AI Summaries of Tagore's Short Stories

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March 16, 2024

Chapter 1

A Problem Solved

1.1 Original Story

Krishnagopal Sarkar of the village of Jhinkrakota handed over the running of his estate and his other responsibilities to his elder son, and set off for Benares. His humble tenants wept bitterly at losing him: so liberal and pious a landlord was rare indeed in the age of Kali.

His son Bipinbihari was a modern, sophisticated BA. He had a beard, wore glasses, and did not mix much with others. He was highly virtuous: he never even smoked or played cards. His manner was courteous and affable – but in fact he was a very hard man, and his tenants quickly felt the effect of this. The old landlord had been lenient with them; but with his son there was no hope of a paisa's exemption from debt or rent, on whatever grounds. They had to pay on the nail, without a single day's leeway.

When Bipinbihari took over, he found that his father had frequently released land to Brahmins free of rent, and many people had had their rent reduced. If anyone came with a plea of some kind, he was never able to refuse it: this was his weakness.

'It won't do,' said Bipinbihari. 'I can't let half the estate go rent-free.' He reached two separate conclusions. Firstly, workshy people who sat at home growing fat on rent from land they had sublet were in most cases useless and deserved no pity. Charity to the likes of them simply gave refuge to idlers. Secondly, it was much harder to ensure an income than in his father and grandfather's time. There was much more scarcity. It cost four times as much to preserve a gentleman's dignity as it had in the past. His father's open-handed, happy-go-lucky scattering of assets would not do now; on the contrary, they should now be retrieved and expanded. Bipinbihari began to do what his conscience told him – that is, he began to act according to 'principle'.1 Whatever had gone out of the house, bit by bit came in again. He allowed very few of the rent-free tenancies to continue, ensuring that even these would not be permanent.

In Benares, Krishnagopal heard, through letters, of his tenants' distress: some of them actually went and appealed to him personally. He wrote to Bipinbihari saying that what

he was doing was deplorable. Bipinbihari replied that formerly when gifts had been made various things were received in return. There had been a reciprocal relationship between zamindar and tenants. Recently laws had been passed that banned anything being given in return other than straightforward rent: a zamindar's rights and privileges, other than rent, had been abolished. So what else could he do but keep a close eye on his dues? If the tenants gave him nothing extra, why should he give extra to them? The landlord-tenant relationship was now purely commercial. He would go bankrupt if he went on being so charitable: it would be impossible to maintain either his property or his ancestral dignity.

Krishnagopal pondered deeply on the way that the times had so greatly changed, and concluded that the rules of his own era no longer applied to what the younger generation had to do. If one tried to interfere from a distance, they would say, 'Take back your property then; we can't manage it in any other manner.' What was the point? It was better to devote what was left of one's life to God.

II Things went on like this. After a great deal of litigation, wrangling and argument, Bipinbihari had arranged nearly everything as he wanted. Most tenants were afraid to resist his pressure; Mirja Bibi's son Achimaddi Bisvas was the only one who refused to give in.

Bipinbihari's attacks on him were the most severe of all. Land given away to a Brahmin could be justified by tradition, but it was impossible to see why this son of a Muslim widow should be given land free or nearly free. True, he had won a scholarship and learnt a little at school, but this did not give him the right to be so above himself. Bipin learnt from the older staff on the estate that the family had received favours from the landlord for a long time – they did not know exactly why. Maybe the widow had gone to him with tales of woe, and he had taken pity on her. But to Bipin the favours seemed highly inappropriate. Never having seen the family's former poverty, he looked at their prosperity and arrogance and felt they had cheated his soft-hearted, unsuspecting father – had stolen some of the zamindar's wealth.

Achimaddi was a very confident young man. He was determined not to budge an inch from his rights, and a fierce contest developed. His widowed mother urged repeatedly that it was stupid to take on the zamindar: they had been protected so far - it was best to have faith in that protection, and give the landlord what he wanted. 'You don't understand these things, Mother,' said Achimaddi.

Achimaddi lost at each stage as the case went through the courts. But the more he lost, the more his tenacity increased. He staked all he had on keeping all that he had.

One afternoon Mirja Bibi came with a small present of garden vegetables and met Bipinbihari privately. Casting her plaintive eyes on him as if caressing him with her motherly gaze, she said, 'You are like my son – may Allah preserve you. Do not ruin Achim, my dear – there'll be no virtue in that. I consign him to you: think of him as an unruly younger brother. Son, do not begrudge him a tiny piece of your untold wealth!'

Bipin was furious with the woman for impertinently using the privilege of age to speak so familiarly to him. 'You're a woman,' he said, 'you don't understand these things. If you've anything to tell me, send your son.' Mirja Bibi had now been told by another's

son as well as her own that she didn't understand these things. Praying to Allah, dabbing at her eyes, the widow returned to her house.

III The case went from the criminal court to the civil court, from the civil court to the district court, from the district court to the High Court. It continued for nearly eighteen months. By the time that Achimaddi was awarded a partial victory in the appeal court, he was up to his neck in debt. Moreover, he had escaped from the tiger on the river-bank only to be assailed by the crocodile in the river. The money-lenders chose this moment to put the court's decree into action. A day was fixed for the auctioning of all that Achimaddi had.

The day was Monday, market-day on the bank of a small river near by. The river was high during the monsoon, so some of the trading was on the bank, some of it in boats: the hubbub was continuous. Among the produce of the season, jackfruit was especially plentiful, and there was lots of hilsa-fish too. The sky was cloudy: many of the traders, fearing rain, stuck bamboo-poles into the ground and stretched canopies over their stalls.

Achimaddi had also come to do some shopping, but without a paisa in his hand: no one would sell to him even on credit. He had brought a kitchen-chopper and a brass plate, hoping to raise money by pawning them.

Bipinbihari had strolled out to take the evening air, attended by a couple of body-guards with lāthis. Attracted by the crowd, he decided to visit the market. He was just – out of interest – questioning Dvari the oilman about his earnings, when Achimaddi came at him charging and roaring like a tiger, brandishing his chopper. The stallholders intervened and quickly disarmed him. He was soon handed over to the police, and the trading in the market continued as before.

It cannot be said that Bipinbihari was unhappy at this turn of events. For a hunted animal to turn and have a go at the hunter is an atrocious breach of etiquette; but never mind, the fellow would receive his due punishment. The women of Bipin's household were outraged by the episode. The fellow was an impudent scoundrel! The prospect of his punishment, though, consoled them.

Meanwhile, that same evening, Mirja Bibi's house – foodless, childless – grew darker than death. Everyone forgot what had happened, had their dinner and went to bed: only for one old woman was it more significant than anything else, yet there was no one in the whole world to fight against it except for her: a few old bones and a frightened, bitter heart in an unlit hut!

IV Three days passed. On the next there was to be a hearing before the

Deputy Magistrate. Bipin himself was to give evidence. He had no objection, even though the zamindar had never appeared in the witnessbox before. That morning at the appointed time, he put on a turban and watch-chain and with great ostentation was carried in a palanquin to the court. The court-room was packed: there had not been such a sensational case for a long time.

Just before the case was to be heard, an attendant came up to Bipinbihari and said something in his ear: somewhat flustered, saying he was needed outside, he left the court-

room. Outside, he saw his aged father standing a little way off under a banyan tree. He was barefoot, wore a nāmābali, and carried a Krishna-rosary: his slender body seemed to glow with kindness; calm compassion for the world shone from his brow. In his chapkan, jobbā and tight fitting pantaloons, Bipin had difficulty in doing obeisance to his father. His turban slipped over his nose, and his watch fell out of his pocket. Fumbling to replace them, he invited his father to step into a lawyer's house near by. 'No,' said Krishnagopal, 'what I need to say can be said here.'

Bipin's attendants drove curious bystanders away. 'Everything must be done to release Achim,' said Krishnagopal, 'and the property taken from him should be returned.'

'Have you come all the way from Benares just to say this?' asked Bipin, amazed. 'Why do you favour him so much?'

'What would be the point of telling you why?' said Krishnagopal.

Bipin was insistent. 'I've managed to retrieve gifts of land from many whom I felt were unworthy of them, Brahmins among them – and you didn't turn a hair. So why have you gone to such lengths over this Muslim fellow? If, having gone so far, I release Achim and hand back everything, what shall I say to people?'

Krishnagopal was silent for a while. Then, fiddling nervously with his rosary, he said in a quavering voice, 'If a frank explanation is necessary, tell them that Achimaddi is your brother – my son.'

'By a Muslim mother?' said Bipin in horror.

'Yes, my boy,' said Krishnagopal.

Bipin was flabbergasted. At length he said, 'You can tell me everything later. Please come home now.'

'No,' said Krishnagopal, 'I shall not live at home ever again. I'm returning to Benares at once. Please do whatever your conscience permits.' Blessing him, fighting back tears, unsteady on his feet, Krishnagopal set off back.

Bipin could not think of what to say or do. He stood in silence. But at least he understood now what morals were like in the old days! How superior he was to his father in education and character! This was what happened when people had no 'principles'! As he walked back to the court, he saw Achim waiting outside – drained, exhausted, pale, whitelipped, red-eyed – captive between two guards, clad in dirty rags. And this was Bipin's brother!

Bipin was friendly with the Deputy Magistrate. The case was dismissed on a technicality, and within a few days Achim was restored to his former circumstances. But he did not understand the reason, and other people were surprised too.

It soon got about, however, that Krishnagopal had appeared at the time of the trial. All sorts of rumours circulated. Shrewd lawyers guessed the truth of the matter. Among them, the lawyer Ramtaran had been brought up and educated at Krishnagopal's expense.

He had all along suspected – and now he could see clearly – that if you looked carefully, even the most respectable could be caught out. However much a man might finger his rosary, he was probably as much of a rogue as anyone else. The difference between the respectable and the unrespectable was that the former were hypocrites and the latter were not. In deciding, however, that Krishnagopal's famous generosity and piety were a sly façade, Ramtaran found that an old and difficult problem had been solved and, in addition, felt – through what logic I do not know – that the burden of gratitude was lifted from his shoulders. What a relief!

1.2 Summary

The short story revolves around the generational clash between Krishnagopal Sarkar and his son Bipinbihari, set in the village of Jhinkrakota. Krishnagopal, a kind and pious landlord, hands over the management of his estate to his son and embarks on a journey to Benares. However, Bipinbihari, although outwardly virtuous, proves to be a hard and pragmatic man, devoid of his father's leniency towards tenants.

Bipinbihari's approach to land management starkly contrasts with his father's. He seeks to retrieve and expand the family's assets, showing little mercy to tenants and disregarding his father's charitable practices. As tensions escalate between Bipinbihari and his tenants, particularly Achimaddi Bisvas, a fierce legal battle ensues over land rights.

Achimaddi, the son of a Muslim widow, adamantly defends his rights against Bipinbihari's relentless pressure. Despite facing defeat in court, Achimaddi refuses to yield, leading to his eventual financial ruin and the impending auctioning of his possessions.

The narrative takes a significant turn when Krishnagopal intervenes unexpectedly during Achimaddi's trial. It is revealed that Achimaddi is actually Krishnagopal's illegitimate son, born to a Muslim mother. This revelation forces Bipinbihari to confront his own moral principles and prejudices.

Ultimately, Krishnagopal's appearance at the trial prompts Bipinbihari to reconsider his actions. The case is dismissed, and Achimaddi is restored to his former circumstances. The story concludes with the realization that appearances can be deceiving, and true morality transcends societal norms and prejudices.

The narrative style of the story is characterized by its rich portrayal of characters and the exploration of complex themes such as generational conflict, moral ambiguity, and the changing dynamics of landlord-tenant relationships. The unexpected twist in the plot adds depth to the narrative, challenging readers to reevaluate their perceptions of morality and justice.

Chapter 2

Babus of Nayanjore

2.1 Original Story

Once upon a time the Babus at Nayanjore were famous landholders. They were noted for their princely extravagance. They would tear off the rough border of their Dacca muslin, because it rubbed against their delicate skin. They could spend many thousands of rupees over the wedding of a kitten. And on a certain grand occasion it is alleged that in order to turn night into day they lighted numberless lamps and showered silver threads from the sky to imitate sunlight.

Those were the days before the flood. The flood came. The line of succession among these old-world Babus, with their lordly habits, could not continue for long. Like a lamp with too many wicks burning, the oil flared away quickly, and the light went out.

Kailas Babu, our neighbour, is the last relic of this extinct magnificence. Before he grew up, his family had very nearly reached its lowest ebb. When his father died, there was one dazzling outburst of funeral extravagance, and then insolvency. The property was sold to liquidate the debt. What little ready money was left over was altogether insufficient to keep up the past ancestral splendours.

Kailas Babu left Nayanjore and came to Calcutta. His son did not remain long in this world of faded glory. He died, leaving behind him an only daughter.

In Calcutta we are Kailas Babu's neighbours. Curiously enough our own family history is just the opposite of his. My father got his money by his own exertions, and prided himself on never spending a penny more than was needed. His clothes were those of a working man, and his hands also. He never had any inclination to earn the title of Babu by extravagant display; and I myself, his only son, owe him gratitude for that. He gave me the very best education, and I was able to make my way in the world. I am not ashamed of the fact that I am a self-made man. Crisp bank-notes in my safe are dearer to me than a long pedigree in an empty family chest.

I believe this was why I disliked seeing Kailas Babu drawing his heavy cheques on the public credit from the bankrupt bank of his ancient Babu reputation. I used to fancy

that he looked down on me, because my father had earned money with his own hands.

I ought to have noticed that no one showed any vexation towards Kailas Babu except myself. Indeed it would have been difficult to find an old man who did less harm than he. He was always ready with his kindly little acts of courtesy in times of sorrow and joy. He would join in all the ceremonies and religious observances of his neighbours. His familiar smile would greet young and old alike. His politeness in asking details about domestic affairs was untiring. The friends who met him in the street were perforce ready to be button-holed, while a long string of questions of this kind followed one another from his lips:

"My dear friend, I am delighted to see you. Are you quite well? How is Shashi? And Dada–is he all right? Do you know, I've only just heard that Madhu's son has got fever. How is he? Have you heard? And Hari Charan Babu–I have not seen him for a long time–I hope he is not ill. What's the matter with Rakkhal? And er–er, how are the ladies of your family?"

Kailas Babu was spotlessly neat in his dress on all occasions, though his supply of clothes was sorely limited. Every day he used to air his shirts and vests and coats and trousers carefully, and put them out in the sun, along with his bed-quilt, his pillowcase, and the small carpet on which he always sat. After airing them he would shake them, and brush them, and put them carefully away. His little bits of furniture made his small room decent, and hinted that there was more in reserve if needed. Very often, for want of a servant, he would shut up his house for a while. Then he would iron out his shirts and linen with his own hands, and do other little menial tasks. After this he would open his door and receive his friends again.

Though Kailas Babu, as I have said, had lost all his landed property, he had still some family heirlooms left. There was a silver cruet for sprinkling scented water, a filigree box for otto-of-roses, a small gold salver, a costly ancient shawl, and the old-fashioned ceremonial dress and ancestral turban. These he had rescued with the greatest difficulty from the money-lenders' clutches. On every suitable occasion he would bring them out in state, and thus try to save the world-famed dignity of the Babus of Nayanjore. At heart the most modest of men, in his daily speech he regarded it as a sacred duty, owed to his rank, to give free play to his family pride. His friends would encourage this trait in his character with kindly good-humour, and it gave them great amusement.

The neighbourhood soon learnt to call him their Thakur Dada. They would flock to his house and sit with him for hours together. To prevent his incurring any expense, one or other of his friends would bring him tobacco and say: "Thakur Dada, this morning some tobacco was sent to me from Gaya. Do take it and see how you like it."

Thakur Dada would take it and say it was excellent. He would then go on to tell of a certain exquisite tobacco which they once smoked in the old days of Nayanjore at the cost of a guinea an ounce.

"I wonder," he used to say, "if any one would like to try it now. I have some left, and can get it at once."

Every one knew that, if they asked for it, then somehow or other the key of the

cupboard would be missing; or else Ganesh, his old family servant, had put it away somewhere.

"You never can be sure," he would add, "where things go to when servants are about. Now, this Ganesh of mine,–I can't tell you what a fool he is, but I haven't the heart to dismiss him."

Ganesh, for the credit of the family, was quite ready to bear all the blame without a word.

One of the company usually said at this point: "Never mind, Thakur Dada. Please don't trouble to look for it. This tobacco we're smoking will do quite well. The other would be too strong."

Then Thakur Dada would be relieved and settle down again, and the talk would go on.

When his guests got up to go away, Thakur Dada would accompany them to the door and say to them on the door-step: "Oh, by the way, when are you all coming to dine with me?"

One or other of us would answer: "Not just yet, Thakur Dada, not just yet. We'll fix a day later."

"Quite right," he would answer. "Quite right. We had much better wait till the rains come. It's too hot now. And a grand rich dinner such as I should want to give you would upset us in weather like this."

But when the rains did come, every one was very careful not to remind him of his promise. If the subject was brought up, some friend would suggest gently that it was very inconvenient to get about when the rains were so severe, and therefore it would be much better to wait till they were over. Thus the game went on.

Thakur Dada's poor lodging was much too small for his position, and we used to condole with him about it. His friends would assure him they quite understood his difficulties: it was next to impossible to get a decent house in Calcutta. Indeed, they had all been looking out for years for a house to suit him. But, I need hardly add, no friend had been foolish enough to find one. Thakur Dada used to say, with a sigh of resignation: "Well, well, I suppose I shall have to put up with this house after all." Then he would add with a genial smile: "But, you know, I could never bear to be away from my friends. I must be near you. That really compensates for everything."

Somehow I felt all this very deeply indeed. I suppose the real reason was, that when a man is young, stupidity appears to him the worst of crimes. Kailas Babu was not really stupid. In ordinary business matters every one was ready to consult him. But with regard to Nayanjore his utterances were certainly void of common sense. Because, out of amused affection for him, no one contradicted his impossible statements, he refused to keep them in bounds. When people recounted in his hearing the glorious history of Nayanjore with absurd exaggerations, he would accept all they said with the utmost gravity, and never doubted, even in his dreams, that any one could disbelieve it.

II

When I sit down and try to analyse the thoughts and feelings that I had towards Kailas Babu, I see that there was a still deeper reason for my dislike. I will now explain.

Though I am the son of a rich man, and might have wasted time at college, my industry was such that I took my M.A. degree in Calcutta University when quite young. My moral character was flawless. In addition, my outward appearance was so handsome, that if I were to call myself beautiful, it might be thought a mark of self-estimation, but could not be considered an untruth.

There could be no question that among the young men of Bengal I was regarded by parents generally as a very eligible match. I was myself quite clear on the point and had determined to obtain my full value in the marriage market. When I pictured my choice, I had before my mind's eye a wealthy father's only daughter, extremely beautiful and highly educated. Proposals came pouring in to me from far and near; large sums in cash were offered. I weighed these offers with rigid impartiality in the delicate scales of my own estimation. But there was no one fit to be my partner. I became convinced, with the poet Bhabavuti, that,

In this world's endless time and boundless space One may be born at last to match my sovereign grace.

But in this puny modern age, and this contracted space of modern Bengal, it was doubtful if the peerless creature existed as yet.

Meanwhile my praises were sung in many tunes, and in different metres, by designing parents.

Whether I was pleased with their daughters or not, this worship which they offered was never unpleasing. I used to regard it as my proper due, because I was so good. We are told that when the gods withhold their boons from mortals they still expect their worshippers to pay them fervent honour and are angry if it is withheld. I had that divine expectance strongly developed in myself.

I have already mentioned that Thakur Dada had an only grand-daughter. I had seen her many times, but had never mistaken her for beautiful. No thought had ever entered my mind that she would be a possible partner for myself. All the same, it seemed quite certain to me that some day or other Kailas Babu would offer her, with all due worship, as an oblation at my shrine. Indeed–this was the inner secret of my dislike–I was thoroughly annoyed that he had not done so already.

I heard that Thakur Dada had told his friends that the Babus of Nayanjore never craved a boon. Even if the girl remained unmarried, he would not break the family tradition. It was this arrogance of his that made me angry. My indignation smouldered for some time. But I remained perfectly silent and bore it with the utmost patience, because I was so good.

As lightning accompanies thunder, so in my character a flash of humour was mingled with the mutterings of my wrath. It was, of course, impossible for me to punish the

old man merely to give vent to my rage; and for a long time I did nothing at all. But suddenly one day such an amusing plan came into my head, that I could not resist the temptation of carrying it into effect.

I have already said that many of Kailas Babu's friends used to flatter the old man's vanity to the full. One, who was a retired Government servant, had told him that whenever he saw the Chota LAct Sahib he always asked for the latest news about the Babus of Nayanjore, and the Chota LAct had been heard to say that in all Bengal the only really respectable families were those of the Maharaja of Cossipore and the Babus of Nayanjore. When this monstrous falsehood was told to Kailas Babu he was extremely gratified and often repeated the story. And wherever after that he met this Government servant in company he would ask, along with other questions:

"Oh! er–by the way, how is the Chota LAct Sahib? Quite well, did you say? Ah, yes, I am so delighted to hear it! And the dear Mem Sahib, is she quite well too? Ah, yes! and the little children–are they quite well also? Ah, yes! that's very good news! Be sure and give them my compliments when you see them."

Kailas Babu would constantly express his intention of going some day and paying a visit to the Lord Sahib. But it may be taken for granted that many Chota LActs and Burra LActs also would come and go, and much water would pass down the Hoogly, before the family coach of Nayanjore would be furbished up to pay a visit to Government House.

One day I took Kailas Babu aside and told him in a whisper: "Thakur Dada, I was at the Levee yesterday, and the Chota LAct Sahib happened to mention the Babus of Nayanjore. I told him that Kailas Babu had come to town. Do you know, he was terribly hurt because you hadn't called. He told me he was going to put etiquette on one side and pay you a private visit himself this very afternoon."

Anybody else could have seen through this plot of mine in a moment. And, if it had been directed against another person, Kailas Babu would have understood the joke. But after all that he had heard from his friend the Government servant, and after all his own exaggerations, a visit from the Lieutenant-Governor seemed the most natural thing in the world. He became highly nervous and excited at my news. Each detail of the coming visit exercised him greatly,–most of all his own ignorance of English. How on earth was that difficulty to be met? I told him there was no difficulty at all: it was aristocratic not to know English: and, besides, the Lieutenant-Governor always brought an interpreter with him, and he had expressly mentioned that this visit was to be private.

About midday, when most of our neighbours are at work, and the rest are asleep, a carriage and pair stopped before the lodging of Kailas Babu. Two flunkeys in livery came up the stairs, and announced in a loud voice, "The Chota LAct Sahib has arrived!" Kailas Babu was ready, waiting for him, in his old-fashioned ceremonial robes and ancestral turban, and Ganesh was by his side, dressed in his master's best suit of clothes for the occasion.

When the Chota LAct Sahib was announced, Kailas Babu ran panting and puffing and trembling to the door, and led in a friend of mine, in disguise, with repeated salaams,

bowing low at each step and walking backward as best he could. He had his old family shawl spread over a hard wooden chair and he asked the LAct Sahib to be seated. He then made a high-flown speech in Urdu, the ancient Court language of the Sahibs, and presented on the golden salver a string of gold mohurs, the last relics of his broken fortune. The old family servant Ganesh, with an expression of awe bordering on terror, stood behind with the scent-sprinkler, drenching the LAct Sahib, and touched him gingerly from time to time with the otto-of-roses from the filigree box.

Kailas Babu repeatedly expressed his regret at not being able to receive His Honour Bahadur with all the ancestral magnificence of his own family estate at Nayanjore. There he could have welcomed him properly with due ceremonial. But in Calcutta he was a mere stranger and sojourner,–in fact a fish out of water.

My friend, with his tall silk hat on, very gravely nodded. I need hardly say that according to English custom the hat ought to have been removed inside the room. But my friend did not dare to take it off for fear of detection: and Kailas Babu and his old servant Ganesh were sublimely unconscious of the breach of etiquette.

After a ten minutes' interview, which consisted chiefly of nodding the head, my friend rose to his feet to depart. The two flunkeys in livery, as had been planned beforehand, carried off in state the string of gold mohurs, the gold salver, the old ancestral shawl, the silver scent-sprinkler, and the otto-of-roses filigree box; they placed them ceremoniously in the carriage. Kailas Babu regarded this as the usual habit of Chota LAct Sahibs.

I was watching all the while from the next room. My sides were aching with suppressed laughter. When I could hold myself in no longer, I rushed into a further room, suddenly to discover, in a corner, a young girl sobbing as if her heart would break. When she saw my uproarious laughter she stood upright in passion, flashing the lightning of her big dark eyes in mine, and said with a tear-choked voice: "Tell me! What harm has my grandfather done to you? Why have you come to deceive him? Why have you come here? Why—-"

She could say no more. She covered her face with her hands and broke into sobs.

My laughter vanished in a moment. It had never occurred to me that there was anything but a supremely funny joke in this act of mine, and here I discovered that I had given the cruellest pain to this tenderest little heart. All the ugliness of my cruelty rose up to condemn me. I slunk out of the room in silence, like a kicked dog.

Hitherto I had only looked upon Kusum, the grand-daughter of Kailas Babu, as a somewhat worthless commodity in the marriage market, waiting in vain to attract a husband. But now I found, with a shock of surprise, that in the corner of that room a human heart was beating.

The whole night through I had very little sleep. My mind was in a tumult. On the next day, very early in the morning, I took all those stolen goods back to Kailas Babu's lodgings, wishing to hand them over in secret to the servant Ganesh. I waited outside the door, and, not finding any one, went upstairs to Kailas Babu's room. I heard from the passage Kusum asking her grandfather in the most winning voice: "Dada, dearest, do tell me all that the Chota LAct Sahib said to you yesterday. Don't leave out a single

word. I am dying to hear it all over again."

And Dada needed no encouragement. His face beamed over with pride as he related all manner of praises which the LAct Sahib had been good enough to utter concerning the ancient families of Nayanjore. The girl was seated before him, looking up into his face, and listening with rapt attention. She was determined, out of love for the old man, to play her part to the full.

My heart was deeply touched, and tears came to my eyes. I stood there in silence in the passage, while Thakur Dada finished all his embellishments of the Chota LAct Sahib's wonderful visit. When he left the room at last, I took the stolen goods and laid them at the feet of the girl and came away without a word.

Later in the day I called again to see Kailas Babu himself. According to our ugly modern custom, I had been in the habit of making no greeting at all to this old man when I came into the room. But on this day I made a low bow and touched his feet. I am convinced the old man thought that the coming of the Chota LAct Sahib to his house was the cause of my new politeness. He was highly gratified by it, and an air of benign serenity shone from his eyes. His friends had looked in, and he had already begun to tell again at full length the story of the Lieutenant-Governor's visit with still further adornments of a most fantastic kind. The interview was already becoming an epic, both in quality and in length.

When the other visitors had taken their leave, I made my proposal to the old man in a humble manner. I told him that, "though I could never for a moment hope to be worthy of marriage connection with such an illustrious family, yet ... etc. etc."

When I made clear my proposal of marriage, the old man embraced me and broke out in a tumult of joy: "I am a poor man, and could never have expected such great good fortune."

That was the first and last time in his life that Kailas Babu confessed to being poor. It was also the first and last time in his life that he forgot, if only for a single moment, the ancestral dignity that belongs to the Babus of Nayanjore.