TALES FROM MANY LANDS

BOOK II

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NEVER TOO LATE

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by

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I

Amrit Kantak is a beautiful place in Madhya Pradesh. There is a temple of Siva at Amrit Kantak and thousands of pilgrims go there every year to worship the god. The river Narbada has its source here. This holy place is in the middle of a great forest.

Long, long age a poor wood-cutter lived at Amrit Kantak. He lived with his wife in a small hut. They had only one child and at the time of this story she was only three years old. The wood-cutter was poor and weak. He could hardly earn enough for the small family. Many nights they had no supper. Yet the wood-cutter and his wife were firm believers in God. "God will certainly help us," said they. They were quite sure of it.

One morning, as usual, the wood-cutter went out to his work in the forest. He cut wood for a long time. While he was cutting wood, suddenly there stood before him a woman of great beauty. She was tall and wore many shining stars on her. head. She had a garland of sweet-smelling flowers round her neck. Her presence lit up the whole place. The wood-cutter was greatly surprised. He looked at the strange figure with great wonder and respect.

The woman came nearer to the wood-cutter. When she was twenty yards from him she stopped and said, "Friend, do not be afraid. I am the goddess Parvathi, wife of Lord Siva. I know you are poor and needy. Bring your child to me. I will take her with me and be her mother. I will take good care of her."

The wood-cutter heard what the goddess said. He knelt at her feet and said, "O mother, allow me to go to my wife. I will tell her about your offer. Then I will bring the child and give her to you."

"You may do so," said the goddess. So the wood-cutter ran home. His wife saw him coming, running. When he had come to her she said, "What is the matter, dear? Why are you in such a hurry? I have hardly ever seen you like this before."

The wood-cutter told her about everything that had just taken place in the forest. She heard everything and it filled her with wonder.

"Please take me too to the goddess," said she. "We shall give her the child. The goddess will bring her up in happiness."

"Yes, dear," said the wood-cutter, "call the child and let us go. The goddess is waiting for us."

So they hurried to the place where Parvathi was waiting for them.

Parvathi greeted the good people and blessed them. Then the wood-cutter gave the child to the goddess. The goddess received her and took her up to heaven. She named her Chandrika.

The wood-cutter and his wife returned to their hut. They did not live long after that. A year later the wood-cutter's wife died. Shortly after that the wood-cutter himself followed her to the Kingdom of God.

QUESTION :—

1. Where is Amrit Kantak ?
2. What is it famous for ?
3. Where did the wood-cutter live ?
4. How many children had he ?
5. Describe his meeting with Parvathi ?
6. What did Parvathi say to him ?
7. Why did the wood-cuttar give his child to Parvathi ?
8. Did his wife agree to that ?
9. What did Parvathi do with the child ?

II

In heaven Chandrika grew up in great joy and happiness. She ate sugar cakes and drank sweet milk. Her clothes were of gold and the little devas were her companions and they played with her. She grew up into a beautiful girl. When she was fifteen years of age, the goddess Parvathi called her one day and said, "Chandrika, dear child, Siva and I are about to go on a long journey. We shall be away for some days. You know that there are eight great dwellings in heaven whose doors are always locked. I am going to leave the keys of the eight doors with you. Seven of these you may open and behold the glory which is within them." Then she showed her a small golden key and said, "This is the key of the eighth door. You must not not open that door.

If you open that door you will be unhappy."

"I will obey your command," said Chandrika. "I will not open the door."

Then Parvathi gave the bunch of keys to Chandrika. "Do not forget what I have told you," said she." The next day she went on a long journey round the world with her husband.

As soon as the goddess was gone, Chandrika began to go round all the dwellings of heaven. Each day she opened one of the doors. Thus she completed examining seven dwellings. In each of them sat one of the Saptarshis in the midst of great light. She wondered at the glory she saw in them. The little gods who went with her were also greatly delighted. Then the eighth door alone remained to be seen. It was the forbidden door. "The

goddess has told me not to open this door," said she, "so I will not open it."

"That is right. You must not," said the little gods, "or Parvathi will be angry with you."

"Open it and see what is hidden behind it," whispered a voice. It was the voice of Desire.

Chandrika could not say 'No' to that whisper. The desire to open the forbidden door came to her.

"I will not open it wide and will not go inside. But I will unlock it so that we can see just a little through the opening."

"O, no," said the little gods, "that is disobedience, a great sin."

Then Chandrika was silent. But she could not forget the desire to open the forbidden door. "Open it, open it," the voice went on telling her. It gave her no rest.

QUESTIONS :—

1. What did Parvathi tell Chandrika one day ?
2. What did she see in the seven dwellings?
3. Did she desire to open the eighth door ?
4. Did her companions ask her to open it ?
5. What did Chandrika tell herself ?

III

Then one day Chandrika was all alone. The little gods had all gone out to gather flowers. "Now I am alone," said she to herself. "I shall open the forbidden door a little and just look in. No one will find out about it."

So she took the key and put it in the lock. When she had put it in, she turned it round. The door flew open and she saw an indescribable sight there. She saw the great goddess Maya sitting in fire and

splendour. Chandrika stood there for some time and looked at every thing inside that hall in great astonishment. A bright light filled the hall. She touched the light with her finger and lo, her finger became quite golden. She tried to rub it off, but could not. "O, this is terrible," said she. All her efforts to rub off the gold were in vain. A great fear fell upon her. She shut the door quickly and ran away as fast as she could. But her terror would not leave her. Her heart beat fast. The gold stayed on her finger.

A few days passed. Then Parvathi returned from her long journey. She called Chandrika. "Bring the keys," said she to her. Chandrika brought the bunch of keys and gave it to Parvathi. Her hand was trembling. Her face was pale. Parvathi looked into her eyes and said, "Have you not opened the eighth door also?"

"No," replied Chandrika.

Then Parvathi said, "Come close to me. Let me feel your heart." "She laid her hand on the girl's heart. She felt it beat fast like the heart of a guilty person. It was clear that Chandrika had disobeyed her order and sinned.

"Are you certain that you have not opened the door?" asked the goddess again. "Yes," said Chandrika. "I am quite certain that I have not opened the door."

Then Parvathi looked at Chandrika's finger which had become golden from touching the fire of heaven. She knew that Chandrika had sinned and was lying. "Have you not opened the door?" asked she the third time. "Tell me the truth and say you are sorry. If you do so, I will pardon you. Else you will have to suffer for it."

"No," said the girl again.

"You have in the first place, disobeyed me and now you have lied. You are no longer worthy to live in heaven."

When Parvathi had said this, Chandrika fell into a deep sleep.

QUESTION :—

1. Did Chandrika open the forbidden door?
2. What did she see there?
3. What happened to her finger when she touched the light?
4. Was she glad after having opened the forbidden door?
5. What did Parvathi ask her?
6. What did Chandrika tell her?
7. Was Parvathi satisfied with the reply?

IV

After a few hours Chandrika awoke. But now she was not in

heaven. She was on earth in the middle of a big forest. She was terrified and wanted to cry out but she could not make any sound. She had lost her power of speech. She sprang up and wanted to run away but thorny bushes on every side kept her back. In the forest there stood an old hollow tree and this had to be her dwelling place. Into this she got when night came and here she slept. Here too, she found protection from storm and rain. It was altogether a wretched life. She called to mind the happy days she had spent in heaven and the thought made her cry bitterly. "How happy I was in heaven!" said she. There little gods had been her companions. Her happiness in heaven had been complete. Here in the forest she was hungry and thirsty. She had to live on roots and wild fruits. Even these she could get only after a hard struggle. She had no clothes

to wear or to protect her from the cold at night. Year after year passed by. There seemed to be no hope for Chandrika.

Then one day the king of the country was hunting in the forest. He was following a deer. It had run into the thick bushes which shut in this part of the forest. He got down from his horse. He made a path for himself by cutting away the bushes with his aword. When he had forced his way through, he saw a very beautiful girl, sitting under a tree. Though she had no clothes on, her long black hair covered her body. "Who is this woman? How has she come here? Why is she here?" the king asked himself. As he looked at her, he wondered more and more how she came to be there. Then he spoke to her. "Maiden, who are you? Why are you sitting here, in the forest?" But the king got no reply.

The king understood that she could not open her mouth to speak.

"Will you come with me?" asked the king again. "I am the king of this country." To this she only nodded her head.

Then the king went up to her, took her in his arms, lifted her on to his horse and rode home with her. When he came to the palace, the people who saw Chandrika were astonished at her beauty. The king gave her fine clothes to wear. When she put on those clothes she looked even more beautiful than before. It was true that she could not speak, but still she was so beautiful that the king began to love her. Not long after, he made her his queen.

QUESTIONS:—

1. Where was Chandrika when she awoke?
2. What changes had come over her?
3. Describe Chandrika's new life.
4. Who came to Chandrika's help? How did he help her?

V

The king and his queen lived very happily. After a year had passed she gave birth to a son. That night the goddess Parvathi appeared to her when she was lying in bed alone. Chandrika was afraid when she saw the goddess. Then Parvathi said, "Chandrika, I have come to you to ask you again the same question. Did you not open the forbidden door? If you will tell me the truth, I will pardon you. I will give you back your power of speech. But if you lie again, I will take your child away from you."

Then Parvathi gave back to her her power of speech. She wanted her to speak and tell the truth. But Chandrika still would not do so. She said again that she had not opened the forbidden door. So now again her tongue lost its power of speech.

The goddess did not stay there any longer. At once she took the new born baby from its mother's arms and disappeared with it. Next morning the king came to Chandrika's room. "Where is my son?" asked he. He could not see the child. He looked for the child everywhere in the room, but it was not there. The king called his servants and they looked for it all over the palace. But it was no use. The news of the disappearance of the king's child ran through the palace. Some said, "It looks very strange. Do you think the queen has eaten the child? She is altogether a strange woman. Perhaps she is a man-eater." This came to the ears of the queen. But she could not open her mouth to explain what had really happened during the night. The king however, did not believe that his wife was a man-eater.

Yet a change came to Chandrika. Her face changed. When she looked in her mirror, she saw it. Her face was not so beautiful as before. There was unhappiness and anger in it.

Another year went by. The queen again gave birth to a son. In the night the goddess appeared to her as before.

"Chandrika, I have come to you again to give you another chance. Tell me the truth now at least. Did you not open the door? If you will tell the truth I will give you back your first child. I will also give you back your power of speech. But if you lie to me again, I will take it away again and this new-born baby too."

For a short time Chandrika got back her power of speech. But her face hardened. She said, "No, I did not open the forbidden door."

As soon as she said this, Parvathi took the child from her and disappeared. And when Chandrika looked in the mirror still more of her beauty had gone. Her eyes did not shine and her mouth did not smile. Her face looked heavy.

Next morning the king came into the room but could not find the child there. The news flew through the palace. People said loudly that the queen had eaten the baby, and that she was a man-eater. The ministers of the king said, "She must go before a judge for trial." But the king loved her so dearly that he did not believe what the people said. He did not even notice her loss of beauty though other people noticed it and wondered adout it. The king only said, "I do not want anyone to say anything againsl the queen."

QUESTION :—

1. When did Parvathi come to her again ? What did she ask her ?
2. What was Chandrika's answer ? Then what did the goddess do ?
3. What did people think of the queen ?
4. Did the king believe it ?

VI

The queen was very sad at what people said about her. She was still more sad at the loss of her two sons. But she was tongue-tied. She could not explain what had happened. But still she was not sorry for her lies.

The next year also the queen gave birth to a child; this time it was a daughter. That night also Parvathi came to her and said, "Chandrika, again I have come to you. I shall give you another chance. Now come with me."

She took the queen by the hand and led her to heaven. When they had come there, Chandrika saw her two sons playing with little gods. They smiled at her. The queen was very happy at the sight of her sons.

Then the goddess said, "Now think of your sons. Tell me the truth. Admit that you opened the forbidden door. Then, I will give you back your children."

But Chandrika would not tell the truth this time either. She said firmly that she had not opened the forbidden door. "Then go back to the earth," said the goddess and the next moment the queen fell to the earth. He third child too was gone.

The next morning the king discovered the loss of the child and very soon every one knew about it. This time people shouted, "The

queen is a man-eater. Take her before the judge." They shouted it again and again. And now when the king looked at her, he saw that she was no longer beautiful. She was not beautiful at all. Her mind was black with lies and her face was black too. Yet he had loved her very much and now he could not treat her badly. But his minister forced him to send her before a judge for trial. The trial was held. The queen was charged with having eaten her three children. Poor Chandrika, she could not help herself for she could not open her mouth to speak. So the judge pronounced her guilty of the charge and condemned her to be burnt.

Chandrika was to suffer. Men collected dry wood. They tied the queen to a post and placed the wood all round her. They lit the fire and it began to burn.

At this moment of danger Chandrika's heart softened. She was sorry that she had disobeyed Parvathi and that she had lied again and again. "How I wish that I could tell the truth before my death and admit that I opened the door!"

As soon as she felt sorry for her sin, her voice came back to her. She cried out, "Yes, O goddess Parvathi, I opened the forbidden door." At that moment rain fell from the sky and put out the fire that was burning brightly close round her. The next moment the goddess appeared before her.

She spoke kindly to her. "Chandrika, I am glad that you are sorry. You have told the truth at last," said she. Now I will give you back your children. He who is sorry for his sin and admits it, is pardoned." No one else could see the goddess and so the king and his men could not hear her words.

They tried to light the fire again and again but they could not do so. Then Chandrika told her husband the whole story and- O wonder!- three children dropped from the sky, two boys and a girl. When the king saw his children, his joy was too great for words. When the people heard the whole of Chandrika's story they were all amazed. They were amazed too to see that she suddenly became beautiful again. She was now as beautiful as before.

The king built a temple for the god Siva and the goddess Parvathi and called it the temple of Amrit Kantak. Amrit Kantak is another name for Siva, Parvathi's lord.

The rain which fell and put out the fire still flows as the river Narbada from that very place.

QUESTIONS :—

1. What did the minister force the king to do?
2. What was the sentence passed on Chandrika ?
3. What happened after that ?
4. How did Amrit Kantak get that name ?

THE FARMER AND THE IMP

1. THE GOOD FARMER

A poor farmer went out early in the morning to plough his field. He did not eat anything when he set out. But he took half a loaf of bread with him.

"I shall eat it when I am hungry," he said to himself.

When he came to the field he got his plough ready. He wrapped the loaf in his coat and put it under a tree. Then he set himself to work.

He ploughed the field till his horse was tired. By that time he was feeling hungry. So he stopped his work, untied the horse and let it loose so that it might graze.

Then he came out of the field and went to the tree under which

he had placed his coat. He sat down near the coat and was ready to eat the bread.

He took the coat and looked for the bread he had wrapped in it. But the bread was gone!

He looked and lookd; turned the coat over, shook it out—but the bread was gone!

The poor man did not understand how the bread disappeared.

"How could it be?" he asked himself. "I saw no one and no one came here. But all the same some one has been here and has taken away the bread.

He looked round to see if there was any foot-print there. But there was none.

"It is strange," said he, "no one has come here; yet the bread is gone."

It was a wicked little imp* that had taken the farmer's loaf. He took it while the man was working in the field. At that time he was sitting behind the tree hoping to hear the farmer curse.

"Now he will swear and call upon the Devil," thought the imp.

But the farmer did nothing of the kind. He was sorry to lose the bread.

"It cannot be helped," he said. "After all I won't die of hunger. Perhaps he who took my bread needed it very much. May it do him good!"

Then he went down to the stream and had a drink of water.

* The Russians are Christians. They believe that God has a great enemy.....the Devil. The Devil tries to lead men into sin and is happy when men turn into sinners. He has servants who go about among men and lead them into sin. The imp ia a servant of the Devil.

Next he lay down under the tree and rested for an hour. Then he rose up saying, "It is time to begin ploughing again."

So he called his horse, yoked it to the plough and started ploughing again.

The imp saw that he was defeated. He could not lead the farmer into sin.

"I shall go and report the matter to my master," said he.

He set off to meet the Devil.

He came to the Devil and told him how he had stolen the farmer's bread and how the man had not cursed the thief, but said, 'May it do him good.'

The Devil was angry when he heard the story.

"If you are defeated," he said, "the fault is yours. You are not clever at your work. You can't

make people sin. If all farmers and their wives live good lives, we won't have a place in the world. We can't leave things like this."

Then he said that he would punish the imp if he failed to lead the man into sin.

"Go back at once," said he, "and put things right. I'll give you three years. Within that time you must make the farmer a bad sinner. If you don't I will punish you. I'll throw you into holy water !"

The imp was filled with fear when he heard this.

TEST:—Complete the following sentences:—

1. One day——went out to plough (an imp, a farmer, a woman)
2. He took some———with him. (cake, biscuits, bread)
3. But an imp stole it thinking that the farmer would———him. (help, curse, bless)

4. But the farmer only said, "May it do him————"

   (a lot of harm, no good, good)

5. The imp went to the ————and told him about it.

   (King, Devil, farmer)

6. His master told him that he would punish him if he did not turn the farmer into a sinner within————

   (a month, a year, three years)

2. THE DRINK

The imp went back to the earth to see what he could do. He had three years and within that time he had to make the farmer a bad sinner. He thought and thought about it. At last he hit upon a good plan.

"First I'll make him rich," said the imp. "Then I'll make him drink and he will become a sinner."

The imp turned himself into a workman and went to the farmer. He said that he was good at farm work and was ready to work on the farm. The farmer took him into his service.

When it was time to sow corn, the imp advised the farmer to sow in a damp field where there was plenty of water.

"This year it will be very dry," he said, "you won't have enough water for your crops."

The farmer took his advice and sowed in the damp field.

The year turned out to be a very dry one and the crops of the other farmers dried up in the hot sun. But the poor farmer's corn grew thick and tall and full-eared. When the harvest came, he had enough corn to last for the whole year. There was also some left over.

The farmer was very much pleased with the imp for his good advice.

The next year the imp told the farmer to sow on the hill.

"This year it will be very wet," he said, "and the crops will rot."

Again the farmer followed his advice and it turned out to be a wet summer. Other farmers' corn was beaten down by the rain and rotted.

But the poor farmers' crop on the hill was a very fine one. He had more grain left over than before and he did not know what to do with it all.

"You can make a fine drink from corn," said the imp to the farmer.

He showed the man how to make strong wine from corn and the farmer made a strong drink.

He began to drink it himsalf and also to give it to his friends.

The imp was very much pleased when the farmer took to drink.

"It is now easy to make him a sinner," said he to himself.

In the evening the well-to-do people who lived nearby came to the farmer's house. He welcomed them and gave them his strong drink.

The farmer's wife handed the drink to them. One day as she was handing it round she fell against the table. The glass fell out of her hand and the drink was spilt.

The farmer saw it and was angry. He began to scold her.

"What are you doing, you careless woman?" he cried. "Do you think it is water from the

well? Why do you throw good drink on the floor?"

The imp was filled with joy when he heard the farmer's words.

"This is the man who did not curse me when I stole his only loaf," said he.

The imp felt he had done good work.

"I must call my master, the Devil," said he to himself, "and show him what good work I have done."

He went to the Devil and boasted that he had made up for his failure. The Devil said that he would come and see for himself how the matter stood.

TEST:—Complete the following sentences.—

1. The imp made up his mind to make the farmer———.
   (poor, rich, wise)
2. He wanted to teach him to——.
   (work, drink)
3. So he turned himself into a——— and worked for the man.
   (farmer, workman, imp)
4. He told the farmer to sow in the wet field in a———year.
   (cold, hot, dry)
5. He made the farmer to sow on the hill in a———year.
   (cold, wet, hot)
6. When the farmer had lots of corn, he taught him to make———.
   (sweets, pudding, strong drink)
7. The farmer began to———and gave drink to his friends.
   (eat, drink, sleep)
8. He scolded his wife when she spilt some ——— on the floor.
   (water, tea, strong drink)

3. THE BEAST IN MAN

The next day the Devil came to earth to see for himself what the imp had done.

It was evening when he came to the farmer's house. The imp met him at the gate and took him in.

"Come in," said he, "the farmer is drinking with his friends."

The man had invited his well-to-do friends and was giving them his strong drink. His wife was handing it to the guests as usual. They were drinking the first cup when the Devil came in.

"See," said the imp, "this man would not touch strong drink when I first came."

As the Devil stood watching the farmer, a poor workman came in. He was returning from work

and came in uninvited. He saw the people drinking and came in hoping he would get a cup for himself. Tired with the day's work, he sat down hoping that the farmer would give him a cup. He sat and sat and his mouth kept watering. But the farmer looked angrily at him and gave him nothing.

"I can't find drink for everyone who comes along," he said.

This pleased the Devil.

"You have done very good work," said he to the imp.

But the imp laughed and said, "Wait a little, there is more to come yet."

The rich friends of the farmer drank and the farmer drank too. Then they began to make false, flattering speeches to one another.

"Listen to their words," said the imp. "They are cunning like the fox."

The Devil listened to their words and praised the imp.

"If the drink makes them so foxy," he said, "they will begin to cheat one another."

"I am sure," said he again, "that before long all of them will be in our hands."

"Wait a little more," said the imp, "and you will see what is coming. Let them have another glass all round. Now, they are like foxes; they wag their tails and try to cheat one another. But presently you will see they are fierce like wolves."

The farmer and his friends had another glass each. Then their talk became louder and rougher. Instead of making insincere speeches they began to scold one another. Before long they began to fight and break one another's heads. The farmer joined in the fight and he too got well beaten.

The Devil looked on and was very much pleased with all that he saw.

"This is first class," he said.

But the imp said, "Wait a little more. The best is yet to come. Wait till they drink a third glass. Now they are fierce like wolves. Let them have one more glass and they will be like pigs."

The farmer's wife gave them another glass each and when they drank it, they became quite like pigs. They began to shout, not knowing why and not listening to one another. Some fell down and could not get up.

Then the party broke up. They went out in twos and threes, all walking down the street with unsteady steps. The farmer went out to the gate to see them off. But he fell on his nose and lay in the mud like a pig.

This pleased the Devil still more.

"Well," said he to the imp, "you have made a first class drunkard. You have quite made up for the first mistake you made about the bread. Now tell me how this drink is made." I suppose you put into it the blood of foxes and wolves and pigs, and that that is what makes men cunning and fierce and nasty like these animals."

"Oh no," said the imp, "that was not necessary. The blood of animals is always in man. You don't have to put it into him. It is there. All that I did was to give it a chance to show itself.

"As long as man has only enough for his needs, he is quite all right," said he. "Give him more and he becomes a beast. While the farmer had only enough corn for his use, he did not grudge his last loaf.

But when he had more corn than he needed, he looked for ways of getting pleasure out of it. Then we must show him a pleasure..... drinking! And he will begin to turn God's good gifts into strong drink for his own pleasure. Then the beast's blood in him will come out, the fox's, the wolf's and the swine's. If only he goes on drinking, he will always be a beast!"

The Devil was pleased with the work of the imp, forgave him for his first failure and gave him a post of high honour.

TEST:—Complete the following sentences:—

1. The —— came to the earth to see how far the imp had succeeded. (imp, farmer, Devil)
2. When he came, the farmer and his friends were ——. (eating, sleeping, drinking)
3. The farmer did not give a glass to the ——. (imp, Devil, workman)

4. When they drank the first glass, they became cunning like ——— . (foxes, wolves, pigs)

5. The second glass made them fierce like —— . (foxes, wolves, pigs)

6. The third glass made them behave like —— . (foxes, wolves, pigs)

7. The Devil asked if the imp had put the blood of foxes, wolves and pigs in —— (the glass, the drink, man)

8. But the blood of the —— is always in man ; when man has more than he needs. it comes out. (man, beast, wolf)

9. When man has more than enough he turns God's gifts into —— for his own pleasure. (money, strong drink, food)

10. While he goes on drinkiag he will always be a —— . (man, beast, pig)



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