

**THE BOOK WAS
DRENCHED**

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_174270

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

THE TALE OF THE TEN COMPANIONS

BEING AN ADAPTATION OF
DANDIN'S DASAKUMARA CHARITRA

BY
FRANK R. SELL, M.A.
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE



LONGMANS, GREEN & CO., LTD.
6 OLD COURT HOUSE STREET, CALCUTTA
53 NICOL ROAD, BOMBAY
167 MOUNT ROAD, MADRAS, S.C.
LONDON, TORONTO AND NEW YORK

1926

All rights reserved

LONGMANS' INDIAN CLASSICS

THE RAMAYANA.	Re. 1-4
THE MAHABHARATA.	Re. 1-4
THE HITOPADEŚA.	Re. 1-0
TALES FROM HINDU DRAMA.	Re. 1-4
SAKUNTALA.	Re 1-4

LONGMANS, GREEN & CO., LTD.

PREFACE

THIS book is an abridgement and an adaptation of a famous work for a special purpose. Readers must not expect to find in it a *translation* of Dandin's work. The necessity for abridgement and adaptation compelled me to retell some of the stories after my own fashion, and to make the book fulfil its purpose as an English text-book for Indian high schools. I have made some of the stories shorter and more natural without, I hope, taking away any vital interest. What might have been thought improprieties of situation I have removed or evaded. One story—the adventures of Chitragupta—I have omitted entirely. It was long, rambling and full of interpolated short episodical stories. In Mantragupta's narrative I have given a different conclusion to the plot because the original solved the question by a metamorphosis scene. To have retained this would have involved a repetition of *plot-motif*. To make the reading easier I have sub-divided the stories, wherever possible, into sections with suitable section-headings. The chapter-headings are my own. I have also added a list of the ten companions showing their relationships at a glance. May the reader have as much pleasure in reading these stories as I have had in writing them.

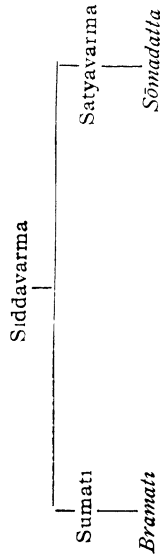
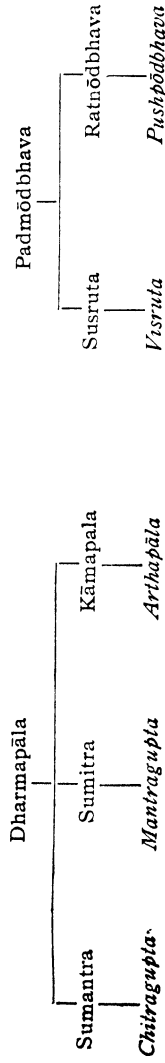
F.R.S.

CENTRAL COLLEGE,
BANGALORE,
June 1926.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. DEFEAT AND EXILE	1
II. THE COMING OF THE COMPANIONS	8
III. THE ADVENTURES OF THE PRINCE. A JOURNEY TO THE NETHERWORLD	19
IV. SOMADATTA'S STORY. THE LOST DIAMOND	36
V. THE STORY OF PUSHPODBHAVA. THE YAKSHA-PROTECTED MAIDEN	42
VI. FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE PRINCE. THE NECROMANCER	52
VII. THE IMPRISONMENT OF THE PRINCE ..	63
VIII. APAKARAVARMA'S ADVENTURES. HOW HE REQUITED WRONG-DOING	73
IX. UPAKARAVARMA'S STORY. HOW A LOST THRONE WAS REGAINED	97
X. ARTHAPALA'S STORY. THE FORGOTTEN PRINCESS	114
XI. BRAMATI'S STORY. A DREAM AND ITS FULFILMENT	124
XII. THE ADVENTURES OF MANTRAGUPTA. THE SKELETON-MAGICIAN	135
XIII. VISRUTA'S STORY. ARYAPUTRA OR THE GODDESS'S SON	142
XIV. THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN	154

LIST OF THE TEN COMPANION



The names in italics are the names of the ten companions

THE TALE OF THE TEN COMPANIONS

CHAPTER I

DEFEAT AND EXILE

IN days of yore Magadha was a great kingdom famous for its wealth and culture. It lay on both sides of the Ganges, and was fertilized by its sacred waters. Its capital was Pushpapura, the City of Flowers. Another name for this beautiful city, adorned with groves, artificial hills and hanging gardens, was Pataliputra. At the time of our tale Rajahamsa was the King, and fair Vasumati, famed far and wide for her beauty, was the Queen. His chief ministers were Dharmapala, Padmodbhava and Siddhavarma. Dharmapala had three sons, Sumantra, Sumitra, and Kamapala. Padmodbhava had two sons, Susruta and Ratnodbhava, and Siddhavarma also had two sons, Sumati and Satyavarma. One of the sons of each minister renounced his rights to succeed his father in his office and went his way into the wide world. Satyavarma went forth as a pilgrim, Ratnodbhava as a merchant overseas, and Kamapala as a seeker of pleasure and happiness. The other sons remained at home and assisted their fathers in affairs of state.

At this juncture, Manasara, King of Malwa, invaded Magadha but was defeated and put to

roul by the valiant Rajahamsa. However, his presumption was forgiven by the generous-hearted ruler of Magadha, who restored to his defeated enemy his liberty and the kingdom that he had forfeited.

After this, the might of Magadha increased so that in all North India there was none so great as Rajahamsa. But absolute sovereignty with all its splendours failed to charm the good king because he was childless and had none to inherit after him the greatness he had acquired. Saddened by this thought, he spent days and nights in supplication to the Supreme Deity praying for the blessing of a son and heir. His earnest prayers were heard. In due course the shastraic ceremony of *seemanta* was performed with the utmost joy and splendour. Whilst the king was yet on his throne in the audience chamber and the durbar was about to close, there stood before him an ascetic whom by secret signs he knew to be one of his spies returning in this disguise to report his discoveries. The king took him apart and learnt from him that the King of Malwa was on his way with a huge army to conquer Magadha. The spy had heard that Manasara after his defeat was so humiliated that he had determined to have his revenge. With this intent, he had repaired to the forests of Mahakala to do *tapas* and to win from the Lord Siva weapons with which to destroy his enemies. Constrained by the austerity of the *tapas* that Manasara performed, Lord Siva appeared before him and gave him a club which—so wise men believed—would deal certain death to those against whom it was used.

This news, coming as it did at a time when the king was filled with benevolence towards all mankind, disturbed him greatly. Grief and anger overpowered him ; grief for the thousands that would be slain on both sides, and anger at a base ingratitude displayed by the ruler of Malwa. He decided to give instant battle in spite of the earnest entreaty of his ministers, who advised him to stay behind and protect the queen. Bravest of the brave, he scouted the idea of shirking a fight merely because his base foe possessed a God-given weapon. Thereupon his ministers requested him to permit them to remove Queen Vasumati, their wives and the ladies of the royal court to a secret hiding place far away in the Vindhya wilds. Rajahamsa permitted this gladly and then ordered his troops to advance and meet the invader outside the gates of his capital. A fierce fight ensued, and, after a while, the cowardly Manasara found his army sore beset and himself beaten to the ground by the heroic ruler of Magadha. Now was the time, thought he, to use his divine club, and so in the twinkling of an eye he whirled it with the energy of despair against the chariot of the victorious Rajahamsa. The weapon was well and truly aimed ; the charioteer was the first to go down before it, slain outright. Immediately afterwards it descended with terrific force upon Rajahamsa, who, deprived of his senses by the impact, fell back as if dead onto the floor of the chariot. The noble steeds, now totally without guidance, turned, and fleeing with the speed of lightning, bore their royal master from the fatal field. By some miraculous instinct, they bore him to the very wilder-

ness where his queen and the wives of his ministers had taken refuge.

When they perceived Rajahamsa's chariot driving swiftly away from the field of battle, the Magadha forces lost heart and scattered aimlessly in all directions. Manasara, elated with success, rallied his now jubilant followers, overran Magadha with fire and sword, entered the "City of Flowers" in triumph and installed himself on the vacant throne as monarch of all Magadha.

Rajahamsa's ministers, who had fallen on the battlefield pierced with a hundred wounds, lay all that night in deathly swoon and towards dawn opened their aching eyes upon the pitiable scene. All around them the corpses of the slain lay in ghastly heaps. Memory revived. With sinking hearts they sought in those heaps for the body of their sovereign. They could not find it anywhere, and so began to be hopeful that somehow he had escaped and would live to regain his throne and kingdom, of which cruel fate had deprived him for the time being. The sun was now rising higher and higher in the sky and it behoved them not to expose their weakened bodies to his scorching rays. They managed to crawl to cool shelter near by where they helped one another to dress their wounds. In course of time, proceeding by slow stages, they succeeded in reaching the secret refuge of their wives and of Queen Vasumati in the Vindhya Mountains.

The queen, expecting to welcome her husband from the field of battle, received a terrible shock and fell senseless to the ground of battle on hearing the tragic news of her lord's defeat and pre-

sumed death. On her revival, the ministers and the ladies of the court tried their utmost to soothe her and to calm her outbursts of grief. Bitterly she exclaimed again and again that life had now no value for her, that further existence in this world without her dear lord's presence was intolerable and that she was resolved to put an end to herself. In reply to these wild words her ministers and her ladies told her to remember that her life was not her own to dispose of as she pleased but was sacred to her unborn child. They reminded her that wise men had foretold great glory for her child. Let her then possess herself in patience until her child had been safely brought up and prepare to play his glorious part in the world of men.

Pretending to be convinced, the distraught queen awaited the oncoming of night and then she stole quietly away from the encampment and hastened to a grove standing at some distance. Selecting a suitable tree she climbed up to one of the lower branches and tied one end of her *sari* securely to it and made a noose for her neck with the other end. But before jumping off the bough and hanging herself, she heaved a deep sigh and exclaimed, "O lord of my heart, was it fair of thee to go away from me who was ever nestling close to thy garlanded bosom? Gracious to all as thou wert in thy life, why hast thou proved cruel to me alone? Listen now to the vow and the prayer which I register before Heaven; through all successive births of mine thou and thou alone art to be my lord and I and none other am to be thy loving wife."

So wailed she and was about to jump off the branch so that the noose around her neck might choke the life out of her body when, to her extreme surprise, she heard herself called by name by what she thought to be her husband's voice. It was indeed Rajahamsa himself who was calling to her to stop committing suicide. Borne almost by a miracle by the steeds of his chariot to this same grove of champak whereto the queen had resorted, the unconscious king had slowly revived. Imagine his horror at seeing his dear wife about to end her life. His voice was weak from the exhausted state of his body, and a terrible fear gripped him lest it should not reach his wife's ears in time to prevent her tragic action. Happily, however, it did. Slipping the noose from her neck, Vasumati jumped to the ground and ran to her lord and fervently embraced him. Her glad cries of joy soon attracted her ladies and other attendants to the spot. One and all rejoiced exceedingly at this most joyous reunion between their beloved king and queen.

The ministers, thankful beyond measure at seeing their master again, tended him with the utmost care so that in a short time Rajahamsa was his old self. Secure in the privacy of these mountain fastnesses and fed carefully on the wholesome roots and fruits of the forest, he made a complete recovery. His life in the forest was not unhappy except for the sorrow he felt at having been deprived by an unkind fate, for no fault of his own, of his throne and kingdom. One day, feeling this sorrow to be unendurable, he went to the hermitage of Rishi Vamadeva and, falling at his

feet, begged him to tell him when his exile would end and whether he or his ministers could do aught to hasten the coming of that happy day. The kindly sage comforted him by saying that shortly a son would be born to him whose greatness would bring back to him all that he had lost and more.

In course of time a lovely son was born in that sylvan retreat at a very auspicious moment. On the tenth day the delighted parents named the babe Rajavahana. Sons were also born to the four junior ministers about the same time. Sumantra named his child Chitrugupta, his brother Sumitra named his baby Mantragupta. To Susruta's child was given the name of Visruta, and Sumati's boy was known as Bramati. These four children were inseparable companions of Rajavahana. All five grew up healthy, cheerful and strong.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE COMPANIONS

THE COMING OF UPAKARAVARMA

ONE day there came to the forest retreat of King Rajahamsa a certain Brahmin bringing with him a young lad to hand over to his care. This lad was the son of Prakaravarma, King of Mithila. On being questioned by Rajahamsa how he had come across the boy, the Brahmin replied, "Sire, wandering one day in the forest I met a woman whose appearance struck me with surprise. Her locks were haggard, her clothes were torn and tattered, and her loosened hair was falling over her shoulders. It was obvious that she had met with some serious misfortune. I felt much pity for her and asked her in gentle tones who she was and how she came to be wandering thus disconsolately in that wilderness of rocks and forests. She looked up at me gratefully and besought my aid in searching for her lost child. Her tale was a piteous one. She and her daughter were the nurses of the twin princes of Mithila. They had accompanied King Prakaravarma and his queen with their tender charges to the court of Rajahamsa to be present at the *seemanta* ceremony of Queen Vasumati. It was a grand affair, she said,

for King Rajahamsa had invited quite a number of rulers and their queens to attend it. Unhappily the wicked King of Malwa invaded Magadha just at that very time. Prakaravarma of course helped his friend and ally, Rajahamsa. The battle was fierce and for a long while indecisive but at last Rajahamsa was seen being driven rapidly away out of the fight, and his troops, loosing all heart, began to scatter in all directions. Prakara-varma, eluding the clutches of the invader, escaped through the jungles towards his own kingdom with his wife and baby sons and a selected body of attendants. At this point of her story the old woman paused and sighed deeply. Past memories overpowered her. 'My daughter and I,' she resumed at length, 'found it no easy matter to keep pace with the king, who was anxious to get home and prepare for a possible invasion of his own territories. This I learnt from his conversation with the queen. Then at a certain rather dense part of the forest a group of wild forest dwellers attacked our party. But Prakaravarma by his valour and skilfulness beat them off after inflicting serious losses upon them. However he did not wish to be interrupted again by such annoying skirmishes, and so he continued his flight faster than ever. Alas, by some strange mischance my daughter and I found ourselves separated a little from the main party. We took a wrong path and lost the track altogether. We were retracing our footsteps, hoping to pick up the trail again, when we found ourselves face to face with a glaring tiger. We both screamed and fled we knew not whither. The tiger pursued us. I

tripped over a tree stump and fell. The child, thrown out of my arms, picked himself up with a laugh and toddled behind a fallen tree. For some strange reason the tiger did not touch me as I lay in an agony of fear on the ground, but was crouching for a spring upon the dear baby, who was actually laughing with glee, when he rolled over with an arrow through his heart. A bold hunter had come up in the nick of time and shot his arrow with unerring aim. I could see from where I lay how attracted the hunter was by the beauty of the child. I tried to shout but my voice stuck in my throat. The hunter carried off the little prince. I was quite unable to follow him, my legs refusing to carry me. Never have I trembled so in all my life before or since. After many hours I arose to search for my daughter, but hungry and exhausted I sank into a swoon. When I awoke I found myself in the hut of a kind-hearted shepherd, whose wife tended me with the most humane care. However, the longing to find the child entrusted to my care, or failing that, to carry the sad news to his parents obsessed me. I resumed my wanderings in these pathless wilds. I have now met you and I implore you by all that you hold sacred to help me in my search.' "

"Such was the old woman's story, Sire," continued the Brahmin, "I assured her I would do my very best for her. Since then I have penetrated into many a nook and cranny. One morning I found myself in the neighbourhood of a shrine of Chandi in a deep glade. On approaching closer, I saw a group of fierce-looking Savaras, men who live by hunting big game, lining up the

doorway of the shrine. Evidently they were about to offer to this dread goddess a human sacrifice as a thankoffering for a recent victory over their enemies. Seated in the midst, looking absolutely dazed, was a beautiful boy smeared all over with red sandal paste and decked with a garland of the scarlet hibiscus beloved of the Goddess Kali. Overcome with fear and pity for the poor child, whom I at once guessed to be the missing prince, I walked boldly up to the group near the shrine and besought them in moving accents to tell me if they had seen my little lost son wandering about in the jungles. If any of them knew where he was and could restore him to his broken-hearted father I would load him with blessings and would pray three times a day to Goddess Kali to shower upon him every prosperity. My grief was so unmistakable, and I looked so piteous that even those ruthless savages relented, and some of them bade me look where the poor little victim was sitting and asked me if he were my lost son. On my rushing towards the lad and clasping him in a fervent embrace, they felt convinced that he was indeed the child I was seeking. They told me in kindly tones to take him up and go my way. I lost no time in so doing, and now I have brought him safe and sound to you, O King, as you are more fitted than I to look after him and rear him in a manner befitting his royal birth."

Delighted to be of some use to his old friend Prakaravarma, Rajahamsa accepted the trust and naming the boy Upakarvarma, brought him up lovingly in company with the other five children.

THE COMING OF APAKARAVARMA

Sometime after the bringing of Upakaravarma, Rajahamsa went disguised on a pilgrimage to the sacred places lying on the banks of the Ganges. On his way back he passed a hamlet of foresters. At the heels of one of the women who were carrying pots of water to their huts trotted a child of rare beauty. Rajahamsa could see at a glance that this was not a village child. He asked the woman who the child was and how he came into her possession. She made answer that the boy had been brought to her by her husband, who had found him lying near the place where he and his men had ambushed the King of Mithila as he was flying from the troopers of Malwa. Rajahamsa at once knew the child to be the twin brother of Upakaravarma. He begged hard of the woman to hand the boy over to his keeping. But as he was in disguise and looked a very ordinary person the woman, who had begun to grow really fond of the boy, hesitated for a considerable time. At last, thoughts of the rough usage to which the men of the village often subjected the tender child decided her to hand him over to the stranger with earnest entreaty to look after him well. Rajahamsa readily gave the most solemn promises to do so and thanked the woman sincerely for trusting him. Thus the boy, shortly after this named Apakaravarma, was happily reared with the other six children in the Vindhya Mountains.

THE COMING OF PUSHPODBHAVA

On a certain day, a month or two later, one of the disciples of Rishi Vamadeva appeared before

Rajahamsa and laid at his feet a tender babe, narrating the following story to explain how it was that the child came into his keeping. "Sire, whilst on my return from bathing in the Ramatirtha Ghat of the Ganges I met an old woman carrying a small baby. Not expecting to see such a sight in that lonely forest, I was naturally curious to know who she was and how she came to be thus wandering aimlessly about with an infant in those desolate parts. She seemed overjoyed to meet a kindly disposed person and answered me readily enough. She was a servant of a certain lady Subhavrta, daughter of a rich merchant in the Isle of Kalayavana and wife of Ratnodbhava, son of a minister in the court of Magadha. Ratnodbhava suddenly conceived the wish to rejoin his parents. He equipped a large boat, loaded it with all the wealth he had gained by trading, and embarked with his wife and child and a few servants. Half-way across to the mainland, the boat was caught in a severe tempest. It became unmanageable and was driven onto the rocks and split in two. Subhavrta and her woman-servant were lucky enough to lay hold of some floating spars and were washed ashore. The baby had been securely tied in its mother's clothes and seemed none the worse for the drenching it had had in the salt water. What with exhaustion and the agonizing uncertainty as to her husband's fate, the poor lady was lying unconscious on the shore.

Just as the old woman was finishing her narrative, a huge elephant came trumpeting and crashing towards us through the undergrowth. The old woman, terrified out of her wits, threw

the baby onto the ground and fled. I myself, no less terrified than she, climbed up a tree near by. The elephant paid no attention to us but picked up the child in its flexible trunk. Doubtless it would have dashed the poor little mite onto the ground and trampled it underfoot had not a lion, which, unknown to us, had been crouching in the long grass whilst we talked, leaped on to its back. The astonished animal flung the child into the air and started to roll upon the ground to dislodge the lion on its back. Most opportunely a big monkey, who chattering and gibbering in the trees as he watched the duel going on beneath him, caught the child most deftly, looked at it tenderly, and laid it gently in a large fork of the tree on which he happened to be. Meanwhile the elephant and the lion went crashing madly through the trees and were soon out of sight and hearing. The monkey with others of his kin that had come up followed the fight, leaping and springing across the tree tops. When all was quiet, I slipped down from my perch, climbed the other tree and recovered the infant. The poor child was bruised and frightened but otherwise not really hurt. Where the old woman fled to I do not know. I took the babe to the hermitage of my *guru* and he bade me bring it at once to you."

Rajahamsa felt very grateful to the gods for having brought to safety the tender baby boy of his childhood's friend, Ratnodbhava. He thanked the Brahmin again and again for his welcome gift. Susruta, Ratnodbhava's brother, who had listened most intently to the Brahmin's story, took his baby nephew into his arms and

caressed him. He named the child Pushpodbhava, and arranged for its upbringing with his own son Visruta and the other children in their Vindhyan retreat.

THE COMING OF ARTHAPALA

A few days later Rajahamsa, on entering the *parnasala* or woodland hut in which he dwelt with his wife and little son, found her nursing a strange infant. Somewhat surprised, he asked her where the baby had come from. She answered as follows: "Lord of my heart, last night I was awakened suddenly from my sleep by a feeling that someone was standing near and wishing to speak to me. I rubbed my eyes and looking round saw standing there the radiant figure of a Vidyadara woman. Her appearance was as dazzling as the lightning flash. I shielded my eyes with my hand and asked her who she was and what she wanted. She answered that she was the wife of Kamapala, son of Dharmapala, minister to Rajahamsa of Magadha, and that her father was the well-known Yaksha Manibhadra. The child she was carrying in her arms was her own little son whom she was now desirous to hand over to the care of Queen Vasumati. For so her parents had urged her to do in order that the boy might have the rare privilege of serving Prince Rajavahana, before whom lay a future of unparalleled greatness. Hardly had she finished speaking when she vanished with the swiftness of a flash of lightning."

This tale made a strong impression on Rajahamsa, who stooped down, took the child out of his wife's arms and kissed it fondly. He named

it Arthapala and handed it over to the care of its father's elder brother Sumitra, with injunctions to bring it up in the company of the other children.

THE COMING OF SOMADATTA

Not many days after this, another of Rishi Vamadeva's disciples came and stood before the king. He was carrying a lovely child in his arms. In reply to Rajahamsa's questions, the Brahmin explained as follows : "Sire, sometime ago in the course of a pilgrimage to the South I reached the banks of the Cauvery. My attention was attracted to a spot somewhat lower down than where I had bathed by the loud lamentations of an old woman. I ran towards her and noticed that she was carrying this child in her arms and that both were dripping wet. I asked her who she was and what grief assailed her. 'Alas,' sobbed she, 'my tale is soon told. One Satyavarma, son of Siddhavarma, minister to Rajahamsa, ruler of Magadha, arrived in these parts in the course of his travels. The loveliness of the Cauvery hereabouts charmed him into staying at an Agraharam not far from here. Here he married a maiden named Kali, but as in course of time they remained childless he married her sister Gowri as his second wife. This baby boy was born to them in due course. But the childless wife grew ever more and more jealous of her sister's child and a few minutes ago as I was nursing the infant on the banks of the river and crooning it to sleep, she stole up quietly behind me, pushed us fiercely into the stream and made off. The river as you see is in flood and I was swept off my feet. The

babe and I would assuredly have been drowned if I had not with a great effort grasped a floating log of wood and so managed to keep our heads above water. Here at this bend of the river we were washed ashore amidst floating wreckage that the current had swept to this point. Alas, as I was pulling myself towards dry land a black snake hidden in the wreckage darted forwards and bit me. With but a few minutes more to live, and not knowing what was to become of my tender nursling, when cruel death had seized me, I cried aloud in my bitter sorrow of heart. May the Gods punish the fiend of a woman that brought us to this extremity.'

Even as she said this, Sire, she fell forward and expired. I tried to restore her to life by all the incantations I knew and one or two simple drugs. But all was in vain. I cremated her body, therefore, with the due rites, and judging it to be fruitless to go in search of the parents of the child, I have brought him to you as being best fitted to look after him."

Rajahamsa was most willing to take charge of him. He named him Somadatta and instructed Sumati, Satyavarma's brother, to bring up his nephew with all due care along with the other children who had been brought together in such a mysterious manner.

Months and days passed. Prince Rajavahana and his nine playmates grew into sturdy young manhood, well instructed both by his father and the wise ministers who shared their royal master's long exile. All the ten companions were proficient

in the scriptures, the fine arts and philosophy. Their physical education also had received the closest attention. They became very skilful in the use of warlike weapons. Indeed their education was so thorough that even gambling and theft which, according to the traditions in vogue, must be learnt though never practised, were familiar to them in theory. The king, the queen, and their ministers who beheld day by day the exemplary conduct of the young men, their modesty, their valour, and their inventiveness, began to indulge in hopes that by their means their exile would soon be ended and the throne of Magadha regained.

CHAPTER III

THE ADVENTURES OF THE PRINCE

A JOURNEY TO THE NETHERWORLD

IT was the custom in those days that, when they were considered to have been sufficiently educated, young men were sent out into the world for a short period of time to gain experience of life at first hand. They could go out either alone or in the company of those who had been their school-fellows. Rishi Vamadeva visited King Rajahamsa one day and told him that it was high time that the prince and his companions should travel so as to perfect their education, for they were all young men from whom he expected great things. Convinced that the sage's advice was very sound, Rajahamsa acted upon it. As soon as ever an auspicious day came round, the king sent forth his son and heir Rajavahana and his excellent comrades upon their travels.

i. HOW YAMA WAS MERCIFUL TO MATANGA THE ROBBER

With the blessings of all who had watched them grow up, the prince and his companions started early in the morning, and, marching the whole of the day, halted for the night in the midst of a dense jungle on the borders of the Vindhya Mountains. Leaving the king's son free to amuse himself, the others set to work cooking food and

erecting shelters with tree branches and foliage under which to sleep comfortably. Rajavahana meanwhile strolled off some distance idly looking about him until his supper should be ready. He carried his bow and arrows and a couple of daggers in his belt, for he might meet some wild beasts as the evening shades were falling so rapidly, and the hour was approaching when wild animals begin to move about. He did not expect to see any men, for during the whole of that day's march they had met none. Great was his surprise, therefore, to hear footsteps approaching. A man was coming rapidly to meet him. The prince put his hand to his dagger but took it away again when he saw that the stranger was unarmed. In a few moments the prince found himself face to face with a man about his own height but in complexion very dark and in physique active and wiry-looking. Long scars, memorials of many a cut and gash, were to be seen all over his body, which was naked except for a loincloth and the sacred thread of a Brahmin. He saluted the prince very respectfully and stood as though he awaited his commands. The prince accordingly opened the conversation by saying,

"O Stranger, who are you and what are you doing in this primeval forest? You look like a low-caste hunter or fowler and yet, for some reason I do not know, you are wearing the Brahmin's sacred thread."

"Well may you be surprised, O prince," answered the other, "by seeing the sacred thread upon one who looks not in the least like a high-caste man. The sad truth is that here and there

in these wild forests groups of Brahmins, disregarding the discipline of their high birth, are living much as do the savage Bhils or Santals by hunting, plundering and slaying. To one such group did I belong and my name is Matanga. Once I went on a raid into the cities adjoining these forests, and with my companions looted many a homestead, tying hand and foot and throwing into dark corners all who resisted, whether men or women. We also made a few prisoners to hold to ransom later on, and with these in our midst we were making our way back to our jungle retreat. As we were proceeding, I saw with uncontrollable anger a party of base-born hunters surrounding a poor Brahmin wayfarer with intent to rob and kill him. I dashed into their midst and laid about me with my sword to rescue the victim. But my action was over-rash and impetuous, for, ere my comrades could intervene, the ruffianly cut-throats rallied themselves from their surprise and swarmed upon me. My sword arm was temporarily disabled by a blow from a stout cudgel, and so they overpowered me and wounded me very seriously. However they did not await my comrades' onslaught but took to their heels, hotly pursued by my companions. I remember falling in a deathlike swoon by the side of the Brahmin wayfarer who was lying gagged and bound on the ground. Then I seemed to awake into a new world. I found myself standing in *Yamaloka*. The messengers of Yama came to me as I stood there dazed and bewildered, and led me before the Lord of Death, who was seated on a gem-studded throne shining as a jewel in the

midst of a magnificent Hall of Gold. Trembling I bowed low before the dread Lord of Death.

Turning to his servants and addressing them, Yama spake thus, 'Slaves, this man before me has done many an evil deed in his life and is a deep-dyed sinner. Yet by a single disinterested action in attempting to rescue a defenceless innocent Brahmin from a cruel death, he has earned merit enough to wipe his slate clean of all previous sins. Moreover, his is an untimely death; many more years of life in yonder world are his destined portion. Bear him back therefore to the earth and encase him again in that battered body of his. But before doing so, confer on him the benefit to be derived by a journey through the length and breadth of this *Naraka*, teeming with its millions of wicked ones suffering well-deserved torture.'

His commands were instantly obeyed. Chitragupta his lieutenant took me round the halls of unutterable woe. The memory of these scenes makes me shudder whenever I think of them. It may be that, in trying to tell you all that I saw there of unparalleled torture and woe, I shall begin to shudder and tremble so violently that I shall not be able to proceed. You must, O prince, excuse my weakness in such a case. However, I shall do my best to give you a succinct and rapid narrative.

The various tortures I am going to mention were inflicted upon those most miserable sinners in different localities, each of which had its distinctive and peculiar atmosphere. It is beyond my powers now to describe minutely the extent of each and

wherein they differed one from another. At the time of my journey through them I noticed these differences clearly enough but now they are all confused in my mind. Suffice it for you to know that some of these places of torture were very hot and some very cold, some were enveloped in dense and murky clouds of acrid smoke, and others were comparatively light but filled with intolerable stench. In such places I saw some wretches being incessantly dragged about by knotted ropes noosed round their necks. Others were made to lie full length on red-hot coals of fire or else, stretched on their stomachs on rocks glowing with heat, were beaten with hammers of molten iron. Over roaring fires of molten heat I saw huge cauldrons of oil steaming and hissing. Within these cauldrons there were wretched ones whose cries were beyond measure piteous to hear. In another place were set tables with jars of some liquid upon them. Chitragupta informed me that this liquid was known as the nectar of hell, a potion which those condemned to drink it were most reluctant to swallow. Even as he spoke I heard heart-rending wailings and saw dark forms being driven forward and compelled to drink. Immediately they fell to the ground and writhed about in unspeakable agonies. O prince, the horror of it all overwhelms me. I pray you excuse me if I cease my narrative for a brief space."

Rajavahana, whose eyes were dilated with horror at the mental pictures that Matanga had so vividly conjured up, was only too glad himself to have some respite from this blood-curdling tale, and graciously gave the desired permission. In

a few minutes Matanga mastered his trembling voice and regained his self-control sufficiently to proceed with his narrative.

“The last horror I remember to have seen was a deep yawning chasm or pit wherein was wriggling all manner of loathsome reptiles. Into these awful places countless wretches were being pushed, uttering as they fell the most dreadful shrieks of anguish. I could endure no more. These scenes of appalling woe had stirred me to the inmost depths of my being. I sat down and wept piteously. Chitragupta, standing by my side, stooped down and lifted me up tenderly. I could see a smile upon his face as he poured into my ears words of hope. ‘O Matanga,’ he said, ‘you have now seen the tortures that sinners bring upon themselves by their wickedness. Take this lesson to heart, amend your ways in the remaining years of your life. Thus alone will you escape these halls of torture.’

With these words ringing in my ears I awoke to consciousness and saw the Brahmin whom I had tried to succour, no longer bound and gagged, bending over me with pitiful concern in his eyes as he sprinkled me again and again with cold water. I beheld my comrades also who had returned from their pursuit of the low-born hunters. With their help I was removed in a litter to our retreat where everything was done that could be done to hasten my complete recovery. That I recovered so soon was chiefly due to the tender and assiduous care of the grateful Brahmin, who would not leave my side for a moment. He nursed me back to physical health first, and then,

a much more important matter, he nursed me back to moral health. He constituted himself my *guru* and taught me everything a Brahmin should know from the rudiments of learning up to the highest soul-saving wisdom. When the time was ripe he initiated me into the mysteries of *dhyana* or devotional meditation. Having thus amply repaid me for my slight service to him, my kind preceptor departed to the Himalayas to do penance for his own salvation."

"After he had left me," continued the now regenerate Kirata, "I changed entirely my former mode of life, renounced my friends and family ties and repaired to these untrodden forests to pass the rest of my days in meditation. Now, O prince, I come to the object with which I have sought you out. Last night I dreamed a very vivid dream. Lord Siva appeared to me riding on his sacred bull and spoke to me thus: 'O devotee, go thou to the forest of Dandaka. At its north-western corner there flows a jungle stream. Passing along its bank following the stream thine eyes will soon rest upon a self-created crystal *linga*. On the coral rock beside it will be seen the imprints of the blessed feet of Goddess Parvati. Keeping these imprints on thy right, proceed until the track leads thee to the mouth of a dark cavern. Near the cavern mouth lies a heavy slab of granite. If a strong man unassisted removes that granite block to one side, he will find underneath it a copper plate with an inscription upon it. Herein he will find clear directions how to get to the regions of the underworld. Now, O devotee, the youth of royal descent who alone can move aside the rock

will come to these wilds to-morrow and thou must go to him and request his help.'

These commands of Lord Siva I am even now fulfilling. Fortunately I have met you, O prince, and now I pray of you to lend me your royal aid."

The prince, to whom such adventures as this appealed strongly, gladly agreed to help Matanga, and fixed the hour of midnight for rejoining him at the spot whereon they now stood. Meanwhile he returned to his friends, partook of the food they had prepared, and retired as though for rest, apart from the others, in a leafy shelter especially prepared for him. At the dead of night, he arose noiselessly and joined the expectant stranger at the rendezvous some little distance from the camp.

On the morrow, his companions, finding no trace of him, searched for him in all directions, loudly calling out his name and marvelling more and more at receiving no reply. Unless something very extraordinary had happened to him, he could not, if still alive, have gone beyond their reach during a few short hours of darkness in dense forest. Their hearts sank at their ill-success. But they were determined to leave no stone unturned to find him and so they planned each to proceed in one separate direction and eventually to repair to Ujjain to report success or failure.

ii. THE JOURNEY TO *Patala*

Rajavahana and Matanga moved cautiously and with difficulty through the forest, for the night in the jungle is not a time when one can walk easily or with safety. Wild beasts are on the prowl,

ready to seize any easy prey, and creeping reptiles are dangerous foes if trodden upon in the dark. Matanga led the way. His life-long experience as a dweller in the forest enabled him to pick his way forward in the right direction with an unerring instinct. Every now and then he would stop and listen for movements of wild beasts and more than once he made short détours to avoid places where tigers were likely to be found. Incidentally, the prince, who thought himself already fully well accomplished in shikar, learnt many a lesson therein from the former bandit. Needless to say, Matanga had taken the precaution to bring with him some of his trusty weapons that he had had lying by unused for so long.

It was some hours after sunrise when they reached the jungle stream at the north-west corner of the forest. They followed it as Lord Siva had directed, passed the crystal *linga*, saw the imprints of the blessed feet of Goddess Parvati on the rock, and finally arrived at the cavern mouth. There, to one side of it, lay the huge granite slab underneath which was to be found the inscribed copper plate.

The prince, exerting all his strength in one tremendous heave, shifted the slab and together he and Matanga deciphered the inscription. Clear directions were therein given for proceeding to *Patala* or the regions of the underworld. But the message inscribed on the copper plate plainly warned the adventurer, whoever he might be, of the many perils of the journey. It was not one to be lightly undertaken nor could it ever be accomplished by the faint-hearted. This warning of

perilous difficulties to be encountered, far from deterring the prince, merely served to urge him on.

The gateway to *Patala* was the black yawning cavern before them. Into the awe-inspiring darkness Rajavahana and Matanga forthwith plunged. Immediately groans and shrieks and wailings assailed their ears from all sides. It was as though all the agonized cries of the tortured in *Yamaloka* were concentrated in the cavern whose huge vaulted roof of rock reverberated echoes that seemed never to die away. Matanga could not restrain a fit of trembling as the memories of his journey through the regions of death crowded upon him. He grasped the prince's arm in a nervous clutch. The prince spoke words of encouragement and the fit of trembling horror passed. They proceeded, but the stench was becoming hardly bearable, for the cavern had been from time immemorial the home of countless numbers of all kinds of bats and vampires. The footsteps of the intrepid adventurers disturbed myriads of these flying creatures of the night. The air was filled with the noise of flapping wings. The prince and his companion had to beat the air with their arms, for so thick was the multitude of these rushing forms that they flew against their faces, unable to avoid them. Round and round, up and down, these evil-smelling creatures flew shrilly squeaking. They would not leave their ancient homes and fly into the bright sunlight beyond. Rajavahana and Matanga had simply to fight their way through, nor did they get any respite from the assaults of these loathsome creatures until they came to a part of the cavern where red

spurts of fire and whirlpools of smoke obstructed their further progress.

Fire and blinding smoke might well have seemed insuperable obstacles, and would have proved such to anyone less bold than the prince. Matanga appeared quite anxious to rush into it. He seemed to have an overwhelming desire as it were to bathe in the flames. The prince could not understand this but was ashamed to appear less sure of himself. Nevertheless he knew himself to be a God or a semi-divine being to brave the scorching touch of fire with impunity. It behoved him to save his skin from burning by some natural means. He looked around anxiously and restrained the impetuous Matanga with considerable difficulty. He was beginning to make up his mind that he would have to dash boldly through the flames unprotected save by his very desperate courage, when his foot dislodged a stone from behind which gushed out a stream of icy-cold water. Immediately he hit upon a plan of escaping the fury of the flames. He bade Matanga not to rush into unnecessary risks but to follow his example. Thereupon Rajavahana bathed his whole body from head to foot in the cold water. It seemed to freeze him to the inmost marrow of his bones. So cold was it that he could not restrain a shout. Matanga also bathed himself in it. Hoping fervently that the fiery barrier did not extend far down the steep descending track, for neither of them could see anything by reason of the smoke, Rajavahana and Matanga plunged forward. They stooped as they ran, occasionally falling forward on to hands and knees as their feet

hit against rocky unevennesses in the path. Luckily the fiery zone was not one of great depth. They emerged scatheless into a scene of a vastly different aspect.

The cavern was now dazzlingly lit. Their smoke-filled eyes could not endure the brightness. They were forced to sit down and cover their faces lest they should be smitten blind. Then, tearing off strips of cloth from their garments, they made thick bandages for their eyes. Even so, the light filtered through the cloth as though it were the light of the sun at noon. They looked ahead and saw to their great relief that they had sat down just in time. A step or two forward and both would have plunged into an awful abyss. The track across this yawning chasm was exceedingly narrow. Their hearts quailed within them. But go forward they must, for by this time their bodies had lost their frozen coldness and the fires were raging behind them. Matanga proposed to go first. He had had much experience in scaling precipitous mountain tracks and had a steady head. The prince was to follow with a hand on each shoulder of his companion and his eyes shut. Matanga lashed together their two spears so as to make a long balancing pole such as walkers on the tight-rope use. Then, fixing his eyes upon a distant mark so as to avoid looking down into the giddy depths below them Matanga moved surely and rapidly across with the prince just behind him. After they had gone some twenty yards, the bridge seemed miraculously to broaden under their feet into a wide smooth path of rock. Eventually they came to what seemed an impenetrable wall of

granite. A cry of despair broke from the prince's lips. They had come all this way for nothing. They sat down to consider their position. After talking it over for some time, Matanga proposed to move along the rocky face and tap it with his spear head. For only so could they hope to find the concealed door that he felt certain existed. The inscription on the copper plate had never said that the quest was hopeless. A way must exist and they must set about finding it. The prince agreed. He moved in one direction and Matanga in the other. After a short space of time Matanga raised a shout that he had found the opening. The prince hurried up and saw that Matanga's spear had broken into a narrow cleft or fissure. Together they widened the opening and squeezing in their bodies sideways began with great difficulty to work themselves along. Having removed their bandages they could see a faint ray of light from the further end but it seemed very very distant. The prince began to think they could never reach it. He was wellnigh exhausted with the fatigue and the excitement of their strange journey. But he and his comrade struggled manfully on for what seemed an eternity of time until at last they issued forth into a wonderful spot. Behind them were the horrors of the terrifying cavern—the gateway to the underworld; before them lay *Patala* in all its indescribable and enchanting beauty.

iii. THE PRINCE IN *Patala*

Rajavahana and his companion had issued from the rocky wall onto an elevated ridge descending sharply to the verdant plain beneath. Their eyes

were immediately attracted by the gilded domes and the marble minarets of a beautiful white city that covered the gentle slopes of a hill rising in the midst of the plain. There it lay spread out before them in all the pride of its gorgeous palaces and broad thoroughfares. After their recent experiences the whole scene was a most gratifying change suggestive of peace, prosperity and comfort. They descended the ridge and walked on until they reached a beautiful lotus-bedecked well by the roadside. Here they sat down and rested awhile before carrying out the sacrifice enjoined upon them by the instructions inscribed on the copper plate. Materials for the sacrifice they found made ready for them near the well. After a sufficient rest, Matanga arose and bathed in the well. Around his neck he hung a garland of holy *rudraksha* beads, and smeared his body with the hallowed *vibhuti*. Thereafter, selecting a suitable spot, he dug a sacrificial pit and filled it with pure sweet-smelling wood. Kindling the wood with appropriate *mantras*, he sat down before the glowing fire reciting the ordained Vedic sentences. Rajavahana stood near on guard with drawn sword protecting the progress of the *Homa*. After the rites had been completed and the Fire-God and Ishtadevata propitiated with ample offerings of ghee and parched rice, Matanga stood up and plunged unhesitatingly into the shooting flames. In a short space of time he emerged therefrom completely altered. The prince was struck with wonder when he saw before him not the old Matanga but a figure of celestial radiance smiling assuringly at him.

Barely had this transformation taken place when another wonder was in store for him. A maiden of surpassing loveliness was seen coming towards him surrounded by a number of richly-dressed attendants. A head taller than them all, the maiden shone in their midst even as the full moon outshines the stars, making them look wan and pale. Approaching the two strangers, the lady of incomparable charm, bowing at the feet of Matanga, laid before him a rare gem of brilliant lustre, and stood at a respectful distance, a rare smile playing at the corners of her mouth, and her head modestly bent.

The enchanted Brahmin asked her who she was and what she wanted of him. The lady made answer, "O best of Brahmins, listen. I am the daughter of the Asura king of this *Patala*, and am known as Kalandi. My father, proud of his prowess, attacked Indra and the other high gods in heaven and spread his dominion over all the celestial hosts. The God of Gods, Vishnu, smote him for his presumption and sent him to the world of the dead as Yama's guest. Left orphaned thus, I spent days and nights in bitter grief until Rishi Narada, taking pity on me, appeared before me in a vision and consoled me in my affliction. He told me that ere long a great hero would visit *Patala*, whose advent would bring to me a husband and to my kingdom a ruler. Since then my soul has been thirsting for the happy day of my hero's arrival. Now you have come, O Lord of my life, and I throw myself on your mercy. I implore you to accept the two queens that await now your pleasure, myself one and the other this rich and far-famed Kingdom of *Patala*."

So said she and resumed her role of modest silence. This invitation to celestial joy, so naively conveyed, was not lost on the erstwhile hunter of wild animals, who gratefully accepted his good fortune. Thus did Matanga win for himself a glorious kingdom and a beautiful loving bride.

The wedding ceremonies were duly performed with great pomp and rejoicings in the great white city on the plain. Rajavahana stayed with his friend for a few days, honoured and fêted above all in the kingdom. He then took his leave, receiving at the time of his departure the lustrous gem that Kalandi had laid at the feet of Matanga ere she became his wife. It was an extraordinary brilliant gem, conferring on its possessor freedom from hunger and thirst. With this gem secure in his keeping, the prince re-ascended the steep ridge onto which they had issued from the fissure in the rocky wall of the cavern. He trembled to think of the dangers of the cavern and wondered how he was going to survive them without his trusty comrade. Great was his surprise and inexpressible his relief to find, on approaching the rock, that the fissure had widened into a broad shining path and that the cavern had been transformed into the interior of a vast palace. All horrors and dangers had been removed from it. His return journey was as easy and free from danger as his coming had been difficult, terrifying and perilous.

Once more he found himself in the sunlight at the cavern's mouth. He hastened with eager steps to the spot in the forest where a fortnight before he and his friends had encamped for the

night. To his chagrin the place was deserted. Far and wide he roamed in vain in search of his companions. At last his wanderings brought him to Ujjain.

.

CHAPTER IV

SOMADATTA'S STORY. THE LOST DIAMOND

RAJAVAHANA was quite exhausted on the day when he reached Ujjain, for he had been hastening towards that city in consequence of an inward feeling that he would shortly hear news of his lost companions. There was a little grove just outside the city wall, and here he stretched his weary limbs at full length in the pleasant shade. After a short doze he idly lifted up his head to look about him and noticed, passing along the highway, the palanquin of some prince or noble, surrounded by a host of servitors. He sat up astonished to see the palanquin being set down on the roadway and its occupant start running towards him. He rose to his feet. The newcomer prostrated himself before him. The prince recognized him to be Somadatta, the youngest of his companions. Overjoyed to see him, he raised him from the ground and fervently embraced him.

The palanquin and the attendants were then summoned to the grove. Somadatta introduced his wife to the prince, who paid her his courteous respects. Together the three of them sat down on the grass, whilst the servants remained standing at a little distance beside the palanquin. For the prince had earnestly prayed his newly-found companion to narrate his adventures forthwith before passing on to the city.

Somadatta then took up his tale, "O prince, when we discovered your absence on that second morning of our travels we searched for you high and low. We could not find you or any trace of you. So we determined each of us separately to follow one direction and continue our search. Your disappearance had been so sudden and so complete we thought it quite possible that some extraordinary adventure had befallen you and that you had been bodily carried off to a distant place. It was agreed between us that after a reasonable time we should all proceed to Ujjain to report success or failure in our search. Well, then, in the course of my wanderings I happened to walk into a clear stream to quench my thirst. The water was so clear that I could see the pebbles on the sandy bottom. My eye caught sight of a bright stone. I picked it up and found it to be a sparkling diamond. A mile or two further on I came to a small ruined shrine under a shady banyan tree. There I found an old Brahmin with a number of pupils around him. These boys were all orphans and maintained themselves and their *guru* by begging alms. The old man invited me to stay awhile with them. I was tired and so I readily agreed. That evening, handing him the diamond for safe keeping, I retired early to rest. But before doing so I asked the old man who it was that had set up a big camp in the neighbourhood. He told me that it was the camp of King Matthakala of Lata. He was returning to his own country with his bride, the Princess Vamalochari. He had fallen in love with this beautiful maiden, but her father Viraketu, ruler of the land in which I

now was, had steadily refused to accept him as his son-in-law. After negotiations had definitely broken down, Matthakala attacked Viraketu with a strong army. The latter, being of a peace-loving disposition, had yielded to the threat of force and had given his daughter to the invader, who was now on his way home with the maiden. The marriage was to be celebrated on their return to Lata. The princess was being escorted by the minister Manapala with a select body of troops. It was rumoured that Manapala, thoroughly displeased with his royal master Viraketu for having yielded without a blow, was hoping yet to find some means of stopping the marriage. My curiosity satisfied, I composed myself to sleep. I do not know how long I had slept when I was suddenly awakened by a great clamour near the shrine. I heard a voice shouting, 'Here is the thief, here he is, we have found him.' Then I saw in the dim moonlight soldiers marching the old Brahmin away. They had not believed his story of a stranger having given him the diamond. But as soon as they caught sight of me they let go their hold of the old man and seized me instead. The diamond, it appeared, belonged to Matthakala and was being diligently sought for. I protested my innocence in the matter but my protests went unheeded. I was roughly dragged along and jeeringly thrust into a hut where I found myself in the company of other men, prisoners like myself. From my talk with them I learnt how matters stood.

Minister Manapala, they told me, had instigated them to break into the tent of the King of Lata

and murder him in his bed. At dead of night accordingly they broke into his tent. Somehow their intended victim escaped, and the attackers, unwilling to return empty-handed, looted the tent of all its valuables. They spent too long on this operation. Before they could effect a retreat to their own camp, Matthakala fell upon them with the guards he had hastily summoned and captured them all. It was very unfortunate that they were recognized as belonging to Manapala's troops. It would put Matthakala on his guard and frustrate any further attempts to rescue the princess. All the loot was soon recovered except the unlucky diamond I had picked up.

When I had heard this I conceived the idea of doing some act of daring that would humble the pride of the invader and succour the poor girl he was carrying away against her own and her father's will. I thought out a plan and outlined it to my fellow-prisoners. They agreed that it was feasible.

Towards dawn we broke out of the hut, overpowered the sleepy guards and gagged them to prevent the alarm being raised. We then made our way into the enclosure reserved for the princess and Manapala. The wise minister, whose only grievance was the pacific nature of his king, received me with open arms and took me into his confidence. I urged him to send for more troops from the city before the distance between the camp and city grew too large and Matthakala had taken them beyond effective striking distance. He promptly did so and in spite of my reluctance, made me the captain of his forces. I was given a chariot, armour and a good sword, and had full

permission to act against the invader as I thought best.

Whilst we were thus maturing our plans, we heard a commotion outside. Some soldiers were demanding admittance. The guard was instructed to allow them to approach Manapala. They came forward in an insolent fashion ordering Manapala, in their king's name, to hand over the escaped prisoners forthwith. Manapala jeered at them and at their king, whom he styled an upstart, and sent them away with a blank refusal. He was emboldened in this line of action by the knowledge that reinforcements from the city would soon be coming up. However, Matthakala lost no time in trying to enforce his demand. He was furious at Manapala's bold reply and was confident that he could soon bring the minister to book. His troops surrounded our enclosure ready to attack.

Deeming a bold offensive to be our best policy, I led my men out against them. Fortune smiled upon me. My men succeeded in beating them off and I myself killed Matthakala in single combat. After the death of their king, his troops completely broke and fled, leaving their camp standing.

We returned in triumph to the city with much booty. I was the hero of the hour. King Viraketu and his nobles vied with one another in showing me distinction and honour. Father and daughter embraced each other tenderly. The king, delighted beyond measure at the unexpected turn of events, acclaimed me as the preserver of his self-respect, and prayed me, sonless as he was, to wed his daughter and assume the reins of government. He was, he said, getting on in years and found the

burden of the kingly office growing too heavy for him.

You may imagine with what eagerness I complied with his requests. Matters were soon arranged and in a short time I became the husband of this beautiful princess whom you now see beside me and the ruler of her fertile country. But when the excitement and the novelty of it all had worn off I thought once more of you and of my still unaccomplished task of finding you. Yearning to see your face again I grew restless and ill at ease. I sought out a pious ascetic who lived in my kingdom and unbosomed myself to him. He consoled me by saying I should surely meet you, lord of my heart, in holy Ujjain if I repaired thither. Taking my wife with me and a number of attendants, I set out from my kingdom and now at the very gateway of the city do I behold you, thanks to the gods."

CHAPTER V

THE STORY OF PUSHPODBHAVA. THE YAKSHA-PROTECTED MAIDEN

THE prince congratulated Somadatta on his boldness and enterprise, saying that he thoroughly deserved his good fortune. He proposed that they should go forward together into the city and procure suitable lodging. As they were about to rise from their grassy seats, they saw a stranger hastening towards them. "Look, Somadatta," cried the prince, in a joyful voice, "by the manner of his walking he can be none other than our friend Pushpodbhava." "Yes," replied Somadatta, "it is certainly he." They arose and went to meet him. It was a most joyous reunion. They embraced one another with eager gladness and returned to the shade of the trees once more. The newcomer paid his respects to Somadatta's wife. At the prince's request they all sat down again to listen to Pushpodbhava's story, for the day was yet young and the grove a very pleasant spot.

i. HOW PUSHPODBHAVA FOUND HIS PARENTS

Pushpodbhava thus began, "Long is the tale I have to unfold, my lord prince. I trust you may not find it tedious. You must know then that after your strange disappearance from our midst in the Vindhyan wilds I searched for you everywhere in the quarter assigned to me. My trappings took me to the foot of a steep cliff, and wishing to rest

myself for a while I sat down under a spreading tree. Looking up the hill casually, I saw to my surprise a human being preparing to throw himself down the precipitous slope, apparently intending to commit suicide. I shouted to him to desist and clambered up the least precipitous part as fast as I could. Luckily I was in time to catch him as he started to roll down the gentler slope above and before he reached the edge of the precipice itself. I found he had lost consciousness. Bearing him in my arms I laid him softly on the leaf-strewn ground beneath the tree.

Sometime after this the man opened his eyes and looked at me in mute despair. I asked who he was and why he wished to kill himself. Imagine my astonishment to discover from his sad answer that he was my own father. Queen Vasumati had often told us, you may remember, how a disciple of Rishi Vamadeva had rescued me, a tender babe, from a monkey after he had met my old nurse and learnt my parentage from her and the story of the shipwreck. The tale told by the man lying before me agreed in a number of details with the old nurse's story. My father Ratnodbhava, the merchant of Kalayavana, had not been drowned as was feared but had escaped and was even now before me. In his despair at finding himself, as he thought, the sole survivor of the disaster, he had, years before, attempted suicide, but had been prevented by an ascetic who suddenly appeared before him and told him that after sixteen years he should find his wife again. Well, the seventeenth year had just begun and there were no signs of his wife, and so he was once

again about to commit suicide in his desperation and disappointment.

Even as he was telling me all this, a cry arose from another part of the forest. We heard a woman's voice saying distinctly, 'Lady, though the ascetic told you plainly that you would meet your husband and your son in sixteen years' time, you desire to burn yourself to death. Madam, desist, do not be stubborn. His words may yet come true.'

I told my father to remain where he was and ran as fast as my legs could carry me in the direction of the voice. Soon I caught sight of a huge fire roaring in a pit and perceived a woman with wild looks and dishevelled hair preparing to jump into the flames. Some women were standing near attempting to dissuade her from killing herself. I ran forward, dragged the dazed lady from the brink of the fiery pit, and calling to the others to follow me, led her away to my father.

The poor lady herself was speechless, but one of the others told us her history, and from her story we knew the lady to be Subhavrita, daughter of Kalagupta and wife of the former merchant prince Ratnodbhava. On one and the same day I had found both my father and my mother. I prostrated myself before her, told her who I was and then pointed out to her my father sitting on the ground. The two rushed into each other's arms.

After their first shock of joy was over I told them my story and how I must continue my search for my prince and leader. With their consent and their blessing I left them both, with the women,

in the *Asrama* of a Rishi and continued my search for you."

ii. HOW BALACHANDRI ESCAPED CALAMITY

"During the course of my wanderings I found a ruined *mantapa* in the midst of a dense jungle through which I had to pass. After resting a short while in it, I had a good look at the crumbling structure outside and in. I poked into all the shrub-grown corners with a long stick, not wishing to come to too close quarters with snakes. In one corner my stick struck against something metallic. I pulled aside the bushes and saw the top of an iron box half buried in the ground. I forced open the lid with a wedge-shaped stone and found the box to be full of gold coins and jewels. Here was a lucky find indeed !

Taking some of the gold with me, I started off towards the nearest town. On my way I fell in with some merchants from whom I purchased a few good bullocks and a sufficient number of gunny bags. Returning with these to the ruined *mantapa*, I filled the bags with the treasure, and loading the bullocks with them, made my way back to the caravan. It would have been too risky for me to be moving about the country alone with such treasure.

The traders were worthy fellows, and in the course of our journey I became intimately friendly with the son of a rich merchant of this city of Ujjain, to which I returned with him. Here with the aid of my friend's father, a kindly old man named Bandhupala, I obtained permission from the ruler of Malwa to settle down and trade. I

bought a fine spacious mansion, in which I installed my parents.

Trade was more an amusement and an occupation than a business for me. I had money enough and fine jewels too in my treasure trove. I could not settle down so long as you, my prince, were still unfound. Thoughts of you would often drive me to diverse places in search of you. The kind-hearted Bandhupala, in whom I confided, seeing how my failures worried me, promised to consult a soothsayer on a certain day.

When the auspicious day came, I visited Bandhupala's mansion to hear the soothsayer's prophecy. During this visit I saw a lovely maiden chatting with my friend, the merchant's son. On my approach she modestly withdrew. My friend told me that she was his unmarried youngest sister Balachandri. He had, he told me, more than once narrated to her the romantic manner in which I had found my parents and my lucky find of treasure in the ruined *mantapa*. It was a story which she was never tired of hearing. I was overjoyed to learn of her sympathy with her brother's friend, for I had already lost my heart to her.

The soothsayer reported that he could not yet give a definite reply to our questions but would shortly return and do so. This was very tantalising for my hopes had been awakened. I could not bear the suspense, and knowing that Bandhupala had the gift of understanding the language of birds, I persuaded him to visit with me this little grove outside the city and listen to the birds' twittering. Accordingly one fine morning a month ago he came with me. I left him sitting under a

tree on which many little birds were singing and wandered off by myself so as not to disturb him.

As I strolled along, I came to a little pond covered with lotuses. It lies over in that direction not very far from where we are now sitting. On its bank stands an arbour, and there I caught a glimpse of my beloved Balachandri. At first she was rather startled, but when she recognized me as her brother's friend she graciously acknowledged my courteous salutation.

I noticed traces of tears in her eyes, and on my politely and tenderly asking what grief could assail one who had such a happy home she replied, 'Ah, sir, it is true I have a happy home but I fear I may be forced away from it. Daruvarma, the younger brother of Chandavarma, regent for his uncle of this kingdom of Malwa, is desirous to make me his wife and has been making overtures. He is a reprobate and has a very bad reputation in this city. What he cannot gain by consent, he will have by force. His elder brother cannot restrain him in his wickedness, and his uncle Darbharsa, son of Manasara, the real ruler of this country, is away in the Himalayas doing severe penance to win the favour of the gods so that he may, by their help, fulfil his ambition of becoming emperor of all Aryavarta. For some months now I have been troubled by the unwelcome attentions of Daruvarma, and many have been the inducements he has held out. But my father's standing in this city is a high one and his influence great enough to be respected even by such a scapegrace as the regent's younger brother. Now, however, my hateful wooer is getting desperate.

Word has reached me that his patience is worn out and that he is planning to obtain me by force. He will risk his brother's displeasure as he has often done before, knowing that his brother is a man of weak character. Anything that his uncle Darbhassara may do to him will, so far as I am concerned, come too late. Do you wonder that I am unhappy ?'

'Fair Balachandri,' I burst forth, 'grieve no more. I shall be your champion and rescue you from the clutches of this ruffian Daruvarma.'

'I knew it,' she cried, 'I knew that my brother's friend would help me as soon as he knew my situation. I followed my father and you out here, hoping that I might get the chance of speaking to you privately. My father and my brother dismiss my fears as visionary. They cannot believe that Daruvarma would ever dare actually to carry out his threats. Indeed they are not convinced that my informant is speaking the truth about him. But I cannot help being afraid ; their words do not reassure me.'

'Fairest of the fair,' I replied, 'trust me, I shall drive away your fears for ever. Listen to my plan. For some days you must act strangely as if something was seriously troubling your mind. Everyone will grow alarmed about you and you must spread abroad a rumour that a Yaksha is enamoured of you, that he is constantly hovering about you unseen of others and that he has been heard to swear that he will kill anyone who presumes to make overtures of love to you. If Daruvarma ceases to molest you on hearing this rumour, it is well. He saves his life and spares me some labour. If, on the other hand, he dis-

regards the rumour, and persists in his wicked intentions, then I must deal out drastic punishment upon the infatuated fool. For, as you may have guessed, I shall be the pretended Yaksha that hovers about you unseen of others. In eight days' time there is to be a grand fête held in the palace grounds. To this everyone of note in the city is to be invited with his wife and daughters. The Rani is causing an enclosure to be made in the most pleasant part of the gardens. The trees will be illuminated with countless lamps and a banquet will be spread on the lawns. Let it be hinted to Daruvarma that this will be an excellent opportunity to seize you in some shaded nook and carry you off. I shall disguise myself as your woman-attendant. If he acts on the hint, he will get an unpleasant surprise.'

Thus did I comfort my beloved one and charmed her fears. I then left her and returned to Bandhupala, whom I found just risen from the ground about to look for me. He cheered me greatly by telling me that the birds had said that in one month's time the great Prince Rajavahana who was to have such a prosperous career, would be sitting under their trees.

All fell out as we had planned. Everyone was alarmed at the state of nervous fears into which Balachandri fell. She told the tale we had agreed upon and her father was seeking someone to drive away the Yaksha who was enamoured of his daughter. But as Balachandri after the first few days of her false affliction became more resigned and composed, Bandhupala hoped it was only a passing delusion.

The night of the grand fête came. Disguised as a woman-servant, I was in close attendance upon my beloved. After she had partaken of the banquet spread on the lawn we moved up and down the brilliantly lit-up walks and gradually edged away into the least frequented part near the wall of the enclosure. Daruvarma by the aid of his spies was kept informed of our movements, and when we had drawn apart from the merry-making throng and had come close to the wall, he suddenly leaped over in front of us and was about to seize Balachandri round the waist so as to hoist her over the wall and carry her off to his estate in the country, when, I slipped quickly forward and, with one hand over his mouth, caught him by the throat with the other and slowly throttled him. We left him lying dead.

Balachandri shrieked and, as pre-arranged, ran out into the crowd of ladies crying that Daruvarma had molested her and had been killed by the Yaksha that invisibly hovered about her. I pretended to be too frightened to speak, for I feared my deep voice would betray my disguise. In the general confusion we both quietly slipped off home. When I had seen her to her father's house, I ran to my own home and quickly putting off my disguise, moved about, asking everyone if the strange story of the murder of Daruvarma by the Yaksha was really true.

In a very short time all Ujjain was talking of this strange affair and people were heard openly warning young men to have nothing to do with Balachandri. Her parents were in despair for never could they now hope to get a husband for

her. I left them alone for a few days and then I went and told them that I could drive away this Yaksha. They were very grateful and took me to their daughter. I found her sitting very quietly by herself on the floor of her room. Solemnly I walked thrice around her, uttering *mantras* and slowly waving my arms about in the air. Balachandri then smiled. Thrice again I went round her, uttering more *mantras* and moving my arms in a rhythmical manner. She arose with a gentle ripple of laughter and told her despondent parents that all was now well and that the Yaksha had left her.

Everyone was exceedingly glad to hear this news which her father made haste to publish. He was extremely grateful to me and readily consented to give me his daughter in marriage. I knew well that Balachandri looked with favour upon me, her saviour from the odious attentions of a man she hated. Our marriage was celebrated with due solemnity and from that hour I have been leading a very happy life. The one month foretold by the birds having ended, I came out to-day in the expectation of seeing you. Thanks be to the gods, you have come."

The recital of this narrative gave great pleasure both to Rajavahana and to Somadatta. The whole party then moved forward into the city to Pushpodbhava's fine mansion, where they remained as his honoured guests.

CHAPTER VI

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE PRINCE THE NECROMANCER

i. THE PRINCE MEETS HIS FUTURE WIFE

PUSHPODBHAVA gave out to his acquaintances that Rajavahana was the son of his beloved preceptor and had come on a visit to him. So charming were the ways of the prince that throughout Ujjain he came to be admired as an ideal young man, courteous, modest, and greatly learned withal.

It was now the season of spring. Tender leaves and lovely buds decked the trees, green lawns and grassy uplands everywhere refreshed the eye. The bright pools amidst the cool groves chased away melancholy from men's minds and invited them to pleasant thoughts of love and happiness.

The young men and maidens of Ujjain bestirred themselves to celebrate the festival of Kama. Princess Avantisundari, daughter of the ex-King Manasara, accompanied by her confidential playmate Balachandri—lately wedded to Pushpodbhava—repaired with a following of shepherdesses to the charming groves outside the city, and there at the foot of a spreading Balamra tree she set up the image of Kama and started the carnival in his honour.

Prince Rajavahana, desirous of beholding the lovely princess, resorted to the grove in the com-

pany of his friend Pushpodbhava. It was a case of love at first sight. Her matchless beauty took his heart by storm. Beckoned to approach by the discerning Balachandri, the two young men drew near to where the princess stood. Her eye soon fell upon the person of Rajavahana, whose beauty and courtesy were already the talk of all Ujjain. The grave beauty of his face, enhanced by his graceful form attracted her and made her wonder if this was not Kama himself once more come in person to receive his meed at her fair hands. Turning to her friend, the princess asked her who this handsome stranger was. Balachandri, unwilling to be too explicit in the presence of so many, merely said, "Lady, he who stands before you beside my husband is his intimate friend. He is a Brahmin deeply learned and of prowess unmatched by any Kshatriya. He is, besides, an adept in mystic lore, and, in short, he is a man deserving of your reverence in every way."

Pleased with her friend's words, the princess invited both the noble guests to be seated and to Rajavahana, who was said to be a Brahmin, she offered *arghya*, the water to cleanse his hands, *padya*, water to bathe his feet, and *achamana*, to be sipped thrice with due *mantras*. After this she laid before them both the offerings sanctified by the *puja* done to God Kama.

Even in this brief interval, the royal knight-errant felt the sensation of intense love for the maid burning in his heart. Surprised at the ardour of his newly-born passion, he sought for an explanation in his previous births. A few moments of divination revealed to him why it was that he

was experiencing such feelings towards the princess. His last incarnation, he discovered, was as Sambha and the maid was then his wife Yagyavati. He at once resolved to convey this momentous secret to the princess by indirect means and then to leave events to destiny.

Just then, a graceful swan was seen swimming on the sparkling waters of the pool near which they sat. Avantisundari begged her friend to go after it and catch it for her. While Balachandri, in obedience to this request, was tip-toeing towards the swan, Rajavahana spoke as follows, "Peerless maiden, it is not right, nay, it is even a positive sin, to capture the royal swan, which, all unsuspecting of evil, is floating so freely and placidly on the water. I shall recount to you, in proof of what I aver, a tale of the past in which a similar wrong was done to a swan with the consequences that flowed therefrom.

Long ago there lived a great man by name Sambha. He had for his wife a most beautiful lady named Yagyavati. One day when these two were sitting on the banks of a watercourse they caught sight of a lovely swan deeply sunk in slumber in the midst of some fresh-blown lotuses. The lady urged her husband to catch and bring the bird to her. Sambha, at first reluctant, finally yielded to her entreaties. He brought the bird to his wife after he had securely tied its legs together with slender lotus flags. Holding the bird before her and showing off its beauties, Sambha thus addressed his wife, 'Dearest, you ought not to have asked me to catch this poor bird. It was no doubt taking a much-needed rest in the midst

of those lotuses. See, even now it is not fully awake. Look more closely at it, do you not see a resemblance to a meditating *dhyani*? I think it is very marked. Permit me therefore to set it free once more. You must have admired its beauties sufficiently by now.' So saying, Sambha set free the swan which, flying to a short distance, turned and thus addressed the hero. 'Man, know that I am no real swan but an ascetic. The particular *yoga* on which I was engaged required uninterrupted practice, and, deeming the guise of a swan nestling beside lotuses the best way to secure the desired freedom from disturbance, I assumed this shape and came hither for the *tapas*. Since, in spite of your exemplary virtues, you yielded to a woman's whim and spoiled my *yoga* great sorrow shall be your portion because your beloved partner in life shall die suddenly.' This awful curse terrified the hero and he fell down at the *tapaswin*'s feet praying earnestly to be forgiven and to be spared the grievous penalty. Moved to pity the swan-changed *yogin* observed, 'Man, know that this my curse cannot be revoked in entirety, for it is only the statement of the reaction of your act of sin. But great is the merit of compassion and your heart is full of that divine attribute. 'It shall come to pass, therefore, that you lose not your wife by an untimely end. But you two shall be born again as husband and wife and in that birth you shall suffer imprisonment for two months with fetters on your feet to redress the wrong inflicted on me by the tying of my legs together for the space of two *muhurtas*. At the end of two months you will be set free again as I

have been set free, and then will begin a long period of glory for you and your wife, for you will become emperor of all Aryavarta. I have spoken.' "

The princess had listened intently to this tale of the past. Enlightenment came upon her. She began to remember vividly events in a past life and she knew that she had been the Yagyavati of the episode, whilst the narrator of the strange tale had been her husband Sambha himself, to whom in his present birth as this Brahmin hero she was equally bound as wife. Rising in a hurry she cried out to her friend not to catch the swan but to return at once. Balachandri was glad because she had been finding it no easy matter to approach near enough to grasp the lordly creature.

The princess turned to Rajavahana and, bowing low before him, told him how she clearly saw that she was the Yagyavati of the story and that he was her husband Sambha and would become her husband now. Nothing, she said, could give her greater pleasure. They then began to tell each other detail upon detail of their past life together. So absorbed were they in these reminiscences that those who stood around them, especially Pushpodbhava and Balachandri, could not help a feeling of surprise at their transfigured faces.

Just then another group of fair women entered the grove and the acute Balachandri, seeing that the fresh arrivals were the senior queen of King Manasara, mother of Avantisundari, and her attendants, signed to her husband to withdraw at once with the prince. He took the hint and with-

drew the prince to the more sheltered part of the grove. The queen-mother, who had come to see how her daughter was enjoying the day of festival, mingled graciously with them all in their merry pastimes. She noticed that her daughter wore an unusually pensive look. Thinking this to be due to fatigue, she bade her daughter accompany her back to the palace. The princess could not but do as her mother wished, and, as she passed the thicket behind which she guessed her lover was hidden, cleverly managed to convey to him her sorrow at parting without taking a tender farewell. Observing a male cygnet flying over the thicket, she addressed it thus, "O best of the royal race of swans, this day I have played with you and found delight in your company. Now I must leave you for my dear mother's sake."

After this the lovers did not see each other for a long time. Social conventions had to be observed. There arose no fitting occasion on which they could meet. But Rajavahana and the princess found the separation hard to bear. Rajavahana was wondering whether or not to approach the Regent, boldly declare his parentage and the history of his life in a previous birth and thereupon to claim the hand of Avantisundari as rightfully his. Pushpodbhava advised him against doing so. Better leave matters to chance than thus boldly to claim the hand of a princess of a rival house. There could be no friendship between King Manasara's family and the family of the exiled Rajahamsa. Besides the Regent would scoff at the prince's story of his previous life as Sambha. with Avantisundari as his wife Yagyavati.

Meanwhile the princess was sighing out her lonely heart and growing thin and pale. Balachandri, her bosom friend, was afraid lest the queen-mother might notice the change in her daughter and send them both away to another place for a change of air. She urged Rajavahana, therefore, to write a letter and tell the princess to be patient a little longer as he was thinking out a plan to accomplish their desire of being lawfully wedded in this life.

ii. THE NECROMANCER LENDS HIS AID

Rajavahana used often to visit the little grove where he had first seen his beloved and go over in his mind the events of that happy day of Kama's festival. Strolling one evening in this grove of happy memories, he met a handsome, much-bejewelled Brahmin in whose countenance there seemed to glow the light of power and knowledge. He approached the stranger and paid him the respect due to a member of the priestly class. Politely he asked him who he was and why he was there. The Brahmin replied that his name was Vidyaswara and that by profession he was a great wonder-worker and caster of spells. There was nothing in the arts of wizardry and necromancy that he did not know. By his powers of insight he could tell any one who asked him just what it was that was troubling his mind. Forthwith Rajavahana implored his aid. The necromancer replied that he had come for the very purpose of rendering the virtuous hero all the help he could give to enable him to win the happiness he deserved. The prince's heart leaped with joy

at this unexpected good fortune. The two soon agreed together upon a plan of action. Rajavahana returned to the city and communicated this news to the princess through Balachandri.

On the morrow, the necromancer proceeded to the Regent's palace surrounded by rich insignia borne by a number of servitors, a few of whom were going before him shouting aloud his several titles of greatness. Arrived at the gates of the palace he sent messengers to the Regent stating who he was and requesting an audience for the purpose of displaying before the court his extraordinary powers. Permission having been accorded, the necromancer and his disciples were ushered into the magnificent audience hall.

The performance was a very wonderful one. Vidyeswara began by displaying his proficiency in literature and music. Never before had such sweet music been heard in Ujjain. Then, laying aside his *veena*, the wizard took in either hand a knotted whisk of peacock feathers and the magic wand. Waving these first in a slow, rhythmical manner, he gradually quickened his movements so that finally, in the rapid whirling round, none could distinguish between the man, the peacock feathers and the wand. Suddenly he stopped. Beginning again his slow rhythmical swaying, he began to chant *mantras* in a low crooning voice. Before anyone in the audience could say whence they came, countless hooded snakes, fiercely hissing, seemed to swarm over the floor. The whole assembly rose in terror and began to scatter hither and thither for safety. Just when the serpents seemed to be upon them, the courtiers were im-

mensely relieved to see a thousand Garudas swooping down upon the wriggling mass of reptiles. In the twinkling of an eye, the hawks had flown away each with a snake in its talons. The audience hall was as peaceful as before.

The next item in the wizard's performance was even more astonishing. After the same preliminary swayings and chantings, there was conjured up before the breathless spectators a truly marvellous illusion. They were transported into the far distant past and seemed to see before them the enraged Lord Vishnu issuing from the pillar which the *Asura* Hiranyakasipu had kicked in derision. They seemed to hear the God's thunderous laughter as he gathered the mocking *Asura* in his arms and tore him to pieces. It was marvellous but at the same time terrifying.

To give his audience something less terrible, something that would, on the contrary, soothe their nerves and gladden their hearts, the necromancer proposed to close his wizardry for the day with the happy picture of Princess Avantisundari's marriage with her future husband. He had already shown his powers by summoning up before them a scene from the distant past—he would now show his powers by bringing before their eyes the celebration, with all due Vedic rites in front of Agni and other supernatural beings, of the marriage between the two as it would take place in the course of time. The Regent and his courtiers had been lost in dumb amazement at the vision of Lord Vishnu punishing the defiant *Asura*. They were eager to behold this promised exhibition of insight into the future. Permission was given to

the wizard to begin this last and most wonderful of his illusions.

On the floor of the audience hall the necromancer and his disciples drew with some coloured paste a wide circle. Around the circumference of this circle smaller ones were drawn. Vidyeshwara took up his position with his Brahmin disciples around him in the midst of the circle they had drawn. They sat around a sacred hearth which he conjured up, and began to chant *mantras* with melodious voices. It will be readily understood that both Rajavahana who was acting in disguise as one of the disciples of the wizard and Avantisundari who was standing by her mother's side were both in the secret of what was to take place. Balachandri also knew the plan of action and was ready to play her part. Soon the hall was filled with a sweet-smelling smoke. Balachandri took advantage of this to smuggle Avantisundari unobtrusively within the magic circle. Then great flashes of light, as it were lightning, fell onto the small circles, and behold! many radiant supernatural beings were seen sitting on beautiful thrones. There before the charmed eyes of the audience sat the bridegroom, all glittering in robes of royalty, with Avantisundari by his side before the sacred hearth. With the chanting of the sacramental *mantras* by the Brahmins seated around the hearth the marriage was duly performed. Then Vidyeshwara in ringing tones exclaimed, "Lo, ye Devatas assembled, the marriage knot has been well and truly tied and ye may now go back whence ye came." The sweet-smelling smoke again filled the hall and again this opportunity was used by Raja-

vahana and Avantisundari to slip back into their former places. Again there came the bright flashes of light as the Devatas departed.

When the spell-bound audience had recovered from their astonishment and were freed from the spell cast upon them, the great audience hall wore its usual aspect save for the coloured circles on the floor. Everyone acclaimed the extraordinary genius of the wizard. The delighted monarch, who believed that all that had taken place was but an illusion, expressed his great pleasure at what he had seen and ordered his chamberlain to reward the great priest-magician on a royal scale.

CHAPTER VII

THE IMPRISONMENT OF THE PRINCE

PRINCE Virasekhara of the Ikshvaku line of kings, was growing impatient. His great friend Darbhasara, King of Ujjain, had promised him the hand of his only sister Avantisundari. But the wedding was not to take place until Darbhasara, having fulfilled his penances in the Himalayas, had returned to his own kingdom. Virasekhara, being the grandson of Vidyadhara, had very considerable magic and psychic powers. He realized that it would be a long time before Darbhasara could acquire sufficient spirituality to enable him, by the aid of the gods, to fulfil his ambition of becoming sole ruler of all Aryavarta. He persuaded him then to give him a letter to the Regent in Ujjain informing him that he who bore the letter was, with the writer's full consent, seeking the hand of Avantisundari. The Regent was instructed to conduct the marriage ceremonies on a fitting scale.

Thus it was that troubles came upon the newly-wedded pair. Virasekhara had been warmly welcomed by the Regent and had made a good impression on the parents of the princess. They were quite willing that their son Darbhasara's royal friend should wed their only daughter. But Avantisundari was strangely reluctant. She refused, seemingly out of sheer obstinacy, to have

anything to say to the newcomer who sought her hand in marriage and would raise her to a queenly throne. Arguments and threats were alike in vain. The princess's parents were at a loss to know what the matter was but the Regent proposed to override the maiden's foolish obstinacy and force the marriage upon her. All this was made known to Rajavahana by the faithful Balachandri. The prince was at his wit's end and determined to go the very next day to the court and make a clean breast of the whole plot.

Meanwhile the would-be bridegroom, suspecting that the princess secretly loved another, had been making inquiries, and when he heard the tale of the necromancer's performance, immediately jumped to the conclusion that there had been no illusion but that a real wedding with some unknown prince or adventurer had taken place. By the use of his psychic powers he discovered that the husband was the so-called learned Brahmin who was Pushpodbhava's guest. In his chagrin at having been forestalled, he penetrated that night into Pushpodbhava's mansion and fastened upon the sleeping Rajavahana's feet a magic silver chain, hoping thus to fetter the young man for years and make him a laughing-stock. For he had come into the possession of the chain in a curious way and knew it to be some celestial being transformed into this shape by a *rishi's* curse. He presumed that the curse would last a long while, for the transformation of a celestial being into a material substance by a *rishi's* curse was no light punishment. Once fastened, there was no power that could undo the chain until the curse had run.

its course. The next morning Virasekhara informed the Regent that in a vision of the night it had been disclosed to him that the princess had been secretly, and yet somehow at the same time openly, wedded, in the presence of the court, to an unknown adventurer. The husband would be found somewhere in the city fettered with a silver chain on his legs. Virasekhara declared his inability to read the riddle of the wedding, secret and at the same time public, but perhaps the Regent might be able to throw some light upon it. At once it flashed upon the Regent that the necromancer's performance had not been an illusion but a fact. He sent out spies to discover the young man whose legs were said to be fettered with a silver chain.

The spies had an easy task, for it was rumoured that something mysterious had occurred in Pushpodbhava's mansion. His so-called Brahmin guest could not move from his room by reason of a silver fetter that no one could unfasten. Chandavarma's spies quickly bore this news to their royal master, who was furious at the trick that had been played upon him. He feared Darbhasara's wrath and determined to punish the daring plotter with an ignominious death and to ruin and drive into exile Pushpodbhava, the husband of Balachandri, for whose sake his brother Daruvarma had lost his life. How to deal with Darbhasara's sister was another matter altogether. He would leave it to Darbhasara himself to issue orders.

The Regent had been very outspoken as to his intentions. Balachandri hastened from the side

of the distraught princess to warn her husband to flee from the wrath to come. Rajavahana, who seemed not in the least perturbed, urged his friend to escape whilst there was yet time, with as much of his money and jewellery as he could carry. He told him that he knew for a certainty that in two months' time the silver fetter would drop off and that Chandavarma's threats against him could never be carried into effect, for it had been foretold him by an ascetic in his previous birth that he was destined to have a glorious career as Rajavahana, son of Rajahamsa. Taking a hurried farewell of his wife and his friend, Pushpodbhava anticipated events by a timely flight well provided with treasure. Balachandri was instructed to return to the palace and comfort the princess and to assure her that in two months' time, in spite of present distress and threatened danger, all would be well.

Chandavarma's officers came and carried off Rajavahana to the dungeon, telling him that the Regent had ordered his execution the next morning. He was to be impaled in the sight of all the citizens of Ujjain in the little grove beyond the city wall. Rajavahana smiled imperturbably at this unpleasant news. Pushpodbhava's house and property were confiscated and soldiers were sent out to track him down and bring him back for judgment.

The princess's parents were in great distress, until Avantisundari told them of her husband's message of comfort, in which she fully believed. For their daughter's sake they determined to do all they could to prevent the Regent putting the

young man to death forthwith. They sent word to Chandavarma that on no account must the young man be put to death and that if anything were to happen to his life, they were resolved to die also because they did not wish to have their only daughter widowed. Deterred thus from executing the bold adventurer at once, Chandavarma commanded that he should be put into a big wooden cage and secretly ordered that nobody should go near him or feed him on pain of instant death. He hoped to kill him by slow starvation. Meanwhile he wrote an account of all that happened and sent it by a speedy messenger to Darbhasara in his Himalayan retreat, requesting to know his pleasure in these matters. Several days passed but to the Regent's astonishment the prisoner in the wooden cage seemed as cheerful and imperturbable as ever and showed no signs of wasting away. He did not know that Rajavahana had concealed in his hair the mystic jewel, given to him in *Patala*, that insured its possessor against hunger and thirst.

Chandavarma determined to use the interval of waiting for Darbhasara's reply on an expedition against Simhavarma, King of Anga. He had been refused the hand of Princess Ambalika, Simhavarma's daughter, and resented this refusal. He would compel Simhavarma to accept him as a son-in-law. Accordingly he invaded Anga in force, carrying fire and sword wherever he went until he thundered at the gates of Champa, the capital city. Champa was strongly fortified and Simhavarma could have easily held out until his allies, to whom he had despatched messages asking for help against

the ruler of Malwa, had come to his relief. But Simhavarma was too impatient and over-confident. He left the shelter of his ramparts and fought a pitched battle outside the city. He was defeated and would assuredly have lost his life had not the victorious Chandavarma reflected that it was hardly decent to kill the father and straightway to marry the daughter. Consequently the king and queen were thrown into confinement in the citadel. Chandavarma made a proud entry into the city, took possession of the palace and ordered preparations to be made for his wedding to Ambalika on the morrow.

At this juncture, the messengers arrived with Darbhasara's reply to the Regent's letter. The contents of Darbhasara's letter gave great pleasure to Chandavarma, flushed as he was with his recent success. This is what he read, "Hail to my cousin Chandavarma. I have read your account of recent untoward happenings in Ujjain. What a senseless fool you are! Should a nameless adventurer be permitted to play us such a scurvy trick and go unpunished with instant death? Certainly not. Torture and trample him to death under the feet of an elephant and pay no heed to my silly parents. Throw the shameless Avantisundari into the dungeon, and my brother Kirtisara also, lest he be fool enough to take up arms on behalf of his stupid parents and wicked sister."

Rajavahana in his wooden cage had been carried about with Chandavarma's army during their invasion of Anga. His calm demeanour annoyed the Regent excessively. Chandavarma was therefore very glad to be able to carry out his execution

as ordered by Darbhasara without delay. He resolved to go through a brief wedding ceremony with Ambalika before sunrise and then, mounted on the state elephant, to trample upon the head of the victim as he stood there buried up to his neck. He gave the necessary orders.

On the morrow Rajavahana was taken out of his wooden cage and carried to the place of execution. By some happy chance his guards did not at once place him in the pit but kept him standing in their midst not far from the elephant. A few moments after their arrival the silver fetters on his legs fell off of their own accord and the radiant figure of a woman flashed before his vision. Unseen and unheard by the others, the woman addressed Rajavahana with deep respect in the following manner, "Prince, pray listen carefully to what I am about to relate. I am one of the celestials of the higher regions and am the daughter of the Gandharva Somarasmi. My name is Suratamanjari. Once I was flying through the air above Lake Mandodaka. A flight of swans flew against me and, as I was making my way between them by gently pushing aside the birds in the centre, my golden bangle was loosened and fell on the head of Rishi Markandeya as he was praying on the margin of the lake. Angered at this interruption of his devotions, the sage cursed the impious offender to become a length of chain. Trembling with fear I fell at the feet of the irate ascetic and prayed for forgiveness. Touched by my contrition, the holy man assured me that I should be transformed into a silver chain for two months only and that I should retain my

consciousness throughout that time. I was lying on the ground in the shape of a chain until I was picked up by Prince Virasekhara. He, being the grandson of a Vidyadhara, realized that the chain was no ordinary chain but some celestial being transformed. Perchance he had heard the rishi's curse after the bangle, so unexpectedly fallen from the sky, had hit him on the head. However that may be, the prince treasured me up for future use and took me with him wherever he went. It was he who cast me across your legs as you lay asleep, for reasons that you know well. He hoped you would be fettered for many years and become a byword among men. However, my period of punishment has just ended and I have resumed my own true form. I shall count the two months that I lay on your feet as truly blessed. Command me now to do you some service."

Rajavahana, to whom the doings of destiny were a matter of course, merely asked Suratamanjari to convey to his beloved wife the news that the chain had fallen off his feet. Scarcely had the words passed his lips than a great shouting arose and people were seen running hither and thither crying out that the invader Chandavarma was dead. The guards, leaving Rajavahana to his own devices, ran off to ascertain the truth of this. One shouted to the others that a robber had rushed into the palace at dawn and stabbed Chandavarma as he was putting on his wedding apparel. Rajavahana, finding himself unguarded, with a single bound mounted the state elephant that was to have trampled him to death, with one blow knocked the mahout senseless to the

ground and himself drove the beast with furious speed towards the citadel. He saw before him a surging mob of soldiers being driven like chaff before the wind by a heroic youth who was laying lustily about him with a sword. He urged the elephant close to him and called upon him to climb onto the elephant's back, for he could see that the youth was getting tired and could not long cope single-handed with his numerous foes. "Hero of heroes," exclaimed the prince, "count on me as your friend, together we shall soon send this rabble to Yama's abode." The gallant youth gladly availed himself of the invitation and was soon on the elephant's back. Exceedingly great was Rajavahana's delight to find that the sturdy wielder of the sword was his own dear comrade Apakaravarma of the sacred band of Ten. No less rejoiced was Apakaravarma to recognize in his timely helper his long-sought prince. There was no time for talk. Seizing hold of the various weapons that were always kept in readiness on the elephant, the two began a grim work of destruction. The enemy found themselves also attacked by a compact body of men led by a bright-visaged gallant youth on an elephant. After a short time the leaderless and dispirited forces of Chandavarma were put to complete rout.

While yet Rajavahana was asking his companion who the bright-visaged youth was, the latter ranged his elephant alongside of theirs and paying his respects to them both, addressed Apakaravarma as follows: "Sir, I did as you commanded me when you left my side to hurry on all alone to Champa. I put myself at the head of a part of

the army marching to Champa and hastening on the men, entered the city just a few minutes ago. The enemy, as you see, has been routed." Apakaravarma introduced the speaker as being his most devoted friend and inseparable companion Dhanamitra. Then he bade him go and set free King Simhavarma and divide the spoils amongst his troops.

The two comrades then made their way leisurely towards the bank of the Ganges and, alighting from the elephant, sat down under a shady banyan tree to enjoy the cool breeze blowing across the river. Whilst they were thus engaged in talking over old times they saw Dhanamitra coming towards them accompanied by several armed warriors. They arose and went to meet them. The prince's heart swelled with joy and gladness to recognize his old comrades Upakaravarma, Arthapala, Bramati, Mantragupta, and Visruta. With them came Prakaravarma, King of Mithila, Kamapala, King of Kasi, and Simhavarma, King of Anga. It was a joyous reunion.

CHAPTER VIII

APAKARAVARMA'S ADVENTURES. HOW HE REQUITED WRONG-DOING

i. THE STORY OF VASUPALITA NICKNAMED "GROTESQUE"

SIMHAVARMA invited Rajavahana to reside at Champa. It was no longer desirable for him to live at Ujjain. Darbhasara was not likely to leave him in peace, and the time was not yet ripe for him to declare his birth and parentage. Avantisundari's parents also feared her brother's implacable temper. Consequently it was soon arranged that the princess should join her husband at Champa. Pushpodbhava and his wife Balachandri also established themselves in that city.

Sitting with his new-found comrades under the trees in the garden of the palace assigned to him by the grateful ruler of Champa, Rajavahana invited Apakaravarma to relate to them his adventures. Apakaravarma readily complied and narrated the following story :—

"Prince, after your inexplicable disappearance, it was, as you know, agreed between your bereaved companions to make every effort to find you. Each of us was to follow one particular direction and eventually to repair to Ujjain to report how we had fared in our search. I chose Anga as my objective and proceeded by steady marches to this city of Champa. On the way I heard much talk of the great sage Marichi, who was said to

be unsurpassed for his profound spirituality and prophetic fervour. This ascetic was reported to be doing penance in the woods on the outskirts of Champa. I hoped to ascertain from him where and when I should find you.

I hastened to those woods and under the shade of a young mango tree I saw the emaciated figure of the *Muni* sitting cross-legged on a black deer-skin. I paid my devotions to him in due form and was beckoned by the sage to sit near him. He asked me who I was. I told him my story and requested him to tell me when and where I should succeed in finding you.

He did not reply for some time and then, looking closely at me, he said, 'Young man, your bearing and looks impress me favourably. There is a great work before you to be accomplished before you can succeed in your quest. After it is done you must return here to me and I shall tell you all that you desire to know.'

Quickly I replied, 'O revered sage, tell me the great work that I must do before I can find my beloved prince.'

'It is no less than the proving by bitter experience to the wicked ones in yonder city that roguery and avarice will be justly punished. There are dwelling there too many idle and mischievous folk who resort hither and vex me with their impudent requests to help them in wicked enterprises. They forget that I can see through their hypocrisy. They disturb my meditations and need a sharp lesson. You are a young man of good education and of keen wit. It is your duty to teach them the required lesson. I leave

the carrying out of that duty to your sagacity. I have spoken.'

Flattered by his complimentary remarks, I was in haste to begin my task at once, but the sage told me to spend the evening with him so that he could discourse with me on the deep problems of life. Long into the night he discoursed to me and, when at last I was dismissed, I soon fell into a profound slumber.

I arose with the dawn, much refreshed in mind and body, and took leave of the sage to go to Champa. Near one of the suburbs stood a Buddhist *stupa* in the grove of which an *Asoka* tree rose conspicuously. Underneath its shade I saw an ugly-looking Buddhist *bhikshu* weeping copious tears which furrowed their way down his dirt-be-grimed chest. Going near to this miserable mendicant and sitting down I asked him gently to tell me what kind of penance it was that he was engaged in, why it demanded of him such constant weeping and whether he was bound to secrecy.

'Friend,' he said, when drying his tears, 'know that I am the eldest son of the merchant-prince Nidhipalita, of Champa. My name is Vasupalita, but my ugliness earned for me throughout the city the nickname of "Grotesque." Near our house there lived another young man, by name Arthapati, who at that time had been reduced to poverty by a series of misfortunes, but was as handsome as I was ugly. He was known everywhere as Rupavan. Moreover he was very learned. Mischievous people brought about a misunderstanding between us, praising him to my face and blaming me to his. On one occasion we

entered into a heated argument about what it was that really conferred distinction on a man. At length we agreed that the one thing the possession of which shed dignity on a man was neither beauty nor riches but the intense love for him felt by a wife. He suggested that we should put the matter to the test by both of us paying court to Kama-manjari, the daughter of a certain close-fisted money-lender. She was a very beautiful and accomplished girl, but, as the sequel will show, utterly unscrupulous.

In a short time it became plain to all whom she preferred. It was my own ugly but wealthy self. Her kindly reception of my suit flattered me exceedingly. I was so sure of making her my wife that I lavished gifts upon her. To make a long story short, I ended by quite impoverishing myself, only to find that the beautiful girl was utterly heartless and desperately avaricious. I was thrown aside like a broken toy and became the laughing-stock of the whole city, who added to my nickname the epithet "Witless".

Where I failed, Arthapati, to my intense chagrin, succeeded. He grew rich again, doubtless with much of my money. But for some reason or other he did not carry his suit to its logical end, matrimony. Perhaps Kamamanjari's father objected to him as being too unstable in his character and not likely to remain faithful to a wife.

I could not bear to remain an object of derision in the city. Therefore I sought an asylum at this *vihara* and, on the advice of a Buddhist monk, commenced a course of privation and contrition in order to obtain *nirvana*. But lately it has dawned

upon me that I have done wrong in deserting the faith of my forefathers and listening to the counsel of heretics, who speak ill of the holy *srutis* and *smritis* and mock at our hoary *dharma* with its twin-pillars of ritual and caste, and, worst of all, who deny the Eternal Creator of the Universe. That I should have listened, even for a moment, to these blasphemers rends my heart so much that you see me now seeking relief in tears.'

This sincere utterance of the poor simple-minded man moved my heart. I was indignant at the treatment he had received and exhorted him to be of good courage, as in a short time I should win back and restore to him all that he had lost, at the same time punishing the evil-hearted persons who had done him injury.

ii. APAKARAVARMA HELPS THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE TO RUN SMOOTH

Rishi Marichi's commission to me was a large one. To teach rogues and heartless swindlers that, after all, honesty is the best policy was no light task. I was glad to have a definite person to begin on, and resolved to take vengeance on Arthapati for the cunning way in which he had acted as hawk to the poor pigeon Vasupalita. For I had no doubt in my own mind that it was all pre-arranged between himself and Kamamanjari. Later on I learnt that Kamamanjari herself had suggested the fleecing of 'Grotesque' in order to help her father the money-lender, whose business was in a tottering condition on account of many absconding debtors. Arthapati, who was no lover of poverty, readily fell to the bribe-

offered him by the beautiful daughter of a man with whom he had had business dealings. My friend Grotesque was a long time in suspecting the truth and then it was too late. The conspirators had played their parts too cleverly. Little did they dream that their poor victim had a champion who would shortly turn the tables on them.

I entered the city to set about my task. I mixed freely with all the disreputable characters, the thieves, the gamblers, the housebreakers and all the unwashed scoundrels that lived by dishonesty. I learnt their slang and their tricks and became as one of themselves. In a few months I was an adept in all manner of dishonest arts. In order to have friends to back me up in time of need, I used to spend in an offhand manner a large part of my dishonest gains, dividing it amongst those present, much in the style of a prince scattering gold pieces among the rabble. With me it was a case of 'Easy come, easy go', and I was always under the necessity of replenishing my purse. One gambler whom I had befriended, Vimartaka by name, took me to live with him in his house. He was grateful to me for having come to his rescue when he was almost ruined by a 'sharper.' Through him I learnt much that proved of use about people of note in the city.

Finding that my funds had run very low, I set out one night on a house-breaking expedition to rob a notoriously rich swindler. Had you seen me then, prince, slinking through the dark streets, you would have taken me for an old professional burglar. My body was almost naked and smeared with a slippery oil. Covering my face was a mask,

on my back a bag of netted twine containing a coil of rope and house-breaking implements, in my hand a dark lantern. My raid was quite successful and the load on my back was considerably heavier by the addition of money-bags. I could not move along as expeditiously as I had come.

To my surprise I met a young woman coming towards me with a quick step. My first thought was that she was the tutelary goddess of the city going on her rounds. I soon perceived, however, that she was a lovely maiden of flesh and blood. I stopped her and asked her who she was and whither she was hurrying all alone on that dark night. The poor girl, believing no doubt that the truth would serve her best, replied, 'Sir, I am the daughter of Kuveradatta, one of the leading merchants of the city. From my infancy I was betrothed to Dhanamitra, another merchant of this place. But after his father's death Dhanamitra ran through his entire fortune in his excessive zeal to found and to endow charities. To-day he stands before the world a poor man, albeit his praise is on everyone's lips. My father has no desire to wed me to a poor man since all my life I have been accustomed to luxury. He has turned his face against my beloved Dhanamitra and proposes to wed me to one Arthapati, who has recently become rich again. The wedding is fixed for to-morrow. Despairing of help from any one I have taken matters into my own hands and, regardless of what society may say of my unmaidenly boldness, am even now on the way to the house of my lover. Together we shall run off to some other city and there get married with

the due rites. Do not censure my action nor hinder me for I shall be saving my father from the dishonour of going back on his word and myself from the arms of an unwelcome husband. Generous robber, please let me pass on my way. Here is my jewel box which I will give you most willingly if you do not obstruct me.'

At the mention of Arthapati's name I had pricked up my ears. Here was a most lucky chance to begin my vengeance upon that reprobate. Moved also by my admiration for the boldness of the tender girl before me in seeking to be mistress of her own life, I spoke reassuringly to her. 'Far from censuring your conduct or obstructing your path, fair maiden,' I said, 'I shall myself escort you to your lover's house and find a way of compelling your father to marry you to the man of your choice. Trust me there will be no need of ill-considered flight nor a breach of social conventions. No one besides our three selves need ever know of your midnight escapade.'

Reassured by my tone, though not in the least guessing why I should have any particular interest in the matter, the maiden led the way towards Dhanamitra's house. As bad luck would have it, we met the torch-bearing watchmen of the city going on their rounds. I whispered to the trembling girl, 'Pretend I am your husband lying senseless on the ground from a cobra bite. Sit by me as I feign unconsciousness and wail and wring your hands. When the men come up sob out that you will be for ever grateful if any one of them knows of any charm or cure.'

Things happened much as I expected. The

watchmen were very sympathetic. One of them, who boasted of his skill in curing snakebite, tried some of his hocus-pocus but there I lay as insensible as ever. The party then left us alone, advising the girl to wait till daybreak and then attend to her husband's funeral for if he were not already dead he soon would be.

When the last echoes of their footsteps had died away, we jumped up and continued our walk. Soon we reached Dhanamitra's house. Admitted within, I addressed the astonished master of the house in these words: 'Sir, I am a burglar by profession. Meeting this fair maiden in a fit of despair going to her lover's house, I took pity on her and escorted her hither. Here is the box of valuable jewellery which she handed over to me. I could not rob so sweet and so brave a girl.'

Dhanamitra was profuse in his thanks to me for my kindness to his 'life's jewel.' He pressed me to keep the box of jewels since I had brought to him a 'pearl beyond price.' But I steadily declined to do so. Having ascertained from him that he thought it best to start out on an immediate flight with his beloved to some far distant city, I besought him not to do anything so foolish, and so damaging to the girl's good repute. 'You and I,' exclaimed he, 'are both men of wit and good sense, all we need is a little time in which to ripen my plan—for I have thought of a plan—to hinder the wedding and later to turn the tables on Arthapati. Leave it to me and I shall cause Kuveradatta to agree without demur to your nuptials with his daughter.'

'My good sir,' he replied, 'you are too kind,

but really I do not see why you are proposing to yourself such troublesome labour on our behalf. Is it from a love of adventure and intrigue or have you some private grudge against Arthapati?’

‘It is both,’ was my answer, ‘later on I shall tell you why I love adventure and why I wish to put a spoke in friend Arthapati’s wheel. But now time presses, for my idea is that we go and burgle Kuveradatta’s house so as to stop the wedding that is fixed for to-morrow. That is the first step—to gain time—then we can do our plotting at leisure.’

Both agreed that it was a good idea. So we hastened to Kuveradatta’s house and, with the aid of the girl to show us the way about, we very soon rifled the place completely of everything of value that it possessed. We hid the treasure in a safe spot, said farewell to the maiden whom we left behind at her father’s house to await events, and then, towards the dawn, we two, Dhanamitra and myself, slunk back to his house. We bathed, put on fresh clothes, ate a hearty meal, and then retired to enjoy a much-needed sleep.

Next noontide we took a stroll in the streets to learn what people were saying about the previous night’s robbery. Kuveradatta was one of the leading citizens and so great excitement prevailed as the news of the daring burglary spread. Kuveradatta did not know what to do—he could not carry out the wedding, for the robbery had been so extensive. Arthapati, pitying him, sent him a bag of a thousand gold pieces, telling him gallantly at the same time to postpone the wedding for a month.

iii. THE TABLES TURNED, OR THE MAGIC PURSE

We had now a month's respite in which to devise and mature our plans for Arthapati's discomfiture, and, if possible, that of Kamamanjari as well. I suggested the following course of action to Dhanamitra. He was to take with him a handsome leather purse and appear before the king with the following petition carefully written out : 'O Crown among Kings ! Lend graciously an ear of favour to your humble suppliant's petition. His father, now dead, was a merchant in the city known as Vasumitra. His own name is Dhana-mitra. After he had lost in various ways the riches that he had inherited, people began to heap insults on his head. When your petitioner was rich, Kuveradatta repeatedly promised to give his daughter to him in marriage but changed his mind completely on learning of his poverty and chose for the maiden another husband, one Arthapati. Feeling life no longer bearable, your petitioner repaired to a forest and was about to hang himself in despair, when there stood before him a radiant *sanyasi* who reproached him for his cowardly intention of committing suicide, and exhorted him to be of hope. He had brought with him, the *sanyasi* continued, a rare gift, nothing less than a treasure-bag or purse which, being miraculous in origin, would ever remain inexhaustible, however often it was emptied. Its custodian must, on getting possession of it, restore to their owners whatever ill-gotten riches he had, spend in properly deserving channels his own legitimate wealth and, when he had thus got rid of all that he could call his own, he should offer *puja* to the

purse in proper form. After that he was to keep it over-night in a well-guarded place. Next morning he would find the bag full of invaluable gems and precious stones. When these had been well spent, the process might be renewed. 'This enchanted purse, O king, the recluse handed over to your humble servant and then disappeared, even without waiting to be thanked. Your petitioner has brought with him this magic purse and he now prays leave to lay it at your feet, as it would be disloyal for him, a mere subject, to possess so divine a treasure without his king's express command.'

'Of course,' I said to Dhanamitra, 'we have to run the risk of the king taking you at your word and keeping the magic bag you loyally offer him. If he does, we shall be in a real fix and I shall have to steal it before he finds out the nonsense of it. Probably, however, he will only half believe your yarn and graciously permit you to retain it.'

'Well,' returned Dhanamitra, 'even if he does allow me to keep it, I don't see how the magic is going to work. I suppose it must work once at least so as to inspire belief in it.'

'I'll see to that, dear friend,' I replied, 'the proceeds of a little burglary or two will fill the bag whilst it remains in your possession. Let everyone first be convinced that your story is true and that there is no humbug in the matter. Then we'll lose the purse and accuse Arthapati of stealing it. That's my line of attack and with some circumstantial evidence against him, friend Arthapati will find it hard to disprove our charge.'

'A great scheme, my dear sir,' exclaimed

Dhanamitra gleefully, 'and then I shall get back into Kuveradatta's favour and wed his daughter.'

'Yes, of course,' I made answer, 'and certain other wrongs will be righted too.'

The king smiled at Dhanamitra's petition; he only half believed it—that was clear. However he graciously permitted him to retain the purse and dismissed him from his presence with generous praise for his loyalty. Dhanamitra earnestly requested the king to provide a guard to escort him home with the magic purse, and also to watch over his house at night. To humour him, the king did as requested, and Dhanamitra's return home accompanied by an armed escort, and carrying the leather purse on a cushion in front of him attracted no little attention.

That same day Dhanamitra scattered all that remained to him of his property right and left on all sorts of deserving charities; he had no occasion to restore ill-gotten wealth to its rightful owners, for he was of too frank and generous a nature meanly to swindle others. He then did *puja* to the purse and left it in a well-guarded spot. At least outwardly it seemed well guarded, but, as a matter of fact, it was not so, for it lay in a recess in the house wall which we could approach from behind by means of a moveable stone. During the night I replenished the purse with stolen gold and jewellery. Next day, Dhanamitra with the well-filled purse on its cushion strolled about the market place and showed the marvel to everyone.

Kuveradatta, anxious to have such a gifted son-in-law, announced that he would, after all, wed

his daughter to the man to whom she had been betrothed in infancy. Arthapati was furious and vowed vengeance on Kuveradatta. His antipathy to Dhanamitra his successful rival was deepened into hatred by the art of Vimartaka, my gambling friend. At my request, he became sympathetic with Arthapati and poisoned his mind against Dhanamitra. Into his sympathetic ear Arthapati poured all his woes : they became the closest of friends.

Whilst these things were going on, I had the fortune, or misfortune, as one might think it, to fall madly in love with Kamamanjari's younger sister Ragamanjari. Their father was falling into his dotage, so the mother and sister were looking after the business of getting Ragamanjari married. All things considered, I was not likely to be looked upon with favour as a bridegroom, being a stranger and having no known occupation except rather dubious ones.

Now that her father was no longer able to look after things, Kamamanjari sought to attract back again to her side her former accomplice and half-hearted lover Arthapati. Vimartaka cunningly directed the young man's feelings to the beautiful girl with whom he had once been so friendly. Soon it was clear to all that Arthapati intended to console himself for the loss of Kuveradatta's daughter by taking the handsome and accomplished Kamamanjari to be his wife.

My net was tightening around them. I wished often enough that I had not been enslaved by an overmastering passion for Ragamanjari. How unkind fate was ! Why was she not the sister of

anyone else than Kamamanjari? I thought of the commission that Rishi Marichi had given me ; I feared that if I did not proceed with my undertaking he might accuse me of shirking my duty and so he might refuse to tell me when and where I should find you, O beloved prince. I resolved, therefore, to proceed, but to remain hidden in the background : my future bride was not to know that I was the cause of her sister's distresses.

I sent word to Kamamanjari that I had fallen desperately in love with her sister, that, after the fulfilment in two years' time of a certain vow, I should disclose my birth and parentage. if for the present she would accept my most solemn oath that they were honourable, and finally that by way of a marriage gift I would somehow cause the magic purse to be transferred to her possession. The avaricious lady fell into the trap. She agreed to the bargain and so I transferred the purse to her and she gave me her sister Raga to wife with as little ceremonial as possible.

The next step was to cause a heated quarrel to take place publicly in the market square between Vimartaka, Arthapati's bosom friend, and Dhanamitra. Vimartaka I must say acted his part splendidly. He taunted Dhanamitra with overweening pride on account of the magic purse. No doubt he had stolen it from someone and would look a sorry fool when someone else came along and stole it in his turn. After this well-acted public quarrel Vimartaka, acting on my directions, left the city and went to Ujjain.

After he had safely departed, Dhanamitra went and complained to the king of the loss of his magic

purse. Vimartaka, Arthapati's friend and confidential agent, he said, had only the previous day threatened him with its disappearance in the hearing of hundreds. Thereupon the king summoned Arthapati to his presence and told him to send for his confidential agent Vimartaka. Arthapati caused a careful search to be made for the man, but, of course, with no success. The king considered this ill-success as due to the deliberate hiding of his man by Arthapati and so he issued orders for his imprisonment.

Some time after this Kamamanjari, madly desirous of putting to the test the virtues of her new possession and of gaining much honour and esteem without any cost to herself, began to carry out the necessary conditions as had been announced by Dhanamitra. First of all, she restored to our friend 'Grotesque' all that she had filched from him. The honest simpleton to whom the restoration was like rising from death into life, made haste to throw off the hated Buddhist garb and resume his former mode of life. Next, Kamamanjari scattered her riches in a most open-handed fashion amongst the deserving poor and needy. People naturally began to talk of this lavish generosity. As soon as Dhanamitra heard about it, he went to the king and told him that he was sure from this unusual behaviour that Kamamanjari had the magic purse. It was well known that Arthapati and she were very good friends : he had undoubtedly passed it on to her keeping.

The king gave immediate orders to have Kamamanjari's house searched. There, sure enough, was the leather purse, but empty ! Luckily the

king did not think it worth his while to probe deeper into the matter. Kamamanjari had no chance of saying that I had given it to her. The purse was restored to Dhanamitra, who bestowed it promptly on some passing pilgrims as an act of great merit ! Kamamanjari and her parents were banished. After a short period in prison, Arthapati followed them into exile. Doubtless they are even now wandering about in poverty and desolation.

My newly-wed wife and I took up our abode in one half of the spacious mansion of Dhanamitra, who was duly married to Kuveradatta's daughter. I was thinking of seeking out Rishi Marichi when my own folly brought a most unexpected hindrance to my movements.

IV. THE YOUNG CITY MAGISTRATE, OR PRIDE GOETH BEFORE A FALL

Who can avert fate ? Is not destiny, O prince, stronger than man's best-laid plans ? I who had been surveying the accomplishment of my commission with deep satisfaction, got punished by the high gods for my conceit.

It came about in this way. I am sorry to confess it, but one night, I allowed myself to indulge too freely in heady liquors. Shouting excitedly that I was going to raid the mansions of all the rich rascals in the city, I ran out of the house, sword in hand, like a mad man, thrusting aside my affrighted wife who endeavoured to stop my rash action. Fortunately she had the good sense to send her chief woman-servant, old Srukalika, to see what became of me.

After I had gone some little distance I ran into a party of city watchmen who, seeing my queer movements, arrested me, but not without a struggle. Had I not been half intoxicated, I am sure I could have sent them flying, as it was, they knocked me down and put fetters on my arms and legs in no time. Just then came to me the old woman-servant in great alarm. Thanks to my recent struggling, my senses had cleared ; in a flash I made up my mind what to do. Raising my voice I shouted, 'Ha, you old rascal, what brought you here? Clear off this instant, or I shall throttle you. I know very well the dirty tricks you've been up to, making Dhanamitra hate me and poisoning your foster-daughter's mind against her wedded husband. But I've had my revenge. Her jewels are gone where they'll not be found again. I can now die without any regrets.' The shrewd old woman, instead of standing there gaping and wondering what this self-condemnation meant, guessed that I wanted to speak a word or two in her ear. So she turned to the watchmen and implored them with tears in her eyes to allow her to talk a few moments with their prisoner, for it was a fact that her daughter's jewels were gone. The young man must have acted from mere spite—he was not an ill-natured fellow really. She was sure he would tell her where to find them. The watchmen gave her permission to speak a few words with me as I lay on the ground. She stooped down and implored me to tell her where the stolen property was to be found. I told her to put her ear to my mouth and whispered a certain plan on which she was to act after her return home:

She nodded assent and, rising and turning to the guards, she blessed them for their kindness to an old woman. Then she went home and I was taken to the prison.

The next morning I was put up for trial before the city magistrate. He was a young man who had recently succeeded his father in the office. In the few days that he had sat on the magisterial bench, he had shown himself to be a perfect fool, excessively vain and self-conceited. This ass of a fellow threatened me, without further ado, with the eighteen kinds of punishment allowed by the law if I did not forthwith disclose where I had hidden the jewels. I laughed at him and asked him to prove that the jewels had been stolen. Needless to say he was enraged and ordered me back to prison—to be whipped!

I had not expected him to exceed his authority in this flagrant manner. Whippings are not pleasant. I had got more than I bargained for. I determined to pay him back in double measure. But how to do so was vexing my mind not a little. My previous mode of life in the city soon made me hail-fellow-well-met with most of the other prisoners, and I managed to ingratiate myself with the prison warders. When the pain of the whipping had subsided I really had quite a pleasant time: it was an adventure and a change in the monotony of life. How happy I should be, thought I, if only I could get even with that coxcomb of a magistrate! I did not expect to remain in prison long, for I had told the old woman to ask Dhanamitra, who had some influence with the king, to intercede for me, saying that I had done

what I did (or rather what I was supposed to have done) in a fit of pique. I had promised restitution on my release. He himself would be my surety.

Have you ever heard of a prisoner wanting to stay longer in prison? Well, my prince, that was my desire when I heard what old Srukalya told me on her first visit to me in jail. She had heard of the harsh treatment accorded to me by the magistrate. She knew that he was very unpopular and guessed that I should be seeking some means of revenge. She filled my heart with joy when she told me how accident had inspired her with a plan of making a fool of the young upstart.

It so happened that she was very intimate with Mangalya, nurse and foster-mother of Princess Ambalya. The princess had often seen her and had taken a liking to her, for she derived much amusement from the old woman's gossiping tongue. Through her the princess learnt much that was going on in the city and would ask all sorts of questions about the people passing by under the palace windows. The princess's apartments were in that part of the palace that overlooked the main road in the city. She was particularly amused by the airs that Kanta, the young city magistrate, gave himself as he rode daily to his court. One morning as Srukalya was rearranging the flowers in the princess's hair she pulled out a dying blossom and threw it out of the window. By a strange chance, the flower fell right in front of Kanta, who looked up and caught a smile on the princess's face, for Srukalya had just happened to make a witty remark. Of course, the coxcomb

thought the smile was intended for himself and that the princess took an interest in him.

This was not the end of my good fortune, for that very evening the princess gave the old woman a small box of jewels and a portrait of herself as a present to my wife, Srukalika's foster-daughter, of whom the princess was really fond. The clever old woman immediately thought of misleading Kanta into a belief that the princess had sent the portrait to him—for there was nothing that his vanity could not be induced to believe. Later on that night, accordingly, Srukalika made her way with the portrait to Kanta's house. She was received with open arms. The young man, after kissing the portrait, waxed quite poetical in his language, saying that the old woman was as a boat in which he could sail across the agitated seas of love to the haven of bliss. She flattered him by saying that the princess had fallen in love with him as he passed daily beneath her windows. His good looks and manly bearing had quite captured her heart. There was every hope of his becoming the ruler of Anga one day. But the princess was yearning to hear his voice and hold sweet converse with him. Could he not manage to have a hole bored through the palace garden wall at the corner nearest the princess's apartments? She would then creep down and enjoy his society for a sweet stolen hour in the darkness. Surely there must be some clever housebreaker in the prison who could do what he wanted.

Kanta had exclaimed, she continued, that he had the very man for the job under lock and key—the prisoner whom he had punished with whipping.

At this point I threw my arms round Srukalika's neck and hugged her in my joy. She had delivered my enemy into my hands. You may be sure that I was to be promised my freedom but was actually to be killed after doing what the rash young man desired, for dead men tell no tales. In fact, that is what Srukalika advised him to do, for the princess's sake even more than his own. Now, after I had been duly warned, he was waiting outside to confirm the suggested arrangements.

I told her to bring Kanta in. He came and swore, the young hypocrite, to restore me to liberty after I had bored the hole. Naturally I pretended to jump at the offer and asked no awkward questions. It was none of my affairs what escapades a young princess chose to run into. I was a mere prisoner. Ah! if Kanta had only known what was in store for him his face would not have beamed with such satisfaction. My fetters were knocked off and I was well fed, for I pretended that I should need much strength to do the work expeditiously.

On the appointed night we proceeded cautiously to the corner of the palace garden wall closest to the princess's apartments. She, of course, knew nothing of what was being done in her name. With the help of my snake-screwed wall-borer I made a fair-sized hole in the wall after two hours' hard work. I squeezed my body through it first, for I was of bigger build than Kanta, and waited for him to follow. No sooner did his head and shoulders appear at the opening than I stunned him by a blow from my wall-borer. Another

blow killed him. I dragged his body through the hole and left it lying there with the tell-tale wall-borer placed in his hand. No more insolence would ever pass his lips !

There had been a rumour in our prison that Simhagosha, the captain of the city guard, and one of Dhanamitra's friends, had fallen into disfavour with the king and would be a lucky man if he managed to retain his freedom. I thought I might manage to do him a good turn, whilst I had the chance. So I made my way to his quarters, told him the whole story, and showed him how to turn it to his own advantage. Let him go to the king, early the next morning, and take him to the corner of the palace garden where Kanta's body was lying. During his patrolling the previous night, he was to say, he had noticed a man breaking into the palace garden, had followed him in, sprung on him from behind, thrown him down and killed him. In his hands was a wall-boring instrument and in his pocket was a portrait of the Princess Ambalika !

Simhagosha was most grateful and on the morrow did exactly as I had advised.

His slanderers were put to silence and he regained his lost favour with the king. Meanwhile Dhanamitra and myself went off to the woods to see Rishi Marichi and tell him all that we had done. He acknowledged that I had carried through my duty very satisfactorily. He would now tell me where and when I should find the object of my search. Imagine my perplexity when he told me that you would shortly be coming in the train of Chandavarma, Regent of Ujjain, who was about to invade

Anga and carry off the princess. My feelings of loyalty to the princess, my wife's friend, would compel me to champion her cause and so find myself fighting against you ! How could I guess that you would be dragged about as a prisoner in a wooden cage ?

Well, prince, you know how it all ended. After the occupation of the city, I sent Dhanamitra to meet and hasten the allies of Simhavarma who were marching to his aid. Hearing of Chandavarma's resolve to marry the princess forthwith, before turning out his troops to meet these allies, I disguised myself as a Brahmin priest and slipped into the marriage pavilion. Just as the upstart was about to take the hand of the princess Ambalika to make her his before the sacred fire, I snatched a sword from one of his officers, dashed at Chandavarma and swept off his head with one blow. Fiercely brandishing the reeking blade, I made my way with the princess from amidst the startled company, and before they had recovered their surprise, dashed off with her to Dhanamitra's house. Having placed her in comparative safety behind strong bolts and bars, I rushed out again and hewed my way through the gathering hordes of the Malwa soldiery towards the city gate. It was at this moment, O chief of men, that your inspiring voice fell sweetly on my ears and I was rescued by my prince and leader."

CHAPTER IX

UPAKARAVARMA'S STORY. HOW A LOST THRONE WAS REGAINED

PRINCE Rajavahana and his companions were extremely interested in Apakaravarma's recital of his doings. They congratulated him heartily on the alert wit and dauntless valour that had brought him safely through his adventures. The prince declared with a smile that Apakaravarma rivalled in the art of robbery even Karnisuta himself, the author of the celebrated work on "Theft." Turning to Upakaravarma, he said, "Now let us hear what sort of adventures Apakara's twin brother has experienced. I am sure they will be well worth our hearing, for the twins never lacked resourcefulness and courage."

i. UPAKARAVARMA HEARS NEWS OF HIS PARENTS

Thus requested, Upakaravarma took up his tale. "Prince, my travels led me in the end to the Kingdom of Videha. Going to Mithila, its capital, I found in a suburb a temple of the Goddess Kali. The grove in which it was situated looked so cool and inviting that I decided to sit underneath the trees for a while and then proceed. An old woman who was there leading the life of a *sanyasini* came to where I was sitting, gave me water for my hands and feet, and welcomed me to her humble *ashrama*. All the while she was, as I could see,

observing me closely, every now and then relapsing into a far-away look. The tears began to swell up in her old eyes.

Wondering why the sight of myself should cause her grief, I asked her gently why she was shedding tears. With a quavering voice she began : 'Noble young sir, years ago my daughter and I were employed in the royal household of Videha's King as nurses to the twin sons born to him by his Queen Priyamvada. Invited by Rajahamsa, ruler of Magadha, to be present at a grand ceremony, Prakaravarma, taking with him his queen, his twin children with my daughter and myself in charge of them, and a large retinue, proceeded to Magadha. Unfortunately, whilst we were still there, Manasara, King of Malwa, invaded the country, defeated Rajahamsa and occupied the kingdom. What happened to Rajahamsa I do not know, but my royal master, after fighting bravely, was compelled to seek safety in rapid flight. On the way home we were ambushed by some jungle tribes and in the confusion my daughter and I found ourselves separated with the baby boys from the main body. We hurried after them. Exhaustion fell upon us. As we staggered blindly onwards, a fierce tiger sprang out upon a straying transport bullock. The sight of this unnerved me. I fell down in a swoon with the child in my arms and when I recovered, lo ! the child was gone ! A kind shepherd found me and, with the aid of his wife, nursed me back to health in his hut. I was preparing to leave them in order to go on to Mithila and report the loss of my helpless charge, when my missing daughter walked

in with a man beside her. He was, she told me, her husband, a Videha man who, like ourselves, had got separated from the party in the ambuscade. He had managed to rescue her from the hands of a villainous hillman, but the baby boy in her charge had been carried off by the leader of the ambushers.

There was now nothing better to do than to hasten on to Mithila and report to the sorrowing parents the great misfortune of the loss of both their sons. Alas ! on the way we learnt the sad news that our royal master and mistress had been dethroned and put into prison by Vikatavarma, son of Prakaravarma's elder brother. This traitorous nephew had usurped the throne and defeated all those who tried to recover it for the imprisoned uncle. I was heart-broken to think how I should be adding to the sorrow of the unhappy prisoners. However, I thought it best that they should know the bitter truth and not live on in nerve-racking anxiety. Then in utter disgust with the world, I renounced it and am living here as a *sanyasini* at this temple. My daughter, being young and newly married, felt otherwise. In due course she entered the service of the usurper and at the present moment she is living in the palace as matron in charge of his queen's household. As I looked upon you, young man, and reflected that the royal babe, had he lived, would have been exactly of your age and manly bearing, I could not restrain my tears.'

The worthy old woman's loyalty and affection stirred me deeply. It was with pleasure that I reminded her of her meeting in the forest a Brah-

min to whom she narrated her loss. That Brahmin, I told her, had discovered the child and had handed it over to the care of the exiled Rajahamsa of Magadha. 'I am that child, O my faithful nurse,' I cried and threw myself into her arms. How shall I describe to you her ecstatic joy? I was alarmed indeed lest it should kill her.

At last when she was moderately composed, I told her of my resolve to free my parents from their captivity, and to regain their lost throne. I pointed out to her that it would be impracticable to rush on the usurper and smite him down. Vikatavarma must be too strongly established by this time and many of his subjects would have a distaste for what would seem to them useless bloodshed. The only course left open to me was patiently to scheme and to intrigue. Thus alone could I hope so to undermine the usurper's authority and prestige that the final blow would be effective. To try and to fail would surely mean death to myself and to my parents.

ii. UPAKARAVARMA PLANS THE REMOVAL OF THE
USURPER

I took up my abode with my old foster-mother, who supplied my scanty needs with pleasure and alacrity. I was continually turning over possible schemes in my head. The result of my deliberations was that I felt I must have friends within the palace itself and attack the usurper from the least-expected quarter. I asked the old woman to send word to her daughter to come out and pay us a visit. From her I hoped to learn how the land lay and where I could begin my intrigues.

The daughter, now quite an elderly woman, came out eagerly to see her mother's 'newly-found treasure.' When she discovered the meaning of her mother's strange message to her, she was beside herself with joy ; she rushed forward and folded me in a close embrace, showering upon my head many endearing epithets. When her emotion had sufficiently subsided, I engaged her in talk upon the situation in the palace, and gleaned the following usual information. Between the senior queen, Kalpasundari, and her husband Vikatavarma there was no love lost. The daughter of the ruler of Kamarup, she was one of the most beautiful and accomplished princesses of her time, and had been intended from her infancy as a bride for one of the twin sons of Prakaravarma. But when she came of age, Prakaravarma had been ousted from his throne and the world knew nought of his two sons, who had completely disappeared. Her father, therefore, gave her in marriage to Vikatavarma, who sought her hand with a sort of prescriptive right. The marriage proved unlucky, as the high-spirited girl found in the usurping ruler an ugly, coarse boor, without any culture, but full of guile and addicted to low pleasures. She had not been slow in letting her husband know what she thought of him and his evil ways and pleasures. What stung him most was to be called ugly ; at her other reproaches he had merely laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

No secrets are hid from the servants of a palace and those in daily attendance upon kings and queens. The rift between the two grew wider. Vikatavarma took to himself other queens and

left Kalpasundari to herself with studied neglect. The reigning favourite of the hour followed his example. The senior queen found herself very much isolated and shorn of power and influence even in her own household.

Here then was my opportunity. I would constitute myself Kalpasundari's champion and redress her grievous wrongs. Had I not been lost in infancy she might have been my own wife at this time. Luckily for the poor woman she had already one faithful and devoted friend in Pushkarika, the matron of her household, my foster-mother's daughter, who very readily promised me her co-operation in my schemes.

Vikatavarma's behaviour to the poor lady had, I learnt, become more callous than usual during the last few weeks. In his drunken frolics he had insulted her name shamelessly. Everyone at court followed his lead. The latest wife he had taken to himself was an ill-bred creature of low birth and base antecedents. This woman took especial delight in mortifying the unhappy Kalpasundari. If, then, I could show the unfortunate queen how to crush this insulting creature and humble her in the dust. I was sure of her help. Of course, I could not let her know the full extent of my scheme, which was to remove the obnoxious Vikatavarma by death. I could not expect a wife, however hardly used, to aid and abet me in killing her husband and thus to reduce herself to the sad condition of widowhood.

None of her reproaches and sharp words had had any effect upon her husband except the allu-

sion to his ugliness. For he was not only ugly in features but ungainly in his carriage and undignified in his gait. This was the crack in his armour of shamelessness through which I hoped to shoot my arrow of vengeance. The husband would give all he possessed to become handsome and manly-looking: the wife would rejoice exceedingly to have the full undivided love of such a husband, particularly if his nature were changed to correspond with his noble bearing. Bygones would be bygones and the other queens would be set aside and forgotten, especially the latest and most shameless of them.

I sat down to consider a plan by which I could stage a transformation scene—in which the ugly, evil-natured, coarse boor Vikatavarma would be changed apparently into a handsome, manly, virtuous ruler and devoted husband. The first step would have to be taken by Kalpasundari herself. Probably it would prove the hardest. The neglected, insulted queen would have to show affection and loving concern for her tyrannous lord. She would need to win his confidence so as to induce him to consent to the suggested means of transformation by supreme magic.

The suspicious usurper would never consent to put himself even for a few minutes, in the power of a magician in whom he had no faith. He would never, I felt certain, permit a reputed necromancer or wizard to have any hand in such a matter. That was too simple a method of being killed; and after all he would prefer ugliness to death in such a booby-trap. Obviously therefore I should have to keep absolutely in the background; no one

except my foster-mother and her daughter must know my real plan. The queen herself must be persuaded that she had the power to perform the necessary magic. Vikatavarma would think scorn to be frightened of her, especially if the magic employed was very simple and obvious and innocent in its nature, such as a full confession of his secret thoughts, and a promise of amendment of his evil ways to be made in the presence of his wife alone before a specially prepared sacrificial hearth, to be followed by a few runes and charms pronounced by his forgiving queen.

Now this, in a way, made my part easier to play. If I had pretended to a knowledge of recondite magic, was it to be supposed that Vikatavarma would not want to have some preliminary proofs of my power? In such a case I should have been helpless and my plot would have failed at the very outset. No, I would keep entirely behind the scenes, for it was essential that the queen herself should not have the slightest suspicion of foul play until, at any rate, the deed was done. If afterwards she learnt the truth, as it was almost inevitable she must learn it in course of time, she, who had acted throughout in good faith would not incriminate herself. For her own sake she would hold her tongue.

iii. THE PLAN IS PUT INTO OPERATION

Such, my prince, was the course of my deliberations. Without Pushkarika's sagacious co-operation I could never have succeeded. Upon her fell the brunt of the first attack, namely persuading the queen to wish for a complete regeneration of her

husband in form and in disposition, and making him believe that such a miracle was possible, and that she alone could acquire the power to effect it.

The astute matron of the household waited until some particularly glaring insolence had been displayed towards her mistress by the ill-bred junior Rani. She then hinted that she knew of a means of humiliating that odious woman. Kalpasundari begged her to be more explicit—for she was white with anger and ready to listen to anything that could crush her rival. Pushkarika sighed and said that hers was not an easy plan but, if carried out, it was bound to succeed. The queen replied that she was ready to face the greatest difficulties if she could be sure of having the satisfaction of humiliating the low-born creature that had so vilely insulted her.

Pushkarika then began to give out the plan that I had discussed with her and her mother. When the queen heard that she was to approach her erring lord with signs of affectionate concern, she drew quick breath but said nothing. Pushkarika explained that only if Vikatavarma's entire nature was changed could her mistress hope to have his undivided affection and to see her rivals thrust aside into oblivion. Such a transformation could only be carried out by the sincere desire of the one he had most wronged, for the gods would applaud such an example of wifely devotion, and, applauding, would help. From her mother, she went on to say, who was living as a devout *sanyasini*, she had learnt that a most famous wizard had lately come to those parts. This man, struck by her austere life, had taught her certain

mantras and charms which, if spoken under certain conditions in sincerity and truth, would transform, in inner nature and outward semblance the worst of men or women into the best. But the charms would have no power unless the person to be transformed sincerely wished it. That was where the difficulty lay, she concluded, namely how to make Vikatavarma sincerely wish to be regenerated.

The queen as Pushkarika told me later, had listened in silence, revolving these strange ideas in her mind. At last she had burst into speech : 'O faithful Pushkarika, however hard it may prove to be, I shall undertake this enterprise. Take me to your mother that I may learn the charms and the conditions.'

A time was appointed for the queen's secret visit to the grove where the shrine of Kali stood. I taught my old foster-mother many *mantras* and strange charms. Together we planned out all the details of what she should say to the queen. By the time Kalpasundari, accompanied only by Pushkarika, arrived at our *ashrama*, my old nurse was word-perfect in her part. I myself lay on the ground outside the hut and watched and listened, ready to prompt if required. My heart went out to the poor queen ; she was so stately, so dignified and so beautiful. I fell in love with her who, had life run its ordinary course, might have been my own wife.

The visit was of necessity a long one. The queen learnt the *mantras* and charms, to be rehearsed at home under the tuition of Pushkarika. She also learnt the conditions of the magic transformation, namely, the expression by Vikatavarma

of a desire to be changed in form and nature, and a frank confession of his secret thoughts at the time of the sacrifice. The king was also to gain the consent of his ministers to his intended proceedings and, if they agreed, to publish it widely that on a certain day, after a day of feasting for the public, the king would undergo by magic process a transformation in form and in character.

It was settled that the sacrificial chamber should be placed somewhere in the palace garden. In the centre of it was to be a deep and broad hearth, by the side of which were to be laid a hundred logs of sandalwood and a hundred of aghil. Camphor and frankincense were to be provided in great abundance and many silken robes of state.

You may imagine, my prince, how anxiously I awaited results after the queen's visit. Days passed on and still Pushkarika could report no progress. However, by constantly harping upon the real possibility of winning for her lord a noble heroic form and figure, Kalpasundari at last, overcoming all his suspicions and fear of ridicule, persuaded Vikatavarma to proceed to the great sacrifice of regeneration.

Vikatavarma's announcement of his intention created a great stir in the city. The importance of this attempt to change his form and nature was enhanced by the approval of the ministers and nobles. They were, so people said, to be present outside the sacrificial chamber together with the queens and all the members of the royal household. Everyone looked forward with eager anticipation to the great feast that was to precede the

yaga. The newest of his queens alone was perturbed.

Events proceeded smoothly according to plan. A suitable spot in the palace garden was chosen and the spacious sacrificial chamber was erected. I climbed over the garden wall by means of a rope ladder, after swimming the moat, and watched the preparations from a tree top.

On the appointed day, the queen entered the sacrificial chamber by herself and with her own hands prepared and lit the fire and scattered sweet perfumes and flowers all about. I lay concealed amidst the piles of logs, trembling lest by any unhappy accident the unsuspecting queen should discover me. However, all was well. After she had carried out the necessary preliminaries she rang a little silver bell—the signal for her husband's entry.

Leaving his throne that had been placed in the middle of the semi-circle of attendant queens, ministers and courtiers on the sward in front of the place of sacrifice, Vikatavarma entered the chamber. With a keen look around lest, after all, there might be an enemy ready to attack, he advanced and stood before the fire. Kalpasundari waving a censer full of sweet-smelling incense chanted *mantras* in a sweet low voice. She then asked her lord to declare his sincere desire to be changed for the better and to unlock his bosom of all his secret thoughts. He made the required declaration, rather sheepishly I thought, and then proceeded thus :

'Pearl among women, the first secret of importance, which I now divulge to you, is the

poisoning of my uncle Prakaravarma. My confidential servants have been ordered to place before him to-morrow some poisoned food. It will be announced that he died of fever.' My second secret concerns my younger brother Visokavarma, whom I hate and wish to destroy. He has my orders to go with a small body of troops to Pundharpur to quell a rising. I have arranged that he does not return. My third secret concerns a priceless diamond necklace which Ganati, a Yavan merchant, has brought to me for sale. I have ordered Sarthavan my confidential broker and an old Panchala jeweller to hoodwink the foreigner into parting with his jewels for a very low sum. Fourthly, I am shortly sending my General Sathahali to the Kuru country with a large force, ostensibly to help the King of Anantasira in putting down civil discord, but really to bring about his death and to annex the country for myself. These, O treasure of my heart, are all the secrets lying locked up in my bosom.'

The queen shuddered, but comforted herself by saying aloud, 'My lord, to-morrow your heart will be changed and your base orders will be recalled. Sit here by my side before the fire and listen to my charms.'

Now, at last, my time had come. Through a hollow bamboo I began to blow a cloud of sleep-bringing powder. Soon the queen's charming voice began to fade into a drowsy monotone. Then it ceased altogether, as she sank back into a deep sleep. The king, thinking it all part of the ritual, made no struggle against his increasing stupor but slowly fell back at full length upon the

ground. I sprang out of my hiding place and with an iron grip upon his throat throttled him to death. I then threw him bodily into the midst of the fiery pit, pouring in many jars of ghee, camphor and chopped aromatic wood. After a while all that remained of the usurper was but a handful of ashes.

Dressing myself in the royal robes of state, I sat down by the side of the recumbent queen and blew gently upon her face. Soon her eyes opened. Slowly she sat up and gazed with awe-struck wonder at the handsome noble-looking man by her side. 'Thanks be to all the Gods,' she exclaimed, 'my lord is transformed and ennobled. No more shall I gaze upon a brutalized ugly countenance nor be ashamed of his shambling gait. All shall be as my recent vision, in this unexpected sleep, disclosed. My heart is filled with joy, wonder and gratitude.'

Taking me by the hand, her face glowing with joy, she led me forth into the sunshine and presented me to the astonished assembly that had waited so patiently, and, if the truth be told, so incredulously. I spake no word but smiled benignantly upon all. The court was dismissed. The marvellous news spread like wild fire through the city. Everywhere there was rejoicing. That night the citizens illuminated their houses and spent their time merrily with music and song.

This rejoicing and merry-making was not merely because of the wonderful new thing that had happened but also in honour of our wedding. For I had suggested to the queen that it would confirm and consecrate the complete change that had taken

place in me her husband, now quite a different man from what he had been if we straightway went through the marriage ceremony afresh. She agreed readily. That same evening, accordingly, in the marriage pavilion of the palace, in the presence of all the court, hastily re-assembled, we were wedded. Thus I won my destined bride.

Early on the morrow, clad in gorgeous robes of state, I sat on the throne in the Durbar Hall. Addressing the ministers and the nobles in front of me, I said : 'Sirs, I have changed my person and simultaneously my character. Bring into this hall forthwith my revered uncle Prakaravarma and his royal consort Queen Priyamvada Devi. Long have I kept my uncle from his throne, but this very hour I shall restore to him what is rightfully his. It shall be for him to decide what position or office I am to fill.' Next I commanded my younger brother Visokavarma to be brought before me and spoke to him thus : 'Brother, you need not now proceed to Pundharpur to quell the rising. The people there are in the grip of a famine ; this is not the time to punish them but rather to remove the cause of their unrest by sending them supplies of grain. Let it be your task to organize the collection and despatch of such supplies.' Then I summoned the confidential broker and the Panchala jeweller and ordered them to pay the just price for the Yavan merchant's diamond necklace. Last of all I sent for General Sathahali, to whom I spoke as follows : 'General, we should not interfere in the affairs of Kurudesā. The only crime of its ruler was his affection for his deposed ally Prakaravarma. As we have

changed our attitude towards Prakaravarma, it is no longer right to treat King Anantasira as hostile. Furthermore as my uncle comes into his own again, it will be for him and not for us to decide the lines of foreign policy.'

The men assembled there, O prince, who heard my commands, were assured beyond a shadow of doubt that I was Vikatavarma and none other. They marvelled greatly at the complete change in their ruler's person and temper, and dispersed, praising the gods for such a handsome prince filled with such generous impulses.

It was with considerable emotion that I beheld my parents. They were astonished beyond measure when they heard the unexpected news that the usurper had repented and become altogether a different being. When I, in my assumed character, received them in the palace, I could scarcely refrain from blurting out the truth forthwith. But the time was not ripe for my disclosure.

They were duly reinstated in their former positions as king and queen. The country began to regain its former prosperity under the change of rule. Kalpasundari was so much in love with me and so rejoiced to see her former rivals dismissed into lonely obscurity, that she acquiesced in my self-effacement in favour of Prakaravarma and the consequent dethronement of herself.

After a few weeks I felt that Kalpasundari loved me for myself so well that she could bear the shock of disclosure. I told her exactly what I had done for her sake and disclosed my true relationship to King Prakaravarma and his queen. She was at first bewildered, but soon recovering, threw

her arms about me, exclaiming, 'O lord of my heart, I was your destined bride ; who can resist destiny? The former time is but as a bad dream. We will think of it no more.'

A few days later I fell at the feet of the king and queen and explained all the seeming mystery. Joyous gratitude to God filled their hearts on learning from me how both their children were alive and well. My father adopted me as his son, so as not to disturb the public mind by the truth, and crowned me in public as *Yuvaraj* the very next day.

At this juncture news reached my father of Chandavarma's invasion of Champa and an appeal for aid followed in its wake, sent by his friend Simhavarma. We hastily prepared ourselves and set out for Champa. Even before we reached its gates, we heard the glad news of Chandavarma's death. And the rarest of joys now fills our hearts—the sight of yourself, O prince and comrade."

CHAPTER X

ARTHAPALA'S STORY. THE FORGOTTEN PRINCESS

“UPAKARA,” said the prince, at the conclusion of the long story, “you have outdone your twin brother in knowledge of human nature and how to play upon it. In subtlety of intrigue and in cleverly-reasoned schemes few can be found to excel you. We have been fascinated by your narrative and congratulate you heartily on the happy outcome of your bold adventure. Now, dear comrades, let us listen to what Arthapala has to tell us.”

Thus invited, Arthapala took up his tale and said : “Prince, wide was the range of countries through which I passed in my search for you. Finally I arrived at the revered city of cities, Kasi. After bathing in the holy waters, I worshipped God Mukteswara in his sacred temple. Then, leaving the city by the southern gate, I strolled about, surveying leisurely the beauties of the scene around me. My eye fell upon a man weeping bitterly. He was young and strong and bore no marks of injury. I wondered much to see such a man weeping as if his heart would break. I approached him and asked him if I could assist or comfort him in any way.

‘Sir,’ he replied, ‘you must be a stranger to this city, else you would know that I am Purnabhadra, the intimate friend of Kamapala, brother-in-law of Simhagosh, king of this country. Alas !

he is to be publicly hanged this very day on a false charge of treason. I know not how to save him.'

'Well, O Purnabhadra,' I rejoined, 'it is quite certain that weeping will not help to keep your friend's neck from the noose. Tell me more about him, perchance we can find influential friends to bring pressure on the king to reprieve him.'

'Friends at court, good stranger, are fair weather friends. Kamapala was too stern and upright a regent during the minority of Simhagosh to have influential friends amongst the nobles ready to risk their own necks by pleading for him. Ah me! we are not likely to have such a wise administrator again unless we can find another son of Dharmapala, the wise minister to the famous Rajahamsa of Magadha.'

'Ha! what say you? Another son of Dharmapala, minister to Rajahamsa? Young man, we must be up and doing instead of idly chatting here, for know this—Kamapala is my father!'

'Kamapala your father? You his son? Where then have you been all these years? But come, there is no use in asking such questions now. If you have one quarter of your father's brain power, you will be a young man of resource. Can you think of a plan of rescue?'

'Why, yes, I can, thanks to my excellent education and training in the company of Prince Rajavahana, son of Rajahamsa. That's where I've been all these years—later I shall tell you my life story, but now suffice it to say that I have grown very proficient in all manner of magic and arts of illusion. Besides this, I know the language

of birds and have strange powers over reptiles. Hear my plan. Yonder sleeps a snake whose bite, though poisonous, is not deadly if treated with a certain simple herb remedy within a few hours. But where is the place of execution?’

‘That thickly-branched tamarind tree over against us is the tree on which criminals are hanged. Ah! look! yonder come the officers of the law followed by a huge crowd.’

‘Quick then let us be. Listen, I shall throw the snake at my father; he will fall into a swoon after being bitten. You must go and bring his wife, and, on the way back with her, request the king to hand over the dead body to the widow. Arrange for the cremation in your garden. Screen off the fire pit well. I shall come later and do what remains to be done.’

Purnabhadra nodded assent and went off, glad of something to do that would prevent his remaining, as if fascinated, on the spot to watch the proceedings. I ran over to the small snake and luckily caught it ere, disturbed by my over-hasty approach, it could slip away. I then scrambled into the branches of the tamarind tree, climbed up high and lay face downwards on a branch.

What son ever saw his father for the first time under such harrowing conditions? There he stood beneath me in the midst of the guard, handcuffed and fettered like any base criminal. But he held his head high, for he was guiltless of the charges brought against him. The chief officer read out extracts of these charges sufficient to show the nature of the alleged crime. When he read out the punishment awarded by the judge a

shudder ran through the crowd. He was first to be blinded by red-hot irons—the executioner was even then heating them in a fire on the further side of the tree—and then in his agony he was to be hanged.

My heart fluttered within my breast. Why had they not brought him closer to the tree? Should I be able to cast the snake at his face so as to ensure that the reptile would bite him? I could but try. Coiling the wriggling creature as tightly as I could, I made my cast. It turned out to be a most dexterous throw. The snake fell like a crown on his head, and, enraged by the shock, bit him on the forehead. I saw my father raise his handcuffed arms into the air in a bewildered way, shake his head violently, and begin to tremble all over. In less than a minute he sank unconscious upon the ground. The snake glided rapidly away through the crowd which scattered in awestruck fear to let it pass between them. A cry arose that it was the judgment of heaven; there could no longer be any doubt of his guilt.

Purnabhadra had in the meantime fetched my mother from her home and escorted her, weeping and wailing, before the king. Her weeping was but acting on her part, because Purnabhadra had told her the glad news of my arrival and of my proposed action. Her heart yearned towards me, the son who had been stolen from her soon after birth and lost to all knowledge. To the king, then, she made her petition between her sobs that he would deliver over to her the dead body of her husband that she might burn it with due rites. It was not for a wife, she said, to examine her

husband's actions to pass judgment upon them. The king promised to send an order to his officers to hand the body over to her after the execution had been duly carried out.

Amongst the group under the tamarind tree there was hesitation what to do at the unexpected turn of events. They decided to remain there and send word to the king to know his will whether or not they should proceed to inflict upon a corpse the ignominy of being hanged by the neck. This was a terrible and to me an unthought-of idea. I trembled to think that my plan of rescue might yet go awry. I was just thinking how I could produce an illusion or intervene in some magical manner when my mother arrived, led by Purnabhadra. She had her head and face covered with a cloth; sounds of wails and sobs came from beneath her veil. She threw herself on my father's body and lamented their cruel destinies. Purnabhadra briefly informed the officers of his interview with the king. To confirm his words a messenger from the king arrived. The officers then withdrew the executioners and the guards and marshalled the mob of spectators away, leaving Purnabhadra and my mother alone with my unconscious father.

I slipped down from my perch on the tamarind branch and made myself known to my mother, who embraced me ever so fondly, at the same time whispering that all her reliance was now upon me and my promise to restore my father. I bade her have no fear. Whilst Purnabhadra, with the help of a servant, arranged to convey the seemingly-dead body to his house, I would go

and find the herbs from a decoction of which the antidote to the snake's poison could be made.

Purnabhadra carried out his part of our plan. A well-screened cremation pit was made in a sheltered corner of his garden and the necessary wood and aromatic oils were placed in readiness. Within an hour I arrived with my herb remedy. In a very short time my father revived and sat up in bewildered wonder. The reunion between my parents was very affecting : it moved us to tears. Then, whilst the fire was burning and all the ritual of a cremation was carried out except for the happy absence of a corpse, we sat apart and talked of our future course of action.

We decided to keep up the pretence of my father's death and my mother's widowhood until we could in course of time, by some intrigue or bold assault, overthrow the ungrateful king and place my mother, the king's sister, upon the throne, with my father as administrator of the realm.

During the night we smuggled my father back into his own palace, a strong fortress-like building surrounded by a deep moat. My father lived hidden away in a small room ; very few even of his own servants knew of his being alive. My mother assumed the garb of a widow and behaved as one. Meanwhile Purnabhadra and myself were feeling our way into the confidence of some of my father's old friends to try to get together a strong party. It was slow work. I grew impatient and urged bolder measures.

My father's palace stood next to that of the king. To dig an underground tunnel between the

two, to surprise and capture the king at dead of night, to drag him down and keep him a prisoner in our dungeon—such was my plan. My father gave his reluctant consent, for, with the help of the few servants in the secret of my father's continued existence, the work would be slow, and, if we should cut into rock on the way, quite impossible.

However it proved to be extraordinarily easy—for we had scarcely dug our passage half the required distance when we found ourselves in spacious vaults and underground chambers, well lighted and furnished : quite a little palace underground.

Leaving my companions behind I advanced alone. I had not gone far when I met a group of young and beautiful damsels. One among them shone in their midst as the moon among the stars. I was captivated by her beauty and wondered if she were a mere mortal or the queen of the fairies. As she moved forward in my direction, she seemed to radiate brightness—it was as if a silver statue had come to life. However, on seeing me, she fell back a little. An elderly woman boldly advanced and fell at my feet, praying me to save them all. Evidently she took me for a god sent to do them some service. I assured her I was but a mortal—the long-lost son of Kamapala and Kantimati his wife. Were they, the beautiful damsels I saw before me, mortals like myself or fairies of the netherworld of whom I had read in my boyhood?

She replied as follows : 'My prince, your grandfather Chandasimha had three children : your

mother Kantimati, Chandagosh and Simhagosh. Chandagosh did not survive long, and Simhagosh is now reigning. This lovely maiden is the posthumous daughter of Chandagosh. On her birth, King Chandasimha called for me and handed me the child with the following words : "I have promised to give my granddaughter Manikarnika to the eldest son of Manasara, King of Malwa. But fearing lest she should make a clandestine marriage as my daughter Kantimati did when she secretly married Kamapala, I entrust her to your care so that I may fulfil my promise to Manasara." So saying he led me with the child to this underground residence. That was thirteen long years ago. Not once did he visit us and the secret of our existence seems to have died with him. I have not dared to make it known to Simhagosh, for between him and his brother was a great hatred. Our residence is comfortable enough, though we see so little of the sunshine, and we are well stocked with provisions and have secret means of getting whatever we desire. This place was originally intended as a secret place of retreat for the king and queen if ever he should be defeated in battle and his life were endangered. I appeal to you, my prince, to aid your cousin and somehow to restore us safely to the busy world above.'

Her appeal did not fall on deaf ears. None in truth was needed to make me espouse the cause of my lovely cousin, the forgotten Princess Manikarnika. I took the old matron aside and briefly told her what had brought me there. She promised her help. Indeed, she saved me much precious time for she knew all the intricacies of

the rambling underground mansion and the secret stair leading into the king's own sleeping chamber. Led by her, I soon found myself at the hidden entrance to the royal bed-chamber. Peering through a minute crack in the wall I could see my victim slumbering peacefully on his luxurious couch.

We were some time in discovering the exact position of the spring, pressure on which would cause a portion of the wall to swing back into the bed-chamber. However we did find it and press it. I sprang noiselessly through the opening, ran over to the king's couch, placed one hand over the king's mouth whilst with the other I gathered up some of the bed coverings. I gagged him so that he could not utter a sound, rolled him up in the coverings and bore him, struggling, to the opening. Then with the matron's help I carried him through the gloomy winding passages to my father's palace.

Arrived there, panting with my exertions, I laid down my burden at my father's feet. 'Behold, my father, His Royal Highness, a helpless bundle! What shall we do with him?'

'We will leave him for the present as he is, and decide his fate later. But tell me how did you succeed so quickly! I thought your digging had taken you only half the required distance.'

'Come with me and see how it was that I have succeeded so quickly.'

So saying, I led my father into the underground mansion, the existence of which he, strangely enough, knew nothing and showed him his unknown niece, Princess Manikarnika, who greeted

us with bashful shyness. After embracing the lovely maiden, he turned to me and said, 'My son, we must alter our plans. You shall wed your cousin and together rule the kingdom. I shall be your minister and train you in the difficult art of ruling. It is more fitting so.'

'My father,' I replied, 'the first proposal I willingly agree to, but not the second. Why should we alter our plans? It is surely more fitting that you, with your experience, should rule this kingdom.'

'Son, my experience will indeed be ruling this kingdom, but through you. I am old; you are young and energetic, and strong enough to bear the cares of state. Be dutiful, my son, and respect your father's wish.'

So it was agreed between us. In due course I was wedded to my princess and ascended the throne by virtue of being the husband of the elder grandchild of Chandasimha. As I was myself the younger grandchild of the old monarch our claims were doubly strengthened and were accepted by all the ministers and nobles who had supported Simhagosh. He is being kept in an honourable captivity. As he was not a strong ruler and the country did not prosper under his administration, no one objects seriously to the change.

Now, as you know, dear prince, I came here to assist Simhavarma, and have had the unspeakable delight of finding you and others of my beloved comrades."

CHAPTER XI

BRAMATI'S STORY. A DREAM AND ITS FULFILMENT

i. THE DREAM-BRIDE

"POOR Princess Manikarnika," said Prince Rajavahana, at the close of Arthapala's tale, "what a dismally dreary childhood she must have spent shut away so long from the bright sunshine, the beautiful trees and flowers and the sweet songs of the birds. We all rejoice that happiness has now fallen to her lot."

"It was fortunate indeed, Arthapala," interposed Apakaravarma, "that your eye caught sight of the snake whose bite was to save your father's life. Truly the gods have favoured us on our adventures."

"Yes," broke in the prince, "they have indeed. Let us hear if Bramati has also experienced the favour of the gods in his enterprise. Bramati, speak and gladden our ears with the tale of your doings."

Thus adjured, Bramati began: "Prince and comrades, I set off on the search along the slopes of the Vindhya. My wandering steps took me to a dense jungle. When night fell I could proceed no further in the thick darkness. So, gathering dried leaves and grass, I made my couch beneath a wide banyan tree. Before composing myself to sleep I prayed earnestly to the Goddess of the Forest to save me from the wild animals and the

jungle spirits that often haunt such places and to send me sweet dreams and pleasant visions.

My prayer was heard. I slept unharmed by any beast of the jungle and I had the most entrancing vision. In my dream I felt myself transported to the city of Sravasthinagar, where a great festival in honour of Lord Siva had just been celebrated. Tired out, the citizens had all sought repose. The city was like a city of the dead—not a sound was to be heard. I wandered up and down noiselessly, for it seemed to me in my dream that I was a creature of air, light as a feather and invisible, going hither and thither with no fixed purpose. Nothing surprised me, for in dreams the most fantastic happenings seem natural. Consequently I did not wonder how it was that I found myself wandering, care free, through the rooms of the royal palace. I admired the gorgeous throne-room and the delicate carvings on walls and pillars. I met the palace guards without trembling, for no one took the least notice of me. They did not see me. I wandered on until I came to the queen's apartments. Then it was that I saw the most beautiful maiden lying fast asleep on her richly adorned couch. This must be, I thought, one of the princesses. This should be, I vowed, my bride if only I, a poor adventurer, could win her. I was stealing softly towards her to imprint a kiss on her pearly cheek when I awoke!

It had been all a dream, an empty dream. I awoke to reality but determined to do all I could to fulfil my dream-vow. With that object in view, I set out on the road to Sravasthinagar.

Not far from my destination, I entered a small

village which seemed unusually full of people. I found that a cock-fight was about to take place at the caravanserai. I joined the crowd of onlookers. I could not help laughing when I saw the birds ; one was so big and strong and the other so lean and sickly-looking. It was not going to be anything at all of a fight ; it would be a mere waste of time to watch it. I began to say aloud what I was thinking when a Brahmin near me pulled me aside and asked me to keep quiet and not spoil his triumph. He knew well, he said, that his cock would win but his opponent had jeered at him and his birds so often, and was so confident that any cock, no matter how feeble, could beat the Brahmin's champions, that he wanted to teach the boaster a good lesson. Hitherto he had been unlucky and had never won a match, but this time he felt certain of victory. So he prayed me to keep quiet.

Naturally, when thus appealed to, I did as he requested me. I sat down by his side and chewed the betel leaf he gave me from his box. The fight was soon over. The Brahmin's cock was declared winner. The proud owner took up his bird in triumph and beckoning me to follow, led me to his own house. There I was most hospitably entertained for a few days. He took quite a fancy to me and was interested in my life-story. I did not, however, tell him of my dream. When we parted he pressed me to consider him as a good friend to whom I could appeal in time of need. I gave him a jewelled ring as a keepsake.

I entered the city of Sravasthinagar, and, as it was noon and the sun was hot, I wandered into a

public garden, sat down under a shady tree and fell asleep.

When I awoke I found a young man sitting near me and looking curiously at me. I asked him why he regarded me with such intentness. He replied, 'Stranger, pardon my curiosity, but really it is a most strange coincidence. Your face resembles exactly a portrait that my sister has recently brought home with her. Come with me and see it for yourself. My sister will be interested to meet you.'

Having nowhere in particular to go to, I accompanied the young man to his house. It was a stately mansion; evidently the owner was a man of importance. He treated me, complete stranger to him though I was, as an honoured guest. After a welcome bath and a more welcome dinner he took me to his sister's apartments.

I found her engaged in painting some flowers on a piece of silk. Evidently my host had told her nothing as yet of my arrival, for she arose from her seat with a look of surprise and regarded me with the same intense curiosity as her brother had shown a few hours before. 'My sister,' he said, 'is it not strange that I have found by happy chance the young man whose portrait you brought home from the palace? Could there be a closer resemblance?' 'Brother,' she replied, 'the likeness is extraordinary, I must tell the princess as soon as possible.'

From this conversation I surmised, what was indeed the fact, that the pretty girl before me was a close friend of a princess—perhaps the nameless princess of my dream. She then produced the

portrait of which her brother had spoken. I gazed upon it and then at my reflection in a mirror. Truly the likeness was extraordinary. I looked at her in a mute appeal for further enlightenment on this strange coincidence.

She saw the look in my eyes and said, 'Stranger, this portrait was painted by my bosom friend Princess Navamalika, who has, as you see, much skill in the art. It is the portrait of the man, or the spirit, that she saw in a vivid dream on the night following Lord Siva's festival. As she was painting it she told me her dream. She saw herself as a disembodied spirit wandering about the city and through the rooms of the palace, irresistibly drawn on, so it seemed to her, by some similar disembodied spirit going before her. It was not until she had come back in her dream-wanderings to her own bedchamber that she saw the face of the being that she had been following. Gradually the dream faded away but not without leaving on her mind the strong impression that the face she had momentarily looked upon was the face of her future husband.'

Prince, you may well imagine my feelings as I listened to this strange story and remembered my own dream. Fate was drawing us together. I told them of my own dream and vision of a sleeping beauty and taking up the paintbrushes I mixed the colours and painted on the back of the portrait the face that I had gazed upon. Though it was but a mediocre performance, both brother and sister saw in it a strong likeness to the princess. As I had never looked upon Navamalika in the flesh, both agreed that my dream-story confirmed

the princess's, and that I must be the destined bridegroom.

Such a story of two dreams that corroborated each other might satisfy the princess, her friends, and myself, but, they both assured me, would not be listened to by the king. He was hard to please in the matter of a bridegroom for his dearly-loved daughter. He looked with suspicion and dislike upon nameless, penniless adventurers of whom there had already been several, for the fame of Princess Navamalika's beauty had spread abroad. They had one and all tried to coax him into believing that they were princes in disguise and fate-appointed bridegrooms. Each had been ignominiously driven out of the city.

'Then, my friends,' said I, 'it is clear that I must win my dream-bride by some stratagem. I have a friend who has promised me his help ; I will go and seek his advice. Be not surprised if you discover me when and where you least expect to. Do not betray me for I shall do no harm or wrongful act. The king himself shall openly accept me as the bridegroom. This enterprise fascinates me, for it is a direct challenge to my wits. In a few months I shall somehow accomplish it, or, if I fail, shall seek death.'

ii. THE BRAHMIN'S MISSING DAUGHTER

They applauded my resolution, promised not to betray me should they find me where they least expected to, and vowed secrecy about our meeting. I then left their house and returned to the village where the cock-fighting Brahmin lived. Before him I laid the whole case. He thought for

a few minutes and then exclaimed, 'I have it, you shall be my daughter for the nonce.'

'How, good friend, can that help me?' 'Have patience, you will soon see.' He would tell me nothing more but kept on laughing gently to himself as at some good joke. Meanwhile I had to learn how to carry myself in my disguise and how to tune my voice and dress my hair and a thousand and one things that a young man must learn if he wishes to pass successfully as a woman. Luckily I am not a big man. My feet and hands are small. I made up as a charming young woman.

When the Brahmin judged that my disguise and my acting were perfect, he unfolded to me his plan (or at least a part of it) over which he had been chuckling to himself. He had not told me sooner because he did not know if I could carry out the impersonation successfully enough. Now he was satisfied on that point. Briefly then his idea was this. He would give me into the king's safekeeping whilst he went off to Ujjain to look for the missing bridegroom to whom he had promised my hand. At the next great festival in Siva's honour I was to slip away and swim across the river at the spot he would point out before we entered the city. He would be waiting for me on the other side with my own clothes. After a decent interval we should return to the palace and then I should see and hear . . . what I should see and hear. He broke off with a laugh and told me to possess my soul in patience.

We proceeded to Sravasthinagar and unseen on the way thither he pointed out the spot where I should swim across. We entered the city, went

straight to the palace and soon found ourselves in the royal presence. My pretended father blessed the king and then made the following request : 'Sire, the girl whom you see here is my only daughter. She lost her mother years ago, so I have been to her both father and mother. She is the apple of my eye and very precious to me. A long time ago I promised her hand to a relative of mine—a young man of good promise, well learned in all the *shastras*. He went off to Ujjain to gather enough money with which to maintain a wife. I had had no word of him for so long that I fear some harm must have befallen him. I must immediately go to Ujjain and see if that be so. For my daughter is of age and I cannot delay her marriage unduly. I have none with whom I can safely leave her during my absence. "The king is the father of all," say the *shastras*. I beg of you, sire, to help me and keep my daughter in your care until my return.'

The king graciously promised to do as requested, and sending for his daughter entrusted me to her kind care. A suite of apartments was assigned to me and I was waited upon as a princess. Nobody could have been kinder than was Nava-malika. She showed me her paintings and her embroidery work, she played on the *veena* and sang to me. I must admit that I was embarrassed by the kind attentions shown to me, and, though I loved being in her company, I had great difficulty in preserving my secret. One day the dear princess explained that she had taken such a strong liking for me because I might have been the sister of her dream-husband. And then she told me

about her wonderful dream and showed me the portrait she had painted. The picture of herself on the other side, she said, had been painted by her friend. That lady, who was standing by her side when she said this merely smiled but did not deny it. I looked at her and saw her give an involuntary start of surprise which she quickly overcame. She had found me where she least expected to but she kept her promise and revealed nothing.

The great festival day came at last. The king and queen and all the members of the royal household proceeded to the temple to pray and to worship. I followed close behind the princess. Before entering the precincts of the holy temple we all dipped ourselves in the river near by. I entered the water with the others but when no one was looking sank below the surface and swam under water to the thick bushes on the further side at the selected spot. I took care to loosen my *sari* and let it float down stream. My Brahmin friend was waiting for me. I rapidly changed into my own clothes that he had in readiness and went off to his house with him.

When my absence was noticed, the princess and the few ladies that were with her looked up and down the river, calling my name. One of them saw my *sari* floating down stream some way off. The princess cried aloud in great distress that I had been carried away by the strong current and drowned. The news was reported to the king who received it with great sorrow. Search was made for my dead body--of course, in vain. The whole palace went into mourning for me.

After a few days, my Brahmin friend, dressing

me up in fine clothes to look like a prince, took me to the palace. We were ushered into the king's presence. The Brahmin, after courteous salutations, said : 'Sire, I am under a deep obligation to you for taking care of my daughter whilst I journeyed to Ujjain. I found the bridegroom about to start on his way to claim my daughter. Here he stands now by my side. He is rich, handsome and accomplished. I am fortunate to have such an excellent son-in-law and my daughter to have such a husband. Will you now, Sire, restore my daughter to me?'

The king knew not what to do. He remained silent and looked sadly at the Brahmin. One of the ministers drew the poor man aside and broke the tragic news to him of his daughter's death by drowning.

When he realized that he would never see his daughter again, the Brahmin broke into tears. He sobbed and wailed and cursed his fate. He spoke of his daughter's charm and beauty and manifold accomplishments. In short, he made a great ado. Then, looking sternly at the uneasy king, he burst into angry curses and then shouted, 'Sire, is this the way you keep your promises? Your carelessness will cause me to break my promise to this young man : in all my life I have never broken a pledge. To do so would break my heart. You are the cause of my daughter's death—you must at least enable me to keep my promised word to her bridegroom ; a bride I promised him and a bride he must have. Give him the princess, your daughter. The *shastras* do not forbid it and my death will be at your door if you refuse it.'

The king, angered by these hot words, ordered the Brahmin and myself to be removed from the palace. But he could not escape doing what had been suggested. For the Brahmin was resolute. He caused a huge fire to be kindled outside the palace gate and loudly announced his intention of entering the fire if the king still refused his request. I shuddered to think what really might happen if the king was obdurate. For my friend seemed to have passed from acting the part of an angry man into being really angry. However after he had thrice gone round the fire and seemed on the point of throwing himself into the flames, one of the king's ministers ran to him and held him back. The king, he said, could not endure the thought of being the direct cause of a venerable Brahmin's death and would do what was asked of him.

Thus, O prince, I was wedded to my beautiful kindhearted Navamalika and received the congratulations of her friend. Navamalika had been closely watching me, I found, from behind the *purdah*, when we had the angry scene in the royal presence. She recognized in me her dream-husband. In fact, it was her pleading with her father that really made him consent to fulfil the Brahmin's wish.

My father-in-law associated me with himself in the government of his kingdom. He will soon retire and hand over the reins of government entirely to me. Meanwhile, here I am, having marched to the aid of King Simhavarma, little expecting the great good fortune of finding you and my beloved comrades here before me."

CHAPTER XII

THE ADVENTURES OF MANTRAGUPTA

THE SKELETON-MAGICIAN

“A WONDERFUL dream,” said Rajavahana at the conclusion of Bramati’s narrative, “we should be indeed fortunate if we could always accomplish the wonderful exploits we dream of. Has our friend Mantragupta a dream-story to excel what we have just listened to?”

Mantragupta smiled and replied, “Prince, I did indeed have a weird dream that led me to my bride, but it was not so mild and pleasant as that which Bramati enjoyed. It was rather a nightmare than a dream. If you would care to hear it, I shall proceed.”

“Yes, yes, Mantragupta, we should,” they all exclaimed eagerly, “begin without delay.”

“Well, dear prince and comrades, in my wanderings I reached the capital of the Kalinga country. Night had fallen and the city gates were shut. I had perforce to spend it outside the walls. It was a dark and gloomy night, cold and wet. I sought what shelter there was beneath the canopy of a fountain near the cremation ground. An uncanny spot to sleep in, but beggars cannot be choosers. However I was so tired that I sank into a deep sleep heedless of howling wind and driving rain.

I dreamt that I was awakened by a curious noise of harsh rough voices speaking in the storm. I

sat up and saw two squat-looking misshapen figures standing near me. They were goblins, and one was saying to the other, 'Why does the skeleton-magician want me? What harm does he intend to do to me, do you think, my brother? Is there no one in this wide world who will rid us of that wicked sinner?' The speaker stayed not for an answer but moved off, followed by the other. 'Ha, ha,' I said to myself, 'here's an adventure, I will follow them.'

I had not far to go. But what a sight I saw! There sat the skeleton-magician with a garland of skulls around his neck, his body smeared profusely with ashes, his long matted hair coated with clay. In front of him was a big pot full of fire with red tongues of flame shooting out as he kept pouring in oil-seeds and mustard. The goblin that I had followed stood with folded hands before him and humbly asked him what were his commands.

'Speed forth,' replied the magician, 'and bring here Kanakalekha, the daughter of the Kalinga King.' The goblin disappeared at once and in the twinkling of an eye reappeared with a heavy burden in his arms. Panting, he laid it down before his master.

It was the princess. There the poor girl lay moaning and bewailing her parents and her maidens. Immediately the wicked exorcist seized the maiden by the hair with one hand and began to drag her along the ground to where a sword was lying. Picking it up with the other hand he raised it to cut off the unfortunate maiden's head. Even the goblins were horror-struck and growled and

groaned aloud. But seemingly they could do nothing to prevent this hideous crime.

All this time I stood rooted to the spot ; my feet refused to move. Then, with this terrible sight before me, I made an immense effort of will and sprang forward just in time to seize the magician's sword-arm in an iron grip. I twisted the arm ; howling with pain, the foul sinner dropped his sword. Before he could think of a spell to cast upon me I snatched up the sword and swept off his head with one blow. The skeleton garland rattled horribly as the body fell convulsively on the ground.

The princess lay unconscious. As I stooped to raise her I saw a number of the dark ugly goblins dancing in high glee around us, uttering harsh and guttural sounds. I asked them to keep quiet lest they should terrify the princess back into her swoon, for her eyelids were fluttering and consciousness was returning. Then the goblin that had brought her said to me, 'O warrior, be not afraid of us ; we wish no harm to the maiden, but being under the magician's power had to obey his commands, however cruel. She has had a terrifying experience ; it will be for you to soothe and comfort her. You are the predestined hero who is to wed her. Out of malicious spite and jealousy, this wicked magician hoped to deprive you of your right by killing her. You have slain him to the great joy of us all and have rid the world of a grievous burden of evil. You have now succeeded to his power but as your nature is noble, you will use your power to set right the injury and wrong that this monster of wickedness

has inflicted. We shall be your humble and obedient slaves from love, not from fear. Command us to do what you will : there are few things beyond our power.'

His words made me very happy. I gazed intently on the beautiful face of my destined bride and saw in it loving gratitude for what I had done in rescuing her from the grim jaws of death. Softly she spoke : 'O chief of warriors, you have saved me, a helpless maiden, from the clutches of a cruel, malicious monster. I have ever shuddered at the sight of his evil face and turned away in fear. That angered him ; he vowed to kill me and had done so but for your timely help. You are my guardian deity and my saviour, and, as the goblin has said, my fate-appointed husband. I am yours from this hour forth.'

My heart was bounding for joy. The thought came to me to command the goblins to convey us to some far-off enchanted paradise where we might live in happiness for ever afterwards. Then the thought of the sorrow that would come upon her parents and of the dishonour that would fall upon my name if I gave up the search for you to seek a selfish happiness determined me to abandon that idea. I would restore the princess to her parents and would ask for her hand in an open honourable manner after rendering some valuable service to her country.

I spake these thoughts to the princess and told her to have no fear. I was her destined bridegroom and would so serve her father the king that he would willingly give her to me. She must return home and wait patiently until that hour

came. We embraced each other tenderly and then I commanded the goblin to bear her back whence he had brought her.

He did as he was commanded and in a brief space of time returned to my side as I sat revolving this wonderful happiness in my mind. He announced his return with a grunt that startled me out of my day-dream and thus addressed me : 'Warrior, you will soon be thinking this all a dream and unreal. It is real enough, even though it happened to you when chained in the fetters of sleep. Remember the charm that will summon us to do your bidding—the word goblins thrice repeated backwards "snilbog, snilbog, snilbog." As a sign that I speak the truth, when you awake your hand will be grasping a skull, one that fell out of the garland that was round the neck of the skeleton-magician.'

It was even as he had said. When I awoke stiff and cold the next morning, my right hand was grasping a skull. I sat up and rubbed my eyes. I looked around. There was no trace of the other skulls, or firepot, or the dead magician's body. I shuddered. What a nightmare ! I wished to test the truth of his word then and there, but, do what I could, I could not recall the charm. It had completely gone from my memory. It was useless racking my brain. I had to leave it until some chance association of ideas should bring it back to my mind.

I passed into the city. There was a general confusion and a bustling about of the citizens. Men were removing their valuables to secret hiding places. Soldiers were passing up and

down ; people were flocking in from the suburbs and outlying hamlets. I made enquiries and learnt that news had come that Jayasimha, King of Āndhradesa, was swooping down upon them and they were putting the city into a state of defence until the king could summon his allies.

I went to the king and proffered my services. Within a short time Jayasimha arrived with a big army ravaging and destroying as he came and invested the city. How I wished I could recall the magic word !

A few weeks passed, the siege was dragging on ; provisions and water were beginning to run short. The king with his wife and daughter proceeded to the big temple to supplicate the guardian deity of the city. From my station on the ramparts I watched the procession. My eyes were rivetted on the fair princess. Where had I seen that face before ? Of course, it was in my dream. Then before my mind floated all the incidents and all the speeches in that memorable dream. I remembered the charm.

Full of eagerness I ran to the king and begged leave to go out alone and scatter his enemies. He thought me mad but gave me the desired permission ; one soldier more or less would make little difference to the besieged.

That night, which turned out to be a night of storm not unlike the night of my dream, I silently and cautiously made my way to the cremation ground—a place the enemy's soldiers avoided. I breathed aloud the formula, 'Snilbog, snilbog, snilbog,' and there before me I saw my trusty goblins. There they stood, thousands of them,

all silently bowing before me and awaiting my commands. I bade them go and strike such terror into the hearts of Jayasimha and his army that they would flee away in dismay. They bade me return to the city and sleep in peace. It should be done.

Next morning, as soon as it was light, the sentinels on the walls came running to the king to tell him that Jayasimha had gone with all his army. Their tents were left standing. The king suspected a stratagem to draw him from the shelter of his walls, but all the spies he sent out returned with the same tale. The enemy had fled far away, and their track was strewn with abandoned equipment and weapons thrown aside.

How the goblins had accomplished their task I never learnt. It was enough to know that it had been done. When the king in his extreme gratitude had thanked me profusely he asked me how I had performed the marvellous feat single-handed, I told him my dream and how I had forgotten the magic formula until the sight of his daughter's face had recalled it. He marvelled greatly and said he would not oppose what destiny appointed : gladly would he give his daughter to me in marriage. He rejoiced to think that he would have such a powerful son-in-law and one that had had such a noble character.

Thus it was, my prince, that I won the hand of the peerless Kanakalekha, princess of the royal house of Kalinga. I won her by a dream even as Bramati won his bride. All the forces of Kalinga that came under my command to the aid of Simhavarma are at your service."

CHAPTER XIII

VISRUTA'S STORY. ARYAPUTRA OR THE GODDESS'S SON

“BELOVED Mantragupta,” said the prince, after he and the others had spoken in warm praise of his story, “with the aid of Kalinga’s army and of those goblin friends of yours we cannot fail to overthrow the ruler of Malwa and regain our lost dominions. A happy time is before us all. Now, Visruta, it is your turn to entertain us before we think of beginning the stern business of war.”

“Yes,” replied Visruta, “I, too, have won a charming bride and the brotherly friendship of a mighty king whose forces will be at your service in our final war of conquest. Had I not been trained in all the arts and sciences along with you in our Vindhyan refuge, I should never have succeeded in my enterprise. What that was I shall now proceed to tell you and you may judge for yourself how much I owed to my education with you and my other dauntless comrades.”

i. THE DISTRESS OF QUEEN VASUNDARA

“In my travels in search of you I came to Vidya-ranya. There by the side of a well I found a weeping youth. When he saw me he implored me to help him to pull his guardian out of the well. It seems the old man had been sitting on the stonework round the mouth of the well and in his utter

exhaustion had tumbled backwards in a faint and fallen in. Fortunately the well was not deep and the stonework down the sides of it was full of cracks and crevices. I climbed down it without much difficulty, hauled the old man out of the shallow muddy water, threw him across my shoulders and, with the aid of a long branch which the youth had the sense to reach down towards me, I managed to scramble up with my burden.

Having revived the old man, I asked him who he was and who the princely-looking youth might be. For I could see that the lad had been gently nurtured.

'Noble sir,' he replied, 'my name is Nali-janga. I am the guardian of this lad, Prince Bhaskaravarma, and have brought him to these parts to escape the danger that threatens him from Mitravarma, King of Mahishmati, at whose court his mother, Queen Vasundara, has taken refuge with her daughter. She is the widow of a once-powerful king who lost his kingdom and his life by his own folly and evil ways. Anantavarma was his name and he was King of Vidarbha. His father Punyavarma, a good and just ruler, had left him a noble heritage but he frittered it away. He had a weak character and allowed himself to be led astray by an evil minister. Everyone of us was very disappointed for he had begun his reign well and for a time had followed the sage advice of a wise minister, Vasurakshaka, his father's most trusted counsellor. But, as he grew older and began to feel more independent, he lent a ready ear to the wicked counsels of Vikarabhadra a worthless rascal. This man used to point out to the

young king the tedium and the vexation of following the principles and the duties laid down in the *Arthasastra*. Let the king enjoy himself and leave the dull routine of administration to his ministers. Alas, the young man did enjoy himself and that too in many ignoble ways. The sagacious Vasurakshaka was dismissed and Vikarabhadra gained complete control over the foolish Anantavarma. His mother tried to reclaim him but failed. The court was filled with ne'er-dowells and adventurers. One of these was Indrapalita, sent away from home in disgrace by his father Chandrapalita, chief minister to King Vasantabhanu. Now we know from subsequent events that the disgrace and the sending into exile of this Indrapalita was all a trick to deceive people. The young man had been sent to egg on Anantavarma in his foolish evil courses and to sow dissension and discord in his kingdom. Vasantabhanu outwardly a friend, was secretly a rival who coveted the riches of Vidarbha. It was he who suggested this plan of undermining Anantavarma's influence. At least so we suppose, for we know that Vasantabhanu instigated a chieftain Bhanuvarma to attack Vidarbha and, when the king summoned his allies to his aid, came and sowed suspicion amongst the other allies. It was not difficult to find some pretext or other for a rupture in the foolish and arrogant behaviour of Anantavarma. His allies deserted him. Vasantabhanu joined forces with Bhanuvarma; defeated and killed the king in battle and, giving some of the plunder to Bhanuvarma, himself occupied the throne.

The poor widow, Vasundara, fled with her son, who is this youth here, and her daughter Manjuvadani to the court of her husband's foster-brother Mitravarma, King of Mahishmati.

Here fresh troubles awaited her. Mitravarma, forgetting that, as the widow of his elder brother, she stands in the relationship of a mother to him, seeks her hand in marriage. His plea is that foster-brothers are not related in blood. However, Vasundara dislikes him and is vexed at his wooing. She fears lest he may do some mischief to her son and so with tears in her eyes she begged me to take him to the forests far away. I was grieved to leave her, for she has yet another trouble awaiting her. Mitravarma has promised the hand of Princess Manjuvadani to Prachandavarma, brother of Chandavarma of Ujjain. Vasundara was not even consulted in this important matter. She dislikes the match as Prachandavarma has an evil reputation. Well may she fear lest Mitravarma seize her son as a hostage and threaten his life unless she acquiesces in his schemes.'

ii. VISRUTA TO THE RESCUE

The old man paused for a few minutes whilst I sat turning over this long story in my mind and wondering whether the lad took after his father or his mother in character. Then the old man asked me if I could not think of some plan or other to help Queen Vasundara out of her immediate difficulties and to regain Vidarbha for her son. I replied, 'Good sir, I have but just now for the first time heard of these royal personages and their

fortunes, for I am a total stranger to these parts. I am engaged on a very important quest of my own and ordinarily should hesitate to spend much time on side-issues. But now my duty to ladies in distress outweighs all other considerations. A sense of chivalry constrains me to devote my time, my talents and my strength to the cause of your queen.'

Both the prince and his old guardian fell at my feet and thanked me most warmly. They were sure that matters would come right. 'Well,' said I, 'let us set about thinking out the situation. First of all it is clear we must get rid of Mitra-varma. In the circumstances you have described he is not likely to lend you an army to reconquer Vidarbha and we must have an army and a strong one too if we wish to recover a lost throne occupied by a formidable enemy. Then we must make matters so unpleasant for Prachandavarma that he will run away home like a beaten cur with his tail between his legs. I have particularly good reasons for wishing ill to the ruler of Ujjain and all his kindred. Of that anon. These two things accomplished, we must inspire the people with a strong desire to accept Bhaskaravarma as their new king so that they may lend him willing aid in his war against Vasantabhanu. Leave the prince with me and go and tell the queen to be of good cheer, for a champion has come—one Visruta, friend and comrade of Rajavahana, son of the famous Rajahamsa of Magadha.'

They broke in with exclamations of glad surprise. Truly might they say that their cause was already won. I cut short their flattering remarks

and continued : 'In my education under Rajahamsa I learnt many arts and sciences. It is now time to put my knowledge to good use. The prince and I will come disguised as skull-worshipping *sanyasis* and take up our abode in the burning-ground near the city. You must bring to me from the queen the richest diamond necklace that she possesses. She must complain to the king about its loss. I shall smear it with a deadly poison and leave it where Mitravarma is sure to pick it up. To effect this I must gain some knowledge of the palace grounds and you must learn the king's daily habits and where he is accustomed to take his walks. Whilst I am in the *sanyasi* disguise I shall make use of time and opportunity to learn what I want to know. So let us set about this business without delay.'

About two weeks after this the prince and I in our disguises sat patiently in our appointed place and awaited the coming of Nalijanga. I had already roamed about one night in the palace garden and made myself familiar with it. Nalijanga came with the necklace, a very costly one. He told me that Mitravarma was in the habit of taking a stroll every evening towards dusk, usually unaccompanied, in a small grove in the south-west corner of the garden. There was need for haste, he said, because the king was pressing on the arrangements for the wedding of Manjuvadani. I told him that within nine days victory would be ours. He was to return in three days' time for further instructions.

That afternoon I smeared the deadly poison over the diamonds in the necklace except where

I was holding it by the largest of all the stones. Whoever got the poison into his skin must die within a week, for the poison eats its way into the blood. There was no antidote that would be of any use after twelve hours and it was not until after that length of time after the application of the poison that the victim felt any uneasiness. I slipped over the garden wall, worked my way cautiously through the shrubs and laid my instrument of death in the pathway. Then I withdrew behind a thicket and waited. Within a short time I heard footsteps approaching. It was the king, and he was talking to himself. 'She shall be mine, after this fool of a Prachandavarma is safely out of the way with her daughter, I shall compel her to wed me. I must hasten matters. Ha! but what lies here? A diamond necklace—'tis the one she complained to me about. The thief must have dropped it here. Well, well, let her future husband wear it round his neck for a while.'

So saying, the doomed man, rubbing the stones well between his palms to brighten them up, placed the necklace round his neck and continued his stroll. That rubbing in his palms would bring about his death at least a day sooner than I had anticipated. I disappeared the way I had come.

Prachandavarma was living as the king's guest in a noble palace and enjoying himself with all sorts of vulgar amusements. I determined to practise upon him my art of mesmerism and degrade him before them all. Two days, then, after dropping the necklace I was performing before the vain conceited fellow and his boisterous companions. I did all manner of sleight-of-hand

tricks, purposely leading him on to think that he knew how I did them. Closer and closer he came to watch me. I said I would show him very slowly how a certain trick was done if he would sit still and watch me intently. He did so. I made the necessary passes before his face and fixed him with my eyes until I had completely mesmerised him. I then said softly to him, 'Now for five days, you are a donkey, a grass-eating beast of burden. Behave as such : death will be yours if you do not.'

There was considerable amusement at first amongst his companions. He behaved exactly like a donkey, kicked and braved and rolled in the dust. Lest anyone should suspect my part in it, I stole away and became once more the sober skull-worshipper. Soon there was much uneasiness ; nothing could persuade Prachandavarma to leave off behaving like a donkey. He insisted on eating grass and refusing his ordinary food. It was noised abroad in the city. The king was furious, broke off the wedding preparations and sent back to his own place his guest, whom he considered hopelessly mad. True, he recovered in five days' time and came back, but by that time Mitravarma was dead and I was in power. I mocked and jeered at him and sent him off fuming in impotent rage.

Nalijanga returned for further instructions at the appointed time. He brought me the news that the king was desperately ill and about to die. His physicians could find no remedy for they did not know the nature of the poison that had got into his blood. I told him that within two days Mitra-

varma would die but that before that happened we must bring forward Bhaskaravarma before the people as an Aryaputra or goddess's son. They would then be ready to accept him as Mitravarma's successor.

To accomplish this end in an effective manner I thought out the following plan, which I communicated to Vasundara through Nalijanga. On the morrow she was to announce to the ministers that she had had a very vivid dream in the night. The great goddess Vindhya-vasini had appeared to her and told her that, in the form of a tigress, she had dragged the young prince away to her den and had tended him therein until it was time to restore him to his mother. She would see her dear son on the morrow, but only if she fulfilled certain conditions. Accompanied by the ministers and nobles, she must proceed to the temple of Kali in the centre of the burning-ground and offer *puja* on a grand scale. They must then stand a little distance from the shrine and await developments. If these things were not done, not only would her son not be given back to her but calamity would fall upon the city.

Now during our sojourn in the burning-ground as skull-worshipping *sanyasis*, the prince and I had dwelt beneath the shelter of an overhanging rock behind the Kali temple. We had utilized our spare hours in digging an underground tunnel to the shrine right beneath the heavy stone image itself. An opening in the floor would have been too noticeable. The image was so heavy that no one would suspect it had been moved. When the tunnel was completed the prince and I had

managed to move the image, tilting it gradually to one side, by wedging a piece of rock in a crack by the side of the pedestal. We squeezed our bodies through and, pushing the wedge back, restored the image to its former upright position. We then returned through the door of the shrine to our shelter. Through the medium of Nalijanga we had procured costly robes of state and a golden crown. Everything was in readiness.

The ministers, afraid of the goddess's threat of calamity to their city, did as Vasundara bade them. A great *puja* was arranged at the Kali temple. The goddess was bathed in scented oils and holy water ; offerings on a big scale were made. After the burning of camphor and the saying of prayers, all left the shrine to stay outside at some distance. The door was carefully closed. The eyes of the expectant multitude were fixed upon it eagerly awaiting the moment when it would re-open and disclose the prince. Meanwhile the musicians played.

The prince and I squeezed into the shrine from beneath the image, set the figure of the Goddess erect again and dressed ourselves in our robes. The prince wore the golden crown. I then threw back the door, stood in the opening and shouted, 'Hear, O Queen Vasundara, ye ministers and nobles, the mighty Goddess Kali sends you a message through my mouth, happy that I am to be chosen as her messenger. Behold, says the Goddess, I restore you your son Bhaskaravarma. I have adopted him as my own. He shall be your king. Crown him and win rich blessings from me.' They all bowed themselves to the ground..

I then brought forth Prince Bhaskaravarma, who moved with a slow and dignified step, saluted his mother gravely and bade her return with him to the palace. The Goddess, he told her, had blessed him richly and given him great power. The young man acted his part better than I had hoped though I had taken great pains to teach him how to move in an awe-inspiring manner.

Everyone felt thrilled. Then the astonished crowd burst into praises of their goddess who had so graciously given her adopted son, the descendant of the Bhoja line of kings, to be their king. For whilst the worship of Kali was yet in progress, Mitravarma had breathed his last. He died sooner than I had expected.

The queen thanked me very cordially for my invaluable services to her. She pressed me to stay with them and act as regent for her son and teach him the art of ruling. Fascinated by the sight of the fair Manjuvadani I consented. After an interval I requested Vasundara to give me her daughter in marriage. This she most willingly did. Then after careful preparation we marched against Vasantabhanu. I had sent ahead certain trusty spies to spread the news that Bhaskaravarma was the adopted son of the Goddess Kali and that Visruta was his champion appointed by the Goddess to help him. Whoever opposed us would surely be burnt to ashes by the angry deity. These tales were believed. None dared withstand us. Vasantabhanu fled, was pursued, overtaken and killed. I crowned Bhaskaravarma king over Vidarbha, his ancestral country, and

also king over the country of Asumaka, the land that had owed allegiance to Vasantabhanu.

Now, my prince and dear comrades, I can bring aid to you in our war of reconquest—many more troops than I have brought to the assistance of Simhavarma.”

Rajavahana thanked Visruta for his entrancing narrative. Together with his companions he re-entered the city of Champa to take counsel together how best to begin the reconquering of Magadha and the overthrow of Malwa.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN

RAJAHAMSA and his queen often wondered how their dear son and his companions were faring in their search for experience of life in the hard world of men. For a long time no news had reached them, until one morning a hunter came to tell them that he had met one of the prince's companions. This young man had requested him to report to the exiled monarch that his son was missing for some unknown reason and that the companions were searching in all directions determined to find him. This news, the man said, he would have brought sooner had he not met with an accident. However, he had come as soon as it was possible.

Rajahamsa thanked him warmly and sent him away with a handsome present. Anxiety and sorrow now fell upon the king and the queen. They sought out the sage Vamadeva. Bowing low before the holy man, Rajahamsa said, "O Rishi, following your advice we sent our only son and his friends on their travels to gain worldly experience. News has just reached us that our dear son is lost and that his companions are scattered in all directions seeking him. Advise us what is to be done."

Vamadeva replied : "O Rajahamsa, be of good cheer, your son is safe, happy and prosperous, and so are his companions. They are even now

gathered together at Champa in Angadesa. The companions have become rich and great men. Most of them have won kingdoms for themselves. Now they will aid your son to conquer Ujjain and overthrow the son of Manasara, your old enemy. But before they enter upon this war of conquest, summon them to your presence and give them your blessing."

On hearing these tidings of good comfort Rajahamsa and Vasumati were filled with joy. Returning to their forest home Rajahamsa wrote a letter to his son and sent it by a speedy messenger. The letter ran as follows :

BELOVED SON,

Our hearts were sorely troubled when we heard through a hunter of your sudden disappearance from the midst of your companions. Though we felt sure that your trusty comrades would find you sooner or later if you were still alive, yet we could not bear the suspense. Your mother and I repaired to Vamadeva's hermitage and the holy man comforted us exceedingly by telling us of your safety and welfare. Before undertaking your great enterprise of defeating our enemies and regaining our lost dominions, come with your companions to gladden our eyes with the sight of your beloved self and to receive our blessings.

Your ever-loving father,

Rajahamsa.

Rajavahana had intended first to recover their lost kingdom and sovereignty and then to fetch his beloved parents from their forest home in the

Vindhya Mountains and instal them in triumph on their former thrones. But, on receipt of this letter, he immediately altered his plans and, together with his companions, set out to the Vindhyan retreat. Their return was very different from their starting out. Rajavahana led the way with a contingent from Angadesa, his companions followed with the soldiers of their newly-won kingdoms. It was a stately procession that started from the city of Champa, headed by the king's musicians. The prince and his friends were soon in the embrace of Rajahamsa and Vasumati, who caressed them lovingly and blessed them. After a few days they proceeded to Vamadeva's hermitage to pay their homage to the old saint and to receive his blessing.

Prince Rajavahana and his nine companions then marched against Ujjain. Darbhasara once more left his retreat in the Himalayas, confident that he had won the favour of the gods by his asceticism. But it was not so; the gods remembered the cruel commands he wrote to his regent Chandavarma. In spite of his confidence, Darbhasara was utterly defeated and slain. Rajavahana entered the city in triumph but spared the life of the ex-King Manasara. He could afford to be magnanimous. Manasara was too old to cause further troubles. Besides he was the father of Avantisundari, the loving and devoted wife of the conqueror. Rajavahana then went to Pushpapuri, where he crowned his father again as King of Magadha and Malwa. But his father, after a short spell of ruling with Rajavahana as the Yuvaraj, felt drawn to his old quiet and peaceful life in the forest. He ab-

icated in favour of his son, and together with Vasumati retired to a quiet hermitage to spend the evening of their lives in undisturbed prayer and meditation.

In due course, the companions of the new king Rajavahana took leave of him and returned with their wives to their respective homes and duties. Pushpodbhava was appointed viceroy over Ujjain where he lived happily with his wife Balachandri.

Rajavahana ruled justly and well over a vast country surrounded on all sides by his friends, kings like himself. Twice a year they used to go to Pushpapuri with their queens and spend a happy time of reunion. It is said that even Matanga, King of the Netherworld, and his queen, Kalandi, visited him.

In good King Rajavahana's time the rains failed not, the soil grew rich and people observed the rules of caste. Peace and prosperity smiled on the happy land. Righteousness and loving-kindness were supreme. Crime and malice were nowhere to be found throughout the renowned monarch's wide dominions.

