

# Snapshots

Supplementary Reader  
in English for Class XI  
(Core Course)



The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse  
The Tale of Melon City  
The Ghat of the Only World  
and other stories

# **SNAPSHOTS**

*Supplementary Reader in English  
for Class XI  
(Core Course)*



11073



**राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्**  
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## Foreword

THE National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy of Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-table is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days are actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this supplementary reader proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the time available for teaching. The book attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hard work done by the textbook development committee responsible for this book. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the advisory group in languages, Professor Namwar Singh and the Chief Advisor for this book, Professor R. Amritavalli for guiding the work of this committee. Several teachers contributed to the development of this book; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, materials and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinements.

New Delhi  
*20 December 2005*

*Director*  
National Council of Educational  
Research and Training

## About the Book

THIS supplementary reader, based on the English syllabus for Class XI, is prepared on the lines suggested by the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2005.

For young adults, awareness of personal development and growing independence begins at the higher secondary stage. It is during this period that they seek to understand themselves and the society in which they live. Literature plays an important role in moulding young minds. The choice of stories and biographical sketches in *Snapshots* by contemporary writers exposes learners to the various narratives of life that the literatures of the world offer.

The stories deal with a range of human predicaments: moral choices in adolescents, as in William Saroyan's 'The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse'; the poignancy of personal loss and reconciliation that follows war in Marga Minco's 'The Address'; language and imperialism invading the rural setting in 'Ranga's Marriage' by Masti Venkatesha Iyengar; and professional commitment in A.J. Cronin's 'Birth', an excerpt from the novel *The Citadel*. We also have J.B. Priestley's play, 'Mother's Day', an early comment on the acceptance of (and rebellion against) the assumed roles of men and women at home. Amitav Ghosh's 'The Ghat of the Only World', is a touching tribute to Aga Shahid Ali, a Kashmiri poet who wrote in English, while Vikram Seth's 'The Tale of Melon City' is a humorous satire set in verse.

The language of these stories allows learners to read on their own with only occasional support from the teacher or reference to the dictionary. Learners should be encouraged to read the stories at home and the themes, narrative patterns and stylistic features including use of punctuation can be discussed in the classroom. It is hoped that this gateway to extensive reading will help learners imbibe language unconsciously.

# **THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA**

## **PREAMBLE**

**WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA,** having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **[SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC]** and to secure to all its citizens :

**JUSTICE**, social, economic and political;

**LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

**EQUALITY** of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

**FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the **[unity and integrity of the Nation];**

**IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY** this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

1. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
2. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Unity of the Nation" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

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# Constitution of India

## Part IV A (Article 51 A)

### Fundamental Duties

It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —

- (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;
- (b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
- (c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;
- (d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;
- (e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- (f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures;
- (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;
- (i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
- (j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement;
- \*(k) who is a parent or guardian, to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

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**Note:** The Article 51A containing Fundamental Duties was inserted by the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 (with effect from 3 January 1977).

\*(k) was inserted by the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002 (with effect from 1 April 2010).

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# **CONSTITUTION OF INDIA**

## **Part III (Articles 12 – 35)**

(Subject to certain conditions, some exceptions  
and reasonable restrictions)

guarantees these

## **Fundamental Rights**

### **Right to Equality**

- before law and equal protection of laws;
- irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth;
- of opportunity in public employment;
- by abolition of untouchability and titles.

### **Right to Freedom**

- of expression, assembly, association, movement, residence and profession;
- of certain protections in respect of conviction for offences;
- of protection of life and personal liberty;
- of free and compulsory education for children between the age of six and fourteen years;
- of protection against arrest and detention in certain cases.

### **Right against Exploitation**

- for prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour;
- for prohibition of employment of children in hazardous jobs.

### **Right to Freedom of Religion**

- freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion;
- freedom to manage religious affairs;
- freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion;
- freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in educational institutions wholly maintained by the State.

### **Cultural and Educational Rights**

- for protection of interests of minorities to conserve their language, script and culture;
- for minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

### **Right to Constitutional Remedies**

- by issuance of directions or orders or writs by the Supreme Court and High Courts for enforcement of these Fundamental Rights.

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# The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse

William Saroyan

This story is about two poor Armenian boys who belong to a tribe whose hallmarks are trust and honesty.

ONE day back there in the good old days when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream, my cousin Mourad, who was considered crazy by everybody who knew him except me, came to my house at four in the morning and woke me up tapping on the window of my room.

Aram, he said.

I jumped out of bed and looked out of the window.

I couldn't believe what I saw.

It wasn't morning yet, but it was summer and with daybreak not many minutes around the corner of the world it was light enough for me to know I wasn't dreaming.

My cousin Mourad was sitting on a beautiful white horse.

I stuck my head out of the window and rubbed my eyes.

Yes, he said in Armenian. It's a horse. You're not dreaming. Make it quick if you want to ride.



I knew my cousin Mourad enjoyed being alive more than anybody else who had ever fallen into the world by mistake, but this was more than even I could believe.

In the first place, my earliest memories had been memories of horses and my first longings had been longings to ride.

This was the wonderful part.

In the second place, we were poor.

This was the part that wouldn't permit me to believe what I saw.

We were poor. We had no money. Our whole tribe was poverty-stricken. Every branch of the Garoghlanian<sup>1</sup> family was living in the most amazing and comical poverty in the world. Nobody could understand where we ever got money enough to keep us with food in our bellies, not even the old men of the family. Most important of all, though, we were famous for our honesty. We had been famous for our honesty for something like eleven centuries, even when we had been the wealthiest family in what we liked to think was the world. We were proud first, honest next, and after that we believed in right and wrong. None of us would take advantage of anybody in the world, let alone steal.

Consequently, even though I could *see* the horse, so magnificent; even though I could *smell* it, so lovely; even though I could *hear* it breathing, so exciting; I couldn't *believe* the horse had anything to do with my cousin Mourad or with me or with any of the other members of our family, asleep or awake, because I *knew* my cousin Mourad couldn't have *bought* the horse, and if he couldn't have bought it he must have *stolen* it, and I refused to believe he had stolen it.

No member of the Garoghlanian family could be a thief.

I stared first at my cousin and then at the horse. There was a pious stillness and humour in each of them which on the one hand delighted me and on the other frightened me.

Mourad, I said, where did you steal this horse?

Leap out of the window, he said, if you want to ride.

It was true, then. He *had* stolen the horse. There was no question about it. He had come to invite me to ride or not, as I chose.

Well, it seemed to me stealing a horse for a ride was not the same thing as stealing something else, such as money. For all I knew, maybe it wasn't stealing at all. If you were crazy about

---

<sup>1</sup> an Armenian tribe



horses the way my cousin Mourad and I were, it wasn't stealing. It wouldn't become stealing until we offered to sell the horse, which of course, I knew we would never do.

Let me put on some clothes, I said.

All right, he said, but hurry.

I leaped into my clothes.

I jumped down to the yard from the window and leaped up onto the horse behind my cousin Mourad.

That year we lived at the edge of town, on Walnut Avenue. Behind our house was the country: vineyards, orchards, irrigation ditches, and country roads. In less than three minutes we were on Olive Avenue, and then the horse began to trot. The air was new and lovely to breathe. The feel of the horse running was wonderful. My cousin Mourad who was considered one of the craziest members of our family began to sing. I mean, he began to roar.

Every family has a crazy streak in it somewhere, and my cousin Mourad was considered the natural descendant of the crazy streak in our tribe. Before him was our uncle Khosrove, an enormous man with a powerful head of black hair and the largest moustache in the San Joaquin Valley<sup>2</sup>, a man so furious in temper, so irritable, so impatient that he stopped anyone from talking by roaring, *It is no harm; pay no attention to it.*

That was all, no matter what anybody happened to be talking about. Once it was his own son Arak running eight blocks to the barber's shop where his father was having his moustache trimmed to tell him their house was on fire. This man Khosrove sat up in the chair and roared, *It is no harm; pay no attention to it.* The barber said, *But the boy says your house is on fire.* So Khosrove roared, *Enough, it is no harm, I say.*

My cousin Mourad was considered the natural descendant of this man, although Mourad's father was Zorab, who was practical and nothing else. That's how it was in our tribe. A man could be the father of his son's flesh, but that did not mean that he was also the father of his spirit. The distribution of the various kinds of spirit of our tribe had been from the beginning capricious and vagrant.

We rode and my cousin Mourad sang. For all anybody knew we were still in the old country where, at least according to

<sup>2</sup> one of the long interior valleys of California

some of our neighbours, we belonged. We let the horse run as long as it felt like running.

At last my cousin Mourad said, Get down. I want to ride alone.

Will you let me ride alone? I asked.

That is up to the horse, my cousin said. Get down.

The *horse* will let me ride, I said.

We shall see, he said. Don't forget that I have a way with a horse.

Well, I said, any way you have with a horse, I have also.

For the sake of your safety, he said, let us hope so. Get down.

All right, I said, but remember you've got to let me try to ride alone.

I got down and my cousin Mourad kicked his heels into the horse and shouted, *Vazire*, run. The horse stood on its hind legs, snorted, and burst into a fury of speed that was the loveliest





thing I had ever seen. My cousin Mourad raced the horse across a field of dry grass to an irrigation ditch, crossed the ditch on the horse, and five minutes later returned, dripping wet.

The sun was coming up.

Now it's my turn to ride, I said.

My cousin Mourad got off the horse.

Ride, he said.

I leaped to the back of the horse and for a moment knew the most awful fear imaginable. The horse did not move.

Kick into his muscles, my cousin Mourad said. What are you waiting for? We've got to take him back before everybody in the world is up and about.

I kicked into the muscles of the horse. Once again it reared and snorted. Then it began to run. I didn't know what to do. Instead of running across the field to the irrigation ditch the horse ran down the road to the vineyard of Dikran Halabian where it began to leap over vines. The horse leaped over seven vines before I fell. Then it continued running.

My cousin Mourad came running down the road.

I'm not worried about you, he shouted. We've got to get that horse. You go this way and I'll go this way. If you come upon him, be kindly. I'll be near.

I continued down the road and my cousin, Mourad went across the field toward the irrigation ditch.

It took him half an hour to find the horse and bring him back.

All right, he said, jump on. The whole world is awake now.

What will we do? I said.

Well, he said, we'll either take him back or hide him until tomorrow morning.

He didn't sound worried and I knew he'd hide him and not take him back. Not for a while, at any rate.

Where will we hide him? I said.

I know a place, he said.

How long ago did you steal this horse? I said.

It suddenly dawned on me that he had been taking these early morning rides for some time and had come for me this morning only because he knew how much I longed to ride.

Who said anything about stealing a horse? he said.

Anyhow, I said, how long ago did you begin riding every morning?



Not until this morning, he said.  
Are you telling the truth? I said.

Of course not, he said, but if we are found out, that's what you're to say. I don't want both of us to be liars. All you know is that we started riding this morning.

All right, I said.

He walked the horse quietly to the barn of a deserted vineyard which at one time had been the pride of a farmer named Fetvajian. There were some oats and dry alfalfa in the barn.

We began walking home.

It wasn't easy, he said, to get the horse to behave so nicely. At first it wanted to run wild, but, as I've told you, I have a way with a horse. I can get it to want to do anything I want it to do. Horses understand me.

How do you do it? I said.

I have an understanding with a horse, he said.

Yes, but what sort of an understanding? I said.

A simple and honest one, he said.

Well, I said, I wish I knew how to reach an understanding like that with a horse.

You're still a small boy, he said. When you get to be thirteen you'll know how to do it.

I went home and ate a hearty breakfast.

That afternoon my uncle Khosrove came to our house for coffee and cigarettes. He sat in the parlour, sipping and smoking and remembering the old country. Then another visitor arrived, a farmer named John Byro, an Assyrian who, out of loneliness, had learned to speak Armenian. My mother brought the lonely visitor coffee and tobacco and he rolled a cigarette and sipped and smoked, and then at last, sighing sadly, he said, My white horse which was stolen last month is still gone — I cannot understand it.

My uncle Khosrove became very irritated and shouted, It's no harm. What is the loss of a horse? Haven't we all lost the homeland? What is this crying over a horse?

That may be all right for you, a city dweller, to say, John Byro said, but what of my surrey? What good is a surrey without a horse?

Pay no attention to it, my uncle Khosrove roared.

I walked ten miles to get here, John Byro said.

You have legs, my uncle Khosrove shouted.



My left leg pains me, the farmer said.  
Pay no attention to it, my uncle Khosrove roared.  
That horse cost me sixty dollars, the farmer said.  
I spit on money, my uncle Khosrove said.  
He got up and stalked out of the house, slamming the screen door.

My mother explained.  
He has a gentle heart, she said. It is simply that he is homesick and such a large man.

The farmer went away and I ran over to my cousin Mourad's house.

He was sitting under a peach tree, trying to repair the hurt wing of a young robin which could not fly. He was talking to the bird.

What is it? he said.  
The farmer, John Byro, I said. He visited our house. He wants his horse. You've had it a month. I want you to promise not to take it back until I learn to ride.

It will take you *a year* to learn to ride, my cousin Mourad said.  
We could keep the horse a year, I said.  
My cousin Mourad leaped to his feet.

What? he roared. Are you inviting a member of the Garoghlanian family to steal? The horse must go back to its true owner.

When? I said.  
In six months at the latest, he said.  
He threw the bird into the air. The bird tried hard, almost fell twice, but at last flew away, high and straight.

Early every morning for two weeks my cousin Mourad and I took the horse out of the barn of the deserted vineyard where we were hiding it and rode it, and every morning the horse, when it was my turn to ride alone, leaped over grape vines and small trees and threw me and ran away. Nevertheless, I hoped in time to learn to ride the way my cousin Mourad rode.

One morning on the way to Fetvajian's deserted vineyard we ran into the farmer John Byro who was on his way to town.

Let me do the talking, my cousin Mourad said. I have a way with farmers.

Good morning, John Byro, my cousin Mourad said to the farmer.

The farmer studied the horse eagerly.



Good morning, son of my friends, he said. What is the name of your horse?

*My Heart*, my cousin Mourad said in Armenian.

A lovely name, John Byro said, for a lovely horse. I could swear it is the horse that was stolen from me many weeks ago. May I look into his mouth?

Of course, Mourad said.

The farmer looked into the mouth of the horse.

Tooth for tooth, he said. I would swear it *is* my horse if I didn't know your parents. The fame of your family for honesty is well known to me. Yet the horse is the twin of my horse. A suspicious man would believe his eyes instead of his heart. Good day, my young friends.

Good day, John Byro, my cousin Mourad said.

Early the following morning we took the horse to John Byro's vineyard and put it in the barn. The dogs followed us around without making a sound.

The dogs, I whispered to my cousin Mourad. I thought they would bark.

They would at somebody else, he said. I have a way with dogs.

My cousin Mourad put his arms around the horse, pressed his nose into the horse's nose, patted it, and then we went away.

That afternoon John Byro came to our house in his surrey and showed my mother the horse that had been stolen and returned.

I do not know what to think, he said. The horse is stronger than ever. Better-tempered, too. I thank God. My uncle Khosrove, who was in the parlour, became irritated and shouted, Quiet, man, quiet. Your horse has been returned. Pay no attention to it.

- 
1. You will probably agree that this story does not have breathless adventure and exciting action. Then what in your opinion makes it interesting?
  2. Did the boys return the horse because they were conscience-stricken or because they were afraid?
  3. "One day back there in the good old days when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream..." The story begins in a mood of



nostalgia. Can you narrate some incident from your childhood that might make an interesting story?

4. The story revolves around characters who belong to a tribe in Armenia. Mourad and Aram are members of the Garoghlanian family. Now locate Armenia and Assyria on the atlas and prepare a write-up on the Garoghlanian tribes. You may write about people, their names, traits, geographical and economic features as suggested in the story.

**TRY THIS OUT**

“The horse stood on its hind legs, snorted, and burst into a fury of speed that was the loveliest thing I had ever seen.” These lines could be an artist’s delight. Try to draw a picture as depicted in the above lines.

ERT  
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# 2

## The Address

Marga Minco

This short story is a poignant account of a daughter who goes in search of her mother's belongings after the War, in Holland. When she finds them, the objects evoke memories of her earlier life. However, she decides to leave them all behind and resolves to move on.

'Do you still know me?' I asked.

The woman looked at me searchingly. She had opened the door a chink. I came closer and stood on the step.

'No, I don't know you.'

'I'm Mrs S's daughter.'

She held her hand on the door as though she wanted to prevent it opening any further. Her face gave absolutely no sign of recognition. She kept staring at me in silence.

Perhaps I was mistaken, I thought, perhaps it isn't her. I had seen her only once, fleetingly, and that was years ago. It was most probable that I had rung the wrong bell. The woman let go of the door and stepped to the side. She was wearing my mother's green knitted cardigan. The wooden buttons were rather pale from washing. She saw that I was looking at the cardigan and half hid herself again behind the door. But I knew now that I was right.

'Well, you knew my mother?' I asked.

'Have you come back?' said the woman. 'I thought that no one had come back.'

'Only me.'



A door opened and closed in the passage behind her. A musty smell emerged.

'I regret I cannot do anything for you.'

'I've come here specially on the train. I wanted to talk to you for a moment.'

'It is not convenient for me now,' said the woman. 'I can't see you. Another time.'

She nodded and cautiously closed the door as though no one inside the house should be disturbed.

I stood where I was on the step. The curtain in front of the bay window moved. Someone stared at me and would then have asked what I wanted. 'Oh, nothing,' the woman would have said. 'It was nothing.'

I looked at the name-plate again. *Dorling* it said, in black letters on white enamel. And on the jamb, a bit higher, the number. *Number 46*.

As I walked slowly back to the station I thought about my mother, who had given me the address years ago. It had been in the first half of the War. I was home for a few days and it struck me immediately that something or other about the rooms had changed. I missed various things. My mother was surprised I should have noticed so quickly. Then she told me about Mrs Dorling. I had never heard of her but apparently she was an old acquaintance of my mother, whom she hadn't seen for years. She had suddenly turned up and renewed their contact. Since then she had come regularly.

'Every time she leaves here she takes something home with her,' said my mother. 'She took all the table silver in one go. And then the antique plates that hung there. She had trouble lugging those large vases, and I'm worried she got a crick in her back from the crockery.' My mother shook her head pityingly. 'I would never have dared ask her. She suggested it to me herself. She even insisted. She wanted to save all my nice things. If we have to leave here we shall lose everything, she says.'

'Have you agreed with her that she should keep everything?' I asked.

'As if that's necessary,' my mother cried. 'It would simply be an insult to talk like that. And think about the risk she's running, each time she goes out of our door with a full suitcase or bag.'



My mother seemed to notice that I was not entirely convinced. She looked at me reprovingly and after that we spoke no more about it.

Meanwhile I had arrived at the station without having paid much attention to things on the way. I was walking in familiar places again for the first time since the War, but I did not want to go further than was necessary. I didn't want to upset myself with the sight of streets and houses full of memories from a precious time.

In the train back I saw Mrs Dorling in front of me again as I had the first time I met her. It was the morning after the day my mother had told me about her. I had got up late and, coming downstairs, I saw my mother about to see someone out. A woman with a broad back.

'There is my daughter,' said my mother. She beckoned to me.

The woman nodded and picked up the suitcase under the coat-rack. She wore a brown coat and a shapeless hat.

'Does she live far away?' I asked, seeing the difficulty she had going out of the house with the heavy case.

'In Marconi Street,' said my mother. 'Number 46. Remember that.'

I had remembered it. But I had waited a long time to go there. Initially after the Liberation I was absolutely not interested in all that stored stuff, and naturally I was also rather afraid of it. Afraid of being confronted with things that had belonged to a connection that no longer existed; which were hidden away in cupboards and boxes and waiting in vain until they were put back in their place again; which had endured all those years because they were 'things.'

But gradually everything became more normal again. Bread was getting to be a lighter colour, there was a bed you could sleep in unthreatened, a room with a view you were more used to glancing at each day. And one day I noticed I was curious about all the possessions that must still be at that address. I wanted to see them, touch, remember.

After my first visit in vain to Mrs Dorling's house I decided to try a second time. Now a girl of about fifteen opened the door to me. I asked her if her mother was at home.

'No' she said, 'my mother's doing an errand.'

'No matter,' I said, 'I'll wait for her.'



I followed the girl along the passage. An old-fashioned iron Hanukkah<sup>1</sup> candle-holder hung next to a mirror. We never used it because it was much more cumbersome than a single candlestick.

'Won't you sit down?' asked the girl. She held open the door of the living-room and I went inside past her. I stopped, horrified. I was in a room I knew and did not know. I found myself in the midst of things I did want to see again but which oppressed me in the strange atmosphere. Or because of the tasteless way everything was arranged, because of the ugly furniture or the muggy smell that hung there, I don't know; but I scarcely dared to look around me. The girl moved a chair. I sat down and stared at the woollen table-cloth. I rubbed it. My fingers grew warm from rubbing. I followed the lines of the pattern. Somewhere on the edge there should be a burn mark that had never been repaired.

'My mother'll be back soon,' said the girl. 'I've already made tea for her. Will you have a cup?'

'Thank you.'

I looked up. The girl put cups ready on the tea-table. She had a broad back. Just like her mother. She poured tea from a white pot. All it had was a gold border on the lid, I remembered. She opened a box and took some spoons out.

'That's a nice box.' I heard my own voice. It was a strange voice. As though each sound was different in this room.

'Oh, you know about them?' She had turned round and brought me my tea. She laughed. 'My mother says it is antique. We've got lots more.' She pointed round the room. 'See for yourself.'

I had no need to follow her hand. I knew which things she meant. I just looked at the still life over the tea-table. As a child I had always fancied the apple on the pewter plate.

'We use it for everything,' she said. 'Once we even ate off the plates hanging there on the wall. I wanted to so much. But it wasn't anything special.'

I had found the burn mark on the table-cloth. The girl looked questioningly at me.

'Yes,' I said, 'you get so used to touching all these lovely things in the house, you hardly look at them any more. You only

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<sup>1</sup> the Feast of Lights, a Hebrew festival in December



notice when something is missing, because it has to be repaired or because you have lent it, for example.'

Again I heard the unnatural sound of my voice and I went on: 'I remember my mother once asked me if I would help her polish the silver. It was a very long time ago and I was probably bored that day or perhaps I had to stay at home because I was ill, as she had never asked me before. I asked her which silver she meant and she replied, surprised, that it was the spoons, forks and knives, of course. And that was the strange thing, I didn't know the cutlery we ate off every day was silver.'

The girl laughed again.

'I bet you don't know it is either.' I looked intently at her.

'What we eat with?' she asked.

'Well, do you know?'

She hesitated. She walked to the sideboard and wanted to open a drawer. 'I'll look. It's in here.'

I jumped up. 'I was forgetting the time. I must catch my train.'

She had her hand on the drawer. 'Don't you want to wait for my mother?'

'No, I must go.' I walked to the door. The girl pulled the drawer open. 'I can find my own way.'

As I walked down the passage I heard the jingling of spoons and forks.

At the corner of the road I looked up at the name-plate. *Marconi Street*, it said. I had been at Number 46. The address was correct. But now I didn't want to remember it any more. I wouldn't go back there because the objects that are linked in your memory with the familiar life of former times instantly lose their value when, severed from them, you see them again in strange surroundings. And what should I have done with them in a small rented room where the shreds of black-out paper still hung along the windows and no more than a handful of cutlery fitted in the narrow table drawer?

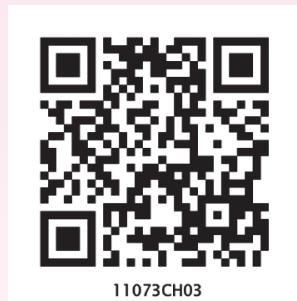
I resolved to forget the address. Of all the things I had to forget, that would be the easiest.



## READING WITH INSIGHT

1. 'Have you come back?' said the woman. 'I thought that no one had come back.' Does this statement give some clue about the story? If yes, what is it?
2. The story is divided into pre-War and post-War times. What hardships do you think the girl underwent during these times?
3. Why did the narrator of the story want to forget the address?
4. 'The Address' is a story of human predicament that follows war. Comment.

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3

## Ranga's Marriage

Masti Venkatesha Iyengar

Ranga, the accountant's son, is one of the rare breed among the village folk who has been to the city to pursue his studies. When he returns to his village from the city of Bangalore, the crowds mill around his house to see whether he has changed or not. His ideas about marriage are now quite different—or are they?

WHEN you see this title, some of you may ask, “Ranga’s Marriage?” Why not “Ranganatha Vivaha” or “Ranganatha Vijaya?” Well, yes. I know I could have used some other mouth-filling one like “Jagannatha Vijaya” or “Girija Kalyana.” But then, this is not about Jagannatha’s victory or Girija’s wedding. It’s about our own Ranga’s marriage and hence no fancy title. Hosahalli is our village. You must have heard of it. No? What a pity! But it is not your fault. There is no mention of it in any geography book. Those sahibs in England, writing in English, probably do not know that such a place exists, and so make no mention of it. Our own people too forget about it. You know how it is—they are like a flock of sheep. One sheep walks into a pit, the rest blindly follow it. When both, the sahibs in England and our own geographers, have not referred to it, you can not expect the poor cartographer to remember to put it on the map, can you? And so there is not even the shadow of our village on any map.

Sorry, I started somewhere and then went off in another direction. If the state of Mysore is to Bharatavarsha what the



sweet *karigadabu*<sup>1</sup> is to a festive meal, then Hosahalli is to Mysore State what the filling is to the *karigadabu*. What I have said is absolutely true, believe me. I will not object to your questioning it but I will stick to my opinion. I am not the only one who speaks glowingly of Hosahalli. We have a doctor in our place. His name is Gundabhatta. He agrees with me. He has been to quite a few places. No, not England. If anyone asks him whether he has been there, he says, "No, *annayya*<sup>2</sup>, I have left that to you. Running around like a flea-pestered dog, is not for me. I have seen a few places in my time, though." As a matter of fact, he has seen many.

We have some mango trees in our village. Come visit us, and I will give you a raw mango from one of them. Do not eat it. Just take a bite. The sourness is sure to go straight to your *brahmarandhra*<sup>3</sup>. I once took one such fruit home and a chutney was made out of it. All of us ate it. The cough we suffered from, after that! It was when I went for the cough medicine, that the doctor told me about the special quality of the fruit.

Just as the mango is special, so is everything else around our village. We have a creeper growing in the ever-so-fine water of the village pond. Its flowers are a feast to behold. Get two leaves from the creeper when you go to the pond for your bath, and you will not have to worry about not having leaves on which to serve the afternoon meal. You will say I am rambling. It is always like that when the subject of our village comes up. But enough. If any one of you would like to visit us, drop me a line. I will let you know where Hosahalli is and what things are like here. The best way of getting to know a place is to visit it, don't you agree?

What I am going to tell you is something that happened ten years ago. We did not have many people who knew English, then. Our village accountant was the first one who had enough courage to send his son to Bangalore to study. It is different now. There are many who know English. During the holidays, you come across them on every street, talking in English. Those days, we did not speak in English, nor did we bring in English words while talking

<sup>1</sup> a South Indian fried sweet filled with coconut and sugar

<sup>2</sup> (in Kannada) a respectful term for an elder

<sup>3</sup> (in Kannada) the soft part in a child's head where skull bones join later. Here, used as an idiomatic expression to convey the extreme potency of sourness.



in Kannada. What has happened is disgraceful, believe me. The other day, I was in Rama Rao's house when they bought a bundle of firewood. Rama Rao's son came out to pay for it. He asked the woman, "How much should I give you?" "Four pice," she said. The boy told her he did not have any "change", and asked her to come the next morning. The poor woman did not understand the English word "change" and went away muttering to herself. I too did not know. Later, when I went to Ranga's house and asked him, I understood what it meant.

This priceless commodity, the English language, was not so widespread in our village a decade ago. That was why Ranga's homecoming was a great event. People rushed to his doorstep announcing, "The accountant's son has come," "The boy who had gone to Bangalore for his studies is here, it seems," and "Come, Ranga is here. Let's go and have a look."

Attracted by the crowd, I too went and stood in the courtyard and asked, "Why have all these people come? There's no performing monkey here."

A boy, a fellow without any brains, said, loud enough for everyone to hear, "What are you doing here, then?" A youngster, immature and without any manners. Thinking that all these things were now of the past, I kept quiet.

Seeing so many people there, Ranga came out with a smile on his face. Had we all gone inside, the place would have turned into what people call the Black Hole of Calcutta. Thank God it did not. Everyone was surprised to see that Ranga was the same as he had been six months ago, when he had first left our village. An old lady who was near him, ran her hand over his chest, looked into his eyes and said, "The *janewara*<sup>4</sup> is still there. He hasn't lost his caste." She went away soon after that. Ranga laughed.

Once they realised that Ranga still had the same hands, legs, eyes and nose, the crowd melted away, like a lump of sugar in a child's mouth. I continued to stand there. After everyone had gone, I asked, "How are you, Rangappa? Is everything well with you?" It was only then that Ranga noticed me. He came near me and did a *namaskara* respectfully, saying, "I am all right, with your blessings."

I must draw your attention to this aspect of Ranga's character. He knew when it would be to his advantage to talk to someone

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<sup>4</sup> (in Kannada) the sacred thread worn by Brahmins



and rightly assessed people's worth. As for his *namaskara* to me, he did not do it like any present-day boy—with his head up towards the sun, standing stiff like a pole without joints, jerking his body as if it was either a wand or a walking stick. Nor did he merely fold his hands. He bent low to touch my feet. "May you get married soon," I said, blessing him. After exchanging a few pleasantries, I left.

That afternoon, when I was resting, Ranga came to my house with a couple of oranges in his hand. A generous, considerate fellow. It would be a fine thing to have him marry, settle down and be of service to society, I thought.

For a while we talked about this and that. Then I came to the point. "Rangappa, when do you plan to get married?"

"I am not going to get married now," he said.

"Why not?"

"I need to find the right girl. I know an officer who got married only six months ago. He is about thirty and his wife is twenty-five, I am told. They will be able to talk lovingly to each other. Let's say I married a very young girl. She may take my words spoken in love as words spoken in anger. Recently, a troupe in Bangalore staged the play *Shakuntala*. There is no question of Dushyantha falling in love with Shakuntala if she were young, like the present-day brides, is there? What would have happened to Kalidasa's play? If one gets married, it should be to a girl who is mature. Otherwise, one should remain a bachelor. That's why I am not marrying now."

"Is there any other reason?"

"A man should marry a girl he admires. What we have now are arranged marriages. How can one admire a girl with milk stains on one side of her face and wetness on the other, or so young that she doesn't even know how to bite her fingers?"

"One a neem fruit, the other, a bittergourd."

"Exactly!" Ranga said, laughing.

I was distressed that the boy who I thought would make a good husband, had decided to remain a bachelor. After chatting for a little longer, Ranga left. I made up my mind right then, that I would get him married.

Rama Rao's niece, a pretty girl of eleven, had come to stay with him. She was from a big town, so she knew how to play the veena and the harmonium. She also had a sweet voice. Both



her parents had died, and her uncle had brought her home. Ranga was just the boy for her, and she, the most suitable bride for him.

Since I was a frequent visitor to Rama Rao's place, the girl was quite free with me. I completely forgot to mention her name! Ratna, it was. The very next morning I went to their house and told Rama Rao's wife, "I'll send some buttermilk for you. Ask Ratna to fetch it."

Ratna came. It was a Friday, so she was wearing a grand saree. I told her to sit in my room and requested her to sing a song. I sent for Ranga. While she was singing the song—*Krishnamurthy, in front of my eyes*—Ranga reached the door. He stopped at the threshold. He did not want the singing to stop, but was curious to see the singer. Carefully, he peeped in. The light coming into the room was blocked. Ratna looked up and seeing a stranger there, abruptly stopped.

Suppose you buy the best quality mango. You eat it slowly, savouring its peel, before biting into the juicy flesh. You do not want to waste any part of it. Before you take another bite, the fruit slips out of your hand and falls to the ground. How do you feel? Ranga's face showed the same disappointment when the singing stopped.

"You sent for me?" he asked as he came in and sat on a chair.

Ratna stood at a distance, her head lowered. Ranga repeatedly glanced at her. Once, our eyes met, and he looked very embarrassed. No one spoke for a long while.

"It was my coming in that stopped the singing. Let me leave."

Words, mere words! The fellow said he would leave but did not make a move. How can one expect words to match actions in these days of Kaliyuga?

Ratna ran inside, overcome by shyness.

After a while, Ranga asked, "Who is that girl, swami?"

"Who's that inside?" the lion wanted to know. The he-goat who had taken shelter in the temple replied, "Does it matter who I am? I am a poor animal who has already eaten nine lions. I have vowed to eat one more. Tell me, are you male or female?" The lion fled the place in fear, it seems.

Like the he-goat, I said, "What does it matter to either of us who she is? I'm already married and you aren't the marrying kind."



Very hopefully, he asked, "She isn't married, then?" His voice did not betray his excitement but I knew it was there.

"She was married a year ago."

His face shrivelled like a roasted brinjal. After a while, Ranga left, saying, "I must go, I have work at home."

I went to our Shastri the next morning and told him, "Keep everything ready to read the stars. I'll come later." I tutored him in all that I wanted him to say.

I found no change in Ranga when I met him that afternoon. "What's the matter? You seem to be lost in thought," I said.

"Nothing, nothing's wrong, believe me."

"Headache? Come, let's go and see a doctor."



"I have no headache. I'm my usual self."

"I went through the same thing when the process of choosing a girl for me was going on. But I don't think that that could be a reason for your present condition."

Ranga stared at me.

"Come, let's go and see Shastri," I suggested. "We will find out whether Guru and Shani are favourable for you or not."

Ranga accompanied me without any protest. As soon as Shastri saw me, he exclaimed, "What a surprise, Shyama! Haven't seen you for a long time."

Shyama is none other than your servant, the narrator of this tale.

I got angry and shouted, "What? Only this morning..." Shastri completed my sentence, "You finished all your work and are now free to visit me." Had he not done so, I would have ruined our plan by bursting like grains that are kept in the sun to dry. I was extremely careful of what I said afterwards.

Shastri turned to Ranga. "When did the young son of our accountant clerk come home? What can I do for him? It's very rarely that he visits us."

"Take out your paraphernalia. Our Rangappa seems to have something on his mind. Can you tell us what's worrying him? Shall we put your science of astrology to the test?"

There was authority in my voice as I spoke to Shastri. He took out two sheets of paper, some *covries* and a book of palmyra leaves, saying, "Ours is an ancient science, *ayya*. There's a story to it... But I won't tell you that story now. This is not a *harikatha* which allows you to tell a story within a story... You may get bored. I'll tell it to you some other time."

Shastri moved his lips fast as he counted on his fingers and then asked, "What's your star?" Ranga didn't know. "Never mind," Shastri indicated with a shake of his head. He did some more calculations before saying in a serious tone, "It's about a girl."

I had been controlling my laughter all this while. But now I burst out laughing. I turned to Ranga. "Exactly what I had said."

"Who is the girl?" It was your humble servant who asked the question.

Shastri thought for a while before replying, "She probably has the name of something found in the ocean."

"Kamala?"

"Maybe."



"Could it be Pachchi, moss?"

"Must it be moss if it's not Kamala? Why not pearl or ratna, the precious stone?"

"Ratna? The girl in Rama Rao's house is Ratna. Tell me, is there any chance of our negotiations bearing fruit?"

"Definitely," he said, after thinking for some time.

There was surprise on Ranga's face. And some happiness. I noticed it.

"But that girl is married..." I said. Then I turned to him. His face had fallen.

"I don't know all that. There may be some other girl who is suitable. I only told you what our *shastra* indicated," Shastri said.

We left the place. On the way, we passed by Rama Rao's house. Ratna was standing at the door. I went in alone and came out a minute later.

"Surprising. This girl isn't married, it seems. Someone told me the other day that she was. What Shastri told us has turned out to be true after all! But Rangappa, I can't believe that you have been thinking of her. Swear on the name of Madhavacharya<sup>5</sup> and tell me, is it true what Shastri said?"

I do not know whether anyone else would have been direct. Ranga admitted, "There's greater truth in that *shastra* than we imagine. What he said is absolutely true."

Shastri was at the well when I went there that evening. I said, "So Shastrigale, you repeated everything I had taught you without giving rise to any suspicion. What a marvellous *shastra* yours is!" He didn't like it at all.

"What are you saying? What you said to me was what I could have found out myself from the *shastras*. Don't forget, I developed on the hints you had given me."

Tell me, is this what a decent man says?

Rangappa had come the other day to invite me for dinner. "What's the occasion?" I asked.

"It's Shyama's birthday. He is three."

"It's not a nice name—Shyama," I said. "I'm like a dark piece of oil-cake. Why did you have to give that golden child of yours such a name? What a childish couple you are, Ratna and you! I

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<sup>5</sup> an exponent of Vedantic philosophy from South India



know, I know, it is the English custom of naming the child after someone you like... Your wife is eight months pregnant now. Who's there to help your mother to cook?"

"My sister has come with her."

I went there for dinner. Shyama rushed to me when I walked in and put his arms round my legs. I kissed him on his cheek and placed a ring on his tiny little finger.

Allow me to take leave of you, reader. I am always here, ready to serve you.

You were not bored, I hope?

### READING WITH INSIGHT

1. Comment on the influence of English—the language and the way of life—on Indian life as reflected in the story. What is the narrator's attitude to English?
2. Astrologers' perceptions are based more on hearsay and conjecture than what they learn from the study of the stars. Comment with reference to the story.
3. Indian society has moved a long way from the way the marriage is arranged in the story. Discuss.
4. What kind of a person do you think the narrator is?



# 4

## *Albert Einstein at School*

*Patrick Pringle*

Albert Einstein (1879–1955) is regarded as the greatest physicist since Newton. In the following extract from *The Young Einstein*, the well-known biographer, Patrick Pringle, describes the circumstances which led to Albert Einstein's expulsion from a German school.

"In what year, Einstein," asked the history teacher, "did the Prussians defeat the French at Waterloo?"

"I don't know, sir,"

"Why don't you know? You've been told it often enough."

"I must have forgotten."

"Did you ever try to learn?" asked Mr Braun.

"No, sir," Albert replied with his usual unthinking honesty.

"Why not?"

"I can't see any point in learning dates. One can always look them up in a book."

Mr Braun was speechless for a few moments.

"You amaze me, Einstein," he said at last. "Don't you realise that one can always look most things up in books? That applies to all the facts you learn at school."

"Yes, sir."

"Then I suppose you don't see any point in learning facts."

"Frankly, sir, I don't," said Albert.

"Then you don't believe in education at all?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I do. I don't think learning facts is education."



"In that case," said the history teacher with heavy sarcasm, "perhaps you will be so kind as to tell the class the Einstein theory of education."

Albert flushed.

"I think it's not facts that matter, but ideas," he said. "I don't see the point in learning the dates of battles, or even which of the armies killed more men. I'd be more interested in learning why those soldiers were trying to kill each other."

"That's enough," Mr Braun's eyes were cold and cruel. "We don't want a lecture from you, Einstein. You will stay in for an extra period today, although I don't imagine it will do you much good. It won't do the school any good, either. You are a disgrace. I don't know why you continue to come."

"It's not my wish, sir," Albert pointed out.

"Then you are an ungrateful boy and ought to be ashamed of yourself. I suggest you ask your father to take you away."

Albert felt miserable when he left school that afternoon; not that it had been a bad day—most days were bad now, anyway—but because he had to go back to the hateful place the next morning. He only wished his father would take him away, but there was no point in even asking. He knew what the answer would be: he would have to stay until he had taken his diploma.

Going back to his lodgings did not cheer him up. His father had so little money to spare that Albert had been found a room in one of the poorest quarters of Munich. He did not mind the bad food and lack of comfort, or even the dirt and squalor, but he hated the atmosphere of slum violence. His landlady beat her children regularly, and every Saturday her husband came drunk and beat her.

"But at least you have a room of your own, which is more than I can say," said Yuri when he called round in the evening.

"At least you live among civilised human beings, even if they are all poor students," said Albert.

"They are not all civilised," Yuri replied. "Did you not hear that one of them was killed last week in a duel?"

"And what happens to the one who killed him?"

"Nothing, of course. He is even proud of it. His only worry is that the authorities have told him not to fight any more duels. He's upset about this because he hasn't a single scar on his face to wear for the rest of his life as a badge of honour."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Albert. "And these are the students."

"Well, you'll be a student one day," said Yuri.



"I doubt it," said Albert glumly. "I don't think I'll ever pass the exams for the school diploma."

He told his cousin Elsa the same next time she came to Munich. Normally she lived in Berlin, where her father had a business.

"I'm sure you could learn enough to pass the exams, Albert, if you tried," she said, "I know lots of boys who are much more stupid than you are, who get through. They say you don't have to know anything—you don't have to understand what you're taught, just be able to repeat it in the exams."

"That's the whole trouble," said Albert. "I'm no good at learning things by heart."

"You don't need to be good at it. Anyone can learn like a parrot. You just don't try. And yet I always see you with a book under your arm," added Elsa. "What is the one you're reading?"

"A book on geology."

"Geology? Rocks and things? Do you learn that?"

"No. We have hardly any science at school."

"Then why are you studying it?"

"Because I like it. Isn't that a good enough reason?"

Elsa sighed.

"You're right, of course, Albert," she said. "But it won't help with your diploma."

Apart from books on science his only comfort was music, and he played his violin regularly until his landlady asked him to stop.

"That wailing gets on my nerves," she said. "There's enough noise in this house, with all the kids howling."

Albert was tempted to point out that most of the time it was she who made them howl, but he decided it was better to say nothing.

"I must get away from here," he told Yuri, after six months alone in Munich. "It is absurd that I should go on like this. In the end it will turn out I have been wasting my father's money and everyone's time. It will be better for all if I stop now."

"And then what will you do?" Yuri asked.

"I don't know. If I go to Milan I'm afraid my father will send me back. Unless..." His eyes gleamed with a sudden idea. "Yuri, do you know any friendly doctors?"

"I know a lot of medical students, and some of them are friendly," said Yuri. "Doctor, no. I've never had enough money to go to one. Why?"

"Suppose," said Albert, "that I had a nervous breakdown. Suppose a doctor would say it's bad for me to go to school, and I need to get right away from it?"



"I can't imagine a doctor saying that," said Yuri.

"I must try," said Albert, "to find a doctor who specialises in nerves."

"There are plenty of them," Yuri told him. He hesitated for a moment, and then added, rather reluctantly, "I'll ask some of the students if they know one, if you like."

"Will you? Oh, thank you, Yuri," Albert's eyes were shining.

"Wait a moment, I haven't found one yet..."

"Oh, but you will!"

"And if I do I don't know if he'll be willing to help you..."

"He will, he will," declared Albert. "I'm going to have a real nervous breakdown, to make it easier for him." He laughed merrily.

"I've never seen you looking less nervous," remarked Yuri.

"A day or two at school will soon put that right." Albert assured him.

Certainly he had lost his high spirits when Yuri saw him next.

"I can't stand it any longer," he said, "I really shall have a nervous breakdown that will satisfy any doctor."

"Keep it up, then," said Yuri. "I've found a doctor for you."

"You have?" Albert's face lit up. "Oh, good. When can I see him?"

"I have an appointment for you for tomorrow evening." Yuri said. "Here's the address."

He handed Albert a piece of paper.

"Doctor Ernst Weil—is he a specialist in nervous troubles?" asked Albert.

"Not exactly," Yuri admitted. "As a matter of fact he only qualified as a doctor last week. You may even be his first patient!"

"You knew him as a student, then?"

"I've known Ernst for years." Yuri hesitated for a few moments. "He's not a fool," he warned Albert.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't try to pull the wool over his eyes<sup>1</sup>, that's all. Be frank with him, but don't pretend you've got what you haven't. Not that you'd deceive anyone." Yuri added. "You're the world's worst liar."

Albert spent the next day wondering what to tell the doctor. When the time arrived for his appointment he had worried over it so much that he really was quite nervous.

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<sup>1</sup> cheat or deceive him



"I don't really know how to describe my trouble, Dr Weil," he began.

"Don't try," said the young doctor with a friendly smile. "Yuri has already given me a history of the case."

"Oh! What did he say?"

"Only that you want me to think you have had a nervous breakdown, and say that you mustn't go back to that school."

"Oh dear." Albert's face fell. "He shouldn't have told you that."

"Why not? Isn't it true, then?"

"Yes, that's the trouble. Now you'll say there's nothing wrong with me, and you'll tell me to go back to school."

"Don't be too sure of that," said the doctor. "As a matter of fact I am pretty sure you are in a nervous state about that school."

"But I haven't told you anything about it," said Albert, wide-eyed. "How can you know that?"

"Because you wouldn't have come to see me about this if you hadn't been pretty close to a nervous breakdown, that's why. Now," said the doctor briskly, "if I certify that you have had a nervous breakdown, and must stay away from school for a while, what will you do?"

"I'll go to Italy," said Albert. "To Milan, where my parents are."

"And what will you do there?"

"I'll try to get into an Italian college or institute."

"How can you, without a diploma?"

"I'll ask my mathematics teacher to give me something about my work, and perhaps that will be enough. I've learnt all the maths they teach at school, and a bit more," he added when Dr Weil looked doubtful.

"Well, it's up to you," he said. "I doubt if it will come off, but I can see you're not doing yourself or anyone else much good by staying here. How long would you like me to say you should stay away from school? Would six months be all right?"

"This is very kind of you."

"It's nothing. I've only just stopped being a student myself, so I know how you feel. Here you are." Dr Weil handed him the certificate, "And the best of luck."

"How much..."

"Nothing, if you have anything to spare, invite Yuri to a meal. He's a good friend of mine, and yours too, I think."

Albert had no money to spare, but he pretended he had and took Yuri out to supper.



"Isn't it wonderful?" he said after showing Yuri the certificate.

"Yes, it's fine," Yuri agreed. "Six months is a good period. This way you won't actually be leaving the school so if the worst comes to the worst you'll be able to come back and carry on for your diploma."

"I'll never go back to that place," Albert assured him. "I'm going to take this certificate to the head teacher tomorrow, and that will be the end of it."

"Don't forget to get a reference in writing from your mathematics teacher first," Yuri reminded him.

Mr Koch willingly gave Albert the reference he wanted.

"If I say I can't teach you any more, and probably you'll soon be able to teach me, will that be all right?" he asked.

"That's saying too much, sir," said Albert.

"It's only the truth. But alright. I'll put it more seriously."

It was still a glowing reference, and Mr Koch made the point that Albert was ready immediately to enter a college or institute for the study of higher mathematics.

"I'm sorry you're leaving us, although you're wasting your time in my class," he said.

"It's almost the only class where I'm not wasting my time," said Albert. "But how did you know I'm leaving, sir?"

"You wouldn't have asked me for this reference otherwise."

"I thought you'd wonder..."

"There's nothing to wonder about, Einstein. I knew you were going to leave before you knew yourself."

Albert was puzzled. What did the teacher mean?

He soon found out. Before he had a chance to ask for an interview with the head teacher, he was summoned to the head's room.

"Well, it saves me the trouble of having to wait an hour or two outside," he thought.

He hardly bothered to wonder why he had been sent for, but vaguely supposed he was to be punished again for bad work and laziness. Well, he had finished with punishments.

"I'm not going to punish you," the head teacher said, to Albert's surprise. "Your work is terrible, and I'm not prepared to have you here any longer, Einstein. I want you to leave the school now."

"Leave school now?" repeated Albert, dazed.

"That is what I said."

"You mean," said Albert, "that I am to be expelled?"



"You can take it that way if you wish, Einstein." The head teacher was not mincing words. "The simplest thing will be for you to go of your own accord, and then the question won't arise."

"But," said Albert, "what crime have I committed?"

"Your presence in the classroom makes it impossible for the teacher to teach and for the other pupils to learn. You refuse to learn, you are in constant rebellion, and no serious work can be done while you are there."

Albert felt the medical certificate almost burning a hole in his pocket.

"I was going to leave, anyway," he said.

"Then we are in agreement at least, Einstein," the head said.

For a moment Albert was tempted to tell the man what he thought of him and of his school. Then he stopped himself. Without another word, holding his head high, he stalked out.

"Shut the door after you!" shouted the head.

Albert ignored him.

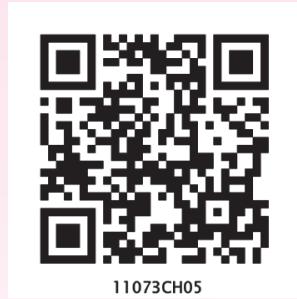
He walked straight on, out of the school where he had spent five miserable years, without turning his head to give it a last look. He could not think of anyone he wanted to say goodbye to.

Indeed, Yuri was almost the only person in Munich he felt like seeing before he left the town he had come to hate almost as much as the school. Elsa was back in Berlin, and he had no other real friends.

"Goodbye—and good luck," said Yuri when he left. "You are going to a wonderful country, I think. I hope you will be happier there."

### READING WITH INSIGHT

- 
1. What do you understand of Einstein's nature from his conversations with his history teacher, his mathematics teacher and the head teacher?
  2. The school system often curbs individual talents. Discuss.
  3. How do you distinguish between information gathering and insight formation?



# 5 Mother's Day

J.B. Priestley

The following play is a humorous portrayal of the status of the mother in a family. Let's read on to see how Mrs Pearson's family reacts when she tries to stand up for her own rights.

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## **Characters**

MRS ANNIE PEARSON  
GEORGE PEARSON  
DORIS PEARSON  
CYRIL PEARSON  
MRS FITZGERALD

*The action takes place in the living-room of the Pearson's house in a London suburb.*

**Time:** The Present

**Scene:** The living-room of the Pearson family. Afternoon. It is a comfortably furnished, much lived-in room in a small suburban semi-detached villa. If necessary only one door need be used, but it is better with two—one up left leading to the front door and the stairs and the other in the right wall leading to the kitchen and the back door. There can be a muslin-covered window in the left wall and possibly one in the right wall, too. The fireplace is assumed to be in the fourth wall. There is a settee up right, an armchair down left and one down right. A small table with two chairs on either side of it stands at the centre.



When the curtain rises it is an afternoon in early autumn and the stage can be well lit. Mrs Pearson at right, and Mrs Fitzgerald at left, are sitting opposite each other at the small table, on which are two tea-cups and saucers and the cards with which Mrs Fitzgerald has been telling Mrs Pearson's fortune. Mrs Pearson is a pleasant but worried-looking woman in her forties. Mrs Fitzgerald is older, heavier and a strong and sinister personality. She is smoking. It is very important that these two should have sharply contrasting voices—Mrs Pearson speaking in a light, flurried sort of tone, with a touch of suburban Cockney perhaps; and Mrs Fitzgerald with a deep voice, rather Irish perhaps.

MRS FITZGERALD: [collecting up the cards] And that's all I can tell you, Mrs Pearson. Could be a good fortune. Could be a bad one. All depends on yourself now. Make up your mind—and there it is.

MRS PEARSON: Yes, thank you, Mrs Fitzgerald. I'm much obliged, I'm sure. It's wonderful having a real fortune-teller living next door. Did you learn that out East, too?





MRS FITZGERALD: I did. Twelve years I had of it, with my old man rising to be Lieutenant Quartermaster. He learnt a lot, and I learnt a lot more. But will you make up your mind now, Mrs Pearson dear? Put your foot down, once an' for all, an' be the mistress of your own house an' the boss of your own family.

MRS PEARSON: [smiling apologetically] That's easier said than done. Besides I'm so fond of them even if they are so thoughtless and selfish. They don't mean to be...

MRS FITZGERALD: [cutting in] Maybe not. But it'd be better for them if they learnt to treat you properly...

MRS PEARSON: Yes, I suppose it would, in a way.

MRS FITZGERALD: No doubt about it at all. Who's the better for being spoilt—grown man, lad or girl? Nobody. You think it does 'em good when you run after them all the time, take their orders as if you were the servant in the house, stay at home every night while they go out enjoying themselves? Never in all your life. It's the ruin of them as well as you. Husbands, sons, daughters should be taking notice of wives an' mothers, not giving 'em orders an' treating 'em like dirt. An' don't tell me you don't know what I mean, for I know more than you've told me.

MRS PEARSON: [dubiously] I—keep dropping a hint...

MRS FITZGERALD: Hint? It's more than hints your family needs, Mrs Pearson.

MRS PEARSON: [dubiously] I suppose it is. But I do hate any unpleasantness. And it's so hard to know where to start. I keep making up my mind to have it out with them but somehow I don't know how to begin. [She glances at her watch or at a clock] Oh—good gracious! Look at the time. Nothing ready and they'll be home any minute and probably all in a hurry to go out again.



[As she is about to rise, Mrs Fitzgerald reaches out across the table and pulls her down.]

MRS FITZGERALD: Let 'em wait or look after themselves for once. This is where your foot goes down. Start now. [She lights a cigarette from the one she has just finished.]

MRS PEARSON: [embarrassed] Mrs Fitzgerald—I know you mean well—in fact, I agree with you—but I just can't—and it's no use you trying to make me. If I promise you I'd really have it out with them, I know I wouldn't be able to keep my promise.

MRS FITZGERALD: Then let me do it.

MRS PEARSON: [flustered] Oh no—thank you very much, Mrs Fitzgerald—but that wouldn't do at all. It couldn't possibly be somebody else—they'd resent it at once and wouldn't listen—and really I couldn't blame them. I know I ought to do it—but you see how it is? [She looks apologetically across the table, smiling rather miserably.]

MRS FITZGERALD: [coolly] You haven't got the idea.

MRS PEARSON: [bewildered] Oh—I'm sorry—I thought you asked me to let you do it.

MRS FITZGERALD: I did. But not as me—as *you*.

MRS PEARSON: But—I don't understand. You couldn't be me.

MRS FITZGERALD: [coolly] We change places. Or—really—bodies. You look like me. I look like you.

MRS PEARSON: But that's impossible.

MRS FITZGERALD: How do you *know*? Ever tried it?

MRS PEARSON: No, of course not...

MRS FITZGERALD: [coolly] I have. Not for some time but it still ought to work. Won't last long, but long enough for what we want to do. Learnt it out East, of course, where they're up to all these tricks. [She holds her hand out across the table, keeping the cigarette in her mouth] Gimme your hands, dear.

MRS PEARSON: [dubiously] Well—I don't know—is it right?



MRS FITZGERALD: It's your only chance. Give me your hands an' keep quiet a minute. Just don't think about anything. [Taking her hands] Now look at me. [They stare at each other. Muttering] Arshtatta dum—arshtatta lam—arshtatta lamdumbona...

[This little scene should be acted very carefully. We are to assume that the personalities change bodies. After the spell has been spoken, both women, still grasping hands, go lax, as if the life were out of them. Then both come to life, but with the personality of the other. Each must try to adopt the voice and mannerisms of the other. So now Mrs Pearson is bold and dominating and Mrs Fitzgerald is nervous and fluttering.]

MRS PEARSON: [now with Mrs Fitzgerald's personality] See what I mean, dear? [She notices the cigarette] Here—you don't want that. [She snatches it and puts it in her own mouth, puffing contentedly.]

[Mrs Fitzgerald, now with Mrs Pearson's personality, looks down at herself and sees that her body has changed and gives a scream of fright.]

MRS FITZGERALD: [with Mrs Pearson's personality] Oh—it's happened.

MRS PEARSON: [complacently] Of course it's happened. Very neat. Didn't know I had it in me.

MRS FITZGERALD: [alarmed] But whatever shall I do, Mrs Fitzgerald? George and the children can't see me like this.

MRS PEARSON: [grimly] They aren't going to—that's the point. They'll have me to deal with—only they won't know it.

MRS FITZGERALD: [still alarmed] But what if we can't change back? It'd be terrible.

MRS PEARSON: Here—steady, Mrs Pearson—if you had to live my life it wouldn't be so bad. You'd have more fun as me than you've had as you.

MRS FITZGERALD: Yes—but I don't want to be anybody else...

MRS PEARSON: Now—stop worrying. It's easier changing back—I can do it any time we want...

MRS FITZGERALD: Well—do it now...



- MRS PEARSON: Not likely. I've got to deal with your family first. That's the idea, isn't it? Didn't know how to begin with 'em, you said. Well. I'll show you.
- MRS FITZGERALD: But what am I going to do?
- MRS PEARSON: Go into my house for a bit—there's nobody there—then pop back and see how we're doing. You ought to enjoy it. Better get off now before one of 'em comes.
- MRS FITZGERALD: *[nervously rising]* Yes—I suppose that's best. You're sure it'll be all right?
- MRS PEARSON: *[chuckling]* It'll be *wonderful*. Now off you go, dear.

*[Mrs Fitzgerald crosses and hurries out through the door right. Left to herself, Mrs Pearson smokes away—lighting another cigarette—and begins laying out the cards for patience on the table.]*

*[After a few moments Doris Pearson comes bursting in left. She is a pretty girl in her early twenties, who would be pleasant enough if she had not been spoilt.]*

- DORIS: *[before she has taken anything in]* Mum—you'll have to iron my yellow silk. I must wear it tonight. *[She now sees what is happening, and is astounded.]* What are you doing? *[She moves down left centre.]*

*[Mrs Pearson now uses her ordinary voice, but her manner is not fluttering and apologetic but cool and incisive.]*

- MRS PEARSON: *[not even looking up]* What d'you think I'm doing—whitewashing the ceiling?
- DORIS: *[still astounded]* But you're *smoking*!
- MRS PEARSON: That's right, dear. No law against it, is there?
- DORIS: But I thought you didn't smoke.
- MRS PEARSON: Then you thought wrong.
- DORIS: Are we having tea in the kitchen?
- MRS PEARSON: Have it where you like, dear.
- DORIS: *[angrily]* Do you mean it isn't ready?
- MRS PEARSON: Yours isn't. I've had all I want. Might go out later and get a square meal at the Clarendon.
- DORIS: *[hardly believing her ears]* Who might?



MRS PEARSON: I might. Who d'you think?  
 DORIS: [staring at her] Mum—what's the matter with you?  
 MRS PEARSON: Don't be silly.  
 DORIS: [indignantly] It's not me that's being silly—and I must say it's a bit much when I've been working hard all day and you can't even bother to get my tea ready. Did you hear what I said about my yellow silk?  
 MRS PEARSON: No. Don't you like it now? I never did.  
 DORIS: [indignantly] Of course I like it. And I'm going to wear it tonight. So I want it ironed.  
 MRS PEARSON: Want it ironed? What d'you think it's going to do—iron itself?  
 DORIS: No, you're going to iron it for me... You always do.  
 MRS PEARSON: Well, this time I don't. And don't talk rubbish to me about working hard. I've a good idea how much you do, Doris Pearson. I put in twice the hours you do, and get no wages nor thanks for it. Why are you going to wear your yellow silk? Where are you going?  
 DORIS: [sulkily] Out with Charlie Spence.  
 MRS PEARSON: Why?  
 DORIS: [wildly] Why? Why? What's the matter with you? Why shouldn't I go out with Charlie Spence if he asks me and I want to? Any objections? Go on—you might as well tell me...  
 MRS PEARSON: [severely] Can't you find anybody better? I wouldn't be seen dead with Charlie Spence. Buck teeth and half-witted...  
 DORIS: He isn't...  
 MRS PEARSON: When I was your age I'd have found somebody better than Charlie Spence—or given myself up as a bad job.  
 DORIS: [nearly in tears] Oh—shut up!

[Doris runs out left. Mrs Pearson chuckles and begins putting the cards together.

After a moment Cyril Pearson enters left. He is the masculine counterpart of Doris.]



CYRIL: [briskly] Hello—Mum. Tea ready?  
 MRS PEARSON: No.  
 CYRIL: [moving to the table; annoyed] Why not?  
 MRS PEARSON: [coolly] I couldn't bother.  
 CYRIL: Feeling off-colour or something?  
 MRS PEARSON: Never felt better in my life.  
 CYRIL: [aggressively] What's the idea then?  
 MRS PEARSON: Just a change.  
 CYRIL: [briskly] Well, snap out of it, Ma—and get cracking. Haven't too much time.

[Cyril is about to go when Mrs Pearson's voice checks him.]

MRS PEARSON: I've plenty of time.  
 CYRIL: Yes, but I haven't. Got a busy night tonight.  
 [moving left to the door] Did you put my things out?  
 MRS PEARSON: [coolly] Can't remember. But I doubt it.  
 CYRIL: [moving to the table; protesting] Now—look.  
 When I asked you this morning, you promised. You said you'd have to look through 'em first in case there was any mending.  
 MRS PEARSON: Yes—well now I've decided I don't like mending.  
 CYRIL: That's a nice way to talk—what would happen if we all talked like that?  
 MRS PEARSON: You all do talk like that. If there's something at home you don't want to do, you don't do it. If it's something at your work, you get the Union to bar it. Now all that's happened is that I've joined the movement.  
 CYRIL: [staggered] I don't get this, Mum. What's going on?  
 MRS PEARSON: [laconic and sinister] Changes.

[Doris enters left. She is in the process of dressing and is now wearing a wrap. She looks pale and red-eyed.]

MRS PEARSON: You look terrible. I wouldn't wear that face even for Charlie Spence.  
 DORIS: [moving above the table; angrily] Oh—shut up about Charlie Spence. And anyhow I'm not ready yet—just dressing. And if I do look



terrible, it's your fault—you made me cry.

CYRIL: [curious] Why—what did she do?

DORIS: Never you mind.

MRS PEARSON: [rising and preparing to move to the kitchen]

Have we any stout left? I can't remember.

Bottle or two, I think. But you don't want stout now.

MRS PEARSON: [moving left slowly] I do.

CYRIL: What for?

MRS PEARSON: [turning at the door] To drink—you clot!

[Mrs Pearson exits right. Instantly Cyril and Doris are in a huddle, close together at left centre, rapidly whispering.]

DORIS: Has she been like that with you, too?

CYRIL: Yes—no tea ready—couldn't care less...

DORIS: Well, I'm glad it's both of us. I thought I'd done something wrong.

CYRIL: So did I. But it's her of course...

DORIS: She was smoking and playing cards when I came in. I couldn't believe my eyes.

CYRIL: I asked her if she was feeling off-colour and she said she wasn't.

DORIS: Well, she's suddenly all different. An' that's what made me cry. It wasn't what she said but the way she said it—an' the way she looked.

CYRIL: Haven't noticed that. She looks just the same to me.

DORIS: She doesn't to me. Do you think she could have hit her head or something—y'know—an' got—what is it?—y'know...

CYRIL: [staggered] Do you mean she's barmy?

DORIS: No, you fathead. Y'know—concussion. She might have.

CYRIL: Sounds far-fetched.

DORIS: Well, she's far-fetched, if you ask me. [She suddenly begins to giggle.]

CYRIL: Now then—what is it?

DORIS: If she's going to be like this when Dad comes home... [She giggles again.]

CYRIL: [beginning to guffaw] I'm staying in for



that—two front dress circles for the first house...

[Mrs Pearson enters right, carrying a bottle of stout and a half-filled glass. Cyril and Doris try to stop their guffawing and giggling, but they are not quick enough. Mrs Pearson regards them with contempt.]

MRS PEARSON

[coldly] You two are always talking about being grown-up—why don't you both try for once to be your age? [She moves to the settee and sits.]

CYRIL:

Can't we laugh now?

MRS PEARSON

Yes, if it's funny. Go on, tell me. Make me laugh. I could do with it.

DORIS:

Y'know you never understand our jokes, Mum...





MRS PEARSON: I was yawning at your jokes before you were born, Doris.

DORIS: [almost tearful again] What's making you talk like this? What have we done?

MRS PEARSON: [promptly] Nothing but come in, ask for something, go out again, then come back when there's nowhere else to go.

CYRIL: [aggressively] Look—if you won't get tea ready, then I'll find something to eat myself...

MRS PEARSON: Why not? Help yourself. [She takes a sip of stout.]

CYRIL: [turning on his way to the kitchen] Mind you, I think it's a bit thick. I've been working all day.

DORIS: Same here.

MRS PEARSON: (calmly) Eight hour day!

CYRIL: Yes—eight hour day—an' don't forget it.

MRS PEARSON: I've done my eight hours.

CYRIL: That's different.

DORIS: Of course it is.

MRS PEARSON: [calmly] It was. Now it isn't. Forty-hour week for all now. Just watch it at the weekend when I have my two days off.

[Doris and Cyril exchange alarmed glances. Then they stare at Mrs Pearson who returns their look calmly.]

CYRIL: Must grab something to eat. Looks as if I'll need to keep my strength up. [Cyril exits to the kitchen.]

DORIS: [moving to the settee; anxiously] Mummy, you don't mean you're not going to do anything on Saturday and Sunday?

MRS PEARSON: [airily] No, I wouldn't go that far. I might make a bed or two and do a bit of cooking as a favour. Which means, of course, I'll have to be asked very nicely and thanked for everything and generally made a fuss of. But any of you forty-hour-a-weekers who expect to be waited on hand and foot on Saturday and Sunday, with no thanks for it, are in for a nasty disappointment. Might go off for the week-end perhaps.



DORIS: [aghast] Go off for the week-end?  
 MRS PEARSON: Why not? I could do with a change. Stuck here day after day, week after week. If I don't need a change, who does?  
 DORIS: But where would you go, who would you go with?  
 MRS PEARSON: That's my business. You don't ask me where you should go and who you should go with, do you?  
 DORIS: That's different.  
 MRS PEARSON: The only difference is that I'm a lot older and better able to look after myself, so it's you who should do the asking.  
 DORIS: Did you fall or hit yourself with something?  
 MRS PEARSON: [coldly] No. But I'll hit you with something, girl, if you don't stop asking silly questions. [Doris stares at her open-mouthed, ready to cry.]  
 DORIS: Oh — this is awful... [She begins to cry, not passionately.]  
 MRS PEARSON: [coldly] Stop blubbering. You're not a baby. If you're old enough to go out with Charlie Spence, you're old enough to behave properly. Now stop it.

[George Pearson enters left. He is about fifty, fundamentally decent but solemn, self-important, pompous. Preferably he should be a heavy, slow-moving type. He notices Doris's tears.]

GEORGE: Hello — what's this? Can't be anything to cry about.  
 DORIS: [through sobs] You'll see.

[Doris runs out left with a sob or two on the way. George stares after her a moment, then looks at Mrs Pearson.]

GEORGE: Did she say 'You'll see'...?  
 MRS PEARSON: Yes.  
 GEORGE: What did she mean?  
 MRS PEARSON: Better ask her.

[George looks slowly again at the door then at Mrs Pearson. Then he notices the stout that Mrs Pearson raises for another sip. His eyes almost bulge.]



- GEORGE: Stout?
- MRS PEARSON: Yes.
- GEORGE: [amazed] What are you drinking stout for?
- MRS PEARSON: Because I fancied some.
- GEORGE: At this time of day?
- MRS PEARSON: Yes—what's wrong with it at this time of day?
- GEORGE: [bewildered] Nothing, I suppose, Annie—but I've never seen you do it before...
- MRS PEARSON: Well, you're seeing me now.
- GEORGE: [with heavy distaste] Yes, an' I don't like it. It doesn't look right. I'm surprised at you.
- MRS PEARSON: Well, that ought to be a nice change for you.
- GEORGE: What do you mean?
- MRS PEARSON: It must be some time since you were surprised at me, George.
- GEORGE: I don't like surprises—I'm all for a steady going on—you ought to know that by this time. By the way, I forgot to tell you this morning I wouldn't want any tea. Special snooker match night at the club tonight—an' a bit of supper going. So no tea.
- MRS PEARSON: That's all right. There isn't any.
- GEORGE: [astonished] You mean you didn't get any ready?
- MRS PEARSON: Yes. And a good thing, too, as it's turned out.
- GEORGE: [aggrieved] That's all very well, but suppose I'd wanted some?
- MRS PEARSON: My goodness! Listen to the man! Annoyed because I don't get a tea for him that he doesn't even want. Ever tried that at the club?
- GEORGE: Tried what at the club?
- MRS PEARSON: Going up to the bar and telling 'em you don't want a glass of beer but you're annoyed because they haven't already poured it out. Try that on them and see what you get.
- GEORGE: I don't know what you're talking about.
- MRS PEARSON: They'd laugh at you even more than they do now.



GEORGE: [indignantly] Laugh at me? They don't laugh at me.

MRS PEARSON: Of course they do. You ought to have found that out by this time. Anybody else would have done. You're one of their standing jokes. Famous. They call you Pompy-ompy Pearson because they think you're so slow and pompous.

GEORGE: [horrified] Never!

MRS PEARSON: It's always beaten me why you should want to spend so much time at a place where they're always laughing at you behind your back and calling you names. Leaving your wife at home, night after night. Instead of going out with her, who doesn't make you look a fool...

[Cyril enters right, with a glass of milk in one hand and a thick slice of cake in the other. George, almost dazed, turns to him appealingly.]

GEORGE: Here, Cyril, you've been with me to the club once or twice. They don't laugh at me and call me Pompy-ompy Pearson, do they? [Cyril, embarrassed, hesitates.] [Angrily] Go on—tell me. Do they?

CYRIL: [embarrassed] Well—yes, Dad, I'm afraid they do.

[George slowly looks from one to the other, staggered.]

GEORGE: [slowly] Well—I'll be—damned!

[George exits left, slowly, almost as if somebody had hit him over the head. Cyril, after watching him go, turns indignantly to Mrs Pearson.]

CYRIL: Now you shouldn't have told him that, Mum. That's not fair. You've hurt his feelings. Mine, too.

MRS PEARSON: Sometimes it does people good to have their feelings hurt. The truth oughtn't to hurt anybody for long. If your father didn't go to the club so often, perhaps they'd stop laughing at him.

CYRIL: [gloomily] I doubt it.



MRS PEARSON: [severely] Possibly you do, but what I doubt is whether your opinion's worth having. What do you know? Nothing. You spend too much time and good money at greyhound races and dirt tracks and ice shows...

CYRIL: [sulkily] Well, what if I do? I've got to enjoy myself somehow, haven't I?

MRS PEARSON: I wouldn't mind so much if you were really enjoying yourself. But are you? And where's it getting you? [There is a sharp hurried knocking heard off left.]

CYRIL: Might be for me. I'll see.

[Cyril hurries out left. In a moment he re-enters, closing the door behind him.]

MRS PEARSON: It's that silly old bag from next door—Mrs Fitzgerald. You don't want her here, do you? [sharply] Certainly I do. Ask her in. And don't call her a silly old bag either. She's a very nice woman, with a lot more sense than you'll ever have.

[Cyril exits left. Mrs Pearson finishes her stout, smacking her lips.

Cyril re-enters left, ushering in Mrs Fitzgerald, who hesitates in the doorway.]

CYRIL: Come in, come in, Mrs Fitzgerald.

MRS FITZGERALD: [moving to left centre; anxiously] I—just wondered—if everything's—all right...

CYRIL: [sulkily] No, it isn't.

MRS PEARSON: [sharply] Of course it is. You be quiet.

CYRIL: [indignantly and loudly] Why should I be quiet?

MRS PEARSON: [shouting] Because I tell you to—you silly, spoilt, young piecan.

MRS FITZGERALD: [protesting nervously] Oh—no— surely...

MRS PEARSON: [severely] Now, Mrs Fitzgerald, just let me manage my family in my own way—please!

MRS FITZGERALD: Yes—but Cyril...

CYRIL: [sulky and glowering] Mr Cyril Pearson to you, please, Mrs Fitzgerald. [Cyril stalks off into the kitchen.]



- MRS FITZGERALD: [moving to the settee; whispering] Oh—dear—what's happening?
- MRS PEARSON: [calmly] Nothing much. Just putting 'em in their places, that's all. Doing what you ought to have done long since.
- MRS FITZGERALD: Is George home? [She sits beside Mrs Pearson on the settee.]
- MRS PEARSON: Yes. I've been telling him what they think of him at the club.
- MRS FITZGERALD: Well, they think a lot of him, don't they?
- MRS PEARSON: No, they don't. And now he knows it.
- MRS FITZGERALD: [nervously] Oh—dear—I wish you hadn't, Mrs Fitzgerald...
- MRS PEARSON: Nonsense! Doing 'em all a world of good. And they'll be eating out of your hand soon—you'll see...
- MRS FITZGERALD: I don't think I want them eating out of my hand...
- MRS PEARSON: [impatiently] Well, whatever you want, they'll be doing it—all three of 'em. Mark my words, Mrs Pearson.

[George enters left glumly. He is unpleasantly surprised when he sees the visitor. He moves to the armchair left, sits down heavily and glumly lights his pipe. Then he looks from Mrs Pearson to Mrs Fitzgerald, who is regarding him anxiously.]

- GEORGE: Just looked in for a minute, I suppose, Mrs Fitzgerald?
- MRS FITZGERALD: [who doesn't know what she is saying] Well—yes—I suppose so, George.
- GEORGE: [aghast] George!
- MRS FITZGERALD: [nervously] Oh—I'm sorry...
- MRS PEARSON: [impatiently] What does it matter? Your name's George, isn't it? Who d'you think you are—Duke of Edinburgh?
- GEORGE: [angrily] What's he got to do with it? Just tell me that. And isn't it bad enough without her calling me George? No tea. Pompy-ompy Pearson. And poor Doris has been crying her eyes out upstairs—yes, crying her eyes out.



- MRS FITZGERALD: [wailing] Oh—dear—I ought to have known...
- GEORGE: [staring at her, annoyed] You ought to have known! Why ought you to have known? Nothing to do with you, Mrs Fitzgerald. Look—we're at sixes and sevens here just now—so perhaps you'll excuse us...
- MRS PEARSON: [before Mrs Fitzgerald can reply] I won't excuse you, George Pearson. Next time a friend and neighbour comes to see me, just say something when you see her—Good evening or How d'you do? or something—an' don't just march in an' sit down without a word. It's bad manners...
- MRS FITZGERALD: [nervously] No—it's all right...
- MRS PEARSON: No, it isn't all right. We'll have some decent manners in this house—or I'll know the reason why. [glaring at George] Well?
- GEORGE: [intimidated] Well, what!
- MRS PEARSON: [taunting him] Why don't you get off to your club? Special night tonight, isn't it? They'll be waiting for you—wanting to have a good laugh. Go on then. Don't disappoint 'em.
- GEORGE: [bitterly] That's right. Make me look silly in front of her now! Go on—don't mind me. Sixes and sevens! Poor Doris been crying her eyes out! Getting the neighbours in to see the fun! [suddenly losing his temper, glaring at Mrs Pearson, and shouting] All right—let her hear it. What's the matter with you? Have you gone barmy—or what?
- MRS PEARSON: [jumping up; savagely] If you shout at me again like that, George Pearson, I'll slap your big, fat, silly face...
- MRS FITZGERALD: [moaning] Oh—no—no—no—please, Mrs Fitzgerald... [Mrs Pearson sits.]
- GEORGE: [staring at her, bewildered] Either I'm off my chump or you two are. How d'you mean—"No, no—please, Mrs Fitzgerald"? Look—you're Mrs Fitzgerald. So why are you telling yourself to stop when you're not doing



anything? Tell *her* to stop — then there'd be some sense in it. [Staring at Mrs Pearson] I think you must be tiddly.

MRS PEARSON: [starting up; savagely] Say that again, George Pearson.

GEORGE: [intimidated] All right — all right — all right ...

[Doris enters left slowly, looking miserable. She is still wearing the wrap. Mrs Pearson sits on the settee.]

MRS FITZGERALD: Hello — Doris dear!

DORIS: [miserably] Hello — Mrs Fitzgerald!

MRS FITZGERALD: I thought you were going out with Charlie Spence tonight.

DORIS: [annoyed] What's that to do with you?

MRS PEARSON: [sharply] Stop that!

MRS FITZGERALD: [nervously] No — its all right...

MRS PEARSON: [severely] It isn't all right. I won't have a daughter of mine talking to anybody like that. Now answer Mrs Fitzgerald properly, Doris — or go upstairs again... [Doris looks wonderingly at her father.]

GEORGE: [in despair] Don't look at me. I give it up. I just give it up.

MRS PEARSON: [fiercely] Well? Answer her.

DORIS: [sulkily] I was going out with Charlie Spence tonight — but now I've called it off...

MRS FITZGERALD: Oh — what a pity, dear! Why have you?

DORIS: [with a flash of temper] Because — if you must know — my mother's been going on at memaking me feel miserable — an' saying he's got buck-teeth and is half-witted...

MRS FITZGERALD: [rather bolder; to Mrs Pearson] Oh — you shouldn't have said that...

MRS PEARSON: [sharply] Mrs Fitzgerald, I'll manage my family — you manage yours.

GEORGE: [grimly] Ticking *her* off now, are you, Annie?

MRS PEARSON: [even more grimly] They're waiting for you at the club, George, don't forget. And don't you start crying again, Doris...

MRS FITZGERALD: [getting up; with sudden decision] That's enough — quite enough.

[George and Doris stare at her bewildered.]



[to George and Doris] Now listen, you two. I want to have a private little talk with Mrs Fitz—[she corrects herself hastily] with Mrs Pearson, so I'll be obliged if you'll leave us alone for a few minutes. I'll let you know when we've finished. Go on, please. I promise you that you won't regret it. There's something here that only I can deal with.

GEORGE: [rising] I'm glad somebody can—'cos I can't. Come on, Doris.

[George and Doris exit left. As they go Mrs Fitzgerald moves to left of the small table and sits. She eagerly beckons Mrs Pearson to do the same thing.]

MRS FITZGERALD: Mrs Fitzgerald, we must change back now—we really must...

MRS PEARSON: [rising] Why?

MRS FITZGERALD: Because this has gone far enough. I can see they're all miserable—and I can't bear it...

MRS PEARSON: A bit more of the same would do 'em good. Making a great difference already... [She moves to right of the table and sits.]

MRS FITZGERALD: No, I can't stand any more of it—I really can't. We must change back. Hurry up, please, Mrs Fitzgerald.

MRS PEARSON: Well—if you insist...

MRS FITZGERALD: Yes—I do—please—please.

[She stretches her hands across the table eagerly. Mrs Pearson takes them.]

MRS PEARSON: Quiet now. Relax.

[Mrs Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald stare at each other. Muttering; exactly as before. Arshatta dum—arshatta lam—arshatta lamdumbona...]

*They carry out the same action as before, going lax and then coming to life. But this time, of course, they become their proper personalities.]*

MRS FITZGERALD: Ah well—I enjoyed that.

MRS PEARSON: I didn't.

MRS FITZGERALD: Well, you ought to have done. Now—listen,



Mrs Pearson. Don't go soft on 'em again, else it'll all have been wasted...

MRS PEARSON: I'll try not to, Mrs Fitzgerald.

MRS FITZGERALD: They've not had as long as I'd like to have given 'em—another hour or two's rough treatment might have made it certain...

MRS PEARSON: I'm sure they'll do better now—though I don't know how I'm going to explain...

MRS FITZGERALD: [severely] Don't you start any explaining or apologising—or you're done for.

MRS PEARSON: [with spirit] It's all right for you, Mrs Fitzgerald. After all, they aren't your husband and children...

MRS FITZGERALD: [impressively] Now you listen to me. You admitted yourself you were spoiling 'em—and they didn't appreciate you. Any apologies—any explanations—an' you'll be straight back where you were. I'm warning you, dear. Just give 'em a look—a tone of voice—now an' again, to suggest you might be tough with 'em if you wanted to be—an' it ought to work. Anyhow, we can test it.

MRS PEARSON: How?

MRS FITZGERALD: Well, what is it you'd like 'em to do that they don't do? Stop at home for once?

MRS PEARSON: Yes—and give me a hand with supper...

MRS FITZGERALD: Anything you'd like 'em to do—that you enjoy whether they do or not?

MRS PEARSON: [hesitating] Well—yes. I—like a nice game of rummy—but, of course, I hardly ever have one—except at Christmas...

MRS FITZGERALD: [getting up] That'll do then. [She moves towards the door left then turns] But remember—keep firm—or you've had it. [She opens the door. Calling] Hoy! You can come in now. [Coming away from the door, and moving right slightly. Quietly] But remember—remember—a firm hand.

[George, Doris and Cyril file in through the doorway, looking apprehensively at Mrs Pearson.]

I'm just off. To let you enjoy yourself.



[The family looks anxiously at Mrs Pearson, who smiles. Much relieved, they smile back at her.]

- DORIS: [anxiously] Yes, Mother?
- MRS PEARSON: [smiling] Seeing that you don't want to go out, I tell you what I thought we'd do.
- MRS FITZGERALD: [giving a final warning] Remember!
- MRS PEARSON: [nodding, then looking sharply at the family] No objections, I hope?
- GEORGE: [humbly] No, Mother—whatever you say...
- MRS PEARSON: [smiling] I thought we'd have a nice family game of rummy—and then you children could get the supper ready while I have a talk with your father...
- GEORGE: [firmly] Suits me. [He looks challengingly at the children.] What about you two?
- CYRIL: [hastily] Yes—that's all right.
- DORIS: [hesitating] Well—I...
- MRS PEARSON: [sharply] What? Speak up!
- DORIS: [hastily] Oh—I think it would be lovely...
- MRS PEARSON: [smiling] Good-bye, Mrs Fitzgerald. Come again soon.
- MRS FITZGERALD: Yes, dear. 'Night all—have a nice time.

[Mrs Fitzgerald exits left and the family cluster round Mother as—  
*the curtain falls.*

1. This play, written in the 1950s, is a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of the mother in the family.
  - (i) What are the issues it raises?
  - (ii) Do you think it caricatures these issues or do you think that the problems it raises are genuine? How does the play resolve the issues? Do you agree with the resolution?
2. If you were to write about these issues today what are some of the incidents, examples and problems that you would think of as relevant?



3. Is drama a good medium for conveying a social message? Discuss.
4. Read the play out in parts. Enact the play on a suitable occasion.
5. Discuss in groups plays or films with a strong message of social reform that you have watched.

‘CERT  
2014



## 6

# *The Ghat of the Only World*

Amitav Ghosh

A dying man, an expatriate from Kashmir, asks the author to write something about him after he is gone. The following piece is what Amitav Ghosh wrote to keep his promise.

THE first time that Agha Shahid Ali spoke to me about his approaching death was on 25 April 2001. The conversation began routinely. I had telephoned to remind him that we had been invited to a friend's house for lunch and that I was going to come by his apartment to pick him up. Although he had been under treatment for cancer for some fourteen months, Shahid was still on his feet and perfectly lucid, except for occasional lapses of memory. I heard him thumbing through his engagement book and then suddenly he said: 'Oh dear. I can't see a thing.' There was a brief pause and then he added: 'I hope this doesn't mean that I'm dying...'

Although Shahid and I had talked a great deal over the last many weeks, I had never before heard him touch on the subject of death. I did not know how to respond: his voice was completely at odds with the content of what he had just said, light to the point of jocularity. I mumbled something innocuous: 'No Shahid — of course not. You'll be fine.' He cut me short. In a tone of voice that was at once quizzical and direct, he said: 'When it happens I hope you'll write something about me.'



I was shocked into silence and a long moment passed before I could bring myself to say the things that people say on such occasions. ‘Shahid you’ll be fine; you have to be strong...’

From the window of my study I could see a corner of the building in which he lived, some eight blocks away. It was just a few months since he moved there: he had been living a few miles away, in Manhattan, when he had a sudden blackout in February 2000. After tests revealed that he had a malignant brain tumour, he decided to move to Brooklyn, to be close to his youngest sister, Sameetah, who teaches at the Pratt Institute—a few blocks away from the street where I live.

Shahid ignored my reassurances. He began to laugh and it was then that I realised that he was dead serious. I understood that he was entrusting me with a quite specific charge: he wanted me to remember him not through the spoken recitations of memory and friendship, but through the written word. Shahid knew all too well that for those writers for whom things become real only in the process of writing, there is an inbuilt resistance to dealing with loss and bereavement. He knew that my instincts would have led me to search for reasons to avoid writing about his death: I would have told myself that I was not a poet; that our friendship was of recent date; that there were many others who knew him much better and would be writing from greater understanding and knowledge. All this Shahid had guessed and he had decided to shut off those routes while there was still time.

‘You must write about me.’

Clear though it was that this imperative would have to be acknowledged, I could think of nothing to say: what are the words in which one promises a friend that one will write about him after his death? Finally, I said: ‘Shahid, I will: I’ll do the best I can’.

By the end of the conversation I knew exactly what I had to do. I picked up my pen, noted the date, and wrote down everything I remembered of that conversation. This I continued to do for the next few months: it is this record that has made it possible for me to fulfil the pledge I made that day.

I knew Shahid’s work long before I met him. His 1997 collection, *The Country Without a Post Office*, had made a powerful impression on me. His voice was like none I had ever heard before, at once lyrical and fiercely disciplined, engaged and yet deeply inward. Not for him the mock-casual



almost-prose of so much contemporary poetry: his was a voice that was not ashamed to speak in a bardic register<sup>1</sup>. I knew of no one else who would even conceive of publishing a line like: 'Mad heart, be brave.'

In 1998, I quoted a line from *The Country Without a Post Office* in an article that touched briefly on Kashmir. At the time all I knew about Shahid was that he was from Srinagar and had studied in Delhi. I had been at Delhi University myself, but although our time there had briefly overlapped, we had never met. We had friends in common however, and one of them put me in touch with Shahid. In 1998 and 1999 we had several conversations on the phone and even met a couple of times. But we were no more than acquaintances until he moved to Brooklyn the next year. Once we were in the same neighbourhood, we began to meet for occasional meals and quickly discovered that we had a great deal in common. By this time of course Shahid's condition was already serious, yet his illness did not impede the progress of our friendship. We found that we had a huge roster of common friends, in India, America, and elsewhere; we discovered a shared love of rogan josh, Roshanara Begum and Kishore Kumar; a mutual indifference to cricket and an equal attachment to old Bombay films. Because of Shahid's condition even the most trivial exchanges had a special charge and urgency: the inescapable poignance of talking about food and half-forgotten figures from the past with a man who knew himself to be dying, was multiplied, in this instance, by the knowledge that this man was also a poet who had achieved greatness—perhaps the only such that I shall ever know as a friend.

One afternoon, the writer Suketu Mehta, who also lives in Brooklyn, joined us for lunch. Together we hatched a plan for an *adda*—by definition, a gathering that has no agenda, other than conviviality. Shahid was enthusiastic and we began to meet regularly. From time to time other writers would join us. On one occasion a crew arrived with a television camera. Shahid was not in the least bit put out: 'I'm so shameless; I just *love* the camera.'

Shahid had a sorcerer's ability to transmute the mundane into the magical. Once I accompanied Iqbal, his brother, and Hena, his sister, on a trip to fetch him home from hospital. This

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<sup>1</sup> a poetic style



was on 21 May: by that time he had already been through several unsuccessful operations. Now he was back in hospital to undergo a surgical procedure that was intended to relieve the pressure on his brain. His head was shaved and the shape of the tumour was visible upon his bare scalp, its edges outlined by metal sutures. When it was time to leave the ward a blue-uniformed hospital escort arrived with a wheelchair. Shahid waved him away, declaring that he was strong enough to walk out of the hospital on his own. But he was groggier than he had thought and his knees buckled after no more than a few steps. Iqbal went running off to bring back the wheelchair while the rest of us stood in the corridor, holding him upright. At that moment, leaning against the cheerless hospital wall, a kind of rapture descended on Shahid. When the hospital orderly returned with the wheelchair Shahid gave him a beaming smile and asked where he was from. 'Ecuador', the man said, and Shahid clapped his hands gleefully together, 'Spanish!' he cried, at the top of his voice. 'I always wanted to learn Spanish. Just to read Lorca<sup>2</sup>'.

Shahid's gregariousness had no limit: there was never an evening when there wasn't a party in his living room. 'I love it that so many people are here,' he told me once. 'I love it that people come and there's always food. I love this spirit of festivity; it means that I don't have time to be depressed.'

His apartment was a spacious and airy split-level, on the seventh floor of a newly-renovated building. There was a cavernous study on the top floor and a wide terrace that provided a magnificent view of the Manhattan skyline, across the East River. Shahid loved this view of the Brooklyn waterfront slipping, like a ghat, into the East River, under the glittering lights of Manhattan.

The journey from the foyer of Shahid's building to his door was a voyage between continents: on the way up the rich fragrance of rogan josh and *haak* would invade the dour, grey interior of the elevator; against the background of the songs and voices that were always echoing out of his apartment, even the ringing of the doorbell had an oddly musical sound. Suddenly, Shahid would appear, flinging open the door, releasing a great cloud of *heeng* into the frosty New York air, 'Oh, how nice,' he would cry, clapping his hands, 'how nice that you've

<sup>2</sup> Garcia Lorca is Spain's most deeply appreciated and highly revered poet and dramatist.



come to see your little Mos-lem!' Invariably, there'd be some half-dozen or more people gathered inside—poets, students, writers, relatives—and in the kitchen someone would always be cooking or making tea. Almost to the very end, even as his life was being consumed by his disease, he was the centre of a perpetual carnival, an endless *mela* of talk, laughter, food and, of course, poetry.

No matter how many people there were, Shahid was never so distracted as to lose track of the progress of the evening's meal. From time to time he would interrupt himself to shout directions to whoever was in the kitchen: 'yes, now, add the *dahi* now.' Even when his eyesight was failing, he could tell from the smell alone, exactly which stage the rogan josh had reached. And when things went exactly as they should, he would sniff the air and cry out loud: '*Ah! Khana ka kya mehek hai!*'

Shahid was legendary for his prowess in the kitchen, frequently spending days over the planning and preparation of a dinner party. It was through one such party, given while he was in Arizona, that he met James Merrill, the poet who was to radically alter the direction of his poetry: it was after this encounter that he began to experiment with strict, metrical patterns and verse forms. No one had a greater influence on Shahid's poetry than James Merrill: indeed, in the poem in which he most explicitly prefigured his own death, 'I Dream I Am At the Ghat of the Only World,' he awarded the envoy to Merrill: 'SHAHID, HUSH. THIS IS ME, JAMES. THE LOVED ONE ALWAYS LEAVES.'

Shahid placed great store on authenticity and exactitude in cooking and would tolerate no deviation from traditional methods and recipes: for those who took short cuts, he had only pity. He had a special passion for the food of his region, one variant of it in particular: 'Kashmiri food in the Pandit style'. I asked him once why this was so important to him and he explained that it was because of a recurrent dream, in which all the Pandits had vanished from the valley of Kashmir and their food had become extinct. This was a nightmare that haunted him and he returned to it again and again, in his conversation and his poetry.

At a certain point I lost track of you.  
You needed me. You needed to perfect me:  
In your absence you polished me into the Enemy.  
Your history gets in the way of my memory.



I am everything you lost. Your perfect enemy.  
Your memory gets in the way of my memory . . .

There is nothing to forgive. You won't forgive me.  
I hid my pain even from myself; I revealed my pain only to myself.  
There is nothing to forgive. You won't forgive me.  
If only somehow you could have been mine, what would not have  
been possible in the world?

Once, in conversation, he told me that he also loved Bengali food. I protested, 'But Shahid, you've never even been to Calcutta<sup>3</sup>'.

'No,' he said. 'But we had friends who used to bring us that food. When you ate it you could see that there were so many things that you didn't know about, everywhere in the country...' What I say is: why can't you be happy with the cuisines and the clothes and the music and all these wonderful things?' He paused and added softly, 'At least here we have been able to make a space where we can all come together because of the good things.'

Of the many 'good things' in which he took pleasure, none was more dear to him than the music of Begum Akhtar. He had met the great ghazal singer when he was in his teens, through a friend, and she had become an abiding presence and influence in his life. Shahid had a fund of stories about her sharpness in repartee.

Shahid was himself no mean practitioner of repartee. On one famous occasion, at Barcelona airport, he was stopped by a security guard just as he was about to board a plane. The guard, a woman, asked: 'What do you do?'

'I'm a poet,' Shahid answered.  
'What were you doing in Spain?'  
'Writing poetry.'

No matter what the question, Shahid worked poetry into his answer. Finally, the exasperated woman asked: 'Are you carrying anything that could be dangerous to the other passengers?' At this Shahid clapped a hand to his chest and cried: 'Only my heart.'

This was one of his great Wildean moments, and it was to occasion the poem 'Barcelona Airport'. He treasured these moments: 'I long for people to give me an opportunity to answer questions', he told me once. On 7 May I had the good fortune to be with him when one such opportunity presented itself. Shahid

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<sup>3</sup> Kolkata



was teaching at Manhattan's Baruch College in the Spring semester of 2000 and this was to be his last class — indeed the last he was ever to teach. The class was to be a short one for he had an appointment at the hospital immediately afterwards. I had heard a great deal about the brilliance of Shahid's teaching, but this was the first and only time that I was to see him perform in a classroom. It was evident from the moment we walked in that the students adored him: they had printed a magazine and dedicated the issue to him. Shahid for his part was not in the least subdued by the sadness of the occasion. From beginning to end, he was a sparkling diva, Akhtar incarnate, brimming with laughter and *nakhra*. When an Indian student walked in late he greeted her with the cry; 'Ah my little subcontinental has arrived.' Clasping his hands, he feigned a swoon. 'It stirs such a tide of patriotism in me to behold another South Asian.'

His time at Penn State he remembered with unmitigated pleasure: 'I grew as a reader, I grew as a poet, I grew as a lover.' He fell in with a vibrant group of graduate students, many of whom were Indian. This was, he often said, the happiest time of his life. Later Shahid moved to Arizona to take a degree in creative writing. This in turn was followed by a series of jobs in colleges and universities: Hamilton College, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and finally, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where he was appointed professor in 1999. He was on leave from Utah, doing a brief stint at New York University, when he had his first blackout in February 2000.

After 1975, when he moved to Pennsylvania, Shahid lived mainly in America. His brother was already there and they were later joined by their two sisters. But Shahid's parents continued to live in Srinagar and it was his custom to spend the summer months with them there every year: 'I always move in my heart between sad countries.' Travelling between the United States and India he was thus an intermittent but first-hand witness (*sháhid*) to the mounting violence that seized the region from the late 1980s onwards:

It was '89, the stones were not far, signs of change everywhere  
(Kashmir would soon be in literal flames)...

The steady deterioration of the political situation in Kashmir—the violence and counter-violence—had a powerful effect on him. In time it became one of the central subjects of



his work: indeed, it could be said that it was in writing of Kashmir that he created his finest work. The irony of this is that Shahid was not by inclination a political poet. I heard him say once: 'If you are from a difficult place and that's all you have to write about then you should stop writing. You have to respect your art, your form—that is just as important as what you write about.'

Anguished as he was about Kashmir's destiny, Shahid resolutely refused to embrace the role of victim that could so easily have been his. Had he done so, he could no doubt have easily become a fixture on talk shows and news programmes. But Shahid never had any doubt about his calling: he was a poet, schooled in the fierce and unforgiving art of language. Although respectful of religion, he remained a firm believer in the separation of politics and religious practice.

Shahid's gaze was not political in the sense of being framed in terms of policy and solutions. In the broadest sense, his vision tended always towards the inclusive and ecumenical<sup>4</sup>, an outlook that he credited to his upbringing. He spoke often of a time in his childhood when he had been seized by the desire to create a small Hindu temple in his room in Srinagar. He was initially hesitant to tell his parents, but when he did they responded with an enthusiasm equal to his own. His mother bought him *murtis* and other accoutrements<sup>5</sup> and for a while he was assiduous<sup>6</sup> in conducting pujas at this shrine. This was a favourite story. 'Whenever people talk to me about Muslim fanaticism,' he said to me once, 'I tell them how my mother helped me make a temple in my room.'

I once remarked to Shahid that he was the closest that Kashmir had to a national poet. He shot back: 'A national poet, maybe. But not a *nationalist* poet; please not that.' In the title poem of *The Country Without a Post Office*, a poet returns to Kashmir to find the keeper of a fallen minaret:

'Nothing will remain, everything's finished,'  
I see his voice again: 'This is a shrine  
of words. You'll find your letters to me. And mine to  
you. Come son and tear open these vanished envelopes'...

<sup>4</sup> involving or uniting members of different religions

<sup>5</sup> other things that were needed for the activity

<sup>6</sup> taking great care that everything is done as well as it can be



This is an archive. I've found the remains  
of his voice, that map of longings with no limit.

In this figuring of his homeland, he himself became one of the images that were spinning around the dark point of stillness—both Sháhid and Shahid, witness and martyr—his destiny inextricably linked with Kashmir's, each prefigured by the other.

I will die, in autumn, in Kashmir,  
and the shadowed routine of each vein  
will almost be news, the blood censored,  
for the *Saffron Sun* and the *Times of Rain*...

Among my notes is a record of a telephone conversation on 5 May. The day before he had gone to the hospital for an important test: a scan that was expected to reveal whether or not the course of chemotherapy that he was then undergoing had had the desired effect. All other alternative therapies and courses of treatment had been put off until this report.

The scan was scheduled for 2.30 in the afternoon. I called his number several times in the late afternoon and early evening—there was no response. I called again the next morning and this time he answered. There were no preambles. He said, ‘Listen Amitav, the news is not good at all. Basically they are going to stop all my medicines now—the chemotherapy and so on. They give me a year or less. They'd suspected that I was not responding well because of the way I look. They will give me some radiation a little later. But they said there was not much hope.’

Dazed, staring blankly at my desk, I said: ‘What will you do now Shahid?’

‘I would like to go back to Kashmir to die.’ His voice was quiet and untroubled. ‘Now I have to get my passport, settle my will and all that. I don’t want to leave a mess for my siblings. But after that I would like to go to Kashmir. It’s still such a feudal system there and there will be so much support—and my father is there too. Anyway, I don’t want my siblings to have to make the journey afterwards, like we had to with my mother.’

Later, because of logistical and other reasons, he changed his mind about returning to Kashmir: he was content to be laid to rest in Northampton, in the vicinity of Amherst, a town sacred to the memory of his beloved Emily Dickinson. But I do not think it was an accident that his mind turned to Kashmir in



speaking of death. Already, in his poetic imagery, death, Kashmir, and Sháhid/Shahíd had become so closely overlaid as to be inseparable, like old photographs that have melted together in the rain.

Yes, I remember it,  
the day I'll die, I broadcast the crimson,  
so long ago of that sky, its spread air,  
its rushing dyes, and a piece of earth  
bleeding, apart from the shore, as we went  
on the day I'll die, post the guards, and he,  
keeper of the world's last saffron, rowed me  
on an island the size of a grave. On  
two yards he rowed me into the sunset,  
past all pain. On everyone's lips was news  
of my death but only that beloved couplet,  
broken, on his:  
'If there is a paradise on earth  
It is this, it is this, it is this.'

The last time I saw Shahid was on 27 October, at his brother's house in Amherst. He was intermittently able to converse and there were moments when we talked just as we had in the past. He was aware, as he had long been, of his approaching end and he had made his peace with it. I saw no trace of anguish or conflict: surrounded by the love of his family and friends, he was calm, contented, at peace. He had said to me once, 'I love to think that I'll meet my mother in the afterlife, if there is an afterlife.' I had the sense that as the end neared, this was his supreme consolation. He died peacefully, in his sleep, at 2 a.m. on 8 December.

Now, in his absence, I am amazed that so brief a friendship has resulted in so vast a void. Often, when I walk into my living room, I remember his presence there, particularly on the night when he read us his farewell to the world: 'I Dream I Am At the Ghat of the Only World...'



## READING WITH INSIGHT

1. What impressions of Shahid do you gather from the piece?
2. How do Shahid and the writer react to the knowledge that Shahid is going to die?
3. Look up the dictionary for the meaning of the word 'diaspora'. What do you understand of the Indian diaspora from this piece?

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# 7

## Birth

A.J. Cronin

In this excerpt from *The Citadel*, Andrew Manson, newly out of medical school, has just begun his medical practice as an assistant to Dr Edward Page in the small Welsh mining town of Blaenelly. As he is returning from a disappointing evening with Christine, the girl he loves, he is met by Joe Morgan. Joe and his wife, who have been married nearly twenty years, are expecting their first child.

THOUGH it was nearly midnight when Andrew reached Bryngower, he found Joe Morgan waiting for him, walking up and down with short steps between the closed surgery and the entrance to the house. At the sight of him the burly driller's face expressed relief.

"Eh, Doctor, I'm glad to see you. I been back and forward here this last hour. The missus wants ye—before time, too."

Andrew, abruptly recalled from the contemplation of his own affairs, told Morgan to wait. He went into the house for his bag, then together they set out for Number 12 Blaina Terrace. The night air was cool and deep with quiet mystery. Usually so perceptive, Andrew now felt dull and listless. He had no premonition that this night call would prove unusual, still less that it would influence his whole future in Blaenelly.

The two men walked in silence until they reached the door of Number 12, then Joe drew up short.

"I'll not come in," he said, and his voice showed signs of strain. "But, man, I know ye'll do well for us."



Inside, a narrow stair led up to a small bedroom, clean but poorly furnished, and lit only by an oil lamp. Here Mrs Morgan's mother, a tall, grey-haired woman of nearly seventy, and the stout, elderly midwife waited beside the patient, watching Andrew's expression as he moved about the room.

"Let me make you a cup of tea, Doctor, *bach*," said the former quickly, after a few moments.

Andrew smiled faintly. He saw that the old woman, wise in experience, realised there must be a period of waiting that, she was afraid he would leave the case, saying he would return later.

"Don't fret, mother, I'll not run away."

Down in the kitchen he drank the tea which she gave him. Overwrought as he was, he knew he could not snatch even an hour's sleep if he went home. He knew, too, that the case here would demand all his attention. A queer lethargy of spirit came upon him. He decided to remain until everything was over.

An hour later he went upstairs again, noted the progress made, came down once more, sat by the kitchen fire. It was still, except for the rustle of a cinder in the grate and the slow tick-tock of the wall clock. No, there was another sound—the beat of Morgan's footsteps as he paced in the street outside. The old woman opposite him sat in her black dress, quite motionless, her eyes strangely alive and wise, probing, never leaving his face.

His thoughts were heavy, muddled. The episode he had witnessed at Cardiff station still obsessed him morbidly. He thought of Bramwell, foolishly devoted to a woman who deceived him sordidly, of Edward Page, bound to the shrewish Blodwen, of Denny, living unhappily, apart from his wife. His reason told him that all these marriages were dismal failures. It was a conclusion which, in his present state, made him wince. He wished to consider marriage as an idyllic state; yes, he could not otherwise consider it with the image of Christine before him. Her eyes, shining towards him, admitted no other conclusion. It was the conflict between his level, doubting mind and his overflowing heart which left him resentful and confused. He let his chin sink upon his chest, stretched out his legs, stared broodingly into the fire. He remained like this so long, and his thoughts were so filled with Christine, that he started when the old woman opposite suddenly addressed him. Her meditation had pursued a different course.



"Susan said not to give her the chloroform if it would harm the baby. She's awful set upon this child, Doctor, *bach*." Her old eyes warmed at a sudden thought. She added in a low tone: "Ay, we all are, I fancy."

He collected himself with an effort.

"It won't do any harm, the anaesthetic," he said kindly. "They'll be all right."

Here the nurse's voice was heard calling from the top landing. Andrew glanced at the clock, which now showed half-past three. He rose and went up to the bedroom. He perceived that he might now begin his work.

An hour elapsed. It was a long, harsh struggle. Then, as the first streaks of dawn strayed past the broken edges of the blind, the child was born, lifeless.

As he gazed at the still form a shiver of horror passed over Andrew. After all that he had promised! His face, heated with his own exertions, chilled suddenly. He hesitated, torn between his desire to attempt to resuscitate the child, and his obligation towards the mother, who was herself in a desperate state. The dilemma was so urgent he did not solve it consciously. Blindly, instinctively, he gave the child to the nurse and turned his attention to Susan Morgan who now lay collapsed, almost pulseless, and not yet out of the ether, upon her side. His haste was desperate, a frantic race against her ebbing strength. It took him only an instant to smash a glass ampule and inject the medicine. Then he flung down the hypodermic syringe and worked unsparingly to restore the flaccid woman. After a few minutes of feverish effort, her heart strengthened; he saw that he might safely leave her. He swung round, in his shirt sleeves, his hair sticking to his damp brow.

"Where's the child?"

The midwife made a frightened gesture. She had placed it beneath the bed.

In a flash Andrew knelt down. Fishing amongst the sodden newspapers below the bed, he pulled out the child. A boy, perfectly formed. The limp, warm body was white and soft as tallow<sup>1</sup>. The cord, hastily slashed, lay like a broken stem. The skin was of a lovely texture, smooth and tender. The head lolled on the thin neck. The limbs seemed boneless.

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<sup>1</sup> the hard fat of animals melted and used to make soap, candles etc.



Still kneeling, Andrew stared at the child with a haggard frown. The whiteness meant only one thing: asphyxia, pallida<sup>2</sup>, and his mind, unnaturally tense, raced back to a case he once had seen in the Samaritan, to the treatment that had been used. Instantly he was on his feet.

"Get me hot water and cold water," he threw out to the nurse. "And basins too. Quick! Quick!"

"But, Doctor—" she faltered, her eyes on the pallid body of the child.

"Quick!" he shouted.

Snatching a blanket, he laid the child upon it and began the special method of respiration. The basins arrived, the ewer, the big iron kettle. Frantically he splashed cold water into one basin; into the other he mixed water as hot as his hand could bear. Then, like some crazy juggler, he hurried the child between the two, now plunging it into the icy, now into the steaming bath.

Fifteen minutes passed. Sweat was now running into Andrew's eyes, blinding him. One of his sleeves hung down, dripping. His breath came pantingly. But no breath came from the lax body of the child.

A desperate sense of defeat pressed on him, a raging hopelessness. He felt the midwife watching him in stark consternation, while there, pressed back against the wall where she had all the time remained—her hand pressed to her throat, uttering no sound, her eyes burning upon him—was the old woman. He remembered her longing for a grandchild, as great as had been her daughter's longing for this child. All dashed away now; futile, beyond remedy...

The floor was now a draggled mess. Stumbling over a soaking towel, Andrew almost dropped the child, which was now wet and slippery in his hands, like a strange, white fish.

"For mercy's sake, Doctor," whimpered the midwife. "It's stillborn."

Andrew did not heed her. Beaten, despairing, having laboured in vain for half an hour, he still persisted in one last effort, rubbing the child with a rough towel, crushing and releasing the little chest with both his hands, trying to get breath into that limp body.

<sup>2</sup> suffocation or unconscious condition caused by lack of oxygen and excess of carbon dioxide in the blood, accompanied by paleness of the skin, weak pulse, and loss of reflexes



And then, as by a miracle, the pigmy chest, which his hands enclosed, gave a short, convulsive heave, another... and another... Andrew turned giddy. The sense of life, springing beneath his fingers after all that unavailing striving, was so exquisite it almost made him faint. He redoubled his efforts feverishly. The child was gasping now, deeper and deeper. A bubble of mucus came from one tiny nostril, a joyful iridescent bubble. The limbs were no longer boneless. The head no longer lay back spinelessly. The blanched skin was slowly turning pink. Then, exquisitely, came the child's cry.

"Dear Father in heaven," the nurse sobbed hysterically. "It's come—it's come alive."

Andrew handed her the child. He felt weak and dazed. About him the room lay in a shuddering litter: blankets, towels, basins, soiled instruments, the hypodermic syringe impaled by its point in the linoleum, the ewer knocked over, the kettle on its side in a puddle of water. Upon the huddled bed the mother still dreamed her way quietly through the anaesthetic. The old woman still stood against the wall. But her hands were together, her lips moved without sound. She was praying.

Mechanically Andrew wrung out his sleeve, pulled on his jacket.

"I'll fetch my bag later, nurse."

He went downstairs, through the kitchen into the scullery<sup>3</sup>. His lips were dry. At the scullery he took a long drink of water. He reached for his hat and coat.

Outside he found Joe standing on the pavement with a tense, expectant face.

"All right, Joe," he said thickly. "Both all right."

It was quite light. Nearly five o'clock.

A few miners were already in the streets: the first of the night shift moving out. As Andrew walked with them, spent and slow, his footfalls echoing with the others under the morning sky, he kept thinking blindly, oblivious to all other work he had done in Blaenelly, "I've done something; oh, God! I've done something real at last."

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<sup>3</sup> a room for washing dishes and for similar work

**READING WITH INSIGHT**

1. "I have done something; oh, God! I've done something real at last." Why does Andrew say this? What does it mean?
2. There lies a great difference between textbook medicine and the world of a practising physician. Discuss.
3. Do you know of any incident when someone has been brought back to life from the brink of death through medical help. Discuss medical procedures such as organ transplant and organ regeneration that are used to save human life.

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8

## The Tale of Melon City

Vikram Seth

The following poem is taken from *Mappings* which was published in 1981 and is included in the *Collected Poems* by Vikram Seth.

The king, in this poem, is ‘just and placid.’ Does he carry his notion of justice a bit too far?

(After Idries Shah)

In the city of which I sing  
There was a just and placid King.

The King proclaimed an arch should be  
Constructed, that triumphally

Would span the major thoroughfare  
To edify spectators there.

The workmen went and built the thing.  
They did so since he was the King.

The King rode down the thoroughfare  
To edify spectators there.



Under the arch he lost his crown.  
The arch was built too low. A frown

Appeared upon his placid face.  
The King said, 'This is a disgrace.'

The chief of builders will be hanged.'  
The rope and gallows were arranged.

The chief of builders was led out.  
He passed the King. He gave a shout,

'O King, it was the workmen's fault'  
'Oh!' said the King, and called a halt



To the proceedings. Being just  
(And placider now) he said, 'I must  
  
Have all the workmen hanged instead.'  
The workmen looked surprised, and said,  
  
'O King, you do not realise  
The bricks were made of the wrong size.'  
  
'Summon the masons!' said the King.  
The masons stood there quivering.  
  
'It was the architect...', they said,  
The architect was summoned.  
  
'Well, architect,' said His Majesty.  
'I do ordain that you shall be  
  
Hanged.' Said the architect, 'O King,  
You have forgotten one small thing.  
  
*You made certain amendments to  
The plans when I showed them to *you*.*'  
  
The King heard this. The King saw red.  
In fact he nearly lost his head;  
  
But being a just and placid King  
He said, 'This is a tricky thing.  
  
I need some counsel. Bring to me  
The wisest man in this country.'

The wisest man was found and brought,  
Nay, carried, to the Royal Court.



He could not walk and could not see,  
So old (and therefore wise) was he —

But in a quavering<sup>1</sup> voice he said,  
‘The culprit must be punished.

Truly, the arch it was that banged  
The crown off, and it must be hanged’.

To the scaffold<sup>2</sup> the arch was led  
When suddenly a Councillor said —

‘How can we hang so shamefully  
What touched your head, Your Majesty?’

‘True,’ mused the King. By now the crowd,  
Restless, was muttering aloud.

The King perceived their mood and trembled  
And said to all who were assembled —

‘Let us postpone consideration  
Of finer points like guilt. The nation

Wants a hanging. Hanged must be  
Someone, and that immediately.’

The noose was set up somewhat high.  
Each man was measured by and by.

But only one man was so tall  
He fitted. One man. That was all.

He was the King. His Majesty  
Was therefore hanged by Royal Decree.

<sup>1</sup> trembling

<sup>2</sup> platform for the execution of criminals



'Thank Goodness we found someone,' said  
The Ministers, 'for if instead  
We had not, the unruly town  
Might well have turned against the Crown.'

'Long live the King!' the Ministers said.  
'Long live the King! The King is dead.'

They pondered the dilemma; then,  
Being practical-minded men,

Sent out the heralds to proclaim  
(In His [former] Majesty's name):

'The next to pass the City Gate  
Will choose the ruler of our state,

As is our custom. This will be  
Enforced with due ceremony.'

A man passed by the City Gate.  
An idiot. The guards cried, 'Wait!

Who is to be the King? Decide!'  
'A melon,' the idiot replied.

This was his standard answer to  
All questions. (He liked melons.) 'You

Are now our King,' the Ministers said,  
Crowning a melon. Then they led

(Carried) the Melon to the throne  
And reverently set it down.

\* \* \*



This happened years and years ago.  
When now you ask the people, 'So —  
Your King appears to be a melon.  
How did this happen?', they say, 'Well, on  
Account of customary choice.  
If His Majesty rejoice  
In being a melon, that's OK  
With us, for who are we to say  
What he should be as long as he  
Leaves us in Peace and Liberty?'  
The principles of *laissez faire*  
Seem to be well-established there.

READING WITH INSIGHT

1. Narrate 'The Tale of Melon City' in your own words.
2. What impression would you form of a state where the King was 'just and placid'?
3. How, according to you, can peace and liberty be maintained in a state?
4. Suggest a few instances in the poem which highlight humour and irony.
5. 'The Tale of Melon City' has been narrated in a verse form. This is a unique style which lends extra charm to an ancient tale. Find similar examples in your language. Share them in the class.