

Very Indian Poem in Indian English

I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding.
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct.
I should say even 200% correct.
But modern generation is neglecting-
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.

Other day I'm reading in newspaper
(Every day I'm reading Times of India
To improve my English language)
How one goonda fellow
Throw stone at Indirabehn.
Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking.
Friends, Romans countrymen, I am saying
(to myself)
Lend me the ears.

Everything is coming-
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception.
Be patiently, brothers and sisters.

You want one glass lassi ?
Very good for digestion
With little salt lovely drink,
Better than wine;
Not that I am ever tasting the wine
I'm the total teetotaler, completely total.
But I say
Wine is for the drunkards only

What you think of prospects of world peace?
Pakistan behaving like this,
China behaving like that,

It is making me very sad, I am telling you.
Really, most harassing me.
All men are brothers, no ?
In India also
Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Hindiwallahs
All brothers
Though some are having funny habits.
Still, you tolerate me,
I tolerate you,
One day, Ram Rajya is surely coming.

You are going?
But you will visit again
Any time, any day,
I am not believing in ceremony.
Always I am enjoying your company.

Nissim Ezekiel

Notes

The poet

Nissim Ezekiel was born in Bombay in 1924 and spent much of his life there. He has written many volumes of poetry, some plays, and edited the works of Emerson and Martin Luther King. He was a lecturer of English at Bombay and visiting professor at the University of Leeds and a number of universities in the USA.

The poem

The poem is a parody of Indianisms, which are direct translations of Indian vernacular structure, particularly, the use of the present continuous tense instead of the simple present tense. The tone is that of a naïve adolescent trying to find meaning in what can be seen as part of the environment. By making fun of a rather serious young person who is worried about the increase in violence in the world and the deteriorating relationship among people, the poet achieves a dual effect – the superficial effect of burlesque and an underlying genuine concern.

Meanings

I ... for – I believe in

fighting, fighting – imitating an Indian's speech

people of world – dropping of the article "the" a typical Indianism

even 200% correct – inaccurate, but a typical Indian exaggeration; hyperbole

improve my English language – another wrong usage, instead of "my English"

goonda – hooligan

Throw stone ... – threw a stone

Indirabehn – "behn" or "behen", meaning sister – reference to former Prime Minister Indira

Gandhi, who was assassinated.

student unrest fellow – dissatisfied student, a member of the student unrest movement

Friends, Romans, countrymen – parody of the phrase in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*

lend me the ears – wrong usage – actually "lend me your ears"

Be patiently – be patient

brothers and sisters – echo of the phrase in Hindi, "*Bhaiyon aur behenon*", frequently used by politicians

one glass lassi – one glass of lassi

lassi – buttermilk

teetotaler – one who does not take wine

completely total – unnecessary repetition – redundant

total – pun on the word teetotaler

most harassing me – worries me greatly

no? – typical Indian question tag

Ram Rajya – the empire of Ram, the legendary king – an ideal society

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. I am standing for peace and non-violence
2. Why world is fighting fighting
3. I should say even 200% correct
4. Every day I'm reading Times of India
(to improve my English language)
5. Friends, Romans, countrymen, I am saying (to myself)
Lend me the ears
6. You want one glass lassi
7. Pakistan behaving like this
China behaving like that
8. One day, Ram Rajya is surely coming
9. I am not believing in ceremony
10. Always I am enjoying your company

II. Answer briefly:

1. What does the speaker not understand?
2. What according to the speaker is 200% correct?
3. What happened to Indirabehn?
4. What is coming?
5. What does the speaker consider a "lovely drink"
6. What are the speaker's ideas on wine?
7. What idea of brotherhood is expressed in the poem?
8. What are the speaker's concluding remarks?

III. Answer in a paragraph

1. What are the ideas conveyed in the first stanza?
2. What is the reference to violence?
3. What does the speaker feel about world peace?

IV. Answer in about 500 words

1. What is the impression created by the speaker in the poem?

Night of the Scorpion

I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.
parting with his poison – flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room-
he risked the rain again.

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.

With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the mud-baked walls
they searched for him; he was not found.
They clicked their tongues.

With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said.

May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.

May your suffering decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.

May the sum of evil
balanced in this unreal world
against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain.

May the poison purify your flesh
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
they said, and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre,
the peace of understanding on each face.

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,
more insects, and the endless rain
My mother twisted through and through
groaning on a mat.

My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
He even poured a little paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.

I watched the holy man perform his rites
to tame the poison with an incantation
After twenty hours
It lost its sting.

My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children.

Nissim Ezekiel

Notes

The poem

A popular choice in school and college text books, this poem is quite different from many typical Ezekiel poems. It does not have the staccato effect of some of his poems, nor is his attitude flippant or sarcastic. Though there is a touch of irony in the description of the father, the tone is undoubtedly sincere. The poem progresses through a series of images, each captured in words as if on a screen. The detailed descriptions bring the scene alive and the poet becomes in turn the peasants, the father and the priest, trying to relieve the woman of her pain. In contrast, the last three lines are effective in their very simplicity.

Meanings

Partingroom – the scorpion stung the mother, and leaving its sting in her leg, it went back out into the rain.

The peasantsEvil one – The peasants are compared to a swarm of flies because of their numbers and the noise they make. They repeat the name of God so that the poison (Evil one) does not spread.

They.....tongues – made a sound of disappointment.

With every.....face – The peasants who came to sympathise had various explanations to offer. The poet strings them together, creating an effect of a crowded noisy room.

My father.....to it – The father can no longer remain a sceptic or a rationalist, when he sees his wife in pain. So he tries all the remedies he can think of.

sceptic – a person who is unwilling to believe in theories without clear proof.

rationalist – a person who values reason rather than blind faith

incantation – repetition of certain words for a particular effect.

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1.Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice
2. he risked the rain again
3. The peasants came like swarms of flies
4.and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre
the peace of understanding on each face
5. My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing
6. after twenty hours
it lost its sting

II. Answer briefly:

1. What did the scorpion do?
2. What did the peasants do?
3. What did the peasants say?
4. What did the father do?
5. What did the priest do?
6. What did the mother say?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. What was the reaction of the peasants to the incident?
2. What did the child experience on the night the scorpion stung the mother?
3. What does the speaker feel about world peace?

IV. Rewrite the episode as a short story.

The Female of the Species

Sometimes you want to talk
about love and despair
and the ungratefulness of children.
A man is no use whatever then.
You want then your mother
or sister
or the girl with whom you went through school,
and your first love, and her
first child – a girl –
and your second.
You sit with them and talk.
She sews and you sit and sip
and speak of the rate of rice
and the price of tea
and the scarcity of cheese
You know both that you've spoken
of love and despair and ungrateful children

Gauri Deshpande

Notes

The poet

Gauri Deshpande (1942 -) writes in both English and Marathi. She has a Ph.D in English from Poona University. Two volumes of her poetry are from Writers Workshop. *Between Births* was published in 1968 and *Lost Love* in 1970. Many of her poems are about love and relationships. She also describes blood and sweat and clenched teeth and talks about "lashing" and "thrashing". But the final effort is not one of intensity. She is better at expressing herself in her short poems.

The poem

This is one of her best poems and conveys the needs and feelings of a woman, as distinct from those of a man. It describes the feeling that a woman sometimes has, of wanting to be with or talk to somebody who will understand exactly what she is feeling and wants to say. The conversation may seem trivial and ordinary, but the women understand that under this casual chat there is a communication that is close to the heart. Personal feelings of love, despair, sorrow and disenchantment have been shared while the two women sit with some sewing and cups of tea.

Meanings

A man.....then – the poet dismisses man in one line as not being of any help at certain times.

Sometimes.....children - The list of things that woman wants to discuss with another woman is split by the lines *A man.....school*. The list continues with *and your first love* and goes on till

second. In between this list is another, of the women she might seek to talk about the things that she needs to talk about – her mother, sister or friend.

you sit...cheese – These lines describe the scene of the two women talking while they sew and drink tea and discuss day-to-day topics such as the prices of food stuff.

you know...children – The last two lines sum up the experience of sharing thoughts and feelings, even though they have not been mentioned explicitly.

you know both – you both know

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. Sometimes you want to talk
2. A man is no use whatever then
3. and your first love, and her first child
4. She sews and you sit and sip
5. and the scarcity of cheese
6. you know both that you have spoken

II. Answer briefly:

1. What does a woman want to talk about sometimes?
2. To whom does she talk about her feelings?
3. What is the role of man at such times?
4. Describe the scene of the two women talking.
5. What are the women aware of having discussed?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. Do you think the title is appropriate? Substantiate with instances from the poem.

A River

In Madurai,
city of temples and poets
who sang of cities and temples;

every summer
a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand-ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the watergates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them,
the wet stones glistening like sleepy
crocodiles, the dry ones
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun.
The poets sang only of the floods.
He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
People everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda, as usual.

The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

He said :
 the river has water enough
 to be poetic
 about only once a year
 and then
 it carries away
 in the first half-hour
 three village houses,
 a couple of cows
 named Gopi and Brinda
 and one pregnant woman
 expecting identical twins
 with no moles on their bodies,
 with different-coloured diapers
 to tell them apart.

A.K.Ramanujan

Notes

The poet

A.K.Ramanujan was born in 1929. He spent much of his life abroad. He was Professor of Linguistics and Dravidian Studies at the University of Chicago. *The Striders*, his first volume of poetry, was published in 1966 and was followed by *Relations*. Many of his poems bear a personal image. The tone is sometimes nostalgic, sometimes sarcastic and at times a combination of both.

The poem

The poem describes the River Vaikai which flows through Madurai, a city of Tamil Nadu. Once a city famous for its many temples and the majestic river, Madurai appears to the poet as a seedy and shabby place. This impression is heightened by the dry river bed, where garbage accumulates. Ancient poets have described the river in flood. This poet too witnessed a flood. But unlike the poets of old, he finds no glory in the flood, only death and destruction. The tragedy leaves him desolate and he is unable to forget the woman and the cows killed by the flood. He repeats the description of the dead woman and cows as if by so doing he would exorcise the memory.

Meanings

Madurai – city in Tamil Nadu famous for its temples

a river - The River Vaikai

baring...them – graphic description of the dry river bed

he – the poet

one.....usual – a matter of fact account of the damage caused by the flood

The new....birth – a passionate description of the dead pregnant woman

The river....year – there is water in the river only once a year; so a poetic description of it is possible only once a year.

And then....apart – an almost obsessive account of the houses, woman and cows, lost in the flood; the tone rises to the crescendo in the protest against the callousness of nature.

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. every summer
 a river dries to a trickle
2. the wet stones shining like sleepy
 crocodiles, the dry ones
 shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun
3. People everywhere talked
 of inches rising
4.but no one spoke
 in verse
5. the river has water enough
 to be poetic
 about only once a year

II. Answer briefly:

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. Is the poet happy to describe the river in flood? Support your statement with lines from the poem.
3. How does the poet describe the dry river bed?
4. What was the loss caused by the flood?
5. What did no one speak of in verse?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. What do you think the poet is trying to convey through the poem, "A river"? Does he succeed in his attempt?

Railroad Reveries

(during a cold wave)

My limbs remind the crippled that I am whole
My coat, my scarf, remind the poor that I am warm
My love reminds the starved ones I am loved
am I a louse ?

I prod the fire-coals, rake the shadows
the headlights as it beats cyclopean
blinds the rail track
scares the shadows

A greasy doubt shares my bed
Its edge astounds me in the morning

Assurance is a promise
of a bygone birth
that cannot carry me to root
On either side they wait
eyes that have not seen
even scarecrow dreams
A girl huddling into herself
searching for a warmth which is not there
wind and beggars whining
as a windscape is humanized by stragglers
Arthritic fingers holding tight to a tea tumbler
Insides fluttering at the steaming contact

A landscape of distance
of meaningless milestones
crouching on the flanks
swallowed in the dust and the express-smoke
The sad-eyed bitch upon the platform
kicked about by urchins doesn't squeal
head drooping, eyes bored, she walks away

The blind boy with his begging can
senses my stone-eyes, my hostility
impersonal and anonymous
directed more against the weight of time
 age piled on age
 layers of black slag
 frozen to an iron shadow

But anger is a stratagem that fails
as I toy with a sweaty coin,
blind, copper symbol of my remorse
But the boy has passed me
It would lack dignity
chasing him now
to foist a coin on him
 Instead I watch
the mica in the dust here
the wind that whips it turns telluric
abstract and brittle
like a crumbling theory

Tomorrow I detrain
A bed-bug and a greasy doubt
Share my berth
I have to live with them till morning

K.N.Daruwalla

Notes

The poet

Keki N Daruwalla (b 1937) had his first collection of poems, *Under Orion*, published in 1970. His other volumes include *Apparition in April* and *Crossing of Rivers*. He won the Sahitya Academy award in 1984. He is capable of remarkable poetic insight, which he combines with intellectual strength and social awareness.

The poem

Daruwalla uses a fine blend of metrical rhythm to convey images that speak for themselves. The compact, harsh, alliterative prose order of his verse creates a dramatic scene, where characters and situations offer a comment on life.

In this poem, he presents a series of vignettes seen by him through the train window. Though the images are disconnected, they reflect his concern for the suffering of others. Seeing himself

through the eyes of less-privileged strangers, he experiences feelings of guilt and anger, which he is unable to throw away.

Meanings

My limb.....loved – The poet imagines that the less privileged people on the platform, such as the cripple, the shivering beggar and the lonely vagabonds are jealous of him for possessing what they do not have.

am I a louse – This short question reflects the poet's anguish for being more fortunate than many others. He sees himself as a despicable parasite.

I prod....shadows – description of the train's journey on the track: in his imagination, the poet tends the coal fire that helps to pull the train by producing steam for the engine.

cyclopean – single eye (the headlight) like the one that cyclops were supposed to have

scares the shadows – as the light from the headlight approaches, the shadows disappear as if they are frightened by it.

A greasy doubt – an unpleasant feeling that he does not deserve to be more fortunate than others

shares my bed – it stays with him even while he is sleeping

its edge.....morning – when he wakes up in the morning he is shocked that a part of it still remains

Assurance.....root – He cannot take comfort in the thought that he deserves what he has

On either.....contact – a description of the random sights that he sees on the platforms as he continues his journey – a poor blind man who cannot even dream of good things because he has never seen them; a poor girl huddled on the platform because of the intense cold; beggars; people fighting the cold wind unsuccessfully; old people holding on to glasses of hot tea

A landscape.....smoke – description of the desolate scenery: he sees mile after mile of empty distance, occupied only by the dust and smoke caused by the train

The sad-eyed.....away – a dog on the platform is too tired to even protest when she is kicked by the urchins

The blind boyhim – a long description of a sullen, blind beggar boy and the sharp feeling of the poet's guilt: the poet's anger is directed not so much at the beggar's demand for money, but at destiny which has placed him and the boy in such opposing poles of the haves and have-nots

But anger....remorse – this remorse makes him immobile and he misses the moment when he could have given a coin to the beggar boy

But the boy.....him – The boy has gone past him and it would be awkward to run after him to give him a coin

Insteadtheory - The moment for action having passed, he turns his attention to the wind and the dust it kicks up

Tomorrow.....morning – He has to spend the night, still smarting with the feeling of guilt that he has too much while others have so little. This guilt and a bed-bug made his journey uncomfortable and he looks forward to getting off the train next morning.

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. am I a louse?
2.the rail track
scares the shadows
3. On either side they wait
4. A landscape of distance
of meaningless milestones
5. It would lack dignity
chasing him now
6. I have to live with them till morning

II. Answer briefly:

1. What does the poet imagine that others might feel when they see him?
2. Why does the poet wonder whether he is a louse?
3. What astounds the poet in the morning?
4. What are the sights that he sees on either side?
5. How does the poet describe the sad-eyed dog?
6. Narrate the poet's experience with the blind beggar boy.
7. What does the poet turn to, in the end?
8. What does the poet have to live with, till morning?

III. Answer in about 300 words:

1. Do you think the poet enjoyed his journey? Substantiate your answer with instances from the poem.

IV. Answer in about 500 words

1. Imagine you are the poet and describe what you saw and felt on the journey.

The Dead

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares
Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth,
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movement, and heard music; known
Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
Touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is ended.
There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
Frost, with gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.

Rupert Brooke

Notes

The poet

Rupert Brooke (1887 – 1915) was born and educated at Rugby, where his father was a master. He then went on to King's College, Cambridge. He travelled in Germany, the USA and the Pacific islands before he got a commission in the Royal Naval Division when the First World War broke out. He died of blood poisoning in Skyros, on the way to the Dardenelles. He became the representative of the "gifted and golden" youth who died in the course of the war. He published two slim volumes of poetry (1911 and 1915). The patriotism and sacrifice of his generation is contained in the simple lines:

If I should die think only this of me

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is for ever England....

The poem

The poem has 14 lines, as sonnets generally have, even though there is no division into stanzas and a couplet or octave (8 lines) and a sestet (6 lines). The division is in the idea. The first 8 lines, which have rhyme in alternating lines (as in cares / theirs, mirth / earth, known / alone, friended / ended), describe the life of people who are now dead. The first part of the poem ends with the stark announcement: "all this is ended".

The remaining 6 lines describe the beauties of nature. There is the beauty of flowing water, lit by the sun. Even the frost which is cold and deadening, is beautiful. It casts a white light on the scene and the world appears beautiful and serene.

The two parts of the poem provide a contrast between the warm, human joys and cares and the

cold, white beauty of a frosty world.

Meanings

These hearts – the life of the people, represented by their beating hearts.

woven of – made of; their lives were made of joys and sorrows

swift to mirth – ready to accept joy

The...kindness – They grew kind with age

Dawn.....earth – Each day and all the colours of all the things on earth belonged to them

These...cheeks – They had experienced all the wonders of life and love.

furs – of animals

cheeks – people

In saying “furs” to denote animals and “cheeks” for people, the poet makes use of the figure of speech of *synecdoche* or a part for the whole, as in “count for the heads”, where “heads” stands for people.

waters – here the poet uses the figure of speech of *personification*. The waters are described as laughing and lit by sunlight.

Frost – Frost too is personified as one who stills the dance of the waves and creates a glow.

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. These hearts were woven of human joys and cares.
- 2.....Dawn was theirs
3. Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone
4. Touched flowers and furs and cheeks.
5. All this is ended
6. A width, a shining peace, under the night

II. Answer briefly:

1. How does the poet describe the wonders of life?
2. How does the poet describe Nature?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. What are the two contrasting scenes described by Brooke?

IV. Answer in about 300 words

1. Comment on the use of figures of speech in the poem.

Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, -
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Wilfred Owen

Notes

The poet

Wilfred Owen (1893 – 1918) was a teacher by profession. He served in the First World War and was ironically killed just one week before the war ended. Many of his poems were written during the war and describe scenes of battle with pity and ruthless honesty. His war poems were published by his friend Siegfried Sassoon, who also wrote poems about the war.

The poem

Owen mourns the fact that young men "die as cattle" on the battlefield. It is not possible to give them the traditional funeral rites. Only the sound of the guns and rifles are heard and not funeral bells. The poet poignantly projects the rituals of a funeral such as bells, prayers, choirs, candles, pall, flowers and drawn blinds, but points out that none of these are available for the soldiers who die in the battle. Their funeral rituals are sadly restricted to the sounds of battle and the sorrow of those who have lost their loved ones.

The poem has 14 lines, as in a sonnet. The first 8 lines or the octave describe scenes of battle and the sound of gunfire. The last six lines or the sextet, describe the sorrow of the bereaved families.

Meanings

Anthem – a song of praise. The word is used ironically for there is no praise, not even the traditional rituals for the soldiers who die as cattle.

Doomed youth – The young men are doomed to die on the battlefields.

passing-bells – bells rung at a funeral

who die as cattle – die in large numbers, without dignity, as if they were animals and not human beings

monstrous anger – terrible anger which kills soldiers

stuttering rifles' rapid rattle – the phrase reproduces the repetitive sound of a rifle firing; the repetition of the sound "r" produces the effect of alliteration

orisons – prayers for the dead

demented – mad; the continuous sound of the bursting shells makes it appear as if the shells have gone mad

bugles calling – the sound of bugles calling young men to join the army

sad shires – the districts (or shires) are sad because their young men are dying in the battlefields

candles – candles are lit beside the dead (to speed them on their way to heaven)

Not....goodbyes – the men on the battlefield cannot light candles for their dead comrades, but their eyes reflect their sorrow as they bid goodbye

pall – cloth spread over a coffin

pallor – pale complexion

The.....pall – The white faces of the mourning girls is the pall for the dead soldiers

Their flowers – the wreaths for the dead

And....blinds – The curtains are drawn in a house where a death has occurred. Every evening, as darkness descends, it is like drawing the curtains in a house of mourning.

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. Only the monstrous anger of the guns
2. Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons
3. The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells
4. What candles may be held to speed them all?
5. The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall
6. And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds

II. Answer briefly:

1. What substitute for bells on the battlefield?
2. What provide the choir for those who die in battle?
3. What are the candles that speed the dead soldiers on their way?
4. What constitute the pall and flowers for dead soldiers?
5. What blinds are drawn as a mark of mourning?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. How does the poet describe the funeral rites of those who die in battle?

IV. Answer in about 300 words

1. Compare and contrast "The Dead" and "Anthem for Doomed youth"

The West Wind

It's a warm wind, the west wind full of bird's cries;
I never hear the west wind but tears are in my eyes,
For it comes from the west lands, the old brown hills,
And April's in the west wind, and daffodils.

It's a fine land, the west land, for hearts as tired as mine,
Apple orchards blossom there and the air's like wine.
There is a cool green grass there, where men may lie at rest,
And the thrushes are in song there, fluting from the nest.

Will ye not come home, brother? Ye have been long away,
It's April, and blossom time, and white is the May;
And bright is the sun, brother, and warm is the rain, -
Will ye not come home, brother, home to us again?

The young corn is green, brother, where the rabbits run,
It's blue sky, and white clouds, and warm rain and sun.
It's song to a man's soul, brother, fire to a man's brain,
To hear the wild bees and see the merry spring again.

Larks are singing in the west, brother, above the green wheat,
So will ye not come home, brother and rest your tired feet?
I've a balm for bruised hearts, brother, sleep for aching eyes",
Says the warm wind, the west wind, full of bird's cries.

It's the white road westwards is the road I must tread
To the green grass, the cool grass, and the rest for the heart and head,
To the violets and the warm hearts and the thrushes' song.
In the fine land, the west land, land where I belong.

John Masefield

Notes

The poet

John Masefield (1878-1967) was a merchant seaman from 1889 to 1897. Many of his poems and stories are about the sea and the joys of sailing. His first volume of poetry was called *Salt Water Ballads* (1902). He also wrote his memoir and several novels. He succeeded Robert Bridges as Poet Laureate in 1930.

The poem

Like his sea poems, this poem too has a tilt and rhythm that make it very appealing. Many poets have written about the West Wind. They describe it as a sign of hope and warmth, which quickens life after the emptiness of winter. Masfield describes the sights and sounds of the spring season when all creatures revel in the warmth of the sun after being in hiding during the cold winter months.

The poem has stanzas of four lines each, with rhyming couplets.

Meanings

air's like wine – the air is as invigorating as wine

fluting – singing; making a sweet sound like a flute

Will ye...eyes – The West Wind invites the tired traveller to come home and rest after wandering in distant lands.

blossom time – time when flowers bloom

tread – walk

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. It's a warm wind, the west wind, full of bird's cries
2. And April's in the west wind, and daffodils.
3. And bright is the sun, brother, and warm is the rain, -
Will ye not come home, brother, home to us again?
4. I've a balm for bruised hearts, brother, sleep for aching eyes
5. It's the white road westwards is the road I must tread
To the green grass, the cool grass, and rest for heart and head
6. To the violets and the warm hearts and the thrushes' song
In the fine land, the west land, the land where I belong.

II. Answer briefly:

1. Why does the West Wind bring tears to the poet's eyes?
2. Why is the West land suited for tired hearts?
3. What does the West Wind say to the poet?
4. What is the poet's response to the invitation of the West Wind?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. How does Masfield describe the West land?

IV. Answer in about 300 words

1. What does Masfield convey through the poem "The West Wind"?

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack of all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight; somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds,
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

W.B. Yeats

Notes

The poet

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Irish poet and dramatist, published his first book of poems in 1889 and became one of the leaders of the Irish literary movement. As one of the patrons of the Abbey Theatre, he contributed many plays. He also published successive volumes of poetry, which contained delicate, romantic lyrics. Prose works such as the *Celtic Twilight* held the same appeal. He was greatly influenced by mysticism. In later years, his work became tinged with violence, which was at times tempered with great simplicity.

The poem

The title "The Second Coming", is not used in the Biblical sense of Christ coming again to redeem mankind. On the other hand, it refers to the coming of the Anti Christ. It seems to the poet that mankind has lost all virtue and only violence is at hand. The anarchy and bloodshed that are evident seem to foretell the coming of a pitiless beast that will rule in the centuries to come.

The first stanza of 8 lines describe the bloodshed and violence that have become the order of the day. The second stanza of 14 lines is an attempt to see the "revelation". But what he sees is "darkness", which "drops again" and heralds the arrival of a beast that "slouches towards Bethlehem".

Meanings

gyre – funnel shaped instrument

widening gyre – the gyre is narrow at one end but broadens towards the other end like a funnel

falcon – a bird of the hawk family which is trained to hunt game

falconer – person who controls the movement of the falcon

Turning.....falconer – Yeats says that people are moving farther and farther away from God as if they were following the funnel shape of gyre, just like a falcon, which is flying away from the falconer. The falcon cannot hear the call of the falconer because it has gone too far. Similarly, mankind cannot hear the call of God.

Things fall apart – Life seems to be losing its pattern. It looks as if the world will collapse.

the.....hold – Even the force of gravity seems to be losing its hold on things.

Mere anarchy – only lawlessness

blood-dimmed tide – the waters of the earth seem to be infused with blood as a result of violence

conviction – faith

revelation – the act of revealing or making known some event that might change the world

Second Coming – the second time that a superhuman being comes to earth – this time it is the Anti Christ

Spiritus Mundi – (Latin) the spirit of the earth

troubles my sight – the thought of the Anti Christ which embodies the spirit of our times, troubles the poet

lion body and head of a man – the Egyptian sphinx is portrayed like this

blank.....sun – remote, uninterested in what it finds and without pity (In the desert the sun seems to beat without pity on all the creatures. There is no shelter from the blazing sun.)

Is.....thighs – is moving slowly

indignant – angry

The.....again – The sun sets and darkness covers the earth

twenty centuries of stony sleep – the beast has been sleeping for 2000 years, since the birth of Jesus Christ and the spread of Christianity.

were.....cradle – The birth of Christ (the baby in the cradle was like a nightmare to the beast)

its.....last – finally the influence of the Christ has gone and it is the time of the Anti Christ

slouches – walks in an ungraceful way; shuffles

Bethlehem – town where Jesus Christ was born

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer
2. Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.
3. The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
4. Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
5. The darkness drops again
6.twenty centuries of stony sleep
were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle

II. Answer briefly:

1. Why cannot the falcon hear the falconer?
2. Why has the ceremony of innocence been drowned?
3. What is the vision the poet has?
4. How does the poet describe what he sees?
5. What was the nightmare?
6. What slouches towards Bethlehem?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. What is the condition in which the poet finds the world?

IV. Answer in about 300 words

1. What idea do you get of Yeats's philosophy of life from the poem?

Journey of the Magi

"A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey;
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter."
And the camels galled, sore footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.
Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water mill beating the darkness,
And the trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon,
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.
All this was long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for

Birth or Death? There was a birth, certainly,
We had the evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death

T.S.Eliot

Notes

The poet

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), was a poet, critic and playwright. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, USA but became a British citizen in 1927. He studied at Harvard, the Sorbonne in Paris and at Oxford. He married Virginia Wood in 1915 and settled in London, where he began to contribute to and edit literary journals. Much of his work is a comment on the changes in moral and social fabric after the disruption and waste caused by the First World War. His long poem, the "Wasteland", embodies the thoughts on what he considered the spiritual blindness of his time. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

The poem

The poem describes the journey of the three wise men from the east, the Magi to Bethlehem, to witness the birth of Christ. It is based on the details given in the Bible, but turns the bare facts into a historic journey. The wise men face many difficulties during the journey, including the cold weather, the refractory camels, the impossible camel men and dirty cities. But the sign of the infant Jesus seems ample compensation. The contrast of the rigours of the journey and the satisfaction of seeing the child is continued in the second stanza, when the speaker wonders whether they witnessed a birth or death. The experience changes their lives and they are no longer at ease in their own homes, among their own people who now seem to be "alien people".

Meanings

A cold coming – they travelled in winter and as they progressed westwards, the weather seemed colder to the three men who came from the warm regions of the east.

sharp – (here) very cold

very dead of winter - the height of winter, the coldest time of the year

galled – stopped; refused to budge

refractory – non cooperative

regretted...sherbet – regretted leaving their homes with all the comforts.

A hard time we had of it – The poet makes a simple, factual statement at the end of a long list of discomforts. The stark contrast makes all statement all the more effective.

temperate valley - change of scene from the cold desert to a place of vegetation

Wet....darkness – the sight and sound of running water reassure the weary traveller

three...sky – one of the indications of the location of the birth of the king

six...silver – a realistic description of men gambling outside a tavern

it...satisfactory – another under-statement to enhance the effect of the poem

this death – They had seen the infant, and so had witnessed a birth. It was also a birth for them, into the new faith. It was also an agony of death – the death of their old beliefs and old way of life.

But...gods – the experience changed them and made them dissatisfied with their life and the people who had now become alien

I....death – They look forward to death, to be united with their new-found God, and as a release from a life which has become unbearable.

Exercises

I. Annotate the following:

1. Just the worst time of the year
For a journey
2. There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet
3. With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.
4. And three trees on a low sky
5.sit down
This: were we led all that way for Birth or Death?
6. But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods

II. Answer briefly:

1. How does the poet describe the time of the year?
2. What were the problems that the Magi faced?
3. What did the camel men do?
4. What did they see in the valley?
5. Describe the scene at the tavern.
6. What was satisfactory?
7. What did they have evidence of?
8. Why would the speaker be glad of another death?

III. Answer in about 200 words:

1. Describe the journey of the Magi.
2. What did the Magi witness? How did it change their lives?

IV. Answer in about 300 words

1. Why does the poet say "I would do it again", when he also says "I should be glad of another death"?

Sacrifice

By

Ravindra Nath Tagore

Act I

(Madhav's House)

- Madhav : What a state I am in! Before he came, nothing mattered; I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, my heart is filled with his dear self, and my home will be no home to me when he leaves. Doctor, do you think he—
- Doctor : If there's life in his fate, then he will live long. But what the medical scriptures say, it seems—
- Madhav : Great heavens, what?
- Doctor : The scriptures have it: 'Bile or palsey, cold or gout spring all alike.'
- Madhav : Oh, get along, don't fling your scriptures at me; you only make me more anxious; tell me what I can do.
- Doctor : The patient needs the most scrupulous care.
- (taking snuff)
- Madhav : That's true; but tell me how.
- Doctor : What else can you do? The autumn sun and the damp are both very bad for the little fellow—for the scriptures have it:
- 'In wheezing, swooning or in nervous fret, In jaundice or leaden eyes—'
- Madhav : Never mind the scriptures, please. Eh, then we must shut the poor thing up. Is there no other method?
- Doctor : None at all: for, 'In the wind and in the sun—'
- Madhav : What will your 'in this and in that' do for me now? Why don't you let them alone and come straight to the point? What's to be done then? Your system is very, very hard for the poor boy; and he is so quiet too with all his pain and sickness. It tears my heart to see him wince, as he takes your medicine.
- Doctor : The more he winces, the surer is the effect. That's why the sage Chyabana observes: 'In medicine as in good advice, the least palatable is the truest.' Ah, well! I must be trotting now.
- (Exit)

(Gaffer enters)

- Madhav : Well, I'm jiggered, there's Gaffer now.
- Gaffer : Why, why I won't bite you.
- Madhav : No, but you are a devil to send children off their heads.

Gaffer : But you aren't a child, and you've no child in the house; why worry then?

Madhav : Oh, but I have brought a child into the house.

Gaffer : Indeed, how so?

Madhav : You remember how my wife was dying to adopt a child?

Gaffer : Yes, but that's an old story; you didn't like the idea.

Madhav : You know, brother, how hard all this getting money in has been. That somebody else's child would sail in a waste all this money earned with so much trouble— Oh, I hated the idea but this boy clings to my heart in such a queer sort of way—

Gaffer : So that's the trouble! and your money goes all for him and feels jolly lucky it does go at all.

Madhav : Formerly, earning was a sort of passion with me; I simply couldn't help working for money. Now, I make money, and as I know it is all for this dear boy, earning became a joy to me.

Gaffer : Ah, well, and where did you pick him up?

Madhav : He is the son of a man who was a brother to my wife by village ties. He has had no mother since infancy; and now the other day he lost his father as well.

Gaffer : Poor thing; and so he needs me all the more.

Madhav : The doctor says all the organs of his little body are at loggerheads with each other, and there isn't much hope for his life. There is only one way to save him and that is to keep him out of this autumn wind and sun. But you are such a terror! What with this game of yours at your age, too, get children out of doors!

Gaffer : God bless my soul! So I'm already as bad as autumn wind and sun, eh! But, friend, I know something, too, of the same of keeping them indoors. When my day's work is over I am coming in to make friends with this child of yours.

(Exit)

(Amal enters)

Amal : Uncle, I say, Uncle!

Madhav : Hullo! Is that you, Amal?

Amal : Mayn't I be out of the courtyard at all?

Madhav : No, my dear, no

Amal : See, there where Auntie grinds lentils in the quirn, the squirrel is sitting with his tail up and with his hands he's picking up the broken grains of lentils and crunching them. Can't I run up there.

Madhav : No, my darling, no.

Amal : Wish I were a squirrel!—it would be lovely, Uncle, why won't you let me go about?

Madhav : Doctor says it's bad for you to be out.

Amal : How can the doctor know?

Madhav : Wat a thing to say! The doctor an't know and he reads such huge books!

Amal : Does his book-learning tell him everything?

Madhav : Of course, don't you know!

Amal : Ah, I am so stupid! I don't read books.

(with a sigh)

- Madhav : Now, think of it; very, very learned people are all like you; they are never out of doors.
- Amal : Aren't they really?
- Madhav : No, how can they? Early and late they toil and moil at their books, and they've eyes for nothing else. Now, my little man, you are going to be learned when you grow up; and then you will stay at home and read such big books, and people will notice you and say, 'He's a wonder.'
- Amal : No, no Uncle; I beg of you by your dear feet—I don't want to be learned, I won't.
- Madhav : Dear, dear; it would have been my saving if I could have been learned.
- Amal : No, I would rather go about and see everything that there is.
- Madhav : Listen to that! What will you see, what is there so much to see?
- Amal : See that far-away hill from our window—I often long to go beyond those hills and right away.
- Madhav : Oh, you silly! As if there's nothing more to be done but just get up to the top of that hill and away! Eh! You don't talk sense, my boy. Now listen, since that hill stands there upright as a barrier, it means you can't get beyond it. Else, what was the use in heaping up so many large stones to make much a big affair of it, eh!
- Amal : Uncle, do you think it is meant to prevent us crossing over? It seems to me because the earth can't speak it raises its hands into the sky and beckons. And those who live far off, and sit alone by their windows can see the signal. But I suppose the learned people —
- Madhav : No, they don't have time for that sort of nonsense. They are not crazy like you.
- Amal : Do you know, yesterday, I met someone quite as crazy as I am.
- Madhav : Gracious me, really, how so?
- Amal : He had a bamboo staff on his shoulder with a small bundle at the top, and a brass pot in his left hand, and an old pair of shoes on: he was making for those hills straight across that meadow there. I called out to him and asked, 'Where are you going?' He answered, 'I don't know, anywhere!' I asked again, 'Why are you going?' He said, 'I'm going out to seek work'?
- Madhav : Of course I have to. There's many about looking for jobs.
- Amal : How lovely! I'll go about like them too, finding things to do.
- Madhav : Suppose you seek and don't find. Then—
- Amal : Wouldn't that be jolly? Then I should go farther! I watched that man slowly walking on with his pair of worn-out shoes. And when he got to where the water flows under the fig tree, he stopped and washed his feet in the stream. Then he took out from his bundle some gram-flour, moistened it with water and began to eat. Then he tied up his bundle and shouldered it again; tucked up his cloth above his knees and crossed the stream. I've asked Auntie to let me go up to the stream, and eat my gram-flour just like him.
- Madhav : And what did your Auntie say to that?

- Amal : Auntie said, 'Get well and then I'll take you over there.' Please, Uncle, when shall I get well?
- Madhav : It won't be long, dear.
- Amal : Really, but then I shall go right away the moment I'm well again.
- Madhav : And where will you go?
- Amal : Oh, I will walk on, crossing so many streams, wading through water. Everybody will be asleep with their doors shut in the heat of the day and I will tramp on and on seeking work far, very far.
- Madhav : I see! I think you had better be getting well first; then—
- Amal : But then you won't want me to be learned, will you, Uncle?
- Madhav : What would you rather be then?
- Amal : I an't think of anything just now; but I'll tell you later on.
- Madhav : Very well. But mind you, you aren't to call out and talk to strangers again.
- Amal : But I love to talk to strangers!
- Gunavati : Only last evening court minstrels came to sing my praise, Brahmins blessed me, the servants silently took their orders from my mouth. What can have happened, in the meantime, that things have become completely upset, -the Goddess refused her worship, and the Queen her authority. Was Tripura a dreamland? Give my salutation to the priest, and ask him to come.
- (Attendant goes out)
- (Enters Govinda)
- Gunavati : Have you heard, King? My offerings have been sent back from Mother's temple.
- Govinda : I know it.
- Gunavati : You, know it, and yet bear the insult?
- Govinda : I beg to ask your pardon for the culprit.
- Gunavati : I know, King, your heart is merciful, but this is no mercy. It is feebleness. If your kindness hampers you, leave the punishment in my hand. Only, tell me, who is he?
- Govinda : It is I, my Queen. Mr Crime was in nothing else but having given you pain.
- Gunavati : I do not understand you.
- Govinda : From today shedding of blood in gods' temples is forbidden in my land.
- Gunavati : Who forbids it?
- Govinda : Mother herself
- Gunavati : Who heard it?
- Govinda : I.
- Gunavati : You! That makes me laugh. The queen of all the world comes to the gate to Tripura's King with her petition.
- Govinda : Not with her petition, but with her sorrow.
- Gunaati : Your dominion is outside the temple limit. Do not send your commands there, where they are impertinent.
- Govinda : The command is not mine, it is Mother's.

- Gunavati : If you have no doubt in your decision, do not cross my faith. Let me perform my worship according to my light.
- Govinda : I promised my Goddess to prevent sacrifice of life in her temple, and I must carry it out.
- Gunavati : I also promised my Goddess the blood of three hundred kids and one hundred buffaloes, and I will carry it out. You may leave me now.
- Govinda : As you wish.

(He goes out)

(Enters Raghupati)

- Gunavati : My offerings have been turned back from the temple, father.
- Raghupati : The worship offered by the most ragged of all beggars is not less precious than yours, Queen. But the misfortune is that Mother has been deprived. The misfortune is that the King's pride is growing into a bloated monster, obstructing diving grace, fixing its angry red eyes upon all worshippers.
- Gunavati : What will come of all this, father?
- Raghupati : That is only known to her, who fashions this world with her dreams. But this is certain, that the throne, which casts its shadow upon Mother's shrine, will burst like a bubble, vanishing in the void.
- Gunavati : Have mercy and save us, father.
- Raghupati : Ha, ha! I am to save you,—you, the consort of a King who boasts of his kingdom in the earth and in heaven as well, before whom the gods and the Brahmins must,—Oh, shame! Oh, the evil age, when the Brahmins' futile curse recoils upon himself, to sting him into madness.
(About to tear his sacrificial thread).
- Gunavati : (Preventing him). Have mercy upon me.
- Raghupati : Then give back to Brahmins what are theirs by right.
- Gunavati : Yes, I will, Go, master, to your worship and nothing will hinder you.
- Raghupati : Indeed your favour overwhelms me. At the merest glance of your eyes gods are saved from ignominy and the Brahmin is restored to his sacred offices. Thrive and grow fat and sleek till the dire day of judgments comes.

(Re-enters King Govinda)

- Govinda : My Queen, the shadow of your angry brows hides all light from my heart.
- Gunavati : Go! Do not bring a curse upon this house.
- Govinda : Woman's smile removes all curse from the house, her love is God's grace.
- Gunavati : Go, and never show your face to me again.
- Govinda : I shall come back, my Queen, when you remember me.
- Gunavati : (Clinging to the King's feet). Pardon me, King. Have you become so hard that you forget to respect woman's pride? Do you not know, beloved, that thwarted love takes the disguise of anger?
- Govinda : I would die, if I lost my trust in you. I know, my love, that clouds are for moments only, and the sun is for all days.

- Gunaati : Yes, the clouds will pass by, God's thunder will return to his armoury, and the sun of all days will shine upon the traditions of all time. Yes, my King, order it so, that Brahmins be restored to their rights, the Goddess to her offerings, and the King's authority to its earthly limits.
- Govinda : It is not the Brahmin's right to violate the eternal good. The creature's blood is not the offering for gods. And it is within the rights of the King and the peasant alike to maintain truth righteousness.
- Gunavati : I prostrate myself on the ground before you; I beg at your feet. The custom, that comes through all ages, is not the King's own. Like heaven's air, it belongs to all men. Yet your Queen begs it of you, with clasped hands, in the name of your people. Can you still remain silent, proud man, refusing entreaties of love in favour of duty which is doubtful? Then go, go from me.
- (They go)
- (Enter Raghupati, Jaising, and Nayan Rai)
- Raghupati : General, your devotion to Mother is well known.
- Nayan Rai : It runs through generations of my ancestors.
- Raghupati : Let this sacred love give you indomitable courage. Let it make your sword-blade mighty as God's thunder, and win its place above all powers and positions of this world.
- Nayan Rai : The Brahmin's blessings will never be in vain.
- Raghupati : Then I did you collect your soldiers and strike Mother's enemy down to the dust.
- Nayan Rai : Tell me, father, who is the enemy?
- Raghupati : Govinda.
- Nayan Rai : Our King?
- Raghupati : Yes, attack him with all your force.
- Nayan Rai : It is evil advice. Father, is this to try me?
- Raghupati : Yes, it is to try you, to know for certain whose servant you are. Give up all hesitation. Know that the Goddess calls, and all earthly bonds must be severed.
- Nayan Rai : I have no hesitation in my mind. I stand firm in my post, where my Goddess has placed me.
- Raghupati : You are brave.
- Nayan Rai : Am I the basest of Mother's servants, that the order should come for me to turn traitor? She herself stands upon the faith of man's heart. Can she ask me to break it? Then today comes to dust the King, and tomorrow the Goddess herself.
- Jaising : Noble words.
- Ragupati : The King, who has turned traitor to Mother, has lost all claims to your allegiance.
- Nayan Rai : Drive me not, father, into a wilderness of debates. I know only one path—the straight path of faith and truth. This stupid servant of Mother shall never swerve from that highway of honour.
- (Goes out)
- Jaising : Let us be strong in our faith as he is, Master. Why ask the aid of soldiers? We ask

the aid of soldiers? We have the strength within ourselves for the task given to us from above. Open the temple gate wide, father. Sound the drum. Come, come, O citizens, to worship her, who takes all fear away from our hearts. Come, Mother's children.

(Citizens come)

First Citizen : Come, come, we are called.

All : Victory to Mother!

(They sing and dance)

The dread mother dances naked in the battlefield,

Her lolling tongue burns like a red flame of fire.

Her dark tresses fly in the sky,

sweeping away the sun and stars,

Red streams of blood run from her cloud-black limbs.

And the world trembles and cracks under her tread.

Jaising : Do you see the beasts of sacrifice coming towards the temple, driven by the Queen's attendants?

(They cry).

: Victory to Mother! Victory to our Queen!

Raghupati : Jaising, make haste and get ready for the worship.

Jaising : Send a man to call Prince Nakshatra in my name.

(Jaising goes. Citizens sing and dance)

Govinda : Silence, Raghupati! Do you dare to disregard my order?

Raghupati : Yes, I do.

Govinda : Then you are not for my land.

Raghupati : No, my land is there, where the King's crown kisses the dust. No! Citizens! Let Mother's offerings be brought in here.

(They beat drums)

Govinda : Silence! (To his attendants). Ask my General to come. Raghupati, you drive me to call soldiers to defend God's right. I feel the shame of it; for the force of arms only reveals man's weakness.

Raghupati : Sceptic, are you so certain in your mind that Brahmins have lost the ancient fire of their sacred wrath? No, it's flame will burst out from my heart to burn your throne into ashes. If it does not, then I shall throw into the fire the scriptures, and my Brahmin pride, and all the arrant lies that fill our temple shine in the guise of the divine.

(Enter General Nayan Rai and Chandpal, who is the second in command of the army).

Govinda : Stand here with your soldiers to prevent sacrifice of life in the temple.

Nayan : Pardon me, Sire, The King's servant is powerless in the temple of God.

Govinda : General, it is not for you to question my order. You are to carry out my words. Their merits and demerits belong only to me.

Nayan : I am your servant, my King, but I am a man above all. I have reason and my religion. I have my King,—and also my God.

Govinda : Then surrender your sword to Chandpal. He will protect the temple from pollution of blood.

Nayan Rai : Why do Chandpal? This sword was given to my forefathers by your royal ancestors. If you want it back, I will give it to you. Be witness, my fathers, who are in the heroes' paradise,—the sword, that you made sacred with your loyal faith and bravery, I surrender to my King.

(Goes out).

Raghupati : The Brahmin's curse has begun its work already.

(Enter Jaising).

Jaising : The beasts have been made ready for the sacrifice.

Govinda : Sacrifice?

Jaising : King, listen to my earnest entreaties. Do not stand in the way, hiding the Goddess, man as you are.

Raghupati : Shame, Jaising. Rise up and ask my pardon. I am your Master. Your place is at my feet, not the King's Fool! Do you ask King's sanction to do God's service? Leave alone the worship and the sacrifice. Let us wait and see how his pride prevails in the end. Come away.

(They go out)

(Enters Aparna).

Aparna : Where is Jaising? He is not here, but only you,—the image whom nothing can move. You rob us of all our best without uttering a word. We pine for love and die beggars for want of it. Yet it comes to you unasked, though you need it not. Like a grave, you hoard it under your miserly stone, keeping it from the use of the yearning world. Jaising, what happiness do you find from her? What can she speak to you? O my heart, my famished heart!

(Enters Raghupati)

Raghupati : Who are you?

Aparna : I am a beggar girl. Where is Jaising?

Raghupati : Leave this place at once. I know you are haunting this temple, to steal Jaising's heart from the Goddess.

Aparna : Has the Goddess anything to fear from me? I fear her.

(She goes out)

(Enter Jaising and Prince Nakshatra.)

Nakshatra : Why have you called me?

Raghupati : Last night the Goddess told me in a dream, that you shall become king within a week.

Nakshatra : Ha, ha, this is news indeed.

Raghupati : Yes, you shall be king.

Nakshatra : I cannot believe it.

- Raghupati : You doubt my words ?
- Nakshatra : I do not want to doubt them. But suppose, by chance, it never comes to pass.
- Raghupati : No, it shall be true.
- Nakshatra : But, tell me, how can it ever become true?
- Raghupati : The Goddess thirsts for King's blood.
- Nakshatra : King's blood ?
- Raghupati : You must offer it to her before you can be king.
- Nakshatra : I know not where to get it.
- Raghupati : There is King Govinda—Jaising, keep still.—Do you understand? Kill him in secret. Bring his blood, while warm, to the altar.—Jaising, leave this place if you cannot remain still,—
- Nakshatra : But he is not brother, and I love him.
- Raghupati : Your sacrifice will be all the more precious.
- Nakshatra : But, father, I am content to remain as I am. I do not want the Kingdom.
- Raghupati : There is not escape for you, because the Goddess commands it. She is thirsting for blood from the King's house. If you brother is to live, then you must die.
- Nakshatra : Have pity on me, father.
- Raghupati : You shall! never be free in life, or in death, until her bidding is done.
- Nakshatra : Advice me, then how to do it.
- Raghupati : Wait in silence. I will tell you what to do when the time comes. And now, go.
(Nakshatra goes).
- Jaising : What is it that I heard? Merciful Mother, is it your bidding? To ask brother to kill brother? Master, how could you say that it was Mother's own wish?
- Raghupati : There was no other means but this to serve my Goddess.
- Jaising : Means? Why means? Mother, have you not your own sword to wield with your own hand? Must your wish burrow underground, like a thief, to steal in secret? Oh, the sin!
- Raghupati : What do you know about sin?
- Jaising : What I have learnt from you.
- Raghupati : Then come and learn your lesson once again from me. sin has no meaning in reality. To kill is but to kill, —it is neither sin nor anything else. Do you not know that the dust of this earth is made of countless killing? Old Time is ever writing the chronicle of the transient life of creatures in letters of blood. Killing is in the wilderness, in the habitations of man, in birds' nests, in insects' holes, in the sea, in the sky; there is killing for life, for sport, for nothing whatever. The world is ceaselessly killing; and the great Goddess Kali, the spirit of ever-changing time, is standing with her thirsty tongue hanging down from her mouth, with her cup in hand into which is running the red life-blood of the world, like juice from the crushed cluster of grapes.
- Jaising : Stop, Master. Is, then, love a falsehood and mercy a mockery, and the one thing true, from beginning of time, the lust for destruction? Would it not have destroyed

itself long ago? You are playing with my heart, my Master. Look there, she is gazing at me with her sweet mocking smile. My blood-thirsty Mother, wilt thou accept my blood? Shall I plunge this knife into my breast and make an end to my life, as thy child, for evermore? The life-blood, flowing in these veins, is it so delicious to thee? O my Mother, my bloodthirsty Mother.—Master, did you call me? I know you wanted my heart to break its bounds in pain overflowing my Mother's feet. This is the true sacrifice But King's blood! The Mother, who is thirsting for our love, you accuse of blood thirstiness!

Raghupati : Then let the sacrifice be stopped in the temple.

Jaising : Yes, let it be stopped.—No, no Master you know what is right and what is wrong. He heart's laws are not the laws of scripture. Eyes cannot see with their own light,—the light must come from the outside. Pardon me, Master, pardon my ignorance. Tell me, father, is it true that the Goddess seeks King's blood?

Raghupati : Alas, child, have you lost your faith in me?

Jaising : My world stands upon my faith in you. If the Goddess must have King's blood, let me bring it to her. I will never allow a brother to kill his brother.

Raghupati : But there can be no evil in carrying out God's wishes.

Jaising : No, it must be good, and I will earn the merit of it.

Raghupati : But, my boy, I have reared you from your childhood, and you have grown close to my heart. I can never bear to lose you, by any chance.

Jaising : I will not let your love for me be soiled with sin. Release Prince Nakshatra from his promise.

Raghupati : I shall think, and decide tomorrow.

(He goes)

Jaising : Deeds are better, however cruel they may be, than the hell of thinking and doubting. You are right, my Master; truth is in your words. To kill is no sin, to kill brother is no sin, to kill king is no sin.—Where do you go, my brothers? To the fair at Nishipur? There the women are to dance? Oh, this world is pleasant! And the dancing limbs of the girls are beautiful. In what careless merriment the crowds flew thorough the roads, making the sky ring with their laughter and song. I will follow them.

(Enter Raghupati.)

Raghupati : Jaising.

Jaising : I do not know you. I drift with the crowd. Why ask me to stop? Go your own way.

Raghupati : Jaising.

Jaising : The road is straight before me. With an alms-bowl in hand and the beggar girls as my sweetheart I shall walk on. Who says that the world's ways are difficult? Anyhow we reach the end,—the end where all laws and rules are no more, where the errors and hurts of life are forgotten, where is rest, eternal rest. What is the use of scriptures, and the teacher and his instructions?—My Master, my father, what wild words are these of mine? I was living in a dream. There stands the temple, cruel and immovable as truth. What was your order, my teacher? I have

not forgotten it. (Bringing out the knife). I am sharpening your words in my mind, till they become one with this knife in keenness. Have you any other order to give me?

Raghupati : My boy, my darling, how can I tell you how deep is my love for you?

Jaising : No, Master, do not tell me of love. Let me think only of duty. Love, like the green grass, and the trees, and life's music, is only for the surface of the world. It comes and vanishes like a dream. But underneath is duty, like the rude layers of stone, like a huge load that nothing can move.

(They go out).

(Enter Govinda and Chandpal)

Chandpal : Sire, I warn you to be careful.

Govinda : Why? What do you mean?

Chandpal : I have overheard a conspiracy to take away your life.

Govinda : Who wants my life?

Chandpal : I am afraid to tell you, lest the news become to you more deadly than the knife itself. It was Prince Nakshatra, who—

Govinda : Nakshatra?

Chandpal : He has promised Raghupati to bring your blood to the Goddess.

Govinda : To the Goddess? Then I cannot blame him. For a man loses his humanity when it concerns his gods. You go to your work and leave me alone.

(Addressing the image) Accept these flowers, Goddess, and let your creatures live in peace. Mother, those who are weak in this world are so helpless, and those who are strong are so cruel. Greed is pitiless, ignorance blind, and pride takes no heed when it crushes the small under its foot. Mother, do not raise your sword and lick your lips for blood; do not set brother against brother, and woman against man. If it is your desire to strike me by the hand of one I love, then let it be fulfilled. For the sin has to ripen to its ugliest limits before it can burst and die a hideous death; and when King's blood is shed by a brother's hand, then lust for blood, will disclose its demon face, leaving in disguise as a goddess. If such be your wish I bow my head to it.

(Jaising rushes in).

Jaising : Tell me, Goddess, dost thou truly want King's blood? Ask it in thine own voice, and thou shalt have it.

A voice : I want King's blood.

Jaising : King, say your last prayer, for your time has come.

Govinda : What makes you say it, Jaising?

Jaising : Did you not hear what the Goddess said?

Govinda : It was not the Goddess. I heard the familiar voice of Raghupati.

Jaising : The voice of Raghupati? No, No! Drive me not from doubt to doubt. It is all the same, whether the voice comes from the Goddess, or from my Master.—

(He unsheathes his knife, and then throws it away).

Listen to the cry of thy children, Mother. Let there be only flowers, the beautiful flowers for thy offerings, —No more blood. They are red even as blood. They are red even as blood,—these bunches of hibiscus. They have come out of the heart burst of the earth, pained at the slaughter of her children. Accept this. Thou must accept this. I defy thy anger. Blood thou shalt never have. Redden thine eyes. Raise thy sword. Bring thy furies of destruction. I do not fear thee.—King, leave this temple to its Goddess, and go to your men.

(Govinda goes)

Alas, alas, in a moment I gave up all that I had, my Master, my Goddess.

(Raghupati comes)

Raghupati : I have heard all. Traitor, you have betrayed your Master.
 Jaising : Punish me, father.
 Raghupati : What punishment will you have?
 Jaising : Punish me with my life.
 Raghupati : No, that is nothing. Take your oath touching the feet of the Goddess.
 Jaising : I touch her feet.
 Raghupati : Say, I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the Goddess, before it is midnight.
 Jaising : I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the Goddess, before it is midnight.

(They go out)

(Enters Gunavati.)

Gunavati : I failed. I had hoped that, if I remained hard and cold for some days, he would surrender. Such faith I had in my power, vain woman that I am. I showed my sullen anger, and remained away from him : but it was fruitless. Woman's anger is like a diamond's glitter; it only shines, but cannot burn. I would it were like thunder, bursting upon the King's house, startling him up from his sleep, and dashing his pride to the ground.

(Enters the boy Druva)

Gunavati : Where are you going?
 Druva : I am called by the King.

(Goes out)

Gunavati : There goes the darling of the King's heart. He has robbed my unborn children of their father's love, usurped their right to the first place in the King's breast. O Mother Kali, your creation is infinite and full of wonders, only send a child to my arms in merest whim, a tiny little warm living flesh to fill my lap, and I shall offer you whatever you wish.

(Enters Nakshatra)

Prince NAKshatra, why do turn back? I am a mere woman, weak and without weapon, am I so fearful?

Nakshatra : No, do not call me.
 Gunavati : Why? What harm is in that?
 Nakshatra : I do not want to be a king.

Gunavati : But why are you so excited?

Nakshatra : May the King live long, and may I die as I am,—a prince.

Gunavati : Die as quick as you can; have I ever said anything against it?

Nakshatra : Then tell me what you want of me.

Gunavati : The thief that steals the crown is awaiting you,—remove him. Do you understand?

Nakshatra : Yes, except who the thief is.

Gunavati : That boy, Druva. Do you not see how he is growing in the King's lap, till one day he reaches the crown?

Nakshatra : Yes, I have often thought of it. I have seen my brother putting his crown on the boy's head in play.

Gunavati : Playing with the crown is a dangerous game. If you do not remove the player, he will make a game of you.

Nakshatra : Yes, I like it not.

Gunavati : Offer him to Kali. Have you not heard that Mother is thirsting for blood?

Nakshatra : But, sister, this is not my business.

Gunavati : Fool, can you feel yourself safe, so long as Mother is not appeared? Blood she must have; save your own, if you can.

Nakshatra : But she wants King's blood.

Gunavati : Who told you that?

Nakshatra : I know it from one, to whom the Goddess herself sends her dreams.

Gunavati : Then that boy must die for the King. His blood is more precious to your brother than his own, and the King can only be saved by paying the price, which is more than his life.

Nakshatra : I understand.

Gunavati : Then lose no time. Run after him. He is not gone far. But remember, offer him in my name.

Nakshatra : Yes, I will.

Gunavati : The Queen's offerings have been turned back from Mother's gate. Pray to her that she may forgive me.

(They go out)

(Enters Jaising).

Jaising : Goddess, is there any little thing, that yet remains, out of the wreck of thee? If there be but a faintest spark of thy light in the remotest of the stars of evening, answer my cry, though thy voice be the feeblest. Say to me. "Child, here I am."—No, she is nowhere. She is naught But take pity upon jaising. O Illusion, and for him become true. Art thou so irredeemably false, that not even my love can send the slightest tremor of life through thy nothingness? fool, for whom have you upturned your cup of life, typing it to the last drop?—for this unanswering void,—truthless, merciless, and motherless?

(Enters Aparna).

Aparna, they drive you away from the temple; yet you come back over and over

again. For you are true, and truth cannot be banished. We enshrine falsehood in our temple, with all devotion; yet she is never there. Leave me not, Aparna. Sit here by my side. Why are you so sad, my darling! Do you miss some god, who is god no longer? But is there any need of God in this little world of ours? Let us be fearlessly godless and come closer to each other. They want our blood. And for this they have come down to the dust of our earth, leaving their magnificence of heaven. For in their heaven there are no men, no creatures, who can suffer. No, my girl, there is no Goddess.

Aparna : Then leave this temple, and come away with me.

JAising : Leave this temple? Yes, I will leave. Alas, Aparna, I must leave. Yet I cannot leave it, before I have paid my last dues to the—But let that be. Come closer to me, my love. Whisper something to my ears, which will overflow this life with sweetness, flooding death itself.

Aparna : Words do not flow, when the heart is full.

JAising : Then lean your head on my breast. Let the silence of two eternities, life and death, touch each other. But no more of this. I must go.

Aparna : JAising, do not be cruel. Can you not feel what I have suffered?

JAising : Am I cruel? Is this your last word to me? Cruel, as that block of stone, whom I called Goddess? Aparna, my beloved, if you were the Goddess, you would know what fire is this that burns my heart. But you are my Goddess. Do you know how I know it?

Aparna : Tell me.

JAising : You bring to me your sacrifice every moment, as a mother does to her child. God must be all sacrifice, pouring out his life in all reaction.

Aparna : JAising, come, let us leave this temple and go away together.

JAising : Save me, Aparna, have mercy upon me and leave me. I have only one object in my life. Do not usurp its place.

(Rushes out).

Aparna : Again and again I have suffered. But my strength is gone. My heart breaks.

(She goes out.)

(Enter Raghupati and Prince Nakshatra.)

Raghupati : Prince, where have you kept the boy?

Nakshatra : He is in the room, where the vessels for worship are kept. He has cried himself to sleep. I think I shall never be able to bear it, when he wakes up again.

Raghupati : JAising was of the same age when he came to me. And I remember how he cried till he slept at the feet of the Gooddness,—the temple lamp dimly shining on his tearstained child-face. It was a stormy evening like this.

Nakshatra : Father, delay not, I wish to finish it all, while he is sleeping. His cry pierces my heart like a knife.

Raghupati : I will drug him to sleep, if he wakes up.

Nakshatra : The King will soon find it out, if you are not quick. For, in the evening, he leaves

- the care of his kingdom to come to this boy.
- Raghupati : Have more faith in the Goddess. The victim is now in her own hands and it shall never escape.
- Nakshatra : But Chandpal is so watchful.
- Raghupati : Not more so than our Mother.
- Nakshatra : I thought I saw a shadow pass by.
- Raghupati : The shadow of your own fear.
- Nakshatra : Do we not hear the sound of a cry?
- Raghupati : The wound of your own heart. Shake off your despondency, Prince. Let us drink this wine duly consecrated. So long as the purpose remains in the mind, it looms large and fearful. In action it becomes small. The vapour is dark and diffused. It dissolves into water drops, that are small and sparkling. Prince, it is nothing. It takes only a moment,—not more than it does to snuff a candle. That life's light will die in a flash, like lightning in the stormy night of July, leaving its thunderbolt for ever deep in the King's pride. But, Prince, why are you so silent?
- Nakshatra : I think we should not be too rash. Leave this work till tomorrow night.
- Raghupati : Tonight is as good as tomorrow night, perhaps better.
- Nakshatra : Listen to the sound of footsteps.
- Raghupati : I do not hear it.
- Nakshatra : See there,—the light.
- Raghupati : The King comes. I fear we have delayed too long.
- (King comes with attendants).
- Govinda : Make them prisoners. (To Raghupati) Have you anything to say?
- Raghupati : Nothing.
- Govinda : Do you admit your crime?
- Raghupati : Crime? Yes, my crime was that, in my weakness, I delayed in carrying out Mother's service. The Punishment comes from the Goddess. You are merely her instrument.
- Govinda : According to my law, my soldiers shall escort you to exile, Raghupati, where you shall spend eight years of your life.
- Raghupati : King, I never bent my knees to any mortal in my life. I am a Brahmin. Your caste is lower than mine. Yet, in all humility, I pray to you, give me only one day's time.
- Govinda : I grant it.
- Raghupati : (Mockingly.) You are the King of all kings. Your majesty and mercy are alike immeasurable. Whereas I am a mere worm, hiding in the dust.
- (He goes out).
- Govinda : Nakshatra, admit your guilt.
- Nakshatra : I am guilty, Sire, and I dare not ask for your pardon.
- Govinda : Prince, I know you are tender of heart. Tell me, who beguiled you with evil counsel?
- Nakshatra : I will not take other names, King. My guilt is my own. You have pardoned your foolish brother more than once, and once more he begs to be pardoned.
- Govinda : Nakshatra, leave my feet. The Judge is still more bound by his laws than his

prisoner.

- Attendants : Sire, remember that he is your brother, and pardon him.
- Govinda : Let me remember that I am a king. Nakshatra shall remain in exile for eight years, in the house we have built, by the sacred river, outside the limits of Tripura. (Taking Nakshatra's hands). The punishment is not yours only, brother, but also mine,—the more so because I cannot share it bodily. The vacancy that you leave in the palace will prick my heart, every day, with a thousand needles. May the gods be more friendly to you, while you are away from us.

(They all go out)

(Enter Raghupati and Jaising.)

- Raghupati : My pride wallows in the mire. I have shamed my Brahminhood. I am no longer your Master, my child. Yesterday I had the authority to command you. Today I can only beg your favour. That light is extinct in me, which gave me the right to defy King's power. The earthen lamp can be replenished and lighted again and again, but the star once extinguished is lost for ever. I am that lost star. Life's days are mere tinsel, most trifling of God's gifts, and I had to beg for one of those days from the King with bent knees. Let that one day be not in vain. Let its infamous black brows be red with King's blood before it dies. Why do you not speak, my boy? Though I forsake my place as your Master, yet have I not the right to claim your obedience as your father, —I who am more than a father to you, because father to an orphan? But that man is the most miserable of all beggars, who has to beg for love. You are still silent, my child? Then let my knees bend to you, who were smaller than my knees when you first came to my arms.

- Jaising : Father, do not torture the heart that is already broken. If the Goddess thirsts for kingly blood. I will bring it to her before tonight. I will pay all my debts; yes, every farthing. Keep ready for my return. I will delay not.

(Goes out)

(Storm outside)

- Raghupati : She is awake at last, the Terrible. Her curses go shrieking through the town. The hungry furies are shaking the cracking branches of the world-tree with all their might, for the stars to break and drop. My Mother, why didst thou keep thine own people in doubt and dishonour so long? Leave is not for thy servant to raise thy sword. Let thy mighty arm do its own work!—I hear steps.

(Enters Aparna).

- Aparna : Where is Jaising?
- Raghupati : Away, evil omen. (Aparna goes out). But if Jaising never comes back? No, he will not break his promise. Victory to thee, Great Kali, the giver of all success!—But if he meet with obstruction? If he be caught and lose his life at the guards' hands?—Victory to thee, watchful Goddess, Mother invincible! Do not allow thy repute to be lost, and thine enemies to laugh at thee. If thy children must lose their pride and faith in their Mother, and bow down their heads in shame before the rebels,

who then will remain in this orphaned world to carry thy banner?—I hear his steps. But so soon? Is he coming back foiled in his purpose? No, that cannot be. Thy miracle needs not time, O mistress of all time, terrible with thy necklace of human skulls.

(Jaising rushes in).

Jaising, where is the blood?

Jaising : It is with me, Let go my hands. Let me offer it myself (entering the temple). Must thou have kingly blood, Great Mother, who nourishes the world at thy breast with life?—I am of the royal caste, a Kshatriya. My ancestors have sat upon thrones, and there are rulers of men in my mother's line. I have kingly blood in my veins. Take it, and quench thy thirst for ever.

(Stabs himself, and falls).

Raghupati : Jaising! O cruel, ungrateful! You have done the blackest crime. You kill your father!—Jaising, forgive me, my darling. Come back to my heart, my heart's one treasure! Let me die in your place.

(Enters Aparna)

Aparna : It will madden me. Where is Jaising? Where is he?

Raghupati : Come, Aparna, come, my child, call him with all your love. Call him back to life. Take him to you, away from me, only let him live.

(Aparna enters the temple and swoons.)

(Beating his forehead on the temple floor)

Give him, give him, give him!—Give him back to me! (Stands up addressing the image). Look how she stands there, the silly stone,—deaf, dumb, blind,—the whole sorrowing world weeping at her door,—the noblest hearts wrecking themselves at her stony feet. Give me back my Jaising. Oh, it is all in vain. Our bitterest cries wander in emptiness,—the emptiness that we vainly try to fill with these stony images of delusion. Away with them! Away with these our impotent dreams, that harden into stones, burdening our world!

(He throws away the image, and comes out into the courtyard.)

(Enters Gunavati)

Gunavati : Victory to thee, great Goddess!— But, where is the Goddess?

Raghupati : Goddess there is none.

Gunavati : Bring her back, father. I have brought her my offerings. I have come at last, to appease her anger with my own heart's blood. Let her know that the Queen is true to her promise. Have pity on me, and bring back the Goddess only for this night. Tell me,—where is she?

Raghupati : She is nowhere,—neither above, nor below.

Gunavati : Master, was not the Goddess here in the temple ?

Raghupati : Goddess?—If there were any true Goddess anywhere in the world, could she bear this thing to usurp her name?

Gunavati : Do not torture me. Tell me truly. Is there no Goddess?

Raghupati : No, there is none.
Gunavati : Then who was here?
Raghupati : Nothing, nothing.

(Aparna comes out from the temple)

Aparna : Father!
Raghupati : My sweet child! "Father", —did you say? Do you rebuke me with that name? My son, whom I have killed, has left that one dear call behind him in your sweet voice.

Aparna : Father, leave this temple. Let us go away from here.

(Enters the King)

Govinda : Where is the Goddess?

Raghupati : The Goddess is nowhere.

Govinda : But what blood-stream is this?

Raghupati : King, Jaising, who loved you so dearly, has killed himself.

Govinda : Killed himself? Why?

Raghupati : To kill the falsehood, that sucks the lifeblood of man.

Govinda : Jaising is great. He has conquered death. My flowers are for him.

Gunavati : My King.

Govinda : Yes, my love.

Gunavati : The Goddess is no more.

Govinda : She has burst her cruel prison of stone, and come back to the woman's heart.

Aparna : Father, come away.

Raghupati : Come, child. Come Mother. I have found three. Thou art the last gift of Jaising.

Sandeep

The Post Office

By

Rabindranath Tagore

Act I

(Madhav's House)

Madhav : What a state I am in! Before he came, nothing mattered; I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, my heart is filled with his dear self, and my home will be no home to me when he leaves. Doctor, do you think he—

Doctor: If there's life in his fate, then he will live long. But what the medical scriptures say, it seems—

Madhav : Great heavens, what?

Doctor: The scriptures have it: 'Bile or palsey, cold or gout spring all alike.'

Madhav : Oh, get along, don't fling your scriptures at me; you only make me more anxious; tell me what I can do.

Doctor: The patient needs the most scrupulous care.

Madhav : That's true; but tell me how.

Doctor: I have already mentioned, on no account must he be let out of doors.

Madhav : Poor child, it is very hard to keep him indoors all day long.

Doctor: What else can you do? The autumn sun and the damp are both very bad for the little fellow—for the scriptures have it:

'In wheezing, swooning or in nervous fret, In Jaundice or leaden eyes—'

Madhav : Never mind the scriptures, please. Eh, then we must shut the poor thing up. Is there no other method?

Doctor: None at all: for, 'In the wind and in the sun—'

Madhav : What will your 'in this and in that' do for me now? Why don't you let them alone and come straight to the point? What's to be done then? Your system is very, very hard for the poor boy; and he is so quiet too with all his pain and sickness. It tears my heart to see him wince, as he takes your medicine.

Doctor: The more he winces, the surer is the effect. That's why the sage Chyabana observes: 'In medicine as in good advice, the least palatable is the truest.'

Ah, well! I must be trotting now.

(Gaffer enters)

Madhav : Well, I'm jiggered, there's Gaffer now.

Gaffer : Why, why I won't bite you.

Madhav : No, but you are a devil to send children off their heads.

Gaffer : But you aren't a child, and you've no child in the house; why worry then?

Madhav : Oh, but I have brought a child into the house.

Gaffer : Indeed, how so?

Madhav : You remember how my wife was dying to adopt a child?

Gaffer : Yes, but that's an old story; you didn't like the idea.

Madhav : You know, brother, how hard all this getting money in has been. That somebody else's child would sail in and waste all this money earned with so much trouble—Oh, I hated the idea. But this boy clings to my heart in such a queer sort of way—

Gaffer : So that's the trouble! And your money goes all for him and feels jolly lucky it does go at all.

Madhav : Formerly, earning was a sort of passion with me; I simply couldn't help working for money. Now, I make money, and as I know it is all for this dear boy, earning becomes a joy to me.

Gaffer : Ah, well, and where did you pick him up?

Madhav : He is the son of a man who was a brother to my wife by village ties. He has had no mother since infancy; and now the other day he lost his father as well.

Gaffer : Poor thing; and so he needs me all the more.

Madhav : The doctor says all the organs of his little body are at loggerheads with each other, and there isn't much hope for his life. There is only one way to save him and that is to keep him out of this autumn wind and sun. But you are such a terror! What with this game of yours at your age, too, to get children out of doors!

Gaffer : God bless my soul! So I'm already as bad as autumn wind and sun, eh!

But, friend, I know something, too, of the same of keeping them indoors. When my day's work is over I am coming in to make friends with this child of yours.

(Amal enters)

Amal : Uncle, I say, Uncle!

Madhav : Hullo! Is that you, Amal?

Amal : Mayn't I be out of the courtyard at all?

Madhav : No, my dear, no.

Amal : See, there where Auntie grinds lentils in the quinn, the squirrel is sitting with his tail up and with his wee hands he's picking up the broken grains of lentils and crunching them. Can't I run up there?

Madhav : No, my darling, no.

Amal : Wish I were a squirrel!— it would be lovely. Uncle, why won't you let me go about?

Madhav : Doctor says it's bad for you to be out.

Amal : How can the doctor know?

Madhav : What a thing to say! The doctor can't know and he reads such huge books!

Amal : Does his book-learning tell him everything?

Madhav : Of course, don't you know!

Amal : Ah, I am so stupid! I don't read books.

(with a sigh)

Madhav : Now, think of it, very, very learned people are all like you; they are never out of doors.

Amal : Aren't they really?

Madhav : No, how can they? Early and late they toil and moil at their books, and they've eyes for nothing else. Now, my little man, you are going to be learned when you grow up; and then you will stay at home and read such big books, and people will notice you and say, 'He's a wonder.'

Amal : No, no Uncle; I beg of you by your dear feet—I don't want to be learned, I won't.

Madhav : Dear, dear; it would have been my saving if I could have been learned.

Amal : No, I would rather go about and see everything that there is.

Madhav : Listen to that! What will you see, what is there so much to see?

Amal : See that far-away hill from our window—I often long to go beyond those hills and right away.

Madhav : Oh, you silly! As if there's nothing more to be done but just get up to the top of that hill and away! Eh! You don't talk sense, my boy. Now listen, since that hill stands there upright as a barrier, it means you can't get beyond it. Else, what was the use in heaping up so many large stones to make much a big affair of it, eh!

Amal : Uncle, do you think it is meant to prevent us crossing over? It seems to me because the earth can't speak it raises its hands into the sky and beckons. And those who live far off, and sit alone by their windows can see the signal. But I suppose the learned people—

Madhav : No, they don't have time for that sort of nonsense. They are not crazy like you.

Amal : Do you know, yesterday, I met someone quite as crazy as I am.

Madhav : Gracious me, really, how so?

Amal : He had a bamboo staff on his shoulder with a small bundle at the top, and a brass pot in his left hand, and an old pair of shoes on: he was making for those hills straight across that meadow there. I called out to him and asked, 'Where are you going?' He answered, 'I don't know anywhere!' I asked again, 'Why are you going?' He said, 'I'm going out to seek work.'

Madhav : Of course I have to. There's many about looking for jobs.

Amal : How lovely! I'll go about, like them too, finding things to do.

Madhav : Suppose you seek and don't find. Then—

Amal : Wouldn't that be jolly? Then I should go farther! I watched that man slowly walking on with his pair of worn-out shoes. And when he got to where the water flows under the fig

tree, he stopped and washed his feet in the stream. Then he took out from his bundle some gram-flour, moistened it with water and began to eat. Then he tied up his bundle and shouldered it again; tucked up his stream. I've asked Auntie to let me go up to the stream, and eat my gram-flour just like him.

Madhav : And what did your Auntie say to that?

Amal : Auntie said, 'Get well and then I'll take you over there.' Please, Uncle, when shall I get well?

Madhav : It won't be long, dear.

Amal : Really, but then I shall go right away the moment I'm well again.

Madhav : And where will you go?

Amal : Oh, I will walk on, crossing so many streams, wading through water. Everybody will be asleep with their doors shut in the heat of the day and I will tramp on and on seeking work far, very far.

Madhav : I see! I think you had better be getting well first; then—

Amal : But then you won't want me to be learned, will you, Uncle?

Madhav : What would you rather be then?

Amal : I can't think of anything just now; but I'll tell you later on.

Madhav : Very well. But mind you, you aren't to call out and talk to strangers again.

Amal : But I love to talk to strangers!

Madhav : Suppose they had kidnapped you?

Amal : That would have been splendid! But no one ever takes me away. They all want me to stay in here.

Madhav : I am off to my work—but, darling, you won't go out, will you?

Amal : No, I won't. But, Uncle, you'll let me be in this room by the roadside.

Dairyman : Curds, curds, good nice curds.

Amal : Curdseller, I say, Curdseller.

Dairyman : Why do you call me? Will you buy some curds?

Amal : How can I buy? I have no money.

Dairyman : What a boy! Why call out then? Ugh! What a waste of time.

Amal : I would go with you if I could.

Dairyman : With me?

Amal : Yes, I seem to feel homesick when I hear you call from far down the road.

Dairyman : Whatever are you doing here, my child?

(lowering his
yoke-pole)

Amal : The doctor says I'm not to be out, so I sit here all day long.

Dairyman : My poor child, whatever has happened to you?

Amal : I can't tell. You see I am not learned, so I don't know what's the matter with me. Say, Dairyman, where do you come from?

Amal : Your village? Is it very far?

Dairyman : Our village lies on the river Shamli at the foot of the Panch-mura hills.

Amal : Panch-mura hills! Shamli river! I wonder. I may have seen your village. I can't think when though!

Dairyman : Have you seen it? Been to the foot of those hills?

Amal : Never. But I seem to remember having seen it. Your village is under some very old big trees, just by the side of the red road—isn't that so?

Dairyman : That's right, child.

Amal : And on the slope of the hill cattle grazing.

Dairyman : How wonderful! Cattle grazing in our village! Indeed, there are!

Amal : And your women with red sarees fill their pitchers from the river and carry them on their heads.

Dairyman : Good, that's right. Women from our dairy village do come and draw their water from the river; but then it isn't everyone who has a red sari to put on. But, my dear child, surely you must have been there for a walk some time.

Amal : Really, Dairyman, never been there at all. But the first day doctor lets me go out, you are going to take me to your village.

Dairyman : I will my child, with pleasure.

Amal : And you'll teach me to cry curds and shoulder the yoke like you and walk the long, long road?

Dairyman : Dear, dear, did you ever? Why should you sell curds? No, you will read big books and be learned.

Amal : No, I never want to be learned—I'll be like you and take my curds from the village by the red road near the old banyan tree, and I will hawk it from cottage to cottage. Oh, how do you cry—'Curds, curds, fine curds!' Teach me the tune, will you?

Dairyman : Dear, dear, teach you the tune: what a notion?

Amal : Please do, I love to hear it. I can't tell you how queer I feel when I hear you cry out from the bend of the road, through the line of those trees! Do you know I feel like that when I hear the shrill cry of kites from almost the end of the sky?

Dairyman : Dear Child, will you have some curds? Yes, do.

Amal : But I have no money.

Dairyman : No, no, no, don't talk of money! You'll make me so happy if you take some curds from me.

Amal : Say, have I kept you too long?

Dairyman : Not a bit; it has been no loss to me at all; you have taught me how to be happy selling curds.

(Exit.

Amal : Curds, curds, fine curds—from the dairy village—from the country of the Panch—mura hills by the Shamli bank. Curds, good curds; in the early morning the women make

the cows stand in a row under the trees and milk them, and in the evening they turn the milk into curds. Curds, good curds. Hello, there's the watchman on his rounds. Watchman, I say, come and have a word with me.

Watchman : What's all this row about? Aren't you afraid of the likes of me?

Amal : No, why should I be?

Watchman : Suppose I march you off then?

Amal : Where will you take me to? Is it very far, right beyond the hills?

Watchman : Suppose I march you straight to the King?

Amal : To the King! Do, will you? But the doctor won't let me out. No one can ever take me away. I've got to stay here all day long.

Watchman : Doctor won't let you, poor fellow! So I see! Your face is pale and there are dark rings round your eyes. Your veins stick out from your poor thin hands.

Amal : Won't you sound the gong, Watchman?

Amal : How curious! Some say time has not yet come, and some say time has gone by! But surely your time will come the moment you strike the gong!

Watchman : That's not possible; I strike up the gong only when it is time.

Amal : Yes, I love to hear your gong. And Auntie falls asleep reading her Ramayana, and in the courtyard under the shadow of the wall our doggie sleeps with his nose in his curled-up tails; then your gong strikes out, Dong, dong, dong! Tell me why does your gong sound?

Watchman : My gong sounds to tell the people: Time waits for none, but goes on for ever.

Amal : Where, to what land?

Watchman : That none knows.

Amal : Then I suppose no one has ever been there! Oh, I do wish to fly with the time to that land of which no one knows anything.

Watchman : All of us have to get there one day my child.

Amal : Have I too?

Watchman : Yes, you too!

Amal : But doctor won't let me out.

Watchman : One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand.

Amal : He won't; you don't know him. He only keeps me in.

Watchman : One greater than he comes let's us free.

Amal : When will this great doctor come for me? I can't stick in here any more.

Watchman : Shouldn't take like that, my child.

Amal : No. I am here where they have left me—I never move a bit. But when your gong goes off, dong, dong, dong, it goes to my heart. Say, Watchman?

Watchman : Yes, my dear.

Amal : Say, What's going on there in that big house on the other side, where there is a flag flying high up and the people are always going in and out?

Watchman : Oh, There? That's our new Post Office.

Amal : Post Office? Whose?

Watchman : Whose, why, the King's Surely!

Amal : Do letters come from the King to his office here?

Watchman : Of course. One fine day there may be a letter for you in there.

Amal : A letter for me? But I am only a little boy.

Watchman : The King sends tiny notes to little boys.

Amal : Oh, how splendid! When shall I have my letter? How do you know he'll write to me?

Watchman : Otherwise why should he set his Post Office here right in front of your open window, with the golden flag flying?

Amal : But who will fetch me my King's letter when it comes?

Watchman : The King has many postmen. Don't you see them run about with round gilt badges on their chests?

Amal : Well, where do they go?

Watchman : Oh, from door to door, all through the country.

Amal : I'll be the King's postman when I grow up.

Watchman : Ha! Ha! Postman, indeed! Rain or shine, rich or poor. From house to house delivering letters—that's very great work!

Amal : That's what I'd like best. What makes you smile so? Oh, yes, your work is great too. When it is silent everywhere in the heat of the noonday, your gong sounds, Dong, dong, dong, — and sometimes when I wake up at night all of a sudden and find our lamp blown out, I can hear through the darkness your gong slowly sounding. Dong, dong, dong!

Watchman : There's the village headman! I must be off. If he catches me gossiping there'll be a great to-do.

Amal : The headman? Whereabouts is he?

Watchman : Right down the road there; see that huge palm-leaf umbrella hopping along? That's him!

Amal : I suppose the King's made him our headman here?

Watchman : Made him? Oh, no! A fussy busy-body! He knows so many ways of making himself unpleasant that everybody is afraid of him. It's just a game for the likes of him, making trouble for everybody. I must be off now! Mustn't keep work waiting you know! I'll drop in again tomorrow morning and tell you all the news of the town.

Amal : It would be splendid to have a letter from the King every day. I'll read them at the window. But, oh! I can't read writing. Who'll read them out to me. I wonder! Auntie reads her Ramayana; she may know the King's writing. If no one will, then I must keep them carefully and read them when I'm grown up. But if the postman can't find me? Headman, Mr. Headman, may I have a word with you?

Headman : Who is yelling after me on the highway? Oh it's you, is it, you wretched monkey?

Amal : You're the headman. Everybody minds you.

Headman : Yes, oh yes, they do! They must!

(looking pleased)

Amal : Do the King's postmen listen to you?

Headman : They've got to. By Jove, I'd like to see—

Amal : Will you tell the postman it's Amal who sits by the window here?

Headman : What's the good of that?

Amal : In case there's letter for me.

Headman : A letter for you! Whoever's going to write to you?

Amal : If the King does.

Headman : Ha! Ha! What an uncommon little fellow you are! Ha! Ha! The King indeed, aren't you his bosom friend eh! You haven't met for a long while and the King is pining for you I am sure. Wait till tomorrow and you'll have your letter.

Amal : Say, Headman, why do you speak to me in that tone of voice? Are you cross?

Headman : Upon my word! Cross, indeed! Yes write to the King! Madhav is a devilish swell now a days. He's made little pile; and so kings and padisha are everyday talk with his people. Let me find him once and I'll make him dance. Oh you,— you snipped snapper! I'll get the King's letter sent to your house—indeed I will.

Amal : No, no, please don't trouble yourself about it.

Headman : And why not, pray! I'll tell the King about you and he won't be long. One of his footmen will come presently for news of you. Madhav's simpudence staggers me. If the King hears of this, that'll take some of his nonsense out of him.

(Exit.)

Amal : Who are you walking there? How your anklets tinkle! Do stop a while, won't you?

Girl : I haven't a moment to spare; it is already late!

Amal : I see, you don't wish to stop. I don't care to stay on here either.

Girl : You make me think of some late star of the morning! Whatever's the matter with you?

Amal : I don't know. the doctor won't let me out.

Girl : Ah me! Don't go then! Should listen to the doctor, People will be cross with you if you're naughty! I know, always looking out and watching must make you feel tired. Let me close the window a bit for you.

Amal : No don't, only this one's open! All the others are shut. But will you tell me who you are?
Don't seem to know you.

Girl : I am Sudha.

Amal : What Sudha?

Sudha : Don't you know? Daughter of the flower-selling here.

Amal : What do you do?

Sudha : I gather flowers in my basket.

Amal : Oh, flower gathering! That is why your feet seem so glad and your anklets jingle so

merrily as you walk. Wish I could be out too. Then I would pick some flowers for you from the very topmost branches right out of sight.

Sudha : Would you really? Do you know as much about flowers as I?

Amal : Yes, I do, quite as much. I know all about Champa of the fairy tale and his six brothers. If only they let me, I'll go right into the dense forest where you can't find your way. And where the honey-sipping humming-bird rocks himself on the end of the thinnest branch, I will blossom into a champa. Would you be my sister Parul?

Sudha : You are silly! How can I be sister Parul when I am Sudha and my mother is Sasi, the flower-seller? I have to weave so many garlands a day. It would be jolly if I could lounge here like you!

Amal : What would you do then, all the day long?

Sudha : I could have great times with my doll Benay the bride, and Meni the pussy-cat, and—but I say, It is getting late and I mustn't stop, or I won't find a single flower.

Amal : Oh, wait a little longer; I do like it so!

Sudha : Ah, well—now don't you be naughty. Be good and sit still, and on my way back home with the flowers I'll come and talk with you.

Amal : And you'll let me have a flower then?

Sudha : No, how can I? It has to be paid for.

Amal : I'll pay when I grow up—before I leave to look for work out on the other side of that stream there.

Sudha : Very well, then.

Amal : And you'll come back when you have your flowers?

Sudha : I will.

Amal : You will, really?

Sudha : Yes, I will.

Amal : You won't forget me? I am Amal, remember that.

Sudha : I won't forget you, you'll see.

(A Troop of Boys enter)

Amal : Say, brothers, where are you all off to? Stop here a little.

A Boy : We're off to play.

Amal : What will you play at, borthers?

A Boy : We'll play at being ploughman.

Another : This is our ploughshare.

Boy (showing

A stick)

Another : We two are the pair of oxen.

Boy

Amal : And you're going to play the whole day?

A Boy : Yes, all day long.

Amal : And you will come home in the evening by the road along the river bank?

A Boy : Yes.

Amal : Do you pass our house on your way home?

A Boy : Come out and play with us, yes do.

Amal : Doctor won't let me out.

A Boy : Doctor! Do you mean to say you mind what the doctor says? Let's be off, it is getting late.

Amal : Don't go. Play on the road near this window? I could watch you then.

A Boy : What can we play at here?

Amal : With all these toys of mine that are lying about. Here you are, have them. I can't play alone. They are getting dirty and are of no use to me.

Boys : How Jolly! What fine toys! Look, here's a ship. There's old mother Jatai. Isn't this a gorgeous sepoy? And you'll let us have them all? You don't really mind?

Amal : No, not a bit; have them by all means.

A Boy : You don't want them back?

Amal : Oh, no, I shan't want them.

A Boy : Say, won't you get a scolding for this?

Amal : No one will scold me. But will you play with them in front of our door for a while every morning? I'll get you new ones when these are old.

A Boy : Oh, yes we will. I say, put these sepoy into a line. We'll play at war; where can we get a musket? Oh, look here, this bit of reed will do nicely. Say, but you're off to sleep already.

Amal : I'm afraid I'm sleepy. I don't know, I feel like it at times. I have been sitting a long while and I'm tired; my back aches.

A Boy : It's hardly midday now. How it is you're sleepy? Listen The gong's sounding the first watch.

Amal : Yes, dong, dong, dong, it tolls me to sleep.

A Boy : We had better go then. We'll come in again tomorrow morning.

Amal : I want to ask you something before you go. You are always out—do you know of the King's postmen?

Boys : Yes, quite well.

Amal : Who are they? Tell me their names.

A Boy : One's Badal.

Another : Another's Sarat.

Boy

Another : There's so many of them.

Boy

Amal : Do you think they will know me if there's a letter for me?

A Boy : Surely, if your name's on the letter they will find you out.

Amal : When you call in tomorrow morning, will you bring one of them along so that he'll know me?

A Boy : Yes, if you like.

Act II
(Amal in Bed)

Amal : Can't I go near the window today, Uncle? Would the doctor mind that too?

Madhav : Yes, darling, you see you've made yourself worse squatting there day after day.

Amal : Oh, no, I don't know if it's made me more ill, but I always feel well when I'm there.

Madhav : No, you don't; you squat there make friends with the whole lot of people round here, old and yung, as if they are holding a fair right under my eaves—flesh and blood won't stand that strain. Just see— your face is quite pale.

Amal : Uncle, I fear my Fakir'll pass and not see me by the window.

Madhav : Your Fakir, whoever's that?

Amal : He comes and chats to me of the many lands where he's been. I love to hear him.

Madhav : How's that? I don't know of any Fakirs.

Amal : This is about the time he comes in. I beg of you, by your feet, ask him in for a moment to talk to me here.

(Gaffer enters in a Fakir's Guise)

Amal : There you are. Come here, Fakir, by my bedside.

Madhav : Upon my word, but this is—

Gaffer : I am the Fakir.
(winking hard)

Madhav : It beats my reckoning what you're not.

Amal : Where have you been this time, Fakir?

Gaffer : To the Isle of Parrots. I am just back.

Madhav : The Parrots' Isle!

Gaffer : Is it so very astonishing? I am not like you. A journey doesn't cost a thing. I tramp just where I like.

Amal (clapping): How jolly for you! Remember your promise to take me with you as follower when I'm well.

Gaffer : Of course, and I'll teach you so many travellers' secrets that nothing in sea or forest or mountain can bar your way.

Madhav : What's all this rigmarole?

Gaffer : Amal, my dear, I bow to nothing in sea or mountain; but if the doctor joins in with this uncle of yours, then I with all my magic must own myself beaten.

Amal : No. Uncle won't tell the doctor. And I promise to lie quiet: but the day I am well, off I go with the Fakir, and nothing in sea or mountain or torrent shall stand in my way.

Madhav : Fie, dear child, don't keep on harping upon going! It makes me so sad to hear you talk so.

Amal : Tell me, Fakir, what the Parrots' Isle is like.

Gaffer : It's a land of wonders: it's a haunt of birds. No men are there; and they neither speak nor

walk, they simply sing and they fly.

Amal : How glorious! And it's by some sea?

Gaffer : Of course, It's on the sea.

Amal : And green hills are there.

Gaffer : Indeed, they live among the green hills; and in the time of the sunset when there is a red glow on the hillside, all the birds with their green wings go flocking to their nests.

Amal : And there are waterfalls!

Gaffer : Dear me, of course; you don't have a hill without its waterfalls. Oh, it's like molten diamonds; and, my dear, what dances they have! Don't they make the pebbles sing as they rush over them to the sea. No devil of a doctor can stop them for a moment. The birds looked upon me as nothing but a man, merely a trifling creature without wings—and they would have nothing to do with me. Were it not so I would build a small cabin for myself among their crowd of nests and pass my days counting the sea waves.

Amal : How I wish I were a bird! then—

Gaffer : But that would have been a bit of a job; I hear you've fixed up with the dairyman to be a hawker of curds when you grow up; I'm afraid such business won't flourish among birds; you might land yourself into serious loss.

Madhav : Really this is too much. Between you two I shall turn crazy. Now, I'm off.

Amal : Has the dairyman been. Uncle?

Madhav : And why shouldn't he? He won't brother his head running errands for your pet Fakir, in and out among the nests in his Parrots' Isle. But he has left a jar of curds for you saying that he is busy with his niece's wedding in the village, and has to order a band at Kamlipara.

Amal : But he is going to marry me to his little niece.

Gaffer : Dear me, we are in a fix now.

Amal : He said she would be my lovely little bride with a pair of pearl drops in her ears and dressed in a lovely red saree; and in the morning she would milk with her own hands the black cow and feed me with warm milk with foam on it from a brand new earthen cruse; and in the evenings she would carry the lamp round the cow-house, and then come and sit by me to tell me tales of Champa and his six brothers.

Gaffer : How charming! It would even tempt me, a hermit! But never mind, dear, about this wedding. Let it be. I tell you that when you marry there'll be no lack of nieces in his household.

Madhav : Shut up! This is more than I can stand.

(Exit.

Amal : Fakir, now that Uncle's off, just tell me, has the King sent me a letter to the Post Office?

Gaffer : I gather that his letter has already started; it is on the way here.

Amal : On the way? Where is it? Is it on that road winding through the trees which you can follow to the end of the forest when the sky is quite clear after rain?

Gaffer : That is where it is. You know all about it already.

Amal : I do, everything.

Gaffer : So I see, but how?

Amal : I can't say; but it's quite clear to me. I fancy I've seen it often in days long gone by. How long ago I can't tell. Do you know when? I can see it all: there, the King's postman coming down the hillside alone, a lantern in his left hand and on his back a bag of letters; climbing down for ever so long, for days and nights, and where at the foot of the mountain the waterfall becomes a stream he takes to the footpath on the bank and walks on through the rye; then comes the sugarcane field and he disappears into the narrow lane cutting through the tall stems of sugarcanes; then he reaches the open meadow where the cricket chirps and where there is not a single man to be seen, only the snipe wagging their tails and poking at the mud with their bills. I can feel him coming nearer and nearer and my heart becomes glad.

Gaffer : My eyes are not young; but you make me see all the same.

Amal : Say, Fakir, do you know the King who has this Post Office?

Gaffer : I do; I got to him for my alms every day.

Amal : Good! When I get well, I must have my alms too from him, mayn't I?

Gaffer : You won't need to ask, my dear, he'll give it to you of his own accord.

Amal : No, I will go to his gate and cry.

'Victory to thee, O King! And dancing to the tabor's sound, ask for alms. Won't it be nice?

Gaffer : It will be splendid, and if you're with me, I shall have my full share. But what will you ask?

Amal : I shall say, 'Make me your postman, that I may go about, lantern in hand, delivering your letters from door to door. Don't let me stay at home all day!

Gaffer : What is there to be sad for, my child, even were you to stay at home?

Amal : It isn't sad. When they shut me in here first I felt the day was so long. Since the King's Post Office was put there I like more and more being indoors, and as I think I shall get a letter one day, I feel quite happy and then I don't mind being quiet and alone. I wonder if I shall make out what'll be in the King's letter?

Gaffer : Even if you didn't wouldn't be enough if it just bore your name?

(Madhav enters)

Madhav : Have you any idea of the trouble you've got me into, between you two?

Gaffer : What's the matter?

Madhav : I hear you've let it get rumoured about that the King has planted his office here to send messages to both of you.

Gaffer : Well, what about it?

Madhav : Our headman Panchanan has had it told to the King anonymously.

Gaffer : Aren't we aware that everything reaches the King's ears?

Madhav : Then why don't you look out? Why take the King's name in vain? You'll bring me to

ruin if you do.

Amal : Say, Fakir, will the King be cross?

Gaffer : Cross, nonsense! And with a child like you and a Fakir such as I am. Let's see if the King be angry, and then won't I give him a piece of my mind.

Amal : Say, Fakir, I've been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. I long to be quiet, I don't feel like talking at all. Won't the King's letter come? Suppose this room melts away all of a sudden, suppose—

Gaffer : The letter's sure to come today, my boy.

(fanning Amal)

(Doctor enters)

Doctor: And how do you feel today?

Amal : Feel awfully well today, Doctor, All pain seems to have left me.

Doctor: Don't quite like the look of that smile. Bad sign that, this feeling well!

(aside to Chakradhan has observed—

Madhav)

Madhav : For goodness' sake, Doctor, leave Chakradhan alone. Tell me what's going to happen?

Doctor: Can't hold him in much longer, I fear! I warned you before—this looks like a fresh exposure.

Madhav : No, I've used the utmost care, never let him out of doors; and the windows have been shut almost all the time.

Doctor: There's a peculiar quality in the air today. As I came in I found a fearful draught through your front door. That's most hurtful. Better lock it at once. Would it matter if this kept your visitors off for two or three days? If someone happens to call unexpectedly—there's the back door. You had better shut this window as well, it's letting in the sunset rays only to keep the patient awake.

Madhav : Amal has shut his eyes. I expect he is sleeping. His face tells me—Oh, Doctor, I bring in a child who is a stranger and love him as my own, and now I suppose I must lose him!

Doctor: What's that? There's your headman sailing in!—What a brother! I must be going, brother. You had better stir about and see to the doors being properly fastened. I will send on a strong dose directly I get home. Try it on him—it may save him at last, if he can be saved at all.

(Exeunt Madhav and Doctor.)

(The Headman enters)

Headman : Hello, urchin!—

Gaffer : 'Sh, be quiet.

(rising hastily)

Amal : No Fakir, did you think I was asleep? I wasn't. I can hear every-thing; yes, and voices far away. I feel that mother and father are sitting by my pillow and speaking to me.

(Madhav enters)

Headman : I say, Madhav, I hear you hobnob with bigwigs now a days.

Madhav : Spare me your jokes. Headman, we are but common people.

Headman : But your child here is expecting a letter from the King.

Madhav : Don't you take any notice of him, a mere foolish boy!

Headman : Indeed, why not! It'll beat the King hard to find a better family! Don't you are why the King plants his new Post Office right before your window? Why, there's a letter for you from the King, urchin.

Amal : Indeed, really!

(starting up)

Headman : How can it be false? You're the King's chum. Here's your letter (showing a blank slip of paper). Ha, ha, ha! This is the letter.

Amal : Please don't mock me. Say, Fakir, is it so?

Gaffer : Yes, my dear. I as Fakir tell you it is his letter.

Amal : How is it I can't see? It all looks so blank to me. What is there in the letter, Mr. Headman?

Headman : The King says, 'I am calling on you shortly; you had better have puffed rice for me.—don't you joke about these things—

Gaffer : Joking indeed! He would not dare.

Madhav : Are you out of your mind too. Gaffer?

Gaffer : Our of my mind, well; then I am. I can read plainly that the King writes he will come himself to see Amal. With the State Physician.

Amal : Fakir, Fakir, 'sh, his trumpet! Can't you hear?

Headman : Ha! Ha! Ha! I fear he won't until he's a bit more off his head.

Amal : Mr. Headman, I thought you were cross with me and didn't love me. I never could have believed you would fetch me the King's letter. Let me wipe the dust off your feet.

Headman : This little child does have an instinct of reverence. Though a little silly, he has good heart.

Amal : It's hard on the fourth watch now, I suppose—Hark the gong, 'Dong, dong, ding—Dong, dong, ding.' Is the evening star up? How is it I can't see—

Gaffer : Oh, the windows are all shut, I'll open them.

(A Knocking outside)

Madhav : What's that?—Who is it?—What a bother!

Voice : Open the door.

(from outside)

Madhav : Headman—I hope they're not robbers.

Headman : Who's there?—It is Panchanan, the headman, who calls.—Aren't you afraid to

make that noise? Fancy! The noise has ceased! Panchanan's voice carries far.—
Yes, show me the biggest robbers!—

Madhav : No wonder the noise has ceased. They've smashed the outer door.

(peering out of

The window)

Herald: Our Sovereign King comes tonight!

Headman : My God!

Amal : At what hour of the night, Herald?

Herald: On the second watch.

Amal : When my friend the watchman will strike his gong, from the city gates, 'ding dong, ding, ding dong ding'— then?

Herald: Yes, then. The King sends his greatest physician to attend on his young friend.

(Royal Physician enters)

Royal Physician: What's this? How close it is here! Open wide all the doors and windows. (Feeling Amal's body.) How do you feel, my child?

Amal : I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.

Physician : Will you feel well enough to leave your bed when the King comes in the middle watches of the night?

Amal : Of course, I'm dying to be about for ever so long. I'll ask the King to find me the polar star.— I must have seen it often, but don't know exactly which it is.

Physician : He will tell you everything. (To Madhav.) Arrange flowers through the room for the King's visit? (Indicating the Headman.) We can't have that person in here.

Amal : No, let him be, Doctor. He is a friend. It was he who brought me the King's letter.

Physician : Very well, my child. He may remain if he is a friend of yours.

Madhav (whispering into Amal's ear)

: My child, the King loves you. He is coming himself. Beg for a gift from him. You know our humble circumstances.

Amal : Don't you worry, Uncle.—I've made up my mind about it.

Madhav : What is it, my child?

Amal : I shall ask him to make me one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door.

Madhav (slapping his forehead) : Alas, is that all?

Amal : What'll be our offerings to the King, Uncle, when he comes?

Herald: He has commanded puffed rice.

Amal : Puffed rice! Say, Headman, you're right. You said so. You knew all we didn't.

Headman : If you would send word to my house I could manage for the King's advent really nice—

Physician : No need at all. Now be quiet all of you. Sleep is coming over him. I'll sit by his

pillow; he's dropping asleep. Blow out the oil-lamp. Only let the starlight stream in.
Hush, he sleeps.

Madhav : What are you standing there for like a statue, folding your palms?— I am nervous.
—Say, are there good omens? Why are they darkening the room? How will starlight help?

Gaffer : Silence, unbeliever.

(Sudha enters)

Sudha : Amal!

Physician : He's asleep.

Sudha : I have some flowers for him. Mayn't I give them into his own hand?

Physician : Yes, you may.

Sudha : When will he be awake?

Physician : Directly the King comes and call him.

Sudha : Will you whisper a word for me in his ear?

Physician : What shall I say?

Sudha : Tell him Sudha has not forgotten him.

Curtain

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