

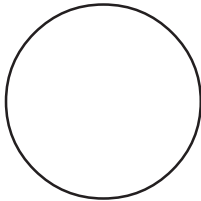
# **SUPPLEMENTARY READER**

## **HIGHER SECONDARY - FIRST YEAR PART II - ENGLISH**

Untouchability is a sin

Untouchability is a crime

Untouchability is inhuman



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## PREFACE

Extensive reading has become the need of the hour. This Supplementary Reader is intended to develop reading skills. Basic skills have been practised in the English Reader. Further development is taken care of in this book. Besides global and local comprehension of a story the student should be able to analyse the events, the characteristics of the persons in each story, the hints of important ideas and their development into continuous writing.

Questions given under 'For Readers' Practice' contribute to the understanding of the story. Questions under 'Self Evaluation' enable them to practise answering questions in the annual examination.

Besides two short stories written by tamil writers Pudumaipithan and Sundara Ramaswamy, one by the Indian Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, there are three other stories by English writers, viz., Guy de Maupassant, O.Henry and James Herriot. The overall effect of reading these stories will be a regional, national and international outlook on human life and culture.

Reading skills developed in the English Reader and strengthened by this Supplementary Reader should enable the students to read any other writing in the media and the book world. Extensive reading is an accomplishment of a good user of any language. Imaginative thinking, analytical process and synthetic approach should stand them in good stead in future studies and career.

It is hope that teachers will use this strictly as an extensive reader and not as a text to be taught in classrooms. Home reading, class discussion and internal assessment are recommended for teaching this book. All the strategic competencies developed in the Reader will be of great help in managing the expansion of general knowledge through this book

# CONTENTS

		<b>Page No.</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>HOLIDAY</b> <i>Rabindranath Tagore</i>	1
<b>2</b>	<b>THE NECKLACE</b> <i>Guy de Maupassant</i>	10
<b>3</b>	<b>THE GIFT OF THE MAGI</b> <i>O. Henry</i>	21
<b>4</b>	<b>REFLOWERING</b> <i>Sundara Ramaswamy</i>	29
<b>5</b>	<b>EVERY LIVING THING</b> <i>James Herriot</i>	41
<b>6</b>	<b>KAANCHANAI</b> <i>Pudumaippittan</i>	49

# HOLIDAY

*Rabindranath Tagore*

Phatik Chakrabarti, leader of the gang, suddenly had a bright idea. Lying by the river was a huge sāl–tree log, just waiting to be made into a mast. Everyone must help to roll it along! Without giving a thought to the surprise, annoyance and inconvenience that would be caused to the person who needed the log for timber, all the boys fell in with this suggestion. They got down to the task with a will; but just then Phatik’s younger brother Makhanlal came and solemnly sat on the log. The boys were rather non-plussed by his haughty, dismissive attitude.

One of them went up to him and nervously tried to push him off, but he refused to budge. Wise beyond his years, he continued to ponder the vanity of all childish games.

‘You’ll pay for this’, said Phatik, brandishing his fist. ‘Clear off.’

But Makhanlal merely adjusted his perch and settled down even more immovably on the log.

In this kind of situation, Phatik ought to have preserved his supremacy over the other boys by delivering immediately a hearty slap on his wayward brother’s cheek—but he didn’t dare. Instead he assumed a manner implying that he could, had he so wished, have meted out this customary punishment, but he wasn’t going to, because a more amusing idea had occurred to him. Why not, he proposed, roll the log over with Makhanlal on it?

Makhan at first saw glory in this; he did not think (nor did anyone else) that like other worldly glories it might carry dangers. The boys rolled up their sleeves and began to push – ‘Heave ho! Heave ho! Over we go!’ With one spin of the log, Makhan’s solemnity, glory and wisdom crashed to the ground.

The other boys were delighted at such an unexpectedly quick outcome, but Phatik was rather embarrassed. Makhan immediately jumped up and

threw himself on to him, hitting him with blind rage and scratching his nose and cheeks. Then he made his way home tearfully.

The game having been spoilt, Phatik pulled up a few reeds, and climbing on to the prow of a half-sunk boat sat quietly chewing them. A boat—not a local one—came up to the mooring-place. A middle-aged gentleman with a black moustache but grey hair stepped ashore. ‘Where is the Chakravartis’ house?’ he asked the boy.

‘Over there,’ replied Phatik, still chewing the reed-stalks. But no one would have been able to understand which direction to take.

‘Where?’ asked the gentleman again.

‘Don’t know,’ said Phatik, and he carried on as before, sucking juice from the stalks. The gentleman had to ask others to help him find the house.

Suddenly Bagha Bagdi (a servant) appeared and said, ‘Phatik – *dādā*, Mother’s calling you.’

‘Shan’t go,’ said Phatik.

He struggled and kicked helplessly as Bagha picked him up bodily and carried him home. His mother shouted furiously when she saw him: ‘You’ve beaten up Makhan again!’

‘I didn’t beat him up.’

‘How dare you lie to me?’

‘I did not beat him up. Ask him.’

When Makhan was questioned he stuck to his earlier accusation, saying, ‘He *did* beat me up.’ Phatik could not stand this any more. He charged at Makhan and thumped him hard, shouting, ‘So who’s lying now?’ His mother, taking Makhan’s part, rushed and slapped Phatik’s back several times heavily. He pushed her away. ‘So you’d lay hands on your own mother?’ she screamed.

At that moment the black-grey gentleman entered the house and said, ‘What’s going on here?’

‘Dādā!’ said Phatik’s mother, overwhelmed with surprise and joy. ‘When did you come?’ She bent down and took the dust of his feet.

Many years previously her elder brother had gone to the west of India to work, and in the meantime she had had two children; they had grown, her husband had died—but all this time she had never seen her brother. At long last Bishvambhar Babu had returned home, and had now come to see his sister.

There were celebrations for several days. At length, a couple of days before his departure, Bishvambhar questioned his sister about the schooling and progress of her two sons. In reply, he was given a description of Phatik's uncontrollable wildness and inattention to study; while Makhan, by contrast, was perfectly behaved and a model student. 'Phatik drives me mad,' she said.

Bishvambhar then proposed that he take Phatik to Calcutta, keep him with him and supervise his education. The widow easily agreed to this. 'Well, Phatik,' he asked the boy, 'how would you like to go to Calcutta with your uncle?' 'I'd love to,' said Phatik, jumping up and down.

His mother did not object to seeing her son off, because she always lived in dread that Makhan might be pushed into the river by him or might split his head open in some terrible accident; but she was a little cast down by the eagerness with which Phatik seized the idea of going. He pestered his uncle with 'When are we going? When are we going?' – and couldn't sleep at night for excitement.

When at last the day to leave came, he was moved to a joyous display of generosity. He bestowed on Makhan his fishing-rod, kite and reel, with permanent right of inheritance.

When he arrived at his uncle's house in Calcutta, he first had to be introduced to his aunt. I cannot say she was over-pleased at this unnecessary addition to her family. She was used to looking after her house and three children as they were, and suddenly to loose into their midst an unknown, uneducated country boy would probably be most disruptive. If only Bishvambhar had insight commensurate with his years! Moreover, there is no greater nuisance in the world than a boy of thirteen or fourteen. There is no beauty in him, and he does nothing useful either. He arouses no affection; nor is his company welcome. If he speaks modestly he sounds false; if he speaks sense he sounds arrogant; if he speaks at all he is felt to be intrusive. He suddenly shoots up in height so that his clothes no longer fit him—which

is an ugly affront to other people. His childish grace and sweetness of voice suddenly disappear, and people find it impossible not to blame him for this. Many faults can be forgiven in a child or a young man, but at this age even natural and unavoidable faults are felt to be unbearable.

He himself is fully aware that he does not fit properly into the world; so he is perpetually ashamed of his existence and seeks forgiveness for it. Yet this is the age at which a rather greater longing for affection develops in him. If he gets at this time love and companionship from some sympathetic person, he will do anything in return. But no one dares show affection, in case others condemn this as pampering. So he looks and behaves like a stray street-dog.

To leave home and mother and go to a strange place is hell for a boy of this age. To live with loveless indifference all around is like walking on thorns. This is the age when normally a conception forms of women as wonderful, heavenly creatures; to be cold-shouldered by them is terribly hard to bear. It was therefore especially painful to Phatik that his aunt saw him as an evil star. If she happened to ask him to do a job for her and- meaning well- he did more than was strictly necessary, his aunt would stamp on his enthusiasm, saying, 'That's quite enough, quite enough. I don't want you meddling any more. Go and get on with your own work. Do some studying.' His aunt's excessive concern for his mental improvement would then seem terribly cruel and unjust.

He so lacked love in this household, and it seemed he could breathe freely nowhere. Stuck behind its walls, he thought constantly of his home village. The fields where he would let his 'monster-kite' fly and flap in the wind; the river-bank where he wandered aimlessly, singing a *rägä* of his own invention at the top of his voice; the small stream in which he would jump and swim now and then in the heat of the day; his gang of followers; the mischief they would get up to; the freedom; above all his harsh, impetuous mother; all this tugged continually at his helpless heart. A kind of instinctive love, like an animal's; a blind longing to be near; an unspoken distress at being far; a heartfelt, anguished cry of '*Mä, Mä*' like a motherless calf at dusk; such feelings perpetually afflicted this gawky, nervous, thin, lanky, ungainly boy.



At school there was no one more stupid and inattentive than he. If asked a question he would just stare back vacantly. If the teacher cuffed him, he would silently bear it like a laden, exhausted ass. At break–time, he would stand at the window staring at the roofs of distant houses, while his classmates played outside.

If a child or two appeared for a moment on one of the roofs, in the midday sunshine, playing some game, his misery intensified.

One day he plucked up courage to ask his uncle, ‘Uncle, when will I be going home to see Mother?’

‘When the school holiday comes,’ said his uncle. The *pûjâ* holiday in the month of Kartik—that was a long way off!

One day Phatik lost his school–books. He never found it easy to prepare his lessons, and now, with his books lost, he was completely helpless. The teacher started to beat and humiliate him everyday. His standing in school sank so low that his cousins were ashamed to admit their connection with him. Whenever he was punished, they showed even greater glee than the other boys. It became too much to bear, and one day he went to his aunt and confessed like a criminal that he had lost his school–books. ‘Well, well,’ said his aunt, lines of annoyance curling round her lips, ‘and do you suppose I can buy you new books five times a month?’ He said no more. That he should have wasted *someone else’s* money made him feel even more hurt and rejected by his mother. His misery and sense of inferiority dragged him down to the very earth.

That night, when he returned from school, he had a pain in his head and was shivering. He could tell he was getting a fever. He also knew that his aunt would not take kindly to his being ill. He had a clear sense of what an unnecessary, unjustifiable nuisance it would be to her. He felt he had no right to expect that an odd, useless, stupid boy such as he should be nursed by anyone other than his mother.

The next morning Phatik was nowhere to be seen. He was searched for in all the neighbours’ houses round about, but there was no trace of him. In the evening torrential rain began, so in searching for him many people got soaked to the skin—to no avail. In the end, finding him nowhere, Bishvambhar Babu informed the police.

A whole day later, in the evening, a carriage drew up outside Bishvambhar's house. Rain was still thudding down relentlessly, and the street was flooded to a knee's depth. Two policemen bundled Phatik out of the carriage and put him down in front of Bishvambhar. He was soaked from head to foot, covered with mud, his eyes and cheeks were flushed, he was trembling violently. Bishvambhar virtually had to carry him into the house.

'You see what happens,' snapped his wife, 'when you take in someone else's child. You must send him home.' But in fact the whole of that day she had hardly been able to eat for worry, and had been unreasonably tetchy with her own children.

'I was going to go to my mother,' said Phatik, weeping, 'but they brought me back.'

The boy's fever climbed alarmingly. He was delirious all night. Bishvambhar fetched the doctor. Opening his bloodshot eyes for a moment and staring blankly at the ceiling joists, Phatik said, 'Uncle, has my holiday-time come?' Bishvambhar, dabbing his own eyes with a handkerchief, tenderly took Phatik's thin, hot hand in his and sat down beside him. He spoke again, mumbling incoherently: 'Mother, don't beat me, Mother. I didn't do anything wrong, honest!'

The next day, during the short time when he was conscious, Phatik kept looking bewilderedly round the room, as if expecting someone. When no one came, he turned and lay mutely with his face towards the wall. Understanding what was on his mind, Bishvambhar bent down and said softly in his ear, 'Phatik, I've sent for your mother.'

Another day passed. The doctor, looking solemn and gloomy, pronounced the boy's condition to be critical. Bishvambhar sat at the bedside in the dim lamplight, waiting minute by minute for Phatik's mother's arrival. Phatik started to shout out, like a boatman, 'More than one fathom deep, more than two fathoms deep!' To come to Calcutta they had had to travel some of the way by steamer. The boatman had lowered the hawser into the stream and bellowed out its depth. In his delirium, Phatik was imitating them, calling out the depth in pathetic tones; except that the endless sea he was about to cross had no bottom that his measuring-rope could touch.

It was then that his mother stormed into the room, bursting into loud wails of grief. When, with difficulty, Bishvambhar managed to calm her down, she threw herself on to the bed and sobbed, 'Phatik, my darling, my treasure.'

'Yes?' said Phatik, seemingly quite relaxed.

'Phatik, darling boy,' cried his mother again.

Turning slowly on to his side, and looking at no one, Phatik said softly, 'Mother, my holiday has come now. I'm going home.'

### **FOR READERS' PRACTICE**

#### **I. Answer the following questions:**

1. How did Phatik tease his brother?
2. Why was Phatik's mother unhappy?
3. Who was the new visitor?
4. What was the suggestion made by the visitor?
5. Why did Phatik's mother agree to send him to Calcutta?
6. Why was Phatik reluctant to go to Calcutta?
7. What kind of reception did Phatik receive in Calcutta?
8. Why did Phatik dislike his school?
9. What were the incidents that increased Phatik's misery in Calcutta.
10. Why did Phatik run away from his uncle's house?
11. In what condition was Phatik brought back?
12. What was the doctor's advice?
13. What do you think happened to Phatik in the end?
14. List out three things Phatik enjoyed in his village, which he missed in Calcutta.
15. What was the attitude of Phatik's aunt towards Phatik?

#### **II. Read the passage given below and answer the questions:**

There were celebrations for several days. At length, a couple of days before his departure, Bishvambar questioned his sister about the schooling and progress of her two sons. In reply, he was given a description of Phatik's uncontrollable wildness and inattention to study; while Makhan, by contrast, was perfectly behaved and a model

student. 'Phatik drives me mad,' she said. Bishvambar then proposed that he take Phatik to Calcutta, keep him with him and supervise his education. The widow easily agreed to this. 'Well, Phatik,' he asked the boy, 'how would you like to go to Calcutta with your uncle?' 'I'd love to', said Phatik, jumping up and down.

1. What were the celebrations for?
2. What was the complaint of Phatik's mother?
3. How was Makhan different from Phatik?
4. Why did Bishvambar suggest that he would take Phatik to Calcutta?
5. What did Bishvambar promise to do?
6. How did Phatik react to the suggestion?

### **SELF EVALUATION**

#### **I. Rearrange the following sentences in the correct sequence:**

1. Phatik's uncle offered to take him to Calcutta.
2. One day Phatik lost his school bag.
3. Phatik's mother could not control Phatik in the village.
4. Phatik found that he was an unwelcome guest in Calcutta.
5. Phatik agreed to go to Calcutta.
6. Phatik gave away all his collections to his brother.
7. Phatik's aunt was annoyed by his carelessness.
8. Phatik's aunt was not pleased at his arrival.
9. Phatik reached his uncle's house.
10. Phatik ran away from his uncle's house.

#### **1. Write an essay on how the life of Phatik in Calcutta differed from his life in village by developing the hints given below:**

Phatik – village boy – father died – lived in village with mother and brother – gang leader of village – established his authority over his brother – indifferent to others – made his mother unhappy – wild in behaviour – inattentive in studies – flying kites – aimless wandering in village – was like a monarch – Calcutta – affection was missing – confined to four walls – no company in school – inattentiveness conspicuous – cousins enjoyed when he was punished – aunt scolded for losing books – His vanity gone – he longed for love.

**2. Under what circumstances did Phatik agree to go to Calcutta?**

Phatik – fatherless boy – wild in behaviour – inattentive in studies – brother behaved well – log on the river bank – wanted to roll – Makhan disobeyed – quarrel – visitor arrives – Phatik indifferent – At home mother furious – complains to her brother, the visitor – uncle offers to educate Phatik in Calcutta – Reasons for the mother’s approval – Phatik’s agreeing – Phatik has no idea of future.

# THE NECKLACE

*Guy de Maupassant*

She was one of those pretty, charming young ladies, born as if through an error of destiny, into a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no hopes, no means of becoming known, appreciated, loved, and married by a man either rich or distinguished; and she allowed herself to marry a petty clerk in the office of the Board of Education.

She was simple, not being able to adorn herself; but she was unhappy, as one out of her class; for women belong to no caste, no race; their grace, their beauty, and their charm serving them in the place of birth and family. Their inborn fineness, their instinctive elegance, their suppleness of wit are their only aristocracy, making some daughters of the people the equal of great ladies.

She suffered incessantly, feeling herself born for all delicacies and luxuries. She suffered from the poverty of her apartment, the shabby walls, the worn chairs, and the faded stuffs. All these things, which another woman of her station would not have noticed, tortured and angered her. The sight of the little Breton, who made this humble home, awoke in her sad regrets and desperate dreams. She thought of quiet antechambers, with their Oriental hangings, lighted by high, bronze torches, and of the two great footmen in short trousers who sleep in the large armchairs, made sleepy by the heavy air from the heating apparatus. She thought of large drawing-rooms, hung in old silks, of graceful pieces of furniture carrying bric-a-brac of inestimable value, and of the little perfumed coquettish apartments, made for five o'clock chats with most intimate friends, men known and sought after, whose attention all women envied and desired.

When she seated herself for dinner, before the round table where the table cloth had been used three days, opposite her husband who uncovered the tureen with a delighted air, saying: 'Oh! the good potpie! I know nothing better than that-' she would think of the elegant dinners, of the shining silver, of the tapestries peopling the walls with ancient personages and rare

birds in the midst of fairy forests; she thought of the exquisite food served on marvellous dishes, of the whispered gallantries, listened to with the smile of the sphinx, while eating the rose-coloured flesh of the trout or a chicken's wing.

She had neither frocks nor jewels, nothing. And she loved only those things. She felt that she was made for them. She had such a desire to please, to be sought after, to be clever, and courted.

She had a rich friend, a school mate at the convent, whom she did not like to visit, she suffered so much when she returned. And she wept for whole days from chagrin, from regret, from despair, and disappointment.

One evening her husband returned elated bearing in his hand a large envelope.

'Here,' he said, 'here is something for you.'

She quickly tore open the wrapper and drew out a printed card on which were inscribed these words:

The Minister of Public Instruction  
and Madame George Ramponneau  
ask the honor of M. and Mme. Loisel's Company  
Monday evening, January 18, at the Minister's residence.

Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she threw the invitation spitefully upon the table murmuring:

'What do you suppose I want with that?'

'But, my dearie, I thought it would make you happy. You never go out, and this is an occasion, and a fine one! I had a great deal of trouble to get it. Everybody wishes one, and it is very select; not many are given to employees. You will see the whole official world there.'

She looked at him with an irritated eye and declared impatiently;

'What do you suppose I have to wear to such a thing as that?'

He had not thought of that; he stammered:

'Why, the dress you wear when we go to the theatre. It seems very pretty to me-'

He was silent, stupefied, in dismay, at the sight of his wife weeping. Two great tears fell slowly from the corners of her eyes toward the corners of her mouth; he stammered:

‘What is the matter? What is the matter?’

By a violent effort, she had controlled her vexation and responded in a calm voice, wiping her moist cheeks:

‘Nothing. Only I have no dress and consequently I cannot go to this affair. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better fitted out than I.’

He was grieved, but answered:

‘Let us see, Matilda. How much would a suitable costume cost, something that would serve for other occasions, something very simple?’

She reflected for some seconds, making estimates and thinking of a sum that she could ask for without bringing with it an immediate refusal and a frightened exclamation from the economical clerk.

Finally she said, in a hesitating voice:

‘I cannot tell exactly, but it seems to me that four hundred francs ought to cover it.’

He turned a little pale, for he had saved just this sum to buy a gun that he might be able to join some hunting parties the next summer, on the plains at Nanterre, with some friends who went to shoot larks up there on Sunday. Nevertheless, he answered:

‘Very well. I will give you four hundred francs. But try to have a pretty dress.’

The day of the ball approached and Mme. Loisel seemed sad, disturbed, anxious. Nevertheless, her dress was nearly ready. Her husband said to her one evening:

‘What is the matter with you? You have acted strangely for two or three days.’

And she responded: ‘I am vexed not to have a jewel, not one stone, nothing to adorn myself with. I shall have such a poverty-laden look. I would prefer not to go to this party.’



He replied: 'You can wear some natural flowers. At this season they look very chic. For ten francs you can have two or three magnificent roses.'

She was not convinced. 'No,' she replied, 'there is nothing more humiliating than to have a shabby air in the midst of rich women.'

Then her husband cried out: 'How stupid we are! Go and find your friend Mme. Forestier and ask her to lend you her jewels. You are well enough acquainted with her to do this.'

She uttered a cry of joy: 'It is true!' she said. 'I had not thought of that.'

The next day she took herself to her friend's house and related her story of distress. Mme. Forestier went to her closet with the glass doors, took out a large jewel – case, brought it, opened it, and said: 'Choose my dear.'

She saw at first some bracelets, then a collar of pearls, then a Venetian cross of gold and jewels of admirable workmanship. She tried the jewels before the glass, hesitated, but could neither decide to take them nor leave them. Then she asked:

'Have you nothing more?'

'Why, yes. Look for yourself. I do not know what will please you.' Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box, a superb necklace of diamonds, and her heart beat fast with an immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took them up. She placed them about her throat against her dress, and remained in ecstasy before them. Then she asked, in a hesitating voice, full of anxiety:

'Could you lend me this? Only this?'

'Why, yes, certainly.'

She fell upon the neck of her friend, embraced her with passion, then went away with her treasure.

The day of the ball arrived. Mme. Loisel was a great success. She was the prettiest of all, elegant, gracious, smiling, and full of joy. All the men noticed her, asked her name, and wanted to be presented. All the members of the Cabinet wished to waltz with her. The Minister of Education paid her some attention.

She danced with enthusiasm, with passion, intoxicated with pleasure, thinking of nothing, in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a kind of cloud of happiness that came of all this homage, and all this admiration, of all these awakened desires, and this victory so complete and sweet to the heart of a woman.

She went home toward four o' clock in the morning. Her husband had been half asleep in one of the little salons since midnight, with three other gentlemen whose wives were enjoying themselves very much.

He threw around her shoulders the wraps they had carried for the coming home, modest garments of everyday wear, whose poverty clashed with the elegance of the ball costume. She felt this and wished to hurry away in order not to be noticed by the other women who were wrapping themselves in rich furs.

Loisel detained her: 'wait,' said he. 'You will catch cold out there. I am going to call a cab.'

But she would not listen and descended the steps rapidly. when they were in the street, they found no carriage; and they began to seek for one, hailing the coachmen whom they saw at a distance.

They walked along toward the Seine, hopeless and shivering. Finally they found on the dock one of those old, nocturnal coupes that one sees in Paris after nightfall, as if they were ashamed of their misery by day.

It took them as far as their door in Martyr street, and they went wearily up to their apartment. It was all over for her. And on his part, he remembered that he would have to be at the office by ten o' clock.

She removed the wraps from her shoulders before the glass, for a final view of herself in her glory. Suddenly she uttered a cry. Her necklace was not around her neck.

Her husband, already half undressed, asked: 'What is the matter?'

She turned towards him excitedly:

'I have—I have—I no longer have Mme. Forestier's necklace.'

He arose in dismay: 'What! How is that? It is not possible.'

And they looked in the folds of the dress, in the folds of the mantle, in the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.

He asked: 'you are sure you still had it when we left the house?'

'Yes, I felt it in the vestibule as we came out.'

'But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab.'

'Yes. It is probable. Did you take the number?'

'No. And you, did you notice what it was?'

'No.'

They looked at each other utterly cast down. Finally Loisel dressed himself again.

'I am going,' said he, 'over the track where we went on foot, to see if I can find it.'

And he went. She remained in her evening gown, not having the force to go to bed, stretched upon a chair, without ambition or thoughts.

Toward seven o'clock her husband returned. He had found nothing.

He went to the police and to the cab offices, and put an advertisement in the newspapers, offering a reward; he did everything that afforded them a suspicion of hope.

She waited all day in a state of bewilderment before this frightful disaster. Loisel returned at evening with his face harrowed and pale; and had discovered nothing.

'It will be necessary,' said he, 'to write to your friend that you have broken the clasp of the necklace and that you will have it repaired. That will give us time to turn around.'

She wrote as he dictated.

At the end of a week, they had lost all hope. And Loisel, older by five years, declared:

'We must take measures to replace this jewel.'

The next day they took the box which had enclosed it, to the jeweler whose name was on the inside. He consulted his books:

‘It is not I, Madame,’ said he, ‘ who sold this necklace; I only furnished the casket.’

Then they went from jeweler to jeweler seeking a necklace like the other one, consulting their memories, and fill, both of them, with chagrin and anxiety.

In a shop of the Palais–Royal, they found a chaplet of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they had lost. It was valued at forty thousand francs. They could get it for thirty–six thousand.

They begged the jeweler not to sell it for three days. And they made an arrangement by which they might return it for thirty–four thousand francs if they found the other one before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs which his father had left him. He borrowed the rest.

He borrowed it, asking for a thousand francs of one, five hundred of another, five louis of this one, and three louis of that one. He gave notes, made ruinous promises, took money of usurers and the whole race of lenders. He compromised his whole existence, in fact risked his signature, without even knowing whether he could make it good or not, and , harassed by anxiety for the future, by the black misery which surrounded him, and by the prospect of all physical privations and moral torture, he went to get the new necklace, depositing on the merchant’s counter thirty–six thousand francs.

When Mme. Loisel took back the jewels to Mme. Forestier, the latter said to her in a frigid tone:

‘You should have returned them to me sooner, for I might have needed them.’

She did open the jewel–box as her friend feared she would. If she should perceive the substitution, what would she think? What should she say? Would she take her for a robber?

Mme. Loisel now knew the horrible life of necessity. She did her part, however, completely, heroically. It was necessary to pay this frightful debt. She would pay it. they sent away the maid; they changed their lodgings; they rented some rooms under a mansard roof.

She learned the heavy cares of a household, the odious work of a kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her rosy nails upon the greasy pots and the bottoms of the stewpans. She washed the soiled linen, the chemises and dishcloths, which she hung on the line to dry; she took down the refuse to the street each morning and brought up the water, stopping at each landing to breathe. And, clothed like a woman of the people, she went to the grocer's, the butcher's and the fruiterer's, with her basket on her arm, shopping, haggling to the last sou of her miserable money.

Every month it was necessary to renew some notes, thus obtaining time, and to pay others.

The husband worked evenings, putting the books of some merchants in order, and nights he often did copying at five sous a page.

And this life lasted for ten years.

At the end of ten years, they had restored all, all, with interest of the usurer, and accumulated interest besides.

Mme. Loisel seemed old now. She had become a strong, hard woman, the crude woman of the poor household. Her hair badly dressed, her skirts awry, her hands red, she spoke in a loud tone, and washed the floors with large pails of water. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she would seat herself before the window and think of that evening party of former times, of that ball where she was so beautiful and so flattered.

How would it have been if she had not lost the necklace? Who knows? Who knows? How singular is life, and how full of changes! How small a thing will ruin or save one!

One Sunday as she was taking a walk in the Champs–Elysees to rid herself of the cares of the week, she suddenly perceived a woman walking with a child. It was Mme. Forestier, still young, still pretty, still attractive. Mme. Loisel was affected. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not?

She approached her. 'Good morning, Jeanne.'

'Her friend did not recognize her and was astonished to be so familiarly addressed by this common personage, she stammered:

‘But, Madame – I do not know – You must be mistaken-’

‘No, I am Matilda Loisel.

Her friend uttered a cry of astonishment: ‘Oh! my poor Matilda!

How you have changed -’

‘Yes, I have had some hard days since I saw you; and some miserable ones – and all because of you-’

‘Because of me? How is that?’

‘You recall the diamond necklace that you loaned me to wear to the Commissioner’s ball?’

‘Yes, very well.’

‘Well, I lost it.’

‘How is that, since you returned it to me?’

‘I returned another to you exactly like it. And it has taken us ten years to pay for it. You can understand that it was not easy for us who have nothing. But it is finished and I am decently content.’

Madame Forestier stopped short. She said:

‘You say that you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?’

‘Yes. You did not perceive it then? They were just alike.’

And she smiled with a proud and simple joy. Madame Forestier was touched and took both her hands as she replied:

‘Oh! my poor Matilda! Mine were false. They were not worth over five hundred francs!’

## **FOR READERS’ PRACTICE**

### **I. Answer the following questions:**

1. Write in five sentences the type of life Matilda Loisel wanted to lead.
2. Why did Matilda often weep?
3. Why was Matilda unhappy when her husband brought her the invitation?
4. How did Mr.Loisel get his wife a new dress.

5. Why was Matilda sorry on the day of the party?
6. How did Mme. Forestier help Matilda?
7. What was Matilda's experience in the party?
8. What gave Matilda a rude shock when she went home?
9. What excuse did Matilda give Mme. Forestier for not returning the necklace?
10. How did Mr. and Mme Loisel manage to return the necklace?
11. How did the life of Mr and Mme. Loisel change after returning the necklace?
12. How did she meet Mme. Forestier?
13. What did Mrs. Forestier say about the necklace?
14. Why was Matilda shocked?
15. What is the moral of the story?

**II. Read the passage given below and answer the questions:**

She was simple, not being able to adorn herself; but she was unhappy, as one out of her class; for women belong to no caste, no race; their grace, their beauty, and their charm serving them in the place of birth and family. Their inborn fineness, their instinctive elegance, their suppleness of wit are their only aristocracy, making some daughters of the people the equal of great ladies.

She suffered incessantly, feeling herself born for all delicacies and luxuries. She suffered from the poverty of her apartment, the shabby walls, the worn chairs, and the faded stuff. All these things, which another woman of her station would not have noticed, tortured and angered her.

1. Why was the woman referred to in the story unhappy?
2. What qualities of a woman make her equal in status to great ladies?
3. Why did the woman suffer?
4. What were the things she was unhappy about?
5. How did she differ from any other woman of her status?

**SELF EVALUATION**

**I. Re arrange the following sentences in the correct sequence:**

1. Mr. Loisel suggested borrowing jewellery from Mrs. Forestier.
2. They bought the new necklace for thirty-six thousand francs.

3. Matilda borrowed a diamond necklace from Mrs. Forestier.
4. Mr.Loisel gave the invitation to his wife.
5. Matilda was a great success in the party.
6. Matilda asked for a new dress for the party.
7. When she returned home, Matilda found the necklace missing.
8. Matilda was unhappy over her not having any jewel.
9. They could not find the necklace anywhere.
10. They decided to replace the necklace.

**II. Write an essay on how the ‘Necklace’ changed the life of the Matilda by developing the hints given below:**

Matilda married to a petty clerk–They were poor–she longed for a luxurious life – Her husband brought invitation – Desire for a new dress and jewellery – borrowed a necklace – Party goes off well – Necklace lost – they get time – buy a new necklace – return it – to pay the debt lead a simple life – Many years pass by – Mme.Forestier is met – Listens to the story – says that necklace is imitation – a small thing has ruined their life.

2. Present a character sketch of Matilda.

Matilda – wife of petty clerk – poor condition of her home – Her longing for a luxurious life – Invitation for ball – Loisel wants to make her happy – she desires a new dress – jewellery – happy at last – happiness short lived – necklace – shocked – had to replace necklace – now accepts a lesser standard of living – life is miserable – no complaints – shocked by the revelation that the necklace was imitation



# THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

*O. Henry*

One dollar and eighty–seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one’s cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing left to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter–box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name ‘Mr James Dillingham Young’.

The ‘Dillingham’ had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now when the income was shrunk to \$20, the letters of Dillingham looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called ‘Jim’ and greatly hugged by Mrs James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with a powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey

fence in a grey backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling – some thing just a little bit near to being worthy of the honour of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in a \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its colour within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's, the other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheeba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out of the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had king Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knees and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out of the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: Mme Sofronie, Hair Goods of All Kinds. One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the 'Sofronie'.

'Will you buy my hair?' asked Della. 'I buy hair,' said Madame.

'Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it.'

Down rippled the brown cascade.

'Twenty dollars,' said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

'Give it to me quick,' said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else.

There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain, simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation – as all good things should do. It was even worthy of the Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friend—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

'If Jim doesn't kill me,' she said to herself, 'before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh, what could I do with a dollar and eighty seven cents?'

At 7 o' clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove, hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stairway down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: 'Please, God, make him think I am still pretty.'

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two – and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stepped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed on Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, not any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

'Jim, darling,' she cried, 'don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again – you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say "Merry Christmas!" Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice – what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you.'

'You've cut off your hair?' asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet, even after the hardest mental labour.

'Cut it off and sold it,' said Della. 'Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?'

Jim looked about the room curiously.

'You say your hair is gone?' he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

'You needn't look for it,' said Della. 'It's sold. I tell you – sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered,' she went on with a sudden serious sweetness, 'but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?'

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The Magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

‘Don’t make any mistake, Dell,’ he said, ‘about me. I don’t think there’s anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you’ll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going awhile at first.’

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! A quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise-shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: ‘My hair grows so fast, Jim!’

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, ‘Oh, Oh!’

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

‘Isn’t it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You’ll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.’

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

‘Dell,’ said he, ‘let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep’em awhile. They’re too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.’

The Magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the Magi.

#### **FOR READERS’ PRACTICE**

##### **I. Answer the following questions:**

1. How did Della save the money she needed for buying the Christmas gift?
2. How did Della make full use of the Pier-glass?
3. What kind of present had Della planned to buy for Jim?
4. What were the proud possessions of the Dillinghams?
5. What did Della decide to present Jim? Why?
6. How did Jim react on entering the house?
7. How did Della convince Jim who was visibly upset?
8. Were the couple leading a happy life?
9. Why was Jim unable to digest the fact that Della had sold her hair?
10. ‘True love builds its edifice on sacrifice’-Explain.
11. Who were the Magi?
12. What is the irony in the story?

##### **II. Read the following passage and answer the questions given below:**

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one’s cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied.

Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing left to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

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1. How were the precious pennies saved?
2. Why did Della count the money thrice?
3. Were the Dillinghams leading a life of comfort?
4. Did the decrease in income upset the couple?
5. What is the author's reflection on life?

### **SELF EVALUATION**

#### **I. Rearrange the following sentences in the correct sequence:**

1. The gift was a set of combs.
2. Jim reached home late.
3. Della held out to Jim the platinum fob chain.
4. Jim was shocked when he looked at Della.
5. Della found that she did not have enough money to buy her husband a Christmas gift.

6. Jim suggested to keep away the gifts for a while.
7. Jim said that he had sold his watch to buy the gift.
8. Della sold her hair and bought a platinum fob chain.
9. Della said that her hair would grow fast.
10. Jim gave Della his gift.

**II. Write an essay on 'True love and sacrifice' by developing the hints given below:**

Jim and Della – ideal couple – humble living – life – a combination of sobs and smiles – two proud possessions – Jim's gold watch – Della's hair – Della's Christmas gift – wishes – most valuable gift – sells her hair – buys – Platinum chain – Jim sells his watch – buys combs for Della – both the gifts meaningless now – but remain a symbol of true love – sacrifice being – the edifice – Jim and Della – wisest Magi.



# REFLOWERING

*Sundara Ramaswamy*

Amma was lying on the cot and I was curled up on the floor right next to it. Amma and I were free to get up as late as we pleased. We had made it our habit over the years. We had to put up a battle of sorts to win it. Ours is a family that takes pride in the fact that we safeguard the dharma of the early-riser. For generations now, we've all bathed before sunrise. But then, Amma and I were invalids. Amma had asthma and I suffered from joint pains. Both could create problems early in the morning.

Outside, there was sounds of the horse shaking its mane, of its bells jangling. The horse buggy was ready. This meant that Appa had picked up the bunch of keys for his shop. It also meant that the clock was inching towards eight-thirty. He would now put on his slippers. *Kweech. Kweech.* Then, once downstairs, the abrupt impatient sound of the umbrella opening, closing. The daily umbrella-health-test, that.

The door opened slightly. A thin streak of sunlight pranced into the room, a shifting glass-pipe of light, dust swirling inside it. Appa! I see him in profile—one eye, spectacles, half a forehead streaked with vibhuti and a dot of chandanam paste, golden-yellow, topped by a vivid spot of red kumkumam.

'Boy! Ambi! Get up!' Appa said.

I closed my eyes. I did not move a limb. As if I were held captive by deep sleep.

'Ai! Get up. You good-for-nothing,' Amma said. 'Appa's calling.'

On the sly I looked at Appa. He looked affectionate, even gentle. As if I were being roused from heavy slumber, I opened my eyes with pretended difficulty.

'Get ready, Ambi. Eat and then go to Aanaipaalam,' said Appa.

‘Go and bring Rowther to the shop straightaway. I’ll send the buggy back for you.’

I looked at Appa, then at Amma. I had told her about the squabble between Appa and Rowther in the shop the previous day.

‘Can you or can you not manage without him?’ asked Amma.

‘This farce has gone on far too long,’ she said. ‘Making up one day and parting the next!’

Appa’s face reddened. It seemed as if, if it grew any redder, blood might start dribbling from the tip of his nose.

‘Onam is round the corner. *You* can come to the shop and make the bills,’ he screamed. Anger twisted his lips, slurred and flattened out the words.

‘Is Rowther the only person in this whole world who knows how to make bills?’ asked Amma.

‘Shut your mouth!’ yelled Appa. Abruptly he turned to me. ‘Get up, you!’ he ordered.

I sprang up from my bed and stood taut as a strung bow.

‘Go. Do what I told you to,’ he growled. As if someone unseen had tugged at the wheels attached to my feet, I moved swiftly out of the room. I heard the horse buggy leave the house. I got ready in double quick time. What briskness! I wore—as I usually didn’t—a dhoti over my half pants, and a full-sleeved shirt, all in the hope that it would make me speak up with some confidence. I didn’t feel my usual anger with Appa. I didn’t feel sad either. It seemed as if even some little fondness seeped through. Poor thing! He had got himself into a fix. On an impulse, he’d spoken harshly to Rowther. He could have been more calm. Now, if a person is merely short tempered, one can talk of calmness. But if he is *anger personified*?

Excited by this paradox, I went and stood before Amma. I looked her straight in the face and I said, ‘If he is anger personified where is the question of calmness?’ Amma laughed; almost at once, she made her face stern and, ‘Smart, aren’t you?’ she asked. ‘Now, if you are a clever boy, you’ll go take Rowther to the shop.’ Placing her right hand over her heart she said, ‘Tell him whatever he may have said, I apologise for it.’

I went and climbed into the buggy.

I too thought that we could not manage the Onam festival sales without Rowther. Who could do sums like him? He was lightning quick in mental arithmetic. Five people sitting in a row, with paper and pencils, would not be equal to one Rowther and his brain. Remarkable. Even regular buyers who flocked round him to have their bills tallied were amazed. 'Is this a mere human brain?' many wondered aloud. 'If the man can be this fast just by listening to the figures, what would he not do if he'd been granted sight?' And to think that Rowther has only studied up to the third class. That's two grades less than Gomathi who works in the shop, fetching and cleaning. The dispute between Appa and Rowther had started mildly enough the previous evening. 'Look here, Rowther, what are you going to do if you let your debts keep mounting like this?' Appa asked. Rowther had chosen all the clothes he wanted, piled them up by his side, before thinking of asking Appa for credit. It was quite clear that Appa did not like this.

'What can I do, Ayyah? My house is full of women. My sons are useless. My sons-in-law are useless. Four sons, four daughters-in-law, eight granddaughters, eight grandsons. How many is that? Just one piece of cloth each, and the cost goes up.'

Appa was staring at Rowther, as if thinking. The man is getting out of hand. I must cut him to size. Right away.

'Kolappa, wrap up the clothes and give me the bill,' said Rowther.

How dare he take the things before permission had been granted? Appa's face reddened. 'It is not possible for me to give you credit this time,' he said.

'So, you're saying you don't want our relationship to continue, no, Ayyah? All right. Girl, take me home.'

Rowther stood up. Gomathi took his right arm placed it on her left shoulder. They went down the steps. When the shop closed in the evening, he would usually look in the direction of my father and take permission to leave. That particular evening he did not take permission. That is, he had taken leave.

I thought I would first pick up Gomathi and take her with me to Rowther's house. That would perhaps lessen his hurt. But Gomathi was not at home. 'Rowther had sent word that he was not coming. She's just left for the shop,' her mother said.

I took a shortcut through the grove, and reached Rowther's house through a narrow lane. A tiled house, the roof low. In the front yard there was a well on the right hand side, its parapet wall, stark, unpainted, broken. Velvet moss sprang around it in bright patches. Stone steps led to the house. A strip of gunny bag hung from the main door.

'It's me, Ambi!' I announced my arrival loudly.

A little girl came out followed by another who was obviously her twin.

'Who is it, child?' came Rowther's voice from inside the house.

'It's me. Ambi,' I said.

'Come! Come! Said Rowther. His voice bubbled with happiness.

I pushed aside the sack curtain and went inside. The floor had been swabbed smooth with cowdung. Rowther was sitting cross-legged, like a lord. His arms reached out for me. 'Come, come,' his mouth kept saying.

I went and knelt in front of him. He put his arms around me. His eyes stared and stared, as if trying to recapture the vision they had lost long ago. He pressed me down by my shoulders, dragged me towards him and sat me down beside him. His emotions seemed to overwhelm him.

'Ah! You seem to be wearing a dhoti today!' he said.

'Just felt like it.'

'What's the border like?'

'Five-striped.'

'Just like Ayyah, uhn? The boys in the shop tell me that you look just like your father, too. It is my misfortune that I can't see you.'

He ran his fingers over my face, my nose, my mouth, my neck, my eyes, my ears, my forehead. 'Everything in place, thank the Lord.' He laughed.

I thought that this was the right moment to tell him why I had come. But words stuck in my throat, as if held there by an unseen hand.

‘Amma...’ I started to say, making a tentative start.

Rowther interrupted me. ‘How is madam’s health now?’

‘As usual.’

‘I have *Thuthuvalai, Khandankattri leghiyam*. No better medicine for asthma. Only, Ayyah likes to see English labels on his medicine bottles. I don’t have English here. Only medicines,’ he said, enjoying his own joke hugely.

This was the right moment to tackle him.

‘Amma wants me to take you to the shop. She wants me to tell you that *she* is very sorry if Appa has said anything to hurt you. You are not to misunderstand him. She says please don’t turn down her request.’

Rowther’s face visibly brightened. He raised his hands in salute.

‘Mother, you are a great woman,’ he called out, ‘Get up, let’s go to the shop at once,’ he said.

That year the sales during Onam were very good. Rowther was in his element. With great elan he supervised the shop boys who constantly jostled around him. He looked like Abhimanyu in the Mahabharata fighting a whole battalion, single-handedly. He would state the price as soon as the cost and quantity of the material were mentioned to him. Only the good Lord knew what spark it was in his brain, what genius that did not need even a minute to calculate? A brain that could multiply and total up the cost of sixteen different items in a trice to announce, ‘Item sixteen. Grand total – 1414 rupees 25 paise,’ how could that be called an average brain? Even if the whole thing were written down on the blackboard, I would have easily taken half an hour to work it out. But for him, answers slipped forth like lightning. He had never till now made a single mistake. Amma has told me that in the early years of their association, Appa used to sit up half the night, checking Rowther’s calculations. It seems he’d say, ‘That man is getting beside himself. I must find at least an error or two.’ But he never could. He just lost a good night’s sleep.

One day, a cart drawn by a single bullock, heavily curtained on both sides, stopped in front of the shop. From inside came the wailing of women and children.

‘Sounds like the females from my household,’ Rowther said.

Rowther’s house had come up for public auction! Apparently amina was taking all the household things and flinging them on to the street.

Rowther started crying like a child and called on God to help him out. Even as he was emoting, Kolappan came with a bill saying, ‘45 metres and 70 centimetres at 13 rupees and 45 paise.’ Rowther stopped his keening for a moment and said to him, ‘Write this down, 614 rupees and 66 paise.’ He turned to my father who sat at the cash counter and sobbed. ‘Ayyah. I have to pay the court the loan and the interest on it, more than five thousand rupees. Where will I go for the money?’

Appa took Rowther in the horse buggy to see a lawyer.

Rowther did not show up for work the next day. Kolappan said he had with his own eyes seen Rowther, reciting the bills in Chettiar’s shop.

‘What injustice! I have just come back after paying the court the entire amount for his debts. He’s let me down, the ungrateful wretch!’ Appa shouted.

The shop assistant Kolappan also whipped himself into a fury.

‘He knows how to calculate, but he’s a senseless idiot. Wait, I’ll go this minute and drag him here by his hair,’ he said as he jumped onto his bicycle.

Appa sat down on the floor, devastated. He started to mumble.

‘This is a wicked world,’ he said. ‘These days you can’t even trust your own mother.’

In a little while, Kolappan returned. Rowther was sitting behind him, on the carrier. He marched stone like Rowther to the cash-counter.

‘I lost my head, Ayyah,’ said Rowther as he stood before Appa, his hands folded in supplication.

‘A time will come when you will be cut down to size,’ said Appa.

‘Please don’t say such things, Ayyah,’ pleaded Rowther. ‘Come work for me and I’ll pay your debts, the Chettiar said. And I lost my head.’

Appa only repeated, ‘The time will come when you will be cut down to size.’

And, surprise of surprises, things soon happened that made it look as if Appa was going to be right after all. When Appa returned from Bombay that year after seeing his wholesalers, he brought back a small machine and showed it to Amma. ‘This can do calculations,’ he said

‘A machine?’

‘It can.’

Amma made up a sum. Appa pressed a few keys. The machine gave the answer.

I quickly worked it out on a piece of paper. ‘The answer is correct, Amma!’ I shouted.

‘Have they transformed Rowther’s brain into a machine?’ asked my mother.

That whole day I kept trying out the calculator. That night, I kept it by my side when I slept. I gave it the most difficult sums I could think of. Its every was right. I remembered something Gomathi had once told me. ‘Thatha! How can you do sums in a *nimit*?’ she had asked Rowther, mixing up as she always did, the Tamil and the common English word. It seems Rowther had said, ‘Child, I have three extra nerves in my brain. ‘Now, how did those extra nerves get inside this machine? I couldn’t control my excitement.

I showed the calculator to Gomathi. She also worked out many many sums.

‘Even I am getting it all right,’ she said, ‘ this machine is more cunning than Thatha!’

One evening Rowther was totalling up for the day. Gomathi was sitting there, the calculator balanced on her lap, checking out his calculations. At one point, very impulsively she said, ‘You are correct, Thatha.’

‘Are you telling me I am right?’ asked Rowther.

‘I have worked it out,’ said Gomathi.

‘Hmm,’ said Rowther. ‘I’ll give you a sum. Answer.’

Rowther gave her a sum. Gomathi gave the right answer. He tried sum after sum on her. She had the correct answer each time. Rowther turned pale. ‘Dear God. I am so dumb I cannot understand anything,’ he muttered.

‘I’m not doing the sums, Thatha,’ said Gomathi. ‘It’s the machine.’

She stuffed the calculator into his hands.

Rowther’s hands shook as he took the calculator. His fingers trembled. He touched the whole front portion of the calculator, the whole back.

‘Is *this* doing the sums?’ he asked again.

‘Yes,’ said Gomathi.

‘You keep it yourself,’ he said as he thrust it back at her.

After this, Rowther was a very quiet man indeed. Words failed him. He remained in a state of stupor, leaning against the wall. That day, Goamthi and I took care of all the billing. After a long time, Gomathi dug her finger into his thigh and asked, ‘Thatha, why don’t you say something, Thatha?’ But he said nothing even to that.

He kept coming to the shop regularly but he looked and acted like a walking corpse. It seemed as if all the laughter, happiness, backchat, teasing, sarcasm, had dropped off him. His voice was slow, hesitant. Even his body looked thinner.

Appa had stopped asking him to do the bills.

One afternoon, it was a busy time in the shop. Murugan had a pile of cut pieces with him. I was working out the cost. Suddenly, Rowther interrupted him, ‘What did you say was the price of poplin?’

Murugan stopped calling out and looked at Rowther’s face, ‘15 rupees and 10 paise per metre.’

‘Wrong. Get the material out and look—it is 16 rupees and 10 paise per metre.’



Appa got up. He came and stood next to Rowther.

Murugan's face fell as he checked the price. 'You are right,' he mumbled.

'You have sold ten metres. You could have lost ten rupees. Are you here to give away Ayyah's money to everyone who comes in from the street?'

'So, you know the price?' Appa asked Rowther.

'Only a memory, Ayyah.'

'Do you remember all the prices?'

'It is God's will,' said Rowther.

'What is the price of the smallest towel then?' asked Appa.

'Four rupees and 10 paise.'

'And the biggest one?'

'Thirty-six rupees and 40 paise.'

Appa kept on asking. The answers kept coming.

Appa looked amazed. He could not believe his ears. He took a deep breath. He could not help doing so.

'If that's so, you do one thing. When bills are being made, please check the prices.'

'I will do my best, Ayyah,' said Rowther. Then he looked up and said, 'Oh, by the way, have you paid your electricity bill, Ayyah? Today is the last date for the payment.'

'Oh, no!' said Appa, calling out to Kolappan.

Rowther said, 'He hasn't come today, Ayyah.'

'How do you know?' asked Appa.

'Everybody has a voice, a smell. Today I missed Kolappan's voice, his smell,' said Rowther, and then he called out to Murugan.

'Yesterday he told a customer that we had no double dhotis. Please reprimand him,' Rowther said.

'I don't understand,' said Appa.

'Ayyah. You put out ten double dhotis for sale. Weren't only seven sold? There should be three remaining, shouldn't there?'

Appa asked for the dhotis to be brought.

Sure enough there were three unsold.

Rowther let a sardonic smile play on his face. He said to Murugan, 'Oh Lord Muruga, you merrily send customers away by telling them we don't have what we do actually have. Are we here for business or for charity?'

That evening Rowther moved away from the bill-making section and went and sat closer to Appa.

'If I am by your side I will be more helpful, Ayyah,' he said and without missing a beat, 'and if you increase the speed of the fan a little, yours truly will also get some breeze.'

Appa gave the appropriate order.

'It is the time to pay your advance income tax, sir. Shouldn't you see your auditor?' asked Rowther.

'Yes, I must go see him,' said Appa.

It was time to close the shop.

'Ayyah, you had wanted to get some medicine for madam. Have you bought it, yet?'

'I'll buy it.'

Appa was tugging at the locks to check if they had been locked properly.

'Ayyah, you were saying that your mother's tithi was due soon. Why not ask Murugan to notify the priest on his way home?'

'Good idea,' said Appa.

The employees left one by one.

Gomathi took Rowther's hand, placed it on her shoulder and started moving.

‘Won’t you be doing the bills any more, Thatha?’

‘Ibrahim Hassan Rowther is no longer a mere adding machine.

He is now the manager. It is God’s will,’ Rowther replied.

### **FOR READERS’ PRACTICE**

#### **I. Answer the following questions:**

1. Why couldn’t Amma and Ambi wake up early?
2. What was the errand on which Ambi was sent? (OR) Why was Ambi sent to Aanaipalam?
3. What was Rowther’s special skill?
4. Why was Appa angry with Rowther?
5. Is there any evidence to prove the bond Rowther had established with his employer?
6. Was blindness a handicap for Rowther?
7. What was Amma’s request for Rowther?
8. “He’s let me down, the ungrateful wretch!” Why did Appa say so?
9. Did the presence of the calculator upset Rowther?
10. When did the Appa fully realise the extraordinary memory power of Rowther?
11. ‘Rowther was an asset to Appa’. Explain
12. What, according to Ambi, was Appa’s weakness?
13. Why did Rowther’s hand tremble when he took the calculator?
14. What changes overcame Rowther when he was told about the calculator? Why was Rowther upset on knowing about the calculator?
15. When did Appa realise that a calculator is only a cheap substitute for a person like Rowther?
16. ‘Rowther was a loyal employer in Appa’s service.’ Narrate an incident to prove this.
17. To whom did Rowther attribute his extraordinary memory power?

#### **II. Read the given passage and answer the questions:**

After this Rowther was a very quiet man indeed. Words failed him. He remained in a state of stupor, leaning against the wall. That day, Gomathi and I took care of all the billing. After a long time, Gomathi dug her finger into his thigh and asked, ‘Thatha, why don’t you say something Thatha.’ But he said nothing even to that.

He kept coming to the shop regularly but he looked and acted like a corpse. It seemed as if all the laughter, happiness, backchat, teasing, sarcasm, had dropped off him, His voice was slow, hesitant. Even his body looked thinner.

Appa had stopped asking him to do the bills.

1. Why was Rowther asked not to do the billing?
2. What made Rowther a very quiet man?
3. How did Rowther behave after the calculator was introduced?
4. Why did the narrator and Gomathi do the billing?
5. How did Rowther behave before calculator was put into use?

### **SELF EVALUATION**

#### **I. Rearrange the following sentences in the correct sequence:**

1. One day Murugan made a wrong calculation.
2. Rowther was promoted as Manager.
3. Rowther was working in a Textile shop.
4. Rowther corrected Murugan.
5. Rowther was a human calculator.
6. Rowther was upset when he was no more needed.
7. Machines can never be a substitute to human beings.
8. The owner of the textile shop brought a calculator.
9. On being questioned Rowther gave the correct details of stock.
10. The owner realized that Rowther was indispensable.

#### **II. Attempt a character sketch of Rowther.**

Rowther – a human calculator – in Appa’s service – commitment and sincerity – coupled with extraordinary memory power – made him invaluable – Appa’s textile business – as well as family – Rowther – had to support – large family – ran into debts – compelled to work – several places – his blindness – never a handicap – he –loved by – Appa and his family – arrival of calculator – upset Rowther – but – his loyalty and involvement in Appa’s business and family – prove him – a super machine – but with a human heart.

# EVERY LIVING THING

*James Herriot*

Sometimes, when our dog and cat patients died the owners brought them in for us to dispose of them. It was always a sad occasion and I had a sense of foreboding when I saw old Dick Fawcett's fact.

He put the improvised cat box on the surgery table and looked at me with unhappy eyes.

"It's Frisk," he said. His lips trembled as though he was unable to say more.

I didn't ask any questions, but began to undo the strings on the cardboard container. Dick couldn't afford a proper cat box, but he had used this one before, a home-made affair with holes punched in the sides.

I untied the last knot and looked inside at the motionless body. Frisk. The glossy black, playful little creature I knew so well, always purring and affectionate and Dick's companion and friend.

"When did he die, Dick?" I asked.

He passed a hand over his haggard face and through the straggling grey hairs.

"Well, I just found 'im stretched out by my bed this morning. But ..... I don't rightly know if he's dead yet, Mr. Herriot."

I looked again inside the box. There was no sign of breathing. I lifted the limp form onto the table and touched the cornea of the unseeing eye. No reflex. I reached for my stethoscope and placed it over the chest.

"The heart's still going, Dick, but it's a very faint beat."

"Might stop any time, you mean?"

I hesitated. "Well, that's the way it sounds, I'm afraid."

As I spoke, the little cat's rib-cage lifted slightly, then subsided.

“He’s still breathing, “I said. “But only just.” I examined the cat thoroughly and found nothing unusual. The conjunctiva of the eye was a good colour. In fact there was no abnormality.

I passed a hand over the sleek little body. “This is a puzzler, Dick. He’s always been so lively-lived up to his name, in fact, yet here he is, flat out, and I can’t find any reason for it.”

“Could he have ‘ad a stroke or summat?”

“I suppose it’s just possible, but I wouldn’t expect him to be totally unconscious. I’m wondering if he might have had a blow on the head.”

“I don’t think so. He was as right as rain when I went to bed, and he was never out during t’night.” The old man shrugged his shoulders. “Any road, it’s a poor look-out for ‘im?”

“Afraid so, Dick. He’s only just alive. But I’ll give him a stimulant injection and then you must take him home and keep him warm. If he’s still around tomorrow morning bring him in and I’ll see how he’s going on.”

I was trying to strike an optimistic note, but I was pretty sure that I would never see Frisk again and I knew the old man felt the same.

His hands shook as he tied up the box and he didn’t speak until we reached the front door. He turned briefly to me and nodded. “Thank ye, Mr. Herriot.”

I watched him as he walked with shuffling steps down the street. He was going back to an empty little house with his dying pet. He had lost his wife many years ago-I had never known a Mrs. Fawcett—and he lived alone on his old-age pension. It wasn’t much of a life. He was a quiet, kindly man who didn’t go out much and seemed to have few friends, but he had Frisk. The little cat had walked in on him six years ago and had transformed his life, bringing a boisterous, happy presence into the silent house, making the old man laugh with his tricks and playfulness, following him around, rubbing against his legs. Dick wasn’t lonely any more, and I had watched a warm bond of friendship growing stronger over the years. In fact, it was something more—the old man seemed to depend on Frisk. And now this.

Well, I thought as I walked back down the passage, it was the sort of thing that happened in veterinary practice. Pets didn’t live long enough.

But I felt worse this time because I had no idea what ailed my patient. I was in a total fog.

On the following morning I was surprised to see Dick Fawcett sitting in the waiting room, the cardboard box on his knee.

I stared at him. "What's happened?"

He didn't answer and his face was inscrutable as we went through to the consulting room and he undid the knots. When he opened the box I prepared for the worst, but to my astonishment the little cat leaped out onto the table and rubbed his face against my hand, purring like a motorcycle.

The old man laughed, his thin face transfigured. "Well, what d'ye think of that?"

"I don't know what to think, Dick!" I examined the little animal carefully. He was completely normal. "All I know is that I'm delighted. It's like a miracle."

"No, it isn't," he said. "It was that injection you gave 'im. It's worked wonders. I'm right grateful."

Well, it was kind of him, but it wasn't as simple as that. There was something here I didn't understand, but never mind. Thank heaven it had ended happily.

The incident had receded into a comfortable memory when, three days later, Dick Fawcett reappeared at the surgery with his box. Inside was Frisk, motionless, unconscious, just as before.

Totally bewildered. I repeated the injection and on the following day the cat was normal. From then on, I was in the situation that every veterinary surgeon knows so well-being involved in a baffling case and waiting with a feeling of impending doom for something tragic to happen.

Nothing did happen for nearly a week, then Mrs. Duggan, Dick's neighbour, telephoned.

"I'm ringin' on behalf of Mr. Fawcett. His cat's ill."

"In what way?"

"Oh, just lyin' stretched out, unconscious, like,"

I suppressed a scream. “When did this happen?”

“Just found ‘im this morning. And Mr. Fawcett cant’t bring him to you-he’s poorly himself. He’s in bed.”

“I’m sorry to hear that I’ll come round straight away.”

And it was just the same as before. An almost lifeless little creature lying prone on Dick’s bed. Dick himself looked terrible-ghastly white and thinner than ever-but he still managed a smile.

“Looks like’e needs another of your magic injections, Mr. Herriot.”

As I filled my syringe, my mind seethed with the thought that there was indeed some kind of magic at work here, but it wasn’t my injection.

“I’ll drop in tomorrow. Dick, “I said. “And I hope you’ll be feeling better yourself.”

“Oh, I’ll be awright as long as t’little feller’s better.” The old man stretched out a hand and stroked the cat’s shinning fur. The arm was emaciated and the eyes in the skull-like face were desperately worried.

I looked around the comfortless little room and hoped for another miracle.

I wasn’t really surprised when I came back next morning and saw Frisk darting about on the bed, pawing at a piece of string the old man was holding up for him. The relief was great but I felt enveloped more suffocatingly than ever in my fog of ignorance. What the hell was it? The whole thing just didn’t make sense. There was no known disease with symptoms like these. I had a strong conviction that reading a whole library of veterinary books wouldn’t help me.

Anyway, the sight of the little cat arching and purring round my hand was reward enough, and for Dick it was everything. He was relaxed and smiling.

“You keep gettin’ him right, Mr. Herriot. I can’t thank you enough.” Then the worry flickered again in his eyes. “But is he goin’ to keep doing it? I’m frightened he won’t come round one of these times.”

Well, that was the question. I was frightened, too, but I had to try to be cheerful. “Maybe it’s just a passing phase, Dick. I hope we’ll have no



more trouble now.” But I couldn’t promise anything and the frail man in the bed knew it.

Mrs. Duggan was showing me out when I saw the district nurse getting out of her car at the front door.

“Hello, Nurse,” I said. “You’ve come to have a look at Mr. Fawcett? I’m sorry he’s ill.”

She nodded. “Yes, poor old chap. It’s a great shame.”

“What do you mean? Is it something serious?”

“Afraid so,” Her mouth tightened and she looked away from me. “He’s dying. It’s cancer. Getting rapidly worse.”

“My God! Poor Dick. And a few days ago he was bringing his cat to my surgery. He never said a word. Does he know?”

“Oh, yes, he knows, but that’s him all over, Mr. Herriot. He’s as game as pebble. He shouldn’t have been out, really.”

“Is he ..... is he ..... suffering?”

She shrugged. “Getting a bit of pain now, but we’re keeping him as comfortable as we can with medication. I give him a shot when necessary and he has some stuff he can take himself if I’m not around. He’s very shaky and can’t pour from the bottle into the spoon. Mrs. Duggan would gladly do it for him, but he’s so independent.” She smiled for a moment. “He pours the mixture into a saucer and spoons it up that way.”

“A saucer ..... ?” somewhere in the fog a little light glimmered. “What’s in the mixture?”

“Oh, heroin and pethidine. It’s the usual thing Dr. Allinson prescribes.”

I seized her arm. “I’m coming back in with you, Nurse.”

The old man was surprised when I reappeared. “What’s the matter, Mr. Herriot? have you left summat?”

“No, Dick, I want to ask you something. Is your medicine pleasant-tasting?”

“Aye, it’s nice and sweet. It isn’t bad to take at all.”

“And you put it in a saucer?”

“That’s right. Me hand’s a bit dothery.”

“And when you take it last thing at night there’s sometimes a bit left in the saucer?”

“Aye, there is. Why?”

“Because you leave that saucer by your bedside, don’t you, and Frisk sleeps on your bed ....”

The old man lay very still as he stared at me. “you mean the little beggar licks it out?”

“I’ll bet my boots he does.”

Dick threw back his head and laughed. A long, joyous laugh. “And that sends ‘im to sleep! No wonder! It makes me right dozy, too!”

I laughed with him. “Anyway, we know now, Dick. You’ll put the saucer in the cupboard when you’ve taken your dose, won’t you?”

“I will that, Mr. Herriot. And Frisk will never pass out like that again?”

“No, never again.”

“Eee, that’s grand!” He sat up in the bed, lifted the little cat and held him against his face. He gave a sigh of utter content and smiled at me.

“Mr. Herriot,” he said. “I’ve got nowt to worry about now.”

Out in the street, as I bade Mrs. Duggan goodbye for the second time, I looked back at the little house. “ ‘Nowt to worry about,’ eh? That’s rather wonderful, coming from him.”

“Oh aye, and he means it, too. He’s not bothered about himself.”

I didn’t see Dick again for two weeks. I was visiting a friend in Darrowby’s little cottage hospital when I saw the old man in a bed in a corner of the ward.

I went over and sat down by his side. His face was desperately thin, but serene.

“Hello, Dick,” I said.

He looked at me sleepily and spoke in a whisper. "Now then, Mr. Herriot." He closed his eyes for a few moments, then he looked up again with the ghost of a smile. "I'm glad we found out what was wrong with t' little cat."

"So am I, Dick."

Again a pause. "Mrs. Duggan's got 'im."

"Yes. I know. He has a good home there."

"Aye .... Aye ....." The voice was fainter. "But oftens I wish I had 'im here." The bony hand stroked the counter pane and his lips moved again. I bent closer to hear.

"Frisk...." he was saying, "Frisk ....." Then his eyes closed and I saw that he was sleeping.

I heard next day that Dick Fawcett had died, and it was possible that I was the last person to hear him speak. And it was strange, yet fitting, that those last words were about his cat.

"Frisk .... Frisk ....."

## **FOR READERS' PRACTICE**

### **I. Answer the following questions:**

1. Why did Dick bring Frisk in a box to the veterinarian?
2. What was the problem with Frisk?
3. How did the cat react to the treatment?
4. Why did Dick's neighbour ring up the doctor?
5. Whom did the veterinarian meet outside Dick's house?
6. What information about Dick did he get from the district nurse?
7. What was the real reason for Cat's illness?
8. Who was taking care of Frisk when old Dick was in the hospital?
9. What was Mr. Dick happy about?
10. What happened to Mr. Dick in the end?

### **II. Read the given passage and answer the questions:**

She shrugged. "Getting a bit of pain now, but we're keeping him as comfortable as we can with medication. I give him a shot when necessary and he has some stuff he can take himself if I'm not around. He's very shaky and can't pour from the bottle into the spoon. Mrs. Duggan would

gladly do it for him, but he's so independent." She smiled for a moment. "He pours the mixture into a saucer and spoons it up that way."

"A saucer.....?," Some where in the fog a little light glimmered. "What is in the mixture?"

"On heroin and pethidine. It is the usual thing Dr. Allinson prescribes."

I seized her arm. "I'm coming back with you, Nurse."

1. Who is the person talking to the veterinarian?
2. What was her purpose of visit?
3. What medicine did she prescribe for Dick?
4. Why did Dick take the medicine from a Saucer?
5. How did the information help the veterinarian?

### **SELF EVALUATION**

#### **I. Rearrange the following sentences in the correct sequence:**

1. Frisk always slept on his bed.
2. Dick was suffering from cancer.
3. Dick thought that Frisk was sick.
4. Dick was asked to take a mixture of medicines before going to bed.
5. Dick had a cat called Frisk.
6. When Dick knew the reason for Frisk's illness he was relieved of his worry.
7. Frisk licked the left over medicine.
8. Dick's hands were shaky.
9. The medicine made Frisk sleepy the next day
10. Dick poured the mixture in a saucer and spooned it up.

#### **II. Write an essay on how the mystery of Frisk's illness get solved by developing the hints given below:**

Veterinarian – Dick with the dog – dog unconscious – hopeless condition – injection – next day Frisk alright – Three days later Frisk ill again – next week – neighbour's phone call - Dick and Frisk ill – Veterinarian meets the district nurse – learns about the treatment – know that the cat licks the left over medicine – cat is cured – Dick dies later

# KAANCHANAI

*Pudumaippittan*

*I just couldn't sleep that night*, for no apparent reason. My mind was neither troubled, nor was it overflowing with happiness to keep me awake thus. I am just like everyone else. Yet my job is not like that of anyone else. I write fiction. That is to say, I spin yarns, and make a living out of the journalistic establishments that are prepared to accept them. My lies are accepted. Or in other words, they are recognized by the majority of the world as God, Dharma, et cetera, in various names and forms. This is what is called Creation, living in the land of the imagination et cetera. In fact liars like me are called other Brahmas, Second Creators. And I am the youngest in this lineage of duplicate Brahmas. When I think of all this, I feel some pride, certainly. Is the handiwork of Brahma false, too, like ours? Am I false? If such philosophic queries occur around twelve o' clock at night, who won't begin to doubt his digestive system? "Ada, chut ! I muttered impatiently, and sat up.

This house had been built in such a way that one could sit up in bed and switch on the electric lights just by reaching out an arm. I did so. The sudden light troubled my eyes. My wife was fast asleep in the adjacent bed. What was she dreaming about? A smile played hide and seek at the corner of her lips. She was perhaps exulting in her culinary skills which could drag a man into philosophical inquiry right in the middle of the night. Stirring in her sleep, she moaned slightly and turned over. She was three months pregnant. Why should I wake her and make her sit up with me just because I couldn't sleep?

I put out the light immediately. I always feel a profound sense of peace, sitting in the dark. Isn't it true that at such a time, you become one with the darkness, united with the night, invisible to others? You can then drive that wooden cart-your own mind- wherever you please. People usually describe imagination as a chariot that can reach the place you wish to go to,

the very moment you choose. But in reality, it is a wooden cart that follows along the thoughts of generations of human beings, from the earliest times to the present day—a path so frequently trodden upon that it has been turned into a beaten track. There are only the grooves made by wheels constantly grinding into the dust, and between them, a raised ground, less frequently walked upon. Occasionally the wheels have stumbled off the rut and on to the raised ground, giving those inside the cart a sudden jolt, otherwise it is always a gentle path, without peril, the track of well bred bullocks.

Lost in the comfort of thoughts, it seemed that in the dark I had smeared rather too much lime on the betel leaf. My tongue felt the sharp sting. Normally I don't bother about such things. If you choose to chew betel leaves in the dark, if you let go of the harness leaving your mind to roam at will, then you should not mind such minor disasters. With due respect, I tossed the tobacco, ready in the palm of my hand, into my mouth.

Chi! What a foul smell! Stinking like a putrefying corpse! Feeling nauseous, and wondering whether the tobacco I was chewing had been tainted, I went to the window, spat it out, and rinsed my mouth before returning to sit on the bed.

I couldn't stand the stink. It was as if a body had rotted and the stench was somewhere near. I couldn't stand it, couldn't understand it. Was it coming from the window? But there wasn't even the faintest breeze blowing. I felt my bed and walked again to the window. I hadn't moved two paces before the stench completely disappeared. How extraordinary! I returned to the bed. There it was, again that foul smell. Was some dead creature lying under the bed? I switched on the light. Under the bed, there was only a cloud of dust that made me sneeze. I stood up and slapped myself free of dust.

My sneeze woke up my wife. "What is it, aren't you asleep yet? What's the time?" she asked, yawning.

It was exactly one minute after twelve.

And wonder of wonders! The stench had changed into a kind of scent. The smell of incense sticks—in fact low grade incense sticks, the kind lit by the side of corpses.

"Can you smell something here?" I asked her.

“No, nothing at all,” she said. After sniffing a while, she said, “There’s a faint smell of incense. Someone must have lit them somewhere. I’m sleepy. Put out the lights and lie down.”

I switched off the light. Traces of the smell still lingered. Going to the window I peeped out. Only starlight

The shutters of the windows and the front door of the house trembled and banged softly. For just a second. Then silence. An earthquake, perhaps? In the starlight, a fruit-bat spread its wide leathery wings, flew towards the groves opposite, and disappeared beyond.

Both the stench and the scent had disappeared without a trace. I came back and lay down.

Next day, when I woke up at last from my pre dawn sleep, it was already late morning. I picked up the newspaper that had been flung through the window, and came out to sit on a cane chair in the front veranda. After creaking its objection, the chair bore my weight.

My life’s partner came out, stood beside me and started complaining, “First of all of you stay awake all night and then sleep late into the morning, and now if you come and sit here like this, what is to happen to the coffee?”

I had an unshakable belief in Democracy and World Peace, and I was worried that both were being jeopardized by “The Advance of the Allied Forces, undeterred by any Resistance.”

“All thanks to your elaborate cooking,” I said, in a feeble counter attack, rising to my feet.

“You have nothing better to do, what else can you think of except to find fault with me? Well, it’s no worse than the stories you write!” With this parting shot, she went towards the kitchen.

Bound by household rules, I went and cleaned my teeth, and then, holding the tumbler of scalding coffee with a towel, scanned the columns of the newspaper.

Just then a beggar woman, and a young one at that, came along, singing an unknown song. She stopped at our doorstep, calling out, “Amma, thaayë.”

I glanced up sharply, then deciding that it was impossible to battle with beggars, put up my newspaper and built a fence around myself.

My wife came out to the front corridor, scolding the woman. “Aren’t you able bodied? Why can’t you earn a living by working in a few houses?”

“If I am given work, wouldn’t I do it? My belly burns, thaayë. So far, I haven’t got even a handful of rice from this street. Give me a piece of cloth to cover myself, amma.” She started employing a beggar’s usual arsenal.

“I’ll give you work, but will you stay on? I’ll give you food to fill your belly, clothes to cover yourself, what do you say?”

“Will that not be enough, amma? These days who is ready to give even that?” Saying so, she stood there, smiling at my wife.

“Shall I let her stay on and try her out for a couple of days?”

You know how easily I tire these days,” My wife asked me.

“Chi, are you crazy? You want to engage a donkey of a beggar, who comes from heaven knows where? Can’t you find anyone else in this entire world?”

The beggar woman, who was standing outside, chuckled. There was a fatal charm in that laughter. My wife kept gazing at her, without once turning her eyes away. It seemed as if her entire will had become one with that nameless creature.

“Can’t you tell a person from her face? You come in, amma,” countermanding my orders, my wife took her inside.

And the deceitful beggar followed her, rejoicing within. What! I rubbed my eyes and stared at her feet. They walked in the air, a minuscule distance—the height of a kunrimani seed—above the ground. I felt a shiver go through me. Was it an illusion? When I looked again, the beggar woman glanced at me with a smile. Ayyo, was that a smile! As if a spear of ice had struck through my bones to the marrow, it nearly killed me with terror.

I called by wife to my side. I told her that it wasn’t good to have this woman in our home. But she, for her part, insisted most obstinately that she must have this stranger for her servant. Is there no end to the odd desires of early pregnancy? My heart beat fast in certain anticipation of disaster.



I peeped at her feet again. They touched the ground like everyone else. What was this strange illusion?

Tenali Raman proved that it was impossible to turn a black dog into a white one. My wife, on the other hand, established that we can turn even beggars into the same kind of human beings we ourselves are. It was clear that once the beggar woman had bathed, washed her hair and put on clean, though old, clothes, she was fit to sit next to anyone and talk to them as an equal. It seemed that this woman was adept at amusing conversation. I heard frequent chuckles and giggles. I was surprised at the way she waited on my wife, hand and foot. My own fears of a while ago seemed to mock at me.

It was dusk, the darkening hour. My wife and that maid were sitting together, laughing, telling stories. I had turned the lights on in the front room and was observing her under the pretext of reading a book. Between the hall where I sat, and the room where they were, there was a central area. I had hung a mirror there. Their reflections were clearly visible in it.

My wife told her, ‘You’ve roamed about everywhere, haven’t you? Tell me a story,’

“Yes, it’s true I’ve been to all sorts of places like Kasi and Haridwar. I was told a story once, in Kasi. Shall I tell it to you?”

“Yes, tell me. Tell me the story.”

“They say it was five hundred years ago. The Raja of Kasi had an only daughter. It was said that you could not find another to match her beauty. The Raja also wanted her to be learned in all fields. The guru chosen for her was a great sorcerer, he knew everything there was to know about magic, devices, strategies. And he had an eye on the princess. She, however, wanted to marry the prime minister’s son.

“Somehow he found out about this. Who found out? That guru.”

This was a miracle! Was I listening to the story she was telling my wife, or was I reading its account in the book I held in my hands? The book was an English one, called *Historical Documents*. The story of the King of Varanasi’s daughter was staring at me, in print. The last line of the page that was open in front of me was an English translation of the words, “He found out about this.” My head began to spin. I broke into a sweat. Was I going mad? I kept my eyes fixed on the open page. The print began to dim.

Suddenly, devilish laughter! With the sharpness of an explosion, it seized my entire mind. I looked up with shock. My gaze fell on the mirror. Reflected there, I could see a loathsome figure, its teeth bared, laughing in frenzied intoxication. I had seen many repulsive figures—those that appeared in my own dreams, and those imagined by the sculptor’s chisel. But I had never seen anything as horrifying as this. The horror was apparent only in the teeth and the eyes. In the rest of her features there was a wonderful serenity, mesmerizing the onlooker. In the eyes, a blood thirstiness. In the teeth, a greed to tear at the flesh and gorge upon it. Behind this faint image, tongues of flame from the fire of the kitchen hearth. I gazed at it, lost to everything. In a minute the image disappeared. The next minute it was the beggar woman’s face reflected there.

“I simply forgot to ask your name.” My wife’s question reached my ears.

“Why not call me Kaanchanai? Like the Kaanchanai in the story. It doesn’t matter what you call me. It’s just a name, after all.”

My heart would not consent to leave my wife alone with her. Heaven knew what might happen. Once the mind is overtaken by fear, can there be a limit to the trembling within?

I went inside. They were merrily chatting.

When I entered, having summoned a forced smile, I was greeted with barbed words. “What business do you have amongst us womenfolk?”

The woman who called herself Kaanchanai was bent low, chopping something. A smile brimming with mischief played at the corner of her mouth. Unable to say anything further, I became the sentry once more, standing guard behind my book fence. My wife, after all, was pregnant. Could I frighten her? How, else could I protect her?

We ate and then went to bed. The two of us slept upstairs. The woman called Kaanchanai slept in the front room.

I was merely lying on the bed. Did not close my eyelids.

How could I? Heaven knows how long I lay like that. My heart was beating fast, wondering whether last night’s smell would return.

Somewhere a clock began its process of striking the midnight hour.

The echo of the eleventh stroke had not yet died away.

Somewhere a door creaked.

Suddenly, sharp nails fell upon my hand, scratched across and slid away.

Shaking all over, I sat up. Thank goodness, I did not babble.

It was my wife's hand that had fallen thus.

Was it really hers?

I got up, bent over and observed her closely. She was fast asleep and breathing steadily.

I was eager to go down and investigate, but afraid!

I went. I climbed down softly, my footsteps making no noise.

It felt as if a whole yuga passed by.

Quietly I peeped into the front room. The outside door was closed. Moonlight streaming in through the open window nearby, pointed to the empty mat and pillow.

My legs wouldn't hold up. They trembled violently.

Without turning around, walking backwards, I reached the stairs. Had she gone upstairs perhaps?

I hurried upstairs.

It was quiet there.

As peaceful as before.

My mind would not clear.

I stood by the window and watched the moonlight.

There was no human movement to be seen.

Only a dog howled somewhere, raising a lament which faded away.

From the opposite corner of the sky a giant bat flew towards our house.

As I stood watching, my fear began to ebb. I became calm, assuring myself that it was an illusion.

But downstairs?

I was eager to see once more.

I went downstairs.

I didn't have the courage to go in.

But there! Kaanchanai was indeed sitting on her mat. She smiled at me. A poisonous smile. My heart froze. Pretending to be calm, I went up the stairs, muttering, "What is it, can't you sleep?"

Was there a smell of frankincense then? I seem to remember it being there.

When I woke up, it was very late.

My wife woke me up saying, "What's happening to you, as time goes on, you seem to be sleeping the days away. The coffee is getting cold."

At daytime, when darkness or fear do not have a place to hide, everything certainly looks different. But deep within the mind, fear had taken root. How was I to get rid of this danger?

Can you seek comfort by sharing with someone else the mental torment you experience because of your wife's adultery? This situation was like that. Suppose someone like me, someone who boasted that he was doing a literary service to society at large, and who fooled himself into believing it, were to go about saying, "Saar, a pei, a she-devil, has come to live in our house. I am terrified that she might harm my wife. Can you advise me how to get rid of this peril?" People would surely wonder whether I was making fun of them, or whether I had gone mad. To whom could I explain it all and ask for help? How long could I stand guard?

How was this all going to end? What disaster was there in store? I was in a quandary, neither able to speak about it nor to swallow it all quietly. Heaven knew what magic potion this new servant had given my wife. They spent their time together without the slightest burden on their hearts.

That day, morning and night seem to chase each other. And I had never known time to pass by so quickly.

At night, as we were about to go to bed, my wife announced, "Kaanchanai is going to sleep upstairs, in the room next to ours." I felt as if a lighted fire had been placed in my lap.

What plot was afoot?

I will not sleep at all. I will spend all night sitting up, I decided.

“What is it, aren’t you going to lie down?” asked my wife.

“I’m not sleepy” I answered. Terror, like a sharp spear, pierced me.

“As you wish,” she said, lying down on her side. And that was it. She was fast asleep. Was it an ordinary sleep?

I too wearied of sitting up so long, lay down, thinking I’ll rest my body.

It began to strike twelve.

What is this smell!

My wife, lying next to me, screamed in an inhuman voice. Among those meaningless sounds which gushed out in the guise of words, I could make out the single name, “Kaanchanai.”

I switched on the light immediately and shook her, again and again, to awaken her.

She came to herself and sat up, shuddering. Rubbing her eyes, she said, “I felt as if something bit my throat and sucked my blood.”

I peered at her throat closely.

At the hollow of her throat, there was a tiny spot of blood, like a pinhead. Her entire body was shaking.

“Don’t be afraid, I lied deliberately.” You must have thought of something strange as you fell asleep.”

Her body was trembling. She slid back on the bed in a faint.

At that very moment there was the sound of a temple gong.

Some strange song in a cacophonous voice.

A voice, calling out with authority, “Kaanchanai! Kaanchanai!

A wild scream which seemed to shake my entire house. All the doors banged repeatedly.

Then a silence. The deep silence of the cremation ground.

I got up and peeped towards the entrance of the house.

A man stood in the middle of the street. What a countenance!

“Come here,” he signalled. Like a puppet on a string, I climbed down the stairs and went out.

As I passed the room where Kaanchanai slept, I could not help looking inside. As expected, she wasn't there.

I went into the street.

He said, “Rub this on amma's forehead. Kaanchanai won't trouble you hereafter. Go and do it immediately. Don't wake her up”.

The vibhuti felt hot.

I brought it inside and rubbed it on my wife's forehead. Was it ordinary vibhuti? I couldn't be sure. I certainly remembered he did not hold a bell in his hand.

Three days passed.

As she gave my coffee in the morning, my wife said, “These men are all like that,” What could I say?

### **FOR READERS PRACTICE**

#### **I. Answer the following questions:**

1. What is the problem with the narrator?
2. What is the significance of stench in the story?
3. Describe the beggar woman.
4. Why did the narrator object to the suggestion of employing the beggar woman?
5. Narrate the story the beggar woman was telling.
6. Why does the narrator call it a miracle?
7. What was the narrator afraid of?
8. What is the role played by stench again?
9. What did he observe on the last night?
10. What brought relief to her author?
11. Pick out at least two occasions in the story that is horrifying?
12. What do you think Kanchana was?

## **II. Read the passage and answer the questions:**

My heart would not consent to leave my wife alone with her. Heaven knew what might happen. Once the mind is overtaken by fear, can there be a limit to the trembling within?

I went inside. They were merrily chatting, when I entered, having summoned a forced smile. I was greeted with barbed words. “what business do you have amongst us women folk?”

The woman who called herself Kanchanai was bent low chopping something. A smile brimming with mischief played at the corner of her mouth. Unable to say anything further, I became the sentry once more, standing guard behind my book fence. My wife, after all, was pregnant. Could I frighten her?

1. What made the narrator get a disturbed mind?
2. Why did he force a smile?
3. What did he want to tell his wife?
4. Why did he not tell his wife, what he wanted to say?
5. How did Kanchanai react to narrator’s entry?

## **SELF EVALUATION**

### **I. Rearrange the following sentences in the correct sequence:**

1. Narrator’s wife takes the beggar woman as a servant.
2. The beggar woman said her name was Kanchanai
3. Narrator has a premonition that something bad will happen.
4. Narrator’s wife takes the Kanchanai into confidence.
5. The narrator was awake all through the night.
6. That night narrator’s wife complained that something bit her throat.
7. Next morning a beggar woman comes.
8. The man gave Vibhuti to apply on his wife’s forehead.
9. A man stood in the middle of the street.
10. There was a tiny spot of blood on his wife’s throat.

### **II. Answer in an essay developing the hints:**

Why did the narrator get antagonised to the beggar woman and how did he get relieved from horror?

Narrator – writer – previous night disturbed – stench – uneasiness – next day – beggar woman – uneasy about her – his wife employs her – sleepless night eerie sensation – Kanchanai story – next night Kanchanai not in bed – wife screams – a man gives vibhuthi – feels relieved.