Tagore toured the world many times during his lifetime, recording his experiences and ideas in letters, diaries, journals, and articles. The excerpts printed here are, strictly speaking, letters, but because of their pictorial quality and their reflective flavor, they have been incorporated into a separate travel chapter. In contrast to the travel literature of the last decade of Tagore's life, which contains more speculative thought and commentary on situations, these selections from the early tours contain specific references to places and people, and throw more light on the culture and history of the people he visited.

On May 3, 1916, Tagore, accompanied by C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, sailed from Calcutta on a Japanese boat, S. S. Tosha Maru, bound for Japan, the first stop on a journey to the United States where he was to undertake an extended lecture tour. They stayed in Japan four months. On the Way to Japan and In Japan were sent to Pramatha Chaudhuri, editor of Sabuj Patra, who published them serially. In 1919 they were collected in a book, Japanyatri (A Sojourner in Japan). Much of this was translated by Pramatha Chaudhuri's wife, Indira Devi, and published in Volume III of the Visva-Bharati Quarterly.

Tagore sailed from Madras on July 14, 1927, for a tour of Southeast Asia, accompanied by Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Surendranathi Kar. By the end of October, when the trip was completed, they had visited, in addition to other places, Java, Bali, Siam, Singapore, Penang, Malacca, and Kuala Lumpur. Letters from Java was serialized in Vichitra during 1927–1928, and issued as a book, Jatri, a year later. Indira Devi translated and published it in the Visva-Bharati Quarterly.

During Tagore's historic visit to England in 1912, Yeats read the Gitanjali poems (see letter of May 6, 1913, to Indira Devi) at a specially
arranged reading in the Hampstead Heath home of William Rothenstein (see Note 3, page 377), and Tagore then retired to the Butterton countryside in Staffordshire where he spent some part of the summer at the home of one of Andrews’ clergyman friends. The letter describing this visit was first published in the December issue of the Tattvabodhini Patrika, was later (1939) incorporated in the book, Pather Sanchay (Gleanings of the Road), and was translated by this editor for the Summer issue, 1940, of the Visva-Bharati Quarterly.

In April, 1932, at the invitation of His Majesty, Riza Shah Pahlavi, Tagore journeyed by airplane to Iran, accompanied by his daughter-in-law (Pratima Devi), Kedarnath Chatterji, and this editor. The tour lasted about two months, and although Tagore was constantly traveling, he regularly sent letters to India. They were serially published in the Bengali monthlies, Prabasi and Vichitra, and were collected in 1936. They were translated into English by Surendranath Tagore, and published in Volumes II and III of the Visva-Bharati Quarterly.

FROM On the Way to Japan

A TEMPLE IN BURMA

From the glare of the outside world we entered into the ripened gloom of olden times. A broad flight of steps rose in tiers before us, covered with a canopy. On either side they were selling fruit, flowers, candles, and other sundry offerings of worship—the sellers mostly Burmese women. The colors of the flowers mingling with the colors of their silk clothes made the shades of the temple as variegated as the sky at sunset. Buying and selling are not prohibited, and Mohammedan shop-keepers are displaying their miscellaneous foreign wares. Meat and fish are not excluded either, and domestic concerns, including eating, are being carried on all around. There is no line drawn between the world and the temple; they mingle freely, but the commotion that prevails in the market is absent. Here there is no solitude, but there is privacy; no silence, but peace. There was a Burmese barrister in our party, who, when asked why fish and flesh
were allowed to be bought and sold and eaten on the temple steps, replied, "Buddha has preached to us, he has told us which way lies man's salvation, and which way lies his bondage; but he never wanted to make anything good by force; no good can be done by pressure from the outside; salvation lies in one's own free will; therefore, there is no ritualistic tyranny in our temple or our society."

HONGKONG  MAY 21, 1916

The sky is overcast with clouds; the hills in the harbor of Hongkong can be seen with waterfalls coursing down their sides. It seems as if a party of giants, after putting their heads into the sea, have just raised them above the water which is trickling down their tangled hair and beards. Charlie ¹ says that the scenery is like that of a Scottish lake surrounded by hills—the same green dumpy hills, the same clouds like wet blankets, the same land and seascape partially blurred by mist.

Our ship will stop here for about two days. The idea of going down to the city and staying in a hotel for the two days did not appeal to me. For a man of my lazy disposition, rest is better than comfort; happiness has its drawbacks, but peace is without sin. I remained on board, even at the risk of enduring the disturbances of loading and unloading. And I was not without my reward.

First of all, I notice the work of the Chinese laborers on the quay. They wore only blue pajamas, the rest of their bodies bare. Sparse and perfectly moulded, there was not the slightest superfluous anywhere—their muscles kept rippling the beat of their work. There was no necessity of prodding them from outside, and work seemed to vibrate from their bodies like music from lutes. I never imagined that I could possibly extract so much enjoyment from the loading and unloading of cargo on a ship's pier. The work of perfect strength is very beautiful; at each stroke it beautifies the body, and that body, too, beautifies the work. The poetry of toil and the rhythm of man's body appeared before me. I can say with emphasis that no woman's figure could be more beautiful than these men's figures, because
such perfect balance between strength and grace is rarely found in women. In another steamer just opposite ours, all the Chinese sailors, after their work was over, were bathing in the afternoon with their clothes off, and it was a joy to watch them.

JAPAN

One thing strikes the eye. There are crowds of people in the streets, but no confusion whatsoever. It is as if these people do not know how to shout; they even say the children of Japan do not cry. On going through the street in a car, when one is sometimes held up by rickshaws, the chauffeur waits quietly, never shouting or abusing anybody. Suddenly in the middle of the road a bicycle nearly collided with our car, under which circumstances an Indian chauffeur could not have refrained from abusing the cyclist to his heart's content, but our man took not the slightest notice. I am told by the Bengalis here, that even when there is an injury caused by a collision between two vehicles in the streets, both parties, instead of shouting and abusing each other, brush the dust off and walk away.

It seems to me that this is the main source of Japan's strength. The Japanese do not waste their energy in useless screaming and quarreling, and because there is no waste of energy it is not found wanting when required. This calmness and fortitude of body and mind is part of their national self-realization. They know how to control themselves in sorrow and tribulation, in excitement and pain; they do not allow themselves to melt and drip through every hole and opening. That is why foreigners say the Japanese are inscrutable; they are too reserved.
FROM In Japan

TOKYO

Immediately on arriving, I was caught in the midst of a cyclone of greetings and kind hospitality, together with which the newspapermen created a furor around me. I had almost given up hope of seeing anything of Japan through the loopholes in this wall. They crowd around you on board ship, they follow you in the streets, they crash into your room.

Pushing our way through this inquisitive crowd, at last we arrived in Tokyo town. Here we found asylum in the home of our artist friend Yokoyama Taikan. Now we began to become acquainted with the heart of Japan. First of all, we had to take off our shoes at the door. We were given to understand that shoes are for the street, and only the feet for the house. We also found that dust did not belong to their houses but to the world outside. All the rooms and corridors were covered with mats under which were mattresses of hard straw, so that as no dust enters their rooms, so also no footfalls are heard. The doors are sliding doors, so there is no chance of their rattling in the wind.

Another thing is, their houses are not very large. There are as few walls and beams and windows and doors as possible. That is to say, the house does not exceed the householder, but is completely within his grasp, and easily amenable to washing and scrubbing, cleaning and polishing. . . .

When I took my seat at early dawn on a mat by the window, I realized that not only are the Japanese master-painters but they have reduced the whole of man's life to an art. They know this much, that a thing which is valuable, which has worth, must be allowed a sufficient amount of space around it. Emptiness of space is most necessary for fullness of perception. A crowd of material is most inimical to the unfolding of life. In the whole of this house there is not a single corner which is uncared for, which is superfluous. The eye is not offended by any unnecessary object; the ear is not annoyed
by any unwanted sound. The mind of man can spread itself out as much as it likes, and does not have to trip over things at every step.

A JAPANESE GARDEN

After going a long way from Kobe by car, we first of all entered a garden deeply filled with shade and peace and beauty. These people know what a garden means. That gardening does not mean working geometrical problems on the earth by laying down some gravel and planting trees, is realized as soon as one enters a Japanese garden. The eyes and hands of the Japanese have achieved the freshness of beauty directly from Nature; they know equally well how to see and how to make.

At the end of the shady avenue, there was some clear water in a hollowed-out stone under a tree in which each of us washed our face and hands. They then took us into a small room and placed small round straw mats on a bench where we sat down. It is customary to sit in silence for some time; you do not meet the master of the house as soon as you arrive. In order to calm and tranquillize the mind, you are invited to advance gradually, after resting by degrees in two or three rooms, to the real meeting ground. All the rooms are silent as if wrapped in the shades of eternal evening; nobody says a word. The charm of this shadowy quiet silence gradually works upon the mind.

There was practically no furniture in the rooms, yet one felt as if they were full of something, and resonant. There is perhaps a single picture or a single vessel somewhere in the room. The guests examine it carefully and satisfy themselves in silence. A real thing of beauty requires a large open space; to keep beautiful things crowded together is to insult them.

The host appeared and told us that for special reasons he had assigned to his own daughter the duty of serving the tea. After bowing to us, she proceeded. From her entrance to every stage of tea-making, everything seemed to be performed in rhythm: washing, drying, lighting the fire, opening the lid of the tea-pot, taking down the vessel of
hot water, pouring out the tea into cups, placing them before the guests. Every act was performed with such poise and grace that it must be seen to be believed. Every utensil belonging to this tea-ceremony is rare and beautiful. It is the duty of the guests to turn these vessels around and around and observe them carefully; each possesses a special name or history. The amount of care lavished on these deserves description.

The idea is to thoroughly control the mind and body, letting beauty penetrate into one's inmost nature with a calm and dispassionate frame of mind. It is not the reckless dissipation of the sensualist; there is not the slightest trace of excess anywhere. To draw oneself far away from the mind's surface, where the waves are constantly rising and falling to the clash of selfish propensities and the winds of various needs and wants, and to bury oneself in the depths of beauty—this is the moral of the tea-ceremony.

FROM Letters from Java

THE ISLAND OF BALI

Not that all the dancing here is dramatic; there is also the pure dance. We saw that last night at the palace of the Raja of Giyanyar. Two little girls beautifully decorated, with flowers in their tiaras swinging to every movement, danced to the music of the gamelan. This music was somewhat different from ours. Our jalteranga has always struck me as a childish musical instrument; but in the gongs of the gamelan the same idea has gained breadth, dignity and variety. The Malayan musical modes have little resemblance to our ragas and raganis, the only common feature being the drum and cymbal accompaniment. Gongs are a prominent element of their concert music which, however, is neither like our modern attempts at melodic orchestration, nor has it the harmony of the Western symphony. The main melody, rung out by the gongs, is interwoven with the sounds of the other instruments into a kind of tonal mosaic.
In spite of the dissimilarity, it was pleasing to our ears and did not seem to hinder the appreciation of the Europeans.

The grace of the dancing of these two little girls was indeed charming. A marvel of elegance and variety, of delicacy and naturalness, the rhythm played through their limbs and over their bodies. Elsewhere one sees the dancer moving the body, but to see these girls, it seemed that the body itself was a spontaneous fountain of dance.

There was once a multitude of Rajas in this little island, many of whom, with thousands of their kinsmen and followers, committed suicide on the eve of the Dutch conquest. The few that still remain are like old candelabra in which candles are no longer lighted. They have their palace and their pomp, and the locality which they inhabit may still be called their capital, but the differences between these capital towns and the surrounding villages are as much as between brother and sister—they live in the same house, not walled off from each other. In modern India the life of the town is distinct from that of the village, with many special features of government and business activity. The lights of the town, however, do not shed any rays on the villages. It is as if there has been a partition of property between the two, and the share allocated to the villages is not enough to maintain the same style of life. That is why the country as a whole cannot sustain or encourage any branch of learning or art. When the townsman thinks of his country, he looks on it as a town, while the villager has forgotten how to think of it at all. As we motor about from one end of this island to another, we see a deep intimacy between its hills, rivers and cornfields, its towns and villages; whatever wealth it has, permeates the whole people.

This is our last day in Bali. I have taken refuge in a dak-bungalow on the Munduk hill. So far we have been going about amidst inhabited and cultivated localities, villages shaded with thick groves of coconut, betelnut, mango and tamarind trees. Here on the hillsides we see the original forest; it is somewhat like Shillong. The slopes below are terraced into rice fields. Through a gap in the range, one has a glimpse of the sea. Like the old history of the island, the distant views here are mostly misty. We are having moonlit nights, but the moonshine is vague, like some imperfectly known language.
The rays of the sun have fallen on the green forest of the nearer slopes; the distant hills are enveloped in a bluish haze. The sea, seen through the gap to the south, is dulled, like a mirror that has been breathed upon. The fronds of the betelnut palms of the village near by, nestling in its groves on the hillside, are trembling in the cool breeze. The women are carrying vessels of water. On the other side of the valley, habitations can be seen in the distance, peeping out of the dense woods, here and there. Around us the glistening leaves of the coconut trees are drinking draughts of sunlight.

At the moment of departure it occurs to me that beautiful as the island is, fine as are its people, nevertheless my mind would not care to build its nest here. From over the seas the call of India haunts me. Not merely because from infancy my communion with the universe has been through India, but because in its rivers and plains, in its atmosphere and its light, I have received intimations of an immensity that has captivated my mind into adoration forever. It is true that it causes me much suffering, the desolation that is everywhere in the lives of her people; yet, transcending it all, there is always with us the message of supreme liberation that has resounded in her skies from the beginning of time.

FROM Rural England

AT A VILLAGE PARSONAGE IN STAFFORDSHIRE

It is August, high summer in England; townsmen are longing to visit the countryside. People rush to parks and open fields; whenever they can get a few more hours they go out of town. Joining the flock of flying townsmen, we also got away.

When we reached the house, our hostess took us to the warm drawing room where a fire had been lit. The house was not an old parsonage but a new one; the garden was also new, perhaps they had themselves cultivated it. Clusters of many colored flowers fringed the deep lawn. I had never seen such profusion, such freshness of
foliage. It is unbelievable, unless one has seen it, how richly green and thick the grass can be.

The rooms of the house were neat and tidy, the library full of books on many subjects; there was not the least trace of negligence. Furniture, decoration, and comfort are of a much higher standard than in our country; every object is kept spotlessly clean with vigilant care. Slackness would not be tolerated by these people.

In the late afternoon my host Mr. Outram took us on a walk; the rain had stopped, but there was no gap in the clouds. On all sides was the deep green of undulating meadows divided by low hedges. Though hilly, the landscape had nowhere the roughness of hills; earth's exuberance was held in a beautiful harmony.

While walking, Mr. Outram met an acquaintance and discussed some business. I learned that a rural committee had been appointed for encouraging farmers to do some gardening of their own; some days ago a competition had taken place and this stranger had received the first prize for flowers. Mr. Outram took me to the houses of a few farm-holders. Everyone had a flower garden around their cottage and a kitchen garden, and there was an atmosphere of homely toil leading to happiness and simplicity. After the day's labor in the fields they returned to their homes and did gardening in the evening. . . . I had occasion to see many other proofs of the human fellowship developed through services and welfare work that existed between Mr. Outram and the village people who were under his care.

Institutional religion may occasionally hamper the progress of people but in spite of it the spirit of religion works in this country and there is no doubt that the clergy have kept the inner standards fairly high in the life of the village people. In our country this was the work of the Brahmins but being based on varna the system led to inevitable neglect of individual responsibility. I do not believe that all clergymen have accepted the ideal of Christ in their lives, but they are not clergymen by birth, and have to be responsible to society. It would be difficult for them to allow their character or behavior to be debased, and they have on the whole held up the pursuit of pure character as an ideal of religion. . . .

The religious orders have arranged for a generalized provision of religion for the communities. But this is not enough—the great problems of humanity that present themselves to the country from
time to time demand spiritual power and inspiration which institutionalism cannot provide. Such problems should be faced by clergymen with the inner music of Christ’s own words in their hearts, by establishing Him in their lives. But how rarely this happens.

FROM Journey to Persia

April 11, 1932

So long as our plane was passing over Bengal, it flew low. The villages, clustering around pieces of water overgrown with weeds, appeared to our gaze like tiny islands dotted over an expanse of bare fields. From our height they looked like cosy green nooks, but our hearts could feel the thirst of the parched land suffering at the approach of summer, its inhabitants having no resource except the whimsical favors of the Rain-God.

Men, beasts and birds were all out of sight. No sound, no movement, no sign of vitality—a world seemingly deserted by life lay before us, swathed in a patch-work shroud. As we rose higher, even this remnant of form was reduced to a pattern of scratchy lines, as though some extinct country of a forgotten name had recorded its annals on a drab surface in unknown characters of undecipherable meaning.

Up to this time we had not felt its motion very much, but suffered from the intolerable din of its propellers—there was no possibility of communication between passengers. My ears stuffed with cotton-wool, I could only look about me. In the front row was a Dane, employed in a sugar-cane plantation in Manila, now going home. He had been busy following our route on a partly rolled-up map, occasionally helping himself to bread and cheese, or chocolates. He had brought along with him a pile of newspapers which he perused one after the other. There were also three wireless operators who, taking turns, sat in their corners with the apparatus strapped to their ears, taking notes or writing their reports between intervals of eating and dozing. Together with the pilots these comprised our little com-
munity, snatched off the earth into isolation, pursuing a course through infinite solitude.

Look at our four Dutch pilots—immensely built, the personification of energy. Their country has not drained their lives, but has kept them fresh. Their rude but overflowing health, inherited from generations nourished by good food, keeps them from being tied down by dull routine. But India’s millions do not have enough to eat and have been exhausted by the toll paid to internal and external enemies. Any worthy achievement depends on the co-operation of man’s physical and mental forces. We may have the mind, but where is our physical energy? Our starved bodies cannot help shirking the needed exertion, resulting in perfunctory habits that are killing our people. In the endeavor to solve their food problem, Western governments compete with one another to empty their coffers, not hesitating to perpetrate cruel injustice on outsiders, knowing that its solution depends on both the material and moral advancement of the nation. In our country the remedy has to be sought individually, hampered by the dispensers of our fate.

April 15

Ever since our arrival, all kinds of functions have been held, and are being planned, to do me honor. My heart finds some difficulty in appropriating this honor because its meaning is not clear to me.

Who am I to these Bushire crowds? In my work, thought, and everyday life, I am far out of their world. When I was in Europe, the people there knew something of me as a poet, and so could judge me on materials before them. These people also believe me to be a poet, but solely by force of imagination. To them I am a poet, not of this or that kind, but in the abstract; so that nothing stands in the way of clothing me with their own idea of what a poet should be. Persians have a passion for poetry, a genuine affection for their poets, and I have obtained a share of this affection without having to show anything for it in return.

I am reminded of what happened when I was in Egypt. The
evidently looked on me not only as a poet, but an Oriental Poet, and must have felt that their country was sharing in the honor which was being shown to me. . . .

April 16

We should have started for Shiraz at 7 o'clock this morning, and so, though I felt far from strong, I was up as usual at dawn. But the others were still in bed, and it was past nine by the time we were all ready.

Our road is an unmetalled track and its condition does not co-operate with the gait of our motor car, so that we are at every moment kept aware of this disharmony, made to feel it in our bones! Empty plains follow one after another with no sign of trees or human dwellings. The greater part of Persia is on a high plateau, several thousand feet above sea-level, surrounded by hills, with mountain ranges running through. This slopes down toward a large tract of desert land, with a scanty rainfall, clouds being intercepted by the hills. Some of the hill streams reach this tract, making streaks of fertility through it, but fail to cross over it to the sea, being absorbed by the desert. . . .

Arrangements for an alfresco dinner have been made in the garden, but for the present I have to forego the pleasure of sitting out there, I am so utterly tired. They show me into a little carpeted room with a bed, on which I lie down. The breeze is soothing, and the foliage refreshes my eyes through the open window.

After a while I leave my bed and go out into the garden where I find the dinner being cooked in huge pots under the trees—much as it is done on the occasion of a feast in India.

A public holiday had been declared in honor of our expected arrival, but the large gathering, originally waiting for us, was thinned down because of our delay. We eventually sat down to dinner outside under lighted lamps, with those who had waited. Our host, out of consideration for my fatigue, offered to have me served in my own room, but I preferred to join the party. The viands—pillai, kabab—were of the style known in Bengal as moghlai. Our fellow-
munity, snatched off the earth into isolation, pursuing a course through infinite solitude. . . .

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I am reminded of what happened when I was in Egypt. The leading statesmen who came to welcome me on my arrival told me that parliament had been temporarily suspended because of my visit. Such a thing could be possible only in an oriental country. They
evidently looked on me not only as a poet, but an Oriental Poet, and must have felt that their country was sharing in the honor which was being shown to me. . . .

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Tagore's letters comprise twelve volumes. Some of them have appeared in Bengali collections published in India, notably Bhanusinher Patravali, Pathe O Pather Prante, and the Chithipatra series (some of which have been published in translation). Others were written directly in English, notably Letters to a Friend (Allen and Unwin, London, 1928). It is obvious that in an anthology such as this, space limitations prohibit a comprehensive collection; the attempt has been made here to choose those few letters which are best representative of both Tagore's personality and ideas current in certain phases of his life.

The letters to his wife are a selection from the first book of the Chithipatra series published by the Visva-Bharati, consisting of letters dating from 1890-1901 which were written by Tagore to his young wife, Mrinalini Devi, during their short separations. The letters have been translated from the Bengali by Lila Majumdar.

The excerpt from Tagore's letter to his niece Indira Devi was translated by herself into English.

The letters to Sturge Moore, W. W. Pearson, C. F. Andrews and Leonard Elmhirst were written by Tagore in English.

The letters to Ranu are a selection from the book Bhanusinher Patravali, a collection of letters written to a young girl, Ranu, daughter of Professor P. B. Adhikari of Benares Hindu University. The letters date from 1917 to 1923 and were published in book form in 1930 and dedicated to Ranu (now Lady Ranu Mookerji). They have been translated into English by Lila Majumdar.

The letters to Mrs. Rani Mahalanobis are a selection from the book Pathe O Pather Prante, in which are collected a number of letters Rabindranath wrote to Mrs. Rani Mahalanobis dating from November, 1926.
The immediate occasion for starting the correspondence was (according to the poet) to maintain a link with his fellow travelers, P. C. Mahalanobis and his wife, who had accompanied him through the major portion of his European tour (May–November, 1936) and had stayed back while the poet made his return voyage to India. The letters have been translated into English by Somnath Maatra.

All the letters printed here follow a strict chronology according to dates, except for the Pearson letter of October 6, 1918, which precedes the letter to Ranu of April 15, 1918.

The letter to Elmhirst of December 29, 1924, was actually dictated to him by Tagore during their stay in Argentina, but because of its spontaneous nature and its formal epistolary content, it seemed more suitable to include it as a letter rather than as an article.

FROM Letters to His Wife

Shelidah
1901

I could not write to you yesterday because of the ceremonies when the tenants pay their New Year’s rent. I arrived at Shelidah on the evening before, and the empty houseawned at me. I thought I would enjoy the lonely quiet after all the harassments of many days, but my mind was unwilling to enter alone where we have been accustomed to living together. Especially when I went into the house, tired after my journey and with no one to look after my wants and be glad and show tenderness, it all seemed very empty. I tried to read but I could not.

When I came in after walking through the garden the empty room with its kerosene lamp appeared emptier. The upstairs rooms seemed even more vacant. I came down again, trimmed the lamp and tried to read once more, but it was no use.

We had an early dinner and went to bed; I slept in the west room upstairs and Rathi² in the east room. It was really cold during the night and I had to cover myself with my woolen rug. The days are also fairly cold.
The rent-collecting was completed yesterday with music and prayers and so on. In the evening a party of kirtan-singers came to the courthouse and we listened to them until eleven.

Your herb garden is full now, but the greens have been planted so closely that they have no room to grow. We shall send you some of them with the other things. A number of pumpkins have been put away. The rose-trees that Nitu sent are in full bloom but the greater part of them are the odorless variety. He was cheated badly. The tube roses, the gardenias, the malati, the passiflora, the mehedi are flowering profusely. The lady-of-the-night is also flowering but there is no perfume. I think flowers lose their perfume in the rainy season.

The tank is full to the brim, the sugarcane in front has grown well, the fields all around are heavy with corn—a flawless green carpet. Everybody asks, "When will mother be here?" . . .

Shelidah
June, 1901

When the rent-collecting celebrations were over I set my hand to writing again. Once engrossed in my work I am like a landed fish which has found water again. Now the loneliness of this place gives me complete protection, the little details of life no longer touch me and I can easily forgive those who have been my enemies.

I can understand why you feel oppressed by loneliness; I would be happy if I could share with you my joy in this mood, but it is something which no one can give to another.

When you leave the crowds of Calcutta and find yourself in the midst of the emptiness here, you do not like it in the beginning, and even when you do get used to it you feel a repressed impatience within you. But tell me what else I can do when my life grows barren in Calcutta. That is why I lose my temper, fret about every little thing, cannot sincerely forgive everyone and so preserve my own peace of mind.

Besides, everyone is so restless there, Rathi and the others never can be properly educated. For all these reasons you must resign yourself to a sentence of exile. Perhaps later on, when I can afford it, I shall be able to select a better place, but I shall never be able to bury all my powers in Calcutta.
Now heavy clouds are darkening the sky and rain is beginning to fall. I have shut all the windows of my downstairs room and while I write to you I enjoy the sight of the falling rain. You could never see such a wonderful sight from your first floor room over there. The gentle, dusky, new summer rain over the green fields all around me is beautiful.

I am writing a critical essay on "Meghdut." If I could portray in my essay the deep duskiness of this heavy summer day, if I could give to my readers the greenness of Shelidah's fields in some permanent form, how would it be? In my books I have said so many things in so many ways, but where can I find this array of clouds, this movement of branches, this ceaseless fall of rain, this thick-shadowed embracement of earth and sky?

How naturally this rainy day gathers over the solitude of the fields, over the earth and the water and the sky; how the sunless mid-afternoon of idle cloudy June gathers around me, and yet I can leave no trace of all this in my writings!

No one will ever know I strung these words together in my mind, or when or where, in the long leisurely hours and in this lonely house. The rain has stopped after a particularly heavy shower, so this is the time to send my letter to the post.

Santiniketan
July, 1901

I have just come back after leaving Bela in her new home. It is not what you may imagine from a distance; Bela is quite contented there. There is no doubt that she likes her new way of life. We are now no longer necessary to her.

I have come to the conclusion that at least for a short period immediately after marriage a girl should keep away from her parents and give herself unrestricted opportunity for being with her husband. The presence of her parents in the midst of this union interferes with it because the habits and tastes of her husband's family are not the same as those of her own, and there are bound to be differences of opinion. With her parents near at hand a girl cannot forget her old ways and identify herself wholly with her husband. Since one must give away a daughter why try to retain any influence over
her? In such circumstances one must consider the girl’s welfare. What is the use of her considering our happiness or misery and adding her paternal attachments to those of her husband’s home?

Remember that Bela is quite happy and try to console your own grief at separation. I can say with certainty that if we had clung around them the result would not have been good. Because they are far away, the affection between them and us will always remain the same. When they come to us for the Pujah holidays or when we go to them, we shall all enjoy a deep and fresh delight.

In every kind of love there should be a certain amount of separation and detachment. No good ever comes of completely swamping each other. And even if Rani goes far away after her marriage, it will be good for her. Of course she will be near us for the first couple of years, but after that, as soon as she is old enough, she should be sent entirely away from us for her own good.

The education, tastes, customs, language and way of thinking of our family are different from those of other families in Bengal; that is why it is all the more necessary for our girls to remove themselves from us after marriage. Otherwise every little detail of her new life might be so irksome to the girl that it might influence her respect for and dependence upon her husband. All the faults of Rani’s nature will be corrected as soon as she is separated from her parental home, but she will never get rid of her old associations if she keeps in close contact with us.

Think of yourself. If I had lived in Fultala after marrying you, your nature and your behavior would have been quite different. Where one’s children are concerned, one should entirely disregard one’s own feelings. They were not born for our happiness; our joy should consist in their welfare and in the fulfillment of their lives.

All day yesterday memories of Bela’s childhood kept coming back to my mind. How carefully I reared her with my own hands; how naughty she would be, penned in by her pillows; how she would shout and hurl herself on any small child of her own age whom she met; how greedy she was, but how good-natured; how I would bathe her myself in the Park Street house; how I gave her warm milk to drink at night in Darjeeling. I keep remembering the time when my love for her first stirred in my heart, but she does not know of these things and it is better so. Let her bind herself to her
new home without pain and fulfill her life with faith and affection and household duties. Let there be no regrets in our hearts.

Arriving in Santiniketan today I am steeped in peacefulness. One cannot imagine how necessary it is to come away like this from time to time. Surrounded by the limitless sky and the wind and the light, I am, as it were, nursed in the arms of the primal mother.

**to Indira Devi**

London
May 6, 1913

... You have alluded to the English translation of *Gitanjali*.¹⁹ To this day I have not been able to imagine how I came to do it and how people came to like it so much. That I cannot write English is such a patent fact, that I never had even the vanity to feel ashamed of it. If anybody wrote an English note asking me to tea, I never felt equal to answering it. Perhaps you think that by now I have gotten over that delusion, but in no way am I deluded that I have composed in English. On the day I was to board the ship, I became ill because of my frantic efforts at leave-taking, and the journey was postponed. Then I went to Shchildah to rest, but unless the mind is active, one does not feel strong enough to relax completely, so the only way to keep myself calm was to do some light work.

It was then the month of Chaitra (March–April), the air was thick with the fragrance of mango-blossoms and all hours of the day were filled with the songs of birds. When a child is full of vigor, he does not think of his mother; it is only when he feels tired that he wants to nestle in her lap. That was exactly my position. With all my heart and all the abandon of leisure I settled myself comfortably in the arms of Chaitra, without missing even a particle of its light, its air, its scent and its song. In such a state one cannot remain idle. When the air strikes one's bones they tend to respond in music; this is an old habit of mine, as you know. Yet I did not have the energy to gird up my loins and sit down to write. So I took
up the poems of *Gitanjali* and set myself to translate them one by one. You may wonder why such a crazy ambition should possess one in such a weak state of health. But believe me, I did not undertake this task in a spirit of reckless bravery; I simply felt an urge to recapture, through the medium of another language, the feelings and sentiments which had created such a feast of joy within me in past days. The pages of a small exercise book came gradually to be filled, and with it in my pocket I boarded the ship. The idea of keeping it in my pocket was that when my mind became restless on the high seas, I could recline on a deck-chair and set myself to translate one or two poems. And that is what actually happened. I passed from one exercise book to another. From an Indian friend, Rothenstein 20 already had an inkling of my reputation as a poet; therefore, when in the course of conversation he expressed a desire to see some of my poems, I handed him my manuscript, with some reluctance. I could hardly believe the opinion he expressed after reading it. He then gave my book to Yeats. The story of what followed is known to you. From this explanation of mine you will see that I was not responsible for the offense, but that it was due mainly to the force of circumstances. . . .

**to Sturge Moore**

Shilida, Nadia  
February 17, 1914

Dear Sturge Moore,

An incident will show you how the award of the Nobel prize has roused up antipathy and suspicion against me in certain quarters. A report has reached me from a barrister friend of mine who was present on the occasion when in a meeting of the leading Mohammedan gentlemen of Bengal, Valentine Chirol 7 told the audience that the English Gitanjali was practically a production of Yeats. It is very likely he did not believe it himself, it being merely a political move on his part to minimize the significance of this Nobel prize affair which our people naturally consider to be a matter for
national rejoicing. It is not possible for him to relish the idea of Mohammedans sharing this honour with Hindus. Unfortunately for me there are signs of this feeling of antagonism in England itself which may be partly due to the natural reaction following the chorus of praise that Gitanjali evoked and partly, as you have said in your letter, to the bitterness of disappointment in the minds of the partisans of the candidates for the Nobel prize. You know it had been the source of a rare great pleasure for me while in England to be able to admire your manly power of appreciation which was without a tinge of meanness or jealousy. I could have gladly sacrificed my Nobel prize if I could be left to the enjoyment of this strong friendship and true-hearted admiration.

I had forgotten to tell you how greatly we all admire your beautiful design on the cover of the Crescent Moon.\textsuperscript{8} It is perfect in its simplicity and grace.

You must have read in the papers that in Paris they are holding an exhibition of pictures by our modern Indian artists. I hope you will find time to go and see it and realize the stir of new life in Bengal that is breaking out in manifold expressions. The head of this art movement in our country is my nephew Abanindranath who is sure to receive recognition some day in Europe. I hear that Havell\textsuperscript{9} will try to exhibit these pictures in the South Kensington Museum some time later on.

I have got a copy of Chitra\textsuperscript{10} sent to me last week. Its get-up is attractive and I hope it will not be deprived of its due because my books have been coming in too quick succession jostling each other. I am sure my publishers are not giving enough intervals to my readers for their appetite to be revived. However this must be said to my credit that the four poetical works of mine closely following each other are different in their character—and by this time critics must be thinking of modifying their classification of my poems as mystic. All poets have the sense of the infinite in some shape or other but it is their own keen sense of the finite that truly individualizes them. It is not according to what they contemplate but what they definitely see that poets have to be classified.

It was difficult to believe when I saw Miss Cooper that she was dying. She was so serenely radiant that she seemed less mortal than most other human beings. In fact, I felt an impulse of a deeper
life in my soul when I met her that evening. I must thank you for giving me the opportunity of knowing this woman in whom life triumphed so beautifully in the face of death.

Kindly remember me to Mrs. Moore.

Ever yours,
Rabindranath Tagore

Santiniketan
Balpur, Bengal
May 1, 1914

My dear Sturge Moore,

Our school is closed, and after a long interval of a busy time a full day has been given to me to spend as I like. I took up your book—The Sea Is Kind—finishing it at one sitting. It will be difficult for you to imagine this blazing summer sky of ours with hot blasts of air repeatedly troubling the fresh green leaves of a tree whose name will be of no use to you. This is as unlike the climate and the country where your poems were written as anything could be. I feel your environment in your poems. There is in them the reticence of your sky, the compactness of your indoor life and the general consciousness of strength ready to defy fate. Here in the East the transparent stillness of our dark nights, the glare of the noon-day sun melting into a tender haze in the blue distance, the plaintive music of the life that feels itself afloat in the Endless, seem to whisper into our ears some great secret of existence which is incomunicable. All the same, nay, all the more, your literature is precious to us. The untiring hold upon life which you never lose, the definiteness of your aims and positive reliance you have upon things present before you, inspire us with a strong sense of reality which is so much needed both for the purposes of art and of life. Literature of a country is not chiefly for home consumption. Its value lies in the fact that it is imperatively necessary for the lands where it is foreign. I think it has been the good fortune of the West to have the opportunity of absorbing the spirit of the East through the medium of the Bible. It has added to the richness of your life because
it is alien to your temperament. In course of time you may discard some of its doctrines and teachings but it has done its work—it has created a bifurcation in your mental system which is so needful for all life growth. The Western literature is doing the same work with us, bringing into our life elements some of which supplement and some contradict our tendencies. This is what we need. It is not enough to charm or to surprise us—we must receive shocks and be hurt. Therefore we seek in your writings not simply what is artistic but what is vivid and forceful. That is why Byron had such immense influence over our youths of the last generation. Shelley, in spite of his vague idealism, roused our minds because of his fanatic impetuosity which is born of a faith in life. What I say here is from the point of view of a foreigner. We cannot but miss a great deal of the purely artistic element of your literature but whatever is broadly human and deeply true can be safely shipped for distant times and remote countries. We look for your literature to bring to us the thundering life flood of the west, even though it carries with it all the debris of the passing moments.

I am getting ready to go off to the hills to spend my vacation there.

Ever yours,
Rabindranath Tagore

FROM Letters to a Friend

TO C. F. ANDREWS 11

Calcutta
July 11, 1915

... In India, when the upper classes ruled over the lower, they forged their own chains. Europe is closely following Brahmin India, when she looks upon Asia and Africa as her legitimate fields for exploitation. The problem would be simpler if she could altogether denude other continents of their population; but so long as there
are alien races, it will be difficult for Europe to realize her moral responsibility with regard to them. The gravest danger is when Europe deceives herself into thinking that she is helping the cause of humanity by helping herself, that men are essentially different, and what is good for her people is not good for others who are inferior. Thus Europe, gradually and imperceptibly, is losing faith in her own ideals and weakening her own moral supports.

But I must not go on weaving truisms; and on our own side I must equally acknowledge this truth, that weakness is heinous because it is a menace to the strong and the surest cause of downfall for others than those who own it. It is a moral duty for every race to cultivate strength, so as to be able to help the world's balance of power to remain even. We are doing England the greatest disservice possible by making it easy for her to despise us and yet to rule; to feel very little sympathy for us and yet to judge us.

Will Europe never understand the genesis of the present war, and realize that the true cause lies in her own growing skepticism toward her own ideals—those ideals that have helped her to be great? She seems to have exhausted the oil that once lighted her lamp. Now she is feeling a distrust against the oil itself, as if it were not at all necessary for her light.

FROM Letters to W. W. Pearson

October 25, 1917

My continuous stay in Calcutta for the last few months was not a particularly exhilarating experience for me. Yet for all I know, it was necessary, not for my peace of mind, but for realizing, rightly or wrongly, that my mission of life was not for exclusively turning out verses difficult of comprehension. I was too long out of touch with our Calcutta people—especially without students. In fact, as far as the Bengali public outside our Santiniketan was concerned, I had been living in a phantom world of a vanished generation. The present generation of our youth merely knows me as a man who has
achieved his reputation. But an assured reputation gives a sense of finality to one's career. It no longer appears like a flame but like a splendid snuffer to the candle of life. It was like a railway train which had accomplished its end and reached its terminus, therefore no longer of interest to the passengers who were beginning or continuing their journey. But this time I had the opportunity to prove to them that I was on the running line and that the signal was down. Our students were rather surprised to find that I still had in me most of the properties of solid matter—weight, penetrability and the power of occupying space. So, like Dada of Phalguni, I am in danger of being surrounded by the crowd, made use of and even praised. I am feeling excessively nervous because I am beginning to be flattered by my countrymen, to which experience, you know, I am not at all accustomed. When misunderstanding lands one upon the Alpine height of praise it is more perilous for him than when it hurls him into the depth of calumny. I am waiting every moment for the downward push to roll back again into my normal position of unambiguous revilement.

However, I am tired. I wish I were in some Japanese monastery with you practicing Zen. I have come to the conclusion that a poet ought to be a poet and nothing else. The combination of a setar and a fishing-rod in one may be convenient but such ingenious monstrousities should be discouraged.

But please do not imagine that my clouds had no gold lining whatever. We staged Dakghar (Post Office) in our Vichitra Hall, gave five performances and felt happier each time we did it. I took the part of Thakurda, Gagan that of Madhab, and Aban personated Morhal to perfection. The boy who personated Amal was glorious. He is a new acquisition to our school whom you do not know. We did miss you so much! I know if Andrews were among the audience he would have created a tremendous scene.

I had a letter from Andrews some time ago saying that he was coming back in November. I hope he will not change his plan. The absence of both of you is a sore trial to me.
Dear Pearson,

All through this last session I have been taking classes in the morning, spending the rest of the day writing textbooks. It is a kind of work apparently unsuitable for a man of my temperament. But I found it not only interesting, but restful. Mind has its own burden, which can be lightened when it is floated on a stream of work. Some engrossing idea also helps us in the same way—but ideas are unreliable—they run according to no timetable whatever—and the hours and days you spend in waiting for them grow heavy. Of all places of rest waiting rooms are the least rest-giving, because you have to put up with a leisure which is unmeaning and undesired. Lately I came to that state of mind when I could not afford to wait for the inspiration of ideas, so I surrendered myself to some work which was not capricious, but had its daily supply of coal to keep it running. However, this teaching work was not a monotonous piece of drudgery for me; for, contrary to the usual practice, I treated my students as living organisms—and dealing with life can never be dull. Unfortunately, poets cannot be expected to enjoy lucid intervals for long, and directly some muse takes possession of their minds they become useless for all decent purposes of life. These are intellectual gypsies, vagrancy is in their blood, and already I feel the call of an irresponsible vagabondage, a kind of passion for an extravagant idleness. The schoolmaster in me is perilously near being lured away by the mischievous imps of truancy. I am going to move away from this place in a day or two, for the ostensible reason of visiting South India from where invitations have been pouring upon me for long, but I tell you in confidence, it is the lapse of reason, my frequent visitor, the spirit of losing way, who is beckoning me, ready to escort me over all lines of prescribed works. I long to discover some fairy-land of holidays—not a Lotus Island—not a world where all week days are Sundays, but where Sundays are not at all needed, where all works carry their rest in themselves, where all duties look delightfully undutiful, like clouds bearing rain appearing perfectly inconsequential.
FROM *Letters from Bhanusinha*

TO RANU

Santiniketan
April 15, 1918

You may have read in books that some birds leave their nests at certain times and fly over the sea. I am such a bird. From time to time something calls me from beyond the ocean and my wings flutter. So I have arranged to board a ship at the beginning of May and cross the Pacific Ocean. If nothing prevents me I shall really set out.

Nowadays, with this war on, the western sea-route does not always take one to the farther shore, but to the bottom of the sea. The eastern route is still safe, but perhaps one day the winds of war will arrive here as well. However, please do not imagine that I have forgotten all about your invitation to Benares. You go ahead with your arrangements while I drop in at Australia, Japan, America, and a few other places on my way, until at last I settle down comfortably with you. But a west-province diet will not do for me. I feel sure you have an excellent cook, in spite of which, unless you prepare everything for me with your own hands, from the first small dish of vegetables down to the last sweet milk-rice I shall instantly rebel. I have not yet made up my mind, but I was thinking of going back to Australia at once, without my lunch, only I am not sure if it would be possible to keep such a promise, so I shall not say anything more for the present.

But I suppose you cannot cook? Is that it? You have been doing nothing except your lessons? Well, I will give you one year’s grace; meanwhile take lessons from your mother. Let us leave it at that. In the meantime I must go to Calcutta and pack my trunks. I am a wonderful packer, but I have one little fault. I often forget to pack the most important things, and just when I need them most I find I have left them behind!

All this causes a great deal of inconvenience but it makes packing
very easy. There is always plenty of room inside my trunks and I have to pay the railway and steam-ship companies much less, the boxes weigh so little!

Besides, there is the other advantage in carrying unnecessary rather than necessary things: one does not have to keep opening one's trunks to get them out, so they remain nicely packed; and even if they get lost or are stolen it does not interfere with one's work or matter one bit!

I must leave by the three o'clock train so I have not much more time to write. I have a wonderful knack of missing trains but it will be of no use today, so I shall just send you my blessings for the New Year and rush off to buy my ticket.

Santiniketan
July 21, 1918

Yesterday evening, layers of dark blue clouds covered the sky while my English friend and I were having tea on the east verandah downstairs. I had finished everything and was starting on the fried parched rice when a whistling wind came up from the west and spread black clouds from one end of the sky to the other.

The sight of those rain clouds after so many days was a pleasure to my eyes. Had I been a Hindustani girl from your Benares I would have gone off to the swing on the sirish tree, singing kajri songs. But neither Andrews nor I have the appearance, nature or manners of a Hindustani girl, and in addition, he does not know any kajri songs and I have forgotten what I knew. So the two of us went upstairs and sat on the verandah before the terrace.

In no time, heavy rain began to fall and the rainwater and the wind made merry in the heavens. They caught hold of the long leaves of the papaya tree in front of our verandah and cuffed its ears. When the rain grew more violent and began to spatter us with drops, we took shelter in my own corner.

Suddenly a thunderbolt fell, dazzling our eyes and making a tremendous noise. We had an idea that it must have fallen in the garden somewhere. As we hurried out, we saw the boys running toward Haricharan Babu's 16 house.
Indeed, the house had been struck by lightning. His eldest daughter had been boiling milk over the oven and she had dropped down, unconscious. From a distance the boys saw smoke issuing from the thatched roof. They climbed up and kept shouting for water which was fetched from the well to put out the fire. Mercifully, no one in the house was injured, except that the daughter’s hand was slightly scalded.

What pleased me most was the boys’ enterprising spirit. They knew neither fear nor weariness. They tore off the burning thatch with their bare hands, flung it to the ground, ran to the distant well, and falling into line, fetched pitchers of water. If they had not noticed the blaze and rushed to the rescue a terrible fire would have broken out.

In this way, the rain and the storm continued far into the night and it is much cooler today. The sky is still overcast; perhaps there will be another spell of rain this evening.

Santiniketan
July 28, 1918

You seem to be deeply engrossed in your lessons these days, but please do not imagine that I am sitting around doing nothing.

My classes continue as usual. You know that I have to teach three classes every morning. Then I have my bath and lunch, and if any letters must be written, I write them. Then I prepare more lessons for my classes until tea is announced.

Later in the evening I sit quietly on the terrace; sometimes the boys come to hear my poems. When it grows dark and the sky is studded with stars, I can hear the boys learning songs in Dinu’s room. At last the singing ends.

Then I hear the sound of singing with the harmonium and flute in the senior boys’ rooms. Slowly the singing stops and I can see one or two lights moving along the distant village roads. Afterwards those lights also disappear and only the sky-wide starlight remains. Then I feel sleepy, so I get up and go slowly to bed.

Then at a certain time the sky in front of my eastern door gradually gets lighter and a bird or two begins to twitter; the clouds are
touched with a hint of gold. The senior-school bell rings at half-past four and immediately I get up.

I wash my face and say my prayers on the stone seat in my east verandah. The sun slowly climbs up and blesses me with its rays.

Nowadays we have early breakfast because at half-past six all the members of the asrama, old and young, gather together in the open ground in front of the school. We sing a song and commence our school work.

I do not teach any classes during the first hour, but sit in my own corner and go through my books and papers and get ready for lessons. After this, my classes commence.

So here is an account of my whole day and night; how peacefully the days pass. I love to work with the boys because they do not realize that the work we do for them has any value. They accept our service as naturally as they accept the light from the sun, and not as they bargain with and buy things from the shopkeepers in the market.

When these boys grow up and take their place in the business of the world, perhaps they will remember these open fields, this sal avenue, the generous light of these skies, these free winds and this obeisance to God every morning and evening, silently, under the open sky.

Santiniketan
November 25, 1918

As yet there is no relief from the pressure of my work. Everyone thinks that I am a poet, that day and night I gaze at the clouds playing in the sky, and listen to the song of the wind. I drown in the moonlight, I am intoxicated with the scent of flowers, I tremble with the murmuring of the leaves, etc. etc. All this is due to jealousy. They wish to boast about the fact that though they may not compose poems they go to the office seven days in the week; they go to court, they run newspapers, give lectures, carry on trades, they are all such terribly busy people.

I wish they would come here and see whether I do any work or not. Well they may do a lot of work, I acknowledge that, but have they the power not to do a lot of work? When they have no work
to do, they either sleep or play cards or drink or find fault with people; indeed they cannot think how to spend their time. I have this advantage, that when there is work to be done I really do it, but when there is no work then I can do no work with all my heart. Your father's committee meetings are nothing compared to that. I get absolutely emaciated in the crush, due to the pressure of doing nothing. Recently, however, I have had such a lot of work to do that I have not been able to write a single work of that drama...

Santiniketan
May 18, 1919

I have just received the account of your travels and have been wondering how to write a reply that will equal your letter. You move, I am stationary; you are a bird in the sky, I am an aswath tree at the edge of the forest; your singing and the rustling of my leaves cannot be the same. At one point we both agree: you have gone for a change of air and so have I. You have gone from Benares to Salon, I have gone from my writing desk to my long chair by the window. A great change indeed. But there is one fundamental difference between your traveling and mine. You move yourself, but I remain stationary while everything before me moves. My travels consist in that kind of movement.

This is traveling worthy of kings. Some one else does the traveling and I do not have to move for the sake of movement. Look, today is Sunday, market day, there is a bullock-cart passing in front of me, and my eyes turn into passengers riding in the cart. Look, there go the Santal girls with bundles of straw on their heads. There goes Santosh Babu's herdsman driving his herd of buffaloes. There go some people from the station toward Goalpara, who and why I have not the least idea. A flat-bottomed coconut-shell for smoking tobacco hangs from somebody's hand, somebody carries a torn umbrella over his head, and somebody a naked baby on his shoulder. See, there come the girls from Bhuvandanga, waterpitchers at their hips, to fetch water from our Santiniketan wells. I let my mind float with the current of all this, and sit here in silence. The clouds pass across the sky, the broken file of last night's storm, looking very
damaged. I shall see them again this evening in blue, red, gold and purple uniforms, heralding the storms and marching from the north-west with the deep rolling of drums, all in military parade. They will not look so meek then.

Our school is closed and only the chattering birds keep the asrama alive; many kinds have gathered here—the banyan fruit is ripe and they are uninvited guests. But Mother Nature has set places for everybody.

July 11, 1919

Your letter put me to shame today. Shall I tell you why? I had already received one letter from you and was thinking of answering it, when this other letter arrived. You win.

How am I to compete with all those dangerous travels you have written about? This morning I thought of standing on the railway track before the little wood at night, and then after the passenger train had passed over my chest, if I could still move my hand, I would write a letter to you that could vie with yours! But I have not yet consulted my daughter-in-law about this, or spoken with Mr. Andrews. I suspect they will not agree. Besides, I have a few doubts of my own. Supposing my thumb is injured by the weight of the train, why, I may not be able to write at all! And then your two letters will always remain winners. I give up the idea.

Nothing terrible has happened here in the last few days. We have had a little rain and storm, but not enough to bring our roof down, and no one has been hit by even an ordinary thunderbolt. All over the country there are robberies with guns and daggers but we are so unfortunate that none of them, or even their distant relatives, have cared to visit our asrama!

No, that is not correct. A blood-curdling event did take place a few days ago. A long road passes in front of our asrama, along the edge of the lonely fields, right up to the station at Bolpur. To the west of this road there is a two-storeyed house. A lady from Bengal lives all alone on the ground floor, with only a few maids and servants and a footman and a milkman and a cook; and an Englishman called Mr. Andrews lives upstairs. Besides these, there is not a single
person in the whole house. That night, the sky was overcast and
the moon shed a few pale moonbeams from behind the clouds. When
it was about eleven and the lonely lady was resting with only ten or
twelve people about her, who was the man that entered her room?
Who was the strange young man? Where did he live, and what did
he want? Suddenly he disturbed the silence of the quietly slumbering
room and asked, “Where is the school?” The lady who was awakened
so abruptly felt her heart thumping furiously. In a choking voice she
said, “The school is to our west.” Then the young man asked,
“Where is the headmaster’s room?” The lady said, “I do not know.”
Here commences the next chapter. In the pale moonlight, in the
middle of the night, resounding with the chirp of crickets, ignoring
the shrill protests of the asrama dogs, the young man walked along
the gravel paths of the asrama and entered the room of a second
defenseless woman. At the moment there was not a single other
person in the room besides her grown-up husband. He asked the
same two questions, and the almost empty room lit by a dim lamp,
was silent with panic. Why had the man come here from a far
country, in search of the headmaster? What enmity was there be-
tween them? That night, the lady who had her husband with her
and the other one who had not, both fell asleep with a load of fear
in their simple and gentle hearts. I wonder if they were afraid that
the remains of the headmaster would be discovered somewhere next
morning—the minus “master” part of him.

Then follows the third chapter. Next day, the first lady said to me,
“Father, at midnight a young man, etc.” Whereupon I hope my
reader will not be astonished to learn that I did not run away from
the asrama, that I did not even bare my sword. Even if I had wished
to do so, I did not possess a sword; in fact a pen-knife was all I had.
I did not take any infantry or cavalrymen with me when I went out
to find the young man who disturbed the sleep of delicate ladies last
night in his search for the headmaster.

Then comes the conclusion. The young man was discovered and
questioned. From his answers, we learned that he had come here
to get a young relative admitted into the school. Finis.
FROM *Letters to a Friend*

TO C. F. ANDREWS

Ardennes
August 21, 1920

Here we are in a most beautiful part of France. But of what avail is the beauty of Nature when you have lost your trunks which contained all your clothes? I could have been in perfect sympathy with the trees surrounding me if, like them, I were not dependent upon tailors for maintaining self-respect. The most important event for me in this world at present is not what is happening in Poland, or Ireland, or Mesopotamia, but the fact that all the trunks belonging to our party have disappeared from the goods-van in their transit from Paris to this place!

And therefore, though the sea is singing its hymns to the rising and setting sun and to the starlit silence of the night, and though the forest around me is standing tiptoe on the rock, like an ancient Druid, raising its arms to the sky, chanting its incantation of primeval life, we have to hasten back to Paris to be restored to respectability at the hands of tailors and washermen!

I have just received your letter, and for some time I have felt myself held tight in the bosom of our Asram. I cannot tell you how I feel about the prolonged separation from it which is before me; but at the same time I know that unless my relationship with the wide world of humanity grows in truth and love, my relationship with the Asram will not be perfect.

Houston, Texas
February 23, 1921

Tied to the chariot-wheel of karma we flit from one birth to another. What that means to the individual soul I have been made to realize in these last few days. It is my tyrant karma which is
dragging me from one hotel to another. Between my two hotel incarnations I usually have my sleep in a Pullman car, the very name of which suggests the agency of death. I am ever dreaming of the day when I shall attain my nirvana, freed from this chain of hotel lives, and reach utter peace in uttarayan.

I have not written to you for some time. For I am tired to the profound depth of my being.

Yet, since coming to Texas, I have felt as it were a sudden coming of spring into my life through a breach in the ice castle of winter. It has come to me like a revelation that all these days my soul had been thirsting for the draught of sunshine poured from the beaker of infinite space. The sky has embraced me, and the warmth of its caress thrills me with joy.

Strasbourg
April 29, 1921

I am writing this from Strasbourg, where I am going to read my lecture at the University this evening.

I miss you very much at this moment; for I feel certain it would overwhelm you with happiness could you be with me now, realizing the great outburst of love for me in the continental countries of Europe which I have visited. I have never asked for it, or striven for it, and I never can believe that I have deserved it. However, if it be more than is due to me, I am in no way responsible for this mistake. For I could have remained perfectly happy in my obscurity to the end of my days, on the banks of the Ganges, with the wild ducks as my only neighbors on the desolate sand islands.

“'I have only sown my dreams in the air,'” for the greater part of my life, and I never turned back to see if they bore any harvest. But the harvest now surprises me, almost obstructs my path, and I cannot make up my mind to claim it for my own. All the same, it is a great good fortune to be accepted by one's fellow-beings from across the distance of geography, history and language, and through this fact we realize how truly One is the mind of Man, and what aberrations are the conflicts of hatred and the competitions of self-interest.
We are going to Switzerland tomorrow, and our next destination will be Germany. I am to spend my birthday this year in Zurich. I have had my second birth in the West, and there is rejoicing at the event. But by nature all men are dwija or twice-born, first they are born to their home and then, for their fulfillment, they have to be born to the larger world. Do you not feel yourself that you have had your second birth among us? And with this second birth you have found your true place in the heart of humanity.

It is a beautiful town, this Strasbourg, and today the morning light is beautiful. The sunshine has mingled with my blood and tinged my thoughts with its gold, and I feel ready to sing: “Brothers, let us squander this morning with futile songs.”

This is a delightful room where I am sitting now, with its windows looking over the fringe of the Black Forest. Our hostess is a charming lady, with a fascinating little baby, whose plump fingers love to explore the mystery of my eye-glasses.

Stockholm
May 27, 1921

I have been following the track of spring from Switzerland to Denmark, and from Denmark to Sweden, watching everywhere flowers breaking out in a frenzy of colors. And it seems to me like the earth’s shouting of victory, and flinging up its colored cap to the sky. My path in the West also has had the same exuberant outburst of welcome.

At first I felt the impulse to describe it to you in detail; for I was sure it would give you great delight. But now I shrink from doing it. For somehow it does not cause exultation in my own mind, but makes me sad. It would be absurd for me to claim what has been offered to me as fully mine. The fact is, there is a rising tide of heart in the West rushing toward the shores of the East, following some mysterious law of attraction. The unbounded pride of the European peoples has suddenly found a check, and their mind appears to be receding from the channel it had cut for itself.

The giant, being weary, is seeking peace; and as the fountain of peace has ever flowed from the East, the face of troubled Europe is
instinctively turned today toward the East. Europe is like a child who has been hurt in the midst of her game. She is shunning the crowd and looking out for her mother. And has not the East been the mother of spiritual humanity, giving it life from its own life?

How pitiful it is that we, in India, are unaware of this claim for succor from Europe which has come to our door; that we fail to realize the great honor of the call to serve humanity in her hour of need!

Bewildered at heart by the great demonstrations made in my honor in these countries, I have often tried to find out the real cause. I have been told it was because I loved humanity. I hope that this is true; and all through my writings, my love of man has found its utterance and touched human hearts across all barriers. If it be true, then let that truest note in my writings guide my own life henceforth.

The other day, when I was resting alone in my room in the hotel at Hamburg, timidly there entered two shy and sweet German girls, with a bunch of roses for their offering to me. One of them, who spoke broken English, said to me: "I love India." I asked her: "Why do you love India?" She answered: "Because you love God."

The praise was too great for me to accept with any degree of complaisance. But I hope its meaning was in the expectation from me which it carried, and therefore was a blessing. Or possibly she meant that my country loved God, and therefore she loved India. That also was an expectation whose meaning we should try to appreciate and understand.

The nations love their own countries; and that national love has only given rise to hatred and suspicion of one another. The world is waiting for a country that loves God and not herself. Only that country will have the claim to be loved by men of all countries.

Berlin
June 4, 1921

... I saw Post Office acted in a Berlin theater. The girl who took the part of Amal was delightful in her acting, and altogether the whole thing was a success. But it was a different interpretation from
that of ours in our own acting in Vichitra. I had been trying to define the difference in my mind, when Dr. Otto of Marburg University who was among the audience, hit upon it. He said that the German interpretation was suggestive of a fairy-story, full of elusive beauty whereas the inner significance of this play is spiritual. ... Do you think that Post Office has some meaning at this time for my country in this respect, that her freedom must come direct from the King's Messenger, and not from the British Parliament; and that when her soul awakes nothing will be able to keep her within walls? ...

TO LEONARD K. ELMHIRST

Miralrio, Argentina
December 29, 1924

... whenever some great personality is born, his voice reaches out to challenge the spirit in us and to remind us that we are not just animals, but men. I believe the time has now come when some new warning has to be preached to us in the realm of politics. We all know that there was a time when a difference of religious belief was punished by physical punishment. Heretics were burned to death. Spiritual truth was believed to be almost material in character. But a sin which belongs to the realm of the spirit can never be eradicated by punishment which is merely physical. The very idea that it could be is but an example of the beast in man speaking. To those who automatically hold religious creeds different from our own, we no longer mete out physical punishment. Today religious conflict is carried on through intellectual discussion, a kind of warfare it is true, but at least on a plane higher than the purely physical one.

Gandhi has, I believe, faith in a new kind of political warfare, one which can have a spiritual character of its own. Only by those who have the courage to accept suffering and not inflict it can, says he, such a spiritual war be waged. If a whole nation could be trained not to fear physical death, no power in the world could keep it in bond-
age. We yield to those who have physical power over us, not because of a difference in degree between our physical strength and theirs, but because of our own lack of moral courage. As long as a people is afraid of physical suffering, machinery for intimidating them will always be invented. Directly as we are able to say we are no longer afraid of physical suffering or of death, arms and armaments lose their significance. If such a faith in our spiritual strength can be inculcated, and Gandhi thinks that a whole people can be brought to accept such an idea, that in itself would be permanent freedom. It is for this idea that he is struggling. It is a great idea.

To convince us that the putting of such an idea into practice is not so difficult and that a great period of peace and of freedom could be imminent and in the realm of the possible, some man of outstanding faith is needed. Jesus Christ had faith in the coming of just such a Kingdom, and in the fact that it was “near at hand.” All idealists tell us that some kind of “Kingdom of God” is within our reach and suggest that any obstruction that may exist in our minds to the idea of its realization is but flimsy and unreal. It may be that we are not yet ready to receive such a message or to act upon it, but it is well that such a challenge to adventure in faith should be uttered. Only thus is our belief in it likely to grow, and this, after all, is the first step. . . .

FROM Pathe O Pather Prante

TO MRS. RANI MAHALANOBIS

Santiniketan
February 8, 1927

. . . I am past the age for letter writing. When one speaks through his pen, much of the life goes out of what one has to say. When one is in the fullness of power, enough remains even after the inevitable loss in transmission. That is why writing then never seems to
lose its natural conversational flow. Now, however, the words do not bubble up naturally into talk, their current at the tip of the pen becomes thin, and one feels disinclined to undergo the pains of composition.

However, let me tell you of something I feel deeply. The times are out of joint, there is much to worry about, much that hurts; there is want and conflict. The shadow of despondency grows deeper every moment, a sense of pain sweeps like a wind across the mind. Then I suddenly remember that the shadow is that of the demon called "I" which has no real substance. The wind then jumps up and asserts loudly that the demon is not there, it has no real existence. Quickly the mind becomes clean and whole again. I pace the red-graveled path outside my house with this tussle in my mind between light and shade. Who, seeing me from outside, will understand that this process of creation goes on within me? Does this creation start and end in my mind? Has it no eternal bond with the creative process of the universe? It certainly has. Something is taking shape throughout the universe and through all eternity. We feel the impact of it in the pain of our hearts. The stage at which man has arrived in the march of civilization has been attained by the creative endeavors of countless millions of unknown individuals, the history of whose personal struggles lies merged in oblivion. Whatever abides in creation is the momentary handiwork of the countless many that have passed away. Those architects of creation, those that are gone, are functioning within me—the thing called "I" only furnishes them with a sort of prop. The scaffolding of a house in construction may be necessary today, but tomorrow when there is no trace left of it, no one will miss it. The completed building never sorrows for its lost scaffolding. The point is that as I pace this path I feel that much of the construction going on within me is being stored in the treasury of Man's creation, with the signature of my name obliterated.

Santiniketan
November 7, 1928

The principal news about me from day to day is that I am drawing pictures. Lines have spread their magic net over my entire mind.
This untimely infatuation for an unknown *inamorata* has resulted in my poetry leaving the neighborhood—I have forgotten that I have at any time written poetry. My present occupation is so fascinating because it is so unpremeditated. However indistinctly, at the very beginning the thought of a poem suggests itself to the mind; and then, like the Ganges rushing down from the matted locks of Siva's hair through a chasm in the Himalayas, the poem comes cascading down the tip of the pen, and the rhythms begin to flow. But in the pictures I try to draw, the method of composition is just the reverse. The first faint suggestion of lines come from the pen itself; then, these lines begin to assume familiar forms, the mind starts to take cognizance of them. The wonder of these fascinates the mind. If I had been an expert artist, I would have first formed the idea, and then worked it out in a picture; the thing within me would thus have found outward expression. There is pleasure in that, too. But when one's whole mind is engrossed in the creation of something that lies outside oneself, the pleasure is still more intoxicating. As a result of this, my other responsibilities have been peeping in at the door and going away after giving me up for lost. If I had been free from the claims of other work as in my younger days, I would have sat on the banks of the Padma, and produced rich harvests of pictures and loaded them in Time's golden boat. But at present, I can only make a little room for them by pushing aside the claims of so many other things. That does not satisfy. They want the whole sky, and I, too, am eager to give it to them, but the planets conspire to place so many obstacles in the way—chief among which is the betterment of the world!

Santiniketan
November 29, 1928

Before saying anything else I want to tell you that the tea you sent was excellent. That I have not written for so long is on account of the peculiarity of my nature. I write letters as I paint pictures. When I feel prompted to write, I put down whatever comes into my head. It has nothing to do with the events of my day-to-day life. It is the same with my pictures; I suddenly see a figure within my
mind. It may not have a resemblance or relation to anything around me—that there is always a process of creation and destruction, movement and adjustment, going on within us. Now an idea, now an image, rises up in the mind to assume different forms. It is with them that my pen has to do. Formerly my mind used to hear the voice of the sky and the music of the wind; words used to come to it out of the air. Now it has its eyes open to the world of forms and the crowds of lines. When I look at trees and plants I see them intensely and understand that the world is a pageant of forms. My pen seeks to join in the play of those forms. Not emotion, not sentiment, not thought—but an assemblage of forms! The surprising thing is that there is deep joy in this, and an intoxication. Lines have come to possess me; I cannot shake them off. They reveal themselves to me in ever-new gestures; there is no end to their mystery. I have at last come to know how the mind of the Creator-Artist works. The Un-manifest binds Himself by means of lines in ever-new finite forms. In size, the forms He gives Himself may be limited, but in their variety they are infinite. So it comes to this, that fullness of expression can only be achieved through limitation. When the Infinite reveals Himself in the finite, He fulfills Himself. The joy that pictures bring is the joy of definiteness; within the restraint of lines we see the particular with distinctness. Whatever object I perceive, whether it is a piece of stone, a donkey, a prickly shrub, or an old woman, I tell myself that I have seen it exactly as it is. And whenever I see a thing with exactness, I touch the Infinite and feel delighted. But that should not make me forget that I very much enjoyed the tea you sent.
Tagore wrote short stories at every stage of his life. His first story, "Bhikharini" ("The Beggar Woman"), was published in 1877 when he was sixteen, and his last few stories, which were outlines rather than finished pieces, were written a few months before his death in 1941. The three volumes of Galpaguchchha, in which all but the very last few are collected, contain eighty-four stories. Over half of these were written between 1891 and 1895 during his first great creative period, usually referred to as the Sadhana period after the monthly magazine which he edited for some years. The rest were written at intervals, sometimes of several years. The largest later groups, seven in 1914 and three in 1917, belong to the Sabuj Patra period when he was contributing a large part every month to the magazine of that name edited by the late Pramatha Chaudhuri.

Tagore's stories reflect his surroundings, currently dominant ideas, and problems which exercised his mind, at different periods of his life. Tagore, himself, liked his earlier stories best because of their freshness and spontaneity. He wrote them when he was managing the family estates and living mostly in the villages—Shilaïda, Patisar, Shajadpur, and others. In a letter dated June 25, 1895, he wrote: "As I sit writing bit by bit a story for the Sadhana, the lights and shadows and colors of my surroundings mingle with my words. The scenes and characters and events that I am now imagining have this sun and rain and river and the reeds on the river bank, this monsoon sky, this shady village, these rain-nourished happy cornfields to serve as their background and to give them life and reality. . . ."

It is also interesting to note that up to the time that these stories were written, the ordinary man and woman, and especially the poor, had
not been written about with any psychological depth in Indian literature.

The *Cabuliwallah* was first published in the November, 1892, issue of the monthly *Sadhana*; its English translation by Sister Nivedita appeared in the January, 1912, issue of the *Modern Review*.

The *Hungry Stones* was first published in the August, 1895, issue of the *Sadhana*, and was translated into English by Pannalal Basu and published in the February, 1910, issue of the *Modern Review*.

The *Runaway* was first published as *Atithi* in the August, 1895, issue of the *Sadhana*. It was translated by Surendranath Tagore for the *Modern Review* of September, 1919, and was later included in *The Runaway and Other Stories* (Visva-Bharati, 1959).

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**The Cabuliwallah**

*(The Fruitseller from Cabul)*

Mini, my five year old daughter, cannot live without chattering. I really believe that in all her life she has not wasted one minute in silence. Her mother is often vexed at this, and would stop her prattle, but I do not. To see Mini quiet is unnatural and I cannot bear it for long. Because of this, our conversations are always lively.

One morning, for instance, when I was in the midst of the seventeenth chapter of my new novel, Mini stole into the room, and putting her hand into mine, said: “Father! Ramdayal the door-keeper calls a crow a krow! He doesn’t know anything, does he?”

Before I could explain the language differences in this country, she was on the trace of another subject. “What do you think, Father? Shola says there is an elephant in the clouds, blowing water out of his trunk, and that is why it rains!”

The child had seated herself at my feet near the table, and was playing softly, drumming on her knees. I was hard at work on my seventeenth chapter, where Pratap Singh, the hero, had just caught Kanchanlata, the heroine, in his arms, and was about to escape with her by the third-story window of the castle, when all
of a sudden Mini left her play, and ran to the window, crying: "A Cabuliwallah! a Cabuliwallah!" Sure enough, in the street below was a Cabuliwallah passing slowly along. He wore the loose, soiled clothing of his people, and a tall turban; there was a bag on his back, and he carried boxes of grapes in his hand.

I cannot tell what my daughter's feelings were at the sight of this man, but she began to call him loudly. Ah, I thought, he will come in and my seventeenth chapter will never be finished! At this exact moment the Cabuliwallah turned and looked up at the child. When she saw this she was overcome by terror, fled to her mother's protection, and disappeared. She had a blind belief that inside the bag which the big man carried were two or three children like herself. Meanwhile, the pedlar entered my doorway and greeted me with a smiling face.

So precarious was the position of my hero and my heroine that my first impulse was to stop and buy something, especially since Mini had called to the man. I made some small purchases, and a conversation began about Abdurrahman, the Russians, the English, and the Frontier Policy.

As he was about to leave, he asked: "And where is the little girl, sir?"

I, thinking that Mini must get rid of her false fear, had her brought out. She stood by my chair, watching the Cabuliwallah and his bag. He offered her nuts and raisins but she would not be tempted, and only clung closer to me, with all her doubts increased. This was their first meeting.

One morning, however, not many days later, as I was leaving the house I was startled to find Mini seated on a bench near the door, laughing and talking with the great Cabuliwallah at her feet. In all her life, it appeared, my small daughter had never found so patient a listener, except for her father. Already the corner of her little sari was stuffed with almonds and raisins, gifts from her visitor. "Why did you give her those?" I said, and taking out an eight-anna piece, handed it to him. The man accepted the money without delay, and slipped it into his pocket.

Alas, on my return an hour later, I found the unfortunate coin had made twice its own worth of trouble! The Cabuliwallah had given it to Mini, and her mother seeing the bright round object,
had pounced on the child with: "Where did you get that eight-anna piece?"

"The Cabuliwallah gave it to me," said Mini cheerfully.

"The Cabuliwallah gave it to you!" cried her mother much shocked.

"O Mini! how could you take it from him?"

Entering at this moment, I saved her from impending disaster, and proceeded to make my own inquiries. I found that it was not the first or the second time the two had met. The Cabuliwallah had overcome the child's first terror by a judicious bribery of nuts and almonds, and the two were now great friends.

They had many quaint jokes which afforded them a great deal of amusement. Seated in front of him, and looking with all her tiny dignity on his gigantic frame, Mini would ripple her face with laughter, and begin "O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah! what have you got in your bag?"

He would reply in the nasal accents of a mountaineer: "An elephant!" Not much cause for merriment, perhaps, but how they both enjoyed their joke! And for me, this child's talk with a grown-up man always had in it something strangely fascinating.

Then the Cabuliwallah, not to be caught behind, would take his turn with: "Well, little one, and when are you going to the father-in-law's house?"

Now most small Bengali maidens have heard long ago about the father-in-law's house, but we, being a little modern, had kept these things from our child, and at this question Mini must have been a trifle bewildered. But she would not show it, and with instant composure replied: "Are you going there?"

Among men of the Cabuliwallah's class, however, it is well known that the words "father-in-law's house" have a double meaning. It is a euphemism for jail, the place where we are well cared for at no expense. The sturdy pedlar would take my daughter's question in this sense. "Ah," he would say, shaking his fist at an invisible policeman, "I will thrash my father-in-law!" Hearing this, and picturing the poor, uncomfortable relative, Mini would go into peals of laughter, joined by her formidable friend.

These were autumn mornings, the time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, never stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the
very name of another country, my heart would go out to it, and
at the sight of a foreigner in the streets, I would fall to weaving a
network of dreams: the mountains, the glens, the forests of his dis-
tant homeland with a cottage in its setting, and the free and inde-
pendent life of far-away wilds. Perhaps these scenes of travel pass
in my imagination all the more vividly because I lead a vegetable
existence such that a call to travel would fall upon me like a
hunderbolt. In the presence of this Cabuliwallah I was immediately
transported to the foot of mountains, with narrow defiles twisting
in and out amongst their towering, arid peaks. I could see the string
of camels bearing merchandise, and the company of turbaned mer-
chants carrying queer old firearms, and some of their spears down
ward the plains. I could see—but at this point Mini’s mother
would intervene, imploring me to “beware of that man.”

Unfortunately Mini’s mother is a very timid lady. Whenever she
hears a noise in the street or sees people coming toward the house,
she always jumps to the conclusion that they are either thieves,
trunkards, snakes, tigers, malaria, cockroaches, caterpillars, or an
English sailor. Even after all these years of experience, she is not
able to overcome her terror. Thus she was full of doubts about the
Cabuliwallah, and used to beg me to keep a watchful eye on him.

I tried to gently laugh her fear away, but then she would turn
on me seriously and ask solemn questions.

Were children never kidnapped?

Was it, then, not true that there was slavery in Cabul?

Was it so very absurd that this big man should be able to carry
off a tiny child?

I told her that, though not impossible, it was highly improbable.
But this was not enough, and her dread persisted. As her suspicion
was unfounded, however, it did not seem right to forbid the man
to come to the house, and his familiarity went unchecked.

Once a year, in the middle of January, Rahmun the Cabuliwallah
was in the habit of returning to his country, and as the time ap-
proached he would be very busy going from house to house collect-
ing his debts. This year, however, he always found time to come
and see Mini. It would have seemed to an outsider that there was
some conspiracy between them, for when he could not come in the
morning, he would appear in the evening.
Even to me it was a little startling now and then, to suddenly surprise this tall, loose-garmented man of bags in the corner of a dark room; but when Mini would run in, smiling, with her "O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!" and the two friends so far apart in age would subside into their old laughter and their old jokes, I felt reassured.

One morning, a few days before he had made up his mind to go, I was correcting my proof sheets in my study. It was chilly weather. Through the window the rays of the sun touched my feet, and the slight warmth was very welcome. It was almost eight o'clock, and the early pedestrians were returning home with their heads covered. All at once I heard an uproar in the street, and, looking out, saw Rahmun bound and being led away between two policemen, followed by a crowd of curious boys. There were blood-stains on the clothes of the Cabuliwallah, and one of the policemen carried a knife. Hurrying out, I stopped them and inquired what it all meant. Partly from one, partly from another, I gathered that a certain neighbor had owed the pedlar something for a Rampuri shawl, but had falsely denied having bought it, and that in the course of the quarrel Rahmun had struck him. Now, in the heat of his excitement, the prisoner began calling his enemy all sorts of names. Suddenly, from a verandah of my house my little Mini appeared, with her usual exclamation: "O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!" Rahmun's face lighted up as he turned to her. He had no bag under his arm today, so she could not discuss the elephant with him. She at once therefore proceeded to the next question: "Are you going to the father-in-law's house?" Rahmun laughed and said: "Just where I am going, little one!" Then seeing that the reply did not amuse the child, he held up his fettered hands. "Ah," he said, "I would have thrashed that old father-in-law, but my hands are bound!"

On a charge of murderous assault, Rahmun was sentenced to many years of imprisonment.

Time passed and he was forgotten. The accustomed work in the accustomed place was ours, and the thought of the once free mountaineer spending his years in prison seldom occurred to us. Even my light-hearted Mini, I am ashamed to say, forgot her old friend. New companions filled her life. As she grew older she spent more of her
time with girls, so much in fact that she came no more to her father’s room. I was scarcely on speaking terms with her.

Many years passed. It was autumn once again and we had made arrangements for Mini’s marriage; it was to take place during the Puja holidays. With the goddess Durga returning to her seasonal home in Mount Kailas, the light of our home was also to depart, leaving our house in shadows.

The morning was bright. After the rains, there was a sense of cleanness in the air, and the rays of the sun looked like pure gold; so bright that they radiated even to the sordid brick walls of our Calcutta lanes. Since early dawn, the wedding-pipes had been sounding, and at each beat my own heart throbbed. The wailing tune, Bhairavi, seemed to intensify my pain at the approaching separation. My Mini was to be married tonight.

From early morning, noise and bustle pervaded the house. In the courtyard the canopy had to be slung on its bamboo poles; the tinkling chandeliers should be hung in each room and verandah; there was great hurry and excitement. I was sitting in my study, looking through the accounts, when some one entered, saluting respectfully, and stood before me. It was Rahmun the Cabuliwallah, and at first I did not recognize him. He had no bag, nor the long hair, nor the same vigor that he used to have. But he smiled, and I knew him again.

“When did you come, Rahmun?” I asked him.

“Last evening,” he said, “I was released from jail.”

The words struck harsh upon my ears. I had never talked with anyone who had wounded his fellowman, and my heart shrank when I realized this, for I felt that the day would have been better-omened if had he not turned up.

“There are ceremonies going on,” I said, “and I am busy. Could you perhaps come another day?”

At once he turned to go; but as he reached the door he hesitated, and said: “May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment?” It was his belief that Mini was still the same. He had pictured her running to him as she used to do, calling “O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!” He had imagined that they would laugh and talk together, just as in the past. In fact, in memory of those former days he had
brought, carefully wrapped up in paper, a few almonds and raisins and grapes, somehow obtained from a countryman—his own little fund was gone.

I said again: “There is a ceremony in the house, and you will not be able to see any one today.”

The man’s face fell. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, said “Good morning,” and went out.

I felt a little sorry, and would have called him back, but saw that he was returning of his own accord. He came close up to me holding out his offerings, and said: “I brought these few things, sir, for the little one. Will you give them to her?”

I took them and was going to pay him, but he caught my hand and said: “You are very kind, sir! Keep me in your recollection; do not offer me money! You have a little girl; I too have one like her in my own home. I thought of my own, and brought fruits to your child, not to make a profit for myself.”

Saying this, he put his hand inside his big loose robe and brought out a small dirty piece of paper. With great care he unfolded this, and smoothed it out with both hands on my table. It bore the impression of a little hand, not a photograph, not a drawing. The impression of an ink-smeared hand laid flat on the paper. This touch of his own little daughter had been always on his heart, as he had come year after year to Calcutta to sell his wares in the streets.

Tears came to my eyes. I forgot that he was a poor Cabuli fruit-seller, while I was—but no, was I more than he? He was also a father.

That impression of the hand of his little Parbati in her distant mountain home reminded me of my own little Mini, and I immediately sent for her from the inner apartment. Many excuses were raised, but I would not listen. Clad in the red silk of her wedding-day, with the sandal paste on her forehead, and adorned as a young bride, Mini came and stood bashfully before me.

The Cabuliwallah was staggered at the sight of her. There was no hope of reviving their old friendship. At last he smiled and said: “Little one, are you going to your father-in-law’s house?”

But Mini now understood the meaning of the word “father-in-law,” and she could not reply to him as in the past. She flushed at the question and stood before him with her bride’s face looking down.

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I remembered the day when the Cabuliwallah and my Mini first met, and I felt sad. When she had gone, Rahmun heaved a deep sigh and sat down on the floor. The idea had suddenly come to him that his daughter also must have grown up during this long time, and that he would have to make friends with her all over again. Surely he would not find her as he used to know her; besides, what might have happened to her in these eight years?

The marriage-pipes sounded, and the mild autumn sun streamed around us. But Rahmun sat in the little Calcutta lane, and saw before him the barren mountains of Afghanistan.

I took out a bank-note and gave it to him, saying: "Go back to your own daughter, Rahmun, in your own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!"

After giving this gift, I had to eliminate some of the festivities. I could not have the electric lights, nor the military band, and the ladies of the house were saddened. But to me the wedding-feast was brighter because of the thought that in a distant land a long-lost father met again with his only child.

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The Hungry Stones

My kinsman and I were returning to Calcutta from our Puja trip when we met the man in a train. From his dress and bearing we at first took him for an up-country Mohammedan, but were puzzled as we listened to him speak. He talked so confidently on all subjects that you might think the Disposer of All Things consulted him at all times. Hitherto we had been perfectly happy; we did not know that secret forces were at work, that the Russians had advanced close to us, that the English had deep and secret policies, that confusion among the native chiefs had come to a point. But our newly-acquired friend said with a sly smile: "There happen more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are reported in your newspapers." As we had never before stirred from our homes, the demeanour of the man struck us with wonder. Even on the most trivial topic he would quote
science or comment on the Vedas or repeat quatrains from some Persian poet, and as we had no knowledge of science or the Vedas or Persian, our admiration for him increased, and my kinsman, a theosophist, was convinced that our fellow-passenger must have been supernaturally inspired by some strange magnetism or occult power or astral body. He listened with devotional rapture to even the tritest saying of our extraordinary companion, and secretly took notes of the conversation. I think that the man saw this and was pleased by it.

When the train reached its junction, we stood in the waiting-room for our connection. It was 10 P.M., and since we heard that the train was likely to be quite late, because of something wrong in the lines, I spread my bed on the table and was about to lie down for a comfortable doze, when this extraordinary person began spinning the following yarn. Of course, I got no sleep that night.

“When, owing to a disagreement about some questions of administrative policy, I quit my post at Junagarh and entered the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad, they appointed me at once, as a strong young man, collector of cotton duties at Barich.

“Barich is a lovely place. The Susta chatters over stones and babbles on the pebbles, tripping through the woods like a skillful dancing girl. A flight of 150 steps rises from the river, above which, at the foot of the hills, stands a solitary marble palace. Nobody lives nearby; the village and the cotton market are far away.

“About 250 years ago, Emperor Mahmud Shah II built this lonely palace for his pleasure and luxury. In those days jets of rose-water spurted from its fountains, and on the cold marble floors of its spray-cooled rooms young Persian women sat, their hair dishevelled before bathing, and splashing their soft naked feet in the clear water of the reservoirs, would sing the ghazals of their vineyards, to the tune of a guitar.

“The fountains play no longer, the songs have ceased, white feet no longer step gracefully on the snowy marble. It is now the lonely home of men oppressed with solitude and deprived of the society of women. Karim Khan, my old office clerk, repeatedly warned me not to take up my abode there. 'Pass the day there if you like,' said he, 'but never stay the night.' I passed it off with a light laugh. The servants said that they would work till dark and then go away. I
gave my assent. The house had such a bad name that even thieves
would not venture near it after dark.

"At first the solitude of the deserted palace weighed upon me like
a nightmare. I would stay out and work as long as possible, then
return home tired at night, go to bed and fall asleep.

"Before a week had passed, the place began to exert a weird
fascination upon me. It is difficult to describe or to induce people
to believe; but I felt as if the whole house was like a living organism
slowly and imperceptibly digesting me by the action of some stupefy-
ing gastric juice.

"Perhaps the process had begun as soon as I set my foot in the
house, but I distinctly remember the day on which I first was con-
scious of it. It was the beginning of summer, and the market being
dull I had no work to do. A little before sunset I was sitting in an
armchair near the water’s edge below the steps. The Susta had sunk
low; a broad patch of sand on the other side glowed with the hues of
evening, and on this side the pebbles at the bottom of the clear
shallow waters were glistening. There was not a breath of wind any-
where, and the still air was laden with an oppressive scent from the
spicy shrubs growing on the hills close by.

"As the sun sank behind the hilltops a long dark curtain fell
upon the stage of day, and the intervening hills cut short the time
in which light and shade mingle at sunset. I thought of going out
for a ride, and was about to get up when I heard a footfall on the
steps behind. I looked back, but there was no one.

"As I sat down again, thinking it an illusion, I heard many foot-
falls, is if a large number of persons were rushing down the steps.
A strange delight, slightly tinged with fear, passed through my
body, and although there was no figure before my eyes, I thought I
saw a bevy of maidens coming down the steps to bathe in the Susta
that summer evening. No sound broke the silence of the valley,
the river, or the palace, but I distinctly heard the maidens’ gay and
mirthful laugh, like the gurgle of a spring gushing forth in a hundred
cascades, as they ran past me in playful pursuit toward the river.
As they were invisible to me, so I was, as it were, invisible to them.
The river was perfectly calm, but I felt that its clear and shallow
waters were suddenly stirred by the splashes of arms jingling with
bracelets, and that the girls laughed and spattered water at one an-
other, while the feet of those who were swimming tossed up tiny waves in a shower of pearls.

"I felt a thrill at my heart; I cannot say whether it was due to fear or curiosity. I had a strong desire to see them more clearly, but nothing was visible. I thought I could catch all that they said if I only strained my ears, but I heard nothing but the chirping of the cicada in the woods. It seemed as if a dark curtain of 250 years was hanging before me, and I could tremulously lift a corner of it and peer through, although the other side was completely enveloped in darkness.

"The oppressive closeness of the evening was broken by a sudden gust of wind, the surface of the Susta rippled and curled like the hair of a nymph, and from the woods wrapt in the evening gloom there came a simultaneous murmur as though they were awakening from a black dream. Call it reality or dream, the momentary glimpse of that invisible mirage reflected from a far-off world, 250 years old, vanished in a flash. The mystic forms that brushed past me with their quick, ethereal steps, and loud voiceless laughter, threw themselves into the river and did not return wringing their dripping robes. Like fragrance wafted away by the wind they were dispersed by a single breath of the spring.

"Then I was filled with the fear that it was the Muse that had taken advantage of my solitude, and possessed me—the witch had evidently come to ruin a poor devil like myself making a living by collecting cotton duties. I decided to have a good dinner; it is the empty stomach that all sorts of incurable diseases find an easy prey. I sent for my cook and gave orders for a sumptuous moghlai dinner, redolent of spices and ghi.

"Next morning the whole affair seemed like a queer fantasy. With a light heart I put on a sola hat like the sahebs, and drove out to my work. I was to have written my quarterly report that day, and expected to return late, but before it was dark I was strangely drawn to my house—by what I could not say. I felt that they were all waiting, and that I should not delay any longer. Leaving my report unfinished, I rose, put on my sola hat, and startling the dark, deserted path with the rattle of my carriage, I reached the palace on the gloomy skirts of the hills.

"On the first floor the stairs led to a spacious hall, its roof
stretching over ornamental arches resting on three rows of massive pillars, and groaning day and night under the weight of its own solitude. The day had just come to an end and the lamps had not yet been lighted. As I pushed the door open there was a great bustle, as if a throng of people had broken in confusion and rushed out through doors, windows, corridors, verandas and rooms, to make a hurried escape.

"I saw no one and stood bewildered, my hair on end in a kind of ecstatic delight. A faint scent of attar and unguents effaced by age lingered in my nostrils. Standing in the darkness between the rows of those ancient pillars, I could hear the gurgle of fountains splashing on the marble floor, a strange tune on the guitar, the jingle of ornaments and the tinkle of anklets, the clang of bells tolling the hours, the distant note of nahabat, the din of the crystal pendants of chandeliers shaken by the breeze, the song of bulbuls from the cages in the corridors, the cackle of storks in the gardens—all creating a strange, unearthly music.

"Then I came under such a spell that this intangible, inaccessible vision appeared to be the only reality in the world, everything else a mere dream. That I, Srijut So-and-so, the eldest son of So-and-so of blessed memory, should be drawing a monthly salary of 450 rupees as collector of cotton duties, driving in my dog-cart to my office every day in a shirt coat and sola hat, appeared to me to be such an astonishingly ludicrous illusion that I burst into a horse-laugh as I stood in the gloom of that vast, silent hall.

"At that moment my servant entered with a lighted kerosene lamp in his hand. I do not know whether he thought me mad, but it came back to me at once that I was indeed Srijut So-and-so, son of So-and-so of blessed memory, and that, while our poets, great and small, could alone say whether inside or outside the earth there was a region where unseen fountains perpetually played, and fairy guitars struck by invisible fingers sent forth an eternal harmony, at any rate it was certain that I collected duties at the cotton market at Barich, and earned 450 rupees per mensem as my salary. As I sat over the newspaper at my camp-table lighted by the kerosene lamp, I laughed in great glee at my curious illusion.

"After I had finished my paper and eaten my moghlai dinner, I put out the lamp and lay down on my bed in a small side-room.
Through the open window a star high above the Avalli hills was gazing from millions and millions of miles at Mr. Collector lying on a humble camp-bedstead. I was amused at the idea, and do not know when I fell asleep or how long I slept, but I suddenly awoke, although I heard no sound and saw no intruder. The bright star on the hilltop had disappeared, and the dim light of the new moon was stealthily entering the room through the open window, as if ashamed of its intrusion.

"I saw nobody but felt as if someone was gently pushing me. She said nothing, but beckoned me with her five fingers adorned with rings to follow her cautiously. I got up noiselessly, and though not a soul except myself was there in the apartments of that deserted palace with its slumbering sounds and waking echoes, I feared at every step lest anyone should awake. Most of the rooms were always closed, and I had never entered them.

"Breathlessly and with silent steps I followed my invisible guide—I cannot now say where. What endless dark and narrow passages, what long corridors, what silent and solemn audience-chambers and secret cells!

"Though I could not see my guide, she was not invisible to my mind's eye: an Arab girl, her arms visible through loose sleeves, smooth as marble, a thin veil falling on her face from the fringe of her cap, and a curved dagger at her waist! I thought that one of the thousand and one Arabian Nights had been wafted to me from the world of romance, and that at the dead of night I was wending my way through the narrow alleys of slumbering Bagdad to a trysting-place fraught with peril.

"At last my guide stopped before a deep blue screen, and seemed to point to something below. There was nothing there, but a sudden dread froze the blood in my heart. I thought I saw on the floor at the foot of the screen a terrible Negro eunuch dressed in rich brocade, sitting and dozing with outstretched legs, with a naked sword on his lap. My guide lightly skipped over his legs and held up a fringe of the screen. I could catch a glimpse of a room with a Persian carpet. Some one was sitting on a bed; I could not see her, but caught a glimpse of two exquisite feet in gold-embroidered slippers hanging out from loose saffron-colored pajamas and placed idly on the orange-colored velvet carpet. On one side there was a bluish
crystal tray on which a few apples, pears, oranges, bunches of grapes, two small cups, and gold-tinted decanter were evidently awaiting the guest. A fragrant, intoxicating vapor from a strange incense that burned within almost overpowered my senses.

"With a trembling heart I attempted to step across the outstretched legs of the eunuch, but he suddenly woke with a start and the sword fell from his lap with a sharp clang on the marble floor.

"A terrific scream made me jump, and I saw I was sitting on my camp-bedstead, sweating heavily. The crescent moon was pale in the morning light like a sleepless patient at dawn, and our crazy Meher Ali was crying out, as is his daily custom, 'Stand back! Stand back!' while he went along the lonely road.

"Such was the abrupt close of one of my Arabian Nights, but there were a thousand left.

"Then there followed a great discord between my days and nights. During the day I would go to my work worn and tired, cursing the bewitching night and her empty dreams, but at night my daily life would appear as a petty, false, and ludicrous vanity.

"At darkness I was caught and overwhelmed in the snare of a strange intoxication. I would be transformed into some unknown personage of a bygone age, playing my part in unwritten history, and my short English coat and tight breeches did not suit me in the least. With a red velvet hat, loose pajamas, an embroidered vest, a long flowing silk gown, and colored handkerchiefs scented with attar, I would complete my elaborate toilet, sit on a high-cushioned chair, and replace my cigarette with a many-coiled narghileh filled with rose-water, as if in eager expectation of a strange meeting with a beloved one.

"I have no power to describe the incidents that unfolded as the gloom of the night deepened. I felt as if in the curious apartments of that vast edifice the fragments of a beautiful story, which I could follow for some distance, but of which I could never see the end, flew about in a sudden gust of the vernal breeze. And in pursuit of them I would wander from room to room the whole night long.

"Amid the eddy of these dream-fragments, the smell of henna, the twanging of the guitar, the waves of air charged with fragrant spray, I would catch the momentary glimpse of a fair young woman. It was she who had saffron-colored pajamas, white soft feet in gold-
embroidered slippers with curved toes, a close-fitting bodice wrought with gold, and a red cap from which a golden frill fell on her brow and cheeks. She maddened me. In pursuit of her I wandered from room to room, from path to path among the bewildering maze of alleys in the enchanted dreamland of the nether world of sleep.

“Sometimes in the evening, while carefully arraying myself as a prince before a large mirror, a candle burning on either side, I would see a sudden reflection of the Persian beauty by my side. A swift turn of her neck, an eager glance of passion and pain glowing in her large dark eyes, a suspicion of speech on her dainty red lips, her figure, fair and slim, crowned with youth like a blossoming creeper, quickly uplifted in her graceful tilting gait, a dazzling flash of pain and craving and ecstasy, a smile and a glance and a blaze of jewels and silk, and she melted away. A wild gust of wind, laden with all the fragrance of hills and woods, would put out my light, and I would fling aside my array and lie down on my bed, my eyes closed and my body thrilling with delight. There around me in the breeze, amid all the perfume of the woods and hills, caresses, kisses, tender touches, gentle murmurs in my ears, and fragrant breaths on my brow floated through the silent gloom, or a sweetly-perfumed kerchief was wafted again and again on my cheeks. Then slowly a mysterious serpent would twist her stupefying coils about me, and heaving a sigh I would lapse into insensibility, and then into a profound slumber.

“One evening I decided to ride my horse. My English hat and coat were resting on a rack, and I was about to take them down when a sudden whirlwind, crested with the sands of the Susta and the dead leaves of the Avalli hills, caught them up and whirled them around and around while a loud peal of merry laughter rose higher and higher, striking all the chords of mirth till it died away in the land of the sunset. I could not go out for my ride, and the next day I gave up for good my queer English coat and hat.

“Again that day at the dead of night I heard stifled, heart-breaking sobs, as if below the bed, below the floor, below the stony foundation of that gigantic palace, from the depths of a dark damp grave, a voice piteously cried and implored me: ‘Oh, rescue me! Break through these doors of illusion, slumber and fruitless dreams, place me by your side on the saddle, press me to your heart, and riding
through hills and woods and across the river, take me to the warm
radiance of your sunny rooms above!"

"Oh, how can I rescue you? What drowning beauty, what incarnate
passion shall I drag to the shore from this wild eddy of dreams? O
lovely apparition! Where did you flourish and when? By what cool
spring, under the shade of what date-groves were you born; in the
lap of what homeless wanderer in the desert? What Bedouin
snatched you from your mother’s arms, an opening bud plucked
from a wild creeper; placed you on a horse swift as lightning; crossed
the burning sands; and took you to the slave-market of what royal
city? And there, what officer of the Badshah, seeing the glory of your
bashful blossoming youth, paid for you in gold, placed you in a
golden palanquin and offered you as a present for the seraglio of his
master? And O, the history of that place! The music of the sareng,
the jingle of anklets, the occasional flash of daggers, the glowing
wine of Shiraz poison, and the piercing, flashing glance! What gran-
deur, what servitude! The slave-girls to your right and left waved
the charmar as diamonds flashed from their bracelets; the Badshah,
the king of kings, fell on his knees at your snowy feet in bejewelled
shoes, and outside the terrible Abyssinian eunuch, looking like a
messenger of death, but clothed like an angel, stood with a naked
sword in his hand! Then, flower of the desert, swept away by the
blood-stained ocean of grandeur with its foam of jealousy, and rocks
and shoals of intrigue, on what shore of cruel death were you cast,
or in what other land more splendid and more cruel?

"Suddenly at this moment that crazy Meher Ali screamed out:
‘Stand back! Stand back!! All is false! All is false!’ I opened by eyes
and saw that it was already light. My chaprasi came and handed me
my letters, and the cook waited with a salam for my orders.

"I said: ‘No, I can stay here no longer.’ That very day I packed
up and moved to my office. Old Karim Khan smiled a little as he
saw me. I felt nettled, but said nothing and began my work.

"As evening approached I grew absent-minded; I felt as if I had
an appointment to keep, and the work of examining the cotton
accounts seemed wholly useless. Even the Nizamat of the Nizam
did not appear to be worth much. Whatever belonged to the present,
whatever was moving and acting and working for bread seemed triv-
ial, meaningless, and contemptible.

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"I threw down my pen, closed my ledgers, got into my dog-cart, and drove away. It stopped by itself at the gate of the marble palace just at the hour of twilight. I quickly climbed the stairs and entered the room.

"A heavy silence was reigning. The dark rooms were sullen, as if they had taken offense. My heart was full of contrition but there was no one to whom I could open it, or of whom I could ask forgiveness. I wandered about the dark rooms with a vacant mind. I wished I had a guitar by which I could sing to the unknown: 'O fire, the poor moth that made a vain effort to fly away has come back to thee! Forgive it but this once, burn its wings and consume it in thy flame!'

"Suddenly two tear-drops fell on my brow from overhead. Dark clouds had overcast the top of the Avalli hills; the gloomy woods and the sooty waters of the Susta were waiting in an ominous calm. Suddenly land, water, and sky shivered, and a wild tempest-blast rushed howling through the distant pathless woods, showing its lightning-teeth like a raving maniac who had broken his chains. The desolate halls of the palace banged their doors, and moaned in the bitterness of anguish.

"The servants were all in the office, and there was no one to light the lamps. The night was cloudy and moonless. In the dense gloom I could distinctly feel that a woman was lying on her face on the carpet below the bed, clasping and tearing her long dishevelled hair with desperate fingers. Blood was trickling down her fair brow, and she was now laughing a hard, mirthless laugh, now bursting into violent wringing sobs, now rending her bodice and striking at her bare bosom, as the wind roared in through the open window and the rain poured in torrents and soaked her through and through.

"All during the night there was no cessation of the storm or of the passionate cry. In sorrow I wandered in the dark from room to room. Whom could I console when no one was here? Whose agony was this? Where did this insconsolable grief come from?

"And the mad man cried out: 'Stand back! Stand back! All is false! All is false!'

"I saw that the day had dawned, and that in that dreadful weather Meher Ali was going around the palace with his usual cry. Suddenly
it came to me that perhaps he had once lived in that house, and that although he had gone mad, he came there every day and went around and around, fascinated by the weird spell cast by the marble demon. Despite the storm and rain I ran to him and asked: 'Ho, Meher Ali, what is false?'

'He did not answer, but pushed me aside and went around and around with his frantic cry like a bird flying fascinated about the jaws of a snake, and making a desperate effort to warn himself by repeating: 'Stand back! Stand back! All is false! All is false!' I ran like a mad man through the pelting rain to my office, and asked Karim Khan: 'Tell me the meaning of all this!'

'What I gathered from that old man was this: that at one time unrequited passion and unsatisfied longings and flames of wild pleasure raged within that palace, and the curse of all the heart-aches and blasted hopes had made its every stone thirsty and hungry, eager to swallow up like a famished ogress any living man who might chance to approach. Not one of those who lived there for three consecutive nights could escape these cruel jaws, save Meher Ali, who had escaped at the cost of his reason.

'I asked: 'Is there no means of my release?' The old man said: 'There is only one means, and that is very difficult. I will tell you what it is, but first you must hear the history of a young Persian girl who once lived in that pleasure-dome. A stranger or a more bitterly heart-rending tragedy was never enacted on this earth.'"

Just at this moment the coolies announced that the train was coming. We hurriedly picked up our luggage as the train steamed in. An English gentleman, apparently just aroused from slumber, and endeavoring to read the name of the station was looking out of a first-class carriage. As soon as he caught sight of our fellow-passenger, he cried, "Hello," and invited him into his compartment. As we got into a second-class carriage, we had no chance of discovering who the man was or the end of his story.

I said: "The man evidently took us for fools and imposed upon us out of fun. The story is pure fabrication from start to finish." The discussion that followed ended in a lifelong rupture between my theosophist kinsman and myself.

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The Runaway

Moti Babu, Zemindar of Katalia, was on his way home by boat. There had been the usual morning stop alongside a village market on the river, and the cooking of the noon meal was in progress.

A Brahmin boy came up to the boat and asked: "Which way are you going, Sir?" He could not have been older than fifteen or sixteen.

"To Katalia," Moti Babu replied.

"Could you give me a lift to Nandigram, on your way?"

Moti Babu agreed and asked the young fellow his name.

"My name is Tara," said the boy.

With his fair complexion, his large eyes and delicate, finely-cut, smiling lips, the lad was strikingly handsome. All he had on was a dhoti, somewhat tattered, and his bare upper body looked like some sculptor's masterpiece.

"Son," said Moti Babu affectionately, "have your bath and come on board. You can eat with me."

"Just a second, Sir," said Tara, and he jumped on the servants' boat moored astern, and started to help with the cooking. Moti Babu's servant was an up-country man and it was evident that his ideas of preparing fish for the pot were crude. Tara relieved him of his task and finished it easily. Then, with a skill which showed a good deal of practice, he made up one or two vegetable dishes. After finishing this, and after a plunge in the river, Tara took out a fresh dhoti from his bundle, clad himself in spotless white, and with a little wooden comb smoothed back the wavy hair from his forehead into a cluster behind his neck. Then, with his sacred thread glistening over his breast, he presented himself before his host.

Moti Babu took him into the cabin where his wife, Annapurna, and their nine-year-old daughter were sitting. The good lady was pleased with the attractive young boy and her whole heart went out to him. Where could he be coming from; whose child could he be; how could his mother, poor thing, bear to be separated from him, she thought to herself.

Dinner was served and a place set for Tara beside Moti Babu, but
the boy seemed to have a poor appetite. Annapurna thought it was bashfulness and repeatedly asked him to try this and that, but he would not be persuaded. He clearly had a will of his own, but he showed it quite simply and naturally, without any appearance of wilfulness or obstinacy.

When they had all finished, Annapurna made Tara sit by her side and answer questions. She could not gather much of a connected story, but it was clear that he had run away from home at the age of ten or eleven.

"Don’t you have a mother?” asked Annapurna.
"Yes.”
"Doesn’t she love you?”
This last question seemed to strike the boy as highly absurd. He laughed as he replied, “Why shouldn’t she?”
"Why did you leave her, then?” pursued the mystified lady.
"She has four other boys and three girls.”
Annapurna was shocked. “What a thing to say!” she cried. “Could one bear to cut off a finger simply because there are four more?”

Tara’s history was as brief as his years were few, but still he was a unique boy. He was the fourth son of his parents and had lost his father in his infancy. In spite of the large number of children, Tara had always been the favorite, and was petted by his mother, his brothers and sisters, and the neighbors. Even the schoolmaster usually spared him the rod, and when he did not, the punishment was felt by all the class. So there was no reason for him to leave home. But, curiously enough, although the scamp of the village, whose time was divided between eating fruit stolen from the neighbors’ trees and feeling the even more fruitful consequences of his stealing, at the hands of these same neighbors, remained within the village clinging to his scolding mother, the pet of the village ran away to join a band of wandering players.

There was a quick response, and a rescue party hunted him out and brought him back. His distracted mother strained him to her breast and deluged him with tears. A sense of duty forced his elders to make a heroic effort to administer a mild corrective, but they
lavished their repentant fondness on him worse than ever. The neighbors’ wives redoubled their attentions in the hope of reconciling him to his home life, but all bonds, even those of affection, were irksome to the boy. The star under which he was born must have decreed him homeless.

When, in his wanderings through unknown lands, Tara saw foreign boats being towed along the river, or a sannyasi resting under one of the village trees, or a gypsy camp by the river—the gypsies seated by their mat-walled huts, splitting bamboos and weaving baskets—his spirit longed for the freedom of the mysterious outside world, unhampered by ties of affection. After he had repeated his escapade two or three times, his relations and neighbors gave up hope.

When the owner of the band of players which he had joined began to love Tara as a son, and he became the favorite of the whole party, when he found that even the people of the houses at which their performances were given, chiefly the women, would send for him to express their special appreciation, he eluded them all, and his companions could find no trace of him.

Tara was as impatient of bondage as a young deer, and as susceptible to music. It was the songs in the theatrical performances which had drawn him away from home. Their tunes would make corresponding rhythms course through his veins and his whole being swayed. Even when he was a small child, the solemn way in which he would sit out a musical performance, gravely nodding to mark the time, made it difficult for the adults to restrain their laughter. Not only music, but the patter of the heavy July rain on the trees in full foliage, the roll of the thunder, the moaning of the wind through the thickets, like some infant giant strayed from its mother, would make him completely distraught. The distant kites flying high in the midday sky, the croaking of the frogs on a rainy evening, the howling of the jackals at the dead of night—all these stirred him to his depths.

This passion for music led him to join a company of ballad singers. The master took great pains in teaching him to sing and recite ballads composed in alliterative verse and jingling meter, based on stories from the epics, and became as fond of him as if he were a pet singing-bird. But after he had learned several pieces, one morning it was found that the bird had flown.

During June and July in this part of the country, a succession of
fairs are held in the different villages, and bands of players and singers and dancing girls, together with hordes of traders of every kind, journey in boats along the rivers from fair to fair. Since the year before, a novel party of acrobats had joined the throng. Tara, after leaving the ballad singers, had been traveling with a trader, helping him to sell his pan. His curiosity being roused, he joined the acrobats. He had taught himself to play the flute, and it was his sole function to play jigs, in the Lucknow style, while the acrobats were doing their feats. It was from this troupe that he had just run away. Tara had heard that the Zemindar of Nandigram was promoting some amateur theatricals on a grand scale. He promptly tied up his belongings in a bundle with the intention of going there, when he came across Moti Babu.

Tara's imaginative nature had saved him from acquiring the manners of any of the different companies with whom he had lived. His mind had always remained aloof and free. He had seen and heard many ugly things, but there was no room within him for these; like other bonds, habit also failed to contain him. Swan-like, he swam over the muddy waters of the world, and no matter how often his curiosity impelled him to dive into the mire beneath, his feathers remained unruffled and white. That is why the face of the runaway shone with a youthfulness that made even the middle-aged, worldly Moti Babu accept and welcome him without a question or a doubt.

After dinner was over, the boat cast off. Annapurna, with an affectionate interest, continued asking about Tara's relatives and his home life, but the boy made the shortest possible replies and at last sought refuge by a flight to the deck.

The vast river, swollen by the seasonal rains to the last limit of its banks, seemed to embarrass Mother Nature herself by its boisterous recklessness. As though with a magic wand, the sun, shining out of a break in the clouds, touched the rows of half-submerged reeds at the water's edge, the juicy green of the sugarcane higher up on the bank, and the purple haze of the woodlands on the farther shore against the distant horizon. Everything was gleaming and quickening with life.

Tara mounted the upper deck and stretched himself under the shade of the spreading sail. One after another, sloping meadows,
flooded jute fields, deep green waves of *aman* rice, paths winding up to the village from the riverside, villages nestling in dense groves, appeared and passed away. This world, with its far-gazing sky, the whisper in its fields, the tumult in its water, the restless trees, the vast space above and below, was on terms of the closest intimacy with the boy, and yet it never for a moment tried to bind his restless spirit with a jealous embrace.

Calves were gambolling by the riverside; village ponies limped along, grazing on the meadows. Kingfishers perched on bamboo poles put up for spreading the nets took an occasional plunge after fish. Boys were playing in the river. Village girls up to their breasts in the water chattered and laughed as they scrubbed their clothes. Fishwives with baskets, their cloth tucked around their waist, bargained with the fishermen. These scenes never exhausted their novelty for Tara; his eyes were always eager.

Tara then began to talk with the boatmen. He jumped up and took turns with them at the poles whenever the boat hugged the shore too closely, and when the steersman felt he would like a smoke Tara relieved him at the helm, knowing exactly how to work the sail with the changing direction of the breeze and the boat.

A little before evening Annapurna sent for Tara and asked him: "What do you usually have for supper?"

"Whatever I get," was the reply, "and some days I don't get anything at all!"

Annapurna was disappointed at this lack of response. She would have liked to feed and care for this homeless waif until he was happy, but somehow she could not find out what would please him. A little later when the boat was moored for the night, she bustled about and sent servants into the village to get milk and sweetmeats and other dainties, but Tara contented himself with a slight supper and refused the milk altogether. Even Moti Babu, who was a man of few words, tried to press the milk on him, but he simply said: "I don't care for it."

Thus passed two or three days of their life on the river. Tara of his own accord, and with great alacrity, helped in the marketing and the cooking and lent a hand with the boatmen in whatever had to be done. Anything worth seeing never escaped his keen glance. His eyes, his limbs, his mind were always on the alert. Like Nature her-
self, he was constantly active, yet aloof and undistracted. Every person has some fixed point, but Tara was just a ripple on the current of things rushing across the infinite blue. Nothing bound him to past or future; his part in life was simply to flow onwards.

From the various professionals with whom he had associated he had picked up many entertaining accomplishments. Free from all troubling thoughts, his mind was wonderfully receptive. He had memorized a number of ballads, songs and long passages from dramas. One day as was his custom, Moti Babu was reading from the Ramayana to his wife and daughter. He was about to come to the story of Kusha and Lava, the valiant sons of Rama, when Tara could not contain his excitement any longer. Stepping from the deck into the cabin he exclaimed: “Put away the book, Sir. Let me sing you the story.” He then began to recite Dasarathi’s version in a flute-like voice, showering and scattering its rhymes and alliterations. The atmosphere became full with laughter and tears. The boatmen hung around the cabin doors to listen, and even the occupants of passing boats strained their ears to get snatches of the melody. When he finished, all the listeners sighed because it ended so soon!

With her eyes filling, Annapurna longed to take Tara into her lap and fold him to her bosom. Moti Babu thought that if only he could persuade the lad to stay on with them he would cease to feel the want of a son. But Charu, their little daughter, felt that she would explode with jealousy.

Charu was an only child, the sole claimant to her parents love. There was no end to her whims and caprices. She had her own ideas about dress and grooming, but these changed constantly. So whenever she was invited out, her mother was nervous till the last moment, afraid she would get something impossible into her head. If she did not like the way her hair had been done, taking it down and doing it up again would not do any good—the matter was sure to end in a fit of sulking. It was the same with other things; however, when she was in a good humor, she was reasonableness itself. She would kiss and embrace her mother with gushing affection, and dis-
tract her with incessant prattle and laughter. In a word, this little girl was an impossible enigma.

With all the fierceness of her untamed heart Charu began to hate Tara. She started tearfully pushing away her plate at dinner, saying the cooking was poor. She slapped her maid and found fault with her for no reason, and succeeded in making her parents thoroughly uncomfortable. In spite of the fact that her mind refused to admit Tara’s merits, she found his accomplishments interesting, and the more he gave proof of those merits, the angrier she became.

When Tara first sang the story of Kusha and Lava, Annapurna had hoped that the music, which could have charmed the beasts of the forests, might soften the temper of her wayward daughter. She asked, “And how did you like it, Charu?” A vigorous shaking of the head was the reply she got, which translated into words must have meant: “I did not like it, and I never will like it, so there!”

Realizing that it was a pure case of jealousy the mother stopped showing any attention to Tara in her daughter’s presence. But when Charu had gone off to bed, and Moti Babu was sitting on deck with Tara, Annapurna took her scat near the cabin door and asked Tara to sing to them. As the melody wafted into the evening, enhancing the hush of the villages reposing in the dusk, and filling Annapurna’s heart with an ecstasy of love and beauty, Charu left her bed and came up sobbing: “What a noise you are all making, mother! I can’t get a wink of sleep!” How could she bear the idea of being sent off to bed alone, and all of them surrounding Tara, revelling in his singing?

Tara found the tantrums of this little girl with the bright black eyes highly diverting. He tried to win her by telling her stories, singing songs, playing on the flute, but with no success. Only when he plunged into the river for his daily swim, with his dhoti lifted short above his knees and tightened round his waist, his supple limbs knifing the water with skillful ease, she could not help being attracted. Every morning she looked forward to his bath-time, but without letting any one guess her fascination. And when the time came, this little actress would start knitting a woolen scarf by the cabin window; now and then her eyes would lift to throw a casual, seemingly contemptuous glance at Tara’s performance.

They had passed by Nandigram, but Tara had taken no notice.
The big boat swept onwards with a leisurely movement, sometimes under sail, sometimes towed along. The days wore on like streams, with a lazy flow of unexciting hours. No one was in any kind of hurry. They all took plenty of time over their daily bath and meals, and even before it grew dark the boats would be moored near the landing place of some village of sufficient size, against a background lively with the sparkle of fireflies and the chirping of cicadas. In this way it took them over ten days to get to Katalia.

Hearing the news of Zemindar Babu’s arrival, men, palanquins and ponies were sent out to meet his boat, and the retainers fired off a salvo startling the village crows into misgivings. Impatient because of the delay caused by this formal welcome, Tara quietly slipped off the boat and made a rapid tour of the village. He hailed some as brother or sister, others as uncle or aunt, and in the space of two or three hours had made friends with all sorts of people.

Perhaps it was because Tara acknowledged no bonds that he could win his way so easily into others’ affections. Anyhow, in a few days the whole village had unconditionally capitulated. One of the reasons for his easy victory was the quickness with which he could enter into the spirit of every class, as if he were one of themselves. He was not the slave of any custom and could easily adjust to things. With children he became child-like; with his elders, he was mature; with the peasant, he was a peasant without losing his brahminhood. He took part in the work and play of all of them with zest and skill. One day as he was seated by a sweetmeat-shop the proprietor asked him to mind the shop while he went on an errand, and the boy cheerfully sat there for hours, driving off the flies with a palmyra leaf. He had some knowledge of how to make sweetmeats, and could also take a hand at the loom or at the potter’s wheel.

Although he had made a conquest of the village, he had been unable to overcome the jealousy of one little girl, and it may be that because he felt that this atom of femininity desired his banishment with all her might, he made such a prolonged stay in Katalia.

But little Charu was not long in furnishing fresh proof of the inscrutability of the feminine mind. Sonamani, the daughter of the
cook, had been widowed at the early age of five. She was now Charu’s age and her closest friend. She was confined to her quarters with some ailment when the family returned home and so could not come to see her companion for some days. When at last she did turn up, the two friends nearly separated for good. This is how it happened.

Charu started on the story of her travels with great circumstance. With the thrilling episode of the abduction of the gem known as Tara, she expected to arouse her friend’s curiosity and wonderment. But when she learned that Tara was not unknown to Sonamani, that he called Sonamani’s mother aunt, and Sonamani called him dada; when she further learned that Tara had not only charmed both mother and daughter by playing kirtan tunes on the flute, but had actually made a bamboo flute for Sonamani with his own hand, and plucked fruit for her from tree tops and flowers for her from brambly thickets—she felt as if a red-hot spear had been thrust into her.

That day, Charu vowed eternal enmity to Sonamani. And going into Tara’s room she pulled out his favorite flute, threw it on the floor and trampled it into slivers.

While she was furiously busy Tara came into the room. This picture of passion which the girl presented amazed him. “Charu!” he cried. “Why are you smashing my flute?”

“Serves you right. I’d do it again!” she screamed, and with a flushed face and reddened eyes she gave the flute some more kicks and ran crying from the room.

Tara picked up his flute and saw that it was ruined. He could not help laughing when he thought of the sudden fate which had overtaken his innocent instrument. As the days went by, Charu was becoming for him more and more an object of curiosity.

He also found in the house other objects which fully aroused his curiosity. These were the illustrated English books in Moti Babu’s library. Though his knowledge of the outside world was considerable, he found it difficult to completely enter this world of pictures. He tried to make up for this deficiency by his imagination, but that was not satisfactory.

One day, finding the books so attractive to Tara, Moti Babu asked him: “Would you like to learn English? Then you could understand all about these pictures.”
“I would indeed!” exclaimed Tara.

Moti Babu, delighted, at once arranged with the headmaster of the village school to give Tara English lessons.

With his keen memory and undivided attention, Tara worked at his English lessons. He seemed to have embarked on an adventurous quest which left his old life behind. The neighbors saw no more of him, and when in the afternoon, just before it got dark, he would pace rapidly up and down the deserted riverside reading his lessons, his devoted band of boys looked on dejectedly from a distance, not daring to interrupt him.

Even Charu rarely saw him. Tara used to come into the zenana for his meals, which he ate leisurely under the kindly eyes of Annapurna. But now he could no longer tolerate the loss of time over all this, and begged Moti Babu’s permission to be served in his room outside. Annapurna grieved and protested at the prospect of losing his company, but Moti Babu, glad to find the boy so earnest in his studies, agreed with the idea and so arranged it.

All of a sudden Charu announced that she also would learn English. Her parents at first took it as a great joke and laughed heartily over their little girl’s latest caprice. But she washed away the humor with a flood of tears, and her helpless parents had to take the matter seriously. Charu was placed under the same tutor and had her lessons with Tara.

But studiousness did not come naturally to this flighty little creature. Not only did she not learn, but also made it difficult for Tara to do so. She would lag behind by not preparing her lessons, but would fly into a rage or burst into tears if Tara went on to the next one without her. When Tara was through with one book and had to get another, the same had to be procured for her also. Her jealousy would not allow Tara to sit alone in his room to do his exercises. She began stealing in when he was not there, and daubing his exercise book with ink, or taking away his pen. Tara would bear this as long as he could, and then would chastise her, but she would not reform.

At last, by accident, Tara hit upon an effective method. One day,
as he tore out an ink-spattered page from his exercise book and was sitting there thoroughly vexed about it, Charu peeped in. "Now I am going to catch it," she thought. But as she came in, she was disappointed; Tara sat quietly without a word. She teasingly skipped near enough for him to cuff her, if he had been so minded. But he remained as still and grave as ever. The little culprit was completely frustrated. She was not used to apologizing, and yet her penitent heart yearned to make it up to Tara. Finding no other way, she took the torn-out page and sitting near him wrote on it in large rour handwriting: "I will never do it again." She then went through a variety of maneuvers to draw Tara's attention to what she had written. Tara could keep his countenance no longer, and burst out laughing. The girl fled from the room in grief and anger. She felt that nothing short of the complete obliteration of that sheet of paper, from eternal time and infinite space, would wipe away her mortification!

Bashful, Sonamani would sometimes come to the schoolroom door, hesitate at the threshold and then leave. She had made it up with Charu, and they were as great friends as ever, but where Tara was concerned Sonamani was cautious. She usually chose the time when Charu was inside the zenana, to hover near the schoolroom door. One day Tara caught sight of the retreating figure and called out: "Hullo, Sona, is that you? What's the news: how is my aunt?"

"You haven't been to us for so long," said Sonamani. "Mother has a pain in the back or she would have come to see you herself."

At this point Charu came up. Sonamani was embarrassed. She felt as if she had been caught stealing her friend's property. Charu, with a toss of her head, cried out in a shrill voice: "Shame on you, Sonamani, coming and disturbing lessons! I'll tell mother." To hear this self-constituted guardian of Tara, one would have thought that her sole care in life was to prevent the disturbance of his studies! What brought her here at this time the Lord might have known, but Tara had no idea.

Poor flustered Sonamani sought refuge by making all kinds of excuses, whereupon Charu called her a nasty little storyteller, and she had to slink away in complete defeat.

But the sympathetic Tara shouted after her: "All right, Sona, tell your mother I'll go and see her this evening."
“Oh! Will you?” sneered Charu. “Haven’t you got lessons to do? I’ll tell master-mashai, you see if I don’t!”

Undaunted by the threat, Tara went over on the next two evenings. On the third, Charu went further than merely threatening. She fastened the chain outside Tara’s door, and taking a small padlock off her mother’s spice-box, locked him in for the evening, only letting him out when it was supper time. Tara was so annoyed that he swore he would not touch a morsel of food. The repentant girl, beside herself, begged for forgiveness. “I’ll never, never do it again,” she pleaded, “I beg of you at your feet, do please have something to eat.” Tara was obstinate at first, but when she began to sob as if her heart would break, he sat down to his supper.

Charu often said to herself she would never again tease Tara and would be very, very good to him, but Sonamani, or something or other, would get in the way and spoil her virtuous resolution.

And it came about that whenever Tara found her particularly quiet and good he began to look for an explosion. How or why it happened he could never make out, but sure enough, there it was, a regular storm, followed by showers of tears. Then the bright sun was shining and there was peace.

Thus passed two whole years. Tara had never before permitted any one to cage him for so long. Perhaps it was the novelty of his studies; perhaps it was his growth of character, which made his restless spirit welcome the change to a quiet life; perhaps his fellow-student, with her endless variety of teasing, had cast a secret spell over his heart.

Charu reached marriageable age, and Moti Babu was anxiously looking for a suitable bridegroom. But the mother said to her husband, “Why are you hunting for bridegrooms? Tara is a nice boy and our daughter is fond of him.”

This took Moti Babu by surprise. “How can you say that?” he exclaimed. “We know nothing of his family history. Our only daughter must make a good marriage.”

One day a family came over from the Zemindar of Raydanga to see
Charu, with the idea of making a proposal. Annapurna tried to get Charu dressed up and taken to the reception room, but she locked herself in her bedroom and refused to come out. Moti Babu stood by the door and pleaded and scolded in vain; at last he had to go back and make feeble excuses to the would-be bridegroom’s party, saying his daughter was indisposed. They came to the conclusion that there was something wrong with the girl which was being concealed and the matter fell through.

Then Moti Babu thought again of Tara, who was handsome and well-behaved, and in every way desirable. He could continue to live with them, and the pain of sending away their only child to another house could be avoided. It also occurred to him that Charu’s obstinacies, which seemed so excusable in her father’s home, would not be so indulgently tolerated in the home of her husband.

Moti Babu and Annapurna had a long talk about it and finally decided to send to Tara’s village with inquiries. When the news came back that the family was respectable but poor, a formal proposal was at once sent off to the mother and the elders. And they, overjoyed at the prospect, lost no time in returning their consent.

Moti Babu discussed the time and place of the wedding with his wife, but with his habitual caution kept the matter secret from everybody else.

Meanwhile Charu would occasionally make stormy raids on Tara’s room, sometimes angry, sometimes affectionate, sometimes contemptuous, but always disturbing. And gleams, like lightning flashes, would create a tumult in the once free and open sky of the boy’s mind. His life now felt the network of dreamstuff into which it had drifted and become entangled. Some days Tara would leave his lessons and go to the library, where he would remain immersed in the pictures. And the world which his imagination now conjured up was different from the former and less colorful. The boy was happy with this change in himself, and conscious of a new experience.

Moti Babu had fixed upon a day in July for the ceremony, and sent out invitations to Tara’s mother and relatives. He also instructed his agent in Calcutta to send down a brass band and other paraphernalia necessary for a wedding. But to Tara, he had not said a word.

In the meantime the monsoon set in. The river had almost dried
up, the only sign of water being the pools in the hollows; elsewhere the river bed was deeply scored with the tracks of carts which had recently crossed. The village boats, stranded, were imbedded in the caking mud. Then all of a sudden one day, like a married daughter returning to her father’s house, a swift-flowing current, babbling with glee, danced straight into the empty heart and outstretched arms of the village. The boys and girls romped with joy, and never seemed to tire of sporting and splashing in the water, their long lost friend. The village women left their tasks and came out to greet their companion of old. And everywhere fresh life stirred up in the dry, languishing village.

Boats from distant parts, of all shapes and sizes, bringing their freight, were now seen on the river, and the bazaars in the evening resounded with the songs of the foreign boatmen. During the dry season, the villages on either bank had been left in their secluded corners to pass the time with domestic concerns, and now in the rains the great outside world came a-wooing, mounted on a silt-red chariot laden with merchandise, and all pettiness was swept away in the glamour of the courting; all would now be life and gaiety, and festive clamor would fill the skies.

This year the Nag Zemindars, close by, were organizing an especially gorgeous car-festival, and there was to be a grand fair. In the moon-lit evening when Tara went sauntering by the river, he saw all the boats hurrying by, some filled with merry-go-rounds, others bearing theatrical parties singing and playing as they went, and any number carrying traders with their wares. There was one containing a party of strolling players, with a violin vigorously playing a well-known tune, and the usual ha! ha! of encouragement shouted out every time it came back to the refrain. The up-country boatmen of the cargo boats kept clanging their cymbals without any accompanying song or tune. Everywhere there was excitement and bustle.

As Tara looked on, an immense cloud rolled up from the horizon, spreading and bellying out like a great black sail; the moon was overcast; the east wind sprang up, driving cloud after cloud; the river swelled and heaved. In the swaying woods on the river banks the darkness grew tense, frogs croaked and shrill cicadas seemed to be sawing away at the night with their chirp.

All the world was holding a car-festival that evening, with flags
flying, wheels whirling and the earth rumbling. Clouds pursued each 
other, the wind rushed after them, the boats sped on, and songs 
leapt to the skies. Then the lightning flashed out, rending the sky 
from end to end; the thunder crackled forth; and out of the depths 
of the darkness came a scent of moist earth and torrential rain. The 
sleepy little village of Katalia dozed in a corner, with its doors closed 
and lights out.

The next day, Tara's mother and brothers landed at Katalia with 
three boats full of wedding necessities. Sonamani, with great trepidation, took some preserves and pickles to Tara's room, and stood hesitating at his door. But there was no Tara. Before this conspiracy of love and affection had succeeded in completely surrounding him, the free-souled Brahmin boy had fled in the rainy night, carrying with him the heart of the village which he had stolen, and returned to the arms of his great world-mother, who was serene in her unconcern.