



THE DESCENT OF THE SUN

F. W. BAIN

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**THE
DESCENT OF THE SUN**

A CYCLE OF BIRTH

**TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL
MANUSCRIPT
BY
F.W. BAIN**

1914

The Descent of the Sun by F.W. Bain.

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was in his eyes, feasting on the face of Shrí, which made him drunk like the juice of Soma ⁷⁴.

Then seeing the state of the case, Shrí said to herself: Alas! I have escaped the lesser danger only to incur the greater, and become the prey of this unrighteous King. Now there is no help for me, save in stratagem, and the natural craft of woman. And she lifted up her lashes, and cast on the King a crooked glance, that almost deprived him of his reason. And she said, moving her bow-arched eyebrows, with a smile: Out upon the heart of woman, for it is soft as a flower, and averse to constancy! Leave me awhile, for I must consider this matter. And yet, stay not away too long, for thou art good to look upon, and well-fitted to be my husband, were I not already the wife of another man. But hearing this, the King was utterly bewildered, and doubted the testimony of his ears. And he thought: Now she will consent, after a little coaxing. And he looked at her as she stood smiling at him, bowing like a flower from the weight of her bosom and the slenderness of her waist, and laughed in his intoxication, befooled by the roundness of her limbs and the blueness of her eyes, and forgetting that the Creator made woman to be an instrument of delusion, with an exterior of honey and an interior of poison. And he left her to perform his kingly duties, intending to return without delay, and thinking the fruit of his birth attained.

But as soon as he was gone, Shrí summoned a chamberlain, and said to him: Take me to the Head Queen, and lose not a moment, or it will be the worse for thee. And that chamberlain trembled and obeyed her, for he feared her power, saying to himself: The King would throw his kingdom into the sea for a glance from her eye, and now my life is on her forefinger. So when Shrí came before the Queen, she said to her: Lady, thou art my sole refuge. Know, that the King thy husband found me to-day in the city, and stole me away, seeking to make me his wife. Now contrive my escape, for I am the wife of another, and I may not be his wife. And do it very quickly, for this is an opportunity which will never occur again. Then the Queen looked at her, and said to herself: She says well, and I must indeed send her away without losing a moment. For if she remains here, and becomes his wife, the King

⁷⁴ A play on her name, as a digit of the moon: Sonia is the moon, and the famous intoxicant of the early Hindoos.

will abandon everything for her sake, and the state will go to ruin. Moreover, he will never again have anything to do with me or any other of his queens: for her beauty is like a very feminine incarnation of the five arrows of the god of love.

So she summoned her confidential women; and they disguised Shrí as a dancing girl, and conveyed her secretly out of the palace without delay. But when the King returned, and found that she was gone, he became mad. And he put to death, of his retainers, everything that was male.

13. A LIGHT IN DARKNESS

But Shrí, when she got out of the palace, instantly went out of the city by unfrequented paths, and entered the Great Forest. For she said to herself: If I remain in the city, I may fall again into the power of the King, or, it may be, of someone still worse. For alas! every man that sees me is blinded by my eyes, and I shall not always find a door of escape from persecution.

Moreover, to beauty without its guardian, wild beasts are less dangerous than men with souls through the influence of passion worse than those of beasts. Better far to be devoured by an animal, than become perforce the wife of another man.

So she went on through the forest for many days, supporting her life on roots and fruits and the water of the pools and streams. And she tore her clothes to pieces in the bushes, and pierced her feet with their thorns, leaving where she passed on the grass drops of blood, like rubies, mingled with the pearls of her tears that fell beside them, as often as she thought of her absent husband. And the deeper she went into the wood, the more her spirit sank, and the more her soul longed for the nectar of her husband's arms. Alas! the courage of women is but a pale and lunar image in the mirror of that of men, and vanishes in their absence. And at last there came a day when she was seized with panic, and a fear of unknown evil: and she sank down at the foot of a tree, and watered its roots with her tears.

Now it happened, that some Bhillas, hunting, by the decree of destiny, in the forest, came upon her track, and saw the drops of blood upon the leaves. And they followed them up, saying to themselves: Some wounded animal has passed this way. So as they came along, every now and then they stopped and listened. And suddenly, they heard the sound of the voice of a woman, weeping in the wood. Then full of astonishment, they proceeded in the direction of the sound: and all at once they saw Shrí, sitting under a tree, looking like an in-carnation of Rati grieving for her husband, when burned by Maheshwara. For her clothes were torn, and her hair was dishevelled, and her great eyes filled with tears resembled the petals of a blue lotus sparkling with drops of water cast upon them by the sporting of swans in a pool. So

those wild Bhillas wondered when they saw her, and said to each other: What is this marvel of a dancing girl, so ragged and so beautiful, weeping alone in the wood? And then they went up to her and stood round her in a ring. And she looked in the midst of those black barbarians like a digit of the moon in the jaws of Ráhu. Then after a while the spell of her beauty entered and poisoned the hearts of those Bhillas, like one of their own arrows. And each one said secretly to himself: She shall be my wife. So they debated about her, and proposed to each other to draw lots for her. But they could not agree about it, and fell to quarrelling, and it was as if a stone had been dropped into a nest of serpents.

Then one laid hands upon her, and then another, till she was nearly torn in pieces. And finally they came to blows, and fought for her over her body, filled by the frenzy begotten by her beauty, and the desire of exclusive possession ⁷⁵. And very soon they were all either dead or dying of wounds, for each was more eager to destroy another than to protect himself: and they lay all about her unable to move. Then Shrí, seizing her opportunity, and urged by terror, rose up and fled away from them, being sprinkled by their blood, mingled with her own, for she had received in the struggle a blow from a Bhilla that was meant for another. And she ran on, stumbling over roots and creepers in her haste, till she came at last to a forest pool. And there she lay down at the edge of the water and drank greedily; and afterwards washed her wound and stains, and bathed her feet, and overcome by weariness, fell asleep. Then the moon rose, and stole through the trees and kissed her with beams that trembled with admiration ⁷⁶; and the wild animals came down, one by one, to drink at the pool, and obedient to the commands of Triambaka, did her no harm, but licked her feet and hands as she lay.

Now, as fate would have it, this was the very pool, at which Umra-Singh had met with Ulupí, the daughter of the Daitya. And in course of the night, Ulupí came herself to the pool, to dance and sport according to her wont. And when she arrived, she saw Shrí., lying asleep by the pool. So she came and stood over her, and marvelled at the beauty of her limbs, even though her

⁷⁵ *ahamahamiká*, 'each one saying I, I.'

⁷⁶ The Moon proper, in Sanskrit, is *Lunus*, not *Luna*.

eyes were shut. And at last, out of curiosity, she touched her on the bosom with her finger, saying to herself: Is this an illusion, or is it a real woman, and is she dead or alive? But Shrí shuddered at her touch, for it suggested evil to her sleeping soul. And she opened her eyes, and their deep blue awoke the envy of the daughter of the Daitya, and astonished her even more than before.

Then they looked at each other, like light and darkness, and each wondered at the loveliness of the other, forgetful of her own. And at last Ulupí said: Who art thou, and what is thy name and family, and whence past thou come to my pool, and why? Shrí said: I am a King's daughter, looking for my husband, whom I lost, by the operation of crimes in a former birth, at the very moment that I found him again, after that he had returned to me from the Land of the Lotus of the Sun.

But when Ulupí heard her, she was filled with sudden rage and malice. And she said to herself: Ha! so this is that absent lotus of the day, by reason of whom my beauty was scorned, and set at nought by the handsome stranger who saw me dancing by my pool. And instantly she started up, and assuming a terrific form, she gnashed at Shrí with teeth like saws, and made horrible grimaces at her, saying:

Wretch, thou shalt never quit this wood, but wander for ever with thy accursed beauty among its trees, haunted and beset by hideous illusions till thou shalt long for death. Let thy absent husband save thee if he can. And she vanished with a peal of laughter, leaving Shrí fainting by the pool.

But Ulupí flew through the wood, and found Nightwalker, the old Wairágí, and told him all, and begged of him a boon, saying: Torment this miserable mortal woman, and deceive her with illusions for she has done me deadly injury. And Nightwalker rejoiced at the opportunity, for he remembered how Umra-Singh had defied him, and cut off his tongue in the wood. But he said: This is no easy matter, for we are forbidden by Pashupati to do her harm. But though I will do her no injury, I will delude this wandering wife of a vile husband, till she will desire to abandon the body of her own accord.

14. ILLUSION

But Shrí, when she came to herself, sat weeping, and fearing for herself in the future: for she foreboded evil from the malicious pranks of the daughter of the Daitya. And yet she could not tell, how she could possibly have offended her, or deserved her anger. And as soon as day broke, she rose up, and began to go trembling through the wood, in which the shadows of night still hung among the trees, starting at the noise of the falling leaves, and yearning for emancipation from danger in the form of her husband's presence.

Then after a while, she stopped and listened: for she heard among the trees steps, as of one coming in her direction. And her heart beat violently, as if to say: Let me abandon thy body, and so escape the danger coming on thee. So she hid herself in a hollow tree, and peeped out in terror. And suddenly, strange! there in the dim twilight she saw her husband coming towards her, looking just as he did, when she left him in the palace at Indiráláyá. And instantly she ran towards him, overcome by emotion and great surprise, and caught him in her arms, exclaiming: At last, at last, I have found thee again. And she wept aloud, and forgot in that moment all her sorrow; and she looked at him, and laughed for joy, and closed her eyes, as if, like the sun, the sight of him dimmed and overcame the faculty of vision. Then after a while, she opened them again, and started and shrieked, and her blood became ice, and her heart stopped. For he that held her in his arms was not her husband, but a hairy thing with hideous eyes, that resembled an incarnation of the brute in human shape; and it fastened those fearful eyes upon her own, and laughed and whined and panted like a beast with hot quick breath into her face. Then her senses abandoned her, like cowards, and she sank down to the earth in a swoon.

And when at length she revived, she looked, and saw that the sun was declining in the western quarter. But the moon had not yet risen, for it was the beginning of the dark half of the month. Then all at once memory came back to her, and she shook with agitation. And she said to herself: Was it a

15. THE DEAD OF NIGHT

So she lay, all night long: and when at length the day dawned, she came, though with difficulty, back to herself. And she tried to rise, but could not, for her limbs refused to do their duty. So she lay there, cold as snow, and shivering like the surface of a lake ruffled by the wind.

Then gradually the sun left his home in the eastern mountain, and ascended the sky. And warmed by his beams, a little of her strength returned: and after a while, she rose to her feet, which wandered away, and carried her where they would, until they brought her to another forest pool. And there she lay down, and leaned and drank of its water. And she looked into its mirror, and saw herself, slender and emaciated as the old moon, but pale and colourless as that moon at mid-day⁷⁸ And her long hair fell down over her shoulder into the water. Then she bound up that wet hair into a knot, and remained all day by the pool, not endeavouring to go further: for she said to herself: Rather let me stay here to perish of hunger, or furnish myself food to some wild beast, than continue my journey through a wood filled with illusions worse than a hundred deaths. For they wear the guise of a friend, and so finding entrance into my heart sting it like serpents, turning into poison the nectar of him whom most of all I long to see. Surely my sins in a former birth were terrible in their enormity: for I have suffered in this existence pain sufficient for many lives. And now I feel that I cannot long endure, for my strength is becoming exhausted. O that I could indeed find my husband, were it only to die in his arms!

So she sat by the pool, grieving like a female *chakrawáka* for her mate, while the sun made, like the enemy of Bali, but three steps over the sky. And when at last he sank, she also grew weary, and fell asleep on the edge of the pool. And in her dreams she saw her husband, and drank her fill of the nectar of his embraces. And then, in the dead of night, she awoke, and sat up, and looked, and to! there in the moonlight she saw him again, silently sitting beside her. And she leaped to her feet in agony, and turned to fly, and

⁷⁸ The same idea is beautifully put by Butler in *Hudibras*, where he calls the sun's light on the moon a Mysterious veil, of brightness made,
That's both her lustre and her shade.

