

mine, and if there's some day propitiousness in fortune, O old woman, I'll tell thee of what befell me in the kingdom of Shah Shamshureen: 'tis wondrous, a matter to draw down the lower jaw with amazement! Now, so it was, that in the eyes of one city I was honoured and in request, by reason of my calling, and I fared sumptuously, even as a great officer of state surrounded by slaves, lounging upon clouds of silk stuffs, circled by attentive ears: in another city there was no beast so base as I. Wah! I was one hunted of men and an abomination; no housing for me, nought to operate upon. I was the lean dog that lieth in wait for offal. It seemeth certain, O old woman, that a curse hath fallen on barbercraft in these days, because of the Identical, whose might I know not. Everywhere it is growing in disrepute; 'tis languishing! Nevertheless till now I have preserved my tackle, and I would descend on yonder city to exercise it, even for a livelihood, forgetting awhile great things, but that I dread men may have changed there also, — and there's no stability in them, I call Allah (whose name be praised!) to witness; so should I be a thing unsightly, subject to hateful castigation; wherefore is it that I am in that state described by the poet, when,

‘Dreading retreat, dreading advance to make,
Round we revolve, like to the wounded snake.’

Is not my case now a piteous one, one that toucheth the tender corner in man and woman?”

When she that listened had heard him to an end, she shook her garments, crying, “O youth, son of my uncle, be comforted! for, if it is as I think, the readers of planets were right, and thou art thus early within reach of great things — nigh grasping them.”

Then she fell to mumbling and reciting jigs of verse, quaint measures; and she pored along the sand to where a line had been drawn, and saw that the footprints of the youth were traced along it. Lo, at that sight she clapped her hands joyfully, and ran up to the youth, and peered in his face, exclaiming, “Great things indeed! and praise thou the readers of planets, O nephew of the barber, — they that sent thee searching the Event thou art to master.

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