

MANIMEKALAI

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MADRAS

THE INDIAN PUBLISHING HOUSE, LTD.

1928

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MANIMEKALAI

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF MANIMEKALAI

The Land of the Cholas is most fair and fertile. No wonder a Tamil poet once called it a Lotus-Land. Is not the lotus the most lovely of all flowers? That poet lived a long, long time ago. Yet even now, the land is very rich and green. The River Kaveri flows through it still, and turns a dull flat plain into a Garden of Eden.

Near the mouth of the river stands a mean little village, called Kaveripatnam. Who would guess that this was once a busy seaport? Who would believe that this poor little place was once a capital? Who would see in Kaveripatnam the proud city of Poompukar? Yet so it was. Kaveripatnam is all that remains of an ancient splendour. Such indeed are the sad changes made by Time.

To Poompukar, once flocked merchants from all over the world. Sailors from every clime once met in its streets. Goods from every

country were sold in its great markets. There men spoke a hundred different tongues.

Poompukar was many times bigger than Kaveripatnam. It spread out on every side. The streets were planned and laid out nobly. Great spaces were left for parks. Flowers breathed out their sweetness from gardens without number. Their bright colours made the whole city joyous and gay. Great buildings rose in their pride to the sky. Here were palaces and pagodas. Everywhere were splendid mansions.

For the people's toil there were factories and markets. For the people's pleasure there were theatres and music halls. Sick people had their hospitals. The aged and poor had their almshouses. Men could seek learning in schools and colleges. They could wait upon their gods in splendid temples. Every need of a man's body was supplied. Every hunger of his soul could be satisfied. Great indeed was the city of Poompukar.

Over this city, ruled a king. The kings of Poompukar had long been renowned for their virtues. Each knew he must be wise and just. It was his duty to guard the fair name of his house. Nor would the people endure a vain or foolish monarch. Many

religions existed side by side. The chief of these was Hinduism. Buddhists had just begun to grow in number. But Jesus Christ was not yet known. As for Mahomed, he had not yet been born.

At this time, there lived a rich merchant in the city. He had an only son whose name was Kovalan. The fond father married his son to the daughter of his friend. She was called Kannaki. Young and handsome was Kovalan. Young and beautiful was Kannaki, his bride. And for some years, the young couple were very happy. They loved each other fondly. Their days were full of sunshine and of song.

But one fateful day, Kovalan saw the young dancer Madhavi. She was fair as she was clever. Her charms made Kovalan forget his own wife. He began to neglect Kannaki. Soon he forgot her quite. All his time, all his money, he devoted to Madhavi the dancer. Nor was Madhavi less fond of him. She loved him in return. Poor Kannaki was forsaken and alone.

Time passed. Madhavi gave Kovalan a little daughter. They called her Manimekalai. She was a lovely child. Everyone said, "Manimekalai will be fairer even than her

mother." Chitrapathi, the mother of Madhavi, loved her grand-daughter dearly. She said, "I will rear the lovely one. I will teach her to sing and dance. She will do me credit. Some day, her beauty and talent will amaze the whole of India."

The prophecy of Chitrapathi was fulfilled. Day by day, the child grew in beauty and in charm. Her tiny feet were light and lovely as the petals of a flower. No maid in the country was as fair as she.

Then one day, Kovalan and Madhavi quarrelled. Each was proud and fiery. Neither would ask pardon of the other. In the end, Kovalan left the mother of his child. Sad and ashamed, he returned to Kannaki, his wife. He expected to be met with anger and reproach. So much had he forgotten the gentle heart of Kannaki. She gave him warm and tender words. She soothed his wounded pride. She healed his stricken heart. Kovalan was much affected by her love. He burned with shame and remorse. "You are too good for me, Kannaki," he groaned. "I have been a fool."

Kannaki said to herself, "I know why my lord has returned to me. All his wealth is gone. He has spent it on Madhavi."

She had a pair of golden anklets. They were her father's gift. They were of great value. Kannaki offered them to her husband. "Do not grieve, my lord. See these golden anklets. They are mine. Gladly do I give them to you. Do with them what you will."

Kovalan's heart was touched at this conduct. More than ever, he was ashamed of himself. He embraced his wife tenderly. "Never will I leave your side again," he swore. "In this city, all men know of my folly and shame. Let us leave this place, dear wife. Let us go to Madura. We are unknown there. These golden anklets I will sell at a good price. With the money, I can set up my shop again. We shall begin life anew, you and I together."

Kannaki was very pleased. She smiled. Tears of joy stood in her eyes. She whispered, "Yes, we shall begin a new life, you and I together."

CHAPTER II

THE DEATH OF KOVALAN
AND KANNAKI

In the last watch of the night, Kovalan and Kannaki took the road to the west. They did not tell their friends of their going. The country was wild. Their way lay through jungles. Many were the hardships they endured. They were of gentle birth. But they endured without a murmur. Each was struck by the courage and fortitude of the other. Their trials drew them closer together. Their hearts beat as one heart. They whispered, "Already have we begun our new life, you and I together."

At Srirangam they crossed the river. Here a messenger overtook them. He bore a letter from Madhavi. The dancer upbraided Kovalan. She begged him to return. She was ready to forgive.

Kovalan was not stirred by the appeal. He turned to his wife. He smiled upon her. "I have been blind once. Now my eyes are opened. I see the beauty and virtue of my own wife." The messenger said, "Your parents also grieve for your flight." Again, Kovalan smiled. "Tell them how happy you

found me. Let them grieve no longer. Rather let them rejoice with me."

Day after day, the happy pair tramped on. One evening, they saw the domes of Madura in the sunset. Their journey was done.

The next morning, Kovalan kissed his wife. He went alone into the city. He wished to sell one of the golden anklets. But to whom could he go? None but a prince could buy so costly a thing. Could the king's goldsmith help him? Kovalan sought him out. Now the king's goldsmith was a rogue. The scoundrel had stolen a gold anklet from the queen. He saw Kovalan's anklet. He thought, "Now I see my way clear." He went to the king. He took the stranger with him. "O king. You have been robbed. The Queen's anklet is missing. I have ceased not in my search. Here it is. And here too, is the thief."

The king went pale with rage. Kovalan tried to speak. The king would not listen. Guards seized the unhappy man. At one savage blow, his head lay on the palace floor.

The news of his death reached the ears of Kannaki. Her grief and rage knew no bounds. She resolved at once to avenge the

foul murder. She went to the king. No guard dared to hold her. She cried to the king, "I am the wife of Kovalan. He is innocent. You murdered him in a fit of passion. I do not ask you to believe the words of a stranger. I can prove my words. What did you put in the anklet of the Queen to make it rattle?"

The king answered simply, "Pearls."

Kannaki demanded, "Cause my husband's anklet to be brought." It was brought. Kannaki broke it open. Little red rubies fell to the floor.

The king groaned. "Kovalan is indeed innocent. I am guilty of murder. Woe is me!"

These were his last words. The king fell forward on his face. He was dead. Remorse had slain him.

The death of the king did not still the rage of the poor wife. She destroyed the whole city by fire. By virtue of her chastity she did it. Only then could her soul be at peace.

For fourteen days, Kannaki walked away from the burning city. At last she came to the Red Hill. Kovalan flew down in a car to meet her. He signed to her. She mounted

beside him. The car rose again in the air. Side by side, Kovalan and Kannaki came to Swarga.

Some hillmen beheld the miracle. They ran to tell the king. The king marvelled at their story. "Let us build a temple in honour of Kannaki," he said. "We shall place her image in the temple. Men shall come to worship her. From this day, Kannaki shall be our Goddess of Chastity."

The king's orders were obeyed. The Temple of Kannaki rose above the Red Hill.

In time, the news came to their old home. Madhavi grieved sorely. She decked herself in widow's weeds. She refused all comfort. She danced and sang no more. She went into a convent. She said, "Here will spend my days in humble service."

Now Manimekalai was a lovely maiden. No dancing girl was so clever as she. But her heart was not in her work. Her mind was grave and thoughtful. Her heart turned to religious service. The life of the Lord Buddha held a great attraction for her. The cruel murder of her father grieved her. She saw how life is short and uncertain. She saw how its joys are vain. "I cannot dance now," she said. "I hate and

despise my life. Let me go to the convent. Let me stay with you, dear mother." Her mother gladly consented. Together, they entered the monastery. They hid their beauty from the world.

CHAPTER III

THE FESTIVAL OF INDRA

In these days, Indra was the special guardian of Kaveripatnam. Every year, a grand festival was held in his honour. It lasted for a whole month. The people did their best to make it a success. They grudged neither time nor money. None must neglect the worship of Indra at this time. Did not the safety of the city depend upon their zeal? What said the old legend? "If Kaveripatnam neglect the worship of Indra, the wrath of the god will descend upon the city. The sea will rise in anger from its bed. The city will be destroyed by flood. Its name shall be no more known among men."

In the Temple of the Sword of Indra, the festive drum was kept. On the first day of the festival, it was brought out. A huge elephant carried it on his neck. They led

him through the streets. The herald beat upon the drum. The whole army turned out in pomp.

To the rhythm of the drum, the herald cried from his scroll, "May this wealthy and ancient city prosper for ever. May the rain fall three times in each month. May the sceptre of our king be always upright. Be it known unto you that Indra and the Host of Heaven walk in our midst during the festival time. Therefore prepare the city for their welcome. Festoon the streets with gay flowers. Put out your pots of water, and your lamps. Stand the golden bowls of seedlings in your doorways. Plant the streets with sugar-canes, and areca palms, and plantain trees in full fruit. Set creepers to climb about your walls. Deck the gilded pillars with strings of pearls. Hang bright cloths everywhere. Let flags wave gaily from the roofs. Sweep up the old sand. Strew new fresh sand all about the place. The Brahmans shall perform the divine rites. The wise men shall teach us the divine truths. Let all men and women banish hatred from their hearts. The gods will walk in your midst. Honour them with true virtue."

All the people of Kaveripatnam took part in the festival. But Madhavi and Manimekalai stayed in the monastery. While the herald beat the drum, they wove garlands for divine service. Chitrapathi grieved bitterly for their absence. The men of the town missed them too. They began to speak evil of the two women. "Do they owe us a grudge?" they asked. "Surely it is their duty to help us at the festival." Chitrapathi sought out the old friend of Madhavi. Her name was Vasantha-malai. "Go to my daughter," she urged. "Plead with her. Entreat her. Tell her that her name becomes an offence in the nostrils of the people. Then perhaps they will come back with you."

Vasantha-malai went gladly on her errand. For she deeply regretted the quiet, holy life that her friend now led. She hastened to the monastery. The sight of Madhavi shocked her. Already, fasting and penance had altered her form. She was pale and wan. Her body was thin and frail. Vasantha-malai almost wept over the change. She appealed to her friend with some warmth. "What are you doing here?" she demanded. "Did the gods give you your beauty that you might neglect it? Did they give you strength that

you might despise it? Did they endow you with talents that you might waste them? For years and years you have studied your art. You spared no pains. You were rightly famous. You can dance, you can act. You know songs without number. You can play sweetly upon the flute and lute. You can draw and paint beautifully. You are skilled in games. Indeed, what is there you can *not* do? You shine above all others. You have great gifts. But what use do you make of them? You hide behind these frowning walls. You are lost to the world of men. Are you angry with the people of Kaveripatnam? Do you owe them a grudge? Truly the people think so. They speak of you with contempt. Your name and the name of your daughter are insulted. And I cannot blame them. Come now. Hide your beauty and talents no longer. Make glad the hearts of the people once more. Come with me to the festival of Indra. Then will the people rise and bless your name."

Madhavi listened gravely to her friend. Her face was sad; but her eyes looked resolute. "It is not this day that I have lost my fair name among men. Kovalan, my lover, was murdered. Yet I lived on! In

that, did I smirch my fair fame. As for Manimekalai, is she not the daughter of Kannaki? Is not Kannaki the Goddess of Chastity? Only a life of holiness is the fit life for her. Learn this, my friend. Sorrow without end is the lot of all who are born. Bliss without end is the heritage of those who attain freedom from births. Sorrow is the fruit of earthly desire. Bliss is the release from earthly desire. And for this blessed release do I seek now and always. For this do I work and pray. For this alone do I live. Go then. Tell my mother. Tell all my friends. As for the people of Kaveripatnam, let them say what they will. I remain here to work out my salvation."

Vasantha-malai turned away. With tears in her eyes, she went back to Chitrapathi. Despair lay heavy on their hearts.

CHAPTER IV

THE GROVE

Vasantha-malai's visit brought back to Manimekalai the sad story of her parent's death. The cruel fate of Kovalan pierced the maiden's heart. The salt tears began to flow again. They fell on the garland of flowers in her lap. Madhavi noticed this. Tenderly she dried the tears on the girl's face; but the garland was spoiled. "It is not fit now for divine service, it has lost its purity. Go now, daughter, fetch some fresh flowers."

Suthamathi sat near. She also was weaving garlands. She heard what Madhavi said. She accosted them, "Manimekalai is stricken with grief for the death of her parents. Fasting and penance have made her still more pale and worn. Yet even so, she is fairer far than the daughters of Kaveripatnam. Look at her face, so very *like the moon*. Look at her eyes, so *soft and big with tears*. Look at her hair, bright as the *sunbeams*. Look at her figure, slender and graceful as the *willow*. Kama himself would long for her. He would lay down his arms. His heart would swell with pity and love for her. What then would

common men do, if they saw Manimekalai? Yet you bid her go alone to gather flowers. It would not be safe. Let me tell my own story. Then you may see the folly of your commands.

“My father was a Brahman. He lived in the city of Chambai. I was his only child. One day, I went into the garden to pick flowers. I was alone. But I was young and innocent; I feared no danger, for I did not see it. A gandharva passed. He was going to the festival of Indra. He stopped to gaze upon me. He desired to possess me. His own form was of divine grace. He was full worthy to be adored. Garlands of flowers were in his hair. Ornaments of gold encircled his waist and noble limbs. I gazed in wonder. Suddenly he seized me. I was borne aloft in his arms. He set me down in a distant city. For some time, I enjoyed his love. Then he brought me here, and here he left me. He went as suddenly as he had come.

“Manimekalai is fairer than I. What then might be her fate? At this time of festival, there are but few places where she might be safe. Fine flowers are to be pickēd in the park beyond the well. But she would meet the men of the king's bodyguard The

palace garden is for the devas alone. Even the bees gather no honey there just now. Demons guard the spot. Then there is the pretty wood where Kaveran, father of our river, lived and died in penance. But evil spirits haunt the place. If wise men avoid it, surely so must your daughter.

“Only one place is safe. That is the Grove. Many kinds of flowers are to be found there. It is under the care of Buddha, whose one law of life is love and service to all living things. In the midst is a crystal chamber, built by Maya, the architect of the gods. No sound can come from it. But it reflects anything inside. This chamber holds a seat, that is shaped like a lotus. It is set with the rarest and finest gems. There one may see the imprint of the Lord Buddha’s holy feet. If you lay a bud on this seat, it will burst into full bloom. Full-blown flowers cannot wither while they lie there. It is holy ground, and the bees do not seek to enter there for honey. People come there to lay flowers. If they are thinking of some particular god, the flower flies straight to the feet of that god. If they do not, it lies there always, nor withers. Thus did Maya

prove that thought and motive are more mighty than action.

“Yes, the grove is the only place for Manimekalai. And if you please, I will go with her.”

Madhavi smiled her approval. “Your words are wise, Suthamathi,” she said. Then she turned to her daughter. “Go with the good Suthamathi to gather flowers in the grove. She will bring you safely back.”

CHAPTER V

MANIMEKALAI ENTERS THE GROVE

With the blessing of Madhavi, Manimekalai and Suthamathi left the monastery. Beyond its walls, sprawled the great city. What stirring scenes awaited them there!

A Jain friar first caught their attention. In one hand he carried his water bowl. In the other, he held a tin can. He wore no clothes. His soul had risen above shame. His famished body had not been washed for years. His skin looked like a sick elephant's. He walked carefully, afraid of hurting the tiniest insect.

A drunken man followed the holy man. He carried a bowl of toddy. He shouted,

“Hail! holy friar! I salute your blessed feet. I pray you give heed to my words. Your soul is shut up in a filthy body. It stifles as in a foul dungeon. Now I have the secret of happiness, in this world and the next. I long to share my secret with your reverence. You cannot bear to take life. In drawing the juice from the cocoanut, you may be sure of killing no single thing. Drink then, drink deep from my bowl. Test its wondrous magic. If I say not truth, then spurn both me and my bowl for ever.”

Farther on, a mad man danced about. Red oleandar blossoms were wound about his arms. Wreaths of erukka flowers decked his neck. His dress was a crazy patchwork of rags and leaves and twigs. His body was smeared with ashes and sandal paste. He babbled words without meaning. He wept and laughed. He moaned and screamed. He fell on his knees. He whirled in the dance. He fought madly with his own shadow. A crowd stood about him. They looked on at his antics with sorrow and pity.

The whole town seemed to be in the streets to admire the sights. There were the pictures of the devas painted on the white walls of the mansions. There were the

gaily-dressed children, who could scarcely walk. The weight of precious metals and jewels on their dress bore them down. White-mustard was sprinkled on their oiled hair toward off evil spirits. Their curls were tied up with strings of pearls.

It was a gay, delightful scene. But none attracted so much attention as Manimekalai. Everyone noticed her beauty. They bewailed her fate. "Shame on her mother!" they cried, "How can she force so fair a daughter to embrace such a life! In the parks, the very swans must be put to shame by her whiteness and grace. The peacocks might learn from her how to walk."

But Manimekalai heeded not their remarks. Lightly she stepped on her way. Her white feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. Soon they arrived at the Grove. Every kind of tree, and shrub, and creeper seemed to flourish here. It seemed as if an artist had made a gorgeous mantle, and flung it over the earth.

At the entrance, Suthamathi bowed before the guardian spirit of the place. Her companion humbly followed her example. Hand in hand, they entered the beautiful garden.

Suthamathi loved the place. She was eager that her ward should miss none of its charms. She pointed out each beauty.

“See how the thick branches form a perfect canopy,” she cried. “Not a ray of the noon-day sun may reach us here. Listen to the busy murmur of the bees. One might think it the music of the lute. Hark! how the bulbuls sing in concert! Look at those monkeys! They have formed a complete circle. They want to see the peacock dance. Is not this pond as clear as crystal? See how the swan sits upon the lotus! Is she not like a noble queen upon her throne? Ah! another peacock is gravely dancing. A cuckoo calls out to him. The cry of the water-fowl is like the flourish of drums. See where the agave grows on the bank. It has shed its pollen on the lotus bloom below. The lotus looks like your own lovely face, soiled with the dust of the streets. Have you noticed how the bees swarm about you? They must think you are a flower yourself.”

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE SEEKS MANIMEKALAI

Joy reigned in the peaceful grove. In the streets of Kaveripatnam were confusion and terror. An elephant of the royal stables had gone mad. He broke loose. The mahout wounded him in the face. But that only increased his fury. Wildly, he raged through the streets and bazaars of the city. The terrified people fled before him. The trainers yelled for help. The people screamed in fear. Up in the sky, vultures followed the path of the mad brute. They followed in the train of death. The frenzy of their desire made them scream too. It was bedlam.

Word was brought to the gallant prince, Udhaya-kumaran. Without loss of time, he dashed off to the rescue. It was easy to track the elephant. He conquered the beast. The trainers came up. They bound the animal, and led him away. There was peace in the streets once more. The prince mounted his triumphal car, and drove through the streets. People lined the route. How they cheered the gallant youth! Great was their pride in the valour of their prince.

As he rode along, he glanced up at a balcony. There he saw his friend Ettikumaran.

He lay on a flowery couch, he touched the strings of his lute. He sang soft sad airs.

The prince called to him, "What ails my friend? Why does he look so sad?"

Ettikumaran came down to speak with his friend. He praised him for his bravery and daring. He said, "As I sat here, I saw Manimekalai pass. She was going to the grove. Her beauty is wasting like a flower kept in too small a vase. I thought of the cruel fate of Kovalan, her father. My heart was torn with grief. My fingers strayed over the lute strings. I made sad discords. Now you know the cause of my wretchedness."

The prince was not downcast. "Banish your sorrow. In a few moments I shall return, bringing with me the lovely Manimekalai." He turned his chariot about, and galloped off. As the moon tears through scudding clouds, so did the ardent young prince tear his way through the crowds. In a very short space of time, he drew rein at the gates of the grove.

Manimekalai heard the sound of the chariot wheels. She turned to her guide in alarm. "It must be the Prince Udhaya-kumaran. Chitrapathi spoke of him. He has set his heart on me. What shall I do? Where can I go?"

At her words, Suthamathi started like a frightened peacock. She pushed Manimekalai into the crystal chamber. "Bolt the door behind you," she cried. Manimekalai shot the bolt home. She herself took up her stand some distance away.

The prince dismissed his attendants. He entered the grove alone. His eager eyes searched every alley and thicket and avenue. The shady grove was bright with the radiance of his beauty. It seemed that the sun had stepped from his chariot in the sky.

CHAPTER VII

THE MEETING WITH THE PRINCE

It was not long before the Prince found Suthamathi. "I know you," he cried. "I know you from the way you stand on guard in this lonely place. Where is your friend, the lovely Manimekalai? Is she ready to pity the pangs of her lover? Does she yet know the nature of love? Is she old enough to understand its ways? Tell me, why has she left the monastery? Tell me. I command you." Suthamathi trembled. She felt like some small animal driven into a corner by a power-

ful foe. There was no escape for her. But bravely she answered the Prince.

“Hail, Prince! You spring from a noble line. Karikalan is your ancestor, he who wore the semblance of age that men might heed his wise judgments. So I need not talk to you of the wisdom of self-control. Nor need I remind you of the duties of a prince. Still, let me say one word to you. The human body is the fruit of karma in one’s former lives. Each life develops karma still further. The body itself ages and dies. It is the abode of ugly diseases. It is the home of desire, the birth place of sin. Wrath lives there, as a serpent in its hole. The mind within the body grieves; it despairs and grows weary. Know then, valiant prince, the true nature of the body. Despise then, the temptations of the flesh.”

As Suthamathi talked, the Prince caught sight of the image of Manimekalai in the crystal. The form was such as to inspire love in any man. At first, the Prince thought it must be a vision. He deeply admired the artist’s skill. The picture was perfect. Then Manimekalai moved. He saw that it was the form of his beloved. He dashed up to the crystal chamber. He felt all over the walls.

But no opening could he find. He turned to Suthamathi. "Where is Manimekalai? Her image is reflected on all sides. How can I approach her? O, talk of her to me. What is her nature like?"

"Prince," responded the woman soberly. "You look handsome and brave as a god. What woman would not delight in your beauty? But Manimekalai cares not for the beauty of men. She has dedicated her life to piety. Her heart cannot be moved, even by the might of love. Steadfast and holy is Manimekalai."

"Can the banks resist the mighty river in flood?" demanded the Prince. "What avails steadfastness? Love will burst through its barriers. Love will take the stoutest heart by storm. Let Manimekalai be chaste; but let her be mine." For a few moments the Prince brooded. Then he went on, "Men say you were brought to the monastery by a gandharva. He left you there. Tell me. Suthamathi, how came you to leave its walls to-day?"

"May your garland never fade, O Prince!" she replied. "May no evil thing enter to poison your mind. Listen to my story."

"My father was an old Brahman. He spent his days in fasting and prayer. Because of my former karma, I fell a victim to the gandharva. My father's heart yearned for me. He could not rest alone at home. He trudged the country in search of me. He came to Kaveripatnam. By chance, he met me in the streets. But I was no longer fit to live with Brahmans. For my sake, he left the Brahmans. He became a beggar. Never would he desert me.

"One day, a fierce cow attacked him. He was sorely wounded. He dragged himself to the Jain monastery. I had already found refuge there. Did the monks wash and bind his wounds? No! Angrily, they turned him off, and me with him. They shut the door in our faces. They said we were unclean.

"Painfully, we turned to the streets again. Bitter were the tears we shed. Who now, would help us? He cried aloud in his distress, 'Is there no one in all Kaveripatnam to help us? Does the city hold one kind heart?' One kind heart there was. A Buddhist monk heard us. He was begging his way from door to door. He thrust his alms-bowl into my hands. With infinite tenderness, he lifted up my father. He carried him to the Buddhist monas-

tery. There, we were received with true compassion. My father had every care. All that human love could do, they did for my father.

“ They talked to us about the Lord Buddha. They explained his doctrines. It is now my chief delight to praise My Lord, my King. He was goodness itself. Yet he lived only for others. By righteousness would he guide man. By love, would he save man. May the blessing of the Lord Buddha rest upon you, O Prince ! ”

The Prince saw now that Suthamathi would never help him to win Manimekalai. He frowned. “ I shall go to Chitrapathi. She will help me,” he said. So he left the grove, and rode to his palace.

Manimekalai stepped out of the crystal chamber. A look of wonder and love was in her beautiful eyes. For a moment, she remained thoughtful before Suthamathi. Then she spoke. “ The Prince thought me without honour or chastity. He believed he could buy me with gold. He desired me; yet he despised me. But I cannot be angry with him. My heart is drawn towards the stranger. Is this then, the nature of love ? If it be so, then let love perish ! ”

CHAPTER VIII**THE BURIAL GROUND**

The sun went down, while the two women were still in the grove. The moon rose slowly in the east. It hung like a great lamp over the city of Kaveripatnam. The city was beautiful beneath the golden sun. Fairer still it looked under the silver moon.

In the grove, the lotus flowers slowly folded their petals. The royal swans left their flower thrones, and flew into the tops of the cocoanut palms. There they rested for the night. The water-lilies opened out. Their delicate faces looked like stars, reflected in the water. The night-bird called aloud to her mate. The cows had grazed all day long. Their udders were heavy with sweet milk. That made them think of their calves. Lowing gently, they wended their way homeward. Brahmans tended the fire of sacrifice in the temples. Pure maidens lit the holy lamps. On all sides, the flute and the lute made sweet music. Evening entered the city, robed in grey twilight.

Higher and higher rose the moon. The sky was clear and cloudless. Darker and darker grew the shadow of the moon. Her

rays streamed into the grove. They flowed through the little spaces between the leaves. They spilled upon the ground, and lay there like pools of white milk. The moon was a silver pitcher, spilling its precious contents.

Then it was that Manimekala-Devi entered the grove. She was the guardian spirit of the island of Manipallavam. She had assumed the form of a maiden. Radiant as a rainbow she was. She had come to worship at the lotus-seat within the crystal chamber.

As she came out, she stopped before Suthamathi and Manimekalai. "Tell me, pray, what has happened to you? Why do you stand here?" she enquired.

Then Suthamathi told the goddess of the Prince's pursuit. "Ah!" replied Manimekala-Devi, "The Prince will not give up his desire. He will surely wait for you outside the main gate. Do not go that way. Depart by the wicket gate instead. You will find it in the western wall. The road will take you to Chakkaravala-kottam. Holy men dwell there. With them, you can pass the night in safety."

Then spake Suthamathi, "You call it Chakkaravala-kottam. The wicked gandharva gave it the same name. Why then, do the people of the city call it the burning-ground? I cannot understand it. Please explain the mystery to me."

Manimekala-Devi made answer, "Already it is growing late. Yet will I tell you the story of Chakkaravala-kottam. Then your minds will be at peace.

" This burning-ground lies just outside the grove. It is as old as the city itself. High walls surround it on every side. It has four main gates. In one gate is a flagstaff; by that gate only devas may enter. They leave their cars suspended in mid-air. They look just like painted pictures there. The second gate is adorned with pictures of paddy-fields, sugar-canes, tanks and groves. The third gate has only white washed walls. Before the fourth gate, stands the terrible image of a demoness. A fierce frown is on her brow; she bites her lips with passion. In her hands she holds a fatal noose and spear. Soldiers stand on guard at that place. Devils haunt it. Within its walls are many strange sights. Terrible sounds

can be heard issuing from the burning-ground.

“Here is the great temple of Kali. Her altar stands in the front yard, surrounded by lofty trees. Their branches are bent to the earth with the weight of human skulls. These are the heads of men who have offered themselves as sacrifice to the goddess. There, too, are many mausoleums. They look like rocks thrown down in play by a giant. They are built of burnt bricks, in honour of kings and saints. Sometimes they honour the sathis who have died with their husbands. On every side, rise altars to the gods. In thatched sheds, the watchmen eat and sleep. Columns of smoke ascend from the blazing pyres. The place is always busy. All through the day, all through the night, mourners come and go. There are the men who burn the bodies. There are the men who expose them. There are the men who bury the corpses. There are the men who cover them with earthen pots. Never is Chakkaravala-kottam quiet and still. Loud and endless are its noises. The death-drum beats without ceasing. It tells the living that they too must die. Songs of praise ascend to heaven. Pious men and women

are being carried to their long rest. Wailings tell of those who mourn their loved ones. Jackals whoop and owls hoot. Ravens croak and vultures screech as they pick the eyes and brains of the dead. All these noises mingle and combine. From afar, they sound like the roar of the mighty ocean.

“Nettles, prickly pear, and thorn bushes form dense thickets. Under their grim shade, foul demons gather their forces. Here they hold their wicked revels. Under the wood-apple tree is another assembly. They are vultures, crows and owls. In open spaces, gruesome creatures feast upon the corpses. Skulls are hung in garlands on the Jujube tree. Refuse and offal and bones are scattered all about the awful place. Death is the victor everywhere. He casts his victims in heaps. He takes the prince and the beggar. He seizes the babe and the bearded aged saint. He spares no one. None can escape him.

“Foolish are they who forget his coming. Foolish are they who lose themselves in pleasure. Foolish all who love not their fellow-men, and do not the right.

“Let me tell you a story. There was once a boy named Sarngalan. One day he

was going home in the dark. He thought this gruesome place was part of the city. He passed through the gate. He was filled with terror. He became mad. Shrieking, he fled to his home. On the doorstep, he fell down. 'Mother, mother,' he screamed, 'A devil in the burning-ground has struck me dead!'

"Gothamai was the name of the poor boy's mother. She was blind. Coming to the door, she lifted up the corpse in her arms, and wept. Slowly she made her way to the burning-ground. She cried aloud to the guardian spirit of the city, 'O Sampapathy! You guard and protect our streets and groves. But know you not that both my husband and I are blind? We have no one to help us but our boy. Now a demon has struck him dead. Is this your care for us? Were you not mighty enough to save our child?'

Thus she cried before the gates. In her arms lay the corpse of her only child. Sampapathy appeared before the poor woman. 'Who calls me in the night? What is thy grief?'

"Gothamai cried again, 'Look at my child. He lies here as though sunk in sleep. Yet a demon has slain him.'

“But Sampapathy answered sadly, ‘No demon has power to take away life. Thy son’s time on earth was over. It had run its course. His fate was fear. It overtook him, and so he died. Cease thy grieving. Cease thy tears.’

“‘Take *my* life,’ cried the stricken mother, ‘but give back the life of my son. He has eyes to see. He can tend his blind father. Take my life for his. Only let my boy live again!’

“Her words moved Sampapathy strangely. Her voice was tender as she spoke. ‘When the soul leaves the body, it is born again in another form. None can doubt this. How then can I recall the soul of your son to *this* body? How can I relieve thy grief? It is impossible. Dry thy tears. It is foolish to offer a life for a life. Thousands of men would give their lives to save their king. Yet many many kings lie buried here.’

“‘Yet what say the Scriptures of the Brahmans?’ pleaded the poor woman. ‘They tell us that the gods can grant boons as they please. Cannot you, great goddess, answer my prayer? If you refuse, then shall I kill myself on this spot!’

“‘This I cannot do for you,’ sighed the goddess. ‘Only One may do this. He

is the Lord of Life. But thou shalt see what power is mine.'

"So saying, Sampapathy summoned all the gods of the universe. At her command, came the seraphs who rule the stars. Came the bright Host of Heaven. Came the spirits of the nether world. All who had power to grant boons came at the word of Sampapathy. She told them the sad story. But none could offer help. None could grant the prayer of Gothamai. She saw that her prayer was foolish and vain. So she burned the body of her child. Then she herself died.

"Maya resolved to keep bright the memory of this great assembly of the gods. On the walls of the burial-ground he carved a picture of the universe. All gods, and all men, all animals and all plants he pictured there. Right in the centre, rose the Chakkara-vala-giri mountains. That is why the ground is sometimes called Chakkaravala-kottam."

CHAPTER IX

MANIMEKALAI LEAVES HER FRIEND

Side by side, Manimekalai and Suthamathi slept in the grove. Midnight came. Without a sound, Manimekala-Devi took the young girl in her arms. Away she flew, to her own island of Manipallavam. There she left Manimekalai till sleeping.

Prince Udhaya-kumaran, in his palace, was unable to sleep for thinking of Manimekalai. He sat on a couch by his bed. What was the good of lying down? He could not sleep. But as he sat dreaming of his love, the goddess appeared before him.

“Son of a king,” she addressed him, “Heed now my words. If the king does evil, he disturbs the spheres in their courses. The clouds will withhold their rain. The earth will dry up. All things will parch, and wither, and die. Men and women will be starved from off the face of the earth. A king must think of his people as of himself. On him, their lives depend. Then quell thy desire for the holy maiden. For the curse of Heaven is upon it.”

The goddess flew back to the grove. She woke up Suthamathi. “Be not alarmed,”

she said, "The time is ripe for Manimekalai to enter the service of the Lord Buddha. I have taken her away to my island of Manipallavam. There, she will learn the history of her former birth. In seven days, she will return to the city of Kaveripatnam. She will be disguised, but by signs you will know her. On that day, many marvels will happen.

"Go and tell Madhavi what I have done. Tell her that her daughter is going to take the Holy Path. Madhavi has heard of me from Kovalan. I saved one of his ancestors from shipwreck. So he named his daughter after me. On the birth of the child, I appeared to Madhavi. I told her that her daughter would conquer the desires of the flesh. I prophesied that she would relieve the misery of the world. I foretold that she would one day be famous for her piety. Remind Madhavi of this dream."

The goddess vanished. Suthamathi was left grieved and puzzled. The city was asleep. The music had died away. The feet of the dancers moved no more. Children dreamed sweetly in their little beds. The doves were silent in the eaves. Stilled were the water-fowl in the quiet ponds; stilled were the birds in the branches. Their last songs had

been sung; their beaks and eyes were closed till the dawn.

But other sounds could still be heard. The sentries of the palace proclaimed the passing of each hour. Hungry elephants pealed forth their impatience from the stables. The guards on the streets sounded their warning drums. From distant hamlets came the noise of revelry. Drunken sailors were still making merry there. The king was at peace with the world, but at the crossroads, his soldiers still made sacrifice. In cries of thunder, they prayed for victory to the arms of their king. Even at this time of night, magicians fought with the demons.

The confusion of sound frightened Suthamathi in the grove. She resolved to leave it. She sought for the wicket gate in the western wall. She came to Chakkaravala-kottam. The door of an alms house stood open: one and all might enter. Suthamathi found refuge there for the night.

On one of the walls, was an image of a god, carved by Maya. As Suthamathi looked at it, the lips of the image opened. "Manimekalai will return in seven days," it assured her.

In the last watch of the night, Suthamathi awoke. Her heart was heavy. She felt very

lonely without Manimekalai. Sentries were tired out with watching. It was the hour when lovers begin to stir. Conches were sounding through the city. Elephants pealed loud and long. Cocks crowed lustily to welcome the dawn. Horses stirred within their stalls. They shook their manes to awake themselves for the tasks of the day. Birds in the woods began to carol. Women began to move about their household duties. Their bracelets made a pleasant jingle. Men began to tune their instruments. Sacrifice was being prepared for the gods. The whole city was awaking to another day. The sun burst forth into the sky. The world was bathed in golden light again.

Suthamathi stepped out into the day. She went to Madhavi, to whom she told all her story. Both women were very anxious about the young girl. Together they wept, and grieved for her safety.

Meanwhile, Manimekalai had awakened. She found herself on the sandy bank of a deep lagoon. Over her head, thick branches guarded her from the hot rays of the sun. Water-lilies and moss covered the face of the water. Blossoms fallen from the trees made a soft bed upon the sand. The breeze wafted

the fragrance to the holy maid. On the beach were oysters, coral, and pieces of sandal wood. The marshes around, were ploughed by snails without number.

Manimekalai looked around. All was strange to her. She felt forgotten by her friends. She felt sad and forsaken. Perhaps this was a new part of the grove. She called aloud, "Suthamathi! Suthamathi! Why do you hide from me? Come out, and let me see your dear face. Where are you? Am I awake or asleep? Where am I? Speak! I am afraid. It is day. My mother will be anxious. Come, my friend. Suthamathi! Suthamathi!"

She searched all about. No friendly face appeared, no friendly voice answered her calls. She searched in the valleys. She climbed the rolling sand-hills. The swan stood like a captain before the company of sea-fowl. The cock led an army of land-birds. They faced each other like foes. But nowhere could Manimekalai find her friend. She shouted and wept in her despair. She thought of her father Kovalan. "O, my dear father!" she mourned. "Cruel fate drove you into exile. By cruel fate were you done to death. That same cruel fate has now brought your daughter here to die."

CHAPTER X

MANIMEKALAI LEARNS HER PAST

Suddenly, before her eyes, appeared the Holy Seat of Buddha. It shone radiant as the sun. A halo of divine glory hovered over it. It was made of purest crystal. On its pedestal, were the imprints of the sacred feet of the Master. The trees around showed down their fragrant blossoms. Yet not one withered leaf touched it. No rotten thing defiled it. No bird flapped its wings there. Was it not the seat of the Lord of Righteousness? It was placed here by the King of the Devas. By its great virtue, men could recall their past lives.

Two kings from the land of the Nagas had once desired it for their own. Neither was able to move it. They gathered their armies to fight for it. The battle lasted long. Many men died, soaked in their own blood. But the Lord Buddha passed by. He claimed the seat as His. Sitting there, he proclaimed the Law of Righteousness to the angry kings. From that day, the seat was blessed. From that day, it was worshipped by all good men.

When Manimekalai saw the seat, all will and desire forsook her. She knew not what

she did. Of their own accord, her hands told above her head in the attitude of worship. Tears streamed from her eyes. She walked three times round the Sacred Seat, then fell prostrate before it. Her loosened hair enwrapped her radiant form, as clouds wrap round the lightning. When again she rose to her feet, all her past life was clear to her.

“O wise and holy Brahmadharma!” she exclaimed. “Now I know your words are true. In my past birth, you met me on the banks of the river Kayankarai. You were then the brother-in-law of Attipathi. You were his teacher, and he was the king of the Gandhara country. To the king you prophesied, ‘In seven days a great earthquake shall shake the land. Your city shall be submerged by the sea. Not one soul shall escape. Flee then, from this place.’ The king hearkened to your words. The drums were beaten through the streets. The citizens were warned. They fled. The king himself went to the city of Avanti. On the way, he heard that the prophecy had come true. He and his people blessed you as their saviour. Then you taught them the Law of Righteousness.

“I was then born, the daughter of the king Ravivanman. My name was Lakshmi.

I was given in marriage to Prince Raghulan. He was the son of Attipathi. Fair was my husband as the morning sun. We came to you, O wise Brahmadharmā. We learned of you the divine truth. One day, you told me, 'On the sixteenth day, Raghulan shall be bitten by a snake. He shall die. You, his wife, shall enter the flames with him. This is your fate. Nor can you escape it. You shall be born again in the city of Kaveripatnam. One day, evil shall threaten you. But Manimekala-Devi shall bear you away to an island. There you shall worship the Holy Seat. At sight of it, you shall remember your past life.'

"I trembled at your words. In my grief, I asked you where my lover Raghulan would be born. You said that Manimekala-Devi would tell me this. O! that she would come to me now!"

Swift as thought, the goddess came through the air to the Holy Seat. Three times she walked round it, giving praise. 'O Lord Buddha!', she chanted, 'This seat is Thine, this Seat is Thou! Therefore do I praise it with my tongue. Therefore do I bow before it. Before Thy coming, all men on earth were foolish. Their hearts were deaf to the words of wisdom. Truth and Justice they had

forgotten. A poor, silly place was the earth before Thy coming. As a glorious sun didst Thou come into our midst. Darkness fled before Thy feet. In its place, came love and truth and righteousness. Therefore do I adore Thee in my heart. For I shall grieve no more for the evil of the world.'

Then Manimekalai advanced to the goddess. "By your divine favour I know my former life," she said, "Tell me now, I pray you, who is my former husband?"

"Listen, Lakshmi," replied the goddess. "One day, in the pleasure garden, you quarrelled with Raghulan. The Prince, in his love, pleaded with you. At that moment, Sadhuchakra, a great sage passed through the air. He came down into the garden for shade from the mid-day sun. You blushed when you saw him. You saluted as if you were ashamed. Raghulan did not understand. He flew into a rage; he demanded the name of the stranger. But with your fingers, you gently closed the prince's mouth. You chid him for not knowing the great sage. Together, you saluted the sinless saint. Though you were not his disciples, you offered him food.

"He accepted it gladly. The result of that good deed still lives with you. For that good

deed, you shall be delivered from the bondage of birth. Prince Udhaya-kumaran is your husband. He loves you still ; your heart also is drawn towards him. But you are destined to serve the Lord Buddha. It is your task to spread His Laws far and wide. If you fell a prey to love, it would be a great folly. It would be like throwing precious jewels into the sea. To save you from this, I brought you here. I wish to make you firm in the Holy Path of Service.

“Listen further, Lakshmi. In your last birth, you had two sisters. They were the wives of King Dutchaya. With him, they worshipped the Mount of the Lotus-Feet. It bears the footprints of the Master. Your two sisters are now with you in this life. They are Madhavi and Suthamathi. Now, Manimekalai, you know all your past life. You know the true faith. You will learn of other faiths. Men may refuse to discuss them with you because you are a woman. Let me therefore, teach you three mantrams. The first will enable you to fly through the air. With the second, you can assume any form you choose. The last will destroy all hunger and thirst.

“On the sacred day of the full moon, you will outgrow all earthly wisdom. You

will. then be confirmed in the true Faith. Salute now this Holy Seat, and return to Kaveripatnam."

The goddess then taught Manimekalai the three mantrams. That done, she rose in the air and vanished.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOLY GRAIL

For a short time, Manimekalai roamed about the island of Manipallavam. All at once, she saw a celestial spirit before her. The spirit enquired, "Who are you, fair maid? Why do you wander here alone?"

The maid replied, "O radiant One, my name was Lakshmi. My husband was Prince Raghulan. Now, am I Manimekalai. My mother ~~is~~ Madhavi, the teacher of dancing. The goddess Manimekala Devi brought me here. She made me know my former birth. You are fair as the rising sun; you are graceful as a tender creeper in blossom. Pray tell me, who are you? What is your name?"

The spirit replied, "My name is Dwipa-Thilaka. The King of the Devas sent me here. It is my duty to guard the Holy Seat.

“Listen! Only those who walk a right may learn the secret of their past lives. You are such an one. And they are indeed few. In front of the Holy Seat is a large well, called Gomukhi. On the anniversary of the Birth of the Lord, the never-failing Holy Grail of Aputhra will appear in the well. The moon will be at the full. This is the day. This is the time. Who knows, perhaps the holy vessel will come into your hands. Rice is the elixir of life. If you put rice in the Holy Grail, it may be taken out for ever, yet will the Grail never be empty. The hungry and needy may feed till their hands are weary. Yet will the rice never grow less. Aravana the sage of Kaveripatnam will tell you more about it.”

The heart of the pure maiden yearned with pity for all the poor and needy of the earth. “O, if I can but possess the Holy Grail!” she implored. “Then will I feed the hungry, and gladden the hearts of the poor.” She fell before the Holy Seat, and worshipped it anew. She walked round the tank Gomukhi. She remained still and steadfast in prayer. And lo! the Grail rose from the depths of the water, and passed into her hands. Great was her joy to receive it. She cried aloud. She

exulted and rejoiced. In song, she praised the Lord Buddha. Here are the words of her song.

“Conqueror of Karma, I bow to Thy Feet!
Destroyer of Evil, I bow to Thy Feet!
Seeker of others' good, I bow to Thy Feet!
Refuser of Paradise, I bow to Thy Feet!
O High above all thought, I bow to Thy Feet!

Giver of Light, I bow to Thy Feet!
O Enemy of Malice, I bow to Thy Feet!
Friend of Goodness, Foe of Evil, I bow
to Thy Feet!

How can my poor tongue praise Thee!
I bow to Thy Feet!”

Then spake Dwipa-Thilaka, “Hunger is a miserable curse. It makes a prince forget his birth. It kills virtue and destroys honour. Hungry men forget wisdom and learning. Sins without number are caused by hunger. So blessed indeed, is the one who can relieve this affliction. My tongue is too feeble to praise such a one. Do you know the story of the great rishi Viswamitra? He gave up his kingdom, and took to penance. A famine scourged the land. He was so hungry, that he resolved to eat a dog. Before he partook of it, he offered part as sacrifice. Indra appeared to stay his hand. The god caused a

heavy downpour of rain. The earth drank up the water greedily. The famine was stayed. Gladness returned to the hearts of men. It is one charity to give food to the poor and helpless. He who gives food, gives life. You are wise to become a life-giver with the Holy Grail in your hands. Great must be your heritage of good deeds."

"In my last birth," said Manimekalai, "My husband died of snake-bite. I threw myself on to the funeral pyre. Before I lost my senses, I remembered feeding Sadhu-Chakra in the heat of the day. Because of this good deed, has the Holy Grail come into my hands. There are many who now reap the harvest of their former good deeds. They are now blest with wealth and happiness. Others now wait in rags because of their former sins. Out in the rain and in the hot sun they go. But they think not of these things. They can think only of the awful hunger that gnaws at their bowels. My heart yearns to help these poor people. As a mother yearns to feed her hungry child, so do I yearn to feed the poor and helpless."

"One thing I have forgotten to tell you," said the spirit. "Only in the hands of the pitiful will the Holy Grail show its

virtue. Your heart overflows with compassion. Go, therefore, and perform your noble task."

Then did Manimekalai rise in the air. And in her hands was the Holy Grail.

CHAPTER XII

ARAVANA THE SAGE

Day after day, Madhavi and Suthamathi awaited the return of Manimekalai. Their hearts were torn with anxiety. On the seventh day, Madhavi said to her friend, "This is the seventh day since her going, yet my daughter has not come."

Even as she spoke, Manimekalai stood before her. "Daughters of the great king Ravivanman, Hail! Wives of King Dutchaya, Hail! Beloved sisters, Hail! I salute your dear feet. May the virtue of your good deeds cleanse you of the sins of the body. Aravana the sage, is here in this city. He will tell you of your past lives. I hold in my hands the Holy Grail of Aputhra. Salute it, sisters."

Madhavi and Suthamathi fell down and worshipped the Holy Grail. Then they went to the house of the sage Aravana.

Old, very old was the blameless Aravana. His hair was grey; his ancient frame was bent. But his voice was firm. It trembled not. In his speech was the highest wisdom. All three saluted him with the greatest respect. Then Manimekalai told him her story. She described the journey to the grove. She told of the pursuit of the Prince, and his words. She described her flight to Manipallavam, and the finding of the Holy Seat. She told of her past life, of the Holy Grail, and of the three mantrams. "To you, now. O sage Aravana, are we come. You can teach us more of the truth. You can tell us more of our former births."

Her words filled the heart of the old man with great joy. "Now let me tell your sisters more of their former births. One day, I made a pilgrimage to the Mount of the Lotus-Feet. There I met the brave King Dutchaya in the grove. He too had come to worship. I asked if all was well with him and his two queens. He cried out in his grief, and told me his story.

"Veerai had gone too near an elephant. The beast had but lately been trapped, and was still wild. The brute trampled on Veerai the queen of Dutchaya. She died in great pain. Tharai could not bear the loss of her

dear sister. So great was her sorrow, she had no wish to live. So one day, she flung herself from a high terrace. The king himself had picked up the bruised and broken corpse.

"I tried to comfort the King. I explained the folly of grief. Your sudden deaths were the fruit of your karma. They had to be. Now I meet you again. Instead of Veerai and Tharai, you are Madhavi and Suthamathi! How like a stage is the world! How like actors are we all! We go on and off the stage; we remain the same persons all the time. We just change our costumes to appear in different plays."

The sage now turned to Manimekalai. "Listen to me, my daughter," he pleaded. "You know of the bondage of birth. You know of the laws of the Lord Buddha. But the Law of Righteousness does not prevail among men. The way to Nirvana is blocked with thorns and weeds. Few follow the True Path. Most prefer to walk the broad path of Evil. Everywhere men are born. Everywhere men are dying. Truth is like the sun. Evil, like a fog, hides the face of the sun. The sun is there in the heaven; but we cannot always see it. Truth is like a mighty ocean. Men will not open their hearts

to it. They only let it trickle through, as through a hole made by an arrow. I myself teach the Truth, though one mouth is little enough. But sixteen hundred and sixteen years from now the Lord Buddha will come to earth once more. It is the prayer of all the gods in heaven. Then shall the earth rejoice. The fogs shall be scattered. Men shall see the sun in all his glory. As a mighty flood, Truth shall flow from out the lips of the Lord. It shall overflow the hearts of all men. Then shall the whole world rejoice in the Truth.

“The pale fingers of the dawn tell us of the coming of the day. So do many signs appear now. Wise men can read them. They now foretell the rising of the Sun of Wisdom to dispel the darkness in the souls of men. Then will the sun and moon shine together in friendship. The stars will ride in their proper paths. The rain will fall in the proper seasons. The earth will drink it up and be fruitful. No living creature will suffer pain or hunger. Then will the winds blow aright. The mountains will give up their wealth, and the seas their hidden treasures. All nature will serve and bless Man. Cows will nurse their calves. With milk will they fill our pails to

overflowing. No more will the birds have to search for food. It will be ready to hand for them, and in plenty. There will be no fear nor hatred between man and beast. The lion and the lamb will lie down together. Even they who dwell in hell, will suffer no anguish. The devils themselves will grieve no more. There will be neither deaf, nor dumb, nor blind. Deformed and idiot children will no more be born. All will hear the words of Mercy from the lips of the Lord Buddha. Then will men be freed from the bondage of birth. Therefore, Manimekalai, do I never cease to praise the Lord in any of my births.

“Listen, fair one ! You are going to be confirmed in the True Faith. Many marvels will happen in this city of Kaveripatnam, because of your virtue. Because of your virtue, have you received the Holy Grail. With the elixir of life, will you bless men. Harken then, to this great truth. Of all gods is it true. Of all men, is it true. ‘To relieve hunger is the highest love.’”

CHAPTER XIII

APUTHRA AND THE HOLY GRAIL

The old sage told them also the story of Aputhra. Aputhra had first owned the Holy Grail, so Manimekalai was very interested.

“Once there lived a Brahman in Benares. His name was Apanchika. He taught the Vedas. His wife, Sali, went once to Cape Comorin. On her pilgrimage, a child was born to her. Sali did not want the child. She hid it in a garden, and went on her way.

“Near by, a cow was grazing. She heard the babe’s cries. She came to the place. She found the baby, and licked it with her gentle tongue. She lay down beside it. The warmth of her body flowed over the child; it fell asleep. When it woke again, the cow fed it with her milk. For seven days, she cared for the baby, as for her own calf.

“On the seventh day, a Brahman and his wife passed that way. The Brahman’s name was Bhuthi. He heard the tiny cries. His heart was filled with pity. He took up the child, and gave it to his wife. ‘From this day, this is our child.’ He is the gift of the gods. Let us praise them!’

“ These good people took the child home with them. He was brought up as their child. He learned to be a Brahman. He grew strong and wise.

“ One day, the lad went to the house of a Brahman friend. A sacred rite was to be performed. A cow was to be sacrificed. The beast was tied to a stake. Garlands of red flowers were twined about her horns. The poor animal trembled with fear. Her soft eyes were full of tears. She moaned and lowed most piteously. The heart of the lad was touched at the sight. He made up his mind to set the cow free in the darkness of the night.

“ He hid near by. Night fell. He stole softly to the poor beast. He untied the rope. He led the beast out of the village by a steep, unused path. But he was seen. A crowd ran after him. They caught him. Brahmans and common people alike were furious. They beat the lad Aputhra with sticks. ‘Shame on you!’ they cried, ‘You have stolen a cow. You must be the son of a thief. Or perhaps you are an out-caste and a flesh eater? Tell us the truth. Then we shall drive you from us.’

“The chief priest took the lead in the attack. In the uproar, the cow drove her horns into the stomach of the priest. He died at once. She then charged through the crowd, and escaped into the jungle.

“‘Please stop beating me,’ pleaded the boy. ‘Let me speak. Is not the cow the good friend of man? Does she not graze quietly in untilled pastures? She needs no attention. Yet we live on her rich, sweet milk. How can you hate so useful and noble a beast? How can you, learned Brahmans, wish to kill her?’

“But the Brahmans replied with scorn. ‘Holy writ commands us to sacrifice the cow. You know nothing about the Word of Brahma. In fact, you are an ignorant little brat. Out of your ignorance, you condemn us. Perhaps you are the foster-child of a cow? Perhaps of this very cow? That explains your madness. You are not a Brahmin boy at all.’

“‘It is you who are ignorant,’ retorted Aputhra. ‘Do you not know of Asala, the son of a cow, and of Srungi, son of a deer? Have you forgotten Vringi, son of a tiger, and Kesa-Kambala, son of a fox? Yet these men were admired by the great ones of the

land. They became elders and rishis. You praise these men to the skies. Yet you call me foster-son of a cow, to insult me !'

"Apuṭhra laughed the learned Brahmans to scorn. He faced them proudly, his head erect. But even the good Bhuthi reproved the lad, saying, 'Your words are wicked and shameful. You are not fit to live among us.. Do not enter my door again. From this day, I have no son.'

"Thus did the Brahmans drive Apuṭhra from them. They would not even give him alms. They treated him as a thief. They drove him out of the village with stones.

"Apuṭhra set his face towards Madura in the south. He took shelter in the doorway of the temple. Day by day, he walked the streets, and begged from door to door. When his alms-bowl was full, he called aloud to the poor, and the blind, and the lame. He fed them from his bowl. Often there was none left for himself. So his days passed in begging, his nights in the doorway of the Temple of Learning. His bowl fed him by day. It was his pillow by night.

"One night, the rain fell in torrents. No light could be seen. Apuṭhra was very very tired. He slept heavily. In the middle of

the night, some travellers came to the temple. They tried to wake him. They cried to Aputhra. 'We have heard of your kindness to man and beast. We are hungry. We are weary. We have come a great way. Can you give us some rice?'

"The heart of Aputhra was sore indeed. His bowl was empty. There was no one to beg from in the darkness and rain.

"Then a radiant form appeared at his side. It was the Goddess of the temple. 'Grieve not, Aputhra,' she said. 'Take this Holy Grail from my hands. Even in the midst of famine, it will not lack food. All the poor and needy may fill their hands and their bellies, yet will it not fail.'

"Aputhra took the Holy Grail. He blessed the Goddess of Learning. 'Goddess of the Mind! Lamp of Learning! Ever bright and fair! Goddess of Speech! You who relieve the sorrows of men! I salute your holy feet!'

"Then he fed the weary strangers from the holy vessel. He went through the city, he went throughout the land. Everywhere he saved life by means of the Holy Grail. Everywhere, men blessed him. No living

creature was forgotten. He was like a tree laden with ripe fruit. Bird and insect hovered round him. Man and beast plucked at him.

CHAPTER XIV

REVENGE OF INDRA

“Aputhra travelled the country. His fame ran before him. In heaven itself, his piety gained him much credit. At last, Indra, King of the Devas, grew afraid of Aputhra the Pitiful. ‘The devas will want him for their king soon,’ he complained. ‘I do not wish to lose my throne.’

“So Indra came down to earth. He put on the guise of an aged Brahman. A stout staff upheld his feeble body. He came to Aputhra. ‘I am Indra,’ he mumbled feebly. ‘Ask me a boon. It is yours. I wish to reward your great charity.’

“Aputhra laughed at the words of the ancient Brahman. How could he be Indra? His sides ached with laughing. He jested with the old man. ‘I do not care for your boons, great Indra, King of the Devas! A deva lives on the fruits of his former good-

deeds. He strives not after righteousness. Charity and self-sacrifice are unknown to him. I, Aputhra, am happier than any deva. By the Holy Grail, I relieve the hunger of thousands. The sight of their happy faces is my greatest reward. What more can I desire? Perhaps, O Indra, you want to give me rich food and fine clothes? Perhaps you would present me with a splendid palace? But I care for none of these things. I have blessing enough. Return to Heaven. I crave no boon!

“The laughter of Aputhra displeased Indra. He tried to punish him. He caused heavy rains to fall, so that the land of the Pandyas overflowed with milk and honey. There was no want anywhere. Not a man needed the help of the Holy Grail. Aputhra was forgotten and despised. He was like a king without a kingdom.

“Wretched and lonely he left the rich city of Madura. From village to village he tramped. ‘Come unto me, all ye who hunger and are in want!’ he cried. But none came. Men laughed at him. ‘Who is he?’ they asked. And none remembered the name of Aputhra. His lonely heart was like to burst.

“One day, he met some sailors. They spoke of the land of the Chavakas. It suffered

from a long drought. The people there were dying by thousands. The heart of Aputhra sang with joy once more. 'Take me in your vessel,' he begged of them. 'In this land of plenty, the Holy Grail is a useless toy. I shall go to Chavakas. I can save men from hunger. The Holy Grail will resume its divine task. I shall see happiness and thanksgiving in the faces of men and women once more.'

"So the sailors carried him with them. A storm overtook the vessel. They were forced to turn about, and find shelter in the island of Manipallavam.

"Aputhra went ashore. He wandered about the strange island. At night, the sea became calm. The sails were hoisted, and the ship sailed away. Aputhra was left behind. In the morning he explored the place. But no human being did he find there. His grief knew no bounds. Was the Divine Vessel then fated to remain for ever useless in his hands? For his sins, this punishment had come to him. The Holy Grail was in unworthy hands. It could perform no more good deeds. For his sins, it became a vanity and a burden.

“He resolved to get rid of it. Having blessed it, he dropped the vessel gently into the tank Gomukhi. Sadly he prayed, ‘May the Holy Grail rise to the surface once in each year! May it pass into the hands of a person who has pity ever in his heart! So once more, it may become a life-giver to the poor and needy!’

“From that day, Aputhra ate no more. He tried to starve to death. But I, Aravana, met him there. He told me his sad story, and died. Now he is born again. He lives in the land of the Chavakas.

“In that land too, a certain cow was born. She has hoofs and horns of gold. Even before she calved, she gave milk to all who thirsted. She is the cow that Aputhra saved from the sacrifice. On the birthday of the Lord Buddha, a boy baby was born of the cow. Thus was Aputhra born again. He was adopted by the king of the Chavakas. He grew up a prince. The king died. Aputhra is now king of the Chavakas.”

CHAPTER XV

THE STORY OF ATHIRAI

Manimekalai listened eagerly to all the tale. Aravana said gently, "Now, fair one, it is time for you to go. There is famine in your own country. For many months, we have had no rain. Is Indra displeased with us? Has the King been unjust? Still, what does it matter? Let us not waste time in seeking causes. The people go hungry. They suffer and die. You have but to comfort them. In your hands the Holy Grail shall feed them. Set about your task at once. It is wrong to leave the Grail unused. You will be sinful as the devas. They made a nectar by churning the ocean. They drank of it themselves. Then they hid it away. But you, O Fair One, have no wish to be as they. Go now, to your blessed task."

The three women thanked the old Brahman and left him. Manimekalai put on the robes of a Buddhist nun. With the Sacred Vessel in her hands, she stepped forth into the streets of Kaveripatnam. The gay gallants and the noisy rabble admired her great beauty. "They laughed at her dress. "Poor, foolish child!" they cried. "With

her fair face, she has bewitched the heart of our Prince Udhaya-kūmaran. Yet she dons the ugly, drab clothes of a beggar-woman. What waste of her charms ! What a stupid blunder !”

Manimekalai wanted to receive her first alms from a woman of perfect purity. Where might she find such a woman ? On her way, she met Kayachandika. Poor Kayachandika had a curse upon her. She never ceased to eat, yet was she torn with the cruel pangs of hunger. Manimekalai spoke to the suffering woman, ‘Tell me, O Kayachandika, where can I find a woman of perfect purity ?’

“ Ah ! ” said Kayachandika, “ I know of such a one. Her name is Athirai. She is a lotus-flower among women. Her purity is spotless. I can tell you her story.

“ Her husband was Sadhuvan. He was faithless and false. He wasted his wealth in the dice; he deserted his wife for pleasures. At last, his money was done. He sailed away in a ship. He wanted to see other lands. He was weary of his own city.

“ Well, the ship was caught in a terrible storm. It was wrecked on the shore of the Nakas. Sadhuvan clung to a broken mast, and was saved. But the Nakas were a tribe of wild, naked savages.

“Some of the sailors and merchants were picked up by another ship. They returned to their homes. Athirai heard that her husband was drowned. She ordered the pyre to be set alight. She wished to become a sati, and join her husband.

“They dug a great pit in the burning-ground. Faggots were laid in it. The pyre was lighted. Bravely Athirai entered the flames, and lay down to die. But the flames could not touch her. Not a hair of her head was singed. The garland of flowers on her head was fresh and fragrant. Athirai could not understand the miracle. In despair, she cried out, ‘What a vile wretch am I! Even the flames disdain to touch me!’

“Then a divine voice was heard. ‘Weep not, Athirai the pure! Your husband is not dead. He was cast ashore on the island of the Nakas. He will return to you in the merchant ship Chandra-dhatta. So dry your tears, and go home.’

“Athirai was comforted. She turned joyfully towards her home. There she lived in virtue and in prayer. Daily she asked the Lord Buddha to send her husband safely back. The fame of her purity spread through the land. All chaste and noble women came to do her honour.

“When her husband was cast ashore, he was weak and exhausted. He fell asleep under a tree. There the savages found him. They said to each other, ‘Here is our supper. He looks a tasty morsel.’

“They awoke him. To their surprise, he addressed them in their own language. They treated him with great respect, and led him to the chief priest. He sat in the midst of bones bleaching in the hot sun. Drinking vessels lay scattered round. A savage woman crouched at his side. They were charmed with the speech of the stranger. He told them of his adventures. The priest cried, ‘our guest is weak with want of food and rest. Put meat and strong drink before him. Bring him our loveliest maiden to wife.’

“But Sadhuvan would have none of these things. He cried out on them, ‘Your words are foolish and evil!’

“‘Is the man mad?’ cried the high priest of the Nakas. We offer him our best. He refuses it.’

“Sadhuvan was very angry. ‘Listen O priest!’ he cried. ‘It is wrong to kill, and to excite the mind with strong drink. To be born and to die, are but waking and sleeping. The righteous go to heaven. Those who live in evil go to hell. Your lives are evil.’

“ ‘What is this ?’ asked the priest. ‘You speak new strange words. Explain them to us. How can life leave one body and enter another ?’

“ ‘Listen !’ said Sadhuvan, ‘I shall explain. ‘A living body feels. A dead body does not. Prod it with your spears. It feels no pain. Something has left the body. What ? We call it the Soul. Where then does the soul go ? It must find a home. Just think of this. You have dreams. In dreams your soul can travel anywhere. It leaves the body behind. It has its own life and power. It returns to the body. You then awake. But if the soul does not return ? Then the body dies. The soul has prepared another body. It takes possession of its new home.’

“ ‘When the chief priest heard the words of Sadhuvan, he fell at his feet. ‘Alas !’ he cried, ‘How are we to live without meat and drink ? How can we live until our fate comes to us ?’

“ ‘Sadhuvan smiled softly, ‘Now you speak wisely. Listen to my advice. Do not seek to kill shipwrecked men. Help them. Harm no living thing. Eat only those animals that die of old age.’

“ ‘That is an easy rule,’ answered the priest. ‘Gladly do we obey. We call bless-

ings on you. Here are spices, and rich clothes, and rare jewels. They have come out of the broken ships. They are yours. Accept our offering.'

"Then Sadhuvaṇ took the gifts. Soon after, a ship sailed into the harbour. He went on board. He returned home to his faithful wife and shared his goods with the poor.

"Yes, surely, Athirai is fittest to give you the first alms. I shall lead you to her house."

So Manimekalai and Kayachandika walked together to the house of the chaste Athirai. They were greeted with due respect. Athirai spoke kindly to the young nun. She filled the Grail with rice. 'May hunger cease on earth for evermore!' prayed the wife of Sadhuvaṇ.

Thus Manimekalai went out into the streets of Kaveripatnam to relieve the hunger of the poor.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STORY OF KAYACHANDIKA

Round Manimekalai now swarmed the hungry ones of Kaveripatnam. The Holy Grail had lost none of its virtue. Amongst the hungry, came poor Kayachandika, crying in a voice of grief, "I am cursed with a hunger that never dies ; all day and all night I eat, yet does my hunger never cease. It is the fruit of my karma. Can you, sweet maid, save me ? "

Manimekalai offered her a handful of rice. At once, her hunger was stayed. The gnawing pains were quieted. Kayachandika was at peace at last.

"I come from Kanchanapuram," said the gandharva woman. "It lies among the silvery hills. It is the bright home of the gandharvas. But my evil karma dogged me. My husband and I set our faces southward, as we had a great desire to see the Podya hill. We passed through the jungle. We rested by a cool stream. Its current was swift and strong. As we sat there, a holy sage passed. His name was Vrishikan. His clothes were made from the bark of trees. His hair was matted together. His locks

hung down like thick ropes. He came to bathe in the waters. Before entering, he placed a Jambu fruit on a teak leaf. The fruit was a splendid one, big as the fruit of the palmyrah.

“When the sage dived into the river, my evil karma tempted me. I could not bear to see the fruit lie there. I got up, and walked past the place. With proud and careless step, I crushed the glorious fruit under my feet. The sage finished his bath. He strode ashore. He was hungry. He looked with horror on the quashed fruit. He looked about. He saw my guilt writ plain on my face. ‘Woman,’ he cried, ‘The best of the Jambu trees yields but one such fruit as this in twelve years. He who eats thereof may know no hunger for twelve years more. No other food passes my lips. Now I shall have no food all that time. Because of your evil deed, I curse you. You shall forget the mantram, so that you cannot fly through the air. Until I again taste of the Jambu fruit, twelve years hence, you shall suffer from elephant-fire, and your hunger shall never cease for a moment. Such a curse is deserved by such a trick.’

“Until to-day, fair maid, this curse has lain upon me. No one can understand the

long anguish of these years. But now, by your kindness, the curse is removed. When the sage left me, my husband came to my side. How grieved he was that my folly should cost so dear. He wished to return home to the north. But I was consumed with hunger. And how could I fly home? I had no longer the power to rise in the air. Great was my husband's pity for me. He brought me fruit. He brought me berries. Nothing could stay my awful hunger.

“Then said my husband to me, ‘Jambudwipam, is a mighty city. Many kind and learned men dwell there. Surely they will do all they can for you. Far, far away is this city of Jambu-dwipam. You must go on foot. That will take you many, many days and nights. But it is best to go there. It is your only hope of ease from pain.’

“So I came to this city alone. My husband visits me once a year. He comes during the Festival of Indra. He pities my pain. But what can he do for me? ‘He goes away again.

“But to-day, I found you, O Manimekalai the Fair! With your great pity, have you cured my pain. I salute you. I thank you, Manimekalai. Now shall I go back to my

own fair city in the north. Happy will my husband be to welcome me.

“Have you been to Chakkaravala-kottam? Many holy men live there. They have built a public alms-house. Its doors stand open day and night. The hungry and the needy and the sick seek refuge there. From villages far and near they come. They hope to find help and comfort there. Go to them, fair lady. Succour their distress. The Lord Buddha will smile upon your holy work.”

Then Kayachandika flew away. Manimekalai watched her vanish out of sight. She then turned her steps towards Chakkaravala-kottam. With great modesty, she entered the alms-house. First, she paid her respects to the altar of Sampapathy, then she adored the Oracle of the Pillar. Having thus observed her holy duties, she turned to the crowds about her. From the Holy Grail she fed them. In their hundreds and their thousands did they feed. The noise of their joy was heard from afar. Their blessings rose to Heaven like incense. Like to rain in a thirsty desert, was Manimekalai in the alms-house of Chakkaravala-kottam.

CHAPTER XVII

CHITRAPATHI PLOTS

Now Chitrapathi heard of the wondrous deeds of Manimekalai, her daughter's child. The old lady was sorely grieved. She felt as if an old wound had been seared with a red-hot brand. She had a very hot temper, and now she boiled with rage. She fumed at Madhavi. She stormed at Suthamathi. "I'll soon put an end to all this nonsense!" she cried. "My Manimekalai, so clever, so fair, turned into a begging nun! It is a shame! It is a disgrace! It is madness! I may be an old woman. No one, takes much account of me. But I am not an old fool. There is life in me still. I will teach these young folks a lesson!"

She called together all the dancing girls. To them she made a solemn vow. "Listen!" she said. "Madhavi was foolish to grieve so much for the death of Kovalan. She was still more foolish to enter a monastery. She is one of us, a dancing girl. We are not born of noble parents. We none of us know our grandfathers. Nor do we care about that. We are not the faithful wedded wives of rich merchants. We do not pine when our husbands die. We do not rush to throw our-

selves upon the pyre. We give pleasure to all. From all we receive pleasure. That is our special privilege. We are like lutes. The instrument does not perish at the death of its master. It lives on to delight the living. We are like the bees. They seek honey from the flower. The flower dies. What matter? There are other flowers! So when one of us becomes a nun, men rightly laugh at us. They laugh at Madhavi. She gives herself airs.

“But that is not all. She has even dragged Manimekalai into a holy house. Is it not nonsense? Never was such madness known in all the world. Manimekalai is the fairest of the fair. Sweetest of all singers is Manimekalai. Daintiest of all dancers is she. Besides, the Prince has set his heart upon her. He desires her beauty. He loves her. I am resolved to aid him. Let Manimekalai give up her alms bowl to someone else. She must mount the chariot of the Prince. She must ride through our streets in her triumph and pride. And this will I accomplish. This is my vow. If I fail, then shall I pay penance. I will become an out-cast from you all. I will walk before you, carrying seven bricks upon my head. I will

live apart with my disgrace. Never will I sully your thresholds with my footsteps. I swear it."

Chitrapathi spoke proudly. She had no fear of failure. She was resolute. Naught should withstand her. She set out for the Prince's palace. A few friends went with her. All the time, her brain was busy. What cunning words should she use? When she reached the palace, her scheme was ready.

She crossed the courtyard. The walks were covered with fresh sand. Flowers bloomed on every side. The air was musical "with the murmur of innumerable bees." Proudly she marched into the hall of audience. It was built of splendid marble. Its lofty walls were covered with gold. Its mighty pillars flashed with rare gems and precious stones. Its ceiling was painted with pictures of great beauty, framed in costly pearls.

The noble Prince sat upon a flowery couch. Carved lions crouched beneath their burden. Their eyes gleamed in the changing light. Two lovely slaves stood by his couch. Their fans were of chamara, white as the foam of the sea.

Chitrapathi kissed the feet of the Prince. He mocked her gaily, saying, "How are Madhavi and Manimekalai? Do their gloomy costumes become their fair beauty?"

Chitrapathi answered, "I have come hither in great haste. I wish to serve my noble Prince. I have seen a rare and beautiful bud. It is just opening out, in the promise of all its wonder. It is a bud fit only for a royal bee. It blooms in the alms-house now. May thy garland never fade, O Prince. That is all my message for you. Is it not enough? Now, I pray you, let me go."

Great was the surprise of the Prince. He knew well what was meant by her words. Manimekalai was in the city once more. At the thought of her nearness, his heart burst into flame again. So must a drowning man feel when a raft comes to his hand. He spoke to Chitrapathi, "I searched for my fair one in the grove. A radiant maiden appeared before me. She reminded me of my duty as a Prince. She warned me to forget Manimekalai. Perhaps it was but a vision. Perhaps it was an angel. What should I do? What is your advice, Chitrapathi?"

The old woman smiled. "You are a Prince," she said. "Can a Prince not do everything? Even the gods cannot resist love. Love conquers all. Have you not heard of Indra himself? Did he not love Ahalya? Have you not heard of Agni, God of Fire, and his loves? Remember that Manimekalai is but a dancing girl. She is not of noble caste. It is her duty to amuse and delight. She ought to keep to her own profession. What does *she* want with such high ideas? It is sheer nonsense. Your princely duty is to end such nonsense. Find her and take her. You love Manimekalai. Then she is yours."

The mind of Prince Udhaya-kumaran changed with her words. His heart was hot with passion. It beat like a hammer in his breast. "Bring me my chariot!" he cried. His slaves ran to do his bidding. In a very short time, he was at Chakkaravala-kottam; and he went straight to the alms-house.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PRINCE PURSUES HIS LOVE

There, in the public alms-house, stood the fair Manimekalai. She was radiant as a goddess. But her robes were the robes of a beggar-woman. In her hands, was the Holy Grail. Poor people pushed and jostled against her. All were eagerly feeding from her magic bowl. The Prince was amazed. He mused, "This is the woman whom I love. She has no equal in all the land. She is lovely as the moon. Yet she toils here, in a public alms-house, and feeds the poor. Here she spends her days in penance and fasting. I cannot understand."

He came up to her. "Tell me, I pray you, why did you take the vows? Why do you lead such a life of penance?"

Manimekalai trembled before the Prince. Her heart was soft towards him. Her eyes looked on the ground. "This is my beloved husband," she thought, "This is Raghulan. I must salute him. I must speak." To the Prince, she said gently, "Man's body is doomed to many births. It suffers want, and sickness, and disease. It is full of woe. Wherefore, do I seek to help my fellows.

I try to allay their hunger, and to ease their stricken hearts. My reasons are just and noble. You know that. Do your will with me. But forget not that you are a Prince, and valiant. A Prince like you has no need of the advice of a mere woman, O Udhaya-kumaran."

Manimekalai left his side. She entered the shrine of Sampapathy. There she worshipped. The Prince stayed outside. Would he wait for her? Manimekalai knew the strength of his passion. "Passion is thoughtless and wild," she said to herself. "Passion has no conscience. Perhaps he will enter. He may seize me, and carry me off to his palace. I must make use of one of the mantrams."

So she took on the guise of Kayachandika, and left the shrine. She went back to feed the poor from her bowl.

The Prince could wait no longer. He dashed into the shrine. No sign of Manimekalai could he see. He was puzzled. "Where can she be? Kayachandika has her alms bowl. Does she hide behind the statues?"

He flung himself before the altar. "O Sampapathy!" he cried. "My love hides from me. Her lips are red coral. Her teeth are pearls. Her eyes are beautiful as the carp.

Like bent bows are her brows. Like the moon at the full is the glory of her face. Like a lute in the hands of a master, is the music of her voice. And she is gone from me. Somewhere here she hides. Tell me how to find my love. For I swear by Thy holy feet, O Sampapathy, I will not leave Thy shrine without her. Weeks and months may go by, I shall not stir, without my lovely Manimekalai."

Then the Oracle of the Pillar opened its marble lips. "Prince! Your vow is rash and vain. You will never find your love."

Then the Prince cried, "All is wonderful about my fair one. Wonderful was the vision in the grove. Wonderful is the Holy Grail she carries. Wonderful is the speech of this stone image. Wonderful is my love for her. O Time, Thou alone can explain these wonders to my heart!"

Sadly, he went from the place. Sadly, he left Chakkaravala-kottam. Sadly he mounted his chariot, and rode home to the palace. Night came down into the city. Lovers touched their lutes. The sound pierced the heart of the Prince like an arrow. He moaned, "Can I live another day without Manimekalai?"

CHAPTER XIX

MANIMEKALAI VISITS THE
PRISON-HOUSE

The Prince had for a time ceased his pursuit.* But, for how long? Manimekalai was not at ease. She felt that they would meet again. That meeting would be full of peril for her. To avoid this, she kept her disguise. People saw the form of Kaya-chandika going about the city of Kaveripatnam. She carried the Grail. The sick and needy flocked around her. Nor were they ever sent empty away.

One day, Manimekalai entered the prison-house. Here, evil-doers were punished by the King. The beautiful girl spoke words of comfort to them. She fed them from her bowl.

Now the guards of the prison saw her. They saw the little bowl in her hand. Small it was, yet it could not be emptied. They went to tell the King.

The King was with his Queen in the pleasure garden. Nobles and courtiers stood about them. The air was heavy with the perfume of flowers. The pleasant hum of bees made happy music in their ears.

Peacocks spread their gorgeous tails in the sun. They danced in proud splendour. Among the trees, the bulbuls sang sweetly. Swans sat like Queens on the lotus thrones in the well. In pairs, like royal lovers, they flew up into their nests in the treetops. A cheeky little monkey sat on a swing. It was meant only for the ladies of the court. His shameless antics made the King laugh in rare good humour. Actors and minstrels, flautists and drummers, waited the King's pleasure. Women sat stringing beads. Others painted. Each and all were there to minister to the delight of their ruler.

Tame animals of all kinds were to be found in another part of the royal park. They gambolled about in the utmost freedom. Here were the short-footed mongoose, and the long-eared hare; there were the timid antelope and the wild goat. The King would call to each in turn. They would approach without fear, and perform their quaint little tricks. The Queen was highly amused.

It was early spring time. A cool wind blew gently from the south. The royal couple roamed happily in their pleasance. They climbed the mounds and hillocks to

gaze down upon the waterfalls. They stood on tiptoe on the heights, and looked down fearfully into the harsh chasms. They examined the wells and tanks. In harbours they sat hands clasped like young lovers. The god of Love seemed to hover round them. His blessing brought joy to their hearts.

In the park, was a mantap. It shone with gold and precious stones. All the goldsmiths of Maharashtra, the diamond-cutters from Maghāda, the skilled workmen from Avanti and Yavana had combined to make this work of art. It was a fit product of the Tamil country.

After a time, the King entered the mantap, and sat down upon a throne. Hither came the guards of the prison. They stood humbly afar off, and sang the praises of the King in war.

“Hail! Mavan-Killi! May you live in glory for ever! May our King live for ever, and his foes perish! Hear us, O noble monarch! Once a woman came to our city. She suffered from elephant-fire. Now she is come to our prison-house. In her hand, she bears a small alms bowl. From it, she feeds all the hungry, till they are weary of eating. We thought best to tell you of

the miracle. May our King protect the world and live for ever!"

The King wondered much at the story. "Send for this woman," he said. At once, Manimekalai was brought to him. She saluted loyally, "May the mercy of our valiant King last for ever!"

"Who are you of great penance?" asked the King. "How did you receive this sacred bowl?"

And she answered, "I am a gandharva woman. I can fly through the air. This form is a disguise. The bowl is a sacred vessel. It is divine. A goddess gave it to me. With it, I cure all hunger, I cure elephant-fire. It is a blessing to all men. May the King live for ever! May rains never fail in all your realm!"

"What can I do for you, O fair one?" asked the King. His voice was gentle and kind.

"I pray you, destroy the prison-house. Let it become a Home of Mercy. Let holy men abide in peace within its walls."

"It shall be done," granted the King. At his command, the prisoners were set free. The dungeon of torture was destroyed. The place became a Home of Mercy..

Within its walls, a temple was built to the Wise One. With his own wealth, the King furnished and endowed it. By his order, it was freed from all taxes. Pious monks and holy men lived there. In the world outside, they brought help and comfort to all men. *

CHAPTER XX

THE MURDER OF THE PRINCE

The Prince Udhaya-kumaran was in despair. His parents seemed to have but one interest. They exclaimed at the Miracle of the Bowl. They talked over their pleasant plans for the new Home of Mercy. They spoke of it at table; they discussed it in the audience hall. His ears rang with it. He thought of his duty as a Prince. He thought of the honour of his house. He thought of the warnings of the gods. But the name of Manimekalai was printed in letters of fire on his heart. Her lovely form floated ever in a vision before his eyes. Was that not enough to bear? And now his ears were filled with the sound of her name. He could no longer resist.

He said to himself, "My love is stronger than the will of the gods. It is stronger than princely duty. It is stronger than the desire of my father. Surely then, might is right! My love must be as wonderful as the cause of it! It is not all madness. Manimekalai is wise as she is fair. To love her is no sin. I shall lie at her feet. Her words of truth shall be her words of love. Her looks of wisdom shall flow like cooling balm into my eyes.

I can keep away no longer. To-night, I go to the alms-house. Her weary children have fed from her hand. They lie fast asleep. She is free. She will listen to me. She cannot refuse me. Surely she will understand. She will say, 'His hunger is greater than any in the alms-house.' Only the magic bowl of her love can appease it. Only the divine dew from her eyes may quench my thirst. Her heart is full of pity for the sick and the needy. I shall tell her of my sickness and my need. She shall take pity on me too."

It seemed to the lovesick Prince that his plea could not fail. He was sure of success. He could not wait till night. He said to himself, "I shall go now. I may

not speak with her. But I can watch her. That is "better than nothing." So he called his chariot, and drove to Chakkaravala-kottam.

Now the curse of Kayachandika was at an end. The twelve years had passed. The sage Vrishikan⁴ ate once more of the juicy Jambu fruit. He lifted the curse from Kayachandika. Kanchana waited with joy. But the wife of his bosom did not return to the bright hills of the Gandharvas. "What can have happened?" asked poor Kanchana. "Once more I shall go to Kaveripatnam, and seek her." So he came to the city. In the temples, and the groves, and the streets of the great city, he looked for her. At last he came to the public alms-house in Chakkaravala-kottam. There he thought he saw her. He did not know that it was Manimekalai in disguise. She was hemmed about by all the sick poor of the town. Kanchana wondered much at the sight. For a while, he was struck dumb. "Can Kayachandika then, be favoured of the gods?" he asked himself. He could hold back no longer. He pushed his way through the crowd. He stood at her elbow. "What is this mystery? I have

watched you for some time. It is but a small bowl. You have fed many people, yet it stands full to the brim. Tell me, dear wife, is it a gift of the gods? Did their kind hearts grow sad at the sight of your hunger? And now the curse of the sage is lifted. You no longer need the bowl. Out of the kindness of your heart, you stay here to feed poor strangers. You do not return to your own country. You stay away from your beloved husband."

Just then, Manimekalai saw the Prince. Her heart gave a great bound. "He loves me still. He does not give up hope. I must speak with him. May the good gods put into my mouth the right words! I must cure him of his passion. But I cannot be cruel. He is my husband, my beloved Raghulan."

So she scarcely heard the words of Kanchana at her elbow. She took no notice of his plea. She passed through the crowd. She made her way to the Prince, Udhaya-kumaran. Near them, stood an old hag. At sight of her, Manimekalai knew at once what to say. The wretched old woman was like a message from the gods.

“O Valiant Prince!” she said, “Do you see that poor old woman? Once she was fair as the dawn, and lovely as the lotus bud. To what depths is she now fallen! Is she not an example of our earthly life? Who could love her now? Once a fond lover shook with fever at the sight of her. Her black curls brought him rapture. He made poems to her eyebrows. When she spoke, his hand wandered to the lute. He made sweet music for her sweeter words. He thought the world well lost, to win her love. She filled all his life.

“And now? As beauty fades, so does our earthly passion. As the fair flesh shrinks, so does our mortal love. As the bright eyes grow dim, so does loyalty fade. The life leaves the glossy hair. It withers greyly. So does the joy of life together wane and wither. The pretty poems on coral lips and pearly teeth are turned to vile cruel jests.

“Is it not true of all of us? Such an end lies in store for each one of us. The promise of youth is—decay! We know it well. We see it all about us. But we try to disguise the truth. We drench our bodies with sweet scents, and hope to drive

off the smells of decay. We put fresh flowers in our hair, to hide the greying threads. We cover the shrunken limbs with rich cloths and rare jewels. And we say, "This is real life! Age and decay can be driven away by these beauties."

The Prince Udhaya-kumaran listened earnestly to the words of his beloved Manimekalai. He cared not what she said. Enough that she spoke. Her words flowed over him like a cooling stream. He cared not why she was near him. Enough that she was near. The sweet loveliness of her body seemed to shine through the drab coverings of her nun's garb. His eyes were dim with love. He thought, "Never was I so happy as this! I could stay like this for ever! I do not ask for her love. I am content with her words and her nearness. Yes! I shall come again to-night. I shall hear more of her sweet wisdom."

The Prince and the begging nun stood close together. Poor Kanchana stood afar off. The Prince knew her for Manimekalai. But Kanchana thought her Kayachandika. His heart was filled with grief and rage. He could not hear their words. But he guessed their love. "For long years, I

have loved Kayachandika. For long years Kayachandika has loved me. The sage put his curse on her. Yet year after year, I came to her to show her my love. 'From the far north I came, to the city in the south. But while I mourn for her and wait, she loves a stranger. His princely favour has made her forget me. I leave the silvery hills of my country. I seek her in a vast city. I find her here in a dreary alms-house. I approach her eagerly. Yet she heeds not my words of love. She sees this stranger. She hastens to his side. She leaves me without a single glance. She cannot hide her love. She does not touch him. But I can see her love shine all about them.

"I cannot endure this. I must take revenge. He is surely her lover. He will come again to-night. She will await him with loving arms. So shall I—but with naked sword in hand. And when I shall go from this place, it shall be red with his false blood."

CHAPTER XXI

THE FATE OF KAYACHANDIKA

At midnight, the gandharva came into the alms-house. He crept into a dark corner. He took his sword from its sheath. He kissed the naked blade. He crouched in the shadow, and waited for his rival. Like a snake coiled in its hole, he looked, ready to strike. And his wild eyes glittered like the snake's eyes.

At midnight, too, came the Prince Udhaya-kumaran. Past the sleeping guards he had crept from the palace. Through the streets of the sleeping city he walked softly. Through the gate of Chakkaravala-kottam he came, and he made no sound. At last he stood within the alms-house. Kanchana knew him for the Prince. He smelled the sweet sandal-paste on his godlike body, and it was like blood in the nostrils of a hungry lion. Like the hooded snake, he darted from his hiding-place, and raised his sword-arm to strike. Down came the weapon on the head of the unconscious Prince. He fell dead at the feet of his enemy.

Kanchana did not stop to look at his foe. He dashed toward the shrine of

Sampapathy. He had seen Kayachandika go in there. He wished to carry her off.

But his steps were stayed. A voice cried out to him, 'Forbear, forbear!' It was the voice of the Oracle of the Pillar. "In the shrine of Sampapathy, the Goddess of this city, is no Kayachandika. It is Manimekalai, in her guise. You have come here to find your wife. You will never find her in this life. The curse of elephant-fire was lifted. Kayachandika hungered and was appeased like any other. The curse of the mantram was lifted also. Kayachandika thought of her dear husband. She was eager to see him once more. It was the Festival of Indra. For twelve years her faithful husband had come in the time of the Festival. Kayachandika said to herself. 'This time I shall fly north, not the south. I shall make all speed. I shall arrive there before he leaves.'

"You know that Durga dwells in the Vindhya hills. No deva flies over the crest of the mountain. That would be an insult to Durga. She would punish the offender with death. Kayachandika came to that place. Perhaps she forgot the custom. Perhaps she did not care. She was so eager

to be with her beloved Kanchana once more, she could not wait. She took the risk. And Durga was angry at her boldness. She killed Kayachandika.

“So was Kayachandika punished for her too great love for you. And you too, must be punished for your too great love for her. The Prince Udhaya-kumaran has died according to his fate. Thus was it written in the Books. It is not for his death that you must suffer, but for the rage and hatred that you harboured in your heart.”

The poor gandharva had lain prostrate at the feet of the Oracle while she spoke. Now he raised himself and went from the place. He said sadly, ‘I am ready to die. I am not worthy to live.’

CHAPTER XXII

MANIMEKALAI SEES INTO THE FUTURE

All this while, Manimekalai had been praying at the shrine of the Goddess Sampathy. When Kanchana was gone from the place, she came out. Her eyes fell upon her princely lover lying dead in the alms-house. She had heard some of the words of the

Oracle. Now she understood them. She knew why the Prince lay there. In a rage of grief, she flung off her disguise. 'Woe is me!' she cried. 'I put on this form to save myself from him. But it has not saved *him* from this cruel death. By my own deed, have I killed him!'

She flung herself at his feet. "At your last death, I threw myself into the flames and died with you. I found glory in it. But now I must stifle my grief. I must continue to live. I must act as if your death meant nothing to me. Ah! Woe is me!"

The Oracle spoke again. "Keep back, O maiden!" it called. "For many lives, have you been husband and wife. But now you must seek freedom from birth. Cease your grieving!"

Manimekalai turned to the Deity. "You know the truth. Can you declare it to me? Why did my love die of snake-bite in our last life together? Why has he again in this life, died an untimely death?"

The Oracle answered. "The sage Sadhu-chakra came one day into your garden. He was weary. You and your husband, Raghulan, offered him food. For that good deed, the Holy Grail has in this life been put into

your hands. But when the cook brought the food to the sage, his foot slipped. The rice was scattered on the ground. Raghulan was a royal host. His guests must not be kept waiting. In anger at the delay, he cut off the cook's head. For that bad deed, this sudden death has been meted out to him. We must all bear the effects of our deeds, good or bad, in this life and the lives hereafter."

"Cease now to grieve. The Prince Udhaya-kumaran has met his fate. Go you now to meet yours. And a great fate it is indeed."

As she listened, Manimekalai's grief softened. A great glory filled all her being. The light of eternity shone upon her. Soon she would be free from births. She would become the chief disciple of the Lord Buddha. Throughout the world, she would spread His name, and teach His law.

In the still darkness of the night, Prince Udhaya-kumaran had met his death. In the sunrise of the waking world, Manimekalai saluted her new life.

CHAPTER XXIII

MANIMEKALAI IS SENT TO PRISON

The sun had risen. It was time to worship Sampapathy. People flocked to the shrine. There they found the body of the Prince. The holy men of Chakkaravala-kóttam were called. They spoke with Manimekalai. She told her story.

The wise men feared the king's grief and rage. He might harm them in his passion. They thought out a plan. First, they hid the dead body. Then they sent Manimekalai to a secret place. After that, they went to the palace of the king. They saluted the king on his throne. "Mighty monarch!" they cried, "May your royal umbrella shelter all the world. May your sword and sceptre shine with mercy. May your reign be without evil. May your days know joy!"

The King bowed to their greeting. "Speak on, O wise men!" he commanded them.

Gently they broke the news to the bereaved father. They told him the history of Madhavi and her daughter Manimekalai. They spoke of the love of the Prince. "Manimekalai is not for earthly loves," they said, "The gods saved her from the Prince. He lies dead before the Oracle of the Pillar."

The King was overcome with his grief. He tore his hair. He beat his bosom. He mourned his beloved son. The holy men tried to soothe him.

“Your son is not the only Prince who has loved a holy maid. Sometimes, the gods avenged the insult. Sometimes his own father punished his daring. No fond father wishes to kill his own son. The gods have been kind to you. You are not as Kakanthan. He had to kill *two* sons by his own hand.”

“Speak to me of this brave and noble Kakanthan,” said the King. “Then may I gather strength from his strength.”

“King Kakanthan was regent in this city. He had two sons. The younger son met a Brahmin woman. He fell in love with her. Her name was Marudhi. She sought help of the guardian spirit of the streets. ‘I have stirred desire in the heart of a stranger. But I am no evil woman. I love only my husband. Is there then some evil in my heart? Am I now unfit to tend the sacred fire?’

“And the goddess answered, ‘Yes, Marudhi, you have evil in your heart. You say you love only your husband. That is not

true. You love gossip and slander. You love jesting and dancing. These reign in your heart, as well as your husband. Give up these false gods. Love none, love nothing but your husband. Then will no stranger dare to love you. It is the King's duty to punish evil-doers. Perhaps he will not punish his own son. Then, within seven days, I shall avenge you.'

"But the King heard of his son's conduct. The youth fell by his father's sword.

"Perhaps, too, you have heard of Visakai, O Killi! She loved her cousin Dharmadhattan. People began to speak ill of them. They put shame on the chaste Visakai. She came to the Oracle of the Pillar. Many citizens stood about her. The Oracle said, 'Visakai is innocent as a new born babe. She is chaste enough to command rain.' Then did all the friends of Visakai rejoice. Her enemies asked her pardon.

"In the midst of a large crowd, the pure maiden went from the shrine. In the streets, the elder son of Kakanthan saw her. At once, he loved her. He wore a garland of flowers on his brow. He thought, 'I shall throw this wreath to the maiden. Then she will look up at me. I shall see her lovely eyes.' He raised his hand to the

garland. It would not come off. The maiden passed on.

"This story came to the ears of King Kakanthan. He slew his elder son."

"Speak on, wise men," begged King Killi. "I have not yet found strength to be like Kakanthan. What became of the pure maid Visakai?"

"Visakai was not quite happy. She said, 'The people believed the Oracle. But I said the same thing. Yet they did not believe me. That hurts me. It spoils my love. I shall not wed with my dear cousin in this life. But I shall gladly meet him in the next.'

"So Visakai went into a convent. Dharma-dhattan swore to marry none but his cousin. He left Kaveripatnam. He went to Madura. There he grew very wealthy. He was now sixty years of age. One day, a Brahman said to him. 'Why do you not marry? You are very rich. To whom will you leave all your wealth? You have neither wife nor child. How then, can you hope to enter Heaven?'

"Dharma-dhattan thought deeply over the Brahman's words. He left Madura. He came to his native city. He brought all his wealth with him.

"Visakai was told of his coming. She left her convent. She came to meet her lover. 'You have kept your vow, O Dharma-dhattan,' she said. 'You vowed to wed none but me. Let me also keep *my* vow. We are too old for love. Love can live best in young bodies. In our next life, we shall surely meet, and wed.'

"Then Dharma-dhattan told her of the Brahman. Visakai made answer, 'No son may open the gates of heaven for his father. The only key to heaven is the good life. Help others. Share your great wealth. This city is full of the sick and needy. Love them, and serve them.'

"Together, they went about the city. Their lives were spent in service. Many asked help from them. None were sent empty away. Their good deeds were as many as the stars."

Then King Killi rose from his throne. "That indeed is a beautiful tale. I thank you for it. Now I have the strength to do my duty. Go in peace. I am a Chola King. To the Cholas, justice is the greatest virtue. Nothing must stand in the way of justice. It is good that my unjust son should die. Bring out his body. Burn it. And bring the daughter of the dancing woman to me. My guards shall look after her."

And so it was done.

CHAPTER XXIV

MANIMEKALAI IS SET FREE

In the palace, there was an old woman, called Vasanthavai. She was wise and gentle. The bitterest sorrow was softened by the gentle tones of Vasanthavai. The direst grief became more bearable when Vasanthavai was near. So the King sent for her. "Go to your royal mistress, O Vasanthavai. Speak to her of Udhaya-kumaran. Tell her of his death. Tell her also of my commands. Soothe her grief. Strengthen her pride."

So Vasanthavai came before the Queen. The Queen wept for her beloved son. Her women wept with her. But Vasanthavai stood dry-eyed. "What would you, O Queen? Would you have him die in his bed? You would think that a shameful death. You would not mourn him. The only glorious death is on the field of battle. Many Kings have fought well in the wars. They have held back the enemy. They have kept peace in their own land. Yet they live to be old. They die of old age in their beds. The prayers of Brahmans and their rites must open the gates of the heroes

heaven for them. Yet they have lived heroes' lives.

"Your son is no hero. Grieve not for him. The King is just. Rejoice then, in all his acts."

The Queen saw the truth of her words. She checked her sobs. She stifled her sighs. But in her heart, she hated Manimekalai. She said to herself, "But for this girl, my dear son would still live. My fond eyes should still adore him." She planned to take revenge on Manimekalai.

One day, she said to the King, "You have done well. Our son was not fit to rule. He is better dead. He deserved his fate. I wept for him. But I see now that you were right. Yet why do you keep the innocent maiden? She has done no harm. Her life is spent in good works. The gods have chosen her from among all women. You prevent her from doing the will of the gods. You are calling their wrath upon you. Set her free, I pray you."

"How wise and beautiful is my Queen!" cried the King. "I could not hope for such nobility. Wise men say, 'The good and the righteous are the children of Kings. Let them deny the rest.' It was hard for me to denounce

Udhaya-kumaran. He was my son. But you were his mother. For him you had travailed. It was much more difficult for you to thrust him out of your heart. I can deny you nothing. Have your way with the girl. I set her free. What will you do then?"

"Let her decide," answered the Queen. "She may stay with me in the palace. Perhaps she will not like that. She may wish to take up her begging bowl once again."

So the King gave up Manimekalai to the Queen. She dwelt in the Queen's apartments. The foolish mother sought to bring harm to the pure maiden. She put poison into her food. She waited to see madness cloud the nun's brain. But Manimekalai knew the past and the future. The drugs could not harm her.

The Queen thought of another plan. There was a foolish young man of the court. The Queen led him aside. She offered him much money. "Insult the maiden before all my women," she bade him. "Shame her before the court." The young man was greedy for money. "That is easy sport," he thought. But Manimekalai guessed the plan. She took on the form of a man. The youth sought her out. He could not find Manimekalai. Instead, he found a man. He was afraid. He ran away.

Two plans had failed. But the Queen's hate only grew in strength. She thought out a third plan. She pretended that Manimekalai was too ill to eat. She shut her up in a dark cell. She hoped that her enemy would starve to death. But Manimekalai had power over hunger and thirst. She felt no lack of food. The roses still bloomed in her cheeks. The strength did not leave her limbs.

Then the Queen grew afraid. "Truly, the gods must have this maiden in their care. I offend the gods. I must ask forgiveness." So she came to Manimekalai, and bowed low before her. "I loved my son. Because of you, he died. I sought to harm you. Now I see my error. Will you forgive me?"

Manimekalai spoke gently to the sorrowing Queen. "Your son means more to me than he does to you. In our last life, we were man and wife. We loved each other dearly. He died. Life held no joy for me without him. I mounted his funeral pyre. Where were you, then? Did you too, weep for him? Your love is a foolish thing. Do you mourn his godlike body? Yet you sent it to the burning ground. Do you mourn his soul? Why? At each death, the soul takes a new form. It is hard to guess what

form. The evil and the good he has done in this life decide that. Do you love his life? Then you should love all life. You should not seek to harm mine. It was his fate to die thus, so suddenly. In our last life, he killed a cook in his royal anger. He slew in haste. So must he himself die a sudden death."

The Queen gazed on Manimekalai with awe. "You speak with an air of wisdom, fair maid. How come, you to know all this?"

Then Manimekalai told the Queen all her history. "I knew you put drugs in my food. They could not harm me. I knew you sent the foolish youth to insult me. But I took on the form of a man. I knew you sought to starve me to death. But I have power over hunger and thirst. Nor did I cease to sorrow for your sorrow. I prayed for you. You are the mother of my beloved. I wished to save you from your own evil heart. I could have escaped from the palace. I can fly through the air. But I stayed on, for your sake. Listen to me, O Queen. There are five deadly sins. They bring much suffering in their train. Try to avoid them. Be wise. Do not let anger enter your heart. Serve your fellow crea-

tures. That is the only way to live. In service to others, one learns to live. A kind heart and a humble spirit are the greatest good. Knowledge and power are fine things too. But they can do nothing by themselves."

Thus spoke Manimekalai to the Queen. Her wise words were as a cooling stream. They soothed the raging sorrow of the mother of Udhaya-Kumaran. Her gentle voice was like balm to her wounded pride. The Queen now saw clearly. She understood the law of life. She bowed to the will of the gods. She fell down before Manimekalai. She tried to kiss her feet. But the gentle maid raised her up. "You are the mother of my husband. You are also the wife of a great King. It is not meet that you should bow before me. Let me bow before you." So did Manimekalai salute the Queen.

Now everywhere in the city of Kaveripatnam men spoke of the murder of the Prince Udhaya-kumaran. Chitrapathi heard the grave news. She was sore afraid. She said to herself, "It is all my fault. I told him where to find Manimekalai. I sent him to his doom." So she came to the Queen.

She fell down at her feet, "I am Chitrapathi," she said. "I am a lonely old woman. Life has lost all its savour for me. The gods delight to deny my wishes. I was a dancer. I had a daughter Madhavi. She too was a dancer. She wept for her lover, and entered a monastery. She was no good to me. I consoled myself with her child, Manimekalai. I trained her for our life. She too has deserted me. The gods have avenged her. The Prince your son is dead. But Manimekalai remains your prisoner. Manimekala-devi may be angry. She may seek to hurt you, and all your kingdom. Do not forget the curse. Let not the festival of Indra be neglected. For then the sea will rise, and drown all the city. This is the time of the festival. None must bear hatred in his heart. Yet you harbour hatred against my grand-daughter. Set her free, I beg you. Observe the rites. Let not the curse fall upon our beloved fair city."

"Manimekalai is already free," answered the Queen.

"Where is she?" asked the old woman eagerly. "Can you send her to my house?"

"Manimekalai is no longer a dancing girl. She has no place in your house, O Chitrapathi. She belongs to the gods now."

Poor Chitrapathi was very sad: She rose to go. She took her humble leave of the Queen. Suddenly Madhavi and Suthamathi came into the presence. The sage Aravana was with them. His piety and wisdom were known to all. The Queen and all her court rose to pay him homage. The old man gave them all his blessing. "May you become wise!" The Queen made him sit beside her. She paid him all honour and respect.

"Our royal house is indeed honoured by your presence," she said. "May your aged body last for many years yet. Your goodness and wisdom are too precious to lose."

The holy man made answer. "All things have an end, O Queen. I am like the setting sun. Some day I must sink down out of sight."

"Then shall our world be the darker for it," responded the Queen.

The sage spoke gravely and gently to them all. ~~They listened with awe and reverence.~~ He told them many wise and true things.

At last he ~~rose to go.~~ He turned to Manimekalai. "Some day, my daughter, I shall explain the laws of Buddha to you.

But first you must give ear to the doctrines of all the other religions."

Manimekalai saluted him. Then she turned to the Queen and to those about her. "Aravana has come amongst you. He has spoken wisely and well. Forget not his words. Guard the pearls of his wisdom as you guard your stores of wealth. And now, I must leave you. I go from this city. I cannot tarry here, for men would say of me, 'There goes the begging nun. But for her, our beloved Prince would still be with us.' They would spurn my humble help. But be of good cheer, and fear nothing. For no one is able to harm me."

CHAPTER XXV

MANIMEKALAI GOES TO THE CHAVAKAS

It was the hour of sunset. All the heat of the sun was gathered into one great ball of molten gold. Its radiance touched the walls, it filled all the rooms of the palace. Even the drab robes of the begging nun seemed to be covered with gold dust. Manimekalai took a fond farewell of her new friend the Queen. She embraced her mother

and Suthamathi. Then she made her way through the streets to the alms-house. In the shrine of Sampapathy she knelt down to pray. Once more she worshipped before the Oracle of the Pillar. She took leave of the holy men of Chakkaravala-kottam. They had been her good friends. They were glad now to see her free. They blessed her, and wished her every good. Then she rose in the air. Through the sunset glow, she flew. By the light of the stars, she made her way across the seas. At last she came to rest. She was in the Land of the Chavakas. She walked in a pleasant grove. The turrets of a fine city were seen through the trees. Resting under the shade of a banyan tree, Manimekalai saw a holy man. She came up to him. She saluted. "What is the name of this fair city, O sage?" she asked him. "And who is its King?"

The sage answered her kindly. "It is the city of Nagapuram, O fair maid! The name of the King is Punnya-rajan. He is the son of Bhumi-chandran. All men praise and bless the name of Punnya-rajan. It is a name of power. He is great and he is good. He is beloved of the gods. Our land is like heaven. Once sickness and hunger

were the common lot. Men died in their thousands. There seemed to be no relief from our pain. Then Punnya-raján was born. From that day, the land grows rich in fruits. The rivers overflow their banks. Steady rains fall. Sickness is unknown in the land. Great and good is our King. Wise and just is he. He holds his sceptre aright.'

Even as they spoke, the King appeared in the grove. His lovely Queen was with him. His court was in attendance. They saluted the sage. "May your days be yet long with us, O Dharma-savakan!" they said. The old sage blessed them. He spoke of Buddha and His laws. And Manimekalai stood by. She listened eagerly to the wise words of the old man. The King noticed her. He thanked Dharma-savakan for his words of wisdom and said, "Who is this strange maid? Never have I seen a face or form so lovely! Yet she wears the robes of a beggar. She carries in her hand a begging bowl. And she gathers up your words as if they were indeed pearls of price! Is she of this world, or do I behold some angelic vision?"

An officer of the court stood by. He too, had been watching the strange maiden. Now he stepped forward. He craved the

ear of the King. "Sire, I have just returned from a visit to the great city of Kaveripatnam. There I met the holy sage Aravana. He spoke to me of a wonderful maiden. Her name was Manimekalai. She was the daughter of a dancing woman. Both women had embraced the holy life. This Manimekalai was a new light to the world. There was none like her in the land. She was peerless in beauty. She was peerless in spirit. The Lord Buddha had chosen her for his chief disciple. This is she. Manimekalai the fair and the pure comes to our city. Great honour has been done to us."

Manimekalai then came forward. She spoke to the King. "All men know you as Punnya-rajan. They praise and bless your name. I know you as Aputhra. And I also praise and bless your name. In my hands I hold the magic bowl of Aputhra. Have you forgotten? It would seem so. You are a King now. You do not remember your last birth. Do you wish to know it? Come to the island of Manipallavam. Worship at the Holy Seat of the Lotus. Many things will then be revealed. But surely in this great city of Nagapuram, you may learn of this present birth."

She would say no more. She could not stay longer in the Land of the Chavakas. Her work in that place was done. Once more she rose in the air. They watched her out of sight. They wondered much at her strange words.

"Let us go back to the city," said the King. "I cannot rest here. I must find the meaning of her riddle. Maybe, my mother will help me."

So they took their leave of the sage Dharma-savakan. They returned in haste to Nagapuram. The King sought to speak with his mother, the Queen Amara-sundari.

"What is your wish, my dear son?" she asked of him. Then he told her of his visit to the grove. "There I met a holy maid. She called me Aputhra. She said strange words. Is there some mystery round my birth? Please tell me all."

The old Queen answered him gently. "My son, yours was a strange birth. In our land, there dwelt a holy man. His name was Munmukha. In his *ashrama*, a cow was born. She had golden hoofs, and golden horns. Her udders were heavy with rich milk. Yet she had no calf. Sick men came to her, and were cured by her milk. On the birthday of the Wise

One, a child was born of this cow. You were that child. On that day, the sky was clear and the sun shone. Yet drops of holy water, and pure-white blossoms fell from the heavens. It was a good omen.

"My dear husband and I had no children. We adopted you. You were brought up in the palace. You were called our son. You were taught all the duties of a Prince of a noble house. Bhumi-chandran died. You were fit to rule in his place. You became King of all the Chavakas.

"Only good has come of it all. Since the day of your birth, all things prosper in the land. But I do not need to speak of that. On all sides, in rich homes, and in poor hovels, you hear your name blessed. No child was born of our love. Yet you brought us every happiness."

"I am glad of that," replied the King, and he kissed her hand fondly. "But it is finished. The thrones of earthly kings are vain things. Only one thing lasts. That is the Throne of God. Nothing matters but that. I have spoken with the sage Dharma-savakan. I have seen the Wise Maid. I must give up this life of pomp and show. I must return to my past life of penance and service. My soul can find no peace in this life now."

The Queen begged him to stay. "Look all about 'you!'" she cried. "Are there not smiling happy faces everywhere? Do you find such sturdy little children in any other city? Who can take your place? The father leaves his home. Do his wife and children continue to laugh and frolic? No, no! Punnya-raján. do not be so rash!"

She called the chief minister. His name was Jana-mithran. His counsels had always been wise. She told him of the King's wish. "What does Jana-mithran advise?" she asked.

Jana-mithran pleaded with the King. "I am no sage. O my King! I cannot see the past, nor the future. I am but a man of the world. I see only the present. But I try to read the signs aright. You were not born of a kingly line. But a great sage gave you to a King. He must have known what was best. He could see into the past and into the future. He could not make a mistake. You wish to leave us now. Are you not acting against the will of the holy Munmukha? Ponder it well, O King!

"Once, there was a great famine in the land. The earth was dry, the river beds were dry. The sky itself seemed dry. Trees withered and bore no fruit. Birds and

beasts died of thirst and hunger. The people were famished. Parents' heard the cries of their little ones. There was not enough food for the whole family. They fought among themselves for the little bit of rice. There was no help in all the land. Our plight was hopeless. Merchants tried to bring us food. Their caravans got lost in the desert. Their ships were wrecked at sea.

"Then you were born. From that day, all went well with us. Rain fell in its seasons, the trees blossomed and bore fruit. The birds and beasts roamed once more in our groves, and reared their young. You were like rain in a scorching desert. The land seemed to flow with milk and honey. No one knows the name of hunger. Sickness is a strange thing in our fair land. And now you speak of leaving us. Does a mother willingly desert her child? Surely then, the blessing of the gods will be taken from us. A curse, worse even than the last, will fall on our innocent heads. You seek the salvation of your own soul. Have you thought that you sacrifice thousands of helpless victims? You speak of the Lord Buddha. Would He wish you to go away? He had no thought for His own life. He

lived only for others. Look well into your own heart, O my King. Look into it as into a clear mirror. Do you see there a noble desire? Or do you see a dark selfish wish?"

Thus spoke the wise Jana-mithran. And the King was moved by his words. Yet he could not give up his desire altogether. "My heart yearns to go to Manipallavam. The Wise Maid said that there I should see the Truth. I must go. My kingdom cannot come to harm in one month. You shall take care of it for me. I will know the truth at the Holy Seat of the Lotus. And I will return. I do not cease to be the King of the Chavakas."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE VISIT TO MANIPALLAVAM

Manimekalai flew straight to the island of Manipallavam. There she worshipped at the Holy Seat, and pondered over many things. And there she awaited the coming of the King Punnya-rajan. When his ship sailed into the harbour, she went to meet him. She made him welcome, and led him to the Holy Seat.

At once, he saw his past life, clearly. It was as if cobwebs were brushed from a mirror. Nothing was hidden from him now. Once again, he gave praise to Chintadevi. To her he owed the gift of the Grail.

Together he and the Wise Maid sat by the tank of Gomukhi. As they rested and talked, Dwipa-Thilaka came to them. She saluted the newcomer. She called him Aputhra. "Know you those bones?" she asked. "Your ship sailed away without you. The merchants found out their mistake. They returned for you. They found you dead. For you starved yourself to death. Do you remember that? You wished to die. But did you wish their deaths also? Yonder on the shore, the sea has made a great mound of sand. It is the mausoleum of the body of Aputhra. Did these men die for you, or did you cause their deaths? You are a King in this life. Were you a murderer in the last?"

Dwipa-Thilaka turned to Manimekalai. "The curse of Manimekala-devi has fallen at last on the city of Kaveripatnam. The King did not pay due respect to the Festival of Indra. The sea rose in wrath, and covered all the land. The King himself is saved. The sage Aravana, your mother and Sutha-

mathi have been carried safely to Vanji. Manimekala-devi asked me to tell you this."

The guardian spirit of the Holy Seat had given her message. Now she left them. The King and Manimekalai talked long together. She showed him all the island. The King wished to stay in that holy place. But Manimekalai urged him to return to the Chavakas. "Now you know all your past. You know how to act. After this, you will be more merciful, more just. You are a great King. Henceforth, your name will be more glorious than ever."

So the King kept his promise to his people. He went back to his own land. There he ruled wisely and well. And his life was long.

Manimekalai flew at once to Vanji. She was eager to embrace her mother Madhavi. Aravana would talk to her of the Lord Buddha and his laws. And there too, was the Temple to the Goddess of Chastity, Kannaki, the wife of Kovalan. Manimekalai wished much to look on the image of the wife of her father.

CHAPTER XXVII

MANIMEKALAI MEETS HER FRIENDS

The temple of the Goddess of Chastity stood on the plain outside the city of Vanji. Manimekalai entered, and bowed before the altar. She gazed at the holy image, and begged her to speak. "Tell me, O chaste Kannaki. A chaste wife commits sati, on the death of her beloved husband. Or she spends the rest of her life in fasting and prayer. Why did you burn down the whole city of Madura?"

"Ah, my daughter," answered the voice of Kannaki, "That was an evil act. I shall pay for that in time to come. Just now, Kovalan and I are with the devas. We reap the fruits of our former good deeds. But the Wheel turns. We do not always remain with the devas. And my punishment shall be great. For my wrong-doing was great. I ought to have known better. For Madurapathy told me the cause of the cruel death of Kovalan. Yet still my wrath burned in my mind and my body. I was driven to my terrible revenge.

"In his last life, Kovalan was a trader. We lived in Singapuram. There was war between our city and Kapilai. In that city

dwelt a merchant. He was the great rival of Kovalan. He and his wife tried to enter our town secretly. They wished only to sell their goods. But Kovalan saw his chance. He went to the King. He denounced his rival in trade, as a spy. The innocent man was seized by the guards, and put to death. And his wife cursed us. In his last life, Kovalan caused an unjust death. So in this life, he has paid for it with his own.

“But at the end, all will be well with us. We have served Buddha faithfully. Some day, He will rise again. Once more we shall hear the Truth from His Divine lips. And we shall attain *Nirvana*.

“And you, Manimekalai, will also hear the Truth, and be saved. But first, you must listen to all the other doctrines. You must examine them closely. You must weigh each on its merits. And in each you will find a flaw. The Law of Buddha alone will be perfect. His Law alone will stand the test. Aravana will be your teacher. You will be his beloved pupil. But the high priests of the other sects will refuse to speak with a woman. You must assume the form of a man. They will speak freely then.”

The image was silent. Manimekalai kissed the feet of stone, and took the form of a holy man. In this guise she passed through the gates of the city.

In those days, Vanji was one of the foremost cities of India. All the wise men of the world flocked to Vanji. Many schools of thought flourished side by side. At each in turn, Manimekalai listened respectfully. But none satisfied. It was time to search for her friends.

All through the city, Manimekalai sought them. And while she wandered, she saw all its beauties. A deep wide moat ran round the foot of its walls. Its surface was gay with flowers. The bees gathered their best honey there. Into the moat, the city drains were emptied. The lords and ladies put rare spices and pastes into their baths. These scents mingled with the fresh fragrance of the flowers. The very alligators in the moat had a pleasant odour. From the edge of the moat, stretched a low jungle where cattle grazed. And on the walls of the fort stood the terrible engines of war. The high gateway was gay with flags and banners. The eyes of Manimekalai grew round at the sight. "Surely this is a hill of silver, and they have tunnelled a way through!"

The guards lived near by, ready to defend their city at a moment's notice. Beyond their barracks, stretched the streets and squares of the beautiful city. The bazaars were crowded with sellers and buyers. Manimekalai wandered in the pleasant groves, where even devas came to rest. She gazed at the fine mansions and glittering palaces of Brahmans and Princes.

In the very centre of the city was the temple of Buddha. There she found a monk. He spoke to her kindly. "I am Masathuvan. Kovalan was my son. Many generations ago, my ancestor came to this city. He heard of the teaching of Buddha. He gave away all his wealth. He built this stately temple. Kovalan died. I left Kaveripatnam. I came here. And here I remain. Now tell me your story."

"I seek the holy Aravana," replied Manimekalai. "I have heard the other sects. I am ready now to hear the Law of Buddha."

"Aravana is gone to Kanchi," said Masathuvan. "Your mother and Suthamathi are there with him. The golden city of Kanchi suffers sorely. No rain falls. Many people die. No one can give alms. You and your Holy Grail are much needed

there. Lose no time, my daughter. You will be welcome as the rain in the desert."

So northward towards Kanchi, flew Manimekalai. Once it had been a great city, but it was a poor place now. Manimekalai circled round it once, then came to earth near the Buddhist temple. She was seen by an officer of the court. He ran at once to the King, crying, "The Holy Maid of Kaveripatnam is among us. She bears in her hands the Holy Grail. Our troubles are at an end. She brings peace and plenty in our midst."

The King and all his court were glad. They made haste to find the maiden. The King said to her, "We know you, O Holy Maid. For some reason our land suffers from lack of rain. Perhaps the fault is mine. Perhaps I am not a good ruler. But the Oracle of the Pillar cheered me. The deity warned me of your coming. And in your honour, I have built a tank in a lovely garden. It looks like the tank of Gomukhi in the gardens of Manipallavam." He took Manimekalai to see the place. She was well pleased. She caused a Holy Seat to be placed there. And temples were built for Manimekala-devi and Dwipa-Thilaka. The magic bowl was laid reverently on the Holy Seat. And the people of the town fed therefrom.

Birds and beasts, as well as men and women, ate from it, and were filled. Then the gates of heaven were opened, and the blessed rain fell in torrents. The fields again were covered with green grass, the lean cattle grew fat; trees blossomed and bore fruit, and laughter was heard once more in the streets.

Aravana, Madhavi and Suthamathi came to the grove of Manipallavam. Manimekalai ran to meet them. She fell at the feet of the sage. She tended his needs. She sought his blessing. And Aravana blessed the maiden, saying, "May all the good you have done, help you in your need!"

Then each told of his and her adventures. They rejoiced to be together again.

"The time is ripe, O Fair One," said the old man. "I can speak freely now of the law and the life of the Lord Buddha."

Manimekalai listened with reverence. Joy flowed through all her being. A great light lit up her spirit. In love and service her days were spent, and her nights in earnest prayer.

And so did she live the perfect life.

THE END

