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THE HUNCHBACK; OR, THE HINDOO PRINCESS.

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CHAPTER I.

Our story opens upon a sunny afternoon in India, upon the banks of that sacred Ganges wherein the Hindoo lives his body with prayerful trust in its healing powers. Gaudy flowers are nodding over its rippling course, loading its surface with their dainty fragrance, and here, stretching back from the sloping banks, lies a garden which nature and art have combined to render strikingly beautiful. There is an Oriental luxuriance and lavish splendor in these peerless gardens, but more beautiful than all the stately and floral gems, the eye falls at once upon a child of exquisite symmetry and loveliness.

She cannot be more than eight or nine years of age, yet her sweet development of form gives promise of extreme beauty. Literally loaded with flowers, the air is musical with her merry laugh and joyous words. Too light in her soft olive complexion for a Hindoo, she is yet too dark for an European, and the practiced eye would at once detect those tokens that indicate the mingled blood of both races.

Following close upon the footsteps of this little hour came a youthful form of the other sex, perhaps a year her senior. Sharing her innocent delight, he was her playmate, but hardly of the same race. His young but intelligent features were of that clear, European complexion, that contrasted finely with the olive of his companion's cheek. They threw themselves together upon the ground, near the cooling influence of a sparkling fountain, and commenced to entwine their vines of gaudy leaves and flowers into wreaths for each other. Not far from them, a Nubian servant, evidently entrusted with their charge, after watching them with half closed eyes, at last dropped lazily upon the ground where he stood, not even seeking the friendly shelter of a tree, but dropping thoughtlessly to sleep beneath the burning rays of the afternoon sun.

We should never tire of watching those beautiful children, so thoughtless and so happy—the picture of innocence, of peaceful joy.

Stay! What stealthy and hideous form is that crouching and creeping towards the Nubian? So cautious and so like children are entirely ignorant of its proximity. On, on it comes, until it is nearly upon the Nubian. Heaven protect the sleeping one, for the strange animal with glaring eyes and distended mouth is just upon him! Ha! that fendish form now rises to its height—it is a hyena! His hot breath is upon the Nubian's brow; but he wakes not. Look again; the creature turns towards the children; they are more tempting prey for his appetite. He moves on slowly but steadily!

At that moment the boy's back was towards the fearful beast, and his companion, looking up suddenly from the wreath she was braiding, screams with terror at the sight of the approaching beast. The boy springs to his feet at once, but hardly before the wild animal is upon him. With brave instinct he reaches to a heavy pruning knife, which a gardener has left handy, and with the quickness of light springs back between the hyena and the girl just as the animal leaped forward. The lad, with steady eye and hand, poised his sharp weapon so that he thrust it down the very throat of the furious creature, receiving upon his breast the headlong fury of the animal, which was aimed for the more delicate child.

The screams of the child aroused the half-stupid Nubian, who rushed forward in time to disengage the poor boy from the dying grasp which the hyena had taken upon his arm as the two rolled together upon the ground.

That bold thrust of the knife at the opportune moment, and the prompt interposition of his own person before that of his companion, saved the child's life beyond a doubt; and so that lovely and trembling being felt as she now threw her arms tenderly about the young hero's neck, and then sobbed hysterically.

The Nubian, trembling with fear at his thoughtless neglect, now conducted the children towards the doors of his master's palace, turning ever and anon to look back and assure himself that the hyena was really dead; for the whole encounter had been so rapid as to seem more like a troubled dream than real fact.

The English rule and conquests in India have vastly changed the Hindoo race. Sir De Lacy Howard, governor of the district of Jungpore, under the English home government, had resided long in Northern India. Hither he had carried with him a gay wife and a cousin, a beautiful girl, who was also his ward. His high position in authority brought him much in contact with the rajah, Hafiz Roy, rightful prince of the soil over which Sir De Lacy Howard was placed as governor. The rajah, with unlimited wealth, and a somewhat indolent and ease-loving disposition, preferred social ease to lordly control, and therefore peacefully grew up in his estate with only the name of prince.

Hafiz Roy and Sir De Lacy were very warm friends, and finally a closer tie was woven between them by marriage of the rajah with Sir De Lacy's ward, the beautiful English girl who had accompanied his wife to India. The English government was highly prosperous in his ventures, outside of his official capacity, and was

only too happy in rendering his home a palace of comfort and luxury, while the rajah's splendid mode of living was the envy of half of Bengal. The scene we have just described occurred in the gardens of the rajah's palace, and the children were the daughter of Hafiz Roy and the son of Sir De Lacy Howard.

Was it to be wondered at that those children afterwards felt bound to each other by the strongest ties? From earliest infancy they had been playmates, had been like brother and sister to each other, but now Zamine seemed to lean upon little Alfred Howard with as much confidence in his power to protect her as though he were a full grown man, in place of a tiny though resolute boy. Zamine's deep dark eyes were never tired of beaming tenderness upon him, and he was ever content so that she were but his companion.

It is no secret to say that the parents of each saw this with delight, for from the first years of their birth, those parents had designed them for each other, should Heaven bless them with life and health.

"What did papa mean about your going away, dear Alfred?" asked Zamine as the two walked together with arms about each other's waists.

"The boy shook his head seriously, but made no reply.

"Why do you not tell me, Alfred?" persisted Zamine, looking tenderly up into his face, and folding her two hands over his shoulder.

"Nay, dear Zamine," he answered, touched by her affectionate appeal, "it is a matter I do not like to talk nor think about."

"What, dear Alfred?"

"Why, this going away," he answered; "this leaving home and you."

"But you'll be back again directly?" asked his companion, eagerly.

"Nay, if I go, it will be for not a few days, but years, Zamine."

The child looked at him inquiringly for a moment, while her lips trembled and her eyes filled with tears. The boy stooped tenderly and kissed them away, but could not trust his own voice to speak lest it should betray the tender emotion that was struggling at his heart.

"You know, Zamine," he said, after a moment's delay, "that I am going to England, to be educated after the manner of our country, and to improve the superior advantages afforded them for self-cultivation. You know we have heard our father speak often of this plan."

"Yes, dear Alfred, but I have thought the time so far off that I have not heeded it much, and now you say it has nearly come, I tremble to think of it. O, Alfred, what should I do without you?"

As Zamine said this, she laid her hand upon his young breast and wept in silence, while the tears also fell fast from her companion's eyes upon her dark, glossy hair. It was their first sorrow, and to both it was very earnest.

But Alfred was right; he was to be sent at once to England, and to adopt a thorough course of classical study, to fit himself for Oxford; nor could he expect to leave behind him there, for many a long and weary year. Perhaps he would never see them all again.

It was a sad day among the family and friends when young Alfred was got ready to take ship from Calcutta. Sir De Lacy Howard placed great hopes and much parental affection in his promising son, and his leave-taking for the long absence was made quite a formal affair. His father, mother and Zamine all accompanied him across the country to the post of departure. In the vehicle the two children sat side by side. Slightly Alfred held the hand of his little playmate, but they exchanged hardly a word with each other. Both realized their long separation to come.

At last the hour came for him to go on board. His young heart beat rapidly; there were some pleasurable sensations in his feelings, a curious expectancy of adventure, a desire to see the world, interest in the huge ship that now floated in full sight with her sails already to wait him far away to the land of his father's. Zamine stood with tearful eyes upon the shore, her tiny hand still in his, when he kissed her tenderly and said: "May I have one of those curls, dear Zamine?"

Child as she was, Zamine blushed, just the faintest little blush, as she ran her hand through her dark, clustering ringlets, and selected one, held it up for him to cut. "If you want it, dear Alfred?"

The boy hastily secured the glossy tress, pressed his lips to her own, and hastening into the boat that awaited him, threw himself into the stern sheets, and covering his face with his hands, gave way to the flood of childish and innocent feeling that he had struggled until this moment to suppress.

The topsails were loosed and sheeted home, the broad canvass, sail after sail was spread upon the English ship, the hoarse words of command came over the water, and she shaped her course far out into the Bay of Bengal. Alfred maintained his stand near the taffrail until the shore faded entirely from view, and then he sought his berth to cry himself to sleep, to dream of the home he left behind him, with father, mother, and his dearly loved playmate.

CHAPTER II.

The rajah, Hafiz Roy, as we have intimated, was of that indolent, ease-loving class, who seek to enjoy life to the utmost, and ready at any time to concede a point rather than contest for what he thought

right. The wheels of Sir De Lacy's governmental office ran smoothly on, and he found time to play his favorite game of chess with the rajah daily, and often for many hours together, Zamine often sitting by them a silent spectator.

It was the second year of Alfred Howard's absence, when Zamine was called upon to lose her mother by death. Great was her loss, but yet so true and judicious had the departed parent been in the care of this, her only child, that she left an abiding influence for good behind her. Though but eleven years of age, Zamine was very womanly, both in mental and physical growth, and became the domestic idol of her dotting father.

For his child's sake the palace was made to glitter with splendid attendants, ornaments, petite amusements, and pets of all sorts. At first, after Alfred Howard had departed, she was quite inconsolable. Even for months she was so dejected as to cause anxiety on this account. But the keenness of her loneliness was gradually away; but not so the memory of her old playfellow. Everything remained to recall him to her mind, for every spot in those beautiful gardens had visited together oftentimes. Here they had braided flower wreaths, here played at hide and seek, here plucked and eaten the delicious fruit, and here Alfred had saved her life from the terrible hyena.

The district of Jungpore grew each year more and more populous with English residents both military and civil, until at length there was quite a large and choice circle of well-bred people, forming a pleasant society. Among them were many youths of either sex, about Zamine's age, and with whom she was more or less intimate. The queen of all their revels and sports, she was also the star that illumined the heart of more than one young but manly heart among the English residents.

Among these was the son of a wealthy commercial agent of the government, named Horace Gray, a fine, spirited and handsome youth, a year the senior of Alfred, who is absent in England. His vivacious spirits, clever accomplishments, good cultivation and gentlemanly characteristics, won the confidence of Zamine, who, with trusting innocence, admitted him to intimate friendship in her feelings. A few years of companionship had thus ripened their friendly relationship when Zamine was already sixteen years of age. The reader, however, must not suppose that she was during this lapse of years once untrue in her feelings towards the far-off playmate of her infancy. No—so frankly were her earnest feelings for him avowed before Horace Gray as to her own heart.

The quarterly arrival of the government packet at Calcutta always brought Zamine a kind, affectionate letter from Alfred, and in return bore him one from her. They were not loveless, sentimental effusions, but well written and interesting letters, through which a tender and affectionate spirit ran like a silver thread, linking their various themes in consonance together. In these letters the engagement between them was alluded to as a matter, not of doubt, but as one to which they had been born, and to which their own hearts had set seal.

But still the intimacy of Horace Gray with the young and beautiful Hindoo girl continued. He rode by her side, he strolled with her in her father's palace gardens, he rowed her fairy boat upon the artificial lake; in short they were so much together that those who knew her to be the affianced bride of Alfred Howard, shook their heads significantly, and said that the absent one was doubtless forgotten!

Though Horace Gray undoubtedly loved Zamine, he had never told her so. He knew that would not do; it would lead to an end of their intimacy at once. He knew her to be loyal to the absent one, and he knew her to be loyal to the absent one, and he knew her to be loyal to the absent one, and he knew her to be loyal to the absent one.

In a neatly arranged study in one of the main buildings which made the clustering college blocks at Oxford, England, sat a young student, before whom lay an open book and a quill pen. The student was a person of fine, manly appearance, quite handsome, with a high commanding forehead and clear blue eye. The reader would have easily recognized him as the boy he had seen years before in the palace gardens of Rajah Hafiz Roy. His face is grave, too grave in its expression, not to indicate something of trouble within. He takes up the epistle and reads it over slowly then replaces it upon the table before him.

The letter was an anonymous one, purporting to be from one who was his friend and read as follows:

"Absence is a great test of affection. Short absence stimulates, long absence is apt to obliterate. Place not too strong trust in your conceded claims to the hand of the fair daughter of Hafiz Roy. Other than your hand is ever ready by her side; soft flattery is not unpleasant—ready adoration is not always unrequited! Perhaps these hints are worth your consideration."

Alfred Howard tried hard to understand the true spirit of this note, tried to reach beyond the letters he saw upon the page before him, and understand the actuating motive of the writer. In the years of pleasant study and rapid pro-

gress which he had passed in England, he had ever been stimulated by one idea, that of returning at length to Zamine's side, endowed with such true manly accomplishments as should command her respect as well as her love. A doubt of the truth and endurance of her affection had never once crossed his mind; but here was matter for consideration.—He would not, could not doubt her; but the long absence might perhaps "obliterate." In his heart (so entirely hers) he felt that she was truly his, that the dear letters he was so regularly receiving could be no counterfeits; but then this epistle had opened a door for doubt, and his thoughts were very, very harrowing. Perhaps, he thought, duty would make her keep her early contract, and then he might get a wife, but one without a heart!

"Now," said he, at last, half aloud, "Zamine is free, free as the air; she shall never marry me unless she does it with a free heart, unless she prefers me to all else on earth. If she has grown up as lovely as she was in childhood, how beautiful she must be! No wonder she finds suitors—ay, and many of them. No wonder she will be tested. I will not pine (if I can help it) for this anonymous hint; and yet, truth to say, I believe whoever writes that thought he spoke the truth, let the actuating motive of the communication be what it may."

At this moment the door of his room was thrown violently open, and in rushed a couple of college chums, full of life and spirit.

"Hallo, Fred, here I've made up a match at foils with you and Charley.—Ten to one that you bit him fair in three bouts. He's agreed—stakes up; and if he touches you at all, I lose."

Alfred took up the note he had been reading, drew a low sigh, banished for a moment the trouble from his mind, and taking down a couple of foils from the wall prepared to engage in a playful but manly game, and to make good the bets which his gay friend had made through confidence in his skill with the weapon.

Perhaps no scene could have been introduced so well calculated as this which at the moment chanced, whereby the character of young Howard might have been better studied by a stranger. The cool yet careful manner in which he took his guard, poised and felt his weapon, bore his point and parried and thrust, were calculated to exhibit all the many qualities of manliness, self-reliance and promptness which were prominent and peculiar in him. The contest was soon decided, and Alfred's adversary was easily "touched," and then dismissed.

In his assiduity for mental culture he had in no way neglected his physical training, and thus bore away the palm from his entire class, but with such modest grace as to create no ill will.

Eight years have passed since Alfred Howard had left that dear playmate on the shore at Calcutta, and five more were yet to be consumed before his education would be sufficiently advanced for him to graduate, and fulfil his father's plan of study and return to India. As he now sat alone once more, thinking over his prospects, the purport of the warning letter and kindred themes, the five years yet to come seemed longer to him than ever before; but he was brave at heart, and he resolved not to swerve in the path of duty he had laid out; he would remain the appointed time and devote himself to his self culture as earnest as ever.

The past eight years had not been without change. Zamine's mother died, as we have already intimated, and Alfred's own mother had also gone to her long sleep these three years since.—"Change," change—it is written upon everything," murmured Alfred; and amid the course of time also change thee, my dear, gentle Zamine? I will not doubt thee; I will not even hint a doubt to thee."

With this implicit confidence in the beautiful Hindoo girl, Alfred seemed to settle his course of conduct, and he did not even mention a thought to her in his letters which could indicate the shadow, however slight, which had passed across the field of his affection for her. The letters of both bore token of the most unchanging and full confidence in each other which they had ever done.

In the meantime Sir De Lacy Howard's letters were as regular as ever to his son, freighted with affectionate advice and ample remittances. He applauded his son's constancy of purpose, and held up to him the honor and satisfaction that must result from a careful persistency in the course of study and discipline which had been adopted. He was a kind father and a judicious one, exercising great influence and control over his son's mind, and his wish with Alfred was indeed law.

But we have other characters and scenes, which we must bring before the mind's eye of the reader in far off India.

CHAPTER III.

In a room fitted with every luxury and elegance that taste and an ample fortune could command sat Zamine, the daughter of Hafiz Roy. She was indeed lovely as a child, but now all the promise of her infancy had been more than fulfilled—she was beautiful in every sense of the word. Dressed in half Eastern, half European costume, she looked bewitchingly attractive. Her wealth of rich black hair, and eyelashes that were so long and dark as to be a distinctive feature in her loveliness; her arms bared to the shoulders, presenting a mould of faultless symmetry; her body, half reclining upon a mound of rich cushions,

formed a picture only too lovely for words to express.

There sat near her a young gentleman, but little her senior in years, whom the reader would have recognized as Horace Gray. He was reading to the beautiful Hindoo; and they were alone together, save the female servant who sat at her mistress's feet—or rather slept there; for sleep seems to occupy nearly the undivided attention of the entire Nubian race.

"Enough, enough," said Zamine, at length, with a languid toss of her fan.—"We can finish it at another time, Horace, for the hour has now arrived for my new teacher to meet me."

"Do you mean that hump backed Arab?"

"Yes, he is hump backed, to be sure, but one forgets it when he is present, he is so entertaining, so very agreeable."

"You seem to be much attached to your new friend?" said Horace Gray, half inquiringly and half sarcastically.

"Who would not like him, Horace? He is so quiet, so thoughtful, and so wise and kind, I almost fear him."

An uneasy shadow passed over the face of her companion, who could not patiently bear Zamine praise any one so jealous was he of her smiles. At that moment, as he was taking leave of her, there entered the apartment the person referred to. At first sight there was little to strike an observer in his general appearance, beyond the manifest fact that he was an Arabian, and one who, had nature not disgraced his form by a hump or protuberance over the region of the left shoulder blade, would certainly have been a finely formed and handsome man. He bowed first respectfully to Zamine, and then her retreating companion, who returned the salute distantly.

"Punctual to the very moment," said Zamine, consulting a tiny diamond-cased watch, as she addressed the Arab.

"It is a wholesome virtue," said the teacher, mildly, as he drew towards his pupil a little stand for the books he brought with him. He moved so gracefully, in spite of his deformity, did everything so noiselessly and easily, that there was a charm in watching his thoughtful and prompt procedure.

Had he been English, one would have set him down as some forty years of age, but the bronzed hue of the desert sat so well upon his handsome face that he looked like one who had hardly passed half that number of years. His neatly turned figure—always excepting the single deformity already referred to—was that of youth also, or at least not of maturity, and he could not be more than ten years older than his fair pupil.

"I'm prepared for a scolding," began Zamine, as he sat down by her side.

"For what, fair Zamine?"

"Because I have not even looked at that lesson you gave me to study," she replied.

"Why have you not?" he asked, in gently reproving tones.

"It is tedious to study."

"But you told me only yesterday that you liked it well."

"O, I mean when you are with me to explain."

The Arab turned his soft blue eyes quickly towards her; then slowly opened his books, as he said: "It shall be as you wish; and if you prefer to study only when I am present, we will acquire the lessons in that manner, and I shall still fulfil my trust to your confiding father."

Zamine smiled her gratitude, and the two were soon busy over the task before them. The Hindoo girl was lost in their occupation, each thought and each principle was so readily elucidated, so pleasantly impressed upon her mind; and at each moment she realized such new rays of light and intelligence radiating her only half-cultivated mind, that her pleasure was unmistakable. The Arab's voice was so low, so gentle, blending the elements of firmness and tenderness so equally, that Zamine really half felt the fear she hinted as to her English friend.

At length, the lesson being finished, the Arab prepared to leave his pupil; but this purpose Zamine frustrated by begging him to tell her some legend of the desert where his life had been passed. To this proposal he acceded readily, and with ready wit and charming ease, related one of those poetical stories in which Arabian literature is so rich.—Zamine drank in of every word, and found strange pleasure in listening to her tutor, whose enthusiastic eloquence in dwelling upon his country's beauty, and in describing her famous places, was most captivating.

And this was not alone the routine of to-day; it was the constantly recurring scene of each successive day. Zamine was changing rapidly in her manners, habits, intelligence; her tutor lent his best energy to instruct her, and that he was thoroughly capable was evinced beyond a doubt. A bright new world seemed to be opened to the Hindoo girl. Up to this period, her education had been of the most superficial character, but now she exerted herself willingly, assiduously, and found rich reward in the satisfaction that was the immediate result.

Horace Gray had but one characteristic to recommend him to Zamine, and that was his entire devotion to her. He had striven to please her in those grateful little trifles which go to make up the daily life of the young and thoughtless; but now that she had received new endowments of taste, intelligence and love of study, Horace Gray was much less desirable to her as a companion. She cared, indeed, little for the companion-

ship of any one save her teacher, the quiet, thoughtful and intelligent Arab.

It was now about eight months since one afternoon, when the Rajah Hafiz Roy had risen from his bountiful meal, that an Arabian teacher of languages presented himself and solicited the post of teacher to his daughter Zamine. The father was himself a man of goodly intelligence for an Oriental prince, and the prompt answers that the new comer gave to his questions at once satisfied him of his ability, and he gladly seized upon the opportunity of doing that for his child which he realized was of so much importance.

Thus Yusuf Hassan was at once established in the rajah's family, and so well had he adapted himself to both father and child that he had been raised to an equal footing with them in all domestic relations. Sir De Lacy Howard had died some twelve months since, and the rajah was only too happy to find in Yusuf Hassan one who could play quite as good a game of chess, and in this way an hour or two was passed daily.

The father was not sorry to observe the devotion that his daughter bestowed upon her studies. She seemed only happy when Yusuf was teaching her, or when she sat gazing into the mild depths of his soft blue eye, and listening to his stories of life and adventure in the desert. Horace Gray, poor fellow! seemed to be entirely forgotten. He was not naturally a bad fellow, but there was a strange animosity springing up in his bosom towards the hunchback. He grew morose and sought to be alone, avoided his former companions, and sat for hours by himself locked up in his sleeping apartment.

Well, who would have wondered?—Every one could see that Horace loved Zamine devotedly, and up to the time of her intimacy with the Arab teacher, she had permitted at least the nearest relation of friendship to exist between them. But now she scarcely saw Horace at all; or if she did, it was but for a moment, and then in the most careless spirit, for her mind was elsewhere. Horace Gray saw all this, and the fiend whispered sad things into his ear! The hunchback was watched, his steps were dogged; there was an enemy plotting his destruction.

The quarterly arrival of the English packet line had just brought Zamine a letter from England, bearing the signature of Alfred Howard. She now sat reading it alone in her private room.—There was a puzzled look, a singular expression, in her beautiful face. She used to bend so lovingly over those letters from Alfred! Now she read and placed it one side, but evinced little emotion, hurrying away to meet the Arab teacher.

A nice observer only would have discovered the tenderness that dwelt in the Arab's voice and eyes as he addressed his pupil, but the most casual would have realized the deep interest that the Hindoo girl felt in his society, the fascination of his companionship. And day by day this feeling grew more positive in its nature, until at last Zamine awoke from her day dream and asked herself: "Do I not love this man?"

The Arab seemed at first not to read her feelings, but at length, emboldened by her tenderness, he wooed her in secret. In her eyes he was no longer the hump-backed Arab, but the Apollo of her tenderest affection. Again came one of Alfred's letters from England, and the title of this, as well as its general purport, caused Zamine to pause and read her heart. What! was she guilty of infidelity to him, her early love—the who had saved her life, her long and tried friend? Alas! she knew not what to do. Covering her face with both her hands, she sobbed aloud: "I love the Arab, spite of his deformity, spite of Alfred, spite of everything. But Alfred, you have been true to me; we loved in childhood. You have my sacred promise, and that promise shall be kept, though I break my heart in the test. I will not enjoy the pleasant instruction and society of Yusuf a few short weeks more, and then he must go. Alas! it will nearly break my heart, but it must be so.—And with tears scarcely dried from her cheek, she went to seek the Arab, and to pursue by his side the intricate studies she had grown to love.

CHAPTER IV.

Zamine and Yusuf sat together in one of those beautiful arbors with which the palace grounds abounded. They had retired here to pursue the studies allotted for the afternoon. These had been completed, and gradually conversation between them had changed to other and dearer themes. Yusuf had declared his love to her some time since, emboldened by the spirit which he read in her eyes, and they sat now together, the Arab retaining one of her delicate hands in his own, while he breathed in gentle whispers a tale of love into her willing ear.

Suddenly Zamine started and gently withdrew her hand from his grasp, as though some sudden resolve had come over her. She paused a moment, then said: "Ah, Yusuf, I am very sad; very unhappy!"

"Unhappy, dearest! and why?"

"I know not how to tell you."

"Should there be any secret between two as dear friends as ourselves?"

"Yusef!"

"Well, Zamine."

"You know the story I told you of my childhood and my youthful companion, Alfred?"

The Arab regarded her thoughtfully for a moment. "Yes, I remember."

"Yusef, I am betrothed to him."

"I know it."

"You know it?"

"Yes."

"Why, this is strange!—and yet you woo me."

"Because I love you, dear one. The betrothal of children by parents I do not hold to be a sacred bond. If I can win your heart, I am worthy to wear the crown of your love."

"Ah, Yusuf, but this betrothal was not alone by our parents; it was as well by my own free and earnest consent. I am in honor bound."

"Do you love him, Zamine?" asked the Arab.

"I did love him truly and faithfully until I knew you."

"And now, Zamine?"

"Alas! what can I say?"

"Do you love him still?"

"This is too trying—too hard. O heart, O heart be still!" cried the agonized girl, holding her hands to her bosom.

"Do you love him still?" repeated the Arab.

"Yusef, I love you!—ay, with all my heart; but listen; I shall keep my promise with the noble and tender friend, who even now is on his way from England, as I learn by his last letter."

The Arab seemed much moved, but spoke not.

"Ah, forgive me, Yusuf, if I have appeared and do still appear inconsistent. You cannot know him as I do; it would break his heart were I to prove inconstant to him; and what happiness could I ever know after?"

The Arab shaded his face in his hands, and sighed aloud.

"I never had a thought of any other but him until you came, and your voice, like magic, went to my heart, and your eyes to my very soul. You awakened in me a love for study; you opened to me new fields of promise, a new world of intelligence. I am grateful—indeed I am!" She sobbed bitterly.

Still the Arab spoke not.

"O, speak to me, Yusuf. You would truly despise me, were I to true to such a man as Alfred. You would loathe one who should disregard such tender promises, such truthfulness."

"I fear love blinds me to all else but my own heart's promptings."

"No, no, you will not blame me; you are too noble at heart to counsel me to be untrue to him."

"I shall never blame you, Zamine, do what you please; but I cannot still the throbbing of my own heart."

As he said this, he raised her hand tenderly from his lips and turned slowly away from her side.

There is one character in our story of whom we must not lose sight. Horace Gray, observant at all times of Zamine's movements, was not so long in finding out that she loved the Arab as Zamine herself saw. He saw it and resolved that before Yusuf Hassan should come between him and Zamine's love, he would take his life like a dog's. He would have felt differently with regard to Alfred Howard; but to have this formed child of the desert rob him of the love of the Hindoo girl, rendered him desperate.

Of late young Gray had grown moody beyond all control of friends. He watched the Arab at all hours; and once, even when he had observed him just leaving Zamine's side at nightfall, in those thickly planted gardens, he had fired a pistol, aimed at his heart; but the bullet passed him harmless by, and Yusuf took little or no heed of the circumstance. This was a few weeks previous to the scene we have just related between Zamine and Yusuf in the garden.

The Arab left her, as we have said, turning his steps toward the river's bank, and thoughtfully walked on. He had not gone far before his quick ear detected a footstep behind him. It was not Zamine's, for hers was as light as a fawn's tread. It was heavy, quick, irregular, and indicated some strange mood in the bosom of him who caused those tokens. Yusuf simply loosened a long dirk that hung at his girdle and moved on. In a moment more he turned quickly, as if by instinct, but at the same moment a blade of a dagger was buried to the hilt in that part of his body which we have described as so deformed. It was evidently not so aimed, but turning suddenly, had caused the blade to enter there.

The Arab when thus faced about stood fronting his enemy with flashing eye and quick, leaving about. The figure that had pursued him was that of one fully his own size, athletic, well formed and able; but let that dagger blade have penetrated Yusuf as deep as it may, he is still more than a match for his subtle enemy. Seizing him by the throat, the Arab bent him nearly double to the ground, and dashing his head upon the hard path, permitted him to lie there almost insensible from the stunning effect of the fall; at the same taking his dagger from him, and quietly walking away.