

# Knell Quarternion

*by* Marc Nash

The Jester sat down on the edge of his mattress. He laboured to bring one gout ridden leg up to lay across the other. The jingle bell at the tip of his pointed toe mocked each serrated movement of his limb with a jaunty tinkle. He grabbed his ankle to arrest its dinging. They had always given him away. Betrayed his advent. People would halt the progress of whatever parley they were engaged in and turn to stop him in aisles and antechambers, demanding an instant jape or trick from him. With the pain in his legs, the aches in his heart and the sour surge of ill-humours throughout his body, his buffoonery was all played out. Touched by God people said of the poor fool. But the King was cert no longer touched by his rib-tickling. These days he only seemed to rub his Majesty up the wrong way. Just like this mattress which had sprouted tickling sticks of horse hair all over its clapped out rind. It had cradled his own pith here in the Palace since the day he had first shaken his bauble in drollery. Seemed like everyone and everything was at the threshold of being put out to grass, with such cankers abound in the kingdom. He managed to work off both of his shoes, while still holding the jingle at their tips. For he didn't want to alert the Devil to come ask him for a prank.

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She lay her weary body down on the straw mat. Having been dancing all day, the sound of the bells were still reverberating inside her head. She had dedicated to herself and to her parents, to be not just a temple dancer, but the most refined and elegant mover of them all. To devote herself to her god and master. She had ascended from the fifty, all the way up to the two hundred bell ghungroos. The weight had been excruciating to bear, but only to better suggest the litheness of her movements picked out in such a deep, thickened sound. She wore them in her sleep, to better temper her muscles to their burden. It made for interrupted slumber. Since each time she turned in her dreams, she was serenaded by a langourous pealing,

each time prompting her that she must jump to it in order to dance for a spring-borne water spirit. It was on being awoken in such manner and waiting to return back to sleep, she often wondered why she never heard the demure tintinnabula of the other Devadasis' bells. The door opened to her room. A male voice demanded her to take off her anklets. "Why? Do you not want me to dance for you oh spirit? " "You are an untouchable, you do not address yourself to me. But yes, you're going to dance for me all night".

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Fearne watched through the mullioned kitchen window that gave out on to the rear garden. Her siamese was striding through the long grass and suddenly she felt privy to millennia of leonine evolution, albeit scaled down for suburbia. The cat was indubitably filled with a purposeful prowl, but there was no prey anywhere to be seen. The tocsin bell hanging from its collar was fulfilling its mission. An early bird warning system to stymie the sorties of the sinuous slayer. Man's adaptive response, to stamp our own rhythms on Mother Nature. Be it placing a bell on a goat to lead its brethren to fall into step behind it. Or the rough music placed around the neck of a free thinker who looks to go his own way. Now Fearne couldn't believe her eyes, as the cat stopped at a rose bush primed with thorns and rubbed himself adroitly against its spines. Sure enough the halter was adroitly transferred to the plant, the collar gently flapping like a snake's sloughed skin in the breeze. Meanwhile the cat marched back to reclaim the garden savannah's leonine throne. Modestly piped in his triumph by a faint chime.

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The monk surveyed the damage wrought by the soldiers in their big dead cow boots. Even though steeled against superfluous feelings, he could not but shed a tear. The salt water drop seemed reluctant to release its anchorage in the bay of his eyelid and his vision was blurred. An overturned candle on the floor was still aflame and its feeble tendril rays seemed to reach out towards him. He knelt down to right it and as he raised himself back up, brought the candle up with him at eye level. He looked right through its

golden streaming light, which together with his water-clouded vision combined to throw a corona behind the head of a terracotta image of the Buddha. He knelt back down again, feeling he was witness to a great sign, the light of revelation itself even. The tears poured copiously now and he wiped them clear from his eye. Alas, now he could see quite clearly that most of the Buddha's face was missing. Stoved in by a rifle butt. Ugly jagged gashes effaced any serenity. Only the mouth remained, sealed without comment on what had befallen the shrine. The tips of the fingers clasped together in humble prayer had been hacked away. He looked at his own fingers, covered in dust from rooting around the floor for profaned offerings. He reached into the fold of his robe and drew out his tingsha. Or what remained of it anyway, seeing as the binding had snapped and only one of the small bronze cymbals remained. There was to be no cadences to open up his heart to sing. No vibrating struck sound to fill his emptiness. This bronze cymbal had rid itself of all earthly attachments. But in doing so there would be no placating the hungry ghosts and they would assuredly send their cruel minions with their boots and rifles back for more offerings.

