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THE STAR OF DESTINY.

A TRUE TALE OF THE WAR IN AFFGHANISTAN.

It was one of those enchanting moonlight evenings, only to be seen in Bombay, and if seen, only to be enjoyed there after the overwhelming heat and oppression of the day, almost overcoming sense, as well as sensation, and depressing the mind with the painful consciousness of being unable to exert its powers, and with the fear of their best energies gradually becoming torpid under the influence of an Indian sky; as benumbing, though from a different cause, as the icy climate of the Northern Pole. Such an evening is well known to many of our readers by descriptions in books, or in the accounts of their relatives, who have served in the military or civil departments of India; let them imagine it in its beauty and freshness, the night I am speaking of.

Let them fancy an apartment, furnished with the utmost lavishness of taste, expense, and luxury, which, though the military accoutrements cast carelessly about it, and the soldier-like trifles, which betray, to a practised eye, a military occupant, marked it as the abode of an officer, bore indisputable evidence, in its costly and profuse decorations, of a greater scale of fortune than is common among the military inhabitants of India; for, though the glitter and trappings of the army dance brightly before its eyes, well does the match-making or match-seeking world of Bombay know, that it is the non-ornamental civilian, with his horse devoid of gay trappings, and his figure of military decoration, who can shower around his bride those beautiful luxuries, the offspring of his Indian gold, which can make life in India one marvelled and glittering fairy tale. An experienced Indian eye could mark, moreover, that the youthful occupants of this apartment had only lately arrived, in the burning land, where they sought accession to fortune, to fame, or to pleasure, as their case might be. Every one of the countless little luxuries, which the most skilful artists of London, of Paris, or of Germany, could produce, was there in its newest and brightest form, mingled with the still more exquisite productions, with which new comers in India so eagarly surround themselves, of the older, and it may be, the once higher cultivation of the eastern hemisphere; the safe and splendid sha[illegible] the long pendant chains of that pecu[illegible] pale yellow colour of Indian gold, which once seen is never forgotten, and has made the heart of so many a returned Indian [illegible] with happiness or with agony, follo[illegible] the recollections it recalled, of the b[illegible] days of youth, glory and pleasure, [illegible]eeded by an honoured and happy old [illegible] in England, or of wasted life, and [illegible] extinguished by slow degrees, in p[illegible] of that fatal Indian gold; and, it ma[illegible] mixed feeling of both, to the youn[illegible]er, who having left her darling in E[illegible], to preserve its life, returns to In[illegible] gladden the life, not less precious, [illegible]ather, and drops her last bitter tea[illegible] pale golden bangles of her infant.

That most e[illegible] of pets, the little mouse deer, ha[illegible] [illegible] the possession of a pile of cu[illegible] which it walked round, with a [illegible] little Blenheim, with the shortest [illegible] largest eyes, the longest ears, [illegible] silky locks that had ever pa[illegible] the shores of Hindostan; and th[illegible] and lavish flowers of the east [illegible] this fairy room, in contrast to [illegible] votive drawings, the gifts of yo[illegible] of the fairest flowers of Eng[illegible], perhaps, the strongest contrast [illegible] by a drawing in its mass[illegible] an old English residence, wit[illegible] clumps of green wood, its cold [illegible]-blue, and masses of dark clou[illegible] grey roofs and walls, compare[illegible] soft melting atmosphere of e[illegible] which surrounded it.

Upon a sofa reclined a b[illegible] creature of eighteen, her fa[illegible] contrasting with her black [illegible] hair, and the delicate but [illegible] upon her youthful cheek sho[illegible] trials of an Indian sky, to the [illegible] thy European, and with the m[illegible] care, had not yet commenced, [illegible] they, for Clara had sailed fro[illegible] ampton only two days after her [illegible] with the husband of her choice [illegible] very few weeks had passed since [illegible] rival in Bombay. Yet, though th[illegible] ering influence of India had not ye[illegible] [illegible]ced their slow, but almost [illegible] effect upon her beauty, a very watchful eye might have traced the possibility that their action was not far off, in the anxious expression of her soft, brilliant black eyes, which glanced occasionally with a restless, melancholy, and almost alarmed expression. Whatever feeling, however, of bodily illness, yet undeveloped, or of mental uneasiness might cause this expression, Mrs. Courtenay did not reveal it in words, for during the time, short in that clime, which passed between the setting of the sun, and the rising of the moon in its brilliancy with its host of attendant stars, she only betrayed this restless feeling by occasional hasty glances from the darkening atmosphere of the scenery without, to another part of the room, where was seated a handsome young man, a few years older than his fairer young bride, in the undress of her majesty's —— regiment. An Indian sun certainly could not yet have produced an enervating effect upon Clara, for she had yet scarcely been exposed, even within her abode, to its influence. Walter Courtenay and his wife had arrived at the close of the rainy season, and this evening was the very first that the dark masses of cloud had rolled off, and the starry sky shone forth in its brilliancy, with the certainty, in the east, of a definite and long period of cloudless heavens.

Whatever passing cause might have agitated Clara's thoughts, she did not communicate it to her husband, but conversed with him occasionally on the thousand novelties of their life in India, in her usual manner, till the last radiance of the setting sun had [illegible] and the host of heaven shone out in undivided brilliancy.

"Let us walk into the verandah to enjoy the moonlight,' said she, in a tone of timidity which the importance of the request certainly did not justify.

Her husband was instantly at her side, and covered from head to foot with one of the exquisite Indian shawls which strewed her apartment, Clara leaned on Walter's arm in the verandah, each gazing on a beauty of sky, of scenery, and of atmosphere, they had never before experienced.

'Let us go beyond the verandah,' said Clara; 'the trees circle us too much round here, we shall see the—the sky so much more beautifully from that rising ground.'

'I think the verandah much pleasanter,' said Captain Courtenay; 'I delight in these trees, they put me so in mind of the woods from the terrace at dear Rossingham,'

A glance, and a closer pressure of the hand, showed that the young soldier was dwelling in memory upon the beautiful park in England, where he had wooed his Clara. Yet, after a few moments she timidly, but pressingly, again begged to leave the verandah for the more open part of their grounds.

The point was of quite too little consequence to be debated a moment longer, and they moved on the spot desired.

'How exquisite the night is!' said Clara; I never saw the stars so brilliant. Do you recollect, Walter, those pretty lines we read before we sailed, written by some officer in India, upon seeing an English daisy growing here? Do you know I think there is something of the same feeling in seeing here the constellations we are accustomed to in England.'

'I like to see them,' said her husband; 'but in recognising them exactly, I think you must have much the advantage of me. I am sure, with Mademoiselle Regnior, and that old Mrs. Humberston, who came three times a week, and the school-room and the great globes, you ought.—Oh, Clara! don't you recollect, years ago in my holidays at Rossingham, how I used to watch behind the laurel to get you out of the schoolroom window when Mademoiselle's back was turned! Come tell me some of your lessons, let us profit by so much learning; you always said you intended to be very useful to me. I am sure at Eton I learned little enough of these things; I don't believe I know one star by name, except Orion and Pleiades.'

'I will show you Cassiopeia's chair; I [illegible]hink it is the most beautiful constellation of all Mademoiselle's Regneir's instructions taught me,—do you see it!' [illegible] her ivory finger traced the form to [illegible] husband. 'Cannot you fancy a [illegible]ly form sitting in that starry throne, [illegible]eigning over half the sky!'

'[illegible]ee it quite plainly, thank you.'

'Do you love? I am so glad,' said Clara, eagerly, almost trembling with pleasure; then, turning to another part of the heavens, she immediately selected another subject for his observation.

'Do you see that very brilliant little star just above the corner of the verandah—a very small one!'

'Yes, very well; it sparkles beautifully.'

With a flushed cheek, Clara now prepared for her grand trial, to which she had been gradually paving the way, she again turned to another part of the sky, and pointing to a star—reader, it is the companion to the Star of Destiny, and if we do not declare to you its real and exact position in the heavens, which is, however, accurately known to many, it is because the impression, be the consequences of having beheld it real or imaginary, of the results which have followed, is too strongly, too really, and too awfully impressed upon our mind to make you a partaker, if you are not already possessed of it, in a secret, which may be productive of much misery and anxiety to you.

'Do you see, Walter?' said she, in a voice trembling between hope and anxiety, that great bright star where I am pointing, just in a line now with my hand! I think, dearest, you have a very quick eye for finding all I have shown you.'

'I see it as well as possible: it is as bright and brilliant as any in the sky—it is easy enough.'

'Then, dearest, do not you see a smaller star just above it, a little to the left, very near it indeed!'

'This is the Star of Destiny, and [illegible] is it known in India.'

'No, I see that great star, but there is no star very near it, that I see.'

'Oh, look! dearest Walter, look again now; look away a moment, and then you will see it at once when you look back again, your eyes are dazzled by looking at the great star.'

'My dear Clara, as if any star could dazzle my eyes, even in their brightness here: you are learning the exaggerations of Indian poetry already, we shall have you full of starry influences and the evil eye next.'

Mrs. Courtenay trembled for a moment, than after a pause, she asked.

'You have found the little star now, have not you, Walter?'

'I can't see any very little star near that one. You don't mean that star to the right, rather below it, some distance off? I see that.'

'Oh, no! love, not that: the star I mean is just above the great one, very near it, and to the left—look again.'

'My dear Clara, I am sure it is your eyes are dazzled, my sight is long and strong; I have often found it of the greatest service in deer-stalking. Glengarry always made me the scout, particularly when we had no telescope: and now you think I cannot see what you do: you must be mistaken, it is a kind of halo of brightness round the star, and your eye dances with looking at so many stars one after the other, and you fancy you see a little one where there is none at all.—Don't you remember I was the only man on deck on our voyage who could see the Victory at first as she neared us. I am sure if there were a star there I could see it.'

Strange to tell, and most strange to her husband, was the only reply Clara made, she burst into tears, and sobbed upon her husband's shoulder. Walter was amazed and almost alarmed; he feared for her health that so very trifling a vexation, if it could be called so, of not being able to get him to own he saw an object she wished him to see, should have so much effect upon her; but the young husband thought it was a woman's whim, and anxious for her health, he drew the soft warm folds of her red Indian shawl which glowed in the moonlight, entirely over Clara's head and figure, and catching her light form up in his arms, he carried her to the house, with the murmured fondness and anxious care of a mother, whose darling is snatched up from the damp lawn where it has played too long in the summer twilight.

The next day Clara beguiled the langour of the hot hours of the now altered weather, until her evening drive, by some of her accustomed English pursuits, which she had been advised by older residents in India not to listlessly abandon, overcome by the climate, but to endeavour to persevere in her usual habits of employment. She took from the table one of Ross's exquisite miniatures of Walter, and worked at her copy of it, she had made great progress, and the face was nearly completed.

'It is the strangest fancy, dearest Clara, to copy that miniature; you said so often you were absolutely satisfied with the likeness; and till we are called on active service you have the original too, and I am sure you are always looking at that, more than ever I think, since this sunny weather set in after the rains, I suppose you are looking for freckles.'

Clara looked up from her drawing with rather a melancholy smile.

'Come and tell me what you think of the copy; I like it myself; can you find any fault, or is it quite perfect!'

Walter seated himself beside her, and examined the beautiful miniature she showed him. It was admirably copied, but one stray lock of his bright hair fell on the forehead, in a manner different from that painted by the master hand of Ross, and gave, he said a melancholy air, to the eyes.

'One looks, dearest, all happiness, as when I sailed, your's looks as if I disliked the Indian sun, or as if I had some gloomy prospects before me—as if I read some dark destiny in the stars.'

These words were spoken carelessly, and without any further meaning; but they made his wife shudder. She looked at her picture, and endeavoured not too see what she wished to persuade herself was a fancy of Walter's; she endeavoured to prove the drawing was exactly the same as that of the original.

'No you have an excellent eye for catching an outline, but mine is more accurate about details, I have a clear sight: look, [illegible] and this lock of hair; your line is much more curved.'

Clara looked at the miniatures, and could not resist the evidence of the comparison. She sobbed aloud.

'My dearest Walter, you certainly have a clearer sight than I have.'

Surprised, vexed, and mortified by this apparent childishness and waywardness on his wife's part, which he had never seen in her character during the long acquaintance of their mutual childhood, and the years of their love. Walter Courtenay drew Clara towards him, and tenderly embracing her, soothed her with the kindest and the most persuasive words.

'How can it vex you, my dearest girl, that I see better than you do?'

'It is not about the picture,' sobbed poor Clara, it seemed to him like a petted child.

'About any thing, what can it signify? I'll wear green spectacles if you like, but do not take such odd, fancied distresses into your head. I half fear, my beloved,—and it is wretchedness to me to think so,—that your precious health is beginning to feel this climate. Ever since the rainy weather ended you have been nervous and unhinged, it seems as if a cloudy sky were necessary to your happiness.'

Clara thought, indeed, with trembling, of the Star of Destiny, would she had never seen or heard of it, or that Walter could but once see it!

'I have noticed for the last two or three days your Ayah has been about you, telling you her Indian romances; they are pretty enough, I dare say, but don't listen to them now, those sentimental things will quite upset you. You know, my angel, you are all in all to me, and here, away from every one at home to aid me in cherishing you, and with your youth and my experience, I really don't know what to do for you, or will you; if your health fails you will break my heart Clara.'

Mrs. Courtenay murmured on her husband's bosom words of promise to subdue her fancy, to revive her spirits of assurance that she was perfectly well, that he had nothing to fear for her health, and that for his sake she would never allow herself to sink, vainly, for an instant.

The rest of the day was one of calm happiness to both; evening came, and with it the refreshing evening drive, the amusement of the gay crowd who thronged around them, and then the ball. It was a very gay one, given expressly in honour of the English, and in the English style, by a distinguished native of Bombay, whose humble origin, his enormous wealth, the result of his industry and enterprise, his profuse generosity, the luxury of his entertainments, and the unrivalled beauty of his exquisite carpets, have long made his name as familiarly known to all the residents in Bombay, as, through the British title lately and deservedly bestowed upon him by the favour of the sovereign, it has lately become in England. The rooms were thronged with all the rank and gaiety of Bombay, natives and British.

Clara and Walter happened to be together in one of the ball rooms, when they saw a little circle formed round the handsome Major Seymour, one of the gayest of their acquaintance.

'Seymour got his new uniform to-day by the Lady William Bentinck, with the new regulation facings,' said Captain Courtenay, 'he is showing it off on himself, but let us hear what he has got to say for himself.'

They joined the circle which had gathered round the gayest officer in Bombay, who was displaying the alterations in the facings of his handsome uniform, just received from Europe, devised according to royal taste. The creticisms were various.

'I like the embroidery on the collar,' said Walter, 'and the pattern is pretty, but I don't believe there is any change there.'

Clara looked at it also.

'There is a difference in the pattern; for my cousin, Edward Clifford was in the —— four years since, and I recollect his showing us all his things in the school-room at Rossingham just before he joined.'

A brother officer of Seymour's was present in the old uniform. It was appealed to, but still Courtenay did not perceive the variation in the pattern: and though judgment was universally given against him, it was only on looking very closely he perceived his mistake and acknow[illegible].

Mrs. Courtenay's eyes sparkled with delight and happiness, her colour rose to still more brilliant beauty.

'I knew, Walter, you were short sighted, I am certain you are, that accounts for it all: I am certain I can see much farther than you can, I am so glad to be sure of it.'

'What a silly whim! said Courtenay, and sat down on a sofa.

'Will you dance this waltz with me, Mrs. Courtenay?' said Seymour, who had admired her brilliant countenance, and scarcely knew what she was saying.

'I shall like it of all things,' said Mrs Courtenay, her eyes still fixed upon the embroidery of his collar. 'Do not you think Walter very short-sighted, Major Seymour?'

'Rather,' said Major Seymour, and a slight smile curled his chiselled lips, as he whirled Mrs. Courtenay into the waltzing circle away from the sofa, where Courtenay was gazing at the wreaths of flowers around the ceiling.

Orders had been issued for the march of troops into Affghanistan, a large body of forces had already moved northwards, with the baggage, and Captain Courtenay and his devoted wife were already some days march on their road towards Cabul. The last evening before the departure of the last detachment had arrived, and the officers who were to accompany it, twenty two in number, were seated at a gay supper in a large tent. At the table, loaded with the profuse abundance of an Indian meal, the moonlight, for it was a perfectly cloudless and most brilliant night, glanced, mixed with and overcoming the artificial lights, upon the uniforms the bright locks, and the fair complexions of the British officers, most of whom, of this detachment were young men, some almost boys, the dark forms of their Indian attendants, who moved to and fro in their service, about the doors of the tent. One swarthy figure alone stood motionless and apparently engaged in listening to each word of the gay discourse of the young soldiers, all eager to take the field, ardent for honour and for excitement of any kind.

'I wish we knew a little of the fellows we are going to fight,' said the young soldier; 'they don't seem like anything we have seen yet, and they say their dialect is something quite different to anything we know of here. It is too bad, after all the pains I have taken at Sandyhurst, and coming out, and with my moonshee here, to find all my trouble will be of no use in Affghanistan, and we shall not know, when a fellow cries out, whether he is surrendering himself, or telling you where his diamonds are hidden.

'The dark figure I have spoken of advanced from the door of the tent to the circle of Englishmen.

'Do not,' he said, in a solemn and thrilling tone, which immediately arrested the attention even of the gayest and most careless of his auditors, 'do not believe that the accents you will hear from the lips of an Affghan will be a prayer for mercy, or the offer of his treasure to save a life which the demons themselves watch over; but if you know by whom the prayers of vengeance which will burst from Affghan lips will be heard, and who will listen with delight to those accents well known to them, you would long for the power of hearing to pass from your shuddering senses. Even the name of the city you march to is fatal. When Solomon, the greatest king then upon the earth, repaid Hiram, King of Tyre, for his cedar trees and his gold with the princely gift of twenty cities, and they pleased not Hiram, look in the First Book of Kings, in the Old Testament of the Christian Scriptures, what King Hiram called the gift.'

The youngest of the party, William Howard, desirous to know what was alluded to, drew from his breast a little pocket bible. He had faithfully kept the last promise he made to his mother, always to carry this little gift to him, next to his heart. He read in the ninth chapter of the First Book of Kings, 'what cities are these which thou hast given me my brother? The Bible young Howard's mother had given him had marginal notes in which he saw Cabul was translated, *displeasing or dirty.*

'Even so; and though those cities stand in Judea, yet here, in Hindostan, does the same name bear the same dark signification. Listen to me, and learn what enemies you will have to deal with, learn the true origin of the Affghan race, the children of a mighty monarch while [illegible]loved heirs of the demon tongue. When Saul, the son of Kish, was chosen from the father's sons to be king of Israel, because he was the most goodly and the strongest of his race, his ambition inflamed by the prize so early obtained, soared to lofty and forbidden things, after his love for earthly power had been fully satisfied. Remember also the witch of Endor.'

The young men looked with increasing interest and attention on this strange narrator.

'The longings of Saul were gratified, even here as they had been before, and he obtained a power and mastery over the demons. Night and day did his demon slaves toil at his bidding to build the palace his pride delighted in, it was to excel in riches and workmanship, and the demon art was tasked by their unfaltering master to complete it. But long was the toil, and heavy the labour his will required, and the days of Saul drew towards their close. To hasten the work, he bade his eldest born, Prince Affghan, labour with the demons, to increase their exertions; and to render him able to communicate with these slaves, he taught Prince Affghan the demon tongue. Yet was all far from completion, when the Angel of Death stood before Saul and demanded of him his soul. The monarch bowed his knee before a monarch more powerful than himself, and besought of him the boon to spare him yet a while, to pass away from him for a season, till his palace was completed; for well Saul knew that his demon workmen would obey no presence but his own. But the Angel of Death said, 'lo! to no man living have I said, thou shalt follow me, and he said nay; and thou shalt follow me likewise. But for thy power and thy wisdom, for it is much, and like unto mine own, will I grant thee this thing, thine earthly form shall remain to the eye as though thy soul were in it when it is away with me, and the demons shall believe thou livest and shall labour at thy palace.'

'So the dead Saul stood night and day, propped upon his staff before his palace, as the living Saul had done, and the demons belived that he lived, and laboured on. But the white ants came, and grew bold as he moved not, and they devoured the wood on which the staff of the dead Saul leaned, and the staff crumbled and fell down, and the dead body of King Saul fell also, and then the demons saw, and knew that their master was dead, and they gave one loud shout of triumph, so that such a sound was never heard before, and they fled home. And Prince Affghan left the unfinished palace, which he had no workmen to complete, and wandered into Affghanistan, where he found a great kingdom, and all his children and his subjects spoke this tongue of the demons.'

'So we are to fight with the friends of the demons, who, no doubt, will lend