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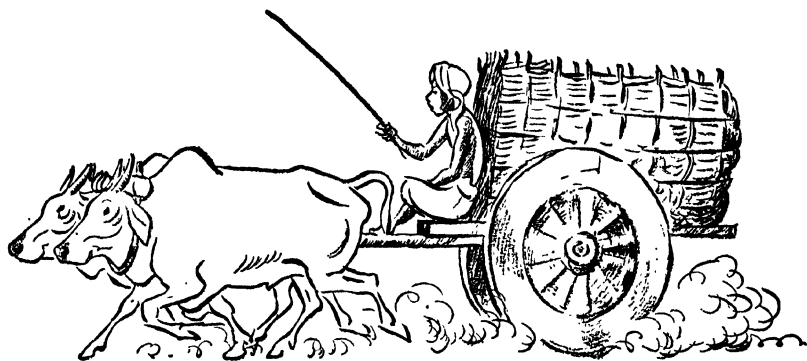
Author Shorter, Bani.

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INDIA'S CHILDREN





INDIA'S CHILDREN

BANI SHORTER

ILLUSTRATED BY KURT WIESE

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His Beloved Twin Brothers

~~Bani (Med. Stud.) & Rala Krishnamma (Wm.)~~

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*For those
who will help in building
a better world*

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Introduction

This book makes a remarkable contribution to the growing literary store for the children of the world. While text-books on geography and history do not always stir the imagination of the young, a book of this kind sparks a lively interest and carries them as excited travellers into the sights and sounds of new India's emergent society.

I am particularly happy that the author has chosen the medium of looking at India through the eyes of her children. Their perspective, while coloured by the historical climate of present-day India, remains fresh and undaunted by the weight of tradition. It is hopeful and creative. Miss Shorter has captured the spirit of free India and has interpreted with understanding. There is no attempt to gloss over ugly problems such as untouchability or the extreme poverty of the country but they have been presented within the framework of a new nation striving to regain its vigour and self-expression.

The children of America who read this book will receive a vivid impression of India and her people and will respond to the warmth of the presentation. They could not have a better introduction to my country.

VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT

India House

Aldwych, London, W.C. 2

July 19, 1960

TO MY READERS:

All the children of this book are real. They live, each one of them, somewhere in the country of India. No one of them may have had exactly the experiences I have put in these chapters, but people I know have lived some part of every story.

Most of India lives in villages. That is why there are many chapters about village life. Part I of this book tells the stories of people in a particular group of villages in the state of Orissa, in eastern India. The things these people do, the problems they have, and their hopes are similar to what village people elsewhere in India also do and feel.

But there are 400,000,000 people in India, and not all of them live the same way. I could not tell about so many. So I have chosen only a few to show how the things they have around them and the things they believe make India's children different from one another. Stories from the mountains of the northeast, the plains of the northwest, and the southern seacoast form Part II of this book.

I have faith in India and her children. They have taught me many things. Most important, I have learned from them that lives which are not like my own can also be eventful, thoughtful, and beautiful. Discovering this has made me glad. I have written this book so that you may have the same opportunity.

BANI SHORTER

Part I

THEIR VILLAGE HOME

1. Come to My House

Bhagawan stands against the mud wall, twisting his foot in the sand. He stands for a long time, hardly moving, a small brown statue against a brown wall, staring at something new. Something new in his village is a visitor, a boy his own age, with light skin, holding a cap in his hand. The visitor may have come from Europe or America. Perhaps he has come with his mother and father who work in India. Not many can come so far just for fun.

When the newcomer takes a step toward him, Bhagawan ducks through a hole and disappears. The next the visitor sees of him is one brown eye, peeking around the heavy wooden door. He is hiding. He doesn't dare to come close. It is too strange.

Yet when the boy walks away down the dusty street, Bhagawan follows. There is a small brown shadow, *padding* along behind. When he turns at the corner, Bhagawan catches up with the boy. He plants his bare feet firmly in the sand and waves the visitor back. He is quite bold and won't let the stranger get away.

Bhagawan grins and bobs his head toward a heavy door

in a mud wall. He just keeps on grinning, a wide, shimmering grin, and bobbing his head. He does not want the boy to go. But what is he trying to say? His grin and his bobbing head are saying, "Come! Come to my house!"

When an American boy pushes open the rough, carved door in the mud wall, it is his turn to feel strange. The wall surrounds most of the world that Bhagawan knows, but it opens on a way of life which outsiders seldom see. This is the door to the house where Bhagawan was born. In this compound he has grown up and learned most of the things a boy must know in India. Here he has been taught to work with his father and his father's brother and his father's father. Here his mother sifts the rice and cooks his food. To this sunny yard he brings his friends to play. This is the place where he wants to be when he is frightened or sad. His treasures are kept safe here. His black umbrella, the stones he uses for marbles and a wooden top are piled against the outside wall which has no windows where thieves could enter.

Bhagawan watches the stranger's blue eyes as they move across the unfamiliar things inside the compound. He sees the curious boy go over to the tools and pick up the sickle. Bhagawan runs to lift the plow and shows how he can carry it on his shoulder. He pulls out a handful of straw to tempt the cow so someone will notice her in the corner beside her calf. He plumps his foot on the pedal of the rice husker to make it fall, *thud! kerthump!* And all the while Bhagawan stares at the newcomer's face to see whether it will tell him that a boy who is not Indian likes his house.

When the boy has seen everything in the little courtyard, Bhagawan still is not satisfied. He calls out something which sounds very much like "Hi!" and darts away into the smoky

kitchen. Then out pops his brown head, bumping against the doorway. He beckons and points to the low opening. He knows the stranger is tall enough to bump his head and he is warning him.

In the kitchen the fire from the morning meal is still smoldering in the firepit. Wisps of curling smoke find their way out through the doorway or a tiny hole in the wall just under the roof. Inside, the air is heavy and it stings the visitor's eyes. He has to blink hard to see the brass pots set along the wall, the water jug, and the stone grinder where Bhagawan's mother grinds spices. Except for the coals in the firepit and the polished brass, the room seems very dark. The thick smoke of many fires has blackened the thatch and smudged the walls.

There is a second room in the house. This is both a store-room and a bedroom. There are rope beds for the other men, but Bhagawan sleeps on a mat on the veranda. In this room stand jars of rice as tall as Bhagawan. Along the outside wall is a tin trunk with a heavy padlock. Inside it are the family valuables. Bhagawan taps it and smiles, but he cannot open it. The key is tied securely into the corner of his mother's *sari*, a long piece of cloth she wears as her dress.

This house—two rooms and a courtyard—was built long ago by Bhagawan's grandfather. His grandmother carried clay from the river bed, basketload after basketload on her head. Grandfather plastered the wall, thick and straight, with handfuls of dripping mud. Each time he raised it by just a foot, he rested for a day and let his wall dry in the sun. Higher and higher it grew.

After the compound was finished, Grandfather began to build the rooms, using the outside wall as one side of his

house. There were a short-handled hoe for digging out the mud and Grandfather's hands for shaping it. He used no other tools. It was many hot weeks before his house was ready and the peaks of the walls on either end were dry and strong.

Then Grandfather went away in the bullock cart to bring back precious wooden poles and bamboo to make a framework on which he could lay his roof. From the village potter he bought red tiles, and he and his wife laid them on together. She carried the tiles, just as she had carried the mud, in a basket on her head, up a narrow bamboo ladder. He laid them one after the other, over and under, over and under, so they would shed the rain.

When the walls of his house were smooth and the tiles were in place, Grandfather bought the carved wooden door. He hung it so that it could be seen from the street, in the space he had left in the compound wall, and he was proud. Grandmother fashioned a mud shrine in the corner of the courtyard and planted the sacred *tulsi* tree. Their house was finished.

Since that year, many years ago, the family has had to mend the house during every dry season. The rains that come each year wash away part of the stout mud walls. Once, when heavy rains came, the outside wall of the house slumped into the street and the tiles were crushed and crumbled. That year no one had money to buy more tiles, so Mother tied straw together for thatch and they covered their house with rice straw. Every year the family's work is the same in the dry season; the walls must be patched and mended, the roof must be made thick and safe. Then, if it is a good year and the people are happy, Mother will mix rice paste and decorate the house.

The visitor can see one of these decorations on the wall of the veranda. It is painted white from rice flour and black from burned coconut shell. There is red from red clay. With these colors Bhagawan's mother has made a gay picture of the dancing gods, and Bhagawan has added an airplane like the ones he has sometimes seen flying overhead.

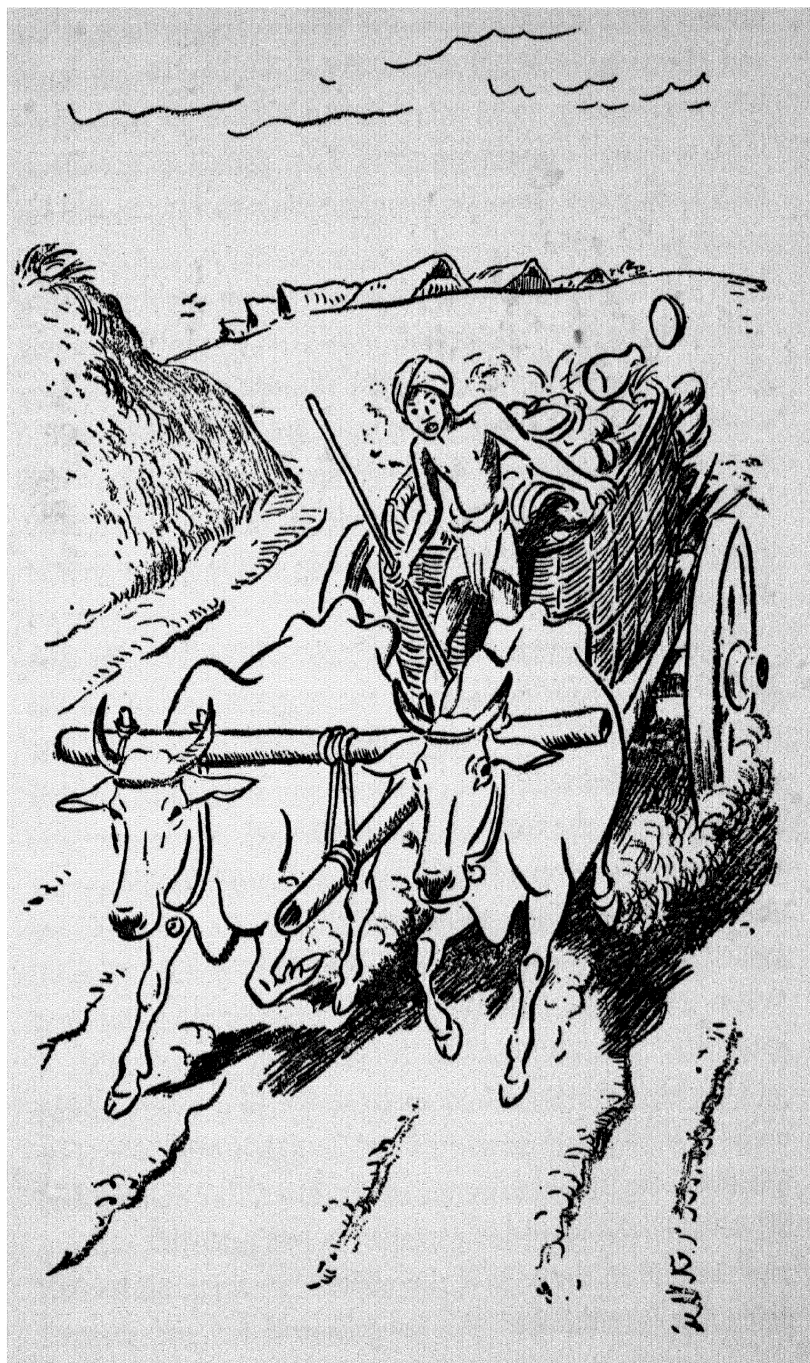
When his new friend has seen all of his house, Bhagawan stands again by the wall, smiling and twisting his foot in the sand. This time, when the boy goes down the street, Bhagawan will not follow. He does not know what more he can do. He will just stand and watch the visitor go till he has left the village and dust settles in his tracks. What he thinks, we do not know. We only have his smile to tell us something special has happened in his brown mud house.

2. Whirring Wheels

Squeak and creak, squeak and creak complained the wheels of the bullock cart as they rolled through the sand. *Scrunch, scrunch, scrunch* steadily fell the feet of the bullocks that drew it. 'Hi-ya, *chalao*, get moving!' yelled Bippin the driver, leaning far out from his narrow seat to prod the lumbering beasts.

Big and bold, Bippin felt. He grinned under his floppy turban and brandished his stick. After all, he was ten years old and it was Monday morning. He was on his way to market in Kusanpuri, alone. Behind him rose a mountain of clay pots, nestled in straw, secure inside the bamboo walls of the cart. He was going to sell them all by himself. When the market was over he would yoke the bullocks and drive back home with many rupees. He was growing up! He knew it. When he met the cowherd at the edge of the village, "*Chalao*," he yelled again and drove right through the herd, raising a cloud of dust and scattering the bewildered cattle into the fields.

Beyond the water tank and across the paddy fields, the sandy road connected with the new hard road where the buses



ran once a day. Here no one had bothered to build a smooth driveway to the new road, so the village road joined it at the end of a steep little hill with a dip at the top. Bippin knew what was coming, so he poked the bullocks to get them moving fast enough to make the grade. They dashed up the hillock with a heave and a bounce, dragging the cart, Bippin, and his mountain of pots.

When it was on the smooth road, the cart could go faster. The bullocks raced along and seemed to forget how weary they had felt a few minutes before. Bippin paid no attention to anything at all except the fun of going. He enjoyed the busy old bullocks, straining out ahead, and the spinning, whirling wheels rumbling alongside. Faster and faster they went. Bippin leaned this way and that to tug at the tails of the animals and urge them on.

Then it happened. Above the noise of the jouncing bullocks and the whirling wheels, the whacking stick and the excited shouts of Bippin, there was a sharp *crash* as the first clay pot toppled against the crusty road. Then came another and another as the bamboo gate at the back of the cart gave way, spilling a stream of water jugs, bowls, and drinking cups, clacking and smashing against the gravel. It was a while before Bippin could quiet the startled bullocks enough to stop. When he did the road behind him was a trail of shattered pots.

That night Bippin did not return gaily. He let the bullocks move as slowly as they wanted and he didn't care. When he reached home the shadows were long. His father had finished his work in the vegetable garden. He had eaten his evening meal and sat on the edge of the veranda, smoking his hookah pipe. Bippin unhitched the bullocks and fed and watered

them. Then he stood before his father and reluctantly held out the two rupees, worth about twenty cents each, and six *naya paisa* coins worth a little more than a nickel, which was all he had.

Late, late in the moonlight Bippin lay awake and remembered and wondered. Again and again he saw how his father had looked at him when he told his story. He thought too how he, Bippin, had stood there for a long time afterward, waiting. His father had not struck him. His father had not scolded. His mother had come out of the kitchen and she had scolded him, clucking and cackling like a troubled hen. But not his father! He had just sat there, puffing at his hookah and looking. Bippin had stood there ever so long; waiting, waiting, waiting. He remembered over and over how he had waited until . . .

Spat went the first basketload of clay into the mixing pit. Bippin sat up in the cool dark. He must have slept. It was still night, but where was the moon? Where? And why was everyone moving around at this hour? Even in the hot season they rose only a little before light. Now his mother had already returned from the river bank, and he could hear his father scraping the clay-caked wheel in the low shed.

Bippin got up and wrapped a thin cloth around his head and shoulders. Then he took his little brass jug and threaded his way among the silent houses and between the paddy fields to the water tank. There he scrubbed his face and arms and, dipping the water up in his jug, dashed it over his neck and shoulders. The cold water slapped his skin and the morning breeze licked it dry. When he finished he walked back quickly.

At home no one seemed to notice that he had left or that

he came back, chilled and hungry. The family had drunk their tea long before and Grandmother was brushing out the kitchen. When Bippin appeared she did not speak either, but she offered him some puffed and toasted rice from a brass plate. He made a little sack from the end of his shawl and he poured in what she had.

Sludge, sludge sucked the feet of Bippin's mother and sister, treading clay in the mixing pit. They had pulled their saris high above their knees to keep them out of the mud as they stamped heavily back and forth. The mud was cold and heavy. Treading was hard work.

Bippin leaned against the doorway, nibbling his rice. As he watched he thought again about what lay on the road to Kusanpuri. Many, many mounds of mud had gone into that heap of broken pieces, many loads of thick clay, made smooth by treading. Bippin watched his sister draw her small feet out of the muck and stamp them down slowly. He could see that it was not fun.

Baskets used for carrying the clay were beside the pit where women dumped their loads and tossed the containers aside. Bippin sidled over to the pile of baskets cautiously. He reached out to grab one. He would get the next load, he thought. Never mind if it was women's work. But just as he stooped over, Bippin received a sharp whack on the side of his head and his mother's hand reached out to take the basket. The blow said as plainly as words, "This is *our* duty. You failed *yours*. Do not interfere." It was the way of the family, but it made Bippin feel worse than ever.

At the other end of the shed his father sat astride the potter's wheel sunk into the ground. It swung round and round and round with a droning *whir-r-r* as pat after pat of

smooth clay was thrown onto it, centered, and molded, and pot after pot was slipped away. Bippin saw his father's hands shape the hollow tubes of clay, then round the bases and flatten the tops for pouring. Up came a stick of rice straw, and the skilled fingers pressed a design around the bulge of the jug while the wheel whirred on and on, never stopping. Bippin waited till two, three, four of the heavy jugs, all exactly the same, had been cut from the humming wheel. "Five, six," he counted and his eyes swam with the rolling of the wheel.

Seven, eight, nine, and the pots stood in a row around his father. Ten and eleven began the second row. The father must have seen the brown feet standing close by as he turned to set his pieces aside, but he never looked up. He worked on steadily, shaping whole things to take the places of broken ones. Bippin wished that he could help.

Nineteen, twenty, and the second row was finished. Twenty-one, and there was no place to put it. His father stopped the wheel and got up. He lifted the soft jug carefully. As he rose he looked at Bippin as if he were discovering him for the first time. Bippin held out his arms. His father set the jug on them without speaking and turned back to his work. Bippin set the jug outside in the sun and ran back for others. He brought them into the courtyard and placed them in rows where his grandmother had swept a place for him. This time no one interfered with his helping. No one stopped him. The wheel whirred on and on while Father and Bippin worked together.

All day Tuesday they worked. The next day and the day after that were just the same. The family rose before daylight and worked silently until noon. After lunch and a rest they began again and, except for time to feed the bullocks and

water the garden, they worked till twilight. *Slap* went the new clay into the treading pit. *Stamp* went the feet of the treaders. The wheels turned and Bippin bent and carried. The only difference in the days was the shape of the things which were slipped from the wheel and stacked in the sun.

On Friday morning a farmer's shadow filled the narrow doorway and fell across the father's hands. Father stopped the wheel but he did not get up to talk to the man. The farmer asked whether he could buy tiles for his roof. He was ready to pay twenty rupees for a thousand. He needed four thousand to cover his two rooms. The money was ready. He held it in his hand.

Bippin looked from the money to his father's face. He heard his father say, "I have none ready. I have not even brought the clay. Next week I will make them. At the end of next week I can fire them. Come back." He saw the farmer turn away. The farmer said, "I am ready now. I shall go to see your neighbor the potter. Perhaps I shall come back." Bippin's eyes smarted when he heard this. That day he worked so fast that at night, when he lay down, his head was dizzy.

On Saturday his mother and sister brought clay from the fields beyond the tank to make tiles. The tiles rose like red chimneys on the wheel, each with a little knob on either side to hold it in place along the bamboo frame when it was laid on the roof. Then the wheel stopped. *Cut* came a wire from top to bottom, splitting the chimney into two pieces, each a tile, to be baked in the sun and fired.

On Sunday the wheel was silent but the family's hands were busy. Bippin and his sister polished every jug and bowl and drinking cup with a wash of fresh clay. Grandmother's

broom scratched in the shallow firing pit, heaping the soft black ash around the sides. Mother sifted broken rice straw and dry leaves into many baskets. Father heaved her crisp, dry loads into the pit and tossed them over what was left of the ash, fluffing them up to make a soft and springy bed.

Flashing under the winter sun, brown arms swung back and forth, over and back, lifting and passing the fragile, sun-baked pieces of pottery. Short brown legs ran here and there as the children collected every brittle bit. Father's gentle fingers caught all the pieces and laid them in the pit, carefully, so they would not break but every piece would be fired evenly when the smudge was lighted.

Over the pottery Mother and Grandmother showered more baskets of dry leaves and straw. Father smoothed the mound with an even coating of black ash until nothing showed at all but a powdery hill with a fringe of straw at the base. Clutching a handful of flaming straw, Bippin ran around the base of the hill and lighted the fires which would burn slowly under the ash throughout the night. By two o'clock dark puffs of smoke rose from the street of the potters. They told the village that the week's firing had begun.

Bippin had learned to observe without asking questions. He did not ask "Why?" next morning when he found his father mending the net bags which could be slung at either end of a pole to carry a load to market, balanced over strong shoulders. Bippin, doing as he was told, brought pottery from the sooty pit to fill the sacks until they bulged out fatter and longer than he was.

Bippin cleaned the bullocks as he was told, too, and yoked them onto the cart. He made a straw nest in the cart just as he had done a week before, and together he and Father packed

the bamboo cradle. This time Mother brought a new gate for the cart and they bound it firmly to the stiff walls. The cart-load was ready for market and on top was placed the carrying pole with its "man load" of pots besides.

Bippin stood at the door and watched with wistful eyes as his father climbed up behind the bullocks onto the place where Bippin had sat so excitedly on a tiny edge of the cart in front of the load the week before. His father squatted, shifting from one foot to the other until he was comfortable. Then he nudged back closer to the load, leaving a little triangle of space in front of him.

Father looked over at Bippin and motioned toward the seat. Twice he did it before Bippin had courage to climb up behind the lumbering beasts. Finally, there he was, cross-legged and erect, close to the lean brown man who had fashioned the load. His father tucked the bamboo stick into Bippin's hand. "Chalao!" They were off, a potter and his son with a load for the market on Monday morning.

Beyond the tank and across the paddy fields they approached the new hard road. It came at the end of the steep little hill with the dip at the top. Bippin saw it and he nervously poked the unwilling bullocks to make them move faster up the grade. They lunged up the hillock, until they came to the hard road, straining with their heavy load.

"Ho!" yelled Bippin's father to bring the creaking wheels to a halt. The surging animals stopped reluctantly. Bippin felt a heavy hand on his shoulder and looked up wonderingly. His heart fell. What had happened to displease his father? Couldn't he go to market after all?

Leaning heavily on Bippin, his father sprang from the cart. He wrapped his thin shawl around his head. He went

to the back of the load and carefully lifted down his shoulder pole. After shifting his burden until it hung evenly, he scrambled down the bank and onto the dusty track which led across the stubble to the big village of Barpali. There he stopped.

Bent under his load, his father smiled encouragingly at Bippin. He pointed his arm along the road and nodded his head. He waited until the stick came down across the backs of the bullocks and the heavy wheels began to turn. Then he jogged away over the fields. Bippin was on his way to market in Kusanpuri, alone.

3. Kamala and the Sacred Tree

In the courtyard of the house grows a quivering tulsi tree. Before it stands a little girl with dripping hair. Her name is Kamala. Beside her kneels her mother. Against the chill and darkness of early dawn, one feeble light burns in a brass lamp at the base of the tree. Kamala is very straight and serious, her dark eyes as still and fixed as painted eyes. She repeats after her mother the words of an ancient *mantra*, a prayer song. "O, Tulsi, I pluck thee," they murmur and their quick hands reach for the leaves of the sacred tree.

The fresh leaves fall onto the brass tray which each one holds. Both trays bear the same things. Each has a tiny mound of uncooked rice, a few pieces of fruit, one or two sticks of incense, and some flowers. The flowers on her mother's tray are strung as a garland, but Kamala's marigolds are heaped just as she dropped them after she picked them.

The tulsi leaves are the last, most sacred things that Kamala and her mother will use. They believe the tulsi tree really belongs to the goddess of their home. When they take her leaves, they must set down their trays, place the palms of their hands together, and bow before the tree to thank the goddess

for her gift. As she rises from her bow, Kamala's mother picks up a brass urn of water from the ground beside her. They are ready to go.

Down the crooked lanes between the village houses they twist their way to the temple. To Kamala, still damp from her morning bath, the path is cold and shivery. The breeze tickles her bare legs and makes her tremble. She pulls her cotton shawl tightly over her head and sucks the end of it to keep her teeth from chattering. Her tray is 'clutched against her side, but she cannot hold it steadily, so she leaves a line of flower petals behind her in the dust. With her head lowered like a wee animal who hasn't learned to find its own way, she scurries after her mother.

Kamala's mother is refreshed from her morning bath. Wrapped in a clean sari, she walks along serenely. Her brass tray balances on her palm and rests against her shoulder. Along the way she and Kamala meet other mothers going to or from the tank or temple. Quiet shapes loom suddenly from the darkness of the path and glide past without a word. Among them Kamala's mother can recognize her friends, but the dark figures are frightening to a little girl.

The temple air is warm and fragrant. It flows outward to greet the newcomers as they lower their heads and slip through the narrow doorway. Once she is inside, Kamala's tense little body can relax. She slides her hand into her mother's. Barefoot, as they are always barefoot in the temple, they walk together through the vaulted archway, past the swinging bell and into the inner room.

To little Kamala, the world holds nothing more beautiful than this home of the gods. In this room she and her mother are face to face with the blackfaced Jagannath, his sister, and

his brother, who stare down at them in awful majesty. But how real seem the glazed eyes that flicker in the plaster forms! How bright the jewels! How gay the headdresses!

Fresh garlands hang from the necks of the gods. The polished brass of the temple ornaments catches and holds the glancing light from a myriad of tiny lamps. Fruit and rice and sweetmeats are scattered over the altar in abundance. On these are heaped damp flowers wound with gold or silver threads. Incense fills the air so the inhabitants of the temple need never breathe anything except perfume. How rich, how alive with color, how awesome it looks to Kamala!

The old priest leaves his meditation and comes before the altar. Kamala and her mother make their offerings. Intoning the priestly mantras, one by one he gives the gifts to the gods—the food, the fruits, and the flowers. He seizes a flaming lamp and waves the fire before the images. Over all the mound of gifts he sprinkles the water. Then he returns to his place.

Kamala and her mother step forward, and with their own hands give the last of their presents. Kamala tucks the marigolds fondly into special nooks within her reach. Her mother places the sacred leaves on the forehead of Jagannath. Taking all the time they desire, mother and daughter arrange things as they wish and light their incense. With solemn faces they say their mantras and bend in the same deep bows they made before the tulsi tree. Reluctantly they leave the gods. Singing in sad, high voices as women do who have finished their worship, they ring the temple bell. Their morning task at the temple is over. They go out into the brightening world.

Back at home later in the day, the same little girl sits beside her mother on the hard earth of the compound. Above



them spread the spindly branches of their tulsi tree. On her lap Kamala holds a bowl of rice paste. Intently she watches her mother trace a pattern with the rice paste on the floor. With slow, deft strokes her mother draws flowers and fishes which will encircle their shrine.

Trained hands dip many times into the rice paste. The familiar form of another god is outlined on the ground. "Oh-h-h!" breathes Kamala excitedly at sight of the magic shape. Her mother does not stop to admire, nor does she ever rub out what she has done. Every line she draws is necessary. Carefully she twists the curling lips. She makes the long, tapered ears. She ornaments his clothes. She adds his jewels and his headdress.

When her god is complete, Kamala's mother sits back in the sand and admires what she has done. She cocks her head critically. Then suddenly she laughs and quickly scoops up the bowl of rice paste again. Kamala leans forward to see what she will make now. After a few minutes the little girl also giggles and claps her hands. On either side of the god, fierce and gay, her mother has sketched a mischievous long-tailed monkey.

Why is she drawing monkeys? As she completes the ceremonial design called an *alpona*, Kamala's mother explains. The god she has made is Rama, one of those who protect the universe. When Rama lived as a boy on earth, he was forced to leave home and wander in exile for fourteen years. The stories of his adventures, called the *Ramayana*, have been told by Indian parents to their children for many generations. In the worst of Rama's troubles it was the monkey king who helped him. Ever since, each year in the month of November, called *Kartika*, women have decorated their homes in honor of

Rama. In her worship Kamala's mother must not neglect the monkeys too.

In the courtyard of their house, holding a bowl of rice paste on her lap, Kamala is having her lessons. She is learning to be a woman. If there were schools in her village, she might go to them, but many of the things she needs to know in order to become a mother in her village home she is learning at the temple and in the compound. A mother must take care of her family. Part of taking care of a family is to perform worship. The father will worship, too, and some of the things he does for the gods cannot be done by a woman, but a woman's worship protects the home. It is important for Kamala to learn her lesson well.

Someday Kamala will be married. Then she will move to her husband's village. Now growing somewhere on the wild hills is the tulsi tree which will become the symbol for Kamala's family. When she has her own tree, she must sprinkle it in the morning as her mother does. At night she will light a lamp before it and ask a blessing on her house. Today, as Kamala watches her mother work, she pats her small hands against the base of the tree lovingly. While she plays, she is practicing being grown up. All she does is in preparation for that other day when she will have a home of her own.

4. Precious Rice

Indu remembers when he first saw his mother cry. If he had not been a boy of India, what he saw might not have seemed so serious. But to Indu his quiet, uncomplaining mother was the center of his village world. She nursed him when he had fever and gave him sweets on his birthday. Her willing hands prepared and served all his food. Patiently she taught him to work and to worship by the customs of their group, called a caste. Her kindness and her gentleness protected him. When he saw her tears, he knew something strong and beautiful was breaking. She had never cried before.

It was the hot month of May when dry winds sear the earth and the grass is powdery underfoot. The family rose before daylight to work while it was cool. His mother was quiet as she served their breakfast—a tiny mound of rice and a small bowl of tea. Indu finished his portion and asked for more. Ananda, his brother, also held out his plate to his mother in the doorway of the kitchen. But she turned away toward the fire saying, "There is no more rice today. There is only enough for the baby."

After they finished eating, Indu's father got up to wash

and then, taking his heavy-handled hoe, his *powrah*, he went to the fields. Ananda trotted after him, driving their cattle. Indu took two of the fat pottery jugs and started to the tank for water, just as he did every morning.

When he came back, Indu saw his mother sitting on the porch with the baby cradled in a hollow between her legs. She was feeding him rice, kernel by kernel, from a dish at her side. The baby beat the air with his tiny fists and sucked greedily for the dry grain.

As the mother sat there on the ground, the morning sun slid under the thatch and lighted her orange sari. It polished her neat damp hair and danced on her jewels—the gold earrings which brushed her shoulders, her spiked bracelets, and the silver snakes which coiled round her ankles. The sun made her sparkle all over, like rain on the rice plants after a shower. But at just this moment, while Indu stood with his foot raised to shut the door of the compound, he saw something else which sparkled too. There were silver teardrops which fell one after the other, quietly, onto his mother's flaming sari and her shining arms as she reached out with rice for the baby.

Indu stared with frightened eyes. His quick heart told him to go to his mother to find out what was hurting her so that he might protect her. But he did not dare to move. He did not even speak. She must not know he had seen her, Indu told himself. If she knew, she would be ashamed.

Indu looked down at the floor and pushed the door shut behind him. He walked quickly across the compound with the slopping water jugs, one on his head and one on his hip. He set them down noisily in the kitchen and poured himself a drink. Then, as he drank, he peered over the rim of his bowl at his mother's back. She had not moved. She still sat there,

feeding the baby. She made no sound and did not seem to be aware of Indu's return.

When he finished drinking Indu went over to the corner where the tools were kept and grabbed the other hoe, smaller than his father's. He marched in front of his mother and out the door. From the doorway, with his hand on the iron ring which was the door handle, wanting to go but somehow wanting to stay, too, he turned back for a last look. She was giving the baby a sip of milk. As she bent forward to raise the baby's head, more tears fell and splashed into the milk in the brass bowl. Indu did not wait to look again. He slammed the door and ran down the village street.

Across the bare landscape Indu threaded his way swiftly on the narrow, hard ridges above the rice beds. Somewhere in the hot distance Ananda herded the cow and the two bullocks to find what fodder they could on the parched stubble of last year's grain. Above, a wide-winged vulture dipped and glided, a ragged blot on the limitless blue of the sky. Another day Indu might have stopped to watch the vulture's flight and to guess where it would drop on its prey. Today he did not even see the shadow on the grass. His eyes were on his own feet scuttling along the narrow *bundhs*, the walls made of hard-packed earth between the rice beds; and his thoughts were on what he had seen in the sunny courtyard.

His father stood in the midst of the sunbaked field and swung his powrah steadily at the lumps of dried clay. Up and back he stretched his brown body, lifting his face into the sun, raising his powrah high above his head. The strong arms aimed carefully, and when they came down each clod flung up a spray of dry earth. Other farmers labored in other fields close by and the still day was shattered by their pounding

and the scraping of their heavy bamboo ladders which were dragged across the ground to crush the smaller lumps of soil. Indu took his place among them, his naked back strained and sweating in the heat.

Even if Indu had felt he could tell his father what he had seen, this was not a time to talk. It was time to prepare the fields before the rains. An early shower had softened the soil so that the farmers had been able to plow. Since then, the sun had bound the clay into tough balls. Indu and his father must break these so that the next rain would soak into the ground and moisten it for rice. Seed planted early held the promise of a good harvest. The rains might come soon. Indu and his father must work till the fields were ready.

That day there was no midday meal in the fields. Instead, Indu and his father walked across the village to another field and began the work of breaking ground all over again. Finally, at about two o'clock, when the sun was hottest, his father put his powrah over his shoulder and started for home. Indu followed him wearily. At the tank they stopped under a mango tree and, leaving their hoes on the bank, slipped into the cool water to wash. They came out dripping but refreshed and trod the rest of the way home in silence. There they drank and Indu ate what was left from the baby's breakfast. Mother was away at market and she had taken the baby with her. Indu and his father could stretch out on their straw mats to nap while the sun was high.

The family did not talk about their troubles, so Indu had to try to answer for himself the question of what had made his mother cry. Later, when the evening chores were done and the lamp was lighted by the tulsi tree, he sat down beside his father and Ananda to wait for their food. At last

there was no work to make him forget, and the memory of the morning again came out of his mind to plague him.

Indu looked at his father's steady face for some clue as to the family's sorrow, but that face was as calm as always. In fact, the entire household was quiet. Usually supper was a noisy time when his mother hustled gaily in and out of the kitchen, her bracelets jangling at every step. Tonight she moved as silently as a shadow. No one spoke, and the silence held the family as closely as the heat had held them earlier in the day. Somehow, Indu's fear told him, the silence was connected with the sorrow, but he did not know how.

When the food was ready his mother served the father first and then she came to Indu. In order to pour his thick bean soup, called *dal*, onto the banana leaf he used for a plate, his mother reached over Indu's shoulder with the cooking pot. When she did this, her graceful arms slipped beneath Indu's eyes. Surprised, he sat up stiffly. Something was missing on those arms, something which could explain why the night was so quiet. His mother's arms were bare, he noticed uneasily. The bangles were gone from her wrists. Her upper arms no longer held the spiked bracelets. Timidly Indu turned to look at the feet beside him. Gone were the filagree chains. Silver snakes no longer coiled around his mother's ankles.

The sight of his mother without her jewels startled Indu. His father had been rich and proud of his handsome wife. Indu had loved her many bracelets and he knew that in the village people said, "The wife of Ram Gopal wears many jewels. In that family no one goes hungry." Now the jewels were gone. Indu wondered fearfully what this meant.

The events of the next morning added still another question to those already in Indu's mind. His mother gave them

boiled rice as well as dal and tea for breakfast. It had been a long time since they had been given so much before work. Indu ate eagerly and cleaned his plate with his fingers. When she noticed this she slipped some rice from her own plate onto his and said softly, "Eat it all. Today again there will be no food in the fields." These words were more important than the extra food to Indu. His mother always brought food to the fields except on market day. "Why would she ever stay away?" he asked himself.

That day seemed longer than any other to Indu, the sun hotter, his hoe heavier. The thought of a day without food tormented him. His father worked without stopping and Indu had to struggle to keep up with him. Relief came only when they walked from field to field. Before the morning was over, Indu's body felt like a clod every bit as dry and stiff as those he was striking. By noon he was almost too tired to care.

However, his father watched Indu and knew that his son was tired. When lunchtime came, even though there was nothing to eat, he led Indu into the shade and together they lay down on the grass. The sun scorched them with its fiery breath and they went to sleep almost as soon as their heads touched the earth.

For a while they slept deeply, as men do who have worked hard when it is hot. Then Indu was aroused by what seemed like a dark shadow crossing his face. He sat up and looked around, but he saw nothing, so he closed his eyes again. Next he thought he heard the leaves rustle ever so slightly overhead. Though there was no wind, he imagined that he felt a faint breeze tickle his damp skin. He was restless. He turned from one side to the other and could only have been half-dozing when he heard his father's mild laugh.

Instantly Indu was awake. He rolled over and looked at his father, who was lying on his back with his arm raised, pointing away into the sky. A smile played on his lips; and when Indu looked to see where his father pointed, he smiled too. There on the rim of the world were the first black, billowing rain clouds. In a flash, the two of them, Indu and his father, were up. If it rained, they could rest at home just as well as under the tree. They slung their powrahs over their shoulders and headed for the village.

The welcome storm brought relief to the hot land and its people. That night the family ate their meal on the narrow veranda while the rain fell in sheets beside them. No one seemed to be in a hurry. They were all content to drink their curd slowly and stare out at the downpour. Their bodies were refreshed by the coolness. They became relaxed and jolly. Mother laughed as she had used to laugh, and Father played with the baby.

After supper, Indu poked his head into the kitchen where his mother squatted on the floor, washing the bowls which had held their curd. In the flickering light, with the rain whispering in the thatch, there was a pleasant feeling in the kitchen. Indu realized this and felt at home again. Playfully, he reached out and tugged at his mother's long black braid. Gaily she switched her hair away from his fingers. Then, as if she knew he was hungry for fun, she pretended she was angry. She whirled around quickly, her eyes flashing, and thrust the empty rice jar into Indu's arms. Laughingly, she commanded him to go and fill the jar without any more nonsense.

Indu scampered along the veranda, grabbed Ananda by the scruff of the neck, and dragged him into the storeroom.

Indu had a trick he wanted to play on his little brother. The rice was so low in the storage bins that whenever he was sent to fill the rice jar he made Ananda climb in to scoop it out. Ananda just fitted the rice bin. Indu always dumped him in, and after Ananda had done his work Indu left him there to squeal until he could tip over the bin and roll out.

Ananda howled as Indu dragged him away head first. He squirmed and tried to get free, but Indu held him firmly around the neck. The little boy was still protesting when Indu set down the jar and tossed away the lid of the bin. "In you go," he yelled and drove Ananda's head into the black pocket of the storage bin.

This time the joke was on Indu. Instead of striking a shadow Ananda's head lodged in grain. The bin was full! Ananda hastily withdrew his head and the two brothers looked hard at one another in surprise. Eagerly they raced around the storeroom, tossing off one lid after another. Not all the bins were full, but they found a second bin of rice, and there were dried peas and onions and chilis, too. The last time they had come, there had been hardly anything. Now there was more food in the storeroom than either of them had seen since harvest.

Ananda was puzzled, but Indu's mind immediately flashed back to the day before. He remembered their breakfast rice, the dal, and the good curd. Here in the rich storeroom were the answers to his questions. The food bins told him what had happened to his mother. It took money to buy this much food in the hot season, more money than his father had. His mother must have gone to market and sold her jewels for food. This is what she had done that had made her sad.

Indu was relieved and yet afraid. He knew now that the

family had not had enough food to last through the year. Yesterday mother had taken her jewels to the money lender. With the money she had received she had bought this food. Tonight Indu's stomach was full, but there were many nights before harvest. As he looked down at the piles of rice and dried vegetables in the storeroom, Indu realized for the first time that there might be a day when the bins would again be empty and the family would not be able to fill them. He wanted to believe that if they ate all they had they could get more. Yet the new truth kept repeating itself, "The money is gone! My mother has sold her jewels."

Indu was eleven. Before that, all the days of his life had tumbled together, one on top of the other, like grains of paddy on the threshing floor. There were the gay days of *puja* festivals when he received new clothes or a kite. There were dusty days spent tending the cows. There were full-of-chatter market days and huddled-together days of winter. But they were all days spent near his village home, protected by the family and their gods.

Indu had not thought that something might come to change his days or scatter them just as he had seen the whirlwind scatter the paddy on the threshing floor. He had not imagined what it is like to watch a thing happen that you didn't want to happen and yet not be able to do anything about it. But after this monsoon he would be able to imagine it and the pictures in his mind would be very clear. The day his mother sold her jewels planted new knowledge inside him. It was not a day to talk about, yet Indu knew he would remember it forever.

All night long it rained, and those first showers called the families to their fields. In the morning, Ram Gopal hoisted

his wooden plow onto his shoulder, yoked his bullocks, and followed them to his rice beds. He drove the blunt shaft as deeply as he could into the moist earth and the bullocks pulled it back and forth. Later Indu and Ananda walked behind and tossed rice seed into the furrows. Within a week after the rain, the family would have to plow and sow their lowland fields. Later, when the monsoon broke in earnest, they would plant sugar cane or peanuts or beans on the high terraces which did not get as much water.

After several days, when all their land was planted, Indu went back to the first fields with his father and saw where the rice had split the earth to rise in the sun. The black fields were pierced by a million slivers of yellow and green. The seed had sprouted well. To Indu this meant they would not have to work for a while as the rice grew, and it made him happy.

Indu expected his father to be happy too, but his father was not as well pleased. When Indu turned to him, he saw for the first time a gesture which became very familiar during the next weeks. His father raised his long arm to shield his eyes from the sun, and turned his head slowly across the arc of the sky, searching for rain clouds. The farmer had learned from many seasons that the first shower only starts the seed. Rice needs rain to grow.

The sky did not reward them that day or the next or the next. Throughout the hot month of May and much of June they waited. Daily Indu saw some hopeful farmer standing like his father in the full sun, searching for the clouds which did not gather. His mother performed ceremonies at home and in the temple, praying for the rain which never fell. Indu saw the early rice wither in the fields. He herded the cattle

across the stiff earth to suck the last nourishment from the dying plants. In all the village homes farmers spent many torrid hours longing for rain.

When at last the rain did come in ever-repeating silver showers, there could be no more rest. For the second time, standing ankle deep in water, Ram Gopal guided his plow across the fields. The bullocks plodded grudgingly, one dripping foot after the other sucking out of the mud. Indu and Ananda paddled after the plow, scattering their seed. When the seed was gone Mother filled their baskets from the grain in the storeroom and they tossed their food on the land in hope of harvest.

Field followed field, from the rich lowlands higher and higher onto the bare slopes. There were no shoots of young cane or green chili seed thrust into the ground this year. This year, when they finished, every field was to be a rice field because Father said, "Rice is money. In a bad year a man has no room to plant anything except what he can sell."

The rice sprouted, pushing its green flames up into a gray world. Indu and Ananda and their mother prepared to do the work of transplanting. They plucked the delicate plants from their mucky beds and bound them with grass into bundles. Then, during one of the breaks which come in the monsoon clouds, the priest visited their fields. His wrinkled forehead was smeared with sandalwood paste and he wore a soft white *dhoti*, a cloth wound like trousers around his body. Tenderly he lifted the plants and blessed them before he transplanted the first rice. The women and children in all the village fields took up his chant. To the sound of singing and rain they bent and pushed the seedlings into the ground. Twisting each shaft to send its roots deep into the soil, patting the mud firmly



around each stem to hold it straight, they patiently planted the frail green rows.

After that, it seemed to Indu that the rain would rain forever. He lived in a water world. He waded through muddy fields where the rice plants sometimes grew as much as an inch or two a day to keep their heavy heads above water. He tugged at the tough wet weeds and felt the rain on his back as he worked. He splashed through the village in a burlap hood which kept his head and shoulders dry, but his legs were always wet and spattered. He played in the rain. When he sang he sang rain songs, and when he went to sleep the sound of the rain was all around him.

In the months that followed, life changed in the house of Ram Gopal the farmer. The piles of grain in the storeroom grew smaller and smaller. Mother measured each day's share very carefully, but when that was not enough there was nothing they could do about it. Indu and Ananda no longer ate what they wanted; they ate what there was. Once a day their mother divided her own food with them, but she never had taken a lot for herself anyway, so it did not help them very much. It became hard for the boys to think of anything but food and the biting hunger which never rested.

Indu learned new things that year. He learned how to hunt along the bundhs and among the bushes for greens that they could eat. He learned how to hoard what food he had so that he could eat a little at a time and still have some left. His mother gave him her last coins and he dropped them into the bony hand of a man who sold him half a pumpkin. Then he knew what it meant to have no money or food or any hope of money or food. He held back his tears when at last his lovely mother grew too weak to work and lay like a shadow on her

charpoy bed. Like his father, he learned to sit uncomplaining and wait.

Day followed hungry day. When golden November came at last, sunken eyes looked out on mature grain and cracked lips tried to smile. The rain clouds wrung out their last drops and drifted away into the blue of the winter sky. The mornings rose cold and clear. The green fields turned to dusky brown and then to ripe yellow. November brought the brilliant days when the barefoot men could go out to mow. Noons sang with the sweep of their sickles. Evenings showed their lines of burnished sheaves.

Harvest days were again busy days for those who could work in the family of Ram Gopal. Indu and Ananda were sent to the threshing floor, which was a clearing packed hard by the feet of many workmen. Ram Gopal brought his sheaves and stacked them nearby. The boys took the long stalks, a handful at a time, and beat the heads over a polished board. The dry kernels of rice fell in a mound and the brothers threw the straw to one side to be used for fodder or thatch.

From other families the women came to winnow. It had been the same in Ram Gopal's family until this year when Mother was too sick to leave the house. This time one of the village women taught Ananda to use the bamboo rice scoop. He held it high above his head and tossed the grain in the wind so that the husks might flutter away. Through the days of harvest Ram Gopal did the reaping. Indu continued to beat the heavy stalks and Ananda sifted the grain in the wind.

From the threshing floor Father swept the clean grain into sacks, twisted and tied them, then heaved them onto the bullock cart. At home he emptied some of the sacks into the waiting bins and packed others behind the bins in the storeroom.

When he was sure that there was enough food put away to last through another season, he loaded the rest onto his cart and started the twelve-mile journey into town where Marwari traders came from the city to buy rice. He took Ananda with him. Indu stayed behind with his mother and the baby.

This was the day for which the farmers waited. The grain had ripened without further mishap. Their storage jars were full. The bullock carts were loaded and on their way to market. With the money that the traders gave them, the men would pay taxes or buy new clothes or tools. If there was enough, they would be able to put something aside for the holidays, to pay a debt, or to keep in case they needed it. The hopeful journey to the trading center was the climax of harvest.

At the end of harvest in other years Indu would have been joyous. He might have gone to the town of Bargarh, too: If he couldn't, his father would surely have brought him a new dhoti or even a calf from the trading center. This year he was left at home with his mother, and he had little hope that the end of the day would bring any surprises.

Throughout the quiet day, his mother hardly stirred. Indu let the baby crawl around the courtyard while he husked and polished their rice with the wooden beater. He cooked the grain with milk until it was almost a smooth paste. In the afternoon, after he had fed the baby, he sat down beside his mother's charpoy and tried to feed her. When he held the bowl to her lips, she opened her eyes for a few moments. Indu whispered encouragingly, "Eat, Mother. Eat the new rice." But after a few sips she fell back on her bed and he could not rouse her again.

That night, long after the moon had risen, Father returned. When Indu heard the squeak of the cart he slipped to the

door, unbolted it, and waited with the lantern. The cart rolled to a stop by their wall. He saw his father spring down and pull out a small bundle wrapped in a dirty cloth. Leaving Ananda to water and bed the cattle in the moonlight, Ram Gopal came inside to wash and have his food.

Later, while all the village slept, Indu's father took up the lantern and went to his wife's bed. Indu followed him, and together they sat down cross-legged beside her. She had not moved since Father and Ananda had returned. Clothed in a coarse sari, she looked dim and shadowy by the light of the oil lantern. Neither Indu nor his father spoke. The only sound in the still house was the quiet rise and fall of the mother's breath.

They sat there for many minutes. At last the mother twisted a little as if she were moving in her sleep. Her eyes opened and she looked around her. Father slid closer to her until his face was next to hers in the lamplight. For a moment it seemed as if she did not recognize him, but he cleared his throat and spoke to her. "I am back from Bargarh. It was a good market. Our rice sold for a good price," he said. When she heard this, Indu could see that his mother understood. Her glazed eyes brimmed with tears, and something like a smile flickered about her lips. Then she sank back with a sigh to her sleeping.

Father got up and in the dim light he untied the cloth which he had brought from Bargarh. Indu could not see what his father was doing, but he listened. First he heard the soft clank of metal objects and then the sound of coins being counted. He saw his father's shape bent over his mother as she lay asleep. The man stayed there for some time before he folded his hands in the reverent gesture of *namaskar* and

turned away with his bundle. Indu heard his father stretch out in the courtyard and knew that he would soon be asleep.

Indu rose and went over to his mother. In the daylight he didn't like to look at her withered face, but tonight at the end of harvest he wanted to be with her and talk to her. He wished she would wake up! Tonight there were both food and money in the house, and when the food was gone the money could buy more. He wanted to tell her and see her happy, too.

Slowly Indu picked up the lamp and held it above his mother's face. She had grown so thin he could see the outline of her bones under the skin. Her worn sari barely covered her, and she shook in the damp night air. Timidly Indu set down the lamp and unwrapped the cloth from his head. Cautiously he spread it over her bare arms and tucked it in around her legs.

As he covered her, Indu felt something hard and bulky against his mother's skin. Curiously he pulled aside the cloth. There, glistening in the yellow light, coiled around her ankles, were two shining silver snakes. In surprise Indu folded the sari back from his mother's hair. Laid against her shoulders were long gold earrings. Now he noticed that bangles flashed again on the shriveled wrists. So this was what his father had brought in the bundle from Bargarh! Harvest had given back his mother's jewels.

Indu's worried face softened. He looked at the beautiful ornaments for a long time before he bent down and blew out the lamp. When at last he slipped onto his mat and felt the warm body of Ananda beside him, he went to sleep immediately. The tears and the hunger were over at last.

5. The Miracle of Hirakud

Along the rutted road to Hirakud grinds a heavy-wheeled bullock cart. The dusty bullocks lurch and twist. Their bells jingle unsteadily. Behind them huddles a family, squat beneath a bamboo shelter. Balanced cross-legged on the front of the cart, shaded by the round canopy, their driver nods and sometimes dozes. Unheeding, the bullocks take their listless way.

From the shadow of the cart nine pairs of eyes gaze out at the winter sun. They are the eyes of the family, squeezed and jostled together, clutching their cooking pots, their bundles of rice and their blankets on their laps. As the cart shifts from rut to ragged rut, the glistening eyes bob up and down. Otherwise they do not waver. They remain fixed on the world which opens behind the grinding wheels.

Some of the eyes belong to children, and their mothers. At the back, from a corner, shine the steady eyes of a farmer. He is the brother of the nodding driver. Opposite him, in the other corner, sits their father, Surendra, grandfather of the children.

The eyes of children who have not traveled see a new world

in every mile. They catch the flight of every egret, the bound of every twittering monkey, the lunge of every mud-spattered buffalo. Mothers' eyes rest on the trees by the roadside and see other mothers lifting water from the wells along the way. A farmer's eyes are on the farmers' work spread out in fields on either side. But a grandfather's eyes see more. Surendra does not glance from one thing to another as quickly as his children. His dim eyes linger while his mind has time to add to the thing he sees all that he remembers about it. What he sees today must be fitted into the things he has seen and done before.

The way slopes gently down to the wide river, the Mahanadi, leading at last to the green, low delta by the sea. Out of the delta the people have been moving, away from the water, closer to the scrubby hills. In a year with little rain the people on the plain do not grow enough to feed themselves. But in years of too much rain the people of the delta lose their food, their animals, and their houses. Then the big river overflows its channel. Villages lie in the water. Wells clog with silt. The rice yellows in the stagnant fields on the delta and famine comes.

Of the two, the drought or the flood, the people will choose the drought. "At least we have our land," they say, and inch their way across the plain. For years Surendra has seen them come along this road, lines of men and animals, searching for homes. Now they have crowded the plain, his old eyes tell him. Today across the level landscape there are fewer trees and more villages than there used to be.

There are also other changes. In the late afternoon the cart approaches a place where many strangers are at work. On one side of the road lies a deep ditch. On the other side the gravel is alive with workers. Men pound and slash at the soil.

Bronzed women move up the steep banks with loads of earth on their heads. Amid the commotion children jump and play. Above it all rises the heavy drone of work songs.

At this spot the cart comes to a halt and the family survey the busy scene. The children wriggle to the back and stare with open mouths. The mothers slip the loose ends of their saris over their heads and lean out shyly to steal a view of their new surroundings. At the front the driver dangles his feet, folds his arms for a second, and watches the strong, bearded workmen. It is a new thing for the family to see people, foreign to this part of India, digging and sweating on the earth of their plain.

In the back of the cart the farmer's son speaks to his father. "It is just the same as the canal near us," he says. "They made the same dry river across Mohendra's fields. The water will flow through here on its way from Hirakud to Barpali."

As the son talks, Surendra's eyes move along the ditch and its uncut path to the edge of the hills, in the direction of his village. He frowns and shakes his head. He has seen old rivers that were made by gods, rivers simmering in summer heat and fierce in flood. But new rivers made by men he has not seen. No picture in his mind can tell him what this work will mean.

On the plains of India the night falls suddenly. After the new canal has been left behind, the children watch the red sunlight turn to twilight's yellow and then to black so quickly that when they shift their eyes from the day's last light they can scarcely see one another's faces. Slowly the cart moves on through the darkness until the moon comes up. Then the driver turns off the road into the shelter of a spreading banyan tree and the family unbends itself. Out come the water jugs

and cooking pots. The mothers build a fire to cook the evening meal while the farmers care for the tired animals.

By the time the last hot mouthful of curry has been eaten and the children are wrapped in their blankets under the stars, cool night settles over the land. In the light of the moon the family quickly prepares for rest. The women look to see that the children are warm, and then stretch out gladly on the narrow bed of the bullock cart. The tired animals loll nearby. The younger men move closer and sit near the dying coals of the fire. Surendra lies down on the ground, weary but sleepless. His head rests on a gnarled root of the venerable tree. He tucks his woolen shawl around him and watches the flickering embers.

The banyan tree provides rest for many travelers on the road to Hirakud, and the family does not spend the night alone. Before the coals burn out, two other carts stop beneath the tree and two strangers come out of the shadows to sit with the men by the fire. The strangers are farmers too. In their carts they transport rice from faraway villages across the plain. They bring the grain over the river to the railroad. They have taken their first journeys after harvest. They too have seen changes and are anxious to talk about them. Under the tree they are glad to find listeners.

The farmers talk of Hirakud. If one could peek into all the mud houses on the Bargarh plain tonight, and could hear the men talking, he would hear this name repeated many times. Hirakud is the name of the dam which spans the Mahanadi River. Throughout the district, village leaders are calling meetings of farmers to plan how to use the water which Hirakud will provide in the dry season. The villagers hear their leaders say, "The floods will never come again. Hirakud has

changed that." This is startling news. People are curious. They talk together about Hirakud and try to understand.

Surendra has heard about this dam for many years and now he and the family are on their way to see it. Tonight he leans his trembling head close to the fire and listens to what the younger men are saying. He hears one of the strangers exclaim, "I have seen it now, as high as our village is long, three miles from side to side. It holds the river behind it."

The other man says, "For seven years I have watched them digging on the canals. During this dry season the water from behind the bundh will come across the fields. In my village we are planting winter wheat."

Surendra looks from one to the other of his sons to learn what they will say. The men are silent for a while, as if considering what they have heard. Then Surendra's son tells how their village headman tried to stop the canals from crossing their village because he was a rich man who lent money to the farmers in bad years. If there were always water his farmers would not be in debt to him. "Can Hirakud free us from the grasp of the money lender?" asks Surendra's son hesitantly.

These things sound dim and strange to old ears. Surendra hears, but his mind goes back to what he saw this afternoon—fewer trees and more villages. He thinks of the flood and the famine. Always it has been so. There have never been seasons without them. The talk of dams and winter water is for younger minds. Nothing that he remembers from his life has taught him how the Mahanadi can be trained. He drops his head onto the twisted root which is his pillow and does not wonder about these things any more. He is asleep.

The dark, quiet night is brief. As soon as morning comes the bullock cart is on its way again, but the road it takes is a

new road which winds up the sprawling, rocky bed of the Mahanadi, beneath bluffs which resound with the noise of the river and its workmen. The cart must pass through crowded bazaars and busy villages where trucks and buses honk and rattle. For nearly a mile the road will be lined with chattering stone crushers. And when at last the family approaches the dam, all other sounds eventually merge into the mighty throb of the water falling over the spillways and down the face of Hirakud. Every step of the bullocks seems to take their load deeper into the clanging, restless factory. The movement of the cart is like a tiny part of a huge machine.

Timid, bewildered children crouch on their knees and stare at this new world. Sometimes they are puzzled and often they are frightened. Their faces are tense with excitement. When they first see a Diesel truck jouncing toward them, belching black smoke and tearing up the sand, it looks to them as if it could push their small cart right over and grind it up as easily as a cow chews her food. Half believing this might happen, they sit wide-eyed in their places and wait.

The cart must pass a roadside well where one of the mothers sees women standing in line to get water from a faucet. The mother has never seen a stream of water that can be turned on and off. Quickly she pokes her sister-in-law beside her and motions toward the queer sight by the roadside. Her sister-in-law sees the water spout and titters. Fascinated, the women edge closer for a better view. Life is different here from that of their village homes! Forgetting their shyness at last, they hang out over the back of the cart, as expectant and as eager as the children.

The farmers have come to Hirakud before, but when they came there was no earth dam, no crowded bazaars or rumbling

trucks. They remember villages perched on the rocky shelves above the river and fields of green rice. Now there is a city built by people from all over India. The farmers wonder where the villagers have gone and what has happened to their land.

Old Surendra sits in his place, dazed by the noise and motion. He lets his eyes fall on two men who are lifting a heavy stone on a carrying pole between them. He observes how they must bend and carry it. This is work Surendra has done before and understands. But when his son points eagerly to the foaming water and says, "There it is at last, Father. There is the great bundh," the grandfather is confused. He cranes his neck and tries to follow the line of earth into the haze of the hills on the other side. He smiles and even nods his head at his son, but he does not comprehend what he has seen.

At the base of the dam the cart must take a sharp turn. The road winds up a steep hill against which one end of the dam is anchored. Straight ahead no cart or truck can go because traffic is blocked by the dam itself.

As the cart slowly climbs the rugged hill which stands like a sentinel beside Hirakud, the sounds of the valley gradually hush. Before long all the activity of building is hidden by trees; and when at last the road rounds the far side of the hill, the family look down on water rather than on villages or workmen. Below is a lake broken by jagged islands. The lake is sometimes so shallow that newly submerged trees can keep their tufted heads above water but often so deep that the surface of the water is not disturbed for miles.

The top of the hill is the end of the journey. Here the family climb down from the cart and the women stand with the children hovering around them. The driver squats on a

rock and shields his eyes with his hand so he can see better. Surendra's other son lifts down his old father and leads him to where the rest are gathered. All together they silently look down on things which village eyes have not often seen.

Underneath, thrusting forward like a powerful arm of the hill, is the wall of the dam, driven across the river, plunged into the hills on the other side. Behind it waits the Mahanadi, cool and placid, forever tamed. Yet the water from the giant river needs room to spread itself. Around the blue Orissan hills, far away, where the eye can no longer separate shimmering water and sky, lies three hundred square miles of lake. Into this basin the Mahanadi has poured throughout the monsoon. It holds most of the water which in other years would have plundered its way to the sea. On the other side of the hill, across the dry plains winds a network of canals which will water the village fields throughout the winter.

Nine pairs of eyes are seeing. In the silence Hirakud is teaching the minds new meanings. The children watch the yellow trucks bounding back and forth across the roadway on the top of the dam, and already they imagine themselves as the drivers holding the monstrous steering wheels. The mothers' eyes look for the workmen's huts where the water springs from the pipes. If the water will come from Hirakud all the way to their village, perhaps some day the mothers can take it from faucets too. The farmers' eyes trace the flowing canals and believe at last that it is time to plow for winter crops.

Surendra observes it all from the brown wall of the dam to the far sky and across the plains. Now he understands. Over fifty years ago, when he was a boy, he helped his father dig a tank in a dry year. They built the bundhs high so the nearby

fields could not be flooded. The rain fell and filled their pond, and all through the winter they drew the water they needed from the tank. Here he sees the men have made a bigger bundh and the Mahanadi has made the tank. This is the meaning of Hirakud.

But it is not all of the meaning. Surendra scans the new horizon and shakes his head in wonder and amazement. He remembers himself as a child watching the edges of his father's land soften and slip away during floodtime. When he inherited his father's house, he sheltered his uncles and cousins left homeless by the angry river. He has watched the slow ripening of many good years and cut the stalks of bad years. But now, at last, only at the end of a lifetime of monsoons, he learns that men can master the rains. At his feet the great Mahanadi lies captive. What he sees is a miracle.

6. Market on Full-Moon Day

The old woman's voice shatters the morning and announces the beginning of market as surely as a rooster's crow heralds the dawn. "You are getting my tomatoes for nothing, I tell you, nothing!" she shrieks. "And leaving me only the green ones which I can't sell to anybody."

Behind her, two children, Binayak and Heddi, stop puffing at the tiny fire they have lighted and lift their sooty faces. Heddi grins and cranes her neck in the direction of the voice. The children see an old woman arranging her vegetables for sale and a housewife with a basket on her head. While they watch, the housewife tosses aside the tomatoes she has been fingering and walks away from the old woman disgustedly.

The old woman's head shakes with the force of her pretended fury and she wags a grimy forefinger at her retreating customer. "How can I sell anything the rest of the day, if you take my best ones?" she yells. There is a pause. The housewife slackens her pace ever so slightly. Instantly the old shoulders slump and all the anger drains out of the wrinkled face. "Come back! Come back," the saleswoman mutters. "Come back and I'll tell you the *real* price."

Binayak giggles and turns to his sister. Heddi winks. "I

can do better than that," she boasts. Quickly she picks up a pottery drum which is lying beside her and she throws herself back on her haunches. She holds the drum up to an imaginary buyer. In a tone half-pleading and half-angry she mocks the old woman. "You're getting this drum for nothing," she scolds.

A cautious smile spreads over Binayak's face. Heddi sets down the drum and glowers at her make-believe customer. "All the work it takes to make it!" she sputters. "How can I sell it for eight rupees? It would be a bargain at twenty rupees." Binayak's eyes gleam with admiration. His sister's acting is almost real. "Go anywhere in the markets of the whole district. See if you can find a better drum," she rattles.

A few early buyers in the market hear Heddi and think she is serious, for they start to walk toward her. As soon as she sees them coming she hastily shoves the drum toward her brother. She is pleased with her small triumph. "See how easy it is," she says, bobbing her head at the people who are sauntering across the marketplace. "Try it yourself!" she urges her brother. Then, leaving Binayak to sell the drum, Heddi promptly turns her back and begins to fan the dwindling fire.

At the sound of those words, "Try it yourself," Binayak's smile vanishes. He reaches out and grabs his drum but he does not display it for customers. Instead, those who gather see him lay the instrument on his lap and stretch his arms across it protectively. He meets their interest with an angry frown. Pretending to be deeply absorbed in something which is happening outside the marketplace, he gazes far away and avoids the curious faces. It soon becomes clear that he does not want to be disturbed by any offer that might be made.

Binayak sits that way for a long time, silent and fierce, like a clever animal which has been trapped. As he sits, his knuckles tighten over the cowhide straps of the drum and from time to time his forehead twitches as though his mind were wrestling with something unpleasant. One by one the figures in front of him melt away as bewildered spectators rejoin the growing crowd.

The road to market is a song of many rhythms. Before Binayak's eyes at this moment, across the golden plains, passes a pageant of people and animals, tall and bold or bent and bowed against the open sky. They run; they walk; a few ride; some limp; but all hurry on their way to *bat*, the market. If he turns and looks in the opposite direction, Binayak's eyes meet other people from other villages, potters and weavers, vegetable growers and rice farmers; all anxious to sell, moving by every village road and footpath into the market, just as the spokes lead into the hub on the wheel of a bullock cart.

From the nearby village of Sikirdi comes a procession of cane-sugar makers. The men carry sticky, dripping pots of syrup called *gur*. These pots are hung on either end of light poles balanced across the men's shoulders. While the men shuffle along, the syrup pots swing on the ends of the supple poles in harmony with the rise and fall of the carriers' feet. Against the cloudless sky the *gur* sellers form a graceful, swaying line.

When the men are still a long way off Binayak sees them, and his hands reach instinctively for his drum. Something deeper even than his anger stirs within him when he sees the *gur* sellers with their swinging poles, for he is a drummer, son of a drummer, who was the son of a drummer. While the *gur*

sellers pick their way across the bundhs above the paddy fields, Binayak's fingers tap a thin, uneven song.

As the men dip into a dry stream bed and hop from stone to stone, the rhythm of the drum leaps also. When they trot down the open road to market the drum beats steady and sure. The gur sellers halt before the collector of rent for space in the market and Binayak pauses, his fingers ready. When Heddi interrupts him, her cheeks flushed from the fire, and huffs impatiently, "Take your food," he reaches automatically for his dal and rice without even setting down his drum.

While the children eat, the market fills. Soon it becomes impossible any longer to pick out and follow one group of people as Binayak did the sugar merchants. All is so crowded! His gur sellers settle against the wall on the edge of the square and set out their syrup for sale. The village street becomes jammed with carts of wood and pottery and heavy bamboo. Basket makers dump their loads near every entrance in order to supply anyone who will buy more than he can carry away on his head or in his hands. Spice sellers who have walked much farther than Heddi and Binayak set out pungent displays of ginger and chilis, of tamarind and mustard and turmeric. Traders bring the things that no one can grow or make in the village—salt, glass bangles, lanterns, kerosene, spicy *pan* leaves to chew, and tobacco.

Brawny, well-fed men uncover rich baskets of bright and glittering brass. Because it is the season when most people have money to spend, cloth sellers come from all the surrounding villages and the marketplace is splashed with the color of new saris. Squawking, fluttering loads of chickens are brought in on the heads of perspiring farmers. Pushing and jostling,

laughing and protesting, the village women roll out their ripe fruits and vegetables. Within half an hour after the first bargain was made, the market bulges with its bounty and clamors for sale.

The children have come only a little over ten miles from their home, but the sights and sounds and smells of market in Barpali are unusual. Even the way a woman dresses her hair or the color of her sari varies from the way women adorn themselves in the children's village. All this strangeness increases the excitement of coming and causes Heddi to lose interest in the everyday routine of breakfast. Time and again her hand lies in the bowl for minutes on end while she stares at an old woman setting up shop under an umbrella made of leaves or listens to the peculiar speech of these villagers. But when she catches herself dawdling, Heddi stuffs the food into her mouth hurriedly, for she wants to finish and be one of the busy crowd.

Binayak also watches the marketplace, but not as Heddi does. The preparations for market affect him differently. He seems to shrink from the crowds and chatter. Whereas his sister is alert and ready to move, he dawdles over his rice on purpose. As more and more people come, he crouches by the fire like a frightened dog. One arm he always keeps wound tightly around his precious drum. Heddi observes this, along with everything else that is happening. She knows why he does it, too; but she pretends not to notice.

When they finish eating, Heddi ties their dishes into a towel, buries the warm ashes, and tries to smooth the spot where they have been sitting. She unrolls a ragged mat and spreads out the onions she carried this morning on her head. She unwraps a crude scale made of baskets hung at the ends of

a short pole, and piles up the tiny iron weights she will use for balances. She tugs and pulls at the corner of her sari which she uses for a purse, and the coins spill out into her lap. All this she does without paying the slightest heed to Binayak, quiet and wistful beside her.

Not until her stage is set for business does Heddi confront the plaintive little figure. "*Chalao!*" she says, firmly. "This is no place to sell a drum. This is a vegetable market."

Binayak does not move from the spot. He hugs his drum more closely and more lovingly. When he rolls his dark eyes up at Heddi, they are not defiant eyes. They are sad eyes which soothe her impatience. For all her bravery, she cannot look at him, but toys with the puckered corner of her sari. When she speaks again, she speaks more gently. "Isn't that why we came—to sell the drum?" she asks.

Binayak's mournful eyes do not waver. "I made my drum," is his reply.

Heddi agrees with him. "Of course you made your drum. You belong to the caste of instrument makers. But instrument makers must also sell their drums," she says.

There is no answer. Heddi changes her manner of speaking. Her voice becomes oily-sweet, like the sticky confections which the villagers will buy today and suck on the way home. "You can make other drums to play. You are so clever," she says.

"Not today," Binayak replies, now defiant.

Today is full-moon day in the month of Kartika. Tonight in every village the drums will play. The village people will be dancing. Binayak is not ready to sell the drum he has made. He wants to be part of the fun.

Heddi continues, "Someone will lend you a drum. Old

Barja Das will lend you a drum. His eyes are too dim to see any more and his fingers are too weak to drum. He is good only to sit on the step and listen." She tries to speak convincingly, but she knows that what she says is not quite true. Old Barja Das will play tonight. Every drummer will play. That is why their father sent them to market. Full-moon day should be an auspicious day on which to sell a drum.

Binayak does not reply. Neither does he move. He sits fixed and unyielding, as if he were rooted in the earth. His sister stares at him, unbelieving. Then slowly, bit by bit, his determination impresses itself upon her. She sees his hardening eyes and watches his muscles stiffen. He is going to stay right there, she realizes. He does not intend to sell his drum at all.

The realization of Binayak's naughtiness sets a spark to Heddi's anger. All at once she jumps up, her eyes flashing and her bangles jangling, her coins falling in a torrent over the onions. She slaps her hands onto her hips, glares down at her brother, and yells, "You get out of here, you lazy rascal! What do you mean, sitting here on my onions?" She nudges the drum with her foot, which is an insult. "Take your instrument to the other side of the market where you belong," she commands.

Binayak does not give her outburst even so much as a flicker of attention. He does not show by as much as a scowl that he has even heard what she has said. His silence is more of a goad to Heddi than words could be, and she becomes more and more inflamed till she is fairly bursting with anger. Furiously she brings her foot down in front of her brother, raising a storm of sand which bites his lips and stings his eyes. She raises her hand and points off across the crowd. "*Jaol! Jaol!*" (Go! Go!) she shouts emphatically.



This explosion is followed by a laugh. The villagers, who detect a quarrel just as vultures detect a dead animal, have collected in a tight knot around the brother and sister. They laugh now to see a sister getting the better of her brother.

Immediately Heddi looks up and makes the most of the crowd's sympathy. She repeats her command. "*Jaol!*" she snaps sharply.

Binayak raises smoldering eyes and scans the crowd. Again they laugh. He winces and lowers his gaze. He has lost. He knows it. The laughter tells him so. His proud figure droops at last and he hangs his head. Bitter and ashamed to have lost to a girl, he snatches up his drum and slinks away.

Heddi, however, takes further advantage of her brother before her admirers. "Humph!" she sneers with a jerk of her head, as if to say to them, "What can you expect of a younger brother?" Then she hastily collects her money and flounces herself down. Before people lose interest she begins to call, "Onions, onions from Bijepur. Onions! Forty *naya paisa* for a *seer*. Forty *naya paisa* for two pounds," she yells. "Onions, onions from Bijepur."

During the next few hours that sharp cry arrests all who pass by Heddi's mat. No matter how busy they think they are or how fast they scurry, they can't help turning their heads to see who would call so sharply. Those on far lanes and alleys gape at her from a distance. Anyone careless enough to look at her vegetables is caught. He is sure to part with a few paisa and take away some of the Bijepur onions.

Heddi is a cunning saleswoman. Her tune changes to fit each customer. To an old man she will seem kind and helpful. To a rich man's servant she becomes almost a beggar. With every mother she drives a clever bargain. "You offer me a

quarter of a rupee, only a quarter of a rupee?" she says in a shocked tone. "But these are the very best onions! How can you give me so little?" The act is repeated over and over. The mound of money tucked under the corner of the mat grows higher and higher and Heddi's stack of onions smaller. When the market thins out at midday, she can set aside her empty baskets and lie down. The onions have been sold. Her work at market is finished.

During the heavy heat of noon the market rests. Young boys and dogs crawl under the bullock carts or crouch by the fences in any place where there is a bit of shade. Old women doze under flimsy shelters. Flies play around the dusty cauliflower flowers and the brass burns bright in the sun but no one heeds. Sellers and buyers sleep. Heddi naps too, curled on the mat, her money protected by her body.

At about two-thirty the postman wends his way down the road and into the marketplace, calling out the names of distant villagers who collect their mail at hat. This is the signal which sets things in motion again. Shopkeepers must stretch and shake themselves off, and so too does Heddi. But while others uncover their baskets of wilted vegetables, Heddi ties her change securely into the corner of her sari and gathers her things together. Leaving an empty stall, she sets off to find her brother.

First, Heddi goes out of the vegetable market to where a sweet seller squats with his tray beneath a black umbrella. There she buys two small cups made of leaves, each holding a few sticky pastries. One cupful Heddi eats on the spot, squeezed into the sparse shade under the umbrella. The other cup she carries in her hand as she searches for Binayak.

Heddi sees Binayak before he sees her. She finds him

hunched near the rent collector at the main entrance to market. Through this gate a crowd of people is again surging. Occasionally Binayak raises his head and asks the people passing by, "Buy my drum? Drum for sale. Want to buy my drum?" Heddi observes that the throng pass by without stopping. Binayak might as well be a sleepy dog who always lies on the same spot beside the roadway, for all the attention they pay to him.

Heddi sighs and shakes her head. Then she carefully worms her way through the line of people. Coming out beside Binayak, his sister drops down in the sand next to him. When he looks at her in surprise, she unwraps the small cup of sweets and holds it out to him. He takes it willingly and munches on the pastries without bothering to call out again.

Neither brother nor sister mention what happened in the morning. But while he eats, Heddi searches Binayak's face for any trace of anger that might be left there. There is none, she thinks. She finds only sadness, which once again makes her feel a little sorry for him. Still, more important than his sadness is his duty to sell his drum. Hopefully she inches a little nearer to him. Leaning over, she speaks softly into his ear. "All the onions are gone. When you sell your drum, we can go home," she says.

Binayak keeps his eyes on the work-hardened feet plodding before him. "No one wants to buy my drum," he complains. "It is a bad day."

No longer does Heddi try to be playful or coaxing. This time she speaks truthfully, and she raises her voice slightly so that he will be able to hear. "Our father will not think so," she says. "He thought market on full-moon day would be an

auspicious market." Her voice drops, but she speaks seriously and distinctly. "He will say you did not try to sell it."

"I will sell it next week," says Binayak indifferently, flinging away the flimsy cup from which he has eaten the sweets.

"But he needs the money now," Heddi insists, "to pay the *Chamar* people of the caste who sell hides and skins. He needs to pay them for the hides they sold him in the spring. The Chamar will not sell him skins for other drums unless he pays."

Binayak sits as still as a temple image. Heddi regards him shrewdly. She is sure he knows his duty but he refuses to do it. He is determined to take his drum home and play it himself. He will not obey his father.

Heddi is baffled, for she does not know how else to convince her brother. Slowly she gets up and unwillingly she picks up the drum. "I will sell it myself," is all she says.

Anger flares in Binayak's cheeks and like a flame he leaps to his feet. The hot rage his sister kindled this morning burns again. He pushes against her angrily. He snatches his drum away from her and in a voice sharp with scorn he says, "You will not! You are a woman! Women only sell vegetables. You wouldn't know how to sell a drum."

With a movement too quick for his sister to catch, Binayak jumps away from her. Quickly he slings the strap of the drum around his neck. The long drum slams against his belly. He shoulders his way out into the stream of people and his fingers strike the taut cowhide.

From the start of those first tight little sounds the people listen. Through all the centuries of village life the drum has called to them. The beat of the drum imparts the news. Its

rhythm accompanies marriage. Drums play at every feast and festival. The sound of the drum always breaks the steady, predictable pace of country life.

When Binayak thrums the drumhead, the sounds fall on the crowd like the first drops of rain on a busy village street. Next comes a hollow roll made by striking the butt of the drummer's hand against the painted center of the cowhide, a sound like the peal of threatening thunder. All over the marketplace people cock their heads and listen.

After the first summons, sounds race and tumble from Binayak's fingers in mad succession, crashing and pounding against one another. With all the pent-up hurt of the day driving him on, Binayak plays with fury, like one of the violent storms which lash the villages before the monsoon. Faster and faster he drums, doubling and tripling the sounds he expects his fingers to play for every beat. He throws back his head and shouts wildly.

The people cheer. All this display is something they love and admire, especially from a young boy. He is putting into sound and energy the feelings which they have too but do not express. Almost immediately Binayak is locked in a circle of willing listeners.

On the edge of that circle sits an angry girl who smarts under the taunt that was flung at her. Her fierce eyes range her brother's swelling audience. All around her the tired feet are starting to tap to his beat. Her own toes are moving in spite of herself, she notices hatefully.

Proud and jealous, Heddi inches her way around in front of her brother and waits her chance. Nervously she wraps the loose end of her sari around her waist and tucks it in tightly. For a few moments, while she crouches in the sand, she lets

her body throb with the pulse of his drumming until it is part of her. Then as suddenly as Binayak began, she springs out into the circle beside him and stamps her foot in rhythm to his playing.

Furiously Binayak cavorts in front of Heddi, trying to out-play her. He flings himself to his knees and taps an angry beat, fast and hard. His sister's ready feet never miss, though her body shakes with violence. He leaps to one side and sinks before her again where his strong arms can have free access to his instrument. With new effort his trained fingers speed over the drumhead. His eyes fixed on Heddi, his teeth clenched, perspiring in the sunlight, he plays faster and faster. Heddi dances on and on. Their stage becomes a swirl of living sound.

The performance is a battle between the two, brother and sister; but what the spectators see is a brilliant exhibition. Heddi stretches out her arms in the familiar gestures of Indian dance. She tosses her head and her loose hair falls over her shoulders. Her body sways and bends like a palm tree in the wind. Binayak's rage finds release in mad and violent rhythms. Heddi's determined feet respond to every quiver of the music of which she is part.

Pat! Into the cloud of dust falls a copper coin. Binayak is startled. Heddi twirls around. Comes another, and another. Binayak's nervous eyes shift from the dancer to the money in the dust. A bright five-paisa bit falls at Heddi's feet. She sweeps down and picks it up as gracefully and as surely as a kingfisher diving for his dinner. Another coin drops and yet another as the crowd shower their praise on the young performers.

The pieces of money that fall are not large but the on-lookers are many, and it is evident that the children please

them. The shower of coins wets the children's anger as water wets and finally extinguishes a fire. Fury flushes away from the team and pride takes its place. Heddi finds it hard to resist her brother further. She lets his drumming lead her and she dances with grace as well as skill. Binayak drums with the same power but for a new reason.

Weary farmers and busy housewives move on but are replaced by others. The daily bus from Bargarh comes chugging into Barpali, and its assortment of passengers spill out into the marketplace. Immediately they are drawn into the circle around Binayak and Heddi. Later, when market begins to empty, weavers and metal workers put down their bundles to watch before they start the long journey home. Binayak drums. Heddi dances on a dusty stage sparkling with coins. The shadows are deep and market is over before the children cease their performance and collect their reward.

Binayak scrambles through the dirt, picking and plucking the small coins. Heddi drops down where she has danced and lets him pour the money into her lap. Together they sort it.

"*Ek, do, tin,*" one, two, three, they count the pieces of money which make the first rupee. This is set aside in a little pile.

"*Char, panch, chay,*" four, five, six, they count later. This time it is not paisa but rupees they are counting. Heddi nudges Binayak and winks. He winks back and goes on counting.

"*Sat, aht,*" seven, eight rupees! And there is still more to count. But '*Aht,*' shouts Binayak, whooping with delight.

"The price of a drum," squeals Heddi through her tousled hair. Binayak hugs his arms close around him and rolls over and over in the sand, laughing to himself. Heddi counts no more. She hastily wraps the money in the towel which was

around their utensils, piles both pots and money into the empty onion basket, and sets it on her head. Binayak stumbles up out of the dust. He grabs his precious drum, and the two race away over the fields.

7. Changing Patterns

Kumar dreamed of sunshine and of home. Once more in his imagination he ran along the narrow lanes between the houses of his own village, searching for the place and the people he knew best of all. Soon he would come to the veranda where his mother sat spinning. It was always so in his dreams. Still, he could not quite escape the anxious feeling that plagued him. He was afraid lest this time she might not be there, that for some reason the porch would be bare or he would awake without seeing her. Yet he found her. Seated on the doorstep, her skin and her sari freshly scrubbed for the day, her hair oiled and turned under on the side of her head in the style of all Barpali women, she spun as always.

Delicately Kumar's mother drew out the silken threads, twisted them over her bare knee, and wound them round her spindle. Beside her on the quiet street lay patches of cocoons spread out to dry. Behind her, freshly dyed warps hung like bright ribbons against the mud walls. The vivid green of her own sari was caught and repeated among those threads and on the young leaves of the *shimul* tree beside the house. Her spindle turned over and over and over.

Refreshed, as he might be while sipping a bowl of tea on a winter morning, Kumar drank in the sunlit scene. It was a long time before he could leave it to mount the steps and enter the compound. There, in a far corner of the courtyard, seated on the edge of the weaving pit he found the other figure he sought in his dreams. It was his father, as absorbed in his own work as his mother was in hers. Swiftly the slender shuttles flew. Steadily the heavy treadles fell. Before the weaver stretched another of the brilliant saris which had made their village famous. And through the framework of the loom Kumar saw the sunlight spread like a golden web over all—the handsome cloth, the speeding shuttles, his father's work-worn fingers and his smile.

In his dream Kumar had come again to his father's house on the street of the weavers. He saw a place which was very familiar to him and he found everything exactly as he remembered it. The family were doing their work just as they had when he had learned to weave and when they had learned to weave from their own fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers. Nothing had changed since he had left and gone away.

Kumar was glad to be back and at first his eyes raced happily from one thing to the other. There, propped against the door frame, was his sister, winding bobbins for the shuttles. She worked well for one so young, Kumar saw, and he was proud. Next his eyes flitted back to his father. The weaver stopped to dip his hand into the bowl of rice starch which he kept constantly at his side. Kumar could feel the thick paste ooze through his father's fingers as he rubbed the stiffening into the warp. Spreading the starch had been Kumar's first task as a weaver, seated beside his father on the edge of the

pit. Now he glanced uneasily at his own loom, dusty and unused in the corner.

On a small wooden bed, far from his father's loom and his mother's spindle, Kumar awoke. One slanting ray of light from a narrow window flickered across his eyes. From the road outside came the patter of bare feet as a fruit peddler hurried past. For a moment Kumar dozed, trying to recapture the first sunny pictures of his dream; but it was no use. The sound of the city waking was clear and unmistakable. He had to force himself to roll off the bed and reach for his water jug.

At seven o'clock on the dot Kumar entered a long, low shed built of concrete with a tin roof. It was a factory for making cloth. Down the center of the shed stood a double row of looms. For almost every pair of looms there was a man at work.

Kumar slipped into place at the looms nearest the door. He started the motors. *Clickety, clackety, clickety, clackety* sounded the power-driven shuttles. Kumar loaded their spindles. He ran back and forth between the looms, checking the finished cloth for flaws, broken threads, or knots. He brought more thread to fill the greedy shuttles.

There were not many windows in the shed, and as the day wore on the heat became oppressive. The noise of the machines made talking impossible, so Kumar's only companions were his thoughts. Hot and hungry, he often found it hard to keep his mind on his job. As he ran his hands over the yards of cotton and rayon his mind returned to his visit in his dream the night before. How different was the work of the factory from the work he had been taught to do!

At home, under his father's watchful eye, Kumar had tied

designs into sections of his thread to make the pattern before he wove it. The threads had been wound on a bamboo frame. To make a fish, Kumar had bound the part of his threads where he wanted the pattern to be. He had bound them so tightly that when he dipped the thread no dye could penetrate that portion. When the threads had dried, the outline of his fish was distinct against the colored background. Hours of careful labor had gone into every design. In the factory the finished saris moved across a printing table. *Snap!* Down came the machine and the design was stamped onto the cloth forever. Sari after sari, alike and unchanging, flowed from the factory onto the shelves of city merchants and the mats of village traders all over India.

How strange, thought Kumar, that there were so few who ever wanted the things his father wove. The saris took a long time to make and the price was high, but they were beautiful. No two were ever alike. People of his district had worn and prized them for centuries before the mills provided ready-made things.

These thoughts make Kumar resent the skill and speed of the machine. Angrily he plucked out the little packet of pan leaf and spices which he had tucked into the knot of his dhoti. Quickly he wadded the leaf into his mouth. An empty shuttle shot toward him. Sullenly he tore out the spindle and rammed in a new spool.

Kumar had not always felt this way. In the heat of all the other days he had not thought the same thoughts. A year ago, when he had seen his village disappear in a cloud of dust raised from the anxious wheels of the bus, he had felt little sadness. Stuffed into a back corner of the old, old bus which moved like an angry wind, plunging through shallow streams,

zooming through cluttered villages on his way to the factory in Tora, Kumar's heart had sung.

His father had sent him. A son has a duty to support his family. If he cannot do it within the traditions of his caste, he can step outside caste and learn a new way. If the family needed money and if there were no buyers for village saris, Kumar had to become a factory worker. Yet Kumar's heart had not sung only because he was an older son who would earn the money for his father's debts. It sang mostly because he was still a young boy, going on a journey to a new place.

No one could say that the city had disappointed Kumar or that the promises of the factory manager had not been fulfilled. Kumar could never forget his first sight of the city with its many rickshaws whizzing along the crowded streets. As soon as he had alighted from the bus on the first day he had been nearly knocked over by one of those rickshaws pulled by a boy on a bicycle. And to this day Kumar loved to stand for hours at a time outside the shops or the cinema to admire their marvelous displays. Also there had been the wonderful discovery of the factory with sounds and sights so strange that at first Kumar could hardly connect what he saw with any process he had ever learned. Yes, the city brought much that was new and alluring.

When the factory manager had stood before them in his stiff white trousers and city-made shoes which looked so strange in their village, he had promised Kumar's father that in the factory Kumar would be able to earn enough to live on and to help pay the debts beside. This had been true. On the first of every month Kumar received his wages. There were rupees to pay for his bed and his rice and some left over which he took

to the post office and sent to the family. As regularly as his work, came his money.

Why then was Kumar homesick? Why did he dream at night of returning, and let the dream creep into the daytime hours as well? Kumar's feeling of loneliness had been planted by the factory manager himself on the day when he had first visited their village. Until then Kumar and his father had woven happily and had regarded the growing debt as temporary. But the stranger had looked at their work and told them, "You will always be in debt so long as you weave this stuff. No one wants it nowadays."

At that moment Kumar had seen a look of horror pass over his father's confident face. Then, he had thought his father was afraid that the family might starve. From the monotonous work of the factory he had learned that it was not hunger but lack of self-respect which had made his father afraid. Kumar had come to the factory because they knew no other way. It had given him money but it had not given him pride, and he longed to go back.

Yet much was to happen before Kumar saw his village again. On the second morning after his dream he awoke and went to the factory as usual, but he was not greeted by the familiar sound of looms. Instead, it was the clang of pails and the swish of water, the wringing of mops and the chatter of sweepers which greeted him. Inside, the place was crowded with workmen, scrubbing and polishing.

The barren shed where Kumar usually worked was hardly the same as the clean and shining place he now saw. The machines had been hurriedly oiled and wiped. Strings of flowers hung over the ends of the looms. High up on the

concrete wall someone had stuck three nails, and as Kumar entered, a workman was hanging three honored pictures—one of the goddess who protected industry, another of the teacher Gandhi, and the third of Rejendra Prasad, the first president of India.

Shyly Kumar entered the noisy room and edged his way to the place where the weavers sat, huddled together against the wall. They, like Kumar, seemed overcome by the activity. They stared with curious eyes at all that was going on around them. Only a few of the older ones were talkative. Being careful not to interfere or to offend, Kumar nudged his way closer to that circle and from their conversation pieced together the story of what was happening.

All the cleaning was in preparation for a visitor from the government of India in New Delhi. The visitor was coming in the afternoon, Kumar heard. It would be a woman. One of the weavers had already seen her arrive at the rest house. She was to be accompanied to the factory by the governor of the state of Orissa. They were coming to look at the mill and to see the weavers.

Kumar marveled at the news. It was more than he could comprehend. The great government in Delhi was sending someone to the mill. This was not ordinary. "Why is someone coming?" he asked. Had they done something wrong? Just as amazing was the fact that the visitor was a woman. How could it be that a woman was being sent? These were questions on the lips of all the weavers, but no one knew the answers.

By three in the afternoon Kumar, dressed in a new dhoti, stood at his looms and inhaled the clean, fresh air inside the

mill. Excitedly he turned on the switches to start the motors. *Clickety, clackety, clickety*, the shuttles began to fly and the heavy wooden beater moved back and forth, knocking the threads into place. Kumar saw the manager walk apprehensively past the window, awaiting his guests. There was an atmosphere of anticipation throughout the factory. All was in readiness.

When the machines were going well, Kumar permitted himself to glance down the row of looms before him. Several of the weavers were peeking back over their shoulders at the door, all as anxious as he. Today he held the envied place among them, for, being near the entrance, he would be the first to see and greet the visitors.

Kumar did not have long to wait. It was not many minutes before the unaccustomed sound of a motor car reached him above the familiar throbbing of his own machines. Others heard it too. Automatically Kumar and all the weavers froze in position before their looms and bent over their work. Kumar watched his dwindling shuttles intently. Outside, a car door slammed. For a moment longer Kumar pretended to inspect the cloth. Then, respectfully, he turned and knelt and put the palms of his hands together in greeting.

When Kumar rose and lifted his eyes, he saw before him a woman unlike any he had ever seen before. She was a flower, such as the village storytellers described in their stories of long ago. Her skin was smooth and sweet-smelling. She had reddened her hands and the palms of her feet with henna. Her forehead was marked with a single dot of vermilion above her eyes. Her black hair had been swept back and wreathed with jasmine. She wore a sari of red silk, as thin as tissue, which

whispered as she walked. Her blouse had been chosen to match the border of her sari. From her ears, around her neck, and on her arms were hung gold ornaments, fine as lace.

The woman smiled and returned Kumar's greeting. Her gestures were not commanding gestures, he noticed. Her eyes and her hands moved like petals in the breeze. Beside her, the governor also greeted the boy. There was no need to be afraid. Kumar knew the weavers had done nothing to displease the government. The government would not have sent such a mother to punish them. She could have come only to help.

Kumar could have gazed a long time at the unexpected beauty of the lady, but the manager of the factory motioned him to one side impatiently and beckoned for his guests to step into Kumar's place at the machine. The manager stopped the motors. While Kumar stood watching, his employer proudly displayed the work which was wound on the loom. Obviously what he found pleased the manager, for he waved his hand grandly at the other weavers as if to indicate that the quality of Kumar's work was repeated on every loom in the entire factory. He called for a helper and asked him to bring a sari which had already been completed. When the sari was brought, the manager ran his hand over the cloth to satisfy himself that it was flawless. Then he held out the finished product for his visitor's inspection.

Kumar was surprised. He had been trained to accept hospitality with thanks and to praise the work of the host. He expected that the lady visitor would graciously touch the sari and lavish her approval on the manager. He waited for her smile to flash with admiration. But the visitor shook her head and Kumar heard her say, "No, this is not what we want at all. When we open our showrooms in Delhi and when we

send our work abroad, we must display the things which Indians have made with their own hands. We need the saris of our village weavers with their old designs. This is very fine machine work, but it is not something which could have been made only in India."

The manager was troubled. He had not expected this reply either, and his pride was hurt. When he spoke, his agitation showed in his voice. "India is a nation of many millions of people," he said. "We live in a world 'where other nations make cloth with machines. Our countrymen must also work with machines. We cannot afford to waste our time at hand looms."

Kumar was astonished to hear this man speak so directly to a representative of the government. Breathlessly, he listened for the lady's response. But she did not scold the manager. She only shook her head sweetly and said, "I agree with you that India may have to clothe herself with cloth from her own machines. But we cannot hope to sell our mill-made saris to other people who can get cloth from countries like Japan. The Japanese people have had machines much longer than we have and they are much better at using them. Yet India can sell cloth made by her own hands. No one else in the world weaves like her village weavers."

Here the governor interrupted. "This may be true," he said, "but where are the workmen?"

"I do not think you will find them," the manager added hastily. "In Orissa there used to be village after village of weavers. The men of those villages did the very finest weaving, the like of which you could not find anywhere. But they do not exist any more."

The manager's face reddened. He wanted his industry to

be appreciated. He cast around for someone to support him and his eyes fell on Kumar. "Here is a boy from a weaving village," he said. "He will say I speak the truth." With these words, the manager fastened a hot and anxious gaze on the boy—and asked, "Are there people left who practice the old art? Have they not left, like you, and come to the city?"

In that moment Kumar let only one loyalty tell him what to say. That was his loyalty to the man who had brought him here and given him a chance to earn his wages. Blotted from his mind were the vision of his weaving family and his desire to go back to them. He answered the man who owned the factory in the way he knew the man wished to be answered. "No, there are no weavers left," he said in a voice high-pitched with feeling. His throat burned and his eyes stung. He hung his head to hide the shame and torment which showed in his face.

Kumar did not remember much else that happened during the lady's visit. It did not matter to him. She saw the rest of the factory. She was polite and kind to everyone she met. They took her away at last in the shiny car, while there remained with Kumar an awful memory of what he had done. He had not understood much of what she had said, yet her words, "We need the saris of our village weavers . . ." had given him hope for his family. The hope had come like the first sunlit day of October after the dark rains of summer, when the world is so bright it makes you blink. He had closed out hope with his own words, as surely as if he had run away.

In his tiny room, alone, Kumar spent a troubled night. He tried to sleep, but sleep did not come. Each time he closed his eyes, the sweet picture of the lady returned to his mind and briefly he could rest. Then the sound of his own voice which

said, "There are no weavers left," startled him like the unpleasant sound of an alarm clock and he was awake. Back and forth he flung himself, trying now one side, then another, snuggling beneath the quilt only to toss it away, seldom quiet, never sleeping.

During those restless hours, however, Kumar's duty became very clear to him. From the time he had taken his first wobbly steps, he had been taught that as a son, his loyalty was to his father. Today he had betrayed his father and the caste of weavers. This was an act which, to Kumar's way of thinking, was every bit as dreadful as stealing or killing. Somehow he knew he must make it right or live, in his mind at least, as an outcast from the family and the village.

Long before anyone else was awake, Kumar rose and went outside. He bathed in the moonlight, rousing the dogs which slept on the cool stones near the pump. Then he walked far out to where the remaining villages hovered on the fringes of the city. There, from the unmolested trees, he picked blossoms with the fragrance of the night still upon them. The first streaks of daylight found him back on his own doorstep, weaving those flowers into a garland. By the time his neighbors had begun to stir, he had completed his task, brushed his hair, and gone.

At the traveler's rest house a sleepy watchman cleared his throat and shuffled onto the veranda. One by one he opened the wooden shutters and fastened them against the outside wall so that the morning air could flow through the still house. With a rag he whisked the dust from the chairs and the table on the porch. From the kitchen behind the main building a quiet little man in white appeared and began to set the table for breakfast. At the same time a boy whom no one noticed

lurked behind the tamarind tree. In his hands he held a garland, and he kept a sharp eye cocked on the work at the rest house.

Kumar was right. He had guessed that no one would bother the lady until after she had eaten. The automobile had not yet driven up to call for the visitor from Delhi and take her to the governor.

Quietly the minutes passed. At last someone stirred inside the house, and finally Kumar saw her come out. The lovely woman from the government went to the table and seated herself. Kumar waited until the little man in white had gone back to the kitchen to get her food. Then he unlatched the gate and walked straight up to the veranda.

Boldly Kumar went as far as the last step. There he dropped to his knees and held up his garland. The lady saw him and a look of surprise and bewilderment passed over her face. Kumar lifted his garland higher so that she would know it was for her. The woman left her place at the table and came over to him. Hesitantly she accepted the garland. But when she looked down into his uplifted face, she recognized Kumar. "It is the weaver boy," she said, smiling.

Kumar's courage failed. Here, looking up into those eyes, so near to the beautiful mother, he found it hard to speak. For a moment he thought he might lose all for which he had come. When finally he did speak, the words were not the ones he had meant to use. "I told you a lie," Kumar stammered bluntly.

"A lie. When did you tell me a lie?" the lady asked, puzzled.

"At the mill yesterday when I said, 'There are no weavers left,' " Kumar answered.

The woman thought for a moment. Then she nodded. "Yes," she said. "I knew that was not so. I know there are weavers."

Kumar felt the same surprise he had felt the day before upon discovering her unexpected wisdom. Today he took courage; however. If the lady had known so much without being told, perhaps she would know and understand other things, too.

"My father is a weaver," Kumar said. "The kind of man you are looking for. He weaves the raw silk. He weaves it as our village has always done, but it does not sell."

Here Kumar stopped for a moment and took a deep breath. He saw that the lady was interested. Now came the hardest words. "The manager told us no one wanted the old things any more and the debts were heavy. So—so—" This had been a long speech for Kumar. His voice left him completely. He could not go on.

From her knowledge of the weavers, the woman finished for him. "So you left and came to work in the factory. Is that right?"

"Yes," Kumar nodded, relieved to have her say it for him.

"And do you want to go back?" she asked.

"Yes, I do," replied Kumar, very close to tears.

For some time they remained there, silently together, the visitor from the government and Kumar. The man in white returned from the kitchen and looked quizzically from one to the other. The hands of the clock moved past the hour when Kumar should have been at work in the factory. In spite of the heat, Kumar trembled with an uneasy fear at the possible result of his having imposed himself on the occupant of the rest house.

The woman seemed to be thinking deeply. After a while she asked out of her thoughts, "Can you take me to your father?"

Again Kumar quivered. Surely he could not take such a well-born person as this to his village. Such a visit would take much preparation and money. He was not an official of the government. "My village is very far away," was all he could manage to say.

Once more the lady solved his unspoken problem. "No, of course you cannot take me," she said. "It is very far. Also, I must go to Cuttack and remain there for several days."

"Cuttack is not so far. I can come to you. I can journey to my father and bring him to you," Kumar said, interrupting her in his eagerness. "We can bring you samples of our work and you can talk to him. We will bring you such a sari as you have never seen before and make you a present of it." Kumar's face glowed with excitement. "You will see what we can do. Then you will buy and others will buy too." For once, Kumar forgot his shyness and spoke from his heart. "Then I can weave again in my father's house and that will be good for all of us." His eyes shone with joy.

The woman understood and smiled. "Are there more weavers who would weave?" she asked. "India needs many skilled people to weave steadily and well in the villages as well as at the looms of the factories. Only then will there be cloth enough at home and things to send away. Will others weave the old designs?"

Kumar looked doubtful. "I am not sure," he said. "Not all are willing. Many thought their work was not wanted and they have become suspicious." He paused. Then suddenly he thought of a way to overcome the suspicion of the weavers.

He beamed. "My father and I will be first," Kumar added importantly. "If we weave in the old way, others will see us weaving and laugh. But if we get money, they will not laugh. Others will weave, too."

The visitor was happy too. "Come to me in Cuttack," she said. "Bring me samples of your work. Let me see the patterns. If you are good weavers, there will be work enough for all of you."

When the noontime sun shone down on the plains of Orissa, it showed a rickety bus bumping along the road from Tora. Stuffed onto a crowded seat of that bus was Kumar. He paid no attention to the villages and rivers they passed. While the bus jerked and heaved, his mind was again waking with new thoughts and his heart was singing. His thoughts were of his home and weaving. His heart sang with the sounds of the spindle and the shuttle. It was a glad song, a proud song, of hands that have found their work.

8. Holy Man and Untouchable

Three people linger by an open well—a woman, an old man, and a dirty child. Down, down into the cool well falls the empty bucket. Hand over hand the proud woman draws it back. The eyes of the child are fixed on the woman and the old man curiously watches the child.

Carefully the woman pours her water into a waiting jug. The child edges forward and holds out a gleaming cup. “Water?” she asks.

The woman shakes her head and lifts the dripping vessel to her shoulder.

From his seat against the tree, the old man calls gently, “Why do you not give her some?”

The woman does not answer. Haughtily, she walks away.

Who is it walks away just now from a village well? Is it a stranger who does not know the customs of the village? Is it the privileged wife of a *zamindar*, a big landowner? Perhaps it is a woman of high caste called a Brahman. No. The woman who neglects the child and pretends not to hear the call of the old man is only the wife of a tinsmith who has lived all her life in the village.

The old man looks at the child and shakes his head. With difficulty he raises himself to standing position and supports his body on a bamboo staff. His orange robes flutter about his knees. Shaking his head and muttering to show his displeasure, he shambles down the village street. The child waits for a while, leaning against the cool well curb. When no one else appears, she gives up her quest for water and scampers into a nearby hut.

The sun streams down on the temple steps. Here the old man stops, lowers himself onto the hot stones, and sits cross-legged, his back against one of the pillars of the temple. Dogs and goats and chickens scavenge in the street. The busy villagers hustle back and forth. Among them at a more leisurely pace the *chowkidar*, the village policeman, saunters through the sand. He also pauses in the overhang of the temple, leans against a pillar, and mops his forehead, sweaty under his wool beret.

"Greetings, old man," the *chowkidar* calls to his neighbor at the foot of the other pillar. The old man makes *namaskar*. The *chowkidar* leaves his chore of wiping and fumbles for a moment in the pocket of his khaki shorts. A coin falls on the hot pavement before the orange robes. The old man lifts his eyes and makes a second *namaskar*, deeper and more reverent than the first. Without speaking, the two continue their rest by the temple, the old man and the *chowkidar*.

Scratch, scratch, grates a broom in the sand, and a miniature cloud of dust heralds the approach of the sweeper. Bent double over her short brush made of reeds, a ragged sari wound around her naked body, the sweeper woman cleans the village streets. Seldom does she raise her head. Yet when she brushes the flower petals from the stones at the temple gate

she stands half upright and, pausing, peers wistfully through the grillwork at the whitewashed temple with its brilliant decorations, its low, darkened passageway to the gods.

Abruptly the chowkidar swings into action. He advances toward the figure. "*Hi-ya, jao!*" he yells gruffly. He threatens her with his staff. This is sufficient warning for the sweeper. Hastily she pulls her sari over her head, picks up her broom, and hustles to her work.

The old man has seen it all. He squints up at the chowkidar and speaks. His voice is mild, "Why do you not let her linger at the temple? She is a child of God the same as you." But the chowkidar remains with his back to the temple, rigid and silent, stalwart guardian of the holy gate.

At noontime, when other people are indoors, the old man's solitary figure tramps the hot street. He walks with a stoop, from shop to shop, carrying a begging bowl. The fat-bellied man who sits over a charcoal fire, stirring milk, stops for a second to ladle curd into the upraised bowl. Another shopkeeper slips a potato pancake out of the sputtering fat for the old man. No one who is asked denies him. The only ones he avoids are the merchants who wear white starched caps and sit primly amid piles of soap and matches and writing paper. They are Muslims, people of another religion, and would not welcome an old man in orange robes.

At the end of the dusty street stands a large cement house. When the old man reaches it, he pushes aside the iron gate and stands waiting inside the garden. Presently a woman comes out. Her hair is cropped short and she wears a white sari. She carries a steaming bowl of rice which she heaps into the brass cup. The old man thanks her and raises his eyes.

They look at one another for a moment and the woman smiles. There is understanding between the two. The woman is a widow and she knows what it is like to live alone and depend on others for charity.

Who dares to come and go at the temple and speak so boldly to the village watchman? Who is he who is fed at the doors of the wealthy and the poor? It is a *sadhu*, a holy man who has no caste and can accept food from anyone. When other clean-shaven men dress in dhotis,¹ why does he grow a beard and dress in orange cloth? He has given up his caste and is a wanderer. He owns no property; he has no home, no family. If you ask him his work, he will tell you that he is a servant of God.

This afternoon, as every day just before the cows come home, the washerman completes his labors. In the morning he brought a sack of soiled clothes from the village. He hauled them far out to an abandoned tank. He beat them on the rocks. He spread them over the grass in the sun to dry. Now, in the late afternoon, he will collect them and carry them home.

Only one tree spreads its shade by the abandoned tank. The others on the plain have long since been cut for firewood. This one remaining tree is a welcome stop for all who pass from village to village. Everyone who travels this way rests beneath its branches. One goes refreshed, and another comes.

Today it is the *sadhu* who has wandered to the edge of the village. He props himself against the tree trunk and observes the washerman at work. The washerman gathers the clothes and neatly folds them. Beneath the tree he piles one sari on top of another till he has built his load. Deftly he binds a torn

sheet around the whole. Intent on his job, he is ready to lift the bundle to his head and set off for home, when the sadhu reaches out and stops him.

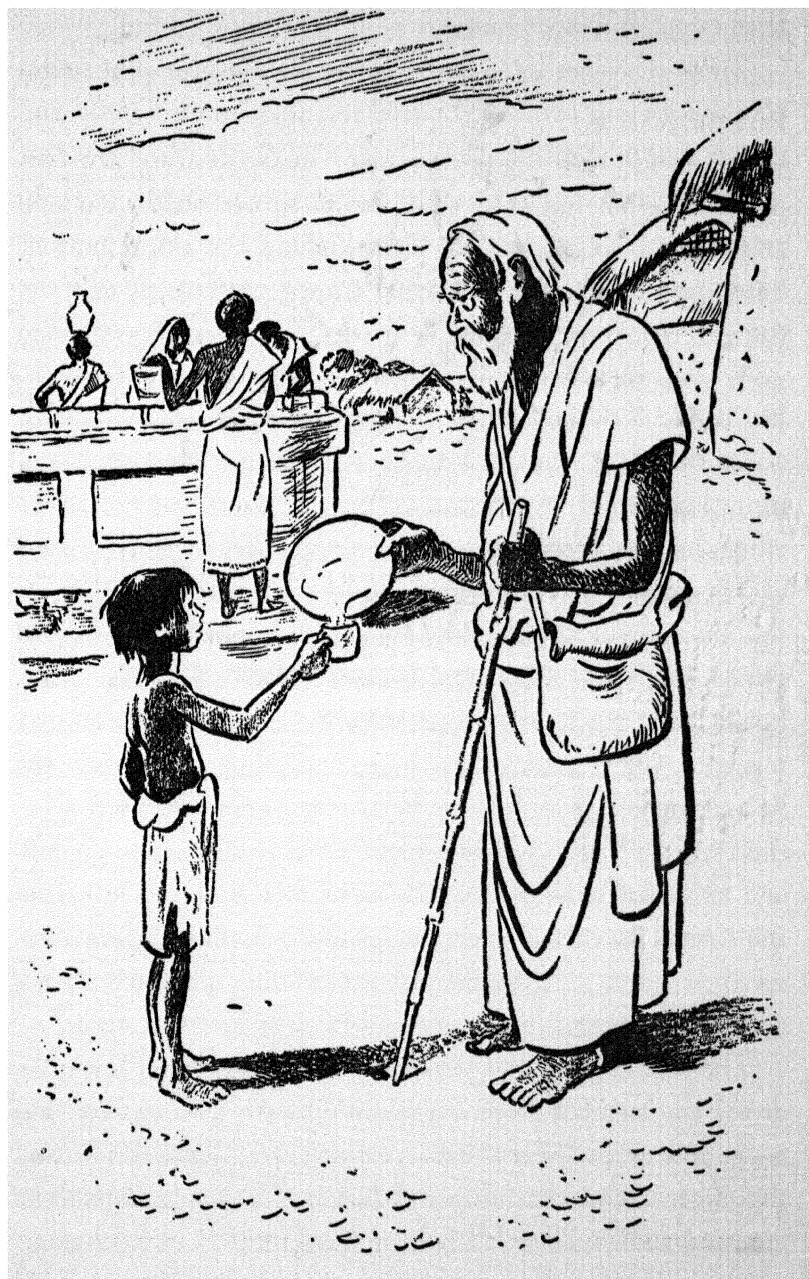
The sun has not set. The afternoon is still warm. The sadhu pats the ground beneath the tree and says kindly, "Stay and rest. It will be cooler."

With his day's work nearly over, the washerman is easily persuaded. He does not lift his load after all. Instead, he eases himself down into the shade, next to the sadhu beneath the tree.

While the two sit resting, another man approaches them. He happens to be a high-caste Brahman. He owns many acres of land but he does not till it. He himself is a poet. Yet from time to time he must check on the condition of his crops which he pays other men to plant for him. Today he has been to inspect and is on his way back to the village.

This man has walked a long way and he has no covering to protect his head from the sun. As he plods across the fields, he remembers the tree by the abandoned tank and plans to rest there until evening comes and it is cooler. Unfortunately he approaches the tank from the opposite side and does not see the two people already there. He is about to slip off his sandals and sit down when he catches sight of the other visitors in the shade. At the same time, the washerman and the sadhu see their guest. The sadhu gives namaskar. The poet smiles and passes on.

The poet does not rest with the washerman. The chowkidar drives the sweeper from the temple gate. A child begs for water at a well. These things have a reason. The washerman, the sweeper and the ragged child are one people. They are "untouchables" called *Harijans*. For centuries they have done



the dirty work of the villages. They live apart in quarters of their own. The new Constitution of India declares that they shall have the same privileges as all other people, but custom rooted in the past dies slowly. For the Harijans progress comes hesitantly.

Who will touch the village heart? In the evening, the people come again for water. The sadhu squats beside the well and sees the village women cluster round the single bucket. Many, many times it is lowered empty and returns to them full and dripping. They come needy. They go away satisfied with water for washing and water for bathing, water for cooking and water for drinking. Yet, when a Harijan child steps out to beg a cup, the young women still shake their heads and do not answer.

The sadhu comes closer. Unafraid, he lifts his bowl among the water carriers. Without a murmur it is filled. In sight of the women this caste-less man pours his water into the cup of the Harijan child. The child touches the old man's feet gratefully before lifting the cup to its thirsty lips. The women hardly notice. They walk away uncaring. The day has brought no change.

9. The Riddle Man

Under the *sal* tree which grew in the center of the village of Tincanni a wiry little man sat spinning. He was dressed in white homespun and his gray hair fell in loose ringlets on his neck. With his right hand he turned the rugged wheel of his *charkha* spinning wheel, while with his left he swiftly drew out the thread. He kept his flashing eyes on his work, but as he spun he hummed; and while he sang, the corners of his mouth twitched and quivered, as if anxious to break into a smile.

In the dusty alley near the *sal* tree some boys were playing marbles with stones. Each boy stepped forward in turn, balanced on one foot, and aimed his pebbles at a pocket in the sand. Occasionally the boys missed their mark, and when they did their marbles rolled down the alleyway.

Today Bansi missed. His pebble went hopping along the alley and he came bounding after it. The pebble landed right near the spinning wheel. Bansi pounced on it with a cry. Then he stopped short. The spinner, who knew that he was not a usual sight in the village, laid down his work for a second and greeted Bansi. "Namaskar," replied Bansi. Then he turned on

his heel and leaped back to his playmates. His breathless whisper preceded him up the alley. "Hey, there's a stranger spinning out under the sal tree," he announced.

News of the spinner spread faster than fire in the thatch. Bansi and his pals immediately left their game to go and tell their brothers, who were fishing. The brothers left their fishing to come and see. On their way back, they passed some girls who were gathering dried cow dung for fuel, and they told them, too. The girls picked up their baskets and followed. Back in the village, the little troupe told everyone they saw. Everyone laid down what he was doing to go and look. So it was not long before the spinner found himself surrounded by a group of curious children and babies.

The crowd formed a rough circle around the stranger and his spinning wheel. Each one who came squeezed the others together just a little more tightly to make room. The stranger noticed every newcomer and took time out for a friendly greeting. The children were shy, and these greetings always set off a round of self-conscious laughing. But the spinner chuckled too, enjoying the fun as much as anyone.

At first the children watched quietly, for they were not used to strangers. But eventually their curiosity got the better of them and they began to whisper among themselves. "Who is he?" or "Why is he spinning?" they asked. No one knew, not even Bansi, who had first seen the newcomer. Anyone who was asked only shook his head or shrugged his shoulders. "He is here. He brought his spinning wheel. Bansi discovered him. That is all," the children said.

"But it is *not* all!" said something in the restless mind of Muti, the clever and determined little daughter of the village weaver. While the rest of her friends slipped back on their



haunches and puzzled frowns deepened on their foreheads, she watched the spinner's fingers intently. The fingers told her a story. When a latecomer pushed into the circle and nudged Muti with the question, "Who is he?" she gave a different answer from the others. "He can't be a weaver. If he were a weaver, he would spin better than that," she blurted out disgustedly.

Such boldness in the face of a visitor! The children in the tiny circle gasped as if with one breath. Hastily they looked from Muti to the spinner to see what his reply would be. Was he offended? No. The spinner surprised his new friends with another grin. "You are right." He nodded to Muti. "I was not born a weaver."

Muti blushed. Her bronzed face burned with embarrassment. She looked away and dug her toes into the sand.

Immediately excited and admiring faces surrounded Muti. Every child in the circle wished he had shown the same courage as she had so that he would have got the same attention. Her friends tried to take further advantage of her bravery. "Ask him. Ask him what his name is," they begged of Muti. "Ask him why he is spinning."

Muti shook her head and shrank away coyly. Still they coaxed her. "Go ahead. Ask him," they teased. The smaller children fell over one another to be near her. "You are brave," they said admiringly.

Flattery did its work. Soon Muti only pretended to be unwilling. She giggled, but she did not protest when the children made a place for her directly in front of the spinning wheel. She gave her supporters one last glance for courage as they propelled her forward. The children grinned and urged her on. With her sari wound close around her, balancing on

one foot, Muti lowered her eyes discreetly. Then, "Who are you?" she stammered straight into the face of the stranger.

"My name is Chameru," he answered, smiling.

This small success further delighted the crowd. "Ask the rest. Ask the rest," they said.

She gave in, despite the fact that such a performance was against her training. "If you aren't a weaver, then why are you spinning?" she asked feverishly. With these words her confidence was gone. Knowing she had done more than she should, Muti quickly drew her sari over her head and darted into the protection of the circle.

"Spinning, spinning? Why am I spinning?" Chameru repeated, as if deciding how he should answer. With a twinkle, he looked directly at the children. "I think I am spinning a school," he replied suddenly.

"A school?" the astonished children responded in chorus.

"A school?" echoed Bansi and his pals on the edge of the circle, starting to laugh. "Spinning a school?"

"Yes," answered Chameru, still with the same twinkle. "I'm spinning a school." With this, he rose, dusted himself off, picked up his spinning wheel, and went inside the abandoned *dharamsala* rest house which stood near the sal tree.

"A school! Spinning a school?" the amused children called after him.

In the village of Tincanni the people liked to laugh. Some villages are like that. Maybe it was because the wife of the village headman, called a *gaontia*, was a jolly and talkative person, or maybe it was because people had a little more money in this village and their bellies were full. But for whatever reason, Tincanni liked to laugh, and that night every family was laughing. They had all heard the children tell the

story of Muti and Chameru, and every time they heard Chameru's surprising answer they broke out laughing. Long after the story had been told the first time, some villager—a grandmother feeding chickens or a carpenter shaping a new handle for a powrah—would repeat Chameru's words, "I think I am spinning a school." Then whoever it was laughed anew, as if hearing the answer for the first time.

Next morning, when the children came hurrying out, they discovered Chameru had not left them after all, as a traveling sadhu would have done. He was up before them and at work again under the tree. The children did not hold back. Hastily they rushed through their chores. Then, with the memory of yesterday's fun still fresh in their minds, they ran over to the spinner and squatted in a circle on the ground. Chameru greeted every child just as he had done the afternoon before, and the children replied with the same anxious giggles.

Among the last to arrive was Muti. Chameru recognized her and gave her namaskar also. Then, with a wry smile, he began to fumble in the pocket of his long shirt. After a few moments he pulled out a short metal *takli*, a hand spindle, and a sliver of cotton. He handed them over to Muti with a quiet challenge. "You are a weaver's daughter," he said. "You should be able to spin faster than I can."

This remark set off another round of giggles from his listeners. The children were amazed at this odd man and his friendly ways! Impatiently they pressed forward to see what Muti would do.

They saw that no one had yet got the better of her. Without flinching, Muti picked up the hand spindle Chameru had given her, and expertly she set it swinging. She drew the thread out perfectly, as if it were the most natural thing in

the world for her to be spinning in the midst of a circle of admirers under the sal tree.

What Chameru did made Muti the center of attraction. She was the envy of all her playmates. She knew this, and any traces of shyness disappeared. She did not hesitate to make the most of her position by talking further with the stranger. "Where is your village?" she inquired after a few minutes of spinning.

"My village is Pipli," Chameru answered distinctly, and his merry eyes swept the circle.

The children stared blankly. Not one of them knew what Chameru had meant.

"Don't you know where Pipli is?" he asked.

"No!" came the answer in chorus.

Chameru laid down his spinning. "Do you know Puri, where the great Jagannath temple is?" he asked, jumping up.

"Yes," they replied, again in chorus. Every child there knew Puri. They all hoped to go to Puri on pilgrimage when they grew up.

Chameru stepped into the middle of the circle and picked up a stick. "I will take you to my village," he said generously. Bending over, he drew a rough outline in the sand. "This is the country of India," he explained. "And this," he added importantly, "is the village of Tincanni." He made a tiny star on his map. The children squirmed with delight at the sight of Tincanni as a little mark in the sand. They crowded closer, spilling over the boundaries of his map in their eagerness to see.

"Now here is Puri," said Chameru, tracing a miniature temple on the seacoast of India. "And here is Pipli." He made another tiny dot a short distance from the temple. "All in

the state of Orissa in the country of India." He finished by encircling all three—Tincanni, Puri, and Pipli—with a crooked outline of the state.

Chameru stood up. "Now you know. You can do it too," he said and offered the stick to Bansi.

The children were fascinated. Not one of them had ever seen a map before. But this time Chameru had picked the wrong person to try. Bansi was so impressed by Chameru and so surprised by what he had just seen that he did not move. The stick dropped in the sand. Along with most of the other children, Bansi simply stared at Chameru, who went back to his spinning.

Silence fell abruptly on the circle. All the children were filled with wonder at Chameru and his knowledge. Though they all wanted to hear more from the friendly man, no one could think what to ask him.

Again it was Muti who became the spokesman. Questioning the spinner was more fun than even she had thought it would be. Politely she waited for a little while. Then, with a sly wink at her pals, she asked, "Who taught you to spin, *Sri* (Mister) Chameru?"

Everyone was alert for his answer. Once again, Chameru let his dancing eyes sweep the circle as he replied. What he said added something special to his already animated face. "Oh, I learned to spin from a little old man who loved children, named Gandhiji," he answered.

Now he had said something they could all understand. He had uttered the name of the best-loved person of all India. People in remote places had heard of Mohandas Gandhi, whom they called fondly *Gandhiji*. Gandhiji had helped to bring *swaraj*, self-government, they knew. Gandhiji had walked the

length and breadth of India encouraging his people. Gandhiji had loved the villagers. With the mention of Gandhiji's name, Chameru became a respected guest. He could go on, softly humming to himself, but no child would speak for the rest of the hour he spent spinning. They were awed and quiet.

Yet no one would have recognized the docile children with Chameru as the same boys and girls who went running home when he left them. Like mangoes which have been left too long on the tree, they were about to burst with their ripeness. They pranced away, mimicking the joyous little man and his gestures. They rehearsed and reviewed everything that he had taught them. They might not have dared to speak or draw before Chameru himself, but they practiced everywhere else they went all day.

That night a map of India was scratched on the surface of every courtyard in the village of Tincanni and every family had acquired a teacher. The old folks were amused at all the youngsters told, but the part of the story which interested them most was the part about Gandhiji. If this clever Chameru was a follower of Gandhiji, he was not simply a visitor. He had a purpose in the village, and they wanted to know what it was.

The following morning the village watchman walked importantly up to the door of the dharamsala and handed Chameru a letter. It was written on yellowed paper by the only man in the village who could have written it, the man who kept accounts for the gaontia. In very formal language it read: "We, the unworthy people of Tincanni, do humbly beg Sri Chameru to attend a meeting of the *gram panchayat*, our village council, to be held at the home of the gaontia this evening, second December."

By seven in the evening, if a visitor had walked into the moonlit village of Tincanni, he would have thought it was abandoned. No lights showed inside the compounds and no noise penetrated to the outside. But if the visitor had continued through the village he would surely have noticed a huge pile of sandals outside the door of the biggest house. And if the visitor had squeezed inside that door he would have seen all the barefoot people of the village squatting in the courtyard, in the center of which sat five dignified old men and Chameru.

The people respectfully waited for the members of the gram panchayat to speak for them. The questions they had for Chameru were simple and direct, and they were put very seriously. Some of the questions sprang from an age-old suspicion of foreigners, but they were not unfriendly.

It was the gaontia's place to speak first. He was also head of the gram panchayat. Everyone waited for him. But when he was ready to speak to Chameru he did not look directly at him. He took a few spices from a tray which his wife had placed at his side and chewed them deliberately. Finally he asked casually, almost as if he were speaking to his neighbor, "Who has sent you, Sri Chameru?"

All the eyes and ears of Tincanni were turned on him, but Chameru was as friendly as he had been on the first day. He spoke quickly, and his lively eyes included everyone there in his answer. "I have come from a school like those started by Gandhiji, where people are trained to help villagers."

The panchayat members frowned and looked at one another closely. The answer had not satisfied them. One of the younger members cleared his throat and asked the question which was on everyone's mind. "Who pays you?"

"The government," replied Chameru. As soon as he had

said it he knew he had made a mistake, for the people began to whisper suspiciously. So he held up his hand for quiet and, with the same contagious smile he had showered on the children, he addressed all the villagers. "Your government, because you rule yourselves. Swaraj wants to help the people of the villages."

His friendly, persuasive voice quieted them, but the villagers did not completely understand what Chameru had said.

"Are you a tax collector?" asked the old accountant, his eyes fixed on Chameru.

Chameru began to chuckle and for a few minutes his jolly laugh rippled over the crowd. "No!" he answered. Then, pointing to himself, he asked, "I? How could I *collect* taxes? I do not even know how to *pay* taxes. I have never had enough money," he chided. Now the people laughed with him. "I am not a tax collector. I am called a *gram sathi*, a friend of the village. I have come to live here and work with you."

The village people looked from one to another, puzzled. It was hard to distrust this friendly person who seemed to speak so honestly. Yet they had never before heard of a gram sathi sent by the government.

"What will you do?" asked one man, shrewdly.

The entire village leaned forward to hear Chameru's reply. "Whatever you need to have done, and whatever you are willing to help with," was all he said. Then he folded his hands and was quiet.

It was a long time before the villagers dared to talk. When they spoke they did not sound very sure of themselves. "What can we do?" asked a member of the panchayat. "We are only poor people." He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"We need one good road from here to market. There is no

road from Tincanni to the outside," a farmer said. "But government will never build that," he muttered half to himself.

Until then no woman had spoken; yet the gaontia's wife was a very powerful woman in the village, and she felt she had a right to express herself. She edged up close to Chameru and bravely began to speak. "You want to know what we need? We need a school," she said, her black eyes flashing. "You come with all your wisdom"—she shook her finger in his face—"but only one man in this village can read and write. It is the dry season. From now till May the children have nothing to do. If you want to help the people of this village, teach them to do something besides—" She stopped, as if at the limit of her patience, searching for a word. "Something besides *spin*," she finished weakly.

Chameru laughed. The gaontia's wife laughed at her own success. The villagers laughed and bobbed their heads in agreement. Then Chameru quieted the laughter with a question. "What would we use for a schoolroom?" he asked the woman.

"You find a place," she snapped. "How can we build a school? We are only poor people."

The villagers agreed with what she had said. "*Han, han*," yes, yes, they exclaimed and nodded their heads.

Chameru was sympathetic. "Perhaps you cannot build a school," he said wisely. "It is hard for poor people to build a school." He did not press them. He did not ask them to do what they thought was impossible. They had told him what they wanted. Now it was only fair that they have a chance to see what he could do.

The villagers saw next morning. When Bansi went to the tank soon after daybreak he met Chameru, charkha under one

arm and blackboard under the other, coming out of the dharamsala. By the time he returned, Chameru had set up his school. He had found a place under the only vacant shelter in the village, the long, low veranda which faced the street along the front of the gaontia's house. By sun-up a few shy children had timidly begun their lessons. More children stood in the street and watched. Everyone who passed by saw them and all the grown-ups smiled. Chameru was smart, they decided.

Fourteen children came to school during the first week. Within six weeks, three times that many came. They ranged all the way from runny-nosed little Hrusi, who could barely walk, to twelve-year-old Muti. They were children of all castes. Only the Harijans and the herdboys stayed away—the herdboys because school was held during cow-herding time, and the Harijans because they did not know it could be useful for a Harijan to read and write. They were all beginners. No child in Tincanni had ever been to school before. Chameru taught them together, hunched on the floor, with their slates propped against their knees.

Chameru began with the things his pupils most wanted to know—how to write their names, to read a story, and to count. Gradually he introduced them to things that Gandhiji would have taught them too—the exciting story of India, how she became free and how the new nation could feed and clothe her people. Gandhiji wanted all children to learn to work with their hands, too, but Chameru did not start with this lesson. He knew that hard-working village people think it is most important for their children to learn only to read and write.

No one complained, however, when in the later afternoon school let out for a game called *baboochur* or “stealing the

daughter-in-law." Everyone listened when the sounds of the national anthem, "*Jana, Gana, Mana*," rang through the village. Still the children came and every night they repeated to their parents the wonders they had learned. Each of Chameru's tiny pupils was a teacher. Quietly, inside the compound walls by the lamplight, parents learned from their children to write their own names and to read their first words from marks in the sand.

At the end of six weeks the gram panchayat met again. This was a quiet meeting. Most people did not know about it. Only the panchayat members came. Chameru had been especially invited. The gaontia's wife attended because the meeting was held in her house.

This second meeting was not so formal as the first had been, either. The spice tray was passed around and around and everyone talked easily. The panchayat members treated Chameru almost like one of themselves. He noticed that they were ready and willing to talk to him. He guessed that they were pleased and that they had something new regarding the school to discuss. Otherwise they would not have been so secretive. They would have asked others to come to the meeting as well.

In order to begin the meeting, the gaontia inquired in a respectful tone, "How is the school going, Sri Chameru?" This was a polite way to begin, but actually the gaontia knew very well how the school was going. He had almost stumbled over it every time he had gone in or out of his house during the last six weeks.

Chameru's face shone. "We have a big school now," he said, flinging his arms wide. "The whole village is coming." He could see that the panchayat was happy about this. He

pulled his hands closer together and continued, with a troubled look on his face. "But we only have this much space," he said. "It is a fine school, but not yet worthy of our village."

For a few moments everyone was quiet. Then a panchayat member asked, "What would you need to build a school worthy of our village, Sri Chameru?"

Now Chameru beamed. From that question he guessed that perhaps he would be able to get what was needed. When he answered, he tried to hide his eagerness and spoke seriously, considering each word. "First we need land," he said. "The government will give us money for building materials, if we have land."

Here Chameru paused and looked around. The panchayat members were smiling and bobbing their heads in agreement. He had said the right thing. The gaontia's wife looked well pleased.

The gaontia continued, in the same thoughtful way that Chameru had used. "It happens that the panchayat has some land," he said. "It is not very good land. It used to be forest land and no crops will grow there. It is out at the edge of the village. But it would be good for a school." He paused to cough, as if to give importance to his last remark. "You could build a school there," he finished.

Chameru was delighted! It was a generous thing for the panchayat to give land. "This is a fine thing that you will do," he said sincerely, including them all in his smile. "But who will build the school?" he asked hopefully.

At this the panchayat members shrugged their shoulders and waited for the gaontia to speak for them. He spoke slowly and at length, avoiding Chameru with his eyes. "Building is the government's job. You are from the government. You

must figure how to build. We are only poor villagers. We have given the land. We can do no more."

"Yes, you are from the government. You must figure how to build it," repeated the others. They rose and shook themselves off, preparing to leave. It was clear that Chameru could not expect more now.

On the following morning school met as usual. The children chanted their alphabets and did their sums. Chameru wrote their new lessons on the blackboard. Then he hopped about among his crowded pupils, checking their slates and explaining over and over again to those who needed help. At first he was like a busy mother hen, keeping her chickens in order. When everyone was settled at last, he sat down before the class and spun while the children came in small groups to recite their lessons.

Yet in the afternoon the school was strangely quiet. The children trudged to the gaontia's house, but by three o'clock the veranda was bare, except for a pile of slates stacked against the wall, and the big blackboard with its lesson printed in Chameru's neat hand. In bold white letters it read, "Gandhiji taught us that we people of India must be ready to work with our hands to build the things we need." Many a villager who sat down to rest on the edge of the veranda that afternoon stared at those lines and pondered what could have happened to the school. Not one of them was advanced enough to read the lesson. If anyone could have read it, he would have guessed what had become of the school.

School was being held that afternoon on a piece of old forest land at the edge of the village. Baskets and powrahs, carrying poles and old kerosene tins took the place of slates and chalk. The children no longer sat in crowded rows. They

moved about, digging, carrying, mixing mud and slapping it into place. Muti and Bansi and a few of the older ones were in charge of gangs of tiny workmen assigned to each part of the work. Among them was Chameru, measuring here, lifting there, smoothing the ground, humming and smiling. Happiness showed in the spring of his step and the sparkle of his smile. He was pleased with the children and they were enjoying their work. Together they would build their new school.

Things went on like this for several days. During the mornings school was held. In the afternoons the children built. Within a week, however, Tincanni showed that it was not going to let the gram sathi and the children do all the work. The village people were able to make plans of their own.

One day, while Chameru and his class were digging and shaping the mud walls of their school, the villagers held a meeting to discuss the building. They expressed satisfaction with what the children had done, but agreed that the honor for the building belonged mainly to the panchayat which, after all, had given the land that had made it possible. What could they do further, now that the walls had been raised almost three feet from the ground? This was the problem they had come to consider.

A respected member of the panchayat made a suggestion. He proposed that the village use an ancient custom called *moti*, whereby every family would give a handful of rice to the panchayat each day. The rice could be collected and sold at market. With the money the villagers would pay for labor to finish the building.

A spokesman for the villagers reminded the panchayat that many people of the village were too poor to give *moti*. How-

ever, those who could not give rice might give work instead. To this both villagers and panchayat agreed. The old accountant made a list of all the villagers present and recorded whether they would give moti or labor. When the meeting broke up, several of the villagers trudged out to help the children.

The first of April was set for the opening of the Tincanni school. A week before that date, the thatchers finished. On the afternoon before the first, the sweeper scratched his broom over the hard dirt floor and Muti strung a silk thread across the open door. The sub-divisional officer of the government was coming all the way from Bargarh to make a speech, and he would have the honor of cutting the thread to declare the school open.

The morning of April first was dry and clear. Chameru rose before most villagers and stood in the open doorway of the dharamsala, looking out into the dim light of the dawning day. As he stood there he saw a strange sight. Along the village road came a bedraggled woman, hustling toward the dharamsala. She was obviously upset. Her sari was flung around her hurriedly and her tousled hair flew about her face wildly. Except for her energy and the ring of her familiar voice, Chameru would hardly have known his friend, the gaontia's wife.

"Sri Chameru, Sri Chameru," the gaontia's wife wailed as soon as she caught sight of Chameru watching her. "A most inauspicious thing has happened. We cannot open the school today. It is not a good day. My poor husband has been ill all night with the fever." The distraught woman stood before Chameru, wringing her hands wretchedly.

"What is this?" asked Chameru, at once concerned. "I saw him only last night. How can it be?"

"Oh, it is only a slight case," the gaontia's wife reassured Chameru. "He gets it every year at this season. The water in the tank is low and dirty, fit only for animals, but we drink it. It can't be helped. He will be all right. But the school and the ceremony and the speeches? What are we to do?" Here the poor woman began wailing again. "The day is not auspicious."

Chameru twinkled. "Maybe we ought to make it auspicious by starting work on a well," he said.

The gaontia's wife forgot her wailing for a moment in irritation. Her black eyes flashed and she shook her finger in Chameru's face. "How can we afford a well with good drinking water?" she sputtered. "It has always been so. We are only poor villagers. We can't even—" She stopped, at a loss for words, so hot was her anger.

"We can't even build a school." Chameru finished for her and smiled.

Caught unaware, the gaontia's wife smiled too, and then she began to laugh. For a moment, forgetting the misfortune which had brought her to the dharamsala, she stood and laughed and laughed at what this man had dared to say. Against the dim sky, she made a funny picture herself with her stringy hair shaking up and down, her wide mouth standing open and her amused cackle resounding through the village.

The school was not opened on April first but a week later. Within the week, the gaontia had recovered and the priest declared an auspicious day. The sub-divisional officer came and

made a pretty speech. The children were scrubbed and handsome. Everyone was gay, even the Harijans, who lingered on the edge of the crowd. Chameru was given so many garlands that he looked like some kind of stuffed animal. After the performance, the gaontia's wife distributed sweets.

The morning after the ceremony, the people of Tincanni went about their usual work once more. The children were at school when about mid-morning a bullock cart piled high with furniture and tin trunks arrived in the village. It stopped before one of the houses. On top of the trunks sat a lonely little girl, the niece of one of the panchayat members. She was the daughter of his brother, who had recently died. Since she had no living mother either, the little girl had been sent to live with her uncle. The man who brought her unloaded the cart and returned to his own village, leaving the child and her baggage in Tincanni.

Later, before the little girl had had a chance to become acquainted with anyone except her new family, she was sent to bring water. On her way through the village, the new child caught sight of a busy little man spinning under the sal tree. He gave her such a friendly greeting that the little girl stopped to watch his flying fingers. He asked her who she was and told her she would be welcome in the school.

This man had the kind of face which makes lonely children want to keep talking to him. "Why are you spinning?" the new child finally dared to ask.

"Spinning, why am I spinning?" repeated the little man, scratching his head and squinting up at the sun, as if deciding how to answer. "I think—" He paused. "I think I am spinning clean drinking water," he ended abruptly.

Wide-eyed, the little girl gazed at the man. She did not

understand at all. But the stranger, instead of explaining, went on with his spinning and began to hum. The little girl was afraid to ask more. She picked up her jug and slid away.

That night all over Tincanni people were laughing. They had heard what Chameru had said to the new girl. They knew what it meant and it tickled them. Everyone in Tincanni was amused, except for the one little girl who sat on the edge of a veranda in a strange compound, dangling her feet in the sand. That little girl was saying over and over to herself, "What a funny man! What does he mean, he will spin water? Who could weave a well? Who could?"

Part II

A VARIED LAND

10. Child of the Garden

Maili began her life in a basket on her mother's back and her first sight of the towering mountains was over the rim of that wicker cradle. She saw the rain come and hide the snowy faces of the hills and she heard it fall against the flimsy sheet of dried leaves which covered her head. She felt the tilt of her basket as her mother worked her way among the shrubs on the steep slopes. Outside the smoky room where she was born, the first smell she knew came from the damp, raw odor of freshly plucked tea.

Now Maili is old enough to be a plucker too. As she works, she stands waist high among the tea plants in the shade of the *siris* trees. Her canvas apron scrapes against the bushes spread like a flat table around her. Automatically her well-trained fingers measure and count. "Three leaves and a bud, three and a bud," she whispers to herself as she snips the stems and tosses the fresh leaves over her shoulder into the basket. Beginning in the cold mornings of early March, throughout the rain-soaked days of summer, till the end of October, every day at sunrise she will patter down the path with her leaf basket. If she works well, she may pluck as many as forty or

fifty pounds of tea in a single day and have several rupees added to her family's credit in the overseer's book.

When her work is over in the afternoon, Maili twists her way up through the garden, past the bamboo thicket, and around the workers' garden plots called *kell* lands, to a small wooden house with a tin roof. She finds Didi, her older sister, already at home, hunched over the circular millstone on the porch. Didi is grinding maize. Maili takes off her basket and sits down wearily near her sister, among the geraniums stuck into old tin cans on the bare earth steps.

The stone moves steadily and the sisters allow their tired bodies to rest in its rhythm. Didi turns the grinder with a bamboo handle stuck into a hole chiseled in the stone. Grasping the bamboo, she stretches her body out over the revolving wheel and rolls around as it grinds. Maili's eyes follow listlessly, round and round.

When Didi considers that the grain is fine enough, she stops the millstone and sweeps up the corn with a short, stiff broom. As soon as the rumble of the grinder has ceased, she wastes no time in reporting the news. "There was trouble today. Raini was stealing. She got caught," the older girl says abruptly.

Immediately Maili's interest is aroused. "Which Raini?" she asks.

"The Raini who lives up there," Didi answers with a twist of her head over her shoulder toward the edge of the bamboo forest. "She hid the tea in a cloth under the bushes. She went back for it after weighing in, but the overseer found her."

Maili's eyes are worried and Didi is not unmindful of the effect of her story. She beats the dust from her broom over the edge of the porch and continues. "She was going to sell it to

the traders from Sikkim, who come through the gardens on Friday. They'll take all they can get and pay well. But the overseer shook his fist at her and bellowed and said she could be turned off the estate for what she had done!"

Maili is pensive. Didi watches her sister out of the corner of her eye. "Hummmph!" She finishes her report with a sneer. "What can you expect? That Raini is nothing but a rascal." To emphasize her feelings, Didi vigorously shakes the meal from her skirts. Then she picks up her bowl and flounces away into the dark hut.

Maili sits alone, looking out across the waving poinsettias to where Kanchenjunga meets the sky. Yet her thoughts are not on the giant mountain. They are very close to home. Maili too has seen the Sikkimese traders. They pass close to where she works. They have asked her for leaf. They would give her money also. She could have enough to buy a gold nose-ring!

For a second, Maili lets her imagination play. The tempting ornament dangles before her mind's eye just as she has seen it hang in the goldsmith's shop. Then she remembers Didi's sneer. "She could be turned off the estate," her sister had said. The golden image darkens. "It would be wrong to steal," Maili reminds herself. "Nothing should be worth so much."

Interrupting her, Maili's little brother, Jetha, comes whooping down the path behind their two black goats. It is hard to tell which is more agitated, Jetha or the goats, as they knock back and forth over the stones. Jetha has had the animals out to water. Now he must try to get them penned up again before they wander off into the tea.

One of the curious creatures comes staggering up the steps to where Maili sits. Instantly all other thoughts are driven

from her mind. Her swift arms reach out to grab the little beast, but she can hardly hold onto him. Kicking and jerking, the goat manages to topple over a can of geraniums before Maili can lift him up and carry him back to his pen.

Jetha traps the second goat under a tea basket and with Maili's help stuffs it into the tiny stall behind its brother. Maili claps the door shut behind the animals and drops the wooden bar into place. Jetha sighs with relief. Goats should never be allowed to get out, the children have learned from experience. Goats can do a lot of damage in the tea.

All over the garden at this hour the workers are coming home. From the cliff where the goatpen stands, the children can see the men and women inching their way through the hedges of tea. The women climb slowly, with their heads down. The men walk with the light springy step of hill people. From this height their small black hats look like pegs being moved along the trails of a gameboard.

One of the hats moving on the terraced path belongs to the children's father. In his hand he carries a long sickle, for today he was assigned to cutting weeds. In a well-spaced garden, where the tea bushes are so close together that they make a canopy over the ground, weeds do not grow. But where bushes have died or have been washed away or were poorly spaced when they were planted long ago, there is earth and sunlight for weeds. The weeds take food from the tea bushes. They must be cut and left as mulch beneath the plants or scraped out to the edge of the terrace with the prunings, where they help to hold the soil in place.

Maili and Jetha linger beside the goatpen, banging their feet against the empty trough. They are reluctant to go in.

When their father returns there will be no more time for gossip or playing. He will give them his sickle and send them off to cut grass for the goats. Firewood must be carried inside and tucked onto the sooty beams beneath the eaves to dry. Presently Didi or their mother will finish the cooking. Then, after eating, Maili and Jetha will clean the blackened pans with ashes until they shine. The day will be gone and a cold moon risen over the hills before the children curl up to sleep.

Early in the morning, when the breeze ruffles the long Buddhist prayer flags hung before the cottages on the slopes of the eastern Himalaya, Maili and Jetha set out again together. Maili carries her tea basket but Jetha has a bag of books. Maili is on her way to her plucking in the lower gardens and Jetha is on his way to school.

The children walk softly, one after the other, through the garden. For a mile or so their path drops continuously down through the thickly planted shrubs. On the hills the only sounds are the lonely call of a cuckoo and the swish of Maili's heavy skirts. But as they approach the center of the estate something else reaches the children's ears, as if coming from a long way off at first and growing ever louder. It is the rumble of heavy machinery which processes the tea. Soon the path widens and the brother and sister emerge from the thicket on the level clearing beside the factory.

Neither Maili nor Jetha have ever been inside the big white shed which is the factory. No one but the factory workers go beyond the gravel paths. What happens inside the building is a mystery to the children. In the huts on the slopes they have seen old women try to cure a few handfuls of leaf,

so they can understand what must be done to the tea in the factory; but how the busy machines do the work, they do not know.

All the operations of the factory help to season and to sort the tea. When Maili drops her leaves at the weighing shed, they are bundled up and brought to the factory at once. Here the damp leaves are spread on burlap racks to wither. When the tea has lain on the racks for several hours, it is rolled in huge mechanical barrels to bruise and break the cells, causing the fragrant leaves to "bleed." Then the bruised leaves are allowed to ferment. After this they are "fired" or dried in warm ovens. Finally they are sorted and packed in wooden chests for shipping down to Calcutta, where the tea will be sold at auction. The entire treatment of the tea within the factory takes less than a day. All the leaves that were plucked yesterday are slowly moving through the roaring machines this morning; but neither Maili nor Jetha comprehend this.

The children would like to find out sometime what is going on inside the sheds, but they do not dare to stop. They cross the loading yard quickly so as not to attract attention, and fall into step behind a group of factory workmen on the path which leads behind the long factory and down the hill. The path lies on a narrow shelf between the building and the slope, and the small party easily slips into single file.

With her head bent and her eyes on the feet of the man in front of her, Maili trails along. She does not notice when the men turn off and begin to mount the factory steps. She follows them instinctively. As soon as her feet strike the unfamiliar concrete, however, Maili knows where she is. She recognizes that this is not the path into the garden and she stops so suddenly that Jetha comes tumbling into her. Vaguely she looks

around for the workmen, but they have already disappeared through the open door and into the building. By the time Jetha has unscrambled himself, she and her brother are all alone at the steps of the factory.

Below the children in the garden the first workers strap on their aprons and wade out into the damp bushes, but from the open door of the top of the steps comes the tempting smell of roasted tea and the mysterious clatter of the machines. Maili glances around. When she finds that there is no one watching, she turns to Jetha impulsively and raises her eyes toward the opening. Her brother grins and nods his head. Mischievously they climb the steps together.

Two shy children peeking around the corner of an open door into the tea factory see a busy picture. Between them and the gigantic ovens stretches a carpet of crisp, black leaves. Their neighbor women sit around the edge of the dark blanket, running the tea through their fingers. Deftly they sift the broken leaves from the whole ones and drop each into its waiting basket. When the oven doors are thrown open with a clang, more leaf falls onto the floor in front of the women. Coolies quickly snatch the baskets of inspected leaf and haul them away to be sorted and graded and packed.

The children stand on the doorsill and inhale the hot fragrance. Outside, the morning air is cold and mist hugs the hills. Inside, it is deliciously warm and the dry air is filled with the aroma of tea. The children's inquiring eyes are filled with the wonder of their discovery. Maili quivers with excitement. Unconsciously they edge their bare feet noiselessly over the threshold.

No one notices the young visitors. Maili drops to her knees and stretches out her curious hands to feel the baked leaf.

There is lots of tea, much more than she can imagine anyone needs. Cautiously she looks around. Jetha's attention is held by the huge ovens. Without interference Maili can slip the white kerchief from her head and wrap some leaves for herself.

Bang! The door on the opposite side of the factory swings shut. Framed against it the children see the tall, thin form of the foreign manager. His experienced eyes sweep the room. Immediately he starts to walk in the direction of Maili and Jetha.

What happens next is swift and hard for the children. Grabbing her brother by the shoulder, Maili pulls him back through the open door. Their small bare feet slap the cold stone steps. Maili's awkward basket thumps against her back and Jetha stumbles on the gravel as they push down the path through the bushes. They shove pell-mell across the brow of the hill. There, hidden from the factory, they drop onto their hands and knees and wriggle under the tea plants. Flat on their stomachs under the green canopy, they wait. The heavy pounding of their own hearts sounds to them like the footsteps of the manager on their trail. Maili digs her forehead into the sand and wishes with all her heart that she had never touched a leaf.

Why is Maili frightened of a thin and kindly man who speaks her language with a strange accent? Would he strike her? No, he would never strike her. Would he take her pay away or her goats or her corn? No, he could not do that. But Didi's words were plain. "If he thinks I was stealing, he will send us away," Maili whispers to Jetha under the bushes. She, like all the workers, fears leaving the estate more than any other thing.

Maili is a child of the garden. Her people came across the



mountains from Nepal more than a hundred years ago when the Englishmen first planted the tea bushes. The workers do not think of themselves as being Nepalis any more. They are simply called *pariyahari*, the hill people. The garden is their home. There are seventeen hundred *pariyahari* on the plantation where Maili works near Darjeeling. Others work on estates in Assam and in the gardens which are now part of the country of Pakistan.

Where would Maili go if she had to leave the garden? What would she do? Another estate would not want a thief. All that she has seen beyond the plantation is the noisy bazaar. She does her work and the tea she plucks goes to the United States or Canada, Australia or Egypt. Her wages are paid by a company owned in England, though she is a citizen of India. But she does not know about this. Her universe is bounded by the plantation and the rim of mountains against the sky. Plucking is the only work she knows.

Presently one cautious eye peeps out from under the scruffy bush and roves the estate from hill to hill. It sees no tall, commanding manager in pursuit. The only other human beings the eye meets are some pluckers below in the valley. Out of the bushes comes one tousled head and then another. All is safe. A book bag and a tea basket emerge and bob along the path together.

A few minutes later Jetha crosses in the shadow of the schoolhouse porch and takes his place unnoticed on the end of a crude wooden bench. Maili plucks her way nervously up a ravine. The bottom of her basket is spattered with leaf, and who can say that she has not been at work for some time? •

Maili forces her trembling fingers to clip steadily and monotonously. She keeps her eyes on the tea bushes. But

when she hears the step of the overseer making his usual rounds, she cowers in spite of herself. She realizes ashamedly that it will be many weeks before she can face the overseer or the manager without pulling her shawl over her face and flushing scarlet beneath it for fear they will recognize her.

Her shame makes Maili angry, and as she works she scolds herself for what she did. When the traders come through the garden, they will never again see her look up hopefully. At the end of the day there must be no bundle of leaf tucked aside under a bush to take home. From now on, she decides, whenever she passes the door of the factory, she will run as fast as she can, dragging Jetha with her. She has learned what it is like to be tempted, but in her mind's eye the gold nose-ring no longer glitters. Its price is too high.

II. Born in the Breakers

For one expectant moment the frail boat hung beneath the threatening wave, just as a hungry fish might hang beneath its bait, as if undecided whether to yield or not. Then, no longer able to resist the strength of the curling breaker, the slim craft glided upward and plunged over on its back. Squeals of excitement broke from the watchful children. Like greedy gulls, little boys hovered over the skiff until, pushed by the breaker, they also tumbled into the foam. Shouting and jabbering, they struggled for the beach, clutching the worn string of their ill-fated toy.

Titas was among them. His boat was the one which had been capsized. Out of all the tiny toy boats made from palm stems which the children had pushed off so bravely in the morning, his alone survived. Many times it had faced the sea and many times it had been driven under, yet it was still sound and ready for another encounter. The other boats were lost and much of the children's interest had gone with them. Now only Titas wanted to stay in the breakers. The rest of the boys soon dropped the string of his toy and raced along the sand in search of new adventure.

"Here! Here! Come here," the children called back. "Let's try to trap a fish in the shallows."

Titas remained intent on his dripping boat. "No, no," he answered with a determined shake of his head. "I'm not coming." Carefully he was already working his way back into the water. Slowly he approached an incoming wave and prepared to launch his craft again.

In full view of all that happened, on the turf beneath the palm trees, Titas's grandfather sat mending nets. The old man was no longer strong enough to go with the fishing boats called *wallams* into the open sea. The withering muscles of his upper arms told the story of many, many paddle strokes he had made against the surf as a younger man; but now age bound him to shore. He rested and repaired broken nets, speaking seldom. However, if he talked of the ocean and boats, all around him listened; for Titas's grandfather was the oldest and had more sons in his family than anyone else from their fishing village of Puthenthura on the Malabar Coast of South India.

From where the grandfather sat, he could survey the stretch of water where Titas played and he could see past their little brick house to the place where Titas's elder brother, Naya, climbed a palm tree and skillfully whacked off a coconut. Naya's friend, a Christian boy from an adjacent village, was there as well, instructing Naya in the art of selecting and cutting the fruit. Long hours the grandfather spent here at his work, dividing his attention between his grandsons, Titas in the waves and Naya on the swaying tops of the trees. He loved both boys; but of the two it was Titas at play who made him glad.

Just as Titas edged his way forward and prepared to meet

the next big wave, an unexpected cry rang out from the palm tree. Titas turned around and looked up to where Naya sat, eagerly pointing out across the green water. "He comes. Father comes first," Naya yelled, letting a coconut fall in his excitement.

Titas dashed out of the water and ran up to his grandfather. Shakily the old man picked up his palm-leaf hat and settled it on his head. Then together the two of them started off, as fast as Grandfather could go, along the beach. Behind them Naya crashed his way down the palm tree, sliding where he could, scraping his feet over the broken fronds. But he scarcely noticed the sharp edges which pricked his toes today, so anxious was he, like everyone else, to see the boat come in.

The same cry which roused Titas and his grandfather had sounded over the entire village. People old and young now came popping from the houses with as little warning as the hidden sand crabs give when gliding from their tiny holes after dark. There were men and boys, school children clutching their slates, women with babies on their hips, and girls with coconut fiber caught in their hair. On foot, by dugout canoe, even with bicycles, the villagers thronged to the edge of the white sand to see the first catch of the day.

Titas's father did not land his boat at their own home but at the house of the fish merchant. Through long training, the villagers gathered there automatically. At the fringe of the group the coolies of the fish merchant squatted, their scales and their carrying baskets ready. In the undisputed center of the tattered crowd stood the serious, well-dressed fish merchant himself. Titas and his grandfather took the only spot left to them, standing at one end of the half-circle with their

feet in the water. There, within a few seconds, Naya joined them.

The incoming boat was close now. They could see the crewmen straining to bring their load quickly to land. Guiding them, the boys' father stood in the prow. When he saw his family waiting on shore, he waved to them. They caught the ready flash of his smile and could hear his call, even above the thunder of the breakers. "Ho, ho, wait until you see!" he shouted.

Sometimes Titas's father approached the crowd self-consciously, and somewhat reluctantly unloaded his fish on the beach. But today he swaggered out of the boat as soon as it scraped the sand. He stood back and watched while the rest of the crew unloaded. He was obviously pleased to see the splashing silver cargo brought out. His family and all the villagers witnessed the event with as much delight as he.

The fish were dumped into the baskets of the merchant, and after a brief sorting period the weighing began. One of the merchant's men squatted in the sand, holding his scales by a chain at the center, balancing the catch against the weights, seer for seer. On their haunches, separated by the scales, Titas's father and the merchant faced one another.

When, eventually, the last fish flopped onto the scales, the time for bargaining had come. Silence fell over the entire group. Oblivious of those around him, the merchant figured. Sometimes he raised his pencil and chewed on it. Occasionally he cleared his throat and squinted up at the sky. Then abruptly, at the end of his work, he snapped his book shut and rose as if the deal were finished. "Fifteen rupees," he announced with an air of finality.

For a few moments Titas's father sat immobile. Then he spat swiftly into the sand and replied to the offer of the merchant, "Thirty rupees."

The crowd laughed good-naturedly at the fisherman's expectations, and the fish merchant laughed too. Then his face grew sober, "Eighteen," he snapped.

Now the eyes of the fishermen fastened on their leader. What would be his response?

"Twenty-five," he answered, his voice scarcely above a whisper.

The merchant was thoughtful. Again he opened his black book and looked over what he had written there. A second time he closed it. "Twenty-one rupees," he offered firmly.

The faces of the crowd lit with surprise. This was a lot of money to offer. Quiet seconds passed. No one spoke. At last Titas's father rose and shrugged his shoulders. "It is all right," he said and turned to his men. The business was over.

It was not common for a captain to bargain for so short a time, but the morning was half gone and other boats might arrive loaded with fish. These could spoil the offer for Titas's father. Twenty-one rupees was more than most captains would get. The money must be portioned out, over half of it to be divided among the crew members, but the father would be able to bring home more than enough to feed his family for another week.

The realization of his good fortune made the captain of the wallam proud. When he faced the boys, his lips parted in a broad grin. He swelled out his chest and boasted, "This is good fishing. Ours is the lucky wallam!"

Catching sight of Naya, his father slapped him on the back and bragged, "You are the son of the father with the lucky

wallam. See how fine it is. Soon you will go with me and bring back the riches of the sea and then we shall be rich together." He threw back his head and laughed at the prospect, and Naya joyfully laughed with him.

Over the hot sand, the old man's hand heavy on his grandson's shoulder, Titas and his grandfather shuffled home. They too were proud of the catch. But, like the others, they did not dwell on their good fortune. Their minds were on another event of the morning. In the moment of his triumph the father had boasted to Naya and promised to take him to sea. But it was not Naya who longed for the chance to go. It was Titas, so his father's jesting words had stung like the bite of an insect.

Beneath the palm tree, at the edge of the eroded sand on the side of their house, the couple rested. Inside, they could hear the father still bragging and they also heard Naya's voice mingled with the pleasant chuckle of the mother. Titas and the grandfather looked at one another. Then Titas glanced bitterly toward the hut. "Naya will never ride the sea," he hissed. "He is only interested in the trees."

As it is with people who share the same love, Titas's grandfather knew the hurt that Titas felt. Yet, whereas Titas grew resentful at the sound of his father's words and he longed to strike back at Naya somehow, the old man was calm and the ways of their life rested more gently upon him. For several seconds the old man waited for Titas's anger to spend itself. Then he said evenly, without blame, "Naya is the elder brother and he must be first." Holding Titas by the hand he led him to the house.

Next morning, when Titas came out to play, some little bit of his anger still seethed within him. He looked at the waves

scornfully in the morning light. He would not play any more in the breakers, he decided, at least not right away. Today if the boys came he would go with them instead and poke around the tepid pools where the grandmothers fished. But now, since no one else was around, he slumped down in the place where his grandfather was accustomed to sit and waited for the old man.

While Titas sat with his back against a tree, a tiny dugout canoe rounded the curve of the beach and drew in to shore. The boy watched without interest. However, when the canoe drove its blunt nose into the sand, Titas recognized this as a craft he had seen before and he saw that it was not a stranger but his grandfather who guided the boat. The old man had not gone to the bazaar after all, as Naya had reported earlier.

The unexpected sight roused Titas and sent him running out into the foam. "Where have you been?" he inquired of his grandfather curiously, dancing up and down to attract attention.

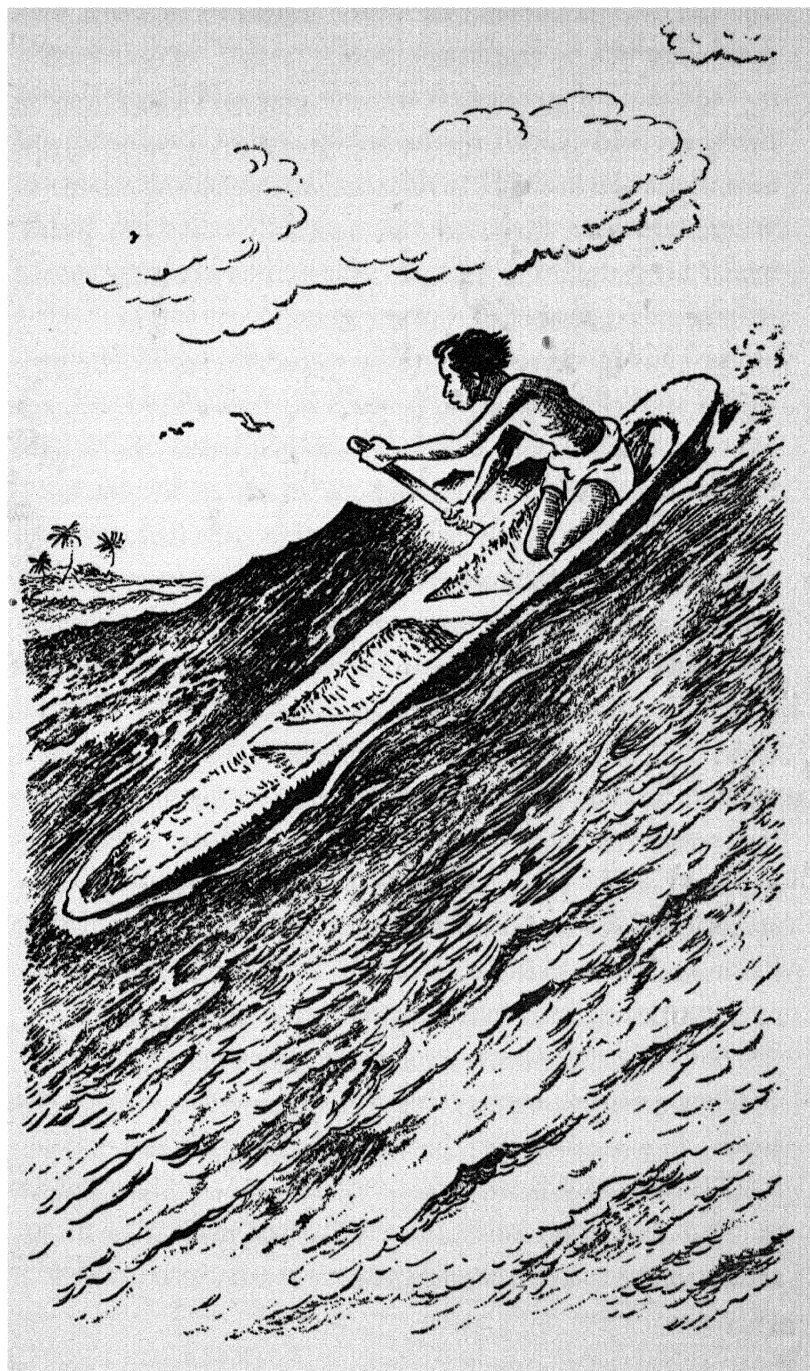
"I have been to see your uncle, the brick carrier, on the Asthamudi Lake, which lies to the far side of our village," the grandfather answered. Then without further explanation he stepped out of the boat and, lifting the paddle, offered it to Titas.

Titas stopped where he was, perplexed.

"Go on," the old man urged his grandson. "Let us see how you will fish from your boat," he said, pointing to the ocean.

"Is it mine?" Titas asked.

"No, it is not yours," the grandfather replied. "It is the women's boat in your uncle's family. But they have no need of it now. They have gone to work in the spice factory. So



you can use it and learn more of the sea than you would with a toy. Try it," he urged once more.

Paddling a dugout canoe was not new to Titas. Often he had gone fishing with the boys in just such a canoe on the lake. But to be in the boat alone and to ride outside the back-water were new. Hesitantly he grasped the wooden paddle which his grandfather held out to him. Nervously he shoved off and pulled himself in over the stern.

As Titas squatted down, ready to paddle, he felt the gentle rise and fall of the waves beneath his craft and his courage returned. Laying his paddle across his knees, he turned back toward shore and lifted both hands to his forehead. "Namaskar," he said, grinning at his grandfather. "Namaskar," the old man returned. Excitedly the boy straightened his craft and headed for the breakers.

A strange school was held that day on the edge of the beach. Titas was the pupil. The waves were the teachers. Time and again the little boat headed out. Titas paddled quietly, waiting for the precise moment to rise and send his craft safely through the force of the breakers. When the moment came, Titas worked furiously. Yet often his slim canoe was lifted as his toy had been and plunged over on its back. Each time this happened, Titas leaped from his craft, recovered his paddle, and, clinging to his boat, swam ashore. There he righted his canoe and went back to try again.

Once in mid-morning Naya came scuffling along the beach, interested to see the new plaything. Titas saw his brother come and let his boat glide into shore. Naya looked at Titas somewhat enviously. "What are you doing?" he asked, trying to appear indifferent.

"Riding the waves," Titas replied, climbing out. "Come on. You try," he suggested, holding the paddle out like a challenge to Naya.

Frightened, Naya backed away. "No," he answered. "I have other work to do." Impressively he lifted his big coconut knife high above his head and let it whiz through the air as he chopped off a make-believe fruit. Then, before the effect of this was lost on Titas, he hurried off to cover his embarrassment. He did not come down to the water again.

During the next few weeks, Titas and his boat were inseparable. Gradually he grew stronger and wiser, so that in the struggle between him and the sea he was most often the winner. Nor did he confine himself only to launching his boat. He dragged old pieces of net along with him into the canoe. He laid the net in the shallows and drew in an occasional fish, so that when he landed, his boat came loaded. Shyly, when no one was watching, he pretended to bargain, using palm nuts for money. Then he sauntered off with the other boys and hung around the benches of the tea shops where the real fishermen came.

The fishing seasons of the Malabar Coast fall into a definite, predictable cycle, and that year when Titas learned to handle a boat was no exception. Throughout the monsoon months the Arabian Sea is so stormy that only large wallams, with crews of more than a dozen men, can go out to fish. Then the work is dangerous, though the rewards are rich. In the autumn and winter months the catch is good and the water is safe. When winter breaks, fish become scarce. By the time April arrives with its burning heat, the seas are still and the nets are empty. In May, when the heat is at its peak, the fishermen will face

even the rampages of a likely tornado to risk a catch. At that time their bodies are lean and the men are weak. The treacherous sea can do its worst. Every year, just before the monsoon, many fishermen are lost in the high surf. The cruel waves seem to lie in wait for the wallams and crush them as cunningly as a hungry tiger will bring down its prey with a single stroke of its paw.

In February and March of that year it appeared to the villagers of Puthenthura that Titas's father did in fact command the "lucky wallam." While the supply of fish dwindled in other boats, his luck held. More than once he brought back fish when others had none, and he had cause to boast of his money while he sipped his tea. On the first scorching day of April his catch, though no better than the others, was not worse.

Then all at once, during the early days of the hottest month, while the relentless sun held everyone and everything in its white-hot grip, the catch failed. The luck left Titas's father's boat. It left the boats of all the villagers of Puthenthura. No one brought back fish. Empty nets were drawn out of the water and dried within a few minutes on the hot boards of the wallams. Nothing sparkled in the mesh or slithered through the holes. With the heat, life went out of the sea.

The days of disappointment were very hard on Titas's father. The money he had saved during the winter months was doled out slowly for rice and tapioca, for fruit and spices. He gave up going to the tea shop, for that had been a luxury and there was no longer any joy in seeing his friends. The family were not hungry, but neither were they as well filled as formerly, and even more meager was the allotment for the

families of the other fishermen. Daily Titas's father saw their thin backs before him in the wallam. All around him there seemed to be hunger and sorrow. There was no longer any sport in his trade.

More and more during these days, the father amused himself with Naya. Titas was forgotten, or nearly so, though he had learned to manage his little canoe as well as an adult and the boys on the beach called him "young captain." When the father came back from fishing, no matter how late or early, he expected to see Naya running to meet him. He talked to his son of the days when Naya would join the crew and he bragged of what they would earn together. As if unable to face the starkness of the present, the father thought, instead, of the future.

The fretful month of May brought storms—not the steady, dependable downpour of the later monsoon but the whirling lash of sudden tornadoes. On that tip of South India the rains come first, and it is as if there they contest for control of all thirsty India. The wind tears at the land. The rain slashes the sky. And after both earth and sky are calm, the waves still bear the force of the storm. Towering higher than the defenseless houses, they advance upon the sand, crashing with a dreadful thunder, tugging earth and roots and turf away in their retreat. So the fishermen wait hopefully, perched like birds along the sand. Twenty feet of pounding surf forms an impenetrable barrier between them and the sea. The captain of each boat sits with his crew around him, waiting for the moment when it seems that they can make a dash for the calmer water offshore. Or, on the other side of the surf, a laden boat waits until it dares to ride in. After minutes or

even hours the moment comes. "Hi!" calls the captain. Within seconds, the boat is shoved into the water. Men heave themselves aboard and paddle for their lives.

One morning after an early storm Titas's father came late to the shore. Thinking it would be useless to risk launching after such a tempest, he had not hurried over his morning meal. When he arrived on the beach he found a group of impatient, disgruntled men there before him. "Why didn't you come before?" they demanded. To his quizzical reply they answered, "There was a chance. In the calm as the storm receded, there was a chance. See, our neighbor's boat is gone." In desperation his crew pointed to the vacant spot on the sand. "He has gone and he will bring back fish. *His* family will eat tonight," they finished spitefully.

For a moment Titas's father looked at his men with defiance, as if to say, "What do you expect of me? How could I have known? I do not have the wisdom of the gods." But he did not speak. Instead, he went to the wallam and with the help of the crew pushed it into the shallows. Then he squatted so close to the water's edge that the folds of his dhoti dripped in the waves. He waited, just as he had waited on other days, but with more determination.

Apart from the fishermen, Titas and his grandfather sat tensely. When Naya came by, asking what the difficulty had been, they beckoned him to a place alongside them. All eyes were on the sea, calculating the force of every wave; for they all knew that today the father had to go.

Therefore, though the waves were still higher than the grandfather would have considered safe, he was not surprised when he saw his son rise and go to the boat. The crew followed. Paddling gently, they kept the boat in position, hold-

ing it for their lucky moment. Then the captain's call rang out and the long, dark wallam was guided into the waves.

With the children and the old man watching anxiously the boat glided out and swiftly passed through the backwash of a spent breaker. Without yielding, it faced the wave yet to come. Staring over their shoulders at that hill of force, the men drove with all their might to pierce it before it should crush them. At another point farther along the beach, the boat which had been launched earlier waited to ride the same swell in. Both crews hoped this would prove to be a safe wave.

For the boat filled with fish, the wave did provide good passage. But for Titas's father and his crew it brought near tragedy. The wave was too high. It lifted the powerful wallam and tossed it over. Like fish jumping through the water, the men leaped clear of the hull and struggled for shore. But when the crew stumbled up out of the shallows, they found that one had not leaped far enough to be free. He had been struck by the edge of the swirling wallam. While the others recovered his gear, the injured man had to stand to one side. There was no chance that the full crew could go to sea again that day.

When their craft had been righted and the wounded man had been sent home, the crew clustered despondently around their captain. What had happened was not out of the ordinary, but it showed the force of the water, and they were less eager to go than they had been. Yet on their leader's face there was no sign of giving in. He smiled at his men for a moment and shook his head, as if to say, "That one *was* a strong one." Then at the far end of the beach he caught sight of the crowd gathered for the fish sale. Immediately he put his shoulder to the end of his boat. "Come," he said. "We shall go."

"How can we go?" his men asked. "We cannot cut the

waves with one of the crew missing." They spoke in surly tones. Not one of them moved to help Titas's father.

The father took his shoulder from the boat and listened. He straightened up and, for a moment, seemed about to relent. But from the little group of spectators beneath the tree a new idea came to him. He called out proudly, "Come on, Naya. It is time you went to sea."

Bewildered, the crew men looked at one another. Then, believing their captain would not risk his son if he felt the sea to be unsafe, they relaxed and jumped for their paddles. A look of horror passed quickly over the face of the grandfather. But he reached down and gave an encouraging shove to Naya, who stood rooted in the sand.

Titas looked fearfully from his father to Naya and back again. Did his father believe Naya would ride the sea in such waves? Titas wondered. Yet there was hardly time for more thought because his father stepped forward and with one of the smiles he reserved for his eldest son he urged, "Come on. Today you shall make this the lucky wallam."

With legs of wood, Naya clambered into the boat. Dumbly he took the paddle. His father's confidence gave him small comfort, for he knew the test was about to come and he would lose that confidence forever. He was held in the grip of cold fear. He was afraid, not only of the loss of his father's pride in him, but of the force of the sea he hated.

The men shoved off. Naya began to paddle, not with the deep, long cuts of the other men but with a jerky motion that sent the water splashing all around. For a few minutes the boat held its place, rocking softly in the foam. The men rowed gently. The movement calmed Naya's fear somewhat and began to give him courage. This was not as bad as he had

supposed it would be. Briefly he imagined himself on the open sea, dragging in the fish, returning covered with glory.

Then the wave came. The men held their boat like an arrow about to be released. "Go, go!" the father yelled and the paddles dug deeply, shooting the boat upward and outward through the spray.

This was the moment which would make the difference. Naya looked at the advancing wave and a fear more terrible than any he had ever known overtook him. Strength drained from every muscle in his body. With all the will of his small self he could not move. Beside him and before him, men paddled with fury. He heard his father's dreadful yell cutting the sound of the sea. He saw the beloved face gnarled with disgust, but he could not help it. His paddle fell. Following a dumb instinct, he scrambled to the edge of the boat and jumped for safety.

•The men came out of the water dripping and angry. This had been their chance for fish and for food. Naya had lost it for them. Resentment showed in the way in which they recovered their gear, in the stoop of their shoulders and the set of their faces as they stood on the beach.

Impatiently his father threw his paddle on the sand and turned to Naya. Shame burned in his eyes. "Where have you been?" he snapped. "The sea is your home. Already you are twelve and should be ready to take your place beside me. Who will captain the wallam? Who will bring home the fish, if you let the sea sweep over you? A fisherman must work. He must be one with the sea. He must be ready when the time is right."

The father's voice rose to a height which brought the neighbors scurrying along the shore. The mother came out of the

hut and stood terrified in the shade of the thatch. "Where have you been? Why have you not learned these things?" the father shouted.

Naya stood submissively before his raging father. No muscle moved. No words came.

Anxiously Titas looked up at his grandfather. In that moment he loved Naya as he had never known he loved him before. "You must be one with the sea," his father had said. Titas knew that feeling. It was part of him. But it was not part of Naya, and that was what made this wrong. He wished he might somehow show Naya how he felt, but he knew no way. Instead, he clutched his grandfather's hand very tightly and whispered, "No, no! Naya can't be part of the sea."

Boldly and with authority, piercing the walls of feeling which surrounded the group on the beach, came the voice of the old man. He dropped Titas's hand and stepped forward. Protectively he went up to Naya and put his hands on his shoulders. Over Naya's frightened head the aged fisherman faced his son.

"Go," he motioned to the boys' father. "But do not try to take this one. He was not made for the sea. You will fish and you will have a good catch. Your sons will be fat but Naya will not be with you."

The father turned and faced the water. All along the beach the boats were ready. News of a good catch had spread throughout the village and every captain was waiting for a safe launching. Around him stood his own men, tired and hungry. His anger spent, but sullen and discouraged, he turned back to the boys' grandfather. "How can we go into the sea?" Titas's father asked hotly.

The old man raised his head and scanned the rough water. Then he turned to the thin form beneath the palm tree. He looked back at the father. "There is another left untried," he said.

"Him?" the father asked in astonishment. "A second son who is still a baby? Haven't we enough ill luck already? Him?" he repeated, this time turning to Titas and looking him up and down, as one might appraise a jug in the bazaar before buying it.

The old man did not raise his voice. He spoke with the confidence which comes to men with the years in India, knowing his advice would be followed. Around him the fishermen and the villagers listened. "Take him. You will have no trouble. He is ten and he is ready. That one was born in the breakers." This was all he said, and after only a moment of hesitation the father obeyed.

• In the waves the slim boat waited. On the shore the people watched. At the place of the wounded fisherman Titas sat, every thought, every muscle ready for the encounter to come.

Beneath the shade on the turf at the edge of the sand stood Naya and his grandfather, hand in hand. The expression on the grandfather's face showed that in his mind he too was taking every stroke of the paddle with Titas, that he felt every rock of the waves as the small one did in the boat.

The captain's cry rang out. The wave came. The onlookers saw ten men and one boy bend to their paddles. The narrow craft lifted under the crest, then slit the water keenly, carving a path for itself. Like a plow in sand it pushed aside the water and went sliding through. On both sides of the barrier tense faces broke into smiles. The wallam was headed for the open sea.

12. Krishna's Birthday Party

Krishna had just one wish. On August fifteenth, when the crowds gathered inside the Red Fort to celebrate India's independence, he wanted to march before them. He wanted to be among those singing the national anthem as the green, white, and gold flag rose above the ancient battlements. That is why he and every other boy and girl in class IV were working so hard at the end of a summer school day. That is why eager hands raced so feverishly back and forth across the copy-books. Each wanted to be the one chosen to go to the celebrations.

Above the crowded benches, fans droned lazily, only slightly stirring the still heat of the classroom. Through the open windows came the sound of many voices, chanting lessons in Hindi. The place steamed with the sweat of busy children packed tightly together. Beneath him, Krishna could feel his starched white shorts stuck fast to the worn bench. Beside him a Sikh boy unwound his hot turban, showing long damp hair knotted on top of his head.

Yet, in spite of the heat, the children kept on working. Sikhs and Parsees, Jains and Muslims, all the religions and

all the peoples of India represented in that classroom were preparing for a special day. Independence was not so old but that some living member of every family remembered its coming. For Indians everywhere, freedom was new and precious. August fifteenth would be marked by splendid festivities.

Krishna's father and uncles had been famous for their part in the long war fought without arms by which India became free. For them, too, Independence Day had acquired added importance when, auspiciously, after the hardships and imprisonments of their struggle were over, Krishna and his country were born on the same day, in 1947. The family had been able to carry a son on the long trek from their former home in the northwest to the capital in Delhi. A new life and their own nation had started together.

Krishna knew the significance of his birth date. At home he saw pictures of his father addressing great crowds in the widely scattered cities of India, talking to them about the future, and from his father's friends he tried to learn the lessons of self-reliance that Gandhiji had taught. In school, he worked hard to place first in his class in his examinations. When he grew up, he intended to be a professor like his father—a scientist as well as a statesman. So it mattered to him more than to any of his classmates that he be allowed to go to the fort. While all those around him wrote in haste, Krishna chewed on the stubby end of his pencil and wondered what, of all he could say, would be worthy of the prize.

"Put away your things and prepare for going home." The metallic voice of the teacher sounded above the busy *scratch, scratch* of the pencils. "Monitors may collect the rulers. Take your essays home with you," she directed her pupils.

The tension of the long school day was broken. Students

raced to put down their last sentences before papers were tucked out of sight. At the end of each row, monitors banged their rulers against the boards impatiently, anxious for their schoolmates to finish. Within a few seconds, desks were to be swept clear of accumulated litter, of books and slates, torn paper and broken erasers. The crowded lines of children pushed and shoved into one another in their eagerness to get things put away.

"Children, children!" the teacher called. "You *must* be quiet!" Momentarily a hush fell over the crowd of squirming children. "Remember to finish your papers by tomorrow so that they can be corrected and copied for the judges. No unfinished paper will be accepted," she announced emphatically.

After the teacher's words, the classroom soon emptied itself. The children started for home. Krishna slung his school-bag over his shoulder and, avoiding his friends, walked briskly along the veranda. At the bicycle rack, he lifted his cycle from the stand and set it firmly on the gravel. But, instead of whizzing off immediately, he purposely wheeled the bicycle into the shade to wait for his sister, Modu.

Krishna knew he had to talk to Modu. If Modu had heard about the contest, she would comprehend his difficulty. Tucked into his bag was the composition paper with its title spelled in careful, even script. "India Looks Ahead," it read. That was all he had been able to write. But Modu was fourteen and seemed very grown-up to Krishna. She was a good student who read in class VI. With the gentle understanding which Indian families encourage between an older sister and her brother, Modu helped in all Krishna's trials. She would help him now.

Modu came out with a line of other girls, laughing and

talking. At sight of her, Krishna whistled shrilly to attract her attention. In answer to his signal, Modu looked around. Seeing Krishna beneath the tree, she broke away from her school friends. Krishna held the cycle rigid for her to get on. Without questioning, Modu settled herself behind her brother, holding her legs well out to the side so that her loose cotton trousers would not catch in the wheels as they turned. Krishna mounted unsteadily. After a final wave from Modu to her friends, they rolled down the shady drive.

Krishna waited just long enough for the tangle of school-children to unwind so that he and Modu were rolling easily along the main road to the university. Then he promptly asked, "Did you write an essay, Modu?"

"Oh, yes," Modu answered. "We've been working on the essays all afternoon."

"Did you finish yours?" Krishna asked immediately.

"Nearly," she replied. "It is a very long one. I don't seem to know where to stop. Have you finished yours?"

Krishna bit his lip nervously. "No, I haven't exactly finished. Perhaps I have some of the same trouble you have. There is so much I want to say that I don't know what to write down."

"I know," Modu sympathized. "I used to be like that when I was in class four. Now I know what to say, but my paper won't be the best." She sighed, as if the outcome of the contest had been decided already in her mind. "Umar will win. Her father is in Parliament and he will help her. But you'll have the best essay in your class, won't you, Krishna?" she inquired hopefully.

Krishna had to turn his cycle quickly in order to avoid a horse-drawn taxi. He delayed answering his sister until the

tonga had safely passed. Then he said, "I'd like to win, but I really can't seem to get started."

Modu's face became serious. "You have to win, Krishna," she said thoughtfully. "Someone in the family has to win, and the celebration will be so fine!"

The girl tossed back her head, switching her black braids over her shoulders. A slight breeze caught the thin scarf she had thrown over her cotton blouse and set it waving behind her. In her imagination, Modu was already part of the crowd at the magnificent Independence Day parade. "Think of it, Krishna," she said. "You would sing before the Prime Minister and you'd be able to see the review of the Mysore regiment. Besides, it will be your birthday!" she exclaimed.

"I know," Krishna said longingly. "I *have* thought of it. But how can I win? That is the question. How?"

Modu thought for a moment. Then, "I have an idea," she said, leaning forward so suddenly that she almost sent the bicycle careening off the road. "You can ask Father, just the way Umar will ask her father. After all, our father knows a lot. He'll be able to get you started."

"Won't Father expect me to write my own essay?" Krishna said, slowing down and turning halfway round in his seat to frown at Modu. His sister's suggestion had surprised him. People wanted him to win, Krishna knew, but he would have to win by his own effort.

"Of course Father won't write it for you," Modu said. "He will only start you off." Teasingly, she nudged Krishna in the back. "Go ahead and see what he says. You'll have your own ideas, too, and Father will feel as proud as a Maharajah to see you walk into the fort on August fifteenth."

Krishna took one hand off the handlebar, letting his bicycle

coast gently, while he considered the matter. Each day, when his father came home, they discussed the boy's schoolwork. It would be easy for Krishna to talk with him about the contest. Yet Krishna liked to report successes to his family; he had not ever brought home a failure. He wondered if he should follow Modu's suggestion.

Finding its way among the automobiles, the people on foot, and the carts and animals which crowd the Delhi streets, the bicycle sped along. Modu was quiet, letting Krishna make up his mind. As he thought, the lines of concentration gradually began to clear from his forehead. For the first time since the teacher had announced the contest, he saw a way out of his quandary. Just before they reached home he said, without looking back at his sister, "I think I might ask him. Father can help to get me started."

When the children dismounted in the tiny courtyard of their house, some boys called to Krishna and asked him to join in a game of cricket. "Okay," he replied, quite himself again and lively as usual. "But I can only play until my father comes home. Then he and I must talk," he finished importantly.

With renewed confidence, Krishna went out onto the playing field to guard his place at the wicket. However, he was anxious for his talk with his father to be over. So he was relieved when he saw the familiar figure come down the cement walk and turn in at the house. Only the sight of a second man, one of his father's frequent visitors, kept the boy from going in immediately. He left the game as he had said he would and, making his way through the garden, Krishna paused near the back door, waiting for his father to call him.

All was bustle and stir in the kitchen which adjoined the

rear entrance of Krishna's home. There his mother was bent over a pan of sputtering fat, frying curry puffs. Modu had been brought from her lessons to serve. Busily, she was gliding back and forth. When she caught sight of Krishna, however, she showed that she had not forgotten what they had discussed. Resting her tray on the low stool where her mother sat when preparing vegetables, she motioned Krishna toward the washroom to scrub his hands and comb his hair.

As soon as Krishna was ready and the tea things were set out, Modu listened politely for an appropriate opening in her father's conversation. When her chance came, she cleared her throat and announced, "Tea is ready." Blushing in her nervousness, she inquired, "Shall I call Krishna?"

Hearing Krishna's name, the father was reminded of his son for the first time since coming home. "Yes, of course," he smiled, pointing to the third cup on the table. "Where is Krishna? What has happened to him?" he asked good-naturedly.

Like a flash, Modu slipped out to fetch her brother. Playfully she called his name. Then, finding him in the hallway, she took him by the shoulders and propelled him to the living-room door. At the threshold Krishna shook her off, and he went in by himself.

"Here is my son," his father said proudly, his deep voice seeming to push back the walls of the tiny living room where he sat with his guest. Slowly Krishna came up to him. "Why do you hang back?" his father asked. "This is Professor Dey. Say namaskar."

Obediently, Krishna gave his namaskar.

"Namaskar. You seem about the size of my son, at home

in Calcutta," the visitor observed. "What class are you in?" he inquired.

"Class four," Krishna replied soberly.

"Why are you so quiet?" his father asked, tickling Krishna in the ribs. "What happened at school today?"

In the presence of the other professor, Krishna did not find it easy to speak. It seemed more than ever unfair to his father to admit he needed help in front of this other man who also had a son his size. Krishna was about to abandon his plea when he caught sight of Modu, lurking in the shadows of the hall. Her fists were doubled into hard knots. She was beating them up and down in the air excitedly, just as she would urge on a favorite player. Spurred on by her enthusiasm, before his kindly father, Krishna's story came pouring out.

He told them about the contest. Everyone in every upper class in Delhi was to write an essay called "India Looks Ahead," he reported. The best essay would be chosen from each class. The winners would parade before the President on Independence Day. They would be a kind of symbol of the nation, he said gravely, repeating what he had heard from the teacher.

The two men listened attentively as he told about the contest. Krishna watched his father anxiously. From his face, Krishna saw that the contest mattered to him too. Whereas Krishna wanted to win for the sake of the prize, his father wanted him to be a leader, to carry on the work of helping his country. Winning the contest would be a beginning of that work. Without knowing what was in their minds, it was the visitor who spoke first. "That is exciting, Krishna," he said pleasantly. "You should win."

"Yes, I can win," Krishna agreed. He swallowed hard, stealing another glance at his father. "There is just one trouble," he confessed. "I don't know what to say."

Professor Dey laughed heartily. Regardless of his son's feelings, Krishna's father could not help laughing too. Outside in the hallway, Krishna saw Modu lift her scarf and cover her face in embarrassment. He reddened, and despite his boyish pride, he felt very close to tears in his dilemma.

"What did you say the title of the essay was, again?" his father asked immediately, lifting Krishna's chin and looking into his eyes.

"'India Looks Ahead,'" Krishna answered. Seeing the deep understanding in his father's face, he went on falteringly, "I thought you would help me."

He should not have spoken. Krishna knew it, but the words were out. His father grew serious, but he kept his gentleness. With the conviction born of his long discipline in the Independence Movement, he said, "The work must be yours, Krishna. In the old days, we did our part. We knew what we wanted. Then, with Gandhiji's help, we found a way to get it." He spoke slowly, anxious that Krishna should understand every word. "You have watched history in the making all around you. Now you have a chance to write the next page. Who would know better what it will say? Haven't you and India been growing up together?"

Krishna nodded, impressed by his father's manner. The two men looked at one another and smiled. Modu chose that moment to come in and fill their teacups. The professors turned to their tea. They took up their previous conversation, leaving Krishna alone. For a moment he stayed by the chair, uncertain whether to go or stay. But when he saw that his

father paid him no further attention, he gulped down his tea and slipped out.

Resolute, Krishna sat on the floor of his bedroom and turned his father's words over and over in his mind. Apart from his shame, most important of all was the thought that his father had not given in to him. "The work must be yours," his father had said: but he had talked, too, as if Krishna would know what to say, because he and India had been learning together. Slowly, his paper laid on the wooden bed before him, Krishna began to write. Ignoring all the things he had seen on other people's papers, he put down simply:

India is not old. She is young. She is only as old as I am and I am twelve on August fifteenth.

Uncertainly the boy looked at what he had written. Somehow, it did not sound like his usual essays. It did not have the same polished phrases. Also, he had intended to write about the greatness of his country, but these sentences ignored her glorious history. Quickly, his pencil moved on.

The past is like a mother. It teaches us what we need to know. Our past has been long and noble. It can be a good teacher.

Krishna enjoyed writing these lines. Like his father's words, they made him feel that he was part of history. With no difficulty, he was able to continue. One page was soon filled and another started.

Krishna had been writing for some time before he became conscious that someone was looking over his shoulder. Glancing up, he saw Modu's laughing face bent over him. By now he was so absorbed in what he was doing that he had not

stopped to consider whether other people would like his essay. At Modu's appearance, however, he wavered. His pencil stopped. Would his sister think this was a good way to begin?

Modu read the paper without stopping. Krishna waited. She said nothing. Instead, his sister drew herself up like a disapproving schoolteacher, tightened her lips, and shook her head.

At first Krishna's heart sank. Then he reread his own lines and his pride returned. He snatched the papers away and hid them behind his back. His face set in hard lines and he said firmly to his sister, "It makes no difference whether you like it or not. It is *mine!*"

Modu burst into gleeful laughter at the success of her trickery. "Silly," she said, teasing her brother. "Did you think for a minute that I wouldn't like it? I do like it. Of course I like it. I think it's wonderful!"

Krishna relaxed and returned his papers to their place. Modu prattled on. "Your essay is different from anyone else's, Krishna. The judges will be impressed, I am sure. You'll win," she proclaimed triumphantly. Giddy with delight, Modu slipped off her sandals and appeared about to dance.

Krishna was happy too. Inside him, hope was again alight. It shone from him just as a wee oil light shines at night and reflects from all the surfaces round about it. But Krishna did not permit himself the same exuberant display as Modu. Instead, he rose and pointed to the door. In a voice of authority, he commanded his sister, "You will leave. I must get back to my work."

Beneath the unshaded lamp, protected by the benign gods whose pictures hung on his wall, Krishna wrote. He thought about all that had happened in his short lifetime and he re-

lived the many conversations he had heard in the little living room when his father and others talked of new ways to solve India's old problems. Also, he remembered the annual journeys the family took to the east, to his mother's village, at harvest time. He saw, from their last journey, the sight of factories rising on the plains, as he had glimpsed them from the train window. The picture was still vivid because of the way his father had spoken at the time. Remembering this, Krishna put down:

Our nation could not do everything at once. We have had to do a little at a time. We have cared for the needs of our own people first. Before we could wear fine clothes, our villagers have had to be fed.

Later in the evening, when the cricket game was over and the gates had been closed for the night, Krishna's mother came in. She urged him to stop for supper. "No, no," he insisted. "I am too busy. My essay has to be finished tonight." Admiring his zeal, his mother set a plate of food by his side and left him alone.

It was midnight when Krishna finished. This time he was sure his paper said what he thought it should say. It was written from the things he knew and, as Modu had said, it was different from any of the others. He thought it might win. Next morning, when the monitors came to collect it, he could wave his essay in the air as hopefully as any of his classmates.

For weeks after that the judges deliberated, while the children speculated as to who might win the contest. Surrounded by his friends and admirers, Krishna listened. The name of Krishna's best friend, Suryajit Das, was sometimes mentioned, but Krishna did not think Suryajit would win. Suryajit was a good debater, he knew, but he did not write

very good essays. Krishna's own name was often suggested as a possible winner, too. Also, the children compared what they had written. The other essays all seemed, like examinations, summaries of what the students had learned in school. Krishna tried not to enter into the conversations. He kept his secret and his hope.

Just before recess, on a bright morning during the first week of August, the monotony of a geography lesson was broken by the sudden appearance of the principal in class IV. He was accompanied by a bespectacled gentleman whom the children had seen passing the windows a half hour earlier. It occurred to many that this man had come to announce the winners of the contest. Slyly the children glanced at one another. Then, with a rattle of desks and benches, they leaped to their feet. Along with their surprised and flustered teacher, they greeted their guest.

The principal stepped onto the teacher's platform and faced the children. Without ceremony he announced, "Our distinguished visitor has come to inform us about the essay contest."

One could have heard a speck of dust fall, so silent was the classroom. Stiffly the children stood at attention.

The visitor stepped up beside the principal and spoke to the boys and girls. "First of all, I wish to congratulate all of you," he said warmly. "You have all worked hard, so hard that you have made the work of the judges very difficult. We are all proud of the children who have worked so hard." His genial praise softened the formal atmosphere in the classroom. The children smiled hopefully at one another.

"Now I have the honor to inform you," the visitor continued, "that—" Here he stopped and consulted the paper

which he held in his hand. Filled with anticipation, the children waited. "—that," the precise voice went on, "Suryajit Das will represent your class on Independence Day."

Krishna was crushed. He looked from his teacher to his classmates. Their longing had been to no avail. They felt as sad as he. All but Suryajit had worked in vain.

The voice of the teacher broke the silence which was produced by the announcement. "Clap, children," she directed. Without enthusiasm, the disappointed children clapped. But, in the front of the room, at the corner of the first bench, Krishna saw the bright face of Suryajit. Then Krishna could not help himself. He smiled too, and clapped loudly for his friend.

The visitor acknowledged the applause, at the same time consulting his papers once again. He had not finished. The principal raised his hand and the clapping tapered off.

"Is there a boy named Krishna in this room?" the gentleman began, scanning his list for the exact name.

Krishna's classmates gasped in surprise. "Yes, sir," Krishna stammered.

"We would like to see you in the office," the visitor informed him. Courteously, the principal and his guest took leave of the teacher, then turned and went out.

Every pair of eyes in class IV turned on Krishna. Not knowing whether to feel honor or shame, he walked past the crowded benches and through the door. Why had they called out his name, he wondered. What did they want to say to him that they could not have said in the classroom?

At a respectful distance, Krishna followed the two men to the office. Classes were being dismissed for recess. Along the veranda he had to pass through lines of curious, staring

faces. All who saw him naturally assumed he was going to be punished. Krishna tried to hold his shoulders erect, but the questioning looks and whispers were hard to tolerate. Before the door of the principal's office, he at last encountered the girls from class VI. When Modu recognized her brother's figure behind the two men, her dark eyes opened wide and her face flushed. Blindly Krishna parted the curtains and hastened into the privacy of the office.

Before the large wooden desk with its highly polished brass decorations, Krishna stood attentively. The two men took their seats. The principal sat upright and gazed sternly, like a portrait of a principal, at his pupil. The visitor, however, leaned forward over the desk and his brown eyes danced behind his spectacles.

"We have something of great importance to tell you," he said.

"Yes, sir," Krishna answered. Below his shorts, he could feel his hot knees tremble; they chattered together with as much force as they would on the coldest day of a Delhi winter.

"Is it true that you are the son of our famous leader from the Punjab?" the man asked.

"Yes," Krishna answered.

"The judges are much taken with what you have written. It is also good that you should have been born on Independence Day. We shall send a letter to your parents," the visitor said. Here he stopped to wipe his glasses, as if the pause would lend weight to what he was about to say. Krishna took a deep breath and held it, not daring to let it out.

"A great honor is about to be conferred upon you," the visitor beamed. The principal agreed. Softly, Krishna let out his breath. "We have not before read such an essay from one

so young. You have your father's gifts," the man went on. "The Parliamentary Committee wishes to invite you to deliver your speech in the Red Fort on Independence Day."

Krishna drew himself up to the full height of his aristocratic ancestors. He went up and shook hands with the visitor. Elated, he shook hands with the principal also. "Thank you. Thank you, sir," he said over and over and backed toward the door.

"We shall all expect you to give a 'worthy performance,'" the visitor said in parting.

Outside, hidden by the curtain, braced against a pillar of the veranda, Modu was waiting. The instant Krishna stepped over the threshold she dashed up to him. "What happened? What did he say?" she panted. "Tell me!"

"I'm going to the fort on Independence Day," Krishna told her. "They like my essay. I have to give it as a speech."

Captivated, Modu listened. When the full meaning of his words was clear to her, it was only the propriety of the school which kept her from leaping into the air with joy. She clasped her hands before her, and she and Krishna rejoiced together.

"I can go to the fort, after all. I'll stand before the loudspeakers, Modu, right beside the President," Krishna said, hardly believing the wonderful news.

"Oh, Krishna, what a beautiful birthday party!" Modu exclaimed admiringly.

After a few moments the children became quiet. Returning to her schoolgirl demeanor, Modu said, "Mother and Father, Krishna—they will be so happy. This is so fine."

"I know," Krishna said, enjoying the thought. "Father can be proud. I wrote the essay myself."

In the brief weeks before August fifteenth, Krishna was the object of all the family's attentions, and the forthcoming event was the most important thing in their lives. At home, in front of the mirror, Krishna practiced his speech. Every day after school he said it over and over until he had learned it by heart. Modu coached him. Outside in the garden his playmates listened. At school the principal rehearsed him. Back home once again his father was audience for him.

On the morning of Independence Day, Krishna returned to the mirror, but this time for a different purpose. With uncles and aunts chattering like crows in the background, while cousins sat in respectful silence before him, he dressed for the day. He pulled on tight-fitting pants and a white silk coat. He donned the white homespun cap his father had worn in the days before Independence. Last of all, Modu coŷiy tucked into his buttonhole a red rosebud just like the one the Prime Minister would wear, and he was ready.

Inside the fort, Krishna saw, as he had seen in his mind's eye on that sultry afternoon in the classroom, weeks before, the crowd of schoolchildren. Somewhere, mingled in the mass of a thousand faces was the official representative of class IV, Suryajit Das. But Krishna was not among them. Instead, he was high on the platform with the distinguished visitors. Wedged between the Prime Minister and the President was his garlanded figure, India's miniature spokesman.

From his honored place, Krishna saw, too, how the vast crowd rose and stood humbly while Rajendra Prasad unfurled their flag against the sun-filled sky. Lining the field were the handsome regiments from all the states of India, each in their distinctive uniforms, held tightly at attention. The walls of the old fort, scene of so many battles, resounded to the sound

of cannon fire once again. This time, however, the guns held no fear for anyone. Instead, they saluted the day which marked the end of bloodshed for India. Then, rising from the depths of the colorful pageant, as if from the heart of India itself, came the voices of the children singing the national anthem. Devotion showed on every sensitive face as they sang. The powerful words of their song penetrated the fortress walls and spread to the city and the plains beyond.

Before the children finished, Mr. Nehru walked to the edge of the platform and looked down into their upturned faces. At the end of their singing, with the spontaneous generosity which his people had come to expect of this leader, he welcomed the boys and girls, saying, "It is with you that I especially wish to visit." Regardless of the crowds waiting beyond, with the same care he had given to his own small daughter while statesmen waited in the days before Independence, Mr. Nehru spoke about the importance of youth and growing.

The children watched. The children listened. Krishna listened, too, feeling immense pride at being so close to the great man. But as he heard his leader's sentences Krishna ceased to feel stiff and small among the people on the platform. Like Krishna's father, Mr. Nehru spoke with a twinkle. Like his father, too, Krishna realized, the Prime Minister did not consider the boys and girls insignificant. He talked to them with respect, as people preparing to do a great work.

"I want for you a world without hatred, without threat of weapons, a life of plenty," the Prime Minister said, concluding his visit with the children. Then he returned to the microphones and talked to the grown-ups in his audience about what lay ahead for India and those things which all

must consider in order to make the right choices for their country.

When the speaker finished, there was no clapping and there was no hurrahs. There was silence. As was their custom on August fifteenth, both speaker and audience paused for a moment to remember the little man whose life had given them this day. Sensing the importance of this time, Krishna sat up very prim and straight. But his mind would not stay on Gandhiji. With anticipation, he looked out over the crowd, knowing that his turn to speak would come next.

With a smile, Mr. Nehru turned. Like a kindly grandfather, Rajendra Prasad patted Krishna on the shoulder to give him courage. Mr. Nehru offered his hand to help the boy up the steps so that he could reach the loudspeaker. After a few words of official introduction, the Prime Minister went back to his seat. With his heart beating wildly beneath his silk coat, Krishna faced his people.

"India is not old. She is young," the boy began stoutly. Suddenly, his thin voice was magnified by the loudspeakers and came crashing back at him from all sides. But the training of weeks at home before the mirror stood him in good stead. He went on.

The audience was attentive. It was not the presentation that impressed them; it was Krishna's words, taken from his own experience, inspired by the adventure of Independence. Below him sat an anxious people. Behind him were men used to every kind of political utterance. But his sincerity appealed to both and they leaned forward, unwilling to miss a sound.

"We cannot all be leaders. We cannot all be famous," Krishna explained. "But we have had a wise teacher and we must try to live by his example. It takes courage to be inde-

pendent, just as it takes courage for a boy to grow and be a man."

Here Krishna paused and smiled, looking down at his audience. He wondered if the people cared about what he was saying. Many thousands of eyes watched. Many thousands of ears listened, hearing these things spoken for the first time by a child born in the new India. Throughout the crowd, the older people swayed in agreement. Somewhere in the wide audience, Krishna's father heard and his heart swelled. Squeezed in among her schoolmates, Modu heard too and felt as if she were about to burst with pride.

"But our neighbors in the world are our own brothers and sisters," Krishna went on. "We speak to them like members of our own family."

Again Krishna stopped, nearly worn out from the excitement and the exertion. He did not see the approving smile which sparkled on the face of the Prime Minister. He did not know that now, like his father and all those who spoke in the mud huts, on the dusty roads of villages, in prisons and in parliaments, beckoning the country to freedom, he used phrases which lay unexpressed in the minds of his countrymen. One, speaking for many millions, Krishna's staunch voice concluded in the words of all India's children. "We say, 'Learn to love us as you love your own people. Hate the bad in us. Encourage the good. Help us to change. Believe we can be great.'"

Glossary

These words are given as they would sound if they were spoken in Hindi, though they would look quite different if they were printed in Hindi characters. They have been used even in stories about places where a local language might be spoken instead, because they are part of the national language which all Indian people will speak some day.

abt: eight

al-po'-na: a ceremonial design, made with rice paste, usually painted before a shrine

ba-boo'-chur: "stealing the daughter-in-law," a game which village children play

Brab'-man: a person of the highest caste

bundh: a wall of packed earth which separates one rice bed from another

caste: a group of people set apart from others because of what they do or what they believe

cha-lao': "Get moving!"

Cha'-mar: the name of the caste of people who sell leather

char: four

char'-kha: a hand spinning wheel

char'-poy: a bed made from a wooden frame laced with rope

chay: six

chow'-ki-dar: a village policeman

dal: thick bean soup, eaten almost daily

dhar'-am-sa-la: the rest house traditionally kept for visitors in a village

dho'-ti: a cloth wound like trousers around the body; worn by men

do: two

ek: one

gaon'-ti-a: a village headman

gram pan-chay'-at: the village council of five members

gram sa'-thi: "friend of the village," a village worker

gur: raw sugar syrup

han: yes

Ha'-ri-jan: the name of the caste of people who were formerly considered untouchable, renamed "Children of God" by Gandhi

bat: the village market, held once or twice a week

boo'-kah: a smoking pipe, in which the smoke is drawn through water

jao: "Go!"

Kar'-ti-ka: the name of the month corresponding approximately to our month of November

kell: the land reserved for workers' gardens on a tea plantation

man'-tra: a song prayer

mo'-ti: an old form of taxation used in some villages, whereby people give rice instead of money

na-mas'-kar: the usual greeting made by placing the palms of the hands together and bowing slightly

na'-ya pai'-sa: Indian coin worth less than a penny, 100 naya paisa making one rupee

pan: a leaf chewed with spices

panch: five

par-i-ya-ha'-ri: the hill people

pow'-rah: a short-handled hoe, used by both men and women for work in the fields

pu'-ja: a festival

ru-pee': denomination of Indian money worth about twenty cents

sad'-hu: a man who has renounced caste and becomes a "holy man"
sa'-ri: a long piece of cloth worn draped around a woman's body and over her shoulder

sat: seven

seer: a measure of weight equal to two pounds

Sri: a term of polite respect, like "Mr.," used for a man

swa-raj': self-government

tak'-li: a small hand spindle made of metal or wood

tin: three

tul'si: a sacred tree planted in each compound to protect and bless the home

wall'-am: the long, thin boat used on the Arabian Sea by the fishermen of South India

za'-min-dar: a landowner who rents land to villagers—formerly they collected taxes as well

