

The Dream of King Karna–Vootra

By Lord Dunsany

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King Karna–Vootra sitting on his throne commanding all things said: "I very clearly saw last night the queenly Vava–Nyria. Though partly she was hidden by great clouds that swept continually by her, rolling over and over, yet her face was unhidden and shone, being full of moonlight.

"I said to her: 'Walk with me by the great pools in many–gardened, beautiful Istrakhan where the lilies float that give delectable dreams; or, drawing aside the curtain of hanging orchids, pass with me thence from the pools by a secret path through the else impassable jungle that fills the only way between the mountains that shut in Istrakhan. They shut it in and look on it with joy at morning and at evening when the pools are strange with light, till in their gladness sometimes there melts the deadly snow that kills upon lonely heights the mountaineer. They have valleys among them older than the wrinkles in the moon.

"Come with me thence or linger with me there and either we shall come to romantic lands which the men of the caravans only speak of in song; or else we shall listlessly walk in a land so lovely that even the butterflies that float about it when they see their images flash in the sacred pools are terrified by their beauty, and each night we shall hear the myriad nightingales all in one chorus sing the stars to death. Do this and I will send heralds far from here with tidings of thy beauty; and they shall run and come to Séndara and men shall know it there who herd brown sheep; and from Séndara the rumor shall spread on, down either bank of the holy river of Zoth, till the people that make wattles in the plains shall hear of it and sing; but the heralds shall go northward along the hills until they come to Sooma. And in that golden city they shall tell the kings, that sit in their lofty alabaster house, of thy strange and sudden smiles. And often in distant markets shall thy story be told by merchants out from Sooma as they sit telling careless tales to lure men to their wares.

"And the heralds passing thence shall come even to Ingra, to Ingra where they dance. And there they shall tell of thee, so that thy name long hence shall be sung in that joyous city. And there they shall borrow camels and pass over the sands and go by desert ways to distant Nirid to tell of thee to the lonely men in the mountain monasteries.

"Come with me even now for it is Spring.'

"And as I said this she faintly yet perceptibly shook her head. And it was only then I remembered my youth was gone, and she dead forty years."