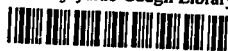


# LOVE'S TRIUMPHS

— Orientally Told

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BY

THE HON'BLE RAI BAHADUR

P. ANANDA CHARLU, VIDYA VINODA,

C. I. E.



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## PREFACE.

ADY Elizabeth Bruce, the daughter of the Viceroy, and Mr. H. BABINGTON SMITH, C. S. I., his Private Secretary, have been so particularly kind and friendly to me, during my stay in Calcutta, that I have thought it meet to submit, in my own small and humble way, some tribute of my esteem and good wishes, on the occasion of their forthcoming marriage. In this view, I have expressly written these stories to be sent up as a modest wedding-present. I trust it will not be regarded an unacceptable offering.

LAKESIDE,

*Madras, 1898.*

P. A. C.

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## LOVE'S TRIUMPHS.

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### RUKMINI AND SREE KRISHNA.

**S**REE Krishna was Sree Hari incarnate on earth—the God of the Vaishnavas. A member of the reigning lunar dynasty in ancient times, he sat not on the throne, as an ancestor of his—the head of his branch—had been unseated by his irate royal father. If thus no ruler of a kingdom, Lord Sree Krishna was, nevertheless, the ruler of all the rulers of the day. He lived amid untold wealth and in the resplendent city of Dwaraka, the absorbing centre of all homage, human and divine. Reports of his divine beauty and illustrious attributes spread far and wide and no maiden, yet to be given away at the bridal fire, could resist the yearning within her to wed him. Foremost among such maidens was Rukmini, the daughter of a virtuous ruler of a petty principality in

the Berars. Smitten with the holy passion for Sree Krishna, the love-lorn damsel pined in her silent and despondent affection; for she was aware of the distance in status between the lord of her heart and the lord of her then home. Her handmaids first guessed and her confidantes next learnt the secret of her grief. In their turn they were non-plussed as they saw not the way to further her cause. The tidings soon reached the paternal ear which was both gladdened and distressed by the revelation; for, to her parents, it was a matter of ineffable joy to entertain even the thought of their child wedding the lord of Dwaraka, while at the same time it was a seemingly insoluble puzzle as to how to bring about the holy matrimony. The news too got abroad and gave universal joy. In his perplexity, the perturbed father called a family council to deliberate the question and decide upon the course to be adopted. If to the entire population of the city and its dependent territories it was one of unmixed pleasure, it was not less so for all but one member of the royal family. That single inauspicious element in the royal family was her eldest brother, haughty in disposition, violent in temper, perverse in his likes

and dislikes and the autocrat of the household. Habitual submission to his erratic wishes and a spirit to conciliate his wayward whims had tended to make him deteriorate day by day and he developed, by the time of which we are speaking, into a touchy, incorrigible and cross-grained nuisance at home, as the first-born usually turned out in all house-holds, when too much petted and indulged. Nuisance or no nuisance, the parents who had helped in sowing the wind must be prepared to reap the whirl-wind. But their regret on this occasion was, by many multiples, deeper and acuter, than under other vicissitudes; for, that recalcitrant son revolted against the family resolve to ally with one who was divine and held out violently in favour of King Sishupala, his exact counterpart in all terrestrial vices and the most pronounced foe of the bride-groom-elect of the family. This domestic dissension foreboded evil: but that was mere nothing by the side of the poignant grief which pierced and was tearing up the young unblemished heart, already undividedly and irrevocably given away to that Being who is all love, all harmony, all mercy and all else which was good, worthy, noble and estimable. But

between the autocratic son and the daughter, overpowered by unsophisticated love, the parents wavered and vacillated for a time and surrendered at last to the caprice of the offspring made of sterner stuff—be it said to their eternal credit that they yielded in speechless sorrow and helpless despair of gaining their point.

A brief period of sadness and suspense overpowered Rukmini's young heart on this final decision being broken to her. But it was only for a short while; for hers was a sacred and changeless resolve to wed none but one who was at once the lord of her heart and the lord of Dwaraka. While her weak parents and strongwilled brother were preparing to bestow her on Sishupala, the deadly enemy of the lord of her affections, she too was maturing her secret plans to compass her own dear purpose. She called an aged, trusty and venerable priest of her family into her presence and poured forth her sorrows into his anguished ears. He listened with attention and growing anxiety. He could not help admiring her spirit. He had but unqualified approval for her exalted ambition. He could not but be struck with her noble choice and her sublime resolve and he determined to help her to



his utmost. He did not forget the final attitude of her parents, and he did not slight or overlook the vindictive wrath and the arrogant high-handedness of her brother. He had balanced the divers considerations, each against the rest and the *pros* against the *cons*; and—though he paused a while and reflected for some seconds, with knit brows, wrinkled face, half-closed eyes and fixed looks under the half-shut eyelids,—the wreath of smile which soon overspread his face and the brightness which came in his eyes betokened his triumph over his misgivings. His meditative attitude was gone and he spoke with the sure accents and the ringing tone of one who saw a way, smooth and straight, before him. He bethought himself of the divinity that was in Sree Krishna. He had read of the many proofs of Lord Sree Krishna's readiness to bless those that sought his blessing. The whole-hearted affection and the unbounded faith Rukmini had for him and in him could not therefore but bear fruit. If Rukmini loved with all her soul, as she doubtless did, Lord Sree Krishna would grant her wish, as he must. So argued the venerable priest with himself. If then the desired result was, as it were, pre-ordained

to follow, what was it which was further needed? Plainly enough, it was only a *Purushacari*—an ostensible intermediary in flesh and blood. On this pregnant piece of reasoning he felt eager and proud (who would not?) to take up the role of a message-bearer and spoke aloud words which told of his alacrity to go forth on the agreeable mission. The old man thus anticipated Rukmini's wishes and offered to hasten to Dwaraka with her happy errand. Rukmini flushed with joy at being thus spared from blushing to formulate her proposals and proceeded to point out when and how it would be opportune for Lord Sree Krishna to accomplish his purpose. She recoiled from the very contemplation of a battle which might perchance link her happiness with broken heads and dismembered limbs of men dear to her or to her kith and kin. What she longed for was bloodless victory—a victory without any trail of sorrow along the track through which she would pass to be united with the object of her ardent affections. With this end in view, she told the would-be messenger how, according to an invariable custom of the royal family she must betake herself to the temple of their tutelary

Goddess on the day of wedding, how, in discharging this function, she was bound to walk on foot, attended by few others than a bevy of her maids of honor, how on such an occasion all suspicion would be at rest and every fighting man would stand aloof on either flank and at considerable distance and how Lord Sree Krishna might seize his chance, as it were, to spirit her away in the face of day but without any strife with battling armaments or contending rivals. This said, the self-given bride blushed the blush of coy maidenhood and looked as though startled at the very temerity with which she unfolded her naive plan of achieving an unerring triumph. The aged priest smiled archly, though pleasantly, at this artless elaboration of a contrivance for the benefit of one who was perfection itself in the attributes of sagacity and wisdom. With all the appearance of deep seriousness, he gave the maiden his plighted word to detail it fully to the lord of Dwaraka. A few seconds elapsed, and the bashful girl became conscious of the superfluous instructions she had been guilelessly drawn into imparting and she bent her looks downwards with an uncomfortable sense of her own simplicity at convey-

ing lessons of tact to the foremost personage of the age. She then looked up timidly into the kindly face of her venerable priest with a simpleton's smile and raised her hands, clasped in each other, in the mode of Aryan salutation and thanks.

The maiden and her aged priest then parted company—the former to find that time for her went by, heavily-laden with leaden wings—the latter flying along, despite his weight of years, on the pinions of a carrier-pigeon. Every hour only increased her heart's flutter and her mind's load of doubt and suspense. An annoying idea flitted across her fancy and tended to vex her for a minute or two. It was the idea that Lord Sree Krishna might view her conduct as one of brazen boldness, bordering on unmaidenly forwardness and might dis-esteem her on that score. Solace came to her soon enough, as she recalled how boundlessly merciful the lord was, whom she fervently sought after and how she herself erred in associating with Lord Sree Hari such flaws and frailties as appertain to ill-judging mortals. Thus restored to a calm, quiescent frame of mind and heart, she confidently looked

forward to a return of the messenger, with a welcome response.

Now let us leave the maiden, for a while and follow the footsteps of the aged messenger, Though sure that Lord Sree Krishna must have already heard and granted the maiden's prayer and that he himself was a sheer, superfluous agent, yet he would not take matters easy or journey along in sluggish marches. In an incredibly short time—an unduly prolonged interval, however, from the point of view of the love-sick maiden—he reached the city of cities, the city of unrivalled splendour, and entered its gorgeous portals. Then he became, as it were, transfixed. Engrossed by the wondrous magnificence of its stupendous buildings, its expansive streets, and its extensive gardens, redolent with odourous flowers, resplendent with blossoms of variegated hues and resonant with the chirrups and tunes of soft-singing birds—he was riveted to many a spot dazed and amazed, and his errand went clean out of the messenger's mind. Fixing his dazzled gaze now on this thing of celestial beauty and now on that, he made but a snail's progress, though what was thus

charm and fascination to the priestly brahmin was little short of pain and insupportable sensation to the maiden, pining in ever-increasing impatience. The Brahmin arrived at the brilliant palace at last and solicited audience with its beauteous lord. The boon was forthwith granted and here was cause for further detention. So captivated and spell-bound was he by the heavenly figure with which he was brought face to face, that his lips opened not and his tongue moved not. He stood immovably, in solemn silence and in spiritual awe and wondered if a Being of such superlative loveliness would deign to wed a mere mortal as he took Rukmini to be. He tried his utmost to shake off the disagreeable and discouraging fancy but he could not. The more he strove, the denser grew his doubt and misgiving. Thus oppressed and tongue-tied, he stood still as a statue and as voiceless as a statue. The humane lord of Dwaraka realised indeed the brahmin's predicament but he nevertheless left him to take the initiative. But the latter durst not. Kindly inquiries were made of his welfare, of the well-being of his king, of the health of his city and territories and of the prosperity of his subjects. The brahmin

answered the questions almost mechanically. He was told to go to the lodgings provided for him to partake of luscious delicacies, and be regaled by the festive rejoicings and by the sights and scenes of joy, of which that earthly paradise was only too full. Thus lodged, *feted* and diverted, the aged priest felt the return of all his lost youth once again and seemed determined once more to live it over. As if unwilling to break the current of happiness experienced, so to speak, by the electrified sojourner, Lord Sree Krishna left him to himself and called him not into his presence up to almost the day fixed, by Rukmini's father for her wedding. Whenever alone, the priest bethought himself of his errand and grieved at his inability to deliver the message, receive a glad response and hurry with it to the anxious royal maiden. But he saw no opening and he was, somehow, struck dumb, when he was again in company. It is indeed a serious question who suffered more—either the girl impatient from love or the brahmin intolerant of this delay. Truth to speak, each sorrowed as much as the other and each lived an age in every hour of the day. Thus did Lord of Dwaraka play with the heart that loved him

and the man who bore the story of its love—evidently to enhance the boon beyond all price and make it relished with greater zest and livelier devotion.

At last the day of wedding dawned at Kundina—the profusely decorated capital of Rukmini's father—and Sree Krishna ordered his lightest chariot and his fleetest steeds and started thitherward with the brahmin messenger beside him. Within less than a league of his destination, the lord desired his companion to alight and hasten to the *mademoiselle* with the news of his arrival. But in the meantime there were no rejoicings on the part of the city public nor was there vast pourings in of the population of the territories, attached to it. Rukmini's elder brother was in the highest of spirits and was working his legs off in arranging fitting receptions for the bride-groom-elect and his friends, admirers and sympathisers whose numerous chariots and multitudinous retinue thundered into the city. An air of arrogance and of triumph was on the visage of each one of them and they were not slow to proclaim, in anticipation, what they regarded as signal victory on their part. These tidings reached the agonised ears of Rukmini and she was a prey to an



unutterable sorrow. So fierce was the storm that raged within her, that she had no small trouble in preventing a betrayal of herself and in carrying, about her, a placid and undisturbed countenance. The God of day advanced above the horizon hour after hour, but there were no signs of the god of her palpitating heart making any approaches to her in compliance with her silent solicitations. A harrowing fear distressed her that the aged messenger might have succumbed to the fatigue of travel and might have sunk and slumbered in some roadside choultry. The hours, which hitherto seemed to be ages and glided by at the slowest pace, now flew as if they were seconds and as if they were borne on the wings of the wind. The brahmin messenger hurriedly made his appearance and delighted her with his face, beaming with joy. Her ears at once greedily devoured the story of Sree Krishna's having come and taken his place adjacent to the temple, towards which she was soon to wend her way. Her heart, which had, till now, wished the hours to be long, now wished that they were shorter than the twinklings of the eye. Her heart panted for snatching a look at the beatific countenance of her lord and

she chafed under what to her seemed intolerable delay.

Processional music soon gave uproarious signal that the bride and her party were on their start for the temple outside the city walls. The friends of the bridegroom—and they were a legion—made semi-circles on either side of the road, along which the swan-like Rukmini was to accomplish her pedestrian pilgrimage to the sacred abode of the family deity. Coy by nature, she was made doubly so by the force of circumstances which forbade her eyes participating the pleasure that her ears had received. With a heart ready to burst with joy, with a mind over-wrought with a laudably irresistible curiosity, and with her light, delicate frame, smitten with tremour and trepidation at the mere thought of her Lord's hands seizing her and lifting her up into his chariot and to his side, she walked with steps which faltered at the electric sensation that had thrilled her from head to foot. With an inward tumult of ecstatic emotions and a laboured exterior of apparent calm and composure, she managed to enter the temple, say her prayers suitable to the occasion and mentally paid to the Goddess,

before her, her heartfelt tribute of praise for vouchsafing a union of hands where there had already been a union of hearts. As she emerged from the temple of sombre appearance, she looked like a wreath of lightning breaking out of dense, murky skies. Amid the cluster of her handmaids, she seemed like the soft and beauteous moon amidst shining stars of a spangled heaven. A little more bold, she lifted up her face for a second and took a sweeping survey of those that formed the semicircles on either side. The fascination in that face, of which they had but a glimpse, made them stare, motionless and emotionless, as if they were petrified into statues cut in alabaster.

*That was* Lord Sree Krishna's opportunity. With the swiftness of lightning, he leaped out of his chariot as Rukmini was in line with him and bounded into his car with his prize, firmly in his clasp and lovingly clinging to him. All this was the work of a few seconds and it seemed as though the winner of the prize was a majestic lion whose very looks were more than enough to instil dismay into the craven hearts of the lookers-on. This done, Lord Sree Krishna blew his conch-shell whose deafening

and terrific sounds filled the welkin space, made every hearer there cower and for the first time helped to rouse the warriors, who stood on the roadside in semicircles as already described and who seemed to have been, as it were, in a trance. But by this time the lord's chariot was on the highway to Dwaraka and he would have altogether distanced his awakened pursuers, but for their loud boast that, if he would only come to close quarters with them, they would undo what had happened. To teach them a sharp lesson for the rest of their lives, he caused his horses to be reined in. They soon overtook him and tried their puny efforts at him, with the result that they were irretrievably beaten back. Rukmini's elder brother, who was most wroth and had reason to be so, fought with a persistence which angered the Lord into a resolve to behead him. But kind-hearted Rukmini pleaded for him, not by any reasoning to justify him, but on the sole and single ground that it was undesirable that her parents, who had all along been heartily for the lord but were only powerless to urge their point to a successful issue, should not feel that the lord wedding one child of their's had shed the blood of

another. This simple plea for unmixed joy for the girl's parents chased all the traces of anger and saved the culprit. The union of Rukmini with lord Sree Krishna, thus brought about—be it noted—is nothing like elopement. It is, on the contrary, a form of marriage, commencing with mutual love—though without or in defiance of parental assent—and ending with the consecrating matrimonial ceremonial, enjoined in the Sastras. Before many days were over, the marriage rites came round and the two families, thus allied, except of course the wicked and vindictive spoiled child of the bride's father, intermingled in a harmonious rejoicing. The succession of festivities that followed for days together added, to many recorded in the Aryan Classics, one more proof of how true love is bound to triumph.

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## DROWPADI AND ARJUNA.

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**E**VERYBODY knows, I presume, who the author of the far-famed Bhagavat Gita—Lord Sree Krishna—was. Of the direct listener to that inspiration, there may not be the same wide-spread knowledge. He, Arjuna, was the ablest of the five Pandava brothers whose famous virtues and the infamous wickedness of whose cousins, Duryodhana and his numerous fraternity, constitute the theme of the Grand Old Epic, the Maha-Bharata. A deadly feud grew up between the two branches from youth upwards and one of the vicissitudes to which the Pandavas were reduced—an escape from a house set on fire to burn them into cinders—forced them to become fugitives in the forest, to settle down in an obscure village, disguised as brahmins, and to keep body and soul together by begging from door to door.

That village, unknown to fame, and on the

skirts of a hill-range had a succession of quiet days and quieter nights. When a man-eating giant by name Baka, whom the neighbouring jungle had sheltered till recently and who had been making periodical raids upon them, was put to the sleep that knows no break, the sparse population of the place enjoyed slumbers that knew no cares. That village of uneventful tenor of life showed, one fine morning, a strikingly lively spectacle, as throngs of travellers sought there a brief halt to cook a hasty meal. Their numbers and their eagerness to resume their journey stimulated the curiosity of the disguised sojourners there and the upshot was that those sojourners themselves at once joined the party. The reason of their resolve to join the travellers was as follows :—

A celebrated brahmin teacher in archery, Drona by name, was, while a youth, the co-pupil of a prince, Drupada by name, of Panchala. As youths generally do, the prince made to Drona a liberal offer of riches on his ascending the throne. The promise, given in the ingenuous youth, was swallowed in equal guilelessness. Years rolled by, and Drupada ascended the mighty throne of his fore-

fathers. Drona, in his turn, married and became the father of a sole and therefore over-fondled son. Recalling the promises of Drupada, Drona went to him for help with a confiding heart. Unlike the excellent Krishna, whose liberality to his sometime school-friend Kuchela, in like circumstances, surpassed all expectations, Drupada, under the giddy influence of power and pelf, slighted the great teacher-of-archery and sent him away with a drooping heart. From the time of this insult, Drona was harbouring thoughts of sweet revenge ; and, when now he took an accurate measure of the rare skill and prowess of Arjuna, he felt sure that, through his means, successful vengeance was within his reach. He declared that he would count himself adequately rewarded, if his pupils would fetch into his presence the king of Panchala a conquered captive. Arjuna led Drupada as a prisoner before his eyes, and Drona, avenged by the defeat and arrest of his insulter, took to himself half his kingdom and let go the object of his long-standing wrath to govern the remaining moiety, after addressing to him a few derisive words.

When thus Drupada was set free, one of two vows



he took was to beget a daughter who might wed his captor. His prayers to the gods, backed up with unexampled austerities, were heard, and the sacrifices he performed blessed him with such a daughter. In due time, that daughter grew up into a lovely maiden ; but, to the unspeakable grief of her parents, the sad tidings reached them that Arjuna with his mother and brothers had been by that time burnt down. Drupada was disconsolate.

As for Drowpadi, she was simply prostrate with voiceless grief. As maidens generally do, she heard of the many princes who aspired to her hand, from her handmaids and others who had access to her. But there was in her some undefinable, instinctive feeling which made her recoil from the mere thought of wedding any of them. Well might this be, as it had been pre-ordained that she must wed Arjuna. Of Arjuna she soon came to hear but as one who had been reduced to cinders as was believed. Accounts of him, however, made her joyous in the midst of all her melancholy. This strange sensation was to her unaccountable and, with a spontaniety she could not explain to herself, her mind loved to hear of him, to

dwell on him and linger on his name unceasingly. Her bosom swelled with rapture as anecdotes of his heroic deeds were related and her love for him surged up as his beauty and fine figure were described ; while delineations of his noble character and unflinching piety sent her into transports of joy. But all these pleasant ideas and what seemed day-dreams of unbounded happiness were dashed to the ground or shattered to the winds at what appeared a stern reality ; viz., that he had long ago shuffled off the mortal coil. Now that Arjuna seemed to be lost to her she vowed to marry none else. But the father soon felt assured that such a cruel doom could not have overtaken the righteous princes and that, if the news of a pretended Swayamvara of his daughter were published throughout the length and breadth of the country, the Pandavas would emerge out of the obscurity in which, it was assumed, they would be living. This scheme had the intended effect.

It was thus that Arjuna and his brothers, learning of the Swayamvara from the travellers, joined them in their march to Drupada's capital. On their arrival there they took up lodgings in an

out-of-the-way alley and lived an unobtrusive life till the day arrived for the choice of a bridegroom. Grand were the preparations made at Panchala for the reception of the numerous princes that were expected to come. On the day appointed and for some days previous, myriads of people poured into the town to witness the splendour and take part in the feasts and rejoicings, incident to the occasion. The town resounded with the continuous rumbling of thousands of chariot-wheels, and the city, with the divers ensigns and the diversified dresses, impressing the eye on every side, looked quite like an epitome of the gorgeous East. The orb of day rose in its utmost effulgence as if in it were concentrated the united brilliance of all the twelve Suns, hallowed in Vedic pages, and as if the author of the solar race of Aryan line of kings was not slow to rejoice at the prospect of a prince of the lunar dynasty achieving a matrimonial exploit, which could well compare with a similar triumph of the hero of the Ramayana. The grounds, chosen for bringing together the assemblage of royal personages who were coming to compete for the hand of the bride, were appropriately selected and excellently

decorated. There were, all around, avenues of trees that cast a thick and friendly shade, as if to welcome the gathering spectators. There were wells in the vicinity, furnished with flights of steps reaching to clear and sparkling waters. There were seats carefully graded to accommodate the royal guests according to their rank. There was the mammoth pavilion under which was lit the bridal fire and in which was a galaxy of princes, the priest, the bride and a host of brahmins whose benedictions were earnestly sought for. The appointed hour arrived, but it was a good while before the bustle and uproar subsided. When silence was partly restored, a brother of the bride stepped forward and thus addressed the assemblage :—

“Princes” he said “you have been invited to compete for the hand of my sister. The condition to be fulfilled is to take up the mighty bow, laid near the bridal fire, to bend it and with five arrows to bring down the imitation-fish fluttering aloft yonder there. You must however remember that, when you take the aim you should fix your eyes—not on the object itself—but on its reflection

in the sheet of water below. Whoever fulfils this condition will forthwith receive round his neck the gay garland gracing my sister's hands."

Upon most, this announcement had a supremely dis-spiriting effect. Some, even of martial renown, thought it discreet to abstain from making an attempt. There were however a few who, in their ungovernable love to possess themselves of the bride and too proud of themselves, were fool-hardy enough to venture forth. The best of the royal princes falling short of ultimate success, a youth emerged out of the crowd of brahmins, and, with steps as confident as dignified, advanced towards the bow. He looked a brahmin, and divers were the thoughts that occurred to the observers. Some were moved to a contemptuous smile that the work, which defied the disciplined powers of well-known heroes, should be undertaken by a youngster of the priestly order; and they set it down to conceit such as betokened ignorance to take a proper view of one's abilities. Others, who were more considerate, took it for granted that, unless the new candidate felt conscious of his superior skill in archery, he would not make the trial. His robust frame,

the brightness of his face, the dignity of his bearing and his obvious piety impressed them strongly in his favour. They, like Drowpadi, whose heart was, as it were, by a divine intuition drawn to him and who already inwardly prayed for his success, half wished that he should come off triumphant. In the midst of these conflicting emotions regarding him, the aspirant approached the mighty bow, made his obeisance to the *guru* and the elders that were present there, reverently went round the bow, and, lifting up and bending it with admirable ease, let fly the five arrows which, in an instant, brought down the imitation-fish, which had quivered in the air. Everyone present was stunned with astonishment. The thunders of applause were ineffable. The words of self-glorifying gratulation, that issued forth from the crowds of the elated brahmins, were deafening, and there was a universal awe at what seemed to illustrate the marvellous powers of the sacerdotal order. Everybody wondered if the successful hero was really a mere brahmin—many conjecturing that he might be some god or angel that assumed the human shape to win this bride of superlative beauty. The youth was no

other than Arjuna in the brahmin guise. The hero of the day stood before the assemblage the *cynosure* of every eye. Drowpadi, who had impatiently awaited the beck of her brother, moved forward, gracefully but trembling with emotion, and placed the wreath of jessamine round Arjuna's neck.

Here, I take it, is another notable story of Love's Triumph in the records of *Arya-Varta*.

## SUBHADRA AND ARJUNA.

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**L**ORD Sree Krishna had a sister, Subhadra by name. She was yet not out of her teens and her adolescence was markedly set off by the multitude of feminine virtues which graced her. A family-difference arose on the subject of her marriage. Sree Krishna and her parents were for bestowing her on Arjuna, with whom the reader must be familiar by this time—if the previous pages have been, at least, glanced through. Balarama, the eldest son in the household, was, on the contrary, for a crowned head, which Arjuna, being the third of five brothers, was not. He therefore had a leaning towards Arjuna's cousin, Duryodhana, who was Balarama's pupil besides. Sure of finally carrying his point, Sree Krishna was far too diplomatic to make any parade of his predilection. He was quite content to wait for his chance and he did not care to create any disquietude in the meantime.



As matters stood thus at Dwaraka, an event happened in the capital of the Pandavas, to accelerate that chance. The details of that event are out of place here and it suffices to state that, as a result, Arjuna came under an obligation to go out on a penitent pilgrimage for a twelvemonth. Within the scope of that holy journey Arjuna—who had heard of Subhadra's unrivalled charms—mentally included a visit to Dwaraka, the home of that mistress of his affections. To him, the dull monotony of sacerdotal rites was broken and enlivened by the cheering prospect of winning the object of his ardent love. Subhadra too loved him as no woman loved. By blood she stood to him within the marriageable limits. He was the son of her paternal aunt and this, under Vedic sanction, was an eligible match. That Sastric approval apart, there were other cogent grounds in favour of it. That Lord Sree Krishna willed it is, to begin with, argument enough. That Sree Krishna's beloved sister should wed his beloved friend is as good a reason. That she should be united with one, noted for high worth and sterling virtues, in preference to another, notorious for greed, vile ambition and all other

forms of depravity, is in accordance with eternal fitness of things. But all these grounds—be it said however—ought to succumb before the damsel's own inclinations, which must be assigned a place at the top of them all; for, from the moment of her budding womanhood, she had rapturously heard of Arjuna's glorious beauteousness and glowing heroism. Nothing, one need hardly say, makes a stronger and livelier impression on virgin susceptibilities than delineations of robust physique, joined to the manly virtues of a high order.

As Arjuna looked forward to the pleasure of seeing Subhadra with his own eyes, Subhadra, too, on her part, was panting for his possible visit to Dwaraka, since she was told of his start on the sacred ramble. While Arjuna had the routine of ceremonies at hallowed spots to divert much of his attention from her, her gay and voluble companions only helped to rivet her mind on him more and more by naming the many kings and princes who might aspire to her hand and from whom her heart fled to the captain of her affections with an absolutely resistless force. Visiting various places and rivers sacred by tradition, and

numerous kingdoms known to fame, Arjuna was led by his longing for Subhadra to Sree Krishna's capital. He was sure that Sree Krishna would be agreeable to his view ; but he was not as certain that his elder brother Balarama, who as has already been said, had a notorious partiality for Duryodhana, would consent to the match. Secretly informed of Arjuna's arrival in the vicinity, his devoted friend Sree Krishna paid him, a private visit. Learning his wishes to wed Subhadra, he suggested a hopeful contrivance. He explained how Balarama was peculiarly partial to ascetics and how, if Arjuna assumed that character, he could find ready admittance to the royal house. This plan was only too cheerfully assented to. When the day broke, Arjuna looked the perfect specimen of a *Yogi*.

His brow which used to wear a tilak of musk and fine sandal gave place for the rough daub of ashes and dull sacred earth, the habitual mark on the forehead of a Sanyasi. The fine gold-bordered gossamer garments, which he was wont to put on as a personage of royal rank, were abdicated in favour of the red-dyed borderless cloth, the distinguishing vesture of the dispenser of the world's attractions. His hands,

which used to grasp the mighty bow and conquering arrows, dropped them now for the flagged sacred bamboo and the wooden receptacle of water which are the inseparable adjuncts of one who, in holy communion with The Most High, forsakes his earthly home and severs asunder his earthly ties. His beautiful countenance, which was accustomed to display the gay smile of blooming youth or the terrors of an avenging enemy or the kindness of a forgiving foe, was now overspread with the calmness and equanimity of a philosophic victor over his passions and emotions. Strange to say that, in view to secure for himself the choicest of terrestrial pleasures, Arjuna had to collect about himself all that which only an abjurer of such pleasures adopts. To the reader who is in the secret as to why Arjuna had thus taken up the role of a Sanyasi, this would be only a seeming paradox.

The news of the arrival of such a sacred personage in the neighbourhood instantly reached the ears of Balarama and he made haste to give him hearty welcome. The pretended disdainer of the world's pleasures received the utmost attention, and was finally solicited by Balarama to be the honored

guest of the Yadavas for a few months, much to the apparent chagrin of Sree Krishna, who weakly advised against the step. Arjuna acquiesced, and was soon in the gardens of the palace, seated in a profoundly devotional attitude under the shade of an umbrageous tree. It was the custom, in those frank and reverential days of austere and unbending virtue, to appoint maiden girls of the house to render services to men of holiness; and Subhadra was accordingly deputed to attend on the pretended Sanyasi. When Arjuna saw her with his own eyes, he was struck by her superb beauty and he said to himself that it was a beauty which excelled by far the reports that had travelled of it.

In struggling to maintain his assumed character of sanctity and of imperviousness to earthly attractions, Arjuna could not, for a few days, look up or open his eyes, reverentially closed, lest Subhadra might notice it and make herself scarce. Her copious and long, black hair, made up into a tapering and lengthened plait or gathered in a knot hanging below her neck—her majestic and measured gait, such as belongs to a figure supple and yet not far from plump—and the

complexion of her colour, reminding one of gold of the finest touch, were alone discerned by him then as he saw her only as she turned her back upon him and was receding from him. As time went on, as the novelty of the situation was wearing away, as her bashfulness abated somewhat, she felt more easy and was more at home with him. At this stage of their mutual acquaintance, his eyes took a bolder flight and admiringly witnessed her raven ringlets, her moon-like face, her crescent forehead, her nose, like unto a *sampangi* flower, her speaking eyes and her coral lips. A few more days pass, and she now and then spoke to him. On such occasions he was all ears and he caught her every word and every intonation of her dulcet, silvery voice, as though the melodies of a finely-strung lute or of sweet-singing birds in the unrestrained gaiety of uncaged liberty were wafted to him and swelled in his ear. When she occasionally smiled, he was put in mind of the soft and mellow moon-light. When she betrayed herself into a gay laugh, he caught sight of a row of teeth, which might compare with wreaths of cream-colored jessamine buds.

A few anxious days elapse. Subhadra's attentions

are assiduous and unintermitting; and she soon falls into familiar converse with the disguised Arjuna. During one of such occasions, profoundly touched by the impassioned language of Subhadra in her inquiries after Arjuna, he awakes to a warm response in her heart to his ardent love, and he throws the mask away. The native bashfulness of the maiden instantly asserts itself, and she withdraws and makes herself scarce. Sree Krishna had however anticipated such a hitch, and he had instructed his wives Rukmini and Sathia whom he took into confidence, to be on the alert so that Arjuna might not starve.

Those wives of Sree Krishna and Subhadra's chosen confidantes were not slow to turn her into a target for the pleasantries of their wit. One of them made fun of her, as though she made obeisance to the ascetic in hopes of obtaining, through his blessing, a good and suitable husband and as though she was taken aback by something he might have vouchsafed to her on the subject. A second of them raised a harmless laugh at her by insinuating that some disembodied spirit possessed her as she passed and repassed along the palace-parks where the ascetic was seated, and that

she was, therefore, afraid to venture out into them any further. One, more naughty than the rest, indulged in the agreeable, though cutting, joke that the spirit which possessed her could only be exorcised by the charms of the Sanyasi into whose presence, it was said, she must be forthwith conducted to take his opinion and to solicit his efforts at enchantments. Under these telling sallies of good-humour, Subhadra winced and felt inwardly angry. But, to avoid a betrayal of herself, she had to put up with the gibes and home-thrusts and to laugh *with* those that laughed *at* her. But there can be no doubt that, in the secret recesses of her heart, she was battling with herself far too furiously to be without anguish and pain.

A few anxious weeks thus rolled on, and a day of popular and general festivity arrived. Agreeably to the custom on such an occasion, the entire population of the town seek a neighbouring isle to disport themselves. The town is virtually empty and the time is opportune for celebrating the marriage between Arjuna and Subhadra in private and for them to quit the city. These objects were gained with the secret help of Sree Krishna, and the newly



wedded pair were instantly on the highway to Indraprastha. The sentinels rush in, but fail to resist the flight of the happy couple. The alarm is given, and Balarama hears it. He waxes wroth at this evident impudence of Arjuna and he and his friends talk of a chase. Sree Krishna's guidance is sought and he pleads for acquiescence in what was on all hands past cure. The marriage knot, he said, was beyond untying and the pair were, without doubt, worthy of each other. No sooner was it clear that Sree Krishna was averse to hostile measures than everybody fell in with his view of the situation. The offence was condoned, and messages of friendship sped to the Pandavas. Before a week was over, an auspicious day was fixed for festivities in honor of the marriage and they went off with a joy as universal as it was genuine.—thus affording a notable illustration of the unerring triumph of unflagging fidelity of holy love.

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## VATSALA AND ABHIMANYU.

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**L**ORD Sree Krishna—a familiar personality by this time to the readers of the foregoing pages—had a brother, Balarama by name. This latter had a daughter by name Vatsala, now in all the glory of blooming youth. Arjuna had by Subhadra a son by name Abhimanyu, a fine valourous youth, well-read in all the Vedic and martial lore of the day. This young couple were thrown into each other's company from childhood upwards, and they became mutually dear and affectionate. The Pandavas were at the time in the sunshine of their glory, and a wide-spread opinion of the public, acquiesced in by Balarama, prevailed that these young cousins were an excellent match for each other. The youthful pair heard of this popular predilection with pleasure and satisfaction, and had grown up in the firm faith that the union of their lives was as good as an accomplished fact. When the Pandavas were

hurled from their pinnacle of greatness and sent adrift penniless, homeless, and friendless, a change came over the ideas of Balarama, who had always a secret partiality for Duryodhana and who now found an excuse for promising his daughter to the son of that ruler of Hastinapura. This caused much anxiety in the Yadava family circle at Dwaraka. When, at her marriageable age, Balarama's sister Subhadra had been carried off by Arjuna against her brother's will as narrated in a previous story, Sree Krishna was able to get him round by pointing to Arjuna's magnificent status as being all that could be desired. That argument was not open to him at the present juncture. The representations of both Sree Krishna and Subhadra failed to win back Balarama. They pressed repeatedly and in vain that, alike by public voice and in accordance with an immemorial usage, Abhimanyu had acquired a claim to the hand of his maternal uncle's daughter, and it would be cruel that his own kith and kin should discard him for what must surely be a transitory want of position and opulence. Above all it was urged

that circumstances had all along favoured to bring about the union of their hearts and that it was meet that it should be sanctified by the union of their hands. Balarama was nevertheless inexorable, and Subhadra took it to heart and became a prey to secret and desponding grief.

Weeks elapsed and the wedding day was finally fixed. When Abhimanyu heard of it, he was in a towering passion, and his first thought was to carry off Vatsala by a *coup de main*. But his mother softened him and counselled recourse to pacific means, as she did not wish to add to the enemies, the Pandavas already had. Thus quieted, both the mother and the son resolved to quit Dwaraka in sorrow and disgust. Abhimanyu was however stricken with a resistless longing to see Vatsala face to face, and learn from her lips whether she resigned herself to the dictates of her father or was resolved to follow the promptings of her own affections. Upon the result of such an interview, he thought, he might decide upon the course of action which he should pursue. While his mother went to Sree Krishna to bid him a sad adieu,

he strove to take his chance by sauntering into the pleasure-grounds attached to the palace, and before long, fortune favored him.

The threatened exit of Abhimanyu and his mother from the palace shot an arrow into the heart of Vatsala, and the hope she had been cherishing of her father veering round to her view of her happiness was dashed to pieces. Life seemed a burden to her and the walls and doors of her home were like those of a prison-building. Solitude was oppressive and the confined air of her apartments—fittingly ventilated though they were—seemed sickening. To escape from her accustomed surroundings and as if to flee from her own thoughts, she had betaken herself to the pleasure-grounds of the palace, with a bevy of her choice companions, and her sweetly-garrulous parrot on her lovely wrist.

The breeze was the softest. The chirrup of birds was ceaseless. The fragrance of blossoming flowers was sweetly-odorous. Her companions were striving their utmost to put her in lively spirits. But in spite of the union of these varied charms, Vatsala's heart was desolate. The weight of sorrow

that was sitting at her heart was not without its outward symptoms, in the shape of a dejected face, languishing limbs and languid voice. Such was the state in which Abhimanyu caught sight of her, pale and wan as moon lacking the sun's life-giving lustre. It was at once clear to him that Vatsala was herself no less unhappy and disconsolate than himself, and it enraptured his soul. At other times his heart would bleed to see her in the slightest degree sad, but now her unhappiness was necessary for his joy, which rose in proportion to her misery. He is in an instant by her side with a beaming countenance, and her maids disperse as summer clouds. When he puts his hand in hers and peers wistfully into her eyes she becomes deeply moved, and her eloquent looks and elegant smile speak of the love which was raging within her, defiant alike of check and outlet. Her hand is instantly in a masterful grip and her soft and slender figure insensibly follows the lead of the being who is to her a guiding influence. In a moment they are both at the garden gate; but there she stops short and begs of her lover to win her in broad daylight and

not spirit her away, as it were, under the cover of dusk. He respects her wish, applauds her loyalty and relaxes his hold of her lovely wrist. She hurries back to her companions and with them to the palace which seemed, amid her present rosy ideas, a comely haunt and not the unwelcome home of a few hours ago; while Abhimanyu rejoined his mother with a satisfied mind.

To deliberate undisturbed, they wandered into a neighbouring jungle which chanced to be the domain of Bhima's cannibal son Ghatothkacha. The scent of approaching humanity angered and appetised him, and he attacked Abhimanyu in all the fierceness of his nature. He had however an opponent, calling his utmost efforts into play. The youths, all ignorant of their mutual cousinship, battled against each other, neither of them giving way and neither of them gaining ground. Subhadra was looking on in breathless silence, but, like a true warrior's mother, with an intrepid heart. The contest went on for hours in unabated obstinacy, and none could tell when or how it might end. It became midnight and still they battled on. Time was flying and, as if in the

interests of poetic justice, the combatants were parted by saint Narada—a personage who, despite his reputation for mischievous meddling and for setting people by the ears, not unoften appeared on the world's stage for purposes of good. He revealed them to each other, and they joyously flew into each other's arms, asking each other's excuse for the unintentional collision. They lost no time in bringing together their respective mothers, and, for a brief while, there was nothing but rapture. It was already beyond midnight. Something bold and effectual must be forthwith done or the marriage on the morrow would not be thwarted and Abhimanyu might lose the beautiful Vatsala. His cannibal cousin who, like Rishis of great spiritual power, was master of the occult art of assuming fancy-shapes or passing invisibly into any recess in spite of heavy bolts and bars to barricade access, announced his plan. Soliciting Subhadra and his cousin to remain with his mother in his safe retreat, Ghatothkacha was up into the sky at one bound and flew to Dwaraka on the wings of the wind. He merrily laughed at the grand preparations that were being



made, while the great bustle which pervaded the city tickled his fancy. Assuming an aerial form, he enters unperceived the guarded boudoir of Vatsala, and his brotherly eyes seek her out, sleeping in her velvet-draped couch but with a face betraying lingering traces of a ruffled mind, not yet at peace. On his spacious back, as Atlas, he lifts up the couch with its sleeping beauty undisturbed and wends his way to his abode with the sacred burden sitting upon him as lightly as a moon-beam. In a few moments he deposits his seraphic treasure at the feet of mother, aunt and cousin and, with their leave, betakes himself to Dwaraka to simulate the form and take the place of Vatsala. The day dawns. Duryodhana with his son, kinsmen and friends enters the city, with a flourish of trumpets and amid sonorous heralds who proclaim him, his greatness and his riches. Insolence and self-satisfaction at his fancied success to the utter discomfiture of Sree Krishna, the Pandavas' steadfast friend, were commingled in his haughty visage. At the propitious hour, the pretended girl coyly submitted to be decked out in all the glory of bridal apparel and brilliant jewellery and conducted

to the bridal *pandal* in the plenitude of a maiden's bashfulness. A *parda* separates the bride, from the bridegroom, and it intercepts the gaze of the assembled gathering, while the preliminary rites are gone through without a hitch and with unalloyed pleasure. As was the wont in those days among the royal folk, the bride-groom, all impatient, peeps over the screen at a certain stage of the ceremonial, to catch a glimpse of his future wife, and lo and behold! his eyes are assailed by the form of a ferocious lion, in all its panoply of fearful fangs, plenteous mane and pointed claws, crouching to take a bound. Affrighted, the youngster staggers back, and the whole gathering is thrown into a commotion. The boy timidly opens his eyes and speaks in uncertain accents, but others who look behind the curtain, contradict him as nothing was visible to them but a lovely figure in sweet sixteen. The bustle subsides into an ill-concealed titter, and the shamefaced bridegroom once again peeps over the screen, but only to witness the features of a savage tiger. Again does the youngster stand aghast, and again is he assured by persons who see

only the maidenly Vatsala on the bridal seat. A few more attempts of the kind take place but with no better results. This set the people there to think and they were at their wits' end to solve the problem. All of a sudden they find a flood of stones descending on them from over their heads, and they fear to look up. A clarion voice is heard in the sky, challenging the heroes, there present, to go out into the open and gird up their loins for a battle, such as they never knew. The call to war removes the doubt and suspense that puzzled and weighed, and Duryodhana, his brothers and his warriors are in a moment in battle-array under the canopy of heaven. Ghatothkacha is before them, with his superhuman battalions, and a war ensued which ended in a complete retreat of Duryodhana's party. Duryodhana and his men fled, and Balarama and his friends concluded that Ghatothkacha had carried off Vatsala for his cousin's sake and reappeared to humble them and get rid of the interpolated bridegroom. Messages sped to Sree Krishna, who had sullenly kept away from the marriage-house as his well-meant advice had been rejected. He arrives and counsels the acceptance of Abhimanyu

as the bridegroom. This is readily and cheerfully agreed to, and Ghatothkacha prostrates himself before Balarama, Sree Krishna and other elders. They are soon at his jungly residence. With tears of joy they are met by Subhadra while Balarama and Sree Krishna are not slow to raise their sister's somewhat downcast spirits by assurances of perfect cordiality and of approval of her conduct and resolution. On a fresh day fixed for the purpose, the marriage of Vatsala and Abhimanyu was celebrated in all the splendour and joy inseparable from the exalted rank of the parties concerned. Let the readers say if this is not an example of true love obtaining a signal triumph?

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## UTTARA AND ABHIMANYU.

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**T**HE story of how Abhimanyu won the hand of Vatsala—narrated in the last few pages—became soon public property. From mouth to mouth and from country to country, it spread like a fairy tale, gathering, from every eloquent story-teller who gave it circulation, some incidents, additional and romantic, as is the vogue in such instances. Among the cities which it reached was the capital of Rajah Virata—a city which was, at the time, the safe asylum of the Pandavas in incognito in another and the last of their miseries, before they fought and wrested the usurped sceptre from the unworthy hands of their wicked cousin Duryodhana. From a town-talk, it became the wondrous theme of amusement among private families. That which was thus the subject of narration in the other families of the city lost no time in penetrating into the precincts of the

royal Zanana. Arjuna—the noble father of that noble son—was there as a dancing and singing master of the royal princess. In form, he was changed into a hermaphrodite, under a curse—originally to take instantaneous effect and to last for life—but, by the friendly intercession of a prophetic personage, postponed so as to come to pass when and only so long as Arjuna might wish it. That he would wish it when an obligation of secret-living was on him, and that the present, was such an occasion goes without saying. He too heard of the story of Abhimanyu's recent marriage and was beside himself with joy. A story-teller and gaming companion of the king, a muscular person of gigantic proportions employed in the royal kitchen, two stalwart youths who were respectively in charge of the steeds and the kine of the king and a female attendant, rather of refined demeanour, attached to the queen—all these have likewise heard it and were rapt with joy. When these six met, as they often did, they talked as though they had been old friends and they, more often than not, united in mutual sympathy as they conversed on this subject or that. In like manner the marriage of

Abhimanyu became the theme of their discourse on one fine, moon-lit night at the dancing hall which was their usual rendezvous.

The royal princess—Uttara—was there as she had often done to while away an idle hour. But she was deeply struck with wonder to note how profoundly that story of Abhimanyu's matrimonial conquest impressed all those six and how the whole of them wept spontaneous tears of choking joy. Such a thing is, in part, accountable indeed, as the outcome of general human sympathy. But the intensity of the joyous feeling seemed to be far in excess of the limits of ordinarily-interested mortals. Anxious to dive into the secret and yet reluctant to rouse suspicions of a character given to illiberal or improper curiosity, Uttara went to work with an archness surprising for her age, but not without frequent revulsions of nervous fear of self-betrayal. Now touching upon this incident and now on that, in the lives of Pandavas, she beat about the bush. But she soon found her task was far easier, after all, than she had imagined. There is an ultimate fact in human nature which astonishes us far too often. Where one's heart is

too full there is, as it were, an unconscious preparedness to pour out that heart in floods. To men and women in that state of feeling, no enquiry is too sensitive and no question is too inquisitive. There would thus be a natural—though seemingly enigmatic—propensity to be readily communicative—often over-communicative. The occasion when Uttara proceeded to question her dancing-master and his frequent companions was, in reality, such an occasion. It soon became clear to her that, far from seeming to dislike or resent her questioning, they appeared not only to relish it but also to court it. Then began a frank, free and easy talk on the beauty, heroism and virtues of Abhimanyu.

The reader can easily guess how glowing and eloquent must have been the description which a proud father, fond uncles or a loving co-mother would give. Need we wonder then that Uttara's unwedded heart should have straightway gone over to him and become consecrated to him in the eye of God, needing but the sacerdotal sanction at the sacred fire—a form of matrimony, known to the ancient Aryans and open to the royal class, under the



name of Gandharva, as already pointed out. From the moment her heart had thus ceased to be her own, her thoughts were fixed on the object of her affections. She used to be caught in gazing at vacancy, in sitting still with downcast looks, in seeming to be lost in contemplation and prayer, in loathing food, in keeping mid-night vigils, in rolling uncomfortably in her downy bed as though it was strewn with nettles, in aimlessly shaking her head and in causelessly seeming to laugh. These and many other outward signs of inward trouble created dismay in the minds of her usual companions. While amid these latter, she was persistently reticent. With her dancing master and his usual comrades, she was talkative to a fault. Not a day passed but she would contrive to provoke a converse, in which the magnetic name and the angelic figure of the unseen captor of her heart might find mention. She knew indeed that he had a wife already and that too was a wife, for whom his affection had grown up ever since his boyhood and to whom he was so passionately attached that he won her in the face of overwhelming odds. But that knowledge created neither jealousy nor heart-ache. To wed him, to enjoy his pleasant

company, to gaze on his heroic face, to vie with his earlier spouse in ministering to his comforts and in promoting his happiness—these, *Padmini* as she was and *Padmini* as she felt sure her co-wife would also be, were the height of her ambition and the passion of her soul. Furthermore, she took for granted that, from all accounts she had received of the captain of her affections, he had far more beauty, far more vivacity, far more diversified learning and versatility of talent and far greater capacity, in every way, to afford enjoyment than for one soul to monopolise. As yet she had only heard of him ; but it was in the impassioned language of sympathetic persons around her. So overpowering, so fascinating and so glowing were the incidents attending the love and conquest by Abhimanyu, as depicted in the impassioned prose of the narrators around her, that she wondered if any genius—be he poetic, epic or dramatic—could improve or embellish the story with any imaginative creations of his own. Already the accounts, which she had daily and rapturously listened to, drove her to the brink of holy frenzy and she had no appetite for more. She feared that anything further

might drive her mad and unfit her for the beatitude she was panting after, on earth.

At this stage of her joy—a stage that seemed to forbid any further addition—the thought struck her that, after all, she was gloating over a dream, which, for realization, postulated a responsive second party. As yet she had no notion that Abhimanyu was aware of her existence, much less of her holy and passionate love for him. How then was he to be apprised of it or sounded upon it? This was a question that seemed to defy all possible solution. Intermediaries often do the needful, if qualified ones could be found. But from where was she to ferret out any such? Rukmini had found one in a family priest. But then that priest had the certainty, which comes to all spiritual men, that Lord Sree Krishna, who was divine, had heard the prayer and granted it, before he, as intermediary, agreed to bear the message of love. That certainty could not, in the nature of things, belong to any mortal, however friendly to her cause and however tactful or skilful. Under this harrowing consideration, she was literally at her wits' ends. Saints like Narada were indeed in the habit of honouring her father with

their occasional visits. But Uttara had been far too young to attract their attention or to render them such homage as would incline them to make friends with her. Now that her playful disposition was at an end and her frolicsome days were over, she longed for a visit of some such saintly personage, in order that she might, by unsurpassable attentions and solicitations, make up for her past, guiltless non-chalance and enlist his sympathy with the one single aim of her earthly being—to wed Abhimanyu. She waited, and waited for days, weeks and months,—each of those days, weeks and months proving to her an age of preternatural length in duration.

Something of substantial relief came to her all of a sudden. An artist of unrivalled powers brought into Virata a picture of a youth in all the richness of elegance and it soon found its way into the king's palace. The king saw it and was mightily struck with its excellence. He took it and caused it to be exhibited in the inner apartments, all ignorant as to whose picture it was. The painter was duly called into the audience-hall and was asked what he would take for it. To the surprise of the Rajah and the rest there

present, he insisted upon the king accepting it as a loyal tribute from him and paying no price. As the king seemed to hesitate as though he viewed this reply as a trick to enhance its value, the artist set the matter at rest by declaring that he would come again on the day of the princess's marriage, and name and receive its value. This seemed reasonable enough and nothing more was said on the point. Soon after the picture was assigned its proper place in the gallery of beauties, exhibited on the walls of the king's inner apartments, curiosity led all the inmates in the palace—servants, foremost among them—to crowd in front of it in increasing numbers and with a wonderment, which made them jostle one another. Uttara too went there with her dancing master. But no sooner did the latter catch sight of it than he left the spot abruptly and with evident loss of serenity. After dusk and in company with his five companions he was once again at it—all gazing intent on it with mingled feelings of joy and melancholy. Uttara noticed this and was prompted by a laudable curiosity to ask for the reason of this seemingly-strange conduct. Her dancing master mentally calculated

to see how the period of his concealment was rapidly coming to an end and how a ray of doubtful light might not altogether injure him if imparted with adequate caution. So he told her that it was the picture of Abhimanyu and asked her to put him no questions as to the source of his knowledge. It was enough for her, however, that it was the likeness of the lord of her heart and she was devouring it with her eyes.

The history of that picture may as well be said here as elsewhere. Young as Abhimanyu was, ruler though he was not, his latest achievement in the matrimonial line brought him into special prominence. When the physiognomist viewed his face, surveyed his finely adjusted proportions, and noted other features which to physiognomists have a deep inner meaning, the youth was pronounced a *Maha purusha*—a personality marked out for high renown. When astrologers scientifically cast his nativity they too arrived at the same conclusion. That opinion soon got abroad and in it a rising painter of rare skill saw his chance of immortal glory. He managed to catch frequent opportunities to study the details of the youth's expressive, intellectual features and to take notes of his finely

chiselled figure. By dint of perseverance and force of skill, he soon produced a likeness of Abhimanyu which represented him as faithfully as a looking-glass. So life-like was this bid for eternal fame that he would not venture to put it into the market or hawk it about, lest its vivid freshness might fade. Sell it he would not. To bestow it on the most worthy of such a gift was the height of his ambition. The original of that picture might indeed be pleased with its exactness but that pleasure he was daily having in his numerous mirrored rooms. His mother Subhadra—separated for over twelve years from her husband—must have found solace by daily and hourly gazing on the beautiful face of her son. She too could derive only a passing sensation of a pleasureable feeling from it. His father had indeed long lost sight of him and might give worlds to see his son in the glory of his blooming youth. But, that father remained plunged in some unknown, Cimmerian darkness. The artist might sooner hope to jump into the moon than penetrate into this place of concealment. As to Vatsala, she was too recently married to be so soon sated in ocularly devouring his beauty and to turn her

steady gaze from the original to the facsimile. Other maidens there might be whom he might wed. In fact there was one such in flesh and blood, if the readers of his horoscope could be trusted. But she must be in the inmost recesses of some royal Zanana and therefore un-get-at-able to him. Such was his perplexity.

But it did not make him despond. He calmly made up his mind to wait as he was sure that he would not have to wait long, in that the period of incognito imposed on the Pandavas was fast drawing to a close. But the opportunity came to him very much sooner. For, meeting the sage Narada casually, he was let into the secret of Uttara's love for Abhimanyu. Guided by this clue, the artist contrived to insinuate the product of his skill into Virata's capital and thence into the Zanana. Uttara saw it, and so did her dancing master and the latter's usual comrades as already said. At the mere sight of it they seemed, each time, to melt into tears—a spectacle which enhanced the wonder of the girl and confirmed her in her secret suspicion that those tears were not the outcome of ordinary sympathy. She dreaded to probe the mystery and she awaited her



chance. That chance came soon enough. The sage Narada—as a God-send, so to say—came on a visit to her father. But then, as usual he might come and go, after receiving honors from her father in the apartments, open to males alone. How could she contrive to be present there? She had passed the age of girlhood which had its great freedom. She was now a full-blown maiden and coyness, modesty and avoidance of male company were expected of her as the theories of ancient times went. To appear before Narada to do him reverence was indeed not denied to her in accordance with the usages of those days. But then how to get him alone to speak to? for he was too honored a guest to be left alone till he chose to take his departure. Here was a veritable gulf to be bridged over in her path.

Thus vexed to distraction she gave up all hope of her little, unaided brain finding a way out of the puzzle and she could only trust to the chapter of accidents. Amid this gloomy outlook a ray of light illumined her mind before long and she greedily clutched at it—not, be it said, as the drowning man catches at straw—but as a true believer clings to the never

falling plank of mercy on the part of Lord Sree Krishna. In terrible odds, he helped the cause of innocent virtue in her would-be-mother-in-law Drowpadi—as tradition had said to her. In the case of her would-be husband's own mother, Subadra, he rewarded her true and genuine love with fruition, despite adverse circumstances. He did no less as regards Vatsala. By the light of these events, she persuaded herself that the same lord would prosper the cause of her innocent love—a love borne towards the son of his dear sister, Subhadra, and his beloved friend, Arjuna. To that Lord she prayed earnestly and fervently and she was in hopes, that, as the result of that earnest and fervent prayer, sage Narada would be divinely inspired to give her a chance and a hearing. Other circumstances unexpectedly aided her. Whether, conscious of his fast approaching duty of choosing a suitable consort for her now-marriageable daughter, the Raja of Virata was moved to take counsel of that world-roaming sage or whether, by his super-human powers of perception, Narada took note of the girl's bent of mind and desired to further her cause, it came to pass that, when that saint came as above,

the theme of conversation between the king and the him was Uttara's wedding. As the upshot of the consultation he reserved judgment till he had had an interview with the girl herself. Though sure of what the choice by the girl was, yet, as though he had a doubt on the point, he sought that interview. This seemed to the father a highly politic course of sounding the mind of the daughter and of employing the very best friend to advise against possible *misalliance*. The saint, with a sly smile in the corners of his lips, and the princess, with earnest, appealing looks on her face, met. The former had hardly hinted at the object of his visit, when, with a thrill of ecstasy which siezed her entire frame, she turned her large eyes towards the picture of Abhimanyu. Her further answer took the shape of her at once rising to her legs and lifting up her hands, clasped in Aryan fashion to convey her deepest thanks. This done, Uttara became demure except to smile a smile of infinite relief to a surcharged mind. It may be imagined that this feeling of satisfaction was rather premature, having regard to the fact that Abhimanyu's mind on the subject had yet to be got at. But in

a few moments all shade of doubt on the point wore away, like summer clouds. The saint's approbation was an absolute guarantee that her preference was without a flaw; for, to him of supernatural faculties, it would be clear as noon-day as to what was destined to happen and what not. She rightly reasoned to herself that, if there were room for apprehending the slightest hitch in the matter, Narada, of all saints, was sure to discourage and sound a note of alarm. In those days when saintly men deserved reverence and were accordingly revered, their mere mental approbation of a proposal worked out its accomplishment. This too tended to maintain the balance of her mind.

A few days elapsed and the whole city was astir. All at once some unknown enemy attacked it on the south with a considerable force. All available fighting men in the city marched out a few leagues to meet him. When the battle which ensued was raging—a battle the particulars or the nature of which it is needless to recount here—the city was once again thrown into the throes of fright by the report that another army appeared on the north and made the

king's kine its first prize. The cowherds hurried into the capital and sounded the alarm. There was consternation everywhere. But neither was the king nor an army at hand. The town was literally empty of fighting men, and none was there, manful enough to undertake its defence. The heir-apparent, a youth of tender years and the best carpet-knight going, received the message while in the *Zanana*, and, as is the wont with persons in such a situation, boasted of his prowess but regretted that there was not a charioteer worthy of the occasion to aid him. Arjuna mentally reckoned up and felt sure that the period of incognito terminated with the day previous and that the fitting time had arrived for giving his cousins, a foretaste of what they might expect, in case war became necessary to recover the dominion. He set up *Drowpadi* to sing his praise in the skill of conducting war-chariots and succeeded in getting himself chosen for the task. In the meantime, he himself took Uttara into confidence and went into full explanations with her as to the identity of himself and the five persons he was often seen to converse with as old friends. Convinced that her dancing master was the world-

renowned Arjuna whose name had long passed into a synonym for victory, Uttara grew not only fearless but also absolutely certain of the vanquishment of the enemy at the north of the city. She too therefore joined her advocacy to that of Drowpadi for the hermaphrodite being assigned the charioteer's function. A gorgeous and well-equipped war-car was got ready, and, amid the affectionate good wishes of the ladies of the Zanana and the vociferous blessings of the thronging population of the town, the youth issued forth with Arjuna, still disguised as a eunuch occupying the seat of the driver.

The incidents attending this sally of the prince are indeed highly dramatic and greatly interesting. But an account of it will be too much of a diversion in this context. Suffice it to say that, when the chariot was within sight of the enemy's forces, the prince's heart gave way, that Arjuna revealed himself to the youth who thereupon agreed to exchange seats with him during the battle and that, after the day was won, they again changed places and drove into the city, Arjuna assuming his neuter's form for the night. At dusk the chariot returned triumphant, with the

prince within it and the hermaphrodite on the driver's seat. The king had just before come back to town and was feeling anxious about the son, who had never before stood face to face with an army. But the message of conquest, which was brought to him almost immediately, banished his fears and made him right glad that his son's first effort in the battle-field should be crowned with such a signal success. As a consequence and under royal orders, the chariot and its inmates were carried in procession along the highways of the city, and the throngs that assembled and the cheers that were showered on them were unparalleled in the annals of that city. The joys of the day, to which the folk of that city were wholly unused, made them spend the entire night in songs of congratulation in celebration of the prince and the hermaphrodite and in prayers to Lord Sree Krishna for vouchsafing to their king, such an eminent victory—songs and prayers which *impromptu* poets of the place vied with each other in contributing for the occasion.

In the early hours preceding the dawn of the ensuing day, an innocent surprise was secretly devised by the Pandavas whose obligation to remain hidden

ended, two days before. As the result of that amusing plot, the Pandavas decked themselves in royal robes before day-break and took their seats in the king's durbar hall. The king entered as usual and laughed at what looked like a farcical joke. The monarch waits and they still rise not. The smile fades on the monarch's face at this excess of daring and his eye-brows begin to knit in anger. Arjuna—a comparative stranger to the king, for obvious reasons—steps forward and proclaims the startling facts about himself and the rest. The prince is soon on the spot and bears witness to the identity of Arjuna with the hermaphrodite of late. The revelation fills the king's mind with dismay and joy—dismay at the thought that, in his ignorance, he might have slighted and wronged the noble Pandavas, and joy at his rare good fortune to have afforded a safe asylum to the righteous refugees from their malignant foes. The Pandavas lost no time to avow that they had no ground for complaint and that their minds had no place for any sentiments other than those of unmixed pleasure and unalloyed gratitude.

When the first outburst of joy somewhat subsid-



ed, the king, who now became aware that Arjuna, and not the prince, was the author of the recent victory, secretly issued orders to fetch Uttara to the spot, decked out in all the glory and jewellery the palace could afford. All ignorant of how the heart of his daughter had already been given away, and not doubting that she or any one would object to such an exalted personage as Arjuna being accepted by him as his son-in-law, king Virata meant a surprise in the shape of a gift of his daughter on the third of the Pandavas. As the girl was brought in, coy, suspenseful and trembling, the king handed her over to Arjuna, with a choked voice which forbade utterance. Arjuna drew her to him, proclaiming aloud, as he did so, that, as his daughter-in-law and wife of his beloved son Abhimanyu, he was accepting her. The king noticed an enhanced joy in the face of his child and the necessary explanation was forthwith given as to how she loved and mentally wedded Abhimanyu already and how her father's unconscious mistake was promptly corrected by Arjuna who had long been in the plot with the princess. Abhimanyu was at once sent for and, as soon as he arrived, the bridal fire was

lit and the rites were all gone through, which laid the seal of Sastraic sanction on a triumph of love, for which one may well claim a place in the annals of men.

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## USHA AND ANIRUDDHA.

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**C**ONTEMPORARY with Lord Sree Krishna there was a reigning prince by name Bana. This latter belonged to a type of beings, called Rakshasas and distinguished for innate wickedness, for implacable enmity to good and virtuous men and for the possession of superhuman powers of clearing distances in incredibly short spaces of time and of assuming fancy-forms or shapes invisible to the mortal eye. His predominant characteristic was an insatiable hatred to Sree Hari, none of whose thousand and one honored names would he suffer so much as uttered within his hearing. As has always been the self-deluding practice of such haters, Bana signalised himself by a deep and fervent worship of God Siva, as if there were some antagonism between Sree Hari and God Siva. As did others before him, Bana obtained the reward of his austere devotion in the shape of a boon to be invincible to men, angels and demons. Giddy

with this exceptional accession of strength, he launched forth on a career of universal conquest and, before long, brought under subjection nearly all the eminent crown-ed heads. War and the excitement attending war soon became the breath of his nostrils, and life turned out, in consequence, to be dull and cheerless to him, after he had secured world-wide dominion. He lost all relish in existence for want of a doughty foe to fight against and he chafed at the doom of idleness to which he found himself reduced. In his over-weening conceit of inordinate strength of muscle and indomitable force of will, he sought out God Siva once again and called him for a fight, declaring that he, God Siva, alone could be his adequate match. God Siva flew into a passion at this evident impudence and resolved to precipitate that utter wreck, which his persecutions of angels and good and virtuous men had already doomed him to. God Siva smiled an angry smile and told Bana to wait for the day, which would soon come, when his flag-staff would topple down without an apparent cause and when there would appear before him a foeman, more than worthy of his mettle. In his ungovernable hankering after

some one to battle against, Bana went home, contented more than vexed with the prophecy, to bide his time in ill-controlled impatience. The wished-for day arrived at last through the unconscious instrumentality of a daughter of his own and as an inevitable sequel to her happiness.

That daughter was named Usha. She was of surpassing beauty and, Narcissus-like, she was absolutely in love with herself. In her inordinate pride of her own prodigious good looks, she would admit none beautiful enough to compare with her among her sex and none, in the opposite sex, fit enough to wed her. Her father trained her in devotion to God Siva and his Goddess Gowri, the latter of whom has been worshipped, since the world began for the Aryans, as an incomparable beauty. Voting against all specimens of loveliness in the angelic, the human and the demon world, she went into the extravagance of praying to the Goddess Gowri that she should be blessed with a husband more beautiful than herself and than even Gowri herself. Somewhat nettled at this wild luxuriance of youthful vanity, Goddess Gowri wished to grant the girl's prayer and to

administer to her a mild chastisement in one and the same breath. With this double purpose Gowri told that poor, self-idolising damsel that one, far more beautiful than Cupid himself, would wed her but that she would first meet him in her dream and that, guided by her remembrance of his features, she should seek him out from the many worlds in creation.

Blank surprise and sad disappointment seized her at once and all her delight at once turned into bitterness of gall. Day after day passed. Night after night did she compose herself to sleep. In the reveries of the day and in the slumbers of the night, figures of sorts flitted across her anxious mind for a time. But they were all prodigies of deformity. So much was she vexed with the iterations and re-iterations of divers forms of ugliness that she wished more than once to be favoured with some drug or beverage which would confer on her an unbroken wakefulness or throw her into a trance or a state of suspended animation; for it became her unwelcome experience that during the day the mirrors around reminded her of that beauty, for her vanity about which she was paying a penalty, and that

at nights, her mind was peopled with figures, weird and grotesque. When for a few weeks the girl was thus oppressed and punished, a night was vouchsafed to her which was to be the beginning of the end of her misery. In spite of herself she lapsed into an involuntary sleep that night early enough. When the first hours glided unconsciously by, the girl jumped out of her bed and peeped and peered on every side and in every corner and creek, as if some one was playing hide and seek with her. Her face beamed with an unaccustomed and uncontrollable joy and her lips whispered words of deep endearment, louder and louder. An attendant maid, her sole companion for the night, was rudely awakened by the spectacle of this speaking somnambulist and she gave her mistress a gentle shake and plentifully sprinkled rose-water on her face, arms and bosom. The princess seemed to be roused from a powerful dream and to collapse into a faint. The solitary servant-girl could neither give help nor go for help and she stood staring about, as if life was fast oozing out of her every pore. The seeming sleep-walker soon collected her wits and it became her turn

now, to give a shake to her handmaid, and bid her go and fetch her favourite confidante, Chitrarekha by name. The girl hurried away and came back with the person desired. Usha and Chitrarekha were soon in secret converse and the former told her how in her dream she met with a figure, whose infinite loveliness seemed more than to correspond with what was promised by Goddess Gowri and which, in an instant, took her captive. In answer to her question to describe that figure, Usha went into such ecstasies and hysterics alternately, that Chitrarekha despaired of any clue from that quarter and reflected a few moments. Those were excruciating moments to Usha, powerless in the last degree to help her friend though virtually it would be but helping her own self. Chitrarekha soon brightened up when it came to her remembrance that, once upon a time and as if with the prophet's foresight, sage Narada, pleased with her devotion, imparted to her certain mystic words (*mantra*) which were singularly invaluable in such contingencies as the present. Those mystic words, when uttered a hundred times in single-minded devotion, had the potency to conjure up,



before her vision, every lovely figure in any world in the creation and bring to her fingers the skill of a matchless artist to draw its exact likeness within the space of a half-hour. When Chitrarekha unfolded to Usha what was thus passing in her mind, she no longer gaped as she had done in her impious despondency. Her wonted faith in Gowri re-asserted itself and she felt sure that, for Gowri's boon to take effect, he that was to wed her must have been long ago born and therefore fall within the scope of her friend's pictorial delineation. She possessed her soul in patience for a half-hour and Chitrarekha was ready with her panorama of beautiful men in all the globes of the universe. Usha's eager survey commenced with the regions of the heavens and finally came down to those of the earth. The whole intermediate spectacle was passed over in a rapid glance by Usha and so also was a large part of the earth's sketch. Kingdom upon kingdom, crowned head on crowned head, glided by, making no impression on Usha's mind. The city of Dwaraka with its inmates was then unfolded before her eye which seemed to pause wistfully first on one personality, more wistfully on a second and most wistfully on a

third and the last. At that last figure, Usha went off in a swoon, a swoon that proved an eloquent tell-tale and set all doubt at rest as to the thief that stole Usha's heart by flickering in her dream. Usha soon came back to herself and Chitrarekha learnt from her how a family likeness seemed to pervade the last three figures her eyes alighted on and how the last and youngest of them was her ravishing lover. Chitrarekha then explained to Usha that the three figures which fascinated her eye in the ascending degree, were Lord Sree Krishna, his son Pradyumna the then *avatar* of Manmadha or Cupid and the last one was Cupid's son, Aniruddha, the loveliest of them all.

How to compass their union—that was the rub. Four courses were open. One was for Usha to go away to him unseen. Such a step would wear the discreditable aspect of an elopement. It was at once discarded on that account. The second course was to enlist her father's sympathies and get him to propose in furtherance of his daughter's happiness. That, for obvious reasons, was manifestly out of the question. The third course was to communicate with the lover and his parents and kinsmen, irrespective of Usha's

parent. But that lover, his parents and kinsmen might not be induced to move in the matter, without some judgment on the girl's fitness, especially as she came of an extraction, traditionally unfriendly to a regard for Sree Hari. The fourth and the only alternative was to contrive a meeting of Usha and her lover and thereby to gain the latter's heart and through him the good will, consent and co-operation of his puissant kinsmen, with Lord Krishna to guide and lead them. This last alternative had the further merit of bringing matters to a head very speedily. In case Aniruddha was, as it were, spirited away from home, he would be forthwith missed and the steps, that would be adopted to trace him out, would inevitably force on a battle between Usha's father and the kith and kin of the object of her love. Thus would the success of her love be accelerated in a degree which nothing else could. There was indeed the risk of a scandal of the maiden behaving un-maidenlike—no matter whether she acted directly or indirectly. This objection was deeply and anxiously pondered over. But it was finally put aside for two reasons. Firstly, there was the stubborn hope

that the plan would achieve Usha's guiltless object. Secondly, there was no help for it. It was further taken for granted, on due consideration, that the first, presumptive impressions about Usha's conduct, would be, soon and effectually, removed when the world came to know, why and under what imperious circumstances, the seemingly-dubious scheme was resolved upon, for want of anything better and with the purest of motives. The conclusion therefore was ultimately arrived at, that the *finale* should be precipitated by the abstraction of Aniruddha from his family home. So far it was easy to decide. But then how was this almost impossible job to be fulfilled? Chitrarekha was again equal to the occasion; for there was no question of difficulties for her in passing through the several gates, watched by sentinels, either in the ramparts of Bana's city or of Sree Krishna's, as Chitrarekha announced that her skill to become invisible to the naked eye would serve her admirably. With a blithe, confident heart, Chitrarekha started forthwith on her mission to filch away Lord Krishna's grandson. As she was dashing along in an æreal form, with the rapidity of

lightning, her progress was arrested by sage Narada, who hallooed to her. They met at once and the purpose of her mission was soon disclosed. Narada, who had already foreseen it and had come to warn and arm her against a danger, unknown to her, told her how the city of Dwāraka was, all night, safeguarded against intruders—chiefly of the Rakshasa type—by the Lord's world-shattering disk (*chakra*) moving round the city with more than a fancy's velocity and how her entry would be, thereby, effectually thwarted. Chitrarekha, thus found that, like unto Tantalus of the Grecian mythology, the object of her desire seemed to be within reach and yet beyond reach. Thus taken aback she stood as if helpless, and the sage too looked frigidly on. Soon roused from her torpour and inaction, Chitrarekha besought Narada to show her the way out of the peril. After seeming puzzled and contemplative for a brief period, he whispered in her ear a talismanic syllable and a watch-word which would propitiate the divine missile in favour of those who did not seek entry with an evil project which, Narada assured her, her present mission was not. With revived spirits and thus fitly

armed, Chitrarekha made reverence to the sage and took leave of him. She resumed her journey in redoubled swiftness to make up for lost time and was at last within the bedroom of Aniruddha. All unconscious of the coming event—be it called trouble or be it called bliss—the youth was wrapped up in a sleep which knew no cares. Pronouncing a soporific spell upon the slumbering figure and being assured in mind that its effects would last for some hours, she took the shape of a formless giant of strength and bore him away to Usha's boudoir within less than an hour. There, she set down the treasure, she had brought, in the presence of Usha. Left alone for a time with the sleeping, silent, *neplus ultra* specimen of beauty, she kept gazing on it, admiring every detail of that singularly symmetrical workmanship of the divine hand. Before long, the spell spent its potency and the youth was beginning to show signs of waking life.

Ensnconced in a safe corner of the room whence she could have a full view of Aniruddha's movements, she waited for the disenchantment of her enchanting lover. The sleeping figure suddenly jumped up in

the bed, rubbed its eyes to dispel the lingering traces of slumber and looked inquisitively around. To Aniruddha—for that was the awakened figure—the scene was passing strange and he could not resist the notion that he was, as it were, snatched away from his home. Before his misgivings could give way to anger, Usha, in front of her numerous handmaids, who had assembled about her on timely prior notice, glided into his presence in a delightful gait, supplicatory attitude and with a bewitching countenance, lighted up with a winsome smile of endearment and holy love. That countenance had its ineffable effect of softening the mind of Aniruddha and reconciling him to the situation in which he found himself. Free from wrath or agitation, Aniruddha interrogated Usha as to how he had been translated there and why. On receiving a full and unqualified confession on her part, he was supremely pleased with her pluck and ardent love for him and he plighted his word to make her his wife,—come what might. He told her of the variance that must needs arise between the family to which he belonged and her father Bana and his friends; but he told her

also of his own, his father's and his grandfather's matchless prowess to bear down all opposition and render their union an accomplished fact. The loving pair could indeed become man and wife *a la* Sakuntala and Dushyanta, whose story of consummated love has long been familiar to Western readers. But she preferred to wait, knowing that Aniruddha must be missed on the morrow and, under the guidance of Lord Sree Krishna, would be unerringly traced to Bana's palace. To effectually shut the mouth of malicious gossip they resolved to keep aloof from each other, to keep apartments far asunder, and never to meet except in the presence of Usha's numerous maids. Be it said, however, to the infinite credit of Usha that she would have gladly shunned even this degree of seemingly dubious freedom, if she were sure of her father's acquiescence. Of this, she was by no means certain. To the contrary, she was absolutely convinced. It was therefore that she maintained the secret, despite herself and left it to the drift of events to make it public. Such a secret is never successfully kept for many hours. The more timid of Usha's maids made haste to bring their discovery to the notice of the king, a



little before daybreak, lest he might take them to task for complicity or designed reticence. King Bana was beside himself with fury when he heard of it. He forthwith called a secret council of his ministers and advisers and declared his determination to capture and decapitate Aniruddha, whom he fancied to be a guilty-minded intruder into the rooms of his unwilling and dutiful daughter. That his daughter had not chosen to raise an alarm was urged upon him as a powerful argument against his theory and it was further pressed that, if the youths had, as a fact, united their hearts and hands in love, it did no good to oppose the bent of their inclinations. Bana saw not the force there was in that piece of wholesome advice; for his fierce, brutal nature was uppermost in him and he could not bring himself coolly to excuse conduct which he construed into effrontery which he would not for his consent to wed his daughter. For this reason and regardless of all extenuations and consequences to his own child, he gave orders that the apartments of Aniruddha should be beleaguered that very instant and that the fancied trespasser should be taken into custody. All unconscious of what was

coming, Usha and the captain of her affections kept their respective rooms in strict avoidance of each other. Chancing to step near a window, Usha noticed a degree of bustle, followed by a gradual gathering of troops, not far from her guest's apartments and she began to be alarmed—not so much, be it said, on her own account, as on account of the safety of the lord of her whole-souled love. She lost no time in breaking her suspicions to him through a trusty maid; but it was only to evoke in him that heroic, indomitable courage which was more than enough to neutralise all the threatened efforts at violence to him or to his lady-love. Such was the bold message he sent back to her.

The sun was high up and the mass of troops which besieged the Zanana looked like a wall of adamant. Turned into a coward by her conscience, Usha cowered beside a protected casement and half peered through it to witness the serried ranks assembled. But Aniruddha, conscious of his unassailable heroism, stood right opposite to the window and cast on the soldiers an intrepid glance, not unmixed with a scornful smile. The full and leisurely look, which he

allowed them to have, of his undaunted face half  
worsted them already and they mechanically held  
their ground, hopeless of their lives, but from fear that,  
in case they retired or fled, they might be shot for  
cowardice or desertion. The order was soon given to  
climb up and capture Aniruddha, but the few, that  
ventured forth as the forlorn hope, fell victims to a  
door-bolt which, for want of his regular weapons,  
Aniruddha hurled at them, invested with mystic,  
preternatural power which he best knew how to  
impart to the flimsiest blade of grass even. That  
missile of mysterious potency put to flight Bana's  
troops down to his own personal retinue, and he  
and his minister alone were left to cool their heels  
in the palace grounds. In a fit of rage, he was about  
to challenge the youth for a single combat, but he  
paused—paused not from any recognition of the un-  
equal contest, but because his flag-staff had not toppled  
down to certify that the youth would satisfy his  
thirst for an equal enemy. He thought that, if he  
incarcerated the youth, the tidings would reach his  
people and some warrior, who might be his match,  
might appear to claim his kinsman. This done, he

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