

PRINCESS KALYANI

A Play in Three Acts

SVARNAKUMARI DEVI

(Mrs. S. GHOSAL)



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From an old Portrait

PRINCESS KALYANI

(A PLAY IN THREE ACTS)

BY

MRS. GHOSAL

(SRIMATI SVARNAKUMARI DEVI)

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TO
HERR THEODOR RIEBELING
IN TOKEN OF
MY SINCERE FRIENDSHIP

SVARNAKUMARI DEVI GHOSAL

PREFACE

THE very kind reception which my former books have met with from the Press and public has emboldened me to launch forth into still another attempt, though in quite a different direction. I hope that this little Eastern drama will be accorded a welcome by the Western stage and help to portray the spiritualistic ideas of our country.

I offer my sincere thanks to my niece Mrs. P. Chaudhuri and my friend Mr. K. C. Sen, I.C.S., for the great help they have rendered me in this connection, and to Miss Agnes Platt for re-arranging some of the scenes. I am also indebted to my English friend "A Buddhist Bhikkhu" for his appreciative Introduction, and to Herr Theodor Riebeling for translating the play into German.

THE AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION

THIS delightful little drama from the pen of the gifted authoress of the *Unfinished Song* and the *Fatal Garland* should perhaps have appeared without any introduction, which is an attempt to provide some kind of bridge or approach between forms of art almost entirely alien to each other. This is unnecessary for a play so self-contained and complete in itself, with its strange and subtle atmosphere. The foreword-writer in such a case can but play the part of mediator or interpreter, and this has been done wonderfully well by the author herself in the prologue.

Man is undeveloped until he is thoroughly humane, and is in reality soulless till he can feel the Universal Soul throbbing in unison with his own. The self-centred man has lost his real self, and this is true not only for an individual, but also for a nation or kingdom. In an objective world, this seems to be a

paradox, but it is a fundamental truth. The great creed of love underlying every religion has been brought to perfection in Buddhism, and where bigotry has been followed by blood-shed in most other religions, Buddhism is perhaps the only religion which draws into its fold by the magnetic-force of Love alone.

As in the physical evolution of the animal world man is the outcome of perfection, so in the evolution of the soul it may not be futile to hope that man will in course of time become god-like in nature. This the author has portrayed most convincingly and realistically.

This play is an illustration of the eternal truths in the guise of a story of the demoralised ancient India. With all its Mid-summer Night's dream-like allegory the play in no wise lacks a human interest, with which the author's consummate skill has succeeded in investing it. Whether taken as an allegory or as plain drama, it will yield the reader equal pleasure and profit.

A BUDDHIST BHIKKHU (AN ENGLISHMAN)

CHARACTERS

The King of Devagiri.

The Queen.

The General (her brother).

The Princess Kalyani.

The Jester.

Matangini (the Queen's favourite lady-in-waiting).

Hashi (the Princess's maid-of-honour).

Lata	}	Queen's maids.
Pata		
Phul		
Renu		
Alo		
Chhaya		
Nila		
Anila		

Sugandha	}	Flower-girls.
Madhugandha		

Dhruvakumar a soldier.

Taru	a poor girl	}	(Afterwards maids of the Princess.)
Tara	a gentle woman		



GLOSSARY

MEANING OF PROPER NAMES

Kalyani	...	The embodiment of goodness and beneficence.
Matangini	...	She-elephant.
Hashi	...	Smile.
Sugandha	...	Sweet-scented.
Madhugandha.		Honey-scented.
Taru	...	Tree.
Tara	...	Star.
Lata	...	Creeper.
Pata	...	Leaf.
Phul	...	Flower.
Renu	...	Pollen.
Alo	...	Light.
Chhaya	...	Shadow.
Nila	...	Sky.
Anila	...	Breeze.
Dhruva Kumar.		The Embodiment of Truth.
Hari	...	Name of the God of Preservation.
Shiva	...	The God of Destruction.
Chamunda and Bhabani	} ...	The different names and forms of the Goddess Kali, the goddess of Might.

- Bharati ... The Goddess of Poetry, Art and Learning. She is worshipped under several names, such as Saraswati, which literally means "from out of the water".
- Parvati ... Consort of the great God Shiva, the deity of Destruction in the Hindu Trinity, and herself the Goddess of cosmic energy, or Shakti.
- Savitri ... A mythological character impersonating chastity, who brought back her dead husband from the clutches of the King of Death.
- Pradakshin ... Moving round in a circle. During worship, it is customary at times to go round the image of the Goddess singing hymns and carrying offerings.
- Sari ... The outer garment of Indian women, consisting of a long piece of cloth trimmed with a border which is draped on the body and brought over the head on occasions.
- Rahu and Ketu. Two astronomical signs in Hindu Astrology. In the Hindu Calendar, every year has its King and Minister. When Rahu and Ketu rule the year, a twelve-month of unmitigated calamity and distress is to be expected.
- Gandharva ... In Hindu Mythology, Gandharvas were renowned for the Fine Arts, and especially Music. Hence it was synonymised Gandharva-cult.

- Bael ... A fruit-tree with medicinal virtues beloved of the God Shiva, to whom an offering of its leaves is believed to be especially acceptable.
- Greek ... In ancient India, the Greeks became naturalised subjects of the country, men and women both serving in various capacities, as soldiers, king's attendants, maids of honour, portresses, etc. When the Greek King, Seleucus attacked the kingdom of King Chandragupta, he was defeated and gave his daughter, Helen, in marriage to Chandragupta as a peace-offering.
- Megasthenes, "who was the Greek ambassador at Chandragupta's court, has left an account of India of his time. He was struck with the absence of slavery in India, with the courage, honesty and simplicity of its men and the purity of its women. No Indian was known to tell lies, and serious crimes, such as murder and robbery, were almost unknown. The whole nation was sober, industrious, contented and averse to litigation."
- Father, Mother. In India, the terms Father and Mother is a reverential form of address applied to every male and female, just as Roman Catholic Priests and Nuns are respectfully styled.
- Sadhu ... A holy man, above all prejudices.

- Pundit ... A Scholar and Teacher.
- Guru ... One who imparts knowledge, especially a Moral Preceptor.
- Shastras ... Scriptures, including various philosophical and scientific works and compilations of social and moral laws and injunctions.
- Caste ... A hierarchical system based on the division of social man according to his tendencies and mental and physical capacities from which sprang the division of labour, which again in course of time crystallised into a hereditary system. Men were divided principally into four classes, *viz* :

(1) *Brahmin*—the highest class, who devoted themselves to the cultivation of high thinking, to the seeking after religious, scientific and philosophical truth and the imparting of knowledge to deserving disciples: the less intellectual and spiritual amongst them took to the vocation of priests, worshipping in the temples and conducting all ceremonials to them. To the Brahmins, all other castes—even royalty—bowed low in submission.

(2) *Kshatriyas* were the military class to which kings belonged. But strange to say, even in this line it was the Brahmins, who gave instructions in the handling of weapons.

(3) *Vaisya*—the trading class which subsequently lost its distinctions and was submerged in the Sudra caste of Banias, who are now hereditary traders.

(4) *Sudras* divided into many sub-castes, mostly occupied in manual labour, such as cultivation of the soil, carpentry, weaving, etc. They also acted as menials and personal attendants to rich high-caste people, which service the low-castes are debarred from; Sudras are not considered degraded or disrespectfully treated by the higher castes; they can even take up any other work, except the religious work done by Brahmins. Sudras were not forbidden to learn reading and writing, but they were obliged to confine themselves to mythological, religious, historical and legendary lore and such like literature. The sacred Vedas and rituals or knowledge peculiar to the Brahmins were sealed books to them.

Low-caste—the off-spring of mixed parentage of the different castes, as also of the Aryans and aborigines. They were supposed to have sprung mostly from criminals and out-castes, and having drifted down in life, had associated with the aborigines, and in

time had degenerated into hereditary untouchables. In ancient times, however, though low-castes as a rule were looked down upon, yet untouchability in its present form was not in vogue, and they were not debarred from entering the temples and shrines. This restriction began from the time of the Mahomedan period to protect the sacred places from the hands of the religious fanatics.

The scenes referring to untouchability have been prematurely introduced into the Drama to give a realistic effect to the present-day problem of India. Efforts are being made, however, to wipe away their stigma and reclaim them into Society by means of the Suddhi (cleansing) ceremony.

PRINCESS KALYANI

FIRST ACT

PROLOGUE

The curtain rises on a wood-land scene, on which a crescent moon shed its silvery light. In the back-ground is seen the motionless figure of a woman, with eyes gazing upwards and hands joined together in deep meditation, standing knee-deep flowering plants and dressed in the loose saffron-coloured robe of an Indian devotee. Her hair is gathered into a knot in which is stuck a feathery white quill.

Suddenly she sways slightly and gazing sadly at the audience speaks thus in resonant tones :

CLAIRVOYANTE

How pitiful ! I see before me the folly and misery of man-kind ! The light of truth shines overhead, but they see it not. They are

blinded by their own torch-light, considering that to be the highest! The way is dark and slippery and the mighty trample on the weak. See how they press forward, laughing like demons at the groans of the down-trodden! This is their courage! This their pleasure! They laugh, triumphant, but they march on to their doom! Behold yonder lies the vast rolling sea! One! Two! Three! and they will plunge headlong into the deep abyss! Alas, for ever! Oh Lord! Have mercy! Oh, that I had the power to open their eyes!

(She closes her eyes and bows her head as if in deep thought. Then with folded hands she again looks up and prays to Saraswati, Goddess of Poetry, Art and Learning.)

Oh Bharati! Deign to favor thy humble devotee, and grant her the Divine gift of expression! Oh, Vinapani, Goddess of Music, inspire me with the melodious strains of thy Vina, that I may reveal the wealth and color of light to all around, filling my song with the spirit of Universal Love, and awakening in the hearts of men the supreme sense of

Truth and Brotherhood. Oh, Presiding Deities of Heaven, Earth and Ocean, Join with me, you Trinity, in invoking Vani, the Goddess of Speech ! Pray that she may grant me power to illumine the world with the glory of Love and Unity ! Oh, come ! Let us join in singing her hymn.

(She sings)

*Hail to thee, Bharati, who dwell'st within
The lotus of my heart !*

*Hail to thee, Vani, who dost give to song
The varied forms of Art.*

Enter the presiding deities of Heaven, Earth and Ocean. Heaven is dressed in blue flowing robes, amply studded with glittering stars, her hair falling in cloudy waves ; the Sun and a crescent-moon adorned her brow. Earth wears pale yellow, representing the Indian spring, profusely decked with many coloured flowers. Her hair is loosely knotted on the crown of her head, and adorned with a single lotus-flower. Ocean is in dark blue, with foamy wavy effect decorated with tiny shells. A single conch-shell is worn prominently either at the waist or breast. A rope of pearls is entwined with coral

on her head, her hair flows down in ripples. All dresses to be graceful and flowing in the Oriental style.

*Earth has Heaven and Ocean on either side ;
they join hands and dance and sing.*

*Hail to thee, Bharati, who dwell'st within,
The lotus of my heart.*

Suddenly the music ceases and the stage is illuminated with a bright light from above. The Trinity, dazzled and thunder-struck, turn to look for the Clairvoyante, but to their amazement find her transformed into the Goddess Vinapani. She has a Vina in her left hand, while the other is extended in the act of blessing. The Goddess is dressed in silvery-white robes with her hair down in a halo round her head. The Trinity, recovering from their astonishment bow down to the Goddess in grateful homage and then with a graceful movement, expressive of the spirit of the song they sing.

*Hail to Thee, Bharati, who dwell'st within,
The lotus of my heart.*

*Hail to Thee, Vani, who dost give to song,
The varied forms of Art.*

*Hail, Vinapani, Paradise-delight !
Both gods and mortals in thy praise unite.
Thy loving tender touch the soul enthrals,
Response inspiring, when sweet music calls.
Hail, Saraswati, muse of speech divine,
Whose worship floods the heart with light
divine !*

*They go out dancing and the prologue ends,
the woodland scene lifting and showing the Hall of
the Palace which is ready set behind.*

FIRST ACT

FIRST SCENE

FIRST ACT

FIRST SCENE

Concert-Hall in the Palace. In the centre back stands a beautiful statue of Gandharva, closely resembling the Greek God Apollo.

The rehearsal for the evening's entertainment is in full swing—musicians dancers and conductor all being women. The conductor is Pata, wife of the Jester.

The musicians are seven in number, two of whom Nila and Anila sing and dance in front ; the other five, holding different instruments, such as the violine, guitar, mandoline, flute, tamburine, etc., are arranged in a picturesque group, some seated and some standing, accompanying the singers singly or jointly as occasion requires.

Being an Indian play, one would naturally expect to see Indian musical instruments, but as it is not practicable to handle them with any degree of skill on a foreign stage, it is recommended that at least some especially the Vina, Esraj and Sitar, which

are not difficult to procure should be placed in front of the musical group, in order to create an Oriental atmosphere.

The songs should be set to suitable music.

Pata, the conductor is watching the performance with critical eyes.

NILA and ANILA (sing and dance):

Oh, smiling moon and night so silver-sweet !

With music on the wing,

And song's harmonious ring,

The anklets tinkle on our dancing feet.

From Sitar, Vina and Sarangi's chords

Awaken Melodies

By swift and slow degrees

With which the Mandira's soft beat accords.

PATA

Well done, Nila ! Excellent Anila ! I am sure you will be encored many times and greeted with showers of bouquets.

NILA AND ANILA

Let us first shower our thanks on you, Madam.

They both do a few more turns joyfully. The other girls, forgetting their poses, stand up excitedly and applaud, marking time with their feet.

MUSICIANS

Bravo! Bravo! our feet are tingling to join in your dance.

PATA

(severely)

Silly girls! Now you have made a mess of the whole thing. Return to your poses again at once!

MUSICIANS

Beg pardon, Madam.

(They revert to their former poses with mock seriousness.)

PATA

Dear Nila and Anila, you have passed the nymph-dance test very well, but there is still

the skirt-dancing to go through. Go you both now to the green-room, and change for it. Be quick.

NILA AND ANILA

Very well, madam. We shall be ready directly. (*Exit in high spirits.*)

PATA

(*Scrutinising the musicians*)

You, Renu, must move away from the centre, and give your place to Chhaya.

(*They do so.*)

RENU

Like this, Madam Pata ?

PATA

Yes, that is better. But now Alo looks a little unsupported. You Phul, and you Chhaya, lean your heads a little more towards her . . . and you Lata, stand a little further off . . . just behind Phul and Chhaya.

(*The girls change position.*)

PHUL

(smiling)

Are you pleased now, Madam Pata ?

RENU

But where am I to go, now Alo has taken my place ?

PATA

Stand near the drum, Renu. You like a big noise, I know. No, no, not quite so close. Don't make a drum stick of yourself ! Ah, that is better. Yes, just below the palm . . . just so ! Ah, now you make a perfect picture. *(Moves further off to review the setting.)*

CHHAYA

(aside to Phul)

What a relief ! she's satisfied at last.

PHUL

What a time her husband, the poor Jester must have !

CHHAYA

He has . . . but not with her ! (*they giggle, Pata returns near, and they pull preternaturally solemn faces*).

PATA

What's that ?

CHHAYA

(*with an air of virtuous gravity*)

We were but moralising on the fate of man, Madam. . . .

PHUL

(*whispers*)

Married man, you mean !

(*Chhaya with suppressed giggle hushes her down*)

PATA

(*Looking sharply at them both, as they now gaze at her with wide-open innocent eyes*)

Leave moralising to our lady, the sweet Princess. You have enough to do to remember

your positions . . . Now do you think you can keep that pose?

ALL THE GIRLS

Yes Madam.

(Unconsciously they all fall out of position)

PATA

(stamping with impatience)

Just look at them! All out of position already! Oh, what am I to do with such a stupid lot of girls!

LATA

(who with Alo has been standing aside rather wearily R)

What are we to do, Madame Pata? We really can't waste the whole day hearing you scold the others!

PATA

(Tartly)

And why are you in such a hurry, pray?

LATA

(she always speaks with a slight drawl)

Oh, I don't mind in the least! 'Tis on your head the scourge of Matangini will fall if she comes by with her horrid page and the rehearsal is not yet over . . .

ALO

What an ugly creature he is! It makes one shudder to look at him.

RENU

Just the outer expression of Matangini's ugly mind.

LATA

That is why she loves and adores him so.

PHUL

Suppose she suddenly turns up and hears us. When then?

PATA

(almost as if frightened)

I hope she will not be passing by yet. 'Tis not time for the Queen's toilet.

LATA

The Queen's favorite does not wait for set hours to pour malicious tales about others into our royal mistress' ears !

PATA

(alarmed)

Oh, girl ! The palace-walls have ears.

LATA

I care not who hears me. I am for the Princess !

RENU

And I !

ALO

And I !

PHUL

And I !

PATA

(horrified tries to stop them)

Hsh ! Hsh ! It is indeed time to finish our rehearsal. I wonder why the girls are delaying. Ah ! here they come.

(Enter NILA and ANILA)

LATA

Lo ! Speak of the fairies and they appear !
You will live long, dearies.

PATA

Will you please hold your chattering tongues
for a little while, girls, and mind your own
business. Now be quick. Sing the final stanza
with a skirt-dancing.

(NILA and ANILA sing and dance)

*The coral music and the song's sweet glow
Enthral us with their charms,
Inspire our feet and arms,
Our anklets and our bracelets whisper low.*

*As they are all intent to their own business,
Matangini the Queen's favorite, with her dwarf-
page approaches unseen from up R. C. and stands
behind them with a contemptuous smile on her face.
The dwarf peeps at the audience and makes faces.
He is an awful stammerer, and those unaccustomed
to hear him can only follow him with great difficulty.
This defect has made him shy of his speech and
unless absolutely obliged to speak, he makes signs
like a mute to convey his meaning. Matangini*

suddenly interrupts, just as the girls are doing their best. The page follows her and stands near the statue.

MATANGINI

A little flat, Anila. I wonder Pata, you cannot keep them to better time and tune! You have had years and years of experience.

(All the girls stop and start, and whispers go round)

PATA

(with a reverence)

Most noble Lady, Matangini, we did not hear you come.

MATANGINI

That is obvious. Your lack of respect proclaims the fact!

PATA

(as if reminded)

Girls, girls! Salute the Lady Matangini!

(All drop their instruments and hurriedly line up in two rows, with respectfully-folded hands, almost like sentries)

PATA

Long live her exalted ladyship, Matangini !

ALO AND CHHAYA

Long live her bounteous presence !

RENU AND PHUL

Long live her gracious highness !

NILA AND ANILA

Long live her personified goodness and her most cherished patron page.

(The page laughs with ludicrous frowns)

MATANGINI

(looking them all over contemptuously)

One must needs live long if every one took their time as you do, Pata ! How many hours have you been rehearsing ? Let us hope Her gracious majesty the Queen will think the result worth those wasted hours, when she hears you to-night.

PATA

(humbly)

Time has flown for us on wings of zeal.

RENU

We did not realise the hours were long till
(*with point*) your ladyship came along.

PHUL

(*with honey-sweet satire*)

One word from you, Oh most high
Matangini, is enough to bring on darkness!

(*All girls make a reverential gesture with a touch of irony. Matangini looks at them sharply, but cannot seize on anything to complain of.*)

MATANGINI

Really! I am greatly indebted to you Phul
for such a pretty compliment.

PHUL

(*Trying to correct the slip*)

O my lady, what I meant was that you shine
forth as a moon in the midst of darkness.

ALO AND CHHAYA

And our hearts O lady, gladden and swell
like the misty vapour when you appear.

NILA AND ANILA

We look upon you as our patron saint. All our hopes are centred in you only, your ladyship.

MATANGINI

Honeyed words, girls ! Sticky no doubt, but empty as the deserted honey-comb.

RENU

Empty you say, Madam ! They are fuller even than the full moon.

PATA AND LATA

Our hearts overflow with admiration towards you as the rivers to the ocean.

MATANGINI

(Pleased in spite of herself)

Indeed ! I fathom your meaning.

(The girls look at one another undecided what to say or do next. Nila and Anila dart towards the dwarf, and bowing low, talk to him mostly in whispers, but at times aloud so that the words may reach the ears of Matangini.)

NILA

O Mighty Dwarf, we adore and worship you above everybody and everything except your supreme sovereign mistress.

ANILA

O you great one in disguise, do you understand us? We want to gain favour of your all-powerful mistress through you and we promise you plenty of sweets if you deign to grant our prayer.

THE PAGE

(excitedly makes ludicrous signs, and forgetting himself, stammers unintelligibly)

I love you Oh! How I love you!

MATANGINI

(laughing aloud)

Bravo, my boy, bravo.

(The dwarf, suddenly remembering himself checks his buoyancy and stands mute.)

Leaving the page alone, NILA and ANILA join the other girls who, seeing MATANGINI in good spirits, feel relieved and join good-humouredly

in the laugh, when RENU plucks up courage and comes forward.)

RENU

Your kind encouragement makes us overbold, gracious lady. May I beg your Highness to remember my little petition about. . . .

PHUL

(coming down and speaking quickly)

Lady Matangini, that little prayer of mine . . .

CHHAYA

(hastening forward and talking down both the others)

May it please your bounteous presence

MATANGINI

(crossly)

Stop! Stop! You have delayed me enough with your silly compliments. I can hear no petition! None at all!

(Makes as if to move on slowly crossing the stage)

PHUL

(whispers to RENU and CHHAYA)

Begin with the present girls. Soft words
butter no persnips!

PATA

(getting in front of the others)

Your Highness! I have brought this necklace as an humble offering. My husband the king's Jester is dreaming day and night, sweet lady, of your bounteous kindness, on which alone depend his life-long hope and ambition. Oh! most kind lady, have mercy on him! He has spent hours composing a jest on your ladyship.

MATANGINI

(sharply)

A jest on me?

PATA

(whom all the girls nudge to show that she has made a slip)

A jest for you on your ladyship's enemies, on all who would not appreciate the wonderous

graces of your ladyship as my man, the poor Jester and I do !

(PATA with comic servility holds out the necklace, Bus for MATANGINI, pretending scorn, yet really attracted. The other girls play up, Bus for them all, when MATANGINI is not looking)

RENU

(who has been making faces, is almost caught as MATANGINI turns suddenly, and instantly turns it off by saying with exaggerated respect and admiration)

Lo, the pearls which were so long moping on an ape, *(nudges PATA who looks indignant but daren't say anything)* now come out in their true splendour and beautify the beautiful !

MATANGINI

(smiling sourly takes the necklace)

I commit myself to nothing, Pata, but . . . it would be a shame for these poor pearls to go back to the APE ! THEY are not to blame !

(PATA is annoyed and the girls make faces, when PHUL pushes RENU forward with her gift.)

RENU

My brother longs for the post of Aide-de-camp to the King. I can but offer this unworthy gift.

(Offers a hair ornament)

PATA

(grasping the opportunity to retaliate)

But your head-ornament, my dear friend, is not even good enough to adorn her feet.

MATANGINI

(taking the present disparagingly)

It is not, indeed! But I will take it, to keep you from the snare of such frivolities. (*RENU makes faces and CHHAYA comes forward.*)

CHHAYA

I beg to offer these wristlets for your kind acceptance. My uncle the Court-jeweller depends upon your favor and . . .

MATANGINI

(interrupting and taking wristlets)

Ah! he shall have it! Your prayers are worthy to be granted!

NILA AND ANILA

(with ironical exaggeration)

You hear that girls ! Is not our lady MATANGINI a personified she-ocean of kindness !

ALL

(Mimicking them)

She is, indeed !

(A slight sound of voices heard off R. TARU a poor girl enters hurriedly, as if rather forcing her way in.)

TARU

No, no ! I must see her ! I must—*(seeing MATANGINI, she runs to her and prostrates herself)* Oh, gracious lady ! Wondrous MATANGINI !

MATANGINI

(wonderingly)

Who is this ?

TARU

I have come to you with high hopes, O Madam ! To you I look for the release of my

father! He is in prison, where he will die of his wounds. Oh, tell the Queen that he is in no way guilty.

(Stops, for she sees Matangini isn't pretending to listen but she is admiring her new jewels and spreading out her dress, etc. In a tone of despair the poor girl says.)

She does not hear me! And my father will die!

PHUL

(bending over her whispers)

Have you brought no presents, girls? Without them your prayers are in vain!

TARU

Alas, what presents can I bring? We have lost our all *(sobs)*. These two poor bangles *(showing them on her wrists)* are all I have.

PHUL

Little enough, but better than nothing, try!

(RENU and CHHAYA encourage the poor girl, who takes the bangles from her wrists and, as Matangini turns her way again offers them kneeling.)

TARU

Oh reverend madam, I lay these two poor bangles at your feet, and vow sincere and heart-felt gratitude. . . .

MATANGINI

*(glancing down at the bangles contemptuously
and interrupting sharply feeling the
bangles with her toes)*

Worthless stuff ! No lustre ! They look to me like brass. And so Light too ; hollow !

PHUL

(pleadingly)

Madam, she offers you her all !

MATANGINI

Insufferable impudence to offer such a present !

(Turns away, but the poor girl clings to her skirts)

TARU

Oh, madam ! hear me. My father will die. . . . he will die. . . .

MATANGINI

(cutting her short)

Such beggars are better dead !

(Turns away, and as the poor girl still clings, shakes her off angrily.)

Hands off ! I am not the princess Kalyani !
The refuse of all the tag rag and bobtail of the
kingdom !

(As the woman still clings to her feet, lying prostrate on the ground.)

Let go my feet ! Go to the princess, woman.
She likes to have her heart melted with tears
and moan and the contagious touch of unclean
hands. Faugh ! Let me go !

(Tears her drapery from the woman's grasp, and sweeps out angrily. L. The mute page follows behind making faces to all in turn. The girl lies on the floor sobbing, then slowly rises.)

PHUL

(watching her compassionately)

Poor girl, what a shame !

CHHAYA

The princess would never do so!

TARU

(catching these words as she rises)

The princess! Princess Kalyani! Go to her she said. And so I will. SHE will not turn from me, poor though I be . . . *(sobs)* I'll go to the Princess Kalyani. *(Goes out sobbing.)*

PATA

(not unkindly)

Yet another begger foisting herself on the king's daughter!

RENU

Shut out from the light of her father's countenance by this present queen, who hates her, our gentle princess feeds her longing heart on the grateful love of those she succours.

CHHAYA

Would that her brother had lived to keep her company!

PATA

Poor, poor young prince! to die so young . . . a tender babe. . . .

PHUL

(significantly)

Given over at his mother's death to the care of Matangini.

PATA

(quickly and nervously)

Don't rake up old tales, girl! Our young prince has been dead some seventeen years.

NILA

And now our sweet princess is old enough to have babes of her own, . . .

RENU

Will she marry the prince of ARUNGIRI, think you?

ANILA

There are rumours of the match. . . .

PATA

(excited at the prospect of a wedding)

My husband the Jester, is preparing merry jests for the wedding. . . . New ones! Brand new! They have not been used since

our king's wedding to his present queen, our Kalyani's step-mother.

PHUL

(laughing)

Jests, say you? The best jest to my thinking is how you can believe the Queen would ever permit such a wedding!

RENU

(surprised)

But PHUL, if the king arranges.

PHUL

The Queen . . . and MATANGINI, will disarrange. Know you not that?

CHHAYA

There will be no peace for this kingdom till that witch, MATANGINI, leaves it for ever.

PATA

(highly amused)

I heartily echo your pious wish.

All *(excited and laughing)*.

Amen! Amen!

RENU

(quickly)

I vow I shall shower sweets on children in the name of the God Hari.

LATA

I vow the family gods a feast of fruit.

ALO

The goddess Kali shall have a goat.

CHHAYA

And I will gratify the God Shiva with an offering of Bel-leaves.

PATA

I will shower rose petals on you all, dears, when Sugandha comes.

PHUL

(laughing)

Strike up the funeral march! *They dance with delight, but in a sudden pause a sweet voice is heard singing off, they turn and look off up R. C.)*

SUGANDHA

(heard singing off)

*Thou bride O ! the sun, oh stately flower,
Thou lovely queen of noon-day hour,
An idle lisper
In thine ears I'll whisper. . .*

ALO

(softly)

'Tis SUGANDHA singing. She comes with flowers for the queen's toilet.

SUGANDHA

(a charming girl carrying two baskets a big one filled with fresh flowers, and a small one with leaves and ferns hiding choice blossoms underneath, appears up at back, singing):

*Oh, sunflower, say, what wounded pride
Or causeless coyness makes thee hide
In goldhued raiment's art
The perfume of thy heart ?*

GIRLS

(go up surrounding her)

SUGANDHA ! SUGANDHA ! SUGANDHA

(singing) :

The flaunting lotus floats and swings ;

The laughing rose her perfume flings ;

Lover-wise, the bee doth come

In their ears soft lays to hum ;

For whom all day dost wistful sigh

So sad and pensive gazing high,

Before the day is done ?

Why dost thou droop thy face

Oh, slighted, loveless one,

Oh flower of queenly grace ?

PHUL

Slighted and loveless ? Girls, SUGANDHA
sings of our Princess.

SUGANDHA

*(places the big basket on the ground and takes
out a garland from underneath the leaves of the
smaller one)*

This garland is for our Princess. See, I have made it of all the most beautiful flowers in the garden.

PATA

(as all the girls admire the garland) :

But what will the Queen say, SUGANDHA ?
If MATANGINI sees that garland . . .

SUGANDHA

She shall not, I will keep it again in its hiding place before she comes.

RENU

Why is not MADHUGANDHA with you,
SUGANDHA ?

SUGANDHA

She went out to find a lotus ages ago . . .

ALO AND LATA

(who were strolling up C)

Here she comes. Here is MADHUGANDHA !

PHUL

She has found her lotus !

MADHUGANDHA

(rather breathless, enters R. C. with lotus)

What a hunt I had to find a lotus, and see what I've got! A rare Gloria lotus. One flower blooms only once in many a year. Only one!

PATA

O, a Gloria Lotus! How exquisite! I heard that one bloomed on the day the Princess was born and the High Priest blest the royal child with it.

RENU

But this is not the time when it flowers.

MADHUGANDHA

I think it bloomed out of season on purpose, eager to be sacrificed for our Princess's pleasure! And who knows but it may have flowered for her wedding this time.

PHUL

And you, my dear, seem to be blossoming into a poet! But I would hide that lotus in SUGANDHA'S basket.

SUGANDHA

(hides it in the basket)

Yes, if that poisonous parasite once catches sight of it, goodbye to all chance of the Princess's getting it!

CHHAYA

(running C from down L)

Quick, quick . . . there's a tinkling of anklets. Matangini is coming! Stand to attention!

(All girls stand to attention waiting for MATANGINI to appear, when HASHI, the Princess's pretty maid comes in down L. instead.)

GIRLS

(bowing so that they don't see who it is)

Long live your ladyship. A thousand blessings on your ladyship!

HASHI

(standing and laughing at them)

Well, you do know how to receive people, I must say!

PHUL

(recovering her upright position)

Good Heaven ! It is only Hashi !

MADHUGANDHA

Thank goodness ! We were half-dead with fright.

RENU

We thought it was that odious scarecrow coming !

SUGANDHA

(takes out the garland again)

This garland, Hashi is for the Princess.

HASHI

(admiringly taking the garland)

How grand ! Beautifully done.

MADHUGANDHA

(taking out the lotus)

And this lotus too. Give it to our princess with our love and salutations. If the stem is steeped in water at nights the bloom will keep its freshness a long time.

PHUL

Better be quick, Hashi. Matangini may be here at any moment.

PATA

It will be a serious matter if she sees you with these flowers!

HASHI

She wont scare me out of my life.

SUGANDHA

(seriously)

It might mean death to us if not to you.

HASHI

Yet the ungrateful wretch was brought up by our princess's mother, our own dear queen, but no sooner was her benefactress dead, than she was professing undying devotion to the new queen!

MADHUGANDHA

When Rahu is king, Ketu must be his minister.

HASHI

But she need not back the queen in her hatred of our princess !

PHUL

How green you are, Hashi ! Don't you know that her interests lie in echoing the queen in all her whims ? Else where would she be !

MADHUGANDHA

Has she no gratitude for the late queen, who did so much for her ?

HASHI

There are two recognised ways of repaying kindness as the saying is. One is gratitude, the other enmity ; and she has chosen the way of enmity towards her daughter.

SUGANDHA

Oh ! Don't stop to talk, Hashi, but go at once.

RENU

Yes, yes, be quick.

PHUL

(who is watching off down L.)

She is coming Hashi ! Hide the flowers inside the basket.

SUGANDHA

Hurry up, Hashi, here's the basket.

HASHI

(losing her head, instead of hiding them places them on the top and runs to each exit and turns back)

Which way shall I go ? This way ? No,—
this,—Oh ———

PHUL

(quickly and warningly)

Too late.

(PHUL slips back to a place behind PATA as MATANGINI enters from down L, this time without her page. Hashi, trying to get away from her turns her back, but MATANGINI, advancing on the girl pushes her round by the shoulder and cruelly enjoys her confusion.)

MATANGINI

Why it's Hashi, the smiling beauty ! Such is the meaning of her name, but I wonder if anyone has ever seen her smile ?

HASHI

Let me go, please, I must go at once.

MATANGINI

(same bus, of turning her round to make the girl face her)

What a basketful of flowers ! And a garland, too ! Taking them to the princess, I suppose ? Now I see why our Queen never gets a decent bloom.

SUGANDHA

(frightened, places the big basket before

MATANGINI)

Here is the basket for the Queen, Madam, filled with garlands and ornaments woven with the best flowers, and the other one was meant for PATA, but HASHI took it from me.

MATANGINI

(sneeringly)

Best flowers, indeed ! and does that garland in HASHI'S basket happen to be made with the worst flowers ? *(kicks the big basket away from her.)*

SUGANDHA

We did not make that garland. She, she brought it to show us.

MATANGINI

And you didn't find that lotus either, I suppose ?

SUGANDHA

Oh, no, your ladyship !

MADHUGANDHA

On the contrary, we have been telling her to give it to us for the queen. A lotus out of season, who but our queen is worthy to wear it ?

SUGANDHA

(playing up)

Do give us the lotus, Hashi, there's a good girl——

HASHI

Good girl? I wish I were! But my inborn deceitful nature will not let me. I but emulate the example of my so-called betters.

MATANGINI

(furious)

You insolent!—

HASHI

(opening wide eyes)

Insolent, your ladyship? I only meant to quote the well-known saying 'To follow in the steps of the high.'

MATANGINI

(furious)

Impudent hussy! Be off, I say!

HASHI

Why? Is this hall yours, or perchance your father's?

MATANGINI

You owl-eyed minx, you dare not assert that it belongs to your father!

HASHI

To my Princess's father !

MATANGINI

Flea-faced fool, I tell you it belongs to my queen, my Queen, I say. . .

HASHI

(about to retreat, over her shoulder)

I am not claiming her !

MATANGINI

(frenzied, rushes after her)

You shall not take those flowers away, just let me see you try it !

(But HASHI moves quickly aside just as she is about to snatch the basket. It ends in a struggle.)

HASHI

(as she manoeuvres to keep the basket just out of reach)

Take care, don't touch those flowers.

MATANGINI

(breathless with the struggle)

Girls, SUGANDHA, take that basket from her this very minute.

HASHI

I should like to see them try !

SUGANDHA

HASHI, why make all this fuss? Give up the flowers.

HASHI

Never ! even if she hangs me.

(Slips further away up stage.)

MATANGINI

(too breathless to follow, shakes her fist at her menacingly)

Hang you? I'll have you stuck on a spike !

HASHI

You shan't have these flowers ! *(waves basket triumphantly)*.

MATANGINI

(with fierce malignity)

I must get them, and your mother and little sister shall pay for this impertinence. I, MATANGINI, will see to it. Doves shall roost on the ruins of your house and desolation walk in your path.

(Exit MATANGINI. HASHI stands a moment, white and frightened, then lifts basket and pretends indifference.)

HASHI

I don't care! She didn't get the flowers!

(About to go off, but though she keeps a brave face her steps falter a little, when the PAGE enters stridently, and walking up to HASHI, makes as if to snatch away the flowers. HASHI suspicious of his movements is on her guard, and holds them out of his reach.)

O you beauty of a monkey, these flowers are quite unfit to adorn your handsome person, so I

shall present you with a choice thing which will make you look princely. SUGANDHA do fetch him a plantain, we shall enjoy seeing his pleasure in eating it !

(HASHI, mockingly imitating the sound of a monkey runs off. The dwarf, feeling insulted, makes ludicrous frowns and rushes off furious.)

SUGANDHA

(picks up the scattered flowers, and places them in the basket, and realising the situation is looking very serious)

Oh, perdition ! Now HASHI is in for it. Nothing is impossible to that monster !

MADHUGANDHA

When kings fight, poor men pay with their blood !

PHUL

(recovering herself)

Never mind sister, let us laugh away all sorrow.

RENU

(shaking her head sadly)

As the copy books tell us PHUL, laughter is followed by tears.

CHHAYA

Or as the preachers preach, the child of to-day is the old man of to-morrow.

PATA

(with some dignity, befitting her greater age)

It is no quarrel of ours, girls. Stop this nonsense. Sweets should be served at the end, so let us finish up with singing.

MADHUGANDHA

Adorning ourselves with these garlands, let us have a fairy dance.

SUGANDHA

*(sings)**I am but a tiny flower,**O ye winds of Heaven that blow,**Blow ye high or blow ye low,**O ye mist and cloud and rain,**Let my prayer be not in vain.*

*Sprinkle me with many a shower,
I am but a tiny flower.*

MADHUGANDHA

*Tinkle, tinkle, ting-a-ling,
I am but a tiny flower,
Life's a moment or an hour,
Let me draw delight with breath,
Let me die a happy death,
Let me laugh and let me sing.*

(All the girls sing while NILA and ANILA dance.)

*We are all but tiny flowers,
O ye sun and moon and star,
Gods that rule us from afar,
All our griefs and all our joys,
Are they nothing but your toys?
What a maze this world of ours!
We are all but tiny flowers.*

(All join in the dancing and singing.)

*Tinkle, tinkle, ting-a-ling,
Life is but a magic game,
Tragic, comic, all the same.*

*Life is but a game of chance,
Let us turn it to a dance.
Let us laugh and let us sing,
Tinkle, tinkle, ting-a-ling.*

*(Holding garlands and flowers, they dance out
as the scene grows dark.)*

END OF FIRST SCENE

SECOND SCENE

(The front scene that was used for the prologue can be used again for this, if the 'Props' are changed.)

The princess, all in white with a single diamond star in her hair emblematic of her royal birth, and veil with graceful folds and flowers in it, is seated on a low ornamental seat, under a Champaka Tree entwined by flowering creepers. She is singing and playing on a guitar. The ground at her feet is strewn with fallen flowers.

PRINCESS

(sings)

In the blue and radiant sky

Golden shines the day's bright eye.

Lovely Earth doth seem to sigh

In Love and beauty's ecstasy.

*All things that on her bosom lie
 Do glow and thrill with dawning love's
 delight.
 Wafted fragrance of the flower,
 Dew-washed freshness of the bower,
 Breezes from the southern tower,
 Ceaseless springs with songful dower,
 Streams that murmur hour to hour
 All sing the Lord's own gladness and
 His might !*

*(Enter HASHI running from R, carrying
 flower basket)*

HASHI

(taking out the lotus)

Princess, Madhugandha has found this rare lotus for you and her sister Sugandha offers this garland with their respects.

(Garlands the Princess and offers the lotus reverently.)

PRINCESS

(delighted)

What a sweet scent ! Would that the hearts of human beings were as fragrant !

HASHI

(putting the basket down)

Allow me Princess to fasten the lotus in your veil.

(Fastens the lotus and showing the basket.)

And the flowers for your divine worship are in this basket.

PRINCESS

Lovely flowers!

(Looks at HASHI and seeing that she looks sad.)

But why is your face not smiling like this lotus, Hashi? Has anything happened? Sit down and tell me, dear——

HASHI

(sitting near her feet)

It is that ogress, Madam! I met her and she,—Oh! But I gave it to her, hot!

PRINCESS

(shaking her head sadly)

That is not well, Hashi. You may have to suffer for it, little friend.

HASHI

But Madam, she wanted to take your flowers !

PRINCESS

What need is there to adorn myself with flowers, Hashi? Don't go to the Royal Gardens for flowers for me. I don't want to displease the Queen.

HASHI

(sorrowful)

But you will require flowers for your worship, Princess.

PRINCESS

Flowers are not essential to God's worship. Truth and Justice, those are the things really dear to Him. The offering of flowers is but the outward symbol. Allegiance from the small created soul to the great Universal Soul, is shown best in the performance of good deeds.

HASHI

Princess, I know neither Heaven nor Hell.
I know but you.

PRINCESS

And you will assist me in my work, dear
child?

HASHI

Whatever you do, that is my work, where
you go there lies my path also.

(Looking off L.)

A lady seeks audience of your highness,
madam, and is standing there.

PRINCESS

Bid her enter Hashi.

*(HASHI goes out and returns followed by a
woman becomingly dressed in a silk sari; saluting
the Princess, she stands before her)*

PRINCESS

(gently)

What would you, my sister? Who are you?

STRANGER

Revered Princess, my name is Tara, an ill-starred woman, I come to lay my sorrows at your feet.

PRINCESS

Speak, sister, and if it lies in my power to relieve your woes, I shall deem myself fortunate.

TARA

Princess, the General's cow came into our garden and was munching the vegetables, and our servant not knowing whose it was tied it up. My husband was in his shop and knew nothing of this, but they have put him in prison and confiscated all our belongings.

PRINCESS

Oh sister! Had I the power, I would release your husband at this moment!

TARA

If you do not take pity on us, Madam, to whom are we to turn?

PRINCESS

Alas, I am more helpless than you are.

TARA

One word to the king——

PRINCESS

(gently raising a hand to stop her)

Since the death of my mother, I have been exiled from my father's presence.

TARA

(passionately)

Our divine princess sacrificed to her step-mother's greed? What wonder that the kingdom is going to rack and ruin? But we of the people will not have it. We——

PRINCESS

(shocked at the woman's vehemence)

Hush my good woman, hush!

(A slight pause. The stranger bows her head as if ashamed of speaking so loud in that gentle presence.)

TARA

Where shall I go with my little ones? We have not a single morsel to eat nor a bit of ground to stand on.

PRINCESS

So long as I have a morsel to eat, you shall not starve. So long as these rooms are mine, you shall not be altogether homeless.

TARA

Oh, most noble princess, you are a haven of refuge in our troubles. May the Lord Krishna preserve you!

PRINCESS

Go friend, and fetch your children.

(With reverence the stranger-woman goes off down R.)

When I think of these high-handed acts of lawlessness, Hashi, my heart is filled with anguish beyond words.

HASHI

Gracious lady, your sweet sympathy does much to right the wrong.

PRINCESS

(shakes her head)

No, Hashi, I am helpless. Oh, that I could trample all this down like mighty Kali in her divine wrath! Oh God, is man mightier than Thou, Wrong greater than Right, and brutal cruelty more powerful than Thy Divine Mercy?

HASHI

(looking off L. where the poor woman of the first scene appears)

Madam, here is a poor girl who was seeking Matangini. I know her——her name is Taru and she begs audience of you.

PRINCESS

Bid her approach, friend.

HASHI

(goes to the poor girl who is standing timidly down stage)

Fear not girl, our noble princess bids you come near.

TARU

(kneeling to the princess)

Oh, Princess, mother !

PRINCESS

What is it, child ?

TARU

I have no more gifts to offer——

PRINCESS

(raising her gently)

Gifts ! There is no gift so precious in my eyes as the gift of your sorrowful story. Speak without fear.

TARU

The General's orderly was passing along the street, when my father was watering it. He did not see him and the water fell on the orderly's boot and, O, Mother !——

PRINCESS

(gently)

Tell me, my daughter.

TARU

(sobbing)

He kicked my poor father till the boot got torn and father was taken to the hospital.

PRINCESS

(with righteous indignation)

But surely he was punished !

TARU

Oh yes, my father was punished, of course.

PRINCESS

Your father ? And what for ?

TARU

The judge said father had no business to have such a weak constitution, that a few kicks should bring him to Death's door. So as a penalty we had to find the murderer a pair of new boots, which cost us every farthing we possessed.

HASHI

Veritable justice indeed ! a brand-new pair for an old worn-out one ?

PRINCESS

Murderer, did you say? Is your father then no more?

TARU

(sobbing)

Alas! Even as I sought your highness, my little sister brought word that he is dead.

PRINCESS

(putting her arm tenderly round the sobbing girl)

Dear, I will be your mother. Go with good Hashi here into my guest-rooms. There shall you and your little sister make your home.

HASHI

(raising the sobbing girl)

Come with me, dear, all will be well with you here, with our good princess. Come!

(HASHI takes her out.)

PRINCESS

*(taking her instrument again plays and sings)**Save us from this monstrous gloom,**Save us from our daily doom,**Raise us from our living tomb.*

*Call us to the joy and bloom
Of Thy World, and leave no room
For grief and suffering, sin, remorse and
pain.*

*Clay is e'er our spirit's mate,
Life is crossed and riven with hate.
Thou hast made our human state
A cup of joy and grievous Fate.
Why we ask Thee, Oh, Thou Great,
Oh God, on Thy creation, why this stain.*

(Enter HASHI quickly, looking a little scared).

HASHI

Madam—Madam.

PRINCESS

(looking up at her)

What now?

HASHI

'Tis the General, our queen's brother, Highness, who craves an audience.

PRINCESS

An audience with us? The General?

HASHI

Shall I show him in, Madam?

PRINCESS

You would not have me see him, Hashi? My ears have but just been wounded with tales of his cruelty and injustice!

HASHI

(timidly)

Yet perhaps for that very reason it would be as well not to make an enemy of him, Madam. Who knows? He might strike at your Highness next.

PRINCESS

Am I to cringe to a tyrant? Go, Hashi, tell him my doors are only open to the humble and the poor. The General can have no petition to make to me, that I could grant!

HASHI

(doubtfully and fearfully)

But Madam——

PRINCESS

You have my answer,

(Hashi, after making one mute gesture of entreaty turns to go. The Princess with closed eyes, prays.)

Oh, God!—Oh, Thou Lord of Earth and Heaven, hear Thou my prayer. Inspire me to the love of good work. Bless me and give me strength. Dwell for ever in my heart, and help me in my poor endeavours.

(She then chants the following hymns with closed eyes):

*Oh Thou, my Master, pour power into my
being,*

And grant me Thy boon of fulfilment.

Vouchsafe success into my striving hands.

Fill with resolve my trembling heart,

Bestow on me faith without limit,

An ever-increasing wisdom.

Oh Thou, My Master,

Grant me Thy boon of perfection.

Attune my feeble voice to the music of Thy lyre,

Revive my drooping spirits with fire immortal.

Cleanse my sight with Thy pure healing touch.

Kindle the light with Thy touch-stone ever bright.

Enrich my heart with Thy divine bliss.

Oh, Thou, my Master,

Grant me the gift of Thy undying.

Thy ever-living love !

(She sits with closed eyes yet a minute more, her lips moving in silent prayer before Hashi runs in again ; the girl stops reverently when she sees her mistress praying, but the Princess quickly opens her eyes and looks questioningly at her.)

HASHI

Madam, an old man craves your Highness's grace.

PRINCESS

Show him in.

(Hashi signs to him to enter, and stands back.)

(Enter an old peasant belonging, to the privileged Sudra caste.)

OLD MAN

O, kind princess ! have compassion on us.

PRINCESS

What has happened, my friend ?

OLD MAN

My son——my boy——(*weeps*).

PRINCESS

Do not weep, good man. Tell me what has happened !

OLD MAN

My son, my child has fallen into evil ways
Mother, or why should we come to this pass ?

PRINCESS

Evil ways ?

OLD MAN

Yes Madam. He was servant to a holy
man, who not only taught him to read and
write but made him a Pandit.

PRINCESS

A very good thing.

OLD MAN

Good, say you? And you so wise? While the Holy Man still lived it was good, but after his death my boy came home and all day long he pored over the Shastras.

PRINCESS

Your son is a good man.

OLD MAN

Madam, it is a sin for one not a Brahmin to read the sacred books!

PRINCESS

A sin? Who calls it sin?

OLD MAN

When the High Priest heard of it, he threatened to take away the privileges of our caste, and forbid us to enter the temple along with the high-caste aristocrats; and we are doomed.

PRINCESS

(aside)

How shall I control myself and keep my indignation within bounds? *(aloud)* Bring your

son here my friend. He will chant hymns in my temple.

OLD MAN

How can we dare be so arrogant! We servile people as they say, mother.

PRINCESS

Surely there is no one who does not serve his fellow beings in one way or another. He is the best king who serves his kingdom well, and we are all born to serve our country. If that be an offence, it applies to us all.

OLD MAN

Well, it is an offence, and a grievous one, for us to look up so high.

PRINCESS

Don't be afraid, my friend, your son is above caste rights and creeds. He is a Sadhu—above any uncultured Brahmin tainted by selfish thoughts; no one will molest him. He shall be a chanter in my temple, and you yourself shall serve as bell-ringer. Go and bring him here.

OLD MAN

You know best, Madam; you are our guardian angel.

(The old man salutes and goes out muttering prayers in deep gratitude.)

PRINCESS

O you grand Aryans! Knew you no other way of proving your superiority and preserving your greatness but by enslaving others? Alas! Even the abode of the gods is closed by you against these unfortunate creatures? What expiation will wash away this sin? Not on your own heads alone are you calling down destruction, but you are bringing shame and ruin upon the whole nation.

(Enter HASHI)

HASHI

Madam, Madam, two more suppliants for your grace.

PRINCESS

Bring them in, Hashi.

(HASHI bids them enter and stands aloof, watching. Two men enter. The first is a soldier belonging to the middle classes, and the second of the low Pariah caste)

THE SOLDIER

Your Highness, mother, listen to our pleading.

PRINCESS

I will listen to you both in turn. (*Turning towards the Pariah*) Will you please tell me your troubles first, my son?

PARIAH

(*coming forward*)

O Princess! I was chased by a soldier——

PRINCESS

Chased? And why?

PARIAH

A tiny bird of brilliant plumage was stuck in front of my turban.

PRINCESS

Yes, yes——You live by hunting.

PARIAH

He wanted to snatch away my precious jewel, and I struggled with him. In the effort to save my bird, I struck him.

PRINCESS

He deserved it.

PARIAH

He chased me——and I took refuge in the temple of Bhawani——Oh, I know that I did wrong!

PRINCESS

Wrong to seek refuge from tyranny in God's temple?

PARIAH

I am a Pariah. The caretaker beat me black and blue and threatened to make me a soulless demon.

PRINCESS

Be not afraid. I engage you as chief servant in my temple. You shall decorate the image of God and help me when I worship.

PARIAH

Oh Mother, it would be a sin ! If I did so, I should be born a dog in my next life, I who am born a Pariah in this !

PRINCESS

Those rules were made by man to further his selfish ends. You are not unclean. Cleanliness of mind is the only true cleanliness, and God accepts the worship of a pure heart. Ramachandra the Just, the renowned king of Oudh took food from the hands of a low Chandal, for it was offered with reverence and love. The Brahmins who act thus arrogantly are unworthy, but not you. Go and bring flowers for the temple with a clean and pure heart.

PARIAH

As you will, Mother. We are ignorant low people and know no better. I am but your servant.

(Bows low and goes out)

PRINCESS

(to the soldier)

And you, son, what is your wish ?

SOLDIER

I ask nothing for myself, Princess, but for my fellows. We are slighted and treated with scorn by our highcaste comrades in arms.

PRINCESS

High caste is not always high breeding, my son. It is for you to prove that truth to them by your courtesy.

SOLDIER

We are always ready to bow down to superior knowledge but why should we be denied the privileges granted to them?

PRINCESS

Do they deny that?

SOLDIER

We may not enter into open competition with them. We are debarred——

PRINCESS

I am glad your thoughts are working on this problem. It is one of moment to our race——

SOLDIER

A young Colonel of ours opened our eyes to the injustice of our position.

PRINCESS

His generous soul had risen above inborn prejudices? He is a great man, my son. Bring him here to me.

SOLDIER

Alas, Princess, as soon as his opinions became known, he was censured and degraded to the rank of a mere Captain. I beseech you to intervene and have him reinstated!

PRINCESS

My son, my word has little weight with the king, my father.

SOLDIER

The General, the queen's brother is the man who has power to right this wrong, Madam. Could you not intercede with him?

PRINCESS

(rising, constrained)

The General? But he is the source of much that I deplore, he is himself a tyrant——

SOLDIER

He is a man of power and ambition and at a word from your Highness——

PRINCESS

From me? What control have I over the General? The queen's brother?

(HASHI moves from her resting place and comes forward. She makes a sign to the soldier, which he doesn't see, as if she knew what he was about to say and wanted to stop it.)

SOLDIER

Why, Madam, they say *(sticks and sees HASHI making signs)*.

PRINCESS

What can they say of me and *(with great contempt)* the General?

SOLDIER

(embarrassed and therefore blurring it out)
They say, Madam, that—that he would ask your hand in marriage.

PRINCESS

(startled out of herself)

Marriage, with him !

SOLDIER

(finishing his sentence)

He is the queen's brother !

PRINCESS

(makes a movement of horror and HASHI comes hastily forward).

Oh !

HASHI

Madam, Madam ! *(to the Soldier)* Go !*(Soldier with an obeisance is about to go, when the Princess makes a gesture.)*

PRINCESS

*(faintly)*One moment *(Weakly and stammering as she struggles for control)* This generous Captain,—
His name ?

SOLDIER

His name is Dhruva Kumar—

PRINCESS

(faintly)

Dhruva Kumar, I shall remember that name.
Leave me, son.

(Soldier with a deeply reverential bow goes out)

HASHI

Madam——

PRINCESS

(lifting her head with renewed strength)

Hashi, I have dishonoured my innate power with fears and vain regrets. Only by using for good every power we possess, do we attain to the true realisation of life. Work alone is holy, and true worship consists in righteous deeds. *(Bell heard chiming.)* The bell is calling us to prayer. Come, Let us go to the temple to worship the God Krishna with the Five Lamps which we shall light at the fire burning within our hearts. Come, Hashi.

(Both go out hand in hand.)

END OF SECOND SCENE

THIRD SCENE

A SONG OF NINE GIRLS

(Enter three girls, Punjabi, Kashmiri and Sindhi)

(Six others wait their turn in the wings)

Punjabi

*Oh, who is she whose fairy face
Is lit with such a heavenly grace ?*

Kashmiri

*Her eyes are wells of tenderness,
Like southern winds she comes to bless*

Sindhi

*Wherever she goes, in every place,
Sweet smiles enwreath her fairy face.*

All Three

*'Tis Kalyani, our dear Princess
The mother of the motherless.*

(Enter Bengali, Gujrati and Maharatta Girls)

Bengali

*Who is this beauteous and divine ?
Her gracious arms like vines entwine.*

Gujrati

*Her precious heart is firm and true,
So all must pay their homage due.*

Maharatta

*Her rosy feet are like a shrine,
Who is this beauteous and divine ?*

All the six Girls

*'Tis Kalyani, our dear Princess
The mother of the motherless.*

(Enter Parshi, Madrasi and Karnati Girls)

Parsi

*Oh, who is she with Vina bright ?
A woman yet a goddess quite ?*

Madrasi

*Her heart is as a fragrant flower,
Her voice has music's magic power.*

Karnati

*The true and good in her unite,
This goddess with the Vina bright.*

All the nine Girls

*'Tis Kalyani, our dear Princess,
The daughter of the regal race,
As fair in mind as fair in face,
The mother of the motherless.*

CURTAIN

END OF ACT I

SECOND ACT
FIRST SCENE

SECOND ACT

FIRST SCENE

(*N.B.—This could be the same scene as Act I, Scene I, to save expense.*)

(*A great hall in the palace. On the floor is spread a gold-embroidered crimson velvet carpet on which stands a Divan. A large mirror hangs against one wall. Attendants about. LATA, PHUL, NILA, ANILA and RENU come in from the Queen's dressing room, which is up L.*)

LATA

(*running in first*)

There is no pleasing her ! Where is Matan-gini ?

PHUL

(*following*)

Lata, I have no mind to stay here and be the scapegoat of her humors, Queen though she be.

RENU

(running in, hand to cheek)

Oh, she has shaken my teeth loose by throwing the ivory comb at my face with such force that it broke into two — and just because I caught one tiny hair in the teeth of the comb.

NILA AND ANILA

(entering slowly)

NILA

Let us go to the Princess ! Anila.

ANILA

Yes, let's ; there we shall find love and affection, and fair play ! Our whole life here is a lie.

RENU

(ruefully, rubbing her cheek)

If we stay here much longer there will be little enough of me left to lie with !

PHUL

All this wealth and grandeur — *(with a wild gesture pacing the beautiful hall)* and yet — nothing but misery and sorrow.

ALO

(running up)

You are all going crazy ! To run off like this and leave us to finish attiring her Majesty !

PHUL

It is we who are tired of her evil temper !

ALO

Oh, Hush ! If Matangini should hear you ? Why is she so late ?

RENU

(who is looking off R.)

Here comes a man !

LATA

(same bus)

'Tis the Jester, Pata's husband !

PHUL

We are having enough jest with the attiring of the Queen ; That's a huge joke !

RENU

At which we laugh on the wrong side of our face.

CHHAYA

(running in anxious and scared)

Girls ! Girls ! The Queen waits !

*(All the Girls turn and run into the dressing room again.)**(The Jester saunters in from R.)**(Dressed in white Jodhpur breeches (pyjamas) and long Indian shirt without collar and cuffs (green or red) ; a gold-bordered long yellow scarf (chudder) thrown over one shoulder and tied round the waist with the two ends hanging in front like a kilt ; shod in a pair of red Indian shoes, curled upwards at the toes. Bare head, with a bald patch on the crown, and scanty curly longish hair).*

JESTER

(calling to them)

Girls, sweet doves, is my little woman there ?

CHHAYA

(stopping at exit to answer)

Pata is busy with the Queen. What are you doing here at this hour ?

JESTER

I was sent for.

CHHAYA

What for?

JESTER

How should I know till I am told? (*with a grand gesture*) Affairs of the State! Or perchance some rosy lily has taken a fancy to the cut of my features. (*Posing before the mirror.*)

CHHAYA

(*laughing and pointing*)

Girls, do you hear? He thinks one of us has fallen in love with his bald head!

(*All the Girls go out laughing.*)

JESTER

(*angrily*)

Bald? Bald? Am I bald? (*looking in the glass*). This little patch? This is soon remedied. (*Arranges hair to cover it carefully, when seeing reflection of PATA in the mirror turns round and begins to twirl his moustache.*)

PATA

Oh, you are busy with your moustache. But things are happening inside. Why have I been sent for?

JESTER

Come, come, my love, you flood of my heart, you ripe corn in the field of my life! (*aside*) This style perhaps would be more suitable when I address the other one, the smiling beauty.

PATA

(*not taken in*)

You are not thinking of me. You are thinking of your toilet. What have you done to your hair? (*ruffles it, disclosing the bald patch again*).

JESTER

(*trying to stop her*)

What are you doing? Exposing my shame to the world!

PATA

You need not be so anxious about your beauty. Your charms are already killing enough.

JESTER

Why? Don't you spend hours over your toilet? And when we, poor men snatch a tiny moment to put a bit of an edge on to our charms, you must needs come interfering!

PATA

You had better put an edge on to your sword just now? The times are bad.

JESTER

Heavens! Were I to bear arms, the kingdom would be prostrate at my feet! How can you suggest anything so disloyal?

PATA

Well, if you must be loyal, can't you make your king open his eyes a little?

JESTER

Your diplomatic life in the palace ought to have made you a little bit wiser, Pata, my dear; learn then that you must say the sun rises in the west, when your king or queen says so.

PATA

Oh, I am tired of your silly talk; let us both go away to the Princess. There is no other alternative for us.

JESTER

Report however says, that place is the reverse of exciting. Empty floors for comfort, and boiled rice with green bananas for food.

PATA

Still it is far better than to smoulder on the burning pile of court jewels.

JESTER

(caressing her)

Yes, this little woman will be by my side for better or for worse. And what meals she would prepare for me—roast bananas, fricasses of rice. Hurrah! Here goes—my right eye dances—a good omen—and—*(He twirls his moustaches)* let us go at once, dearest.

PATA

(coquettishly)

Oh I know whom you are thinking about.

JESTER

How can you be so unjust ! It was only you that I was thinking of sweet, Oh, how can you be so unkind ?

(He sings)

*Why dost thou turn thy face away,
O proud and bonnie lassie mine !
How canst thou spurn from thee, I pray
The heart that doth thy feet entwine ?
O proud and bonnie lassie mine ?*

PATA

*Oh, see this lyre that lieth mute,
This dumb yet sweet-voiced silver flute,
This harp gold-stringed and music winged,
Attuned to sing thy mane divine.*

JESTER

*O proud and bonnie lassie mine !
Thou crown'st me king, my diadem ;
Of all my wealth most priceless gem ;*

PATA

*Thou art my one desire and dream,
For which I hourly yearn and pine.*

JESTER

O proud and bonnie lassie mine !

*(They both sing and dance hand in hand.
Then PATA slips off and runs out.)*

JESTER

(in a loud voice)

Wait a minute, dearest. Inform the queen that the king is coming early.

PATA

(stopping at exit)

Very well.

(runs off)

JESTER

(again approaches the glass, arranges his hair and smiles with appropriate comic gestures).

Do I not look as fascinating as sweet seventeen now, or still better—as irresistible as formidable forty, Ha ! Ha ! but for this precious moustache. Isn't it a veritable Cupid's arrow for the fair sex ? *(Faces the audience and twirls it into*

different positions.) Yes, yes, I must go with Pata to the Princess. That wonderful girl, that Hashi, that sweet little bit of dancing laughter! To see her is to forget hunger and thirst, I tell you. And you my little woman, beware, I give you fair warning! (*Peeps to right and left in imitation of a frightened cat, and seeing nobody places his hands on his heart and heaves a sigh of relief.*) One gets tired of woman's foolishness. Heigho! Is it my fault if she goes and does her best to throw Hashi in my path? Whimpering and whining would be in bad taste after that, and to imagine that she, that enchantress, will take no notice of me, would be down-right nonsense, wouldn't it? (*Returning to the glass he twirls the ends of his moustache energetically with intense absorption and doesn't notice Matangini who has come with her page in from up R. and stands watching him disdainfully.*)

MATANGINI

The Jester wasting the king's time over his toilet!

JESTER

(turning quickly)

My lady Matangini! *(does elaborately comic bows)*. Long may the sun bask in the black night of your presence.

MATANGINI

Oh, don't waste further time! I want no compliments!

JESTER

Compliments? It is no compliment to say that the lady Matangini is as fair as the heart of a lotus, just before sun-down.

MATANGINI

(sharp)

When it is closed in sleep? Is that a compliment?

JESTER

(rather frightened at his own audacity)

A Jester's privilege, Madam.

MATANGINI

I am not in the mood for jesting. Listen !
There is work to be done.

JESTER

(with a pose)

Work ! Work !

MATANGINI

Yes, a lucky job. Here it is. *(Jingles purse full of gold.)* If you succeed, you are a made man. If you fail you will pay with your blood.

JESTER

(shivers and cringes)

You have but to speak, fair lady.

MATANGINI

Then do you cease speaking and listen ! You have an eye for Hashi, the Princess's favourite maid. Now don't deny it ! I have watched you ogle her !

JESTER

(frightened, looking round)

If my wife Pata heard you say so.

MATANGINI

(with grim humour)

You'd sooner be beheaded, eh? (*JESTER nods*) Well, you may avoid both fates if you do as I bid you.

JESTER

(briskly)

You have but to command me, Madam. You bid me seek the fair Hashi?

MATANGINI

(sharply)

Nothing of the kind. She is with the Princess. I bid YOU go to her home.

JESTER

(surprised)

In the town?

MATANGINI

In the town.

JESTER

And what am I to do there?

MATANGINI

(whispers)

Set fire to it.

JESTER

(horrificed)

Set Fire ! But——

MATANGINI

She will not be there, the more's the pity.

JESTER

But her little sister's there——and her bed ridden old mother.

MATANGINI

(impatiently)

You imagine difficulties, but remember it is the Queen who commands it, and you will pay the penalty for your disobedience.

JESTER

(frightened)

No, No——I——

MATANGINI

Consider the reward, if you please the Queen——gold and your golden beauty Hashi in marriage.

JESTER

(choking)

Ye——es.

MATANGINI

Ah, you find second thoughts are best. Good, I thought you would. I shall be back shortly and shall expect to find you gone upon my errand. *(Exist up R.)*

JESTER

(excitedly)

Oh! It seems that I too shall go out of my mind like my royal master the king. Plans are being hatched to burn his subjects alive and he is wrapped in dalliance in the inner apartments. Heavens! There is nothing left for me but to turn a Sadhu. To set fire to Hashi's house! The audacity of her proposal! I would rather be burnt alive myself than do that. Well, it is good that the Saitani confided her

secret to me rather than to any one else. She thinks me a fool ; Fool am I indeed ! Yet not enough to be a tool in her hands——indeed not ! I must try to baffle her machinations.

(Exit up R.)

(Enter MATANGINI with her Page from L.)

MATANGINI

He is not here. It seems that he is gone to serve my ends.

PAGE

No, Madam, he won't do so.

MATANGINI

Won't he really ? How do you know ?

PAGE

I have overheard him.

MATANGINI

(quite upset)

The devil ! Then what's to be done !

PAGE

I'll do what you want, Madam.

MATANGINI

You! Go through such a risk.

PAGE

Yes, I shall gladly do it. I have a score to settle with her.

MATANGINI

With whom?

PAGE

I will have my revenge on Hashi: she always mocks and laughs at me.

MATANGINI

But there is great danger in the work.

PAGE

I don't care. Revenge is sweeter than life. I shall be grateful if you will allow me to do it.

MATANGINI

Very well, go then, but be careful.

PAGE

Yes, Madam.

(They both go off R.)

(The Queen, attended by all her maidens enters from L. She is dressed in gold-embroidered blue silk with golden slippers).

QUEEN

What brings your husband here, Pata?

PATA

Madam, he came to announce that His Majesty will be here early.

QUEEN

(sits on the Divan)

He brings good tidings. Girls! *(calling to the Girls who have followed her)*. Fetch me the ornaments of the seventh treasure-chest: you shall deck me in them to-night.

(ALO and RENU salute and run out L.)

PATA

(with simulated ecstasy)

How wonderful Your Majesty will look in those lovely jewels!

QUEEN

And Matangini is not here to see that they are put on me properly ! Why is she so late to-day ? Where are my flowers ?

PATA

(uneasily)

The flower season is poor, and she may have difficulty in finding blooms.

QUEEN

(impatiently)

Nonsense ! There are plenty of flowers in the royal garden.

PATA

(flatteringly)

But no flowers anywhere beautiful enough to be worthy of your perfection of loveliness, my Queen ! Lata, can you ever imagine anyone in more radiant beauty ?

LATA

(with respectful courtesy)

No, never !

PATA

(as the other girls come back laden with the jewels, sandalwood-paste, etc., and place the trays before the queen)

Even these magnificent jewels will pale before such glory !

QUEEN

(smiling and fingering the jewels)

Yet these jewels are among the most valuable of the royal treasure house. *(Reclining on the divan)* Come, dress me—deck me to perfection. Did you not hear ? The king comes early this evening.

ALO

(taking the diadem)

This diadem, My Queen, belonged to the mother of the elder queen. When her daughter was married, Her Majesty took it from her own head and placed it on her daughter's.

RENU

This diamond necklace, my Queen, was sent as a wedding-present by the king of Arraken to Her Late Majesty.

CHHAYA

And this pearl bracelet and jewelled waist-band were presented by the queen of Nepal to the Princess on her birth-day.

PHUL

And these sparkling sapphire armlets were——

QUEEN

You need say no more. All these are mine now, mine alone!

NILA

(with slight bitterness)

Yes, they are indeed!

ANILA

(flatteringly)

And on no other person have they ever looked so lovely.

PATA

Sing, Girls, sing, while decking Her Majesty!

(*All the Girls*)

*Our Queen we'll deck with love and care,
With raiment fair
Beyond compare*

ALO

(*taking the sandal-paste from the silver tray*)

*With sandal-paste and crimson dust
And rose-red tinge
On feet paint fringe (Does so)*

CHHAYA

*With fine attire and perfumes rare,
With star-like gem
On diadem
And jewels flare upon thy hair !*

LATA

*With pearls and diamonds round the neck
Our Queen with loving care we deck.*

PHUL

*With sapphire armlets and glittering
wristlets pair by pair
This emerald waistband debonnair.*

NILA AND ANILA

*And on thy feet
Will anklets greet
With tuneful murmur the soft air.
Golden lotus flowers rare,*

ALL THE GIRLS

*Thy loveliness
Will smiling bless
The light of day and heaven fair.*

(The Queen rises and Pata adorns her with a long Silvery veil which falls from under the crown and sweeps the ground like a royal train.)

PATA

(clasping her hands in ecstasy)

How lovely you look, my Queen !

LATA AND PHUL

Superb !

NILA AND ANILA

Wonderful !

ALO AND CHHAYA

Could a fairy or a nymph of heaven be half so beautiful !

RENU

Simply enchanting !

QUEEN

(standing in front of mirror poses, admiring her own beauty)

It is nothing without the soft grace of flowers to set off the jewels. Where is Matangini ?

PATA

(looking off R.)

Madam, here she comes.

(Enter MATANGINI)

QUEEN

(petulantly)

How late you are ! The king is coming early. Give me the floral ornaments, quick !

MATANGINI

I have none, Madam.

QUEEN

No flowers? (*angrily*) What does this mean?
You have been away long enough!

MATANGINI

Trying in vain to get other flowers in place
of those the Princess's maid took away.

QUEEN

(indignantly)

The Princess's maid? She dared to take my
flowers and ornaments? Matangini, are you
mad?

MATANGINI

I speak the truth, Madam.

QUEEN

Insufferable! Why did the flower girls let
her have them?

MATANGINI

(watching the Queen carefully)

They said Hashi took them by main force.
After all she is the Princess's favourite maid.
What could they say?

QUEEN

Oh, this is beyond endurance ! (*paces angrily*)
See that they are arrested.

MATANGINI

(*again watching stealthily*)

The flower girls, Madam ?

QUEEN

(*furiously*)

The flower girls——Hashi——her mistress
——everyone——

PHUL

(*with suppressed excitement*)

Arrest the Princess ?

PATA

(*hushing her down in a whisper*)

Attend to the toilet, Girls.

MATANGINI

(*in subdued anger*)

Don't listen to your betters, or you may hear
amiss !

(*PHUL turns away and begins gathering up the sandalwood-paste and other toilet things, MATANGINI touches the Queen's dress with expert fingers.*)

Your Majesty looks wonderful to-night.

QUEEN

(*pouting*)

With no flowers!

LATA

Shall I bring the flowers that the gardener has left in the pleasure house?

MATANGINI

(*as if indignant*)

Think before you speak, Lata! Is the Queen to have the flowers left lying in the dust to be collected by the sweepers? I wonder you dare suggest such a thing.

QUEEN

(*cuffing LATA*)

I will wear NO flowers. (*LATA begins to cry the other girls look at her with sympathy.*)

What are you standing about for, idle hussies? Go, and make ready for the King's visit. (*The Girls and PATA all go off with silent salutes, looking frightened*). My flowers! SHE to have my flowers! (*paces angrily*).

MATANGINI

My Queen, have patience. If you issue publicly such orders as you were about to give, we shall be worsted. After all, she is the Princess, and no guard or soldier would dare to carry them out.

QUEEN

You forget the General is my brother.

MATANGINI

And anxious to marry the Princess himself.

QUEEN

(*becomes thoughtful and paces more slowly*)

She is to marry the Prince of Arungiri, I hear.

MATANGINI

But your Majesty will not have that.

QUEEN

It would take her away and she would infect my country no longer.

MATANGINI

She would have a country of her own, where she will be QUEEN, even as Your Majesty is.

QUEEN

(stung to jealous fury)

Matangini, you are right ! I could not endure that. I would have her a slave at my feet, with meagre food and rags for clothing. If she marries at all, she shall marry my brother, so that she may remain our slave for ever. She to be a queen ? And perchance the mother of a royal son that one day will succeed me ?

MATANGINI

Had Your majesty but a son !

QUEEN

Oh, Mother Chamunda, what sin have I committed that you should withhold the gift of a son from me ? All is useless to me without

a child! O Goddess, I will sacrifice a hundred goats, a thousand buffaloes. (*Gazing upward with folded hands*). O Mother Chamunda, be propitious, I offer you a human sacrifice! Verily, I will tint your feet red with the blood of a virgin Princess.

MATANGINI

(*half-afraid*)

Madam, hush! Even the winds carry tales!

QUEEN

You are my true friend, Matangini, I shall never forget your faithful service!

MATANGINI

(*significantly*)

Madam, there is an old proverb, she who would be deceived by the promises of kings is a fool!

QUEEN

(*grasping her wrist significantly*)

But a greater fool is she who does not perceive that her interest lies in conforming to their will!

(The two women gaze into each other's eyes, with a secret understanding. They break apart as PATA comes running in again with the other girls).

PATA

Your Majesty, His Imperial Majesty is coming to the reception hall.

QUEEN

Go, you girls, hasten to receive him. *(Exit girls. The Queen stands before the mirror once more and scrutinises her dress and ornaments.)* Does not my beauty shine like a magic reflector? *(Then turning towards the audience, she tosses her head and exits laughing triumphantly.)*

END OF SCENE I

SECOND SCENE

(N.B.—This could be the same scene as the previous one, with a few changes in the props ; such as, in place of the dawn, a throne to seat two should be placed with flowers and plants around to make it look like a reception-hall. The King and the Queen are seated on the throne. To shorten the cast, instead of employing separate dancers, the Queen's attendants may be utilised here as performers, who are entertaining them with singing and dancing. Matangini is standing behind the throne and occasionally spraying the royal couple with scent from a gold scent bottle. The King is glancing at the Queen from time to time with eyes full of tenderness and love, and talking to her in whispers ; at times he throws bouquets and showers flowers at the dancers.)

GIRLS

(some sing, others dance. The song may be divided into chorus and solo)

*With glory, glory the earth doth ring,
In tribute to our Queen and King,
Here flowers lose their thorny sting,
And clouds no gloom within here bring.*

*They smile, they swim the sky, they swing
And light is like a sapphire ring.
We're happy like a bird on wing,
The golden moments dance and sing
To golden pleasure laughter sling.
And joy and fragrance breezes fling.
With glory, glory the earth doth ring,
In tribute to our Queen and King.*

*(Then as usual, the whole troop including
MATANGINI go off, leaving the Royal Pair
alone.)*

QUEEN

Great is my good fortune to-day, O King !
While you are engrossed in high matters of
State, I pass my days in thoughts of you, my
lord, wearying for your coming !

KING

When I look at you, my Queen, I forget all
my royal duties. My heart is overwhelmed by
the flood of your matchless beauty.

QUEEN

Do not put me to shame by such extreme
praise. Let me share your counsels O, my

lord, and lighten with my sympathy the burden of your responsibilities.

KING

I have glad tidings to give you to-day, my Queen.

QUEEN

Who so glad as I of glad tidings from my lord and master? Tell me these tidings, that I may rejoice in them?

KING

You will rejoice even as I, my sweet. The Prince of Arungiri has sent a messenger to ask for the hand of our daughter Kalyani.

QUEEN

Glad tidings indeed. For the happiness you bring me in this news I have nothing to offer you in return, for my heart and soul and all I have are already yours. Yet if I might venture——

KING

Venture? What?

QUEEN

I am so anxious for the honor of the King, my lord——and I had heard——

KING

(frowning)

What had you heard? Nothing against my honor?

QUEEN

(feeling her way diplomatically)

Oh, if any one said aught against that to me, he would die, that instant!——No!——I was thinking of an old tale that the Prince's father insulted your father by sending him a shoe.

KING

(annoyed)

An old tale indeed. I wonder you credit it!

QUEEN

(perceiving the shade of annoyance)

It was but over-zeal for my dear lord. I merely repeat what everyone says.

KING

It is the wrong version. It was my father who was to blame. While a guest at the Palace of Arungiri, he laughed at his uncle, who was a bit cracked, and took the insult to heart. The wise king deservedly rebuked my father, as I have often heard my father say, and there the matter ended.

(His face clouding over again)

Has anyone spoken to her of the proposed alliance with the Prince of Arungiri.

QUEEN

Alas, how should I know? Will she consent to see me? Has she not refused all these years to call me mother or let my ardent affection melt one iota of her pride?

KING

(angrily)

Her obstinacy, you should say. For what obstinacy so base as that which refuses to respond to virtue as inestimable as yours?

QUEEN

If she knows I wish this marriage—and that you wish it, is enough to make me heartily desire it—she would refuse it out of sheer contumacy. Why even to-day, her maid Hashi snatched away all the flowers from my maid Matangini, leaving me thus unable to adorn myself fittingly for you, my dearest lord.

KING

(glancing at her, sees the absence of flowers)

No flowers when I visit you? And through the fault of that stiff-necked girl? This is indeed an insult!

QUEEN

Had she but insulted me! Let her scorn me as she pleases I shall not resent it, for she is your child; but to insult her own father!—And to deprive me of the flowers you love, is to insult YOU.

KING

You speak rightly, my Queen, I believe this was planned to show contempt and scorn of me! For why should she insult you?

QUEEN

(with a hypocritical sigh)

Why indeed ?

KING

Except to hurt me? You are right. She aimed this at me, her father! She has gone too far! It is not to be borne! *(rises in anger and paces. The Queen also rises and shows signs of triumph behind his back).*

QUEEN

(coming near him)

I try to be patient, but I find it hard to sit by, when she insults my lord *(weeping)* I confess my heart bleeds, and for all my outward calm, my soul is wrung within!

KING

(turning at once to console her)

You need no longer suffer this thing! This viper! She must go! She shall marry the Prince of Arungiri without delay! *(turns to pace again)*

QUEEN

Is it wise to send her away? Who knows what enemies she may stir up against this poor kingdom? Supposing she bears him a son?

KING

(looks up, struck)

Well? What then?

QUEEN

The Prince might think it gave HIM a claim to this kingdom *(watches the King to see the poison of her words sink in)*

KING

(lifting his hands to Heaven with a gesture of despair)

Oh, That my son had lived and she been taken!

QUEEN

My dear, dear lord, it breaks my heart to see you grieve!

KING

(taking her hand sits again on the throne with the Queen)

Had you but borne me a son, my Queen.

QUEEN

(with a thrill of real grief)

When your son——went——I thought,
another heir would soon be born, but——*(veils
her face)*

KING

(patting her hand)

It was born dead! And no other child has
come! *(drops her hand with a sigh and after a
pause)* The Princess is my heir. We must
give her to a husband. *(A slight noise is heard
off R. The King raises his head)* Who is that?

(Enter MATANGINI)

MATANGINI

Your Majesty, the General craves audience

QUEEN

(attentive)

My brother?

KING

(after a second's pause)

Show him in.

(Enter the General and salutes the King and Queen)

GENERAL

Your Majesty ! My noble sister.

KING

What would you with us, General ?

GENERAL

Sire, the Prince of Arungiri has demanded an exorbitant dowry, and the Minister, thinking the matter urgent has asked me to submit it to Your Majesty personally.

(Produces Parchment.)

KING

(Glancing at the paper, and throwing it down on the ground angrily.)

But the messenger mentioned nothing of this ! He has returned with our message of goodwill. Whence comes this script now ?

GENERAL

It was discovered among the ceremonial presents, Sire.

KING

Among the presents !

GENERAL

It seems that the messenger lacked the courage to present it to Your Majesty, and may have put it there purposely.

KING

Well, let the Minister reply to the effect that the kingdom of Devagiri knows how to uphold its honour, and will not tolerate any dictates from without. If the Prince of Arungiri apologises for this piece of audacity, then and then only shall marriage be possible with our house.

GENERAL

Your commands shall be obeyed, Sire.
(*Aside*) My plans will not miscarry I trust.

(*Salutes and departs, but is recalled by the King.*)

KING

General!

GENERAL

(*Approaching and saluting*)

At your command, Sire.

KING

The Minister need not send a reply just yet. I shall hold a conference with my councillors before coming to a decision.

(General salutes and departs.)

QUEEN

Oh! how my blood boils at this wanton insult! After this any alliance with Arungiri will trail the honour of Devagiri in the dust!

KING

Be not hasty, my queen! We must consider the matter calmly. However much she may displease me, Kalyani is my daughter and I owe her a father's duty.

Arungiri is unrivalled in princely lineage and one is proud to bestow the hand of a daughter such as he.

QUEEN

Do you see no other eligible match my King? Surely there is my brother—a brave soldier and an able statesman. Would it not be a

good policy to give your daughter to one who is bound by every tie of fidelity to your throne?—

MATANGINI

(coming forward and affectionately gazing at the Queen)

If Chamunda grants our prayer—and a son and heir is born—

KING

(looks at them, then hastily breaks off the talk)

My daughter is of the blood royal of our house. Her marriage must not be lightly decided upon.

PATA

(coming in from L.)

Hail to Your Majesties! We await your commands to begin our play.

(A tumult is heard off and cries of Fire! Fire!)

QUEEN

Will you now see this little entertainment that my girls have been planning for your pleasure, Sire!

KING

(throwing off his cares, rises and is about to lead her out when the clamour outside increases and he lets go her hand and they stand aloof.)

What is that noise? Do I hear a cry of fire?

LATA

(running in frightened with ALO)

Madam, Madam, the town is in flames.

KING

Where are my guards?

(The Girls run out R.)

MATANGINI

(to the King)

'Tis probably but one small house, Sire. The panic-stricken cowards exaggerate.

QUEEN

(with a questioning look, softly)

Do you know aught of this, Matangini?

MATANGINI

(equivocally)

What should I know ?

*(The rest of the Girls come in running
and frightened)*

RENU

Madam, Madam, a crowd is gathered without, calling for the King.

QUEEN

Do they expect the King to extinguish the flames with his own hands ?

(Enter General and salutes)

GENERAL

Flames are rising from the City, Sire——

KING

(anxiously)

Go, General, try to pacify them and see that the fire is extinguished. Assure the people that their losses shall be made good from the State Treasury, but they must stop their clamour.

GENERAL

I am afraid mere leniency, Sire, will not appease them, unless threatened with punishment.

KING

I leave it to you to deal with the situation as you think fit, but do not have recourse to hard measures except in extreme cases.

(Exit GENERAL saluting)

PORTRESS

(coming in)

Your Majesty, Her Highness the Princess desires audience.

QUEEN

The Princess? She has come here!

KING

(grimly)

I will not see her!

PORTRESS

(standing her ground)

Her Royal Highness says it is important.

KING

(impatiently)

Bid her begone !

(Exit PORTRESS)

KING

(pacing greatly perturbed)

I will not see her. I will not—I must avoid her.

(Turns to go and finds himself face to face with the Princess who is standing quietly with arms folded upon her breast, waiting for her chance.)

Kalyani !

PRINCESS

(saluting)

Your Majesty, accept the obeisance of your unfortunate and loving daughter !

KING

(starting as in a dream)

Child ! How like you are to your mother.

(Overcome with tenderness advances a step towards her.)

QUEEN

*(with a hypocritical sigh in his ear, leaning
over his shoulder)*

So like——yet so unlike, Sire——It seems a profanation of such beauty that the soul behind it should be as a snake nestling in your generous breast. Behold the lotus! ostentatiously worn to slight me.

KING

(hardening)

Why have you come here, Kalyani?

(Cries from without grow louder)

PRINCESS

O King! My Imperial Father! I have come to lay the sorrows of the people at your feet. Listen, Father! to their heart-rending cries. All that belongs to them lies there in flames!

KING

I see no reason why you should concern yourself with such matters. My officers are doing all in their power to stop the conflagration.

PRINCESS

But who started it, Your Majesty ?

KING

What do you mean ? Do you dare to imply that anyone in my service is responsible for the fire ?

PRINCESS

(standing her ground inspite of his angry tone)

If Your Majesty will deign to enquire, you will find that there is evidence.

KING

(interrupting angrily)

Evidence ? Evidence that some in my employ——

PRINCESS

Not yours, my lord——

QUEEN

(drawn to her full height, her eyes flashing)

Your Majesty, that is but another stab at me !

KING

You dare insinuate that the Queen has had something to do with this fire ?

PRINCESS

(meekly but bravely)

An emissary of——one of the Queen's entourage was taken dying from the flame and——confessed——

KING

You are mad, Girl! What was there to confess? You believe this absurd tale and come to bother me with it? Go back to your rooms and don't stir up the people against your father and your king by encouraging such lies! Begone, I say——

PRINCESS

Father, Alas, how can I open eyes that are so blinded? How can I relieve the misery of the poor people!

KING

Back to your palace! I myself will go and see what measures are being taken to put out the fire!

PRINCESS

(her face lighting with hope and gratitude)

Father! dear, dear father——(tries to take his hand, but he draws it away)

KING

Back ! (*She turns and goes slowly out. Pauses, then as he turns to the other door, the Queen throws herself upon him.*)

QUEEN

My lord, you would not risk your life.

KING

There is no risk. (*Tries to put her off but she clings still*)

QUEEN

I cannot let you go——I am afraid.

KING

Fear does not become a King. I must go !

(*Puts her off and is about to go out, when ALO running in from R. with LATA*).

ALO

Pata—Pata—your husband is burnt.

PATA

(*horrified*)

My husband ?

LATA

Yes, while trying to put out the fire, the flames caught him.

PATA

(frantically)

He won't die, he mustn't die! I will bring him back to life from Death's clutch, even as Savitri did.

(Exit running)

KING

Who was that?

ALO

(doing reverence to the king)

The Jester, Your Majesty. He was in the flames.

KING

(thinking this out)

My Jester in the flames? My Jester? *(a second's pause while he quickly scans the faces of all about him, then he turns on his heel shouting)* Sentries, Guards, Sentinels! Run! Run and lend a helping hand.

(Rushes out frantically)

QUEEN

(quickly and secretly to MATANGINI)

Matangini, what does this mean?

MATANGINI

All is well, Queen. This, too, will we turn to our account——come, *(she and the Queen go out quickly after the King)*

(THE STAGE IS DARKENED)

END OF SECOND SCENE

THIRD SCENE

(After an interval the stage is lighted up and the faded flowers scattered about indicate the scene of the previous evening)

(Enter GENERAL)

GENERAL

(looking exultantly at the empty throne)

Ha ! Ha ! Empty lies the Royal Throne, as if inviting me to sit on it ! The place looks like the enchanted hall in a fairy tale. Quite deserted. Not even a guard on duty. People howling outside and no king to hear. *(Clapping his hands)* Ho Sentry !

(Enter SENTRY and salutes)

GENERAL

Why do I find no one here ?

SENTRY

On hearing the news of the death of the Jester, the King acted like a mad man and rushed out with the guards and sentinels, to put out the fire and search for the body of his favourite. The whole palace is in a state of chaos since last evening. His Majesty also enquired for you, Sir, but you were not to be found.

GENERAL

I was engaged in preventing chaos in the kingdom, and taking measures to subdue the riotous people and restore peace and order. Go, and send word that I crave His Majesty's audience.

(Exit SENTRY saluting)

GENERAL

The moment has arrived for realising my ambitions at last. I need hardly do much more to incite the people to active rebellion. If they come out victorious, I am the Crowned King. If not, the King will think it is I who

have saved him. (*Paces thoughtfully, then stands still*)

(*Enters SENTRY and salutes*)

SENTRY

Pardon, General, the King is inaccessible now. He returned at a late hour and is now resting in the inner apartments, but Captain Dhruva kumar waits outside and seeks an interview.

GENERAL .

Send him in.

(*Exit SENTRY saluting*)

Just the man I want. I must get him to help me. He is impatient of tyranny, but a brave man. If I can induce him to side with me, success is sure.

(*Enter DHRUVAKUMAR*)

DHRUVA

(*saluting*)

I have been seeking you, General, to make an urgent request.

GENERAL

Tell me what it is, Captain. I shall be glad to do anything for you.

DHRUVA

You hear the lament of the people, General?

GENERAL

It pierces my heart.

DHRUVA

Their homesteads are burnt and they are reduced to penury. That they have dared to complain is looked upon as an unpardonable sin. Is there no remedy, General?

GENERAL

The matter is absorbing all my thoughts also, and I am confident that with you to aid me we shall be able to remedy all evils.

DHRUVA

I am whole-heartedly ready to do all in my power, General, but to my mind, if only the policy of ruling by power is changed, and the iron hand of tyranny is replaced by the gentle

touch of sympathy, all this conflagration will die out in a moment. The King's eyes must be opened to this, and I pray you to undertake the task.

GENERAL

Do you think Kings are so easily led to change their policy? Unless a show of power is maintained, the people would soon have no respect for institutions. Power is the true foundation and bulwark of a kingdom and upholds its prestige.

DHRUVA

Then in your heart of hearts you approve of this tyranny?

GENERAL

Approve? No, at times my blood boils like a volcano. You don't know how hard I find it to obey orders. But I am helpless. How can I resist it? I am but a slave.

DHRUVA

But the people look to you to intercede on their behalf. Does not His Majesty always follow your counsel? (*passionately*) O General,

do guide the King to the right path, and help to bring back peace and order and good government.

GENERAL

My friend, by whatever method the King desires his kingdom to be governed, you will be wise to call that good government. I am his General, only so long as I obey his orders.

DHRUVA

I cannot believe that. I know this evil has grown because the king is unaware of the true state of things. If his eyes were but opened to the cruel injustice being done in his name, the kingdom might yet be saved !

GENERAL

Not till the people themselves rise up in revolt !

DHRUVA

(starts back astonished)

You——you counsel revolt ! The people were on the verge of breaking out, but I pacified them, and——

GENERAL

(drawing in)

I counsel nothing——

DHURVA

I beg your pardon, Sir, a thousand pardons. If, however, this persecution goes on much longer, they might be goaded to it as a last resource. I pray you again to go and try for once to explain the whole situation to the King and let me assure his loyal subjects on your behalf that full justice shall be meted out to all.

GENERAL

How green you are! It will make matters still worse. Know then, my boy, that justice and equity which bechove the upper classes are too fine a raiment to suit the common herd. If I plead for the people, it means censuring the King, and it would be downright disloyalty on my part to do so.

DHURVA

I think I shall go mad! If you do not dare, I shall stake my all to right the wrong and fight the injustice.

(Rushes out without asking the General's permission)

GENERAL

(with a gesture of rage)

Audacious wretch! This thorn must be removed from my path, and I must work without him to secure the crown.

(He goes out R.)

* * * *

(Two days have passed and to indicate the lapse of time the stage is darkened for a few minutes and the Royal Throne removed; then it is lighted up again)

(Enter LATA, RENU and PHUL)

LATA

Two days have passed by. The fire has burnt down, but still the wailing continues. It is heart-rending to hear their piteous cries.

RENU

To-day is the feast of Saraswati, but it will ever be memorable as a day of mourning by the people.

PHUL

Poor King! He has suddenly turned religious and is trying to drown his grief in prayers.

(Uproar outside)

LATA

(startled)

This does not seem like wailing but rather like the shouting of a riotous mob.

(Enter ALO running)

ALO

The people have broken out into open rebellion.

GIRLS

(alarmed)

Are they going to invade the palace?

(Enter JESTER disguised as a Sadhu, his face smeared with ashes and masked with a false heavy beard. Dressed in saffron-coloured robe and turban.)

SADHU

Have no fear, my children. The Captain of the Guards is resisting them.

ALO

Who are you, your reverence ?

LATA

Protect us, O Sadhu. Give us shelter.

SADHU

Come you all to the Princess, where you will be quite safe. Pata is there already.

RENU

(recognising him ; in surprise)

Is it you, the Jester ! You are not burnt then ?

SADHU

Jesters are not merely boasters, but can perform magic. I have turned the fire into a farce, and lo, here am I as full of life as ever.

RENU

(eagerly)

And Hashi's people, Sir ?

SADHU

(fervently)

Thank God! I was able to remove them to safety before fire was set to their house.

PHUL

The King is mad with grief for you. Will you not show yourself to him?

SADHU

Do you wish to see me flayed alive by the Queen? I must wait till the proper moment comes.

(Uproar increases)

ALO

O Jester, do please melt away the rebellion with your witchcraft.

SADHU

Don't be alarmed, my dears. Follow me, and you will live in the midst of peace and bliss.

LATA AND RENU

To the Princess ! Let us go to the Princess.

ALL

To the Princess ! To the Princess !

(Their cries mingle with the noise outside and the scene ends in tumult as the curtain falls.)

END OF ACT II

THIRD ACT

FIRST SCENE

THIRD ACT

FIRST SCENE

(Same as Act II)

THE QUEEN IS RECLINING ON THE DIVAN

QUEEN

(starting up)

I was dreaming, and at such an unusual hour! What a bad dream! My heart sinks within me. Mother Chamunda, have mercy, I shall verily fulfil my promise and——and *(pacing the stage anxiously)*——why has Matangini not come yet?

(Enter MATANGINI)

MATANGINI

Here I am, Your Majesty.

QUEEN

Oh! I have spent such an anxious time!
What news, MATANGINI?

MATANGINI

Good your Majesty. Glory be to the Goddess Chamunda, our secret is buried with my Page, the dwarf. I am sorry for the poor fellow, but we are safe now.

QUEEN

What about the devil of a Jester? Did you not employ him as an emissary first?

MATANGINI

The devil has gone to the kingdom of devils. No one has heard or seen anything of him since, so Your Majesty may rest in perfect peace. All the searching and mourning will not bring him back to life again.

QUEEN

So far so good. But the people are still in revolt, I hear, and even the executions have availed nothing to stop the general discontent.

MATANGINI

The gallows and the spike are scarcely calculated to allay the misery of your subjects.

QUEEN

You are pleased to be sarcastic! Whose fault was it that this rebellion broke out? Tell me that.

MATANGINI

Surely your Majesty would not blame me for all the sorrows of this oppressed people?

QUEEN

If you mean to imply that I am responsible for the misery of the people, you might at least remember that you have always aided and abetted me, and that in the matter of the fire that brought the present trouble to a head, you were the chief instigator.

MATANGINI

The last straw appropriate indeed to a conflagration!

QUEEN

(bitterly)

You jest! When our plans are confronted by ruin? But what made you think of setting fire to the city?

MATANGINI

Madam, you are unjust. I gave instructions merely to burn the home of that insolent Hashi, and even that I did out of love for Your Majesty!

QUEEN

Oh, very fine love indeed——to ruin me and threaten the King, my husband with the loss of his throne!

MATANGINI

I did it in revenge for the terrible insult Hashi put upon Your Majesty.

QUEEN

So you screen your own spite and revengeful nature behind me! But I will no longer be made your scapegoat. I shall tell the King of your mad and wilful deed!

MATANGINI

(menacingly)

Had you not better think first what I might tell him ?

(The two women look magnetically at one another, hatred flashing in their eyes.)

QUEEN

Tell him——what? What can you tell him ?

MATANGINI

Did he not once lose a dearly-loved son ?

QUEEN

(lowering her eyes, moves about nervously)

The child——died——soon after the death of his mother——

MATANGINI

(significantly)

Died ?

QUEEN

(glances quickly at her alarmed)

He died——of——of——convulsions——was it? You told me——

MATANGINI

I told you a lie !

QUEEN

(shrinks, then recovers herself)

So you think you can now save yourself from my just displeasure by raking up some old tale of the poor child's death—

MATANGINI

No—no tale indeed—?

QUEEN

You—you think you can make the King believe . . . the child was poisoned ?

MATANGINI

I do not mean to tell the King that the child was poisoned—unless

QUEEN

(relieved and changing her tone)

Matangini dear—I might have known you would be faithful to me—

MATANGINI

(enigmatically)

I do not even mean to tell the King— —that you commanded me to poison the child. At least, not unless he puts me to the torture.

QUEEN

(again startled)

Why should he torture you ?

MATANGINI

To get at the truth.

QUEEN

(pacing excitedly)

You dare to frighten me? But who is to believe you? You will only bring down ruin upon your own head; and who is to save you then unless you be in my good graces?

MATANGINI

(hypocritically)

Has Your Majesty any further commands for me?

QUEEN

*(raging)*Oooh! *(clenching her fists again).*

MATANGINI

(with a warning gesture)

Madam! The King is coming!

(Salutes as the KING enters.)

QUEEN

(changing to her false, honeyed tone)

My lord, Come and rest in my arms! Your head is hot *(draws him down to the divan and caresses him)* and your pulse feverish. You are troubled.

KING

(gloomy and worried)

Who would not be troubled, Queen? The people are in revolt!

QUEEN

(she and MATANGINI now work together for the same end, their private enmity put aside)

Yes, and I know it to my cost. Even my own maids have deserted me and fled to the Princess.

KING

(head bowed on hands)

Rumour says that our troops and retainers are tyrannising over the people, each one for his own ends. Oh, God! If there is any truth in these stories, no wonder they have all risen against me!

QUEEN

What truth could there be in such stories? Are they likely, or in any way credible?

KING

(not responding to her caresses)

I don't know. I have been so much with you, my Queen, that I have taken far too little thought for the comfort of my people—

QUEEN

Comfort? What do such as they want with comfort?

KING

From all accounts they have had little enough. Two scanty meals a day—they have thought to be luxury. Many have had even less than that.

QUEEN

YOU cannot be worried by such trifles. Your ministers, it is they who should attend to such things.

KING

My ministers? I hear tales of daily hanging, imprisonment for a mere thoughtless word.

QUEEN

(shrugging)

The evil tongue of the multitude. Stern and terrible punishment alone is mete for such vile slanderers.

KING

They are but poor, simple-minded folk. But, alas, they are my subjects. *(Sinks his head in his hands.)*

QUEEN

(after exchanging signs with MATANGINI)

As you say, Sire, the fault is not solely theirs. A house divided against itself is at the root of all this trouble. Woe is me that I have to disclose what I would ever have kept a secret from you, my King!

KING

(looking at her)

A secret? Tell me what you know!

QUEEN

(pretending reluctance)

How can I? It is too painful.

KING

Tell me. It is my request—my command!

QUEEN

(as if reluctantly)

If you must know, it is the Princess. Her malice is at the bottom of all this trouble.

KING

(bending his brows)

How do you mean?

QUEEN

Listen then, my lord. Whilst you are occupied with state affairs, your daughter receives the malcontents, supplies them with money, gives them aid and counsel in rebellion.

KING

(impatiently)

That's easily said, but——

QUEEN

Is there not proof of it, Sire? Have you not seen for yourself how important a figure she is in the state? Have you made her so? No, for you, most wisely, kept her secluded as a modest woman should be. But you heard how the people called on her name, and you know how even my own personal attendants when trouble threatened us, deserted at once to her. Why should such things be, O King, if she herself had not bade them go to her when the rebellion she expected and inspired at last broke out against your Majesty?

KING

Stop, stop! (*He closes his eyes as if in terrible mental pain. The QUEEN and MATANGINI watch him triumphantly; at last he opens his eyes*) Oh, this is terrible! Would to God she were wedded and gone this instant! Only then shall I be at peace, on the day she leaves this kingdom!

QUEEN

You think the question is so easily settled?

KING

(looks at her, slight pause)

You have more to tell me?

QUEEN

(as if terribly reluctant)

I? No, my lord. I have nothing to tell you. It was my brother, the General——*(stops as if confused)*.

KING

The General? What has he dared to say?

QUEEN

Oh, nothing——nothing——it is nothing—— I said so when I heard it, did I not, Matangini?

MATANGINI

Your Majesty indignantly refused to believe the tale!

QUEEN

(makes a gesture of acquiescence and stands waiting)

KING

(looking from one woman to the other)

What is this tale you refused to believe?
Tell me——tell me——I must know.

QUEEN

O Sire! *(sobs as if quite broken down)* I cannot tell you——

KING

You must!

QUEEN

(facing him as if in desperation)

I will not! No! though you sent me to the spike for it, I will not break your heart! *(slight pause)*.

KING

(stamps and claps his hands. Attendant appears)

Go, bid the General come to me at once!

(Attendant goes out. Silence till he returns almost immediately, showing in the General.)

GENERAL

(saluting)

Your Majesty——

KING

(speaking slowly)

General, I hear you have something——to tell me.

GENERAL

(raising his eye-brows)

About the rebellion, Sire ?

KING

(slowly and painfully)

Yes, about the rebellion. Tell me, who is counselling the people ?

GENERAL

Alas, a man of my own guard.

KING

(relieved)

Ah ! A man and a soldier ?

GENERAL

A clever soldier, Sire. A born commander. Captain Dhruvakumar.

KING

(in a thinking mood)

Dhruvakumar you say? The man who came to plead with me for the people as their head, and informed me of the persecutions they were going through?

GENERAL

Treacherous scoundrel! To try and gain your Majesty's ear surreptitiously.

KING

His attitude did not strike me as treacherous; he seemed to be an earnest and sincere spokesman, and almost convinced me, though I paid no heed to his pleadings, and ordered him to clear out of my way.

GENERAL

Yes, the mean hypocrite. He is the originator of all this trouble and leads the rebels, Your Majesty.

KING

But perhaps getting no response from me, sympathy for the people caused him to become their leader.

GENERAL

Sympathy for the people? Not so, Your Majesty, to gain his own end. But I have been able to baffle him and pacify the people.

KING

(surprised)

Then why do they still fight? Why all this uproar?

GENERAL

These are an excited mob who are still creating a disturbance, but I have succeeded in restoring peace and order in general.

KING

And where is this leader, Dhruvakumar?

QUEEN

He must be severely punished and made an example of.

GENERAL

I sent my soldiers to arrest him—but—

QUEEN

(as if to stop a terrible revelation)

No, no ! don't say it ! I cannot believe it. I will not !

KING

(looking at her quickly)

Believe——what, my Queen ?

QUEEN

(as if utterly overcome with shame and grief)

That she, your daughter, guilty though she may be of a thousand acts could possibly be so lost to honor——

KING

(furious)

What ? You mean——

QUEEN

(meekly)

I mean nothing, Sire——Nothing——the General will tell you——

KING

General——speak——speak out——I insist !

GENERAL

Dhruvakumar is even now with the Princess.

KING

(raging)

Ooh ! If this be true——

QUEEN

Don't believe it, Sire.

KING

(taking no heed, solemnly with arms raised to Heaven)

If this be true, then I shall avenge the dishonour by sacrificing her to Goddess Chamunda ! It is the law of my house ! *(His arms drop, he adds with intensity)*
But I must have PROOF !

QUEEN

(wildly as if heart-broken)

There can be no proof of what can't be true !
Go yourself, Sire, and see !

(KING rises and stands a moment glaring, then turns and swings off with determined steps.)

GENERAL

(turns on his sister)

This is your work, you cruel woman ! But I will save her yet.

QUEEN

Save her ? For what purpose ?

GENERAL

To make her my wife ! If I rescue her from death, she will marry me out of gratitude !

(Rushes out)

QUEEN

Will she ? what do you think, Matangini ?

MATANGINI

I think this is a great day for my Queen, who has at last accomplished her desires !

QUEEN

(with a wild laugh of triumph)

O Chamunda ! I offer you a human sacrifice ! Grant me my prayer. Give me a son !

(Her laughter turns into tears, and she falls on the divan sobbing hysterically.)

END OF FIRST SCENE

SECOND SCENE

(The front scene as in Act I and Scene II. Princess discovered sitting in thought. The scene of a Temple suggesting the view of the Goddess inside through an open door, is painted on the wing.)

PRINCESS

(sings)

Of harmony and love, on this auspicious day.

Sing, heavenly Goddess sing!

*Remove the grievous wrongs that make my
country bleed,*

*And charm away all selfish power and
tyrannous greed,*

And hate and envy's sting.

(Enter the maids PATA, TARU and TARA, headed by HASHI. They carry flower baskets and brass trays with articles of worship, some in their hands, some on their heads.)

HASHI

Here we are Princess: we are on our way to the temple to worship after doing the *Pradakshin*.

PRINCESS

Oh, I had quite forgotten that to-day is the feast of Saraswati. Alas! Even on such a peaceful holy day, discord, envy and suffering are abroad. If I but knew how to warn my father. (*Sighs and rises.*)

(*She and the Girls then walk round the temple singing the chorus.*)

ALL

(*sing*)

*The lamp of skulls that burns with blood for
oil,*

Seest thou not, Bharati,

Why should such cruel rites thy worship soil?

*Are slaughtered victims' cries, that from thy
temple rise,*

Meet offering for thee!

Arouse in men the love of righteousness

*In thought and deed and word,
May virtue reign and succour all distress,
Unto the blind give sight,
Unto the mind give light,
With thy lyre's sweet accord.*

(Finishing the round they stop in front of the temple.)

PRINCESS

Amen! Peace——peace to all. O Goddess!
Grant us thy favour.

GIRLS

Long live our Princess!

PRINCESS

(with folded hands looking towards the temple)

May all living creatures be freed from evil:
May the poor and unhappy be saved from
all sorrow. Alas! The Goddess's eyes seem to
fill with tears.

*(As she stands in an attitude of devotion, a
terrible roll of drums is heard from afar. All
listen terrified, and some of the articles of worship
fall from their nervous hands.)*

PRINCESS

What is that? Why is the drum beating at such an unusual hour?

HASHI

(in a hushed voice)

It is the drum of the temple of Chamunda.

PATA

(anxiously)

Why should it sound on the feast-day of Saraswati?

PRINCESS

(with tears in her eyes)

Alas! Perhaps some poor wretch is to be sacrificed. Oh! I cannot bear it any longer. Who will deliver me from this agony of despair?

PATA

(timidly)

The Prince of Arungiri seeks your hand, Madam.

PRINCESS

Let him come then. Let him wed me and take me hence for good. I cannot endure the

cruel injustice of this kingdom any more.
Come girls, to the Temple.

(But she stops and falters) Alas! I cannot worship, with this anxiety in my heart. Hashi, you lead the girls to the Temple, and worship the Goddess. Let me be alone with my thoughts for awhile.

(They go out. The Princess paces up and down in anxiety, then stands still facing the audience, and says with deep feeling.)

Oh! how can I ever be happy, and leave these oppressed and helpless children of mine to their dark fate! How could I think of such a thing even for a moment! I want but a friend, a guide, a helper, to fill me with renewed energy.

(Enter DHRUVAKUMAR: he stands and gazes at the PRINCESS from afar.)

DHRUVA

(aside)

Oh, what a divine vision! One longs to wash her feet with the stream of one's joy, pure as the dews from Heaven.

PRINCESS

*(suddenly seeing DHRUVAKUMAR,
surprised, aside)*

Who is this young soldier of noble appearance? Is he the God-sent answer to my prayer?

DHRUVA

(coming near and saluting her)

Hail, O goddess!

PRINCESS

Gentle Sir, you are welcome. Pray tell me who you are.

DHRUVA

I am a Captain in the King's army, Madam, and my name is Dhruvakumar.

PRINCESS

That noble Captain, who has a mind above caste distinction. Sir, I have heard of you.

DHRUVA

(saluting again)

I have come on special business to Your Royal Highness.

PRINCESS

What may that business be ?

DHRUVA

A mighty conspiracy is afoot against the King, and attempts are being made to drive his subjects into open rebellion.

(The roll of the drum which was indistinctly heard before, now draws near and mingles with the shouts of the people.)

PRINCESS

Then is this the clamour of the rebellious people ?

DHRUVA

Their cries and lamentations have long continued, but the King is deaf to their complaints: he thinks some offenders are being sacrificed at the temple of Goddess Chamunda, and thinks his enemies to be his friends. Warn him, O Princess !

PRINCESS

We must open his ears to the justice of their demands, and unseal his eyes to their misery.

But alas! how am I to approach him? I was sent away from his door. (*Wringing her hands*) Oh! can you not find any means to save him, noble soldier?

DHRUVA

Madam, I have tried my best. I have counselled the people to seek peaceful redress for all their wrongs, and have even dared to lay the matter before His Majesty, who was coming out of the temple of the Lord Krishna,—but in vain.

PRINCESS

Oh, brother! We must warn him at any cost.

DHRUVA

Princess, you have called me brother. That word puts new strength into my heart, new fire into my soul. Rest assured I shall be able to quell the mutinous spirit of the people, and succour those you hold dear.

PRINCESS

Brave soldier, I regard you verily as my own brother. Go and rescue your king and

country. May God be your help. Yours will be the struggle of right against unjust might. Your victory will save both king and kingdom.

DHRUVA

Give me your blessing, my Princess, my sister, that I may not sustain failure and defeat.

(He kneels. The Princess takes the lotus from her hair, and blesses him by putting it in his turban)

PRINCESS

Go my brother; you are fortunate, for you are dedicating yourself to a just cause.

DHRUVA

(rising)

Your words inspire every fibre of my body, every vein of my heart. *(He raises his sword)* Victory to the King, victory to the Princess, victory to the Truth.

(He raises his sword at each invocation, and finally saluting her with it, departs.)

But alas! how am I to approach him? I was sent away from his door. (*Wringing her hands*)
Oh! can you not find any means to save him, noble soldier?

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(The PRINCESS, deeply affected, stands in a solemn attitude)

(Enter JESTER, dressed as a Sadhu, and salutes)

PRINCESS

(startled)

What brings you here, my good Jester?
Even trifles make me nervous.

JESTER

The maids of the Queen are here, Princess.

PRINCESS

(astonished)

Here? What for?

JESTER

To seek your protection, Madam.

PRINCESS

My protection? Have they too been
ill-treated?

JESTER

The people have revolted and are marching
on to the Palace, and they are frightened out
of their wits.

PRINCESS

To the Palace! God grant that Captain Dhruvakumar may be in time to check their advance.

JESTER

Yes, he is a brave fellow. I saw him amidst the fighters, resisting their attacks, counselling some and warding off others, regardless of his own life.

PRINCESS

May God be his help. Go and bring me news, Sadhu.

JESTER

I go, Princess, and now is the time when I shall utilise my garb to pacify the enraged mob. I trust I shall be able to come back unscathed this time too from the fire of battle, and give you assuring news.

(Exit JESTER, saluting)

(Enter HASHI and other Girls)

HASHI

We have performed the worship of the Goddess, Princess, with a hollow heart.

PRINCESS

(sighing)

Let us go and see the maids of the Queen, and hear what they have to say.

(Exit all.)

(*The soldiers of Dhruvakumar's regiment march past on the stage singing.*)

MARCHING SONG

1

*Hark !, 'tis the Mother's call,
All hail !, salute the King of kings,
Come, let us strive for noble things,
Awake ye, one and all.*

2

*The grim black night is worn,
Ten million brothers unafraid,
Let's march in martial form arrayed,
Upon this shining morn.*

3

*Spend not in vain the hours,
No longer let us idly rest,
An equal status we must wrest,
In this wide world of ours.*

4

*With tyranny we'll fight,
The good alone to us is dear,
Now vanquished lies benumbing fear,
E'en death is free from fright.*

5

*Come, let us do and dare,
Let us espouse with all our might,
The cause of justice and of right,
The crown of glory wear.*

END OF SECOND SCENE

THIRD SCENE

(One day passes between Scene Two and Three. Curtain rises on the same scene. The distant din of battle)

(Enter PRINCESS)

PRINCESS

(looking anxiously at the sky)

How overcast is the sky! Midday looks like evening. The battle began yesterday; it still rages as fiercely as ever: the clamour and din even seem to increase in violence. I cannot tell which side is winning. Each messenger I send out to bring me tidings, disappears in the thick of the fight. Even Hashi does not return. O gracious God, our Saviour in danger and trouble, save us!

(Enter HASHI running)

Tell me what you have learnt, Hashi.

HASHI

O Princess, what a terrible sight! What a deafening uproar! Yells that seem to burst the skies asunder, pools of blood——oh, horrible!
(*Covers face with her hands*)

PRINCESS

It is the darkest hour which heralds the dawn; the fiercest storm that ushers in the calm. (*Looking up with clasped hands.*) Grant me steadfast faith, my God; keep my trust in Thee unshaken.

(*Outside the noise increases; they both look out.*)

HASHI

O Princess! The rebels are coming this way. Let us take shelter inside the temple. (*Takes hold of the Princess's hand*)

PRINCESS

Have no fear, Hashi. They will never do us any harm.

HASHI

Look, look! They are really coming this way——there———

PRINCESS

(looking out with surprise)

Why, it is Dhruvakumar! They have surrounded him, and he is being attacked from all sides. *(Addressing the rebels)* Stop, stop, my children, kill him not.

VOICES

(from outside)

The Princess——our own Princess! Listen to what she bids us do.

PRINCESS

You are my brothers, my children, do not strike a helpless wounded soldier.

FIRST MAN

Let him alone then———

SECOND MAN

Get you gone, fellow, our Princess bids it.

THIRD MAN

That's a big fish we got into our net, friends; 'tis a mortal pity to let him go. A big reward has been offered for him, dead or alive.

PRINCESS

He is not our enemy, my sons ; he is our friend, our helper and our guide.

MANY VOICES

Who knows which are friends and which are foes ?—Better make an end of them all at one stroke.

A VOICE

But when the Princess commands, we must obey. Go away, you lucky devil ! and thank your stars for your narrow escape.

ALL

Glory be to our Princess ! Long live our Princess !

(They retire, leaving DHRUVAKUMAR, who enters wounded and bleeding.)

DHRUVA

My Princess, my sister, our end is attained ; the King is safe, and the rebellion is quelled.

(He falls fainting on the ground at her feet.)

PRINCESS

(sitting by him)

Water——Hashi ; bring some water, quick !
from inside the temple.

(HASHI goes out)

Alas ! How terribly you are bleeding.
*(PRINCESS begins to remove his broken
armour and turban with the lotus still
affixed.)* All honour to you, brave soldier !
In life and death alike you are blessed ;
you have counted life as nothing for the
sake of justice, for the sake of the country.
Yet why do my tears fall, try as I may to
keep them back ? Ah me ! a broken spear-
head is lodged in his breast ; the blood flows
as if it would never be staunched.

*(Drawing out the spear-head and quickly
tearing a piece out of the flowing end of her veil,
she wipes away the blood.)*

DHRUVA

(waving his hands still with closed eyes)

Despicable hound ! Vile ingrate !

PRINCESS

Calm yourself, you have come back victorious.

DHRUVA

(opening his eyes)

My lady, my Princess! Is it you, my sister? To-day my joy knows no bounds. The King is safe, and the General foiled—Ah!—

(Faints away again, HASHI comes with a water-jar.)

PRINCESS

(washing DHRUVA'S wounds)

Hasten Hashi, and bring ointments and medicine; and tell anyone you meet on the way to bring a palanquin. *(HASHI runs out)* Alas! Will not these wounds open the eyes of the King? Falsehood prevails but for a little while; Truth reigns for ever.

DHRUVA

(with closed eyes)

Where is he gone? Where is he? I can't get at him!

PRINCESS

Don't excite yourself, my brother. Alas! He is still in the midst of the fight. What is this that has been loosened from his breast, and being washed shines like a star? What can it be? Surely not the amulet of my lost brother? My brother! Oh my hero, my flesh and blood! All these years I have waited for you: My dearest, O dearer above all things, have you come to me only in death?

(As she bends down to embrace DHRUVA-KUMAR the King enters and stands surprised and aghast.)

KING

Then it is true! My heart ever refused to believe it. Yet it is true, it is true: O Lord! may your thunderbolt strike me down this instant!

PRINCESS

(startled and standing up)

O Father, O King! Your own child—it is your own——

KING

(grasping his sword)

Stop! You shameless wretch, stop! Vile monster! Cursed am I, and my royal race that you are my child: with this sword——no——no! I shall not taint my sword by spilling the sinful blood of yours.

(Goes out quickly, meets GENERAL on the way and stops short in a commanding attitude)

General, let arrangements for a sacrifice before Goddess Chamunda be made ready instantly, and let the corpse of that soldier be delivered into the hands of low caste people to be burnt.

GENERAL

It is done, Your Majesty.

(Both go out)

PRINCESS

Have patience O my heart! What shall I do? How shall I save him? *(Sitting down again, and breaking off a petal from the lotus)* I will

write on this petal with his blood : there is no time ; no time to lose, O my heart ! Sustain me for a moment ! O Death ! Grant me a moment's time ; O God ! Give me strength. (*Writes on the petal dipping the spear-head in blood*) Who will take this to the King ? All is lost ! They are coming ! Alas ! Alas !

(*Enter the JESTER*)

Praise be to God ! It is only a friend.

JESTER

I return alive again, Princess ! The battle is ended, but alas ! that I should see our saviour in this plight.

PRINCESS

The medicine ?—Why does not Hashi return with the medicine ?

JESTER

I met Hashi on the way, she has gone for a palanquin and I have brought this rare medicine ; it has great healing properties and will stop the bleeding. I had it from a real Sadhu. Have no fear Princess, the Captain will revive instantly.

PRINCESS

Give me the medicine. You go, go at once with this petal.

JESTER

Where and on what errand again? I have not yet got back my breath, Madam! (*Taking the petal*) What is this? It is written with blood!

PRINCESS

Go at once! Don't lose an instant. Give this petal to the King, with this star and tell him that this soldier is his own son. His lost child is found to be living and a hero.

JESTER

Can this be true? Is he really our own Prince? The dead come back to life!

PRINCESS

Yes, it is true. Go and convey the news to the King at once, or I shall not be able to save him from the hands of the enemy. Be quick with the speed of lightning.

JESTER

What joy! Our Prince that was dead is alive. I must fly this moment. The King must learn this good news from me first. This is a fitting opportunity to reveal myself. (*Goes out quickly.*)

PRINCESS

(applying medicine to the wounds of her brother)

Wonderful! The flow of blood has already ceased; why does not Hashi come back with the palanquin? Whose foot-steps are those I hear? Alas! All is fruitless! Perhaps all my efforts are in vain, O Merciful God!

(The GENERAL enters and stands near the wing with soldiers behind the scenes. He gives the Princess a military salute.)

GENERAL

A palanquin is ready for your Highness—

PRINCESS

There is no need for a palanquin for me. Please wait one moment. I am going on foot to the temple of Chamunda without delay.

GENERAL

Pardon me, your Highness, I shall not allow that cruel order to be executed as long as I am alive. Please do not delay.

PRINCESS

I thank you, General, but cannot disobey the commands of the King. I have only one favour to ask of you.

GENERAL

Be pleased to command me: I am but your Highness's servant.

PRINCESS

Let none of these soldiers touch this body lying here.

GENERAL

(aside)

So this is how she loves him! How my heart burns and bleeds! *(aloud)* Pardon me, noble Princess, I can risk disobeying the King's commands for the sake of your Highness, but for a common soldier——

PRINCESS

A common soldier! (*aside*) No, I must not reveal the truth yet.

GENERAL

Soldiers! Lift up this body and go.

(*Soldiers advance*)

PRINCESS

My children! Do not touch him. Stand off, stand aloof at the bidding of your Princess.

(*Soldiers stand at a distance and look at the GENERAL in fear.*)

GENERAL

Princess, you are inciting them to disobey the King's orders.

PRINCESS

The King ordered his dead body to be removed. This soldier is still alive.

GENERAL

(*turning to the audience*)

(*aside*)

I cannot endure it any more: still alive! With my sword, I could mince him into a

thousand pieces this very instant. But that would only frustrate my plans. (*Turning round, aloud*) Soldiers! I command you to stand by till I call you. (*They retire*) As your Highness commands, her servant will always be ready to obey. Even laying down his life were a trifle, but—but he hopes that that he will receive his reward——

PRINCESS

What reward do you seek?

GENERAL

I want——I want——you to be my queen.

PRINCESS

O Mother Earth! Burst asunder, and receive me! Hide me in your bosom.

GENERAL

(*angrily*)

You who do not think it a shame to serve a common soldier——for you to be my queen——

PRINCESS

Stop, you villain ! Silence !

(Looks up as if supplicating Heaven. Dhruva-kumar gets up suddenly, and takes up his fallen sword.)

GENERAL

(taken aback, retreats and draws his sword)

Is it a ghost ?

DHURVA

Vile wretch ! Defend yourself.

(Rushes up to the General and they fight.)

For such insufferable insolence take this—
this be your meet reward.

(The General falls to the ground behind the scenes.)

GENERAL

Oh pain, Oh agony ! Soldiers, come, seize
him, bind him—vengeance ! VENGEANCE !!

DHRUVAKUMAR

(Throwing down his sword and turning round)

The Lord of Justice be praised ! Now I shall have no regrets even if I die.

PRINCESS

(coming near)

The brave never die. They are immortal in their deeds.

DHRUVAKUMAR

(kneeling)

Sister, Your words inspire me with new strength.

CURTAIN

END OF THIRD SCENE

FOURTH SCENE

SIDE VIEW OF THE PALACE

Garden

(The KING and JESTER are discovered standing in a grove of palms. Behind is a divisible curtain with two sidewings depicting a garden scene. It is a dawn-like afternoon, suffused with a mild red glow from the setting sun, half-hidden amidst grey-blue clouds, massed on a pale gold back-ground. Shady bushes outline the bank of the distant river.)

KING

(Looking at the amulet)

Is he really alive? Tell me Jester, is Captain Dhruvakumar my own son? Is it true, or only a fleeting delusion?

JESTER

It is God's own truth, Your Majesty. Our Prince is really alive, and behold! here is our hero, comes in the flesh.

(Enter Dhruvakumar, pale and walking with difficulty. He is bareheaded and barefoot. His bandaged wounds are covered with a long loose cloak, tied at the waist where the lotus is affixed.)

KING

(Advancing eagerly)

What do I see? My own long-lost son!
O my son, my son, have you really been
restored to me at last? But why do I
doubt? Dhruva, the Truth, can never die.
It may be hidden for a while, only to shine
forth in all its glory. Come, my son, never
leave me again.

(Holds out his hands.)

DHRUVAKUMAR

(Kneeling eagerly)

I crave your blessing father. Grant my
prayer I beseech you and save my sister's life.
She is at the sacrificial altar, at Your Majesty's
command.

(Rises)

KING

Oh horror! My innocent child! At the sacrificial altar at my command! I shall go mad! How am I to save her! O God! give me the speed of an arrow, and preserve my beloved child.

(Rushes out frantically)

JESTER

It may not yet be too late to prevent this appalling disaster. Let us follow him, Prince.

(Exit both)

* * * * *

(The wings of the curtain slide apart, revealing the Temple of Chamunda. The sacrificial sword lies at the feet of the Image. Incense burns in the brasier. The priest and chanter stand by the PRINCESS and both look ashamed and aghast. HASHI, LATA, PATA, PHUL and RENU stand by weeping).

PRINCESS

Delay no more, your Holiness. Do not disobey the King's command.

PRIEST

Mother, I cannot obey this command. I cannot worship the Mother-Goddess with my mother's blood. To-day I resign my office as Royal Priest.

PRINCESS

(advancing to the Chanter)

Then you, Royal Chanter, Why waste further time, Your Beneficence? Fulfil the King's behest. *(Takes up the sacrificial sword from the ground.)* Take this sword. Relieve me of the sin of transgressing a paternal and royal command.

CHANTER

(with downcast face, mutters)

I cannot. I will not do it.

HASHI

(suddenly snatches the sword from the PRINCESS and kneeling, places it at the CHANTER'S feet)

Your Beneficence, take my blood for that of the Princess.

PRINCESS

Rise, Hashi ! I command you to rise.

PATA

Sacrifice me instead !

LATA

Me, Your Beneficence !

PHUL AND RENU

No, me, me, Your Reverence——

(They all kneel down with hands held out imploringly.)

PRINCESS

My dear, dear friends, do not hinder me in my duty ! Hearten me ! Give me courage ! Rise !

(The Girls rise weeping, and pray to the Goddess. The Princess kneels at the altar with eyes closed and hands clasped in deep meditation)

ALL THE GIRLS

O Merciful Mother, protect us. Deliver us from tribulation——Deliver us this day——

HASHI

(with uplifted faces sings)

*O King of kings, Thou God of righteousness,
Shine forth in glory, trample down all wrong,
Relieve the innocent of their distress,
And from the agony they've suffered long.*

PATA AND LATA

(with uplifted faces sing)

*O Just and Beautiful, O King Eterne
Of Goodness, wake and raise thy sceptre now!
And wield Thy flashing sword of justice stern,
And strike down all injustice at a blow.*

PHUL AND RENU

(with uplifted faces, sing)

*All-gracious Lord, God of the Universe,
With trident of Thy all-destroying wrath,
Slay sinful arrogance, dark clouds disperse,
Rescue the helpless from destruction's path.*

HASHI

*But where art Thou, O Father, loving-king,
Why no response to hearts that Thee entreat?
Why no assuring message dost Thou bring
Thy tortured children, prostrate at Thy feet?*

ALL

*Art Thou too, O All-powerful, without power
 To crush Thy challenger? And dost Thou
 stand
 Shorn of all might and truth, Thine ancient
 dower,
 A helpless prisoner in Satan's hand?
 Hast Thou made him Thy Lord? Oh! where
 shall go
 All tortured, exiled souls to ease their woe?*

PRINCESS

(sings)

*All-knowing Judge and Father, if this be
 Thy will, then let Thy will be done. I yield
 Unto Thy wish, upon Thine altar, free
 I sacrifice myself, Oh, be our shield!
 I pray thee as I die, deliver us
 From shame and fear, for ever may we rise
 With hopes renewed, a nation glorious,
 From dust and ashes spring unto the skies.*

CHANTER

I will not allow this dastardly act to be
 accomplished. No——never—— I go to seek
 His Majesty——

HASHI

Come, oh come! let us all lay ourselves at His Majesty's feet, till he yields.

(The Chanter, Hashi and the girls run out.)

PRIEST

(feeding the fire with oblations)

O Goddess Chamunda! Wake and wield thy power to crush this sinful plan and preserve her innocent life.

(Enter the QUEEN with MATANGINI)

QUEEN

What! Have you all failed in your duty? Cowardly Priest! You are no better than a criminal.

PRIEST

(rising up and in dignified reproof)

Your Majesty ill considers your words! It is incumbent on me to hurl the thousand and one curses on you from the Book of Tantras, which will benefit your wicked soul.

(Goes out to fetch the Book)

QUEEN

(shrugging)

We must avail ourselves of this opportunity, Matangini. You have ever been a staunch friend to me. This is the supreme test of your devotion. Come, take this sword.

(Holds out the sword)

MATANGINI

(Takes the sword as if about to obey, then lets it fall)

Pardon me O Queen, I cannot—all else you may be pleased to command me I will do, but not this.

QUEEN

So at this fateful moment, you too desert me! Was it not you, who to please me killed her brother—the infant Prince?

MATANGINI

No, Madam, I did not—I could not—even at your bidding.

QUEEN

So you deceived me then and defy me now !
Then look——there is one who can and will do
the deed——

PRINCESS

I salute you, mother ! Take this life from
me. Let the kingdom have peace——

QUEEN

(lifts the sword)

Bend your neck, sinful girl——

PRINCESS

(bending as requested)

Alas, all this trouble is for my unworthy
sake ! Oh Goddess Mother, be propitiated with
your victim ! Let all the ills and troubles of
this kingdom cease with my ceasing ! Accept
me I pray, as a peace-offering !

QUEEN

*(As she raises the sword, a sudden faintness
seizes her, and her hand becomes paralysed
and remains out-stretched)*

O Goddess Chamunda ! What is this ? Have
mercy !

PRIEST

(returning and running towards the Queen)

Hold thy hand—thou vampire !

(But before he could snatch away the sword from the Queen, it falls from her benumbed hand and the Princess is struck down. The Priest stands motionless and aghast.)

KING

(rushing in)

What is this ? Is it an evil dream ?

PRIEST

(with hands clasped)

No, Your Majesty, it is the awakening !

KING

Kalyani, dearest child ! *(Flinging himself down by her.)* I too have offered you as a sacrifice. I, your father !*(Rising in distracted sorrow and facing the Goddess.)*

O blood-thirsty monster ! What have you done !

(Then suddenly espying the Queen, who is standing motionless like a statue.)

You fiend in the shape of woman! The disaster you have wrought is complete and irredeemable! May God accept your life-long penitence and cleanse your sinful soul in mercy, if not in this life, then in the next.

(Sinking down again by the Princess and gazing at her calm and smiling face.)

O thou beautiful angel! didst thou descend to this earth only to give us a glimpse of Heaven!

(Enter Dhruvakumar and the Jester)

DHRUVAKUMAR

(Kneeling down by the Princess, he takes the lotus from his girdle and places it reverently at her feet)

My own loving sister, am I to lose you for ever! Your lotus put new life into me, and I now lay this precious blossom at your feet as an emblem of eternal love.

(The Princess with a wan smile glances at them, and feebly raises her hand in the act of blessing; then the hand drops down and the eyes close in eternal sleep.)

JESTER

Alas! This Gloria lotus will never again bloom on this earth.

(The priest lays his hands on the bowed heads of the King and the Prince, in the act of pronouncing benediction.)

Enter the Chanter and all the girls, as well as Sugandha and Madhugandha who scatter flowers over the Princess, while the others stand by weeping. The Priest approaches the sacrificial fire, and both he and the Chanter feed the fire which flames up brightly, while they chant Hymns from the Vedas.)

VEDIC CHANT

*O listen, denizens of earth,
Ye children of immortal birth!
I know that sunlike Being divine,
Beyond the darkness He doth shine.
Know Him and conquer death I say,
Know Him; there is no other way.*

CURTAIN

THE END OF THE THIRD ACT

EPILOGUE

(Same scene as the Prologue. The King is discovered praying, in the garb of an ascetic who has renounced the world.)

KING

Darkness had long reigned before my eyes, but now that darkness, that blinding mist has been washed clean away in the red tide of her sacred blood ! To these eyes of mine, once so blind, those dear eyes of hers, now closed for ever, have bequeathed some of their own true vision ; to-day I stand fully awake, never to sleep again ; face to face with truth at last.

(Enter DHRUVAKUMAR, and salutes the KING.)

DHRUVA

Let her will be done.

Let human sacrifice be forbidden in this Temple from this day. Let false faith in religion's holy name, and injustice and oppression be banished from our realm for evermore.

*Hail, Power benign and beautiful,
Hail, Truth, all hail to thee.*

(Enter Jester and HASHI, as well as all the GIRLS dressed in the saffron-coloured robes of the Indian devotee, each carrying a flag, the emblems of Love, Truth and Peace, They join in the song)

*Hail, Power benign and beautiful,
Hail, truth, all hail to thee.
Grief holds no fear, death leads from here
To immortality !
May love and peace bring sweet release
To all humanity !
May evil conquered be !
From thine eternal fount
May songs of gladness mount,
And lead Earth's minstrelsy.
All hail, all victory to you,
The good, the beautiful, the true !*

(Suddenly the sky is brilliantly illuminated.)

(Enter the Deity of the Sky, singing)

SKY

*But lo, what light resplendent reigns and
blooms,
It is the Dawn ! The God of Fortune wakes !*

(Enter the Deity of Earth singing)

*From age-long slumber, bursts his prison-
ing tomb,
With eyes wide open, slumber off him shakes.*

(Enter the Deity of Ocean singing)

*The whole world stands in wonder, while
his sword
Of Justice lights horizons limitless!*

ALL THREE

*A new millennium's here, the holy word
Proclaimed triumphant, no more in distress
Or grief or fear; 'tis evil trembles now,
Good triumphs! Hail, thou ever-lasting Glory!*

ALL

*(including KING, DHRUVAKUMAR
and ATTENDANTS)*

*All peace, love, justice be our song; allow
A nation's voice to chant the glorious story!*

THE END

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