.

"My father's friends are mine," she said gently, placing him a chair, — "and you knew my mother? Why, I am more glad than I can say to see you."

"I am your father's lawyer, Miss Romaine. For many years I have had charge of his estate. It was necessary, since he lived upon his income and constantly travelled, to have some one who would look after his property during his long voyages here and there, and I was selected," he said modestly, accepting her proffered politeness. "I thought it would not be wise to disturb you before the last rites were over; but now, I think perhaps you will be able to tell me your desires."

Sylvia was silent a moment, and then calling Doyle, who at once appeared, said, "This gentleman, Doyle, is Mr. Carter. Perhaps you remember him."

"I do indeed, Miss," said Doyle heartily; "he was often in your grandfather's house in my time."

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I am very glad to see you, sir," he added respectfully, while the gentleman greeted him pleasantly.

"Miss Romaine wishes to know if she can trust me as her lawyer," he said with a smile.

"Why, Miss Sylvia, he has had my little bit o' money in his hands for the last ten year!" he exclaimed, "and a good thing you have made of it, sir, thank ye," he added gratefully.

"That will do," said Sylvia, resuming her seat. "I can now assure you of my confidence," turning to Mr. Carter, who was regarding her with the same kind look. "Oh, sir," she went on, "you don't know what that means to me! I was so forlorn, so friendless."

"And yet with a host of friends!" he said pleasantly. "Yet, I understand you. Your loss seems irreparable. You and your father were so intimate, so devoted. But," after a pause, "can I assist you in anything? Have you made any plans? You surely will not wish to live in this great house alone — in fact —" he hesitated, "you cannot."

"I cannot!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Why not?"

"Because — I dislike to say so — I do dislike this, I beg of you to believe — but it is my duty, my duty!"

"Mr. Carter, speak out!" said she, "tell me the truth!"

"This home of yours is mortgaged, and long ago would have been taken away had it not been for the sympathy of the owner. Your father, in the strange monomania that possessed him, had come to the end of his resources. I regret to say that you

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will have a great responsibility resting upon your young shoulders. You must learn to face the world, to — ”

“I am penniless, then,” said Miss Romaine.

The old lawyer dropped his eyes, and said but half audibly, “I am afraid so.”

“When should the mortgage have been foreclosed?” asked Sylvia, earnestly.

“About three years ago.”

“And we have been living upon this stranger’s bounty for three years!” she cried in horror. “Why, how can I ever repay it! What can I do?”

“There is no need to do anything at all, my dear child,” answered the lawyer quite as earnestly. “Nothing will ever be required of you; it was done in the kindest spirit.”

“Ah, I see!” — a bright smile illuminating her sorrow-stricken face — “it was the payment of some great favor done by my father; it was some moral obligation!”

The lawyer’s face for a moment was a study, but he at once composed it and said gently, “No doubt, no doubt.”

“But my pledge!” she again exclaimed excitedly, “my pledge to father for five years! How am I to carry it out? How can I find the Bronze Buddha?”

“Can it be possible that your father made you promise to carry out his wild schemes?” he answered in a stern voice, his whole manner showing the indignation he felt.

“I swore it,” said Sylvia; “I swore it a moment before he died.”

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CHAPTER TENTH

“IT cannot be possible,” mused the lawyer, “that so persistent, so life-long a search for any object could be without importance or meaning. We have recently been led to believe that your father had a monomania on the subject, but in view of this carefulness, this eagerness on his part to transfer the burden to you, whom he loved so dearly, and I may say so intelligently, — I can but think there is some great event hanging upon this statue which he sought so long. Has he not told you its secret, or why he gave his very existence to finding it?”

“The whole matter is written and in the safe. He told me so, and with such earnestness, such anxiety that I should not give up his work, that I could but pledge myself to continue it.”

The old gentleman rose and grasped his hat. “I fear, then, that I am delaying the knowledge which you must be most anxious to gain. I had wished to tell you something of my ideas regarding your immediate future, but there is no haste, and I would not intrude at this important hour for a great deal. Permit me to say adieu, and a few days from now, when you desire to see me, I will come down again.” But Sylvia instantly extended her hospitality and insisted that he should remain and share with her the strange story of the Buddha. “Your counsel at this moment

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will be invaluable, Mr. Carter, and in any case, I feel that a friend who has ever managed my father's financial affairs must be quite worthy of my confidence. To tell the truth, it is with reluctance that I open the safe by myself, — there may be disclosures there which will surprise and perplex me.”

After the dinner, served with that ceremonial dignity yet generous hospitality which had ever characterized the household, Sylvia at last led the way to the small but well-appointed private room where her father had always kept his safe, papers and other personal belongings.

She had for many years acted as his confidential secretary, and as regards their daily business was a clever accountant and most able correspondent. But the affair of the Buddha had been a forbidden subject save in so far as its actual pursuit led to questions or conversation. Now, taking out the large tin box which she had never touched before, she quietly opened it, but her face was somewhat pale and her hands trembled a little with suppressed excitement. On the top of the pile of things in the box was a small jewel case of velvet, with a note addressed to her bound about it. Opening the envelope she read aloud:

“MY DARLING GIRL: —

“Your father has kept for you, ever since you were born, the jewel which you will find in this little box. Never forget that, besides being invaluable intrinsically, it is yours and yours alone, formed for you, cut for you, kept for you, left for you. It is a treasure

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beyond price, of inestimable age, lost art in workmanship, worn by one of the purest and greatest persons that ever adorned this earth, impregnated with one of the noblest spirits that ever God created and full of that talismanic virtue which leads to everything the heart can wish.

“This ring, my Sylvia, is the talisman and proof by which you shall know the Bronze Buddha when you find it. Underneath the hand of the image which holds the scroll, on the garment which covers the left knee, amidst the embroidery sculptured so thickly that such a mark would not be noticeable, is the carved face over which the intaglio face on your sapphire will perfectly fit.

“Press the stone upon it and you will find, if it be the true Buddha we seek, that your ring will almost cling to the moulded face, so finely is the impression made. That will be, and that alone, the one god in all the world that we seek, the one which will be the acme of your fortunes.

“Not until I had passed out of my body could it legitimately come to you, as its destiny of transference rests within the immutable laws of its own aura, but now that I am no longer mortal, take it, place it on the third finger of your left hand and thank God that you have come to your own.

“With love and blessing, “YOUR FATHER.”

Tears were running over the beautiful cheeks before she had reached the end, and as she read the name she leaned back, sobbing softly, while Mr. Carter rubbed his eyes furtively and ejaculated,

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"How he loved you!" At last summoning courage the daughter opened the velvet box.

A blue light seemed to proceed from it, a soft blue burning flame, as if one of those azure suns of the winter night had lent its soft but positive rays to the gem, which, set in a yellowish dead-gold circlet of strange carving and workmanship, glowed electrically with something so unusual and subtle, its rareness of color no words could fitly describe.

Raising it to her lips and implanting a kiss upon it, Sylvia slipped it on her finger. The sapphire, if sapphire it was, so brilliant and almost filled with intelligent life it seemed, was carved with the head of a Buddha. The calm, moveless countenance cut into the gem with matchless skill was the very counterpart of that latest one which she had recently beheld in New York, the same strange look of fascinating power combined with divine compassion and serenity.

Under a microscope the features appeared with such human splendor as to astound the gentleman, who could hardly release it from his interested grasp. The effect of this ring upon Sylvia was something startling to herself. She said nothing, but Mr. Carter noted the internal exhilaration and joy which seemed to redouble the exquisite beauty of her eyes. Blue as the stone itself, they also began to glow with a serene fire as of some hidden exaltation of the spirit, and if the old man had acknowledged the exceeding loveliness of his young client before, he could but marvel at the new richness of her expression as she proceeded.

The next document was carefully sealed and endorsed "*How I know about the Bronze Buddha.*"

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They both drew a breath of relief, and simultaneously exclaimed, "Now we shall know."

The manuscript was written in the very plain, clerkly hand of Mr. Romaine and began as follows: —

"My dear child, I was born of poor parents. They had once been rich, but that was before I was born, for I came late in their lives and was their only child. They did everything possible to give me a good education, and in those days an education in a college meant more than a mere smattering of knowledge. But not content with providing me with what their own country could furnish, they saved every penny with self-sacrificing care and sent me to Oxford, where I was graduated with honors. Returning to the United States, I began to learn the importing business with a very large and old firm now out of existence, with a view to travel abroad to buy goods.

"To my Greek and Latin, then, I added two or three other languages, as you know, and which my strange destiny has caused me to use all my life as freely as our own. Having become proficient in the understanding of my duties, I was sent for the first trip to India, accompanied by the one son of the elder partner of the firm, who, travelling for his pleasure, was yet to learn with me by experience somewhat of the business which it was supposed he would eventually inherit.

"Henry was a fine fellow, a true friend, a brilliant scholar, a clever thinker. I had known him but a year, yet my heart was very warm towards him and we had never felt the least clash of interests, desires or ambitions. We travelled as friends rather than as

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clerk and prospective employer, and a more versatile, attractive yet singular travelling companion it would be difficult to find.

“I say singular, because of the strange power he seemed to possess over any one on whom he set his attention. In fact, this power seemed to me uncanny and weird, for then I had no idea whatever of the occult forces which actually prevail over the world and direct its fate. He simply had to look fixedly at the back of a man’s head to make him tremble, turn about and go to him, or he could instantly send the same man walking to the end of the ship with all speed, only stopping on the very brink of plunging himself into the sea.

“Many other strange things he did, without ever for a moment admitting that he did them, and finally I began to feel that he was practising his tricks upon me. Day by day, as we passed from scene to scene, I began to feel myself enmeshed in the will of another. I would be looking at a monument, for instance, and instead of a monument I would see an elephant, richly caparisoned, on an open desert.

“Accusing him of influencing my mind, he would deny it and ask suspiciously if I was going crazy. I finally began to think my own mind was assuring me of these phenomena and that Henry was utterly innocent. I became confused, restless and unable to conduct myself in my usual manner. Melancholy and apprehension took possession of me and I began to hate my friend with a hatred that grew with every hour.

“At last, having arrived in India, we were to visit

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some of those remote and unfrequented mountainous regions where we were assured were many of the rarest curios to be found, and having heard of a certain tribe whose shawls were practically priceless, yet to be had at a low valuation, with a few attendants and a guide we started for a village in one of the hidden valleys of the range.

“It was a journey of several days by horse, and as our retainers were on foot, was slow, but by no means uninteresting. You, my Sylvia, have been over the same track, and must remember the peak which you christened ‘Glory Peak,’ from the magnificent sunrise we viewed from there.

“My companion was all excitement and happiness, for every novelty, every new scene seemed to give intense impression to his volatile spirit. To me the journey, although absolutely new, had no charm. I was enraptured in a sense of gloom that nothing could dispel.

“One night, having encamped near a clear stream, when the fires had burned low and the unutterable darkness of the woods had fallen like a mantle over our little party, in spite of the danger from wild beasts, I took a fancy to climb to a jutting promontory above our heads, and answering the warnings and persuasions of my companion with some rough speech, almost disdainful and I am sure half insulting, I sullenly left camp and went into the jungle.

“I could not have gone more than a thousand yards when I came suddenly on a rocky cavern, and to my surprise a dim light proceeded from it, as also a sound like a low moan. Listening very intently, I

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decided that the moan was human and I unhesitatingly stepped down a few feet into the cave, which was but little higher than my head.

“ Therein lay a very old man on a few boughs and dried leaves, his shockingly ragged garment indicating him to be a priest of some of the religious temples or a hermit who had left his order for this mountain seclusion. Half rising on his elbow, his face, which was illuminated by the tiny wick floating in a small vessel of oil, looked to be of a hundred years.

“ In the language of the Hindoos he immediately began to utter some blessing of his caste, and as well as I can remember, in an excitement and haste beyond expression, handed me a package which he drew from his bosom.

“ ‘ Not too late, not too late,’ he murmured, thrusting the package in my hand. ‘ I had thought to pass, I had thought to pass, but it is not too late. Stranger, heir, being of destiny, whom the great Buddha has sent by the Eternal Will to carry on the work of His world, — from wherever you come, to wherever you go, be surrounded by the ineffable potency of those powers which I join. To the holder and possessor of the sacred ring which I have given thee, belongs the gracious god whose emblem it is! He who shall possess the ring is the heir of our Buddha forever. To thee or to thine will belong the prolonging of his benevolence.’ Exhausted and failing he pointed to the little light and then to the back of the cave. ‘ Proceed!’ said he.

“ It would be useless to describe my feelings of astonishment or my stupid acquiescence with all his

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acts and words. I had hastily placed the package in my pocket and now quickly went to the end of the cave, where, with a push on a panel of rock so nicely fitted as to be unnoticeable, I felt it give way and I almost stumbled into another chamber.

“This was small and four square in shape, the sides being ornamented somewhat by rough carvings in the Hindoo manner.

“The sides seemed to be supported by quite elaborately carved pillars cut from the natural stone, and the pseudo-arch, like many of the Buddhist temples, was formed by courses of stones each overlapping that below it, till the sides approached at the top so closely that the opening was covered by a single stone. From this I afterwards argued that the cavern was really built in part by those who had deposited the god within.

“For in the middle of this hall, the head within four or five feet of the roof, the sides of the room coming down within at least six feet of the sides, stood the Bronze Buddha, which has been the very soul of my life ever since.

“From whence it came, how it could get there, why it was thus hidden I then could not argue. I only knew that I was looking at something which almost seemed beyond the range of human art. Attracted to its feet as by a spell, I could hardly take my gaze from its compelling features, and not until I heard an impatient low cry from the old priest could I withdraw myself from its fatal presence.

“Sylvia, that was thirty years ago, and I have never seen it since.”

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CHAPTER ELEVENTH

“ **O**NCE more standing beside the dying hermit, for he was dying, as was plainly evident, he grasped my hand and pulling me down by his side whispered in very faint accents, growing more and more feeble, what I will try to remember in substance if not in language.

“ ‘ Almost sixty years ago,’ said he, ‘ a war, a terrible outbreak came over this part of the great land of India, and we, the priests of the great temple not far from here, were suddenly driven out, scourged, wounded and dying, or killed outright before the very faces of the gods.

“ ‘ Only two of us remained of the old and initiated order who knew the secrets of the temple or were aware of those things that become but priests of the highest order to understand.

“ ‘ On the preservation of these secrets, yet their transmission to younger men when we were called to the outer portals of human existence, depended the re-erection of our temples, the continuance of the truths of philosophy and religion and the extension of those splendid moral maxims which have influenced the world for ages.

“ ‘ Chief among the objects of our solicitude was that glorious form, so eminent among all the other representations of the Divine Buddha, that had made our

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temple celebrated and our fane the pilgrimage of thousands.

“ ‘Unhurt amid the flames and fury that surrounded it, softly smiling in its immortal serenity it remained, while our strained souls watched and waited for the invaders to retire and give us the hope of concealing it from the vandalism of the vile.

“ ‘Happily, as morning dawned, we perceived that our village and the ruins of its temple had been deserted by the troops. One by one the frightened inhabitants came forth from their hiding-places, and we, before food could be eaten or water allowed, as leaders and guides of their religion, commanded all to remove the Divine Buddha from the pedestal he had blessed for unknown ages and deposit him in this rock-cave in the hills, which was reached by an underground passage from the temple.

“ ‘The great deed accomplished, my compatriot and master, in solemn accents, placed a ban upon whoever, even under pain of death, should reveal the whereabouts of their gracious god.

“ ‘For half a century, hoping against hope that means would be employed for the re-building of the temple, my master and I kept constant watch over the divine image. But such was not to be. With these hands I closed the eyes of one devoted and already almost translated, and heard from his lips, for the first time, the secret of the god.

“ ‘From thence, alone, forgotten and helpless, pledged by my every belief and by my given word never to desert by night or day this silent post, I have long depended upon what little food I could

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procure, by trusting to the faithful or the stranger. But now, I feel my end is at hand.

“ ‘No miracle of glory has come to ransom me and the great image which is dedicated to humanity. Not in some great and splendid temple shall it stand, the wonder and the awe of the Hindoo. Destined for another work, I leave it, — and brought by your Karma to me at the last moment, I know and recognize you as the predestined bearer of the Immortal Message. Farewell, — in other lands and under other skies, the Bronze Buddha will make its wishes known.’ ”

“ Hardly had he completed this strange story when, with a gasp as of pain and a long sigh, he closed his eyes forever.

“ As I stood there, astounded, dismayed at some seeming obligation thus thrust upon me, lifted in spirit and with a clearer vision than I had ever known, a laugh, a laugh that seemed sarcastic and full of irony that madly irritated me, came from the entrance of the cave.

“ Henry had followed me and was on the point of discovering that which to me had already become sacred. With a dash at the tiny light which extinguished it I rushed out, and exclaiming wildly, ‘How dare you intrude upon me! How dare you spy upon me! I’ll teach you never to put your hellish power upon me again!’ I gave a mad stroke with the poniard I had taken in my hand, when I had started out, lest beasts might attack me, and, God forgive me, my Sylvia, I gave him a long stroke across the throat, for he was bending back,

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that left a scar deep and long, far down across the breast, — and which he must bear to his grave.

“How I came to my senses when he fell I know not, but a dozen of our attendants had heard his cry. He was hurried to camp and treated with great skill. His wounds were dressed and as soon as possible he was carried in a litter back to the city. May I say how humbly, sadly and patiently I attended upon him!

“Confession by letter to our firm, earnest prayers for forgiveness from him, everything that man could do to atone for my great fault, I did, and as time went on, and his wound was fully healed, he treated me with the same kindness as of old, never alluded to what he called the unfortunate accident, and to all appearances, he forgot it all, and equally forgave.

“His people, however, insisted upon our immediate return, and although I now knew that my life work would never be business or affairs, nevertheless my great fault and my obligations to my employers would not permit of any delay. Returning together, therefore, I left behind me the Bronze Buddha, which had now become an object of desire greater than any on earth.

“We had been gone more than a year, and on our return, as Henry was so friendly, the social intercourse between myself and his family was resumed.

“During our absence his sister had returned graduated from her school, and was ready to enter society. We met, and the instant her dark eyes rested on mine we became mutual captives. But hardly had we met when a great bereavement fell upon her, —

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her mother, already feeble, died, and her father, on hearing the news, was stricken with apoplexy and died within the hour.

“In this time of great trouble I heartily made myself useful to Henry, and did my best to comfort his sister. He, full of many cares, and soon called upon to settle his father’s enormous estate, noticed nothing of the attachment growing up between his sister and myself.

“When time had chastened and mitigated her grief, I perhaps too rashly declared my love, but with happy response and tears of confidence and joy, your dear mother, Sylvia, gave her love to me.

“Hardly, however, had we together announced it, when her brother Henry became violently agitated. Growing more and more stern, he decidedly opposed it; nay, more, he commanded my Marie to give up the thought forever, and warned me that should I persist in it, he would soon find means to end my audacity.

“Hot words followed, and defiance on my part was met with cool and exasperating determination on his. Months went on, and still Marie would not listen to his persuasions or arguments. He told her of the death-stroke I had given him, and declared I was insane or at least had been insane, but she only laughed at the supposition.

“Assured that I had never meant to injure him, certain of my sanity and as deeply in love with me as I was with her, she quietly met me one afternoon, and as she was of age and her own mistress, we were married, and notified her brother of the fact from our hotel.

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“We never had an interview with him. Her share of the estate was placed in the hands of their old lawyer, Mr. Carter, who, I hope, will be living when you read this story of my life. She voluntarily made her will in my favor when the possibilities of death were made clear to her when you were born. As the guardian of my child she believed me to be worthy of perfect confidence, and I believe, although I have not hoarded her estate in the commonplace way some might have expected, that my use of it has been ever for your benefit, my daughter, and will prove so in the end.

“Her death was a great blow to me, but when I had recovered from my grief, you, my Sylvia, were there to take her place and urge my ambitions. Then, also, was absolute freedom to enter upon my great task.

“We sailed for India when you were five years old. Back to the spot made memorable by that strange occurrence, I hastened with all the speed available. Alone, trembling with excitement, I again found and entered the rocky cave of the old hermit. The cave was there, the end with its swinging stone was visible.

“I pressed, but pressed in vain. The hidden chamber had been found, dismantled of the god, filled up with weighty stones and every trace of the Buddha had disappeared.

“Not one of the villagers knew anything about it, no information from the government or any tribe could be obtained. If the mouths of those silent people had been stopped with gold they had been

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stopped effectually; and then, in varied moods of rage, disappointment, hope or despair, began the world pilgrimage we have made together.

“Blame me not, my child. If I have been wrong, it has been a wrong intended only rightly. And now remains my last counsel to you. Beneath this paper you will find the package which was handed to me by the dying Buddhist priest.

“It is encased in leather, and can be worn as a belt about the body. Never, night nor day, let it leave your person. I forbid you to open it until you find the Buddha. I would not subject you to the same emotions I have borne. I would not bias your nature by the knowledge I possess. Find that great image you will, for it is your inevitable destiny. Only in His presence, with the one tried soul that is your mate and your other half, shall the leather case be opened. Then, in the midst of your wonder, forget not me. Then, in the midst of your gratitude, forget not humanity. It is to be the Benevolence of the Divine, that the mission has fallen upon you.”

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CHAPTER TWELFTH

SYLVIA finished reading the paper and then gently laid it down without a word. The communication was so unexpected and remarkable, it involved so many unthought-of traits in her father's character and so many unknown incidents in his career, that she could not at once adjust herself to the new man his confession revealed. Respecting her silence, the old lawyer remained quiet until she suddenly turned upon him and exclaimed: —

“Then I have an uncle, — my mother's brother!”

“Yes, but you see a feud of years' standing has separated you, and doubtless your father never felt like mentioning him.”

“Is he living?”

“Yes, I presume so. He took the handling of his own business affairs when he placed your mother's share of the estate in my hands, and I have never spoken with him since. He has been a great traveller, away for years together. I believe he owns a house in New York, but I doubt if he is ever to be found there, his movements are so erratic. In fact, of late years I have known but little about him.”

“But you used to know about him. Did he, too, lose his property? Is he rich or poor?”

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“He is enormously rich. Your father used some of the money left him to speculate in opposition to your uncle, in those early years when there was an active dislike between them, but oddly enough his methods three times played a fortune directly into your uncle’s hands. It seemed strange.”

“Do you think my uncle exercised an unseen influence over my father, Mr. Carter?”

“Well, frankly, Miss Sylvia, I don’t. I never saw anything very unusual in the young man. He was light-hearted and jolly. Mesmerism and magnetism and electricity were all in their infancy, one might say, and he was deeply interested. I remember he gave some parlor magic two or three evenings at home while in college, — but as for actually being able to will people to do or see things unnatural, — why, don’t you see by your father’s own testimony that he was not quite in his right mind then? Did his actions appear sane or natural? And pardon me, my child, I would not hurt your feelings for the world, but have not you thought at times that this search for a brass image was unreasonable?”

“I have not understood it,” said Sylvia, gently. “I am inclined to think,” she added, “that my uncle has been blameless in this matter. He certainly was cruelly wronged. Again, if my father has used a great fortune that came from my uncle’s family in a vain struggle to find what appears to be a useless thing, I cannot blame my uncle for considering it wholly wrong. I cannot myself see that my uncle influenced my father, and I am perfectly

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certain that when he happened to find him in that cave, he was kindly looking after his friend, in anxiety lest he should have come to harm. It was only my father's excited and irritated mind that suggested his being a spy, — and my uncle was nearly murdered, — it was horrible!"

She shuddered and grew pale to the very lips.

"Miss Sylvia," cried Mr. Carter, "how wise and sensible you are! I admire your good sense. I was afraid I should find a childish or unreasonable girl whom I should have to persuade or force to see the truth, but I find you a woman, — and thank heaven, a true one!" rubbing his hands and striding up and down the room delightedly.

Sylvia paid no attention. She was thinking deeply.

"I have much to ask you," she finally said. "You say we have been living on some stranger's bounty for the last three years, — who is this stranger, and if he has a mortgage on this place, do we own anything at all in it? Do I own" — she hesitated and choked down a sob — "my father's grave?"

Mr. Carter stopped still like a shot.

"I never thought of that!" he exclaimed. Then seeing her face he went on, "but that can all be arranged, — oh, yes, don't let that worry you at all, — you shall have that fixed in no time! And what do you own now? Why, everything, everything! Books, pictures, furniture, clothing, ornaments, everything but the house and grounds, dear Miss Sylvia, — to do with as you please."

"If I left everything right here do you think it would pay him?"

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“Pay who? Oh, the present owner? Why, — yes, — more than pay him. Look at the library alone! It is very valuable, very valuable indeed, and two of the pictures I know to be most valuable also; I have looked at them very carefully.”

He went to the window and slyly laughed.

“Well, then, I will leave all of the furniture, the library and the two pictures behind. My mother’s portrait I should like to keep, and a few things dear to father, — shall I be honorably free then? Do not deceive me!”

“I think there will be a small amount of money coming to you if you do this,” he said gravely. “I will have an inventory made and settle it as soon as possible.”

She heaved a sigh of relief.

“You mean to leave here, then?” he asked kindly.

She looked surprised.

“I must go somewhere! I must begin to earn my living.”

A look of courageous determination was soon brightened by a smile.

“But I am not so poor as you think! Papa has always been very liberal with me and I have saved some money.”

“Much?” with a lift of his eyebrows.

“Three thousand dollars.”

He was truly astonished.

“That is a lucky thing,” said he. “But now, let me come to the real point of my visit here. You know my sister, Mrs. Kemp?”

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"Is Mrs. Kemp your sister?" Sylvia asked in astonishment.

"Yes, and in the course of conversation she told me how you had met several times in London and had come home on the same steamer. You attended one of her receptions in the spring, did you not?"

"Yes, and she was so kind! Papa was very anxious to visit a collection of pictures where I had seen a Buddha, and she loaned us her carriage. I admire Mrs. Kemp very much."

"She wishes you to come and make it your home with her, Miss Sylvia. You know she is a widow, very rich, rather quiet, and she has no niece or daughter who could be a companion to her, and if you admire her, my dear, she equally admires you. She wants you to come right to her and let her be a mother to you. Won't you, Miss Sylvia? She will never forgive me if you say no!"

A look of unspeakable gratitude came over the fair face as she listened, — a look so confiding, so exquisite in its native pride but appreciative yielding, that the old man caught his breath. In a moment she had accepted his proposition, and he was patting her quite hard upon the shoulder, for this time her emotion was too much, — she was crying.

She soon controlled herself however, and asked, —

"But Doyle and his good, faithful wife, — what is to be done with them?"

"Oh, don't worry about that!" he exclaimed. "I fancy you don't know how much Doyle is worth! He has not served you people here all these years

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for nothing, and I have made quite a little sum for him myself! Your uncle — I should say that you remember he was brought up in your grandfather's family, and your uncle gave him a thousand dollars when the estate was settled, besides."

"Yet he came to live with us! Why did n't —"

"Oh, you know he was very much attached to your mother, and so your uncle sent him to her, — you see he was going to travel."

He stumbled and seemed to be choosing his words with great care. Sylvia thought a moment or two and then said slowly, —

"I believe my uncle is a saint."

Mr. Carter laughed out loud.

"I do not think he would agree with you!" he exclaimed.

"But how is this?" cried Sylvia. "Papa told me that in a certain bank he had ten thousand dollars deposited for the purchase of the Buddha if I find it, and he told me also that he had left me well provided for!"

"It is possible that rather than pay the mortgage on this place he has let it stand and saved what money he had to spare. Let us look over the other accounts!"

They did so and found a bank book, crediting Mr. Romaine with many small sums, deposited from year to year over a period of twelve years, aggregating about sixteen thousand dollars.

"This was your father's money, evidently, Miss Sylvia, for he began to save it years ago! He was not obliged to pay the mortgage if he did not so

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desire. I am glad you are not quite a 'poor' girl, my child."

"I shall keep the ten thousand intact until the end of the five years," said Sylvia decidedly. "If then, by my uttermost efforts, I have not been able to find the Bronze Buddha, I shall consider it to be mine."

The lawyer made a low bow and smiling said, —

"Miss Romaine you should have entered my profession, for you are the embodiment of justice, wit and wisdom."

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CHAPTER THIRTEENTH

SEVERAL months had passed since I suddenly quitted the house of that man who was still to me a mystery. Good, bad, or neither, I had never been able to determine. But he had become a part of my mind. The undercurrent of my thought had that voice, two phases of the same voice, as the basal note of my being. I had never seen him.

I had been to the door of his house twice, for curiosity, fascination, attraction, anxiety, I know not what, had drawn me thither, and his words, "Let me ask you to trust me in the going so that by and by you will be coming also," were a constant appeal, a sad, strong cry, as of one longing soul to another. But the house had been closed, closed absolutely for weeks and months.

Neither had I seen — her. That rhythmic, exquisite echo of his voice in hers still rang softly in my memory, but not once, in all the maddening crowd that I so habitually scanned, had that high-bred, lovely, womanly countenance beamed out upon me.

I had determined to take my mother abroad. Obed Spear had "learned his lesson," which at first he said "did not agree with his vicissitudes," but he had become one of the most efficient men I had ever

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employed. The estates left by my good father a few years previous needed a constant oversight, and Obed Spear, in his honesty, shrewdness, decision and quick wit, had gradually become of very great assistance.

We had never found any trace of the Buddha, to be sure, but that had now become a secondary interest to me. I had never mentioned my strange Hindoo-American acquaintance to my mother, for I felt a curious reluctance. Would she comprehend it? Would she not think me over-strained and nervous to think of him so constantly? No, I kept it to myself.

We were packing for the steamer and ready for a long jaunt through Europe, and perhaps to India, when one day my sweet mother came in from a round of farewell calls. She looked somewhat excited and very handsome.

"Arion," she burst out suddenly, and that was so unlike her that I started, "have you seen the new lion?"

"Oh, Prince Mihira? No. Of course I have heard of him and his wonders!" I smiled, for New York had been in a fever for a month or two over the magnificence, physical beauty, exquisite manners, wonderful residence and so on, *ad infinitum*, of this Hindoo prince."

"Mother dear," said I, "are you to join the ranks of his female adorers? Has he very long hair and very flashing eyes?"

She drew off her gloves with a laugh. "I have been calling on Mrs. Kemp," she said. "You know she has been in mourning for a year or two and only

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returned from abroad last spring. Well, she has not only seen Prince Mihira, but she has entertained him, and she assures me a more fascinating man never existed. The Ashmores have long ago taken him under their wings, and as he has a bachelor establishment, Mrs. Ashmore and some others are going to act as chaperones for him in a reception for which he has issued cards, as a sort of return for all the hospitality he has received. Mrs. Kemp had her cards and I presume ours have arrived. But Arion, don't look so cynical! Truly, you are really not nice."

"I know what *that* means!" I exclaimed, so I kissed her.

Somewhat mollified she went on. "I suppose you think I am crazy over him on account of his title and all that, — I am *not!*"

"Why, mother!" I exclaimed, "*you* crazy over a title! After refusing two that would set this fellow's eminence at naught" —

"He is n't a fellow!" she cried, "He is a gentleman."

I sat down by her and took her hand. "Now Mumzie, out with it. What is it? I know that there is some reason for this enthusiasm. We will accept the invitation, of course. We will both see him."

"He keeps concealed in an inner shrine a Bronze Buddha, a magnificent one, — and who knows, — Arion?"

"But if it be so, and the one they are seeking, how does that help us to find *them*?" said I sadly dropping her hand and walking slowly away.

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“I know it! But who can tell? Instinct, intuition, chance, fate, destiny, may draw them to it! Don't you see? Stranger things have happened than that, Arion, — and my boy, you suffer, and I know it.”

“Well, mother dear, I love her, and I have lost her.”

We were silent for some time. “By the way,” she then began, “Mrs. Kemp is going into society again. She is going to have a ward of hers come to live with her. She is a Miss Romaine. Don't you remember an old firm, Dusart and Co., importers, who used to be called rivals of Stewart in importing? Oh, I don't suppose you do, it was before your time,” and she laughed, — “but this Miss Romaine is a Dusart. Her mother was the only daughter. I never knew her, but I met her brother several times. She is of fine family and I presume is wealthy. Mrs. Kemp will introduce her to New York.”

I confess I had paid but little attention to the latter part of her speech. The name Dusart had struck me very forcibly.

Finally I said, “Is not Miss Romaine a New Yorker?”

“No. It seems her mother died at her birth and her father and she have travelled for years and years. But her father is dead and she is to live with Mrs. Kemp. Of course I did not ask any questions, as I was not particularly interested.”

“I should think she would live with her uncle!” I said.

“Oh, he!” and my mother flushed like a rose. Now why should she?

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“Yes, he,” said I; “what kind of a man was he?”

“Very much of a gentleman, I should say,” she calmly responded, “but eccentric, extremely so. He never married and has lived so much in the far East and foreign countries that he is almost unknown now, or remembered only by those who knew him as a young man. Doubtless he may be in Siam or Colorado! No one ever knows anything about him.”

“Was he a fine looking man when you knew him?”

“Very. Wait a moment.”

She went to the library and, taking down an old-fashioned album, pointed to a small picture. “That was he.”

Unmistakably the picture was of the man who had promised “never to let any harm go from his soul into mine.” “A frank, strong, able, young face, full of possibilities. One could trust him?”

My mother was gazing very gravely at the portrait and slowly shut the album.

“Yes, my son, one could certainly trust him,” said she.

I began to think and think until a flood of light began to suffuse my brain.

“Miss Romaine is Mr. Dusart’s niece?” I suddenly exclaimed in a loud voice, almost running to her and looking at her with intense anxiety.

“Yes!” she exclaimed, in great surprise, “what of it?”

“The voice, the voice! It must be, it cannot help being! No two such voices could exist out of one

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family! I have found her, mother, I certainly shall find her! Miss Romaine is our Star!"

Of course, before the day of the reception given by Prince Mihira I had told my beloved mother in detail all that had befallen me in connection with my first sight of the Buddha, the second meeting with Henry Dusart and the strange experience in his mansion.

Her impressions were mingled with mine; we argued the motive, the meaning, the intention of this strange being, and often I detected as she spoke a light in her face of something beautiful yet hidden, a ray of hope, an intuition of joy, quite beyond my comprehension, yet full of suppressed meaning.

How or why he had either hypnotically or by picture or trick of mirrors or electrical apparatus shown me a picture of one whom now I was certain must be his niece; how he could possibly have known that I had ever seen her, or had the least interest in her; or whether it was indeed she in person, mysteriously visiting him or under his control,—the three days intervening between our believed discovery and our probable meeting with her at the reception were dramatically full of thought and life.

I was boyishly eager to set off, and were it not for my mother's profound sense of conventionality, we should have arrived a half-hour before any guest would be expected. As it was, however, ruled by the worldly wisdom of that dear lady, I did not find myself in the centre of a laughing group of well-known young beauties until more than a hundred had arrived.

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Although Prince Mihira always appeared at the clubs and in society in the usual dress of an English or American gentleman, the ladies had persuaded him, in his own home, to wear the Indian dress to which he was accustomed and which was so beautifully harmonious with the dwelling which he had fitted and furnished for his sojourn here.

The very atmosphere of India seemed to have been transported into this house, which once so prosaic was now a dream of splendid opulence. All that color and light could do to express beauty, in every form, from hangings to rugs, from ceilings to couches, divans and works of art in carvings, curios, jewelled ornaments or arms, was pervaded by that repose, that soft, languorous, rich serenity of feeling which glitters, glows and gleams in the golden sunlight of that ancient land, and sweeps in winds of odorous perfume through the tessellated chambers of her palaces.

So inherent a charm of placid silence seemed to fill these lordly rooms that the conversation of the hundreds present was instinctively lowered, the laughter softened and the manners refined. For such was the unspeakable dignity, yet the grace of our host, that I was ashamed of having so much as thought of him in a depreciating sentence.

He at once gained my hearty respect,—the instinctive homage which a free-born American can well afford to pay to a man whose every motion showed culture and refinement, whose words were gracious yet reserved, whose eye met another's clearly and squarely and whose hand gave a manly, athletic grasp, full of physical and mental health.

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His face and form were so impressive of power, the chiselled beauty of the countenance reminding one of his own gods,—no wonder women could not speak of him without emotion and that some men felt him far above them.

I had hardly been presented and like lightning received these positive impressions when the turbaned servant who had announced us said in broken English, glancing at their cards, "Mrs. Alexander Kemp and Miss Romaine."

My back was turned to the entrance and for a moment I stood still, I think unable to move. What was it that seemed to overflow me and fill me, to hold and control me, until my very heart quivered in my body, and my blood ran like quicksilver through my veins! "It may not be she,—it will not be she! It will be she,—I know it is she!" surged through my mind in contradiction, and still I gazed from the window and could not turn.

Presently I heard a voice say, "Prince!" and then, "Miss Romaine, permit me to present Prince Mihira." "With pleasure," answered the voice. "I was in Benares but three years ago," she added. "Mrs. Kemp told me so," he answered, and then in his own language began to converse, while she continued to answer him with perfect ease.

How beautiful she seemed to me when at last I turned and looked at her I cannot express. She was some distance across the room and half sheltered by a velvet drapery. Her intelligent, ardent, spiritual face, her moving lips, her speaking eyes, were but the embodied picture which I had worn in my heart

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and worshipped all these months. In a few moments Mrs. Kemp and my mother both came to me, and the dear one's eyes were blue as the very heavens and bright as its stars with joy.

We looked gently at each other for a moment and then Mrs. Kemp said, "Come, Arion, I must introduce you to my ward! Now my dear boy," tapping me with her fan, "don't think I am enthusiastic, but I think you will like her."

"My dear madam," said I, "your selections for me have ever been in the best taste. Do you remember the boy-love you gave me in little Irene?"

She laughed in her ponderous fashion. "What a little flirt! She married a count."

"Oh, yes," said I dolefully, "I was best man."

At this moment Prince Mihira's attention was diverted and I stood before the being whose voice had been my music, whose soul had been my dream. She looked up at me, and instantly her face took on that same expression of infinite delight in her eyes, that world of pleasure which shone there when first she gazed at me. Hardly had the words of introduction been pronounced when she murmured, "I have seen you before!" and I, smiling with the unutterable joy of my heart answered, "And I have seen you."

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CHAPTER FOURTEENTH

IT was inevitable that Sylvia should have made a confidant of Mrs. Kemp soon after her arrival and the warm, even loving reception with which she was greeted. To tell her the story of her life and to inform her of her mission was the natural outcome of the situation, and as deception and concealment were abhorrent to the transparent nature which took and gave with equal generosity and sweetness, the romantic yet almost tragic circumstances under which she had lived and would be forced to live were freely discussed between them.

Although Mrs. Kemp was a woman of the world, positive, diplomatic and practical, and although she secretly believed the whole affair would reach no satisfactory conclusion, yet the wise cautions of her brother not to interfere with the strange project and her own sincere respect and affection for her young friend induced her to aid, in every possible way, the quite un-American scheme of finding an Indian god.

At once she saw a possibility in the Buddha said to be possessed by Prince Mihira, whom she had met at two or three houses in London before she had again renewed the semi-acquaintance here, and at once declared they would together attend the reception given practically in his honor.

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Any conventional doubts as to Miss Romaine's having so recently lost her father were necessarily set aside, as it was to accomplish his wishes and would surely be approved. In fact, Sylvia had been educated by him to consider death to be but a transition, an incident in the long career of an immortal soul, and to feel certain, with Socrates, that "No evil can befall a good man whether he be alive or dead."

She therefore prepared for the social event with interest, hope and womanly curiosity, nor was she averse to meeting a man whom all agreed to be so marked in personality, so delightful in intercourse.

The meeting with Arion had been a second revelation to her of herself. She well remembered the first meeting. She had seen him long before he reached her, and a strange feeling of such blinding joy, such ecstasy as she had never imagined held her feet to the pedestal which she had climbed to get a glimpse of the back, hoping to find some clue to the Buddha she believed she had previously seen upon it.

Now when he was presented to her, the same unexpected throb of bliss stirred the very core of her heart, translated itself to her clear, frank eyes and almost transfigured her shining face.

Although he was almost immediately drawn away from her, the flush of rose which had mantled her cheek burned sweetly bright, and the knowledge of his presence made every courteous word addressed to her an unwonted pleasure.

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The report that Prince Mihira possessed a Buddha was easily verified by all his guests that afternoon, for none were excluded from the small circular padded room where in the centre a fine specimen was seated on a beautifully carved pedestal. The decorations of twining wreaths of a climbing plant with small greenish-white fragrant flowers, the milky white juice of which produces the soma drink, — a favorite offering to Indra, and which they afterwards themselves partook, — the burning perfumes, the absolute silence which pervaded the satin-lined chamber had duly impressed those whose curiosity had bidden them long to intrude even upon the host's household idols.

The dining-hall, with its brilliant lights, music and delightful refreshments of Eastern sweets, comfits, curdled milk, ghee (the clarified butter which they were assured was half a century old), the fried grains, preserves, salads of delicate herbs and luscious fruits, had been another attraction so unlike the pleasures of the usual afternoon that the guests were for once charmed beyond criticism and could find nothing to say but praise.

Arion had been so unfortunate as to be separated by many eager people from Miss Romaine, whose distinguished air and striking beauty called forth many requests for introductions. He found himself apart and only able to watch her being served by the Prince, who was paying her the most delicate courtesies. They were at the end of the large room and constantly surrounded by groups who were attracted to both. Arion was looking at them and wondering

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to see two such specimens of physical perfection, when some girl near him said:—

“What a magnificent couple! And he seems devoted to her! We girls haven’t had a glance since she came!”

“Where in the universe did she spring from?” chimed in another.

“Jove’s heart, I fancy!” said the man who had been listening and looking. “She is classic enough and yet a woman, too.”

Arion did not think less of the speaker even while a sharp pang sped swiftly through his heart.

“Well, why not?” he asked himself. “They are a magnificent couple,” but soon he could not bear the sight any longer, and seeing his mother near him, said to her unsteadily, “Come, let us go!”

Instantly divining some unusual feeling by his voice, she hesitated not a moment, and began to approach the entrance hall. But Mrs. Estcourt had an interminable list of friends who constantly detained her, while Mrs. Kemp joined Arion and chaffed him on his indifference, which he immediately concealed, to the bevy of ladies to whom he had hitherto been unusually silent and distraught. Joining at once in the spirited conversation around him he was equally delayed in escorting his mother to the carriage.

Meantime, earnestly desiring an opportunity to escape from the dining-room, Sylvia had quietly waited for the chance to verify her hopes. She with the others had visited the solemnly silent and magnificent shrine of the Buddha, but had had no

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opportunity to prove its interest to herself. The sliding doors had afterward been softly closed by one of the Indian servants, and its serene presence was forgotten by the chatting crowd.

But after partaking of the exquisite refreshments offered by her host, and seeing him courteously engaged with others, while many of the guests had gone or were departing, she went back through the curtained alcove which led to the rather remote chamber, and easily sliding the padded door, closed it behind her.

For the first time she had a chance to note this circular room, domed and padded with scarlet satin, lighted only by electricity and rich with the odors of champaka oil. The Buddha, almost hidden by the blue mist of the burning perfumes, did not especially affect her.

She had seen and examined hundreds of these gods in and out of half the known temples of the world, and one more, even found amid such peculiar surroundings, was of no moment. Carefully looking at every fold and depression, she could see nothing in the least like the head on her ring until, just as she believed she had discovered something which might be the mark, and was about to take her ring from her hand, to her dismay she found it was gone.

She was holding her gloves with her fan and handkerchief, for she had removed them, but the ring had certainly disappeared. Sinking down on the divan which encircled the room she gave a sharp cry of dismay! White and trembling, frightened and

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faint, the horror of her loss became more and more apparent to her mind.

As she sat there, quite unable to move, not knowing what to do, the door slid softly open, shut as softly, and Prince Mihira came in, going straight to the front of the statue. Raising his hand in sight of the figure, he uttered in his own language, with a sort of internal passion like physical agony.

*“ O seeker of the Real, behold God in the fair
face and symmetrical beauty!
Alas, thou darrest not regard the Real to-day,
O dupe of to-morrow's promises!
He who says that a fair face is not the
Visage of God, hath not the Truth-seeing eye,
and his pretension is vain, —*

“ Yet — ” with a pause like a sob: —

*“ He who remembereth me loveth me; and he who
loveth me, passionately desireth me; and him who
passionately desireth me I passionately desire; and
whom I passionately desire, I slay.”*

*“ Slay my heart, thou wilt! I passionately desire
thee, — O face that is fair.”*

Amazed, Sylvia listened breathless, but in spite of her own immediate trouble, full of sympathy for this strong man whose being seemed racked with sorrow. But before she could make herself known, she was astounded to see her ring on that raised hand.

Instantly the sight gave her courage and self possession. Have it she must, however he had become possessed of it. Rising she said softly, “ Prince! ”

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He turned in surprise and, perceiving who it was, clasped his hands and looking at her as if all Heaven were blazing upon him exclaimed, "Can it be true? Has the great Guide granted me freedom? Art thou sent to me, art thou mine?"

Alarmed and astonished, Sylvia stepped back and assumed an attitude of dignity and reserve.

"Pardon me, I beg of you," she said, "for so unintentionally intruding upon your devotions! I assure you I had no intention, nor knew it was your hour of prayer. Let me go at once, Prince, and later beg your pardon as humbly as I may."

"Nay, go not! O Beautiful. I prayed not. I only cried out in my pain! I ask nothing, I dare not ask, — but stay!"

Struck by the intense entreaty of his voice and attitude she trembled and remained silent, but finally summoning courage said, "I do not comprehend you, Prince, but I see you have found my ring. Will you return it to me?" in a voice whose calmness was a soft rebuke.

He in turn looked amazed.

"Your ring?" he answered, "What ring?"

"Why the ring upon your hand there. Did you not pick it up? I must have drawn it off with my glove," extending her hand for it.

At this moment the servant opened the sliding door and Mrs. Kemp came in, with Arion and his mother.

"Oh! here you are!" said she cheerfully, "we are going, Sylvia, and fancied you might have come to take a second look at this rare object," giving

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Sylvia a meaning glance. "Is there anything interesting about it?"

Sylvia was standing leaning on the statue, her face as white as her snowy hand.

"I have lost my ring," she said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Kemp, well aware of the intense meaning of the words, "Oh, Sylvia."

"But Prince Mihira has found it," she breathed, in a low tone.

"No, Madam," said the Prince, now wholly at ease and smiling pleasantly, "Miss Romaine fancies that this ring is so like her own that it must be hers, but it is not so."

"But it is hers!" cried Mrs. Kemp, "I could tell it among ten thousand. I have repeatedly examined it under a microscope, and it would be impossible to mistake it. Prince, surely you do not wish to annoy my ward! Pray give the ring to her. Do you not see she suffers?"

Arion had stepped directly beside Miss Romaine, and his fine face had also become stern and white as marble.

"Is the ring certainly yours, Miss Romaine?" said he.

"It is, I am positive of it," she answered.

"Then, Prince," said he, "you must certainly return it to her."

Prince Mihira now gazed at them all with such a look of growing astonishment that at last he appeared as one utterly at a loss. Then suddenly a still stranger expression dawned in his face. As if inspired with a new and magnificent idea, — some-

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thing that gave him unutterable joy, he laughed aloud and said:—

“Oh, the grand destiny! Oh, the ways of fate!” and then quietly but a little sarcastically said to Arion, “Sir, I recognize your honorable right to protect an American lady from the machinations of the foreigner: pray remain here with me until Miss Romaine can reach her home. Wait a moment.”

His eyes closed, his lips set in firm, determined lines, his hands clasped rigidly behind him, and without opening his eyes he said in a far-away voice as if from another world, “Miss Romaine’s ring hangs on the silver candelabra in her book room.”

With a slight quiver he opened his eyes, smiled faintly, and putting his hand on Arion’s shoulder said, “Stay with me, sir. They will soon send us a message that I have spoken the truth.”

Sylvia noted that on his brown hand no longer gleamed the ring.

Arion remained with Prince Mihira. They left the shrine-room and went into a cosy corner where huge cushions invited to repose, and the Prince entertained his guest with such wit and worldly wisdom, chatted so freely and easily of London and Paris, and so completely seemed to have forgotten the unpleasant episode that a half hour slipped away in what seemed less than half that time. A servant very soon entered with a note, and glancing at the address, the Prince courteously handed it to his guest. It was from Mrs. Kemp and was written in the strong, characteristic hand one might expect.

“The ring is here, safe and sound, precisely where

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Prince Mihira said it would be. Miss Romaine and I do not know how to express our regret that we should have insisted upon so discourteous a mistake. We can but rely upon the well-known generosity of Prince Mihira to overlook what a less noble nature might assume to be an insult, — and we beg him and you to assure us that he cherishes no resentment by soon visiting us and allowing us to personally request his forgiveness.”

“Prince,” said Arion, first reading the note aloud and then handing it to him, “I in turn must heartily beg your pardon. There is no doubt that the ring must be extremely like the one Miss Romaine wears, or both the ladies could not have been so positive.”

“I as heartily forgive your act of gallantry, Mr. Estcourt; nay, I applaud it. As for the rings,” he added, turning his on his finger and gazing at it with a brilliant smile, “I think they must be duplicates.”

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CHAPTER FIFTEENTH

WHEN Arion had departed, and the accustomed silence had settled over the great mansion, Prince Mihira, indicating his wish to be undisturbed, retired to the shrine-room and shut himself within.

Throwing himself prone on the soft divan which was piled with pillows, he thrust his face into his hands and fell into that melancholy mood when a man is led to review his whole life and see, if he can, that any great thing has come of it.

As a child he could remember the palace where a beautiful woman watched over his play with loving smiles, and who taught him in one breath the English and the Hindoo which had become as one language in his mind. Then suddenly the sweet, sad face appeared no more, the palace vanished and he was transported a long distance to a monastery, where, surrounded only by priests and penitents, his sole recreation was to visit the beautiful gardens, birds and animals he was allowed to frequent and love, and which were the only respite from interminable studies, long and frequent sacrifices, self-immolations of every natural impulse, quietude when his whole being seemed anxious to leap, run, fly; forced tasks when long sleeplessness had made them abhorrent, and the constant instilment of truths, theories, religious

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practices and ceremonies, again and again repeated until young manhood made him silent, self-contained, learned, meditative, rich in all the lore of the East, — marvellously well acquainted with the outer world, yet as apart from it, as far from the real life of humanity as if he were an exotic grown on the inner wall of some hermit's cave.

Carefully taught the diplomacy of men, the history of nations, the religions of the centuries, yet kept with infinite care from contact with even the country outside the walls, he had reached the years of rounded manhood, and finally, by some growing and developing quality of his being, he had suddenly, with fierceness, passion and the determination of a long cultivated will, rebelled, — rebelled in hot haste, in unspeakable anger, in protest, in defiance. "He would go out into the world. He would be independent! He would try his manhood in the struggle of his kind!" And expecting dire punishment, imprisonment, perhaps death, he had been astounded by the gentle voice of the high master of the temple saying, "Child no longer! Thou art right. It shall be so."

With these words what a flood of joy, of ambition had almost blinded him! What bright air-castles for future knowledge and personal greatness he had builded!

"But a few days," had said the priest, with dignified gravity, "and thou shalt leave us. Be patient until all is prepared."

And then one morning, called from his rock-hewn chamber, he was led to the center of the great tem-

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ple, whose magnificence had become so wearisome to him, whose wonderful carvings, amazing pillars, stupendous pinnacles and ever beautiful yet sombre decorations had been familiar from his earliest years.

What to him were jewels, incense, music, rites, sacrifices? They were the everyday routine, the tiresome paraphernalia of material things which to his enlarged spirit seemed vain and useless. If that great idol whom he daily worshipped, and before whose countenance he was now gently drawn, was the embodiment of the Ruler of his destiny, — if by some miraculous power its metal lips translated his prayers to the Unseen Being who had created and preserved him, — why should his life languish in repetitions and monotony, why curb his mental and moral strength in this narrow and apparently resultless devotion?

These were the thoughts with which he tardily excused to himself his sudden outbreak; for the exquisite kindness, the faultless methods by which he had ever been taught and surrounded, his heart most gladly acknowledged.

As the splendid ceremonies proceeded, and he was left standing alone in front of the temple deity, he began to realize that this was a somewhat unusual scene.

The vestments of the priests and their subordinates were of the most magnificent order, the music had the highest phase of worshipful beauty, and the banner of Indra, set on a pole adorned with an umbrella, flag, mirror, fruits, crescent-shaped jewels,

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garlands of flowers, plantains, sugar-canes, with the figures of a lion and a tiger, was elevated steadily while the joyful noise of hundreds present, the blessings and salutations of the priests, the loud sound of the kettle-drums, tabors, and conch-shells, with the texts of the Vedas chanted by the Brahmins, all seemed in some strange way to have some direct meaning for him, — yet what, he could not understand.

The flame of the homa fire was diligently watched by the sacred interpreters and for a time its appearance was that of benefic objects. Emitting a good odor, bright and large, all prosperity, of whatever the enterprise might be, seemed to be indicated. Joy sat on the countenances of the Brahmins. Yet in the midst, a blue-jay swooped in and settled on the banner pole. A murmur ascended, heads were shaken. “The prince shall suffer!” Then the flame grew dim and flickered dully! “The prince shall meet many obstacles!”

Then came the high priest and uttered loudly, with his right hand resting upon the head of the prince, his eyes raised to the statue above:—

“Thou art Vishnu, the deity that exists throughout eternity, — the all-pervading principle — who appeared in his Varaha Avatar. I invoke the all-knowing Agni, the protecting Indra, the lord of the Devas, that our hero may be successful.”

He remembered how quietly, then, all the priests and people dispersed. How soon the silence seemed to enwrap both, as he stood alone with his master.

Gently taking him by the hand, the great Brahmin now led him into the monastery garden, and seat-

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ing themselves in the shade, turned his mild, serene face upon him with a benignant smile.

“Thou hast now been consecrated to thy life work, for which thou wert brought into thy present incarnation, my son, and but a few days will see thee sent out into the world thou dost so long to visit. I must tell thee in brief, what thy Karma hath destined thee to do. For thou wert born to do that of which I will tell thee, as I shall prove.

“Back in the very early part of this century, in a far-away and different part of our great land of India, it matters not to thee what spot, there was a quick rebellion, a great struggle, a disturbance of an ancient temple, wherein had sat and reigned for untold years a god, worshipped by hundreds of generations. Related to our temple and our caste by thousands of ties, the priesthood of this temple were in close communication with us. But recently the Most High had been averse to him who preceded me so many years before my time, and friendly intercourse had ceased. There was a complete massacre of all the priests attending on the great god of this most ancient and remote temple, and the image sacred by a thousand years of worship, the bronze figure disappeared.

“Taken away by the triumphant mob of soldiery, its fortune was to be carried over seas, and doubtless through all these years up to this day, held by some English lord, it stands, neglected and forlorn, unworshipped and unsung, forgotten or disdained by those who, alien and ignorant, impudent and gross, know not and dream not of the treasure they possess.

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The proof of their so-called valor, the object of their coarse jests, the Buddha, held sacred for a decade of centuries, no longer blesses us, no longer exerts its miraculous power for good, among its own and peculiar people.

“Hatred, violence, injustice, famine, poverty, illness, have followed that loss. Sorrow and trouble have visited our unhappy land. Aliens press us and scorn us. Taxes wrest from our helpless ones the wages of their toil.

“Not until the great, the all-powerful shall be restored to his seat among the mighty, not until the skies of India shall reflect themselves from the mild benevolence of his countenance, shall India regain her prosperity, shall our dying country rise from her bed of woe!”

The pallid lips shook with his suppressed emotion. The prostration of his noble figure was eloquent with grief. At last raising himself he went on:—

“Prince, thou art ordained to be the saviour of thy country. To thee falls the mission of finding and restoring to us the great Buddha. Thy mother was a princess of a most ancient line. She loved a great foreign lord, and, alas!—yet glory be it!—she put aside her caste, she yielded to his persuasions, she escaped from her palace and, joining him, fled to the great metropolis of the world.

“According to his religion, embracing the beliefs and customs of her beloved, she in high ceremony and grandeur became wedded to him, adjuring by this union the ancient beliefs of her race. But when thou wert born, yearning for her own land, fear-

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ing from the change in her health that she was about to leave the living, she was brought with tenderest care by her lord back to the city of her birth.

“Under the old influences, among old scenes, dying, she consecrated thee to us, to the religion, the care of her own beloved master, and with the consent of thy father thou hast been brought to thy manhood under the beneficent training of the Brahmin.”

Again he paused, the prince remembered, lying there as if in a dream, and threading his history bead by bead up to the present.

“But my father!” he had exclaimed. “My father lives? Where is he? Who is he?”

“He dwells in his own land, and he wills not thou shouldst know him. It was on this condition he yielded to thy mother’s persuasions and gave thee to us. He makes no claim and will not have thee claim him! I know not of thy father since those years. And since thou couldst not be wholly one of us; since foreign blood had made thee alien, — yet such hast been thy purification since birth that thou art in effect, a Brahmin, — we have believed, as thy birth was on the fateful day in the year of the desecration; as thou wert born on the reappearance of the star Canopus, and thy mother, knowing this, offered her Arghyam to Agastya by pouring it out on the earth for thee, and we have continued it, so that four times seven times, in a truly devout spirit, fragrant flowers, fruits, precious stones, gold cloths, sweetmeats, rice and fragrant paste have been duly offered, — thou hast been and shall ever be kept free from all disease, thou shalt triumph over all thy

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enemies, thou shalt see things hidden, thou shalt attain thy desire!"

He had risen, and like one inspired had chanted this prophecy in a voice of intoned music.

"Now, go into the world. No moneys shall be lacking to thy purse, no obstacle that thou shalt not have means to conquer. Dwell grandly among men and mould them. Read their secrets with the clairvoyant eye, hear their histories with the clairaudient ear. Find, let it be where it will, the great Buddha, and bring the god back to his own.

"On thy hand I place this jewel. It was the sign and seal between our temple and the priests of the ravished shrine where dwelt the Buddha of the ages. Lost forever the other, — gone with the dismantled body of the Master there, no doubt, but still the one, the perfect clue to the original, the only, the oldest, the greatest deity."

Then he had gazed at the ring long and curiously and had said, "Master, this ring, then, is not the original. It is the duplicate. Should I find the Buddha, why should I claim it? It is not ours! To the other temple, whose priests you tell me were at variance with you, that great god must belong! What if some other soul hath been selected by the god to carry out the eternal purpose? What if some other being wears the sacred ring?"

Indignation, doubt and fear were all mingled in the voice of the Brahmin as he clutched his hands and answered, "It shall not be so! Son of my heart, thou speakest impossible things! Thou alone shalt

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find and possess the sacred god; the other ring is buried."

"Nay," answered the sweet, deep music of the pupil's voice, "but should it be so! Then, then we should have no right! The Buddha would belong to the owner of the ring?"

"If the impossible become possible," the priest replied in a sardonic tone, "I absolve thee, body and soul, from this quest. Give your duplicate to the miraculous possessor of the original, and bow your head to your Karma."

"You say this because it is right?" persisted the prince.

The old man lifted a white face to the skies and said in a half whisper:—

"Because it is right."

In a few moments recovering his equanimity he continued:—

"But I have no fear that thou wilt ever see that ring, nor that the glorious god whose heart must long for home shall cease to watch over thee and draw thee, draw thee closer and closer to his heart. Thou wilt find and worship him, Mihira, and thy name shall be set forever in letters of gold on his pedestal in our temple.

"Listen: On the fold of the garments, beside the right knee, is impressed, under the hand that holds the parchment roll of judgment, the divine face that ages ago was engraven on this ring. Search, Prince, search until thou findest, and then return, bringing thy glory with thee, for it is written, '*Such shall become the Ruler of the Earth.*'"

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CHAPTER SIXTEENTH

“**S**UCH shall become the ruler of the earth,” murmured Prince Mihira to himself, rising and pressing his head into his hands. “And search as I may, no trace as yet, save — this strange affair of the ring. But it cannot be! Nay, it is not! Some bit of Greek or Roman art, some quaint or curious carving deceived her hasty vision. An American girl, young, delicate, and surrounded by all modern influences, how could she become possessed of the lost talisman of more than a century ago! And that from a land so far away, so alien — yet stay! She has travelled much, she has visited Sarnath and Benares, she speaks the language like a native — can it be possible — by some chance — O beautiful beyond words!”

And he held out his arms with a look of intense yearning, “O wondrous if it were so! But more strange that I know not, and cannot know! If I were in my own land, an exertion of will, a desire would give me the truth. I should see her, visit her spirit, hear her speak! Time nor tide should keep me from her! The clairvoyant eye should pierce the walls of her dwelling, the clairaudient ear should listen to the melody of her voice. But here!” — he threw up his hands as if angered and helpless — “Here, my power is going — nay, is gone! It

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was but by a supreme effort that I dimly saw her ring, and I doubt if I can ever see the hidden again. Month by month my power has waned, and now, in this babel of hurry, noise, modern ideas, religious clashings, thousand interests, social bickerings, the ancient, the sage, the occult, the pure wisdom, fade out, become dull, useless, vapid, dead. I breathe no more the atmosphere of spiritual life!"

As he stood, thinking of the time he had spent in world-wandering since the day when the high priest had told him his history, he answered a gentle rap on the cushioned door with an imperative, "Enter!" His Indian servant brought a card, and he read "Henry St. John Dusart" engraved upon the paper. "A stranger!" he said musingly. "I will see him. Take him to the French drawing-room."

In a few moments making a change in his toilet to ordinary evening dress, and casting behind him the memories evoked by his hour of reverie, he approached the new guest with that gracious and hospitable air which distinguished him. The man before him was singularly oriental in appearance, yet certainly not so by birth, and Prince Mihira was at once attracted by the pleasing dignity of his address.

"I fear I am mistaken in the hour of your reception, Prince," he said with a smile. "I confess I hastily read the card, and presumed it was for the evening."

"It is over; but I heartily congratulate myself that one guest can be enjoyed alone. The mistake is a great pleasure to me, I assure you; but I fear you will miss the society of the ladies."

"I am myself delighted to find you alone, for

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although I hastened here at once to meet you in the company of others, I should have asked permission to call again upon you later.”

Prince Mihira summoned a servant and ordered refreshments. “Do not send for anything on my account, I beg of you,” said Mr. Dusart, “for I made a great dinner at the club not an hour ago. The fact is, I only arrived in town from the far west three hours ago, and found your invitation on my dressing-table, together with mountains of mail. I hastened at once to meet you.”

Prince Mihira secretly wondered why his guest should have taken such pains, but most cordially expressed his hospitality.

Mr. Dusart seemed a trifle agitated and pale. He continued, “The truth is, I am come to you as a messenger, and my haste has its own significance. A person who knows you — a gentleman who knows your family — has sent me to speak with you — to open the way — to tell you that he exists.”

The Prince smiled a little, as one man of the world must perforce smile when he sees another man of the world embarrassed. “I beg you to tell me at your leisure,” said he gently, “for I have met a great many men since I left my home in India, but none who knew my family.”

“This friend of mine,” said Dusart, evidently regaining his composure, “knew both your father and your dear mother, when they were in London, where you were born. He remembers the time of your birth, and was with you when you returned to India. I suppose you know your history?”

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“I know that my father was of birth foreign to India, and that my mother was a princess. They placed me with the priests of a great temple, with whom I have remained until a year or so ago, when I was sent to travel, and have come to the United States.”

“And that is all?”

“All, but that my mother soon died, and that my father in giving up all claim to me demanded that I should never make any claim upon him, which agreement has been religiously kept.”

He said this with an air of great reserve and pride.

“Oh!” exclaimed Mr. Dusart, as if struck with sudden pain, “that is not quite so. Your beautiful mother begged him to promise, that unless you chose voluntarily to leave the monastery, or for any reason were sent forth from there, so that by either means you became a denizen of the outer world, that your father should never disturb your religious progress, but let you become bound to the priesthood if you would.

“In her dying moments your lovely mother naturally returned with renewed force to the beliefs of her people, and perhaps secretly regretted that her great love had led her to take up with what she had believed to be a false faith. Respecting her every wish, and blaming himself for having cast a single cloud of anxiety upon her pure spirit, your father thought he could do no wiser thing than to grant her desires.

“Prince, he crucified his own heart, but he has kept his solemn promise, and never by word or sign intruded upon you, or tried to influence you. He

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has, however, never forgotten you, but has visited India two or three times, seeing that your mother's fortune was properly conserved for you, that you were healthy, contented, your education progressing, and in all probability you would in time become one of the great Brahmins of your race. His life-sacrifice has gone on and on for a quarter of a century. He never dreamed that it would end. There was no apparent reason why you should come out into the world."

"He went to India!" exclaimed the Prince, eagerly. "Did he see me? Did I unconsciously see him?"

Mr. Dusart looked into the fine young face with unutterable tenderness. "One day when you had grown to be quite a lad, — fifteen, I think, — he stood with the other worshippers to see the fixing of an image in the temple. You were among the other youths, dressed in your robe and looking virgin as a girl! Over the image you poured your jar of milk, your water mixed with kusa grass, and to you it was given to also bathe it in fragrant water from a jar into which the devout had thrown their gold and gems, while the Vedic hymns were chanted and the idol faced the east.

"As you approached for the last time to rub the image with the earth taken from places trodden by elephants and bulls, from the mountains, the ant-hills, and the lotus-tanks, in beautiful symbolism of the powers for good to be exerted by the god over all the orders of the world, you stumbled, and he —"

"I remember it!" exclaimed the prince. "I was

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suddenly caught up, and for an instant pressed to a stranger's heart. My own thrilled with a strange feeling, and I could hardly compose myself for further worship."

"It was he!" breathed the other, with a sigh of joy. "For once he touched the person of his boy!"

"And then?"

"Then he returned to his native land, and once more became absorbed in those occult studies to which he had devoted his life. Science, psychology, the human mind, spirit, being, its powers, its possibilities, — these have occupied the leisure of the man, even in his own city of New York."

"His own city!" cried Prince Mihira, astonished. "Is my father an American?"

"Certainly!" answered his guest. "Did you not know it?"

"No. I supposed he was English. They told me he was a great lord."

Mr. Dusart smiled. "In India," said he, "any display of luxury makes a lord of a foreigner. No, your father is an American of the seventh generation, although far back the family was French. And now," he added eagerly, "I have come in haste as an ambassador to you, Prince, from the man who is all eagerness to greet you; and I ask you if you will receive him, if I may be assured that you will not reject him? Have you never thought of him, never wished to know your father?"

"I have thought of him, and offered up my devout prayers for him every day since I was told he is still living, — with both love and resentment," answered

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the prince in a low voice. "I felt that in renouncing me he was heartless; yet my soul has nevertheless yearned for him from the time I was a little child. My mother dead, my father lost to me, the affections of my heart have been stifled and in vain."

He had risen and was pacing the floor, his face filled with melancholy. "And which prevails?" asked Dusart, who had also risen and was bending forward with an intense anxiety—"which prevails, resentment or love?"

Prince Mihira stopped short, and coming close to the older man looked at him straight in the eyes, with a strong, sweet gaze that searched his very soul, and soon, glowing with reverence and joy, he said: "My mother loved and trusted you, my father, why should not I?"

Dusart clasped him to his breast with a smothered sob. "My son!" he uttered, and his tone was a benediction. "My beloved son!"

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CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH

I WAS surprised on leaving Prince Mihira's house to find the carriage at the door. Watson sprang from the box and opening the door said, "Mrs. Estcourt desired me to ask you to drive straight home."

"Thank you, Watson," said I, "and Boyd, home!" as Watson resumed his place. Good fellows, — they had been with us a long time, and I fancy would not complain between themselves if they had waited all night.

On my arrival I found dinner still awaiting me although it was nearly nine o'clock.

"I hope you did not wish to go elsewhere?" asked my mother, drawing me to my seat and giving me her usual caress. "I could not wait! Mrs. Kemp asked me to follow them and I did. We all went into the little book-room at the head of the stairs and, — shall you require Margaret at present?"

"No, she may go," said I. "What did you find?"

"Why, the ring, Arion, hanging on the candelabra, just as he said. You cannot imagine how badly Miss Romaine felt. She sobbed and cried like a child. 'How ashamed I am!' she kept saying. But truly, the poor girl was not to blame! The ring is exactly like that of the prince, and who would suspect there could be two such strange

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rings as that! We called up Mrs. Kemp's maid and she said that in sweeping she had found it under a book-shelf and so hung it there. Miss Romaine remembered having a hard pull on a big book there this morning, that was tightly packed in, and doubtless she lost the ring then. Of course Mrs. Kemp wrote the note of apology, and then I came away. What did Prince Mihira do? I am dying to know!"

"He simply said that he thought the rings must be duplicates. But how could he have known where hers was? That must have been true clairvoyance! It was a remarkable proof of it. But, mother, his expression was very strange. He seemed overjoyed, as if over some great discovery. How do you like him?"

"Look here, Arion," she said, going after the old album again and pointing to the picture of Henry Dusart in his youth. "Is not that a remarkable resemblance?"

I could but admit it. The face of Prince Mihira was amazingly like the photograph.

"Two duplicates," said Mrs. Estcourt, with a short laugh, "and another also!"

"What is that?" said I earnestly.

"Did you not notice that Prince Mihira and Miss Romaine have exactly the same voice?"

"That is it! That is what I have been puzzling over, from the moment I heard him speak. Mother, it is more remarkable than anything else! Yes, it is true. Their voices are as one!"

"I cannot comprehend all this," said she with

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a slight shudder. "It seems actually uncanny! There can be no possible relationship between Miss Romaine and Prince Mihira, yet she wears the duplicate of his ring, or he wears the duplicate of hers, and without ever meeting before, they speak as if they were twins!

"Well, anyway, we shall have an opportunity to see them together again, and that soon, for Mrs. Kemp invited us to a private dinner party for next Tuesday, and said we would have only six or eight guests, including the prince and her brother, Mr. Carter, who, you know has practically become Miss Romaine's guardian. Did you know he has become Judge Carter? Oh, yes, he is on the Supreme Bench."

So she ran on, my dear, lovely mother, keeping the most important topic, — the one she knew was on my heart and lips, — in abeyance until we could reach the cosy solitude of the library. Darling diplomat! She knew soft firelight and rose-scented silence would draw forth the passion of my soul in words! I tantalized her for a few moments with silence, but then spoke forth my disappointment in a burst.

"I had no chance to talk with her at all!"

"Oh, but I watched her, Arion, — and she is beautiful! Her spirit shines through the expression of her face like a soft flame behind an opal! Every thought is mirrored there in translucent changes, and her heart of fire burns beneath the whole."

"Be my poet, mother, go on!"

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“When she saw you, Arion, for an instant she was paler, as if a cloud had obscured the sun as it beamed over a placid lake, but then, — the cloud went away and such sunshine burst forth as only spring and joy and youth and love can make in the world! She was the very embodiment of happiness! I never saw a face so illuminated!”

“That is precisely as she looked before, dear, — one would think her spirit had found its heaven!”

My mother sat back and looked at me, with a slow, soft smile growing deeper in her eyes. Finally in a slightly dry tone she said, “It probably had.”

I sprang up. “Do you think, truly and faithfully, that I am worthy of such a woman, — to be my wife, — to take care of her happiness for all her days? Does my spirit match hers?”

“My son, from your birth you have been an honor to your name, a comfort and blessing to me and beloved by a thousand friends.”

.
We both waited for Tuesday with impatience. I was astonished when mother appeared ready to go. She was simply gorgeous! She had always detested diamonds, for some reason, but had passionately admired rubies, and from time to time our gifts had enhanced her collection until it was indeed a rare one. To-night she glowed with them, and her rich white brocade shot through with the same color gave her a distinguished beauty that her snowy hair becomingly crowned.

“It is a rose dinner,” she said simply. “I forgot to tell you.”

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We found Judge Carter had arrived, and Mrs. Kemp greeted us with delightful informality.

"Miss Romaine will be down in a moment, and we are expecting the Prince. I do not know how we shall manage to say our apologies," she laughed, "but we are humble, humble!"

When Prince Mihira was announced, he stepped quickly forward, and after bowing said to Mrs. Kemp, "I have ventured to break through all rules of etiquette and bring you another guest. He is however an old friend, he tells me, and I am sure you will forgive me."

"Mr. Henry Dusart," announced the servant. I saw my mother start and a flush of bright color rise to her forehead. I too was surprised.

"Oh! Henry!" exclaimed Judge Carter and Mrs. Kemp in one breath. "How glad, how pleased! Where have you been all this time? What lucky fate brought you to us to-day?"

"The Prince," said he, smiling and greeting them most cordially. Then turning to me he said, "Mr. Estcourt, we dine together again?" and then in a low tone, "Forget the dream in the reality," as Miss Romaine entered the drawing-room. A silence as of a heart-beat fell for a second over us all, as her presence became felt. The fresh, blessed air of the skies of June seemed to exhale from her person.

"Where roses and sweet lilies blow," murmured Dusart.

After greeting the prince and ourselves with sweetest courtesy she came straight forward to him.

"I heard your name and I know you to be my

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uncle," said she, her face bright with happiness. "My good uncle! My dear uncle!"

He caught up both her hands and kissed them in knightly fashion.

"My dear child," said he, "do you greet me so kindly? I feared perhaps, — but no! I am sure your judgment would be merciful. Sylvia, I am your mother's only brother, and if you will let me, I will love you as my own."

At this moment, with her usual tact, seeing the situation becoming a trifle strained, my mother made a diversion by saying, "Did we not race with each other on the ice some years ago, Mr. Dusart?"

He turned and gave a little start, but laughed easily and clasped her outstretched hand.

"Madam," he said, "your light feet put mine to shame! You were the Atalanta of the park!"

We moved to the dining-room, chatting as only old and confidential friends could do, and went through the several courses of dinner without a moment's break in the rapid conversation. When the biscuit and cheese and coffee were being discussed and the servants had retired, Mrs. Kemp begged us to listen to a little speech.

"This is an occasion," said she, pleasantly, "as well as a mere dinner! The judge has something to announce."

"Hear, hear," we cried, "what is the toast?"

The Judge rose and bowing profoundly said, "To Mrs. Kemp's daughter, Sylvia Romaine Kemp."

We were astounded, and waited breathlessly for an explanation. He drew a document from his

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pocket and unfolding it so that the seals and signatures were visible said, "Miss Romaine, in the months she has spent under this roof and during their previous acquaintance, has so endeared herself to my good sister, has so won her respect, confidence and affection, that being childless, and as I am a bachelor, Mrs. Kemp has prevailed upon Sylvia to become her legally adopted daughter.

"She feels that in taking this treasure to her heart and home she has gained far more than she can give, and as for myself, I welcome my new niece with unaffected pleasure."

He handed the paper to Miss Romaine, with the grace of a courtier.

With a soft glow blooming her cheeks the new Miss Kemp rose and said in a low voice, "The honor which has been extended to me is so deeply appreciated, that only a life of faithful and devoted care can repay its graciousness."

We offered our congratulations right and left, and Mrs. Kemp just dabbed her eyes with her lace handkerchief, unable to speak her pleasure.

"Since we have had so delightful a surprise to supplement so delightful a dinner," sounded the rich, grave voice of Mr. Dusart, perhaps you will be willing to listen to a little announcement from me!" And he half laughed, half trembled with some inner excitement. Again "Hear, Hear!" we cried, and he proceeded.

"I toast Prince Mihira Dusart, my beloved son."

Amazement, silence, incredulity followed this speech. We looked from one to another, unable

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to reply. The prince rose to Mr. Dusart's defence.

"It is quite true," he said simply, "and you shall hear the romantic story in brief. My mother, the Princess Varaham Mihira, — direct descendant of that great astronomer whose Aryan wisdom shone resplendent, and from its eminence dazzled the eyes of distant nations, who illumined every corner of the intellectual horizon and served as a beacon, lighting the paths of travellers, — met, loved, left her home for and married in the metropolis of England my honored father.

"Two years of infinite happiness, and then health and life began to fail. I joined them in their home, but brought with me still more sorrow than joy, for my mother did not improve.

"Longing for her home, her people and her religious associations, we went back to India. She died desiring that her boy should become a priest of the great temple of her city. Yielding to her prayers, my father complied, and I have never known him, until now, sent forth on a mission for our faith, he has found me, and I thank the Almighty Ones I have found him. Will you, my friends, accept the Indian to your American bosoms? For remember, I am half American myself."

If we had been amazed, pleasure predominated before he had finished and the father and son were made the recipients of a thousand congratulations, compliments and questions.

My dear mother had been very silent. Her face was a little weary and I thought so much excitement

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was wearing upon her. As we went back to the drawing-room she leaned heavily on my arm and I led her to a deep soft chair where she could almost lie at ease, with her head resting on its velvet cushion.

“This is a delightful little drama,” exclaimed Miss Kemp lightly, as we all grouped about the piano, “but nobody seems to think that there is another act!”

“What is it?” we all exclaimed. “Pray act it then!”

“I will,” said she, and going over to Prince Mihira, with infinite grace, she made a courtesy to him and bowing low, spreading her rose-soft skirts, said sweetly, “Welcome, Cousin Mihira.”

He started, and a fleeting expression of pain swept over his face, but he instantly raised her, and kissing her hand said gently and I thought very sadly, “Sweet cousin, — Sylvia.”

I think for a moment I was dazzled with the great joy that suddenly sprang into my soul. It was a revelation to me. I had not put it into words in my thought, — it had been latent, dormant, only intuitive, instinctive, — but I knew now that I was infinitely glad of the close relationship between them, and that although he might love her madly, — I was glad!

The evening was too full of emotions for all of us to regain our ordinary moods. We were all alive with the unexpected incidents that had taken place, and it was not until Miss Kemp went to the piano and began to play that we relapsed into a restful silence.

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I know not what she played, but some one softly rose and put out the electric lights, leaving only the shaded candles to light the dim beauty of the room. The music went on and on, in exquisite harmonies, in ever-rising exaltations. Serenity, peace, aspiration, grew slowly into the atmosphere. We ceased to watch the lovely woman sending forth through the ivory keys her very soul. We dropped our eyes and communed with our own. Over my mother's pale cheeks fell two liquid tears.

We parted in subdued and intimate quiet, the tenderness of this mutual reunion having drawn us sweetly together in a bond of indissoluble friendship.

. The Bronze Buddha

CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH

A FEW days after this Obed Spear came to the library door one morning and requested my attention.

“You know, sir,” said he, “that when you hired me, you told me to constantly keep my eye out for that Buddha? Well, I’ve been keeping it out.”

“Yes?” said I, “and what have you found with that eye?”

I smiled, for I had almost forgotten the Buddha, and presumed that since Miss Kemp’s father was dead, her desire to find it must be a thing of the past. I had never heard her mention the strange god, nor had I on that remarkable evening spoken of it to Dusart.

“I haven’t seen much,” said he, “but I got a glimpse of something bronze, and I took a notion, — I don’t know what the dickens I did for, either, but I did, — that it was the thing you want.”

“Sit down,” said I, “and tell me all about it.”

“Well,” said he, “you know your business keeps me down about the wharves a good deal and I like to be about the ships anyway. I guess I’m a real Yankee for I’m always poking my nose into other people’s business, — and yesterday I was down on the wharf looking about when I saw a wagon drive up with a mighty queer-shaped box on it.

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“It took three or four men to get it onto a steamer that runs down to Atlantic Highlands, and in dumping it off the wagon a bit of the box got broken and I caught sight of something shining. I just happened to stand pretty near it after they had got it aboard and it was bronze that I saw inside, — that ’s a fact. The box was shaped some like a chair, narrow at the top and broad at the base, — just such a box as might be built for that image, and it was directed to F. F. Doyle.

“The more I looked at it the more interested I got, and true as I live, they cast off and started out in the stream and I did n’t care if they did. I made up my mind to stay by that box.”

“So you took a trip to Atlantic Highlands?” said I. “Pretty cool, this time of year, was it not?”

“Oh, that ’s all right! When we got there a big wagon stood waiting, and after some delay the box was loaded onto it and a great green gawk drove off.

“I went up to the stables near by and asked where Mr. Doyle lived. They described a big place about two or three miles off and I hired a buggy and soon caught up with the team. When we got there they turned down a long private lane at the end of which was a gate leading on to the lawns that surrounded the house and outhouses. There was a great greenhouse, stables and sheds, all handsome as a picture.

“Quite a ways from the house was a queer-looking building of brick about twenty feet square. There was n’t a window in it and I ’ll be whipped if I did n’t think they were going to put the darned thing into a tomb. The driver took a key about as

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long as my arm and opened the iron door, and the two men he had brought with him tugged well to get the box off his cart. I came up and offered to help lift, as I saw they were about stuck, and that gave me a chance to see inside. It was a mighty handsome place, all domed up stone upon stone to a center like a pyramid, where a ventilator was set over a hole on top. It had one of these fine stone floors such as you see in new hotel offices, all cemented fine and tiles all around the sides as white as snow mixed with red and pretty colors. It had sort of panels set in the walls, made of queer tiles, besides. It was n't any tomb, but it was a dandy place, I tell you. We got the box in and the feller come right out and locked up. He thanked me and was going off when says I, 'Mr. Doyle ain't home to-day?'

"'No, he 's gone to the city, the place is all shut up. Did you want to see him?'

"'Well,' said I, 'I 'd kinder like to see him, about a little business I hed. What 's his address up town?'

"'He 's gone to visit some of his relatives in the northern part of the state,' said he, 'and I don't believe you 'll find his address in town.'

"'Don't you know it?' said I.

"'No, he 's a visiting around, I tell you; maybe the postmistress 'll know.'

"And he clucked up his horses and off he went. I walked up the lane as if to untie my horse, but as soon as they were out of sight I went back and examined that building. Why, sir, the walls are

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two feet thick if they are an inch! I never saw such a queer built thing, unless it was in a graveyard!

"I hunted around and found a ladder and up I got on top. By a little working I managed to get the small tin ventilator turned to one side and peeked down, but of course it was dark in there as a pocket.

"Somehow I was n't satisfied with one look so I tried to see into it again. I had a string in my pocket and tied a match to it, lit it and let it down the hole. It burned long enough for me to see quite a good deal, so I let down another. That's all I had. That ventilator would be a mighty good place to hear what was going on inside if anybody was in there!"

"Obed," said I sharply, "I think you have carried your detective propensities too far. The idea of your getting on a man's roof and removing his ventilator! It is a wonder you were not discovered. And after all, what did it amount to? You saw an oddly shaped box containing some heavy article, — ha! I'll warrant it was one of those bronze images or fountains or dogs or lions with which they ornament lawns. Well, I hope you replaced both the ladder and the ventilator?"

"I did, sir, and the postmistress gave me no better information than the driver. She said, 'Mr. Doyle had lived there for many years, had a wife but no family, and was off up country, she did not know just where.' I suppose I was a fool, sir, to think the box contained the Buddha, — but honest now, — don't you think yourself Mr. Estcourt, that such a building on a place is a strange thing?"

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“Were there shelves running around the room?”

“Not a shelf.”

“I thought perhaps the building might have been intended to receive a magnificent collection of books or rare curiosities. . There are a few such buildings in the country, fire-proof and burglar-proof and even earthquake proof, — designed to be kept safe for a thousand years. I know of one rich gentleman who has built one in Connecticut.”

Obed was thinking.

“I wonder,” said he, rubbing his hands and speaking as if to himself, “if those big bronze tiles all ornamented and carved might not have been little doors into boxes, like a safety vault. If I remember right there were six of those on a side, about a foot square; and if the walls are two feet thick that would leave a space big enough in each to contain a great many things.”

“Did n’t you ask the postmistress anything about the building?” said I.

“Oh, yes, of course, and two or three other people, but she acted as if she got sick of my asking so many questions, and went back from the window. She said she had never seen it and they all seemed to think it an old story. One old man said it had been built more than ten years, and nobody yet had ever found out what it was for. Then ‘Mr. Doyle must be a sort of crank!’ I said.

“‘Oh, no,’ he answered, ‘Doyle is as good a fellow as ever stepped, never saw a more reasonable man, kind-hearted and generous.’

“They all spoke well of Mr. Doyle. I could not

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seem to get anything further so I came home. I looked up the directory at once but there is no F. F. Doyle, and probably he has never resided here. He has a fine place, anyway."

My man looked a little crestfallen and disappointed, as if he had concluded I would consider his trip a failure.

So I said, "Well, Obed, I thank you very much for the pains and trouble you have taken. To be sure, it is none of our business how many boxes Mr. Doyle has come to his place, but you have certainly shown great interest and care. If anything further comes to your notice act on it at once."

"It was n't very expensive," said he. "I did n't get anything to eat. It only cost two-sixty."

I laughed outright. "If you always save me the expense of your lunch Obed," said I, "I am afraid that round paunch of yours will get too thin to be becoming. Have a cigar. Now don't be foolish. *Always*, in the midst of life or death, whether you survive or perish, eat your dinner Obed, let come what will."

He went off saying something like "darned good feller," under his breath.

As I sat thinking of this odd business my mother came in and said, "Arion, I cannot get that strange vision of yours at the house of Henry Dusart out of my mind. What a strange thing that you should have seen Miss Kemp, — Romaine, — his niece, and in such a costume, such a strange environment. Were you not very much astonished as well as angry? Did you not expect to see the

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Bronze Buddha when he took you down into that room?"

"I certainly did, — and yet, he had been so mysterious, was such a stranger and had so positively said that I should not see it again that I did not know what to think. Astonished? Angry? Why, mother, the whole thing was so full of emotion that when I remember calmly sitting down afterwards and dining with him I do not know whether to be ashamed or to trust his words and believe that it was something intended for my good. He seemed very much puzzled himself, and did not understand my indignation."

"You will not let it rest? Now that we have met him socially and under such intimate conditions you will go and see what it all means?"

She spoke anxiously and seemed a little eager. I told her then of what had happened to Obed Spear. She listened very earnestly and at the end remarked, "I never have heard of any Mr. Doyle. I do not really think there is anything in it, do you?"

"Obed is a shrewd fellow," said I, "a born detective. He does things without knowing why he does them. His intuitions lead him along in spite of himself. He has been invaluable to us, mother. We were being pretty well defrauded by that rascal Dolittle, do you know? And yet, he is so eager to serve us that his enthusiasm may lead him astray."

"Yes, I know, still! When are you going to see Henry — Dusart?"

It was but the fifth part of a second that she hesitated after saying Henry, but I confess I noticed it.

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“As Mrs. and Miss Kemp are there on a little visit,” said I gently, “I thought I should call around there this evening.”

“Has the prince given up his establishment and gone to his father’s home, as they discussed?”

“Oh, no, he preferred his own house and way of living. It is quite natural and I think very wise.”

“Who told you? I did not know you had seen them?”

“I met Miss Kemp yesterday, just for a moment. She was going into Tiffany’s, and she said her uncle had given up his desire.”

“And then you asked to call?”

I smiled.

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CHAPTER NINETEENTH

IT was with a curious feeling that Arion again mounted the steps of Henry Dusart's great house, after the events of the intervening months. He stopped before pressing the bell and thought of his host's last words, which had so strongly impressed themselves upon his memory. He had never met Mr. Dusart since, save at Mrs. Kemp's rose dinner and such were the incidents of that occasion that with none of the party had he enjoyed an extended conversation.

Now the words, "Go, now, Arion, and let me ask you to trust me in the going so that by and by you will be coming also," again arose in his mind. Had he trusted him? Could he trust him? Why should he trust him? Yet he was the uncle of his "Star" (for still in his heart he called her so), and could that blood be false, that lineage be evil?

On entering the drawing-room the same feeling of homelike, wholesome, lovely hospitality at once touched his sensitive being, and finding the prince, Mr. Dusart and his niece grouped before the open fire in the hall, he sank into one of the great soft chairs with a sense of happiness too delightful for words.

The chat drifted from one point to another until he suddenly bethought him of Mrs. Kemp and inquired for her. "She felt that she must go back to her own

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house to-night," said Mr. Dusart, "but under the chaperonage of good Mrs. Doyle, she agreed to let Miss Sylvia brighten us up for a few days."

"Mrs. Doyle is my dear old nurse, Mr. Estcourt," said Miss Kemp. "You cannot know how deeply I appreciate your bringing them to live with you, dear uncle," she went on, turning his way. "I might have known how attached you must have been to them, however," and she snuggled her hand in his.

At that moment Arion, who had started at the name of Doyle as one who could hardly believe his own ears, saw a comfortable matronly figure come from between the curtains and say, "Could I speak with you a moment, Miss Sylvia?" and in a second she had been drawn in and introduced by Miss Kemp, who fondly patted the plump hand she held. The woman retired almost immediately, but not until she had shown, by her tone and gestures, with what respectful adoration she regarded her charge.

This little incident only enhanced the feeling of homelike comfort which had both times seemed to pervade the atmosphere of this house. As they sat before the great blaze and watched the birch bark curl over the logs, he could but remark how delightful the good old-fashioned wood fire could make a room, even if bare and scantily furnished.

Whereupon Sylvia told of the different fires before whose ruddy flames she had sat with her father. Campfires on the Arabian desert; a mass of peat glowing in the darkness by an Irish lake, where the great circle of Druid stones stood gaunt and ghostly against a stormy sky; a little scanty bonfire made of

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dry heather on a Scottish hillside. One after another recalled some incident of travel.

Finally, "By the way, dear," went on Mr. Dusart, "I hope you won't mind, but I have decided that Holly Bank should have steam heat. Those great fireplaces do very well, as an addition to other heat, but taken alone! I found one of the most unique radiators I ever saw the other day, which a firm are trying to introduce instead of those hideous things which were put into this house years ago. It is a great dolphin on a shell and the pipes are entirely hidden behind it. It is bronzed, of course, and looks remarkably well. I sent it down a day or two ago and Doyle will go down next week to see to the whole thing."

Arion, who had listened to this speech with unutterable amusement, now broke into uncontrollable laughter. The more he thought of Obed Spear following a steam radiator and climbing on top of a brick mausoleum to observe it, the more comical it seemed. He laughed until he was ashamed and could only apologize again and again, begging them to wait until he could find breath to explain himself. At last he said, "You would think, Miss Kemp, that my meeting you in a gallery of beautiful paintings fully a year ago could not possibly have any connection with your uncle's steam-heating arrangements to-day, and can probably not see the least thing amusing about it, but life is full of odd combinations and this one makes laughter the key!"

"On that day," he continued gently, his expression and voice becoming as tender as a caress, "I heard

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your dear father's exclamation of dismay, when you told him that the Bronze Buddha that had stood there was missing. I noted your sadness, his weakness and pallor, and after you had left the gallery found that he had been very much shocked when the ticket-taker had declared he knew nothing about it. Now I myself had a marked interest in the Buddha, as a certain gentleman had prophesied that I should not soon see it again, — so I determined to spare neither time, care nor money to hunt it up for you."

"You have been doing this for me?" she said in a low voice, a great joy trembling in her heart.

"So for months the search has been kept up," he went on more lightly, "and only this very day my man reported that he had noticed a peculiarly-shaped box, fancied it might contain the Buddha, followed it by steamer to Atlantic Highlands, hired a team and followed it across country two or three miles and finally helped unload it into a strange brick building on the estate of a Mr. Doyle!"

Whereupon they all laughed as merrily as he.

"You see I had not the keys of the house," said Mr. Dusart to Miss Kemp, "and so let the young gardener place it temporarily in the — what *did* your father call it, Sylvia?"

"Papa never gave it a name. I well remember when it was built. All the people round about came to see it. I suppose he thought that would be the wisest way, — poor papa!"

During the whole of this merry chatter Prince Mihira had remained quiet, pale under his olive complexion and not speaking a word.

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Now, coming over to Sylvia he said in that exquisite voice which distinguished them all, "I have never yet asked to see if your ring is really a match to mine, dear cousin. Are you willing to compare them?"

Taking off their rings, the dark head almost touching the golden one, they bent close to the firelight and examined them with the greatest care. "Here is a magnifying glass," said Mr. Dusart, bringing one, and turning on more electrics.

"They are the same!" exclaimed Sylvia.

"They are absolutely the same," murmured the prince.

Each looked again and again, trying to discover some difference in the antique intaglio, or the chasing of the settings, but nothing could be discerned.

The prince was extremely pale now, and stood with his hand tightly clasped on a chair. Arion handed Miss Kemp one of the rings while the prince picked up the other. Suddenly, with a cry of dismay Sylvia lifted her head and looked from one to the other.

"Oh, the rings, the rings, — they are mixed, — which is mine? Which is mine?"

Prince Mihira sank into a chair. He also looked like one stricken with horror: he gazed at Sylvia with an intense look of pity, pain and unspeakable love. Finally, as she leaned on the mantle, trembling and silent, he said sweetly and solemnly: —

"The Almighty One, divine pervader of the universe, shall judge, shall lead us! I, Krishna, am the same to all creatures; I know not hatred nor favor; but those who serve me with love dwell in me

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and I in them. The righteous soul obtaineth perpetual happiness."

In the hush which followed these beautiful words, Sylvia raised her head, and kissing the ring on her hand responded, "I will answer you, Cousin Mihira, with words that are a matter of faith with me: the nature-poet, John Burroughs, wrote them:—

"Serene I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind, or tide, or sea;
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,
For, lo! my own shall come to me.

The stars come nightly to the sky;
The tidal wave unto the sea;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high
Can keep my own away from me."

Without another word or anxious expression, both resumed their places at the fireside, while the two who observed them thought proudly in their souls, "What equanimity, what grace!"

"You of course cannot know, father," said Prince Mihira, "how deeply significant to me is this strange incident, but I am glad to tell you all what is the real object and mission of my journeys about the world. Mr. Estcourt has just enlightened me in a way, to the extent that you, my dear cousin, or at least your father, has been searching for a certain Bronze Buddha. Is this true?"

"My dear father spent half his life in search of a certain Buddha which he first saw in India some thirty years ago. I am not aware of the reason why my father searched for it, — he never told me, — but

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he exacted a promise of me that I should spend five years of search before I should give it up as useless. Every day I seek some clue. Your ring, prince, must be a clue!"

And she looked at him keenly yet sweetly.

"I have been sent from the temple in India where I was educated for the mission, to search for a Bronze Buddha which disappeared from India as they supposed about one hundred years ago. This ring will fit perfectly upon a raised face carved in the folds of the garment. To restore the Buddha to our temple, and according to my Master's belief, to also restore prosperity and health to the sorely-pressed people of India by bringing back our exiled god, is why I am present in this city to-day, — why I find the clue in your ring, my cousin."

"But my ring was given to my father directly, by the dying highpriest of the temple where it belonged!" exclaimed Sylvia. "His words were, 'He who shall possess the ring is the heir of our Buddha forever!'" After these convincing words, spoken so quickly yet so gently, a silence that was almost breathless fell on the group.

Then, holding up his ring and looking at Sylvia with a serene expression, Prince Mihira said: —

"Is this the ring the priest handed to your father, or is it the one on your hand?"

Silence could be the only reply. At last Henry Dusart, taking the hands of both and looking lovingly at each said gently: "My son, — daughter of my beloved sister, — this union of life work should bind you in a friendship as unusual as inspiring. Your

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noblest aspirations, your highest good rest in one object. Let it matter not who first finds the Bronze Buddha nor to whom it will be given when found: be assured that if either of you are so fortunate as to behold it, that He who is above both men and gods will give it to whom it belongs."

"Who knows," now put in Arion, with a soft laugh designed to break up the tension of this unexpected scene, "that my good Obed Spear may not be the one to present his godship to the light of day? If he is as successful as yesterday, he may demand a thousand shekels of you each!"

With this, Mr. Dusart turned to Arion and said, "When you visited me once before, I took you to my room of magic, did I not? Supposing we all go there and see what visions of the night will vouchsafe their airy beauties to our gaze?" And following the word with the action, led the way up the broad staircase to the roof conservatory.

"Is not this a beautiful place?" said Sylvia, as Arion gave her his arm. "For the few days I have been here, I have spent half my time in this sunny spot. The violets are now in full bloom,—let me give you some," and she knotted a few leaves and blossoms on his coat. "I have never been into uncle's magic room, as he calls it,—is it wonderful?"

"It is indeed, a marvellous room" he replied, "I was never in it but once, however."

They passed down the iron steps and came into the flame-lit, richly draped apartment. The great velvet curtains hung as before, and when they were seated, after having exclaimed over the strange

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gorgeousness of the place, their host said, "Now I am going to have some music, and while you hear it, I beg of you very earnestly to each think of that which you most long to see. No matter what it may be, think with your whole attention of whatever you most wish to see."

As when Arion had listened, again the richest, sweetest music seemed to pour around them from all the air at once, but this time it was of a noble and religious character.

Deep notes as of an organ or some great viol flooded the atmosphere with splendid tones while a chorus as of human voices far away chanted some glorious anthem. Slowly, slowly the velvet draperies were drawn aside, the soft gray mist, the endlessness of space appeared. Hushed, awe-struck, silent, they could almost hear each other's hearts beat in the silence which followed. Then dully, deeply, like a hue of dim sunset or a shaded blaze of ruddy gold, grew into shape a seated form.

One by one, feature after feature came to view, detail after detail. A crouching lion first, then richly carved garments, a hand and arm holding a lotus leaf, a hand and arm holding a scroll, and slowly, like a birth into radiant life, came the face, — the calm, exquisite, divine, compassionate countenance which was so deeply engraven on the hearts and memories of each.

Splendid in its perfection, its almost speaking plentitude of meaning, sat before them, in a light which seemed to emanate from its own being, the long-sought image of the Bronze Buddha.

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CHAPTER TWENTIETH

AS slowly, as silently as it had come into view the vision faded, faded, or rather seemed to disintegrate part by part from sight. The curtains drooped their velvet folds softly over the gray, soft fog, and Mr. Dusart, who had been standing, first turning to them and to the god, sank into a chair.

Prince Mihira was the first to speak. "You are a very mysterious man, father," said he. "Sometimes you seem the embodiment of all that is beautiful, strong and true, and sometimes I almost fear you."

"I am mysterious to myself," he answered.

"Is it hypnotism," asked Arion. "Of course I know the god is not there, because I saw something else once, that was not there."

"It is not hypnotism," said Mr. Dusart, "it is something I myself cannot explain. If you wish, go, all of you, and satisfy yourselves that all there is against the wall is a screen of soft gray felt. In the lights I have arranged here and between the curtains, it gives the appearance of infinite distance. That is all the 'trickery' there is about it, if one were disposed to think it trickery." His voice was a little hard, a trifle bitter.

"So many real, beautiful, strong, gracious things in this world are called 'tricks' of the imagination,

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‘tricks’ of the emotions, ‘tricks’ of fancy! You see, do you not, that there is nothing but a screen? Well, come back now, and hear from me what I have never told to any mortal, never breathed to a living soul.” He had grown calmer, and the infinite sweetness of a harmonious nature again attuned his voice.

“I was, from a little lad, a great lover of music. Nevertheless I could never read a note and have never been able to play upon any instrument. But many times, when wide awake, music of the most delightful or the most stupendous character has sounded for me, so plainly that I am confident no human ear is attuned to such a sound, so fine, so high, so tensioned that one might fancy it came from the wings of a humming-bird too small to be seen, — or so wonderfully, magnificently grand in one note, that a trombone as high as the Washington Monument must have produced it.

“I don’t wonder you smile, — but I am telling you the facts, exactly as they are. An orchestra of the spheres, each instrument distinct as a cut line in crystal, has sounded in my soul so plainly, that my dull mortal ears have been strained in the hearing.

“When I was a young man I met a lady who was writing a book which she said was ‘impressed upon her’ by some exterior power. She read to me a chapter about art, music and expression among the inhabitants of Heaven. The ideas which remained firmly impressed upon my memory were these: That ‘when we dwell in our spiritual bodies and are free from this hampering flesh, we then have no need of

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any instrument to express ourselves in music, printing or any other form of genius, but we *think our thought right out of ourselves into form*. Material is only the *expression* of the spiritual, and the utterance of thought in spirit takes form.'

"I argued that 'thoughts are things,' from this communication, and that ideas have in themselves some kind of substance, no matter how ethereal.

"Two or three years later I was travelling in England. I occupied a compartment with one other gentleman who was absorbed in a novel. I never read on a train and so lolled back and began to will to hear music, for by this time I had gotten control of my invisible orchestra and could call up the most remarkable music at will. Becoming absorbed in what I was hearing, I thought, 'Oh, that I could send this out of myself, into the world!'

"I had hardly thought the wish when the man opposite dropped his book, started up and listened with all his might.

"'My God! we are going to have an accident and be killed! I hear heavenly music! It is always a sign of death.'

"He had a little dog with him, and the dog began to howl as dogs will when they hear music. This of course instantly distracted my attention, — but I felt faint with astonishment and joy. By some means I had become possessed of the power to express music out of myself. Mihira, Arion, Sylvia, when I went to my rest that night, I got on my knees before the Author of all Good and thanked Him with joy and reverence for this great and beautiful experience."

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“And can you command it? Can you do it at any time?”

“No, I cannot. I can much more often express music than anything else, but it depends greatly upon the condition of my mind and the minds of those about me. It seems as if inharmony is not compatible with spiritual gifts.”

“We are to conclude, then, dear sir, that the Buddha we have just seen was your thought expressed into form!” said Arion gently.

“It was so. I knew very well what would be the most probable sight you would all wish to see, and three of us had already seen it. You, my son, were deeply impressed with its face, for you have studied your ring a thousand times. Thus everything aided me, — and I was successful.” They discussed this astonishing power pro and con, Mr. Dusart eagerly requesting their suggestions.

“How did you express a form the first time?” finally inquired Arion.

“That was as much an amazement to me as was my first expression in music. Sylvia, child, I wonder if you know how your father and I first happened to go to India? I doubt if you do. He could not have told you, for he never realized it, and Doyle had been commanded never to tell. My father, your grandfather, was very fond of your father. He designed to make him the head of his business. To that end, after he had returned from Oxford, he desired him to learn Hindustani and Japanese. He studied early and late, hours into the night. We were not aware of this intense devotion until he

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suddenly broke down, had a brain fever and came out of it distraught. His mind was perceptibly unbalanced.

“Covered with remorse, my father complied with the directions of the physician to give him a sea-voyage to restore his shattered nerves. We naturally went to India, where I could do some business for the firm, — and it was there — ”

“Yes, dear, dear uncle, it was there he gave you that terrible wound! But he was not responsible, — oh, tell me he was not!”

He leaned and pressed his lips to her forehead.

“Dear child, never think of it again!” said he.

“Well, to my story. We were standing in front of some monument or other, a plain marble shaft, when by some sudden turn of fancy my mind wandered off to Egypt, and I saw before me a caravan of camels or elephants, I forget which, on a sandy desert. In an instant poor Romaine grasped my shoulder and shook me.

“‘You are killing my mind!’ he exclaimed. ‘You are making me your slave, your tool! I cannot even see straight! Is that an elephant? Is that a desert? Is n’t that a marble shaft? Or am I raving mad, and you have made me so?’

“A crowd began to gather about and I hurried him back to our hotel, but when I had had time to collect my thoughts I knew I had expressed my thought of that scene into form, and in his super-sensitive condition he had seen the picture.”

“But why think it was not telepathy?” exclaimed

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Sylvia. "Why think that your mind did not simply impress itself on his?"

"Because," answered Prince Mihira in a low voice, filled with absolute conviction, "his theory of his method is correct. In the secret proceedings of our temple, among the adepts and by the masters, is accomplished the same thing! Once, in a ball of crystal suspended in one of the monks' cells of our monastery, I saw, when quite alone, a superb dahlia shoot out of the ground, grow into a small plant, become a large one and form into a blossom, — one rich, heavy, splendid blossom, which seemed to bend toward me as if in love. Someone had expressed it out of his thought."

Mr. Dusart gave his son a glance of the deepest affection. "It was the symbolic image of your mother, Mihira! I called her 'Dahlia' for a pet name. She was to me the very personification of that flower! I was young and not very literary, but I made a verse about her which she cherished, — shall I remember it?"

"Oh, if you could!"

"I called it

'THE DAHLIA.'

"Velvet-robed empress! thou September's queen
Born to the purple, — whose luxurious dyes
Are richly dark as are my proud one's eyes:
 Throned on thy leaves of green,
Stately and tall, — if she doth near thee stand,
Or lift the small, white blossom of her hand
 To give thee a caress
 Of maiden tenderness,
Subject to her light touch thy crown doth lean.

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Yet mourn not, since thou hast fair company.
The violet of May, and even June
With fragrant rose and nightingale in tune,
 Rivalled her modesty,
Her sweet voice, and her sweeter breath, in vain.
And know that I, who love her, share thy pain;
 For she doth so transcend
 My highest, that I bend
In homage to her preference, even to thee."

"And was it *your* thought, father, sent to me in that form?" he questioned, after the silence which had followed.

"I do not know. I cannot tell. I always think of her as with you, — I see you together whenever I think of you in India — I feel she is ever near her son."

Arion, who had followed the conversation with intense sympathy and interest, now said, "I know now you will be quite willing to explain to me the vision I saw the first time I entered this house."

"I will as far as possible, but I am much puzzled myself. When I seated you in the chair I desired to see and to have you see embodied your *highest ideal*. I set my mind on yours and wished to become so permeated with your atmosphere as to be able to express out of my heart the noblest, highest ideal in yours.

"To tell the truth, Arion, I wished to test you. Well as I believed I knew you, from the outward record of your life, it was the inner being, the real man whose sincerity, purity and nobility I wished to put to the trial. The result, as it became portrayed in form, astonished, disappointed and yet charmed

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me. I could not understand it, but I afterward reasoned that probably the oriental music, the luxurious warmth, — the just passing through the deliciously scented conservatory, the sudden coming into riotous light and color, the draped curtains, like a stage — suggested the thought of a ballet, harem, or something quite Eastern, so that my first effort merely produced a picture of what you saw, but as I gathered power and took upon myself your thought more fully, the face of your ideal shone upon you, and the incongruity startled you as it astonished and troubled me; for Arion, I then had not found my son, — I believed he was destined to a life wholly distinct from mine, — you, you were dear to me, — I longed to have an heir to this power, — I hoped to teach you, — to find you all I longed for, — to leave the knowledge of this law of another human power as an inheritance in pure and honorable hands.”

He trembled with emotion, he spoke as one whose very being was stirred.

“You loved me?” murmured Arion.

“You loved him?” repeated Sylvia in a tone of joy.

“Oh, uncle, what was this vision, — Mr. Estcourt, — I am wrong, I should not have asked, — but your highest ideal! Surely, surely, it cannot be wrong to ask what is one’s highest ideal?”

Yet she blushed as if caught in a great fault.

Her uncle turned his luminous eyes upon her as if contemplating her very soul. Finally he answered slowly: “It was —

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“A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command.
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature’s daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.”

While he softly quoted these familiar lines Arion had looked intently at the floor. He dared not glance at Sylvia, — a sudden delicate embarrassment came upon him, as if to read her thought would be a sacrilege; while she, growing more and more sad, felt a hopeless depression take possession of her heart, — a desolate sense of loss beyond the present power of realization. The bright joy that had filled her exultant spirit faded out, for she at once concluded, “He loves some one. It cannot be me, — for he had never known me.”

In a moment Henry Dusart turned with a saddened face to meet their earnest ones. “I will tell you another little story,” said he. “I am full of revelations and mysteries to-night, — but it is an old man’s privilege to once in a while dive down into the very depths of his memory and bring up for his children the sacred pearls of his life experience. For you are all my children, by blood, by love, by hope.

“Before I went to India the first time, suddenly, I had a foolish lover’s quarrel with the beautiful girl whom I loved.” Mihira drew a long breath. “We parted angrily, — but I had promised to send her my picture, and I kept my promise. I sent with it a little note, begging her forgiveness and telling her of my

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sudden trip abroad, and asking her if she forgave and still loved me to answer to Calcutta.

“During my whole stay in India no steamer brought a word from her. Again and again I thought I would write to her, again and again my foolish pride forbade. I felt if she was not willing to answer the message I had sent with my promised picture that she must have been so angered by my hasty words that a settled aversion had taken the place of affection. Still, I could not give her up!

“My heart was sad, but I determined that as soon as I arrived home once more, I would go and make my peace, — for she loved me, even as I loved her. But when I came back, the first news that greeted me was of her marriage to a man twice her age, that she was rolling in luxury and moving in society like a queen.

“Then, perhaps, came into my soul and my manner that occasional cynicism, that sardonic shadow of the brighter attributes, which must inevitably tinge the lives of all men, and lend a darker character to some of their words and acts. Distinguished in her beauty, dignified, refined, womanly, to this day I have never quite understood her marriage, — but fate doeth what it will.”

“Then you did not love my mother,” said Mihira sadly.

“Your mother loved me with an idolatrous worship, dear boy, and I felt for her a reverence, a devotion so pure and so exalted that only poetry could express it. That in my humble way I made her happy, this sentence, one of the latest she spoke on earth, gives me surety and content.

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“‘I can enter no sweeter Heaven than I leave,’ she said, raising her velvet eyes to mine and blessing me with her dying smile.

The two men wrung each other’s hands.

“And that was more than a quarter of a century ago,” said Arion musingly. “That old gentleman the lady married must be dead.”

“Long ago,” answered Henry Dusart, quietly, “long ago.”

Prince Mihira was thoughtfully looking at his father, with a steady interior gaze, as if in the deepest thought. “Father,” said he in a moment, — I do not wonder that you love your Arion!”

“No?”

“Because it was his beautiful mother whom you loved!”

“Oh!” exclaimed each and every one of them.

“How can you tell, — how do you know, Prince!” cried Arion, gladly.

“I can see her face, shining out of his!” said he.

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“I fancy,” said Arion with a quizzical smile to Mr. Dusart, as he bade them goodnight, “that I am your child ‘by hope’!”

His host gave him a look quite as smiling. “If you consent!” said he.

Arion turned and glanced back at Sylvia, whose clear-shining face, now lit by the fire, shone out star-like to guide him on his way.

“I should like to become so by love,” said he with a radiant happiness springing into his eyes.

“If she consent,” said her uncle.

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Prince Mihira, who was also leaving, divined these words as much by the expression of their faces as by hearing, and looked gloomily after Arion as he started for his own residence. Setting his lips to a thin, resolute curve, he muttered under his breath, "If I consent."

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIRST

THE new life upon which Sylvia had entered when leaving her childhood's home, saddened as she was by the loss of her only companion, had deepened within her the tendency to silent thought while it had awakened many emotions of which she had previously been ignorant.

The womanly kindness of her adopted mother, so full of the tenderest regard for her happiness; the evident pride with which she introduced her to her flock of friends; the pleasure with which she insisted upon an almost lavishly beautiful wardrobe; the loving taste shown in the great chamber with its bath, "book-room" and dressing-room, assigned for her sole use, was of so delightful a nature that her gratitude and affection were almost humble toward the generous woman who declared she was "the light of her eyes."

Sylvia tried indeed to be the light of her eyes in a hundred ways. Her correspondence, accounts and household business naturally and quickly fell into the young girl's hands. The details of her various entertainments no longer rested upon her shoulders, but were admirably carried out by the bright wit and capable hands of her new daughter.

Charitable beyond most, amid the kind, earnest and intelligent women of her city who would have

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been ashamed not to have had some noble part in the needs of the poor, she soon delegated to Sylvia the personal visits or offerings which were made with such sympathetic grace, such sisterly goodness, that in a certain miserable district of the "East Side" family after family looked upon the coming of their young benefactor as the relief of some angel messenger.

Many a "shut-in," among those who were not actually poor, brightened with hope and love as she gently knocked at the door. Many dull eyes would become lustrous, many lips tremble with joy, as she made them forget their pain by reading or singing or chatting gayly of that world from which they were kept prisoners.

From devoting her life to one beloved invalid, she had slowly but surely become the blessing of many, and yet this was all accomplished easily and without too great a tax of either time or nerves. For, as Mrs. Kemp said, "Sylvia knows when to do things, and how to do things! She can accomplish, in her systematic two hours a morning, more than I used to do in two weeks!"

But this surface life of activity, busy, filled to the brim with thought for others, had its hours when the real self took its repose, — the mind could gauge its advance, the soul seek its higher element. With rare perception and refined comprehension, Mrs. Kemp decided that when she went to her own room, Sylvia should be left alone.

"We all need to be alone at least an hour each day, dear," said she. "I do not wish to be intruded

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upon myself at times, — I just like to sit and think. Repose of body and mind are essential to me, and to every one. Now, love, when I am shut up in my room, I let no one take advantage of it; and believe me, when you take the same privilege none shall dare to disturb you.”

Sylvia was “taking advantage” of this now. It was nearly twilight and the mellow sky in the west played in golden light over the old trees in the park. Situated facing the fine sweep of park which the city had reserved for a pleasure ground, the sweet, blossomy smells of early spring, the gentler sounds of life that come with the dying day even in a metropolis, gave to her broad windows a charm almost like that of her loved country home.

As she sat half-dreaming in the fading light, some of the sweetest memories of her life began to throng her imagination. She saw herself as a little child, bare-footed, playing on the golden beach of a tropic island, gathering shells and twining in her sunny curls roses like shells, so firm, pink, and perfect were they.

Again, by a rolling blue surge lit by a clouded moon, she saw herself standing on the cliffs, looking out longingly toward home, sweet home.

Amid the splendid scene of a carnival ball in Rome she again saw herself, shrouded in a snowy domino of satin and masked in a golden gauze, hearing an orchestra whose splendid resonance filled the gorgeous, temple-like room. From scene to scene of her strangely varied life she glanced, with an ever increasing sadness, for in every one, — from

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the flying feet of her shouting childhood to the rich experience of her young womanhood, — she had ever felt herself alone. The soul within her had sought and sought, — she had longed for something, waited, watched for something, — she had known not what.

But now she knew. She had known, — how many months? When in the short distance between them the form of Arion had appeared, and as he approached her and finally stood before her their eyes had met, — in one sweet, sudden revelation, she had known! Her soul had found what it sought, her being had touched that acme of joy that can have but one meaning, one end. Yet, sweet as was the discovery that there existed in the world the fruition of her being, how saddening was the belief that even before she had recognized it, all its fulness had been dedicated to another! The cross-purposes of life, which we all know mark the daily incidents of experience, had never seemed so puzzling.

As she thought, sitting in the growing darkness, she again had resource for comfort to some lines which had seemed to her a consolation and a prophecy.

BY AND BY.

Be quiet, restless heart! The long light lies
In gleams of lingering sunshine on the hill;
The home-bound swallow, twittering as he flies,
Makes silence seem more still.

The shadows deeper grow, and in the woods
The air a latent sweetness holds in fee;
An odor faint of yet unblossomed buds —
So like, dear heart, to thee!

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Far distant in the soft, cerulean deep,
Where the horizon bounds the nether world,
Great ships becalmed, like brooding birds asleep,
Lie with white sails loose furled.

In peace the day is ended, and the night
Falleth as doth a veil upon the sea;
Along its bosom come with swift-winged flight
The gray mists, silently.

O anxious heart, how Nature speaks! Her power
How leisurely she uses! How intense
The infinite peace of her most fruitful hour!
How soft her influence!

Time hath she for her storms to sweep the main;
To rock the tree-tops with her winds of wrath;
To bring forth fragrance in the summer rain;
And time for snow she hath.

So, dear, for all thy eager soul desires,
She keeps sweet times and seasons. In her mood
Is hid for thee all passion's subtle fires
To round thy womanhood.

Cease, then! and in this dewy twilight, move
As one who asks not whither, cares not why;
This gift for all holds still the Eternal Love —
God's endless by and by.

The first thing of which she had been conscious when leaving Arion in the picture-gallery was, that she was aware that she had left something behind her. There is a saying that in falling in love, you leave your heart behind you, but in this instance it was not her heart.

It was as if in meeting him she had affixed to him or drawn from him a thin thread of connection, —

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it was as if, without touching his body, she had in some way attached to him or drawn from him a cobweb line, a thin, immaterial yet absolutely real thread of some world-stuff, that as the distance increased between them still held taut and true, and literally drew them together as by an invisible cord.

Over this thread of attraction had seemed to come to her, long before she had met his eyes again, something so sweet, so life-giving, so vital, — an energy so exquisitely full of the richest devotion, that her sleep was an unspeakable refreshment, crowded with new fancies, dreams of some unknown joy, not personified yet not vague, — an atmosphere of all-surrounding love, which had seemed to crown her and protect her, as by a prayer.

The influx of a stronger, a newer self seemed to exalt her to an ineffable height, even as the union of herself with God had inspired her with awe and responsive love. The thought of Arion seemed mingled with her thought of heaven, and her prayers for her own uplifting to God's heart, without the spoken word or conscious thought, carried him ever on their snowy wings.

But now, since the revelation of his ideal had been made so plain to her, she shrank back, dismayed and grief-stricken, ashamed that she had ever dared to think of him or build those airy castles that can but throb in the happy fancy of a growing love.

She had with apparent carelessness questioned her uncle before she left his home, as to how long

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he had known and loved his friend, and he had replied lightly, "From the time he was born, sweet, — for he was — hers!"

"And it was when he attained manhood that you put him to the test?" she had queried.

"Yes, Sylvia, — but I do not think I should do right to say more than that. However surprising the scene became to me, his honorable action, his assertion of manly and noble character, were better proof even than the picture of his ideal itself. Perhaps he will tell you, some time, Sylvia, what he saw."

"Oh, no! no! he never will, — he never shall!" she cried, leaving the room. "I never could bear it, — I never will!" "To be told of some other beautiful face that he adores, — to make *me* his confidant!" she thought, — "that would be beyond my power to endure."

Henry Dusart had stepped forward and looked after her as she went. "Can it be possible I am mistaken!" he had thought, surprise and disappointment making a frown to appear on his forehead, — "Does she not care for him! Poor fellow, — I hope this is not true!" and he had lingered wistfully thinking, while she went upstairs.

From that time forth, a tinge of melancholy had softened the brilliancy of her speech, had set a strange dignity upon her manner.

The playfulness of the child which in merry moods had filled the house with an air of gayety had given way to a gentle serenity which was controlled and careful.

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But to occupy her thought had also come the uncertainty about her ring. Time and again she took it from her finger with a shudder of aversion. Again and again she conscientiously replaced it with a sense of duty, but without that singular affection for it which had grown with wearing.

She noted, too, a curious depression of vitality when she had worn it all day, — a depletion of her physical energy, — as if it drew through the slender finger on which it was placed the very life of the blood pulsing in the veins beneath.

“This is not my ring!” she would say to herself, gazing at it with half-averted eyes, “it pains me. No, it does not pain me, — it tries me, like a fire. It chills me, — I know not what to say, — oh, what shall I do! He will never give me the other!”

For well she knew the grounded superstition of her cousin Prince Mihira. They had not discussed the subject of the Buddha for nothing. She had read beneath the calm and gracious manner, the intellectual acumen, the elegant culture which had made him so fascinating to others, that inbred undercurrent of irrational belief which had been taught him from his earliest childhood and which had been inherited from a long and priestly ancestry.

His constant and ready quotations from the books of the East, ornamenting his speech as pearls ornament the golden thread upon which they are strung, but indicated his close mental alliance with those theories of life and destiny which are the stagnation of that ancient people. However broad had been his culture in the history of other nations, the

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inevitable foundation of his deeper thought lay on the rock of worship of the invisible powers and belief in their evolvment of an eternal plan.

His instant acquiescence in the possible exchange of the rings, and, as he believed, the equally possible exchange of destiny, between his new found cousin and himself, had nothing of deception in it. Aware that hers was the genuine ring, yet he had not for a moment contemplated getting possession of it, the thought had not crossed his mind.

Yet, when the accident of getting them so mixed had actually occurred, he had accepted the outcome with that dumb willingness which had in ancient times carried a widow to her husband's death pyre, or tossed from the extended arms of the mother her child into the sacred river of the Ganges.

He had been born on the lunar day of Krittika, and the augury had said: "He who is born on this day shall delight in white flowers, will perform sacrificial rites, will be a skilled magician, Brahmin, priest or astronomer," and had he not ever had a passion for white flowers? Was he ever without one or the perfume derived from one about his person? Was not he in his way and measure skilled in occult law, a Brahmin and a priest, in so far as every surrounding of his life had been ordained? Then certainly as the gods had presided, they still would preside over the destiny of their pledged devotee!

All this had Sylvia become accustomed to expect in the character of Mihira, and perhaps no one whom he met could so thoroughly appreciate his position

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as she, knowing his language, travelled in his country and a witness of those rites and ceremonies which are the daily custom of his people.

How natural, then, that he should ever turn to her, not alone because of her beauty, which he quaintly likened to everything attractive in nature. In his inner thoughts he would say of her:—

“She hath a gait like a gazelle, her eyes are like the leaves of the lotus, her body is as fine as that of Cupid! Her voice is as sweet as the cuckoo, her lips are red and her hands as soft and white as flowers. Upon her death she shall be a star along with the innumerable stars of brilliant lustre, and shall shine to the end of Brahma’s day!”

Their discussions as to the possibility of finding the bronze god were ever poetized by him by the expression of a sentiment which could hardly relieve itself by language, and day by day his influence upon her mind, now again cast back into interior loneliness and sadness, was to draw forth her confidence, her comradeship, her dependence upon his society.

As she now sat in the quiet darkness thinking of these things and the many useless efforts they had mutually made to obtain the least clue to the whereabouts of the prize, a still stronger feeling of distrust stole over her than she had many times before experienced, and with a touch of dislike she gave a slight shudder at the thought of the prince.

She rose, and twisting her ring hastily from her finger she threw it into a drawer. At the moment a

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maid knocked and presented a card. It was that of her cousin.

Shrugging her shoulders, she slowly went downstairs. He was standing in the hall eagerly awaiting her, and in his hand was a magnificent bunch of white hyacinths.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SECOND

SHE received the fragrant blossoms with a languor and indifference which surprised even herself, and as a maid was passing, requested her to bring a vase and arrange them on the piano.

Prince Mihira observed this with a dark look, and when seated watched his cousin a moment before he spoke. Finally he said gently, "You seem weary, Sylvia."

"No, I am not weary," she answered, "I have been resting and thinking."

"Perhaps you have thought too deeply. Let us be happy!" He rose and leaned over the sofa where she half reclined.

"I am neither weary, thoughtful nor sad!" he went on in an eager voice. "I have been struggling and battling, full of life and resolution! I have conquered all my scruples, all my timidity, all my sense of unworthiness! I have reasoned down every obstacle and trampled on every tie, — and all for your sake, Sylvia, my beautiful! and having once determined, I am come!"

She looked at him quietly with a slight tightening of the lips.

"It is not the custom in our country, Prince," said she, "to tell a person to her face that she is beautiful!"

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“Then bah! on the cold and cynical conventionality of the country! When the heart overflows with admiration, when the soul breathes but in the adoration of another shall the disloyal lips be silent, the words be dull and false? Sylvia, great and sweet and high, — destiny has brought me to thy feet! Dost thou not see it and know it? Accept the offering, thou living blessing! Let me love thee!”

“I am amazed, my cousin!” she replied, rising and coldly averting her eyes. “Are we not close kindred? One blood, one race? Have you forgotten that your American grandfather was also mine?”

“Do not cousins marry in this land?” said he sullenly.

Sylvia blushed. “They do,” she said in a low tone, “but among the cultured, — among those who have refinement of feeling, — it is rare.”

He hesitated and then came forward, taking possession of her hand and drawing her to the sofa. “Listen! listen, in mercy!” said he, “if you have any regard for me at all! Do you remember the day at my house, at the reception, — how I came into the shrine room and threw myself in agony at the feet of the god? Do you remember my cries and the outspoken anguish of my heart?”

“It was of you, you, my Sylvia that I prayed, and not one moment since has your lovely image left my soul! At one moment you appear to me in all the beauty of your face, your form, your smile, your scent, — that peculiar fragrance of your person, — your in-

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telleet, your sympathy, your superb womanhood, all appeal to me with crushing force! At the next moment you thrill me all over, all within me; my mind, my thought, my feeling, are excited at the touch in my being of your power!

“I have tried to forget you. In the midst of the daily occupations, in the exalting enthusiasm of my search for my country’s God, I calm down, but I do not forget. At night if I have seen you but for a moment, —how bright, sweet, elevating appears that day!

“This is love, Sylvia, — love, as you have never known it or can know it from any human being! What man among your nation is filled with that impassioned devotion which I should lavish upon you with my life? Ah, cousin, love, hear me! Do not reject me! Be my princess, — my wife!”

A curious sensation of satisfaction, of yielding, of easy, untrammled dependence had gradually come over Sylvia while he had looked into her eyes with his own set and glowing. Why should she not love him? Why should she reject him? Why not do as he wished? What was there to hinder? Her mind was confused, broken, agitated. She could not seem to remember! She only seemed conscious of him, of his voice, his words, his dark, handsome face, his soft pressure on her hand.

“I do not know, — I cannot remember,” she murmured. She gazed absently about and then ever returned to his face, growing more and more vacant in her expression.

Prince Mihira became aware of the strangeness of

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her expression but did not realize the cause. He clasped his hand over hers still closer, yet such was his reverence for her exquisite purity, that he did not venture to kiss it.

“Do you not know, sweet cousin,” he said, “that we are all in the hands of a Power which moves to good, and that whatever we do tends only for our happiness? It slayeth and it saveth! It is love, it is life, it is death, it is pain! O make it life for me, not death, my Sylvia!”

At any other moment she would have smiled at this, for she would have had little faith in his death; but now the words seemed like the echoes of a dream.

“No! no!” she answered, with trembling lips.

“Why ‘no’? Do not say ‘no.’ Will not the splendid pattern of our lives be spoiled? Are we not met by some strange, unseen motion of the gods? Say ‘yes,’ and let us work the pattern out!”

Another fascinated look into his face and she answered, “The pattern out?”

“Ay!” He went on: “Have I not found you, the possessor of the sacred ring which destiny has mated with my own? Are we not both the very blind servants of the Buddha, giving our very lives to his finding, and sure to be together in our triumph? Everything points towards our sweet, our perfect destiny, my beautiful! Even Arion—”

She started up and gave a low cry. “That is the clue!” she said, shaking her head, and tossing her arms like one who has been manacled. She walked up and down the room once or twice quickly.

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“Prince! pardon me! for a moment I had forgotten you were speaking. It was of finding the Bronze Buddha? Yes, — I do not wonder it fills your soul with enthusiasm. To you it is a grand, a holy mission, — but to me, it is simply a duty.”

Mihira stood back in astonishment. He saw that his whole impassioned speech had been utterly lost. She had not realized it, or something had made it instantly slip from the grasp of her mind. She went to the piano and began to rearrange the hyacinths.

“Did you bring me these, cousin?” she said, pleasantly. “Why do you always choose white flowers?”

The bright genuineness of her innocent expression could not be denied. She was not aware that he had offered her his love. At first he was inclined to be offended, but suddenly as with a shock a new idea formed itself in his brain and his expression changed. He turned so that she might not observe it, and controlling his voice answered in a light way about the flowers, and added that he had found them in a green-house near by. Then he said, “By the way, it is a most charming evening, Sylvia, — won’t you get your hat and take a little walk? We were going to hear the vesper singing, don’t you know? The church was just being illuminated as I came by.”

“Why, with pleasure!” she cried, and soon appeared with her jaunty walking-coat and hat.

The church was but a block or two away, and just as they entered a chant was being sung by the choir.

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They took seats in a darkened corner of the great building, where they could listen in undisturbed silence. When the chant was finished Sylvia whispered, "I often come in here at about five o'clock to listen to the organist. He practises for an hour, and I think sometimes that his music far transcends that of many a more famous player." Then restlessly moving her head she said as pitifully as a child, "Mihira, my head aches."

"Let me just touch your forehead," said he, "I have often cured a headache so!" He was in the pew in front of her, and turning around lightly pressed his hand on her temple. "I should like to come here too," he murmured, "to hear the organist practise. Would you mind my coming with you some time? Could you come to-morrow, do you think, and hear him with me?"

"Yes," she answered. "Oh, my head feels so much better!"

"Will you come to-morrow at five o'clock? Say 'yes,' " he went on.

"Yes," she whispered obediently.

"And when you come, you will say 'yes,' to everything that is asked you?"

"Yes," said she.

"Very well, now remember. At five o'clock to-morrow, you will come to this church, walk in and come straight to me, and for the next ten minutes you will answer 'yes' to everything that is asked of you. Do you understand and will you do it?"

"Yes," she said again.

He took his hand abruptly from her head and said

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in a very ordinary tone of voice, "Sylvia, listen. They are going to give us a solo."

She started quickly, pressed her fingers to her eyes, smothered a little yawn, smiled a perfectly natural smile, and as he turned back in his seat said, "Dinner will be ready. We must only wait for this one."

He nodded and put up his hand as if for silence. Although she could not observe it, he was trembling as with an ague. His teeth were clenched together and his heart was beating with excitement. Discovering thus that he could hypnotize her, like lightning a daring scheme had suggested itself and without a moment's hesitation he had put it to the proof. Now, above them, soaring to the dome in surges of exquisite pathos mingled with hidden joy came the words: "Trust in the Lord! Trust in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire!"

Sylvia's eyes filled with tears. She could have knelt and lifted up her voice in tender pleading. "And He shall give me my heart's desire," she murmured to herself. Oh, how that church seemed narrow and small! How large and sweet sounded that blessed sentence in her soul! How the broad heaven with its cloud of stars should have syllabled those precious words! For what was her heart's desire! For what had she longed until longing had almost become unconsciousness!

"Trust in the Lord!" rose the deep contralto voice again. Mihira motioned to go. They slipped out into the darkness and the prince gravely bade her good-bye at her door.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THIRD

MRS. ESTCOURT had been ill for two or three weeks, and confined to her room. At one time her physician had feared pneumonia, but managed to "stave it off," as he expressed it, and now for the first time she had come down to the library, smiling and happy, if a little paler than was her wont.

Arion, who had hardly left the house during her illness, greeted his "Little Mamma" with unfeigned delight. "This house has been like a prison without you!" he exclaimed. "What's the good of a home anyway without a lovely mother in it?"

"I want to thank you, dear boy, for your constant supply of flowers. How thoughtful you have been! Every morning a fresh bunch, and always violets! I love violets." And there was a reminiscent pleasure in her eye.

"Oh, I did not send them!" said Arion carelessly. "I saw you had plenty, so I did not bother."

"Why, who *did* send them?" she cried, elevating her beautifully arched eyebrows in surprise.

"Oh, some of your numerous adorers, I suppose," said he. "By the way, Mumsie, we did n't go to Europe, did we?"

She smiled a little, looked at him significantly, and finally said simply, "No, we did n't."

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“I did not say anything about it, because —” said he.

“I did not say anything about it, because —” said she.

They both laughed. “Europe will keep.”

“But what was your ‘because,’ mother — your own, not mine?”

Her eyes sparkled, and she looked very handsome indeed. “I did not wish to go.”

“Well, neither did I,” he answered. “I thought it was more interesting at home.”

“My dear son, you have made a great sacrifice for me during the past three weeks. I am sure you have not left the house long enough to have called upon her. Mrs. Kemp came twice while you were out, you know, and Sylvia has sent me so many pretty messages and little comforts, — but you have not seen her. Have I been so very ill?”

“Pretty ill, mamma. But now you are safe, I think I will send a message and ask her if she will not take a gallop in the park with me this afternoon. She rides beautifully. She was just going into the park last week when I caught a glimpse of her, but I think she did not see me.”

“Do!”

Arion wrote the note and sent it off. Then, turning with a very loving look to his mother, he said, “I have had a chance to think a great deal about you during your illness, mother. The danger of losing you brought up every memory of my childhood, every blessing you have bestowed upon me. And in the thought of our Star, came to me the

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wonder of how you happened to marry my father. He was a noble gentleman, I know, but he was a quarter of a century your senior, was he not?"

"Quite!" said she.

"Then why did you marry him?"

"I married him because I did not wish to," she said with a sigh.

"Because you did not wish to!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I did penance upon my own soul. But of course there were other, many reasons. He had begged and pleaded with me to marry him for over two years. He knew I loved — some one else — but he said he did not care, that I should learn to love him. Then came a misunderstanding between us — I mean, between the one I loved and me. We were young, hasty, and mutually jealous. We quarrelled bitterly, and both declared we wished we had never met, and never wished to meet again. He left me, and in less than a week had sailed for India without a word. Mr. Estcourt took advantage of my feelings, my friends all urged the union. By this time I was remorseful, and felt a lifetime of penance only could atone for my fault, and I desperately gave myself away."

"Yet you made my father happy, — that I know."

"Yes, Arion, I think I did. Having accepted my fate, I accepted it, and I think he became entirely satisfied with me."

"Still," said her son with a sigh, "it was a pity."

She came and stood before him, looking grandly at him, with the proud air of a queen. "A pity, when it gave me such a son?"

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Arion laughed. "That is true!" he exclaimed. "I am afraid I should n't have been here but for that!" and they both felt a light mist in their eyes.

He went to the shelf and took down the old album. "I want to see that picture of Henry Dusart again," said he, opening it. "By the way, Prince Mihira would n't have been born either," he added carelessly, as he began to pull the picture out.

His mother watched him with a face very strangely excited. "Don't, Arion, don't take it out! I thrust it in there the moment I received it, and it has never been touched since. I was so angry I would hardly look at it, but now —"

The picture was one of those old-fashioned ones taken on tin, and was framed in that open-faced pink envelop, so familiar many years ago. He pulled out the picture, envelop and all, and began to take the tin-type out. "Why Arion, obey me!" cried his mother. "How can you do that!"

He paid no attention, but drew from beneath the picture a thin slip of old-fashioned foreign letter paper, and with a look of intense love laid it in her hands.

"My darling, my wronged darling!" it said. "Oh, if you can only forgive me, and love me again! I beg you on my knees to forgive me. I have to go suddenly to India. I sail to-day. Write me to Calcutta at once, dearest, and tell me I am forgiven. For I love you, darling, and shall love you until I die."

Mrs. Estcourt burst into tears. Arion stepped into

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the hall and brought in a beautiful bunch of fresh violets, laying them in her lap. "He sent them," said he, and going out, softly closed the door behind him.

The afternoon was breezy, brilliant, cool, exhilarating. Arion felt a sort of delicious madness in his veins. Had he been in the country he would have shouted, sung, leaped his horse over fences, rushed through the woods, flung himself on the short fresh grass, and given vent to the joy of life within him. Full of a glorious health and strong young manhood, his generous heart thrilled with love and hope; when he met his Star and lifted her lightly to the saddle the very air seemed ready to caress them both, and kiss the faces of such bonny children of the earth with joy.

Off they rode at an easy trot, and soon were winding in and out along the bridle paths, making their way north toward the heights. His gayety, so infectious, was responded to by a thousand bright remarks or ripples of laughter, and both could find amusement in the slightest obstacle or least hint of fun. He told her about his gymnasium for poor boys, where he had established, besides, a sort of private military school. He had now been gathering boys from the streets for more than three years, and having them meet in a building he owned in the upper part of the city.

"We have nearly three hundred now," he said, "who are well drilled in military tactics, besides being excellent athletes. Two or three men in my

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class in college have given their teaching, while a member of the Seventh has acted as captain; and the boys are as handsome a company of little fellows as you can find. We have visiting nights twice a month, when they perform in the gymnasium and drill. Won't you and Mrs. Kemp come up some evening?"

She would be delighted, of course. "Are they from the very poor?" she asked.

"Well, bootblacks, newspaper boys, and some hoodlums," he answered smiling; "but we soon take the evil out of them."

"The hoodlums? How?"

"Why, by putting in the good! We teach them one hour, every night, by means of lectures and talks. One of the less prominent but best pastors in this city gives them a talk and a prayer, so witty and so wise and good,—Miss Kemp, he sometimes makes a little man of a little vagabond in a single night. I am proud of it."

She looked at him with eyes so full of admiration that he gave a smart blow with his crop.

When they had settled down to a walk again she asked demurely, "But don't you teach them anything, Mr. Estcourt?"

"Oh, they get a little exercise out of me, when I'm not singing to them."

"Singing!" she exclaimed in delight. "Can you sing?"

"Why, I try it," he said carelessly. "Don't you?"

"Yes, I sing —" and then she pulled up short.

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“What time is it?” she asked.

“Three o’clock,” he answered, with an anxious glance. “You are not tired—you do not wish to go home?”

She drew a breath of relief. “Three o’clock,—oh, no, that was not it,—three o’clock, four o’clock, five o’clock,—five o’clock! That is it,—I know now,—yes, it is five o’clock.”

“No, it is but three!” he repeated, thinking her speech very odd.

“I know; but I have to go somewhere at five o’clock. Yes, I know, it is where they sing—sing about ‘Trust in the Lord.’ It is to the church near our house. I go there to hear the organist play, and I must go there to-day. I have promised some one to surely be there at five o’clock.”

She said this in a dreamy fashion, her eyes set ahead and half as if repeating a lesson.

For a moment Arion felt annoyed and troubled, but her next remark was so gay and his own heart was so light that he soon forgot it and thought no more about it.

“We will get back by five,” he assured her, and then they took a good gait and sped on to the drive by the river.

It seemed to Sylvia as if Arion raised his hat every two minutes, for they were continually meeting people whom he knew. “You see I have lived here all my life, Miss Kemp, and have a slight acquaintance with half the city,” he laughed.

As they were coming back into the town a little ragamuffin shouted out, “Mishter Estcourt, sir, I

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say!" Arion stopped. "There haint a-goin' to be nothin' at the hall to-night, we've got a vacach!"

"Is that so?" and turning to Miss Kemp he said, "Since my mother has been ill I have not been there."

"Yeth, sir! We are goin' to have a rattlin' good time, Mishter Estcourt,—we are all a-goin' to the circus."

"No!" exclaimed Arion, as if greatly surprised.

"Yeth, sir, the minister he said you had sent up the —"

Arion cried, "There's a man who wants a paper, lad!" and the boy ran off, kicking up his heels and calling out over his shoulder "An' I'm so glad, thank you sir,"—as they trotted along.

"Well, you know 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' Miss Kemp," he said apologetically. "A fellow wants a good time once in a while!"

She was silent, for her heart was beating with happiness. But soon again within her rose that urgent, that compelling force which brought her mind again to five o'clock. They were just passing a building on whose tower the clock marked half past four.

"We must hasten," she said anxiously; "we must certainly be there at five."

"Is it so important?" inquired Arion.

She looked at him strangely. "Important? I don't know,—I can't tell,—I don't seem to remember."

"Don't remember! why, how strange. Don't you know why you must be at the church at five o'clock?"

"No,—yes,—oh, yes, I am to say 'yes,' 'yes,'

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‘yes,’ all the time for ten minutes,—nothing but ‘yes,’ to anybody.”

Arion was very much startled. He grasped her bridle and brought the horses to a halt. “There is something wrong about this,” he thought, “she acts as if possessed by some will other than her own!”

“I am sure you will wish me to accompany you, won’t you?” said he.

“Oh, certainly. Why should you not? Perhaps you will see, — will hear, — will understand about it. I just seem to have to go, Mr. Estcourt, I really *must*.”

They walked slowly along, the horses giving each other an occasional friendly nip. Arion was very much puzzled and she remained silent. At a minute or two before five they came to the church door and Arion hailed a passing cabby.

“Take charge of these horses for a few minutes, will you?” said he, slipping a bill into the man’s hand. He grinned and agreed, muttering to himself, “A runaway marriage, I’ll bet my hat.”

Miss Kemp, paying no more attention to Arion, went up the steps on the very stroke of five. He slowly followed her and to his amazement, as he went in a side door, he saw Prince Mihira step from behind a pillar, join her and walk slowly up the broad aisle. Not a sound came from the organ loft, not a person appeared to be in the building.

In a moment a clergyman in his silk gown appeared and with him a woman and a man, the dim light preventing any of them from being plainly seen.

Leading Sylvia straight to the altar, Prince Mihira said “Go on,” and the minister began to read a

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simple marriage ceremony. In an instant Arion had gone along the side aisle almost to the altar. Prince Mihira noticed nothing, and Sylvia was standing with her hand clasped firmly in his, as white and still as a statue.

“Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?”

“I will.”

“Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?”

“Yes,” said Sylvia.

The clergyman gave her a look of surprise. “You mean to say ‘I will,’ do you not?” he questioned.

“Yes,” she responded.

“Then, if there be present any person who can give any lawful reason why this marriage should not be performed, let him speak now or else forever hold his peace.”

“I object,” said Arion Estcourt, coming forward and holding up his hand.

The prince started as if shot and turned with a menacing gesture.

“By what right?” he exclaimed. “You are no relative, nor even a close friend. The lady is of age and we are both free to marry. Sir, proceed.”

With mild dignity the reverend gentleman turned to Arion. “We are ready to hear your reasons,” said he.

“My reason lies in the lady herself. She does not desire to marry this man. She came here by compulsion. She is not responsible. Let me ask her, and she will tell you so herself.”

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“You shall not!” cried Prince Mihira. “This is dastardly! This man has no more right to interfere than a stranger!”

“He shall ask the lady herself,” replied the minister.

Sylvia had stood as if frozen during the whole of this scene.

Arion now stepped in front of her and said gently, “Miss Kemp, did Prince Mihira tell you to come here at five o’clock?”

“Yes.”

“Did he tell you to answer ‘yes’ to everything?”

“Yes.”

“Do you wish you had not come?”

“Yes.”

“Has he a bad influence over you?”

“Yes.”

“Are you afraid of the prince?”

“Yes.”

“Do you wish to leave him and go home?”

“Yes.”

“Do you wish to have me take you home?”

“Yes.”

“Then come!” and in a moment he had lifted her in his strong arms, bounded down the aisle, ran down the steps and seated her on her horse before the astounded witnesses could move a step to prevent it.

Vaulting into his saddle, he grasped her rein and turning up the street they were just entering the park greenery, when the four people they had left behind appeared on the church porch breathless and excited.

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“Well, I’ll be hung!” said the old cabby to himself, as he drove off after noting these lightning-like incidents; “that was the quickest work I ever saw since I drove a keb.”

The clergyman, smiling in spite of himself as he slowly removed the clerical garments in his dressing-room, after the prince had made some incoherent excuses and gone, hummed a little and then with a youthful laugh quoted aloud:—

“One touch of her hand and one word in her ear,
When they reached the hall door and the charger stood near;
So light to the croupe the fair lady he swung,
So light to the saddle before her he sprung!
‘She is won! we are gone, over bank, bush and scaur;
They’ll have fleet steeds that follow,’ quoth young Lochinvar.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOURTH

ARION and Sylvia went deep into the park at a quick pace, but soon finding the path winding through a bit of secluded woods, drew rein and halted. He had expected every moment to hear a sob, for under such a strain of excitement it was but natural. She had said nothing, not a word. Now she slipped off her horse and leaned against it. He instantly came to her side. She was flushed with the exercise, her eyes were deeply dark and a half-smile played around her lips.

“I suppose I ought to be in tears,” she said meekly, “but somehow this affair has struck me as being actually comical. Imagine it, in the nineteenth century, in a metropolis like this!”

Arion drew a breath of relief. “Oh, Miss Kemp, thank you, thank you!” he exclaimed.

“What for?” in surprise.

“For not crying. It is so jolly that you do not cry. Truly, I don’t think I should know what to do if you did! I am not very handy in emergencies!”

She laughed outright. “I thought you were, decidedly handy, by the way you handled me!” and she gave him a glance full of mischievous fun. “But seriously,” she added, “this readiness of yours has saved me from a life of misery! Oh, I thank you, I thank you with my whole soul!”

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This time her eyes were full of eager gratitude, of comprehension, of admiration.

“Then you realize it?”

“Yes, I am fully awake. I know now why I went to the church and how I was led into that terrible snare. My cousin mesmerized me.” She said it with an accent of shame. Then she told him the incidents of yesterday. Everything came back plainly to her. Even the eloquent pleading of the prince seemed to be imprinted on her brain, and, now that she had come to a normal condition once more, stood out clearly in her memory. “I fully understand his plot, — and I think I can as fully believe that it was unpremeditated, — a plot wrought out on the instant, — the sudden intention born of his finding he could hypnotize me!”

“But he must have been in despair of gaining you by any other means!” said Arion slowly.

“He certainly was,” she answered. “He had always been.”

“I cannot think that to his mind, educated in the way he has been, this act would appear so infamous as it does to us,” said Arion thoughtfully. “He has none of that keen feeling of the independence, — the responsibility and individuality, — of woman that we have. You know that a woman in India attains a soul through her husband! At least very many believe that! We cannot fathom the inner motives which led him to act so hastily. Perhaps in his fanatical fancy the fact that you possess the original ring of his worshipped idol means that you belong to him by right of fate, and to take you thus, by any means, is justifiable.”

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“He is nevertheless dangerous to me!” she exclaimed, “and it would be folly for me to overlook this insult. If he does not know, he should be taught. He is a man of the world in one sense—he has both studied and travelled!”

Her spirited reply struck Arion as being both just and wise. Yet he could not bear to think that even in her wrong she felt unkindly or vindictive. Still he could but admit the truth.

So he said with equal earnestness, “Miss Kemp, it was a dastardly act. It was criminal.”

A wave of color spread over her face and she became very gentle.

“He loved me.”

Her tone was that of pleading. Arion felt his heart leap with joy. She was not hard then, nor cold!

For an instant he felt that he must clasp her in his arms and whisper, “So do I, darling,” but he controlled himself, for he thought such an action at this moment would hardly be honorable. Although so calm, he knew that the many emotions to which she had been subjected would tell upon her later, and he would not cause her further excitement. So he answered gently, “I do not blame him for that,” and smiled.

“What shall we do? I cannot conceal this?”

“Certainly not. You will tell your mother and uncle. I shall tell my mother,—but it will go no farther, and we will endeavor if possible to prevent it ever becoming known. Probably the prince has arranged with his witnesses to keep silence, as doubt-

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less he will not care to become the laughing-stock of society."

"How was it that you happened to think to take me away so suddenly, — did I ask you to do so?"

"You answered 'yes' to every question I put to you. I asked you if you wished me to take you home and you answered 'yes.' You had told me before, you know, that you were to answer 'yes' to every question put to you, so I asked questions to which you could reply."

"You certainly are very dull-witted in an emergency!" said she. "Commend me to such wit. But let us go home," said she gravely.

"Let us go to my home," said he, quite as gravely. "Do you not remember that Mrs. Kemp was to visit with my mother this afternoon? And I have reason to believe you will find Mr. Dusart there also."

"I shall be very glad to see your mother again. How happy you must be in her recovery! And you say uncle Henry will be there? For any reason?" — significantly.

"For a very sweet reason, I think," he answered softly, — "the very sweet reason of love."

"I sometimes wonder if love be reason or unreason," she remarked, "it has so many ways of manifesting itself!"

"And you do not know?" he asked.

"I am very blind."

"So is Love," said he.

He helped her vault into the saddle, but after arranging her skirt still stood there, thoughtfully tapping his crop on a tree.

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She looked down on his finely shaped head, for he had taken off his riding-hat, and noted how beautifully the hair encircled the forehead, how the brown, short locks curled tightly in strong, crisp rings.

A minute or two passed and neither said a word. The horses rubbed their velvet noses together in tender play and the man and woman in their hearts drew close, — they could almost hear each other's beat.

Suddenly raising his face to hers, he drew her hands towards him and growing pale with earnestness said, "You will not let this be the last time I shall help you? You will always trust me and give me a chance to serve you. Who knows what next may happen?"

"I do not trust Prince Mihira, — of course one cannot, after this, — yet, I do not really distrust him."

"Neither do I. I cannot believe he is deliberately bad. But I should avoid him from this time forth."

"He will never hypnotize me again."

"No, I think he could not. But there are other dangers. He is searching for the Bronze Buddha, — so are you. He is fanatically superstitious about his destiny, — you appear to be his counterpart. Oh, promise me that you will not battle against him alone, — that whatever happens you will rely upon me!"

"I promise you, most sacredly, Mr. Estcourt. You shall be informed of every move he makes."

He pressed her hand strongly and they trotted quickly in the direction of his residence; but with the

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sinking sun, her happiness also sank far below the horizon of hope. If he had loved her, surely then, then if ever, he would have told her so.

They found, as Arion had anticipated, the three dearest friends they had, assembled in the drawing-room. Dinner was nearly ready to announce. The soft light of the candles and the perfume of flowers came shining and fragrant through the hall.

They were welcomed with the sweetest hospitality, and Sylvia noted the youthful, exhilarated expression of her hostess, while Mr. Dusart seemed like a school-boy, so intense was the happiness betrayed in every gesture.

They listened to the romantic story of the "abduction and elopement" as Arion lightly put it, first with indignation and then with amusement, for even they, worldly-wise and conventional, could but smile at the outcome of the outrage.

But the gay smile and joyous manner of Henry Dusart instantly became one of unspeakable shame. He looked at his niece as if helpless to express his mortification. In the midst of their questions and explanations he grew more and more humiliated. All the flush of inner rejoicing seemed quenched in realization of this disgraceful affair.

Mrs. Estcourt, too, quickly sympathetic with both Sylvia and her uncle, became downcast and silent, the brilliant color fading from her cheek.

"There is no reparation that I can make for this strange, this atrocious imposition upon you, Miss Kemp, and as Prince Mihira's father I feel myself implicated so deeply in it, that words cannot express

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my abasement. But if there be anything you can suggest which will in any possible way soothe your just anger or repair and atone in the least degree, I beg of you to tell me and it shall be yours."

Sylvia went over to her uncle and kissed him softly on the cheek. "Why, uncle dear," said she, "you are in no wise to blame for this, and truly, I do not feel very angry with your son, — because, you see, he did not really accomplish very much, — but had it not been for Mr. Estcourt, —" she shuddered and in a moment had hidden her tearful face on his breast.

"Dear child!"

"I hope to heaven there were no reporters, — as there usually are, if anything occurs, — they are like the dragon's teeth that turned into men for Jason in old mythology days! They pop up anywhere." Mrs. Kemp anxiously turned to Arion.

"I did not see a person besides the clergyman and the two witnesses. Not even the organist was left, for he ran down the stairs and went, just as I entered."

"Then perhaps it will never be known," she sighed in relief. "Should it be known I could never forgive him."

"Uncle," now said Sylvia, wiping her eyes, "there is one atonement Prince Mihira can make to me, which I shall value so much that it will go far to win my forgiveness. I wish him to return my ring."

"Why, — your ring! How can you tell, — how do you know that he has your ring? I thought we could not find the least difference between them?"

"I know it by my own feelings, by the effect upon myself. I cannot wear the ring now in my possession.

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I do not wear it. I left it at home to-day. There is an evil influence about it. There is some spell or charm in it antagonistic to my health, my happiness, my life. When I wear it vitality, hopefulness, serenity, go! I am restless, my faith in God dies out,— I cannot see my future sweet and clear.

“But from the moment I put my own ring on my finger I was instantly possessed with a new joy. I found everything clean, fair and brilliant in my mind. I felt fresh energy pour into my very body and a strange confidence, an exaltation glowed in my spirit. Everything went well with me until that evening when we exchanged the rings,— and from that hour I have met with misfortune.” She was thinking that on that evening she had learned that Arion had an ideal foreign to herself.

“You shall certainly have your ring,” said Mr. Dusart, decidedly. “Destiny or no destiny, if you prefer the other ring, my son shall restore it to you. For my sake I beg of you to be lenient,— will you not? Do not judge him too harshly! Perhaps he will repent and voluntarily make ample amends.”

Refusing to remain to dinner, with a saddened face and yet with a gentle dignity he bade them farewell, assuring Sylvia that the ring should be sent to her as soon as he could see his son.

When they were finishing the nuts and coffee Mrs. Estcourt remarked quietly, “Since dinner seems to be a time when our family announcements are usually made, I suppose it may as well be said that,— I knew Mr. Dusart many years ago. We were, in fact, engaged. And now —”

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Arion came to her rescue. "Mamma dear, we are all eager to congratulate you. I am sure Miss Kemp has suspected and perhaps —"

"Why, you could n't expect she would keep such a charming thing from me, could you?" cried Mrs. Kemp. "I have been dying to congratulate you all the afternoon, for I saw something had happened as soon as I came in! Nothing could be more pleasing, dear Mrs. Estcourt. I am genuinely glad you are happy!"

They all went back to the drawing-room and Arion took a pretty velvet case from his pocket.

"Just a little engagement token," said he, as he thrust a golden comb set with turquoise in her hair, "for she will be more our queen than ever! She will now rule over two!"

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIFTH

FOR six days the mansion inhabited by Prince Mihira had been absolutely closed. Mr. Dusart had tried in vain to enter and was much puzzled and troubled, for he could not determine whether the house was occupied or not. Again and again he went to the doors, but the curtains remained down and not a sound answered his touch on the bell.

Determined on the seventh day to investigate by direct means, his anxiety for his son overcoming all scruples, he rang, and almost instantly the door was noiselessly opened and he was silently drawn in by the hand of the principal servant, the old Hindoo nurse, who had been with the prince since his birth, and who had become the head of his small retinue of servants. With a finger on his lip he led Mr. Dusart into the smoking-room, and closing all the entrances, suddenly fell on his knees with uplifted hands.

In Hindoostanee he began bemoaning the fate of his prince, and excusing his own disloyalty in disobeying his orders to admit no one, but said that he was in despair lest his master should die. "Thou art his father!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "Thou canst save him! He has not eaten for seven days! He has not been seated for seven days!

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He has not lain himself down for seven days! He walks, ever walks, or leans against the wall! He cries out upon himself and appeals to the god to be purified! He hath been married unto the mango tree and he dieth bemoaning before it."

The mango tree! The anxious father bethought him, with bowed head and eager memory, of the thousand and one superstitious ceremonies, beliefs and customs which make up the life of the Hindoo. The mango tree! Slowly the remembrance of a strange rite came up to his mind. He had seen it performed during his earliest visits to India. The ancient custom of tree-marriage had ever been held sacred, and often, when any obstacle prevented the consummation of a marriage between a man and maiden, the ceremony would be gone through with the mango tree and the groom would be considered as a member of the family, henceforth.

Could it be that by some refinement of fancy his son had yielded to the ancient superstition?

"We found for him the grand mango!" continued his faithful servitor, "in one of your great glass gardens of this splendid and honorable city. We brought it in the night. The good Buddha hath joined them."

"Where is my son?"

"In the shrine-room, Sahib, pacing and ever pacing. I have knelt to him, my tears rolling to his beloved feet, but he will not take one little bit of food."

"Have patience," said Mr. Dusart kindly. "I will go to him at once. Let nothing disturb us."

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He slid the softly padded door and stepped in. By the side of the Buddha, its lofty green branches bending over from the dome in floods of foliage, stood a large mango tree, its small yellow-pink blossoms filling the room with a delicate and unusual fragrance. About the base of the god had been knotted and woven masses of white, soft silk, and the face was hidden under a mourning veil of silken fabric. Mihira, with a bunch of mango leaves tied to his wrist, had a red silk thread wound ten times about his throat like a necklace, and the trunk of the tree was similarly encircled. Splashes of red color had been thrown on the bark.

He was slowly, painfully moving around the circular velvet carpeted space between the pillowed divan, sometimes leaning against the tree, sometimes wearily proceeding a few steps more. His richly embroidered Indian garments, his turban knotted with precious stones, his jewelled sandals, his unkempt beard all showed dishevelment and grief. As he came around to the entrance where his father stood, he gave a great sigh, and murmured, "Long is the day, and the sun goeth to his rest but slowly. Rest cometh to me with the night, — I shall have strength to bear it."

"Mihira!" said his father gently. He started, gave a cry and fell almost fainting on his neck. Dusart clasped and held him firmly, his strong arms sustaining the sinking form.

"What time is it?" gasped his son.

"It wants but three minutes of five in the afternoon, dear boy," he replied.

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Mihira clung to him in utter weakness. "Hold me up, father," said he in a whisper, "hold me up until five, and my penance will mercifully be over."

Exerting his strength, the father with a loving clasp quietly kept the now almost insensible man standing, until, in the utter silence, the boom of a church-bell announced the hour of five. Then, laying him upon the divan, he quickly divested his son of all clothing, and calling the old nurse of his boyhood, they carried him to the bath.

Revived by the water and gentle rubbing, carried to his chamber and placed in the soft, cool linen sheets, he was, although silent, willing to partake of the light nourishment offered, and after a few moments fell into the slumber of unspeakable relief after fatigue almost unto death.

During the night vigil the tender heart of the American father of this Indian son pondered many things. As he watched the faint color come back to the lips and cheeks, the sad, hopeless expression change into some happier prefigurement of health, his being throbbled with the pain of melancholy helplessness — the feeling that never could he enter into or comprehend the inherited, blood-wrought religious and poetic interpretation of life, which to the young man was the natural, the only truth.

Yet his love easily divined the meaning of this penance: it was to purify the soul from its temptation to wrong; it was to exalt the spiritual far above the sensual; it was to crucify the offending mortal passion, that the immortal spirit of self-

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sacrifice should lift the love of the man to the abstract love of the highest god.

Accustomed from his babyhood to endure such trials, assured that to become master of his future incarnations, or to achieve Nirvana, no bodily anguish should be considered, Prince Mihira, suddenly confronted with the full enormity of his guilt, had put upon himself the hardest penance that he knew, starvation and sleeplessness, for the sacred seven days from five to five, of a week of remorse.

But with a pathos too profound and subtle for ordinary comprehension, the young, broken, stricken heart, bereft of the woman whom he had adored, worshipped, loved to mind-distraction, had solaced, had comforted itself by his native, symbolical union with a tree!

By some delicate and interior comprehension of the hidden meaning of the singular rite, he had imbued the tree in his fancy with her spiritual essence, and had drawn from the contact with the blessed leaves, the binding of the magic thread, some sweet and poetic consolation which had given him strength to endure; while in embracing the trunk and kissing with reverent lips the dedicated blossoms, he had, in some harmonious way, tried to assuage the grief for his loss and his sin.

With the dawn, waking and taking food and stimulants like an obedient child, he finally turned to the faithful watcher and said softly, "You know?"

"Yes, my son. And know too how great was the temptation, — how conscientious the repentance.

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Be at ease, Mihira, — the day of grief is over.”

He was long silent. “Do you think — they — she will forgive me?”

“When she knows — this, her heart will be of stone if she does not!”

“I shall recover my strength,” he went on feebly, “and then I shall go home, — home, to my own place. I shall go back with empty hands and empty heart. The conquering Prince, the Ruler of the Earth, shall hide him in his cell and await the end with what patience he may.”

“No! my son, that shall not be! Neither empty-handed nor empty-hearted shall you go home. Arise and be a man. Be my son, my American son. Bravely do your duty, and stand like a hero and take your just punishment, whatever it may be. Throw off this mantle of shame and put on the armor of renewed righteousness!”

He had risen, and his grand voice rang out with inspiring, resuscitating power. There followed a complete silence. Like one who has received into his mind a shock which threatens its very foundation, Prince Mihira stared at his father while every nerve trembled like a leaf.

Then each drop of blood in his body suddenly thrilled with racial traits. Like a new birth, a revolution, a springing to life of strong dormant qualities never before aroused, out of his utter weakness, — the yielding almost to death of his other self, — grew into full being the profounder, the deeper racial attributes of a patriotic, honest, frank and generous ancestry.

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Rising from his pillow by a supreme effort, he looked above with eyes flashing with new courage, new purpose, and lifting his hand high above his head cried out in a voice resonant with determination: "O God, I will."

The Bronze Buddha

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIXTH

ONE morning Arion came into the breakfast-room limping on one foot. His mother was surprised and asked if he had twisted it. He seemed very quiet and pale, and not answering, she became a little alarmed and said, "Is it anything serious?"

He was slow to answer, as if he wished to put it off until the last moment, and yet finally said, "I am afraid it is, mother."

"Why, Arion! what has happened? Have you had a big fall at the gymnasium, or what?"

"No. I have not done any vaulting or anything severe there in a month. I do not know what has caused it. It has been coming on gradually, for more than a week. I have managed to conceal it until now, and in fact, until this morning I could use my right side a little, — enough to get around, — but to-day —"

She was trembling with apprehension.

"Mother, dear, I am paralyzed in my right side, up to my shoulders, — I can just lift my shoulder a little, but nothing else."

A number of consultations and examinations among physicians followed this announcement, but the cause seemed to be absolutely hidden, and the right side remained motionless. It was decided

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that Arion, young and strong as he was, had received an apoplectic shock. His general health remained very good, his brain perfectly clear, his countenance unchanged, but he was utterly helpless in his right hand and limbs, — as helpless as an invalid of twenty years standing. It would be useless to describe the grief of his loving mother, the sorrow and sympathy of his hundreds of friends.

The house for ten days was crowded with visitors, callers, gifts of flowers, and every possible attention — from the grateful boys whom he had befriended and who had grown to love him as an elder brother, to the long list of society people whose hospitalities he had enjoyed and returned. He was in no pain, and in fact, as he sat in an easy chair, the picture of health, it was difficult to realize that this exceptionally strong and perfect physique should have been stricken down in youth, — for the surgeons and physicians gave but a doubtful prediction of his recovery. “If we could only ascertain the cause!” But there was no cause that could be determined.

It was not until he had been confined to the house for more than two weeks and had had long, leisurely hours in which to wholly think out the situation, discuss it with his mother and arrive at a characteristic conclusion, that Mrs. Kemp and Sylvia arrived. After the adventure in the church Mrs. Kemp had thought it wise to leave town immediately, and as she had some relatives in the West who were clamoring for a visit, Sylvia and she started at once, simply sending a brief note to Mrs.

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Estcourt to say they would return at the end of the month.

Although notices of the unfortunate condition of Mr. Estcourt had appeared in the New York press, in the rural district where they were visiting the news did not reach them, and it was only on their return to the city that they heard of the condition of their friend. During the whole of her trip Sylvia had felt an unusual depression. It was in vain she tried to be gay, — a dull, saddening cloud seemed to hang over her. When alone she frequently found herself clasping her hands over her heart and catching her breath as if in grief or pain. She attributed this to her interior sadness, — for she had tried to put her deep love for Arion out of her heart, but in vain.

The sensation of a tie, an invisible cord uniting them was stronger than ever. She could not think of him without a singular tension of the nerves, half of delight, half of anguish. When drowsing before sleeping she felt herself so light, so apart from her physical body, that she almost seemed to quit it, or else he came to her in something like an unseen vision, — a vision of touch, rather than sight, a consciousness of presence rather than touch, a subtle knowledge of being heart to heart, rather than a physical consciousness. Their very spirits seemed to mingle, to meet, to know each other as one being.

Yet through all this intense, exquisite, unnamable union, where the soul seemed translated into an atmosphere so pure, so clear, so full of har-

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mony, that earth had given her nothing like it, was a gray, sombre, intangible woe, — a barrier, a darkness which made her waking hours full of a dumb expectation.

She heard of his illness, then, without that surprise, that excitement which would otherwise have overwhelmed her. It was as if she had known it before. The morning after they had arrived, then, they had hastened at once to the house, and Mrs. Kemp and she now came into the library, where Arion was established with every luxury that could enhance the brightness of the room. An invalid is always imagined as surrounded by cushions or lying on a lounge, but they found him seated at the great writing table, patiently trying to write some important letters with his left hand.

He looked up brightly and greeted them with a mild cheerfulness which added years to his dignity, yet was so winning that they thought he had never appeared so handsome. The experiences of the soul through which he had passed had so chastened his expression, that while the splendid manhood was still in evidence, there was a new softness of manner, a reserve, which was positively endearing.

In a few moments his mother led Mrs. Kemp upstairs to her own room, where she could pour out to the sympathetic heart of her old friend the tears, the apprehension, the grief verging upon despair which she had so bravely repressed. For to Arion not once had she so much as suggested her fears that this terrible blow was to be permanent. She had forced herself to be apparently certain that a

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few weeks would restore him to health. But in reality she had but little hope, and her long strain of silence now sought its relief in her friend.

Sylvia remained with Arion, and with that remarkable power which women have to control themselves when they must, chatted gently and half gayly of her trip, of their adventure, of anything and everything which was of mutual interest. But moment by moment they each felt that such subjects were irrelevant, — out of harmony, distractive. The sight of her had aroused in him the love he had determined to crush out, with such compelling force that he almost breathed it into actual being from his face, while she, urged by that feminine and delicate pride which wisely will not show the feelings of the heart until the heart is sought, nevertheless was almost conquered by the irresistible impulse to pity, to weep and to caress.

“You must have had many friends to visit you!” she said, looking about the plants and bouquets which adorned the windows and mantel, “and they have brought their tributes!”

“Yes, so many! All have been so kind!”

“And she,” she said impetuously, for she could not help it, “how grief-stricken she must be!”

“Who?” said Arion, gently.

“Why —” she hesitated, “why, — the lady, — your ideal, — your highest ideal! Surely she has come to you in your trouble!”

“Do you remember that!” he answered; “no, she did not come until this morning.”

“But she came, and —”

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“Yes, Miss Kemp, she came this morning.”

“Oh, what a comfort, a blessing it must have been to you! When we love how long for those we love, especially when in sorrow.”

“Yes, I longed for her, — I cannot tell you how much, Miss Kemp, — but, of course, now I could not expect more than her friendship! A fellow stricken as I am must give up all hopes of love.”

“And she — would she endure that?” she exclaimed, her color rising and indignation creeping into her voice.

“She should, she ought! what would her life be if she linked it with mine! You are so sweet and good, that you do not stop to realize what this would mean to her! Think of me, — what a care, a burden, a confinement, a sacrifice! Never to stand on my feet again! Never to raise my right hand to my lips, never to lift myself from my chair! To be ever surrounded by servants, to have a nurse or attendant ever at my heels! To stay in the house, never to be able to escort her into society, never to ride, to walk, to go to the theatre, to travel, unless on some special occasion when my people could help the poor invalid into his seat! Oh, no! Miss Kemp, to ask a young woman to give up her fresh, free life to me, to tie herself to the chair of a sick man! It would be impossible!”

“What did she say?” said Sylvia in a low, cold tone.

“She simply asked if she could endure it, and I have told her ‘no.’”

“Then she never loved you!” said she. “If love

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is so poor a thing that when some misfortune has overtaken the loved one it should for one instant reason, or calculate, or discuss its power to bear — ” she laughed. It was a scornful, cynical, miserable laugh of bitterness. “Oh, I have no right, — I know not what you will think of me, Mr. Estcourt, — doubtless you love her with your whole heart, — you do, or you could never so calmly sacrifice yourself; only think, she came this very morning, — your ideal, — the woman of all women for you, and she could give you up, she could think of her own selfish pleasures, her future happiness, her ‘confinement to an invalid,’ when her breaking heart should have given itself to the utmost with a generosity like God’s! It is terrible!”

“Would you do so?” he exclaimed, clenching his hand on the chair and growing white as death.

“If I loved you,” said she, bending forward with her very soul in her eyes, “I should feel it the joy, the gladness, the honor, the great God-gift of my life, to be to you all you could need or desire.”

He was silent, looking at her with an anguish of struggle in his face, an intense yearning, an equally intense repression. At last he said very slowly and gravely, “You are a very noble girl, Miss Kemp. I pray to my God that the man you love will be worthy of such greatness and never take the least advantage of it.”

She turned away and went to the window, her quivering lips and beating heart precluding the possibility of a reply. For a moment or two she stood mastering herself, putting down the climbing sor-

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row, crushing out the desire to give a groan, a cry, anything to relieve the keen pain of her heart. But suddenly the words, "Trust in the Lord, and He shall give Thee thy heart's desire," came like a benediction into her mind. She seemed to hear again the rich, deep contralto, soaring far into the dome, — the dim religious light seemed to cover and surround her. She became very calm.

Coming back to Arion, whose helplessness, sitting there almost immovable, struck her far more forcibly than it had at first, she noted the lines of suffering which had come into his face and seemed to age it, alter it, make it seem the countenance of an old man.

"Please tell me," she said gently, "about everything you did before this happened. Did you ride in the park any more?"

"Yes, I went out the day you went away. I had a long ride, and a pretty good header, too! Faith, I had forgotten it."

"You fell?" she exclaimed.

"Yes. Just up at the far end of the park they were repairing the road. I was crossing from the bridle path over a carriage drive, riding at a slow canter, but carelessly looking around at the men at work, when Centaur lost his footing somehow or rolled his hoof on a stone. He went down on his knees like a shot.

"I pitched over his head into the rocks, and for a moment I was pretty well stunned and shaken up. The men got me on my feet, and in five minutes I felt all right and rode home."

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Sylvia was listening with eyes aglow. "Which side of your head did you hit?" said she.

"The left," he answered. "But it did not hurt, — hardly at all. In fact, I have n't had a headache or felt it or thought of it since."

"Have you told the physicians of this?" she said eagerly.

"Why, no! Truly it was of so little consequence I never mentioned it or, as I say, thought about it. I have many a knock in the 'gym' twenty times as hard as that. The horse was going very slowly."

"Mr. Estcourt!" she cried, the light of hope streaming like a glory into her speaking face, "I believe that is the cause of your trouble, that it can easily be remedied and that you will be cured! Oh, if the surgeon had only known this! Don't you think some bone of the head is pressing on the nerves which cause the muscular action of your body? Don't you think if that pressure were removed your brain would then send its power to your limbs and you would walk again? It was the left side! Arion! The brain nerves cross and the left lobe affects the right side while the right affects the left. I am sure, I am sure that is it! You will be cured!"

She ran out of the room and bounded up the stairs. Calling Mrs. Estcourt she explained her discovery. "I do not know very much of physiology," she explained apologetically, "but I do remember that, — oh, I am sure I remember it rightly! Come, come, mother! we will drive at once to Doctor

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Thorpe and perhaps, — perhaps even by night we shall know he can be cured!”

Arion, straining his ears to hear them go, to hear the last sound of her sweet, excited voice, sighed as the door closed and silence fell over the house. In her eagerness his mother had joined them, with only a word of farewell to him. “I shall be back in half an hour!” said she.

For a moment her infectious hope had given him a strong, refreshing confidence, but when he remembered the rigid examinations to which he had been put, the questions he had answered and the undoubted skill of his physicians, the flattering assurance died out and left him unable to indulge the least pleasant expectation.

But into his soul had come something very sweet, very comforting. The remembrance that he had been enabled to carry out his determination to sacrifice himself utterly for her sake, the thought that he had so quickly and easily taken advantage of her belief in some “ideal woman” to mislead her, and through that mistake to show her that not for all the world would he burden one who loved him with the care of his unhappy life, was of so high a nature that even in the intense sadness of abnegation a light as of the spheres illuminated his being.

Drawing a little volume of poems toward him from the table, he opened it at random, and in one of those trifling coincidences which sometimes seem fulfilled with unexpected appropriateness, he read the first lines which met his view.

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If there should come a time
In that far future, when the weary soul
Had reached its first fine touch of the sublime ;
And in amidst the triumph of its joy
At seeing grow so near the perfect goal,
It should faint back anear to human things,
Remembering the earth and its alloy,
With all the ages it had struggled through,
And this poor body whence the spirit springs ;

I know the Lord would stand
In that great hour of crisis very near ;
And reaching out his firm and tender hand,
Raise the bowed head and touch the tearful eyes
Until they saw him plain. Who, then, can fear
To take up any burden, or go forth
Bravely to meet the darkest destinies,
If sometime, somewhere, after all is done,
His smile shall prove the meaning and its worth ?

He sat with the book in his hand a long time,
thinking, thinking. Finally, with a deep breath of
complete resignation, he softly replaced it and said
in a whisper, "It is all right. God is love."

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVENTH

PRINCE MIHIRA was standing on a high eminence on the borders of one of the boundless stretches of cultivated acres which adorn the mountain plains of Colorado. A sunset rich in rose, gray, purple and gold flushed the broad heavens with splendid light.

The full glow of summer was over all the scene and before him stretched a very Paradise of orchards, miles of grain, acres of garden stuff, counties of potatoes and townships of small fruits. It seemed to him as if from the foothill on which he stood the sheep on the thousand hills, multiplying thousands upon thousands themselves, the great army of workmen, wagons, horses, machines and implements engaged in busy, happy, lucrative labor, were a revelation of that practical, strongly intelligent race which rounded itself into the manifestations of art and luxury in their cities, but held themselves free, active and independent beneath these western skies of blue which in their immensely distant horizons seemed to dome the world.

Arising after a time of weakness from his sickbed; taught by long conversations with his father much of the meaning of American progress; anxious to learn as a precocious child all that could be told him of this country to which he now felt a strangely

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enthusiastic allegiance, — after returning the ring to Sylvia and receiving from all those he had offended a generous and sympathetic forgiveness, he had eagerly accepted Mr. Dusart's invitation to go with him to the far west, and see for himself those agricultural enterprises which form the foundation of our national prosperity, and study for himself the possibilities of introducing such practical projects upon his own estates.

Before he had left his native land the great Brahmin of the temple, the friend and instructor of his youth, had taken him over the thousands of acres which had for generations belonged to his princely line. Including some large villages and many smaller settlements, inhabited by many thousands of persons in all, he had found himself welcomed as their lord, and was accepted as the master by those who were accustomed to the arbitrary rule of those so far above them.

Splendid as were the revenues which he derived from those English securities which had been increased by wise methods ever since his boyhood by his ever efficient guardians, the remarkable beauty of the residence in the city left by his mother, and the intrinsic value of her jewels and small outlying estates, — nothing had appealed to him so keenly as the apathetic, listless acquiescence in things as they were, shown by the lower classes of poverty-stricken, wandering inhabitants, or those whose miserable homes had been stripped time and again by the privations necessary in epidemics and famines.

Something even then, within his vivid and easily

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impressed nature, rebelled against the state of things found upon his own land; but, surrounded by obsequious retainers, young, inexperienced and accustomed by habit to see the daily mendicants at the temple doors, he had not, nor could he have understood or realized that by a new method, by energy, intelligence, money and persistence, he could make the region of his princely forefathers to become an example of what good judgment and good work could do.

But as he stood here facing the sunset, after having travelled thousands of miles, visited many States, looked into the history and statistics of the immense farms carried on with systematic care and returning to their owners not only excellent profits, but that glory of true benevolent reward, the sight of a busy and growing population, well housed, well fed, well clothed and well taught, he felt his very soul broaden to the boundaries of the clouds which mantled him, and an ambition as pure as ever entered a chastened heart came into his with a noble insistence.

Bereft of love, disturbed and almost made heretic in his religious belief, remorseful as to the error of his past, full of desire to atone to that Father whom he now began to gladly recognize as the God above all gods, his mind leaped with rejoicing at the influx of that idea which would crown his life with something worthy of his name.

Here at his feet was the object lesson his father had not only brought him to see, but taught him had been accomplished solely by himself. He could

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but remember the glow on Mr. Dusart's face, as after a long ride from the station they had reached a comfortable village. Here were neat modern cottages surrounded by flower and kitchen gardens. A little chapel, a schoolhouse, a blacksmith shop, a grocery, a market, — all the necessities of a pleasant village together with one artistic and beautiful building with windmill attached which he found was what his father called the Sanitarium, and over whose broad doors was written "Health of Mind, Body and Soul." Here was a well selected library and reading-room, containing a piano and other musical instruments. In the other part was a small gymnasium with bath rooms and swimming-tank.

"These are mine," said his father, "from this fence where you stand, Mihira, to as far as you can see. I have made this. When I bought this land it was an open prairie. That was six years ago. To-day, in some seasons, these buildings shelter a thousand people, and the regular inhabitants number over four hundred. I do not believe in charity in the usual sense. I would not give that man there a dollar, if he was well and could work for it, — but I have found many who had no work to do and not a dollar to buy bread.

"Of these, and many whom I have sent here from different parts of the country to begin a new life, I have now provided for nearly a hundred families, and instead of being vagrants or recipients of state aid, they are as you see living a life of comfortable industry, their children are growing up to be useful

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citizens, and to tell the truth, I have not lost a cent. In fact, I have made a fair profit.

“This profit, Mihira, will year by year extend the domain and its usefulness. This, to my mind, is a practical form of benevolence. My only credit in it all is that I have given my personal superintendence when I might have been fishing or yachting.” He laughed. “But my son, think it over. Perhaps you will find some way to apply the lesson.”

And Mihira had thought it over. He had obtained books and studied the science of agriculture. He had questioned the active manager of the estate. He had spent hours in the barns and granaries, talked patiently with all grades of workers, ate at the tables of the laborers, made friends of the children, knew their mothers and earnestly devoted himself to gaining a correct and intimate knowledge of their work and condition.

Now, taking a long look over the beautiful fields, the thought, the determination which had been gathering force in his consciousness, to go back to India and do likewise, stood out in strong and comprehensive proportions in his mind; and again, as he had cried out when his father had exhorted him, he raised his hand high above his head and said aloud, “O my God, I will.” As he spoke he felt the presence of some one behind him, and turning beheld one of his temple teachers, a venerable priest.

“From the great city where thou hast thy present home I am come to thee,” said he, and raising his palms in benediction, he almost wept as his reverent pupil knelt before him.

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“Welcome, beloved Master!”

His soft, melodious voice answered him in his own language. “The blessing of the Master be upon thee!”

Mihira was indeed overjoyed and surprised to see one of the prominent Brahmins of his temple thus bowing and smiling in evident pleasure at meeting him.

“I have come unto thee from far, with a message,” said he.

“I am glad to see thee! Tell me of all thou hast left behind!”

They seated themselves on the rocks, and Mihira listened for an hour to a description of everything that had happened since his departure. He questioned as to the health of all his teachers and companions, and was transported in memory far away from this scene of modern activity to the land that is ancient of days.

Finally his companion said, “Now, Prince, that thou art satisfied of the hunger of thy mind regarding thy former abode, I would tell thee what I have avoided until now. The great Brahmin and I have made the pilgrimage of the sacred Ganges!”

Mihira clasped his hands in eager interest. As in the old days of the crusades the returning knight was welcomed with emotions of reverent joy, half tinged with envy that he should have had so glorious a privilege, so did the prince feel an added respect for the man who had performed the longed-for pilgrimage to the source of that marvel of rivers.

Historically wonderful, combining as it does the

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religious as well as the political story of the ages, it has been for centuries the especial object of worship, honor and endearment to the Hindoo.

“Thy spiritual lord and mine, Prince,” said the priest, “began to feel the weight of years upon him. Great as was his nature, he was still as modest as a child. To lave his body in the purifying stream, thus chastening his conscience, had long been his secret wish, and at last amid the tears of the multitude we started. A large number of followers made up our caravan, and splendid was the munificence of our lord to the poor, as he passed on and up along the sacred shores.

“At Calcutta we saw the rich tide sweeping beneath ships and bridges of the latest invention, the modern wonders that come from all parts of the globe to ride on the sacred waves, and take the milk of life from the flowing bosom of India. Then we reached Benares, laden with its ornaments of rich temples and ghats, from whose portals came long processions of priests and people to do our great master honor.

“Clamoring for his blessing they came about us, showering us with their treasures of fruits and flowers, offering their service and crying when we departed for the serene beauty of Hardwar, ‘The Gods protect thee! Indra give thee glory.’”

“How shall I tell thee of the hills of happy Hardwar! Rising above each other in ranks of emerald, the very heart of nature seemed to breathe in beauty, while like a maiden in a passionate mood, turbulent, wild and noisy, we stood in awe at Rikhiksha, where the waters plunged and raved before us. Oh,

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but my Prince, thou shouldst have been with us on the Lachman Jhula. Even my master paused there as if too reverent to proceed. If ever the divine river teaches abnegation, philosophy, the triumph of the noble, the elevation of the intellect, it is where those placid silences command repose and, like the uplifted hand, press back the eager word upon the lip!

“On, on we went from scene to scene of ever changing grandeur. Above us night by night shone the resplendent moon of India. Our camp-fires lighting the hills or casting ruddy shadows on the rocks responded in bright flickerings to the chants and music, the prayers and aspirations of all who had power to understand.

“Night hardly hid her silver shield before all was happy action and confusion, for we knew our lord was anxious, his face with its serene look of peace growing white and lined. Sunsets over the shield of molten gold, that reflected the rose above in a glittering rose below, at last brought us to Gangotri! Here we made our resting-place, for here it is said the Ganges takes its flow. But he, my lord, in his wisdom knew of other things, and calling me to his tent, he said, ‘Friend, let us depart, for thou and I alone shall touch our foreheads with the sacred drops which flow from the heart of the Invisible! Thou and I alone.’

“So we fared forth, and leading the way as if his steps had trod the path from infancy, he took me on, higher and higher into a solitude of hills. Ay, Prince, gaze on these hands, for they have been

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purified; even at the very well of life have these lips drank the waters of Paradise! We gained the hidden spot where my master and I, alone and with prayer, dipped our palms in the very first drops of the grand source of our prosperity and laved our foreheads with its cool and healing waters!

“But alas! our great Brahmin was an aged man. Thou, my lord, hadst been the comfort of his declining years. In thee he had seen the predestined savior of his country by the return of the lost and lamented Buddha. The effort to perform this great pilgrimage had taken all his strength. Fainting with fatigue and fever, at the very moment when the chrism of victory and glory anointed his beloved lips as a token of approval and a promise of Nirvana, when the silver drops sparkled on his brow, lifting his palms to the god he saw, he cried:—

*“Lo! like fierce foes slain by some warrior
Ten sins along these stages lie in dust.
The love of self, false faith, and doubt are three
Two more, hatred and lust.*

*Who of these five is conqueror, hath trod
Three stages out of four: yet there abide
The love of life on earth, desire for heaven,
Self praise, error and pride.”*

“And even as a light borne in the hand of a white-robed novice shineth far into the darkness of the temple, so a light came out of the face of our master and I was, in my darkness, shined upon. Then, sinking into my arms he continued the mantra:—

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*“As one who stands on yonder snowy horn
Having nought o'er him but the boundless blue,
So, these sins being slain, the man is come
Nirvana's verge unto.”*

“I laid him upon the very brink of the tiny stream and let its refreshment bubble over his palms, but alas, he was spent, — the clear crystal stream of his life was also flowing out. Feebly he told me the secret of the lost image, solemnly he appointed thee, my lord, to take his high place in our holy temple, provided thou dost achieve the mission on which he sent thee, for that will be proof of thy destiny. If thou dost not succeed within a year, he then absolves thee from the trust and thou shalt rule thy life as thou wilt.

“Even as he said this, the breath seemed to go forth from his body. He sighed gently, smiled sweetly and was gone. Grief and tears overcame me and long I was silent, — but soon I made our sorrow known.

“We carried his beloved body back to our temple, and the ceremonies of his cremation were worthy of his high rank and unspotted life. Leaving all in good hands I have fulfilled his will, and have come unto thee to ask thee what is thine.”

Mihira trembled with emotion as he listened to this eloquent description ending in so great a loss. Tears forced themselves through his closed lids and a long silence as of prayer ensued. At last raising his head he said, “I know not of the god, more than I have regularly reported to thee. As I have written,

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in Europe I found nine statues of the Buddha. Three were in London, one in Berlin, one in Florence and others elsewhere. But not one had the mystic face of the ring impressed upon its garments. Finally I determined to come to this new land, where I was told great wealth exists and where men gather about them as curiosities those objects which by other nations are regarded with superstition or reverence.

“Thinking that to live in our own way and to possess a Buddha which should be seen of the wealthy, so that some discussion, some wonder and some suggestions might be made by them of others they had seen, I took the residence of which thou knowest, and in that shrine-room which I had previously purified and prepared by all the sacred rites of the preparing to raise a temple, — I neglected nothing.

“I chose a room whose height was twice its breadth, and divided it into sixty-four squares. The entrance was in the middle of the wall, and the walls were four square on the outside. The breadth of the entrance I made a fourth of the breadth of the room. On the walls beneath the satin hangings I had painted, as should be, figures of birds, trees and pots, male and female figures as well as those of leaves, creepers, and of the fiends attending on Siva.

“In truth, I chose such an image as should satisfy my conscience, for I well remembered the rule, that ‘the fine particles moving in the rays of the sun coming into a room through the window are known as atoms. Is not the atom the first of all measurements? Eight atoms make a hair’s end; eight bar-

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ley seeds make an inch, the unit of measure!’ By this measure measured I my Buddha, and thou wilt see its body is the color of the atasi flower, its countenance is cheerful and it is adorned with its crown.”

This explanation, made earnestly, almost apologetically by Mihira, was received with a profound bow of approval.

“Thou hast done well,” said the priest. “Thou hast not profaned thy religion, but hast kept it holy. But from these people whom thou hast welcomed came no clue?”

“One! I found the possessor of the original ring.”

His companion in the twilight shadow gave a sudden start, and his countenance gave him a strange appearance of exultation. But he only said, “Doth he value it?”

“It is owned by a young and beautiful American woman, who values it as her life.”

“Doth she understand the full meaning of her treasure?” It was asked in suppressed excitement.

“No. Her father, who gave his whole life to the search for our Buddha, died and said no word of why he so sought it. He however made his daughter promise to find it if it took five years of her time.”

“You tell me that they do not know why they sought it?” said the Indian incredulously.

“I say she doth not know. Her father knew, but he is dead, and he gave no reason, but compelled her duty. She told me that she was doing all in her power, but from a sense of duty only. She, being an American, hath no religious affiliation with a

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foreign god, and believes not that it will be of any value to her when it is found."

"Why, then, not purchase the ring, and relieve her of her duty, while at the same time we become the destined of the Buddha, to possess his image?"

"It is impossible. Wealth hath no value to her, she hath all that woman can use! Her given and sacred word to her dead father would be dearer to her than a splendid fortune, and such is her integrity, that she would guard her ring as her honor."

"Hast thou not tried to procure the ring from her?" queried the man in a low tone, full of suppressed passion.

"No," answered Mihira, and truthfully.

"Wilt thou?"

"No."

"Thou hast come unto the very clue and destined leadway to our great god and will not try to possess it for our own?"

"No," said Mihira simply, "I will not. The ring, the destiny, the finding, the Buddha, are hers and hers alone. I will not steal her fate away nor trifle with the wishes of the god. I cannot and I will not."

The Indian drew a jewelled dagger from his hidden belt, and for a moment Mihira was on the brink of sudden death. Anger, deep, unmitigated, merciless, and anger that seemed to him just, righteous and of honor, burned and seethed in the heart of the priest. But he finally controlled himself, replaced his dagger and said in a soft voice somewhat unsteadily, "I think thou must love this fair lady."

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“I love and reverence her,” answered the prince gently. “She is of my own race and blood, a part of my own life. I have informed thee that I have found my father? We now stand upon his boundless acres. This lady is my own cousin, the daughter of the sister of my father.”

For a moment surprise kept the other silent. Then, “Hast thou any reason why I should not try to gently persuade her to sell or give back the ring to our great Indian faith?”

“I believe thou art gentle, generous and honorable, therefore I have no objection,” said Mihira. “I am certain thou wilt not succeed, but thou hast my permission to make the request. Believe me, thou canst not force the gods! But by their divine aid thou mayst persuade her. I will not hinder thee.”

He gave the address carefully, and going down the hill to the little village, his companion bade him farewell, refusing all hospitality in his haste to be gone. His last words were gravely pronounced: “Thou shalt soon hear of my success,” said he.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHTH

WHETHER it had been by womanly intuition or by the inspiration of love, Sylvia had, while perhaps not at all correct in her theory, at least called attention to the real cause of the state in which Arion found himself.

Unaware of any accident, the physicians had not before this received a suggestion of that which now led to a re-examination and different treatment.

This was followed by great pain for many days, and Arion found that intense pain absolutely isolates the individual. A person suffering physical agony is as much apart and distinct from his kind as a man out of the flesh. Others hover around, sympathize and pity, but they can no more enter into a realizing sense of his feelings than as though he were a being in another state. He at once felt this isolation and looked upon himself as one out of the ordinary relations of life.

The intensity of the pain in his body, all unused as he was to suffering, threw him upon his inner resources, and he fast came to feel as if utterly alone amidst a universe of life. God and he seemed to be the only beings in it who could comprehend his condition. Memory of health and happiness was a mockery instead of a help, for in his present state he could no longer realize health: it was submerged

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beneath this overwhelming, constant, decisive sensation which dominated him, giving him no time to do aught but aspire towards a possibility, that possibility being almost equally longed for, — immediate recovery or death. His soul sought like a child the One and only source of comfort.

In being driven away from humanity, who could seemingly do him no good, he was still more strongly led to Divinity, which alone could restore him. He was brought into closer relations with that Divinity through his helplessness, in a way and to an extent of which he had never dreamed before, and when the respite came, the great strain was over, the pain ceased and hope revived, he was left in a state of adoring thankfulness and truly resigned to endure more if need be, to gain and add to that interior blessing which he now saw had been granted within him.

To the real delight of his physicians, in a reasonable time their patient's recovery was assured and it was now the last day of his confinement to the house. To-morrow he was to be allowed to take a short ride.

He was seated in the same room where he had experienced the purifying influences of self-abnegation and self-mastery, but with what different thoughts was his mind filled to those of that sad and almost hopeless morning!

To-morrow he would be free! To-morrow he could resume the life of a strong, active, energetic manhood. How precious had become to him the power to do, to act, to accomplish! How dear to

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him had become his secret charities and those noble interests relating to his great school of growing boys! How much, for the good they could accomplish, did he value the thousands which he could spare from his ample income.

This confinement and helplessness had taught him a great lesson, — his utter dependence upon God, and his actual delight in expending his work and wit for others. Many were the plans he made for enlarging his range of benevolence. Many a person came to mind whom he determined to aid or relieve.

When he had believed that all he could do henceforth would be to pay the bills, his real benevolence seemed to him but a dead, a ghostly thing. But now that he could both “enjoy and spread joy,” a touch of heaven seemed to enter permanently into the web and woof of his destiny.

In after years he recalled this period of apparent despair as one which had given him the strongest incentive to persist worthily, and to live up to that high standard which he had long ago set as his ideal. Thus thinking and filled with a joyous sense of all that is gracious and gladdening, he was aroused from his revery by the quiet and respectful entrance of his good man Obed Spear.

“Well, Obed?” said he, “Got back, have you? I received your telegram yesterday. Any more bronze heaters down there? Any use for ventilators and mausoleums?”

He was just smiling, — so kindly, yet so full of good-natured fun that no one could have taken offence.

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“ Oh, ventilators come in quite handy now and then ! ” replied Obed mysteriously.

“ I have no doubt you went down to that place again for some very good reason, ” said Arion, “ but now that we both know it belongs to Mr. Dusart and that Miss Kemp is preparing it for his return, — really, unless you wanted to personally attend to setting up the bronze radiator, I cannot conceive what you went down there for ! ”

“ Yes, sir, ” returned Spear, “ of course I know I followed a wrong clue once and got stuck ! But that ’s no sign I always would get stuck, and this time I stuck the other feller, by jee ! ”

“ Sit down and report, ” said Arion.

“ Well sir, ” taking a chair, “ on the last day Miss Kemp was here, that day she found out what was the matter, — I hope you ’ll excuse me, sir, but her doin’ that has made me take considerable interest in her, — not supposin’ of course that you care, one way or the other, — that is, what I mean to say, whether I do or not, — but I do, anyhow, — that day when she rode off like mad and the doctors came and we had some hope you ’d get straightened out all right, — darned if I did n’t cry, I was so glad, — she went out down among some of her poor folks afterward. Before she went I happened to be walking by their house and I saw a dark, Indian-looking chap go up the steps.

“ He was the same kind of a style of man as Prince Mihira, Mr. Estcourt, only old enough to be his father, or older ! I don’t know what made me notice him particularly, but some way he struck me. I s’pose any Indian would strike *me* ! I always have

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that Buddha in my head, mornin', noon and night. Anyway, I took a notion I did not like him. I thought I'd come back later, and see if I saw him again. When I came back Miss Kemp was just going around the corner and in less than two blocks I saw that man come out of a side street and follow her.

"I followed both. She went to a good many places and he never lost track of her and I never lost track of him. Presently she came home again and when she went into the house he started off at a brisk pace and entered a fashionable hotel. After that I thought I would keep watch of that man and three different days I shadowed both.

"It did not matter where she went, he always seemed to know when she would start, for he was on hand. He was not always dressed alike. Sometimes he wore a heavy cloak, sometimes a kind of clergyman's dress, sometimes a plain business suit. If she went in the carriage he would manage to catch a car, or call a cab, — he always seemed to be able to follow her. She went to a concert, he went. She went to an exhibition of pictures, he went. She went to the horse show, he went. Whether with Mrs. Kemp or any of their friends or alone, that man tagged at her heels, — and, Mr. Estcourt, I tagged at his.

"Now sir, that was not my orders, and I did not in my conscience know that it had anything to do with the Bronze Buddha, but somehow I thought it did, and I went by my inward ideas.

"I've kept account of the expenses. I had a pretty good time myself, takin' in all the swell doings, and

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some of those tickets cost high. There was the concert, one dollar, — ”

“ Never mind that,” said Arion, “ we will attend to that later. Go on.”

“ I meant to have gone on, but all of a sudden the man disappeared. I watched for weeks for all I was worth, but he never came in sight and I made up my mind that whatever had been the cause of his dodging around after the young lady, he had given it up and vamoosed the ranch.

“ Several weeks went by, until the other day, when Miss Kemp was to go down to Holly Bank. I knew of it because Mrs. Kemp borrowed your mother’s coupé to take her to the steamer, as one of their horses is lame. It popped into my head to see her off safe, and so I just took the Elevated and went on board.”

“ And did this man appear, after all this time? ”

“ He did, and that’s the reason I was n’t at home and had to telegraph you.”

“ Did you not see Miss Kemp and warn her of this? ”

“ No, sir, no more than I told you. She has been looking very peaked and pale lately, sir, and I hated to scare her for nothing. I made up my mind I could watch him and handle him. As for telling you, sir, and worrying the life out of you when you could not get out yourself, — ”

“ That was quite right,” said Arion gently. “ Where did you get that wise, warm heart of yours, Obed? ”

“ Dad was a pretty good man,” said he, “ and as for mother, — she ’d put love into a pine knot.”

“ And this man? ”

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“ Miss Kemp went down to the Dusart place. Mrs. Kemp did not go. You see, sir, it’s Miss Kemp’s home. She has always lived there when she has been in this country. Mr. and Mrs. Doyle were down there, for they went as soon as Mr. Dusart and his son went west. They shut up the city house and went to the old place. So she went down to put it in order for the summer. Doyle told me her uncle had given her leave to all refurnish it in great style, and you ought to see the loads of fine things that are going down every day.” Arion smiled. “ So she went, — and he went, — and I went.”

“ Did that fellow follow her there ! ” exclaimed Arion.

“ He did, for a fact. We all went down on the afternoon boat. I am sure she did not see him and I know neither of them saw me. We got there about six o’clock, and Mr. and Mrs. Doyle welcomed her as if some angel or other had got back to her right home. They drove off in the Dusart carriage. I got into a farm wagon and the Indian hired a buggy.

“ When we had all got there, the Indian about ten minutes later than I, he took up his station in the thick trees behind a low wall. I went into the grape arbor near the little building I told you about. I think Miss Kemp had dinner, for she stayed in the house about a half an hour. Then she came out on the piazza. Presently she walked out under the trees toward that tomb or whatever it is. They had been cleaning it and the door stood open with the key in the lock.

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“Out from a tree as if he had just walked down the lane then appeared my gentleman, bowing and smiling very fine. He began to talk to her in a mixed-up English I could only half understand.

“She seemed very much astonished to see him and answered him very coolly, and I finally heard her say: ‘It is useless. I have refused your offer repeatedly. I now desire you to give up all hope. I positively will not.’

“He had stepped up quite close to her. They had turned their backs, and having seen that I could get much nearer to him by going into the building, I quietly slipped in there and watched him argue and gesticulate like a crazy man. Oh, he was as mad as a wet hen!

“To tell the truth, I was bound to get as close to that Indian as I could. In reply to her speech he made some kind of a low, passionate, angry appeal. She raised her hand as if to repulse him, and in a moment, quick as thought, he had grasped it, and as she was but a few feet from the door he thrust her inside and pulling out the key he stepped in after her and locked it on the inside. Well! I had come into closer quarters with the devil than I had expected.

“‘Now,’ he exclaimed, in his broken way, ‘will you refuse? Shall I have to break that pretty hand of yours or crush that graceful arm to get it? I tell you it is ours, by right, by tradition, by the will of the gods! I will have it, do you hear? Give it to me, or I will strip it from you!’”

“And what did she do!” cried Arion, breathless.

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“He gave her no chance to speak or act. He sprang upon her in the darkness and then I sprang upon him.

“Why, Mr. Estcourt, I took that man up by the nape of the neck and tripped him up with my foot just as easy — but he had wrenched it off of her finger at the same moment, and she gave a cry of great pain.”

“Was it her ring!”

“Yes, sir, it was her ring. I am afraid I dropped him pretty hard. Anyhow, he didn't stir after he struck. Then I said just as quiet, Mr. Estcourt, as I am speaking now, ‘Miss Kemp, don't be afraid. I am Obed Spear, Mr. Estcourt's man. Take the key and unlock the door, — I will hold this fellow.’ She gave a little sound of relief and did just as I told her. I went after her as quick as I could, and locked the rascal in.”

“Did you get the ring?”

“Why, no, sir! It was all done in a moment and I had no idea what the man wanted, nor why she cried out! She told all that afterward. She was plucky! I thought she would faint or something but she did n't. She showed me her hand, — it was badly scratched and her finger was bleeding, but she wound her handkerchief around it and thanked me so nice that I got ashamed, for what was knocking down a man like that when he was trying to rob a woman!”

“It was rather fortunate!” said Arion with a grim smile. “I envy you, Obed.”

“Well you may!” he answered, with a broad grin of delight! “When she thanked me she said some

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pretty pleasin' things. One was, 'Like master like man.' Is n't that Shakespeare sir?"

Arion's face shone. "Well, was he dead? Did you kill him?" said he.

"I ought to have, — I almost wish I had! No, I did n't. I'll tell you. After we both got calmed down, Miss Kemp asked me if I supposed I had hurt him. I told her I thought I had, but not so but what he would come to, all right. But if he had groaned or shrieked we could not have heard him through those thick walls. She told me that it was a very valuable ring that he had been trying to buy, beg, borrow and steal from her, and that this was the second time he had done his best to persuade her to sell it at any price. She said that he had called upon her in New York and been very polite, but she had felt a little afraid of him then. However, as she had not seen him since, she had supposed he had given it up. I told her how he had followed her and how I had followed both, and she turned white, I tell you, and then she was more grateful than ever. 'What induced you to do me such a kindness, Mr. Spear?' said she. 'Why, Miss Kemp,' said I, 'I knew that your family and Mr. Estcourt's family are all great friends and that he would do the same if he were able, and so I naturally did it, just naturally.'

"So then I said to her: 'I'm goin' to ask you, Miss Kemp, straightforward, as man to man, if you are willing to trust me with this matter, clear up to the end?' 'Since you have made so good a beginning,' she answered smiling, 'I certainly believe you will make a good ending. Yes, I agree. And what

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do you propose?' 'Do you see that ventilator on top of that place?' said I. I said place, because I did not know what else to call it. 'Yes. Is that the one you used when you peeped at the bronze radiator?' and she laughed as sweet as any bobolink ever sung. 'Well,' said I, kind of dignified, 'I did, once, make a valuable use of it in my legitimate business.' 'What of it now?' said she. 'If you have a lantern about the place,' said I, 'I'll just put the ventilator aside and drop it down, say a foot, not low enough for him to touch it, and see how he feels.' "

"We went to the kitchen, and after Doyle and his wife had heard the whole story and Mrs. Doyle had had a conniption fit, just as women always do, we got a small lantern and I went up on top. I lowered the lantern through the hole and of course I could see pretty plain. He was standing up, against the wall, looking considerable played out, but when he saw me peeking at him he went into a tirade, sometimes in his own language and sometimes in ours, as well as he could speak it. Finally when he stopped for breath I said, 'Do you want to come out?' He disdained to answer. So I lowered down a good stout string and said, 'When you want to come out, you tie Miss Kemp's ring on to the end of this string. I will come around every once in a while and see if you are ready.' So then I drew up the lantern and came down.

"Miss Kemp asked me how long I proposed to keep him there and I told her I did not think he would be hungry and thirsty enough to give up the ring much under twenty-four hours, and so we all went

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into the house. I had a good supper and I gave the key to Miss Kemp, so she would feel perfectly safe, and assured her that I would give the fellow a show every three hours,—‘But of course,’ said I, ‘we had better go to the sheriff in the morning, and when he gives up and we let him out, he will be arrested as he ought to be, and taken to the county lock-up.’ She agreed to this and we carried it out to the needle’s eye!”

“How long did he bear it?” said Arion.

“Till about three o’clock in the morning. I went and pulled on the string about every two hours, for I knew well enough that to him, shut in that tomb, time would seem like days, while he would have no possible means of knowing how many hours had passed. So at about three, sure enough, I felt a slight weight on the string, pulled it up and there was her ring, safe and sound.”

“Did you let her know at once?”

“Yes, I woke up Mrs. Doyle and she was only too glad to carry it to her. Then I thought it would be rather mean to keep the man hungry any longer, so I went and lowered down a good sandwich, some bananas and a bottle of milk. He asked when he was to be let out. I told him the time, said he would be released in the morning, bid him good night and came away. He was muttering some of his lingo but I shut the ventilator down in place and left him.

“So in the morning we went up and made our statement, got the warrant and brought two sheriffs and went to the door. Miss Kemp would not come out to see him arrested, but I guess she was looking.

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We thought he might make a rush for liberty when the door was opened, so they had the handcuffs ready. But he was as quiet as a lamb. He did not come out, so we flung the door open and the three of us went in abreast together."

Obed became tantalizingly quiet. His face was a study. Finally Arion cried impatiently, "Well, how did you find him!"

"We didn't find him," said Obed, "he was n't there!"

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINTH

HENRY DUSART and his son were hastening east on the Pennsylvania Express. They had been ready to leave the great Colorado ranch when each had received a telegram. Dusart opened his first and exclaimed, "Here is a telegram from your cousin Sylvia, Mihira. She says, 'Please return at once if possible. Important,'" — while the prince looked up from his with a radiant face.

"The Bronze Buddha is found, father! Hear this, from Lala Sojan! 'The object of our search is found. Come to New York at once.'"

On hearing this bit of news, the face of Mr. Dusart assumed a very peculiar expression. He began to speak and then suddenly checked himself, resuming his usual manner. "I can hardly believe it, Mihira! And yet, both telegrams point to it! Can it be true?"

The prince was inattentive. He read the line over and over, "The Bronze Buddha is found!" he repeated to himself. "Well! that means my return to India, my carrying with me the blessings of the god."

His father looked at him curiously. "I do not quite understand you, Mihira. Do you still actually believe that if you take that bronze image back to India

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your nation will become prosperous, healthy, victorious, independent?"

"No, father, frankly, I do not. I have thought it all out and am certain that this, like many another superstition, has no foundation in truth. But nevertheless, to a portion of our people the blessing and prosperity will certainly accompany the god, for upon my lands, which stretch far and wide about our sacred fane, shall bloom and fruit the results of this trip, my father!

"I will be the messenger of the Buddha indeed. They will accept it as my old master would have done, — as the direct benevolence of their divinity; and satisfied that it is his will, as the Brahmin who has returned it to their land, they will obey me. I shall teach them to labor and show them the splendid results of labor. Among my own I will set an American example, and while they will think prosperity all flows from the good will of their temple deity, I shall know that it has been the outcome of a diviner plan."

His dark, fascinating face now glowed with a color and enthusiasm so deep and so exalted that the happy father could hardly suppress an exclamation of joy.

"But, Mihira!" said he, "Supposing the Buddha to actually be found, how do you know that you can become the possessor of it? You always seem to feel that the moment the god is discovered, it is yours! Yet there is Sylvia, with her prior claim, and the owner may be obstinate and even obdurate. You may not be able to secure it for love or money!"

Mihira bowed his head and stood thinking. "I do

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not know how I know it, but I always see myself successful. I have always felt that the god would be mine, that I should as surely find and carry it back as that I shall live."

They were now nearing the Jersey City station and were about to part, Mihira to go to his city residence and his father to run down to the former home of Miss Kemp, now his own country-seat. He had been told of the sudden visit of the Brahmin, the death of the old master and every word of the conversation between them. Mihira and he had frequently alluded to Lala Sojan's project of begging Sylvia to sell the ring, but neither had the least faith that she would do so. In this later development of the finding of the Buddha itself, however, the possession of the ring would be of less importance. Her uncle had given Miss Kemp *carte blanche* for the restoring and re-furnishing of Holly Bank. In view of his coming marriage with Mrs. Estcourt in the autumn, it was proposed that the two families should enjoy the place together as they might choose, during the beautiful summer weather.

To this end Sylvia had most delicately consulted with Mrs. Estcourt through Mrs. Kemp, and while that lady was confined almost entirely to her home by the illness of Arion, still she took the keenest interest in every nook and corner of the great old country mansion as described by her young friend. Sylvia was somewhat surprised at the extent of the additions and changes for the better suggested by Mrs. Estcourt, and thought it a little odd that even to silver and china, ornaments and pictures, the old

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place was made to seem an ideal abode by the lavishness of the expenditure, but she knew that a few thousands, more or less, were of little matter to either her uncle or to her prospective aunt, and she therefore entered into the plans with girlish enthusiasm.

As Mr. Dusart now approached the place he could hardly believe his own eyes. Gardeners were rolling the paths, flower-beds were in bloom, the house was an entirely different color, a new wing, tower, and *porte cochère* had been added, the glass verandas at the north and the beautifully adorned open verandas elsewhere were infinitely tasteful and luxurious.

Greeted with glad tenderness by his niece, whose touch of pallor and weariness he attributed to much thought and care, he could but go about from room to room, admiring the taste and appropriateness of all the appointments.

“Are you pleased with it?” asked Sylvia timidly when they had returned to the piazza.

“My dear girl,” he said, “you have exhibited both common sense and artistic feeling! Everything is delightful. What a home for my bonny Kate!” And he laughed a good, round, boyish, amused laugh which did her good to hear. “But now, — what is ‘important’? I have hesitated to ask you until I have seen that all is well with you.”

“And I have hesitated to tell you, for I thought it might cast a shadow over your home-coming, dear uncle. But it is inevitable.”

Whereupon she gave him in detail an account of the offensive visits of the Brahmin priest, and after telling the story of the assault and disappearance said,

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“I cannot conceal from you what this terrible man said. He assured me, over and again, that he was a messenger from Prince Mihira, had been sent to me by him and was told to secure the ring at any cost.”

“Can you believe this!” cried her uncle, pacing the floor excitedly.

She looked at his agitated face a moment and then said slowly, “No, I do not believe it. Can you explain it?”

He at once told her of the visit on the plains, the whole matter from beginning to end, and of the telegram which had brought Mihira flying home. “My son is absolutely innocent of this outrage, child, excepting in so far as he trusted the priest to be a gentleman. He knew you would refuse the request, but he also knew the man would never be satisfied until he had made it. That he would resort to violence never occurred to either of us! O God! Sylvia! you seem to be destined to endure unutterable insults from me and mine! I cannot express my humiliation!”

She came swiftly to him and kissed his forehead. “Uncle,” said she, “the whirligig of time brings human fate around again in a circle. Once, dear, you received a deadly insult from mine, — my father. On your breast you bear the mark of that mad stroke. Forgiveness lies between us, does it not?”

“It shall!” he answered. “It shall!”

“But the man disappeared!” exclaimed Sylvia, — “he is at large! I confess I have been very anxious ever since! I have deprived myself of my accustomed walks, — I have not dared to go out in my

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canoe! I have taken the young gardener James as groom when I have ridden on horseback. This feeling of insecurity has been very trying!"

"Where could he have gone? How could he have gotten out of the building?" asked Mr. Dusart.

Sylvia laughed. "They say those Indian priests can dissolve themselves and then come together again! Perhaps he dematerialized inside the Buddha shrine and materialized outside."

They both laughed merrily. "That he has materialized we know!" said her uncle, "for he, as I told you, has telegraphed Mihira that he has found the god! Dear girl, does your ring suit you now, — do you feel happy with it, — is it the right one?"

She turned the blazing jewel to the light and looked at it with affection. The sun struck its cerulean glow into a ray which made a soft blue star on her forehead. Her eyes, almost as blue, like those delicate violets found in hollows of the woods, seemed to her uncle even more beautiful than the gem. "It is my own," she murmured; "it fills my heart with peace."

"If you will permit me," said her uncle thoughtfully, "I will at once institute some repairs and changes in our little temple. That ventilator has performed its mission, I fancy, and I will have it closed. Besides this, I prefer to make the temple of some use, — a place we can enjoy, instead of a rather gloomy object in our lawn woods. May I surprise you? Will you promise me to let me make these alterations uninterrupted? May I count on you not going near the building until I pronounce it finished?"

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“Why, certainly, and please give orders to the servants. I shall truly be glad to have it changed to something more agreeable. But you make me smile, asking my ‘permission.’ Oh, uncle, what a diplomat you are!”

“I prefer to be the courtier when in your presence, fair lady!”

“And now, my good child,” he said, when they had been silent a moment, “what of Arion?”

She drooped her head a little and turned away.

“He is now almost completely recovered, I think.”

“Why, yes, I know that, of course, and I know it was your lucky thought which suggested the cause of his trouble,—but of course you have seen him? How is he looking?”

“I have not seen him,—I have been down here for some weeks,—back and forth, you know.”

He glanced at her keenly. A deep interior sorrow was plain upon her countenance.

“Sylvia, sweet,” said he, “your face makes me think of Mihira. You would hardly know him. He has almost entirely thrown off the atmosphere of India and become as one of us,—but he suffers, constantly, always. Many nights he has been out of his bed for hours roaming the foothills,—many times I find him with set lips repressing the desire to pour out, in the old fashion, his grief to the gods. He loves you, Sylvia, with a love unto death.”

An expression of deep sympathy, knowledge, pity, so strangely comprehensive came over her face that he sprang to her side. “You too are unhappy!” he

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said softly, drawing her head to his shoulder. "You too have some hidden grief. Oh, confide in me! Relieve your heart! What troubles you? Do you not remember that for years and years I bore within my soul the sting of unrequited love?"

"You thought so, — I know so," she almost whispered.

"Arion!" he exclaimed in intense surprise.

"He does not love me," she said simply, as if that were the end and she had uttered her last word.

"Whom does he love then?" he asked, putting her to one side and gazing at her in indignant surprise.

"Do you not remember, do you not know? The woman, — the ideal, — the highest ideal of his soul whom he saw in the vision! He loves her! and he always will."

Henry Dusart gave a kind of gasp for breath, — a queer sound like a suppressed laugh. "Where is she?" said he.

"She came when he believed he was paralyzed, — she came to him, — and he released her, told her he could never bind her to a sick man's chair, and selfish, cruel, disloyal, unwomanly, she accepted the position and left him! Yet, I see, I know he still loves her!"

Dusart looked extremely puzzled. "I cannot understand how she could do that," said he, "for a more pure, true, generous, noble girl I never saw but once, than this same ideal of his! Of course I except my Kate!"

"Then you know her!"

"Yes, I know her, 'root and branch,' and I know he loves her with all his heart, — and if he has re-

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turned to health, as I believe he has, I see no reason why he should not see her again and tell her that she has been his very life from the moment he first met her.”

Sylvia turned away. “I cannot bear this,” she said.

He came and clasped her hands. “I am only cruel to be kind,” said he. “The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. Dear girl, there are many things that go to make up happiness which seem extremely bitter at the time, but when all is accomplished and we look back over the years, we find without the sorrow we could never have come to the chrism of joy. Have patience, little one. Love is long and time is fleeting!” He gave her a smile of such fond tenderness that she leaned against him with a sense of perfect rest.

“But the Buddha!” she said at last, “you say it is found!”

“So Lala Sojan telegraphed Mihira! He is at my son’s residence and by this time, doubtless, Mihira has been told of its whereabouts. Are you extremely opposed to ever meeting the prince again?” he asked wistfully. “You know, dear, that he will never intrude upon you by word, look or deed. All that is past. But he is still my son, and your cousin. Do you not think you could meet him, — permit a friendship of a kindly nature? He will doubtless soon go back to India, — but in this finding of the god — surely, Sylvia, you will almost be obliged to meet.”

“It would be a little embarrassing at first,” she replied gently, “but that is of no consequence. Truly, uncle, I do not dislike your son! Neither do

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I distrust him. If it will give you any pleasure I shall meet him heartily and cordially. When I forgive, I forgive."

"Oh, thank you!" said he. "You do not know how this simplifies matters! We all wish to be together this summer, do we not?"

"That is what this home has been prepared for," she said smiling. "But I may find myself sent to the end of the earth when I see the Buddha!" she added.

"You always speak, Sylvia," he said in a curious tone, "as if the Buddha, when found, would immediately belong to you! Now how do you know that the owner may not be obstinate, obdurate, and will not give it up for love nor money? How do you know you can possess it, even if you have found it?"

"I do not know how I know," she answered, "but I have never doubted for an instant that it would come into my possession, provided it could ever be found. I see myself as disposing of it in a way to please my father."

Dusart concealed a broad smile behind his hand. "It is well for young people to have the courage of their convictions," he remarked dryly. "But now I will hasten to town. I will find out at once what the priest communicates to Mihira; the location of the Buddha shall determine my action. If they say it is in New York, expect a telegram to come up at once. If elsewhere, you shall be informed immediately. I promise you, on my sacred word, that Mihira shall never see the Buddha

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until you see it together. You shall stand in front of it at the same moment or not at all. We both owe you that, my child, and you may depend upon it."

"This place is all ready now, uncle. Only a day or two and not a trifle will remain to be done. The ladies will come down soon will they not, — Mrs. Kemp and Mrs. Estcourt?"

"Yes, and with your permission I shall send down some more servants. My man will be needed and one or two others! If this business of the Buddha detains me for a few days will you welcome our guests and make them comfortable?"

"I cannot tell you how good and faithful Doyle and his wife have been, uncle, in all this work. And Obed Spear!" She laughed lightly. "Truly, uncle, I think now I may ask a favor. When we actually see that long-lost god, don't you think, after all he has done, that you might allow Obed to be with us? He is as honest as the day and loyal as the sun."

"We certainly owe a great deal to Obed Spear," he answered gravely, "and I will see that he shall accompany us, wherever we go."

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CHAPTER THIRTIETH

THE priest, Lala Sojan, was restlessly tossing on a bed of fever when Prince Mihira arrived at his mansion. For weeks, an honored guest, attended with faithful devotion by the Indian servants left in charge, he had come and gone at will. But returning from a short sojourn elsewhere, he had found himself prostrated a few days previously, attacked with utterly new sensations of pain and heat, agonized by such difficulty in breathing that he at once superstitiously prepared for death, and awaited the coming of his host in response to his telegram with ever growing impatience. Below in the shrine room the sound of sacrifices, the burning of incense, the watching of omens, the mantras: "*O thou giver of prosperity, I entreat thee to divine my future! I mean to leave thee only after being informed by thee and I will again question thee from the northeast corner early in the morning!*" — spoken to the dove which had been procured and which sat in the branches of the now dry and faded mango tree, — was going on, while after the ablutions, carried out in the strictest manner, the august patient was brought to the foot of the Buddha, now surrounded with eight small vessels containing ghee. For ghee is light, it washes off sin, it is the food of the Devas and the world continues to exist by it.

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Three times during this day had Lala Sojan been prostrated before the god, his forehead against these sacred jars and his tongue, swollen and dry, pronouncing the formula, "*May all the sins committed by me in my incarnations on the earth, in Swarga and in the middle regions, be washed off by contact with ghee.*" The shawl had been reverently removed from his person, he had bathed in the bottled water of the Ganges, brought with the other paraphernalia of the prince, but nothing had availed, — his pains increased, his death seemed certain.

The moment his host approached the couch on which he was reclining, he broke forth into many lamentations, and hushed the earnest and anxious inquiries as to his state by imperative assurances that his life was at an end, and all he asked was to have strength to inform the prince of what he had discovered. Finding it useless to oppose him or to offer medical aid, which would under any circumstances have been rejected with horror, Mihira listened in silence to what the Brahmin painfully and slowly disclosed.

"I came directly to this city and visited the young woman, thy cousin. I prevailed not with her to give unto me the ring! Alas, I feared this the moment I observed her palm, for the lines in it were the lines of the lotus, and she was thus a guardian of treasures. Yet, since on setting out on my errands I first saw a horse with rings in his coat, on the front legs, belly and forehead, I still hoped for prosperity. Then followed many days of watching. I hoped to surprise or persuade her, or to gain the ring by subterfuge,

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— for, Prince, the god must be India's! Sometimes the omens were good, sometimes they were evil; and at one time they were so very evil and of such a nature that I remained for days in this house, awaiting a sign.

“At last it came! A halo appeared around the moon, the color of a peacock in fire and silver! It was in the shape of a complete circle, bright and glossy! The next day I watched and I saw and I followed. She left the city and went where great trees grow and beautiful waters flow in from the sea, and the wondrous wheels of the steam-craft on which we went revolved but a double hour on the way.

“Into a beautiful dwelling she passed and I waited. But I trembled, for over my head came the caw of crows! Over and around from left to right they whirled, giving forth the cry which means troubles from strangers. But she came forth and approached me and stood near a strange, small temple builded four square and strong beneath the trees. Then tried I again to persuade her to sell me or give me or lend me or grant me the touch of that ring, — even in thy name I said it, Prince, and still she obeyed not! Whereat mine anger seized me, and I took her quickly by the hand and drew her into the tomb they had builded, and upbraided her and demanded and threatened. But she would not! So, encouraged by a keen last gleam of the setting sun which showed me her hand through the key-hole, I grasped it.

“But the fiends of Siva protected her. A blow felled me. I awoke in utter darkness and silence. But in my clenched hand was the ring!”

The prince gave a great start.

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“Did you lock her in!” he exclaimed in an ominous voice.

“I turned the key in the door that she might not escape, for my soul was much fretted and the fever of rage was upon me. Had I not offered to her ten times the value of the gem? Had I not pleaded with her for the clue to the Buddha, telling her of the poverty and sickness and subjugation of the children of India, because of the loss of their true god? Yet she would yield not!”

“What answer did she make to your appeals?”

“She said that she and not I was the destined owner of the true ring and the true image; that from the great priest who had guarded the statue all his life her father had received the ring, and not for me was the glory of the finding nor the praise of the restoring. She was calm and determined.”

“She was right and just, Lala Sojan! We are the intruders, the interlopers! The unwarranted claims we make should shame us both.”

“Yet our country! Our beloved India, our poor famished people, our offended deity!”

“That deity will give himself to whom he pleaseth,” said the prince, “for doth not Krishna utter: ‘*The doer who performs necessary actions unattached to their consequences, and without love or hatred, is of the nature of the quality of truth! The doer whose actions are performed with attachment to the result, with great exertion, for the gratification of desire or pride, and attended with rejoicing or anger or grieving, is of the quality of falsity.*’ We have both sinned, thou through anger and I through much attachment, and

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I dread me that the Buddha will never turn his divine countenance upon us."

The old man lifted his hand feebly as if spent. "Sink not my heart in the waters of death!" said he sadly, "for already I feel their flow. Let me tell thee all as quickly as I may. — Many minutes or hours passed when above me appeared a light. A mocking face and jeering lips could be seen above the light that was lowered a little from the roof. Whoever it was demanded the ring and dropped a cord to which I was to tie it, when I would regain my liberty. I would not reply, and I was left again to darkness.

"Much I meditated on my lowliness and my disgrace, shut in a tomb in the land of the unbeliever, subjected to insult who had been lord of all. But so, beneath the sacred Bo-tree, was subjected and subdued the pride of Him who is the Lord of all the world. I submitted and possessed my mind with patience. Now an interminable time passed and I reasoned within my soul, 'Shall I die thus, or shall I give up my will unto manifest destiny, that in the later time my life shall regain its hold and not be lost to the god?' So I tied the ring unto the cord and in time food and drink were lowered down for my refreshment. But this time, the light also was much lowered, and to my astonishment I found myself in a veritable Hindoo temple of the lesser sort, each feature beautified, but all the sacred proportions respected; and hope at once filled my breast. For out of all such temples, as thou knowest, are ever to be found paths to the greater temple or to the outer gardens within their walls.

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“From the keen ray of the sun that had penetrated the key-hole, I argued the door stood west and in a moment I had found it. Then the north was easy to find and quickly in feverish haste I sought the secret panel which should be there. Long I pressed and sought and touched each engraved or embossed ornament, but finally, suddenly, the hidden door gave way and I set my foot on a stair. Silence, darkness, cold, mystery were before me, behind me, everywhere.

“Long stood I hesitating. What might not this opening lead to, — into what should I plunge? But summoning courage I at last stepped forward and down. The panel, relieved of my hand, instantly shut into place and I found myself imprisoned in a living tomb. I trembled, but I went forward and down. Nine, ten steps I counted and then I knew I stood upon the earth.

“Groping my way, my hand struck upon something metallic and very cold. With a shock I discovered it was the shape of a hand. Lifting mine cautiously and rubbing it over the surface, inch by inch, O Prince, I found it was a Buddha, a great, a magnificent Buddha, so tall that as I stood I could but touch the forehead.

“Forgetting my fears, exalted by hope, excited and reverent and glad, even if I were to meet my death the next moment, I carefully, slowly and certainly touched every portion of the Divine Image, and on the spot we know, amid the carvings of the garment, under the hand that holds the roll of judgment, I found distinct, clear and positive to the

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touch, the miniature face which shines there on your hand!"

Prince Mihira bowed low, reverently pronouncing: "*To those always devoted to me who worship me with love, I out of my compassion, standing within their hearts, destroy the darkness which springs from ignorance, by the brilliant lamp of spiritual discernment.*"

The priest, silent and with eyes closed, joined in this devotion. "Assured," he then continued, "that by the will of the great Arbiter of our Destiny, through these dark and devious ways, I had been led straight to the object of our consecrated search, I bowed my soul in the darkness and lifted up my heart in praise.

"Then, patiently feeling my way, I came to a path which rose gradually a few feet and struck against a wooden trap-door. This I easily lifted, and emerging, I found myself in a great glass building, rich with flowers, grapes and apricots, the sun just rising welcoming me to a new morning and freedom setting her crown upon my brow. Quickly escaping, unseen, unheard, I made my way back to the landing where the steam-vessel lay at anchor. In three hours more I was lying upon this couch."

Prince Mihira had listened to this story with varying emotions. He could but analyze, as he listened, the new phase of thought which continually filled his mind. Once, to have heard that the Bronze Buddha had been discovered would have made him wild with religious and superstitious fervor! Now, even in the midst of the mantras he uttered, crept a sense of unreality, of uselessness, which chilled his enthusiasm and kept him unresponsive.

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Yet the habit of his life, the ingrained thought which had predominated over his reason for so many years, was not instantly to be replaced by newer ideas, and his earnest aspiration for the recovery of his friend was accompanied by that inevitable resignation to fate which distinguished his very mind.

“ In this corporeal frame moves swiftly the soul ; so will it pass through other forms hereafter : be not grieved thereat. Know this, — the being that spread the universe is indestructible. Who can destroy the indestructible ? Those bodies that enclose the everlasting, inscrutable, immortal soul have an end ! But the soul kills not and is not killed : it is not born nor doth it ever die.”

As the old priest slowly conveyed his narrative, many conjectures were forced upon Mihira, of which Lala Sojan knew nothing. Therefore his mind was full of speculation before the tale was ended. If the Buddha was really concealed beneath the little temple he had heard of at Holly Bank, — that was most certainly the estate which his cousin had been preparing for the return of his father. It had previously been her home, her father had builded the shrine. Then had her father also placed the Buddha beneath its foundation ?

If so, the god would most surely belong to her. But now that it had come into possession of his own father, — may it not be that Henry Dusart himself had placed the image there ? Then, without doubt, it would come into his possession. Yet nothing that his father had ever uttered had in the slightest degree pointed to any knowledge of the god. Not one of these people whom he had met in this new land had

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betrayed aught but a lively desire to find the image, nor by any hint had betrayed the least knowledge of its location.

He began to long for the coming of his father with as intense anxiety as the priest had longed for him. But now, before him was an instant and imperative duty. Moment by moment he saw that the illness of Lala Sojan was becoming more serious. Satisfying him with promises to go to see the Buddha at once, and noting that his mind was already wandering, the prince hastened to secure a prominent physician, whose grave face on examining the patient was anything but encouraging.

The day passed in attending to many matters that were necessary after his long absence, and it was not until evening that his house had again assumed that beautiful order and tranquillity, that still serenity for which it had ever been distinguished. His own baths taken and his servants cheerfully attending to their well-known duties, he threw himself at ease upon a divan in the smoking room and awaited his father.

As he sat there alone, with leisure to think of all these things, a strange sense of illusion of the senses seemed to come to him. He could hardly imagine himself so changed since he had left the great temple, whose solemn and magnificent ceremonies were still going on day by day as they had for centuries, while he had grown so far apart from it all in belief if not in practice. And which was right, — which truth, which best? Suddenly, as the brain will frequently bring appropriate images to the illustration of inward

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uncertainty, a sonnet Sylvia had repeatedly read to him came up to mind. It had been called "Elusion."

A poet and a painter loved a maid
Whose beauty neither pen nor brush might show ;
Yet one, with words impassioned, sang the glow
Of her cheek's bloom ; the other, in the hush
Of a most solemn silence, caught the shade
From a wild rose, and made it seem like her.
Then of his work each grew a worshipper,
And aimed to put his rival to the blush.
With eager eyes they sought her, that her cheek
Itself, with tell-tale flush of joy, might prove
Which most had been inspirèd by his love.
But when they found her, tears alone might speak :
Picture nor song were true, — their art a breath, —
For all the color had been stolen by Death !

Is that true? Is love, religion, faith, aspiration but a delusion, a will-o'-the-wisp, — escaping the searcher, defying the longing, yearning soul? Is death at the end, — just death, — the color of joy forever stolen, — the hope of the world denied?

He was seized with unspeakable melancholy.

At last his old Indian servant announced the arrival of his father and he started from the revery into which he had fallen. With all possible minuteness he gave a graphic description of the strange adventure of Lala Sojan, his present illness and all that had been done for him. "And now, father! I beg of you to tell me!" he cried — "Did you know aught of this? Does the Buddha belong to you?"

Dusart rose and stood looking down from his full height upon his son. His presence was majestic and seemed to carry with it a protection, assurance and

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comfort of which the prince was now keenly aware. There was a strong, bright light in his eyes of dominance and power. "My son," said he, "do you respect and trust me?" Mihira gave an exclamation of devotion and kissed his hand. "Then beloved, have patience for a little longer. Go not to the spot until I go with thee! If the god is there we shall find it. If there be a secret we shall fathom it. But it is not for us to determine the just ownership of the divinity!

"If beneath that metallic breast doth breathe the spirit of the ideal; if within that moulded heart there dwells a purpose of good to humanity, time and fate will bring the truth to light. I tell you, Prince, that I know not the secret of its being, nor its value to any race or nation, but if there be in the occult and invisible power that which shall make its form a real and efficient benevolence, you shall take part in all it can give, and out of its long past history of silence the lips of the god shall speak."

"But Sylvia!"

"Beautiful, good, forgiving, — she will forget the past. She will receive and welcome you."

"But Sylvia!"

"Her claim is first, Mihira, but it is my belief that you will only be rivals in generosity."

Again the prince with sad despairing eyes looked in his father's face and murmured, shaking his head: —

"But Sylvia!"

His father clasped his hand and wrung it hard. "I know, my son. But quench your sorrow in relieving the sorrows of others."

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A long pause ensued. At last: —

“That is the Christ way,” answered Mihira, his pale face bowed upon his hands. In a moment however he raised it and said gently: “I will make it my way.”

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIRST

THE week after my first venture out of the house was full of pleasure to me, for I could feel health and strength creep steadily into my body, like a great wholesome current of wind into the lungs! The long imprisonment had so dimmed the sensations of springing life within me that when they came again in a flood, the joy of it was beyond words. Impatient as I was to go to my Star, I resisted the impulse for many reasons.

Duties awaited me that were imperative, and I had a sense of incompleteness still, which I wished to entirely conquer. In truth, to her bright, rounded, perfect womanhood I would not take one single touch of weakness, but waited until that glorious morning when, every duty performed, every kindly attention acknowledged, I felt myself again in absolutely perfect health of brain, body and heart. I have often been glad that I am fair-skinned. My idea of a grand man is one richly made up of blood, bone, muscle, — a person of exquisite wholesomeness, but seven times seven times refined in its athletic beauty. I often see him, like an ancient statue. He looks white and gold to me, — not a dark shadow about him. The Orient does not produce him, nor does the North, save in coloring, but among the Greeks of old days he must have existed, physically

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at least. He is the counterpart of my ideal of woman's beauty, — its mate and its other half.

Only to such could I surrender her, — surrender her! My thoughts had suddenly brought my blood to the boiling point. The very suggestion that she could become another's shook me with unbounded rage. I found myself white and ready to cut down the very ideal of my imagination.

How thoughts will ebb and flow in the mind! In a moment I was smiling at myself. The sparkling blue bay, the fleet of yachts and schooners again came into my vision.

Our country club, situated within a three miles' row of Holly Bank, had taken on its summer dress and I found my room prepared for me and my trim canoe ready at the landing. From some sentiment I could not express even to myself, I chose white for my clothing and tossed some white and blue cushions into the tiny craft.

The quiet of a sunny afternoon had settled upon even the leaves and a stillness which was the very soul of solitude brooded over the great pines which lined the shores. I slipped along under the dark boughs, occasionally filtered through with yellow rays of sunshine, keeping the shore and gliding noiselessly along its edges. The scene was full of that sweet and tranquil beauty which has the power to play with delicate fingers on my soul-strings and produce within me those harmonies of emotion which bring me *en rapport* with nature in that exquisite sense of oneness so dear to me.

The unspeakable joy of anticipation filled me with

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an interior song. How should I find her? How would she greet me? What would be the expression of that delicate and ardent face? Would her eyes brighten, her lips tremble a little? Eagerly I pushed the canoe through the blue and silver waters, hoping, fancying, dreaming, and every moment coming nearer, nearer to the crown, the joy, the light of my heart.

When the stately walls of Holly Bank came in view I drew the paddle slowly, for I hoped to see her before I must enter its doors. I was gazing earnestly at the piazza, thinking she might be there, when her voice, — that voice, unlike any other, save those so near to her, — sounded very close to me.

“Will you pass me by?” she said.

“Dearest!” The word sprang to my lips involuntarily! I could not help it. She was in a snow-white canoe, half hidden under a great bending bush of wild roses. In her arms were the blossoms she had just gathered, — great bunches of azalias, dogwood, bridal-wreath and spicy yellow clove, while a wreath of blue water-violets crowned her head and a knot of them was caught upon her breast. She seemed the genius of summer and sweeter than the blossoms she held. The filmy gown she wore showed the pearl and rose of her lovely neck and arms, while her snow-plumed hat was thrown on the violet cushions beside her.

My sudden word sent a flush of pink from forehead to finger-tips and she stepped quickly from her canoe and stood on the grass with a slightly defiant air. Then she began to look at me, with a dear,

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loving criticism, so unconscious, so innocent in its earnestness, that my heart leaped with joy.

"You are quite well," she said with a long sigh of relief.

"But you," I answered, with some anxiety, "do not look quite so well! Has this re-arranging the house, the grand adventure of the Brahmin and the finding of the Buddha been too trying?" For I had been told the history of the past few weeks by Prince Mihira and Henry Dusart. I had seated myself beside her under an enormous tree which cast its shadow over a mound of violet-strewn mosses.

"I do not think so," she said. "I have been alone and have had a chance to think. I have often sat looking across that line of water there to the point. Beyond is the open ocean. So, beyond and behind all our mortal and material surroundings lies the ocean of infinity. My spirit has been filled of late with a singular melancholy, which is neither pain nor fear."

"And have no sunlit hopes crept in?"

"Oh, yes! I have thought how sweetly your dear mother will rule this home; how much you will enjoy it."

"But for yourself?"

"Banishment, probably. Some mission to India, some strange command which I must heed, to do good to the world!"

"But not alone!" I exclaimed.

She turned her sweet face on me, so full of pure and noble thoughts, and answered, "That would no doubt be best."

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I took her hands and found myself thrilling and trembling with love and emotion!

“Sylvia, beloved, never alone, never alone, if you will only love me and let me be with you. I am come, dearest, to beg you to love me as I love you! How I love you! From the moment I saw you standing there on the Buddha pedestal, heaven shining in your face, I took you into my very soul! Darling, not a day, an hour, a moment has passed that I have not loved you from your dear feet to your lovely golden head! I must pour it out, — don't stop me! Do not take your little hands away! Let me tell you how I love you and why I hope you love me. Have you not heard me call you in the night when far away?”

“Yes!” she breathed, her lovely eyes darkened to jet.

“And have you not in your dreams, — even in your waking visions, — when you were close to me in spirit, known me to be with you, loving you, adoring you, restless and sad without you, longing, yearning for you, — do you not know this, darling?”

“Yes — but — she — she — oh, how can you speak so? How can you be so false to her?”

“To whom!” I exclaimed.

“To her, your ideal, the beautiful woman of your vision, whom you released, but who now will again come to you, since you are again well. You told me you loved her, longed for her, but would not tie her to an invalid! What farce is this?”

She had grown more and more cold and indignant.

“Sylvia,” I answered very gravely, “you alone are

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that ideal, you are the vision, you are the dear being I released, and now that I can in honor openly claim you, I do claim you as mine, darling, mine by a love that has never varied, never altered, never faltered, but has ever grown and grown greater and sweeter and purer from day to day! You came in the morning and I told you my ideal had come in the morning. You misunderstood and I was willing you should misunderstand. I could not and would not let you show me that you loved me, dearest, for I knew you would suffer so much afterward, and I had determined that rather than to allow you to make such a sacrifice for me I would die silent."

Her face assumed the same expression of uplifted and exalted ecstasy which I had seen upon it once before.

"Trust in the Lord!" she said, "and He shall give thee thy heart's desire!"

For a moment I was puzzled, and then, with my face close to her dear cheek, my lips seeking her lovely lips, I whispered, "And what did your heart desire, Sweet?"

"Arion!"

"Oh! how can it have been that you loved me so soon!" she asked when I had given her my soul through our lips. "Yet so it was with me! Did you think you saw me first? No! I saw you as I stood there, far down the great room, and as you came slowly, step by step nearer, I felt, I knew that something dear and dearer was coming closer and closer into my heart. I knew myself was coming, some sweet, strange part of myself hitherto un-

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known; that another half of me was approaching, that a cord of heavenly light was drawing you right into your own place, here!" and she spread her hand tightly over her breast.

"I knew not how I looked at you, I only knew you were coming close, and when you stood and looked up at me, I only saw as in a mirror some part of my own being which had been lost, reflecting itself before me! Arion, I know not how I remembered that we were strangers, I know not how I turned away and left you!"

A shiver of delight so exquisite that it resembled pain came over me with these divine words. We became silent: the union between our hearts was too intense for speech.

The long sweet hours passed until the scarlet sunset tinged the trunks of the trees with flame and the rich music of the thrush fell through the growing gloom.

The birds fairly shouted in the woods at twilight and when the sun at last sank below a dark rift of angry clouds it shone out again in a grandeur and magnificence that turned the world crimson. The stately boles of the trees blushed deep red and the dark foliage standing out from the trunks made a picture Rembrandtesque for coloring and like Corot for depth and feeling. Poetic images flooded our minds and the unusual variety of beauty touched every sense to acute impression.

And above all this the sweet and subtle charm of agreeable companionship, of youth and chivalry, of strength and courtesy, of coyness and yielding, of tenderness and coquetry, made the landscape

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bright with unexpected motions and graces and vivified every sensation with a newer and more attractive brilliancy.

I stole the wreath from her bright head and begged the blossoms on her bosom. "Exchange these violets with me," said I, daring to dislodge their odorous blooms.

"Exchange!" said she, "but I do not see that you are wearing flowers."

I opened a little case and carefully taking a few withered blossoms from it laid the broken stems and leaves in her hand. "They have been kissed to death," said I. "Take them and hide them away with kisses, for they are sacred. You gave them to me the night we went through the conservatory to the magic chamber!"

"And it was there I heard about your vision, there I lost my hope."

"I never hoped, I knew!" I exclaimed; "for something within me has sung a song of victory and joy from the time you beamed upon me! And do you know, love, this great love of you has vivified me with a love for others, so intense and strange! I find the essence of love in me so quickened that I cannot casually touch a new hand without feeling virtue go out from me to bless them!"

"Oh, that is so true!" she cried. "I too wish to bless everyone! I long to be of use to my fellow men, to my fellow women,—to the newsboy, the aristocrat, the beggar, the millionaire. . . They all need us, we can bless them all! Out of each one of us can go influences which shall have an endless

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result for good. Divine and impartial love and anxiety to bless has that power of dissemination !”

“Such a feeling, love,” said I, “is like a vial of attar of roses, never scentless, but always filling the whole surrounding air with fragrance that shall creep to the worn sense of the vilest man or lowest woman and suggest to them a newer and more beautiful conception. It may not be visible, but it is beautifully potent.”

“Together,” she said gently, and she lingered on the word as if in love with it, “together, we should be able to make a small part of the world very sweet.”

I clasped her to my heart, reverent and glad beyond any gladness I had ever known, loving as I had never dreamed I could love and thankful to my Heavenly Father until my soul burned with gratitude.

“Together, beloved, wife! Together, sweetheart, for life and death!”

And so I won my Star.

We finally moored our canoes and went slowly to the house. As I had anticipated, the ladies had arrived and had gone over the whole establishment, commenting and eager, discussing the convenience of the kitchen department, the beauty of the great tiled bath done in green and silver, the airy chambers and the comfortable hall.

Before we went in, however, Sylvia had met her good nurse, old Mrs. Doyle, who, not seeing me, exclaimed, “Here comes my Lady with her angel face a-beaming, — here comes my Rose of the

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world!" and I saw Sylvia pat her cheek a little and say, "I am very happy, nurse, very happy."

We had finished dinner and were watching the moon rise over the water red as the shield of Mars, when a telegram came to Mrs. Estcourt. It was from her betrothed and said: —

"Please tell Miss Kemp that the man who disappeared is dead."

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SECOND

THE cremation of the body of Lala Sojan with those ceremonies due to his high rank in blood and condition was carried out with refined splendor by Prince Mihira. The matter was kept secret and the crematory reserved for the whole day, that there should be no intruders curious to behold a strange and sacred rite.

Accompanied by his retinue of servants and his father, the prince had caused the little Christian chapel attached to the crematory to be temporarily transformed into a temple of India and the prayers and chants for the dead were beautifully conducted by the Master, who, on the authority of the papers brought to him by the dead priest, now for the first time assumed his high position.

To Henry Dusart a new feeling of union between the very old and the very modern seemed to dominate the occasion. He could but acknowledge a sense of the invulnerability of such a purifying disposition of the earthly part of man.

As he gazed through the iron doors through which they rolled the flower-covered form, he seemed to look into a great cavern of richest rose color; the very acme of beauty; and since it was impossible for the senses or the imagination to conceive the degree of heat, it appeared simply a lovely, an exquisite

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place in which to leave the body of a friend. He saw the rose hue of scientific attainment blush on the horizon of death. Heat, the Purifier, took to his glowing heart the form which had been the home of the intellect and spirit and poured the treasure of its material being into the crucible of the original elements, — with lightning speed accomplishing without a trace of disgust what Time, with his slow horror of corruption, would lag through months or years to do.

Alone, unmixed with other dead; purified to the symbolic whiteness of peace, the ashes of Lala Sojan were placed in a polished urn of bronze and committed to the care of the most able and trusted of his Indian followers, to be taken back to the sacred temple now waiting for the coming of its lord.

“Tell them I come!” said the prince as he waved his hands in good-bye to the man who was to be his forerunner. “But a short time and I will follow you and I will bear a blessing with me.”

Now, after this time of many thoughts and actions, many feelings and resolves, he was sitting with all the others whom he had met most closely, one of a united and happy group. The great lawn sweeping to the creek, whose high tide from the outer ocean broke in silver ripples of moonlight and frothed in soft spray against the wall, was piled with seats and pillows or swung with hammocks, and in the delicate gowns suitable for the heat of summer, adorned with flowers or jewels, the three sweet women seemed to their friends the embodiment of all that was gracious and elevating.

A little apart from the others, lying against a pil-

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low, his pensive face turned to the sea, Prince Mihira had, in the eloquent phrases he was accustomed to use, told of the death and disposition of the priest. He suddenly sat up and turned to Sylvia.

“It seems strange to me, cousin,” said he, “that in all these months, you have never seemed to have made any effort to find the god. Is it really so that

“Serene you fold your hands and wait,
For lo! your own shall come to you?”

“I have taken measures,” she said gently, “but I fancy you will think my method too modern to be romantic.”

“Will you tell me?” he asked half timidly.

Sylvia gave a little laugh. “I am nothing if not practical. Knowing that the great newspapers and magazines of this country and of London send men all over the world and to the most remote and un-beaten tracks of it to secure interesting articles of travel, I have systematically visited the editors and told them of my great anxiety to find a certain Buddha.

“I had printed a minute description of the image, had my ring duplicated in celluloid plates and also photographed and magnified, so that no mistake could be made in securing the right one; offered the sum of two thousand dollars to any person who would give me direct and positive information of its whereabouts, and sent these circulars, seals and photographs to no less than one hundred and eighty-six gentlemen of education who are at this moment engaged in using their eyes and ears for my benefit.

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“Not content with this, I wrote to every American consul in the world (or caused such letters to be written), offering the same reward. In return I have received a very large number of replies so courteous and kind that I am proud and glad of the chivalry and grace of my countrymen.

“To secure attention I deposited the sum in a certain bank in which Judge Carter is interested, and they graciously allowed me to refer to them as my financial authority.”

None but Mrs. Kemp and her brother had ever heard a hint of this, and the others could but express their astonishment and pleasure.

“But I knew several of the consuls and colonial governors,” she exclaimed, stemming the torrent of their words, “for I have visited so many places with my father!”

“But nevertheless,” said Arion smiling, “it seems the Buddha is very near to us, for the prince knows where it is. His Brahmin found it.”

“Yes, I know,” said he.

“And you do not hasten to secure it?” asked Mrs. Estcourt in surprise.

“I await the will of my father.”

All turned to Henry Dusart. He was a little pale and looking out to sea with a strange expression. He said nothing.

A silence followed, broken only by the sleepy twitter of a bird overhead.

Finally, gathering the whole group into his eyes with a tenderness that lighted the majesty of his countenance with a warm glow, he spoke.

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“The hour is come when it is right and well and destined for me to give up the secret which I have cherished for years. The story is one of many emotions, bad and good. I am no saint,—I am not a very noble man,—I am not worthy of very much love,—I am human, I act humanly, I feel humanly. If what I have done appears to need excuses, I cannot pain myself with making them. What I have done is done, and it must rest there.”

Sylvia came closer and pushed her little hand into his.

“After your father, Sylvia, married my sister against my judgment and will, I was angry. I was so angry that I cast them both out of my heart. I settled our estate and left the country. I was determined to go to India and find the strange god over which Mr. Romaine had raved with such enthusiasm. He had accused me of being a spy when I happened to interrupt his meeting with the priest and had followed up the accusation,—how, you know.

“These things I might have forgiven him, but he stole my sister. On the ship sailing from England I met a Jew. He was one of those shrewd and clever men who made immense fortunes by the collection of odd and strange things from all parts of the world. The more rare and difficult to obtain, the better he liked an object, and some of his treasures were worth their weight in gold. Getting better acquainted with him and interested in his remarkable experiences, I told him that I was going in search of the Buddha.

“Causing me to minutely describe it, he suddenly gave a kind of shriek, lifted his long hands and ex-

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claimed, 'Go no farther, turn about, come back, I have it, I possess it, it is in London. How much you give me for him!'

"I had fortunately not alluded to the god in a way which disclosed any particular interest, for had it been so, my purse would hardly have borne the tax he would put upon it,—but by the most careful comparison of the place, time and description, I became convinced that the old collector had been before me. Then and there I bargained with him,—and while we naturally could not at once turn back, we mutually agreed between us that on my return to London, I should possess the image.

"On arrival in India, however, my wanderings being in a measure aimless, I decided to go over the route again, and as I meditated over the strange infatuation of my brother-in-law for the Buddha, I determined to put a block in his path, should he ever come and try to discover it.

"I cannot tell you what really actuated me to do this, but at the time I think I hated him. On coming to the village, near which we had encamped that night, I climbed up toward the precipice and soon found the cave,—but quite as I expected, it was empty and forlorn. The stone door which Mr. Romaine had described was immovable and the space within filled with rocks.

"Going to one of the leading men of the tiny hamlet, I gave him gold for his promise to command that under no circumstances should any one tell what had become of the god. He assured me that but two or three of his personal friends knew, for they had

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secretly sold it to the Jew and were themselves anxious to keep the matter quiet, lest some punishment should befall them.

“Assured then that all trace of the god would be lost, I took up my journey through the various provinces and principalities of the land.”

“Henry,” said Judge Carter, “I have been aware that you possessed the Bronze Buddha from the time you imported it!”

They all expressed intense surprise.

“How did you become acquainted with the fact?” asked Mr. Dusart slowly.

“You went west immediately, and there was some mistake at the custom-house. The clerk came to me, as your family lawyer, and in setting his figures straight described your importation. I knew at once it must be the object so sought for by Mr. Romaine.”

Mrs. Kemp was looking with a sort of incredulous admiration at her brother. “And you have never hinted of it, never suggested it!” she exclaimed.

“My dear Martha,” he answered with simple dignity, “it was not my affair.”

“Uncle, I must ask you,” said Sylvia, “whether Arion and I did really see the Buddha in the art gallery? Was it there or did you make it to appear so?”

“It was really there,” he answered. “The explanation is very simple! You know there are two exhibition rooms in that building. One was devoted to the great collection of the Russian painter, the other to a loan collection of curiosities for some charity. Some ladies had begged me to aid them

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and send some of the things I had collected in my long travels. On an impulse I decided to loan the god. But by some mistake, instead of being taken into the room intended for it, it was placed in the gallery of art. I was informed of it and went down to have it changed, when I saw Arion standing nearly before it.

“ I had long wished an opportunity to make his acquaintance and test him, so I spoke to him and puzzled him on purpose to interest him. Having told him he would not see it again, I had it sent back to the house, instead of being exhibited in the loan collection.”

“ Then it was not there but a single day ! ”

“ No, and you must both have seen it on the same day. Of course Obed Spear would not remember it, and it was not on the catalogue.”

He went on: “ I met your mother, Mihira, and you know the rest. On our arrival in London I secured the Buddha. For her happiness I set it up in a room prepared for it, and she mingled before it her half-Christian, half-Buddhistic prayers. While she bore you in her being her eyes rested daily upon the god, — and if we ever gaze upon that face again, I shall leave it to these dear ones whether they see any trace of its expression in your lineaments.”

Arion observed his mother during this speech and was glad to see the sweet eyes turned with exquisite sympathy and perfect confidence upon her betrothed husband. In her loving heart was no trace of jealousy of that long-ago past which she knew was but a beautiful episode of love beside the great, unchanging devotion which had ever been hers.

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So deep and rich had grown the comprehension between these united souls that the very thoughts of one were duplicated in the other.

They had all drawn nearer to him, and Mihira with a soft exclamation also took his father's hand.

"She died and I left you in the temple. I brought the Buddha to my home in New York. Meantime, no news for several years had reached me of my sister. But now I learned that she too had departed, leaving a little child. The father had taken the child abroad, for what purpose I knew not. For three years they were gone, but when they returned I happened to be in the city.

"Mr. Romaine entered into some speculations which were connected with some of my own, and endeavored to bring me to financial ruin, or else to rebuild his own fortunes on my supposed inability. I won, he lost, and then more than ever he seemed to show as sincere a dislike for me as I confess I felt for him. Sylvia, this feeling is long past; and for years I have deeply repented it. In time I may be able to atone."

"If any atonement were needed," said she, lovingly pressing his hand, "your unfailing kindness to his daughter has amply accomplished it."

"After some time I casually heard that the object of his travel for so long was the finding of the Buddha. It was then ten or twelve years before I knew that your father was devoting his time and money to that object. From that point forward I kept myself informed of his affairs. I saw him use the money accumulated by my father, and which should be the carefully hoarded inheritance of his

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child, spent persistently for the sake of the image which stood covered with dust in my house. He had certainly become perfectly sound in mind, but I felt that his former brief monomania had settled into an amazing persistence, which I could not comprehend.

“But I too travelled. I seldom heard from him even indirectly. At last he appeared to come to the end of his resources, and applied to Judge Carter to negotiate a loan on this property. I was informed, and advanced the money, more for the child’s sake than for any other reason.

“He died, and the remainder of the story is well known to you. But let me say this in extenuation. On all occasions when I was at home, and my house open and in order, the sight of the Bronze Buddha was a great consolation to me. The remembrance of the sweetness and purity of the woman who had adored it made it sacred in my eyes.

“The divine beauty of the god itself appealed to me as no other object of art in all the world has appealed to me. The compassion, the intellectual greatness, the splendid serenity of power in that magnificent production drew my soul as with a spell, so that finally, could I have overcome my long prejudice, my long dislike, and generously given it to my Sylvia’s father, it would have been like taking from out of my life a thing that had grown unspeakably dear.

“On the death of Mr. Romaine, I determined, however, that time should decree the destiny of the god. If Sylvia should prove worthy, if my niece should be so true and brave and sweet as to deserve it, she

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should become the rightful possessor of the image. And afterward, when I came to hear the wonderful manner in which her father had obtained the moral if not the legal right to its possession, I more than ever determined that in good season I would restore to her, or rather give to her, what her father so long sought.

“The time is at hand. To-night at midnight we will all seek the temple so long ago built for its reception. In two hours I will open the door, and you shall all see the Bronze Buddha.”

“Shall I bring the belt that contains the manuscript my father left me?” asked Sylvia in a low voice.

“Certainly,” said her uncle.

“I also have a manuscript,” said Prince Mihira, speaking for the first time; “it was given to me by Lala Sojan, in his dying moments, as a precious inheritance from my dead master. Neither he nor I knew what it contains. I believe if there is any secret about the sacred image that at this moment no soul on earth knows what it is.”

“Prince!” said Sylvia, standing up, and in the streaming moonlight looking like a snow-white statue, “it would seem that we are rivals in this matter. But you are the heir of your father, who is the legal owner of the statue, while I am the heir of my father, who was the moral owner.

“May I be permitted to make a proposition before either of us knows what is to be the outcome of these manuscripts? In the name of the great Deity of India, I faithfully agree before these witnesses, that

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whatsoever shall be enjoined of benevolence and generosity and goodness to the world, I will obey, whether it involve sorrow or joy, duty or pleasure, at home or abroad. One half of all I inherit shall be given to humanity, whether it be in personal service, treasure, self-abnegation, or any other form of noble charity, providing Prince Mihira will pledge himself to the same. Does he agree?"

On hearing this Arion started, and felt a shudder of apprehension. What might not this vow mean? And yet she stood there so serenely, so like a vestal virgin in her white flowing robes, — such grace, beauty, and dignity crowned her, that a splendid faith grew in him, — a sense of awe, as of one before a spirit, and he stood back and was silent.

Prince Mihira, stepping forward so that he faced the little company, took her hand, and with a countenance as fervently uplifted as her own, said, "Even as my cousin, Sylvia Romaine, hath bound herself solemnly to a noble vow, so I bind myself, in the name of her Divinity, the Christ."

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THIRD

THE revelation that the bronze god was in such immediate proximity to them had touched each of the group with different emotions. They inevitably felt a nervous excitement, which was communicated from one to the other, so that an air of joyousness seemed to fill the atmosphere, and while some of them dispersed to their chambers, others wandered aimlessly about, in that state of eager waiting which can but precede something so long expected and so close at hand.

In honor of the occasion the ladies decided to adorn themselves to the utmost, and Sylvia covered her excitement by allowing her maid to attire her in an Oriental robe of richly embroidered satin, clasped by a jewelled girdle, and softened about the throat and in the front with a massed flow of precious lace, which fell in ripples to her feet.

“We had to do something!” exclaimed Mrs. Kemp, as they surprised the gentlemen in the drawing-room. “For the two hours would have been interminable had we been compelled to wait inactive! Ah, I see the prince has expressed his feeling of sentiment also!” for he appeared in the usual attire of a Brahmin.

“Obed Spear!” whispered Sylvia softly, as they prepared to start on the little pilgrimage through the moon-lighted trees.

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“He is with us,” answered Mr. Dusart, — “as faithful to you and Arion as a thoroughbred mastiff, but sincerely good as a man. I have grown to like him very much. His quaint humor hides a world of honorable feeling.”

“He was extremely anxious lest the blow he gave the priest had contributed to his death.”

“Yes, but it was not so; and so I have assured him. The physician told me that Lala Sojan was in no physical condition to attempt so long a voyage at the start, and had evidently contracted a low form of fever, which, aggravated by change of climate, water, mental excitement and probable exposure, had culminated in a disease too severe to alleviate.”

On opening the door, those who had been into the temple before gave exclamations of delighted surprise. The mosaic floor had been covered entirely by a rich Persian carpet, and the stone roof had been hidden with hangings of silk, interspersed with curious lanterns of many colors, quaint with carvings, odd in shape and soft in illumination.

Two jars of classic shape, holding fragrant waters, were set in niches and enwreathed with flowers; sandal-wood, and conch-shells and cloths of the religious colors were properly arranged. This had been done, without doubt, in deference to the habits and customs of Prince Mihira. To see bare walls surrounding the god would have seemed to him as sacrilegious as to see the face of the Saviour in an inappropriate place would have shocked an American.

Around the walls had been arranged set couches, wide and comfortable, on which were piled innumer-

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able pillows and which caused the place to appear much like the shrine room in the mansion of Prince Mihira. In the centre, covered with a great silken sheet which nevertheless indicated the form beneath, was that which every eye sought eagerly, every heart panted to see.

Carefully locking the door, when they had arranged themselves Henry Dusart said, "Now, my son, read to us what was sent by the master."

Taking from the folds of his garment a sandal-wood box bound with silver, he placed a tiny key in the lock and took out a packet closed with a dozen seals. Delicately and reverently opening these, he produced a small bit of parchment on which was written in Hindostanee :

"Even as the original Buddha is found to be, so, surely, thou shalt find that the Buddha of our temple is also. Consecrated by the prayers of the grateful and the faithful, devote thy inheritance to thy native land."

A silence of amazed speculation followed. From these obscure words what could be gained?

The prince had stood in deep thought. He finally looked up with a smile of pride and satisfaction in his eyes. "Friends," said he, "I am sure I understand this and it gives me much pleasure. I feel such reverence for the hand that wrote it, that I would explain to you the generosity and honor which dictated it. My great master, who taught me from childhood, knew that our claim upon the Bronze Buddha was not first, — he was aware that not the original, but the duplicate ring belonged to our temple. Although it

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was right that by fair and honorable means I should find, procure and restore the Buddha to India, — and since the ancient temple is in ruins, to give it supreme honor in our own, — still he felt he had no right to disclose to me its secret unless it should actually become mine.

“But in his splendid faith that destiny and the will of the deity itself would bring it into my hands, he told me the story of both in the event of my success. ‘Even as is the original Buddha, so is the Buddha of our temple.’ Sylvia, cousin, it is for you to read what is the meaning of the original god.”

She drew from her bosom a small leather case enclosed in silk, and with a tiny pair of scissors snipped the threads which held it. A small bit of parchment was disclosed, together with a brief note in the handwriting of her father. It read:

“I place here the statement given to me in India by the hermit who for sixty years guarded the treasure he describes. It is your inheritance, my beloved child, and my justification.

Her hands trembled a little and she finally said: —

“Uncle, before we read the secret, will it not be well to see the face of the image itself? I would take it into my heart unprejudiced, as the exposition of a human ideal of the godhead which had been revered by millions for a thousand years!”

“It shall be so,” he answered, “be seated.”

Soon out of the absolute silence arose a tone of deep, sweet bells. Far away, far away, in harmonious concert like the mingled temple bells of a huge city, the melodious richness grew and grew. Soon

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silver bells chimed in, and crystal bells; bells high and sweet and clear made some strange foreign air above the solemn boom, boom of monstrous monotonous. Ships' bells and bells of the buoy on rocky reefs joined in a minor strain until the bewitched senses were drawn into an ecstasy of sound, until the very world seemed chiming out a glory of peaceful praise.

Then in a softened gradation they died out, — the silken covering was gently drawn aside and the Bronze Buddha was revealed, surrounded with buds and blossoms, the sweet blue smoke of incense and the mild illumination of the lamps. Around its neck was a string of Brahmin's beads made from the sacred seeds used for rosaries.

While they gazed breathless at its supernal beauty, out of the lips so long silent seemed to proceed these words: —

“Thou hast seen this form of mine, which is difficult to be perceived and which even the gods are always anxious to behold. Place, then, thy heart on me, penetrate me with thy understanding and thou shalt without doubt hereafter dwell in me. And even those also who worship other gods, with a firm faith in doing so, involuntarily worship me too, O son of man. I am the same to all creatures: I know not hatred nor favor: but those who serve me with love dwell in me and I in them.”

Mr. Dusart stood with his towering form leaning against the wall. His forehead was covered with drops, — but his face was alight with inspiration. Once more he had been enabled to use that myste-

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rious power which seemed to link him with the immortals and bring out of the atmosphere of the celestial country a new gift to the world.

Sylvia now rose and taking her precious ring from her finger, pressed it against the unmistakable face in miniature over which the intaglio fitted. So perfect was the union between the metal and the gem that one would have thought the force of a magnet was holding them together; but in a moment the ring dropped back into her open palm.

She turned to her cousin. "Now, Prince!" He set his ring firmly against the bronze but was unable to cover the face. It repeatedly fell back and refused to join itself to the image. A hair's breadth, a shadow of difference in the copy had proven his suit rejected, — the gem so absolutely a duplicate to the eye had varied infinitesimally, — as the hand of the carver shook.

A flush of scarlet for an instant suffused his dark face and then, bowing very reverently first to the Buddha and then to Sylvia, he silently retired.

Standing beside the god, her fair face softened beneath the mellow lights above to a sweet seriousness, Sylvia read and translated these words: —

"It is well known that Shivaism and Vishnuism have latterly taken the place of the pure, glorious and eternal religion of Buddha, the Enlightened, and it would seem that those immortal precepts had disappeared from the hearts of the Indian race.

But among many of us secretly lives in unabated splendor the holy teachings of the Enlightened. In giving, to whomsoever the all-wise shall send, the ring

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which our sacred temple has preserved for more than two thousand years, we also give the possession of the image of him who wore it.

When the great founder of our faith sat beneath the Bo-tree, that tree of knowledge where he received his sudden illumination, during the forty-nine days of the temptations of Mara, he grieved unto death over the sins and sorrows of the world. A tear of agony rolled from his eye and fell upon his hand. Then, such was the sacred virtue of his holy person that the tear congealed into a brilliant gem, reflecting the blue of the eternal heavens.

Feeling the jewel clinging to his hand, he gazed upon it, and reflecting his majestic countenance, the stone took into itself, as by the carving of a diamond, the blessed features of the savior of our land. From thence he wore it, and ever saw his own heavenly face grow clearer in the ring. When he had passed, it came to us, the original founders of his truth before men, and it is this treasure of inestimable qualities which I intrust with solemn blessings to the living soul destined to wear it.

And now of the image of our Lord. The sacred statue of our great god Buddha hath been for centuries the safe repository of those princely offerings which in times of famine, plague, war or terror have been brought to our temple as expiations, as tokens of gratitude or as propitiations.

The holy image has been divided by us into two compartments, the head and the body. Metallic plates have been placed between them which can easily be removed by the application of heated coals.

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“ We have displaced from the gems their golden or silver settings, since such were comparatively valueless beside the jewels they inclosed. To him who comes into possession of this treasure, may the Eternal God give wisdom, that his soul may be open to the cries of the miserable and his hand be generous in the day of their woe.”

On hearing this unexpected communication they all crowded around Sylvia and made her read it again, hardly believing their own ears. They had expected some great religious exhortation, or some mysterious command to do some impossible deed. That the image should be of such priceless value intrinsically, not one of them had so much as dreamed.

Obed Spear was sent for a brazier of fire and soon returned. The men carefully and with real reverence turned the image upon the floor and they all saw that a base of metal had been soldered in.

“ Mr. Dusart,” said Obed, “ I think that the men who have been tinning the stable roof have left their little furnace behind. I saw it glowing still, early in the evening. They have not finished, and perhaps their tools are there also ! ”

He soon found them, and meantime Mrs. Kemp had gone to the house for a great bowl, into which to pour whatever they might find. Awkwardly and slowly the men managed to loosen and finally remove the base.

They had spread the white silk sheet beneath the image, and then over its snowy folds poured a dancing, sparkling, shimmering stream of dazzling color, — thousands of gems from the body of the image,

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rolling in lavish profusion to the very sides of the room. Pearls that would do honor to a monarch's bride; sapphires that had adorned the brown arm of some princely maiden; diamonds like drops of dew or midnight stars, great, luminous, throwing out gleams of long imprisoned glory, — the splendor, the untold magnificence of this Indian treasure, representing as it did the lavish offerings of sovereigns long since dust and princes whose memory had passed away, filled them with a sudden comprehension of the unexampled luxury of the ancient world.

Gathering them as well as they could into the huge bowl which was overflowed and could not contain them, — amazed, pale with wonder and excitement, the compartment of the grand head was also opened. This, too, in a rich stream of starry beauty gushed forth in a very fountain of jewels, larger, finer and more beautiful than those which had seemed an impossible collection.

Plunging their hands in the mass, they dripped a hundred rubies from their fingers, or setting some Orient pearl against Sylvia's cheek, dared a comparison with her rosy skin.

For a few moments they were all beyond themselves! It was a sight to stir the coldest bosom. It was beyond calculation or computation in value, a treasure which together would have ransomed a kingdom.

At last, heaping the whole in a pyramid in the midst of the silk, the bronze god was quietly restored to his throne. The blossoms were rearranged, the incense still floated softly to the ceiling, men and

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women sank upon the pillows and a silence that neither cared to break settled over them.

Presently, her low rich voice trembling with emotion, Sylvia spoke to her uncle.

“You are the owner of this treasure.”

“I abdicate in your favor.”

“But it is priceless.”

“So is honor.”

“I accept. Prince, to you I give the full possession of the Bronze Buddha. Take the sacred image back to its native country. As that heap of gems lies there, dip your hand into it and take forth all that you may. I will then dip mine, and thus we will divide the inheritance between us!”

The prince held up his large brown hand and smiled. “Shall I rob thy little palm?” said he.

Mrs. Estcourt then said gently, holding up a crystal vase which adorned one of the niches, “Let Obed Spear take this and be the arbiter.”

He came forward, proud and happy, kneeling in wonder before the splendid heap, and then, pouring the vase into the bowl for Sylvia and into his unbound turban for the prince, carefully divided the gems with an even hand. At the last a beautiful emerald dropped and he stooped to catch it, when Sylvia cried, “Keep it, Obed; wear it always in remembrance of me!”

“It would be well to leave these gems in the temple,” said Mr. Dusart, “for no safer place can be found than these small vaults, which doubtless Mr. Romaine had arranged for this very purpose. Sylvia, here are the keys to these on the right: my son,

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these will lock the left. They are Chubb locks and the outer door could hardly be forced with cannon. Besides this, none knows the secret, and until you decide what to do with them, no better place could be found for their hiding.”

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When they left the temple to darkness and silence, the dawn was flushing the east with rosy and silver lights. The thrush, trilling and chirping with innocent joy, was answered by a hundred other calls, a very chorus of natural love. Leaning on Arion, his fine face pressed against her own, lingering behind the others, Sylvia lifted her lovely arms and placed them around his neck. He returned her gaze with eyes of adoration, the quick, sweet soul within him almost anticipating her coming words: —

“What shall we do with this treasure, beloved?”

“He who has intrusted it to our keeping will give us inspiration and wisdom. Broad and splendid shall be your charities, my Sylvia, and I shall rejoice to aid my wife with what measure of wit I possess. There is no better word I can say to you than your own motto, Sweet, which now more than ever shall represent you.”

And together repeating “Enjoy and spread joy,” they sealed the compact with a kiss.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOURTH

MY happiness henceforward was more than exuberant; it was profound and constantly renewed. The remainder of the summer passed only too quickly. It had been decided that both marriages should take place at the same time, and early September was chosen, since it was the desire of Prince Mihira to be present. He had spent his time with his father making the most careful arrangements for carrying into practical action the plans which they had matured in Colorado.

A merchant vessel was chartered and loaded with agricultural and other machinery, with seeds, bulbs and thousands of conveniences, inventions and tools which would be needed in the opening up of his principality to a higher state of prosperity and civilization.

Several unmarried men, skilled in their respective trades, had joined two or three able farmers, willing to emigrate to India to carry on the great farms and to teach the natives how to successfully labor. All that money and judgment could do to further this enterprise was given by both most freely, and by wise measures in disposing of some of the minor jewels found in his collection, the prince was unhampered in any of his philanthropic desires.

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As his good ship sailed down the bay, our whole party stood on the heights of Navesink and watched her white wings grow yellow and rose in the setting sun, as she made swiftly out to sea.

The traveller in India who does the empire thoroughly will at this late day come across a part of the country which will amaze him. To his astonished eyes will appear a stretch of valley which will certainly remind him of our great and flourishing West. Waving fields of grain, vineyards and orchards, comfortable habitations surrounded by kitchen gardens, producing vegetables hitherto not known or used, and many trades flourishing where once there were but two or three.

Although in the midst stands that ancient temple, one of the finest examples of old Buddhistic architecture extant; and within, the splendid ceremonies continue which in their modified fashion still express the faith in gods and idols which is the inheritance of the Hindoo; and set on a throne of beautiful workmanship the Bronze Buddha receives the worship, offerings and prayers of the population who believe his coming back has brought this prosperity and happiness, — still, the great Prince Brahmin, the fortunate of Destiny, who restored the image, is almost as perfectly adored.

Yet the natives living in this district will surprise the traveller by their activity, cleanliness, intelligence, happiness and the absolute lack of that beggary, jugglery and superstition so common in other parts of the great empire.

But then, as we stood there, watching the well-

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freighted ship lose herself in the twilight, we could only have faith that the fostering sunlight of education would have this result. We could but dream what fruitage the future would bring.

In the meantime my Sylvia had been infinitely busy. We had first sent courteous communications to all those who were assisting her in the pursuit of the Buddha, informing them that the image had been found, and enclosing a souvenir as thanks for their good intentions.

And at once we found, on the right hand and the left, chances to spread joy among many who had not known joy, or repose, or a change, or beauty for years, and to these, as a beginning of her lovely labors, the first few gems culled from the god's storehouse brought the pleasure of unexpected comfort or the relief of undreamed-of leisure.

My love grew so beautiful that her starry eyes were always alight, her sweet lips curved to a tender smile. As for myself, there seemed to grow within me a strange sense of human brotherhood which I had always felt to be right theoretically, and had practised in the way of charity, but which now was turned into something different, — not charity but actual love. It was no longer "charity," but rather as if I were doing good to my own.

At last but a few days remained before the double ceremony would take place, and for the last evening at Holly Bank we were all gathered on the piazza listening in pensive silence to the rustle of the leaves touched with that note of change which foreshadowed the autumn parting.

The Bronze Buddha

As yet a scrupulous secrecy had been preserved by Mrs. Estcourt and Henry Dusart as to their plans for the wedding journey. Not even I had been told where it was to be nor what would be the changes in the households which would become necessary. My regard for the reserves of others precluded the possibility of intruding even upon my mother with questions, and while Sylvia and I had made a little plan of our own, we had awaited some sign from our elders before broaching it.

Suddenly out of the pillow-strewn corner where she was reclining came my mother's voice. "You have not told us, children, where you mean to flit on your wedding journey!"

"You have not told us, grave and reverend seniors, where *you* mean to flit on your wedding journey," I returned with a laugh.

"This is a very sweet place," said Sylvia, wistfully.

"You love it, don't you, dear! Arion, do you too like this place?"

"Truly," said I gravely, "I must earnestly congratulate you that it is to be one of your homes."

"But it is n't!" said she.

"No," said Mr. Dusart, taking her hand, "it is not."

"You are not going to sell it?" cried Sylvia in alarm.

"No," said her uncle, "I am so satisfied with it, — I find it such a perfect summer residence that I have decided to give it away. Judge, have you the deed? I think I might as well carry out the plan now as later."

The Bronze Buddha

The judge handed over a document and Henry Dusart rose. Approaching his niece he said gently, "My dear child, this is my wedding present. Pray accept it with my love."

Sylvia gave a low cry of surprise and joy. "How kind!" she murmured. "How kind!" Then turning to Mrs. Estcourt she gave her a great girlish hug with a sob of happiness. "My old home! and I have always loved it so, — and *you*, you, extravagant, luxurious, showering money even on silver faucets and carved staircases! Now I understand! Now I understand!"

"But you cannot live here in the winter, Arion," said my dear mother after laughingly disentangling herself, "I suppose you would prefer New York for a residence?"

"All my interests are there," said I, "and we have planned so much ahead in the city that I think we shall be busy for a decade!" and Sylvia gave me a look so sweet and grateful that I thrilled with pleasure.

"Then, Judge," said my mother, "do not let Mr. Dusart put me to shame," and she took another document from his hand.

"Here, Arion, is the deed of our New York home. It is your natural inheritance, and would come into your possession some time anyway, — but, — I do not intend to die just yet," and she gave a laugh as gay and sweet as a girl's.

"But you, — what will you do?" I exclaimed excitedly. "Oh, I forgot, — pardon me, Mr. Dusart, this is all so surprising."

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“Aren't you willing she should come over to my house and live with me?” he answered simply.

“Yes!” I replied, suddenly grown grave; “I am willing and glad to give my beloved mother into your honored hands.”

“But I am not going there!” said the beloved mother, “at least not now.”

“You are full of the most delightful enigmas,” exclaimed Sylvia. “Mihira, make her tell where she is going!”

“I know,” said he, “and it is so pleasant to me, that I have hardly been able to keep the secret so long. They will go to India with me.” And he clasped his hands tightly together and grew a little pale.

“Not to live?” she cried in surprise.

“Oh, no! only to see me safe home!” he answered in a low voice. “You will have them again in a year.”

“And you too, we hope,” said I cordially, — “often and for much time together! I assure you, Prince, that I shall always welcome your coming both for myself and Sylvia!” and I gave him a hearty, whole-souled grasp. For I had grown to respect him and even to feel an affectionate confidence in him. His exquisite courtesy and reserve toward his cousin had won our warmest regard.

In a very meek voice for her, Mrs. Kemp now let herself be heard. “Sylvia, Arion,” said she, “you two have been the victims of a conspiracy! We all propose to desert you and leave you here alone in a

The Bronze Buddha

lover's Paradise. The judge and I are going with them!"

This was indeed beyond all calculation, and both freely expressed our astonishment. But the judge explained that in all his life he had never been abroad, although begged to do so every trip his sister had made, and now, having retired from the bench almost as soon as he had won his honors, he was ready to be "led blindfolded by a woman," as he put it.

We chatted over the trip and the details of their route for some time, when I saw my Star slip out of the room. After a little she returned, bringing with her a brilliant lamp which she set on a tea-stand beside the couch. Then taking a velvet case from behind her back where she had carefully held it, she laid it down before my dear mother, and kneeling beside her took from it a small tiara of rubies.

There were but three stones, set in almost invisible gold, — but such drops of flame, such great, glowing hearts of rose, that when they were placed in the soft white hair a blush and bloom seemed to spread from them in rays of mellow splendor.

"They make your set perfect, mamma," said she, using the loving diminutive for the first time; "and as for my other mamma, she would only accept this pearl!" fastening an iridescent ocean-born gem at her throat.

After the gentle murmur of thanks the judge said, "But Sylvia, you wear no jewels yourself!"

"Oh, always! my ring!" and she held up the intaglio sapphire with a happy smile. "The other

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gems," she added, "must be worn by others, — who knows! Perhaps some of them will adorn a kingly crown or sceptre, — they are certainly valuable and beautiful enough. Others may be given by happy lovers to their brides. Some may be purchased for a great collection, and feast the eyes of multitudes with beauty! But wherever they go, they will leave behind a blessing, for the price of their going shall carry joy to a thousand hearts."

"Doth not my cousin wear jewels?" said Mihira softly.

When we parted for the night, and I paddled slowly back to the club, I could but think that such elevating days, such days of the fulness of one's being, supplemented by the very love and beauty of all lavish nature, are foretastes of that Elysium which means: "Heaven! the fulfilling of the soul's desire."

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Another month saw the separation of these devoted friends who had been drawn together by so many unexpected incidents, and knitted in their mutual love by the singular influence of the Bronze Buddha. If there is a soul of things, an invisible, an occult power which pervades the universe and enters into the destinies of human lives, may not the subtle essence of that magnificent creation have moulded these events, which made for the highest good?

It may be a dream that matter is pervaded by spirit, — and the lips that smile, the eyes that weep, the hearts that bound with joy or beat with admira-

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tion of heroism, generosity and beauty may be but an expression of some chance combination of atoms; but in the belief of the wedded lovers, who, returning to the exquisite solitude of their quiet home, stood in the serene and perfect radiance of the harvest moon, and once more solemnly pledged themselves to pure and noble lives, the god was but the hand-piece of that God who rules His world in wisdom and whose loving kindness is over all His works.

THE END.

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