

The Ninth Vibration and Other Stories

By

L. Adams Beck

Web-Books.Com

The Ninth Vibration and Other Stories

| | |
|--|------------|
| The Ninth Vibration | 3 |
| The Interpreter A Romance Of The East | 35 |
| The Incomparable Lady | 82 |
| The Hatred Of The Queen | 91 |
| Fire Of Beauty | 106 |
| The Building Of The Taj Mahal | 120 |
| How Great Is The Glory Of Kwannon..... | 127 |
| The Round-Faced Beauty | 136 |

The Ninth Vibration

There is a place uplifted nine thousand feet in purest air where one of the most ancient tracks in the world runs from India into Tibet. It leaves Simla of the Imperial councils by a stately road; it passes beyond, but now narrowing, climbing higher beside the khuds or steep drops to the precipitous valleys beneath, and the rumor of Simla grows distant and the way is quiet, for, owing to the danger of driving horses above the khuds, such baggage as you own must be carried by coolies, and you yourself must either ride on horseback or in the little horseless carriage of the Orient, here drawn and pushed by four men. And presently the deodars darken the way with a solemn presence, for-

These are the Friars of the wood,
The Brethren of the Solitude
Hooded and grave-"

-their breath most austere pure in the gradually chilling air. Their companies increase and now the way is through a great wood where it has become a trail and no more, and still it climbs for many miles and finally a rambling bungalow, small and low, is sighted in the deeps of the trees, a mountain stream from unknown heights falling beside it. And this is known as the House in the Woods. Very few people are permitted to go there, for the owner has no care for money and makes no provision for guests. You must take your own servant and the khansamah will cook you such simple food as men expect in the wilds, and that is all. You stay as long as you please and when you leave not even a gift to the khansamah is permitted.

I had been staying in Ranipur of the plains while I considered the question of getting to Upper Kashmir by the route from Simla along the old way to Chinese Tibet where I would touch Shipki in the Dalai Lama's territory and then pass on to Zanskar and so down to Kashmir - a tremendous route through the Himalaya and a crowning experience of the mightiest mountain scenery in the world. I was at Ranipur for the purpose of consulting my old friend Olesen, now an irrigation official in the Rampur district - a man who had made this journey and nearly lost his life in doing it. It is not now perhaps so dangerous as it was, and my life was of no particular value to any one but myself, and the plan interested me.

I pass over the long discussions of ways and means in the blinding heat of Ranipur. Olesen put all his knowledge at my service and never uttered a word of the envy that must have filled him as he looked at the distant snows cool and luminous in blue air, and, shrugging good-natured shoulders, spoke of the work that lay before him on the burning plains until the terrible summer should drag itself to a close. We had vanquished the details and were smoking in comparative silence one night on the veranda, when he said in his slow reflective way;

"You don't like the average hotel, Ormond, and you'll like it still less up Simla way with all the Simla crowd of grass-widows and fellows out for as good a time as they can cram into the hot weather. I wonder if I could get you a permit for The House in the Woods while you're waiting to fix up your men and route for Shipki."

He explained and of course I jumped at the chance. It belonged, he said, to a man named Rup Singh, a pandit, or learned man of Ranipur. He had always spent the summer there, but age and failing health made this impossible now, and under certain conditions he would occasionally allow people known to friends of his own to put up there.

"And Rup Singh and I are very good friends," Olesen said; "I won his heart by discovering the lost Sukh Mandir, or Hall of Pleasure, built many centuries ago by a Maharao of Ranipur for a summer retreat in the great woods far beyond Simla. There are lots of legends about it here in Ranipur. They call it The House of Beauty. Rup Singh's ancestor had been a close friend of the Maharao and was with him to the end, and that's why he himself sets such store on the place. You have a good chance if I ask for a permit.

He told me the story and since it is the heart of my own I give it briefly. Many centuries ago the Ranipur Kingdom was ruled by the Maharao Rai Singh a prince of the great lunar house of the Rajputs. Expecting a bride from some far away kingdom (the name of this is unrecorded) he built the Hall of Pleasure as a summer palace, a house of rare and costly beauty. A certain great chamber he lined with carved figures of the Gods and their stories, almost unsurpassed for truth and life. So, with the pine trees whispering about it the secret they sigh to tell, he hoped to create an earthly Paradise with this Queen in whom all loveliness was perfected. And then some mysterious tragedy ended all his hopes. It was rumoured that when the Princess came to his court, she was, by some terrible mistake, received with insult and offered the position only of one of his women. After that nothing was known. Certain only is it that he fled to the hills, to the home of his broken hope, and there ended his days in solitude, save for the attendance of two faithful friends who would not abandon him even in the ghostly quiet of the winter when the pine boughs were heavy with snow and a spectral moon stared at the panthers shuffling through the white wastes beneath. Of these two Rup Singh's ancestor was one. And in his thirty fifth year the Maharao died and his beauty and strength passed into legend and his kingdom was taken by another and the jungle crept silently over his Hall of Pleasure and the story ended.

"There was not a memory of the place up there," Olesen went on. "Certainly I never heard anything of it when I went up to the Shipki in 1904. But I had been able to be useful to Rup Singh and he gave me a permit for The House in the Woods, and I stopped there for a few days' shooting. I remember that day so well. I was wandering in the dense woods while my men got their midday grub, and I missed the trail somehow and found myself in a part where the trees were dark and thick and the silence heavy as lead. It was as if the trees were on guard - they stood shoulder to shoulder and stopped the way. Well, I halted, and had a notion there was something beyond that made me doubt whether to go on. I must have stood there five minutes hesitating. Then I pushed on, bruising the thick ferns under my shooting boots and stooping under the knotted boughs. Suddenly I

tramped out of the jungle into a clearing, and lo and behold a ruined House, with blocks of marble lying all about it, and carved pillars and a great roof all being slowly smothered by the jungle. The weirdest thing you ever saw. I climbed some fallen columns to get a better look, and as I did I saw a face flash by at the arch of a broken window. I sang out in Hindustani, but no answer: only the echo from the woods. Somehow that dampened my ardour, and I didn't go in to what seemed like a great ruined hall for the place was so eerie and lonely, and looked mighty snaky into the bargain. So I came ingloriously away and told Rup Singh. And his whole face changed. 'That is The House of Beauty,' he said. 'All my life have I sought it and in vain. For, friend of my soul, a man must lose himself that he may find himself and what lies beyond, and the trodden path has ever been my doom. And you who have not sought have seen. Most strange are the way of the Gods'. Later on I knew this was why he had always gone up yearly, thinking and dreaming God knows what. He and I tried for the place together, but in vain and the whole thing is like a dream. Twice he has let friends of mine stay at The House in the Woods, and I think he won't refuse now."

"Did he ever tell you the story?"

"Never. I only know what I've picked up here. Some horrible mistake about the Rani that drove the man almost mad with remorse. I've heard bits here and there. There's nothing so vital as tradition in India."

"I wonder'. what really happened."

"That we shall never know. I got a little old picture of the Maharao - said to be painted by a Pahari artist. It's not likely to be authentic, but you never can tell. A Brahman sold it to me that he might complete his daughter's dowry, and hated doing it."

"May I see it?"

"Why certainly. Not a very good light, but - can do, as the Chinks say.

He brought it out rolled in silk stuff and I carried it under the hanging lamp. A beautiful young man indeed, with the air of race these people have beyond all others;- a cold haughty face, immovably dignified. He sat with his hands resting lightly on the arms of his chair of State. A crescent of rubies clasped the folds of the turban and from this sprang an aigrette scattering splendours. The magnificent hilt of a sword was ready beside him. The face was not only beautiful but arresting.

"A strange picture," I said. "The artist has captured the man himself. I can see him trampling on any one who opposed him, and suffering in the same cold secret way. It ought to be authentic if it isn't. Don't you know any more?"

"Nothing. Well - to bed, and tomorrow I'll see Rup Singh."

I was glad when he returned with the permission. I was to be very careful, he said, to make no allusion to the lost palace, for two women were staying at the House in the Woods - a mother and daughter to whom Rup Singh had granted hospitality because of an obligation he must honor. But with true Oriental distrust of women he had thought fit to make no confidence to them. I promised and asked Olesen if he knew them.

"Slightly. Canadians of Danish blood like my own. Their name is Ingmar. Some people think the daughter good-looking. The mother is supposed to be clever; keen on occult subjects which she came back to India to study. The husband was a great naturalist and the kindest of men. He almost lived in the jungle and the natives had all sorts of rumours about his powers. You know what they are. They said the birds and beasts followed him about. Any old thing starts a legend."

"What was the connection with Rup Singh?"

"He was in difficulties and undeservedly, and Ingmar generously lent him money at a critical time, trusting to his honour for repayment. Like most Orientals he never forgets a good turn and would do anything for any of the family - except trust the women with any secret he valued. The father is long dead. By the way Rup Singh gave me a queer message for you. He said; "Tell the Sahib these words - "Let him who finds water in the desert share his cup with him who dies of thirst." He is certainly getting very old. I don't suppose he knew himself what he meant."

I certainly did not. However my way was thus smoothed for me and I took the upward road, leaving Olesen to the long ungrateful toil of the man who devotes his life to India without sufficient time or knowledge to make his way to the inner chambers of her beauty. There is no harder mistress unless you hold the pass-key to her mysteries, there is none of whom so little can be told in words but who kindles so deep a passion. Necessity sometimes takes me from that enchanted land, but when the latest dawns are shining in my skies I shall make my feeble way back to her and die at her worshipped feet. So I went up from Kalka.

I have never liked Simla. It is beautiful enough - eight thousand feet up in the grip of the great hills looking toward the snows, the famous summer home of the Indian Government. Much diplomacy is whispered on Observatory Hill and many are the lighter diversions of which Mr. Kipling and lesser men have written. But Simla is also a gateway to many things - to the mighty deodar forests that clothe the foot-hills of the mountains, to Kulu, to the eternal snows, to the old, old bridle way that leads up to the Shipki Pass and the mysteries of Tibet - and to the strange things told in this story. So I passed through with scarcely a glance at the busy gayety of the little streets and the tiny shops where the pretty ladies buy their rouge and powder. I was attended by my servant Ali Khan, a Mohammedan from Nagpur, sent up with me by Olesen with strong recommendation. He was a stout walker, so too am I, and an inveterate dislike to the man-drawn carriage whenever my own legs would serve me decided me to walk the sixteen miles to the House in the Woods, sending on the baggage. Ali Khan despatched it and prepared to follow me, the fine cool air of the hills giving us a zest.

"Subhan Alla! (Praise be to God!) the air is sweet!" he said, stepping out behind me. "What time does the Sahib look to reach the House?"

"About five or six. Now, Ali Khan, strike out of the road. You know the way."

So we struck up into the glorious pine woods, mountains all about us. Here and there as we climbed higher was a little bank of forgotten snow, but spring had triumphed and everywhere was the waving grace of maiden-hair ferns, banks of violets and strangely beautiful little wild flowers. These woods are full of panthers, but in day time the only precaution necessary is to take no dog, - a dainty they cannot resist. The air was exquisite with the sun-warm scent of pines, and here and there the trees broke away disclosing mighty ranges of hills covered with rich blue shadows like the bloom on a plum, - the clouds chasing the sunshine over the mountain sides and the dark green velvet of the robe of pines. I looked across ravines that did not seem gigantic and yet the villages on the other side were like a handful of peas, so tremendous was the scale. I stood now and then to see the rhododendrons, forest trees here with great trunks and massive boughs glowing with blood-red blossom, and time went by and I took no count of it, so glorious was the climb.

It must have been hours later when it struck me that the sun was getting low and that by now we should be nearing The House in the Woods. I said as much to Ali Khan. He looked perplexed and agreed. We had reached a comparatively level place, the trail faint but apparent, and it surprised me that we heard no sound of life from the dense wood where our goal must be.

"I know not, Presence," he said. "May his face be blackened that directed me. I thought surely I could not miss the way, and yet-"

We cast back and could see no trail forking from the one we were on. There was nothing for it but to trust to luck and push on. But I began to be uneasy and so was the man. I had stupidly forgotten to unpack my revolver, and worse, we had no food, and the mountain air is an appetiser, and at night the woods have their dangers, apart from being absolutely trackless. We had not met a living being since we left the road and there seemed no likelihood of asking for directions. I stopped no longer for views but went steadily on, Ali Khan keeping up a running fire of low-voiced invocations and lamentations. And now it was dusk and the position decidedly unpleasant.

It was at that moment I saw a woman before us walking lightly and steadily under the pines. She must have struck into the trail from the side for she never could have kept before us all the way. A native woman, but wearing the all-concealing boorka, more like a town dweller than a woman of the hills. I put on speed and Ali Khan, now very tired, toiled on behind me as I came up with her and courteously asked the way. Her face was entirely hidden, but the answering voice was clear and sweet. I made up my mind she was young, for it had the bird-like thrill of youth.

"If the Presence continues to follow this path he will arrive. It is not far. They wait for him."

That was all. It left me with a desire to see the veiled face. We passed on and Ali Khan looked fearfully back.

"Ajaib! (Wonderful!) A strange place to meet one of the purdah-nashin (veiled women)" he muttered. "What would she be doing up here in the heights? She walked like a Khanam (khan's wife) and I saw the gleam of gold under the boorka."

I turned with some curiosity as he spoke, and lo! there was no human being in sight. She had disappeared from the track behind us and it was impossible to say where. The darkening trees were beginning to hold the dusk and it seemed unimaginable that a woman should leave the way and take to the dangers of the woods.

"Puna-i-Khoda - God protect us!" said Ali Khan in a shuddering whisper. "She was a devil of the wilds. Press on, Sahib. We should not be here in the dark."

There was nothing else to do. We made the best speed we could, and the trees grew more dense and the trail fainter between the close trunks, and so the night came bewildering with the expectation that we must pass the night unaided and unarmed in the cold of the heights. They might send out a search party from The House in the Woods - that was still a hope, if there were no other. And then, very gradually and wonderfully the moon dawned over the tree tops and flooded the wood with mysterious silver lights and about her rolled the majesty of the stars. We pressed on into the heart of the night. From the dense black depths we emerged at last. An open glade lay before us - the trees falling back to right and left to disclose - what?

A long low house of marble, unlit, silent, bathed in pale splendour and shadow. About it stood great deodars, clothed in clouds of the white blossoming clematis, ghostly and still. Acacias hung motionless trails of heavily scented bloom as if carved in ivory. It was all silent as death. A flight of nobly sculptured steps led up to a broad veranda and a wide open door with darkness behind it. Nothing more.

I forced myself to shout in Hindustani - the cry seeming a brutal outrage upon the night, and an echo came back numbed in the black woods. I tried once more and in vain. We stood absorbed also into the silence.

"Ya Alla! it is a house of the dead!" whispered Ali Khan, shuddering at my shoulder, - and even as the words left his lips I understood where we were. "It is the Sukh Mandir." I said. "It is the House of the Maharao of Ranipur."

It was impossible to be in Ranipur and hear nothing of the dead house of the forest and Ali Khan had heard - God only knows what tales. In his terror all discipline, all the inborn respect of the native forsook him, and without word or sign he turned and fled along the track, crashing through the forest blind and mad with fear. It would have been

insanity to follow him, and in India the first rule of life is that the Sahib shows no fear, so I left him to his fate whatever it might be, believing at the same time that a little reflection and dread of the lonely forest would bring him to heel quickly.

I stood there and the stillness flowed like water about me. It was as though I floated upon it - bathed in quiet. My thoughts adjusted themselves. Possibly it was not the Sukh Mandir. Olesen had spoken of ruin. I could see none. At least it was shelter from the chill which is always present at these heights when the sun sets, - and it was beautiful as a house not made with hands. There was a sense of awe but no fear as I went slowly up the great steps and into the gloom beyond and so gained the hall.

The moon went with me and from a carven arch filled with marble tracery rained radiance that revealed and hid. Pillars stood about me, wonderful with horses ramping forward as in the Siva Temple at Vellore. They appeared to spring from the pillars into the gloom urged by invisible riders, the effect barbarously rich and strange - motion arrested, struck dumb in a violent gesture, and behind them impenetrable darkness. I could not see the end of this hall - for the moon did not reach it, but looking up I beheld the walls fretted in great panels into the utmost splendour of sculpture, encircling the stories of the Gods amid a twining and under-weaving of leaves and flowers. It was more like a temple than a dwelling. Siva, as Nataraja the Cosmic Dancer, the Rhythm of the Universe, danced before me, flinging out his arms in the passion of creation. Kama, the Indian Eros, bore his bow strung with honey-sweet black bees that typify the heart's desire. Krishna the Beloved smiled above the herd-maidens adoring at his feet. Ganesha the Elephant-Headed, sat in massive calm, wreathing his wise trunk about him. And many more. But all these so far as I could see tended to one centre panel larger than any, representing two life-size figures of a dim beauty. At first I could scarcely distinguish one from the other in the upward-reflected light, and then, even as I stood, the moving moon revealed the two as if floating in vapor. At once I recognized the subject - I had seen it already in the ruined temple of Ranipur, though the details differed. Parvati, the Divine Daughter of the Himalaya, the Emanation of the mighty mountains, seated upon a throne, listening to a girl who played on a Pan pipe before her. The goddess sat, her chin leaned upon her hand, her shoulders slightly inclined in a pose of gentle sweetness, looking down upon the girl at her feet, absorbed in the music of the hills and lonely places. A band of jewels, richly wrought, clasped the veil on her brows, and below the bare bosom a glorious girdle clothed her with loops and strings and tassels of jewels that fell to her knees - her only garment.

The girl was a lovely image of young womanhood, the proud swell of the breast tapering to the slim waist and long limbs easily folded as she half reclined at the divine feet, her lips pressed to the pipe. Its silent music mysteriously banished fear. The sleep must be sweet indeed that would come under the guardianship of these two fair creatures - their gracious influence was dewy in the air. I resolved that I would spend the night beside them. Now with the march of the moon dim vistas of the walls beyond sprang into being. Strange mythologies - the incarnations of Vishnu the Preserver, the Pastoral of Krishna the Beautiful. I promised myself that next day I would sketch some of the loveliness about me. But the moon was passing on her way - I folded the coat I carried into a pillow

and lay down at the feet of the goddess and her nymph. Then a moonlit quiet I slept in a dream of peace.

Sleep annihilates time. Was it long or short when I woke like a man floating up to the surface from tranquil deeps? That I cannot tell, but once more I possessed myself and every sense was on guard.

My hearing first. Bare feet were coming, falling softly as leaves, but unmistakable. There was a dim whispering but I could hear no word. I rose on my elbow and looked down the long hall. Nothing. The moonlight lay in pools of light and seas of shadow on the floor, and the feet drew nearer. Was I afraid? I cannot tell, but a deep expectation possessed me as the sound grew like the rustle of grasses parted in a fluttering breeze, and now a girl came swiftly up the steps, irradiate in the moonlight, and passing up the hall stood beside me. I could see her robe, her feet bare from the jungle, but her face wavered and changed and re- united like the face of a dream woman. I could not fix it for one moment, yet knew this was the messenger for whom I had waited all my life - for whom one strange experience, not to be told at present, had prepared me in early manhood. Words came, and I said:

"Is this a dream?"

"No. We meet in the Ninth Vibration. All here is true."

"Is a dream never true?"

"Sometimes it is the echo of the Ninth Vibration and therefore a harmonic of truth. You are awake now. It is the day-time that is the sleep of the soul. You are in the Lower Perception, wherein the truth behind the veil of what men call Reality is perceived."

"Can I ascend?"

"I cannot tell. That is for you, not me."

"What do I perceive tonight?"

"The Present as it is in the Eternal. Say no more. Come with me."

She stretched her hand and took mine with the assurance of a goddess, and we went up the hall where the night had been deepest between the great pillars.

Now it is very clear to me that in every land men, when the doors of perception are opened, will see what we call the Supernatural clothed in the image in which that country has accepted it. Blake, the mighty mystic, will see the Angels of the Revelation, driving their terrible way above Lambeth - it is not common nor unclean. The fisherman, plying his coracle on the Thames will behold the consecration of the great new Abbey of Westminster celebrated with mass and chant and awful lights in the dead mid-noon of

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

