

# READING FOR PLEASURE







*Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*  
**Sultana's Dream**

One evening I was lounging in an easy chair in my bedroom and thinking lazily of the condition of Indian womanhood. I am not sure whether I dozed off or not. But, as far as I remember, I was wide awake. I saw the moonlit sky sparkling with thousands of diamond-like stars, very distinctly.

All on a sudden a lady stood before me; how she came in, I do not know. I took her for my friend, Sister Sara.

'Good morning,' said Sister Sara. I smiled inwardly as I knew it was not morning, but starry night. However, I replied to her, saying, 'How do you do?'

'I am all right, thank you. Will you please come out and have a look at our garden?'

I looked again at the moon through the open window, and thought there was no harm in going out at that time. The men-servants outside were fast asleep just then, and I could have a pleasant walk with Sister Sara.

I used to have my walks with Sister Sara, when we were at Darjeeling. Many a time did we walk hand in hand and talk light-heartedly in the botanical gardens there. I fancied, Sister Sara had probably come to take me to some such garden and I readily accepted her offer and went out with her.

When walking I found to my surprise that it was a fine morning. The town was fully awake and the streets alive with bustling crowds. I was feeling very shy, thinking I was walking in the street in broad daylight, but there was not a single man visible.

Some of the passers-by made jokes at me. Though I could not understand their language, yet I felt sure they were joking. I asked my friend, ‘What do they say?’

‘The women say that you look very mannish.’

‘Mannish?’ said I, ‘What do they mean by that?’

‘They mean that you are shy and timid like men.’

‘Shy and timid like men?’ It was really a joke. I became very nervous, when I found that my companion was not Sister Sara, but a stranger. Oh, what a fool had I been to mistake this lady for my dear old friend, Sister Sara.

She felt my fingers tremble in her hand, as we were walking hand in hand.

‘What is the matter, dear?’ she said affectionately. ‘I feel somewhat awkward,’ I said in a rather apologizing tone, ‘as being a purdahnishin woman I am not accustomed to walking about unveiled.’

‘You need not be afraid of coming across a man here. This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm. Virtue herself reigns here.’

By and by I was enjoying the scenery. Really it was very grand. I mistook a patch of green grass for a velvet cushion. Feeling as if I were walking on a soft carpet, I looked down and found the path covered with moss and flowers.

‘How nice it is,’ said I.

‘Do you like it?’ asked Sister Sara. (I continued calling her ‘Sister Sara,’ and she kept calling me by my name).



'Yes, very much; but I do not like to tread on the tender and sweet flowers.'  
 'Never mind, dear Sultana; your treading will not harm them; they are street flowers.'  
 'The whole place looks like a garden,' said I admiringly. 'You have arranged every plant so skilfully.'  
 'Your Calcutta could become a nicer garden than this if only your countrymen wanted to make it so.'

'They would think it useless to give so much attention to horticulture, while they have so many other things to do.'  
 'They could not find a better excuse,' said she with smile.

I became very curious to know where the men were. I met more than a hundred women while walking there, but not a single man.  
 'Where are the men?' I asked her.

'In their proper places, where they ought to be.'  
 'Pray let me know what you mean by "their proper places".'  
 'O, I see my mistake, you cannot know our customs, as you were never here before. We shut our men indoors.'  
 'Just as we are kept in the zenana?'  
 'Exactly so.'

'How funny,' I burst into a laugh. Sister Sara laughed too.  
 'But dear Sultana, how unfair it is to shut in the harmless women and let loose the men.'  
 'Why? It is not safe for us to come out of the zenana, as we are naturally weak.'  
 'Yes, it is not safe so long as there are men about the streets, nor is it so when a wild animal enters a marketplace.'  
 'Of course not.'  
 'Suppose, some lunatics escape from the asylum and begin to do all sorts of mischief to men, horses and other creatures; in that case what will your countrymen do?'  
 'They will try to capture them and put them back into their asylum.'  
 'Thank you! And you do not think it wise to keep sane people inside an asylum and let loose the insane?'

‘Of course not!’ said I laughing lightly.

‘As a matter of fact, in your country this very thing is done! Men, who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women, shut up in the zenana! How can you trust those untrained men out of doors?’

‘We have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India man is lord and master, he has taken to himself all powers and privileges and shut up the women in the zenana.’

‘Why do you allow yourselves to be shut up?’

‘Because it cannot be helped as they are stronger than women.’

‘A lion is stronger than a man, but it does not enable him to dominate the human race. You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interests.’

‘But my dear Sister Sara, if we do everything by ourselves, what will the men do then?’

‘They should not do anything, excuse me; they are fit for nothing. Only catch them and put them into the zenana.’

‘But would it be very easy to catch and put them inside the four walls?’ said I. ‘And even if this were done, would all their business – political and commercial – also go with them into the zenana?’

Sister Sara made no reply. She only smiled sweetly. Perhaps she thought it useless to argue with one who was no better than a frog in a well.

By this time we reached Sister Sara’s house. It was situated in a beautiful heart-shaped garden. It was a bungalow with a corrugated iron roof. It was cooler and nicer than any of our rich buildings. I cannot describe how neat and how nicely furnished and how tastefully decorated it was.

We sat side by side. She brought out of the parlour a piece of embroidery work and began putting on a fresh design.

‘Do you know knitting and needle work?’

‘Yes; we have nothing else to do in our zenana.’



‘With solar heat,’ she said, at the same time showing me the pipe, through which passed the concentrated sunlight and heat. And she cooked something then and there to show me the process.

‘How did you manage to gather and store up the sun-heat?’ I asked her in amazement. ‘Let me tell you a little of our past history then. Thirty years ago, when our present Queen was thirteen years old, she inherited the throne. She was Queen in name only, the Prime Minister really ruling the country.

‘Our good Queen liked science very much. She circulated an order that all the women in her country should be educated. Accordingly a number of girls’ schools were founded and supported by the government. Education was spread far and wide among women. And early marriage also was stopped. No woman was to be allowed to marry before she was twenty-one. I must tell you that, before this change we had been kept in strict purdah.’

‘How the tables are turned,’ I interposed with a laugh.

‘But the seclusion is the same,’ she said. ‘In a few years we had separate universities, where no men were admitted.’

‘In the capital, where our Queen lives, there are two universities. One of these invented a wonderful balloon, to which they attached a number of pipes. By means of this captive balloon which they managed to keep afloat above the cloud-land, they could draw as much water from the atmosphere as they pleased. As the water was incessantly being drawn by the university people no cloud gathered and the ingenious Lady Principal stopped rain and storms thereby.’

‘Really! Now I understand why there is no mud here!’ said I. But I could not understand how it was possible to accumulate water in the pipes. She explained to me how it was done, but I was unable to understand her, as my scientific knowledge was very limited. However, she went on, ‘When the other university came to know of this,

they became exceedingly jealous and tried to do something more extraordinary still. They invented an instrument by which they could collect as much sun-heat as they wanted. And they kept the heat stored up to be distributed among others as required.



'While the women were engaged in scientific research, the men of this country were busy increasing their military power. When they came to know that the female universities were able to draw water from the atmosphere and collect heat from the sun, they only laughed at the members of the universities and called the whole thing "a sentimental nightmare"!'.

'Your achievements are very wonderful indeed! But tell me, how you managed to put the men of your country into the zenana. Did you entrap them first?'

'No.'

'It is not likely that they would surrender their free and open air life of their own accord and confine themselves within the four walls of the zenana! They must have been overpowered.'

'Yes, they have been!'

'By whom? By some lady-warriors, I suppose?'

'No, not by arms.'

'Yes, it cannot be so. Men's arms are stronger than women's. Then?'

'By brain.'

'Even their brains are bigger and heavier than women's. Are they not?'

'Yes, but what of that? An elephant also has got a bigger and heavier brain than a man has. Yet man can enchain elephants and employ them, according to their own wishes.'

'Well said, but tell me please, how it all actually happened. I am dying to know it!'

'Women's brains are somewhat quicker than men's. Ten years ago, when the military officers called our scientific discoveries "a sentimental nightmare," some of the young ladies wanted to say something in reply to those remarks. But both the Lady Principals restrained them and said, they should reply not by word, but by deed, if ever they got the opportunity. And they had not long to wait for that opportunity.'

'How marvellous!' I heartily clapped my hands. 'And now the proud gentlemen are dreaming sentimental dreams themselves.'

‘Soon afterwards certain persons came from a neighbouring country and took shelter in ours. They were in trouble having committed some political offense. The king who cared more for power than for good government asked our kind-hearted Queen to hand them over to his officers. She refused, as it was against her principle to turn out refugees. For this refusal the king declared war against our country.

‘Our military officers sprang to their feet at once and marched out to meet the enemy. The enemy however, was too strong for them. Our soldiers fought bravely, no doubt. But in spite of all their bravery the foreign army advanced step by step to invade our country.

‘Nearly all the men had gone out to fight; even a boy of sixteen was not left home. Most of our warriors were killed, the rest driven back and the enemy came within twenty-five miles of the capital.

‘A meeting of a number of wise ladies was held at the Queen’s palace to advise as to what should be done to save the land. Some proposed to fight like soldiers; others objected and said that women were not trained to fight with swords and guns, nor were they accustomed to fighting with any weapons. A third party regretfully remarked that they were hopelessly weak of body.

“If you cannot save your country for lack of physical strength,” said the Queen, “try to do so by brain power.”

‘There was a dead silence for a few minutes. Her Royal Highness said again, “I must commit suicide if the land and my honour are lost.”

‘Then the Lady Principal of the second university (who had collected sun-heat), who had been silently thinking during the consultation, remarked that they were all but lost, and there was little hope left for them. There was, however, one plan which she would like to try, and this would be her first and last efforts; if she failed in this, there would be nothing left but to commit suicide. All present solemnly vowed that they would never allow themselves to be enslaved, no matter what happened.



'The Queen thanked them heartily, and asked the Lady Principal to try her plan. The Lady Principal rose again and said, "before we go out the men must enter the zenanas. I make this prayer for the sake of purdah." "Yes, of course," replied Her Royal Highness.

'On the following day the Queen called upon all men to retire into zenanas for the sake of honour and liberty. Wounded and tired as they were, they took that order rather for a boon! They bowed low and entered the zenanas without uttering a single word of protest. They were sure that there was no hope for this country at all.

'Then the Lady Principal with her two thousand students marched to the battle field, and arriving there directed all the rays of the concentrated sunlight and heat towards the enemy.

'The heat and light were too much for them to bear. They all ran away panic-stricken, not knowing in their bewilderment how to counteract that scorching heat. When they fled away leaving their guns and other ammunitions of war, they were burnt down by means of the same sun-heat. Since then no one has tried to invade our country any more.'

'And since then your countrymen never tried to come out of the zenana?'

'Yes, they wanted to be free. Some of the police commissioners and district magistrates sent word to the Queen to the effect that the military officers certainly deserved to be imprisoned for their failure; but they never neglected their duty and therefore they should not be punished and they prayed to be restored to their respective offices.

'Her Royal Highness sent them a circular letter intimating to them that if their services should ever be needed they would be sent for, and that in the meanwhile they should remain where they were. Now that they are accustomed to the purdah system and have ceased to grumble at their seclusion, we call the system "Mardana" instead of "zenana".'

‘But how do you manage,’ I asked Sister Sara, ‘to do without the police or magistrates in case of theft or murder?’

‘Since the “Mardana” system has been established, there has been no more crime or sin; therefore we do not require a policeman to find out a culprit, nor do we want a magistrate to try a criminal case.’

‘That is very good, indeed. I suppose if there was any dishonest person, you could very easily chastise her. As you gained a decisive victory without shedding a single drop of blood, you could drive off crime and criminals too without much difficulty!’

‘Now, dear Sultana, will you sit here or come to my parlour?’ she asked me.

‘Your kitchen is not inferior to a queen’s boudoir!’ I replied with a pleasant smile, ‘but we must leave it now; for the gentlemen may be cursing me for keeping them away from their duties in the kitchen so long.’ We both laughed heartily.

‘How my friends at home will be amused and amazed, when I go back and tell them that in the far-off Ladyland, ladies rule over the country and control all social matters, while gentlemen are kept in the Mardanas to mind babies, to cook and to do all sorts of domestic work; and that cooking is so easy a thing that it is simply a pleasure to cook!’  
‘Yes, tell them about all that you see here.’

‘Please let me know, how you carry on land cultivation and how you plough the land and do other hard manual work.’

‘Our fields are tilled by means of electricity, which supplies motive power for other hard work as well, and we employ it for our aerial conveyances too. We have no rail road nor any paved streets here.’

‘Therefore neither street nor railway accidents occur here,’ said I. ‘Do not you ever suffer from want of rainwater?’ I asked.

‘Never since the “water balloon” has been set up. You see the big balloon and pipes attached thereto. By their aid we can draw as much rainwater as we require. Nor do we ever suffer from flood or thunderstorms. We are all very busy making nature yield as



‘That is very good. I see purity itself reigns over your land. I should like to see the good Queen, who is so sagacious and far-sighted and who has made all these rules.’

‘All right,’ said Sister Sara.

Then she screwed a couple of seats onto a square piece of plank. To this plank she attached two smooth and well-polished balls. When I asked her what the balls were for, she said they were hydrogen balls and they were used to overcome the force of gravity. The balls were of different capacities to be used according to the different weights desired to be overcome. She then fastened to the air-car two wing-like blades, which, she said, were worked by electricity. After we were comfortably seated she touched a knob and the blades began to whirl, moving faster and faster every moment. At first we were raised to the height of about six or seven feet and then off we flew. And before I could realize that we had commenced moving, we reached the garden of the Queen.

My friend lowered the air-car by reversing the action of the machine, and when the car touched the ground the machine was stopped and we got out.

I had seen from the air-car the Queen walking on a garden path with her little daughter (who was four years old) and her maids of honour.

‘Halloo! You here!’ cried the Queen addressing Sister Sara. I was introduced to Her Royal Highness and was received by her cordially without any ceremony.

I was very much delighted to make her acquaintance. In the course of the conversation I had with her, the Queen told me that she had no objection to permitting her subjects to trade with other countries. ‘But,’ she continued, ‘no trade was possible with countries where the women were kept in the zenanas and so unable to come and trade with us. Men, we find, are rather of lower morals and so we do not like dealing with them. We do not covet other people’s land, we do not fight for a piece of diamond though it may be a thousand-fold brighter than the Koh-i-Noor, nor do we grudge a ruler his Peacock Throne. We dive deep into the ocean of knowledge and try to find out the precious gems, which nature has kept in store for us. We enjoy nature’s gifts as much as we can.’

After taking leave of the Queen, I visited the famous universities, and was shown some of their manufactories, laboratories and observatories.

After visiting the above places of interest we got again into the air-car, but as soon as it began moving, I somehow slipped down and the fall startled me out of my dream. And



on opening my eyes, I found myself in my own bedroom still lounging in the easy-chair!

(1905)

### Glossary

**Bustling:** Full of energetic and noisy activity; busy and lively.

**Boudoir:** A woman's private sitting room or bedroom.

**Conveyances:** Means of transporting people or goods; vehicles.

**Ejaculate:** Say something quickly and suddenly.

**Sagacious:** Having keen mental discernment and good judgment; wise.

**Covet:** To desire something very strongly, often something that belongs to someone else.

### Study Questions

1. Write a short note on the main theme of the story.
2. What are the scientific achievements this story is based upon? Do you think they are accurate enough? Why do you think so?
3. Explain these two concepts: "Our religion is based on Love and Truth. It is our religious duty to love one another and to be absolutely truthful." "We do not take pleasure in killing a creature of God, especially a human being."



*Langston Hughes*  
**Thank You, Ma'am**

She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the single tug the boy gave it from behind. But the boy's weight and the weight of the purse combined caused him to lose his balance so, instead of taking off full blast as he had hoped, the boy fell on his back on the sidewalk, and his legs flew up. The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter. Then she reached down, picked the boy up by his shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

After that the woman said, "Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here." She still held him. But she bent down enough to permit him to stoop and pick up her purse. Then she said, "Now ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, "Yes'm."

The woman said, "What did you want to do it for?"

The boy said, "I didn't aim to."

She said, "You a lie!"

By that time two or three people passed, stopped, turned to look, and some stood watching.

“If I turn you loose, will you run?” asked the woman.

“Yes'm,” said the boy.

“Then I won't turn you loose,” said the woman.

She did not release him.

“I'm very sorry, lady, I'm sorry,” whispered the boy.

“Um-hum! And your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you. Ain't you got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?”

“No'm,” said the boy.

“Then it will get washed this evening,” said the large woman starting up the street, dragging the frightened boy behind her.

He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, frail and willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans.

The woman said, “You ought to be my son. I would teach you right from wrong. Least I can do right now is to wash your face. Are you hungry?”

“No'm,” said the being dragged boy. “I just want you to turn me loose.”

“Was I bothering you when I turned that corner?” asked the woman.

“No'm.”

“But you put yourself in contact with me,” said the woman. “If you think that that contact is not going to last awhile, you got another though coming. When I get through with you, sir, you are going to remember Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.”

Sweat popped out on the boy's face and he began to struggle. Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked him around in front of her, put a half-nelson about his neck, and continued to drag him up the street. When she got to her door, she dragged the boy inside, down a hall, and into a large kitchenette-furnished room at the rear of the house. She switched on the light and left the door open. The boy could hear other roomers laughing and talking in the large house. Some of their doors were open, too, so he knew he and the woman were not alone. The woman still had him by the neck in the middle of her room. She said, “What is your name?”

“Roger,” answered the boy.

“Then, Roger, you go to that sink and wash your face,” said the woman, whereupon she turned him loose--at last. Roger looked at the door—looked at the woman—looked at the door— and went to the sink.



Let the water run until it gets warm,” she said. “Here’s a clean towel.”

“You gonna take me to jail?” asked the boy, bending over the sink.

“Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere,” said the woman. “Here I am trying to get home to cook me a bite to eat and you snatch my pocketbook! Maybe, you ain’t been to your supper either, late as it be. Have you?”

“There’s nobody home at my house,” said the boy.

“Then we’ll eat,” said the woman, “I believe you’re hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook.”

“I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes,” said the boy.

“Well, you didn’t have to snatch my pocketbook to get some suede shoes,” said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. “You could of asked me.”

“M’am?”

The water dripping from his face, the boy looked at her. There was a long pause. A very long pause. After he had dried his face and not knowing what else to do dried it again, the boy turned around, wondering what next. The door was open. He could make a dash for it down the hall. He could run, run, run, run, run!

The woman was sitting on the day-bed.

After a while she said, “I were young once and I wanted things I could not get.”

There was another long pause. The boy’s mouth opened. Then he frowned, but not knowing he frowned. The woman said, “Um-hum! You thought I was going to say but, didn’t you? You thought I was going to say, but I didn’t snatch people’s pocketbooks. Well, I wasn’t going to say that.” Pause. Silence. “I have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son—neither tell God, if he didn’t already know. So you set down while I fix us something to eat. You might run that comb through your hair so you will look presentable.”

In another corner of the room behind a screen was a gas plate and an icebox. Mrs. Jones got up and went behind the screen. The woman did not watch the boy to see if he was going to run now, nor did she watch her purse which she left behind her on the day-bed. But the boy took care to sit on the far side of the room where he thought she could easily see him out of the corner other eye, if she wanted to. He did not trust the woman not to trust him. And he did not want to be mistrusted now.

“Do you need somebody to go to the store,” asked the boy, “maybe to get some milk or something?”

“Don’t believe I do,” said the woman, “unless you just want sweet milk yourself. I was going to make cocoa out of this canned milk I got here.”

“That will be fine,” said the boy.



She heated some lima beans and ham she had in the icebox, made the cocoa, and set the table. The woman did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his folks, or anything else that would embarrass him. Instead, as they ate, she told him about her job in a hotel beauty shop that stayed open late, what the work was like, and how all kinds of women came in and out, blondes, red-heads, and Spanish. Then she cut him a half of her ten-cent cake.

“Eat some more, son,” she said.

When they were finished eating she got up and said, “Now, here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto my pocketbook nor nobody else’s—because shoes come by devilish like that will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But I wish you would behave yourself, son, from here on in.”

She led him down the hall to the front door and opened it. “Goodnight!” Behave yourself, boy!” she said, looking out into the street.

The boy wanted to say something else other than “Thank you, ma’am” to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but he couldn’t do so as he turned at the barren stoop and looked back at the large woman in the door. He barely managed to say “Thank you” before she shut the door. And he never saw her again.

(1958)

### Vocabulary

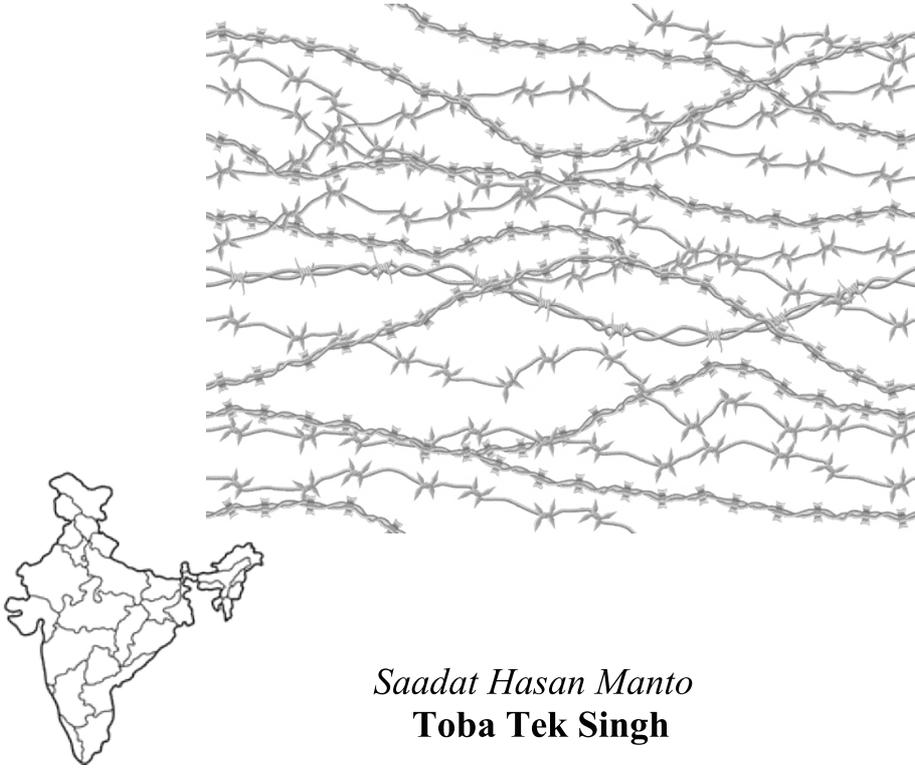
Frail: Physically weak or delicate, often due to age or lack of strength.

Nelson: A wrestling hold in which one arm is passed around the neck of an opponent, usually to control or restrain them.

Cocoa: A beverage made from cocoa powder, usually mixed with milk and sugar, often served hot.

### Study Questions

1. Examine the theme of trust and its importance in human relationships as portrayed in the story.
2. How does Mrs. Jones’ reaction to Roger’s attempted theft challenge conventional response to crime?
3. How does the story suggest about the impact of Mrs. Jones action on Roger’s future behaviour?



*Saadat Hasan Manto*  
**Toba Tek Singh**

A couple of years after the partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums should be sent to India.

Whether this was a reasonable or an unreasonable idea is difficult to say. One thing, however, is clear. It took many conferences of important officials from the two sides to come to the decision. Final details, like the date of actual exchange, were carefully worked out. Muslim lunatics whose families were still residing in India were to be left undisturbed, the rest moved to the border for the exchange. The situation in Pakistan was slightly different, since almost the entire population of Hindus and Sikhs had already migrated to India. The question of keeping non-Muslim lunatics in Pakistan did not, therefore, arise.

While it is not known what the reaction in India was, when the news reached the Lahore lunatic asylum, it immediately became the subject of heated discussion. One Muslim lunatic, a regular reader of the fire-eating daily newspaper Zamindar, when asked what Pakistan was, replied after deep reflection, ‘The name of a place in India where cut-throat razors are manufactured.’

This profound observation was received with visible satisfaction.

A Sikh lunatic asked another Sikh, ‘Sardarji, why are we being sent to India? We don’t even know the language they speak in that country.’

The man smiled. ‘I know the language of the Hindostoras. These devils always strut about as if they were the lords of the earth.’

One day a Muslim lunatic, while taking his bath, raised the slogan ‘Pakistan Zindabad’ with such enthusiasm that he lost his balance and was later found lying on the floor unconscious.

Not all inmates were mad. Some were perfectly normal, except that they were murderers. To spare them the hangman’s noose, their families had managed to get them committed after bribing officials down the line. They probably had a vague idea why India was being divided and what Pakistan was, but, as for the present situation, they were equally clueless.

Newspapers were no help either, and the asylum guards were ignorant, if not illiterate. Nor was there anything to be learnt by eavesdropping on their conversations. Some said there was this man by the name Muhammad Ali Jinnah, or the Quaid-e-Azam, who had set up a separate country for Muslims, called Pakistan.

As to where Pakistan was located, the inmates knew nothing.

That was why both the mad and the partially mad were unable to decide whether they were now in India or in Pakistan. If they were in India, where on earth was Pakistan? And if they were in Pakistan, then how come that until only the other day it was India?

One inmate had got so badly caught up in this India-Pakistan-Pakistan-India rigmorole that one day, while sweeping the floor, he dropped everything, climbed the nearest tree and installed himself on a branch, from which vantage point he spoke for two hours on the delicate problem of India and Pakistan. The guards asked him to get down; instead he went a branch higher, and when threatened with punishment, declared, ‘I wish to live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live in this tree.’

When he was finally persuaded to come down, he began embracing his Sikh and Hindu friends, tears running down his cheeks, fully convinced that they were about to leave him and go to India.

A Muslim radio engineer, who had an MSc degree, and never mixed with anyone, given as he was to taking long walks by himself all day, was so affected by the current debate that one day he took off all his clothes, gave the bundle to one of the attendants and ran into the garden stark naked.

A Muslim lunatic from Chaniot, who used to be one of the most devoted workers of the All India Muslim League, and obsessed with bathing himself fifteen or sixteen times a day, had suddenly stopped doing that and announced his name was Muhammad Ali—that he was Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This had led a Sikh inmate to declare himself Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Sikhs.

Apprehending serious communal trouble, the authorities declared them dangerous, and shut them up in separate cells.

There was a young Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had gone off his head after an unhappy love affair. When told that Amritsar was to become a part of India, he went into a depression because his beloved lived in Amritsar, something he had not forgotten even in his madness. That day he abused every major and minor Hindu and Muslim leader who had cut India into two, turning his beloved into an Indian and him into a Pakistani.

When news of the exchange reached the asylum, his friends offered him congratulations, because he was now to be sent to India, the country of his beloved. However, he declared that he had no intention of leaving Lahore, because his practice would not flourish in Amritsar.

There were two Anglo-Indian lunatics in the European ward. When told that the British had decided to go home after granting independence to India, they went into a state of deep shock and were seen conferring with each other in whispers the entire afternoon. They were worried about their changed status after independence. Would there be a European ward or would it be abolished? Would breakfast continue to be served or would they have to subsist on bloody Indian chapatti?

There was another inmate, a Sikh, who had been confined for the last fifteen years. Whenever he spoke, it was the same mysterious gibberish: ‘Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain.’ Guards said he had not slept a wink in fifteen years. Occasionally, he could be observed leaning against a wall, but the rest of the time, he was always to be found standing. Because of this, his legs were permanently swollen, something that did not appear to bother him. Recently, he had started to listen carefully to discussions about the forthcoming exchange of Indian and Pakistani lunatics. When asked his opinion, he observed solemnly, ‘Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the Government of Pakistan.’



Of late, however, the Government of Pakistan had been replaced by the government of Toba Tek Singh, a small town in the Punjab which was his home. He had also begun inquiring where Toba Tek Singh was to go. However, nobody was quite sure whether it was in India or Pakistan.

Those who had tried to solve this mystery had become utterly confused when told that Sialkot, which used to be in India, was now in Pakistan. It was anybody's guess what was going to happen to Lahore, which was currently in Pakistan, but could slide into India any moment. It was also possible that the entire subcontinent of India might become Pakistan. And who could say if both India and Pakistan might not entirely vanish from the map of the world one day?

The old man's hair was almost gone and what little was left had become a part of the beard, giving him a strange, even frightening, appearance. However, he was a harmless fellow and had never been known to get into fights. Older attendants at the asylum said that he was a fairly prosperous landlord from Toba Tek Singh, who had quite suddenly gone mad. His family had brought him in, bound and fettered. That was fifteen years ago.

Once a month, he used to have visitors but, since the start of communal troubles in the Punjab, they had stopped coming. His real name was Bishen Singh, but everybody called him Toba Tek Singh. He lived in a kind of limbo, having no idea what day of the week it was, or month, or how many years had passed since his confinement. However, he had developed a sixth sense about the day of the visit, when he used to bathe himself, soap his body, oil and comb his hair and put on clean clothes. He never said a word during these meetings, except occasional outbursts of, 'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain.'

When he was first confined, he had left an infant daughter behind, now a pretty, young girl of fifteen. She would come occasionally, and sit in front of him with tears rolling down her cheeks. In the strange world that he inhabited, hers was just another face.

Since the start of this India-Pakistan caboodle, he had got into the habit of asking fellow inmates where exactly Toba Tek Singh was, without receiving a satisfactory answer, because nobody knew.

The visits had also suddenly stopped. He was increasingly restless, but, more than that, curious. The sixth sense, which used to alert him to the day of the visit, had also atrophied.

He missed his family, the gifts they used to bring and the concern with which they used to speak to him. He was sure they would have told him whether Toba Tek Singh was in India or Pakistan. He also had a feeling that they came from Toba Tek Singh, where he used to have his home.

One of the inmates had declared himself God. Bishen Singh asked him one day if Toba Tek Singh was in India or Pakistan. The man chuckled. ‘Neither in India nor in Pakistan, because, so far, we have issued no orders in this respect.’

Bishen Singh begged ‘God’ to issue the necessary orders so that his problem could be solved, but he was disappointed, as ‘God’ appeared to be preoccupied with more pressing matters. Finally, he told him angrily, ‘Uper the gur gur the annexe the mung the dal of Gurwji da Khalsa and Guruji ki fateh . . . jo boley so nihai sat sri akal.’

What he wanted to say was, ‘You don’t answer my prayers because you are a Muslim god. Had you been a Sikh god, you would have been more of a sport.’

A few days before the exchange was to take place, one of Bishen Singh’s Muslim friends from Toba Tek Singh came to see him—the first time in fifteen years. Bishen Singh looked at him once and turned away, until a guard said to him, ‘This is your old friend Fazal Din. He has come all the way to meet you’

Bishen Singh looked at Fazal Din and began to mumble something. Fazal Din placed his hand on his friend’s shoulder and said, ‘I have been meaning to come for some time to bring you news. All your family is well and has gone to India safely. I did what I could to help. Your daughter Roop Kaur...’—he hesitated— ‘She is safe too ... in India.’

Bishen Singh kept quiet; Fazal Din continued, ‘Your family wanted me to make sure you were well. Soon you will be moving to India. What can I say, except that you should remember me to bhai Balbir Singh, bhai Vadhawa Singh and bahain Amrit Kaur. Tell bhai Balbir Singh that Fazal Din is well by the grace of God. The two brown buffaloes he left behind are well too. Both of them gave birth to calves, but, unfortunately, one of them died after six days. Say I think of them often and to write to me if there is anything I can do.’

Then he added, ‘Here, I brought you a nice treat from home.’ Bishen Singh took the gift and handed it to one of the guards.

‘Where is Toba Tek Singh?’ he asked.

‘Where? Why, it is where it has always been.’

‘In India or in Pakistan?’



‘In India ... no, in Pakistan.’

Without saying another word, Bishen Singh walked away, murmuring, ‘Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and Hindustan dur fittay moun.’

Meanwhile, the exchange arrangements were rapidly being finalized. Lists of lunatics from the two sides had been exchanged between the governments, and the date of transfer fixed.

On a cold winter evening, buses full of Hindu and Sikh lunatics, accompanied by armed police and officials, began moving out of the Lahore asylum towards Wagha, the dividing line between India and Pakistan. Senior officials from the two sides in charge of exchange arrangements met, signed documents and the transfer got under way.

It was quite a job getting the men out of the buses and handing them over to officials. Some just refused to leave. Those who were persuaded to do so began to run pell-mell in every direction. Some were stark naked. All efforts to get them to cover themselves had failed because they couldn't be kept from tearing off their garments.

Some were shouting abuse or singing. Others were weeping bitterly. Many fights broke out.

In short, complete confusion prevailed. Female lunatics were also being exchanged and they were even noisier. It was bitterly cold.

Most of the inmates appeared to be dead set against the entire operation. They simply could not understand why they were being forcibly removed, thrown into buses and driven to this strange place. There were slogans of ‘Pakistan Zindabad’ and ‘Pakistan Murdabad’, followed by fights.

When Bishen Singh was brought out and asked to give his name so that it could be recorded in a register, he asked the official behind the desk, ‘Where is Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?’

‘Pakistan,’ he answered with a vulgar laugh.

Bishen Singh tried to run, but was overpowered by the Pakistani guards who tried to push him across the dividing line towards India. However, he wouldn't move. ‘This is Toba Tek Singh,’ he announced. ‘Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana mung the dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.’

Many efforts were made to explain to him that Toba Tek Singh had already been moved to India, or would be moved immediately, but it had no effect on Bishen Singh. The guards even tried force, but soon gave up.



There he stood in no-man's-land on his swollen legs like a colossus.

Since he was a harmless old man, no further attempt was made to push him into India. He was allowed to stand where he wanted, while the exchange continued. The night wore on.

Just before sunrise, Bishen Singh, the man who had stood on his legs for fifteen years, screamed and as officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed to the ground.

There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth, which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.

(1955)

--Translated by Khalid Hasan

### Glossary

Inmates: People confined to an institution like a prison or asylum.

Asylum: A place offering protection or shelter, often referring to an institution for the mentally ill.

Enthusiasm: Intense and eager enjoyment or interest.

Eavesdropping: Secretly listening to someone else's conversation.

Rigmarole: A long, complicated, or confusing procedure.

Vantage point: A position that gives a good view or understanding of something.

Communal: Related to a group of people, often involving a community or shared culture; can also refer to conflicts between different religious or ethnic groups.

Limbo: An uncertain state or condition.

Atrophy: To waste away or deteriorate, typically through lack of use.

Fettered: Restrained or bound, usually with chains.

Atrophied: Weakened or shrunk because it hasn't been used.

Colossus - A person or thing of enormous size, importance, or power.

### Study Questions

1. How does the lack of clear communication among the inmates reflect the broader confusion caused by the partition?
2. What does Toba Tek Singh represent in the story, and why is it significant for understanding the impact of partition?
3. How does Bishan Singh's refusal represent a form of resistance against the imposed national identities of being an Indian or a Pakistani ?



*Imam al-Ghazali*  
**Deathbed**

Say unto brethren when they see me dead,  
And weep for me, lamenting me in sadness:  
Think ye I am this corpse ye are to bury?  
I swear by God, this dead one is not I.  
I in the Spirit am, and this my body  
My dwelling was my garment for a time.  
I am a treasure: hidden I was beneath  
This talisman of dust, wherein I suffered.  
I am a pearl; a shell imprisoned me,  
But leaving it, all trials I have left.

I am a bird, and this was once my cage;  
 But I have flown, leaving it as a token.  
 I praise God who hath set me free, and made  
 For me a dwelling in the heavenly heights.  
 Ere now I was a dead man in your midst,  
 But I have come to life, and doffed my shroud.

(1111)

Translation: Martin Lings

**Glossary:**

**Corpse:** The dead body of a person; symbolizes the end of life. Example: “The corpse lay peacefully in the tranquil setting.”

**Talisman:** An object thought to have magical powers, representing the body; symbolizes protection or significance. Example: “The talisman hung around her neck, a reminder of her strength.”

**Doffed:** To take off or remove; here meaning to leave behind the body; signifies liberation or release. Example: “He doffed his earthly ties, ready to transcend.”

**Study Questions:**

1. How does the speaker view the relationship between the body and the soul?
2. What metaphors does the poet use to describe the soul's transition from life to death?
3. How does the poem reflect the Islamic understanding of the afterlife?



*Emily Dickinson*

**“Hope” is the thing with feathers**

“Hope” is the thing with feathers —  
That perches in the soul —  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all —

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -  
And sore must be the storm—  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land—  
 And on the strangest Sea—  
 Yet - never - in Extremity,  
 It asked a crumb - of me.

(1891)

### Glossary:

Perches: To settle or rest on something elevated. Example: “The bird perches on the branch.”

Gale: A strong wind; often refers to a storm. Example: “The gale made the trees sway.”

Abash: To make someone feel embarrassed or ashamed. Example: “He felt abashed by the criticism.”

Chillest: The coldest; can refer to temperature or atmosphere. Example: “It was the chilliest winter in years.”

Strangest: Most unusual or unfamiliar. Example: “He had the strangest dream last night.”

Extremity: The furthest point or limit; can also refer to severe conditions. Example: “In extremity, she found her strength.”

Crumb: A small piece or morsel of food. Example: “She offered him a crumb of bread.”

### Study Questions:

1. How does Dickinson use the metaphor of a bird to represent hope? What qualities of the bird convey the nature of hope in the poem?
2. What role do the imagery of weather and nature play in enhancing the poem's theme? How do they reflect the challenges and resilience associated with hope?
3. What is the significance of the line “It asked a crumb - of me”? How does this line contribute to the overall message about the nature of hope and its relationship with the individual?





*Pablo Neruda*  
**Bird**

It was passed from one bird to another,  
the whole gift of the day.  
The day went from flute to flute,  
went dressed in vegetation,  
in flights which opened a tunnel  
through the wind would pass  
to where birds were breaking open  
the dense blue air—  
and there, night came in.  
When I returned from so many journeys,  
I stayed suspended and green

between sun and geography -  
 I saw how wings worked,  
 how perfumes are transmitted  
 by feathery telegraph,  
 and from above I saw the path,  
 the springs and the roof tiles,  
 the fishermen at their trades,  
 the trousers of the foam;  
 I saw it all from my green sky.  
 I had no more alphabet  
 than the swallows in their courses,  
 the tiny, shining water  
 of the small bird on fire  
 which dances out of the pollen.

### Glossary:

**Vegetation:** Plant life; greenery. Example: “The forest was thick with dense vegetation.”

**Suspended:** Hanging; not moving. Example: “The swing was suspended from a tall tree.”

**Telegraph:** An old method of sending messages, often metaphorically used to suggest rapid communication. Example: “The message travelled through the telegraph quickly.”

**Foam:** Bubbles formed on the surface of water or liquid. Example: “The sea was topped with white foam as the waves crashed.”

### Study Questions:

1. How does Neruda use the metaphor of birds to explore the passage of time and the interconnectedness of life? Consider the roles that nature and the environment play in the movement of the day.
2. What is the significance of perspective in the poem, especially with regard to the speaker’s observation of the world “from above”? How does this viewpoint alter the way the speaker perceives both the natural and human-made environments?
3. How does the poem challenge traditional notions of language and communication through its imagery of “feathery telegraph” and the “alphabet” of swallows? What might this suggest about the limitations of human language compared to the communication found in nature?



**Anton Chekhov**  
**THE PROPOSAL**

A Joke in One Act

**CHARACTERS**

**STEPAN STEPANOVICH CHUBUKOV**, a landowner

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA**, his daughter, 25

**IVAN VASILYEVICH LOMOV**, Chubukov's neighbour, a healthy, well-fed, but very hypochondriacal landowner

The action takes place on Chubukov's estate.

A parlour in Chubukov's house.

I

**CHUBUKOV** and **LOMOV** (enters wearing a tailcoat and white gloves).

**CHUBUKOV** (going to meet him). Darling boy, look who it is! Ivan Vasilye-vich! Absolutely delighted! (Shakes his hand.) This is what I call a pleasant surprise, laddy . . . How are you?

**LOMOV.** Well, thank you kindly. And how are you getting on?

**CHUBUKOV.** We plug along in a modest sort of way, my cherub, all the better for your asking and so on. Have a seat, please do . . . The thing of it is, it's wrong to neglect your neighbors, laddy. Darling boy, why are you in formal dress? A tailcoat, gloves, and so on. You headed anywhere in particular, my trusty friend?

**LOMOV.** No, I'm only calling on you, respected Stepan Stepanych.

**CHUBUKOV.** Then why the tailcoat, the elegance!

**LOMOV.** Well, you see, here's what it's about. (Takes him by the arm.) I have come, respected Stepan Stepanych, to trouble you with a certain question. More than once now I have had the honour of calling on your assistance, and you have always, in a manner of speaking . . . but, excuse me, I'm getting excited. I'll take a sip of water, respected Stepan Stepanych. (Drinks water.)

**CHUBUKOV** (aside). He's here to ask for money! He won't get it! (To him.) What's the matter, my beauty?

**LOMOV.** Well, you see, Respect Stepanych . . . sorry, Stepan Respectych .

. . . I mean, I'm awfully excited, as you may have noticed . . . In short, you're the only one who can assist me, although, of course, I don't deserve it in any way and . . . and I don't have the right to count on your support . . .

**CHUBUKOV.** Ah, stop beating around the bush, laddy! Spit it out! Well?

**LOMOV.** Right away . . . this very minute. The fact is, I have come here to ask for the hand of your daughter Nataliya Stepanovna.

**CHUBUKOV** (overjoyed). Darling boy! Ivan Vasilyevich! Say that again — did I hear it right?

**LOMOV.** I have the honor to ask . . .

**CHUBUKOV** (interrupting). My darling boy . . . I am delighted and so on .

. . . The thing of it is and so forth. (Embraces and kisses him.) I've wanted this for a long time. It's always been my wish. (Sheds a tear.) And I've always been fond of you, my cherub, like my own son. God grant you both wisdom and love and so on, and I've really wanted . . . Why am I standing around like a lunkhead? I'm dazed with delight, quite dazed! Oof, with all my heart . . . I'll go and call Natasha and that sort of thing.

**LOMOV** (deeply moved). Respected Stepan Stepanych, what do you think, can I count on her consent?



**CHUBUKOV.** The thing of it is, a good-looking fellow like you and . . . how can she not consent! She loves you like a cat loves catnip, I'll wager, and so on . . . Be right back! (Exits.)

## II

**LOMOV** (alone).

**LOMOV.** It's cold . . . I'm trembling all over, as if I were about to take an exam. The main thing is to make up your mind. If you think about it too long, and hesitate, talk it over a lot and wait for the perfect woman or true love, then you'll never get married . . . Brrr! . . . It's cold! Nataliya Stepanovna is an excellent housekeeper, passable looking, educated . . . what more do I need? However, there goes a ringing in my ears with all this excitement. (Drinks water.) And I've really got to get married . . . First of all, I'm already thirty-five — what they call a critical age. Second of all, I need an orderly, well-regulated life . . . I've got heart trouble, constant palpitations, I'm touchy and always flying off the handle . . . Right now, look, my lips are quivering and my right eyelid's starting to flicker . . . But the most awful thing is when I go to sleep. No sooner do I get in bed and start to doze off, when suddenly something starts in my left side—a twitch! and it moves to my shoulders and head .

. . . I leap out of bed like a lunatic, pace the floor a bit and lie down again, but no sooner do I start to doze off, when there it is in my side again— that twitch! And so it goes twenty times over . . .

## III

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** and **LOMOV**.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** (enters). Oh, for heaven's sake! It's only you, and Papa was saying: go inside, there's a dealer come about the merchandise. Good morning, Ivan Vasilyevich!

**LOMOV.** Good morning, respected Nataliya Stepanovna!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Excuse me, I'm in an apron and housedress . . . We've been shelling peas for drying. Why has it been so long since your last visit? Please sit down . . .

They sit down.

Would you like some breakfast?

**LOMOV.** No thank you, I've already eaten . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Go ahead and smoke . . . Here are the matches . . . Splendid weather, but yesterday it rained so hard that none of the farmhands did a lick of work all day. How much hay have you mown? Can you imagine, I was a greedy little pig and mowed the whole field, and now I've got second thoughts, I'm afraid my hay might rot. It would have been better to wait. But what's this? I do believe you're wearing a tailcoat! That's a new one! You going to a dance or what? By the way, you're looking good . . . Honestly, why are you all dolled up?

**LOMOV (excited).** Well, you see, respected Nataliya Stepanovna . . . The fact is that I've made up my mind to ask you to hear me out . . . Of course, you must be wondering and even angry, but I . . . (Aside.) It's awfully cold!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** What's this about?

Pause.

Well?

**LOMOV.** I shall endeavour to be brief. As you know, respected Nataliya Stepanovna, it's been a long time now, since we were children, in fact, that I've had the honour of knowing your family. My late auntie and her husband, who, as I expect you know, bequeathed me my land, always had the deepest regard for your daddy and your late mamma. The Lomov clan and the Chubukov clan have always been on the friendliest and, one might even say, familial footing. Besides, as I expect you know, my land is closely adjacent to yours. If you will don't mind recalling, my Bullock Fields are bounded by your grove of birch trees.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Sorry to interrupt you. You said "my Bullock Fields" . . . Are they actually yours?

**LOMOV.** They're mine, ma'am . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Well, is that so! The Bullock Fields are ours, not yours!

**LOMOV.** No, ma'am, they're mine, respected Nataliya Stepanovna.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** That's news to me. How do you figure they're yours?

**LOMOV.** How do I figure? I'm talking about the Bullock Fields that form a wedge between your birch grove and Stinkhole Swamp.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** That's right, yes, yes . . . They're ours . . .

**LOMOV.** No, you're mistaken, respected Nataliya Stepanovna—they're mine.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Come to your senses, Ivan Vasilyevich!

Since when have they been yours?

**LOMOV.** Since when? As long as I can remember, they've always been ours.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Now, that's really going too far!



**LOMOV.** You can see it in the deeds, respected Nataliya Stepanovna. Bullock Fields were once in dispute — that's true; but now everybody knows that they're mine. And there's no point arguing about it. If you don't mind, my auntie's granny made over those Fields without limit of time or payment for the use of your daddy's granddaddy's peasants, so that they would bake bricks for her. Our daddy's granddaddy's peasants had had the use of the Fields rent-free for some forty years and were used to considering them their own, so later when circumstances altered ...

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** It's not at all the way you're telling it! Both my granddaddy and my great-granddaddy assumed that their land ran up to Stinkhole Swamp—which means, Bullock Fields are ours. What's there to argue about?—I don't understand. It's really annoying!

**LOMOV.** I can show it to you in the deeds, Nataliya Stepanovna!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** No, you must be joking or putting me on . . . What a surprise! We've owned the land for nigh on to three hundred years, and all of a sudden somebody points out to you that it's not your land! Ivan Vasilyevich, forgive me, but I can't believe my own ears . . . It's not that I care so much about the Fields. They're barely a dozen acres or so, and they're worth maybe three hundred rubels, but it's the unfairness of the thing that upsets me. Say what you will, but I cannot put up with unfairness.

**LOMOV.** Hear me out, for pity's sake! Your daddy's granddaddy's peasants, as I've already had the honour to tell you, baked bricks for my auntie's granny. Auntie's granny, eager to do something nice for them . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Granddaddy, granny, auntie . . . I can't make head or tail of this! They're our Fields, and that's that.

**LOMOV.** Mine, ma'am!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Ours! You can show me proofs for two days running, you can put on a dozen tailcoats, but they're ours, ours, ours! . . . I won't take what's yours and I won't give up what's mine . . . Say whatever you like!

**LOMOV.** I don't need Bullock Fields, Nataliya Stepanovna, but it's the principle of the thing. If you like, then, please, I'll give them to you.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** I can give them to you myself, they're mine!

. . . This is all very peculiar, to put it mildly, Ivan Vasilyevich! Up to now we considered you a good neighbour, a friend, last year we lent you our threshing machine, and that's why we couldn't finish threshing our own wheat until November, and now you treat us

as if we were gypsies. You make us a present of our own land. Excuse me but this is not neighbourly behaviour! To my way of thinking, it's downright impertinence, if you don't mind my saying so . . .

**LOMOV.** In other words, I'm supposed to be appropriating what's yours? Madam, I have never grabbed other people's land and won't allow anyone to accuse me of such a thing . . . (Quickly goes to the carafe and drinks water.) Bullock Fields are mine!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** That's a lie, they're ours!

**LOMOV.** Mine!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** That's a lie! I'll prove it to you! This very day I'll send men with scythes to those Fields!

**LOMOV.** What, ma'am?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** This very day my men will be mowing it down!

**LOMOV.** I'll toss 'em out on their ear!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** You wouldn't dare!

**LOMOV** (clutches at his heart). Bullock Fields are mine! Understand?  
Mine!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Stop shouting, please! You can shout and talk yourself hoarse with anger in your own home, but please get a grip on yourself while you're here!

**LOMOV.** Madam, if it were not for my appalling, agonizing palpitations, if the veins were not throbbing in my temples, I would speak to you in quite a different tone! (Shouts.) Bullock Fields are mine!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Ours!

**LOMOV.** Mine!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Ours!

**LOMOV.** Mine!

#### IV

The same and CHUBUKOV.

**CHUBUKOV** (entering). What's going on? What's all this shouting for?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Papa, please explain to this gentleman who owns Bullock Fields: us or him?

**CHUBUKOV** (to him). The Fields're ours, my chick!



**LOMOV.** For pity's sake, Stepan Stepanych, how do you figure they're yours? You of all people should have some sense! My auntie's granny handed over the Fields on a temporary, rent-free basis for the use of your granddaddy's peasants. The peasants used the land for forty years and got to thinking of it as their own, so when circumstances altered . . .

**CHUBUKOV.** Excuse me, my valued friend . . . You're forgetting that the peasants paid your granddaddy nothing and so on, precisely because the Fields were in dispute at the time and so forth . . . And now every whipper-snapper knows perfectly well that they are ours. In other words, you haven't seen the surveyor's map!

**LOMOV.** But I'll prove to you that they're mine!

**CHUBUKOV.** You won't prove it, my dearest boy.

**LOMOV.** No, I will prove it!

**CHUBUKOV.** Laddy, why shout like that? Shouting certainly doesn't prove anything. I don't want what's yours and I'm not inclined to give up what's mine. On what grounds? If it comes to that, my dear, dear boy, if you're inclined to dispute the Fields and so on, I'd rather turn them over to the farmers than to you. So there!

**LOMOV.** I don't understand! What right have you got to give away other people's property?

**CHUBUKOV.** Permit me to know whether I have the right or not. The thing of it is, young man, that I'm not used to being spoken to in that tone of voice and so on. I am twice your age, young man, and I request you to speak to me without losing your head and so forth.

**LOMOV.** No, you simply take me for a fool and laugh at me! You're calling my land your land and even expect me to be calm and collected and talk to you like a human being! Good neighbours don't behave this way, Stepan Stepanych! You're not a neighbour, but a land grabber!

**CHUBUKOV.** What's that, sir? What did you say?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Papa, send the men out with scythes to the Fields right away!

**CHUBUKOV** (to Lomov). What did you just say, my good sir?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Bullock Fields are ours, and I won't give them up, I won't, I won't!

**LOMOV.** We'll see about that! I'll prove in court that they're mine!

**CHUBUKOV.** In court! Go ahead and take it to court, my good sir, and so forth! Go ahead! I know you, the thing of it is, you've just been waiting for a chance to sue us and so on . . . A litigious character! Every member of your family has been lawsuit crazy! Every last one!

**LOMOV.** Please refrain from insulting my family! Every member of the Lomov clan has been honourable and not a single one has been tried for embezzlement like your beloved uncle!

**CHUBUKOV.** But every member of your Lomov clan has been crazy as a loon!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Every one, every one, every one!

**CHUBUKOV.** Your grandfather drank like a fish, and that young auntie of yours, you know the one, Nastasiya Mikhailovna, ran off with an architect and so on . . .

**LOMOV.** And your mother was lopsided. (Clutches at his heart.) There's a twitching in my side . . . A hammering in my head . . . Holy saints! . . . Water!

**CHUBUKOV.** Well, your father cheated at cards and ate like a slob!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** And your auntie's a scandal-monger, to put it mildly!

**LOMOV.** My left leg's paralyzed . . . Well, you're a bunch of schemers . . . Ugh, my heart! . . . And it's no secret to anyone that just before the elections you bri . . . There're spots before my eyes . . . Where's my hat?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** How contemptible! How dishonourable!  
How nasty!

**CHUBUKOV.** Well, you personally, the thing of it is, are a spiteful, two- faced and underhanded individual! Yessiree!

**LOMOV.** There's my hat . . . My heart . . . Where's the way out? Where's the door? Ugh! . . . I think I'm dying . . . My foot's dragging . . . (Goes to the door.)

**CHUBUKOV** (following him). And never set those feet in my house again!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Take us to court! Then we'll see!

**LOMOV** staggers out.

## V

**CHUBUKOV** and **NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.**

**CHUBUKOV.** The hell with him! (Walks around in agitation.)

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** How do you like that stinker? After that try and believe in good neighbours!



**CHUBUKOV.** The bastard! The overstuffed dummy!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** What a crackpot! Appropriates somebody else's land and then dares to brag about it.

**CHUBUKOV.** And this hobgoblin, this, thing of it is, thing that goes bump in the night has the unmitigated gall to propose marriage and so forth! How about that? A marriage proposal!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** What's that about a marriage proposal?

**CHUBUKOV.** I'll say! He drove over here to propose to you.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** To propose? To me? Why didn't you tell me this before?

**CHUBUKOV.** That's why he got himself all dolled up in a tailcoat! Like a frankfurter in a tight casing! The puny runt!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** To me? Propose! Ah! (Drops into an armchair and moans.) Bring 'im back! Bring 'im back! Ah! Bring 'im back!

**CHUBUKOV.** Bring who back?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Quick, quick! I feel faint! Bring 'im back! (Goes into hysterics.)

**CHUBUKOV.** What's the matter? (Clutches his head.) What a miserable wretch I am! I should shoot myself! I should hang myself! They're torturing me to death!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** I'm dying! Bring 'im back!

**CHUBUKOV.** Phooey! Right away. Stop bawling! (Runs out.)

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** (alone, moans). What have we done? Bring 'im back! Bring 'im back!

**CHUBUKOV** (runs back in). He's coming right away and so on, damn him! Oof! Talk to him yourself, the thing of it is I don't want to . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** (moans). Bring 'im back!

**CHUBUKOV** (shouts). He's on his way, I tell you. "Oh, Lord, a heavy burden this, Be father to a grown-up miss . . ." I'll cut my throat! I'll definitely cut my throat! We've cursed the man, heckled him, kicked him out, and it's all because of you . . . you!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** No . . . you!

**CHUBUKOV.** So now the thing of it is it's my fault!

**LOMOV** appears in the doorway.

Well, you talk to him! (Exits.)

## VI

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** and **LOMOV**.

**LOMOV** (enters, utterly exhausted). The most awful palpitations . . . My leg's numb . . . my side is throbbing . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Excuse me, we got a bit carried away, Ivan Vasi-lyevich . . . Now I remember: Bullock Fields are in fact yours.

**LOMOV.** My heart's pounding horribly . . . The Fields are mine . . . There are spots before both my eyes . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** The fields are yours, yours . . . Do sit down ... They sit down.

We were wrong . . .

**LOMOV.** I insist on the principle of the thing . . . I don't care about the land, but I do care about the principle . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** The principle, exactly . . . Let's have a little talk about something else.

**LOMOV.** Especially since I've got proof. My auntie's granny made over to your daddy's granddaddy's peasants . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** All right, all right, that's enough of that . . . (Aside.) I don't know how to begin . . . (To him.) Planning to go hunting soon?

**LOMOV.** For grouse, respected Nataliya Stepanovna, I think I'll start when the harvest's over. Oh, did you hear? Imagine my bad luck! My Dasher, whom you are good enough to know, has gone lame.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** What a shame! How did it happen?

**LOMOV.** I don't know. I suppose he dislocated something or some other dogs bit him . . . (Sighs.) My very best dog, not to mention what he cost me! I actually paid Mironov one hundred twenty-five rubles for him.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** You paid too much, Ivan Vasilyevich!

**LOMOV.** To my way of thinking, it was pretty cheap. He's a wonderful dog.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Papa paid eighty-five rubles for his Splasher, and, after all, Splasher is far superior to your Dasher!

**LOMOV.** Splasher superior to Dasher! What are you talking about! (Laughs.) Splasher superior to Dasher!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Of course, he's superior! It's true, Splasher is still a pup, he's not matured yet, but judging by his paws and his carriage you won't find his better at Volchanetsky's.

**LOMOV.** Excuse me, Nataliya Stepanovna, but actually you're forgetting that he's got an underslung jaw, and a dog with an underslung jaw can't get a good grip.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** An underslung jaw? That's the first time I've heard that!

**LOMOV.** I assure you, the lower jawbone is shorter than the upper.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Did you measure it?

**LOMOV.** I did. He'll be all right as far as tracking goes, of course, but when it comes



to retrieving, he can hardly . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** In the first place, our Splasher is pedigreed, a thoroughbred greyhound, sired by Buckle-down and Chiseler, but as for that rust-colored mutt of yours there's no point in talking about blood-lines . . . And besides he's old and hideous as a swaybacked nag.

**LOMOV.** He may be old, but I wouldn't take five of your Splashers for him . . . You must be kidding? Dasher is a dog, whereas Splasher . . . it's ridiculous even to argue about it . . . Things like your Splasher you can find at any kennel — common as dirt. Twenty-five rubles would be asking too much.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Ivan Vasilyevich, you are possessed today by a certain demon of contradiction. First you decide that the Fields belong to you, next you think that Dasher is superior to Splasher. I don't like it when a man doesn't say what's on his mind. After all, you know perfectly well that Splasher is a hundred times better than your . . . that stupid Dasher. Why do you have to contradict?

**LOMOV.** I see, Nataliya Stepanovna, that you take me for either a blind man or a fool. Why can't you get it through your head that your Splasher has an underslung jaw!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** That isn't true.

**LOMOV.** His jaw is underslung!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** (shouts). That isn't true!

**LOMOV.** What are you yelling for, madam?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Why do you talk such rubbish? This is really aggravating! It's high time you put your Dasher to sleep, and yet you go on comparing him with Splasher!

**LOMOV.** Excuse me, I can't prolong this argument. I have palpitations.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** I've noticed that the hunters who argue the most are the ones who know the least.

**LOMOV.** Madam, I implore you to be quiet . . . My heart is pounding away . . . (Shouts). Be quiet!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** I will not be quiet until you admit that Splasher is a hundred times better than your Dasher!

**LOMOV.** A hundred times worse! He should drop dead, your Splasher! Temples . . . eyes . . . shoulder . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Well, your stupid Dasher doesn't have to drop dead, because he's already dead on his feet!

**LOMOV** (weeps). Will you be quiet! I'm having a heart attack!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** I will not be quiet!

### VIII

The same and CHUBUKOV.

**CHUBUKOV** (enters). What's going on now?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** Papa, tell me honestly, in all conscience: which dog is better—our Splasher or his Dasher?

**LOMOV.** Stepan Stepanovich, I entreat you, just tell me one thing: does your Splasher have an underslung jaw or not? Yes or no?

**CHUBUKOV.** And what if he does? A lot of difference that makes! On the other hand there's no better dog in the district and so on.

**LOMOV.** But isn't my Dasher actually better? In all honesty?

**CHUBUKOV.** Don't get overexcited, my dear friend . . . Allow me . . . Your Dasher, the thing of it is, has his good points . . . He's pedigreed, his paws are firm, his haunches ride high, and so forth. But that dog, if you must know, my beauty, has two fundamental flaws: he's old and his bite's too short.

**LOMOV.** Excuse me, I have palpitations . . . Let's look at the facts . . . Please remember that on Maruskin Meadows my Dasher was coursing neck and neck with the Count's Smasher, while your Splasher was lagging a whole half-mile behind.

**CHUBUKOV.** He was lagging behind, because the Count's master of hounds struck him with his whip.

**LOMOV.** For good reason. The rest of the dogs are chasing the fox, while Splasher starts to worry a sheep.

**CHUBUKOV.** That's not true, sir! . . . Laddy, I'm a hot-tempered fellow, and, the thing of it is, I suggest that you drop this argument. He struck him because everyone gets jealous when he looks at another man's dog ... Yessiree! They're all haters! And you, my good sir, are not blameless! The thing of it is, the minute you spot any man's dog that's better than your Dasher, you start in right away with a kind of . . . sort of . . . and so forth . . . I remember it all, indeed I do!

**LOMOV.** And so do I!

**CHUBUKOV** (mimicking). And so do I . . . And just what do you remember?

**LOMOV.** Palpitations . . . My leg's gone numb...I can't bear it.

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** (mimicking). Palpitations . . . What sort of a hunter are you? You ought to be lying in a warm corner of the kitchen, swatting spiders, not chasing the fox! Palpitations . . .

**CHUBUKOV.** Truth be told, what sort of hunter are you? With your palpitations, the thing of it is, you should stay at home, and not jolt up and down in a saddle. It would be a fine thing if you actually did some hunting, but you only ride in order to start arguments and mess with other people's dogs and so on. I'm a hot-tempered fellow, we'll change the subject. The thing of it is, though, you're no hunter!

**LOMOV.** And you are? You ride only to suck up to the Count and spin your schemes .



. . My heart! . . . You're a schemer!

**CHUBUKOV.** What's that, sir? I'm a schemer! (Shouts.) Shut your mouth!

**LOMOV.** Schemer!

**CHUBUKOV.** Spoiled brat! Puppy!

**LOMOV.** Old buzzard! Hypocritical fraud!

**CHUBUKOV.** Shut up, or I'll shoot you with a uncleaned gun like a partridge! You pipsqueak!

**LOMOV.** Everybody knows that—ugh, my heart! — that you beat your late wife . . . Leg . . . temples . . . Spots . . . I'm falling, falling! . . .

**CHUBUKOV.** And your housekeeper leads you around by the nose!

**LOMOV.** Look, look, look . . . my heart's fit to burst! My shoulder's come detached . . . Where's my shoulder? . . . I'm dying! (Drops into an armchair.) Doctor! (Faints.)

**CHUBUKOV.** Spoiled brat! Mamma's boy! Pipsqueak! I feel faint! (Drinks water.) I feel faint!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** What kind of a hunter are you! You don't even know how to sit on a horse! (to her father.) Papa! What's wrong with him? Papa! Look, papa! (Yelps.) Ivan Vasilyevich! He's dead!

**CHUBUKOV.** I feel faint . . . I'm gasping for breath! . . . Air! . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA.** He's dead! (Tugs at Lomov's sleeve.) Ivan Vasilich! Ivan Vasilich! What have we done? He's dead! (Drops into an armchair.) Get a doctor get a doctor! (Goes into hysterics.)

**CHUBUKOV.** Oof! . . . What's going on? What's wrong with you?

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** (moans). He's dead! . . . dead!

**CHUBUKOV.** Who's dead? (After a glance at Lomov.) As a matter of fact he is dead! Good Lord! Water! Call a doctor! (Lifts a glass to Lomov's lips.) Drink this! . . . No he's not drinking . . . Which means, the thing of it is, he's dead . . . I'm the most miserable man on earth! Why didn't I put a bullet in my brain? Why haven't I shot myself before now? What am I waiting for? Give me a knife! Give me a pistol!

**LOMOV** stirs.

He's reviving, I think . . . Drink some water! . . . That's right . . .

**LOMOV.** Spots . . . mist . . . Where am I?

**CHUBUKOV.** Get married right away—and then you can go to hell! She's consented! (Uniting Lomov's and his daughters hands.) She's consented and so forth. My blessings on you and so on. Only leave me in peace!

**LOMOV.** Huh? What? (Getting up a bit.) How's that?

**CHUBUKOV.** She's consented! So? Kiss one another and . . . to hell with you!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA** (moans). He's alive . . . Yes, yes, I consent . .

**CHUBUKOV**. Kiss one another!

**LOMOV**. Huh? How's that? (Exchanges kisses with Nataliya Stepanovna.) Very nice .

. . Excuse me, what's this all about? Ah, yes, I get it . . . Heart. . . spots . . . I'm happy, Nataliya Stepanovna . . . (Kisses her hand.) My leg's gone numb . . .

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA**. I . . . I'm happy too . . .

**CHUBUKOV**. There's a weight off . . . Oof!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA**. But . . . all the same, now you've got to agree: Dasher is not as good as Splasher.

**LOMOV**. Better!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA**. Worse!

**CHUBUKOV**. Now, domestic bliss is off to a running start! Champagne.

**LOMOV**. Better!

**NATALIYA STEPANOVNA**. Worse! Worse! Worse!

**CHUBUKOV** (trying to shout over them). Champagne! Champagne!

*Curtain*

--Translated by Laurence Senelick

### **Glossary**

**Impertinence**: Disrespect or rudeness.

**Litigious**: Tending to engage in lawsuits or legal disputes.

**Embezzlement**: Theft or misappropriation of money or property that one is entrusted with

**Spiteful**: Showing malice or a desire to hurt someone.

**Pedigreed**: Describing an animal with pure lineage, often referring to its genetic . background being of superior quality or officially recognized.

**Underslung jaw**: Refers to a condition where the lower jaw is shorter than the upper one, resulting in a misaligned bite.

**Pipsqueak**: An insult referring to someone who is insignificant, small, or unimportant.

### **Study Questions**

1. How does social status and land ownership influence the characters' motivations for marriage?
2. In what ways does the play highlight the absurdity of human behaviour in romantic situations?
3. How does Chekhov critique societal expectations about marriage in The Proposal?

**The End**

