

Chapter 17-The day before the match

Swami has run away from the house. He is feeling very lonely and wants to be back into the crowd and noise of the city. He is missing home, a lot. He is missing his cook making delicious food. Most of all, he is missing his mother. He is very hungry. He wished that he had not dropped out of school, and instead let the headmaster beat him with his cane. He had his thoughts set on going back home. It would just result in a little bit of scolding from his father. He wished he had not left home just 2 days before the match. He was worried about what Rajam would say if they would lose the match. He started to head back home. While heading back home, Swami takes a small wrong turn, and instead of reaching the trunk road, the path to home, Swami gets lost in the woods.

Even in these circumstances, Swami does not lose hope. He thinks that he would surely find the trunk road, not caring about how much time it could take.

As Swami is running continuously to find the trunk road and his way back home. He starts to hear sounds, the thudding of his footsteps, and every variation in them. After a while, he is thinking that he is hearing something like a sinister whisper calling him to make a dreadful sacrifice. He thinks that his own name is being called. His mind was giving him the thought that he had been encountered by a devil. But he then realized that the devil was nothing but a tree.

Swami reaches a road, where he notices all features of the familiar trunk road. But after noticing some of the unimportant features in this new road, Swami realizes that he is not in the trunk road, but in a distant separated road at midnight, lost utterly. Swami loses all hope of reaching the trunk road. Swami started weeping and shouting.

Sad and lonely Swami starts imagining things. He thinks that animals are attacking him. He suddenly finds himself in the cricket match, which they win, thanks to him

Ranga, a cartman, finds Swami lying in the forest. At first, he thinks that Swami is dead. But then he checked carefully and knew that Swami was alive. Ranga had many questions in his mind about Swami. He was a town boy nearly dead on a distant highway! Ranga decided to take him to the *sirkar* officer. He takes Swami in his cart and leaves for the way to the officer.

Swami wakes up and thinks that he is at home. Someone asks Swami whether he was alright. Swami gets delighted as he thinks that it is his father. That stranger asks him questions about himself. But Swami would take long to answer and then end up speaking incoherent and irrelevant things. The man soon gives up on asking him questions. Swami's head has tons of questions. He is unable even to identify whether this person is his father. This stranger was MR. N.P.S Nair, the District Forest Officer.

Even after all the terrors, he had gone through, Swami is up and active early in the morning. He is doing bowling practice with stones. Swami explains about the match with Y.M.U. He then asks about the day of the week it is.

Mr.Nair replies that it was Sunday, but quickly lies about it being a slip of the tongue and that it is Saturday after learning that the match is on Sunday.

Chapter 18-The Return

Swami had not seen the real cricket match in his dream. The Y.M.U had scored a whopping total of 86 runs. Rajam and the M.C.C are missing Swami as their best bowler. After the innings break, the game starts again at 2:30, while Swami is still not showing up for M.C.C. The M.C.C batsmen were struggling. Rajam is disheartened. His father tells Rajam about the safe return of Swami. Upon his father's question about whether Rajam wanted to go to Swami's house to deliver the letter about Swami's return, Rajam expressed his carelessness by saying no to that question. When Rajam gets back to the field, he decides to not tell Mani about Swami's return. Instead of continuing about the match, the writer switches to Swami's side of the story. Swami is back home where he is feeling majestic and flattered with the number of visitors that come to see him. All of the visitors express their happiness on Swami's return. Swami's father went out of the house with a few of his friends. Swami receives a remark from his father which he finds cruel about him not needing to find Swami again upon his return. Swami met more of the visitors, including his parents' and granny's friends. Swami receives delicious food items too. Swami told all his stories and everyone had a laugh. Swami feels sad about having not taken the leave of the forest office. He thinks that he should have at least said goodbye. The talk continues for a while.

The writer had not yet disclosed that Mani was also among the audience. Swami and Mani decide to go outside. Mani expresses his gladness on Swami being alive. Mani gives Swami a scolding about the fact that Swami had run away from the headmaster. Upon Mani's question on where Swami had been all that time, Swami's hesitation sows that he really did not know. Mani and Swami talk for a while about the fact that the cartman deserved a bag of gold and that Swami should have thanked the forest officer. As the talk reaches to sending the forest officer a letter, Swami tells Mani that he needs to write a nice letter to him for bringing him in time for the match.

Swami now learns the truth about MCC's bitter defeat. Swami's voice becomes very weak as he tells Mani that they had done the match on a Saturday(not really believing it anymore). When Swami tells Mani about what the forest officer had said about it being a Saturday. Upon Mani's reply, innocent Swami says that he won't write a letter to MR.NAIR because of his deceptivity. Swami started weeping when Mani told Swami that Rajam was angry with him. Mani refused Swami's request to convey his explanations to Rajam. In the conversation, we also learn that Swami would go to Board High School Again.

Chapter 18-Parting gift

The chapter starts by expressing Swami's will to meet Rajam one last time before the train leaves from Malgudi station.

Swami wakes up an hour before the train would arrive, at 5:00 A.M.
(the night before)

Swami had no knowledge about it until Mani had told Swami about Rajam going away late at night the day before. Mani had been restricted to tell that to Swami, but Mani's impatience and fury got the better out of him. This was all because Rajam's father had been transferred to

Trichinopoly. Swami was almost in tears at the very thought of Rajam going away. Swami was feeling a mixture of emotions. Swami was sad but also feeling guilty that he had not met Rajam after his return. He had just turned back all the way from the front door! Swami had also learned that Mani wouldn't accompany him to the train ride, because he would be sleeping with Rajam. This made Swami feel jealous and lonely. Swami wanted to give Rajam a present. The first thing worth giving to Rajam he saw was the train engine Rajam himself had given him. But he put it back because of two things. He loved the engine and Rajam might find it an insult to have a present returned. In the end, he decided to give Rajam a book, Swami's most respected one, 'Andersen's Fairy Tales.'

(back to the morning)

Swami reaches Malgudi station when it is half dark. Swami sees Rajam's car, consisting of Rajam, his parents, and a stranger. All Swami's determination shrinks away upon the sight of Rajam. But there are too many security guards around Rajam, that it made him unapproachable. Then Rajam and his family get on the train. (This is beautifully written, almost in slow-motion by the writer) then Swami finds Mani. He has a brief talk with him. He then asks whether Rajam would speak to him, to which Mani gives a positive reply. Then in the dramatic ending, Mani says goodbye from Swami's side and passes the book to Rajam. Rajam waves back to Swami and the train leaves, carrying Rajam away forever.