

Born in 1921 in an Orissa village, Manoranjan Das studied in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack and joined All India Radio, where he had a distinguished career and rose to be the Producer (Emeritus) of Akashvani and Doordarshan. He wrote his first play when he was an undergraduate student. Sri Das's plays focus on man's ceaseless attempts at a meaningful existence and the attendant agony. Most of his plays are multidimensional-social, symbolic philosophical at the same time.

*The Wild Harvest* is an English rendering of his Sahitya Akademi Award (1971) winning play *Aranya Fasal*. It unravels the hypocrisy and suppressed sex pervading the modern urban life. Two women and three men meet in a forest bungalow as their past relationships came to weigh heavily on their present.

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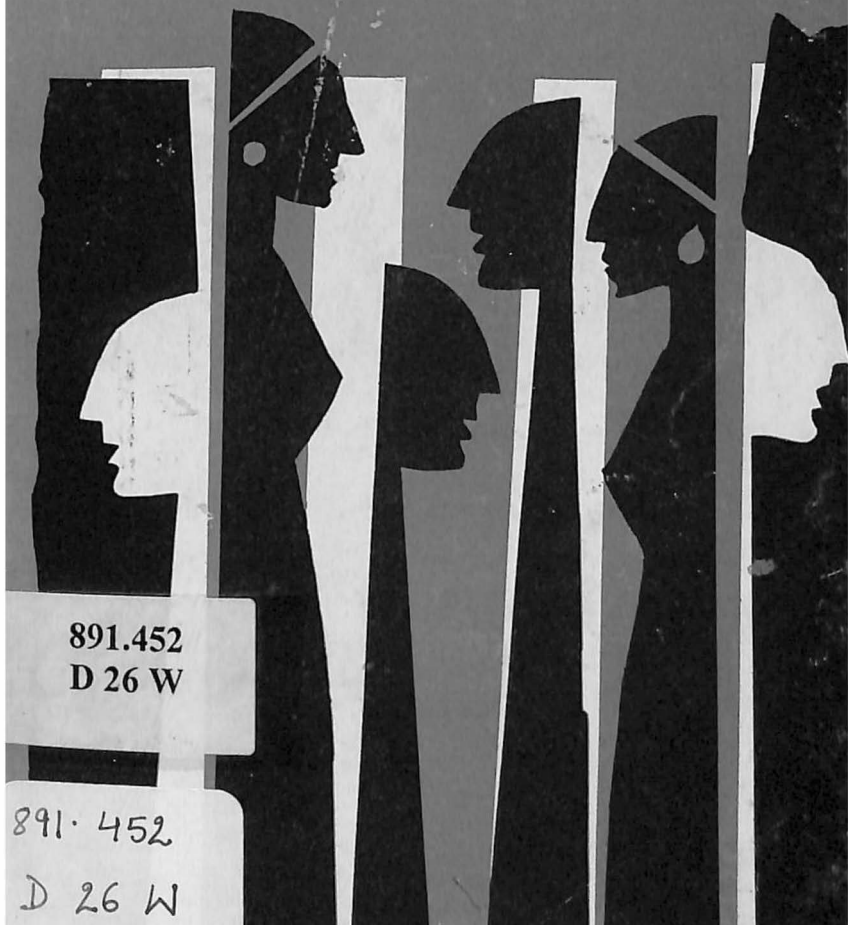


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Sahitya Akademi Award Winning Oriya Play

# The Wild Harvest

Manoranjan Das



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## THE WILD HARVEST

**The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.**

**From : Nagarjunakonda. 2nd century A.D.**

**Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.**

Manoranjan Das  
**THE WILD HARVEST**

*Translated by*  
Prabhat Nalini Das  
Jatindra Mohan Mohanty



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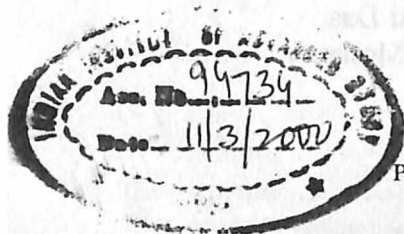
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## FOREWORD

THE WILD HARVEST is one of the major plays of the Oriya theatre which till the 1960s was concerned with either mythology and romance or with social realism with sufficient critical awareness. *The Wild Harvest* which won the Sahitya Akademi award is a departure from the tradition established by playwrights like the late Kali Charan Patnaik or Gopal Chhotrai. The play had been considered as an example of the 'absurd drama'. The author in his preface to the first printing in Oriya refers to the disinterested and fractured life of modern man for whom life has lost all coherence and meaning. The agony of the age is sought to be communicated in language which is no longer an adequate vehicle for it. Hence the language of drama has to be incoherent to suggest the disjointed nature of modern life itself. Ideas like the above which are at the back of the absurd theatre may not find a universal response in our society as a whole, but in the urban-elitist sector there is considerable evidence of the pain and anguish experienced by the sensitive and sophisticated mind in trying to live an intelligent and sane life.

The development of the dramatic art of Manoranjan Das, whose name today is generally mentioned along with Biswajit Das and Bijoy Mishra, shows his awareness of and response to the changes in the cultural life of our country. The *angst* that is manifest in *The Wild Harvest* is not found in Das's earlier



plays. The plays he wrote from the 1960s onwards reveal a quest for meaning in life and ceaseless experiment in form to transmit the experience of the artist in relation to life as a whole. It must be said, however, that in his experiments, the author has not come to a kind of dead end or to a realization that all modern art is to culminate in silence. The use of folk traditions in a play like *The Wooden Horse* (1973) obviously is an indication of the triumph of the forces of life in their immemorial continuity over the forces of death and despair.

*The Wild Harvest* makes use of a dramatic situation of coincidence and revelation of inner character. From this point of view the play resembles Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton*, in which a group of persons are stranded in an island and Barrie shows that even if one gets a second chance, character refuses to change. The masks which people wear in ordinary social life are cast off and their inner selves stand revealed in such a situation. In *The Wild Harvest* the author brings together in a dak bungalow three men and two women all of whom have a past in the sense that at the same place, some time in the past, four of them had met and established relationships amongst themselves. These relationships have been kept hidden under social masks since Baby is now married to Subrat, Lily to Mr Verma and Sangram has turned into a gold prospector. When the second chance comes into their lives they find themselves helpless in the face of their inner drives, urges, compulsions and the cowardice and inhibitions which social behaviour requires of them. On the earlier occasion Sangram and Baby had gone to the very place and met Lily and Subrat. Like Eliot's protagonist they had not been able to take the step into the rose garden. But on this occasion they are prepared to dare to take a plunge into extreme situations and the relationships between Subrat and Baby, Subrat and Lily, Sangram and Baby, Sangram and Lily, Lily and Mr

Verma undergo a profound change. But is this change worthwhile? Had it been so the question of escape into romantic vistas by purling streams or into the unknown as is posed by Subrat or Sangram would not have occurred. These characters have an inner deficiency and they try to conceal it by conjuring up a realm of fantasy. It is here that the author's insight into the human condition in modern civilization is relevant and pertinent. Owing to the pervasive element of instability and uncertainty in modern civilization dominated by a sense of flux arising out of the march of science and technology, 'modernism' becomes an attitude of life. This attitude can be meaningful only when an artist can discover meaning in the midst of meaninglessness, or else the nature of art becomes questionable. The plays of Samuel Beckett, for that matter, in spite of all their merit leave a sense of utter loneliness and despondency echoing the myth of Sisyphus. Since such a cultural crisis does not exist in our country, absurdity can only be revelation of 'flux' or the sheer transience of all values as is the case with *The Wild Harvest* in which the equation in the third act is between the goat and the characters in the context of their varying degrees of wildness or domesticity. But they are so governed by the social codes that they all look like hypocrites, except Sangram, who although called an 'Actor' is perhaps the only one who is true to himself and hence is able to see beneath the mask of hypocrisy which they put on. Hence to him: 'Everything's unnatural ... absurd ... Subrat ... Lily ... Verma ... Baby ... tiger-hunt ... the goat ... the banks of the stream ... contempt ... suspicion ... picnic ... hypocrisy.' Thus the 'Actor' is the only genuine person, and the genuine persons are actors in this plot woven round suspicion and hypocrisy. In such a world, life for one who has adhered to purity and holiness becomes meaningless. Sangram who has been quoting from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* resorts to real acting to

kill himself creating a situation that is reminiscent of the well-known film *A Double Life* in which an actor performs a real act of murder, and also, to an extent, of Albee's *The Zoo Story*.

The play which is divided into three acts builds up the action slowly but certainly in the first two acts in which the gaiety and frolic of a picnic is crossed by the hints which are thrown from time to time to suggest the earlier relationship between Sangram and Baby and Lily. This introduces an element of tension in the action which gets complicated with the introduction of the preparation for the tiger-hunt. The main action, however, is brought back into focus when Subrat comes back from the hunt and in the ensuing scenes they exhibit their unstable character. The end which is melodramatic has been contrived to bring into sharp contrast the actor and the non-actors, to underscore the transvaluation of the values being suggested so long in the human relationships presented in the play.

*The Wild Harvest* is not an absurd play like the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Adamov. What Das is primarily concerned with here is the shallow, insincere, fleeting, sensational and escapist trends in the character of modern man. Such a concern is characteristic of him in as much as in his plays like *The Wild Swan* and *The Word Script* he has exhibited the same concern although with different and more advanced techniques. The four main characters—Subrat, Sangram, Baby and Lily—are representative of the urban, rootless life of the modern age. Subrat resembles Prufrock in not having the courage to perform an act of daring during his first visit to the dak bungalow with Baby and his accidental meeting with Lily there. Sangram, on the other hand, lives in a make-believe world and hence does not have the stature of a tragic character. The end, therefore, is necessarily melodrama in spite of the ironical killing of a goat. Tragedy, we are told, originated in such killing or sacrifice. The modern age

is bereft of the tragic sense of life. Mr Verma, however, is a contrast to the other characters. He lacks refinement, can glibly lie about himself and has a passion for hunting. The Chowkidar is the only character drawn from ordinary life, a simple rustic who provides an element of relief in the dramatic action. The presence of such a character is ample evidence of the presence of a positive view of life in contrast to the actions performed by the main characters whose disorientation from life makes love and personal relationship a meaningless pastime—the picnic is the symbol of that attitude.

The language used in the play is a clue to the attitudes of the characters. The dialogues are often in stichomythia, staccato in rhythm, echoes of one another thereby suggesting the restlessness, anxiety and tension which characterize modern man.

In the Preface to *The Wooden Horse*, Das says that as society is a dynamic organization, with the passage of time, the wants, difficulties, happiness and sorrow of the socially controlled human beings have also changed. Man's life is no longer as simple as it was in the past. If drama is to discharge its responsibility to society, to man, it has to touch some aspect of the anguished life of modern man to reveal his essential helplessness and reflect the disorganization of his thinking.

*The Wild Harvest*, I think, will help the reader in understanding and appreciating the modern attitude and sensibility that the author has tried to exhibit in his obiter dicta.

BIDHU BHUSAN DAS

## CHARACTERS

SUBRAT

BABY

CHOWKIDAR

LILY

MR VERMA

SANGRAM OR THE ACTOR

## ACT ONE

*A dak bungalow in the midst of a mountain forest. There are three rooms. The middle one is used as a drawing room. It has five or six chairs, a long table and upstage there is a chest. The walls are decorated with disproportionately large pictures of wild animals, two wild boars fighting; or a deer being chased by a tiger; or wild animals like tigers, foxes, deer and wild boars etc. congregated near a stream. In front of the middle room upstage is the entrance to the dak bungalow; through the entrance can be seen a long corridor. On the two sides of the main room are two rooms with doors opening to the drawing room. On both sides of the door upstage are two windows with bars. Through the door and windows the corridor outside can be clearly seen as also the jungle and mountain in the distance. It is afternoon. Subrat opens the door leading into the room from outside and comes in. He has a small suitcase in his hand. He is young and serious and cautious in speech. His wife Baby follows him. She is frail and feeble. She has the habit of suddenly bursting into a flow of speech and then lapsing into complete silence. He places the suitcase on the table, goes to the windows and opens them, leans out of the second one and shouts.*

SUBRAT. Chowkidar ! . . . Chowkidar ! . . .

*(He turns round from the window and finds Baby standing as before, still holding the suitcase; as he takes the suitcase from her.)*

What is it ?

BABY. H'm . . . ?

SUBRAT. What's bothering you ?

BABY. Nothing.

SUBRAT. What's the matter with you ?

BABY. What ?

SUBRAT. Nothing ?

BABY. Nothing.

SUBRAT. You can sit down . . .

BABY (*as she sits down absent-mindedly*). Oh . . . . Yes . . .

SUBRAT. Do I have to ask you to open the suitcase ?

BABY. Would you like me to take out your clothes ?

SUBRAT. Only mine ?

BABY. Are you asking about mine ?

SUBRAT. Aren't you going to change ?

BABY. Do I look dirty ?

SUBRAT. Well . . . the dusty road . . .

BABY (*absent-mindedly as before*). Yes . . . . Yes . . .

*(She goes to one of the suitcases and starts taking out the clothes.)*

SUBRAT. Just take it easy, Baby, relax. We'll be here for three days.

BABY. Here ?

SUBRAT (*with some clothes in his hands*). What else did we come here for ?

BABY. But here ?

SUBRAT. Of course we're going to be here. We'll have fun . . .

BABY. Did you bring me here to have fun ?

SUBRAT. What else did you think ?

BABY. No, nothing.

*(She gets up and looks out as if she scans things outside to take a good look at them.)*

You probably knew I'd object to coming here.

SUBRAT. Why should you ?

BABY. Then why didn't you tell me before we came ?

SUBRAT. I thought I'd give you a surprise.

BABY. But if the hills object . . .

SUBRAT. Why? This place is lovely . . . mountains . . . forests all around . . . so secluded.

BABY. No, we won't stay here.

SUBRAT. But, Baby . . . !

BABY. We've the car with us. Let's go somewhere else . . .

SUBRAT. But . . . why not . . .

BABY. But I fail to see what's so striking about this place.

*(As she says the last part of the sentence she leans out of the window.)*

SUBRAT. Have you been here before ?

BABY. Chowkidar . . .

SUBRAT. Where has he gone ?

BABY *(with the gesture of shouting louder)*. Chowkidar . . .

SUBRAT *(going to Baby and leaning out)*. Chowkidar . . .

*(Baby comes back to the middle of the room and starts folding the clothes. Subrat comes back to her.)*

SUBRAT. He's coming . . .

BABY *(as she folds the clothes and keeps them inside the suitcase, she tries to feel for something with her hands.)*

Where's . . . ?

SUBRAT *(bursts into a stream of words)*. I told you . . . we'll be completely free from our routine here.

BABY. Are you going to look at me all day?

SUBRAT. That's why I haven't brought a single book with me.

BABY. Oh, what a pity, the books must be moping.

SUBRAT. Tch . . . tch . . . they must be weeping.

BABY. Oh, poor things . . .

SUBRAT. You're jealous of them . . . even here ?

BABY. No, not of the books.

SUBRAT. Of me . . .



BABY. Yes . . . .

SUBRAT. I don't object to your sitting with them all day.

BABY. I'm not a Professor.

SUBRAT. That isn't all that you can say about me . . .

BABY. Of the University . . .

SUBRAT. Of Philosophy.

BABY. Does a Philosophy Professor ever have fun ?

SUBRAT (*laughing*). Do you think he only sits and reads all day ?

BABY (*with disregard*). No.

SUBRAT. That's why . . . here . . .

BABY. What a wonderful idea . . .

SUBRAT. Three days off . . .

BABY. We'll have fun . . .

SUBRAT. We'll forget everything . . .

BABY. Everything . . . ?

SUBRAT. Everything.

BABY. And you won't sit down to your books ?

SUBRAT. No.

BABY. What'll I do ?

SUBRAT. You will sing . . .

BABY. Shouldn't I dance ?

SUBRAT. Did you dance when you were in college ?

BABY. No, I acted.

SUBRAT. I've never acted.

BABY. Never ?

SUBRAT. But I've seen plays.

BABY. Do you like acting ?

SUBRAT. Yes, I like good acting.

BABY. I see . . .

SUBRAT. We'll go out for walks in the morning.

BABY. To the stream . . .

SUBRAT. Stream ? (*with a surprised look*) How did you know

that ?

BABY (*laughing*). I thought there must be one . . .

(*During the conversation Subrat has gone to the window. Suddenly looking out.*)

SUBRAT. He's coming . . .

BABY. The Chowkidar . . . ?

(*Subrat nods assent, smiling. The Chowkidar enters. He is advanced in years. His manner of speaking indicates the desire to please. He curtsseys quietly and in an attitude of eagerness takes out the screens from the chest upstage and gets busy hanging them on the windows.*)

SUBRAT. Hi there.

CHOWKIDAR (*still busy hanging the curtains*). Sorry, I was a little late, sir . . . People don't come this side these days, sir. I'd kept some hens . . . one or two eggs when people came here now and then . . . But the place is infested with wild cats, sir. They have wrung their necks . . . all of them . . . finished. (*Humbly*) How long can I sit idle ? So now I've kept a goat, sir . . .

SUBRAT. A goat . . . ?

CHOWKIDAR. I tie it up on one side of the kitchen corridor. It's a wild animal, sir, and if it's let loose, it'll run away to the barren hills. It jumps over thorny bushes and cactus and runs ahead. I'm an old man, sir, how can I chase it . . .

SUBRAT (*joking*). So, did you manage to bring it back or have you left it on the barren hills ?

CHOWKIDAR. I've brought it back, sir.

BABY (*all on a sudden*). The goat is a domestic animal.

CHOWKIDAR (*pausing in his work*). Ma'am . . .

BABY. The hen is a domestic bird.

CHOWKIDAR (*still wondering*). Ma'am . . .

BABY. The cow is a . . .

CHOWKIDAR (*unable to understand*). Ma'am ... ?

SUBRAT. You see, you don't see many goats in the city, that's why ...

CHOWKIDAR. Oh, yes ... Oh, yes, sir ...

SUBRAT. Then when do you start chasing the goat again ?

CHOWKIDAR. No, sir ... there's nothing more to be done here ... I've filled the buckets in the bathroom ... the village is just there ... a quarter of a mile away. There's a small shop ... and a school ... I've bought all the foodstuff for the night, sir ...

SUBRAT. Fine, fine ...

CHOWKIDAR. The bungalow has two living rooms. This one ... and that one. You've reserved both, so whichever you want ... Please come and take a look, ma'am, whichever you choose ... (*He opens the doors of the two rooms and looking at the door right.*) This is the door to this room and (*looking at the door L.*) this is the door to that room, but it has a window without bars, which leads outside. One may jump out of it ... now and then, sir ... to the kitchen.

SUBRAT. Why don't you go ? ...

BABY. And see the room ? (*Starts moving, then changes her mind and sits down.*) What if I don't go ...

SUBRAT. They must be reaching any time now ...

BABY. They ?

SUBRAT (*teasing*). Guess who ?

BABY. Who ?

SUBRAT (*changing the topic*). Chowkidar ...

BABY (*rises, and goes to Subrat*). Tell me.

SUBRAT. So you can't guess.

BABY. No.

SUBRAT (*laughing to whet her curiosity*). And you can't even wait.

BABY. Tell me. Come on.

SUBRAT. Have you filled up the pitchers, Chowkidar?

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, sir.

SUBRAT. In all the rooms?

CHOWKIDAR (*while going into room*). Yes, sir. Drinking water in the pitcher . . . . Water for washing in the bucket.

SUBRAT (*enters room R. following the Chowkidar in the attitude of checking if everything is all right.*) H'm.

BABY (*sits down*). Ugh . . .

(*Mr Verma enters.*)

VERMA. Oh . . .

(*Mr Verma is elderly. He is strangely dressed. A camera hangs from one of his shoulders and a rifle from the other. Numerous packets in his hands.*)

BABY (*getting up*). Oh . . .

VERMA. Hello, Baby, I hope there's nothing wrong.

BABY (*absent-mindedly*). H'm.

VERMA. I bet, nothing is wrong.

BABY. Oh, no . . .

VERMA (*goes on handing over the packets to her one by one while she keeps putting them on the table.*) Tea . . .

BABY (*looking at the packet*). Leaf tea . . .

VERMA. Coffee . . .

BABY. Roasted . . .

VERMA. Milk . . .

BABY. Condensed . . .

VERMA. Snacks . . .

BABY (*tears each packet at the corner to see what's inside*).

Salted biscuits, cashew-nuts, savouries . . .

(*She keeps them.*)

VERMA. Crispics? (*inspecting the other packets and finding them*) Oh, yes. They're here. Good.

BABY (*taking the packet*). Good.

VERMA (*takes out the camera*). Camera.

BABY. Rifle. (*She takes the rifle off Mr Verma's shoulder and tries to aim outside.*) Loaded?

VERMA (*laughing*). No.

BABY. Cartridges?

VERMA (*remembers and looks for them in all his various pockets, then moves to the window and calls out*).

Lily, I've left the box of cartridges on the rear seat.

(*As Subrat enters he hears Mr Verma.*)

SUBRAT. On the rear seat . . . ?

(*He goes out without waiting. The Chowkidar also follows him. Baby goes to the table in the middle and places the rifle on it.*)

VERMA. It's a powerful rifle. I once killed a tiger with it.

BABY. Are there tigers here?

VERMA. We'll see. If we have luck . . .

BABY. Bound to be some deer at least.

VERMA. Perhaps.

BABY. But there must be goats here, for sure.

VERMA. Goats?

BABY. Yes, goats—that eat thorny cacti.

(*Mr Verma looks at her in surprise. She laughs and explains.*)  
The goat is a domestic animal . . . goat . . . domestic. (*She laughs aloud. Mr Verma also laughs, but without understanding. Lily Verma enters. She is about thirty-five, plump, dressed sparingly in smart ultra-modern clothes. Between the saree and the blouse a thick roll of flesh. Subrat and Lily bring in a basket of fruits, with the box of cartridges on the top, lifting and swinging it from both sides. The Chowkidar follows with two or three suitcases in his hands. After all the things are piled on the table . . .*)

LILY. Hullo, Baby . . .

BABY. Hullo.

*(The Chowkidar goes out during these preliminary greetings.)*

VERMA. How's everything, Subrat ?

SUBRAT. Fine.

VERMA. Lily, didn't I tell you that they'd have surely reached here earlier ? We'd sent word here earlier to arrange everything.

LILY. When did you reach ? How much earlier ?

BABY. Just now.

LILY. Makes no difference really.

SUBRAT. Baby isn't feeling well.

BABY. No.

LILY *(supporting her statement)*. No.

SUBRAT. She isn't happy over coming here.

LILY. Really, Baby ?

VERMA. Really ?

BABY. No, I'm not sick.

LILY. Why, it's a nice place.

SUBRAT. Mountains . . . all around.

BABY *(as she lifts the fruit-basket)*. Forests . . .

LILY. There may be tigers too.

VERMA. And you didn't want me to bring the rifle.

*(Subrat offers to help Baby and holds the basket.)*

BABY. Oh, I can manage *(She tries to lift the basket with an effort)*.

VERMA. Lily, why don't you . . .

LILY. Oh, of course. *(She helps Baby lift the basket and both carry it into the room R.)*

VERMA. Is Baby really sick ?

SUBRAT. No.

VERMA. But you said . . .

SUBRAT. No . . .

VERMA. Didn't you ?

SUBRAT. She's upset.

VERMA. But why ?

*(Lily enters.)*

LILY. Subrat, didn't you tell Baby ?

SUBRAT. About what ?

LILY. About coming here ?

VERMA. Really, Subrat . . .

SUBRAT. No, I didn't.

LILY. Why ?

*(Subrat laughs idiotically and passes on a suitcase to Lily.)*

VERMA. About our coming here ?

SUBRAT. No, I didn't.

LILY. It isn't fair, really . . . *(Lily goes back into the room with the suitcase.)*

SUBRAT. But what's so wrong about it ?

VERMA *(thinking)*. H'm . . . H'm . . .

SUBRAT. Do you hear ?

VERMA *(keeps quiet for a while, then as though he has finally found a solution)*. H'm.

SUBRAT. What's the matter ?

VERMA. I think . . .

SUBRAT. Is it all that bad ?

VERMA *(in a natural tone)*. May be.

SUBRAT. No.

VERMA. No ?

SUBRAT. Oh, she'll come round by and by.

VERMA. I see.

LILY *(as she comes back)*. But . . .

VERMA. Well ?

LILY. But why is Baby . . . ?

SUBRAT. It's a habit.

LILY. Oh, no.

VERMA. You think it could be something else ?

LILY (*to Subrat*) What else can it be ?

SUBRAT. No, I don't think so.

LILY. Strange.

SUBRAT. I tell you, she'll be all right by and by . . .

VERMA (*to Lily*). But of course, it's difficult to change a habit.

LILY. You telling me ?

VERMA. Well, what's yours ?

SUBRAT. Suppose she has one, so what ?

VERMA. Of course, it doesn't matter.

LILY. Now, if I go into your habits . . .

(*Baby enters and looks at them in bewilderment.*)

BABY. Well . . .

VERMA. Well ?

BABY. If we are to stay here, then the things . . .

(*Tries to lift up the other things.*)

SUBRAT. Didn't I say ?

BABY. What ?

SUBRAT. That you'll be all right soon.

BABY. Am I all right ?

SUBRAT. Of course.

BABY. Then it must be so.

(*She goes into the room with some more packets. Lily starts following her but Mr Verma takes away the packets from her hands.*)

VERMA. Wait a minute, let me arrange the room first.

(*Mr Verma goes in. Until his return Lily and Subrat talk freely and lightly. As they talk Lily casually munches fruits and snacks and offers some to Subrat.*)

LILY I wanted to drop out.



SUBRAT. Why ?

LILY. Mr Verma is not like you.

SUBRAT. What do you mean ?

LILY. I was like Baby at her age.

SUBRAT (*unable to comprehend*). Naturally.

LILY. I wasn't so fleshy then.

SUBRAT. Fleshy . . .

LILY. Mr Verma says I've put on flesh.

SUBRAT. He probably thinks so because he is a forest contractor.

Flesh isn't easy to tour around with, you know.

LILY. I don't have to tour.

SUBRAT. Of course, of course . . . well . . .

LILY. Has he been able to keep himself trim by touring ?

SUBRAT. What else ?

LILY. By failing.

SUBRAT. Failing ?

LILY. Five years in each class.

SUBRAT (*laughs*). Is that so ?

LILY. He couldn't even pass the Matriculation exams.

SUBRAT. Er . . . I didn't know that.

LILY. He ran away to Burma and learnt to work in the forest there.

SUBRAT. Really ?

LILY. He keeps that a secret.

SUBRAT. But you've told me.

LILY. Tch . . . tch . . . Ah . . . Ha. What a pity !

SUBRAT. Did you . . . meet him in Burma ?

LILY. No, here. After his return.

SUBRAT. I see.

LILY. And you ?

SUBRAT. Me ?

LILY. Yes, when did you meet . . . ?

SUBRAT. Meet Baby ?

LILY. No, Mr Verma.

SUBRAT. Well, I can't recollect exactly. But we were together in kindergarten. Then . . .

LILY. I know . . . last year, you mean ?

SUBRAT. Yes, I'd been to purchase timber for the construction of my house and I ran into Mr Verma in the saw-mill.

LILY. He told me about it the same evening.

SUBRAT. What did he tell you ?

LILY. That he had invited you for dinner.

SUBRAT. Yes, old friends, meeting after so many years.

LILY. Naturally.

SUBRAT. And how you glutted me that day.

LILY. Something to remember me by, wasn't it ?

SUBRAT. Sure. Otherwise I'd have forgotten.

LILY. You can't; you also took us home for an excellent dinner.

SUBRAT. Well, the credit goes to Baby.

LILY. Not to you ?

SUBRAT. Me ?

LILY. Now come on, don't say no.

SUBRAT. All right, all right.

LILY. But, Subrat, you didn't say . . .

SUBRAT. What ?

LILY (*moving closer to him*). Have I really put on too much weight ?

SUBRAT. Well, well, n-not really.

LILY. But Mr Verma says . . .

SUBRAT. Too bad.

LILY (*overjoyed*). Do you really mean it ?

SUBRAT (*smiling*). Yes . . . Yes, of course.

LILY. Oh. Come along.

SUBRAT. Where ?

LILY. But they . . .

SUBRAT. They must be arranging the rooms.

LILY. Do you like the rooms ?

SUBRAT. You mean the rooms or the place ?

LILY. The place.

SUBRAT. Yes, yes, it's beautiful. It's Mr Verma's choice, I'm sure.

LILY. No. (*Subrat looks surprised.*) It's mine.

SUBRAT. But you said . . .

LILY. Yes, I was thinking of dropping out.

SUBRAT. Why ?

LILY. Mr Verma is a gypsy.

SUBRAT. What do you mean ?

LILY. He likes to wander about alone.

SUBRAT. Baby says the same thing.

LILY. What ?

SUBRAT. That I like to be alone.

(*Mr Verma comes in.*)

VERMA. Wonderful . . .

SUBRAT (*suddenly gets busy picking up the remaining packets*).

No . . . I . . .

VERMA. Don't you worry, we'll move them by and by.

LILY. By and by ?

VERMA. You were busy . . . so I told Baby . . .

(*Baby comes in, with a steaming kettle in her hand.*)

BABY. The Chowkidar . . . he's great. There's a cute little oven . . . in the corner in that room.

LILY. Did he have hot water ?

VERMA. It was boiling . . .

(*Mr Verma opens the chest and brings out the cups and saucers. They all help him and sit around the table. Baby keeps pouring the tea into the cups and while they all sip the dialogue continues.*)

SUBRAT. Snacks . . . ?

LILY. No, thanks.

VERMA. Guess how the idea of tea came to my mind ?

BABY. Forest contractors are extra fond of tea, I suppose.

LILY. At this odd hour . . .

VERMA. Ah, every time is tea-time.

SUBRAT. That's a bad habit.

BABY. Subrat doesn't find time for tea.

VERMA. No. Not really.

BABY. The Philosophy Professor . . .

LILY. Forgets ?

BABY. Oh, no.

VERMA. Really, Subrat.

BABY. He just doesn't have time.

VERMA. Strange.

BABY. Back from the University, he goes straight into the study.

LILY. But why can't he have his tea in the study ?

BABY. He shuts himself up in the study.

SUBRAT. Just to study uninterrupted, you know.

BABY. He's in there late into the night.

SUBRAT. And then there's no need for tea.

LILY. But what about bed-tea ?

BABY. Routine . . . just one cup.

SUBRAT. Sugar, please.

LILY (to Verma). Sugar for you ?

VERMA. No. (Lily looks at Baby.)

BABY. I take very little sugar.

(Lily stops Subrat from lifting his cup.)

LILY. Just a moment. I also need some.

(She gets up and goes into the next room.)

VERMA. As I was telling Baby . . .

SUBRAT. Yes ?

VERMA. About coming here.

SUBRAT (*laughing*). I see.

BABY (*as Lily comes back*). Could you manage to get some ?

LILY. Yes. (*As she takes out a spoonful of sugar from the packet and puts it into Subrat's cup*) You want some more ?

SUBRAT. No, thanks. Baby is mad at me.

LILY. Why ?

VERMA. Subrat didn't tell her about coming here.

LILY. I think you'd decided to spend three days and had made all arrangements, hadn't you ?

VERMA. Subrat didn't tell Baby.

SUBRAT. I'd merely said, we've three days off, let's go to some nice place.

BABY. I thought it was some other place.

SUBRAT. But why some other ? This is a good enough place.

VERMA. Yes, we can spend three days here in peace.

BABY. You've got the rifle with you. You can go hunting.

LILY. Tiger-hunt . . . ?

BABY. Goats. The Caretaker has a goat.

(*Everyone bursts into laughter.*)

LILY. When we were here last two years ago . . .

VERMA. Oh, don't think I won't succeed because I failed then.

SUBRAT. It's a matter of luck.

VERMA. I'm sure to be lucky this time.

LILY (*looking at the room R.*). Will that room do for you ?

SUBRAT (*pointing to the room L.*). I suppose that one has been cleaned up ?

VERMA (*smiling*). The Chowkidar knows his job . . .

BABY (*gets up to look at room L.*) It's smaller than the other one.

LILY. It's all right. There's an open corridor on the other side.

SUBRAT. Open ? I mean how do you . . .

LILY. I told you I've been here before.

SUBRAT. Oh . . .

VERMA. We came here in March that year.

LILY. Yes.

VERMA. Lily finds that room more convenient.

LILY. It doesn't matter.

*(Tea almost over. Lily and Baby start clearing the table and putting cups on top of the chest in the corner.)*

VERMA. You spent all the time sitting in the corridor, didn't you?

LILY. How do you know it was all the time? You went out hunting and came back only after two days.

SUBRAT. He must have noticed all the time he was here, though.

VERMA. But isn't that true?

LILY. Okay, okay.

VERMA. But this time you can't sit there.

LILY. Why not?

VERMA. What do you think, Subrat?

SUBRAT. I should think not.

BABY. Why?

VERMA. When Subrat proposed that we come here . . .

SUBRAT. Just a minute, you were the one to do so.

VERMA. Me? Me? I only said we'll forget everything when we get there.

BABY *(thrilled)*. Forget everything?

VERMA *(unable to react)*. God knows who has what sort of habits . . . who . . . what . . .

SUBRAT *(jokingly)*. You must have been searching in my suitcase for books, haven't you? But I didn't bring any.

LILY. There's no study here to sit and read in.

VERMA. You can't go on sitting out on the corridor, can you?

LILY. What do you do, Baby?

BABY. I just move about outside when Subrat studies day and

night.

SUBRAT (*laughing*). Then you won't move about here, you'll have to keep sitting.

BABY (*suddenly sitting down tired*). Keep sitting . . .

VERMA. That won't do.

BABY. What do you mean ?

VERMA. I feel pepped up after the tea.

SUBRAT. What's the time ? (*Looking at his own watch*) Mine's stopped.

VERMA. It's four.

SUBRAT (*setting his watch*). Should we ask the Chowkidar to prepare dinner . . . ?

LILY. No, let's cook it ourselves. What do you say, Baby ?

BABY. Yes.

VERMA (*surprised, joking*). You say that. Would you ? Really ? . . .

LILY (*theatrically*). Yes, sir . . .

(*Then she collects the rifle and the other things and enters room L. Baby goes to the room R. with some other things.*)

VERMA. I can't believe it.

SUBRAT. What ?

VERMA. That Lily would cook.

SUBRAT. Why ?

VERMA. Near the fire, with all that fat . . .

SUBRAT. Oh. Ho. Ho. (*He bursts into guffaws.*)

VERMA. On tours . . . I don't take Lily with me.

SUBRAT. What a pity !

VERMA. But Baby should be a good cook.

SUBRAT. Tolerable.

(*Pauses for a moment.*)

VERMA. Let's go out . . .

SUBRAT. Now ?

VERMA. We'll take a look around for the spot.

SUBRAT. Spot?

VERMA. Yes, spotting ... we may have to keep awake all night ... in hunts ...

(*Lily enters.*)

LILY. Let's go.

VERMA. Where?

LILY. To the spot. I'll come.

VERMA. You?

BABY (*entering*). Where's the Chowkidar?

SUBRAT. Must be in his room.

BABY (*going to the window*). Chowkidar! —

VERMA (*addressing Baby*). Let's get going.

BABY. Where?

LILY. Let's see where Mr Verma will lie in wait at night.

VERMA. It's better to choose a nice spot near the stream well ahead.

CHOWKIDAR. You called me, sir?

BABY. Where would it be more convenient to cook ... ?  
in this one (*indicating the room R.*) or ... ?

SUBRAT. Isn't the kitchen convenient for cooking ... ?

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, to be sure it is, sir, but ...

VERMA. What's the difficulty?

CHOWKIDAR. Didn't I tell you, sir? It's that goat of mine.

It's very greedy, sir. At the smell of rice, *chapati* or vegetable it starts bleating. It's never enough for it.

SUBRAT (*laughing*). Suppose we kill it for our meat?

LILY. How much would it cost?

CHOWKIDAR. Beg your pardon, sir?

VERMA. Oh, no, no, we're just fooling.

BABY. Then it's this room. (*Proceeds to room R.*)

VERMA. So you aren't coming?



BABY. No.

LILY. But I'll come.

VERMA. Then why should you . . .

SUBRAT. We'll be back soon, won't we ?

VERMA. Well, we'll just take a look around.

BABY. Let me peel the vegetables in the meantime.

LILY. I'll be back if they take too long.

BABY. Can you grind the spices, Chowkidar ?

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, Ma. I do that whenever any one comes here.

BABY. Forget it, I can manage.

*(She goes into the room R.)*

VERMA. The rifle, Lily . . .

*(Lily goes into the room L.)*

SUBRAT. What do you want the rifle for ?

VERMA. It's not right to go unarmed.

CHOWKIDAR. Tigers don't come here in the daytime. But who knows, sometimes in mountains and jungles . . .

*(Lily enters with the rifle.)*

VERMA. Hère.

LILY. Let me carry it. *(She hangs it on her shoulder.)*

VERMA. What about the cartridges ?

LILY *(pointing to room R. and proceeding)*. In there.

SUBRAT. I'll get them. How many do you want ?

VERMA. Just a few . . . two or three . . .

*(Subrat goes into room R.)* Chowkidar !

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, sir ?

VERMA. Don't leave the bungalow.

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, sir.

VERMA. Ma is here alone . . .

CHOWKIDAR. Yes . . . yes . . . sir . . .

*(Subrat enters.)*

SUBRAT. I've got four.

VERMA (*addressing Lily*). Let's go.

(*Lily, Verma and Subrat go out. The Chowkidar starts clearing the table. The goat is heard bleating. The Chowkidar goes to the screen of the door R.*)

CHOWKIDAR. Ma ...

(*Baby has some sliced onions and potatoes on a plate.*)

BABY. Yes?

CHOWKIDAR (*seems to stop short while about to say something*).

Ma ...

BABY. Yes, what is it?

CHOWKIDAR. It's the goat ...

BABY. Why is it bleating?

CHOWKIDAR. The masters have gone past it ... in front of it ...

BABY. So?

CHOWKIDAR (*embarrassed*). It's a very clever goat, ma'am.

Whenever a newcomer is here it can sense it and starts bleating.

BABY. Really ...?

CHOWKIDAR. They offer it something or the other ... a little puffed rice ... a biscuit... or some vegetable peel ... as they please.

BABY. I see ...

CHOWKIDAR. Is there any puffed rice, ma'am? Just something thrown at it—and it'll stop bleating.

BABY. All right, all right.

(*She leaves the place and goes in. Brings a few biscuits and hands them over to the Chowkidar. The Chowkidar goes out. Baby keeps paring the vegetables. The goat stops bleating. Mr Verma enters.*)

You're back?

VERMA (*addressing someone outside*). Please come in ...

BABY. Who's it?

VERMA. Were you feeling lonely ?

BABY. I asked you who's there outside.

VERMA. Lily and Subrat walked fast and've gone far ahead.

BABY. And you lagged behind . . .

VERMA. But it turned out to be a blessing.

BABY. A blessing ?

VERMA. Yes, I chanced to meet the gentleman.

BABY. The gentleman ?

VERMA. He was standing by the car at the foot of the hill.

BABY. Who ? Who are you talking about ?

VERMA. He asked me if I had a set of spare batteries.

BABY. Batteries ?

VERMA. He said his car had developed some trouble on the way . . .

BABY. His car ?

VERMA. I said . . .

BABY. Yes . . .

VERMA. I said, 'We'd think of that later. If you're in difficulty, why don't you stay with us for the night ?'

BABY. How generous of you, Mr Verma.

VERMA. Where can the gentleman spend the night . . . in this wilderness ?

BABY. Do you mean . . .

VERMA. We'll see about that later when we get back . . .

Some sort of arrangement . . .

*(Sangram enters. A spare man. His clothes are somewhat crumpled. Very bright eyes. A firmness in his tone. He enters and stares at Baby. Baby stands helplessly unable to do anything.)*

BABY. They . . .

VERMA. Oh. *(Introducing them)*. This is Baby, the wife of my professor friend, Subrat.

SANGRAM. O, I see . . .

VERMA (*rather excitedly*). Please make yourself comfortable.

They won't be . . .

SANGRAM (*glancing around*). No, there won't be any inconvenience.

VERMA. Su . . . Excuse me, what did you say your name was?

SANGRAM. Sangram.

BABY (*bursting into laughter*). Ah yes, of course . . . Otherwise roving among the hills . . . looking for gold mines.

SANGRAM. Prospecting.

VERMA. How wonderful.

SANGRAM. But it means a lot of risk . . . because . . .

VERMA. Well, later . . . see you later. . . . Excuse me . . .

They must've gone a long way.

BABY. It's a forest road, if they . . .

VERMA. They must've gone to the stream. The spot.

(*Verma goes out. Baby sits down exhausted and starts cutting the vegetables. Sangram starts moving round the room quietly looking at the large pictures hanging from the wall . . . After a brief pause*)

SANGRAM. These seem to have been put up recently. But why pictures of wild life in this wilderness? The tiger chasing the deer. How'd it be if the deer were chasing a tiger instead?

(*The goat bleats a couple of times. Sangram goes to the window.*)

SANGRAM. The other Chowkidar didn't have a goat.

BABY (*gets up impatiently*). Don't talk nonsense, Sangram.

SANGRAM. Well, did he?

BABY. Sangram . . .

SANGRAM. Mr Verma said . . .

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. Mr Verma, the friend of your husband, Subrat . . .

BABY. Ugh . . .

SANGRAM. You must be feeling lonely.

BABY. Please . . .

SANGRAM. We can talk the time away until they come . . .

BABY. Enough, stop it.

SANGRAM. Which room is yours?

BABY (*indicating R.*). That one.

SANGRAM. I'd stayed in that one when I'd come here once. That was when I was in college.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. I'd invited someone else also.

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. In college I used to act in plays.

BABY. Actor.

SANGRAM. Now I've taken that hill on lease and am prospecting for gold mines.

(*Baby picks up the knife and starts slicing the onions.*)

SANGRAM. Oh, no . . . not that way. You'll hurt your fingers.

(*Pulls out an onion and puts it on the table and cuts into slices.*) This is the way to slice onions . . .

BABY (*in pain*). Oh . . .

SANGRAM. Now, what was I saying? Yes, acting in the college . . .

BABY. Gold mines . . . hoax . . .

SANGRAM. Yes, the story of my college life. I was a senior student . . . a good student, too . . .

BABY. In search of gold mines . . . hoax . . .

SANGRAM. One who had no money, was poor . . .

BABY. When did you take this up?

SANGRAM. I'd invited someone to this very dak bungalow.

After the performance.

BABY. How did you know there are gold mines here?

SANGRAM. Acquaintance had already developed into friendship.

BABY. How much have you invested ?

SANGRAM. She was the daughter of a wealthy man ... yet, to fall in love at first sight ...

BABY. Where did you get all that money ?

SANGRAM. We acted together in a play, and then we came ... closer ...

BABY. How did you know there was gold here ?

SANGRAM. The day after the play we met in the lonely corridor of the college ...

BABY. That's a lie. It's not gold mines .... It is something ... something else.

SANGRAM. Speaking in whispers ... fear ... terror ... attraction ...

BABY. Come on, what is it ?

SANGRAM. Surrender ... self-surrender ...

BABY. Gold mines in these hills ? Absurd.

SANGRAM. She didn't have faith in me. Persons with wealth and reputation ... don't have faith in others.

BABY. Come on, tell me, isn't this stuff about gold mines all concocted ?

SANGRAM. Shakespeare helped me ...

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. Suddenly I remembered the words of Romeo ...

BABY. Ah ...

SANGRAM. Romeo's response to a woman's surrender.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. The answer of Romeo on my lips ...

BABY. You're crazy.

SANGRAM. 'Call me but love and I will be new baptized.'

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. A few days later, the invitation.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. To this very dak bungalow.

BABY. Absurd . . . lies . . . all put on . . .

(*Sangram smiles and moves closer to Baby.*)

SANGRAM. They must be on their way back.

BABY. Let them.

SANGRAM. What makes you think I'm not prospecting for gold mines ?

BABY. Are you ?

SANGRAM. Yes.

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. Only acting ?

BABY. What else ?

SANGRAM (*going out*). All right, then.

BABY. Sangram . . .

SANGRAM (*stopping short*). But what brings you here ?

BABY. A picnic.

SANGRAM. Fine. It's a fine place.

BABY. Do you remember ?

SANGRAM. What ?

BABY. We were to decide on our marriage that day.

SANGRAM. Acting ?

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. There was someone else in the dak bungalow that day.

BABY. Yes, (*inertly*) there was someone else.

SANGRAM. You left this place annoyed, disgusted.

BABY. You and she . . .

SANGRAM. A plump woman. Older than you.

BABY. Shameful.

SANGRAM (*indicating room R.*). You were already asleep in this room.

BABY. Oh. Stop it.

SANGRAM (*turning to room L.*). And she was alone in this room.

BABY. Enough. Forget it.

SANGRAM. Your husband is a professor, isn't he ?

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. I couldn't become one.

BABY. Gold mines are more profitable.

SANGRAM. Let's see.

(*The Chowkidar enters.*)

CHOWKIDAR. Looks like they'll be late. Should I set about . . . ?

SANGRAM. Are you going to cook ?

BABY. It's a picnic.

SANGRAM. I see.

CHOWKIDAR. So what about . . .

BABY. No, let them get back.

(*The Chowkidar starts moving out.*)

SANGRAM. Chowkidar.

CHOWKIDAR (*stopping short*). Yes, sir ?

SANGRAM. I'll sleep in your room tonight.

CHOWKIDAR (*startled*). In my room, sir . . . ?

SANGRAM. Yes, I can manage, I can.

CHOWKIDAR. You, sir ?

SANGRAM. Later . . . later . . . you'll have your due.

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, sir . . .

BABY. You can leave now and come when you're called.

SANGRAM. Later . . . yes, later . . .

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, sir . . . as you please, sir . . .

(*The Chowkidar goes out.*)..

BABY. In the Chowkidar's room . . .

SANGRAM. I have to move a lot through hills and forests . . . .

I'm used to it now.

BABY. But . . .



SANGRAM. You're in this room . . . . Mr Verma must be in that one . . .

BABY. Mr Verma . . . and . . .

SANGRAM. Who else ?

BABY. Lily.

SANGRAM. Lily ?

BABY. Can't you remember ? Lily . . .

SANGRAM. Lily ?

BABY. That plump one . . . older than me . . .

SANGRAM (*trying to think*). Plump . . . older . . . who do you . . .

BABY. Acting again ?

SANGRAM. Believe me, I hadn't asked for her name. So I don't know.

BABY. Mr Verma's wife.

SANGRAM. She, too . . .

BABY. Will you stop acting ?

SANGRAM. Believe me, I left after you did.

BABY. I don't believe you.

SANGRAM. Lily . . . Mr Verma's wife . . .

BABY. Why did you leave ?

SANGRAM. You want to know ? (*Laughing*) Silly.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. Is the professor pure . . . holy ?

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. I have never had a reputation for morals.

BABY. Why did you come here ?

SANGRAM. For the picnic.

BABY. For Lily.

SANGRAM. Not for you ?

BABY. Never.

SANGRAM (*as he tries to figure it all out*). Lily . . . you . . . me . . . your husband . . . Lily's husband . . .

BABY. You better leave this place.

SANGRAM. Does Lily know ?

BABY. What ?

SANGRAM. What you saw.

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. Thank God.

BABY. I got to know Lily much later.

SANGRAM. Your husband ?

BABY. What about him ?

SANGRAM. Me . . . about me . . . ?

BABY. No.

SANGRAM (*smiling and with firmness*). I'm not going.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. I'm a guest at your picnic.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. An anonymous guest . . . the actor.

BABY (*as she is about to sit down helpless*). Actor . . . Actor . . .

SANGRAM. The actor has given up acting. He has turned to a new activity. Prospecting for gold mines . . . pure . . . pure gold. Wandering in the wilderness . . . used to it now. I can easily manage in the Chowkidar's room.

BABY. Oh . . . (*She goes impatiently to the window.*) Lily is coming . . .

SANGRAM. Lily.

BABY. Lily . . . Verma . . .

(*Baby goes into the room R. Sangram has just turned to look back when Verma enters.*)

SANGRAM (*seeing Verma*). Were you able to choose a spot ?

VERMA. NO.

SANGRAM. Across the stream . . .

VERMA. Someone seems to have cleared the forest.

SANGRAM. If you'd gone a little farther perhaps . . .

VERMA. No, I'm afraid it isn't possible today . . .

SANGRAM. Are you going to try again tomorrow ?

VERMA. We've the whole day tomorrow. Surely tomorrow . . .

SANGRAM. You're sure to get a deer or a boar.

VERMA. I've bagged a lot of deer. Not interested in them any more.

SANGRAM. Tiger, then ?

VERMA. Tiger, yes.

SANGRAM. Not impossible, you know. You may chance upon one.

VERMA. Let's see.

SUBRAT (*to Verma*). How fast you managed to climb the steps.

(*Subrat enters.*)

SANGRAM. High jump.

SUBRAT (*laughs*). High jump . . . interesting . . .

VERMA (*laughing*). Very interesting . . . this gentleman . . .

SANGRAM. My car developed trouble on the way . . .

Had to walk all the way . . .

SUBRAT. So I heard.

SANGRAM. Just for the night, if you don't mind . . .

SUBRAT. Mr Verma has told us. It's just as well.

(*Lily enters. Taking the rifle off her shoulder.*)

LILY. Oh . . .

VERMA (*introducing*). Lily . . .

SANGRAM. Oh . . .

SUBRAT. Mrs Verma. (*Calls out loudly*) Baby . . .

VERMA (*to Lily*). This gentleman . . .

SUBRAT. Gold mines in the forest . . .

SANGRAM. You seem to have told them all about me ?

VERMA. Whatever little I know about you.

SANGRAM. I'm prospecting.

SUBRAT. Gold mines.

SANGRAM. H'm, that's right.

LILY (*with wonder in her eyes*). Gold mines.

SANGRAM. Yes, at least trying to look for gold ...

(*Baby enters.*)

SUBRAT. You know, Baby ...

BABY. Yes.

VERMA. I forget ... the name ...

BABY. Actor ...

VERMA. }  
SUBRAT. } Actor.

SANGRAM. Actor. I used to do a lot of acting in my college days.

BABY. Yes, in college.

VERMA. Good.

LILY. What's so good about it?

VERMA. Baby already knows about it.

LILY. Baby?

BABY. Yes, me ... only me ...

SUBRAT. Rubbish ...

(*The goat bleats.*)

VERMA. Rubbish?

LILY. The Chowkidar's goat ...

SANGRAM. With some puffed rice or biscuits ...

BABY (*suddenly gets up absent-mindedly.*). The goat is a domestic animal ...

(*She goes out as if she has not heard anything.*)

SUBRAT. Baby ...

VERMA (*repeating Baby's words with amusement*). The goat is a domestic animal. (*He breaks into loud laughter.*)

SUBRAT. My dear Verma ...

VERMA (*gets up abruptly.*). Let me give it some biscuits.

(*He goes out.*)

SANGRAM. It won't stop.

SUBRAT. Once it gets some biscuits ...

SANGRAM. It'll bleat for more.

SUBRAT (*exasperated*). All through the night ... like this ... ?

SANGRAM. But it will stop ...

SUBRAT. How ?

SANGRAM. If you set it free.

(*Sangram goes out. Subrat goes to the window and looks out.*)

LILY. You couldn't climb the steps.

SUBRAT (*as he keeps looking outside absent-mindedly*). Yes ?

LILY. You couldn't compete with me.

SUBRAT (*continuing to look out*). Interesting.

LILY. Interesting ?

SUBRAT. The goat is jumping down the steps.

LILY. And the biscuits ?

SUBRAT. The Chowkidar is chasing it.

LILY. The Chowkidar ... ?

SUBRAT. Come and have a look. What fun ! the Chowkidar can't keep pace with it.

LILY. And Mr Verma ?

SUBRAT. He's following the Chowkidar.

LILY. He ... ?

SUBRAT. He is standing and laughing.

LILY (*goes to the window and looks out*). Actor ...

(*She bursts into laughter.*)

SUBRAT. Baby was right ... actor.

(*Subrat also bursts into loud laughter. Baby enters.*)

BABY. What's the matter ... ?

SUBRAT (*turns from the window, still laughing*). Actor ...

BABY. Yes of course, the actor, I've seen him in college.

SUBRAT (*still laughing as before*). In college ...

BABY. Haven't you ever seen him ?

SUBRAT. No.

BABY. What about you, Lily ?

LILY. Not me either.

BABY. That's what I said. I'm the only one to have seen him.

*(Sangram enters.)*

SANGRAM. I told you, it'd stop.

BABY. It would have stopped with some biscuits, too.

SANGRAM. I bet not.

BABY. The goat is a domestic animal.

SANGRAM. No.

SUBRAT. No ?

SANGRAM. The goat is a domesticated wild animal ...

*(Verma enters.)*

VERMA. The Chowkidar has caught it.

SANGRAM. It'll bleat again.

VERMA. I've given it some biscuits.

SANGRAM. It won't stop.

SUBRAT. You can set it free if it doesn't.

SANGRAM. The Chowkidar will catch it again.

VERMA. You can set it free again.

SANGRAM. He'll catch it again.

BABY *(unable to bear it)*. The goat is a domestic animal ...

SANGRAM. The goat is a domesticated wild animal ...

VERMA *(laughing)*. Domesticated wild animal ...

*(Lily gets up and proceeds to room L.)*

BABY. Lily ... *(Follows her.)*

VERMA. Please keep it away ...

*(Verma gives the rifle to Baby. Baby takes it and enters the room L. following Lily.)*

SUBRAT *(settling comfortably)*. We'll have a lot of fun.

VERMA *(sits down)*. What a pity we can't go hunting tonight.

SUBRAT. Doesn't matter. We'll sit and chat ...

VERMA *(laughing)*. Yes, we'll forget everything ...

SUBRAT. I have already forgotten everything since I came here.

SANGRAM. We'll talk our heads off . . . . I am the actor.

VERMA. Actor. The goat is a domestic animal . . .

SANGRAM (*correcting Verma*). Wild animal.

SUBRAT. Wild animal.

*(They all join in peals of laughter, almost in waves.)*

## ACT TWO

*The same room. The next evening. A lamp hangs from the ceiling. Although it lights the room it does not appear to be strong. However, as the evening advances into night the light continues to get stronger. The room is now decorated a little more tastefully with twigs and leaves hanging from the walls. Baby is busy giving final touches to the decoration. Subrat enters from room R.*

SUBRAT. Isn't the actor back yet?

*(He goes and sits on a chair.)*

BABY. No.

SUBRAT. Oh, I had a pretty long nap.

BABY. You did.

SUBRAT *(beaming)*. I feel rested.

BABY. Are you joining the hunt tonight?

SUBRAT. I'm used to being up all night, you know.

BABY. But going hunting is not like reading.

SUBRAT. With doors closed?

BABY. H'm.

SUBRAT. But I haven't brought any books, you know.

BABY. Thank God.

SUBRAT *(yawning)*. A nap in the afternoon . . .

BABY. Makes you feel lazy.

SUBRAT. No, refreshed.

BABY. Really?

SUBRAT. But you didn't have a nap?

BABY. I was arranging the room.

SUBRAT *(gets up and looks around)*. Marvellous.



BABY (*ironically*). Really ?

SUBRAT. Really wonderful . . .

BABY. Mr Verma brought the leaves and branches.

SUBRAT. Where's he ?

BABY. Gone to the spot . . .

SUBRAT. Lily ?

BABY. She is asleep.

SUBRAT. The heavy lunch . . .

BABY. H'm.

SUBRAT (*going to the window*). Chowkidar . . .

BABY. He's gone with Mr Verma.

SUBRAT. To the spot . . . ?

BABY. With all the twigs and leaves . . .

SUBRAT. I see.

BABY. You know why ?

SUBRAT. For camouflage . . .

BABY. Yes, at the spot . . .

SUBRAT. Then today, surely . . . ?

BABY. Tiger.

SUBRAT. How did you know ?

BABY. The Chowkidar said.

SUBRAT. Good.

*(Subrat starts scrutinizing the leaves and the branches adorning the walls.)*

BABY. Would you care for some tea ?

SUBRAT (*abruptly*). But Lily may be disturbed if you suddenly switch on the light.

BABY. Should we then wait till she's up ?

*(They remain silent for a while.)*

SUBRAT. How long have you known . . . the actor ?

BABY. I told you, in college.

SUBRAT. Were you in the same class ?

BABY. No, he was senior.

SUBRAT. From acting to gold mines.

BABY. Mad.

SUBRAT. Mad ?

BABY. Yes, from acting to gold mines.

SUBRAT. I see.

*(Lily lifts the curtain and stands at the door L.)*

LILY. It's already dark.

*(Baby starts moving out.)*

SUBRAT. Where're you off to ?

BABY. The light . . .

*(She goes in.)*

SUBRAT. I also had a good nap.

LILY. Are you going for the hunt tonight ?

SUBRAT. Mr Verma asked me this morning. .

LILY. I'm not coming. What about Baby ?

SUBRAT. I don't know.

LILY *(pointing to the decoration)*. Did you . . . all these . . . ?

SUBRAT. No, Baby did.

*(Baby switches on the light in the other room and comes in.)*

LILY. Oh Baby, just imagine, if the Chowkidar's goat came in here . . . .

BABY *(scared)*. Oh, no . . .

SUBRAT. You, silly. Why should it come here ?

LILY. Has he left any message ?

SUBRAT. Mr Verma ?

LILY. Yes.

BABY. He must be on his way back.

LILY *(peering into the room L.)* I don't think he's taken his rifle.

SUBRAT. The Chowkidar is with him.

LILY *(laughing sarcastically.)* Obsession.

SUBRAT. If he can bag a tiger, I'll admit the obsession has a point.

BABY. He's sure to bag one.

LILY. How do you know?

BABY. The Chowkidar said so.

SUBRAT. It's likely, tigers must be coming at night.

LILY. No.

SUBRAT. How do you know?

LILY. I sat up all of last night ... on the corridor ... on the other side.

SUBRAT. Last night?

LILY. Had it come, the goat would have bleated at the smell.

BABY. On the contrary, a tiger roars at the smell of a goat.

SUBRAT. Well, it amounts to the same thing. But ...

*(Looks at Lily.)*

LILY. You mean why I sat up?

SUBRAT. Yes, why?

LILY *(lightly)*. I couldn't sleep.

SUBRAT. I also didn't sleep well last night.

BABY. You!

SUBRAT. We sat and talked late into the night. The actor is a very funny chap.

BABY. It wasn't fair to let him sleep at the Chowkidar's.

SUBRAT. I tried to persuade him not to.

BABY. Really?

SUBRAT. Yes, Mr Verma also tried to persuade him.

LILY. Mr Verma, too?

SUBRAT *(jokingly)*. Perhaps if you'd requested ...?

LILY *(startled)*. Me?

*(It is difficult to guess to whom Subrat addresses the question. He puckers up his lips in a smile as he looks at both.)*

BABY. Me?

LILY. I've known him only for a few hours . . . after he came here.

BABY. I'd known him in college, of course. But . . .

SUBRAT. Forget it. Yesterday is over. What about tonight?

LILY. Well?

SUBRAT. Mr Verma had already requested him before he left.

BABY. Mr Verma?

SUBRAT. I too have requested him. Let him go on prospecting for his gold mines all day . . . as long as he likes. Let him try to pull out his car from where it is stuck. But we'll be here only for three days. Let him spend the nights with us.

LILY. He is a charming talker.

BABY. An excellent actor, too.

SUBRAT. Yes, he said so.

BABY. What?

SUBRAT. That he'll give us a sample if there's time . . . mono-drama, you know.

*(Sangram enters humming a tune.)*

SANGRAM. The goat is a domesticated wild animal.

SUBRAT *(in a gesture of welcome)*. You are late.

SANGRAM. The goat is a domesticated wild animal. Do you know this statement can be made in a number of ways?

BABY. How do you mean?

SANGRAM. The wild goat is a domesticated animal. The goat is a domesticated animal of the wild. A domesticated animal the wild goat is. The goat of the wild is a domestic animal. The domestic goat is a wild animal. The animal of the wild is a domestic goat. The goat is an animal of the domestic jungle.

The animal is a jungle of the domestic goat, etc. etc. etc . . .

BABY *(bursting into laughter)*. Oh, actor.

SANGRAM. Actor . . .

SUBRAT *(still laughing)*. You, actor . . .

SANGRAM. What about Mr Verma ?

BABY. He isn't back yet.

LILY. Gone to the spot.

SANGRAM. The goat had got loose. I've brought it back.

BABY (*listening*). No, it isn't bleating anymore.

SANGRAM. I've tied it up.

(*Lily is on her way to the room L.*)

Let it be.

LILY (*stopping*). Yes ?

SANGRAM. I'm going to get the goat.

LILY. To this room ?

SUBRAT. Baby has done it up. It will eat everything if it comes in.

SANGRAM (*holding up and testing the edge of the knife lying on the table*). H'm ...

BABY. Well ?

SANGRAM (*laughing*). Let's butcher the goat.

LILY (*startled*). The goat ?

SANGRAM. Let Mr Verma return.

BABY. What do you mean ?

SANGRAM. Mutton chops at night ...

SUBRAT. Actor ...

SANGRAM. The four of you will hold its four legs ... and I ...

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. The blade is sharp .... (*Swishing it to cut a twig*)  
It snaps the twig.

BABY (*shouting*). No.

SUBRAT. The actor has probably found his gold mines today.

LILY. How do you know ?

SUBRAT. He seems so happy ...

SANGRAM. Does one feel happy when one discovers gold mines ?

SUBRAT. What else ?

SANGRAM (*as if he feels tired. While settling into a chair*).

Oh, let me just sit for a moment.

SUBRAT. Have you been on your feet all day ?

SANGRAM. All day . . . on my feet.

*(Mr Verma and the Chowkidar enter from outside.)*

VERMA. The spot is ready.

SUBRAT. How far away is it ?

VERMA. Chowkidar . . .

CHOWKIDAR. It'd be about half a mile, sir, but if you go round that hillock . . .

VERMA. Then it'd probably be a mile.

SANGRAM. Your goat had got loose again.

CHOWKIDAR. Sir . . . ?

SANGRAM. I've brought it back.

CHOWKIDAR. Please don't worry, sir. It's getting dark. It won't go anywhere now. It will get into its pen by itself.

SANGRAM *(to Verma)*. When do you start ?

VERMA. Chowkidar . . . ?

CHOWKIDAR. Let it get a bit late in the night.

SANGRAM. What's it going to be—tiger or deer ?

CHOWKIDAR. There's no knowing, sir. But if the deer comes to the stream for a drink, the tiger will follow.

SUBRAT. How's the camouflage ?

VERMA. Perfect.

SUBRAT. How about some tea ?

LILY. Sure. Why not ?

*(Lily gets up and goes into the room R.)*

BABY. Dinner is ready.

SUBRAT. Is that so ?

BABY. You went to sleep at noon, and I . . . all by myself . . .

SUBRAT. Baby has arranged the room.

SANGRAM. Oh, how nice.

BABY. I've also prepared dinner for the night.

VERMA. I'm not going to have anything. I'll feel drowsy.

SUBRAT. A cup of tea will wake you up.

VERMA. No, I won't have any more tea. Chowkidar . . .

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, sir.

VERMA. Go and finish your dinner.

CHOWKIDAR. Yes, sir.

SUBRAT. Baby . . .

BABY. Come on.

*(Baby goes to the room R.; the Chowkidar follows.)*

VERMA. Baby has become quiet.

SUBRAT. Strangely.

SANGRAM. Quiet ?

VERMA. But Lily . . .

SUBRAT. Yes ?

VERMA. Last night . . .

SANGRAM. She didn't sleep.

SUBRAT. How do you know ?

SANGRAM. Just a guess.

VERMA. Oh . . .

SUBRAT. What about you ?

VERMA. I fall asleep the moment I get into bed. What about you ?

SUBRAT. I'm used to reading late into the night.

VERMA. But what about last night ?

SANGRAM. He didn't sleep well.

VERMA. How do you know ?

SANGRAM. Guesswork again.

VERMA. We are sorry.

SANGRAM. Why ?

SUBRAT. In the Chowkidar's room . . .

SANGRAM. It made no difference.

VERMA. But . . .

SANGRAM *(suddenly changing the topic)*. You said you wanted

to hear a story ?

VERMA. Story ?

SANGRAM. Yes. Once a gentleman decided he'd stay in the dark.

VERMA. In the dark ?

SANGRAM. He chose a cave and stayed inside it.

SUBRAT. Absurd.

SANGRAM. He stayed there for a long time . . . the feel of it . . .

VERMA. What about food ?

SANGRAM. Fasting . . . hunger . . . pleasure . . .

SUBRAT. Rubbish.

*(Subrat gets up. Lily comes in with the tea and serves it to them. While they are taking tea.)*

VERMA *(to Sangram)*. How far did you cover today ?

SANGRAM. Quite a distance.

SUBRAT. Your car ?

SANGRAM. It's still lying there.

SUBRAT. Oh.

VERMA. Tomorrow again . . .

SANGRAM. The next hill.

LILY. Sugar ?

SANGRAM. No, thanks.

*(Baby enters.)*

BABY. The Chowkidar is taking his food.

*(The conversation continues.)*

SUBRAT. Suppose you do come by the gold mines, what would you do ?

SANGRAM *(smiling)*. All the gold mines belong to the government.

VERMA. Strange. Then what do you gain ?

SANGRAM. You mean all the struggle, all the pain . . .

SUBRAT. Yes, why all that ?

SANGRAM. In college, I was obsessed with dramatics, I felt I



couldn't be famous that way. Then I felt if I did something unusual . . .

VERMA. Gold mines . . .

SANGRAM. Yes, they'd make me famous.

VERMA. Don't you act any more ?

SUBRAT. But yesterday you said you'd do a monodrama ?

SANGRAM. Would it be possible here ?

VERMA. You mean because there's no stage ?

SANGRAM. Oh, no, life's a stage, but . . .

VERMA. We've to while away the time.

SUBRAT. My life is a stage.

LILY. Of course. You stand on a stage and lecture to the students.

BABY. That's not a stage; that's a platform.

SANGRAM. The politician stands on a platform and delivers speeches.

SUBRAT. My father wanted me to join politics.

BABY. You'd have failed.

SUBRAT. How do you know ?

LILY. Why didn't you join politics ?

SUBRAT. I thought I'd educate myself and acquire some solid knowledge first.

VERMA (*laughing*). From Politics to Philosophy ?

SUBRAT. Philosophy is easy.

LILY. If you'd joined politics you would've been a tramp like him. (*Indicating Mr Verma*)

VERMA. The more you move the more money you earn.

SANGRAM. I am a tramp, and I may come by gold mines but all the mines belong to the government.

BABY. But you'll be famous.

VERMA. I was a good scholar when I was young.

SUBRAT. Verma ?

VERMA. Wasn't I ? Ah, you don't remember. Didn't I always

stand first ?

SUBRAT. First.

VERMA. I was a good player, too.

SANGRAM. Football ?

VERMA. All the games. I was a good sportsman.

LILY. A sportsman doesn't sleep so much, doesn't go without food . . .

VERMA. Well, I don't eat because I have to be up all night.

SANGRAM. I've been rambling about the whole day.

VERMA. Since you have honoured our request and returned . . .

SANGRAM. Grateful, are you ?

SUBRAT. No, happy.

SANGRAM. I thought I won't come back.

LILY. Why ?

SANGRAM. Well, with so many strangers . . . I was not sure . . . this way . . .

VERMA. Of course, yesterday we were strangers, but today we know one another.

SANGRAM. Friends.

VERMA. Sure, friends.

SANGRAM. How long are we going to carry on ?

VERMA. What do you mean ?

SUBRAT. Are you hungry ? Would you like to have your dinner ?

SANGRAM. I've rambled about the whole day.

SUBRAT. I, too.

BABY. Why did you take tea ?

SANGRAM. Wish I hadn't . . .

VERMA (*getting up.*) Lily . . .

LILY. Should I get it here ?

VERMA (*as he goes to the room L.*). Please carry on . . . Let me put on . . . my dress, I mean. (*Verma goes into the room L.*)

LILY. Then let me . . .

*(She goes to the room R. almost at once to get the food.)*

SANGRAM. Then I'm no longer a guest here.

SUBRAT *(laughing)*. A friend, Mr Verma said.

SANGRAM. A friend . . . then allow me to help.

*(Follows Lily to the room R.)*

SUBRAT. Would you like to join us for the hunting?

BABY. No, I didn't sleep in the afternoon.

SUBRAT. Do you mean because I slept . . .

*(Baby starts laying the table for dinner.)*

BABY. You lied.

SUBRAT. What about?

BABY. Politics.

SUBRAT. No, it's true.

BABY. No, that's a lie. Your father never wanted you to join politics.

SUBRAT. But Mr Verma also said he used to stand first in the class.

BABY. Strange.

SUBRAT. Absurd. He used to fail.

BABY. But he was a sportsman.

SUBRAT. I too played well.

BABY. No.

SUBRAT. How do you know?

BABY. Bookworm.

SUBRAT. Baby.

BABY. Yes, you are.

SUBRAT. Baby.

BABY. Locked yourself in the study. Bookworm. Always . . . since childhood.

SUBRAT. Today . . . even today . . . *(Goes to Baby and draws her close to himself, whispering with great emotion)* Baby . . .

Baby . . . please.

BABY (*trying to free herself*). They are in the next room.

SUBRAT (*still holding her*). Say it again. Am I a bookworm ?

BABY (*whispering*). Verma . . . Lily . . . actor . . . in the next room.

SUBRAT. I couldn't sleep last night.

BABY. Leave me alone.

SUBRAT. No . . . you've got to answer me. Am I a bookworm ?

BABY (*staring at Subrat's face for a while, deeply engrossed*).  
Yes.

SUBRAT (*insistent*). No.

VERMA (*from the room L.*). Subrat . . . my belt, please . . .

(*Subrat is startled as though he has suffered an electric shock, releases Baby and proceeds to the door L.*)

SUBRAT. His belt . . . ?

BABY. May be help him tie up his belt.

VERMA (*calling from inside*). Subrat . . . (*Subrat does not respond but goes into the room L. Baby starts laying the table again. Sangram enters with plates full of chops etc.*)

SANGRAM (*keeping the plates on the table*). They are delicious.  
(*Baby looks wondering.*) I have already tried some.

BABY. Where's Lily ?

SANGRAM. She is baking the *chapatis*.

BABY. Did you talk to her ?

SANGRAM. No.

(*Baby silently takes the plates out of the chest and starts setting the table.*)

SANGRAM. You know why ?

BABY. Why ?

SANGRAM. I'm not safe.

BABY. What do you mean ?

SANGRAM. I'm single. Mr Verma may get suspicious. .

BABY. What about Subrat suspecting me ?

SANGRAM. No.

BABY. How do you know ?

SANGRAM. Subrat knows that you know me.

*(After a long pause)*

BABY. Are you really prospecting for gold mines ?

SANGRAM. You asked the same question yesterday.

BABY. I can't believe it.

SANGRAM. You had come with me to this bungalow once before.

BABY *(in a distressed tone)*. Sangram.

SANGRAM. Play-acting . . . ?

BABY. Are you joining the hunt tonight ?

SANGRAM. No.

BABY. You have rambled the whole day.

SANGRAM. Tired . . .

BABY. Are you going off to sleep after dinner ?

SANGRAM. What else is there to do ?

BABY. In the Chowkidar's room . . . ?

*(Lily comes in with a plate of chapatis.)*

LILY. I've warmed up everything.

SANGRAM *(shouting)*. Mr Verma . . .

VERMA *(from the room L.)*. I'm changing.

SANGRAM. Professor . . .

SUBRAT *(from the same room)*. I'm helping him.

BABY *(loudly)*. Hurry up please . . . the *chapatis* will get cold.

SANGRAM *(shouts)*. No, no. *(Turns to Baby)* We are hungry.

BABY. That's a lie.

SANGRAM. Are you sure ?

BABY. Isn't it ?

LILY. Yes . . .

*(Subrat enters.)*

SUBRAT. Let's begin. Mr Verma says he won't have anything.

*(All of them begin to take their seats.)*

SANGRAM. The chops are yummy.

SUBRAT. How do you know ?

SANGRAM. I've tried some already, on the sly.

*(Subrat breaks into guffaws and begins to eat.)*

LILY. How do you like them ?

SUBRAT. They're damned good.

LILY. Congrats, Baby.

SUBRAT. I fell asleep in the afternoon. Baby sat up ...

LILY. I too went to sleep.

SANGRAM. I was operating the graph on that hill over there.

LILY. Graph ?

SANGRAM. The gold-detector.

*(Verma enters decked in the full gear of a hunter.)*

VERMA. How do you like my dress ?

SANGRAM. The hunting outfit.

VERMA. The belt is rather tight ...

LILY. It's new.

SANGRAM *(gets up and fingers the belt)*. It fits very well.

SUBRAT. I've helped to tighten it.

BABY. The sportsman.

SANGRAM *(bursts into guffaws)*. Well ... well ...

SUBRAT. I told you I had tightened it.

VERMA. I couldn't manage it.

SUBRAT. But I could.

VERMA. You need strength for that.

SUBRAT. No, it's not strength ... it's skill you need.

VERMA. You need skill to hunt a tiger.

SANGRAM. Skill ... or concentration ?

BABY. Concentration ... or courage ?

LILY. Courage ... or aim ?

VERMA. No, skill.

BABY (*to Subrat*). You'll make a good hunter.

SUBRAT (*surprised*). Me ?

SANGRAM. Nothing is impossible if one really tries, you know.

BABY. Hunting is not like acting.

SANGRAM. I've given up acting.

SUBRAT. But you said you'd act for us ?

SANGRAM. Now ?

SUBRAT. After dinner.

VERMA. No, I don't think it'll be today. Tomorrow, may be.

SANGRAM. Must I be here tomorrow ?

BABY. The gold mines wouldn't run away, I'm sure.

VERMA. Let's get done with hunting today.

SANGRAM. Will you come with me tomorrow ?

VERMA. Where ?

SANGRAM. In search of gold mines.

VERMA. Not a bad idea.

*(Dinner is over. Baby removes the plates.)*

BABY. No, not a bad idea.

SUBRAT. No, we'll talk all day tomorrow.

VERMA. Talk ? What is there to talk so long about ?

SUBRAT. We'll watch some acting.

SANGRAM. You mean, my acting ?

BABY. All day . . .

SUBRAT. May be at night, too.

BABY. Today . . .

SANGRAM. Hunting.

LILY. In case you don't come by tigers . . . . ?

SANGRAM. He may come by a deer.

VERMA. Yes, the Chowkidar said, there are deer around.

LILY. If you get a deer tonight I'll cook it tomorrow.

SUBRAT. Deer's meat is not like the goat's.

LILY. It all depends on how you cook.

*(Subrat gets up and feels his stomach.)*

SUBRAT. Heavy.

*(Verma comes to Subrat and strokes his stomach.)*

VERMA. Heavy?

LILY. If you eat a lot, you feel drowsy.

VERMA. If you sit next to me I'll wake you up.

SANGRAM. But he may fall asleep again.

SUBRAT. Not unlikely.

LILY. Not unlikely.

BABY. He has slept all afternoon.

SUBRAT. Then I won't feel sleepy at night.

*(Everyone has finished. During the conversation that follows Lily and Baby follow one another into the next room with the plates etc.)*

SANGRAM. The dinner was excellent.

VERMA. Baby cooks well.

SUBRAT. You certify before trying.

VERMA. I've tried before.

SUBRAT. Lily also cooks well.

SANGRAM. Women cook well.

VERMA. Not everyone, only some.

SANGRAM. Those who cook well, their husbands are fortunate.

SUBRAT. Husbands?

SANGRAM. Husbands.

VERMA. You mean your wife doesn't?

SANGRAM. I have no wife.

VERMA. You mean ... aren't you ... married ... yet ... ?

*(Baby enters. Sangram looking at Baby)*

SANGRAM. No.

SUBRAT. I see.

VERMA *(amused)*. It's too late.

SANGRAM. I'm looking for gold mines ...



VERMA. If you look for gold mines, you can't get a wife.

SANGRAM. What if you act?

SUBRAT (*laughing*). Oh, actor . . . .

(*Lily comes in. Sangram looks at Lily.*)

SANGRAM. Everyone is an actor.

SUBRAT. Theorizing . . . ?

SANGRAM. Aren't you one?

SUBRAT. Absurd.

SANGRAM. What about you?

VERMA. Acting and me? Heavens . . .

SANGRAM. And you?

BABY. Me? . . . no . . . yes, of course I've seen a lot of acting.

(*Sangram looks up at Lily as if to ask her the same question.*)

LILY (*contemptuously*). A . . . c . . . t . . . i . . . n . . . g . . .

SANGRAM. Perhaps not, right?

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. None of you?

VERMA. None of us.

SUBRAT. Barring one.

SANGRAM. Me?

BABY. Yes.

(*The Chowkidar enters. All of them look at him as if his coming in at this moment is unwarranted.*)

LILY. What do you want?

CHOWKIDAR. A piece of *chapati*, Ma . . . . It's that goat, sir, you know, very greedy. The more you give, the more it wants. It laps up all that you give. If there's any left-over, Ma . . .

SUBRAT. Is there?

BABY. A whole pile.

(*Baby goes into the room R.*)

VERMA. When do we start?

CHOWKIDAR. It's still too early, sir. If we set out too early we'll

have to keep waiting and our bodies will ache all over and we'll only get bored . . . . You've already put on your outfit, sir . . . ?

*(Baby returns with a stack of chapatis and hands them over to the Chowkidar.)*

I'll come when it's time, sir . . . *(He goes out.)*

VERMA *(uncomfortable)*. Unnecessarily . . .

SUBRAT. H'm . . . . ?

VERMA *(sits down)*. We'll have to while away the time, somehow . . .

LILY *(sympathizing)*. Boring . . .

VERMA. Boring . . .

SANGRAM. Would you like to listen to a story ?

SUBRAT. No, why don't you act ?

VERMA. Is it an interesting story ?

SANGRAM. It is.

VERMA. Then it must be a true story.

BABY. Is it a hunting story ?

SANGRAM. No, a true story.

VERMA. Hunting stories are also true stories.

SANGRAM. Other stories are true stories, too.

SUBRAT. Forget it, let's have acting.

VERMA. No, stories.

*(Sangram gets up and begins in the manner of telling a story.)*

SANGRAM. Once a gentleman decided . . .

SUBRAT. In the dark . . .

VERMA. He chose a cave . . .

SANGRAM. No, a dak bungalow.

LILY *(taken aback)*. Dak bungalow.

SANGRAM. A dak bungalow surrounded by hills and forests.

VERMA. Thrilling . . .

SUBRAT. Really . . .

SANGRAM. He came to the dak bungalow and saw . . . (*He looks at Lily and stops abruptly.*)

LILY. What ?

SANGRAM. Guess what he saw ?

SUBRAT. I can't.

SANGRAM. Can you ?

VERMA. A tiger.

SANGRAM. No.

BABY. A deer ?

SANGRAM. No.

LILY. A goat ?

(*Everyone bursts into laughter.*)

SANGRAM. No. A woman.

(*Everyone suddenly becomes serious.*)

SUBRAT.	}	A woman ?
VERMA.		

SANGRAM. All by herself.

SUBRAT. Perhaps on a picnic.

SANGRAM. No one comes alone for a picnic.

VERMA. Must be some forest officer . . .

BABY. Forest officer ?

VERMA. May be on tour with her husband.

SANGRAM. I didn't enquire.

SUBRAT. Well ?

SANGRAM. She was sitting alone on the corridor outside.

VERMA. Looking up at the sky and stargazing, I'm sure.

LILY. Stars ?

SANGRAM. No.

SUBRAT. So it wasn't in the night.

SANGRAM. It was mid-day.

SUBRAT. Then she must have been counting the trees in the com-

pound.

BABY. No, gazing at the top of the bare hills, perhaps . . .

SANGRAM. None of you could guess.

LILY. So ?

SANGRAM (*turning his back towards all of them*). She was sucking her fingers . . .

SUBRAT. Funny.

SANGRAM (*turning round*). Her own fingers.

VERMA. Own fingers.

(*Verma sucks his fingers.*)

SANGRAM. I thought the finger was hurt . . .

BABY. A hurt finger ?

SANGRAM. No.

SUBRAT. Strange.

VERMA (*continuing to suck*). I don't feel anything.

SANGRAM. You can't . . . if you suck your own fingers.

SUBRAT (*eagerly*). And then . . . ?

SANGRAM (*in a dreamy voice*). Then she suddenly caught hold of my hand and started sucking my fingers.

(*Verma takes out his fingers from his mouth and holds them in front of Lily.*)

VERMA. Let's see . . .

LILY. Ridiculous . . .

SUBRAT. Baby . . .

BABY. Don't be silly . . .

(*Sangram keeps laughing.*)

SUBRAT. Please . . .

SANGRAM. I felt a thrill . . .

SUBRAT. Please . . .

(*Baby has been moving away from Subrat. But he follows her, catches hold of her hand and starts sucking her fingers.*)

BABY (*till she cannot bear it any longer*). Ugh . . . Ugh . . .

*(Baby releases herself with an effort and runs into room R.)*

VERMA. Lily ...

LILY *(in disgust)*. No.

*(Lily also follows Baby out.)*

VERMA. Sensation ... ?

SANGRAM. Then ...

VERMA. Her fingers ... ?

SANGRAM. Yes.

SUBRAT. Both ... each other's ...

SANGRAM. Yes, together ... a new experience ...

SUBRAT. Lucky.

VERMA. Subrat.

SUBRAT. Her husband was away ... I'm sure the woman was  
sexy ...

VERMA. I just can't believe it.

SANGRAM. It's true.

SUBRAT. I told you, it was lucky.

SANGRAM. No.

SUBRAT. What happened then ?

SANGRAM. I left the place.

SUBRAT. Spineless ... coward ...

SANGRAM. I had no other way.

SUBRAT. Coward ...

SANGRAM. I'm an actor.

*(Baby enters.)*

BABY. Is the story over ?

SANGRAM. Not yet.

VERMA. Just forget this story.

SANGRAM. Fine.

SUBRAT. Why ?

SANGRAM. I don't like it.

BABY *(Was going out but stops at the doorway)*. It's a filthy

story . . .

SANGRAM. Well, I'll leave it there.

SUBRAT. Why did you begin it at all ?

SANGRAM. You asked for a true story . . .

VERMA. Yes, true stories are interesting.

SUBRAT. This is a true story . . . and interesting, too.

*(Baby comes to Subrat and in a stern voice)*

BABY. Subrat . . .

SUBRAT *(as if he can't hear her)*. Interesting . . . . Sucking fingers . . . each other's . . .

*(Just at this point the goat bleats. Lily enters.)*

LILY. O, no. Not that goat again.

SANGRAM. The glutton.

VERMA. May be if some more *chapatis* . . .

*(The Chowkidar enters, an axe in his hand.)*

CHOWKIDAR. The goat is bleating, sir.

BABY *(irritated)*. One can see that . . .

CHOWKIDAR. Please listen carefully, sir . . .

*(They strain their ears.)*

*(The birds have started twittering. The monkeys are chattering in the distance.)*

SUBRAT. That's right . . .

CHOWKIDAR. Their noise has upset it, sir. It doesn't want to; it's scared . . .

LILY. Scared ?

CHOWKIDAR. The animal has moved in, sir . . . . We must hurry up.

VERMA. My rifle, Lily.

*(Lily goes to room L. Verma addressing Subrat.)*

SUBRAT. Heavy . . . I feel uneasy.

VERMA. Won't you go ?

SUBRAT. What about the actor ?

SANGRAM. My feet are tired.

SUBRAT. I feel heavy.

VERMA. But then—

SUBRAT. Let's all go then.

VERMA. All ?

SUBRAT. Yes, all of us.

VERMA. Chowkidar, will there be room for all of us ?

CHOWKIDAR. But you'd said, only three people would sit on the  
*machan* . . . .

VERMA. Three . . . .

SUBRAT. Can't you make it four ?

VERMA. The camouflage has been arranged in a narrow space.

SANGRAM. That saves me.

*(Lily comes in with the rifle. Mr Verma takes it.)*

SUBRAT. No, that saves me.

LILY (*eagerly*). What's the matter ?

SUBRAT. There's place only for three on the platform.

VERMA. One of you has to stay back.

SANGRAM. I'm tired. (*Indicating Subrat*) You can go ahead.

*(The goat bleats again.)*

CHOWKIDAR. Sir . . .

VERMA. Yes, of course . . .

BABY. It's great fun . . . . Who's going ?

VERMA. Please hurry up . . .

SUBRAT (*reluctantly*). I . . .

SANGRAM. I'm really tired.

SUBRAT. Acting again . . . ?

SANGRAM. No. Tired.

BABY. An impasse.

*(Verma suddenly takes out a coin from his pocket and holds it forth.)*

VERMA. A toss.

SUBRAT. A toss ?

VERMA. Yes, that will decide . . .

SANGRAM. Subrat ?

SUBRAT. Head.

SANGRAM. Naturally, tail for me.

*(Mr Verma tosses it. Others bend down to see the outcome. Subrat, Sangram and the Chowkidar stand apart. Almost at once they shout in unison.)*

VERMA.

BABY.

LILY.

} Head.

SUBRAT. Oh.

VERMA *(addressing Subrat)*. Hurry up.

SANGRAM. I'm saved.

SUBRAT *(enviously)*. What is it ?

SANGRAM. The tiger . . .

VERMA *(holding out the rifle to Subrat.)* Tiger, for sure.

LILY. No, not a tiger. Kill a deer, please.

BABY. A deer ?

LILY. Yes, I'll cook the meat tomorrow.

VERMA. The torch, please . . .

LILY. Oh, sorry . . .

*(Lily goes into room L. to fetch it)*

SANGRAM. Chowkidar . . . your room . . .

CHOWKIDAR. I've bolted it from outside, sir.

SANGRAM. Very well . . .

CHOWKIDAR. I'll dust the room . . . you'll . . . on the bed . . .  
like yesterday . . .

SANGRAM. H'm. *(Starts moving away.)*

SUBRAT. Suppose we don't find anything . . .

VERMA. We'll try again tomorrow.

SANGRAM *(stopping short)*. I shall be coming tomorrow.



SUBRAT. I may come, too.

*(Lily hands over the torch to Mr Verma.)*

VERMA. Lead us, Chowkidar . . .

SANGRAM. Good luck . . .

BABY *(wishing them luck)*. Do bag a tiger.

LILY. No, a deer.

SANGRAM.

VERMA. } Good luck.

SUBRAT. }

*(Verma, Subrat and the Chowkidar leave the room by the back door. It is quiet for a while. Sangram goes to the window to see them go, then turning round . . .)*

SANGRAM. No one objected.

BABY. What about?

SANGRAM. That I stayed here alone . . .

BABY. Filthy . . .

*(A pause for some time.)*

LILY. Did Subrat ever go hunting before?

BABY. No.

LILY. It's very trying to sit waiting for game.

SANGRAM. One forgets it all when you bag a catch.

BABY. Subrat has slept all day . . .

LILY. It's an ideal place to relax.

*(Sangram suddenly picks up the kitchen knife lying on the chest.)*

SANGRAM. They've forgotten the knife.

LILY. There's one in his belt.

BABY. This is only a kitchen knife.

LILY. Did you cut all these twigs with this?

BABY. Oh, yes.

SANGRAM. It's quite sharp . . . .

*(Sangram passes his finger over its edge to test its sharpness.)*

BABY. You'll cut your finger.

SANGRAM (*keeping it back*). I'm careful . . .

LILY. If the gun goes off there, we can hear it from here, I suppose.

SANGRAM. You can hear it a long way off at night.

BABY. I'd have gone off to sleep.

SANGRAM. Me, too.

BABY. You've wandered about all day.

SANGRAM. Yes, I'm tired.

BABY. I didn't sleep the whole day.

LILY. I had a good nap.

BABY. Do wake me up when you hear any noise.

SANGRAM. You won't need to wake me up.

BABY. What do you mean?

SANGRAM. I'm a light sleeper.

LILY. They must have got there by now.

SANGRAM. No.

BABY. How do you know?

SANGRAM. I can guess . . .

BABY. You said you would act for us . . .

SANGRAM. If it's convenient . . .

LILY. What'll you perform?

SANGRAM. A monodrama . . . all by myself . . .

LILY. Would you like to sit out?

BABY. Out?

LILY. Yes, in the open air.

SANGRAM. I'll be off to sleep.

LILY. I asked Baby.

SANGRAM. It's better not to sit out.

LILY. Why?

SANGRAM. It isn't safe. (*He starts going out by the backdoor.*)

BABY. No, it isn't.

SANGRAM (*stopping at the door*). Do bolt the door from inside.  
LILY (*indicating the room L.*) The door in there is bolted from inside.

SANGRAM. Not that, I mean this one.

(*Sangram goes out closing the door behind him. Baby bolts the door. Lily protests weakly.*)

LILY. If they return without waiting there . . .

BABY. They'll call.

LILY. Supposing we've gone off to sleep . . .

BABY. They'll shout.

LILY. You haven't slept all day . . .

BABY. But you have.

LILY. I may also fall asleep.

BABY (*harshly*). No.

LILY. No ?

BABY. If you feel sleepy, go off to sleep by all means.

LILY. I can't sleep.

BABY. But you said you may fall asleep.

LILY. I thought we could sit out and chat.

BABY. I'm not feeling too well.

LILY. I, too.

BABY. What's wrong with you ?

LILY. What about you ?

BABY. I usually sleep early.

LILY. Verma says I've put on weight . . .

BABY. Really ?

LILY. Can't I be slim ?

BABY. Of course.

LILY. How ?

BABY (*contemptuously*). If you take exercise.

LILY. At this age . . .

BABY. Then go in for acting.

LILY. Acting ?

BABY. Yes, acting monodramas.

LILY. Me ... and acting ...

BABY. Take lessons from the actor ...

*(Baby proceeds to her room, i.e. room R.)*

LILY. What do you mean ?

BABY. Acting monodramas, acting, exercise ...

*(Baby goes into the room R. and puts out the light. Then the door between the middle room and room R. is bolted. Lily keeps mumbling.)*

LILY. Exercise ... acting ...

*(There is a light tap on the door outside. Lily goes and opens it. Sangram enters.)*

LILY. What's the matter ?

SANGRAM. Acting ...

LILY. Acting ... ?

SANGRAM. I want to rehearse.

LILY. Here ?

SANGRAM. No, in the Chowkidar's room.

LILY. Rehearsal ?

SANGRAM. I'll go off to sleep if I feel sleepy.

*(Sangram picks up the knife.)*

LILY. The knife ?

SANGRAM. I came for the knife.

LILY. Why don't you sit down for a minute ?

SANGRAM *(showing the knife)*. I need it for the rehearsal.

*(He begins to move out.)*

LILY. Just a minute.

SANGRAM *(stopping)*. Yes ?

LILY. Baby must have gone off to sleep.

SANGRAM. I couldn't ...

LILY. Nonsense ...

SANGRAM. What's nonsense ?

LILY. The knife ...

SANGRAM. I need it ...

*(Sangram does not say anything more and goes out, but stops short at the back-door.)*

Please bolt the door ... from inside ...

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. Should I bolt it from outside ?

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. Then I'm closing it.

*(He closes it after him.)*

LILY. Oooh.

*(Then Lily becomes restless with some unspeakable agony and looks out of the window. After a short while she brings her handbag from room L., takes out the mirror from it, arranges her saree and hair and touches up her face. Then she paces about the room in an agitated manner. Subrat opens the outer door and enters.)*

LILY. You ?

SUBRAT. I didn't like it there.

LILY. You came alone ?

SUBRAT. The Chowkidar escorted me. He has gone back.

LILY. Please take your seat.

SUBRAT. Where's the actor ?

LILY. In the Chowkidar's room.

SUBRAT. And Baby ?

*(Lily goes to the door R. and tries to find out if the room is quiet.)*

LILY. She's gone off to sleep.

SUBRAT *(sits on a chair)*. She didn't sleep in the day.

LILY. But you did.

SUBRAT. I think, you too.

LILY. Yes.

SUBRAT. Feel like chatting for a while ?

LILY. You think we'll feel better ?

SUBRAT. I think so.

LILY (*comes and sits next to him*). Yes, I feel like chatting.

SUBRAT. Go ahead.

LILY. What about ?

SUBRAT. Whatever you feel like.

LILY. No, you better start . . .

SUBRAT. What about ?

LILY. Anything you like.

SUBRAT. I just can't think of anything.

LILY. You know, the story the actor told us . . .

SUBRAT. Yes, how he saw someone in the dak bungalow . . .

LILY. A woman . . .

SUBRAT. Who took his fingers . . .

LILY. And sucked them.

SUBRAT. Yes.

LILY. Baby didn't suck yours.

SUBRAT. No.

LILY. Why ?

SUBRAT. Baby is vain.

LILY. Subrat . . .

SUBRAT. In her eyes, I'm just a bookworm.

LILY. You are a Philosophy Professor.

SUBRAT. No, a bookworm.

LILY. You know what Verma is ?

SUBRAT. What ?

LILY. A brute.

SUBRAT. Brute ?

LILY. He is indifferent . . . . To him hunting is more important.

SUBRAT. He is a hunter.

LILY. A tiger hunt is no hunt.

SUBRAT. Of course not.

LILY. He'd said we'd forget everything here.

SUBRAT. I have forgotten everything.

LILY. But he hasn't been able to.

SUBRAT. What?

LILY. He has the habit of leaving home and going out ...  
always.

SUBRAT. Baby has also not been able to forget ...

LILY. What?

SUBRAT. She's off to sleep by the time I get back from my study.

LILY. Verma says I'm fat ...

SUBRAT. Baby says I'm a bookworm ...

LILY. There's nothing unholy about a bookworm's fingers.

SUBRAT. No.

LILY. She didn't suck your fingers ...

SUBRAT. No.

LILY. When somebody sucks your fingers it sends a thrill through  
the body.

SUBRAT. Lily!

LILY (*pulls Subrat up by by the hand*). I ...

SUBRAT (*protesting*). Lily ...

LILY (*placing one of her hands on Subrat's eyes*). Close your  
eyes ...

(*Then she takes Subrat's hand with her other hand and starts  
sucking his fingers.*)

SUBRAT. Lily.

LILY (*as she takes her hand away from Subrat's eyes*). We'll  
forget ... everything ...

SUBRAT. Baby ... in the next room ...

LILY. You said he was a coward.

SUBRAT. Who ... ?

LILY. The hero of the actor's story. The man who ran away.

SUBRAT. Am I a coward?

LILY. Bookworm ...

SUBRAT. No.

*(As she takes Subrat's hand again to suck his fingers, in a passionate voice)*

LILY. Subrat ...

SUBRAT *(presses Lily's hand with both of his.)* Lily ...

*(Then they leave each other's hands and move away. For a while both are speechless.)*

Has Verma ever suspected you?

LILY. No.

SUBRAT. He is an ideal husband.

LILY. Idealism is not enough for life, you need something more ...

SUBRAT. What is it?

LILY. Courage ... daring ...

SUBRAT. But there's danger in it.

LILY. There's excitement in danger.

SUBRAT. Excitement?

LILY. Don't you think so? *(She looks longingly at Subrat.)*

Subrat ...

*(Just then the goat starts bleating. Subrat in a frightened tone)*

SUBRAT. Damn it, that goat again ... so loudly, too ...

LILY. Coward ...

SUBRAT. No.

LILY *(in a commanding tone)*. Go to bed ....

*(Subrat is about to go to room R. Lily points towards room L., her room.)*

LILY. To this room.

*(Subrat stops short. Lily smiles and nestling closer to him)*



*whispers*)

The window is open ... one can go out ...

*(Subrat is still hesitant. Lily comes closer.)* Coward.

SUBRAT *(He stands and looks speechless at Lily for some time, and then in a firm voice)*. No.

*(Then he goes into Lily's room and puts out the light. Lily follows him and bolts the door. Soon after Baby opens the door of her room and comes into the middle room. The goat bleats loudly. Baby knocks at Lily's door. Sangram enters by the back-door.)*

SANGRAM. I've set the goat free.

BABY *(banging the door)*. Lily ...

SANGRAM. It made too much noise in the room ...

BABY. Lily ... Lily ...

SANGRAM. It won't make any noise now ...

BABY *(without heeding him and knocking loudly)*. Oh ...

SANGRAM. Must be fast asleep.

BABY *(agitated)*. Go on, get out ...

SANGRAM. Me ?

BABY *(leaning on the door, tired)*. O ...

SANGRAM. What's the matter ?

BABY. Nothing.

SANGRAM. Don't try to hide it from me.

BABY. You know it ?

SANGRAM. Yes.

BABY *(faintly)*. Sangram ...

SANGRAM *(indistinctly)*. Actor ...

BABY *(in a more agitated tone)*. No ... no ...

SANGRAM. I'm going ...

BABY. Go ...

*(Sangram hangs his head and goes out by the back-door. Baby bangs the door again.)*

BABY. Lily . . . Lily . . .

*(Baby pushes hard at the door. The door opens. Lily stands on the doorway pretending to be just awakened.)*

LILY. What's the matter ?

BABY *(unable to say anything, in a voice full of agony)*. No . . .  
no . . .

LILY *(yawns)*. I'd gone off to sleep . . .

BABY *(foolishly)*. Yes.

LILY. Would you like to come in ? Shall I put on the light ?

BABY. No . . .

LILY. Why did you bang the door so hard ?

BABY. That goat . . .

LILY. Are you frightened of its bleating ?

BABY *(inertly)*. No

LILY. Go to bed.

BABY. Lily . . .

LILY. I'm feeling sleepy.

BABY. Yes . . .

LILY. I'm closing the door . . .

BABY *(in the same listless way.)* Do.

*(Lily closes the door. Baby sits down on a chair, tired. Subrat comes in through the outer door. His looks and clothes are dishevelled. Baby looks at Subrat for a while but does not say anything.)*

SUBRAT. Baby.

BABY. Yes ?

SUBRAT. Didn't like the damn'd business. So I got away.

BABY. H'm.

SUBRAT. The goat is roaming outside.

BABY. Go to bed.

SUBRAT *(as if offering an explanation.)* The Chowkidar escorted me back.

*(Baby is silent.)*

Verma said he's not coming back until he bags some game.

*(Baby is still silent. Subrat gets closer to her.)*

Why don't you speak ?

BABY. What about ?

SUBRAT. You haven't gone to bed yet ?

BABY. I did.

SUBRAT. Why did you call me a bookworm ?

BABY. Subrat.

SUBRAT. Am I a bookworm ?

BABY. Subrat.

SUBRAT. Am I a coward ?

*(Baby looks up at him but still does not answer.)*

Tell me . . . am I a coward ?

BABY. Coward . . .

SUBRAT. No.

BABY. Go to bed.

SUBRAT. No.

BABY. Aren't you feeling well ?

SUBRAT. I'm all right.

BABY *(in a restless tone)*. Subrat . . . .

SUBRAT. Why didn't you suck my fingers ?

BABY. Oh, God . . .

SUBRAT. Did a shiver run through your spine ?

BABY *(restless with agony)*. Subrat . . . .

SUBRAT. I'm not going to sleep.

BABY. It's very late.

SUBRAT. The actor hasn't gone to sleep, too . . .

BABY. Subrat.

SUBRAT. I saw him whetting his knife when I came by.

BABY. Don't talk nonsense.

SUBRAT. I wonder why he was doing that.

BABY. Go to bed.

SUBRAT. What about you ?

BABY. No.

SUBRAT. Why not ?

BABY. Subrat.

*(Subrat goes forward to Baby and places his hand on her shoulder.)*

SUBRAT. All right, I'm a coward. But what about you ?

BABY. Please . . .

SUBRAT. You're vain.

BABY. Subrat.

SUBRAT. You hate me . . . .

BABY. Subrat.

*(Baby stands up to stop him.)*

SUBRAT. Leave me alone . . . I don't feel well. I want to sleep.

*(Subrat goes into room R. and closes the door.)*

BABY. Oh, God . . .

*(Baby sits down on a chair, helpless.)*

### ACT THREE

*Morning of the next day; the same room. Sangram is clearing the walls of the leaves and twigs and is heaping them on the table. Lily comes from the room L. Her clothes are dishevelled, hair ruffled, and she looks like she didn't have a wink of sleep last night.*

LILY. Actor . . . ?

*(Sangram continues with his work and does not answer.)*

Baby arranged all this.

SANGRAM. Last night they were fresh, now they've all dried up.

*(Lily lifts up a small twig and looks at it closely.)*

Not all of them, of course, only some.

LILY. But . . .

SANGRAM. Of course they'll all dry up when it gets hotter.

LILY *(indicating Baby's room)*. It's so late. Aren't they up yet?

SANGRAM. No idea.

*(Lily turns and begins to move away.)*

Just a minute! .

Why don't you sit for a minute? *(Lily sits down.)*

*(Lily comes back.)*

Do you want me to go the other way and find out?

LILY. Never mind.

*(A pause)*

SANGRAM. Haven't you had your tea . . . ?

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. Me, too.

*(Lily is about to get up.)*

Oh, never mind.

LILY. I can make some.

SANGRAM. Where's the hurry? Let them be up.

LILY. They can have it when they're up.

SANGRAM. Let Mr Verma get back.

LILY. There's no knowing when he will.

SANGRAM. You mean he won't be back without a kill?

LILY. I'm afraid so.

SANGRAM. Obsession.

LILY. Always.

*(Sangram picks up the leaves and goes out. Lily stands surprised. He returns after throwing them away.)*

SANGRAM. That's for the goat. It will eat them up.

LILY. The goat?

SANGRAM. Yes, goats enjoy dry leaves.

LILY. I don't understand.

SANGRAM. I set it free last night.

LILY. I know.

SANGRAM. How did you?

LILY. Because it didn't bleat last night.

SANGRAM. How do you know?

LILY. I didn't hear it.

SANGRAM. Weren't you asleep?

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. I too couldn't sleep last night.

LILY. Why?

SANGRAM. I was waiting for Mr Verma.

LILY. That's a lie.

SANGRAM *(laughs)*. I'd have carved the deer if he'd come back with the kill.

LILY. Nonsense.

SANGRAM. You'd have cooked it, wouldn't you?

LILY. Nothing of the sort.

SANGRAM. But tell me, why didn't you sleep?

LILY. I couldn't.

SANGRAM. Now, that's a lie.

LILY. Certainly not.

SANGRAM. Subrat got back last night. (*Lily looks up.*)

From the spot . . .

LILY. Why?

SANGRAM. He didn't like it.

LILY. Really?

SANGRAM. He must have slept well.

LILY. May be.

SANGRAM. It feels good to sleep well.

LILY. I'm not feeling well.

SANGRAM. You'll feel better if you take a stroll outside.

LILY. Outside?

SANGRAM. As far as we can go . . .

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. Let's go and sit by the stream . . .

LILY. Are you kidding?

SANGRAM. You can hold my fingers and . . .

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. Subrat is a coward . . .

LILY. You, too.

SANGRAM. No.

LILY. Of course, yes.

SANGRAM. You want to . . . test . . .

LILY. I have.

SANGRAM. You mean that day?

LILY. Coward.

SANGRAM. You mean I didn't dare that day?

LILY. And, now?

SANGRAM. I can.

LILY. Can you ?

SANGRAM. Most certainly.

LILY. I bet not.

SANGRAM. That day I had no faith in myself.

LILY. Have you ? today ?

SANGRAM. Of course.

LILY. Why did you come here ?

SANGRAM. Why did you ?

*(Lily does not answer.)*

I know . . .

LILY. What do you know ?

SANGRAM. On tour with Mr Verma . . .

LILY. Yes.

SANGRAM. Verma is indifferent . . .

LILY. But why did you come ?

SANGRAM. Just to go back.

LILY. Are you trying to evade ?

SANGRAM. But I won't go empty-handed this time.

*(Lily looks up surprised. Sangram smiles.)*

It's only the weak who retreat.

LILY. Yes.

SANGRAM. Experience ?

LILY. Of what ?

SANGRAM. That you're a coward.

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. I was in college . . .

LILY. In college ?

SANGRAM. And I had no money.

LILY. But now ?

SANGRAM. Plenty. I am after gold mines.

LILY. Why did you call me a coward ?

SANGRAM. Courage is not a matter of words.



LILY. Whose words ?

SANGRAM. Are you scared ?

LILY. Of course not.

SANGRAM. Then let's go.

LILY. Please wait a minute.

*(Lily starts moving to room L.)*

SANGRAM. If Mr Verma comes back ...

LILY *(stopping)*. Who's the coward ?

SANGRAM. I'm not scared.

LILY. You think I am ?

SANGRAM. You should know that.

LILY. No, I'm not.

SANGRAM. We'll sit by the stream ...

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. No ?

LILY. We will go away.

SANGRAM. Go where ?

LILY. We won't come back.

SANGRAM. No, we won't.

LILY. You want me to come out with it ?

SANGRAM. With what ?

*(Lily picks up Sangram's hands.)*

LILY. You aren't a coward.

SANGRAM *(laughing)*. Not a coward like Subrat.

LILY *(letting go of his hands)*. No.

*(She starts moving into the room.)*

SANGRAM. Why do you go in ?

LILY *(indicating her dress)*. Not like this ... ?

SANGRAM. I see ...

LILY. I won't take long.

SANGRAM. Hurry up ...

LILY. Just my hair ... and clothes ...

SANGRAM. I'll wait . . .

*(Lily smiles assent and goes into room L. and bolts the door. Sangram starts clearing the rest of the leaves and twigs. Baby opens the door R. and comes in.)*

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. Call me actor.

*(Baby sits down listless.)*

SANGRAM. Aren't you feeling well?

*(She says nothing but only looks at Sangram.)*

SANGRAM. I didn't sleep last night.

BABY. Why?

SANGRAM. I was rehearsing.

BABY. Rehearsing?

SANGRAM. Yes, my monodrama.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. The goat is a domestic animal. The domestic animal is a goat. The animal goat is domestic. The domestic goat is an animal. The goat is an animal domestic.

BABY. Stop it, I say . . .

SANGRAM. What?

BABY. I don't like it . . .

SANGRAM. Then put on an act.

BABY. Act?

SANGRAM. Shakespeare . . .

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. Romeo and Juliet . . .

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. Call me but love and I'll be new baptized . . .

BABY. Stop it, will you?

SANGRAM. We acted together in college.

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. Then we came here.

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. I've come here again.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM (*looking at her face and laughing with pressed lips*).

Today, again . . .

BABY (*impertinently*). Why have you come again?

SANGRAM. In search of gold mines . . .

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. I've grown rich.

BABY. You lie.

SANGRAM. All right.

BABY. Why then have you come?

SANGRAM. To meet you.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. To ask . . .

BABY. What?

SANGRAM. Why did you ask me to leave last night?

BABY. I wanted you to go to sleep.

SANGRAM. In the Chowkidar's room?

BABY. Well, that's where you are sleeping.

SANGRAM. I didn't sleep all last night.

BABY. You said so.

SANGRAM. I was rehearsing.

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. What about you?

BABY. What about?

SANGRAM. Did you sleep?

BABY. Why do you ask?

SANGRAM. Subrat came back last night.

BABY. I know.

SANGRAM. Why didn't you call me?

BABY. Why should I have called you?

SANGRAM. We'd have sat down and chatted.

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. I had set the goat free.

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. It wasn't bleating any more.

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. But what could we've chatted about?

BABY. Yes, what?

SANGRAM. About the stories of the past.

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. On that day Lily too was here.

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. You saw . . .

BABY. Enough.

SANGRAM. And you left.

BABY. What else could I've done?

SANGRAM. Ah, poor Lily . . .

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. I didn't know her that day.

BABY. And now?

SANGRAM. Yes, I do. She is the wife of Mr Verma.

*(Both are silent for a while.)* May I ask you a question?

BABY. What?

SANGRAM. Will you tell the truth?

BABY. What is it?

SANGRAM. Is Subrat faithful?

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM. Don't hide from me.

BABY *(helplessly)*. I haven't.

SANGRAM. The same Lily again.

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. And Subrat . . .

BABY. Yes.

SANGRAM. I wasn't faithful that day . . .

*(Baby looks at Sangram, overwhelmed.)* And now Subrat . . .

*(Baby gets up and starts moving. Sangram stands barring her way.)*

Faithful ?

BABY. No.

SANGRAM. You saw Lily and me together that day and left the dak bungalow.

BABY. You want to know what I'll do today ?

SANGRAM. Yes.

BABY. You're cruel.

SANGRAM. Had I been so, I wouldn't have come again.

BABY. You want to know what I'll do . . .

SANGRAM. What ?

BABY. Commit suicide.

SANGRAM. Oh, no.

BABY *(helplessly)*. What else can I do ?

SANGRAM. I'll tell you.

*(Sangram puts his hand into his pocket and brings out a knife which he holds out to Baby.)*

BABY *(unable to understand)*. What do you mean ?

SANGRAM. Murder . . . .

*(Baby catches hold of the knife, unable to understand.)*

Subrat . . .

*(The knife falls from Baby's hand.)*

BABY. Sangram !

SANGRAM. Traitor . . .

BABY *(scared)*. No, no.

SANGRAM *(picking up the knife)*. It's quite sharp. You sliced the onions with it . . . the twigs, too . . .

BABY *(helplessly)*. Oh . . .

SANGRAM. Let's get away from here.

BABY. Where ?

SANGRAM. We'll sit by the stream ... go far away ....

BABY. Sangram !

SANGRAM. I've waited a long time.

BABY (*in a trance*). A long time.

SANGRAM (*theatrically*). 'Call me but love and I'll be new baptized.'

BABY. Sangram !

SANGRAM. Baby ...

BABY. How far ... ?

SANGRAM. Far ... far away ...

BABY. Far ... far away ...

*(Baby goes silently into her room. Sangram folds the knife and puts it in his pocket, then knocks lightly on the door of Lily's room.)*

SANGRAM. Lily ... Lily ...

*(Subrat comes in from the other room halfway through his shaving, razor in hand and the towel on his shoulder.)*

SUBRAT. Isn't she up yet ?

SANGRAM. Yes, she is.

SUBRAT. Why's the door locked ?

SANGRAM. Make-up ...

SUBRAT. Oh, I see ...

*(Subrat sits down and continues with his shaving. Sangram opens out the knife dramatically and stands close to him.)*

SANGRAM. To be or not to be, that is the question ...

SUBRAT. What do you mean ?

SANGRAM. Acting.

SUBRAT. Oh ...

SANGRAM. What are you going to do ?

SUBRAT. What about ?

SANGRAM. Lily is at her make-up.

SUBRAT. Make-up ?

SANGRAM. She must be changing into another *saree*.

SUBRAT. Why ?

SANGRAM. Must be powdering herself.

SUBRAT. Ah . . .

SANGRAM. Didn't you like it last night ?

SUBRAT. No.

SANGRAM. The heavy dinner ?

SUBRAT. Yes.

SANGRAM (*again theatrically.*) To be or not to be, that is the question.

SUBRAT. Why repeat the same thing over and over again ?

SANGRAM. Acting.

SUBRAT. Last night the same way . . .

SANGRAM. In the Chowkidar's room ?

SUBRAT. Yes, last night.

SANGRAM. When you got back last night . . . you saw me like this . . .

SUBRAT (*laughs*). Yes.

SANGRAM. I was rehearsing.

SUBRAT. With this knife ?

SANGRAM. Acting by myself.

SUBRAT. To be or not to be . . .

SANGRAM. Yes.

SUBRAT (*has finished shaving. Gets up and goes to the door of Lily's room.*). Lily.

SANGRAM. She may not have finished.

SUBRAT. With what ?

SANGRAM. I told you . . . her make-up.

SUBRAT (*getting back to his own place*). I see . . .

SANGRAM. Are you feeling better now ?

SUBRAT. Now ?

SANGRAM. Yes.

SUBRAT. Yes.

SANGRAM. I don't think so.

SUBRAT. How do you know ?

SANGRAM. A guess.

SUBRAT (*contemptuously*). A guess.

SANGRAM. What are you going to do ?

SUBRAT. About ?

SANGRAM. Lily will be here any moment.

SUBRAT. How do you know ?

SANGRAM. She'll open the door after her make-up.

SUBRAT. What do you think I'll do ?

SANGRAM. Can't imagine.

SUBRAT (*contemptuous again*). Wonderful . . .

SANGRAM. Sexy . . .

SUBRAT. Oh . . .

SANGRAM (*offering*). The knife ?

SUBRAT. The knife ?

SANGRAM. To be or not to be . . .

SUBRAT. Hamlet.

SANGRAM. Hamlet.

SUBRAT. Yes.

(*Subrat takes the knife from Sangram's hands.*)

SANGRAM. Verma must be on his way . . .

SUBRAT. Let him.

SANGRAM. The gun in his hands . . .

SUBRAT (*in a firm voice*). Doesn't matter . . .

SANGRAM. Wonderful.

SUBRAT. What ?

SANGRAM. Acting.

SUBRAT. No.



SANGRAM. Baby will object.

SUBRAT. Let her dare.

SANGRAM. Lily will back out.

SUBRAT. Certainly not.

SANGRAM. Verma will resist.

SUBRAT. No.

SANGRAM. Not unlikely, you know.

SUBRAT. I have the knife in my hands.

SANGRAM. Murder ?

SUBRAT. Yes.

SANGRAM (*taken aback*). For Lily ?

SUBRAT. What else can I do ?

SANGRAM. Verma is a sportsman.

SUBRAT. What about me ?

SANGRAM (*laughing*). Professor ...

SUBRAT. No, sportsman ...

SANGRAM. Have you read Maugham ?

SUBRAT. Maugham ? ...

SANGRAM. Maugham.

SUBRAT. Of course.

SANGRAM. *The Rain* ?

SUBRAT. I've read it.

SANGRAM. Davidson ... the hero of *The Rain* ... ?

SUBRAT. Suicide.

SANGRAM. Cutting the throat to commit suicide like Davidson ?

SUBRAT. No.

SANGRAM. Only the weak commit suicide.

SUBRAT. I'm not weaker than Verma.

SANGRAM (*taking a good look at him from top to toe*). N-no ...

I think not ...

SUBRAT. Why suicide then ?

SANGRAM. For another.

SUBRAT. For whom ?

SANGRAM. One who is stronger.

SUBRAT. Who's that ?

SANGRAM. One with whom Lily will go to sit by the stream . . .

SUBRAT. With whom ?

SANGRAM. Who do you think . . . ?

SUBRAT. With whom ?

SANGRAM (*posing to ask for it*). The knife, please . . .

SUBRAT (*testing the edge*). No.

SANGRAM. You'll hurt your fingers.

SUBRAT. Never mind.

SANGRAM. No.

(*Sangram snatches the knife away from Subrat's hand.*)

SUBRAT (*insistently*). With whom ?

SANGRAM. What's your guess ?

(*Just then Baby enters from room R.*)

SUBRAT. Baby . . . .

SANGRAM (*going out*). I'll be back in a minute.

BABY. Shall I get some tea ?

SUBRAT. Actor . . .

(*Sangram goes out with a gesture asking Subrat to wait.*)

Baby . . .

BABY. Yes ?

SUBRAT. Please take your seat.

(*Baby sits down quietly. Subrat goes to her.*)

Why aren't you talking to me ?

BABY. I am.

SUBRAT. You didn't talk to me last night . . .

BABY. I did.

SUBRAT. You went straight to bed . . .

BABY. There was nothing else to do.

SUBRAT. We could have chatted . . .

BABY. Lily was there . . .

SUBRAT. You were there too . . .

BABY. I wasn't feeling well.

SUBRAT. Why do you call me a bookworm?

BABY. I won't say that again.

SUBRAT. Baby . . .

*(A long pause.)*

Why are you so quiet . . . ?

BABY *(sadly)*. What can I say?

*(She remains quiet for some time and then gets up suddenly.)*

I'm going back.

SUBRAT. Why?

BABY. The picnic is over.

*(She starts moving towards room R.)*

SUBRAT. Just a minute . . .

BABY *(stopping short)*. Yes?

SUBRAT. Who is this actor?

BABY. A guest.

SUBRAT. Is he really prospecting for gold mines?

BABY. That's what he says.

SUBRAT. Crazy.

BABY. So are you . . .

SUBRAT. I'm not crazy.

BABY. That's good.

SUBRAT. Why do you want to go away?

BABY. What else can I do?

SUBRAT. I'll also go away.

BABY. Why?

SUBRAT. There is a stream out there . . .

BABY. You want to sit by it?

SUBRAT. Yes.

BABY. Fine.

SUBRAT. What about you ?

BABY. No.

SUBRAT. No ?

BABY. Lily . . .

SUBRAT. Baby.

BABY. Last night . . .

SUBRAT (*taken aback*). What ?

BABY. You . . . in that room . . .

SUBRAT. Baby.

BABY. Don't hide from me.

SUBRAT. Not me.

BABY. Yes.

SUBRAT. No, the actor.

BABY. No, you.

SUBRAT. I felt sleepy . . . came back to sleep.

BABY (*moving out*). Forget it.

SUBRAT (*stopping her*). Baby . . .

BABY. I'm going to pack . . .

SUBRAT. Will you go away ?

BABY. That's what I said.

SUBRAT (*in a helpless tone*). O . . .

BABY. Shall I call . . . ?

SUBRAT. Whom ?

BABY. For you to sit and chat . . .

SUBRAT. Baby.

BABY. Won't you go to the stream ?

SUBRAT (*sternly*). Whom will you call ?

BABY. Lily . . .

SUBRAT. Baby.

BABY. I told you, I'll call Lily . . .

*(Lily opens the door L. and comes in. Her make-up is unusually heavy. She has changed into another saree and a new*

*and attractive hairdo.*)

SUBRAT (*seeing Lily*). Lily.

BABY (*covers her face with her palms*). Oh, God.

LILY (*takes out a small mirror from her hand-bag and scrutinizes her face*). Is it too heavy?

(*She starts brushing her face with her handkerchief.*)

BABY. No.

LILY. We haven't had tea in the morning.

SUBRAT. Mr Verma isn't back yet, you know . . .

LILY. There's no knowing when he'd return once he's out hunting.

BABY. Right.

LILY. Do I look plump in this *saree*?

SUBRAT. Lily.

LILY. This flimsy *saree* . . .

SUBRAT. Lily.

LILY. This flimsy *saree* . . .

SUBRAT. Yes.

LILY. What should I do to look slim?

BABY. Take walks in the morning.

LILY. I'm about to set out for one now.

BABY. To the stream?

LILY. Would you like to come along?

BABY. No.

LILY. And you?

SUBRAT. Me?

LILY. No.

SUBRAT. Lily . . .

LILY. Forget it . . . (*Calls out*) Actor . . .

SUBRAT. Actor . . .

(*Sangram enters.*)

SANGRAM. To be or not be, that is the question . . .

SUBRAT. Actor.

SANGRAM. To be or not to be . . .

LILY. I'm all set.

SANGRAM (*to Subrat*). Let's get going.

SUBRAT. Where?

SANGRAM. To the stream.

BABY. Subrat . . .

SUBRAT. No.

SANGRAM (*to Subrat*). Hypocrite . . .

SUBRAT. Actor . . .

SANGRAM. Bookworm.

SUBRAT. Lily . . .

SANGRAM. Coward . . .

SUBRAT. Oh . . .

SANGRAM (*laughing*). Can't you get words?

SUBRAT. No . . . no . . .

SANGRAM. The weak find no language.

SUBRAT. No, I'm not weak.

SANGRAM. The strong have many languages.

SUBRAT (*gets up*). You mean you're strong?

SANGRAM. Evidently.

SUBRAT (*helplessly*). Baby . . .

BABY. I don't like it.

SUBRAT (*more helplessly*). Lily . . .

LILY (*to Sangram*). Let's make a move . . .

BABY. Actor . . .

SANGRAM. Acting . . . pure . . . .

SUBRAT. Pure, is it?

SANGRAM (*to Baby*). Isn't it?

BABY. I don't act.

SANGRAM. Everyone does.

BABY. Everyone?

*(Baby moves towards the window.)*

LILY. Let's go . . . .

SUBRAT *(barring her way)*. No.

LILY *(She gestures him to move away)*. Subrat.

SUBRAT. No.

LILY. Coward.

SUBRAT. Coward?

*(Baby presses her face against the bars and looks out of the window. Then calling out)*

BABY. Chowkidar!

LILY. Chowkidar?

*(Lily also goes to the window and looks out.)*

SUBRAT. Is he coming?

BABY. Yes.

SUBRAT. And Verma?

LILY. No.

*(The Chowkidar enters from outside.)*

CHOWKIDAR. Sir, that goat of mine . . .

SANGRAM. The goat is a domestic animal . . . .

The domestic goat is an animal . . . .

The goat domestic an animal is . . . .

The animal goat is a domestic . . . .

A domestic animal is a goat . . . .

SUBRAT. Actor.

SANGRAM *(laughing)*. A goat?

CHOWKIDAR. Sir . . . I don't seem to find my goat anywhere, sir, I never let it loose in the morning, sir, without giving it something to eat . . . you know, whoever is in the dak bungalow . . . I give it that and set it free . . . I've searched all around the bungalow, sir . . . but my goat, sir . . .

SANGRAM. It must be munching leaves somewhere around here . . .

CHOWKIDAR. The pile of dry leaves is lying there outside ... at the backyard near the clump of trees .... but it doesn't seem to be there, sir ...

SANGRAM. Strange. Where then ... the Chowkidar's goat ... ?

CHOWKIDAR. The goat is my only companion, sir .... You'll all be going away, sir .... God knows when who will come ... Time somehow passes for me ... by tending it, sir .... God knows how it got free ...

SANGRAM. It didn't get loose ...

CHOWKIDAR. Sir ... ?

SANGRAM. I set it free ...

CHOWKIDAR. Did you, sir? Did it bleat? Did it look for me?

*(The Chowkidar starts moving out.)*

SUBRAT. Here ...

CHOWKIDAR. It must have wandered into the forest, sir .... If I don't go at once and look for it ...

SUBRAT. Where's Mr Verma?

CHOWKIDAR. Hasn't he come back?

BABY. What do you mean?

CHOWKIDAR. It must be a long while now, Ma'am ... we saw two big eyes ... and he fired ...

SANGRAM. Must be a tiger ...

CHOWKIDAR. Then the animal ran into the forest and *Sahab* chased it. I had a feeling the shot didn't hit the mark ... I thought it was dawn and *Sahab* must have come back ... I waited for a while. Then I remembered my goat and came back.

BABY. Then Mr Verma ...

SANGRAM. A man-eater, I'm sure.

SUBRAT. Actor.

LILY. He has a gun on him ...

BABY. May be, it isn't a tiger at all ...

SANGRAM. Yes, it is.



CHOWKIDAR. It may well be a tiger, sir . . .

LILY. Could be a deer . . .

BABY. Could be.

SUBRAT. Then . . . why so long ?

LILY (*sarcastically.*) Habit.

(*Lily proceeds to room L.*)

SANGRAM. Where are you off to ?

LILY (*raising her face.*) What is it ?

BABY (*coming to her.*) What is it ?

SUBRAT (*coming and looking at Lily's face.*) It's only sweat . . .

SANGRAM. A dash of powder . . .

BABY. Powder ?

LILY. I'll be back in a minute.

(*Lily goes into room L.*)

SANGRAM. Does she know the truth ?

BABY. What about ?

SANGRAM. The tiger.

CHOWKIDAR. It must be a tiger, sir.

SANGRAM. A man-eater.

SUBRAT. Actor.

SANGRAM. The man-eater must have killed Verma.

SUBRAT. Chowkidar.

CHOWKIDAR. Sir . . . How can I dare, sir . . . to say, sir ?

SUBRAT. Chowkidar.

CHOWKIDAR. It's a tiger-hunt, sir . . . *Sahab* left the *machan*,  
sir . . . who can dare to say that for sure, sir . . . ?

SUBRAT. I suppose not.

CHOWKIDAR. It's already day, sir. Let me go and find out, sir.

SUBRAT. No . . .

CHOWKIDAR. Please don't stir out, sir . . . If the shot has hit the  
tiger, then . . . The goat too had to disappear now of all  
times . . . (*He goes out.*)

SANGRAM. The Chowkidar also knows.

SUBRAT. What ?

SANGRAM. That Verma is no more.

SUBRAT. Actor.

SANGRAM. Poor Lily ...

SUBRAT (*restless*), No ...

SANGRAM (*to Baby*). What are you hanging around for ? Let's go. ...

BABY. Where ?

SANGRAM. To the stream.

BABY. The stream ?

SANGRAM. Or somewhere far away ...

SUBRAT. Actor.

SANGRAM. Lily may be late ...

SUBRAT. Lily won't go ...

SANGRAM. But Baby will ...

SUBRAT (*bursting into a shout*). Will you stop ?

SANGRAM. You wanted to know who was more powerful ?

Baby ... ?

BABY. Really ?

SANGRAM. It's me. I'm more powerful.

BABY (*sarcastically*). Oh, really ?

SUBRAT. Actor.

SANGRAM. You couldn't believe that Lily would go but if Baby goes ...

SUBRAT. Baby ...

SANGRAM. I told you, more powerful ...

SUBRAT. Brute.

SANGRAM (*laughing*). Brute ...

BABY. Brute.

(*Lily enters.*)

LILY. Mr Verma ?

BABY. No.

LILY. Then who is the brute ?

(*Sangram laughs and indicates Subrat.*)

SUBRAT. No.

BABY (*in great agony*). Oh ...

SANGRAM. You'll feel better if you sit by the stream ...

LILY. Baby ?

SANGRAM (*to Baby*). Come. We'll sit like we did that day ...

SUBRAT. Like that day ... ?

SANGRAM. Please, why don't you say ... ?

BABY. Crazy.

LILY (*with jealousy*). Which day ?

SANGRAM. Like that day ... that day ...

LILY. Oh, I see ...

SUBRAT. Like which day ?

SANGRAM. Why don't you tell him, Lily ?

SUBRAT. Will Lily tell me ?

SANGRAM. Yes, Lily.

LILY. As if I will ...

SUBRAT. Lily ...

BABY. Oh ...

SANGRAM (*laughing softly*). Acting ... acting ... boring ...

(*Sangram comes closer to Subrat.*) Boring.

SUBRAT. Yes, boring.

BABY (*coming to Subrat*). You haven't had your tea in the morning.

SANGRAM. Hasn't also had sleep all last night.

SUBRAT. Baby ...

BABY. And you feel wretched without tea in the morning ...

SUBRAT. Baby.

SANGRAM. Call me but love and I will be ...

SUBRAT (*addressing Baby*). Call me but love and I will be ...

BABY (*happily*). Oh, Subrat ... ah ...

SANGRAM. But ... bookworm ... coward ... suicide ... murder ... (*going towards Baby, theatrically*) Only once more ... only once ... call me but love ...

LILY. Oh ... actor.

SANGRAM (*standing in front of Baby*). And I will be new baptized.

BABY. Damn it ...

(*Baby's face shows hatred and disgust. She brushes Sangram aside and goes into room R.*)

SANGRAM. I couldn't stop her.

SUBRAT. Oh ...

SANGRAM. Call me but love and I will be ...

SUBRAT (*threatening*). Actor ...

SANGRAM. You dare.

SUBRAT. Yes.

LILY. Why?

SANGRAM (*smiling*). There are two parties to a fight.

SUBRAT. The actor is my opponent.

SANGRAM. So you'll fight, will you?

SUBRAT. Of course.

SANGRAM. Boxing?

SUBRAT. Yes.

SANGRAM. Poor Professor.

SUBRAT (*advancing towards Sangram*). Come on.

LILY. Subrat ...

SANGRAM (*with a simple disarming smile*). No.

SUBRAT. Coward ...

SANGRAM (*moving closer to Subrat*). You know, only the coward fights.

(*Lily makes an attempt to stand between them.*)

LILY. Actor ...

SANGRAM. I'm not a coward.

SUBRAT (*trying to brush Lily aside*). Lily ...

SANGRAM. I don't want to fight.

SUBRAT. Shame on you.

SANGRAM (*sarcastically*). Shame ...

LILY. Actor ...

SUBRAT. Coward ...

SANGRAM. No, crazy.

SUBRAT. Yes, crazy.

(*Subrat goes into room R. Sangram going to Lily.*)

SANGRAM. Crazy or rejected ... ?

LILY. Who was there with you that day ?

SANGRAM. Lily ...

LILY. Tell me, who was it ... ?

SANGRAM. You know.

LILY. Yes.

SANGRAM. Yes, Baby ...

LILY (*shouts*). Brute ...

SANGRAM. Subrat, a coward ...

LILY. You mean ... you left that day ... for Baby's sake ...

SANGRAM. Yes.

LILY. I'm going to call her.

SANGRAM. Lily ...

LILY. Why didn't you go hunting yesterday ?

SANGRAM. I roamed all day.

LILY. I don't believe you.

SANGRAM. Are you jealous ?

LILY. Actor ...

SANGRAM. But I'm not jealous ...

LILY. Acting again ...

SANGRAM. Don't talk too much.

LILY. Why ?

SANGRAM. You'll merely sweat and ruin your make-up . . .

LILY. Actor.

SANGRAM. Come on.

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. We'll sit by the stream.

LILY. And then ?

SANGRAM. We'll go far . . . far away . . .

LILY. Won't you come back ?

SANGRAM. No.

LILY. But Baby is there . . .

SANGRAM. Baby is a domestic animal.

LILY. And me . . . ?

SANGRAM. You are a domesticated wild animal . . .

LILY. And what about you ?

SANGRAM. Just an animal.

LILY. Yes, definitely.

SANGRAM. Shall I call Subrat ?

LILY. Subrat.

SANGRAM. He is safe . . .

LILY. What do you mean ?

SANGRAM. Baby is there, so Verma will not suspect him.

LILY. Rubbish . . .

SANGRAM. When a wife is around, no one suspects the husband.

LILY (*disgusted*). I won't go.

SANGRAM. With Subrat, you mean ?

LILY. No, with you.

SANGRAM. Why, what's the matter ?

LILY. I'm not a substitute.

SANGRAM. Am I ?

LILY (*seething with anger.*) Yes, you are.

SANGRAM. I knew it.

LILY. What ?

SANGRAM. The sudden change ...

LILY. No.

SANGRAM. It's but natural.

LILY. What's natural ?

SANGRAM. This sort of change.

LILY. Mr Verma will be here any time now ...

SANGRAM. That day, too ... suddenly ... my finger ...

LILY. Forget it.

SANGRAM. Then I left.

LILY. I don't believe ...

SANGRAM. Baby went back, too ... haunted by the ghost of chastity ...

LILY. What ? What's that ?

SANGRAM (*calling out*). Professor ... Baby ...

LILY. Why bother them ... ?

SANGRAM. I'd have called Mr Verma ... but he's dead ....

LILY. Actor.

SANGRAM (*shouting*). I told you .... Mr Verma ... dead ... dead ... dead ...

LILY (*frightened*). Oh, Baby ...

SANGRAM (*shouting*). Professor ...

LILY. Oh, please don't shout ...

SANGRAM (*shouting louder*). Chowkidar ...

LILY. Oh, my God ...

(*Baby and Subrat enter.*)

BABY. Lily ...

SUBRAT. Actor ...

SANGRAM. Verma's dead ....

LILY.

BABY.

SUBRAT.

} Actor.

SANGRAM. I told you ... dead ... dead ... dead ...

*(Verma comes in from outside by the door at the back, gun in hand. Everyone is overwhelmed with surprise except Sangram.)*

VERMA. What's the matter ?

SANGRAM *(goes forward close to him)*. Verma ... dead ...

*(Verma keeps the gun away and begins to loosen his belt.)*

VERMA. I can't understand anything.

SANGRAM. You can't.

VERMA. Where's Lily ?

SANGRAM. At make-up.

VERMA. What do you mean ?

SANGRAM. Picnic ... the stream nearby ... far away ...

VERMA. What about Subrat ?

SUBRAT. Where's the kill ?

VERMA. Just wait and see ...

SANGRAM *(in a tone of reverie)*. Waiting ... waiting ...

VERMA. I watched all night.

SANGRAM. Tired, are you ... ?

VERMA. Can I have some tea ?

LILY. Baby ...

BABY. Yes.

SUBRAT. None of us has had any tea yet ...

SANGRAM. Forget it.

VERMA. What do you mean ?

SANGRAM. Verma's dead ... a dead man can't take tea.

BABY *(laughing)*. Crazy ...

SANGRAM. Everyone looks down upon a crazy man ...

BABY. Yes ...

SANGRAM. The crazy man isn't chaste ...

LILY. No ...

SANGRAM *(suddenly sitting down dejected)*. Oh, God ...

VERMA *(going up to Sangram)*. What's wrong ?



(Sangram picks up the knife and goes up and down the room.)

SANGRAM. Animal . . . . The goat is a domestic animal . . .

(Then suddenly shouts)

Brute . . . brute . . . brute . . .

SUBRAT. Actor . . .

SANGRAM (throwing the knife to Subrat). Just take that knife . . .

SUBRAT. The knife ?

SANG AM. You can kill . . . you're powerful . . .

BABY. Sangram.

SANGRAM (picks up the knife again). Why don't you take it ?

BABY. Me ?

SANGRAM. Suicide . . .

VERMA. What the hell is all this ?

SANGRAM (to Lily). You better take it . . . . Murder or suicide ?

VERMA. No doubt about it. He's really mad.

SUBRAT. Mad, is he ? . . . or is he just pretending . . . acting . . . ?

VERMA. Are you acting or have you really discovered a gold mine . . . ?

SANGRAM. Gold mine . . . this lovely dak bungalow . . . fingers . . . chaste . . . indifferent . . . The goat is a domestic animal . . . Ha, ha . . .

VERMA (going to Subrat). Just let me on it. What exactly is happening ?

SUBRAT (to Baby). Baby ?

SANGRAM. Everything's unnatural . . . absurd . . . Subrat . . . Lily . . . Verma . . . Baby . . . tiger-hunt . . . the goat . . . the banks of the stream . . . contempt . . . suspicion . . . picnic . . . hypocrisy . . .

VERMA (to Subrat). His words seem so incoherent . . .

SUBRAT. Irrelevant ...

SANGRAM (*coming close to the two of them*). The words of the actor ... acting ...

BABY. Actor, please ...

SANGRAM. The actor has no name .... The name Sangram is lost ...

(*Sangram takes the knife and opens it.*)

SUBRAT. I say, actor ...

SANGRAM. I rehearsed last night ...

VERMA. Rehearsal ...

SANGRAM. There was no one to talk to ... you said ... you'd like to see me act ... a monodrama ...

VERMA (*pleased*). Yes, of course ...

SANGRAM. Last night would have been better ...

VERMA. Last night?

SANGRAM. Real-life acting ...

LILY. Actor.

SANGRAM. Yes, the stage had been set.

SUBRAT. The stage?

SANGRAM. Yes, Baby had done it up ... leaves and twigs ... they're dried up today.

VERMA. But the faded leaves are lying scattered out there ...

SANGRAM. Anyway ... would you like to have me do it now?

VERMA (*sits down*). First, the tea ...

SANGRAM. But then, it'll be too late .... I can't wait any more ...

VERMA. Okay then, so be it ...

SANGRAM (*addressing the others*). Please take your seats, all of you .... (*All of them sit down not knowing what to do.*)

Ready .... This is the stage .... I'm the actor ... Now I come on to the stage ... The drama begins like this ....

One wishes to kill another to get what he desires ....

Another wants to go away with someone for his own happiness. But finally nobody musters up enough courage to pursue his desire to its end. Some pretext is found . . . . It means everyone is a hypocrite . . . . They kill themselves . . . they kill their conscience. Ladies and gentlemen, if this be the scene that the actor acts out for you . . .

*(Baby, Lily and Subrat have already hung down their heads. Suddenly Subrat looks up.)*

SUBRAT. I say, actor . . .

SANGRAM. Acting . . . . The actor has the knife in his hand . . . he is not weak . . . he is pure . . . holy . . . . There should be holiness even in his acting . . . faith and deed are one and the same for him. Yes, the knife . . . the knife which butchers the goat . . . . But before the goat is butchered, others catch hold of its legs . . . *(He goes first to Subrat and then to the others.)* Get hold of me . . . my legs . . . body . . . neck . . . my head . . . . *(Everyone is quiet, only Mr Verma keeps laughing.)* No . . . none of you can . . . . Hypocrites all . . . . The actor alone is not a hypocrite . . . . He is holy, pure. He will go to the wings . . . . He'll press the knife against his stomach . . . and then . . . and then . . .

*(Sangram puts the knife against his stomach and goes into room L.)*

VERMA. A marvellous piece of acting.

SUBRAT. Fantastic.

BABY. But . . .

LILY. He used to act in college . . .

BABY. No . . .

SUBRAT. Didn't you say . . . in the college . . .

BABY *(inadvertently)*. Yes.

*(The Chowkidar enters from outside.)*

CHOWKIDAR. Oh, sir . . . sir . . . I'm ruined, sir . . .

SUBRAT. What is it ?

CHOWKIDAR. Oh, sir . . . my goat, sir . . .

VERMA (*gets up*). Yes, I've killed it . . . . Couldn't get any kill though I sat up all night . . .

LILY. On the way back . . .

VERMA. Yes, I saw it was wandering around, so I killed it.

CHOWKIDAR (*whimpers*). Oh, sir . . . .

LILY. What's there to worry about ? You'll get your price.

SUBRAT. Yes, you'll get your price.

VERMA. How much do you want ?

LILY. I'll make cutlets.

*(The Chowkidar keeps weeping. Baby feels uncomfortable as she realizes that Sangram has been too long inside the room.)*

BABY. But the actor . . .

SUBRAT. Actor ?

LILY. We'll get back today . . .

VERMA (*calling out*). Hi there, actor. It was a wonderful piece of acting. Come on, we'll have mutton cutlets tonight.

*(Sangram walks in unsteadily. Half the knife is inside his stomach. His body is smeared with blood.)*

SANGRAM. Cutlets . . . picnic . . . we'll forget everything . . .

*(He sinks to the ground in agony.)*

BABY

LILY

SUBRAT

} (*They surround him*). Oh, actor, actor !

*(Verma does not realize what exactly has happened and pushes the others aside to get close to Sangram.)*

VERMA. Still at it ?

SANGRAM (*still pressing at his stomach with the knife*). Hypocrisy . . . the goat is a domestic animal . . . . Oh, nothing . . . nothing wrong at all . . . actor . . . actor . . . acting . . . only acting . . .

*(Subrat and Lily lean over Sangram in horror.)*

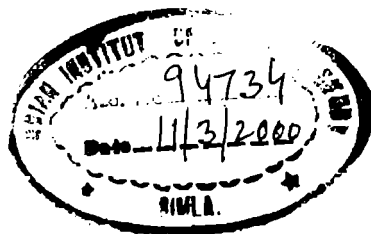
SUBRAT. }  
LILY. } Acting, is it ?

*(Baby pushes everyone aside and takes up the blood-smeared head of Sangram on her lap and continues to say with a voice choked with tears.)*

BABY. No: ... no ... no ...

*(They all fall silent all of a sudden. Baby's head hangs inert as if she has lost all power of speech. Verma keeps standing, unable to think, a vacant look on his face. Subrat and Lily hang their heads and back out slowly. The Chowkidar stands behind them all and continues to sob piteously.)*

CURTAIN



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