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To the memory of
a very dear friend
Kittu R Puri

INTRODUCTION

The financial expert's office was under a banyan tree, his office furniture an old tin box. From the first pages of Mr Narayan's new novel we are back in the town of Malgudi with which for nearly twenty years we have been as familiar as with our own birthplace. We know, like the streets of childhood, Malgudi's outskirts: the vendor of toothpaste, Lawley Extension with its superior villas, the Royal Hairdressing Saloon, the river, the railway. We expect at any moment to see the Bachelor of Arts waving a long farewell to a friend from the platform; small Swami wrapped in his adventurous dreams tramping down Water Lord; Mr Sampath at the door of his dubious film studio. It is as if through these friendships we have been able to meet all these men—and rather dull fellows—characters. Margayya, the financial expert himself, who graduates from the banyan tree to publishing and back to more elaborate and more crooked bankings (but I never knew all his contradictions), Dr Pal, journalist, entrepreneur and author, and Margayya's son Balu whose progress from simple childhood to spoilt frustrated manhood is perhaps the saddest study Mr Narayan has written.

insult a goddess The caste of a great-grandfather is still of great importance. Margayya, astute about mortgages consumed by the modern desire for wealth and motor-cars yet consults the priest of the Goddess Lakshmi and finds himself seeking a red lotus to pound up in the milk drawn from a smoke-coloured cow (the 40 days of prayer have results he becomes the owner of a pornographic manuscript called first *Bed Life or The Science of Marital Happiness* but afterwards, through the caution of the printer *Domestic Harmony*)

Margayya—the sad ambitious absurd financial expert—is perhaps the most engaging of all Mr Narayans characters In his ambitions for his boy his huge dreams his unintended villainies and his small vanities his domestic tenderness he has the hidden poetry and the unrecognised pathos we so often find in Tchechov's characters who on the last page vanish into life 'He knew that he had a scheme somewhere at the back of his mind a scheme which would place him among the elect in society which would make people flock to him and look to him for guidance advice and management. He could not yet say what the scheme would be, but he sensed its presence he felt he ought to wait on that inspiration with reverence and watchfulness

Whom next shall I meet in Malgudi? That is the thought that comes to me when I close a novel of Mr Narayan s I don t wait for another novel. I wait to go out of my door into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema the haircutting saloon, a stranger who will greet me I know with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open a door on to yet another human existence.

GRAHAM GREENE

PART ONE

From time immemorial people seemed to have been calling him 'Marpayya'. No one knew, except Ramalakshmi and maybe Kuthra who were only dimly recollected by a few even in his ancestral village that he had been named after the enchanted god Kuthra. Everyone called him Marpayya and thought that he had been called so at his name ceremony. He himself was forced to recall his original name. It had gradually given in to the habit of simply his name Marpayya even in legal documents. And what did it mean? It was purely derivative. Mara meant The Way and 'Anna' was an honorific suffix. Taken together it referred to one who showed the way. He showed the way out to those in financial trouble. And in all the villages that lay within a hundred mile radius of Mallapuram there was no one who could honestly deny that he was in financial difficulty. The emergence of Marpayya was an unexpected and fortuitous piece of luck for all operators of rural [illegible] will be best understood if we watch him in his [illegible] little more closely.

in whose shade Margayya sat and transacted his business There was always a semi-circle of peasants sitting round him and by their attitude and expression one might easily guess that they were supplicants Margayya, though very much their junior (he was just forty two) commanded the respect of those who sat before him. He was to them a wizard who enabled them to draw unlimited loans from the co-operative bank. If the purpose of the co-operative movement was the promotion of thrift and the elimination of middlemen, those two were just the objects that were defeated here under the banyan tree Margayya didn't believe in advocating thrift his living depended upon helping people to take loans from the bank opposite and from each other

His tin box, a grey discoloured knobby affair which was small enough to be carried under his arm contained practically his entire equipment a bottle of ink, a pen and a blotter a small register whose pages carried an assortment of names and figures and above all—the most important item—loan application forms of the co-operative bank. These last named were his greatest asset in life and half his time was occupied in acquiring them He had his own agency at work to provide him with these forms When a customer came the very first question Margayya asked was Have you secured the application form?

No

Then go into that building and bring one—try and get one or two spare forms as well It was not always possible to secure more than one form, for the clerks there were very strict and perverse. They had no special reason to decline to give as many forms as were required except the impulse to refuse anything that is persistently asked for All the same Margayya managed to gather quite a lot of forms and kept them handy They were taken out for use on special occasions Sometimes a villager arrived who did not have a form and who could not succeed in acquiring one by asking for it in the bank. On such occasions Margayya charged a fee for the blank form itself and then another for filling in the relevant details

The clerks of the bank had their own methods of worrying the villagers A villager who wanted to know his account had to ask for it at the counter and invariably the accounts clerk snapped back, 'Where is your pass book?' A pass book was a thing the villager could never keep his hand on. If it was not out of sight it was certain to be out of date. This placed the villager fully at the mercy of the clerk, who would say 'You will have to wait till I

get through all the work I have now on hand I'm not being paid to look after only your business here' And then the peasant would have to hang about for a day or two before getting an answer to his question, which would only be after placating the clerk with an offering in cash or kind

It was under such circumstances that Margayya's help proved invaluable He kept more or less parallel accounts of at least fifty of the members of the bank. What its red tape obstructed, he cleared up by his own contrivance He carried most of the figures in his head He had only to sight a customer (for instance Mallanna of Koppal, as it now happened to be) to say at once 'Oh! you have come back for a new loan, I suppose If you pay seventy five rupees more, you can again take three hundred rupees within a week! The bye-law allows a new loan when fifty per cent is paid up'

'How can I burden myself with a further loan of three hundred, Margayya? It's unthinkable.'

Now would begin all the persuasiveness that was Margayya's stock-in trade He asked point blank, What difference is it going to make? Are you not already paying a monthly instalment of seventeen rupees eight annas? Are you or are you not?

Yes I'm paying God knows how much I have to— —

'I don't want all that,' Margayya said, cutting him short I am not concerned with all that—how you pay or what you do You may perhaps pledge your life or your wife's sarees It is none of my concern all that I want to know is whether you are paying an instalment now or not.'

'Yes master, I do pay'

'You will continue to pay the same thing, that is all Call me a dog if they ask you for even one anna more You fool, don't you see the difference? You pay seventeen rupees eight annas now for nothing, but under my present plan you will pay the same seventeen rupees eight annas but with another three hundred rupees in your purse Don't you see the difference?

But what's the use of three hundred rupees, master?

'Oh! I see, you don't see a use for it All right don't come to me again I have no use for nincompoops like you You are the sort of fellow who won't— — He elaborated a bawdy joke about him and his capacity, which made the atmosphere under the tree genial all round The other villagers sitting around laughed But Margayya assumed a stern look, and pretended to pass on to the next question in hand He sat perusing over some papers with

his spectacles uneasily poised over his nose. Those spectacles were a recent acquisition the first indication that he was on the wrong side of forty He resisted them as long as he could—he hated the idea of growing old but long-sight' does not wait for approval or welcome. You cannot hoodwink yourself or anyone else too long about it—the strain of holding a piece of paper at arm s length while reading stretches the nerves of the forearm and invites comments from others Margayya s wife laughed aloud one day and asked Why don t you buy a pair of glasses like other young men of your age? Otherwise you will sprain your hand. He acted upon this advice and obtained a pair of glasses mounted in silver from the V N Stores in the Market He and the proprietor of the shop had been playmates once and Margayya took the glasses on trial and forgot to go that way again He was accosted about it on the road occasionally by the rotund optician who was snubbed by Margayya Haven t you the elementary courtesy to know the time and place for such reminders?'

Sorry sorry the other hastened to apologize I didn t intend to hurt or insult you

'What greater insult can a man face than this sort of thing? What will an onlooker think? I am busy from morning to night —no time even for a cup of coffee in the afternoon! All right it doesn t matter Will you send someone to my house? I m not able to use those glasses either I wanted to come and exchange them if possible but —— it trailed off into indefiniteness and the optician went away once again and soon ceased to bother about it It was one of his many bad debts and very soon he changed his commodity gradually his show-case began to display powder puffs scents chocolate bars—and the silver rimmed glasses sat securely on Margayya s nose

He now took off his spectacles and folded the sides as if disposing once and for all of the problem of Mallanna He looked away at a man on his right and remarked You may have to wait for a week more before I can take up your affair

Brother this is urgent my daughter's marriage is coming off next month.

'Your daughter's marriage! I have to find you the money for it b t the moment my service is done you will forget me You will not need your Margayya any more?' The other made several deprecating noises as a protestation of his loyalty He was a villager called Kanda who had come walking from his village

fifteen miles away He owned about twenty acres of land and a house and cattle, but all of it was tied up in mortgages—most through Margayya's advice and assistance. He was a gambler and drank heavily, and he always asked for money on the pretext of having to marry his daughters, of whom he had a good number Margayya preferred not to know what happened to all the money, but helped him to borrow as much as he wanted. 'The only course now left is for you to take a joint-loan, but the difficulty will be to find someone as a partner' He looked round at the gathering before him and asked, 'All of you are members of the Co-operative Society Can t someone help a fellow-creature?' Most of them shook their heads One of them remarked, 'How can you ask for our joint-signature? It's risky to do it even for one s own brother'

'It's most risky between brothers,' added Margayya. 'But I'm not suggesting it for brothers now I am only suggesting it between human beings' They all laughed and understood that he was referring to an elder brother of his with whom he was known to be on throat-cutting terms He prepared to deliver a speech 'Here is a great man, a big man, you cannot find a more important man round about Somanur He has lands, cattle, yes, he s a big man in every way No doubt, he has certain habits no use shutting our eyes to it but I guarantee he will get over them. He must have a joint loan because he needs at least five hundred rupees immediately to see him through his daughter s marriage. You know how it is with the dowry system—— Everybody made a sympathetic noise and shook their heads 'Very bad, very bad. Why should we criticize what our ancestors have brought into existence?' someone asked

'Why not? another protested

'Some people are ruined by the dowry'

'Why do you say some people?' Margayya asked. Why am I here? Three daughters were born to my father Five cart loads of paddy came to us every half year, from the fields We just heaped them up on the floor of the hall, we had five halls to our house, but where has it all gone? To the three daughters By the time my father found husbands for them there was nothing left for us to eat at home!'

'But is it not said that a man who begets a son is blessed in three lives, because he gives away the greatest treasure on earth? said someone.

'And how much more blessed is he that gives away three

ters? He is blessed no doubt but he also becomes a bankrupt Margayya said

The talk thus went on and on round and round always touch ing practical politics again at some point or other Margayya put his spectacles on looked fixedly at Mallanna and said Come and sit near me The villager moved up Margayya told the gathering, 'We have to talk privately And they all looked away and pretended not to hear although all their attention was concen trated on the whispering that now started between the two Margayya said It's going to be impossible for Kanda to get a joint loan but he ought to be ready to accept whatever is available. I know you can help him and help yourself—you will lose nothing In fact you will gain a little interest You will clear half your present loan by paying seventy five rupees and apply for a fresh one Since you don t want it give it to Kanda He will pay you seven and a half per cent You give the four and a half per cent to that father in law (Margayya always referred to the Co-operative Bank with a fresh sobriquet) and take the three per cent yourself He will pay back the instalments to you I will collect and give them to you Mallanna took time to grasp all the intricacies of this proposition and then asked Suppose he doesn t? Margayya looked horrified at this doubt. What is there to be afraid of when I am here?' At this one of the men who were supposed to be out of earshot remarked Ah what is possible in this world without mutual trust?' Margayya added Listen to him He knows the world

The result of all this talk was that Mallanna agreed to the pro-posal Margayya grew busy filling up a loan application form with all the details of Mallanna s heritage etc He read it out aloud seized hold of Mallanna s left thumb pressed it on a small ink pad he carried in his box and pressed it again on the applica tion form and endorsed it He took out of the box seventy five rupees in cash and handed them to Mallanna with 'Why should I trust you with this without a scrap of paper? Now credit this to your account and halve your loan and then present that applica-tion

If they refuse to take it?

Why should they refuse? They have got to accept it You are a shareholder and they have got to accept your application. It's not their grandfather's money that they are giving you but your own. By-law—— He quoted the bye-law and encourag ed by it the other got up and moved on.

It is impossible to describe more clearly than this Margayya's activity under the tree. He advanced a little loan (for interest) so that the little loan might wedge out another loan from the Co-operative Bank, which in its turn was passed on to someone in need for a higher interest. Margayya kept himself as the centre of all the complex transaction, and made all the parties concerned pay him for his services, the bank opposite him being involved in it willy-nilly. It was as strenuous a job as any other in the town and he felt that he deserved the difficult income he ground out of a couple of hundred rupees in his box, sitting there morning till evening. When the evening sun hit him on the nape of the neck he pulled down the lid of his box and locked it up, and his gathering understood that the financial wizard was closing his office for the day.

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Margayya deposited the box under a bench in the front room of his house. His little son immediately came running out from the Kitchen with a shout *Appa!*—— and gripped his hand, asking 'What have you brought today?' Margayya hoisted him up on his shoulder. 'Well, tomorrow, I will buy you a new engine, a small engine.' The child was pleased to hear it. He asked, 'How small will the engine be? Will it be so tiny?' He indicated with his thumb and first finger a minute size. 'All right,' said Margayya and put him down. This was almost a daily ritual. The boy revelled in visions of miniature articles—a tiny engine, tiny cows, tiny table, tiny everything, of the maximum size of a mustard seed. Margayya put him down and briskly removed his upper cloth and shirt, picked up a towel that was hanging from a nail on the wall, and moved to the backyard. Beyond a small clump of banana trees, which waved their huge fan-like leaves in the darkness, there was a single well of crumbling masonry, with a pulley over its cross-bar. Margayya paused for a moment to admire the starry sky. Down below at his feet the earth was damp and marshy. All the drain water of two houses flowed into the banana beds. It was a common backyard for his house and the one next door, which was his brother's. It was really a single house, but a partition wall divided it into two from the street to the backyard.

No. 14 D, Vinayak Street had been a famous land mark, for it was the earliest house to be built in that area. Margayya's father was considered a hero for settling there in a lonely place where there was supposed to be no security for life or property. More-

over it was built on the fringe of a cremation ground and often the glow of a burning pyre lit up its walls After the death of the old man the brothers fell out their wives fell out and their children fell out. They could not tolerate the idea of even breathing the same air or being enclosed by the same walls They got involved in litigation and partitioned everything that their father had left Everything that could be cut in two with an axe or scissors or a knife was divided between them and the other things were catalogued numbered and then shared out But one thing that could neither be numbered nor cut up was the backyard of the house with its single well They could do nothing about it It fell to Margayya's share and he would willingly have seen his brother's family perish without water by closing it to them, but public opinion prevented the exercise of his right People insisted that the well should remain common property and so the dividing wall came up to it and stopped there, the well acting as a blockade between the two brothers but accessible from either side

Now Margayya looked about for the small brass pot He could not see it anywhere.

Hey little man! he called out 'where is the well pot?' He liked to call his son out constantly When he came home, he could not bear to be kept away from him even for a moment. He felt uneasy and irritated when the child did not answer his call He saw the youngster stooping over the lamp trying to thrust a piece of paper into the chimney He watched him from the doorway He suppressed the inclination to call him away and warn him. The child thrust a piece of paper into the lamp and when it burned brightly he recoiled at the sudden spurt of fire. But when it blackened and burnt out he drew near the lamp again, gingerly putting his finger near the metal plate on the top Before Margayya could stop him he had touched it He let out a shriek. Margayya was beside him in a moment. His shriek brought in Margayya's wife, who had gone to a neighbouring shop She came rushing into the house with cries of What is it? What is it? What has happened?' Margayya felt embarrassed, like a man caught shirking a duty He told his wife curtly 'Why do you shout so much, as if a great calamity had befallen this household—so that your sister in law in the neighbourhood may think how active we are, I suppose?'

Sister-in-law—how proud you are of your relatives!' Her further remarks could not be continued because of the howling set up by the child whose burnt finger still remained unattended At

this the mother snatched him up from her husband s arms, and hugged him close to her, hurting him more, whereupon he shouted in a new key Margayya tried to tear him out of his wife's arms, crying 'Quick, get that ointment. Where is it? You can keep nothing in its place.'

You need not shout!' the wife answered, running about and rummaging in the cupboard She grumbled 'You can't look after him even for a second without letting him hurt himself'

'You need not get hysterical about it, gentle lady, I had gone for a moment to the well'

'Everyone gets tap-water in this town We alone—— she began, attacking on a new front.

All right, all right,' he said, curbing her, and turning his attention to the finger 'You must never, never go near fire again, do you understand?'

'Will you buy me a little elephant tomorrow?' the child asked, his cheeks still wet with tears By now they had discovered a little wooden crucible containing some black ointment in the cupboard, hidden behind a small basket containing loose cotton (which Margayya's wife twisted into wicks for the lamp in God s niche) She applied the ointment to the injured finger, and set the child roaring in a higher key This time he said I want a big peppermint.'

At night when the lights were put out and the sounds of Vinayaka Street had quietened, Margayya said to his wife, lying on the other side of their sleeping child 'Do you know—poor boy! I could have prevented Balu from hurting himself I just stood there and watched I wanted to see what he would do alone by himself' His wife made a noise of deprecation 'It is as I suspected You were at the bottom of the whole trouble I dont' know I don't know that boy is terribly mischievous and you are you are ' She could not find the right word for it. Her instinct was full of foreboding and she left the sentence unfinished After a long pause she added It s impossible to manage him during the afternoon. He constantly runs out of the house into the street I don t have a moment s peace or rest.'

'Don't get cantankerous about such a small child,' said Margayya, who disliked all these adverse remarks about his son It seemed to him such a pity that that small bundle of man curled beside him like a tiny pillow should be so talked about His

wife retorted 'Yes I wish you could stay at home and look after him instead of coming in the evening and dandling him for a moment after he has exhausted all his tricks

'Yes gladly provided you agree to go out and arrange loans for all those village idiots

The child levied an exacting penalty on his parents the next day for the little patch of burn on his finger He held his finger upright and would not let anyone come near him. He refused to be put into a new shirt, refused food refused to walk and insisted on being carried about by his mother or father Margayya examined the hurt finger and said It looks all right there seems to be nothing wrong there.

'Don t say so screamed the boy in his own childish slang 'I'm hurt. I want a peppermint. Margayya was engaged all the morning in nursing his finger and plying him with peppermints His wife remarked He ll be ill with peppermints before you are done with him.

'Why don t you look after him, then ? he asked.

I won t go to mother screamed the boy I will be with you

Margayya had some odd jobs to do while at home in the mornings. He went to the nearby Urban Stores and bought sugar or butter he cut up the firewood into smaller sizes if his wife complained about it, or he opened his tin box and refreshed his memory by poring over the pages of his red bound account book. But today the boy would not let him do anything except fuss over him.

The child kept Margayya at home for over an hour beyond his usual time. He could leave for the Co-operative Bank only at midday stealing out when, oblivious of his surroundings the little fellow's attention was engaged in splashing about a bucket of water in the backyard. When the water was exhausted he looked all round and let out such an angry shout for his father that the people on the other side of the wall remarked to each other 'This is the worst of begetting sons late in life! They pet them and spoil them and make them little monsters. The lady on the other side of the wall could well say this because she was the mother of ten.

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Margayya looked up as a shadow fell on his note-book. He saw a uniformed servant standing before him. It was Arul Doss the head peon of the Co-operative Bank an old Christian who had

grown up with the institution. He had wrinkles round his eyes, and a white moustache and mild eyes Margayya looked up at him and wondered what to do—whether to treat him as a hostile visitor or as a friend Instinctively he recoiled from anyone coming out of that building, where he knew he was being viewed as a public enemy He hesitated for a moment, then looked up silently at the figure before him 'Sit down, won t you, Arul Doss?' Arul Doss shot a glance over his shoulder at the office.

'He will not like it if he sees me dallying here. He, I mean the Secretary, asks you to come——' said Arul

Me!' Margayya could hardly believe his ears 'The Secretary! What have I to do with your Secretary?

'I don't know at all, but he said, "Go and tell Margayya to come here for a moment." '

On hearing this, Margayya became indignant Go and tell them I am not their paid—paid——' He was about to say 'servant' but he remembered in time, even in his mental stress, that the man standing before him was literally both paid and a servant, and thought it would be injudicious to say so now So he left off the sentence abruptly and asked 'Do they pay me to appear before them when they want me?'

'I don't know,' said this very loyal Co-operative man 'He told me to tell you The Secretary is no ordinary person, you know,' he added. 'He receives a salary of over five hundred rupees a month, an amount which you and I will probably not see even after a hundred years of service.' Now Margayya s blood was stirred Many angry memories welled up in him of all the indignities that he had suffered at the hands of his brother, who cut him off with half a house, while he himself passed for a man of means, a respectable citizen Margayya felt that the world treated him with contempt because he had no money People thought they could order him about He said to Arul Doss 'Arul Doss, I don't know about you, you can speak for yourself But you need not speak for me You may not see a hundred rupees even after a hundred years of service, but I think I shall do so very soon—and who knows, if your Secretary seeks any improvement of his position, he can come to me.'

Arul Doss took a few moments to understand, then swayed with laughter Tears rolled down his cheeks 'Well, I have been a servant in this department for twenty nine years, but I ve never heard a crazier proposal All right, all right' He was convulsed with laughter as he turned to go Margayya looked at his

helplessly He cast his eyes down and surveyed himself perhaps he cut a ridiculous figure, with his *dhoti* going brown for lack of laundering and with his shirt collar frayed and those awful silver spectacles I hate these spectacles I wish I could do without them But age age—who could help long-sight? If I wore gold spectacles perhaps they would take me seriously and not order me about Who is this Secretary to call me through the peon? I won't be ridiculed I'm at least as good as they He called out Look here Arul Doss With a beaming face Arul Doss turned round Tell your Secretary that if he is a Secretary I'm really the proprietor of a bank and that he can come here and meet me if he has any business——

Shall I repeat those very words? Arul Doss asked ready to burst out laughing again.

Absolutely Margayya said And another thing if you find yourself thrown out of there you can come to me for a job I like you, you seem to be a hard working loyal fellow Further parleys were cut off because a couple of villagers came round for consultation and started forming a semi-circle in front of Margayya. Though Arul Doss still lingered for a further joke Margayya turned away abruptly remarking All right you may go now

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Please said a peasant, be careful sir That Arul Doss is a bad fellow

I'm also a bad fellow snapped Margayya.

It's not that. They say that the Secretary just does what this fellow says If we go in to get just one single form he charges us two annas each time Is that also a Government rule?' asked the peasant

Go away you fools Margayya said. You are people who have no self respect. As long as you are share-holders you are masters of the bank. They are your paid servants

Ah is that so?' asked the peasant. And the group looked up at each other with amazement. Another man, who had a long blanket wrapped round his shoulder a big cloth turban crowning his head and wore shorts and was bare-foot said We may be masters as you say but who is going to obey us? If we go in we have to do as they say Otherwise they won't give us money

'Whose money are they giving away?' asked Margayya It is your own.

'Margayya, we don't want all that. Why should we talk of other people?'

'True, true,' said one or two others approvingly

Encouraged by this, the peasant said We should not talk about others unnecessarily' He lowered his voice and said If they hear it they may——'

Margayya's blood rushed to his head 'You get away from here.' he thundered I don't want to have anything to do with people without self-respect, who don't know their importance and strength What better words can we expect from someone like you who wraps himself in that coarse blanket at this time of the day? What better stuff can we expect from a head weighed down by so many folds of a dirty turban? The peasant was somewhat cowed by Margayya s manner He mumbled 'I didn't mean to offend you, sir If I did would I be here?'

'That's all right No further unnecessary talk If you have any business, tell me Otherwise get out of here Before dusk I have to attend to so many people You are not the only one who has business with me.'

'I want a small loan, sir,' began the peasant. 'I want to know how much more I have to pay to clear the balance loan.'

'Why don't you go in there and ask your Arul Doss?'

'Oh, they are all very bad, unhelpful people, sir, that's why I never like to go there, but come to you first. Why do we come to you, sir, of all persons in this big city? It's because you know our joys and sorrows and our troubles, our difficulties and——'

'All right, all right,' Margayya said, cutting him short, yet greatly mollified by his manner 'I know what you are trying to say Don t I?' He looked round at his clients And they shook their heads approvingly, making appropriate sounds with their tongues, in order to please him

After all these bouts he settled down to business He had a busy day filling up forms, writing applications, writing even petitions unconnected with money business for one or two clients, talking, arguing, and calculating He was nearly hoarse by the time the sun's rays touched him on the nape of his neck, and the shadows of the banyan tree fell on the drive leading to the Co-operative Bank. He started to close his office. He put back his writing pad neatly folded up some pieces of paper on which he had noted figures, scrutinized again the little some cash, and checked some receipts He back in the small tin box, laid a few sheets of '

forms flat on top of them so as to prevent their creasing restored to its corner the ink bottle and laid beside it the red wooden pen. Everything in its place He hated more than anything else having to fumble for his papers or stationery and a disordered box was as hateful to him as the thought of Arul Doss His mind was oppressed with thoughts of Arul Doss He felt insulted and sore. What right had he or anyone to insult or browbeat him? What had he done that they themselves did not do? He would teach this Arul Doss a lesson—no matter at what cost

At this moment he heard a step approaching and looking up saw a man, wearing a brown suit, standing before him. His hands were in his pockets and behind him at a respectable distance stood Arul Doss The man looked very smart with a hat on his head a very tidy young man who looked as if he had just come from Europe Margayya reflected Looking at him he felt himself to be such a contrast with his brown *dhoti* torn shirt and the absurd little tuft under the black cap No wonder they treat me as they do he said to himself Perhaps I should have exercised greater care in my speech God knows what that Arul Doss has reported I should not have spoken This fellow looks as if he could do anything Margayya looked at Arul Doss and shuddered noting the wicked gleam in his eye He soon recovered his self possession I am not a baby to worry about these things What can anybody do to me? He resolutely fixed his gaze on the hard knobs on his box gave its contents a final pat and was about to draw down the lid when the other man suddenly stooped thrust his hand inside and picked out a handful of papers demanding How did you come by these? These are our application forms!

Margayya checked the indignation that was rising within him Put them back, will you? What right have you to put your hand into my box? You look like an educated man. Don't you know that ordinary simple law?' In his indignation he lost for a moment all fear Arul Doss came forward and said Take care how you speak. He is our Secretary He will hand you over to the police.

Stop your nonsense you earth worm! Things have come to this, have they when every earth-worm pretends that it is a cobra and tries to sway its hood. I will nip off your head as well as your tail, if you start any of your tricks with me Take care Get out of my way

Arul Doss was cowed. He withdrew a little but he was not to be dismissed so easily He began He is our Secretary——

'That s all right. It's written all over him,' yelled Margayya. 'What else can he be? He can speak for himself, can't he? You keep away, you mi- ble ten-rupee earner I want none of your impertinence here ou want an old piece of cloth, torn or used, come to me. The Secretary seemed to watch all this with detachment. Arul Doss fretted inwardly, tried to be officious, but had to withdraw because the Secretary himself ordered him away 'You go over there,' he said, indicating a spot far off. Arul Doss moved reluctantly away Margayya felt triumphant, and turned his attention to the man before him. 'Secretary, you will put back that paper or I will call the police now'

'Yes, I want to call the police myself You are in possession of something that belongs to our office.'

'No, it belongs to the shareholders'

'Are you a shareholder?'

'Yes, more than that——'

'Nonsense Don t make false statements You ll get into trouble Reports have come to me of your activities Here is my warning If you are seen here again, you will find yourself in prison Go—— He nodded to Arul Doss come nearer, and held out to him the loan application forms Arul Doss avidly seized them and carried them off like a trophy The Secretary abruptly turned round and walked back to the porch of the building, where his car was waiting

§

Presently Margayya bundled up his belongings and started homeward With his box under his arm and his head bowed in thought he wandered down the Market road He paused for a moment at the entrance of the Royal Hair Cutting Saloon, in whose doorway a huge looking glass was kept He saw to his dismay that he was still wearing his spectacles He pulled them off quickly, folded up their sides and put them into his pocket. He didn t feel flattered at the sight of his own reflection. I look like a wayside barber with this little miserable box under my arm. People probably expect me to open the lid and take out soap and a brush No wonder the Secretary feels he can treat me as he likes If I looked like him would he have dared to snatch the papers from my box? I can't look like him. I am destined to look like a wayside barber, and that is my fate. I m only fit for the company of those blanket wrapped rustics' He was thoroughly vexed with himself and his lot

He moved to the side of the road as cyclists rang their bells and dodged him jutka men shouted at him and pedestrians collided against him. His mind was occupied with thoughts of his own miserableness He felt himself shrinking Two students emerged laughing and talking from the Bombay Anand Bhavan their lips red with betel leaves They stared at Margayya They are laughing at me, he thought. Perhaps they want to ask me to go with them to their rooms and give them a hair-cut! He kept glancing over his shoulder at them and caught them turning and glancing at him too with a grin on their faces Somebody driving by in a car of the latest model seemed to look at him for a fleeting second and Margayya fancied that he caught a glimpse of contempt in his eyes Now at the western end of Market Road he saw the V.N Stores with its owner standing at the door 'He may put his hand into my pocket and snatch the glasses or compel me to give him a shave. He side-stepped into Kabir Lane, and feeling ashamed of the little box that he carried under his arm wished he could fling it away but his sense of possession would not let him. As he passed through the narrow Kabir Lane with small houses abutting the road people seemed to stare at him as if to say Barber come early tomorrow morning you must be ready here before I go for my bath. He hurried off He reached Vinayak Street, raced up the steps of his house and flung the box unceremoniously under the bench. His wife was washing the child on the back verandah At the sound of his arrival the little fellow let out a yell of joy through the towel

'What's happened to make you come back so early? asked Margayya's wife.

'Early! Why can't I come home when I please? I am nobody's slave. She had tried to tidy herself up in the evening after the day's work. She looks He noticed how plebeian she looked with her faded jacket, her patched discoloured saree and her anaemic eyes. How can anyone treat me respectfully when my wife is so indifferent looking?' His son came up and clung to his hand 'Father what you have brought me today?' He picked him up on his arm. 'Can't you put him into a cleaner shirt?' he asked.

'He has only four' his wife answered. And he has already soiled three today I have been telling you to buy some clothes

'Don't start all that now I am in no mood for lectures His wife bit her lips and made a wry face The child let out a howl for no reason whatever She felt annoyed and said 'He is always

like this He is all right till you come home But the moment you step in, he won t even finish washing his face'

'Where should I go if you don't want me to return home?'

'Nobody said such thing,' she replied sullenly The little boy shouted, put his hand into his father's coat-pocket and pulled out his reading glasses, and insisted upon putting them over his own nose His mother cried Give those glasses back or I'll ' She raised her arm, at which he started yelling so much that they could not hear each other's remarks Margayya carried him off to a shop and bought him sweets, leaving his wife behind, fretting with rage

In the quiet of midnight, Margayya spoke to his wife seriously 'Do you know why we get on each other's nerves and quarrel?

'Yes,' she said at last 'Now let me sleep' And turned over Margayya stretched out his hand and shook her by the shoulder 'Wake up I have much to tell you'

'Can't you wait till the morning?' she asked

No' He spoke to her of the day's events She sat up in bed 'Who is that secretary? What right has he to threaten you?

'He has every right because he has more money, authority, dress, looks—above all, more money It's money which gives people all this Money alone is important in this world Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse'

She said 'You shouldn't have been so rude to Arul Doss You should not have said that you'd employ the secretary That s not the way to speak to people earning five hundred rupees a month.'

'Let him get five thousand, what do I care? I can also earn a thousand or five thousand, and then these fellows will have to look out.' Much of his self-assurance was returning in the presence of his wife. All the despair and inferiority that he had been feeling was gradually leaving him. He felt more self-confident and aggressive. He felt he could hold out his hand and grab as much of the good things of life as he wanted He felt himself being puffed up with hope and plans and self-assurance. He said, Even you will learn to behave with me when I have money Your rudeness now is understandable. For isn't there a famous saying "He that hath not is spurned even by his wife, even the mother that bore him spurns him.' It was a very wise man who said it Well, you will see. I'll not carry about that barber s box any

more, and I'll not be seen in this torn *dhoti* I will become respectable like anyone else That secretary will have to call me 'Mister' and stand up when I enter No more torn mats and dirty greasy sarees for you. Our boy will have a cycle he will have a suit and go to a convent in a car And those people' (he indicated the next house) will have to wonder and burst their hearts with envy He will have to come to me on his knees and wait for advice I have finished with those villagers

§

He became like one possessed He was agitated as if he had made a startling discovery He couldn t yet afford to keep away from the place where he worked He went there as usual but he had taken care to tidy himself up as much as possible. He wore a lace-edged *dhoti* which he normally kept folded in his box. It was of fine texture but much yellowed now He had always kept it in his box with a piece of camphor and he now smelt like an incense-holder as he emerged from his small room clad in this gorgeous *dhoti* It had been given to him as it now seemed a century and a half ago on the day of his wedding when he was sitting beside his wife on a flower-decked swing surrounded by a lot of women folk joking and singing and teasing the newly weds after the feast at night. He sighed at the thought of those days How they had fussed about him and tried to satisfy his smallest request and keep him pleased in every way How eminent he had felt then! People seemed to feel honoured when he spoke to them. He had only to turn his head even slightly for someone or other to come rushing up and inquire what his wishes were. He had thought that that would continue for ever What a totally false view of life one acquired on one s wedding day! It reminded him of his brother How he bargained with the bride s people over the dowry! He used to be so fond of him. His brother's face stood out prominently from among the wedding group in Margayya s memory as he sat in the corner beyond the sacrificial smoke, in their village home. Margayya sighed at the memory of t they had got on quite nicely but their wives couldn't If women got on smoothly Half the trouble in this world is due to women who cannot tolerate each other

His wife was amused to see him so gaudily dressed 'What's the matter?' she asked Are you going to a wedding party? 'This is the only good one I have They will never see me in that again,' he said, indicating his discarded *dhoti* 'Keep it and give it to Arul Doss He may come for it' He was pleased with his own venom aimed at the distant Arul Doss This quiet pleasure pricked his veins and thrilled his body He put on a new shirt which he had stitched two years ago but had not had the heart to wear—always reserving it for some future occasion. The child too seemed to be quite pleased to see his father in a new dress He clapped his hands in joy and left him in peace, concentrating his attention on a piece of elephant made of lacquer-painted wood Margayya had elaborately tied up his *dhoti*, with folds going up, in the dignified Poona style, instead of the Southern fashion, looked down upon by people of other provinces He explained to his wife 'You see, if we are treated with contempt by people it is our fault Our style of tying *dhoti* and our style of dressing—it is all so silly' No wonder He talked like a man who had just arrived from a far-off land, he spoke with such detachment and superiority His wife was somewhat taken aback She treated him with the utmost consideration when she served him his frugal meal Usually he would have to ask, 'Food ready? Food ready?' several times and then pick up his plate and sit down and wait indefinitely as she kept blowing the fire If he said 'Hurry up, please' She would retort 'With my breath gone, blowing on this wet firewood, have you the heart' etc. But today she said 'Your plate is there, food is ready' She served him quietly, with a sort of docile agreeableness 'I got this brinjal from the back garden,' she said 'You didn't know I had a garden' 'No Nice stuff,' he murmured agreeably Even the little fellow ate his food quietly, only once letting out a shout when he thought his mother wouldn't serve him his *ghee* On that occasion he threw a handful of rice in his mother's face She just ignored it, instead of flying at him, and the episode ended there At the end of the meal Margayya picked up his plate as usual to wash and restore it to its corner in the kitchen But she at once said, 'Oh, don't, I will attend to it' He got up proudly and washed his hands, wiping them on a towel readily brought to his side by his wife. She gave him a few scented nuts and a betel leaf and saw him off at the door as he went down the street He had opened his little box and picked up a few papers, which he carried in his hand It looked better He walked with the feeling that a new existence was opening before him

His clients were somewhat surprised to see him in his new dress He didn t squat under the tree, but remained standing

'Why are you standing Margayya?

Because I am not sitting Margayya replied

Why not?

Because I like to stand—that s all he replied

He handed a filled up application to someone and said Give it in there, and come away He told another Well you will get your money today Give me back my advance He carried on his business without sitting down One of the men looked up and down and asked Going to a marriage party?

'Yes replied Margayya. Every day is a day of marriage for me Do you think I like a change of wife each day? He cracked his usual jokes He placed his paper on the ledge of a wall and wrote. He had brought with him hidden in his pocket the little ink bottle wrapped in paper and his pen As he bowed his head and wrote he muttered I just want to help people to get over their money troubles I do it as a sort of service, but let no one imagine I have no better business

'What else do you do sir?' asked a very innocent man.

'Well I have to do the same service for myself too you see. I have to do something to earn money

'You get interest on all the amounts you give us

'Yes yes but that's hardly enough to pay for my snuff he said grandly taking out a small box and inhaling a pinch It sent a stinging sensation up his nostrils into his brain and he felt his forehead throbbing with excitement. It made him feel so energetic that he felt like thumping a table and arguing He said aggressively I want to do so much for you fellows do you know why?' They shook their heads bewildered. 'Not because of the petty interest you give me —that's nothing for me. It is because I want you all to get over your money worries and improve your lives You must all adopt civilized ways That's why I am trying to help you to get money from that bastard office. He pointed at the Co-operative Bank. They all turned and looked at it. Arul Doss was seen approaching He is coming they all said in one voice Arul Doss approached them somewhat diffidently His gait was halting and slow He stopped quite far away and pretended to look for a carriage or something on the road. Margayya thrust himself forward and watched him aggressively Arul Doss stole a glance now and then at Margayya. Margayya felt annoyed The sting of the

snuff was still fresh He cried out Arul Doss, what are you looking for? If it is for me, come along, because I am here.' Arul Doss seemed happy to seize this opportunity to approach Margayya said 'Mark my words, this is god-given shade under the tree, if you or your secretary is up to any mischief, I will make you feel sorry for your—— The villagers were overawed by Margayya's manner of handling Arul Doss Arul Doss had no doubt come spying but now he felt uncomfortable at Margayya's sallies If Margayya had been squatting under the tree with his box, he might have had a tale to bear, but now he saw nothing wrong He had only one worry—that of being called an earth-worm again before so many people. He tried to turn and go, saying, 'I just came to see if the secretary's car had come.'

'Has your secretary a car? Margayya asked patronizingly

'Haven't you noticed that big red one?

Margayya snapped his fingers and said 'As if I had no better things to observe Tell your secretary——' He checked himself, not being sure what his tongue might utter Arul Doss, if you are in need of an old *dhoti* or shirt, go and ask my wife She will give it to you' Arul Doss's face beamed with happiness

'Oh, surely, surely,' he said He approached nearer to Margayya and whispered Margayya raised his hand to his face and put his head back The other's breath smelt of onion Margayya asked 'Do you nibble raw onion in the morning? Arul Doss ignored the question and whispered 'You must not think that I myself tried to bother you yesterday It's all that fellow's orders' He pointed towards his office. 'He is a vicious creature! You won't think that I You can carry on here as you like, sir Don't worry about anything' He turned and abruptly walked back. Margayya looked after him and commented to his circle 'That's the worst blackguard under the sun—both of them are. This fellow carries tales to him and then he comes and behaves like a great governor here. What do I care? If a man thinks that he is governor let him show off at home, not here, for I don't care for governors'

§

As he went through the town that day he was obsessed with thoughts of money His mind rang with the words he had said to the villagers 'I'm only trying to help you to get out of your money worries' He began to believe it himself He viewed himself

as a saviour of mankind If I hadn t secured three hundred rupees for —— he would be rotting in the street at this moment. So and so married off his daughter educated his son retained his house.

His mind began to catalogue all the good things money had done as far as he could remember He shuddered to think how people could ever do without it If money was absent men came near being beasts He saw at the Market Fountain a white sheet covering some object stretched on the pavement It was about six in the evening and the street was lit up with a blaze of sunlight from the West Pedestrians donkeys and jutkas were trans formed with the gold of the setting sun. Margayya stood dazzled by the sight. A ragged fellow with matted hair thrust before him a mud tray and said pointing at the sheet-covered object on the ground An orphan s body sir Have pity help us to bury him. Margayya threw a look at the covered body shudder ed and parted with a copper as so many others had done There was a good collection on the tray Margayya averted his face and tried to pass quickly Farther on yet another man came up with a mud tray whining Orphan body——

Get off already given said Margayya sternly and passed on There was money on this tray too Margayya was filled with disgust. He knew what it meant A group of people seized upon an unclaimed dead body undertook to give it a burial and collected a lot of money for it. He knew that they celebrated it as a festive occasion. When they saw a destitute dying on the roadside they cried to themselves Aha! A fine day ahead They left their occupations seized the body carried it to a public place, put it down on the pavement placed a few flowers on it bought a few mud trays from the potter and assailed the passers-by They collected enough money at the end of the day to give a gorgeous funeral to the body They even haggled with the grave-digger and were left with so much money at the end of it all that they drank and made merry for three or four days and gave up temporarily their normal jobs such as scaveng ing loadcarrying and stone-quarrying It made Margayya reflective. People did anything for money Money was men s greatest need like air or food. People went to horrifying lengths for its sake, like collecting rent on a dead body yet this didn t strike Margayya in his present mood as so horrible as something to be marvelled at. It left him admiring the power and dyna mism of money its capacity to make people do strange deeds

He saw a toddy tapper going a hundred feet up a cocoanut tree and he reflected 'Morning to night he wears a loin cloth and goes up tree after tree for fifty years or more just for the eight annas he gets per tree' He saw offices and shops opened and people sweating and fatiguing themselves, all for money Margayya concluded that they wanted money because they wanted fellows like the Secretary of the Co-operative Bank to bow to them, or to have a fellow like Arul Doss speak to them with courtesy, or so that they might wear unpatched *dhoties* and be treated seriously Margayya sat down for a moment on a park bench The Municipality had made a very tiny park at the angle where the Market Road branched off to Lawley Extension. They had put up a cement bench and grown a clump of strong ferns, fencing them off with a railing He passed through the stile and sat down on the bench Cars were being driven towards Lawley Extension Huge cars He watched them greedily Must have a car as soon as possible, he said to himself Nothing is impossible in this world.' A cool breeze was blowing The sun had set Lights were lit up here and there. 'If I have money, I need not dodge that spectacle dealer I need not cringe before that stores man I could give those medicines to my wife The doctor would look at her with more interest and she might look like other women That son of mine, that Balu—I could give him everything' His mind gloated over visions of his son He would grow into an aristocrat He would study not in a Corporation School, but in the convent, and hobnob with the sons of the District Collector or the Superintendent of Police or Mangal Seth, the biggest mill-owner in the town. He would promise him a car all for himself when he came to the College He could go to America and obtain degrees, and then marry perhaps a judge's daughter His own wife might demand all the dowry she wanted He would not interfere, leaving it for the women to manage as they liked He would buy another bungalow in Lawley Road for his son, and then his vision went on to the next generation of aristocrats

At this moment he saw a man coming from Lawley Extension a cadaverous man, burnt by the sun wrapped in a long piece of white cloth, his forehead painted with red marks and his head clean shaved, with a tuft of hair on top A tall gaunt man, he was the priest of the temple in their street An idea struck Margayya at the sight of him He was a wise man well versed in ancient studies, and he might be able to give advice Margayya

clapped his hands till the giant man turned and advanced towards him.

Ah! Margayya! What are you doing here?

Just came for a little fresh air. The air is so cool here unlike our Vinayak Street.

Oh these are all aristocratic parts with gardens and fresh air. Our Vinayak Mudali Street! It's like an oven in summer.

And what a lot of mosquitoes! Margayya added.

I couldn't sleep the whole night, the priest said.

Why should they make such a row in our ears? Let them suck the blood if they want, but it's their humming that is so unwelcome, said Margayya.

They spoke of weather and mosquitoes and fresh air and the diseases prevalent in the town for about half an hour. The priest lived in a sort of timelessness and seemed to be in no hurry. The stars were shining in the sky. Margayya asked, How was it you were coming this way?

I had gone to perform a *Puja* in a house in Lawley Extension. You know that Municipal Chairman's house, they are very particular that I alone should perform these things. They won't tolerate anyone else. So every evening I do it there and then rush back to our temple where the devotees will be waiting. A man can't be in two places at the same time.

Truly said. I will walk back with you to the temple, if you are going there.

I have to go to another place on the way and then on to the temple. Just a minute's delay there, that's all. Do come with me. There's nothing so good as company on the road. I've to walk miles and miles from morning to night.

They walked back towards the Market Road. The priest led him into some unnamed lanes behind the Market. He stopped in front of a house and said, If you will wait here, I will be back in a moment. He went in. Margayya sat up on the pyol. There was a gutter below him. This is worse than our Vinayak Street, Margayya reflected. The place was occupied by a class of handloom weavers. All along the lane they had set up weaving frames with yarns dyed in blue and hung out to dry on frames. Somebody came out of the house and said to Margayya, Won't you come in? Margayya felt pleased at this attention and followed him in. There was a very small front hall in the house piled up with weaving frames, stacks of woven sarees in different colours, and several rolls of bedding belonging to the members

of the household At one corner they had put up a small wooden pedestal on which a couple of figures of Gods and one or two framed pictures were hanging An incense stick was burning His friend the priest sat up before the pedestal, with his eyes shut, muttering something The master of the house with his wife and children stood devoutly at a distance. There were four children One or the other of them was being constantly told 'Don't bite your nails before God' And they were so much overwhelmed by the general atmosphere that they constantly put their finger tips to their lips and withdrew them quickly as if they had touched a frying pan. Margayya was very much impressed with their seriousness, and wondered at the same time what his Balu would have done under these circumstances He'd have insisted upon doing what he pleased—and not only bitten his own nails but other people s as well He would have upset all this holy water and camphor flame,' Margayya reflected, with gratification It seemed to him a most enchanting self-assertiveness on the part of his child It gave him a touch of superiority to all these children, who wouldn't bite their nails when ordered not to He felt a desire to go home and spoil his son I left so early in the day,' he reflected He suddenly asked himself, 'Why am I knocking around with this priest instead of going home? An old lady, probably the grandmother of the house, sat before the God with a small child on her lap Only the child's eyes were visible, gleaming in the sacred lamps It was entirely wrapped in a blanket. Margayya guessed that it must be very sick. They were all fussing over it. How old is that child? Margayya wondered, unable to get a full glimpse of it. Somehow this worried him. If Balu were in his position would he have consented to be chained up like this? Some children are too dull——'

It was nearly nine o clock when they came out. Margayya followed the priest mutely through the streets The town had almost gone to sleep The streets were silent

It's so late! he murmured

'What is late? asked the priest

'We are so late'

Late for what?

Margayya fumbled for a reply He said clumsily 'You said you'd be kept there only for a short time. I thought you be kept only a short time—that's why——'

'In holy business can we be glancing at a wrist watch

ume? That child has been crippled with a dreadful disease from childhood It is now much better It is some wasting disease——

Do you perform *Puja*s for his sake?'

'Yes, every Friday It is the *Puja* that enabled young Markan deya to win over *Yama* the God of Death

O! Margayya exclaimed interested but not willing to show his ignorance

Every child knows that story

'Yes of course of course Margayya said non-committally He felt he ought to say something more and added 'Those people indicating over his shoulder a vast throng of wise ancestors, 'those people knew what was good for us

'Not the people you mean but those who were there even before them corrected the priest in a debating spirit

All right Margayya agreed meekly

The priest asked him further on 'What do you gather from the story of Markandeya?

Margayya blinked and felt like a schoolboy He said ceremoniously How can I say? It is for a learned person like you to enlighten us on these matters

All right. What was Markandeya? asked the man persistently

Margayya began to feel desperate He feared that the other might not rest till he had exposed his ignorance He felt he ought to put a stop to it at once and said It is a long time since I heard that story My grandmother used to tell it I should like to hear it again.

Ask then If you don't know a thing there is no shame in asking and learning about it moralized the priest He then narrated the story of Markandeya the boy devotee of God Shiva, destined to die the moment he completed his sixteenth year When the moment came the emissaries of *Yama* (the God of Death) arrived in order to bind and carry off his life but he was performing the *Puja*—and the dark emissaries could not approach him at all! Markandeya remained sixteen to all eternity and thus defeated death. 'That particular *Puja* had that efficacy—and it is that very *Puja* I am performing on behalf of the child who is much better for it

'Will the child live?' asked Margayya, his interest completely roused.

How can I say? It is our duty to perform a *Puja* the result cannot be our concern. It is *Karma*

Yes, yes,' agreed Margayya, somewhat baffled

They now reached the little temple at the end of Vinayak Mudali Street. There under a cracked dome was an inner shrine containing an image of Hanuman, the God of Power, the son of Wind According to tradition this God had pressed one foot on the very spot where the shrine now stood, sprang across space and ocean and landed in Lanka (Ceylon), there to destroy Ravana, a king with ten heads and twenty hands, who was oppressing mankind and had abducted Rama s wife Sita

The priest was part and parcel of the temple There was a small wooden shack within its narrow corridors, where he ate his food and slept. He looked after the shrine, polished and oiled the tall bronze lamps and worshipped here.

Margayya hesitated at the entrance It seemed already very late I'll go now,' he said

'Why don t you come in and see the God, having come so far?' asked the priest Margayya hesitated He was afraid to ignore the priest s suggestion He feared that that might displease God As he hesitated, the priest drove home the point 'You stopped me there at the park to say something You have been with me ever since and you have not spoken anything about it Margayya felt caught He found himself behaving more and more like a school boy He remembered his old teacher, back there in his village, an old man with a white rim around his black pupils that gave him the look of a cat peering in the dark, whose hands shook when he gripped the cane, but who nevertheless put it to sound use, especially on Margayya s back, particularly when he behaved as he behaved now, blinking when he ought to be opening his lips and letting the words out Later in life Margayya remedied it by not allowing any pause in his speech, but the disease recurred now and then This was such a moment He wanted to talk to the priest and seek his advice, but he felt reluctant to utter the first word As he stood there at the portals of the temple he feared for a second the old whacking from a cane But the priest only said 'Come in'

'Isn't it late?

For what?

Margayya once again blinked He mutely followed the priest into the shrine The main portion of the image went up into the shadows, partly illuminated by a flickering oil lamp The priest briskly swept into a basket some broken coconut, plantains, and coins left on the doorstep by devotees He held up a plan-

tain and a piece of cocoanut for Margayya Probably you are hungry Eat these I will give you a tumbler of milk He went into his shack and came out bearing a tumbler of milk

Margayya squatted on the floor leaning against the high rugged wall of the corridor The town had fallen asleep Vinayak Mudali Street was at the very end of the town and no one moved about at this hour Even the street dogs which created such a furore every night seemed to have fallen asleep A couple of cocoanut trees waved against the stars in the sky The only noise in the world now seemed to be the crunching of cocoanut between Margayya s jaws It was like the sound of wooden wheels running over a sandy bed Margayya felt abash ed, and tried to eat noiselessly At this a bit of cocoanut went the wrong way and he was seized with a fit of coughing which racked his whole frame. He panted and gasped as he tried to explain It It It The priest seem d to watch with amusement and he felt indignant What right has this man to keep me here at this hour and amuse himself at my expense?

The priest said Drink that milk it will make you all right

He asks me to drink milk as if I were a baby Next I think he will force it between my lips He suddenly grew very asser tive and said resolutey I don t like milk I have never liked it. He pushed away the tumbler resolutely The priest said Don t push away a tumbler of milk with the back of your hand Margayya was no longer going to be treated and lectured like a schoolboy He said I know But who doesn t?

And yet said the priest with amused contempt you push away milk with the back of your hand as if it were a tumbler of drch water

No no said Margayya semi-apologetically I didn t push it with the back of my hand. I just tried to put away the tumbler so that you might take it.

Ignoring this explanation and looking away far away the priest said Milk is one of the forms of Goddess Lakshmi the Goddess of Wealth. When you reject it or treat it indifferently it means you reject her She is a Goddess who always stays on the tip of her toes all the time, ever ready to turn and run away There are ways of wooing and keeping her When she graces a house with her presence, the master of th house becomes distinguished famous and wealthy Margayya reverently touched the tumbler and very respectfully drank the milk taking care not to spill even a drop

'That is better,' said the old man 'There was once upon a time——' He narrated from Mahabharata the story of Kubera, the wealthiest man in creation, who undertook a long arduous penance as atonement for spilling a drop of milk on the floor of his palace When the story ended and a pause ensued, Margayya felt he could no longer keep back his request. He felt somewhat shy as he said 'I want to acquire wealth Can you show me a way? I will do anything you suggest'

'Anything?' asked the first emphatically Margayya suddenly grew nervous and discreet 'Of course, anything reasonable. Perhaps the man would tell him to walk upside down or some such thing 'You know what I mean' Margayya added pathetically

'No, I don't know what you mean,' said the old man point-blank. Wealth does not come the way of people who adopt half hearted measures It comes only to those who pray for it single-mindedly with no other thought'

Margayya began to tremble slightly at this statement. 'Perhaps he is a sorcerer, or a black magician or an alchemist' He threw a frightened look at him and then at the shack in which he usually dwelt. Perhaps he has hidden human bodies in that shack, and extracts from the corpses some black ointment, with which he acquires extraordinary powers'

Margayya wanted to get up and run away In the starlight the man looked eerie, his hollow voice reverberating through the silent night. Margayya's mind was seized with fears 'Perhaps he will ask me to cut off my son's head' He imagined Balu being drugged and taken into the shack. 'It's midnight or probably dawn Let me go home.'

He got up abruptly The old man did not stop him. He merely said 'Yes, go home It is very late. Probably your wife will be anxious' Margayya felt tremendously relieved that after all he was permitted to leave He got up, prostrated before the God's image, scrambled to his feet hurriedly, lest the other, sitting immobile where he had left him, should call him back. He hurried off through the silent street. Far off a night constable's whistle was heard 'I hope he will not take me for a thief' He was wearing his wedding *dhoti*, carrying his account papers under his arm, the whole thing struck him at this hour as being extremely ridiculous

He stood before his door unable to make up his mind to knock. It might rouse his wife or his son But unless his wife was

roused And how could he explain his late coming? Something has happened to me—everything seems to be going wrong That Arul Doss has perhaps cast a spell can t be sure what everybody is up to—— The world seemed to be a very risky place to live in peopled by creatures with dark powers As he stood there undecided his wife threw back the bolt and let him in She hadn t put out the kerosene lamp She looked at him sourly and asked What have you been doing so late? Once inside his home all his old assertiveness returned He was the master in his house with nobody to question him He ignored her and quickly went into the smaller room to undress and change. He washed himself briskly at the well His son was sleeping near the doorway of the smaller room on a rush mat He threw a loving look at him, with a feeling that but for a quick decision on his part th little fellow might be in that shack put to no end of tortures His wife was very sleepy as she waited for him in the kitchen. He found that she had spread out two leaves 'What? You have not had your dinner yet! he said feeling pleased that she had waited for him.

How could I without knowing what had happened? Hereafter if you are going to be late——

I must ask your permission, I suppose, he said arrogantly

They consumed their midnight dinner in silence. They went to bed in silence He lay on the mat beside his son She went down into her room, and lay on a carpet on which she had already snatched a few hours of sleep before he arrived Margayya lay in bed unable to shut his eyes He lay looking at the ceiling which was dark with smoke cobwebs dangled from the tiles like tapestry She ought to clean it and not expect me to have to see such things, he said to himself angrily He got up and blew out the kerosene lamp and lay down. He slept badly constantly harassed by nightmares composed of the priest the secretary and Arul Doss. One recurring dream was of his son stepping into the shack in the temple with the priest standing behind the door and all his efforts to keep him back proved futile. The young fellow was constantly tiptoeing away towards the shack It bothered Margayya so much that he let out a cry *Ayo! Ayo!* which woke up the child who jumped out of bed with a piercing scream which in turn roused his mother sleeping in the other room, and she sprang up howling Oh what has happened! What has happened! It was about half an hour before the dawn All this commotion awakened Margayya himself He cried

'Who is there? Who is there?' Someone was moving about.' 'Someone made a noise.' The uproar increased. 'Where are the matches?' Margayya demanded suddenly and cursed in the dark. 'Who asked you to blow out the light?' his wife said. He sprang up and ran towards the backyard thinking that the intruder must have run in that direction. The little boy cried, 'Oh, father, father, don't go. Don't go.' His mother clutched him to her bosom. He struggled and wildly kicked for no reason whatever. The people of the next house woke up and muttered 'Something always goes wrong in that house. Even at midnight one has no peace, if they are in the neighbourhood.'

§

Margayya was sitting before his small box, examining the accounts written in his red book. His son came up to sit on his lap. Margayya said 'Go and play, don't disturb me now,' and tried to keep him off. 'This is my play, I won't go,' said the child, pushing towards him again resolutely and climbing on his lap. Margayya had to peep over his head in order to look at the register before him, Balu's hair constantly tickled his nostrils and he felt irritated. He cried 'Balu, won't you leave me alone. I will buy you a nice——'

What? asked the child.

'A nice little elephant.'

All right, buy it now, come on.'

'No, no, not now. I'm working now.' he said, pointing at the small register. Balu shot out his little leg and kicked away the register petulantly, and in the process the ink well upset beside it and emptied on the page. Then the child stamped his heel on the ink and it splashed over Margayya's face and spoiled the entire book. Margayya felt maddened at the sight of it. He simply gripped the boy by his shoulder, lifted him as he would lift an unwanted cat, and almost flung him into a corner. Needless to say it made the child cry so loudly that his mother came running out of the kitchen, her eyes streaming with tears owing to the smoke there. What has happened? What has happened? she cried rushing towards the child who undaunted, was again making a dash for his father as he stooped over the wreckage trying to retrieve his damaged account book. Look what he has done.' he cried excitedly. This monkey!

You are a monkey! cried the boy, imitating his father's voice as he was blotting the spilled ink.

If you don t leave me I'll—I'll—— He was too angry I'll give you over to the temple priest He'll flay your skin.

'He will give me plantains corrected the boy He turned aside and suddenly pounced on the book, grabbed it and dashed off His father ran after him with war cries The boy dodged him here and there, going into this corner and darting into that. His tears had by now dried he was enjoying the chase and with hysterical laughter he was running hither and thither clutching the precious red note book in his hand. It was a small space within which he ran, but somehow Margayya was unable to seize him. Margayya panted with the effort He cried If you don t stop I'll flay you

What is the matter with you? What has come over you? asked the wife.

I m all right Margayya replied proudly You ll see what I'll do to that little monkey that devil you have begotten His wife gave some appropriate reply and tried to help in the chase. She pretended to look away and suddenly darted across to seize the boy He was too swift even for her calculations She only collided against her husband, which irritated him more and it allowed the child to dash into the street with his prize with his father at his heels. He cried impatiently to his wife Get out of the way—you—— at which she turned and went back to the kitchen murmuring 'What do I care? I only let the rice over boil watching this tomfoolery The boy dashed down the front steps with his father following him. Margayya was blind to all his surroundings—all he could see was the little boy with his curly hair and the small red-bound book which was in his hand. Some passers by in Vinayak Mudali Street stopped to watch the scene. Margayya cried shamelessly Hold him! Hold him!' At which they tried to encircle the boy It was evident that by now he had become completely intoxicated with the chase. Presently he found that he was being outnumbered and cornered. As a circle of hunters hemmed in he did an entirely unexpected thing—he turned back as if coming into his father's arms and as he was just about to grasp him, darted sideways to the edge of the gutter and flung the red book into it. The gutter ran in front of the houses roaring waters went down the drain God knew where. It was well known that any object that fell into it was lost for ever it sank and went out of sight, sank deeper and deeper into a black mass, and was hopelessly gone. The gutter was wide as a channel Once in

a while, especially before the elections, the Municipal officials came down and walked along the edge peering into its dark current and saying something among themselves as to its being a problem and so on But there they left it until the next election It was a stock cynicism for people to say when they saw anyone inspecting the drains They are only looking for the election votes there! At other times the gutter continued its existence unhampered, providing the cloud of mosquitoes and the stench that characterized existence in Vinayak Mudali Street.

Presently a big crowd stood on the edge of the drain looking at its inky, swirling waters People sympathized with Margayya Wild, inaccurate reports of what had fallen into it were circulated. Margayya heard people tell each other A box was dropped into it.' That child threw away a gold chain into it' Everyone looked at Balu with interest He seemed to have become a hero for the moment He felt abashed at this prominence and hung his head The sun was shining on them fiercely, though it was just nine-thirty in the morning Margayya looked red with anger and exertion His son's face was also flushed The little boy crossed his arms behind him and stood on the edge of the gutter watching it with fascination There was no trace of the book left anywhere Margayya's blood boiled as he watched the unconcern of the boy, who, true to the type in that street, wore only a shirt which covered only the upper half of his body Two pedlars carrying green vegetables, a cyclist who jumped off on seeing the crowd, a few school children, a curd-seller, and a few others formed the group which now watched the gutter with varying comments passing between them A man was saying 'Some people are so fond that they give their children everything they ask for' On hearing this Margayya felt so enraged that he lifted the edge of the shirt the little boy was wearing and slapped him fiercely across his uncovered seat The boy cried aloud 'Oh!' and turned round on his father It started a fresh scene Someone dragged away the child crying 'Save the child from this ruffian' Another said He would have pushed the child into the gutter' A woman with a basket came forward to ask 'Are you a heartless demon? How can you beat such a small child? She flung down her basket and picked up the child on her arm Balu copiously sobbed on her shoulder Another woman tried to take him from her, commenting 'Only those who bear the child for ten months in the womb know how

precious it is Men are always like this Someone objected to this statement it turned out to be the man holding the cycle who retorted with great warmth Boys must be chastized otherwise do you want them to grow up into devils? Margayya looked at him gratefully Here at last was a friend in this absolutely hostile world He swept his arms to address all the women and the gathering It s all very well for you to talk But he has thrown in there an important account book What am I to do without it?

How can a baby know anything about account books and such things? God gives children to those who don t deserve them.

You should not have kept it within his reach You must always be prepared for such things where there are children.

A washerwoman who had come forward said 'You were childless for twelve years and prayed to all the Gods and went to Tirupathi was it only for this?'

'What have I done?' Margayya asked pathetically He was beginning to feel very foolish Society was pressing in upon him from all sides—the latest in the shape of this woman who had on her back a bundle of unwashed linen Vegetable sellers oil mongers passersby cart-men, students—everyone seemed to have a right to talk to him as they pleased Society seemed to overwhelm him on all sides The lone cyclist was hardly an adequate support on which to lean. Margayya turned and looked for him. He too was gone. He saw his son clinging fast to the waist of the cucumber seller sobbing and sobbing, and gaining more sympathizers Margayya knew that the little boy would not let his sympathizers go until they took him to the shop across the road and bought him peppermints

The crowd turned away and was now following Balu and Margayya felt relieved that they were leaving him alone He broke a twig off an avenue tree, and vaguely poked it into the gutter and ran the stick from end to end He only succeeded in raising a stench. A schoolmaster who passed that way advised Call a scavanger and ask him to look for it. He'll have the proper thing with him for poking here Don t try to do everything yourself Margayya obediently dropped the stick into the drain reflecting "No one will let me do what I like He turned to go back into his house He climbed his steps with head because his brother's entire family was ranged
side He quickly passed in w
ed Something is always agitating

row' Margayya went straight into the kitchen, where his wife was cooking, ignorant of all that had happened, and told her The folk in the next house seem to have no better business than to hang about to see what is going on here Do they ever find the time to cook, eat or sleep' This was a routine question needing no reply from his wife She merely asked 'Where is the child? 'Probably rolling in the gutter,' he answered wearily 'What has come over you?' she asked 'You don t seem to be in your senses since last night'

'I'm not And if you try to imply that I have been drinking or spending the night in a brothel, I leave you free to think so——

§

The loss of the little book produced endless complications for Margayya He could hardly transact any business without it, he had to conceal the loss from his customers, who he feared might take advantage of it He had to keep out of the tree shade, remain standing or moving about, and give out figures from his head—it was all most irksome It was an important day, he had to collect money from three or four men to whom he had advanced cash

'Where is the book, master? asked Kali, one of his old customers Margayya said 'I m rebinding it. You know it must look tidy But it is really not necessary for me. I have everything I want here,' he added, tapping his forehead Kali had not been here for some weeks now and so looked with suspicion at this man standing beyond the gate, without his box, without his book. Perhaps,' thought Margayya, 'Arul Doss has been speaking to him' Kali was like a tiger which suddenly meets the ring master, without the ring, or the whip in his hand

'Why are you not in your place? he asked

'Oh! I'm tired of sitting and sitting—some sort of lumbago here,' Margayya said He sat down on the short compound wall A country cart passed along, and it threw up dust Margayya sneezed 'You see, you should not sit there,' moralized the other I should not, that s why I m looking for an office hereabouts with chairs and tables When eminent people like you arrive, you will be seated in chairs,' he said 'I must also look to your convenience, don t you see?

'Of course, said the other 'But that banyan shade was quite good sir So much fresh air I always like it'

'I don't, replied Margayya 'It s all very well for a man like

you who comes out to lounge and have a nap in the afternoon. But for a businessman it is not good. The uproar those birds make! I can hardly hear my own voice! And then their droppings! And those ants down below I used to suffer agony when I was sitting there.

'Where is your box sir? asked Kali, noticing its absence

Sent it for re-painting it's a lucky box, my dear fellow I don't like to throw it away It's not looking quite tidy I've sent it for painting I have it more as a keepsake

Yes whatever article has grown up with us must be kept all our life In our village there was a fellow who had a hoe with a broken handle——

I know all that, Margayya cut in, snubbing him just for the sake of effect. 'When he changed the handle his harvest suffered didn't it?

How do you know sir?' asked Kali overawed

I know everything that goes on in people's minds otherwise, I should not have taken to this banking business Now I know what is going on in your mind. You have got in your purse, which you have tucked at the waist money drawn from the bank.

No no sir he protested Is it so easy to get money out of them?

Listen! Your loan application was considered and passed on Monday last You must have in your purse now two hundred and seventy nine rupees and four annas that is you have given eight annas to the clerk and four annas as a tip to Arul Doss Is it, or is it not a fact? He cast a searching look at Kali who had wrapped himself in a large sheet There were a hundred corners over his person where he might tuck a whole treasure Kali met his gaze, and turned to go It was the dull hour of the afternoon when his other clients had gone into the bank or were dozing in the shade. They would all come a little later Margayya was glad it was so because he wanted to tackle this difficult man alone. Others would not be able to take a lesson from him. Kali was attempting to retreat. He looked up at the sky and said Looks like three o clock. They have asked me to call in at three again. You know how it is if we go in even a minute late They make it an excuse—— Margayya looked at him. If he let him go out of sight, he would pass into the bank and then out of it by the back door

He said firmly You give me the fifty rupees I advanced with interest. The other looked puzzled.

'Fifty! With interest! What is it you are talking about, Margayya? At other times, if anyone said such a thing, Margayya would open the pages of his red bound book and flourish it. He thought of his son. Why did the boy do such a thing? He had left the book alone all these days! Kali stopped, looked at him haughtily and said 'I never like to be called a liar! You may settle my account tomorrow, the first thing. Let me see what it is, and I will settle it the first thing tomorrow, to the last pie.' He moved away. Margayya stood helplessly. He watched him with sorrow. He could not even throw after him any curse and threats (brilliant ones that occurred to him, as usual, a little too late). 'Margayya, you have been made a fool of. They have made a frightful fool of you.' They haven't. I should have told him. You son of a guttersnipe. Don't I know what your father was! He went to jail for snatching a chain from a child's neck! You come of a family which would steal a match stick rather than ask for it. I shouldn't have associated with you, but I'll get at you one day, don't worry. I can——' But it was no use arguing with himself in this manner. The man was gone, while Margayya stood watching him dumbly. He recollected that he had helped him get loans four times—when his life and honour, as he said, were at stake. And this is what I get.' He was filled with self pity. He thought of the account book. Suppose he announced a reward to any scavanger who might salvage it? Even if it was salvaged what was the use? How was it to be touched again and read!

He had to wait at the gate, away from the line of vision of the secretary's room, sitting on the short parapet, and keep an eye on all his old customers who might go in and come out of the building. Without giving himself too much away, he was able to tackle a few of his old customers, and they didn't prove as tricky as Kali. He was able to salvage the bulk of his investments within the next fifteen days, which amounted to just two hundred rupees.

§

Margayya stepped into the temple driven there by a vague sense of desperation. He told himself several times over that he was going to see the God and not the priest. But he did not believe it himself—nor did the priest let him view only the God and go away. As soon as he entered the portals of the temple the priest's voice came to him from an unknown unobserved

behind the image in the dark inner sanctum. Oh Margayya Margayya welcome to this God s home Margayya was startled as if a voice from Heaven had suddenly assailed him. He trembled The last worshipper had prostrated before the image and was leaving Margayya prostrated on the ground before the inner sanctuary A couple of feeble oil lamps were alight a mixed smell of burning oil flowers, and incense hung in the air That was a combination of scent which always gave Margayya a feeling of elation He shut his eyes For a moment he felt that he was in a world free from all worrying problems It was in many ways a noble world where everything ran smoothly—no Arul Doss or Co-operative Society Secretary no villagers with their complex finances no son to snatch away an account book and drop it in a gutter Life was a terrible affair The faint acrid smell of oil seemed to detach him from all worries for a moment. He shut his eyes and let himself float in that luxurious sensation with the tip of his nose pressed against the flag stones of the corridor It was still warm with the heat of the day s sun Its smell of dust was overpowering—the dust carried by the feet of hundreds of devotees and worshippers or blown in by the wind from Vinayak Mudali Street When Margayya withdrew from the feeling of ecstasy and lifted his head he saw the feet of the priest near his face He looked up The priest said Margayya s mind is deeply engrossed in God If a man s piety is to be measured by the length of time he lies prostrate before God Get up Margayya. God has seen your heart already Margayya got to his feet He smiled at him and felt some explanation was due He began awkwardly You see, you see I felt I should visit God at least once a week——

Yes you were here only last evening, have you forgotten it already?'

Not at all not at all Margayya replied I wonder what the time is

In this house there is no need for us to look at a watch. If it is dark, it is night If it's sunny it s day that s all we know This is not a bank, you see At the word bank' Margayya gulped suddenly He thought it referred to him. He said I don t have a watch either

But you ought to said the priest A bank keeps a watch to see how fast interest is accumulating

My bank is finished. This is all I have, said Margayya, taking out of his pocket a small packet of currency notes—all that he

was able to salvage from his banking operations Just two hundred rupees—what is it worth?

'Two hundred rupees,' replied the priest. Come in I will give you some milk and fruit!'

'What again!' asked Margayya

'Yes, again, and again!' answered the priest 'Is there anything strange about it? Don't we have to eat every day, again and again?' Margayya was cowed. He explained It's not that. I was wondering what the time might be'

'It's not yet tomorrow, that s all I know,' replied the priest. 'If it is really late for you, you can go' He turned and moved down the corridor and passed out of sight Margayya stood still for a few moments He looked at the image of the God and threw it a vague nod His wife might once again start a lot of bother and pull a long face and think he d been visiting a brothel 'Funny creature, so jealous at this age? he reflected I can tell her I've been out on important business What makes her think I have sweethearts!' Ever since he could remember she had always shown a sort of uneasiness about Margayya. 'Who d consent to be a sweetheart to me!' he said 'A fellow with the name "Margayya," which seems almost a branding with hot iron' He remembered how a year or so ago she raised quite a lot of bother when he mentioned that a woman had come to him as a client under the tree She looked sullen for two days until he convinced her that he had only been joking

He found himself obeying the priest without a single thought of his own At a look from this gaunt man, he peeled four plantains and swallowed them in quick succession, and he drank a huge vessel of milk, treating the matter with as much reverence as he could muster When the priest said approvingly 'That s very good indeed That s an excellent performance,' he felt proud of the certificate The priest added, 'You have been hungry without knowing it'

'Yes, but when one s mind is full of worries, one does no notice,' he said, feeling that the time had come for him to say something The stars were out A cool breeze was blowing and night seemed quiet, the nourishment he had taken filled him with a sense of harmony, and so when the priest said 'Margayya! What is ailing you? You can speak out, he felt that he could no longer hesitate and fumble, that all barriers between himself and the world had been swept away and that he stood alone, that he alone mattered He had a right to demand the goods of

life and get them like an eminent guest in a wedding house—a guest who belongs to the bridegroom s party with the bride dancing attendance ever waiting for the slightest nod or sign to run to his side and do some pleasing act He swelled with his own importance When he inhaled the fresh night air it seemed to increase his stature so much that the earth and the sky were only just big enough to hold him. He began to talk in a grand manner the priest with his eyes glinting in the star light listened without speaking a word He looked like a sloth cub in the darkness as he humped into a ball with his chin on his knees his lank face thrust forward Margayya catalogued all his demands He was like a Departmental Officer indenting for his stationery—a superior baize cover for his office table a crystal paper weight a shining mirror like paper knife and so on There was no reason why he should be given the inferior things Let the stores department beware he would throw it out of the window if they sent in the miserable stuff they pu on their fourth clerk s tables He would just throw it out that s all He would be a man of consequence let them beware let the Gods beware—they that provided a man with a home cars servants the admiration of his fellow men and good clothes After letting him run on as long as he liked the priest opened his mouth and said That means you would propitiate Goddess Lakshmi the Goddess of Wealth. When she throws a glance and it falls on someone he becomes rich he becomes prosperous he is treated by the world as an eminent man his words are treated as something of importance All this you seem to want

'Yes said Margayya, authoritatively Why not? He took out of his pocket his little snuff box and tapped its lid He flicked it open and took a deep pinch. The priest said Go on go on no harm in it A devotee of Goddess Lakshmi need care for nothing not even the fact that he is in a temple where a certain decorum is to be observed. It's only a question of self assurance He has so much authority in his face looks so much money in his purse so many to do his bidding that h cares for nothing really in the world It's only the protége of Goddess Saraswathi who has to mind such things But when Saraswathi favours a man the other Goddess withdraws her favours There is always a rivalry between the two—between the patronage of the spouse of Vishnu and the spouse of Brahma

S raswath is th d ty pres d g o knowledg and nl ghtenment.

Some persons have the good fortune to be claimed by both, some on the contrary have the misfortune to be abandoned by both. Evidently you are one of those for whom both are fighting at the moment' Margayya felt immensely powerful and important. He had never known that anybody cared for him and now to think that two Goddesses were fighting to confer their favours on him. He lifted his eyes, glanced at the brilliant stars in Heaven as if there between the luminous walls, he would get a glimpse of the crowned Goddesses tearing at each other

'Why should they care for me? he asked innocently

The priest replied 'How can we question? How can we question the fancies of Gods? It's just there, that's all it's beyond our powers to understand'

Intoxicated by this, Margayya said 'A man with whom the Goddess of Wealth favours need not worry much. He can buy all the knowledge he requires He can afford to buy all the gifts that Goddess Sarnswathi holds in her palm'

The priest let out a quiet chuckle at Margayya's very reckless statement Margayya asked Why do you laugh? Already a note of authority was coming into his voice. The priest said 'Yes, this is what every man who attains wealth thinks You are moving along the right line. Let me see your horoscope. Bring it tomorrow Tomorrow! It seemed such a long way off 'Can't you say something today? Margayya asked pathetically, feeling that he was being hurled back to the earth. The priest said About the same time as today, meet me with your horoscope'

'Yet another night out and all the trouble with my wife,' Margayya thought immediately

The priest saw him off at the door and shut the temple gate.

§

The moment his wife opened the door Margayya demanded 'Where is my horoscope?'

Horoscope? his wife said dreamily 'What happened that you want it so urgently at this hour?' She looked him up and down suspiciously and feeling probably that it was not the right time to drag him into a talk, turned and went back to bed.

It was eight o clock when Margayya got up He would probably have slept on till eleven but for the fact that Balu sat on his chest and hammered his head with his lacquered wooden elephant

When he opened his eyes, Balu let out a shout of joy put his arms round his neck, and pretended to lift him out of bed Margayya looked at him benignly 'This boy must grow up like a prince The Goddess willing, he'll certainly He sprang up from bed In a quarter of an hour he was ready bathed wearing a clean dress, and his forehead smeared with red vermillion and a splash of sacred ash. He seemed to be in such a great hurry that his wife, although she had resolved to ignore his recent eccentric ways, was constrained to ask, 'What is agitating you so much?

Is coffee ready?' he asked.

She laughed cynically Coffee! The milk vendor created a scene here last evening demanding his dues It was such a disgrace with the people in the next house watching

'They seem to have nothing better to do he said irrelevantly his mind going off at a tangent.

Anybody will watch when there is something to watch she said.

So, no coffee?' he asked with a touch of despair It seemed terribly hard for him to start the day without a cup of coffee It produced a sort of vacuum, a hollow sensation He braved it out saying 'That's right. Why should we want coffee? As if our ancestors—— She added 'There is no milk even for the child Margayya threw a sad look at Balu Balu seemed happy to be missing his milk. He said 'Let us drive away that milkman It will be so nice.

'Why aren t you hungry?' Margayya asked

'Yes, I'm hungry Give me biscuits

Margayya said 'Wait a little, young man I'll fill a whole shelf with biscuits and chocolates and fruit

All for me?' the boy asked eagerly

'Yes, absolutely provided you don t bother me, but leave me alone now Margayya said. He went into their little room and pulled out a wooden chest. It was filled with letters in their old envelopes of nearly thirty years ago there you could find letters written by Margayya s father from a village Margayya s father-in-law writing to his new son-in-law a letter from an uncle saying that there was a nice girl to be married and proposing her for Margayya, enclosing horoscopes There were several letters containing saffron tipped horoscopes on old stiff paper There were unknown names of girls—either proposed to Margayya or to his brother with their horoscopes and many acrimonious letters that passed between him and his brother before the parti-

tion Every letter he picked up stirred a cloud of dust. Little Balu stole up and stood at his shoulder as he squatted on the ground Margayya turned round and said 'Balu, you must promise not to put your hand out'

'Why?'

Margayya handed him over to his wife with 'Take this fellow away If you let him come near me again——'

She snatched him up as he protested and shouted and carried him away, muttering This is only a trick to send me off. You don't like me to see what you are doing I suppose. I don't know what you are up to! So mysterious!

'Women can t hold their tongues, that's why,' Margayya replied Little Balu made a good deal of noise in the other room and Margayya muttered She has completely spoilt him, beyond remedy, I must take him out of her hands and put him to school That's the only way, otherwise he will be a terrible scoundrel' As he rummaged in the contents of the box his mind kept ringing with his wife s weak protests and grumblings 'Seems to be bent upon worrying me—she s getting queer? he said to himself He took up every envelope, gazed on its post mark, examined the letters, became engrossed for a while in by gone family politics, and finally came upon a couple of horoscopes tucked into an envelope addressed to his father A short note by his father in-law said 'I'm returning to you the originals of the horoscopes of Sowbhagyavathi (ever auspicious) Meenakshi, and your son Chiranjeevi (eternally-living) Krishna Your daughter in law is keeping well Any day you ask us to fix the nuptial ceremony I shall bring her over' Margayya (he hadn't yet attained that name) felt a sudden tenderness for his wife She seemed to become all at once a young bashful virgin bride.

'Meenal' he cried Here are the horoscopes' She came up, still bearing her son on her arm Margayya flourished the horoscopes 'I ve found them' He clung to them as if he had secured the plan of approch to a buried treasure 'What is it?' she asked He held up the letter and cried 'This is a letter from your father about our nuptials' She blushed slightly, and turned away 'What has come over you that you are unearthing all this stuff?' Little Balu would not let her finish her sentence. He started wriggling in her arm and showed an inclination to dash for his father s horoscope 'Take him away,' cried Margayya Otherwise we shall find all this in the gutter before our house—so much for this son of ours'

Presently she came without their son to ask What exactly are you planning? Her face was full of perplexity Don t worry he said looking up at her He still felt the tenderness that he had felt for her as a virginal bride He told her Don t worry I ve not been hunting out my horoscope in order to search for a bride He laughed She found it difficult to enjoy the joke with him It was too puzzling She merely said By all means look for a bride I shan t mind He was disappointed that she sounded so indifferent he was proud to feel that she guarded him jealously However he bantered her about it without telling anything He could not exactly say in all seriousness what he was trying to do You will know all about it very soon. When he started out that day she asked rather nervously Will you be late again today?

'Yes he said 'What if I am late? I m only out on business be assured.

His son said I will come with you too and ran down the steps and clung to him. Margayya could not shake him off easily He carried him up to the end of the street and lectured him all the way on how he should behave in order to qualify for biscuits and chocolates The lecture seemed to affect him since he became quite docile when Margayya put him back at his house and left

§

That night in his shack, the priest scrutinized the horoscope with the aid of an oil lamp He spread it out and pored over it for a long while in silence He said Saturn! Saturn! This God is moving on to that house He may do you good if you propi tiate him. Why don t you go and pray in that other temple where they've installed the Planetary Deities? Go there with an offering of honey 'Where can I get honey? Margayya asked looking worried. He suddenly realized that he had never bought honey in his life It was just one of those things that one always had at home, when the household was managed by one s parents Now he recollected that ever since he became an independent family head he had managed to get along without honey Now the testing time seemed to have come The priest burst into one of his frightening chuckles He remarked Margayya shows the whole world how to increase their cash—but honey! He stands defeated before honey is that it?' I will manage it, Margayya said haughtily I was only saying— The priest

arbitrarily cut short all further reference to the subject 'On Saturday go to the temple and go round its corridor thrice. Do you know that Saturn is the most powerful entity in the world? And if he is gratified he can make you a ruler of this world or he can just drown you in an ocean of misery Nobody can escape him. Better keep him in good humour,'

'All right, I will do as you say,' Margayya said, with quiet obedience in his voice. He felt as if Saturn were around him, and might give him a twist and lift him up for the plunge into the ocean of misery if he did not behave properly

It was four o'clock when the priest had finished giving him instructions—a course of prayers and activities He recited a short verse and commanded Margayya to copy it down in Sanskrit, and side by side take down its meaning in Tamil He saw him off at the door and said 'You need not see me again, unless you want to Follow these rules'

'Will they produce results?

'Who can say?' the priest answered 'Results are not in our hands'

'Then why should we do all this?

'Very well, don't, nobody compels you to'

Margayya felt completely crushed under all this metaphysical explanation He bowed his head in humility The priest closed one door, held his hand on the other, and said The *Shastras* lay down such and such rituals for such and such ends Between a man who performs them and one who doesn't, the chances are greater for the former That's all I can say The results are you may have results or you may not or you may have results and wish that you had failed—'

'What is your experience with this *Mantra*?'

'Me!' He chuckled once again 'I'm a *sannyasi*, I have no use for it Don't do it unless you wish to,' said the priest and shut the door Margayya stood hesitating in the road with the stanza in his pocket, and all the spiritual prescription written down He looked despairingly at the closed door of the temple and turned homeward He felt it was no use hesitating He might go on putting questions, the other could answer, yet all the problem would remain unsolved 'Problem? What's the problem? he suddenly asked It was a happy state of affairs not to remember what the problem was The priest had been saying so much incomprehensible stuff that Margayya felt muddled and fuddled. He stopped in the middle of the road and

He has told me what to do I shall do it honestly Let me not bother about other things

§

Margayya s wife was overawed by his activities He told her next day Clear up that room for me indicating the single room in their house in which she slept with her child and into which all the household trunks and odds and ends were also thrown

What are we to do with these things?

Throw them out I want that place for the next forty days

Where am I to sleep?'

What silly questions you keep asking! Is this the time to think of such problems?

She became docile at this attack and begged Can t you tell me exactly what you want to do?

He told her in a sort of way he d been advised not to talk of his method and aim even to his wife The priest had said Even to your wife—there are certain practices which become neutralized the moment they are clothed in words

She asked Is this what people call alchemy changing base metals?'

No it is not, said Margayya not liking the comparison

They say that it is like magic—black magic, she wailed looking very much frightened

Don t get silly notions in your head it is not that the priest is not a man who dabbles in black magic Don t go talking about it to anyone—

The little room was cleared and all the odds and ends—broken down furniture, trunks and boxes stacks of paper spare bed rolls and pillows and mats were pulled out and heaped in a corner of their little central hall Balu became ecstatic. He pulled down the things and mixed them up and generally enjoyed the confusion Their neighbours heard the noise of shifting and thought They are doing something in the next house wonder what it is? They tried to spy on them but there was a blank wall between them Margayya had the room washed clean chased out the rats and cockroaches and swept off the cobwebs that hung on the wall and corners It was a very small room less than eight feet broad with a single narrow window opening on the street If the shutter was closed the room became pitch dark. Margayya drew up several pots of water from the well and splashed the water about He then commanded his wife to decorate the floor with white

flour designs, a decoration necessary for all auspicious occasions. He had a string of mango leaves tied across the doorway He took from a nail in the hall the picture of the Goddess Lakshmi, put up a short pedestal and placed the picture on it the four-armed Goddess, who presides over wealth, distinction, bravery, enterprise, and all the good things in life. When he carried the picture in, his wife understood something of his plans Oh, I see, I now understand'

'That's all right. If you understand, so much the better—but keep it to yourself

He had two hundred rupees in his possession still, which he had to use up He gave his wife a list of articles she should supply him with—such as jaggery, turmeric, coloured cooked rice, fruit, refined sugar, black gram cake, sweetened sesamum, curd, spiced rice and various kinds of fruits and honey He would require these in small quantities morning and evening for offering—and most of them were also to be his diet during the period of *Japa*. He gave his wife a hundred rupees and said This is my last coin. You have to manage with it.

What about the provisions for the house—and the milkman?'

'Oh, do something manage the milkman and the rest for some time and then we will pull through This is more urgent than anything else'

§

A couple of days later, at the full moon, he began his rites. He sat before the image of Lakshmi He shut the door, though his son banged on it from time to time. He kept only a slight opening of the window shutter, through which a small ray of light came in but not the curiosity of the neighbours. He wore a loin cloth soaked in water A variety of small articles were spread out before him in little pans He inscribed a certain Sanskrit syllable on a piece of deer skin and tied it round his neck with a string He had been in an agony till he found the deer skin. The priest had told him 'You must carve out this on an antelope skin

'Antelope!' he gasped Was he a hunter? Where did one go and find the antelope skin? 'You search in your house properly and you will find one Our elders have always possessed them for sitting on and praying' said the priest

'Very well I will look for one' said Rajayya.

'And then have you seen any red lotus?'

Yes I have, Margayya said apprehensively wondering what was coming next.

Where?' asked the priest. Margayya blinked and felt disgusted with himself 'They usually sell them in the street for *Vara Lakshmi* festival

Exactly! said the priest But now you will have to go where it is found. Formerly you could pick up a lotus from any pond nearby—there were perhaps ten spots in a town where you could pick up a lotus in former days, but now our world is going to pieces because we have no more lotus about It's a great flower—the influence it has on a human being is incalculable After a dissertation on lotus the priest said Beyond Sarayu towards the North there is a garden where there is a ruined temple with a pond. You will find red lotus there Get one, burn its petals to a pitch black, and mix it with *ghee*

Ghee! Oh yes— Margayya said feeling that here was at least one article which you could find in the kitchen Even if the store-man was ill-disposed one might still win him over in view of the impending change of circumstances

It must be *ghee* made of milk drawn from a smoke-coloured cow! said the priest.

Oh! groaned Margayya, not being able to hide his feelings any more.

You probably think all this is bluff some fantastic nonsense that I m inventing

Oh no I don t feel so for a moment, but only how hard what a lot of——

'Yes but that is the way it's done It's so written in the *Shastras* You have to do certain things for attaining certain ends It is not necessary to question why It'll be a mere waste of energy and you will get no answer Well follow my words carefully Take the blackened lotus petal mix it with *ghee* and put a dot of it on your forehead after the prayer every day exactly between your eyebrows

Yes, Margayya said weakly He was feeling more and more in despair of how he was going to fulfil these various injunctions 'Red lotus grey-skinned cow and antelope where am I? what a world this is—— It seemed to him an impossible world 'How am I to get all these?' He groaned within himself

Have trust in yourself and go ahead He will show you a way Did you imagine that riches came to people when they sat back and hummed a tune?'

He cut across the field and walked half a mile, and came upon a garden hedged off with brambles and thorn His legs ached with this unaccustomed tramping and his feet smarted with the touch of thorns He passed through the thicket expecting any minute a cobra to dart across and nip at him This place must be full of them—supply the entire district with cobras from here There was a small narrow gap in the hedg and he passed through it into a large wood semi-dark with sky topping trees—mango margosa and whatnot The place looked wild and deserted and an evening breeze murmured grimly in the bough above Down below fallen leaves were ankle-deep and he passed through them with his feet sending out a resounding crick-crick This is just where cobras live—under a blanket of dry leaves—— Here flower gardens had gone wild—all kinds of creepers ja mine bushes and nerium growing ten feet high were intertwined and mixed up Some fool has let all this go to waste, he reflected In fruit alone one might make ten thousand rupees out of this soil

He arrived at the pond Its greenish water had a layer of moss occasional ripples were thrown out by warts or some other darting water creature and mosquito larvae agitated the surface here and there Margayya felt very lonely The steps of the pond were broken and slippery half the bank on his side had fallen into the pond On the other side there was a small *mantap* its walls covered with cobweb and smoke Three blackened stones in a corner indicated that some wayfarers had sojourned and lighted a fire here it might be last year or a century ago In the middle of the pond there were lotus flowers—red as the rising sun They were half closing their petals 'They know better than we do that it s nearing sun-set Margayya reflected He stood on the somewhat slippery step thinking of how to reach the lotus He d have to wade through the greenish water He stood ankle deep in it and wondered if he had better take off his clothes and go in If this *dhoti* gets dirty it will not merely be dirty but it ll acquire a permanent green dye, I suppose. And it'll be difficult to go back home wearing it. People might stare and laugh Better take it off there s no one about. He tucked up his *dhoti* and looked round in order to make sure If a man lives here he will not need a square inch of cloth he reflected Far in a corner of the little *mantap* on the other bank h saw someone stirring He felt a slight shiver of fea passing through him as he peered closer Is it a ghost or a maniac? He withdrew a couple of steps and

He cut across as yours he replied promptly As I said I am garden because it doesn t seem to bother anyone I discovered this with a pure fluke I m given to cross-country hikes I have to in to my profession——

'What is your profession?

I m a journalist. I m a correspondent for all these districts of a paper called *Silver Ray* published in Madras

Tamil paper?

Yes of course It is the most widely circulated paper in Tamil with an enormous circulation in F M S Ceylon and South Africa I cover these districts for them and in my spare time write my own books

Oh you write books?' Margayya asked full of wonder

'Yes yes during my spare time—so difficult to find the leisure for it as a correspondent. All day I must knock about courts and offices and meetings on my cycle in search of news I don t get much time That s why I stay here, where I can work without disturbance Margayya was greatly impressed. He had always thought very highly of newspaper people How many books have you written?

Four came the reply and he added 'Three are here, tapping his forehead. Only one has been got down on paper——

'What is it? A story?'

A story! Oh, no something more serious than that

Oh! said Margayya feeling that he had better not make inquiries in a region where he was a stranger Books and writing were not for him he was only a business man Margayya arose to go

It's getting late, he murmured

I will go with you up to the road, said the other and followed him down to the edge of the pond Margayya was fascinated by the sight of some more red lotus floating on water with their petals already closing He reflected Even if there is a pound of paste to be made we have enough lotus here—provided I can find the grey cow His mind started worrying about the next stage of the search Where are grey cows to be seen? Perhaps this author and journalist by his side might be able to help They walked down the grassy path in silence for a while Margayya surprised the other with the sudden inquiry Have you seen a smoke-coloured cow?

Where?' the other asked stopping suddenly

Anywhere I mean do you know where a smoke-coloured cow can be seen?

'Why?'

Margayya felt embarrassed. He blinked again. I want its milk—for some special, medicinal purpose.

'Are you an *Ayurvedic* doctor or an aphrodisiac-maker?' the other asked, looking at him. Trying to make some potent drugs with red lotus and so on. I have seen only *Ayurvedic* doctors coming here in a search of some herb or leaf or lotus and things like that.' Margayya felt that because he had no ready answer, and no name to give for his avocation in life, the other would give him no useful tip He covered the entire topic with a loud, prolonged laugh, at the end of which he found the other completing his remark I suppose the milk must always be white, whatever the colour of the cow

Margayya agreed with this remark, laughed afresh, and changed the subject immediately 'What did you say your books were about?'

Sociology,' said the other

Oh! I see,' said Margayya, trying to look clever, though completely bewildered by the term. He felt like asking 'What is it?' but felt it might be an undignified inquiry He just nodded his head and remained silent. The other asked 'You know what sociology is, I suppose?' He was trapping him unnecessarily

'Of course, in a manner, but you know I'm a businessman, we businessmen have not much time for scholarly activities'

Dr Pal understood the position and said It's a subject that has been much neglected in our country—particularly in our own vernaculars, in our mother tongue. They've everything in English, but in our mother-tongue—no What should the thousands of persons who know only our language do to learn the subject?'

'Yes, yes, it is very difficult,' Margayya agreed. They had now reached a thatched hut. 'Come in for a moment and see my home and study,' said Dr Pal

Margayya protested and said something about its being dark.

'I will escort you back safely,' said the other 'Don't worry there are no cobras here.' He pushed the door open. A mat was spread on the ground with a greasy pillow on it, and away from it stood a small tin trunk with a bottle of ink and a stack of paper on it. A very small bed-room lamp was kept on the trunk. Dr Pal pushed away the pillow and said 'Pray sit down, I have not much furniture to offer—this is all But this is a nice place.'

Margayya sat down carefully holding the lotus so as to protect

it from being crushed The place smelt of straw which was spread on the floor

I do all my writing here I return here at the end of my day s roving in the town. I sit on this mat all night and write at dusk I go out to that pond and sit contemplating in the *mantap*—it s a very inspiring place Margayya felt impressed and overawed so he asked as a piece of courtesy I suppose that is your book You send it afterwards for printing?

'Yes I hope to said the other He picked up the manuscript and handed it to Margayya Margayya received it with the ut most courtesy The cover was of brown paper He turned the last page and saw the number Oh a hundred and fifty pages? he asked admiringly

'Yes I want it to be a short book so that any person may buy and read it Margayya turned the pages and a chapter-heading caught his eye Philosophy and the Practice of Kissing

Oh! Kissing! You have written about kissing too!

Yes of course it is an important subject

Who kisses?—children or——

Oh! Children s kisses are of no account here—— Margayya felt interested and turned to the title of another chapter Basic Principles of Embracing He turned over the pages and started reading the first sentence of the opening chapter Man embraces woman, and woman embraces man—— He felt interested Briskly turning over the leaves he came upon the title sheet and read out aloud Bed Life or the Science of Marital Happiness

What is this? Margayya exclaimed You said it was——

Sociology Yes this is a branch of sociology I have spent years studying this subject. A thousand years ago Vatsyayana wrote his Kama Sutra or Science of Love I have based this whole work on it plus research done by modern scientists like Havelock Ellis and so on This subject must be understood by every man and woman. If people understood and practised this science there would be more happiness in the world.

'But it seems to be all about about—— Margayya could not find the right word. He felt too shy He felt eager to read on but put it away feeling that further inspection would seem indecorous

'You can read it if you like, said the other

Margayya put it away as if avoiding a temptation.

'You will have everything you want in a nutshell there It seemed as if the other would not let him go The author added I want to have a few illustrations if I can find a artist.

'What those illustrating those? gasped Margayya

'Yes, why not? I want to illustrate some of the parts I want it to be of practical benefit I want it to serve as a guide book to married couples My aim is to create happiness in the world'

'Are you married?' Margayya asked, coming to the point.

'Yes otherwise how could I write all that.'

'But but you are alone——' Margayya said, looking round.

'Yes I have to be——' He seemed saddened by some domestic memory Margayya's curiosity could no longer be kept in check 'Where is she?' he asked bluntly

'God knows,' said the other 'I have had to leave her——'

'Why? Why?' Margayya said, 'How sad! He sat brooding

The other said 'She was an impossible woman a terrible woman who was unfaithful, and tried to ogle every man who appeared before her A woman with a polyandrous tendency' Margayya was somewhat shocked at the free manner in which he spoke The other laughed and said 'How scared you look at my talk! Don't fear, I am not yet married Probably you are already thinking how can this fellow write about the happiness of married life when he himself has been such a failure! Was it not the line of your thought?'

'How did you guess?' Margayya asked Everyone seemed to guess correctly what went on in his mind—a most dangerous state of affairs it seemed to him 'I never married,' the other assured him again 'But I only gave you a sample of what is likely to happen when people are ill-matched'

'True, true,' said Margayya

'Reading this book will be a way of preventing such tragedies,' said Dr Pal

§

The next few days Margayya was lost to the outside world He sat in the small room repeating

> Oh Goddess, who affordest shelter to all the fugitive worlds!
> Thy feet, by themselves, are proficient in affording immunity from fear and bestowing boons

He had to repeat it a thousand times each day, sitting before the image of the Goddess He wore a red-silk *dhoti* and smeared his forehead and body with sacred ash The cries of the pedlars in the street were submerged in the continuous hum that proceeded

from his own throat his son s continued shout of *Appa! Appa!* was heard by him as a distant muffled sound A little light came through the small opening of the shutter The room was filled with the scent of incense camphor sandal dust and jasmine All this mingled perfume uplifted the heart and thoughts of Margayya He was filled with a feeling of holiness—engendered by the feel of the red silk at his waist He was gratified at the thought of his wife s obedience She is quite accommodating he reflected She got up at five and prepared the jaggery sweetened rice which had to be offered to the Goddess As he sat down with his eyes shut he said to himself I have achieved difficult things grey cow's milk butter red lotus made into black paste This time last week I could not believe that I should be able to get together grey milk and red lotus When the God dess wants to help a man she sends him where all things are available and who would have thought that there was a deserted garden——

This brought to his mind Dr Pal and his works He felt an unholy thrill at the memory of Pal s book It seemed as though his mind would not move from the subject This man wanted to put in pictures—what a wicked fellow It d be most awkward Why was Dr Pal interested in the subject? Must be an awful rake if he could write all that and was unmarried Some of the chapter headings came to his mind He realized with a shock what line his thoughts wer pursuing and he pulled them back to the *verse* the priest had told him to let his mind rest fully on its meaning while repeating it He kept saying Oh Goddess who affordest etc. and unknown to him his thoughts slipped out and romped about—chiefly about the fruits of the penance he was undertaking forty days of this—afterwards? He visualized his future How was wealth going to flow in? When he became rich suppose he bought from his brother the next house too tempting him with a handsome cash offer He realized that this was his major concern in life He would be a victorious man if he could bring his brother to his knees and make him part with his portion of the house and then he would knock down the partition wall Each day it took him eight hours of repetition to complete the thousand and then he reverently put the black paste on his forehead Int the camphor called in his wife and child and sprinkled the holy water on them. His jaws ached, his tongue had become dry he felt faint with hunger since he had to fast completely while praying

He followed this course for forty days When he emerged from the little room, he had a beard and moustache and hair on his nape He had been told not to shave in the course of this penance He looked venerable His voice became weak, he could not utter any speech without automatically mixing it up with 'Oh, Goddess, who affordest shelter ' He looked like an examination student who has emerged from the ordeal, sipped in every way but with his face glowing with triumph Margayya had lost ten pounds in weight much of the padding on his waist and jowl had gone

PART TWO

WHEN he was again seen in the streets, shaven and clean, he looked like a young man. His chin sparkled with the long-delayed shave, and his moustache was trimmed to perfection. He looked so tidy when he went along the street again with his shirt and upper cloth that people stopped and asked 'Where have you been all this time, Margayya?' He had no answer So he said 'Here. All along Where should I go?'

'I haven't seen you in your usual place or anywhere.'

'Usual place! Oh, there, you mean! That was only a side business for me, more for my own diversion I'm busy with other plans,' he said grandly

About the time he closed his business he had two hundred rupees in hand, out of which the previous month's household expenses took sixty rupees, the forty-day ritual cost him at least two rupees a day for fruit and flowers and special offerings, then he had to have a feast on the last day and feed four brahmins, and give them each a silver rupee on betel leaves after the meal. About a hundred rupees in all were gone He found himself grudging this expense and explained to himself 'How can grudge it! Can't a man spend at least so much for earning the benevolence of a Goddess?' He had a magic syllable carved on leather and tied to his sacred thread He wished he could know when the beneficial effect would start, when the skies would open and start raining down wealth He wished he could get an answer to his question

In his despair he tried to meet the priest. But somehow the priest had not encouraged him to call again For a day Margayya was seized with the horrible thought that the man had played a practical joke on him What if he had merely fooled him! Priests were capable of anything Every word that the priest had uttered seemed to lend support to this suspicion He had even taken the trouble to avoid him

Days passed, and his misgivings increased He seemed to have suddenly lost all plans in life His purse was getting lighter each day It was difficult to while away the time. From morning to night he had to think what he should do next. If he stayed at home, it invariably resulted in some clash with his wife, for his

son misbehaved so much in his presence that either he or his wife felt impelled to chastize him, and each vehemently protested when the other did it And then all kinds of controversies started between him and his wife It was such a strain having always to talk in whispers—lest the people next door should overhear He sat dejectedly facing Goddess Lakshmi and mentally saying to her You have taken my last coin What have you given me in return? Has the priest been fooling me? He felt indignant at this thought. If he has fooled me! God help him I'll have my fingers round his throat!

As he lay across the hall on a towel spread on the floor his mind was busy with these thoughts In that small house it was a bother to have the head of the house all the time lying across the floor Margayya's wife had quite a number of visitors coming in each day A brinjal-seller who brought in her basket walked across the hall and sat in the back yard verandah to transact her business the servant woman who came in to wash the vessels and scrub the back yard an hour a day a fat lady wife of a lawyer who dropped in for a chat in the afternoons and some school children who came running in during the afternoon recess for a drink of water When Margayya lay across the hall of his house he obstructed their passage to the rear verandah and kitchen where the lady of the house received them. Every time a visitor arrived Margayya had to scramble to his feet and stand aside to let the visitor pass. They went on and asked Margayya's wife privately 'Why is your husband not going out?' The lady felt confused and awkward and gave out some reply but later questioned him 'What has come over you that you don't go out at all——?'

'Where should I go?

Like all the other men why don't you try to do some work and earn some money?

Money is not a pebble in the street to be picked up by just going out.

Oh, is that so? I didn't know I thought it was something to be had in the street.

Thus their talk went on entirely lacking in point She had no clear idea of what she expected him to do and he had no clear idea of what he should do outside the house. He tried it for a few days His steps naturally led him to the Co-operative Bank. But it was clear that he had lost his place His previous clients only tried to avoid him, fearing that he might accost them for their old

dues He had no one to talk to He went through the town like a lost soul, but although to begin with some people spoke to him, now nobody took any notice of him. He could not go down the Market Road for fear of being stopped by the optician. So after a few days of aimless wandering, he took to staying at home It delighted only his little son and no one else Next door they remarked 'What has come over that man? He is hardly to be seen outside Is he hiding from creditors?' They had also wondered previously why so much scent of incense emanated from the next house 'They must be up to some mischief, perhaps trying black magic on someone they don t like We must be careful with such people'

As the month came to an end and Margayya had to buy rice and salt for the pantry, he found himself short by ten rupees, and they had to manage without ghee His wife declared 'I have never been in this plight before' Balu made matters worse by asking 'Mother, I want ghee.'

'There is no ghee, my boy You must eat your food as it is,' Margayya replied.

'I won't,' said Balu, throwing away the rice and getting up

'You'll learn to be contented with what you get,' Margayya moralized foolishly

'No, I won't. I want ghee, said the boy rebelliously, kicking away his rice plate

If you kick away your rice, I will kick you,' Margayya said, at which the boy burst into tears and appealed to his mother She burst into tears too because it reminded her of the story of Gora Kumbar, a potter, who was devoted to the God Vishnu and took no care of his family At meal times his little son demanded ghee, without which, just like Balu, he would not eat. The lady went out to borrow ghee from the next house, leaving the child in the care of the father, who was stamping on wet clay all the time When she was gone, he got into a mystic ecstasy and started dancing, and did not notice the child crawling under his feet and when the mother returned with ghee the child had been stamped into the wet mud Margayya's wife burst into tears, remembering this story, which she had seen as a drama in her young days Margayya, bewildered and pained by all the scene, ate his food in silence, but, without ghee and with all this misery, it tasted bitter

He decided to search out the priest I can't keep quiet any

more. He will have to tell me what is what—otherwise, I will not let him off lightly

Margayya sought him out late that night. He pretended to go to the temple very late in the evening for worship, and hung about till the crowd cleared. He heard the priest's voice inside the sanctum. When the crowd dispersed he moved up to the threshold of the sanctum and peered in. There was a new man there.

Margayya asked 'Where is he?'

'Who?'

'The other priest——

'Why?'

Margayya felt annoyed. Why were these priests assuming such impudent and presumptuous manners? But the priest was in the proximity of God and Margayya was afraid to speak sharply He controlled his voice and temper and answered I have some business with him.

'What business?' asked the priest, tossing flowers on the image without turning in his direction. 'Does this man think he is God wondered Margayya. 'He is so indifferent!

Probably he thought, the other priest had told him Margayya may be dropping in often, asking for me If he comes, show him the utmost rudeness and keep him out. It seemed quite possible to his sickly imagination. Margayya opened his lips to say something, but in came some devotees with coconut and camphor and the priest became busy attending to them. Margayya noted with pain the differential treatment that was being meted out. It's quite clear that he has been told to snub me see how warm and effusive he is to those people! It is because he hopes to get money out of them. Money is everything dignity self respect. This fellow is behaving towards me like the Co-operative Bank Secretary In his mind he saw arrayed against him the Secretary Arul Does this man, and the washer woman who abused him on the day his son destroyed the account book. It seemed such a formidable and horrible world that he wondered how he had managed to exist at all

The priest now came out bearing a plate with a camphor flame on it which lit up his face Margayya noted that he was a very young man. The others put money into the plate after touching the flame. The priest paused near Margayya, who just looked away I have paid enough for these godly affairs thought Margayya. The priest threw a quick look at him and went in

The devotees left. The priest sat down before the image and started reciting some holy verse. Margayya stood on the threshold. The other paused during his recitation and asked 'What are you waiting for?'

'I'm only waiting for your honour to come out and answer my question.'

'Am I an astrologer? What's your question?'

'This man is practising studied rudeness on me. He has been taught to this young fellow! thought Margayya. His anger rose. He became reckless 'Hey, young man, who taught you to speak so rudely?'

The young man looked surprised for a moment, and then raised his voice and resumed his recitation.

Margayya cried 'Stop it and answer me! A very devout man, indeed!

'You want to stop God's work. Who are you?'

'A youngster like you need not ask unnecessary questions Learn to give correct answers before you think of putting questions At your age!'

The youth asked 'What do you want?'

'What I want to know is, where is the old priest. And, if you can, answer without asking why'

'He has gone on a pilgrimage.'

'When did he go?'

'About a month ago'

'When will he come back?'

'I don't know'

'Where has he gone?'

'To Benares—from there he is going on foot all along the course of the Ganges, to its very source in the Himalayas'

'Why is he doing all this?'

'I don't know How can I say?'

Margayya felt indignant He walked out of the temple without another word. He felt he had been cheated That old priest had played a trick on him, making him waste all his money in performing fantastic things 'Benares, Ganges! Himalayas! How am I to get at him!' He wished he could go to the Himalayas and search him out. For a moment he speculated pleasantly on what might happen to the old man there He might get drowned in the Ganges, or die of sunstroke on the way, or get frozen in the ice of the Himalayas

Next day he wandered up and down through the east and the west districts of the town in search of an idea He got up in the morning hoping that some miracle would happen some chance or fortune be picked up on the doorstep He got up early and opened the door There were the usual goings on of Vinayak Mudali Street, and nothing more—a curd-seller passing with the pot on her head, a couple of cyclists going to a mill some children running out to play an early game, and so on But he saw nothing that was likely to bring him the fruits of his penance He felt acutely unhappy

He wandered all over the town in search of an idea. He went up to the northern section and sat on the hot sands of the Sarayu thinking He sat in the shade of a tree and watched the sky and river His mind had become blank. He went down the Market Road looking at every shop He was searching for an idea He watched every trade critically Tailoring? Hair-cutting Saloon Why not? Any labour had dignity But all of them would be more troublesome than anything he had known. 'Nobody will give me money for nothing I must give them something in exchange——' He sat on the parapet of the Market Fountain and thought. What was it that people most needed It must be something that every person could afford. The best business under the sun was either snuff or tooth-powder or both. It had to be something for which every citizen would be compelled to pay a certain small sum each day He was engrossed in profound economic theories Snuff his mind gloated over the visions of snuff The initial outlay would be small just enough to buy a bundle of tobacco He knew all about it, for there used to be a snuff maker in front of his house. All his equipment was a few cinders of charcoal a small iron grate, and a mud pot for frying the tobacco in. Fry and pound the tobacco add a little lime, and leave the rest to the snuffers themselves Margayya's snuff for flavour this was worth trying It was an investment of ten rupees He must fry the leaves in a place far away from human habitation. Tobacco while being fried sent up a choking smoke which kept the neighbourhood coughing and complaining He wondered how long it would take to realize the profits A year or less or not at all Suppose people never touched his snuff and it accumulated in tins up to the ceiling? What could he do with them? He might probably use the stock himself But he himself had been addicted to the Golden Monkey Brand for years and he dared not try any other Or he might manufacture tooth

powder His mother used to make a sort of tooth powder with burnt almond shell and cinnamon bark and alum, and it was said to convert teeth into granite

Margayya now thought of his mother with gratitude There was always a big crowd of sufferers waiting for her at the hall of their old house She was of a charitable disposition She took the stock out of a large earthen jar, and distributed it liberally His father used to declare 'You will be reborn in a Heaven of Golden Teeth for this' She did it as a form of charity, and their house was known as the Tooth Powder House It seemed an ideal business to start now The world was going to be transformed into one of shining teeth. But a misgiving assailed him How could he make people buy it rather than the dozen other tooth powders? He didn t know the art of selling tooth powder He couldn't go about hawking it in the streets It would be a fine look out if the Secretary of the Co-operative Society caught him at it. Arul Doss would call out 'Hey, tooth-powder, come here, give me a packet. Here are three pies' And he would have to gather the coppers like a beggar, with peals of laughter ringing out from the whole world And the old priest might chuckle from the Himalays for having reduced him to a picker of copper coins! 'No,' he told himself, 'I'm businessman I can only do something on the lines of banking It's no good thinking of all this' He watched the fountain hissing and squirting, while the traffic flowed past, and sighed, as he had sighed so often before, at the thought of his banyan tree business He sighed, reflecting Here is an adult, sitting on the fountain like a vagrant when he ought to be earning' He feared that if this state of affairs continued he might find himself looking for an orphan s corpse and dashing about with a mud tray in his hand.

'Hello, friend,' cried Dr Pal from the other side of the fountain He was coming down the road on his cycle 'I thought I should never see you again—you went away without telling me where you lived You didn t come again for lotus! It took time for Margayya to be shaken from his business reverie 'Oh, you!' he cried, not exactly liking being disturbed by this man now He felt shy of meeting him, associating him with smut Dr Pal leaned his cycle on the parapet and came over and sat beside him.

'You didn't come again for lotus,' he said

'Oh, lotus—one was enough for me,' said Margayya, putting into his tone all the despair he felt at the whole wasted activity

People always go for lotus in a series, never in singles——' said

the other obscurely Margayya laughed pretending that he read some inner meaning Well what makes you spend your time sitting here?' Pal asked

Margayya thought Why can t people leave me alone? He didn t like to give the correct explanation. He said Someone has promised to come up and meet me here

Oh a business meeting, I suppose

Of course said Margayya. I have no time for just casual meetings The time is——' He looked around him.

Four said the other looking at his wrist watch. 'You won t mind if I keep you company?'

Oh not at all replied Margayya mortified, but he overcame his mortification enough to add, I only fear it may hold you up unnecessarily You may have other business

I m on duty even when I m sitting here and talking to you. I'll make a story of it for my paper—that's all they want. They won t mind as long as I fulfil my duty

Surely you won t write about me?' Margayya said

'Why not? I might say Mr—— Oh, what's your name please? I've not enquired, although I've been around with you so much.

'Why do you want my name?' Margayya asked defensively

'Don t worry I won t publish it. I just want to know as a friend, that's all Suppose som.body asks me who is that friend with whom I have been talking and I say I don t know it'd look grotesque. Isn t that so? What is your name?'

'People call me Margayya——

'Excellent name initials?'

'No initials——

Oh, no initials, that's excellent. Initials indicate town and percentage. But that's for lesser folk who have to announce their antecedents

It's not necessary for me If you say Margavya every one will know However that's not my name

Oh I thought it was

How?'

How? How? The "how" of things is my trade secret Otherwise I wouldn t be a writer My business is to know things—not tell anyone how you understand

'Extraordinary fellow Margayya said

'Yes I am, said the other I know it. Come along, let us go somewhere and gossip

'We are doing it here quite well said Margayya.

'Oh, no This place is too noisy I want to talk to you privately Come on, come on, don't say "no!" ' He was irresistible. Margayya remembered in time to protest 'But I have told you I am waiting here for someone '

'Oh, he will follow us there, don't worry '

'Come along to my office. I must show you my office.'

They walked along, through the crowd. It seemed to be all the same for Margayya, what he did or where he went. He followed the other blindly He took him through the eastern end of Market Road, turned into a lane, stopped before a house and knocked on the door A little boy opened it. 'Who is inside' Pal asked.

'No one,' the boy said.

'That's fine!' said Pal. 'As I expected Open my office then, young fellow!'

The young man disappeared and opened a side door and put his head out. Hold the cycle,' commanded Pal The young man came out with alacrity and took hold of the bicycle. Pal marched in, asking Margayya to follow He followed him into a very small room stuffed with empty packing cases, piled up to the ceiling There was a stool in the middle of it with a higher stool before it. On the wall hung a printed sheet 'Silver Way—Chief Representative's Office. There were a few stacks of paper in a corner 'Don't look shocked by the state of my office,' said Pal 'This is only a temporary place I'm moving into a big office and showroom as soon as it is ready '

'Where?' Margayya asked

'Wherever it may be available That's all I can say You know how it is with the present housing conditions!' Margayya did not feel disposed to agree with him He said 'You can get houses if you honestly try After all, you want only a room——'

'But nobody will give it to me free, don't you see, and that is the only condition on which our chief office is prepared to accept any accommodation! You see my problem. They want a place in the town to be called their office, but they won't pay any rent for it I got this because I also write accounts for these businessmen and they have allowed me to hang up my board '

What do they deal in? Tooth-powder or something like that? Margayya asked

'They make cheap soap and export it to Malaya—make a lot of money——' he said

'Must be an easy job,' Margayya reflected aloud.

Most messy and a terrible gamble

But I think there is a lot of money in it said Margayya. His mind at once went off He had no clear idea how soap was made He only remembered some piece of odd knowledge about coconut oil and caustic. Perhaps a hundred rupees invested might soon multiply provided the soap became popular Give it a lot of attractive colouring and sell it cheap and people would flock to buy it—Margayya s soap Margayya s tooth powder Margayya s snuff The choice of his business now seemed to be between these three He would have to make up his mind about it and start somewhere instead of idling away the day on the fountain parapet. There was silence during these reflections The other watched him and then asked Have you done with your deep reflections!

Some ideas connected with my business came to my mind suddenly——

Sit down there it s not nice to remain standing, said Pal

Margayya sat down Pal sat down on the higher stool

Margayya listen to me very attentively he began. I am speaking to you on a very important matter now

Go ahead I am not deaf You can speak in whispers if you like, if it is such a great secret Margayya said.

If you are thinking of making money or more money or just money speak out said Pal almost in a whisper coming close to his face His eyes were so serious that Margayya said How did you guess?'

'There are only two things that occupy men s minds I'm a psychologist and I know

What are they?' Margayya said

Money and Sex. You need not look so shocked. It is the truth Down with your sham and hypocritical self-deception Tell me truthfully is there any moment of the day when you don t think of one or the other?' Margayya did not know how to answer It seemed a very embarrassing situation Pal said I m an academician and I m only interested in Truth and how human beings face it

I think of plenty of other things too Margayya said defensively

'What are they?'

About my son and what he is doing

'What is it but sex? asked the dialectician 'You cannot think of your son without thinking of your wife

'Oh, that will do,' said Margayya indignantly 'I don't like anyone to talk of my wife'

'Why not?' persisted Pal 'Have you considered why people make such a fuss about their wives? It is all based on primitive sexual jealousy'

'No—you should not speak lightly about wives You know nothing about them If you are a bachelor, then I don't know what you are'

'I am a sociologist, and I cannot sugarcoat my words I have to speak scientifically'

Margayya was overawed by the man's speech He did not quite grasp what he was saying All the same, he said 'It is generally understood that you may talk of any subject freely—but you must not make free reference to another man's wife'

'Nor to one's own wife,' added Pal I don't think anyone can speak openly about his wife If he could speak out openly what she means to him and what she thinks of him or he of her behind the screen of their house or behind the screen of their bed chamber, you will know'

'Oh, stop, stop,' cried Margayya 'I won't hear any more of it' He felt ashamed This 'sociologist' or whatever he called himself seemed to be preoccupied with only one set of ideas Margayya said 'I wish you would marry some strong girl and settle down It will give you other things to think of

'I don't want to think of anything else I feel I am made by God in order that I may enlighten people in these matters and guide their steps to happiness, asserted Pal 'And do you know it is the most paying, most profitable occupation in the present-day world?'

At this Margayya sat up This was a sentiment which appealed to him. He said 'What do you mean by that?'

'I'm going to start a sociology clinic, a sort of harmony home, a sort of hospital for creating domestic happiness, a sort of psychological clinic, where people's troubles are set right I can charge a small fee Do you know how many people will come in and go out of it each day? I am certain to earn five hundred rupees a day easily My book 'Bed Life'—you remember you saw it?——'

'Yes'

'That's only a first step in the scheme When that book is published, I expect to have at least a lakh of copies sold'

'At what price?' asked Margayya

Say at about a rupee per copy You must not price it higher than that After all our purpose is to reach the common man.

'You mean to say that you are going to make a lakh of rupees out of it?'

'Yes what is strange about that? That's only for a start.

One Lakh of Rupees! One Lakh of Rupees! In Margayya's eyes this man began to assume grandeur This lank fellow cycling about and gathering news held within his palm the value of a lakh of rupees Margayya was filled with admiration. Tooth-powder and snuff and all the rest seemed silly stuff beside this You could never see a lakh of rupees with these commodities it would probably go back into the oven again and again, perhaps But here was a man who spoke of a lakh of rupees as if it were a five rupee note!

'That's only a starting point, Pal added There is no reason why it should not go on earning a similar sum year after year It's a property which ought to bring in a regular rent There is no limit to your sales The book will simply be—there will be such a clamour from humanity for this stuff that ultimately every human being will own a copy The Tamil-speaking area in India gives us a good start add to it the tens and thousands of people in Siam Burma, South Africa and so on and you get the number of copies you should print. And then if it is translated into Hindi, it should reach the whole of India—and the population of India is three hundred and sixty millions according to the last census If every man parts with a rupee, see where you are.

Yes replied Margayya greatly impressed I never thought there was such a wide scope for selling books

Not for all books For instance if I wrote a book of say poems or philosophy nobody would touch it—but a book like Bed Life is a thing that everyone would like to read Do you know people like to be told facts people like to be guided in such matters Ultimately as I told you I shall open a clinic. I want to serve mankind with my knowledge I don't want to keep it within my closed fists We must all be helpful to each other I have worked for years and years studying and writing just in order that mankind may be helped He spoke without stopping for breath and concluded Do you know if I just throw down a hint anywhere that there is such a book as this people will fall over each other to publish it.

Indeed!

'Yes there are offers of ten thousand rupees or more for it. But I won't part with it for ten times that amount

'Why not?' asked Margayya.

'Because I can do better than that if I keep it If people come to make a business offer, they will find me very hard, let me assure you, because I know my mind.'

'So it will be impossible to get it out of you?' asked Margayya

'Yes, generally, if anyone comes to me as a businessman'

'Oh!' Margayya said, remembering with despair that he came under that category

The other added 'But let a man come to me as a friend and hold out his hand, the book is his'

'But you will lose your lakh——'

'I wouldn't care Don't imagine I am so fond of money I treat money as dirt.'

This was a shocking statement for Margayya He cried 'Oh, don't say such things You must not' He recollected how the Goddess Lakshmi was such a sensitive creature that if a man removed a tumbler of milk she fled from the place and withdrew her grace

'I'm a man who cares for work, human relationships, and service to mankind,' said Dr Pal 'Money comes last in my list.'

Margayya felt a desperate idea welling up in him He could hold it back no longer It almost burst through his lips, and he asked 'Suppose I say "give me that for printing and selling," what would you do?'

In answer, the other went out and came back carrying the bag which had been hanging from his cycle handle He thrust his hand into the bag, and brought out the manuscript Without another look at it he dropped it on Margayya's lap as he sat on the stool

'Are you playing? asked Margayya, hardly able to believe his eyes It was bound in a blue wrapper He vaguely turned its leaves to assure himself that it was the right book 'Principles of Embracing'

'You take it. It's yours Do whatever you like with it,' said Pal magnificently

No, no, no,' said Margayya 'How can I?'

It's no longer mine,' said the other 'It is a bargain which is closed' He looked resolute He then held out his hand and said 'Give me what you have in your pocket I will take it in exchange It's a bargain You cannot back out of it'

Margayya said 'I haven't brought any money——'

'Then why have you brought that purse? I see its outline'

Margayya looked down with a sigh Yes the damned stuff was showing It s not a purse he tried to say But the other said Take it out let me see what it is that looks like a purse but isn t Stick to your bargain Margayya put his hand in and brought out the little purse which had a silver George V embossed on it He opened it Twenty five rupees were all its contents He took out a five rupee note and placed it on the outstretched palm of Dr Pal The other didn t close his fingers or withdraw his arm He sternly said Stick to your bargain. Empty it

This is all I have pleaded Margayya

I m giving you all that I have for my part

Margayya said I have to buy rice I have a wife and child

'Don t be theatrical Stick to your bargain Here is some thing I m giving you worth at least a lakh of rupees In return for it give me your purse I will take it whether it contains one rupee or one thousand or none Isn t it a fair bargain?

I can t give you my purse It's a lucky purse I ve had it for countless years now

I don t want your purse Give me only its contents

I don t want your book. I don t know how to print or sell a book.

Go to a printer and he will print it. You tell the public the book is ready and they will come and buy it There are no further complications It's the easiest business under the sun In fact you will hardly be able to meet the demand

'Then why have you not done it yourself?' asked Margayya

'Well I was about to But just to show you what is a bargain I've made my offer he drawled If you are really keen on can celling this bargain I am ready for it. On second thoughts I don t see why I should waste my breath on you He reached for the manuscript on Margayya s lap saying Every man must make his choice in life This is a cross roads at which you are standing Some day you will see another man going away in his Rolls while you sit on the Market Fountain and brood over my words of this evening I will give you five minutes to think it over I ll have the entire contents of your purse or none at all He kept his arm outstretched to receive the manuscript back and fixedly gazed at his wrist watch His face was grim

Margayya s face perspired with intense excitement I m losing twenty thousand each minute he told himself. Twenty forty sixty He wanted to say Give me five minutes more, but his throat had gone dry No words came By the time he

could get his voice to produce a sound again another ten seconds were gone Looking at this man, he prayed, 'God, why have you put me in the company of this terrible man amidst these wooden boxes! A yellowish sunlight came in through a top ventilator, and fell on the opposite wall. 'He will probably choke me if I don't agree,' he ruminated He wondered if he should scream for help Somewhere a cycle bell sounded. Wasn t it auspicious, the sounding of a bell? 'Three seconds more,' said the other The sound of the bell was the voice of God. God spoke through his own signs Margayya s decision was made. He suddenly felt lighter and said jocularly 'Three seconds! That's a great deal yet' He added grandly Tell me when there is still half a second to go, and pushed away the other's outstretched arm.

§

Margayya carried the manuscript home as if he was trying to secrete a small dead body He was afraid lest somebody should stop him on the way and look at it. He had begged Pal at least to wrap it in paper Pal snatched up an old issue of *Silver Way* and wrapped it up Margayya told himself all along the road 'I must see that the young fellow doesn t get at it.' His plan had been to tuck it within the folds of a stack of clothes in his box the moment he reached home At the front door he saw his wife with his son on her lap, inducing him to swallow his food by diverting his attention to the stars in the sky and the street below 'Father!' the little fellow cried joyfully, trying to jump out of his mother's arms 'Wait, wait, Margayya said, and passed in swiftly, trying to conceal the bundle under his arm

'What is it that you are carrying? his wife asked as he went by 'Bread?

He made no reply but walked straight in, opened his box and securely locked it up He then went through his routine of changing and washing His wife brought in the child and gave him into his care

Balu said 'A monkey came to our house'

'That's very good,' Margayya said. 'What did it do?'

'It ate coconut and will come again tomorrow Father, why don't you buy me a monkey?'

'Yes, when you are a good boy'

'Balu is a good boy,' he replied, certifying to his own conduct.

Margayya sat in the corridor with his son on his lap He felt

light and buoyant, expansive, and full of hope that the good things of life were now within his reach. He hummed a tune to himself and played with his son. All the time his wife was very curious to know what he had brought in the parcel She knew by trying to look severe she would never get the truth out of him. She said something agreeable about the boy Do you know what a change is coming over the little fellow? He is so quiet and obedient nowadays, she said, coming and standing beside him

Margayya replied He is the finest youngster except when he is otherwise, and laughed. The boy looked at him bewildered and said 'Why do you laugh?'

I don t know Margayya said, and all of them laughed heartily

The boy having heard a good report about himself wanted to keep it up and did nothing to exasperate his father He ate a quiet dinner lay down on his mat and ordered his father to tell him a story Margayya strained his memory and began the story of the fox, the crow and the lion, till the boy interrupted him with I don t like the fox story Tell me a flower story'

I don t know any flower story Margayya pleaded At this the boy threatened to kick his legs and cry Margayya hastily began Once upon a time there was a good flower—— and fumbled and hummed and hawed wondering how people wrote hundreds of pages of stories which brought to his mind Dr Pal and his book—how those people ever could sit down and write so many pages. He admired for a moment their patience, and subsequently corrected himself He didn t like to admire anyone and so said to himself These fellows have no better business that s why they sit down and fill up sheets whereas we businessmen have hardly any time left even to compose our letters

The boy insisted on knowing at this stage What flower was it?'

'Lotus, he felt like saying but checked himself and said Some flower—why do you want its name now? and then blundered through a clumsy impossible story, till the boy fell asleep out of sheer lack of interest.

After finishing all her work, his wife came up with an endearing smile and sat beside him on the ma.. He put his arm round her and drew her nearer recollecting the chapter on Principles of Embracing. She nestled close to him. It was as if they had thrown off twenty years and were back in the bridal chamber He said 'Why don t you buy flowers regularly? I see that you don t care ~t them nowadays

'I am an old woman, flowers and such things——'

'But this old man likes to see some flowers in this old lady's hair,' he said They laughed and felt very happy And then she asked at the correct moment 'What is that bundle you brought with you?'

Oh, that! You wish to see it?'

'Yes, yes, of course,' she said, quite thrilled at the prospect

He got up, opened his trunk and brought out the packet wrapped in *Silver Way* He slowly opened the wrapping and took out the manuscript At the sight of it her face shadowed with disappointment.

'What's this?' she asked

'It's a book'

'Oh! I thought you had brought me a *saree,* some surprise gift, I thought' There was a note of disappointment in her voice 'Book! Paper,' she said contemptuously 'What book is this?'

'You see for yourself,' he said, and gave her the packet

She turned the leaves and was horrified 'What is it all about? It seems to be ' But she could not say anything more. 'It seems to be so vulgar!'

'No, no, don't say such a thing,' he said He didn't like to hear any disparaging reference to the book 'It's a scientific book. It's going to bring in a lot of money'

She made a wry face and said 'How can anybody have written about all this? You men have no '

'What's wrong with it? It's something going on all over the world every moment. It's very important. People should possess correct scientific knowledge, and then all marriages will be happy I'm going to educate Balu in all these matters the moment he is interested'

Oh, stop that,' she cried, and flung away the book

He picked it up, bent close to the lamp and started reading it aloud It was probably too scientific for ordinary mortals She listened both horrified and fascinated

6

A few days later, Margayya walked into the Gordon Printery in Market Road It was a fairly big establishment in Malgudi—every form, letter-head, and bill-book in Malgudi was printed at Gordon's Its proprietor was a man from Bombay who came and settled down here years ago—a hefty, rose-cheeked

called Madan Lal He sat at a table right in the middle of a hall where a dozen people were creating the maximum amount of noise with various machines which seemed to groan and hiss and splutter In this general uproar he sat calmly poring over proofs and opposite his table were ranged two iron chairs Margayya stood at the entrance He felt lonely and isolated and unhappy They might sneer at him and tear up his manuscript If the Secretary and Arul Doss came down at this moment to see some of their own printing He overcame this sinking feeling immediately Self assurance is the most important quality to cultivate he realized He sounded quite assertive when he asked someone at the entrance Where is your proprietor?

Sitting there the man replied

Oh I didn t notice Margayya said and went up The man looked up from his papers and asked What can I do for you? He pointed at an iron chair Margayya sat down placed his manuscript before him and said with a lot of self assurance I wish to have this book printed Can you take it on?

'That I can say only after going through the manuscript.

Go on read it.

I have no time now You can leave it here

Impossible, said Margayya. I am not prepared to leave it with anyone You can go through it here while I wait

I've other business

I ve also other business I have come to you for printing not for any other business If you are not prepared to take it on say so and he put out his arms towards the manuscript.

Oh no, don t lose your patience the other pleaded. I was only—— He picked up the manuscript and glanced at the title page Ah!' he exclaimed And then he passed on. Every chapter heading and every page seemed to fascinate him He kept exclaiming Ah! Ah! and Margayya sat before him and watched with complete aloofness He admired himself for it. This is the right attitude to cultivate in business If we show the slightest hesitation or uneasiness others are only too ready to swallow us up Proof bearers came up and waited around until Lal should look up An accountant stood there with an open ledger in his hand, waiting to catch his attention Lal kept exclaiming Ah! Ah! every few seconds His staff stood around in a circle. Get out of the way everyone and give me light, he suddenly shouted Th.. accountant alone came up and said undaunted 'This is urgent. He placed the fat book on the

manuscript, Lal snatched a minute to look into it, and pushed it away When his accountant showed signs of looking over his shoulder, he said brusquely 'Don't try to see what people are reading Go away' And the accountant went away Lal looked for a moment at Margayya and said 'The curiosity some people have! They have a lot of unhealthy curiosity about all sorts of *things*'

Margayya said 'Are you going to read through the entire manuscript?'

'Yes,' said the other 'Otherwise, how can I know whether I can print it or not?'

'Have I to sit here all the time?' asked Margayya

'Why not? That's what you said you would do Otherwise you may go out and return'

What was the man proposing? Margayya reflected Perhaps he had some dark design No, even if it took a whole day, he would sit up there Never go out of sight of those papers 'I will wait here,' said Margayya. Go through it fast'

'Yes, yes,' the other cut it impatiently 'Don't disturb me'

Papers continued to come to him. Lal was indifferent Proofs piled up on his table. Attenders waited around for approval of copy The accountant came up again and again for his signature on a leatherbound book Lal snapped at him and signed. And then he pushed the other papers unceremoniously off his table saying 'No one is to come near me till I am through with this piece of work this is very urgent and important Don't you see this gentleman waiting?' The machine room foreman came up presently He hovered about, cleared his throat, and ventured to say 'The School report, sir The machine is idle.'

'Oh!' he replied, then rummaged amongst his papers, snatched a proof, and after the briefest glance at it, flung it at him 'Go ahead.'

It was one o'clock in the afternoon when Lal looked up and said 'I'm hungry, and yet I have not finished Still thirty pages more I have to go home You wouldn t leave this with me, I suppose!

'No', said Margayya resolutely How can I?'

'Then you come along with me for lunch'

Margayya felt worried This man from the North—God knew what he ate at home perhaps beef and pork and strange spices How could he go and sit with him? He said bluntly I have already had my food'

'That's excellent come along with me

'No I have to go home

'Why should you if you have had your dinner already?

I have got some other business

Then what do you want me to do Sit here with this foregoing my meal is that it?

As you please You must have read enough of it to know what to tell me.

Be reasonable Muster he appealed. If you give me a little more time, I will finish it and then I shall be in a position to discuss the matter with you

Then go on Margayya said. I am not preventing your reading further

The other hammered on the call bell impatiently till an attendant came up and stood before him Go home and tell them I m not coming for my meal today Send somebody and get something from the restaurant for two

Coffee and several plates arrived Lal pushed away all the papers to make space for the plates and invited Margayya to eat. He kept the manuscript on his lap his eyes running down the lines his fingers strayed towards the plates on the table and carried the food to his mouth as if they had an independent life of their own. He looked up for a brief moment at Margayya and said Go on, go on, make yourself comfortable

Margayya had some plates on his side of the table he hesitated only for a moment and then said to himself 'Why not?' He was hungry He had had a sparse meal hours ago They had put before him many tempting coloured sweets and coffee. 'This is indeed lucky he reflected. 'This is good tiffin. It'd have cost me over a rupee. He ate the *jilebi* and wondered if it would be proper to carry a bit of it home for little Balu He was racked with a feeling that he was stealing some delicacy which ought to have gone to his child.

Make yourself comfortable Lal said hospitably from time to time without lifting his eyes from the manuscript.

Margayya noticed that the other was a voracious eater and polished off all sorts of oddments in a lump it didn t matter what That's why he is so hefty Margayya reflected He is not a half fed, half-starving businessman like me That s why he is able to command so much business and income

When the plates were removed Lal wiped his mouth with a handkerchief looked at Margayya and announced I have finished reading the book.

'Well, what do you think you can do?'

'It's an interesting book, no doubt'

'It's a book that must be read by everybody,' Margayya added.

No, no, don't say that, it s not fit for everybody's reading For instance, if a young unmarried person reads it——

He will know a lot of facts beforehand,' Margayya said, and thus established a greater communion between the two

Lal said 'Mister, I must consult my lawyer first'

'What has a lawyer to do with it?' Margayya asked The mention of a lawyer was distasteful to him.

'The trouble is,' said the other, 'I must know if it comes under the obscenity law There is such a law you know They may put us both in prison'

It's not obscene It's a work of sociology'

'Oh, is it? Then there is no trouble. But I'd like to be told that by a lawyer Will you please come again tomorrow at this time?'

'What for?'

'I will have discussed the matter with my lawyer, and then I shall be able to tell you something If only you could leave the book with me!'

'That I can't do,' said Margayya, sensing another effort on the part of the printer to get at the manuscript. He added for emphasis 'That I can't do, whatever may happen.

'Won't you come with me to the lawyer?'

'When?' asked Margayya, with a profound air of having to consider this engagement diary

'Sometime tomorrow'

Margayya sat considering It was no use going to a lawyer The thought of a lawyer was distasteful to him. The Co-operative Society Secretary was a lawyer All lawyers were trouble-makers Moreover, why should he cheapen himself before this man? He said Impossible. I have a busy day tomorrow I can probably drop in just for a few minutes if you like, that is if you are going to tell me definitely yes or no He added 'I came to you because yours is the biggest establishment I knew you could do it, although a dozen other printers were ready to take on the job'

'Ours is the best and biggest press,' Lal said haughtily 'You will not be able to get this service anywhere else, so much I can assure you'

'What will be your charge?'

I can tell you all that only after we decide to take on the work

'Will you require a long time to print the book?' Margayya persisted.

I will tell you tomorrow Lal said.

Margayya said 'You are a very cautious man You don t like to commit yourself to anything.

'That's right, the other said appreciatively sensing a kindred soul For among businessmen as among statesman the greatest dread was to be committed to anything Being non-committal was the most widely recognized virtue among businessmen and it came to Margayya instinctively as his other qualities came to him

The musician hums the right note at birth the writer goes to the precise phrase in the face of an experience, whereas for the businessman the greatest gift is to be able to speak so many words which seem to signify something, but don t which convey a general attitude but are free from commitment.

Next day Margayya tidied himself up more than ever and was at the press at the appointed time. He still carried his manuscript securely wrapped in a paper sheet. The moment he entered the press he had a feeling that all was going to go well He went straight up to Lal and asked 'Well, what does your lawyer say?

'We can take it if you agree to a couple of small conditions'

'You can speak your mind freely Margayya said encouragingly 'In business we either conclude a deal or we don t, but there is no room for mincing words If you don t want it here I can take it somewhere else, he added.

'No, no, don't say such a thing, Master the other said I don t like negative statements to be made in this press

I don't like negative statements myself unless I am forced to make them, said Margayya, discovering instinctively yet another principle of business life to have the last word. He concluded that he who spoke last gained most He was burning with anxiety to know if the other would print the book, for he seemed to be a man who knew his job Margayya looked about and asked in a businesslike manner 'What are the two conditions you mentioned just now?'

I will take up the printing provided it's done on a basis of partnership

'What's the partnership for?'

'Well that will make our work more interesting Let us publish it together and share whatever we get I mean fifty fifty in everything expenses as well as returns Do you agree?

Margayya took a little time before answering 'I won't say "Yes" or "No" before thinking over it deeply What's your second condition?'

'You must indemnify me against any legal action that anyone may take at any time.'

'What do you mean?'

'You must bear the legal responsibility for bringing out this book'

'I see!' said Margayya with deep suspicion 'Why?'

'It's because you are bringing it out'

'If I am bringing it out, you have nothing to do with it except to print it, isn't that so Then why do you ask for profits? How are you concerned with profits?'

For a moment the other looked a little confused, but soon recovered enough composure to say 'I mean to propose a non-liability partnership'

Margayya was taken in by the high-sounding phrase What did it mean? It meant evidently sharing his profits, not his troubles

He said 'I've done a variety of business I'm experienced in different kinds of partnership'

'What business were you doing before?' asked Lal

'Chiefly banking,' Margayya said 'You know when a man is a banker he is at once involved in a number of other things too,' picturing himself writing a letter here for a villager and arranging a joint-loan for another there

Lal seemed to appreciate this He said 'We have a bank in Gujerat, but you know it also deals in oil-seeds in certain seasons'

'It's inevitable,' Margayya said, with an air of profundity

'It's impossible not to be interested in more than one business,' added Lal

They went on talking far into the day Once again lunch-time came. Once again they got their tiffin from a hotel and Margayya stuffed himself with sweets and coffee and began to feel quite at home in the press They kept talking non-committally, warmly, discreetly and with many digressions, till late in the evening, but without concluding anything Their talk, and counter-talk never ceased and the manuscript lay between At about six they dramatically stretched their arms over it, shook hands and concluded the pact, whereby Margayya had the satisfaction of seeing himself a fifty-fifty partner without any investment on his part He covered the satisfaction he had in the deal with 'I'm not keen

on this but you know you seem to have become such a friend to me that I find it difficult to refuse He pulled a long face and signed a partnership deed with the utmost resignation He kept saying 'You have won me over You are a sharp business man a compliment which Lal accepted with the utmost cheerfulness

We can never be businessmen unless we give and take on a fifty fifty basis Lal kept saying a proposition heartily endorsed by Margayya although its arithmetic was somewhat complex and beyond the understanding of ordinary men

Margayya knocked on his door with great authority Lal had offered to drive him home in his car But Margayya declined it definitely He didn t want him to see his house or street He explained that after all the hours of sitting in a stuffy atmosphere he would prefer a walk, so as to be fit for work next day

He knocked on his door with such authority that his wife came up hurriedly and opened it She stood aside to let him pass in. She could not pluck up enough courage to put to him the usual irritating questions She served him his food and then said in a forced light manner 'This has almost become your usual hour?

'Yes it may have to be even later hereafter I shall have to be very busy

Oh! she said. Is that book printed?'

It's not so easy he replied. 'There are many complications And as she did not annoy him with further questions he added I have almost signed a partnership agreement with a big man. He liked the sentence and the feeling of importance that it gave him. But he didn t like the word big' that he had used. Reflecting he felt he might take the word out and knock it flat lest his wife should think he really meant anyone was bigger than he He rectified his mistake by adding *Big* business man! *Big*! A North Indian he thinks he is very clever but I was able to tweak his nose——

Oh! said his wife gratified He seemed to acquire a new stature and importance He finished his dinner and when he got up she was ready with a bowl of water for his hands And then she held a towel up to him

He was pleased with all these manifestations thinking 'Yes she is not a bad sort except when she gets into a bad mood He said aloud We can live differently hereafter I think. A lot of money is coming in.

The next day he had a very busy time discussing several technical matters, of which he was totally ignorant, with Lal Lal seemed to assume that Margayya knew what he was talking about Margayya true to his principles did not wish to show his ignorance

Lal asked 'Shall we print on demy or octavo?'

What was demy and what octavo? What strange terms were these, to what universe did they belong? Margayya frankly blinked, wondering 'What was this man talking about?' He said grandly 'Each has its own advantage, it's for you to decide, you are a technical man'

Lal said 'You see, demy will give us greater area'

Margayya was hearing the word for the first time in his life He could not understand to which part of a book or press or sales the word referred. He kept himself alert, deciding not to lose any hint that might fall in the course of the other's talk He added 'If it means extra area, what other consideration can you have?'

'It's not only that, octavo is more handy, and will look less like a gazetteer'

At the mention of gazetteer Margayya made a wry face 'Oh, no, we cannot afford to make it look like a gazetteer'

In that case we will print it on octavo'

'All right,' he said, permitting it graciously 'But as a matter of formality I shall be glad to know the difference in cost.'

'Not much, about an anna per pound,' Lal said.

Pound! Where did pound come in? He was about to blurt out the question, a survival of his boyhood days in the classroom where, whenever the word pound was mentioned, the immediate question was 'Lb Pound or Shilling Pence Pound?' He almost opened his mouth to ask it, but pressed it back in time, remembering that it was a silly betraying question even in those days the teacher caned all the boys who asked him that question, for it showed that they had not paid any attention to the sum they were doing Margayya feared if he raised it the other might tear up their agreement or decide to swindle him with absolute impunity What did they weigh in the book trade? He could understand nothing of it He dropped it, hoping on some future occasion that he would know all about it He had on unfailing hope that whatever there was to be known would be known by him one day 'Only I must keep my eyes open, and in six months I shall be able to tell them what is wrong with them,' he thought, with much self-esteem

Lal observed him for a moment and then said 'Why are you silent? You are not saying anything

It is because I have nothing to say said Margayya.

So you accept my choice

'Yes, of course, Margayya said hoping this would once and for all save him from further embarrassment.

But Lal turned up with a new poser for him Shall we use ordinary ten point Roman or another series which I use only for special works? It s also ten point but on an eleven point body

Body? Points? Ten and Eleven? What was it all about? Margayya said Ah that is interesting I should like to see your eleven point body He had grotesque visions of a torso being brought in by four men on a stretcher When Lal reached out his arm and pulled out a book, he didn t think it had any relation to the question he had asked He thought Lal was trying to read something But Lal opened a page, thrust it before him and said 'This is it How do you like this type?' Margayya gazed at it for fully five minutes and said It seems all right to me What do you say?'

It's one of our finest types said Lal. Do you wish to see our ordinary Roman?

Now he roughly knew what this meant If this is your best there s not much reason why anything else should be seen he said with the air of a man who could employ those few minutes to better profit. He added, in order not to allow the other too easy a time, Only tell me if you have any special reasons from the point of view of costs

A difference of a couple of rupees per forme that's all

'That's all is it? Margayya said. How many formes will there be?'

Lal glanced through the script and said Even if it's going to be page for page it won t be more than ten formes

I don't think we ought to worry about a bare difference of twenty rupees Margayya said feeling happy that he could after all take part in the discussion

I agree with you said Lal Now about the style of binding etc.

Oh these details? Margayya exclaimed They should not come as far as me. You ought to decide those things yourself

But every item has to go into costs I don t want you to feel at any time that I have incurred any expense without your knowledge

That comes only at the end doesn t it? Margayya said

Of course in the first quarter following publication

And Margayya felt relieved—he had a gnawing fear lest he should have to shell out cash immediately

'And,' said Lal, 'my lawyer suggests that we had better call this book "Domestic Harmony' instead of Bed Life Have you any objection?

Oh, none whatever,' said Margayya In these matters we must implicitly obey the lawyers'

Otherwise we shall get into trouble.

Yes, otherwise we shall get into trouble,' echoed Margayya, adding We must do everything possible to avoid getting into trouble because a businessman's time is so precious'

'You are an uncanny fellow You seem to understand everything,' Lal said admiringly

When Balu was six years old Margayya had him admitted to the Town Elementary School Margayya made a great performance of it He took the young man in a decorated motor with pipes and drums through the Market Road the traffic was held up for half an hour when Balu s procession passed Balu sat with the top of his head shaved, with diamonds sparkling on his ear lobes, and a rose garland round his neck, in a taxi with four of his picked friends by his side Margayya walked in front of the car, and he had invited a few citizens of the road to go up with him as well Strangest sight of all, his brother was also with him in the procession. They seemed to have made it up all of a sudden On the eve of the Schooling Ceremony, Margayya stated 'After all, he is his own uncle, his own blood, my brother Unless he blesses the child, of what worth are all the other blessings he may get?' He grew sentimental at the thought of his elder brother Don't you know that he brought me up But for his loving care ' He rambled on thus His wife caught the same mood and echoed 'No one prevents them from being friendly with us

'There are times when we should set aside all our usual prejudices and notions—we must not let down ties of blood,' Margayya said pompously As a result of this sentiment, at five A M they both knocked on the door of the next house and quietly walked past the astounded stare of his brother as he held the door open. Margayya's wife went straight into the kitchen to invite the sister-in-law, and Margayya stood before his brother in the hall and said 'All of you are keeping well as usual, I suppose!' adding Balu's schooling ceremony is tomorrow morning Come and bless him——'

Oh yes oh yes his brother said, still somewhat dazed.

Bring yourself and all the children for a meal Margayya said and added You must not light the oven in your own house Come in for morning coffee. Where is my sister in law?'

His brother said 'There

Margayya shouted Sister in law! familiarly as he used to do in his boyhood days It seemed to take him back decades when he was a student coming home during the afternoon recess for rice and butter milk. He made a move towards the kitchen when his wife came in the opposite direction with bowed head showing the respect due to the elder brother in law she moved off fast giving Margayya a swift glance, which he understood He turned and followed his wife quietly into the street Hardly had they gone up their verandah steps when she whispered She will not come.

Why not? Margayya asked.

She bit her lips so and nodded—the vicious creature She wouldn t speak a word to me.

Why not?'

'Why not? Why not? Don t keep saying that. She is that sort that is all

She used to be very kind to me in those days Margayya s sentimentality still lingered in him, as he remembered his school days

No one prevents you from going and asking her again.

'You invited her properly I suppose, Margayya said.

She flared up I have abased myself sufficiently

That's all right, that's all right, Margayya said scenting danger

His brother and seven of his children came and presided over the function. He presented young Balu with a silver box and at the sight of it Margayya felt very proud and moved. He asked his son to prostrate himself before his uncle ceremoniously and receive his blessings after which the boy started out for his school in a procession.

§

Margayya s son had a special standing in the school for Margayya was the school secretary Teachers trembled before him, and the headmaster stood aside while he passed They knew Margayya was a powerful man and also that he could be a pleasant and kindly man, who listened to their troubles when they met him

at home to discuss small promotions or redress He listened to them most attentively and promised to do his best, but hardly remembered anything of it next moment This was purely a defensive mechanism He simply could not keep in his head all the requests that people brought to him each day The utmost he could do for them was to be pleasant to them. When they pestered him too much he merely said, 'See here, I took up this work as a sort of service for our people, but this is not my only occupation. As a matter of fact I did not want all this business, but it was thrust upon me and they wouldn t take my refusal '

He spoke like the president of a political party after an election campaign, but his place on the school board did not come to him unsought nor was it thrust upon him On the day he admitted Balu to the school he realized that his son would not have a chance of survival unless he admitted himself also to the school Within fifteen days of the schooling ceremony he heard reports that Balu was being caned almost every day, was having his ears twisted by all and sundry, and that even the school peon pushed him about rudely He loved his son and it seemed to him that the school was thoroughly in the wrong He went there once or twice to rectify matters and was told by the headmaster that it was all false and perhaps the boy deserved all that and more They treated him in an off-handed manner which angered him very much They almost hinted that he might take his son away At the end of the term Balu came home with his progress card marked zero Margayya decided to take charge of the school

He was a busy businessman who could not afford the time for unprofitable honorary work, but he felt he ought to sacrifice himself for the sake of his son's educational progress He wanted Balu to grow up into an educated man, graduating out of a college and probably going for higher studies to Europe or America He had immense confidence in himself now He could undertake any plan with ease, he could shape his son's future as if it were just so much clay in his hand His son might become a great government official or something of the kind, or indeed anything in ten years, if this cursed school were not in his way He watched for the next election time. It was a strategy of extraordinary complexity and meant expense too, but he did not grudge it. He felt that no expense was too great for a child's future, and slipped into the place of a member whom he had persuaded to retire. After that one could notice a great improvement in Balu's career He never lost his place in the class, and the teachers

seemed to have adjusted themselves to his way of thinking In addition Margayya picked up a home tutor for him He made this selection with great astuteness He kept an eye on all the teachers and sounded his son himself as to whom he would like to have as teacher at home to which Balu promptly replied No one

Margayya said You are not to say that. You must have a home teacher Tell me whom you like most in your school

After a great deal of persuasion, the boy said Nathaniel.

Margayya knew him to be a mild Christian gentleman whom all the children loved because he told them numerous stories let them do what they pleased never frowned at them even once, and taught them history and such innocuous subjects rather than mathematics Margayya decided at once to eliminate this gentleman from his list as a home tutor It is no good appointing a sheep to guard a tiger cub he told himself He suddenly asked 'Who is the teacher that beats the boys most?

The science attender replied the young innocent.

I don t mean him. Margayya said I mean among the teachers

But the science attender says he is also a teacher Do you know father he beats any boy who doesn t call him Sir!

He does that, does he! exclaimed Margayya angrily You go and tell him that he is merely a miserable science peon and nothing more and if he tries to show off I will cut off his tail

'Has he a tail father?' asked Balu. Oh I didn t notice He burst into a laugh and laughed so loudly and rolled about so much that his father was forced to say Stop that Don t make all that noise The vision of the science attender with a tail behind only made Balu roll about more and more He made so much noise that his mother came out of the kitchen to ask, What is the matter?'

Mother the boy screamed, father thinks that our science teacher has a tail the science teacher has a tail He danced about in sheer joy at this vision and Margayya could not get anything more out of him. The boy was too wild He left him alone for the moment but questioned him again later and found that the teacher he most detested was Mr Muru the arithmetic and English teacher an old man who always carried a cane in his hand, shaved his head and covered it with a white turban, and wore a long coat. To Margayya it seemed to be a very satisfactory picture of a teacher None of your smart young men with bare heads and crop with their entertaining stories and so forth. He

immediately asked Murti to see him at his house and fixed him up at once as Balu's teacher at home and a sort of supervisor for him at school too His own professional work was taking up more and more of his time each day, he wanted another agency to protect the interests of his son at school

Murti was only too happy to accept this job since he earned only twenty-five rupees at school and the ten rupees that Margayya arbitrarily offered him was most welcome, as was the perpetual contact he would have with the Secretary of the School Board day in and day out It enhanced his status at school among his colleagues and also with the headmaster, who, if he wanted to sound the secretary's state of mind over any important question at school, called aside Murti and spoke to him in whispers All this Murti welcomed, but he also lost something in the bargain, and that was his power over his pupil, Balu. He knew that although Margayya had asked him to handle him as he would any other boy, the plan would not work. He had far too much experience with people who had an only child and a lot of money They never meant what they said with regard to their children. No one lost his head so completely over a question of discipline as the parent of an only child. Murti did not want to offend the young boy and lose his favour so that one day he might tell his father, I won't be taught by that teacher' On the other hand he did not want the father to feel that he was not able to handle Balu So he walked warily He tried to earn the goodwill and co-operation of the pupil himself so that his job might be easy He gave him many gifts of sweets and pencils and rubbers if he did a sum well and forbore his mischief, and treated him generally as a friend The scheme worked, although the boy was on the verge of blackmailing his teacher whenever he set him more sums than he cared to do But on the whole the relationship was successful and Balu progressed steadily from class to class and reached the Fourth Form

The teacher and the pupil were like old partners now, seasoned partners who knew each other's strong points and weak points Margayya stuck to his School Board election after election. He boasted to his friends and relations whenever he found a chance 'Balu is just thirteen you know, and in two years ' He gloated over a vision of his son passing into a college. He would give him a separate study in the new house he was planning to build in New Extension He would buy table lamps with green shades, they said that a green shade was good for the eyes. He would

send him to Albert Mission College, although it was at the other end of the town, far away from New Extension He would buy him a car People would look at him and say Well there goes Margayya s son. Lucky fellows, these sons of businessmen

§

Margayya had converted the small room into a study for Balu. Every morning Margayya carried out an inspection of this room in order to see that his son learnt civilized ways and kept his things in their proper places but he always found the mat not spread out on the floor but stood up against a corner half rolled his books scattered on the floor and his little desk full of stones feathers, cigarette foils and empty packets These were all collected from a small shop made of dealwood planks near by which had recently been set up by a man from Malabar Margayya felt unhappy when he saw the condition of this room. In his view a study had to be a very orderly place, with books arrayed on one side, and the clothes of the scholar folded and in their place on the wire stretched across the wall Margayya had secured a small framed picture of the Goddess Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning and Enlightenment, sitting beside her peacock and playing on the strings of a veena He hung it in the study and enjoined his son ceremoniously to pray to the Goddess every morning as soon as he got up from bed He inquired unbiningly Boy have you made your prostrations before the Goddess?'

'Yes the boy answered and ran in and performed them in a moment, then came back to the hall and just hung about staring at the sky or into the kitchen. Margayya felt angry He told his son sharply God is not like your drill class to go and dawdle about half heartedly You must have your heart in it.

'I prostrated all right father

'Yes but your mind was where?'

I was thinking of of He considered for a moment and added My lessons knowing it would please his father But it did not seem to have that effect.

'When you prostrate, you must not prostrate so fast

'How long can I lie on the floor prostrate, the boy asked sullenly I can t be lying there all the time

If you grumble so much about your duties to the Goddess you will never become a learned man, that is all Margayya warned him.

'I don't care,' said the boy, very angry at the thought of an exacting Goddess

'You will be called a useless donkey by the whole world, remember,' Margayya said, his temper rising 'Learn to talk with more reverence about the gods Do you know where I was, how I started, how I earned the favour of the Goddess by prayer and petition? Do you know why I succeeded? It was because my mind was concentrated on the Goddess The Goddess is the only one who can——'

The boy cut him short with, 'I know it is a different Goddess you worshipped It is that Goddess Lakshmi I know all that from mother'

Margayya felt upset by this taunt He called his wife and asked, 'Why have you been talking nonsense to this boy? He is saying all sorts of things'

'What has he been saying?' asked the wife, wiping her wet hands on the end of her saree

Margayya was at a loss to explain There was really no basis for his charge He merely said, 'That boy contradicts me' He turned furiously on his son and said, 'It is all the same Goddess There is no difference between Lakshmi and Saraswathi, do you understand?'

The boy was not to be cowed He simply said, 'They are different, I know' He said it with an air of finality Margayya asked, 'How do you know? Who told you?'

'My master'

'Who? Murti? I will speak to that fool If he is putting obstinate ideas into your head, he is not fit to be your teacher Then he added, Tell me as soon as he comes tomorrow or this evening'

'But you won't be at home when he comes,' said the boy

'Let him wait for me Tell him he must see me,' said Margayya

All right,' said the boy

Margayya then ordered him out, with, 'You can go and do your sums now Don't waste the precious hours of the morning' Balu ran off with great relief to his study and read a page out of his geography at the top of his voice so that all other sounds in the house were drowned

He went to school trembling with the joyous anticipation of carrying a piece of unpleasant news to his teacher The moment he sighted him he cried, 'Sir, sir, my father has asked you to wait for him this evening'

The teacher's face turned pale 'Why? Why? he stammered nervously There were some boys watching them and he said Go away boys attend to your work why do you stand and gape as sternly as he could He then took Balu aside and said Tell me boy why does your father want me to see him? I don t know sir Balu replied enjoying the occasion completely I don t know sir He shook his head but his eyes were lively with mischief and suppressed information The teacher tried to frighten him Should you not ask him why he wants to when somebody says he wants to meet somebody else? Must you be taught all these elementary things?

Oh my father cannot be asked all that He will be very angry if he is questioned like that Why should I be beaten by him sir? Do you want me to be beaten by him sir?

The teacher took him privately under the tamarind tree and begged See here what exactly happened today won t you tell me, won t you tell your teacher?

He sounded melodramatic and Balu started bargaining I couldn t do any sums this morning The teacher assured him that he would condone the lapse And then Balu went on to the next bargaining point by which the teacher himself should do the sums and not bother Balu except to the extent of showing him what marks he had obtained for them When it was granted Balu demanded 'You promised me *bharfi* I must have it this afternoon sir

'You will surely get a packet from me this afternoon said the teacher affably After all this Balu told him the reason why his father wanted to meet him The teacher cried I say whatever made you speak thus? Have I ever mentioned to you anything about Lakshmi or anything of the kind?

My father asked who told me all that and so I had to say it was you, said Balu with obscure logic.

§

The teacher waited for Margayya s arrival in the evening after finishing the lessons with Balu. Balu went in to demand his dinner It was past eight when Margayya came home As the pitpat of his sandals were heard outside the teacher felt acutely uneasy and stood up Margayya carefully put away his sandals at the corridor and came in. He saw the teacher and asked, What is the matter teaching so late! The teacher went forward

ɔed his hands and said, 'Oh, I finished the lessons
Balu has even gone to sleep I only waited to see
added
ımpossible,' said Margayya He proceeded to put
ɹr cloth and take off his shirt 'I come home after a
ork and now you try to catch me for some idiotic
ıess, I suppose Do you think I have no other
Go, go, nothing doing now'
ıt, sir, the teacher said turning to go, greatly relieved
anything else?' Margayya shouted as the other was
he teacher thought for a moment and said 'Nothing
,' in a most humble tone, which satisfied Margayya
ımportance was properly fed, and so he said, as a sort of
the teacher, 'I hope Balu is all right?'
ɔes, sir, he is quite up to the mark although he needs
watching '
, as a teacher that is what you are expected to do, remem-
And any time you see him getting out of hand, don't wait
Thrash him. Thrash him well' As a sort of general
ophy, he added, 'No boy who has not been thrashed has
to any good. I am going to be extremely busy hereafter
won't have much time for anything Don t take your eye off
boy'
Yes, sir, I will always do my best, as a teacher my interest is
e him rise in the world as a man of——
Margayya turned and went away to the back-yard without wait-
for him to finish the sentence His wife picked up a vessel of
ter and gave it to him As he poured it over himself and she
ould be sure he was feeling cooler, she said, 'Why do you con-
tantly say "Thrash" "Thrash" whenever you speak of the
child It is not good'
Margayya replied, 'Oh, you believe it! It is just a formality
with teachers, that is all It keeps them in trim After all, the
ow takes ten rupees a month and he must keep himself alert,
he dare not even touch our little darling I would strike off
miserable teacher's head'
as all very bewildering to his wife She asked, If you
him to do it why do you tell him to thrash him?
is the way things have to be done in the world, my dear
a policeman ask him to catch the thief, if you see a
to go up a tree, and if you see a teacher ask him to
upil These are the things they do and it pleases

them they are appropriate If you want to please me tell me to put up the interest, and I at once feel I am being spoken to by a friend and well wisher!

§

There was probably no other person in the whole country who had meditated so much on the question of interest Margayya's mind was full of it. Night and day he sat and brooded over it The more he thought of it the more it seemed to him the greatest wonder of creation It combined in it the mystery of birth and multiplication Otherwise how could you account for the fact that a hundred rupees in a savings bank became one hundred and twenty in course of time? It was something like the ripening of corn. Every rupee, Margayya felt contained in it seed of another rupees and that seed in it another seed and so on and on to infinity It was something like the firmament endless stars and within each star an endless firmament and within each one further endless It bordered on mystic perception It gave him the feeling of being part of an infinite existence But Margayya was racked with the feeling that these sublime thoughts were coming to him in a totally wrong setting He disliked the atmosphere of the Gordon Printery He detested his office and the furniture Sitting in a chair dangling one's legs under a table, seemed an extremely irksome process it was as if you remained half suspended in mid air He like to keep his knees folded and tucked—that alone gave him a feeling of being on solid ground. And then his table and all its equipment seemed to him a most senseless luxury They were not necessary for the welfare and progress of a business man they were mere show stuff And all that calling bell nonsense The best way to call was to shout Boy and keep shouting till the boy's ear drums split and he came running All this tinkling calling bell stuff was a waste of time. You were not a shepherd playing on a flute calling back your flock! Margayya was so much tickled by this comparison that he laughed aloud one day while he sat in his office, and was supposed to be counting the orders for *Domestic Harmony* The boy came running in at the sound of this laughter and Margayya flung the call bell at him and said 'Don't let me see this on my table. I don't want all this tomfoolery This was the starting point.

The business always seemed to him an alien one The only interesting thing about it seemed to be the money that was coming

in 'But money is not everything,' he told himself one day It was a very strange statement to come from a person like Margayya. But if he had been asked to explain or expand it further he would have said 'Money is very good no doubt, but the whole thing seems to be in a wrong setting' Money was not in its right place here, amidst all the roar of printing machinery, ugly streaming proof sheets, and the childish debits and credits that arose from book sales with booksellers and book buyers, who carried on endless correspondence over trivialities about six and a quarter and twelve and a half per cent and a few annas of postage and so forth It was all very well if you spoke of those percentages with a a value of a hundred rupees at least, but here you were dealing with two rupees per copy and involved yourself in all these hair-splitting percentages It did not seem to Margayya an adult business, there was really no stuff in it, there was not sufficient adventure in it, there was nothing in it. 'Book business is no business at all,' he told his wife one evening when he decided to part company with Lal 'It is a business fit for youngsters of Balu's age.' The lady had no comment to offer since all business seemed to her equally complex and bewildering. She had to listen with patience as he expanded his theme 'It is a rusty business, sitting there all the time and looking at those silly figures

Well, to let you into a secret, there is not much of that either, the figures are falling off, sales are not as good as they used to be.' And then it hurt his dignity to be called the publisher of *Domestic Harmony* He would prefer people to forget it if possible. When the profits dwindled he began to view the book in a peculiarly realistic light 'Awful stuff', he told his wife. 'Most vulgar and poisonous It will do a lot of damage to young minds

'And also to old minds, I think. How can people write brazenly of all those matters?' she asked.

Margayya said 'Did you ever notice how I have managed not to bring a single copy into this house? I don't want our Balu even to know that there is such a book.' His wife expressed deep appreciation of this precaution. Margayya felt further impelled to add, 'I don't want people to say that Balu enjoys all the money earned through *Domestic Harmony* I would do anything to avoid it.' He felt very heroic when he said that. He seemed to swell with his goodness, nobility and importance, and the clean plans he was able to make for his son.

It was quite a fortnight before he spoke of it to Lal Lal was thinking that Margayya was attending to his work as usual

Their quarterly statement system worked quite smoothly There was no chance of any mistake or misunderstanding Lal himself was a man who believed that in the long run honesty paid in any business. Margayya had complete charge of the sales and the division of the spoils went on smoothly without a hitch At tiffin time, Margayya called up his boy and told him Go and ask Lal if he will come here for tiffin today Tell him that there is something I have brought from home. Lal came up Mar gayya ceremoniously welcomed him and pointed to the chair opposite. My wife has sent something special today for my afternoon tiffin and I thought you might like to taste it

I have to go home for lunch said Lal I have told them that I would be there.

I will send word to them. Boy! Margayya cried He took complete charge of the other Call the master's servant, and send him up to inform the lady at the house that *Sab* is not coming there for his meal. And then run up and bring He gave an elaborate list of tiffins to be purchased at the canteen next door Ask him to make the best coffee.

'I don t want coffee, master Let it be tea. I have taken coffee only for your sake once or twice. I don t want coTee

All right, make it tea then and coffee for me Hurry up! Why are you still standing and blinking? Hurry up young fellow There, consuming their repast, Margayya made his proposal. 'Lal, you have done a lot for me I want to do a good turn to you.

At the mention of this Lal sat up interested Good turn he thought. That sounded suspicious No one like Margayya would do a good turn except as a sort of investment Lal wanted to know what the proposal was going to mean. He knew that it must be something connected with *Domestic Harmony* but he felt he should have all his faculties alert. He said very casually 'Well master we must all be helpful to each other isn t that so? Otherwise, what is life worth? What is existence worth? If we are always thinking of our profits we shall not be able to do any good in this world. I am glad you think so much of my little service to you But pray don t think too much of it I have done the little I could although financially it has really meant a loss. If I should put into my books all the time and energy to say nothing of the materials, that have been put into our job it would really turn out to be a loss If I had engaged myself in something else. But my mind will not run on these lines

I always like to think at the end of the day that I have done something without thought of profit, and only then do I feel able to go to sleep'

Margayya felt it was time for him to interrupt this peroration 'The same with me I like to go a step further Not only lack of profit I like to feel that I have done something with a little sacrifice for another person's sake It is not often one gets a chance to do such a thing, but when one does, one is able to sleep with the utmost peace that night'

With their mouths stuffed with sweets and other edibles they spoke for about ten minutes more on sacrifices and the good life. When they came to the coffee there was a lull and Margayya said casually, Here is the proposal about *Domestic Harmony* I don't like you to bear the burden any more since you say that you have had a loss Why don t you let me take it over completely?'

'Why? How can that be? There is our partnership deed My lawyer '

'Oh, let your lawyer alone. We don't need lawyers Why do you bring in a lawyer when we are discussing something as friends? Is this all the regard you have for our friendship? I am very much hurt, Lal I wish you had not mentioned a lawyer' He sat looking very sad and broken-hearted at this turn of events

Lal remained quiet for a few moments He took a cup of tea and gulped it down. He said 'Why should you feel so much upset at the thought of lawyers? They are not demons Somehow I don t like to do anything without telling my lawyer about it.'

'As for me,' said Margayya, 'you need not imagine that I have no use for lawyers I consult not one but two or three at a time in business matters I never take a step unless I have had a long and complete consultation with my lawyer But now there is nothing to warrant the calling of a lawyer or the police,' he added laughing

The other could not view the matter with the same ease and still looked very serious

Margayya said I am not calling you here to give you trouble, Lal I am only informally trying to talk over a matter with you, that is all, but if you are going to be so suspicious I had better not speak of it. You see, I am not a person who cares much for advantages, what seems to me the most important thing in human life is good relationship among all human beings'

This maudlin statement had the desired effect and Lal softened a little, and asked, 'What is it that you are trying to say?'

Merely that you should let me buy up the partnership for *Domestic Harmony*

It is impossible he cried I can prove that I have observed all the clauses faithfully How can we cancel it mister? What is it that you are suggesting?

It is only a suggestion Margayya said. Just to save you the bother that's all there s nothing more in it especially since I thought you could employ your time and energies more profitably—

Impossible! Lal cried. I will not listen to it.

Oh Margayya said and remained thoughtful Then he added Well then I will make a sporting offer He tapped his chest dramatically Just to prove that all is well here I make this sporting offer to you. Take it if you can You will then know that I am not trying to gain a mean advantage over you

'What are you saying, mister?'

It is this I will speak if you promise you will not call your lawyer or the police after me!

Oh you are a very sensitive man Lal said I meant no offence

'You might not, but it is very depressing You are a business man and I am a business man Let us talk like two business men. Either we agree or we don t agree Either give the *Domestic Harmony* solely—

Impossible cried Lal once again. There is our partnership deed.

'What is the deed worth? Tear it up I say and take over the book yourself I do not want any interest in it. I am prepared to give it to you this very moment, although in a couple of months the marriage season will be on and the demand for the book will go up I am prepared to surrender it. Are you prepared to accept it?'

'No said Lal promptly I do not like to take advantage of anyone s generosity

It needed however two more days of such talk rambling challenging and bordering on the philosophical before they could evolve an equitable give-and take scheme a scheme which each secretly thought gave him a seventy five per cent advantage. By it Margayya abandoned for ever his interest in *Domestic Harmony* for a lump sum payment, and he tore up his document dramatically and put it into the waste-paper basket under Lal s table, at which Lal seemed to be much moved. He extended his

hand and said 'Among business men once a friend always a friend Our friendship must always grow If you have any printing of forms or anything remember us, we are always at your service This is your press'

He saw Margayya off at the door and Margayya walked down the Market Road with a satisfactory cheque in his pocket

PART THREE

MARGAYYA went straight to the Town Bank He refused to transact his business at the counter, he had to do it sitting in a chair in the Manager's room But he found someone talking to the Manager and he had to wait outside for a moment. It was a crowded hour Margayya never liked to do his transactions through the counter window He despised the clerks It was a sign of prestige for a businessman to get things done in a bank without standing at the little window That was for the little fellows who had no current account but only a savings bank book He had the greatest contempt for savings bank operations putting in money as if into a child s money box and withdrawing no more than fifty rupees a week or some miserable amount, not through cheques but by writing on those pitiful withdrawal forms Having a current account seemed to him a stamp of superiority, and a man who had two accounts, account number one and account number two, was a person of eminence He saw waiting at the counters petty merchants, office messengers, and a couple of students of the Albert College attempting to cash cheques from their parents

Hearing their inquiries, Margayya felt 'Why do their parents send these boys cheques which they won't know how to cash? He thought 'What do these people know of cheques? What do they know of money? They are ignorant folk who do not know the worth of money, and think that it is just something to pass into a shop Fools!' He pitied them. He felt that he must do something to enlighten their minds He would not be a banker to them, but a helper, a sort of money doctor who would help people to use their money properly with the respect due to it. He would educate society anew in all these matters He hoped he would be able to draw away all these people into his own establishment when the time came The reason why people came here was that they were attracted by the burnished counters, the heavy ledgers, the clerks sitting on high stools and so on, and, of course, the calling bells and pin cushions Once again show, mere show Showiness was becoming the real curse of all business these days, he thought. It was not necessary to have anything more than a box for carrying on any business soundly, not necessary to have

too many persons or tables or leatherbound ledgers all that was required was just one head and a small notebook in which to note down figures if they became too complicated and above all a scheme He knew that he had a scheme somewhere at the back of his mind a scheme which would place him among the elect in society which would make people flock to him and look to him for guidance advice and management He would not yet say what the scheme would be but he sensed its presence being a financial mystic. Whatever it was it was going to revolutionize his life and the life of his fellow men He felt he ought to wait on that inspiration with reverence and watchfulness

A peon came up to say The Manager is free

All right, I ll be coming said Margayya He liked to give an impression that he was in no hurry to run into the manager's room at his call He looked through some papers in his pocket folded and put them back, and sauntered into the manager's room.

The manager was a very curt, business like gentleman who had recently been transferred to this branch. Sit down please, what can I do for you?' he asked He was a man soured by constant contact with people who came to ask for overdrafts or loans on insufficient security The moment he heard a footstep approach ing, he first prepared himself to repel any demand. So accord ing to his custom he put himself behind a forbidding exterior for a moment, and assumed a monosyllabic attitude

I wish to open an account said Margayya The manager could not take it in easily at first He still had his suspicions This man might be anybody might have come to open an account or to open the safe This hostility affected Margayya too He said at once You don t seem to want a new client If that is so He pretended to rise

Sit down please, said the other 'We have instructions not to admit too many new accounts but I should like to know——

'You would like to know whether I am a bankrupt or what All right I am not anxious to have an account here. I want it here because it is quite near to my own business place.

'Where is it?'

'You will know it presently

Really? What business?'

Margayya would not answer this question. The more the other pressed for an answer the more he resisted. Let me tell you this it is a very specialized business my clients are chiefly

peasants from the villages I have a great deal to do with their harvests and advances and so forth.' To further inquiries by the manager Margayya refused to give an answer 'I cannot give any details of my business at the moment to you or to anyone. No one will be able to get these things out of me But let me tell you I have come here only to deposit my money and use it, not to take money out of you I can quite see what is at the back of your mind Now tell me whether you would care to have my account here or not ' Now he was taking out his trump, namely, the cheque given to him by Lal. If you don't want me here, give me cash for it, but if you think I am good enough for you, start an account with this '

'Have you an account anywhere else?'

'I don t answer that question,' said Margayya out of sheer financial pugnacity, he could have told him that he had quite a sizable account in Commerce Bank in Race Course Road

The bank manager felt that here was a man who knew his mind and felt a regard for him. 'Of course I will open your account here,' he said with sudden warmth 'What does a bank exist for unless to serve its clients?'

'Quite right, Margayya said. 'I quite appreciate, he said patronizingly, your precaution as a banker Only a business man can appreciate it in another businessman.'

He had a feeling that he had after all found the right place for himself in life—the right destination, the right destination being 10, Market Road It was a block of four shops, each about twelve feet square, with a narrow corridor running in front which was thrown in as a sort of grace to the tenants The other three were taken by a tailor whose single machine went on rattling all day and night over the din of clients who came to demand their overdue clothes, and next to it was a board announcing itself as The Tourist Bureau, and having a number of small chairs and a few benches, and a fourth shop was a doctor's, who claimed to have practised under a great seer in the Himalayas and to be able to cure any disease with rare herbs Margayya was pleased with this spot. It was a combination which seemed to him ideal On the very first day he came there he felt that these were just the men with whom he could live 'They are not people who are likely to interfere with my work Moreover, it is likely that people who

come to the tailor or the doctor or the tourist bureau are just the people who have some surplus cash and who are likely to be interested in my business too

It was Dr Pal who put him into this setting Dr Pal sought him out one day at his house just as he was bullying his son over his lessons He walked in saying I didn t know your house exactly but just took a chance and came over I was just saun tering down the road wondering whom to ask when I heard your voice.

Margayya had a slate in his hand and there was a frown on his face and tears in his son s eyes He got over his confusion and affected a smile Oh Doctor Doctor what have you been doing with yourself?

The doctor looked at Balu and said You have evidently been trying to teach this young man. Don t you know that for parents to teach their off-spring is prohibited in all civilized countries? He then said to the boy as if taking charge of him immediately Now run off little man He turned ceremoniously to Margayya and added Of course with your permission Balu did not wait for any further concession he swept aside his books and ran out of sight as if a bear were behind him.

Margayya s mind had still not come to rest. He kept looking after his son and mumbled You have no idea how indifferent and dull present-day boys are

Oh no don t tell me that Remember correctly do you think you gave an easy time to your father or the teachers? Just think over it honestly

It was not a line which Margayya was prepared to pursue He brushed aside the topic, remembering suddenly that he had not been sufficiently hospitable He burst into sudden activity and began to fuss elaborately over his visitor He jumped to his feet clutched the other s hand and said Oh oh, Doctor what a pleasure to meet you after all these years! Where have you been all the time? What have you been doing with yourself? What is the meaning of cutting off old friends as you did? He unrolled a new mat and apologized You know I have no sofa or chair to offer——

'Well I didn t come to be put on to a sofa

'That is right. I don t like furniture, the type of furniture which does not suit us we are made to sit erect with our feet dangling——

I wonder said Dr Pal if the prevalence of nervous disorders

in the present day might be due to the furniture which has become popular In ancient days our ancestors squatted on the floor, stretched themselves as much as they liked and lived to be wise old men.'

Margayya could not understand whether the man was joking with him or was in earnest He called his wife and said, 'Get two cups of coffee ready immediately My old friend has come.' While waiting for coffee he said, 'Now tell me what you have been doing with yourself, doctor Where have you been hiding all these days?

The doctor said, 'I had gone for a little training in Tourism.'

Margayya was bewildered. This man was specializing in obscure and rare activities 'What is Tourism?' he asked.

'It is a branch of social activity,' the doctor said. 'The basic idea is that all people on earth should be familiar with all parts of the earth.'

'Is it possible?'

'It is not, and that is why there must be a specialist in tourism in every town and city'

'What is Tourism?' Margayya asked innocently once again

The doctor viewed him with pity and said, 'I will explain to you all about it by and by one day when we meet in my office. Now tell me about yourself.'

'No, you tell me about yourself first,' Margayya said, with a vague desire to avoid the theme of himself for the moment. There was at the back of his mind a faint fear lest the doctor should ask him to render the accounts of *Domestic Harmony* He wondered if the man had hunted him down for this and he wished to be on his guard He had hardly made up his mind as to what he should say if he broached the subject, when, as if reading his thoughts, Pal said, 'I came here some time ago, but didn't like to meet you lest you should think I had come after my book.'

Margayya sniggered and said somewhat pointlessly, 'Oh, isn't it quite a long time since we met?'

Yes, ages since. I have been away for a long time. You know I am no longer on that paper I gave it up It did not seem to me serious enough work. I always feel that we must do something that contributes to the sum and substance of human experience Otherwise all our jobs seem to be just futile.'

'I also am about to start a new business'

'Yes, I heard about it from the town bank manager,' said Pal

The man seemed to know everything that was going on everywhere, thought Margayya with a certain amount of admiration. Margayya's wife brought two tumblers of coffee to the door of the kitchen and made some noise with the vessels in order to attract Margayya's attention. Margayya said from where he sat 'You can come in, it is my friend Dr Pal I have spoken to you about him.

She was at once seized with fear whether the man was there in order to discuss another book on the same lines as the previous one. She withdrew a little, and Margayya went over and took the coffee from her hands and carried it to the front room.

The conversation languished while Dr Pal was relishing the coffee, and then he said, I heard from the bank manager that you are starting a new business I just came to tell you that if you want a nice place on Market Road, there is one vacant in our block. There is some demand for it.

They went to 10 Market Road Margayya liked the building when he saw it. A man who made a lot of money selling blankets had bought up the vacant site next to the Municipal Dispensary and built these rooms At the moment, the house was of one storey Eventually he proposed to add a first floor and a second floor The man himself had his own shop in one of the back lanes of the Market, a very small shop stacked with rough blankets. He was a strong dark man with a circular sandal paste mark on his forehead. He sat there all day chasing the flies 'Flies come here, God knows why Margayya reflected when he went to meet him with Dr Pal. They had to stand outside the shop and talk to him as he peeped out of his blanket stacks At the sight of Pal the other man brought his palms together and saluted. He had evidently great reverence for learned people.

'How are you, sir?' Dr Pal inquired genially This is one of my greatest friends he told Margayya in an aside, and added, 'You cannot imagine how much he has helped me in my most difficult times

'Tut, tut, said the other from the depth of his woollen stacks 'This is not the place for you to start all that Don't Now who is this person you have brought with you?'

He is a friend of mine who wants to be your tenant. He is opening his business in a couple of days Am I right?' he asked, turning to Margayya. With a sheet of paper Margayya fanned off

the flies that were alighting on his nose The man in the shop announced apologetically, Oh, too many flies here——'

'What have flies to do here? Margayya asked, unable to restrain his question any more

The other replied, They have nothing to interest them here, but behind this shop there is a jaggery godown There is a gap in the roof through which flies pass up and down. It is a great nuisance, and I have written to the municipality to get the jaggery shop moved somewhere else but you know what our municipalities are!'

'He is himself a municipal councillor for this ward,' Dr Pal added, 'and yet he finds so much difficulty in getting anything done. He had such trouble to get that vacant plot for himself—'

'I applied for it like any other citizen. Being a municipal councillor doesn't mean that I should forgo the ordinary rights and privileges of a citizen.'

The conversation went on with the sun beating down on their heads, and a feeling of still greater warmth was given by the sight of the heavy dark blankets all round. Margayya felt somewhat irritated that he was being made to stand in the sun all the time. He suddenly told himself, I am a businessman with all my time fully booked, why should I stand here in the sun and listen to this fellow's irrelevancies?' He told his friend somewhat sharply, 'Shall we get on with the business?'

Dr Pal looked at him surprised for a moment and asked the blanket merchant, 'Will you give the vacant shop to this gentleman?'

'Of course!' the other said, 'If you want it Give it to him if you choose.' Dr Pal turned to Margayya and said, 'Take it.' Margayya was unused to such brisk and straightforward transactions He had always a notion that to get anything done one had to go in a round-about manner and arrive at the point without the knowledge of the other party Margayya rose to the occasion and asked, What is the rent?'

'Seventy-five rupees,' said the other briefly

'Seventy-five! Rather high isn't it?' Margayya asked, hoping against hope there would be a reduction from this stern and businesslike man.

'Yes, if it were any other place but here the spot has market value. You can take it if you like. But if you are looking for a cheaper place——' said the blanket man

I shouldn't be here,' said Margayya finishing his sentence for

him. I am taking it definitely from tomorrow It pleased him very much to be able to speak up confidently in this manner If it had been those horrible past days he would have collapsed at *the knees on hearing the amount of the rent*

Dr Pal said to the blanket-seller This man is one of my oldest friends I like him very much you know

Yes I know I know said the other I could guess so otherwise you would not have brought him here Here is the key He held out a brass key for Dr Pal to take

He asked Margayya. What may be your line of business ?'

'Well sort of banking Margayya said without conviction fearing at the word bank these people would at once visualize shining counters and all the gaudy ornamentation.

It'd be more simple to call it money lending said the other from within the blankets

It is not merely lending Margayya essayed to explain. It is not so cheap as that I also try to help people about money whenever they are in difficulties Margayya started on his oration. Money is He paused and turning to Dr Pal asked You have not told me your friend s name. It was more to put the other in his place

Oh we call him Guru Raj Dr Paul said.

Margayya began his sentence again. Guru Raj money is the greatest factor in life and the most ill used People don t know how to tend it how to manure it how to water it, how to make it grow and when to pluck its flowers and when to pluck its fruits What most people now do is to try and eat the plant itself——

The other roared with laughter I say you seem to be a very great thinker How well you speak, how well you have understood all these matters! You are indeed a rare man Where have you been carrying on your business all these days?

Mine is the sort of business that searches me out I didn t have to move out of my house at all But you see, it gives me no rest with so many people always coming in——

'You must never allow your business transactions to invade your home, that will simply shatter the home-life, said Guru Raj

I have a son studying in high school said Margayya. He liked the feel of the word. Studying in High School He felt very proud of Balu for the moment, but at the same time he felt a tinge of pity at heart. He had been too severe with him during the day

'Oh, if children are studying it will simply ruin their time to have visitors at all hours,' the other said

After more such polite and agreeable talk, he said, 'All right, sir, I wish you all success May God help you You may please to go now I cannot offer you a seat in this wretched shop It is my fate to sit here amidst the flies, and why should I bother you with them too? And it is not proper to make you stand I will come and listen to your talk in your own shop, some day'

It was midday and all the stalls in the market were dull and drowsy Fruit-sellers were dozing before their heaps Some loafers were desultorily hanging about Stray calves were standing idly near a shop in which green plantain leaves were for sale A seller of betel leaves held out a bundle saying, 'Finest betel leaves, sir, flavoured with camphor——' applying the usual epithets that betel-sellers employ for recommending their wares Pal took some, haggled for a moment, and paid the price He stuffed the bundle of betel leaves into his pocket. He stopped for a minute at the next stall to buy a yard of strung jasmine 'Excuse me,' he said 'These are necessary to keep the peace at home, necessary adjuncts for domestic harmony, you know'

'Oh!' Margayya exclaimed, and decided to ignore any special significance he might have put into the words *Domestic Harmony*

'You are no longer alone?' Margayya asked

'No'

'Are you married?'

'No'

'Are you going to be married?'

'Not yet.'

Margayya was mystified 'Where is your house? Are you still in that garden?

'No, no I have to leave it long ago Someone bought it, and has been farming on a large scale there He cleared the place of all the weeds and undergrowth, which included me But he appeared to be a nice man I have been so far away and so busy I have a house, I live in an outhouse in Lawley Extension Someone else is in the main building You must come to my house some day'

They reached 10 Market Road, and at once Margayya was enchanted He had always visualized that he would get some such place The Malgudi gutter ran below his shop with a mild rumble, and not so mild smell But Margayya either did not notice or did not mind it, being used to it in his own home

Margayya s blood was completely the city man s and revelled in crowds noise and bustle the moment he looked out and saw the stream of people and traffic flowing up and down the road he felt that he was in the right place A poet would perhaps have felt exasperated by the continuous din but to Margayya it was like a background music to his own thoughts There was a row of offices and shops opposite insurance agencies local represen tatives of newspapers hair-cutting saloons some film distributors a lawyer's chamber and a hardware shop into which hundreds of people were going every day Margayya calculated that if he could at least filter twenty out of that number for his own pur poses he would be more than well off In about a year he could pass on to the grade of people who were wealthy and not merely rich He drew a lot of distinction between the two A rich man according to his view was just one caste below the man of wealth Riches any hard working fool could attain by some watchfulness while acquiring wealth was an extraordinarily specialized job It came to persons who had on them the grace of the Goddess fully and who could use their wits He was a specialist in money and his mind always ran on lines of scientific inquiry whenever money came in question. He differentiated with great subtlety between money riches wealth and fortune. It was most important people should not mistake one for the other

§

Next to the subject of money the greatest burden on his mind was his son. As he sat in his shop and spoke to his clients he forgot for the time being the rest of the world but the moment he was left alone he started thinking of his son the boy had failed in his matriculation exam and that embittered him very much He wondered what he should do with him now Whenever he thought of it his heart sank within him God has blessed me with everything under the sun I need not bother about anything else in life, but but He could not tell people My son is only fifteen and he has already passed into college The son had passed that stage two years ago Two attempts and yet no good Margayya had engaged three home tutors one for every two subjects and it cost him quite a lot in salaries He arranged to have him fed specially with nutritive food during his examination periods He bought a lot of fruits and compelled his wife to prepare special food always saying The poor boy is preparing

for his examination He must have enough stamina to stand the strain' He forbade his wife to speak loudly at home. 'Have you no consideration for the young man who is studying?'

He was in agonies on examination days He escorted him up to the examination hall in Albert College. Before parting from him at the sounding of the bell he always gave him advice 'Don't get frightened, write calmly and fearlessly and don't come away before it is time,' but all this was worth nothing because the boy had nothing to write after the first half hour, which he spent in scrawling fantastic de .gns on his answer book. He hated the excitement of an examination and was sullenly resentful of the fact that he was being put through a most unnecessary torment. He abruptly rose from his seat and went over to a restaurant near by His father had left with him a lot of cash in view of the trying times he was going through He ate all the available things in the restaurant, bought a packet of cigarettes, sought a secluded corner away from the prying eyes of his elders on the bank of the river behind the college, sat down and smoked the entire packet, dozed for a while, and returned home at five in the evening. The moment he was sighted his mother asked, 'Have you written your examination well?'

He made a wry face and said, 'Leave me alone.' He hated to be reminded of the examination. But they would not let him alone. His mother put before him milk, and fruits, and the special edibles she had made to sustain him in this ordeal. He made a wry face and said, 'Take it away, I cannot eat anything.' At this she made many sounds of sympathy and said that he must get over the strain by feeding himself properly

It was at this moment that his father returned home, after closing his office early, and hastening away in a jutka. All day as he counted money, his and other peoples', a corner of his mind was busy with the examination Oh, God, please enlighten my son's mind so that he may answer and get good marks,' he secretly prayed The moment he saw his son he said, 'I am sure you have done very well my boy How have you done?' The boy sat in a corner of the house with a cheerless look on his face. Margayya put it down to extreme strain, and said soothingly 'You stayed in the hall throughout? That was for him an indication of his son s performance

Whatever was the son's reply, he got the correct answer very soon, in less than eight weeks, when the results came out. At first Margayya raved, Balu has done very well, I know Someone

has been working off a grudge Then he felt like striking his son but restrained himself for the son was four inches taller as he stood hanging his head with his back to the wall and Mar gayya feared that he might retaliate So he checked himself and from a corner the mother watched, silently with resignation and fear the crisis developing between father and son She had understood long before that the boy was not interested in his studies and that he attached no value to them, but it was no use telling that to her husband. She pursued what seemed to her the best policy and allowed events to shape themselves She knew that matters were coming to a conclusion now and she was a helpless witness to a terrific struggle between two positive-minded men, so she no longer had any doubt that the son was a grown-up man. She covered her mouth with her fingers and with her chin on her palms stood there silently watching

Margayya said, Every little idiot has passed his S S L C. exam. Are you such a complete fool?'

Don t abuse me, father said the boy whose voice had recently become gruff. It had lost, as his mother noticed much of the original softness The more she saw him, the more she was reminded of her own father in his younger days exactly the same features the same gruffness and the same severity People had been afraid to speak to her father even when he was in the sweetest temper for his face had a severity without any relation to his mood. She saw the same expression on the boy's face now The boy's look was set and grim. His lips were black with cigarettes which she knew he smoked he often smelt of them when he came home But she kept this secret knowledge to herself since she didn t like to set up her husband against him. She understood that the best way to attain some peace of mind in life was to maintain silence ultimately she found that things resolved themselves in the best manner possible or fizzled out She found that it was only speech which made existence worse every time. Lately after he had become affluent, sh found that her husband showed excessive emphasis, rightly or wrongly in all matters she realized that he had come to believe that what ever he did was always right. She did her best not to contradict him she felt that he strained himself too much in his profession, and that she ought not to add to his burden. So if he sometimes raved over the mismanagement of the household she just did not try to tell him that it was otherwise She served him his food silently and he himself discovered later what was right and

what was wrong and confessed it to her Now more than in any other matter she practised this principle where their son was concerned She knew it would be no use telling her husband not to bother the son over his studies, that it would be no use asking him to return home at seven-thirty each day to sit down to his books with his home teachers he simply would not return home before nine It was no use shouting at him for it. It only made one's throat smart and provided a scene for the people next door to witness She left it all to resolve itself Once or twice she attempted to tell the son to be more mindful of his father's wishes and orders, but he told her to shut up She left him alone And she left her husband alone She attained thereby great tranquility in practical everyday life.

Now she watched the trouble brewing between the two as if it all happened behind a glass screen The father asked in a tone full of wrath 'How am I to hold up my head in public?' The boy looked up detached, as if it were a problem to be personally solved by the father, in which he was not involved. Margayya shouted again 'How am I to hold up my head in public? What will they think of me? What will they say of my son?'

The boy spoke with a quiet firmness, as if expressing what immediately occurred to the mother herself She felt at once a great admiration for him He said in a gruff tone How is it their concern?'

Margayya wrung his hands in despair and clenched his teeth. What the boy said seemed to be absolutely correct 'You are no son of mine I cannot tolerate a son who brings such disgrace on the family'

The boy was pained beyond words 'Don't talk nonsense, father,' he said.

Margayya was stupefied. He had no idea that the boy could speak so much Talking till now was only a one way business, and he had taken it for granted that the boy could say nothing for himself He raved 'You are talking back to me, are you mad?'

The boy burst into tears and wailed 'If you don't like me send me out of the house.'

Margayya studied him with surprise. He had always thought of Balu as someone who was spoken to and never one who could speak with the same emphasis as himself He was offended by the boy's aggressive manner He was moved by the sight of the tears on his face He was seized with a confusion of feelings He found his eyes smarting with tears and felt ashamed of

before his son and before that stony faced woman who stood at the doorway of the kitchen and relentlessly watched. Her eyes seemed to watch unwaveringly with a fixed stare So still was she that Margayya feared lest she should be in a cataleptic state He now turned his wrath on her It s all your doing You have been too lenient You have spoilt him beyond redemption You with your——

The boy checked his tears and interrupted him Mother has not spoilt me nor anyone else Why should anyone spoil me?

There is too much talk in this house That s what's wrong here Margayya declared and closed the incident by going in to change and attend to his other activities The boy slunk away out of sight. In that small house it was impossible to escape from one another and the boy slipped out of the front door The mother knew he would return after his father had slept bringing into the home the smell of cigaratte smoke

Margayya stayed awake almost all night When the boy sneaked back after his rounds and pushed the door open, it creaked slightly on its hinges and he at once demanded Who is there? Who is there?'

Balu answered mildly It s myself father

Margayya was pleased with the softening that now seemed to be evident in his tone but he wished at the same time that the boy had not disgraced him by failing He said 'You have been out so long?

'Yes came the reply

'Where? he asked.

There was no further reply Margayya felt that failing the Matric seemed to have conferred a new status on his son, and unloosened his tongue He felt in all this medley a little pride at the fact that his son had acquired so much independence of thought and assertiveness He somehow felt like keeping him in conversation and asked, with a slight trace of cajolery in his voice 'Was the door left open without the bolt being drawn?'

'Yes replied the boy from somewhere in the darkness

'That's very careless of your mother Does she do it every day?

There was once again a pause and silence His wife seemed to have fallen asleep too for there was no response from her He somehow did not wish the conversation to lapse. He said as a stop gap 'What'll happen if a thief gets in? There was no response from the son After blinking in the dark for a few

minutes, Margayya asked 'Boy, are you asleep?' And the boy answered 'Yes, I am' And Margayya, feeling much more at peace with himself at heart for having spoken to him, fell asleep at once, forgetting for a few hours the Matriculation examination and his other worries

They got into a sort of live and let live philosophy He hoped that when the schools reopened he could put the boy back at school, prepare him intensively for his examination, and if necessary see some of the examiners and so on Margayya had a feeling that he had of late neglected his duties in this direction He had unqualified faith in contacting people and getting things done that way He could get at anybody through Dr Pal That man had brought into his business a lot of people known to him Margayya's contacts were now improving socially People were indebted to him nowadays, and would do anything to retain his favour Margayya hoped that if he exerted himself even slightly in the coming year he would see his son pull through Matriculation without much difficulty Of course the boy would have to keep up a show of at least studying the books and would have to write down his number correctly in the answer book and not merely scribble and look out of the door It was extremely necessary that he should at least write one page of his answer and know what were the subjects he ought to study

Margayya felt that if he could persuade Balu to make at least a minimum of effort for his own sake, his mind would be easier He proposed it very gently to him about a fortnight later as they sat down to their dinner together Margayya showed him extreme consideration nowadays, it was born out of fear and some amount of respect. The boy was always taciturn and grim He recollected that it seemed ages since he had seen any relaxation in his face He had a gravity beyond his years That frightened Margayya Except the one instance when he saw tears in his eyes on the day of the results, he had always found him sullen He hoped to soften him by kindness, or, at least, outward kindness, for he still smarted inside at the results of the examination He looked for a moment at the face of his son and said Balu, you must make another attempt I'll see that you get through the examination without the least difficulty'

Balu stopped eating and asked 'What do you mean, father?'

Margayya sensed danger, but he had started the subject He could not stop it now under any circumstances So he said 'I mean about the Matriculation examination'

I will not read again said the boy definitely defiantly I have already spoken to mother about it

H m. Margayya turned to his wife who was serving h m and said He has spoken to you has he? What has he said?

Just w at he has told you she answered promptly and went back to the fire place to fetch something

Why didn t you tell m about it? Margayya asked eagerly looking for some lapse on her part to justify him in letting off steam

She merely replied Because I knew he was going to tell you about it himself

Margayya burst out at her 'What do you mean by discussing all sorts of things with the boy and not telling me anything? These are matters——

His son interrupted him Father if you hate me and want to make me miserable, you will bother me with examinations and studies I hate them.

Margayya went on arguing with him all through the meal till the boy threatened to abandon his dinner and walk out of the dining room Margayya assumed a sullen silence, but the atmosphere ached with tension. Everyone was aware that the silence was going to be broken in a violent manner next moment as soon as dinner was over Father and son seemed to be in a race to finish eating first. Balu gobbled up his food and dashed to the back yard. He poured a little water on his hand wiped it on a towel near by and moved towards the street door Margayya jumped up from his seat, with his hand unwashed dashed to the street door and shut and bolted it. Frustrated, the boy stood still Margayya asked Where are you going? I have still much to tell you. I have not finished speaking yet The boy withdrew a few steps in respons

Meanwhile his mother had brought in a vessel of water Margayya snatched a moment to wash his hand at the little open yard. He said, wait to his son. He opened his office box and brought from it the boy's S S L C. Register He had secured it on the previous day from the headmaster of the school The S S L.C. Register is a small calico-bound note-book with columns marked in it, containing a record of a high-school boy's marks conduct hand writing and physical fitness Margayya had got the register from the headmaster and studied its pages keenly the whole of the previous day Matters did not now appear to him so hopeless. The headmaster had marked Fair both for his

hand writing and drill attendance Margayya had no idea that his son could shine in anything So this was an entirely happy surprise His marks in almost all subjects were in single digits The highest mark he had obtained was twelve out of a hundred in hygiene, and he had maintained his place as the last in the class without a variation

One would have expected Margayya to be shocked by this, but the effect was unexpected He was a fond and optimistic father, and he fastened on the twelve marks for hygiene It seemed so high after all the diminutive marks the boy had obtained in other subjects Margayya hoped that perhaps he was destined to be a doctor, and that was why his inclination was so marked for hygiene What a wonderful opening seemed to be before him as a doctor! Doctor Balu—it would be very nice indeed If only he could get through the wretched S S L C barrier, he'd achieve great things in life Margayya would see to it that he did so, Margayya's money and contacts would be worth nothing if he could not see his son through

He had prepared himself to speak to Balu about all this gently and persuasively He hoped to lead up to the subject with encouraging talk, starting with hygiene, and then to ask him if he wished to be a doctor What a glorious life opened before a doctor! He would send him to England to study surgery He could tell him all that and encourage him. Margayya had great faith in his own persuasiveness He sometimes had before him a tough customer who insisted upon withdrawing all his deposits and winding up the account a most truculent client But Margayya remembered that if he had about an hour with him, he could always talk him out of it The deposit would remain with him, plus any other money that the man possessed Now Margayya wanted to employ his capacity for a similar purpose with his son That's why he had come armed with the S S L C Register He could read out to him the headmaster's remarks 'Fair,' etc., and prove to him how hopeful everything was if only he would agree to lend his name and spare time to go through the formality of an examination in the coming year

At the sight of the note-book the boy asked 'What is this? Why have you brought it from school?' as if it were the most repulsive article he had seen in the whole of his life His face went a shade darker It symbolized for him all the wrongs that he had suffered in his life it was a chronicle of all the insults that had been heaped upon him by an ungracious world—a

schools studies and examinations What did they mean by all this terrible torment invented for young men? It had been an agony for him every time the headmaster called him up and made him go through the entries and sign below Such moments came near his conception of hell Hell in his view was a place where a torturing God sat up with your scholastic record in his hand and lectured you on how to make good and told you what a disgrace you were to society His bitterness overwhelmed him suddenly as his father opened a page and started Here is your hygiene——

The boy made a dash for the book snatched it from his father's hand before he knew what was happening tore its entire bulk into four pieces (it had been made of thick ledger paper and only his fury gave him the necessary strength to tear it up at one effort) and ran out into the street and threw the pieces into the gutter And Vinayak Mudali Street gutter closed on it and carried the bits out of sight. Margayya ran up and stood on the edge of the gutter woefully looking into its dark depth. His wife was behind him. He was too stunned to say anything. When he saw the last shred of it gone he turned to his wife and said They will not admit him in any school again the last chance gone And then he turned to tackle his son—but the boy had gone

§

The only sign of prosperity about him now was the bright handle of the umbrella which was hooked to his right forearm whenever he went out. He was a lover of umbrellas and the moment he could buy anything that caught his fancy he spent eight rupees and purchased this bright handled umbrella with German ribs in the parlance of the umbrella dealers Hitherto he had carried for years an old bamboo one, a podgy thing with discoloured cloth which had been patched up over and over again He protected it like his life for several years He had his own technique of holding an umbrella which assured it a long lease of life and kept it free from fractures He never twisted the handle when he held an umbrella over his head. He never lent it to anyone Margayya, if he saw anyone going out in the rain in imminent danger of catching and perishing of pneumonia, would let him face his fate rather than offer him the protection of his umbrella. He felt furious when people thought that they could ask for an umbrella. "They will be asking for my skin next he

often commented when his wife found fault with him for his attitude. Another argument he advanced was, 'Do people ask for each other's wives? Don't they manage to have one for themselves? Why shouldn't each person in the country buy his own umbrella?' 'An umbrella does not like to be handled by more than one person in its lifetime,' he often declared, and stuck to it He had to put away his old umbrella in the loft, carefully rolled up, because its ribs had become too rickety and it could not maintain its shape any longer It began to look like a shot-down crow with broken wings Though for years he had not noticed it, suddenly one day when he was working under the tree in the Co-operative Bank compound, someone remarked that he was looking like a wayside umbrella repairer and that he had better throw it away, he felt piqued and threw it in the loft, but he could never bring himself to the point of buying a new one and had more or less resigned himself to basking in the sun until the time came when he could spend eight rupees without calculating whether he was a loser or a gainer in the bargain. That time had come, now that thousands of rupees were passing through his hands—thousands which belonged to others as well as to him

Except for this umbrella, he gave no outward sign of his affluence He hated any perceptible signs of improvement He walked to his office every day His coat was of spun silk, but he chose a shade that approximated to the one he had worn for years so that no one might notice the difference He whitewashed the walls of his house inside only, and built a small room upstairs He bought no furniture except a canvas deckchair at a second-hand shop On this he lounged and looked at the sky from his courtyard He told his wife to buy any clothes she liked, but she was more or less in mourning and made no use of the offer She merely said, 'Tell me about Balu That is what I need, not clothes'

Margayya replied 'Well, I can only offer you what is available. If you are crying for the moon, I can't help you much there.'

I am asking for my son, not crying for the moon,' she said.

She was always on the verge of hysteria nowadays She spoke very little and ate very little, and Margayya felt that at a time when he had a right to have a happy and bright home, he was being denied the privilege unnecessarily He felt angry with his wife He felt that it was her sulking which ruined the atmosphere of the home They had so much accustomed themselves to the disappearance of their son that he ceased to think of it as a primary

cause the more immediate reasons became perceptible. He tried in his own clumsy manner to make her happy He told h-r Ask for any money you want

What shall I do with money? she said. I have no use for it

He disliked her for making such a statement. It was in the nature of a seditious speech He merely frowned at her and went on with his business What was that business? When at home he carried about him the day's financial position finely distilled into a statement and was absorbed in studying the figures When he wanted relaxation he bought a paper and went through its pages Nowadays he did not borrow the paper from the news paper dealer but subscribed for a copy himself He read with avidity what was happening in the world the speeches of states men, the ravings of radicals the programme for this and that, war news and above all the stocks and shares market. He glanced through all this because a certain amount of world information seemed to be an essential part of his equipment when he sat in his office. All kinds of people came in and it was necessary that he should be able to take part in their conversation. To impress his clients he had to appear as a man of all round wisdom

He walked to his work every day soon after his morning meal The house was in suspense till he was seen safely off He did not believe in employing servants at home and so his wife had to do all the work. He often said 'Why should we burden ourselves with servants when we are like a couple of newly weds? Ours is not a very big family The lady accepted it meekly because she knew it would not be much use arguing it out with Margayya. She knew as he himself did, that he did not employ a cook because he did not like to spend money on one. But he was sure to give some other reason if he was asked. He would in all probability say Where is the need to show off?' She knew that he viewed money as something to accumulate and not to be spent on increasing one's luxuries in life. She knew all his idioms even before he uttered them. Sometimes when he saw her sitting at the fireplace, her eyes shrunken and swollen with the kitchen smoke, he felt uneasy and tried to help her with the kitchen work, keeping up the pretence of being newly weds He picked up a knife here and a green vegetable there, cut it up in a desultory manner and vaguely asked, Is there anything I can do?' She hardly ever answered such a question. She merely said, 'Please come in half an hour and I will serve you your meal" She had become very sullen and reserved nowadays

She brooded over her son Balu night and day She lost the taste for food Margayya behaved wildly whenever he was reminded of their son 'He is not my son,' he declared dramatically 'A boy who has an utter disregard for his father's feelings is no son. He is a curse that the Gods have sent down for us He is not my son.' It all sounded very theatrical, but the feeling was also very real When he remembered the floating bits of calico in the street gutter, he felt sorry that his son was no longer there to be slapped. His fingers itched to strike him. He reflected 'If he had at least disappeared after receiving the slap I aimed, I would not have minded much' He discouraged his wife from mentioning their son again and had grandly ordered that the household must run on as if he had not been born When he spoke in that tone his wife fully understood that he meant it His affluence, his bank balance, buoyed him up and made him bear the loss of their son He lived in a sort of radiance which made it possible for him to put up with anything When he sat at his desk from early in the day till sunset, he had to talk, counsel, wheedle out, and collect money, in fact go through all the adventures of money-making At the end of the day as he walked back home his mind was full of the final results, and so there was practically no time for him to brood over Balu

Late at night when the voices of the city had died down and when the expected sleep came a little late, he speculated on Balu Perhaps he had drowned himself There was no news of him, although several days and weeks had passed. His wife accused him at first of being very callous and not doing anything about it He did not know what was expected of him He could not go and tell the police He could not announce a reward for anyone who traced him. He could not He hated to make a scene about it, and solved the whole thing by confiding in Dr Pal Dr Pal had promised to keep an eye on the matter and tell him if anything turned up No one could do more than that. Margayya had generally given out that his son had gone on a holiday to Bombay or Madras, and lightly added 'Young boys of his age must certainly go out by themselves and see a bit of the world I think that's the best education.'

'But boys must have a minimum of S S L C.,' someone remarked

Margayya dismissed it as a foolish notion What is there in Matriculation? People can learn nothing in schools I have no faith in our education Who wants all this nonsense about A squared plus B squared If a boy does not learn these o much the better To be frank I have got on without learning th A squared and B squared business and what is wrong with me? Boys must learn things in the rough school of life Whatever he said sounded authoritative and mature nowadays and people listened to him with respectful attention These perorations he delivered as he sat in his office

§

His office consisted of a medium-sized room with four mattres es spread out on the floor At the other end of it there was a sloping desk where an accountant sat. He was a lean old man, with a fifteen-day-old silver beard encircling his face at any given time He was a pensioner a retired revenue clerk who wore a close coat and a turban when he came to the office He was expected to an before Margayya. It pleased Margayya very much to see him at his seat bent over his ledgers He was instruct ed not to look up and salute when Margayya came in sin it was likely to disturb his calculations and waste his time Margayya said I do not want all this formality of a greeting I see you every day If you want to please me do your work and get on with it without wasting your time. But when he felt he needed an audience for his perorations he addressed him and any other clerks who might be there

§

Margayya sat in one corner of the hall He had a desk before him made of smooth polished wood which he had bought from the blanket merchant at a second hand price Margayya loved to gaze on its smooth, rippled grains—remnants of gorgeous designs that it had acquired as a tree trunk—hieroglyphics containing the history of the tree. Wherever he gazed on it he felt as if he were looking at a sea and a sky in some dream world. But what is the use of gazing on these and day-dreaming?' he told himself sharply pulling his mind back. He lifted the lid and gazed inside, and there was the reality which he could touch and calculate and increase a well bound half leather

ledger, a bottle of red ink, a bottle of black ink, an oblong piece of blotting-paper, and a pen—the red holder of which his fingers had gripped for years now And beside it was a small bag made of thick drill, into which went all the cash he collected His clerk did not know what he collected each day He did not look into the account book which Margayya kept, nor did he count the cash It was all done by Margayya himself He did not believe that it was necessary for anyone to share his knowledge of his finances it was nobody s business but his own The work that he gave the accountant was copying down the mortgages that were left with him by the villagers who came round for financial assistance He not only kept the deeds, but put the old man to the task of copying them down entirely in a big ledger He alone could say why he wanted this done, but he would not open his mouth about it to anyone The old man was being paid fifty rupees a month, and he was afraid of being thrown out if he questioned too much He just did his duty At about two o'clock Margayya locked his safe box and got up saying, I m going out for tiffin—will be back in a minute Look after the office, and keep anyone who may come here till I return

Margayya was always used to having a semi-circle of persons sitting before him as in the old days and never interrupted his studies or calculations to look at them or receive their greetings He was a very busy man who e hours were valuable as the day progressed it was a race with time, for he had to close his books before sunset

The owner of the house, the blanket dealer, did not like to waste money on installing electric lights He went on dodging his tenant s appeals day after day His excuse was that materials were not available in the quantities he needed or at prices he was prepared to pay He went on saying that he had sent a direct order to the General Electric in America, that he had business associates of his blanket-contract days who would supply his wants direct, and that he was looking for a reply with every sailing and thus he kept his tenants in hope The plain fact seemed to be that he did not like to waste money He confided to his friends 'Why should anyone keep his shop or office open after six o'clock? Let him work and earn during the day that is quite enough I hear that they are going to introduce a law limiting working hours, when it will be a grave penalty to keep shops or offices open after sunset.' The result was that the shops remained without light, and since Margayya did not believe in

spending his own money on an oil lamp he had to rush through his day's work and close the accounts before darkness fell He worked without wasting a minute

One or two of his clients who had waited long enough to catch his attention cleared their throats and made other small sounds Margayya suddenly looked up from his desk and told one of them Go there, pointing at his accountant sitting at the other end of the hall He will give you the deed back The other showed no sign of moving at which he said sharply You heard me? If I have got to speak each sentence twice, I shall have to live for two hundred years and be satisfied with a quarter of my present earnings

Why do you say such harsh things master? the other asked Is it because I am asking for my deed back? Is it wrong?

It is not wrong Why should anyone refuse to give a title deed that is yours by right? He said it in such a tone that the other hesitated and said, You have been as a father to me in my difficulties and you have helped me as much as you could.

And yet you have not the grace to trust me with your title Do you think I am going to make a broth of it and drink it off?'

The client rose and said I will come again for it tomorrow sir just to show that I am in no hurry He rose and walked out.

Margayya said to the others You see that fellow the ingratitude of some of these folk sometimes makes me want to throw up everything and The others made sympathetic sounds just to please him. His accountant added from his corner his own comment in his hollow hungry voice

He is afraid he may have further interest to pay if he leaves his papers here. I know these people they are docile and lamb-like as long as they hold our money but the moment they return the principal and interest——

Margayya did not like this Don t disturb yourself Sastri go on with your work. He hated the hungry tired tone of his accountant.

I was only giving you a piece of observation it is getting to be a nuisance, some of these fellows demanding their papers back at short notice Sastri persisted At this Margayya realized that it would not be feasible to put his accountant down so easily and cut him short with, 'True, true We must include a condition that they must give us at least three days for returning their papers

A visitor who felt that he had waited too long asked, 'Margayya don t you recognize me?'

'No,' replied Margayya promptly

I am Kanda,' he said

Which?'

'Of Somanur——'

'No, you are not,' replied Margayya promptly

The other laughed, leaned forward almost over the desk, and asked, 'Do you still say that I am not Kanda, master?'

Margayya scrutinized him closely and cried, You old thief, it is you, yes! What has come over you? You look like a man a hundred years old Why those wrinkles round your nose? Why those folds at the chin and that silver filing all over your face? What is the matter with you and where are your teeth gone?' The other just raised his arms heavenward, lifted up his eyes as much as to say, 'Go and put that question to the heavens if you like' Now Margayya wanted to clear his hall of all his visitors He felt that here was the man he would like to talk to the whole day He looked at the others, gave a paper back to someone, and said, I cannot advance you on this——

Sir, please ' he began

'Come tomorrow, we will see Now leave me, I have many important things to talk over with old Kanda'

He had lost sight of Kanda years ago Margayya had been very fond of this man, who always said that he preferred fluid cash to stagnant land and that it was more profitable to grow money out of land than corn Kanda had now come to ask Margayya's advice on how best to get money out of some new lands which had unexpectedly come to him through the death of a relative These lands were in the regions of Mempi whose slopes were covered with teak and other forests, and at whose feet stretched acres and acres of maize fields, with stalks standing over a man's height. Margayya was carried away by visions of this paradise of blue mountains, forest, and green fields It was wealth at the very source and not second-hand after it had travelled up to town The more he listened to Kanda's petition the more he felt that here was raw wealth inviting him to take a hand and help himself. Though it had grown nearly dark he sat and listened to Kanda as he narrated to him his financial ups and downs

'I am glad you have come back to me, Kanda I will pull you out of your difficulties,' he said as he rose to go

Kanda explained, 'I cannot get any more loans from the Co-operative Bank, they have expelled me for default, although they auctioned the pledges '

The crooks Margayya muttered They are crooks I tell you I do not know why th government tolerates this institution Tl ey should put in jail all the secretaries of co-operative societies The picture of the secretary and Arul came back to him with all the old force Margayya warned him Don t go near them again they will see you ruined before they have done with you I will loo after you he added protectively starting to lock up his door He had sent away his accountant and with a duplicate key he locked th door of his office He generously indicated to Kanda the ve anda Sleep here Kanda no one will object I will see you tomorrow morning and then we will go and inspect your property a Mem i What time is your bus r

The first bu lea es the Market Square at six o clock

Th n t?

It s st eight thirty Four buses pass Mempi village every day he said with a tou h of pride

So that you may come oftener into town and borrow I suppose!

There is also a railway station, about five or six stones off Kanda said From here you can get the evening train and be down there at about twelve o clock

And get eaten by tigers I suppose Margayya added before reaching home

Kanda l ug ed at this piece of ignorance 'Tigers are in the hills and generally do not come down.

E en t en i prefer to com with you by the morning bus Margayya said We will go by the second bus tomorrow You can have your food in that hotel there

Margayya walked home At his house he found a commotion His wife s voice could be heard wailing and a large crowd had gathered at his front door He quickened his pace on seeing it

Wha is the matter?' he asked someone n ar by He hoped the peopl were not rushing in in order o loot the house He had kept a few important documents in the front room and a lot of cash Must remove it elsewhere he thought as he pushed his way throu h the crowd on the front teps Get out of the way he thu dered What are you all doing h re? Someone in the crowd r d Your l dy is weepin ——

I see that Why?

Th y l ss a d to peak He g ipped one n rby by his shirt collar n l demanded Wh has happen d? Can t you spe k? He shook him vigorously till he protested Why do yo t troubl

me, Margayya? I won't speak' Margayya let him go and went in He saw his wife rolling on the floor and wailing, in a voice he had never heard before He never knew that she had such a high-pitched voice There were a number of women sitting round her and holding her

Margayya rushed towards them crying, 'What has happened to her? Meenakshi, what is the matter with you? She sat up on hearing his voice Her hair was untied Her eyes were swollen She wailed, Balu Balu' Her voice trailed off and she broke down again She fell on the floor and rolled in anguish Margayya felt helpless He saw his brother and his wife also in the crowd He knew something must be seriously the matter if these two were there, and their many children sucking their thumbs His brother s wife was sitting beside Margayya s wife and trying to comfort her Margayya rushed up and pleaded 'Won t someone tell me what has happened? His brother pushed his way through the crowd and handed him a card Margayya s eyes were blurred with the mist of perspiration His excitement had sent his heart racing He rubbed his eyes and gazed on the card He couldn t read it He groaned, and fumbled for his glasses He could not pull them out of his pocket easily He gave the card to the one nearest him and cried Can't someone read it? Is it an illiterate gathering? What are you all watching for? And then some person obliged him by reading out Your son B Balu is no more——

What! What! Who says so? Margayya cried, losing all control over himself More perspiration streamed down his eyelids and he wept aloud 'My son! my son! Am I dreaming? The assembly watched him in grim silence

His wife was sobbing She suddenly shot towards Margayya and cried 'It s all your doing You ruined him

Margayya was taken aback There was a confused mixture of emotions now He did not know what to say One side of his mind went on piecing together his son s picture as he had last seen him

Did I treat him too harshly over the examination results? Or have I been too thoughtless over that cursed school record——? He felt angry at the thought of examinations they were a curse on the youth of the nation, the very greatest menace that the British had brought with them to India If he could see his son now he would tell him, 'Forget all about schools and books you just do as you like, just be seen about the house—that's sufficient for us

In this din, his wife s accusation reached him but faintly He retorted 'What are you saying you poor creature! What are you trying to say?'

'You and your schools! she arraigned him. But for your obsession and tyranny——

'You keep quiet he said angrily He turned round to someone and enquired Do you know how it happened?

Several voices chorused He fell off a fourth floor of a building in Madras He must have been run over in that city Probably caught cholera, We don t know—

Who was with him?' asked Margayya. He conducted a ruthless cross-examination.

How can we know—the card is signed by a friend.

Friend! Friend! Margayya cried 'What sort of friend is it? Friend, useless blackguard. He did not know what he was saying. Nor could he check the rush of his words He babbled as if under the influence of a drug He saw the whole house reeling in front of his eyes—the surroundings darkened and he sat down unable to bear the strain. He sat on the floor with his head between his hands, quietly sobbing His brother sidled up put his arm round him and said 'You must bear it, brother you must bear it.

'What else can I do?' Margayya asked like a child. He still had on his coat and turban. Through all his grief a ridiculous question (addressed to his brother) kept coming to his mind Are we friends now—no longer enemies? What about our feud? A part of his mind kept wondering how they could live as friends but the numerous problems connected with this seemed insoluble. 'We had got used to this kind of life. Now I suppose we shall have to visit each other and enquire and so on

All that seemed to be impossible to do He wished to tell him then and there 'Don t let this become an excuse to change our present relationship

Margayya did his best to suppress all these thoughts but they kept bothering him till he could say nothing till he was afraid to open his lips lest he should blurt them out. His brother whispered among other things We will send you the night meal from our house.

No, we don t want any food tonight, Margayya said. Please send all those people away He was indignant. Because Balu was dead, why should this crowd imagine that the house was theirs? Shut and bolt the door he thundered.

His brother left him, went up to the strangers about the house and appealed to them to leave He said, with his palms pressed together in deference 'Please leave us This is the time when the family has to be together'

'No,' Margayya thundered with deadly irony in his tone 'How can they leave? How can they afford to ignore all this fun and go? If an entrance be charged——' he began, then stopped, for in his condition he realized that he ought not to complete his sentence, which ran 'We might earn lakhs——' He did not think it was a good statement to make So he merely said 'Oh, friends and neighbours, the greatest service you could do us is to leave us alone' The neighbours grumbled a little and started moving out On the fringe of the crowd someone was muttering 'When are they bringing the body?

Margayya never knew till now that he had so many well-wishers in the city The next day they proposed to bundle him off to Madras He seemed to have no choice in the matter All sorts of persons, including his brother, sat around and said 'It's best that you go to Madras—at least once, and verify things for yourself?

'What for?' asked Margayya The others seemed to be horrified at this question, and looked at him as if to say 'Fancy anyone asking such a silly question!'

I can t go, I won't go, it is not necessary,' Margayya said offensively

His wife had been transformed. She looked like a stranger, with her face swollen and disfigured with weeping, She glared at him and said 'Have you no heart?'

'Yes, undoubtedly,' Margayya said in a mollifying manner He felt that she had lost her wits completely and required to be handled with tact

'If you have ordinary human feelings then go and do something at least at least——'

'Yes, I understand But it's all over'

His brother said 'Is this the time to argue about it all? You must go and do something'

His sister-in law added her own voice 'It's your duty to go and find out more about it Perhaps, there is still some chance of——'

'But, wailed Margayya, where am I to go? Madras is a big world—where on earth am I to go there?' He despairingly turned the post-card between his fingers 'There is no address

here nothing is said of where they have written from nor who has written it

Never mind they all said with one voice Margayya felt now more than ever most unhappy to have been the father of Balu The duties of a father seemed to be unshakable He made yet another attempt to make others see reason Look here if I go to Madras where am I to go as soon as I get down at the railway station?

Is this the time to go into all that? they asked looking on him as if he were a curious specimen This encounter left him no time to brood over his own sorrow There seemed to be so many demands upon him following the catastrophe, that it was as much as he could do to keep himself parrying all the blows it left him no time to think of anything else When there was a pause and his eyes fell upon a little object the lacquer painted wooden elephant that Balu had played with as a child it sent a sharp stab down his heart it made him wince he choked at the throat and the tears came down in a rush involuntarily—but he was spared more of that experience by the people around him He almost regretted that his brother and his family were now back in the fold they seemed to think up a new proposition for him every minute and his wife who seemed to be already crazed apparently fell in with every one of their proposals One moment they kept saying that he must at once make arrangements to get through the ten-day obsequies for the peace of the departed soul and start right away the performance of those rites the next they immediately said that he must go to Madras and try and do what he could.

You want me to buy a train ticket this moment and in the same breath ask me to send for the *purohit*——

At the mention of the word *purohit* his wife clapped her hands over her ears and wailed afresh I never hoped in my worst dreams to hear that word applied to my darling——

How can you be so callous as to utter that word so bluntly? asked his sister in law and another lady scowled at him.

He felt irritated but practised gentle ways with a deliberate effort fearing lest anything that he might say should once again bring a rupture between the families and continue for another decade He contented himself by saying and his brother I don't seem to know what to say— all the wrong things seem to come uppermost They did not encourage him to go on

with even that reflection, but said, Do something, don't sit there and chat This is no time for it

His brother added If you are afraid to go to Madras alone, I will go with you I know one or two people there'

'Here is this man, Margayya at once reflected, wangling a free journey to Madras' And the prospect of his brother's constant company for so many days appalled him Lest the women folk and others should follow up the idea, he hastily said Don't worry, I will go myself I don't want anyone to think that I am reluctant to go'

He suddenly saw it as a beautiful opportunity to escape His grief was unbearable no doubt, but the atmosphere and the people about him made it worse He saw himself being entangled with these folk for the rest of his life that seemed to suit his wife, but he liked to be more independent His house seemed to have lost all privacy For the rest of their existence these people perhaps intended to sit around and wail over Balu At the echo of the word Balu' in his mind he let a loud cry escape his lips and he beat his brow It occurred almost involuntarily, and at once brought his brother and a cousin to his side No, no, not that way If you break down and lose all control, what is to happen to the others? You must be in a position to give them strength and ——'

'How? How can I? sobbed Margayya, moved by their sympathy 'I prayed for him, and promised the Gods his weight in silver rupees if he should be born'

'Did you fulfil that promise? some asked, going off at a tangent. 'For that is a sacred pledge, you know'

Margayya's wife answered 'Yes, it was done within an hour of his birth'

'Yes, these vows must be fulfilled within the shortest time possible Otherwise the baby will acquire weight How much did the child weigh?

About three hundred rupees weight at birth We tramped to Tirupathi,' said Margayya, recollecting his pilgrimage with his young wife so many years ago

She had worn a saffron dyed saree, had carried the infant on her arm and walked behind him as he went to ten houses and begged for alms His pride would not let him beg, but it was once again his elder brother who bothered him by explaining The God at Tirupathi does not like anyone to visit him as a holiday maker, just for fun He wants you to go there as a humble

supplicant in the attitude of a beggar He had put into it all the weight of scholarship that he had acquired That's the symbol that's why you are obliged to visit at least ten houses with a begging bowl stand and cry at the door for alms and then go on the pilgrimage on foot if possible The God does not notice a person who goes to him in a holiday mood

And Margayya had clutched a brightly polished pot and followed by his saffron clad wife, had gone from door to door Give me alms—— People had come out of their houses and dropped a handful of rice into his copper pot

He suddenly recollected now how amused he had felt when he saw his face in that burnished pot—its convex surface distorted his nose and cheeks it was so grostesque that he could not help grinning at his reflection which made it so much more funny that it became impossible for him to maintain the gravity needed for the occasion He remembered that one or two people had felt scandalized by the way he grinned when they came out to give him alms His wife had pulled him up but he held the shining pot to her face and she too burst into a laugh He remembered how at that time he wish d he could also amus the infant He remembered how he carried the alms and the sovereigns equal to the weight of the child to the Tirupathi Hills and deposited them all in the treasure box in the shrine He felt he had done a good job and it had been an enchanting pilgrimage He sighed and groaned at the memory of his son. Through it all he remembered how he had not been a day too soon in weighing the youngester in gold as he showed a tendency to grow heavier each day

'That vow was fulfilled all right. Nothing wrong there, he said suddenly

§

He sat in a third class compartment in the train to Madras He had become extremely unhappy when leaving home He told his brother Keep an eye on this house will you? He had told his wife, Don t ruin yourself with crying I will go to Madras and do what I can. It had sounded most futile—what could he do at Madras? Where could he go at Madras? It was all a very confused business He felt unhappy that he was not even in a position to utter a promise He bundled up a couple of shirts and dhotes into a small jute bag which had no clamp It was to

serve as a pillow for him at night He had not travelled for years now, and he found it exciting He wondered how he could leave his office What was to happen to the business? Suppose somebody did something and killed his business? He wished he didn't have to leave at short notice He wished he had had a little more time to arrange his affairs and then leave. But death gives no notice They were bundling him about and finally they thrust him and his bag into a jutka and sent him down to meet the six o'clock train to Madras coming from Trichy

He asked at the ticket window Will you please give me a ticket?'

'What class?' he was asked.

'Class! I am not travelling in a saloon If there is a fourth class——' Margayya pushed in his money for a third class ticket

There was such a crowd that he had to push himself in through a window—not an easy task considering the paunch that he was developing as a prosperous man The compartment was no more than normally crowded in a railway system which issued tickets 'till the fingers ached' It was a compartment meant to seat twelve—a conception in an ideal world Perhaps it technically satisfied the rule—because those who could technically be said to be seated were twelve The rest kept themselves in it, in all manner of ways, with their bundles heaped about. People sat on each other's laps, hung by each other's necks, curled themselves on luggage racks overhead, spread their beds and stretched themselves comfortably in the space under the seats One of them was explaining 'This is the best way of travelling I have always thought this better than even the first class I always come two hours before and spread my bed'

Margayya had extreme difficulty in hanging his legs down because quite a lot of people seemed to be sleeping there, and he could not cross his legs because he had managed to secure only half a seat, and had to dispose of the rest of himself somehow in mid-air Seeing the manner in which the others had disposed themselves, he felt triumphant that he had at least got this seat—and he congratulated himself on his pluck. The moment he had shot in through the window, the impact of his arrival displaced someone who was already seated. Margayya just let himself down there before the other could recover He was a villager

When he did recover he cried 'Get out of my seat.'

'Why don't you learn better manners?' Margayya said in his habitual masterful way with villagers

The police officer took charge of Margayya as soon as they arrived in Madras Egmore Station He took him to the waiting room and said Make yourself at home There is the platform restaurant. You can rest as much as you like I will be back Give me that post-card He spoke to a platform official about Margayya.

Margayya began to doubt how far he ought to trust the man. Perhaps he would throw him in jail or perhaps he was a brigand himself He was gradually changing his mind about wanting the man s help In the cold morning light of Madras things seemed different and more reassuring there was a certain hopelessness in the dim-lit compartment which made him want to confide in someone and enlist his sympathy But now it all seemed different. He reflected Why not run away from here? Suppose he opened the door on the off-side and cleared out But the police officer gave him no chance He said taking him by the sleeve Don t move out of here till I come back I will see what I can do for you.

Oh, no I wouldn t bother you said Margayya, trying to withdraw The other paid no heed but just turned round and went away 'Why should anyone be so considerate to a stranger?' Margayya s devious mind kept ringing, particularly in this city which is notoriously cold blooded.

After food Margayya stretched himself on a bedstead in the waiting room and slept soundly He snored so loudly that the people moving about the platform stopped and looked in Margayya dreamt that he had got down at Mempi and someone whom he could not recognize pointed up to the sun lit horizon and said All that is yours Margayya was struggling to work up the interest rate on this proposition and was involved in a terrible quantity of figures, when the police officer came in again and woke him up Margayya felt very apologetic for having fallen asleep He said clumsily You see I am sorry——

'There is nothing to apologize about, said the Inspector Well if you like to have a wash let us go out Margayya got up and went round with him in search of a tap The Madras heat seemed to prick him in a dozen places He felt better after he emerged from under the tap He went back to his room dripping tidied himself up, and put on a long coat and turban. In the heat of Madras it was like getting into steel armour and helmet.

The Inspector said 'Well, I have good news for you. He

returned the post-card to Margayya and said 'I have spent the whole day tracing the author of that post-card. It's a falsehood he has written' Margayya's mind was still clouded with sleep and calculations of interest He looked dull and uncomprehending The Inspector held out his hand for a pinch of snuff 'Give me your snuff It's very good and I will tell you what you should do You go back to your wife at once and tell her that your son is alive'

'How do you know?' Margayya asked, still dazed

'Because we've managed to trace it back to the author He is a madman in Park Town who keeps writing messages like that to any address that he picks up'

How did he pick up my address?'

'Well, that's what we shall investigate, if you will stay for another day,' said the Inspector

§

The Inspector took him along to a house in Park Town It was a very big house in a lane, occupying the space of three or four blocks together Its outside was painted green and red in alternating strips with oil distemper Its front verandah was enclosed by iron rods painted yellow the whole scheme made the house look like a crayon box with its lid open Over it all was hung a board painted 'The House of Enlightenment' It was a hot, dusty afternoon, and the taxi had run through several winding lanes Seeing so much gaudy colour made Margayya's throat parched and thirsty, it also made him feel homesick. Before the car came to a halt the Inspector said 'I was able to trace this man through the post office Don't be surprised by anything you may see or hear, we are going out to meet a madman, remember He is a very wealthy man, gone mad He owns a theatre, and his relations are managing it.'

They got down He knocked on the door An attendant opened the door and showed the way They went through several pillared halls The pillars were of smooth granite, and the floors mosaic-covered Potted ferns were kept here and there. Some parrots and miscellaneous birds were twittering in the cages hanging down from the ceiling The house was so deep inside that the noises of the city came in from far off, completely muffled The place was cool and shady All along the walls of the corridors and passages and halls there were pictures of Gods in terrible

shape and fury destroying the world. Margayya felt he was in an utterly strange world. The world of Vinayak Mudali Street of his wife and brother and Market Road and banking seemed to be distant and unreal. The Inspector whispered to him Don t you feel that you are in a zoo?

'Yes, yes, said Margayya, just to please him although he did not know what it looked like inside a zoo They were now in a large hall where a man sat on a divan surrounded by cushions He wore an ochre robe and had grown a beard From two tall incense holders smoke was curling The man had about him a heap of post-cards, a pen and a writing pad He was writing furiously when they entered He had an attendant fanning him, although there was an electric fan above There were two seating cushions along the wall The man took no notice of the arrival of the visitors The Inspector whispered to Margayya Take your seat there. They sat on the cushions and waited The attendant bent over and whispered into the ear of th big man He put away the pen, leaned back and looked at the Inspector The Inspector salaamed. The other's face relaxed a little, and a smile hovered about it but the next moment it became rigid again as he said 'Who is that mortal next to you who does not seem to recognize us? Is it likely that we are invisible to his eyes?'

'Yes, that's so said the Inspector 'That s the correct explanation.

Oh it never occurred to me I can make myself seen We often forget that we divine creatures are transparent and that we cannot be seen.

'But it is easily remedied, if your holiness makes up his mind. The other shook his head in approval then waved his arm looked at Margayya and asked Do you see me?

The Inspector muttered Salute him

'Yes, replied Margayya with a reverential *salaam*

'Now what is your business mortal?'

The Inspector said 'He has come after his son Balu about whom a card has emanated from here. He held up the card and said He wants to know in which world to look for him

The other shook his head and said That I am not allowed to say That only God can do I am not God but only God s agent. He ordered, Go and prepare the world for my coming That I am doing. I write every day to every King Ruler Viceroy President and Minister in the world that their boss is

soon arriving, and let them get ready for it Every day I write to President Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill, particularly' He indicated a big file of letters waiting to be posted

The Inspector said That's fine—but we want to know the whereabouts of Balu He is not a Maharaja or anything like that and it is enough for us to know in which world he is to be found Will you please look up the necessary reference?

'Is this his earthly father?'

'Yes,' said the Inspector

'Does he believe in Death?'

'He does not,' replied the Inspector

'I am very pleased about it It's my mission in life to inform at least ten mortals about Death each day and educate them People must learn to view death calmly'

'Of course, of course,' said the Inspector and added 'Please look into your file'

The other took out a ponderous file, turned over its leaves, muttering 'Balu Balu Son of Malgudi' Margayya could hardly believe his ears He cried involuntarily 'How did you get my address? The Inspector suppressed him with a gesture and said 'Where did you pick up this mortal s address?'

'How do I pick up George VI's address or Mahatma Gandhi's address?' he answered back Whenever anyone comes to me for charity, I will not give them an anna unless they give me their true address Whenever anyone comes to me for employment in any of my businesses, I won't take him in unless he gives me his true address'

'How do your know it is his true address?

'By writing a card to that address,' the other said triumphantly 'You must not forget that there is God above me'

'Did this boy come to you for employment?

'Didn't he?

'Or for charity?

'I don t believe in charity Whenever anyone comes to me for charity, I give them employment'

But when they come to you for employment——?

'I give them charity,' the other said

'Where is this Balu? persisted the Inspector

'You may persist for a million years, but you will not get a reply unless God sanctions an answer'

'Hasn't he sanctioned it?' asked the Inspector

'No,' replied the madman

In that case we are going said the Inspector rising The Inspector walked away unceremoniously Margayya hesitated for a moment at the door and then followed the Inspector out 'What are we to make of it? asked Margayya.

'Don t worry Your son is living somewhere We ll have to find that out We will do it Don t worry

'How do you know that my son still lives?'

Because I know this man. Everyday he writes ten death notices and sends them to the post. His servants usually do not post them, but your one card must have slipped through into the ordinary post.

My misfortune is that he should have got at my address! Margayya wailed suddenly realizing It's three days since I went to my office God knows what is happening to my business. Probably this is the beginning of the end—— He reflected ruefully

The Inspector took Margayya to the Central Talkies that evening The Manager rose in his seat when the Inspector entered his room The police were a troublesome lot and it was best to keep on good terms with them The Manager became elaborately fussy and cried 'What a pleasure! It's ages since you came here Mr Inspector Shall I order coffee? The film is on now Would you like to see it? He was as proud of the picture as if it were his own product. Margayya sat in a chair idly gazing on the pictures of film stars hung on the walls in sepia print. A stale, surcharged tobacco smell pervaded the air and made Margayya more bilious than ever The Manager said 'We are showing———on the 26th. You must definitely send your children

The Inspector waved off the invitation with a gentle in difference and said We saw your boss sometime ago——

Oh! How is he?

As usual I suppose How does he manage the business?'

'His son-in law looks after everything What he does is—he comes round occasionally sits through a show notes down the names of all the people he meets and goes—that he does once in a while.

Have you a new boy in your employment now?

'Yes Yes We got one a few weeks ago He seems to be an educated boy

Is his name Balu?'

'Yes, That s it said the Manager Why anything wrong?'

'Is he about eighteen?' asked the Inspector, and gave a further description which the other accepted.

'What does he do?' asked Margayya interested.

'Well, miscellaneous things Just now he is out with the sandwich boys They will all come back before the evening show'

They had to wait there till the crowd for the evening show began to arrive at the ticket-window A kettle-drum was heard approaching over the noise of the crowd It came nearer and stopped, and now through the gate streamed in street-arabs wearing sandwich boards, on which colourful posters were stuck announcing '*Krishna Leela*' The boys were ragged street-urchins with matted hair and sun-scorched complexions—covering their middles with loin-cloth and practically bearing on their bare bodies the sandwich frames They put down their frames and gathered in front of the Manager's room along with the drummers and pipers Presently Balu arrived, saying 'Payment only for three, sir, the rest dozed off under the trees' At which the rest started arguing furiously 'What injustice to get work out of us and cheat us! Hey, you are no——'

Over all this Balu's voice rose 'You won't be paid for just loafing' His voice thrilled Margayya But he checked himself He feared that he might make a scene, or that his son might start to run away, out of sight once again, and then the Inspector and the others might blame him for spoiling the entire situation. So he edged away towards a corner of the room and turned his face towards the wall as Balu strode in Balu came in saying 'Manager, sir, we went through the People's Park, Rundall's Road, and Elephant Gate, and returned this way—except for the three boys, the rest skulked away for a nap in Moore Market. You must teach them a lesson, sir'

Margayya could hold himself in check no more. He turned and observed that the boy wore a dirty dhoti, his cheeks were sunken, he was dark with wandering in the sun, and his hair was uncut As he later explained to his relations, the moment he saw him he felt as if he had swallowed a live cinder In this state he rushed forward with a loud cry, some indistinct words coming out in a rush in which the only clear words were 'Is this spectacle my fate? Is it for this I prayed for your birth as my son? What has come over you?' His face was wet with tears The taken aback—so were the other two

The Inspector had credited Margayya with greater self possession. A crowd gathered at the door the cinemagoers viewed this as a free show The Inspector lost his temper at the sight of the crowd and going up to the door shouted Get out of this place He stood at the doorway and Balu felt that his retreat was cut off He surrendered without a word

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The officer saw them off at the Egmore platform Margayya gripped his arm and once again there were tears of gratitude in his eyes He said You have been like a God to me Tell me if there is any way in which I can repay you write to me. You know my address

Oh yes This is the first time I got at someone who was not a dacoit or a knave. I am glad to have done a good turn, said the Inspector He told Balu Be a good son Don t be a bother to your parents again I have told the railway police to keep an eye on you. It was this part that Balu did not like, and later commented after the Inspector went away

'What can the railway police do? I m not a thief. If I want to give them the slip there are a dozen ways

The Inspector had got them comfortable seats in an end compartment which was not too crowded All night Margayya plied his son with questions and tried to know what he had been doing with himself ever since his disappearance after the results, but the boy sullenly declared I won t speak of anything Why couldn t you leave me alone? I was quite happy there

But but have you no affection don t you want to see your mother your——?

I don t want to see anybody

But my dear boy do you know what it will mean to them to see you back in the flesh? Your mother broke down completely——

Why couldn t you have given me up for dead? I was quite happy seeing pictures every day I want to be in Madras I like the place he said, already feeling dull at the prospect of living in Malgudi. What are you going to do with me? Make me read for exams I suppose? he asked next

'You need not go near books you can do just as you please, said Margayya indulgently He was filled with love for his son. He felt an indescribable pity as he saw the dirty greasy dress and the famished appearance the boy had acquired He became

absolutely blind to all the dozen persons packed into the compartment He hugged his shoulders and whispered 'You eat, rest, and grow fat—that is all you are expected to do, and take as much money as you like'

The boy seemed to accept this advice with a hundred per cent literalness As one supposed to be returned from the grave, he was treated with extraordinary consideration His mother, he found, seemed to have become an entirely new person She looked more youthful A new flush appeared on her sallow cheeks Her eyes had become very bright and sparkling She became loquacious and puckish in her comments She took the trouble to comb her hair with care and stuck jasmine strings in it. She seemed to feel that she was born anew into the world. She spoke light-heartedly and with a trembling joy in her voice. This was a revelation to Balu He had never thought they attached so much importance to his person He enjoyed it very much. His mother plied him with delicacies all the time. He had only to take a deep breath and look for his mother, and she at once asked 'What do you want, my boy? Balu found that he had returned to a new home Everything now was different. His father left him alone according to his promise It was a very agreeable situation for all concerned—except Margayya's brother and family

The moment Balu was brought back home, their position as the helpers of the family disappeared It was a relationship essentially thriving on a crisis The moment that the crisis was over, the two families fell apart, and they were once again reduced to the position of speculating from the other side of the wall what might be happening next door Margayya's wife ceased to bother about them Balu never knew that there had been a momentary friendliness during his absence. On the day he arrived with his father, when he stepped in and saw his uncle and the family in their central hall, he was speechless

His uncle demanded What have you been doing with yourself? What is all this——?

And his aunt and the children of the next house stared at him and gaped at him. He felt abashed. He simply rushed into the little room at the side and shut the door on the gathering That was the signal, when he reopened

the house was cleared and the front door bolted Margayya briefly announced to him They have all gone

'Where? Balu asked with interest.

To their own house, Margayya said and added What is their business here, anyway?

His wife chimed in They probably wanted an excuse to plant themselves in here again!

Margayya did not like to contradict her or say anything so utterly ungracious himself although the moment he had secured his son his first thought was to tell his brother's family as diplomatically as his nature would permit, that they might go back to their house and resume their avocations! This he said very gently when the occasion came As Balu shut himself into the small room, his brother wanted anxiously to know what had happened.

He said Did I not tell you to go to Madras and then it would turn out to be good for you?'

Here is this fellow Margayya reflected rubbing in his own wisdom and judgment as usual. He hated in his brother the 'Didn t I say so?' tone that he constantly adopted It seemed to him a very irritating and petty habit of mind and so he retorted sharply That's all right nobody doubts your wisdom.

His brother ignored this sting and asked Well where did you find him? What was he doing? Who wrote that card?'

Margayya lowered his voice and said in a whisper I will tell you all that later when the boy is out of hearing Now I had better attend to his wants He moved towards the street door

His brother took the hint he cast a glance at his wife who got up, herded the children together and started out, telling Margayya s wife I have so much to do at home—I think. Any way let us thank God for this recovery and marched out. The moment the door shut on them, Margayya s brother's wife ground her teeth and said Even if this house is on fire let us not go near them again. It was a sentiment which was not approved by the last but one toddling beside her Why not, mother? It's so nice being in that house!

'Now what has happened to you to make all this fuss?' her husband asked. There were tears in her eyes when she went up the steps of her own house She said I only want you to have self-respect that s all After all that we have done for them these

three days, baking and cooking for them night and day—five seers of rice gone for those ingrates——'

'After all, she was the only person in their house You have included the feeding of your own children,' her husband said, which enraged her so much that she stabbed his cheeks with her fingers screaming 'Go and lick their feet for lo e of that wonderful brother of yours, you will do anything for him I am sure'

PART FOUR

Balu devoted himself to the art of cultivating leisure He was never in any undue hurry to get out of bed At about nine o'clock, his father came to his bedside and gently reminded him Had you not better get up before the coffee gets too stale? Balu drank his morning coffee, demanded some tiffin, dressed himself, and left the house He returned home at about one o clock and sat down to his lunch His mother waited for him interminably He came home any time after one Sometimes he came home very late Even then he found his mother waiting

What are you waiting for, mother? he asked She never answered the question but went on to serve him his dinner After dinner, he went up to the shop opposite, bought betel leaves and arecanut, chewed them with great satisfaction, and sat down on a dealwood box placed in front of the shop, watching the goings on of the street for a while and smoking a cigarette, after making sure his mother was not watching If he saw any elder of the house or of the next house coming out, he turned the cigarette into the hollow of his palm and gulped down the smoke. After this luxury, he suddenly got up, crossed the street, and went back to his house. He spread a towel on the granite floor, in the passage from the street, and, cooled by the afternoon breeze blowing in through the street door, was overcome with drowsiness and was soon asleep He was left undisturbed He woke from sleep only at five in the evening and immediately demanded something to eat and drink, washed himself and combed his crop and went out He returned home only after ten, when the whole town had gone to sleep By this time, his father had already come home and was fretting, bothering his wife to tell him where Balu had gone He had got into the habit of feeling panicky if Balu absented himself too long from home But the moment the door opened and Balu came in, he became absolutely docile and agreeable.

He said 'Oh, Balu has come?' with tremendous enthusiasm and as he went in to change, asked with the utmost delicacy, 'Where have you been?' avoiding to the best of his ability any suggestion of intimidation or effrontery

The boy just said I've been here and there—what should I be doing at home?

Six months of this life and the boy became unrecognizable there were fat pads under his eyes his chin was doubling, and his eyes seemed to shrink down to half their original size Margayya wondered what to do with him Must do something so that he is able to grow up like other normal boys of his age—otherwise he will rust He thought that the best solution would be to marry him. He sent out his emissaries and very soon the results became evident From far and wide horoscopes came in and letters asking for his son's in return Margayya carefully scrutinized the status of those who clamoured for his alliance. It was like the State Ministry scrutinizing the wedding proposals of a satellite Prince. The chief assistant in this business was his accountant Sastri. He had acquired a new status now as a match maker As he sat in his corner copying in his ledger Margayya said from his seat Sastri do you know anyone with a daughter?'

Yes sir Sastri said pleased to have an opportunity to look up from his ledger Yes sir quite a lot of inquiries have been coming my way sir for Balu——

'Then why didn't you mention the matter to me?'

'You may be sure, sir that when the right party comes they will be brought to you Till then it does not seem to be very necessary to trouble you sir

Quite right said Margayya pleased with his accountant and feeling his own eminence unquestioned and clearly placed You are right Sastri—I'm very keen that if there is to be an alliance it must be with a family who have a sense of——

I know sir they must at least be your equal in status, sir

Status! Status! Margayya laughed pleasantly I don't believe in it, Sastri it's not right to talk of status and such things in these days You know I'm a man who has had to work hard to make money and keep it But I never for a moment feel that I am superior to anyone on earth. I feel that even the smallest child in the road is my equal in status

'Very few there are, sir said the other who are so wealthy and are so free from vanity or showiness. I have known people with only a tenth of what you possess sir but the way they——

How do you know it is only a tenth of what I have? Margayya

asked, his suspicions slightly roused for he let the other keep only one set of accounts the other set which gave a fuller picture of his financial position was always in his possession Had this fellow been peeping into his private registers? The man gave a reassuring reply 'Any child in the town can say who it is if he is asked to name the richest man.' It was very flattering and true, but Margayya hoped that the Income-tax people would not take the same view Further development of this conversation was cut off because three clients from a far off village came in asking 'Is this Margayya's?' At once Margayya and his assistant fell silent and became absorbed in their work When anybody entered with that question on his lips, it meant that he was a new client, he had been sent in by one of Margayya s agents, and he would want ready cash before departing for the evening

Margayya said 'Come in, come in, friends May I ask who has sent you along?' They had come with the right recommendation The three villagers came in timidly, tugging in their upper cloth Margayya became very officious and showed them their seats on the mat it was as if he had reserved for them special seats on fresh carpets and divans He then said 'Will you have soda or coffee? Or would you care to chew betel leaves? He turned to Sastri and said 'Send the boy down to fetch something for them they have come a long distance You came by bus?'

'Yes, paying a fare of twelve annas, and we want to catch the evening bus, if possible'

They went by the evening bus, but leaving their mortgage deed behind, and carrying in their pouches three hundred rupees, the first instalment of interest on what was already held at the source The first instalment was the real wealth—whose possibilities of multiplication seemed to stretch to infinity This was like the germinating point of a seed—capable of producing hundreds of such germinating points Lend this margin again to the next man, as a petty loan, withholding a further first instalment, and take that again and lend it with a further instalment held up and so on it was like the reflections in two opposite mirrors You could really not see the end of it—it was a part of the mystic feeling that money engendered in Margayya, its concrete form lay about him in his iron safe in the shape of bonds, and gold bars, and currency notes, and distant arable lands, of which he had become the owner because the original loans could not be repaid, and also in the shape of houses and blocks of various sizes and

shapes which his way of buying interest had secured for him in the course of his business—through the machinery of distraint Many were those that had become cra ed and unhappy when the courts made their orders but Margayya never bothered about th-m, never saw them again It s all in the business he said. It s up to them to pay the dues and take back their houses They forget that they asked for my help People borrowed from him only under stress and when they could get no accommodation elsewhere Margayya was the one man who easily lent He made the least fuss about the formalities but he charged interest in so many subtle ways and compounded it so deftly that the moment a man signed his bonds he was more or less finished He could never hope to regain his possessions—especially if he allowed a year or two to elapse

There were debt relief laws and such things But Margayya nullified their provisions because the men for whom the laws were made were enthusiastic collaborators in his scheme and every thing he did looked correct on paper He acquired a lot of assets But he lost no time in selling them and realizing their cash again, and sto ed it in an iron safe at home What am I to do with property? he said I want only money not brick and lime or mud, he reflected when he reconverted his attached property into cash The only property he often dreamt of was the one at the foot of the Mempi Hills but somehow it was constantly slipping away that fellow Kanda came again and again but always managed to retain his ownership of his lands

Sastri turned up with quite a score of offers for Margayya s son. Margayya felt greatly flattered and puffed up with conceit. This was evidence that he had attained social importance He had never thou,ht that anyone of consequence would care to ally with his family There was a family secret about his caste which surred uneasily at the back of his mind. Though he and the rest were supposed to be of good ca te now if matters were pried into deeply enough they wou d find that his father's grandfather and his brothers maintained themselves as corpsebearers They were four brothers The moment anyone died in the village, they came down and took charge of the business from that moment up to dissolving the ashes in the tank next day They were known as corpse brothers It took two or three g-nerations for the family

to mitigate this reputation, and thereafter, they were known as agriculturists, owning and cultivating small parcels of land No one bothered about their origin, afterwards, except a grand aunt who let off steam when she was roused by declaring It s written on their faces—where can it go, even if you allow a hundred years to elapse

It was Margayya's constant fear that when the time came to marry his son, people might say Oh, they are after all corpse-bearers, didn't you know?' But fortunately this fear was unfounded At any rate, his financial reputation overshadowed anything else Horoscopes and petitions poured in by every post It produced a sense of well-being in Margayya, and a quiet feeling of greatness

Sastri had done his part of the work efficiently He had set aside all ledger work for the moment, and had written out scores of letters to men known to him within a radius of about two hundred miles He was a compendium of likely parties with daughters to marry He went out and saw in person quite a good many locally, as an ambassador In all his correspondence and talk he described Margayya as the 'Lord of Uncounted Lakhs' or as one who was 'the richest in India , and he spoke of Balu as inheritor of all this wealth and an apprentice in his father's own business and a young man whose education was deliberately suspended because his father, having his own idea of education, was more keen on training the young fellow in business than letting him acquire useless degrees Margayya scrutinized quite a file of applications and horoscopes He rejected most of the proposals They were from quite unworthy aspirants Margayya felt, 'Why should these people waste my time and their own? Are they blind? I have a certain position in life to keep up and I naturally want only alliances which can come up to that expectation'

Finally he picked up the horoscope of a girl who seemed to him desirable from every point of view Her name was Brinda She was seventeen years old Her father in his first letter described her as being 'extremely fair He was a man who owned a tea-estate in Mempi Hills At once it biased Margayya's mind in his favour It was not a very large estate but yielded an income of ten thousand rupees a year Margayya sent Sastri out to fetch an astrologer There was one practising in the lane behind the Market Road A man presently entered with beads at his throat and sacred ash on his forehead, wrapped in a red silk toga

dressed every inch for his part There were a few of Margayya s clients waiting for him and he had to dispose of them before he could attend to the astrologer He seated the astrologer and made him wait for a few moments The astrologer fretted at having to wait. He sat shifting uneasily in his seat cleared his throat and coughed once or twice in order to attract attention Mar gayya looked up and understood He interrupted himself in his work to tell the astrologer Hey Pandit can t you remain at peace with yourself for a moment? The astrologer was taken aback but curbed his restlessness Margayya disposed of his clients looked up and said Come nearer Pandit' The astrologer edged his way nearer

By his manner and words Margayya had now completely cowed the man It seemed necessary as a first step to dictate to the planets what they should do Margayya had made up his mind that he was going to take no nonsense from the planets and that he was going to tell them how to dispose their position in order to meet his requirement his requirement was the daughter of a man who owned tea estates in Mempi Hills and he was consulting the astrologer purely as a formality These were not days when h^ had to wait anxiously on a verdict of the stars he could afford to ask for his own set of conditions and get them He no longer believed that man was a victim of circumstances or fate —but that man was a creature who could make his own present and future, provided he worked hard and remained watchful 'Th gold bars in the safe at home and the cash bundles and the bank pass book are not sent down from heaven—they are a result of my own application I need not have stayed at my desk for ten hours at a stretch and talked myself hoarse to all those clients of mine and taken all that risk on half-secured loans! I could just have sat back and lost myself in contempla tion——

His mind sometimes pursued such a line of thought But he at once realized that it was not always quite safe to think so and added the rider Of course Goddess Lakshmi or another will have to be propitiated from time to time But we must also work and be able to keep correct accounts and pay for what we demand This was no doubt a somewhat confusing and mixed up philoso- phy of life, but that was how it was—and its immediate manifesta tion was to say to the astrologer as h^ pushed before him his son s horoscope and the tea estate daughter's Pandit see if you can match these horo-copes

The Pandit put on his glasses and tilted the horoscopes towards the light at the door and studied them in silence

Margayya watched his face and said 'What is your fee for your services?

'Let my fee alone', the other said 'Let me do my work properly first.'

Margayya said 'Well, probably I shall be able to add a couple of rupees to your usual charges and if the alliance concludes successfully, well, of course, a lace-dhoti and all honours for the Pandit——'

'Give me a pencil and paper,' the other said briefly

The astrologer filled the sheet of paper with numbers and their derivatives, and worked up and down the page and on the back of it He asked for another sheet of paper and worked up further figures Margayya watched him anxiously He said softly I want this alliance to go through I shall appreciate it very much if you will work towards that objective I can show my appreciation concretely if——'

The astrologer shook his head and muttered 'Impossible—you will have to find——'

'I don't want you to talk unnecessarily,' Margayya said

'The seventh and ninth houses in your son's horoscope are are not quite sound The girl's marriage possibilities are the purest The two horoscopes cannot match—they are like soap and oil'

'I have no faith in horoscopes personally——'

'Then you need not have gone to the extent of looking at these', the astrologer said

Margayya felt angry He asked finally 'Is there nothing that you can do?'

Absolutely nothing What can I do? Am I *Brahmar*'

Margayya could not trust himself to speak further He called across the room 'Sastri——'

'Yes, sir'

'Give this *Pandit* a rupee and see him off'

'Yes, sir,' Sastri proceeded to open a money bag

The Pandit said 'A rupee? Am I a street astrologer! My fee is usually——'

I am not interested My fee for such service as you do is just one rupee maximum. You will not get even that if you misbehave,' said Margayya, and he shot out his hand and snatched back the horoscopes and the sheet of calculations He looked a moment at it to see if he could read anything It was a

of obscure calculations and figures He thought of tearing it up but remembering that he had paid for it folded it neatly and put it into his personal desk. The astrologer got up loftily and walked towards the accountant received his rupee with an air of resignation, and strode out without relaxing his looks

Dr Pal helped Margayya to find a different astrologer who rearranged the stars of Balu to suit the circumstances Margayya did not meet the astrologer in person. Dr Pal took upon himself the task. He made several journeys between the astrologer and Margayya carrying the envelope containing the horoscopes and finally came back one day with the astrologer's written report on a saffron tipped paper the report said that the two horoscopes perfectly matched, with reasons adduced Considering the mightiness of the task the fee of seventy five rupees which Dr Pal said the astrologer charged was purely nominal

Events then moved briskly Dr Pal s services became indispensable and constant. He saw Margayya through the preliminary negotiations, the wedding celebrations and the culmination in a newspaper photo with Balu wearing tie and collar his handsome bride at his side

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It was the third year of the war and Margayya decided that the time was now ripe for starting a new line He walked into Dr Pal s Tourist Home and asked Doctor how are you faring?

'Not badly said the Doctor

Margayya observed the dust laden table, the pen holder which had not been moved, and the unwritten sheets of paper before him—unmistakable signs of dull business Margayya settled in the chair and began Doctor I think you ought to make more money'

'Why?'

Just for your own good. I will show you a way if you like

I m quite contented with what I have

'You are not, sir said Margayya. 'You forget I'm also in the same building as you are Don t tell me that there are many fellows coming into your office to seek your assistance in tourism or whatever it may be——

Dr Pal became submissive I have tried one thing after another in life. You know I am a qualified Sociologist—one of the handful in this country——

'Let us not talk of all that,' said Margayya, not liking the idea of going back to the *Domestic Harmony* days It was something which had gone clean out of his mind, except one copy of the book which he retained as a memento of his earlier days and which he kept locked up in his iron safe at home for fear that Balu might get at it Fortunately, he felt, his daughter-in-law's father did not seem to have heard anything about his association with it Otherwise he might never have gone through with the alliance—it was as risky as the ancestry of his corpse-bearing grandfathers And so now he cut short Dr Pal s reference to sociology and psychology as if it were dangerous talk, and said I want to do you a good turn'

'Why?' asked the Doctor

'Because——' began Margayya, and was about so say, you did me a good turn once by forcing on me your manuscript,' but checked these words, and said, Don't ask why Because I have known you for a long while, and have seen you also—and I sincerely wish that you could make a little money and live comfortably—'

'Tourism,' said Dr Pal, 'is a very honourable and paying proposition in the West, but here nobody cares There is not a single person anywhere here, who knows the history and archaeology of the country round about. Do you know that there are half a dozen different jungle-tribes to be found on the top of the Mempi Hills? All of them live, breed and die, in the jungles—but there are so many differences between them. My tourism does not confine itself to telling people, 'There is the river," "There is the valley," "Here is big game' —and pointing to a few ruined temples—that's not my idea of tourism, it's something different, something that's as good as education

But it hasn't been a paying line,' said Margayya, growing impatient with his lecture For the moment, if you want a good income, listen to me. If I throw out a word about it, I am sure there will be dozens ready to take it up, but I want to give you the first chance because—— He once again narrowly avoided reference to *Domestic Harmony*, and said Because, because, I've been seeing you for quite a long while, and I would like to see you prosper'

There was another reason why Margayya wanted to help, which was also not mentioned He found Dr Pal hanging too about his son's establishment at Lawley Road M one of the houses he had acquired to his son for

family independently although Margayya s wife did not much like the idea of living separated from him But Margayya told her Think for a moment my dear girl Brinda comes from an up-to-date family and already shows her superior training Is she very comfortable in this house?

His wife thought it over and agreed I don t think so Balu has been saying that the new room you have put up on the terrace is not good enough. In her father s house she has four rooms all her own Sh added The girl hardly comes out of her room all day I ha e to call her a dozen times before she will come downstairs for her meal I hardly see anything of Balu either He doesn t speak much. I m probably not good enough for a modern girl like her

Tut! Tut! Margayya said to her Don t get into the habits of a mother in-law I like the girl very much myself—if those two are happy I think it's best they are left alone to manage their affairs in their own fashion. I have recently acquired a house in Lawley Extension I think it best that they move off there

So far! exclaimed the mother horrified

It s not so far as you imagine just half an hour by a *jutka* He studied her face for a while and added Don t make a fuss The boy is eighteen years old and he ought to look after himself *The girl will manage the household for him.*

To Margayya s wife it seemed an unthinkable proposition. They hardly know how to boil water or even to light an oven.

They will learn everything Margayya said And they can engage a cook *if they want* He was adamant *Sooner or later the* boy will himself open the subject and ask for this and that. If he does that it will annoy me very much and I will resist. I d rather do things before he speaks—it'll look better I will give him a house and a settlement. I want to see if that will make him think of doing something with his time.

His wife did not like the note of irony in his voice and protested You have already forgotten what happened. I dread to think you have already started again thinking you ought to improve him!

Margayya s wife nearly broke down on the day Balu bundled up his clothes into a neat leather suit-case presented to him by his father in-law put them into a taxi and drove away with his young wife Margayya s wife had spent a good part of an entire week in running up and down between Vinayak Mudali Street and Lawley Extension, arranging the bungalow at Lawley Extension

for its new occupants The girl prostrated at her mother-in-law's feet before taking leave of her

Balu, a taciturn man, just said 'I'm going, got into the car, and sat down leaving space for his wife Margayya's brother's family had crowded on the parapet of the next house Margayya himself was away, for it had been a busy day for him at his office.

The house for Margayya's wife seemed to have become dull and lonely without her son It reminded her of the days when he had gone away without telling anybody, but Margayya noticed no difference because his mind was busy formulating a new plan which was going to rocket him to undreamt of heights of financial success

Margayya observed that after Balu settled in his new house, Dr Pal became a constant visitor there Whenever he went there, at the end of a day's work, he saw Dr Pal settled comfortably in the hall sofa He played cards with Balu and his wife He also suspected that Dr Pal constantly took cash from his son Margayya did not like a man who could write *Domestic Harmony* to associate with young, impressionable minds, he would probably recite passages from it, talk over further projects with his son, and he couldn't say what Balu might or might not do under those circumstances At any rate, it seemed imperative to wean his son away from Dr Pal—and it seemed best to do it by employing Dr Pal's hours usefully and so making it unnecessary for him to go to the youngster, at least for money

Now Margayya told Dr Pal 'You can make a thousand rupees a month easily if you will associate with me After you have made some money it'll be much more feasible to try your tourism to your heart's content Are you willing to try and do something?

'Yes, definitely, said Dr Pal At which Margayya began a lecture on money conditions The war had created a flood of inflated currency All sorts of people were making money in all sorts of ways—some of it unaccounted or unaccountable.

'You know what the market has been! said Margayya This is the time when I wish to attract deposits rather than lend People have money and are looking for a place to put it—and I look to you to get me a few contacts I will make it worth while. You know all kinds of people as a journalist, and you are the man for me'

'I will do my best,' declared Dr Pal enthusiastically, thinking 'At least next month I can pay the stores, instead of dodging, I am tired of dodging'

I am tired of this tame business of lending to my rustic clients Margayya said I want to do something better for a change It does not mean I m giving up my village clients I shall continue to serve them as a sort of duty to them but——

Margayya s instinct was right in choosing Dr Pal as his tout He was a man who visited almost all the shopmen in the town every day He knew the rice merchant in a certain back street who hoarded rice in a secret godown whose frontage was stuffed with innocent looking rag and old paper collected for the paper mills who sold rice at about a rupee for half a seer to needy people, and made an enormous quantity of money each day Dr Pal knew the man who supplied office glue to the army and hoarded enough cash by showing a joint stock firm with imaginary partners another merchant who supplied screws in cartons only half filled the contractor who built huts and got enormous bills passed easily by bribing the Garrison Engineer He was a rich man because his huts meant to stand for three years would stand only for a couple of months—till the bills were passed by the friendly Garrison Engineer! It was this margin that gave him real wealth There were drug stockists who didn t show their stock, but bargained when it was a matter of life and death to a customer there were military men with pensions and go-betweens and busy-bodies who could secure contacts at New Delhi for a consideration, people who could manage export and import priority All these people had a lot of money—the town was reeking with it. Only a part of it came out in income-tax returns and the balance remained hidden in bundled up currency notes in dark boxes—it was these that Margayya wanted to attract to his own stronghold. Besides these, people generally had a lot of cash these days Margayya had decided that all the cash must go to him He had a feeling that, though by ordinary standards he might be termed a man of wealth yet the peak was still a long way off He was like a financial mountaineer who sets his heart on reaching the summit of Everest. He might be standing on the highest peak. Yet he can never feel that he has really attained the highest

The blanket man was Dr Pal s first client Dr Pal sat in his shop amidst piles of dark blankets and lectured him so long that he expressed a desire to meet Margayya. Dr Pal said I will see him first and speak to him He is very reluctant to accept deposits But I think my recommendation will work—wait until I see you again tomorrow

The next day he came to the blanket shop and took the man along to meet Margayya at his office. Margayya effusively seated him on the mat, and went on with his work. He interrupted himself only for a moment to declare 'Still no light! As our landlord, you should look to our convenience.'

'Certainly—I have ordered everything, it's coming,' he said in his routine manner Dr Pal said 'Our friend Guru Raj has some cash, and wants your advice as to what he should do——'

'He is himself an old businessman. Why does he need my advice?' said Margayya.

The blanket man said 'After all, you are an experienced banker Your advice will be valuable.' As he hesitated, Margayya threw a look at Dr Pal and he got up and went away unobtrusively Margayya drew nearer and in a confidential whisper asked Are you really serious about depositing your cash with me? No doubt I can offer you an interest of twenty per cent on your deposit which you can draw monthly' The blanket merchant gasped, 'Twenty per cent? Did I hear you all right?'

'Yes, I said twenty per cent,' said Margayya. 'I know what I am talking about'

'The banks are offering only three per cent.'

'I'm not concerned with them. I'm not a bank, but I can guarantee you twenty per cent'

'How do you manage it?

'Well, that is my look-out,' Margayya said. 'I have a business which yields me more, I have investments which give me probably twenty-five per cent. I keep five per cent and turn over the twenty per cent to the depositor, after all,' he said with a very virtuous look, 'I am using your money Unlike the banks and co-operative societies, I believe you are entitled to the larger share as the owner of money You see, I have made enough money,' he said with an air of sanctity I don t want more. I only want to be of help to people, that is all,' he said vaguely

At the end of his talk Guru Raj took out five thousand rupees in cash and placed them on the table. Margayya swept them into his desk and wrote out a receipt This is the receipt. Any time you want your money back, just take it to my accountant and collect your five thousand But as long as you don t cash it, you can collect the interest on every first As long as you do not withdraw the principal, you can draw the interest.

The blanket merchant went away with his head in the clouds. Twenty per cent! 'I have to dispose of a hundred blankets a day

if I have to make that money How does this man manage?' On the following month when he went to Margayya s the accoun tant gave him the cash When he got his interest as a reality the man was aghast and cried That man Margayya is a wizard How does he manage it?'

Very soon the word Wizard came to be bandied about freely whenever anyone referred to Margayya His methods were too complex for anyone to understand The banks were puzzled The deposits in their possession were all going People speculated how the wizard did it No one had any clear idea Nor could they get any enlightenment from Sastri or Dr Pal Margayya assigned to them only portions of certain duties and attended to all things personally and they never had a full knowledge of what exactly he did The whole town seemed to talk of nothing but this all day People said that he underwrote shipments arriving at Madras Port or Bombay and made money that he discounted bills of lading that he paid interest on capital out of a sheer desire to impress But the fact was there that he seemed to need new clients each day and Dr Pal had proved invaluable in this task. He had now earned for himself a second hand Baby Austin and brought into Margayya s at least a dozen new clients each day Margayya calculated If I get twenty thousand rupees deposit each day and pay fifteen in interest, I have still five thousand a day left in my hands as my own——

PART FIVE

He might have been a movie celebrity He could never take a few steps in the road without people gaping and pointing at him It was now necessary for him to have a car, for it became a nuisance to walk in the roads All sorts of people saluted him respectfully and stood aside while he passed It made him feel very awkward All sorts of people tried to make friends with him All sorts of people tried to waylay him and explain their difficulties One wanted help to get a daughter married, another to send his son to Madras for higher medical studies, a third applied for help to extricate his lands, or to buy rice for the next meal, and so on and so forth In addition to this, public bodies seemed to have suddenly become aware of his existence—a Flood Relief Fund here, and Gandhi Fund there, Earthquake Relief for a far off country, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Promotion of Child Welfare, Education, and the War Fund the most constant demand was from the War Fund of the local district authorities People called on him at all sorts of places and all sorts of hours—in the street, at home, or in his office Quite a flood of visitors waited for him All applications for charity instead of rousing pity only angered Margayya 'What do they take me for? A Magic Pot? I work hard and wear myself out not in order to give gifts but to keep Who came to my help in those days when I was in difficulties?'

He had to barricade himself at home and in his office At his office he had to move out of his original place and take another room and shut himself in. He left the disposal of his visitors and applicants to Dr Pal, who just told people This is only a bank not a charity home,' and sent away whoever came for cash He was tactful where it was necessary, and diplomatic or downright rude where it was necessary Sometimes he was visited by high Government officials who asked 'Well, what is your contribution to the War Fund?

Dr Pal said 'Our boss is a convinced Congressman. We don't believe that this is our war unless the Congress High Command orders him to pay, he will never give a pie he is a man of strict principles Why should we contribute for a fund with which the British and U S fight their enemy—not our enemy,

our enemy is Britain not Germany When the Congress commands us to gather funds for fighting this enemy you will see Margayya placing his entire wealth at the disposal of the country' Or he said Governor's War Fund! Nothing doing! Sir somebody or other they've sent from England as our Governor pockets half the war fund he collects isn't it a fact? If he takes twenty thousand in cash for the war fund he takes a similar sum in kind in the shape of a casket or something for domestic consumption Can you disprove it? Till you can do that you cannot expect Mr Margayya to contribute anything He is a man of strict principles Or if it was a highly placed police or Income-tax official who was making the request Dr Pal said Margayya has been thinking over it You may rest assured he will send in his contribution very soon And he advised Margayya to send off a cheque. It will not do at all to get into disfavour with these folk—after all they will be using the money for defeating the Nazis He also told Margayya You must have a car You simply should not be seen in the streets any more you have passed that stage. If you like a walk, go along the river but don't walk in the streets Margayya allowed the other to buy a car for him.

It was necessary for him to use a car also for another reason at the end of a day Margayya carried a huge bag of cash—notes of all denominations were in the old mail sack which he had picked up at an auction. Very good material, said Margayya of the sack, which came near bursting when Margayya closed for the day He now worked far into the night with the aid of kerosine lamps. The moment he reached home, he counted the notes again, bundled them up in tidy little batches, the lovely five rupee and ten rupee and the most handsome piece of paper—the green hundred rupee note. He counted his cash over and over again, and locked it up in his safe and shut the door It would be nearly midnight when he finished the counting and rose to have his dinner His wife waited for him patiently and sat down for food after he had had his dinner He hardly noticed that she waited for him his mind was fully occupied with various calculations He hardly spoke during the dinner If she asked Shall I serve? he merely answered back without looking up Don't bother me Do what you please only don't bother me He ate very little—just the quantity that a boy of ten would eat It worried her secretly She tried to improve it by putting more rice and stuff on his plate, but he just pushed it all aside got up and went back

to work by the lamp, for further additions She never knew when he went to bed, because even after she had finished all her work and gone to bed, she still saw him bent over his registers She saw him with a drawn look and felt moved to say 'Shouldn't you mind your health?'

'What's wrong with me? I'm all right If you feel you need anything, go ahead and buy it and do what you like. Take any money you want Only leave me alone'

She felt it would be best to leave him alone. He seemed to have so little time left for rest that she concluded it would be better not to encroach upon it with her own comments Balu has only taken after his father—his sullenness and silence, she concluded It became a household where perfect silence reigned. She was only secretly worried over his thin appearance and the dull weariness about his eyes She often wanted to ask him 'Why should you work so hard? Haven't we enough? And what are you aiming at?' But refrained from uttering it She knew it would only annoy him. Perfect silence reigned in the house.

In the course of time, at the end of a day he brought home not one bag, but quite a number of them. It was no longer possible to count the currency notes individually He could only count and check up the bundles—and even that took him beyond midnight. For now his fame had spread far and wide and it was not only the deposits of well to-do people that arrived at his counter, but also those of smaller tradesmen and clerks and workers 'If I have a hundred rupees better hand it to Margayya, for he will give me twenty rupees per month for a lifetime He is our saviour' Margayya accepted any deposit that came to him, however small it might be. He explained I like to make no difference between rich and poor in this business, which exists after all for serving society We should not make distinctions

'I heard,' said Pal, they are thinking of conferring on you a title for your services'

Margayya was really alarmed to hear it What for?

For doing the greatest Public Service If you only found the time to go round and see the number of people who are happy and secure through your help There is a talk in Government circles of giving you at least a Public Service medal

In his home the large safe was filled up, and its door had to be forced in, and then the cupboards the benches and tables, the space under the cot and the corners His wife could hardly pass into the small room to pick up a saree or towel there were cur-

rency bundles stacked up a foot high all over the floor Presently Margayya ordered her to transfer trunks and effects to the room upstairs She patiently obeyed him Very soon this room had also to be requisitioned more sacks emptied themselves into the house every day

'They have carried in five sacks today said his brother in the next house.

Do you really say all that is money? asked his wife excitedly

And then they heard Margayya going upstairs and a kerosene light burned far into the night His brother's family would have given anything to know what Margayya was doing up there so late. His brother's wife strained her ears against a small crack in the wall and heard Margayya say to his wife 'You will have to clear out of the upstairs room too

Where shall I put my trunks?

Keep it in the store room for the present

Is it a safe place? I have some gold jewellery

Oh there are more valuable things for me to keep in the rooms Don t make a fuss

All right, she said docilely

Only till I build a vault somewhere, he said feeling that he ought to be a little more mollifying I must have a strong room built somewhere I wish I could find the time to attend to it.

§

It was about seven in the evening The lights had not been lit yet. Margayya s eyes pained him and he felt weak and weary He had been skipping his morning food these days because he had lost the taste for it he drank a cup of diluted butter milk, kept himself on a few cups of coffee throughout the day and had his food only at night after closing his cash. With work ahead, I have no patience for food. He went to his office almost as soon as he got up from bed he washed and changed and rushed off and returned home at indefinite hours He said to his wife Opening the office is in my hands but the closing is in the hands of other people. He had to cut out even his snuff—the one thing he liked and still enjoyed. Dr Subbu of the Reliance Medical Hall, one of his investors advised Margayya to give up snuff He consulted him with regard to a persistent pain at the back of his head which kept him sleepless at night. The doctor examined him when he came over to collect his interest.

He said 'Probably your snuff irritates the optic nerves Why don't you stop snuff? Anyway, come over to my clinic for a thorough examination We want to see you kept in the fittest condition possible you know' He laughed like many other doctors of his kind at his own joke

Margayya gave up snuff with a resolute will, and felt better for it It was not quite so easy to give it up, but he said to himself If I do not sleep at night properly, I might mess up my calculations and then God knows what will happen' He had mitigated his headache, but a sort of dizziness perpetually hung about his head

Dr Subbu said when he visited him next 'Why don't you take a holiday at Kodaikanal Hills? It'll do you good Can t you afford a holiday?

Margayya shook his head sadly 'Not possible in this life I'm tied up too much with various things——' He figured himself as being in the centre of a tangled skein 'If I move even slightly,' he began, but merely said I cannot afford to move even slightly this way or that'

His accountant, Sastri, was bundling up currency, stuffing it into mail sacks, and preparing statements All his customers had left. Margayya felt ill He sat in his room with his head resting on his arms He called out 'Sastri, hurry up with your stuff'

'Yes, sir,' said Sastri from his corner Your son is here to see you, sir' The door opened and Balu entered and took his seat opposite to him.

Balu, come in,' Margayya said, feeling happy at the sight of his son 'It must be more than two weeks since I saw you How is your family?'

'Baby has some stomach trouble and is crying

'Must be teething, I suppose. Take your mother there and show her the child She will be able to do something she understands these things better'

'You never come to our house I took Brinda to see mother today——'

'Oh! That's good otherwise I wish I could go over to your house Well, I suppose when the pressure here lessens I suppose I shall I am virtually a prisoner here Your cook is all right, I suppose'

'Yes, but he is sometimes very impertinent I want to send him away, but Brinda is too patient She spoils him'

'Don t quarrel with her Leave these things to her She is right

Now the common topics of conversation seemed to be over There was a moment s silence Balu sat moving a pebble on Margayya s desk as a paper weight

'Why don t you buy a better paper weight and a good table and chair instead of squatting like this on the ground father? asked Balu.

He merely replied I don t need all those luxuries He locked up his desk and made preparations to start out calling Sastri is the statement ready?

Almost sir replied Sastri giving his customary reply

I want to talk to you seriously father said Balu nervously

Margayya looked at his face apprehensively before saying I am not quite well today Tomorrow I will come to your house

No I must speak to you now You have got to listen to me said Balu authoritatively

Oh! said Margayya 'Wait a minute then He quickly passed out of the room went over to Sastri and whispered Don t bring in the cash bags yet returned to his seat and settled down He sat looking at his son fixedly without saying anything.

The boy sat biting his nails for a moment. He did not know how to begin His voice shook as he said Father I I want more money

Oh! Margayya said with a feeling of relief I thought as much Why do you hesitate? How much do you want?

The boy felt encouraged by his kindness He brightened up Still he fe t hesitant to answer the question. The father en couraged him Come on Balu speak boldly I always like a fellow who talks freely and openly and boldly Have I refused you any thing so far?'

The boy preferred to ignore this question I I want to ask you something I want more money——

'That is all right replied Margayya irritably I've told you I'll give it you How much do you want?

It depends It depends on what you have I have no idea what you have. How can I say?

'What do you mean? I do not understand you said Margayya feeling puzzled If you cannot talk clearly you had better see me again some other time I am not quite well he said sharply He liked to have things clear cut as in interest calculations vague indefinite talk annoyed him. He got up saying I wish to go home and lie down. Come with me if you like.

'No, can't talk to you there Mother will be there I don't like to talk before her'

Margayya called out 'Sastri, get the car ready,' and made a move towards the door The boy sprang up and blocked the door, with arms spread out 'You must let me talk to you and not go——'

Margayya did not like scenes in his office He threw a look at Sastri, but he was engrossed in his accounts Margayya went back to his seat clamly and sat down He was completely bewildered This was the first time he found his son so talkative —it was a revelation to him The boy, though not docile, was always taciturn and quiet and never so aggressive He asked for money, which was granted, and yet what happened? He had said, 'It depends on how much you have' Margayya could hardly believe his ears He sat in his seat and patiently waited He felt weak and fatigued He wanted so much to lie down

Margayya struck a match and lit the dim kerosene lamp He resigned himself to whatever might be coming The boy said 'I want to speak to you about something very serious'

Margayya suppressed the annoyance that was coming over him He felt afraid to be angry Probably his son had taken to drinking he sniffed the air to find if it was confirmed by his breath He found himself clutching the ruler on his table—but relaxed his hold at the thought, After all it's Balu——' It seemed to be an unworthy move to make He let go his hold on the ruler and waited The boy still would not open his lips Margayya felt exasperated He pulled out his watch and said 'It's about seven o'clock If you do not speak before the clock hand points to seven five, I will go I will knock you down and walk out if necessary' He felt relieved after delivering this threat He felt his authority re-established 'The boy cannot have it all his own way,' he told himself He placed the watch on his desk dramatically, turning it towards Balu

Balu fidgetted for a moment with his eyes fixed on the clock and then said 'I want a share of property—my share of property'

'What property?' asked Margayya

'Well, I mean, my share of property—our ancestral property'

'H'm—I see Why? Why do you want it?

'Because I have attained my majority You know it as well as I do I am nineteen and entitled to my own share of property'

'What property?' asked Margayya

'Ancestral property,' the boy answered

At this Margayya put his hand into his pocket brought out a half rupee coin placed it on the table pushed it over and said There it is take it—that's exactly half of what your grandfather left in cash take it and give me a receipt

The boy picked it up and looked at it Is this all the movable and immovable property?

What movable and immovable property movable? Margayya lost his temper on hearing it lost his head completely Movable! Immovable! You want me to give you a list is that it? Here it is this is what it was listen and he described in coarse terms the movable and immovable properties possessed by his worthy ancestors he was filled with chagrin at the memory of the travails he had gone through with his brother before the partition of their single house the trip to the courts the hours of waiting on the old lawyer's bench the Court Commission visiting their house and so on and so forth He remembered how miserable he had felt wondering where his wife was going to cook the next meal and where they were to put the youngster down to sleep while the legal proceedings were going on and they hung on to his brother's house uncertainly Those miseries could not be understood by the boy even if explained to him He felt sorry He said softly Boy let us go home now and discuss it. It s all right This is not the right time to talk of all those things

No said the boy Don t try to dodge me.

'Where did you pick up all this language?

I m old enough to know the world retorted the boy If you don t give me an immediate account I will go to court

'Very well—go ahead, I have nothing more to say Margayya got up and tried to move out. The boy once again sprang up spread out his arms and blocked the door Margayya slapped his face, crying Get out of the way you swine The boy burst into tears and sobbed. Margayya looked at his face and was moved There were tears in his eyes too He put his arm around the boy and said You are being misled by someone probably a lawyer who wants an occupation. Don t listen to such people Here I am your father ready to do anything for you only ask what you want.

I want a share of your property——

Idiot! What obstinacy is this! What property is there?'

I know how much you have made. I am entitled to half of it

'How do you make that out?'

'Because it is multiplied out of grandfather s property and I am entitled to half by right'

'I have given you a house to live in, I give you three hundred rupees a month for your expenditure Well, if you want, ask for some more, I will probably increase it to four hundred'

The boy shook his head 'I want nothing of it I want my share'

'And why?' asked Margayya

'I want to buy——' He stopped short, changed his mind and merely said 'I want it for various things'

Margayya said in a mollifying manner All that I have is yours, my boy Everything that I have will come to you who else is there? To whom can I pass these on after my time?'

'After your time! When is that?'

'Are you asking when I am going to die?'

The boy looked abashed 'I am not saying that, but I cannot wait I want my share urgently

'Pray, what is the urgency, may I ask?' said Margayya cynically 'Do you think that I ought to drink poison and clear the way for your enjoyment? The boy did not know how to answer Margayya could no longer keep standing He pushed the boy aside and walked out He told the accountant Put the bags and the statement into the car He got into the car and drove off, leaving his son standing on the steps of the bank

Margayya felt restless After closing his accounts, putting away the cash, and bolting down his food, he told his wife 'I am going out for a moment Close the door

At this hour!' she asked, but he had gone. She turned in with resignation

His driver had locked the car and gone home Outside, the stars were sparkling in the sky, and the streets were deserted and silent Margayya had to walk the entire way—it was some months since he had walked—and he felt exhilarated by the exercise today 'I have perhaps been too severe, he told himself 'I must investigate what his troubles are more sympathetically Probably he is genuinely hard up Perhaps I might take him into business and see that he has a better income and standing' He wondered if the boy would be surprised to see him there at that hour This is the only time I can spare' He told himself 'If

morning rush starts He must also be fairly annoyed that I have not been seeing the grandson Young parents think the world exists in order to take an interest in a new born child he reflected philosophically When Balu was born we cut off relations who didn t come and stand over the crib and say admiring things about him. All the same he had no business to upset me—I have not been feeling well He should have had more sense Share of the property! The damned fool The recollection of this made him so angry that he stopped and almost turned to go back home What right has that fool to make me walk to him at this hour? It is sheer nonsense why should I go there? he asked himself suddenly Share of the property! Accursed fool! What share—I gave him the right answer He chuckled at the memory of his vulgar repartee Anyway there i no other time when I can meet him and speak to him—might as well get through it and see what ails him I will make him a proposition to join me in business That is the thing to do It is ages since I saw Brinda—nice girl——

He came to Lawley Road It was about one o clock He stood before number 17 at Fourth Cross Road a small villa with a bluebell creeper over the gatepost and a mesh-covered verandah He stood outside and admired the house Got this practically for a song—less than two thousand rupees If that fool of a fellow could not pay the interest even after two years the fault is not mine if it falls in my lap—the fruit can only fall on the palm of him who holds up his hands for it As he opened the little wooden gate and entered he saw no light in the house Probably the boy has slept he reflected He was hesitating whether to turn back and go But the gate had creaked a verandah light was now switched on and the bolt of the front door was being drawn back.

'Who is there?' asked Brinda s voice from inside

Margayya called out Brinda to disclose himself Brinda had just risen from bed she looked sleepy and rather tired She was a very elegant girl Looking at her Margayya thought What a fortunat. thing to have secured this daughter in law If those fool astrologers had had their way! He climbed the steps

'You have come walking at this hour his daughter in law asked her voice was soft and musical

Margayya said I couldn t find any other time How is the baby?' He walked in and stood looking at the little fellow sleeping on his mother's bed He gently touched his cheek

The girl demurely said 'He wouldn't sleep and gets up at the slightest sound'

Why should you not let him stay awake? asked Margayya

'He gives us no peace He wants to be carried about all the time,' she answered She was showing him the utmost respect as an elder

He admired her for it—her tone of courtesy, her soft movement and elegance 'God bless her!' he told himself 'Yes, Balu used to be troublesome too when he was a baby Where is Balu?' he asked, noticing the vacant bed beside hers

She hesitated ever so slightly before answering briefly 'He has not yet come home' Her face became serious when she said that

'Where has he gone? Margayya asked

She still hesitated She merely bit her lips Margayya sensed something was wrong He persisted, and she merely replied He has gone to a cinema,' with an effort

'A cinema! So late as this! How can he leave you and the child alone and go away like this? There was so much genuine sympathy in his voice that the girl was affected by it and burst into tears Margayya was totally at a loss to know what to do now This was a new situation for him, and he did not know what to say He said to her 'Why don t you sit down? Why do you keep standing?'

She wouldn't sit down out of respect for her father in law But he was able to persuade her She rallied and said I wanted to come and see you Every day this happens he comes home every day at two o'clock If I ask him, he he I'm afraid of him'

And then it came out bit by bit Dr Pal was his constant companion They gathered in a house and played cards—it was the house of a man who called himself a theatrical agent She had learnt from their servant that there were a lot of girls also in the building Pal had something or other to do with these people, and picked Balu up in his car They sat there continuously playing cards till midnight. They chewed tobacco and betel leaves, sometimes they drank also, and men and women were very free, and all of them dropped down wherever they sat and slept and became sick when they drank too much—it was a re olting description that she gave all learnt from the servant who worked in the house, the uncle of the girl who looked after the baby Brinda also said that Balu seemed to be thinking of becoming a partner in their busine s In fact he always explained to his wife

that it was business that kept him out late If I speak he threatens to drive me out It s that Pal Can t you do something to keep him away?'

How long has this been going on?

For months——

'Why didn t you tell us?

I was afraid Even now please don t tell him that I have said anything

Margayya brooded over it darkly He now seemed to understand why his son was asking for a partition Dr Pal! Dr Pal! What shall I do with him? he reflected He was torn between caution and an impossible rage God knew where it would lead if he alienated Pal s sympathies the fellow might do anything He decided, within a fraction of a moment that the thing to do was to separate his son from Pal without making a fuss about it and then deal with his son separately He would have to tempt Pal to go out of town—probably on the pretext of a contact outside but if he went there and Margayya found he was in terror of him. The only element that kept people from being terrified of each other was trust—the moment it was lost people became nightmares to each other this seemed to be truly his problem that he could neither keep the fellow in sight nor let him go out of sight. But anyway he had better move with the utmost caution. The daughter in law patiently sat in a chair and watched his face He told her with a great deal of tenderness 'You go in and sleep my child. I will go home and I will see about this tomorrow Don t worry about anything I will set your husband right You lock the door now look after the baby Tell me if you need anything Don t be afraid I will send your mother-in law to see you tomorrow morning He got up and left. The girl bolted the verandah door and put out the light

As he was closing the wicket gate behind him Dr Pal s Baby Austin drew up The moment the rattling of its engine was heard the verandah light was switched on again and the bolt was drawn with a pat. At the same moment Balu got down from the car He leaned his elbow on the door and whispered something to Dr Pal at which Dr Pal burst into a laugh and giggling sounds emanated from the back seat of the car They did not notice Margayya s presence Margayya could not restrain himself any longer He was conscious of a desperation that impelled him on All his caution and discretion was swept aside He dashed to the other door of the car near the driving seat thrust his arm in, got Pal

by the scruff of his coat and dragged him out as Balu on the other side was saying Good Night! Nobody was prepared for it and Dr Pal staggered out The moment he was out of the car, Margayya took off one of his sandals and hit him with it, he kept hitting out with such tremendous power and frequency that Pal could hardly protect himself He was blinded by pain, and blood oozed from the cuts on his face The girls within the car screamed Balu came over and demanded What has come over you, father?'

Margayya turned on him, put his fingers around his neck and gave him a push towards the gate with 'Get out of my way, you little idiot!' Balu staggered and hit his head on the gatepost.

His wife came down the verandah steps with the cry 'Oh, are you hurt? What has happened?'

He rushed towards her asking 'When did this father of mine come here?' Meanwhile the child had been awakened by the hubbub and started howling and Brinda turned and ran back into the house Balu followed her blindly in

Meanwhile, the two girls in the back seat of the car cried out 'Help! Help!

Margayya put his head in and ordered Shut up, you whores!' He felt overpowered by the scent of powder filling the inside of the car 'Who are you?' he demanded They at once became silent, and his tone became more menacing 'Who are you?' he thundered His voice woke up a couple of street dogs and they started barking which again woke up Balu's child so that it shouted more than ever

The girls said We belong to the theatre——

The theatre! Why don't you say what you really are! If you are seen gain anywhere——'

The rest they could not hear, because Dr Pal wriggled himself free, and suddenly dashed into the car, started it, and was off. He looked back and remarked You miserable miser, who cannot share your goods with your own son—all right——

The red rear light of the car receded and vanished around a bend Margayya hesitated on the road for a moment to decide whether he should follow his son into the house But he saw his son bolt the verandah door, and put out the light. Good! Good! It is a good sign He is a good son that trembles and runs away from his father,' he said to himself, and turned homeward

Later in life Margayya often speculated what would have become of him if he had started back home after speaking to his

daughter in law a little earlier and missed Dr Pal s Austin that night or if he had remained in the shadows and had allowed Pal to go off after dropping Balu whom he might probably have tackled with more circumspection and diplomacy he might even have shared his property with him as he demanded that would have saved him at least the rest of it—and prevented the doctor from doing what he did

Dr Pal went straight to a police station and recorded an immediate complaint of assault The two actresses and Balu were his witnesses Next morning he went round with plaster on his face to his various customers and businessmen His first visit was to the blanket merchant He took Balu along with him in the car The blanket merchant was the first to ask What has happened to your face Doctor?

The doctor looked sad and said I am an academic man and I should not have associated with businessmen——

Can t you tell me what happened? the blanket merchant persisted

The doctor just shook his head and said No I can t—better leave things alone It was my mistake to have associated with all sorts of folks and I ought to blame only myself I m paying for it

Don t say so sir We have the greatest respect for you——

Business people have money and they can help me to set up my Psychological Clinic—that was my chief interest that would have been of the greatest benefit to them nowadays psychological wear and tear has the highest incidence among businessmen theirs is a life of the utmost strain I thought I might be of some help to the business community more than to anyone else—and what is the result?

No sir you must not speak like that We have the greatest regard for you But business life is becoming difficult with so many controls and permit forms to be filled up for all sorts of things You have no idea how many obstacles a businessman has to face before he can get through anything in the Government——

After this the doctor drew his attention again to the plaster over his cheeks The merchant asked You have not yet told me where you got it?

Dr Pal lowered his voice to a whisper and said You will not believe me! Margayya assaulted me last night near his son s house

'What! Why?'

How can I say? He is somewhat queer these days His son went up to him with some request and was slapped in the face Later I had to see him Things are probably not going smoothly there

'Ah!' exclaimed the merchant

He was the first to meet Margayya at his house that morning 'I want to take back my deposit There is a marriage proposal likely to shape out—— He grinned awkwardly, nervously, and held out the receipt issued by Margayya

My accountant has all the figures,' began Margayya

The blanket merchant cringed It's urgent I've to find immediate cash'

You have already drawn interest on it?

'Yes yes But I want the principal

'Oh, yes, certainly,' said Margayya, and went into the small room and came out with a bundle of currency

'You are a clever rogue! You have earned so much interest and are now getting your capital! Very clever, very clever, Margayya said light heartedly, which pleased the blanket merchant tremendously as he counted the cash and went out This was the starting point Margayya could not leave for his office One after another they came with their receipts Margayya returned their cash without a murmur The street became congested with people converging on his house, people hung about his steps and windows He bolted the front door and dealt with them through the window

Margayya's wife looked panic stricken What has happened? Why so many people?

They are wanting their money back, that's all

What are you going to do?

We'll give it back, that's all

'You have not eaten this whole day

I have no taste for food' He felt very weak and did not stomach the thought of food His eyes smarted with scrutinizing so many receipts His wrist pained him with the counting of notes He wished he could get his accountant by his side He saw him through the window, struggling to approach the house in the midst of the crowd But he could not come nearer Some persons recognized the accountant and turned upon him Margayya saw them manhandling the old man

I knew nothing about it I swear I did know nothing about it' he was crying

My life s savings gone! I am a beggar today! one of them shouted into the ears of the old man

They were pulling him here and there His spectacles were broken and his turban torn A policeman came into the crowd and took away the old man

By about four o clock all the cash in the house was gone All the mail sacks lay about empty and slack yet peeping through the window Margayya saw seas and seas of human heads stretching to the horizon human faces at their most terrifying The babble of the crowd was deafening Luckily for him the front door of the house was at least a century old and made of thick timber and could stand the battering by a hundred hands People jammed the passage and windows and shouted menacingly There seemed to be only one theme for all the cries My money! My money gone! All my savings gone——

Margayya could sit up no longer He just flung himself down on the floor beside the window No air could come in There were terrifying faces all around and the babble of voices and over it all came the cry of an ice cream pedlar Ice Cream! Ice Cream for thirst! as his bell tinkled

Margayya s wife was scared by the siege and at the condition of her husband She bent over him and asked What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?

Call my brother said Margayya

She ran to the backyard. Very soon Margayya s elder brother climbed the lavatory wall and the parapet of the well jumped into the backyard and was in a minute by his side

Brother what is this? What has come o er you?

I m tired Please send for the police Hurry up otherwise they will mob this house they will kill us they will set it on fire they will——

Do you still owe all of them money?'

'To all of them and many more unseen more will come tomorrow More and more of them Get me the police to save us now and bring a lawyer I am filing insolvency at once.

Insolvency! Think of your family reputation!

No other way out none whatever

The brother ever a man for a crisis stood thinking The hubbub outside was increasing every moment.

'The flood is outside Margayya said. It will wipe us out. Please, please run—— He felt too weak with his effort and lay still with his eyes closed.

His brother ran to his sister-in-law standing at the door sobbing 'Quick, give him something——'

There is no milk in the house The milkman could not come in. There is nothing in the house We have been shut up here since the morning'

'Oh, is that so? He rushed away, and returned soon carrying a vessel full of coffee, and something to eat He seemed to be enjoying the situation He said excitedly 'Now, try and give him something I tried to see if there was a regular meal next door—but it was not available your sister-in-law will send you food presently She has just started cooking' He bustled round spreading his utensils about Give him something at once I will go and get the police to guard us I will also get a lawyer I will do everything to exempt this house at least from the schedule This is inalienable property They cannot attach this' His talk was full of technicalities He rushed off to the backyard and then on to his task.

§

The tide rolled back in about three or four months Days of attending courts, lawyers, inventories and so on and so forth Margayya felt that he had lost all right to personal life

He relaxed completely He lay on a mat with his eyes closed, his wife in the kitchen. A jutka stopped outside, and in marched his son followed by his wife, carrying the infant on her arm. The jutka man brought in a couple of trunks and beds and placed them in the hall Margayya clutched the baby to his bosom His daughter in law went into the kitchen. Balu stood about uncertainly Margayya did not speak to him for a long time The boy stood in the passage undecided what he should do, his shirt unbuttoned at the throat A feeling of pity overcame Margayya The boy had lost some of the look of confidence that he wore before—the radiance that shone on his face when there was money in the background Money was like a gem which radiated subdued light all round The boy looked just dull and puzzled Margayya kept looking at him so long that he felt he had to explain so he just said 'I have come away—they have attached the house

'With the furniture and all the other things?' Margayya asked I was expecting it——

'It was difficult to come out even with our clothes and Brinda's jewellery They demanded a list'

I was expecting it Come here Balu

Balu approached him and sat beside him Margayya put his arm round him You see that box there I have managed to get it out again. He pointed to a corner where his old knobby trunk was kept Its contents are intact as I left them years ago— a [illegible] and an ink bottle You asked for my property There it is take it have an early meal tomorrow and go to the banyan tree in front of the Co operative Bank I hope the tree is still there Go there that is all I can say and anything may happen thereafter Well what do you say? I am showing you a way Will you follow it?

The boy stood ruminating He was looking crushed How can I go and sit there? What will people think?'

Very well then if you are not going I am going on with it as soon as I am able to leave this bed said Margayya Now get the youngster here I will play with him Life has been too dull without him in this house

MYSORE

R K NARAYAN

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Thus every aspect of the ecliptic with reference to the heavens is easily represented and a large number of problems involving the relations between altitude, azimuth latitude longitude time and position of the heavenly bodies generally, can be solved mechanically

In the Jaipur Museum there are some more astronomical small brass instruments Any one who wishes to go further into the subject is referred to Captain Garrett's interesting book The Jaipur Observatory and its Builder" 1902 where he will find allusion to some of Jai Singh's astronomical Theories in which he shows for example that the heavens must be spherical and that the earth is also a sphere and he shows how enormous the dimensions of the celestial sphere must be

He gives the correct explanation of the flattened appearance of the sun and moon and when rising and setting and this effect is not apparent when the sun and moon are high above the horizon because the layers of the atmosphere at the zenith which we look through perpendicularly are few whereas at the horizon we look obliquely through many more layer and the image is flattened showing that he was acquainted with refraction

All prove that Jai Singh was a genuine worker in his favourite science It is a matter of satisfaction to see that his Observatory has been restored by his descendant

APPENDIX B.

HIS HIGHNESS MAHARAJA SAHIB BAHADUR'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS TO DIFFERENT FUNDS AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS SINCE HIS ACCESSION TO THE GADDI IN 1880

North-West Indian Famine and Cholera Fund 1881	Rs.	5,000
Rajputana Famine 1881	Rs.	1,000
Nowshera Medal Fund for the Maharaja College Jaipur 1885	Rs.	371
Memorial Fund Bombay 1883 to 1884	Rs.	1,000
Rifle Range Fund 1883 to 1884	Rs.	500
Expenses of Lady Lansdowne's visit to Jaipur in 1885	Rs.	2,500
Lady Dufferin Fund —		
1st instalment 1885 Rs. 10,000		
2nd instalment 1886 Rs. 1,00,000	Rs.	1,25,000
3rd instalment 1892 Rs. 25,000		
Commemoration Fund Hall Maharaja College Ajmer 1883 to 1884	Rs.	8,130
Charity Fund Bombay 1887	Rs.	1,000
Subscription Veterinary School Ajmer 1892	Rs.	2,000
Colonel Walter Memorial Ajmer 1893	Rs.	500
Further contribution to Maharaja College Endowment Fund Ajmer 1898	Rs.	50,000
Famine Relief Abu Fund 1896	Rs.	2,000
Contribution to School Mount Abu 1898	Rs.	1,000
Public Subscription Ground Mount Abu 1901	Rs.	5,000

APPENDIX B.

HIS HIGHNESS MAHARAJA RAMJI RANA DUR'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS TO DIFFERENT FUNDS AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS SINCE HIS ACCESSION TO THE GADDI IN 1880

Northbrook Indian Museum and Zoological Garden 1881	Rs.	5,000
Rajputana Museum 1881	Rs.	1,000
Northbrook Medal Fund for the Maharaja's College Ajmer 1883	Rs.	311
Free Memorial Fund Donation 1883 to 1884	Rs.	1,000
Rifle Range Donation 1883 to 1884	Rs.	500
Repairs to Bandi tank and Ghats at Boondi 1883 to 1884	Rs.	2,300
Lady Dufferin Fund —		
1st instalment 1888 Rs. 10,000		
2nd instalment 1896 Rs. 100,000	Rs.	1,25,000
3rd instalment 1901 Rs. 15,000		
Ornamental Gate to the Mayo College Ajmer 1883 to 1884	Rs.	8,150
Clothing the Bachelor Band 1885	Rs.	1,000
Rajputana Veterinary School Ajmer 1891	Rs.	2,000
Colonel Walter Hamilton Ajmer 1893	Rs.	500
Further contributions to Mayo College Endowment Fund Ajmer 1901	Rs.	50,000
Boondi Bridge Abu Road 1895	Rs.	2,000
Veterinary School Mount Abu 1899	Rs.	1,000
Public Hall from Ground, Mount Abu 1901	Rs.	1,000

Trevor Pitcellie Memorial Fund		
1st instalment 1814 Rs. 30,000		
2nd instalment 1815 Rs. 4,014	Rs.	34,014
Raymond Constable Memorial Fund —		
1st instalment 1898 Rs. 27,242		
2nd instalment 1900 Rs. 9,986	Rs.	37,228
Famine Relief Grain Shed Mount Abu 1899	Rs.	1,000
Dr Adam Memorial Mount Abu 1900	Rs.	300
Rajputana at Home Mount Abu (in two equal instalments of 1000 each) 1905	Rs.	2,000
Excavation of tank in Muir Garden Deesa 1884	Rs.	1,000
Society for the Encouragement and Preservation of Indian Art 1891	Rs.	1,391
Imperial Institute London 1891	Rs.	2,5?8
International Congress Hygiene and Demography Indian Section London 1891	Rs.	1,400
Lord Roberts Memorial Calcutta 1893	Rs.	1,000
Indian Peoples Famine Fund —		
1st instalment 1900 Rs. 11,00,000		
2nd instalment 1901 Rs. 4,00,000		
3rd instalment 1901 Rs. 1,00,000		
4th instalment 1902 Rs. 4,00,000	Rs.	20,00,000
Transvaal War Fund 1900	Rs.	1,00,000
Queen Victoria Memorial Fund Calcutta —		
1st instalment 1901 Rs. 4,?8?		
2nd instalment 1902 Rs. 1,00,000		
3rd instalment 1903 Rs. 1,00,000		
(Two per cent interest)		
4th instalment 1904 Rs. 80,000	Rs.	2,?4,?8?
King Edward Hospital Fund London 1902	Rs.	75,000
Lady Minto Nursing Fund 1908	Rs.	10,000

Malabar Hill Seven Saints Bombay 1908		Rs. 10,000
Gift to Queen Alexandra for hospitals in London 1908		R 1,00,000
Mahalaxmi Memorial Bombay 1909		Rs. 2,000
King Edward Memorial —		
At Delhi 1910	Rs. 5,000	
At Ajmer 1911	R 4,000	Rs. 13,000
At Jaipur 1911	Rs. 5,000	
Curzon Wylie Memorial Ward, Jaipur 1911		R 10,000
Minto Memorial Calcutta 1911		R 5,000
Edinburgh University 1912		Rs. 1,575
Royal Geographical Society London through Lord Curzon 1912		Rs 3,000
Benevolent Fund Surat 1913		R 2,000
Imperial Gymkhana Club, Delhi 1913		Rs. 8,000
Lord Harding Recovery Fund 1913.		Rs. 50,000
Lady Hardinge Medical College for Women, Delhi 1913.		R 2,00,000
Lord Hardinge Memorial Library 1914		Rs. 5,000
Hindu University 1915		R 5,00,000
Maharaja Kshatriya Boarding House Gwalior 1915		R 2,5,000
Cost of column to be erected in the new city of Delhi to commemorate the visit of Their Imperial Majesties 1916		Rs 2,00,000
All India Hardinge Memorial, Delhi 1916		R 5,000
	Total	R 47,85,575

Notes —

1. In the State itself His Highness during his reign of 35 years has spent on his own land over seventy crore lacs of rupees on works of public utility such as Railways, Roads, Public Buildings, Irrigation works and Famine relief.

2. His Highness has granted remission of back rents amounting to 65 lacs of rupees in his weight in the honour of the visit of Her Imperial Majesty Queen Mary to Jaipur in 1911.

Contributions in connection with the war—

St. John Ambulance Association 1913	Rs.	2 000
Viceroy's Imperial Indian War Relief Fund 1914	Rs.	1 00 000
His Royal Highness Prince of Wales War Relief Fund 1914	Rs.	1 00 000
Ladies Committee St John Ambulance Association Ajmer 1914	Rs.	1 000
Queen Mary's Needle Work Guild Fund London 1914	Rs.	1,500
St John Ambulance Association Simla 1914	Rs.	1 000
Officers' Families Fund through Sir John Hewett 1914	Rs.	1 500
New Year Gift to Her Imperial Majesty for the benefit of sailors and soldiers fighting for the Empire 1915	Rs.	15 998
Contribution towards the expenses of the War 1915	Rs.	5 00 000
St John Ambulance Red Cross War Fund Simla 1915	Rs.	5 000
Gift to His Imperial Majesty's thank-offering on his recovery towards the purchase of a battery of ten Mountain Guns for the use of the Indian Army on the front 1916	Rs.	30 000
Union Jack Club London for the benefit of sailors and soldiers 1916	Rs.	1 000
Total	R	7 58,298

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Contributions in connection with the war—

St. John Ambulance Association 1913	Rs.	2 000
Viceroy's Imperial Indian War Relief Fund 1914	Rs.	1 00 000
His Royal Highness Prince of Wales War Relief Fund 1914	Rs.	1 00 000
Ladies Committee St. John Ambulance Association Ajmer 1914	Rs.	1 000
Queen Mary's Needle Work Guild Fund London 1914	Rs.	1 500
St. John Ambulance Association Simla 1914	Rs.	1 000
Officers' Families Fund through Sir John Hewett 1914	Rs.	1 500
New Year Gift to Her Imperial Majesty for the benefit of sailors and soldiers fighting for the Empire 1915	Rs.	1 228
Contribution towards the expenses of the War 1915	Rs.	3 00 000
St. John Ambulance Red Cross War Fund Simla 1915	Rs.	5 000
Gift to His Imperial Majesty's thank-offering on his recovery towards the purchase of a battery of ten Machine Guns for the use of the Indian Army on the front 1916	Rs.	30 000
Union Jack Club London for the benefit of sailors and soldiers 1916	Rs.	1 000
Total	Rs.	38 228

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