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DANCING AROUND THE WORLD

"Temple Dance of India"

By John Richard Finch

FROM mystic India, cradle of a civilization as ancient as infinity, comes the dance of the Temple. Awesomely, it unfolds a tale of complete denial of all sensual claims for the attainment of an inward peace of spirit—deep-rooted, all enveloping. Its background is in a great Temple, with tall pillars, gold encrusted, dulled by centuries of time and incense smoke. Strange figures, supporting the domed roof, glare down at the squatting bronzed forms of the scantily-clad devotees. White turbans and loin-cloths, catching a gleam of the faint light which pierces the fretted door of a sacred shrine, etch weird outlines in the semi gloom. An atmosphere of mystery and devotion, belonging to another civilization and another age, creates a strange, hypnotic spell—fascinating, weird. Wailing music swells, as the worshippers, offering their gifts, prostrate themselves before a great central shrine.

Then, through the incense smoke the tall door of the shrine opens slowly, revealing the impassive form of the Goddess Rhada, wrapt in profound contemplation. Her complexion is like spun gold; her slender form glittering with jewels; great rings adorn her toes and fingers, and a high tiara crowns a face of cold beauty.

The music becomes more poignant. Fresh spires of smoke wreath up before her. Her limbs slowly become animate. Or is it the flickering of the lights? No, slowly the throb of life creeps into the face of the Goddess. The eyes half open; the head is slightly raised; the bosom heaves, the head turns slowly. Rhada has awakened from her long repose and gazes curiously at her worshippers.

LIKE a phantom she rises, behind the curling smoke, and slipping lightly from her throne, pauses to enjoy the pulsations of life, the warm breath of the air, the strange new luxury of the world. By degrees, as her dazzled worshippers prostrate themselves before her, she tastes the joys and sensations with which she has endowed mortals, then, with the grace of a true Goddess, glides into the Dance of the Five Senses.

Sight is awakened by the sheen and hues of the jewels which bedeck her lithe body, and reflect the quivering lights of the Temple; *Hearing*, by the little silver bells that tinkle, as she bends to catch their varied detonations, her whole body alert to note their differences; *Smell*, by the garlands of flowers, in which she wreathes herself, drawing them luxuriously around her, crushing them against her shimmering flesh as though all parts of her would partake of their fragrance; *Touch*, by a satin-petalled lotus, laid in turn to her cheek, her arm, her lips, her body, while the smooth ripple of muscles under her glossy skin responds with shivers of sensitive sympathy to the caressing pressure of her bare feet upon the floor of the Temple. Every nerve is sensitive and in turn conveys the message. Then, most human of all, *Taste*.

THE dancer drinks, and for one brief moment she is intoxicated with human sensation and, flinging away the bowl, abandons herself to the passion of life. When the spell is over, she sinks to the ground in a semi-swoon. A mortal exhaustion creeps over her. For a moment she remains immobile, then, slowly gathering the self control of ages, she rises, steps past the prostrate worshippers and the flowing flames of the sacrificial fires back to the solitude and solitude of her shrine. Again, through the smoke of incense, she resumes her dais. Her limbs are folded; the hands rest upon the knees; animation dies down—down, until once again she is a waxen image of the Goddess Rhada—serene, immutable, in eternal contemplation, a token that peace of spirit lies only in denial. Lights flicker out, the gates of the shrine close slowly, as the shrill falsetto notes of the music vibrate through the Temple, and the incense-laden air burdens the fancy with images of mythical worlds where strange Gods invoke supernatural rituals upon a people as unfathomable as eternity.

In India's Temple Dance lies the key to the mysticism of the East. It is symbolical of a people who have inherited the Wisdom of the Ages, and who have found that the "Great Peace" comes from within—in profound meditation and in renunciation of all fleshliness.

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