

been assured that the likeness was only a coincidence, that it could be nothing more; for the photograph—if photograph it was—had been in my possession for more than twenty years, while this girl could not possibly be over twenty years old. But, in my surprise and agitation, I did not consider this, and to me she was the creature in flesh and blood of my youthful dreams.

The fakir himself was an old man, thin almost to emaciation, yet of powerful frame. His hair was sparse and gray; his sallow face was half-covered by a straggling beard, and his eyes were deep-sunken, but marvelously brilliant. He wore the American evening dress; but this conventionality of attire could not hide the real personality of the man—a personality that struck me at once as being sinister and repulsive.

He performed numerous feats of legerdemain and magic, to which, however, I gave little heed, my attention being absorbed by his fair assistant. Finally, he announced, in his broken English, that he would give an exhibition of his power in telepathy. "Mlle. Vaisya," as he called her, should be put into a trance or hypnotic sleep; if, then, a dozen or more persons in the audience would each write on a slip of paper a number, a name, a date or a sentence, and hand the same to him, the young lady, controlled by his will, and without receiving any other communication, would move along the aisles and reproduce for each one the identical number, name, date or sentence that had been written.

The girl seated herself in a chair, and he made several passes with his hands before her face in the approved manner of Mesmer, with the result that her eyes quickly closed. He then went among the audience with a hat, collecting the slips of paper from nearly a score of persons in various parts of the theatre, myself among the number, and reading each slip as received.

Standing then in front of the footlights, he made a commanding gesture with his arm, and the girl arose, still with closed eyes, and descended the steps from the stage. Watching her closely, I noted that her face was pale, but I could not tell if she were actually in a trance. She moved as one is supposed to walk in sleep, listlessly and aimlessly. As she advanced along the aisle, she stopped suddenly, as if impelled by some unseen force, and, employing a pencil and a small pad of paper she carried, wrote something which she handed to the person by whom she stood. Then she continued her way, up one aisle and down another, pausing and writing frequently, actuated, apparently, only by an occasional sweep of the arms on the part of Naka Narayana. When she came and stood by me my heart beat violently, and I gazed up into her mobile face with an intensity of excitement that could hardly have escaped the attention of those around me. Without an instant's hesitation she wrote, handed me the sheet of paper, and passed on. What I read was this, in a free, running hand:

Kismet—what must be, shall be.

They were the same words that I had written on the paper taken by the magician. Nevertheless, coming from her to me, they seemed to have a new and tremendous significance, and in the extravagance of my delusion I half fancied that she had wittingly given them a personal meaning and application.

The girl then returned to the stage, and Naka Narayana, taking the slips one by one from the hat, read them aloud, and elicited from each contributor to the performance an acknowledgment of the correctness of Mlle. Vaisya's transcription. She was then awakened, and the curtain fell, amid great applause.

The magic or trickery of the proceeding, which so mystified and amazed the

audience, was lost upon me in the contemplation of the mystery surrounding the girl herself, the mystery of her identity and her subjection to the odious fakir. I had but one concern in I knew, and that was, to make the acquaintance of "Mlle. Vaisya," whose affinity to myself I had never doubted in the worship of her image, when she was only an image, and whose life, I felt, was designed by fate to be interlinked hereafter with my own.

It need hardly be said that I wasted no time in the pursuit of my purpose. As I was personally known to the manager of the theatre, I experienced no difficulty in obtaining, on some trivial pretext, the private address of Naka Narayana, which, investigation disclosed, was that of a cheap theatrical boarding house not far from Washington Square. I applied there for a room, and secured one at the back of the house, learning, at the same time, by adroit questioning of the none too secretive landlady, that the magician and his assistant occupied separate rooms on the top floor, that they took no meals in the house, except, perhaps, of their own preparing, and that the girl never went out during the day, and the man but seldom.

During the next week my ingenuity was taxed to the utmost to secure a meeting with the girl. Long hours I sat in my room, watching the hallway, with the door ajar, but she never went out except in the evening, in company with the magician, who never himself left the house save at this time. On every occasion possible I brought myself to her attention, until I congratulated myself that she must be familiar with my features and conscious of my interest.

Finally, one morning, Naka Narayana went out alone; and I was about making up my mind to resort to bold measures to secure the coveted interview, when one of the servants of the house brought me a note, in a handwriting that I instantly recognized. It read thus:

"I need a friend. Can I trust you?"

"VAISYA."

My delight was supreme, and I instantly replied that I was hers to command, and that I would await her in the back parlor below, where we could speak undisturbed.

She came down almost immediately, in a simply made dress of dark-red India silk. As she entered the room where I stood, she hesitated, glanced around uneasily, and then, impulsively, appealingly, came forward with extended hand.

"I have waited for this moment for twenty years," I said, looking into her eyes.

She gazed at me in surprise.

"Then—then you know my story?" she asked.

"I know nothing of you," I said, "except that your image has been before me all my life."

"It is strange—I do not understand," she answered.

"Tell me how I can serve you," I went on. "You can confide in me, utterly."

She sat near me, with her eyes downcast for a moment and the color slowly rising in her cheeks.

"I do not know why I should have appealed to you," she began, "unless it was because I read something in your face that reassured me. I fancied a week ago that you were—were interested in me."

"It was not merely fancied," I interjected. "From the moment I saw you I devoted myself to making your acquaintance. You see I am frank, for I wish you to be frank with me. Opportunities such as this are too hard to obtain, to be wasted. Tell me everything, and whatever you would have me do, shall be done."

"You are right—opportunities are few," she said. "I am watched nearly all the time, and when I am not watched I am helpless. All my life I have been in the power of Naka Narayana, and rarely have I ever passed a word with any other human being. I have wanted always to escape from this slavery, but if ever a chance presented itself, my will was not my own, and I could not take advantage of it. My story is a strange one, but I can tell it to you in a few words. I was born in India. Who my parents were I do not know, but I think my father was an Englishman and my mother a native. I have no other name than Vaisya that I have ever heard. When a child I fell into the hands of Naka Narayana, who was even then an old man, and famed for supernatural powers. From the first he exercised the most absolute control over my mind. He taught me to read and write in several languages, but allowed me no freedom, and compelled me to undergo his own rigid regimen of existence. When I was about fifteen he informed me that it was in his power to keep me young for a very long time. Age, he said, came from the wasting away of the physical powers of the human body by constant use; this waste was inevitable in conscious moments, and for every day of consciousness a night's sleep was required to restore the lost energies; from this he argued, that without consciousness, and hence, without this vital waste, save only at necessary intervals, the individual would grow old almost imperceptibly, and live indefinitely. It was his purpose, he declared, to thus preserve my youth. "Hereafter," he said, "except for a few hours at a time, your physical functions will be kept entirely in abeyance, and your beauty will thus be long in fading. I have experimented on myself, and I have already prolonged my life beyond the age of most men. By this means I shall defy death for perhaps another generation."

"All that he said I do not remember. I was in despair when I realized that my slavery was to be even more abject and complete than it had been before, and my soul revolted at the plan he contemplated. But I was too thoroughly in his power to make any resistance, and from that day to this I have been most of the time in a state of torpor or trance. How many years have gone by I do not know. Twice we have crossed the seas, and given exhibitions on the stage such as we are giving now. Even during the two or three hours each evening when I am awake, I am still under his spell and the slave of his will. At no time, not even now, when he has left me awake for the first time in months in order that I might repair a stage costume that was torn last night, am I free, physically, from his influence. I have always wanted to escape from him; but I feel that I cannot escape alone—I have not the strength; I should not know how to elude him if I were away. At times I think I am going mad; and I have appealed to you, as the only one in whose face I have ever read sympathy, to save and protect me."

"And I will do so," I answered earnestly. "Listen, Vaisya; though I never saw you until, by chance, a week ago, I have known and loved you always. Years ago a picture came into my possession—the picture of a girl—to me the most beautiful girl in all the world, and that girl has filled my dreams by day and night ever since. It was you picture—I know this now—and it is the happiness of my life that I may be the instrument in the hands of fate to rescue you from your abominable slavery. Let us lose no time; go at once to your room and secure such of your belongings as you wish to take with you, and we will escape before Naka Narayana returns," and I seized her hand and

pressed it to my lips.

She made no reply for a moment, but stood trembling, as if a struggle were going on within her. Then she said, with a radiant face:

"You give me strength. I trust you. It shall be as you say."

She quitted the room and went up the stairs, leaving me thrilled and intoxicated by her beauty and the prospect of joy that was before me. While I waited her return I paced the floor in a fever of impatience, pondering over the marvelous story of her life that she had told me, and wondering at the sorcery of Naka Narayana. "It is fate—fate," I was saying to myself; "fate has kept her for me all these years," when I heard the front door of the house open and shut, and footsteps in the hall.

Looking out cautiously I beheld the magician.

He was holding his hand against his breast and walked unsteadily. In the glimpse that I caught of his face I saw that which startled and shocked me. His sallowness had changed to pallor, his deep-sunken eyes were staring wildly and his age seemed to have doubled since last I looked upon him.

Evidently he had been suddenly stricken while on the street, and, reprehensible as the feeling may have been, yet something of exultation succeeded my astonishment and chagrin at his appearance. "Should he die," flashed through my mind, "the one great danger the one great obstacle in my road to happiness will be removed."

I approached the door leading to the hallway and looked after him. He clutched the railing of the stairs and tottered as he slowly made his way upward. Once or twice I thought he would fall backward. When he reached the top of the first flight he paused and rested for a moment before pursuing his way. Presently I could hear him stumbling up the second flight.

Curiosity impelled me to follow him, and when he had reached the top floor, I was on the floor below, where I stopped and listened. I could hear him breathing heavily as he entered the room that I knew to be Vaisya's. The door closed behind him, and for a

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