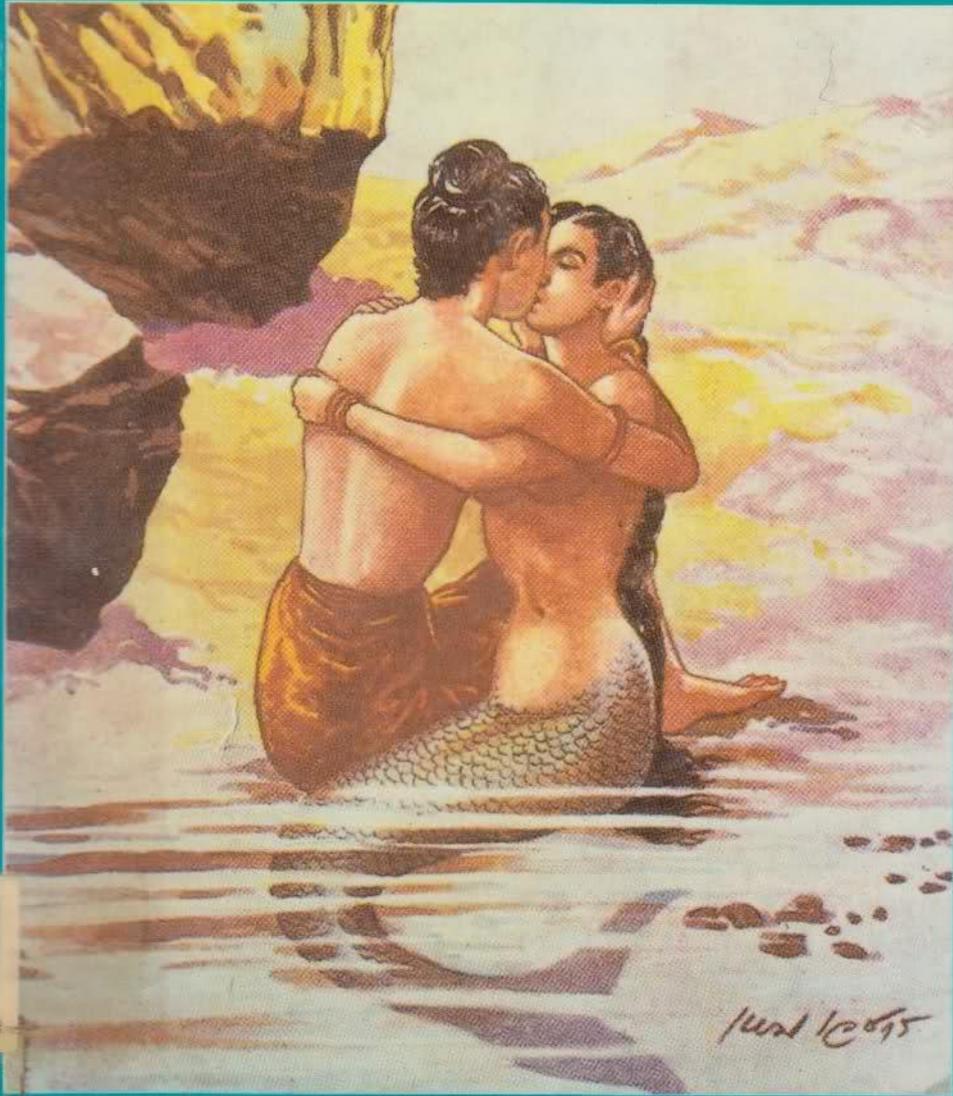


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SUNTHORN PHU

*The Story Of*  
**PHRA ABHAI MANI**



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BY PREM CHAYA

# The Story of Phra Abhai Mani

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## General Preface

By Montri Umavijani

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CLASSICAL Thai literature can vie with the best literature in any language as a product of genius. However, the task of making it available to the world is beset with problems and difficulties. First of all, the Thai language, even though fully developed and capable of transmitting a great variety of human experiences, is understood only by a limited number of people. Besides, classical Thai literature might strike the uninitiated reader as fantastic, far removed from real life, showing a world in which supernatural power, magic, and lofty passions predominate. But indeed these strange things are necessary elements of the world of classics - a world built entirely by its own rules and finished by its own laws. At this world's core, however, the reader finds the condition of universality. Once arrived there, the reader may look back to the strange, winding path he has travelled with much satisfaction and understanding. S.T. Coleridge has similarly described the function of art as going either from the strange to the familiar or from the familiar to the strange. If classical Thai literature seems to begin with the strange, the fully absorbed reader will always find in it things with which he has already and always known.

A belief in the relevance of classical Thai literature alone would not be enough. There is a great need to translate that literature into other languages which are more widely used. In this programme, H.H. the late Prince Prem Pu-rachatra who wrote under the pseudonym of Prem Chaya has been the anchor man. Not only was his whole life de-voted to the task of translating Thai classics into English, but he also encouraged other people to do so and published their translations of Thai literature in his Standard Magazine. Towards the end of his life, he organized the Thai Literature Salon as a meeting place of writers and translators to carry out this very purpose.

A brief mention may be made of Prince Prem Purachatra's career as translator. His first translation was done when he was only 19 and still a student at Oxford. This was an adaptation, into an English play, of the fifteenth century Thai romance entitled Phra Law, retitled Magic Lotus. Immediate success of the play both in England and at home spurred him on to take up two great works of the Rattanakosin period for translation, namely, Phra Abhai Mani and Khun Chang and Khun Phan. The method used to translate these two works was the story retold, after Charles Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare. In retelling these classics, Prince Prem Purachatra retained the original quality of keeping the reader spellbound. At times, the translator became so engaged with

certain details or scenes that he gave us as beautiful and exact prose renderings. This may be called the first period of Prince Prem Purachattra's translation.

Afterward, he became convinced that he had to translate Thai poetry into English verse. Then came a period of nearly twenty years in which he ceaselessly experimented with English verse forms such as end-rhyme, blank verse, free verse, etc. His forte was, however, rhyming metrical verse. At first, he tried his hands at translating excerpts from some great authors, particularly Sri Praj and Sunthorn Phu. Some of these translations were highly polished. He usually incorporated them into his lectures and articles. Among the best known is the following quatrain from Sri Praj:

*Let not thy arrow-eyes my fate foretell,*

*Cornering thy prey like a hunter fell.*

*If thou must shoot, then shoot right in my heart!*

*'Twould be more cruel to threaten, then depart.*

But Prince Prem Purachattra was determined to translate Thai Classics in full, not merely excerpts. In the last ten years of his life, this project materialised, partly because he was honorary visiting professor at the University of Copenhagen where he initiated a

programme of Thai studies. Under those circumstances, he produced a number of translations as well as made plans to do many more. Among the completed works were Sunthorn Phu's travel poem entitled *Nirat Muang Klaeng*, King Rama II's dance-drama entitled *Kraitong*, King Vajiravudh's play in verse and poem entitled *Pra Ruang* and *Dharmaar-Dharma Songkram*, respectively. These translations are nearly perfect. Some of them have borne out meanings hitherto unnoticed by Thai scholars and readers.

Prince Prem Purachatra is truly a pioneer in the field of Thai literary translation. Such a work, he once said, is a labour of love.

## Preface to the First Edition

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THIS is neither a translation nor an adaptation of Sunthorn Phu's Phra Abhai Mani, one of the best-loved stories in all Thai Literature.

It is merely intended as an introduction to great work, for the benefit of those who are unable to read the original. In its summarised form, it necessarily lacks some of the finer qualities of the masterpiece. But it should serve its purpose until the complete work is translated.

The well-known artist, Hem Vejakorn, has designed the front cover specially for this edition, and is also responsible for the other illustrations, reproduced by courtesy of Mr. Udom Chatabutra.

Phra Abhai Mani :  
A Brief Introduction

*By Montri Umavijani*

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THE poet Sunthorn Phu took more than 20 years to write his masterpiece Phra Abhai Mani. It has often been criticised as being a story without end, written to earn a living. On the one hand, it is the story of the protagonist's strange loves with four women, namely, the Sea Giantess, the Mermaid, the Eastern Princess Suvarnamali, and the Western Princess Laweng.

Interestingly, Phra Abhai Mani had two prodigious sons, Sin Samudr and Sud Sakorn, born of the Sea Giantess and the Mermaid respectively. With the gentle Princess Suvarnamali, he had twin daughters. The charming and cunning Princess Laweng bore him an ungrateful and misguided son. Consequently, she repulsed any further amorous advances from Phra Abhai Mani lest they should have another bad child.

On the other hand, Sunthorn Phu's work presents a picture of the world governed by science and technology. There are things anticipating machinegun, ocean liner, aeroplane and technological

warfare. The whole work is permeated with things which could be interpreted in technological terms.

In spite of the diversity of stories and interests, the work is held together well thematically. It rests on a new concept of education which Sunthorn Phu believed in and propagated.

At the very beginning, Phra Abhai Mani and his younger brother Sri Suvarna set out to acquire knowledge. The kind of knowledge that was thought fit for princes in Thai stories then was the silpasat, which is equivalent to general knowledge or liberal education. The two Princes took up special studies instead. Phra Abhai Mani mastered the art of music, especially flute-playing, while Sri Suvarna was trained in the art of self-defence, in particular cudgel-fighting. Such specialisations were not known or appreciated then and, as a result, the two Princes were turned out of the kingdom by their own father.

Afterwards, the two Princes met three Brahmins who also professed special sciences. One of them could shoot seven arrows at the same time and make them all hit the mark. They exhibited their special excellences of which Phra Abhai Mani's outshone the rest. At this point, Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna were separated from each other and had different adventures. But they kept

themselves from harm by virtue of their special knowledge. Their lives were also shaped by what they had learnt.

The point about specialisation was actually preached to Sud Sakorn by the wise and powerful Hermit who was his teacher. Being innocent, Sud Sakorn was deceived by the naked fakir who promised to teach him supernatural knowledge. He was then lured to a cliff and pushed off it to die. The Hermit came to his rescue and taught him as follows : "Put not your trust in any mortal, for their wiles are immeasurable. Even the most tortuous creepers round the hoariest tree are not as crooked as a man's heart. True love among mortals is only to be found in the love of a father or mother. The only support you can rely upon is yourself. So you must be careful and wise, my boy. There is no better armour than knowledge, for it is best to know how to keep oneself from harm.

The above statement is at the core of Phra Abhai Mani. At variance are two kinds of education : the education which gets one through and the education which does not get one through. Sunthorn Phu, of course, preferred the former. And this is not opportunism either. In the Buddhist tenets, the knowledge that gets one through even to the Enlightenment or Nirvana is the highest.

The world of Sunthorn Phu's masterpiece is based on this technological concept of education. The characters remain

consistent to their specialties and perform their different tasks. It is a world technologically conceived, and operates on a technological basis.

Likewise, when Laweng raised a military alliance to invade the city of Phra Abhai Mani, called Paleuk, she enlisted people of special skills. And in the following Paleuk War, also caused by a woman like the Trojan War, arts were waged against arts and sciences against sciences. The fate of the city hung on a very delicate balance. It was only when the heroes on Phra Abhai Mani's side fought in unison, taking turns to defeat the opponents, that they could finally win the war.

When the war was at its worst, the Hermit miraculously appeared and preached to all parties. He told them that without control of one's desires and without compassion for one's fellow-men, there would be no peace at all in the world, only incessant strife and war. This is a warning to the modern world of technology. The special arts and sciences can easily be used for the total destruction of mankind. The welfare of the world depends not only on the special duties that one performs, but also on the sense of morality that one observes. If the world of technology is a world without love and faith, it will be a world without hope for regeneration, like T.S. Eliot's "Waste Land." The truth of this has been

attested by two long world wars with a brief restless period of peace in between.

The English poet William Wordsworth has made a remark on the function of poetry as follows : "Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge-it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of men of sciences should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those gen-eral indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself."

According to Wordsworth, poetry will have to collaborate with science. Whatever science produces, poetry must humanise. In this respect, Sunthorn Phu has done more than is required of him as a poet. In Phra A bhai Mani, not only has he imagined a world in which science and technology rule, but he has also forestalled any dangers they might cause to the human world.

## Part One : The Two Brothers

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ONCE upon a time, a certain prince whose name was Sudasna ruled over a small but prosperous country. He had two sons : the elder, fifteen years of age, was called Phra Abhai Mani, and the younger, aged thirteen, was called Sri Suvarna. Realising that they had reached years of discretion, and were ready to have knowledge instilled into them, so that they might later rule the principality rightly and justly, he summoned them into his presence and addressed them thus :

"My sons, one day you will rule over this country. It is meet that, like those princes of old, you should acquire knowledge which will enable you to protect your inheritance. So you must seek out learned men from whom you may receive instruction in such subjects as will be useful to you hereafter."

The two young brothers bowed to their father, and signified their intention of obeying his will. After receiving further words of fatherly advice, they took their leave of him.

In those days, wise and learned men lived the lives of hermits, jealously guarding the treasures of their knowledge in the fastnesses of the forest or in the distant villages. By dint of much

effort, and after fifteen days' travel through the jungle, Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna succeeded in finding two ancient professors worthy of their consideration. One, as a notice on his door announced, taught the gentle art of flute-playing, and the other the sturdier science of self-defence. Phra Abhai Mani decided without any hesitation that he would learn to play the flute, while Sri Suvarna chose self-defence. The only difficulty was that neither had brought with him the hundred thousand tamlueng of gold which each professor seemed to require in exchange for his instruction, (for in those days before there was popular education, teachers were entitled to demand their price!). However, on explaining the matter to the venerable old men, the latter kindly agreed to accept a ring of each as fee : they knew that the boys were of noble descent.

The two pupils made rapid advance in their studies. The professor of music took Phra Abhai Mani to the top of a mountain to play his flute, and what he learned was no common kind of flute-playing. When he played, all the wild animals in the forest-even tigers and elephants-forgot to eat and came to listen, enraptured by the magic notes that came out of the musical instrument. Within seven months, Phra Abhai Mani had completely mastered the art of music, with which he could charm the hearts of men and lull them to sleep or make them fall in with his desires. His instruction

finished, the professor handed him back his ring : he desired no payment from a pupil such as Phra Abhai Mani. So Phra Abhai Mani, full of gratitude, took leave of him and rejoined his brother, who had likewise completed his course. Sri Suvarna now knew all there was to be known about military tactics and could handle any weapon with infinite skill. He had also been handed back his ring on completing his studies. There was nothing to prevent the two brothers from returning to their father's palace with all due speed.

On their arrival, they went straight to the hall where Sudasna was giving audience. As soon as the Prince saw his sons, he beamed with pleasure, and called them to his side. At once he began to ask how they had fared. But when he heard how his elder son has been learning to play the flute, and his younger son had spent his time wielding common weapons, his pleasure turned to anger, and, stamping his royal foot, said in his rage

"I do not wish to hear any more! Music! Music is fit only for hired minstrels and entertainers. Why, even the women in my palace can learn to play music. And a knowledge of common weapons is suitable only for common sol-diers. What have the sons of princes to do with such things? You have both put me to shame. I cannot let you stay in my palace. I ought to drive you out. You have been away a whole year, wasting your time, and then you come to annoy me with your foolish talk.

The Prince rose, still moved with anger, and strode into his private chamber.

The two brothers were surprised and grieved at their father's unaccountable wrath. Phra Abhai Mani said to Sri Suvarna, "Our father is angry with us, and has driven us out of his palace. If we have to go out into the world alone, shall we not starve?" Sri Suvarna replied, "You need not be afraid, my brother. As long as there is life left in us, we shall continue our journey, and perchance we shall find some town or village where we can seek shelter. We are armed with knowledge, so what is there to be afraid of?"

Thus the two brothers decided to set out on another journey into the wide world. They disguised themselves as common travellers, and started on their way. The elder brother had his flute, and the younger took a stout stick. They passed through fields and meadows, skirted mountains and valleys, walking all day and taking their rest at night. They ate fruit growing wild in the woods and on the plains. Finally, after more than a month, they reached the sea coast. There by the shore, which echoed with the waves of the sea, they sat down in the shade of a tree to rest their weary limbs.

Now it happened that the three sons of a Brahmin always came to play at that spot. All three of them could boast exceptional skill.

The first, Mora, could build big boats out of straw. The second, Sanon, could summon the wind and the rain. The third, Vichien, was an expert archer who could shoot seven arrows at the same time and make them all hit the target. It was not long before they came across the two strangers sitting under the tree, who immediately re-vealed who they were. The three Brahmins were delighted with their new-found friends, as the latter were with them. They eagerly exchanged information and ideas. Talking of their respective experiences, they marvelled greatly at the fact that Phra Abhai Mani had done no better than to learn how to play the flute. Quite frankly, they could not understand how this could possibly be of any use. "How can music serve, save for serenading women?" they argued. Phra Abhai Mani then explained: "Music has many uses, and is like a gem that is worth a city's ransom. Now, for instance, if I play on this flute, men and beasts, and even angels, who hear the melodious notes will forget their anger, will become soothed and eventually lulled to sleep. Yes, music certainly has great charms. If you do not believe me, let me play to you." So saying, he lifted the flute which his teacher had given him, and started to play. Exquisite notes came forth from the instrument, notes of such a plaintive and tender quality as to pluck the heartstrings, forming a melody which was sweet and soporific. The three Brahmins were entranced and soon fell fast asleep. It was not long before Sri Suvarna fell under the same spell. So Phra

Abhai Mani sat alone, making immortal music as melodious strains flowed from his magic flute.

Now, there lived in the those parts a mighty giantess of the sea, whose name was Pisia Samudr. She lived in a palatial cave at the bottom of the ocean, but sometimes came up to see what was going on in the world of men. At that particular moment, she had come up to catch fish for her supper, when she heard enchanting music coming from the shore. She was drawn to it by a spell she was unable to resist, and, creeping stealthily to the beach, looked to see whence it came. She saw a handsome youth playing on a flute, and, at first sight, fell completely in love with him and desired him for her own. Acting on impulse, she strode to where Phra Abhai Mani was seated, and with a force like that of the wind picked him up in her hand. She then ran, plunged into the water, and headed for her cavernous home, with Phra Abhai Mani safely in her grasp.

It was remarkable that Phra Abhai Mani survived this ordeal. The shock of being seized by a giantess and taken into the depths of the sea might have killed any ordinary mortal, but not Phra Abhai Mani. He merely fainted. When he recovered, he found himself in a large and well-appointed cave, and lying on a bed of rock. Beside him sat a beautiful young woman. However, Phra Abhai Mani was not deceived. He knew that it was merely the giantess reduced in

size and transformed into human shape, to deceive him into thinking that she was a human being and to allay his fears.

Pisua Samudr tried all her charms on this youth whom she loved, but to no avail. Phra Abhai Mani was rude to her, calling her names and pushing her away from him. This he kept up for a long time, seeking only a means of escape from the cave, in order to rejoin his brother from whom he had never been separated. But finally, despairing of any means of escape, and Pisua Samudr becoming more importunate, he agreed to comply with her desires, on condition that Pisua Samudr would swear never to make a meal of him, as she might do because she belonged to the race of giants who were extremely partial to human flesh. This oath the giantess solemnly swore by all the gods. So Phra Abhai Mani took Pisua Samudr as his wife, to her great joy.

Curiously enough, the course of this strange love did run fairly smooth. Although, he could not leave the cave, Phra Abhai Mani was well looked after by Pisua Samudr, who gave him everything he desired. In course of time a son was born to them a normal human child, to whom they gave the name of Sin Samudr, "Treasure of the Sea." When the child grew up, he began to show remarkable attributes inherited from his parents; he was handsome like his father, and was an amphibian like his mother. He was perfectly at home in the water, and would spend hours swimming,

diving, turning, playing with mermaids, without going to the surface. Pisua Samudr thought herself in heaven, so happy was she. It was only Phra Abhai Mani who yearned for the world he knew and for his brother whose fate he did not know.

## Part Two : The Mermaid

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ONE day, while the giantess was away hunting fish, and Phra Abhai Mani sat all alone in the cave thinking of his brother, little Sin Samudr, playing as usual outside the cave, saw a merman with a fine tail and thought that if he could catch him he might show him to his father. So he swam towards him, seized his tail, and with all the strength his little body could muster, dragged him into the cave.

Phra Abhai Mani was aghast at what his young son had done. "Do you not know," he said sternly, "that your mother would be full of wrath if she knew? She does not yet know that you are so strong that you might help your father to escape at any time."

Sin Samudr could not understand why his father should want to escape. So he asked his father, and his father told him everything

from the very beginning. The little boy's eyes filled with tears when he learned that his mother was a giantess.

The merman, who all this while had been lying on the floor of the cave in fear of his life, felt his courage returning. His ancestors having been human, he could understand and speak the language of men. So he lifted up his head and addressed Phra Abhai Mani thus : "Lord, spare my life, and I and my kin will help you to escape from the clutches of the giantess. I will take you to a wonderful island where lives an aged hermit who is endowed with superhuman power. There you will be safe. You can ride on my back, and your son can ride on my wife's back. But you must allay the suspicions of the giantess, while we make ready, and you must use guile to send her away for three days and nights, so that we may have time to escape."

Phra Abhai Mani was much impressed by the words of the merman, and they at once made plans for the venture. Finally, the merman took his leave, promising to return to fetch the prince and his son.

Not long afterwards, Pisua Samudr returned, laden with provisions for her larder. Phra Abhai Mani and Sin Samudr neither said nor did anything to arouse her suspicions. When night came, they went to sleep as usual. But the giantess had a dreadful nightmare. She

dreamt that her cave was destroyed and that she herself was killed. Awaking, she recounted the dream to her husband and sought his advice. He immediately told her that there was only one way of avoiding the consequences of an evil dream, and that was to go and lie at the foot of a mountain for three days and nights without stirring from the place.

Pisua Samudr unsuspecting, believed what Phra Abhai Mani had told her. So, early in the morning, having made all preparations, she set out for a high mountain on the mainland where she hoped to shake off the effects of the evil dream.

As soon as she was gone, Phra Abhai Mani and Sin Samudr made ready to leave. They left the cave and ascended to the surface, where they were joined by the merman, his wife and his daughter. The latter was a comely young mermaid, and Phra Abhai Mani could not but admire her attractive figure; indeed, were it not for the fact that she had a tail instead of legs, she might have been one of the palace ladies.

They wasted no time in starting on their long journey, for they knew that any delay might make a difference between life and death. Phra Abhai Mani got on to the back of the merman, while Sin Samudr climbed on the back of the merman's wife. The mermaid followed behind.

They had journeyed swiftly for more than three days, without reaching their destination, when a fearful storm arose behind them. Phra Abhai Mani asked the merman what this might portend, "Alas," said the latter, "the giantess has discovered your escape and is doubtless pursuing us. It is likely that she will soon overtake us."

On hearing this, Phra Abhai Mani felt rather uncomfortable. But Sin Samudr merely laughed and said to his father, "Leave it to me. I shall stay and talk to mother. But you must hurry on." 38 39 The merman exclaimed: "Alas! My strength is all spent I can go no further. Neither can my wife. But I still have my daughter." And calling his daughter to him, the merman said, "Your father has reached the end of his days. But you must carry on in my place. It falls upon you to bear the Prince for the rest of the journey to the safety of the island." The mermaid obediently came alongside, and Phra Abhai Mani changed his mount. She was young and strong, and could easily carry the Prince and yet swim swiftly. So Phra Abhai Mani and the mermaid went on alone.

The waves were lashed into fury at the approach of the giantess, and Sin Samudr was astonished to find that the approaching figure was quite unlike his mother : for he had only known his mother as the beautiful woman in the cave. He cried out : "What are you, you black and ugly thing, a beast of the land or of the sea?" Pisua Samudr replied, "Do you not know your mother?" and spoke in the

gentle tones she used in the cave. So Sin Samudr knew that it was his mother. But, in spite of her pleadings, he refused to tell her where his father had gone. He merely took a deep dive, disappeared under the sea, and later joined his father.

The merman then spoke up. He told the giantess that he and his wife would lead her to where Phra Abhai Mani had gone, promising that should the giantess not find him there she could kill them both. The giantess accepted his fair offer, and the merman and his wife led her in the direction opposite to that which Phra Abhai Mani and the mermaid had taken.

Phra Abhai Mani eventually arrived safely at the island. Here lived the wise and powerful hermit, attended by a hundred shipwrecked men of all nationalities - Chinese, Brahmins, Indians, Thai, Javanese, Englishmen, Hollanders, and other Europeans. He lived in a cave on a hill, and subsisted on vegetables and herbs which were plentiful on the island. He was deeply venerated by all for his piety and kindness. Phra Abhai Mani immediately went to pay his respects and to seek his protection.

No sooner had he done this than huge waves lashed the island and the giantess appeared. She was more furious than ever, having been deceived by the merman, whom she had torn to pieces. Now

she wanted her husband. She stood there, towering over the island on whose hallowed soil she could not step.

The hermit came down from the hill to remonstrate with her. But Pisua Samudr merely used abusive language and accused the hermit of acting beyond the bounds of his duties. So the hermit took a little magic sand and blew it in her direction. The giantess knew that she was powerless against his magic charms, and so retired baffled and angered.

Phra Abhai Mani, Sin Samudr and the mermaid lived on at the island, and performed little services for the hermit who had befriended and protected them. As the days passed, Phra Abhai Mani became attracted towards the mermaid. After all, she had saved his life, and he pitied her for the loss of her parents. Besides, she was pretty to look at, and even if she lacked some of the physical qualities of a woman, she certainly had the charm and the grace of one. He therefore asked her to become his.

The mermaid, who was not averse to his overtures but realised the incongruity of the position, said: "You are human, and you live on land. I am a fish, and my home is the sea. We are very different from one another. How can we love each other? It is not possible. You would merely debase your dignity by deigning to love me. Let me be but your servant."

"No," replied Phra Abhai Mani, "love is common to all living creatures, be they men, animals or fish. It is for each to place his love where he will. Although we are of different races and species, it is evident that we were destined to belong to each other, for how else could we have come here together in safety. So do not say that you will be my servant. I have no wish to be your master. I want to be your lover."

The mermaid needed no further convincing. And there on the beach, in the light of the full moon, she and Phra Abhai Mani found the happiness which had been ordained for them by a strange but inevitable destiny.

The union of Phra Abhai Mani and the mermaid was a happy one. They never let the difference of race and species come between them, but shared to the full their beautiful and idyllic love. And so passed seven brief months of untold rapture.

Meanwhile, Phra Abhai Mani and his son became well acquainted with the shipwrecked people on the island. From them they learned several European languages as well as Chinese.

Sin Samudr had a great respect for the hermit. One day, he asked the latter if he and his father could take holy vows in order to receive instruction from him. The hermit, delighted, accorded him

his request, and both father and son were initiated into the mysteries of religion and philosophy.

It was precisely at this time that the ship of Silaraj, the prince of a neighbouring country, arrived at the island. This prince had a beautiful daughter called Suvarnamali, who had a sudden and irrepressible longing to go to sea, for she had been told it was there that she should meet her destiny. Her father complied with her whims, and fitted out a ship for a short cruise. But contrary winds carried the ship far out into the ocean, and the passengers were in despair. Then one morning, they saw a lovely green island and knew that it was the island where the venerable hermit lived. They decided to land and pay their respects to the old man.

So the prince and his daughter, with their retinue, ascended the hill. As they approached, Phra Abhai Mani and Sin Samudr, who were supposed to be wrapped in meditation, looked up. Phra Abhai Mani saw Suvarnamali and held his breath. He had never seen such a vision of beauty before. Suvarnamali, on her part, was not a little surprised to find that the hermit had so handsome a disciple. Their eyes met, and said more than words ever could. After an exchange of greetings, Silaraj told the hermit and his disciples how he had arrived at the island. He then turned to Phra Abhai Mani and asked who he was and how he came to be on the island and taken refuge with the hermit. Phra Abhai Mani replied by

telling him the whole story, from the time he learned to play the flute and thus incurred the wrath of his father, to the time when he escaped from the giantess of the sea. Silaraj (and undoubtedly his daughter also) was profoundly moved, and expressed interest in the magic flute. He wished Phra Abhai Mani to play it for them. But the latter declined, saying that as he had taken holy vows he could not play on the flute. He added, however, that as he had taught his son how to play on it, Sin Samudr could, with the hermit's permission, satisfy the prince's curiosity. So when the requisite permission had been granted, Sin Samudr took up his father's flute and started to play a soothing air. As was inevitable, all those who heard the melody were soon drowsy with sleep, and dropped off one by one. In the end, Sin Samudr and his father were the only ones left awake.

Phra Abhai Mani now had opportunity to observe and appraise Suvarnamali more fully. He rose from his seat and came near her, but did not touch her. He could not take his eyes off her, for in his opinion the girl's beauty was flawless in every respect, and a wave of passion swept through him. Eventually, he returned to his seat, meditating on something other than religion or philosophy.

The hermit was the first to awake. He was highly amused that even he himself had fallen under the spell of the flute. He struck a bell which soon woke up all the rest.

Now, Sin Samudr had noticed how deeply his father had been affected by the beauty of Suvarnamali, and it needed only a hint from the hermit before he knew what he had to do. He approached the princess and bowing very low, said in a childlike way : "I like you. I think you are very kind. You see, I am an orphan. Will you please be my mother and take me with you wherever you go?"

The ladies-in-waiting tittered. Suvarnamali blushed until her cheeks bloomed like roses and she became more beautiful than ever. But she loved the boy, and agreed to be his mother.

Eventually, the day came when Silaraj decided to return home. It was agreed that not only Sin Samudr but also his father would accompany him on the boat. They all took their leave of the hermit who had been so kind to them.

Now Phra Abhai Mani had a heavy task before him. He had to break the news to the mermaid, whom he still loved. He went down to the beach which was her home and called on her. But he could not bring himself to tell her. The mermaid, however, had guessed what was in his mind, for she had seen the ship arrive, and the ship was now about to depart. Her handsome husband was going back home to his own people. So she told him of her own

plight. She was heavy with child, the child of Phra Abhai Mani. Who was to protect her and her child?

Phra Abhai Mani's eyes filled with tears "O my dearest," he said, "it is not that I want to leave you, but I must go. I will leave you and our child in the good care of the hermit."

So saying, he took from his finger a ring of great price, and gave it to the mermaid, telling her that when the time came she was to put it on the finger of their child. Phra Abhai Mani and the mermaid then indulged in a tearful farewell.

Not long afterwards, Phra Abhai Mani and Sin Samudr sailed away with their new-found friends. The mermaid was left all alone, except for the hermit who looked after her as he had promised.

When the time came, she was delivered of a son, a normal human baby boy, the very image of his father. He was given the name of Sud Sakorn- "the limit of the ocean."

### **Part Three : The Giantess's Revenge**

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SILARAJ's ship set sail, its motley cargo comprising passengers and crew of many races and nationalities. The Prince had arranged

things well. His own suite was amidships, while ladies and gentlemen of the court were in the bow and Phra Abhai Mani and the other men in the stern.

Sin Samudr, of course, was with his adopted "mother." But every now and then he found opportunity to come and see his father. On these occasions, Phra Abhai Mani eagerly asked him how he was faring and avidly enquired news of Suvarnamali. He learned that she had noticed his attentions and the fact that he had "a sharp eye" for the ladies; but otherwise she appeared to be favourably impressed. This encouraged him to confide in his son that when they reached land he would offer her his services. He also discovered that Suvarnamali had given his son one of her scarves. This he borrowed of him, saying that he would keep it to remember the sweet lady by.

When Sin Samudr returned to Suvarnamali's cabin, she called him to her couch and embraced him. At once, she noticed that he was not wearing the scarf and asked him what he had done with it. Sin Samudr replied that he had put it in his box. She would not believe him and told him not to try to deceive her. So he confessed and told her all that his father had said, including the offer of his services.

Suvarnamali was deeply touched, but said : "Do not say such things. If other people hear of it, there will be a scandal. Besides, it is impossible for me to accept his offer, because as soon as we get back, I am to be married to the son of the King of Lanka, according to the wishes of my father. But you may tell your father how much I esteem him and would wish to regard him as a brother."

Sin Samudr was angry. With childish temper, he cried, "Why should you be made to marry a foreigner? I will not let you! I will fight for you! I want you for my father!"

Suvarnamali had to calm him down. "It is late," she said softly. "Do not speak so loudly and stop boasting!" With that, she made him lie down on her couch and he fell fast asleep.

The next morning, Sin Samudr rose with a heavy heart, took leave of Suvarnamali and went straight to his father. He told him what Suvarnamali had said the night before. Phra Abhai Mani was full of grief and could scarcely restrain his tears. He recoiled at the thought of losing the only real normal woman he had ever loved. There and then, he made up his mind to woo and win her, to fight for her, to elope with her if necessary. He told his son to go to Suvarnamali to plead his cause.

Sin Samudr obeyed his father's instructions. In the presence of Suvarnamali, he wept as if his little heart would break.

Suvarnamali, amazed and frightened, asked: "What is the matter with you? Stop crying and tell your mother everything. She loves you as much as life itself, and will grant your every wish."

Sin Samudr answered through his tears: "It is because you are so hard-hearted that you will kill Father and kill me too."

Suvarnamali wondered, and questioned the boy further.

"Father's heart is broken," he explained, sobbing without shame.

"He does not know what to do. You have rejected his proposal and prefer to accept the love of the Prince of Lanka. So he no longer has any desire to live. We have decided to jump overboard together at sunset."

Suvarnamali in her innocence believed the boy and was alarmed by what he had said. Her fear overcoming her modesty, she begged him to go and tell his father not to commit such a rash deed. "Tell him," she said, "that I was only saying what was true. But if in spite of that he still has affection for me and is importunate, you may say anything comes into your clever little head, but whatever you do, do not jump overboard." Sin Samudr was pleased beyond measure and stopped crying immediately. "I shall tell Father what you have said," he exclaimed. He jumped up and ran to his father. When he had heard all, Phra Abhai Mani was filled with joy. He took from his finger a diamond ring of seven carats, and handed it

to his son, saying : "Give this to the Princess, and beg to let me have in exchange the necklace that she wears."

Sin Samudr, the busy messenger, carried out his father's instructions. In a short while, Suvarnamali was wearing the diamond ring, and Phra Abhai Mani, in possession of the necklace, felt as happy as if he had the Princess herself.

All the while that Phra Abhai Mani and Sin Samudr were on the enchanted island, Pisua Samudr the Giantess lived in despair and waited only for the day when her erring human husband might again fall into her clutches. She set her sea sprites and hobgoblins to keep close watch on the island for any attempt he might make to escape.

Accordingly, when Silaraj's ship set sail, her minions went post-haste to inform her. Pisua Samudr lost little time in setting out to intercept the ship which carried her husband and her son, now no longer under the kindly protection of the sorcerer-hermit. She called together her train of sea ghosts and devils and scattered them before her to comb the ocean.

It was on the fifteenth day that they made contact. Silaraj's ship had thus far made an uneventful voyage with favourable winds and calm seas. That evening, an island came within sight on the horizon, capped by a majestic peak resembling a cloud. But as

soon as shades of night fell, a fearful storm arose and engulfed the ship. The wind howled in the rigging and waves lashed the decks. The vehemence of the tempest increased with the lateness of the hour. The vessel tossed helplessly with its rudder out of control. On top of this, the first of Pisua Samudr's ghosts and devils began to arrive and hovered round the ship. The passengers and crew were mortally afraid and fell to their prayers. The ghosts and devils remained at a distance, mocking them by making their eyes bulge and putting out their tongues.

Shortly before dawn, the towering figure of the Giantess herself appeared beside the ship. She was shouting and gesticulating. At this, her ghosts and devils were emboldened and approached the ill-fated vessel. Members of the crew stood up and fired their muskets, but to little purpose. The invulnerable Giantess drew close and seized the rudder. Under the weight of her grasp and the lashing of the waves, the ship capsized, throwing all on board into the sea. The ladies of the court, the gentlemen-in-waiting, the seamen, were all struggling in the water. Those who could not swim sank from sight. Others immediately fell prey to sharks that collected round the swirling mass in anticipation of a feast. The more fortunate ones got on to the backs of porpoises. As for Suvarnamali, she was rescued in the nick of time by Sin Samudr, who bore her away to safety.

Phra Abhai Mani seized hold of a door panel that was floating above that waves. With the aid of this, he made his way towards the island and reached it just as the sun was rising. Pisua Samudr had missed him in the general confusion. She had tried to catch her son; but Sin Samudr, who inherited the dexterity of his father and the aquatic skill of his mother, successfully evaded her. Now she saw her husband on the beach of the island, and was coming towards him with tremendous strides. Phra Abhai Mani did not hesitate. He ran towards the mountain whose peak he had seen the evening before. He reached it and began to climb. Pisua Samudr followed in hot pursuit, but slipped and fell, and so Phra Abhai Mani just managed to escape her reach. She was unable to climb the mountain because it was too slippery for her. So the unfortunate Giantess remained at the foot of the mountain appealing to her unwilling husband to come down.

"My husband, my handsome husband," she cried piteously, "why are you afraid, and try to hide yourself from me? I have been trying to follow you all this time. Come to your wife. Do not neglect her or be angry with her." Phra Abhai Mani was too preoccupied with the question of his own safety to pay any attention to her. He climbed up as high as he could, and then sat down to pray to deliverance. He was soon joined by a hundred other fellow-travellers who had also escaped both the sharks and the Giantess.

When he saw that his position was secure, Phra Abhai Mani stepped to the edge of the precipice and looked down on Pisua Samudr. They held a long parley together, he persuading her to give up the pursuit, she begging him to descend from the mountain.

In the end, the patience of the Giantess was exhausted. Seeing that pleadings no longer served her ~urn, she decided to resort to other weapons. Summoning up her supernatural powers, she caused a heavy shower of rain to fall on the mountain, until Phra Abhai Mani and his followers were soaked through to the skin. As if that were not enough, she also caused hailstones to fall on them.

Phra Abhai Mani hurriedly took counsel of his followers. His love and pity for Pisua Samudr were at an end. He came to the conclusion that the best course would be for him to play his magic flute, which he always kept on his person, until the Giantess was overcome. His followers immediately agreed with him, and he ordered them to stop up their ears while he played.

Taking up the flute in his hands, Phra Abhai Mani again went forward to the edge of the precipice and, after uttering the appropriate prayer, began to play. The melody that he played touched and stirred the heartstring of Pisua Samudr. To her it was at once ecstasy and agony, sweetness and bitterness, joy and

despair. As she listened, she fell into a swoon. When the last notes re-echoed in the hills, the Giantess died of a broken heart, and her body turned into stone.

## Part Four : Sin Samudr and the Pirate

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SIN Samudr to whom the sea was a natural element, by reason of his birth, was a strong swimmer and could easily support the weight of Suvarnamali. He bore her well above the crest of the waves, and although they were surrounded by sharks, these did not come near them. Nevertheless, Suvarnamali was mortally afraid, all the more so when she saw that Sin Samudr was becoming tired. Tearfully she said to the boy:

"My dearest Sin Samudr, you are exhausted. Please leave me to my fate in the sea, and go back to join your father."

Sin Samudr, exhausted as he was, paid no heed to her and went on swimming. He told her

"If you die, then I will die with you. I look upon you as my mother, and I cannot leave my mother to die in the sea. I have some strength left, so do not cry or despair but have courage."

By dint of great exertions, Sin Samudr swam bravely on and finally came within sight of an island. Delighted and heartened, he made a special effort and reached the shore just as the sun was setting. Then, having deposited Suvarnamali safely on the beach, he collapsed and fainted from sheer exhaustion.

Suvarnamali at once took him into her arms. Tears fell from her eyes as she held him close to her breast. And thus they remained until night fell.

"O my dearest Sin Samudr," she cried, "why do you not wake up? I have tried to awaken you without success. You saved me from the perils of the sea and brought me here in safety. Now that we have reached dry land, you leave me. Is it meet, my darling boy, that you should die and leave me all alone? Have pity on your mother, who knows not what to do." And in this fashion, Suvarnamali long continued to lament and bewail the fate of Sin Samudr and of herself.

The moon rose, and the solitude of night was broken by the hum of insects. Dew began to fall from the clear sky.

Sin Samudr's body was still warm. This raised hopes in Suvarnamali. She prayed the gods that if Sin Samudr was destined to die, she might die with him there and then; but that if he was destined to live, he might recover immediately.

She had hardly uttered the last word of her prayer when Sin Samudr opened his eyes and sat up. The dew had refreshed him and woken him up from his deep slumber. Suvarnamali was overjoyed. She embraced him, and told him that she owed her life to him and would have died had he not recovered. This made him love Suvarnamali all the more.

Sin Samudr took her to the shelter of a cliff and made her as comfortable as he could. Then he explored that part of the island and brought back some fruit for her. They both sat down and ate avidly, for they were hungry after their strenuous adventure.

Now it happened that, the following morning, a big ship sailed into the bay of the island and dropped anchor. From it came small boats full of Dutch sailors who, as soon as they landed, proceeded to fetch water from a stream. Nothing could have surprised them more than to find an attractive young lady and a boy on the island. They immediately began to ask questions. Sin Samudr conversed with them, and learned that their ship belonged to the notorious English pirate, Surang. He, in his turn, told them how he and Suvarnamali came to be on the island, and asked to be given a passage to the mainland. When he saw that the sailors were taking undue interest in Suvarnamali, however, he upbraided them. But the sailors had made up their minds; they would capture the lady

and the boy and offer them to Surang their master. So they quickly seized the unfortunate couple and took them to the ship.

Surang the pirate was delighted with the prize his men had brought him. He had neither wife nor child, and rather fancied the idea of having this comely wench and the handsome young lad on board. But in order not to betray his intentions too soon, he received them with civility and offered them one of the best cabins in the ship. Having seen them safely installed, he gave orders to set sail with all speed.

Not long afterwards, Surang was sitting in his big chair talking to some of the men. He was highly pleased with himself and relished the prospect of having a woman as his very own. He told them that she was doubtless a young widow with a son on her hand. He would get better acquainted with her; in any case, she could not escape her fate. But the boy was in the way. He would have to be removed, at least temporarily. Surang's plan was to make the boy drunk so that he would be out of the way for some time.

Therefore he ordered his men to prepare a feast and also a jug of liquor.

When all was ready, Surang invited Sin Samudr to come out and join him. The two of them, pirate and boy, sat at the table laden with rich food. Surang poured out the liquor from the jug. Sin

Samudr, in his innocence, thought it was water and drank it all up. His face turned red. Becoming giddy, he seized pieces of chicken and duck piled in front of him. Meanwhile, the pirate plied him with liquor. Soon enough, Sin Samudr was completely drunk. He tried to rise from his seat but instead fell down on the deck. Surang then ordered his men to carry the boy away to his own bunk to sleep off the effects of the liquor.

Surang saw that the favourable opportunity for which he planned had come. So he prepared to take possession of the lady. He put on his best clothes and then slipped quietly into Suvarnamali's cabin. The latter was lying on her bed. The pirate went straight to the bed and sat down beside her. Suvarnamali leapt from the bed and put as much distance between herself and the pirate as she was able. At the same time, she called for Sin Samudr at the top of her voice. Hearing no reply, she began to tremble with fear. All this time, Surang was smiling quietly to himself. Now he spoke in the arrogant way of a pirate.

"There is no need to run away when I come in. Or is it because you are reminded of your late husband who is no longer with you? It is too bad that you used to be together once and now you are left a defenseless widow. Do not worry. Be mine, and I will look after you. Be reasonable, and I will take care of you and your son. I

know that I am not to be compared to your late husband, but I can protect you."

Seeing that his overtures were not well received, he said to her sternly

"Now, you must not adopt that attitude. Even if you make a fuss, you will not escape me. It is better to accept my proposal. If you do so quietly and without trouble, it will be all the better for you. Come, woman!"

So saying, he tapped the side of the bed with his knuckles.

Suvarnamali knew that she was in a desperate situation. She could only rely on her own wits to save herself now. She decided to try to appease the pirate.

"You are very kind to offer me your protection," she told him as boldly as she could, "and I am deeply grateful for the offer you have made me. But can you let me have time to think it over? There is no need to hurry. We are still at sea. Please wait until we reach the next port, and I will do as you wish."

This proposal did not satisfy Surang in the least.

"You are trying to put me off with your talk," he shouted. "I cannot wait until we reach the next port. I have been waiting long enough

for a woman like you. You cannot deceive me. Once you get ashore you will escape. Now, will you be reasonable or do you need further persuasion?"

Suvarnamali was seized with terror. But she controlled herself and answered the pirate with great presence of mind and courage.

"If you show no pity for me now. I shall not wish to live to show my shame. Give me a little more time. I would like to consult my son. Please send my son to me. I will explain everything to him so that he will understand and raise no objection. Please, please wait until this evening. I cannot run away from you. Go now, and return this evening."

Surang, in spite of his adventurous career, had little experience with women. He was so infatuated with Suvarnamali that he believed all that she had said, and yielded to her plea. He did not wish to force her to the extent that she might do some injury to herself.

"Well," he said, "if that is the case, I will wait until this evening. But first let me have some proof that you are not deceiving me. Let me cool my passion by kissing your beautiful cheeks."

Suvarnamali knew that she had discovered the pirate's weakness and made full use of it.

"Hateful man!" she cried. "The more gently I bear myself towards you, the more gross and excessive your demands. If you really love me and desire me, you will do as I ask. Tonight I shall be yours. In the meantime, please leave me. Why do you sit here and annoy me?"

Surang saw that she was angry. Smiling a wry smile, he told her

"Do not make a fuss. I will be patient until tonight. As soon as it is dark, I shall come to you."

So saying, he strutted noisily out of Suvarnamali's cabin. He went straight to his quarters and found Sin Samudr fast asleep in his bunk. He woke the boy up. Sin Samudr, who had shaken off the effects of the liquor, said to him

"I do not like getting drunk. From now on, I will not touch a drop of your fiery water."

Sin Samudr left the pirate and made his way to Suvarnamali's cabin. There he found her sobbing and weeping on the bed.

Suvarnamali was delighted to see him. Through her tears, she told him what had happened.

"Alas, it is my fate that I must die. I can escape him in no other way, so I will kill myself. You must try to get back to your father

and tell him that although I have not been able to serve him in this life, I hope that we shall meet again in our next existence."

Sin Samudr was angered beyond words. "Ambitious villain!" he cried out in a loud voice. "A crow that wants to mate with a golden swan! I am going to smash his bones."

"Stop!" said Suvarnamali, holding him back. "You do not know what you are saying. You cannot fight a full-grown man. Besides, all his men are out there. You cannot fight them all. Wait and consider..."

But Sin Samudr would not listen to her. He was not afraid of anybody on board the ship. He knew that he had the strength of a man, and his mother and the hermit on the island had endowed him with supernatural power. So he went straight up to Surang the pirate and challenged him.

"You dog!" he shouted. "You have insulted my mother. Do you think I am afraid of you? Come and fight. I shall kill you as I would a mosquito."

So saying, he stepped forward and delivered a blow so heavy that Surang fell prostrate on the deck. The pirate immediately called his men, who came running with sticks and clubs in their hands. Sin Samudr seized an axe, swung it round and scattered them. Then he closed with Surang and, flooring him again, stepped on his chest

and with a swift stroke of the axe cut off his head. That done, he lifted the pirate's corpse and used it as a weapon to flay those of his men who still wanted to fight. But the pirates had had enough, and there was no fight left in any of them. They all begged mercy from the boy who had slain their late master. Sin Samudr stopped and stood proudly surveying the scene. He then addressed the pirates. "Men! If you do not want to fight me, I will not kill you. I only slew Surang because he thought I was a child and could not protect my mother."

Surang's boatswain, whose name was Angura, came forward and offered his allegiance and that of the rest of the crew.

"Sir, spare our lives, and we will obey your commands and follow you anywhere."

Thus Sin Samudr found himself master of a pirate ship and its entire crew. He gave orders for the ship to keep its even course towards the nearest mainland. He then light-heartedly repaired to Suvarnamali's cabin to tell her of his victory.

## Part Five : The Amazing Adventure Of Sri Suvarna

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Up to this point in the story, we have been following adventures of Phra Abhai Mani and his son Sin Samudr. We have not told what happened to Phra Abhai Mani's brother, Sri Suvarna, after the Sea Giantess had abducted our hero. Sri Suvarna, who was left with his brahmin friends on the beach, all fast asleep under the spell of the magic flute, woke up to find his brother gone.

THE sun set in a blaze of colour, and dew began to fall gently on the earth. This, together with the sound of the waves breaking on the shore and the shrill cries of the birds in the forest, awakened Sri Suvarna from his deep slumber. At once, he missed his brother, who was nowhere to be seen. He quickly woke up his three Brahmin friends and asked them, "Where has my brother gone? Just now, he was playing his flute here. The beach is flat; surely he cannot be hiding anywhere."

The three Brahmins thought it strange that Phra Abhai Mani should have run away and left his brother behind. They suspected that something out of the ordinary must have happened. So they carried out a search. It was not long before they found footprints of superhuman size leading from the sea to within a short distance of where Phra Abhai Mani had been sitting, and back again to the

sea. "These are not the footprints of any human being," cried one of them, and immediately a feeling of horror and despair came over them all. "Some horrible creature from the sea has taken Phra Abhai Mani away from us," observed the second Brahmin. Sri Suvarna saw that this was indeed the case. He threw himself down on the sand and wept until he fainted.

The three Brahmins were full of sorrow for the brother who had gone and for the one who lay there unconscious. They administered aid to Sri Suvarna until he recovered. He sat up and began to bewail his fate. "O my brother," he said, "you have left me and I shall see you no more. We have hitherto shared all joys and sorrows, even from the time when we left our prosperous city to endure the hardships and privations of a journey through the forest. We have always been together and now we are suddenly parted." He shed tears in great measure and refused to be comforted.

The three Brahmins were likewise unable to restrain their tears. They sought in every way to bring cheer to Sri Suvarna. One of them addressed him thus : "Do not let yourself be overwhelmed with grief, but take courage. Those who are born in this world must experience both joy and sorrow. As for the disappearance of your brother, we do not yet know for certain whether he is dead or alive. Let us therefore set out to find him. We can sail upon the

sea, and if your brother is not dead we shall perhaps meet him again. All three of us will go with you and help you to the end. So do not cry any more. It will only waste valuable time."

Sri Suvarna listened to them and believed. His courage and strength were restored. He told them, "In saying that you will go with me, your kindness is beyond all measure. But in which direction shall we go, for the sea is so wide and deep?"

The Brahmin whose name was Sanon spoke up. "I have learned a little of the occult art. I will see if I can provide you with an answer." So saying, he lifted his fingers and began counting. He then lapsed into a trance. When he came out of the trance, he was able to tell Sri Suvarna, "You need not worry about your brother. A woman has taken him away, but he is quite safe and happy. At some later time you may meet him again. You need not fear that he will die, even though he is living at the bottom of the ocean in the south-east. Let us hasten to find him."

The second Brahmin, Mora, at once set about applying his skill, and within a short time he had constructed a seaworthy boat ready to sail. The four friends embarked, and Mora took the helm. The boat moved smoothly out to sea. There was bright moonlight and a steady breeze caught the sails. So Sri Suvarna and his three friends discovered and enjoyed the thrill of a new adventure, even though

they did not know where it would lead them. Thus they sailed for many days and nights. It was Fate that brought them to the shores of Romachakra. The four adventurers looked out one morning and saw land. As they approached, they noticed a tall watch-tower on the cliff, and so they knew that it must be some important place. They were right, for soon enough a big city came into sight. They consulted each other and decided to pay it a visit.

The coast guards saw the boat coming into the harbour and beat their drums as a signal. The Brahmins lowered the sails, and the boat drifted to rest at a quay and was duly tied up. Meanwhile, Sri Suvaina dressed himself up as a Brahmin like the others.

The four friends then conferred and decided to burn their boat, so that the nature of its construction should not be discovered. They set fire to it accordingly, and in the subsequent confusion caused by the flames and smoke, and the attempts of the coast guards to put the fire out, they made their way ashore. The burning boat sank into the depths of the harbour.

The captain of the guards saw the Brahmins and took pity on them. Calling them to his office, he asked question as to their identity and whence they came. Sanon acted as their spokesman. "We are all brothers and come from Kamvasi," he told the captain. "I am the eldest and I am called Sanon. Next to me is Vichien, and then

Mora. The name of the youngest is Sri Suvarna. We are practitioners of the art of healing, and we set out on a journey to find medical herbs among the islands. We were blown off our course by contrary winds, which blew the crew overboard and all but wrecked our ship, and so we drifted to this place. What is the name of your city?"

"This city," replied the captain, obviously delighted with the Brahmins, "is called Romachakra. It is ruled by Tao Tosavongsa." Then he became more confidential. "He has a beautiful daughter called Kaew Kesra, who is desired by many neighbouring kings. In particular, the powerful Tao Uthen has sent ambassadors to ask for her hand in marriage. This being refused, he now threatens to invade our country. That is why we soldiers are stationed here in force. We expect trouble, we can tell you."

The Brahmins were not in the least disturbed by this news. They merely asked for shelter and permission to see the sights of the city. The captain laughed at their simplicity and undertook to show them the sights himself. He led them through the streets and they finally arrived at the palace.

Outside the palace, there was a row of houses and shops. The street was full of people going marketing. The four Brahmins attracted a good deal of attention, especially from the market

women, who called out to them to pay a visit to their shops and stalls. The women were full of admiration for them, particularly for the youngest. The captain was not averse to these proceedings, for it afforded him an opportunity to take advantage of the market women's momentarily generous impulses in replenishing himself freely with betel and tobacco. But the four Brahmins walked on and took little notice of the market women.

Now, there was a servant girl of the palace who had been sent out to do some shopping. Being of a lightheaded and amorous disposition, on seeing the little Brahmin, she immediately became infatuated and, leaving her baskets scattered about the street, rushed forward to offer him flowers. But Sri Suvarna took no notice of her, and passers-by laughed and mocked. This made her angry, but she continued to press her favours on her hero and followed him wherever he went.

The girl was absent from her duties for such a long time that another servant was sent from the palace to find out what had happened to her. Seeing the baskets scattered about the street, the latter feared the worse. Soon enough, she came upon the girl, who was still making sheep's eyes at the young Brahmin. The servant women pinched her, seized her by the hair and led her back to the palace.

The girl was brought trembling before her superior, who at once questioned her regarding her conduct in the public street. Terrified, the girl told a deliberate lie. She claimed the handsome young Brahmin as her lover, and went on to describe his particular qualities and supposed intentions. Her superior cursed her and reported the matter to the four nurses of the king's daughter.

The nurses merely laughed and treated the whole thing as a joke. "We shall see how handsome he really is," they said. Then, summoning the men servants, they ordered "Go, some of you; take this girl with you, and bring her lover into the palace." The men obeyed their instructions, went out into the street with the girl, who soon found her Brahmin and pointed him out. The men immediately surrounded him, saying, "So this is your lover! Good for nothing but flirting with women of the palace! You will be fortunate if you escape a whipping. We have orders to take you to the palace. Come, do not waste our time!"

The captain heard this and flew into a rage. "These friends of mine have come out for a walk with me. When did they ever flirt with palace women? It is this blabbing girl who has been trying to flirt with them."

The men from the palace would not listen. They merely remarked: "Here's an ill-tempered man for you! Perhaps he would like to be

whipped too!" They then took hold of Sri Suvarna and escorted him to the palace.' The three Brahmins and the captain could do nothing but follow them.

When the four nurses saw Sri Suvarna, they knew at once that the servant girl's story had been false. This young Brahmin, they thought, could be no base lover but surely the son of a monarch of some distant kingdom. They wondered how he came to be in Romachakra and for what purpose. They even went so far as to consider him a suitable match for the Princess herself. So in order to detain him longer and find out more about him, the nurses gave orders that the young Brahmins be lodged with the old gardener in the palace garden until they received further instructions.

The Brahmins were not unwilling to comply with the nurses' wishes. So they said to the captain, "It is better for you to go back home now. When we are free, we shall visit you again." The captain was not at all satisfied but he accepted their advice. "Do not worry," he told them, "I will not give you up. As soon as I reach home, I shall have food sent to you here." So saying, he walked away grumbling, "Shameless, that's what it is! Getting innocent people into trouble! If they lay hands on my young friends, I will bring an action against them, I will appeal to the King!"

The men took the four Brahmins to the gardener's hut, explained the orders which had been given by the nurses and left them there. The old gardener and his wife began to worry. "What are we going to do?" they wailed. "These are young men. We are old. If they try to escape, how can we prevent them?" But the Brahmins assured them. "We shall not try to escape, grandfather and grandmother, so you need not worry. We have been unjustly accused of a wrong we did not commit, so we shall stay to defend our case." The old couple were still doubtful. "How can we believe you?" they answered. "Who would admit that he is going to escape? You must all go into the hut and stay there." The Brahmins obeyed, while the gardener and his wife stationed themselves on the verandah to see that they made no attempt to escape.

Sri Suvarna reflected on what had come to pass and felt sorry. He told his friends, "I am ashamed that they said those things of me. Why did you remain silent and not help to deny their accusations?"

The three Brahmins merely laughed. "Have you forgotten," they asked, "what that captain said about the King's beautiful daughter? Perhaps it is the hand of Fate that brings you here. We noticed the nurses looking at you very intently. It may be that this is a trick to enable you to meet the Princess. In any case, we shall know by tomorrow. Meanwhile, calm your anger, or else the Princess will be offended if she gets to hear of it." Sri Suvarna, who was shyly

innocent of love, warmly repudiated the suggestion. "Even if a goddess came down to earth, I would not want to meet her. What I wish is to find my brother, not to meet women. If you like these palace ladies, you are welcome to them; but they are not for me!"

His friends smiled and nudged one another. "Do not be too sure of yourself," they told him. "Once you see, hear and touch a really beautiful girl, you may think yourself in heaven!" Again they laughed at Sri Suvarna's expense to his great discomfort. The latter was quite relieved when the old couple shouted out to them to keep quiet and go to sleep.

The same evening, the four nurses went to attend the Princess as usual, and could not help whispering among themselves about the Brahmins. Kaew Kesra heard them and, her curiosity aroused, asked about whom they were talking. The nurse whose name was Prabhavadi quickly told her that she had dreamed of a handsome young Brahmin who came to the palace. The Princess was not deceived and understood their insinuations. She told them severely : "Do not think that you can interest me by talking about men. All my life I shall never allow any man to love me. Even if he were gold all over, I would not want him."

That night, Kaew Kesra really did have a dream, and it upset her so much that she called her nurses. She told them that in her dream

a big snake came up to her bed and coiled itself round her breast. She asked them what the dream meant. The nurses smiled and said that they were afraid to tell her because she might be angry, but added that she could consult the book of dreams by her bedside. This the Princess immediately did, and discovered to her dismay that the dream signified a love-match. She flung the book down to the floor in anger.

Sri Suvarna was sitting under a tree when he heard women's voices. He looked up and saw Kaew Kesra. All at once his heart stood still and his limbs contracted. He could only stare in amazement as if a goddess had indeed come down to earth. Perhaps they had belonged to each other in a previous existence. Whether this was so or not, he fell deeply and hopelessly in love at first sight. Spellbound by her dazzling beauty, he perceived that each and every part of her was perfect, and he lost himself in contemplation of the rare vision.

The Princess, on her part, was similarly moved by the unexpected and pleasing appearance of the young Brahmin. When her eyes met his, a wave of emotion swept through her entire frame. She too had fallen passionately in love at first sight. But recollecting her maidenly modesty, she blushed and moved away.

When Kaew Kesra walked away, Sri Suvarna felt as if a fire were burning inside him. His eyes followed her until she ascended the royal pavilion in the garden and was lost to view. His heart quivered, and he regretted that this chance meeting did not permit him to approach. All he could do was to stare at the royal pavilion, lost in the depths of reverie.

The Princess, on her part, was no less sorry at having lost sight of the handsome young Brahmin. She turned pale like the moon when it is suddenly veiled by a passing cloud. Forgetting her attendants and her flowers, she gave herself up to thoughts of him.

Neither of them slept that night.

The following day, the four nurses again came to the garden. They knew well by now what feelings Kaew Kesra entertained for the young Brahmin, and were determined to find out more about him. The only information they obtained was that the young man had vowed to serve the Princess to the end of his days. As an earnest of this pledge, he wrote a poem in praise of her and begged the nurses to convey it to their mistress. At the same time, he took the richly-bejewelled ring from his finger and placed it with the poem.

The nurses returned to the palace with the message and the ring, but did not give them to the Princess at first. Kaew Kesra, whose patience was strained by her suddenly-awakened passion, gave

vent to her feelings by flying into a temper and upbraiding her nurses for not having secured more precise information regarding the ill-concealed object of her affection. Finally, in order to calm her, the nurses handed over the poem and the ring, remarking that the young Brahmin must indeed be a prince in disguise to be able to present such rich gifts.

Kaew Kesra read the poem, which, as might have been expected, was written in terms of abject love, concluding with a threat that should the writer fail to achieve his high ambition, his present abode would be his grave.

The Princess feigned a disinterestedness that was not in the least convincing. She took the ring and put it on her finger. "This ring," said she, examining it carefully, "is of excellent design and workmanship. I will buy it from him and he may name his price. But as for his absurd poem, I will show what I think of his presumption by writing him a rude reply."

The nurses raised no objection as to the latter suggestion. As for the ring, the Princess might consider it as a gift from them. If she would deign to accept, they told her, she might signify her approval by giving them in return the shawl with which she had covered her head on the previous day's visit to the garden.

Kaew Kesra could not restrain herself from blushing as she handed the shawl to the eldest of her nurses. She made the latter promise, however, that she would never give the shawl to anybody else.

That evening, the Princess wrote her poem, which was duly enveloped and sealed. This and the shawl were taken to the garden by the four nurses the following morning. Sri Suvarna was overjoyed to receive such favours from his goddess. He put the shawl on his shoulders with a contented smile. Then he took the poem and read it to his three friends.

In her poem, Kaew Kesra thanked him for his friendship and good intentions, but expressed surprise that he should have left his father's kingdom, where luxury, wealth and women awaited his pleasure, to endure the hardships of a long journey in order to find a consort. She deprecated the praises he lavished upon her, saying that even though he might love her now it would not be for life, for as the old proverb said, "Too much sweetness palls." Finally, she told him plainly that his amorous advances were in vain; but that if he really and truly loved her in his heart, he should return to his own kingdom and, according to ancient custom, send ambassadors to her father the King to ask for her hand in marriage.

Sri Suvarna was serenely happy to receive this not unhopeful message from Kaew Kesra. While he savoured the joy of it to the full, making plans for a rosy future, the nurses took their leave and retired to a quiet corner of the garden accompanied by the Brahmins. There they paired off Prabha and Mora, Ubol and Sanon, Chongkol and Vichien. Only poor Sri Suda, who had taken such pains over her toilet and dress, was left without a partner, and so she returned at once to the palace with deep resentment in her heart against the callous levity of men and the wanton wiles of some women she could (and did) name.

Not long afterwards, the expected invasion of Romachakra by the forces of the redoubtable Tao Uthen began. Suddenly one morning, some five thousand ships, big and small, appeared off the coast and put ashore a mighty army. The defenders were outmanoeuvred and outfought. Within a short time, the invaders laid siege to the city.

The King of Romachakra was greatly disturbed. Many thousands of his people had crowded into the city for protection, and supplies were running short, causing much distress to all. He knew that the city could not withstand a long siege even though troops and cannons were concentrated within its walls. More than once he was tempted to call a truce and surrender his daughter Kaew Kesra according to the wishes of Tao Uthen. But he thought of the

honour and reputation of his country, and could not bring himself to yield.

The commander of Tao Uthen's forces, seizing his advantage, delivered an ultimatum. He demanded immediate surrender and acceptance of Tao Uthen's terms. In the event of failure to comply, he would give no quarter and would reduce the city to rubble. On receipt of the ultimatum, the King called together his counsellors and ministers. They all expressed the opinion that, in order to spare the people, it would be best to accede to the demands of Tao Uthen. The King, unwilling to act at once on this advice, asked for three days in which to think it over. This request was grudgingly granted by the besiegers.

Meanwhile, Sri Suvarna and his three Brahmin friends living in the garden which lay outside the city walls were cut off from the city. They feared for the safety of Kaew Kesra and her nurses. One and all made up their minds to place their services at the disposal of the King. The question was how they were to enter the besieged city. They decided to adopt the bold course of walking straight up to the gate and eliminating any who obstructed their passage. Arming themselves with swords and clubs, they made their way to the city wall. The besiegers were so astonished at this bold move that they did not think of challenging them until they neared the city walls. Then they surrounded the four intrepid strangers. But Sri

Suvarna and his friends set upon them with a will and scattered them in all directions. Each killed his man and took a severed head to show any new assailants what they might expect. But the four friends met with no further attack, and the guards at the city gate quickly opened it to admit the warriors who could slay the enemy with such ease.

News of the prowess of Sri Suvarna and his three Brahmin friends soon reached the ear of the King, who lost no time in sending for them. They were ushered into his presence. Surprised at their slender and frail appearance, but reassured by the air of self-confidence and eagerness borne by them, he asked whether they would undertake to defend the city and drive the foe out of the Kingdom. When Sri Suvarna replied in the affirmative, the King delightedly promised that if Sri Suvarna succeeded, he would make him his son and heir. Sri Suvarna told the King what he planned to do. First of all, he asked for four horses, all of different colours and well-trained in battle, each properly harnessed and equipped. Then a message was to be sent to the commander of Tao Uthen's forces challenging him to engage in single combat with Romachakra's champion. If the former prevailed, the King of Romachakra would without further delay deliver his daughter Kaew Kesra into the hands of Tao Uthen. If, however, Romachakra's champion prevailed, Tao Uthen's forces must immediately

withdraw to whence it came. The challenge was accordingly issued and duly accepted, and the fight was arranged for the following day.

Sri Suvarna told the King that Kaew Kesra had entered a dangerous phase of her life, and that a ceremony must be held to ward off the evil misfortune that would surely befall her otherwise. Me himself offered to make all the necessary preparations for the ceremony.

The King believed what the young stranger said and granted him permission to make whatever preparations he wished. He commanded a special pavilion to be built within the palace grounds to house the four friends, and detailed a detachment of soldiers to serve under them. At the same time, he gave orders to the palace officials to make ready for the ceremony.

When the time came for the ceremony, Sri Suvarna and his three companions were ushered into the inner palace. Sri Suvarna had the place of honour in the hall, and there he impatiently awaited the arrival of the Princess.

Kaew Kesra knew that it was a ruse on the part of Sri Suvarna to make possible another meeting between them. At first she hesitated, but fear of her father's wrath and perhaps a desire to warn Sri Suvarna not to risk his life on the field of battle overcame

her maidenly modesty, and finally she came accompanied by her nurses and took her seat next to her young admirer as arranged. The latter was so overjoyed to see her at such close quarters that he almost forgot his role in the ceremony, and made as if to touch her, when he recollected himself and proceeded with the customary rites. Nevertheless, he found an opportunity to whisper to her in an undertone, which others present in the hall took to be some mysterious incantation.

"Adored one," he said to her, "turn your face towards me and do not look so crestfallen. I came here to tell you that I have offered my services to the King your father for love of you. I have been longing to see you again and have therefore arranged this meeting. Please speak to me."

Kaew Kesra, her heart beating faster than it had ever done before, summoned up all her courage and whispered her reply. "In saying that you will fight the enemy because of your love for me, your kindness is greater than the earth. If victory is yours, I shall never cease to rejoice either by day or by night. But if defeat and death be your lot, I will not live to see another day."

Sri Suvarna tasted the joys of heaven on hearing this. "You are a woman beyond all comparison," he whispered. "It is because I love you more than life itself that I shall take the field tomorrow. I shall

wipe my adversary off the face of the earth, and when I have done so, I will come to claim you as my own."

Kaew Kesra, however, was not quite so confident of his victory. He looked so small and slender and hardly suited for mortal combat. But he reassured her with a smile and begged her to be present on the morrow with the King her father at the city wall to see him triumph over the enemy.

The following morning, Sri Suvarna and his friends were ready for the fray. They took leave of the King and passed through the city gate to the accompaniment of drums, gongs and shouts of the soldiers. The young champion looked up along the city wall and saw Kaew Kesra. Their eyes met and exchanged loving glances. The three Brahmins also observed the nurses and their eyes likewise spoke love.

When the forces of Tao Uthen heard the noise and saw Romachakra's champions advancing towards them, they also sent up cries that echoed far and wide. Immediately, four of their bravest and most skilful commanders rode out to offer battle. Sri Suvarna, undaunted by their approach, spurred his horse and engaged the foremost of them. His opponent dealt him a blow with his sword, but the young prince skilfully evaded it and, wielding his club, brought it down with a resounding blow on the commander's

head. The commander crumpled and fell from his horse. The three Brahmins, emulating the example of their young leader, went into the attack and each engaged one of the remaining commanders. Mora with a swift stroke severed his opponent's head. Vichien buried inches of steel into his opponent's body. Sanon with equally unerring aim pierced his opponent's breast. When they saw all their commanders fall, the forces of Tao Uthen broke their ranks and fled.

The King of Romachakra saw that the enemy was utterly defeated and laughed loud for sheer joy. Kaew Kesra felt immeasurably relieved and her face was radiant with happiness. All the soldiers and people of Romachakra shouted and cheered delightedly.

When Sri Suvarna and his three companions returned from the field of battle, the King was there to receive them at the gate. They were then escorted in triumph into the city which they had saved from the hands of the enemy.

The King ordered that the four young heroes were to be given the best of everything. Accordingly, when they reached the pavilion which had been hastily erected for them, they found gentlemen of the royal household waiting, ready to attend to their every need. They bathed, had a massage and put on the richest costumes and fineries from the palace wardrobe. The most sumptuous foods and

drinks were set before them. The only thing Sri Suvarna and his three friends lacked, and what they longed for most, was the presence of the adorable Kaew Kesra and her charming nurses. They had accompanied the King back to the inner palace.

'I, Sri Suvarna would have given much for another meeting with Kaew Kesra. As evening fell, he looked out and saw the moon and stars in the sky. "It is as soft and sweet as her lovely face," he murmured. "How I wish she were here with me, so that I can make love to her. Love makes a man sad and drives him almost to desperation. How can I reach her? There is a high wall between us, and I cannot go to her side..." He consulted his friends.

The Brahmins told him that there was nothing to worry about, since the Princess obviously returned his affection and it would be only a matter of time before his desire was attained. "You have fought and freed the city. The King is bound to reward you. You must refuse whatever else he offers you and state what you really desire. The King should be willing to comply with your request."

Meanwhile, Kaew Kesra was also thinking of her handsome hero and wishing to have him by her side. She fell asleep with his name on her lips and tears of longing in her eyes. The following morning, she asked her nurses to pick jasmine flowers from the pots in which they were grown near the palace. These were put in a

golden bowl and placed in front of her. Kaew Kesra proceeded to string them together into a garland. The garland which she had made with her own hands was placed on a golden platter to be sent to Sri Suvarna. The nurses also threaded their garlands of variegated flowers for the Brahmins. As Sri Suda had nobody to thread a garland for, she was entrusted with the mission of taking the garlands to the four heroes, who received them with great joy. Thereafter, garlands went forth daily from the inner palace to the special pavilion.

The day came when the King was to reward the officers and men of his army who had served faithfully in defence of the city. He took his seat on the throne in the royal audience chamber, in the presence of his ministers and all the great men of the realm. Sri Suvarna and the three Brahmins were also commanded to be present.

The King bestowed munificent gifts of silver and cloth to all the warriors, from those of the highest rank to those of the lowest. Then came the turn of the four heroes who had indeed snatched victory from the enemy's grasp. The King asked his councillors. "What reward shall we give to the Brahmins, that is worthy of their meritorious services?" The chief minister respectfully replied, "According to ancient custom and usage, a monarch rewards his victorious generals by bestowing gold decorations and insignia of

high rank, and by sending them to rule distant cities of the kingdom. Since the four Brahmins have shown themselves to be great generals and have decisively defeated the enemy, it is meet that your celestial highness should honour them by allowing them to rule some outpost of the realm." The King accepted the advice of the minister. "Let it be so," he said, "and let the responsible officials look to the matter without delay."

Sri Suvarna, however, came forward and bowed low before the throne. In quiet and respectful tones, he addressed the King thus : "I am deeply conscious of the honour that your celestial highness has seen fit to bestow upon me and my friends in decreeing that we become rulers of cities. But I humbly beg your celestial highness' leave not to accept such an exalted position. The reason why I sought to enlist in your celestial highness' service was because I craved protection. I looked upon your celestial highness as a father, I would therefore consider myself bounteously rewarded if I could remain at your celestial highness' feet."

The King knew from the young man's cunning reply that he had fallen in love with his daughter. He did not reply at once but weighed the matter in his mind. If he gave his daughter's hand in marriage to this stranger of unknown parentage, he would lose prestige; on the other hand, if he did not, he would lose a brave warrior. So he decided to adopt delaying tactics. He turned to Sri

Suvarna and said : "Do not fear, I will adopt all four of you as my sons, and you shall stay with me. Nothing you desire shall be denied you, except the sun and the stars."

One month went by, and Sri Suvarna was no nearer to attaining his heart's desire. He therefore wrote a letter to Kaew Kesra, expressing in doleful terms, since his suit appeared to be a hopeless one, his intention of committing suicide. The Princess, who had also grown desperate with longing, read the letter and believed that Sri Suvarna would really kill himself. The shock was too much for her, and she collapsed in a dead faint.

On hearing the news, her parents rushed to her side. The court doctors were sent for, but they could do nothing to revive the shock stricken Princess. When all were beginning to despair of her recovery, somebody thought of the young Brahmin warrior who had once before saved her from evil misfortune. Accordingly, he was bidden to come into the inner palace, and it must be confessed that he wasted no time in so doing.

Arriving at the bedside of Kaew Kesra, he called for perfumed water, and this was brought to him in a golden bowl. After invoking all the sacred things in the universe to come to his aid he sprayed the water on the prostrate form of the Princess. Miraculously, or so it seemed to all the onlookers, Kaew Kesra stirred and opened her

eyes. On seeing Sri Suvarna there beside her, colour returned to her cheeks, and her condition improved almost immediately. The King, the Queen and the whole court were beside themselves with joy, and praised Sri Suvarna for his healing powers.

After that, Sri Suvarna was given permission to remain inside the inner palace until such time as the Princess should be fully restored to health. He had access to her at all times, and on certain occasions he found it necessary to remain with her up to a late hour. It was a long while before Kaew Kesra regained the normal state of health, and by then the young couple were firmly knit in love.

Realising the circumstances, there was nothing the King could do but yield with good grace. He announced the betrothal of his daughter Kaew Kesra to Sri Suvarna. The day of marriage was fixed and, having arrived, was duly celebrated with all pomp and ceremony. The people of Romachakra rejoiced to have a brave and handsome youth like Sri Suvarna as heir to the throne, and in course of time the old King came to share their admiration for his son-in-law. So following the example of his ancestors, he retired into private life and left Sri Suvarna to rule the kingdom with Kaew Kesra by his side.

## Part Six : Strange Reunion

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SRI Suvarna had ruled the kingdom of Romachakra for close on ten years, and was the father of a lovely little girl called Arun Rasmi who was eight years old, when he dreamed a strange dream : a forest fire had spread to the city and the roof of his palace was set alight, so he went out to extinguish it; whereupon the fire took hold of his person, and he himself was on fire; then all of a sudden his brother Phra Abhai Mani appeared, quenched the flames and presented him with a jewel of rare beauty. Consulting the court astrologers, he was informed that a situation of some peril to the state would arise, but that his brother would come to his aid and put things to right.

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state would arise, but that his brother would come to his aid and put things to right.

Sensing the danger of another invasion by his old enemy, Tao Uthen, Sri Suvarna made preparations for the defence of the kingdom. He sent his three brave Brahmin friends to guard distant corners of the realm Mora to the east. Vichien to the north, and Sanon to the west. All three set out at once with their wives, who were the three nurses, with whom they had fallen in love, and all the available forces they could muster.

The attack, however, came from a quarter and in a manner quite unforeseen.

Sin Samudr, on board the pirate ship he captured, had spent three months searching the seas for traces of Suvarnamali's father and the men and woman of his court who were shipwrecked with him, but without success. By now, his provisions were running low and he decided to make for the nearest land. He consulted Angura the boatswain, who told him that the nearest land was a country called Romachakra, rich in resources of the soil. So it was decided to call there to replenish the ship's stores. Arriving at the bay where Sri Suvarna had landed several years previously, men from the pirate ship took to their longboats, hoisted sail and made for the shore. Now, the coast defences had been warned to be on

their guard against strange vessels entering the bay. They were naturally suspicious of the pirate ship and the longboats that came from it. So they fired a warning shot as a signal to lower sail. The landing force, under the command of an experienced pirate whose name was Hasken, took this for opposition and immediately opened fire on the coast defence from the longboats. After a short and sharp engagement, the coast defences were silenced, and the pirates were able to approach.

The governor of the coastal district was the one-time captain who had helped Sri Suvarna and his friends when they first landed. When Sri Suvarna became ruler, he was made a nobleman of the realm (and given the responsible task of governing the coastal regions. He was his ease listening to his concubines playing their music and singing, hen he heard the sound of gunfire. At once he sprang to action and ordered boats, men and guns. With these, he lost no time in going to intercept the enemy. He engaged them at point blank range and succeeded in sinking one or two of the longboats. Hasken, realising that he was outnumbered, wisely retired in the direction of his ship. The defenders, emboldened by this seeming victory, gave chase and realised too late that they had come within range of the guns of the main enemy force. They were consequently hot to pieces, and the few survivors beat a hasty retreat to the shore.

After that, Sin Samudr's men had no difficulty in getting ashore. Only an old fort with massive walls stood in their path. The ship's cannons soon made a breach and the men stormed the fort, which fell to the invaders within a short space of time. Those of the defenders who survived were taken prisoner. The pirates, who had been forced to desist from their customary practices ever since Sin Samudr took over command, now gave vent to their desires, swooped on the neighbouring town, plundering the houses and despoiling the women. They collected a vast amount of booty as well as provisions, which they took back with them to the ship.

In the heat of battle, the old governor succeeded in escaping. He took a small boat and made his way with all possible speed to the city. Arrived there, he called up high officials to convey the news to Sri Suvarna. By the time it reached the latter, it had magnified into a report that a big army of invasion had landed and was threatening to march on the city.

Sri Suvarna took counsel with his assembled ministers, who were in a state of alarm. He could not find out from the old governor whether or not it was Tao Uthen who had thus forcibly invaded his kingdom. However, he was determined to meet force with force, and ordered his troops to prepare for battle. Early the following morning, Sri Suvarna himself rode out of the city at the head of his troops and proceeded in the direction of the sea. Reaching an

open plain about a mile distant from the old fort, where the invaders could be seen encamped, he ordered his men to halt and entrench themselves.

Sin Samudr, who was standing on the look-out of the fort became childishly excited when he saw on the horizon the full array of the Romachakra army with red and green banners unfurled. He asked Angura's opinion as to how he should deal with the situation.

The old pirate advised him to hold fast to the fort and see whether the enemy, who was numerically far superior and, who appeared to be commanded by a personage of eminence would first launch an attack. But Sin Samudr was in no mood for such wait-and-see tactics. He divided his small force into two and ordered Angura to hold the fort with half the men, while he led a frontal assault on the enemy with the other half. Raving made his decision, he mounted a steed captured during the fighting of the previous day, and, to the accompaniment of battle cries, made a sortie at the head of a small band of men. The warriors of Romachakra, taken by surprise at this bold and unexpected move, fell away before the onrush, so that Sin Samudr was able to ride unharmed through their ranks until he came up face to face with Sri Suvarna.

Here he drew rein and halted. He had intended to challenge the enemy commander to single combat. But on coming closer, he was struck by the resemblance between this man and his own father. Thoughts of his father came crowding upon him and made him hesitate and lose initiative. Sri Suvarna, recovering first from his surprise, spurred his horse and charged. His sword landed squarely on Sin Samudr's chest, and the youngster fell from his horse to the ground.

This was a signal for Sri Suvarna's army to attack. In no time Sin Samudr's small force which had made the sortie was scattered and the fort itself was surrounded. Angura, however, was a man of mettle and decided to defend the fort to the last. When evening fell, Angura's men were still fighting staunchly and successfully prevented any infiltration into their lines. Sri Suvarna decided to break off engagement for the night.

In the fort, Angura held council with his men. Eventually it was agreed to hold the fort for the night, in case Sin Samudr should recover and be able to rejoin them. If he did not come before dawn, they would fight their way out and make for the ship.

Meanwhile, Sin Samudr, who had been left for dead, still lay on the ground unconscious. The dew revived him. He opened his eyes and looked cautiously around. He saw the fort surrounded by the

enemy. Rage swelled within his heart. He decided to show them that he, the son of a hero and a sea giantess, could not be put down in such a fashion. Springing to his feet, he ran towards the nearest group of men. Single-handed he felled some and put others to flight. Then he shouted, "Hey! come on! Where is the commander of this army? Come out and fight!"

As nobody seemed willing to accept his challenge, he made his way unhindered to the fort, where he shouted for Angura. The latter, delighted to see his young master alive and unhurt, quickly opened the gate of the fort to let him in. Sin Samudr told him that he would make another attack at daybreak and ordered him to tell his remaining men to prepare for battle.

The following morning, Sin Samudr bathed in perfumed water and put on magnificent garments. He then prayed to the gods to grant him invulnerability. As the sun rose, he took his place at the head of his diminutive force and rode out to challenge the enemy.

Meanwhile, Sri Suvarna's army was still in a state of consternation following the surprise raid carried out single-handed by a mere boy. But Sri Suvarna himself was quite composed and confident. He said to his followers: "That boy whom I thought I had killed yesterday dares come out to fight again. I will see to it that he does so no more." So saying, he put on his armour, mounted his horse and rode out to meet Sin Samudr.

When they were face to face, the uncle asked the nephew : "Who are you, boy? Why do you come to attack our city? You are too young to be a pirate or robber. Do you want to meet your death at our hands?"

Sin Samudr replied fearlessly : "I am no pirate or robber. My name is Sin Samudr, and I am the son of Phra Abhai, a scion of kings. I am making a journey by sea. Your men attacked mine first for no reason, so we had to fight them. Now it is your turn to tell me who you are. Are you nobleman of the realm? If you have a desire to live, submit and we will leave you in peace."

Sri Suvarna made no immediate answer. He was deep in thought. The boy, he mused, said that his father's name was Phra Abhai. May that be my long-lost brother? He looked at Sin Samudr and perceived that there was indeed a resemblance. But the boy's hair was curly like a demon and his eyes were more red than those of an ordinary human being.

Sri Suvarna then asked him:

"Where is your father? Did he come with you? Speak rather than seek to fight, for that would surely mean your own destruction. I am the King of Romachakra, and a tried warrior. I have no desire to harm your tender youth. Go, and bid your father come to me; we shall settle it between us."

Sin Samudr laughed scornfully. "So you are a skilled warrior! Then prove your boast. What has my father to do with this? This is a matter for the two of us to decide. Come, I dare you to single combat!"

Having hurled defiance Sin Samudr spurred his horse and charged at Sri Suvarna with drawn sword. The King skilfully parried the blow aimed at him and made a quick evasive movement. Sin Samudr, confident of his own prowess, followed close behind. Sri Suvarna turned suddenly and caught him off his guard. He dealt his nephew five or six sharp blows with his longstaff, until the sound of it echoed over the plain. But the boy withstood the blows and was unharmed. The latter then seized and wrested the longstaff from him and proceeded to return blow for blow, until the King was unsaddled and fell to the ground. Whereupon some of Sin Samudr's men came running up and secured the outfought ruler of Romachakra, while the rest shouted their battle cry and launched an attack on the King's army. Having witnessed the defeat and capture of their King, the Romachakra troops were in no mood to stay and fight it out; they fled in all directions, leaving behind their weapons and much booty besides. These were duly collected by the pirates. After which Sin Samudr led his men back to the fort in triumph.

There, seated in his chair of state, surrounded by rejoicing men, Phra Abhai Mani's son ordered the captive to be brought before him. Sri Suvarna remained calm and dignified as he stood before the boy who had conquered him. Then, suddenly, he caught sight of the ring Sin Samudr was wearing and immediately recognised it as his brother's. At the thought of his brother, his eyes filled with tears.

Sin Samudr taunted him : "What, a king in tears? Are you thinking of your palace and your queen? Why did you accept the challenge to combat, then, if you are afraid to die?"

Sri Suvarna flushed with anger. "Do not insult me, boy!" he cried. "I am not afraid to die. I am a man, and would gladly die a soldier's death to preserve my honour and my name. If you wish, you may kill me at once. I do not ask for mercy. But something that I see brings tears to my eyes. It is the ring on your finger. I know it belongs to my brother Phra Abhai Mani, from whom I have been parted these many years. You asked what my name is. My name is Sri Suvarna."

Sin Samudr was disconcerted by this unexpected oration. He recalled how his father had told him that somewhere in the world he had an uncle called Sri Suvarna. But not wanting to seem too credulous, he asked his royal prisoner : "If you are really my

father's brother, you will know what country he comes from and wherein lies his particular talent. If you can answer these questions truly, I will salute you as my uncle."

"My brother has a magic flute," replied Sri Suvarna. "When he plays it, all living creatures become powerless and fall fast asleep." Then he proceeded to tell Sin Samudr the story of their lives up to the time they became separated, and how he himself had won the throne of this country.

Sin Samudr now realised that the man standing before him was indeed his uncle. So he threw himself down at his feet, and with tears in his eyes begged Sri Suvarna's forgiveness. This being given, he told his uncle his own life story and the sad circumstances of his separation from his father.

Sri Suvarna sat down and embraced his nephew. "Alas, to think that we nearly killed each other!" he said. "Come, let us put a stop to these hostilities. We will go together to the city, and you shall meet your aunt. I shall give orders for supplies and provisions to be sent to your men here. When we have rested a few days, we will set out together to find Phra Abhai Mani."

Sin Samudr told him that his mother on board the ship waited anxiously for news. Sri Suvarna immediately expressed a wish to accompany his nephew, in order to invite her to come and stay in

the city. So Sin Samudr ordered Angura to prepare one of the longboats, and uncle and nephew set out together to join the beloved of Phra Abhai Mani.

Meanwhile, the city of Romachakra was in a state of panic. The first remnants of Sri Suvarna's defeated and fugitive army had reached the city bringing with them news of the calamity. Word soon reached the palace, where Kesra and her aged father were waiting anxiously, that Sri Suvarna had been captured and taken to the enemy stronghold, and his army utterly routed. As there was no further organised resistance against the enemy, it was thought probable that the enemy would take this advantage to march against the city and lay siege to it. Kesra and her father were advised to flee while there was yet time. The old ex-king was sorely perturbed. His age no longer permitted him to take up the enemy's challenge. His son-in-law Sri Suvarna was the most redoubtable warrior Romachakra ever had; and if he could be defeated, what hope was there left for the city? Kaew Kesra bewailed her fate and thought of her husband in the hands of a ruthless enemy. As no further reliable reports came in as to the enemy's movements, she began to fear the worst and prepared to follow her husband in death. Her aged mother was likewise full of grief and despair and beat her breast.

For the rest of that day, nobody went about in the streets of Romachakra. But towards evening, news reached the city that a fleet of the enemy's boats was sailing up the river. Immediately, the city was in an uproar as its citizens rushed wild-eyed through the streets. Even the crippled, the maimed and the blind succeeded in making their way to places of refuge. Many simply sought shelter in big water jars and hoped they would escape detection. Others hid themselves under the bed or anywhere else which offered the least semblance of safety. Soon enough they heard the drums of the enemy as their boats approached the city. Then came triumphant shouts as the boats prepared to come alongside the landing stages. The citizens of Romachakra trembled more than ever before.

The aged ex-king saw that the situation was hopeless and that the only course was to yield with good grace, while seeking the best possible terms from the victorious enemy. So he sent a deputation of nobles to receive the enemy commander at the landing stage.

When Sin Samudr's boat touched the stage, another cheer went up from the escorting vessels. The nobles, fearful and trembling, bowed low to the ground. Out of the boat stepped Suvarnamali, Sri Suvarna and Sin Samudr. The latter, though still a boy, made many a nobleman who had witnessed his prowess quake with terror. The fair lady they did not know. But the sight of Sri Suvarna,

alive and smiling, reassured them. The nobles went forward and knelt at his feet.

Sri Suvarna immediately surprised and delighted them beyond measure by telling them that the youngster who had vanquished him on the field of battle was none other than his nephew and the son of his long-lost brother Phra Abhai Mani. The lady, he explained, was the boy's mother and therefore his own sister-in-law.

The good news travelled fast to the palace. By the time Sri Suvarna and his party stepped inside the great hall, the old king and queen, Kaew Kesra and her daughter, were there to welcome them. There was great joy over this unexpected meeting of unknown relatives, and there was much to be told and explained on both sides.

Sin Samudr naturally attracted a great share of attention. Admiring eyes were turned on him, and all wondered how it came about that so much courage and skill were to be found in one so young and small. The only person present who was not at all impressed was little Arun Rasmi. On being told to pay respects to her new-found cousin, she pursed her lips and pouted : "So you are my cousin, who took Father away and made us all cry! You have been disrespectful to Father and you deserve to be beaten!" Before any one could stop her, she went up to Sin Samudr and pinched him.

"Oui!" exclaimed Sin Samudr in pain. "Stop pinching me, dear cousin, and I will explain everything. I did not know he was my uncle. Now that I know, we love each other very much and I will love you too. Please forgive me and I will give you some of the dolls I have on board our ship." Arun Rasmi stopped pinching her cousin and became quite friendly with him. All those present in the hall laughed at this strange encounter in which Sin Samudr for once came off the worse.

Meanwhile, the old king looked intently at Suvarnamali and was puzzled. Finally, curiosity overcame him and he asked her: "My child, how old are you? You look like a young girl still. How do you come to have a son as big as Sin Samudr is?"

Suvarnamali blushed and was at a loss to know how to answer. She did not want to confess before all the company that she was still a virgin. At the same time, she did not wish to lie to the old man. So she exaggerated her age slightly, and~this was sufficient to satisfy him.

The old king invited Suvarnamali and Sin Samudr to stay in Romachakra and rest after their long, adventurous journey. But Suvarnamali declined the invitation, saying that they had to set out again to scour the seas for Phra Abhai Mani. It was therefore agreed

that they should remain in the city a few days longer before leaving.

After a brief but happy period spent in each other's company, the time came for the visiting relatives to depart. Sri Suvarna made up his mind to join his nephew in the search for his brother, and Arun Rasmi insisted on going too, so much did she grow to love her cousin Sin Samudr. But Kaew Kesra had to be left behind to look after her aged parents. When the moment of parting came, Sri Suvarna, his nephew, his daughter, and Suvarnamali, all embarked on the old pirate ship. Kaew Kesra and her parents, with tears in their eyes, came to see them set sail. The three brave and faithful Brahmins, who had been recalled to the city to guard it in Sri Suvarna's absence, were also there. When sad farewells had been said, sails were hoisted, and the ship glided slowly out into the open sea.

We last left Phra Abhai Mani on the deserted and mountainous island where he and his followers were left stranded after being shipwrecked and where the Sea Giantess pursued him in vain and finally died of a broken heart. The Prince and his devoted companions had no choice but to remain there, ekeing out a bare existence with the poor products of the soil, such as wild potatoes, roots and occasionally wild fruit. It was with great relief, therefore, that one morning they saw sails on the horizon. As the day wore

on, the ships drew closer to the island, and they saw that there was quite a fleet of ships which evidently belonged to somebody of eminence.

As fate would have it, it was the fleet of Usren, the betrothed of Suvarnamali, who, since his future bride and her father had been reported missing at sea, had organised an expedition and searched the seas in vain for any sign of them. His ships duly reached the vicinity of Phra Abhai 84 Mani's island. Seeing the mountain top from afar, Usren decided that it might be worth while to sail closer to this strange piece of land in the hope of finding his beloved Suvarnamali there. When his ship was within a reasonable distance of the island, he looked through his telescope and saw unmistakable evidence of human habitation. So he ordered his fleet to drop anchor fairly close to the shore, while he himself dressed and prepared to land.

Meanwhile, Phra Abhai Mani and all his followers gathered on the beach and eagerly awaited their heaven-sent rescuers. A boat was soon lowered from the principal ship and after some brisk rowing quickly made the shore. Out of it stepped Usren, clad in rich black garments which at once showed him to be some wealthy potentate from the West.

Usren knew immediately that Phra Abhai Mani, in spite of his ragged appearance, was a man of rank. So he addressed him in the language of the Westerners. Phra Abhai Mani, who had learned that tongue while he was with the old hermit on the enchanted island, replied with ease. He told Usren how he, an eastern monarch's son, and his motley companions of divers nationalities, came to be on the island. Then he recounted how Suvarnamali, her father, and his own son, had disappeared in the sea.

Usren sat down on a rock, his eyes filled with tears. "O my Suvarnamali!" he cried. "It is not our destiny to live together in this life. But I cannot return to my country without you. I will follow you in death here and now."

Phra Abhai Mani now knew who his new acquaintance was. He decided, however, that it would be more politic to conceal his own sentiments towards Suvarnamali for the time being.

Usren asked him, "Are you sure that you saw her sink in the waves?" Is there no hope left?"

"I cannot tell," replied Phra Abhai Mani. "I was in the stern of the vessel and the Princess was amidships. Because of the distance, and in the confusion of the wreck, I could not see what became of her. Why do you not consult an astrologer?"

"That is a wise suggestion. I have brought one along in my ship, and he is always full of hope. I will send for him."

So the astrologer was sent for. His answer was as hopeful as ever.

"The Princess is safe, my lord. She has someone to protect her, and is now in the north-east. If you sail in that direction, you will surely meet her."

Usren felt a little relieved. He told the astrologer, "If you are wrong, your head shall pay for it. If you are right, you shall be handsomely rewarded."

Then, turning to Phra Abhai Mani, he said, "Will you and your men be pleased to accompany me on board my ships? We go to search for Suvarnamali."

Neither Phra Abhai Mani nor his men raised any objection. So they all boarded the ships, which in due course weighed anchor and set sail.

Usren thought so highly of his princely guest that he offered him the best cabin, which was richly furnished. That night, Phra Abhai Mani opened the large windows and looked out on the calm sea under the stars and the crescent moon. Cold dew bathed his face and settled on the window ledge like sparkling diamonds. The ship's bell struck an echoing note in his heart. He thought of his

son and of Suvarnamali. Would they ever meet again? If they did, how could he win her from Usren, who was his rescuer? But was it not himself whom she loved? She had given him her shawl, which was even now round his neck, delighting his nostrils with its subtle and soothing perfume.

Not far away, in another cabin, Usren was also gazing at the moon and the stars. He too was thinking of Suvarnamali. Usren's fleet carried out a thorough search of every island and reef encountered. Usren himself maintained ceaseless vigil, ever scanning the sea with his telescope for any signs of Suvarnamali and her party.

Suvarnamali, meanwhile, was safe on board Sin Samudr's ship, with Sin Samudr and Sri Suvarna, who on their part were searching for Phra Abhai Mani. Sri Suvarna was much concerned regarding his brother's fate, and kept careful watch in every direction. Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi enjoyed themselves immensely, for being children without a single care in the world, they had no doubt whatever that everything would come out right in the end and that their father and uncle would be found. They spent much of their time with Suvarnamali, who taught them the names of the various stars and constellations.

One day, the ships of both parties did eventually meet. Sri Suvarna was the first to espy Usren's fleet stretched across the horizon and coming towards his ship. He was determined to remain in its path and find out whose fleet it was.

Usren also saw the former pirate ship and wondered what manner of vessel it was. So he ordered a boat to be lowered and sent a party of men to find out the name of the owner of the ship that dared to obstruct the path of his fleet.

Usren's messengers were received by Sin Samudr himself. When they told him that their master was searching the seas for a princess named Suvarnamali, who was to be his consort. Sin Samudr's anger flared up.

"What! you dogs of Lanka!" he shouted. "Know, your blind and insolent search is in vain! The King of Paleuk has given the Princess to my father. She is here with me on this ship. Go back and tell your master that he shall never have her. If he values his life, let him return to Lanka and marry some other pretty woman there. Tell him that I, Sin Samudr, warn him to do this!"

After Usren's messengers had gone back to report to their master, Sin Samudr with childish glee ran to meet his "mother." He told her what had happened and what he had said.

Suvarnamali was at once frightened and ashamed. With a maidenly blush, she upbraided Sin Samudr for linking her name to that of his father. Nor did she approve of his boastful challenge, for she was afraid that a man of spirit like Usren might take it up, and a fearful battle would ensue.

"He wants to come and take you away and marry you," retorted Sin Samudr. "This made me angry and so I gave him a piece of my mind. All right, if you wish it, I shall tell him that you are not married to my father. But I am not afraid of battle. Let him come and I shall destroy him utterly."

Suvarnamali pinched his cheeks. "What a jealous child you are! Who ever told you that I wish to marry your father? I only adopted you as a son. How do you know that I might not wish to marry Usren?"

But Sin Samudr merely laughed.

Meanwhile, Usren's men regained their ship and immediately reported to their master : "My lord, the owner of that ship is a mere child about nine years of age, but he has the temper of a devil. He told us that his name is Sin Samudr and that he is the son of the Princess Suvarna-mali, who is with him on board the ship. He said that the King of Paleuk gave the Princess to his father."

Usren felt as though some one had tried to sever his head from his body. He shook with anger until sweat poured from his face and he had to wipe it off with a handkerchief. "Lying slave!" he shouted, "I shall see to it that he does not escape. But did you see the father?" His men replied that they had not. "No matter. Whoever he is, I will take him alive, skin him and rub his flesh with salt!" Usren then sent for Phra Abhai Mani to ask his advice. He related all that his men had told him. Phra Abhai Mani knew at once that it was his own son but deemed it expedient not to mention the fact.

Usren was all for battle. But Phra Abhai Mani succeeded in dissuading him from any hasty action, by offering to make the recalcitrant ship yield without a shot being fired. Obtaining Usren's consent, he brought forth his magic flute and at once began to play a plaintive air. Usren and all his men were immediately spellbound and gradually fell into deep slumber. Soon, all on board the ships of Lanka were prostrate except for Phra Abhai Mani and his followers, who knew the trick and stopped their ears.

Those on board Sin Samudr's ship likewise fell asleep when they heard the somnolent melody wafted by the breeze across the water. Only Sin Samudr, Suvarnamali and Sri Suvarna, who had heard it before, remained awake. They were overjoyed, for they knew that the player of the flute could be none other than Phra Abhai Mani.

In spite of his uncle's objection, Sin Samudr decided to go to his father without delay. With a graceful movement, he leapt into the sea, and, true son of his mother the sea giantess, swam with bold and easy strokes to Usren's ship. Arrived there, he climbed on board without difficulty. Everywhere were prostrate forms which he had to step over. But he followed the voice of the flute and soon came upon his father. He rushed to him, knelt at his feet and embraced him.

As soon as he saw his son, Phra Abhai Mani was overcome with joy, as though he had died and was then born again. Putting down his flute, he embraced the boy, with tears of delight flowing down his face. Even his followers, hardened mariners though they were, could not help being affected by this touching sight of reunion between father and son.

By this time, Usren had slept off the effects of the magic spell. He awoke just as father and son were exchanging accounts of their experiences and adventures. He asked who the boy was. "This is my son Sin Samudr," Phra Abhai Mani told him, "so there is no need for further talk of fighting. Come, Prince, let us go to his ship. There you shall meet the Princess Suvarnamali."

So the three of them took a boat to the former pirate ship. Sri Suvarna was waiting for them, there was a happy reunion between

the two brothers, who had been separated from each other for many long years. But of Suvarnamali there was no sign. She had fled to her cabin at the approach of her two suitors.

Usren was impatient to meet his betrothed. "Pray, tell me," he addressed Sri Suvarna, "Which is her cabin? I would like to meet her, to tell her that our ships are ready to escort her back to her own land."

At this, Sin Samudr became angry and, unable to control his childish temper, cried out impetuously, "I will not let anybody take my mother away!"

Phra Abhai Mani tried to soothe him. "My dearest boy, do not excite yourself. Prince Usren is a dear friend. He helped your father when in distress. Were it not for him we should not be meeting each other now. Go and tell your mother. She will decide what is best."

Sin Samudr could find no answer. He merely burst into tears and ran to Suvarnamali's cabin. Suvarnamali put her arms round him and asked what was the matter. "Has that man who came with your father said anything?"

"He is the cause of all trouble." Sin Samudr replied, sobbing childishly. He then put an earnest question to Suvarnamali "Tell

me truly, do you really love that man, that Prince of Lanka? He says he wants to take you away and marry you. Do you really want to leave me?"

"Do you want your mother to go?" Suvarnamali asked him teasingly. "So you are afraid of him, are you, my little cry-baby? What does your father say?" "I am not afraid of any man," Sin Samudr retorted indignantly. "But I do not like the way Father treats Usren as a friend, and is willing to give you up to him. He left it to you to decide what to do. Mother, you must be firm and refuse to go to Lanka. I will not let you go. I will fight him and him."

Suvarnamali's eyes filled with tears. Her patient longing and sacrifice had been in vain. Phra Abhai Mani had all but called her his own, and now he was willing to cast her off for the sake of a mere acquaintance. Feeling of shame at having been so easily duped and deceived obsessed her spirit and wounded her proud heart. She decided that the only solution was to seek solace in death.

"It is my evil destiny, child," she sobbed. "I shall become an object of derision, accused of pretending to be what I am not. How changeable and cruel is your father! I regret now that I have given him remembrances of me."

Suvarnamali then took from her finger the ring that Phra Abhai Mani had sent to her and put it on Sin Samudr's finger.

"Whoever handed this ring to you to give to me, return it to him and say that I have no further use for it."

So saying, she seized a dagger that was lying by her bedside and unsheathed it to stab herself.

With a movement swift as lightning, Sin Samudr wrested it from her and threw it out of the window into the sea.

"You should not do such a thing, Mother. Even if you are angry with Father and cannot forgive him, you still have me."

Suvarnamali held the boy close to her breast and wept. "I know that you love me, my child, and I shall never forget it," she said. "But there is no hope left for me. I am filled with shame, and cannot hold my head up to public gaze any more. There is nothing more degrading than a woman who belongs to two men. How can I ever live down the fact that I have once declared Phra Abhai Mani to be my husband?"

Sin Samudr tried to comfort her. He put the ring back on her finger and promised her that he himself would arrange matters. Then, taking his leave and stepping out of the room, he beckoned to

Arun Rasmi and whispered to her to go into the cabin and stay with her aunt until he returned.

Sin Samudr came out on to the deck where Usren waited impatiently. He told the latter curtly "My mother does not wish to come. Moreover, she says that she does not know you."

Usren began to lose his temper. "You mean, You will not allow her to come out. Do not trifle with me. I will bide no excuses. Your father knows full well that Suvarnamali is mine, was given me by her parents. That is why I have been searching the seas for her. Now I have brought your father to you, you should hand over the lady to me."

Sin Samudr was obstinate and stood his ground. "Did I tell you to bring my father?" he answered. "I would have found him anyway without your assistance. Now go back home and find some beautiful woman there to be your wife. You can never hope to get my mother. I may be young and small, but I will see to it that she remains with me. Go! You annoyne!"

Usren could scarcely control himself. "Youngster, you do not know what you are saying! Your father and I have come to an understanding. So do not attempt to put me off in this manner." Then, turning to Phra Abhai Mani, he asked "Well, what say you?"

Phra Abhai Mani found himself in a difficult position between his rescuer and his son. He replied diplomatically "If you wish to take the Princess, I personally raise no objection. But the boy loves her and will not part with her." Sri Suvarna felt it was time to speak in support of his nephew. "The Princess has no desire to go with you." he told Usren. "How can you force her to do so against her will?"

Usren's patience was exhausted. "I have pleaded with you as a man of peace. But you will not listen to me. Very well, I am also a warrior and have powerful forces under my command. If you wish for battle, I am at your service. From now on, we fight." So saying, he left them and returned with all speed to his own ship. There, he called a conference of his commanders and told them to stand by for action. Their fleet would surround Sin Samudr's ship and close in on it from all sides. In boarding the ship, they were to seize and bind Sin Samudr. As for the Princess, she was not to be touched and must be brought to him unharmed.

The several commanders promptly carried out their instructions. Soon, Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna saw that their ship was completely surrounded by vessels of Usren's fleet. They asked Sin Samudr what he proposed to do under the circumstances. Sin Samudr was not in the least perturbed. He called up Angura and gave orders for battle. Angura's men took up their action stations, and the ship sailed on in face of the enemy.

Phra Abhai Mani informed his son that, in view of his obligations to Usren, he could not be a party to the battle but would remain on board as a neutral observer. Sin Samudr went to tell this to his "mother." Suvarnamali was angry with Phra Abhai Mani for not wanting to help his own son. So she told Sin Samudr that she herself would help him instead, and insisted on dressing up as a man. She accompanied him on deck, and none of the men recognised her.

Usren's ships closed in. As they came within range, they lowered their sails and fired several broadsides. Angura's men replied with all their cannons, and the exchange of fire went on for a while.

It was Suvarnamali herself who suggested the tactic of engaging one enemy ship at a time. The operation was carried out and proved highly successful. Bringing all guns to bear on each ship in the turn, the gallant little ex-pirate ship sank Usren's men-o'-war one after another. Finally, Usren's own ship was encountered. By a daring manoeuvre, Sin Samudr's ship closed in, and the ex-pirates, long accustomed to this type of engagement, boarded the other vessel and took Usren's men, who had prepared them-selves for a more lengthy gun-duel at long range, completely by surprise.

Sin Samudr himself went with the boarding party and personally captured Usren. The latter was brought back to Sin Samudr's ship

with his hands securely tied behind him. When they saw that their prince had been taken prisoner, the rest of Usren's fleet surrendered at once.

Usren did not remain a prisoner long, however. Both Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna pleaded with Sin Samudr to release him. Sin Samudr consulted Suvarnamali, and eventually they agreed to do so, after warning him not to try to stir up trouble again.

Usren returned to his ship more furious than ever. Instead of learning a lesson, he was more determined than before to have his revenge. After drinking three bowls of liquor, he became boastful and told his men that he would annihilate Sin Samudr. He ordered them to prepare for another battle.

That night, Usren's ship stealthily closed in on Sin Samudr's ship which was sailing unsuspectingly along the appointed course. When the vessels were within easy range of each other, Usren's men catapulted oil-soaked cloth and flaming torches into the ex-pirate ship, which immediately caught fire.

However, Sin Samudr, his father and his uncle, rose to the occasion. Summoning all hands on deck, they diligently set about putting out the flames, so that nowhere did the fire cause extensive damage. Meanwhile, Angura assembled a squad of sharpshooters who fired a volley on to the deck of the attacking

ship. One of the bullets hit Usren as he was directing his men to the attack. He fell, with blood pouring from his wound. His lieutenant decided to break off engagement immediately, so Usren's ship withdrew from the fray. By early morning it was already out of sight of Sin Samudr's ship and heading for Paleuk with all possible speed, with a wounded and aggrieved Usren on board still weakly vowing vengeance.

### Part Seven : The Love Match

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AFTER the shamefaced retreat of Usren, it was the wish of Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna to pay a visit to their aged parents, whom they had not seen for many long years. This information was conveyed by Sin Samudr to Suvarnamali, who however implored him to go first to Paleuk, where her mother was left all alone without news. She feared that Usren in his anger might wreak vengeance upon the defenceless city. Sin Samudr had no difficulty in persuading his father and uncle to adopt this plan, although Phra Abhai Mani entertained a shrewd suspicion that it was an attempt on the part of Suvarnamali to put him off.

So Sin Samudr's ship set course for Paleuk, in an effort to overtake Usren and thus forestall any mischief that the latter might cause there. Suvarnamali now felt happier than she had been for a long while, and, after instructing Sin Samudr not to let his father interfere with her, she called the young maid whom she had brought from Romachakra and told them to play music for her.

The strains of song reached the ears of Phra Abhai Mani as he paced up and down the cabin where he and his brother were drawing up plans. This made him think of Suvarnamali and his heart swelled with passionate desire. Although she was now virtually in his power and could hardly escape him in the end, he thought, the question was how he should approach her and win back her love. He would have liked to consult his brother, but was too ashamed to do so. He therefore wrestled with his problem alone, throwing himself prone on his bed and putting his hand to his brow.

Sri Suvana observed his brother's behaviour and recognised the symptoms. He could hardly refrain from smiling. He might have offered advice, but feared that Phra Abhai Mani would be offended. So he left his brother to his thoughts and went up on deck.

After a while, Phra Abhai Mani rose and went out of the cabin. He intended to go in search of Suvarnamali, and walked up and down the length of the ship. But he soon thought better of it and returned to his cabin, where he stretched himself on the bed and, for want of a better, cuddled his pillow. "O Suvarnamali," he murmured, full of sighs. "Why can you not see that I adore you? Why do you avoid me and scorn me? Is it because you have ceased to love me that you act in this way? If you cast me off and leave me, having no further affection for me, how shall I live?" Tears rolled down his cheeks, and he sobbed as if his heart would break.

The following morning, he wrote on a piece of parchment and sealed it. When his son came in to see him, he told him to take it to Suvarnamali and give it to her discreetly.

When she saw the parchment, Suvarnamali pretended to be angry. "I do not want any love letters," she exclaimed indignantly. Sin Samudr put on his most innocent air and pleaded, "Read it for me then." Suvarnamali could not help smiling. She took the missive and held it in her hand. Sin Samudr said, "Please read it aloud, Mother." Suvarnamali broke the seal and read.

The message was written in verse. It explained how, ever since the writer and she whom he loved became separated after the

shipwreck, he had made every effort to follow her and had never for a moment ceased to think of her. Even if he had died and never met her again in this life, he would have prayed that they might meet each other in heaven. But now that fortune favoured them and they were able to meet again, why did she not pity him? Or had she forgotten him, and so walked away whenever she saw his face, as if she had been offended to the extent of not wishing to have anything to do with him any more, although he had given no such offence. Why did she not find out the true facts, instead of being angry? He asked her forgiveness and begged her not to give way to anger. He had no intention of deceiving her in the least. Whenever she was angry, he was full of sorrow and was wasting away. He was pining away morning and night. He wished to visit her but feared her anger. If he had committed a fault, she must tell him so, and let him know what was truly in her heart. Such was Phra Abhai Mani's message.

Suvarnamali pretended to be angry. "How absurd of him to write such a thing!" Then turning to Sin Samudr, she said: "And you must not bring such things to me. I have no use for poetry."

Sin Samudr took the parchment and read for himself. Then he observed: "What is there to be angry about in this? It is very prettily written. If I were you, Mother, I would answer him in the same

style." Suvarnamali replied, "I do not want to, I am too lazy to do it. Do not be so annoying or I will pinch you."

Sin Samudr said, "But you have opened it and read it, Mother. It would be wrong not to reply to it."

"Very well," agreed Suvarnamali, "I will reply to it so that I shall not be blamed for having bad manners."

So she wrote a reply and sealed the parchment, which in due course Sin Samudr took to his father.

Phra Abhai Mani, delighted, broke the seal and read Suvarnamali's verses.

In neatly written lines, she paid her respects to him, who had treated her with kindness. She declared that she would never cease to be grateful to him and would serve him faithfully to the end of her life. If she committed any wrong he was free to punish her. But she wished him to look upon her as a daughter. She had made up her mind that she would not accept any man as her husband in this existence. What had been said in the past was over and done with. However persuasive he might be, she would not and could not comply with his wishes. In conclusion, she wrote. "I have made a vow that in this life I shall have no husband. All I

wish for is to be allowed to live alone with my adopted son. This is the whole truth which comes from my heart."

Phra Abhai Mani loved Suvarnamali more than ever after reading these protestations. "So she wishes to be my daughter!" he mused. "How shall I answer her, so that she may be appeased?"

He lay down on his bed and studied Suvarnamali's reply carefully once again.

He decided to send her another missive. When this was written, he called his son, gave it to him and told him to return in the evening. Once more, Sin Samudr played the part of messenger and handed his father's message to his adopted mother.

This second message was short and touching. It read: "O my adored one, you should not doubt me. I have already begged your forgiveness and yet you have not forgiven me. In that case, I would beg a meeting with you, so that I may explain everything to you. If then, you are still unsatisfied, I would be willing to comply with your terms and do as you wish."

Suvarnamali read the message and thought to herself: how cunningly he turns my words to suit his own purpose. I ask one thing of him, and instead of granting it, he asks me to go and meet him, and at the same time taking this advantage to mock me. I am

too afraid to let him come near me, for I shall only become a victim of his wiles.

So she wrote another message in reply, and told Sin Samudr to deliver it to Phra Abhai Mani and to come back immediately. Sin Samudr was thus placed in a quandary. Both his father and his adopted mother wanted him, and he did not know whom to obey.

As Sin Samudr was leaving on his new errand, Suvarnamali repeated: "Do not stay too long. Just give him the letter and come quickly."

The boy turned and asked, "Why are you afraid of him, Mother? What can Father do to anybody? What harm is there in meeting Father and having a talk with him?"

"Oh, what a little nuisance you are!" replied Suvarnamali. "Can you not understand that your father is like all widowers? There is no trusting them! They await their opportunity and seize upon defenceless women."

Sin Samudr laughed. "You are not so defenceless as all that, Mother, and Father is not so very fierce or strong. Besides, he would not attack any woman. Why, the very sight of Pisua Samudr frightened him. Or are you afraid of having a husband?"

Suvarnamali pinched him. "But I do not look like Pisua Samudr, so he would not be afraid of me." she said. "He would merely try to make love to me. I want you to be with me all the time in case he comes."

Sin Samudr promised to return immediately. He went along to his father's cabin, handed him the letter and was about to step out again. Phra Abhai Mani caught hold of his arm.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" he asked his son. Sin Samudr told him that Suvarnamali had bade him to return at once. "Why?" asked Phra Abhai Mani, "is she afraid of ghosts or something?"

"No, she is not afraid of anything," answered the boy, "only that she does not trust you, Father."

Phra Abhai Mani was greatly amused, and asked more about Suvarnamali. His son told him all he wished to know, but implored him not to tell his adopted mother that he had done so. Phra Abhai Mani embraced him and persuaded him to remain a little longer. He then opened Suvarnamali's missive and read it.

In it, Suvarnamali expressed herself as willing to meet him, on condition that the meeting should take place the next day in the

presence of Sri Suvarna and others. If he agreed to this, she would wait upon him every day and render him any service he desired.

Phra Abhai Mani could not help admiring her wit and ingenuity. But he was determined to take her at her word, and see as much of her as he possibly could. He did not fancy the idea of having to wait until the following morning, and wished to accomplish his purpose that very evening. But Sin Samudr must first be got out of the way. So, patting his son on the back, he told him that his uncle Sri Suvarna wanted to see him.

Sin Samudr, unsuspecting, went straight to his uncle's quarters. There, Arun Rasmi tried to engage him in conversation, but he excused himself saying that it was getting late and he had to go to look after his mother. Sri Suvarna jokingly asked him, "Why do you have to look after her? Is any one trying to run off with her?"

Sin Samudr enjoyed the joke. "Oh, no, uncle," he replied in childish simplicity, "But I am afraid that Father will try to go and visit Mother, and I must be there to see that everything is all right."

Sri Suvarna chuckled to himself and said, "Look here, nephew, what business is it of yours to interfere between husband and wife? (;)n the contrary, you should let them meet, and later you may have a nice little brother to play with."

Sin Samudr answered, "Oh, no, I would never think of interfering between husband and wife. But I am afraid they will beat and pinch each other. Mother has always had her own way and will never give in. I must be there to see that nothing goes wrong."

Sri Suvarna was amused at his nephew's innocence. He questioned him further and discovered that it was Phra Abhai Mani who had sent him to his uncle. Then it dawned on him that Phra Abhai Mani wished to keep the boy out of the way, because he had made a rendezvous with Suvarnamali. So he replied Sin Samudr with questions and got him so engrossed in conversation that the latter forgot the time and did not even hear the ship's bell striking six.

Meanwhile, Suvarnamali waited for Sin Samudr, but he did not return, and now it was dark. She feared that this was Phra Abhai Mani's trick to keep him out of the way. She guessed that now was the time when Phra Abhai Mani would attempt to take advantage of her. Therefore she called together her maids and told them to make up the bed so that it would look as if she were there sleeping on it, then draw the curtain and sit around with their musical instruments. She herself put on the very effective male disguise she had assumed once before during the battle, and went out on to the deck.

Sure enough, Phra Abhai Mani came not long afterwards, beautifully groomed and dressed. He glanced into Suvarnamali's cabin, and saw only the maids. He asked them, and they shyly informed him that she was asleep in bed. Phra Abhai Mani approached the bed and drew back the curtain. It was half dark, and he could only see the shape and outline on the bed. Very gently, he stretched out his hand and touched the blanket. But he felt only a soft mass. He lifted the blanket and found nothing but pillows. He was bitterly disappointed and aggrieved. "Have I lived so long to be fooled by a woman?" he cried.

He turned to ask the maids, but the latter merely began playing their instruments. He knew that they were making fun of him. He withdrew from Suvarnamali's cabin in confusion, and searched the deck for her, but never a woman did he see.

As for Suvarnamali, she could hardly restrain herself from laughing. Once he actually brushed past her, but did not realise that it was she.

Eventually, Phra Abhai Mani looked in at his brother's cabin and called out to Sin Samudr, "Your mother has disappeared! Why do you not go to find her?"

Sin Samudr rose to his feet in apprehension. He felt that he had been guilty in leaving his adopted mother for so long. So he ran to

Suvarnamali's cabin, followed by Arun Rasmi, who was determined not

to be left out of the excitement. They found only the maids, who refused to tell them anything. They searched everywhere for her, but met with as little success as Phra Abhai Mani. Arun Rasmi remarked, "Dear cousin, somebody has surely stolen my aunt away."

"And I know who that somebody is," said Sin Samudr grimly. There is no doubt that Father has taken her."

They both ran to Phra Abhai Mani's cabin, but found no trace of Suvarnamali, Sin Samudr confronted his father, saying, "Father, where have you hidden Mother? Please tell me."

"I do not know where she is myself. Now, do not disturb me!"

The two children returned to Suvarnamali's cabin. They turned it inside out but still could not find her. Arun Rasmi burst into tears. Phra Abhai Mani followed them into the cabin and picked up a scarf which was lying on the bed. It was still scented with perfume. He took it away with him as a keepsake.

Once Phra Abhai Mani had returned to his cabin, Suvarnamali went back to her own room. It was some time before Sin Samudr saw through her disguise and welcomed her with open arms. "I have

been looking for you all over the ship until I am worn out," he exclaimed.

Suvarnamali doffed her disguise and embraced the two children. She told them both to lie on the bed with her. It was then that she missed the scarf which she had left on the bed. Sin Samudr promptly told her that his father had taken it away with him. Suvarnamali knew why and feigned annoyance. "See, my children, he failed to find me and has therefore stolen my scarf!"

At that very moment, Phra Abhai Mani was lying prone on his bed with the scarf spread out across his breast. "What a woman!" he sighed. "How she has made a fool of me! But anyhow, I have her scarf." He inhaled its delicate perfume and was comforted. But he could not help wondering, "Where has she gone at this hour of night? When I come to think of it, I should be jealous. Yet I cannot believe that a swan would deign to swim in muddy water." Thus Phra Abhai Mani thought of Suvarnamali all night long until the sun rose on another day.

The rest of the voyage was uneventful. Finally, the good ship arrived at Paluek where she dropped anchor. The townspeople of Paleuk were greatly excited when they heard that their long-missing Princess was on board. Word soon reached the palace, and Suvarnamali's mother Mondha made haste to come to the

quayside. The ladies of the court, thinking that the king had returned, powdered themselves and put on their fineries with hopeful expectation that they would be noticed. They accompanied the queen to the quay.

On board the ship, Suvarnamali bathed and dressed herself up in her finest apparel and told Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi to do the same. Then they went on to the deck where Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna had taken their places. When she saw the spires of the palace in the distance, she could not help thinking of her father and tears rolled down her cheeks. Then, turning to the two brothers, she bowed low to take her leave. "I am going to meet my mother," she said, "soon I will return to invite Your Highnesses to land on our soil. Since you have both been to me as a father and have taken the trouble to accompany me all this distance, I beg that you will remain with us at least a month."

Sri Suvarna could hardly refrain from smiling. "As for myself," said he, "I must beg leave to return to my country."

Suvarnamali blushing understood the implication of his words, but did not answer him. Instead, she addressed Phra Abhai Mani. "Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi wish to accompany me. Do they have your permission?"

Phra Abhai Mani took note of her shyness. "Who would wish to deny it to them," he replied. "Even if you do not want their fathers to accompany you, we are quite willing to let the young ones go with you. I personally shall remain on watch here, or do you prefer to dismiss me altogether?"

Suvarnamali suppressed a smile and said, "I did not intend to give offense by avoiding you during our journey on the high seas. I did not know your intentions and I was much afraid. As for your resolve to remain here, please think it over carefully. You are a friend of Prince Usren. Should there be a war, may we depend on Your Highness?"

With that parting shot Suvarnamali took leave and, her young charges on either side, board'd a small boat which took them to the shore. Immediately upon landing, she ran to her mother, fell at her feet and sobbed. The shock of this extraordinary return of her daughter was too much for the queen. She fell into a swoon.

When she had been revived by her maid-in-waiting, she began to ply Suvarnamali with questions, asking where she had been and where father was. Suvarnamali told the whole story of her adventures. The disappearance of the king filled the old woman with sorrow, and this confirmed her fears for his safety ever since she dreamed that disaster had befallen him.

After bemoaning his fate for a long while, Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi were presented to her. Mondha embraced them lovingly, and invited them to go with her to the palace. She then gave instructions to the assembled officials. Since the king was presumably dead, she told them, another ruler had to be found. In default of male issue, she decided that the best course was to invite Phra Abhai Mani to take over the reins of government. The officials were therefore to prepare the royal barge together with escort vessels.

When all was ready, Mondha, Suvarnamali, Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi, accompanied by a considerable number of retainers, boarded the vessels which took them to the ship anchored offshore. They were welcomed by the two brothers, who had put on their regal attire. After an exchange of greetings, in the course of which Mondha was more than ever impressed by the appearance and bearing of Ph r a Abhai Mani, the latter was ceremoniously invited to become ruler of Paleuk.

Phra Abhai Mani smilingly replied, "You are too generous, O Mother! I have done nothing to deserve this great honour. I am merely a passenger on board this ship which belongs to Suvarnamali and her adopted son, who also happens to be my son. Even when the ship was attacked by the Prince of Lanka, I did not help to defend her, so Suvarnamali has been angry with me from that day to this. If

you do not believe me, you may ask her yourself. Therefore I am unworthy to rule this country and beg leave to depart in due course."

The old queen said, "If Suvarnamali has behaved rudely or improperly towards you, pray forgive her and teach her to know her place, and she will owe you allegiance. I am old now and shall not live much longer. If you remain, I will leave all I have to you, including my dead body which you must cremate. I have come all this way to invite you to rule over Paleuk. Do not refuse. Come with me now to the palace." She turned to her daughter and told her to join in pleading with Phra Abhai Mani.

Suvarnamali could not disobey her mother, so she remarked:

"Perhaps His Highness does not accept our invitation because he is going to rule over one of the lesser heavens. Even so, I hope he will refrain from discrediting me any further. As a woman, I may be temperamental, but not to an extent that is comparable with His Highness!" Then, turning to Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi, she added, "Now you help to beg your father and your uncle to stay. I am unable to persuade him."

Arun Rasmi at once spoke up in her innocent way, "You will stay, will you not, uncle?" The maids-in-waiting tittered at the simplicity of the child.

Phra Abhai Mani replied, "In that case, you must tell your aunt Suvarnamali to stop being angry with your uncle. Then your uncle will go with you to the palace."

Arun Rasmi immediately turned to Suvarnamali and chirped, "Please do not be angry with him, dear aunt!"

Suvarnamali blushed, put her hand over the girl's mouth and whispered, "Do not say such things, you make me feel ashamed!"

"Let us go at once," said Mondha.

They all came together to the palace, and the old queen handed over everything to Phra Abhai Mani, including some very choice young maids-in-waiting to attend upon him. Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna took up residence in the golden pavilion, while Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi stayed with Suvarnamali in the queen's apartments.

Phra Abhai Mani did not cease to long for Suvarnamali. Although the loveliest maidens in the land were presented to him, he thought continually of the Princess whose destiny he considered to be bound up with his own. He lost no opportunity of reminding the old queen of the fact.

As for Suvarnamali, she realised only too well that if she took no decisive action, she would fall easy prey to Phra Abhai Mani's

advances. She therefore told her mother that she wished to become a nun and lead a solitary existence in the hills, so that through her piety, merit might accrue to her father in heaven. Mondha understood her daughter's pretext and said to her, "And what will you do with your betrothed? I have arranged for your marriage to Phra Abhai Mani next month."

"But I have no wish to marry him," protested Suvarnamali.

"If I desired a husband, I could have given myself to him on board the ship when he was so importunate. As it was, I carefully avoided meeting him for almost the entire journey. Now he has many attractive women to wait upon him, and has probably forgotten all about me. So please grant my request, dear mother."

"I have already promised to give you to Phra Abhai Mani," said Mondha. "So if you really wish to defer your marriage, you must go and obtain his permission. If he raises no objection, I will grant your request."

Accordingly, with hope in her heart, she went to call on Phra Abhai Mani, taking Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi with her. Ushered into his presence, she bowed to him obsequiously and explained the purpose of her visit. "I made a vow while on board the ship," she told him, "that I would take orders as a nun to pray for my father's soul. I must therefore beg leave to fulfil my vow."

This declaration came as a stunning blow to Phra Abhai Mani. However, he did not see how he could very well stand in the way of her vow. "It seems that I am the most unfortunate of men," he told her. "I had thought that my troubles were over and that I would now attain my desire. But now you wish to run away from me. What shall I do while you are away beyond my reach?"

Suvarnamali smiled and replied, "You have many to wait upon your pleasure here, and you will not miss me. Besides, I shall not be far away and I shall not be a nun always. When I have completed the term of my vow, I will return. If by then you still desire me, I will be ready to serve at your feet."

"I grant your request," said Phra Abhai Mani, "but you must tell me how long you intend to remain a nun and when you will return to me, so that I may bear record of it in tny heart."

When all was ready, Suvarnamali took leave of her mother and journeyed to the mountain hermitage which had been prepared for such a purpose. Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi insisted on accompanying her and sharing the life of frugal piety. They were followed by several ladies of the court who looked upon it as a kind of adventure. On arrival, Suvarnamali, Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi claimed possession of the bare, uninviting cells that had never known such young and charming

hermits. Suvarnamali took her acolytes into the chapel, and there they dedicated themselves, vowing to spend their days in piety and purity.

Almost immediately, the newly-installed nuns had visitors-Phra Abhai Mani and Sri Suvarna. The two brothers made every attempt to convince them to give up their self-imposed regime of austerity. But Suvarnamali was adamant. Finally, Phra Abhai Mani had to admit defeat, and returned to the city to hold his soul in patience.

After a few weeks, Phra Abhai Mani came to the conclusion that he had adopted the wrong policy in weakening to Suvarnamali's will. He decided that it was time to be firm, and that Suvarnamali must be brought back to her senses. He made up his mind to call on her again and compel her to return to the city. So he put on his finest robes and had an equally fine set of apparel fit for a queen placed on a golden tray, covered up in such a way that none could tell what was there. Then he called Sri Suvarna, and the two brothers went together once more to Suvarnamali's hermitage.

Suvarnamali, chastely dressed in the white garment of a nun, was sitting outside her cell with Sin Samudr and Arun Rasmi, admiring the beauty of nature-birds mating in the hoary banyan trees, bees rolling in the pollen of blossoms, and fragrant flowers giving forth their sweet and refreshing odours. As soon as she saw Phra Abhai

Mani and Sri Suvarna coming up the slope of the hill, she sent her adopted son and niece to meet them. Phra Abhai Mani, after greeting her in the customary way, said "I have been thinking of you all this while. Even though I have been living in the palace, my heart was here. It was as though I could see you near me morning and evening. O, it is impossible to say how much I have missed you. Have you never thought at all of me? Or are you so firm in your faith that you have rejected me altogether?"

These words thrilled Suvarnamali through and through. But recollecting her present circumstances, she answered demurely, her eyes fixed to the ground, "I have prayed for Your Highness continually in my waking hours. I have also heard that a very clever woman has found favour in your eyes." She was referring to Valee, a misshapened wench who aspired to be Phra Abhai Mani's consort and had offered him her services.

Phra Abhai Mani smiled at the thought of Suvarnamali's resourcefulness and perception. "Yes," he admitted, "Valee comes of a good family and is highly intelligent. I thought she would make a useful attendant for you when you return to the palace. I have come to implore you to come back with me to the city and live among your people. As for your pious devotion, you can leave that for the time when you are well advanced in years, and then we

will both retire together and lead a secluded existence here to the end of our days."

"People will say that the Ruler of Paleuk forces nuns to leave their devotions," protested Suvarnamali.

"Those who love will always praise, those who hate will always censure. One cannot escape praise or censure. Why need we fear what they say of us? Today is a propitious day for leaving your hermitage. Please do not delay any longer. I may lose my patience and carry you off, I warn you!"

Suvarnamali flushed with dismay and shame. "I beg you not to take such a drastic step! Please be patient and wait. Give me time, and I will obey you."

Phra Abhai Mani turned to his brother. Sri Suvarna said, "Well, do we have to spend the night here?"

Arun Rasmi spoke up, "What do you say, dear aunt? Let us hurry and return to the city."

Suvarnamali glanced at her in surprise. "So you are another one of them!" she exclaimed, smiling.

Phra Abhai Mani looked as if he were going to burst into tears. "What a hard-hearted little hermit you are!" he cried. "I will allow you three more days, but no longer."

Then, feigning anger, and without saying another word, he beckoned to his brother and they both went back to the city.

Three days passed, and Suvarnamali still did not come. Phra Abhai Mani was disconsolate. He could neither eat nor sleep. He did not even take notice of the women who attended him.

It was Valee who came to the rescue. She knew what was in Phra Abhai Mani's troubled heart. One evening, as she sat in attendance on him, she sang a song in which she hinted at a solution. His curiosity aroused, Phra Abhai Mani asked her to tell him of any means whereby Suvarnamali might be brought to reason. Valee told him that she had conceived a plan, which could not fail to bring Suvarnamali back to the palace without trouble and without delay; he had only to leave it to her to accomplish this. Phra Abhai Mani asked how this might be done. But Valee refused to tell him, and merely promised that if she failed, he could have her executed.

Valee's ruse was simplicity itself. She asked that preparations be made for a seven-day festival to celebrate Phra Abhai Mani's nuptials. Phra Abhai Mani told Sri Suvarna, who gave the necessary

orders for such preparations. The palace officials lost no time in obeying these instructions. Special pavilions and theatres were hastily constructed, while the palace women busied themselves with the decorations and provisions for the feast. When all was complete, an invitation was extended to the populace to join in the festivities. So there was great rejoicing throughout the city.

The old queen was at a loss to understand the meaning of such celebration. She feared the worst and hurried to her daughter's hermitage.

On learning the news, Suvarnamali was apprehensive and grieved. Thinking that Phra Abhai Mani had given her up and was about to make Valee his queen, a wave of resentment and jealousy swept through her. She promptly discarded her nun's clothing and donned the queenly robes Phra Abhai Mani had brought her on the previous occasion. Then, with her mother, she descended from her hermitage and hurried to the palace. Phra Abhai Mani, who was expecting her as promised by Valee, saw her from afar. He immediately took off his diamond-studded sash and bestowed it on the delighted and triumphant Valee.

On the following day, Phra Abhai Mani married Suvarnamali in great state, to the immense joy of their people.

## Part Eight : Princess of the Western Isle

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AFTER their marriage, Phra Abhai Mani and Suvarnamali lived happily together. Naturally, the former never ceased to have a roving eye for the attractive ladies of the court, but his amorous advances towards them were unfailingly curbed by the jealousy of his consort. Indeed, such good care did she take of him that she soon found herself with child. In due course, she was delivered of two baby daughters-twins.

In the meanwhile, Sri Suvarna had taken his daughter Arun Rasmi and his nephew Sin Samudr to see their long-neglected grandparents in the distant city of Ratana. The aged ruler and his queen were so overjoyed to meet their younger son again, and to have two strapping grandchildren with them, that they would not let them return but made them stay to delight their waning days. Instead, Sanon, who had accompanied the party, was sent to report to Phra Abhai Mani and convey a message from his parents.

While all was peaceful and happy at both Ratana and Paleuk, great preparations were afoot at Lanka. Usren, still smarting from the wounds of defeat, was determined to settle accounts with Phra Abhai Mani once and for all. He raised a great army and prepared a vast fleet of ships for the invasion of Paleuk. When everything was

ready, he embarked and set sail. His father, although well-advanced in years, decided to join his son on the expedition. He left his daughter Laweng, now a beautiful young lady of sixteen, to the tender care of nurses and councillors.

Now, one of the men who had accompanied Phra Abhai Mani from the magic island happened to be in Lanka at the time. He was therefore able to send an urgent report to his master in advance of Usren's fleet. Phra Abhai Mani was not a little disturbed, for Paleuk was not prepared against aggression, as its people were peace-loving and not warlike. So he took counsel of Valee, who had become his trusted adviser in all manner of things. She advised him that, as the few troops available were not likely to be able to withstand a frontal attack, they should resort to strategy and cunning. When the invasion began, Phra Abhai Mani's men were to make as if they were forced to retreat. Thus they would lure the enemy into the unknown recesses of the interior. When that was accomplished, another force would attack the enemy from the rear.

Accordingly, when Usren's fleet appeared in the Bay of Paleuk, all necessary plans had been laid. On board his ship, Usren marvelled that the arrival of such an imposing armada should cause so little stir among the inhabitants. So he fired a cannon as a warning. This at least did produce some effect. A few small boats riding at

anchor along the coast tried to run the gauntlet of his ships and sail up the river. One of them was caught and the men were sent to him for questioning.

From them, he learned the extraordinary news that Phra Abhai Mani had wind of his coming, and so had evacuated the whole population inland. Phra Abhai Mani himself was fleeing in a boat up the river. As if to confirm their statement, flames and smoke rose from among the buildings in the city, and a few ships could be seen making their way upstream in haste.

After a hurried consultation, Usren and his father decided to divide their force. Usren was to take some ships up the river in pursuit of Phra Abhai Mani. His father and the main body of the army would encamp outside the walls of the abandoned city. In conformity with this decision, Usren at once gave chase to Phra Abhai Mani's ships which were slipping away upstream. His father ordered the rest of his ships to beach so that the soldiers might disembark.

By nightfall, the major part of the Lanka fleet had been beached in an orderly row. The soldiers had set up camp, and, meeting with no opposition, had relaxed their vigilance and given themselves over to feasting and merry-making.

This was a grievous error on their part. The city of Paleuk was far from being empty. Behind its walls, men and women were plotting

their destruction. While Usren's men were off their guard, a party of townsfolk led by Suvarnamali herself, once more disguised as a man, crept through the wall and silently stole to the beach. There, under cover of darkness, they set fire to the row of ships. As the timber and sails were caught by the flames, there was one big blaze all along the line. Taking this as their signal, the main body of those who had concealed themselves in the city made a sortie, and, uttering terrible cries, threw themselves upon the invaders.

Usren's men did not have a chance. Filled with consternation at the sight of their burning ships, and thrown into confusion by the unexpected sortie, their enforced retreat became an utter rout. As many as could, they made their way to the few ships that were still afloat. Usren's aged father, unable to run away quickly enough by himself, was placed on the shoulders of a burly and dusky warrior. Valee, who was leading the sortie, caught sight of them and let fly three of her arrows, which found their mark but failed to inflict mortal injuries. The old man, wounded but still conscious, and his faithful mount, succeeded in reaching one of the ships, which straightway put out to sea.

Meanwhile, Usren's squadron had sailed far from the scene. When Phra Abhai Mani thought that the chase had lasted long enough, he turned and attacked the enemy from both front and rear. Usren, fearing that his retreat might be cut off, decided to retire

and fall back on the main strength of his invasion fleet. So it came about in this strange battle that the pursuer became the pursued.

Coming downstream at full speed, Usren's ships reached the mouth of the river and confidently sailed in close to the shore where the main body of his army had been encamped. The reception they received was not quite what they expected.

Cannons roared, cannon balls hurtled through the air and landed on the ships. The stern of Usren's own vessel was entirely shot away, so that the ship began to sink. All on board with the exception of Usren started jumping overboard to save themselves.

Phra Abhai Mani's ship came alongside. A party boarded the sinking vessel and brought up the unconscious form of Usren. Seeing his erstwhile rescuer and rival in such a plight, Phra Abhai Mani's eyes filled with tears and he went to embrace the prostrate prince.

The battle was ended. The remnants of the Lanka fleet had fled. So Phra Abhai Mani ordered a cannon to be fired as a signal for the cessation of operations. The warriors and citizens of Paleuk returned joyfully to their city.

Usren was carried to a royal chamber in the palace and placed on a couch. Doctors were summoned to tend his wounds sustained in combat. When he regained consciousness, his eyes first alighted on Phra Abhai Mani. This filled him with shame and grief, and he no

longer had any desire to live. He felt about him for his sword with which to kill himself, but it had been removed while he was being carried into the palace. Its loss plunged him into despair.

Phra Abhai Mani understood his intention and state of mind, and thus addressed him with soothing words:

"Be not sad, O my brother, for we are as relatives to one another. From the very beginning, we were good friends and loved each other. Then we quarrelled over a woman and fought. It is customary in battle to fight hard in order to gain the victory, as I have done over you. But I have brought you here only to have a talk with you, so that you may abate your anger and we may resume friendly and loving intercourse to the end of our days. Your men and your ships, such as have survived the hostilities, shall be returned to you. Let our two peoples live in peace and happiness from henceforth. What say you, my brother?"

Usren was not susceptible to these overtures of good will. He assumed a defiant attitude and said: "I know well that you are full of tricks. But remember that I came here to destroy you. I did not think that I should be defeated. But since this has come to pass, do not expect me to make friends with my enemy. I am a man and a warrior, I am not

afraid to die and therefore will bow to no one. Kill or quarter me, if you wish. I will be reborn to plague you."

Phra Abhai Mani generously overlooked this passionate outburst and continued to plead with him. "I have too much compassion for you and cannot let you die. Now, I beg of you, tell me what I can do to appease your wrath. If it is humanly possible I will do it."

Usren replied: "If I had taken the city, I would have had you and Suvarnamali bound together, flayed alive and then rubbed with salt. After that I would have cut off your heads and interchanged them. Only that would have satisfied me."

On hearing this, Phra Abhai Mani turned his head away in horror. This was not a wish that could be granted. Then he said gently to Usren:

"You are still filled with thoughts of vengeance. But I will let you go freely without hurt or hindrance. You once did me a service and now I repay it with this. If later you should want to make war again, it shall be as you wish. But while you are recovering from your wounds, consider yourself as my guest; live, bathe and eat as you are accustomed to do."

Valee could not endorse her master's policy of appeasement. According to accepted rules and practices, victorious monarchs did

not set free those enemies who had sought their destruction. "Our King is overly generous," she thought to herself, "he thinks that he will win gratitude. He underestimates the tiger's cub. But what can be done? He will not listen to me. The queen is of the same mind, because her father was friend of Usren's father. There is only I myself who can complete the task. The wise say that if you beat a snake and only break its back, it will return to do you harm; a crocodile that escapes into the water finds new strength; a caged tiger that regains the jungle is deadly. In the same way, if you spare the life of a captured enemy, he will only cause you greater trouble again in the future."

So Valee thought of ways and means of bringing Usren to book. Finally, an idea occurred to her which she considered would suit her

purpose. She dressed up again in man's clothing and put in her belt a handsome dagger with a bejewelled hilt. Thus attired, she went to the royal apartments and sought audience of Phra Abhai Mani. There, in the presence of Usren, she told him how she herself had shot three arrows into the body of the aged ruler of Lanka. Although the latter succeeded in escaping, it was her firm conviction that the old man could not survive three nights at the most. It would therefore be opportune to follow the fleeing enemy to their city.

But Phra Abhai Mani would not entertain the suggestion. "I do not wish it," he said, "I am sorry for brother Usren. What is the use of going on with the fighting?"

Usren heard what Valee had said and was filled with the most morbid and gloomy thoughts. It was not enough that he had been ignominiously defeated in battle; his father was mortally wounded and dying, and now this misshapened wench was allowed to come and gloat over the fact. It was more than he could endure. His temper rose, but as he was already weak with wounds, his strength waned and eventually failed him. Convulsions seized his sorely-trying body and life slowly ebbed away.

Valee had her wish. Usren was dead and could never harm Paleuk again. But she had reckoned without the consequences. Usren dead caused her greater anguish than Usren living. His ghost roamed the palace seeking revenge. Shrill cries would pierce the stillness of the night, calling for vengeance on the mocking woman. One evening, the ghost caught up with her and gave her the fright of her life. It chased her through the chambers of the palace, inflicting on her blow after blow. Valee succeeded in escaping to her room, but she never recovered from the shock. Terror-stricken, she became prey to terrible fits and fevers. In spite of the care and attention lavished on her by Phra Abhai Mani and Suvarnamali in person, she failed to rally and, having taken leave of her master

and mistress, with the ghost of Usren mocking her from afar, ended her mortal life.

Phra Abhai Mani and Suvarnamali were prostrate with grief. They had lost a faithful counsellor and loyal friend whose real worth they had not fully recognised while she lived. Phra Abhai Mani had not always taken her advice while Suvarnamali had actually been jealous of her. So they begged her pardon and prayed that she might be born again, this time more beautiful than she had been in her existence which had just ended. They ordered elaborate funeral ceremonies for her, bestowing upon her the rank of a queen's sister.

As for the body of Usren, Phra Abhai Mani commanded that it be placed in a golden urn suited to his princely rank. The urn was then taken on board a ship, escorted by Usren's own followers who had been taken prisoner with him. The ship was then permitted to set sail for Lanka.

Usren's father reached Lanka after a long and painful voyage. Efforts to cure his wounds were of no avail, and he sank into deep despondency. The arrival of the ship which carried the golden urn containing Usren's body plunged him even further into immeasurable grief. "This is the end of my hopes!" he cried. "I have no other male issue. Who shall rule this country after me? I have

but one child left, but she cannot rule, and will only live to drink tears. God has truly deserted me!" Finally, overcome with sorrow and weakened through wounds, the old man passed away.

As soon as the news of the king's death spread through the palace, a wail of despair arose on all sides. The courtiers and the warriors joined in the general lamentation, "What shall we do now that both the sovereign and the prince have gone?" they cried. "It is as if both the sun and moon disappeared from the sky, as if the sky itself and earth and sea had melted away, leaving nothing but chaos." As the news spread, panic seized the populace. "O, light that lightened our darkness, now that you are extinguished, there will be confusion and despair on all sides!" All night long, the city echoed with outcries of utter grief that resembled sounds made by the waves of an angry sea.

The following morning, there was a meeting of nobles and elders to decide what was to be done. It was unanimously agreed to raise the princess Laweng to the throne of her ancestors, in default of a male heir.

For her part, Laweng fell into a swoon on hearing that both her father and her brother were dead. However, under the expert care of her nurses, who administered the right restoratives, she soon recovered sufficiently to go and pay her last respects to the royal

remains. She bowed at the feet of her father, and sobbed. "O my dearest parent, you have left your daughter all alone and gone to heaven with her brother. To whom shall she look now for guidance? It is a most difficult situation for a woman. The more I think of it, the more readily flow my tears and the colder grows my heart. When mother died, I still had you. But now you are gone, it is as if a light had gone out of my life. I have no one left to lean on, so I pray that you take me with you. I will ask to be born again with you. I am not afraid to die. I will kill myself to follow you."

So saying, she pulled a trident from the sleeve of her dress and lifted it in the air. All at once, her nurses uttered a piercing shriek and wrested it away from her. Laweng made strenuous efforts to retrieve it, but was prevented from doing so by the raised voices of the courtiers, who implored her to live and rule their leaderless land, and to avenge the deaths of her father and brother.

Laweng, her young and beautiful face stained with marks of sorrow, replied to the assembled courtiers. "Ruling a country is a man's work. I am only a woman, and others might not accept me as their leader. So let all of you choose some man to be your leader."

The courtiers would not however accept her proposal. "There is no other who can rule this country but you," they told her. "It is true that you are a woman, but you are the sole remaining descendant

of the kings of Lanka. If any city of the kingdom dares to oppose you, we shall all volunteer in your service to destroy it. Besides, you will be safe, because your royal father has left with you the magic signet of Rahu, which will protect you from all dangers. You must live and rule in order to avenge the deaths of your father and brother."

Laweng made up her mind to meet her destiny. She therefore answered them thus: "I thank you all for what you have said and promised, and wish that you will help me in waging war against our enemy, so that we may wipe away our shame. I shall keep the magic signet of Rahu by my side. As I lack experience in the affairs of state. I hope that you who are skilled will guide me. But, first of all, let us perform funeral obsequies for the dead."

The funeral ceremonies for the dead ruler and his son Usren accordingly took place in the manner prescribed by the customs of the country.

When that had been done, Laweng was invited to take her place on the throne in the council chamber, where all bowed before her and greeted her as the new ruler of Lanka.

Seated on the royal throne of Lanka, holding the diamond-studded signet of Rahu in one hand and the other hand grasping the hilt of her sword with its scabbard of flaming design, Laweng

thus addressed her noblemen: "We thank you all and hope that you will continue to help us rule the country. We are only sixteen years of age and a girl besides, therefore we lack the qualities of a warrior. But so incensed are we at the infamous insults heaped upon us by Paleuk that we must go to war even if it means our death. Advise us what to do in order that we may conquer the people of Paleuk."

The nobles of Lanka, however, were unable to offer any constructive advice. They had only learned the rudiments of warfare, since superior problems of military strategy had always been left to the King. So they told her, "That is for Your Highness to decide and command. Whether an army wins or loses a battle depends entirely upon the commander in whom the supreme power is vested. But Your Highness might consult the Patriarch, who is the fount of wisdom and who knows all things, even the arts of war. If Your Highness is in doubt, the Patriarch will always give counsel."

Laweng promptly sent for the Holy Father. She received him with great ceremony, setting before him wine, tea and tobacco. Having done this, she told him what had recently come to pass. "I implore you to help me," she begged. "Please tell me what to do."

The Patriarch laughed at her fears. "Such is the mysterious hand of fate!" he exclaimed. "Paleuk knows how to defend itself against warriors. But this land is now ruled by a woman, and Paleuk will not know how to deal with a woman. A woman will conquer where men have perished. You must use your woman's wiles; that is more effective than any signet of Rahu. If you follow my advice, no one will dare lift a finger against you!"

Laweng was certain of the priest's wisdom, but could not grasp his meaning; and so she answered: "I am still young and inexperienced. Please tell me how I can use my woman's wiles."

The Patriarch laughed again, and mystified her further by speaking in riddles. "Wiles mean work, work means wiles and therefore wiles and work go together. You have nothing to fear so long as you remember this."

He then rose and returned to his cell, ignoring Laweng's request for an explanation.

Laweng tried hard to think over what the priest had said, but could make nothing out of it, as she had never exercised any wiles. Without saying another word, she retired to her bedchamber.

From that day onwards, Laweng was never allowed to forget that she had a score to settle with Paleuk. At council meetings, her

nobles kept on reminding her how the hated enemy had slain her father and brother. Her ears tingled as though they were constantly pricked with stinging nettles. Whenever she retired to bed, it was always with a heavy heart full of sighs. She tossed on her couch as she thought of the Patriarch's words. Unable to sleep, she even forbade officers of the watch to strike the gongs which denoted the passing of the hours.

Her nurses were perturbed at her restless condition. They counselled her to call on the Patriarch, who alone could enlighten her. So Laweng decided to go and visit the holy man.

Passing through a garden full of fragrant flowers, Laweng and her nurses and attendants climbed the steps leading to the great door of the church. Immediately, a gong sounded loudly three times, and the Patriarch came down to receive them. He invited the Princess to step inside and take a seat in his vestry. When she had done so, he asked her, "What brings you here, my child?"

Laweng answered, "Holy Father, I come to seek your aid, for which I would gladly tender you my life. Please tell me the meaning of your words, when you said that I should use my woman's wiles and that it would be more potent than even the signet of Rahu. Please explain the significance of this to me, so that I may

understand and take steps accordingly to avenge the death of my dear father."

The priest gave a discreet cough, lowered his voice and spoke to her in a confidential tone. "My child, you must know that the signet of Rahu which graces this city has long been the object of envy of other lands. There is no prince living who would not dare all to become the possessor of it. Do you but proclaim that whoever undertakes to assist Lanka to defeat her enemies shall become her ruler, you will not lack champions to take up your cause. As for your woman's wiles, be you as wise as Mekhala. Order an artist to paint portraits of yourself, send them into all the neighbouring lands, and you will not lack suitors who will offer to fight unto death for love of you. Thus you will gain your ends without having to sacrifice your own people."

Having said this, he went to a cupboard and took out a number of maps. These he handed to Laweng and showed her the different countries which were near neighbours of Lanka and which might be prevailed upon to come to her aid in return for the chance of such a fair prize as Laweng. He also gave her the recipe for a love potion that could not fail to capture the hearts of men, provided the user studied it carefully and carried out the instructions. He told her that this potion was so efficacious that, should the most strong-minded of men but look upon her face or merely see her picture,

he would almost die of love for her. At first, Laweng resented such a suggestion, but the cunning priest explained that no harm could befall her if she did not herself fall in love with any of her victims.

Armed with this knowledge and the maps, Laweng returned to her palace delighted and not a little excited. Once back in her own chamber, she fell immediately to studying the maps and the recipe. The ingredients of the potion were curious: they consisted of a compound of perfumes and a human eye taken from a covetous woman. The potion was duly prepared according to instructions. Laweng then gave orders for the hundred most beautiful maidens of the city to be brought to her and to be trained in the art of womanly wiles. Besides, she commanded that no fewer than three thousand women be taught the practice of archery, and a greater number of men be drilled in the science of war. When all this had been done to her satisfaction, she sent out ambassadors, each of whom was entrusted with a portrait of herself, to all points of the compass where powerful kingdoms were to be found.

In due course, one of them reached the land of the Tamils, a virile race that derived strength from eating meat instead of rice. The King of this country was called Laman. At the time when Laweng's ambassador arrived, Laman was mourning the loss of his dearly beloved wife who had predeceased him. As he kept on repeating,

"I cannot find a new wife who is able to satisfy me half as much. Even though there are thousands of other women, none of them can match my late consort." But that was before Laweng came into his ken.

The night before the ambassador's arrival, Laman dreamt a strange dream. In this dream, a giant serpent fell from the sky and coiled itself round his palace, breathing flames and smoke until he himself was consumed by fire and burnt to ashes. When he awoke, he knew at once that the serpent signified a woman, and began wondering who it was that desired to be his queen. He consulted his astrologers, who at once confirmed his suspicion and declared that he would soon have a new consort.

So when Laweng's ambassador was announced, Laman readily assented to grant immediate audience. The ambassador handed him the letter and the portrait of his royal mistress. As soon as his eyes fell upon the picture, Laman was completely overcome with wonder and admiration. He gazed so long at it that he fell into a swoon. When he recovered, he made enquiries of the ambassador, whose replies filled him with the highest hopes.

"It is my good fortune," he exclaimed, smiling. "To think that this beautiful young virgin will be mine, and Lanka too!" He read the letter over and over again. He was so pleased that he all but leapt

into the air for sheer joy. He laughed loud and long, and then turned to the ambassador. "Why does your Princess look for a husband in our land?" he asked. "As she must surely know, they consider us to be cruel barbarians. Pray tell me why she does not fear to seek an alliance with us?"

The wily ambassador, as well-primed as a gun, replied: "Your Highness, even the fiercest leopard does not harm its own. With you by her side, my royal mistress will no longer fear but be feared."

Laman took the portrait and kept it close to his breast. All day long and at night, he stared at it with longing, and refused to speak to any one. The only command he gave was to the effect that a whole fleet of ships be hastily prepared for a voyage to Lanka. For his desire was so swift that, as he kissed the painted lips of Laweng, he wished that he could fly through the air to her side.

When Laweng learned that Laman was really coming, she could not help feeling a sudden wave of fear. But she calmed herself with the thought that he could really do no harm to her. She ordered preparations to be made for the reception of the Tamil chief.

On the appointed day, when Laman was to make his entry into Lanka as her guest, Laweng took special care over her toilet. She

bathed and perfumed herself lavishly, then put on a rich and brilliant costume studded with precious stones. Indeed, she looked like some female divinity descended from heaven, as she took her place on the ancestral throne in the great hall.

Outside, the sound of drums and gongs grew louder. The Tamils approached the palace along a beflagged street lined with inquisitive inhabitants of Lanka, and treading on white cloth that was laid on the ground like a carpet. Surrounded by a formidable-looking company, Laman entered the hall of the palace.

Laman was dumbfounded at the amazing beauty of Laweng. He could only stand still and smile. Meanwhile, his followers lost no time in getting acquainted with the ladies of the court. Here, the training the latter had received at the hands of their mistress proved invaluable. With smiles and coy looks, they completely captivated the hearts of Laman's men.

Laweng suppressed a shudder as she looked down at the muscular but ungainly person of her visitor. Yet she deemed it expedient to be polite. So she addressed the Tamil prince.

"Brother, receive my thanks for hurrying hither. My desire has now been fulfilled. I am able to look upon you as my champion."

Laman was still lost in wonder and admiration. But he pulled himself together and answered: "Sister, as soon as I heard of your plight, I hastened here to rid you of your enemies. I will set you up as an empress. Your foes shall bow down at your feet. If they do not, they shall feel the edge of my sword. Now, tell me where Paleuk is, and I will go to cut off the head of Phra Abhai Mani and bring it to you as a gift."

Laweng bestowed on him her sweetest smile. "You have come from afar, so you must be tired," she said, "Give your weary men some rest." Then she told him the whole history of the war with Paleuk, and how Phra Abhai Mani had inflicted defeat and death on her own father and brother as well as her countrymen. "If you are really as valiant as you appear to be," she continued, "you must help me to vanquish him. If you are successful, the throne of Lanka and the signet of Rahu are yours."

Having said this, Laweng called her attendants, who brought forth tables laden with rich food and set them before Laman. At the same time, the choicest maidens poured him cups of wine, while others played on musical instruments and sang songs.

Laman watched all with wonder and admiration as if he were a provincial simpleton come to town. He partook of the food and the wine with much relish. When the wine went to his head, he

conceived a great passion for Laweng. He looked at her with sensual longing and promised himself that when she was his, he would embrace her and put her on his knee. Then he began to boast, and swore that he would make mincemeat of the citizens of Paleuk. "I am afraid of no one," he cried. "I will win a great victory and look after Lanka." His men, who by now were somewhat drunk like their master, shouted noisy approval and started to sing uncouth songs. Some seized hold of the girl attendants and kissed them. The sounds of merriment echoed and re-echoed throughout the palace and the city.

When it was evening, the party broke up and Laman's followers retired to their camp outside the palace. There they fell into a drunken torpor and slept soundly until early morning when they were summoned to roll call.

As for Laman himself, he spent the night in a pavilion which had been specially prepared for him. For a long time he could not sleep because his desire had been aroused. When he did fall asleep, it was to dream of Laweng. He dreamt that he already possessed her; he embraced his pillow and kissed it lovingly

The next morning, Laman summoned his officers to a council of war and told them to prepare for an expedition against Paleuk. "If we do not defeat Phra Abhai Mani, we will not return," he warned

them. The officers received their orders and went off to inspect their troops and ships.

Laman wished to show the women of Lanka his manly qualities. So he bathed and perfumed himself, and put on fine raiment. Over all, he wore a quaintly-fashioned armour studded with diamonds. On his head was a cap of soft gold with a crest in the shape of swan's plumes. Then, with a bow in his hand, he left his pavilion, called some of his officers, and marched into the palace.

Laweng was giving audience to her court. As soon as she saw Laman, she invited him to take a seat by her side, and said in her gentle manner, "I am sorry for your sake, O my brother. You had everything you desired in your own land. Now that you come here, you enjoy nothing but hardships. But do not be grieved that I have not yet been of greater service to you." So saying, she handed him a garland of choicest flowers.

Laman was soothed by her sweet words. He took the garland and thanked her for it. Then he said in a boastful vein, "I will be your champion to the end, you need not doubt that, my sister. This evening I shall set sail with my army to wrest victory from the men of Paleuk. I do not fear dangers and hardships. I lay my life at your feet." When Laweng smiled in answer, he felt happy beyond words.

Laweng pretended to be sad at his impending departure. She sighed and then spoke haltingly. "I have been thinking it over and I fear that your troops alone will not be sufficient for your purpose. I will raise an army too to help you fight the enemy."

Laman, however, would not hear of it. "There is no need. I myself will undertake to do all. If there is any one who defies you, I will eliminate him utterly."

Laweng then ordered a ship to be fitted out to act as a pilot to Laman's fleet and also to bring back news to Lanka.

The time came for Laman to leave. Laweng invoked the heavenly powers to bestow blessings upon him, and added, "When the war is won, please return quickly and I shall be happy to see you again."

Laman was overcome with joy to hear her speak these words. He had no wish to leave her now, but must perforce carry out what he had promised. Sorrowfully he boarded his ship. All at once, there was a noise of drums, gongs and bells, and at the same time the sailors shouted a full-throated farewell. The wind was favourable, the sails unfurled and Laman's fleet was on its way to Paleuk.

As on a previous occasion, word had already been sent to Phra Abhai Mani well in advance of the sailing of the invasion fleet. Phra Abhai Mani therefore had time to call together his generals and officers to work out schemes of defence. They decided to adopt the old tactics that had previously stood them in good stead. The inhabitants of the city were again advised to withdraw into the interior of the country, taking their belongings and their cattle with them. Meanwhile, able-bodied men were employed in building huge iron cages, for Phra Abhai Mani wanted to capture alive the tall, bearded Tamils. Each soldier was given a length of chain with which to capture one of these giants, who were comparable to them in size as elephants are to mice.

Early one morning, the fleet of Laman sailed confidently into the Bay of Paleuk. From the bridge of his ship, Laman saw citizens of Paleuk scatter in confusion, each trying to get his cattle away inland as quickly as possible. Laman rashly concluded that he had taken them by surprise and that they would offer no opposition. So he ordered a landing to be made by a company of bowmen, who immediately advanced towards the city preceded by green and yellow banners. As they approached the city walls, however, they found the battlements strongly defended by men dressed in scarlet.

Laman decided against immediate attack, but instead ordered a herald to approach the principal fort and deliver a message, as follows:

"You men of Paleuk! My Lord Laman the Tamil, bold and ruthless, has come with his army to avenge the defeat of Lanka. If Phra Abhai Mani sets any value on the lives of his family and his countrymen, let him come forward and stand trial before my Lord Laman, who will spare all living in this city. If he is obdurate and resists, my Lord Laman will raze this city to the ground with fire and his sword will spare no one, not even the babies in their cradles. Tell your Lord that thus says Laman the Bold!"

This message was accordingly conveyed to Phra Abhai Mani.

Phra Abhai Mani was not in the least perturbed. He merely commanded his officers to wait until nightfall, when he would give the signal for action. As soon as they saw the victory flag being hoisted, all the men of Paleuk were to make a sortie from the city gates and proceed to tie up each of the enemy with their chains. Moreover, he impressed upon them the importance of filling their ears with wax. That done, Phra Abhai Mani dismissed his officers and made a tour of inspection round the battlements and ramparts, and observed the positions of the restless enemy outside the walls.

When night fell, Phra Abhai Mani took his place in the commander's pavilion on the battlements. He picked up his magic flute, performed the customary salutation to his teacher and then began to play a soul- stirring melody, which could not fail to entrance all hearers. His own men did not hear it, because they all had wax on their ears, so the music had no effect on them whatever. It had a devastating effect, however, on Laman and his followers. The breeze wafted the melodious sounds to where they were encamped. As soon as they heard the voice of the flute, they became enraptured and lay down to listen to it. It was not long before they were all fast asleep.

When Phra Abhai Mani perceived this he ordered the victory flag to be hoisted. The men of Paleuk thereupon gave a shout and sallied forth through the opening city gates. In a trice, they fell upon the unconscious Tamils and quickly fastened chains on their bodies. The prostrate forms were then dragged into the cages which had been specially prepared for them within the city.

As for Laman, he too was tied up with chains and then deferentially carried and ceremoniously deposited in a specially guarded cage.

After the operation had been successfully carried out, Phra Abhai Mani called together his officers and warned them to be on their

guard, for the captured Tamils would behave like wild elephants in a kraal. It would be at least two days before they accustomed themselves to captivity. Having said this, the ruler of Paleuk re-entered his palace.

When the followers of Laman woke up from their deep slumber and found themselves tied hand and foot, they were enraged and uttered terrible oaths. A few even succeeded in breaking their chains and had to be bound again with great difficulty. Recalcitrant cases were treated with a heavy blow of the truncheon.

Laman was more distressed than any of his men to find himself in such a sorry plight. He said to himself, "It is my evil fate to fall asleep and thus be taken by my enemy. How can I fight and conquer him now? What a waste of effort in bringing my army all this distance in order to take revenge on behalf of a dear friend! What will become of Laweng now? Will she not wait in vain for my victorious return? It is not my destiny to make you mine, O Laweng! But even if I die, I shall still lay claim to you. If any other man attempts to possess you, my ghost will surely break his neck." In his rage, he defiantly called on his guards to kill him.

That night, Laman pined more than ever for Laweng. Fortunately, he had brought with him the portrait of her, which he kept hidden next to his heart. He now brought it out and caressed it. Tears

rolled down his face as he thought of the romance he would never have. Overcome with sorrow, he began to treat the portrait as if it were yeally Laweng herself. He kissed it and embraced it and fondled it, until his cage echoed with wonder and astonishment.

Soon enough, curiosity overcame the guards. They approached the cage to find out what kind of a picture it was that Laman treated in such an affectionate manner. They were pleasantly surprised to see the portrait of what seemed to them the most beautiful woman in the world. When Laman saw what they were doing, he quickly put the portrait back into his jacket. It was now quickly chilly with a cool wind blowing and dew falling on his face. Feeling more miserable than ever before in his adventurous life, Laman tried to compose himself for sleep. But sleep eluded him until the early hours of the morning, when he dozed off out of sheer exhaustion. It was then that the guards seized their opportunity and took the portrait away from him. They bore it in triumph to Phra Abhai Mani.

Phra Abhai Mani had already risen and was giving his first audience of the day. The first thing he did was to ask how Laman had fared during the night. The guards told him all that had come to pass and handed over the portrait. Phra Abhai Mani took one look at it and was deeply moved. A subtle emotion stirred within him and he had to avert his gaze. "So this is the prize for which the foolish

Tamil ventured his life!" he exclaimed. "Bring the captive Laman hither!" While the guards went to fetch their prisoner, Phra Abhai Mani once more admired the peerless beauty of Laweng and ruminated whether he himself would not take up arms to fight for her.

Laman was brought before him. The Tamil prince proved to be fearless and could not be prevailed upon to answer any of Phra Abhai Mani's questions. He was therefore taken back to his cage. Phra Abhai Mani then told his assembled officers what he had decided to do with him. He would not allow him to return to his own country. He therefore proposed to set him and his chief followers loose upon some distant island to which no ship ever sailed.

The commands of Phra Abhai Mani were fulfilled. Laman and a few of his officers were taken on board a ship, which sailed to a small, uninhabited isle in the middle of the ocean, where sustenance and springs of fresh water were to be found. There they were left to fend for themselves.

Laman did not long enjoy his new dominion, however. Discovering the loss of the cherished portrait, he fell into a deep and bitter grief which was inconsolable. Not long after his arrival on the island, he succumbed to that grief, and his ghostly spirit fled from

his lifeless body and returned to Paleuk to take up abode in that very portrait of Laweng which had been his dearest possession.

### Part Nine : The Infant Prodigy

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Meanwhile Phra Abhai Mani was encountering all these adventures, warlike and amorous, his mermaid-mistress whom he had left on the magic island brought up his second son, Sud Sakorn, to lusty boyhood. Being no ordinary mortal, Sud Sakorn grew quickly in strength and intelligence. By the time he was ten months old, he was as fully developed as a normal child ten years of age. He no longer had to rely on his mother for sustenance and protection. So, very reluctantly, the mermaid decided that she could no longer keep him entirely to her own watery element and resolved to place the boy in the care and guidance of the wise hermit who ruled the island.

The hermit gladly took Sud Sakorn to his cell. He fed the child on wild bananas and cow's milk, until he was healthy and strong. Sud Sakorn spent much of his time running about in the neighbourhood of the cell, chasing cattle and buffaloes and riding on their backs. Sometimes he would go down to the cove and play with the

fishes, until the hermit tired himself out with calling him to return to the cell. However, the hermit insisted on Sud Sakorn learning how to read and write, how to take care of himself and defend himself.

One day, when he was about three years old, he escaped from the cell while the hermit was in deep meditation, and went down to the cove to chase the fishes. Finding one of largish size, he mounted its back and together they sped away far out to sea. At a considerable distance from the island, Sud Sakorn saw a monster he had never met with before. It was a giant sea horse with a black body, a face like a dragon's and a tail like a sea-serpent's. Taking a fancy to this creature many times his own size, he grabbed hold of it. Immediately, the great beast swung round and seized the little boy in its jaws. With a titanic struggle, Sud Sakorn shook himself loose and succeeded in getting on to its back. Roaring angrily, the monster tried to upset its rider in every conceivable way-leaping into the air, rolling over and swishing its enormous tail. But Sud Sakorn held on for dear life. The strange ride went on until the evening when, fearing that the hermit would be angry, the boy jumped off the creature's back and swam to the island. Running to meet the hermit, he recounted the whole amazing adventure.

The hermit knew at once that his pupil had encountered the offspring of a dragon that had mated with a horse. That was why it

had the head and tail of a dragon but the body of a horse. He also thought how appropriate it would be if the creature could be tamed to serve as a mount for Sud Sakorn. He said this to the boy and told him how it could be caught and rendered harmless by means of a magic spell. Sud Sakorn made every effort to memorise what the hermit had taught him before falling asleep that night.

Early the next morning, Sud Sakorn rose and, finding a piece of rope, immediately descended to the cove where one of his finned friends was waiting to take him out to sea. Out among the big breakers, he saw the sea-dragon-horse cantering on the surface. Drawing closer, he leapt from his mount and seized the monster by its whiskers. With an angry roar, the latter shook its huge head and flung the boy into the sea, the while lashing furiously with its tail and attempting to snap him in its jaws.

Undaunted, Sud Sakorn again approached and seized the beast's whiskers once more. At the same moment, he slipped the rope's noose over its head. Taking advantage of the animal's temporary confusion, he mounted its back and quickly repeated seven times the magic incantation he had learned of the hermit. Suddenly, the sea-horse seemed to lose all its strength and resisted no more. Sud Sakorn then blew on its head six times, and found that by now the steed was his and was perfectly amenable to his direction. Flushed with triumph, he headed towards the shore and soon the

monster was galloping up the sandy slope in the direction of the hermit's cell.

The hermit was seated at ease trimming his beard. When he saw his pupil in full control of the monster, he gave a delighted chuckle and called out to him: "Ho, there! Do not gallop about so much, but bring the beast here! I want to have a look at its funny head."

Sud Sakorn obediently dismounted and led his steed to the hermit, who examined it closely with much interest. Then with another chuckle, the venerable old man said to Sud Sakorn, "It is strange and amusing, being no less than a number of different animals all rolled into one. It has the strength of a giant, and is invulnerable. It has molars of diamonds and scales of onyx. It is equally capable of feeding on human flesh, crab, fish, grass and leaves. If you use it as your steed, you yourself will also be invulnerable. I will give it the name Nilmangkorn. You may let it go now. There is no need to tie it up, but let it roam at will. When you need your steed, call Nilmangkorn and it will come to you."

The hermit felt that now was the time to tell Sud Sakorn something of his royal ancestry. So he drew the boy to his side and told him how his father, a prince and heir to a kingdom, had been assisted by his mermaid mother to escape from the clutches of a

giantess; how they had fallen in love on that very island; and how Phra Abhai Mani sailed away shortly before Sud Sakorn was born.

The hermit then said to him, "Now you are old enough to fend for yourself. You must go after your father and find him. It is not meet that you should stay here and do nothing."

Sud Sakorn felt sorry for his father who had met with so many misadventures. At once he replied, "It is shameful for a son to leave his father thus. I must beg your permission to go and search for him, even if I die in doing so. Please tell me, in which direction did he go?"

"Your royal father," replied the hermit, exercising his powers of far vision, "is now the ruler of Paleuk, and is about to make war with Lanka. Where my arm is now pointing, in that direction you will find him. But the way is long and difficult, and you may go astray. Nor is it without dangers. You will encounter fierce and evil spirits, ghosts and wicked men. But I see that nothing deters you from your wish to seek your father; that is good and right, for gratitude to one's parents is the greatest virtue."

The hermit then picked up a long, crooked stick and handed it to Sud Sakorn, who was dwarfed by it, saying: "Take this magic stick with you. Keep it always with you, and never let it go from your hand. As a weapon, it is as effective as a bow and arrows or a

dagger. Moreover, it is an impenetrable shield against all kind of arms."

The wise old man also put the golden hair pin which Phra Abhai Mani had left with him into the boy's top-knot, and wrapped a tiger's hide round him in the manner of an ascetic. A tall head-piece of skin completed the outfit, and made Sud Sakorn look like a diminutive hermit. The old man then distilled some scented rose-wood and anointed the forehead of the boy. Sud Sakorn bowed low and reverently to the hermit.

The time came for Phra Abhai Mani's son to take leave of his mermaid-mother. He went down to the cover and called her. She came, her eyes filled with tears, but her heart full of pride. Sud Sakorn turned to the hermit and said, "Now that I am leaving this island, I am concerned about my mother. Would you please look after her, holy sir? There is no one but you to give her protection until I return again."

The hermit was moved to compassion and said, "You have no need to worry, I will look after her and see to her wants, such as they are."

Thus reassured, Sud Sakorn took his leave. The hermit gave his blessing. Then the boy called Nilmangkorn and led the great steed

to the shore where, after taking a last farewell of his mother, he mounted and sped over the ocean.

Nilmangkorn galloped tirelessly on the crest of the waves. All that Sud Sakorn could see was a wide expanse of water with occasional glimpses of green islets on the distant horizon. It was not long before they reached the lost kingdom of Thao Pakka. The country was once prosperous. But the people forsook the religion and morality of their forefathers and took to evil ways, and so one day the whole island sank beneath the sea, drowning all its inhabitants. This spot therefore became the abode of ghosts which preyed on the wreckage of sunken ships lured on to the treacherous reefs because the ghosts conjured up a vision of the once-stately city.

Sud Sakorn did not know this. As he approached, all he saw was a beautiful and glittering town with citizens going hither and thither about their business. Some of them hailed him and invited him to enter. As he was tired and needed a rest, he decided to stop awhile and see what the place could offer him. He guided Nilmangkorn through the city gate. As soon as he did so, he perceived to his horror that the walls seemed to cave in. The city and the cheerful citizens vanished, giving way to desolation and a multitude of ghosts, which formed a ring round him and leered at him.

Sud Sakorn was not afraid. Taking a firm grip of his magic stick, he swung it right and left. Immediately they were struck, the ghosts' heads rolled off their ghostly bodies. But the more he disposed of in this way, the more others came to leer at him, putting out their greedy tongues. Sud Sakorn, undaunted, continued to strike at them, while Nilmangkorn lashed with its tail and bit with its fangs. When evening fell they were still fighting the inexhaustible hosts. The ghosts even brought burning torches to illumine the battle. The magic stick kept them at bay, but they persevered in the hope that in his exhaustion the boy might drop it. The strain was now beginning to tell on Sud Sakorn and on his loyal steed. The boy began thinking of the hermit and how welcome his assistance would be. All at once, there was a deafening sound as of thunder and all the ghosts disappeared into thin air. Out of the clouds came the hermit, with a kindly smile on his countenance. He told Sud Sakorn about the lost kingdom and its ghostly inhabitants, and warned him to leave immediately. The hermit then vanished into the clouds, and Sud Sakorn made a hasty departure.

The boy rode his dragon-horse right through the night. When dawn broke, he found himself close to a beautiful green island. Deciding to make a stop, he directed Nilmangkorn to the shore. There he found various kinds of fruit to feed on while Nilmangkorn made a

meal of fishes found in the shallow water. Afterwards both enjoyed a much needed rest.

Refreshed by this brief sojourn on the island, Sud Sakorn again mounted his steed and continued his journey across the ocean. It was some time before he reached the first inhabited island.

On this island, there lived a cunning rascal of uncertain ancestry who professed to be a holy man. Shipwrecked near the island, he lost the few possessions he could boast of and landed on the island literally naked. To cover up his shame, he told the islanders that he was a fakir of a certain sect that spurned all forms of clothing as sinful. He allowed his hair and his beard to grow so long that they partly hid his nakedness. Refusing to eat fish, the principal diet of the island, he subsisted solely on rice and vegetables. All these things so impressed the natives that they were completely taken in by him and believed that he really was a holy man. So they built him a hermitage where he lived in great comfort and ease.

It was to this hermitage that Sud Sakorn first came when he arrived at the island. He rode Nilmangkorn as far as the gate. Peering in, he saw the naked fakir lying stretched out asleep and snoring on his couch. The sight repulsed him, but curiosity overcame him and he

called out. "Ho, there! Wake up, old man! Why do you not wear any clothes?"

The fakir woke up, startled. He looked all around to see where the noise came from. Eventually he espied the boy astride a strange beast outside his gate, and asked, "Where have you come from? What is your business, little hermit? What is that animal you are riding?"

"Wait," said Sud Sakorn authoritatively, "You must tell me first why you are so shamelessly naked. Have you no clothes? And do you not brush your teeth?"

The fakir immediately assumed a pose of virtuosity which was so blatantly a sham that any one with more experience than Sud Sakorn or the islanders could have seen through it at once. "I have renounced all desires," he exclaimed with false piety, "because I realise the folly of human vanity. What, after all, is our human body? Just a storehouse of disease and dirtiness. Therefore, what is the use of trying to conceal it? For this same reason, I have taken to a holy life, renounced the world, effaced my name and person. Just as I was born into the world, so am I at this instant. Now, pray, what is your business? Whither do you go?"

Sud Sakorn, in his innocence, believed all that the fakir had said and believed him truly to be a holy man. He dismounted and

entered the hermitage, and begged the naked fakir to forgive him for speaking in a rude fashion. He then gave an account of himself and his strange journey.

The naked fakir closed his eyes and listened. As the story unfolded, he became more than ever convinced that this was no ordinary boy, that small though he was he possessed extraordinary magical powers. He decided to pry the secret of these powers from the boy.

In his sly manner, the fakir said, "That is all very well, and you may have succeeded in crossing the oceans. But before you lie far greater hazards, such as the sea of flowing lava. Your charms and incantations are powerless against this. I will teach you how to overcome this and other obstacles." Sud Sakorn expressed his willingness to learn.

"Then you must tell me all that you know already," said the fakir.

The boy innocently believed that the fakir would help him, and so told him all that he had been taught by the hermit and revealed the secret of the magic stick.

The fakir was delighted, and it was with considerable difficulty that he controlled his emotions sufficiently to say to Sud Sakorn, "We

will begin our lessons at once. Now you must follow me to the place of meditation on yonder mountain."

The naked man rose from his couch and strode out of the hermitage with an agility that belied his years. Sud Sakorn followed, holding on tightly to the magic stick.

After much climbing, they eventually reached the highest point on the island. On a narrow ledge overhanging a precipice, with a sheer drop of several thousand feet into the valley below, the fakir told the boy to sit and adopt the attitude of meditation. Unsuspecting, Sud Sakorn obeyed. He placed the stick by his side and put the palms of his hands together as in prayer.

Immediately, the wicked fakir seized his opportunity. With a quick movement of his bare body, he pushed the boy over the edge and watched him fall until out of sight. Then with a shout of joy he gleefully picked up the magic stick and made his way down the mountain side.

Reaching the hermitage, he lost no time in proving his mastery over Sud Sakorn's steed, Nilmangkorn. At first the dragon-horse showed great aversion, but when the fakir waved the stick, it was cowed into submission and bowed its head to the inevitable. The fakir mounted its back, and, prodding it with the stick, made Nilmangkorn carry him across the sea to the kingdom of Karavek,

where, he knew, his newly-acquired possessions and knowledge would yield him a comfortable living.

Karavek was ruled by a young prince named Phra Suriyotai, who had a consort called Chomchanthavadi and a two and a half year old daughter called Saovakontha. At the very hour when the treacherous fakir pushed Sud Sakorn over the precipice, Phra Suriyotai was fast asleep. While he was sleeping, he had a strange dream. He dreamt that an ugly and evil-smelling vulture, with a gleaming crimson body but few feathers, flew towards him with a crystal in its beak. The air was filled with the smell of death so that it made him feel faint. Then all of a sudden, the vulture disappeared and the sun rose in all its glory, bathing the whole city in light. He found the crystal on the ground and gave it to his daughter. At this point, he woke up.

Summoning the court astrologers, Phra Suriyotai asked them to interpret his dream. After making their calculations, they were able to inform him what the dream signified. The evil vulture represented a villainous man of strange aspect and appearance who would soon be coming to Karavek. The crystal indicated that this man would be followed by a child of exceptional strength and power, and the child would ultimately become the husband of the little Princess and rule over Karavek.

Soon enough, the naked fakir arrived as predicted. He rode Nilmangkorn through the streets of Karavek, to the great consternation of the populace, who thought that spirits of the underworld had come to town. Cries and lamentations rent the air. But the fakir rode unconcernedly on until he reached the main gate of the palace. There some knowledgeable persons who had heard of the naked fakir of the neighbouring island greeted him respectfully and asked his purpose in coming to Karavek. Flattered, the wily rascal told them that he had come to warn them of an impending epidemic of cholera which would sweep the city, striking down the improvident. "Please tell all your people," he cried. "If you are afraid to die, do not delay. Come out into the street and I shall sprinkle holy water over you, so that death will pass you untouched and you will live in happiness and health."

On hearing this, all forgot their fear and aversion. They pressed eagerly towards him, begging him to help them. Soon the streets were lined with crowds. Even the sick and the maimed made their appearance, and new-born babies were carried in the arms of their mothers. Young folk looked at the unclothed stranger with wonder, while the bolder spirits even hid their faces and laughed.

These facts were reported to Phra Suriyotai who, forgetting his dream, was as enthusiastic as any of his subjects. He told his courtiers that he would invite this holy man into the palace to

perform his miracle there. But when the fakir entered the palace, all the palace women took fright and scattered in all directions. He rode up to the door of the throne hall, where he was politely received by courtiers. Beaming with pleasure, he dismounted. As he did so, Nilmangkorn, freed from the evil influence, leapt into the air, and with the speed of the wind, galloped away through the palace gate and headed for the sea, in the direction of the island where he had left his beloved master.

The fakir, horror-struck, fell into a swoon. Efforts to revive him failed. It was in this condition that he was presented to the Prince. Phra Suriyotai ordered him to be carried into an inner room and summoned doctors to attend him. There he languished in abject sorrow and despair for several days.

Meanwhile, Nilmangkorn returned to the island and wandered hither and thither in search of Sud Sakorn. Not finding him, the faithful steed went to the hermitage and from there followed the trail of his master. It only led to a mountain wall. So Nilmangkorn sat down and cried, and his wails echoed through the rocky valley.

Now, by the grace of the hermit's magical power, Phra Abhai Mani's son had not perished in his fall from the precipice after being pushed over by the wicked fakir. But he was grievously hurt and remained unconscious for a long while. In time, the cool trickle of

a stream which gushed forth from the rocks and touched his body revived him, and he regained consciousness. Immediately he became aware of the piteous wailing of the faithful Nilmangkorn. Looking about him, he could however see nothing but solid and massive walls all around. To climb them was impossible, and there was no way out of the deep chasm. In despair, Sud Sakorn again called on his mentor.

Once more, the hermit came to the aid of his ward. There was a deafening sound. Sud Sakorn looked up and saw the old man descending astride a rainbow. Gathering the bruised body of the boy up in his arms, the hermit took him aloft and gently laid him on the mountain top. He then proceeded to teach the boy thus: "Put not your trust in any mortal, for their wiles are immeasurable. Even the most tortuous creepers round the hoariest tree are not as crooked as a man's heart. True love among mortals is only to be found in the love of a father or mother. The only support you can rely upon is yourself. So you must be careful and wise, my boy. There is no better armour than knowledge, for it is best to know how to keep oneself from harm. Now you must go and recover your magic stick." As soon as he had said this, the hermit vanished from sight.

Sud Sakorn rose and came down the mountain side to find his steed. Nilmangkorn showed great delight on seeing him. The boy

led his dragon-horse back the way he came, picking fruit and feeding himself and Nilmangkorn as he went. When he reached the hermitage, he collected pomegranates that the naked fakir had planted. Having eaten his fill he bathed in the clear, cool stream.

Calling Nilmangkorn, he said to his steed, "You know where that wicked man has gone. Take me to him at once." He mounted the dragon-horse and away they sped to Karavek.

The citizens of Karavek were no longer frightened of Nilmangkorn, so they came out of their houses to take a good look at the rare creature. They thought that the boy who was riding it must be the son or grandson of the fakir. They called out to him, "Where have you been, little hermit? Have you come to join the old one?"

Sud Sakorn returned their friendly greetings. "I share my blessings with you all," he told them. "But tell me where I may find the naked fakir, please tell me where he resides." The citizens told him that their ruler had invited him into his palace.

It was not long before Sud Sakorn gained access to the palace, for every one who saw the boy fell in love with him. He dismounted and entered the chamber where the fakir had been placed. The wicked man was fast asleep, but the magic stick was leaning against the wall. Taking hold of it at once, Sud Sakorn waved it triumphantly over his head and shouted, "Hey, you base and

heartless villain! You wormed my secrets out of me and sought to kill me and steal my stick. You shall die for it!"

The naked fakir woke up with a start and was horror-stricken to find the boy whom he had pushed over the precipice standing over him. He jumped up and, having no thought for anything but flight, ran out of the room as fast as his legs could carry him, followed by the royal doctors with their cups of medicine. The guards outside not knowing what was happening, joined in the hue-and-cry. There was considerable commotion in the palace.

The noise reached the ears of Phra Suriyotai, who immediately came out from his inner chamber to see what was afoot. On reaching the quarters assigned to the fakir, he saw the little boy in hermit's clothing. Sud Sakorn had not taken the trouble to join in the chase, but was explaining to the startled courtiers, "I have come only to take back my stick; you need not be afraid, for I harm no one."

Phra Suriyotai took an instant liking to the boy, and invited him into his inner chamber. There he asked questions of Sud Sakorn, who told him about his ancestry and his adventures.

When Phra Suriyotai heard how the fakir had deceived and tried to kill Sud Sakorn, his fury was aroused. He ordered the man to be arrested and brought into his presence. As the fakir refused to

admit his guilt, he was whipped and sentenced to death. But Sud Sakorn interceded for him, saying that what had befallen himself was doubtless due to some fault he had committed against the man in a previous existence; if he were to exact punishment now, a chain of recurring acts of revenge would be projected into their future existences.

Phra Suriyotai agreed to Sud Sakorn's request on one condition: that Sud Sakorn should remain in Karavek as his adopted son. The boy, not averse to this proposal, replied: "I thank Your Highness for the magnanimous suggestion that I should look upon Your Highness as a father. When I have found my parent and other relatives, I shall return to Karavek and serve Your Highness for the rest of my life."

Phra Suriyotai was delighted with this condescending reply and made a further proposal: "I myself will accompany you on the journey to your father's kingdom. But first you must rest here awhile and refresh yourself. In the meantime, I will send word to Paleuk."

Sud Sakorn had no objection to this. He merely asked permission to call Nilmangkorn and tell the faithful steed what he intended. That done, and when Nilmangkorn had been given leave to play in the ocean, the boy followed his new-found sire into the inner

palace, where he received an affectionate welcome from Chomchanthavadi and her daughter Saovakontha.

Days passed into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years, and Sud Sakorn stayed on at Karavek, tasting the delights of a civilisation and culture he had never known. He completely forgot the object of his mission, which was to journey in search of a father he had never seen.

One day, however, he suddenly remembered that Phra Suriyotai was not his father, nor was Karavek his parental domain. He had an instant urge to go and search for Phra Abhai Mani. At once he went to his adopted parents and told them that he would set out from Karavek on the morrow. He also said to Saovakontha, whom he loved dearly, "I must leave you, little sister. The desire to meet my real father burns like a fire within me. When I have found him, I will bring him here to see you. You must take good care of yourself. I shall always think of you."

"In that case," remarked Saovakontha, "I will go with you. I cannot remain behind in the city without you, dear brother."

In spite of all his efforts to dissuade her from accompanying him, Saovakontha was adamant, and even her parents had to give in to her whims. But they arranged for their two young charges to go in

ship which was properly fitted out and fully manned, and with a number of attendants to wait upon them.

Sud Sakorn did not forget his faithful steed. He called Nilmangkorn and told the dragon-horse to go with them. In the day time, Nilmangkorn could gallop about at will across the surface of the ocean. But at night, the dragon-horse must join the ship and sleep on board.

The ship set sail in the direction of Paleuk. The voyage through calm seas passed off uneventfully until they reached a large island, where they stopped to replenish their supply of fresh water. Now, unknown to them, this island was the abode of ferocious, man-eating butterflies of gigantic size. When these creatures scented human blood, they winged out in hordes of hundreds and circled over the ship in search of prey. The sailors were panic-stricken and ran below deck. Little Saovakontha, hearing the commotion, leaned out of the window of her cabin. In a flash, one of the monsters swooped down, caught the child in its talons and flew aloft again at great speed. Fortunately, Sud Sakorn saw what happened. Seizing his stick and calling Nilmangkorn, he set off in immediate pursuit. Almost at once, he was attacked by hundreds of other hungry butterflies. Undismayed, the boy struck at them with his stick and shattered their wings. The remainder were quickly put to flight. Sud Sakorn then proceeded to rescue Saovakontha

and brought her back to the ship on his trusty steed. After that, he went out again with Nilmangkorn and made his way to the island, where he sought out and slew the king butterfly. He took out both the creature's eyes, which shone like gems, and brought them to the ship, for he had been told that they gave great strength to any one who possessed them.

Finally, after many weeks spent in crossing the ocean, the ship arrived in the territorial waters of Paleuk. There they found several patrol boats cruising off the shore. Drawing nearer, the Karavek sailors beat their gongs to attract attention and called out to ask whose boats they were. They received the reply: "We are the patrols of Paleuk. Where do you come from, and do you come as friends or enemies?" The Karavek sailors, delighted that they had reached their destination, cried out: "We are no enemies! This ship carries the Princess of Karavek and the renowned Sud Sakorn, son of the illustrious Phra Abhai Mani, who comes to meet his father. If you approach, you may pay your respects to His Highness!" The patrol boats came alongside and the officers boarded the ship. Sud Sakorn received them in a friendly manner and soon confirmed that they were indeed his father's subjects. But when he asked them to take him to Phra Abhai Mani, they hesitated and said that they would first have to await instructions from the palace. So they sent messengers to advise high officials at the court.

The news was conveyed to Suvarnamali, as Phra Abhai Mani was still distracted following Laman's curse and the strange spell which Laweng's portrait exercised over him. Suvarnamali had never heard of any other son of her husband, and was naturally suspicious. After consulting the ladies of the court, she decided to find out more about Sud Sakorn and await the arrival of Sri Suvarna and Sin Samudr before admitting him into the city, for it was generally agreed that the enemy were capable of using any subterfuge. So the messengers went back to the ship with the request that Sud Sakorn should not enter the city immediately but wait at the outpost. Sud Sakorn learned of his father's illness with dismay and anxiety and spent much time questioning the messengers. In the end, he decided to comply with the request and set up his camp on the outskirts of the city.

Meanwhile, word reached Suvarnamali that a vast concentration of forces had gathered at Lanka. The cunning Laweng had offered her hand to any one who could conquer the twice-victorious ruler of Paluek. Consequently, all the sovereigns of neighbouring states from powerful monarchs to insignificant princelings, had offered their services, and now a mighty allied army was ready to swoop on Phra Abhai Mani's kingdom. Suvarnamali hastened into her husband's chamber and found him kissing the bewitched portrait of Laweng. Sitting down beside him, she told him the news she had

received. Phra Abhai Mani flew into a rage, crying: "You come here merely to vent your jealousy! All you can do is to talk and talk!" He picked up a pillow and flung it at her. Suvarnamali ran out of the room. Seeing that to discuss the matter with her husband was useless, she herself summoned the ministers and generals to prepare for war.

The soldiers of Paleuk were scarcely ready before the allied enemy fleet appeared off the coast. Such a vast congregation of fighting ships had never been seen before, nor had any force been known to be as large and formidable as the one they transported. The invaders seemed unassailable. Nevertheless, the brave patrol boats went out to intercept them, firing their diminutive guns. The big enemy vessels replied with cannons and in no time not a trace was left of the hapless defenders. Thinking they had disposed of the only resistance before reaching the shore, the fleet sailed in at full speed and ran into Sud Sakorn's ship, which opened up with all its guns and succeeded in sinking a few of the leading vessels. But even the gallant visitors from Karavek could not withstand the entire strength of the invading fleet and were forced to retire. The invaders therefore gained the desired beach heads and began to disembark their troops with little hindrance. Within a short time, they completely surrounded the city and began assaulting the walls.

Suvarnamali, who had taken over supreme command of the defence, decided that the only hope lay in staging a diversion by making a brief sortie. Disguising herself as a man once more, she collected a band of resolute women and led them out through one of the city gates. She intended to take them out only a short distance, sufficient to draw the attention of the enemy, and then beat a rapid retreat. But the enemy were too quick for the women. Before the latter could retrace their steps, they rushed the gate and succeeded in cutting off the retreat. Suvarnamali and her amazons tried to fight their way back with bows and arrows. In doing so, many of them, including Suvarnamali herself, were wounded.

At this critical moment, the enemy ranks faltered and broke, as Sud Sakorn came riding on Nilmangkorn, scattering warriors left and right. Realising instinctively that the disguised woman was his father's consort, he rushed to her rescue and escorted her back to the safety of the walls. He then returned to the fray at the head of the troops from Karavek and, swinging his stick and urging on his formidable steed, made a frontal attack. The enemy, surprised by this strange combination, turned and fled.

Sud Sakorn entered the city of Paleuk in triumph. At last, after many adventures, the infant prodigy had found his father.

## Part Ten: The Family Reunion

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WHEN Sri Suvarna and Sin Samudr heard of the peril that threatened Phra Abhai Mani, they at once took leave of the ruler of Ratana and lost no time in embarking on their long journey back to Paleuk.

For the first few days, the voyage was calm and serene, without any untoward incident. Then, one evening, their ship reached a large island just as a storm was arising. Deeming it wise to seek shelter, as well as to replenish the store of water, Sri Suvarna gave orders to heave to and drop anchor in a secluded bay. A landing party was sent ashore to bring back supplies of fresh water.

As the men were returning to the beach with pails and barrels, a ferocious lion of immense size sprang upon them from the thick undergrowth. The sailors scattered in all directions. Those who retained some presence of mind fired their muskets at the beast, but this only served to enrage it the more. With a resounding roar of anger, the monster pounced on the men who happened to be nearest, and then chased the rest into the sea. The latter swam for

dear life, as well they might, for, strange to relate, the lion plunged in after them and followed at their heels right to the ship's side.

Hearing the commotion, Sin Samudr stepped out on to the deck and saw what was happening. Without a moment's hesitation, he leapt into the sea and engaged the beast with his bare hands. A tremendous tussle followed, and the trial of strength ended with the boy ensconced on the lion's back.

The amphibious monster was not yet beaten, however. With an angry howl, it bounced Sin Samudr into the air. But the resourceful youngster evaded its gaping jaw and clutched its tail, using this as a lever to regain the saddle. The lion, finding this diminutive human more than a match for its own strength, made a bee line for the shore, with Sin Samudr still astride its back, and roared for help. In an instant, the beach was crowded with snarling lions.

Undaunted, Sin Samudr dived into the sea and came up with an armful of small fishes. These he calmly scattered among the beast, which began to devour them greedily. Meanwhile, the fearless son of Phra Abhai Mani walked in their midst and stroked each by the mane. By the time he came up to his former adversary, even this fierce monster was completely appeased. There and then, Sin Samudr decided to take it along with him as his future steed.

The boy thereupon led the lion, now tame as a kitten, back to the ship, where they were greeted with wonder and astonishment, and not a little trepidation on the part of those who had occasion to know its ferocity. Approaching his uncle, Sin Samudr said: "I want to have this lion as my steed. It is invulnerable, is as strong in the sea as on land, and feeds on fish. It will make an incomparable companion." Sri Suvarna agreed with his nephew, and so a new recruit was added to the brave company.

The remainder of the voyage was uneventful. However, as the ship drew near to Paleuk, the sky reddened. Full of foreboding, Sri Suvarna urged more speed and hastened into the city. They were welcomed by Suvarnamali who, pale and distraught, told them of repeated attacks by the allies of Laweng and of Phra Abhai Mani's strange obsession for the bewitched portrait of the Princess of the Western Isle.

The unhappy Queen then took Sri Suvarna and Sin Samudr into the royal apartment, where Phra Abhai Mani, now emaciated and bedridden, lay ever contemplating the likeness of Laweng, the amorous hero saw them coming, but instead of expressing delight, flew into a towering rage and, accusing them of spying on him, shouted to his handmaidens to chase them away.

When Sri Suvarna saw that his brother was not in his right mind, he felt as though stabbed to the heart. Drawing near, he knelt down beside the royal couch and spoke in the gentlest manner.

"My dear brother," he began, "I have long been out of your sight. Now I am returned, bringing your beloved son with me. O, why do you greet us in this fashion? Have you forgotten your own kith and kin? Why do you persist thus in making love to a mere picture? Oh, what misfortune has brought you to this pass? Even though you and I were cruelly separated when still young, yet we lived to see each other's face again. But this time you have changed, and look strangely on me."

Sin Samudr took the cue and, bowing low at his father's feet, exclaimed with tears in his eyes: "My father, beat or kill me if you will, but I must tell you that I do not like this picture. It is because you have it near you that you behave so strangely. I am going to take it and burn it."

Suiting action to the word, the boy snatched the portrait away from his father's hand. Quick as lightning, Phra Abhai Mani snatched it back again. Then pointing his finger at Sin Samudr in uncontrolled fury, he cried: "How dare you touch her!" Seizing a pillow, the crazed King struck at his brother, and his son, until they both ran out of the room.

Back in her own chamber Suvarnamali told her astonished brother-in-law and her adopted son, "The astrologers say that he will be saved, and that by an unknown offspring. Now, there has arrived in this city a young boy who calls himself Sud Sakorn and who claims to be the son of Phra Abhai Mani. Indeed, in saving the city at a critical moment, he has shown valour worthy of the name. But where he comes from and of what womb, he will not say."

Sri Suvarna remained mystified, but Sin Samudr thought long and then said: "When we were living on the magic island, my father kept company with a mermaid who once bore him on her back to safety. In requitement of her love, he gave her a signet ring and a bejewelled pin. If this Sud Sakorn be indeed her son, he would surely wear these tokens of parental affection. I will find out whether he has them."

Sri Suvarna was in agreement with his nephew's reasoning and proposal. "If he is really your half-brother," he told him, "you may bring the boy to us."

Sin Samudr mounted the royal chariot and proceeded to the pavilion where Sud Sakorn was lodged. From afar, he saw the stripling whose face was the graven image of the mermaid. As he came closer, he saw his father's signet ring on the other's finger, which removed all doubt. Sud Sakorn, on his part, recognised his

elder from the description given him by the old hermit. So the two brothers, acting simultaneously, rushed to embrace each other, with tears of joy flowing down their tender cheeks.

Fraternal greetings and exchanges over, Sin Samudr and Sud Sakorn set to discussing the sorry plight of their father. The older told the younger how Phra Abhai Mani was enraptured with the portrait of a bewitching female who sought to destroy him.

Sud Sakorn seemed scarcely perturbed. "Do not worry," he said, with the air of one accustomed to dealing with such problems. "Even if the woman is a witch, I can counter her charms. The learned hermit, my foster father, gave me this magic stick. With it I have quelled ghosts and devils. What female witch would dare stand up to me?"

Sin Samudr held up his hand in admiration. "Is that really true, dear brother? Then let us go together and destroy this witch. My mother and our uncle will be pleased."

So the two young brothers went arm in arm to the palace, where they were warmly received by Sri Suvarna and Suvarnamali. The latter were delighted to hear that Sud Sakorn knew how to exorcise the malign spirit that was in the picture, and asked if he required any assistance.

"No," replied the boy, confidently. "Just give me the portrait, and I will beat it with my stick."

Suvarnamali told Sin Samudr to go to his father's chamber and try to obtain possession of the article. Sin Samudr went willingly and stealthily entered Phra Abhai Mani's room. He saw his father asleep on the couch, the guilty object beside him. Quietly, he crept up and successfully removed it, without disturbing the troubled sleeper, and quickly brought it in triumph to his brother.

Sud Sakorn placed the portrait on the floor. Then he uttered a prayer and an incantation. That done, he picked up the magic stick and, lifting it, brought it down on the portrait with a swift, sharp blow. A shrill scream rent the air, and it appeared to come from the parchment. Sud Sakorn struck again and again, until the parchment shrivelled up and suddenly vanished.

All four hurried into Phra Abhai Mani's chamber. The King was still asleep, but gave a deep sigh of relief. Suvarnamali approached the royal couch and bathed his face with water of fresh jasmine and roses. At that moment a great cry of joy echoed through the palace; the courtiers and guards had heard of Sud Sakorn's victory over the evil spirit. Phra Abhai Mani woke up with a start. He slowly lifted himself upon the couch as the recollection of a bad dream passed away from him. He looked round and saw his consort, his

brother, his son, and a younger boy seated beside him. His eyes rested on this boy, and gradually he observed in his features a resemblance to the mermaid he had long ago forsaken. The King called the boy to him and tenderly placed his arm round the young shoulders, saying, "My son, my lost son of your poor mermaid mother!"

Phra Abhai Mani's family was at last reunited. Thus strengthened, they would together give battle to the enemy hosts arrayed against them. It was not long before the King regained his vigour and presided over a council of war. It was decided to dispose the command in this wise : the vanguard would be under Sri Suvarna, the right wing under Sin Samudr, the left wing under Sud Sakorn, the rearguard under the three Brahmin warriors. The main body of the army, under the personal command of Phra Abhai Mani, would be in the centre.

Therefore, when the concerted attack launched by the allies of Lanka finally came, the forces of Paleuk were fully prepared. On the day of battle, a mighty army was assembled outside the palace. At the auspicious hour selected by the astrologers, the gongs of victory were sounded, and the soldiers raised a shout that thundered to the heavens. To the accompaniment of trumpets and conches, Sri Suvarna ascended his chariot. To that of drums, Sin Samudr mounted his ferocious lion and Sud Sakorn his swift

dragon steed. The three Brahmins were astride horses of sturdy build. Finally, Phra Abhai Mani took his place on the golden chariot of state, amid shouts and blowings of trumpets and conches and the beating of drums. The entire army, with its full panoply of war and colourful banners, moved forward into the field.

Drawn up against them were the eight armies of the enemy, each with the flags of their several nations. Each was led by generals of great fame who were determined to lead their men to victory.

Phra Abhai Mani watched the two sides deploying for battle. He knew that, by playing a few notes on his magic flute, he could still the advancing tides and thus achieve an easy triumph. But that would not be the heroic way of deciding the issue. Besides, he wished to see his sons win their spurs in combat of arms and gain immortal renown. So he sent a herald to the enemy bearing this challenge: by ancient laws of chivalry, in order to spare the lives of common soldiers, the commanders of opposing camps themselves engage in single combat; if the allies of Lanka dared to match their strength against the leading warriors of Paleuk, let them send their champions on to the field.

The enemy generals quickly accepted the challenge. One of them, a burly warrior in a black cloak who looked like an enormous tiger, armed with an axe and a lance, spurred his horse forward shouting

defiance; "Come, whoever dares, and fight me according to the challenge!"

Sin Samudr at once went forward on his lion to meet the adversary, who tried to pierce him with the lance but, failing, used his axe. The boy was too quick for him, however, and wrested the axe from him. The general then feigned retreat, allowing the boy almost to catch up with him, and, suddenly turning, hurled an iron ball which hit Sin Samudr on the chest so that the latter, fell senseless from his mount. He was about to make mincemeat of the boy when Sud Sakorn rode up to challenge him. He turned quick as lightning and struck the brother with another iron ball and felled him also. It was now the turn of their uncle to come to the rescue. Swinging his club, Sri Suvarna eluded several successive missiles thrown at him, closed in and dealt the general a mortal blow.

Another of the enemy general rode forward to attack Sri Suvarna and, swinging a rope, caught the latter's club and sent it flying, at the same time bringing him down to the ground. Fortunately, by this time, Sin Samudr had recovered and now came to his uncle's aid. With a deft stroke of his axe, he quickly dispatched the second general. But he, in turn, was struck by a third general who wielded a sword of fire. Sri Suvarna rose and swung his club, but it was no match for the sword. It was left to Sud Sakorn, who had also

recovered from the blow of the iron ball, to carry on the duel. With a well-calculated swing of his magic stick, he severed the head of the third general from the body.

The fourth enemy general came on to the field with a cauldron of flaming oil in each hand. These he hurled at the two young brothers and scorched them with fire. Then, emboldened, he galloped towards Phra Abhai Mani, calling out, "Hey, king! Be quick and surrender!" Sri Suvarna came up after him and successfully clubbed him to earth, but was forced to retire when the resourceful warrior threw flaming oil on his hand which held the club. At that instant, Sin Samudr shot an arrow which hit the general in the right eye and eliminated him from the fray.

As evening fell both sides retired for the night, to preserve strength for the morrow. Phra Abhai Mani hastened to receive his sons, who were so sorely burned by the flaming oil that they both fainted away. Brought into camp, physicians were summoned to attend them but they did not recover. As a last resort, the King asked the Brahmin Sanon to exercise his art. This the latter did, and soon enough the clouds

burst and rain fell in great abundance. The two youngsters were taken out and their burns bathed in the pure water, which washed

away the corrosive oil. Sin Samudr and Sud Sakorn were thus restored to health.

Meanwhile, the steady downpour of rain continued and intensified as the night wore on. The enemy troops shivered and made attempts to light fires, but failed because the ground and the wood were damp. Finally, to add to their discomfort, a hailstorm flattened all the tents in their camps. Dawn found them cold, disheartened and desperate.

Phra Abhai Mani came to the conclusion that it would be kinder to the enemy and more expedient for all to make a quick end of the battle. He therefore ordered a general advance of his troops. Beating their gongs and shouting shrill battle cries, the men of Paleuk marched forward. The opposing armies, losing what courage they still possessed, turned and fled in panic. Phra Abhai Mani's forces chased them to the sea, where they embarked in utter confusion and sailed speedily back to their several lands.

Thus ended the invasion of Paleuk by the allies of Lanka. Phra Abhai Mani, his brother, his sons, his commanders and his men, returned in triumph to the city, where they were enthusiastically received by the joyful populace.

ถึงม้วยดินสิ้นฟ้ามหาสมุทร  
 ไม่สิ้นสุดความรักอันครมึน  
 แม่อยู่ในใต้ท้าวธิดาธรา  
 ขอพบพานพิศอาลัยมิคลาย  
 แม้เนื้อเหินเป็นทองมรรคเทพ  
 พี่ขอพบศรีสวัสดิ์เป็นมัจฉา  
 แม้เป็นบัวดัดพี่เป็นภุมรา  
 เขยงกาไกลอุปทุมทอง  
 แม้เป็นธำอำไพใครเป็นทองดี  
 ละร่อนองสิงสู่เป็นคู่ครอง  
 ขอติดตามทรมลจอนนวลละออง  
 ... เป็นคู่ครองพิศอาลัยทุกชาติไป ...

พระอภัยมณี - อุณทก

พระอภัยมณี - พระอินทร์ ๒๕๐ อักษรพิเศษ ไปชกชก

