



## Flower, the Freed Slave's Story

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**I**N connection with the good news that along the Debai Coast the slaves are going to be set free by order of the British Government, you may be interested in the story of Flower, as told by herself, which is typical of the life story of many of the freed slaves in Bahrein.

"My country of birth is the Jungle. It is called Nyassa, and has a river as big as the Basrah one. And such good things as we used to eat—sugar cane and peanuts and lots of other nuts and potatoes and egg-plant and all sorts of great big vegetables. We also had lots of meat, for the country was full of sheep and goats. But of rice we ate very little and dates I never saw there. Our houses were built of grass and mud, with very strong wooden beams, because they had to be strong enough to keep out the wolves. Our country is just full of wolves.

"But one day when I was only five or six years old I was playing out in the woods with other boys and girls, when three men came along. They seized us, filled our mouths with flour, tied up our chins and put us on camels. First they took us to Ali's house in Zanzibar, where we remained for about a week. But then he became afraid that our people would come after us, so he put us on a sailboat bound for Sur in Oman, Arabia. There they separated us and put us in different houses so that we could not see each other any more. I, myself, was taken to the house of Sheikh Sagr bin Khalid.

"When after about five years I grew up into a pretty woman, they told me I must learn Arabic and become a Mohammedan. I became one of the Sheikh's seven concubines. He was good to us and gave us jewels and clothes, but his wife tore our clothes and beat us every day. When she used to beat us so much, we used to say to our master, 'Uncle, take us to the bazar and sell us!' He said, 'I will never take you to the bazar—you are like my wives and cannot be bought and sold. Your children are my children.' I gave birth to a little boy, but when he was only seven months old my master's wife took him away from me. She, herself, had four children and feared that if my child grew up, the Sheikh might leave him some of the inheritance.

"I was so angry that they had taken my child away that when I found out that there was in Bunder Abbas a Sahib who could free slaves, I fled from my master's house. To pay my passage I gave my necklace to the captain of the sailboat, telling him to take me there. The trip took us only a day and a night and part of another day. We arrived at dusk and my master got there the next morning, but he found me already at the consul's house. I was holding on to the flagpole. I was so frightened. After the consul got up and ate his breakfast, he came out on the veranda. Then he saw me and sent a servant to ask me who I was and from where I came. I told him I was from Sur in Oman. Then he said, 'Who is your master?' I said

'Sheikh Sagr.' The consul then ordered 'Take her to the cook's wife.' She gave me rice and meat and bread and buttermilk till my hunger was satisfied. After that the consul sent for me. He asked 'What is your name?' I said 'Flower.' 'Who is your father?' I said 'Othman.' 'Who is your mother?' I said 'Jedaya.' 'Where is your country?' I said 'The jungle.' 'How many years have you lived in Sheikh Sagr's house?' I said, 'Fifteen years.' 'Why have you come here?' 'They beat me, they broke my teeth, they took my child from me and killed him and so, Sahib, I have come to you and to God. Whether you help me or whether you kill me, one thing I know—I shall never go back to my master.' The Sahib then took a piece of paper, wrote on it my release and handed it to me, saying, 'Look here, Flower, you are free, so free that if you want to go to London to see the land of Queen Victoria no one can hinder you. No one can hinder you or say anything to you or take you, for you are free. If your master has anything to say, let him come to me.'

"For about a week I remained in Bunder Abbas, and after that went back to the consul to ask permission to go back to Linga. He said 'You are free; go.' I went to Linga and stayed for a year with the sister of my former master. She was fond of me and I served for a year about the house. She provided me with food and clothes. Then a black man, named Bilal, asked for me. My mistress said, 'This poor man wants you for his wife.' I said 'Thank you.' He gave me two hundred and fifty-five rupees and brought me mats, bedding and clothes. We remained in Linga for four years. He was a diver, and when he went to dive, I stayed with my former mistress. He did make some money but he spent it all on opium. He went from bad to worse and began to commit all kinds of wickedness so that I did not want him any longer. One Ramathan we left Linga and came to Bahrein. We built a house, but he began to steal again. To get money for opium he began to steal even from me, my clothes and pots and pans. Then I went to the missionaries to complain. I said, 'My husband steals from me and beats me.' The missionary lady took me to the hospital and told me to serve there for twelve rupees a month. My husband was caught stealing and taken to the consul's prison. He fled from the prison and I never saw him again. Two years later he sent me my divorce papers. I took them to the missionaries, who all read them, and told me I could now serve in the house. So I left the hospital work and began my work in the house. I lived in a room back of the Mission house.

"I know I have often been naughty—I have run away and left the dishes unwashed—when other women laughed at my reading. I would not come again to learn to read. When I listen to the Gospel it often makes my heart happy, but sometimes it makes me cry and I ask what will happen to me in the Day of Judgment. I have cursed, I have lied, I have sinned and am like dirt beneath the feet of the Lord. Then I pray like you do, 'Forgive my sins, Lord, wash away my guilt and give me a clean garment.'"