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Rabindra Nath Tagore, *Sacrifice*, 1918

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SACRIFICE.

A Play

By

SIR RABINDRA NATH TAGORE.

SACRIFICE.

CHARACTERS.

GUNAVATI (The Queen)

RAGHUPATI (The Priest)

GOVINDA (The King)

JAISING (The Servant of Temple)

APARNA (The beggar girl)

NAKSHATRA (The King's brother)

MINISTER

NAYAN RAI (General)

CHANDPAL (General)

DRUVA (Little boy).

1.

SACRIFICE.

A TEMPLE IN TIPPERA.

(Enters GUNAVATI, The Queen.)

GUNAVATI Have I offended thee, dread Mother? Thou grantest children to the beggar-woman, who sells them to live, and to the adulteress, who kills them to save herself from infamy, and here am I, the Queen, with all the world lying at my feet, hankering in vain for the baby-touch at my bosom, to feel the stir of a dearer life within my life. What sin have I committed, Mother, to merit this, - to be banished from the Mothers' heaven?

(Enters RAGHUPATI, the priest.)

O Master, have I ever been remiss in my worship? And my husband, is he not godlike in his purity? Then why has the Goddess, who weaves the web of this world-illusion, assigned my place in the barren waste of childlessness?

RAGHUPATI Our Mother is all caprice, she knows no law, our sorrows and joys are mere freaks of her mind. Have patience, daughter, to-day we shall offer special sacrifice in your name to please her.

GUNAVATI Accept my grateful obeisance, father, My offerings are already on their way to the temple – the red bunches of hibiscus and beasts of sacrifice. (They go out.)

(Enter GOVINDA, the KING; JAISING, the servant of temple; and APARNA, the beggar-girl.)

JAISING What is your wish, Sire?

GOVINDA Is it true that this poor girl's pet goat has been brought by force to the temple to be killed? Will Mother accept such a gift with grace?

2.

- JAISING** King, how are we to know from whence the servants collect our daily offerings of worship? But, my child, why is this weeping? Is it worthy of you to shed tears for that which Mother herself has taken?
- APARNA** Mother! I am his mother. If I return late to my hut, he refuses his grass, and bleats, with his eyes on the road. I take him up in my arms, when I come, and share my food with him. He knows no other mother but me.
- JAISING** Sire, could I make the goat live again, by giving up a portion of my life, gladly would I do it. But how can I restore that which Mother herself has taken?
- APARNA** Mother has taken? It is a lie. Not mother, but demon.
- JAISING** O, the blasphemy!
- APARNA** Mother, art thou there to rob a poor girl of her love? Then where is the throne, before which to condemn thee? Tell me, King.
- GOVINDA** I am silent, my child. I have no answer.
- APARNA** This blood-streak running down the steps, is it his? O my darling, when you trembled and cried for dear life, why did your cry not reach my heart through the whole deaf world?
- JAISING** (To the image) I have served thee from my infancy, Mother Kali, yet I understand thee not. Does pity only belong to weak mortals, and not to gods? Come with me, my child, let me do for you what I can. Help must come from man, when it is denied from gods.

(JAISING and APARNA go out.)

(Enter RAGHUPATI; NAKSHATRA, who is the King's brother; and the courtiers.)

- ALL** Victory to the King!
- GOVINDA** Know you all, that I forbid shedding of blood in the temple from to-day for ever.
- MINISTER** You forbid sacrifice to the Goddess?
- GENERAL NAYAN RAI** Forbid sacrifice?

- NAKSHATRA** How terrible! Forbid sacrifice?
- RAGHUPATI** Is it a dream?
- GOVINDA** No dream, father. It is awakening. Mother came to me, in a girl's disguise, and told me that blood she cannot suffer.
- RAGHUPATI** She has been drinking blood for ages. Whence comes this loathing all of a sudden?
- GOVINDA** No, she never drank blood, she kept her face averted.
- RAGHUPATI** I warn you, think and consider. You have no power to alter laws laid down in scriptures.
- GOVINDA** God's words are above all laws.
- RAGHUPATI** Do not add pride to your folly. Do you have the effrontery to say that you alone have heard God's words, and not I?
- NAKSHATRA** It is strange, that the King should have heard from gods and not the priest.
- GOVINDA** God's words are ever ringing in the world, and he who is wilfully deaf cannot hear them.
- RAGH.** Atheist! Apostate!
- GOVINDA** Father, go to your morning service, and declare to all worshippers that from hence they will be punished with banishment, who shed creatures' blood in their worship of the Mother of all creatures.
- RAGH.** Is this your last word?
- GOVINDA** Yes.
- RAGH.** Then curse upon you! Do you, in your enormous pride, imagine that the Goddess, dwelling in your land, is your subject? Do you presume to bind her with your laws and rob her of her dues? You shall never do it. I declare it, - I who am her servant.
(Goes.)
- NAYAN** Pardon me, Sire, but have you the right?
- MINISTER** King, is it too late to revoke your order?
- GOVINDA** We dare not delay to uproot sin from our realm.

4.

MINISTER Sin can never have such a long lease of life. Could they be sinful, – the rites that have grown old at the feet of the Goddess?

(The KING is silent.)

NAKSHATRA Indeed they could not be.

MINISTER Our ancestors have performed these rites with reverence; can you have the heart to insult them?

(The KING remains silent.)

NAYAN That which has the sanction of ages, have you the right to remove it?

GOV. No more doubts and disputes. Go and spread my order in all of my lands.

MIN. But Sire, the Queen has offered her sacrifice for this morning's worship; it is come near the temple gate.

GOV. Send it back. (He goes.)

MIN. What is this?

NAK. Are we, then, to come down to the level of Buddhists, and treat animals as if they have their right to live? Preposterous! (They all go out.)

(Enter RAGHUPATI, - JAISING following him with a jar of water to wash his feet.)

JAIS. Father.

RAGH. Go!

JAIS. Here is some water.

RAGH. No need of it!

JAIS. Your clothes.

RAGH. Take them away!

JAIS. Have I done anything to offend you?

RAGH. Leave me alone. The shadows of evil have thickened. The King's throne is raising its insolent head above the temple altar. Ye gods of these degenerate days, are ye ready to obey the King's laws with bowed heads, fawning upon him like his courtiers? Have only men and demons combined to usurp gods' dominions in this world, and is heaven powerless to defend its honour? But there remain the Brahmins, though the gods be absent; and the King's throne will supply fuel to the sacrificial fire of their anger. My child, my mind is distracted.

JAIS. Whatever has happened, father?

RAGH. I cannot find words to say. Ask the Mother Goddess who has been defied.

JAIS. Defied? By whom?

RAGH. By King Govinda.

JAIS. King Govinda defied Mother Kali?

RAGH. Defied you and me, all scriptures, all countries, all time, defied Mahakali, the Goddess of the endless stream of time, - sitting upon that puny little throne of his.

JAIS. King Govinda?

RAGH. Yes, yes, your King Govinda, the darling of your heart. Ungrateful! I have given all my love to bring you up, and yet King Govinda is dearer to you than I am.

JAIS. The child raises its arms to the full moon, sitting upon his father's lap. You are my father, and my full moon is King Govinda. Then is it true, what I hear from people, that our King forbids all sacrifice in the temple? But in this we cannot obey him.

RAGH. Banishment is for him who does not obey.

JAIS. It is no calamity to be banished from a land where Mother's worship remains incomplete. No, so long as I live, the service of the temple shall be fully performed.

(They go out.)

(Enter GUNAVATI and her attendant.)

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GUNA. What is it you say? The Queen's sacrifice turned away from the temple gate? Is there a man in this land who carries more than one head on his shoulders, that he could dare think of it? Who is that doomed creature?

ATTEN. I am afraid to name him.

GUNA. Afraid to name him, when I ask you? Whom do you fear more than me?

ATTEN. Pardon me.

GUNA. Only last evening court minstrels came to sing my praise, Brahmins blessed me, the servants silently took their orders from my mouth. What can have happened, in the meantime, that things have become completely upset, - the Goddess refused her worship, and the Queen her authority. Was Tripura a dreamland? Give my salutation to the priest, and ask him to come.

(ATTENDANT goes out.)

(Enter GOVINDA.)

GUNA. Have you heard, King? My offerings have been sent back from Mother's temple.

GOV. I know it.

GUNA. You know it, and yet bear the insult?

GOV. I beg to ask your pardon for the culprit.

GUNA. I know King, your heart is merciful, but this is no mercy. It is feebleness. If your kindness hampers you, leave the punishment in my hand. Only, tell me, who is he?

GOV. It is I, my Queen. My crime was in nothing else but having given you pain.

GUNA. I do not understand you.

GOV. From to-day shedding of blood in gods' temples is forbidden in my land.

GUNA. Who forbids it?

GOV. Mother herself.

GUNA. Who heard it?

GOV. I.

GUNA. You! That makes me laugh. The Queen of all the world comes to the gate of Tripura's King with her petition.

GOV. Not with her petition, but with her sorrow.

GUNA. Your dominion is outside the temple limit. Do not send your commands there, where they are impertinent.

GOV. The command is not mine, it is Mother's.

GUNA. If you have no doubt in your decision, do not cross my faith. Let me perform my worship according to my light.

GOV. I promised my Goddess to prevent sacrifice of life in her temple, and I must carry it out.

GUNA. I also promised my Goddess the blood of three hundred kids and one hundred buffaloes, and I will carry it out. You may leave me now.

GOV. As you wish.

(He goes out.)

(Enters RAGHUPATI.)

GUNA. My offerings have been turned back from the temple, father.

RAGH. The worship offered by the most ragged of all beggars is not less precious than yours, Queen. But the misfortune is that Mother has been deprived. The misfortune is that the King's pride is growing into a bloated monster obstructing divine grace, fixing its angry red eyes upon all worshippers.

GUNA. What will come of all this, father?

RAGH. That is only known to her, who fashions this world with her dreams. But this is certain, that the throne, which casts its shadow upon Mother's shrine, will burst like a bubble, vanishing in the void.

GUNA. Have mercy and save us, father.

RAGH. Ha, ha! I am to save you, - you, the consort of a King who boasts of his kingdom in the earth and in heaven as well, before whom the gods and the Brahmins must, - Oh, shame! Oh, the evil age, when the Brahmin's futile curse recoils upon himself, to sting him into madness. *(About to tear his sacrificial thread)*

GUNA. *(Preventing him)* Have mercy upon me.

RAGH. Then give back to Brahmins what are theirs by right.

GUNA. Yes, I will. Go, master, to your worship and nothing will hinder you.

RAGH. Indeed your favour overwhelms me. At the merest glance of your eyes gods are saved from ignominy and the Brahmin is restored to his sacred offices. Thrive and grow fat and sleek till the dire day of judgement comes. *(Goes out.)*

(Re-enters KING GOVINDA.)

GOVIN. My Queen, the shadow of your angry brows hides all light from my heart.

GUNA. Go! Do not bring a curse upon this house.

GOVIN. Woman's smile removes all curse from the house, her love is God's grace.

GUNA. Go, and never show your face to me again.

GOVIN. I shall come back my Queen, when you remember me.

GUNA. *(Clinging to the King's feet.)* Pardon me, King. Have you become so hard that you forget to respect woman's pride? Do you not know, beloved, that thwarted love takes the disguise of anger?

GOVIN. I would die, if I lost my trust in you. I know, my love, that clouds are for moments only, and the sun is for all days.

GUNA. Yes, the clouds will pass by, God's thunder will return to his armoury, and the sun of all days will shine upon the traditions of all time. Yes, my King, order it so, that Brahmins be restored to their rights, the Goddess to her offerings, and the King's authority to its earthly limits.

GOVIN. It is not the Brahmins' right to violate the eternal good. The creature's blood is not the offering for gods. And it is within the rights of the King and the peasant alike to maintain truth and righteousness.

GUNA. I prostrate myself on the ground before you; I beg at your feet. The custom, that comes through all ages, is not the King's own. Like heaven's air, it belongs to all men. Yet your Queen begs it of you, with clasped hands, in the name of your people. Can you still remain silent, proud man, refusing entreaties of love in favour of duty which is doubtful? Then go, go, go from me.

(They go.)

(Enter RAGHUPATI, JAISING, and NAYAN RAI.)

RAGH. General, your devotion to Mother is well known.

NAYAN. It runs through generations of my ancestors.

RAGH. Let this sacred love give you indomitable courage. Let it make your sword-blade mighty as God's thunder, and win its place above all powers and positions of this world.

NAYAN. The Brahmin's blessings will never be in vain.

RAGH. Then I bid you collect your soldiers and strike Mother's enemy down to the dust.

NAYAN. Tell me, father, who is the enemy?

RAGH. Govinda.

NAYAN. Our King?

RAGH. Yes, attack him with all your force.

NAYAN. It is evil advice. Father, is this to try me?

RAGH. Yes, it is to try you, to know for certain whose servant you are. Give up all hesitation. Know that the Goddess calls, and all earthly bonds must be severed.

NAYAN. I have no hesitation in my mind. I stand firm in my post where my Goddess has placed me.

RAGH. You are brave.

NAYAN. Am I the basest of Mother's servants, that the order should come for me to turn traitor? She herself stands upon the faith of man's heart. Can she ask me to break it? Then to-day comes to dust the King, and to-morrow the Goddess herself.

JAIS. Noble words.

RAGH. The King, who has turned traitor to Mother, has lost all claims to your allegiance.

NAYAN. Drive me not, father, into a wilderness of debates. I know only one path, - the straight path of faith and truth. This stupid servant of Mother shall never swerve from that highway of honour. *(Goes out.)*

JAIS. Let us be strong in our faith, as he is, Master. Why ask the aid of soldiers? We have the strength within ourselves for the task given to us from above. Open the temple gate wide, father. Sound the drum. Come, come, O citizens, to worship her, who takes all fear away from our hearts. Come, Mother's children.

(CITIZENS come.)

FIRST CIT. Come, come, we are called.

ALL. Victory to Mother!

(They sing and dance.)

The dread Mother dances naked in the battlefield,
Her lolling tongue burns like a red flame of fire,
Her dark tresses fly in the sky, sweeping away the sun and stars,
Red streams of blood run from her cloud-black limbs,
And the world trembles and cracks under her tread.

JAIS. Do you see the beasts of sacrifice coming towards the temple, driven by the Queen's attendants?

THEY CRY Victory to Mother! Victory to our Queen!

RAGH. Jaising, make haste and get ready for the worship.

JAIS. Everything is ready, father.

RAGH. Send a man to call Prince Nakshatra in my name.

(JAISING goes. CITIZENS sing and dance.)

GOVIN. Silence, Raghupati! Do you dare to disregard my order?

RAGH. Yes, I do.

GOVIN. Then you are not for my land.

RAGH. No, my land is there, where the King's crown kisses the dust. No! Citizens! Let Mother's offerings be brought in here.

(They beat drums.)

GOVIN. Silence! (To his attendants.) Ask my General to come. Raghupati, you drive me to call soldiers to defend God's right. I feel the shame of it; for the force of arms only reveals man's weakness.

RAGH. Sceptic, are you so certain in your mind that Brahmins have lost the ancient fire of their sacred wrath? No, its flame will burst out from my heart to burn your throne into ashes. If it does not, then I shall throw into the fire the scriptures, and my Brahmin pride, and all the arrant lies that fill our temple shrines in the guise of the divine.

(Enter GENERAL NAYAN RAI and CHANDPAL, who is the second in command of the army.)

GOVIN. Stand here with your soldiers to prevent sacrifice of life in the temple.

NAYAN. Pardon me, Sire. The King's servant is powerless in the temple of God.

GOVIN. General, it is not for you to question my order. You are to carry out my words. Their merits and demerits belong only to me.

NAYAN. I am your servant, my King, but I am a man above all. I have reason and my religion. I have my King, - and also my God.

GOVIN. Then surrender your sword to Chandpal. He will protect the temple from pollution of blood.

NAYAN. Why to Chandpal? This sword was given to my forefathers by your royal ancestors. If you want it back, I will give it up to you. Be witness, my fathers, who are in the heroes' paradise, - the sword, that you made sacred with your loyal faith and bravery, I surrender to my King. (Goes out.)

RAGH. The Brahmin's curse has begun its work already.

(Enter JAISING.)

JAIS. The beasts have been made ready for the sacrifice.

GOVIN. Sacrifice?

JAIS. King, listen to my earnest entreaties. Do not stand in the way, hiding the Goddess, man as you are.

RAGH. Shame, Jaising. Rise up and ask my pardon. I am your Master. Your place is at my feet, not the King's Fool! Do you ask King's sanction to do God's service? Leave alone the worship and the sacrifice. Let us wait and see how his pride prevails in the end. Come away. (They go out.)

GOVIN. Oh Goddess, where is humility in this world. Even they who grovelst thy feet do not know what meekness is. So poor, so proud, so vain they are. (Goes out.)

(Enters APARNA.)

APARNA. Where is Jaising? He is not here, but only you, - the image whom nothing can move. You rob us of all our best without uttering a word. We pine for love, and die beggars for want of it. Yet it comes to you unasked, though you need it not. Like a grave, you

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hoard it from the use of the yearning world. Jaising, what happiness do you find from her? What can she speak to you? O my heart, my famished heart!

(Enters RAGHUPATI.)

RAGH. Who are you?

APARNA. I am a beggar girl. Where is Jaising?

RAGH. Leave this place at once. I know you are haunting this temple, to steal Jaising's heart from the Goddess.

APARNA. Has the Goddess anything to fear from me? I fear her. (She goes out.)

(Enter JAISING and PRINCE NAKSHATRA.)

NAKS. Why have you called me?

RAGH. Last night the Goddess told me in a dream, that you shall become King within a week.

NAKS. Ha, ha, this is news indeed.

RAGH. Yes, you shall be King.

NAKS. I cannot believe it.

RAGH. You doubt my words?

NAKS. I do not want to doubt them. But suppose, by chance, it never comes to pass.

RAGH. No, it shall be true.

NAK. Master, keep your word to the last. As soon as I am King, I will drive away that old Minister who always bothers me with his counsels. I am afraid of him. You shall be my minister.

RAGH. Me? No, thanks.

NAKS. Well, then Jaising shall be my minister. But tell me, how can it ever become true? That I shall be King?

- RAGH. The Goddess thirsts for King's blood.
- NAKS. King's blood?
- RAGH. You must offer it to her before you can be King.
- NAKS. I know not where to get it.
- RAGH. There is King Govinda, - Jaising, keep still, - do you understand? Kill him in secret. Bring his blood, while warm, to the altar, - Jaising, leave this place if you cannot remain still, -
- NAKS. But he is my brother, and I love him.
- RAGH. Your sacrifice will be all the more precious.
- NAKS. But, father, I am content to remain as I am. I do not want the kingdom.
- RAGH. There is no escape for you, because the Goddess commands it. She is thirsting for blood from the King's house. If your brother is to live, then you must die.
- NAKS. Have pity on me, father.
- RAGH. You shall never be free in life, or in dearth, until her bidding is done.
- NAKS. Advise me, then, how to do it.
- RAGH. Wait in silence. I will tell you what to do when the time comes. And now, go.

(NAKSHATRA goes.)

- JAIS. What is it that I heard? Merciful Mother, is it your bidding? To ask brother to kill brother? Master, how could you say that it was Mother's own wish?
- RAGH. There was no other means but this, to serve my Goddess.
- JAIS. Means? Why means? Mother, have you not your own sword to wield with your own hand? Must your wish burrow underground, like a thief, to steal in secret? Oh, the sin!
- RAGH. What do you know about sin?
- JAIS. What I have learnt from you.

- RAGH.** Then come and learn your lesson once again from me. Sin has no meaning in reality. To kill is but to kill, - it is neither sin nor anything else. Do you not know that the dust of this earth is made of countless killings? Old Time is ever writing the chronicle of the transient life of creatures in letters of blood. Killing is in the wilderness, in the habitations of man, in birds' nests, in insects' holes, in the sea, in the sky; there is killing for life, for sport, for nothing whatever. The world is ceaselessly killing; and the great Goddess Kali, the spirit of ever-changing time, is standing with her thirsty tongue hanging down from her mouth, with her cup in hand, into which is running the red life-blood of the world, like juice from the crushed cluster of grapes.
- JAIS.** Stop, Master. Is, then, love a falsehood and mercy a mockery, and the one thing true, from beginning of time, the lust for destruction? Would it not have destroyed itself long ago? You are playing with my heart, my master. Look there, she is gazing at me with her sweet mocking smile. My bloodthirsty Mother, wilt thou accept my blood? Shall I plunge this knife into my breast and make an end to my life, as thy child, for evermore? The life-blood, flowing in these veins, is it so delicious to thee? O my Mother, my bloodthirsty Mother, - Master, did you call me? I know you wanted my heart to break its bounds in pain overflowing my Mother's feet. This is the true sacrifice. But King's blood! The Mother, who is thirsting for our love, you accuse of bloodthirstiness!
- RAGH.** Then let the sacrifice be stopped in the temple.
- JAIS.** Yes, let it be stopped, - No, no, Master, you know what is right and what is wrong. The heart's laws are not the laws of scripture. Eyes cannot see with their own light, the light must come from the outside. Pardon me, Master, pardon my ignorance. Tell me, father, is it true that the Goddess seeks King's blood?
- RAGH.** Alas, child, have you lost your faith in me?
- JAIS.** My world stands upon my faith in you. If the Goddess must have King's blood, let me bring it to her. I will never allow a brother to kill his brother.
- RAGH.** But there can be no evil in carrying out God's wishes.
- JAIS.** No, it must be good, and I will earn the merit of it.
- RAGH.** But, my boy, I have reared you from childhood, and you have grown close to my heart. I can never bear to lose you, by any chance.
- JAIS.** I will not let your love for me be soiled with sin. Release Prince Nakshatra from his promise.
- RAGH.** I shall think, and decide to-morrow. (He goes out.)

JAIS. Deeds are better, however cruel they may be, than the hell of thinking and doubting. You are right, my master; truth is in your words. To kill is no sin, to kill brother is no sin, to kill King is no sin. – Where do you go, my brothers? To the fair at Nishipur? There the women are to dance? Oh, this world is pleasant! And the dancing limbs of the girls are beautiful. In what careless merriment the crowds flew through the roads, making the sky ring with their laughter and song. I will follow them.

(Enter RAGHUPATI.)

RAGH. Jaising.

JAIS. I do not know you. I drift with the crowd. Why ask me to stop? Go your own way.

RAGH. Jaising.

JAIS. The road is straight before me. What an alms-bowl in hand and the beggar girl as my sweetheart I shall walk on. Who says that the world's ways are difficult? Anyhow we reach the end, - the end where all laws and rules are no more, where the errors and hurts of life are forgotten, where is rest, eternal rest. What is the use of scriptures, and the teacher and his instructions? – My Master, my father, what wild words are these of mine? I was living in a dream. There stands the temple, cruel and immovable as truth. What was your order, my teacher? I have not forgotten it. (Bringing out the knife.) I am sharpening your words in my mind, till they become one with this knife in keenness. Have you any other order to give me?

RAGH. My boy, my darling, how can I tell you how deep is my love for you?

JAIS. No, Master, do not tell me of love. Let me think only of duty. Love, like the green grass, and the trees, and life's music, is only for the surface of the world. It comes and vanishes like a dream. But underneath is duty, like the rude layers of stone, like a huge load that nothing can move. (They go out.)

(Enter GOVINDA and CHADPAL.)

CHAND. Sire, I warn you to be careful.

GOV. Why? What do you mean?

CHAND. I have overheard a conspiracy to take away your life.

GOV. Who wants my life?

CHAND. I am afraid to tell you, lest the news become to you more deadly than the knife itself. It was Prince Nakshatra, who, -

GOV. Nakshatra?

CHAND. He has promised to Raghupati to bring your blood to the Goddess.

GOV. To the Goddess? Then I cannot blame him. For a man loses his humanity when it concerns his gods. You go to your work and leave me alone.

(CHANDPAL goes out.)

(Addressing the image) Accept these flowers, Goddess, and let your creatures live in peace. Mother, those who are weak in this world are so helpless, and those who are strong are so cruel. Greed is pitiless, ignorance is blind, and pride takes no heed when it crushes the small under its foot. Mother, do not raise your sword and lick your lips for blood; do not set brother against brother, and woman against man. If it is your desire to strike me by the hand of one I love, then let it be fulfilled. For the sin has to ripen to its ugliest limits before it can burst and die a hideous death; and when King's blood is shed by a brother's hand, then lust for blood will disclose its demon face, leaving its disguise as a goddess. If such be your wish I bow my head to it.

(JAISING rushes in.)

JAIS. Tell me, Goddess, dost thou truly want King's blood? Ask it in thine own voice, and thou shalt have it.

A VOICE. I want King's blood.

JAIS. King, say your last prayer, for your time has come.

GOV. What makes you say it, Jaising?

JAIS. Did you not hear what the Goddess said?

GOV. It was not the Goddess. I heard the familiar voice of Raghupati.

JAIS. The voice of Raghupati? No, no! Drive me not from doubt to doubt. It is all the same, whether the voice comes from the Goddess, or from my master. (He unsheathes his knife, and then throws it away.) Listen to the cry of thy children, Mother. Let there be only flowers, the beautiful flowers for thy offerings. – no more blood, - these bunches of hibiscus. They have come out of the heartburst of the earth, pained at the slaughter of her children. Accept this, thou must accept this. I defy thy anger. Blood thou shalt never have. Redden thine eyes. Raise thy sword. Bring thy furies of destruction. I do not fear thee, - King, leave this temple to its Goddess, and go to your men. (GOVINDA goes.) Alas, alas, in a moment I gave up all that I had, my master, my Goddess.

(RAGHUPATI comes.)

RAGH. I have heard all. Traitor, you have betrayed your master.

JAIS. Punish me, father.

RAGH. What punishment will you have?

JAIS. Punish me with my life.

RAGH. No, that is nothing. Take your oath touching the feet of the Goddess.

JAIS. I touch her feet.

RAGH. Say, I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the goddess, before it is midnight.

JAIS. I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the goddess, before it is midnight. (They go out.)

(Enter GOVINDA and NAKSHATRA.)

NAK. Wherever I go all say, “You will be King! You will be King!” It is very strange. Even when I sit alone I hear the same voice, “You will be King! You will be King!” as if two parrots had settled in my ears and know no other phrase than “You will be King! You will be King!” Ah well, let that be so, but the King’s blood, will they get it for me?

GOV. Nakshatra, you intend to kill me? Tell me the truth! You have brooded on that night and day. With this poison rankling in your mind, you have smiled on me, saluted at my feet, taken my blessing and broken bread with me. You would plunge your dagger in this heart. Brother, when thy feet touched the hard ground of this earth, it was this heart that drew you to it. When our Mother put her hands on thy head and blessed thee for the last time leaving us alone in this world, it was this heart that gave thee shelter. And to-day you would put a dagger in this heart. The common blood flowing in our veins has come from our forefathers. You want to sever those veins and shed that blood. There is none to witness it. Take my sword and do it now.

NAK. (Falling at his feet.) Forgive, brother, forgive!

GOV. Come, come back to this bosom. You want my forgiveness? I cannot but forgive you!

NAK. Raghupati gives me evil counsel, save me from him!

GOV. Fear not, brother. (They go out.)

(Enters GUNAVATI.)

GUNA. I failed. I had hope that, if I remained hard and cold for some days, he would surrender. Such faith I had in my power, vain woman that I am. I showed my sullen anger, and remained away from him; but it was fruitless. Woman's anger is like a diamond glitter; it only shines, but cannot burn. I would it were like thunder, bursting upon the King's house, startling him up from his sleep, and dashing his pride to the ground.

(Enters the boy DRUVA.)

GUNA. Where are you going?

DRUVA. I am called by the King. (Goes out.)

GUNA. There goes the darling of the King's heart. He has robbed my unborn children of their father's love, usurped their right to the first place in the King's breast. O Mother Kali, your creation is infinite and full of wonders, only send a child to my arms in merest whim, a tiny little warm living flesh to fill my lap, and I shall offer you whatever you wish.

(Enters NAKSHATRA.)

Prince Nakshatra, why do you turn back? I am a mere woman, weak and without weapon, am I so fearful?

NAKS. No, do not call me.

GUNA. Why? What harm is in that?

NAKS. I do not want to be a king.

GUNA. But why are you so excited?

NAKS. May the King live long, and may I die as I am, - a prince.

GUNA. Die as quick as you can; have I ever said anything against it?

NAKS. Then tell me what you want of me.

GUNA. The thief that steals the crown is awaiting you, - remove him. Do you understand?

NAKS. Yes, except who the thief is.

GUNA. That boy, Druva. Do you not see how he is growing in the King's lap, till one day he reaches the crown?

NAKS. Yes, I have often thought of it. I have seen my brother putting his crown on the boy's head in play.

GUNA. Playing with the crown is a dangerous game. If you do not remove the player, he will make a game of you.

NAKS. Yes, I like it not.

GUNA. Offer him to Kali. Have you not heard that Mother is thirsting for blood?

NAKS. But sister, this is not my business.

GUNA. Fool, can you feel yourself safe, so long as Mother is not appeased? Blood she must have; save your own. If you can.

NAKS. But she wants King's blood.

GUNA. Who told you that?

NAKS. I know it from one, to whom the Goddess herself sends her dreams.

GUNA. Then, that boy must die for the King. His blood is more precious to your brother than his own, and the King can only be saved by paying the price, which is more than his life.

NAKS. I understand.

GUNA. Then lose no time. Run after him. He is not gone far. But remember. Offer him in my name.

NAKS. Yes, I will.

GUNA. The Queen's offerings have been turned back from Mother's gate. Pray to her that she may forgive me. (They go out.)

(Enters JAISING.)

JAIS. Goddess, is there any little thing, that yet remains, out of the wreck of thee? If there be but a faintest spark of thy light in the remotest of the stars of evening, answer my cry, though thy voice be the feeblest. Say to me, "Child, here I am", - No, she is nowhere. She is naught. But take pity on Jaising, O Illusion, and for him become true. Art Thou so irredeemably false, that not even my love can send the slightest tremor of life through thy nothingness? O fool, for whom have you upturned your cup of life, emptying it to the last drop? - For this unanswering void, - truthless, merciless, and motherless?

(Enters APARNA.)

Aparna, they drive you away from the temple; yet you come back over and over again. For you are true, and truth cannot be banished. We enshrine falsehood in our temple, with all devotion; yet she is never there. Leave me not, Aparna. Sit here by my side. Why are you so sad, my darling? Do you miss some god, who is god no longer? But is there any need of God in this little world of ours? Let us be fearlessly godless and come closer to each other. They want our blood. And for this they have come down to the dust of our earth, leaving their magnificence of heaven. For in their heaven there are no men, no creatures, who can suffer. No, my girl, there is no Goddess.

APARNA. Then leave this temple, and come away with me.

JAIS. Leave this temple? Yes, I will leave. Alas, Aparna, I must leave. Yet I cannot leave it, before I have paid my last dues to the – But let that be. Come closer to me, my love. Whisper something to my ears, my love. Whisper something to my ears, which will overflow this life with sweetness, flooding death itself.

APARNA. Words do not flow, when the heart is full.

JAIS. Then lean your head on my breast. Let the silence of two eternities, life and death, touch each other. But no more of this. I must go.

APARNA. Jaising, do not be cruel. Can you not feel what I have suffered?

JAIS. Am I cruel? Is this your last word to me? Cruel, as that block of stone, whom I called Goddess? Aparna, my beloved, if you were the Goddess, you would know what fire is this that burns my heart. But you are my Goddess. Do you know how I know it?

APARNA. Tell me.

JAIS. You bring to me your sacrifice every moment, as a mother does to her child. God must be all sacrifice, pouring out his life in all creation.

APARNA. Jaising, come, let us leave this temple and go away together.

JAIS. Save me, Aparna, have mercy upon me and leave me. I have only one object in my life. Do not usurp its place. *(Rushes out.)*

APARNA. Again and again I have suffered. But my strength is gone. My heart breaks. *(She goes out.)*

(Enter RAGHUPATI and PRINCE NAKSHATRA.)

RAGH. Prince, where have you kept the boy?

NAKS. He is in the room, where the vessels for worship are kept. He has cried himself to sleep. I think I shall never be able to bear it, when he wakes up again.

RAGH. Jaising was of the same age when he came to me. And I remember how he cried till he slept at the feet of the Goddess, - the temple lamp dimly shining on his tear-stained child-face. It was a stormy evening like this.

NAKS. Father, delay not. I wish to finish it all, while he is sleeping. His cry pierces my heart like a knife.

RAGH. I will drug him to sleep, if he wakes up.

NAKS. The King will soon find it out, if you are not quick. For, in the evening, he leaves the care of his kingdom to come to this boy.

RAGH. Have more faith in the Goddess. The victim is now in her own hands and it shall never escape.

NAKS. But Chandpal is so watchful.

RAGH. Not more so than our Mother.

NAKS. I thought I saw a shadow pass by.

RAGH. The shadow of your own fear.

NAKS. Do we not hear the sound of a cry?

RAGH. The sound of your own heart. Shake off your despondency, Prince. Let us drink this wine duly consecrated. So long as the purpose remains in the mind, it looms large and fearful. In action it becomes small. The vapour is dark and diffused. It dissolves into water drops, that are small and sparkling. Prince, it is nothing. It takes only a moment, - not more than it does to snuff a candle. That life's light will die in a flash, like lightning in the stormy night of July, leaving its thunderbolt for ever deep in the King's pride. But, Prince, why are you so silent?

NAKS. I think we should not be too rash. Leave this work till to-morrow night.

RAGH. To-night is as good as to-morrow night, perhaps better.

NAKS. Listen to the sound of footsteps.

RAGH. I do not hear it.

NAKS. See there, - the light.

RAGH. The King comes. I fear we have delayed too long.

(KING comes with attendants.)

GOVIN. Make them prisoners. (To RAGHUPATI) Have you anything to say?

RAGH. Nothing.

GOVIN. Do you admit your crime?

- RAGH.** Crime? Yes, my crime was that, in my weakness, I delayed in carrying out Mother's service. The punishment comes from the Goddess. You are merely her instrument.
- GOVIN.** According to my law, my soldiers shall escort you to exile, Raghupati, where you shall spend eight years of your life.
- RAGH.** King, I never bent my knees to any mortal in my life. I am a Brahmin. Your caste is lower than mine. Yet, in all humility, I pray to you, give me only one day's time.
- GOVIN.** I grant it.
- RAGH.** (Mockingly) you are the King of all kings. Your majesty and mercy are alike immeasurable. Whereas I am a mere worm, hiding in the dust. (He goes out.)
- GOVIN.** Nakshatra, admit your guilt.
- NAKS.** I am guilty, Sire, and I dare not ask for your pardon.
- GOVIN.** Prince, I know you are tender of heart. Tell me, who beguiled you with evil counsel?
- NAK.** I will not take other names, King. My guilt is my own. You have pardoned your foolish brother more than once, and once more he begs to be pardoned.
- GOVIN.** Nakshatra, leave my feet. The judge is still more bound by his laws than his prisoner.
- ATTEND.** Sire, remember that he is your brother, and pardon him.
- GOVIN.** Let me remember that I am a king. Nakshatra shall remain in exile for eight years, in the house we have built, by the sacred river, outside the limits of Tripura. (Taking NAKSHATRA's hands) The punishment is not yours only, brother, but also mine, - the more so because I cannot share it bodily. The vacancy that you leave in the palace will prick my heart, every day, with a thousand needles. May the gods be more friendly to you, while you are away from us.

(They all go out.)

(Enter RAGHUPATI and JAISING.)

- RAGH.** My pride wallows in the mire. I have shamed my Brahminhood. I am no longer your master, my child. Yesterday I had the authority to command you. To-day I can only beg your favour. That light is extinct in me, which gave me the right to defy King's power. The earthen lamp can be replenished and lighted again and again, but the

star once extinguished is lost forever. I am that lost star. Life's days are mere tinsel, most trifling of God's gifts, and I had to beg for one of those days from the King with bent knees. Let that one day be not in vain. Let its infamous black brows be red with King's blood before it dies. Why do you not speak, my boy? Though I forsake my place as your master, yet have I not the right to claim your obedience as your father, - I who am more than a father to you, because father to an orphan? But that man is the most miserable of all beggars, who has to beg for love. You are still silent, my child? Then let my knees bend to you, who were smaller than my knees when you first came to my arms.

JAIS. Father, do not torture the heart that is already broken. If the Goddess thirsts for kingly blood, I will bring it to her before to-night. I will pay all my debts, yes, every farthing. Keep ready for my return. I will delay not. *(Goes out.)*

(Storm outside.)

RAGH. She is awake at last, the Terrible. Her curses go shrieking through the town. The hungry furies are shaking the cracking branches of the world-tree with all their might, for the stars to break and drop. My Mother, why didst thou keep thine own people in doubt and dishonour so long? Lave it not for thy servant to raise thy sword. Let thy mighty arm do its own work! I hear steps.

(Enters APARNA.)

APARNA. Where is Jaising?

RAGH. Away, evil omen. *(APARNA goes out.)* But if Jaising never comes back? No, he will not break his promise. Victory to thee, great Kali, the giver of all success! But if he meet with obstruction? If he be caught and lose his life at the guards' hands? Victory to thee, watchful Goddess, Mother Invincible! Do not allow thy repute to be lost, and thine enemies to laugh at thee. If thy children must lose their pride and faith in their Mother, and bow down their heads in shame before the rebels, who then will remain in this orphaned world to carry thy banner? I hear his steps. But so soon? Is he coming back foiled in his purpose? No, that cannot be. Thy miracle needs not time, O Mistress of all time, terrible with thy necklace of human skulls.

(JAISING rushes in.)

Jaising, where is the blood?

JAIS. It is with me. Let go my hands. Let me offer it myself (entering the temple). Must thou have kingly blood, Great Mother, who nourishes the world at thy breast with life? I am of the royal caste, a Kshatriya. My ancestors have sat upon thrones, and there are rulers of men in my mother's line. I have kingly blood in my veins. Take it, and quench thy thirst for ever.

(Stabs himself, and falls.)

RAGH. Jaising! O cruel, ungrateful! You have done the blackest crime. You kill your father! Jaising, forgive me, my darling. Come back to my heart, my heart's one treasure! Let me die in your place.

(Enters APARNA.)

APARNA. It will madden me. Where is Jaising? Where is he?

RAGH. Come, Aparna, come, my child, call him with all your love. Call him back to life. Take him to you, away from me, only let him live.

(APARNA enters the temple and swoons.)

(Beating his forehead on the temple floor) Give him, give him, give him! Give him back to me. (Stands up addressing the image). Look how she stands there, the silly stone, deaf, dumb, blind – the whole sorrowing world weeping at her door, - the noblest hearts wrecking themselves at her stony feet. Give me back my Jaising. Oh, it is all in vain. Our bitterest cries wander in emptiness, - the emptiness that we vainly try to fill with these stony images of delusion. Away with them! Away with these our impotent dreams, that harden into stones, burdening our world!

(He throws away the image, and comes out into the courtyard.)

(Enters GUNAVATI.)

GUNA. Victory to thee, great Goddess! But where is the Goddess?

RAGH. Goddess there is none.

GUNA. Bring her back, father. I have brought her my offerings. I have come at last, to appease her anger with my own heart's blood. Let her know that the Queen is true to her promise. Have pity on me, and bring back the Goddess only for this night. Tell me, - where is she?

RAGH. She is nowhere, - neither above, nor below.

GUNA. Master, was not the Goddess here in the temple?

RAGH. Goddess? If there were any true Goddess anywhere in the world, could she bear this thing to usurp her name?

GUNA. Do not torture me. Tell me truly. Is there no Goddess?

RAGH. No, there is none.

GUNA. Then who was here?

RAGH. Nothing, nothing.

(APARNA comes out from the temple.)

APARNA. Father!

RAGH. My sweet child! "Father", - did you say? Do you rebuke me with that name? My son, whom I have killed, has left that one dear call behind him in your sweet voice.

APARNA. Father, leave this temple. Let us go away from here.

(Enters the KING.)

GOVIN. Where is the Goddess?

RAGH. The Goddess is nowhere.

GOVIN. But what blood-stream is this?

RAGH. King, Jaising, who loved you so dearly, has killed himself.

GOVIN. Killed himself? Why?

RAGH. To kill the falsehood, that sucks the life-blood of man.

GOVIND. Jaising is great. He has conquered death. My flowers are for him.

GUNA. My King.

GOVIN. Yes, my love.

GUNA. The Goddess is no more.

GOVIN. She has burst her cruel prison of stone, and come back to the woman's heart.

APARNA. Father, come away.

RAGH. Come, child. Come, Mother. I have found thee. Thou art the last gift of Jaising.