



A HEIFER OF THE DAWN

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BY
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and to! there came up a common fish, made of the ordinary flesh of fish; and he took it in his hand and carried it away, and was perfectly happy, and he utterly forgot the fish of gold, and the fish of silver, as if they had never been.

Then the King said: Dear *chétí*, I would be angry with thee, if I could, for thy roguery in comparing me to such a vile fisherman. And she said: O King, beware! lest the parallel should turn out to be exact. Then the King said: Thou mayst liken me rather to a fire which was all but extinguished, and could not be rekindled, disdaining as it did every species of common fuel: till they offered it a piece of heavenly sandal, of which even that that grows on Malaya is but a poor copy. And then it blazed up from its ashes with a pure flame, such as it had never put forth before.

Then she said: King, it is time for me to go. And she laid the lotus at his feet, and went away; but she turned and looked back at him, before she disappeared among the trees. And the King picked up the lotus, and said: Lotus, said I well, that I was fire, and she the fuel? Or is it not rather I that am the fuel, and she that is the fire? For certainly she burns me like a flame, even more, now that she is absent, than when she was here. Therefore, O thou red lotus, I will carry thee about all day, since thou resemblest a piece of herself that she has left behind, to cool me in the hot noon of her absence like a lump of snow. And he went back to the temple, with the lotus in his hand, feeding on the future, and forgetful of the past.

SHRÍPHALA

THEN he dreamed of Madhupamanjarí, all night long, and in the morning he rose before the sun, and went out. And as he stood listening to the joyous cries of the *chakrawáka* and his mate, meeting in the morning after a night of separation, the *chétí* came towards him through the trees, holding in her hand berries of the *shríphala*. And she said: My mistress sends her lord, by these unworthy hands, berries, and if he has enjoyed sweet sleep, it is well with her.

Then the King said: Dear *chétí*, I cannot tell whether I slept last night or lay awake: this only I know, that all night I listened to thy voice and gazed at thee: but whether it was a dream or not, I cannot tell. Then she looked at him with mock gravity; and said: These are symptoms very dangerous and alarming to the physician. Thy case is parlous, and very similar to that of the madman who was enamoured of a stone. Then he said: Pretty *chétí*, I see no resemblance whatever between a stone and thee. And she said: I can be to thee no more than a stone was to him. And the King said: Tell me his story, for I care not whether it be like my own, or not: and in the meantime I will watch thee, and listen to thy voice. Then she said: Know that there was a king, who hunting in the forest came to an ancient temple, and on its wall was a stone image of the goddess of beauty. And the instant his eye fell on it, he fell in love with it so violently, that he could not tear himself away from it. Then sending for workmen, he caused them to extract the image from the wall; and carrying it away with him, he had it set up in a room in his palace. And night and day he lived before it, never taking his eyes off it: and he used to kiss it, and caress it, and upbraid it for not returning his caresses. And one night, as he lay asleep, he thought he saw the goddess come down to him out of the wall, no longer made of stone, but warm and living flesh and blood. But just as he was going to clasp her in his arms, almost beside himself for joy, suddenly a watchman in the street shouted and awoke him. Then in his fury, the king instantly put the watchman to death, and banished every watchman in the city. And he spent the remainder of his life vainly trying to recover in his dreams the conclusion of his meeting with the goddess, and yet he never could succeed: and he was filled with contempt for everything that happened when he was

awake, saying to himself: This whole world is like the stone, a mere lifeless copy of that real original which I found that time, by the favour of the deity, in my dream. And surely he is mad, who pursues all his life a thing inaccessible to him even in a dream: and such am I to thee; and thou will surely resemble him, if forgetting my mistress, thou allowest thy fancy to fix on an object forbidden to thee. O King, is it not true, and is not the comparison exact?

Then the King said: I do not know: I have not heard thy tale; for I was wholly occupied in watching thy lips, and I marvel, that I never noticed them before. Tell me again, and I will shut my eyes; so that thy beauty shall not interfere, and keep me from comprehending the meaning of thy words. And she laughed, and said: Surely I am right, and thy wits are deserting thee. And she laid the berries at his feet, and went away, without looking back, and was lost among the trees. But the King stooped, and picked up the berries. And he said: Berries, ye are well named ²⁹. Did ye acquire merit in a former birth, that ye were privileged to be plucked from the tree and carried in her hand, while your brothers and sisters were left disconsolate and unhappy on the tree? And he went back to the temple, holding them in his hand, haunted by the memory of her lips, whose colour they resembled, to wait for another dawn.

²⁹ *Shríphala*; i.e. the fruit of the goddess of beauty and good fortune.

SHIRÍSHA

AND they hovered before him, as he slept all night on his bed of leaves, and in the morning he rose before the sun, and went out and stood on the brink of the pool. And as he gazed at its surface, which was dotted with lotuses like a panther's skin, there entered into his heart a doubt, like the shadow of the bats that were taking their last flight over the water before the dawn. And he said to himself: O, she is beautiful, but alas! she is a woman: have I done well in allowing her to steal entrance like these bats, into my heart. And that instant, he saw her coming towards him, with a *shirísha* flower in her hand. And she came to him, and said: My mistress sends her lord, by these unworthy hands, a flower, and if he has enjoyed sweet slumbers, it is well with her.

And the King looked for a moment at the smile that sat like sunlight on her lips; and he said with a sigh: Dear *chétí*, how can he sleep well, who doubts and fears? For I am about to put out again upon the sea, on which I have already made shipwreck. Blue, blue is the sea, and soft and calm its waves, and smiling, and yet so it was before, when it betrayed me. And shall I trust my little bark on it again? Then she looked at him awhile, with sorrow and reproach in her eyes. And she said: Doomed is the double mind, and he that can-not venture, for want of courage or of trust, can never win return. Not for him the treasures that lurk in the bosom of the sea, where monsters roam, and jewels lie, and sea nymphs dwell. For once upon a time, there was a merchant's son, who set out in a ship to go on a trading journey to a distant land. And he sailed for many a *yojana* over the billowy waves, till at length he came to the very middle of the sea. Then suddenly the wind fell, and the sails hung idle on the yards, and the ship stopped. And out of the green and heaving sea there rose before him a tree of coral; and on a branch of that tree there sat a maiden of the sea: and the foam of the sea dripped from her limbs, and sat like pearls upon her breasts, and fell like cream into the water, and her long hair lay on the waves that surged beneath her like her own breast. And she called to the merchant's son: Jump into the sea, and come and live with me, and I will give thee jewels such as no merchant ever saw, and surfeit thee with pleasures such as never mortal tasted yet. Then that coward merchant's soul was balanced between his longing for

that heavenly maiden and his fear of the waves. And he looked and longed to jump, but did not dare. And then in a moment that fair tree and its lovely burden sank back into the sea and disappeared, and he was left alone, with the water and the sky. Then he continued his journey, filled with unavailing regret, and presently there arose a storm, and it sank his ship into the sea, and he was drowned. Thus he lost his treasure, and yet for all that did not even save his worthless life from the very danger that he feared. And, O King, this life is fleeting, and more unstable than the waves of ocean that it resembles. And what does it contain that should make it worth a hero's while to balance for a moment between losing it, and winning what fortune only offers once in any life, and often not at all?

Then she laid the *Shirísha* flower at the King's feet, and turned and went away, slowly, and was lost among the trees. And the King stooped and picked up the flower. And he said: O *Shirísha*, woe to thee, lovely as thou art, for thou art the bringer of unhappiness. Now have I offended my beloved *chétí* by betraying unworthy suspicion. But ah! she is a woman. Why did not Maheshwara lift her out of the category of women, and place her in a species by herself, that I might not remember when I gaze at her imperfections that are inseparable from all her sex but her? And he went back to the temple, with the flower in his hand, angry with himself, and more in love with the *chétí* than before.

KADAMBA

AND he lay all night on his bed of leaves, repenting of his doubts: and in the morning he arose before the sun, and went out, and watched the eastern sky changing colour like an opal as the night drove away before the dawn: but the *chétí* never came. And as the day grew older, the King grew paler, for he said: Can it be that she means to leave me another day alone? And then at last, when the sun was already high in the heaven, he looked, and saw her coming slowly towards him, with a purple flower of the *Kadamba* in her hand. And she seemed in his eyes like the nectar of reconciliation in feminine form. And she came up to him and said: My mistress sends her lord, by these unworthy hands, a flower, and if his slumbers have been light, it is well with her.

Then the King said: Dear *chétí*, how can he sleep who waits to be forgiven for a sin committed? And she said: What is that? The King said: My bark is launched, and long ago floating on the very middle of the sea. Nothing now is wanting, save the lady of the coral tree, to bid me to jump into the water. Then she looked at him with joy dancing in her eyes: but she said: O King, such maidens are very rare, rarer even than the trees on which they grow. And much I fear, that thou hast launched thy little boat in vain, and will have to content thee with a more earthly mistress, such as mine. Then the King said: Tell me not of thy mistress, for I will not listen. Then she said: Nay, but surely thou art curious to learn at least what she is like. She is far more beautiful than I, and she is tall. Then the King said: If she is taller than thou art, she is too tall. Then she said: Moreover, she is skilled in poetry. And the King said: I love not ladies that are pundits. Then she said: She dances and sings like an Apsaras in Indra's hall. And the King said: I care for the dancing of no feet, save that of thine as they come towards me; and for no music, save that of thy voice, which is more delightful in my ear than the murmur of the bees. And as he spoke, a bee, attracted by the flower in her hand, flew to it, and entered it. Then she closed the petals quickly with her hand, and said: O King, I have him here a prisoner, to convict thee of thy madness. Listen, and tell me if thou canst, without deceiving, which is the sweeter, the real bee, or that voice of mine which thou dost liken to its humming? And the King put his ear close to the flower, and heard the bee inside: and he

said: I cannot tell. And he fixed his eyes upon her face, and said: Now speak, that I may judge between him and thee. Then she laughed, and let go the flower, and the bee flew away. And the King exclaimed: Alas! the bee is mad, not I. For who would willingly quit a prison compounded of a flower and thy hand, which is itself a flower? Give it me that I may compare them. But she said: Nay; the flower is thine own, for it was a present from my mistress: but my hand is mine, and now I must return to her. And as she spoke, the bee came again, and buzzed about her head. And she ex-claimed in terror: O King, this villain of a bee will sting me. And the King said: Doubtless: he has come to avenge himself for his imprisonment. Then she ran in agitation almost into the King's arms, exclaiming: O King, protect her who comes to thee for refuge³⁰. And in his delight, the King exclaimed: O King of bees, come thou to me, and in return for the favour thou hast done me, I will serve thee with honey in lotus cups all day. But in the meanwhile the bee flew away. And Madhupamanjarí started back in confusion, and said: O King, my mistress is brave, and not afraid of bees. Then the King said, with emphasis: Out upon all women, that do not fear bees! But, O Bee Blossom³¹, surely this bee is to be excused, if he mistook thy lips for a flower.

Then she said: O King, this unmannerly bee has disgraced me in thine eyes, and caused me to forget the reserve of a maiden: and now it is time that I were gone. And she laid the flower at the King's feet, and ran away without looking behind her, and vanished in the trees. But the King stooped and picked up the flower. And he said: O glorious flower, I will preserve thee for ever, even after thou art faded: for thou vast the occasion of the onslaught of this incomparable bee, which led my dear *chétí* to forget her caution and take refuge in my arms. O beauty, thou art irresistible above all, because thou art weak! Out, out upon all kings' daughters that are not afraid of bees! And he went back to the temple, kissing the *Kadamba* flower, and intoxicated with delight.

³⁰ This is a formula. The special business of kings was like that of the knight in the Middle Ages, to protect the distressed (*sharanāgata*).

³¹ He plays upon her name

AMARANTH

AND all night, he slept with the *Kadamba* flower on his bed of leaves: and in the morning he went out, and watched the fire-flies on the pool hastening to hide their lamps before they should be shamed by the coming of the Great Lamp of day. And presently the *chétí* came towards him, holding in her hand an amaranth³². And she looked like an incarnation of the essence of timidity, blushing at the recollection of the adventure of the day before. And she came up to the King, and said: O King, my mistress sends her lord, by these unworthy hands, a flower, and if his slumber has been peaceful, it is well with her.

Then the King said: Dear *chétí*, he sleeps well, who has not to reproach himself with withholding succour from the suppliant. Then she dropped her eyes upon the ground. And the King looked at her with affection, and he said: Dear *chétí*, do not be ashamed: for thy case was perilous.

Moreover, I took no advantage of thee in thy distress. But nevertheless, could I discover that bee, I would intoxicate him with nectar, till he could not fly. Then she said: And what, if he had stung me? Then the King said: *Chétí*, had the villain stung thee, I would have bound him with cobwebs, and thrown him before an elephant. Then she laughed, and said: Poor bee! the punishment would have exceeded his crime. But enough of him! Let me rather continue to enlighten thee as to the virtues of my mistress. Then the King said hastily: O thou tormenter, wilt thou never cease to remind me of thy mistress? O that I were not a King, to endure by reason of policy queens that I do not want! Or why art thou not thy mistress, and she the maid? For as it is, I see before me nothing but despair. Then she said: O King, despair is unavailing. And even greater obstacles than these have been surmounted by others, by the favour of Ganesha and their own determination. Did not Wishwamitra by resolution long ago become a Brahman? Then the King said with a sigh: O my dear *chétí*, I am in misery, and instead of consoling me, thou mockest me with old legends that are not to the point. And she said: O King, some surmount obstacles, and some faint and die before shadows, which seem to be but are not really obstacles at all. For once there was a full moon. And looking for lotuses to love, he peered curiously into a

³² *Kurabaka*: it has a crimson flower.

forest pool. Now in that pool there was a pure white lotus, growing in the black mud. But that day there had come down to the pool two male elephants; and they fought in the pool, and struck their tusks into each other's sides, and their red blood streamed into the pool, and fell upon the lotus, and turned its petals red. So when the moon looked down into the pool, he exclaimed: Alas! it is only a red lotus, and not a bride for me ³³. So he pined away in sorrow, and night after night he grew thinner and thinner, and at last his emaciation became such that he vanished altogether, and ceased to exist. And then on the dark night that precedes the new moon, the clouds assembled in masses; and there fell a furious rain into the pool, and it washed the lotus clean. And when the new moon stole into the pool, lo! he saw to his delight a pure white lotus, with a rain-drop shining on its leaf, like a tear of joy at his approach³⁴ .

Then the King said: O, that I were that moon, and thou my lotus: then would my nights pass like an instant of delight, and not hang over me, as now they do, black with the hours of separation. But she laid the amaranth at his feet, and went away: and turned, before she vanished in the trees, and then became invisible. And the King stooped, and picked up the flower. And he said: Amaranth, gladly would I stain thee, as those mad elephants did the lotus, with my blood, could it avail: yet even so, I could not make thy colour redder than it is. And he went back to the temple, with the amaranth in his hand, sad at heart, fore-seeing the conflict of his honour with his love.

³³ The white lotus (*kumuda*) is the proper moon lotus, the others are apparently all devoted to the sun.

³⁴ The King did not understand her, for love is blind.

ASHÓKA

THEN all night long, he lay tossing on his bed of leaves. And in the morning he rose before the sun, and went out and stood before the pool, and watched the parrots screaming in the *ashwattha* tree, with beaks that were tipped with the colour of the dawn: till he saw the *chétí* coming towards him with twinkling feet, holding an *ashóka* flower in her hand. And she seemed in his eyes *like a draught of the nectar of love longing incarnate in a feminine form*³⁵. And she came up to the King and said: My mistress sends her lord, by these unworthy hands, a flower, and if his slumbers have been sweet, it is well with her.

Then the King said: Dear *chétí*, can he sleep well, whose night is passed in longing for the morn? Alas! why is it not always dawn? for see, at dawn, how all the lotuses turn golden in the sun, and thou art here. Could not Maheshwara of his omnipotence strike Súrya with his trident, and fix him in the sky, over the eastern mountain: so would the lotuses be always golden, and thou wouldst be always here. Then she said: O King, they come to evil ends who long for the impossible. As, long ago, did he, who coveted the Spinners of the Sun. For once there was a gambler, who having lost everything at play was wandering about the world, and by chance came upon an Apsaras asleep. But as he ran at her, she woke up, and sprang into the air and vanished: but he caught her by the foot, and she left her golden sandal in his hand. Then she began to wheedle and cajole him, saying: Give me back my sandal, for without it I cannot go to Indra's hall, and to-night I have to dance there without fail. Then he said: I will give it back only if thou wilt carry me to heaven, and let me see thee dancing. So finding no escape, the Apsaras carried him to heaven, hidden in a flower in her ear. And he saw all the Apsarases dancing in golden robes, like a bed of golden lotuses all waving in the wind. Then filled with greed, he said to her, whispering into her ear: Whence come your golden robes? And she said: They are made for us by the Spinners of the Sun, who dwell beyond the eastern mountain. And every night they sit and spin the hair of his old rays into gold, combing it out of his head, after he has washed in the lakes of liquid amethyst that

³⁵ These are the expressions that are the despair of the translator. So simple, so beautiful, so pithy in the original: so roundabout and clumsy in a language whose genius is altogether different (*múrtámaut-sukyamádanám*).

lie hidden in that mountain, where it is always dawn, and never either dusk, or night, or noon. But when the gambler heard her, insatiable desire filled his greedy soul. And he began to shout and bawl: Hey! for the gold: hey! for the Spinners. And Indra said: Who is that making discords in heaven, and throwing out the dancers? So they hunted about, and found him hidden in the flower in her ear. Then Indra said to Mátali: Turn this rascal out of heaven, and with him the impudent Apsaras who has dared to smuggle him into heaven in her ear. So Mátali threw them out. But the gambler, not being a sky-goer, fell down to earth and was broken to pieces.

So King, beware! lest by coveting the impossible thou shouldst lose thy heaven altogether. And she laid the *ashóka* flower at the King's feet, and turned to go. Then the King said: Alas! dear *chétí*, canst thou not stay longer? And she said: No. Then he said: Then canst thou not come twice or three times in the day? For the days are long, and thou art here but for a moment: and between every two days there is a night. Then she said: O King, covet not the impossible: for where my mistress is, I must be too: and now I have duties to perform, And she went away through the trees, looking back over her shoulder at the King, till she disappeared. Then the King stooped and picked up the flower. And he said: *Ashóka*, thou dost torture me exactly like the provoking *chétí* who conveyed thee: for thy beauty is such, that I cannot bear to throw thee away, and yet thou dost not cease to remind me of my obligation to her mistress. And he went back to the temple, with the *ashóka* in his hand, and the image of Madhupamanjarí in his heart.

PALÁSHA

AND he lay all night, tossing on his bed of leaves . and in the morning, he arose before the sun, and stood sadly, plunged in meditation, like a crane, on the edge of the pool. And he never noticed how the *chétí* came towards him, till he looked up, and saw her standing beside him, with a red *Palásha* flower in her hand. Then she said: O King, my mistress sends her lord, by these unworthy hands, a flower, and if his sleep has been sound, it is well with her.

Then the King said: Dear *chétí*, sleep, like a jealous rival, has taken offence at thy frequent visits to me, and will not come near me. And she said, with a smile: O King, let her not be angry, for soon will my visits cease. Then the King cried out: Ah! say not so: thou hast uttered the very secret of my heart. For I must ere long celebrate this hateful marriage with thy mistress, for to keep her waiting any longer would not be polite. And then, alas! what will become of me and thee? Thy visits will cease, and if thy mistress should suspect me, she might put thee to death. Then the *chétí* said: Nay, not so: for my mistress wishes well, both to thee and to me. And I fear, lest when thou knowest her, it may turn out wholly otherwise; and thou wilt rather forget the *chétí* for the mistress. Then the King exclaimed: Be the sun my witness, that I will not. Rather will I send her back to her father. Let him do what he will: let him take my kingdom, and add it to his own: I care not, so that he only leave me this wood and its pool, and thee for its visitor in the morning. And she looked at him with a smile: and said: O King, these are but idle words. And well do I know, that thou wilt never send her back. Then the King said: *Chétí*, I will. Then she said: Nay, that were to deceive her, and break thy own word. And deception is base, but fidelity is good. Moreover, she is a deposit³⁶ in thy hands. And know, that once there was a merchant, who possessed a great pearl, such that the hand could hardly grasp it: and it resembled a mass of sea-foam, collected into a ball in the light of the moon on an ocean shell, under the constellation *Swáti*. And it was famous throughout the kingdom. Then having to go on a journey, he went to a brother merchant, and gave it to him, saying:

³⁶ This idea of a 'deposit' constantly recurs in Hindoo poetry.

This is a deposit with thee, till I return. So he said: Very well: go without fear. And the merchant departed. But the other buried the pearl in the ground. Then the King came to him and said: Give me the pearl which was deposited with thee, and I will enrich thee: if not, I will take it by force. Then the merchant said: What wilt thou take, to wait for a week: for I love to look at it? The King said: For one crore³⁷, I will wait for one week.

So the merchant gave him a crore. Then after a week, the King came again, and said: Give me now the pearl. And the merchant bought from him the delay of another week for another crore. And so he did, till after a while his wealth was exhausted, and he was a beggar. Then the King said: Give me now the pearl. Then the merchant said: King, I have a daughter, fairer by far than all thy queens. Take her, and sell me, for her, another week. So the King did. And then he came again: and said: Give me now the pearl. Then the merchant said: Take my life, and sell me for it yet another week; and when that is ended, take the pearl, and promise to put me to death. So the King said: Very well.

Then after three days, the owner of the pearl returned. And he came and asked for his pearl: and the other gave it to him, and said: Thou art returned in good time: here is thy deposit; and all is well.

And then he went to the King, and said: O King, the owner of the pearl has returned: and I have restored to him his own: and here I am. Then said the King: Thou art the pearl for whom I have been waiting. And now thou shalt marry my daughter, and recover thy own, as pure as when I took her; for she was thy deposit in my hands: and my kingdom and all my affairs shall be in thine.

Then she laid the flower at the King's feet, and went away. But the King stood and watched her as she went, till she passed out of his sight. And then he stooped and took up the flower.

And he said: O flower of the Dhák, thou art a deposit in my hands. How shall I do without her? or how retain her and my honour, for they are incompatible?

³⁷ About a million sterling, when the rupee was equal to a florin.

And he went back to the temple with the flower in his hand, striving to discover some way of escape from the dilemma, but in vain.

SHAMÍ

AND he lay all night, tossing on his bed of leaves: and in the morning, he rose before the sun, and went out. And as he stood watching the fish, raising their silver heads from the water to nibble the lotus stalks, he saw the *chétí* coming towards him, with a yellow flower of the *shamí* in her hand: and she resembled the very creeper itself, gifted with the power of motion. Then she came up to the King, and said: O King, my mistress sends her lord, by these unworthy hands, a flower, and if his slumber has been sweet, it is well with her.

Then the King said: Dear *chétí*, how can he sleep, who sees just before him the end of his life? And she said: O King, is thy life so sweet to thee? Surely this very moon was new, when life was yet a thing of no value in thy eyes? Then the King said: Aye! but then I had never seen thy face. And the *chétí* laughed, and said: O King, but am I not a woman? And what are women in thy eyes? Then he said: What thou art, I care not: sure I am, that thou art not a woman. Or if thou art a woman, the Creator has surely formed two species of thy kind: in one, he put all other women; and in the other, thee alone. And she looked at him, with mischief in her eyes. And she said: And in which class did he place my mistress? But the King exclaimed: Out on thee, thou marble-hearted *chétí*! Canst thou not allow me to forget but for a moment, what I remember but too well? Then she said: But, O King, thou dost not well. Wilt thou leave my mistress for ever awaiting thy pleasure in this matter of thy marriage? And the King winced at her words, like a noble horse touched by the whip. And he said: *Chétí*, poison not the nectar of my dawn. Only too well I know that thou art right, and that my behaviour in this matter is not that of a gentleman ³⁸. And yet, for this, thou art thyself to blame; and so is she. Could she not have chosen some other than thyself to do her errand? And yet, out on her, if she had! Then should I have missed the very kernel of the fruit of my birth. Alas! whichever way she chose, it was my ruin. Then said the *chétí*: That which is to be is known only to the deity. But thy duty to the Queen is very plain. And the King sighed. And he said: Hard is thy heart, and very fair thy form: sweet is thy voice, and bitter are thy words. To-morrow, I will

³⁸ *anárya*: an exact equivalent.

do thy bidding and my duty, and pay a visit to the Queen, and consult with the astrologers and fix a day for the ceremony. But O! to-day let me see thee and hear thee to the full. Stay with me till the evening, that I may draw from thee strength to nerve me for the morrow.

Then she looked at him awhile, with kindly eyes: and then she said: O King, that which is written on the future by the deity, no man can erase, and no wisdom can avert. For once there was a king, with many queens. And among these, there was one, whose name was Shrí³⁹; and the name was not appropriate, for she was the least beautiful of all. But she was gentle, and small, and she thought nothing of herself: and the king loved her so passionately, that he would have given his kingdom, and his life, and all the riches of the three worlds, to save one hair from falling from her head. Now it happened, that one day a criminal was apprehended in a crime: and the king gave orders that he should instantly be put to death: and it was done. Then after a while, the priests came to him and said: O King, this man, that thy order put to death, was a Brahman⁴⁰; and the gods are angry. And now, thy life and thy kingdom are in jeopardy: and unless they are appeased with a sacrifice, the gods will destroy us all. Then the king said: What sacrifice is necessary? And they said: That of the queen that loves thee, and that thou lovest, best. Then terror came into the king's heart. And he lied: and said: She of all my queens that loves me, and that I love, best, is Priyadarshiní: and alas! she is the most beautiful of all. So they said: Very well. To-morrow morning, the sacrifice shall be performed. And they went away. And in the morning, all the people assembled in a vast crowd around the sacrificial stone, and the king sat near, upon his throne. And they led up the victim, covered with a veil: and the officiating priest stood ready with a knife. Then they took off the veil from the victim, and uncovered her: and the king looked, and saw, not Priyadarshiní, but Shrí.

And then, in agony, he bounded on his throne. And the world vanished from his sight, and he waved his hands, not knowing what he did. And he cried out, with a voice like a trumpet: Ah no! ah no! not Shrí: not Shrí.

³⁹ The goddess of beauty.

⁴⁰ The most frightful penalties are laid, in Manu, upon those who slew Brahmans: under no circumstances whatever could the King put them to death. (It is a total misapprehension to ascribe these, and similar regulations, as is so often done, to the cunning and policy of the Brahmans. They were the repository of the religious welfare of the State, and they shared the superstition which made the killing of them a crime.) See e.g. Moore's Pantheon, p. 373.

But the priest raised the knife. And as he did so, it caught in his garments, and fell to the ground. And in a moment he regained it, and raised it, and struck. But in that instant, the king threw himself like a tiger upon the body of his wife. And the knife fell, and pierced his heart.

And then Shrí rose, from under the body of the king. And she looked for a moment at the crowd around her, and sat down upon the ground, and took the king's head upon her lap, and fell upon it, and followed him into the other world. Then dead silence fell upon the people, and they waited in fear. And at last the priest said: The sacrifice is complete, and the gods are appeased: for they have gained, not a life for a life, but two for one.

Then the *chétí* stopped. And she laid the flower at the King's feet, and turned to go. But the King shook with agitation. And his voice trembled, as he said: What! wilt thou go so soon, almost before thou hast arrived? O tell me another tale, that I may listen to thy voice. Or, if thou wilt, say no-thing: stand only where thou art, and let me watch thee: so shall thy brow, and thy smile, and the colour of thy dark blue eyes melt deep into my soul, and remain there fixed like a never-fading dye, to keep me from despair when thou art gone. Then she turned and stood. And suddenly she came up close to the King, and laid her hand upon his arm. And she said: O King, now I must go, for it is time. But wait: it may be that my mistress will send me back again: for there are matters to arrange for the morrow. And she smiled at the King, and went away quickly through the wood, while he stood motionless, and watched her as she went. And then he stooped, and picked up the flower. And he said: *Shamí*, thou hast, like me, fire in thy heart ⁴¹, and what thou art to the *ashwattha*, that is she who laid thee at my feet to me. Like thee, I needed but the touch of her hand to burst into a flame. And here I will await her, on the edge of the pool: and if she does not come, I will not live to see another dawn.

And he waited by the pool, getting up and sitting down in his impatience, and fixing his eyes on the place where the *chétí* had vanished in the wood. And meanwhile the hours followed one another, and the sun rose higher and higher in the sky. And the heat grew, till the lotuses shone like silver on the lake slumbering beneath them: and the fish slept in the

⁴¹ The primeval fire was generated by the friction of the *shamí* and *ashwattha* trees. Kalidas (*Raghuwansha* III. 9) calls the *shamí* '*abhyantaralínápáwakam*,' i.e. that 'which has fire in its heart.'

water, and the birds upon the trees, and the bees grew tired of humming and lay drunken in the flowers, and the forest hushed as if it were buried in a swoon, and the leaves forgot to rustle on the boughs. And suddenly as he watched, the King saw Madhupamanjarí reappear in the distance, there where she had gone away; and she stood for a moment like a picture on a wall, while the King gazed at her in an ecstasy, listening in the silence to the beating of his heart. Then, after a while, she broke the spell, and moved. And she came towards him very slowly, and stood before him. But she carried nothing in her hand. And she said: O King, my mistress wishes for a lotus, and has sent me to fetch it from her lord.

And the King looked at her, as she stood before him, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, and, her long lashes lying like shadows on her cheek. And his heart rose into his mouth, and he stood silent; and he tried to speak, but the words died upon his lips. So they two stood there in the forest, surrounded by the stillness. And at last the King spoke. And he said: Dear *chétí*, there is a thing that I would ask thee: but I am afraid. Then she said: What does the King fear? And she looked at him for a moment with a smile that vanished from her lips almost before it had appeared; and dropped her eyes. Then he said: *Chétí*, canst thou tell me, whether I am in love with thee, or not?

And as the King watched her, he saw the colour come and go upon her face. And at last she said, slowly: How can the physician decide, who does not know the symptoms?

Then the King went up, and stood close to her. And he put his two hands behind him, and shut them together tight, and leaned towards her, and said: Therefore I ask thee, because I cannot tell, whether I am in love with thee, or not. For once before, I thought I was in love, but then I felt not as I do now. And if then, I was in love, I am not now; and if now, I was not, then. And it may be, thou canst tell me, for thou art very clever, as I am not. For when I see thee coming, darkness spreads over my eyes, and fire leaps and rushes through my frame. And the sound of thy voice makes me faint, and burns me like the touch of ice: and a shiver runs like a flame over my limbs, and a deafening noise booms in my ears, and I know not what I do. And tears stand in my eyes, and yet I wish to laugh for joy; and if I try to speak, my voice trembles, as it does now; and there comes into my throat a struggle, and an obstacle, and I try to breathe and

cannot, and pain presses at my heart. And what else I feel, I cannot tell; but this I know, that when thou art with me, it is life, and when thou leavest me, it is death.

But Madhupamanjarí stood silent. And her lower lip trembled, and a tear stood upon her lashes, and her breast heaved slowly up and down. And at last she raised her eyes, and smiled through her tears, and she said: O King, it is better that I should go: for these are words fitter for my mistress than for me.

And then the King drew a long breath, and he stood up. And he looked that way and this way: and he laughed. And he said: Thou hast driven me to desperation, and I care not. Lo! I am a man and a strong man, and thou art a woman, and but a small one. Hence thou shalt not go, for thou earnest away my life.

And suddenly, he seized her in his arms, and held her tight. And as he did so, she shrieked, and struggled. And half frightened, and half laughing, she exclaimed: *Aryaputra*⁴², let me go. Hast thou not guessed, that I am the Queen?

And the King started, and leaped into the air, as if a sword had been run into his heart. And as he stood astounded, Madhupamanjarí looked at him, and almost against her will, began to laugh. And he stood gazing at her, first with amazement, and then with shame, and lastly with delight. And he exclaimed: Laugh as thou wilt, for thy laughter is music to my ear, and I care not, so long as thou art with me. But O thou delusive *chétí*, what is this? Was it not thou that wouldst not let me deceive the Queen? And yet what hast thou done to me?

And instantly, Madhupamanjarí stopped laughing, and tears fell instead from her eyes. And she looked at her husband with a smile; and suddenly she came to him and took him by the hand. And she led him away, and sat him down upon the steps, and said: Sit thou there, and I will tell thee. Then she knelt beside him on the right, and put his right hand round her, and took his left in her own. And she said: Foolish one, and didst thou think, because one was light as stubble, that all other women were the

⁴² As much as to say, *my husband*. The word is used by ladies in addressing their lords.

same? And didst thou also think, that thy life could be passed without the nectar of a woman? Listen now, and I will tell thee, what thou dost not know. For when my father sent to offer me to thee, I also sent my messenger, who brought to me thy portrait, and told me all about thee, and I loved thee long before I ever saw thee. And I determined that it should be the same with thee: and I made thee long for me, not knowing who I was. And but one day I was weak, and that was the day I did not come to thee, and I passed it in weeping for thee, and to keep away was almost more than I could do. And now, I will show thee what thou hast never known, the sweetness of thy life. For when thou art joyous, I will double all thy joy: and when thou art sad, I will halve thy sorrow and remove it, and it shall be a joy to thee, deeper than joy. And when thou art well, I will surfeit thy soul with amusement and variety, and when thou art sick, I will nurse thee: and if thou art weary, thou shalt sleep upon my breast, and it shall be thy pillow: and night and day my spirit shall be with thee, and my arms around thee. And when thou dost not want me, I will be absent; and when thou wishest me again, I will be there. And if I should die before thee, it is well, and thou shalt miss me: but if thou leavest me behind, then will I follow thee through the fire, for I will not live without thee, no, not even for a day. For like a dream, and like moonlight, and like a shadow, and the image on the surface of a pool, I must vanish into nothing, when that which gave me substance and reality is gone. For what am I, but a double and a copy and an echo of a Being which is Thou? my duty and religion, to be thy Dhruwá and Arundhatí, thy Rati and thy Rádhá, thy Chakrí and thy Kshetrabhúmí, thy Shakti and thy Twin⁴³ ? Churn me only with the mountain of thy love, and like the milky ocean, I will give thee up my essence, and show thee that a faithful wife is the butter of beauty, and wine of youth, and syrup of pleasure, and salt of laughter, born of the foam of the waves and the lather of the sea⁴⁴ . And I will be to thee a nectar and a camphor and a lotus and a sweet, and show thee the essence and the savour of thy life; and thou shalt own that without me it was blank, and a word without a meaning, and a night without a moon.

⁴³ *Dhruwá*, 'thy polar star:' an allusion to the marriage ceremony, in which the bridegroom points out to his bride that star, the emblem of fidelity. *Arundhatí*, the 'patron-saint' of Hindoo marriages, the pattern of a perfect wife. *Rati*, the wife of Káma: *Rádhá*, Krishna's darling, the lovely milkmaid. The two last names are mystical: 'thy other half,' 'thy Self, in feminine form.' *Chakrí*, the bird that pines and dies without its mate: *Kshetrabhúmí*, an idea hardly intelligible save to a Hindoo. It means an exclusive possession, a thing to use and abuse, and a home: a sacred spot of mother earth and cultivable soil, whose memory is twined around the heart.

⁴⁴ A passage full of plays on words and mythological allusions.

And then the King took her head, and held it in his hands. And he looked into her eyes, and knew that her words were a confession of the truth. And suddenly, with a violent effort, he tore himself away from her, and stood up; for the passion of his joy was more than his heart could endure. And then in an instant he returned to her. And he said: Dear *chétí*, thou hast forgotten something. And she said: What? Then he said: Wilt thou not take a lotus for thy mistress from the pool?

Then Madhupamanjarí laughed with delight. And she said: O King, thou hast said well. And they turned together, and moved towards the pool. And as they went, the King looked at her, and trembled. And he said to himself: Still she has not kissed me: and it is still to come. Then they drew near to the pool; and they found a lotus growing at its edge. And the King said: Thou shalt pluck it, and I will hold thee in my arms, lest thou shouldst fall into the water. And he took her in his arms; and they leaned over the pool. And Madhupamanjarí stretched out her hand to the lotus. Then the King whispered in her ear: See, I have brought thee to the water, that there might be two of thy faces instead of one. Now, which shall I kiss, and which will kiss me, the *chétí* or the queen?

And Madhupamanjarí plucked the lotus. And he turned towards him, and said: Both.
