

THE LORD COMES

*A novel on the life
of Buddha by*

Robert Payne

H E I N E M A N N

Buddha—that figure of beauty and mystery, which legend passes down to us over a quarter of a century of centuries—comes vividly to life in these pages. To write such a life in fictional form is an immensely ambitious project, and Robert Payne's triumph is commensurately great. The life of Gautama Buddha is seen through the eyes of his beloved disciple and cousin, Ananda. First we see the young Prince in his garden and palaces at the foot of the Nepalese hills. The colours are clear and bright. There are the hunters, the dancers, the bathers, the talk about love and life. Then there is the sombre sojourn in the forest, and the starvation. Then to Benares, the wandering, the teaching, the temptation, the triumph. It is indeed an immortal story—one of the world's greatest stories. And Robert Payne tells it in such a way that it will be as beautiful to the reader who knows nothing of the subject, as to the scholar.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In his youth the Lord Gautama Buddha was known as Siddhartha, his full title being Prince Siddhartha Kumar of the Kshatriyas, of the province of Kapilavastu. In later years he was known as the Tathagata, or Enlightened One, and in the places where he is still worshipped he is known by still more exalted titles. For himself, according to some of the early Pali texts, he seems to have preferred to be known as "the brother of man".

The incidents in this story are largely taken from the early texts. The debate between Siddhartha and his cousin Ananda on the nature of love is based on these sources. For the rest it is only necessary to add that the account follows the frescoes of the caves of Ajanta, the Dhammapada and the Abhinishkramana Sutra, and owes more than I can say to conversations with Chinese Buddhist scholars, and with Jawaharlal Nehru, who seemed of all men the closest in spirit to the prince depicted in these pages.

FOR
MARTHA
with love

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PART ONE

The Education of the Prince

I

The Snows of the Himalayas

I ANANDA, KNOWN AS THE LOVER, THE cousin of the Lord, have written this that men may know how the Lord came into the world garlanded with flowers and holding in his hands the peace of the high mountains, so that these things may not be forgotten in the old age that draws near. Often at night the monks and the acolytes have come to my cell, demanding that I should tell them this or that detail of his life, for they say: You have known him longer than others and your memory is failing and soon you will die, and then how shall we know what manner of man he was? Sometimes, when I heard them speaking in this way, I answered in the manner of the Lord himself, who often spoke in parables, and I would take a new blade of green grass or a handful of snow or a young animal new-born, a squirrel or a young panther, and I would hold it up to them, saying nothing, for they would understand by my silence whatever I intended them to know. And secretly I would tell myself: He was born in the morning freshness of the world.

There are days when I do not sleep, when the memory of the Lord comes to me and disturbs me with its beauty; and seeing him in glory, there is such a pain of sweetness in my heart that I can hardly breathe. I see him, as I saw him first, a young man in the pride of life, naked and garlanded, walking through the forest trees, or else I see him surrounded by nautch-girls, his lips painted with red wax and with green malachite on his eyelids, wearing only a skirt of some coloured silk material, or else I see him when he had

performed the renunciation, in those days when he was gaunt and beggared and the ribs cut through his skin like sharp knives, but more than ever I see him as he was in old age, wearing the yellow robe, an old man magnificent in wrath, a god walking among men, calm and confident, yet lost in dreams of another earth where there is no suffering. And sometimes as I write, I think I hear his voice speaking to me, and he seems to be here in the room beside me, though it is only a few years since I saw his body burning. How shall I speak of him, who was a man like us and unafraid? How shall I speak of the torments which disturbed his spirit? How shall I speak of his wrath, his silences, the sweetness of his smiles? Shall I speak of his hands which were stronger than iron and of his head which shone like bronze? Sometimes I have only to lift my eyes to see him standing motionless in the corner of my cell: he says nothing: his eyes are closed: his hands fall by his side: and at such moments, looking at the calmness of that face and the mystery of his smile, I know that he is waiting for the end of the world.

I am old, my pen falters in my hand, I can no longer see as well as I could. Perhaps later I shall dictate to two or three of the acolytes, and they may compare the words and see that they are well-preserved; and yet now, with the pen in my hand and the Lord standing motionless in the corner of my cell, I know that the Lord of the Tusita heaven will preserve me to the end.

It is late now. The candle burns on the stone bench, a great *neem* tree plays against the window, and all is whiteness outside. The moon has risen over the flowers, and the small court-yard is deserted except for the young goatherd playing on his flute. I do not know why he is there. He has come perhaps to remind me of the Lord, so that everywhere I turn I shall see evidence of the Lord's beauty; and indeed

the young goatherd looks surprisingly like Siddhartha when he was young, and I think of those days when my limbs moved more easily than they do now, when we wandered under the blue Himalayas in the forests of satin trees, speaking to one another all day and all night, till at last the conches blew from the palace walls and the farmers called to us through the night; and still we crouched in the long grass hugging our loneliness, till dawn came and we returned gravely to the palace.

The goatherd kneels on the rock and sings to the moon. So on those bare naked rocks we used to sing, he with his flute and I with my reed-pipe, looking down on the valleys of flowering sephali trees. In those days the sun shone higher in the skies than it does now, the leaves were greener, water more silver; there was great abundance of all things, and no one thirsted or hungered. The world has changed since then. But while the goatherd stands and dances under the moon, I remember how we would dance arm in arm, and sing till all the starlings flung themselves out of their nests, and now that the goatherd has disappeared in the shadows, I remember one night when there was no moon. It was midsummer. We had gone into the forest to seek shelter. The Lord Siddhartha was seventeen, and I perhaps four years younger. He wore a kilt of silks and a short tunic of blue stuff, but it was warm and he threw the tunic over his shoulder. It was dark and I could not see him. I heard the wild boars calling and roaring, the tumult of a battle-royal among the tigers and from somewhere there came the grunting of animals sharpening their tusks. Siddhartha had gone a little way in front. I called to him. There was no answer. It was dark—dark. I kept on calling to him. I knew he was somewhere near. I thought I could hear him breathing. I shouted with all the power of my lungs, but there was no answer—only the faint, faint echo of a wolf's howl. And I must have been exhausted with shouting, for I

remember I woke up and saw the sky covered with thick black clouds like foxes' tails, and the rain was pattering down on the trees, thick and wet, and the ants were crawling over me and I was soaked to the skin. I shouted to him again. I was shivering with fear and weeping like a young girl who is thrown on a bed for the first time. I had no sandals, my feet were bruised, the rain came down, I swear I heard the forest tigers. It grew colder—the rain was like ice—I imagined the animals coming closer, I heard them padding softly in the undergrowth, I heard the screams of branches in the wind and the desultory patter of the rain among the ferns and the louder patter of rain on leaves. I thought I could see so many things—the red eyes of tigers, the green eyes of leopards, the gold mane of lions. I say I thought I saw them, but for me they were very real. I would step back and hide my face in my arms and wait for them, but they never came—they were there, but they never saw me. Then I must have slept again, for when we are afraid we often find ourselves overcome by torpor; and I remember there were terrible nightmares and my body was stiff and frozen when I awoke. And the sun was shining, all emerald and gold, and a white mist rose from the grass, and there was Siddhartha standing before me, naked and bronzed, faintly smiling, with a wreath of white convolvulus blossoms on his hair.

“So you were afraid,” he said. “O Ananda, I was always there—why should you be afraid?”

I answered nothing, so he went on: “The monkeys chatter, the green snakes coil in the grass, there are always dangers, but the greatest danger of all is to be afraid. Why were you afraid, Ananda?”

“I heard so many things,” I said. “There was the baying of the wolves high up in the Himalayas, and the eyes of leopards and tigers, but worse than anything else was the cold and the noises of the branches crackling.”

“And yet you never heard my soft breathing?”

“No, I never heard it.”

Siddhartha laughed: “But I was there all the time. I could have thrown out my hand and touched you. Amazing!—you were weeping. Sometimes I saw you hide your eyes. Does a man behave like that, Ananda, or were you like a young girl?”

“I was not afraid,” I said. “I was sorrowing because you had gone from me.”

“And must you always sorrow every time I have gone away from you?”

“I must sorrow,” I said slowly.

I thought Siddhartha would smile, but he looked grave and plucked one of the convolvulus blossoms hanging near.

“Do the flowers sorrow?” he asked.

“No—they have no feeling.”

“And do the trees sorrow?”

“You know as well as I do that the trees do not sorrow as we sorrow, but I have seen elms struck by lightning and deodars that bear no fruit and they seem to be sorrowing——”

As I said this he crushed the convolvulus petals in his hand.

“There is no end to suffering,” he said. “The petal falls, the fire burns, the sun drops from the heavens, but how glorious they are, Ananda! Crush the petals in your hand, and such a sweet scent arises you can hardly breathe! There is cruelty in the world, Ananda, but how sweet it is. You lie alone in the forest and the rain comes and you are separated from your lover, and you hear the voices of the forest animals, but the relief in the early morning is greater than your fear, and you love Siddhartha more because he was not with you. Why do you look at me like that, Ananda? Is it so strange that the world should be cruel? You wept all night, but now you are laughing ——”

“I am laughing because the sun is rising.”

“No, you are lying, Ananda, you are laughing because I have been given back to you.”

I said nothing. I had never seen him like this. Always he had been tender: now he had suddenly grown older, and for the first time I noticed the gold down on his lips, and his body seemed to have grown longer, as a flower will suddenly shoot up after a night of rain. He crushed a petal in his hand.

“You have changed,” I said.

“How have I changed? All things change. Why should I change now rather than at another time?”

I think it was that morning that I noticed for the first time that he was conscious of his beauty, of our delight in seeing him. He stood there, negligently leaning against the trunk of a sephali tree, his eyes half-closed, filled with a keen languorous grace; and suddenly opening his eyes, he held out his hand with the crushed petal and said:

“But beauty fades. I have only done what the wind will do to it—O Ananda, all things fade, the flower falls from its stem, the streaked petals grow dark until they are the colour of mud, the sky turns red and then brown and then black. See, Ananda. Have you ever stared at a petal until it bleeds? It is strange, it is terrible—you could hardly believe that such a monster could exist. It was so beautiful a moment ago, and now the colours have faded, and look—there is no life in it. Have you ever looked at a fire and felt how terrible is the process by which a thing is consumed—how it disappears into nothing, into a few grains of powdered ash, a few black stones? Flowers fall, a petal fades, and there is nothing. Nothing!”

His eyes were half-closed again and he was muttering under his breath. The sun shone, the whole forest was alive with emerald and gold, and he stood there, leaning against the tree, smiling at the crushed petal of the convolvulus

flower in his hand. In this sunlight the trees shone icy-green, the thick ferns were waving, bright metallic red ants crawled up the silvery-yellow bark of the sephali tree, the monkeys were chattering near-by and battalions of flying foxes were sailing overhead: dawn had come like the beating of gongs, and the reverberations still hung in the air.

“Nothing could be so cruel as to leave me alone all night,” I complained.

“Yes,” Siddhartha laughed softly. “That was cunning, as a snake is cunning which waits in the long grass. O, I was cunning. I would go up to you and then dart away. Surely you did not see me?” He laughed. “Once I touched you and you screamed, but perhaps you were sleeping. Such nightmares! Little one, little one, what were you thinking of—sleeping in my arms?”

“No—the wild beasts.”

“It’s the same, Ananda. The wild beast burns, and the lover burns, and there is no end to these things. If I had crept close to you, you would not have known fear, but if a hungry tiger had crept close to you, there is no name for the fear you would have known. The teeth of the wild beasts are flames, the petals are flames—all burns.”

“Yes, truly,” I said, “all burns including the sun,” for the hot sun hung over the forest, and I was hungry.

Siddhartha smiled and kept plucking the blossoms of the convolvulus flowers from the crown on his hair.

“What if I should leave you now?” he said smiling. “I can run faster than you, and I shall lose you easily. The hot sun will not feed your stomach. Perhaps even,” and then a sly smile appeared on his face, so that the mouth seemed crooked, “perhaps even you will perish. I have seen bones in the forest.”

“So have I. That is why I was frightened last night.”

“And there are things worse than bones, Ananda.”

“What things?”

“Bones with the flesh sticking on them.”

“Yes, I have seen them.”

He said slowly: “Look at a petal until it bleeds!”

I thought he had gone mad, I did not know what he was talking about—look at a petal until it bleeds!—I was hardly fourteen, and so sick with love for him, since he was the prince and beautiful. I thought I might become like him. I imitated his way, holding a fan as he held it, walking gracefully like a shadow as he walked, pursing my lips together when eating, sleeping with feet straight out and not curled at night, and following him everywhere. But I could not follow him in his thoughts. I knew we were made of bones with only a thin covering of flesh, I knew this in my heart but did not speak of it. Yet now Siddhartha spoke of these things openly, the bones and the bleeding flowers, and gave such weight to his words that I was afraid.

“How shall I be strong?” I said.

“Not by loving,” he said, and went on to say that all lovers are cruel.

“They have given me a girl,” he went on. “It is terrible. She lies there with her legs and arms apart, all white, and you think you will play with her, but it is not play—it is burning. So I came out in the forest, where there is no burning and the rain is cold. To be like ice——” He shook his head, as though he wanted to forget these memories. “It is better not to live in that fire——”

“Where shall we live, then?” I asked.

“Not here, not in this burning, not in the place where if you crush a flower it changes colour, somewhere where things are not destroyed, and perhaps there is no such place in the world.”

He spoke more to himself than to me, and I do not always remember in what order he spoke. I remembered how we had come to the forest. It was his birthday. There were

celebrations and feasts and an archery contest, but no wife had been chosen for him; I remembered how strange he looked in the morning, and how the strangeness wore off during the day. And then he said: "We'll go into the forest," and I nodded, and we walked through the small east gate unseen by the palace guards. When he spoke of the girls, he was like someone spitting out hairs from his mouth, but he did not speak about them for long. "Beware of tigers," he said; and all night, shivering among the wet ferns, while the rain kept on coming from overhead, I remembered these words.

"What kind of tigers?"

"White tigers."

And all night I had thought of these tigers as I huddled in the grass.

Suddenly he laughed in the sunlight: "Can you imagine a girl walking in this forest?"

"No."

"Or an old woman?"

"Yes, I can imagine an old woman. They come to pick faggots."

"This means," he said, "it is only when they are old and gnarled like the trees that they dare to come into the forest."

"That is so," I said.

"And therefore when they are young they are lacking in courage, but when they are old they are not afraid of the beasts."

"That is so."

"And further, their skins are so delicate that they are afraid of thorns, and they are afraid of the hot sun in the forest, just as they are afraid of the snow. And therefore——" and here Siddhartha's voice became strong and menacing. "And therefore they are despicable with their sheltered lives and sweet scents and the silken things which

hide their breasts and their little red tongues which are always flickering inside their mouths like snakes' tongues. They are despicable because they are sheltered, because they attempt to be unchanging, when everything else changes, and they imitate flowers—but surely it would be better to be a flower than to imitate a flower. I say they are despicable——”

I knew then why he had crushed the flower. I had never seen him so angry.

“Why, you are speaking as though you knew all the girls in the palace. There are some that are good, surely——”

“Never at rest, never contemplating themselves except in a lake or in a mirror, making eyes, wriggling hands, stepping lightly, turning this way, turning that way, buttocks smooth, arms smooth as lard, never at rest——” The sun was slanting across his face and shoulders, and truly he looked like a girl himself as he stood there, leaning so negligently against the tree. “Which is better, Ananda? The soft thing of lard, or the old gnarled woman who comes to fetch faggots?”

“You want me to say the old gnarled woman, but I am young——”

“Yes, you are young, but it is better to be an old woman weighed down with cares, bitten by the sun, with bent shoulders and legs that trip over stones, than some young thing that only scents herself——”

He spat out the words and lifted his knee, as though he was butting away some invisible dancing girl, and then suddenly his face grew calm and he said softly: “And best of all never to be angry.”

Afterwards we began to walk back through the forest. Sometimes I would take sidelong glances at him, for he was broad in the shoulders and very slim and good to look upon; and never had he seemed more beautiful than when we walked hurriedly through the green lanes, while the

dappled sunlight fell on his arms and legs. He had large eyes with heavy lids, and the eyes were a deep and fiery blue; his hair was the colour of bronze. He walked in silence, his lips were pursed together and slightly moving, so that he seemed always to be thinking or meditating, and sometimes he whistled under his breath as though surprised by some thought that had occurred to him.

Now that the sun was rising high, there was no more dew on the leaves. Sometimes he played on his flute, sometimes he smiled, looking up at the yellow blossom of the creepers, but more often he was silent. I had noticed for some time that he was becoming less talkative—until this morning, when he talked more wildly than ever. The sun struck like a burning-glass; soon there were little mottled red patches on his shoulders, and more heat-blisters. A grey lizard darted across the road. He ran after it—he had to throw himself at full length among the ferns before he caught it—but when it lay in his hand it was very quiet, looking up with its bright red eyes. He began to caress it until it slept, then quietly he laid it on his shoulder.

All the way, while we were returning to the palace, he would say strange things, speaking only at long intervals. He said once: “The petal bleeds and cries out,” and a little while later he said: “If it was silent, if there was no wind, if it was held there silently and unchanging,” and saying these words, he shook his head from side to side. He was like someone crazed with his discoveries during the night, his eyes brighter than ever and his mouth a little crooked.

“Would it be better if everything were unchanging and unmoving?” I asked, afraid that he was tormenting himself. “Must everything be still like the snows?”

I do not know why, but he leapt at the word “snows” and repeated it over and over again, believing perhaps there was some magic in the simple sound.

“The snows do not change, but the sun changes them,”

he said, "and we too are changed by the sun, but the snows do not grow old——"

"The snow melts," I murmured, becoming braver now that I realised that I had no fear of change, or of things growing old.

"The snows on the Himalayas never melt," he objected. "This I have heard from my teacher, and there are other things I have heard—that snow breathes, and snow is warm, and snow does not change its colour, which is no colour. Ananda, it is better to be like the snows."

I laughed then for the first time that morning, I laughed aloud in his face and said: "Or it is better to be like an ass or a monkey—what difference does it make? According to the songs, all things are alive and breathing. What is tormenting you, Siddhartha? Some girl has left her tooth-marks on you, or have you left your tooth-marks on her? You have changed. Yesterday, or the day before, you were filled with pleasure, now you are so sure there is no joy that you keep on saying: 'It is better to be like the snows.'"

I was pleased when he laughed and put his hand tenderly over my shoulder.

"Look at the lizard. Its eyes gleam now that it is awakened, and why is it that the eyes are gleaming? Because it is enquiring, Ananda. It is enquiring the cause of the heat which makes its skin warm, and does not know that it comes from the warmth of my body. It is enquiring why something yellow and black comes to hide it from the sun, not knowing that this is your face, Ananda. It is enquiring what thing is waving backwards and forwards in front of it, not knowing it is your finger-nail. It is enquiring——"

"Listen to me, Siddhartha——" I cried out, for this time my courage was returning. "Listen, all things are made by love, the flower, the fruit, the snows on the mountain, they are all made by love, and so there is nothing to fear——"

“The flowers are made by love,” Siddhartha said slowly and strangely, weighing the words and at the same time smiling. “But it is better to be loveless than to love, better to be solitary than to be surrounded with nautch-girls, better to be the old woman gathering faggots than a girl in the forest——”

He was silent for a moment, looking at me strangely with the same crooked smile.

It was at that moment that we saw some of the dancing girls making their way through the rice-fields towards us, singing and clapping cymbals together to show that they had found us and to get the prize. “There they are,” he went on. “Their feet must be muddy, and surely this is better. They are lazy. Now they will have to scent themselves all over again.” He laughed coarsely, a horrible sly crooked laugh which seemed strange coming from him, for he looked bronze and strong and yet he walked like a panther towards them.

“And yet you say you hate them,” I said, but he paid no attention to me. He was almost running towards them, showing his teeth.

“Have you been searching for me?” he called to them.

“Yes,” they answered, and bowed low.

“For how long?”

“All night.”

He looked at them, his eyes wide open, and there was something coarse about him, the wreath of convolvulus blossoms askew on his head.

“What were you searching for at night?” he asked. “A fox with a white tail?”

“The Lord is angry with us.”

“Siss, siss, the Lord is angry—in broad daylight.” He spoke with the little mincing speech of the nautch-girls. “Who are you? Who sent you? Who would be frightened of you? A rat with nine tails! Siss, siss, the women in the

fields are better. They are brown and dark. You are white like bones, and where you are dark it is not pleasant. Siss, and weak too, arms like little lumps of lard." He sighed and turned on his heels, and I saw him scowling at them, showing his teeth. "It is a wonder to behold. They send out dancing girls to search for the Lord. They beat cymbals. They cry. They paint their breasts. They run at a command, nodding their heads. O they are fierce as tigers!"

"You are tormenting them, Siddhartha."

"No, I am tormenting myself," he answered. "They like it. They love to be howled at." He walked on, paying no attention to them and making little sucking noises at the grey speckled lizard on his shoulder. We could see the biscuit-coloured walls in the distance, beyond the rice-fields, and there were no shadows now that the sun hung steadily overhead. His face was red with scowling, the same colour as the earth between the rows of rice. Meanwhile in the fields, and on the slopes of the mountains in the distance, the rice-terraces were creamy in the morning haze, speckled with the figures of blue-clothed workmen whose young bodies moved through the haze. On the edges of the fields mothers tended their children; reaping-hooks flashed in the sun; bronze shoulders shone duskily. Sweat trickled over our skins. The dancing girls had hurried towards the city walls to announce our presence—we heard them singing. We walked along the hard-baked red-earth pathways under the midsummer sun, and I saw the heat-blisters on his skin grow larger, yellower, and there were smaller ones on his face; and once or twice the speckled lizard croaked, he would touch it gently with his fingers and then it would be stilled.

In the hot bright heat-haze there were no trees, no shade, no wind. It was one of those days in summer after a storm when the air is motionless and the sun is like molten glass. The reapers did not look up as we passed. There was no

sound save for the wooden clappers of the boys on the edges of the fields, as they frightened off the birds: the wooden clappers gave no echoes—everything was hard and metallic, even the tread of our feet on the raised earth-mounds gave no sound.

Kapilavastu came nearer till we saw the pennons hanging from the towers, the high walls, the barrel-vaulted gates, the sharp blue outlines of roads leading to the forest or down to Benares; for the plain to the south led straight to Benares, but there was a pathway through the forest which led to the mountains. In this light the mountains were blue, the same colour as the roads; and I have noticed often during the depths of summer that the snow is solid blue, not white, and sometimes the moon is the same colour. By now Siddhartha had forgotten the dancing girls and the white paint on their cheeks and the way they walked, arching their feet like prancing horses, and he smiled tenderly again, and I knew he was thinking once more of not returning to the palace. We walked on, hardly knowing where we were going, except that we were going in the direction of the towers: for right up to the walls of Kapilavastu there are rice-fields.

“There is no place to rest,” he said, turning his head from side to side. One of the young labourers recognised him and bowed low. Immediately afterwards, he whispered to his neighbour and soon they were all bowing and calling out the Lord’s name. He did not wave to them. The anger rose to his cheeks; to calm himself he played on his flute.

“Oh, why do they bow like that?” he whispered. “What good does it do?—bow to the sun, yes, but not to a man.”

“They bow because you are their Lord.”

“What if I am their Lord—is that excuse enough for bowing? Look, they are clean-limbed and well-formed—I was thinking of lying down in a rice-field. At least it is cool there, but how can I lie down in the mud when they come calling me ‘Lord’ and ‘Good master’ and such-like nonsense?”

Am I their master? How do they know who I am?" He laughed mockingly. "I am Siddhartha, the one who has accomplished his aim, and what aim have I accomplished except to amuse myself with the dancing girls and learn from Bambuni that the songs of the ancients are full of wise words, yet they were only songs. The old man creaks behind his beard." Dripping with mud up to the loins a young man was coming towards us, his black hair knotted above his head, a small reaping-hook hanging from a leather belt, wearing only blue trousers and a rag round his neck to absorb the sweat; he was bearded, and moved slowly against the suction of the mud; others followed him, young women with babes at their breasts, and old men with grizzled white hair who walked more slowly.

"What do they want?" he said half-aloud, but they heard him and laughed: "Nothing, nothing—only to see the Lord."

"Why do you want to see the Lord?"

"No reason, no reason," the old man said nervously, putting out his hand to touch the Lord.

"They are like apes," Siddhartha said, "they just chatter."

"It is good to give pleasure," a girl said.

"Do they want me to stand here all day and give them pleasure?" he whispered. "They know nothing. They gape. They are apes chattering about the glory of the Lord, and the Lord is a foul thing, a string of bones, but they know he is the Lord. Am I so handsome? Must they follow me with their eyes?" He raised his hand, and lifted the flute to his lips, and all eyes followed the movement of his lips, but no sound came from the flute. The peasants were drenched in mud, the red mud of Kapilavastu which is the colour of blood, and he recoiled from them in horror. "Foul and disease-ridden are those who worship the Lord." And I laughed aloud, because they were all handsome and healthy.

I knew then, though I must have guessed it before, that he was not a simple creature; he was eaten up with pride in his own beauty, and at the same time he despised his pride. He would fall into profound fits of sorrow and self-pity, he would weep unaccountably, and then too he would stand for hours looking at his reflection in the blue pool, wholly immersed in contemplating his own identity. I say that I knew these things, but I was much younger than the Lord and only knew them intuitively, sympathising with him and never able to help him. I was his companion at all times, but we had little enough in common, though we had the same father; his mother died shortly after his birth and he was brought up by my mother. But what was strange and appealing was his indifference to his own fate and to his own beauty, a negligence which seemed at times to verge on madness, for he was indifferent to all things except the things of the spirit. Anger he possessed in abundance, perfection of grace we sought in him, and always found. Yet for days he would be sunk in a kind of sadness which knew no end, a sadness which was like remorse for sins committed in some former life. And as we walked back to the towers, he talked again of his former lives, as he thought he remembered them.

“I was always a prince,” he said sadly. “I cannot remember any other kind of life. Never have I had to work like the blue-gowned men in the rice-fields. Always the crowns and diadems. Perhaps this is why I no longer value them, why I am proud and despise the labourers in my heart, but what reason have I to despise them? I am a Kshatriya, a knight who is taught from earliest times to fight with weapons, and why should I despise those whom I am taught to defend? O Ananda, we live through all our lives without feeling the weight of toil, and yet it would be better to toil——”

“A little while ago you said it was better to be like the snow. You are always changing your mind.”

“Even so, it would be better to be like snow, which never changes, though I change. I was a prince in some other land——”

“Do you remember your former life?”

“I remember. There were great plains and no mountains; there were many horsemen, and a blue lake. It was somewhere in the north-east beyond the mountains.”

“There is no country beyond the mountains,” I objected, for everyone knows that beyond the Himalayas there is the end of the world, a deep chasm four hundred and eighty million feet deep, and beyond that another chasm, and so on till a small lake is reached, where a *sunyasi* bathes in the sun; but he shook his head from side to side.

“I remember it—the wind in your ears when you are riding across the great plains, and the sour smell of the milk. The women were not beautiful, as they are here, and their eyes were small and black.”

“And your eyes?”

“They were small and black like theirs, but larger, because I was a prince. But that is not all. I remember other lives. In forests, in the hills, and once in a desert which was the colour of gold, but that life was brief, for I died young, and perhaps I was poisoned. I can remember ten lives, and none of them were truly mine. I would like to live a life that is mine and a death that is mine, for assuredly we must live our deaths. How many lives can you remember, Ananda?”

“None, none—I must have been born without a memory for my former lives——”

“You remember nothing?”

“Nothing.”

“No sins, no crimes——”

“Nothing, Siddhartha. It’s terrible, of course. There must have been a crime somewhere.”

“A smear of blood?”

“No, no—nothing. The mind empty, the spirit not keen.

I am dull, Siddhartha. Bambuni says I am dull. I do not always understand what he says," I complained, knowing that there were many things from the old man's mouth which were incomprehensible, and besides, I was living under Siddhartha's shadow and because he was the prince it was necessary for me to be dull.

"If you remember nothing, then you have no dreams?"

"I have no dreams—only nightmares."

"How lucky you are! You can live all the time in this world, and it does not seem to you to be always changing. I have lived so many lives, Ananda, and none of them were profitable and in none of them did I toil—and this is bad, truly it is bad," and saying this he lifted the flute to his lips, and I think at that moment ^{it} he smiled, thinking of some incident in one of his former ^{lives}.

Already we were coming to the roads at the edge of the rice-fields. These roads, as I have said, were the colour of blood, and some say that it was because wars were fought in these parts, and others say it is because red rain used to fall, but I have never seen red rain even when the monsoons are blowing, and perhaps they are red because there are minerals in the earth. I knew we would create attention if we walked along the roads, for we were unclothed except for our silk kilts. But where could we hide? A few chariots passed on the way to the city, but there were no caravans from the south—it would be easier if there were caravans. Worse still, the dancing girls had given the alarm, and the guards would be waiting for us at the gates—at each gate there would be a chariot to take us to the palace. The king's orders were never disobeyed.

"We must hide," he said.

"How?"

"O a thousand ways—you could be a woman. No, that's not possible. We will be farmers——"

"In silks?"

“Nonsense, in the blue cotton of the labouring ones.”

We were not quite at the edge of the rice-fields, and there were still some labourers in the wet mud. Siddhartha approached them and asked for clothes, but they were ashamed to give them. “Lunatics and worse,” he came back. “I told them who I was, and they laughed at me. Five minutes ago they were all bowing.”

“Then there is no way——”

“No, none. Like children on a dark night—no way. Is it better to be a prince or to die like a beggar?”

To humour him, I said: “Better to die like a beggar.”

“No, it is better to die like a prince,” he answered. “The pang and the pain are greater, for so much is left behind,” and he had hardly spoken, before he saw some farm-labourers returning toward the city, saluted them and begged for some clothes. They must have recognised him, for they gave them willingly; and we walked back to the city in the red-stained blue clothes of the rice farmers, shambling as the farmers shambled, in the heat of the sun and the insects.

It was midsummer. Hot dust in the streets, and the sun hidden by the overhanging beams of houses; the streets dirty and black, swarming with flies; the high walls concealing the gardens of the princes and the family retainers. There were gates through the city walls leading to the palace grounds, and through these we usually passed when we escaped in the direction of the forest, but today Siddhartha insisted on walking through the streets among the crowds of people milling and screaming, the children naked and filthy, the beggars with their green and blue sores; yet all were handsome, for they were not slaves. And in a whining voice Siddhartha challenged the passers-by: “Which way to the palace?”

“Can you remember the lives to come?” I whispered, but he only said: “Look out for the cess-pool!”

It was a long way to the palace, through many circuitous streets, through many dark alley-ways. Rice was cooked on open fires in the market-place. There were dung-fires, caravans passed through the dusty streets, the sun hung high, windows were closed, the green shutters and the red shutters, and there were fires burning inside houses with boys fanning them. They must have thought we were beggars on our way to petition the king. Siddhartha whined: "Which way to the palace?" with his face smeared in red mud, and he shambled convincingly. We were lost in the city, the roads rutted and yellow in the hot bursts of sunshine which came wherever there was a gap between the houses.

"What other lives?" he said, for I had been talking about his memory of future lives. "No, I remember none in the future. It may be the end. I hope it is the end."

It was not weariness or distaste. In the palace they said he was haunted, and there was a story that a few weeks before he was seen prowling round the palace and asking whoever he met: "Have I seen you before?" and then he went away, shaking his head. Bambuni had chosen me to be his companion, and often the old man would draw me aside and say: "There is holy vessel there—do not spill it," meaning perhaps that I must always be careful what I said.

"You see," he explained, "I ask them the way to the palace, and they know I come from some other place and purposely misdirect me. If I walked naked, they would know I was the prince."

"Are you?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I feel I have been in the rice-fields all my life, I feel the way the water comes between the toes, my shoulders are heavy with the labour of the reaping-hook. We take on momentary disguises. In such a place, at such a time, we are labourers—it is as easy to imagine oneself a lion."

“So they gave you cooling drinks?”

“Yes, to cool the imagination, but that too is a flame. All burns, including the sun, as you say. But when you want to know in which direction you are going, who will tell you? The monks, perhaps? But they wander in the forest, and know only that the Himalayas are in the north. So they are, but beyond the Himalayas there are deserts.” He said he had dreamed it in some other life, could still feel the wind and kept on talking about the deserts. “Bambuni knows nothing. I told him about the black-eyed people—with small bones, and he said there were people with webbed feet, but no one had seen them. Immensity! But he lives among books.”

The palace was to the north of the city, so we knew we were being purposely misdirected, for we were going south.

“Ask, and they will always answer, but it is a waste of breath. Better to be ragged and to complain than to offer petitions to the king. Whining, whining—what is this life but whining? The stomach whines most—I must talk to Bambuni about this. The flower bleeds. I have made one discovery tonight, and it is almost enough to drive me mad. Ananda, if one was mad——” He paused for a moment, and then went on: “Who shall say whether I am a prince or someone dreaming I am a prince? I shall wake up and be a mad beggar like that *sunyasi*.”

He pointed to the beggar in the market-place who wore only a loin-cloth of dark-grey material, bones protruding through his flesh, his eyes burnt-out and blackened by the sun.

“I shall be like that.”

“And then?”

“But I know it is bad. Why kill the body? There must be a bag for food, and another bag for air. But it is worth trying. The important thing is to find a sense of direction—to know where one is going. You have to try all ways.”

“Does the snow try to find directions?”

“The snow doesn’t care—all directions are contained in it, it points all ways—and that is the best.”

“And beyond the Himalayas?”

“No snow.”

We had turned about, and now we were coming in sight of the palace; we saw the pennons waving, the green gold-trimmed pennons of the Kshatriya kings and the pure gold of the king’s personal flags. There were the guards in their armour of padded felts with short kilts and spurs, riding on small Arab ponies, with spears and lances, short bearded men who seemed to be made out of starched silk, so unmoving and solemn they were, and yet they were curiously formidable in their silence. Siddhartha shambled up to them and coughed and spluttered: “Which way to the palace?” They paid no attention to him, and this delighted him. He fawned and threw himself at their feet. “Great ones, great ones, have mercy on a poor labourer——” There was something fearful about the way in which the guards looked straight ahead on their horses, and I thought: “They stand there for so many hours gazing that they are like the *sunyasis*,” and determined to tell this thought to Siddhartha later, but he was angry. He was sick of their insolent calm faces, though he himself could be insolent and calm whenever it pleased him. We came away.

“There is no goodness in them—they could not recognise me.”

“Did you expect them to recognise you? They are asleep, like the *sunyasis*.”

“It is bad to sleep,” Siddhartha answered; and once more I found myself contemplating those odd words which he threw off with such depths of meaning.

It was hot—hot. The sun glinted from the tiles, the withered streets in this heat seemed grey, whitewash flaked from the walls, fires burned inside houses and another fire burned in the heavens, naked children splashed themselves

at the water-pumps, and sometimes a girl would come down with a pitcher and fill it slowly, so slowly, because the heat had drenched her dress and the air was like oil. Carriages passed; inside the carriages we could see the ministers drinking sherbert and frantically fanning themselves. The city was like a prison, oily with refuse, discoloured, grey and brown and black with sudden tremendous squares of bright orange from the slanting sun. We hardly knew the city. At night we could hear its murmur, and Bambuni would tell us about the lives of the people—"They eat, they sweat, they sleep together, they fornicate——" He had no delight in them, and would talk seriously about the advantages of our lives in the palace, where there were gardens and peach trees, and only the murmuring of fountains to distract our attention. "Study, learn archery, give yourselves delicate bodies, be humble before the Sun." And somehow we were both unsatisfied, thinking of the farmers and the city people as rough, uncouth and snail-skinned, yet somehow pleasing by their very uncouthness.

But now that we had come to the city, we were prepared to agree with Bambuni: for the place was evil and not well-planned. The streets staggered without order, houses crowded together, refuse lay outside the doors, there was no sound of music. The people were handsome, for all the people here are handsome; but they were slovenly in speech, paid no attention to us and sometimes laughed in our faces, hearing the way we talked, for we could talk only in the court language, which few understood. There were places so foul that we could only walk holding our noses; and seeing us with our hands touching our noses, they would run after us and shout evil words at us, and sometimes they seemed about to use force; but they did not attack us, because we were young and strong. And so we wandered, not knowing in which direction to go, lost in the great hot city which was like a dirty jar of sunlit wine.

“We are lost, we are lost!” Siddhartha cried aloud. “It’s astonishing how easily we can be lost.”

“We can go out and enter one of the palace gates through the wall,” I suggested.

“Yes, and admit our failure,” he answered. “There must be some better way. A curse on the city! How can we enter——”

We had noticed some workmen entering the palace gates, but they were dressed in dark-brown, not the blue of the farmers. If we could obtain dark-brown clothes, we might be allowed to enter. They would think us artisans, perhaps; they might curse us and slap us across the face, but it was better than to be alone in the seething city. At last Siddhartha was hungry, and he said: “Let us go into an inn and get food—if they ask for payment, we can sing for them.” (It was the custom in the palace sometimes for us to sing for our food—if we sang particularly well, the food was very carefully prepared.) I obeyed. I was weary with wandering over the sun-baked earth of the place. I said: “If they do not care to listen to us, what then?” Siddhartha smiled: “We will sing them the ‘Willow Song’ and ‘The Song of the Bright Snows’.” I said: “They may not care for these—better to sing them the songs of the concubines, for example, ‘The Song of the Coiled Head-dress’.” He agreed to this, and soon we found an inn.

The inn was very small and low, with smoke-blackened beams. There was the usual furnace, the usual slut-faced children on the baked-earth floor, the usual panniers of rice made of reeds from the river. It was difficult to find a table, but we found one at last somewhere at the back, where it was very hot from the furnace flames. We could understand the speech of the landlord, for the difference between the court language and the language of the people is largely one of intonation; but he could not understand what we wanted. Then we wrote out our demands for him; he shook his head

and summoned someone else who could write, and perhaps it was half an hour before the food and the wine was brought to us—thick, red oily wine, like the people. There was fowl's flesh, baked white, and grey mushrooms which resembled worms, though they tasted of Paradise; and other things I can no longer remember. The wine stuck in our throats; it was hot and spiced: I could see Siddhartha smiling idiotically to himself and waving a paper fan, and sometimes he belched, and looked round the room with his odd, crafty smile—the same crooked smile which I had noticed in the morning. But even when he laughed, he was still handsome. Once he leaned over the table and whispered to me: "I am the prince—I am conscious of my identity."

"Is the identity in the name?" I asked.

He seized another bottle of wine.

"Surely, surely, there is no identity in a name—there is identity only in the voice speaking the name." He drank, and wine stained his bronzed skin. "Listen, when I drink, who am I? Am I Siddhartha, the prince, or am I a labourer pretending to be Siddhartha? Look, there is spice in the wine. So, perhaps, the identity of a man is the spice and the man himself is the wine, and one is drowned in the other. What is man? Spice or wine?"

"Surely man is spice," I laughed, "and the wine is the world around him, and the spice scents the wine and afterwards no trace is left. Like the aroma of wine is our life——"

"And love?" he asked, remembering that he had called me the Lover.

"Love is the colour of wine," I said, and suddenly his face fell, and he whispered: "Wine is the colour of blood."

It was evening before we left the inn. The stars had come out, the great smoking black torches were alight, blackening and staining the wall; so many people had come in that the place was crowded. There were merchants from the south

with plumed head-dresses, young boys from the farmlands, accompanied by girls and even by suckling babies: the girls showed no shame: they held the babies on parted thighs and let themselves be milked under the flames of the ash-brands. Noisily they ate, and noisily they fell to quarrelling. Siddhartha whispered: "Let us escape at the moment when there is the greatest quarrelling." There was a horse-dealer smashing the table with his whip, a great mole on his forehead, and his teeth were like horses' teeth; he cracked the whip in the air above the tables, and spoke—I do not know what he was speaking about, for he spoke in a southern tongue popular among some of the others, for they also answered him with the same speech. It was then that we tried to escape. But the eyes of the landlord were like the eyes of a mouse; he saw us; pulled us back; threatened to borrow the horse-dealer's whip and was about to abuse us when Siddhartha said plaintively: "I will sing for my food——" and somehow the landlord understood.

"What, for four pullets and the devil knows how much wine——"

But before he could go on, Siddhartha was already singing. It was hot in the inn; and as he sang, he waved his body backwards and forwards. There, in the small inn, under the blackened roof-beams, swaying backwards and forwards, in the light of the furnace flames, while the heaped-up panniers of rice glowed from the fires, he had never looked more handsome. The girls were silent but some men grumbled. The landlord was at his wits' end, fingering his beard, but his wife was beside him and she watched admiringly. He sang the songs of the dancing girls, not 'The Song of the Coiled Head-dress', but another song, more lascivious, making little pouting movements with his lips, smiling and wreathing the air with his hands.

When he had finished, there was silence. The landlord was looking at the merchants, still wondering whether we

should be allowed to go in peace; for he dared not engage his customers in argument. The horse-dealer was the first to break the silence.

He beckoned the landlord.

"It seems to me there is something strange about this blue-coated labourer," he said. "I want to look at him more closely."

The landlord hurried towards Siddhartha and led him along.

"Here he is, your honour. Just look at him. If you like his song, I will make him sing again."

We did not know exactly what he was saying, but by the gestures we knew that it was something of the kind. Siddhartha bowed low to the merchant, and winked at me, and he was not so handsome in this half-light, without the furnace fires behind him. The horse-dealer took him by the arm.

"Firm flesh, firm flesh, but his hands are soft like a woman's. Laziness—does he think he can sing? The voice of a castrated cock!"

He laughed in his belly, and rumped the pure skin of Siddhartha's forearm between his fingers. From time to time he turned to his companions, who were horse-dealers from Kapilavastu, and smiled, saying: "He is ill-educated, and his breath is not like ours, and his tongue is pink, not black with chewing seeds. There is something very curious about him. Almost certainly he has been castrated." There was renewed laughter, and by now all the members at the table were leaning forward and looking carefully at Siddhartha, who was reeling a little from drink. Sweat was pouring out from him. His heavily-lidded eyes would close, and then open as though startled by the sights and sounds of the place, the thick fumes, the faces brightening and then blackening as the flames died out, the noises, the whispered conversations, the rush of air into the furnace and the whistle of the flames.

“If we employ him, it is necessary to find out whether he has been castrated or not,” the horse-dealer said.

Siddhartha was becoming accustomed to this savage tongue, and at last he said, gracefully brushing his forehead with the back of his hand in the weariness and torpor of wine:

“The horse which is castrated is swifter than the lumbering mare. May it please your honor, I was castrated three times!”

There was a roar of laughter, Siddhartha smirked and smiled and very nearly fell over; then, when he had regained his balance, he danced a little in front of the horse-dealer, waving his hands, swinging his body, making little fidgeting movements with his feet and rolling his eyes, so that we could see the green veins in them.

“I am a little slender reed,” he said, “and the wind is waving through me.”

“The poor boy is quite mad with drink,” the horse-dealer said, frowning. “Let him sleep a little. Then we can discuss his purchase——”

It was only later that I heard that boys from Kapilavastu were bought as slaves, and sometimes they were castrated for this very purpose——

Imitating the rough speech of the dealer, Siddhartha said: “Oh, but it is much better to buy me now. If I awake, I may not desire to be bought.”

For some reason this remark also drew bursts of laughter, which Siddhartha seemed to enjoy, for he rolled his eyes more and more, and made little beckoning gestures. What was frightening was that he was behaving like a boy or girl of thirteen.

It was at that moment that something happened which allowed us to escape. There was a girl in green silk, with a green head-band, eating with a youth, and suddenly she came forward and said: “According to my humble opinion, this youth is more handsome than any others, and deserves

respect. He is drunk now, and ill, but in the morning he will be carefree again. Let him be returned to his parents before he is sold."

She came up to the table, very scented, and I noticed there were small red flowers in her head-band.

The horse-dealer said: "I will give seven small gold pieces for him——" and threw down the money on the table.

Siddhartha took the money in his hand—apparently a sign that he accepted the purchase, for the horse-dealer then clapped his hands three times, and there were guffaws from the other horse-dealers. I could not understand why the horse-dealer should want the youth—perhaps as a jockey, perhaps as a servant to attend his wife. It began to grow cold, for the nights in Kapilavastu can sometimes be bitter, and Siddhartha was shivering. The girl looked at him. "He is cold and ill, he has drunk too much wine," she said. "If you look at him carefully, you will see that he is perhaps a god descended from heaven: his forehead and chest are well-formed; his nostrils are delicate; his hands are soft like lard. He sang pleasantly, in a rich voice, even though he was imitating a woman's voice. It is my opinion that he is a wandering monk in disguise."

These last words were received with renewed laughter, but the laughter was immediately silenced by the girl who took one of the flaming brands from the wall and began to hold it near Siddhartha, fearing he would catch cold. He thanked her dazedly, and whispered: "Flowers in her hair—red flowers—take one." I took one, while she was not looking, and at that moment he threw with all his strength the seven small pieces of gold into the furnace. It was this which enraged the merchant, who began to beat Siddhartha over the shoulders with his whip; and suddenly everyone started crying out, and Siddhartha raised his voice and shouted above them: "Gold in the furnace!" and for

the space of a few drum-beats there was such confusion as I have never seen, everyone talking and shouting at once. The flames from the torch, or the coldness of the air, must have awakened Siddhartha from his drunken torpor, for immediately afterwards he said: "It's time to escape—the gold is boiling in the fire," and he rushed out into the road, his bare chest and falling hair shining in the dim suffused light of the furnace.

And in the bare deserted street it was cold, with ice in the pools and the starlings whistling in the sky. Siddhartha was running as fast as he could and screaming something at the top of his voice, but I could not hear what he was saying. I could hardly breathe the cold air and began running after him, shouting to him; I doubt whether he heard me, so engrossed was he in running faster than his pursuers—though there were no pursuers.

I shouted: "Siddhartha, which way are you going?"

There was no answer. He was running quickly, but there were still some fumes of wine in his head and he reeled drunkenly, throwing long shadows. The moon shone above shuttered houses.

"I'm going back to the woods—the animals don't try to buy you for seven pieces of small gold."

"Did it annoy you?"

He laughed: "I should have been happier if they had offered twenty, but it is all over now, Ananda, and besides we did not have to pay for the four pullets and the wine." He smiled—I saw his teeth flashing. The east gate was still open. The evening was bitterly cold, with drifts of rain blowing over the fields. Silently, almost creeping on all fours, we went through a small gate in the wall leading to the palace.

II

The Snow-Leopard

HOW ELSE SHALL I WRITE OF HIM EXCEPT as a young god? In those days we were together always, we slept under the same silken sheets, we wandered together hand in hand, we sang and played together, and there were no secrets between us. He was older than I, yet I was chosen to be companion. We were young and clean, not touched by the red dust of the world; and we suffered together, and laughed together, and if a bird rose from a coppice or a flower fell, we saw these things together and smiled together and looked in each other's eyes, asking who had first seen this thing which made the world beautiful. And still sometimes in the evening he would smile with that crooked smile.

We had developed a taste for silently escaping through the palace walls. We went wherever we pleased, bribing the guards to secrecy, and sometimes we were disguised as merchants or beggars or labourers—anything we pleased. As I think of those days, I see his brightness, his swift-moving grace and the calmness of his smile. Sometimes we were wandering musicians, or else wastrels; more often we were disguised in such a fashion that we were like others and therefore invisible. We learned the gutter-language of the streets, the still harsher language of the brothels. We learned to sit cross-legged in the market-place, listening to the teller of stories who was blind, and knew all the stories that had ever been told. On feast-days we powdered our faces and danced among the lanterns; on days of mourning we wore black sack-cloth and crawled kneeling through the main highway. We thought we were invisible; we did not

know we were being followed, and we did not know that everyone else knew who we were.

They were to say afterwards that when Siddhartha rode out of the palace and saw a sick man, a dead man and a *sunyasi*, he had never seen these things before, but in fact we had seen everything—men dying, women in labour, the screaming which comes suddenly from a dark house at night, and the bodies being burnt beside the river first swelling into redness, then into black, and then into a terrible grey slimy powder. There were three people who did not know that we were recognised—they were Siddhartha, myself and the king; for everything was kept from the king, and everything was hidden from us.

It was the custom in those days to rise two *ghatikas** before sunrise, at the time of the false dawn, and not as now nearly two *ghatikas* earlier. For a little while we would lie on the scented bed and tell each other our dreams, or if there were no dreams we would talk of the explorations we would perform during the day. Then the servants would enter with hot water, we bathed, brushed our teeth with herbs and made offerings at the *puja*. Afterwards we perfumed ourselves with unguents and fumes, and painted our lips with wax and with lacquer dyes, and dressed in spotless garments. Over our shoulders there was usually a gold chain from which hung a small carved bottle of betel and spices. At some time between offering sacrifices at the *puja* and making our faces, we would take the morning meal of milk rice and a paste made of flowers, or perhaps wheat-cakes with sugar.

Customs have changed, but even today the ceremonial at court is the same. When the sun has reached the height of the walls, we went to the king's chamber to listen to his instructions and to hear the conversations between the king and the governors. There were fourteen governors, all old

*About forty-eight minutes, according to the early Hindu calendar.

men. Bambuni, our teacher, was the king's adviser. Bambuni sat on a small earthenware stool at the king's feet, Siddhartha sat on a gold chair one step lower than the king, and I stood throughout the interviews on the fifth stair, because I was of royal blood and because it was thought that one day I would be a governor or a minister. I did not enjoy these interviews, for every day they were the same—orders were given about prices, traffic, drainage, the upkeep of roads, the archery contests, the seven-fold offerings and the recitation of the hymns. The old king always asked for facts and figures, which the ministers gave him, reading from bamboo scrolls and nervously shuffling their feet, for any inaccuracy in the figures led to punishment. We were Kshatriyas; we had conquered the place by force; and though Kshatriya blood had intermingled with the blood of the people, there were times when revolt had to be put down—not in Kapilavastu but in the frontier regions. And so the minister of the east frontier region would speak in his frail mincing voice of the number of heads put up on spikes on the walls of some village where the taxes remained unpaid, and the old king nodded sleepily and said: "Seven heads, did you say?" and the minister kneeled and touched the king's garment and this was a sign that the seven heads were indeed correct. Meanwhile Siddhartha yawned, looking self-conscious in the gold overgown he wore at these ceremonies.

And after the ceremony it was worse—three or four hours of listening to Bambuni's teaching. He was not a good teacher. He read the hymns, he described the geography of the world, he insisted on giving us moral instruction, pale with earnestness, trembling at the proximity of royal blood. Siddhartha listened with his face cupped in his hands, saying little. We were longing to get out in the open. Sometimes Bambuni would ask questions. What was amazing was not Siddhartha's knowledge, but his capacity for inventing

reasons for things. Once Bambuni asked: "Why has a bird got feathers?" I did not know the answer, but Siddhartha knew: "Feathers are only hair—once men could fly." Bambuni asked: "Is it in one of the Books?" and Siddhartha answered: "It is not in any of the books, but I am sure that men could once fly." Bambuni nodded and dismissed us, and I knew he was going to look for the book on bird-feathers to see whether Siddhartha was right.

But Bambuni was not our only teacher. There were others—there was the music teacher, who was old and continually lifting his head back and dropping snuff down his nose; there was the dancing teacher, who was strong and youthful, though the hair falling over his shoulders was pure white; there was the teacher of the law, whose face was spotted with white ash and who wore the Brahman cord round his neck; there was the teacher of the customs of the country, who could recite the customs—even the most ancient—without reading them from the bamboo scrolls. It was noon by the time the teaching was over. We ate late in the afternoon or in the evening, for the Kshatriyas say that valour comes from hunger, and Siddhartha would say: "It is better to be hungry, so that we can sharpen our senses." I was always hungry; I would carry round with me a small box of food, which I would plunder when Siddhartha was not looking. In the afternoon we bathed in the pools, practised archery, drove the chariots in races round the gardens, and sometimes, though rarely, we attended performances given in the gold tent. Or else we trained our talking birds, or squatted over the fighting cocks, or we played games of chess and dice.

In the evenings we bathed again and made sacrifices to the *puja* at sunset. Afterwards we returned to our rooms, washed ourselves, put flowers in our hair and smoothed perfumes over our bodies, while the servants attended us; at such times to amuse us a *vidushaka* or jester would enter

our rooms unannounced and perform for us, swallowing fire and cutting himself with knives, or the dancing girls would come in silk robes and stand before us in the attitudes of the *gopis*. After the evening meal there was archery by moonlight, for at that time there was a craze of doing things by moonlight,—painting by moonlight, or watching birds by moonlight, or writing poetry, or playing musical instruments. Sometimes the king himself would appear, surrounded by his courtiers and concubines; and it was at such moments, when there were so many people about, that we found it easiest to disappear.

It was at this time, when I was nearly fifteen, that Siddhartha became passionately interested in women. There were courtesans at the palace, but they were not many, and they were usually girls from the palaces of the older generation of princes. There were *devadases*, of course, for there were temples within the palace walls, but usually they offered themselves to the monks and to those who were allowed to penetrate the palace walls, and they were never allowed out of the temples; so that whenever we saw anyone of middle-age or younger about to enter the temple-gate, we knew exactly why he went there, and sometimes we would hide near-by and watch till he came out again, dishevelled, his gown or his kilt all creased and stained with the dust of the temple-floor; and seeing them, Siddhartha would burst out with that high-pitched crazy laugh of his.

But I noticed that he was paying more attention to his personal appearance. He would shave his moustache every fourth day; every fifth day he shaved the hair of his private parts; every tenth day he shaved the hair under his armpits. He was continually having baths—sometimes he would order a bath between lessons. Every other day he had his limbs rubbed with oil. He took to wrestling, saying that it was only by physical exhaustion that he could control the pressure of his desires. Although he really knew almost

nothing about these things, he would take me by the arm and walk with me round the gardens, talking learnedly of the women of Malwa, Kasala and Magàdha, saying they were passionate and hardy of body and accepted a lot of rough handling, while the women of Maharashtra were passionate but concealing, and the women of Ipa were sloe-eyed and enticing, but slipped away from your embraces. This he must have learned from books, or from the servants, for none of these ever came to the palace: even the courtesans who attended us were Kshatriyas, with the high-bridged nose and high foreheads of our clans. And he would talk about the sixty-four developments and the ninety-one postures with a crazy, sickening delight in it all which showed that he was unnerved and moody.

I was younger than Siddhartha, but I understood what he was saying instinctively, and I did not enjoy it. I would see the crooked knowing smile, and then look from his face to the lithe towering young body and wonder how anyone could resist him; and I knew that he knew his own power over them. He was completely without flaw. Whatever attitude he assumed, he was elegant. He could move as delicately as a girl, or with the outrageous violence of the charioteers. He could simper perfectly, he could imitate women's voices, he was known to love unguents; and at the same time he could shout louder than the palace guards, wrestle more strenuously than the professional wrestlers, run more quickly than the palace-runners who delivered messages to the frontiers. He was an animal enjoying his manhood except in one thing—he could not tame his desires.

All Kshatriyas are hot-blooded, living in the shadow of the snows, hot tongues pushing up from the south; they would melt the snows if they could. It was at this time that I would see him standing on moonlight nights gazing up at the snows with an expression, not of defiance, for he

knew their mystery, but of awestruck silence, as though he desired to imitate them but could not. The snows called him, but a moment later I would see his shadow passing swiftly in the direction of the summer-house, and I would hear their laughter.

Sometimes he took me with him. Then, his lips red with wax, his body scented, with a red wine-smear on his cheeks and with flowers in his hair which coiled down to his shoulders, wearing only a silk kilt and a metal tunic open at the neck, barefoot, he walked languorously towards one of the secret pavilions in the garden, where the girls were waiting for us. I would follow him at a distance, holding my white skirts about me, not shamed but near-shamed, since I was younger than him and less experienced; and hating to walk bare-foot. And he would whisper softly, the green malachite shining on his soft eyelids: "How handsome you are! Really tonight you are more handsome than Hari," so that I blushed as I have seen criminals blush when they are about to be strangled.

The pavilion was known as the Green Pavilion and lay among a grove of sal trees, so that it was known also as the Pavilion of Red Blossoms or the Pavilion of the Lanterns, for immense lanterns hung from the roof-beams. The windows were fretted, and there was a small lake behind it where the peacocks nested. Though the lanterns were enormous, they were covered with some dark-coloured cloth, for fear that people would wander through the gardens and find us; and no music was ever played there. Sometimes when we arrived we found the girls asleep, or heavily clothed, for it could be very cold in the evenings; but after we arrived, the fires were lit, the girls awoke, and for a while we sat on the benches, drinking wine, while they danced and postured. Then Siddhartha would dance with his eyes closed or call one of the dancing girls to him, and they would dance together, and there was no sound except

the soft scraping of bare feet on the tiles. Afterwards while the fire leapt from the porcelain stove, lying in a chair of basket-work strewn with flowers, he called for music and then the girls formed a ring, kneeling round us, singing and humming so softly that they could not be heard outside, delighting in the presence of the lord who scattered gifts among them—necklaces of pearl and onyx, small boxes of inlaid gems, girdles and hairpins. Then he would tell me to select one of the girls, and choose one for himself, and we lay with them while the girls continued to sing their muted songs behind the curtains of pearls.

Now as I think of those nights I see the fires blazing, the paintings on the low ceiling, the blackened beams, the pheasants whirling past the windows, the peacock strutting among the dancers and Siddhartha's slow crooked smile; I remember the warmth of the place and the drumming of bare feet on the tiles; I remember the smell of the bearskins from the Himalayas and the night in winter when snow fell outside like a curtain of pearls, so that I did not know from which direction the voices came, whether from the garden or from the small alcove where they sang; I remember the silken touch of breasts and the moment when the gold girdle fell to the ground with a tinkling sound; I remember Siddhartha's heaving shoulders and his green eyelids as he danced; and the wine that was served to us afterwards, when we awoke from that agony, for it was the custom among us not to sleep after lying with a girl but to bask in the awakening of the senses which comes when the body is at peace. I remember too the dancer with the eyes like sloes whose veils were sprinkled with diamonds and how Siddhartha seized her once and withdrew suddenly, his hands scratched by the sharp stones. I remember the taste of warmed wine, the sweetmeats and the confections of fruit, and how differently they tasted, whether we ate them before or after the agony, and then I remember how even in midsummer

the nights were cold and we returned to the palace with tiger skins thrown over our shoulders, walking in shadow, bare-foot still, hoping not to be observed.

These are things that I shall not forget, though I am old now and no longer have desires. There was no evil in this youthful playing: there was evil only in Siddhartha's crooked smiling and his amorous glances, for at such times his eyes would blaze like small red stones and his voice became high-pitched, like the voice of an animal in pain. He would whisper: "There is no sound so pleasant as the sound of the tearing of veils," till I wondered whether he was thinking of their warm flesh or of the thoughts that kept him awake at night. He did not sleep well. Sometimes when he slept, I heard him moaning. His brain did not sleep. He would call out for something—water, some scent, a flower or perhaps one of the animals he kept, for he liked having tiger-cubs round him, and he had a special fondness for a white sharp-toothed snow-leopard, and in the light of the oil-lamp I would see him writhing and turning on the bed. "What has happened, Siddhartha?" "Nothing—an accursed dream." "What kind of dream?" "They turn into ghouls—the veils fall away, and then the skin falls away, and there are only red wet bones." I would try to humour him. "Do you want them to be young for ever?" There was no answer; his face was buried in the pillows, and I knew he was stifling his sobs.

It was about that time that Devadatta came to stay in the palace. He, too, was a cousin of Siddhartha. Much darker, almost brown, the colour of the bark of the sal tree in autumn, which is brown mixed with some red, he had lived for a long while in Benares, and spoke the coarse tongue of the south people; but with this he possessed also amazing strength and courage. It was said of him that he could shoot the three-stringed bow better than anyone at Court, and could wrestle better. He came in a caravan on

the invitation of the king, who was beginning to think it necessary that there should be trials of strength between us; for we were all young, and our energy was too much for our young bodies.

He came early in the morning when it was almost dark; we heard the camels champing, and the bells; we heard the rough tongues of the servants and the voices of the guards. And then we heard the caravan arriving at the gate.

“Who is it?” I asked.

“Devadatta,” Siddhartha said tonelessly. “It’s some fatality—we were happy together, and now Bambuni insists that I should be surrounded with more princes of royal blood. Why? Can I only live with princes of royal blood? And we were perfectly happy together.”

I nodded, half-awake. The conversations were still going on outside the great barred gates. I heard the chinking of money, the bells and the loose flapping reins of the camels and someone whispering commands. I had seen Devadatta years before at a carnival, remembering how silent and swarthy he was in robes too long for him, and his dark eyes which were black as unflamed coals, not blue like Siddhartha’s. Then we heard the creaking of the gates as they opened, more whispers, the gateman saying the stables were not large enough to hold all these camels, and an angry voice answering with muffled curses.

“Yes, it is Devadatta,” Siddhartha whispered, “for no one else would dare to talk in such a fashion.”

Saying this, he got out of bed and threw a red cloak over his shoulders, one of those red cloaks which are common among the peasants in the Thibetan uplands, and shortly afterwards I heard him giving orders that the gates should be closed. His word was law. The gates were banged to, and Devadatta must have been left outside, for there were no more muffled curses, only the faint ringing of camel-bells.

“Why did you do it?” I asked.

“I told them it was the law—the gates were never opened before sunrise—and it is quite true. Devadatta asked me who I was. I said I was the chamberlain. He could not recognise me in the dark—they had their lanterns, but ours were out. Then he cursed me under his breath and raised his whip, but he did not strike.”

“Are you sure it was Devadatta?”

“Perfectly sure—black as coals. His grandmother was Arabian. Go to sleep, Ananda.”

I could not sleep. I thought of this other youth who would come to live with us and share our pleasures; he was of higher rank than I, swarthier and stronger and perhaps two years older, closer to Siddhartha's age; and I remember that while the dawn came up white and solemn as the first rains, I thought of how he would come between me and Siddhartha, and knew I was powerless to prevent it. They would go to the Pavilion of the Lanterns together, they would ride in the same chariots, they would stand together at the ceremonies, they would bathe in the lotos pools—the red, the green and the black lotos pools, which Siddhartha himself had constructed—and I knew it was the beginning of the end.

I must have been almost weeping, because when I woke up from a short drowsy sleep Siddhartha was in bed beside me.

“What is it, Ananda?”

“I'm afraid—afraid. I can't tell you why I am afraid——”

My teeth were chattering, the blue paint was running from my eyelids, and Siddhartha was laughing and holding a mirror to my face.

“You're frightened that Devadatta will come between us?” he said.

“How did you know?”

“You are trembling so much, and gnashing your teeth and saying ‘Devadatta’ over and over again. Have no fear.”

Then he kissed me and smiled, making a new head-dress of flowers. The sun was coming up. He wore only the short kilt which he wore at night, and the sun came through the window on his naked shoulders and his great chest. I watched him as he sat cross-legged at the foot of my own bed, his lips pouting, his eyes half-closed in concentration, a mysterious calm smile playing on his curved lips.

The gates were being opened. Beyond the tamarisk trees we saw the camels coming.

“Are you still afraid?”

“Yes, Siddhartha.”

“But I told you there was no reason to fear. O Ananda, the greatest of all crimes is fear.”

“I am not afraid of being wounded,” I answered, for I also was a Kshatriya, “but I am afraid of losing you, and worse still—losing the love I have for you. We have always been together. You have taught me more than Bambuni will ever teach me. I can see him already standing between us—a dark brown thing, not gold like our bodies. He has heavy veiled eyelids like yours, and he does not speak to me. Why should he speak to me?”

Siddhartha said nothing. He had finished the crown of flowers, and he was smiling to himself.

After a while he said: “You will see.”

At first I thought all my fears were realised, for Devadatta was always in our company. He was less swarthy than I thought—perhaps in Benares he had found a milk which blanches the skin, but his eyes were dark as coals, and he walked ungracefully, with stiff heavy strides. I would watch him fearfully, always on my guard. He paid little attention to me, and seemed indeed to be hiding something from me. He called Siddhartha “brother”, and me he called “cousin”. He was so respectful to the king that we would sometimes laugh, hiding our mouths with our hands; and at

the same time he was timid, not knowing what was expected of him, or how long he would stay.

It was one of those hot days when the sun shines red on the earth, in those intervals between the rains. The earth was drowsy with scents, the lotoses were flowering, the green tiles of the Pavilion of Lanterns were simmering in the heat-haze—we had been riding, and now we lay beside one of the pools. Siddhartha had been bathing. There were drops of moisture on his shoulder-blades. His back was turned to me, and I knew he was writing something on one of the bamboo scrolls. Devadatta was swimming across the pool, throwing up a white wake.

“He’s better than I thought,” Siddhartha murmured, “but don’t be afraid—he will never come between you and me.”

I heard the scratching of his pen on the bamboos.

“What are you writing?”

“Nothing. You mustn’t look at it, Ananda. It’s so childish, I don’t think I shall ever be able to write poetry.”

I looked over his shoulder and read:

*There is a fatality between us,
A falling, as of dew from the lotos petals,
A rending, as of veils being torn,
A terrible whiteness, as of lips parting . . .*

He must have felt my presence, for he turned the scroll upside down and began to gaze over the lotos lake, lost in dreams, looking at the summer smoke which rose from the petals and at Devadatta who was laughing as he plunged towards us. It must have been then that I realised how close in blood Devadatta was to us, for gazing over the lake it seemed to me that it was not Devadatta but myself who was racing towards the bank—myself, the person I had seen in the polished bronze mirrors of the palace, the same smile, the same eyelids tinted with antimony, the same heavy shoulders, the same curious frog-like swimming stroke; and

I turned to Siddhartha, half expecting to see myself again, but he was so large lying there that he seemed to have been made of some towering bronze stone. These mirages are common in our northern summers—the mind fades before the immensity and colours of things. And what was strange, stranger than anything else, was Devadatta's slowness as he came to shore, his face no longer brown, for the water shone on it. I remember the petals were motionless and seemed made of iron; and the Pavilion was unreal, as though painted on paper.

"Everything is unreal," I whispered to myself, and Siddhartha must have heard me, for he whispered: "There is a fatality in life somewhere—nothing remains. There is a falling, as of dew from the lotos petals——" He did not go on, but looked across the lake at Devadatta, who was coming so slowly—so slowly—with his head raised a little above the water, his hair falling over his forehead like wet feathers.

"Have you finished the poem, Siddhartha?"

"No. Why should I finish it? Everything is illusion today. Perhaps tomorrow——"

"It's only the heat and the smoke coming from the water."

"Nonsense, it is always there."

Then, ever so slowly, Devadatta rose from the water, a dancing girl came with a towel, he rubbed himself down and put on a silk girdle and a short kilt and sleeves of some painted material. He said nothing to either of us. We thought he had returned to the palace, but a little while later we heard the bells of the chariot racing beside the wall. We had a passion in those days for racing in the orchard. There were fig trees and rose-apple trees. The chariots were small-sided, so that it was possible to race among the trees. Siddhartha said: "There are still blossoms, and he is sure to shake them down." It was part of the rules of the chariot races that we should not shake down the blossoms from the

trees. "But he is skilful—I will admit that. He is good at all things, except drawing the bow—he does not wait for the drum-beat." I should explain that we practised archery in those days to the music of drums.

I said: "I have always thought he was good at drawing the bow. He has practised so much that it is like drawing breath for him."

"But he is impatient," Siddhartha answered. "He does not wait—he has the bad manners of those who are impatient. In the Court ceremonial it is said: 'Always be calm'."

I must have answered something to the effect that we were all Kshatriyas, and therefore it was difficult for us to be calm, for Siddhartha answered: "Truly I sometimes believe impatience is the greatest of all crimes——"

"Greater than murder?"

"Yes, because it includes murder."

Then he turned his back to me, and I saw that he was scratching on the bamboo scrolls.

It must have been half an hour later when the wild geese came over. They came like barbed arrow-heads. It was near sunset, the sky red in the west along the last curving buttresses of the Himalayas, and there was a cold wind among the tamarisk trees. Siddhartha was still scribbling. I had gone swimming, and was about to come to land when the wild geese flew over, their blue necks craning forward and their wings flapping slowly. I said: "It would be easy to shoot them down—they are flying so low." The dancing girl came with a towel. Suddenly there was the sharp note of an unloosened bow-string and I saw the arrow climbing steadily and slowly towards the geese, followed by another, and then another; and I thought: "It must be one of the Kshatriya youths from the inner court-yard, for this afternoon there was only Devadatta, Siddhartha and myself playing in the garden." Siddhartha was still writing—I

heard the leaden sound of the sharp instrument with which he incised the beautifully-formed characters on the bamboos, and then there was a short silence while the geese wheeled round and one fell straight out of the sky with an arrow through its wing not far from where I was standing, on the edge of the lotos lake. Siddhartha was writing even after it fell. He had heard the sound of the bird falling, and must have thought it was something else—the sound of fruit falling from the rose-apple trees, or perhaps a servant lumbering along in one of the old chariots from the stables. Then he looked up, smiled, nodded to one of the dancing girls to throw a cloak over his shoulders and said: “What was it, Ananda?—have you ever thought——” I have no idea what he was going to say, perhaps some moral precept, perhaps something from the long poem he was composing, but at that moment he noticed the wild goose urgently flapping its wings on the grass near the lotos pool. It was the pool of black lotoses, with small black buds. He jumped up, frowning, and shouted something to the effect that he had given orders—I don’t know what orders—the bird must be released from its misery—it was terrible to see it flapping its wings, the long neck craning up, the arrow vibrating, the neck feathers black with mud from the edge of the pool. “Fools, standing there, why don’t you do something?” The dancing girls saw his rising anger and were transfixed to the ground, trembling with cold. It grew darker. The sky was red and black, and Siddhartha’s mind was still half occupied with the poem and half groping with the urgent presence of the unaccountable wild goose on the border of the pool. Suddenly he threw the bamboo roll aside and ran to the place where the goose was lying.

“Fools!” he screamed. “Why do you let this happen? Who shot the arrow? I have given orders——”

The dancing girls said nothing. We heard the sound of bells—someone chariot-racing through the orchard.

In a loud voice Siddhartha said: "Bring honey and wine—I've taken the spear away."

It was a short, blunt-edged arrow, very wide, with feathers along the whole length of it, unlike the arrows we use, which have only a single feather on the haft. Honey and wine were brought immediately. He bathed the wound first in the wine, to clean it, and then smeared honey over it.

"Who is responsible for this nonsense?" he screamed at us.

The servants said nothing, but at that moment a young boy called Datta, who was one of Devadatta's servants, a boy who was quite handsome but a little bow-legged, with his hair in a small oiled top-knot, wearing riding costume, a short linen kilt, greaves on his thighs, metal shoes and a silk scarf round his neck came running up. He was out of breath from hard running, for the orchard was nearly a quarter of a mile away. He went up to Siddhartha, cupped his hands to his forehead and bowed. I noticed that he averted his gaze and did not look directly at the Lord.

"Well, what is it?"

"My master has shot a wild goose which has fallen in your garden. He asks you to send it to him without delay."

The goose was lying in Siddhartha's lap as he sat cross-legged looking across the pool. All the time Siddhartha was stroking the wing and the long craning neck.

"Who is your master?"

"Prince Devadatta."

"Then tell Prince Devadatta, with my compliments—you know who I am—that if the bird was dead, it would be only right that I should return it immediately, but since it is not dead, he has no title to it."

The boy Datta listened, turning his face away, his hands still cupped together. He was not, of course, allowed to reply to the prince; he could only give messages and take messages; so, after standing there irresolute for a while, he turned slowly towards the small horn-gates and disappeared.

The dancing girls laughed. They were all bending over Siddhartha, admiring the bird or perhaps admiring their own proximity to the prince. The more temerous ones embraced the wild goose, and I could see that the goose was flustered and wanted to escape. By this time I had rubbed myself down, poured unguents over my body and put on the long yellow skirt which I habitually wore during the evening, the upper garment being made of a few strings of jewels laced across the shoulders, chest and arms.

I went up to Siddhartha.

“Is it some trick?” he asked brutally. “I haven’t seen the boy before—he talks in a horrible brogue.”

“From Benares?” I laughed.

Siddhartha frowned, ordered the dancing girls to go some distance away and bade me sit beside him. There were still a few wild geese circling over the palace, and we heard their honking.

“Some trick—doesn’t he know that everything that falls in my garden is mine? Look how soft the breast is. It was only wounded through the wing, and I truly believe the wound is healing. What I am afraid of is that Devadatta will try to wring its neck.”

I said nothing, but kneeling beside the prince I, too, began stroking the feathers, which were grey and purple; and as darkness came down, and the servants came hurrying with lanterns, I realised for the first time what an immense goose it was—almost three spans between the fluttering wing-tips.

“I must ask Bambuni about it,” Siddhartha went on. “They come from beyond the Himalayas—I told you there were deserts there, and sometimes fountains.” He was going on to talk about what he had observed about the breeding habits of the wild goose when the boy Datta returned. He had put a white cloak over his shoulders, and at first I thought it was another boy. This time he had evidently

been beaten; perhaps the white cloak covered wounds on his back; anyway, he had been weeping, and the cheap antimony was running from his eyes.

“Well, what is it, cry-baby?”

“Prince Devadatta says that whether the bird is living or dead, it is his. He says, Lord”—the boy had forgotten his manners—“He says, ‘Lord, that he brought it down, and why dost thou delay sending it?’”

Siddhartha smiled—it was the same crooked smile.

“Now sit there, cry-baby, while I patiently explain. The reason I have taken the bird is two-fold. First, the bird has fallen into my garden, where everything that falls, whether it is a plum-blossom or a slave-boy or perhaps a drop of rain, becomes mine by reason of its falling. The second reason is that I strive secretly for perfection, and once I have reached the perfection for which I strive, I shall receive and protect all living things; but if, as you say, the bird belongs to someone other than me, then tell the Prince, your master, to summon all the wise and ancient men of the Kshatriya tribe so that the question may be decided on its merits.”

The boy nodded, weeping, and made to go away, but Siddhartha held him back.

“Tell me about your master,” he said kindly. “Does he beat you?”

The boy nodded.

“And yet you love him and tend him?”

The boy nodded again.

“It is very strange, little one. He whips you with the seven-thonged whip, but you told the truth—you gave him my message plain?”

“Certainly, Lord.”

“And then he sends you again, and he may whip you again with the seven-thonged whip?”

“He will certainly whip me, Lord.”

“Now, little one, listen to me. Whipping hardens the

body—there is no crime in it, but there is crime in sending you backwards and forwards on a useless errand, and crime in wounding a bird and hoping it will die. Look how silken-smooth the feathers are, and how noble the bird is—would you want it killed?”

“No, Lord.”

“Or nailed to the door-gate?”

“No, Lord.”

“Or any other animal—would you want it killed, for the sake of the glory of its feathers, or for the delight in seeing a once-living thing now dead, or for any other reason?”

“No, Lord.”

“Then tell your master that if he wants the bird, he must come to me, and that if he whips you, I will whip him, and tell him that everything that falls in my garden, whether it is a blossom or a boy or a young prince from Benares, must answer to me.”

The boy began to weep again, trembling within the thin silken cloak in the light of the lanterns which were ringed round the lake. There were dark clouds. Here and there were dancing girls walking errands, with small panniers on their shoulders; and I remember there were bells ringing, but I do not remember from which direction they came. Lights appeared in the small pavilions. A girl came with a leopard's fur to put round the shoulders of the young prince, and he ordered a kind of cage of basket-work for the wild goose, until it was completely healed. The page-boy disappeared in the darkness, and we lay on the grass looking over the lake, where the goldfish were swimming in the light of the lanterns, waiting for the moment when we should no longer hear his footsteps in the dark. And in the darkness (for his face was hidden) I heard Siddhartha saying: “I shall never be able to complete the poem now, but I have learned one thing—he who nourishes and cherishes is the keeper and owner, but he who shoots and

destroys is the loser and disperser. And is it so strange? For by shooting and destroying we shoot and destroy ourselves, but by loving and cherishing we become ourselves——”

One of the slave-boys brought hot glasses of wine. Once again the wild goose was craning its neck, and I noticed how in the lantern-light the feathers took on the colours of the forests at noon-day; there were crimson and deep blue colours moving among the feathers, and the beak was like gold.

“What will you do with the goose?” I asked.

“I will keep it with me until it decides to fly away, but it will not decide to fly away. You know perfectly well that animals are grateful and show their gratitude. They smile and they run. They have quieter passions——”

I must have laughed aloud, for he suddenly turned on me out of the shadows and asked: “Do you think I did right, Ananda?”

“Certainly you did right, but it is not true that animals have quieter passions. Even the birds go mad during the mating season. We are quieter in our passions than the birds, for when music is played to us, our minds are as though becalmed, and it is better to have calm minds. This I have learned from you. Keep the bird, if you like—it will do no harm, but Devadatta will come for an explanation.”

“I am not afraid of him.”

“I never thought you were afraid of him, but your mind will not be calm.”

He smiled and stroked the glossy feathers—it was impossible to see where the wound was.

The next morning Siddhartha whispered to me that Devadatta had come asking for the bird as his right—Siddhartha refused, and Devadatta then said quietly: “Must our friendship be broken for the sake of a wild goose?”

“It is not a question of our friendship,” Siddhartha

replied, "but of the life of the bird, and of the lives of all birds, and also of the right I have of possessing everything that falls in my garden."

"Then if I fall in your garden," Devadatta answered, "will you possess me?"

"No, I shall not possess you unless I overcome you by force."

Immediately afterwards, as though a sign had been given, they walked towards the lake of the black lotos buds, stripped and wrestled for the space of an hour, for it was silently agreed between them that whoever should first throw the other into the pool should possess the bird. Only a few pages were present. Hearing the groans of the combatants, the dancing girls had hidden themselves, and some of them had even reported the matter to Bambuni; but no one came between them. They wrestled bare-handed on the slippery, dew-filled grass; they wrestled without mercy, silently, doggedly, with complete absorption in the task before them. They were not ill-matched. The brown body of Devadatta was well-made, though the legs were short; yet his shoulders were heavy and powerful as a bull's, and I saw afterwards how he would dig his toes into the earth and fight from there upwards, as a flower thrusts itself into the sunlight, or a tree. He reminded me always of one of those sprawling banyan trees heavy with shade and twisted into strange shapes; he had the heart of a tiger and the cunning of a leopard. Yet Siddhartha was slightly taller; had longer arms and his legs were thick-set and splendidly formed. They fought, as I have said, for an hour, but neither fell into the lake.

It was after this that Siddhartha returned to the small room near the gates and told me of the fighting. There were deep tooth-marks on his shoulders, there were great blue bruises and the skin was dry, as though all the sweat had seeped away; but he pretended that he was unwearied, and

indeed pretended so well that in time he even came to believe in it himself.

"I could have thrown him once, but he bit my shoulder and tried to bite my belly. We were groaning—we must have made a terrible row. Are you sure you didn't hear us?"

"I was fast asleep."

"You have an extraordinary talent for going to sleep at the wrong time, Ananda. I suppose you had the dancing girl——"

"No, I didn't touch her. I was thinking all the time—— Oh, not about you. I was worrying about the page-boy, Datta. I don't like to think of him being whipped."

"He won't be whipped again."

Siddhartha was half-kneeling, half-reclining in his usual position on the edge of my bed.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. I have taken Datta under my care—he is in charge of my ponies."

It was only then that I realised the full seriousness of the affair. They might fight together, they might abuse one another, but to steal a servant from another was the greatest crime. I knew they would be perfectly polite to each other, would raise their hands in the usual benediction of greeting, would even forget that they had fought strenuously, would go chariot-racing and kite-flying together, but there would always be a sense of unappeasable strain between them, and perhaps there would come a time when it would burst into flame. But as Siddhartha lay there, tossing his crown of flowers up to the ceiling and watching it delightedly when it fell, I knew he was determined on his purpose.

The next day Devadatta came with an offering of fruits from Benares. I say "fruits", but they were waxed and honeyed and resembled *gopis*. They were very fresh. Devadatta must have sent for them on the evening he shot

down the wild goose. As Siddhartha offered some to me, he said: "Have you heard the news? Bambuni has decided I must get married."

"Do you want to get married?" I asked.

"Not at all. I am perfectly happy with the dancing girls. I suppose I have to get married, but it wouldn't have happened if Bambuni did not insist upon it. It happened yesterday—they sent a messenger. But it's dreadful——"

I could not understand why marriage should seem dreadful to him, for he was of the right age, it was necessary to secure the succession, the kingdom was prosperous, he was famed for his beauty, and besides this he had spoken about marriage himself a few months earlier with a half-wondering delight in one of the Koliyan princesses who had come on a state visit. He had seen her, he said, bathing by moonlight, and it was like being suddenly struck dumb—such whiteness that the moon seemed a craggy rock in comparison.

"But why dreadful?" I insisted. "There will still be the dancing girls if she does not satisfy you, and almost certainly she will not satisfy you——"

His brow furrowed.

"You are too young, Ananda, to understand these things. I have come to the age when at last, after desperate attempts all through my childhood, I can see who I am, I can contemplate my identity, I see myself in my own mirror—I am I, Prince Siddhartha, Kshatriya Kumar, lord of this province and that, wearing the royal diadem, and do you know, more than anything else I want to be able to understand my identity, to perceive perfectly who I am, this yellow-skinned thing lying here at the foot of your bed. Well then, I shall get married and have children—and how shall I retain my identity? Am I my children? When I am lost in the embraces of my wife, who am I? With a dancing girl one can be perfectly callous, but in marriage at the moment of embracing one must lose oneself completely, otherwise the

children will be unthinking things like stones; I must give them my life, but must I give them also my identity?"

I could not follow this strange argument, and said: "Have they chosen a wife?"

"Oh, of course, it's all settled—Bambuni is pretending to be racking his brains, but you know what his brains are like—if you cut open his head, the brains would be little squares like cubes of ice, and each one would be marked with some sign or other—'education of the young princes', 'matters of politics', 'heating arrangements in the classroom'. You're not very intelligent today."

"I swear I am quite wide awake, Siddhartha, but—but—if you are married—honestly, I would prefer you not to marry for some years."

I said this because I had suddenly realised that all my fears of Devadatta were groundless: I was faced with a fear still more horrible, the fear that Siddhartha would be taken from me more completely by his wife than by anyone else.

"Then we shall never wander through the forest together," I complained. "I will never wake up in the morning and see you lying on the edge of my bed, I will never go chariot-racing with you, I will never go to the Temple with you or to the Pavilion of the Lanterns. It's selfish of me, but I don't want you to get married. Please wait a little while."

Siddhartha smiled and went on to discuss the arrangement for the marriage, which he had learned from one of the chamberlains, the horoscopes, the secret meetings of the ministers, the discussions round the Gold Table at which Bambuni presided sometimes, though more often it was the king, Suddhodanna himself, and how everything was arranged for the second day after the first full moon in autumn, though nothing had been told him officially, and he had learned about these things only by bribing the servants.

"And who is the girl?"

"Oh, Yasodhara, of course—I couldn't possibly marry the

Koliyan princess, they would think it was an attempt to form a treaty of alliance, the Malla princes would object—and besides she is perfectly formed. She has breasts like little peaches, and her arms are as soft as peach-blossom——”

I burst out laughing.

“How on earth do you know these things?”

“Oh, Ananda, you are so ignorant this morning. On these matters I have my own spies—the dancing girls know everything. I notice you don’t talk to the dancing girls, you play with them and fool around with them, but you never talk seriously with them, yet they are far more educated in matters like this than Bambuni. It’s most important to understand the dancing girls.”

I resolved to pay more attention to what the dancing girls were saying, but at the same time I so dreaded the separation from Siddhartha that I wanted at least to spend every moment up to the time of his marriage with him, and immediately suggested that we should spend the day in the foothills.

“We’ll have to take Devadatta with us,” he said.

“Why?”

“He will think it is a kind of declaration of war if we refuse.” He thought for a moment. “If you like, we could arrange to meet him somewhere, then we could return with him, but we could walk out alone. It would be a sort of punishment for him, but at the same time he could hardly take exception to us. We shall go out disguised as peasants.”

I thought about the plan for a long while, lying on the saffron bed with my eyes half-closed, conscious of Siddhartha’s presence, trying desperately to think of some plan by which we could avoid Devadatta entirely, but at last, seeing no escape, I nodded and sank wearily among the pillows. I knew it was unequal combat. I could not fight Devadatta and Yasodhara together. I would remain in the palace, and perhaps they would give me some secretarial

post to the ministers, there would be formal visits to each other's gardens, but the splendour of our young years would be gone. When I opened my eyes again, Siddhartha had disappeared as silently as he had come.

I dressed hurriedly, but there was a long time before the meeting and I amused myself by putting my thoughts in order. I tried to calculate what chances I possessed of keeping Siddhartha to myself. It was, of course, impossible to poison Yasodhara, though at the time of my great-grandfather that would have seemed to be a solution; it was equally impossible to poison Devadatta. I could kill myself—this was hardly a solution. I could poison Siddhartha's mind against both or either of them. I could hope for a war in which one of us would be killed honourably on the field of battle. I could—there were a thousand things which might be done, but all of them were impossibly vain, and besides this, my mind was sterile, I was so overwhelmed at the thought of losing his love and my own love for him that I knew only one solution which offered any promise of salvation: to leave the palace at once and adopt the life of a wandering mendicant. "And what would be the use of such inconceivable idiocy?" I asked myself. "To starve, to seek shelter in the forests during the rains, to torment my flagging spirit, to desire more lustfully than ever because desire was forbidden to me, to see none of the fine people of the Court, never to go chariot-racing through the orchard, always to be sickening and lamenting my fate—yes, if you take on the yellow robe of a mendicant, at least be one of those mendicants who are called Watchers of the Sun, who burn out their eyes with feasting on the sun's radiance. But even then, Ananda," I went on to tell myself, "you will be consumed with envy and hatred, you will torment yourself with longing for the Court, for the lotos lakes, for the scented clothes and the crowns of flowers. Perhaps in time Devadatta will return to Benares, and certainly Yasodhara

is more dangerous to me than this young brown prince whose manners are those of a small southern state—I must attempt to poison Siddhartha's mind against marriage, but I must do this cunningly and be very wary, lest he come to know what is on my mind." There was a knocking at the door. The servant had come to tell me it was time to depart. As I walked out, dressed in the mud-caked clothes of a farmer, I noticed in the mirror that I had the same crooked smile as Siddhartha on the day after his first love-making.

We walked along the edges of the rice-fields, keeping the Himalayas straight in front of us. We could see the scarlet rhododendrons on the edge of the forest, and there was red millet in some of the fields. The clouds were low, but small, and high above them lay a faint shimmering of fish-scales. The rains had passed, the earth was washed clean, the hot sun fell from an untroubled jet-blue sky. In this valley, watered by the silk-soft waters of the Himalayas, the colours are sharper than in the south, but the shadows are more delicate. There lay the smoking forest in front of us, the thick green of the deodars, the russet edges of ilex and birch, the flaming *neem* trees with their garlic-scented berries, whole hosts of forests shading off into each other up to the highest foothills; and then beyond them, almost transparent, not white nor blue nor clouded but of some unearthly pure colour of their own, stood the Himalayas.

We plodded over the rice-banks with great pounding strides, saying very little, glad to be outside the palace enclosures, glad to see the immense blue sheets of water over the rice-pools instead of our small lotos lakes, glad above all to see the white ghostliness of the Himalayas. I said once: "Are you still searching for the *paramatma*?"* but it was some time before he answered: "Yes, I must get

* The supreme soul or identity.

married—it is the law among the Kshatriyas—but the supreme identity of my soul still troubles me. Last night there were clouds like ice-floes. I got up very quietly. The dancing girls were in bed—it must have been about four o'clock in the morning—and just standing there by the black lotos pool, it seemed that something, I do not know what it was, came raining down out of the sky and filled my soul to bursting; and at that moment, at the precise moment when I thought I could bear this thing no more, when I was most excited and at the same time most quieted, it seemed to me that I was fully conscious of the *paramatma*.” “And then what happened?” “Nothing, or rather the most accursed thing—I remembered that I had left something, a jade ring, with one of the dancing girls, went into the pavilion and lay with her.”

I was secretly pleased by this. I began to think of a plan that had been growing in my mind for some minutes: that we should both of us deride women, and live strenuously without them.

I said: “I think it is better to have nothing to do with women, Siddhartha. There is greater virtue in having nothing to do with women. The smell of women is terrible and cannot be disguised. It would be best if for the space of a year neither of us lay with a woman.”

He smiled, for we were passing some peasants knee-deep in the rice-fields, and among them was a young girl. He played on his flute until she looked up, and then he sighed.

“It’s best not to love, Ananda,” he said, “but it is better still to love with detachment. You are never detached. You are so filled with love that you have long ago agreed with yourself that love is something divine; but it is not divine, or at least it is not divine in the sense in which you call it divine. O Ananda, have you seen the face of a young girl, how she secretly adores everything, the fountains, the trees, her own limbs, and all that she sees and feels? The snows of

the mountains are for her like the riches of creation, and more dear to her than the opals of the South Island are the green buds on the trees. A young girl, waiting for her lover, knowing that he will come, and having not yet set eyes on him—how adorable she is, how tenderly she follows the road on which one day she will see him coming. But, Ananda, have you seen the eyes of a married woman?"

"Yes, their terrible eyes," I assented, and I could have jumped for joy, thinking of his marriage with Yasodhara.

"No," he smiled, "sometimes their eyes are not terrible, but calm, for they love with detachment, and indeed they are doubly detached, for they are separated from their husbands by a barrier of hammered steel—the presence of their children." I could see his brown smooth chest rippling with laughter under the blue linen of his coat. "There is detachment among married women, and perhaps it is possible to learn from them."

"But how?" I asked, for I could not understand what was going through his mind.

"By watching them, Ananda, as one learns everything else—all learning is a watching."

By this time we had passed the farmers and come to the edge of the forest, where there were a few water-tanks kept clear by officers of the Court, for sometimes the snow leopards came down from the high mountains and at times of drought, if there is no water, they may enter the city. Siddhartha suggested that we bathe there for a little while, for there was a long journey ahead.

"How long?"

"We shall not be back before nightfall, but even if we stay out all night, I shall not leave you, Ananda."

We undressed amid the croaking fat-bellied frogs. Siddhartha caught a small tree-frog, bright green, which seemed to be made of lacquer, perhaps an inch long, and for a long time he gazed at it, wondering at the shining colour

and the soft cream-white under-belly; then he tossed it into the tank, but seeing that it could not swim like the other frogs, he dived after it and kept swimming in circles with the tree-frog held high above him in his hand.

“Does the tree-frog know its identity?” he asked, and lifted it to his lips as though enquiring an answer, and I heard him muttering: “Who has ever seen Brahma face to face? Who may this be, who has thus vanished away? a man or a god?” Then he allowed the tree-frog to escape from his hands and he watched it hopping along the leaf of a banana tree until it nestled in shade.

“Are animals plagued with an identity?” he asked shortly afterwards. “I feel the tigers and the snow leopards must know who they are, and perhaps they know before man knows; and the Himalayas know who they are; but does the tree-frog know? And then, is it necessary to know? Is it not enough to know only the enjoyment of every strenuous movement of body and mind, and thus find oneself within the great *paramatma*, unconscious of self but perfectly conscious of the whole? And who are we, who know at all times that we are within the whole, and yet sometimes are given a special indication of our own presence within the whole, as last night amid the clouds and ice-floes I thought the whole was passing through my veins and swelling my heart, and I was nothing or I was all things.”

I said: “With how much of his body can a man still remain alive?”

He looked surprised.

“Why?”

“Because if we could pare down the body, we would know at least that the soul is in that part which remains. The soul is not in the legs and the arms—we can cut them off, but we know that identity remains. The soul is in the stomach or in the head, but perhaps the legs and arms are also conscious of their identity, and each identity consists of

a million other identities. They say the Sun is the great horse—does it know its identity, or does each flame of the Sun know its identity?”

It must have been about that time that we noticed the butterflies. Siddhartha shouted: “It is all nonsense—identity or no identity—look at the butterflies!” and I jumped up and saw them streaming north-west directly over our heads, millions of whirling pink and yellow butterflies flowing hardly more than a hand’s span above the trees. They were like a wind-borne stream of petals, and we saw that they were so crowded that they jostled one another and sometimes the torn wings fell out of the cloud of butterflies, quite large, about a whole hand’s span in breadth. I have never seen anything like that—so many, so crowded, so tumultuous a heap of butterflies flying across the sun on their way to the Himalayas. I thought: the mountain foothills are seventeen thousand feet high, and beyond them are loftier ranges; they will turn in a moment and veer south, or perhaps they will settle in the forests—but no, I could see by the way they were going that they were flying straight towards the Himalayas, an impassable barrier of rock and ice and snow which stood across their course.

“Great rattlesnakes, what are they doing?” I shouted. “Is it a mirage—so much whirling splendour? Look how they are tossed by the wind, there must be millions of them, I have truly never seen anything more beautiful——”

“Watch when they float over the Blue River,” Siddhartha said, for the river curls round the forest and is very broad there. I waited. It was almost as he had said—the pink and yellow reflections of the butterflies flowing above the river, and there were so many that the reflection stayed in the water for about five minutes, and it was as though the water had suddenly grown alive with pink and yellow fish. It was terrible. Clear-cut in the sky, that immense sweep of butterflies heading straight for the Himalayas.

"I have never seen anything like it," I said.

"I saw it last year," Siddhartha said. "It was while you were ill. Exactly the same, only a little larger and there were clouds, and perhaps more wind. I followed them till they were out of sight. Afterwards I sent some of the servants to the hills—it was four days before they came back with baskets full of broken wings. They had dashed themselves against the Himalayas."

"And died?"

"Of course. I told you there were deserts beyond the Himalayas. There——" a wing of a butterfly was thrown by the wind at his feet. "There is the proof that even the Himalayas are not eternal."

"Poor Siddhartha, have you gone mad? If anything is eternal, the Himalayas are eternal. They will be there through all the *kalpas* that remain."

"No, they will not be there," he said quietly, "otherwise how can the wing of the butterfly be here? There must have been a time when the butterflies went to the deserts in the north—a time before the Himalayas were born."

It was quite incredible. I gasped: "A butterfly more enduring than the Himalayas? You fool!" I held the veined wing to the light, so that the sunlight came through and the soft yellow powder flaked off in my hands, but I knew this was not the end. Other thoughts came crowding. If the butterflies, why not the mendicants? The yellow butterflies hurled themselves at the snow-blue heights, and the mendicants wandered thither of their own will, seeking peace in the vast desolation of snow, living in caves, eating the mountain dew—were they also hurling themselves to death? And was it true that there were deserts beyond? And if, as Siddhartha said, smiling quietly, the Himalayas were less enduring than the wings of a butterfly, were the stars more enduring, was the earth enduring, or the seas, or the rivers? The cities, I knew, perished. I, too, have seen

the crumbled walls in the rice-fields, and sometimes one of the peasant-farmers would bring to the palace an old grey stone chalked with inscriptions no one could read, or with designs unlike our present drawing. Where was the end of all this? The earth seemed to be gathering speed, about to hurl itself at the Himalayas.

“You must be talking nonsense,” I said. “It must be an accident—the wind, or they have gone blind. It has happened twice——”

“No, it has happened every year since I was born.”

“Will you listen quietly, Siddhartha. This is terribly important. Birds fly to the same nests. Do you really believe the butterflies are flying to a remembered home, and that home is not the Himalayas, but something beyond, and that once they could fly there when there were no Himalayas?”

“This is what I said.”

“But perhaps they have lost their power. Once they could fly high—now they have lost the strength of their wings.”

“Yes, perhaps.”

“Or else there are earthquakes, and the shape of the Himalayas has changed. Why did you say the wing of a butterfly was more enduring than the Himalayas?”

He shrugged his shoulders and began dressing, smiling when the tree-frog came into sight again, and I saw that his face was turning red in the sun. There were little bubbles of water on his lips and cheeks, and the hair looked matted and black, though like the hair of all the Kshatriyas it was fair.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said tenderly, “but perhaps the wing of the butterfly is more enduring than the Himalayas, though I believe that all things are enduring—even ourselves. When we die, we endure. The flower bleeds and perishes, but what remains is still the flower, and another flower will grow from it. The petal falls into the ground, and from the ground the tree takes its nourishment; and we, through all our remembered lives, are the same.”

I did not want to ask him about his remembered lives—we had spoken about it so often, sitting cross-legged at the edge of my bed, his eyes concentrated pin-points upon the lamp he held on his knees; he would try to remember; some detail would appear—a piece of cloth, a footprint, a forest which was not our forest, and the faces of his children. “What happened to the children?” I would ask. “I can’t see very far—only a little way. The children died, of course, and perhaps you were one of them.” Saying this, he would laugh and blow out the lamp. For myself I could remember little except a small red-earth temple among green hills, but we have no green hills here and our temples are chalk-white, with swords and gods inside them, though each god is only another face of Brahma.

I said: “Are you sure there are deserts beyond? This is what is terrifying—I thought we lived at the edge of the world.”

He said nothing, and I knew it was useless to ask him further, so I begged him to tell me what the baskets of butterfly wings were like, and we must send out more servants for the wings this year, for by now the butterflies had disappeared out of sight.

“They were hard and covered with ice, and really very beautiful. I have still got some, Ananda. I put them in the cellars where we keep the ice-water. And please don’t think about these things.”

“Why not?”

“It’s dangerous—like looking at flames. The mind reels. As soon as you think deeply, the mind comes against precipices.”

We were skirting through the forest of deodars. The stillness of the afternoon held us both silent. We saw the maize and millet rolling in great rust-red waves, and the biscuit-coloured walls and drum-towers below, and the two rivers, one red and one blue; and then we dipped into the

cattle-road under the hanging leaves of the deodars, the path slippery with pine-needles, and there was no sound of birds, for the birds are almost noiseless under the Himalayas—only the crickets and the bull-frogs and perhaps the sound of a blue boar sharpening its tusks. And sometimes a grey-whiskered *lampur* swung noiselessly overhead.

It is at night that the forest awakes to the tumult of battles royal, and you hear the tapping of the musk-deer and the sharper tapping of the moles. At night I think even the moon-moths and the fishes in the pools can be heard. But the most terrible sound of all—far more terrible than the tigers and the snow leopards—is the sound made by the elephants when they rip up the bark and hack off the leaves of the banana trees: it is a soft sound, but very startling and nearly as frightening as the sudden outburst of chirruping among the crickets in the evening. All sounds are moistened and dulled and changed in the forest, so that sometimes I have been deceived by a strange tinkling, thinking a sheep with a bell had strayed far from its flock, when it was only a cricket in the grass at my feet.

It was dark, though scattered light fell from the topmost leaves; and because it was dark I fell to thinking once more of Devadatta, and remembered the poem Siddhartha had written on the stone bank of the lotos pool. I could hardly tell him that I had read some of it, looking over his shoulder, so I said: "Tell me how to write poetry, Siddhartha."

"It must be like the moment when the *paramatma* descends," he said, "but where the *paramatma* fills the spirit, this other thing overflows into the sentiments and emotions, and you can no more avoid chanting the lines which fall so mysteriously into the heart than you can avoid being filled with the *paramatma*, when it descends. And what is strangest of all is that sometimes, when you are meditating upon something quite different, the words come to you—words filled with prophecy or warning, words which have

nothing to do with the subject of meditation you have chosen, words so charged with meaning that you are like someone thunder-struck, recognising the secrets you have buried. But the worst of it is that one can only write alone: if one could write in company with others, it would be greater poetry.”

He was lost in meditation for a while, then he said: “It is best to sharpen it like a sword.”

I asked him about the lines he had written.

“They frightened me, because I had never written anything like them before. Shall I sing them to you?” and he began to sing, very softly, the four opening lines I had read. I think he knew I had read them.

“What is it all about?” I asked.

“I shall know one day, but they are very mysterious. There is no fatality. I am sure I shall not die soon. *A falling, as of dew from lotos petals.* What does it mean? The dew falls certainly. There is no end to the dew falling. The leaves shiver in the wind, and the dew rolls along them—and have you noticed the moment when the dew-drop reaches the edge of the leaf and seems about to fall, but does not, and the wind shivers it again, or perhaps a bird hops on the leaf, and then it falls—so much waiting, so much trembling, and you feel your whole life has fallen and you will never again play in the sunlight. When I am king, I shall change the banners—they will be bright gold, as they are now, but in the centre there will be a lotos flowering, and on the leaf a single drop of dew.”

I said: “It must be some warning——”

“Or more than a warning,” he answered, “but there will be no fatality. If I could not remember my previous lives, perhaps I would believe I would come to an end, but I know I shall live again, and always as a king. I think Devadatta hates me, but he can do nothing.”

We had journeyed for perhaps an hour in the forest, till

our clothes were sticky with the moist air. The darkness was closing above us like water, and we heard the dripping of the leaves. For a while we held banana leaves over our heads, for it was like rain—evening rain, when the bark crackles as well as the leaves, and yet we knew the sun was shining overhead. It was damp and moist and sweet-smelling, and sometimes there were flaring patches of red overhead—a parroquet or the sky, impossible to tell which; and sometimes an abandoned tank grown ripe with creepers, and pud-marks all round it. We had lost the way. I asked Siddhartha: “Where are we going to meet—by the red stone? but the path is miles back.” He smiled: “Yes, where the tanks are,” meaning the great basins of curved stone where once there must have been a city. “Do you remember, we went there once—so many blue boars sharpening their tusks that they looked like needle-women with their scissors?” I remembered, but we were sunk in meditation and had long ago forgotten where we were going. “Devadatta will be angry,” I said. “He will think we delayed him purposely, or worse—stayed in the palace.”

We turned back slowly, and it was not easy: we had grown accustomed to this slow walk in the half-dark, the slippery pine-needles underfoot, the rustle of honey-bears—the only animals we had seen on the journey. There were peacocks shining dull gold, but that was at the beginning. We tried to retrace our steps, but even that was difficult; and there were the same flaring patches of wind-swept sky, the ochre-coloured phosphorescent bark gleaming high up and sometimes orchids; and it was all evil-smelling, the grass decayed, the creepers clinging to our clothes, the forest narrowing. Once we came upon a slate-blue buffalo which had fallen into a ravine with a sharp-edged ploughshare of tamarisk-wood still joined to its hide; the ants had hollowed it out, and the thing stank, but even in that darkness we could see the magnificent horned head and the places where

the eyes were red with blood, and like roses. It had probably wandered from the rice-fields only a few weeks before; a tiger may have killed it, or it may have stumbled into the narrow trickling ditch. It was a cow buffalo, the blue hide wrinkled and gashed, very old.

But we were lucky. We knew we were coming to the red rock when we came to the first tanks so sodden with creeper-growth that they looked like hillocks, though you could hear the water spilling out from the runnels. Here, too, the forest changed from deodars and birch to silver banyans with immense waterfall-beards, the water trickling down the slender ropes of silver leaf like saliva into the ~~beard~~ beard of a drunk man. There were white flowers of amaryllis and some yellow creepers.

"This must have been where the palace was," Siddhartha was saying. "Seven flights of steps, then a sun-disk——"

"I can't see anything."

We still could not see the rock, which stands alone in a clearing, with tanks all round it. We listened for a while, hoping to hear Devadatta, but there was no sound except that ceaseless trickling of water from the flooded tanks. Here were rocks split and decayed, with banana trees growing through the cracks; stones slippery with green furry moss turning black when you passed your hands over them; curious obelisks and towers hidden by creeper and waving fern and silver spider-web; places where the animals never came, for there were no pud-marks. They did not come to the red rock either—there must have been a curse on the place, or a holiness. And then, while I was coming out of a hedge of ferns and plunging recklessly in the direction of a red shaft of sunlight which I took to be the rock, Siddhartha whispered hoarsely that he had found something—a heap of coins or a casket, and I looked and saw him plunging his hands into what seemed a large cup of earthenware and lifting up a solemn cascade of diamonds

and amethysts and pearls which shone blinding white and fiery red in the faint watery light of the place. I was so thunder-struck that I ran up to him, but all he said at first was: "It must have been built for a hero—I was wrong to think it was a mendicant," and then a little later he said: "The world's so old, Ananda, these stones may be thousands of years old, and all the time they have been here." There they were, the sun pouring through them as they trickled through his fingers, white and red and green and gold—only the pearls were dulled a little by so much immersion in the saltless rains. "There are altogether too many jewels in the palace," he complained. "I suppose we shall have to play chess with them, or shall we leave them here?"

"Better to use them as chessmen," I said. "It will remind us of the journey through the forest."

He nodded; we gathered them up, leaving a few for the spirits of the forest, lest they come to molest us, and for perhaps half an hour we searched for inscriptions on stones or more jewels or something which would give us a hint at the plan of the palace—or perhaps it was a burial-ground; and all the time Siddhartha seemed to be weighed down by the thought that everything here smelt of a terrible old age, only the jewels remained. "The jewel in the lotos bud," he whispered. I could not understand these words and asked him to explain. He said: "Neither does the dew on the lotos disappear."

Our clothes were torn. Hunger had sharpened our senses. We were growing accustomed to this faint watery sunlight. We wished we had brought torches. We cleaned off the moss from the stones, but our reward was only a black wet stain smeared over the stone: the moss-roots grow deep and bite the characters which men have bitten in stone. I doubt whether a butterfly wing is more enduring than the Himalayas, but moss destroys the most enduring things made by men; and water destroys what moss has left. Once

there were delicate and graceful characters engraved on the stone: now there was only unformed rock.

The place had one advantage: because there were no animals, there were no reeking shoulder-high piles of elephant dung. The air smelt sweet and cool, and the wind in the leaves was like silk rustling. Besides this, though few flowers grew in the forest, we found a clump of rhododendrons and the gravel-grey pines were beautifully shaped, forming arches over our heads. Siddhartha was troubled how we could find the place again—he talked of bringing workmen and servants from the palace—but after a while we decided to try to find the red rock. To our surprise it ~~was~~ not long before we found it, climbing over what may have been the steps to some ancient palace and suddenly finding ourselves in the grove.

Since the last rains the place was almost unrecognisable: ferns sprouted from the rock, there were orchids and small butter-flowers, and moon-moths were flapping drowsily. The late afternoon sun came down and lit the rock with a faint ruddy glare. There was no sign of Devadatta, but on the rock-ledge there was a square of red silk, quite fresh, presumably a sign that he had come and gone, having waited for us so long.

“We must leave something to prove that we have come,” I suggested, and Siddhartha immediately spilled out a small pile of emeralds on the red silk, removing the stone which kept it down.

It was then that the most extraordinary thing happened—the most extraordinary thing perhaps that has ever happened to me. We had been perhaps three minutes in this clearing. The little pile of emeralds shone darkly against the frail red silk, which must have come from one of the dancing girls. We were talking quietly. I remember Siddhartha said: “It was good of him to come—I was afraid he would not keep his promise, and really there is no reason why he should

trouble to meet us here.” We talked a little about the emeralds, and then suddenly, very faintly but very clearly, we heard the sound of laughter. I cannot explain the quality of that laughter. It was low and mocking and mischievous and there was a hint of something more than mischief in it. The forest was eerie at all times. The shadows were thickening, and growing darker; and suddenly from all directions, not from one direction, we heard this laughter.

“It must be Devadatta,” I whispered. “Shall we call to him?”

The laughter grew louder. The wind had stilled, we were rooted to the ground, there was only the sound of the laughter. Siddhartha called out in a low voice: “Is it you, Prince Devadatta?” His voice was hoarse, and I saw the sweat pricking out of his skin; and there were black smears of sweat under his armpits and across the back of his shoulders. Then his voice dropped still lower and he whispered: “If he should choose to kill us, he would kill us here. They could throw our bodies into the tanks, and then if we were ever found they would say we had slipped into the tanks at night—there are arrows which show no wounds.” Then the laughter came again, this time louder and closer, just behind our ears, a low muffled drumming laughter. They might kill us? But who were *they*? And then I remembered, with a sudden new awakening of fear, that Devadatta went always accompanied by an armed servant, a huge coarse half-naked brown man he had picked up in Benares.

The laughter ceased. We crouched down—we could only avoid the arrows by making our bodies smaller. I was thinking of that brown man hidden among the ferns, and perhaps they had been following all our movements in the abandoned temple; but there was no more laughter, only the half-silent running of stream-water from the tanks and the faint whistling of the highest leaves.

"They will come soon—I can hear something," Siddhartha whispered.

"What sort of thing?"

"It sounds like an animal padding softly."

I looked up desperately at the sky, the red fading, the darkness coming. I feared another night of storms. We, too, could hide. We could run crouching, until our bodies had disappeared and flattened themselves among the ferns, the creepers, the roots of the shrunken trees. We could lose nothing by running for our lives. But for some reason we could not move, we were held there—not by the intangible presence of Devadatta, but by the thought that the moment we began to run, we would hear the low mocking laughter again.

And then, from some other direction, not the direction we had expected, we heard the crackling of branches as some animal came bounding towards the clearing. "He has sent a tiger against us," and I thought of the small Koliya steel dagger I always carried, about five inches long from tip to haft, of blue-white steel with a watered blade and a gold ring round the haft; and then the animal came running wildly towards us, all white except for the green leaves sticking to the fur, an immense white snow-leopard with reddish markings on the feet, so huge that the bristles of its head came above my shoulders. As it broke through the creepers, the laughter began again, and this time it was deafening, loud and maniacal, and so shrill that sometimes it was inaudible.

I held the short dagger and waited. There were perhaps twenty yards between the creepers and the red rock. I saw the great yellow eyes and the rippling fur-white shoulders as it made three bounds across the clearing, the mouth wide open, the great yellow fang of the tongue pulsing in and out; and then I must have closed my eyes, because when I opened them again Siddhartha was lying on

the ground with the great beast over him, and I could smell the warm fur and the ugly breath coming from the animal and I heard the laughter again; but what was strange was that Siddhartha was not struggling, he was simply lying there and there was some blood coming out of his arm, and the snow-leopard was sniffing him all over, and sometimes clawing him.

I am not so brave as Siddhartha, but at least I am also a Kshatriya. The smell of the leopard infuriated me, and I threw myself, half-crouching, half-running, on the beast with the knife pointed upward, hating the way it played with Siddhartha and hating more than anything else the three or four streams of blood which were coming from him. I jabbed quickly—the best place is under and into the throat, because the heart lies very deep and it is better to cut the throat-veins. Siddhartha was moaning, his hands covering his face. The animal must have been given some of Siddhartha's clothes to sniff, for it went for him immediately. And then Siddhartha managed to roll away, and I kept on jabbing at the throat until the blood came, staining the white fur and falling in a trickling stream on the grass. Siddhartha's clothes were almost torn from his body. He was not unconscious, but he was writhing with pain and finding it difficult to get up. The snow-leopard was fierce, I could not reach the heart with the short knife and though I had wounded it, and its breath came in short sharp evil-scented grunts, I knew I would have to wound the beast many times and in many places before it would sink down. And just at that moment, when here and there small swelling stains of blood were appearing on the white fur, Siddhartha rose up, took the dagger from me and hurled it with all his strength at the place where the sound of laughter came from.

“It's Devadatta,” I said breathlessly.

“It may be,” he answered, then looking down at the

animal, all white and sticky red, he said: "Don't kill it—it's a lovely beast," and he began to caress it slowly across the muzzle and over the shoulders, and then ran to pick up the datura petals which were growing near-by and smeared them on the wounds, saying: "It won't hurt you again."

We were both breathless. It was growing dark—the only bright things were Siddhartha's gold skin and the white fur of the beast. The forest light darkened, not in gradual and perceptible motion of change, but in sudden increasing darkenings. It was still March, the rains had not yet come, the creepers were making a clucking sound in the wind, but there was no more sound of laughter. Somewhere, high overhead, we thought we saw the arrow-heads of wild geese. I thought of the lotos pool, and the long journey home. I am not sure, but I think I heard Siddhartha saying: "There is a fatality between us," but when I looked he was still stroking the leopard and the wounds seemed to be healing.

The beast was no longer beautiful. Here and there on the white fur were patches of leaves and petals, and Siddhartha made a kind of bandage of leaves to stop the bleeding at the throat. He stroked it very gently, from the wet muzzle to the point on the shoulders where a bone almost breaks up through the fur, and sometimes he stroked the paws and whispered to it strange words of endearment. I could not understand his affection for the animal which had almost killed him, but afterwards I was to learn that he was always half in love with death-dealing things, whether it was a spear or a short sword heavily engraved or a wild animal overthrown.

"We must take it back to the palace," he said.

"And what the devil shall we do with it there?" I asked, for I was breathless and out of temper. "There are enough animals already. You have a jerboa and two tiger-cubs and a mongoose and a tame eagle and heaven knows how many

other animals—and besides you have a snow-leopard already.”

“It would be nice to have a leopard-cub,” he smiled.

“You call it a leopard-cub!” I answered angrily. “It’s as large as a full-grown tiger—larger.”

“Yes, but they’ll mate, and then I’ll have a leopard-cub.”

He was smiling. In this darkness I could see only his skin through the torn blue cloth, and the white fur. His wounds had stopped bleeding, and I knew that he too had salved them with the petals of the datura plant. He knelt down and whispered again to the leopard, for it was trembling a little and had lost much blood; then he began making a rope of creepers, fastened it round the neck of the beast and we began to walk slowly home.

I was still afraid of Devadatta. True, the laughter had ceased, but we were still in the forest and darkness was coming down, and there was no moon. We knew the path from the red rock, but we did not know where Devadatta was. I remember I caught a glimpse of the emeralds sparkling on the red silk on the rock like little grapes of blue fire, and I remember nothing more except the slow plodding through the forest, the smell of the snow-leopard’s breath and the soft padding of its paws.

“There’s no reason to be afraid,” Siddhartha murmured once. “He cannot see us, and we cannot see him.”

After a while he said: “Perhaps it is not Devadatta at all, perhaps he is perfectly innocent, we only know that he waited for us and left a square of silk cloth—and perhaps he did not leave it, it was someone else. We’ll ask when we return to the palace.”

“We could ask the boy Datta,” I said. “He is the only person we can rely on. We can’t trust the Arabian.”

He nodded and murmured something about the hardships of Devadatta’s life, and then he said something which struck me with renewed fear: “He is Yasodhara’s cousin.”

“That’s impossible,” I exclaimed.

“No, perfectly possible,” he said quietly. “He is a prince of Magadha.”

“So he wants to kill you in order to marry Yasodhara himself,” I said, and I could hear his quiet breathing and the padding of the leopard in the dark.

It was a long time before he spoke, and when he spoke I thought I detected a sense of strain, as though he was saying things against the grain, saying things which he hardly believed or thought possible.

“I do not think he wants to kill me, and I am sure he does not want to kill me because of the goose, but it is possible that he is consumed with jealousy, because in his former lives he was not a king, and in all my former lives I have been a king. And then I am sure he does not want to marry Yasodhara.”

He said a little later: “I shall get married, I shall have children, but I shall never grow attached to them. The flower bleeds—better not to love.” And then very quietly, almost as though he was speaking to the tune of the padding paws of the snow-leopard, he went on: “I want to bring peace to the world—an end to desires. Let there be no desires, Ananda, only love—and yet I would not have you love as men love, for there is much burning in love. I would have you adore all created things, but I would not have you possess them, or enter into them, or in any way take them into your arms. The world is sick of loving, Ananda, and if you must love, I would have you love as the plants love, and let there be no burning.”

I had heard this, or words much like them, before, but he spoke them in the darkness with an increasing soft passion so that they seemed new and strange, and I asked: “Why must there be no love? You said yourself once that there was colour in that burning.”

“Yes, but it is like the colour of phosphorescence,” he

answered. "In the ferment of love things perish more quickly—I would have things endure."

I wanted to say: "Like the butterfly's wings, which are more enduring than the Himalayas," but instead I said: "I have been meditating on 'the enduring'. It seems to me it is nonsense. Nothing endures. Is the life of a butterfly longer than the life of a man? You say all things are illusion, but I say that space is not illusion, but time is illusion."

We had come out of the forest at last. We could see the starlight, the small flames on the gate-towers in the distance, and there was no sign of anyone else—no sign of Devadatta. The snow-leopard was driving forward, straining on its rope of leaves, and I thought: "Devadatta must have passed by here a few minutes ago, the scent is still fresh on the path, the leopard knows where he has gone." But he must have passed this way some hours before, at least an hour, because after a while the leaf-rope was sagging and the leopard had lost whatever scent he was following. Thinking of Devadatta, though I felt in my heart a great certainty that he was responsible for the strange interlude during the late afternoon, it occurred to me that there was someone still more terrible than Devadatta, and that was the man we called the Arabian. And then other things occurred to me: why was it necessary to attack us with the snow-leopard? They could have killed us easily enough with their own weapons; they could have buried our bodies under the ferns and the creepers, and even if the king sent out the whole army in search of us, they would never find us. And I thought of Devadatta's thick-set body with the heavy shoulders and the fair-grained brown skin and the thick black eyebrows which almost met over his forehead, and I did not know whether to fear him more than I feared my own fear of him.

In the starlight at last our fears left us. The crickets were singing with deafening shrillness in the rice-fields. Sometimes we caught a gleam of light—a peasant guarding the

fields or a will-o'-the-wisp, and there were a few glow-worms. Then the walls came nearer, we met a caravan with charcoal fires burning in wicker panniers on the saddle-bags, and soon afterwards we entered the city.

When we had tied up the snow-leopard, we asked one of the palace servants whether there was news of Devadatta.

"He came in about four hours ago."

"Are you sure?"

"O, quite sure—he came to Prince Siddhartha's room and enquired of him, and when he heard that the prince was still away, he said we were to give this to him," and then the servant ran into the little pavilion and brought out a square of red silk, exactly the same size and colour as the silk we found on the red rock.

Siddhartha said nothing. It was late, and we were hungry; besides, it was necessary for him to go to the apothecary to have his wounds seen to. He smiled dreamily in that torch-light—the palace was awake, there were sounds of singing from one of the other court-yards and we could see the distant trees nestled with lanterns, and though there was no moon, the stars came out bright and strong, and there was the Milky Way so white that it resembled a smear of butter across the sky.

Afterwards he came to my room, bandaged in several places, wearing the white silk kilt, barefoot as usual, and at his belt he wore the little square of silk cloth. We decided not to go to the Pavilion of the Lanterns. "To hear music in the distance, and not to partake of the music; to listen to the rain on the bamboo tiles, and not to be walking in the rain——" He lay on his bed, and I lay on mine, and sometimes we heard the growling of the snow-leopard in its recent captivity, and the soft padding of the slaves' feet on the stones, and then the drums would begin again and drown these accustomed symbols of our hardy security; or else,

suddenly flaring above rose-apple trees, we watched a spluttering firework go out in the night.

“And if we died?” Siddhartha asked. “Listen, Ananda, if he had killed us—what then?”

“I suppose I would become a ghost and you would become a king,” I said bitterly, and I remembered then that when I dug the dagger into the throat of the leopard, I was wishing it was Devadatta; but he seemed to be talking to himself and I heard him saying: “Would Yasodhara sorrow? Would the king sorrow? Would the ministers sorrow? They would put on the robes of mourning, and for three weeks the palace would be sickly with people whose cheeks and foreheads were smeared with ashes, and the dancing girls would wail and beat their breasts and claw at their breasts, and the servants would wonder who would be the new master, and the banners would be hidden by little tufts of horse-hair—for the great Sun is our lord—and soon, soon, as a pebble is thrown in a pool and is never seen again, there would be no more sorrow. And it is right that there should be no sorrow.”

“If there is love, there is sorrow,” I answered. “We love what is closest to us, we marry so that we may enjoy our children’s grief when we are dead, and I think sorrow and love cannot be separated.

“Does the flower sorrow when it bleeds?” he asked, “or the stones or the moss we have removed from the inscriptions? We must sorrow for all the sadness of the world, or we must not sorrow at all.”

Afterwards he was silent. We were both restless. It was hot, for summer was coming on, and soon there would be rains; and of that night I remember only our extraordinary restlessness, and the red rag of silk at Siddhartha’s waist like an immense wound, the growling of the leopard in the dark and Siddhartha brooding there in the light of the butter-lamps of the sorrow which was

not his own, for he was not killed and no death had come near us, and sometimes it would seem to me that Devadatta's brown gaunt face would appear in the half-light of the shadows, and at such moments I held the handle of my dagger and wished to heaven he was there. Then I must have slept again, for when I woke up Siddhartha had vanished, but from the direction of the Pavilion of the Lanterns I heard laughter, though all other sounds had ceased.

III

The Contests of the Court

THEN IN THE EARLY SUMMER THE TEMPERATURE rose, dry hot winds came from the east and on the pearl curtains of the bed there were little drops of steaming water. Clouds piled and massed against the Himalayas, and in the fields the earth stood baked and cracked in the shape of spiders' webs, and the rakes and mattocks lay idle, and there was no wind on the fields, where the farmers were idle, drenched in sweat from the hot currents of air swelling up through the cracks in the earth, the lotos pool turning to steam and the lotoses faded.

We waited for the rains impatiently. The half-naked servants fanned us. Siddhartha had never looked so much like a beautiful young god as he lay on the stone bank, his body oiled and scented, sweat trickling down his shoulders, his long thighs veined like marble. For a while he amused himself by growing a beard—then little gold wires pushed firmly through his gold skin, the bristling gold of the beard and the light yellow hair falling over his shoulders, and sometimes a servant would come to comb his beard as he lay there, and the little dark-skinned boys from the south in

their long white kilts which reached to their sandals would fan him with waving plumes.

Sometimes we read quietly in the library, but it was difficult to read: when you opened the scrolls, the clicking of the bamboos was quite insufferable, and worse than the clicking of the scrolls was Bambuni's presence—for he was always there. He would tell us to read the *vedas* again, and then, wearing only the lightest silk garments, while the kingfisher plumes waved overhead, we would sit at his feet while he recited the verses, his face turned always in the direction of the Himalayas. He was growing old. We thought he would die soon. We did not care. The heat mounted outside and blanched him, and his clothes grew more ragged about him, and we could see the thin bony flesh of his bare arms as he lifted them in salutation to the sacred word; all the while we thought of the light quivering on the lotos pools, the dancing girls swimming in the shade of the mangoes, and the silence of the gardens. "And who is Varuna?" he would ask, while the drowsy flies buzzed against the latticed windows, and perhaps a pale-green light from the outside would fall on his uplifted face, no longer the face of a ghost but of a dead man, so old, so skull-carved was that dreary skin, and we longed to get out in the sunlight.

Siddhartha had so great a passion for the sun that at that time he refused to worship anything else. There were ceremonies at the ancestral shrine, where the image of Kshatriya himself glowed among lamps; there were genuflections; there were prayers whose meaning was forgotten—they were much older than the *vedas*—and there was a special priest who wore a kilt of gold: he must have belonged to the royal family, for his hair was as light-coloured as our own, and he walked gracefully, though he too was old. Siddhartha loved the sunlight; he wrote praises for the sun's rays; he read all that has been written about the sun and he

prized especially one of the *upanishads* which was written to the sun's glory. And I thought: With his skin of gold, he is so much like the sun that I could easily imagine him becoming a god, and sometimes late at night or early in the morning, lying on my bed, he would say: "To fly to the sun is to become a god. Do you know, Ananda, the best thing is to become like the sun, shedding light on all things, consuming oneself and yet never being consumed," and I would laugh, thinking how at other times he would say it was better to be like snow, like a rose, like the frosted leaves of the mango trees, or like a butterfly's wing more enduring than the Himalayas.

"And will the sun last for ever, Siddhartha?"

"No, but there are other suns—the whole is permanent, but the parts perish. Have you looked at the sky at night and seen yourself being drawn upward among the stars, and there is no end to space, and you know at that moment that nothing will change, though everything will change? There are birds that fly to the stars." And saying this, he would lose himself in contemplation.

While the fields were baked dry, while the steam rose from the lotos pools, the stars shone brighter and seemed larger than ever—great wheels of things spinning and almost obliterating the light of the moon; and so, in the evenings, we returned to the pools and watched the starlight reflection on the withered lotos leaves and even on our bodies and on the bodies of the dancing girls as they came from the water. "The starlight flows," he would say, "and our bodies are like suns—look at the girl coming from the water, how the stars drip from her shoulders and breasts and thighs and from her hair, and in all the dark places of her body there are stars."

But as June came nearer, a lassitude descended on us. Devadatta was called away to Benares, Yasodhara was coming to stay at the court, there was talk of frontier wars—

our tempers grew worse. Once Siddhartha blazed up in anger—I have forgotten about what—and I came upon him coming out of the water towering with some rage or other, the water matting his hair, a lotos petal smeared on his immense chest, his legs and arms shaking with some secret rage. I asked him what was the matter—had he found something in the pool which disturbed him, but he said nothing and marched still naked to his own room, more god-like by reason of his anger than ever. He was silent for three days. He never spoke about what he had seen or heard—something in the pool, a whisper of one of the dancing girls hidden in the bushes—and now I remember the lightning flickering in the stormy unclouded sky, and this dripping figure coming out of the pool in rage.

There are other things I remember. There was an execution outside the walls which we attended disguised as merchants. The crime had been particularly reprehensible, and the slave was ordered to be whipped to death. Such a thing was unusual in Kapilavastu, for though we were soldiers, we had abandoned fighting; and though we were trained in chariot-racing and archery, we had abandoned the use of weapons except when in mortal danger. The slave was bound to a post. He was a small man, not yet thirty, with a fine face, a long jaw, high cheek-bones, and he did not flinch, he seemed even to enjoy the unbearable pain of the whips, for three men beat him, and we listened to the whistle of the little shreds of glass attached to the leather thongs, and we hid our faces in our hands. The day was so hot, the air so rich and baking that I believe he hardly felt the pain. At first his teeth were clenched together. There were ribbons of blood ringing round his naked body, and sometimes the glass would cut into his face, yet he steeled himself and did not allow himself to sink to the ground; and all morning and all afternoon we heard the whistling glass and the queer crackle as the thongs bit into

blood-soaked flesh. The boy had murdered his wife. He looked up at the sun. The whole of his body was wet with blood, and sometimes when the blood dripped to the earth we could see the white muscles underneath. Siddhartha gazed at him tenderly, never taking his eyes away from him, though sometimes when the slave's flesh quivered as the result of some unusually cruel blow, Siddhartha would wince and push his fist in his mouth to prevent himself from crying out. Afterwards, on our way to the palace, we introduced ourselves to a doctor who was present at the ceremony; the doctor said the man had died in the morning, and though he quivered and seemed to be shielding himself and looking at the sun in the afternoon, these were only the reflex movements of death. "Why did he look at the sun—so that he could bear the pain?" Siddhartha asked, but the doctor turned away; and all night we trembled together, thinking of the deserted field beyond the walls, the black crows, the stench of blood and the small huddled figure whose muscles shone white in the moonlight.

We went once again to the forest. This time we did not go alone, but took with us some of the dancing girls and a small elephant carried our panniers of food. We paused at the red rock, but there was no sign of the red silk or the little pile of emeralds—some peasant must have found them. Siddhartha helped me to find my dagger, which he had thrown among the creepers, and it was then that we learned from one of the dancing girls of an incident long hidden from us. When Devadatta returned on the night of the snow-leopard he went immediately to the place where Siddhartha and I were staying, the small pavilion near the west gate of the palace; he held a silver-thonged whip in his hand; he was cursing under his breath, and bristling with anger, and he kept saying that Siddhartha had stolen or ordered to be stolen from him one of his falcons—he did not use the word "stolen", but it was clear that it had disappeared

and that it was to be found somewhere in Siddhartha's chambers; he had talked for a long time about the falcons, grey-winged birds with high fluted necks and cream-coloured claws, and it was evident even to the dancing girls that he was saying this to attract attention to himself, for everyone knew that Siddhartha had no love of hawking. Then Devadatta had gone raging off to his own quarters, and the dancing girl said that he had amused himself alone with one of his own dancing girls (he had brought six with him) all evening and all night, shutting himself up in a small tower which was like a pavilion at the end of the garden. But why then the snow-leopard, why the sound of inhuman laughter as the light was fading, if Devadatta had already returned home? Why a falcon—why particularly a falcon, except that a falcon is a bird of prey which comes suddenly out of the sun?

“What time do you think he came back?” Siddhartha asked, sitting cross-legged at the foot of the red rock in exactly the same place where we were attacked.

The girl answered: about two *ghatikas* before sunset, and she smiled and stroked his scented beard and pressed her ripe breasts against him, but he pushed her away and said angrily: “Are you sure it was a falcon—not something else? A snow-leopard, by any chance?”

“No, I am sure it was a falcon.”

Siddhartha swung towards me and said: “It is terrible. If she had said nothing about it, I should not have worried about it. Why a falcon?”

It was hot in the forest and iced water was brought to drink. I could feel that he was tracing in his mind's eye the course of the conflict—the snow-leopard came from over there, the maniacal laughter from over there, the dagger was hurled there and those rust-red stains in the grass were perhaps the blood from the leopard's neck. He sighed, pushed the women away and began walking up and down

in front of the red rock. He murmured three or four times: "The falcon, the falcon," and then for a long while I saw him treading down the creepers and moving through the undergrowth—I would see a shoulder, a part of his head, and then he was lost for a few moments. When he returned, the wet leaves were clinging to his flesh.

"Do you remember how white the leopard was?" he asked. "Snow white?"

I nodded. I didn't understand what was happening; the heat was terrible. He was smiling and splashing water over his face, and suddenly he said: "It was white because it was caged: I found the cage, but who lifted the trap?"

"Devadatta?"

"No—the falcon. It's all clear now."

"How?"

"He was cunning. He came early. The snow-leopard may have been brought with him then, or more probably at some other time, and it was starved and given some of my clothes to gnaw at—it knew my scent, and then the falcon came and released the trap. He—Devadatta or another, for I am not sure it was Devadatta—had arranged everything perfectly, but they had forgotten many things. They forgot we might have weapons. And do you remember, afterwards, when we were returning, how tame the leopard was?"

I remembered the long journey through the dark, the ghostly white fur padding softly on a grass-rope as thick as a man's wrist, but I didn't understand this—the falcon—the trap—or why anyone should want to murder us. He took me by the hand and led me among the creepers; he had beaten the path with his bare feet; and there was the trap like bits of grey and sunken wire, for the dead wickerwork does not wear well, and I could see the wood-spring inside by which a heavy bird alighting on it would release the gate. "We would have heard the beast," I said. "It would have

been growling there, and then there's the laughter." We whispered together; we did not want the dancing girls to hear. "How can you explain the laughter?" I whispered, seeing for the first time the string leading from the wicker-cage. "It's all madness, the leopard is not a weak thing, it would not remain in so frail a cage," but there was the string and at the end of the string was a dead parrot. I think it was a parrot. There was only the bright pink beak and the small skull; the rest was eaten away by the ants and the worms.

We returned silently to the dancing girls. I wished no one had spoken of the falcon, and yet I could not believe that Devadatta had attacked us so evilly, or with such planned deliberation. I understood now why he avoided us after our return, and there were other things I understood. Had all this arisen because once a wild goose fell in our garden? I shuddered. The girls wanted to stay there, but instead we went further into the forest, to the place where the tanks were, and the buried stones, and where we had found the earthenware cup full of jewels. I noticed then that the younger servants had brought trenching tools. Siddhartha ordered them to dig at the root of the crumbling walls, and cut down some trees so that there would be more light; but though they laboured all afternoon they found nothing except a bone necklace which might have been left behind by a farm-girl.

It was then that the rains began. The rain came suddenly out of a darkened sky: a hot rain which smoked and steamed and turned the place into a quagmire. There was no warning of this storm. The deodars hissed like the crackling of thorns under a pot, the creepers were flattened down, and turned red; for the rain threw up the red earth until everything up to the height of a man's waist was the colour of blood; and the silks of the dancing girls melted on them. The clouds which had appeared from nowhere seemed to sink lower and lower until they were on a level with the tree-

tops; water came flooding over the tanks; even the beasts were frightened and we heard them growling in the rain. The dancing girls, of course, were screaming, turning this way and that, now running and stumbling among the creepers, now sitting quite still in the mud, dazed by the rumbling of thunder on the Himalayas and the blue lightning which burst among the trees some distance away like the sudden explosion of a million glass vessels. So the rains fell, streaking the trees with silver, turning the earth into marsh, and filling the clearing with blue smoke and red fountains of mud; and all the time it was so hot that we could hardly breathe. The dancing girls were screaming, the paint had run from their faces, they were imploring Siddhartha to protect them, the baby elephant was raising its trunk and making a shrill whistling sound and a few of the dancing girls were trying to take shelter underneath it, till Siddhartha moved them away for fear they would be trampled on. And still the rains came and the smoke rose and the solid earth became a red lake, and we heard the roar of the water swilling over the ledges of the tanks, and felt the stinging of the sharp rain on our cheeks and shoulders like the impact of red-hot iron balls. There are no prayers that are heard by Indra when he is raging. We could only stumble silently and ingloriously along the road we had come, cursing the Court augurer who had predicted three more days of cloudless sky. But all the way along that haunted miserable journey home, while all of us slowly turned bright red, I thought of the yellow-pink beak of the parrot, the wicker-cage which was breaking apart in the sun and the falcon which we had neither seen nor heard in the forest on some other night.

The rains came to stay until the end of September. The clouds roared, and sometimes there was a sound of crackling as though the Himalayas were being burst asunder. I would gaze out at the lotus pools pitted with black rain, the mango

trees at the bottom of the garden hidden by these white sheets which descended from heaven. But the tension, the terrible humid waiting, the awful heat, the feeling that just below the caked surface of the earth everything was crepitating—all this was over, and sometimes there were afternoons of bright sunshine when the palace was bathed in the moist splendour of the rains. There they were—the rose-apple trees, the flame of the forest, the coral and the cotton trees, all blossoming, all thrusting out new shoots of leaves which would suddenly enlarge, as one blows out a fan, into a leaf as large as a hand and as thickly veined. Now between the rice-fields poppies grew, and sometimes the wind scattered their pale-blue petals over the fields till it seemed that our red earth had changed to the colour of the dawn sky. Plums, guavas, oranges and pomegranates all flowered at this time, and though water ran down the runnels and overflowed in the lotos pools, and sometimes one of the pavilion roofs would cave in under the weight of rain, it was not unpleasant in the gardens. We longed for autumn, but we were content with the long summers.

It was the time when embassies arrived, when state papers were examined, when the elephants were tamed and the birds imprisoned in cages. Siddhartha was now nineteen and a member of the state council, which wearied him, for he disliked those endless meetings in the morning with grey-bearded officials, and he disliked even more the hours he was compelled to spend among the state archives. He had shaved off his beard. Now he no longer wore the short white kilt and was compelled to wear the uniform of the ministers, a braided gown trimmed with red and gold, and some kind of beaded jacket over it. He attended to his business gravely, hardly ever complaining, but it was amusing to see how his lithe, agile body would feel constrained in such tightness. But though he complained of the days spent in the ceremonial hall, of his constant attendance

on the ambassadors, he became quieter, less headstrong, and there was a quietness in his face in repose which I had never seen before.

Then—it must have been towards the end of August—Devadatta returned, and once more we began to hear rumours of Siddhartha's marriage. He would rarely talk about them. Yasodhara was living in the city with her father; we knew that Devadatta often visited her; but we heard nothing from her. Siddhartha contrived to have a portrait of her made secretly, and sometimes, coming into his room in the evening, I would see him poring over the portrait by the light of butter-lamps, gravely preoccupied by the features whose outline he would trace with his fingertips. She was more beautiful than any of the dancing girls, even more beautiful than Nina Deva, the dancing girl with whom I was then living, preferring her gold-brown skin to the pink-white of the others, and besides I approved of the chastity of her expression, though she was far from chaste. Sometimes, too, I would find him whispering endearments to the portrait, which was painted on enamel, so that I began to imagine that in some way he was already secretly married and I would never speak about her to his face, or indeed to anyone else, and I even imagined that there were secret meetings between them. I only once broke my promise not to speak of her. I said simply: "Do you really want her in marriage, Siddhartha, or are you toying with the thought of marriage for the sake of marriage, because marriage is something other?" He smiled—I remember the sudden lifting of his face and the way his chin was thrown up—and said quietly: "Whether it is marriage, or the idea of marriage, or the idea of the idea of marriage, it is no more than a ripple of water in the sunlight." I said nothing. He returned to the endless readings of the state archives.

One evening Devadatta came unannounced into our room, bringing with him the young prince Sundarananda,

who particularly interested us because he had once escaped from the Court and travelled round the country as a wrestler. (As a punishment he was sent to a small village called Parchi near Benares, where he was living without any titles of rank and studying under a famous *sadhu* called Kandanya.) He was very tall, almost a head taller than Siddhartha, and amazingly well-built, although inclined to fatness. He was very hairy, and his chest was so fat that he seemed to have two hairy breasts; and most of his body was covered with fine dark hairs. He was extraordinarily proud of this, and delighted in showing himself off in the bathing-pool to the dancing girls.

In spite of his physical coarseness, Sundarananda was well-educated according to the Brahman fashion of the south, but what was most peculiar was the quiet mincing voice that came from so huge a body. Siddhartha asked him about his travels, his studies, his visits to Benares, the complexions of the girls in these places, the industries and the customs, for he had himself never been allowed to leave the region of Kapilavastu; and Sundarananda answered all these questions with dignity and the greatest respect, for Siddhartha was the chief prince of the Kshatriyas while he, Devadatta and myself were far inferior in rank, though if Siddhartha died one of us would be chosen for the succession. At first he refused to sit down. Siddhartha had been reclining in bed, and was compelled out of politeness to stand in Sundarananda's presence. I remember the first occasion on which we saw his hairy body. He had come to visit us as soon as he arrived, wearing his travelling clothes which were stained with mud. It was a mark of special politeness that he should come in the clothes he wore on his arrival, and he explained that the last stages of the journey were like forced marches—it was necessary to reach Kapilavastu before the gates were closed. He had blundered into the palace, and because he spoke in the southern

brogue and refused to put on airs of royalty, the servants naturally led him straight to Devadatta's court-yard. It was about five minutes afterwards that he was brought to us.

We had been speaking for a little while when Siddhartha suggested that he should wear more comfortable clothes—Siddhartha himself had put aside the white ministerial cloak, and wore his white kilt and the vest of pearls. As well as possessing an extremely feminine mincing voice, Sundarananda also stuttered. “If y-y-your h-h-highness w-will p-p-p-p-p-permit,” he stammered, but he went no further, for a servant came with a starched linen kilt, gold sandals lined with bear's fur and a woollen cloak to cover his shoulders; the servant also brought a basin of scented water and three or four small towels, all made of silk and brightly coloured. Sundarananda looked at these for a moment. It was evident that he was not accustomed to such delicate fare, and indeed he had lived nearly all his life like a poor workman, though he spoke the royal dialect convincingly enough, making few errors and always explaining his errors by his long absence from Court. I noticed that Devadatta was very patronising to him, while Siddhartha on the contrary treated him if not with respect (for it was impossible to respect this shaggy animal with the squeaking voice), with the very gravest distinction. Sundarananda thereupon threw off his heavy leather sweat-smelling garments, and began to bathe his body in the scented water. The light in the room was not very bright, and Siddhartha said: “Surely you will take off your vest and things before you bathe, your highness.” Sundarananda looked round sharply at the clothes he had flung on a chair, and exclaimed: “P-p-p-prince Siddhartha, I have already t-t-t-t-taken every one of my c-c-c-clothes off.” Siddhartha almost burst out laughing aloud. I could see him covering his face with his hands, his shoulders were trembling and Sundarananda

himself was so covered in confusion that he was splashing the water all over the place.

After this incident Siddhartha always possessed a protective attitude towards Sundarananda, though he was much shorter and in many ways much weaker. Seeing that even his toes were covered with these fine silky black hairs, I thought: "What a good pillow one could make out of this hair."

Meanwhile he had bathed and dressed. Food was served. Though he was very hungry after the long journey, he pretended to have almost no hunger at all, and it was amusing to watch him eat delicately, while at the same time his enormous eyes would search the plates like two mouths. His eyes were the same colour as Siddhartha's, which are a lighter blue than mine; but in the light of the butter-lamps they looked like gold balls swivelling in their sockets.

He was well-mannered, however. When Siddhartha asked him for details about his wrestling matches, he answered politely enough, though it was clear that he disliked talking about this episode in his life. He explained that the wrestlers were nearly always fire-swallowers as well, and that when they wrestled their bodies were thickly coated with *ghee*. He said he had once by accident broken a man's neck in wrestling, and afterwards he had felt an increasing distaste for the sport, though sometimes even now he wrestled for fun.

"Can you really swallow fire?" Siddhartha asked.

"Y-y-y-yes," he answered immediately. "W-w-w-would you like me to sh-sh-sh-show you?"

"I would be delighted," Siddhartha answered.

"B-b-but it's just a trick," Sundarananda managed to explode. "You j-j-j-just p-p-p-put m-m-m-m-mud in your mouth. It doesn't b-b-b-burn much."

Even then Sundarananda was not sure whether he would be called upon to perform the trick, and I noticed that

he looked craftily away from the direction of the butter-lamps. I also realised that he spoke with a mincing voice and stammered because of the effects of fire-swallowing on the throat. But Siddhartha was insistent. He pretended that all his life he had wanted to swallow fire—it was his greatest ambition—and would Sundarananda be so kind as to show him? Sundarananda could not escape. He asked one of the servants to bring him some red mud from the garden, went into the corner of the room and performed some secret ablutions and asked for one of the resinous pine torches to be lit. This was done. The great black-smoking pine torch was handed to him as he lay on the floor, he passed it several times over his face, pronounced some words in his curious mincing stammering southern brogue and then sucked in a huge draught of fire—so much that the torch almost went out. We heard the fire roaring in his chest, his mouth was closed, his eyes were protruding, he was turning his head slowly from side to side with an idiotic puffed expression on his face, and then suddenly, with a faint hiss, a column of flame was expelled from his mouth. As I have said, the room was quite dark; and all we saw was the half-naked hairy body of the prince lying on the floor with the great column of flame towering above him and throwing down huge red shadows on the walls. Then the flames disappeared, there was more roaring in his chest, and then another column sprang out, and later on there was a third. There were five columns of smoky flame altogether, but the fifth was much weaker than the others. As Sundarananda came lumbering to his feet, Siddhartha was dancing with joy.

“Will you teach me how to do it?” he said, “and will you teach me to wrestle?”

Sundarananda tried to make excuses.

“Your royal highness, I’m n-n-n-n-not worthy to d-d-d-do such a thing,” he answered. “I’m j-j-j-just st-st-stupid,” and he kept on knocking his huge fist against his head.

“I’m quite serious,” Siddhartha insisted. “I’ve never been more serious in my life. You know, they keep me inside the palace. Of course I often go out with Ananda, and we are disguised as anything we please, but truly nothing would give me greater pleasure than to perform in the market-place. Ananda could stick pins in himself and I could swallow fire—it would be such a relief after reading all the dull state papers. How long are you staying?”

Sundarananda was covered in confusion, and exclaimed peevishly:

“I didn’t come here to swallow fire. I c-c-c-came for the g-g-games, your highness.”

“What games? Oh yes, Bambuni told me about them—Manahama, who is the Prime Minister, wants us to take part in some absurd contest or other.” He sighed, and ordered the servants to bring in more butter-lamps, for the room was getting darker and he wanted to see Sundarananda more clearly. “Four games—archery, wrestling, chariot-racing and music. There will be some prizes, and then life will be exactly as it was before. There is a special compartment in the minds of these morons concerned with the ‘education of princes’, but I think we are quite old enough to educate ourselves.” The lights were brought in. Each little hair on Sundarananda’s legs shone like gold wire. As often happens even in summer, the night was cold; a fire was brought in and then there was the most extraordinary thing—Sundarananda’s body seemed to be covered in gold netting, and he would push out his legs and look at them with an amused frown which made him uglier and at the same time more charming than ever. Siddhartha said something about arranging for his quarters to be near ours, and I could well understand that there was already a growing affection between them, and in any case Sundarananda was a more pleasant companion than Devadatta.

The talk went on desultorily. Once or twice Siddhartha

mentioned in passing that he had been recently to the forest, he even said he had found a dead parrot and kept the beak as a keepsake, and talking about entirely other things he mentioned the falcons and the red silk we had found, and the snow-leopard and how much he hated walking in the forest at night. Devadatta had come in a short while before. While Siddhartha was saying these things, he was not looking at Devadatta but staring into the fire. Devadatta smiled pleasantly when the wine was handed round by one of the slaves. I think his face twitched when Siddhartha spoke about the parrot, but it was calm and impassive at other times. Sundarananda spoke of his days as a wrestler, describing the roped-in circle in the grazing-grounds, the eternal smell of cow-dung fires, the endless journeying. "It's better than being a monk," Siddhartha said, and Sundarananda nodded his head violently in disagreement, saying there was no holiness in swallowing fire, it was a trick and anyone could perform it after half an hour's practise. Shortly afterwards, explaining that he was tired after the long ride, he begged to be shown to his quarters; the servants were summoned, Siddhartha asked if he wanted a dancing girl to amuse him, but though his eyes looked greedy, he said he wanted more to sleep than to wrestle again, and besides it was growing late, we had heard the first cockcrow and the wine was going to our heads.

To my surprise Devadatta remained and suggested a game of chess. I think he wanted to measure how much of the curious incidents of the spring Siddhartha remembered and understood. Perhaps the suggestion was perfectly innocent, but you can learn a great deal about what a man is thinking by playing chess with him. And there was one other thing: Devadatta had been very silent all evening, and now he began to talk, as we say, like the June rain. It was clear that he possessed for Sundarananda the same kind of innocent affection that we felt for him, an amused brotherly tolerance and even enjoyment of his presence, and an almost protective

feeling. Sundarananda was so tall, so strong, so childish that we were all afraid he would one day hurt himself; and from that day onwards I grew accustomed to thinking of him as the elephant, a great lumbering tree-hacking elephant like those which are specially trained in the forests, with iron weights round their necks to prevent them from running away.

“And do you know,” Devadatta explained, “when he was studying under Kandanya, he practised the most extreme austerities——”

“What, that elephant?” Siddhartha interrupted. “Such fat! If he held a woman on his lap, she would just disappear in all that fat!”

He laughed contentedly, a servant was touching his brow with a sweet-scented silk cloth, the fire was going out and presently some heavy woollen capes were brought in.

“What kind of austerities?” Devadatta was asked.

“O, the usual kind—lying on nails, going without food, smearing his body with fresh human dung, haunting the *ghats*.”

“What happened to the fat?”

“It just remained. He was born like that, and he can’t help it—some disease or other. He is immensely strong, and he must have a heart like a bullock to carry all that fat around with him.”

Saying this, he moved the chessmen and stared into the flickering pale-blue embers of the fire.

“And he suffers from the most terrible headaches,” Siddhartha went on a little later. “He almost screams with pain, and at such times you can order him to do anything you like. He prefers boys to women. I suppose he thinks he might break a woman’s neck; and so he is very delicate and humble towards women, even women of the servant class, and always asks them: ‘What can I do for you?’ and ‘If it please you, can I be of service to you?’ and such-like

nonsense! He has no pride whatsoever. Of course he enjoys his royal rank, and if anyone speaks roughly to him he will pull himself up and say in the most contemptuous tones imaginable: 'Do you know who I am?—I am Prince Sundarananda of the royal Kshatriya clan,' and then a look of the most extreme confusion appears on his face. And there's another thing—he likes bear-hunting. He told me that he was convinced that in one of his former lives he was a bear.'

"How extraordinary!" Devadatta exclaimed, "a bear killing a bear!"

"He doesn't kill them," Siddhartha said quickly. "He likes trapping them in wickerwork cages. He is very clever with his hands. He can make the most delicate cages, yet they are so strong that no animal can escape from them——"

I knew this game from of old. It was a game that we often played when we were younger, when there was treachery at Court; but now that there was no more treachery we played it less rarely. Devadatta was still trying to find how much Siddhartha knew; but Siddhartha was perfectly calm, utterly impassive, with that immobile marble fixed gaze which came from long meditations near the lotos pool. There was little light in the room, but the chessboard was made of squares of opals and rubies; and some light was reflected upward on their faces from the chessboard. In this light I could see Devadatta's lips twitching with pain; he made a false move and two or three minutes later the game was over. Siddhartha had won. Devadatta threw a handful of gold on the table and Siddhartha picked it up silently and wrapped it in the square of red silk which he kept always on his person.

It was some time before anyone spoke. Siddhartha sank away into the shadows where he was hardly visible, and began to tell a story of one of his previous lives.

"I was once a tiger," he said. "It was a very long time ago, and at that time—it was somewhere in the Hima-

layas—there was a very beautifully-marked tigress, her skin sleek and shining. All the male beasts were enamoured of her and wished to possess her in the usual way, one saying ‘Come with me,’ and another ‘Come with me.’ So at last the beasts said to one another, ‘Let us not quarrel over this matter, but let the lovely tigress herself decide whom she will select for herself, and let him be her husband.’ Now at that time I was king of the beasts. So first of all came the buffalo, and advancing towards the tigress he said: ‘Amongst men my dung is used for the sweetest scents—for this reason, O beautiful tigress, you should select me for your husband.’ Then the tigress replied to the buffalo, saying: ‘I notice a great hump above your neck, and it seems to me that the hump is used by men for the tying-on of a yoke by which you may draw a chariot—how can I be possessed by you or desire you for my lord and husband when you are so evidently made to be the slave of man?’ Then there came a large white elephant, who addressed her thus: ‘I am the greatest and tallest of all animals who inhabit the snows—I can raise trees by the roots and hurl them a hundred thousand leagues, and I have been known to run for a hundred thousand miles without food, so great is my endurance. And in war, too, I am known to be the strongest. So how can you refuse to select me for a husband?’

“Then the tigress answered: ‘You, O elephant, when you hear the roar of the lion or the tiger, tremble in every pore, you take flight, you are confused and terror-stricken, so how can I take you to be my lord and husband?’

“Then the tiger king advanced slowly and majestically through the herd, he licked the tigress and stood over her, saying: ‘Look well and examine my proportions and my form; see how in the fore part I am large and powerfully made, and in the flanks I am graceful and sleek. I dwell amid the snow mountains and pass my life without restraint, and I am able to protect and feed for other creatures. I am lord of

all the beasts, there is none who would dare to compete with me, whoever sees my form or hears me roaring takes to instant flight. I am not able to say anything more about my great strength or my great majesty; but I ask you, dear tigress, as you know all this, to select me and take me as your lord and husband.' Then the tigress answered the tiger king: 'Your strength is very great, and your spirit high and noble, your body and your features are in the highest degree graceful: so I select you as my husband, and I desire to honour and respect you henceforth as I ought to do!' "

There was a long pause. The flames had gone out: there were not even any dying embers. Wrapped in our cloaks, we lay on the long couches listening to the night. Rain thundered on the roof—we were so preoccupied with our thoughts, the sudden visit of Sundarananda, the conflicting torments of the game of chess and our awakened fear of Devadatta that we had not noticed it before. Through the windows the world was bathed in silver rainlight, for by now the moon was shining and sometimes the lightning flickered, turning the mango and pomegranate trees purple. I heard Siddhartha's quiet breathing, and I wondered why he had told this story to Devadatta. The last of the butter-lamps went out as the wick sank into the black vestiges of the oil. Then silently in this darkness I heard the growling of the snow-leopard.

During the following weeks the rain slowly came to an end. We were always practising for the games. Sometimes we would ride in chariots through the rains, and I remember of those days the wet touch of leaves on my face, the grass all green and silver, the pomegranates ripening and bursting through their skins, the humming of the bow-strings and the incessant sounds of music from the pavilions, for we were all practising on flutes and zithers and those little reed-pipes which were introduced a few years ago.

According to the established custom, we did not meet during the day but practised alone, either with our teachers or by ourselves. There were, of course, disadvantages in this, for if anyone was unscrupulous he would fill the air inside his garden with the sounds of activity; and since our gardens adjoined, we heard but did not see what the others were doing. I had been living with Siddhartha; now I stayed in a garden nearly a quarter of a mile away, not far from Sundarananda's garden. I could hear Devadatta, but I hardly ever heard Sundarananda—only the thwacking of his bow-strings and sometimes the screaming of the axle-bearings of his chariot or the neighing of the small sleek mountain ponies. He was extraordinarily quiet, and this was worse than Devadatta's loud clamour, for I began to imagine that in spite of his elephantine body and stupidity he concealed great powers. According to the custom, we slept alone during these days, not only because we were afraid of losing our physical powers, but also because, as everyone knows, at the end of summer the conjunctions of the stars are predisposed against these luxuries.

Every evening, we would meet at one of Siddhartha's lotos pools. The lotos leaves were green; the flowers in full bloom—tremendous dew-wet red buds, or black buds, which I thought slightly evil; and if there were no rains, or even if there were rains, we lay on tiger-skins on the stone edge of the pool, sometimes fishing with little bronze hooks, though there were rarely any fish and we nearly always threw them back again; or swimming; or playing at acrobatics; or simply gazing at the cloud-mirroring pool. Even the dancing girls were not allowed to come near us, in case they might awaken our desires; so we were served always at this time by the ugliest boys and by old men who were pock-marked, diseased or nearly bedridden. It was at this time that I came to know Sundarananda better.

One evening, when the clouds were low and there was still a faint curtain of rain hanging over the garden, Siddhartha suggested that we should meditate on the broken surface of the pool. We would often plunge into meditation gazing at the still surface; and, of course, nothing is easier, for our eyes are made of water and we meditate through our eyes. Sundarananda was sitting cross-legged, naked or wearing the kilt—I have forgotten which. Smoke rose from the pool, the leaves were trembling and the surface was pitted with little black-silver rings. A faint rain was falling, but the sky was almost cloudless. Sometimes a butterfly swung low among the scented lotoses, and sometimes a frog or a bird hopped on them and threw the whole pool into confusion. Siddhartha was sitting cross-legged on the bare stone with some silken gold material thrown negligently over his shoulders, and I remember there were flowers in his hair and he still wore his necklace of pearls. He looked amazingly beautiful. Those three or four weeks of strenuous exercise and music had refined his features; he looked older; his eyes were more deeply and more firmly set; his arms looked powerful and well-joined to the body, and he was losing gradually and imperceptibly the adolescent loose-limbed delicacy of body which sometimes gave him the appearance of a girl. I knew he was meditating deeply—there is nothing better for meditation than a lotos, for the green of the leaves calms the emotions and the buds awaken the spirit.

We had the practice in those days of meditating first on the invisible intertwined roots, then on the thick stem surrounded by swirling water and then on the hairs of the stem and the bright ventricles and veins through which the lotos derived its nourishment; then on the spreading and jointing of the leaves, and the way the sunlight fell over them, and the wind, and perhaps at that point we would allow our minds to be momentarily distracted by the appearance of the dew which rolled along the smooth surface; then we would meditate on

the formation of the bud and of the flower; then finally we would allow our minds to soar into the sky, imagining the whole of the heavens to be the unfolding of the small red bud of the lotos, ourselves contained within it, being ourselves the shadow of the flower and the flower itself, having our roots in the slime at the bottom of the pool, ourselves the universe, the bud and the flower. I knew that Siddhartha was meditating in this way, but more keenly, more daringly, more athletically and with a deeper penetration than usual.

Suddenly, perhaps an hour after we had begun our meditations, when darkness was descending, there was a curious sound from the direction of Sundarananda. It was almost a clucking sound. I paid no attention to it at first—I was already half leaf, half man. I could feel the sap rising from the bottom of the pool through my limbs, I could feel the sunlight breathing inside me, I was wholly the leaf and already I was penetrating the bud, becoming myself the virgin flower. But the clucking sound went on. I thought it was one of the slaves coughing. I could have choked the boy. I could feel the leaf peeling away from me, the light thickening—no longer the delightful pink light within the bud; and then I turned my head slowly and saw Sundarananda waving his hands in the air and he was saying in his high-pitched mincing feminine voice: “I am b-b-b-b-becoming a b-b-b-b-bird.” It was ridiculous. The rain had ceased. A sparrow was hopping on the leaves. Whenever the sparrow threw up its damp ruffled wings, Sundarananda did the same; yet his eyes were closed, or nearly closed, and he was not looking at the sparrow.

Siddhartha did not move. Lost in his meditations of coolness and the growing bud, he seemed cut off from the world, isolated in the imprisoning chamber of his breath and of his vision, so ghostly gold a thing that he seemed even then superior to anything in creation.

“Where art thou?” I whispered to Sundarananda, for I knew it was dangerous to awaken a sleeping man with anything but a whisper. “Art thou inside a bird?”

The rude question must have awakened him a little, for he turned to me without opening his eyes and clucked again, for mercy’s sake, and because the bird had hopped away into the bough of a mango tree. The leaf was trembling and the bird was fanning out its wings and letting them dry in the last rays of the descending sun, and it began to grow cold.

“Art thou a bird?” I whispered again, for it is dangerous to meditate on living things since one is in danger of losing one’s soul inside them and not being able to pitchfork it out again, and then he opened his blue eyes wide and looked at the pool and said: “D-d-d-dear, where am I? D-d-d-dear, I thought I was a b-b-b-bird,” and there was a look of iron-skinned terror on his face as he slowly dragged his soul back into himself again. But this was not the end. He fell asleep again a few moments later, and by chance a butterfly came and once more he began waving his hands and arms and a curious sound escaped from his lips. This lasted for perhaps three minutes. I dared not touch him. He began to rise slowly, grunting and sweating, a huge towering blubber of manhood which began to dance over the garden in the half-light with hands flapping, the sweat pricking out and the great hairy rump dancing a dance of its own. It was terrible. Sundarananda had become a butterfly. I ran after him, for fear he would fall into a pool or break his head against a tree-trunk; at last he subsided groaning on the grass; a slave threw a cloak over him; he began to talk light airy things and still kept fluttering his hands and groaning, while the last rays of the sunlight sent red gashes on his skin. A few moments later Siddhartha awoke; Sundarananda was carried into our room and lay on the couch breathing heavily for some while, and then there was a terrible spasm, as he attempted to regain his soul, and he opened his eyes.

“What happened?” he asked, his teeth chattering.

Siddhartha knew nothing of the affair.

“Dost know?” Sundarananda turned to me. “I have been bird and flower and star—now that happiness has been taken from me.”

Siddhartha said: “All things are contained in the bud of a flower, but what is it to be a star?”

“It is cold in a star—not dead, but cold——”

He had lost his stammer in the excitement of being these things, but it returned again when the slaves brought wine to heat our chilled stomachs.

“Tell me,” Siddhartha said, “what is it like inside a star?”

“A star is m-m-made of water,” Sundarananda tried to explain. “White and green, b-b-b-but a butterfly is yellow. Yes, it must have been a star at the bottom of my stomach,” Sundarananda went on, his voice so high-pitched that it almost made me scream. “I vomited it up. Then there was the bird. The claws are hard. The little heart beats—pit-pat—I w-w-waited for five seconds. Tuck, tuck. To reach that bough—no, I could never exert myself so much. Such pity. Waiting for a road.”

“What road?” Siddhartha leaned forward questioningly.

“A r-r-road in the air. They’re green and blue. The green ones are waving in the wind, but the blue ones climb straight upwards, like spiders’ webs. You wait. You see backwards and forwards, but sometimes it goes quickly—too quickly. You wait. The little heart beats. You dig your claws into the leaf, and you wait—I know it’s dangerous. I must have eaten something that turned my stomach.”

“What *are* you talking about?” Siddhartha lifted his hand and began to wave it before Sundarananda. “I can’t understand the bird. I have nearly done it myself, but it’s so hard—the soul gets clogged in the feathers, and I know how difficult it is to get away. And I can’t understand the green ones. They

waving lines in the air, and the other things, but why the red blood? It's best not to think of blood." He shuddered. Something was happening to us. It was like the moment when Siddhartha took up the jewels and wrapped them in the square of red silk. "Please tell me what happened," Siddhartha said.

Sundarananda looked dazed, and suddenly, as though some recollection of the past had occurred to him, he put out his long fleshy hairy legs and began to gaze at them, but there was nothing there except a recent scar. It was dark again. The boys padded silently. A parrot began to scream in its cage, and there was the great good-natured blubbery mass of Sundarananda looking at his big toe. And then a beatific smile appeared on Sundarananda's face, his mountainous breasts heaved, he smiled slyly and a moment later he was rolling with laughter.

"I wish I understood what was happening," Siddhartha said, pouring out some wine. "He becomes a star and then a bird——"

"And a butterfly," I interrupted.

"Yes, a butterfly," Sundarananda burst out laughing. "I w-w-was w-w-waving my w-w-wings."

I told him how I had followed him through the garden, but he paid no attention to me, but continued to laugh and look at his big toe, and Siddhartha whispered: "He's really mad—something wrong with his head."

We all laughed. From that moment Siddhartha's affection for Sundarananda changed: no longer only brotherly and protective, but deeply confiding. He would take his troubles to Sundarananda, he would tell him the most intimate things, he would speak to me gently of Sundarananda's experience, saying how right he was to have escaped from the Court and become a wrestler; and there was an added tenderness in his voice when he spoke to others of Sundarananda's accomplishments. As for myself,

I felt no jealousy. I, too, developed the greatest imaginable affection for my cousin and would seek his advice, and tell him things (as for example my affection for Nina Deva) which I would tell to no one else but Siddhartha. And to all my enquiries he replied frankly and charmingly, in that ridiculous high-pitched stammering voice which was sometimes like the cooing of turtle-doves but more often like a young girl singing out of tune.

The time for the games was drawing nearer. I had visited Nina Deva once or twice, but only to caress her. I told her about my new relationship with Sundarananda, but I purposely said nothing about another relationship which at that time was occupying my attention. Among the dancing boys at Court was one who was well-skilled in wrestling. His name was Sujati. He was about the same height as Siddhartha, but brown-skinned, dark-haired, feline and very graceful, though immensely strong. He seemed to have no bones in his body. He would dance for hours sitting cross-legged and wreathing his fingers into strange shapes of lions, flowers, trumpets and indeed, the movements of his hands could assume the shape of anything he pleased. He was a famous dancer, a famous singer and a famous wrestler, for having the appearance of being without bones he could escape any clutches and any embraces. He was very religious, wore the Brahman cord from the left shoulder over the right hip and generally he wore a plain blue turban and a coloured vest and a long silk skirt of some white material. He was said to be secretly in love with Nina Deva, but since she never spoke of him in my presence and I never referred to him, I was never sure whether there was anything between them.

During the last days before the contests I wrestled with him every day. I no longer went to Siddhartha's palace in the evening, but contented myself with listening to this boy's singing, and sometimes I would ask him to dance for

me. And then, sitting cross-legged on the stone plinth in my garden, with the mango trees and coral trees behind him, with oil-lamps hanging from the boughs, I would watch him while somewhere out of sight the musicians played. It was perhaps three days before the contest that I began to notice that if I watched his hands, I could sink into a state of meditation more completely and more easily than if I gazed at the lotos in the pool. But the hands were living? We were often warned against meditating on living things, yet I felt no danger, I saw only the interweaving patterns of the brown oiled hands with the long slender fingers, and though the hands were incessantly moving, the movements were so graceful that I was not conscious of any movement at all. Has the hand a soul of its own? Can one lose one's own soul to the soul of a hand, being only a hand, becoming no more than a palm and five fingers? And is it dangerous to become a hand, as, God knows, it is dangerous to become a smear of blood? I could see nothing dangerous in it—it was like watching, as we often do, the ripples in the pool when a drop of dew falls in it. But what was most remarkable was that though the meditations were calm, I was conscious that the thinnest imaginable veil divided me from something else, some unexplored territory beyond the interweaving of hands. What kind of territory it was I shall never know for I never pursued these meditations, but sometimes I think that if one meditated on those hands long enough, and deeply enough, some unannounced glory would appear, and perhaps great power; for nothing is more beautiful than hands in repose except hands in graceful movement, and for years afterwards I dreamed of those hands weaving across the spaces of the stars some strange patterns of their own. Even now in the fading light I see those dark hands weaving against a background of trees and smoking oil-lamps and stars, and it seems that there is nothing so graceful as these hands which were like flowers.

In the early morning, with the dew still on the grass I would forget the beauty of his hands, and think only of his supple muscular body, and not even of his body, but of the positions and strength of each muscle, and how each muscle assists another, so that the body itself whatever shape it assumes is like a spring—or rather five springs, the two arms, the two legs and the trunk; and just as in playing chess there are an inconceivable number of possible positions and possible ways of attack, so too the five springs of the body can assume an infinite number of positions. We stripped, covered our bodies in *ghee* and faced each other in the sunlight at arm's length, holding hands. At that hour there were no others in the garden. For a long while we remained there, according to the custom of the time, pressing with all our force on the hands till one or other of us was forced back, and at such moments it was permissible to disengage the hands and attempt to overthrow the other in some other way. Sujati was strong. With his legs planted in the ground, he would sway backwards and forwards like a leaf, but it seemed to be impossible to throw him. I remember him smiling, the hair falling over his eyes, his dark skin glinting with the oil and the *ghee*, and though I used all my strength, he resisted savagely and lithely—this boneless spring which slipped out of my hands. He wrestled naturally. He had taken no lessons. He understood instinctively, perhaps because he had studied so deeply the movements of the fingers, how the body can resist, twist, half-fall, but never overbalance. I envied him his grace and lightness of movement, and after we had wrestled for an hour and the slaves had come out at last and thrown warm cloaks of camel-wool over us, we lay on the grass, laughing delightedly, completely unaware or forgetful of the terrible struggles which had tormented us since the dawn.

On the night before the contest I went to see Siddhartha. I found him lying on the tiger-skin couch while the slaves

were rubbing scented oil all over him. There was not an inch of fat on him. We began to talk about the contest which would take place in the immense garden belonging to the king which stretched from the palace to the city walls. He said the auspices had been taken, the lots were drawn, in wrestling I was matched against Devadatta and he himself was matched against Sundarananda, and the games were to begin with the archery contest. He said it was secret, and was not to be told to the others. He smiled, dismissed the slaves, ordered a fire to be lit and offered me wine. I noticed the snow-leopard prowling near the wall, but paid no attention to it, thinking it was tamed by now and perhaps muzzled. Suddenly he startled me by saying that Yasodhara would be given to the winner of the contests tomorrow.

I asked whether he was sure.

“It is quite certain,” he answered, “and Yasodhara has approved of it herself. She is, in fact, the only princess of the Kshatriya clan, she is fifteen now, it is time she was married, and I think Manahama wants her off his hands.” He said this very slowly, in a low voice, as though enunciating a precept.

“Are you nervous?” I asked, for I remembered that I had seen him poring over her portrait.

“Not at all. I am completely detached from love—I shall love her and worship her, but I shall never adore her. I shall adore nothing except one thing.” He said this perhaps three times altogether. “I shall offer adoration to the whole universe, and all that happens and will happen and has happened within it, but it is absurd and senseless to adore a single woman—as absurd and senseless as to adore a single lotos flower in leaf. And if you or Devadatta or Sundarananda achieve her, it will make no difference.”

I complained that the offer of Yasodhara had spoilt the games, the contest was ridiculous, there was the grave danger that the four of us would be separated rather than

bound closer together by this absurd invention of Manahama, there had never been contests of this kind before, it would be better if all the knights of the Kshatriya clan, not only those of royal blood; were engaged in the contests, and for my part I was prepared to ruin the whole affair by refusing to take part in it. Siddhartha thought for a while and looked up at the ceiling, where in gold and green were painted the figures of Krishna and the *gopis*.

“Then everything will be spoilt,” he said at last.

“Why?”

“They are trying to find a husband for her, and you refuse to play their game. It will give them the most tremendous satisfaction. They will watch and say, ‘How proud we are of the beauty and skill of the royal princes,’ or else they will say, ‘Look how bravely Prince Ananda steers the three piebald mares,’ or else they will say, ‘Who is that lumbering elephant?’ or ‘Who is that dark-eyed young man with the coat of rich Benares cloth?’—and you refuse to give them this pleasure.”

I objected that he was being cynical.

“I am not being cynical, Ananda. I am beginning to be weary of being a king, or the son of a king. In all my lives I have been a king, even when I was some animal or other. It’s really most exhausting. A king has perfectly serious duties to perform, but there are also the most ridiculous rituals—the ritual of giving pleasure to people. I have no desire to give pleasure to people. I love people—there is no person whom I do not find entrancing, full of the most extraordinary, the most magical abilities, but when I think of Bambuni and Manahama and my father, and how necessary it is to please them at all times, and how they delight in being pleased, then I feel almost ashamed of being of royal blood, and I would prefer not to be a king in any of the lives that come after.”

“But surely,” I objected, “our greatest duty is to give

pleasure to our ancestors, to scholars and the gods.”

“No,” he said quietly, “our greatest duty is to kill pleasure, to cut ourselves away for ever from our ancestors and to worship the gods.”

The snow-leopard was still prowling round the room, there were a few servants behind the pearl curtains and I heard the tinkle of wine being poured into a bronze ewer. I could not understand what had come over him. Lying there on the couch, perfectly proportioned, like a slender young god, more beautiful than Sujati or anyone else I had ever known, he seemed to be filled with a quiet and uncontrollable despair. Why? He had overstrained himself, he had been looking forward with intense excitement to the contest and suddenly, for no reason at all, the contest seemed to him a thing of little worth. Such things had happened before, he had given way to outbursts of despair, saying that it was terrible to be in the position of a king's son, that the weight of destiny was too great, he was weary of responsibilities—this at a time when he had no responsibilities whatever—and besides he was not formed to be a king, it would be better to be a wrestler, to feel part of the commonness of humanity, not to have a brain which was continually and desperately attempting to enter the *paramatma*, not to be so finally, so completely alone: best of all to be nothing, a flower, a lotos bud, a clump of mud adoring the sun. These moods had passed, as the crooked smile had passed, but now when he spoke of “killing pleasure” and “cutting ourselves away for ever from the ancestors” it seemed that they had returned with double force, so softly and so menacingly had he spoken. The snow-leopard was crouching at his feet and licking his knees. The lamps were burning brightly, and there was only a soft patter of rain on the tiles.

“Do you really mean that one should kill pleasure—never go to the Pavilion of Lanterns, never dress in silks and jewels, never amuse ourselves, never do exactly as we please?”

“I mean that. I mean that pleasure is more intolerable than pain, and that both are terrible. I want to live in a world where there is no pleasure and no pain.”

“But the gods have pleasure, Siddhartha?”

“If you call it pleasure to be in continual contemplation of your own holiness. How dull! I want some other world—not the world of the gods, not the world of continual rebirth, not the world of this earth. Do you know, in my next life, I think I would like to be an ugly bitter-mouthed old harlot—I would scream imprecations at the world—I would reduce pleasure and pain to a monstrous idiocy, turning pleasure into pain and pain into pleasure, and perhaps in doing this, in doing it with the most complete and utter contempt for the men I seduce, I would achieve a kind of holiness. A foul-mouthed bitch in the sun, rolling with worms, with black fluid coming out of the holes of her body knows more about holiness than all the *sunyasis*. A curse on life! They have given me, for the ten millionth time, the body of a young god, and they do not know that I thirst only for holiness—for holiness——”

He was almost screaming. There had never been such bitterness in his voice, so crooked a smile. I had no idea what to do. I could say: “Siddhartha, I am here—I am Ananda—I love you——” but I knew he would turn on me with the bitterest imprecations of all, the imprecations we employ to abuse those who are nearest and dearest to us. I waited for the emotion to subside, thinking of the banners, the trumpets, the races, the rejoicing, the glinting of the staves of the chariot-wheels and all the brightness of the morrow, knowing that it was all faintly ridiculous, like all splendid things except the most splendid of all, and not knowing how to reply. But already he was regaining his composure. The snow-leopard was licking his face, and he was saying gently: “It’s delightful that you have come, Ananda. My head is swarming with the most fantastic

ideas. I can't sleep. I am thinking of the races, and hoping I shall succeed, and at the same time I know that they are senseless—if I go three paces forward the road goes on forever, but if I turn two steps to the left there is a yawning abyss. It's better to be an animal and not to think. I do not think an animal feels pain or pleasure. It feels glory, perhaps, when it kills, when it gives birth, when it leaps on the female—but it is not our senseless glory. Do you remember the man we saw beaten to death outside the north wall? Was it pain or pleasure? I don't know. Death may be pleasure. It's best not to think, to be an unreflecting animal. An animal adores the sun, but it does not speak of adoration. Best to sit still."

"It's best not to feel sharply," I said.

"But I must," Siddhartha said. "I must hurl myself into each life as it comes. There is no sense in it otherwise. The flaming javelin. It's absurd. I lie here very quietly, the slaves fan me, but at the same time my body and my nerves are quivering and rocketing with the pure delight in existence, so that I am continually on the verge of bursting into tears or the most hellish laughter, and it does not end even in meditation—even in meditation. Meditation sharpens it, makes it worse. The old bitch doesn't meditate as she sprawls in the sun waiting for some man to come along so that she can hurl the most filthy abuse at him. It's best not to meditate."• He stroked the snow-leopard. "It's as though I had drunk something poisonous. Like Shiva, I have drunk the world poison, and my throat is blue.* And the dance goes on, and there's no way I can make my body or my mind really quiet except by exhaustion. Will mortification help? It might. One can at least try. Or reading poetry, or having a wife, or taking up the care of children—it seems absurd, too, but it might stop this damnable excitement of living. Best perhaps to get old quickly.

* Shiva had a blue mark at his throat after drinking the world poison.

There are too many fermenting juices in the young.”

In order to quieten him I began to speak about Sujati, the boy’s clean grace and freshness, how he loved sitting cross-legged in the sun, his grace and his hands and his large dark eyes turning in the sockets slowly like marbles. I must have spoken enthusiastically, for he turned and said: “I suppose you are in love with him—do you wrestle with him?”

“Yes, but there’s no feeling of love at all. He belongs to another world. Even when we touch, it is outside emotion, and I have discovered something—I can watch the dance of his hands and fall into a sort of meditation. I ask him to play for me sometimes——”

He interrupted and said: “What do the hands say?”

“Can one describe a meditation?” I answered. “Sometimes, but not always, and it’s the worse for being described. You must come and see him.”

It was already late, but Siddhartha was excited and insisted on seeing the boy, and came to my garden. The boy was not there, but we found him after some difficulty in a small whitewashed room near the stables. He was drowsy with sleep, but he had never performed for Siddhartha and after dousing himself in cold water and putting on ceremonial robes—gold coiled shoes, bracelets and the heavy gilt necklaces and vestments—he came and sat on the stone plinth. The musicians played sleepily, too. The rain had ceased. I whispered to Siddhartha: “It’s late—you must rest—the contest begins at dawn, and they will never forgive you if you don’t take part,” but I don’t think he heard me. And then it began—the soft black interweaving of hands, the swans’ heads, the falcons, the snow-leopards, the raging torrents, the chasms opening, the innumerable swift shapes and visions, cascades of diamonds when the moon fell on his wrist and softly curved towards the pointed finger-tips and the deafening silence when the hands were for a moment

still. These visions, these postures did not excite the imagination. They flowed carelessly into one another, and though we saw the hands, we saw too the boy's handsome face which was unmoving and seemed to be cast of granite. And so it went on, a cold wind coming from the grasses and Siddhartha nodding sleepily, at peace at last, and sometimes a bird would awake from its nest among the trees and dip over the pool, and the boy's hands were always there, weaving substantial things out of visionless air, black and silver, and the moonlight glanced off the pearls of his head-dress, and though the hands moved, they were also deathly still. I was surprised that Siddhartha had not seen the boy before, for everyone agreed that he was the best dancer at Court. "What would you have me do—look at those hands for ever to appease the restlessness of my heart?" Siddhartha whispered once. At last he fell asleep with his head on my shoulder. The dance came to an end. I awoke him, and he walked back to his chamber, saying that as soon as the contest was over, he would ask the boy to come and perform for him. The snow-leopard came running up to lick his face. "There are leopard-cubs now," he whispered. "Will you do me the honour to accept one of them?" And then suddenly, like an awakening into nightmare, I remembered the short dagger, the leap in the forest, all the trickery of Devadatta, the contests in the morning.

There was never a more beautiful morning, the grass smoking and silver, the trees heavy with fruit, the freshness and the scents of the long garden reaching down to the city wall had never been lovelier. There were small white tents under the mango trees, and pennons, and huge yellow silk banners floating from the towers. The peacocks, all red and gold and fiery green, were strutting under the mango trees, and there were hosts of black swans in the lake. Here were

the four immense lakes cascading into one another and fed by the Red River, and now that the rains had come to an end the colour of the lakes was brick red and there were great splashes of duckweed over them. There, too, were the palaces and the small pavilions, all newly painted, and the musicians with their ermine collars and short daggers at their sides, and I remember the jewelled hilts glinting as though in time to the music, and the blare of the trumpets, and the solemn silence when the games opened.

Of course, the contest was not arranged entirely for us. The Kshatriya knights also took part, and the first part of the games was entirely dedicated to them. We were a kind of finale, the absurd and deafening conclusion to all the gaiety that had gone before. As we expected, Manahama was master of the games and wore for this purpose the same uniform as the knights—nodding plumes, breast-plates of gold, short kilt, greaves and gold sandals; but as you can imagine, his legs and arms were so thin that he seemed a caricature of young knighthood. The young knights were truly magnificent. There had been intermarriage among the neighbouring tribes: not all of them had our yellow hair and blue eyes. Some of them indeed were as dark as Nubians, copper-black, and I noticed that these moved with a kind of inward grace, slight and lithe, with feathered helmets and spears attached to their shoulders by short leather thongs. The spear-edges were light blue and very sharp. I remember this because, as I was passing, I touched one and cut my finger. And then there were the slaves, who also took part in contests; and along the rows of mulberry trees there were wickerwork cages containing tigers and bears, for later in the morning the knights would wrestle with them.

There was an intoxication in the air. Perhaps it was the music, perhaps the glitter from the immense lakes, perhaps—and this is more likely—it was simply the fantastic spectacle of seeing so many young and handsome people

arrayed in armour under so clear a sky. The embassies were still here. We saw them standing or riding on horseback in the royal enclosure, wearing all kinds of uniforms, each vaunting with the others in attempted splendour, ridiculously puffed and polite to each other. There was Pamphisara, king of Rajagaha, and the Koliya and Malla princes and the embassies bearing tribute from the colonies in the Himalayas, little squat men with broad cheek-bones and stark black coil-plaited hair; their faces were yellow, almost the colour of our hair. They brought with them their priests, great ragged men in bear-skins who played sometimes on thigh-bone trumpets and wore their robes loosely, as though at any moment they would step out of them; and there were dark-skinned Pathans with eyes like eagles—short, thick-set, with huge shoulders like the shoulders of buffaloes. They were all here, in all their rich and variegated clothes, either walking slowly towards the contest-ground or standing quite still in the enclosures for the ambassadors, or sitting cross-legged under the trees, chewing betels and squirting the juice out so that red poppies seemed to grow in circles round them.

But more beautiful than the people was the immense park stretching to the invisible walls—for the mulberry trees covered the walls. Our own gardens were small, perhaps twelve or thirteen acres; the royal park was at least three miles long. Gazelles wandered under the trees. The peacocks blew up their wings and strutted with as much pride as any of the combatants. In this bright liquid sunshine, for rain still hung in the trees and in the air itself, everything scintillated, everything seemed to shine with metallic colours, everything was like the rich heady wine we drank in our own rooms in the evening; and the fountains played, and the horses threw up their heads, so that the bells tinkled, and there was a girl in a green dress among the acacia trees who smiled as we passed. . . .

I cannot remember this day without a feeling of emotion. It was not the colours, the fights, the sounds, the smell of horse-dust and the glint of armour—it was all these things seen against the blue of the sky and the long low-lying range of mulberry trees in the distance. From where we were standing, everyone and everything looked small, like little coloured jewels rolling along a chessboard, but at the same time there was an immensity in this great park which made their movements delightful and strange, like the movements of dreams.

And then—it was about ten o'clock—suddenly and surprisingly and for no reason at all, a thick white mist descended upon the whole park; everything obliterated; blotted out; except perhaps here and there a curved helmet or a pennon flying at the end of a spear or perhaps the head of some beast, elephant or camel, moving sedately above the thick white motionless layer of cloud which was so inexplicably precipitated over the whole length of the park except over the hill where the palace was. Nothing—no flowers, no trees, no ringed enclosures—only the heads of the knights and the tallest animals, and in the places where the lakes were there seemed to be some kind of green shadow.

Siddhartha said: “Illusion, illusion—wait and see what happens next. The mist will go away, and then everything will be upside down, the elephants will run upside down and the knights will have turned into three-tongued ogres, and there will be no women——”

But nothing of the sort happened. The mist vanished as suddenly as it had come, and there once again was the familiar park known as the Park of the Mulberries, and everyone was walking about utterly unconcerned by the vanishing mist. I am told that this kind of thing happens often in the regions south of Benares, a kind of mist mirage, a sudden inexplicable and only momentary blotting-out of

a whole landscape, but it was surprising that it should have happened at this moment.

I think, too, that it was some anniversary—perhaps of a battle, or perhaps of King Suddhodana's marriage. The contests were never so splendid, yet often they were inhumanly cruel. In one corner of the field I noticed a man naked except for a loin-cloth fighting a bear. The man possessed, as his sole means of attack or defence, a whip. He would try to cut the bear into insensibility, but nearly always it was the man who fell under the bear's claws. There were other and more terrible contests between prize-fighters whose fists were bound with gold tape—as usual, they fought completely naked; there were swordsmen fighting in an enclosure near the lake, and under the shadow of the mulberry trees there were even young girls fighting, not with swords or lances, but with flowers; yet very often they died in this contest, for one can be smothered to death by flowers if they are attached to branches, and this game was played with huge flowering branches which the girls whipped into the air. They were farm-girls, but now they were arrayed in simple white costumes reaching a little below the knees, and they fought valiantly, and if they died, according to custom, they were not buried, but their bodies were taken into the forest, smothered with flowers and left there. These were the outlying contests. The principle contests took place a little below the hill where the royal box was: first, there were elephant jousts, and these were of two kinds: jousts between riders seated on *howdahs*, and jousts in which elephants were matched against young men with lances. I had never seen these before, and I was shocked at the elephants' wounds, the thick oily blood dribbling from the thick hides, and the way the elephants in their confusion would lift their trunks imploringly as they bellowed, shrinking beneath the sudden jabs of the lances and so heavy that when they attempted to rush their opponent, they

sometimes fell down in their efforts to swerve after him. These contests were dangerous, and I believe the elephants' feet were weighted with lead. There were similar jousts between horsemen, thin-boned horses with round sleek haunches, long rippling manes and tails threaded with blue silk, the youngsters naked except for the short kilt and perhaps a rope of pearls flung negligently round their necks. Suddhodana grunted—he had seen it before, year after year, and sometimes Siddhartha would talk to him and he would stroke his beard and answer shortly with the vast incurable boredom of someone who has seen it a hundred times.

Siddhartha, of course, looked splendid, with ropes of pearls hanging from his head-dress, a net of jewels across his chest, a red silk kilt, greaves which had been delicately chased, and he wore the royal slippers of dulled gold which ended in a curved point. There was a history attached to the royal shoes: one of the early Kshatriya kings wore spikes when he went to battle and killed the enemy king by kicking him with the spiked shoes; in course of time the spikes were forgotten, and now there was only the delicately curved gold point to remind us of a forgotten battle. Yet it was a sign of royalty, and only those in the male line of descent were allowed to wear them. For myself, I found them dangerous, always tripping up over the points and so unaccustomed to them that I would look down and find myself thinking: "What's this? It's most inconvenient and dangerous."

But he was perfectly unconscious of the effect he produced. No one, seeing him, thought of the prince. They saw a young man, slender, muscular, very bronzed, with the yellow hair we owe to the early invaders falling smooth to his shoulders. He would try to keep still, motionless like Suddhodana, but sometimes he could not prevent himself from applauding; he would lean over the balustrade till he nearly fell over; he would shout at the top of his voice, and I

could see the blue veins at his temples swelling with happiness.

“Look at the lancer—the elephant really can’t do anything with him!” Siddhartha exclaimed, seeing the lancer in the distance running round the elephant; but a moment later Siddhartha turned back crestfallen, hiding his face in his hands, nearly crying, his shoulders quivering, for the elephant spun round amazingly fast and stamped the young lancer underfoot, squashing him into red pulp, so that we saw only the gleaming red juice out of which two arms and two legs unaccountably moved. Afterwards, I noticed that Siddhartha was immersed in a kind of involuntary forgetfulness of his surroundings, not sad, but quietly and unobtrusively attempting to recall to himself what might have happened if the thick stump of the elephant’s leg hadn’t turned a man to juice.

“You see,” he whispered, “it was nearly over—the elephant was weakening, and if the boy could have remained alive a few hours longer——”

He made enquiries about the lancer’s family, only to be told that he was the son of a poor charcoal-seller from the mountains, a person of no account, and certainly not worth the bother of further enquiries.

“But it’s interesting,” Siddhartha explained. “It was a bull-elephant and very fierce. There was one moment when I thought the bull would go stampeding across the fields, but he skilfully prevented it. He had beautiful muscles, do you remember——” He might have gone on to talk about the young lancer, but at that moment Yasodhara arrived, trumpets blew, another pennon was hoisted above the royal box and we all turned, slowly, for it was not regarded in those days as a sign of decorum for a man to turn round quickly towards a young woman. I confess I was astonished more by her smile than by her beauty. She was unveiled. Her feet were bare except for a thin sheet of gold fastened

by little clips at the side; she wore skirts of three colours, a heavily-jewelled belt and two carefully ornamented gold cups over her breasts; but what was most astonishing was her smile and the single flower she wore in her hair instead of the diadem. Siddhartha and Sundarananda both went up to her, bowed and stood very close to her. It must have been at that moment, when I was no longer gazing at her smile, that I noticed that her eyes were darker than those usually found among the Kshatriyas, and her eyelids were painted silver blue.

Devadatta whispered to me: "Which of us is going to take her skirts off tonight?" but he said this so pleasantly that it was impossible to take offence.

The contests were coming to an end. The servants were bringing in meats and great hampers of figs; there was secretive whispering among the Court attendants who had only just been informed of the purpose of Yasodhara's arrival; there was subdued applause at a particularly astonishing feat which happened almost immediately below us. In a small hedged corral a wild bull had been let loose, and a dark-skinned boy with a short dagger was crouching before it, not beckoning, simply crouching there; then the bull snorted, a cloud of purple smoke rose from its nostrils and it raced towards the boy with head lowered, and meanwhile the boy did not move, he remained exactly where he was and as the bull passed over him, attempting to gore, the boy plunged his dagger into its neck. A moment later he came running away, entirely covered in blood, waving in one hand the dagger and in the other the bull's tongue.

It was a perfect day, and there was not too much bloodshed, and in any case we were too far to see all that was happening. Siddhartha possessed from childhood a horror of blood. It was said of him that shortly after he was born, a silver tray was offered to him. There were daggers and knives, there was the royal diadem, there were bracelets and

rolls of bamboos and even jewelled clothes; but he refused to touch them. For a while his dimpled hand hovered over a girl's necklace, but did not touch it, and after contemplating the tray for a moment, not being able to find what he wanted, he suddenly threw the whole tray to the ground, where it clattered endlessly. He said he hated blood, though sometimes on the clean flesh of young warriors blood seemed a necessary beauty, almost an increase of wholeness, but it was better to be unmaimed. So he watched the contests, as one might watch the dancing girls, negligently and almost nonchalantly, paying no more attention to the knights in the immense field than to the servants who came to shower him with perfumes.

"What is surprising," he whispered, "is that she is not in the least nervous—she looks at us in exactly the same way as she looks at the Malla princes. Of course she is well-trained," he went on. "I suppose all that we have learned from our training at the Court is to look at people indifferently, as though they were all equally interesting or all equally uninteresting. And how dull it is! The fixed stare, the ever so slightly protuberant eyeballs! No, people are all different, amazingly different, all going by different roads into the *paramatma*." He sighed; the feasts were beginning, and the games were coming to an end. There would be a few more games in the afternoon, then the trumpets would blare out for the contest of the princes. We ate little at the feast. I noticed that Sundarananda was nervous, and from time to time he kept glancing with the most covetous expression in the direction of Yasodhara: he looked almost beastly, with those hanging red lips of his. "How b-b-b-b-beautiful she is!" he stammered, and he kept on stammering with mouth agape till I rapped him over the knuckles with the hilt of my dagger.

"Why did you do that?" he said with a hurt expression, still gazing at Yasodhara.

“An accident,” I answered, “but be careful of more accidents if you choose to gaze on her with such eyes.”

Instead of showing anger, Sundarananda, who always reminded me of a charming, if slightly surfeited, baby elephant, hung his head in shame, and then whispered slyly: “But she does not please me.”

It was nearly three o'clock when the contest of the princes began. It was exceedingly dull, and obeyed immemorial patterns. The order of the contests was changed at the last moment, and began with music. We played our own compositions on flutes and reed-pipes, and everyone pretended that the princes were excessively cultivated; our hymns in honour of the dynasty were solemnly recorded on bamboo strips by the music-master attached to the Court; and curiously enough the prize was won by Devadatta, whose hymns were lively and coloured by southern influence. The next contest was known as the “iron boar”. We shot with steel-shod arrows at a small shape of iron which was supposed to resemble a boar, and this shooting was accomplished to the sound of music. It was necessary that the steel-shod arrow should penetrate the iron figure, and therefore the bows were fitted with the strongest deer-gut. We each shot ten arrows: the air was filled with the whining of the arrows and the applause of the audience, applause which none of us deserved, for though few others could bend such heavy bows, we had been trained to it from childhood. This contest was won by Sundarananda, as everyone expected. There remained the wrestling contest. Oiled and greased, naked except for the customary red loin-cloth, we wrestled in a little enclosure near the lake; Sundarananda wrestled with Siddhartha, and I wrestled with Devadatta. As might be expected, Sundarananda managed to throw Siddhartha; and I was so filled with fury at Devadatta's treachery, remembering the forest, the snow-leopard, the wild goose and so many other things, that out of the strength of my

hatred I succeeded in throwing him. This contest was long, and waged with bitterness. I could feel Devadatta's skin slipping through my fingers, but gradually there came a time when I grew accustomed to the position of his muscles; and it seemed to me that I was holding him, not by the oiled flesh, but by the quivering silvery muscles underneath. It was curious—the muscles of the arms seemed silver and red, the muscles of the body silver and grey, the muscles of the legs silver and black; and I hated the silver and black muscles, seized him by the thighs and threw him more easily than I could ever have hoped. This was not against the rules, but it was certainly against the custom; and Devadatta lay there with his nose bleeding from the fall, and even then it seemed to me that there were quivering coloured muscles underneath the bruised flesh; our finger-marks left deep brown bruises. Five minutes later I was faced with Sundarananda. He gave the impression of grotesque power, with a heavy brown hairy paunch and breasts like a woman after child-bearing, the small legs hardly able to bear his weight. I knew he was more powerful than me; the only hope lay in trickery, but I felt like the young lancer who suffered under the elephant's feet. By good luck he fell as Devadatta had fallen, too heavy to resist a sudden sweep at his legs. There followed the chariot-racing contest, which Siddhartha won easily, not only because he was the most skilled and daring, and the most resourceful at the corners, but also because his dappled horses were by far the swiftest in the palace. In fact, none of us had covered himself with glory, and though the knights cheered us, and we were crowned with flowers, it was all slightly ridiculous, for we had accomplished greater feats of daring in the silence of our meditations around the lotos pool.

By this time we had almost forgotten that the winner of the contest had been promised to Yasodhara, and we were

surprised when we advanced in our chariots towards the royal box to find the ministers in solemn conference: I have never seen Manahama looking so much like a conspirator, twirling his beard and whispering, and all the while he seemed to be staggering under the weight of his heavy responsibilities. The King, Suddhodana, had absented himself; even Yasodhara was nowhere to be seen, though we heard her laughter beyond the laurel-bushes. The pennons were whipping in the wind; a storm was rising and soon there would be rain. But for the moment we were conscious only of the splendid darkening of the light, which gave all things a mysterious dreamlike appearance; the jewels on our vestments glittered; the banners shone like diamonds; and far away, at the very edge of the immense field in the distance, where the knights were huddled in small groups, where the elephants and dancing bears were being taken away, a huge rainbow was shining. Manahama was coming towards us. "It is agreed that Yasodhara shall choose whomsoever she pleases, since the contests were equally divided." We assented to this suggestion of the ministers, and asked whether it would not be better if we wore our ceremonial robes; but there was no time, the first drops of rain were falling, and though we were half naked and covered with sweat, and the servants had not yet found towels, Yasodhara was invited to choose among us as we were; and perhaps her final choice was unalterably decided many years ago, and sprung from nothing more than ancestral memory.

We stood on the dais, wearing only our armoured kilts, silk turbans and jewelled vests; for the servants and slaves had been ordered to bring whatever was available. We carried short swords, and I remember that Siddhartha wore a rope of pearls round his neck. And then Yasodhara came, for all the world like a beautiful curved incense-burner, the light rain falling on her hair and her shoulders. She paused

for a while before Devadatta and bowed her head, so that we thought at first she had chosen him; then she passed on to Sundarananda, bowed again and remained there for a while; then moved to me and smiled through her pointed eyelashes, but said nothing; then lastly she came to Siddhartha and kneeled before him, saying: "Let Prince Siddhartha be my lord." He was so overjoyed that he made a slight movement towards her, but refrained from touching her. The 'serving-maids were gossiping so loudly that one of the ministers was compelled to ask them to cease. Then Yasodhara's pennon was unfurled from the great oak mast which was flying Siddhartha's pennon; the heralds came with their trumpeters; messengers were sent into the city; Siddhartha took off the rope of pearls and hung it round Yasodhara's neck; and then, like a confused roar, like the never-ending rumbling of battering-rams, we heard the applause from the city.

It was growing dark. Siddhartha took Yasodhara by the hand and presented her to the King, bowing with his hand on the sword-hilt, and too confused to notice that Yasodhara was weeping. Garlands were placed round her shoulders, incense was burnt, we heard the elephants trumpeting in the distance; and then there were fire-rockets blazing from every corner of the city, and the hymn of the Kshatriyas resounded. As night came the stars blazed furiously, and in the gardens of the palace and in the squares of the city the fountains played never so high, reflecting the stars and the rockets and the small moon low on the horizon.

That night there were feasts everywhere provided by the King; whole sheep were boiled alive in all the market-squares, and from all directions the farmers came riding in on ponies. The gates of the city were left open. Pennons waved, and trumpets blared, and there was dancing in all the streets, and here and there in the dark corners you would see the lovers lying together; for this night was called the

“marriage of all Kapilavastu”. Never in the history of the kingdom had there been such rejoicing, or such lamenting afterwards among the virgins. But the processions were beginning, the huge brushwood fires were lit on the drum-towers, everyone was beginning to be arrayed in their most costly garments, and there was one strange thing which I had never noticed before—in the market-places the fountains ran, some with wine, and some with scented water. At midnight the royal elephants left the west gate of the palace to proceed through the city; the *howdahs* were pure gold, under which even the elephants trembled, so heavy they were, and above the *howdahs* were the royal canopies, also of gold, and above these were silken umbrellas. On the first of the elephants rode the King and Mahaprajata, the aunt of Siddhartha who had fed him at her breast when his mother died shortly after his birth; then came on separate elephants the cousins of Siddhartha, Devadatta, Sundarananda and Ananda, and behind them came the elephants bearing the Court ministers, and last of that long procession (for it included also the distant relatives of the King and the chief captains of the Court) came Siddhartha riding with Yasodhara. The rockets blazed. Lamps swung from the *howdahs*, and everyone could see Yasodhara, but sometimes Siddhartha drew nervously into the shadows, and sometimes he plucked *sephali* blossoms from his wreath and scattered them on the people dancing below, and once it was noticed that he was weeping and hiding his face, and it seemed incongruous that this bronze-faced youth, looking so lovely in his wreath of blossoms, should be weeping. So the procession went slowly through the city, and never had we heard before that terrible powerful thumping of the elephants marching in so great numbers. There were ceremonies in the small temple at the centre of the city, where the perpetual fire burns; and sometimes the Prince would order the elephants to pause before the house of some noble or some

ascetic, and sometimes a dreadful silence descended upon the people, who waited only for the moment when they would see Siddhartha with their eyes. And all night, even when the lovers were asleep, we heard the voices of the people: "Siddhartha! Yasodhara!"

IV

The Sick, the Dying and the Dead

DURING THE FOLLOWING YEARS I WAS sent on an embassy to the Court of the Malla princes. We travelled in state, not on camels, but on the tusked elephants from the royal stables, with embroidered red silks hanging from the *howdahs* almost to the ground. We were received everywhere with the excessive politeness which is reserved for ambassadors, so that it is never possible to know what the courtiers are thinking; costly presents and concubines were showered on us; we were given gold vessels dipped in the Ganges, and if even for a moment our eyes settled on any costly object in the palaces of the Malla princes, these things were immediately ordered to be offered to us by slaves on bended knees. Such luxury was accompanied by darkness; the body weakens under too much voluptuousness, and the mind also weakens when surrounded by too great beauty. We would awake in the morning, bathe, sit by lotos ponds, drink wine under red-plum coloured awnings and spend the afternoons hunting wild-fowl or duck or young boars till we were surfeited by the coarse casual grace of these princes, who showered upon us everything but affection. At night, by the light of small tapers, we danced and sang with girls dressed only in light veils of flowers, while the Malla princes reclined on long chairs smoking water-pipes, reciting poetry to one another,

their eyebrows painted green or gold, their tempers as red as their hearts; for often at night a knife flashed gleaming among the tapers. A prince, said Siddhartha, must wear all disguises possible, see all things, know all things. But the Malla princes, in their silken wigs and with their glittering knives, with the paintings of *houris* in luxurious and indecent postures on the coloured walls, knew nothing of these things and preferred not to listen to them; and somehow I felt that they were like skinned animals, for have you not noticed the sleekness of an animal when it is skinned, the white flesh faintly touched with purple? We concluded our embassies and returned home, so overjoyed when we saw the Red River, the forest and the mountains winding in the distance that we raced the elephants to the gates and heard the earth thumping beneath the yellow dust.

I had been away for four years. Siddhartha greeted me by kissing me on the cheek, and then on the lips as a sign of rejoicing in my return; but I thought I detected some weariness in his expression. He had hardly aged. There were a few wrinkles under his eyes and his mouth was more firmly set. I had taken my dancing boy with me, and Siddhartha recognised him and received presents from him, and there was the faintest expression of distaste on his face when I explained the peculiar customs of the Malla princes. "They drink wine all day, and yet they are not drunk," I explained. "They fornicate all day, and it is dreary beyond words; they have everything they desire, and they are compelled to amuse themselves with murder. It is the custom among them to murder the peasants. They murder skilfully. The peasants believe they are murdered by other peasants, for they come in the dark. They are beyond doubt men of singularly acute passions, yet so often have they assuaged their need of women and wine that they are like men who have no passions left at all."

I remember that Siddhartha pricked up his ears, and bade me enter the new pavilion.

“Tell me more about them—they have broken through their passions into something else? What happens then, when they are beyond all passions?”

“Nothing, Siddhartha, nothing at all—simply a repetition, a refinement, a self-torturing.”

“And how do they look—what kind of expression have they on their faces?” he asked eagerly.

“They have no expression, Siddhartha. They are like men who are so drunk that even if they desired to show the expression of laughter, they would show the expression of lamentation.”

Siddhartha said slowly: “They are not to be despised.”

He spoke a little of Yasodhara, and of the changes which had taken place at the Court since my departure. Sundarananda was married to a princess of Magadha. There was famine in the third year; no one had starved but a few peasants had been hungry, so Siddhartha ordered part of his own court-yard to be planted with corn and rice. He said: “The young shoots are more beautiful than flowers.” He had enlarged the three lotos pools, making them one, and designed small boats to sail on them, but cursed the absence of wind. “The high walls prevent the wind coming in,” he said, “but truly there is nothing so beautiful as to sail on a lake. I have learnt to meditate, lying at the bottom of my boat and looking up at the sky.” He had had a small child by one of the dancing girls, a girl-child who was very beautiful, with silky dark eyelashes and a small pursed mouth, a child who was unnaturally silent and unlike other children of her age she took no delight in playing with toys. “She is cursed with my restlessness,” he said. “She is silent for a long while, and then suddenly howls; and I am like that; and it is better not to bring children into the world.” He said he hoped Yasodhara

would never bear children, not only because her beauty would change, but also because he had noticed no change in her since the marriage, and she alone of all things gave the illusion of something unfading, but instead of speaking about her he invited me on the following evening to sail with him in the Great Lotos Pool.

I was so excited at the homecoming that I was like someone out of breath. Very few things in the palace had changed, yet for me everything had changed; I recognised all things, yet they were subtly transformed with the patina acquired by my absence. My own court-yard, at my orders, was left exactly as it had been; I saw once again my own dancing girls; hardly had they changed, though they threw themselves upon me with expressions of abandoned delight in my return, and postured recklessly, and showed me by a thousand attentions that they had felt the loneliness of my absence; and sitting two on my knees, and with another throwing her arms round my neck, I promised I would never leave them.

The sailing-boat was excellently contrived, with inlaid cushions, a stem of burnished gold and a mast of cedar-wood inlaid with turquoises, the oars were of thin slivers of silver cunningly patterned and the rowlocks were of green jade; yet the beauty of the boat vied only with the beauty of the lake, the rose trees and the sunset. For it was evening when we arrived, and soon the moon came to flood the pavilion roofs, and some slaves, paddling their feet in some remote corner of the lake, sent a million green rings of waves floating towards us. Siddhartha was dressed in his usual kilt, with jade pendants hanging from his tiara and with the jewelled net over his chest, which concealed nothing and in fact only made brighter that bronze flesh which gleamed in the dying daylight. I remember there were also jewelled nets which hung from his waist, and sometimes they clanged together with a tinkling sound. He told me, while we were

waiting for Yasodhara, that he had long contemplated a life of luxury, but now contented himself with the silver-oared boat; the rest of his possessions, even his clothes, his armour and his collections of jewels, he was slowly giving away. He had formed a connection with a young Kshatriya knight, who spoke gravely, with a youthful wisdom, of a life dedicated to the snows, yet lived with a hot-blooded temper of his own, carousing and whoring according to the canon of knighthood, yet insufferably tormented by the near presence of the Himalayas. "I should like you to meet him," Siddhartha said, smiling. "He is better than your dancing boy, whose hands weave a pattern on the world. He has been to the Himalayas, he has left his footprint on the snows. They say he murdered a man and decided to give him proper burial, so carried the body alone and covered it with the snow on the high reaches of the Himalayas. He returned blind, of course; but the blindness passed, and he was playing with dancing girls until one night he heard the avalanches and then hurried away, to see whether the boy he had buried had moved from the place of burial. 'What is so beautiful,' this knight told me, 'is that the boy was still there, ringed round by the snows, unharmed—the avalanche had not reached him. I thirst, Siddhartha, for the unfadingness of the snows.' You will like him, Ananda, for I believe that you too thirst for the unfadingness of the snows——"

I think he was going on to talk about his journey to the mysterious foothills but at that moment Yasodhara arrived. I can swear that I have never seen anyone so beautiful. She was so simple, so unaffected, so unadorned, wearing a transparent silk skirt of some uncoloured material, and two cups of plain gold to hide her breasts, with no jewels in her hair or on her arms, and wearing only the heavy gold ring on the middle finger of her left hand, a ring which had been so cunningly made that it was impossible for her ever to

remove it. She made a slight inclination towards me, and explained how she had been distressed by my absence and also by the statements in my reports concerning the habits of the Malla princes, and saying this she lifted her eyes in the direction of the mountains. At that moment some servants arrived with peacock fans and salvers, of beaten silver filled with fresh fruit, and while she was entering the boat I noticed that her skin was so oiled that it reflected all the rippling waves of the lake. Shortly afterwards Sundarananda arrived, but without his bride (for he was married only a few months previously), and then there arrived a few boys and young girls who were not yet nubile to arrange and decorate the sails according to the prevailing winds.

Siddhartha said: "We drink to your homecoming, Ananda," and lifted the goblet to his lips. He turned gravely to Yasodhara: "I call Ananda the lover, because he believes everything has its origin in love. But now that he has seen the Malla princes at their love-making, I am sure he no longer believes in love."

"I believe in the innocence of all lovers," I said.

Yasodhara nodded and lifted the goblet to her lips, sipped it and handed it to Sundarananda, who was so heavy that Siddhartha ordered the boys to climb on the prows lest the boat overturn. I noticed that Yasodhara was looking at me gravely and tenderly, and there were green ripples of reflected water moving like veils across her perfect face.

"But what is innocence?" Siddhartha answered. "A flower is innocence, a young girl is innocence, but how easily this innocence decays. To be perfect, lovers must have more than innocence."

"What must they have?"

He turned to Yasodhara and smiled: "Faith in each other more lasting than the snows."

It was difficult, even with the lantern hanging from the

mast-head, to understand the full strength of his words; and I thought I detected just for a moment the bitter-sweet crooked smile I had known before. Sundarananda had dived off the boat, with the result that we were no longer moving calmly, but as though ship-wrecked in the waves of the oily giant who was moving like a fat porpoise in the shadows; and so, very hurriedly, the girls and boys on the prow were ordered to come amidships, where they lay around us, smiling in the green light of the waves, for the lantern was too high to shine on them.

I asked Siddhartha what he had learned during my absence.

"I have learned that the jewel in the lotos fades," he answered and turned his head away.

Yasodhara said: "He is savage and miserable," but in a voice so low, and leaning so close to me, that Siddhartha either did not hear or was impatient of her words, and therefore kept silent.

"Poor Siddhartha," she murmured. "He has a conscience in everything. Even when we are making love, he asks himself—is this right? should one do this? and sometimes he is savage beyond belief, and sometimes he shuts himself up with Bambuni in a small whitewashed cell behind the refectory and then there is no sound at all except the unrolling of the bamboo scrolls."

"There is no wisdom in books," said Siddhartha. "The letters in books are like the hairs in Bambuni's beard."

"But the *vedas*?" I asked, remembering how once he worshipped the ancient hymns. "The peasants repeat the *vedas*, and do not know what the words mean. There is only one truth. There is earth, there are bones, there is flesh, and all are beautiful, and all fade," he whispered.

Saying this, he dived off the boat cleanly into the mirrored lake and we saw his great shoulders heaving through the moon-mist, for the moon had come out at last, silver and

green and rippling beneath the water, so fresh and live a thing that I thought at first it was one of the slaves. And then Yasodhara did a strange thing. She filled a goblet with wine and then emptied it into the lake, and whispered: "He loves purity too much."

I was puzzled. It was clear that she loved him, but as she murmured these words beneath her breath, I was conscious that she was uttering, not some kind of imprecation, but a kind of farewell.

"Tell me about your meditations among the Malla princes," she asked, and I was about to say that it was impossible to meditate in their company, we were too exhausted by fornication and the chase, and besides there was no time: so that we saw nothing of their preparations for war, we were continually visiting the princes and their cousins, making pilgrimages to strange caves, knowing always that every moment of the day was occupied. I could meditate only at night, but who can meditate in the silky arms of some brown-haired maid? And besides——but Siddhartha was calling to me, I dived from the boat and soon we were swimming through the lanes between the lotoses, and Siddhartha was saying: "How strangely unfading they look in the moonlight, as though made of ice!" And there was the fat porpoise bucking and diving, and even the children were swimming about in the lake, and there was only the small boat with the silken sails and the silver oars gliding passionlessly across the lake in the moonlight. From the boat came the scent of perfumes, for the incense brazier was lit; and then I looked up, and Yasodhara was no longer there, and for some strange reason the boat seemed larger than ever, hiding the moonlight.

It was some time before Yasodhara reached us. She had a passion for swimming underwater, and then, seeing that white thing moving at the play of the water, I was half

tempted to believe it was a slave-girl and swam towards her. She came up at last near Siddhartha, with a lotos bud in her mouth and one of the gold plates over her breasts askew, and when I asked her how she knew where Siddhartha was, she answered: "The odour of holiness travels even through water," reciting one of Siddhartha's poems which he had sent me, and laughing. Yet she seemed cold, and I understood why Siddhartha was sometimes savage with her: so cool and uncomplaining and curiously regal, and so chaste and inexplicably innocent, though there was some quality in her innocence which made me afraid. I have come to the conclusion that snow and ice are the mirrors of innocence, but both have sharp edges; and I have heard that one can be killed by daggers of snow.

Then we returned, a small fire was lit on the prow, we dried ourselves and some of the slaves sang for us. I had told Yasodhara before I left for Malla that the postures of my dancing boy's hands were more beautiful than the patterns of the shadows of leaves on a wall, and now she asked that he should be brought here. One of the slaves was sent to summon him. The boat was moored in mid-lake, and it was necessary for the boy to swim to us; and then, still dripping with water, his hair black and awry, he sat on the poop and danced with his hands to the music of the flute-players. And I thought: "There is more innocence in these hands than in the snows, for they search and glow, and like a lover's hands they awaken the air. And surely we should be like lovers all our lives."

I must have said this aloud, for I noticed Siddhartha looking at me with a curious expression, almost of distaste. The noon was hiding behind the sails. Yasodhara was leaning forward, peering at the egrets who had alighted on the lotos petals. Sundarananda was still rolling like a porpoise just outside the glow of the mast-lantern. We were all suddenly silent, and I knew that at any moment

something terrible would happen. I remember that I breathed with difficulty and complained about the heaviness of the air. The incense brazier was glowing, but the small fire on the prows was going out. I can see all these things clearly—the smoke rising from the golden tripod, Sundarananda's lumbering greasy body rolling in the dark-edged shadows, Yasodhara leaning forward with her face cupped in her hands and the gold breast-plates resting on her knees, and through the smoke of incense I could see Siddhartha summoning my dancing boy to him, beckoning him, and then when the dancing boy was kneeling before him, Siddhartha whipped out a short diamond-encrusted dagger, ordered the boy to hold out his hands, and then looking at each hand carefully, as though uncertain which he wanted, he at last took the boy's left hand and then brought the dagger down with all his force on the quivering wrist, catching the hand as it fell and tossing it, all bleeding, into the centre of the boat.

The fingers still danced in the pool of blood, still shone in the moonlight. The dark blood kept pulsing out from the wrist; and still the fingers danced a little, and grew thinner, and at last lay still.

I sent up a wail: "Siddhartha, what have you done? Do you not know better than to destroy such beauty?" but he did not answer, he was gazing impassively at me, the dancing boy was crouching close to Siddhartha, his face averted, and there were the great green ripples coming from the direction of the shore, and the egret was flying away from the lotos petals. Yasodhara had lifted her face to gaze at one of the pavilions where a lantern had suddenly appeared, and Siddhartha was still gazing at me tenderly and compassionately, without answering my question. "Why did you do it, Siddhartha?" I wanted to say. "This is intolerable—to destroy with a single knife-thrust the most beautiful thing in the world," but before I could say this I

noticed the boy clambering up to the prow, and squatting there against the moonlight he began to dance again with his hands, one hand perfectly formed, the other a single black stub from which the blood dripped in spurts. And then I must have fallen unconscious, for I remember nothing more except the cold water on my brow, and Yasodhara gazing at me, and the green ripples of the lake playing on her lovely silken body.

“Ananda, wake up,” Siddhartha was saying. “What has happened to you? Why were you screaming? It’s perfectly all right—no one is harmed.”

I looked round. The prow of the boat was nestled among the reeds of the shore, and the silver oars were being held by a boy.

“Are you sure you are well?” Siddhartha went on. “You must be tired after your long journey. Yasodhara, please order one of your serving-maids to take him to his pavilion.”

I noticed that he wore no dagger, and indeed there was not even a dagger-clasp on his belt, and the kilt was still wet, and there were bubbles of water on the diamonds of his vest, so that the diamonds glinted unbearably with scarlet and purple lights. I noticed other things: that the dancing boy was beside me, breathing as though he was out of breath, and hiding the smashed and broken wrist behind his back; I noticed Yasodhara’s lips which were parted and shaped like melon seeds, and her knees which seemed the colour of brown silk, and as smooth, and the way her lungs were beating inside her skin, and how the skirt was stiffening now with only a few drops of silver water rolling over it; I noticed the slave-boys and girls running and laughing along the lower beam supporting the sails, their little round buttocks and slim shoulders catching the moonlight; and there was no explanation, none at all, and I dared not look in the hollow of the boat where the severed hand lay in a

pool of blood, bloodless now, like the hand of someone who has long been buried.

Siddhartha came to my side and put his arm over my shoulder.

“Tell me what I have done, Ananda. You were saying such terrible things against me—that, I was destroying the beauty of the world, destroying everything. You said: ‘Not with flames, but with knives.’ I don’t know what you are saying.”

Then the dancing boy came closer to me, like some hurt animal who has been tortured and betrayed. There were tears on his long eyelashes, and still he was holding the broken, bleeding wrist behind his back. I turned to the dancing boy, and said softly: “It will make no difference, Sujati. Siddhartha must be in love with you to do such a thing to you——”

“He has given me a jewel from his head-dress in reward for my dancing.”

“And for your hand——?”

The boy smiled gravely; there was evidently no pain, for he glanced up at Siddhartha with those dark almond eyes, his body scented like almonds, and said: “Prince Ananda is restless tonight—let me dance for him again, and perhaps he will be more composed.”

At the thought of the boy dancing again with the black bleeding stub, I screamed aloud and brought my fists down with a crash against the gunwales, rocking the boat and doing this so forcefully that one of the children on the mast, either because he was so surprised or because the vibration of my blow had thrown him off his foothold, fell into the lake; and at that moment Sujati began to dance for me, and his left hand was not broken, but whole, and he danced with his hands close to my eyes.

“I must be moonstruck,” I explained. “I distinctly saw Siddhartha cutting off the boy’s left hand with a dagger. I

remember there were diamonds on the hilt. It must be a dream—it is terrible to dream such dreams, and at the same time it is unforgivable. Please allow me to return to the pavilion——”

But Siddhartha did not want me to go, and at that moment Sundarananda began to lumber on to the boat, heaving himself up, and he said: “I have s-s-s-swallowed s-s-s-some fish, S-s-siddhartha,” and asked us for some wine because he thought they were still alive in his stomach—he could hear them moving round and round like goldfish in a bowl—and perhaps the wine would kill them, and then Yasodhara burst out laughing with a clear tinkling laugh which echoed and re-echoed from the stone edges of the pool.

Some days later Siddhartha said: “Sujati has invented a new dance—the dance of the severed hand. It’s quite extraordinary. At the most unexpected moment in the dance, the hand seems to break at the wrist. I am afraid he is developing a turn for the grotesque.”

I murmured something about the boy’s extraordinary imaginative sense and how it seemed to me at some moments that the boy’s whole body, his mind, his desires, his most innocent thoughts were at the mercy of his hands, which assumed a life of their own; how it was perfectly possible to imagine those hands living an independent existence, with eyes, mouth, nostrils—I would sometimes ask him to put his hands on a shining blackwood table, and I would gaze at them, for they were so beautiful and seemed to breathe and one could almost stroke them as one strokes a tame animal or a bird, and suddenly, when I least expected it, they would start moving, though hardly moving at all, dancing with the faintest suggestion of movement, and out of those slow passionless movements of the boy’s dark hands I thought I could see how a flower grows, or a tree; and there were other times, especially when I was weary of the devilish lusts of the

Malla princes, that I would summon Sujati to me, and while one of the musicians played, the boy danced with his hands by the light of a single taper, so that I saw the hands and their moving image on a screen; and then all the delights of the world were open to me, for the hands were now bamboos, now birds, now armies, now dancing girls, now rivers, now the opening of immense gates, and there was only one dance which the hands were powerless to perform, and that was the dance of the red dust on the road.*

Of this time I remember only a few sayings of Siddhartha's. He often played with children, and once he said: "There is no innocence in children, nor any patience. You say love is born of innocence and patience, but I say they are neither loving, nor innocent, nor patient, and I play with them for the same reason that I play with my snow-leopards."

"And why, Siddhartha, do you play with your snow-leopards?"

"Because they have grace, and while I play with them I believe them immortal."

Once we rode on camels to the foothills of the Himalayas and gathered fresh snow and returned and buried it in the vaults to freshen our wine. At such times there were moments when I noticed, in the settled sadness on Siddhartha's face, an expression of such contempt for the world, of such pain and misery and desire for self-abandonment, of such overwhelming greed for a permanence beyond the impermanence of the world, that I would find myself subtly imitating his mood, and so became lost in an unexplored world, for it was not my own. "We will find it perhaps in music, or in the flight of a bird," he said once. "There is permanence perhaps in the most impermanent of things."

He was intoxicated by thoughts of holiness.

* Here Ananda means the dance of the *paramatma*.

“The mind reels before the saints, yet always reels back. Before such glory, such permanence, we reel and return. There is no patience or innocence here—only a reeling, a moment of adoration so intimate, so piercing that we can hardly endure it; and then, in a moment of time, we find ourselves returning. Certainly, the lover knows this double movement, and sometimes listening to music—the flute-player mirrored in the lake—I have known it. But which is the moment of sanctity? For you it is the return, for me it is the moment of permanence; and I would drink the world’s poison and have a blue scar at my throat if only I could enjoy life always at that moment.”

I said: “Because you are a king’s son and possess unimaginable wealth, therefore you desire permanence.”

It was a cruel thrust, and I wished I had not delivered it, for immediately afterwards he gazed at me, white-faced, bleak and silent, dazed by a thought that had never occurred to him.

Once we were riding on horseback through the orchard of plums, and I heard him enquiring of himself: “Do I desire to be good? Do I desire to be the world emperor? Do I desire holiness? Do I desire to have the most beautiful woman and possess the most beautiful things? Do I desire to set my face always in the sunlight? No, Ananda, I desire none of these.”

“Not even holiness?” I asked.

“Not even holiness, if there is no permanence,” he answered.

Once I overheard the King, Suddhodana, saying: “Siddhartha has no taste for kingship—he must learn—he must learn——” Siddhartha bowed his head, and whispered: “To step from the life of a prince to the life of a king is like wading naked in a river and returning to the bank to put on heavy clothes.”

One evening, while we lay on couches on the shores of

the lake and the dancers sang for us, their movements reflected in the steel-black water, Siddhartha amused himself by throwing chrysanthemums in the water, and once he turned to me and said: "Here in the lake the petals remain; if this was a river, all the petals would disappear," and then shortly afterwards some white birds were released and we watched their reflections on the black water. The air was scented and very close. For some strange reason Siddhartha had even allowed Danya, his child by a dancing girl, to be present. She was growing up, nearly four years old, dark-skinned. Siddhartha held her between his knees, and there was no sign of Yasodhara at all, and meanwhile the dancers sang for us.

"I must accept this child," Siddhartha said. "It is a kind of renunciation."

"And yet you despise happiness?" I said.

"Not theirs, but my own; not the happiness of a child or of a young woman, but the happiness of having too much happiness. I have everything I want. If I could dream of things, instead of possessing them! And do you know, Ananda, the greatest imaginable blessing would be to be like this child—seeing the dancers in the lake—not knowing what is happening—not understanding—seeing and delighting. And what is reality?" Saying this he threw a pebble with all his strength into the black pool, so that the reflections in the water, all gold and white, poured over one another, disappeared, became nothing at all but a vast floating palace of quivering light, and then gradually the clear-cut portraits of the inverted dancers and singers reappeared, but their portraits in the water were silent, mimicking the grace of the actors until a fish rose or a bird alighted on the surface or another pebble was thrown, to disturb the surface.

"And so it is with our lives," Siddhartha went on, grave to silence. "So does Shiva destroy and create, and once again after our deaths the images re-form; and there is no

need for any thunderbolt, or any world poison—it is only necessary to throw a stone.”

These are the things I remember of this time, but more than anything else I remember the dusky brown arm throwing the stone, the marble-black lake and how the dancers were destroyed and at last the images of the dancers re-formed.

I was sent on embassy during the following year to the tribesmen in the Himalayas. So gaunt and rugged and ice-cold a country, among blue-white cliffs, high beyond the line of the deodars, could do nothing to comfort me. Exile I have never loved; and all day and all night, among the butter-lamps and the frozen tea, in the smoking tents, I felt like someone who had strayed out of life altogether. The customs of the people did not please me; nor did my marriages—for since I came unmarried I was compelled to accept the advances of the young women of the tribes.

Day after day I wrote despairing letters to Siddhartha; they were unanswered. I wrote even more despairing letters to the ministers to send me a wife—any wife, as long as she was clean and her hair was scented. I wrote to Sujati, asking him to send me flowers and musical instruments, for the flowers I had brought were all frozen and the musical instruments were broken on the journey. I wrote to Yasodhara, asking her to send me a locket of her hair, since we were so closely related; and though I received the advices of the Court and reported faithfully upon the arms and equipment of the tribes, and the peculiar conflicting loyalties of their chiefs, my private letters were censored and doddering Manahama must have thought me an imbecile to accept the mission which he had so desperately begged me to perform.

And then gradually, almost imperceptibly, I found that this exile was pleasant; I meditated cross-legged on a

tiger-skin in the snows; I hunted mountain leopards; I joined with the young tribesmen when they sang round their yak-dung fires. They sang with low muted voices, as desolate as the kingdoms over which they ruled; they were healthy and stocky, their eyes were pointed at the sides, their hair black and oiled, some were dark-skinned from long exposure to the sunlit snows. I was a hostage among them, but they treated me as a prince in exile, and some had pity for me, and delighted in offering me presents: a yak's tail, the eye of a tiger buried in snow which possessed magical properties, the bones of some *sunyasi* who had strayed into their encampment, or great pelts of bears and warm furs. Most of all they delighted in making me drunk from some blue-white wine which is formed from the fermenting milk of their camels. And though I joined with them in pleasures, and they offered me young dancing girls, who smiled showing all their teeth, I found myself thinking more and more of Siddhartha, until there came a time when he seemed to be present by my side.

By love one can conquer the universe. So I had thought, but it was necessary to sharpen my concepts of love. In the snows, love seemed no more than a melting warmth of the heart, a blaze of sun on rock, the blue shadows of footprints leading to some inaccessible foothold among the crags. One could climb after the blue footprints and be lost in the misty sun-veils, one could watch the blaze of the sun until one was blinded, one could contrive to melt the snows until the whole plains were gleaming rivers. But a love which was more permanent than our desultory love-affairs, unstained by the grossness of flesh, untrammelled by the integuments of the spirit—this I could not achieve except rarely, at moments when the snow in meditation became harder than rock. In meditation there was peace, but only peace. I could not see, like Sundarananda, the roads on which the birds travelled, nor could I see, though my eyes

were lifted to the furthest peaks, a place so motionless and entire that the mind reeled into benediction for ever. The more I thought of love, the more did it seem, as Siddhartha had said, that there were two movements in love: the one when the mind reeled into an instant of adoration, the other when the mind was discomposed and sought by return to penetrate the thing it worshipped. And how, but by some peculiar blessedness, could the instant of adoration be prolonged, when it was necessary that the body should be stuffed with food, when it was necessary for the physical organs to be satisfied, when it was necessary for the sun to climb down the heavens and break up the long worship of a mind becalmed? How could the mind be for ever stilled in contemplation, except perhaps in death? So I would think, staggering among the evil-smelling dung-piles, or at evening singing among the blue yak flames, while the sweat of these young unscented people makes life so great a nightmare that I contemplated throwing myself from their high rocks.

And yet, as I have said, in their own way they were beautiful. They possessed no graces, but animal graces. They sweated and roared with lust and grovelled on uncarpeted floors. There was a grandeur in their animality; and so I wrote about them to Siddhartha, telling him how splendid they were in their grossness and effortless courage, and how sometimes it seemed to me that love must partake a little of that physical splendour, but the letters were lost in some gully, or else were used by the tribesmen as charms, to be mingled with urine and sweat of bears into a potion too strong for any but these animals to drink. I was sorry the letters were lost. Siddhartha held that the world was illusion—Shiva threw a pebble in the pool, and the world was reformed, but at any moment he might throw another pebble—but it was not all illusion. We were not carefree. There were sudden violent storms,

there were moments when our encampments lay at the mercy of avalanches or deluges of snow; moments when the snow mountains appeared about to crumble over us. I have never known such storms. I would write to Siddhartha: "Such a storm, beloved, as you would never guess or dream of, and truly I do not envy your lotos pool. There is a wildness in nature greater than anything Nina Deva has ever shown me, a torment unceasing. I pray you, Siddhartha, think sometimes of the malevolence of nature, not the malevolence of our sins. Nature is blind and does not curry our favour. You cannot throw a pebble into the face of a storm, and see the world dissolve. It dissolves, but not in the way you meant; and when it re-forms, it is not the same: the tents are buried and the beautiful boys are drowned." So I would write, hands trembling, with a sharpened bone in my fingers scratching at yak leather, by the light of those terrible yak-dung fires, cursing my fate and yet secretly enjoying it. And there were other things I discovered: how the rare mountain air makes the senses keener, though at first there is a great weariness. How immense distances were perceived, how colours appeared sharper, how naturally we were a part of our environment. And truly these boys on their shaggy ponies possessed innocence and patience.

When the time came to leave, I was already the father of fourteen children; they had our fair hair and the tribesmen's dark eyes, and fat limbs (for they were smeared with oil all day long) and crawled in the snow as though they were born from the snow, while I huddled in heavy furs. And as I came down through the passes, I realised that even though the embassies had been fulfilled, I would have stayed there readily enough, delighting in this strangeness and thinking that of all people these patriarchs of the hills were closer to the gods than we were, since they were closer to the elements and delighted in the high mountains. I felt then that

Kapilavastu was no more than a small garden with a few flowering tamarisks, nothing of importance, too fleshy and weak to be admired, and too given over to luxury; but when I saw the forests and the green plains, I knew I was mistaken. One belongs where one is born: and throughout all life one's birthplace calls to one.

Siddhartha came to greet me. Our camels were weary and overladen with strange oddments, gifts to the king and embroidered hems and innumerable furs. There were furs enough for all the people in the Court to wear in the evenings or to lie upon at night; more than there were in Benares. There were thigh-bones and human skulls painted black and green; there were the flowers that grow on rocks, and strangest of all there were snake-skins; as a present for Siddhartha there were millions of butterflies encased in ice.

Seeing Siddhartha's pennon I raced my camel to meet him. He rode on horseback, dust-stained but otherwise unchanged. I looked in a bronze mirror. I knew I was unrecognisable, burnt black by the sun. It was four years since I had seen him, but he was exactly the same, perhaps a little taller, but it is difficult to tell a man's height on horseback and besides he was wearing furs. He looked so young and graceful and slender that I thought of him as a boy again, and remembered our walks through the forest and was almost surprised when he said: "Yasodhara has given birth to a child." I congratulated him by kissing him. He seemed delighted, but he frowned once and said: "I have called the boy Rahula, which means an obstacle." He had brought a pony for me. I exchanged the rough-shod camel for a sober-pacing pony, and we went leisurely towards Kapilavastu, while he spoke gently of the embassy, and how delighted Suddhodana would be to greet me, and how pleased he was that I had arrived safely, with no more harm than a sun-blackened face. He told me that Devadatta had returned three months previously from Benares. "But

he has changed—much quieter, and perhaps more evil. I think he wants the succession. He can have it, nothing would please me more, but Yasodhara is determined that Rahula shall be king one day; and so I must fight him, and it is all a weariness.” He sighed. He looked magnificent in his white bear’s fur.

Kapilavastu had not changed. The palace had not changed. We came through the east gate, the trumpeters blew from the drum-towers, we sauntered through the streets while the people gazed at us, there was the same red dust in the air, the same urchins playing at street corners, the same fire-swallowers. I said: “They should have sent Sundarananda to the hills instead of me—you need fat men there.” Siddhartha smiled: “Sundarananda is the father of four children, and I assure you there were never any uglier girls in the kingdom, yet he delights in them. And he no longer practises meditation. It is really extraordinary how smug a married man can be.” He sighed again when we were entering the palace court-yard, saying: “Through you I have breathed the air of the high mountains. You must tell me about it, Ananda, and tell me—are you still the lover?” He went on: “Of course you will never believe it, but all the children of Sundarananda stutter—it is the most amusing thing in the world to hear them talking together.” He laughed, flung his jewelled cap in the air, caught it, raced up some stone steps for no reason at all and then jumping off his horse came running towards me, saying: “We must celebrate, Ananda—we must celebrate your safe return, we must celebrate your embassy, we must celebrate the birth of Rahula and the birth of your fourteen children——”

“But how did you know?” I gasped in amazement.

“But, my beloved, all your letters arrived, you told me everything, your love affairs in the high mountains——”

“Your letters never came.”

I noticed that he looked at me with the strange sidelong

glance which he reserved only for those moments when he was puzzled or defeated.

“I did not write to you, Ananda.”

“Why not?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

I went to audience with Suddhodana. It was nightfall. The palace was illuminated by coloured lanterns. I presented the tribal chief who had come down with me from the mountains; there were exchanges of gifts and shortly afterwards I returned to my own court-yard, where Sujati was waiting for me, older now, with a beard dyed blue. To me, worse than his beard was the news that he too had married.

There followed four days of festival. Once again there were contests, we played shuttlecock, we danced, we bent our shoulders over chessboards, we were continually together. I told Siddhartha how it seemed to me that love consisted of two movements, or rather of a single moment and a movement of return; the return came from oneself, and from the beloved object there was nothing but the power to create the moment, a power so mysterious that it was beyond fashioning; and it seemed to me that this movement of return was somehow opposite to the movement of meditation, for in meditation the closed bud of the lotos comes towards you, but in the moment of love you stand for an instant in utter silence and then run towards the beloved object. Siddhartha said: “It is better that it should come to us rather than that we should run towards it—if we run too hard, we may stumble.” I told him once again about the habits of the tribesmen. He asked: “Have they dignity?” I said: “Immeasurably.” And he went on to say that he had been thinking that of all things human dignity was the most to be prized, and therefore he could no longer tolerate the *sunyasis* who crawled in the dung with their festering sores, or put rusty nails through their flesh, or

hung themselves like apes in the forks of trees—there was dignity at the Court with its elaborate ritual, and there was dignity among field-labourers, who obeyed the still more elaborate ritual of the seasons; there was dignity even in marriage with its ritual of tendernesses received and given, a game played delicately and pleasantly, with strength of muscle and mind. “And is that dignity enough?” I asked. “No,” he answered, “dignity alone can never be enough—we must go further, but always it must be included in our homage. Perhaps in mortification there is delight—the delight of putting the body beyond you, but there is a greater delight in dignity, for the body is untamed and dignity is the trapping we must put on. Have you noticed that when a man dies, sometimes just a few moments before he dies, he does the most extraordinary things, there is a flash of lightning, he sits up in bed and laughs uproariously, or does completely disgusting things, or simply sits there with a finger in his mouth like an ogling girl? We cannot help ourselves, Ananda. Dignity is taken from us sometimes. But as long as we breathe, we must hold dignity in honour.”

As I have said, we were young still, and we used words like counters. Dignity meant something to us, desire meant something to us—and so did “love” and “patience” and “innocence” and a hundred other words. We could not define the words we used. We talked round them, we attempted to enclose them, we would describe them from every point of view, and yet somehow they would slip out of our minds in exactly the same way that a fish will slip out of our nets: in the distance we would hear the word splashing and coming to life again. And so I attempted to explain to Siddhartha the meaning of the word “love” as it had appeared to me while I was living among the tribesmen: the moment of vision, and the moment of return. I would say: “I look at the petal, and for a moment I am the petal, and then afterwards my mind runs towards the petal,

and this is the movement of love—to be the thing and to be leaping into it at the same time.” But he only answered: “It is all perfectly ridiculous, for surely the important thing is to be the thing unequivocally and not to long for it.” And then he said, very strangely, holding his head a little to one side: “I shall no longer meditate on the lotos bud—I shall not meditate on a petal or a tree or a blade of grass, for all these things fade. I thought of meditating on rock, but rock melts. I have decided to meditate on myself, for to my knowledge I shall never fade.”

It was a few days later, when we were walking in a quiet part of the garden, that he said: “The King, my father, has found a bride for you.” I was so astonished that I could not speak for some minutes. I said: “I have no desire to marry—I am twenty-five, and what can marriage give me? Better to wait a little while.” Siddhartha smiled. “You are a prince, and you have the responsibilities of princes. I’m afraid you’ll have to marry.” “Who is she—one of the Malla princesses?” I said this as a joke, thinking of the Malla princes, their lean knives, their thirsting tempers and their outrageous desires. He nodded, and shortly afterwards I left him, thinking I might be able to run away from the Court, for it seemed to me suddenly that life in the mountains among the tribesmen was more desirable than any other kind of life; and those Malla princesses, accustomed to all the excesses of their husbands, are provocative beyond words, and so exhausting that you grow older in one night with them than in a year with some wench from Kapilavastu. I said nothing. One evening I saw the chosen bride through the blue screen which hangs in the audience hall. She was not unattractive, straight and tall, with blue-black hair, long eyes and a large mouth. “And of course,” said Siddhartha, leading me away gently, “all life is a loneliness and a desolation, we are all weak and hunted, and the trap is sprung——”

“But at least,” I said, “the trap is well-formed. I shall die of heart-disease one night, for the Malla princes die young.” And then in silence I remembered that the vices of the Malla princes came, not from themselves, but from their wives.

Yet the marriage, I learnt a few days later, was necessary. Peace is maintained by the most delicate, the most fabulously silken connections. As easily as the yellow spores of a butterfly’s wings are scattered by the wind, so easily do wars appear; but there were always these tenuous silken threads to join us in peace. The Ministers insisted that the marriage should take place. We were ringed round with enemies; it was necessary to maintain the peace. The Malla princess, Dikaya, had come; she would stay a few days; when it was necessary for her to return I was to accompany her.

It was at this time that an extraordinary event occurred to Siddhartha. He was accustomed in the early morning, when the dew was silver-wet on the grass, to go walking through the park, his chariot accompanying him at a distance. Always he was accompanied by the young charioteer Channa, a youth who was slightly pock-marked, but graceful, well-formed, not elegant, for his shoulders were too heavy and his legs too sturdy. It was one of those mornings when the sky is very high, sky piled upon sky. Siddhartha had taken with him his flute. Along the roads through the park were little stone urns where the dew-water collected, and sometimes he would dip the flute in the dew as he passed; for then the sweetness of the flute became greater. It was still early in the morning. There was a mist with the dew, and more important perhaps he was accompanied for the first time by Yasodhara. Devadatta was staying in one of the outlying parks. He heard the tinkling of the chariot-bells, and he heard Channa whispering to the three horses—he told me all this afterwards—and then Siddhartha began to talk to Yasodhara about the paintings made by the palace

children. He had been painting himself—small things, of no importance, but graceful. He said something about the paintings by one of the children, who painted with bold coarse strokes yet gave an impression of gentleness; and suddenly he noticed that Yasodhara was not listening, but looking straight ahead, her face white and her hands folded over her breast. “Am I dreaming?” she asked. He went on talking, but suddenly she clutched at his arm and said: “I have never seen him before, Siddhartha. How did he come here?”

What was frightening, Siddhartha said afterwards, was the terrible stillness of the early morning, when the sun-veils are lifting through the trees, and the birds are still silent. There was some unaccountable menace in the scene, as though the stillness had become permanent. He was perfectly conscious of this—the champing of the horses, Yasodhara standing beside him in her long dew-hemmed skirt and Channa whispering as usual to the horses; and there in front of them, like a green snake in the grass, was a man covered with festering sores, quite naked, crawling towards them.

“It cannot be,” he said.

“But it is,” Yasodhara whispered.

“Then how did he come here?” Siddhartha asked, and attempted to turn his head in the direction of Channa, who was still walking slowly beside the chariot towards them.

Siddhartha said afterwards: “What was most terrible was that we felt ourselves imprisoned—Channa behind, and this crawling festering thing in the grass in front.”

It came closer, very slowly, the sunlight catching the purescent green sores which ran all over the blood-streaked back, and along the arms, the buttocks and the hips. The legs were a grey colour. It crawled very slowly, moaning, and suddenly it lifted up its face and there was nothing but a mess of green sores, the eyelids puffed and closed, and there

seemed to be no mouth at all. Suddenly Siddhartha shouted. Channa came running up, and he saw this thing, and vomited, and the horses must have been afraid of it, for there was a loud jangling of bells and then the horses began to trot away down the long avenue of cherry trees and cypresses.

Siddhartha steeled himself and bent over it, and though he asked the man where he came from, and how he came there, there was no answer except moaning. And still the thing crawled, silky green, with glistening ripening sores—he had never seen anything so terrible. Channa ran back and summoned the servants, who brought a mattress and pillows and bandages and something to hide the thing's nakedness; and it was taken away; and for a few minutes they pretended nothing had happened. But by this time Yasodhara felt faint, and Siddhartha began to wonder whether it was all a hallucination and hurried back to his pavilion, very out of breath by this time, and not knowing how to approach the servants. The mist was still lifting, and he remembered afterwards that he had been running down the avenue between the cypresses and the cherry trees, forgetting that he had left Yasodhara behind. He asked one of the servants whether anything extraordinary had happened. No, the servant had seen nothing. He asked another. The answer was exactly the same. He began to believe that nothing had happened until he found a group of servants bandaging the man. They could get nothing out of him, how he had come there, where he was going, what caused the frightful disease. The guards were summoned. They had seen nothing remarkable, and could offer no suggestion as to how he had entered the palace. Siddhartha had seen diseased men before, but never anyone so diseased as this. Yasodhara returned, pale and shaken. We expected the man to die, but he didn't die. He lingered there, bandaged in fine linen now; and though Siddhartha

spent the better part of the day with him, and sent messengers secretly through Kapilavastu to enquire of his family, he never learnt where the man had come from, or where he was going.

The next morning he was afraid to go through the garden: he began to fear that something terrible had happened, a curse or the beginning of a plague: he even regretted he had sent messengers through the city, and did everything he could to hush the affair. The man was still living. The sun was still shining splendidly—it was May, and the *neem* trees were in full flower. But on the second day he decided that it must have been some poor devil who had come through the water conduits to sleep in the garden; it was even related that such a thing had happened before, many years ago, in the palace of one of the minor princes. So he went out again, alone, playing on his flute and occasionally dipping it in the stone urns by the way. There was no sign of anyone. Channa was there, and the gilded chariot moving slowly after him, the trappings flashing in the sun. Between playing on the flute and gazing at the starlings, he began to recite poems aloud to himself. The mist rose, unveiling the blue sky. But what was strange was that something had happened—he could not tell what—there was some change in the air, the trees and the fruit and the leaves containing the bright scarlet seed-pods were the same, but something had changed, something obscurely present in the air. He began to slacken his pace so that Channa could catch up with him, and then because he was afraid of his fear he began to walk more quickly than ever. And then he saw it: an old man walking near the wall, half hidden by the mulberry trees, a man so old and grey that the skin seemed almost to have faded into the skull, with matted white hair falling to his shoulders, the ribs showing white, the drab loin-cloth hanging limply.

Siddhartha's first instinct was to turn away—it was an

hallucination. He was quite sure it was an hallucination until he noticed Channa staring with his mouth open. In all his life Siddhartha had never seen a man so old.

“Where has he come from? What is he doing here?” he muttered, and then it occurred to him that the old man might as well have spoken these words of him, Siddhartha.

“It is the smell of old age,” answered Channa, “which has changed the air.”

Siddhartha did not dare to go up to the man. He asked Channa to send the servants and examine him, for it was strange that once already a man had entered unannounced into the gardens. He returned to his pavilion, and waited. Some hours later they came to tell him that the man was speechless with old age, no one knew where he had come from, and no one had ever seen a man so withered. “It is some curse on me,” Siddhartha exclaimed in despair. He sent a note asking if he could see me. It was urgent. He began by apologising for all the trouble my marriage was causing, and then very slowly and hesitantly he began to talk about the disturbing things he had seen. He was in his own room, among the bear-skins and the incense burners. He said: “I believe it is some trick of Devadatta—these things have never happened before. But why should Devadatta do such things? Is it chance that every time I go into the gardens, I find something like this? And do I deserve such a fate?” He ordered one of the dancing girls to dance for him; the girl came near him, tossing scent-balls, swaying hips and haunches and shoulders, and though he gazed at her, his mind was elsewhere. “Why should this thing happen to me?” he asked over and over again. “Is it some warning? Is there anything I have left undone?” He said he would not go to the augurs—he was afraid of their magic herbs and thigh-bones; he said he felt too enclosed within the palace; there were always dangers; Devadatta was still here; he would like to fight Devadatta and have it out, once and for

all, with cleanness and a sharp sword-edge. He sent the servant off with a silk bag of gold, asking her to see whether there was any more news. She returned, saying that the man with the running green-blue sores was still under the care of the doctors, but the old wizened man in the loin-cloth had disappeared.

That night we trembled, for a meteor had been seen and there were other signs. Siddhartha invited me to his room. In the palace candles were burning, candles made from the wax of honey-cells, and therefore fragrant. The musicians were playing. Yasodhara lay on the bear-skin couch, fanning herself, with Rahula by her side. But Siddhartha seemed strangely unaffected by all the beauty there. Usually he would weary of it, but there were always moments when the sheer presence of so much beauty would arouse in him some sensation of longing, of dedication, even of the desire which is not desire, but contemplation; but this evening he was remote from us all. He smiled wearily and heavily, like someone oppressed, perfunctory even in his commands to the servants. Once a candle fell, setting light to the rushes on the floor. Barefoot he stamped out the flames, and then returned silently to his couch beside Yasodhara. Rahula was nearly two years old, with fine hair and little legs which were continually pushing against the coverlet, a boy with Siddhartha's sweetness of expression, and Siddhartha's heavy eyelids; he could speak a little and crawl and was learning to walk. And it was nearly morning when Siddhartha retired and whispered: "Come with me, Ananda, when there is still dew and mist in the gardens. If there are ghosts, we shall watch them unharmed."

There were no ghosts. In the morning Siddhartha was in my room, sitting as often before at the foot of my bed, with Rahula in his arms, laughing and throwing up little coloured paper balls which Rahula tried to catch; and making out of grasses and the stems of reeds and lotos

seeds little animals, which Rahula clutched deliciously to himself.

"I have already gone out," Siddhartha said, when he saw that I was awake. "There was nothing—nothing at all. I looked—I deliberately went in search of it. There was absolutely nothing." Then he went on to say that a meteor had fallen in Kapilavastu.

I bathed and dressed hurriedly.

"I am so glad, Siddhartha," I said. "It must mean good luck."

"And this is not the end of it," Siddhartha went on. "The augurs have sent a message saying that the meteor signifies a great blessedness, and the man suffering from disease and the man who was so old that he could hardly walk—these, too, mean a great blessedness, perhaps another child, perhaps——" He closed his eyes. "It is written in the stars or in the map of the mind—a great blessedness." I think he was quoting the words of the augurs, those bearded and fragile old men who wear gold chaplets and robes of pure white. And then, taking Rahula on his shoulders, wearing only the usual starched kilt, gold sandals and the vest of pearls, he said: "The demons have been exorcised. Let us go out, for it was neither Devadatta nor the enemy of us all who has made this thing, but Brahma who offers blessedness." Yet the terror was still to come.

I have said before that the gardens were beautiful, but never have they been so beautiful as in these mornings of early May, when the scents and the sounds of the place, the lotos pools, the green-gold irises, the mulberries in the distance, the gnarled rocks, the birds swinging in the gold-lace cages, the peacocks and the snow-leopards were bathed in the earliest freshness of the world. All things were trembling with dew. Upon the silken leaves of the dying peach trees were cups of dew brighter than the jewels on Siddhartha's vest: and above us lay the sky, blue and white,

transparently deep, coloured at the edges with a faint greenness from the earth.

We walked slowly, for there were many things to talk about—my approaching marriage, the paintings by the children, a thousand and one things which captivated us this spring morning. Perhaps it was because I was four years younger that he turned to me tenderly and said: “You have your blessedness of youth, when the mind and the body are both swift, but my swiftness is going from me. What is blessedness? Always I have thirsted for it, but I do not know what it is.” He smiled. Channa was riding the chariots, standing firmly on the boards with the tasselled reins held lightly in his hands. Siddhartha was puzzled. He wondered why Channa had come, but he thought it a good opportunity to teach Rahula something about chariot-racing, and stepped into the chariot, and we watched him disappearing in a cloud of dew down the long avenue of cypresses.

He was away for about five minutes. When he came back he was pale, and holding the child more closely than ever to his chest.

“It’s not blessedness—it’s a curse,” he said, jumping off the chariot; and with one hand he was still hiding Rahula’s eyes from the sight of something that must have terrified him.

“What happened?”

He could not speak for some moments, shaking and shuddering.

“It may be a hallucination,” Siddhartha said after a while. “I don’t know what is coming over me—perhaps the monsoon is coming soon. There was the sick man, and then the old man. But this—this is worse.”

He was shuddering, his mind confused with a strange dread. I heard music and the ringing of bells, and a sound that seemed to be the swish of skirts on the grass, and another sound which was unlike any of these, the sound of

sobbing, the sobbing of old men and young women. And then we saw it coming relentlessly towards us down the long avenue between the cypresses and the cherry trees: the long winding funeral procession, the priests in white leading the bier. There were girls beside the bier throwing coloured grasses upon it, there were women tearing their hair and beating their breasts with grief, some throwing dust on their heads or furtively looking down at the uncovered face of the dead man who was being carried so remorselessly forward among the wailing and the tinkling of bells.

First the sick man, then the old man, then the dead man; and the dead man was coming towards us like the prow of a great ship, and there were banners flying, and the air so scented with sweet grasses we could hardly breathe. The procession came on, on and on, while Rahula cried and turned his face away, and Siddhartha stepped into the shadow of trees, waiting for it to pass. "I gave orders," he murmured, "but no one obeys. How do they come here? Every day *must* I see these things?" I tried to say something to console him, but my words were drowned by the wailing of the women, while the dead peaked face looked at the high barren sky. And so they passed us, moving at a snail's pace, to the tune of the beating gongs, and still they threw coloured grasses into the bier. We stood there with our heads bent to the ground, and sometimes Rahula would make a sound like the whinnying of a horse, but more often he was silent; and when the last celebrant had passed into the distance, Siddhartha said: "Perhaps this blessedness was my approaching death." He said this so simply, so convincingly that I nearly believed him. And a little later he said: "In the past when a meteor falls, it has always been the sign of death—how can this be a blessedness?" Then we returned slowly to the palace, to find that the procession had left through the main gates. Some time later he said: "We have reached the end. After a dead man, there can be nothing else."

And we both knew that this was untrue.

The next days were filled with the celebrations for my marriage. I rarely saw Siddhartha now. I remember a sense of vague foreboding, wondering whether the signs were meant for me as well as for Siddhartha, wondering what star guided us, what meteors would fall, what rivers would overflow their banks. At such moments I would console myself with thoughts of the tribesmen in the hills, who obeyed no gods and lived so naturally that they were like knives passing unhindered through life; till the memory of them, the smell of yak-dung, the hot boys singing around their fires, the white-robed and sweat-stained riders of small ponies, all these things would come to me like a sudden shock on exposed nerves, so that it was as though I was once more living in those blue windswept heights. Meanwhile, there were new costumes to be bought and measured, the choice of presents for the princes, a hundred and one nerve-wracking strains.

The marriage was to take place early in July. The wedding ceremony lasted three days. There is no place here to describe all the sacrificial duties, the ceremonial calls, the pilgrimages to the river and the singing of hymns which are prescribed for a prince of the second rank: such ceremonies are no doubt similar elsewhere, and are gradually falling into disuse. But I remember that I was particularly careful to notice Siddhartha's appearance when he came to the banquet and sat by my side. He was no longer tormented, he laughed gaily, he even made a few jokes, and once he whispered: "Nothing has happened—nothing at all," and I knew that his fears were over.

He said a little later: "I may go on a journey, Ananda. How much pleasanter it would be if I could go with you." He asked when I was leaving. I said: "Almost at once." He accompanied the bridal procession through the streets, and at one point in the journey threw his necklace of pearls

to a young woman, Kisa Gotami, who was throwing flowers at his carriage. I did not know then that this was almost his final valediction on the world, nor did I know that on the morning of my marriage he had seen a monk in a yellow robe, wandering through the gardens, a monk who spoke to him quietly and courteously, and yet with great majesty, saying that he had come into the gardens for the sake of the shade of the fruit trees. Siddhartha asked him by what road he had come; the monk refused to answer, but said later that he had wandered down the Himalayas in search of a young prince who would bring peace to the world.

“Am I that prince?” Siddhartha asked.

The monk again refused to reply, but went slowly to the great gates.

“And have you no message for me?” Siddhartha asked, hurrying after him.

“I have no message,” the monk replied, “and even if I had a message, it would be useless at such a time.”

Siddhartha pondered for a long time; and many years afterwards he was to say that he was so deep in his meditations that he had not noticed the monk’s disappearance, but he was sure that the monk possessed a real existence, a man with a heavily-built face, great stature, and possessing the dignity of a king.

Early the next morning, I left for Kusinara, where the Malla princes are. I did not see Prince Siddhartha for many years. His childhood ended, and so did mine. We had lived together in all the agony of youth, the Himalayas before us, all the morning freshness of the world around us, and where my mind was dull and undiscerning, his opened like a flower. There was about him always a royal humility which enclosed him; and yet greater than his humility was his wisdom. He came and went, like a star across the paths of those who loved him. There was the sick man, the dying and the dead; and though they slipped through his hands,

they were to come to him later when, robed in a yellow gown, he walked among us: a giant among men, but graceful and always smiling. He was young and handsome always; it was not possible not to love him. Death takes the gentle ones: in his youth he was the gentlest of us all, and still, wherever he is, and wherever he will appear to us, his gentleness remains; as the petals of flowers, as the bodies of women, as the sun in the dust. So I have written this account of his youth, that men may remember him before he wore the yellow robe and walked into the red dust of the world.

PART TWO•

The Lord in the Yellow Robe

V

The Unreflecting Lamp

I ANANDA, THE COUSIN OF THE LORD, KNOWN as the Lover, have written this during the long nights, and every night the herd-boy has been playing on his flute in the small court-yard; but now the moon is down, and though he may still be there, I shall not see him till the moon rises again. In this moonlight, I said to myself, the mind rejoices out of itself, we hear and listen to things we never understood in life, seeing things as they are, coloured as they are, scented and oiled as they are; and it is a great thing to be able to see with the same clearness as we hear the note of a flute-player. The pen itches in my hand, but the hand is not strong any more. "Be vigilant always," the Lord said. "Do those things which must be done; worship no statues; adore the perfect circle of the sun. And for the rest, remember that the Lord's presence is like the grain which the farmer sows in due season, but the grain perishes in a green shoot: so will the man who trusts in the Lord, and holds fast to the Law, obtain deliverance and pass into Nirvana." And he said again: "Let none cherish their fathers or mothers or sisters, but let them be devoid of all cherishment, and let them come to me in due season." And again: "During this life I come as the Lord of wisdom, but in the next I shall come as the Lord of Love." And truly he will come. And truly those who listen hear approaching footsteps, for he is here, everywhere among us, and so great is the voice of his love that it will deafen all other voices, and none shall know whence that voice is come.

Come then, my brothers, my acolytes, light the wicker-

lamps, sharpen your steel instruments, set the folds of your yellow gowns in order, be meek and attentive as I recite those things which are known to me. And as you write and as you read, remember always that he was a man in the full strength of his manhood, restless and tormented more than other men, and yet possessing in his heart a secret treasure—for was he not the hunter who took part in the chase and killed whatever beast had to be killed, once and for ever?

O you who listen in the corners, turn up the wicker-lamps and shine like the Lord.

On that fatal evening of my marriage the Lord returned to his pavilion. There were pearls in his head-dress and on his kilt, and these he unloosened carefully, gazing at them for a long while, sending the dancing girls away, and then he threw the pearls on the couch, took a small light with him inside the bed and at last unloosened the pearl curtain. He sighed and said prayers, the prayer to the sun and the four heavens, the prayers for the Kshatriya clans and the prayers for his friends and those who were dear to him. He had taken the lamp to comfort him; and then for a while he looked at the long nets of pearls hanging from the roof-beam of the bed, and he noticed for the first time that every pearl mirrored perfectly every other pearl. He would hold one pearl in his fingers, and the movements of his hand, and of the pearl itself, would be reflected by every one of the million pearls forming the curtain; and every image on every pearl would be reflected on every other pearl, so that the movement of a single pearl was magnified a million times, and there was no end to these reflections. For some reason he had never noticed this before, and it occurred to him that every movement of his body was similarly reflected, and that life itself was reflected, that everyone was part of the mirroring whole, and the least thing—a drop of dust, an

eyebrow, an eyelash, a single hair—all these were reflected in the moving mirror of the world, and therefore they were eternally mirrored, and eternal.

He could not say how he had been led on this surmising, for he soon forgot the presence of the pearl curtain and saw only that everything in the world was not alone, but infinitely repeated. There were mirrors everywhere. There were butterflies' wings stronger than the holy mountain. There were lives which were eternal, either here or on some other planet, and all were being repeated. The girl who is murdered will be murdered again elsewhere, and she will be born again, and give suck to her child again; the way of the world was a ceaseless reflection. "And let me rest here," he told himself. "If I think any further, I shall be lost in my meditations." But his mind went on, untrammelled by reason of his youth or because he was weary after the long processions, and he said: "It is good that there should be these reflections, but better if one could be caught up in an instant gleam of light beyond all reflections, and eternal. Better to escape altogether from the mirror of the world, and shine with one's own light. Better to move away from the wheel, better to pray."

So he prayed, in the scented bed among the bear-skins, while the dancing girls crept back again and he heard them moving restlessly in the chamber, posturing before him. Then he slept, and when he awoke it was cold, the dancing girls were lying on the floor asleep, some assuming the postures of dancing, others yawning in sleep, the scent of their bodies becoming foul in the warm air, the lamps untrimmed and smoking with oil, the musical instruments scattered all over the floor, everything in the confusion of sleep; and worst of all were the unmoving shadows on the wall.

"What has come over me?" he asked himself, and then he thought of the sick man, the old man, the dead man and the

monk in the yellow robe; and suddenly a terrible fear of death took hold of him. "It must be like this," he told himself. "In the graves, in unseemly attitudes, the black shadows . . ." He did not go on. He had said before many times that it was unhealthy to think of death; and more than unhealthy, because it sapped at the springs of life; but now in the presence of the nautch-girls death seemed horrible beyond words, stinking with sweat and the flowers in their hair were withering, and they looked like dolls which had been broken and scattered about the room. "And all the time, to the very last minute before they fell asleep, they were thinking only of pleasing me."

The pearls were still shining in the bright light of the small bronze lamp. He saw himself reflected there, sullen with sleep, with grey lines on his forehead and on his cheeks, and the rouge from his lips was running. The lamp burnt steadily; and even this was terrible. The steadiness of this lamp cast a desolation on the room—nothing was recognisable. Only the snow-leopard, crouching in a corner, with its white head resting on its paws, was beautiful.

He looked down for a moment at the dark-skinned dancing girl who was the mother of Danya. He felt no regrets in leaving her. The life of the senses must cease. He was determined upon this now—the senses were illusory, they said nothing, they communicated pleasure and pain, but pleasure and pain were no more than hot and cold. He hated the bedchamber now, hated it with the furious dispassionate hatred of one who has seen in vision a flame which does not cease, unchanging, unalterable. "There is no flame in this graveyard," he said, "nor in these bodies lying about the room like so much coarse meat—who would taste them? The mouth would spew them out if it knew what it was eating." He coughed once, and one of the dancing girls half-awakened, and for some reason he was ashamed. He knew now what the augurs said when they

spoke of blessedness. It was not here. The meteor had fallen in the snows, and that was blessedness. And saying the word "blessedness" over and over again, he crept to the door.

There were the stars, white, blazing, magnified by the moisture in the air, a torrent of stars roaring across the sky, yet quietly, like the glint of a million axle-staves. He noticed small pellets of scented ointment hanging from the roof, swaying in the warm wind, and took one, and crushed it underfoot, till the gaudy little thing was no more than the smear of a crushed spider, black and shining. A wind was coming up, the air was close, he could hardly breathe, yet how much fresher it was in the garden than in the overheated deathly room in the palace. Now, as he stood in the garden, the dark air swept through the open doors, and all were silent, caged in sleep, and perhaps they would never awake. He decided to call Channa and harness the horse Kanthaka. He went to Channa's place, woke him softly and said: "Prepare." There was no need to say any more, for Channa was accustomed to instant obedience; and meanwhile it occurred to him that he should bid farewell to Yasodhara, to Rahula and Danya, but Danya was too far away—she would grow up to a life of the senses, he told himself regretfully—and Yasodhara's palace was near. "She will not let me escape, but if I go to her, and still I escape, then the test is over." He went to her on tiptoe. She was sleeping on the great camphor-wood bed, one white arm bent tenderly over the child. He tripped over something—he never knew what it was, and he would say afterwards that he tripped over his conscience—for then he noticed that Yasodhara was awake.

"I am glad you have come—such terrible nightmares," she said. "I have never known them before. Come close to me, Siddhartha." He advanced a little, but did not come close to her. "Sacred one, in my sleep, I saw all the great earths around us shaking and trembling, and the standard of

Indra, broken in twain, fell to the earth. Then I saw the sun and the moon, and all the stars, falling through space as men fall over cliffs, with their arms outflung. What is the meaning of this?" .

"There is no meaning—only the nightmare," he said tenderly, but did not come closer.

"It was a long dream," she went on, "and I do not want to weary you, but I have never dreamed such dreams. I saw Channa coming and taking the choicest jewels from my head-dress—why should I dream of this? I saw my body, so smooth and scented, suddenly become wrinkled and evil-smelling; and then one by one my hands and feet dropped off; and the couch fell to the ground and turned to old wood, and the silk coverlet faded away into a few shreds like hair—this couch where I have reposed with you and enjoyed your caresses. So many things happened! I saw the acacia tree in the palace garden blown down by the same wind which blew out the sun. I saw the watchmen at the gates suddenly turn into wooden figures parading the streets, wailing and beating their chests in lamentation, and all their silk cords and the tasselled fringes of their turbans melted away, and they were left there bleeding; and the whole city of Kapi-lavastu was suddenly a waste, and no sheep and no flowers grew there. I saw all the trees and flowers scatter their leaves, and all the tanks dry up, and men lying dead on the ground, and only a few birds wheeling over them. I have seen all these things——"

She was weeping, but Rahula was still sleeping. The lights were burning, gleaming on her white flesh and on the jade bracelets on her arm.

He went closer to her, saying: "It was a nightmare. Now sleep again." He said this so confidently that she half believed him and turned her head away; and soon afterwards she fell asleep, and he heard the slow rise and fall of her contented breath. Once, inexplicably, she opened her

eyes and gazed at him reproachfully, and he said: "Dream, and this time your dreams will be pleasant." In the distance he heard Channa harnessing the horses.

Then he withdrew into the shadows of the room, and once more he gazed at her, so filled with love for her, which was unlike the love he gave to the dancing girls, more tender, more careful and at the same time more carefree. He smiled nervously, and discovered that he was stroking the air with his hands as though the air had formed into the shape of her; and then once more he thought of the myriad pearls in his bedchamber, and how each one reflected all the others, and how he himself was no more than a reflection, no more than a dream. He wanted to embrace Yasodhara; he wanted to take Rahula in his arms, pressing the plump legs against his chest; and then again he wanted only to watch them, never taking his eyes away from them, absorbed in contemplation of their silent beauty. Listening to the sound of the horse's snaffles, he remembered every instant of their love-making, and then like an arrow his mind fled to the bedchamber he had left only a few moments before—the crawling attitudes of the dead, all beauty immersed in sleep's toil. He heard Channa whispering to him: "The horses are ready," but he delayed a little longer and then slowly returned to his own room, perfumed himself, decorated himself with pearl vestments and with a cape of gold, and for the last time looked at himself in one of the bronze mirrors lying on the bear-skins. "It is over," he said. "There is blessedness in the air, and now no more shall I enjoy a life of sensations. Sensations perish, the flesh perishes, all things will come to their dusty end, but the unreflected flame remains. O where, in all these worlds and torments, whether in the body or in the air surrounding the body, shall I find the flame which no pearls have ever reflected, no man has ever seized—the flame outside time and space which nourishes me?"

He walked through the garden to the place where Channa was waiting for him; and then it occurred to him, seeing the silver lake shining in the moonlight, that he would go through the small gate where the funeral procession had entered, reversing the way of death. He would ride with Channa till exhausted, not caring where he was going or what strangers he met on the way; he would find the unreflected flame whatever torments it cost him. He saw the white horse in the moonlight champing in the long grass; he saw the places where he had played, the armour he had worn, the spears glinting in the armoury, the tassels and crowns he had won in the contests; and now they meant less than nothing to him—he would go away like the wind and where the wind brought him, he would rest, perhaps searching in the wind for the flame.

Then very slowly he mounted Kanthaka, and rode to the small gate.

It was very dark in the forest, with the wind beating in great gusts from the north and east, and only by the noise of the monkeys and by the occasional flashes of lightning did they at length find the stone path, and even when they found it they did not know where they were going. The moon had not yet risen. Siddhartha flung the robe more tightly round him, and looking for Channa in the darkness, saw nothing except a great sephali tree which suddenly turned white as ice, and he heard the gale blowing in the distance, coming nearer. “On such a night as this, when the wild towers . . .” he murmured these words, but they meant nothing to him, and it was as though a shutter of lead had fallen. And a little while later, when he heard Channa coming closer, the hoof-beats in the dark, he lifted up his head and felt the first drops of pelting rain.

“Where are you, Channa?” he shouted.

“I am coming, Lord,” Channa answered, and at that

moment Siddhartha saw the gold spurs by the light of distant lightning.

“Then I am at peace,” Siddhartha said. “On such a night as this, when the wild towers companion me . . .”

It was a night of storm such as they had never known before. Trees cracked and fell across the path. Though there were lowering clouds, there were still a few stars, and by the steady light of the stars and the flashes of lightning they made their way through the forest, soaked to the skin. Birds flew out of the thickets, and once an eagle swooped from under the horses’ hooves, where it was nesting. It was a night when the gods are wide awake, a night when meteors fall and mountains rumble in the darkness; and the sting of the wet rain on their lips and faces, and the branches they brushed against, and the patter of the horses’ hooves were such as to frighten them, but they rode onward against the wind.

“The gods must be awake,” Channa shouted in fear.

“It is right that they should be awake,” Siddhartha answered. “On such a night as this, the wild towers fall. The gods are everywhere around us. I see them peering through the bushes, and watching where we go. Do not think of these things, Channa, for the night comes when they watch for ever.”

By the lightning flashes Channa sometimes saw Siddhartha with his bare knees pressed high up on the saddle, his hands thrown forward over the horse’s mane. Now no more was the young prince reclining in the robing-room, wearing flowers and skirts of silk; his great knees and great arms were flung forward, the gold robe thrust out from his shoulders in the wind, and he resembled a horseman on a palace frieze rather than a horseman making his way through the dark night.

“Can you hear them coming after us, Channa?”

“Yes, I can hear them, Lord. There are conches and

shells, but the shells are louder. They are summoning the palace guards. We must hurry. Already they have found the path we have taken.”

“It is right that they should find the path, and it is right that they should follow us. They are searching for me, Channa, but it is not true that I am causing them suffering, for I should cause them greater suffering if I remained.”

Saying this, Siddhartha pricked his spurs into the white flanks of Kanthaka and rode on quietly, for the rain had abated, and the soft brushwood on the ground deadened the noise of the horses’ hooves. But now he rode more swiftly, with his body bent forward until his shoulders touched the mane of Kanthaka, and he said: “Let this be preserved—the lightning and the thunder.”

Then they began to hear voices behind them, at first softly and then more loudly, voices of foot-soldiers and of cymbals ringing, and all through the dark night Channa would turn round; but Siddhartha did not turn round.

“Listen,” Channa exclaimed. “They have sent men with crossbows and other men with spears——”

Siddhartha said nothing. They were cantering now, and though the rain had ceased there was still lightning. In this lightning Siddhartha looked like a youth covered with frost, so white were the lightning-strokes across the sky; and sometimes there was thunder. They knew they would have to hurry. The soldiers knew in which direction Siddhartha was going; they had consulted the soothsayers.

“Let it be,” Siddhartha whispered, “they will not find me unless I announce myself, and why should I announce myself? The time is late. The robing women have awakened, and Yasodhara has awakened, and the palace is lit with candles, but they shall not find me. The road is long, but the night is longer for those who do not take this road. Listen to me, Channa. I know the signs in the sky—this thunder and lightning mean that the gods are awake, and

who knows whether they shall ever sleep again? The road is long, but the gods will not sleep again." He spoke with pride and a kind of fury, knees close to the horse's mane, and sometimes now that they were cantering he would stroke Kanthaka and whisper: "You have led me along the right road, but never again shall I ride on you. These last moments are mine."

When dawn was breaking Siddhartha had already divested himself of royal power. Ragged and torn were the saddle-cloths and the long gold robe. The dawn brought out all the scents of the forest, the wild thyme and the deodars and the sickly-sweet smell of the *neem* trees, and Siddhartha breathed the new air, delighted by the silver-whiteness of the trees, which held the rain.

"This is the way it must be," Siddhartha said. "The dawn comes grey, and then there is ripeness," and saying this he passed his hands before his eyes.

"Can you hear the soldiers?" he asked after a while.

"No, Lord."

"Then this is the place where we must take our leave—where no voices can be heard."

Channa had not believed that the long night would come to an end, when he saw Siddhartha dismounting.

"And what is there that I must do for my Lord?"

"You must return to my father's house and say that I am becoming a recluse, and take Kanthaka with you."

In the grey light Channa's face looked worn.

"And what then, Lord?"

"There is nothing then, Channa. You have served me faithfully, and now it is time to go."

Siddhartha still wore the crown of pearls; there were splashes of dew on the gold robe.

"It is time, it is time," he repeated slowly.

"They are weeping for you, Siddhartha," Channa said.

"The robing women are weeping, and the children are

weeping, and there is no end to their weeping. The weeping will never cease unless the Lord returns.”

Siddhartha frowned.

“The weeping never ceases,” he answered. “Whether I return or not, there is still weeping. And this is why I must become a recluse—so that there shall be an end to weeping. Listen, Channa. There is an end to weeping only when we are very old, and now I am old, I am older than anything you have seen, older than any man or mountain, because I am about to cut myself off from the world.”

“Why must this be, O Lord?”

“It must be,” Siddhartha said, and with these words he took the chaplet of pearls from his head and offered them to Channa, saying: “Take these to my father, and take the sword, and take all that I possess, and offer them to my father, but first cut my hair.”

Because Channa did nothing, Siddhartha went on: “I must be free from the love due to parents and those who are close to me. I can see myself—the yellow hair, the face of gold, the broad shoulders, the slim waist, the feet firmly planted in the sand, the beauty of my body gold in this sunlight. There must be an end to this beauty, Channa. Let it be as I have said, Channa. Cut off my hair with my sword——”

The sun was coming up, shining on all the wet green leaves of the forest, on the little insects sheltering under the fronds, on the rivulets and streams bursting out of the forest paths; and the sun rising touched the Lord’s skin, and a cold wind came, and he shivered, standing there with the wet robe hanging on him.

“What is this that I see, Channa?” he exclaimed. “You have always obeyed me, even in the palace, even in the bridal bed I could call to you and you would obey me. Cut my hair till my head is smooth. Make me like one of the monks whose heads shine in the sun!”

Channa's fingers were shaking as he lifted the jewel-hilted sword and began to cut the hair which reached down over the Lord's shoulders. Flakes of hair dropped away and fell in the grass, and he would stoop and pick them up, and all the while he was listening for the approach of the men with the crossbows.

"But they will not come," Siddhartha smiled. "They have taken the wrong path, and now that my hair is shorn, there is no way for me to return——"

Channa gathered some bright hair from the grass.

"My fingers tremble, O Lord."

"Then hold fast to the sword, and cut deeply as though you were killing a man, for indeed you are killing the prince, and there will be left only a monk in a loose deer-skin robe, with shambling feet walking through the forest paths, feeding on the droppings of birds, on leaves and berries, and on the fruit of the trees. Cut deeply, Channa. The bowmen will never come."

At last all the hair was cut off, and Channa held it in his hands.

"And now take this necklace," Siddhartha said, "and these shoes, and these strings of pearls from my waist, and take them to my father, and take my robe and my under-vest and the silk skirts round my waist and these jewels, and let me be left alone naked like the beasts."

Saying this, the Lord removed these things one by one and left them with Channa, divesting himself of all earthly things, all jewels and garments and sweet-smelling herbs pressed against his skin, while the wind rippled over him and his feet were planted firmly apart. Seeing the Lord nearly naked, Channa said: "Each one of these things is worth ten *lakhs* of gold, yet the Lord cannot eat in the forest, nor can he have attendants, nor has he any flute to play on. In the baths the Lord is naked, and in the bridal bed he is naked, but why should the Lord be naked in the forest?"

At that moment by chance they saw a hunter coming through the forest and wearing a loose deer-skin robe. He was a tall man with thick matted hair, and carried arrows in a quiver slung across his chest; but he was weary and walked shambling, carrying nothing except the quiver.

“Let me speak to him,” Channa said, and he spoke to the huntsman, saying: “My Lord desires these clothes and will give you these robes of gold in exchange.”

“For what reason does he wear cloth of gold?” the huntsman asked, but said nothing more, for Channa was drawing him nearer to the Lord.

“All things pass,” the Lord said. “Cloth of gold passes, and so do the stars.”

The huntsman silently disrobed; and Channa, standing by the river edge, saw the firm body of the prince beside the old gnarled grey body of the hunter, and thought: “In a few years Siddhartha will be like this—he too will be gnarled and infirm and sorrowful. He will sleep in the forest at night, with no roof to cover his head, and in the morning he will awake, his hands covered with mud and forest leaves, and none will recognise him. Shambling, shambling, he will go through the forest paths . . .”

The Lord must have heard these thoughts, for he said: “Shambling indeed are all creatures who wander through a palace, but lithe and swift are those who wander under the trees.”

Now at last the Lord was wholly divested of his emblems of rank, of all his regalia, of his diadem of pearls, of the silk vests so light that a million could be carried by a single girl, of his kilts and skirts and the short tunic studded with jewels; and stood there quietly in the long flowing deer-skin robe, which was rent and needled together, and he said: “All things must be rent that they may be whole.” And the huntsman stood there, wearing cloth of gold and gold greaves, smiling to himself.

The Lord said nothing, but gazed into the blue pools of the river and saw himself wearing a deer-skin robe and smiled, as the huntsman had smiled, and dismissed the huntsman and said to Channa: "These things which you have heard you will tell to my father, that he may know that I have divested myself of all earthly rank and all emblems of rule, and have come alone to the forest, where I can meditate. And let no one be sent in search of me. There is one other thing which I order you to do against the day of my return, and that is to comfort Yasodhara, and Rahula must also be comforted; and the slaves and concubines must also be comforted; and you must help whomsoever needs to be helped. There are so many who will need your help, and you must give it to them freely. And now you must return." A little later he said:

"The life of man is shorter than the smoke of a flame. I shall stay in the forest for eight years, no more and no less, for eight years is long enough for meditation."

"And then, Lord?"

"I shall go out into the world, as a youth goes out in the world and scatters his seeds. But now I shall go into the forest."

Saying this, Siddhartha went slowly into the forest.

It was afternoon when Channa returned to the palace, where there were pools of ice and the silk trees were white with a winter frost. He had never known a day like this. The parks were deserted: the only sound came from the flapping of silk leaves and from the murmur of fish underneath the pools. Guards stood on the towers; from inside the palace came the sounds of lamentation. And still Channa accompanied by Kanthaka walked silently through the parks.

He walked slowly, dragging his feet, on that endless day which was like the end of a world, a day of sorrow and grave resolves and still graver lamentations. The yellow

flags bearing the image of Siddhartha hung straight out in the wind, as though the spirits were determined that when he was absent he should be the more seen; and Channa was conscious of the hidden eyes which watched him from the lattices. He heard trumpets and conches.

"I am the bearer of evil tidings," he told himself.

He braced himself for the moment when he should enter the central court-yard, for he knew they were waiting for him there, or thought he knew. His face was grey, his silk garments were torn by thorns. Lights shone in deserted gardens, nautch-girls were singing.

Then at last, weary beyond endurance, he made his way to Yasodhara's quarters and gave her silently the head-dress, the stirrups and one or two other things that the Lord gave him for her.

The Lord lived on fruit and seeds and leaves, and stayed in a little grove of sal trees in the forest, alone and uncomplaining, and then he went further afield. Sometimes he spoke to himself, the words thrown out like stones, words which at first seemed meaningless—"pearl", "blessedness", "the jewel on the lotos", and many others—and as these stones were flung into the pool of his mind, great swelling rings were formed and he followed them as far as the mind could reach. He asked himself whether one should meditate all one's days, and in incessant pondering probe at last to the sources of life, and perhaps find there the sources of holiness. There, too, perhaps he would find the unreflected flame, the unlit lamp that burns and sheds its light like the sun. So he went on, deep in thought, not knowing where he was going, and not caring, disguised in a deer-skin robe, far from men, avoiding men when he heard them in the forest.

And where should he go—what town, what city, what snows? But this was the least of his questions, and though sometimes his feet hesitated and he found himself walking

unconsciously in the direction of the woodcutters' smoking fires, his will edged him away from such dangerous places, knowing that the woodcutters would reveal him to the Kshatriya soldiers who were combing the forest for him. Sometimes he heard them; at such moments he had only to hide in the shadows of trees or lie quietly in a ditch. He thought of their lives, the prey to an effortless obedience, and it amused him to think that they possessed something in common with the life he was leading now. This was the end. There could be no further travels, only relentless obedience to his meditations, following a single meditation to its roots—holiness, the unlit lamp. He would go on and on, and wherever he found it he would celebrate it; and if none listened to him, no harm was done, for perhaps the roots he followed were poisoned at their source. Now, cupping his hands in lake-water and lifting the water to his mouth, he said: "All thought must be like this—transparently clear, yet tasting of earth; like crystals, yet brackish." And he went on: "There must be life certainly in all our thinking. A child may contemplate a pearl, for he is so close to the sources of life that he colours the pearl with his own life; but a grown man had better contemplate brackish water or the bud of a lotos which springs from the mud. There is holiness there."

So he went on, cursing sometimes his nervous feet too soft for hard walking, amazed at the sudden descending of the night. It was many years since he had wandered through forests alone, and since his childhood there had always been Ananda or someone near. He ate little. This was good, because it allowed him to see more clearly, so that sometimes he could almost see through a leaf into something beyond; but at night the mind was free of all the exigencies of the spirit, and groped blindly to form pictures of things unseen. Leopards came close to him. Mysterious riders came clop-clopping through the forest. He saw them so

clearly when they rushed past him, grey faces in the moonlight, he thought he could smell the sweat of their bodies, but they were no more than the patterns of the moon on stones and the drumming of the leaves. And all through the night he heard them, so that it was impossible to meditate calmly.

It was a week before he could meditate at night without fear, not caring what happened to him. During the days he walked interminably, exhausting his body deliberately, till the sweat ran and thoughts came cleaner. He began to make things with his hands, a wooden bowl, a water-strainer from some old rotting cloth, and even from some dead animals and from creepers a new robe, his own so torn already that he wondered how the hunter could pass daily through the forest. He began to delight in small things: the slow creeping of the dew down the leaves, the silver explosions of the dew-bubbles when the sun awakened them, the clean-cut yellowness of the highest branches and all the curious gnarled shapes of the tree-boles. He could stare for hours at water. He had done it before, when weary of gazing at lotos buds, for water was alive, continually changing, every ripple glinting in a different way; now he stared at single leaves, and sometimes even while he was gazing the leaf would fall from the stem and plunge downward to earth: then he was bemused, as though something so strange had happened that it was beyond all eloquence of meditation to explain—it was like death or earthquakes or the fall of cities. And then how tenderly he rose and walked to the leaf and gazed at it, as one might gaze at a dead child. “And surely,” he told himself, “there is no difference, only the leaf was cleaner and clung to the sun.” Or else he would meditate on the pud-marks of animals, not yet able to distinguish them all, or in the evening he would sit cross-legged near some ancient green-vined water-tank, where the animals came down to drink; and it pleased him to see them

licking and scooping up the water with their red tongues.

What was strange was that he felt stronger each day. The cares of the palace no longer tormented him. It was all over—the fate of the kingdom not worth the fate of a single yellow leaf. He no longer searched for wild lotoses; he could meditate more easily on a ragged brown-stained dead flower held in the palm of his hand. Nearly all things pleased him. Even dangerous things were beautiful and pleasing; the curled thorns of the creepers, the scarlet points thinning to yellow; the mosquitoes with iridescent wings; the lithe and handsome cobras with green markings and brownish yellow bodies basking in the sun; they were all beautiful, and he felt no fear of them. He feared nothing except that one day he might come upon a dead or dying animal.

Sometimes he would cook the fruit he gathered; then he would light a small fire with kindling-wood and watch the gum oozing out and the little green flames flickering; he made a bowl of caked mud and boiled the fruit, and nothing pleased him more than the thick-scented smoke which rose from the cooking-pot; or else he would take a little milk from the deer, place it in the cooking-pot and watch it till, through the brittle creamy scum, the bubbles appeared and broke through, finding in the tormented agitation of broth something similar to his own questionings, the meditations which were pursued till the moment when they became supreme. And yet, though he meditated on how the world began and how it will end, how it was formed, on the nature of the spirits, on whether the soul is formed from the *paramatma* or whether the *paramatma* is formed from the souls of all men, he thought more often of holiness and of how men could escape from the ceaseless wheel of change. He would imagine a leaf that does not change in a sun which is unmoving in an earth which is at rest; and there were times when it seemed that there was never any change, when

every leaf at the instant he gazed upon it was eternal, brilliant, unchanging, hard as diamonds. And then he would ask himself, more often at night when the flames by the cooking-fire were dying down: "Am I also eternal and unchanging?"

One morning when he awoke he was surprised to see a man walking across the clearing. The man was ragged and old, there were great tears in his deer-skin robe and he walked with difficulty. He looked a little like the monk he had seen in the garden, but there was a severity in the man's face which showed that some elements of passion remained, an old man weighed down with the cares of contemplation. The Lord answered his greeting, rose, and walked towards him: the sun was coming through the forest trees, it was already autumn and the brightness of the green leaves after rain was dazzling. Looking sorrowfully down at a pool of stagnant water, the old man said: "The water flows, and the clouds remain."

"I do not understand," the Lord complained. "It seems to me that the water is brackish and does not flow."

"Does it seem to you that the clouds are moving?" the old man asked.

"Some are moving and some are at rest," the Lord answered.

The old monk in the torn deer-skin seemed not to be listening, for he said: "I have known for a long time that you are here—you are Prince Siddhartha Kumar of the Kshatriyas."

"That may be," the Lord answered. "I have lost all sense of identity, and perhaps I shall lose it still further and think myself a blade of grass."

The old monk was silent for a moment.

"So you would become a blade of grass? This is interesting. I have never known of a monk who wanted to become a blade of grass——"

“I did not say I wanted to become a blade of grass, but you asked me about my identity, and truly I cannot answer you. When I watch a humming-bird on the bough, am I the bough or the humming-bird? For certainly at such moments I am not Siddhartha.”

As he gazed at the Lord, the old man smiled, for a sudden thought had occurred to him, but before he could go on, the Lord said. “I have been three weeks in the forest, and I have seen no one except some huntsmen at night, and they were certainly visions——”

“Do you suffer from loneliness?” the old man asked.

“No, why should I suffer? The more I think of it, the more I believe that conversations between friends do no more than shield us from our most urgent thoughts. I would have a conversation with an enemy if I could find one.”

“Who is the enemy?”

“Mara, the temptress, and there are a thousand others. You must know them as well as I do, since you live in the forest.”

The old man sighed: “Yes, I have known them, and there is another temptress—the gold they will give me when I tell them I have found Prince Siddhartha. How much gold will they give me?”

Something in the man's tone, and his eagerness, made Siddhartha look up sharply: the man spoke like a fool, but there was a sullenness in the way he expressed his thoughts, a curious hidden quality of torment, which attracted him, while at the same time it occurred to him that nothing was so ungraceful as this man, with matted hair and beard, crawling with lice, yet containing in the expression of his face and eyes something inexpressibly sad, as though his whole soul was overflowing with longing. Had he found peace in the forest? Or some kind of contentment? But his hands were trembling.

“Who are you?” the Lord asked.

“I am Alama Kalami,” the man replied, suggesting by his tone that the description was enough. “I have meditated through all the four stages of consciousness.”

“How do you meditate?” Siddhartha asked.

“By looking at my navel. There are hairs in my navel, but it doesn’t matter—I look through the hairs.” He sighed. “I look at my navel and it is all there. I follow the invisible cord to the beginning of time. I hop from one womb to the other—in three seconds I can reach the beginning of all things, but I know, when I reach the beginning of all things, I have to begin again.”

Alama unfastened his deer-skin robe, sat cross-legged on the grass mat where the Lord had been sitting a moment before and began to gaze at the navel in his shrunken belly. His straggled beard flapped against his chest, his eyelids were narrowed down to slits, the shoulders hunched and bent and two thin fleshless legs could be seen as brown as autumn leaves. Siddhartha recognised all the signs of meditation, a meditation more profound than any he had ever known, for there was no period of preliminary waiting for the calm to descend; it was there, almost immediately, between two heart-beats. And what did it matter, Siddhartha thought, laughing a little, that he should look at his navel—it is as sensible as anything else. He himself could gaze for hours at a knot of wood, to find himself following the pattern of the grain to the dead centre, there to be lost, and perhaps it was not so strange that an old man should attempt to hop from one womb to another in order to gaze on the beginning of the world.

“And what do you find there, Brother Alama?” he said softly.

“I see identity and non-identity.”

“Nothing more?”

“There are filaments of blood and darkness, but chiefly I

see identity and non-identity.” He sighed deeply, slowly coming to life. “But I know it is not the end—I heard you laughing. If you can think of something better to look at than your navel, please tell me. I have been forty years wandering in this forest, sleeping in dung-hills, festering with the sun’s sores, and truly I tell you I have seen nothing better than my navel. I have known a monk who would look at his toe-nail till it perished with the rot of vision, and he walked with four toes; and others who look at the sun till their eyes are black holes.”

“There are some who look at the markings of tigers,” Siddhartha suggested.

“I have heard of them,” Alama croaked. “If you look long enough, they seem darker, for you are viewing them from inside the tiger.”

“There are others who look at the moon?” Siddhartha suggested.

“I wouldn’t give a soul’s purchase for the moonstruck ones,” Alama answered. “Best of all is to look at your navel and go to the end of all things. If you look long enough, you come to the end, but you must have patience. For forty years I have tried to go beyond identity and non-identity, to the place where the soul escapes from its cage into the *paramatma*, and I have seen the sparks. Ha, you ask me what the sparks are? Those are the little souls—I can shed them easily, but the big soul is another matter, it is still imprisoned. I have thought, if I cut off the hairs of my navel the big soul will be free, for the hairs are like prison bars; but whoever heard of a wandering forest-dweller who cut off those hairs? I tell you, in forty years I have learnt only two things: that the soul is a knife-grinder with a flint wheel throwing off sparks, and then this other thing: that the great earth is established on water, the water on wind, and the wind on space. I am telling you this to help you, because you are young and inexperienced. If you will come with

me, I'll take you to the place where I lodge in the trees."

"Do you live in the trees, Brother Alama?"

"Of course I live in the trees—where do you expect me to live, among the roots? Only fools live among the roots. If you climb the trees, you are nearer to the sun, and you can see further. You will ask me, what is the use of seeing further when I am only interested in looking at my navel. I will tell you. Listen carefully. No man's eyes can stand the strain of looking at the navel for long. I sit on the branches of a tree and train my eyes to see things in the distance—ten leagues, twenty leagues, thirty leagues. I can see over the horizon. At first I was short-sighted and could not even see the horizon, but now at last I can see round corners——"

"What is there, Brother Alama, round the corner?"

"Only a few cooking-fires and people making bean-cheese," Alama answered disgustedly. "It's not worth it. I do it only to train my eyes. There's nothing in the world worth seeing except your own navel, but be careful that it is clean. It doesn't matter about the rest of the body, but you should always clean out your navel. Three times a day I do it, once in the morning, once in the afternoon and once at night. This is the law of Brahma, for if it is not clean, a flea may jump into it, and what could be worse during your meditations?"

"It might look like the standard of Indra?" Siddhartha suggested.

"I thought I saw identity once," Alama said sadly, "but it was only a flea. It was very sad. I shall never forget it."

"You need not be so sad, brother. I have looked at lotos buds and still water and moving water with petals in it, and all things are the same for the one who meditates. One could meditate on a coil of dung as easily as meditate on a flea."

"Perhaps you are right," Alama answered. "I thought

about it for many nights, but I could not reconcile myself to it. I caught the flea and it died, and I made a box of leaves and buried it in the forest, but I do not know where the place is—a tiger came and left his claw-marks in the neighbourhood, and perhaps he was searching for my flea. It was a female flea.”

“How did you know?”

“By the way it hopped, fool! Do you think a male would hop like that? You have no experience of women, or you would never say such a thing. You are ignorant. I must take you to my tree-top and show you how to look at your navel.”

Siddhartha declined the invitation, but later, when he watched the forest-dweller walking sadly away, he felt sorry, and also afraid. He had never thought this would happen; he began to wonder on what tree-top Alama rested, and whether he was comfortable. Did he climb the tree to avoid the fleas on the ground? Siddhartha felt suddenly sick and weary, and very old. He had thought of all the dangers which the forest might bring; but he had never thought that there would come out of the sunlight a querulous thin-fleshed man in a torn deer-skin who contemplated his navel in the fork of a tree. He pondered the matter for many days, undecided whether the man was a fool or a charlatan or someone from whom he could learn. Alama had spoken about gold. Would he run to the nearest city and inform them that he had seen Siddhartha? Perplexed, and sad at heart, he resumed his journeying. The forest held him. There were young panther-cubs in the sunlight with soft paws the colour of bees' wax; there were baby elephants, the colour of their unwrinkled flesh almost pink, sucklings beneath their tawny and immense mothers; there were green fish and white birds and sometimes a heron would flap lazily past him, and so slowly that without meditation at all he felt caught up in the slow soft movements of their wings.

The eyes of animals no longer frightened him; they were clearer than his own eyes. He thought sometimes of Alama contemplating his own navel, but gradually he forgot Alama. And more and more, under that boundless sky broken by the yellow leaves of the highest *sephali* trees, he thought of the *paramatma* and the unreflecting lamp.

“The lamp is in myself,” he said, “and in all ourselves—it burns in darkness, but where the darkness begins and where it ends no one knows except by the extremes of contemplation. There is a place beyond the furthest reaches. There is land where no land is, sky where no sky is, water where there are only parched mouths; but how summon them out of the air and kneel before them?” He thought of a landscape lit by the unreflecting lamp, there were people dancing and singing in this landscape, it was not the landscape of the dead, but the landscape he had seen every day of his life, but brighter, the colours deeper, the gestures more perfect, the expressions of the faces more serene. Poverty had no place there; none died or suffered or sought to hurt others or inflicted punishment on themselves. And it seemed to him when he was hungry, when the body was at the mercy of his mind, that he saw this country more perfectly, with a startling clarity of outline and with great depth; and this country was not unlike the country he had known. It was no more than vision, but if he could penetrate deeply enough and see this vision by the light of the unlit lamp, perhaps it would become substantial, so real that like a chrysalis it would burst from its cocoon-shell.

It was this that tormented him more than anything else—that *paramatma*, the supreme soul, was something very close to him and not unlike the world he knew. Each thing, each light, each glitter, the sunset and the coming dawn, all these seemed to be a part of the *paramatma*, and at the same time to be the whole. The lion-cubs in the clearing, the red

foxes whose eyes were like bright stones, the birds hopping among the autumn leaves in search of fallen acorns, all these were wholes as large as the *paramatma* itself, performing the same actions as the *paramatma*, for the supreme soul could have no other purpose than the enjoyment of itself. And then, in contemplation and meditation, this enjoyment could be plumbed to the furthest extremes of the hesitant spirit, and somewhere in those depths he would see them, not in the light of the sun, but in the light of the lamp which cast no shadow.

More and more he meditated, but not as he meditated in the palace; he meditated now as though his whole life, and the lives of all things he had seen and heard about, depended on him alone. To meditate as though at that moment one was dying, as though never again would there be an opportunity to plumb those secret depths, and then, having reached that place, to go still further, still deeper, with the deliberate intention of reaching the end; using that last step as a spring-board, a final desperate leap into the unknown; to meditate consciously, not allowing the mind to be overcome by what it has seen; to fall, and know that you are falling, like a moth into the flames of the unreflecting lamp.

He would not admit to himself consciously what he was doing; he would not say: "I will go still further, I will hold my hands in the light of those flames." He would wait till the spirit took him—a petal, a leaf, something seen clearly and with almost unbearable brilliance, would set his mind moving into those profound depths, and having reached them he hoped to secure a foothold. A leaf was a mountain to be scaled, a petal was as high as the sky. You could look at a petal or a leaf till your mind went dizzy with the intolerable poignancy of its life; and beyond poignancy lay the flame. He found now that if he starved himself, all things were more colourful, all were dressed in robes of splendour; in the light of mortification lay the still flame.

There were moments, then, of excitement so intense that he could hardly breathe; and it was at this time, some months after entering the forest, that he began to control his breath, so that there seemed to be no outflowing or inflowing—only the breath held in tremulous suspension. His mind cleared. He found that he could enter deeper, like a swimmer plunging into a sea, but unlike the swimmer in that the deeper he plunged, the clearer and more luminous everything became. And there was no oozy bottom to the sea. He went on and on, held in the trembling suspension of breath, and then he discovered a thing that surprised him so much that for several nights he could not sleep. At first he thought it was a kind of mirage, something obscurely wrong, something which obeyed no laws of behaviour or action. At first he could not see clearly in those depths, but gradually he began to make out the shapes of things, and what was surprising and unexpected was that *at the most profound moments of his meditation he saw—not Brahma—but the world exactly as he had known it before, as though the swimmer had come out at the other end of the world only to find himself exactly where he was before.* This startled him. The world was real. The people, the birds, the little coils of tiger-dung, the great waist-high smoking mountains of elephant-dung, the orioles on the trees—they were all there, exactly as he had seen them before, but somehow brighter, coloured by vision, and there was, he said, a sense of greater security about them, they seemed more rooted in space, not travellers in the world but at home there. And then he would say, laughing: “Even the navel of Alama was at home there.”

It was at this time that he met forest-dwellers who lived in a clearing not far from the village of Urevala. They were young men, bearded and well made; Assaji came from a rich family of merchants; Kondanya was the son of a salt-seller and the oldest of them all; Padrakha and Pasaṭa, both young men from the courts of one of the minor dukedoms; and

Manahama, who was a cousin of the other Manahama, the chief minister in the Court of Kapilavastu. They, too, had grown weary of a life of pleasure; but as though they were intent on destroying the pleasures they had known, they were subscribing to the most dangerous mortifications, fasting almost to death, covering themselves with dung, diving into rivers until their eyes were swollen and red, so that they hardly resembled human beings. The Lord lived with them for three months. It had seemed to him there were great treasures in mortifications which sharpened all senses until one sense ran into another, and you could say of a sound that it was coloured dark purple and of a smell that it rose on the wings of an oriole. And then sometimes it would occur to him that their mortifications were only another kind of pleasure, that they smiled and showed their teeth when they were sticking knives and tigers' claws into themselves; and they were proud of their sores, their swollen genitals, their broken skins. "What is it," he asked himself, "that makes them so proud and without nobility? Mortification for them is like the body of a woman—they lust for the sharpest sensations of the flesh, and they say this is Brahma. But Brahma is without pain."

Assaji said: "Brahma is the sharpest pain of all. Take a tiger's claw, sharpen the point to the size of a hair—there is Brahma."

The Lord quailed before them.

"You know nothing," they said. "You are still the young prince sitting on the edge of a lotos pool, cross-legged on a tiger-skin. What pleasure is so sharp as the pleasure of the senses? Sharpen them still further, heap dung on yourself, go to the extremes—there is blessedness. Make yourself so foul that you have reached the limit of foulness; blessedness comes in the suppurating flesh."

"It is only lust," Siddhartha answered brutally; but he did not leave them. He practised their terrible austerities, their

craven worship of dung and thorns and sleeplessness, but always he felt a kind of revolt, a masked hatred of their intolerance. Their game was to destroy the nobility of the body till the body could no longer protest, to couple with animals, to sleep in the skins of animals not yet dead, to destroy themselves utterly by making of their own bodies a temple of the world's refuse; they would croak at night, half-mad and staring, the broken pitiless bodies shrinking with the horrors they had accumulated during the day. Sometimes there were moments of quiet when they would discuss round the evening fires their objects and their search. At such times they would come crawling along the ground like animals, thorns sticking from bellies and loins and shoulder-blades, faces aghast and swollen with disease.

"Will it always go on like this?" Siddhartha would ask them.

"Until we have found the *paramatma*," Assaji answered. "Then perhaps we shall take up our wooden staves and come preaching to the people."

"And you will continue these austerities?"

"Perhaps we shall not continue them—we shall inform others what we have achieved, to save them for the supreme soul." He went on: "Only by the extremes can we reach the end of the world. One must risk everything for the sake of the *paramatma*. Out of our sores we shall make the Himalayas, and afterwards perhaps we shall wear Mount Sumeru in our ear-rings." And having said this, crouching in the yellow light of the fires, naked, with dung smeared over him, thorns protruding from his face, the bones crippled and bruised, he burst into sudden raucous laughter, which chilled the damp air of the night, so that they seemed to be surrounded by walls of ice. It was these moments, Siddhartha knew, that they particularly prized—moments of intensity and horror when the life within them leapt to the surface, almost flung itself out of their quivering bodies.

“And what then?” Siddhartha asked quietly.

“What then? Is it not enough that we should have the mountains as our ear-rings, the forests as our shoes, and all the earth to be our garments. Is it not enough that our bones become worlds, and the lice on our skins become human habitations?”

Siddhartha could not understand them when they spoke in this way. Horror was another kind of mortification, but he feared dead things and would move away from them as fast as possible. He wondered whether they were sincere in their efforts to reach Brahma. Was Brahma some crawling lice-infested animal, was there a complete absence of nobility in the final things of the spirit? Better to pray alone, and if there should be mortification, let it be only by starvation!

And yet sometimes the rocking spirits of these five forest-dwellers did not frighten him, but seemed necessary and inevitable. They, too, were meditating to the point where all meditation becomes meaningless, when the footholds disappear and the spirit can only fling itself wildly, with arms outstretched, into the unknown; and sometimes they returned from their savage voyagings with things of value. Once Assaji said: “I have meditated on this subject. Grind the body into powder. Grind it so small that there is only a handful of black dust. Then grind again and again, till there is no more than a little speck of dust, and then again, till there is no more than a small filament like the tiniest veins on your hand, and then further and further—what consciousness remains?”

“No consciousness remains,” Siddhartha answered.

“But surely there is consciousness,” Assaji said, croaking again. “The faintest consciousness, but surely consciousness. And now consider this. You have ground the body to powder, and now you perform the reverse process: from this tiny filament of dust, smaller than the smallest veins in

your hand, imagine it growing larger, imagine the thing swelling till it becomes a man again.”

“Yes, I can imagine it.”

“Then doesn’t it fill you with giddy laughter that this thing, this worm in the womb, becomes a man, with a man’s tastes and eccentricities and indecencies, doesn’t it make you want to vomit, don’t you *want* to see it crawling with slime, ridiculous, at the mercy of its mouth and its desires, unscrupulously at the mercy of its environment——”

He spoke with such eagerness that Siddhartha grew afraid; the eyeballs protruded; there was a look, not of malevolence, but of scorn, of some deep-seated spiritual disease; of hatred and despair and much weariness. It was night. There were no fires, but the round eyeballs caught the white light of the moon.

“And you really believe this?” Siddhartha asked.

“Certainly—why not? In the extremities of feeling, in moments of great triumph, great reverse, we enter Brahma——”

“Then we must always live in extremities of feeling?”

“Of course,” Assaji answered, “until the senses are sharpened to the finest point. I have told you before that starvation is not enough.”

Siddhartha could not say what was wrong with the argument except that it lacked nobility; it had force; there might be some people who could reach Brahma that way. But the means are dedicate to the ends; a means full of sloth and self-degradation could only lead to sloth and self-degradation. It was a kind of slavery, and all slavery was unendurable. Then one day he decided to leave them, and dressed himself cleanly in a yellow robe, blessing them with uplifted hands and gestures, while they tried to stand, tottering, in their filth, their rags, their creeping vermin.

“You’re becoming a prince again,” Assaji jeered at him.

Siddhartha smiled. “It might be better to become a

prince, but not at Court," he said, and he was about to go when he added: "Let us meet again in Benares when we have reached Brahma."

"When shall we meet in Benares?" Assaji jeered again.

"In a year's time," Siddhartha answered.

They nodded, bowed, raised their clasped hands together and watched him disappearing, a yellow thing like a tiger in the striped sunlight. It was seven years since he had entered the forest.

For Siddhartha there followed months of agony. He went to a place seventy miles west of Urevala where he was unknown, in another kingship, and practised mortification by the side of a stream. On a bed of grass he sat cross-legged, his eyes concentrated on the moving water, where leaves and rubble and dead animals floated past, everything disappearing, the river swollen in the rains, the bank muddy, the place smelling of death and decay. He ate only five grains of rice a day, and whatever water lay within reach. He became himself a self-tormenting whip. The flooded river bore everything away, monstrous, terrible, all things dissolving within it, flesh, hair, dung, leaves, feathers, petals—no end to the river, no end to his regret as he saw the most beautiful things—the sleek fur of animals, the petals of the *sephali* trees—withering, drowning or being carried away by the river—where? "Let the river cease, let everything be held in abeyance, let nothing more be drowned or withered or carried away." But the river went on remorselessly; no effort of will could prevent it. He grew thinner. He determined that whatever happened he would plumb the depths. He pressed his tongue to his palate, breathed never so lightly, crushed out his mind with his mind, and if anyone should come near him, he would say without looking up: "Go away, I am the guardian of the river."

He was almost insane with starvation. Though there were times when his mind was still, there were other times when the sweat flowed out of his armpits, and a terrible heaviness came over him. Sometimes when he attempted not to breathe, he would hear the sound of a violent wind issuing from his ears, 'a sound like the blowing of a blacksmith's bellows, and sometimes he felt as though his head was being crushed on the point of a sword. For a while he left off eating altogether, thinking that the air would flow through the pores of his skin, and then, he said afterwards, there was first a curious light-headedness, but afterwards a great grief. He knew he would be sorry to die. Though he returned to eating food—vetches, the juice of beans, chick-peas and pulse, as much as would fill the hollow of his hand—he was now thinner than he had ever been, the marks left by his buttocks were like a camel's footprint, and when he touched his stomach, he could feel his spine. All his hairs fell away. People came to look at him. They murmured: "The Prince Siddhartha is black," or else: "He is not black, but brown," or else: "He is not black or brown, but the colour of a madura fish." He sighed often, because he was as far away as ever from seeing the unreflecting light, and what was still more terrible, he found his mind wandering; he would think of his childhood, the rose-apple trees, the lotos pools, the chariots. There were times when he was once more the young Prince Siddhartha with his dancing girls, his bed strewn with rose-leaves and bears' furs, all the luxuries of the Court. He could not meditate, he could see no light nor feel any warmth. He shivered uncontrollably, the knees rocking, the head spinning, the hands never still, and nearly always after he had eaten a few chick-seeds he would be sick and find himself falling over. And more and more often there were periods when he felt only a dark and revengeful heaviness which was not unlike the half-conscious sleep of a drunken man.

“This must end,” he said to himself, but he did not know how it would end.

He had lost all power of speech, his tongue was cleft to the roof of his mouth, his flesh was slowly falling away.

It happened at this time that a young girl called Sujata, a garland-maker in the village of Gaya, came through the forest in search of some rare orchids. She saw him and tried to speak to him, but he refused to answer her. She came back to the village and told the people that she had seen a man who looked like a prince, perhaps he was the famous Prince Siddhartha, and he was starving himself to death in the forest.

“What was he like?” they asked.

“He must have been very sleek,” Sujata said, “but now he is thin, and there is no flesh on him, only enough to bind the body together; there is nothing unclean on him, his body is clean, his face is clean, there are no nits in his hair, he sits facing the river, and sometimes he trembles with cold when it is very warm.”

Gradually the news became known to other villages; and six months later the rumours were heard in Kapilavastu.

In those days Suddhodana was ageing fast. Though he was King in name, the power had fallen largely into the hands of Devadatta, who increased the taxes, changed the rules of the government, amassed an army, surrounded himself with corrupt officials and the most lascivious dancing girls, and ruled implacably over the city. I had returned from the country of the Malla princes, but I possessed no power. There were spics everywhere. The Court was honeycombed with Devadatta’s agents, no one could be trusted, there was famine, and a great avalanche in the Himalayas which powdered the sky with white dust for thirty days. The augurs were silent; it was said of Devadatta that he had murdered four of them because they had prophesied that if power fell into his hands the kingdom would be ruined.

One evening at night I was summoned to Suddhodana's palace by one of his most faithful servants. It was necessary to go to him secretly, so I dressed in the clothes of a dancing boy, with painted eyelids and cheeks, wearing jewels. I entered the bedchamber. Some rumours had reached him. Perhaps Siddhartha was alive, it was necessary that someone should go to him at once lest the kingdom fall into disrepair. He was pale, with short white hair and a long beard; he could hardly speak; Yasodhara was there, and she was trembling with fear, not only for her own life but for the life of the King.

"Tell Siddhartha he must return," Suddhodana whispered. "Tell him it is not too late."

I bowed four times and touched his hand, and then, drawing my cape over my shoulders, I returned to the shadows of my pavilion. I do not know whether we were followed, but it seemed that we were. I waited for a while and then summoned the guards who were faithful to me, and before midnight I escaped from Kapilavastu with a small retinue.

It was the time of the rains, the rivers in flood and the stars invisible; a time of great suffering, so that when I rode through the city I heard the lamentations of the people, and saw them in the thin light of dying fires, starving and complaining in whispers among themselves. I did not know how long it would take to reach Siddhartha. Perhaps he was dead, covered with leaves and beetles, in some remote forest. I was sick at heart, fearing the image of Siddhartha which rose to my mind, an image of a man who was no more than bones. It was three weeks before I reached the village of Gaya.

That evening I spoke to the girl Sujata who was the only person who had seen him; and it seemed to me that she was half-mad, and was suffering from visions. The villagers spoke of her with bated breath. They said she was a witch.

They tried to drive me away, giving me no place to rest my horses or my retinue; but some time later the girl Sujata stole out of her house and came to me with a tallow candle in her hand. She had large staring eyes.

“When did you last see him?” I asked.

“Nearly four months ago,” she answered.

“And since then?”

She shook her head; it was dark and the wind was roaring in the pines, and then the tallow candle flickered out, and it was five minutes later before I found another. Then, in the dark, accompanied by three servants, shielding the candle-flames with our bodies, we went into the forest.

Perhaps there has never been such a hopeless quest: an insubstantial rumour that a man had been seen dying three or four months previously. I was sure he was no longer alive; he had been eaten by tigers and leopards months ago; he had starved by the wayside? The girl shook her head—perhaps it was a vision, but his skin was gold. I questioned her in whispers, but she could only say he looked like Siddhartha. There were animals in the forest, our hands were continually on our sword-hilts. And then, while we made our way through the creepers, the thought would come to us: he must return to save the kingdom.

We searched in the darkness, but found no sign of him. I was weary and impatient. Once I fell over a small bundle of bones still gluey with flesh, and cursed loudly, and held them to the light: they were the bones of a wild boar pecked by the crows. We were all famished. Worse still, the girl began to scream; she had lost her way; she began to cry and beat her breasts, and she knocked the lantern out in despair, and then it was pitch-dark, for the moon had hidden behind the clouds and the other lantern was only at that moment being relit. We found the place where she said he had been, facing the river. There was no sign of him, only the bed of grass.

When dawn came, we were still searching, not hopefully, but as though some desperate need had overtaken us. In the grey forest every animal seemed to be him, every cloud of dew-smoke, every branch in the long grass. It was late when we found him. He had crawled away from the river to some place in the forest where there was deep shade. He wore the yellow robe which had turned dark brown and thin with age, and he was so thin that he looked taller than I had ever seen him. The face was like the thinnest scrapings of parchment, unlined, yellow, with cavernous eyes and cavernous lids. He said nothing, sitting there with hands like clasped bones, till I stood in his light and whispered: "It is time to come," afraid that if I spoke louder he would not hear me. I was shocked by the pointed ribs showing through the gown, the bones of his feet each one white and visible; and as though the dew thought him stone, his body was running with moisture.

He did not look up.

"It is time to come away," I said. "Siddhartha, do you remember your promise?" He had made no promise, but it was necessary to shake him out of the dream. There were little piles of white dung round him as small as those left by rats. "Do you remember?"

He sighed: "I remember nothing."

I was silent for a while, wondering whether there were any chinks in his armour, and also because I was not yet accustomed to the nauseating smell of his body.

"Have you gone far?" I asked tenderly.

"Far—far——" he murmured, and then almost violently: "The river goes into darkness. It is not good." The glazed eyes opened for a moment; I knew he had recognised me, for the faintest of smiles appeared on his lips.

"And what then?" I asked. "If the journey has been so long——"

"The river goes into darkness, but out of the darkness

there may come another river," he said in a weak voice, so weak indeed that it resembled more than anything else the sound of heart-beats.

"Are you waiting for it to come?"

"Yes, I am waiting."

There was a long silence. I began to talk slowly and carefully about the situation at Court, Devadatta's cunning, the treachery in the palace and how everything was sullied over with a kind of flat darkness, a meaninglessness, the life gone out of things. I went on: "You must return—they need you so badly——"

"Why? If they have accepted Devadatta, they are cowards and deserve nothing better. The people are responsible for their rulers."

"Not always," I argued. "When he has taken over power by force, or by trickery."

"Then it still shows they are cowardly; they could have prevailed against him. No, I will not return."

"Your father is dying, and begs it of you."

"He has passed the age of manhood. It is better for him to die."

I hoped, by turning the subject to Danya and Rahula, to plant in him the seeds of a desire to return, but even if the seeds fell, they never flowered; he was totally uninterested in the fate of his children. He had no desire for the kingship. The past kingship which he had accepted and renounced remained an undefeated menace, for I saw his eyes flickering when I mentioned the Court and his own place in it. "The people are calling for you," I said. He answered softly: "Let them call—it is good for their lungs, and if they call loud enough they may find courage to find someone like the thing they wished I was, among themselves." What was strange was that he seemed to have lost, not the accent of the Court speech, for that remained, but the hovering soft tone: he spoke as roughly as a peasant.

He seemed so retired into himself that he had lost himself, and yet the eyes in their dark-rimmed hollows were clear; they roamed round me, and through me, never sharing my thoughts though noting them all.

I said: "You may die soon."

He answered: "I have thought of that often. It makes no difference, for I must reach Brahma, or perish. There is a dark light now. It may become a bright light casting no shadows, but I shall go on till I find it. If I die, you can take up my bones and bring them to Kapilavastu, saying that these are the relics of a man who died in the fixed prosecution of his resolve." He said this very sadly, without any inflection in his voice. He had not changed his position once since our meeting, neither altering the position of his hands nor of his head, though his eyes would follow me. He did not notice the retinue kneeling before him.

"Is there any message, Siddhartha, for your father and your wife?"

"There is no message," he replied.

"And for Rahula?"

"No message."

We stayed there for a while longer, but there was almost nothing to say. I dreaded his look of hurt misery, the pain in his eyes when he talked about the darkness and the river, and most of all I dreaded the unbending inflexible will.

"It is better to eat," I said. "Let me at least offer you food in parting." So saying, I laid a bowl of sweet rice by his side, and was about to go in despair when he lifted his bony hand and said: "There is one message, Ananda."

"What is this message?"

"Tell Danya that I would prefer her not to marry."

Then he was silent, a lonely shrunken figure in a tattered yellow gown in the rain-filled forest. He had chosen a place far from the flooded river, but even there we could hear the

roar of the flooded stream; and though the sun shone, the dew was heavy, and he was still silver with dew. The retinue came closer and touched the hem of his robe; he blessed them as we departed. And so, very slowly and by easy stages, we returned with heavy hearts to Kapilavastu.

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I shall never know what made him change his resolve. Perhaps it was the food we left, perhaps it was Sujata and her younger brother, Nandika, a shepherd boy. They came to him with gifts of oil and wheat and barley, and also clean linen, which they left near him, not daring to speak before the awful serenity of that graven face. They brought warm water and honey, and once when they brought butter they were astounded when he leaned forward silently and with a long bony arm began to smear it over his body; and still more astounded when they noticed that the body absorbed the oil like the thirsty earth absorbing rain. They brought small wheat-cakes dipped in cream, and sometimes he ate them, and sometimes he broke them into crumbs for the birds and small animals; and gradually he began to put on flesh. He was like someone who had come out of a long dream, or a long illness, and though at times the convalescence was painful, and often the shivering fits came over him, he realised slowly, amid the awakening senses and the greater health of his body, that the years of mortification were not in vain.

Anyone who has been gravely ill knows the joys of convalescence, the moments when the body stirs, the blood flows more easily and a sensation of light-heartedness so intoxicating that it is almost unbelievable spreads through every vein, every artery of the body; and so it was with Siddhartha creeping out of the black-edged heaviness of his long hibernation. Now, more even than during the months when he first entered the forest, he noticed with startled clarity the sharp outlines of things, all space filled by a bird,

a dragonfly, a petal, a falling leaf. Space, coloured and glistening from a thousand facets, enchanted him. The infinite shades of green on a single blade of grass, the complexity of the veined surfaces, all these were enchanting; and now he saw them, not as he saw them before, as pitiable dying things, but as colours and shapes of space, all part of a whole. Now he saw depths of shade and transparency unknown to him before, and all were permanent; and in the sharpness of the etched colours of things he saw how permanently they were etched on the surface of the world. He saw the unreflecting light, and the unreflecting light was in everything that appeared on earth, for he was like that diver who has sunk to the bottom of the sea and seen an opening which led to a strange land; and that land was the land he had inhabited before he dived into the sea. And when he asked himself how this land differed from the land he had left, he could answer only that it was a land where the pleasures of the senses had died, and everything was seen, not remotely, but with the perfect detachment of one who no longer desires them, and therefore more perfectly enjoys their presence.

“Only by detachment can the mind travel to the further shore,” he would whisper; and felt no desire for the beautiful shapes of things, no desire, no love, only a detachment which was like a benediction. He possessed no desire to live and no desire not to live; he had done what was necessary to be done and there was nothing left to him; he had reached the further shore, where all things were clear and lived in their own light only because the contemplating mind was so perfectly detached from them; and in that detachment, maintained through all temptations, there was the firm foothold. And raising his hand in the gesture of benediction, he murmured: “From detachment flow all blessings.” Then he slept peacefully for the first time since he left the forest-dwellers.

On the next day he went to the village of Gaya and prayed beside the house of Nandika, the father of Sujata and Nandika, the shepherd boy. He said nothing to them, but drank the warm syrups of fruit they prepared, and the cream junket, and asked for a place where he could bathe, saying that he had at last arrived at perfect enlightenment and come face to face with the *paramatma*, and the *paramatma* was everywhere; then, gazing at the faces of the children, he said: "This detachment is possessed by children."

He was still frail, the eyes sunken, the lids heavy and almost transparent, like silk. He walked slowly, as convalescents walk, reeling a little, seeing the world in all the intoxicated brightness of his sharpened senses; desiring only that blessedness which flowed through him, and was therefore beyond desire; the faces of the children yellow like butter as they gazed up at him; and every bird in the village sparkling with dew. Silently, supporting himself with a cut branch from the bo tree under which he had received the final illumination, with head downcast, he wandered with his begging-bowl through the village; and that night, for the first time in eight years, he slept under a roof.

For twelve days he stayed in the house, liking most of all the brightly-lit hearth at night, for the sun dazzled him. He bathed regularly, ate regularly, slept dreamlessly; though sometimes, just as he was falling asleep, he shuddered at the temptation which had assailed him when Ananda came and invited him to the Court. Almost he had leapt aside from that final illumination which came with convalescence. Yes, it was in those moments that he had *known*; when the body seemed to come alive afresh, and when he looked on the faces of the children. To be detached, to desire nothing, to love nothing, neither giving nor taking nor uttering nor holding secret, himself, alone, not fearing, but always beholding—all the majesty of sun and earth, if they were in his power, not worth the pure joy of beholding. Behold,

the Lord comes, desiring nothing but that there should be no desires, no burning, only a cold loving detached from love, a cold burning. And he had come there at last, after many pains and much sadness, having seen the river flowing into darkness carrying the petals and the dead animals to no known grave. Sometimes the children came to him among the rice-stalks, and once, as though taken by surprise, he saw them looking gravely at their own shadows; at that moment he nodded his head, understanding that they too had received the perfect enlightenment.

He attended the ceremonies in the house, and with a cracked voice intoned the hymns to the sun; he bathed with the children in the river; he swept the court-yard; and when the villagers bowed before him and heaped food into the begging-bowl which he carried by habit rather than design, he nodded gravely and took it to the forest, where he scattered it on the earth for the animals and birds to eat. He began to speak to the villagers, begging them to put away their desires, saying that mortifications and prayers and devotions and almsgiving were of no avail unless the soul is detached; and at night, coming in from the burning sun, with the children beside him, he sang a queer high-pitched song in the light of the flames:

*O Brahma, I have passed through many births,
And there are many births again I must pass through;
But always I have sought the builder of the house.*

*O Architect, now I have seen thee!
Never again shalt thou build me a house.
I have broken the rafters,
I have destroyed the king-post.
My mind is detached:
All desires are extinguished.*

While he sang, Sujata and Nandika gazed at him pensively, not daring to say anything for fear of disturbing the strange man who was so ill when he came, but who was now so miraculously restored to health.

“What is the song you are singing?” Sujata asked.

“It is a hymn of triumph,” he replied, and explained its meaning to her.

“And what is a king-post?” she asked.

“O Sujata,” he answered. “Can you not see him? The king-post is your brother, Prince Siddhartha of the Kshatriyas, who has obtained the perfect enlightenment which is the birthright of every child.”

VI

At the Deer Park

SIDDHARTHA REMEMBERED HIS PROMISE TO the five forest-dwellers in the woods near Urevala, and began to make preparations to go to Benares, not knowing the road or how to get there, and hardly caring so long as he could follow some caravan route to the south. When he left Gaya, the children followed him down the dusty road, throwing flowers at him. He pondered on this for some time, and told himself that they threw flowers because he was their brother; and then as he journeyed alone down the road he thought of the children and suddenly the tears flowed and he told himself: “In the man who is perfectly detached, there are no regrets.”

It was a long journey across the dusty plains. He knew he was not yet strong enough to assume the burden of so difficult a voyage, but now that the rains were coming to an end, strength flowed into him from the pelting sun, and he enjoyed the shadow of the blue rocks and the

yellow cornfields of autumn; the thorns crackling under pots; the smell of camel-dung fires; women with shining bronze cooking-pots; the bear-men and the acrobats in the villages; the girl in a green cloak who turned somersaults from a high pole; the vultures and the pigeons and the wild geese, and the dust whirling across an unparched land. Sometimes, passing through deserted silent villages at night he thought he heard a man playing on a *seeta*, but when he stopped to analyse his thoughts, it was only the music of the hymn of triumph which he heard. The king-post was broken, but a prince strode on, holding his begging-bowl and his staff; and the earth was rich, and he was content. No longer did he see the strange squat yellow-faced men he had seen sometimes in Kapilavastu; the further south he went, the darker the people became, and nearly all wore the mark of Vishnu or Shiva on their foreheads.

For him nothing was so beautiful as the sweet-smelling dung-smoke or the copper-coloured children playing in the dusty roads; in the morning all shone with dew, but at noon everything was held in a breathless stillness, the heat so overwhelming that he took shelter under the blue rocks or under awnings. There were rivers in the distance; and beyond the horizons the land went on, men were born and suffered and died and were filled throughout the short space of their lives with desires; and he was utterly detached; and when he saw the faces of the women, he was reminded for a space of the dancing girls in his garden, but possessed no desire for them; and because he possessed no desire for them, they became more ravishingly beautiful.

He did not know what to expect in Benares, but one night, coming slowly over a hilltop and leaning heavily on his staff, he saw a river below him enclosed in a net of jewelled lights; and it seemed to him that the whole city lay silent and breathing like a dancing girl who slept at night in her vest of threaded jewels.

Over the great river a mist rose white and gleaming, while the stars paled in the immensity of the sky. Sirius lay low among the temple towers, a green light flashing through the milky mist, and where the Plough had been only a whitish glow shone through thick clouds. There were lights shining over the city—lights from the bronze cups glowing in the sockets of walls, lights from reddish flares and from funeral pyres, and these lights were the colour of vitriol. There were rivers of light winding through the city precincts, and when a carriage passed down the street he would see the red flares and torches held in the hands of the outriders.

“And all these lights reflected in the river are insubstantial,” he murmured, “and these curved arms uplifted, and the young girl’s swelling breast, and the leaping of the fish, all these are insubstantial, and all shall fade.”

He was not filled with sadness. It seemed to him that the river, which was for ever being replenished, for ever vanishing, was something he had expected, something which would always return; and seeing it there in its splendour, he felt like someone who has returned to a familiar place.

He had journeyed for many days in the forest, but he was not weary. The river with its freight of silken boats and lights reminded him of something he had seen long ago. It was evening; a soft wind shook the boughs of the sal trees, and he was content to rest. Looking down at these palaces and towers and at the swift-flowing river, he was conscious that he had come to the end of one pilgrimage and the beginning of another. He sat cross-legged on the grass, and when the wind came up the mountain, he covered his face with the hem of his yellow gown, praying silently that he too might shine with the glory of the river, and lost in the darkness there, seeing the lights only dimly through the fabric of the gown, he waited for the moment when it would be necessary to go down to the river. But the

moment did not come. No voices compelled him. Waiting there, silent and alone, looking through the yellow cloth at the river, and wondering what the city held for him, he remained for a long time, and he heard himself saying:

“Why do men live in cities? Can men love one another among stone walls? In the forests there are pathways, but there are no pathways in cities—only prison bars.”

He was frightened. He did not want to go down to the city. He watched a stranger coming up the hill with a little oil-lamp swinging: you could not see the flame, only the little wisp of light coming from the open bowl.

“It is late,” the Lord said, “and why do you carry a lamp when the moon is shining?”

The man was breathing deeply.

“Why do you carry a lamp?” the Lord repeated.

The old man laughed silently, and the moon shone more brightly on his domed forehead than on the lamp he carried in his hand.

The old man answered: “Why do I carry a lamp? You fool, the lamp is not for my benefit, but for yours lest you should stumble against me in the dark.”

“It is broad moonlight.”

“Fool, who would trust the moonlight? The moon is only a stone in the sky, and it may fall.”

“That is true,” the Lord said, “but if it falls, it falls on us all alike. And also it is unlikely.”

“How do you know it is unlikely?” the man asked, peering down at the Lord with a wondering expression which was partly fear that the lamp might be taken from him. “The moon has fallen before,” he said, “and if it falls again, surely it will fall in the River Ganges. I have not told you the truth. I carry the lamp in order to find the moon again when it falls.”

“This is a child’s tale,” the Lord answered. “The moon will not fall in your lifetime, or in mine. The sun always rises.”

“I am glad to hear you say that, but I am a philosopher,” the man said. “What is the value of your word against the possibility of its fall? It is madness to believe that such a thing has not happened before—have you never seen the Himalayas?”

“Yes, I have seen them.”

“There was another moon once, and it fell in the north of India, but the world is evil and another moon is due to fall—then there will be two Himalayas. I see that you are a *sunyasi* and know some things, but you have never thought of that.”

The Lord laughed softly: “Tell me the truth—why do you carry the lamp?”

“I will tell you the truth. I am carrying my lamp in order to find the truth.”

“And have you found it?”

“Do you expect a man to find the truth on a moonlit night?”

Once again the old man peered by the light of the lamp into the Lord’s face, for though the moon shone brightly he seemed to trust the lamp more. He was an old man, perhaps seventy, wrinkled and grey, wearing a little yellow cap and a felt coat and sheep-skin boots. The small wizened face under the domed forehead resembled a monkey’s, and sometimes the fleshy lids would open and disclose bright childlike eyes. The man gazed at the Lord, laughing silently to himself, and sometimes he looked in the direction of the river, where the milky mist was lifting. When the mist rose, the precipices, the square walls, the sails of the silken boats and the colours of the river from the lanterns—all these were suddenly revealed, and it was strange to see how quietly they appeared, glowing so bright that they seemed to come from the heart of a furnace, bright reds and greens where previously there was only an opaque white cloud. And soon the wind rose.

“It is strange that you should be looking for the truth with a lamp,” the Lord said at last, carefully watching the wick as it slipped in the blackened oil. “If the lamp shone with a steady light like the sun, then I could understand it, but all lamps flicker in the wind. Do you know a wind which will blow out the light of the sun?”

“No, I have never seen such a wind.”

“I am glad you say that, for I would be frightened by such a wind, and yet it is this wind that I am searching for.”

The old man turned with pride towards the Lord.

“It is good to hear you say such things,” he said. “I have met many philosophers, but never one who said he was searching for the wind which would blow out the sun. No, I have never seen a philosopher like you. You gaze down at the desolate city, where all is foulness—even the offerings to the dead are foulness—and you say you are searching for the wind which will blow out the sun. And where is this wind?”

“Surely you know.”

“No, I cannot tell you where that wind can be found—perhaps in the Himalayas, where the winds are strong, or perhaps on the seas. But certainly in Benares there is no wind so strong. I am Upaka, the philosopher, but never have I seen a man who could talk as you do, or whose face was so calm. Tell me, where can that wind be found?”

“In the human heart,” the Lord answered, “there can be found that wind. A wind that blows out the sun.”

“You are not drunk with wine by any chance?” the old man asked.

“No, I am not drunk with wine—I am drunk with thoughts of mortality,” the Lord replied. “But tell me, you who have searched for fifty years with your lamp, what have you found?”

“I have found nothing,” the old man answered, “except that the lamp burns and gives me some comfort—it is

enough, I do not ask more of the lamp. I have learned only that the lamp burns and that oil costs money.”

While the old man was talking the Lord took the bronze lamp in his hands and spilled the oil on the grass. The oil fell in a silver stream like a snake, and then disappeared in the earth, leaving only a faint trace. The old man made a desperate effort to save it, but he was too late.

“Why have you done such a thing?” he asked. “Now you have deprived me of my comfort.”

“It is a moonlight night,” the Lord answered, smiling, “and you can see well enough. There is a light inside you—live by that light.”

The old man said: “There is light, I know, in the eyes of leopards, and perhaps in the eyes of monkeys, but this light cannot guide me through the forests—it guides me only to the places where I cannot go.”

“It is better to follow the light inside you,” the Lord answered softly.

Upaka reflected on these words for a long time, stroking the fringe of his beard, and at last he sighed:

“Perhaps you are right. I have looked in the green eyes of cats—they are certainly liars.”

“And what other eyes have you looked into?”

“I have looked into the eyes of the dead and of those who are dying,” the old man answered, “and I have looked into the eyes of the young. As you say, all are liars.”

“I did not say all are liars—I said you will not find the light of the truth in others, but in yourself. There is truth in dying, and truth in the young, but you will not find it in their eyes.”

Upaka reflected for a moment, and then said: “May I look into your eyes?”

“Yes, you may look into my eyes.”

The old man peered closely into the face of the Lord, not knowing what to expect. He gazed for a long time, his lips

trembling, and then at last he rose from his knees and said: "The eyes are clear—I did not expect such clear eyes. I am Upaka, the philosopher, but who are you?"

"I am an old mendicant, and I am on the way to Benares to beat the drum and bring light into darkness. I am the Buddha."

At these words Upaka bowed low to the ground. He had half-suspected that he was talking to a strange god, but when he heard that it was the Buddha, the enlightened one, his voice failed him and he began to look carefully at the face of the Lord, who sat cross-legged on the earth, wearing the yellow robe of the mendicants, smiling as he gazed on the city below.

"I am the conqueror," the Lord said.

"Yes, I have heard you were coming. Will Benares fall into your hands tonight?"

"Not tonight, but it will fall into my hands. Of this I am certain. But I shall not come with swords or armies, nor shall I ride on horseback. I shall come with gifts of peace, with the terrible peace of the concentrated will. I shall demand that each man possess his own peace. Old man, you who have looked in my eyes, what have you seen there?"

"I have seen peace there."

"What else have you seen?"

"The inflexible will."

"Then you have seen the thing which is necessary to be seen—the terrible fury of the man who demands peace from the world. I tell you, I have come to bring peace into the world by the merciless uprooting of desires. I have come to bring peace by the death of the flesh. I have come to put out the burning. There is a wind which can blow out the sun, and the wind is in ourselves, and we blow out the sun of our lives with the terrible reproach of our desires. There must be an end to desires, an end to this servitude of the spirit, an end to the

burning of the flesh and the clamour of voices inside us. There must be a beginning of stillness, a pause, a waiting. I tell you I shall come as conqueror into the foul city of Benares if I can put out the torch of this burning. I shall be the murderer. Ruthlessly, with calm eyes, I shall burn out the burning, for a fire can only be quenched by a greater fire. I come with sword and flame to heal wounds and put out fires. I shall be the ruler, I shall be the murderer, I shall put an end to the desires of their lives——”

The old man wrapped his sheep-skin coat more tightly around him and said: “I wish you a good journey with your killing, but for myself I am content with my lamp.”

Saying this and shaking his head, Upaka was about to go, but the Lord held him back, and put something in his hand.

“Here is something,” he said, “which will make your lamp burn again.”

“What is it?” Upaka said. “I cannot see clearly in this light.”

“A sesame seed.”

“And how shall the sesame seed give me light?”

“Plant it—from the sesame tree comes oil, and from a single tree there will come a million trees, surely enough to keep the lamp burning.”

“Yes, it is enough,” Upaka answered, and mumbling to himself he picked up the lamp and marched northward. “I am going to the Himalayas,” he said. “I shall plant the sesame seed in the snows.”

Once more the Lord was sitting cross-legged above the city of Benares. Though the moon had risen, and the mist was ascending, there still remained on the surface of the Ganges a faint mist-smear as of honey; through this mist the ivory boats sailed, the lamps shone, the pavilions and pleasure-houses glittered with their dancing lanterns, and silken scarves could be seen waving and there were places

where the lights were so bright that it was as though there were conflagrations.

As the Lord marched down the hill, swinging with long strides, the yellow robe blowing in the wind, his face lifted towards the stars, it seemed to him that the mist was scarcely real—hardly more real than the blazing fires or the lamps underneath the surface of the water; and indeed, had he known it, some of the lights that appeared to be reflections were in reality lamps that floated beneath the surface of the river, flaming coals in pigs' bladders, and others were not lamps at all but the carcasses of the dead whose burnt bones and flesh retained their phosphorescence. Musing over these things, he wondered, as well he might, at the domes and minarets of the city—whether they were as substantial as the shadows. Were they as real as the lights shining in the water, or the voices? A puff of wind might blow them over, or a child's cough—what was real, these men and women huddled in the boats, antimony on their eyelids, powder on their faces, wax on their mouths, or their shadows which danced over the water? He knew he would have to pass through the city before he reached the river. How would he cross? In one of those high-prowed tented boats where the shadows of lovers in sickly embraces were painted on canvas? But he knew that in the yellow robe of a mendicant he would pass unrecognised through the city walls.

He walked through the high-walled streets slowly, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of the caravan drivers and the shrill litanies of the shop-boys, the whining of beggars and the diseased dogs snapping at his heels. Smoking pitch-flares came from embrasures in the walls; the shops were alight with thick candles; there were lights in the high towers. Why did the women paint their faces with white lead, which gave them the appearance of corpses? He was about to turn down a side-street when

he saw a woman leaning from an upper window, the two flat breasts like ripe fruit on the sill, her face painted with silver except for the black holes of the eyes and for the sodden redness of her lips. "Come, Lord," she whispered, and he looked at her more closely. "Come, Lord, refresh yourself in me." But he was beyond all desire. He gazed up at the brilliantly-lit window again, but the face was gone, someone was thumping up the wooden stairs, the window was closed by invisible hands and a moment later the light went out suddenly, leaving a blackness on the house like a missing tooth. He thought: "It is strange that there should be no more light. Are they afraid of seeing each other?" But at that moment his attention was caught by a single willow-leaf of a tree shining in the light from one of the hanging street-lamps, and he said aloud: "In this city nothing could be more lovely than a leaf shining in the light of a lamp—such beauty should turn men to repentance."

Talking softly to himself, he wandered down the street of the fishermen, then of the usurers, then of the merchants, then down the small side-street of the meat-killers where, under bronze lamps, freshly-killed carcasses streaked with blood were hanging from enormous hooks. Near the street of the meat-killers were the burning *ghats*, where dead bodies were laid on charcoals. He would peer into the doorways of shops, watch the merchants counting their piles of copper and gold coins, but when they looked up, conscious of his presence, he would be gone. He chose the darkest, the narrowest, the filthiest streets, where the beggars huddled against the walls. Sometimes, in the chill wind which came from the river, he would see their patched clothes being carried away in the dust and muck, and sometimes, by the light of some neighbouring pleasure-boat, he would see their red sores ringed round by flies; and overhead there were vultures.

"What mercy is there in the world?" the Lord com-

plained, shaking his head in sadness. "The vultures come in flocks, and the beggars whine—neither have mercy for themselves."

A vulture landed on a beggar's shoulder and flapped its leathery wings, and the beggar screamed as he tried to drive it away.

"Too late," the Lord sighed. "*They* know when the time is ripe, *they* know that the gizzards of the birds are inexhaustible, *they* know why the beggars whine."

As he went down the street, the beggar's scream faded and suddenly became silent.

"*They* know," the Lord repeated. "How should they not know?"

Then he was silent, watching the close-huddled grey figures, like bones clothed in sackcloth, the bald heads, the black scrabbling beards, the imploring bony hands raised in prayer and benediction and supplication.

What was most strange was that the nearer he came to the river, the more people recognised him. An old man came to him, touched his robe and said: "How shalt thou cross the river, O Lord? Shalt thou go in a boat with the courtesans? Then work a miracle, O Lord—fly like the vultures," and the Lord shuddered, and turned on him angrily and said: "What have the vultures to do with me?—do I eat the flesh of the dead?" The old man slunk away amid the ghosts of the river shadows, but still there were others round him, attempting to hold the hem of his yellow cloak, or to touch his feet.

"And where shall I cross?" he asked himself. "Must I touch the silk gowns and smell the perfumes of the women in the river? Better to swim in the river among the defilements of corpses than to be contaminated with these perfumes—better to sink to the bottom of the river rather than be touched by them!"

A boat was coming to shore. Out of it there stepped a youth

with heavy eyebrows, a flowered head-dress, wearing a long tunic of purple reaching to his feet, such a youth as the Lord had been himself in his earlier life, young and perfumed and with silver rings round his bare arms.

“Whence comest thou?” the Lord asked.

“From the guard.”

The Lord looked at the youth with the heavy eyebrows, and noticed a sword at his side.

“I can see you are Kshatriya,” the Lord said. “There is virtue in the sword, but tell me, what can you do with it?”

“One can kill people or slice a falling apple.”

“And is there pleasure in these things?”

“Certainly.”

“And does the pleasure remain?”

“Certainly—for afterwards one can think of these things.”

“And does this pleasure last through a lifetime?”

“Most assuredly, for in old age there is nothing so pleasant as to remember the prowess of one’s youth when speaking to our grandchildren.”

“Yet if our grandchildren are killed by the sword, does the pleasure remain? And if there is no one left, if they have all been slaughtered, what pleasure is there?”

“The sword means cleanness and death—if they are dead, then at least they have come to cleanness. You are talking in parables, old mendicant; so I, too, talk in parables.”

The Lord was surprised that he should be called old.

“Even the sword is illusion,” he said.

“Why so?”

“Our sufferings are illusions, and that which puts an end to our sufferings is also illusions. And there is nothing we can do—no medicine, no sword-edge—which can put an end to our sufferings. This you know yourself. The body is born and dies, and for countless *kalpas* it is reborn again. *There is only one place where a sword kills.*”

For some time the youth had been gazing at the Lord, noting the stiff yellow robe and the cropped head, the bare unsandalled feet and the way the Lord would shake his right arm free of the robe; he did not always understand what the Lord was saying. Was he Prince Siddhartha? There were rumours that Siddhartha with a huge retinue was about to descend on Benares from the north: in every bazaar there were stories of his coming.

“You were saying there is only one place where the sword kills——” the youth said.

“This place is in the heart of the mendicant who escapes from the world, who never suffers again in the world, who is cut off from the world by the power of his own blessedness, never needing to return to the earth, motionless and calm, killed by the sword of his mercy, by the self-inflicted wound of his own majesty.”

“I do not understand these words, O Lord.”

“They are simple, surely—man suffers, man cannot escape from the interminable wheel except by majesty, by the most profound calm and blessedness. Listen, if you were to kill yourself with the sword, what happens——”

“I would be born again certainly.”

“But should you desire not to be born again, should you desire to live with the gods and escape from the relentless wheel of things, to be a mendicant immersed in the contemplation of blessedness——”

“Will you teach me these things, Lord?”

The Lord nodded and stepped on the boat. The scullers and oarsmen had taken up their position beside the thwarts. The river was glassily clear, swelling with flood-water. A lamp in a silk net burned on the prow. The youth leaned forward and gazed steadily at the Lord, and meanwhile the rowers rowed between the pleasure-ships under the moonlight. There was still no wind. The sails of the pleasure-ships hung stiff along the masts, there were cries and groans

from the pleasure-seekers, and sometimes screams; yet the river gave the impression of being becalmed. The lights shone in the water—the little pigs' bladders with their flaming coals, and the Lord noticed that the river was so filled with decaying phosphorescence that even the fish glowed.

"Tell me, how can one become blessed?" asked the youth. "Is it possible to be blessed in Benares?"

"Certainly—there is no place where it is not possible to be blessed."

"And is it possible to take one's blessedness with one through all our lives?"

"That also is certain, but the greatest blessedness is to leap out of life altogether; to become a saint, to be immersed in endless meditation among the gods." Saying this, the Lord scooped up one of the fish and watched it flickering, with dazzling colours, in the hollow of his robe between his thighs. "To glow and shine eternally one must pass out of life altogether."

"And what then, Lord?"

"There is nothing then—only the eternal contemplation and the eternal repose. I can see that you have thought about these things. You have the air of one who has thought much, and by too much thinking has plunged into dissipation. The flesh cries out, the heart saddens, the women are wet and shining like the fish, there is no end to dissipation, for one woman leads to another—I say that it is best to be calm, and best to escape from the wheel."

"Then it is better to die than to live?"

"Nay, it is better to live than to die—the world knows its forfeits, but best of all is neither to be living nor dying, but to be outside the world altogether. Tell me about your former lives."

"I remember nothing, Lord, only there were many women."

“We are all bound in that bondage,” the Lord said. “I tell you, the stars are the eyes of women, and the mountains are their breasts, and we are all born from them. I tell you, with a silver penny one can reach the stars, but the penny must be purchased from a mendicant. I have come a long way, and now I go to the Deer Park, which is also known as the Park of the Gazelles, to speak—not wisdom, for wisdom is as common as filth, but those things which are deep in my heart. Will you follow me?”

“Yes, Lord.”

The Lord laughed and put his hand on the youth’s knee and looked into his eyes.

“There must be an end to suffering,” the Lord said.

“This I know, but I do not know how it can be brought about—and also it seems that suffering is something fixed like the Sun. I will follow you, Lord. This is certain. It is not that I have suffered—for I am young and enjoy my sufferings—but I know that their weight increases in time. Sickness comes. The sword which does not make a deadly wound is worse than the sword which pierces the heart.”

Hearing him, the Lord smiled.

They were coming to the opposite bank, crowned with deodars and at the foot of the hills were winding streets, more lights, more burning *ghats*. This part of the Ganges was not sacred, for the washerwomen pounded their clothes there, and a great number of boats were moored to the bank. There were temples in the woods. There were people coming down from the hills with lanterns in their hands, and here and there he saw fires burning.

“What are the fires?” he asked.

“The fires are for mendicants to warm themselves,” the youth answered. “And food is offered to them by the pleasure-seekers when they return from their boats.”

The youth sighed, for already they were reaching the mud-banks, the boat moved slowly, corpses floated in the

water, but the smell from the corpses was concealed by the scents from the fuming braziers on land; and once again the Lord saw the small floating pigs' bladders filled with red-hot coals which gave the river the appearance of a live thing with a million red eyes. "There is no river like this," he said. "Surely the river loves calmness, and surely the river is a slave between its banks?"

"Yes, Lord."

"And therefore it is better to leave the river and live like the mendicants in the hills, for the earth is firm underfoot, and the trees love calmness."

The youth was not sure that he understood, but once again he nodded his head in agreement, for he had found that even if he did not understand the first time, there always came a time when the Lord's words became intelligible; and already he realised that he was speaking to Prince Siddhartha Kumar of the Kshatriyas, son of King Suddhodana, who was known as the Blessed One, for no reputations are safe in India and everything was known to those who frequented the bazaars.

As the boat pushed against the shore, the youth said: "There are many deer parks belonging to the rich. Which is the deer park where thou art bound, O Lord?"

The Lord smiled and answered: "How shall I know? Perhaps we shall have to go to many deer parks to find the one we spoke of. It is late now—the mendicants are waiting for me, and it is better that I should be there before they disperse for the night."

This was the first time he had mentioned that the mendicants were waiting for him.

"And how shall we recognise the mendicants?" the youth asked.

The Lord laughed softly: "We shall recognise them first by their names, and then by their appearance," he answered. "I have made a vow that I shall meet them. This was in the

year when I was practising austerities. I have come to tell them there is no glory and no worth-while pain in the austere life—our bodies are holy and given to us.”

While he was saying this, the youth was lifting a wood-plank against the gunwales to help the Lord descend, the rowers were standing idle and some boys were coming down the mountain side with torches of bamboo dipped in burning oil. Huge shadows were thrown on the shore, and the blood-red flames leaped from the bronze bodies of the boys and from the silken skirts of the prince who accompanied the Lord. Meanwhile the Lord was silent, looking up at the hills.

“Is there no way—no road?” he asked, for the shore was littered with so many mud-huts that it was impossible to see any road.

The youth said: “Lift up your skirts, O Lord, lest the dust and mud of decayed bodies touch them.”

The Lord bent and took a handful of earth and murmured: “Perhaps this dust is the skull of some man or the heart of some girl—all is vanity except this striving. The striving remains.”

The forest-dwellers had been waiting in the Deer Park since early in the afternoon, eagerly discussing with themselves whether the Lord would arrive. They had come in their garments of threaded leaves, with thorns still clinging to them, black with sunburn, smeared with dust and excrement. They sang hymns to the dying sun, lit tallow candles and huddled together in a corner of the Deer Park, and sometimes Assaji, the leanest and most tormented of them all, with thorns coming from his nostrils, drummed with his fist on the earth and said: “Can you hear his footsteps, O forest-dwellers?”

“He is a prince, and therefore he will come,” said Kondanya, “unless he has died from his mortifications. He

proclaimed that he would receive perfect enlightenment or perish—perhaps there is only perfect enlightenment in death.”

“Can you hear someone coming?” Kondanya asked after a while.

“I can hear no one. The man has perished,” Assaji answered, “or else, as I told you, he is dead. They say Prince Ananda came to ask him to return to the Court. He said nothing, only closed his eyes. It is all rumour. His face turned blue, but that is rumour. The only thing I believe is that if you stick a thorn in the flesh it will remain there.”

There was nothing then, only the whispering of leaves and sometimes a sigh from the lovers in the grass, and the white mirage of the river between high banks rolling beneath them. Birds rustled in their nests, or perhaps they too were lovers; and sometimes in the hot moonlight the gazelles and deer trotted across the darkness.

“He does not come,” Assaji complained. “Why? Because he is afraid to come? He is afraid—the heart has been taken out of him, and he has not seen Brahma face to face. He will come in despair, tearing his hair, with long finger-nails soaked and tarred with blood; or else like a prince, high-stepping in finery. Cursed be his name! He has brought us here, and we would be better to have remained in the slime of the forest!”

It was at that moment, when the moon came out white and full, that they saw the Lord approaching, accompanied by a young prince in a silver tunic, the loose yellow robe of the mendicant billowing in the warm wind from the Ganges. The five monks saw him, but said nothing till Assaji whispered: “Here, Brethren, is the monk Siddhartha—how fat he is!—and look, he is accompanied by a young attendant, very handsome, with flesh on his belly and buttocks. He has given himself up to a life of abundance, he does not exert himself, does not torture his flesh! We must

not greet him, nor rise in respect, nor take his bowl, but we will make a seat for him, and if he wishes he may sit beside us!”

In the moonlight the Lord looked taller than ever, well-formed and handsome; impossible to see the sad eyes or the quivering of his lips. At Assaji's order one of the monks took his alms-bowl, another took his outer robe, another prepared a seat and old Kondanya prepared a small ewer of fresh water from the spring to set by his feet. Then, for a long while, the monks were silent. At last, sneering, Assaji said: “Friend Siddhartha——”

“Who is this man?” the Lord answered. “Who is friend Siddhartha?”

He looked very weary, like someone who has forgotten his own name.

“Then Prince Siddhartha, if you prefer it,” Assaji said contemptuously, leaning up so that the Lord could see his gaping toothless mouth, the syrupy pus and the thorns sticking out of his nose and ears.

“I do not know Prince Siddhartha,” the Lord answered wearily. “Where is he? What land does he come from? What kingship does he rule?”

“He is suffering from lack of memory,” Assaji explained to the monks. “It happens—they get fat—and memory suffers.”

The Lord opened his robe, so that they could see the protruding ribs and the sunken stomach, and he showed them his thin wrists and bony hands silently.

“Yes, memory suffers,” he said. “I do not know Prince Siddhartha. Who is he? I am the Tathagata or the Lord who has received Perfect Enlightenment. I have attained the immortal perfection, I am the teacher, I utter the doctrine. I have wasted my years in mortification, but now I know that mortification harms the spirit—there is health only in recovering from a mortal sickness. I will teach you the

doctrine, so that you who are well-born youths coming forth from your houses into a houseless life will even in this life learn the true aim of the religious life, and abide in it."

"What is this doctrine, O Lord?" Assaji asked, smiling. "Is it in the air or in the mouths of birds? By what exercise, what practice of self-mortification have you gained the superhuman truly noble knowledge? You were fat once: you are a little thinner now. Living in abundance, not lying in torment, how will you obtain the knowledge of the *paramatma*?"

"I have found it," the Lord answered simply, and beckoned to the youth to come nearer; and when the youth came into the circle of starving ascetic monks, with his jewelled turban, his silver tunic and the rope of pearls hanging from his neck, the monks gazed at him in disgust and the Lord heard them whispering angrily among themselves.

"Coarse, coarse is the sackcloth; coarse, coarse are the vermin; coarse, coarse are the terrible thorns," Assaji whispered in a broken voice. "But beautiful, beautiful are the jewels: beautiful, beautiful are the silk vestments; beautiful, beautiful are the scented stuffs." Saying this, he spat at the youth and leered at him and on his bony haunches began hopping round him, arms stretched up, thorny face gazing up at the moonlight; but for some reason the youth was not afraid, and remained exactly where he was, smiling in the direction of the Lord.

"All is coarse," the Lord said, "the sackcloth and the jewels. You say I have come to live in abundance. True. You say I am not lying in torment. True. But not as you know torment and abundance do I come to you. I have not given up exertion, I have not turned to abundance as the world knows abundance. I have come as the Tathagata, the Lord who has received Perfect Enlightenment."

“And what is that Perfect Enlightenment?”

“Perfect Enlightenment lies in detachment—I have learnt this at last, recovering from a fever. I have known mortifications; they lead nowhere. I have known meditations; they lead far—but not far enough. Best of all is the fever and the convalescence. Best of all the moment of supreme detachment, knowing the wretchedness of birth, the wretchedness of decay and dying, how all things are taken away by the river into a great darkness, but now I have found how to step out of the river altogether—by perfect detachment, and in this perfect detachment the soul is freed and gains the unborn, the supreme peace, the Nirvana.”

“And what is this blessed thing called Nirvana?”

“Nirvana is the peace of the soul which comes when you have stepped out of the river, never to return. O monks, there are two extremes, which are not to be practised by one who has gone out from the world. And what are these two extremes? These two extremes are the indulging in passions, for passions are without nobility and useless, since nothing is attained by them; and the second thing which should not be practised by the forest-dwellers is self-torture, since this also is mean and ignoble, painful and useless. There is a middle way, O monks, whereby these two extremes are never touched—the way of nobility and detachment. There is a calmness, O monks, which comes to the mind of the man who has appointed for himself the middle way. Let a man resolutely refuse to step into the river, let him resolutely refuse to be borne away, let him be a hollow reed, standing on the shores of the river, let his mind be pleasant and calm, listening to music, taking enjoyment in things, but never entering into things, let him care for his body as long as it endures him, let him be clean, let him be good to his fellow-creatures, and even when he is good, let him be detached, never having too deep a pity, never loving, never entering

into the uncleanness of the body; and doing these things, and praising the sun always, he will escape from the river, he will be new-born, he will be perfectly detached and in his death he will enter the *paramatma*.”

The monks listened, gazing now at the yellow robes in the moonlight, now at the silver-shining tunic, and sometimes they whispered among themselves. They came closer to the Lord, looking up at him, wondering a little at the quietness of the subdued voice which was hardly louder than the rustle of grass; and now it was growing late, no longer did they hear the lovers in the woods, and even the deer and the little gazelles were silent.

The Lord raised his hand in blessing, and said: “I am the sun, and this youth is the moon, and you are all the stars.”

Once again there was a long silence; then the Lord began to speak again, quietly, effortlessly, but this time there seemed to be a more determined edge to his words, and he spoke no longer light-heartedly, but gravely.

“Now, O monks, I shall tell you the Eightfold Path and the noble truth of pain. Old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow and lamentation and despair—all these are painful, and none can avoid them except by following the Eightfold Path. First therefore, there is detachment. There should be the middle way in speech, and the same in feelings, in actions, in livelihood, in endeavour, in faith, in memory, in meditation. This is the Eightfold Path; but in all these things, in memory, and meditation, and livelihood, and action, and feeling, and faith, and endeavour, and speech, there must be detachment, and what kind of detachment? The detachment which comes to a man convalescing after a fever.”

At this moment Kondanya came forward and touched the hem of the Lord's gown; there was a faint stirring among the monks, and it was noticed that Assaji removed the largest of the thorns embedded in his face, gazed at it by the

moonlight and threw it away. Then the voice went on, as effortlessly and inevitably as before:

“Now, O monks, I shall tell you the four noble truths. First there is the fact of suffering or sorrow. Birth causes sorrow, and many other things cause sorrow, but all of them spring from birth. Illness and growth and decay and death—all these cause sorrow, and so too does separation from the beloved; all that is concerned with the soul’s identity causes sorrow, and all that is concerned with attraction and repulsion, and all that is concerned with growing. Such are the causes of sorrow, O monks. Second there is the cause of sorrow. Sorrow comes from the craving thirst to renew ourselves perpetually, to remain ourselves unchangingly, from pleasure in sensual delights of the flesh and the mind, and from seeking after this pleasure, and from the contemplation of birth, and from the contemplation of decay, and from the contemplation of death. Third there is the way to end sorrow. We end sorrow by burning out the thirst for pleasure, by burning out the craving for life and sensual delights, by burning out identity, by breaking completely the forces of attraction and repulsion, by never craving for the beloved, by never thirsting, by being always detached. Fourth there is the path leading to the end of sorrow, and this is the middle way, the detached way, the way of the virtuous who follow the Eightfold Path, not loving the Eightfold Path, not loving detachment, not loving virtue; but being remote from all these things, and therefore they are not carried away by the dark river, they are lifted away from the river, they stand on the bank and watch the river floating away. And he, O monks, who looks upon the world in this detached way, beholding all things but not beholden, the subduer who is unsubdued, seeing clearly with a mind refreshed, he shall not enter the river, nor be reborn, achieving a perpetual convalescence he will live in this life his last existence. In eternal contemplation he will live

in the light of the unreflecting lamp, seeing all things clearly, untormented by the injuries of the flesh, or by the passing of worlds, immune from wars, sacred to himself, counting his body holy like the sun, never practising austerities, yet remaining austere, and ever striving. For striving, O monks, remains: the striving after complete detachment. And just as a leaf falls from a tree, or a whirlpool appears in the river, so shall the monk end his days. Therefore there is no need for weeping, or laughing, or mutilations. The body of man is a whole, and his eyes are whole, and the whole universe lies before him; only, he must be detached. As the fire burns, so is his body consumed. As bread is made by hands, so does he come into the world. Therefore, O monks, I pray you be detached, living simply, in the utter simplicity of detachment, and pray to the sun."

This was the speech he made in Benares at the Deer Park, taken down in the memories of the six men who listened to him and later recorded on the bamboo scrolls, the speech of a man who was gentle and pitying, himself detached from the world and overcome with the great weight of suffering which hangs over the world. He spoke as the wind moves in the trees, and made no gestures, but sat quietly in the place which Kondanya had made for him; and he did not look at their faces or their half-naked slime-covered thorn-infested bodies; and though his eyes were closed, yet he seemed sometimes to be looking at them. After a long pause he said: "I am the Tathagata, I have received perfect enlightenment, now rest in peace." And all night, while they were sleeping, he kept watch over them.

When dawn came a cold wind rose, mist settled on the river, and monkeys were keeping the deodars in perpetual commotion—but it was not the same, the Lord reflected, as he went slowly down to the river to bathe. Something had changed. There was a glory in the heavens, a streaming blueness brighter than before, and the white city shone in

the light of the sun more august than in the smoking flares of night. Turtles raised their heads above the water. A small white-clothed procession was coming down the hill towards the water, but as his eyes grew accustomed to the bright light he recognised them as mourners, carrying in their hands a body wrapped in linen towels. He followed them with his glance to the water's edge, watched the sprinkling and the purifications and bowed his head when the first flame appeared; and now one by one, along the bank, in the sacred places, more flames appeared, and the air was filled with vultures and black crows wheeling above the fires.

"It is late, for the sun has risen," the Lord said; but he did not move from the place where he was.

It seemed to him that the city had changed out of all recognition. The gold and white sunlight brooded like another river over the sacred Ganges, the crumbling palaces and towers and temples also resembled small fires, all were sacrificial flames burning with the intensity of a final renunciation; yet the renunciation was not yet. For three or four miles along the waterfront on the opposite shore palaces crowded on palaces—impossible to see the dark dung-smelling alleyways he had come through the previous evening, impossible to imagine the beggars with their livid red-rimmed sores, or the prostitutes and thieves. The sweet-smelling dung-smoke rose to heaven. Here and there were clumps of pale-green bamboos and broad-leaved banana trees; yellow crumbling walls without roof-beams; small white earthenware shrines. And as the city awoke from the shrill darkness of the long night under the stars, caravans became real—no longer clouds of yellowing dust, and there were the Thibetans with their scarlet fur head-dresses leading pack-mules down to the Ganges, he could almost smell the tea and rice in their saddle-bags. "And where have they come from? Where do they go? The world is in

perpetual movement of merchandise, gold is spinning from hand to hand, the clouds wheel above them, the birds disappear into the blue of the forest, and all this striving is good, and nothing is better than the smell of cow-dung rising to the heavens." He fingered the Brahman cord round his neck and took shade among some low-lying scarlet rhododendrons which grew wild on the shore—everything blazing with colour, smoking, steaming, gleaming with life. Even the thatched huts, the low white-domed temples, the processions of mourners, the immense face of the blue river without a patch or seam or ripple upon it except where a slow-moving boat went downstream, all these things seemed good to him, for though life poured out of them as ants pour out of a struck stone, yet from a distance all this life formed one life, all were parts of a whole, obeying the law of the whole, taking sustenance from one another and from the air above them, so rich with the wealth of the river and the sun that once more they became the river and the sun—in the whole of creation there were only these two things. "So we must worship the sun and worship the river," he murmured, sitting cross-legged among the rhododendrons while the mist rose higher and higher, and a blue cerulean light caught one of the spires.

All morning he meditated among the rocks where the wild cherries and the wild olives grew in effortless profusion. As he meditated, he turned the wheel of the law, his immense brooding face copper in the sunlight, his hands raised sometimes in benediction of the world which had never seemed lovelier. Once he rose and stood on a high rock, and with his hands outstretched he blessed the whole city: "Let all escape from the wheel of suffering, let all become saints, let the pitted sores be healed and the tears be dried and the evil be taken, and let all ascend to heaven." Then, having said this, he folded the skirts of the yellow gown more carefully around him and descended towards the river.

VII

The Splendour and the Glory

A COW-HERD CALLED KOTIYA HAD BEEN hiding among the wild cherry trees at the moment when the Lord stood on the rock and blessed the city. He was a small youth, filthy with rags, lean and cavernous-bellied, with sores on his hind-quarters from too much squatting, and his face was small and wrinkled like a nut; but his eyes were bright, and having seen the Lord in the attitude of benediction he hurried down the bank and spread the news to all the gossipers and mourners and street-sellers.

“What kind of man, say you?” they asked him.

“I saw him with mine own eyes, a great prince robed in gold who came out of the earth, as though swallowed and vomited up again, crowned with a light of flowers and the shadows of his body were the colour of the Ganges—I saw him with mine own eyes, which are not watery or covered with sores, and I heard with mine own ears which are not filled with cow-dung—these words I heard: ‘Blessed be the whole city, blessed be all who live in the city, let them ascend to heaven.’”

“Truly thinkest thou they will ascend like bits of dung-smoke?”

“Fool! Let me describe him. He was robed in a yellow gown the colour of a datura petal, and he was tall and noble with a shaven head the colour of a gold piece, and he went down to bathe and his whole body was the same colour as his head—he is the height of ten men, or perhaps thirteen women, and truly I believed him likely to bless the city, every one in it, down to the lice which jump up from their inner garments.”

“Thou sayest well. What manner has the name of the Lord?”

“That I didn’t enquire—he was too swift for me. For myself I would say his name was the Blessed One, for he made the movements of a wheel with his hands, and he was truly great. He left his yellow cloak on the rocks, and no *nats* settled on the cloak—I saw them covering their faces and running away, with their black hair like clouds. This I saw with mine own eyes.”

“Thine eyes are speckled with cow-dung from too much watching cows.”

“Truly he was Lord and blessed the city——”

The boy Kotiya could not keep still. He was like someone who is drunk, running all over the bank, telling everyone about this strange Lord who had stood on a rock with closed eyes and outstretched hands, who resembled something seen in dreams, taller than a house. The boy ran along the banks and talked to everyone who would listen to him. He was so full of the story that he would tell it backwards, but he told it so well and so often that people believed him—many monks and *sunyasis* had blessed the city, but none had been taller than a mountain—and by the evening of the third day the Deer Park was full of jostling crowds who came to see this wonder, who by now was taller than heaven.

It was true that the Lord was tall and well-formed, and in the light of the butter-lamps his bronze shaven head shone with an unearthly golden colour, but it was not true that he was tall as heaven. They grumbled a little when they saw him sitting cross-legged under a tree, fanning himself with palm leaves—they had seen it before; but when he spoke late at night under the clear stars, his voice like honey, his hands assuming strange shapes of prayer, the liquid yellow light of butter-lamps flooding the round dome of his head, they listened eagerly and whispered together, praising his beauty,

till it was necessary for him to silence them with uplifted hands. What were the four noble truths and the noble Eightfold Path? They had heard some of them before, but never so convincingly. Ai, ai, there must be an end to suffering. What is the cause of sorrow? The craving thirst for satisfactions of the body, the lust for life, the sexual organs, the lips, the nipples, the veins leading backwards and forwards through the heart, the light playing on the girl's skin and on the man's laughing face. "Dost groan with pleasure, then I say pleasure is not something which makes men groan and sigh, but something which makes them laugh and sing; and I say it is necessary to laugh and sing, since the earth is wholly spread out before you. O my brethren, follow the noble Eightfold Path, have pride in body, do not tear yourselves to ribbons with mortifications, but live justly and nobly, ever striving after virtue. Strive nobly. There is no other thing." Suddenly the voice would stop, and one of the acolytes, perhaps old Kondanya, would speak in his ugly high-pitched mendicant's voice of the royal chariot-wheel of the Universal Truth which could be seen in the heavens and in men's hearts, for had not the Lord spoken of these things? and as for the noble Eightfold Path, men must be just in all things—in belief and feelings, in speech and actions, in livelihood and endeavour, in memory and meditation. It was as simple as that; and the boy Kotiya, sitting cross-legged in front of the preacher, forgot to scratch his sores and kept looking in the direction of the Lord, whispering: "Aya, he is taller than a heaven of twenty mansions, and sweeter."

There had never been such weather in Benares. The skies at night retained some of the blueness of the day, and there were hardly any clouds, though sometimes there were abrupt storms during the day, when the Ganges was streaked white with waves. It was noticed that there were fewer pleasure-ships than ever. It had become almost a fashion among the

young gallants to attend the meetings in the Deer Park, accompanied by their knights, leaning on the arms of their mistresses, who wore kingfishers' plumes in their hair and who daubed their faces with white powder; but at the gates of the park the acolytes begged them to remove their swords and sandals, and asked the maidens not to suck sweets and make endearing noises lest the Lord's words went unheard. The boy Kotiya was frantic. Seeing a young bride, or an old bearded merchant with pearls in his fur head-dress, he would run up to them and whisper: "Dost see the Lord?—over there—crouching in the dung-grass—truly his voice is like the honey of the rose-apple tree," and he would lead them to a place which he calculated as being respectfully distant, but not too far, from the Lord, and prattle away till Kondanya or some other monk told him rudely to be silent.

But the most remarkable thing of all was the moonlight, which was immense, pure white, streaked with blue, and of a radiance which had never been seen before. It may have been some trick of the weather, but it was strange that the moon should have blossomed forth like this at such a time. Like many cow-herds, Kotiya saw visions; and one evening towards the end of the week he reported that he had seen the whole heavens like a lovely maiden listening attentively to the Lord's words. "She was a maiden of incomparable virtue," he related, "the stars were the pearls upon her neck, the dark clouds her braided hair, the deepening space her flowing robe, and her voice was as the humming of bees. Gracefully she bent her head and listened to the Lord's words——"

"What are these things they are saying of me?" the Lord asked.

Old Kondanya shuffled up to him and made salutations.

"Some devil of a boy who lies with his tongue in his cheek—his eyes are black hell's coals——"

"What does he say?"

“He said he was hiding somewhere in the prickly thorns among his cow-dung, and saw the Lord worshipping the city——”

“That is true enough. I saw him. He had a little black rump full of sores, but his face was cloudless.”

“Cloudless?” said Kondanya scornfully. “Say you, a black smear-blooded tadpole-shaped urchin is cloudless? I ordered him to be beaten, Lord.” And then seeing the Lord smiling, he added: “He yelled—he said it is the Lord’s pleasure, and—and—the rump was hard, as you say. It makes no difference,” he sighed. “I’ve told him to go away, but he is so small and black a thing that he comes through the gratings like a snake. A black devil smeared with cow-dung.”

“Bring him to me,” the Lord said.

So Kotiya was brought to him. He had been so intoxicated by watching the Lord and running to and fro that he had not eaten for three or four days. His face was near-black, his eyes were burning and the rags hardly covered him. He stood there trembling with fear and adoration, but his tongue was so caked with thirst that he could not speak or explain himself.

“Hast thou eaten, Kotiya?”

“Nay, Lord.”

“But it is good to eat—good to take the earth’s harvest,” and dropping his voice to a lower tone, the Lord said: “Benares is not poor.”

“Nay, Lord, not poor—richer than ever since thou hast come to us. Aya, I said thou wert taller than thirteen women, but I see now thou art not more than a few hands’ breadths taller than I.”

“Dost need anything—food or lodging, or some better rags to hide thy shame, little one? Thou hast only to speak——”

“I cannot speak, Lord. Shame—shame—I know shame.

I have marched to that place six times a day in very excitement," the boy gabbled on, holding his hands tightly together so that the knuckles resembled white stones. "I have gone and come back again since thou wert here. Wilt thou take me for a disciple? I can milk cows. When thou art hungry, I can hide at night under the cows and give thee handfuls." Saying this he lifted his black cow-dung-smeared hands, as bony as claws, and then remembering where he was, knitted them together in an attitude of supplication.

"Such disgust," Kondanya said. "Have mercy on us, Lord. Let him go back to his evil-smelling trade."

"What trade wast *thou* fond of, mendicant, but the most evil-smelling of all?" the Lord said sharply. "Nay, it is late—he should have been my disciple before. Wash him and clothe him—give him the yellow robe of a mendicant. I see flames around him. A king in a former life who fell from a high tower, and what wast thou who fell from a dung-pit? Take him and bathe him, lest the Lord see flames, not around thy head, but around thy feet."

Kotiya understood very little of what the Lord was saying, and hardly knew whether he was being praised or blamed. It was evening. The acolytes had placed butter-lamps and sweet-smelling flowers round the Lord; a soft wind was playing among the tamarisks; the sky was still arched with that perfect pale blue and with the immense whiteness of the moon; in this light the boy's body under the ragged clothes shone almost gold. Tears streamed down the boy's face. He gulped the food and looked pityingly at the other acolytes who were standing at a distance, and sometimes, hardly able to believe his good fortune, he pinched himself or dug his sharp flint-like fists deep against his eyes.

"I dream, Lord," he said. "After so much fasting —"

"Fasting is good, but all of us are dreaming," the Lord

answered. "Better to dream and know that you are dreaming than to sleep and not know when you shall awake. Better to have sorrow than to think the sorrow is also a dream——"

"I don't understand thy words. I am but a wandering cow-herd, and must return to my cows——"

"Krishna was a cow-herd, but he saw the milk-maids. Was that a dream? Think, little one, all thy life is a dreaming. Hast thou seen the milk-maids?"

The boy hardly understood the courage which began to flow into him. He found he could touch the Lord's robes without trembling, even touch the Lord's arm, even smile into the Lord's face. It was like exploring a new country—he hardly dared go an inch farther, but everything was so delightful, so warm and confiding that he dared strenuously; and the Lord whispered comforting words: "See—I am like others—touch—it is no different to others."

"But there is greater blessedness, Lord?"

"Nay, not even that—only I have striven hard. Thou wast a king in some former life, but now thou art to me a kind of Krishna, only more calm."

From that day the boy Kotiya was with the Lord at all times. On the midnight when the Lord left the Deer Park to return to his wanderings, it was Kotiya who swept the leaves from his path, Kotiya who fanned him and ran errands for him and hurried in his yellow-skirted robe to the villages, waving an alms-bowl, waking the watchmen and singing the praises of the Lord, till dawn came, and even then he was still singing, like some mad thing, not yet engrained into service. Service would come later. Fifty or sixty accompanied the Lord on this pilgrimage. They had seen the vision, and realised in their hearts that the only salvation came from an unforced detachment; the river would pass by them, they said hopefully, and meanwhile they followed the Lord where he led them.

No one knew where the Lord was going. He went north-west, as though expecting later to return to Kapilavastu. Strength poured into him. His health returned. It was burnt-dark country, with streaks of water-courses, mantles of scrub and here and there were red rocks, where we lingered in the shade. I say "we", for I reached Benares four days after the Lord spoke in the Deer Park. Perhaps the rumours had already reached Kapilavastu, perhaps it was, as he said it was, some kind of vision; but Manahama said that he had seen in a dream the Prince recovered and going slowly towards Benares. Secretly, hiding his mission from Prince Devadatta, the king called for me and whispered: "There is someone who has dreamed——" I knew the rest and hardly heard him. With Siddhartha everything was possible, even convalescence, even recovery from mortal wounds; but on the long journey southward I remembered my distrust for Manahama, and how little I believed in his dreams. And then gradually, as I went south, I heard the peasants speaking in whispers, saying: "There is a new Tathagata who wears the yellow robe, and he has received perfect enlightenment," and then I knew it could only be Siddhartha. We met in the Deer Park. I was conscious that he had changed, conscious of the startling sensation of power, the sudden blaze of his blue eyes, fierce, unyielding, unmerciful. He began to talk very slowly, as to a child, of the moment which occurred shortly after I left him, the moment of recovery and convalescence, when he understood suddenly, and as though he had been struck by a thunder-clap, that all life was illusion, the river was always flowing, and in remoteness and detachment lay salvation; but what was puzzling was that in him remoteness and detachment seemed at times to vanish altogether, or rather there occurred a sudden leap from the remote habitation where he lived into the heart of the thing he contemplated. Gazelles came and ate from his hand: he would gaze at them for a

long time, tenderly, and as though searching within them, partaking of their life, while the sun gleamed on his yellow hair and the folds of the yellow gown hung stiff like marble. It was then, immediately, without any doubts or hesitations, with the certainty that no remorse would follow, that I decided to follow him, and I was left alone to contemplate my own thoughts with a young man who wore a silver tunic, with ropes of pearls round his neck and an egret's feather in his blue turban, who told me of how he had accompanied the Lord across the river, and did not know yet whether he would follow him—there was an ache in his heart for his courtesans.

So we marched across the dusty plains north-west of Benares, where the sand is sharp and our bare feet were hurt and footsore; so that every evening we grew accustomed to the ritual of washing in some neighbouring stream or waiting till the peasants came to us with their thin bronze ewers. The Lord's fame had spread. Scouts came from the villages and would report our coming, seeing the great yellow banner of dust above our heads, for within a month we were four hundred. The Lord led us. He was always marching ahead with the wind in his face, the scowling dust at his heels; so that sometimes the followers complained that he went first to avoid the streaming dust-banners which pricked our faces. Often I would walk by his side, and sometimes I would talk of Kapilavastu and of how it seemed to me that even if he had obtained supreme Buddhahood, he should return to the Court, where Yasodhara was waiting for him; but he never spoke of the Court, never asked after Rahula, never concerned himself with Devadatta. I would paint a picture of the Court filled with misery, unjust taxes, deprivations of rights, even imprisonment—the soldiers were torturing the peasants to death, Devadatta was impenitent; but he seemed unconcerned. "What would you have me to do?" "I would have you return there, O Lord,

even if only for a few hours. I would have you show yourself and display yourself. I would have justice come to enter the city.” “And can justice be acquired simply by a middle-aged man showing himself?” “Perhaps not, O Lord, but if you show yourself, they will know that Devadatta is not alone in possession of power.” Then I would notice the hard keen crystal-blue eyes turned on me, and his voice saying: “I have said that in detachment from the world lies all blessedness—then how would you expect me to enter the stream? Once, and only once, you tempted me—now I shall return, but I shall not return as a prince, I shall return as a mendicant, for truly, Ananda, by government we change nothing and by a change of heart we change all things.”

One day, four day's march from Benares, we came to a small temple of the fire-worshippers. They were devout men, well learned, and possessed of great dignity and calm; and when the Lord passed, they asked him to enter within, and spoke humbly to him, saying they had heard of his sermon in Benares, but why had he not spoken of the sun? “Is not the sun good?” they asked. “Do not all our blessings come from the sun? Are we not born from fire, and when we die are we not burnt in fire?”

The Lord said: “Truly we are born from the sun and die into the sun, but let us not worship the cause or the manifestation, for a glow-worm gives light—do we worship the glow-worm? or the cause of the glow-worm, which is another glow-worm? Everything burns, O disciples, and with what fire is it burning? I declare to you that we are all burning with the fire of desire, and it is better to be consumed, better to be like the moon, better to be like ashes. Let us be still as a small flame in a windless space, but with a cold burning. Look——” As he spoke, the brushwood on a distant bank had suddenly burst aflame, and there were thick fumes and bright tongues of redness on the banks. “Look, the flame

burns and never ceases burning. How shall we put an end to this burning? By taking water—then let us be like water, let us put an end to this burning.” Some of the acolytes, not understanding his words, ran to the well and hoisted the ropes, and later they returned having stamped out the flames, swilling the earth with water, their bodies black with smoke and their clothes torn. “So should we stamp out the flames of the body, O monks, and let none hinder us; and let us not think of the burning of the sun but of its bright light, and best of all let us think of the moon, which is ashes.”

Kasyapa, the elder of the fire-worshippers, was a man well learned in things of the spirit and he answered: “Cold, master, is the wintry night, and cold is the moon, and the time of frost is coming; and rough is the ground for the treading of the hooves of cattle, and thin is the couch of leaves, and light is the yellow robe, and the winter wind blows keen. Is this not the truth, Lord?”

“Yes, it is the truth.”

“But in the evening, when the disciples sleep, is it not better that they should have fire to warm themselves? And is it not better that they should delight in warmth rather than in cold? And is it not better that they should worship the source of all life?”

“Yes, it is better.”

“And therefore there is no harm, and indeed great benefit in worshipping the sun?”

“This is true, O monks,” the Lord answered, “but the learned one, Kasyapa, has told us of what is good, and indeed these things are better; but now I will tell you of what is best, and the best is the Eightfold Path, and complete detachment, and chiefly detachment from fire which burns with its consuming flames. Let us worship all things, for all things are worthy of worship; and let us not enter into that river which is the most terrible of all, the river which Kasyapa worships, the river of the sun.”

He was silent then for a while, gazing at the small altar erected to Agni, god of the flames. He bent his palms together in worship to the sacrificial altar, and then passed on; he had gone down the road only a little way when Kasyapa decided to follow him.

One morning, when we came to the Bahuka River, an old Brahmin with the frail cord hanging from his neck and the red mark of Shiva on his forehead said: "Come to this river, O monks, wade through this river, O monks, and all your sins will be washed clean."

"How so?" the Lord asked gravely.

"Have you not heard, master," the monk replied, "that the river is sacred, that a drop of the river is like a drop of oil, that all who pass here are washed clean of their sins. Pay me a small fee, and enter the river."

"Why should we pay you a fee, O monk?"

"Because I am the guardian of the river."

The Lord thought for a moment.

"And what sins are washed free?" he asked.

"All sins, master. The sin of envy, the sin of concupiscence, the sin of desire——"

Then the Lord summoned those about him and said: "This man is a fool. No river can cleanse the doer of evil, except the cleansing river of his own mind. For the Tathagata cannot be cleansed by water any more than he can be cleansed by mortification. Let us rest in the river, O monks. Let us bathe in the river, O monks. But let us beware the thought that the river can cleanse our sins."

So on the morning, while the yellow sun fell on the yellow robes left on the bank, the acolytes and followers of the Tathagata bathed in the river till there was no more dust on them, and their bodies shone silver. Kingfishers swooped over the broad-flowing river, and the morning sun-veils were lifted, and there was only the sound of running

water and the splashing of the young monks. There was the swift-flowing river with white-silver bodies flowing in it, and the Lord sitting cross-legged on the bank, in the posture of meditation, saying: "The river is aflame with men, and yet there is no desire, and the river does not carry them away."

A little while later the Lord plucked a reed and showed how it was hollow, and yet a clear sound came from it. "Therefore, O monks, be ye hollow as a reed, bending to the wind, never growing hard, always pliant in the hands of the Law; and may you sing sweetly, O monks!" Or else he would take a coloured stone, and show how it had been rubbed smooth by the waves, and he would explain that through all our lives we had been rubbed smooth, but the stone was detached and separate from the waters and endured longer than all things. Or else he would point to the wild-fowl, or the clouds, or the clear blue of the sky, or the lengthening shadows, and from all these he derived sermons. "But above all, O monks, be clear-sighted in your detachment; be as this river which is transparent, which when you look down on it seems not to be flowing and which is a mirror reflecting the sun." Or else, taking a handsome youth a little apart from the rest, he made a sermon so short that for a long while we were bewildered; for he said only: "Be ye handsome like this youth."

And once when we asked the Lord why we could not settle in the forest, or in a grove, he answered: "We are brethren, O monks, and therefore we are wanderers. All is ours—the whole world is ours—why then should we stay in one place? Let us remain together, O brethren, for as long as we journey together we may remain together, but if we settle in some grove, then we shall find ourselves tormented by restlessness, and each one of us will seek his private abode. And better, O monks, to sleep under the stars and possess no place, even a dwelling in the forest, which we can call our own, for we are detached men,

wandering over the earth, where all is ours and nothing is our own. And if we should desire to rest somewhere or to possess something, how should we be detached, and how should we have sympathy for those who are homeless? Monks, let us be wanderers, for the whole world is our own.”

One of the young acolytes died, a youth of perhaps fourteen years, a friend of Kotiya, brown-faced and strong, and like Kotiya he had been a cow-herd. He tripped over his robe when running and fell on his face; there was little harm done, but a few days later he complained of fever and pain. Kotiya tended him, and together they sang the praises of the Lord, sometimes singing the song of the builder which the Lord composed in the village of Gaya, sometimes singing songs of their own making. The younger disciples all tended the youth, bathing his body in scented water and covering his face in perfumed ointments; but the fever went on unabated, and soon Kotiya saw the youth shrinking away from him. They lit candles, they heaped flowers by him—it was the first death to happen on the pilgrimage.

Kotiya ran to the Lord: “Bring life to him, bring life to him!” he screamed.

“How shall I bring life to him?”

“Thou art Lord, thou art Tathagata, thou hast magic potions—bring life to him, O Lord, lest I be afraid.”

The Lord shook his head.

“I can bring prayers, I can bring salvation, I can bring repose to him. I cannot bring things which are beyond my power.”

Kotiya then tugged at the Lord’s gown and brought him to the place where the candles were burning and there was an overwhelming scent of forest flowers, but by the time the Lord reached there, the boy was dead already, very pale and still in the flickering lamps, and there were beads of sweat

on his brows. The Lord placed his hands on the boy's face and murmured: "Cold, cold are the nights of death; weary, weary is the road of life; sweet, sweet are the hours of repose."

Kotiya screamed: "Let him wake, Lord! Let him wake!"

"He cannot wake," the Lord answered. "It is too late to wake. On this long night no dawn will ever break."

"Let him move, Lord!" Kotiya screamed.

"He cannot move, nor speak, nor take food, nor smile, nor breathe, nor feel the wind on his face, nor feel the sand at his heels, nor say one word of love. He is wholly detached, O monks. In complete detachment, O monks, having become a saint and reached Nirvana he neither takes nor gives, but utters himself only in silent blessing. There is no need to weep, brother Kotiya, nor need to sigh. In this peace he utters his benedictions continually, as the snow blesses us, or the sweet winds which never die."

The boy Kotiya, wearing the yellow robe of the monks, patched and darned in twelve places, gazed down at his friend, and did not sigh. He could not hear the dead youth's benedictions, and the Lord, knowing what he was thinking, whispered: "They are silent."

"It is terrible to die," Kotiya murmured.

"More terrible to live," answered the Lord, "and still more terrible not to live. Your friend has become a saint, because he was blessed in his life and detached; and therefore he has escaped from the wheel, therefore he will not return, therefore he will live for ever in complete detachment, in the contemplation of the unreflecting light. No shadows will be thrown from him, none will speak or see him, yet he will remain, himself a light. Man gathers flowers, his heart is set on pleasure. Death comes upon him like the floods of water in a village, and sweeps him away. From love cometh sorrow, from love cometh fear: whosoever is free from love, for him there is no sorrow. And though the waters have

swept your beloved away, he was not there—he stands in eternal contemplation by the banks of the stream, and has no need to cross any river.”

The boy did not understand these words. The frozen tears no longer flowed. He looked at the dead youth without pity. But some hours later he came to the Lord again. He was dry-eyed and without fear, and said: “Lord, I have heard there is something which can put life into those white bones.”

“Yes, there is such a thing,” the Lord said.

“What is that thing?”

“A pinch of mustard seed.”

“Where shall I find the mustard seed, O Lord?”

“Thou shalt find it in a house where neither son nor daughter nor parent has died. Go to the village and ask for the mustard seed.”

For the first time Kotiya began to smile and laugh; he raced like a whirlwind to the village, shouting to all the monks: “I am going in search of mustard seed.” He turned cart-wheels and somersaults in pure joy, and smiled, showing all his teeth; and the Lord watched him from afar with a heavy heart. When he reached the village, Kotiya ran to the house of a nobleman’s daughter, and said: “Have you any white mustard seed? The Lord says it will cure my brother.” She gave him a catty of mustard seed, but he returned all except a small thimbleful; and he was about to go when he remembered the Lord’s command and said: “Daughter, in this house has son or daughter or parent died?”

The nobleman’s daughter bent her head.

“What sayest thou, youth?” she asked. “Yea, a daughter is dead, and two sons—they were burnt by the river. As for the living, they are few; the dead are many.”

“Then I return the medicine,” Kotiya said. “It will not cure my brother.”

Then he went from house to house, and always it was the

same; some had died, and throughout the whole village in every house the dead were in greater numbers than the living. At last he returned empty-handed to the Tathagata.

The Lord said: "Did you receive the mustard seed?"

"Nay, Lord, for in every house there were some who had died."

The Lord placed his hand on the youth's hair.

"See, Kotiya, thou hast been a faithful servant, but thou knowest nothing of the Law. There is the law of the world, which each man must obey. The Prince of Death is the greatest of princes, for he comes to the sleeping town and sweeps everyone away in his raging torrent." A small fire was burning near him, and he pointed to it. "Fear not, Kotiya. Even as it is with these flames, so also it is with the living of this world: some flare up, while others flicker out; they only that have reached Nirvana are no more seen." And then the Lord added in a softer voice: "Seest thou not that in Nirvana he loves thee more than ever?"

"I see, Lord," said Kotiya quietly.

"Then go and rejoice in his Nirvana. Come, Kotiya, let us go together and celebrate the peace of this boy."

Then the disciples were surprised to see the Lord and Kotiya walking hand in hand, shouting and laughing through the rice-fields and then growing suddenly silent, for they had come to the place where the dark-skinned youth was burnt beside the river among the vultures; then very slowly, in calm meditation, they returned.

All this occurred not far from the village of Gaya, where Sujata and Nandika were still living, though they had grown beyond childhood, were tall and slender and would soon be married. Many years had passed since the Lord's illumination. "It was there," the Lord said, "among the carcasses of animals, and hidden from the river and the village, that I received illumination." "Let us cut down the branch of a tree and take it with us," Kasyapa said. "No,

let the tree remain; let nothing be worshipped; take no leaves of any tree to hide your nakedness. Worship all things, not one thing, for all things are sacred—even fire.” Kasyapa smiled, rubbing his mouth with the back of his arm, and they stayed in a grove at the edge of the village for two months.

It was at this time that news came from Kapilavastu that King Suddhodana had recovered and had placed the power in the hands of Sundarananda. The Lord was well pleased. He would summon me to him and speak softly of Sundarananda, saying that though he stuttered he was inclined to the soul’s obedience.

“What is the soul’s obedience?” I asked.

“He knows what is right and wrong because he has meditated deeply. Let him rule in peace.”

There were now perhaps seven thousand members of the order, men who had shorn their hair—the Lord had ordered that all the disciples should shear off their hair, for still there were some who took pride in their appearance, and besides, it was more comfortable in the heat to be bare-headed—and now we were becoming too many for a single pilgrimage. The cloud-banners of dust stretched a mile high along the dusty roads; so he sent Kasyapa and Assaji to take some monks to the south, and he ordered me to take some monks to the east, but I begged to be allowed to remain.

“Better that you should go alone, Ananda, than that you should remain with me,” the Lord said.

I said nothing but stood there with tears falling from my eyes.

“Go then,” the Lord continued. “Take those monks whom you desire to accompany you, and go the road of the east.”

And seeing my reluctance, he said:

“I have taught you the soul’s obedience, and do you refuse to obey the soul? Why stayest thou here, brother?

Whoever says 'My Father is in my thoughts' or 'My wife is in my thoughts' or 'The laughter of my children is in my thoughts' or 'The Lord is in my thoughts'—he will not attain to Nirvana."

"Better not to attain Nirvana than to go away from the Lord," I answered.

The Lord thought for a while, gazing at me, and then taking me into the shade of the sita trees, he whispered: "Thou art full of love, Ananda—canst thou feel the flames?"

"Yea, Lord, I feel the flames."

"Thou knowest that the burning will never cease?"

"Yea, Lord, I know that the burning will never cease."

Once again the Lord was silent, meditating upon the flames; then, saying nothing, he took me by the hand and led me back to the groves where the monks were talking together enviously, saying that the Lord preferred me above all others. The Lord summoned the monks to him, and said: "I have ordered Ananda to take the monks to the east, but Ananda has disobeyed. What shall be done to Ananda, O monks?"

There were sharp tempers among the monks at that time; some whispered that he should be expelled from the Order of the monks, others that he should be punished.

Then the Lord said in a clear voice: "Let there be no envy among you, O monks. Those who came first to the Tathagata are supreme. And who are those who came first to the Tathagata? There is Sujata, who offered me rice-milk by the shores of the Nairanjuna River, and there is Ananda, who offered me temptation by the same river, they are supreme by their devotion—Sujata at the moment when she offered rice-milk and Ananda at the moment when he tempted the Lord to return. Therefore bear well with them, for they are my beloved ones."

It was at this time also that the Lord pronounced his ser-

mon "on crossing the river". We were about to depart from Gaya. The Lord accompanied us to the bank of the river, now in flood, and for a while remained silent in meditation, then he said: "What, O monks, is the purpose of life? The purpose of life is to cross the river in safety, and he who crosses the river in safety and reaches the further bank in safety, this man we call the *bodddhisatva*. How does one cross the river? By becoming pure and transparent like the river, which reflects the sunlight but is not warmed by it. For what is the river striving? The river is striving to enter the sea, but never will any drop of water know that it has reached the sea. You will say: The sea is salt, and the river will know it has reached the sea when there is the taste of salt, but so small are the particles of the river that they will not know they have reached the sea, since the taste of salt is so small. Now, imagine him who stands by the river bank, determined to reach the further shore. Is he armed? Is he tall enough to wade across without being drowned? Has he a boat or a ship to assist him? No, monks, he has none of these things. Then what has he? He has nothing but his own strength. Before he was born he was on one bank, when he dies he reaches the other bank, in life he is constantly fighting against the stream, but he is determined never to be taken out to sea and, moreover, he is determined never to be drowned. Such is the life of man, O monks, and therefore let us pray for all those who attempt to cross the river, all those whose single desire is not to be carried with the stream."

He said this very slowly and eloquently, for, as I said, the river was in flood, the bridges were washed away and it was necessary to swim across the river. Having said this, he gazed at the river flowing at his feet in great sadness, for though the sun glittered on the river, the sun was already sinking; and all round him lay the dark and sinister forest shaded by hills. He stood alone, a little apart from us, seeing

the dead carcasses of animals, the dead rushes and many other things which flowed downstream; then very quietly he entered the river, still wearing his robes, and swam to the other side, followed by the monks who accompanied him to the other shore.

During these years the monks were divided into four groups, but I remained always with the Lord.

During the time known as *Vassa*, or the rainy season, it was the custom of the monks to take refuge in small huts on the edge of the forest, where sometimes they planted grain, for the Lord said: "Let none be idle, lest evil desires come to them." Even now there were no rules for the monks, except that they should shave their heads and walk humbly before others, with downcast eyes offering their begging-bowls; it was also ordered that they should not look upon women, because it came to the ears of the Lord that sometimes the monks were disappearing among the rice-fields, where they unclothed the women with whom they consorted. At first the Lord thought of punishing them with death, but instead he ordered them to appear before him, decently dressed, and said: "O monks, which is better—to go in search of women or to go in search of yourselves?" The monks answered: "O Lord, it is better for us to go in search of ourselves." Thereupon he dismissed them, saying that their crime was great, but they were doing no more than the animals do, and for the same reason. "Let all the monks be clothed decently," he said later, "even when they are bathing, for the greatest fire of all comes from the flesh. Our hands are sticks, and our flesh is wood; and thus, by rubbing sticks against wood, is fire produced." He said this very sorrowfully, and not in his usual tone; it was as though the crimes of the young monks had burnt into him a great sadness. And indeed, as the pilgrimage proceeded, it was noticed by those who were close to him that his sadness increased.

Yet though his sadness increased, so too did his delight in the monks. Almost he had been inhuman in Benares; now he laughed, and supped with them, and told stories rather than sermons. He became more human by becoming more inhuman. He seemed to reach out beyond himself, to be more than one person at once, to be continually present where small groups of monks came together, so that they said of him that he possessed the power to be in many places at once. With this increasing sadness, there seemed to come to him a greater depth of penetration; he, who celebrated detachment, appeared to be able to enter more and more deeply into the heart of things. And now, more than ever, in some places beyond the grove, in hill-scrub, in the shadow of mountains, beside rivers, he gave himself to solitary meditation.

Loneliness afflicted him, for there can be no greater loneliness than that of a general in battle; and always he seemed to be battling for some cause—battling to be beyond the battle. For himself, he possessed perfect detachment, but he had achieved it only by intense mortification, by meditation and by convalescence. So he played strange tricks with himself, like all lonely people, and I would find him in the evening sitting alone somewhere in the forest, weeping like someone who has received ill-news, and if I asked him why, he would say he had thrown out the net of his knowledge and seen a monk behaving badly, and that it was not he himself who was crying but the monk in permission of penitence for his sins. Or else in the evening on the unploughed levels above some village, where the old gods were still worshipped with stone phalluses painted crimson, I would see him looking around, as simple as a child, enquiring of the old gods whether they heard him, speaking in whispers and listening to the wind; but the gods did not hear him. “There are no gods,” he would whisper, “only Brahma,” and he would come down the hill with his

long shadow before him, and sometimes he would kneel and gather up the dust, feeling it between his toes and sifting it between his fingers, saying: "Perhaps there is some seed here, for all things must be permitted to grow." There were even times when doubts assailed him, when I would hear him saying over and over again in sleep: "I have found the blessed enlightenment, I have found detachment, and I believe there was no other way by which one can cross the river." He was certain in sunlight, but there were ghosts of the night who plagued him, as they plagued all of us, for at night we are most tempted. Then, in the morning, having knelt to the sun and the four directions of the winds, he would brace himself for more striving.

In the eighth year of our wandering, there were two great monasteries, one at Rajagira, which had been given to the monks by King Pamphisara, and one at Savatthi given by the woman Visakha. How this came about I shall relate in the instant, but first it is necessary to say that the Lord had a horror of women and would not go near them, always keeping a great distance from them, saying they were impure, possessing neither wit nor wisdom, given to sharp practices and unholy midnight rites, unscrupulous in their love and not a little hesitant in their worship, since they felt that their skins were beyond worship, the most desirable of all things. The Lord hated particularities; not one thing was to be worshipped, but all things, and perhaps a woman's skin was the least, since it was no better than the stripped carcass of a dog, and less beautiful. There were monks who said he was in love with Visakha, but this is nonsense; he rarely spoke to her, and then always at a distance.

One blazing hot afternoon in the summer, when the monks were encamped some distance from Savatthi in little reed huts, the Lord walked in the gardens and looked towards the towers of the city. Heat-waves broke off the volcanic rocks, and it was one of those afternoons when the

waters of the earth are sucked up by the heat of the sky; and the scrub-oak gave off heat; and no metal things could be touched; and the alms-bowls were cracked by the sun. The Lord walked very slowly, accompanied by three or four monks who kept praying for rain till the moment when the Lord rebuked them, saying: "Why pray ye? Rain is an element like death, and men have no power over her." But they prayed continually and silently, for the heat was so great that one could easily imagine the human body splitting like the alms-bowls. Then suddenly in the distance a slow procession of prancing horses leading a carriage came from the east gate of the city.

"Who is it who is celebrating on such a day?" the Lord asked.

The monks said: "We have heard that the maiden Visakha is about to be married, and now they are performing the circuit of the horses in advance of the marriage."

"Who is this maiden?" the Lord asked. "It is strange that she should be married on such a day."

"Not so strange," I said. "She has sent you a message asking you to attend her marriage, accompanied by all the monks."

The Lord smiled: "Is this some pleasantry?"

"No, she is serious. She desires your presence, and in return for your presence she will offer you a monastery." He asked details of her. I told him a story which was already famous, how Visakha, who was the daughter of a rich guild-master, went down to the river to bathe accompanied by her hand-maidens. After she had bathed and attired herself, it began to rain and the hand-maidens hurried home, but Visakha walked very slowly. They asked her why she did not hurry. She replied: "Dear friends, there are four persons who are not seen to advantage when they are hurrying. Should the anointed king, adorned with all his jewels, gird up his loins and run in the palace court-

yard? Should the state elephant, when fully caparisoned, be seen running wildly? Should a woman run, for if she runs they will say she is wandering round like a man?" Then they asked her for the fourth reason, and she answered: "The fourth reason is that I am young, and will soon marry, and if I fell to the ground and broke a foot or a hand, I would become a burden to my parents." The Lord smiled, but said nothing. It was some days before the invitation was repeated to him. He said nothing, and no one knew whether he had accepted the invitation or not.

On the day of the marriage trumpets sounded from the walls of Savatthi, and three coaches made entirely of gold were prepared to receive the bride and her attendants. As a mark of his love for her, the father of Visakha had prepared a head-dress such as we had never seen in the Court of Kapilavastu, a head-dress of pearls and diamonds and emeralds threaded with pure silver in the shape of peacocks' feathers. When it was placed on the girl's head, they said it was like a peacock standing on the peak of a mountain and dancing, and only by going very close could you tell that it was not a real peacock; what was more surprising was that the bells and flutes inserted in the head-dress played a gentle music, like the sound of young girls singing in the far distance; and they said that the cost of the head-dress was nine crores, and the workmanship cost a hundred thousand pieces of silver.

And below this she wore a dress of pure gold thread, and shoes with silver buckles, and she carried a fan of small white feathers, and her attendants were dressed in silver thread with small peacocks nodding on their heads—and it was truly magnificent to see them all standing in their carriages, the sun glancing off the diamonds in the head-dress so that we were dazzled. The bridegroom was clothed in a long robe of silver, and to us this seemed strange, for in Kapilavastu it is the custom for the bride-

groom to be bare-legged and bare-armed during the marriage ceremony.

The Lord took no part in the marriage ceremony, but in the evening we saw four chariots coming through the dust towards the grove where we were staying. Dusk had settled on the sephali trees, and the cicadas were clamouring, and meanwhile the chariots approached the grove at a trot, and the drivers in flowing silks could be heard cracking their whips, and there was Visakha standing in the foremost of the chariots, with the pearls and diamonds and emeralds of her peacock head-dress glimmering in the dying sun, more red than blue in this light. I half expected the Lord to summon the monks to turn away, for though she was decently dressed, the shape of her body was visible, the small pointed breasts, the narrow shoulders and the long swan-like neck of the girl who had married and yet was not married. But the Lord said nothing. He gazed dreamily at the advancing chariot, all gold and ivory, and meanwhile the scented dust rose and the monks kept looking at them. "It is strange," the Lord whispered, "that she should come in that finery." Then the chariots came to a pause, the dust settled and, without looking at the monks, Visakha stepped out and went straight to the Lord, the hand-maidens following.

"What brings thee here?" the Lord murmured. "Such grace and finery, yet we are dedicated to poverty."

"I have come," Visakha said in a clear voice which could be heard by all the monks, "for the consolations of thy peace."

These words seemed strange to us, for none up to that time had dared to address the Lord in this way.

The Lord seemed to be amused and said gently: "Yet thou shalt be fighting with weapons this night; why speak ye of peace?" and smiled, and took her by the hand into the small grass-roofed hut where he slept, and where there were

altars to the god Brahma, who rules over us. The hand-maidens followed her, and a little while later came her husband, a dark-skinned pleasant youth, with a swollen upper lip and gold ear-rings. I followed them, and I think Kasyapa and Assaji were there, too. A hand-maiden lifted her head-dress before she entered the door of the hut, for otherwise it would have been impossible for her to enter; and thereupon she bowed and attempted to kiss the Lord's foot, but he refused to allow her to do this, saying: "There is no need to worship a man, and there is evil in such worship, but thou art forgiven the evil intention by mercy of thy beauty." In the narrow grass-roofed hut with candles burning, the air made sulphurous by the scent of the women, and the young husband grimacing with nervousness, it was strange to listen to the Lord speaking of detachment to those who were attached to one another; and then, and this was the most surprising of all, there appeared in the hut, dark-skinned, with shaggy hair reaching to his shoulders, a naked ascetic.

Savatthi was known at this time for the number of naked ascetics who lived within the city, bearded and foot-loose men who squatted in market-places or entered as priests into the houses of the great. Such a naked ascetic had been housed for a long while in the court-yard of the father of Visakha. How he had come no one knew, but with his quaking voice, in the rough unclothedness of his indecency, staggering among the women like a drunken man, he called upon Visakha to abandon the Lord and return home, where he would teach her the truth, and the truth lay in nakedness, and in no other way of life. The candles were burning low. The old man prowled among the women, gibbering and showing his toothless mouth and pressing up against them. A curtain hid the Lord's bed from sight. The Lord pointed to the curtain and ordered the naked ascetic to sit behind it, and strangely the naked

ascetic obeyed. Then the Lord said: "O naked ascetic sitting behind a curtain or behind a wall or behind a mountain, or even behind the range of mountains that encircles the earth—I am the Tathagata and thou shalt hear my voice. Not in nakedness of the body but in the nakedness of the mind lies the truth."

There was no answer from the naked ascetic except a gibbering sound, a low laughing, a kind of gibbon-like chatter without words.

"What sayest thou?" the Lord said in a deep-throated voice.

"I say the nakedness of the body and the nakedness of the mind are two things, and the nakedness of the spirit is a third thing, and the nakedness of the teeth and of the tongue and of the fingers is a fourth thing, and the nakedness of——"

"There is no nakedness but the nakedness of the Tathagata who has achieved supreme enlightenment. I am the Lord, and I say to you that the naked ascetics are not detached and take pleasure in showing their skins, to horrify us——"

There was a low howl of laughter from the naked ascetic. We could see him dimly by the light of the small candles and butter-lamps as he sat cross-legged inside the curtains, and though it was difficult to understand what he was saying, we thought we heard him say: "O Tathagata, O One who has received perfect enlightenment, how canst thou be detached from thy skin? Thy skin is thy nakedness. Show thy skin. Thou wast born clothless. Show to all thy skin, O noble son of the Kshatriyas . . ."

It was terrible; we could hear the bed shaking under him, and the rustling of the curtains, and the hand-maidens had turned pale; and at any moment I thought Kasyapa would drive through the billowing curtains and strike him.

"Why art thou silent, O Lord?" the naked ascetic complained.

“As the body is covered with clothes, so does my silence conceal my words, O naked ascetic.”

Then once again we heard the old man moving restlessly on the bed.

“Let there be two things, O Tathagata—let there be at least the mind unclothed and the body unclothed,” he said. “As for the teeth and the tongue, perhaps it may be better to clothe them. Thy teeth are sharp. I have noticed that. Beware of thy clothes,” and then, getting up from the bed and clawing through the curtain, he attempted to disrobe the Lord, but only succeeded in pushing the yellow gown a little off his shoulder. “She is married, O Lord. Dance before her. Make play with her. Ha, in utter nakedness of mind, in utter nakedness of soul, in utter nakedness of body dance before her. Thou darest not dance, yet the stars dance in nakedness.”

The Lord said quietly: “Let the body be clothed, and let men worship the body.”

The naked ascetic pulled down the curtain and began to dance on the bed, and I noticed Visakha in her gold dress looking down on the ground, and sometimes her husband would look up and watch the naked ascetic and sometimes he would look away, ashamed almost of his own body, seeing that black crawling thing on the bed. And all the time the naked ascetic was singing in his croaking high-pitched voice, and showing himself to all the women and attempting again, with lascivious gestures, to tear off the yellow gown of the Lord. And then suddenly, at the moment when the butter-lamp went out, the Lord turned for the first time in the direction of the bed and solemnly cursed the man, so that he lay still, breathing heavily, lying on his belly to cover his sins, and groaning. The Lord cursed him in a low voice. “Cursed be thou, cursed be the rotten fruit on thy bough, cursed be all that which leads us away from detachment, cursed be thy body, and thy loins,

and thy lips, and thy tongue. Cursed be thy muscles, and thy fingers, and thy groin. Cursed be all things in thee and upon thee, all creeping things in thy hair, all creeping things in thy lungs.” And then another candle went out, an acolyte was hurried away to find another and Visakha lifted up her head and the Lord blessed her marriage, saying that it was good that there should be children, but none should be too attached to children; and fruitfulness was good, and seemliness was good, and it was good to rejoice in the body, yet even rejoicing should be detached.

It was growing late, and we heard the chariot-bells tinkling outside. Visakha touched the Lord’s gown and departed slowly, followed by the hand-maidens, and we watched them in the starlight riding towards Savatthi. It was perhaps an hour later that we learned that she had left her head-dress behind, for I had completely forgotten that I had given it to my own acolyte for safe-keeping. Thereupon, without telling the Lord, I sent a messenger to Savatthi, but when the messenger arrived at the house he found that all the lights were dimmed and the bridal chamber was sealed according to the custom, and there was no sign of Visakha except for the gold shoes which lay on the mat beside the door. So the messenger returned, and I hurried to the Lord to tell him that the peacock head-dress was in my safe-keeping.

The next morning a slave-girl came to demand the head-dress, but seeing that Ananda was touching it, she said: “My mistress told me that if any monk was seen to touch it, then it shall be given to the monks for their safe-keeping, or for the benefit of the monks, to buy medicines.” I said: “It is too much; let the head-dress be returned,” but the slave-girl answered: “These were the words of my mistress. Let the head-dress remain among you, and if the Lord should agree, let a park be bought with the money, and let the monks rest there; for my mistress desires no reward,

since she says: 'I have seen the face of the Lord, and received his blessing, and desire nothing more in this life.' ” The head-dress was sold, and thenceforward a great park in the east of Savatthi was arranged for the use of the monks; and sometimes, returning from his pilgrimages, the Lord would rest there.

There followed the long years of pilgrimage, when the Lord wandered between Benares and Buddh Gaya, and beyond Buddh Gaya to the foothills of the Himalayas. He would avoid Kapilavastu, saying it was there that he was born, and Kusinara, saying it was there that he would die; and he kept to the forest paths, avoiding the high roads, saying that in the forest you could meditate—there was silence—the creaking of the leaves during the day were the appropriate sounds for meditation, and it was good to know fear at night, listening to the forest animals. Sometimes he walked for a few days along the great caravan roads which lead to Benares, roads deep in dust, with vultures and eagles hovering overhead, for there were often carcasses of animals along the road, and he would walk especially slowly towards the evening, saying that it was then that he preferred to speak to the disciples; and in those evenings, after a small meal of chapatis, he would summon the yellow-robed monks around him and speak to them in parables. Or at other times, and then more particularly if we were in sight of the Himalayas, he would go to some place apart and meditate with eyes lifted to the blue snows until the sunset faded and the acolytes found him in the morning waiting for the first breath of light on the snows.

He was a man of simple habits and great authority; and of few words. To us they seemed more like carvings than words, so deeply were they chiselled into our minds. He would take anything—anything at all—as the theme of his parables, but the end was always the same: there must be no

love, there must be no compassion, there must be hardness, a desperate escape from the wheel by killing desires. "Desires kill, desires lead to re-birth, desires are a burning." He would point to a blue-gowned peasant in the rice-fields and say: "He ploughs with a shield over his back and a sword girt at his thigh, and therefore, O brethren, we must always be on the watch against the mortal danger of desires. Be like the moon, which remains steadfast. Just as my hand is not caught nor seized nor held fast by the air, so let yourselves be free to follow the laws of the seasons, and never despair. Be like the flowers, like the grain of dust which rises with the wind and is carried no one knows where. Be fruitful, but not as men are fruitful; be fruitful of souls. Go ye out, O brethren, and travel from place to place for the welfare of many people, for the joy of many people, in pity for the world, for the blessing, welfare and joy of men and gods." The arguments against love were always the same; and yet as he grew older, the arguments seemed to enlarge, to be kindled like fire which beginning with a small rush of smoke consumes a whole forest. "All must be consumed: be like the ash of fire."

Quietly, deliberately, repeating the same words of advice and blessing, he would inculcate in the young acolytes a desire for changelessness, of an existence beyond the wheel of existence and changing identity. In the cool shade of the rose-apple trees, or in the kareri forests, where the trumpetings of elephants were raised above the voices of the pilgrimage, he would make the same gestures and speak in the same tongue as in years before, commanding us to be still, changeless as the snows. Always he spoke against love.

Footsore, and with our yellow robes in rags, we came at night to the inns or the deserted temples of other sects. Fires burned. The food collected in begging-bowls was shared equally among the acolytes. Wet robes were hung out to dry. Beside the small fires the acolytes would warm

themselves, naked, dust-stained, covered with the sweat of the journey, not beautiful, with gnarled shaven heads and rough-used hands, for many of them had been farmers. And now, as I remember those years of pilgrimage, I remember chiefly these fires in deserted temples at night and the sweat of young bodies and the unappeasable desires, but the acolytes were often young and sometimes desires sprung upon them suddenly; and sometimes, if the Lord heard of these things, he ordered them to be beaten with whips until no more desire was left in them. Endlessly we walked; and this too in an effort to break the ruthless assault of untamed desires—walking into the limit of weariness, till the feet could be felt no longer, till the body no longer possessed an existence of its own, till we were ash carried by the wind “no one knows where”. And I remember too the early mornings when life flamed again, when the hymns were sung and the acolytes gathered round to listen to him as he spoke softly and earnestly of the blessings to be obtained from the sun, and how the acolytes should train themselves to see clearly the sufferings in all things, and by observing suffering avoid all evils. I could not agree with the Lord. He hated love; I could see no great harm in it, and sometimes I would argue with him, yet knowing that he possessed greater powers of understanding than I.

At such times he would look at me closely, as though not understanding.

“How many years have we been together, Ananda?”

“Forty years.”

“How many years have we been on pilgrimage together?”

“Eight years.”

“How many years have we eaten from the same bowl?”

“Four years.”

“During all those years you have been impenitent, Ananda. You say: We must love, we must have no desires.

But once there is love, there are always desires. How shall we avoid these things?"

"We shall have love without desires, O Lord."

Then he would smile and say: "There is always love without desires, but if the acolytes thought in this way, they would love too hastily. They are deprived of love, they thirst for love, their senses are keen from hunger, they have wandered far and seen many things, their love is strong and might break like water through the flood-gates—how else shall I keep them from loving but by quenching their desires? There is love, certainly, as flowers love. Let them love one another as flowers love one another, but let them not touch one another."

I would turn over a stone: a million black ants would creep out.

"The earth is fruitful, how shall we escape from the fruitfulness of the earth? They mortify themselves——"

"Let them mortify themselves: their senses become clearer, their worship more understanding, their minds more transparent, their souls more footsure——"

I would say: "When they pass through the villages, they see things which make their eyes blaze."

"Then let them not pass through the villages—O Ananda, years ago I called you the Lover. Impenitent you were, and impenitent you remain. Where is the end of impenitence? Like the panting of elephants, like the bellowing in the forest at night is impenitence, but how much fairer is the forest without sounds?"

I could not convince him, and had no desire to make him abandon the path. He was the Lord, wandering through the thirsty land, speaking against desires. The flower bleeds. He would see the flower motionless and unchanging whatever winds stirred: the acolytes unchanging as the snows. I knew it was necessary, I knew that desires eat into the flesh, but I thought that if there was the necessity

for compassion, there was also the necessity for love.

“What is compassion?” I asked. “Is it not the soul thirsting for love? Compassion for the dead, but we ourselves desire to be dead. Compassion for the poor and starving, but we ourselves desire to be poor and to starve. Compassion for the living, since we ourselves desire to be living.”

“That is so,” he said.

“And surely that compassion is like love—for we ourselves desire to be the beloved object.”

“Yet compassion is directed toward spiritual things or spiritual states, but love is directed towards living things, things of beauty and fire, that burn. The acolytes love one another, and some love me, and it is better that they should be like the snows loving only the splendour of the sky above them. Let the mind be fixed on the things that are unchanging, let the acolytes pause in their meditations and become charged with remoteness, being like stones flung in a stream from a high cliff, and let them not touch living things, neither wife nor friend nor child; and let them love the spiritual state of loneliness.”

“And what then?”

“Only this—deeper and deeper, until loneliness becomes an end in itself, and the tree flowers.”

I could not follow him on these heights; whenever I meditated, I was distracted by some passing effort of beauty, some government of the colours of the world. Love kept coming in when I was least aware of it. I would repeat my name over and over again and try to resolve the problem of my own identity, but who was I? Ananda—certainly, but Ananda means love. I was damned or blessed by my own name. And seeking to find some end to these doubts that plagued me, I would say to the Lord:

“It is necessary that there should be women in the community. We are like men without arms or legs without

the presence of women. Is love so dangerous that we must fear it?"

"If women should enter the community, Ananda, would there be peace? The body of a woman is like a spear, and the heart of a woman is like a cage, and the eyes of women are like knives. Women are exceedingly beautiful, and how shall there be peace among so much beauty, since every part of a woman is beautiful. Better fall into the fierce tiger's mouth, or under the sharp knife of the executioner, than to dwell with a woman. I have watched women closely. They have no hearts, like men. They do not suffer, like men. Women are anxious to show their bodies, and whether they are walking or standing, sitting or sleeping, they are anxious that their bodies be seen, and how can men guard themselves? Men are weak. If a woman cries, they must comfort her. But we, if we see a woman weeping, must regard her tears as our most bitter enemies, and when she disarranges her hair and tears her robe, we must ask ourselves why she does these things—for her pleasure or for ours?"

"For both, Lord."

"No, it is always for her own pleasure that she disentangles her hair and comes to us weeping. It is better to be torn asunder than to touch a woman, Ananda, better to be blinded by staring at the sun than to look at a woman, better to die terribly than to stay in the same bed with her, since this also is dying terribly. Be careful, Ananda. Do not talk to me again about allowing women to enter the community."

It was years before I talked to him of this subject again. I had long meditated the frailties of women, and knew how avaricious they were of their own beauty and how they differed from men in the strength of their desires. But I asked myself, were not the *devas* in heaven represented as women, and was not Yasodhara a woman? But the Lord never said they were evil. I would meditate on women

without passion, women who had burnt out their desires and lived only for worship and the escape from the wheel. Such women there were. I have seen them in villages and in palaces, and in the rice-fields coming home so weary that no desire was left in them, and surely, it seemed to me, such women should be allowed to listen to his teaching?

One day I taunted the Lord and said: "You allowed Visakha to present us with a park and a monastery in Savatthi, but she was rich, yet there are poor women who desire to follow in the path of detachment, and even the wives of ministers, and even the wives of kings. A woman has come here, old and white-haired, and desires to enter the Order."

The Lord asked who the woman was, and I answered: "It is the aunt of the Lord, Mahapajapati Gotami, who desires to enter the Order. She was thy nurse and thy foster-mother, and my mother, and she gave thee milk, and when thy mother died shortly after thy birth, she gave thee suck. Why desirest thou to keep her from entering the Order?"

"How dost thou know these things?" the Lord smiled, and yet I noticed that he was frowning: I dared not tell him that Mahapajapati had for a long while been in communication with me, and in her old age desired to be close to her foster-son.

By this time eight simple rules had been introduced into the Order—one should not destroy life, one should not take what is not given, one should not tell lies, one should not drink intoxicating liquors, one should refrain from unlawful sexual intercourse, one should not eat unseasonable food at night, one should not wear garlands nor anoint oneself with perfumes, one should sleep on a mat spread on the ground.

Still frowning, the Lord said: "A woman is capable, Ananda. If Mahapajapati will take upon herself to follow

the eight rules, then let her enter the Order.” The next day I went to visit Mahapajapati at a village near Gaya, where she was staying, offering incense and prayers at the place where the Lord received perfect enlightenment, and told her that in reward for her many virtues, and because she had been his foster-mother, the Lord begged her to enter the Order on condition that she followed the eight rules. She was now an old woman, very tall, and her face was wrinkled like rose-apples; hearing these words she bowed her head and whispered in the tones of someone overcome with grief: “O reverend Ananda, as a young woman places a lotos flower in her hair, so do I receive the words of the Lord, and tell the Lord that I shall obey all the monks, even the youngest of them, and let all nuns obey the monks.” Saying this, she smiled and plucked a lotos bud and put it in her hair and then removed it and threw it in the river; and she did this so charmingly that I began to think of her as a young girl. Then I returned to the Lord, who seemed overcome with a strange fear, asking where I had been, and how she had received me, and whether she had made any womanish gesture; I spoke of the lotos bud, and the Lord seemed grief-stricken. “They are all the same, Ananda,” he said. “It is terrible, Ananda. If there were no women in the Order, then I would know that the Lord’s words would last a thousand years, but now that women have been received in the Order I know that they will last only five hundred years. It is the same with houses, when there are only women to defend them, the robbers steal in. Let them enter the Order, Ananda, but let the oldest and wisest of the nuns always obey the youngest and most foolish of the monks.”

In the same month, in the season of the shedding of leaves, at Vesali, four hundred nuns who had cut off their hair and put on yellow robes and whose feet were swollen, because they had walked barefoot, were allowed to enter the Order; but neither in that year, nor in the following years,

and not until long after the Lord's death were they allowed to follow the pilgrimages.

The bands of disciples hurried down the dusty roads north of Benares; for the rains were over and the time of the pilgrimages had come again. Now there were more young boys than ever among the pilgrims, and the Lord was troubled by their incessant chattering, for though they were clothed in yellow robes and walked barefoot, carrying only a mendicant's bowl, their heads shaven, their long sleeves covering their hands, yet their mouths were uncovered and they cried out to all the passing caravans, and laughed like the monkeys in the forests of deodars and talked in whispers as they squatted in the shade; then, seeing that the older pilgrims had outpaced them, they gathered up their skirts and ran to join in the long winding procession of the Lord's monks.

The rain had swollen the streams; the mangoes at the edge of the grazing-grounds were in full bud. Meanwhile this rumour spread among the youngest acolytes and monks: "The Lord is returning to Kapilavastu, where he was born. There will be more food than we can eat. They will give us new gowns, and costly vessels. Perhaps they will provide us with asses on the journey."

The Lord listened to their laughter, but said nothing, grateful for the calm, the absence of dust, the freshness of the air after the rains. Now more and more monks were following in the path he had laid out for them; the Order was swelling like a torrent in flood; when he entered a city, he entered like a king accompanied by his retinue, armed with begging-bowls and the sword of the law. And indeed, as he walked at the head of the winding procession of monks, he resembled a king more than he had ever resembled a prince in his birth-place, so complete was his authority over his own monks and over the men who received him. There were

no wars at this time. A settled peace had descended upon the plains of northern India. The rice-fields were white and green, and in the marshes the herons waded—and all these were signs of peace. “But I have come to make war,” the Lord announced. “I have come to make war on the desires of the flesh, and still more on the desires of the mind—and let no one believe that my sword does not drip blood.”

The young acolytes turned somersaults, raced through the knee-high ranks of fresh rice, sang under the bulbul trees, and entertained themselves with stories of the coming feasts at Kapilavastu. “Such a great town—towers and minarets and silks floating from the gates; ring-staked stable ponies; three lotus lakes—one green, one red, one black.” Some of the acolytes disappeared in the lank dampness of rice-fields; others followed the girls to the wells; still others sang ribald songs. All these things were related to the Lord, but for some reason he said nothing, and it was noticed that he was filled with a quiet grief, hardly desiring to enter the city which he had left for so long.

“Rahula must be a grown man now,” I said.

“Yes,” the Lord answered. “They say he is tall and strong and given to archery. O, Ananda, this is the worst—I have no courage to see him. They say Yasodhara is still beautiful—I have no courage to see her. Yet I know I must meet them. A man belongs in this life to the place which gave him birth and to those who nourished him; and worst of all the burdens that attach themselves to us are the burdens which come from our birth-places.”

It was one of those autumns when the sky shines like veils of milk; never had the fields seemed brighter. At dawn the *kokils* shouted from the bulbuls; flowers glowed like smoke from coppersmiths’ fires; the rivers were white with fish; the rice-fields were white with buds; there was no dust in the air. When all the acolytes were shouting with pure joy in life, only the Lord was silent. Here there were streams he

remembered, he could see the walls, the forests and the smoke. He knew messengers were on the way to receive him.

“What shall I say to them?” the Lord asked. “I am a wandering mendicant. I am the holy one, the lost one, the one who is abandoned by the roadside. Better to have been born in a ditch—a place unknown.”

He began to talk of his wife and father. The acolytes were silent, for they heard the Lord was stricken with a great grief and it was rumoured that having come in sight of Kapilavastu he was prepared to die. And slowly, as a wave follows another wave, they were filled with an inexplicable regret, a sense of departure, a feeling that they also were about to return to a place of foreboding. There was no explanation for these things. They come silently and mysteriously—those strange movements of the mind which afflict the wandering mendicants, who are like leaves in a storm. I have noticed this many times. A fever will afflict the mendicants, who are so starved and threadbare and worn that they are at the mercy of the least impulses of the spirit—the cry of a bird will send them running or the appearance of a flower will throw them to their knees. In this strange restlessness they waited the approach of the messengers.

The Lord slept. It was afternoon when he awoke. We were not far from the banks of the Red River, which winds among rice-fields. He must have been heavy with sleep, for when he looked around, he seemed not to know where he was.

“Where am I, Ananda?”

“You are near Kapilavastu, O Lord, and lying in a grove of sal trees near the banks of the Red River.”

By this time the messengers had come and were standing some tens of paces away from the Lord, leaning on their spears.

“Is the King in good health?” the Lord said.

“Yes, Lord.”

“And the teacher, Bambuni?”

“Bambuni died during the rains.”

“Is the Queen Yasodhara in good health?”

“She is in good health, Lord, but since you have gone she has heaped mortifications on herself, sleeps not on a bed but on a coarse mat and cares only for her child.”

“Is Prince Rahula in good health?”

“Assuredly he is in good health. He is like the Lord, when the Lord was a child. He is skilful at archery, and even though he is only eighteen years of age, he is more capable than any of the courtiers at chariot-racing.”

“Does Rahula know of my coming?”

“No, Lord, these things have been hidden from him.”

The messenger who was speaking was lean and gaunt, about fifty years of age, and he wore a blue turban. Behind him were the servants and the youths of the bodyguard, boys and men with sunburnt faces, wearing loose robes of gold cloth glittering in the hot sunshine; for though there were dark clouds and the hot rain was falling, the sun still shone.

“Tell me about the King,” the Lord said.

“He is old and infirm, but his mind is still keen and he rules willingly. There have been no wars recently, O Lord, and therefore the kingdom is prosperous.”

At last, as he was about to go, the captain of the guard said: “The feast is prepared in the banqueting hall—all the monks have been invited.”

“The monks are vowed to poverty,” the Lord answered.

“Yes, we had foreseen that,” the bodyguard said sadly. “The King asks you not to beg. If you come through the city, they will say: ‘Here is Lord Siddhartha Kumar, who has come to beg—how is it so?’”

There was no answer, and shortly afterwards the Lord dismissed him. Dust rose in scented columns along the road. The monks were squatting on the ground, either meditating on the circles they made with their finger-nails in

the dust, or else they were talking softly among themselves. They looked thin and wretched in the patched gowns, and some were sick. The Lord said: "In the morning we shall go begging."

It was still early when the Lord entered the city. There was a deathly stillness on the street. We learned that Devadatta had ordered that no honours should be shown to the prince, and none should fill his begging-bowl under pain of death. So he went through the streets, silent and remote from men, and sometimes he looked up and gazed keenly into the eyes of the people who were afraid to worship him. Then at last the people could contain themselves no longer. No longer afraid of death, they ran to the Lord, they shouted, they implored him to return, they spoke tenderly of how they had kept watch on Yasodhara and Suddhodana, and how handsome the young Prince Rahula was; and the Lord noticed that there was no detachment in their friendliness. He looked ill and old as he went down the silent streets; but when they shouted for him, he looked young again. His begging-bowl was filled with clean rice, each person dropping one grain into it; but even so it was overflowing. And then the gates opened very slowly, so slowly indeed that the people were frightened, thinking that the armed guards would pour out, and King Suddhodana came out, leaning on the arm of Sundarananda, and then there was a sudden silence, when even the bells which the beggars were already clapping were stilled. Some guards were ordered to keep the people at a distance, while King Suddhodana hobbled up to the Lord, still leaning on the arm of Sundarananda, who was fatter than ever, yet totally impassive, afraid of giving way to emotion, gazing straight in front of him.

King Suddhodana whispered: "My son, my son, have you no shame to come with your begging-bowl? Is it necessary to beg for food? Do you imagine I would not be

pleased to lay my whole fortune at the service of the mendicants?"

"It is the custom of my race to beg," the Lord answered, with head downcast.

"How so?" Suddhodana asked, overcome with violent emotion. "How so? Thou art a Kshatriya still, and well thou knowest it. No single person of our race has ever begged. Ha, thy shoulders support the world—we are Kshatriyas."

The Lord said: "Father, our family may claim the privileges of Kshatriya descent, but my descent is from the Buddhas of old. The celebration of the Law is not only for this world." And then moving up to his father with tears streaming down his worn cheeks, looking old again, almost as old as King Suddhodana himself, he whispered: "Father, let me share my treasure with you. The treasure I have is the treasure of detachment—let no one be attached to wealth, for wealth passes like beauty, and all things fade, except the perfect detachment of the soul—this alone remains."

Then the King said: "Thou art my son, Siddhartha. My son, thou art my son, my only son, and now I have no son."

Some days later, accompanied by the King, Yasodhara came to the camp, trembling and crying, wearing the yellow robe of a monk, and she knelt before the Lord and touched his bare feet.

Suddhodana said: "Have mercy on her, O Lord. When she heard that thou didst shave thy head, and put on mean garments, or didst eat only at appointed times and then from an earthen bowl, she did the same. Though by the laws she might marry again since thou hadst departed, she did not marry. She slept on an earthen bed, hearing that so thou slept, and often went sleepless, for the nights were long; yet thou didst not think of her sufferings, and thou didst not weep, O son. Though Prince Devadatta came to her, she refused him, saying that she had sworn obedience to her Lord. This I say to you. Thou hast not cared for her in all

the years of thy wandering, nor for me, nor for thy son, Rahula, and when the kingdom was filled with wars and the rumours of wars and when there were treacheries, thou didst not return.”

“I have returned,” the Lord said.

They spoke very quietly, hardly raising their voices above whispers, but when the Lord spoke these words, all the monks heard Yasodhara weeping. Then they noticed, coming from far away, the chariot bearing Prince Rahula. He was slender and handsome, his skin like beaten gold, wearing flowers in his hair and a short white kilt and a vest of jewels, and he moved with the same effortless grace which I have noticed in some animals—the snow-leopard moves in this way, and so did the Lord. Rahula came unaccompanied, except for the driver of his chariot, who was an old man, white-bearded, with sunken chest and the fine eyes of a Kshatriya; and suddenly I saw it was Channa. The Lord said nothing, eyes downcast in the sand, and once he made with his toes a perfect circle in the sand.

Rahula’s voice was clear and sharp: “My father, why didst thou go from me?”

The Lord said: “How didst thou recognise me? Thou wert too young to know me when I left thee.”

Rahula smiled at us caressingly. There was a certainty in his bearing which pleased us all, and the Lord smiled at him.

“Whence comest thou?” the Lord asked.

“I come from the palace to my father for my inheritance.”

“What inheritance?” the Lord asked; and they said (for I was looking at Channa) that a cloud seemed to cross his face and he stepped back a few paces, and then looked at his son again. “What inheritance? There is no inheritance but this one treasure—the treasure yielded to me beneath a fig tree near the river. Dost thou know thine inheritance?”

“Yea, father, I know, but the people are complaining that if all were detached like thee, who would rule the kingdom?”

and they say they rejoice that the kingdom should be mine, now that the King is old, and that I should rule in thy stead with Prince Sundarananda; and they say further that if thou wouldst rule if only for one day the heart of the people would be glad.”

“Better not to rule,” the Lord answered sadly, “better not to have lordship over the whole universe, better not to listen to the words of power, but best of all to be silent in meditation.” Saying this, he went to his son and spoke in whispers with him for some moments; then Rahula took the wreath of flowers from his head and the gold rod and laid them at the Lord’s feet.

From that day Suddhodana, Yasodhara and Rahula were admitted into the Order of the monks.

The Lord stayed in the camp until the rains came. Many times he went into the city and preached there, always bare-foot, always wearing the ragged yellow gown, which was stitched in a hundred pieces. He did not ask that all men should follow the Order, but he asked that they should be detached from their passions. Once the Lord entered the palace to speak to the palace servants. He avoided the places of his youth and childhood, and it was noticed that he went with downcast gaze, afraid that he would recognise some object dear to him. Sundarananda had asked to be admitted into the Order, but the Lord relented and refused to accept him, saying that he ruled justly, had no desire for wealth or fame, practised meditation regularly, and it was good that he should rule.

He had long ago decided not to return to the places of his childhood, for fear they would claim too great a hold on him; therefore he abandoned any thought of going to the forest and visiting the place where he had fought with the snow-leopard. He was a man without a sense of the past, valuing all present things lightly, and not too greatly beloved

of the future. He had no gift of prophecy, but possessed a strange unruly power over animals, and even over men; and sometimes I think he believed that men were only more gracious and more suffering animals. When a monk was sick, the Lord rarely comforted him; but wept if the monk died, saying that the passion of grief was the most difficult of all the passions from which to be detached. He loved above all young children.

We were sad to leave Kapilavastu. The people were handsome and gifted with gentle speech; they spoke little; they drank water from sweet wells; the women were hardy and lithe, not dark-skinned like those of Benares; and so great was the worship of the women for the Lord that they would follow him always, but almost he execrated them, saying that it was a pity he had allowed them to enter the Order; the monks would look at them and grow pale or try to climb on them, and he said: "Too great a passion is too great a sin." And sometimes he would take Yasodhara and Rahula aside, begging them to love all things, lest they love each other and him too much.

During the rains we stayed in huts outside the small village of Sevati, and while the rain drummed on the roofs, we practised meditation and sang songs and prayed that we might be granted Nirvana. It was at this time that messengers came to us, saying that the Kshatriyas and the Kolis were almost at war with one another. For a whole day the Lord remained silent in his hut; then at last he asked his acolytes to prepare some food for him and accompany him to the border. He went barefoot, wearing only his under-vest and long gown; the rains poured down on him, so that the gown clung to his body and turned black with the mud on the road. When he came to the border, he found the Kshatriyas and the Kolis fully armed with war-elephants and mountain ponies, with lances and pennons, yet no war had taken place. The sky had cleared, and

he came among them in his threadbare gown now patterned with dried mud, and they asked: "Who is this wandering mendicant?" and when they heard it was the Lord the confused roar of sounds died away, and a moment later the Kshatriyas, recognising him, threw down their weapons.

The Lord said: "What is the dispute between you? Is it that you love war?"

"No, Lord," they answered, "there is a dispute between us about water, and who should own the dam, and how much water should be released."

"And who owns the water, and how much water shall be released?"

He asked this of the Kshatriya generals, but none knew how to reply; so he asked the Koli generals, who said: "We do not know why we are fighting. We have been told there is a dispute, but we do not know why we are fighting."

The Lord asked them to enquire, and they returned in the dead of night from the capital to say that a certain dam in the mountains was under dispute, the water-rights had belonged to the Koli kingdom for generations and the Kshatriyas were using the water.

"Where does the water come from?" the Lord asked.

They replied: "From the melting snows."

"And who melts the snows?"

"The snows are melted by Indra."

The Lord thought for a moment, his face impassive by the light of the signal fires, and then he stared across the river at the Kshatriyas, who were standing there with black pennons and war-plumes hanging stiff in the wind. At last he said: "What is the value of water, O generals?"

They said: "The value is very little."

"And what is the value of men, O generals?"

"The value is very great."

"Then surely it is better that the dams should be allowed to flow, and the water be allowed to nourish both kingdoms,

for if the value of water is small and the value of men is great, why should you throw away what is of little value for what is great. O generals, hear my words, all wars are like this, and the life of one man is worth all the snows of the Himalayas.”

So they were silent for a long while, and in the morning they departed for the capital.

Many other stories are told of this time, but they are too numerous to relate. They say that Prince Devadatta attempted to kill the Lord with bowmen, and great rocks, and once he sent a wild elephant plunging among the Lord's monks, and those stories are true, but the Lord asked that no one should relate them for fear that hatred for the Prince should be nourished in men's breasts; but so close to death was the Lord that even now, when I am old and have no longer any fear of death, I shudder when I see in my mind's eye the elephant plunging through the small town, and I hear the crackle of timbers and the drumming of the great black beast on the earth, the beast so maddened with pain that it lurched like a wild thing and swung its heavy trunk like a flaying hammer, and there in the centre, where all things are still, the Lord stood, waiting for the oncoming of the beast, impassive and remote from the world, smiling gently, till at last the elephant was healed; then quietly, and with tender words, he led the black elephant back to the forest.

VIII

The Stories of the Lord

OF THOSE YEARS FOLLOWING THE renunciation and the sermon in Benares and the first wanderings, I remember chiefly the dust and the rain. During the rains we stayed in huts and read the *vedas* and

whatever else of the ancient writings were preserved in our libraries; for the Lord insisted on learning, but insisted more on the Eightfold Path, and while the rain pelted the banana leaves and the great grey storm clouds came over the Himalayas we waited patiently for the coming of the October sunshine, when the peacocks blazed in bronze and green and gold and the skies were as blue as the dye with which the northern farmers colour their clothes so that we said of the sky that you had only to dip your hands in it and your skin would be the colour of Krishna. The Lord prayed; the Lord received visitors; the Lord discoursed. But though he spoke gently, the summer months were long and we prayed for the day of release when once more we would go on our journeys. Then, until the rains came again, we wandered wherever the pleasure of the Lord led him.

I remember the morning mists hanging in banners of green and white and gold; I remember the valleys where the air was like must, so old and used that we longed for the mountains; I remember Rajagira with its bare scalded blue rock on which the Lord once preached a sermon of fire, for a bush was burning on a neighbouring mountain; I remember the solitary walks by moonlight between dark avenues of cypresses, and the soft, clayey walks under the noon sun through the paddy-fields, when the stalks were hot to the touch; I remember the banquets and the villages where there was drought, and the long swinging climb to the uplands, when the loins were strained beyond endurance, but still we marched onward, a ragged army without banners; I remember the drowsy camels and the stinking grazing-grounds and the skull of a dead child and the boars sharpening their tusks and blue doves screaming from the dove-cots on our arrival at Malla; I remember the scents and piths and sounds of an endless journey, and the elephants coming through the streets of Kapilavastu with their

hanging embroidered shawls and the *bowdahs* tottering and the men on stilts and with swords in their hands, and the crowding spires of Benares and the Thibetans blowing on their thigh-bone trumpets and the sudden rest at the end of a journey when we pulled off our sandals and rested our feet in boiling water, and the great horned owls and the sounds of a conch at night and the peacocks screaming in the morning. I remember all this so perfectly that I believe that even after I am dead, I must remember them; but more than the heat and the smoking dust I remember the face of the Lord as he walked slowly through this hospitable country, followed by the monks in their yellow robes and all the tattered sunburnt children of the place, and the women blessing him and the men offering him gifts, and the quietness which surrounded him wherever he went, like waves of benediction ceaselessly flowing out of him. We were not shadowy ghosts: we were living men, but we were like ghosts in comparison with the Lord. We followed after him, we picked the crumbs from his table, we leaned on him as old men lean on rocks, and though we recorded the things he said, many of them were left unrecorded, either from the frailty of human memory or because the bamboo strips were lost or because no scribe was present to hear them. There were the early mornings and the evenings when the sound of the crickets was like the banging of drums—these are the times I remember most for they were the times when love reigned in our hearts, but who will say that we loved without detachment? We were young—it was still the morning freshness of the world.

We ran, we bathed, we talked, we wept, we shouted, we sang, we danced through all the northern country. We cooked *chapatis* over small huddled fires, we crowed with the glory of life which sprang in our veins. Our senses, sharpened by hunger and by long journeying, were brittle with excitement, the splendour of being alive, for truly

there is nothing more wonderful than journeying unimpeded through this northern country, and then in the evenings the excitement and the brittleness passed, there were prayers and hours of meditation, while the blue smoke rolled from the camel-dung fires, or else we lay in grass-covered huts and listened to the Lord speaking so quietly and effortlessly that it seemed that his voice was no more than the breathing of his body.

I remember most the evenings we spent by the cooking-fires, not that we took enjoyment in the taste of food but that the evening pleased us with its descending colours. When the shadows fell, we would look out from some roadside hut at the camels kicking up the aromatic branches of shrubs or throwing an evening veil. Sometimes we heard voices from a long way away, and sometimes there were girls singing in the distance.

Such mercy was not to be desired; it came with the ebbing sunlight and the waxing moon, when lying on the grass we listened to the Buddha's stories. He would sit cross-legged, with his hands resting on his lap; and while the stars came out in the frosty brilliance of the night-sky, we listened to the soft imploring voice which spoke of incarnations beyond the wheel of time, when all men would be still, composed within the *paramatma*.

One evening, on the purple scalded rock beyond Rajagira, he told the story of the Gold Maiden; and I shall try to tell it as he told it, asking you only to remember how he sat cross-legged beneath the *neem* trees while the scarlet flowers were falling, with a butter-lamp near his feet and the acolytes sitting round him.

"There was a time," he said, "when a youth called Anitthigandha was reborn into a family in Savatthi possessing great wealth; and this youth, O brethren, was so frightened of women that he would scream if one came near him, and he was frightened even of his mother, so that when

he was being suckled her breast was concealed with a pillow. And this youth grew up, still frightened, his blood curdling even when he saw the maidens going to market in the distance, trembling in every pore even if he saw by accident the portrait of a woman and in no way resembling the monks who pass by a woman as though she was not there.” At this point there would be a low murmur of protest, but the story was resumed. “When the time came for this youth to be married—for, O brethren, in those days all youths were married—his parents came to him and said: ‘Dear son, we wish to arrange a marriage for you,’ and the son answered: ‘Dear parents, I have no use for women—they frighten me so that the hairs of my pores rise whenever I think of them,’ and after they had asked him ten million times he replied at last in desperation: ‘Let there be made out of a thousand *nikkhas* of gold a woman of gold, who will be permanent and unchanging and more beautiful than these country girls, and if there should be found a girl as beautiful as the Gold Maiden, then I will marry her.’ And so the statue was made, and the parents still wanted him to marry, and therefore they gave the image of the Gold Maiden to some wandering Brahmans to take through all the states of the country in the hope of finding a girl of the same beauty. The Brahmans wandered for many years, just as you, O brethren, wander through the country, and at last they came to the city of Sagala in the kingdom of Maddha, and there they found a maiden sixteen years old of surpassing beauty, like the Gold Maiden. Her mother and father had provided chambers for her on the topmost floor of their seven-storeyed palace, and there she lived, attended only by her old nurse; they saw only her face at the small grated window.

“Now one day it happened that the nurse went down to the river to bathe, and though she was dim-eyed she noticed by the side of the house the image of the Gold

Maiden; and thinking that the girl had escaped from her upstairs chamber, she struck the image tenderly and said: 'Go back to your chamber, girl,' but the image made no reply. Then, after striking it again, she perceived that the Gold Maiden was not the maiden she had cared for all her life, but an image made of precious metal, and thereupon one of the Brahmans approached her, asking why she had struck the image, and she replied: 'It seemed to my dim eyes like the maiden in the tower.' The Brahmans were delighted beyond words. They asked the nurse whether it was possible to send a message to the master and mistress of the house because Anitthigandha desired to marry the girl, since she was so beautiful. The nurse nodded, and said: 'Let me tell the master and mistress of the house, and perhaps you may take this girl to be wed.' Now the Brahmans were more delighted than ever, and indeed within a few days they were shown into the great court-yard, where the master and mistress were awaiting them, and there also was the young girl, more splendid in her beauty than the Gold Maiden.

"When Anitthigandha heard of the mission of the Brahmans, and how it was accomplished, his desire always to be separated from women vanished; and in its place there arose an immense thirst for this young girl so great that he cried out with all the strength of his lungs: 'Let her be brought—let her be brought for me—I thirst to touch her.' This message also was conveyed to the Brahmans, who arranged that the girl should be taken to Savatthi in a delicately contrived carriage; but the jolting of the carriage on the rough roads gave the girl cramp, so that shortly afterwards, having ridden only a few miles from her home, she died. The youth waited for her, still thirsting. He sent messengers to greet her. The Brahmans, afraid of the effect on his health, delayed sending him the news of her death, saying she would arrive tomorrow or the day after tomorrow or perhaps a few days later; till at last the news could be no

longer concealed, and he was taken aside and informed that she had died because the axles were ungreased, and the road was too rough. Thereupon the youth fell into so great a grief that he nearly died.

“It was at this time, O brethren, many centuries and *kalpas* ago, that a Teacher was wandering in the neighbourhood of Savatthi, and coming upon the house of the youth Anitthigandha Kumara, he heard wailing and lamentations and the sound of a man beating his hand on his naked breast which is like the sound of a fan clicking open; and wondering at this strange repeated sound, he entered the house and found the grief-stricken parents of the youth, and the youth himself, and they all told him of the Gold Maiden and how he had waited impatiently for her arrival, and how she had died. And now the youth was fasting nigh unto death, and the Teacher said to the youth: ‘Why do you sorrow?’ and the youth replied: ‘Because I shall never see her alive.’ Whereupon the Teacher explained that it was love which created his intense sorrow. Thereupon the youth decided to put away sorrow and follow the fruits of conversion, and no longer to think of love.”

Siddhartha smiled as he ended this story, and for a moment he seemed no longer the Lord, but the slender youth walking among the edges of the rice-fields in Kapilavastu.

He told many stories during our wanderings, and as he grew older, he grew more inventive, he saw stories in all things; and there was no greater delight than listening to his stories. He said that stories should be told simply and charged with the colours of life; and if there was murder, this also should be told simply; and if there was evil, this also should be told simply, as it happened, in the face of the sunlight and in the breath of the human body. If there was grace in the women he described, he would speak of their grace; if there was grace in animals, it was necessary to

speaking of that also; and if there was horror and brooding by night, why then, these things must also be told; and all things, even the girl when the beast leaps upon her at night, even the falling star which struck an old man on the forehead and changed him into an ant carrying an egg, these must be told, not for the sake of the telling, but for the sake of the splendour.

It was in the green cliffs of Buddh Gaya that he told the story of Sundari, one evening in autumn when the monsoon clouds were disappearing in the creamy haze of the sky:

“O brethren, I will tell you the story of the wandering nun Sundari who was unfortunate in her wanderings, for everywhere she went, people would say of her: ‘Your hair is shaved from your head—why not rest awhile, and live with me, and then your hair will grow,’ for she was beautiful according to the men who watched her, and she was accustomed to walk quickly, so that her feet and legs and thighs would show through the gown; and everyone among the men looked at her with frosted gleaming eyes, and all gazed after her.

“One evening, by accident, she came to the monastery where Devadatta was staying, and Devadatta cast covetous eyes on her, and he said: ‘Sister Sundari, why come you here?’ and she said: ‘I come with my begging-bowl.’ Devadatta asked her to come nearer. ‘But is there any necessity to beg,’ he asked, ‘for one who is so well-formed?’ To which she replied. ‘It is not that I am well-formed, but that I am hungry.’ Devadatta said: ‘Of what are you hungry, for all things are provided here.’ She did not understand what he was saying until darkness fell; but in the morning, when she woke up, and Devadatta came to her again, she said: ‘You were mistaken in that I desired this thing—what I desire in the world is holiness. And now I am confused with shame and dare not approach the Lord, and perhaps a child will grow within me, and how shall I

face the other nuns, carrying my begging-bowl.' Devadatta laughed in her face and said: 'For shame, for shame, Sister Sundari, where have you come to? A strange man lay on your bed—is not this a question of shame? But I shall hide you from this shame.' And so, having taken this sister into his house, he summoned the other monks near him and said: 'Now at last we have a way in which we can defame the Lord.'

"You must remember, O monks, that these things happened a long time ago. In those days for a woman to be shamed was indeed something terrible. And so Sister Sundari was perplexed and did not know what to do, and long thought of her suffering, and all the time Devadatta amused himself with his monks and said: 'I have a trick which I can play on the Lord.' 'What is that trick?' the monks asked. 'It is a simple trick,' Devadatta replied. 'I shall tell her that she has only one way of avoiding the terrible issues with which she is faced, and that way is to offer herself to the Lord.'

"So it happened that she would come to the Lord wearing garlands, and bearing perfumes and ointments, with cinnamon, bitter fruits, and so forth, and she would sit at the feet of the Lord and gaze at him entrancingly; and indeed, O monks, she was very tender and beautiful. But though she made caressing movements in the direction of the Lord, the Lord abstained from any intercourse with her, either in speaking or in touching; and soon it came to his ears that when she returned late at night to her own quarters, she would answer the nuns who asked: 'Where have you come from?' with the words: 'I have slept in the bed of the Lord.'

●

"Now it happened that Devadatta heard of these things and was well pleased, but it seemed to him that there remained a method by which he could further defame the Lord, and therefore he said to his secretaries: 'Go kill the

nun Sundari, and throw her body on the pile of withered garlands not far from the cesspool near the Perfumed Chamber of the Lord.' So they approached her at night on her return, and killed her. Then a few minutes later they cried: 'Where is the nun Sundari? Look, we have found the nun Sundari lying bleeding to death on the pile of withered garments near the cesspool and near the Perfumed Chamber of the Lord. Who has killed her? Surely it is the Lord.' Thereupon they laid her body in a litter, and carried her through the streets, saying to all who came near them: 'This is the body of the nun Sundari who slept in the bed of the Lord and who has been killed by order of the Lord, lest the news be told.' And they took her body to the king, who ordered that there should be wailing and beating of gongs, and that her body should be placed on a high platform for all to see; and meanwhile the secretaries of Devadatta went round the countryside informing the people of the evil deed of the Lord.

"But gradually doubts arose in the mind of the king, for the secretaries of Prince Devadatta seemed to be ever in a drinking mood, carousing and whoring and telling stories about the Lord. So the king gave orders that these men should be summoned to him, having heard that they were quarrelling over the money they received. The king said: 'Wherefore do you quarrel?' One of them answered: 'This man here received money from the Prince to murder the nun Sundari, and I helped him, but he gave me no money.' The king asked: 'Why did you murder the nun Sundari—is it the custom to murder wandering nuns?' The criminals bowed their heads, but refused to answer further questions till they were given over to torture, and then at last all became known, the criminals were strangled and the honour of the Lord only increased.

"And at the moment of her death from a dagger-blow the nun Sundari received the fruits of conversion."

One day—it was during the rains, and we were huddled in grass huts on the edge of the forests of Magadha, and the evening was so cold that frost formed on the embers of the fire—he told the story of the executioner. We had seen, as we walked through the forest in the rains, the blackened head of a criminal spiked on a tree, a head with the mouth open and with the beard growing. Near this place the criminal had committed the murder of a young girl. Therefore we were filled with alarm, and wished to escape from the place for fear of meeting the spirit of the girl. So we begged the Lord to move a little further down the road; but he refused. The Lord folded his cloak under him, and said:

“There is no reason to fear the dead, O brethren; nor is there reason to fear murder, since death is murder. O brethren, do not make haste to die; but remember that death is destined, and even the worst of men may attain to Nirvana. Even the strangler, the murderer, the pimp, the cut-throat, the deformed in mind, they may forsake the evil path, and attain to the blessed enlightenment. There was a certain executioner with copper-coloured teeth who was once among a band of robbers captured by soldiers. When he was captured and the soldiers sought to find someone whom they could employ to execute their prisoners, it was this man who hacked off their heads with swords, and lived in finery, and received the clothes of the dead and much *ghee* and many catties of silver for his deeds. He did not repent. Often when he passed down a street, children would run to their mothers, saying that they had seen the man with copper-coloured teeth and were afraid. How many men did he put to death? No one knows, for he was so clean an executioner that criminals from other provinces were brought to him, and their heads were hacked off with a single blow. One or two men were brought to him each day, and sometimes there would be ten men, and sometimes

twenty men, and he always executed his tasks faithfully. Then, as he grew older, he could no longer hack off a man's head with a single blow, but sometimes it was necessary for him to make three blows or even more; so that the people said: 'He is committing the great crime of torture. To execute is perhaps worthy, but to torture is terrible.' So the executioner, who wore garlands of jasmine, was asked why it was necessary for him to use torture, and he replied: 'I am growing old and weak, and my hand is not as steady as before.' Thereupon a youth was employed for the purpose, and the executioner was asked to teach the youth. This he performed splendidly and in all the years of his life the youth always executed the criminals with a single blow. And did this executioner attain to Nirvana? Assuredly, O monks, he attained to Nirvana, for in his retirement he gave comfort to monks and preached the Eightfold Path and obeyed the laws of the kingdom and did much for the families of those he had executed. Therefore, O monks, remember that the least worthy according to the ways of the world may attain to Nirvana, and the greatest must sometimes go through an infinite cycle of births before they reach this height."

Truly there was no greater glory than to wander over this northern country listening to his stories. He grew older, but the stories remained and it was never necessary to tell the same story twice. So we wandered through the land all our days, singing praises, listening to the Lord, though the rains fell or the heat grew worse and the sand stiffened on our faces; and always there were hymns of thanksgiving for his coming, and always on the long roads there were clouds of dust. Sometimes we whispered among ourselves: "The Lord is growing older—perhaps he will not live for ever." But to the end he was young and gay, except during those last weeks when a settled gravity of manner made us afraid that he would pass, as all men pass, leaving only their foot-

prints in the dust. Now in this evening, while the lamp in the wicker-basket still burns in my cell and he gazes at me from the corner, I must gird myself to relate patiently the manner of his death.

IX

The Lord Comes

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS WHEN MIST comes rolling down the Himalayas, and the scent of pears hangs heavily in the air. The sky seemed like an immense fruit raining down drops of sweet juice, and I remember as we walked slowly along the edge of the forest, we would pause and gaze at the kites wheeling in drowsy circles in the blue air; and taking up our yellow skirts in our hands, we would drop to our knees beside the brackish pools and slake our thirsts. The rains were over. Once more we were setting out on pilgrimage, but now we walked more slowly, for the Lord was ageing.

He was still tall and strong, his eyes were still blue, there were no wrinkles on his face, which had grown fuller and heavier with the passage of years. In his bright yellow gown he looked younger than many of the acolytes, and his eyes were keener. I would stay by his side for hours, marvelling at his declining strength which seemed but an increase of majesty: for never had he appeared so tender to us all.

Sometimes I noticed him trembling. There would be an involuntary movement of his hands, as though he was warding off a blow, and then shortly afterwards he would lean against a rock or find support on the shoulders of one of the acolytes, and say nothing for a little while, facing the sun, not weak or spiritless but as though he

was being compelled to grapple with forces which were greater than him. Such things had never happened before: he seemed puzzled by them. Once he said: "You must have no pity for me, Ananda, nor any love. The time has come when I must go on my last pilgrimage." A little while later he said: "You must have no pity for the dead," and this was a word he used so rarely that I became frightened.

Sometimes, too, he seemed not to talk coherently. There were some horses playing in a field of cotton-grass, and when he noticed them he said: "The sun strikes, and the ring-streaked and piebald ponies run in circles." And then, another time, when we were sheltering beneath high rocks against the sun's heat, he said: "The sun is our mother—we must learn to suck her paps and open her thighs." He talked more quietly than ever now, and fell into strange silences, from which he would be aroused by the fall of a petal or the scream of the monkeys. He laughed only once during that long morning, and that was when, having admired one of the grey-whiskered monkeys hanging on the boughs, the acolyte ran up the tree and gathered it screaming in his arms.

"Is this for me?" the Lord said. "Look how quietly it comes."

And indeed the monkey was quite silent now, and he blessed it, and it was allowed to return to the tree, and there was no more chattering. And so we turned in the direction of Kusinara along a dusty road where, as afternoon melted in evening, we watched caravans laden with spices and scented timberwood coming down from the north, bronze kettles glistening in the decaying sun, and already we smelt the clean air of the Himalayas which rushes headlong down these valleys. I remember this evening. I remember how he blessed the caravans, and I remember his voice—how in the last days he would speak words like "love" and "death" and

“the wheel of the law” as he never spoke them before, and sometimes, even to the people in the caravans, he would say strange things: “Remember, brethren, till your fields in peace, and do not fear anything, for in the fields there is no fear.”

I think that during those last days he began to love men more than ever. He would gaze at people for a long time, lost in thought, as though he saw something in them he never noticed before. That evening, when the caravans were quiet in the hired field, he saw a girl putting a child to her breast, which was full and veined with green veins as large as ropes; and seeing her against a background of ripe maize, he said to himself: “Her veins are suns,” and then went over to talk to the girl, enquiring after her health, her husband, her children; and receiving answers to all these things he returned more carefree than he had been for some time, talking of the beauty of the child whom he had seen sleeping while drinking milk.

At night small red fires glowed on the camping-grounds, and he would warm his hands by these flames of cattle-dung and speak to merchants, old women in rags and small naked boys. The wind dropped: the thick smell of cattle-dung filled the air; through the smoke of camp-fires we watched the women coming down to the river to bathe.

Then night came, and the bats flung themselves screaming with high-pitched voices round the fruit trees. It was one of those nights when the expectation of moonlight is almost as blinding as the full moon, and you can feel the silver coming up over the mountains. It was dark, the trees lost colour, there was little movement in the camp, yet you knew that a few moments later there would be a blinding light from over the mountains. The Lord was restless, wandering from one caravan to another, lifting up his skirts in the dust, speaking quietly to whoever cared to listen to him, inhaling deeply the smoke-filled air. When I found him at last, the Lord

said: "How restless the world is tonight, Ananda. Even when they sleep, they are sighing and tossing about." His mind must have travelled back to his youth, for he went on: "I have seen a beautiful girl lying asleep, naked, as white as bleached satin, and when she was asleep I thought she was dead."

I noticed at that moment a herd-boy sleeping in the shadow of a thorn-bush, a boy blackened by the sun, with a wreath of grasses on his brow, and picking the boy up in my arms I said:

"O Lord, he is sleeping. Surely he has escaped for a while from the wheel."

The Lord, seeing that the boy was about to awake, lifted him into his own arms and whispered:

"Then let him sleep. When he wakes, he will weep at the moon."

At that moment the boy awoke, drowsy with the heat, with great eyes like coloured stones, and noticing that he was being lifted in the arms of an old man, he became frightened and would have slipped ecl-like from the Lord if he had not been held tightly. The Lord dropped him slowly to the ground, saying: "It is given to few to speak to the Lord, but he has spoken, and he will escape from the wheel and become a saint, and become more famous than any of my disciples."

"How is that, Lord?"

"He will become a great king, and he will worship at my throne, and whatever he says shall be engraved on bronze, and he will be so great that there will always be a shining about him."

He said this quietly, as though with regret, and meanwhile the child crept away like a snake, his blackened skin shining silver in the faint moonlight which was gradually rising, and then he hid under the great silver udder of one of the cow-buffaloes grazing in the camp.

By now all the people on the grazing-ground were asleep except for the watchman who beat small bells with a wooden clapper. The moon rose, shining on the craggy tips of the Himalayas, turning them black and silver; and all things were black and silver, even the tent-ropes and the horses. On such a night, I have noticed, people smile and talk in their sleep; but the Lord could not sleep, and continued to walk slowly round the camp. Once, in the clear moonlight, I saw him gazing down at a girl of about eighteen years who had escaped from the caravan to seek coolness and shelter under a sal tree. The Lord was saying: "The night is long for those who keep watch, and long is the road for the weary, and longer still for the foolish is the path of rebirth. She is crying for her lover, who has forsaken her and who sleeps now with a dancing girl in Benares. Let her therefore cry no longer, but ascend to Nirvana." At that moment I thought I saw a little tongue of gold flame escape from the parted lips of the girl, and when he bent down to touch her hands, he felt they were cold.

"Is she dead, O Lord?" I asked.

The Lord nodded.

"But it is not I who killed her," he said. "She died at this moment because of the heat and because her heart was parched of love." A little later he said: "Man gathers flowers, his heart is set on pleasure, death comes upon him like the floods which pour through a village, and he is swept away. It is better not to love, Ananda. From love comes sorrow, from love comes fear. Whoever is free from love, for him there is no sorrow. Therefore you must not lament the girl who died in the moonlight."

"Must all things die, O Lord?"

"We have spoken about this often, Ananda. Men die, and their coming is as mysterious as their deaths——"

The Lord pointed to a disused well which lay on the edge of the grazing-ground. A cold wind came down the

mountains, and instinctively I leaned forward to fold the Lord's dress more tightly round his shoulders. The Lord smiled, and gently brushed me away.

"Do not think of the girl who died," he said in a quiet tone, and now that the moonlight played around his face I saw that he was filled with grief for the death of the girl. "Do not lament her, do not lament the long nights: for the sun rises in the morning, and she will be there. I shall die in sight of the Himalayas, and whether it is now or whether it is later is a matter of indifference to me. It is better not to love, Ananda, and though you persist in loving me, it is better that you should love nothing that is animate. Love trees, love mountains——"

"I am cursed with loving, O Lord. How shall I escape from it?"

There was no answer. The Lord smiled, sitting on the edge of a well, and sometimes he would look out across the grazing-grounds at the distant silver mountains, and he said nothing, and seemed to be asleep; but I knew he was not sleeping, and so I remained there, watching him until dawn came, running down the slopes of the Himalayas like a sheet of flame.

Then the caravans awoke, the dust rose, birds cried, the earth teemed with scented fruits and the peasants went out into the maize-fields, clad in stiff blue, a morning like a million others, yet for us it was a morning which we feared, for the Lord was shivering after his long vigil by the well and the acolytes complained that he was not taking care of himself—he should at least have allowed them to wrap him in a blanket. He seemed to be deep in thought, rarely taking his eyes away from the Himalayas. "All—all is the gift of the snows," he murmured, saying the word over and over again. And he went on continually repeating these words and looking up at the snows.

In the morning the people, the trees, the mountains, the

insects—everything was alive and quivering with life. The little grey lizards with their almond-shaped black eyes, the foaming buds of the sal trees, the blue, flooded rice-fields, the silver streams—all these were glittering with life, but the Lord was dying. He could still walk, but he was shaking with fever, and once again he did something strange which neither I nor any of the disciples understood. As we were walking in the direction of the grove of Pawa, I remember how he picked up some dust from the earth and allowed it to trickle through his fingers, while the sun shone on it, and while the last little fountain of dust fell away, he looked up and smiled, saying: “Do you understand now, Ananda, why the young die?”

So we went on, walking slowly, not meditating, watching the landscape as it passed before us—a camel grazing on a thorn-bush, a girl bathing her feet among the minnows of a chalk-stream, the blue flash of a kingfisher over a pool. The air burned. There seemed to be no shadows. There is something in a pilgrimage which gives solace to the soul: we watch uninterruptedly and our watching is like a meditation or like a prayer. And what was strange was that nature was being shown to us in all her glory—never had there been such freshness in the air. Every ripple of the streams, every gold-dusted grain, every leaf and bud and flower shone bright and clear. There were moments indeed when the perfection of the day seemed to be about to overreach itself, and there were moments when the sheer beauty of the world around us seemed to contain the seeds of some shattering end, as a reflection in a lake may be shattered by a stone thrown negligently by a boy. Perhaps it was the glitter from the Himalayas which caused this curious effect of an inherent impermanence, but some of us believe that it was the sunlight shuddering at the approaching end of the Lord. So would the Lord die, I told myself, gazing at the heavy face of the Lord which one of the acolytes had

crowned with purple sephali flowers. "Already the Lord is becoming like a flame, there is already a brightness in his blue eyes, and truly in old age he has become tempered like steel. He is an avenging flame, but there will come a time when even this bright flame is invisible, so bright that it cannot be seen by mortal eyes. And yet he hates love and prefers solitude, and for their own sakes he kills those who have suffered. The herd-boy he did not kill, but he killed the girl whose heart was breaking for her lover. Must one come to life and others go to death because he chooses? And who is he to choose, even though he burns like a flame?"

Yet though I was disquietened by the doings of the Lord, and often wished I was not bound by so great a love for him, never had I felt so great an affection for the old man who walked alone, a little ahead of the dancing acolytes, down the dusty road. It was noon; the peasants in blue loin-cloths were returning from the fields, and already the acolytes were seeking shelter from the flies in the shade of the forest.

Everything was motionless, the heat rose, the wild boars who could be heard sharpening their tusks all morning were silent at last. The Lord pointed to the sun, which threw no shade.

"The sun is still," he said, "and soon I too shall be still. But, dear brethren, we must walk a little longer together. The elements are fierce to dying men. Therefore I beg you, be fierce to yourselves, be like the sun which burns itself to give light to men. Be a torch unto yourselves. Let truth be your torch and refuge, and seek no other. He who either now or after I am gone shall be his own sun, his own torch and his own refuge shall be my true disciple and I shall have faith in him."

The grove where we were taking shelter was known as the grove of Pawa. The sal trees there were no more than striplings, young and green, but recently planted. Here

streams ran white over pebbles, and there were small wattle huts erected far from the road. Orioles were singing in the mango trees, and sometimes their yellow tail-feathers brushed the face of the Lord, who was sunk in meditation and did not feel them. Suddenly, looking up at the sun through the leaves, the Lord said: "It is late, the time for harvesting has gone."

I answered: "It is only now, O Lord, that the harvest has begun."

"Nevertheless," the Lord answered, "the harvest is ending. For many years I have eaten each day the grain which the earth produces. Am I not therefore a harvester?" Then seeing some children playing naked in a pool, he said: "They harvest for love. If they must love, let them love only the earth. The love of lovers is terrible, but the love of the earth and of children—these will remain and lead to perfection. The fruits of the earth are innocent——" There fell to the earth at that instant the little white burnished cup from a sal tree, still sticky to touch, and one of the acolytes lifted it up and offered it to him; and he began to talk of the life of the little seed-pod, how it had grown on the branch, how it rejoiced in the sun and how the wind broke the little green stem, and then how it fell superbly to the earth, and he ended: "So do they love the earth, the little seed-pods, and so also should you love the earth. There is no passion between these little seed-cups, no sorrow comes to them except the sorrow of old age, and this seed falls where the wind listeth. So should it be with men." And then pointing to the green lotoses in the pools where the children were playing, he said slowly and deliberately: "As a lotos rises with its flowers, some blue, some white, springing out of the water, rising up to the surface of the water, and the water does not moisten their blossoms, so shall those who follow the Way in my light spring from the earth, and the earth shall not harm their blossoms. Be like the trees and the

flowers. Seek holiness, be intent on holiness, in holy haste seek after the sun.”

Meanwhile the acolytes were fanning him with the leaves of *kurchi* flowers dipped lightly in streams, so that the silver spray glistened. The acolytes in the great heat had hung their robes round their waists, and now the sun shone on their bronze shoulders and long waving arms; and they listened to the Lord's words like men drugged by the heat. And some of us, listening to the dying intonation of his voice, sometimes prostrated ourselves, feeling that there were not many moments which remained, and sometimes we would leave him and wander away into the neighbouring villages, crying: “The Lord comes! Give him the sweetest rice and the richest milk!”

It was an hour after noon when the Lord awoke again, and the sun still shone on his face and on his wasted shoulders and on his chest-bones. He looked sick, sicker than I had ever seen him. But just at that moment we heard the sound of a flute-player, a sound so menacingly sweet that the Lord opened his eyes and said: “Have I been received in Heaven already?”

“No, Lord,” we answered, “it is a flute-player in the forest or along the road who plays to pass the time.”

“Then bring him to me that I may see him. Truly he sings like the saints in Heaven.”

Accordingly acolytes were despatched in search of the flute-player, and it was a long time before they returned. The Lord waited impatiently. It seemed to us that the voice of the flute-player came from all directions, now from the east, now from the south, now from the west, now from the north; and sometimes he seemed to be playing by our sides. At last he was brought to the Lord, and we were astonished by his beauty. He was a youth garlanded and naked, with hair falling like grape-clusters over his shoulder, lithe and strong, well-formed, with long legs and hands so fine that

they seemed to be carved out of jade; and in appearance he was as the Lord was in his youth, but wilder and more ragged. The boy's eyelids were painted blue, his mouth with carmine, and the wreath of tasselled *sephali* blossoms lay askew, so that his forehead resembled a new moon. He was so handsome that the acolytes whispered among themselves: "He is like Krishna or like the bird Kunala . . ."

"Who is he?" the Lord asked, for even he seemed surprised that anyone should be so beautiful.

But the youth said nothing. He was insolently silent, laughing quietly to himself, looking down at the Lord, who lay in the tiger posture on the grass. All the monks were robed in yellow; the youth alone was naked. Holding a small blue flute to his dreaming lips, he stood there insolently before the Lord, while the sunlight flowed over his ivory shoulders.

"Who are you?" the Lord asked softly, though he knew.

"I am the flute-player from Magadha," the youth answered.

The Lord paused for a while, blinded by sunlight and looking at the slim body of the stripling with the blue eyelids.

"Why do you play on your flute?" the Lord continued. "You know that you have enchanted my acolytes, so that they no longer listen to my teaching." He went on: "I have known many people from Magadha, but none who sang so well on the flute. Tell me why you play—is it in honour of my dying?"

"I play to amuse myself," the boy answered, "and to honour the god Krishna. I play because it is autumn and the sal trees are in flower. I play because the Lord is dying, but not in honour of his dying." The Lord sighed, and the innocent youth went on: "Everywhere, O Lord, in the cities, they are preparing festivities; everywhere people are preparing for the day of your death. The dancing girls and

the merchants are preparing, and the old women by the caked-earth ovens, and the clowns and princes—they are all preparing, for they say that when the Lord dies, the earth will be given over to love, and no more shall we have to obey the Lord who tells us to hide our desires.”

The Lord said: “Desires end in sorrows.”

The boy shook his head, smiled and lifted the flute to his lips.

“Nevertheless there are no other joys,” he said. “You have taken our joys from us, you have said that all our desires are a burning, and yet we prefer to burn. O Lord, you have forgotten love, you have made love terrible, you have said that even the love of the young is terrible, and it is not so. Therefore, when the Lord dies, there will be feasts and love-making. Listen, O Lord. You say that men are burnt to ashes when they love, but I say that men become flowers. You say that men perish in love, but I say that men are born again to love. And that is why I sing on my flute through the countryside.” And he went on: “I was made for love, and there is nothing else—that is why I paint my eyes and walk around naked, like the god Krishna. The body of a girl is filled with love, and the body of a youth is filled with love, and there is nothing else. Are the birds in the trees innocent of love? Are the snakes in the grasses innocent of love? Oh, we know that everything must be paid, there is suffering and the heart drowns sometimes in the tides of love, but how else shall we live, O Lord, except in the heart of love?”

The Lord answered: “Fruitfulness is worse than barrenness.”

“How so, O Lord?”

“Because fruitfulness is an outward splendour, and barrenness is an inward splendour, and which is more beautiful—the snows of the Himalayas or the cities that cluster at her roots?”

“Surely the snows of the Himalayas . . .”

“But the snows are barren, and at peace, and the fire does not burn in its hearths, for it has no hearths, and the snows are like flowers, but do not propagate themselves, and there is peace in the snows and no peace in the cities of men.”

“Yet there is peace sometimes,” the youth answered.

“Yes, there is peace sometimes,” the Lord said sadly, still lying in the tiger posture, still looking up at the youth who held the flute to his mouth. “But at what price do we obtain that peace you speak of? A dreamless sleep, like the sleep of the beasts, after sweating and writhing. Is it beautiful to sweat and writhe? Is it beautiful to lick a woman as a beast licks the grass? Is it beautiful to be burning? The whole earth is labouring, and the whole earth is burning. Oh, you are young. You do not know the price of all this burning. You are beautiful, and such beauty is always a burning. You have killed with your beauty. Even now there is a maid of Magadha who is hanging herself on the roof-beam because of your love. She was young. She adored you. You went away, saying you would return, but you never returned. Do you remember her?”

“Yes, I remember her, O Lord.”

“Then play for me—play for me the song of the sweating and writhing, play the song of the girl who climbs on a ladder with a rope round her neck, whose tongue is burning, whose eyes start from their sockets, whose face grows red and then purple and black, and whose hairs . . .”

Suddenly the boy fell on his face before the Lord.

“Even so does love perish in the dust,” the Lord murmured, gazing down at the boy who was weeping in the dust and touching the feet of the Lord, and sometimes gazing up imploringly. “No sound comes from your flute, and no voice comes from your heart to save the young girl, who is hanging from the roof-beam of her father’s house in

Magadha with her red tongue protruding from her mouth. The tongue protrudes from her mouth, the eyeballs protrude from her sockets, she is swinging on the rope and no one hears her.”

“What can I do, O Lord, to save her?”

“Put away your beauty, put away your insolence, become a monk, join the Order, pray for the souls of the damned, refuse to enter Heaven until the last soul has been admitted into Paradise, and always pray, always pray——”

“I am praying, Lord.”

“But you have not yet put away your beauty.”

“How can I put it away? How can I destroy what has been given to me?”

The Lord gave him a knife.

“What shall I do with it, O Lord?”

“It is already almost too late. Her tongue is becoming green with hatred, she smells the gates of death. If you must save her, save her quickly——”

He took the knife and threw the flute away. He looked at the Lord for a moment as though undecided, while the acolytes crowded around, and no one spoke. The Lord lay there in the tiger posture with his eyes closed. We were all waiting. We were all looking at the youth, at the fair skin silver with sweat, the hand trembling, the hair falling in grape-clusters. Never have I seen anyone so beautiful, for he was exactly like the Lord in his youth. He held the knife, and suddenly he inserted the sharp blade in his cheek and with both hands pulled downward with all his strength, making a wound through which we could see his teeth; and pulling so heavily that we were afraid he would break his jaw-bone. His knees were trembling and running with sweat. His breath came in short gasps. He pulled the knife out and slashed the other cheek, then he slashed his lips, his thighs and his chest, and his hands were jerking, and he was laughing uncontrollably, and all the time he was

looking at the Lord. But the Lord lay there in the tiger posture with his eyes closed.

“What else, O Lord?” he asked imploringly.

The youth fell in the dust, writhing a little, sometimes jerking his hands into a fresh knife-thrust, while the blood spurted from a thousand places in the sunlight. He was more beautiful now, he was more beautiful than he had ever been, though already he was scarred and swollen, and we could see the teeth through the great holes in his cheeks.

“Have mercy, have mercy,” he kept on groaning. “Have mercy on her, O Lord. Take her away from the roof-beam. Lord, Lord, have mercy!”

Saying this, he struck his head repeatedly in the dust and rolled in his own blood, as a sick pig rolls in its own vomit, but still he was beautiful, and still he attempted to slash himself with the curved knife, which was used for cutting fruit from the trees.

The Lord took pity on him and smiled tenderly.

“She is dead,” he said, “but she is coming to life again. She lies there, with her hair covering her face, and her father stands over her, and she is breathing again. Return to her. She is still living.”

The youth arose slowly, like someone who has awakened from a dream, spitting blood and looking at the Lord, as though he could not believe that the Lord’s words were true.

“Go to her, comfort her,” the Lord said. “Return, return, everything is forgiven you. Take up the broken flute, comfort her, but not with love. Tell her there is another love——”

“What is that, O Lord?”

“It is love for all created things, not only for one thing; it is love which is humble, not proud; it is love which is calm, without sweating and writhing; it is love which inflicts no pain——” He went on: “It is love which is dead and born again.”

And it was strange then to watch the naked youth standing there while the blood crept away from his wound, smiling a little and clenching the teeth against the pain; and suddenly he lifted the broken flute to his lips and played a strange song on it, for the air came through the holes in his cheeks; and the song was low and sad and wild, and as he played on the flute the tone grew bolder and yet not passionate, summoning all the acolytes to listen to him, so low it was, and so wild in its melancholy. It was a song which he must have made up for this purpose, a song for the monks and the priests and their long nights, a song for prayer and quiet contemplation and for the bitterness of loneliness which comes to the monks at times. And when he had finished, he wiped the spittle away on the grass, and already his wounds were healing.

“She is saved now,” said the Lord. “She hears you, and perhaps it is good that a boy should know love, but only once. For the fire which burns must be known if it is to be quenched.”

And still the boy was there, playing quietly on the flute. The sun began to slant through the leaves of the sal trees, throwing purple shadows around the red body of the youth, and the Lord whispered to me:

“Look at this youth who plays for me and offers me his beauty. Look at him! How delicately he sings. Previously he sang of love, and now he sings my approaching end. Is it not strange, O brethren, that a youth in whom love still flows should sing for the dead? Yet he who has conquered the flesh and remains beautiful, possessing in his heart the love for the all, whose desire is without bitterness because it is desire for the all, surely he will attain Nirvana. Once I was a youth like him and played the flute and tamed the animals in the forest. But I saw the dead and the suffering, I changed my garments of silk and flowers for the skins of wild beasts, I covered myself with rags from the charnel

house on which pieces of flesh were still hanging, I clothed my nakedness in strips of bark, in grass and in leaves, with a patch of some wild animal's hair or the wings of an owl. I was the 'thorn-sided one', who lived on the roots of dead trees, letting my hair grow long, living silently and morosely in the places where the bats scream. For many years I suffered my body to waste away. But the body is gentle, O brethren," and here the Lord raised his voice and went on: "But it is wrong to let the body waste away. What grows naturally like a leaf must be allowed to shine like a leaf and perish like a leaf, and what is splendid must remain splendid, and what is living and beautiful must remain living and beautiful, and nothing must come between us and their beauty. Look at the flute-player! Even now he is beautiful. How negligently he sang, and how beautifully he stood among the leaves; and nothing is lost, even when he cuts himself with knives. Be like the leaves, and be like the sun which gives forth light, and do not forget the flute-player from Magadha."

So the Lord spoke, and an acolyte offered the flute-player a yellow robe to cover his nakedness and his wounds, but already the wounds were healing with thin golden crusts, and already the young flute-player was smiling. And the Lord continued: "Learn from him, O brethren, who smiles at us as enchantingly as he smiled once for the girl at Magadha, and yet he has no physical desire for her any more, and the time of sweating and writhing is over. His heart is not torn with grief, though he knows that he will soon cease singing for the girl and instead he will sing for the sake of all suffering things, and they too will lie in his arms; and a time will come when he will be silent, an old mendicant, toothless and alone, with feet cut by thorns, wandering round the countryside with a begging-bowl. This time will come to all of us. O, look at the soft down on his cheeks and on his legs, how handsome he is, and his

clusters of falling hair and the golden scars, and then look at your own shaven heads and your skulls which are like the skulls of the dead. Once I, a yellow-haired boy passing into manhood, shaved off my hair and beard and put on a yellow robe and went wandering in the world, and all this was in vain except that I prayed for the beauty that would torment men with no 'desires, and this beauty I have found, O monks, in the young flute-player from Magadha who will sing for my death!"

Saying this, a light shone on the Lord's face—perhaps a trick of the sunlight, which is always strong in the long autumn afternoons, or perhaps it was the glow of praise from the thunder-headed gods. He paused and looked for a while at the face of the wounded youth, and said: "He is fair, O monks, and it is good that there should be fair youths. But let no woman desire him for his beauty. Let him mortify himself, let him be barren, let him watch the snows, let him so cultivate his body and his mind that he is not fruitful in one woman but in all women—and then let us praise him and heap flowers around him, for flowers have no desires. O monks, remember the earth and her fairness. And let us praise the flute-player, who has become a monk and who will live among us."

Afterwards he slept, not dreamlessly, for sometimes he stirred uneasily in his couch of grasses; and we knew his strength was failing. The flute-player knelt by his side; and the acolytes knelt by him; and the thunder-headed gods. There was a whistling in the air, as of wind, and great clouds coming over the Himalayas; and it was all as we expected, the stillness of the air and the perfumes around him.

"The Great Lord will disappear among us in fire and torment, and there will be sadness and rejoicing on the faces of the young; and in old age he will be like a young hunter, and in sleep he will be like a woman; and we shall know his passing by the music of the thunder-headed gods."

I do not know where I learnt these lines, but I remember that they were in my mind at the time. All that afternoon we lay drowsily on the edge of the forest, watching the Lord and wondering how soon it would be before he entered the Tusita heaven.

Then, a little later, when he had awakened, we saw a small procession coming down the road. There was an old man, bearded, with square shoulders, dressed like a merchant; and behind him came servants bearing trays of some precious metal and piled high with delicacies. The Lord awakened and watched them, sighing.

“Why do you sigh?” I asked.

The Lord whispered: “He is bringing me my death.”

The old man came nearer. We could see his leathery face, his black oiled beard, his bright eyes, the wives and concubines following him. This too was as we had expected. I do not know why, but it seemed that their march from the city with the heaped piles of food, and the gold vessels, was something predestined, inevitable, something which we all recognised as forming part of the Lord’s death; and yet none of us dared speak. We watched them coming nearer, until we could see the gold anklets of his wives and his great face coming steadily on, a face blackened by the sun and coarsened by the rain, though he was a rich merchant from the city.

“Who is it?” the Lord whispered.

“It is Chunda the goldsmith,” Assaji answered.

The Lord said: “It is Chunda who made this grove that the mendicants might have rest on their journeys. Therefore we should be grateful to him.”

The goldsmith must have heard, for he smiled, showing gold teeth, and then he came forward with his offerings.

“To the Lord be all praise,” he said quietly.

The Lord said: “In my name, and adoring my name, you have erected this grove for the wandering mendicants. To

you will come many gifts, O Chunda, and your name will be celebrated over the earth.”

The goldsmith stood there, surrounded by his wives, his concubines and his children, not understanding the Lord's words, silently contemplating the Lord and making his offerings.

The Lord looked at the still-smoking food, the bear's fungus, the sweetmeats, the olives and the edible roots; and then seeing the monks looking at the food which had been brought, the Lord asked them to come nearer and taste the food, and himself took some of the bear's fungus, and himself lifted it to his mouth. Meanwhile the goldsmith said:

“Is it true that the Lord is dying?”

“Even now I am dying,” the Lord answered, “and it is you who have brought me my death. But have no fear. As the weary man in the evening, after hunting in the forest, closes his eyes, so I too shall close my eyes. Is the huntsman to have no rest? And would you deny me so small a pleasure as dying?”

At the time no one could understand these words. We thought the Lord was delirious. We saw him eating, we saw the blood come back to his cheeks, we heard his deep voice, and all the while we were surrounded by these perfumed wives and concubines, and the gold plates shone in the sun, and the monks were hungry.

“I had hoped the food would bring you life, O Lord,” the goldsmith said. “Never before have I seen the face of the Lord. They said his head was still fair though he was old, and that I know to be untrue, for it is white indeed. They said his eyes were bright blue, and that also is untrue: for they are darker than lead.”

“This happens with the eyes of all old men who have looked long at the snows,” the Lord answered.

And then suddenly and inexplicably there was silence, a deep resounding silence such as sometimes falls on the

monks during their pilgrimages. For the space of a journey across a rice-field, no one murmured, or whispered, or said anything at all. Then the Lord said: "O Chunda, you have brought me the most valuable of all possessions. Now go in peace. Speak peaceably to all men, live righteously, love your kinsmen. Remember, when the Lord calls you to the silence of the snows, the gift that you have given me will be given you."

Thereupon the Lord dismissed him, we watched the goldsmith and the wives prostrating themselves in the dust, we watched them as they returned through the dust to the city, and once again the Lord slept. There was a heaviness about him that was frightening. He slept like a child, in a deep heavy sleep, his breathing very loud and regular. "He sleeps now," said Assaji, "and no one knows when he will awake."

But in the evening, once again and against everyone's expectation, the Lord awoke. There was a heaviness still, but he looked refreshed. He summoned the flute-player to him, and for a long while spoke to the youth in whispers. The youth had shaven his head and wore the yellow robe of a monk, and there were still great gashes in his cheeks; and after dismissing him, the Lord listened to him playing on his flute through the forest.

Once more the pilgrims made their way in the direction of Kusinara. The cavalcade of monks moved slowly onward to the clicking of beads and the swirl of hot dust. We walked in loneliness, our eyes half-closed, immersed in meditation, hardly noticing the darkening shade or the naked buffalo-boys who were glazed black by the sun, or the lemon-coloured rocks. Once I said: "You should rest, Lord. Evening has come."

The Lord answered: "I am thirsty. Bring me water to drink from the sweet wells."

At sunset we saw the towers of Kusinara.

“I have seen the towers of Kusinara,” I said.

The Lord bent his head in prayer.

“Are they far?” he said.

“No, Lord, they are near.”

“That is well. Outside the east gate of Kusinara, I shall ascend to the Tusita heaven.”

I said: “Then let us delay our journey. Let the light of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, still shine a little longer among men.”

“The light has shone long enough, Ananda,” the Lord answered. “Just as, after many *kalpas*, the light of the sun shall cease, and just as, after many *kalpas*, the Himalayas shall sink into the sea, so, after many *kalpas*, the Lord shall arise again.”

The sun was setting along the great drifts of snow. The Lord lay down and covered his face with his robe and prayed silently for a while before receiving cool water from the monks. He complained of a burning heat, and shivered with fever. It was growing dark. Like shoots of flame, the Himalayas were disappearing in the sunset, and never had they seemed higher or more majestic. The Lord was in agony. A greyness appeared on the face of the mountains; a fresh wind brought the scent of the *neem* flowers to our faces, and the Lord no longer muttered incoherently to himself, covering his face with his gown.

By night, without lanterns, we came to the River Kukushta. Wrapped in his gown, the Lord sank wearily to the ground under the trees, deep in thought, his face very grave and close to the earth. He did not move. Sometimes he began to murmur things which no one understood, and once he mentioned the name of his mother, and of his wife, Yasodhara. Though we pressed flowers on his forehead to cool his fever, and listened to his heart-beats, he did not hear or notice us. And now he was in full fever.

We lit a fire of coarse thorn-bushes and the dried heart-

shaped leaves of the pipal, and covered him with our cloaks and our robes, and peered at his fading eyes; and he was not sighing or even murmuring any longer, except when the flute-player played on his flute, and then he would look up, as people after dreaming suddenly sit up in a dark room, wondering where they are, and in the light of the flames we saw his gaunt features, and the sunken eyes. •

The fever was shaking him. The monk Assaji held his wrists, and said he must be bathed in the river, for the fever was burning him. His brows were hot with sweat; he was shivering uncontrollably; his mouth opened; no words, no intelligible sounds came from his lips.

“Can these things happen?” we asked.

The flute-player was silent as we undressed the Lord and carried him to the river. In the light of the fire we looked down at the wasted body which was like the body of a youth, the skin was still firm and the heart vigorous. Only the arms were thin from too much praying. In old age it is the thighs that first lose their fat: his thighs were strong and firm, though there was fever all over them. And while the moon came over the mountains and the pipal branches crackled and blazed, we gazed at him for a long while as we lifted his body to the water, and already some of the monks were saying we should go back along the path we had come, away from the east gate of Kusinara, so that he would remain among us a little longer. We held him by the arms and legs, and allowed his body, all except the face, to sink in the water, in this white moonlight which bathed all things in a cold light. And then, after the space of a few minutes, when his body was cool again and he had shaken off the fever, we brought him back to the shore and sprinkled perfumes on him and threw herbs in the fire, and he said nothing, but seemed to be dreaming.

“Is the goldsmith Chunda here?” he asked once, and he went on: “When I am gone, tell the goldsmith Chunda that

his offerings will bring a great reward, for having eaten of his food, I am about to ascend the Tusita heaven. And if he should still doubt these words, say that you have heard them from my own lips, for there are three gifts which are blessed above all others: one was given by the Lady Sujata before I received supreme wisdom, one was given by the flute-player from Magadha and the other was given by the smith Chunda, when he brought about my death." Saying this, his head sank to one side, and for a little while he remained silent as though sleeping.

When the sun rose, he was given rice-cakes but could eat them only with difficulty; yet he refused to be carried on a litter. He walked slowly, leaning on my arms and on the arms of the flute-player. The monks formed a large circle round him, for we were walking in the direction of the east gate of Kusinara, and many people were travelling along the road, and we were afraid that the Lord would be questioned and disturbed; but the people passed silently or prostrated themselves on the ground. And once a suppliant, named Pukkusa, by a ruse, forced his way through the circle of monks and came up to the Lord, and said: "Is it true that the Lord is dying?"

"Yes, it is true," the Lord said, and he was shaking with a fever. "The *devas* know of my death, and many who are not *devas* know it is coming."

"If you are dying, O Lord, what message have you to give to men?"

"I have no message," the Lord answered. "I would have men be austere, but is that a message?"

"Yes, that is a message," the suppliant answered, and he bade one of his companions come forward, and he took from the companion two robes of gold and offered them to the Lord, saying: "If the Lord is dying, let him at least die in golden robes."

The Lord murmured: "It is better to die naked, but if you

insist, give one of these robes to me and the other to Ananda, and let me wear the robe on the last pilgrimage of my life to Kusinara.”

Then I removed the Lord's robe and dressed him in the robe of gold, and said: “O Lord, it must be that your face has suddenly become radiant with the light from the Tusita heaven, for the robe seems to have lost its lustre.”

The Lord said: “Twice does the face of the blessed one shine with the ghostly light of the Tusita heaven—once when he receives supreme wisdom, and once when he is dying. And this very night, O Ananda, at the third watch, I shall ascend to heaven.”

And he looked at the youth Pukkusa, who was young and bearded, and said: “You also shall receive gifts from heaven, since you have desired that the Lord be well prepared for his journey and his last pilgrimage. Go therefore in peace. Many things will be given to you, and know that I shall come again.” Turning to Ananda, the Lord said: “Be brave, Ananda, wear your garment of gold and accompany me on this pilgrimage.

The Lord's eyes shone, his clear skin seemed to be made of beaten copper, and his face was young. Never had he seemed so divine among men, and never had he worn with divinity so sovereign a grace, for was he not a king? and were we not all his subjects, even to the last of us? and was he not a descendant of a king, and the father of a king? He stood there, glowing in gold, radiant like the snow on the Himalayas at the moment when the sun strikes the mountains, supreme among men, towering among us, his head bowed in meditation, gold shining from his face and from his clothes.

He said: “Gold is dust.”

I do not know what his words meant, and perhaps I shall never know, for he spoke often in parables, and at such times you could only understand him if you looked straight in his face. The youth Pukkusa, who had brought the cloth

of gold, prostrated himself before the Lord and then returned to Kusinara, to announce to the nobles and to the people that the Lord had prophesied his own death at the third watch of the night.

We went slowly towards the towers, through a lane of cedars which led to the Hiranyavati River, which flows between clumps of aloes. By now he was too weakened by dysentery to move at more than a snail's pace. He leaned on the arms of the flute-player and of Assaji, and sometimes he would pause and gaze at the monks who surrounded him at a distance, but he said little; he had lived by continual striving and his heart was tired. Only once during that long afternoon did he talk intelligently, and that was when he addressed me and said: "I am weary, Ananda, and must rest. Make me therefore a bed pointing northward to the Himalayas and let it lie between two sal trees."

There was a small grove of sal trees near-by. The Lord was laid beneath them, assuming the lion posture, lying on his right side and placing one foot above the other, and he summoned the acolytes to listen to him. At that moment the wind sprang up, and the blossoms of the sal trees fell down in a continual coloured rain.

"Worship me, therefore, as the flowers worship me," the Lord said, "and let your worship be like a coloured rain which falls silently and continually. There is only one form of worship, O brethren—to live in truth and freedom, obeying the precepts of the Lord as they have been given to you, and being like a continual coloured rain."

Taking me by the hand, he said: "Listen, Ananda, the gods of the ten worlds have come to witness my dying, and for twelve leagues about me there is not a spot so small as the point of a hair which is not thronged by these mighty ones, and they are saying: 'We have journeyed far to behold the Lord, for seldom does a Lord, an Enlightened One, appear before us. Now, at the third watch of the night, the

Lord will ascend to Nirvana.' ” His lips quivered, the sweat ran down from his eyeballs, and a paroxysm of terror came over him.

Now already the shadows were lengthening and it was growing dark. We could see the red flares on the walls of Kusinara, and soon we saw horsemen riding from the north and east gates of the city with glint of spears and silver harnesses and the tinkle of spurs. We prayed and fasted, while the moonlight came through the trees, lighting up the sombre features of the acolytes, who shuffled in silence up to the Lord and then away again. They lit butter-lamps and spirit-lamps on the grasses, and what was curious was that the blossoms of the sal trees fell continuously around the Lord. Sometimes his lips moved, and then he seemed to be speaking to himself or to the demons, and his eyes, sunken by weariness, seemed to grow larger and more cavernous, reflecting the light from the candles and the butter-lamps, and at such moments we thought he was dead.

I whispered to him: “How shall we live, Lord, when you are gone? It is the custom of the monks to come and attend you after the Retreat, but when you are gone, whom shall they attend?”

The Lord said in a weak voice: “There are four places worthy to be visited by a disciple: the place where the Tathagata was born, the place where he attained enlightenment, the place where he began to turn the Wheel of the Law, the place where he attained complete Nirvana. All those who make pilgrimages to these shrines and die in faith will after death be reborn in heaven.”

Then I said: “How are we to act with regard to women?”

A faint smile appeared on the Lord's face.

“Not seeing them, Ananda,” he answered.

“But if we should see them, how are we to act?”

“Not speaking, Ananda.”

“But if we should speak to them, Lord?”

“Be careful of them, Ananda.”

One of the disciples asked how the burial of the Lord should come about.

The Lord said: “There are laymen, Kshatriyas and others who will see to it, and there are monks who will see to it. The Buddha will be buried like a universal king, and a monument shall be erected at four cross-roads.”

Some monks were weeping.

The Lord said: “Flowers fade, flowers suffer. Better that one should die and enter Nirvana than that one should live and fade like the flowers. Better that one should escape the Wheel, and enter into another silence. This I have done in mercy to the living. Do not weep, Ananda, do not be grief-stricken. What will come to pass must come to every man, and it is better never to weep, neither for father nor for son. I have said before, Ananda, that the spirit must part from the flesh, and though we have power to renew ourselves when we are young, when we are old this power is taken from us.” Then, raising himself a little and turning towards the other disciples, he said: “O brethren, look upon Ananda, who is weeping. He has served me always until this moment, but soon he will serve you. He loves me, and so he weeps tears. O brethren, be like Ananda—but without love.”

It was almost dark. Most of the candles had gone out: there was now only a small butter-lamp which was placed before the Lord, shining up on his face and on his gold gown. The princes had come, but lying there in the lion posture, he seemed not to notice them.

At last, noticing their cries and lamentations, he asked: “Who are they?”

“They are the princes who have come to attend upon the Lord.”

There was silence for the space of two drum-beats, and then he said: “Let them be brought before me.”

Then, after receiving them, the Lord said: “It is right that

they should come, but it is better that the poor should come also. There are pilgrimages that must be performed by all, and he who dies in the faith while on a pilgrimage to a holy place walks the good road and is born again on the heavenly road. And the poor also walk on this pilgrimage. Why are you weeping, Ananda? It is only lovers who weep. Put away love, Ananda, now and for the last time, for no good ever came out of love, and there was always too much grief in love. Tell me, why are you weeping?"

"Because after you have gone, O Lord, there will be none left to guide us."

"But the three jewels will remain."

"And what are those jewels, O Lord?"

"They are the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Order of those who follow the Law. The universe, the sun, the stars, the seas and the mountains—all these shall perish; only virtue remains. O, Ananda, there is an end to labour. There is an end to work in the fields, and to suffering, but there is no end to virtue. Therefore be austere, Ananda, and make haste to welcome goodness. I know that all the monks who are present will follow me, and so I tell you for the last time: all things decay, but strive without ceasing."

Saying this, his head fell forward on his chest and we heard the watchmen from the drum-towers calling the third watch of the night. He still retained the lion posture, and seemed indeed from the expression of his face to be more alive than for many hours previously, but there were no more heart-beats. The flute-player lifted his flute to his lips. The lamps burned. From the sal trees the petals flowed; and then there was a long silence.

I went up to the Lord and lifted his face.

"Awake, O Lord," I said.

I took a branch and touched the Lord lightly on the cheek.

"Awake, O Lord," I said again.

There was no answer. Soon everyone was wailing, and as a string will catch fire swiftly when it is soaked in oils and the fire travels the whole length of the string in a moment of time, so the news of the Lord's death travelled through the company of princes and monks. And indeed, though he had fallen forward on his face, and it was necessary that we should hold him up, there was so great a gravity on his face, and such sweetness, that those who were near thought him still alive; and when we had smoothed the folds of his gold gown, we sang hymns, and wept, and praised the Lord who had brought us away from the wheel into the path of eternal life.

The next day we entered Kusinara to inform the Mallas, and they came with scents, garlands, all kinds of music, and five hundred sets of robes to do honour to the body of the Lord. For six days there was dancing, and on the seventh the monks assembled to take the body to Kusinara. Before the north gate of Kusinara, which faces the mountains, he lay in state for six more days, his face uncovered and his hands lifted in the attitude of benediction; and on the evening of the sixth day, at sunset, when there were sounds of a storm brooding over the Himalayas, he was taken into the coronation hall of the princes, and there his body, wrapped in silks and coated with a pulp of odoriferous dust and covered with gold garments, was placed in a basket of *neem* wood; and there was an inner coffin of gold. This coffin was placed on a blue stone, and over the stone an opening had been made in the awning of the roof, and there were canopies of sandalwood and aloes. So he lay in the lion posture, reclining on his right side, with his head to the north and his feet to the south. Then again, and for the last time, the monks sang hymns as they walked round the basket, and more fragrant wood and more melted butter were sprinkled over him, and the merchants and princes from all corners of the world came to prostrate themselves before

him. And there came peasants and soldiers, and young women and goatherds, to praise him and to decorate him with offerings of flowers.

At midnight on the seventh day there was a silence for the space of thirteen drum-beats, and then I, Ananda, approached close to the Lord, with a brand dipped in sweet-smelling oils, and I summoned the Lord to ascend to heaven, if he had not yet ascended, and stood aside when the heat of the flames struck me as though my hand had risen against me. The flames burnt fiercely, and they were pure yellow, and in less than the space between twenty-four slow drum-beats the whole body was consumed, without leaving behind any of the flesh, skin, sinews or fluid of the joints, or any ash and soot: there were only bones which had turned black in the flames.

So the Lord died, and of his body there remained only a few small objects like pearls, the teeth and the bones. These were left in the coronation hall of the Malla princes, to be given in offering to those who worship him in later times. Of his footprints nothing remains. He has crossed the river, he has entered the Tusita heaven, and there are not many men now living who can remember the form of his features. Though we put a fence of spears round the place where his body is, and though we know he is dead, sometimes even now I hear the *devas* at their songs, as I heard them when he was still living, and then I wonder how soon it will be before I see the Lord in brightness and vision, like a youth in the splendour of youth, before he was in heaven.

All this happened fifteen years ago, and now I am old and bent, and the light fades, and I know I shall not remain much longer in the world of men. I am weary of life, and would like to follow the Lord who comes with the soft-footed monkeys unannounced in the chambers of those whom he loves. The Lord comes, and those who see him are lovers,

and those who do not see him are blind, but he is there, as he promised, everywhere among us, scented and garlanded like a naked youth who comes forth from a forest among flowers. There is such a freshness on the earth when he appears that men are struck dumb, and such torments when he is gone that men are discomforted; and still at night and in the morning, the youth comes barefoot among us, scattering flowers.

We were young and handsome and loved one another, yet he became Lord. Is this so strange? We would ride through green hills under the white sheets of the Himalayas, and you would hear the silver trappings jingle along the forest paths, and the air was scented with the perfume of *neem* flowers, but how was it that he became Lord? His body was consumed into ashes, and yet we know he will come again. He will come with his lightning and with his grace, and though we shall not recognise his features, children will know him, and old men will know him, and women in child-bed will know him, and all shall worship him. The Lord comes on the wings of archangels, and shall we not see him with our eyes?

I have written of him as I knew him, not knowing or caring whether my words are intelligible to men. He lived and suffered among us, tall and blue-eyed, walking in unapproachable solitude like the kings, not knowing which way to gather the imponderables of his mind, for all things fed him; and among all things he was the most alone. There was more of sunset than of sunrise in his eyes, for he was like a fruit glistening on the topmost bough, where none could reach him. He said there was no grief that cannot be forgotten, no suffering that does not come to an end, no desires that are not broken on the Wheel of the Law.

So, my beloved acolytes, watch for the yellow robe, for they say he will come among us wearing such a robe as he wore when he walked through the fields, far brighter than any

yellow we have seen, bright with the brightness of a flame. And he will come in the glory of youth, looking like a man and a child, and to all women he will give his tenderness, the tenderness of a man; and so it will be till the world dies, and in the moment of the world's dying he will envelop us all in the burning of his yellow robe. O watch for the yellow robe! See in the dawn and the sunset the colours of the Lord, for assuredly the dawns and the sunsets are his banners flying. Come then, my acolytes, put your pens away and look at the statue of the Lord, all that remains of him, praise the beauty of the Lord, give honour to the Lord for his peace and the burning of the yellow robe!

I, Ananda, known as the Lover, the cousin of the Lord, have written this that men may know how the Lord came into the world garlanded with flowers and holding in his hands the peace of high mountains. As the leaves fall, as the bark of a tree withers, as the petals fade on the stems, so the Lord dies. But he will come again in glory, rising in spring-time, offering himself to the tigers and the leopards, bringing to the world the peace it has always desired. And there will be such love in his hands and in his breasts and in his eyes that we shall be like men burning in so great a holiness. And lest we fail him, lest we go beyond the paths he has laid down for us, lest mercy is taken from us and the flames burn us, let there be no weeping when he comes.

THE END

Robert Payne

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SONGS

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