TALES OF MALAYA

BY “SOUTHERN CROSS.”

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TALES OF MALAYA.

“CIRCE.”

A STORYETTE.

The Boy believed in many things—in truth, in work, in human love and friendship, and in a God who made these things to be facts in a shifting, theoretical world. But, most of all, he believed in the woman to whom, all unknowingly, he had given his heart; and so one day, as such women will, she led him to tell her of his love.

Dorothy Feverel did not hold the same idyllic views of life as the Boy. She was a little, fair woman, with a baby face and large appealing grey eyes with just enough unrest and sadness in them to have enabled her to assimilate something of every philosophy of disenchantment from Solomon downwards. Instead, she found herself reverenced and adored as the incarnation of all the Boy’s verities of life and death.

They had met shortly after the Boy had come out to the “glorious, gorgeous East” in the
pride of his youth and with high hopes and ambitions, and in the many social functions of Singapore society their acquaintanceship had ripened into a deep friendship on the Boy's part. She was, however, only attracted by the Boy's untainted freshness and the brave way in which he looked on life, almost defying Fate to deal unkindly with him. The Boy thought constantly of her as a dear, kind little woman. But, instead of this, she was a little natural-born flirt, selfish to the core, and had made up her mind to captivate the Boy. Her husband, who was much her senior, if he knew of her many flirtations, did not interfere, as he was wrapped up in his business and the pursuit of the "almighty dollar."

So the Boy rode and drove with Mrs. Feverel of an evening, and acted as her escort to every social gathering and entertainment. People talked, as people will in a town where everyone knows everyone else, and many were the remarks passed about "Circe," as Mrs. Feverel's numerous conquests had led her to be named, and her fresh victim. The Boy, however, was in a dream of enchantment and had not yet realised the hold the woman, who was playing with him, had taken on his life.

One night "Circe" made the Boy escort her to the Botanical Gardens to listen to the music
discoursed by the Band of one of the Garrison regiments, and whether it was the spell of the full tropical moon in her blood, or a spirit of pure devilry, she determined to break down his barrier of innocence and bring him to her feet.

As they sat in a secluded nook under a clump of luxuriant tropical palms, she suddenly swayed lightly against him and murmured, half inaudibly, "We have so little time. You waste it so. My husband sends me home next month."

With an overwhelming rush the Boy realised all the Woman was to him. Star-dust whirled before his vision and his senses swam. He came to himself to find her in his arms, returning his passionate kisses with lips so soft and dewy that his blood raced like fire through his veins.

*    *    *    *

For a space the Boy was happy. What so contagious as not to care; what so simple as to drift—holding on to the warm, clinging hands of love? He was all unconscious of the process, but one day he awakened to find he had lost truth by the way, that honour had slipped out of sight, and that his ambitions and dreams of fame were shattered to fragments. He had love still, however, he thought:

*    *    *

The Boy sought an interview with the Woman. With beseeching eyes he told her of
his position and asked her to fly with him to another country, where he would start the battle of life anew, with her as an aid to his aspirations. It did not take the Woman a moment to realise that the inevitable crash had come in the Boy's affairs. Did she care? Does the Lighthouse against which the wild-eyed seagull dashes itself, care for the fate of the bird it has lured to doom? Her heart was as stony as the granite of the tower. Her eyes took a steely glint at what she termed his presumption in asking her to give up a life of luxury and ease for the inevitable hardships she would have to encounter with him. She drew herself away exclaiming, "Are you mad? Did you not know I was only amusing myself with you?"

The Boy blanched at the heart-stab he had received. His heart beat so heavily that it sounded as if it sobbed. "Even love fails me," he gasped. "Fails me when it was all I had left." He leaned his head on one of her dainty tables in an attitude of utter despair, and choking sobs shook his frame. The Woman, touched somewhat by the sight of the ruin she had wrought, said, "I did not know I was deceiving you so when I flirted with you, or that you would take it so badly," and her voice died away in an impotent murmur. Leaping to his feet, the boy clasped her in his arms and strained
her madly to his breast, showering kisses on her face. "No," she began again, "do not kiss me. I do not deserve love like yours. Men have said much of that feeling, called love, to me, but I cannot realise it—I cannot make myself feel it. It all seems not worth while, too! I ought to suffer as I have made you suffer. I've grown callous, but I feel as if I ought to be tied down and whipped quite slowly—till I died. I could feel that, I suppose?"

"Oh, hush, hush," cried the Boy. "What does anything matter now? It's all too late. Good-bye for ever!" and, with a last look into her eyes, he dashed out into the night. The Woman saw the mad despair portrayed on his face and, as she looked out after him, the misery she had wantonly wrought gripped her at the heart and would not leave her. She knew the Boy had gone away, like a wounded animal, to die. From across the lawn the night jar's weird note, which is like the driving of nails into a coffin, fell on her ears.

The next day a sad fatal revolver accident was recorded by the local newspapers, but one person knew the "accident" was no accident at all. At last she felt. She stole secretly for one last look at the Boy. He lay so cold and still; the strong, firm hands, which had clasped hers so passionately but a few brief hours
before, folded peacefully on his breast, and the anguish she had seen delineated on his face replaced by the calm of Death—that healer of all broken hearts. All the hitherto unspoken, hardly perhaps formulated, reproaches rose within the Woman. She felt the Whip falling slowly. It beat her to her knees by his side, and she knelt there and covered the cold, still hands with kisses and unavailing tears. "I killed him," she sobbed for the hundredth time, and crept away with remorse, which would never leave her, gnawing at her heart.

FINIS.
TALES OF MALAYA.

ZORA.

A MALAYAN TRAGEDY.

A SHORT STORY IN TWO CHAPTEERS.

The Golden Cup of Love runs o'er
With mingled Sweet and Fire—
Fair fancies hover round the brim
And raptured Dreams inspire;—
Some may but sip; some mustforego;
Some drink at their desire.

But Sorrow's silver chalice holds
A chill and dreary wine—
Oh, well for those who blend with this
A dearer draught divine,
Yet neither Wealth nor Fame may quench
Its taste of tears like brine.

Who drinks too deep of Sorrow's wine
May henceforth only know
The weariness and thirst that wait
The Fourth Cup's coming slow;
That every guest must drain at last
Ere he hath leave to go.

From "THE FOUR CUPS."