AUT Master of Creative Writing Thesis

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FREEDOM STRUGGLES

Freedom Struggles **(the working title) is a manuscript of a novel by Kamala Jackson accompanied by an exegesis**

The exegesis component of the thesis is 4500 words in length/ 12 pages

The novel length fiction component is 100,000 words/ 366 pages

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CONTENTS

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

EXEGESIS

Freedom Struggles is the first draft of a novel set in Telengana, the Telugu speaking part of the State of Hyderabad, South India. The time is the 1940s and most of the action takes place 1947-8, the period of Indian Independence and its aftermath. Other novels written about the same era (Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan,* Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*) are set in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent, in areas that were once part of the British Raj. Unlike these, *Freedom Struggles* is set in the South Indian feudal princely state of Hyderabad, ruled by the Nizam. It explores the disruption to lives, and the testing of friendships and loyalties across ethnic, religious and political lines that arose when Hyderabad was forcibly incorporated into democratic, secular, independent India. This subject has not to my knowledge been explored in contemporary English literature, nor has the life of Indian Christians in that area. The novel centres on a Christian community and an established mission station in the fictional town of Kalampett.

As this novel is set in India after its independence from British rule, it can be seen as a postcolonial work. Postcolonial literature is defined by Talib (2002) as literature of the colonised and formerly colonised. Brians (1998, version 2006) gives a variant definition: the " literature written by people living in countries formerly colonised by other nations"(para. 5). However, the discussion on postcolonialism is not limited to "literal colonization" (Brians, 2006, para. 6). Dominance of one country can be effected by the spread of its ideas and values in a country that has not been under its colonial rule. This is the concept of 'hegemony' (Brians, 2006). Neo-colonialism is a term given to the continued influence of an ex-coloniser through some legacy, for example the continued use of English in India. But Rushdie (1991) has written "… Those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, . . . They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have to hand." (p. 64)

The neo-colonialist view is sometimes seen as Euro-centric, attributing a greater relevance and position to the ex-Colonial power in the contemporary life of the ex-Colony

than it actually has (Brians para. 9). Chaudhuri (2001) talks about the "peripherality of the Western figure" (p xix) in Indian literature. Brians has noted that "postcolonial authors" do not necessarily write to engage "in an on-going critique of colonialism" (para. 12). In the Indian context he mentions the writer R.K. Narayan, who "displays a remarkable indifference to the historical experience of colonialism" (para 10). Chaudhuri goes further and explains that colonialism does not mean "a simple conflict between native and foreign cultures" (p xix). The colonial period "represented a troubled, but rich, phase in the Indians sense of self, and his or her relation to tradition, history, community and change" (p xix). The changes Chaudhuri mentions are education, the railways, the emergence of a new class structure alongside or cutting across the traditional caste system, and the growth of urban life. He continues, "this phase of self-enquiry and self-redefinition is, substantially, what colonialism meant in India" (p. xix).In a discussion of Bengali literature, he describes the response to colonialism as "complex, subtle, varied and profound . . . If an oppressor … is identified and subject to critique . . . it is either the old feudal landlord caste or the emerging upper middle classes." (p. xx)

Boehmer (2005) identifies three developments in postcolonial writing during the 1990s: writing by women, by indigenous peoples, and by diasporic or migrant writers.

She sees the writing by women as multi-voiced, with a " mosaic or composite quality: the intermingling of forms derived from indigenous, nationalist and European literary traditions." (Boehmer, 2005, p. 219). Postcolonial women writers "are … concerned to bring to the fore the specific textures of their own existence." They note " the validity of the buried, apparently humble lives". (Boehmer, p220).

The second strain of later post-colonial writing identified by Boehmer, the writing by 'first' peoples in white settler colonies, has no relevance here.

The third category is that of migrant writers. "Ex-colonial by birth, 'Third World' in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, she . . . works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national, ethnic or regional background."(Boehmer, p. 227)

The overarching, historical, macro-narrative of *Freedom Struggles* is the conflict between the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Government of newly independent India.The Nizam wants to be free to rule Hyderabad as he wishes, something he was not entirely able

to do when Britain, the "paramount" power, ruled India. However, the Indian government cannot tolerate a large, wealthy, separate state in the middle of India and wants Hyderabad to "accede" to the Indian Union. When negotiations break down there is a stand off, formalised in the Standstill Agreement. This situation is resolved when the Indian Army invades Hyderabad and the Nizam surrenders.

This novel has multiple characters struggling in their separate ways with changes to their world and their identities.

Anand is the son of the widow, Graceamma, employed in the mission bungalow. Anand's aim is to marry Rosie, the schoolgirl daughter of the clerk in the mission office, and a teacher in the mission school. But to be acceptable to Rosie, Anand must make himself a suitable suitor – a man with prospects who can ensure status and financial security for his wife.

As an eighteen year-old, Anand is sent by his missionary mentors to Hyderabad to learn the printing trade. His future seems assured. He meets the charismatic Satyan, a caste Hindu with dangerous secrets. Anand's one area of superiority over Satyan is that he can read and write Telugu, thanks to his mission schooling. Satyan who went to school in Hyderabad City, is literate in Urdu, the minority elite language, but not his native tongue. Satyan hires Anand to teach him to read and write Telugu and a friendship develops.

Anand is also befriended by the theologian, Isaiahgaru, who has recently returned to India from Britain. Luke, Anand's father, was Isaiahgaru's great friend in their student days. Anand knows very little about his dead hero father, but learns more from Isaiahgaru.

Anand is asked by Satyan to look after his secret gypsy wife and two sons when his friend leaves Hyderabad to join the communist insurgency in the countryside. In keeping this promise, Anand has to leave Hyderabad himself. Communist cadres prevent his return to Hyderabad, so he decides to make his way back to Kalampett, his mother, the missionary mentors and Rosie. On the way he finds himself in Cheddapalli, the village where he was born, where his father died, and now a centre of communist activity, led by Satyan. Anand begins to act politically against the armed struggle of the Communists. This places him in direct opposition to Satyan, his former friend, and puts him in danger. As the Indian army is about to enter Hyderabad State, Anand and Satyan fight and Anand is left for dead. At the end of the novel, both Anand and Satyan are prisoners of the military in Kalampett. Anand,

now blind, is a suspected communist, and Satyan is disguised as Shiva Rama Rao, a robber caught red-handed by soldiers. Satyan's true identity is another secret Anand must keep. Anand's credentials as a suitable suitor for Rosie are lost, and Rosie herself is no longer a "suitable" bride. Anand while in Cheddapalli, and while he was wounded and semi-conscious on a bullock cart and even while he is in gaol, learns more about his dead father.

Graceamma, Anand's mother, traumatised by the early death of her husband has lost her ability to read. Her life choices have been largely determined by others. She became the ayah to the daughter of a missionary household. When the daughter is older and no longer needs an ayah, Graceamma stays on as a servant, as the missionary bungalow is now her home. Anand's unexplained disappearance causes further trauma, but she recovers and leaves her life as a servant, making her own decision about how she will pursue the rest of her life.

Abraham, the cook, a lover of beauty, dignity and order, is dissatisfied by his employers' ways of sabotaging their own status, symbolised by Harriet Rimmer's inferior dinnerset. By undermining their status they undermine his, as cook and bearer at the mission bungalow. In difficult times, he is forced to respond to demands made on him by the cheating Muslim butcher, Hassan, who fears for his life, and take responsibility for the unbeautiful schoolboy, Prakasam, who becomes a victim of political change. In the process Abraham revises his priorities.

Harriet, the missionary, despite her dedication and concern for her servants and the pupils at the school, cannot in the end keep them all from harm. She learns from her cook, that a cheap dinnerset will not effectively close the gap between her position of privilege and the lives of the local Indians.

Mrs Amos, who in her keenness to look after the unfortunate Kumarraj, her youngest sibling, and at the same time to find a neat solution to her husband's desire to retire, inadvertently brings about the situation in which her beloved daughter Rosie suffers the ultimate disgrace to a conventional young girl.

Rosie is a young girl with the traditional Indian (and Jane Austen-like) ambition of seeking financial security and an improved social position through marriage, possibly to Anand should he prove himself. This plan is upset by Anand's disappearance, and more seriously, when she is raped by her uncle, an event that cannot be kept secret because she is

made pregnant. She attempts suicide. Missionary patronage allows Rosie to escape from the small town of Kalampett and the oppression of conventional judgements and go to college in Madras. Marriage is on hold, but there are now other options in her life.

Kumarraj's name is literally PrinceKing. He exemplifies the high status of the male in traditional society, and his counterpart is the traditionally submissive woman, his wife Shanti who died in childbirth. Despite the high value put on a bride's virginity, the power of a man's standing is such that when one asks an unmarried virgin to go to bed with him, she finds it difficult not to comply, despite the risk of pregnancy and disgrace. However, Rosie, though traditional in respect to wanting status and security through marriage, is not submissive. Kumarraj takes advantage of her when she is asleep, and Rosie when she realises what has happened exacts her revenge. Kumarraj repents his act and seeks to change his life.

The young and sensitive Lester, who carries a war wound, is the latest recruit to the Kalampett mission station. He falls in love with the beautiful Amy Parker stationed in Bezwada and woos her against the odds of distance, the lack of privacy, the disapproval of the Bishop, the disruption to the mails and his diffidence. His staid courtship is a counterpoint to the more dramatic lives of the Indian characters.

In a story within a story, the fictional Rahel, daughter to one of the Nizam's concubines, hero-worships her father, but grows disillusioned and at the end makes the decision to leave his protection and embark on an independent life. The friendship between Rahel and Nasreen (meaning Wild Rose), echoes in some respects the friendship between Rachel (Harriet's daughter) and Rosie. Both Nasreen and Rosie are victims of incest.

It will be seen from these many storylines that the novel is multivoiced (Boehmer, 2005). The author is a woman, however she is not a Telugu, or indeed an Indian, but a Westerner born and brought up in India till she was sixteen and in that sense "ex-colonial". Like the migrant writer Boehmer describes, she "works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic . . . connections with a . . . regional background". (p. 227)

This region, Telengana, did not experience "literal colonization" (Brians, 2006) as it was ruled by a traditional Muslim dynasty, with its unique culture, feudal structure, and its own administration. So the power opposed in the novel by the communist Satyan is not a

western, but an eastern power structure, and, to quote Chaudhuri again . . . "If an oppressor . . . is identified . . . it is . . .the old feudal landlord caste …" (p. xx). Whether the fight against this caste should be with weapons, or by non-violent means, is a matter of dispute between Satyan and Anand, and comes to a head after a communist ambush. Anand and his associates, in a Good Samaritan act, pick up a wounded victim along the roadside, only to realise that the man they have saved is the cruel and hated landlord. This puts them and their village in danger as the communist cadre, realising they have not captured their target, seek him out.

So the political struggle in the novel is not against a Western colonial power, but a struggle between Indians with different interests, a struggle between feudalism and democracy, between oligarchy and the idea of an elected government, between the traditional and the modern, and a struggle between fundamentalist Islamists and Communists, who later forge a pact to fight a common enemy, independent India.

In the novel there is an ambivalence towards Indian Independence. It is celebrated by the Christian community of Kalampett and the missionaries who are "progressive" in their views. However, the communists see the new Indian government as essentially elitist and bourgeois. According to Benichou (2000), a leadership change in the Communist Party of India in December 1947, from reformist to radical, introduced a hardline attitude towards the socialist Nehru who was officially regarded as a reactionary bourgeois leader. The Muslim population saw the Indian government as representing the Hindu population, and to the outcaste and landless peasants it was a "caste" government, with more in common with the oppressive landlord class than with themselves. To the illiterate population concepts of " democracy" and "representative government" had no resonance, and calls to oppose "foreign rule" meaningless to a population conditioned to a traditional respect for the Nizam. (Benichou, 2000). It was the Communists, local leaders committed to protecting the landless against the exploitation of the landlords, who gained political traction in Telengana.

In the novel, Anand, whose views have been influenced by the radical Satyan, and the travelled and highly educated Isaiahgaru, adopts a wait and see attitude to whether the new nation, though gloriously free and independent, delivers what the people hope and need.

While Hyderabad was not directly colonised by Britain, it was also resistant to its "hegemony", that is, resistant to Western values and institutions, (but not to modern innovation, such as the railways). Unlike other Indian Princes and members of the Indian elite in British India, the Nizam did not have his sons educated in Britain. Also, it was the Nizam's opinion that "Constitutional monarchy . . . has no meaning in the East" (Campbell-Johnson, p. 329). It could be argued that the Nizam's enemies, that is, the post-Independence Government of India and the Communist Party of India, were far more susceptible to, indeed promulgated, European ideologies, (Democracy and Marxism). It could be said that from a Hyderabad point of view, the Indian Government was a proxy for the colonial power, espousing representative Government, and inheriting administrative structures.

The historical Nizam had personal ambitions to be an independent ruler but there were also strategic reasons for Hyderabad to maintain independence. The partition of the subcontinent into the separate countries of India and Pakistan, put the Nizam in a difficult position. The 'princely states' though legally entitled to their own independence had much pressure put on them by the leaders of Indian Independence and by Britain, in the person of Mountbatten, to voluntarily join or "accede" to India or Pakistan. For geographic reasons a Hyderabad accession to Pakistan was unrealistic, and accession to India might have provoked a violent reaction of the Nizam's Muslim subjects. (Benichou, 2000) While most Princely States were too small to contemplate viable futures as independent states, this was not the case with Hyderabad. Its income and expenditure matched Belgium's and was greater than those of twenty smaller member countries in the United Nations.(French, 1997)

The Westerners in this novel are missionary characters and one of the missionaries, the Bishop, is an Indian, a Tamil.Historically, Westerners living outside the city of Hyderabad tended to be Protestant missionaries or Roman Catholic priests, there by permission of the Nizam's government. (Author unknown, *Khammamett in 1913,* 1914). For this writer, the novel *Freedom Struggles* has had a thirty year gestation. One of the difficulties was how to represent the missionary characters at a time when public discourse on Maori Sovereignty, British colonialism and ideas of political correctness have rendered the missionary an unadmirable character and a tool of colonialism.

In Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible* (1999), the American missionary, Nathan Price, is an emblem for the evils of Imperialism. Kingsolver's parents themselves worked briefly in the Congo as "medical and public-health workers". In an Author's Note (page x), Kingsolver thanks her parents "for being different in every way from . . . the narrators of this tale." The missionaries I wished to depict, in order to be "true" to my experience, were also people of a different stripe. Theologically, they were evangelical but not fundamentalist, politically and socially they were "progressive". They were well-educated, the ones from the United Kingdom often graduates of Oxford and Cambridge or Trinity College, Dublin. In a peasant culture, these outsiders had the status of *dora* or "lord". They had authority and *mana*, perceived by the locals as not being there for personal gain. Some missionaries stayed for many years, decades or even a lifetime. Local stories and anecdotes often depicted them as "heroic" or "holy".

In the novel, the pragmatic dhobiwoman sees the missionaries as being good for business. Anand describes them as midwives, "alongside us through all this, caring for us and ready to intervene", but they "do not themselves experience the pangs of labour at this birth of a new nation." The missionaries are not the main story, but exist as agents for change, providing education and medical care not provided by the government of the Nizam. The religion of the missionaries, Christianity, provides an opportunity for people, particularly for the 'untouchables' of a traditional Hindu society, to see themselves no longer as despised and outcast, but in a different, more positive light. To "redefine" themselves, to use Chaudhuri's term (p xix). (In this century there is a move for Dalits, the current name for 'untouchables' to escape ancient stigmas by converting to Buddhism.)

The Indian Christians in the novel are not part of the "oppressed masses". By engaging with the education, the medical care, and the religion introduced by the outside agent (the missionaries) they are already bettering themselves, moving from a rural to an urban life, forming a new middle class. Shakuntala, the nurse, who started life in a village, but became educated and trained, is able to return to the village as a person with expertise. Unlike the younger Rosie, she has not looked to marriage as a route to advancement. Shakuntala is independent, described at first by Anand as "bold" and "free", but these are dangerous words in a conventional setting, so he settles on the word "strong". In a "male"

world of conflict and danger, Shakuntala is able to act effectively and earns respect in her own right. She is also free to contemplate unconventional sexual connections.

There are three rapes in the novel. The first is the incestuous rape of Rosie. The second is the incestuous connection between the fictional Nizam and his daughter by one of his concubines. In sexual matters, the historical Nizam had a feudal, seigneurial 'right'. His mother gave him, when a young, unmarried prince, a concubine as a birthday gift. (Bawa, 1993). The third rape is of a servant woman by a soldier of the Indian Army. After the historical "police action" of the Indian Army that incorporated Hyderabad into the Indian State, an investigation by Nehru officially uncovered what was known locally, that the Hyderabadi population suffered a great deal at the hands of the military, deaths, rapes, looting. (Bawa 1993). The Indian Army stayed on to fight the Communist insurgents. The villagers were caught between the wrath of the Communists who wanted their protection and the wrath of a military after information and assistance in capturing the insurgents. The soldiers in the main did not speak the local languages, and this may have contributed to the lack of care and compassion in their treatment of the villagers. A missionary was instrumental in getting the army to withdraw soldiers from Uttar Pradesh (a state in the north of India), who had a particularly bad reputation. (Jackson,1980)

In the novel, there are two historical characters, the Nizam and Major-General Chaudhuri. To my knowledge the historical Major-General did not eat with the missionaries, but they were asked to help the Army to approach the Muslim community in their town. (Tate, 1981).

Like the work of postcolonial women writers Boehmer describes, this novel has a "mosaic or composite quality" (p. 219)

The structure of the novel follows month by month from June 1947, when British withdrawal is announced, to September 1948 when the Indian Army enters Hyderabad and secures the surrender of the Nizam. Each month the stories of different characters are progressed in scenes or vignettes. So, for example, in the chapter July 1948, the first scene is with Anand, the second with Harriet, then a scene set in Archie's office, followed by a diary entry, and the final scene is again with Anand. The scenes are often in different places: Kalampett, Hyderabad, Cheddapalli, and the change of location is given as a heading for that scene. Different forms are used, letters and a diary, the device of "a story

within a story", and there is much conversation and anecdote giving flavour and texture to the ordinary and, often, domestic lives.

At the end of the novel, it is another outside agent, the Indian Army, that comes to liberate the characters from a feudal political order and unite them with the rest of India, but this "liberation" also creates victims. Ordinary people, the characters of this novel, have to ride the storms created by the governments of whatever stamp, feudal or democratic, anachronistic or independent. While the general theme of the book is freedom, it is individual freedoms as well as a larger political freedom, that are important.

The novel is written in a formal, not a contemporary, register, placing the novel in the 1940s. Differences in vocabulary and syntax are used to distinguish the characters who are English speakers from the characters who are Telugu speakers. Language also denotes status and position and differing levels of education. Isaiahgaru, the Indian theologian, speaks in a precise high language, whether he is speaking Telugu or English. Benjamingaru, while speaking Telugu, has a penchant for breaking into English clichés.

The second to last scene, a brief scene with the Rimmer family, indicates circularity. Though the political landscape has changed forever, some events are repeating themselves.

The novel starts with a wide-angled view (the Prologue). As the narrative progresses, Indian viewpoints are given more importance than those of the missionaries. The final passage of the novel is in the first person as Anand reflects on events in gaol and looks to the future of the nation's life and his own. As in the macro-narrative, a power shift towards self-government is achieved in the local church. When the Bishop dies, two Western missionaries in turn decline to stand for the position in favour of a Telugu, thus within the local community there is also a transfer of power.

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Freedom Struggles

Prologue

When war was declared in 1939, the New Zealander, Ross Rimmer left the dusty obscurity of Kalampett and went by train to the nearest recruitment office in the seaport of Vizagapatam. He went to enlist as an army chaplain.The sea air was tangy and smelled of dried fish, and the idea and imminence of war gave a greater briskness to the squads of marching men, more crackle to their starched uniforms, a crispness to their salutes. But the reverend's personal commitment to the war effort was short-lived. A telegram came from the Bishop saying, "Return immediately."

Ross caught the next train wondering what the emergency was. Was his wife taken ill, or his daughter? Usually, if he was without his bicycle, he walked the six miles from Kalampett station, but that day Ross was in a hurry and took a cycle-rickshaw. He sat elevated, enjoying an unusually leisured view as the rickshaw went through the bazaar, past temple, mosque and the cruciform church, past stinking open drains and mud buildings daubed with symbols, among them the ancient swastika and the twentieth century hammer and sickle, and into a countryside that smelt of dust and dung. A rough cart track snaked over rocky hillocks and from the last rise one looked down on the mission school compound. A dry stone wall enclosed an area of five acres scattered with trees and buildings, the largest of these being the mission bungalow and its struggling front garden.

But sometime before the cycle-rickshaw reached this vantage point, it came to a standstill on an upward slope, the driver proving too frail for his job. Ross changed places with him. He peddled urgently and had built up quite a speed as he coasted through the

compound gates, down the avenue of neem trees and came to a slithering stop at the back steps of the bungalow where stood Abraham, the cook.

Abraham, seeing his Doragaru, red-faced and sweaty, dismount from the cycle, and the rickshaw driver slip sheepishly down from the split plastic rickshaw seat, refused to feel discomfited. He had just tested a clutch of guinea fowl eggs by submersing them in a basin of water, and each and every egg had sunk with a slow rocking gravity to the bottom of the basin. The eggs were all fresh and Abraham held in his mind a vision of the perfect omelette he would make. A vision he would not allow the Doragaru to dislodge.

"Is everything all right here, Abraham?"

"Oh, yes, Doragaru."

"Where is the Dorasani?"

Ross found Harriet teaching a class of infants. They sat cross-legged making garlands on the floor. One flower, two leaves, one flower, two leaves until each had made a circle. Harriet was glowing with pedagogic success.

"They're getting it. You know, I really think they're getting the idea of number."

"And is Rachel all right?"

"Yes. A letter arrived yesterday. She came second in a twenty yard dash, and she's got Masefield's 'I must go down to the seas again' off by heart. Couldn't be better." Harriet turned to Ross, "But what is it, darling? Why aren't you in Vizag?"

Satisfied that no crisis existed in Kalampett, or with his daughter in boarding school, Ross took his own bicycle to the station and caught another train to cover the fifteen miles to Dornakal, the home of the Bishop. This was a smaller town than Kalampett, but the station was a significant railway junction with sidelines to and from the collieries at

Singarene, and small mountains of shiny-faced coal alongside the tracks. Here at night the great express trains going north or south stopped to refuel.The sounds of shunting engines, the fizz of steam under pressure, clashings and hootings went on day and night. On one side of the tracks was the town with an apology of a bazaar and on the other the buildings of an expanding mission. That compound was dominated by a whitewashed Cathedral built in a fusion of two indigenous styles. At the front were two domed towers that could have graced a mosque and the sides were pillared and open like a Hindu temple court. And between the towers a cross glinted from the pediment.

This architectural innovation was very pleasing and the brainchild of the Bishop, who throughout his life surprised people with the range of his abilities.

Ross found the Bishop in his upstairs office dressed in a purple cassock and looking tired. It was only a month since his heart attack. He sat, a short man at a large desk, with a view through a window of the Cathedral domes framed by leafy neem trees. On the wall opposite him, at a level where his gaze fell each time he raised his head from his work, was framed the unrestful Biblical injunction: Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

As far as the Bishop was concerned, Christianity was not a 'Western' religion, though 'Westerners' in their imperial way often claimed it. It was a religion for the world, though not all the world knew that yet, and over the centuries its dissemination had followed an idiosyncratic path, stalling in places such as Kerala, becoming marooned with the Copts in Egypt, becoming overrun by Islam in its homeland of Palestine. As it spread, the messengers were inevitably outsiders, foreigners. So Paul, a Jew, brought the news to the Greeks of Ephesus, St. Patrick, a Romano-Britain, converted the Irish, a Yorkshireman

preached the first Christian sermon to the Maori in New Zealand, and a German, sent by the King of Denmark, was the first Protestant missionary to land in India in 1706. The Bishop himself was a Tamil from the south, come to evangelise the villages of the Telugu hinterland.

"I'm greatly relieved to see you," the Bishop said to Ross. "An Army Chaplain. What were you thinking of, Rimmer? You're needed here. The Army will have no difficulty finding someone to take your place, but where could I find a man at this time who can speak Telugu? Has your compassion and commitment? Your general fitness for the work?"

Several issues of the Madras Mail lay on the desk between them. Bold headlines affirmed the momentousness of the war story. The Bishop glancing down at the papers, pushed them impatiently aside.

"This war should not be your main concern. It is a sin of governments. Another case of temporal rulers transgressing against their people. The real battle is the same one our Lord faced against disease, ignorance, fear, superstition, hopelessness. We are the foot soldiers in that battle, Rimmer. The frontline is here."

Six years later the war was over, and governments and their statisticians were counting the costs of the dead and maimed, the destroyed infrastructure and unbalanced economies, and trying to grapple with the implications of a new bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the configurations of a new world order.

The Bishop from his sick bed (another heart attack) wrote his regular pastoral letter, giving the statistics for his diocese. In those same six years, the message of God's love was taken to another hundred villages, tens of pastors and teachers were trained,

thousands of patients received treatment in clinics and hospitals, the boarding school rolls had tripled, and the rising generation, fed on a balanced diet, measured a good three inches taller than their parents.

Some Telugu men did find their way to fight in that other war, and some of those died far away, in Burma or Malaya. Archdeacon Godfrey, an Irishman, raised a memorial, a stone needle pointing heavenwards, in the mission compound in Kalampett. He chose the text to be engraved on a brass plate. "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

It was to the weary, the Telugu people labouring and subsisting on the mainly arid reaches of the Deccan plateau that he had devoted his life, whose classical language he spoke with a scholarly precision, whose quarrels he mediated into the night, whose sun had struck him down more than once, whose dust he breathed, until he had become as weary as those he worked among, a weariness so constant and pervasive they did not dwell on it, enjoying the incidences of colour and shade, a dish of rice, a drink of water, a bathe in a river, songs, jokes, rain, festivals, children at play, and a night's rest.

Chapter one 1946

Kalampett

Anand waited for the pendulum wall clock to strike the half hour after four before he got up from his desk.

"Goodnight, Doragaru."

"Goodnight, Anand. Thank you." Rimmer-doragaru lifted his sandy-haired head and smiled. Goodnight was what they always said even though it was light outside and the sun would not disappear for another one and a half hours.

And the Doragaru always said Thank you, as though Anand were doing him a favour and not his job, for which he was paid enough to afford his single man's room, his annum, three clean shirts, a pair of leather chappals and all the beedis he could wish to smoke. Anand was lucky to gain this job as junior clerk in the school office. And though it was easy work, he did not become lax, always making sure that the entries in the ledger balanced at the end of the day, that he wrote the entries in his best handwriting, that he blotted the page before he closed the book, wiped the pen nib clean, and screwed shut the lid on the ink pot.

Outside the office, Anand walked slowly down the steps. He liked to be out in the air and take a stroll around the compound before he returned to his room to cook himself some rice and dhal. A friend was coming to play cards, but there was no hurry on this or any other evening.

He lit a beedi. Senior girls from the boarding hostel were practicing a dance. Anand stood, breathing in the tobacco smoke, breathing it out as he watched the feet thudding in the dust, hands twirling gracefully. Some evenings Rosie joined them. He looked carefully,

squinting slightly. No, Rosie was not there today. Disappointed he turned away and then he saw her walking past with a friend. She looked over her shoulder at him, calling, "Annah, are you well?" "I'm well, and you?" The two girls walked on without pausing towards the small house where Rosie lived with her parents.

Rosie was wearing a green half sari over her ankle length white skirt, and her hair was in a single plait down the middle of her back. Anand liked the sight of her as she walked away, her narrow waist, the strip of skin showing between her blouse and skirt. Her friend was taller, darker, with stiff shoulders.

Anand no longer called Rosie 'little sister'. Had long since stopped thinking of her merely as a younger child of his mother's friends, someone he had grown up with, because one day he was going to marry her. He thought she knew that, but she persisted in calling him 'annah' as she had all her life. He was four years older and could remember her as a squalling, peevish bundle in her mother's arms. She remained sickly and was given to death-defying tantrums. In despair her mother, Amos-ammagaru, took her to the Dorasani who also had a baby daughter, pink and plump and smiling, like a large version of a doll that arrived in a parcel one day.

After that visit the food for both the babies was prepared by Abraham in the kitchen bungalow. The Dorasani had an obsession with vegetables and the babies were spooned pale orange and green mashes. He stuck his finger in one and spat it out, nauseated by the lack of flavour. His mother seeing the spat mash on the floor, thought it came from one of the girls. Without saying anything she wiped it up.

The sickly child, named Pushpa or Flower, became better and started to grow, and they could see she was pretty. But she never outgrew her tantrums. Her parents nicknamed her Rosie, both for the soft delicacy of her features and her thorns.

There were days when Anand did not feel sure that Rosie would want to marry him. "Your mother is just a servant, who has forgotten how to read and write." This lack of respect for his mother was painful. Amma became a servant after his father died, died a hero's death. But Rosie even criticised Anand's father. "What is the use of a hero father if he is dead?"

Anand did not remember his father, Luke, but other people did. Once a month the village pastors came into Kalampett. They called in at the office, to get their pay. Some of these men had known his father and they were friendly to Anand and asked after his mother. Sometimes they spoke of his father, his high spirits, his love for others, and his musical talent. Lyrics written by his father were still sung in church, and even Rosie once commented that one was a favourite of hers.

Not everyone had a hero father, loved by others, but Anand wished he could have known his father.

Anand threw his spent beedi onto the ground and started to stroll. He hadn't gone far when Tundrigaru's tall, lean figure fell into step beside him. The Irish clergyman was a celibate. He went about in a long white cassock with a black silk cord knotted at the waist. A bald elderly man with a lined face and bent nose who was a magnet for small children. When he walked through Kalampett, children would run after him and cling for awhile to whatever they could, his fingers, the tassles of his cord, the white cotton of his cassock.

Anand was a godson of Tundrigaru's, one of many. Amosgaru, Rosie's father, counted up one day the number of Tundrigaru's godchildren he personally knew. It came to thirty-six. But as he said, there were others he did not know, in Dornakal and out in distant villages, and perhaps there were as many as a hundred. Tundrigaru remembered the names of all his godchildren and the anniversaries of each baptism. Every year until he left school, Anand received a note from Tundrigaru reminding him that he was a child of God, loved by him and an inheritor of His Kingdom.

A conversation with Tundrigaru was never casual. He had not fallen in step beside Anand and started to steer him down the avenue of neem trees towards the compound gates out of a simple desire to show friendliness, or to pass the time.

"How long have you been working in the school office now, Anand?"

"One year, Tundrigaru."

"How do you find the work?"

"It is good, sir. Not at all difficult."

"But not the job you would want to do for long, I would think?"

Certainly Rosie would not agree to marry him if she thought he would remain a junior clerk, or even if he rose to being the chief clerk like her father. With a clerk's salary he would not be able to afford the fine new sari she would want every Christmas and Easter. Rosie loved her mother, but was determined not to lead such a humble life as she did.

"No,sir."

Tundrigaru was looking at him, his watery blue eyes blinking mildly. There was a courteous expression on his face, as though he expected Anand would have more thoughts

on the subject of his job. Anand did have other thoughts which he was used to keeping to himself, but Tundrigaru was waiting, giving him the chance to voice them.

"I find myself filled with uncertainty. About what to do in life. I only know that I do not wish to be a pastor like my father, or a teacher, a doctor, or . . . a clerk. I wish to do something but what that is I do not know." Most people would find such thoughts perplexing. Young men did in life what their fathers had done before them, worked in the fields or made leather goods, kept shop or studied to be a priest. But Anand could say this to Tundrigaru without excusing himself or hastening to say how fine the jobs were that he was rejecting.

"Do you remember the printshop we used to have in the compound? Do you remember Benjamin, the young lad who was the printer? He was very good at repairing the machine each time it broke down."

"Oh, yes sir." Benjamin he rememberd as thin and proud and self-important. Anand liked to hang around the door watching the large black clattering machine, excited by its noise and the smell of ink, and how fast the printed pages shot out until the man in charge of this machine saw him. "Go away, boy. Can't you see I'm very busy."

"Eventually," Tundrigaru was saying, " that printing machine was broken beyond repair. There were no funds for its replacement and Benjamingaru left to find work elsewhere. He has become very successful. Runs his own printing and publishing outfit in Hyderabad. The Good News Printers."

Their steps had brought them to the compound gates, and they wheeled around and started walking back.

"The Bishop," said Tundrigaru "is very keen that we re-establish a printing facility here. There is an expanding need for Christian literature. The Divinity School in Dornakal requires study material, scholarship written by Telugus for Telugus. We would operate on a larger scale than before, with a trained full-time publisher and manager. The Bishop has asked me to find an intelligent, literate young man who would be keen for just such a job. And Benjamingaru has agreed to take on the young man and train him."

Tundrigaru fell silent, and Anand found himself watching a squirrel chase another with a morsel in its mouth. The chase went up the trunk of a tree, along one branch, hopped onto another. It seemed very important that the second squirrel got its share.

Tundrigaru turned to face him.

"Would you be interested in entering that field of work, Anand?"

"Yes, sir."

"It would mean leaving home and living in Hyderabad for two years. This is not a decision to rush into. Pray about it. Think about it. Speak to your mother. And when you are sure, tell me what you have decided. Good night, Anand."

Tundrigaru lengthened his stride and walked away. Then he suddenly turned back.

"Rimmer-doragaru mentioned that he thinks you're short-sighted. Something about peering at a clock. Go to Doctor-ammagaru tomorrow and have your eyes tested."

Daylight was dimming, the sun about to drop over the horizon. The compound was now empty of schoolchildren. The buffaloes had come from the common ground and found their way home to their owner's houses and stood munching straw untidily. Rimmer-doragaru was only now locking up the office and walking in his purposeful way to the

bungalow, where Amma would be lighting the lamps and taking them round to each room. He must talk to her now.

He lifted his head to the darkening sky with some early stars, and let out a yell, a long inarticulate sound carrying a rush of raw feelings. But he had one clear thought: Rosie could not refuse him now. This was no time to walk staidly like a junior clerk. He ran, jumping over a squawking guineafowl that strayed across his path.

Graceamma

What Anand needed was a small tin trunk. His sheet and blanket could be rolled up and tied with a cord, but he needed something to transport his clothes and personal possessions. Buying her son a tin trunk to take with him to Hyderabad seemed the right thing to do.

"Jacob has agreed to take me to the bazaar tomorrow," she told her son.

"There is no need, Amma. I can do it."

"But I am your *amma*." A commonplace word, two sounds that resonated with strength and a painful fragility.

"Bring me your clothes and sheets. I must look through them." To her own ears she sounded unaccustomedly bossy. "Lukegaru," she whispered to her dead husband, "This is our son's big chance." She inspected Anand's clothes carefully. Missing buttons could be replaced. An unravelled seam or a hem restitched. But anything with a patch or tear in the fabric she rejected.

"Amma, I wear that shirt to the office, and no-one has complained. Why, the Doragaru himself sometimes wears a patched shirt."

Graceamma shrugged. “This is Kalampett, but there,” she waved a hand vaguely, that is Hyderabad.”

Graceamma had never been to Hyderabad, and had no wish to go, but in some mysterious way she felt she knew it. It was their capital city, and beautiful with its palaces and gardens and the famous Charminar named for its four minarets. Urdu was the language most commonly heard on its streets, and she thought if she were there it would feel to her like a foreign place. The Nizam lived there with his four wives and all his concubines, and still the man was not satisfied. It was said a pretty girl was not safe on the streets of Hyderabad. If the Nizam should see her and want her, her family may not refuse. A Muslim girl, a Hindu girl, it was all the same to the Nizam, as long as she was pretty.

Graceamma had no doubt that the city also held dangers for young men. Her mind kept returning to the story of the prodigal son, a story well-known throughout Telengana. It was acted in the villages and towns and was popular with audiences, Christian, Muslim and Hindu alike. Young men especially enjoyed the scenes in which the younger son is living in a foreign place and wasting his inheritance on “riotous living”. Words that conjured up loudness, drunkenness and debauchery, all manner of excess, played with unseemly gusto by the young actors and relished by the audience. Of course such a life does not last. The money runs out, the so-called friends depart. There is a famine. The prodigal is reduced to taking on the disgraceful job of feeding pigs, while he himself starves. The lead actor then depicts the wretchedness of the young man, his remorse, and his decision to return home and throw himself at the mercy of his father. The father, an emblem for God, happens to be most loving and forgiving, far more so than a human father was likely to be. He orders a feast to be prepared to welcome home his son. If the audience was composed largely of

Hindus, the reference to killing the fattened calf would be omitted so as not to injure sensitivities.

"Jesu Christu," prayed Graceamma, "Protect my son Anand from the vices of Hyderabad."

When Luke died, Tundrigaru arranged for her and the three-year old Anand to be taken in by a home where impoverished widows and unmarried mothers were taught to make lace. As the wife of the village pastor, Graceamma had worked teaching children their letters and numbers. She had taught Bible stories, the importance of clean water, how to form letters on their slates, how to sew, how to pray. After Luke died she could have received formal training as a teacher and supported herself and Anand, except she had a breakdown.She was writing a sentence on a blackboard, preparing for a class, when Luke's mutilated body was carried into their hut, she happened to have been writing on a small blackboard easel, preparing a lesson. The neighbours came to mourn with her, crying loudly and rocking their bodies, but she had felt like a stone that water flows over and around but does not shift. Later she reported that she had forgotten how to read and write. This condition persisted and Graceamma and others began to think it would not correct itself.

Tundrigaru came to her one day and said it would not be good for her to stay long term in the home. A missionary colleague had had a baby and needed an ayah. He said life as an ayah in a busy household would be more responsible, less secluded and help her recovery. At that time, Graceamma did not care where she was. Her life had ended. That she was in a place where her son was safe and fed was all that mattered. The lace home was such a place and it seemed troublesome to move again. So when Rimmer-ammagaru came

to see her to offer Graceamma a position as ayah, she had made up her mind to refuse. But then she heard Luke's voice. It said, "She is a kind woman. Accept the offer. It will be good for you and Anand." And so she had come here to the compound and made new friends, and life for her as a widow was good.

Most of the tin trunks in the bazaar were decorated with Hindu deities, gaudy pictures of Lakshmi and Ganesh and Hanuman, not at all suitable for a Christian boy. But then Graceamma spied a blue one, with a pink lotus bloom with cupped petals painted on the lid, and two green leaves flat like trays with a raised rim. The painter – Graceamma thought of him as an artist – had added little white ripples on the blue lake water, suggesting with these flourishes of his brush, a day with a light cooling breeze.

She packed this trunk with Anand's clothes that she had mended, and washed, and pressed with the heavy iron heated with coals from the kitchen fire. And then she wrapped his father's copy of the New Testament in a cloth with a lace edging that she had worked when she was at the home. She held this to her chest for a moment before she placed it in the trunk and closed the lid. The clothes, the tin trunk, the holy book, were assembled with a mother's love, but that seemed too slight a thing to protect him in his new life.

Anand was so young! A youthfulness not entirely to do with age. His face was still soft and malleable. It seemed to Graceamma that it changed a little from one day to the next as though his features were still undecided about what adult form they should settle on. He took after her, in the sense that the path of his life was determined by others rather than his own clear sense of purpose.

His father had not been such a vague person, nor was Luke's mother who had a fixed ambition that her son should be a doctor or evangelist. That lady had a prodigious

knowledge of the Bible. She used to relate stories from it to Luke and his boyhood friends as though Lot's wife who turned to a pillar of salt, or Elijah who went up to heaven in a chariot were members of her wider family. Luke himself first had ideas of becoming a film actor or a musician. But when he came across that sad, dispirited, quarrelsome bunch of Christians in the village of Cheddapally, he could not forget them, and after he graduated from Divinity School went back to be with them. And they had rejected him, but he camped under a tamarind tree, and sang his songs, and slowly earned their trust.

The day Anand left for Hyderabad he wore his new glasses for the first time. The unfamiliar look of those metal frames separated him, as though he had already left her. They were a part of his new life. Before the morning classes started, Amos-ammagaru came with Rosie to wish Anand farewell. She gave him a packet. Samosa she had cooked for his journey. Rosie had jasmine in her hair. There was kohl round her eyes and powder on her face. Her gift to him was this picture of her, smiling and pretty. If Anand had a fixed idea, it was to marry Rosie, who at times seemed herself to entertain this thought, but she was a changeable girl.

Later Tundrigaru came to farewell Anand and to say a prayer. The Doragaru shook Anand's hand and wished him the best, and Ammagaru said, "We'll see you at Christmas and hear of your adventures." Then Graceamma climbed with Anand into the bandy cart, and Jacob urged the bullocks on. For a few miles then Graceamma was alone with her son. They sat across from each other and were mostly silent. She could tell from the expressions flitting across his face that he was asking himself was this really happening, was he really going to Hyderabad?

When the train pulled into the station, Anand pushed his way to a window seat. Graceamma reached up for his hand and held it tightly.

"Remember to give thanks to Jesu Christu, and never forget your hero father."

"Yes, Amma." A sudden joyousness animated Anand's voice and lit up his face. At that moment he looked like Luke on that morning he left home unknowing and happy, only to return later as a mutilated corpse. The train lurched and began to move forward, but Graceamma did not want to let go of her son and ran beside the carriage. She heard his surprised yell. "Amma, you will hurt yourself." She lost her footing, but swung from Anand's grip. Then Jacob came and caught her up and she let go. The engine pulled its carriages around a bend and she could see Anand's face no more.

Hyderabad

On the platform at Hyderabad station, Anand put down his trunk and bedroll to feel in his pockets for his ticket. There was much noise and pushing. He felt a hand on his shoulder. A voice spoke in his ear.

"Friend, you are in danger of losing your possessions."

It was true. A beggar boy was trying to pull his trunk through a forest of legs. Other travellers cursed the boy and the stranger grabbed him by the shoulders.

"Tamadi," he asked,"Little brother, why do you show such disrespect to a newcomer to our fine city? Let the man have his luggage."

The boy was not at all pleased, but he did not put up a fight. When they were through the ticket gate, the man said to Anand, "Perhaps you can give the boy a paisa to take back to his beggar master. If he returns empty handed he will only get beaten."

Anand did not want to give the boy anything. Firstly, he had tried to steal his luggage. Secondly, Anand only had a few rupees to last him till his first pay, one month hence. But the stranger was so friendly. His eyes shone so openly on Anand's face, that he found himself giving the boy a coin.

"Now, perhaps, you can give the boy some fruit for himself. Clearly, his beggar master keeps him hungry."

Anand could see the boy's ribs through the rents in his shirt. He also had unhealthy patches on his skin, and his unkempt hair was rusty-coloured, revealing a deficient diet. So Anand bought the boy a naranji-kaya, thinking it was too little, the boy really needed a meal.

The boy ripped off the peel with nimble fingers, releasing an enveloping citrus scent. He stuffed the segments into his mouth and the juice ran down his chin. It was such a polished performance of ravenous hunger, that Anand stood with the stranger to watch and a goat stretched its neck between their legs to nibble on the fallen peel. When the ragged boy had finished the orange, he stood like a statue, gazing longingly at a snack stall. Anand's philanthropic feelings evaporated. The stranger laughed.

"Go, now, tamadi, and thank your lucky star that the man you tried to steal from has a generous heart." He turned to Anand. "My name is Satyan, and you?"

Everything had been arranged for Anand through an exchange of letters between Tundrigaru and certain people in Hyderabad. He was to wait outside the station with his luggage until his landlord, an Anglo-Indian guard called Mr Johnson, had finished his shift and came to collect him and take him to his new home. So when Satyan asked if he knew

his way from the station, that perhaps he could help, Anand replied, "I must stay here. Someone is coming."

"I also have time to kill," said Satyan. "Let's sit over there and drink some chai."

Satyan paid for the tea and some snacks. He was only a few years older than Anand, not enough to account for the enormous gulf Anand felt between himself and this man with his warmth, his film star looks, the gold chain that glinted against his skin, his air of confidence.

Perhaps he was a Christian. That might account for his helpfulness, his concern for beggar boys, the way he behaved as though caste and class were unimportant. Or perhaps he was some kind of trickster. That could explain his knowledge of beggar masters and their ways and why he should bother with a country boy who had just arrived in the city. Anand shifted his chair to be closer to his luggage and placed his foot on his trunk. Then by way of apologising for his suspicions he took out a packet of beedis and offered one to Satyan.

"Thank you, but I do not smoke. It is a vice I do not have." Satyan smiled.

Anand had never thought of smoking as wrong, but as a sign of adulthood. It was not after all like becoming drunk. He looked at the tightly curled leaf in his hand, undecided about whether to smoke it.

"Please do light up," said Satyan. "Do not deny yourself a simple pleasure on my account."

"I will save it for later," said Anand, returning it to his pocket. " I like to smoke in quiet moments."

A passing youth hailed Satyan and came towards them. Satyan introduced Anand and the man's eyes travelled briefly over Anand before dismissing him. He spoke to Satyan alone.

"When are you next coming to visit? My sister Lakshmi pines for you, though she would not admit it. You know my parents have approached yours for a match. My mother is particularly ruthless. She has had several horoscopes cast, not being satisfied until some one found a way of showing that your horoscope and Lakshmi's were compatible."

"Your sister Lakshmi is beautiful and smart. And the man who makes a match with her will be fortunate. But you know your mother should take more notice of the unfavourable horoscopes. A match between your sister and myself is not meant to be."

"Your reluctance for marriage is well known, but if any Hyderabadi mother can succeed in bringing a match with her daughter and you, it will be my mother." And the boy called Ravi left them.

"What? You do not wish to marry?" The question jumped out of his mouth, irretrievable. Anand blushed. "Satyan, excuse me. I do not mean to pry. It is just that I was astonished, never having heard of such a thing." It was only celibates like Tundrigaru who did not marry.

"Don't distress yourself, Anand. My situation is not usual." Satyan did not seem at all offended. In fact he looked at Anand with the air of someone about to tease. "If I'm to answer your question, then I shall be telling you a secret known only to my closest friends. If I am to be this frank with you, you will have to agree to be frank with me."

Anand had nothing to hide. No vices, except it seemed that of smoking, and this was already known. But did he wish to be burdened by this city boy's secret?

"Tell me," he said, "As long as your frankness does not concern illegal matters. And then I myself will answer any question."

Satyan smiled calmly and leant towards him. He spoke quietly and clearly.

"I am already secretly married to a woman my family would consider unsuitable. Even if they were accepting, I would not wish my wife to be confined in my parents' household. That would be as cruel as caging a freedom-loving songbird."

This was indeed a secret of some magnitude. How foolhardy to share it with a stranger. How poetic his description of his wife.

"I will not speak of this to anyone." Anand hastened to reassure Satyan.

"Good. And are you ready to answer my question?"

Anand was not sure how it was he should prepare himself. "Yes."

"My question is, can you read and write Telugu?"

Was this a joke? An insult? Did this man think that because he was a country boy, he was an ignoramus.

Anand sat up straight and tall in his chair.

"You should know that I am a third generation literate. And I will prove this to you now." His annoyance made him act decisively. He unlocked his trunk, opened it, pulled out the New Testament wrapped in its cloth. These actions caught the attention of others in the chai shop. They craned to peer into his trunk. They watched as Anand swept crumbs off the table top. Cleaned greasy marks with the end of his shirt. They got up and stood around as he unwrapped the holy book.

"Open this," Anand challenged Satyan. "At whatever page you like. I can read it all."

Satyan reached out and turned back the leather cover. His fingers flicked over the thin slippery pages. Then he randomly pointed at a spot.

"Read here."

A man standing behind Anand's chair stooped down and put his head above Anand's shoulder, his eyes fixed on the text. His mouth was working, chewing and sucking on toothless gums. "Hmm,hmm," he said in Anand's ear. Anand cleared his throat and raised his voice over this and other distractions.

"A man was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell among thieves …." He read on to the last sentence of this passage. "Who do you say was truly neighbour to this man?" This question prompted a discussion, and a countryman with a turban of unbleached cotton asked, "Who is this Samaritan? Can you tell me where he lives?"

The chewing man raised his head.

" Hmm, hmm. It is true," he said to Satyan. "This boy can, hmm, read."

"I am impressed," said Satyan to Anand. "You see, I cannot read and write Telugu. Those of us who go to school here in Hyderabad must learn our lessons in Urdu. That is not just, is it? I want to meet with you again, Christian boy. I want you to teach me to read and write my own language."

Letter from Hyderabad

My esteemed and much-loved Amma,

By God's goodness and grace I have arrived safely here in Hyderabad. My luggage was very nearly stolen by a beggar boy at the station, but a kind stranger stopped him. As arranged, Mr Johnson came and took me to his house. He has a pretty wife who speaks no

Telugu, and two young sons. They asked me, Did I play cricket? When I said I did not know this cricket, Mr Johnson said they would soon teach me, because they were mad for the game. My room is the one vacated by their houseboy. He has married recently and wishes to stay with his wife. There is a bed, amma! My own bed, woven with rope with a mattress and a pillow. And a small stove. There is a separate door to go in and out of this room, without disturbing the family. Outside there is a courtyard with a temple flower tree. How Rosie would love the fragrant flowers for her hair. In one corner there is a latrine and a place to bathe. I have everything I need, but I am not to invite friends to my room. That said Mr Johnson is a strict rule. I am sure I will be happy here.

Three days ago I reported to the Good News Printers for the first time. Benjamingaru is a big man now. I did not at first recognise him, and I think he does not remember me. He speaks with a loud voice and was very welcoming, saying he likes to think of his workers as belonging to one happy family.

I must tell you about the stranger who saved my luggage. He is some years older than me, from a caste family. He learnt his lessons at school in Urdu medium, and cannot read and write Telugu. He has asked me to give him lessons. We are meeting tomorrow evening for the first one. He is paying me one rupee for each lesson.

Amma, you must not be sad that I am away from home. This is a good place here and everyone is friendly. Give my heartfelt respects to Tundrigaru, the Doragaru and Dorasani, Amosgaru and ammagaru. To Abraham and Jacob and all my friends.

I am your Anand, who thanks God daily for all his mercies heaped upon me.

For Satyan's first Telugu lesson, Anand got together a framed slate, of the kind used in schools, some slate pencils and a sheet printed with the Telugu alphabet. He had chosen a sentence from St. John's gospel. "A woman came to the well to draw water." A familiar everyday scene using simple words that would lead to other simple words. They could spend several sessions just on this one sentence.

As arranged, Anand met with Satyan in a solitary shack found where the margins of the city met the open countryside.

"Welcome to the Hanuman Chai Shop. This is where I meet with my friends." Satyan smiled as though in possession of a huge joke, but Anand was feeling aggrieved. Why, out of all the chai shops that existed in Hyderabad, would Satyan want him to come to this out-of-the-way hovel?

It was gloomy inside. The only light came from a smoke vent in the thatched roof. A fat-laden haze carrying a smell of onion and ginger and chilli drifted through the gaps in the curtains that separated the cooking and eating areas. Immediately Anand felt hungry. The thatched roof was held up by a rough wooden support and a framed print of Hanuman, the Monkey God, hung from a nail. A tinsel garland with coloured medallions had been placed around the picture, perhaps by someone in a spirit of devotion, but it had since become fly-spotted, the garland tarnished.

Satyan pulled aside a curtain, a grand sweeping gesture.

"Come, Anand, and meet my friend, Devadas."

A man in his thirties, his face sweaty from the oily heat, sat crosslegged in front of his stove, a simple affair of three rocks on which balanced a smoking karai. He wore

nothing but a dhoti and his legs were polio-withered sticks. He drained the pakora with a slotted spoon and put them on a plate.

"Welcome, Anand. I hope you are not as noisy as Satyan's other friends."

"No,no. Anand is very quiet. Very studious. He is going to be teaching me to read and write Telugu."

"Abbah, you have taken on a big job there, Anand. We will see how well you retain his interest. Will you have some pakora to eat? Satyan said you would probably be hungry. You will have some chai too, isn't it? Das, Das, come here. Light a lamp for Satyan and his friend."

A boy of ten emerged out of the gloom, and further back there was a thin silent woman suckling a baby. Anand touched his hand to his forehead to acknowledge her.

As they ate and drank, sitting on mats and in the light of the hurricane lamp, Satyan told Anand that Devadas was ten years old when he contracted polio. His father worked on a large estate belonging to a Muslim. There was a bad outbreak that year and the landlord's son also contracted the disease. That boy was now his landlord, and out of a fellow feeling he allowed Devadas to have this shack and run his business here for a minimal rent.

They then talked about the lesson.

"Are you ready to make a start?" asked Anand, emptying his cloth bag of the slate, his father's New Testament, the pencils and printed sheet.

"Yes." Satyan was holding a thin pamphlet. He held it out saying, "This is what I wish to read." Anand innocently took it, thinking it might be a Telugu gospel tract, such as the ones printed for distribution among enquirers. He looked at it and was so shocked that for some moments he did not breathe.

"Moscow Dialectics."

Thick black letters and below in blood red a crudely drawn hammer and sickle. The black and red printing inks had bled into the paper, which was of the poorest quality. After just a week under Benjamingaru's tutelage, Anand recognised this as a very poor print job. That in itself was sufficient to cause distaste, but the real shock was discovering that Satyan, a caste Hindu boy, was flirting with atheistic ideas, or, for all Anand knew, was already a fully fledged god-denyer.

Politeness made Anand take the pamphlet. He turned the flimsy pages, seeing spelling mistakes, characters from different fonts, gross examples of bad inking that left pages too dark or too faint to be easily read. Evil words jumped out at him. He set the pamphlet down and pushed it away.

"What's the matter?" asked Satyan.

"It is a terrible example of workmanship, full of mistakes. The man who did this took no pride in his work. Benjamingaru says that to produce a clean printing job on the worst paper is a real test of the printer's metal."

"Never mind that," said Satyan "Can you read it?"

"Of course. But this writing has difficult words. Very difficult words. It is better to start with something simple. I have chosen a sentence for today. You wish to make a start, isn't it?"

"I have shocked you, my friend. I see that. Perhaps you are also a little frightened?"

"A little," allowed Anand. "I see now why you chose such a distant, out of the way place for our meeting. This tells me that you yourself must also be a little frightened, isn't it?"

Satyan laughed easily. "I, too, can be cautious at times. It is of no benefit to be shown to be a communist here in Hyderabad."

This admission was followed by a long silence. Anand could not help thinking that perhaps it was also of no benefit to be shown to have a communist friend.

He could see through the open doorway that it was now dark. A mosquito whined in his ear. Anand flapped at it and looked at Satyan in the light of the hurricane lamp.

"It is true that when learning it is better to start simply," said Satyan, breaking the silence between them, "But I have a burning desire to read this book. To read it and re-read it, until I gain a full understanding."

"Have you no …" Anand did not wish to articulate the word 'communist', to put his mouth, his cheeks, his tongue into such a shape,"… similar thinking friends who can teach you?"

"My Telugu-reading communist friends are busy organising conferences and workshops, writing policy and remits, or else they are in the villages teaching people there."

Anand had not known the god-denyers were so organised. He pictured a familiar scene. An impromptu classroom under a tree. A man, or woman instructing a motley group of villagers sitting on the ground. The teacher drawing in the dust, using a flannel board, distributing materials. In this manner, a pastor or bible woman taught villagers of the love of God and of his son, Jesu Christu. To think that similar scenes, similar methods could be used for spreading hate and godlessness was very uncomfortable.

"Some of my Muslim friends wrongly see Telugu as a no account language. They offer to teach me Persian. For them the highest culture is found in Persian poetry. I say to

them, do you think the burdens of the peasants will be eased if I sit writing ghazals, as the Nizam does?"

"The question is, do you wish to learn from me, and do I wish to teach you?"

"I like you, Christian boy. Some might see you as a simple fellow from a country town with little experience of life, but your mind is sharp and you are not easily influenced. I would like to reach an agreement with you. Let us spend half the lesson learning sentences from your book, and the other half learning from mine. That is fair, isn't it?"

As fair, Anand thought, as saying, I will share your gold with you, if you will share my dross with me.

He closed his eyes so as not to be influenced by the compelling presence and charm of the man in front of him. If you put aside a man's appearance, you could tell his nature and character by his deeds. Satyan had saved Anand's luggage from being stolen. Satyan showed friendship and respect to Devadas, a cripple whose withered limbs were permanently fixed in a cross-legged position, who pushed himself round on his buttocks. Who owed this miserable shack and this pathetic living to a charitable landlord. This was how many might see him, and some out of pity might give him a paisa, but for one such as Satyan to give Devadas friendship, that was a big thing. Surely a person's actions were more important than his foolish notions and wrongheaded ideas?

Anand opened his eyes and looked steadily at Satyan.

"I like you, also, because you are generous hearted. But you must understand it will be distressing for me to touch that pamphlet again. Not only touch it, but examine each and every badly printed word and mistaken idea and treat them seriously. This friendship for

me will have its price." He smiled suddenly. "But who knows? I might show you the wrongness of your thinking."

"Or I you."

They burst out laughing. Satyan called for more chai.

Anand picked up his slate and started to write in large clear letters:

('A woman came to the well to draw water.' In Telugu characters)

Kalampett

It was Abraham's opinion that the dawn hour was sacred. A time for the body and mind to quietly and slowly wake and stretch and adjust to a new day. But one morning the pariah dogs in the compound raised an unholy, never-before-heard-of-din. Like others, Abraham rushed outside.

A jungle creature, furry, with no tail, was trapped on the branch of a neem tree. Below it the pariah dogs were barking and leaping. Starving dogs used to scraps of rotting food and the carcases of birds and rats here scented a feast. No-one had a name for the creature. They had never seen one before. They just knew it must have come from the jungle. Something had driven it from that place of ancient trees and shadowed danger into open spaces, through fields of *cholam,* and castor oil plants, to paddle through rice fields, across thorny rocky ground to this compound where it found the avenue of trees planted by Rev Woods thirty years earlier.

The din of the dogs was terrible and the creature crossed over to the branch of the adjacent tree to escape them, but they moved too, surrounding the trunk of the second tree. When the creature crossed back, the dogs split into two packs, one at the base of each tree,

waiting with flashing teeth and dripping tongues for the moment the creature came down to the ground. There was no escape for the animal unless it tried to sit out the dogs, staying out of reach until their hunger drove them to search for more accessible nourishment. But the incessant mass barking was driving the creature mad. It was utterly alone in its predicament. It did not snap its jaws or whimper, but its fear was felt in its silence. Small children turned and hid their eyes and women carried or ushered them away, but the men and boys stayed to witness what was bound to be a gory spectacle.

The doomed creature uselessly turned hither and thither on a branch until there came a moment when it seemed to decide that delay was pointless. It turned towards the ground and began to step softly and elegantly downwards, and the dogs seeing that leapt higher, their barks delirious.

It was then a boy broke away from the knot of men, surprised the dogs and swung himself up the tree as nimbly as a monkey up to the creature that started to retreat. The boy became still and making soft sounds and with infinitesimal slowness reached for the animal which the spectators now began to see in a different light. They saw how large its eyes were. How appealing, almost human its face. It was something after all, a creature worth saving. When the boy held it in his arms, a cheer came from the crowd, and the youths beat and stoned the dogs away, and Jacob went to the tree and reached for the animal. And the boy handed it to him and jumped down.

They discovered that the boy's name was Prakasam. They had never really noticed him before, he was new, part of that year's intake. Abraham couldn't help thinking it was a pity about the boy's teeth. He seemed to have too many for his mouth which remained open most of the time.

Jacob took the creature and the boy to the bungalow. The Doragaru said that it should be put in a cage and given water and leaves and taken back to the jungle. So Jacob took it in the bandy cart and the boy was praised and allowed to go too and see the creature, which it seemed was a small tailless monkey, returned to its home. And the journey there and back took Jacob and the boy four days.

At the time this seemed an odd, isolated episode, with an unexpectedly happy ending, but later on when Abraham looked back on it, he saw it as the first sign of what was to come, a time when things and people were lost and misplaced, bringing about unhappiness and danger to their lives, to the point that a man from Uttar Pradesh in the north, a soldier in the Indian army, himself a person in the wrong place, brought rape and murder to their peaceful compound.

Chapter 2 June 1947 The British announce their decision to leave India

Kalampett

Abraham was the master of his small domain. Four soot stained walls. A clay stove built at waist height with four round holes for the blackened *dekshi* to rest in. The tunnel beneath these holes for the wood-fire to flare and burn. A large brass pot holding water. In this, his environment he wore a sleeveless white *banyan* and a *dhoti,* and carried over his shoulder an all-purpose cloth. To flick, to wipe, to hold something hot.

In the waking light of dawn coming through the square kitchen window, he contemplated a new chip, like a pale fingernail laid on the rim of the blue dinner plate. His heart started to beat fast, but he managed to set the plate down gently. He had waited a long time for this auspicious day. The day when he would take the initiative, seize the opportunity this chipped dinnerplate provided, the day he would speak to his Dorasani.

But first he had to calm himself. He concentrated on the morning sounds filtering into the kitchen. The rhythmic rasp of the broom on the back steps, the clatter of the chain as the bucket plunged into the well, the zing, zing of the buffalo's milk directed into a brass pot, and the distant voices of the hostel children as they went about their morning duties. These familiar sounds spoke of orderliness and were in their ordinary way beautiful, calming his soul.

He came to this bungalow as a young man, when his Dorasani, Harriet Rimmer, was herself young and recently married. One of his first tasks was to unpack and unwrap a monster dinnerset with sixteen place settings and different sized platters and serving dishes - a wedding present from the Dorasani's father. The Dorasani had herself chosen the service from the Army and Navy Stores in Madras, and it was evident that she was very

happy with it. "It should last us all our working life in India," she told him. And she liked the colour, a wishy-washy blue, that reminded her of a wild flower that grew along the roadsides and in the ditches of her hometown in New Zealand. "Periwinkle" she called it, or some such. But Abraham had known instinctively, as he held the first unwrapped bowl, that the dishes were cheap and would easily break. They were not of a quality that one should properly expect in a foreigner's household. Indeed the set devalued his job as cook and bearer at the mission bungalow, and insulted in advance all the delicious meals he was ambitious to prepare. His spirits sank lower and lower as the differently sized plates and bowls were piled higher, covering the dining table, colonising the sideboard. He could not imagine why someone would need so many dishes of so many different sizes. He had yet to learn that the size of a plate indicated its use – for dinner, lunch or for bread and butter, that the larger bowls were for soup or the breakfast *ragi*, and the small ones for fruit and custard. "Dorasani, where would you like me to put them?" There was not enough room in the pantry for this mass, this weight of spirit-sapping mediocrity. "We'll keep what we need for now, and the rest will have to go back in the packing cases, I'm afraid. And put in the store room. As a dish breaks, which it will of course, we will replace it with one in storage."

That had been the Dorasani's grand plan, to have a store of replacement dishes to last a lifetime, except that the dinner plates, cheap, inferior things they were, had not lasted as long as she had hoped. Abraham knew there was not a single plate of this size left in storage to replace the one with its new, pristine chip.

There was one matter on which Abraham wholeheartedly supported the Dorasani. She had a rule that after a dish was chipped it was no longer to be used. Chips led to cracks

and cracks harboured germs, as the Dorasani had taught them. Germs, the invisible-disease spreading foe, Dorasani's enemy number one. Abraham had never deliberately broken a plate, except when it was cracked. Then it was his duty to dispose of it, and even though he smashed it with a distinct lack of sorrow, whatever his thoughts and his emotions at the time, they did nothing to reduce the efficacy of his action in the war against disease.

The sound of sweeping had stopped. Boys called out as they raced from their water-pulling duties to their hostel for breakfast. The Dorasani would be back at any moment from her early morning rounds. Abraham pulled on his starched white jacket, his spotless turban. It was important to be appropriately dressed for this occasion. He was ready, positioned next to the sideboard, with three dinnerplates, one chipped, when he heard the Dorasani run up the back steps and enter the bungalow with her accustomed energy. Surprising in someone so slight. Unsuitable in such heat. His Dorasani's lack of dignity was regrettable, but he was prepared to overlook it as a lovable eccentricity.

"Good morning, Abraham."

"Good morning, Dorasani."

She removed her topi, that unflattering headcover that she and other English insisted on wearing. As usual it left disfiguring indentations across her damp forehead.

"What's this?" she asked, waving at the dinnerplates, at his unusually formal attire for that time of day. "I know, you're going to scold me."

"Oh, no, Dorasani!" How could she think such a thing? "Only I must sadly report," he said in a mournful voice, "that there is a new 'chip'" (he said the word in English) "leaving only two dinnerplates without. Dorasani, there are no more such plates in the

storeroom." He had tried to warn her, to hint, had asked her to inspect the stored china, but she hadn't heeded him and now matters had reached this crisis point.

"I see. That's a shame, but nothing lasts for ever. Never mind, Abraham. At dinner, just give me a smaller plate."

He could not believe that she should so casually suggest this lowering of standards, the use of a luncheon plate for dinner.

"Yes, Dorasani. And when the new Doragaru arrives from England next month, must he be given a smaller plate too? Miss Rachel, also, when she is home from school? And what to do when there are visitors? Shall we borrow plates – perhaps from Dr Ammagaru's bungalow?"

"Abraham, are you threatening me with Dr. Ammagaru's Royal Worcester dinnerset?" The Dorasani sounded amused, but "threaten" was a terrible word. "Those dishes, lovely as they are, are simply too grand for us. You know the Doragaru and I like to live simply." There was a pause in which a crow cawed outside. "I'm not saying that Dr.Ammagaru wants to be ostentatious. China like that is ordinary for the sort of family she comes from. It was a gift from her godmother. Actually, Dr. Ammagaru would be quite happy eating off a tin plate."

Abraham had to agree. Dr. Ammagaru was another eccentric, who did not seem to notice the poor quality of the food Samuel, her cook and bearer, served up. Lumpy mashed potatoes, burnt custard and pitifully flat meringues. Some one who did not notice such culinary disasters, and was prepared to inflict them on her guests, could not be expected to notice the plates the food was served on.

"As for our plates…" continued the Dorasani. "Thank you for bringing the matter up, Abraham. I'll write a letter to the Army and Navy Stores tonight. It's a very basic dinner service, so there should'nt be a problem getting replacement dishes. You can post the letter yourself, Abraham, when you go to the bazaar tomorrow." The Dorasani smiled at him in her friendly way, forgetting to keep a suitable distance.

Did she expect him to be pleased with replacement dishes?

"Thank you, Dorasani. There is just one thing…" Harriet Rimmer was on the point of leaving the room.

"Yes?"

Abraham straightened his back. It was now or never.

"These dishes chip and break easily. Is it not time … ?

"They do, don't they? Disappointing. But you have made them last very well."

When the Dorasani gets to the door, she turns back to look at him.

"Well done, Abraham." Behind her round glasses, her right eye winked. A wink! So undignified, so unsuitable in a Dorasani. And she has not discussed the day's menu.

Her head popped round the door again. "About today's meals, just do the usual. Thankyou, Abraham. What would I do without you?"

Abraham left the diningroom and walked into the pantry where Graceamma had gathered together the kerosene lamps from around the bungalow. She wass wiping away the smoke shadow inside a glass funnel. He felt her eyes on him as he slowly took off his turban and jacket.

"Your talk with the Dorasani, it did not go as you wanted?"

"If I am to escape the blue dishes, I will have to resign." He told her about the Dorasani's plan to order replacements.

"But where would you go?"

"I should like to work for Dr Ammagaru." Abraham pictured her dinner service, ornamented with fruit in jewel-like colours, gleaming circles of gilt, with a glaze like a high polish, of a quality that Abraham, who did not at first know the name Royal Worcester, had instinctively recognized. Such china could inspire the creation of dishes of great taste and delicacy.

Graceamma set down a polished funnel, and picked up the dirty glass of a hurricane lamp.

"I do not think Dr. Ammagaru would dismiss Samuel, however much she might prefer to have you."

"Then she would be showing that slovenly, lazy Samuel an undeserved loyalty."

Abraham went into his kitchen to calm himself. His own erect bearing, his splendid moustache fitted him to be the bearer of those magnificent tureens and platters and serving bowls. But did he really want to leave the school compound? In the hospital compound he would be assailed by sights of the diseased and the maimed, the sounds of pain, the grief of the bereaved, odours of illness and fear, and in particular that pervasive smell of methylated spirits, used lavishly in the hospital as a disinfective, that always induced in him feelings of nausea and dread.

No. For the time being he would stay where he was. He had done what he could to guide the Dorasani towards a more suitable choice of tableware. The rest was in God's hands.

In a few minutes the Doragaru and Dorasani would be expecting their breakfast. "Just do the usual," the Dorasani had said. The usual for breakfast was a poached egg. But Abraham felt a spurt of independence, rebellion even. He made a very good poached egg, but such pallid fare was suitable only for the ill or toothless. He would not poach an egg! He would make an omelette. There was onion and chilli and a small tomato from the dried up garden. Sadly, no fresh coriander, but he would add a touch of cumin. Whether the Doragaru and Dorasani recognized it or not, the omelette would be fit for a lord.

A clutch of mail sprawled on the sideboard. Amongst the letters and circulars, Harriet spotted a pale blue Croxley envelope. A letter from Rachel. When Rachel was younger, the words Rev. and Mrs. Rimmer were written with a painstaking copybook evenness. But her daughter's handwriting had become more individual with some conscious attempts at style. The capital letters had a flourish, 'and' become '&', and the smaller letters were jostling, growing taller at different rates.

Harriet opened the envelope and pulled out a single sheet of lined paper.

Dear Mummy and Daddy,

It is chaos here. Parents are not waiting for the end of term. Almost everyday a car arrives and a girl is hastily packed up. My locker has been utterly ransacked for things to give as presents. All I have left are my brush and comb and a pair of spare brown shoelaces. My autograph book is crammed with addresses and tearful, wobbly messages. It has sprouted a veritable woodland of forget- me-nots. (*This sentence had a line through it.)* Miss Bisley is gushing with the parents, but otherwise grim. The future of the school is at

stake! Several times she has said, "Rachel, next term, I shall be relying on you." This is ominous. Because she is losing girls so fast, she has decided to close the school early. Those of us who remain will be packed off on Thursday next week. So I shall be home that Friday night. Sorry this letter is short. I have to go to wave another bosom buddy adieu.

Lots and lots of love, Rachel

Harriet re-read the short letter and then stared at the bottom of the page, at the remaining blue lines palely underlining unwritten Racheline thoughts. She could never get enough of her daughter, and did not know what was really going on in her head.

Rachel was four years old when they took her home to New Zealand. Introduced her to the relatives. A very blonde child. Round blue eyes. "Look at her. Pretty as a picture." At dinner one evening they explained that when Rachel was old enough they would be sending her to boarding school on a hill station. They would have to do that, endure that separation for the sake of her health, her education. Next morning in a sunny kitchen Bertha was working at the sink. "You know, you could leave Rachel with me." Plates crashed together in the soapy water. "I'd be happy to look after her. Nice to have a girl around. Good for the boys. She could start school here at five. Have a normal childhood."

Leave her daughter? As if. Bone of her bone. Flesh of her flesh. She would never. Harriet's mind snatched at certain words and phrases. I'd be happy. Nice. Good for the boys. Normal.

She wanted to spit.

"Good of you to offer," Ross said to his sister. "But we couldn't accept. We know people who've done something similar. The parents and children grow up strangers to each other. We would hope to avoid that."

"In your situation, it's the child you have to think of." Bertha efficiently dried a pile of plates.

"We are," said Harriet, "We are."

Bertha banged a handful of crockery into the cupboard.

"You're not the first person who's offered to take Rachel." Harriet pitched her voice to be friendly, to entertain. "When she was three weeks old a woman in a village offered me a few *paisa* for her. I think she thought Rachel was a doll."

"What were you two thinking? Taking a baby into a dirty village."

A packet of flour, a mixing bowl landed on the bench. Harriet could see a batch of scones threatened.

That encounter with Bertha, it returned to Harriet again and again. Rachel was growing up here happy, but inevitably estranged from New Zealand. Harriet's instinct was to keep her child close, or as close as boarding school allowed, but what if her-sister-in-law were right? What if Rachel, when she went back home, had difficulty settling in? That was a common story for missionaries' children. While Ross and she got immense fulfilment from their work, Rachel would pay the price for their lives. Bertha, her sister-in-law, competent, skilled, influential in her farming community, had a point, but Ross did not worry as Harriet did.

"We're a family, the three of us. We stick together."

Sunday afternoon and Harriet was meeting with Virginia (Dr. Ammagaru) and Hilda (locally seen as a saint) at Archie's bungalow. He was Uncle Archie to Rachel, Archdeacon Godfrey to the Bishop. As a celibate, and therefore, father to no-one in particular, he was left free to become *tundri* to all and had over the years grown into this role, and so was known by a third name, Tundrigaru. His bungalow was architecturally distinct to the school bungalow. A balustrade ran around the flat roof and in the centre two rooms provided Archie with a study and bedroom, though most nights even in the cool weather he slept out under the stars. Harriet thought his bungalow resembled a white ship marooned high on the Deccan plateau.

Archie's place was a monkish establishment: an ascetic master and two celibate servant men, Thelonius and David, father and adopted son, who chose this renunciation all the better to serve their master who in his turn served God. Without the requirements of wives and families, these three men took up only half the house. The other wing had been locked up for years. And then the mission told them a new man was coming. Lester Newby, an accountant, to take over the financial administration, and free up Ross to work in the villages. He was to live with Archie.

When the tall teak doors were unlocked and opened, a family of bats flew out. Stains mottled the stone floor where leaks had pooled and dried, pooled and dried. A rotten egg lay in a snake's nest in the broken hay box. Humans had been absent from this space for years, but birds and insects and reptiles and small creatures had come and gone through cracks and a broken shutter and the waste hole in the bathroom, leaving their detritus and layers of pungent odours. Harriet had come to see, and opening the almirah had released a whining blinding cloud of mosquitoes. The repair work had been carried out during the hot

weather. The final task was to whitewash the entire house inside and out. This involved the lived-in side of the house to be emptied of its furniture and all Archie's books and papers. It was a lot of hard work, but it was all done except for some final touches, and Harriet was meeting Virginia and Hilda to provide those.

Hilda had brought some lengths of printed cotton and they hung these to curtain the doorways. Harriet produced sheets and pillowcases. A new wooden frame woven with fresh white tape replaced the old bed attacked by woodworm. The mattress and pillows were made with fresh ticking and stuffed with clean kapok.

The women shook out the folded linen and slowly made the bed together. Virginia made hospital corners with the sheets.

"I've never done this before, but I've seen it done often enough."

The others laughed. Fact was that not one of them at that time was used to carrying out the quiet orderly movements of domestic tasks, and they enjoyed doing them, this once, on this occasion preparing the living quarters for a new colleague.

During the clean up, David had found old framed pictures and stacked them against the wall to wait their inspection. Mostly they were stern portraits of past worthies, but there was a print of Holman Hunt's that the three women regarded as acceptable. Hilda had brought along a print of the Sussex Downs, Virginia a water colour, an Indian village scene with the *gul mohr* in bloom. They covered the bed with a colourful block print counterpane, tied up the mosquito net. Placed a small oil lamp in the bathroom, and a hurricane lamp on the dressingtable, a Dorothy Sellers thriller by the bed.

"Ladies, tea is ready." David liked to talk to them in English and they liked to talk to him.

"David," said Virginia, "There's a Telugu word, I'd like you to translate. It was used by a patient's husband. He was angry with me at the time. I understood the sentence about no man wishing to bed me. And I understood that foreign women should not interfere in the domestic lives of Indian men, but there was a word that was new to me. Let's see if I can remember it."

"It must be a bad word, Dr. Ammagaru. Maybe it should not be translated?"

"No, no. I want to understand everything that is thrown at me, and I particularly enjoy insults. I know, I've got it." She said the word.

"I've never heard that before," said Harriet.

"Well?" Virginia demanded of David.

"It is a very, very bad word."

"Well?"

He told them. The ladies laughed.

"What did you do to make him so angry?" asked Hilda.

"His wife had just given birth. She'd lost quite a lot of blood and was also anaemic. I, interfering foreign woman that I am, told him his wife needed all her strength to feed the baby. That he should withhold from conjugal relations for one month. This is advice I frequently give, but the man is said to be a local Communist. He was sensitive, I suppose, to the Imperialistic overtones of my advice."

Ross returned from Kalampett bazaar one morning, having come upon the violent aftermath of what was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration. He told Harriet and Archie about it at

lunch. Indian union flags and footwear lay scattered on the ground. Shocked demonstarators clutched arms and shoulders as they recovered from a lathie charge made by the Nizam's police. An elderly man lay curled on the ground. He had a crack on his head and was having chests pains. The police were still there, arresting the demonstrators. Ross spoke to the officer in charge, offering to take the elderly man to be checked out by Virginia. "I told him it would do the police no good, if a lathied demonstrator had a heart attack and died while in custody. He saw the point, but was a bit reluctant. Said he was under orders to arrest every demonstrator, no exceptions. When I said I'd bring the man back to the police station, once he was discharged from hospital, he relented."

"A good outcome, then," said Archie.

"Yes. The elderly man had a relative with him. A nephew, perhaps, or a grand-son. This young man very much resented my intervention. 'Go away, English. We can look after ourselves.' He started to chant, 'Quit India' and the other demonstrators joined in. They had come together to protest against the Nizam, but the Nizam's police had shown little respect to their non-violence. It seemed to cheer them to have another object of protest, as they were taken away. And then, a curious thing, an elderly Hajji with a white beard stepped out of the crowd and said to the young man, "Quit Hyderabad."

"I'm not sure I like the sound of that," said Harriet. "We can do without racial tensions here in Kalampett."

"The police officer seemed to think that the demonstrators were all Congress troublemakers from across the border. 'Our Hindus are all loyal to the Nizam,' he said."

"But is the Nizam faithful to his people?" murmured Archie. "Is he going to allow representative government?"

"Oh, Harriet." Ross had just remembered. "There was a school boy in the crowd. That one who keeps skipping class. What's his name?"

"Prakasam."

"I was quite pleased he was there. It meant he could ride my bicycle back to the compound, while I took the old man to hospital in a tonga."

Ross smiled at the memory. The boy was too small to reach the pedals from the saddle and had to reach under the crossbar for the other pedal. He wobbled at first, but soon achieved a canny balance, with the bike leaning to the right, his body to the left, his small legs vigorously working.

Hyderabad

Anand woke up, struggling from under his sheet and out of a dream about he knew not what. He rubbed his face and wiped away the dampness from the corners of his eyes. He had become so accustomed to his glasses that before he could make sense of the world and a new day he needed to put them on. He turned and felt under his bed for his spectacles, and it was then that he heard again the voice in his head. There were no words, just a certain pitch and tonality, two or three notes echoing in his mind. His hand stopped searching for a moment as he waited for the voice to reveal more, but as always when he tried to focus on it, the recollection, if that was what it was, left him and he could not by an effort of will bring it back. Amma once told him that his father used to carry him in his arms and sing to him every evening. If the voice was a memory, it was the only one he had of his father alive.

It was strange that on the day he woke up and thought of his long dead father that the Rev. A.P. Isaiah came to visit Benjamingaru, Anand's boss, at The Good News Printers. Anand happened to be sitting at a desk in the corridor, not far from Benjamingaru's office door, proofreading the latest galleys. Benjamingaru's voice was booming one moment, whispering confidentially the next. He burst out into English phrases and loud laughter. This was how he was when he wished to impress. The other man's voice was light, even in tone and precise. Anand only pricked up his ears when he heard his own name spoken in mid-sentence by the visitor.

" ….. a young man, a Mr V.P.Anand working here. I wonder if I may speak to him?"

Anand was not sure he had heard correctly. There could be other young men called V.P. Anand, though not of course working there. And he had never before heard himself referred to with such formality. A formality that gave him adult status.

"Who? … Oh, Anand. A promising young man sent to us by the Bishop of Dornakal . He is a worthy cause. His mother is a widow, an ayah, you know."

"I knew his father at Divinity School. He was my best friend at the time. I also knew his mother, Grace. I was present at their wedding in Dornakal Cathedral. The Bishop presided. I should love to make myself known to their son."

"Of course, of course." Benjamingaru was all affability.

He summoned the peon and told him to ask Mr V.P. Anand to come to the office immediately.

"Mr…. who?" asked the peon.

"Anand. Anand," said Benjamingaru with irritation. Then he turned to Mr. A.P.Isaiah.

"We are usually informal here," he boomed. "One big happy family."

Isaak, the peon, came towards Anand with a slightly confused look.

"Are you Mr . . . ?"

"Yes. Mr V. P. Anand. I am a big man now." He grinned at Isaak and whispered, "What's the visitor like?"

"Very distinguished looking. More so than Benjamingaru."

They shared a grin.

Anand was introduced to a tall spare man with a grey sparkle to his hair, who looked at him with a slight smile on his face and real interest in his eyes.

"Mr. A.P. Isaiah has recently returned from England and America. He is famous in those parts, and has come today to ask me to publish one of his writings, a text for Telugu divinity students. We are very honoured by this request."

Benjamingaru was making it clear, that Anand was also very honoured that such a man had requested to speak to him.

"Not so famous," said Mr A.P. Isaiah mildly. "I was given the opportunity for further study, and teaching experience in those countries. I am very happy to return now. These are most exciting times in my homeland."

He stepped forward and took Anand's hand.

"I can see something of your father and something of your mother in you, but mostly, like all children, you are your own self. I will not detain you from your work now,

but it will give me enormous pleasure if you will dine with me this evening. My wife and children have not yet joined me in Hyderabad, so I am alone."

Benjamingaru stepped forward.

"Oh, but you must eat with us! My wife and I will be most honoured to hear of your successes in England and America. My children also. And it is no secret that my wife is a first class cook."

"Your invitation is most kind, Benjamingaru. And at another time I would assuredly have accepted it. But I find that since I have returned to my homeland, I am in a very nostalgic mood. And this young man is a link to the past. I hope you will forgive me."

"Nothing to forgive," said Benjamingaru. He looked disappointed, and dubious at Mr Isaiah's choice of dinner companion.

"Excuse me, Isaiahgaru. Did you say that you were present at my father and amma's wedding?"

Benjamingaru frowned at this evidence of eavesdropping.

"Yes. It was a most joyful occasion. I borrowed Tundrigaru's box brownie and took a photo of the happy couple."

"I have seen that photo. Amma keeps it in her box of treasures." Anand's picture of his father came from that photo, a vision fixed in time. It struck Anand that were his father still alive, his hair might be greying like Isaiahgaru's

The distinguished theologian and the ayah's son both smiled. They had taken a liking to each other and were delighted to establish this link.

Benjamingaru cleared his throat vigorously, torturing his vocal chords, and triggering a paroxysm of coughing. The peon offered Benjamingaru a tumbler of drinking

water. Mr A.P. Isaiah looked most distressed and held out a clean, folded English handkerchief. Anand felt useless, his glasses fogging with alarm. At last a smile broke through the tears coursing down Benjamingaru's face.

"Thank you, my good friends." He mopped himself. "Thank you. I am quite recovered now." He took a sip of water and smiled again.

Before his meal with Rev. A.P. Isaiah, Anand bathed and changed into a clean white cotton shirt and cotton trousers, his best clothes. He carefully oiled his hair and put on the leather chappals he wore once a week when he went to church. Normally, he was bare footed, but it was only fitting to wear one's best when going to worship, and of course he slipped off the chappals before entering that holy space.

When he stood in front of the Hanging Gardens Hotel, he wondered if garments good enough for Sunday worship would be acceptable here. The hotel looked immensely grand. Well-watered potted plants lined the path to the door and the spacious verandah. The upstairs veranda was festooned with creepers and hanging baskets. At the large carved entrance stood the doorkeeper magnificent in his red braided jacket with a purple cummerbund and a turban of striped silk.

Imagining Abraham dressed in such splendour, smoothing his moustache, his proud look, Anand smiled. His amma, Grace, would enjoy such a picture too. The doorkeeper frowned. He was there to keep out undesirables. Anand did not feel in the least confident that he would pass muster. As he tried to summon up his courage he heard someone calling his name. Upstairs, framed by two baskets of colourful flowers was Mr.A.P. Isaiah, who smiled down at him and beckoned him up.

Anand walked up to the door and spoke to the fiercely magnificent doorkeeper.

"Mr A.P. Isaiah, who is on the upstairs verandah, has invited me to meet him here"

"Yes, yes. We know."

Anand started to shuffle off his chappals at the door.

"No, no. There is no need. Inside please."

The doorkeeper signaled to a bearer, who with equal disdain led this country boy up the stairs to a table on the verandah where Mr. A.P.Isaiah was seated. The bearer pulled out a chair from the table and looked at Anand who looked at the chair.

"Please sit down, my young friend," said Mr.A.P.Isaiah. Once Anand was seated and the bearer had left them, Mr.A.P.Isaiah carried on in his friendly,easy way.

"Hotels can be so very intimidating. I know how awkward I felt the first time I was in a hotel in London. Sitting at the restaurant table, faced with an array of implements, I felt quite mystified. Fortunately, that is one hurdle we will not have here. It is permissible to eat one's annum with the hand, in the customary way. It is only the foreign guests who use a spoon."

Mr. A.P. Isaiah reached forward and picked up a starched cloth in front of him. It was folded rather like a small turban and he shook it out and spread it on his lap. Anand did the same. When Mr. A.P. Isaiah picked up an icy glass of water and pressed it to his lips and took a sip, Anand did likewise. The chilled water made his teeth tingle and pooled in his stomach like melted ice.

"The food will be served soon. I have already ordered. When I was abroad there were days when I longed for the tartness of tamarind. Or the taste of a fresh coconut and coriander chutney. In England we lived like everyone else under wartime restrictions.

Occasionally we obtained mutton, but we found it very fatty. To all intents and purposes we were vegetarian. So tonight, with you my friend as my excuse, I am making merry. I have ordered a goat biriani, with all the accompaniments. I hope it will be to your taste."

Anand was struck wordless by the hotel, by his father's friend, his exotic life overseas, the banquet spread in front of them. He could not remain silent for ever. He cast around for something to say.

"This meal is excellent, Isaiahgaru. You are very generous."

Isaiahgaru smiled at him in a kindly way.

"The last time we met we spoke of your parents' wedding. Your parents' marriage was a love match, you know. Did your mother ever tell you how that came about?"

"No, sir. If she speaks of the past, it is of the village where my parents lived. Where I was born."

"Well, then I shall take great pleasure in recounting an important chapter in your family history.

"Your parents met while Luke was a student at the Divinity School in Dornakal, and your mother was still a schoolgirl. Her father worked as a carpenter in the Cathedral Compound. Very early each morning she went to draw the household water and it was Luke's habit to walk past the well at this time and go to a quiet place where he would sit on a rock and compose his lyrics and tunes. One morning things were not going well for him, so he got up from his rock early. The girl he passed each morning was in distress, and he stopped to speak to her. It seemed she had broken her clay water pot. Luke suggested that she draw another bucketful of water, and he would carry the bucket to her home and then return it to the well. As they went with the water, Graceamma walked behind Luke who

carried the bucket on his head. The girl had stopped crying and was by then apparently feeling much happier because she began to hum. Luke was shocked to realise the tune she hummed was one of his. He stopped and asked her what she was humming. "Your best song, annah." His best song. "And what is my worst song?" he asked. "The one you were working on today." She had answered honestly, but held her head, fearing she had angered him or hurt his feelings. But your father, Luke, did not have a false pride. He was a divinity student, one of the elect, but he was not too proud to ask this slip of a girl what she thought he was doing wrong. "You are liking your words too much to change them, though they are too long for the melody, which is beautiful and which you also do not want to change."

" 'You know, Isaiah,' your father said to me later, 'Her analysis was absolutely correct. I had known that all along but did not want to face it.'

"You see it turned out that Graceamma was musical too. Her father had for years played the harmonium and sang, but his harmonium was ancient and the leather had perished in several places and he could not afford its repair or its replacement. It was typical of Luke, on hearing this, to raise a subscription for the repair of the harmonium. He petitioned the lecturers, the missionaries, the Bishop and all and sundry to rally to this cause. It wasn't long before Graceamma's father had a harmonium to play again, and it became the custom for our class of students to meet weekly at his house to sing."

Isaiahgaru took a sip of water, and then continued.

"I remember Luke calling Grace to join us. She was inclined to sit in a corner and watch. I remember Luke saying, 'Isaiah, my friend, you do not need so much space for your skinny frame. Move up, move up. We must make room for Grace. Do not be misled by her

humble manner. This young woman is a connoisseur of song. She is my first and fiercest critic, and besides her voice isn't bad.'

"I recall those days with much affection.

"Then later, after Luke established himself in Cheddapalli, he wrote to Grace who by that time had matriculated and was thinking of becoming a teacher. He asked for her hand in marriage and she accepted and became a partner in his work, but that is another story."

Anand had tears in his eyes. He could not help it. He was unable to swallow. Isaiahgaru also had not eaten much. He was smiling at Anand.

"While my wife and I were living in England, we developed a taste for pudding. It was a treat to have a little sweetness after a humdrum meal. It is not at all necessary to do this here, but the habit remains. Would you join me in some *mitai* and some coffee?"

Rahel's Diary

Abbu was very happy today. I saw him from my usual spyhole. He had a visitor, an Englishman. My father is not usually happy when called on by Englishmen, but this one brought good news. The very best. The Angrezi are leaving India! Abbu looked so excited. He clapped his hands. When the visitor left him, he called for his robes of state. There and then he was dressed in them. His gold silk tunic, his red cape, a jewelled turban on his head and a sword strapped at his hip. How fine and handsome my Abbu looked. He told the courtiers and servants to withdraw. Then he walked to his throne and sat on it. He seemed to fill the throne, fitting it for the first time. Ever since the third Nizam the Angrezi have

meddled in the affairs of Hyderabad. But now, Abbu, the seventh Nizam can be properly King, and I, Rahel, daughter no. 23, share that joy with him.

And Nasreen. I must go and tell my sister immediately.

Chapter 3 July 1947

Victoria Station, Bombay

Lester Newby had disembarked that morning, his first day in India, and in the evening stood at the luggage deposit at Victoria Station to claim his two suitcases and a bag. He found himself surrounded by coolies, raising their arms and voices as each claimed his right to Lester's baggage. He had little choice in the matter. A man on his left had grabbed his arm. Lester did not think he would let go if he happened to give the nod to some other chap. A second coolie and then a third took possession of the suitcases. An argument erupted. Lester was at a loss, unable to understand what was being said, unable to effectively intervene. But some agreement was apparently reached as the argument ceased, and the other coolies departed leaving as victor, the man who had grabbed him. He retied his turban and proceeded to pile the luggage on his head. To limit his load Lester picked up the bag, but the coolie wrested it from his hand. Then he set off at a great clip. Lester tried to hurry after him, concerned because he had not told the man which train he was catching, so how did he know where to go, and was Lester perhaps going to lose all his luggage? The cooli made a right-angle turn onto a platform where travellers were boarding a train. To Lester's relief he spotted a sign saying Madras Express. He found his name chalked on a second class sleeper, along with two other names. S.T. Thakadas and Abdul Malik.

Once his luggage was loaded Lester was not at all sure what to pay the coolie. He pulled out a handful of notes and coins from a pocket, and then appealed to his fellow passengers.

"You know, I've no idea what I should pay him."

"Please to excuse." One of the men leant forward, stretching out a hand. Curiously the nail on his little finger was grown very long and painted a dull red. He plucked some coins out of Lester's palm and thrust them at the coolie. But the fellow was not pleased. He remained in the carriage, giving Lester piteous looks, his hands in perpetual motion, joining in supplication, stretching in appeal, going to his mouth.

Lester was about to delve again into his pocket, when the other passenger spoke.

"Please do not give him more. He has received that to which he is entitled. He is a cheeky fellow, trying to take advantage of a newcomer to this country."

The doors of other carriages were slamming shut, whistles blew, the train started to move and still the coolie remained at the open door pleading his case, but before the train gathered speed he jumped off. Lester leaned out to see that the man had landed nimbly on his feet and then closed the carriage door against the rushing air. Engine smuts had landed on his tropical linen suit, put on for the first time that morning. He brushed his lapel lightly, leaving a smudge.

"Oh, dear. Lester, what have you done?" He mocked himself and smiled towards the two faces observing him. "I'm Lester Newby, by the way."

Mr Thakadas turned out to be the passenger dressed in the white homespun of the Congress supporter, and he, of the long fingernail, was Mr Abdul Malik.

"Thank you for your help," said Lester, "But I did form the impression that the cooli was not happy."

Mr Thakadas looked at Lester somewhat severely.

"It was wrong of that fellow to try and take advantage of a foreigner to our shores, but, sir, you were wrong too, to show him the contents of your pocket. Naturally the sight of your wealth aroused the man's desire for more than his entitlement."

Lester, this is your first telling off.

The conversation that followed closely resembled an interview. Where was he from? Harrow, but no he did not attend the public school that Jawarharlal Nehru went to. What was his profession? Accountant. What was his reason for coming to India? To take up a position as Financial Administrator. Where, Madras? No, Kalampett. Where???

It was a comical moment. Mr Thakadas, who knew of Harrow in a country he had never visited, did not know of Kalampett, a town in his native land. Indeed, why should he, the town being so small, the country so vast, but Mr Thakadas appeared seriously discomposed to be found ignorant in front of a recent foreign arrival. Mr Malik, who it turned out had family connections in Hyderabad, gave him the geographical location of Kalampett, and Mr Thakadas' sense of personal dignity was restored. A border town in Hyderabad State was a "no account, backward place", to not know of it was therefore no disgrace.

"But who there would need the services of an accountant, and wish to import one from England?" asked Mr. Thakadas.

Lester was responding in his best interviewee manner.

"I'll be working in a mission office. Employed by a large church diocese, as large as ….. Wales. I do not know an Indian equivalent."

"How is it that the Nizam, a Muslim, has allowed preselytisers into his state? That is one more reason why he is unfit to rule." Mr Thakadas looked most unhappy.

"The Nizams have always practised religious tolerance," said Mr Malik. "If missionaries wished to come and teach literacy to the local peasants, and provide modern medicines at no expense to the state treasury, then the Nizam would consider that a bargain."

"Let them come by all means, with their medicine and education, until India has sufficient doctors and teachers, but let them leave their religion at home."

"You know, that's very interesting," said Lester. "We humans tend to respect and value people with power and privilege. Fame. Beauty. We make hierarchies. Our societies have classes and castes. So the idea that God loves each individual equally, sees through the trappings of power, is not put off by a dirty leprous body, is quite powerful. Perhaps it's not an attractive idea to those among us with great wealth and prestige, because we like to think of ourselves as more important than others, but to people at the bottom of the heap who are used to being despised, it's an idea that can transform a life. Without that transforming idea, we missionaries more than likely wouldn't be here."

There is a silence.

Lester, get down from the pulpit. You're talking too much.

"Are you interested in shikar, Mr. Newby? It is very good in Hyderabad. And if you have no gun, I can give you the name of a supplier."

"You know, there was so much killing and destruction in the war. People, animals, nature. It is kind of you, Mr Malik, but I will have no need of a gun."

" I see you walk with a limp, Mr Newby. Do you carry a war wound?"

"A piece of shrapnel made a mess of my leg. I'm fit for sedentary work, but not much else."

"And what was your rank, may I ask?"

"I did not enlist. I was a conchie, but I didn't like the idea of my school mates being exposed to physical danger, while I remained in safety in prison or a camp, so I volunteered as a stretcher bearer. I was one of the chaps who carried the wounded to the field hospitals, and one day I found myself being carried."

"Being non-violent, does not give one immunity from experiencing violence. I am a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, a believer in satyagraha, and I have been lathied and imprisoned."

There was a change in the rhythm of the train. It was slowing. It hooted as it came into a station.

Mr Thakadas and Mr Malik, stirred, looked out the window, spoke between themselves. Then Mr Thakadas turned to Lester.

"It is here that passengers order themselves an evening meal. It will be a pleasure for Mr Malik and myself to order a meal for you. To guide you as to what to eat. It will be best if you confine yourself to dhal and rice and curds and perhaps some vegetables. The meat curries here are very hot"

"Very, very hot."

"Are you vegetarian, Mr Newby?"

"I will be for tonight. Thank you."

Later, Lester watched his companions prepare for bed. The laying out of sheets and pillows on the leather bunks. Mr Thakadas changed into a singlet and length of cloth knotted at the waist. Mr Malik changed into a singlet and loose wide trousers gathered and

tied with a cord. The men went in turns to the compartment toilet. There was a smell of soap and moist skin and wet hair.

Lester, you are privileged to be here.

He did not change or wash, intending to sit up till the train arrived in Kalampett at one or two in the morning. Arrival times were not precise, but the timetable only allowed one minute for the stop. He wanted to wash, to remove his shoes, to lie down, but he wedged himself into a corner against the padded backrest.

"I would like to say thank you to both of you for your kindness to me on my first day in India. It has been….wonderful."

"On the subject of guns, Mr Newby, on second thoughts perhaps you should carry one for your personal safety. I applaud your non-violent attitudes, but, if Mr Malik will excuse me, I must say that Hyderabad State is not the most civilised of places. There are jungles. There are tigers, bears, and robbers who will not hesitate to kill."

Mr Thakadas turned off the compartment light and lay down on a lower bunk. Mr Malik was already prone on the bunk above. A silence followed except for the hypnotic sounds of iron wheels speeding on iron tracks, the whirring of two small ceiling fans in their wire cages. In the enigmatic blue of the nightlight each man withdrew into his separate, private world.

Kalampett

The monsoon month was intensely humid, but they just lived with it. No exertion was required to release that trickling through the hair, the repeated beading on the upperlip, the slickness on the back of the neck and between the breasts. After a walk across the

compound their clothes were wet and sticky. Ross changed his shirt three times a day. But the compensations for this discomfort were enormous.

Harriet loved waking to the overnight greening of the dry dusty compound, as dormant grass seeds came to life. The coral creeper along the garden fence was putting out new shoots that left the fence and raced across the ground. The growth was phenomenal. A flock of parakeets had arrived early this morning, their chatter waking Ross, and he woke her. "Listen." The birds kept their conversation going all day, as they flashed their colours, red and paddy green, in a neem tree they had made their monsoon home.

When a heavy shower stopped in the midmorning, Harriet left a classroom block to return home briefly. Rachel had arrived in the night and was still sleeping when Harriet left to teach. She had yet to have a good look at her daughter. In the strong sunlight vapour rose from the ground carrying the smell of damp earth, and the air hummed with insect life. In this glorious verdant teeming month they could also enjoy the actual physical presence of their child. Ross was ahead of her, his movements eager as he opened the garden gate.

They sat with their daughter on the verandah and Graceamma brought out a tray of tea things. They gazed and gazed, taking in the changes to their child: the darkening blonde plaits, the growth of nose and chin, the tender curves of the cheeks.

"Doesn't she look well, Ross? Hasn't she grown?"

"She's blooming. A picture of health."

"Look at her pink cheeks, and her … I'll have to send to Madras for a brassiere."

"You'll embarrass the child, Harry."

"Hallo, I'm here." Rachel, sitting opposite, gave them a little wave. "You two are doing that again. Speaking about me, not to me. And Daddy, I'm not a child."

"Sorry, Rach."

"Matron has sent you a note, Mummy. You're to buy three brassieres. One to wear, one to wash, and one clean in the drawer."

"I can always trust matron to keep me up to the mark. What was it last time?"

"Shoes. You sent the money, and matron let me go on my own and choose them for myself. I bought a pair of brown slipons, instead of the usual laceups. But tell me what's been happening here.'

"Lester, the new man, arrived a week ago."

"Daddy and Jacob went to meet the train."

"He was fast asleep. We had to wake him. He was quite disoriented."

"His fellow passengers had talked about the life threatening dangers to be found in Hyderabad, bears, tigers, dacoits and so on. So the sight of Jacob's turbaned head, his missing tooth, and the shadows thrown by the hurricane lamp, made him think dacoits were invading the train."

"Really?"

"He was quite brave. Put up a protest when he saw Jacob hauling his trunk to the door," said Ross.

"Then he realised he was not being addressed in a foreign language. It was Ross's New Zealand accent welcoming him to Kalampett. The poor man has spent the first week looking quite anxious and wary."

"I don't blame him. On his first morning, Archie walked him round the house and grounds pointing out all the places snakes and scorpions might be lurking. Virginia descended on him with a supply of quinine which she told him to start taking immediately

because Kalampett was a hell-hole for malaria. And then Harriet turned up and gave him her lecture about not walking in barefeet for fear of hookworm. How he must not let any unboiled water pass his lips, not even for cleaning his teeth, and how at the first evidence of diarrhoea, he must take a sample to be tested at the hospital, in case it was a debilitating dysentery. And if the dysentery wasn't properly treated, there was the possibility of contracting tropical sprue, and he wouldn't want to be invalided back home, now that he was here, would he?"

"He's feeling the heat terribly. When I told him to put salt in his drinking water, he looked quite alarmed, as though I'd asked him to perform an unnatural act."

"He's a good chap," said Ross. "Told me he hadn't expected to face so many dangers in peacetime. He's going to fit in well."

"Doragaru." The peon was standing at Ross's elbow. "A man has come to the office."

Ross hurriedly glanced at his watch and stood up.

"Lovely to have you home, Rachel." He reached down and kissed her on the top of her head. A downpour started and he went off sharing his umbrella with the peon.

"Amma," said Graceamma from the doorway. "There is a woman at the back steps wanting to talk about son."

"Thank you, I'm coming. What are you going to do, Rachel? Such a pity that Rosie's holidays don't coincide with yours."

"Don't worry, Mummy. There is always something to read. Or write."

Hyderabad

Anand bought a bicycle with the money he had saved from Satyan's Telugu lessons. Everything about it was marvellous. The iron frame was solid and heavy. The black leather seat and the handlebars were high giving him a good view of potholes and random hazards. The greased chain had strong links and functioned smoothly with the pedals. The bell! The lever responded firmly as he pressed and pure sounds rang out, forceful and commanding: Out of the way. Anand is coming. As a final touch, red tinsel sparkled round the hub of each wheel. Red for Rosie, of course.

When Anand brought it home, he rode it round the small courtyard, ringing the bell. Tommy's and Danny's eyes were huge and excited.

"Give me a ride."

"Me. Give me."

Anand took both boys at the same time. The older one, Tommy, sitting on the flat package carrier over the back wheel, his legs splayed. Danny was set on the crossbar in front of Anand and held firmly with one arm around him. His fine brownish hair smelt of soap. There was only room to go round in circles, and Anand wheeled it around sometimes running. The boys wobbled and shouted and laughed.

"Take us on the road, Anand."

"No," said their mother

"Again. More."

"Another time. I'm going out,"

"Can I ring the bell?"

It took him only fifteen minutes to cycle to the Hanuman Chai Shop, and while Anand waited for Satyan he took Das for rides up and down the road outside.

Satyan was often late, arriving with some tale. His stories delighted Anand. They were shocking, or funny or ridiculous. Such a different life he led, such a different temperament. There was a great deal to talk about at this time. The coming Indian independence and what that would mean for Hyderabad.

Satyan turned up after nightfall. In the light of the hurricane lamp dangling from the rafters he was looking in good spirits. His eyes, his smile, his gold chain gleamed in the light.

"I have just returned from the countryside. Returned only to see you, my friend."

"I believe you of course," said Anand. "The fact that you have a wife, a freedom-loving songbird, who so fills your heart and mind you do not as much as glance at another woman, has nothing whatsoever to do with your return."

They laugh.

"And how is the countryside?"

"Good. Very good. I went to a village where the cadre is working well. The men – and the women – are very keen. They've formed themselves into troops. And practice for confrontation. Missile throwing at the enemy.

"What sort of missiles?

"You will laugh," says Satyan. "The women throw chilli powder. The men use slings and stones."

"I am relieved," said Anand. "That way they cannot do much harm."

"As I say, it is for practice. For morale. Later we will get them real weapons."'

"I hope it does not come to that. What do you think of the news?"

"And what news is that? That you have started to grow a moustache?"

Anand fingered the sparse growth on his upper lip. He wanted to look older, and less like a clerk.

"This? I know it is nothing as yet, but maybe by Christmas. I am hoping Rosie will like it. Satyan, you know very well what news I mean."

"My friend, forgive me. That colonialism is ending in India, that is good."

"Some people are very excited by this."

"Especially, it seems, the Nizam." Satyan laughed satirically. He had a relative at court who knew such things.

"But we know better than that. We are pleased that colonialism is ending, but we are not excited."

"Yes, my friend, we know better." Satyan put an arm around Anand's shoulders. Anand disagreed about the necessity of the armed struggle. In fact he was strongly opposed to such a violent path, but they were united in their knowledge that a mere transfer of power did not in itself help the landless peasant.

"I have travelled miles today and I am hungry. Will you join me in a meal?"

"Yes," said Anand, putting his arm around Satyan. "Let us have a meal together, and celebrate that we are not over-excited."

Kalampett

Graceamma hummed to herself as she stripped sheets from the Dorasani's double bed. She watched the squirrels playing outside. They took fright at sounds coming from the back.

The clatter of the dhobiwoman's stick as it fell on the stone steps. Her cracked voice loudly uttering oaths and complaints as she eased herself down into a sitting position. The strange grunts coming from the mouth of her deaf mute son as he unloaded his heavy bundle of laundered clothes.

"Graceamma. Graceamma…aa." Abraham's voice was loud and urgent. What was upsetting that man now?

When Graceamma reached the back steps, Abraham and the dhobiwoman were both in full voice.

"Amma, your language is coarse, your voice overloud, your oaths and curses offend the ears of respectable people, and today you are dripping blood on the Dorasani's steps."

"Have you no humanity, you half-man? I am cursed. Abandoned by my husband. My only child a deaf mute. And today I took a fall. Look at my leg. Abbah, abbah. I'm bleeding here, and dying."

Abraham averted his eyes with barely concealed disgust.

Like all active, working women, the dhobi wore her sari bunched up and pulled through her legs, the back hem tucked into her waist at the front. Her exposed legs were not a beautiful sight. She appeared ancient, had always seemed old and no-one knew her age, least of all herself. There was a cut on her wrinkled knee and thin streams of blood were coursing down the chapped skin, pooling in healed ulcer scars and then overflowing to continue downward till they reached the steps.

"What a tamasha!" Graceamma crouched by the dhobiwoman's knee. "That looks painful, Amma. What happened?"

"What do you think? A malevolent rock jumped up and tripped me over. How it hurts, but this half-man here shows no kindness."

"Where is Jacob?" Abraham looked around urgently.

"I saw him not long ago, walking towards the well. You could catch up, if you hurry."

Abraham set off, and Graceamma smiled.

"He always escapes to be with Jacob, when we women get too much for him."

"Jacob, now there is a man. I would welcome such a one as he into my hut at any hour."

"Just two nights ago, Jacob trod on a snake and so quick were his reactions, before the snake had time to sink in its fangs, he caught it up, twisted and broke its spine and tossed it away."

"Truly?"

"We saw the dead snake the next day. Lying crooked, its back broken. Look, your knee has stopped bleeding. I will clean up your leg and put medicines on the wound."

"Oooh, your medicines hurt."

"For a short time only, amma. And they will stop the leg going bad."

Graceamma was back in a moment with a white enamel basin, the water in it clouded with Dettol, a wad of cottonwool and a bottle of Mercuricome.

"I'm glad we are alone." The dhobi woman lowered her voice to a hoarse whisper. "There is something I must tell you. On our way here from the river, we were stopped by a gang of men."

"Abbah!" exclaimed Graceamma.

“ Suddenly they were there surrounding us, armed with staves and knives and iron bars. Isn’t that so, son?” She leant over and shoved her son’s leg. He was dozing, and woke with a start. She yelled at him.“Those men. So big.” She reached up with her hand. “Evil looking.” She pulled a ferocious face. Then waggled her head encouragingly at her son. He stood up, and reached up with his hands, and flexed his muscles and swaggered about, and pulled his face into stern, angry, fierce masks. The dhobi woman laughed and clapped.

“See, Graceamma, I told you. There were six of them, weren’t there?” She held up six digits. He agreed, counting off his fingers.

“You can sit down now,” she said gesturing to him, and she laughed her pleasure at his performance, and he laughed back, his throat making strange, uncontrolled sounds.

“How terrifying. What happened?”

“Those badmashes asked us where we were going, if you please, as though they owned the place. I told them we were taking the same route from the river our dhobi clan have always used. That they, strangers to this place, had no right to stop and question us.”

“You said that, truly?” asked Graceamma.

“Yes, I was angry. Those good for nothing strangers interfering in the lives of hardworking people. One piece of chicken shit actually threatened to cut out my tongue. They asked if we carried any annum. I handed them my bundle of chapattis and pickle. To my surprise they did not take it all, actually returning one chapatti. I was expecting them to rob us further, but they did not ask for paisa and showed no interest in my necklace and toe-ring. What they wanted from me were answers, answers, answers. Whose washing were we carrying? How many doragarulu lived here? How many bungalows? The number of boys in

the hostel. On and on. And whether the Nizam's officials and police in Kalampett bothered to come out here.

"I answered that I have no interest in such matters. I only wish to wash the clothes, get paid, have a meal and watch my grandchildren's antics. But that I had heard that the Nizam's officials and police were often in this area. I said that, hoping to frighten them away. Then the biggest, most villainous looking one asked me if I had heard whether the foreigners kept guns. Guns, if you please. I said the only weapons the foreign doragarulu had were stinging, evil tasting medicines. Then they asked if I were a Christian. Me, a good dhobi woman, who most mornings, when she remember, makes puja to the goddess Lakshmi. I told them these foreign doragarulu are not our enemies. They have been coming here for generations and are good for local trade. My great grandfather was the one to offer dhobi services to the first white man and woman to come here. That woman was known for her strange looks. Her hair was so yellow, like the hair of the zamindar's albino daughter. Her eyes were very blue, like lapis. People from all parts came to see her. So my great grandfather told my father who told me. But the gangleader cut me short. Said I talked too much. That cutting out my tongue was no idle threat. And I was to tell no-one they were in these parts asking questions."

"Will you be in danger returning home?"

"No. Those men will be distant now. But I was glad to get away from them. When we saw the compound gates, I started to hurry, the sooner to arrive. It was then the stone tripped me up."

"Will you be still now, amma? And let me do your leg."

Graceamma dabbed the cut with antiseptic water, and then picked up the small bottle of mercuricrome.

"I know that medicine," said the dhobiwoman. "It has the sting of a scorpion, but it is a beautiful, beautiful colour. Graceamma, first, give me a bottu."

"A bottu?"

"Yes." The dhobiwoman lifted her face, and closed her eyes.

"All right, as you wish. You are so playful, Amma."

Graceamma shook up the bottle of red liquid, turning it upside down to coat the bottom of the cork.

"It will not be very good. It is too watery."

"Do it, just do it." The dhobiwoman wriggled impatiently.

"All right. Hold still."

Graceamma pressed the base of the cork on the dhobiwoman's forehead above her nose. It left a vermilion dot.

"Do I not now look beautiful?" The dhobiwoman and Graceamma laughed together and Devadas made waa-waa sounds. "See, my son likes it." She clapped her hands. "My husband was not entirely useless. After all, he gave me this good, strong boy. Now, Graceamma, I will allow you to put that medicine on my wound."

At last they got down to the business of the laundry. The bundle of clean clothes was untied and Graceamma took possession of the dresses and cassocks and shirts, all dry, starched in ricewater, and pressed with a heavy iron. The dirty laundry was counted, so many sheets and towels, five cotton day dresses, one organdie evening gown, five shirts and three cassocks, her saris and Abraham's white jackets.

"You know," said Graceamma, "I do not like the thought of those men. Who are they and what do they want? They make me uneasy."

"I know what you are saying," agreed the dhobiwoman. "If they were just honest, straightforward robbers, plying their trade to feed their wives and children, that one could understand. Do you know what that gang of thugs said? That they know where to find me on the river. And they will call one day for more chapattis. Huh, they don't know me, if they think they can take the annum out of the mouths of my grandchildren."

"I worry for you, and I also worry for the people in the village further up the river where I lived with my husband, Luke, and where my son Anand was born. Who will protect them?"

"Abbah. That was a bad day when your hero husband died. We could do with hero-men around here now that there are gangs of strangers roaming the countryside."

"Oh, we are not entirely helpless. Not when we have hero-women such as you to stand up to them."

"Me, a hero-woman? I like that!" The dhobi woman chortled happily.

Later, after the dhobiwoman had gone, Graceamma made the Doragaru's bed with the freshly laundered linen. As she tucked the sheets under the mattress, she whispered to Luke, her dead husband, something she did whenever she was anxious.

"If such threatening strangers are to be here around Kalampett, it is good is it not, that our son is safe in Hyderabad?"

Hours after the dhobiwoman had left, Abraham still felt a residual resentment against the woman. How her coarseness blighted his day. But he forgot about her, when the Dorasani, after her siesta, came to give him some news.

" Abraham, a letter came today from the Army and Navy Stores in Madras. Unfortunately, the news is not good. We will be unable to get replacement dishes for our dinner set, as they are no longer being produced."

Abraham felt a spontaneous delight, but managed to control his features.

"That is a shame, Dorasani," he murmured, feeling it was only right to commiserate, whatever his personal feelings.

"But the news is not bad for everyone." The Dorasani looked at him in a meaningful way. "I will be ordering a different set of dishes, and one of these days, you will be able to pack away those blue plates you so hate."

"Oh, Dorasani." He did not try to deny it. His hands came up and met in a gesture of gratitude. "Tankyou," he said in English.

When his mistress left, he allowed his sense of triumph and vindication to spill over.

"You see, you see," he said to Graceamma. "Even the manufacturers have come round to my way of thinking. Even they know that those cheap wishy-washy plates should be produced no more."

Rahel's Diary

Today I feel so angry with Nasreen. Can't she see that her new attitudes threaten our friendship? We have always been so close. Half twins, born on the same day, at the same hour, from different mothers. All these years we have shared everything. Secrets, sorrows,

escapades and excitements. My friendship with her has been the best, the happiest thing in my life. How can I live without it?

Just because her body has changed, why does her mind have to change too? The old ayahs say, that with her breasts and hips, Nasreen now looks like her mother when she first entered the Zenana. That, I am sorry to say, is not the only resemblance. She is now showing the same shallowness her mother is famous for.

"This independence you talk about, it is only politics, which is so dull. If you can tell me that independence means I shall have a new shalwar kameez, then I could be a little interested. A silk kameez of peacock blue, embroidered at the neck with gold thread. That would suit me, don't you think? And if this independence means that I will be married to a richer, more handsome suitor, then I say 'Hyderabad, zindabad.' Rahi! Pay proper attention as you comb my hair. You are a little rough today."

Brushing and combing each other's hair is something we like to do, though there are plenty of attendants to do the job. Actually, I was very restrained as I tackled a knot, considering the fury I felt.

As small children we had two favourite pastimes. The first one developed from the nursery game of hide and seek. After many hours of sitting at the back of dusty wardrobes, giggling, waiting to be found, we decided to stay quiet making the game more challenging for the seekers and, as it turned out, more interesting for us. The usual calls saying, "Coeee, we are coming. We are coming nearer. Don't be frightened, we will find you soon," became "Where are they? Have you seen Nasreen and Rahel? We give up, you win. You can come out now. Chup, chup, hurry now, it's time for lessons. Nasreen, Rahel, your mothers want you. There is some mitai here, your favourite. If you don't hurry your

brothers will eat it all." Then we heard the voice of an ayah asking, "Do you think they have escaped?" When the extent of the panic we caused frightened us a little, we came out of hiding, yawning and rubbing our eyes. "Look, the little monkeys fell asleep. Did you not hear us calling? We were so worried."

From that was born our game of Escape. It was far more exciting to give the ayahs and ammas and Begums the slip, to venture out of our quarters into dark corridors and servants rooms, the goal being to escape from the Zenana itself. At first we were easily discovered, spotted by some servant, or other. But after we stole some servant boys' clothes (our brothers' clothes were too fine), we found we could wander much more freely. Passing servants chivvied us to get on with our chores, and asked who did we think we were, idling around, children of the Nizam?

Our father was the Nizam! What this meant sank in over time. He was fabulously rich, the first Prince in India, too important and busy to see his children, except on scheduled occasions such as his birthday. This very remoteness and distance piqued our curiosity. We pestered people for stories and information. Anything Nasreen or I gleaned we shared with each other, gloating over it, so precious it seemed. An uncomplimentary remark, any negative comment we ignored. We understood our father, others did not. We must have spent hours gazing at the portrait of the Nizam as a young man, dressed in his regal finery. It is not how he looks these days, but appearance is such a trifling matter, is it not? Or so we both thought until Nasreen's body changed. Our joint devotion to this unknown father has been the cornerstone of our friendship. But now that the moment has come for the Nizam to achieve his lifelong ambition, to be a truly independent ruler, Nasreen is no longer interested. She is betraying our father, and betraying me.

For the first time I feel quite alone. And that is not all. On my last visit to the spyhole I heard that the men in Delhi do not wish the Nizam to be king. I do not know for whom I feel more miserable, my father or myself.

Chapter 4 August 1947

Hyderabad

It was lunchtime and Anand was idling through the bazaar. Yesterday he made the mistake of eating samosas. The small triangular pastries spluttering in hot fat had smelt delicious. They turned out to be very greasy, the oil stale, and he had suffered stomach cramps later. Today, passing the same vendor's stall, the smell turned his stomach. He wanted something soothing. A handful of rice and some curds.

As Anand turned away he caught a glimpse of a drooping insubstantial figure. The man with a pockmarked face under a rusty black fez. A police informant. Satyan pointed him out one day. "My shadow," he called him. That was in the days when Anand was still in essence a countryboy, easily impressed, appalled, shocked by his new friend.

The crowd parted leaving a clear line of sight between Anand and Fez Man who was looking sideways at him. Anand turned to face the man and openly bowed and salammed him. Not long ago he would have been incapable of such bravado. The man casually shifted his gaze and spat, staining the ground red with the paan that discoloured his teeth.

Anand moved on. Perhaps today he would eat nothing. Take some tea, only.

"Hallo, Christian boy. How are you, my friend?" Satyan's voice came from behind. Anand turned. Satyan grinned and clasped Anand's hand, and with his other arm warmly gripped his shoulder.

Anand checked the reflex. It shamed him. The involuntary glancing around to see if anyone had noticed this encounter between the charismatic and well-connected Satyan, and himself, a humble Christian boy from the countryside. A man with the looks of a film star

greeting, in such a friendly manner, a thin boy who could be mistaken for a clerk, his weak eyes peering through his glasses.

"Fez Man is here," murmured Anand. That man's ears were undoubtedly alert. "Will you have a cup of chai with me?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot. I'm meeting my married sister at the tin merchants to haggle over the price of some dekshi. Why don't you come? My sister is a very fierce haggler. It could be quite entertaining. In fact,' he said with a wink, "The more who come, the merrier. Are we still meeting, later?"

"I should like to watch your sister's expertise, but at some other time," Anand said for anyone bothering to listen. "Yes, I'll see you there," he added for Satyan's ears only.

Satyan strode confidently on. He made respectful salaams and namastes to older men of his acquaintance, talked to urchins in the street, calling them tamadhi or little brother. Young men of his own age he greeted loudly and joyfully, as though encountering a long lost friend.

Anand watched Fez man slip out of a barber's shop and unobtrusively follow in Satyan's wake, and then returned to his problem of what he should have for lunch. A small sharp explosion made him start and look around. A street vendor was selling firecrackers and had allowed someone to sample his wares. A number of people, their attention caught, were moving towards his stall, and Anand joined them. He would spend his money, not on food he did not want, but on some fireworks for Danny and Tommy. They would remember Independence Day for the loud noises they made, and how their mother clapped her hands to her ears.

Nasreen has her wish. A new outfit. It is really too tedious how she prances round in pleasure. A cream silk shalwar. How desperately unexciting. A crimson silk kameez. I turn my head away to hide my yawn. She of course thinks I am jealous.

For days there has been much activity in the kitchens. The grinders cracking open nuts. Everything is being done to the precise instructions sent by the Nizam. Everything carefully weighed and measured. The walnuts and almonds. So much rosewater to soak so many raisins and apricots. I am surprised a measure will suffice, and each raisin is not counted out individually, so insistent is my father against any waste even at this time of feasting. He has ordained that there will be so many red chillies used and so many green. This amount of ginger, and that amount garlic, onions, so many seers of rice and flour and dhal. This number of chickens and that number of goats to ritually have their throats slit. And let us not forget the sheets of silver and gold leaf to decorate the sweets.

Today the grinders are grinding the walnuts and almonds. Women are standing to thump the long wooden pestles into the rock mortars to make paste, a team of people are winnowing the rice and bending over to clean it of small stones. The flour is being milled in dozens of stone mills

Outside the kitchen, much else is going on. There are over thirty servants dusting and washing the chandeliers. The French china, the plates of gold, the Irish crystal glasses are all being washed and prepared for the feasting. For the many thousands who will not be dining off such dishes, there are hundreds of baskets of peepul leaves, and women sitting crosslegged stitching the leaves together with pieces of broom, making the leaf platters that after they have been used, will not be thrown away (such waste) but fed to goats.

The Nizam himself will not be getting a new outfit. He has sent a shawl to us here in the Zenana to be darned. I wished to do this task myself out of daughterly love, but a Begum forbade this, saying it must be done by the best seamstress available and that is certainly not me. A servant is doing this, one who is almost blind, who can see no further than her hand, after a lifetime of doing the tiniest of stitches.

On Independence Day, here in the Zenana, we will dress up and feast and no doubt have childish entertainments. How I wish for more. To follow the Nizam as he progresses through the streets, throwing coins at his subjects as they crowd the streets to get a glimpse of him, throwing rosepetals and marigolds and jasmine in front of his car. To see the nobles line up to be admitted into the Nizam's presence. To kneel before him and offer their nazar. My father would be generous with his looks and smiles, putting aside for one day the concerns that his fellow Indians in Delhi are treacherously laying upon him. My heart is bursting, with pride and pleasure on one hand, and torment on the other.

It was loud and raucous in the Hanuman Chai Shop. Satyan came with a tale of how he, in order to give his shadow the slip and to tease him - for the man was a good Muslim with an invalid wife, who wanted to earn more money so he could afford to marry a second one – had gone down a certain alleyway and through the door of a brothel. It was a route he had used many times before. The hajri would torment Fez Man for as long as he lingered outside, making gestures and trying to entice him in. But Satyan would be gone having exchanged a few jokes, laughing his way through a back door few knew existed. He arrived with newspaper wrapped packages tied - cocooned- with white thread, and thrust them into the boy Das's hands.

"Here. Unwrap these."

Das opened the bloody papers, and gasped.

"Three fowl," he exclaimed, at the sight of the recently beheaded roosters.

"Well, there are many mouths to feed,' said Satyan. "Devadas has agreed to cook for us tonight."

Anand joined in the cheering. Two of Satyan's friends were especially loud. They had first gone to the toddy shop opposite, to partake of "the people's drink", and came back to say how rough it was, how it caught on their throats. That capitalist drinks were better and in future they would stick to Johnny Walker. This proclamation was greeted with hoots and claps.

Many cups of chai were drunk as they waited for the meal to be prepared. A boy was talking. He had gone with Satyan to a village and come back full of fervour. As the discussions heated up, someone produced a bottle of brandy made from the grapes grown on his father's land. It was quickly opened and the bottle passed from hand to hand, each person pouring a mouthful or more down his throat. When the bottle reached Satyan he kept hold of it in his hand.

"Before we go on, I have a question to put to each of you. We have talked of the evils of feudalism for a year or more. The Nizam is under pressure at this time. After the fifteenth, the new government of India will be putting its pressure on him. The time for discussions is past. We must act. Go into the villages to train and support the peasants. They will need our protection from the Ittehad-ul-Mussulman. That group is actively recruiting and will fight for the Nizam's rule. I am going. Who will join me?"

There is a shifty silence.

"I know Anand won't," said Satyan. "He has strange scruples about not hurting a hair on the head of murderous landlords." This raised a laugh. "How about you, Ravi?"

"Broth-er, you know my situation. My wife is about to have our first child. I cannot leave her. You understand."

"Suleiman?"

"My role is to write cutting articles for whoever will dare to print them. I am not an action man."

Das moved around the group, laying a banana leaf as a plate in front of each.

"Premchand?"

"I will be joining the proposed demonstration on the fifteenth. I cannot do much more at this time. My father is old and ill."

Das put a heap of rice on each leaf. When he reached Satyan, he stopped.

"Annah, I will go with you."

"Tamadi, I love you." Satyan laughed, ruffling the boy's hair, pinching his cheek. "But this is a job for lions, not lion cubs. You are a number one boy, already doing a first class job here with your father."

Only one person said he would go with Satyan. The one who had already spoken with admiration of the peasants.

Someone tried to crack a joke, but it fell flat. A gloom descended on the party as they ate the chicken curry. They finished off the brandy in a moody way. They knew the meetings, the exciting, political arguments had come to an end. Perhaps they were no more than hotheads after all, chai shop revolutionaries. One by one they left early, murmuring excuses, a wife, a sick father, an unpublishable article that needed polishing.

"What about your songbird?" Anand whispered to Satyan. "Is she happy at what you are doing?"

"My wife is a woman of great strength," said Satyan. "She accepts me as I am." He seemed to have become uncharacteristically sombre.

"Perhaps I should go with you." Hearing himself say this, Anand was shocked. That he should so casually jeopardise his future, his marriage with Rosie, the happiness of his mother, the good opinion of others. This was a piece of foolishness, simply because he did not like to see his friend downcast.

"You, Christian boy. I would not have you beside me with a gun in your hands.What if your glasses were knocked off in a struggle? With your poor eyesight we would all be in danger of our lives."

Anand did not know whether to feel pleased or indignant that his offer was received as a joke. But the mention of a gun sobered him.

"Are you not disappointed that the others will not join you?"

Satyan turned and looked at Anand with a calm smile.

"Tonight I have been farewelling the friends of my youth. Tomorrow I will go to join strong, committed, purposeful men. They are my comrades, my friends, now."

"So, our lessons too have come to an end?"

"Our lessons, yes. But not, I hope, our friendship. Besides I have plans for you, Christian boy."

"What plans?"

"A personal favour to me. It is late now. I will be in touch with you some other time." Anand was curious, but Satyan would say no more.

Kalampett

Lester Newby wrote to his mother every week. Mother and son were alike, a little cautious, a little quiet, competent but inclined to worry. His father had been a confident, successful businessman with a rotund face, cheery with a natural optimism. Rosalie, his younger sister, was daring with a vivid, enamelled, seemingly indestructible beauty. But it was these two favoured ones who had died young. Rosalie at the age of ten from fever and his father from a heart attack when he was only 43. The family remnant had lost its momentum, its purpose, its laughter. The wrong people had died. Had Lester and his mother died, the other two would have had the necessary bouncy to recover and thrive.

As Lester watched his father's coffin being lowered, he felt his mother grasp his hand in her gloved one, even though at fifteen he was no longer a child. Then it ocurred to him that his mother was seeking comfort, so he did not, as he wanted, disengage his hand. Before he returned to boarding school she said to him, "We must hold on to each other." She did not mean physically.

The first letter he received from her was a shock. She wrote to him as though to another adult. Spoke to him about her feelings. How the family home, sucked of its life and joy, had become sepulchral. That as she dusted the photos of the dead she felt herself to be no more than an attendant of a cold mausoleum. That the usual remedies of gardening, bridge parties, the Mother' Union were worse than useless. How in her despair she had made an appointment to see the Vicar.

When Lester wrote back he tried to match her candour. Instead of recording the latest results of the school's first eleven, he told her about his best friend Marcus who, at the advanced age of fourteen, was still mad about creepy crawlies and had a habit of

keeping them in his locker. That Matron had made a surprise inspection of their dormitory and had found Marcus's collection of bugs. "But they're alive!" she had screamed. They seemed to distress her more than the pictures of scantily clad women unearthed from other lockers. How Marcus had passed Lester a dirty sock that housed a toad and Lester had put it down his shirt. During the entire inspection the toad had stayed still, pulsing like a second heart beat.

Mrs Newby told him about her appointment with the Vicar. How the man had surprised her. Instead of offering spiritual consolations, he suggested she go back to work. She was a wealthy widow and working had not occurred to her. But the Vicar pointed out that there was value in work aside from the money. She had been a nurse before her marriage and so made enquiries about re-training. She had an interview the following week and was surprised by how much she hoped to be accepted.

As their correspondence continued mother and son discovered a richness in each other's lives they had not suspected. And though they were physically apart had achieved an emotional and intellectual closeness.

Dear Mumpty,

The big news this month is of course the Independence Day celebrations. Here in Hyderabad State the situation is ambiguous. While all ethnicities and faiths can combine to celebrate the end of British rule and domination, those of us in Hyderabad are not yet living in an united India. How long the Nizam can hold out is an unknown factor. Whether he will relinquish his dreams or have them forcibly taken from him. Those in his administration have the most to lose, and they are fearful of the uncertainties and troubles ahead. And

there are those who would be bitterly disappointed if independence meant only the continued existence of a non-democratic feudal state.

This morning we held a service of thanksgiving in the Church in Kalampett to which we invited the Talsidar and other officials, the Head of Police, the Stationmaster, and prominent Hindu merchants. For such occasions we have two rows of pews at the back of the nave for the "high ups", while the rest of us, the normal congregation, sit cross-legged on the stone flagged floor. Following local custom, the congregation are divided, men and youths sitting on the right, women and children on the left. Those of us who are shod, remove our shoes before we enter. The church has the beauty of simplicity. The bare floors, the open doors, a blue curtain hanging from a rod behind the altar furnished with a burnished cross. The focus of the church is not embellishment and grandeur but given over entirely to a spirit of devotion. The murmured responses of the congregation, bent over on the floor, the women with their heads covered, the singing accompanied only by the clapping of handheld cymbals to set the rhythm, the hush when the Bible is read, give the services a feeling of authenticity, a reminder of the early church, when ordinary people gathered, before the church acquired its wealth and pomp.

The crying of babies is not considered an intrusion, but as a natural part of daily life. The mothers simply suckle them and that too is not an offence. Few people have coins to spare. The offerings carried up to the altar on round brass trays are handfuls of rice and other grains, a coccnut, some chillies, eggs and occasionally a live cockerel. These gifts are auctioned after the service and the money collected goes towards some project, at the moment the sinking of a well for an outcaste community.

The Archdeacon took the service, the purpose of which was to thank God for the removal of the "foreign yoke", something which unites Muslims, Hindus and Christians alike. The service felt a little constrained by the presence of the official guests at the back who were more like an audience than fellow worshippers, and because we could not go further and thank God for the end of feudalism and the coming of democracy. That will have to wait for some future time. Evenhandedly, we commended to God's care both the Nizam and the new rulers in Delhi, asking for all to be given wisdom as they take over full responsibility for their subject peoples.

The mood was very different the previous night. Ross Rimmer has a crystal radio set and he issued a general invitation for people to come and listen to the ceremony in Delhi. There was a great excitement towards midnight as people gathered and we saw the lights of hurricane lamps and torches bobbing nearer as people came from all corners and across the fields of sorghum. As we gathered – clergy, teachers, hospital staff, household servants, senior pupils – there was a rising sound of greetings and high spirits. But when Ross turned on the crystal set a tremendous hush fell as we crowded together sitting on the steps of the verandah and strained to catch every word through the crackles. English and Hindi words were translated in whispers by those who could to those nearby. Much of it passed us by, but this did not detract from the feeling that we were participating in something historic, and that there were millions of others like us celebrating in groups small and large all over the vast subcontinent. We could not open our lungs and sing Janagana mana, the new national anthem, without being treasonable to our ruler the Nizam, but spontaneously someone started to sing the Telugu version of "Now, thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices," to the traditional tune, so even I was able to join in

by singing the English words. Before we dispersed the Archdeacon relayed a message from the Bishop, reminding us that we were still subjects of the Nizam and if that situation were to change we should leave the sorting out to the politicians. That our duty was to carry on with life as normal, with our jobs, our prayers and our witness. This sober note did little to dent the general feeling of jubilation. As I lay on my bed I could here the pops of firecrackers being set off until it was almost dawn.

I will end here. I need to mug up more vocab for my Telugu lesson tomorrow. Ever the schoolboy.

God bless,

Lester

Chapter 5 September 1947

Hyderabad

Anand knew a place outside Kalampett, not far from the stone wall surrounding the mission compound, where there was a small pond with a kingfisher poised above it on the branch of a thorn tree. Of course the kingfisher was not always perched, and no doubt it was not always the same bird. In the rains the pond expanded into a small lake and was lively with dragonflies and frogs, and sometimes in the hot season it was not much more than a puddle in the middle of a dish of cracked clay. But whatever the season it was a place empty of people and their confusions and Anand liked to go there.

Early one Sunday morning Anand climbed on his bicycle and set off on an expedition to find a similar place outside Hyderabad. He took his usual route out of the city towards the Hanuman Chai Shop. He cycled without stopping, past the collection of huts where the Lambadi lived, on deeper into a countryside of fields and mango groves. Now and then he took his hand off the handlebar to feel in a pocket that a folded envelope was still safely there. The very act of his fingers probing their way into the pocket threatened the safety of the envelope, so he would feel the need to check again. Eventually he arrived at a large tank filled almost to the brim with water. It was surrounded by a wide concrete bund. Only a wealthy zamindar could afford to build such a large tank and enjoy its beauty. Blue waterlilies raised their heads above the surface of the water, and the round flat leaves were so numerous and they formed a thick green pathway across the expanse to the other side where stood the large walled house. The whitewashed house had flat balustraded roofs, carved shutters in the windows, and small minarets on the corners.

This was not the secluded intimate pond that Anand was looking for, but it was a peaceful place free from interruption so he decided to stop. He lay his bicycle down on the bund, and sat with his feet dangling in the water sending out ripples that rocked the lily pads as dragonflies shimmered and darted.

He drew the envelope from his pocket and smoothed it flat. Written on the envelope in Telugu, in Isaiahgaru's small neat hand, were the words, "For dear Anand, a precious young man, and son of my great friend, Luke. I have treasured the contents of this envelope for many years, and came across it again as I unpacked more papers. It is now time that you have this. Read it quietly with an open heart and learn what manner of man your father was."

On Friday evening as Anand was about to leave the Good News Printers, Benjamingaru had called him into his office. He took down the picture of Jesu Christu on the cross to reveal a safe. He unlocked the safe which seemed to hold very little, and took out the envelope, thick enough to have a letter inside.

"Isaiahgaru stopped by on his way to the station. He asked me to hand this to you at a suitable time and until then to keep it safe. I have done that." Benjamingaru turned the sealed envelope over and over in his hands, as though perhaps there was somethingelse he should do before simply handing it over. "Take it."

When Anand read Isaiahgaru's words a feeling of warmth rushed through him. Part of him wanted to open the envelope there and then, but another part of him was reluctant to do this under the gaze of Benjamingaru or anyone else. He had since kept the envelope close to him in his pocket, and as he waited for the right moment to open it, had found it difficult to think of anything else.

Sitting on the bund, he again read the words Isaiahgaru had written on the envelope. Isaiahgaru's wife had now joined him. Anand had been invited to the house and he had seen Isaiahgaru's room of books. It had reminded him of Tundrigaru's room, that David once allowed him to look around, with its glass fronted cupboards and books piled here and there, on a table, a chair, the floor. Boxes of papers held sermons and letters and periodicals and cuttings. Tundrigaru's books were for the most part older than Isaiahgaru's, the covers sporting holes where worms had bored their way inwards, the corners of some pages were nibbled into a fine lace, and dried flattened insects had fallen from between the pages. It was amazing to Anand that one person should have so many books and papers, indeed so many possessions.

When he himself first arrived at the Johnson's house, it had taken no more than a few minutes to unroll his bedding and empty his trunk of his clothes and his comb, his small jar of coconut oil, a piece of soap, his Bible, his beedis and matches. His own papers were a pile of notes he had received from Tundrigaru over the years and these he had left with his mother. But Isaaiahgaru had accumulated so many papers in his years of scholarship and teaching it was taking him weeks to unpack them all in stages.

With one hand Anand held the envelope down on the concrete and inserted his other index finger under the unglued corner of the envelope flap. The finger was a blunt instrument for the job, and he wanted to damage the envelope as little as possible. Using short firm movements he tore along the top. He pulled out the letter, unfolding thin brittle sheets of paper that shook in his hands. A light breeze flapped the pages, causing him to tighten his grip. There were four closely written sheets. He folded up three and put them and the envelope back in his pocket while he tackled the first page.

The ink had faded and discoloured over the years in some places turning from a strong blue to a dull khaki, but even in those places it was still possible to read his father's words.

"My dear friend Isaiah,

"After a three day march, by God's grace, I arrived safely at the village of Cheddapalli. It was dusk and I hastened to make myself known to the small Christian community. The men and women were returning from the fields, sore and weary after a day's work. I told them I had come to serve and minister to them, to help them in any way in Christ's name. A man took a strong stick and beating it into his palm, advanced upon me, telling me to leave and not to bother them. I admit that I was surprised by this reaction. In my innocence, I had thought that a person with youth and energy and well-meaning would be welcomed by a community that had lost its way.

"You remember that occasion when Our Lord's disciples were rejected and they shook the dust of that place of their feet and swore never to return? This was not I felt a similar situation. These people of Cheddapalli are so tired and dispirited that any change, even if it is for the better, seems so beyond the capabilities of their reduced energy, so fatiguing even to think about that they would rather continue in their misery. As asked I withdrew from that sad place, leaving the air bitter with quarrels and the crying of unhappy, hungry children.

"I spent my first night under a tamarind tree. Roosting above in its branches were some guinea fowl and their gentle rufflings and cluckings were a comfort. The sky was thick with stars and I thanked God for the beauty of his creation, and asked that if it was His will that I should stay that he would bless my enterprise and show me to how to

proceed. Before I fell asleep I heard the slither of a passing snake and indeed in the morning found several snakes holes at the base of the tree trunk. But Brother Snake had not bothered me nor I him.

"In the morning I performed my ablutions and said my prayers and then set about my day's work. Sitting under the tamarind tree I sang hymns and songs about the life of Yesu Christu and the love of God. For some time in the day I had the company of a young goatherd, his head shaved except for a tassle of hair from his crown. He shared his roti with me before he moved on. The next day a Mussulman approached. He is the village tanner and leather worker. After a conversation, he offered me the use of his kitchen. So I was then able to cook myself meals and boil my drinking water. In the days following, children, ever curious, approached the tree. I encouraged them to clap to the tunes and they picked up notes and words, and now I hear echoes of my songs coming from different corners of the village.

So my first friend was a Hindu boy, my second friend a Muslim, and during the course of a week I made the acquaintance of most in the village, but not one person from the Christian community came near me. However, in talks with the Mussulman I learnt more of their history. It seems they once had land, but after years of drought and famine they became indebted and in the end lost the land to the man for whom they now work.

They earn a pittance with no possibility of cancelling the debt in their own or their children's lifetimes. And this has made them lose all hope.

"On Saturday, with plenty of time on my hands, I fashioned an altar under the tree, building it with boulders and laying a plank across the top. On Sunday I made my communion. A sacrament that is intended to be the breaking and sharing of bread, the

passing round of the cup, was perforce quite solitary. But afterwards I felt strengthened and confirmed in my decision to stay.

"And then the next morning came a break through.

"A woman I recognized as from the Christian community brought me her boy child, only a few weeks old and weakened with diarrhoea. The infant appeared to be dying and she asked me to save him. As you know I am neither a doctor nor a miracle man. I prayed earnestly over the child in the name of the One who welcomed the presence of children and praised their innocence. I mixed some spittle with dust and made the sign of the cross on his forehead. The child we put in a sling, suspended from a bough. I had boiled drinking water at hand and I asked the mother to dip her little finger in the water and let it drip, moistening the baby's mouth. In this manner we tended the child all day, and when the heat of the day had passed, he stirred, moving his limbs and crying a little. He was strong enough to take some ricewater, and we fed him through the night, taking it in turns to sleep and feed the infant, who in the morning appeared much stronger.

"The recovery of the infant was proclaimed a miracle and the woman and her family and friends requested a small service of thanksgiving. Slowly with such small steps I am earning their trust. This community is forbidden the use of the village well, and the women must walk miles to the river and carry their heavy water-filled pots back before going to the fields to work. In time we will dig a well together. This and other plans are swimming around in my head along with fresh lyrics and melodies.

"Just today there is further reason to rejoice. The Mussulman, Ibrahim, has told me that he has a second hut that is vacant and has offered it to me to rent. So I shall have a roof over my head and will plant a small garden of vegetables and with this produce

I will pay the rent to Ibrahim, my friend.

"Having a place to live is a significant step for me personally. If God wills that I become established here I intend to write to Grace and ask her to be my wife and partner in this missionary venture. I share this only with you, the best and dearest of friends, and ask you to pray about such a possibility.

"As I sit here under my trusty tamarind tree and think about you, I cannot help smiling. How fortunate are those students in Bangalore to have you as their lecturer, receiving the wisdom of your insights. I praise God that we both have opportunities to serve our Lord and make His name known to others, and in His name I end this letter. Your friend, A.P Luke."

Anand folded the pages of the letter and returned them to the envelope. When his father wrote this letter he would have been about the age that Satyan was now. Both of them had love for the villagers, both of them were committed and courageous, but their methods of helping them were so different. Anand as he picked up his bicycle and started to ride felt how uncertain a person he was in comparison to his father and Satyan, how feeble his own ambitions.

As he cycled past the Lambadi encampment, he saw a man come out of a hut. He was tall and strong, his upper body bare, silver and bone bracelets on his upper arm. His dhoti was tied in two places at his waist in the lambadi manner. What was surprising was that this man looked so like Satyan. Anand smiled at the coincidence, and planned to joke with Satyan when he next saw him. He would ask, "When you were a baby, was not your twin brother stolen by the Lambadi?"

Two small boys tumbled out of the hut, and the man picked them both up. A woman followed. She was a good match for the handsome man. Tall for a woman and sturdy, a beautiful wide face. Her traditional bodice, embroidered with mirrors and beads, clothed large round breasts. Her colourful head shawl and skirt swayed with her movements, and the breeze carried the chiming of her anklet bells. He would liked to have lingered to watch this family so fully and happily absorbed in each other, but he suddenly understood the truth of what he was seeing.

It was necessary for all concerned that he look straight ahead and pedal on before he was noticed.

Kalampett

Abraham stood at the butcher Hassan's stall. A fresh sweet smell rose from the meat cut from a newly slaughtered goat. Flies buzzed excitedly. Some swooped down onto the piece of meat Abraham was eyeing. He had been too long with the Dorasani to be able to resist reaching out and waving the flies away.

"Salaam, Hassan."

"Salaam, Abraham." The man responded in a lazy, complacent way. Abraham knew that Hassan knew that Abraham had noted the superior quality of the meat. This did not put him in a good bargaining position.

"How much?" Abraham indicated the neck, though it was a piece from the shoulder he wanted. The price Hassan named was predictably exorbitant. While the Dorasani's budget for meat did not rise, Hassan's prices did, and for no good reason.

"That is a big increase over last week."

Hassan shrugged. “There are these current troubles.”

“That is true. Communist activity in the countryside. Embargoes and taxes on the border. I too have heard of these things, Hassan. But none of these troubles affect the local goats or the traditional methods of slaughter. In this matter there is no increase in the costs.” Abraham glared at Hassan. He did not often glare because it caused a distortion of the features, but on this occasion the glare was called for. The man was complacent and greedy.

“I am sorry you are not yourself today, Abraham, and I would like to help you with the price, but there is also my need to raise the money to send Ali on pilgrimage to Mecca. You are a devout man yourself, Abraham, and will understand this. I will not have done my duty as a father until my son is entitled to call himself Hajji.”

The mental picture of Ali wearing the full beard of a Hajji caused Abraham to be thoughtful. Ali was a handsome boy with a fine jaw line about which he was understandably vain. It would be some time before Ali would want to hide his face behind a beard, some time before Ali would make his haj, and in the meantime Hassan’s prices would rise and rise. He may after all have need to ask the Dorasani to increase the budget for meat.

“Of course, if your Dorasani has not given you sufficient money for this clean, fresh smelling piece of goat, then I can let you have this mutton. Admittedly, it is not entirely fresh, and therefore I can let it go at a small discount.”

Abraham felt a little flustered that the butcher had caught something of his thoughts.

"How you insult me, Hajji Hassan. And how you insult the Dorasani. A dog would reject that flyblown stinking piece of mutton. I see that today you have nothing I am prepared to serve at the Dorasani's table. Salaam to you."

Abraham stalked away and went to the other end of the street putting as much distance as he could between himself and that thief Hassan. He found himself at the fish stall with piles of strong smelling dried shrimps and fresh, whole, river fish. There was one of a good size, enough to make a meal for four. Abraham purchased it though the price was almost as much as the meat.

As Abraham cycled back to the compound with the fish in a cloth bag, dangling from the handlebars, he felt the need to relieve himself. There was no one in sight but he hid his bicycle behind a rock and walked away from the track until he found a dip in the ground. Many men blatantly squatted in full view of all and sundry, but Abraham was not one of those graceless ones, and sought privacy even when no-one was around. And this place half way to the compound was a place were no-one lingered. He was surprised then to hear strange knockings and shouts from somewhere nearby.

When he had finished his business he climbed up the slope in front of him and peered out from behind a large rock. On a level piece of ground not far away there were six, no, seven men. Each carried a long bamboo stick. A man stood in front of them shouting instructions and the others stood in line advancing together and wielding the sticks. Abraham first thought this was some kind of sport, but why then would they not be doing it on the maidan in Kalampett with on-lookers to cheer them on. Why had they come here to this out-of-the-way place? The instructor was wearing the khaki shirt and trousers of a soldier, and each of the others wore some item with a military flavour. One wore a

helmet, another a bandoleera empty of bullets. Ali was among them, wearing a khaki jacket over his usual pajama. While the others looked comical, somehow Ali managed to look smart.

Abraham stepped out from behind the rock and raised his arm.

"Awww, Ali," he shouted. "What are you doing here? I have just been speaking with your father. Is it true you are planning your haj?"

The men stopped advancing and Ali looked at him with a cold face.

"Who is this man?" asked the instructor. 'Is he one of us?"

"He is no-one," said Ali, turning his back.

"It is I, Abraham."

Ali and his friends seemed to sneer.

"You must go away, ayah, and stop interrupting," shouted the instructor.

Abraham withdrew behind the rock. That man he had never seen before, but the others were all men from the town. So he, Abraham, was no-one was it? He who had tenderly pinched Ali's cheek when he was a small boy and bought him jeedi pup. Abraham peered round the rock again. That was not sport they were practising, but some sort of warlike practice, here in secret, away from the knowledge of the town. And they were each of them Muslim.

He picked his way back to his bicycle. He had reason to be disgusted with both father and son on the same day, except that Hassan's behaviour stemmed from the normal greed of a trader. Ali's behaviour was far worse. It showed a disturbing lack of respect, an exclusivity, a sense that he and his group were superior. That was not how they were

accustomed to live in this town and Abraham felt strongly that it was not how things should be.

The afternoon was so quiet David could hear the squirrels in the neem tree. Some times they left the tree and scampered across the roof. David was in Tundrigaru's study. He had a paper bag of naphthalene balls, and these he was distributing behind the books along each shelf. This was his favourite room and he liked to spend time here alone, in this shrine to thought and learning. Even when he was a boy, Tundrigaru had never forbidden him access. He had a practice of asking David to bring him books from the shelves, always referring to them by author and title, not by the colour of the binding, or the thickness of the volume, or by some picture or symbol on the cover. Referring to a book by such attributes would have initially made David's job easier, but would have delayed his progress in reading, and Tundrigaru wished him to read, not only Telugu which he learned in school, but English also. And over time he had also learned to distinguish the volumes written in Sanskrit, Greek and Hebrew.

The stillness was disturbed by the sound of a vehicle pulling up fast outside the bungalow. Men leaping, running up the front steps, banging and rattling on the shutters of the front door. Only officialdom would behave with such disrespect. David went out the study door onto the roof and looked over the parapet. A jeep. Its wheels had churned up the gravel and sand. A uniformed policeman strutted up and down. He was looking up and saw David.

"Hey, there. Houseboy. The inspector needs to speak to your master.'

"The Doragaru is away, sir."

"Away?" roared the policeman, as though this were a form of impudence.

"He is in Madras, as are the other doragarulu"

"What business have they in Madras?"

"Church business. Very important Church business. Historical Church business, sir."

"Enough of your very important, your historical. How dare you shout down from the roof at your betters. Come down immediately!"

"Yes sir."

As David came down the internal stairs, the rattling at the front door started again. His elderly father called from his string cot on the back verandah: "I'm coming, I'm coming. Have patience with an old man with arthritis."

"Do not worry, tundri. I was upstairs. I will see to them now."

"Who are they?"

"The police."

"What is so urgent that they must wake the innocent," grumbled the old man.

The inspector at the door had a very important looking moustache. Though his jeep was covered in dust and his men had dirty shoes and puttees, the officer managed to look immaculate. And he wore a holster with a gun.

"Salaam, sir. My master is away in Madras."

"So I have heard." While his men liked to show their power by hectoring, this officer's style was to affect languor and boredom. " Good. That facilitates us carrying out our duty. Inside!" He gestured with his stick and his men rushed in, knocking David aside.

One charged left into Newby doragaru's quarters, one rushed to the right, and one up the stairs.

David did not know which man to follow, what part of the bungalow to protect first.

"Sir," he appealed to the officer, "What am I to tell my master when he returns?"

"You may tell him, that we have come with orders from the Chief of Police, who had instructions from the highest authority, to search these bungalows. If your master is foolish enough to make a complaint, he will have to take up this matter with the Nizam himself."

"If I may ask, sir, for what are you searching? I may be able to help. There are books and papers upstairs that must not be disturbed."

"Silence."

A policeman appeared at Newby doragaru's door. He held out a safety razor.

"I found this, sir."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, sir.

"It is called a safety razor," said David, " because it is difficult to cut oneself with the blade. I will show you." He took the razor and demonstrated by drawing the razor down through the two day speckled growth on his cheek. The razor dragged. "It should be used with water and lather, Sir."

"A razor is it?" drawled the Inspector. He turned to his man. "Impound it."

"But, Sir, Newby doragaru uses it everyday to shave."

"Let him go to the barber, like everyone else."

"Sir …"

"Silence. There are orders that must be followed. If you impede us, we will arrest you."

"Sir, I only wish to help."

"Good. Then bring us Archdeacon Godfrey's razor."

"Unfortunately, Godfrey doragaru has taken his cutthroat with him to Madras. He likes to be cleanshaven each and every day.

The inspector allowed himself a slight frown. "I have no interest in the ablution habits of your master. We are here to search for weapons and sharp pointed items. The Doragaru must surrender his cutthroat when he returns from Madras."

A policeman came from the kitchen with three knives and the Inspector declared them impounded. How was David supposed to cut up onion and goat meat for curry? He knew the sort of answer the inspector would give to such a query, so he did not bother to protest. His main concern was with what the third policeman might be doing upstairs. He didn't want the man to be rifling through drawers and papers. A completed manuscript was on Tundrigaru's desk ready to be sent off to the publishers.

"There is a weapon, sir. In fact, two weapons. Upstairs. I will go and get them."

"Stop. We will go with you. At no time are you to be unaccompanied while we search."

"As you wish, sir."

The policeman upstairs had been active, pulling books off shelves, pulling a glazed bookcase off the wall. There would be much to do once these men had left.

"The weapons are not there." David spoke in a firm voice and walked straight to Tundrigaru's desk. "The weapons are behind here."

"Weapons?" asked the third policeman.

"Help me. I must pull this heavy desk away from the wall."

There was a curtain hanging behind the desk. David pulled it aside to reveal a door. He pulled out a key from his pocket and inserted it in the keyhole. The policemen jostled at the door each trying to be the first in.

"Behind the door is a very small storeroom. Space sufficient for two people only."

The inspector called off his men, and squeezed himself behind the desk to be the one to first sight the cache of dangerous weapons. David turned the key and pushed open the door into a pitch dark space. He reached up to a shelf and felt for a torch. The meagre beam picked out a trunk: wooden and banded with black iron and capped at each corner. The sides of the trunk were plastered with stickers: Bombay, Port Said, Madras, Tilbury, Southhampton, Marseilles, Colombo.

The Inspector wanted the chest opened.

"There are clothes in there mainly. Banyans and other such for the hills and England. The weapons are behind." David reached behind the chest and brought out something long and shrouded. He unwrapped it to reveal an ancient rifle.

"I did not know Archdeacon Godfrey went on shikar. He has never invited me."

"You are right, he does not. This was a gift, sir. He has never used it."

"He does not travel with it?"

"No sir. He travels with his camera."

This answer made no sense to the Inspector.

"Once as we were travelling we came upon a tiger in a clearing in a patch of sunlight. It was on its back, turning and twisting on the grass to scratch itself, making

growling noises in its throat. I wished to run, but Tundrigaru stayed to watch so I remained with him. The animal was so caught up in its pleasure and happiness, it did not realise it was observed. Then we went quietly away. I did not feel safe till we had covered some miles, but Tundrigaru showed no fear. He spoke of it as a beautiful sight, and regretted not carrying his camera. Since then he has, and though we have seen other beautiful sights and he has taken many pictures, we have never again come across a tiger in such a position."

"What courage.!"

"What foolishness!"

"You were lucky."

"Enough of tales. Where is the second weapon?"

David reached into the dark store room and unhooked something hanging on the wall. The searchers were amazed.

"A scimitar?" The handle and the blade were fashioned out of iron as one piece. The edge was quite blunt and rusty. No decorations or embellishments of any kind.

"How is it your master has one of these?"

"It too was a gift. A village Muslim's son was ill and in agony. Tundrigaru arranged for the boy to be carried on a litter through the night and brought to the hospital here. The operation saved his life. Later, the father brought the boy to the bungalow to show Tundrigaru how healthy and well his son had become. This scimitar he offered in thanks to the man who had saved his son's life. Tundrigaru at first refused to accept it, because he does not take gifts for acts of compassion. The man hung his head, ashamed he had so little to offer in return for the life of his son. He thought, you see, that Tundrigaru regarded the gift as inadequate. When he realised that Tundrigaru wished for nothing in return, the man

became even more anxious that Tundrigaru accept his gift. Out of respect for the man Tundrigaru did, telling the man that he would remember him and his son in his prayers, and he asked the man to remember him, when he prayed, and so the two parted."

"Very nice," said the Inspector, "We know your master is a holy man, but such stories are taking us away from our purpose. Where are the bullets for the gun?"

"There are no bullets,sir"

A minute search, with the torch was carried out in the storeroom and the Inspector demanded the chest be opened. As David had said its contents were woollen clothes for the hills and England. No bullets were found, but there were ribboned medals won by Tundrigaru for his service in the Great War. The inspector was particularly taken with the light, shiny dress medals.

"These are impounded."

"Please, sir. They are not weapons."

"They are evidence that a man who will not kill a tiger, has fought in a war and therefore killed men."

As they followed the inspector down the narrow winding steps, David, who was at the rear spoke to the policeman in front of him.

"Are you now going to the school bungalow?"

"We have been already. It is why the inspector was in a bad mood."

"Why?"

"There were no weapons there. And when the inspector pressed the servants, asking if the doragaru had nothing to protect himself with against wild animals that might wander from the jungle, a servant woman agreed there was something. And she produced a black

umbrella saying that was what the Doragaru took into the garden the last time a disturbance was heard, only he had seen nothing, and it was next morning that they noticed the panther spoors. As she was saying this, the Dorasani arrived at the bungalow, and she laughed and asked the inspector if he wished to impound the umbrella and leave them defenceless against wild animals."

The two of them were standing on the verandah as the other two policeman each carried a weapon to the jeep and the Inspector supervised the stowing of the rifle and scimitar.

"Though the Dorasani laughs she does not mean to be disrespectful."

"I know. My small daughter attends her school, so we know something of her ways."

"Salaam," said David. "Your master looks somewhat happier now."

Hyderabad

Nasreen is in a better mood. I never know from one day to the next how she will be, but yesterday she was actually kind. The dyer came with his packets. I was feeling a strange moodiness that I could not entirely put down to my concern for the Nizam's difficulties. My eyes kept straying to the packets of dyes as they were opened. I looked from one pure hue to the next – the deepest red to the palest blue- and felt my spirits rise. Each shade so pure I could not choose between them.

The Begums made their selections first. They use only the finest, sheerest muslin for their saris and now they examined the dyes with expert eyes. When it was Nasreen's turn she was very animated. Discussing with others which colours were best for daytime or

night, morning or afternoon. Her mother wanted her to choose a deep red. "Of course I myself would no longer wear such a colour. At my age I might look dowdy. Only the young can wear such a colour. It would set off your fair complexion. Give you an air of mystery, and set the hearts of a thousand young men beating." Though how the thousand young men, would ever catch a glimpse of Nasreen confined here in the Zenana is a mystery. Nasreen never argues with her mother. "Do you think so?" she asked sweetly, and chose a blue, like a bluejay's feather, but several shades paler. A light cooling colour suitable for a summer morning or the early afternoon. She turned and saw me. "Come here, Rahel. It is time that Rahel has a sari, isn't it?" The others agreed. "I will help you choose." She made a space next to her, and chose a colour I would never have thought of, the faint blush on a ripe mango. My skin is darker than hers, and she said such a shade in a gauzy muslin would flatter my skin tone. She draped some muslin over my arm, and scattered the powdered tint over it to give an idea of the effect. "Isn't that beautiful?" she demanded. The dyer and everyone else agreed. It was wonderful to have the attention of my sister again, to be jointly involved in something, even something as trivial as clothing.

Nasreen will no longer come with me on escapades, but she will, when I ask, obligingly cause a distraction, falling in a faint, so others will fan her face, loosen her bodice, and wave pungent scents under her nose. Or drop a pearl so everyone else must stop and hunt for it, while I slip away unnoticed.

I have been out twice this month. It is harder now that I am older. On the other hand I have being doing it for so many years that I know where I can hide and when I can be bold. Besides I have friends, a servant girl of my age, and an old opium befuddled eunuch. The girl has made a shrine to Jesu Christu and his mother Maryam at one end of

an enormous wardrobe packed with with jewelled coats and jackets that seem to have been forgotten. The eunuch keeps his secret opium pipe at the other end, and it is in this wardrobe that I also hide from time to time.

This common hiding place makes for a sometimes tiresome intimacy. The eunuch tells me my wanderings should not be for the purpose of spying on the affairs of state. "How unnatural of you to be so besotted with your old father," says he giggling offensively. "It is a young man you should be interested in." This is gross presumption, but we have a pact. He will not report my escapades and I will not tell on his addiction.

My father's affairs are not in good shape. His supporters are quarrelling between each other and giving contradictory advice. As if those problems in Delhi are not bad enough without having other difficulties here in Hyderabad. Two of his best advisers resigned, because of Rasvi, the man who claims to be the Nizam's most fervent supporter. His eyes glitter like a snake. I cannot like him however loyal he is. He wishes to go to extremes and that is dangerous. The Nizam has not accepted the resignations. More than ever he needs good people with him.

All this gives me a headache. I will find Nasreen and talk about our new saris and the bracelets we will buy to go with them.

Chapter 6 October 1947

Hyderabad

Benjamingaru was sitting at his office desk, his face beaming. Long galley proofs spilled out in front of him.

"Aa-nand. Come in, my good young fellow. Isaiahgaru is most pleased. He has read and marked the proofs and said there were very few errors. 'A very high standard of work.' Those were his actual words. So, you are 'top of the class' young fellow, and I will mention this in my monthly report on your progress."

"Thankyou, Benjamingaru."

"I must say that, not knowing you, I was at the beginning not keen to give you a position here. I agreed only out of my high regard for Archdeacon Godfrey, and my belief that he is a good judge of character. However, these days I have no doubt as to your suitability. In fact I told Isaiahgaru, that on account of my personal esteem for him and his scholarship, I put my best typesetter to work on his book. Tomorrow you will make the corrections and proceed to the page proof stage. And now that everyone is so pleased with you, Mr. V.P. Anand, do not let me down."

"No, sir. Thank you, sir."

As Anand left the Good News Printers and joined the crowd in the street, he did not notice a small boy, blind in one eye, until the boy banged on his thigh to get his attention.

He looked down into an upturned face, one small eye quite piercing as though to make up for the dull cloudiness of the other.

"Are you Christian boy? Christian boy, Anand?"

"Yes."

"Give me baksheesh."

"All right. Stop banging me now." Anand produced a coin. "Do you have something for me, tamadi?"

The boy didn't answer, his good eye fastened on the paisa in Anand's hand.

"Here, take it."

The boy snatched the coin.

"Do you have parents? Who looks after you?"

Anand may as well have been speaking a foreign language. The boy banged on his thigh again and then held out his other hand. Anand eased the crumpled note from the small sticky fingers and the boy ran stooping through the crowd.

Satyan's handwriting was large and clumsy. He did not write often enough to have gained a fluent hand, but Anand was nevertheless pleased with his pupil.

Tonight. Usual place. The message could not have been more brief. He screwed it up and dropped it to join the beedi butts, the paan stains, banana skins and goat droppings and worse along the public thoroughfare.

During the course of the Telugu lessons they had worked through the Gospels and were part way through the Acts of the Apostles when they stopped. Satyan had said he found the New Testament more interesting than he thought he would. How the land and people of Palestine were similar to the people of Hyderabad, how the Roman occupation of that country paralleled the British rule of India. But if Marx had lived then instead of Christ what a different course history would have taken.

They had read Moscow Dialectics so many times that Anand as well as Satyan could recite it word for word. They also looked at numerous other communist circulars and

pamphlets in which the semi-literate language matched the crudeness, the violence of the propaganda, inciting the slaughter of zamindari children, the taking of blood for blood, the torture and massacre of named individuals who had spoken against the communists. The words enemy and hate were bludgeons running through the communist propaganda. Those sentiments and language alongside the beauty of the classic Telugu of the New Testament, its stories of healing and the moralities of the parables created such a dissonance, that it was impossible not to fall into a discussion and analysis of what they were reading.

Anand had learnt a lot from Satyan about the power of the landlords and how the people working for them had no rights and no protection against exploitation, arbitrariness and cruelty. He was convinced of the need for change, the sooner the better. But he continued to maintain in their discussions that an armed struggle was wrong. "Nehru is a socialist. He will change these things peacefully, by legislation. You will see." But the propaganda also spoke against socialists, and sometimes Nehru's name was put alongside those of Hitler, Mussolini, Chiang Kai Shek as people to hate.

When he was alongside Satyan's more powerful personality, Anand had worked strongly to maintain his convictions. But it was two months since he had seen Satyan, and during that separation, without Satyan to argue against, he found himself becoming doubtful and unsure. Was revolution, violent and ugly and cruel as it was, the only certain and practical way of overturning unjust centuries old practices?

He was unable to speak to anyone about these things. Not the Johnsons, certainly not Benjamingaru, and he did not want to reveal to Isaiahgaru that his friend Satyan was a communist, nor how thoroughly acquainted he himself was with communist thought. And

into this confusion was the shining example of his hero father, whom he would not want to betray.

Anand sat crosslegged on a straw mat in the Hanuman Chai Shop. Flies settled and walked across the mat, apparently still finding nourishment from old food stains. Das carelessly placed a glass of milky chai on the floor in front of Anand so that it spilt a little.

"Do you miss Satyan?" asked Anand.

Das shrugged. He took the grimy cloth from his shoulder and started flicking flies. He was an expert at knocking them to the floor where they landed on their backs whizzing in circles, their legs useless, failing to find anything to grip.

"He is coming this evening."

Das flicked his cloth and there was an ear-shattering crack.

"Abbah!" objected Anand. "Stop torturing the air!"

The boy shrugged again and disappeared into the kitchen.

It was late when Satyan arrived. In the light of the hurricane lamp dangling from the rafters, Satyan was looking in good spirits. His eyes, his smile gleamed in the light, but something was missing, something that should have been there glinting round Satyan's neck.

"Where is your gold chain?"

"My what?"

"Your chain. It's missing."

"Is it so obvious? My sharp-eyed sister noticed it too, and loudly told everyone. When my parents asked, I said I'd lost it. My mother then worried that the clasp was not

made strong enough for that weight of gold. And my sister said she had always known that the jeweller was a thief and shoddy in his workmanship. To stop her going to the bazaar and berating an innocent tradesman, I made up a story."

"Which was?"

Satyan scratched his cheek and smiled ruefully. "I said I was out walking and passed an orchard and the smell of the ripe custard apples made me realise that I was hungry. There was one custard apple high up in the tree, perfect in its shape and state of ripeness, and I decided that rather than take one that was within reach, I would climb the tree to pick that perfect fruit. But as I climbed I became entangled in leafy branches that pulled at my clothes. I stretched upward and felt a tug but thought nothing of it at the time. It was only later that I had noticed the chain was gone. So my father asked, did I not go back and search beneath the tree? I replied I was drunk at the time and could not remember whose orchard it was."

"Did they believe this fantasy tale?"

"Not my sister. She snorted all the way through saying that I had sold it and spent it on my fancy women. As you know, that is her fantasy tale. But my parents wanted to believe me, and the story fitted the picture they have of me: the spoilt youngest son who doesn't want to grow up. My father asked the servants to take messages round to every landlord who has custard apple orchards that they should give instructions to their servants to search in the orchards for the chain. He has offered a reward for its return."

Anand started to laugh. Satyan's life had such twists and turns, one escapade following another.

" But in truth you have sold the necklace to support your wife, isn't it?"

There was no answering acknowledgement on Satyan's face.

"Oh, no. You have donated it to party funds." This latest escapade did not seem harmless anymore. "So the gold necklace from your landlord father is sold to buy guns to kill landlords, who are friends or relatives of your father. Maybe kill your father himself. Tell me, is this the action of a son, or a mad man? If I had a father I would not want in any way to risk hurting him."

"Lower your voice! My daughter cannot sleep."

Anand and Satyan turned to look at Devadas crosslegged in a gap in the curtains. He looked weary. Behind him there was a glimmer of coals smouldering under a pot, and they heard a child crying.

"Forgive me, Devadas. We are going." Anand made a move to get up from the mat, but Satyan put out a restraining hand.

"Devadas, my friend, I still have some business to discuss with Anand. Is it too late for two cups of chai? We will be quiet and leave soon."

Devadas did not protest. He simply turned himself around and started poking the coals into life.

"What business? You said nothing about business."

"It is about Leila, my wife. Maybe you have guessed that she is not a city girl. My Leila is Lambadi."

"I have seen you with her," admitted Anand.

"Where?"

"The Lambadi encampment, not far from here. I was cycling past early one morning."

"You said nothing."

"I have not seen you since, until now. But rest assured, I have kept your secret. And I saw the two boys."

"It is because of this loyal nature of yours that I have something to ask. It is not a small thing and you must feel free to say no. Our struggle is intensifying and it may be months before I can return to see my family. Not everyone in her tribe is happy that I am her husband. Not everyone is happy that I come and go. She is looked after and protected by her kinsfolk, but I will feel less anxious, if there is some else she can talk to. Someone that I can trust.

"There is no-one I trust more than you, Anand. I have many friends, and many of them would say they were willing to help. 'Yes, Satyan, anything you ask, anything at all.' They will say such things and then later have some excuse as to why they did not do as they promised. But you will not pretend to be willing. If you agree, I know you will do it."

Anand drank down his chai.

"I am flattered that you ask, and at this moment I can see no reason to refuse. But Leila and the boys may not trust me."

"I will take you now to meet them."

"Now?"

Satyan stood up and reached down to pull Anand to his feet. "Yes. You can give me a lift on your bicycle."

Small fires burned in the Lambadi encampment, and a breeze swirled sparks up into the air. As they dismounted from the bicycle, a dog got up from where it lay by a fire and barked. A man's voice challenged them.

Satyan called out in the Lambada language. He led Anand towards an elderly turbaned man, seated with a shawl around his shoulders. As he spoke, this man turned to look at Anand. He asked Satyan something, his eyes still resting on Anand's face. Satyan translated.

"This man is the leader of the tribe. He has asked me where you are from. I told him you are a Christian from Kalampett who is living now in Hyderabad. He replied that he has no problems with the Christians in Kalampett. That they are known to some Lambadi who live there. He says you look like a person that can be trusted."

"Namaste," Anand touched his forehead in respect.

The old man nodded his head.

"Now come to meet my Leila."

Leila had a quiet, pleasant voice. She spoke Telugu with a slight accent.

"Welcome, Anand. Satyan has spoken of you. We know how you have taught him to read." She held the younger boy in her arms. "Hari, says namaste to Anand." The boy turned his head away. "Show your younger brother how to talk politely to a friend."

"Namaste, Anand." The boy grinned shyly and looked up at his father.

"Good boy."

Hari rested his head against his mother's shoulder. As he stared at Anand he opened his mouth wide in a yawn.

"The children are sleepy."

"Yes," said Leila. "They stayed up in the hope that you might come."

Anand had only met this woman and the boys a few minutes ago, but they had already made a place for him in their lives.

"What is your decision Anand? Will you come and visit while I am away?" It was as though Satyan had sensed an advantage and was pressing it, and how could Anand refuse, faced by the gentle friendliness of Leila and the innocent vulnerability of the boys?

As he cycled back into Hyderabad towards home, he was surprised by the number of men out on the street so late at night. They were all walking in the same direction. Not only pedestrians but other bicycles, rickshaws, and horse drawn jutkas. A lorry, its tray full of men waving and shouting slogans, blared its way through the crowd.

When Anand reached a crossroads he dismounted. The road to the Johnson's house went west and it was comparatively quiet. The stream of people, Muslim men and boys was going north. He tugged the sleeve of a passing man.

"Where are you all going?"

"To Nagar district."

"Why?"

"To stop the Nizam's negotiators from going to Delhi. They are selling us out. It will be a strong message to the Nizam." The man shook off Anand's hand. He looked worried and urgent. He was a poor man, his clothes threadbare.

"I'll give you a lift," said Anand. He might just as well. If he had gone straight home he would not have slept.

They managed to progress quite freely for some miles, but as they neared the destination it was easier to go forward on foot. The man salaamed Anand and threaded his

way onward, while Anand went more slowly pushing his bicycle which was now a nuisance, blocking people, tripping them up. But he persisted until he reached a street with large houses set in spacious gardens. Here the mass of people remained, some shouting slogans, some talking to each other, some watching the houses. Lights shone in the windows. Servants came to look out. Sometimes a front door opened to let someone in or out. There were police, but they were standing around just looking on. A man was raised up on the shoulders of others. He was addressing the crowd in Urdu. When he finished there were loud shouts from the crowd and some men shot guns into the air. It seemed as though this mass of Mussulmen did not want to leave but slowly the people on the edges of the crowd turned away.

As Anand pushed his bike away he spoke to a young man walking rapidly close by.

"Do you speak Telugu?"

"Of course."

"Who was the man who spoke?"

"You do not know? That was Kasim Rasvi."

"No, I had not seen him before. Tell me, what was done there, just now?"

'You saw those houses? That is where the Nizam's negotiators live. They were to catch a plane early this morning to go to Delhi. We prevented them leaving. Those men are no good. They do not fight hard enough for the Nizam. We want Rasvi to be a negotiator. Tonight has been a great triumph for the Muslims of Hyderabad."

When Anand arrived in his room there was time only for a short sleep. He lay down and closed his eyes only to see the Muslim crowd, white clothed and white capped. When he thought of Muslims it was to think of them as individuals, but tonight they had acted as a

unified committed motivated group. If there were committed groups such as these in the villages meeting up with the committed communists the only result could be bloodshed. He slept longer than he meant to and arrived late for work.

Benjamingaru's forehead was meshed with frownlines.

"Yesterday, you were praised, and already this morning, you have let me down. And not only myself, but the Bishop in Dornakal, Tundrigaru, Isaiahgaru, your *amma,* and the memory of your hero father."

"I am sorry, Benjamingaru. I will work late this evening."

"And tomorrow evening also, and for the rest of the week."

Kalampett

In the darkness, just south of Kalampett, a group of men huddled amongst boulder and scrub not far from the railway line. They had no lamps and no fire. They wrapped themselves for warmth and watched as the last passenger express for that night rolled powerfully past them.

Then they got up and ran towards the tracks. The lines were still vibrating, still warm from the friction of the wheels. They separated along the tracks and crouched down at the joinings of the rails. They worked to smash the bolts and prise loose the fish plates that held the rails together. The noise they made, a metallic percussion and ringing, enveloped them, assailing their ears and creating a tidal wave of sound, but in that place it only caught the attention of a jackal that howled before running away.

When they judged they had done enough they left the tracks, leaving a debris of metal plates and bolts, and went back to their waiting place which now had a homelike

feeling to it. They settled down, leaning against a rock or a cushioning shrub, finding what comfort they could as they waited and dozed.

As the sky began to pale, a new sound was heard, coming louder and nearer, gathering momentum. The men opened their eyes and watched the doomed train. The steam engine faltered, seemed to lose its footing and rocked off the track but came to a stop still upright. The following goods carriages banged and tilted, some tipping over scraping the ground, making sparks and sending boulders rolling. The men covered their ears at the noise. As the carriages scraped across the land they uprooted bushes and left long scars behind on the earth. A few minutes work had brought about this result.

They ran to the goods train. Two men went to overpower and tie up the engine crew. The others went to the carriages smashing the locks and drawing the heavy bolts. They were after grain and foodstuffs. They examined and assessed their loot. Hardware and tools useful for villagers they set aside. Wares destined for bourgeois households, if not already broken, they gratuitously smashed. Letters from an open postal bag were shaken out and some letters were lifted by the breeze, clumsy like large moths in the dawn.

Seemingly out of nowhere villagers arrived, and the train wreckers doled out grain to them, rice, wheat, lentils, gram, as much as the people could carry away in their shawls and turban cloths.

“We have done this for you. Take it, take it. You deserve it. We know how you are exploited. How you are kept poor. How the bourgeois landlords benefit unfairly from your labour. We are fighting for you. And you should join us. We will succeed faster if you join us. We will train you how to fight, how to succeed. Take this, take this. Feed your children and come and join us.”

The next day, in the afternoon when the Doragaru and Dorasani were having their siesta, a tonga arrived in the compound, interrupting Abraham and Graceamma as they sat on a mat in the pantry eating their meal.

"What now?" said Abraham going to wash his hand.

"Ayah!" called out the tonga driver as he walked up and down outside the bungalow.

"Lower your voice," said Abraham, going out to him. "The Doragaru is sleeping."

"I have brought his goods to him."

"What goods?"

"Is this not the school compound?" asked the young stranger anxiously. "I have brought them a long way. They were on the wrecked goods train."

"The new dinner set from Madras? Are the dishes whole?' Perhaps this fellow was not just a nuisance after all.

"Some are broken," said the man. "I brought them all. They will be worth something to the Doragaru, isn't it?"

"Let me see." Abraham stepped up onto the tonga weighed down by a broken crate leaking sawdust. He deciphered the word Rimmer painted on the outside.

"But surely, they are broken," he said, hoping otherwise. His hands trembled as he pulled aside some pieces of wood and reached into the sawdust, pulling loose a dinnerplate. This new plate was cream in colour, decorated with three stripes running round the edge. Abraham could not help feeling disappointed. True the plate was not the hated wishy-washy blue, but the coloured stripes, a dark blue, a dark green, a dull yellow, had no brightness or beauty. He delved into the crate bringing out fragments: a squat shaped cup

with a broken square handle, dull saucers and bowls mostly broken, fragment after fragment.

"You brought these? They are broken."

"Not each and every one, ayah. And some are only a little damaged."

"We have no use here, ayah, of things that are chipped and cracked. And what is the use of one cup and one bowl and one plate, we already have one of this and one of that. What we have need of is a complete set."

"I have come a long way, ayah. My horse is tired. I should like to talk to the doragaru himself."

Perhaps Graceamma had called the Doragaru because he was with her now walking down the steps towards them.

"What is this about, Abraham?"

"Doragaru, it seems the new dinnerset ordered from Madras was on the goods train wrecked by the communists. Even though they are broken, this man has brought them here hoping for a reward."

"Namaste, ayah. Have you come far?"

"I have travelled for hours, Doragaru. And before that there was the time spent picking up every piece. Look." He reached into the tonga for a bundle and opening it out revealed small pieces and shards of crockery.

Abraham sighed. "He is a foolish man, Doragaru."

"He must be tired and hungry." The Doragaru calmly gave his instructions, and the servants went about them. Graceamma gave the man a plateful of food and a tumbler of water. Abraham called Jacob and then the two of them with the Doragaru unloaded the

crate. Jacob poured well water into an old kerosene tin so the horse could drink. And then the man, undeservedly rewarded with paisa, salaamed the Doragaru and left.

Graceamma patiently delved through the sawdust, giving a cry of triumph if she found something whole, setting it aside on the steps.

When the Dorasani came she predictably laughed.

"Oh dear, our precious new dinner set. Smashed by the communists." This was unnatural, to treat this matter as a joke.

"Abraham, we'll have to be patient. There's no point in ordering another set until these disturbances are over."

"That is true, Dorasani."

"What do you think of this modern style?" She held up a squat striped cup, examining it. "It's quite different, more angular. Tell me, Abraham, do you like it?"

"Very nice, Dorasani."

Abraham averted his eyes. The world was becoming a senseless place, peopled with fanatics and fools, and plate manufacturers who came up with ugly new designs.

Chapter 7 November 1947

Kalampett

Graceamma wound her way across the field through fresh young djona plants towards Tundrigaru's bungalow. She could see David's head over the roof parapet. He was bent over some task, but when he lifted his head he noticed her and waved. He came down to the verandah to greet her.

"You have a letter from Anand?"

"Yes. It came yesterday." Graceamma untied a knot at the end of her sari and took out a piece of paper folded over many times. She handed it to David and sat down on the top step eager with anticipation. David sat down too and unfolded the paper. He smoothed it out over the floor. The Telugu script was written in Anand's neat hand, though the letter was shorter than usual. Much shorter.

"What does he write?"

"He writes, 'Honoured mother, for whom I will always, wherever I am, and whatever the future might hold, feel the utmost love and respect.'"

"He says that? 'The utmost love and respect'? Abbah, that is a good thing for a mother to hear." She was quiet for a moment. "Why does he say, 'Wherever I am'? We know he is in Hyderabad. 'Whatever the future might hold'? We know that also. When he finishes his training he is returning to Kalampett, to be manager at the printing office. Is he in some trouble?"

"He doesn't say. The letter goes on, 'My life has become more busy. If there is less time to write letters, it does not mean I have forgotten you. I hope you continue in good health and keep safe. Your son, Anand'"

"That is all?"

"Yes."

"It is strange, I think. Not a proper letter. For one thing he does not start in the usual way."

It was traditional to refer to Jesu Christu's blessings.

"He says he was busy. Maybe he was in a hurry," said David.

"Look again," urged Graceamma. "Is there nothing there about his job, about Benjamingaru? Where is the story to make us laugh? The thing to make us gasp in wonder? Does he not send his greetings to Tundrigaru?"

"No, not this time. Maybe in his next letter, when he is not so busy."

"But what is he busy at? He does not say and I do not like it. 'Wherever I am, whatever the future might hold.' Perhaps there is some mistake and he is dismissed from his job."

"Maybe. But if his life is to be busier, perhaps he has gained a promotion."

Graceamma rejected this favourable interpretation. "No. If he had good news he would come out and say it. He says he is to be more busy, but does not tell us what the business is. It is a secret business, and that disturbs me."

" Whether Anand is in trouble or not I cannot say. But like you, I think this is not a proper letter."

"My son has sent me a chit," said Graceamma, bitterly.

"No, amma. A chit is shorter still. Simply a written message. As when the Dorasani sends a boy to the hospital with a chit that reads, "I am sending this boy,Sundar, for an examination. He is suffering from lethargy, and could possibly have hookworm.' Or when

the headmaster sends a chit to the bungalow. 'Thankyou for your invitation to tea on the twelfth inst. The headmaster and staff are pleased to accept.' As this is neither a chit, nor a proper letter," continued David, "perhaps it is 'a brief note'."

" 'A brief note.'" Graceamma repeated the unfamiliar English sounds. "What is this thing?"

"It is what Tundrigaru writes when he does not have time to write a letter. He will write such a thing to anyone. The Bishop in Dornakal, his sister in Ireland, the missionaries in Bezwada. At the station when he is waiting for the train he will do this. Or before we leave to walk to a village he sometimes says, 'Wait a moment, David. I think there is time to write a brief note.'"

"I do not like this 'brief note'. It is like being offered a mouthful of annum, when your appetite is for a plateful."

Graceamma took the piece of paper from David and refolded it. She felt a strong antipathy towards it, this unsatisfying non-letter. But she tied it again in her sari and knew that when she was in her room, she would unlock her trunk and put this letter with the others. But she would not take it to the Amos family, as she had taken the other letters, for Amosgaru to read the letter aloud as the family sat in front of the house in the cool of the evening.

As Graceamma was leaving she asked, "And what is this 'Keep safe' that Anand says in his letter. Of course I am safe. Why should I not be?"

"There is more politics happening now," said David. "Not just in Delhi, or in the north, but in Hyderabad also. There are different parties, each one wanting to be able to decide what will happen next. Perhaps Anand sees some uncertainty or trouble in the

future, which we here in Kalampett know nothing about as yet. Naturally, he is concerned for his mother."

"Well, if he is so concerned, why is he not hurrying here to protect me?"

"I think," said David "that Anand has something big on his mind. Something he needs to think about. About which he is not yet ready to speak."

Those were ominous words. Graceamma's hurt and disappointment turned to anxiety. She decided to speak to Tundrigaru. To ask him that when Anand returned to Kalampett at Christmas, he might be allowed to stay safely at home until the troubles in Hyderabad were over.

Lester enjoyed travelling on the day train from Bezwada. He travelled third class and the carriage was packed with human drama and byplay. Children stared and sometimes a brave little hand reached out to touch this foreigner on his arm or face. He practised his Telugu by talking to the parents, matching their inquisitive questions concerning marital status and numbers of children with his own. And in between these conversational bouts his mind was free to wander, and this day it wandered around the person of Amy Parker.

Amy Parker in a blue dress standing on the verandah. Amy Parker's wavy dark gold hair springing away from a central parting, framing her pre-Raphalite face. He should like to see that hair loose, but it was always caught at the back of her smooth neck, twisted up, its natural exuberance disciplined by a squadron of pins. Amy Parker's smile revealed a front tooth chipped in a spill from a bicycle when she was eleven. As she took him to his room there was a hint of merriment in her contralto voice. "You'll be pleased to know the mosquito net's been darned. They won't be making a meal of you tonight."

On his previous visit, he had been plagued in his sleep. His skin had reacted badly to the bites. The irritation was intense and unbearable. Of course he had scratched them.

Next morning, breakfast should have been a leisurely meal. It started with fresh paw paw, then porridge followed by scrambled eggs, and then toast. At this point the standard of the food fell off. Unobtainable butter and marmalade was replaced with dripping mixed with marmite or a tomato jam. He sat at the white cloth covered table with Archie, who had come too, and the missionary spinsters of Bezwada, the middleaged Muriel, the white-haired Esme, and the young Miss Parker. He had seen how their gaze, at first covert, kept returning to the red welts on his pale arms. The bites still irritated him and the hairs on his arms stood up though he was embarrassed, not cold.

It was after the porridge that the first remark was made by Esme, the eldest.

"My dear Lester, those bites look quite painful. We must put Calamine on them at once." She left the table, and returned shaking a bottle with the pinkish fluid. She called Lester from the table and in the relative privacy of a corner asked him to remove his shirt and she had dabbed his bites front and back and along his arms.

Lester, you are back in boarding school with matron.

But he was grateful. The liquid had a cooling effect. And he was glad the others were bending over their eggs, conscientiously not peeking.

"Have you been bitten, Archie?" asked Amy.

"No. Once they smelt Newby's fresh blood, they left my old hide alone."

"I'll leave the bottle here for you" said Esme, putting it down on an occasional table. "Doubtless there are other bites. The ankles can be quite painful, and, particularly, I find, the little toe."

Lester thanked her, relieved he had not been asked to undress further. When he was back at the table, Amy had given him a sympathetic smile which went a long way to make up for the embarrassment.

"I wonder, Lester, if you tucked yourself in properly?" asked Muriel. "The mosquito net tucked firmly under the mattress all around the bed leaving no gaps."

Lester, you are not off the hook yet. This is the assistant matron speaking.

"I – I think so," said Lester.

"I'm sure he did," said Archie. "He's a conscientious chap, and Harriet and Virginia made sure he was aware of this necessity on his very first day."

The ladies laughed.

"Then I must be the one at fault," said Muriel. The housekeeping was her responsibility and she prided herself on her competence. "There must be a hole in the mosquito net. There is no other explanation." She put down her knife and fork and dabbed her mouth with the table napkin. "I'll go and check this minute."

"Surely, Muriel, that can be done once breakfast is over?" said Esme.

"Yes, please don't disturb yourself now," said Lester. His bites seemed to be causing no end of trouble.

"It'll put my mind at rest, one way or the other." When Muriel returned, she confirmed there was indeed a hole, up in one corner, no larger than a penny, and after she had apologised to Lester "for this shocking lapse", the matter was finally dropped.

The reason for these visits was to draw money from the Bezwada branch of the Imperial Bank of Madras, there being no such branch in Hyderabad. The money was withdrawn on a monthly basis for all salaries and expenses. Archie had undertaken this task

for years, a responsibility, Harriet told Lester, he had never treated as onerous. Once he had left the unlocked briefcase filled with money on the train. Archie alone had remained unperturbed. The stationmaster at Kalampett sent urgent wires further down the line and miraculously the briefcase was returned, the notes untouched. His colleagues wondered why, given Archie's fits of absentmindedness – his mind being constantly engaged with matters of import - such a thing had not happened before. In Kalampett this incident enhanced Tundrigaru's status as a holy man, his sanctity so forceful it repelled the calamities that beset lesser people. After Lester came to Kalampett, the job was his, but Archie had gone with him the first few times. This time Lester had come to Bezwada on his own.

To withdraw money from the Imperial Bank of Madras was not a simple matter of filling in a withdrawal slip and having the clerk count out the money, particularly when the amount to be withdrawn was rather large. There were delays for reasons that on the surface remained obscure, but underlying them was the intention to force the payment of a bribe to speed up the process. Paying bribes was against the missionaries' ethics and their only recourse was to wait until the Bank gave in. Archie had filled his waiting time by falling into conversations. He was an excellent listener and people found it easy to confide in him, and having heard their troubles he gave advice and encouragement, a wise word here and there. Over the years his pastoral care had extended from the clubfoot beggar at the door of the bank, to peons and clerks, and bank customers and to the Brahman bank manager himself. He knew the names of all the staff who acquainted him with their family events, the birth of a child, the marriage of a daughter, so the staff of the bank began to see this foreign reverend as their personal friend and not as a source of monetary enrichment. His

advice was valued and freely given. The man expected nothing from them except that they do their job. So in Archie's case, the waiting time was reduced to a token half hour. But this consideration was not extended to his colleagues, when occasionally, Ross or Harriet went to Bezwada for the money.

"One time, I was thoroughly fed up with the delays," Harriet told Lester, "There were so many things waiting for me to do back here, that I declared a hunger strike. I said I would not leave the bank's premises without the money and, if necessary, fast until death. In this part of the world fasts are taken seriously. News of this was relayed up to the manager, and I expect the very idea of a corpse on his premises was deeply offensive. I was dealt with very promptly after that."

The train began to slow down. Lester came out of his reverie as the train came to a stop at the Indian customs post.

Three officers awaited them in an open shed with long tables. It was the passengers from the first and second class carriages that generated the greater interest, but as Lester descended with his briefcase among a mob of third class passengers with grubby bundles and live fowl and tearful children, he was spotted by an officer, a balding well-fed fellow, who waved him over with a hairy arm.

As Lester opened the briefcase, the man's eyes widened.

"For what do you have this large sum of money?"

Lester was relieved the man spoke English. And in fact the man made no difficulty over the money, only expressing surprise that the mission should have so many teachers and clergy and Bible women on its payroll. Then Lester put his foot in it. He attempted a

joke. “I promise you, the money will not be used to finance an army of Muslim militia!” The officer’s relaxed gaze became steely.

“That is no joking matter. We know foreigners are helping Hyderabad with the importation of armaments.”

“A bad joke,” said Lester. “I apologise.”

“Open the other bag.”

Lester also had a small case, carrying his pyjamas and toothbrush, a change of clothes, a book. And a brown glass bottle with pills. Harriet had asked him to get them from the mission dispensary in Bezwada.

A hairy hand reached in and grabbed the bottle.

“What are these?”

“Hookworm tablets.”

“No medicines are allowed into Hyderabad.”

“They are not for me. They are for the children at the school. The manager asked me to buy some. We have run out of them in Kalampett. The mission hospital no longer has any, nor does the medical officer. They are desperately needed.”

“That is not my problem.”

Alongside Lester a rather large woman in a silk sari and numerous gold chains round her neck was having her difficulties too. An officer was insisting on emptying all the food out of her tiffin carrier. He had found pills hidden in the folds of some chapattis and mingled with the Bombay mixture.

“They are for my husband. His heart. Why are you doing this to me? I am a Hindu like you. Why are you murdering my husband?”

Lester decided to re-double his efforts.

"Do you know what hookworm can do to children?" he demanded. "Once the larvae are in the blood stream they are carried to the heart and lungs. They work their way up the lungs to the throat where they are swallowed. They settle as worms in the gut, fastening themselves to the walls and sucking the child's blood. The child can suffer abdominal pain, anaemia, diarrhoea and weight loss. The anaemia leads to loss of iron and protein, and this loss can stunt the child's growth, his mental and physical growth. The child is unable to learn."

These details of medical devastation Lester had learnt only recently from Harriet. They left the officer unmoved.

"If untreated," added Lester with some desperation, "There could be breathing difficulties and heart failure. The death of a child. Of many children. I beg you to return the pills."

"Why are you making this problem, sir? You have been allowed the money, and these are just pills."

When the train eventually reached Kalampett it was late afternoon. Lester locked the money away in the office safe. Before he went home, he dropped in on Harriet to tell her what had happened to the pills.

"No medicines allowed into Hyderabad? That is outrageous. Lester, you look quite pale after all your exertions. Sit down and have a rest." Harriet insisted he stay for a cup of tea.

"Tell me, how did it go at the bank?"

"It wasn't too bad. I was prepared for a long wait. I had a book with me. Blandings Castle by Wodehouse. It's very funny of course and I didn't restrain myself from laughing outloud. Eventually that got on someone's nerves. I'm sure I heard the word 'pitchiwadu' being muttered. A clerk then hurried to deal with this mad man and get him out of the bank."

"Good man," said Harriet. "You're learning the ropes quickly." She reached over with the teapot and topped up his cup. "And how are the ladies in Bezwada?"

"All well. Amy … Miss Parker, asked me to pass on her best wishes. I didn't know she was working with you here last year. She said she enjoyed it immensely."

"We loved having her. Very musical, Amy. Marvelous with small children. We had lots of plans."

"If she was happy here, why did she leave?"

"Ah. That was at the Bishop's doing."

"I'm sorry, I don't follow."

"You see, at times the Bishop finds us Westeners to be a mixed blessing. He will not allow a young missionary spinster and a young bachelor at the same station. Horror of horrors, they might start courting! They might be seen walking across the compound hand in hand. Such loose Western behaviour would set a bad example to the locals! You see, we could not rely on you and Amy loathing each other on sight. As Archie says, propinquity sometimes has a lot to answer for."

Lester felt the blush spreading, heating his face.

"Now had you brought a wife with you, Lester," teased Harriet, "I could have kept Amy. Strictly speaking, the school in Bezwada does not need a specialist infant teacher, but

Muriel was understandably keen to grab Amy when the opportunity arose. Officially, Amy knows none of this. She was told she was being transferred to answer a need. I'm sure she's worked out by now that the greater need is here. But that's one of the things we learn to accept as missionaries. From time to time, the powers that be order us to do things that defy commonsense."

Lester, you are used to a lack of privacy. Boarding school dormitories, war-time barracks, the intrusion of missionary colleagues. Enquiries as to the state of your bowels, the public anointing of your mosquito bites. But this … my feelings for Amy - and yes I do have them - maybe no more than a passing crush. That a connection between us has already been a matter of public discussion is a cruel trespass.

Lester. Lester. You are hurt in your innermost being, your most private self. So howl, simply howl, like the little boy you are.

Hyderabad

"There is something troubling your spirit, isn't there?"

"Sorry, sir …" Anand blushed, caught out at being inattentive. Isaiahgaru, an indefatigable scholar, was telling him something he had found out about the Nizam's forebears, 'a little digging' he had been doing.

"You were saying…sir?"

"What I was saying, is not important. Mere chatter that can be brought up again at some idle moment. But this, I think, is not such an occasion. You are troubled, my son. That is what we should be talking about."

Anand found it hard to meet Isaiahgaru's gaze. He knew it well. Attentive, intelligent, a gaze that touched one's face lightly, but steadily. Nothing forceful or intrusive or greedy. It was kindly. As were his smile and the lines of expression in his thin crooked face.

"Ís everything as it should be at work?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Everything is very good there. I am concerned for a friend, only." As though concern for a friend was of no real account, something of such diminishing importance one could sweep it out the door and let it blow away with the dust.

"Sometimes our friends' problems are more troublesome than our own, especially when we feel there is no practical action we can take."

Anand felt an urge to confide in Isaiahgaru, the friend of his father. Perhaps he could say something without giving too much away.

"I have a friend who is most interested in politics. He is not a simple hothead, like so many others, talking bravely in tea shops. This friend is committed to action. I am afraid that in doing so he may hurt others, or perhaps he himself will be hurt."

Anand dared to glance at Isaiahgaru's face, and was relieved to see it showed only a calm interest.

"I am angry also," continued Anand. "He has taken an evil course. Perhaps I should forget him, but this I cannot do since I know him to be a generous person."

"Shall we walk a little," suggested Isaiahgaru mildly.

They strolled side by side along a tile lined path in the rectangular garden. The air was free of dust, the sun pleasantly warm. Scent came from a jasmine twining up a wall.

Mrs Isaiah had grown very fond of English gardens, and was here creating a beautiful garden of her own.

"Do you know that the power of the jagir in his own estates is very nearly that of an absolute ruler?" Isaiahgaru had apparently returned to his original topic. "His landless tenants are helpless in this situation. He sets their taxes, decrees their punishment, sets their hours of work, and if they have a grievance, the jagir or his patel will settle the matter for a fee. Their justice unfortunately is not impartial. It too is bought and sold and punishment is more often than not meted out to the innocent and not the guilty. We have to thank the Communist rebellion in the countryside for bringing the evils of this system to the forefront of our minds, however uncomfortable that might make us."

As he listened to this, Anand felt more and more astonished.

"Are you saying the God-deniers are right?"

"I am saying that the Communists are right to focus on the most oppressed among us. As we Indians rightfully rejoice in our independence we are perhaps in danger of forgetting that there are evils in our own Indian institutions and traditions, and that reform will have to be a conscious goal pursued with determination."

Isaiagaru paused and looked down at a pot of African marigolds as though examining the complex overlapping arrangement of petals.

"I do not endorse the methods of the Communists. I do not endorse the bloodletting of revolutionaries. The very poorest who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of the revolution, are also the battle fodder. The means therefore are very much at odds with the ends. The only way we Christians can oppose communism is by thinking better and acting better."

Isaiahgaru looked up from his contemplation of the marigold.

"I do not know what political path your friend has chosen, but trying to forget him will not be helpful, even if it is possible. Now more than ever you should remember him in your prayers."

Some frangipani blossoms tumbled to the ground. He stooped to pick them up.

"For my wife's hair. Now let us go inside and drink tea." He smiled at Anand. "You know, if you were my son, I would recommend an early night."

Anand was grateful for Isaiagaru's concern, but when he left, instead of going home, he went to the Lambadi tanda to check on Leila and her boys.

Rahel's Diary

Everyday someone mentions that old tale of how a holy man predicted that the Asaf Jah Dynasty, the dynasty of my father the Nizam, would last for seven generations. If that is to be believed, then my father who is the seventh will also be the last Nizam. And if he is the last Nizam, what will come after? What will happen to Hyderabad? What will happen to all of us?

I tell whomever will listen that this is disloyal, defeatist thinking.

Nasreen's mother, on her nightly trysts with the Nizam, uses her position to exact as much treasure for herself and Nasreen while there is still the opportunity. She came back this morning crowing with success, flaunting an emerald necklace, which she immediately fastened round Nasreen's neck. Of course my sister looked beautiful, but I could tell the whole occasion was painful for her. She does not like her mother's avaricious ways, her boasting. "Look at my daughter. See how the emeralds are a fitting tribute to her beauty.

How they match the green of her eyes. Eyes that show she has the blood of the great Sikander flowing in her veins." Nasreen is aware of the jealousy this arouses. As soon as she could she removed the necklace and went to old Maryam who this morning was complaining of the pains brought on by the chill morning, and offered to massage her neck.

Whatever Nasreen does she is surrounded by admirers, sycophants and enemies. She even draws the eyes of the eunuchs. I took my chance and slipped out and went to the long wardrobe hoping to find someone to talk to. The opium addict was there. He had not yet lit his pipe so I talked but got no comfort from our exchange. He said that even the greatest dynasties came to an end. He cited the Mughals. If it was Allah's will that the Asaf Jah Dynasty was to end now it would. "Do you think that you and Rasvi can stop that? Perhaps a marriage could be arranged." That fanatic Rasvi and I have nothing in common! The disgusting eunuch giggled offensively and offered me his filthy pipe "to relax you".

I rebuked him and said he should stop smoking and keep alert to deal with the evils ahead. His mind and manners are loathsome, sickening and repellent and I shall not forgive him.

My poor father is surrounded by the fanatical, the self-interested and the drug addicted. What chance does he have, if fate is against him too?

Chapter 8 December 1947

Hyderabad

Anand dismounted and hid his bicycle in a thicket. As he crossed the empty ground towards the tanda he saw the smoke of fires lit to cook family meals. There was a pot sitting on the fire outside Leila's hut. It was unattended and she was nowhere to be seen. Where were the boys? He had a packet of jeedi-pup for them. A snack was always well-received by Leila's tumbling, energetic sons. He picked his way round other children playing. They were used to his visits now and they called out to him. When he was close to Leila's hut he heard a child whining, another coughing. A whoop that strained on and on. Leila was hushing, trying to soothe her children.He called out to her at the entrance to the hut.

"Leila, it is I, Anand."

"Anand, come inside." She was bending over a child, her back to him. She was not wearing her shawl, and the flesh on her exposed back was hot and glistening. He wondered if she was ill too. She picked up the two-year old boy and freed her nipple for him, more as comfort than nourishment. The second boy was lying inert, his eyes half shut. He was flushed and hot, and had kicked a cover away. Then he coughed. Each spasm propelled his upper body forward then dropped it back. He was as helpless as a leaf in a storm. Anand crouched down and supported the boy as he coughed.

"Easy. Take it easy."

He looked up at Leila holding the sucking child. It was too much for her. To face this problem without Satyan. Her eyes met his.

"I need medicines. Anand, get me medicines."

"Yes. Are you ill, too?" The child let go of the nipple and started to whine.

"Go, go now."

He left. He had no idea where to go. As he cycled away he noticed a dull light on in the Hanuman Chai Shop. Perhaps Devadas knew of a local doctor.

The chai shop was empty of customers. The lamp in the seating area was unlit and the only light came from the kitchen area through a crack in the curtain. It was so silent Anand at first thought the hut was empty.

"Who's there?"

"Devadas. It is Anand. There's a problem. Can we talk?"

"Anand, is it?"

The curtain was pulled aside, and Devadas came out with surprising speed. He was sitting crosslegged on a low contraption on wheels.

"Whatever is that?"

"A present from Satyan. He saw things like this being made in Bezwada and got one for me. It is made for cripples, beggars, anyone with the need. "

"Abbah, that is wonderful."

"Look." Devadas pushed himself round, circling a mat. "Good, hah? I can now travel down the road. And my hands are not so calloused."

"I am happy for you."

"Sit down, Anand. What is you problem.?"

Anand sat down on a mat, his head level with Devadas'.

"I know a woman who is alone with two children. The children are ill, very ill. She has asked me to get medicines tonight. Devadas, ayah, I do not know where to go."

"Is the woman Leela, and the boys Satyan's sons?"

"You know?"

"You and I. We two know." Anand felt relieved that he could speak openly. And Devadas who loved Satyan would understand the urgency.

"Where can I go for medicines in this neighbourhood? I must be quick."

"There is a hakim who lives not far from here. You go further down this road, not in the direction of the tanda, but away from it. The Hakim lives in a white house with a flat roof. It is surrounded by a white wall. Go to the side gate and beat on the bars with a rock. Someone will come to you."

"Will he see me at this hour?"

"He will see you at any hour."

"What if I do not have enough paisa to pay him?"

"He will allow for that and not demand immediate payment."

"He is a good man then."

"And so was his grandfather, who treated me and Seyyid, my landlord, when we were both struck by the same illness as boys. Unfortunately, Seyyid died last week. He asked for very little in the way of rent, but now his brother demands five times the amount. I am forced to close my business and lose my home. I must leave in two days."

"But where will you go?"

"I do not know. Maybe you will see me on my cart begging at Hyderabad station."

Anand would have liked to think that a joke, but it probably wasn't.

"Abbah. I would like to help you when you move."

"That brother of Seyyid will also probably cause problems for the lambadi settlement. He will want to claim the land."

"That has always been Satyan's concern. That someone for some reason will do harm to Leila's tribe, and therefore to Leila and their sons. Does Satyan know what is happening?"

"I have sent a message. Whether it has reached him yet, I do not know."

"So many problems, all at once. I must hurry now for the medicines and return to Leela. I will be back in two days to help you move."

There was a grill in the Hakim's side gate. It slid open and a lad's face appeared. There was a fine dark down on his upper lip. He looked impassively at Anand, waiting for him to speak.

"I need medicines from the Hakim for two children. It is urgent."

"The Hakim," the lad's voice broke , " is eating his meal. Come back later."

"No, no. It is urgent, I said," but the face disappeared. "They may <u>die</u>," yelled Anand after him. He paced up and down. Then he banged on the grill, rattled the door.

"Take it easy, young man."

The Hakim was young and bearded and wore a white cap. A fellow spectacle wearer. Anand was relieved to see someone who looked as though he would take the matter seriously.

"Who is ill?"

"Two boys."

"Ages?"

"Two years and four years."

"What is the nature of the complaint?"

"They are glistening with fever, and they make a terrible cough. It racks their bodies as though they are possessed."

"Anything else?"

Anand could not think of other symptoms. "Their mother is very worried, sir. Their father is away, and the boys might die."

"Wait here."

When the hakim returned, he opened an aperture lower down the door. His hands came into view. They were pale like his face, very clean and embellished with a few delicate black hairs. Each hand was holding a packet.

"Take this." The hakim held out a very small packet with his left hand. "These are tablets for the fever. Give one half tablet to each boy tonight, in the morning and again at night, and so on. These are sufficient for five days. This other packet holds herbs and almonds." It was a bulky package. Anand took it. "Take a handful at a time, making sure you include two almonds. Grind them together with the herbs and make a tea. They must drink some tonight, and throughout the next day. It will ease the coughing. Come back the day after tomorrow to tell me how the patients are doing. During the day is best."

"I must attend my job during the day, sir. I will come in the evening."

"I understand."

"I have come without money, sir. When I visited the family this evening I did not expect to find an emergency."

"So pay me on your next visit."

The grill was closed.

As Anand cycled back to the tanda, he passed groups of men squatting round fires. More men, larger groups than he was accustomed to seeing along that road, but he saw no reason to be perturbed.

At the hut the coughing had become a louder hacking and more prolonged. Leela looked relieved to see him and the packets in his hands. She immediately set about grinding the herbs and blowing on the fire outside to heat the water for the tea.

Anand sat beside the two year old. The boy was hot and drowsy, his breathing rapid and congested. "Wake up." Anand shook him lightly. He squeezed the child's cheek to open the mouth. Anand had seen his amma do this when she was helping a woman in the compound with her sick child. The child shook his head trying to get away. "Sht, sht."

When he had the head still and the mouth open, he pushed the pill with his index finger down to the base of the tongue. The swallowing was automatic. The child looked surprised at what was happening in his mouth.

Then he went to the four year old and sat him up against his leg. "Open your mouth." Anand pushed the half tablet to the back of the boy's throat, until he gagged and then swallowed. The boy started to cry and called for his mother.

"Hush, you have done well. The tablet will do you good. Your mother is preparing another medicine. When you have taken it you will feel much better, I promise you."

He laid him down and covered him, then went outside.

The sky was dark. No moon. Some light from the dying fire lit up Leela straining tea into a tumbler. She poured the tea from that tumbler into another, back and forth to cool the liquid. Her bangles jangled.

In the encampment other fires were dying out. Shapes moved, voices chattered and chuckled quietly, a sudden shout of laughter.

"The men are tired tonight. They will want to sleep early."

Anand could see the fires he had noticed earlier. Even at this distance he could see they were burning strongly. Those men were not thinking of sleeping.

"Who are those men over there?"

Leila glanced in the direction he was pointing.

"I do not know. I have not seen them before. Come, Anand."

He followed Leila into the hut. She handed him a tumbler. He sat with the older boy, coaxing him to sip. She gave the medicine to the younger one, pushing a pointed spout into his mouth.

"I am so glad you came tonight, Anand. I am so glad you went for the medicines."

"Have you heard from Satyan recently?"

"No. It has been twenty, maybe twenty-one days."

"Can you send a message to him?"

"A message will take too long. The children will either be dead or recovered by the time a message reaches him."

Leila said this calmly .

The Hakim's medicine was working. The boys coughed less and both fell into a proper sleep.

Anand should have gone then. After all he did not want to be late for work again. Isaiahgaru's book was to be bound the next day. Anand asked if he could be the one to take

a bound copy to Isaiahgaru in the evening and Benjamingaru had somewhat reluctantly agreed. If he was late for work, that privilege would be revoked.

"You should go now." Leila smiled at him.

"I'll stay a little while outside by the fire. If you need me, call. It is lonely for you to be alone with two sick children."

"No. I can call a tribeswoman to be with me if I want."

He should have left the tanda while he could. But he squatted outside by the dying embers. He felt chilled and rubbed his arms as he looked up at the stars. He thought of his mother. And of Rosie. In another year she would be sitting her final school exams, and he would be in charge of the new printshop in Kalampett. How soon after that could he make a serious proposal of marriage? In three weeks he would see them all, see them at Christmas.

Anand woke up cold and stiff. At first he thought he was dreaming. What looked like a forest of trees on fire was coming closer towards the tanda. Drums started to beat. Tribesmen erupted out of the huts, shouting. One ran past, putting his head into Leila's hut and yelling something before moving on. Anand hurried into the hut. Leila had spread a cloth onto the ground and was piling clothes and her few possessions on to it.The boys were crying, clutching their mother, impeding her work.

Anand picked them up.

"What is happening?"

"We are surrounded. Threatened. We have to go." The din outside was terrible, frightening. It was difficult to think. Leela was tying up the sheet into a bundle.

A tribesman put his head through the door. They spoke briefly. Leela took her bundle outside and collected her cooking pots. Anand followed, carrying the boys. All the

Lambadi were packing up. The tanda was surrounded by a cordon of goondas with sticks and drums and torches. There was no panic. An opening was left in the cordon to allow the lambadi to pass through. Already family groups were hurrying out. Already some of the huts were being torched. This was surely the new landlord's doing.

Leela had the bundle on her back and three cooking pots on her head.

"Give me the children," she said.

"You cannot carry both.'

"The older one will walk."

" He is ill. I will carry him."

They hurried through the cordon after the others. Men, women and children, they all walked quickly. Surely they cannot keep up this pace, thought Anand, but soon there was a rhythm to the tramping feet, the whole tribe jingling and jangling through the night. The men were grim-faced, but filled with purpose. To put distance between their families and hostility. To find another place to settle. They did not fight for their homes. It was not their custom to own land and they did not expect permanence. This was bred into them. These sudden departures, the walking into the night, into the wilderness.

It was daybreak when the tribe came to a halt. Children and elderly curled up on the ground to sleep amongst the bundles and chattels. Mothers nursed their babies. Women and girls hunted for firewood. The men scouted the lie of the land and for the prospects of work. The tribal head, wrapped in a shawl, sat with other elders, waiting for reports from the scouts.

Six hours ago they were forced out of their homes. But their lives still had order and purpose. Individually they knew what each must do and they got on with it. It was only Anand whose mind was in a whirl, whose life had been abruptly disrupted.

There was a moment when he could have gone. Maybe someone else from the tribe would have carried the boy. The goondas who had surrounded the tanda and burnt the huts were vicious thugs, but they would not have worried about him. They were paid just to get rid of the tribe and chase it off. They had done that. He could have pulled out his bicycle from where he had hidden it and peddled home. Had he himself not done enough by bringing the medicines?

But these thoughts were pointless. He was here now.

The boys were coughing again. He took out a tablet and broke it in half. The boys shuddered after he pushed the medicine down their throats. Leant against him and wailed.

'I'm hungry, I'm hun-gry."

"We must all wait, for now." Anand felt hungry too. As he sat with the small one pressing against him, Anand felt a granular object poking into his thigh. It was the jeedi-pup he had bought for the boys the day before, before all this had happened.

"Did you say you were hungry? Come on, stop crying and I will give you a snack."

He shifted the boy so he could reach into his pocket. The packet was fashioned out of newspaper and a corner had burst, as he pulled it out of his pocket jeedipup fell to the ground. The boys picked up the chickpeas, cramming them into their mouths. Other children came. Their eyes were big, but they were very polite, waiting as he made the opening in the packet bigger, waiting for him to pass the snack around.

In two hours or so Benjamingaru would be expecting him.

Three young Lambadi returned to the camp. They had found a water source, a large artificial tank almost full with water. It was good news. Women got up and taking their water pots followed the young men.

Leila came back with a bundle of firewood.

"The land here looks good. There is wet land for rice, and land for cholam. There will be a good crop of mangoes later on. Water is plentiful. This would be a good place to settle. I hope the elders decide to stay here."

"Is it possible they will decide otherwise?"

"Yes. If there is reason."

Leila set and lit a fire. She mixed flour and water for chapatti. He liked watching her. She was deft and efficient and pleasant on the eye with her colourful clothes and bangles. And there was comfort in the making of food.

"I also hope the elders decide to stay here. Because it is not too far for me to return to Hyderabad, to report to the Hakim and then, on my bicycle I can bring back more medicines."

"For those reasons also I hope we stay here. It will be more difficult but maybe from time to time we will see you, Anand. You are such a good friend. Here, take this."

Leila handed him the first cooked chapatti. Straight from the tawa it was very hot, burning his fingers. He tossed it from hand to hand to cool it.

The children eyed the chapatti and moved towards him.

"Stop it," she told them. "You will have yours soon enough. We must honour our friend, isn't it?"

Local villagers wrapped in shawls against the morning chill were wandering over to have a look at the newcomers. They started talking to a group of lambadi men. Anand went to join them. What the villagers had to say was not good. The landlord was a bad one, and they had had enough and turned communist. One of their own had been martyred, set upon by the landlord's goondas. They were not going to the fields to work that day. A protest was planned, but every protest brought forth a vicious reprisal. The land was good, the harvests were good, but there was no stability.

Anand asked if they know a young communist from Hyderabad, a young man belonging to the Reddy clan.

"There are Reddys. One will be here today, to lead us. What is your friend's name?"

"Satyan."

"Satyan, did you say? We know of no Satyan."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

It was a huge disappointment. If Satyan was coming, he would find Leela and the boys, and take over responsibility for them, and Anand would have been free to walk back to Hyderabad.

Instead the tribe's leader decided to move on away from hostilities. The tribe packed up again. And Anand went with them, carrying the boy who was still running a fever. He could not turn his back on them and simply hope for the best. He needed to know for Satyan's sake where Leila and the boys were going to end up.

Kalampett

Graceamma could tell that something was wrong. Ammagaru's face lacked its customary animation. Her eyes were concerned, her voice subdued.

"Tundrigaru would like to speak to you. He is on the front verandah."

Graceamma fumbled as she set down the lantern globe she was wiping. Her hands shook. This was something very bad, she knew it. She saw her fingers were smudged with smoke. She went to rinse her hands. She dried them on a towel.

"Come," said Ammagaru, touching her shoulder.

Graceamma followed the Dorasani through the house.

It is Anand, it is Anand. They are going to tell me my son is dead.

Tundrigaru was standing on the verandah, looking out over the garden. He turned and blinked. He moved towards Graceamma and took her hand.

My son is certainly dead.

"Graceamma, there is a mystery concerning Anand's whereabouts. He did not return to his lodgings on Sunday night. He was not at work on Monday or any day since. The last anyone saw of him was Sunday afternoon when he left his lodgings on his bicycle."

It was as she feared. Graceamma closed her eyes and swayed on her feet. She felt Ammagaru put an arm around to support her. Tundrigaru pressed her hand.

"Graceamma look at me." She made herself open her eyes and tried to focus on Tundrigaru's face.

"We must not fear the worst. We know Anand to be a sensible young man. He was in no trouble and had no reason to abscond. It is likely that he has been caught up in some

disturbance not of his own making. I am going to Hyderabad today. Anand spent some of his free time at Mr. Isaiah's place. Isaiahgaru maybe able to help us with some leads. I promise you that we shall do our utmost to find Anand."

Graceamma salaamed her thanks.

"This is a tremendous shock," said Ammagaru. "You must do no more work today, Graceamma. Go and rest in your room."

As Graceamma walked back through the bungalow, she spoke to Luke.

Anand is lost, but Tundrigaru is going to Hyderabad to look for him. She repeated the words to herself.

In the kitchen, Abraham was in a panic.

"We are out of eggs, the vendor did not come yesterday as he promised and now I myself shall have to go out to the garden and hunt." He looked at her, expecting words of sympathy. Then he stared. "What is the matter?"

"Anand has disappeared. No-one has seen him since Sunday. Tundrigaru is going to Hyderabad to look for him."

"Abbah! Anand missing. That is terrible. Where will Tundrigaru look? The hospitals? The jails? The morgues?" Abraham's voice moved from concern to the deepest gloom.

Of course, Anand was in a hospital, a jail or morgue. Why did she foolishly feel hope when Tundrigaru said that he himself was going to Hyderabad?

Graceamma experienced a faintness in her head, weakness in her knees and she collapsed. She would have liked to cry out, to shout, to rebuke God, but she could not. It was the same when Luke's bloody, maimed body was carried into their home. Others

rocked and wailed, but she was like stone until she was alone. And even then her tears were silent.

"Graceamma!" Abraham sounded distraught. Extremes of emotion, even silent ones, were too much for him. Far too distasteful.

"Leave me, Abraham," murmured Graceamma. "I wish to be alone. To sleep, or die. It matters not which."

Either way she would stop picturing Anand lying in a morgue.

Graceamma could feel Abraham still there. He had too much heart to abandon her, but not enough to help a hysterical woman make the few short steps to her room.

"Dorasani, Graceamma has collapsed," shouted Abraham. "Graceamma has collapsed. What shall we do?"

Such foolishness to call the Dorasani.

"Leave me." Graceamma murmured. Thankfully there was a mist, a cloud passing through her body, muffling pain.

But then the Dorasani came. Hands were over her, touching her,

"Graceamma, can you hear me? Graceamma?'

Such inconsiderate loudness.

She was shown no mercy. Her name was called again and again. Her body abused, shaken and slapped and pinched into consciousness. The cloud rolled back. It seemed she must face the horror. All of it. Graceamma opened her eyes and saw the Dorasani's face bent over her.

"Graceamma. There is hope, there is still hope. Cling to that."

"Will she live, Dorasani?"

"Oh, yes. Her pulse is much stronger now. Perhaps some hot sweet tea, Abraham?"

Later when Graceamma awake from a long sleep, assisted by medicine Doctor Ammagaru gave her, she felt very present in her small room. There was the square window with the bars first put there to keep out wild jungle animals, and then to hamper robbers. There was her comb made from buffalo horn, with long fine teeth to clear her hair of lice. Her tin of coconut oil. A cracked mirror hanging from a nail. Her lamp. The tin trunk that held her treasures: the Telugu Bible she could no longer read, the small photo of Luke and herself on their wedding day, and those coloured saris that Ammagaru gave her each Christmas and Easter for some years until she at last accepted that Graceamma could not be persuaded to leave her widowhood behind. Truly, the saris were a generous gift for which Graceamma felt grateful, but she could not even bring herself to try one on. It seemed more truthful to wear her widow's sari. The white sari that spoke of how diminished Graceamma's life had become since Luke died and her life as his partner ended. And just as she saw each of her possessions in its particular clarity, she heard as clearly, Luke's voice.

"Grace, our son Anand needs you and your prayers. When he is found he will need the strength of your love."

Luke had always encouraged her to look beyond an immediate calamity; a shattered waterpot, a broken down harmonium. In her frailty and foolishness she had almost succumbed to grief. Imagine if she had died, and how, when Anand was found, he had to be told his mother was no more. But she had been saved from such a sinful abandonment.

Abraham's voice, loud with complaint, reached her from the pantry.

"Chi, chi, chi. Ants crawling in the sugar! It is one thing after another."

Graceamma laughed quietly. She stayed in her room. Abraham could cope with that small problem on his own.

Harriet

Christmas was five days away and still no word from or about Anand. Archie had interviewed everyone in Hyderabad known to have a connection with him. Isaiah had said that Anand was worried about a politically active friend, an extremist. The lads at Church who supported the Congress Party had never seen Anand on their demonstrations. Otherwise, the only known, yet at the same time unknown, friend was the Hindu caste boy who Anand was teaching to read and write. In his letters Anand had referred to him as "my pupil". If he was the political activist, it was most unlikely that he had joined the Razarkars, the Muslim militants. The other extreme group was the Communists. This was supposition, but worrying none the less.

Archie had thought it was best not to share such thoughts with Graceamma, but he did tell her facts. The police had told him of all the disturbances that Sunday that Anand was last seen, and in the days that followed. Archie had personally seen the faces of all young men incarcerated on those days and could say with certainty that Anand was not among them. He had also drawn a blank at the hospitals and the city morgue. The only disturbance he did not follow up, and it was only mentioned as an aside, was one concerning a group of Lambadis driven from their encampment. Anand had never mentioned any Lambadis. There was no reason to suppose that incident had involved him. The other thing Archie could tell Graceamma was that the disappearance was not planned

by Anand. He had a specific reason for being at work the next day – overseeing the binding of Isaiah's book, and taking a finished copy to him, something he was keen to do.

So far Graceamma was bearing up quite well, but this waiting was so difficult. They were all affected by Anand's absence, and Christmas this year would be subdued. The trains were still being disrupted and they were not receiving the usual volume of Christmas mail. The Bishop received more of this than anyone, from supporters and friends and well-wishers in England and around the world. Each year he expressed amazement at the cards. Those cheery robins holding sprigs of mistletoe, jolly Santas waving from sleighs passing over snowcovered landscapes, men and women in eighteenth century dress, wearing top hats and muffs as they skated over frozen ponds or carried wrapped boxes. "What have these to do with the birth of our Saviour?" asked the Bishop.

It was a disappointment her mother's Christmas cake had not arrived. Even the war had not interrupted this tradition. Her mother baked the rich cake in late September, wrapped it in brown paper and sealed it in a tin. The tin was put into several layers of sugar bags, firmly stitched, and sealing wax, looking like shiny red buttons, was dropped along the seams. By the time the cake reached them the flavour had matured. The rich moist fruity slices were a wonderful treat for all on the mission station and for Christmas visitors.

Thankfully, Rachel had arrived safely from school. She was taller, taller than Harriet now. There was a woman there emerging from a girl-like plumpness. She and Rosie, who was also on holiday, had reconnected, spending two hours yesterday on the verandah when the bangleman called at the bungalow. A dark head and a fair head bent over together as they tried on the bangles of different colours and combinations of colours, and the bangleman had patiently untied yet another loop of bangles at their excited

requests. Rachel's hands since she was a baby had been moulded and pushed into tiny bangles, and her hands were still supple, still able to be squeezed into fragile glass rings that were far too small for Harriet.

When Rachel wasn't with Rosie, she was writing, something she would not let them see. "It's not finished yet." All Harriet gathered was that the work was on-going and of indeterminate length.

One letter to randomly arrive from New Zealand came from old Mrs Leggett with the news that her son Brian had died from a cancer. She was eighty one, and he was her only child who had not himself married. Brian Leggett had been Harriet's history teacher and he had coached the school's debating team. Harriet was his star pupil and he had high hopes for her. "You should enter politics," he used to tell her. He was an atheist and later when Harriet told him she was going to India as a missionary he was visibly upset. "What a waste. I had you marked out as the first woman Minister of Education. Why are you so hell-bent on obscurity?" When she and Ross first came to Kalampett she wrote to Brian Legget telling him where they were stationed. He replied that he had looked it up in his Atlas without success. "You are not even on the map," he wrote. "Where I am," she wrote back, there is nothing obscure about these children. Their eagerness for education is conspicuous, their health problems glaring, and their joy for life undimmed. You would love them, too." Each time they were on furlough, she and Ross went to visit him. They had enjoyed those afternoons. He was one of the few friends back home that they could talk to about Kalampett, the place, its politics and climate, the people, without his eyes losing focus and the subject changed. In fact he pushed them to talk more, by asking intelligent questions. He seemed to understand their passion.

Mrs Leggett's letter said that Brian had left her comfortably off, but there was also a legacy for "Harriet's school", and could Harriet please let their lawyer know the best way to transfer the money. The sum was enough for a new classroom block. "Very generous of him," said Ross. "And as it happens, an answer to prayer. Coming from a love, not for God, but for Harriet."

"Let's call the block the Brian Leggett House," she said. "I think his mother would like that."

Mrs Amos and Harriet always had a session together to review each pupil's progress.

"This boy Prakasam, in my class. He is not learning at all. I have tried but I cannot interest him. He is one of our scholarship boys. Amma, I do not like to say so, but maybe we should stop his scholarship, and give it to some other child who is keen to learn."

"This is difficult. His parents are elderly and he is their only child. All their hopes are centred on him. What does interest the boy?"

"Being outside, Amma. He watches animals and climbs trees."

"I think we should try for another year. Perhaps you can use his love for nature to gain his interest in class."

"Yes, amma. I agree. I do not like to take away a good chance from a child."

Brian Leggett was the teacher Harriet had learnt the most from. She was sure that in the future, there would be grown men and women looking back fondly on Mrs Amos.

Rahel's Diary

This morning, my father, the Nizam, went as he always does, to the Christmas service at St Anthony's Catholic Church. It is his tradition, the tradition of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty, to practice tolerance and support for all faiths. This tolerance has made Hyderabad famous and gives me yet another reason to be proud of my father. He has taken with him his two sons and their Turkish wives, and his party included our Scottish governess, Miss Dominey, because it is her day.

It will be good for him to be away from the tensions in the Palace if only for an hour. There is not much peace and goodwill at this time except perhaps at church. To observe the measured pace and dignity of ritual will be soothing to one who has had to put up with unusual scenes of anger, accusations and counter accusations, the falling out of men who all claim to have the best interests of the Nizam at heart. This atmosphere of agitation and mistrust has a way of reaching us here in the zenana. Stormy scenes are played out in front of servants, witnesses who pass on to other servants what they have seen and heard. And so the news spreads from the palace chambers to the household attendants down to the kitchens and by way of one route or another to the Zenana itself. We do not necessarily know what the quarrels are about, but we have heard that Sir M, a trusted adviser, usually controlled and diplomatic in the British manner, raised his voice in a way he has never been heard to do before, his pale face turning an alarming red as he faced the Kotwal,the Chief of Police. and accused him of dereliction of duty. We have heard how Kasim Razvi forgot his manners and his position and lectured everyone in his shrill voice as though he imagined himself to be in charge. And how the Nizam by a look

and a gesture commanded his advisers and officials to collect themselves, but afterwards how he shook with displeasure and asked for a half measure of opium to be put in his pipe.

But it is Christmas and we have decorated the Zenana in the way our Governess has taught us. The youngest children have been making chains of coloured paper. Miss Dominey's preference is for red and green, but the children introduce their favourite colours of yellow and pink and purple and orange and blue. When the multicoloured chains were hung up over the doorways and round the windows, the children brought in Miss Dominey to look at and admire their handiwork. "Oh my dears, how gloriously gaudy! It takes courage to put such colours together. A great success, my dears, a great success." She has been teaching them to sing, "Away in the manger", "God rest ye, merry gentlemen", and "The Holly and the Ivy." There will be a concert tonight performed by the children and attended by the Begums and Miss Dominey's former pupils. After a lolly scramble (Miss Dominey's Christmas treat for the young children) the Begums will take her away for a teaparty, because it is Christmas and she is a long way from family and home.

This is a private party but over the years Nasreen and I have peeked and eavesdropped. A Christmas cake will be brought in. A cake cooked in the Nizam's kitchen, under the Senior Begum's strict instructions that the "receipt" be followed exactly, without any creative deviation, whatever the personal taste of the cook. This secret family recipe was solicited by the Senior Begum herself from Miss Dominey's mother in Dundee, a recipe that requires whisky marmalade imported from Scotland. After tea and cake, a Begum will say that even though the cake was cooked here in Hyderabad, she hopes it is up to scratch. And Miss Dominie will reply that the cake was perfection, her mother could not

have done better herself. A fir tree, cut down in Darjeeling and brought to Hyderabad by rail, stands in the corner, decorated with shining coloured balls, gold and silver stars and an angel, in female form with yellow hair, fastened to the tippy top of the tree. There will be an exchange of gifts. From Miss Dominie, volumes of Scottish verse, lawn handkerchiefs edged with lace and embroidered in the corners. Miss Dominey embroiders them herself, choosing as her subjects Indian birds and flowers. Best of all are her decorative book marks. Miss Dominie draws Celtic patterns on parchment and paints them with jewel- like colours and goldleaf. I think she would be surprised to know how much we (from the Begums down to her ex-pupils) treasure them. Just as we are surprised that inside that person dressed in greys and beige, behind that pale freckled skin and light blue eyes beats the soul of a true artist. But Hyderabad is a Mecca for artists and poets and we are educated to recognise talent when we see it.

Once Nasreen and I were allowed to watch her at work as long as we did not ask questions. We would not have dared. As an artist Miss Dominey is transformed. Her face and eyes attend to nothing else as she works. There is an impenetrable silence around her. The sudden caw of a crow flying past the window, a hullaballoo from the street, a crash of crockery, these things do not disturb her. In such a silence Nasreen and I became conscious of our breathing. We tried to suppress it only to find it became louder, until we too were caught up in Miss Dominey's spell. We forgot altogether the business of our lungs as we watched her thin crisp-skinned hand hold the brush so steadily, move so exactly. The brush, tipped with colour, stroked gently here, boldly there. Another brush, a different colour. Where will it go? There. Of course. The result ss-uuuu-blime. When Miss Dominie finally raised her head, she blinked as though surprised to see us there.

Miss Dominie carries her presents in a red bag trimmed with cotton wool to represent white fur. And to "get into the spirit of things", she dons a red cap, also trimmed. She is someone who innocently makes a fool of herself, but the Begums do not think the worse of her for that. A servant opens the bag and delivers the presents to the four Begums, who are graciousness itself. The Begums' presents to Miss Dominey are wrapped in fine muslin and attached to the tree with gold thread. The servant delivers them one by one, giving her time to unwrap each present, exclaim over its beauty and express her touchingly sincere gratitude before the next is delivered. An ivory comb, a crystal perfume bottle, an amethyst fashioned into a thistlehead, a sandlewood fan painted on one side like a peacock .When the fan is opened the peacock's tail spreads revealing its full, irridescent glory.

After the presents the party relaxes into stories and reminiscences. First names are used. Jessie we discovered was the name of our Governess. Jess-ie dom-in-ey, jess-ie dom-in-ey became a favourite chant, until we were overheard and given a severe telling-off. To us, we were told, the Governess was always and only Miss Dominey. We had meant no harm, but it made a strong impression on us to be reproved directly by the Senior Begum. It showed the importance the family put on the practice of treating with respect all those who work for us privileged ones.

To remember and write of such things, gives me a brief holiday from brooding on the endless difficulties and complications of my father's life.

Merry Christmas.

Chapter 9 January 1948

Kalampett

Mr. Amos, Rosie's father, had a problem, and his problem concerned his brother-in-law, Kumarraj. When Mr Amos told his wife that he wished to retire from his position as Head Clerk in the school office, she had come up with the idea that her youngest brother Kumarraj be approached to replace him. The young man was more than qualified. First, he could type, a skill Amosgaru had never needed, second, he could read and write English. As much of the correspondence carried out in the office was in Telugu, and the English letters were written by Rimmergaru, Mr Amos had not needed that skill either.
His great contribution to the work in the office was his talent for written Telugu expression. Rimmergaru had often asked him to check over the Telugu text of sermons he had written, and always appreciated Mr. Amos' corrections and recommendations. And Mr Newby, as a new student of the language, also called upon Mr Amos' help. It was not known at this stage if Kumarraj would show the same flair, but nevertheless he had other useful skills and his wife's idea seemed a good one.

When Mr Amos approached Rimmergaru with the suggestion that his brother-in-law replace him, Rimmergaru had agreed in principle to a trial period of three months, during which time Mr Amos would instruct his brother-in-law in office standards and procedures. It had been much harder to persuade Kumarraj to leave his life in Masulipatam, but Mrs Amos in the end had succeeded, her efforts fuelled by the tenderness and concern she felt for her youngest brother.

As the eldest daughter she had looked after him like a mother, carried him everywhere on her hip and kept him from ever experiencing the horror of being alone.

Kumarraj's early life was charmed, doted on by his family, praised by his teachers, popular with friends, all working together it seemed to smooth his path. His elderly parents arranged his marriage to a nice looking girl, educated and good at sport, who turned out to be a loving biddable wife. All this Kumarraj had accepted as his due. But then the tragedy, a double tragedy, took place, unexpected and unimaginable that it would happen to such a fortunate young man. Shanti, his wife, died giving birth to their first child, a boy, and the baby had died too, both of them overwhelmed by a very lengthy and painful labour.

Kumarraj unfortunately both saw and heard his wife's distress, the hours, the days of it. He resisted attempts by family members to take him away, to shield him from the worst. His eyes looked inward and he barely registered the death of his son. It had been expected that this vain and self-centred young man would grow to love his wife, but they had not known how much.

It was one of the distressing things in life, reflected Mr Amos, that there were times when it was not possible to shield one's loved ones from hurt or take on their burden of pain. Kummaraj could not do that for his wife, or Mrs Amos for Kumarraj.

With the central joy of his life extinguished, Kumarraj was like an empty shell or husk. He was still vain, but he did not look after his health. He expected favours and promotions but he did not work for them, and it was a shock when he suffered a demotion to a dead end position. It was thought another marriage might be a remedy, but when this possibility was raised with him, he said categorically he would never marry again.

So it was Mrs. Amos idea that if Kumarraj were in Kalampett she could care for him, that he could start a new life in a different place among a new set of people. Kumarraj,

who had never visited there, objected that Kalampett was a hot dusty fly-ridden no account place, but in the end he said he would give it a three-month trial.

However it was not only Kalampett itself that Kumarraj belittled. He did not think much of their two-room house, with the communal bed taking up most of the space in one room. Certainly it was small without much furniture but Mr and Mrs Amos had happily brought up four girls there and they were very fond of a house packed full of memories. It was a surprise to them that anyone would see it as in some way inadequate. Mr and Mrs Amos had not seen Kumarraj for some years, and they were shocked by his general look of discontent and habits of belittlement. His mocking laughter, after he poked fun at someone, grated on Mr Amos's ears.

Mr Amos feared that it was these characteristics that would make it unlikely for Kumarraj to find favour with his employers, despite his knowledge of English and his typing skills. If Kumarraj's position at the office was not confirmed after the end of three months, Mr Amos would have to put off his retirement because he would not leave Rimmergaru and the young Mr Newby unaided. And if Kumarraj departed from Kalampett, Mrs Amos would be disconsolate. For all parties to be happy, Kumarraj would have to change for the better, but Mr Amos, who was not usually pessimistic, could not foresee such a transformation.

One morning, the peon from his position on the office verandah, alerted them to the arrival of unexpected visitors. Mr Amos, looking out the window, saw a tonga draw up outside, not one of the shabby tongas available for hire outside the railway station, but a private tonga with colourful fringed curtains and a glimpse of a woven mat and cushions inside, drawn by a well-fed horse. A smart young man dressed in shirt and trousers got out

first and turned to assist an older man. The older stranger had thick grey hair and caste marks painted on his forehead. He wore a spotless white dhoti, and his buttoned jacket fitted tightly over a stomach long accustomed to ample meals. Mr Amos recognized the older man as a landlord with an extensive estate, the landlord who allowed the school children to picnic in his mango grove near the river. As the two men made their way up the office steps, Mr Amos saw the peon go to have a chat with the tonga wallah, and a boy slip out of the classroom block opposite, in fact his wife's classroom and softly approach the horse. It was the boy called Prakasam, the boy Mrs Amos had such difficulties with trying to teach him number.

That morning the office was crowded with Rimmergaru and Mr Newby and Kumarraj and himself all present at once, and all four chairs were in use. The doragarulu stood and exchanged greetings and pleasantries with the visitors and Mr Amos moved his chair from behind his desk making it available. He signalled to Kumarraj, who was still lounging in his chair, to do the same.

When the visitors were seated, the older man came down to business.

"As you know Rimmergaru, it will soon be time to harvest the cholam, and this year we are expecting a good crop."

"You must be pleased."

"Yes, of course. But this very abundance gives me a major problem. We have no hope of selling all the grain. With these present troubles, people are more short of money than is usual. Normally we store the surplus, but we know if we do that the storehouses will be broken into by the communists and we will be robbed. So I have come today to offer you the grain for your school children."

"This is a very welcome offer, we need the grain, but like others we are unable to pay for it."

"I was expecting you to say that, but that is not a problem. I know that when these disturbances are over, you will pay me. Is that agreed?"

Rimmergaru and Mr. Newby looked at each other.

"I know we will need the grain," said Rimmergaru.

"What is the quantity and what is the price?" asked Mr Newby in his new minted Telugu.

The landlord had something between four to six bullock carts of grain in mind. A substantial quantity. Calculations were made, a price arrived at.

It was at this point that Kumarraj spoke.

"Look, look!" He pointed to a window. The boy Prakasam, with his too big teeth, was peering through the bars at the visitors. "Wild animal at the zoo. Heh, heh, heh."

Everyone turned to look and the face disappeared.

"It is the boy Prakasam," said Mr Amos. "He should be in class. I will ask the peon to take him."

"Thank you Mr Amos."

"Mr Amos is a very experienced and trusted clerk, helpful in all kinds of ways," Rimmergaru said to the landlord, "Mr Kumarraj is new and has come to learn how we do things here."

The landlord acknowledged Mr Amos, but barely glanced at Kumarraj. He began to speak of the arrangements for delivery, of which the young man, his nephew, would take charge.

Rimmergaru and Mr Newby walked outside with the visitors. Kumarraj was glowering.

"Insulting idiots," he muttered.

"Such remarks might go down well with your past classmates, but they will not help you here. Both the Doragaru and the Dorasani like us to be respectful, even to the school children."

Mr Amos went outside and spoke to the peon.

"Where is the boy now?"

"He is up that neem tree."

"Call him down and take him back to class. Amosammagaru's class."

The tonga was driving towards the gates, leaving dust clouds behind.

"Well, Mr Amos, that offer of grain is most fortunate, but storing it will be our problem now."

Rimmer Doragaru walked back with Mr. Amos to the office.

They sat down on their chairs at their desks to discuss the problem.

"Our present storage space in the bungalows and hostels will not be enough. And we don't want to be seen constructing a storehouse. That might invite trouble."

Mr Amos was jiggling his knee with worry. What would he say this evening to Mrs Amos when she asked with hope and apprehension vying in her eyes, "Tell me, my husband, how did my brother do today?" But he turned his mind from this problem and considered the one posed by Rimmergaru, and was rewarded with an inspiration.

"A village man when he wants to hide something will bury it in the floor of his hut, and at night his family sleep over it. Is this not correct, Kumarraj? I am thinking there is much suitable floor space in the hostel dormitories, Doragaru."

"Good man. Excellent idea! The boys could dig the holes in teams. It will be best if we did the work ourselves and did not hire outside help. You will be prepared to help Newby and I do some spade work, won't you Kumarraj?" He said that last sentence in English.

Kumarraj looked shocked that he should be asked to participate in cooli work.

"Yes, Doragaru. That is no problem."

Mr Amos stopped jiggling his knee. He would tell his wife how Kumarraj had consented to participate in this scheme, a scheme that he himself had come up with to the satisfaction of the Doragaru, and Mrs Amos would once again smile.

A man staggered through the garden gate. The Rimmers were having afternoon tea on the verandah. Rachel's eyes widened and she stood up.

"What is it?" said Ross, turning his head.

The villager walked along the verandah towards them, his raised hands clasped in a mixture of greeting and supplication. His bare cracked heels scraped on the stone floor. He spoke in gasps.

"Doragaru. Help us. Our village. We are murdered."

Ross and Harriet were standing. They moved towards him.

"Sit down, ayah. Sit. You must have some water first." Harriet rang the small brass bell for Graceamma. "A tumbler of water, please. Quickly."

Ross crouched down beside the man.

"You are Kanthayah, is that right? From the village of Chinnapet?"

"Yes. You must help us." The man's eyes closed.

Ross gripped his shoulder.

"Rest now. We will talk later."

Harriet hurried to the kitchen.

"Abraham, the man is very weak. Please, boil two eggs and put them with the rice and lentils. And some greens from the garden. I'm sure he's anaemic. Thank you, Abraham. Be quick."

"Ross," she said, walking back at speed into the living room. "After you've had a talk with Kanthayya, we should send him to Virginia for a check-up. I'd better go now." She clapped on her topi and walked out into the glare. Some edible weeds had been found growing on the edge of the field of cholam. It was a discovery she was excited about. The children did not have enough leafy vegetables in their diet. They were picking the leaves under Jacob's supervision and Harriet went to see that all was going well.

When Graceamma took the man his food she thought he was asleep. He was curled on his side on the verandah, his turbaned head pillowed on his arm.

"Ayah, I have brought your food." She set the plate down near his head.

He opened an eye. It inspected the plate for a moment and then he sat up.

She also had a small brass pot filled with water. She poured it for him as he washed his hand, the water spilling over the verandah edge and pitting the dust below.

She watched him tackle the food. He needed the food, but he was also tired or ill, so he ate slowly and sighed between mouthfuls.

"Ayah, what is happening in your village?"

"These men come at night. They demand food. We do not always have enough so the beat us."

"Who are these men?"

"We do not know. Just that they always come at night. And then the other men come during the day. These men also demand food. Each group, the night invaders and the day invaders, threaten us with punishments if we feed the others. One lot say they will cut off our ears. The others say our noses.

He sighed. His fingers released a ball of rice back onto the plate.

"Try and eat more."

"In a little while, perhaps. Last night they shot a man. The son of the headman. He was standing up for us, for the village. He told the men there would be no food for them that night. That our children were going hungry, that our men and women were losing their strength to work in the fields. He was beaten until he fell to the ground and there he was beaten some more. His mother threw herself on him to protect him, but she was dragged off. They would not listen to anything his father or the rest of us said. They said they would make an example of this boy so that we would never again refuse them. Then their leader pointed his gun and shot him."

"How old was this boy?"

"Perhaps eighteen."

The same age as Anand, but Graceamma did not allow herself to be distracted by this thought.

"You must tell the Doragaru all this."

"Even that the headman's wife was dishonoured?"

"All of it. Tell him everything. He will try to put a stop to this. Get those badmashes punished."

"What will this Doctorammagaru do to me?" Kanthayyah asked Jacob a little fearfully. He had never encountered such a personage before.

"First she will look at your tongue and your eyes," said Jacob. "Then she will put rubber tubes in her ears. Such tubes are joined to a disc through which she can hear how your heart is beating and your lungs are breathing. Then she will take your blood." He was taking Kanthayah around to the hospital in the bullock cart, along the winding road to the main gates. There was a much shorter way on foot that involved climbing over a stone wall, but it was thought the villager was too tired and weak to be asked to do that.

"My blood! Can you not stop her from doing this?"

"It is nothing. A mere prick. To step on a thorn is more painful. She needs only a drop or two. She looks at the blood through very strong glasses and she can see if your blood is weak or strong. If it is carrying illness, she can find out what that sickness is. Then she will give you medicines."

"My wife asked me to return with medicines for our children. Our youngest is poorly and will not feed. Will this Dr Ammagaru listen if I ask?"

"She will listen." The bullock was slowing, and Jacob dug his heels into its rump to hurry it along.

"There is something I will tell you about this Doctorammagaru, so that when you see her you will not be needlessly alarmed. She is unusual looking for a woman. Firstly, she is very tall. You saw tonight how Rimmergaru is a tall man. Well she, though a woman, is as tall as he. And her voice is very deep, also like a man's. Her hands and feet are large. Her eyebrows are thick and meet over her nose which is like a hawk's beak. If you are overawed or frightened by the sight of her, remember this that I am telling you. That woman's heart is full of love. She works always for others and she is an expert doctor. You will be safe with her."

The bundy lurched over a rut in the road. Jacob fell silent and Kanthayyah ruminated on what he had heard. Their bodies swayed peacefully with the movement of the ox and cart.

"Maybe she is not a woman."

"Who?"

"This Doctorammagaru, who is so like a man. Maybe she is a man/woman."

" No. There is no doubt she is a woman."

"But how can you be sure?"

"I tell you I know. Once, by chance, I saw her naked."

"Abbah. And what did she look like?"

"You have seen a woman, have you not? That is what Dr Ammagaru looked like."

When Virginia arrived in India, she took a plane from Bombay to Hyderabad, and stayed there a night with a family contact who worked in the British Residency. He had an aristocratic Indian friend who owned a monoplane and loved to fly it around. The next day Virginia found herself in this plane with an exuberant pilot who whooped her up and down and around as though in charge of a magic carpet. As the crow flies, or a monoplane could, it was a short flight from Hyderabad to the small grassy field at the edge of Kalampett township. However, her pilot and guide took her on a scenic tour, starting with a quick spin over Hyderabad City, pointing out the lake, the palaces, a gateway with four minarets, the great tombs of past rulers at Golconda and the diamond mines. Then he whisked her further afield along the courses of rivers, pointing out collieries and other sites of mineral wealth, skimming over jungle treetops. "Look, look. Do you see that cow elephant with her calf in that clearing?" and he swooped down to give her a closer look.

What an experience! What an unrivalled opportunity to get this bird's eye view of Hyderabad's topography! How glamorous to arrive in Kalampett by plane, rather than endure the tiresome, slow, dirty, plebeian journey by train.

By the time the monoplane taxied to a bumpy stop, Virginia felt prostrated with nausea. She had started the day with a head cold. With the sudden changes in altitude the pressure in her ears had became excruciating, then her stomach began to feel unwell. The handsome pilot jumped out of his seat and gallantly helped her down. Once on the ground, which failed to feel firm, she turned away from him and was violently ill.

He must have been disconcerted, if not disgusted, but his well-schooled manners were a match for this misadventure.

"This is my fault," he declared. "I am deeply sorry that you have suffered on account of my impetuosity, my own exhilaration at the modern miracle of flight. My friends tell me that even when I drive a car, I allow my predilection for speed, my fondness for manoeuvring the twists and turns of the road, overcome my concern for the passengers' comfort. However I hope, when you have recovered from this indisposition, you will think of the flight with some recollections of pleasure."

Virginia wanted to be somewhere else. Somewhere she could sit down quietly with a drink. In her mind she cursed this man and his facility with the English language. If only he were a wordless yokel. But then it seemed there was such a person at hand.

"I see your next conveyance is here waiting for you." At the edge of the field there was a stationary wooden cart hitched to a bullock. A man wearing only a loincloth and turban sat on it, regarding them impassively. Virginia's new friend waved this man over and started to question him. It surprised Virginia to gather that her friend's grasp of the vernacular was not nearly as good as his English, but eventually communication was achieved.

"Yes, everything is as it should be. This man has come for you. He knows who you are, and where he is to take you. Now you will be able to experience a traditional Indian form of transport. I shall let our mutual friend Richard know that I delivered you safely, though not unfortunately in prime condition."

"Thank you," said Virginia. "It was kind of you to fly me here. A flight I shall remember. Goodbye." She shook his hand. Once the pilot became airborne his impetuosity and exhilaration led him to circle the field and somersault his plane before finally flying away. From the bullock cart, Virginia responded to his wave, her face stretched painfully,

more in a grimace than a grin. Then she slumped down in the silence of the yokel, who on closer inspection looked more like a handsome pirate. He wore a redstone earring, and had a missing bicuspid. That gap in his otherwise even, white teeth only accentuated the smoothness of his muscles, his burnished near ebony skin, the symmetry of his features.

Virginia diagnosed the start of a fever.

When the unfamiliar motion of the bullock cart triggered more nausea, she allowed herself to groan loudly. And then when her hand flew to her mouth, he halted the cart.

She spent her first two days in bed mainly asleep. A woman, a rounded figure in a cotton print frock, soft brown hair in a bun, Northumbrian vowels, identified herself as Hilda and appeared from time to time with cups of weak tea. Virginia woke to find a jug of water and small offerings of food on the bedside table. A bowl of rice and curds. Some thin sour lentil water. A piece of bread with Marmite. All equally unappetising.

Hilda appeared again and sat on the edge of the bed.

"You aren't touching the food, but at least you're drinking water."

"Why does it taste smoky?"

"It's boiled. On a wet day, when the water is boiled in a shack, it can become smoked. It's not so strong when it's done in the open."

"I see. I don't suppose you have any brandy, or strawberries?"

"Unfortunately not. The closest we'ld come to that is communion wine and a custard apple."

"You know, I shall get up and have a bath."

"Good. You must be feeling better, and you're not looking so green about the gills."

There was no bath as such and no taps. Virginia stood and poured water over herself. It splashed over her and down her legs and puddled at her feet before eddying out of a waste hole.

Then a door opened, the door that connected the bathroom to the outside. She had not thought to bolt it. In came a man, the pirate in the guise of a servant carrying a pot of water on his shoulder. He stood there immobile. Virginia grabbed a towel to cover herself and then in her most authoritative voice told the man to "Da! Da!" The man ducked his head, set down the waterpot and left. She thought she detected a puzzled look, but he must have understood her first foray into speaking Telugu, because he had complied. She was in the bedroom when she was struck with a deeper embarrassment. That two letter word she had come out with so forcefully and effectively, was not equivalent to the two-letter English word 'go.' Quite the reverse. She had told the man in idiomatic language to 'come, come', but thankfully he had fled.

Virginia rang the small brass bell that Hilda had left by her bed. By the time Hilda came, Virginia's mortification had become laughter. "Let me tell you what I've just done. Something I do not intend to pass on to my Telugu lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies." Hilda's laughter was gleeful.

"A bit of hilarity does one good," she said wiping her eyes. "Don't worry about Jacob, though. He's very discreet."

"Oh, I'm not concerned. It's unlikely to be the last time I scandalise the natives. Hilda, you mentioned communion wine. Is there any available for unconsecrated consumption?"

Hilda's hazel eyes scanned her face. Her expression was still amused, but a little distanced as though a limit had been reached.

"Don't be silly, Virginia."

The Rimmers got up while it was still dark. Ross dressed, putting on his white cassock. Harriet and Rachel remained in their housecoats. Yesterday, after hearing Kanthayyah's account, Ross had cycled into Kalampett to report the aggression to the authorities. They said they would send a police jeep. They travelled armed, for protection, but there was little they could do, beyond questioning and collecting scant information. The villagers knew very little and were in any case frightened to be seen talking to the police, and the miscreants had gone, melted away.

Whether the police went or not, Ross was going anyway. Kanthayah's village was off the beaten track, one reason why the police jeep might not be dispatched, but it was no more than a four hour walk.

Archie and David were going with Ross. Lester, too. He had been very keen, very determined, saying that if his leg held them up they were to push on and he would follow behind. As the three men arrived, pushing their way through the garden gate, the horizon behind them was molten with colour, and a shaft of light caught Lester's thick thatch of blonde hair from behind turning it into a nimbus. Thus haloed he walked towards them, his face in shadow, and Rachel who was standing beside Harriet, abruptly sat down. As the men joined them they could see their faces. Archie's thin lined cheeks and bent nose, David

with a days's speckled growth glistening on his dark skin, and Lester's eyes showing up a bright blue, his young clean skin freshly shaved. Rachel hurried from the verandah.

The men were too wound up, too anxious to make a start to sit down for breakfast. They sipped tea and ate Abraham's hardboiled eggs as they stood looking out over the field of cholam towards some distant hills.

When they left Rachel returned to stand with her mother and watch the four men, two of them cassocked, walk away. The cassocks were not the most practical garb for a hike, but practicality was not the point. They could be seen and recognised from a distance. Men coming in peace, coming to bring comfort.

"Time for our breakfast, Rachel." Harriet went inside, but Rachel stayed until the figures dwindled beyond recognition.

Rahel's Diary

I am filled with shame. That a man, this Nasir, whom I have seen often enough standing beside the General, but never really noticed - it is the Arab General, after all, with his beard, his height, his broad shoulders and his deep respect for my father who is the imposing one – this Nasir has me bewitched. I could not draw my eyes away from his face, his figure, his smiles, his gestures, the elegance and proper humility of his deportment. How did I not notice such things before? Carelessly my eye fell on him and his beauty struck me with the force of a missile. An arrow penetrated my eye and lodged somewhere near my panicking heart. In my belly there was a quaking, an overturning, a rearranging that I have never felt before. I would have fallen had I not sat down. I could make no sense of it.

After all, I have appreciated beauty throughout my life. My first sight of a full moon had me reaching for it from my mother's arms. Beauty is everywhere, often in quite commonplace things – in a smile in an old wrinkled face, in the eager expressions of children at play, the flash of a blue jay in flight, the call of a hoopoe, the smell of orange blossom or rosewater. The pure clear sounds of a bamboo flute played by a master musician. Poetry, art, weaving, the grandeur of a caparisoned elephant walking in procession, minarets reaching above the dirt of the city streets, the luminous green of paddy in a wet field and a white heron rising, the blaze of a gul mohr in bloom seen from a speeding train, the melancholy sight of a lone whitewashed tomb on uninhabited land.

Beauty has soothed me, gladdened my senses or quickened my blood, made me marvel, lifted my spirits or surprised me into a sharp intake of breath. But always I have remained myself, my head clear and in possession of my body. Until now.

Until my eye fell carelessly on that Nasir and my body betrayed me. Since then I have had to put up with uncontrolled surges and senseless longings, all the more idiotic now that I know this Naisr is betrothed to the daughter of the General, no less, and the wedding is in preparation.

Yesterday I returned to the spyhole. Perhaps I had made a mistake. Perhaps his nose was too big, his teeth uneven. He was bandy legged and had hairs on the backs of his hands.

But the mistake was to return.

I saw again that his beauty is complete: his hair as black and shining as crow's feathers, his skin the golden colour of wheat, his shaven face fresh, smooth and clean, so different from the older, worn faces of my father and his usual attendants and advisers.

I could write poems about his perfect nose, the curves of his lips, his smooth shapely hands, the emerald ring on the little finger of his left hand. How light seems to follow him wherever he moves, how well his head is balanced on his straight shoulders, how I should like to lean my head against his chest.

Then I spotted a flaw. His teeth are white and even, but one front tooth slightly overlaps the other. Unfortunately, instead of detracting from his perfection this gives his smile an added charm.

As I gazed, he glanced around the room. He looked in my direction. His head stayed there turned towards me. Had he noticed the spyhole? Could he see my eye and beyond, into my mind sensing my thoughts and feelings? I was caught out, exposed. The horror and shame of him knowing! I turned and fled.

In the Zenana I threw myself into activities, played boisterous games with the children, quarrelled over trifles, avoiding at all costs to be alone with my confusion and misery. My mother called me. "You are agitated." She had me lie on a divan and close my eyes. She put cool compresses on my forehead. A servant massaged my feet with soothing oils. I worried that when we were alone she would question me, but instead she whispered, "My clever daughter, Rahel, how proud I am of you. What pleasure and delight you have given me from the time you were born and while you were growing. And look at you now, at the beautiful woman you are becoming."

" I do not like becoming a woman," I whispered back. "I can't bear it, the way my body rules my thoughts and feelings. I have lost the person I was and don't know myself anymore. The idea of being afflicted like this for the rest of my life… ! How can you and other women bear it?"

"Nothing is wrong with you. These feelings are unfamiliar and fierce, that is all. They will ease off and you will find a balance. Rahel, have you seen someone who has given rise to these feelings? "

When my mother asks a question it is impossible to deny her an answer. Not any answer, but the right answer. When I was small I thought she could see through walls, had eyes at the back of her head, had preternaturally sharp ears because she always knew when I was lying. I now think she only asks a question when she already knows the answer. And she doesn't need supernatural powers. The zenana is full of eyes and spies, eavesdroppers galore. A false answer would be received by a raising of an eyebrow, after a second false answer she would ask me to repeat what I had said, because she hadn't heard me correctly, after a third one she quietly remarked that she would wait until I was ready to tell her. Her patience was formidable. She didn't punish me, didn't put me into Coventry, but this knowledge between us that she was waiting was a constant impediment, like a brace on my leg stopping my ease of movement. Every glimpse I had of her, her focussed attention at the mirror as she plucked her eyebrows, her sure touch as she applied kohl around her eye, her meticulous attention to the fit of a blouse, how elegantly she picked up a ball of pilau with her fingertips when she ate, the sight of her creamy midriff as she unwound her sari at night, in every stroke as she brushed my hair. Each simple everyday action that normally would go unremarked, held the knowledge that she was waiting. The longest I held out was seventeen days back when I was eight and my conscience was pricking me fiercely because I had secretly borrowed a sibling's toy, accidently broken it, and rather than confess threw it out the window. The zenana was upturned in the search, and later the damaged doll, now with a shattered face, and missing

shoe was returned. Found by the gardener in a bed of zinnias, it passed through many hands from one servant to another until it finally returned to the zenana. The reappearance of the damaged doll provoked inconsolable tears. I stood apart. My mother looked at me across the room. She merely lifted an eyebrow, but it was enough. I turned and walked towards my mother's room to confess.This time I did not delay.

."I saw Nasir Shah." I didn't need to say anything more.

"Nasir Shah is a fine young man. And he is shortly to be married to the General's daughter. I do not think he will want a second wife just yet." My mother was not joking or being ironic, she was simply being practical.

"I don't want to be a second wife!" This burst out of me without thought. How would this sound to a mother who was not even a third or fourth official wife, but one of many unofficials who were taken to the Nizam's bed for a short time and then abandoned? Not materially abandoned, because was she not clothed and fed and housed in luxury? But left without the love and companionship of a mate.

For the first time, I felt critical of my father and burned with shame on my mother's behalf.

She did not respond to this thoughtless outburst except to stroke my arm.

"With the right man and at the right time and place, these feelings you have will not be a burden, but a gift." She spoke soothingly, allowing me such an expectation, even though for her the Nizam could never have been the right man.

Chapter 10 February 1949

Kalampett

Yesterday Mr Newby had returned from Bezwada with the salaries, and Mr Amos was showing Kumarraj how the wages were counted out and put into envelopes, and the ledger with the names of the village clergy was filled with the date and the amounts ready for their signatures as they were handed their salary.

It was a big day when the clergy dressed in white cassocks gathered, each bringing news from his small corner of the countryside. They gathered outside the office under the neem trees and Tundrigaru and Rimmergaru moved among them. After they had gathered they would spend the morning in prayer and bible study in the bungalow and then they would be served lunch sitting crosslegged on the bungalow verandah. The meal was cooked outside in large blackened vessels. Abraham was in charge of the cooking, but the menu was chosen by Rimmerammagaru who followed the principles of a balanced diet. This invariably meant brown rice for the sake of vitamin B, a substance lost when rice was polished. The clergy did not complain, because it was known that the Bishop, as an example to others, ate brown rice daily in his home, though such a thing was difficult to believe.

Rimmergaru joked that Mrs Rimmer, though she did not believe in the literal truth of the Bible, believed in "the verbal inspiration of Aykroyd's The Nutritive Value of Indian Foods and the Planning of Satisfactory Diets". It was on the principles of this Mr Aykroyd that the meal for the clergy would be based. Very healthy, but less in oil, and some said less in flavour.

This day the clergy milling outside were fewer in number. Not everyone had been able to make the journey, and three had arrived with their families that they wished to leave in the safety of Kalampett.

Unfortunately, his brother-in-law, Kumarraj, regarded these village clergy as simpletons. They could not speak English as he could, a skill he liked to demonstrate each morning when he arrived at the office by greeting Mr Newby with the words, "Good morning, goodmorning, Mr Newby, sir. I trust you are well today." These words would be said in a jocular tone, but after Mr Newby had returned the salutation and enquired in turn into Kumarraj's health, Kumarraj would lapse into a somewhat sullen and complaining attitude, that only changed when he could laugh at someone.

The last clergyman to arrive that morning was Rev. Moses of Cheddapalli. His village was the furthest away, and because of a bad heart he walked slowly and Jacob had been sent with the bullock cart to meet him along the way, and bring him and his wife. As the bundy came to a halt the other clergy gathered around.

Hearing the hubbabub, Kumarraj and Mr Newby went to the window. Kumarraj started laughing. He pointed and said something in English to Mr Newby, and laughed again. "Heh,heh,heh." At that same time Rimmergaru walked into the office. He doubtless had heard what Kumarraj had said in English, and Mr Amos dreaded to think what that might have been. He knew it would be something critical, because Kumarrajraj liked to voice criticisms in English in front of people who would not understand what he was saying, and Mr Newby was looking uncomfortable as he often did after Kumarraj's remarks.

"Kumarraj," said Rimmergaru, "I'd like to make it a practice from now on to only speak Telugu in the office. This way we will be helping Mr Newby prepare for his language exam." Then he turned and spoke to Mr Amos. "Amosgaru, I don't think Kumarraj knows Rev. Moses' story. He should know more about the clergy.Tell him the story, if you will, at a convenient moment. And Lester, if you are not too busy, you could put in an appearance in the bungalow. We are about to make a start."

Shortly thereafter, the compound was quiet and Mr Amos was alone in the office with his brother-in-law. He got up to sharpen a pencil, standing so the flakes of wood would fall into the wastepaper basket. Kumarraj was batting a ball of paper into the air with a ruler. Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap and with each tap the self-satisfied grin on his face widened. Mr Amos set down his penknife a little loudly on the table, and that distracted Kumarraj who let the ball drop.

"Did you see that, Amos? I batted ten in a row before I missed."

"Kumarraj, what did you say to Mr Newby when you were at the window?"

"Did I say something to him? Oh yes, I remember now. That man is humourless."

"What was your joke?"

" I pointed out that man with the growth over his eyebrow. I said if it got any bigger he would not be able to see out of his right eye. Heh, heh."

"That man is the Rev. Moses. He is a good man."

"He may be a very good man, but he is nevertheless ugly."

"Dr. Ammagaru says that growth can be removed, but Rev. Moses doesn't want that."

"Then the man is also a fool."

"It seems his grandfather had one, too. Rev. Moses keeps his to remind himself of his family."

"Why does he need to be reminded? Can't he go and see them." Kumarraj took a sheet of paper and put it into the typewriter, and turned the roller.

"They do not want to see him again. His family disowned him when he converted."

Kumarraj had his fingers poised over the keys, but his hands were still, possibly because he was listening.

"In fact his mother poisoned him. His sister went for help and he was taken to hospital where his life was saved." Kumarraj raised his head and looked at his brother-in-law. "His mother said that since she was going to lose her son, she would rather lose him to death than to a religion of untouchables. His family were shopkeepers. As you and I know…"

"That story is very moving, Amos, but Rimmergaru has left me with a report to type." Kumarraj started tapping the keys fast and loud.

What Amosgaru was going to say was that Christianity was not a religion for untouchables alone and he could name Christians who came from the whole range of castes. But the untouchables were particularly attracted to a religion that taught that each individual, however lowly, was valued and loved. Whole families, and sometimes groups of families, a village in fact would discuss the matter together for weeks and then decide that this was the faith they wished to live by. It was much harder for people, who by converting would lose family and friends and caste, to make that decision. But Mr Amos could not voice such thoughts against the smothering clatter of the typewriter.

Kumarraj typed not looking at his hands at all, but only at the handwritten pages he was copying and when the typewriter bell pinged, without a glance he reached smoothly for the lever and with scarcely a pause went back to his keys. There was no doubt the fellow was an expert typist, but as to his position being confirmed at the end of the trial period, Mr Amos would not say anything to dishearten his wife, but to himself he acknowledged that it was a matter still very much in the balance.

"My husband, have more," urged Rosie's mother, holding out the dish with the remains of the goat curry. A final morsel of meat in rich gravy. He was a small eater and he declined, holding up a long-fingered, elegant hand.

"My brother." Her mother's face showed the special tenderness she felt for her youngest sibling, he who had suffered such a tragedy, on whose plate she had already heaped plenty.

Rosie touched her mother's arm. She whispered.

"Amma, you should eat it yourself."

"Ssh. Go on, brother, take it."

Kumarraj burped. "How can I refuse my sister's cooking?" He looked around at the others, smiling complacently, and with a gesture assented to the offer.

Her uncle made her sick. Rosie relaxed her fingers, releasing a ball of rice back onto the plate.

"Rosie, take some perugu with your rice."

"No, amma." She usually liked finishing her meal with some curds on the last of the rice, but today she felt she could not eat more. "I have had sufficient. I am now going to serve you."

Her mother always served herself last, and since Kumarraj had come to live with them she had been serving herself less. There were many days, like today, when she had taken no meat.

Rosie scraped out the last of the rice onto her mother's plate. Then she spooned out the perugu.

"Enough, enough," said her mother. "Do you wish me to get fatter?"

"Rosie is doing a good thing," said her father. "I have noticed, my wife, that you are becoming thinner."

"Thinner? What nonsense is this?" laughed her mother.

"Just look at your arms, amma."

"My arms?" She lifted one up wonderingly.

The tight sleeve of her blouse used to bite into the flesh. But now it did not and the skin on her arms hung loose, a little emptied.

"See," said Rosie.

Amma put down her arm rather quickly.

"Well," she said, "I have plenty of flesh on me elsewhere. Haven't I, my husband?"

He did not answer. He was busy removing a particle of food stuck in his teeth.

Kumarraj swallowed a last mouthful and burped his appreciation again.

"Well, I hope my sister is not losing weight on my account." He smiled around at them all.

Rosie got up from the table a little abruptly. It was her job to take around a basin of water, a piece of soap and a cloth. Her father washed his hand first. Her mother waved aside the basin, so Kumarraj could go before her.

"Film star girl . . . "

"Don't call her that." Amma sounded surprisingly sharp, and then she laughed. "If you call Rosie that, she might get a big head."

"Rosie," said Kumarraj, "Look." He pointed at a curry stain on his shirt. "I have a shirt for tomorrow, but I will need this for the next day. Make sure when you wash it, that there is no visible trace of your mother's delicious curry."

"Yes, Uncle."

"Rub the stain with soap and leave the shirt to soak overnight," said Amma, washing her hand. "Then it will be easier for you tomorrow."

Rosie took the cooking pots outside. The air was cool against her burning face. She took some deep breaths. Then she squatted down and began to scour the pots with ash. She scrubbed hard, trying to purge her anger, her disgust. Her uncle was spoilt and overfed, and yet she had heard him complaining to someone about the food her mother cooked. "Goat meat, all the time, goat meat. If only my sister would cook some fish. I miss the shrimps and crab we have in Masulipatam." As Rosie worked, she felt rather than heard Kumarraj come out. She remained bent over a pot, not looking up. And he said nothing, standing too close. His pale trousers were beside her in the dark, and she felt his heat. She closed her eyes and averted her face.

"Film star girl . . ." Murmured words, secret, hateful.

"Don't call me that. You heard my mother." She looked up then. His fleshy torso was bare. He held out his shirt.

"A present for you."

"I won't wash it."

"So, this film star girl has spirit. And flashing eyes. You will wash it. After all, I am a prince, a king, a man. Your mother will be very unhappy if she hears of this insolence."

The shirt flapped down onto the ground causing an eddying current of stale sweat. Kumarraj was gone.

"Rosie, do you have soap there?" called her mother.

"No, amma."

Her mother came outside. "Here, rub it on the shirt. My, how pleasant it feels out here."

Rosie took the soap.

"How are you, my daughter? You are quiet tonight. You do not seem yourself." Her mother bent down and put a hand on Rosie's shoulder. "Abbah, how warm you feel."

"It's all right, Amma. I have become warm while scrubbing the pots."

Rosie picked up the sticky shirt and started looking for the stain.

"Surely you cannot see. I'll bring a lamp."

When her mother returned with the hurricane lamp, she lingered for a moment.

"You are a good girl, Rosie, and I do not like to see you like this. Perhaps you should sleep early tonight."

It was kind of her mother to show concern, but even in her dreams Rosie did not escape from the pudgy leering face of her uncle.

"How is the Telugu coming along, Lester?" Hilda asked in her quiet voice. They were dinner guests at Virginia's bungalow.

"Nearing the end of the text book. The grammar itself is not difficult, it's now a matter of building up vocabulary. Writing is more complicated and I still confuse some letters."

"The ees and the gees."

"Exactly."

"And the khees and ghees," said Virginia passing around a plate.

"Those too."

You never knew what you were going to get to eat at Virginia's place. On her own she dined meagrely on rice and dhal and curds, but when she invited people for dinner, she would give her cook, with his limited repertoire, the night off, and she would open tins of which she had a seemingly inexhaustible supply. Tins from Fortnum and Mason and Harrod's, ordered by her mother the Honourable Mrs Barker. Virginia's mother was the daughter of a baronet and her father was a famous Harley St surgeon. Virginia had grown up posh and it had given her, thought Lester, an enormous amount of self-confidence.

Hilda was nibbling on a cracker.

"This paste is delicious. What is it, Virginia?"

"Pate de foie gras. To be followed by stilton soup, steak and kidney pudding, and tomatoes and gulab jaman from Kalampett bazaar."

"Everything scrumptious, like a schoolgirl feast. Perhaps we should postpone eating till midnight." Hilda smiled.

Lester had noticed before how these two women became playful when they were together.

"Lester," said Virginia, "You were talking about Telugu. Talk some more."

"Yes, Doctorammagaru." Lester bowed his head, responding to Virginia's imperious tone. "I was wondering, is it just something missionaries do, addressing servants using the suffix of respect? I was in Dornakal last week and I noticed the Bishop's wife didn't. She spoke to her servants using -ra and not –rundi."

"We missionaries do have that tendency," said Hilda. "It only seems right to be particularly polite to the servants who do so much for us."

"I myself take a more robust attitude," said Virginia. "Ross and Harriet in their need to be courteous tie themselves up in knots. There is no word for 'please' in everyday Telugu. They have dug up this obscure word 'diachasee' which they use instead. It must confuse a lot of people, though their servants are used to it and understand what is behind this peculiarity. But it is also part of Ross and Harriet's Western way, our way indeed, to expect an order or instruction to be carried out promptly, so the Telugu word for 'quickly' is frequently on their lips. A typical instruction to Abraham might be, 'Diachasee, annum twaraga teeskarundi'. A mischevious translation of that might be 'If you would be so gracious, O respected one, bring the food <u>immediately</u>!'"

They laughed quietly.

"What I find difficult," said Lester, "is being taller. When I'm standing talking to a chap, I find myself quite literally looking down at him. That makes me quite uncomfortable."

"Maybe that is why Archie when he has to speak to someone does so by walking alongside him," said Hilda.

"In the office, when visitors are seated, we are on an equal level, but not everyone, a villager for instance, is comfortable sitting on a chair, so then I move to the verandah and we sit crosslegged on a mat."

"I find my height a great advantage," said Virginia. "It is much harder for men to be rude to me when they have to look up. But this height discrepancy could disappear in two or three generations. Harriet has been banging on for years about vitamins and a balanced diet. Her one woman nutritional mission has been very successful, and I do take my hat off to her. Her boarding school children are very healthy. Healthier and taller than the higher caste children who live in town. She scored a great coup when she persuaded the Bishop to eat brown rice. Primala complains bitterly about this. It goes completely against the grain not to serve polished white rice to visitors. To make up for this she serves expensive milk and sugar sweets to the visitors to Bishop's House, which works against the benefit of the brown rice."

Virginia got up and went to her frig and came back with a bar of Swiss chocolate.

"These have to be eaten up," she said. "The chocolate is taking up too much room. I need the space for storing penicillin."

"Are you still managing to get drugs?"

"Yes. I'm friends with an engine driver. I've treated his wife and children on a number of occasions. John is regularly in Bezwada and the engine crew are not searched. I've given him a thermos. He's able to get ice and the drugs arrive in good condition even though they travel in the cabin of a steam engine."

Lester laughed. “I, too, have my ways.”

“Well, tell us.”

“Small things, jars of pills I put under my topee. It fits firmly round my head and nothing drops out, and the customs people haven’t started to frisk us yet.”

The conversation drifted pleasantly on until Hilda was the first to make a move.

“Early start tomorrow.” It was a mild joke. They all had early starts.

Lester decided to take the long way home. Virginia’s luxury food was very rich, and it tasted, he thought, of a faint uniform tinniness that lingered in the mouth. He needed to stretch his legs and then have a long drink of water before he turned in.

Chapter 11 March 1948

Cheddapalli

Anand heard voices ahead, coming closer from the other side of a rise. He did not want to meet these people without knowing who they were. He was not badly frightened by the bands, whether Communist or Razakar, but he was tired and thirsty and had no wish to be detained as they always stopped people to question them and find out their business. So he crouched quickly behind a rock, startling a small lizard that disappeared into a crack. The shirt and trousers Anand had been wearing the night he left Hyderabad had become worn and he had taken to wearing village clothes. With the cloth of his dhoti he wiped his dust-filmed glasses as he pressed against the rock, listening to the voices as they passed. He put his glasses back on and peered out.

Three young villagers were talking in a relaxed, friendly way as they bumped along the stony track. The man was wearing kurta pajama and a white cap, the woman a red sari with a green border and the youngest was tall and strong wearing a turban and dhoti, his back bare. He jumped and ran to the side and picked up stones, hurling one to bounce off a rock, another at a crow in a palm tree, and then returned to his companions. It seemed the simple act of walking was not sufficient exercise for his boyish energy.

Anand stood up.

"Namaskaram," he called out, hoping not to startle them. They turned and stared at him in silence. There was a wary look in the eyes of the older two though the younger one remained unconcerned.

Anand moved away from the rock.

"I'm alone. I'm travelling to Kalampett. I hid when I heard you, in case you were communists or razakars. I'm tired and thirsty. Can you help me?"

The man stepped towards him with a friendly expression on his face.

"Come with us. We are returning to our village now. If you had come a week ago you could have had a companion to travel with. That is when one of us left for Kalampett."

Anand felt cheered. This was the first time he had come across anyone who knew of Kalampett. And that one of them had so recently left to go there, made him feel that home was not that far away.

"If you would like to stay the night," said the woman, looking over her shoulder, "you can sleep in our prayer room."

"You have a prayer room? Are you Christians?"

"I am," said the woman. "Hussain there is Muslim, and Ganesh is Hindu. We are all friends."

"Who is this person who left for Kalampett? I am surprised that someone should choose to travel at this time."

"He is the Christian pastor and he goes there once a month. The communist and razarkar groups know who he is and leave him alone."

"But who is this pastor? I must know him as my home is in the mission compound in Kalampett."

"He is Mosesgaru."

"But the Rev. Moses is from the village of …"

"Cheddapalli. We are coming to it now."

Ahead was the usual group of thatched huts with an unusual number of trees that gave the village a restful, shaded appearance. Cheddapalli was the place where he was born. The village for which his amma had great affection. But also the place of their tragedy, where his father died.

After Anand had left the Lambadi in a communist dominated area, he had been unable to return to Hyderabad, constantly stopped by communist cadre, accused of being a police informer and turned back. So after staying with the Lambadi for a while, working in the fields with the men, he decided to travel east towards Kalampett. He knew the rivers flowed eastwards, and once he found a river tracked it for a while, but he had had no accurate idea of where he was or whether his eastern trajectory was north or south of Kalampett and when he mentioned the name to people they had not heard of it. To stumble in this way across the village of Cheddapalli , to find people who knew of Kalampett, was a tremendous relief. He found himself approaching this village with expectations that were not confined to shelter and refreshment. This place had personal significance. He might find someone here who remembered his father and amma. He would see the tamarind tree under which his father had camped on his first night. Perhaps someone would point out the hut in which he had lived with his parents. Was it the same hut that Mosesgaru now lived in? His eyes strained through his glasses searching for glimmers of familiarity, something to awaken a memory.

"Why are you travelling in such times?" asked Hussain, who was now walking beside him.

"It is a long story. I was living in Hyderabad. But to help a friend I travelled with his lambadi wife and sons when her tribe were driven from their grounds. We travelled for

three days until they found a place to settle, and then when I tried to return to Hyderabad, the communists in that area would not allow me passage. They kept forcing me back. They thought I might inform on them. So I lived for awhile with the lambadi and worked with them in the fields. I was not used to the work and it was hard. I kept hoping my friend would turn up and vouch for me, so I could return to my job. But he didn't come and I knew my absence in Hyderabad would be reported back home, and my mother would be very worried, so after a while I decided that since I was unsuccessful in going to Hyderabad, I would turn east and return to Kalampett. I did not expect that along the way I would find myself in Cheddapalli, the village where I was born."

"You were born here? What is your name?"

"My name is Anand."

"And your parents?"

"Luke and Graceamma."

"Shakuntala, Ganesh, come here." Hussain called. "This man is Anand, son of the Rev. Luke."

"You knew him?"

"He is well remembered in our village. You see Ganesh, this big strong boy, it was your father Luke who saved him from drowning. His mother will want to meet you."

"And it is because of your father and your mother, Graceamma, that I started to read and write. Now I have completed my nursing training in Bezwada, but I came home after Mosesgaru wrote to me and suggested I come back to help while there is trouble and people are injured." Hussain and Shakuntala looked at him in an eager, friendly manner. Anand's revelation had driven them to speech, but Ganesh seemed to be dumbstruck. He became

still and looked at Anand as though he, and not his father, had been the hero who saved him.

"I am very happy to meet you all." Anand felt quite dizzy.

" Surely, you must stay with us a while and get to know your native village. Your mother, when she knows where you have been, will understand," said Shakuntala.

"Perhaps. When Rev. Moses returns from Kalampett he might have some news of her, and then I will know if she is well."

"But he will not be returning. He and his wife are to travel from Kalampett to Guntur by train, where he is to have a big operation. We do not expect him back for two or three months."

There was the sound of a motor behind them. A horn blaring. Anand moved with the others as they automatically stepped away from the path. They watched as the car emerged from a swirling dust storm, its clogged wipers slowly sweeping arcs in the dust. The yellow dust thickly covered the body and closed windows of the car. As it passed them it was just possible to make out bulky shapes of men, and eyes peering, searching them intently. The car was creating its own dusty trail, and they covered their lower faces and turned away.

"Who has a car out here?" asked Anand.

"A landlord," said Hussain. "A very rich and powerful man. He is hated and must always travel with his goondas to protect him."

"Has there been trouble here?"

"Some. Unfortunately, there will soon be much more."

Kalampett

Inside the house it was dark and quiet. Rosie sat on the bed, in the furthest corner where it was darkest. She did not so much sit as huddle, her knees drawn up, her body sagging a little against the wall. She had not been in the house, alone, at this time of the morning since before she had started school. Then her elder sisters were away in class, her father at the office, her mother out, briefly, her voice within hearing.

Rosie would sit on the edge of the bed where they all curled up together at night, sit as quietly as possible, so she could hear the house breathe. Chinks of light glinted like stars between the roof tiles. Brass pots and chembus gleamed softly in the halflight.. Two trunks were stacked against a wall. There was a faint smell of last night's annum, and the raw smell of beeum soaking in water. There would be small movements. A toad breathing in a dark corner, its pale throat pumping up and down, or a lizard darting suddenly, or ants on the floor milling around a dead beetle. She played with the glass bangles on her arm, listening to their pretty clinking.

That teasing from Nirmala. There was enough of it yesterday. That it should start again so early in the morning, as they were standing in line with heads bent waiting for the headmaster's prayer. Nirmala and that one, Shanti , had purposely stood on either side of her. "Have you had news yet, of that Communist Anand? You will marry him now, isn't it? Become a communist whore." And she had pinched Rosie on the arm, her long nails biting. And the other one, Shanti. "So handsome your uncle. And single. Does he not give you looks? Does he not say things? Have you lain with him yet?"

After prayers she had gone straight to the class mistress and told her she was unwell. "Is it your time of the month?" "No, but I feel very unwell." The teacher stretched

out to feel Rosie's forehead. "No fever, amma. A bad headache." She looked straight at the teacher, pleading, her eyes brimming.

"All right. I will write a chit. Take it to the outpatient clinic. Are you well enough to walk there alone?"

Rosie did not go to the clinic, but walked straight home. All she knew was that she wanted to be alone.

When she had told her father that she was teased, he had only said that she should take no notice, that those girls were jealous. But their words were poison. Perhaps it was true that Anand had become a communist. What other explanation was there for such a long absence? Unless he was dead. Look at how his mother was suffering, how her hair had turned white. It was impossible to know what to think. If only they knew the truth. Then if it was known he was dead, they could all grieve, and she would cry and cry. If it was known that he was a communist, she could be justifiably furious with Anand. At how he had ruined their match. And she would also feel disgraced. Nirmala's words made her feel disgraced already. That she had allowed herself to be taken in by a to-be-communist, had fixed her hopes on him and his prospects, had taken pleasure in his successes, had looked forward to his letters that Graceamma brought for her father to read aloud as they sat outside in the evening.

Anand's unexplained absence was problem enough. But there was also that hated presence of her uncle, living with them. How he stood too close when her parents were not looking. How he breathed 'Filmstar girl. Smile at me. Am I not your prince, your king?' And she could not speak to her parents about this because Amma loved her brother. She could not hurt her mother by criticising her uncle.

Her parents had a plan, that when her uncle's trial period was over, he would take a place to live in the bazaar. But this was all taking too long.

One of the hateful things her Uncle did was criticise the people in the compound.

"They are all schoolboys or servants here. None that I should want as a friend. And how can you bear it," he asked his brother-in-law, "To live constantly under the eyes of the missionaries? Don't you want to feel free?"

Her father replied that he had all the freedom he wanted right here in the compound. And there was nothing he needed to do in secret, to hide from the missionaries.

Her mother laughed when her brother became critical, as though he were joking.

" Missionaries' eyes," she mused. "The Dorasani has such laughing eyes, though if one of her schoolchildren was threatened she could become a tigress."

"Doragaru has eyes that wait. Patient eyes," said her father taking up amma's theme. "And Tundrigaru's eyes are far-seeing."

"And what of Doctor-ammagaru's eyes?" asked Amma happily. She enjoyed such conversational games.

"Dr Ammagaru's eyes look down from a surprising height. Her eyes are keen and interested, though I'm sure they could be quite severe if she thought a man was treating his wife badly."

"If it is flashing, angry eyes that concern you, brother, you need look no further than our dear daughter Rosie," Amma reached over and rubbed Rosie's knee. "She is well-known for those and we have each felt them, have we not, my husband?"

"And her loving, caring looks also. Come here, my daughter." Rosie moved to sit beside her father and he put his arm around her and she wished her uncle would disappear and leave them alone.

There were sounds outside the house. Someone with a slow, tired tread was climbing the steps, crossing the verandah to the doorway and standing there. Her uncle. He had not noticed her yet, and because he did not know he was observed, his face had relaxed into sadness. It was that unconscious look of his that so affected her mother.

That her uncle should be here now. It was the worst thing. Rosie stayed as still as she could, hoping he would go. Why was he not at the office? Then Kumarraj stepped over the threshold and walked into the room. His face was in the dark, but when he stood still she knew he had seen her.

"Rosie. I did not think you would be here. Why are you not at school?"

"I did not feel well. I have a headache."

"I also. Rimmergaru gave me some tablets." He put his hand in his trouser pocket and brought out some pills. He put one in his mouth and put his head back and swallowed. Then a second one.

"You should have some too. Take these." He held out his hand.

"I need water to take them."

" Stay as you are. I will get you some." He walked out and she heard his movements in the next room. He came back with a full tumbler. He was behaving like a parent. Rosie moved from her corner to the edge of the bed. She took the pills and he watched her as she swallowed them, and then took the tumbler from her.

"I wish to sleep now. You should sleep too. You will feel better then, isn't it?"

Rosie nodded.

When Kumarraj returned he was dressed for bed in a banyan and lungi. Rosie had removed her half sari, and folded it and placed it on the trunk.

"Come and lie down. Let your uncle look after you."

Rosie lay on her side in her blouse and long skirt facing away from the door. Kumarraj lay down behind her. He put an arm over her and his hand lay loosely at her waist. He lifted a leg over her hip.

It was not so bad. Her uncle seemed to be a much nicer man when he had a headache. He had not called her "filmstar girl", or asked her to smile, or looked proud, or treated her as though she must do his bidding. His breathing lengthened and his arm and leg became heavy as he relaxed into sleep. The house was filled with a calm silence. Rosie closed her eyes. She took slow breaths and her worries and thoughts dropped away.

No. no. This must not be. This shouldn't … her skirt pulled up at the back … the air on her thighs, …She was broken into. Speared. Hooked. Her limbs flopping with each push. Her hands went to her face. Behind them her mouth gaped. She screamed silently into her hands. She was gripped and rammed. The ramming burnt. Faster and faster. STOOOPPP. He groaned, shuddered. It was over and she was forever disgraced. She felt his weapon shrink, slink out. Fluid leaked from her. Her hands became fists and she pounded the bed. This should not have happened. He reached for her. "Turn to me." She turned. His sweaty pudgy face. Open pores glistened on his nose. He put his lips to her face, and she shrank from his foul breath. She went past his mouth, to his ear and she bit with all her strength.

A shriek of pain.

"Are you mad?" He sat up violently, knocking her aside. He looked down in confusion at blood streaming down his arm and chest.

He leapt off the bed and ran from the room.

Rosie held the warm fragment in her mouth, a tang of blood. Her mouth was filling with saliva. She spat. The scrap of flesh landed on the earthen floor. As she stared, it seemed to quiver.

Kumarraj stood at the cracked fragment of mirror, mopping the streaming blood, trying to see what had happened to his ear. Why did his sister not have a better mirror, a bigger mirror, one without blotches? How was he supposed to see clearly? The mirror was just one of the things wrong with this place. He should never have come, never have allowed her to wear him down with her incessant letters and expressions of sisterly concern. He pinched his ear, but his fingers closed on themselves and were slippery with blood. He staunched the flow and, removing the cloth, saw for a split second before the oozing and dripping started again not a split ear, not at all. What he saw was an absence of flesh, a truncated ear, a mutilation.

What would people say? This was something that could not be hidden. His action, it was wrong, but so sweetly was his excitement fulfilled, he had felt for a moment such loving tenderness for her, not knowing that the smooth, silky girl was a Delilah, about to perform an act of treachery. If it were not for that, this could have remained a secret. She would not have wished anyone to know that she was dishonoured. But a missing earlobe, that surprising lack of symmetry, it would incite questions. How his sister would press him to tell her when and how, and utter again and again her heartfelt sympathy. His brother-in-

law would question him too, Mr Newby would look astonished and Rimmergaru joke. "Did the barber's razor slip, Kumarraj?"

What could he tell them, that a she-rat had nibbled him as he slept?

How could a mere girl, his niece, have done this to him? His sister had failed to teach her a proper respect for men. He could not stay here, in this house, with that girl knowing what she had done. Nor did he want to stay. The trial period was over as far as he was concerned, they had failed and disappointed him, all of them.

Kumarraj tore his lungi into strips, discarding pieces that smelt of semen. He bandaged his ear, winding the cloth round his head. He put on his office shirt and trousers. He went to the bedroom. She was there still sitting on the edge of the bed but he did not look at her as he reached under for his trunk. It already held his spare clothes. He stuffed the incriminating pieces of lungi inside and snapped the trunk shut, then he walked out of that house into the heat of the afternoon sun. It was a still a full hour before school would be out. He hurried through the empty compound, through the gates. With luck no one had spotted him. There would be a rickshaw waiting for trade at the hospital gates. He would take the next train to Bezwada and change there for Masulipatam, never to return to this benighted Kalampett.

What would his dear precious Shanti think if she could see him now, fleeing with a bloody bandage round his head. What would she have thought had she seen him on the bed with his niece? But it would never have happened, never have happened if Shanti had lived.

Sweat was trickling into his eyes. He stopped to mop his brow, doing it ineffectually, feeling sickened that he was now finding fault with his blameless wife.

He had a flash of his face as he had seen it in the mirror. How ugly it had looked, and not only because it was lop-sided and bloody. It had oozed a sullen, discontented self-pity.

He hurried to escape, stumbling on the uneven ground. He grazed his shin on his trunk, a nerve-raking, bone-bruising graze. He swung the trunk up onto the shoulder away from his throbbing ear and pressed on, limping. What had happened that he, Kumarraj, a prince, a king, should have sunk to this?

Cheddapalli

Anand woke from a nap with a hum in his head. Those three tantalising notes of an undeveloped, unfinished melody that returned time and again. He put on his glasses and saw the thatch above him and remembered that he was in the prayer room in the village of Cheddapalli. A simple room with a clay floor and woven straw mats and on one wall the outline of a cross done in white lime. A first class accommodation that he was sharing with someone else.

A turbaned man lay on a mat in a corner turned away on his side. He was snoring and his lower leg was bandaged. The man's clothes were spotted with dried blood, but the bandage was clean. The prayer room was used as accommodation and what else, a hospital ward?

He went outside, keen to look around. The village was dry and a hot wind conjured small dust storms that swirled like phantom dervishes. The main pathway was lined with modugu trees in bloom. The crowns of the leafless trees were covered with large red parrot-beaked blossoms that drew the gaze up from the parched land and refreshed the eyes.

Mynah birds hopped from flower to flower inserting their beaks for nectar. As Anand looked around he found he remembered nothing about the village and yet he felt comfortable there. It was somehow familiar. He began to look for a tamarind tree, the one his father had slept under, and found one near the end of the village. He had imagined it in the centre of the village, a magnificent tree around which the villagers went about their lives to the music of his father's singing. This actual tree was not imposing. There was a larger tamarind in the mission compound, the one he climbed as a boy, from which he had thrown green tamarind pods to tease Rosie as she played hopscotch with Rachel. Rosie dressed for church in a pink frock, her freshly oiled plaits doubled up and tied behind her ears with pink ribbons. One of the tamarind pods had struck her on the head, and she had stamped her foot at him and called him an imbecile. It had made a strong impression, that depth of passion in a girl so small and delicate. He was fourteen, she ten and he decided then and there that he would marry her.

"Anand." It was Hussain . "I was coming to see how you were. You are feeling refreshed?"

"Yes. There is a man sleeping in the prayer room."

"I know. Shakuntala puts her patients there."

"Her patients? "

"This is an active communist area. After some demonstration or action, there are always injured people. Sometimes that room is full."

"I see." Picturing all that energy, the demonstrations, the treatment of the wounded, it made him feel tired. " I went in search of a tamarind tree and found one, but it was smaller than I expected. I do not know whether I remember it or just imagined it."

"If it is memory, it is you who have grown bigger. Come with me now, and I will take you to Ganesh's mother."

A little way out of the village was a hamlet, a clutter of smelly shacks. Partly naked children with unbrushed hair and runny noses stopped their playing to stare. An infant squatted shamelessly to defecate. Small black pigs with coarse hair and patches of dried mud stuck to their hide snuffled along a wall. Hussain stamped a foot, waved his hands and shouted at the swine. The herd obliged by taking a detour.

" Ratnabhai," called Hussain into the doorway of a hut. "Come out and meet Anand, Lukegaru's son."

A woman emerged holding a baby, which she handed to a young girl. She covered her head with the end of her sari. She wasn't wearing a blouse and her pendant breasts, partially covered, were already wrinkled though she was probably not much more than thirty. She smiled shyly and Anand could see where Ganesh had inherited his bashful expressions from, also his height. She touched her forehead and then crouched down and touched his feet as though he and not his father had been the hero.

Embarrassed, Anand bent down to raise the women.

"It was my father, not I."

Ratnabhai continued to gaze at him with a dazed wonder in her eyes. Her hands were folded together at her mouth, the fingers interlaced.

"Lukegaru's son, Lukegaru's son," she murmured over and over.

Anand wondered if she were simple.

"I was just a girl. Ganesh was my first born. We were on pilgrimage when the boat sank. My husband pulled me up onto the bank out of the flood while I held my baby tight.

Then I slipped. The baby slipped. I saw him fall into the water and disappear. A man was there in the water pushing others onto the bank. I called out, My baby. Save my baby. The man dived under the water and when he came up further down the river he held Ganesh high with one hand, while he himself held onto a fallen tree, and pulled himself towards the bank. My husband reached for our son, and the man in the river called out to me, Ammai, suck out your baby's nose and mouth. I held my baby, he was limp and lifeless. Then I understood what the man meant. I sucked and Ganesh spluttered and then breathed. I looked for the man, but he was gone. They said the man did not come out of the river. They said his name was Lukegaru."

The baby in the girl's arms began to whine, and Ratnabhai automatically reached down and put him to her breast.

"You have a big family now, Amma."

"Eight. I have been blessed with eight children. They have fallen ill, but they all still live." She smiled as though amazed they had survived through all the mishaps and afflictions of life.

"I am very pleased to have met you, amma."

They farewelled the woman and walked away. Anand was struggling with something and it took him a while to voice it.

"Why did my father not reach the bank himself?"

"You don't know?"

"My mother has never spoken of it."

"He was no doubt tired from his efforts, he had pulled and pushed many people to safety before he went for the baby, but it was a crocodile who seized him by a leg and pulled him under. Some reported seeing the tail."

"Abbah!"

"When his body was recovered, they found his legs to be half eaten."

Anand remembered a certain stench, remembered a covered shapelessness in the middle of the hut. He shook his head to shake such memories away.

"Will you eat with me tonight? Others are coming. There is much to discuss."

Anand's thoughts were still with his father's death, and the re-surfaced memories.

"Much to discuss?" he repeated, sounding stupid.

"Our problems. The landlord you saw in the car. What actions we can take. We could do with another person's help."

Anand wrenched his thoughts back to present concerns.

"Yes, I will come."

But he did not. He fell asleep again, tossing and sweating with fever, dreaming of mutilations and his mother's tears.

Kalampett

Rosie was dreading the questions. What should she answer? Her mother arrived home first. She was smiling, looking pleased. Rosie was about to get out her story, but her mother started speaking first.

"That boy Prakasam, you know who I mean?"

Rosie tried to think which of the small boys her mother taught this boy Prakasam could be.

"No, amma."

'Never mind. This boy has at last started to pay attention and learn, and today I am a happy teacher. Is something cooking?" Rosie followed in her mother's wake.

" Oh, the tawa!" Rosie had forgotten it. The iron skivet was overheated and the kitchen was filled with fumes. Her mother beat at them.

"Just take it off the flame," her voice was calm. "Wait for it to cool."

Rosie picked up a stick of firewood and knocked the tawa off the fire.

"Amma, . . ."

" Your chapatti dough is good." Her mother was testing the ball of dough with her finger.

"…there is something I must tell you."

"What? Your uncle likes chapattis. Perhaps he likes his food too much. Do you think he's been putting on weight? We like our men to be healthy looking, but Ammagaru says if we feed them too well we are shortening their lives."

"I came home early from school."

Her mother stopped poking the dough and looked at Rosie. Her gaze was neutral but uncomfortably direct.

"I was not feeling well. I slept most of the day. Then when I woke . . ."

"You're looking pale." Her mother moved towards her and held her arms and then felt Rosie's forehead. "Are you faint? Come and sit down." Rosie let herself be pushed into a chair. "I will finish the cooking. Perhaps you should lie on the bed."

"No, amma. I'll be all right here." Rosie slumped onto the table and closed her eyes.

"All right, my daughter. You rest here while I roll out the chapattis."

Rosie did not want to be by herself in the bedroom. To be alone with foul memories. She had stripped the bloody sheets off the bed, and scrubbed and scrubbed the floor. Her uncle had left a trail of blood through the house to the shower enclosure outside. She found smears on the mirror. Her skirt was bloodied too. After the soaping she had rinsed and rinsed. She twice went to the well for more water. The rinsing water she poured over her mother's flowers and around the papaya. She thought if the plants did not die from the poison of her uncle's blood, they would surely drown.

Her mother went out the back.

"There's been a flood here," she shouted. She would see the sheets hanging to dry. And her skirt. She came back into the kitchen. "You need not have washed the sheets, I changed the bed only two days ago."

"Don't be angry, amma."

"I'm not angry. I am sorry you put yourself to this trouble when you were not feeling well. But next time you do the laundry do not use so much water. It is wasteful."

She started to cook the rolled chapatti.

"You didn't think to wash your father's shirts as well?"

"No, amma, I scrubbed the floors."

"And I have just now dropped some dough on it, your lovely clean floor." Her mother started to laugh and Rosie tried to join in.

There were more difficulties when her father came home. He looked around as though missing something.

"Where is Kumarraj?"

"How can we know? He was with you." Her mother's tone was amused

"He left the office this morning at ten o'clock. He said he had a headache. I thought he would be at home."

"No, we have not seen him have we, Rosie? Unless …" Her mother's forehead screwed up in thought. "Unless Kumarraj, when he came home and saw Rosie asleep, thinking not to disturb her, went . . . I don't know where."

"Rosie was at home today?"

"Yes, she was unwell. But when she woke she put herself to a great deal of trouble washing and cleaning the house. See how pale my daughter is looking."

Rosie sat still. She bent her head under the weight of her father's concern.

"How are you now, Rosie?"

"I am better now." She looked up, trying to smile cheerfully.

"Look at her. She is the picture of a girl pretending to be better. I told her to go and lie down, but she refuses."

"I am all right, amma, just a little tired. Shall I serve the food now?"

"You will not. You will sit there and I will look after my husband and daughter." Her mother's concern changed direction.

"Husband, where do you think Kumarraj could be? It is most unlike him to be late for a meal." Her laughter sounded forced.

Rosie wished she could end her parents' worries, but that could not be without causing them more grief. She sat still and waited for whatever might happen next.

Rimmergaru came to the door.

"Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Amos, Rosie. Sorry to disturb you, I've come to see how Kumarraj is."

"Kumarraj is not here, Doragaru. No-one has seen him since he left the office at ten this morning. Rosie was at home today and she did not see him. It is unusual for him not to be present for his meal. My wife and I have been discussing where he might be."

"Mr Amos, may I speak to you outside for a moment?"

The men moved out on to the verandah. Mrs Amos and Rosie moved near the window to listen.

The Doragaru spoke in a confidential tone.

"I don't wish to be alarmist. Kumarraj may be visiting and have become detained, but we know he has not been . . . a deep dissatisfaction …"

Rosie did not hear what was said next because her mother staggered from the window and collapsed on to the floor.

"I could not bear it," she whispered to Rosie, "if my tamadi's life ended so."

A search was started. Jacob was sent to make enquiries at the hospital bungalow, and Higgsamma's house. The peon crossed the field to Tundrigaru's. David came with Mr Newby to join the search in the compound. Jacob climbed down into the deep well. Darkness fell. Lamps moved in and around the compound, disembodied voices called Kumarraj, Kumarraj as the men searched every room and outhouse and store place and field and tree and rock.

Abraham was not at all pleased. That this Kumarraj could be so inconsiderate as to disappear without explanation, that the Doragaru was searching for him instead of taking his evening bath, and that supper could not be served till God alone knew when. He held up a hurricane lamp, peering vainly into the dark for his errant master.

"Who are they looking for, ayah?" The boy Prakasam was at Abraham's elbow.

"Is it any of your business?"

"Are they looking for Kumarrajgaru?"

"What if they are?"

"I saw him."

Abraham turned to frown ferociously at the boy.

"I suppose you were not in class. You were sitting up in some tree."

"Oh, no, Abrahamgaru. I answered Teacherammagaru's questions correctly and she was very pleased with me. She is pleased with me often these days."

That was a most unlikely tale.

"Do you wish me to believe, that you, the boy Prakasam, who is known to skip class, is now making his teacher happy?"

Prakasam nodded his head.

"How can this be?"

The boy shyly gnawed his lower lip, rubbed one foot up and down the other leg.

"Speak up."

"Because I'm going to be a forester in the Nizam's jungles."

"How preposterous. Who said such a thing?"

"Teacherammagaru asked me one day if I would like to be a forester when I grew up. I said, What is a forester? When she told me, I said, Now I know what I want to do when I'm a man. Teacherammagaru told me that to be a forester I would have to know how to count. So that when the Nizam asked how many elephants were in the jungle I could tell him. Or how many tigers. I have been to the jungle once."

"I know," said Abraham.

"It is beautiful there. Today in class Teacherammagaru took some sticks and leant them against a wall. She said each stick stood for ten teak trees in the jungle. Then she threw a ball at the sticks. The ball was a cyclone which knocked down some trees. She asked me how many trees were knocked over, and how many trees still stood. Both my answers were correct."

"That was well done," acknowledged Abraham, "But what has this got to do with Kumarrajgaru?"

"After answering the questions correctly, I walked back to my place and passed the doorway. I looked outside for a moment, happy that I had answered correctly, happy that I could now be a forester. It was then I saw Kumarrajgaru. He was carrying a tin trunk and his head was bandaged."

"Come with me.' Abraham grasped the boy's hand. "We will find the Doragaru, and you will tell him what you have just told me. Then I will give you a reward. A handful of sprouted gram. Two handfuls perhaps. Because you answered teacherammagaru correctly. For your ambition to be a forester. But most importantly, for ending this search for Kumarrajgaru."

Rosie's father and Rimmergaru strode into the house, into the bedroom where Rosie sat holding a compress on her mother's forehead. They did not speak. Her father stooped to look under the bed. When he stood he spoke directly to the Doragaru.

"The trunk is not here. The boy's story could be true."

Rosie's mother sat up. Her face was swollen from tears, her loosened hair disarranged.

"What story?"

"Kumarraj was seen leaving the compound with his trunk." Her father said nothing about the bandage. Rosie did not think he would say anything about that to his mother.

"How is this? That he would leave without telling us? Without saying goodbye?"

Rimmergaru sat down beside her on the bed.

"Kanthamma," he said, using her first name and taking her by the hand. "This is difficult, especially for you. Kumarraj has left behind him many unanswered questions, but we can be thankful he is alive."

Rosie wished with all the strength she could draw from the wrong done to her, from the pain her body suffered, from the weight of the secret she must keep, that her uncle had never been born.

Chapter 12 April 1948

Kalampett

Graceamma stood in the street gazing at a line of desolate shops, the doors locked, rough boards nailed across them at different hurried angles. Further along was a run of three small shops blackened and gaping, an empty gum pulled of its rotten teeth. She caught a small movement in the ash behind what was a fallen beam, reduced now to a stick of charcoal. Two pointed ears rose into view, twisting slowly, twisting back. A small sharp face appeared, the head of a cat, peering with caution and cunning. The family had gone but the cat remained, surviving somehow in the wreck.

This town, her town was unrecognisable. Graceamma was disoriented but walked on towards some open, functioning stalls ahead.

"Is that you, Graceamma?"

She was hailed by a tailor from his stall. He beckoned her from his cross-legged position at his sewing machine on a platform above the dirt of the street. Usually his hands were fully occupied, one turning the handle, the other guiding the material under the flashing needle, but today they had little to do and moved restlessly, picking up a thread, flicking at a piece of fluff, caressing the smooth black contours of his machine.

"I am relieved to see you, ayah. In fact it is to you that Ammagaru has sent me. But when I saw those empty shops I thought you may not be here."

"All this," he said, his arm sweeping over the ravaged scene, " is a fight between Muslim and Hindu. But not only Muslim and Hindu. You know there have always been two sari shops, now there is one only. Last week one was burnt out. The other shop owner

said it was the work of Muslims, but it is thought that he himself had a hand in it, thinking to get rid of his competitor."

"Abbah." Graceamma made a noise in her throat that indicated how shameful such events were, how lamentable was the state of the town, a sound that also commiserated with the plight of victims. "I have heard it has been bad, but until I saw this today, I did not understand. And you have been safe?"

"Mostly the Christians have been left alone. I stay here waiting for whatever business might come. But business is slow and money is short and when we do have money there is little we can afford because prices are now so steep."

"I have brought you work today. It isn't much. Ammagaru wants you to make this material into a skirt for her daughter." Graceamma opened her cloth bag and brought out a folded length of soft blue cotton.

The tailor stood and shook out the cloth expertly, revealing a red and navy paisley border.

"There is more than enough here for a skirt. Does Ammagaru want pockets?"

"No pockets"

"What is the waist measurement?"

"Twenty four inches."

"That is not small, but there is enough to make an English dress. How old is the girl now? I'll use the border for the sleeves also.There must be buttons down the front, and two pockets, definitely two pockets. The Dorasani likes the length somewhat above the ankles, isn't it? Tell the Dorasani there is too too much material and I will make a beautiful dress for her daughter."

"But the Dorasani asked for a skirt only. One without pockets."

"Do not concern yourself, Graceamma. I know the Dorasani's taste and she will be pleased with the dress when she sees it."

"I'll tell her. Abraham will pick up the dress tomorrow."

As she walked back down the street, Graceamma saw a small group of young men. She thought she recognised some of them, one in particular. He had gone through school with Anand. As she drew level with them, they turned their backs on her and spoke amongst themselves, laughing secretly, giving her glances. '

Graceamma could not believe that Anand's long time friend would behave in such an unfriendly way. She stopped.

"Sundarao, is that you? It is a long time since I last saw you. How is your mother?"

The young man reluctantly detached himself from the group. She saw a hand reaching to detain him, but he brushed past it.

"Graceamma, how are you? Let me walk with you a little."

"Your mother?" she asked again, gently.

"She is well. Amma, did you know I am to get married?"

"Really. What good news. Is she a local girl?"

"No she is from India-side, a nurse."

" I am happy for you. When is the wedding?"

"No date as yet. We are waiting."

"Yes." That's what they were all doing, waiting.

"It was good to see you, Graceamma. Perhaps I should return now to my friends."

"Stop."

He looked at her in surprise.

"Have you heard anything, anything at all about my Anand?" She scanned his face. He looked uncomfortable.

"Maybe." A mumble.

"Tell me. I have heard nothing," she said making her anguish and need plain to him.

"There have been some reports. Not good ones."

"He is dead?"

"No, no. He is alive."

She looked at him expectantly, but he remained silent.

"Tell me about the reports, whatever they may be."

"It is said that he … is a Communist. So it is said."

"Do you believe that of my Anand? Of your long time friend?"

"I don't know, amma. It is possible. Through the Communists here in Kalampett, it is known that Anand had a Communist friend in Hyderabad. That friend has left Hyderabad. So has Anand. It is thought they are fighting together."

Graceamma closed her eyes. She felt a little unsteady and wavered on her feet. Sundarao reached out to steady her.

"Amma, are you all right?"

He was young, and he was alarmed for her. She noticed he no longer seemed to be in a hurry to get away.

"If Anand has joined the Communists, it is understandable. I know others who have joined. You see the Communists are fighting for freedom, amma. The freedom of the malas

from the landlords, the freedom of Hyderabad from the Nizam who does nothing for us, the freedom of the Telugu people. It is for these reasons that people join them."

"But are they not also against God?"

"Yes, that is so."

Graceamma turned away from the young man and started to walk home.

He stepped quickly after her.

"Are you going now to the compound?"

"Yes."

"Will you be alright on your own?"

"Yes. I wish now to be alone." She paused to look up at him. "It is right that you told me." As she walked, she could feel that he stood for awhile watching her. His voice called out, reaching her from behind.

"It is possible we are wrong about Anand. We do not know it for certain sure."

She did not usually mind the walk home, covering that distance, but today she felt the heat. How it blasted down, rose in waves from the road, radiated from the rocks. She wished she had brought her black umbrella. Ammagaru had given her leather chappals as an Easter gift, and these protected the soles of her feet, but the thongs were rubbing between her toes, and walking was increasingly uncomfortable. As at other times when she felt overwhelmed she spoke to her dead husband.

"Luke, my husband, they say our son is a Communist. A Communist. Can it be true? Luke, what am I to think?"

She walked on, one foot in front of the other.

"Luke?"

Nothing.

She stood still, tuning her ears, waiting for his voice of calm encouragement that never failed her. The heat was a furnace, consuming everything in its silent roar. No sound of bird or beetle, no movement from a living creature. No Luke.

A huge emptiness. A void.

The ground fell away beneath her. She was falling, falling.

Dear Mumpty,

It is only a week since Easter Sunday, but subsequent events, close to us, make that seem a long time ago. I will start my account a week earlier when things seemed calmer. Palm Sunday was a festival that came alive for me for the first time. The school children pulled down the long leaves off the date palms that dot the countryside and decorated the spiked ends with flowers. Every Sunday they walk to church, a distance of six miles, but this time they processed waving palms and singing despite the heat. Archie and Ross lead the way while the teachers and Harriet spaced themselves along the line of students and I brought up the rear. We made a triumphal entry into the township and then did a circuit through the streets. People came to their doors to watch. Some waved, some namasted us. I think the colour and verve boosted the morale of the townsfolk whatever their persuasion. Some joined the tail of the procession and followed us into church.

The custom on Good Friday is for people to bathe and fast. The women don white saris. Some have been fasting throughout Lent, a practice Harriet deplores on the grounds that people barely get enough food as it is. But fasting is as much a devotional practice in India, as it was in medieval Europe.

On Easter Sunday people gathered at the church as dawn broke, that time of morning when those women so long ago found the tomb to be empty. Our women were dressed in bright colours, the wealthier ones wearing silk. Archie and Ross took the service, which was both dignified and joyful. Despite the current privations the Easter offerings were abundant: goats, guinea fowl, laying hens, coconuts, cereals and flowers. Waxy red blooms from a local tree and ivory, yellow throated frangipani, the scent wafting like incense through the church. The after service auction for these items was brisk, bidders competing in a jocular spirit.

It was the next day that we got the news of the latest atrocity. A young man was dead. Nathaniel, a godson of Archie. Ross and Archie left for the village immediately, and returned two days later. A communist gang had come into the village wanting to recruit men. The headman told them the villagers were not interested. The men insisted that they needed more recruits to fight against the landlord, an action that would free all his workers. The village pastor told them that as Christians they already felt free and they had no quarrel with the landlord who had contributed to the building of their chapel (a humble thatched hut). He had also donated a goat and rice for the feast that followed the chapel's dedication. The communists responded by setting fire to the chapel which still had the flowers and decorations from the Easter service. Then they questioned each youth asking him individually to join up. They declined or stayed silent knowing what would follow. After the beatings they took hold of the headman's eighteen year-old son, Nathaniel. "Surely," they said to him, "you do not believe in the resurrection." He replied that he did. They scoffed and challenged him, "Why, have you seen such a thing in your life?" "Yes", he replied. "Every year we take dead seed and bury it in the ground and it springs to life."

They took the lad and tied him to a tree trunk, his arms to branches, mocking the crucifixion. The pastor pleaded that they tie him up instead and spare the boy. They called him an old fool, useless to all. They asked Nathaniel again, on pain of his life, if he would join them. He refused and they shot him.

Archie and Ross when they returned reported the incident, but we don't expect anything will be done. The police and the authorities are too cowed. They need help from the central government which is not forthcoming.

The mood here remains sombre. Graceamma, the Rimmers' maid, was found collapsed on the road, suffering from heat stroke. She is recovering slowly. Her son a promising lad who was training as a printer went missing last December, and we are still in the dark, not knowing if he is dead or alive.

Some of us are leaving this for awhile to take the annual hill holiday, though Archie is staying on. I thought I should offer to stay too, but Archie was firm. He said my first priority was to pass the language exams. I feel this is a somewhat cowardly let-off, but it is true that I can contribute nothing more than Archie and Ross already give.

It will be spring where you are. Showers and cool breezes and soft blossom. I can scarcely imagine such benefactions.

My love and God bless, Lester

Lester folded the written sheets, and put them in a drawer with his other unposted letters. He would post them all once he got to Madras, with other mail. A manuscript from Archie to his publisher, a report from Ross to mission headquarters. Doing that would give him a small sense of usefulness. He closed the drawer.

Now Lester, admit it. You are overjoyed at going to the hills. Overjoyed that you will see Amy Parker everyday. That you will accompany her on picnics and walks, take part with her in plays and concerts and whatever frolics missionaries on holiday think up. Harriet says the hill holidays are the season for courting, and you will court and court Amy Parker with all your heart, shamelessly talking advantage of propinquity and the rarefied atmosphere and the beauty of the gardens, the waterfalls and views, and surely one evening there will be a magnificent sunset colouring the sky, making each other glow.

Cheddapalli

Shakuntala had very thick hair that started low over her forehead and was pulled back to hang in a fat plait. There was a fine seam of hair that ran down her nape and under the edge of her blouse that made Anand wonder how far it went. At her ears there were short straight wisps, and soft fine hair crept down her cheeks, a down accentuated the contour of her upper lip. The hair on her lower arms was thick but still fine. She was not a beautiful girl but she was confident from knowing she was skilled and useful. Anand could imagine her in a blue trimmed white sari, a nurse's cap pinned to a thick bundle of her hair.

There were six of them that morning in the prayer room. He liked the way she talked to the villagers and he could see they trusted her. She was of them and from them and had returned with foreign knowledge and they were impressed with her mastery of unfamiliar equipment: a thermometer, rolls of cotton wool and crepe bandages, bottles of Dettol, and small brown glass bottles with white pills. Splints and plaster of paris. These men, used to traditional treatments which sometimes left them scarred or infected,

submitted to her novel ministrations and though most of them were older than she was, called her mother.

One young man lay unconscious from a head wound, but the other four had bruising and cuts from kicks and beatings. The wounds were cleaned, disinfected and bandaged and they were allowed to stay for a night's rest. The next morning, if they were not running temperatures, they were sent on their way.

"Go home," she said, "And for your children's sake stop joining in these boy's games and behave like the men you are."

After the men had gone, reluctantly as though they had enjoyed being bossed by her, Shakuntala came and bent over him.

"I see Mr Anand is better today. You have been looking, watching, isn't it?"

He opened his mouth to reply and she thrust a thermometer under his tongue. Then she took his wrist, knowing exactly where to put two fingers over his pulse. He started to say something, but couldn't with the thermometer in his mouth and she smiled as though happy to see him trapped.

As soon as she removed the thermometer he sat up, then stood. She was reading the mercury.

"Yes, Mr Anand is better today. You are not weak now? As you stand and move around? Your temperature was quite high for two nights."

"I am well. I shall set off shortly."

"Set off to where?"

"Kalampett." Where else? "My mother will be worried."

"That is for another day," she said. "Do you not think your mother would wish you to rest if she knew you had been ill? What if you go now and then feel unwell along the way or at night? Who would help you?"

Anand did not wish to be persuaded by her. He could think of nothing to say except to repeat that his mother would be worried. A man would need sound arguments to prevail against Shakuntala, and, it was true, today he did not feel robust. He was saved from having to summon up words by a clatter outside and the sight of Hussain coming in followed by Ganesh carrying a litter made out of hide stretched across two poles.

Ganesh carried this over to the unconscious man and it was laid alongside him.

"Hussain, make sure to support the neck as well as the head," instructed Shakuntala. Ganesh was at the man's feet and Shakuntala at his middle. She was facing Anand and she looked up at him.

"When we lift the patient, Anand, slide the stretcher under him."

He managed this manoeuvre, helped by the others shuffling their feet out of the way as needed.

"Ready?" said Hussain. They bent their knees to a crouching position as they lowered the man onto the stretcher. Their movements were remarkably synchronised. It was a difficult manoeuvre that they must have already done a number of times. Although the patient moaned, he was not seriously affected. Anand realised they would have to raise the laden stretcher to their shoulders as they crouched, before rising to their feet. It seemed an enormous task. They were not lifting an inanimate object or a corpse but a seriously ill man who seemed at times to be scarcely breathing.

Anand went to support the stretcher opposite Shakuntala.

They carried the wounded man to a hut where Shakuntala's parents lived. There was a string cot waiting for him.

"This does not smell like a hospital ward, but my mother keeps her home clean, and she will look after him when I have other business."

The man had a bullet in his brain. It had not killed him outright and he would likely die, but while he lingered his mother wanted him under Shakuntala's care.

"Anand makes a good member of our team, isn't it?" Shakuntala spoke to Hussain and Ganesh. Hussain clapped Anand on his back. "Perhaps he can stay to help."

"Anand is Lukegaru's son," Ganesh told Shakuntala's mother, who smiled.

"Come with us now," Shakuntala said to Anand, and he went with the three of them, this unlikely 'team', to Hussain's home.

Hussain was a tanner and leatherworker and at the front of his hut he had built a thatched shelter under which he had a rough bench where he made chappals and leather puppets. They sat on a mat under the shelter and Hussain's wife, a woman with pale skin wearing a shalwar kameez, came out bringing them small glasses of sweet milky tea.She was talented, Hussain told him, at painting the faces of the puppets.

"My father's first friend in the village was a tanner who offered him the use of his kitchen, and later took him as a tenant in his second house. Was that man . . .?" said Anand.

"Yes, that man was my father. And later Lukegaru bought that house."

"It is the house that Rev. Moses now lives in," said Shakuntala. These facts were part of their living history. As for Anand, he was only now putting flesh and life to his early story.

When Ganesh had drunk his tea, he stretched out and fell asleep.

"Why is he not working in the fields with the other village men?"

"Because he gets into trouble. He is a strong worker, but his interest doesn't last the whole day. So he goes away and does something else or has a nap. He has often been beaten by the overseers, but they cannot change his nature. His mother now wishes him to stay away from the fields altogether."

"He sometimes works with me, washing and cleaning the goat skins. He also climbs palm trees and helps the tappers bleed the plant. He has worked with the potter, carrying clay, and spends time with the goat herd. He is fed by the people he helps and that is all he wants. A varied life, and sufficient food in his belly."

"There is one other thing." Shakuntala paused meaningfully.

Hussain smiled, knowing what she was about to say.

"What?"

"He is completely immoral," said Shakuntala. "And women lose their morals with him. He looks at a woman, she looks at him, and then the two have disappeared in a ditch or behind a rock. I said to him one day that he should take care to only go with married women. He said,Yes, they are best, isn't it? It was not his pleasure I was concerned with, but the honour of maidens."

"I have seen him go with men also."

"Truly? Well, the men cannot get pregnant." Shakuntala laughed briefly and then sighed.

Anand was amazed. He had never been with people, especially a woman, who spoke so freely. Should he be shocked at Shakuntala? Perhaps, but he wasn't.

They talked about the landlord who was so hated he was always surrounded by hired goondas, who were also hated and feared. They said that Muslim and Hindu had joined together against the landlord, that they were susceptible to the communist message, that there was a communist firebrand who spoke to whip them up. A Catholic Priest had been documenting the landlord's crimes. The priest was harassed and threatened, but accident intervened to save the landlord further trouble. The priest in some rare time off went to an island in the river for a day's fishing. A heavy fall of rain, a flash flood, he was swept away. After this accident the people were even more fearful of the landlord, as though he had the power to corrupt God or the forces of nature, and bend them to his advantage.

Shakuntala took hold of Anand's wrist.

"Your heart beat is fast. You are running a temperature. Anand, you should go to bed now."

"It is the stories you are telling me," protested Anand.

"Do as Shakuntala says. She knows what she is talking about."

"Maybe it is for the best. Then I can leave early tomorrow." As he was saying this he was conscious of a reluctance to go from Cheddapalli. He would like to get to know them all better. But Amma . . ..He felt guilty as he got to his feet.

Shakuntala stood up and faced him.

"Listen, Anand. You are not strong enough yet. I mean this, but you are not a child and will do as you wish. I must go myself now to see my patient."

Anand did not leave. Shakuntala's patient had died in the night. He was a member of the local communist cadre, and the bullet in his head had come from one of the landlord's men.Ganesh was sent with a message and some Party men came to collect the body. He was nineteen years old, a student, and he was named a martyr.They intended to turn his funeral into a propaganda event.

Later that day the firebrand was to speak in a neighbouring village. Men, women and children went from Cheddapalli to hear him. Anand went with Hussain and Shakuntala, and mingling in the large crowd gathered from the surrounding countryside was an excited Ganesh.

Red paper flags fluttered from a pandal and beneath it five men, each wearing a garland of marigolds, sat on chairs. From their clothes you could tell they were outsiders. A village band was playing and the musicians sang a song against the landlord.

This landlord is the devil

He takes many shapes

As a donkey we will hobble him

As a buffalo we will make him bellow

As a thieving monkey we will cut off his paws

As a snake we will cut out his fangs

This landlord is a tyrant

He commits many crimes

This tyrant, we will poison his well

This tyrant, we will burn his buildings

This tyrant, we will take his land

This tyrant will wish he was a donkey, a buffalo, a monkey or a snake.

The song was popular with the crowd. People laughed and hummed and talked excitedly, but when the music stopped, the man who sat centrally under the pandal stood up and there was a sudden expectant hush. He was a short man, still young though his hair was beginning to turn gray at the temples. He held his head high. His voice was loud and ringing.

"Comrades, today we have a martyr. A young man aged only eighteen. His name, Ramachandran. He died with the landlord's bullet in his head. He died fighting for the cause of freedom. But is he the only martyr? Oh, no. I see before me today, sitting here, hundreds of martyrs. Still breathing, but surely suffering. Dying slowly, from long hours of hard work, from cruel beatings, from lack of food, from a withering of hope."

Then the man started to ask a series of questions to which his listeners responded. Anand could see what he was about, starting with a seemingly innocent question, leading up to a point of incitement.

"Are we just dumb peasants?"

"No," they shouted in response.

"Will we continue to suffer?"

"No."

Anand beckoned Ganesh and when he came, climbed up onto his shoulders.

"Does the landlord deserve to live?"

"No!"

"Friends, friends," shouted Anand from the back of the crowd. This took everyone by surprise and they turned to stare. The men under the pandal were asking each other questions.

"Most of you will not know me. My name is Anand and I was born in the village of Cheddapalli, a place known to you all. I have only recently returned, but as a native-born, I think I have a right to speak."

At this point no-one seemed to want to dispute that.

"I too have a question to ask you."

Then the speaker interrupted with his more penetrating voice.

"Is this someone who thinks the landlord deserves to live?"

This was a false question, a clever question. People laughed and waited ready to jeer at Anand's response.

"This landlord is a criminal. We all know it. He deserves to be brought to court. To be made to listen to the catalogue of his evil-doing, to listen to every word of the testimony of eyewitnesses, to hear the sorrows his harsh treatment has caused. He has the right to put up a defence, and then after he has been heard, deserves the punishment of the court."

There was an outburst. A volley of words. Death. No need for courts. Courts are corrupt. Witnesses bribed. Bought judges."

"The question I want to ask," yelled Anand above the hubbab, "is this. How does the martyrdom of Ramachandran help his family, who already suffers at the hand of the landlord?"

"He was prepared to die for the cause." This came from a young man who stood to speak. " His widowed mother takes pride in that. The fault of his death lies with the landlord who has made this resistance necessary."

"How will his mother survive now?"

"The Party will look after her."

"You speak like a good servant of the party."

The young man looked pleased.

"But is it good to remain a servant? You have two masters, now. The landlord and the Party. When you are not doing the bidding of the one, you are doing the bidding of the other. And the ways of both your masters are violent."

Hussain was standing beside Ganesh, calling up to Anand.

"You must get down now. We must go."

Anand could see men coming from the front, making their way through the crowd, towards him. Then he caught sight of a tall man, standing a little apart, his arms crossed.

"Hurry now, Anand." That was Shakuntala.

Like Anand, that man's hair had grown long and he had a full beard. His face was thinner than before. They looked at each other. Anand recognized him through all that hair and was sure that he too was recognized.

"Ganesh, bring Anand down." Anand felt himself being unceremoniously tipped to the ground. He scrambled up and they ran, pushing their way against people who were also running and pushing. The landlord's goondas had arrived, but so had the police. There were skirmishes. There were shots. Anand felt himself to be forgotten.

"My aunt lives in this village. We are going there."

Shakuntala grabbed Anand's shirt and pulled him in a different direction, ducking behind some huts until they came to one where she shoved him inside. Hussain and Ganesh were already there, collapsed on the floor, panting.

"Aunt, this is Anand, Lukegaru's son."

The aunt was an older version of Shakuntala. She also had a direct gaze.

"I remember your parents well. I remember as a child feeding you castor oil, and massaging your baby limbs."

"Everyone here seems to know more about me than I do myself."

"Where did you learn to speak out?" asked Hussain.

"I have not done so before. But I have spoken and argued politics with friends."

"For a first time it was very good." Shakuntala looked over at him and wagged her head approvingly.

"Is there food?" asked Ganesh.

"A cold chapatti." Shakuntala's aunt passed one to him."Have you been working hard, Ganesh?"

"Our strong boy here was holding Anand on his shoulders as he spoke to the crowd."

"Anand here is not too too healthy, but that must still have been hard work."

Ganesh smiled at these acknowledgements and slid his long body down, closing his eyes as he chewed on the chapatti.

"Who was the man who spoke?" asked Anand.

"His name is Suresh. He is the spokesman. We are not sure where he is from," said Hussain.

"That was clever, Anand, to say that you were born here," said Shakuntala. " The party leaders are not. Apart from Suresh there is another man. Perhaps you saw him. A tall, good-looking man, standing apart. He is the real leader, but he does not speak in public. He is called the Red Tiger. No one knows his name."

"I know it," said Anand.

"What? How?"

"His name is Satyan Reddy. I knew him in Hyderabad. He was my best friend, but it seems we must now be enemies."

"I expect there will be more patients waiting when we return to Cheddapalli. Gunshot wounds." Shakuntala looked tired.

"I will do what I can to help. Just tell me what to do."

"She is good at that," said Hussain.

"What about your mother?" asked Shakuntala.

"Perhaps I can send a message. That is, if you know of someone going towards Kalampett."

"I don't know of anyone now, but maybe in the next few days."

Kalampett

Graceamma was very ill for a week. In hospital she was wrapped in icy sheets and given pills to sleep. When her condition had stabilised she was taken home to the bungalow, to her own room.The Dorasani said that they must all make efforts to be as quiet as possible and Abraham tried to curb his irritations often expressed by the banging of pots and implements, the crash of the screen door and furious utterances.

During the months of Anand's disappearance, Graceamma's hair had been turning white, but now it was altogether snowy. Abraham considered that white hair could look pleasing on a man or a woman when hair was thick and the face beneath smooth and serene. But Graceamma was losing her hair. Abraham was appalled by the long limp strands swept out of Graceamma's bedroom each morning by Marthamma.

It was important, the Dorasani said, that Graceamma start to eat again.

Abraham worked to whet Graceamma's appetite. He prepared enticing morsels: chicken liver cooked quickly in ghee with chilli and tomato, a milk pudding spiced with cardamoms and sweetened with jaggery and raisins, slices of green mango dipped in salt. As he was cutting up a chicken to make curry he found three yolks in ascending size in the hen's reproductive passage. These were an especially nourishing treat. He poached them lightly and served them with rings of raw onion and a sprinkle of chilli powder. These titbits he pushed under her door curtain. Sometimes it was days later when a dish was pushed back, the food scarcely touched.

He missed her presence, her chatter, her soft footfalls. The dense silence behind her curtain was constant except when she had visitors: Dr. Ammagaru, the Dorasani, Amosammagaru and Tundrigaru, and the daily ministrations of Marthamma.

One day he heard the Dorasani say to Graceamma, that she should get off her bed each morning and walk a little around the house. And then when she had regained some strength, she should take a walk in the garden in the evening.

The next morning Abraham saw a clawlike hand fumble at her curtain and then push it aside. Graceamma wavered like a wraith in the doorway. Her cheeks were sunk, her thinned hair pulled back into a pitiful knot.

"How are you?" he asked.

She did not reply. Her eyes ranged around the pantry and outside through the screen. She sighed as though discouraged by what she saw.

"I'm well." He barely heard this, as she turned back into her room.

Dr Ammagaru tackled the problem of Graceamma's dwindling health with pills and injections. Graceamma was not required to go to the clinic. Dr Ammagaru herself came to the bungalow and administered the injections in Graceamma's room off the pantry. And she who suffered the continued absence of her son in silence was surprisingly loud in her protests over a needle prick.

Abraham took this moment of stridency as a hopeful sign. A spark, a spark alive in Graceamma's ashes.

To coax a spark into a flame required a gentle fanning to begin with and a quiet well–aimed breath through the kitchen blow pipe. Impatience and an untoward strength can kill a spark. Abraham knew about this. Bringing a kitchen fire back to life was another skill of which he was a master. He had never been to the South Indian hills, but he had heard of the waterfalls, the fresh greenness of grass and trees, the scent and colour of the flower gardens, soft temperate breezes. In such a place Graceamma's spark could ignite into a small promising flame, keeping hope and strength alive while she waited for Anand.

One morning Abraham overheard Graceamma speak in a small weak voice to the Dorasani.

"Ammagaru, this year, I do not wish to go to the hills."

Not go to the hills! This was most improper. Ayahs were taken to the hills. Cooks, watermen, gardeners, sweepers, these servants were not. They stayed in the heat, putting up

with it as best they could. Abraham would live his whole life without seeing the hills. Never see, even from a distance what were said to be blue peaks arising abruptly from the plains. For Graceamma to refuse was, was . . . He could not put a word to it.

"Why is that, Graceamma?" asked the Dorasani.

Abraham waited for her answer, but she remained silent.

"I think I understand," said the Dorasani. "If, when, Anand comes back home you want to be here. Of course you do. But Graceamma you are very ill. I could not possibly leave you. Tundrigaru is staying here in the hot weather. If Anand comes, Tundrigaru will send us a telegram straight away. I want you to get better and the hills will do you so much good. Graceamma, I insist that you come with us."

After the Dorasani left her, Graceamma cried. Abraham heard that too. It was like the mewling of a kitten.

But it was right that the Dorasani insist on taking Graceamma to the hills. Abraham said so to Jacob, who agreed.

Harriet had called together a gathering of the missionaries. The night air was hot, not the slightest breath of air. They sat on the verandah in the light of a single hurricane lamp. There was such a shortage of kerosene they had stopped reading at night and went early to bed. That was not a bad thing as they were all exhausted. In this half light they looked gaunt. Even Lester's youthful face was a little drawn.They were talking about Graceamma.

"Well, Graceamma is seriously depressed," said Virginia. " I've given her a pill, so she can sleep tonight. But she needs something stronger which I don't have. I'll write out a prescription, Harriet. A dispensary in Madras should stock the drug. There is the danger of

suicide. I don't think we can expect much in the way of recovery until the situation with Anand is resolved. I told her that as her doctor I recommend she go to the hills with you."

"Thank you," said Harriet. "I can do with that support."

"It's more than depression," said Archie. " Graceamma is having a spiritual crisis."

"Did she say that?" Harriet was amazed at the personal things people told Archie.

"She said she no longer hears Luke's voice. She used to hear it, offering her words of encouragement, as he did in life. And she's always had a sense of God's presence. Solid, permanent and all-embracing. Now she's experiencing a profound absence. Not only does she not know where Anand is, she can't hear Luke's voice and she cannot find her way back to God. Her prayers go nowhere. In her own words, "God has forgotten me."

"Poor, Graceamma."

"What did you say to her?" asked Ross.

"I said she should continue being herself. Not change in any way. Pray when she normally prays, read the Bible as usual."

"But she can't read anymore," objected Harriet. "Or can she now?"

"She has her own method. She and Luke had favourite passages which she underlined with pencil. She opens the Bible at one of these passages, follows it line by line with her finger while she recites it. She knows them all off by heart."

"I've seen her," said Harriet, "Her finger tracing the words, her lips moving. I thought she was trying to recover her reading."

" I told her to maintain her devotional habits, despite there seeming to be no point. That when her darkness passes, which it will, she will find herself intact, and quite possibly

stronger. By the way, there's no danger of suicide. Graceamma will stay alive for Anand, and she will not want to cast herself into that absence she fears."

"If Anand turns up over the next weeks,´ said Ross, "Archie will no doubt dispatch a telegram."

"Immediately."

"The political situation may have changed by the time we come back."

"I think it unlikely that anything decisive will happen in the hot weather."

"It will be a few weeks before we are together again. Shall we say a prayer?"

They listened with bent heads to Archie's cadences, and after their Amens they separated. There was a half moon, and in that light Archie and Lester crossed the field covered with a dead stubble, lying fallow. Hilda and Virginia took the short cut, clambering in their evening gowns over the wall that separated the school and hospital compounds. Snakes were known to live in the stone wall. The heard a warning hiss as they placed their feet from one stone to another without benefit of light.

Chapter 13 May 1948

The Hills

"Coo-eee. Is anyone at home?"

"I'm here. In the orchard." Harriet raised her voice, but did not expect to be heard, calling up a steep slope thick with trees. "I'm coming." She made her way uphill in rubber boots that slipped on the rough dewy grass.

"Coo-eee. Now what on earth are you doing down there?" enquired Joyce Pringle's deep voice.

As Harriet passed she knocked against a tree and cold drops fell from an overhead branch onto her hair and slid down the back of neck. It was delicious, that chillness, after the heat they had come from.

Now Harriet could see Joyce's sensible shoes, beaded with dew, but staying firmly on the edge of the concrete path.

"Hallo . . . Joyce." Harriet scrambled the last slope and reached the path out of breath."There's a … there's a good … a good …"

"Slow down, girl. You haven't got your hill legs yet. Or your puff. That's better. What were you doing down there anyway?"

"Inspecting the crop. Pears and peaches coming along."

" Those horrible mountain peaches are usually as hard as rocks."

"They're not like the ones at home, of course. But they're still a treat. I bottle them and we eat them on the plains when we are entertaining. With our cook's custard and meringues they are very nice."

"Bottling peaches," chortled Joyce. "Relax, girl. Put your feet up and read a good thriller."

"Oh, I intend to do that as well. Now Joyce, tell me your news."

"No,dear. My news can wait. I've come in the hope of a good strong cup of tea, and to ask the question that is on everyone's lips. What is happening in Hyderabad?"

As was often the case with Joyce, she did not so much want to hear your news as tell you your news and what she thought of it.

"I don't suppose Virginia is coming? She could hardly go to Kashmir at this time, so where is she going?" There was a disparaging tone to Joyce's voice. There were missionaries who disapproved of Virginia as "not being our sort", quite unfairly in Harriet's opinion, as though Virginia could help being the granddaughter of a baronet. And though Virginia lived like the rest of them in Kalampett, when she was on holiday, she travelled first class and could afford to go to places further a field than the South Indian hill stations. There were people, Joyce among them, who disapproved of this, thinking Virginia looked down on them. But if Virginia did not think much of someone, it was not on account of her class.

"She wants to explore Kerala's waterways for a week or two, and," continued Harriet, ignoring a disapproving grunt from Joyce, "she has been invited to stay with the Travancores. They are coming to the hills and Virginia will be their guest. They are very kind you know," hurried on Harriet, feeling obliged to also defend the Hindu Maharajah. "We stayed in a cottage next door to them one summer, and they put on a birthday party for Rachel."

Joyce's blunt features remained unrelentingly sour.

"Would you like some more?" Harriet indicated the teapot and Joyce nodded, her stare fixed on Harriet's face.

"I do not mind that Virginia moves in other social circles. One summer when she was in Darjeeling she met a Bengali musician. He came to stay in Kalampett for a few days. A very charming, very educated man. He brought his bamboo flute, and he played it for the school children. They had never heard such a thing before. Nor had I. Such pure sounds. We were all uplifted."

The man was a Brahman and a vegetarian. Samuel's cooking wasn't up to it and Virginia couldn't open her tins of game casserole and turtle soup for this visitor. So she had arranged through a patient for a tiffin carrier of food, prepared in a Brahman kitchen, to be delivered twice a day. Virginia was never flummoxed or stymied. Harriet admired that about her.

"I know you are friends with Virginia. A very loyal friend. If you like her, Harriet, I daresay she must have some good points." Joyce's face broke into an unexpectedly charming smile. The smile reminded Harriet that Joyce had once been engaged. Her fiancée had died in an accident at a level crossing only a week before the wedding.

"I hear that Archie isn't coming."

"No. Ross was going to stay too, but Archie thought there was only need for one of them, and as he is the senior missionary it was up to him. Ross argued about this, but Archie wouldn't budge."

"Hmmph. Stubborn old fellow at times, isn't he?"

"The clergy in the villages," carried on Harriet with her report, " are doing a wonderful job maintaining the villagers' morale, but there is no back up from the

authorities. The police have more or less given up responding to incidents, even though they're armed. When something ghastly happens, all Archie and Ross can do is go there, giving what comfort they can by their presence and delivering the sacraments. They show the villagers that not everyone in Kalampett has abandoned them."

"Interesting times, huh?" Joyce had her elbows on the table, her chin cupped in her hands."And how has it been for you, my dear?"

"Well, we have enough food for the school children." She told Joyce about the landlord who had given them his harvest of rice. "For us personally, it's just the shortages. Silly things like shampoo. We've been using soapnuts."

Joyce pulled a face. "Horrible things, don't they sting? And the bits of shell left in the hair."

"And then there are the important things like salt and kerosene and pills. We've become adept at smuggling small items. It's been so hot that we really felt the lack of salt. Virginia came to supper one evening and brought along some olives bottled in brine. We fell upon them and they were eaten in a moment. Do you know that since I've arrived I've had bacon for breakfast every morning?" She laughed. "I should probably ease up on that now."

"When is Iris Brown arriving?"

"I'm not sure that she is. Travelling through the interior of Hyderabad isn't easy."

"I heard a rumour that she had managed to get out."

"I do hope so."

"I also heard ," Joyce paused, and then lowered her voice "that she'd been feeding Communists. What do you know about that?"

"Nothing. We haven't been in communication. Well, if Iris has been feeding Communists, there must have been a good reason for it."

Cheddapalli

Anand heard faint noises outside the prayer room, as of someone putting something down against the wall outside. Packets of medical goods were sometimes dropped off there in the early morning and the messenger would quickly leave. The packets came from the Party.When Shakuntala had told them about this, she had shrugged.

"Strange, is it not? They smuggle in guns for themselves and medicines for me. Does that mean I am working for them?"

"They might think that. You are working for the people, which they think they are doing too. In your case, you really are."

"I miss Rev. Moses. He helps me with my thoughts."

Anand felt a pang that he was not as helpful as Rev. Moses.

Sounds continued. Someone lingered, shuffling his feet. Anand opened the door and went out. Satyan stood at the corner of the hut, looking as Anand had seen him at the meeting, his face impassive, his arms folded.

They looked at each other without smiling.

"How are Leila and the boys?"

"They are well. I am able to see them from time to time." Satyan dropped his arms. "I should thank you. Leila said you were very kind. That the boys may have died without the medicines. I am sorry about your job."

"The Hakim near the Hanuman Chai Shop, he is owed money for the medicine."

"I will see that he is paid."

There was an awkward silence.

"How goes the struggle?" asked Anand.

"We have had our victories. Captured food and distributed it. Taken over land and given it to the landless. Our numbers are growing."

Anand nodded.

"You should think of leaving. Go to your mother in Kalampett."

"That is pointless at this time. She will have gone with the Dorasani to the hills."

"Do not speak again at meetings. You will anger people."

"Is speech no longer free in these villages?"

Satyan looked impatient.

"I have warned you, Anand."

He stepped away, and disappeared around the corner.

Kalampett

Abraham drank slowly from a tumbler. The water came from a clay coojah set in a bowl of water. This insulation kept the water cool without refrigeration and was less of a shock to the stomach.

When he drained the tumbler he rolled out his mat in the pantry for a nap. His eyes were heavy and his brain numbed by the heat. To sink onto the mat, for now that was all he wanted. The boy was outside somewhere.That boy Prakasam whose mother was unwell and since the hostel was closed the Dorasani, asked him, Abraham to look after the boy. So far

he had not been a problem. He hated to be indoors and he loved to climb. He would be somewhere up a tree.

"Ayah, Abrahamayah. There is a man coming through the gate."

The boy's voice sang out to him. He was closer than Abraham had realized, outside the kitchen, up in the tamarind tree.

"Let him come," said Abraham, "As long as he doesn't disturb me."

"He is running, sir. But not so well. He is fat. A fat Muslim who cannot run is running. Look, look, sir. It is very funny."

"It will not be very funny if you keep disturbing me. Say not a word more. I wish to have a nap."

The boy was quiet. Abraham was almost asleep when a fly landed on his face and wandered over his mouth. He shook his head. Waved his arm. Go, go.

"Sir, the man has fallen. I'm going to him."

Abraham got up to arm himself with the swat. He waited for the fly to land, but the germy nuisance stayed airborne. So he batted it in the air. Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. In the end the fly was fatally attracted to Abraham. His heat, his sweat. It landed on his leg. Thwack.

"Is this the house? Is this where I will find Abraham?" The man's voice, panting, hoarse, was coming from the back steps.

"Yes, sir," said the foolish Prakasam.

Abraham knew the voice, but couldn't place it. "Who is that?"

"It is I, your friend Hassan."

My friend, was it? That voice had never before sounded so syrupy. What did the man want? He was now heaving himself up the steps.

"This is no time for a visit. To walk here in this heat is the act of a mad man. Or a desperate…"

"Let me in, let me in, you idiot. My life depends on it."

He would let this man in, and out of compassion offer him some water, and then make some excuse to send him on his way. Should he, Abraham, not be allowed his sleep?

Hassan's heavy body was leaning against the door, so when Abraham undid the latch the door sprung open past his face and Hassan fell prostrate at his feet.

Hajji Hassan was like a dying buffalo heaving and groaning for breath. His face was reddened and bloated. The beard was tangled. His body exuded odours of things Abraham did not wish to think. But he could not leave him there, half in, half out the door.

Without allowing time for revulsion to set in, Abraham bent down towards that hot, pulsating stickiness that was Hajji Hassan and gripped him under the armpits. Then he dragged that weighty body that had feasted on the best fat meat in Kalampett clear of the door.

The boy was gawping

"Bring some water," snapped Abraham.

The boy headed for the water pot.

"Not there. From the cooja. Yes. That's right."

Abraham managed to prop Hassan against the packingcase/sideboard.

"Here is water, Hajji. Drink." He held the tumbler to his mouth.

Hassan sucked greedily, dribbling and spilling water Then he pushed the tumbler away .

"I'm being followed. A man.With a sword. He wishes to kill me. You must not let him in." He grasped Abraham's bunyan tightly at the neck and pulled him close.

"He threatens to kill me. You understand? Kill me."

"A man with a sword? Of course I won't let him in here. Into Doragaru's bungalow? I would not allow such a thing. Prakasam, go and climb the tree and watch for this man. If you see him, make a birdcall. And stay in the tree. When he comes I alone will speak to him."

"What bird would you like sir? A blue jay, a coppersmith, a golden oriole? The golden oriole is the best, sir."

"Anything, anything. Hurry. The man will be here before you are up the tree."

At the same time Hassan is pulling at him. "Abraham, that door is slight. And you can see through the screen. If the man sees me here, he will beat the door in."

"I was thinking the same. How far behind is this man? Perhaps there is time to take you to the hostel store room."

"No, no. I am not leaving this place until it is safe. Hide me somewhere in the bungalow."

"Certainly not. Much as I want to save your life, once the bungalow is locked up for the summer, it is not opened till the day before the doragaru and dorasani are expected back. Then the sweeper comes to clean, and Jacob draws water for the bathrooms, and I . ."

"You have no key?"

"Of course I have the key. Is it not my job to both lock the door and then to open it at the right times, and my duty to see the bungalow is not disturbed in between?"

"Abraham, my brother, I admit it. I have cheated you. I have not always given you the quality of meat your payment deserved. But for such reasons, you, a God-fearing man, will not want blood on his hands?"

This was picture language, a way of saying only, and yet Abraham saw it, his hands red and wet and dripping.

"Pee-oo-ah. Weel-a-woe." A sound of beauty. The call of the golden oriole.

"From now on I will give you the best quality meat. Cheap, cheap. What am I saying? Free meat. For all time. And I have money here. Look. Look." Hassan was babbling. He was opening a bag at his waist. Holding out coins and notes and gems. He was falling to his knees and clutching Abraham's feet. This ugly cravenness, this odious sweat of panic. Simply unbearable.

"No,no,no,no,no,no,NOOOOO."

Silence. A sob.

"Look, Hajji Hassan. I am unlocking the door." Abraham fumbled for the key at his waist. He inserted it. "I wish nothing from you. Except honest treatment."

The lock was stiff. Sometimes it needed oil.

"Tonk, tonk." This time it was the sound of the coppersmith. A better choice.

There was no time now for oil.

"Hurry, hurry, you clown." Hajji Hassan was sobbing.

"And respect. I wish for respect." Abraham glared at Hajji Hassan.

"Tonk, tonk, tonk."

Abraham shifted the position of the key. He shut his eyes and squeezed with all the strength in his wrist. The lock gave. He pushed open the doors and shoved Hajji Hassan into the gloom beyond, and hurriedly pulled the doors to.

His hands were shaking as he locked them.

"Tonk, tonk, tonk, tonk."

Abbah, abbah, enough.

Coins, notes and gems were spilled on the floor. Was that a diamond? Abraham swept them into a pile with his hands, and dropped a cloth over them. He then went outside and was confronted by another demented fellow, a young man with a wild look in his glittering eyes, the marks of Shiva on his forehead, and a curved sword in his hand. A black heavy sword with a glinting, newly sharpened edge.

Lester was sitting on a rock in the pool. His trousers were rolled up above the knees, and his legs moved in the cool water. A gust tossed spray from the waterfall, a light sprinkle landed on him, and he was holding a piece of bacon and egg pie. The steady roar of the waterfall muted the sound of the high jinks in the pool. The scene was idyllic, but Lester's thoughts and eyes were directed towards one thing only. Or rather, one person. Amy Parker in a blue sunfrock.

She was sitting at the edge of the pool and Johnson, that idiot, who was up to his waist, splashed water into Amy's face and over her dress.

There was always an idiot where there was a pretty girl and water around. An idiot who goes too far.

Bagshaw, who was a stride away from Johnson, jumped on him and pushed him under.

" In defence," he shouted in his bass voice, " of the lady."

"Thank you, Bags. I was worried there for a moment." Amy's shining blue eyes, her laughing voice, she was treating it as a joke. Why do women put up with buffoons?

Bagshaw was older. Not married. Tall, knowledgeable about India. Wonderful singing voice. Possibly quite attractive to younger women.

Lester took his eyes off Amy and looked down. His legs were distorted and foreshortened in the water. The skin where they patched up his wound was shiny, an unearthly white.

"Hallo, is there room for me ?"

Amy was stepping and jumping her way across the rocks to where he was sitting.

"Yes." Lester shifted sideways.

"It looks safer here. A little more sane." Amy scrambled on to the rock. Now that she was close, he noticed a dusting of freckles that were new across her face, and down her arms. They looked healthy and friendly.

"How are you Lester? I haven't seen much of you yet. What do you think of the hills?" Amy herself was a veteran of one season.

"Astonishing. When you think of South India, the last thing you picture is temperate breezes and cottage gardens. And the natural beauty. It's as good as anything I've seen."

Idiot.

Lester looked down. He was still holding untouched his slice of bacon and egg pie.

'Would you like a bite?"

"Yes, please. It's good, isn't it?"

They munched companionably on what Lester suddenly realised was indeed an excellent pie.

'I say, can I have a piece?"

Johnson was swimming and splashing his way towards them. When he reared up in front of them, he was covered in goosepimples and his lips were blue.

"Johnny, don't you think you've had enough of the water?"

Lester tried to assess the degree of concern in Amy's voice.

Johnson bit off the last of the pie from Lester's hand. With his mouth over full, spilling crumbs, he started to pull himself up on to their rock.

"Don't you dare, you great big wet Labrador."

With surprising vigour, Amy shoved him off. Lester noticed that as Johnson slipped back into the water, his shin scraped against a rock.

Ouch.

Poor idiot. The man had a first in Greats. Last year he topped the Tamil language exam and an attractive woman reduced him to being a clumsy dog. Johnson backstroked away from them, making gibbering calls, and predictably splashed them with his kick.Water glistened down Amy's arms, stained her dress.

"Shall we go for a walk?" he suggested.

She turned to him.

"I'd like nothing better."

The path through the shola was spongy with humus and smelt of leaf mould. Water trickled down mossy banks, under small quivering ferns, past flowering violets and other

wildflowers Lester could not name. The ancient trees had trunks standing like cathedral pillars supporting the overhead canopy. They passed thick bushes and arching tree ferns. One of these large filigree leaves dangled over their path, and Lester leapt to grasp the point and pull it down.

"Magnificent," he murmured. "You know, in the middle of the war, in a countryside where the woods and trees were shot up and wrecked, I never imagined for a moment that I'd find myself in a place like this." He let go of the leaf and it flexed up and away like a horse rearing, tossing its mane.

"People were so brave then," said Amy. "There was so much ghastliness. The fear. It was too much to speak about. People just held it within themselves. Held it there and carried on."

"Let's sit over there." Lester indicated a tree. The leaves under it were as dry as parchment. "It shouldn't be too damp here."

When they sat, his trousers rode up his legs. Lester noticed that a cuff was still turned up, partly exposing his scar.

He went to roll the cuff down.

"Don't." Amy looked at him. She reached towards his leg.

"May I?"

He nodded dumbly.

Her fingers were cool. They moved slowly up the discoloured hairless corrugations, and down again. Then she stroked the swelling of his calf where his skin was good.

"Does that feel different?"

"Yes."

"I nursed for a bit. I saw the wounds when they first came in. I saw them sewed up and bandaged. I never saw one after it was healed."

Lester did not know what to think. Why should Amy do that? Noone had touched his scar. Not even his mother.

Something opened inside him. He had always said to himself that his leg didn't worry him, how trivial it was compared to injuries others carried, but a small shame had remained locked within him. He realised that now. But Amy had changed that.

They talked about the others at the picnic.

"Hasn't Rachel grown? Grown out of her puppy fat. I went round to visit soon after they arrived, and she was there for the weekend. She had on a dress that Harriet had the Kalampett tailor make.The poor girl was looking miserable. The dress was far too long, with a dreary border suitable only for a woman over fifty. Harriet could not understand why Rachel was not more pleased. I offered to alter the dress, make it more the latest thing. They agreed. So I shortened it, taking off the dreary border, and took out the sleeves. She is looking very pretty in it today.

"I hadn't noticed."

Amy looked sideways at him. "She notices you. The poor girl has quite a crush."

"I didn't know. Poor girl, indeed. How horribly inconvenient."

"For you or her? If she is awkward with you, do be kind. I once had a crush on the deacon at our parish church. The day he realised, he laughed. It was the worst humiliation I've ever had."

Lester had never given any consideration to the trials of adolescent girls, though he might one day. If he had daughters. It was the grown woman beside him who dominated his thoughts.

They stood, Amy brushing bits of crumpled leaf off her skirt.

"You wouldn't think it," says Amy, as they walked further into the native forest, "But there are supposed to be panthers here in the shola."

"Yes, that is a surprise. How do you know?"

"People's puppy dogs go missing. And when they search they find gruesome remains."

" In the absence of a dog, what does one do on meeting a panther?"

"I do not know that there is a set procedure. What I would do is scream, run, climb a tree, hide behind you."

"That is not at all brave," said Lester. "No. We must face the danger together, fair and square, while holding hands." His white fingers firmly interlaced themselves between her golden freckled ones. He was surprised by the confidence of his grip, her relaxed acceptance, and how good it all felt.

Lester, you might win the maiden yet.

Kalampett

"Was that the coppersmith I heard?" asked the man with the sword. He was sitting on the steps pouring water down his throat. The sword was no longer clenched in his fist, but it still looked dangerous leaning against a step.

"Yes," said Abraham. "That repetitive sound drives me mad."

"It would drive me mad too except that I am already enraged. I have chased that cheating, bribing, manipulating butcher all the way from Kalampett. Unfortunately someone told him I was coming and the coward had a head start. But I am younger and knew I could catch up with him, and when I was at the top of the rise, I saw him sneaking through the gates of this compound."

"There are many ways he could have gone from there. He could have turned right towards the boys' hostel and the storehouses and further to the girls' hostel. He could have turned left and gone to the school office or the classroom blocks."

"Or he could have gone straight and arrived here."

"That also is true," acknowledged Abraham.

"Are you sure you did not see that butcher sneaking past this way?"

"I am sure. I was trying to have a nap," said Abraham sounding aggrieved.

What was the butcher doing now? Sitting in a chair at the dining table? In Tundrigaru's chair, perhaps. He could be taking a nap on the Doragaru's bed, or worse still on Miss Rachel's, his sweaty bearded head on her pillow. Such thoughts were most disagreeable.

"I also have had my problems with that butcher."

"It is time we all got justice. Thank you for the water." The man grasped the sword and stood up. Abraham also stood.

"Now that we have met, I should know your name. Mine is Abraham."

" G.T. Sundarao. We are on the same side, isn't? Against the Muslims." He brandished the sword. "Death to Muslims."

"It is only one I have a problem with, and I would not wish to kill him," said Abraham, feeling squeamish. At that moment Jacob arrived.

"Namaste." Jacob asked after the man's health.

"He is angry and wants to kill the butcher." Prakasam had climbed down the tree without anyone noticing and chose that moment to insert his face with the overly large teeth into the adult's conversation.

"Tchee," muttered Abraham.

"Why are you searching for the butcher here?"

"Because this is the way the coward ran. And I saw him enter the gates. I will go now and search the other buildings."

"I am just now come from inspecting the buildings, as is my job, and there is no-one there, ayah. It is likely the butcher went over the stone wall and crossed the field. That is a route favoured by absconders and runaways, especially when the cholam is high. There is only stubble now, but still the other day I saw a stranger in a hurry picking his way through."

G.T.Sundarao looked uncertain about what to do next.

"May I ask," continued Jacob, "What a devotee of Shiva is doing with a Muslim sword?"

"It was the only weapon I could get that would do the job. It cost me a month's wages, and then I learnt that the man who sold it had himself got it for nothing, stealing it from the police depository. But it is just, is it not? To slaughter a Muslim with a Muslim sword. To butcher the butcher."

Despite these words, the man had lost some of his wild energy.

They stood in silence, except for Prakasam who was scratching a scab on his elbow.

"Stop it.' Abraham glared.

"I will take my leave now." G.T. Sundarao started jogging in the direction of the stone wall. They watched him go.

"The butcher is safe. He is in the bungalow. I did not want to let him inside, but there was no time for anything else."

Jacob nodded impassively. "I have seen that fellow before. He is usually a mild sort of person. Did you see his eyes? He has taken drugs to give himself courage. But they will soon wear off and then he will go home."

"What about the sword?"

"I think it is Tundrigaru's."

"I also think that."

"I'm hungry, ayah," whined Prakasam, pulling at Abraham.

"You will have to wait." He shook the boy off.

Abraham went to wash. He soaped between each finger and under his nails and rinsed his hands three times. He had been itching to do this ever since he held the sweating Hajji. And there was something else he must also do. He was full of misgivings as he unlocked the bungalow door and let himself in. He had to locate that nuisance of a butcher and see what damage he had caused.

He found the man in the Doragaru's dressing room. There was a mat there on which the Doragaru knelt to pray. And there was Hassan, himself prostrate, himself using the very same prayer mat. There were drips of water leading from the bathroom, evidence that the Hajji had properly washed himself first. The only problem was that in his fatigue and

confusion, in his unfamiliarity with these surroundings the Hajji was not facing the right direction. He was facing south, not towards Mecca. Abraham wondered if he should correct the man and, while he was about it, complain at this use of the Doragaru's carpet.

Hassan did not seem to have noticed another's presence in the doorway. Abraham reflected that not all people were intolerant as he, that were the Doragaru to know, he would not object to Hassan using his mat. And it was quite possible that Allah, may his name be praised, would be forgiving of Hassan's disorientation. The man was very loud and voluble in his prayer. No doubt he was confessing his sins, and as he had many sins to confess, Abraham left him to it and made a leisurely inspection room by room of the bungalow, checking that at least everythingelse was in order.

The Hills

The visitor waiting in the diningroom sat in the chair at the further end of the table. A small, thin, awkward shape caught against the daylight in the window. Graceamma recognised her straightaway and was surprised into uttering a cry of pleasure. She had not seen Brown Ammagaru since . . . , since Anand was three and she herself a homeless widow. Graceamma stayed for less than two years in the lace home and in that time grew to love every inch of that woman. Her grey hair knotted in a bun, the three floral cotton dresses worn in rotation, the soap and water skin with a scar shaped like a cashew nut on her right cheek. She was plain, she was ordinary, and shone with goodness.

The figure got up and moved eagerly towards her and folded Graceamma's hands into her own knuckly ones.

"Oh, Graceamma. It's so good to see you. Let's sit down," Still holding hands, they arranged themselves onto adjacent chairs.

"Now, I might have some important news for you. Have you heard of a young woman called Shakuntala? She is a nurse and she is in Cheddapalli doing great work, patching up the wounded. Recently we heard that there was a young man helping her. A young man who had been away a long time, but had been born there."

Brownammagaru tightened her grip for a moment.

"Now I hope I'm not falsely raising your hopes, but I heard that this young man was said to be Lukegaru's son. Your son. It was even said," Brownammagaru lowered her voice to a scandalised whisper, "that this was Lukegaru risen from the dead!"

Graceamma was wordless. Tears streamed from her eyes. Brownammagaru brought out a white cotton handkerchief edged with lace and pressed it gently into Graceamma's hand.

"Anand, if it is indeed Anand, has been most courageous. Speaking out so bravely against the Communists."

Graceamma's tears continued to fall. The flowing warmth of them comforted her skin, leaked into her mouth.She could taste the salt.

Brownammagaru sat quietly with Graceamma until the tears stopped.

"Shall we have a quick prayer?"

Graceamma listened as Brownammagaru enumerated the blessings for which they could thank God, and at the end she whispered, Amen.

Brownammagaru said she must have a word with Harriet, and Graceamma went out to the garden.

For the first time since she had arrived in the hills, she noticed the cool, purity of the air, and could take pleasure in the colours of flowers. She bent over a rich rose and breathed in slowly.The scent travelled like honey through the passages and veins of her body reaching the heart.

Brownammagaru was an angel, a messenger from God.

Harriet normally did not feel a kinship towards those who uttered expressions such as, "Praise the Lord," and "Hallelujah!" But she made an exception for Iris Brown. Iris was so selfless she was almost transparent. She was incandescent with kindness, an attribute she ascribed to others.

"Did you have difficulty getting out?" Harriet asked Iris.

"Oh no. You see, everyone was so kind."

"Everyone? Who do you mean?" This sceptical, probing tone made her sound like Joyce Pringle.

"You know, the fighting men. They control the countryside at the moment."

"The Communists?"

"Yes, and the other lot too, the Razarkars."

"The Communists and Razarkars were kind to you?" Harriet wished she could stop herself sounding like Joyce.

"Oh yes, dear. One lot helped me onto the boat with my luggage, all my lace goods, and the other lot helped me off. And then as I travelled by bullock cart the gangs of men were very friendly along the way. They would raise their, you know, guns in the air, by

way of greeting. The villagers were kind too. I've never had so many offers of buffalo milk and delicious titbits."

Harriet started to giggle.

"Iris, Iris. What did you do to make yourself so popular?"

"There was a problem, you see. More and more of these men were coming into the countryside and there was not enough food to go round. They were harassing the villagers. Well, we couldn't have that. We talked about this and prayed and prayed about it. It seemed right to put aside the lace-making for awhile – which means I haven't brought as much as usual for the missionary Sale of Works – I do hope people won't be too disappointed- and we started to grow vegetables and raise chickens and guineafowl. And we bought in supplies when we could, lentils and cholam and so on, and cooked one large meal a day. We didn't allow the men inside the Home. We served them at the gates on alternate days. And then – people are so generous- we were donated food. The donations were irregular, as you'd expect, and we never knew what might turn up.There were goats slaughtered in the, you know, Muslim way, venison sometimes and wild fowl, and once, I'm afraid to say, a monkey. Dear, oh dear, we were not very expert at butchering, but by now we can cook for a crowd without turning a hair.

"Of course we were not solving the political problems, and it can be quite distressing, especially for the little ones, to hear gunshots. So we did a great deal of singing. But I believe that by providing the food the stress on the villagers was lessened. They assured us of this when we did our visiting."

"Iris. What an adventure!"

"Yes, I suppose it was, dear. There was some good news just before I left. The Communists and Razarkars have formed a truce."

"A truce? That seems unlikely." Harriet spoke in her Joyce voice.

"Well, dear, I don't understand the politics, but it must be good if there is less fighting. And another thing." Iris giggled girlishly. "Most unexpected, really. I received proposals for two of our young mothers."

"Iris, you didn't!"

"Well, of course, I had to refuse. The men were not bad, not bad really, but they weren't suitable. One a convinced communist, the other a devout Muslim. Fortunately, the girls did not like them.The beards, the rough clothes and so on. They can be quite fussy, you know. But I saw the proposals as a welcome sign. If the prejudice against young unmarried mothers is breaking down, that is good, isn't it? Praise the Lord."

"Indeed," said Harriet.

Kalampett

David stood in the doorway to Tundrigaru's office. His master was sitting at his desk. He was naked except for an old pair of shorts and a wet towel draped around his neck. He was sunk down in his chair in a doze. It was one of those moments when David saw his master as ageing. The grizzled puff on his chest, the creases across his midriff. That pink delicate skin on top of his head, shiny from repeated sunburn, rimmed with white. It was a sight that made David think of the future, of Tundrigaru's death.Unlike most missionaries, Tundrigaru would not be returning "home". His dust would mingle with the earth here.

Tundrigaru had given instructions that should he die in a village, his body should be simply rolled in a grass mat and buried in the earth without fuss or expense.

But David knew that if Tundrigaru were to die in Kalampett, this Bishop, or the next one, would want to hold a funeral in the Cathedral and set up a tombstone in the Cathedral enclosure. After the funeral, David would then have to think of what he would do, and what that might be, for now, was unimaginable.

"Tundrigaru."

The eyes blinked open, the chin lifted.

"Ah, David."

"That man is here again. In a jutka. He came yesterday, but then left without alighting."

"Ask him to come in." Tundrigaru stood up. His balance wavered as he reached for his shirt and a pair of trousers.

The visitor was a man about thirty with a prominent brow, neat ears and a fleshy mouth. He wore trousers and a shirt.

Archie moved a chair closer to the desk and invited the man to sit down and then sat in his own chair.

"It is very hot to be out and about. You must have a strong reason to come. Where are you from?"

"I live here in Kalampett itself. Bad things have been happening." He licked his lips. "I do not wish to leave town. My family live here. Parents, uncles, aunts, cousins. I would not wish to leave them, but I am frightened to stay. We are all frightened."

He moved on his chair. Crossed a leg, uncrossed it.

"No hurry," said Archie. "Take your time."

The young man nodded.

"I have seen over these months past, how the Christians do not seem to be frightened. I have asked myself why this must be. I looked at them with envy, wishing to be like that. So I have come to say that I too wish to be a Christian, and to ask what I must do."

The young man's hands were clasped tightly on his knees.

"There are a number of reasons why people ask to become Christian. There is only one good reason and that is belief. Fear is not sufficient grounds."

The man was taken aback.

"But…sir … You do not wish… to help me?"

"I will not accept you for instruction at this time. When these present difficulties are over and the cause of your fear has gone, I would be happy to tell you about our faith if you are still interested."

Archie stood up, but the young man was reluctant to go.

"Is there something that will make you change your mind? My father is rich …"

"No," said Archie. He motioned for the young man to go through the door first and he followed him down the stairs, speaking above his head in the echoing stair well.

"The Christian faith does not promise that believers will be safe and live a pain free life. We are commanded to do difficult things. To love our enemies. To take no revenge on those who have harmed us.To sell our goods and give to the poor. Our Lord was hated by

some and suffered crucifixion, and in his service, we too may offend others and feel their hatred."

Outside David was talking to the jutka driver, who took hold of the horse's reins, steadying the animal.

The young man said nothing as he climbed into the carriage and sat stiffly on the seat. Archie raised a hand in farewell to the man who lifted his hands briefly.

"I don't think we will see him again, David, though I hope I'm wrong. He is a frightened young man, and a rich one. It is a difficult lesson for him, that salvation cannot be bought."

Rahel's Diary

The picnic was held on the night of the full moon. The girls of my age were allowed to go, to escape the stultifying heat of the zenana. He was there. I knew he would be. And so was she. My feelings of misery and self-hate are too tedious, they bore even myself. Each was the centre of their circle of friends. She reclined on a rug among bolsters and cushions. As is prescribed, she was veiled. That veil was a mockery. A diaphanous wisp embroidered with seed pearls that gleamed in the light. Her face was luminous through the veil, her eyes were deep pools. A veil is intended to be a protection, protecting women from lustful looks, and men from the temptations of beauty. Her veil ruffled softly in the breeze, an allurement, inviting every glance to the beauty it enhanced. Even the beams of moonlight could not stay away. She whispered to her friends and softly laughed and fanned herself, pretending not to notice the looks coming her way.

He roamed with his friends under the trees. He had brought two Afghan hunting dogs and a rifle. His friends had rifles too. They shot at small innocent things; rabbits and owls, or just shot off their guns. The explosive noises made us jump. The men continued to be restless and loud and every now and then one would grapple another and wrestle.

I walked with my friends along the tank bund.We climbed the steps to a viewing platform.From there we could see all the way to Golconda, to the mausoleums of nobles and rulers. The Nizam did not come to the picnic. I do not know what he is about these days. I feel distant from him. There is revolution in the countryside, armed bandits terrifying villagers. The Muslim bands thinking they are being loyal to their Nizam, to Hyderabad and its proud traditions, indeed to Allah. But they are disloyal to our open-minded traditions, disloyal to the magnanimity of Islam.They do this out of fear.

What more can I say? There was food. There was music. It was not a peaceful picnic.

Perhaps it will be our last.

Cheddapalli

Anand sat under the tamarind tree in the early morning light. He was saying goodbye to the village, for now. There was less work for Shakuntala and her band of male helpers, of which he had become one, so in that way he would not be missed. This lull followed the truce between Communist and Razarkar. What a joke! They had not found a common mind, but a common enemy, called India. If they thought the combined forces of their part-time, illtrained, underequipped bands could match the military might of India they were clearly deluded.

He had not seen Satyan again face to face, but was aware of him, his shadow, his force, his fingerprints touching and controlling events. Anand had not spoken out so publicly again, but he had spoken informally with knots of men, sitting and smoking with them under a tree. To women as they drew water and bathed their young children. To boys playing their games of war with pieces of wood as guns.

During these discussions he had learnt how easily he could become frustrated and impatient. How he wanted to grab an illogical and stubborn fool by the throat and force him to admit he was wrong. At such moments he understood why people took to guns. But he was speaking for peace and non-violence, wasn't it? So far, with God's help, he had not disgraced himself. When he was tempted to raise his voice and shout, he had become silent and hung his head, keeping himself still, and if some one asked, "But what do you say, Anandayah?" then he would express his thoughts quietly without looking for agreement.

Shakuntala had come to the prayer room to wish him well. She gave him a packet of roti, freshly cooked, still warm. She put out her hand and held him by the sleeve.

"Pray with me, Anand." She knelt down and pulled him down beside her. She arranged her sari over her head, and bent low over the floor.

Anand's prayer habits were limited to saying Amen in church, or to someoneelse's words. On his own, prayers were half-thoughts, verbal fragments telegraphed to God, about his concerns for his mother, for Satyan, and others. And there were moments when he felt so pleased and happy with life that words of thanks and bursts of song were in order. He had certainly never prayed in public outloud.

However, Shakuntala turned out to be as fluent in prayer as she was at everything else, and fortunately she was not lengthy.

"O Lord God, have mercy on Thy servants, Anand and Shakuntala, now praying here. May thy Holy Spirit guide us in these troublesome times. I thank you, Lord, for sending Anand back to his birthplace, to help us. May he have a safe journey back to Kalampett, and a joyful reunion with his mother. We ask this in the name of Thy son, Jesu Christu, who in his life, felt, as we do, the heat of the day, the fatigue from walking many miles, the pangs of hunger, thirst and pain, and the burdens of doubt. Amen."

"Amen." said Anand.

Shakuntala nudged him.

"Your turn." He hesitated.

"O Lord God," he started, repeating Shakuntala's opening. He paused. He could marshal a political argument, surely he could do this?

"I thank Thee for bringing me here to Cheddapalli, my birthplace, where I have learnt things I did not know before about my family. For the friendships I have formed here, in particular, my friendships with Shakuntala, and Hussain, and Ganesh. Bless them and their families. Lord God, I have assuredly lost my job, my disappearance must have hurt others, my future is in doubt." Anand thought for a moment of Rosie. " I am an enemy now to my best friend, Satyan, and he to me. I am about to return to Kalampett. I am unpracticed at prayer." He paused. What disparate, unconnected statements. "I ask for Thy help and forgiveness, in the name of Jesu Christu, Amen."

"Amen." They got to their feet.

"Now go, Anand, quickly, before I . ."Shakuntala laughed.

"What?" He searched her face. She was quite calm and he thought she had dabbed herself with jasmine scent that morning.

"Before I pull you down onto the mat and lie with you."

"You would do that? In the prayer room?"

"You think God has not seen such things? We have been such friends these past weeks, working well together. Are you not a little tempted, also? But I know you will have a girl somewhere, in Hyderabad or in Kalampett, a girl you wish to marry, and for whom you will keep yourself pure."

She picked up his bundle and the packet of roti.

He had never before considered that a man and woman, as friends would do such an act in friendship and then part.

"Here." She handed him the packets and he stood with his hands full. She held him at the waist, turned him and pushed him to the door. Her hands felt warm through his shirt. This touching, it was not at all offensive. He had wanted then to retreat back inside, but she pushed him out into the morning chill.

It was becoming warmer, and he should make a start before the day turned hot. Anand stood up with his bundle .

Ganesh and his mother were walking towards him, and oddly Ganesh was carrying a bundle too.

The mother greeted Anand.

"I heard you were leaving. I want you to take Ganesh with you. There is too much fighting in these parts. I am worried for my first-born. He must not stay here."

"Ratnabhai, what does Ganesh have to say?" Ganesh was looking down at his feet.

"He wants to go with you, he admires you, your father saved his life. As his mother I give him to you, to be your servant."

"I have no need of a servant."

"He is a good boy, a strong boy. He will help you. Won't you?"

Ganesh raised his head.

"Anandgaru, I will be honoured to serve you."

This was too much! But how to refuse a mother?

"If my Ganesh stays here and becomes wounded and dies, that will be a waste of your father's sacrifice. My first-born was saved for some reason, I know it, and that reason is to serve you."

"Then we had better get started."

It was not after all a bad thing to have a companion on the journey. Ganesh in his energetic and coltish way was amusing. His eyes were attuned to the countryside and he pointed out birds and tracks and snakeholes, and he was eager to prove his use as a servant.

"Are you thirsty, Anandgaru? You are thirsty isn't?" He shinned up a coconut tree and hacked off some fruit. When he was back on the ground, he cut a coconut in half, careful not to lose the milk in the middle, and handed a halfnut to Anand as though it were a goblet.

Anand had misgivings about introducing Ganesh into the school compound in Kalampett. He thought he must say something.

"Ganesh, listen to me. We are going to a place where there is a boarding school. The school pupils live there. There are small boys and girls, and there are also bigger girls. Some of these girls are pretty, but they are all pure, all virgins, and they must stay that way." The picture of Anand's favourite virgin, the delicate and fragrant Rosie, came to mind.

Ganesh's face remained innocent and bland.

"I know your immoral habits. You must not so much as look at one of these schoolgirls." Anand frowned at Ganesh.

"Don't worry, Anandgaru. I can hold myself. For days."

"That . . " began Anand, his frown deepening.

"For weeks, if necessary."

"Good boy."

"Anandgaru, you are not planning to stay in this place for long, is it?"

Chapter 14 June 1948

Kalampett

Graceamma woke in her own bed at home, woke from a powerful and vivid dream. Anand had been here, right here beside her as she slept. No words were said. He was simply crouched beside her bed, smoking a beedi. She was alone when she woke, but so strong was the sense of his presence, that she was not at all surprised to catch lingering whiffs of beedi smoke, and, surely, that was the scent of hair oil. These were signs, more proofs, that her son was indeed alive.

She hurried to do her hair, keen to leave her room and tell Abraham of this dream. As she paced between her mirror and trunk, she almost stepped on something small and smudged on the floor. She picked it up and held in her hand the smelly butt of a beedi.

"Abraham." She swept aside her curtain. There was a stranger, a village youth, stretched asleep on the floor. Graceamma went to the screen door. Abraham was outside, sitting on the steps with another stranger, his hair down to his shoulders. Their heads were bent together, their shoulders almost touching.

"Abraham." He turned towards her, as did the bearded stranger.

"Amma, you are awake."

The men stood up and stepped towards her.

"Anand, is it you?"

"Graceamma," said Abraham, "you are laughing."

"Haven't I cried enough?" She held her returned son tightly, laughing up into his face, as he grasped her.

"You're hair has grown back, though it is still white," continued Abraham.

"Listen to him," laughed Graceamma, "Talking about such things, when my long absent son is here alive and well."

The Dorasani invited Anand and Rosie to afternoon tea. Her idea was to serve it on the verandah. English tea, that is Nilgiri tea served in the English manner, with a little cold milk poured into the cup first, and after the tea is poured, to stir in a teaspoon or so of sugar. It intrigued Anand as a small boy, as he watched his mother polishing the eating implements, that the Doragaru and Dorasani had these small spoons, specifically to use with tea.

Anand had never been invited to drink tea at the bungalow before, though it was certainly not the first time for Rosie, who as Rachel's friend had been to the bungalow on numerous occasions, both formal and informal. Who else had been invited Anand did not know. To prepare himself, Anand went to a barber in town to have his hair cut and his beard shaved. As the man worked the hair fell in thick curls onto the floor.

"I will leave your moustache," said the barber. "Shape it only. It will look well."

When he had finished the shearing and shaving, the smoothing and brushing, he presented Anand with a small cracked mirror. The barber had given him a middle parting, and brushed the cropped hair off the forehead. It swept back in smooth waves exposing a face that seemed, broader, stronger, older. The moustache was surprisingly thick, considering its initial sparse growth. Anand no longer looked like a timid clerk. His glasses now enhanced his appearance. They gave him a look of class, an educated look.

"Good, isn't it," said the barber, happy to take the credit for this transformation. "If you were wishing to impress a girl, you will do it now."

How did the barber know? But of course he didn't. It was just chatter.

Anand was the first to arrive at the bungalow. A smiling Dorasani invited him to sit on a cane chair. She was a lady never at a loss for words, but her words sounded a little innocuous, foolish actually.

"Well, I for one, will welcome the monsoon when it comes. This heat is unbearable, is it not?"

"Yes," agreed Anand. The palms of his hands were sweating, but more from nervousness. Isaiahgaru once told him that in a social setting with westerners, yes is not an adequate response. One must add to this. Amplify.

" The fields in the countryside from where I have just come are very dry. The river is only two streams of water trickling through deserts of sand."

The Dorasani smiled at him, apparently pleased with this response.

On the cane table were two plates with palaharum bought from the bazaar. One plate was piled with hot, salty snacks, the other with sweets. Luddoo and Mysore pak were festive fare. He had not seen such sweets since he had left Hyderabad. Clearly he was expected to eat, but Anand did not know whether the knot in his stomach would let him.

"You are looking very well, Anand. Your experiences do not seem to have harmed you."

"Thank you, Dorasani." Should he respond that she also was looking well? In fact she was looking refreshed. He remembered the hill holidays.

"I trust your holiday in the hills was enjoyable?"

"Yes, thank you, Anand. Ah, here is Rosie."

The Dorasani got up from her chair. Anand did not know whether to stand or remain where he was, but he forgot this dilemma when he turned his head and saw Rosie. She was wearing a full sari. Blue rustling silk folds. Her shiny hair was pulled back into a grown up's bun, and ringed with a string of jasmine. The scent trapped and pulled him. She had outlined her eyes with kohl, making them bright. She seemed healthy-looking. Certainly her breasts were bigger.

He had a new desire for her, a new vision of them standing side by side, trusting and loyal through difficulties and joys, until they were old and bent. Anand rose from his chair.

Rosie did not look at him. Her smiles were for the Dorasani to whom she handed a gift, a small bunch of orange and purple flowers dotted with jasmine.

"Oh, Rosie. How lovely. Thank you very much. Your mother does so well with her garden. Fancy having flowers to pick at this time of year."

These effusions were part of tea party manners, but rendered into Telugu they sounded ridiculous. He had to say something. Get Rosie's attention.

"Rosie, are you well?" Banal, conventional words, but he really wanted to know. Was she happy that he was back? How had his unexplained absence affected her, if at all? Was she ever worried for his safety? Now that his job prospects were in doubt what did she think of him? The old Rosie would have shown an undiluted scorn at his allowing life's events to have deflected him from the important course of getting himself a job with money and status, making himself a suitable marriage prospect.

She looked at him. Her expression told him nothing, except that she was schooled in good manners.

"I'm well. You are well too?"

"Let's sit down," said the Dorasani. She reached for a small brass bell and rang it.

Abraham was spick and span in a clean white jacket and turban. He was looking very official and did not acknowledge Anand or Rosie. He carried a tray with a teapot, milk in a small jug, sugar in a bowl and teaspoons. When these were set out, cramming the table, Abraham handed a small empty plate to Rosie, and another to Anand. Then he took the larger plates of palaharam and offered them to Rosie. She held the small plate in her left hand and with her right hand helped herself to some Bombay mixture that she put on to the plate. Then she took a luddoo and a square of Mysore pak. Anand followed Rosie's lead. The Dorasani was pouring milk and tea into short wide cups set in small dishes each with a spoon.

Abraham took one of these tea cups to Rosie. He also held a small bowl with sugar and a spoon.

Rosie set her plate of food down on a small table beside her. With her left hand she held the dish with the cup. Her right hand spooned some sugar into her tea and this spoon she returned to the bowl without wetting it. With the spoon beside her cup she stirred her tea and then sipped delicately at the rim of the cup.

Anand was impressed with Rosie's deft handling of these small complications. When it was his turn, he felt her watching him, waiting for him to fumble or make a mistake, to know whether to be pleased or displeased with him. That was the old Rosie. He did not know whether she would prefer him to succeed or fail. He almost stirred his tea with the spoon from the sugar bowl, but a small noise in Abraham's throat caused him to pause, and then avoid that mistake. He didn't think that the Dorasani herself would mind

what spoon he used, an aspect of her that caused Abraham some grief, but for himself, in front of Rosie and Abraham, he wanted to do things the correct way.

"Rosie isn't it wonderful, that Anand is back with us, safe and sound? And he's looking so well."

Anand could see how the Dorasani's question put Rosie in a difficult position. She was being asked to agree with these effusions. Rosie was not effusive and she may not agree. Anand felt for her, but he was also curious to hear what she would say.

"I am happy for Graceamma, that her son has returned, and that he is in good health. Dorasani, is Lakshmi coming today?" Rosie glanced at the empty chair.

"No, not today. Anand, tells us more about the young man who is here with you?"

"His name is Ganesh," said Anand. "He calls himself my servant. As you know I have no need for one, but he insists on remaining with me. So for now I am jobless, penniless, with no possessions, yet I have a servant. In fact, at this moment, he is sitting behind that pillar, hoping that I will call him. Yesterday I walked to the bazaar, and my mother lent me an umbrella. That was Ganesh's big chance. He insisted on carrying it. I am sure that was the first time in his life that he has carried one. He was not good at it, receiving more shade from it than I did. But still, it impressed the barber that I arrived with an umbrella bearer, and I think for that reason he worked hard to give me the very best cut."

The Dorasani laughed. "That's a good story. You tell it well, Anand."

"But who is he?" asked Rosie, looking at Anand for the first time.

"He is the baby my father saved from the river before he himself was drowned."

There was a pause. Perhaps such a thing should not be said at a tea-party.

"You see what manner of a boy this Ganesh is. Tall and strong. There is not much thinking goes on in his head. He is just as happy joining in a communist action, -yes, he has done such - or harvesting the djona, or dozing at the base of a pillar. I will confess, that when I understood who this person was, I was dismayed. Surely, if my father was to die saving a baby, that baby should grow up to be a Mahatma. Only that would be worth my father's life. But heroes do not think like that. They just do what is needed, isn't it?"

Rosie was looking down at the hands in her lap. Her nails had been recently reddened with henna.

Perhaps I have bored her, thought Anand.

"This has been most enjoyable. No," said the Dorasani, holding up a hand as Anand made a move. "I must leave now, but you two may stay as long as you like. There must be so much for you to talk about."

She smiled at each of them and left.

Anand welcomed this missionary manipulation that gave him the opportunity to be alone with Rosie, but he sensed Rosie stiffen. He kept looking straight ahead at the Dorasani's empty chair.

"Pushpa," he said, calling Rosie by her formal name, "If you wish me to leave now, I will go."

There was no answer. He turned to look at her and they started to speak at the same time.

"Who is Shakuntala? I heard there is a Shakuntala in Cheddapalli."

"It has been so long Rosie, . .

He answered first.

"As you say, she is a woman in Cheddapalli. A nurse, in fact. She was looking after all those who got injured in the clashes. She is a bold woman?"

"Bold?"

"Free."

"Bold and free.?"

Rosie's tone reminded Anand that those were not the words to be used to describe a well-brought up young woman.

"What I mean is, she is a strong woman."

"Do you like strong women?"

"Yes, if their strength is used for the good of others."

"Is she beautiful, this Shakuntala?

"She has a beautiful … spirit."

"So, she is ugly."

"No, I would not call her ugly. Rosie," said Anand with some urgency. "I have seen and heard things I never expected while I have been away, in Hyderabad and elsewhere. I have changed, grown up. Some of the things I came across were cruel, evil. At those times it comforted me to think of you here in this compound, peaceful and safe."

"Safe, is it?" The words were said quietly. She looked down.

"Did you think of me while I was away?"

Her answering look was fierce, hostile.

"Why did you come back?" she asked in a whisper.

"I wanted to see you Rosie."

"To see me, is it? Well now that you have seen, you must go."

"Rosie, what is the matter?"

There was a luddoo crumb on her lip. It clung where the curve of Rosie's lower lip was at its fullest. He found himself staring. He looked away.

Suddenly she bent towards him.

"You have spoilt everything. Without saying one word, you disappeared. We feared for your safety. You remained absent. People could no longer wait. In Hyderabad your position was filled by someone else. Your room was let. Your belongings returned here. People were saying things here in Kalampett. That you had become a Communist. What was I to do? You should have been here. Then months later you turn up. And now it seems you are a saint. You have not been torturing or killing after all, but putting medicines on people's wounds. I thought, it no longer matters to me, whether he is a communist or saint. Look at him. His clothes are rent, his hair tangled, that wild beard. This jungly person is nothing to me.

"But today you are wearing clean clothes, you are shaved. You are taking tea with the Dorasani, speaking fine with, oh, so interesting things to say. You are once more the Anand I knew. You are better than the Anand I knew. But you are … you have come too late."

He thought she was going to choke. That was Rosie, his Rosie shuddering, making harsh ugly sounds. She clutched herself and rocked. "May God forgive me. May God forgive me." Anand had sometimes thought that he should like to know Rosie's innermost thoughts and feelings. But this brutal naked despair made him want to run. He left his chair and went to her. His hand hovered over her shuddering shoulders.

"Rosie. Tell me what is the matter."

She did not seem to know he was there. He crouched beside her. “Rosie, do not distress yourself.” He was frightened for her, that gasping, the panic in her eyes.

“Now I am dying,” she moaned. He believed that.

His mother had to be close by. Somewhere in the bungalow. He went to the door.

“Amma, come quickly. Rosie is unwell. Quickly, Amma.”

He hurried back to crouch beside Rosie. He clutched her feet, imploring her to get better.

“It will be all right, Rosie. I love you!” Even to his ears that sounded weak. “Everyone loves you. Whatever is the problem, we can help you overcome it.”

Amma was there. “Sht, Rosie, Sht.”

She stood behind Rosie’s chair and leant forward, cupping her hands over her nose and mouth.

Rosie struggled.

“Amma, she cannot breathe.”

“Anand stop talking and do as I say. Hold Rosie’s hands.” He did this. They fluttered and tore like frightened sparrows.

“Rosie, listen. Take small breaths, slow breaths. You think you are dying, but you will not. It is just how the body feels when it has taken in too much air.”

Amma kept her hands over Rosie’s mouth and nose. He could hear the breathing slowing, becoming normal. Her hands relaxed, letting go of their panic.

“Son, you should go now. Take Ganesh. I will look after Rosie.”

Ganesh, Anand had forgotten him. He was wide awake, standing behind a pillar and peering round, his eyes wide.

"Come." They left the verandah and went to the gate. Anand turned. He saw Rosie's back, her bowed head, the jasmine string broken and dangling, and Amma with an arm around her taking her inside.

"What does Rosie mean by saying I have come back too late?"

"I do not know, son."

"What can she mean?" he asked again.

"I do not know."

Rahel's Diary

It is now a year since the English packed up, leaving my father happy and hopeful. How different things are now. To be frank the Nizam is no nearer getting his wish to be a truly independent ruler. To be brutal, it seems that such a thing is no longer possible.These days it is the wishes of people that are powerful, not the desire of kings. Democracy. Miss Dominey taught us that this idea came from the ancient Greeks. It has taken a long time to reach us here.

The heat is oppressive and carries with it a sickly mood of dread. It seeps up from the nether world of the servants who are closest to the goings on in the street and it comes down to us from the whisperings among the Begums and their visitors. We, the children, are not supposed to hear these things, but whenever voices are hushed, then our ears become sharper.

One visitor reported that on returning home her family found the bloodied body of their houseboy lying in the middle of their reception room. The weapon was an iron curtain

rod with ends like spearheads. It was the heap of curtains on the floor that she saw first and her thought was to shout for the houseboy, but walking around the curtains she found his body. He was pierced right through the neck and his blood had flowed over the tiles and soaked into a prayer rug. They have no idea who the intruders were. It is thought they were personal enemies of the boy's family who in the current ferment decided to take revenge. That such a young boy would have at his tender age such serious enemies seemed almost as shocking as the brutal killing.

This incident has provided us with days of secret discussions and speculation and prompted not a few nightmares. The evil thugs may have been watching the house for days waiting for a time when the family was out. The visitor said she could no longer bear to stay in her house and always dreaded returning. Her family was thinking of leaving Hyderabad. That one of us would think to leave our life here would at one time have been unthinkable.

Here in the zenana, in the Nizam's most private sanctum, there is an unsettling change. We children are beginning to look at each other in a different way. Old friendships are ending, new ones formed. My mother is a Muslim, Nasreen's a Hindu. This has never mattered to us before and I will not let it matter now.

Kalampett

Anand did not approach Rosie again, but from the bungalow's back steps they were all witnesses to the unusual unhappiness around the Amos household.

Rosie was speaking to noone. Her mother's heartfelt hugs and soothing voice could coax nothing useful from her. No information, no reason, no confession, nothing to tell

anyone why she was so out of sorts. Her father's thin grey figure moved unhappily across the compound from his house to the office and back to his home. The man who wanted to retire, now spent as much time as he could at the office. When he was home he could not settle in his usual chair on the verandah. He sat, only to disturb himself a moment later by calling a half tamed mynah that landed on his hand. He stroked it and spoke to it, giving it an affection that was not acceptable elsewhere. He picked the dying flowers off his wife's marigolds, he went to offer the family buffalo handfuls of straw, and always he looked to be speaking, his lips moving, his words soundless. When he sat again he seemed exhausted, leaning his head back and shutting his eyes.

Rosie was his favourite, and he hers. Mr Amos had never been a strict parent. Never raised a hand or his voice against her, but when she misbehaved as a child there would be a look of pain in his eyes as he asked, Did I hear you say that, Rosie? Did I see you do that? Anand as a boy watched how Rosie could not bear to think she had hurt her father. How she tearfully apologised for her offence before climbing on his lap and putting her arms around him. But it seemed she no longer wished to be near him.

The previous evening she had sat on the step with a school book, when her father came out and sat beside her. He put a gentle hand on her shoulder, murmured a kindly word. She shrivelled at his touch. Stood up with her book and walked away.

"Rosie, my daughter, what has come over you?"

She disappeared around the back of their small house.

Anand found her slumped down against the wall, her knees pulled up under her skirt which was like a tent around her legs. She was picking up handfuls of dust and letting it run through her fingers.

He had expected to find her crying. She was composed and dry-eyed and looked at him as though he was a strange creature in which she had a mild interest, watching to see what the creature would do next. Perhaps that made Anand harsher than he intended.

"How could you treat your gentle, kindly father so? The man who over the years has never failed to be patient with your tantrums. And continues to love you despite everything."

"Leave me, Anand." She sounded bored and looked down at her hand playing with the sand. He had been no more successful at getting through to her than her father, so he left her alone.

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"Is it possible," he later asked his amma, "that Rosie now dislikes her father?"

"It may not be dislike. It may be some shame she is feeling."

"For what?"

"I do not know." He could get nothing more from her.

Tundrigaru spoke to Anand. He said for now the plans for the new printing office were in obeyance, and with them Anand's job. He predicted that the standoff between the Nizam and India would be resolved in a few months.

"You will have to do something while we wait. Perhaps you could help Mr. Amos in the office."

At one time Anand would have accepted Tundrigaru's suggestion, but now he found he had a different idea. He put it to Tundrigaru.

Rev. Moses and his wife were expected to arrive the next day from Guntur where his operation had been successful. It was planned that Jacob would take them in the bullock cart to Cheddapalli. Anand told Tundrigaru that he would like to take Ganesh and travel with them. He had felt useful at Cheddapalli, he might be useful there again. Tundrigaru looked back at him, with his half smile and his mild blinking eyes. The expression on his face rarely changed. It was his words they waited for. "You know, Anand, I think your father would be quite proud of you."

Early in the morning, the day after Mosesgaru and his wife returned from Guntur, Anand set off with them, saying goodbye to his mother again. And to Abraham and the Doragaru and Dorasani, but there was a silence from the Amos household.

A strong dry wind blew towards the bullock cart. Ahead of them it had caused a dust storm. They saw it swirling up and at the same time they heard gunshots. Jacob stopped the bullocks. The dust cloud was blowing towards them so they covered their faces waiting for that gritty storm to pass over.

It left them with sand in the cart and over their clothes, grit in their mouths and noses. They coughed and spat before setting off again. There was a silence ahead.

They soon came to a place where the track was hemmed in by two large rocks on either side. An ideal location for an ambush and that is what they had heard. A car had slewed off the track, its doors open, it was empty except for a body in the driver's seat. Stones and thorn scrub were still blocking the road, but the ambushed and the perpetrators had gone.

Anand and the other men got off the cart and examined the dusty empty car with bullet holes in the windscreen and windows on one side. There were bloodstains on the back seat, blood streaks down the inside of a door, a puddle of blood, filmed with dust, on the road. They knew the car. It belonged to the landlord. As they were clearing the road, Mrs Moses called from the cart. She thought she had heard sounds, groans. The men went off in the direction she pointed and they had gone about twenty yards when they came across a prone, semi-conscious figure obscured by a thorn bush. The man was bleeding from a shoulder, and the side of his torso. He groaned loudly as Jacob and Ganesh lifted and carried him. They laid him on the floor of the cart. Though the wounded man was not wearing his usual jacket, and though he was wearing a turban, they recognised him. He was the landlord, in partial disguise.

"When the Party men realise," said Rev Moses, "That the man they took to be the landlord, was in fact a decoy, they will come looking. We cannot take him to his house, they will be watching it. We will have to take him to Cheddapalli. Shakuntala will clean his wounds. And then we will hide him. The Party men will come to the prayer room. They will search our huts. We must think carefully where to put this wounded man."

Kalampett

That afternoon in Kalampett, it was very sultry. Prakasam had escaped from the classroom. Teacher-ammagaru was not herself. She had given them a passage to read, and had written questions on the blackboard. They were to write the answers on their slates. After giving these instructions Teacher-ammagaru had sat on a chair and closed her eyes. Prakasam read the questions.

What colour is the girl's dress?

What colour is the boy's shirt?

What is the name of their baby brother?

These were not questions necessary for a boy destined to be a forest ranger.So he left and he was lying along the branch of the tamarind tree imagining how a python might see the world from such a position. He found himself looking down at the top of a girl's head, and below that her feet hopping uncomfortably in the hot sand. It was difficult to recognise someone from that angle, but he thought it was Rosie-akka, Teacher-ammagaru's daughter, who was also not in class. Rosie-akka was another one not herself these days. Her hair was unplaited and hung loosely. Her skirt was crumpled. Prakasam wondered why she was going in this direction past the bungalow.

David came out of Tundrigaru's office with a dusty cloth. He shook it over the parapet. The whitewashed parapet dazzled and he looked over the dried stunned field to the school bungalow, over a landscape in which nothing moved. Nothing except a figure of a girl, rounding the corner of the bungalow in the direction of the well. This was no time for anyone to be drawing water, and besides she did not carry a waterpot. A young woman going to the well without a pot when noone was around, could mean something bad was about to happen. Particularly if it was a young woman known to be deeply unhappy.

David climbed over the parapet, and from a ledge jumped into a tree catching at a branch and disturbing some dozing squirrels. His feet found a lower branch, and hanging from that he dropped to the ground. It was a long way from there to the well, impossible to get there in time, all the same he ran.

Prakasam made the sound of the coppersmith. "Tonk, tonk. Tonk, tonk, tonk.'

This was the warning sound he had made when the man with the sword came to kill the butcher. This sound might anger Abrahamgaru, but it was his attention he wanted. Sure enough the screen door banged open, Abraham came out and looked one way then the other as Prakasam climbed down the tree.

"You!" said Abraham,"I might have known."

"Rosie-akka," Prakasam shouted. "She has gone to the well, and Jacobgaru is not there." Abraham forgot his cross words, and muttering under his breath, set off in a hurry.

Ross Rimmer had got up early from a sticky sleepless siesta. After going to the bathroom and throwing three buckets of water over himself he had gone to sit on the far end of the verandah with a book. Two paces away was a sagging, almost dead bougainvillea hedge; a mass of branchlets and thorny twiglets denuded of leaves and showy flower bracts. Beyond the hedge was the well with a low granite wall, a wooden structure holding the wooden pulley, an empty kerosene tin as bucket, and a long coil of thick rope. The water in the well was low, it had never run out, but at this time of the year it was a long way down.

His eyes kept sliding off the page, his mind not fully engaged with the adventures of Jim Corbett tracking down a man-eating tiger. He was easily distracted by a small sound on the other side of the hedge. He saw a movement, the green of a sari. A young girl was at the well, at this time of day.

"Amai," called out Ross Rimmer. He stood up. The girl started, and then began to climb on to the wall.

Ross crashed through the hedge, pushing his way through the snagging and scratching branchlets. It was Rosie. As he crossed the distance from the hedge to the well, he saw in the corner of his eye a figure rushing up from the right.

Abraham tripped on the coil of rope but as he fell he reached out to grab Rosie's ankle as she stood up on the wall. Rosie moved to avoid his hand and fell rather than jumped. She shrieked. Automatically she reached out to save herself. She found the bucket and it dropped, the rope bucking and uncoiling, the pulley whining. Ross grabbed the rope. It slithered, cutting his hands. He grabbed again and pulled back and the fall slowed. Abraham grabbed the rope and added his strength. The fall stopped. They could feel Rosie's weight hanging, twisting on the end of the rope.

"Why hasn't she let go?" wondered Ross aloud.

"Maybe she has changed her mind."

Echoing up from the well were Rosie's sobs.

"I want to die. May God forgive me, I want to die."

They started to pull Rosie up, but progressed by inches. Then David turned up, gasping for breath.

" Thank God you're here," said Ross. "We need you."

"I saw from the roof. Is it Rosie?"

The three of them pulled, arm over arm, until Rosie and the bucket came into view. They could see that her hair and her sari ended were tangled around the wire handle of the bucket. She was hanging onto the bucket to stop herself being scalped. As Abraham and David held the rope firm, Ross reached out for Rosie.

"Hold on, hold on," he encouraged, because her hands must be cramped and tired. He grasped her and pulled her to the wall, dragging her over, so that she was slumped over the wall. The other two went to help. They lifted her and the bucket and put her down as gently as they could on to the ground. Rosie was spent, and whimpered as they tried with their burnt and blistered hands to disentangle her hair. The boy Prakasam crouched beside her, and his small fingers were better at the job, but it was still slow work.

"We need scissors," said Ross.

"Prakasam, go and ask Graceamma for scissors," bossed Abraham.

As they waited with the shivering girl, Ross held her.

"You are safe now, Rosie. You are safe."

When the girl was cut free, David carried her through the compound, the hem of her skirt dripping. Ross hurried to the school office. His idea was to break the news as gently as possible. But Mr Amos' shocked face was at the window, he came out of the door a trembling old man.

"She is alive," called out Ross. "Rosie is alive and unhurt." He went and supported the man who was close to collapsing. Mrs Amos appeared in her classroom door. Her cry, a primal lament, curled shivering around the compound. Harriet came running. Other teachers hushed their children.

Mr Amos pulled himself up and walked down the steps to his daughter.

When she saw her father, Rosie started to cry.

"Father, I'm so sorry. I thought to do this when no-one was around."

He touched her cheek.

"You are never alone, Rosie. We are always with you. You must trust us. But what was it you did?"

"She was at the well," said David. "We saved her from jumping in."

Rosie was taken to the hospital to be examined by Virginia. Ross and Harriet went to support Mr and Mrs Amos, but withdrew when Virginia appeared to talk privately to Rosie's parents.

The revelation that Rosie was three to four months pregnant muddied their feelings. The first important thing was that Rosie was alive and physically healthy.That was a matter for rejoicing. But it could not be a pure, simple joy. Rosie was no longer a virgin. She was unmarried and pregnant and would be publicly disgraced. No one would wish to marry her. Their bright and shining daughter would be a social outcast.

The name Kumarraj loomed in Mr Amos' mind. He would not say this name aloud. Mrs Amos would have to work it out for herself. Accept the unpalatable. Her precious tamadi had done this wrong to her beloved daughter.

Chapter 15 July 1948

Cheddapalli

Anand and Shakuntala were bandaging a man's leg, when five men carrying guns walked into the prayer room. They carried their rifles hooked over their shoulders in a negligent manner, carried them with the familiar ease of a shawl.

"Cut," said Shakuntala, and Anand scissored across the width of the bandage.

"Namaste, amma.We are looking for a missing man."

"Is he one of yours?"asked Shakuntala

"No. It is the landlord."

"Why not look for him at his place?"

"He is not there. He was in his car when it was ambushed, and afterwards went missing."

"You think that man is here in Cheddapalli?" Shakuntala secured the bandage with safety pins, and stood up, looking at the men in her open way.

"Perhaps he was hurt and needed treatment."

"Well, if you find him, and he does need treatment, make sure you bring him to me."

The men ignored this.

One of them walked over to the prone figure, lifted the sheet and then let it drop back.

"Why," asked Anand, "Would the proud landlord take refuge in a village?"

"He is helpless without his bodyguards and servants. And though he is an enemy of the people, he still has his wealth. It is possible he has bribed some misguided villagers to give him shelter."

"Any villagers who have accepted his bribes, we will punish," said another man, glaring at Anand. The man glared at everyone, the prone figure on the floor, even his comrades. Something was wrong with his eye.

"Come on, let's go," he said to them. The fighters left, their rifles swinging. They did not say goodbye.

"Your ulcer is healing well." Shakuntala raised her voice, because her patient was also a little deaf. "Keep it covered and clean.Understand? Covered and clean. If your wife has the time, ask her to massage your leg. Massage. But the oil must not touch the bandage."

The elderly man got up and salaamed Shakuntala.

"Come back in a week. I want to see you in a week. Understood?"

Anand packed bottles of pills and disinfectants, jars of ointment, bandages and other nursing paraphanalia into two cloth bags, as Shakuntala crouched beside her other patient. He stirred as she checked his pulse.

"How are you feeling, ayah? Still tired, is it? Your pulse is stronger. See, I have put clean water beside you. You must take a sip each time you wake from a doze. It is good that you sleep. All you need now is more rest." Shakuntala got up and shook herself.

"Are you ready, Anand?" He indicated the bags he was holding and they went to the door.

The fighters were going from hut to hut. Women were pleading with them not to enter their homes. One did not want her sick child frightened, another her dying mother disturbed. But the men ignored these pleas, as though their guns gave them the right to act inconsiderately towards the poor, the sick and the dying.

"I should like to stop them," fumed Anand. "They can search as thoroughly as they want, but all they will find hidden is a snake or rat."

"Don't draw attention to yourself. We won't go until they have left, and then follow them from a distance."

They went to the hut next door to the prayer room.

"Ammagaru, it is I, Shakuntala, and Anand. May we come in?"

"The food is not ready," said Moses ammagaru wiping her face. She had grown up in a house with servants, but after marrying Mosesgaru and coming to this village, had adapted herself to lighting fires, fanning the coals, and cooking in a squatting position.

"I had prepared uppama, but when those men came, they helped themselves. A mouthful each. So now I am making roti."

"I'll help, ammagaru." Shakuntala squatted down and rolled balls of dough into a round flat breads.

" Will the men search . . .?"

"We don't know, but we are watching them."

"I'll wait outside," said Anand, "Keep an eye on what they're doing."

When the men had finished searching the huts, they stood in a knot, talking amongst themselves, and then set off out of the village.

"Shakuntala, we should go now," called Anand. She came out carrying a tiffin carrier, and he picked up his bags.

They walked so as not to gain on the men but still keep them in sight.

"If that myna bird walks toward the tail of the buffalo, they will take the path to the hamlet," said Shakuntala.

"If that baby stops crying, the men will pass it by."

"If that little girl wins the race against her brother, the men will pass by."

"If that dog turns to bite his tail again . . ."

"What then?" asked Shakuntala. They laughed. The nonsensical game had eased their tension a little.

They watched as the men reached the fork in the road. They saw them glance down the track towards the squalid huts, hesitate and walk on.

"It seems Mosesgaru was correct."

"For now." They laughed. The relief was enormous.

"I want to run," said Anand.

"Even now, do not bring attention to yourself."

"All right, akka, I'm doing as you say, walking staidly like a middleaged man."

"Talking like a cheeky, immature one."

By the time they reached the turn-off, the fighters had been out of sight for some minutes.

"Race you!" Shakuntala hoisted up the hem of her sari and ran down the track towards the hamlet. Anand chased her, only passing her near the end of the path. The small children from the hamlet ran towards them excitedly.

"Anand, give me my medicine bags. Here is the food."

They swapped bags, and Anand left Shakuntala to bend over the children, checking on ringworm and skin complaints and other medical matters.

Ganesh was chatting with his mother outside talking to her as she suckled her youngest.

"Namaste, Ratnabai. Ganesh." Anand pulled him aside.

"A gang of Party men searched the village this morning, but passed by here. Do not worry your mother about this. I do not think they will come back."

Inside Ratnabhai's hut, Rev. Moses sat talking to a wounded, unwashed, sour-looking man.

Anand greeted them, and then put the tiffin carrier in front of the landlord.

"The food is late," the man grumbled.

"It could not be helped, sir. Some armed men came to the village this morning looking for you. They searched all the huts, but did not think to come here. They have gone now."

"How are the villagers?" asked Rev. Moses.

"Disturbed, frightened, but no-one was harmed."

"You must move me from this disgusting place," said the landlord as he began to eat.

"It is the safest place for you just now, as this morning has proved. You see this place as polluting.Later there will be time for you to perform your rites of purification.But for now, think how this outcast family has agreed to give you shelter. Risking the anger of

the Party. In what a generous manner, the mother allows you to take up space that properly belongs to her children."

"They snivel and cry, keeping me awake at night."

"They are hungry. They do not get enough to eat from the pitiful wages you pay their father."

"They are untouchables. It is their karma."

"It is not karma that sets their wages. That, my dear sir, is done by you."

"You speak to me like that?" The man chewed angrily.

"How is it to be so hated that you cannot travel anywhere without bodyguards? Is that a good way to live? Fear and danger are the inauspicious fruit of your own actions. It is your actions, my dear sir, that pollute your being, more than the dirt of this hut."

Anand looked from Mosesgaru to the landlord. One was quiet and courteous as he dared to speak such hard things, the other was a broken man, frightened and powerless and frustrated, his arrogance and anger, so out of place, so foolish in this setting.

"You are a thief. When I was unconscious you took my money." The landlord struck out angrily with his left arm. Mosesgaru caught the arm and held it. The landlord resisted, but then gave way. Mosesgaru returned the man's arm to his side.

"I will tell you again," he said. "We took the money when we stripped you of everything that might identify you as the landlord. All those things, including the money, are safe and will be returned."

"My wife and children, they do not know where I am. They do not know I'm alive. I am fearful for them." He had become tearful.

"I will try to get a message to them. But for now your house is watched, and I will not risk the messenger."

"My skin is itching and drying. You must send a woman to massage me."

Mosesgaru chuckled.

"My dear, sir. We are you rescuers, not your servants."

"At least return my shoes."

"No, sir. Look at your feet. Anyone seeing your smooth heels would know instantly that you are not a villager. The more itchy and scaly your skin, the thinner you become, these are the things that will protect you. The Communists will not give up. They will come back, and next time we cannot rely on them to bypass this hamlet. If you are to be accepted as Ratnabhai's old father you need everyday to rub rough stones and thorns on your feet to roughen the skin."

It seemed the landlord did not know whether to be angry or cry. He sank down on the mat in a sullen silence.

"Our aim, sir, is to return you, when you have recovered, safely to your home. But you are not yet ready and the time is not right."

Kalampett

The full moon showed a bland, impartial face. If Harriet had noted it she would have said How beautiful! How glorious! but the express train bringing Rachel from Madras was four hours late and Harriet, clutching Ross's hand, had no time for anything but anxiety. It seemed, as they walked the platform, that they were the only two keeping vigil for this train. Sleeping figures covered from head to toe by sheets, looked like shrouded corpses

laid out after some disaster. Even the panda-eyed stationmaster, his skin discoloured by long hours of wakefulness - he slept in snatches at the station, his son bringing him food from home twice a day - had disappeared for a nap. He had dispatched his "crack team", young fit men drilled to respond to the non-arrival of trains. Armed with sticks and lamps, as sure footed as goats, they had gone running alongside tracks that gleamed like pewter in the moonlight.

Before the stationmaster went for his nap, he had spoken to reassure the Rimmers and himself.

"It is in any case very rare for a train to journey without incident. There are those who pull the communication cord and stop the train in the middle of nowhere so they can make a short cut across the fields to their home. Such individual selfishness delays the journey for the other passengers. It takes time to check the cords in each carriage and start up the train. And there are the occasions, more common than people suppose, when women give birth while squatting on the latrine and the newborn falls onto the tracks. Happily, I have not known of a single occurrence when the baby concerned has been killed, or even maimed. There are derailments, of course, by accident or sabotage. However, we must remember that it is goods trains that are targeted by the Communists. Usually."

A brief lapse, a fatigue of the spirit, a lack of confidence in the reasonable showed in his face.

"All we can do now is wait," and he had gone for a nap.

When Harriet and Ross saw a lightening in the eastern sky, an expanding arc-shaped glow, for a moment they took it to be the dawn. Then a strong penetrating beam jumped

towards them and they heard the distant but unmistakable sound of metal wheels singing on metal tracks.

"We should wake the stationmaster," exclaimed Harriet, but the train did that for them. The night's silence was pierced by a hooting, persistent and long, a clamour of import.

This was not a routine arrival of the Delhi Express at Kalampett Station, when it slid sleekly to a stop, and one or two doors opened and one or two passengers alighted, and the train was on its way again with little disturbance to the sleeping passengers. This time they were all awake and before the train had quite stopped carriage doors burst open, city wallahs descended in search of officials to hear their grievances. Raised voices spoke in Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Urdu. The stationmaster sent a message to the police station and tried to evade passengers in order to first speak to the engine driver, who had climbed down from his engine to report to the stationmaster.

Harriet and Ross hurried along the train to a second class sleeper with Rachel's name chalked outside. Ross swung up the steps. Harriet heard him apologising before he backed down, pulling Rachel's bed roll and suitcase after him. He turned to Harriet, his face paled but careful.

"Rachel isn't there."

As they faced each other in an eternal moment of dread, a girl's voice drifted down the platform.

"Mummy, Daddy. I'm here!"

She stood ouside a purdah carriage. Her dress was torn and dirtied, blonde hair haemorrhaged from a plait. Her leg was scraped and bleeding. Was that a swelling on her cheek?

She waved at them, cheerfully.

"Darling! Are you all right?" Harriet enveloped her daughter too tightly.

"Ouch! Sorry, Mummy. I fell down a bank and landed in some thorns. But everyone is all right. The men just wanted money and jewels and things."

Rachel took hold of her mother's hand.

"Come. I want to introduce you to someone."

She pulled her mother round the carriage door. Standing in the opening was a young woman of astonishing beauty, dressed in an embroidered shalwar kameez.

"Mummy, I'd like you to meet Zehra. Zehra, my mother, Mrs Rimmer."

"How do you do, Mrs Rimmer?" The young woman stretched out a slim hand.

Harriet reached up to shake it.

"My dear, are you travelling alone?"

"No, my mother and an aunt are with me. My aunt is of a nervous disposition. Actually, she was in hysterics."

"You must have been terrified."

" I must admit my hands shook as I removed my aunt's rings and necklaces. She was unable herself to respond to the demands. And then the rebel forced us out of the carriage, not allowing us to take anything with us. The same fate had befallen the other passengers. We were huddling in the dark in the middle of nowhere wondering what was going to happen next. The rebels were clever. They hurled our plundered luggage out of the

train. While we were scrambling in the dark to find our possessions, they made good their escape. Rachel very kindly came to our aid. Thanks to her we managed to locate our bits and pieces."

"I fell down the embankment. Zehra invited me into her compartment and washed my cuts."

"Thank you so much, Zehra, for looking after Rachel."

"We were grateful for her help. It was good to have a cheerful companion to take our minds off our petty concerns."

As they pushed their way out of the station, they heard irate voices in full blown dispute.

"In Delhi we have heard how you cannot keep order in this State, and yet you incompetents wish to be independent."

"Perhaps you should tell your good friends Nehru and Patel, that by allowing the Communists to freely set up their headquarters in Bezwada, they have allowed these cross-border raids and the consequent mayhem in Hyderabad State."

There was a loud blast from the engine. The guard was waving his green lantern. All complaints ceased as passengers struggled then to reach their compartments.

"The Communists had an accomplice on the train who pulled the communication cord." Rachel told her parents as they journeyed in the bullock cart. "It was all planned.The men were waiting to board the train."

"How did you know they were Communists and not robbers?" asked Ross.

"I don't know, actually. They weren't waving red flags and calling each other comrades. But it was what everybody thought."

"Well, everybody may have been right."

The dawn was pastel, opalescent, as the bullock cart reached the compound. Word had reached Archie and Lester, and they were waiting on the verandah along with Abraham and Graceamma.

"She's a little shabby around the edges," Ross told them, "but sound in body and soul."

Archie kissed Rachel, his god daughter. Lester shook her hand.

"Off to bed," said Harriet, steering her daughter to the door. But Rachel turned around in the doorway,

"Oh, Lester, I almost forgot. Amy was at Bezwada Station. She asked me to give you this."

In a gesture that seemed to Harriet to be conscious and rehearsed, Rachel put her hand down her neckline and pulled out a folded crumpled envelope. The dramatic gesture was undermined by Rachel's dishevelment.

"Amy told me to guard it with my life,"said Rachel as she handed the envelope to Lester.

"Thank you, Rachel. I'm relieved it didn't come to that. Thank you, very much."

Rachel suddenly blushed, turned quickly and vanished.

"She doesn't know about Rosie, yet." Harriet told the others. "I'll tell Rachel after she has had a good sleep."

Lester read Amy's letter in his room. Then he left the bungalow and went for a long walk, during which he was aware of very little except his own state of mind. When he got back, he sat down and wrote this letter.

To the General Secretary,

Mission Headquarters,

Elephant and Castle,

London

Dear Sir,

In accordance with Rule 21c in the booklet of Rules and Regulations Governing Missionary Behaviour, I should like to request permission to marry Miss Amy Parker, stationed in Bezwada. Miss Parker will also be writing a letter on her account.

Our acquaintance covers a period of a year. In the course of my duties, I have visited Bezwada regularly and formed a friendship with Miss Parker. This attachment was strengthened during the hill holidays, and has become love. I believe Miss Parker shares these feelings.

We both hope that a marriage between us will do nothing to impede the work of the mission. Miss Parker, before she was sent to Bezwada was teaching in the school here in Kalampett, and she will tell you that she would be happy to return. Mrs Harriet Rimmer, Manager of the school, has always spoken highly of Miss Parker's work. It is likely that if Miss Parker, as Mrs Newby, were to rejoin the staff, Mrs Rimmer would have no objection. I myself, whatever your decision, will continue as Financial Administrator in the Church Office in Kalampett.

Miss Parker and I have both prayed about this proposed marriage, and feel it to be right.

Unfortunately, though this letter is dated July 1948, it may be some weeks before I can post it, because of the present disruption to mails and communication in general. It is therefore likely that you will receive a letter from Miss Parker ahead of this one from me.

I cannot expect a response for some months, but I shall wait patiently, and continue to pray.

Yours truly,

Lester Newby.

Lester, you have written a very strange letter. How can a man sitting at his desk, in Elephant and Castle on a grey day, have the remotest understanding of your feelings for Amy, and wondrously, hers for you. Instead of this dry formal letter you should send him fireworks. Something to sparkle and fountain on his desk, and rockets to shoot through his roof and explode into starbursts of colour in the London sky.

Rahel's Diary

I am not sure how to write about what has happened. But I shall try to record this shocking event with honesty and calmness, though at this moment the pen is shaking in my hand.

Last evening, as usual, Nasreen's mother prepared herself for a night with the Nizam. She bathed and washed her hair. She insists on using the most expensive oils and perfumes for her toilette. We are accustomed to hearing her voice raised in censure and

complaint over the efforts of her patient maid. Her maid is an expert in coloring hair and dressing it to disguise its thinness. Her efforts make Nasreen's mother look at least ten years younger but this is not sufficient for her. It was her looks that brought her here to a life in the Zenana and they are part of her armoury of weapons to wheedle privileges and jewels from the usually unextravagant Nizam. For her nothing is worse than the diminishment of her looks and a loss of influence over the Nizam.

After Nasreen's mother left, accompanied by her maid, Nasreen and I sat down to play a game of schach. Soon after there was a commotion in the passageway outside. The doors burst open and Nasreen's mother was dragged inside by two eunuchs, each holding an arm. The maid followed looking distressed and frightened. We stood up in alarm. Nasreen's mother's clothes were in disarray and she was uttering curses. Our first thought was that she must have come to physical harm.

But it turned out that the Nizam did not wish her in his quarters that night. It was her practice to wait in the courtyard between the Palace and the Zenana for the Nizam to personally come for her. She would sit on the swing in a flirtatious manner and fancy herself as the legendary Sita who was there to meet with the god Rama. She liked the Nizam to recite verse, particularly something written in her honour. But much of the Nizam's verse is written in Persian, a language she does not understand. It was unlikely that the Nizam daily penned a new paean to her beauty, but recited other verses praising Allah or Hyderabad or himself. After the recitation of his verse, the two aging lovers would go into his quarters.

Last night she was as usual sitting on her swing, her maid pushing it gently, when the Nizam appeared in the doorway. He stood for awhile and then, instead of coming out

and greeting his demanding mistress, turned his back without a word and disappeared. Two eunuchs came out of the doorway with a message from the Nizam. He thanked her for her attendance, asked her to forgive him for not requiring her companionship that night and desired that she take no offence.

X was distraught. She demanded to see the Nizam and had to be restrained from entering the palace. Her maid could not calm her, and her dishevelment was a result of her own struggles. She pulled at her hair and tore her clothes as though someone had died.

All this we discovered later.

Nasreen naturally went to her mother's side to comfort her. It was then the unimaginable happened. The eunuchs took hold of Nasreen.

"Come with us. The Nizam request's your presence."

"NO!!!" My mother clapped a hand over my mouth so I could shout no more and with her other arm restrained me. "There is nothing you can do," she whispered. "It is the Nizam's right."

In that instant, Nasreen's dream of making a good marriage with a handsome, worthy, young man was shattered. After her initial surprise, Nasreen walked to the doorway with such dignity that the eunuchs let go of her. She left without a word or backward glance.

Nasreen's mother screamed at the eunuchs, "You cannot take her, she has not bathed. She has no skills in the arts of love. You think she can do for the Nizam what I cannot?" She was not speaking to protect her daughter, but spoke with the hate and scorn of a rival. The Begums withdrew from this shameful performance and closed their doors. They left it to the servants to deal with her and give her a sleeping draught.

After I had paced for an hour, shaking with a confusion of anger and shame and hurt, my mother brought a draught for me.

When I woke up the next morning, Nasreen had returned and gone into seclusion in her room. The Begums in their concern visited her and a midwife examined her.

Nasreen had not shed a tear throughout her ordeals, but when I finally got to see her myself, we put our arms around each other and wept. All our lives, unknown to him, we had loved and venerated out father. But he did not know it. As his daughters we were nothing to him except numbers. Daughters 23a and 23b, born at the same hour on the same day to different mothers. Perhaps that made it easier for him to use us as he wished. If only he had known Nasreen, he would have been loving and proud, wanting the best for her as a father should. This 'right' he felt he had is all wrong.

The man I venerated the most has harmed irreparably the sister I most love. I cannot imagine a worse sorrow.

"Archie, Rosie must not be banished to the lace home." Virginia stood tall and ruffled in the doorway. She was breathing heavily.

He had been seated at his desk when he heard her shoes percussing on the stone stairs as she hurried up, and now he was standing.

"Welcome, Virginia. Sit down." He took hold of a cane chair and steered it round, the arms of it open and welcoming.

Virginia sank down. "Sorry to burst in on you like this. I've only half an hour before I'm due back in surgery, so I will make my point. Rosie must not be banished to the

lace home. Mr Amos has mentioned the lace home and said he had spoken to you. Well, I cannot agree."

David appeared silently in the doorway.

"Tundrigaru, would Dr Ammagaru like a drink?"

"A glass of water. Thankyou, David," said Virginia , who then turned back to glare at Archie. "Firstly, I disagree on principle that two men should decide on a young woman's fate without any discussion with her. Secondly, …"

"I'll interrupt you there for a moment, if I may," said Archie. "I agree with you, in principle. In practice, it was not possible to speak with either Mrs Amos, who is prostrated by these events, or with Rosie herself, who does not wish to speak of the matter. Amos is her father, I her god-father. These were our first thoughts on the subject, knowing that other immediate alternatives were unacceptable, …"

"Yes, I understand," broke in Virginia, "That for obvious reasons Rosie cannot be sent to Mrs. Amos relatives in Masulipatam. Though Rosie still insists Anand is the father, two and two added together make Kumarraj. And I must say in an aside here, Archie, if Rosie is responsible for that missing earlobe, it shows what spirit that girl has. She has character and intelligence and is very young. Her subsequent life must not be blighted by this forced pregnancy."

David came in carrying two glasses of water, one which Virginia took from him and immediately sipped. The other glass David put down on a small table beside Archie.

"Tundrigaru," murmured David, "I will be in the kitchen if you need me."

Archie nodded with his half smile at David.

"In each case of an unmarried mother, and there are not many, we try to treat the individual with love and respect, whatever her character and intelligence."

Virginia put down her glass and took a couple of deep breaths. She was relaxed with this reproof and seemed content for the moment to listen.

"The immediate concern," said Archie " Is to find a safe place for Rosie to stay during her pregnancy. By safe I mean a place free from open expressions of social stigma. Her sisters' homes in Kalampett would not be free of that, they are too close to town. The mores here are as intolerant to unwed mothers as in our own society. Rosie for the time being cannot continue with school. She would be shunned and made miserable. And Mrs Amos has requested to have some distance between her daughter and herself. I think she feels a measure of guilt for having introduced Kumarraj into their household, and her feelings for her brother are confused. She would like to think her brother was not wholly to blame, but that makes her daughter partly complicit. This is unfortunate."

Virginia had cooled down.

"I have a pertinent suggestion to make. Rosie can stay with me. She will be secluded in the hospital compound. She can carry on with her studies privately, doing her homework and having it marked, or I could arrange for a tutor. That way she will be able to sit her matriculation exams at the end of the year. Her parents could visit Rosie, if that is what they all want. She will be safe, but not banished."

"I think that will work very well, Virginia. Put it to Rosie and her parents."

"Yes, but it's not enough. Something more must be done for Rosie. She needs to get away from here. To be stretched. I am prepared to pay for her college education. The Women's Christian College in Madras. It has good academic standards. I know one of their

lecturers. A Scotswoman, Oxford educated. Her father and mine correspond. Medical interests in common. Yes, that will be a suitable place for Rosie, but she will need to improve her English."

Virginia sat up, flapping her arms, anxious now to get away.

"I must leave you, Archie." She waved from the door and he heard her toes tapping down the stairs.

David entered.

"Is everything all right, Tundrigaru?"

"Yes, David. Two missionaries have, to their own satisfaction, decided the course of a young girl's life for the next few years." Tundrigaru's half smile stretched to a full one and thin folds apeared in his cheeks spreading like ripples on a still pond.

"Missionaries often have good ideas, Tundrigaru."

"Well, I think this one looks quite promising, and it means that Virginia will be with us for a little time yet."

"Is Dr. Ammagaru thinking of leaving?"

"Dr. Ammagaru is a bird of passage. She is too large a person for one place to suit her for long. One day she will take off to alight somewhere completely different. A jungle, a desert, or, perhaps, a metropolis. Wherever it is, David, I would guess that Virginia will already know somebody there."

"Tundrigaru, I have been thinking about Rosie's baby. If it is a boy, I should like to adopt him, as my father adopted me and gave me a name and a home."

"Not this time, David. Rosie's baby has a father. I think Kumarraj must be expected to take up his responsibilities. Don't be disappointed. There will be another boy.There are always fatherless children."

Cheddapalli

"You are back," said Anand, trying to sound relaxed and unconcerned. He was surrounded by three armed men, the one with the glare and two others.

"We have heard that on the day of the ambush, a bullock cart came to Cheddapalli." The man's tone suggested this was a grave misdeed.

"What of it?"

"You were among those on the bullock cart."

"I was," admitted Anand. "We had travelled from Kalampett."

"Kalampett? Where is this place?"

"East from here. On the border with India. There is a mission school and a hospital there."

"A hospital?"

"A Zenana hospital for women. But it has an annexe for men. It specialises in eye complaints. It was there I received my glasses."

The man's hand went up to his face, to his eye, then he collected himself.

"Never mind that."

He reached out and gripped Anand at the neck of his shirt.

"Tell me, what did you find at the place of ambush?"

"A road blocked with rocks and thorn bushes. A car with many bullet holes. It was empty except for the slumped body of the driver. Blood in the car. Much blood, front and back. But the people were gone. So many bullets, and only one dead. The assailants were not good shots, isn't it?"

The man released him at the throat, and smacked Anand across the face.The force turned Anand's head, squeezed tears from his eyes, knocked his lower jaw sideways. He felt gritty bits of enamel in his mouth. Smelt burning. He turned his head back and looked at the man.

"We wanted to take the landlord alive."

"For what?"

"To punish him. To show him to the people. Take him from village to village bound and humiliated. To hold a public trial, a public execution. It would have been a great triumph."

Anand said nothing.

"When the bullock cart left Cheddapalli, was it empty?

"Yes. That is my understanding."

"Where did it go?"

"To Kalampett."

"To the hospital?"

"Certainly to Kalampett."

"We have finished here," said the man to the other two.

They stepped forward and pushed the muzzles of their guns into Anand's throat. He closed his eyes.

"If we find that you helped that enemy of the people escape, you will be punished. Not only you, but the entire village."

The gun muzzles pushed again, lifting his jaw higher, his head back.

The pressure ceased. Anand felt a splash on his face. He opened his eyes. Heavy raindrops had started to fall, penetrating his thin shirt, wetting the dust. The men were walking away fast in the rain, their guns swaggering.

In that direction they would pass the path to the hamlet. This time they might choose to follow it.

Anand ducked behind a row of huts. Hens scattered, squawked.

Children came out to play in the rain.

"Where are you going, ayah?"

"Ssh!"

They forgot him, lifting their faces to the rain, opening their mouths.

He pushed his way through a hedge, and ran across rocky open ground. He could reach the hamlet first. He just had to go in a straight line, run as fast as he could. The rain was falling in torrents, rivulets forming on the ground, puddles in his footprints. He was sodden when he reached the hamlet where the dust had now turned to mud. Children played in the rain, in the mud. Pigs rolled in it. The women were wet too, but they had retreated to their doorways. Anand ran sliding in the mud to Ratnabhai's hut.

"Amma, is Ganesh inside?"

"Yes." She stepped aside for him.

Ganesh was stretched out, dozing.

Anand crouched, shook him.

"Wake, wake up."

He went to the landlord who whispered fiercely to Anand.

"Look, the roof is leaking. My bedding will be wet."

"Sir, your enemies are coming for you. We must take you from this hut. Ganesh, help."

Without ceremony they pulled the landlord to his feet. Anand peered outside. Children and pigs squealing. No gunmen. Not yet.

"Come."

Outside the hut, Ganesh threw the groaning man over his shoulder.

"This way."

Anand went round the corner of Ratnabhai's hut behind it, avoiding the open area in the front with the mud and the pigs. As they pushed through a thorn hedge they heard the men coming down the lane, entering the hamlet. Women rushed out of their huts to grab their children and retreat to their homes.

"Stay outside, stay outside. We are searching your huts."

"We will drown out here."

"Shut your mouth, woman." The piteous voices, the crying continued. A gun shot. Silence.

"It was shot in the air. A warning, only," said Anand.

Ganesh waggled his head. Tried to smile.

The landlord had stopped his groaning. He was very still as they hid, huddled close together behind thorn bush and rock. They heard the squelching of feet, as the gunmen went from hut to hut. A child's sobbing started again.

"Do you think someone will tell them," asked Anand.

"No," said Ganesh. "My mother has promised them a feast."

"I haven't heard of this feast."

"No one knows of it, except my mother. Each time she speaks of it the feast grows bigger. It started with a pilau made with the best rice. It now has chicken and guninea fowl and goat. It has bitter gourds and okra and drumstick soup. It has rasam and dhal and breads of all kinds. Look!"

Ganesh pointed at a snakehole beside them at the base of the rock. Rainwater had started to trickle into the hole, forming a small stream.

"Watch, the snake will now come out."

Ganesh was right. The head of a cobra swayed at the entrance. The landlord stiffened and pulled away.

The snake slid out, turning away making for higher ground.

The landlord let out a groan of relief. Anand, too, relaxed.

"See how blessed you are, sir. So many times you might have died, and yet you are still alive."

"You call my sufferings fortunate?"

Ratnabhai called over the hedge.

"Anandgaru, Ganesh, my son. Come out. The men have gone."

They returned to the hut, sodden and scratched.

The landlord complained of thorns in his arms, his legs, his feet.

"Let me have a look," said Ratnabhai.

"First some dry clothes," said Anand.

Ganesh produced some torn but clean cloths.

Anand held out a lungi, allowing the landlord to change with some modesty, away from the eyes of staring children. When he was dressed in rags, slumped on the floor, he could almost be taken for a downtrodden peasant, except that he looked more miserable.

"I'm cold," he said. "Look, I am shaking."

"Doesn't he look sad," said Ratnabhai. "Perhaps I will massage him also."

Anand touched her on the shoulder.

"Ganesh was telling me of this feast you are planning."

"Oh, yes. It will be very, very grand." She laughed and spread out her arms, as though she could see it layed out in front of her. "We will eat for hours, and finish with milk sweets decorated with nuts and gold leaf."

Chapter 16 September 1948

Cheddapalli

Anand and Ganesh had walked for about an hour on their way to Kalampett when Satyan with two others stepped into their path.

"You are not thinking of leaving?" Satyan spoke to Anand.

"I'm going. To be with my mother. Close to Rosie's family. To be home. You should do the same. Be with Leila and your sons when the Indian army comes."

"What, you think the struggle is over?"

"Yes. These communist adventures should end now. The Indian Army is too powerful."

"These are not adventures. It is a struggle to the death, and we are entering a new phase."

Satyan appeared angry. He took a step forward. He was thin, older and carried a gun. Since Anand had come to Cheddapalli he had not seen Satyan smile. He wished he could sit down with him now, put an arm round his shoulder.

"A phase of inevitable defeat," he said.

"We may be smaller in number, but we could worry a large army for years."

"Worrying is not winning."

Satyan came closer. He stared at Anand in silence.

"It seems the landlord returned home," he said quietly.

"I heard that too."

"Your meddling spoilt an important success."

Anand wondered whether he should deny being involved.

"We found a wounded man along the roadside. That he turned out to be the landlord was a problem. But having rescued him and bound his wounds, would it have made any sense to hand him over to you to be tortured and shot?"

"Your meddling spoilt an important success. Is there any reason why I should not shoot you now."

"You have a gun. It is in your hands, but . . ."

"But?"

"You know I have loved you, and you could not expect me to act against my principles." Anand stepped towards Satyan, wanting him to understand.

Satyan moved closer.

"You think you can go back and take up your old life as though nothing has happened this past year, no struggle, no gains, no sacrifice of lives. You think all this has been . . ."

" No. Much has changed. What of the innocent lives lost?"

"Regrettable, but inevitable."

"Only if you choose to go to war."

They glared at each other.

They stood so close now that Anand was conscious of Satyan's hot anger.

"I hate your sickly purity. It is false. Have you not betrayed Rosie with that whore, Shakuntala?" Satyan sneered, his breath an assault on Anand's cheek. Anand struck out. Satyan dropped his gun. They grappled and struggled. His men moved towards them, but Satyan shouted at them to leave him, that this was a personal matter. They moved together over the rough ground, stumbling at times. They fell. Anand found himself on top of a

prone Satyan. He felt strong, powerful, no longer the puny clerk, he was winning. He grasped a rock.

A surge from Satyan and Anand found himself on the ground, his head striking it. Satyan was straddling him, breathing hard. Anand could hardly breathe at all. Satyan's weight, the grip of his knees stopped his lungs inflating normally. He still held the rock. He hit Satyan on the side of his head. The blow was enough to unbalance Satyan, weaken his grip. Anand pushed him off and stood up.

"Anandgaru," asked Ganesh, "Are you still intending to leave?"

Satyan was floundering at his feet.There was blood on his face.

"Yes. I've finished here. Let's go." His hand was still gripping his weapon. He dropped it.

As he walked on, Anand's triumph leaked away. No one had won, nothing had been settled. They had succeeded in inflicting pain. They had wanted to harm. He had felt the desire to kill.

They had almost reached the shelter of a mango grove when a voice called out from behind.

"Anand," called Satyan.

Anand stopped. He began to turn. An elephant kicked him in the head. As he fell he heard from a distance the crack of a gun.

Kalampett

Lester followed Ross along the edge of a heaving panicking crowd at Kalampett Station. Entire families, with their household chattels, their elderly, their suckling infants were

boarding the last train to Hyderabad. The carriage doors were clogged and fathers were shoving packets and small children through the barred windows. Women pulled and shoved, fighting to be next. Children screamed as they found themselves separated. All the yelling and shrieks combined to make a sound that was a like a force of nature, a tide, a whirlwind, overwhelming them, making Lester mute.

Something small pushed past him. The short hunchback who wore a fez, who begged outside the station. He dodged around peoples' legs to reach the train, and nimbly scaled the carriage to the roof. He sat there with his bundle, grinning down at those still struggling below.

The only ones attempting to control this chaos were three junior policemen who could think of nothing except to use their lathis to belabour those within reach.

Ross signalled to Lester. He had spotted the stationmaster and was working his way to him. Lester struggled in that direction stepping on a woman's bare toe. She cursed him.

Lester, you are doing more harm than good.

"All these people," Ross was saying to the stationmaster, "They won't all fit on the train. Are there no more carriages?"

"This is my entire complement. It is insufficient, but there are no more carriages at my disposal. Of course there are more at Dornakal Junction, but how to get these people there?"

"Trucks," said Lester.

They looked at him.

"Yes, if we promised them trucks, perhaps they will let the train leave," said the station master.

"It will take more than promises. We will need to have the trucks outside the station, with petrol and drivers. The police must do this. They have powers of requisition."

"Most of the police have decamped. There are policemen in mufti on this train waiting to go."

"There must be someone still in authority." Ross went off urgently to find this person.

It took several hours, but eventually there were four trucks assembled at the station.The train had still not been able to leave. Men, women and children had lain down on the tracks to prevent this. These people were persuaded by the stationmaster and the police to move to the trucks.

There were four trucks with petrol, and three drivers.

Ross looked at Lester.

"You drive, am I right?"

"Yes."

"Your leg?"

"Not a concern."

Lester climbed up into the cabin. The key was in the ignition. He turned the key. A stutter that petered out. Lester pushed the accelerator to the floorboards and tried the key again. A surge of power that left the cabin shuddering. He pressed the rubber ball of the horn. The sound was galvanising. People surged on to the truck. In a few minutes it was full. Children sat beside him, a hen walked into his lap. Lester held it down, grasped its claws. He opened his door and swung himself out, holding out the bird.

"Will the owner of this bird please tie its legs together and keep it out of the cabin." He said this in Telugu. Hands grabbed the bird. A goodhumoured girl tore a strip off the hem of her skirt and tied its legs together.

"Thank you," said Lester.

"Thank you, sir." She smiled.

He ducked back into the cabin and slammed the door shut and pushed the stick into first gear. He let out the clutch, a small jerk and the truck moved forward.
Whistles and cheers erupted behind him. Ross was grinning and waving. He waved back.

Lester, do you believe it? You are driving a truck load of people to Dornakal. Possibly to safety.

All day tongas pulled into the hospital compound. These were not ill women, but frightened women from the Muslim section of town. These were people with no place to run. No relations in Hyderabad or elsewhere, or no money for the train fare. During the week, Hilda Higgs, on her visits to their homes had told them, that when the time came, they could come to the grounds of the Zenana Hospital. She was here to welcome them as they came. To assign them to a site in the grounds, if they were lucky, in the shelter of a tree. Women and girls set to work setting up their temporary homes. They found stones for fireplaces, started heating water or food. They rolled out mats to sleep on. Their husbands, fathers, older brothers remained at home with some idea of protecting it. The compound took on the character of an outdoor dormitory. Women sitting on their mats talked to the women on the mats next to them. Conversation began to hum. When a child cried the

neighbour took a part in soothing it.Women were meeting strangers, but in these circumstances the strangers became new friends.

Hilda and Virginia had decided that at nightfall, the gate to the compound would be locked. For psychological reasons. The old wooden gates would not keep out an army tank. Not long before the gates were due to close, a bullock cart turned in. A man in village dress was driving the cart. Sitting with him was a young man. The cart seemed to be empty. There were certainly no women. Hilda hurried to the cart. When the lad noticed her he jumped down and hurried towards her. She could not place him, but he looked vaguely familiar.

"Ammagaru, you must help. We have come along way. My master is dying." Hilda looked over the side of the cart at the prone, motionless figure of a young man. He appeared to be breathing. She knew this person. It was Anand.

Abraham did not sleep that night. Graceamma did not sleep, also. At times they heard murmurs coming from the Doragaru and Dorasani's bedroom. Jacob had come to keep them company in the pantry, and when they saw the flash of the nightwatchman's torch, they invited him in also. It was one thing to guard the compound at night against intruders or common robbers, but what could one man do against the Indian Army?

It was not known for certain, if it was this night, or the next or some other, when the Army would come. Everyone in Kalampett had prepared themselves as best they could. Many had left town, the shops were all shut and boarded up, and people were living on what they had managed to hoard. There was no kerosene and the fridge was not working,

so Abraham had been unable to store meat for the Dorasani's meals. Everyone was curtained and shuttered and locked into their houses, waiting.

The sooner the Army arrived the better, said Abraham to Jacob. And the sooner the Army had done what it came for, the sooner all their lives could return to normality.

They did not sleep that night. They waited in the dark, in a hushed stillness, listening. After midnight they heard deep rumbles. These sounds came from the other side of the town. They heard them coming nearer and louder. They imagined jeeps and trucks and tanks slicing the very air of their country with their powerful headlights, crushing the ruts on the bullock tracks, intruding into the empty streets of their shuttered town. They heard the sharp cracks of rifle fire, and Graceamma crept from her bed to be with them. They huddled close together knowing that some of their own people, no matter who or what, were now lying dead or wounded in the dark.

The heavy throbbing stopped before any big motors reached the compound. Whether soldiers on foot had come nearer, whether the compound was surrounded, they did not know. The night was quiet again except for the furtive peerings of the curious. A lamp was lit. A baby was crying. Then they heard closeby a woman's scream. A scream that was muffled and stopped short. The three men hurried out, Jacob, the night watchman and Abraham. They hurried towards the well, towards the scream, and ahead of them running was a small figure that Abraham recognised. He should have been in the hostel, asleep, but he was running ahead of them shouting. "What's the matter, Amma?" He was running round the other side of the well, when he dropped like a bird falling from the sky and there was a sharp noise echoing off the well wall.

Again the boy was in the wrong place. Had Abraham not reminded him? When the school bell rang, it was time to run to the classroom. Not stop to watch a lizard changing colour. When Teacher ammagaru turned to write on the blackboard then he should pay attention, not slip out and watch the squirrels. Abraham had told him such things again and again, so what was the boy doing sneaking out of the hostel before dawn? And on such a night when the Indian army had marched into Kalampett and it was important to stay inside, stay safe until Matron-ammagaru or the Dorasani or Tundrigaru, someone in authority came to say that they could come out.

"Slow down, Abraham," whispered Jacob. He was flat on the ground and so was the nightwatchman. They were wriggling like snakes, moving forward and around the well. There was this other movement on the ground, a man, a soldier.They saw his shorts pushed down. They saw his thin buttocks. He was forcing himself on a woman.

Abraham let Jacob and the nightwatchman deal with the man. He went to the boy and knelt beside him. He was wearing a pair of shorts. His small bare chest was streaked wet. A dark hole, nearer to one nipple than the other, oozed and glistened. Abraham put his face close to the boy's. His eyes were half open and so was his mouth with its overlarge teeth. It was the sight of those teeth that made Abraham shake him.

"Wake up. Wake up now." But the boy didn't do as he was told. His limbs flopped as Abraham started to lift him. His head fell back.

"You're not making this easy," scolded Abraham. He stood with the boy in his arms, feeling his blood soaking his shirt and took some steps towards the others. They were looking at him.

"He is dead," he told them. "The boy Prakasam is dead."

There was a cry from the Dorasani. She came running. The Doragaru was there too. Jacob and the nightwatchman held the soldier's arms behind him. That man's trousers were round his ankles, shackling him. His shame glistened down one thigh. The violated woman was hiding her face on Graceamma's shoulder. Was she not their sweeper, Marthamma?

After dawn an army jeep drove through the gates of the compound and came to an important stop in front of the bungalow. Four soldiers leapt out. A Major came to tell the Rev. Rimmer that the Indian Army was here to peacefully take over the state of Hyderabad and there was nothing to be feared.

Ross Rimmer informed the Major that a soldier of the Indian Army had that morning shot dead a school boy and raped their sweeper. He then took the Major to a locked storeroom where the captured soldier was held along with a few tins of peanut butter and powdered milk and the scrabblings of hungry rats. And then he was taken to a small whitewashed room where the dead boy lay under a white sheet on Matron's bed. The Major saw the bullet wound in the boy's chest. He was shown the rifle. The prisoner was then transferred into army hands and the jeep departed in a hurried disgrace.

Harriet and Mrs Amos had a brief discussion on the back steps of the bungalow.The children would not be informed of Prakasam's death till the evening. Lessons would carry on as normal, but some of the classes would have to be combined because Harriet herself would be away all day, going to the village where Prakasam's parents lived.

For her journey the Dorasani wore walking shoes and her sola topi. She carried a metal canister with drinking water that banged her hip as she walked and its webbed strap rubbed her neck. She was not walking however. She would take Jacob and the bullock cart,

because the elderly parents could not be expected in their grief to make the journey on foot. Her husband kissed her as she set off.

In the middle of the morning Ross Rimmer returned to the bungalow for a cup of tea. He informed Abraham that Major-General Chaudhuri would be joining them for the evening meal. Also present would be Tundrigaru, Dr Ammagaru, and Higgs dorasani.

"And we should also expect the Dorasani, though she might be late. That is six for dinner. This is short notice Abraham, but I know you'll do your best. We have some important things to say to the Major-General."

It should have been one of the proudest days of Abraham's life. He was used to important visitors. Bishops, churchmen from England, America, even New Zealand. But he had never expected to cook for someone such as Major-General Chaudhuri of the Indian Army. Major-General Chaudhuri from Bengal.

But this Indian Army had let them down badly. Despite his sorrowing heart, despite the shortages of food and fuel, he must prepare a three-course meal for six people, a meal that would not shame his Dorasani in front of the Major-General.

Before lunchtime they heard that Anand was lying in hospital with a Communist bullet in his head. Graceamma went quietly to see her son and Abraham feared for her.

Abraham's job turned out to be easier in ways he didn't expect. All of a sudden, there seemed to be a great deal of kerosene available, so his first job was to get the fridge going. And if there was ice that night, he would serve cold lime juice to the guests.

When it was time to serve the guests everything was ready, the food, the table, the borrowed Royal Worcester dinner service. David and Samuel had come from the other bungalows, looking smart in bearer's uniforms, ready to serve. Graceamma had returned

from Anand's hospital bed. He was conscious and had spoken to her. She was quiet, but insisted she wanted to work. She calmly filled the lamps with kerosene, polished the glass and lit all the lamps. The Aladdin lamp was in the centre of the table. The petromax hissed on a stand spreading a wide circle of white light. Smaller lamps were spread around creating a festival of lights.

The missionaries assembled and waited for the Major-General. Abraham was pleased to see they were dressed in their best clothes. Higgs dorasani wore her blue silk sari, glass bangles and a gold chain with a cross. Doctor Ammagaru wore her green gown that floated down to her ankles, green earrings and a carved ivory brooch. Tundrigaru wore his white cassock tied at the waist with a black silk cord. The other doragarus wore clean shirts and trousers. Their hair was well- brushed, their partings straight.

Abraham was not at all disappointed with the Major General's appearance. He was tall, for a Bengali, and handsome with small even features in a squarish face. Tundrigaru introduced the Major-General to each person in the semi-circle. The soldier's manners were very good. He shook hands firmly with the men. When he took the ladies' hands he bowed slightly.

"There is one thing I must say first," said the Major-General. He spoke English with a pukkah accent. "I apologise most sincerely for the regrettable incident that took place here this morning. It was out of character for my men, and the individual concerned will be dealt with severely. The intention of this Police Action is peaceful. We have orders to return fire only if we have been fired on first. There was a skirmish in the night. You may have heard it. Some Muslim militia and Communist insurgents."

The first course was a soup. Abraham had steamed and pureed some garden greens, thinned them with coconut milk and scented the soup with cardamom.

"This is very good," said the Major-General in an aside to Dr. Ammagaru

"Yes, Abraham is an excellent cook."

The soup plates were being removed, when a sound from the other end of the room made the diners look over. The Dorasani was walking towards them. She was still wearing the dress she had put on that morning. It was her most faded print frock, now crumpled and damp with sweat. Her hair was tangled, her face almost old. There were streaks of dust up her legs. On one side of her neck there was a painful redness where the strap of her water bottle had chafed her. All this Abraham saw clearly in the glare of the lights, but what he noticed most of all was how grief had dignified his Dorasani.

As she approached the table the men rose from their seats.

"Harry, are you all right?" Rimmergaru's table napkin dropped from his hand.

"Yes, thank you." The Dorasani stood in the stark light of the Petromax and looked determinedly at their guest. "Ross, will you introduce me?"

Ross introduced his wife to the Major-General.

"Major-General Chaudhuri," said the Dorasani, "As the Manager of this school, I am responsible for the education, the health and the spiritual wellbeing of 200 hundred village children. I take these responsibilities seriously, and I find myself mourning the death of a schoolboy as though he were my own child.

"I have come from the parents of the dead boy, Prakasam. The boy who was shot by one of your soldiers, Major-General. The soldier was in the act of forcing himself on our

sweeper, Martha. He did not wish to be interrupted and when this nine year old came running up, the soldier shot him and then threatened Martha with the same fate."

"That man is in chains and under guard. I assure you, Miss …"

"Mrs Rimmer," reminded Tundrigaru.

"I can assure you, Mrs Rimmer, that the Army will deal with his witnessed crimes with the full force of its authority. I deeply regret this incident."

"This is not just a matter of Army discipline, Major-General. It is a human tragedy. The boy Prakasam was the only child of elderly parents, their only surviving child. Their miracle. He had an unusual empathy for living creatures, and he hoped to use these gifts as a forest ranger. It wouldn't have mattered to him who owned the forests. The Nizam or the Government of India. It is the animals he would have served.

" This morning I left early for the village where his parents live and they are now here in Kalampett. The parents are deeply confused by what has happened. Why would an Indian soldier kill their son? What is the Indian Army doing here? I have been sitting with them beside their dead boy. The mother whispered that Prakasam had grown since they last saw him. The father reached out ever so gently to touch the boy on his cheek.

"They are almost mute in their grief. So I take it upon myself to speak for them." Here the Dorasani paused.

"Go on, Harriet," said Tundrigaru.

" When your masters, Nehru and Patel, lost patience with the Nizam, not, I imagine, a difficult thing, and initiated this so-called Police Action with soldiers, guns and tanks, did they take into account the cost to innocent people? In our grief for a dead boy let us not

forget Martha and the degradation she has suffered. Major-General, how many more Marthas and Prakasams will there be before you have finished your job here?

"As the Manager of St Paul's Boarding School I invite you, Major-General Chaudhuri to represent the Indian Government at the funeral tomorrow morning of the boy Prakasam.

"Now if you will excuse me, I wish to retire. Goodnight."

The Dorasani walked to the door. As she passed her cook she whispered, "Abraham, I can see you have done a magnificent job. Thank you.'

At the dinner table the men resumed their seats. It was Dr. Ammagaru who broke the silence speaking in an accent easily a match to that of the Major-General.

"I have forty Muslim families, that is the women and children, camping in the compound of the Zenana hospital. They will be spending their second night outside. They would like to know when they can safely return home."

"This is a matter on which I would request your assistance. As yet my men have not approached the Muslim quarter in Kalampett. We do not wish our presence to be taken as hostile. If one of you were to accompany us, I think that would ease fears."

The Major-General looked at Archie Godfrey and at Ross Rimmer.

"The person you need," said Archie, "is Hilda Higgs. She has been there daily these past weeks. She is both known and loved by that community."

"I will be happy to help." Hilda bobbed her head.

"Thank you."

When the meal was over, the Major-General turned to Ross.

"Please convey my apologies to Mrs Rimmer. I shall not be able to attend the funeral tomorrow. My orders are to press on to Hyderabad. But I will arrange for an officer to take my place."

Rahel's Diary

It is over. So quickly. A few days.

The servant girl Maryam told me her brother was watching at the gate. He saw what happened. The Major-General from Bengal came to the city wall. The Arab General was there to meet him. The Arab passed over his sword. A surrender. It was accepted.

Later cars and rickshaws went through the bazaars. People shouted and waved the Indian tricolour. Saffron and white and green. We heard the sounds through the windows of the Zenana. Those people celebrating the end of the Asaf Jahi dynasty.

Hyderabad is now ruled by the Indian Army. By Major-General Chaudhuri.

We put on white saris as mourning.

We waited for word from the Nizam.

But he was silent.

Chapter 17 Later

Rahel's Diary

I bathed and dressed very carefully, as though preparing to meet my lover. The ayahs welcomed the distraction from the disasters that have come upon us. They rubbed my body with ground almonds and rosewater, washed and perfumed my hair with oil of jasmine. They hennaed my fingertips and the soles of my feet. I chose a silk bodice, blue shot with mauve. And a mauve silk sari, shot with the same blue and a gold border. My black hair was left loose. It shone like silk. I chose pearls for my neck, my nose, the centre parting of my hair. My sandals were made of plaited silk and gold thread.

When I looked in the mirror, I hardly recognised myself. What I saw gave me confidence. I had the freshness of youth, (which so mesmerises the old), I had acquired poise, I had a purpose. I held myself straight as I left my chamber to walk through the communal room and head for the main doors.

There was a hush. I looked straight ahead and moved steadily. I heard my mother breathe my name. No one tried to stop me, not the Begums, the eunuchs, the guards. Two guards opened the heavy doors and I walked through them. Freely, I walked down the passageways. Servants stood back and salaamed. I left the Zenana building and walked out into the garden, into the bleached light of late morning.

As I expected, there was an old man in a worn and dirty jacket, sitting on a rock. Below a shabby fez, his hair was grey and uncombed. Beside him was a goat. The old man was speaking to it softly, feeding it with dry grass. I stood beside them.

"Abbu."

He looked up and I saw how thin and lined his face was. How cloudy his eyes. I wondered how well he could see. He smiled crookedly. His eyes came alight.

"Such beauty. Are you one of my daughters?"

"Daughter number 23. My name is Rahel."

"Rahel. Did I choose it, or did your mother?'

"I was told you did."

"I thought so. I always liked that name." He lost focus, then, and looked back at the goat, stroking its neck.

This broken man was the father that Nasreen and I had hero-worshipped. Those years of filial devotion, of childish emotions were unknown to him. He had failed us, but I would not burden him with that.

"It turned out to be true." He looked at me. "The legend. That the seventh Nizam would be the last. If that is Allah's will, I accept it."

He was a solitary figure, but I think he felt at peace. Content that for this moment the courtiers and sycophants were replaced by a goat with yellow eyes with black vertical slits. A goat that liked him to scratch behind its ears, did not object when he playfully tugged its beard.

I could not help but pity my father, and wish that his remaining life could be reduced to such simplicity, but it could not. He no longer had the burdens of state, but he did still have the responsibilities for his wives, his concubines, his children, the court functionaries, the retainers and servants, all of whom were now so fearful of their future.

"Abbu, I have come to tell you that I'm leaving the Zenana, leaving Hyderabad. I'm taking my mother, a servant girl, and my twin. That is four people for whom you will not need to provide."

He smiled indulgently. "Rahel. My beautiful daughter, Rahel. There is no need for that….Twin? Did you say, twin?"

"Same day, same hour, different mothers."

"Aah. And what is the name of the 'twin'?"

"Nasreen." I waited to see if that name meant anything to him, but he remained blank. How could he ruin someone's life and it mean nothing? I spoke with some anger.

"The daughter of your favourite concubine. The daughter you ravaged."

"Aah. I was hoping she would look after me in my last years."

"What? Because you spoilt her chances of a good marriage, which is all she ever wanted, and what her mother wanted for her.?"

"You are angry."

"What you did to Nasreen is something I cannot forgive."

"I suppose I could find someone for her. There are still people who owe me favours."

"Some geriatric, opium-addled dullard who cannot adapt to change and will be living out of your pocket for the rest of his days? Is that your idea of recompense? No, it is better that I take her away for a fresh start. We are too young to stay here in Hyderabad, mourning the passing of greatness, watching the decline and ruin of palaces and gardens, the end to the life of our kind. We must step boldly away, and embrace a new life, whatever it brings."

I was not sure how much the Nizam took in of my little speech. He bent down as though to scratch himself. His fingers slipped inside a sock that fell shapeless and loose round a scrawny ankle. He was feeling for something. A stone? A thorn? His fingers brought out a small packet wound with thread.

"Take it. Open it."

I opened it to find a dozen diamonds in the palm of my hand.

"There is not a stone there that weighs less than a carat. Some are from Golconda, some South Africa. All are flawless and of exceptional clarity."

He sensed that I was thinking of rejecting them, perhaps flinging them on the ground.

"I have not been a good father," he said quietly, " but at this moment, when we have got to know each other a little, when you are about to leave, will you not accept your old father's blessing, and some practical help?"

He was wily, my father, the Nizam. He took his dues with regal disregard, but he could also bind people to him. Make them love him. Rejecting the diamonds would be a grand but foolish gesture. By leaving this life, my mother, Nasreen and I were gaining freedom, or so I told myself. But this freedom is a vast, shapeless thing that sends shivers down my spine. I wrapped up the diamonds and slipped the packet into my bodice.

The Nizam's smile did show some triumph, but also relief and pleasure.

"The diamonds are not so large that they will be difficult to sell, but they are the best of their size. Sell them one at a time, slowly and wisely."

I felt a smile at the corners of my mouth. I touched my hand to my forehead and stooped and touched his feet, and that is how I met and took my leave of my father, the seventh and last Nizam.

Harriet, having read this last page, set it down with the others. Ross picked up the manuscript and shook the loose pages into a neat block and put them in a large manilla envelope.

After breakfast Rachel had come to Harriet with the envelope and put it in her hands.

"It's finished," she said, smiling. She looked excited and happy.

"Darling, that's wonderful," said Harriet, without really knowing what it was she had been given.

"I'm going off to see Rosie."

"All right. Have a good time."

Harriet had given Abraham a day off, and she had packed a picnic for two. She sat with Ross beside a pond. There was a kingfisher poised on a branch and a tailor bird working, stitching its nest of leaves together.

They had read the manuscript together, Ross reading a page first and passing it to her.

"Do you think she has talent?"asked Harriet.

"It's possible."

"But where did she get the idea? To write about the Nizam's hareem?"

"Do you remember that limerick Archie wrote? That time Rachel was in bed with mumps? He sent her something everyday. A text, a quotation. One day it was a limerick. Rachel wanted me to learn it by heart so we could recite it together."

"Vaguely. About a girl from Golconda, wasn't it?"

"That's it.

'A venturesome girl from Golconda,

Of whom the Nizam grew fonder and fonder,

Said, Life in the hareem

Is so dull I could scream,

And ranaway to hunt anaconda."

Harriet and Ross looked at each other and smiled.

"So, Archie is responsible, as he is for so much. Ross, I'm worried. This," she indicated, the pond, the wider scenery, and beyond to India, "This is what Rachel knows. She is full of it, she's," Harriet grasped for a word, " imbued with it through and through, and we are sending her home. How will she manage?"

"She was seven when we sent her away to boarding school. She managed that. We were astonished at how well she did. She thrived."

"True, but New Zealand?"

"It's a bigger step, but she's older. I think she's ready. What does she say in her story, stepping boldly away, embracing a new life whatever it brings?"

"You're the optimist," said Harriet. "I remember the bit about freedom being vast and shapeless and sending shivers down the spine."

"There'll be shivers, regrets, fears, and new friends and unexpected possibilities. It'll be a life, her life."

Harriet wiped tears from her face. She looked around.

"You know there's not a soul about. We are actually alone." She looked at Ross. "I don't think that kingfisher will mind, do you?"

She reached for him as he reached for her.

Graceamma approached Ammagaru as she was sitting at the table, studying her book about vitamins. She felt quite fond of this woman, especially now as she was about to leave her.

"Ammagaru, I wish to speak to you."

As Ammagaru raised her head, her eyes filled with surprise.

"Graceamma, that sari. What a lovely colour. It isn't one of those I gave you, is it?"

"Yes, Amma. I have kept it in my trunk all these years."

"Perhaps it was a mistake, to give them. It was me imposing my ideas on you."

"No mistake, amma. At that time I was not ready to farewell my husband, and my widow's sari joined me to him still. But I have said good-bye to my dead husband now. I no longer speak to him and ask for his reply. It is time for him to rest. I am well again, amma. Fully well. I can read once more."

" How simply wonderful!"

"Yes, amma. When we journeyed back from the hills, we first passed stations with their names written in Tamil. But then the train passed stations where the names were in Telugu. I was awake and looking out the window when I saw a Telugu name and I read it. Pa – patta- palli. And when we reached Kalampett, I could read that also. I have said

nothing till now, because I wanted first to be certain sure that once again I am able to read. Ammagaru, I feel that God is telling me to return to Cheddapalli. To once more teach village children. I have talked to that woman, Shakuntala, and she has said that Mrs Moses would like someone to help her in the village school. Ammagaru, I could take your teaching methods to the village. Ammagaru, perhaps you could give training sessions . . ." Graceamma was panting a little, feeling brimful of ideas, excited at this new life.

" I'll do anything I can to help." Ammagaru stood up from her chair and came to put her arms around Graceamma.

"From now on, Graceamma, you must call me Harriet."

"Abraham, do you also wish to leave?" asked the Dorasani. "There seems to be a strong mood for change."

"Oh no, Dorasani. This is my place."

"I'm glad you feel like that. The Doragaru and I are not the most adventurous eaters. I thought you might be bored cooking for us."

"Sometimes, Dorasani, that is true. But also I have changed your taste a little and can do so again."

"I got a letter today that will interest you. From the Army and Navy Stores in Madras. They have just completed a through stocktake and found a dinnerset they had overlooked. They said its style is no longer in fashion, and they are willing to sell it at half the normal price."

"That is good, Dorasani. Old fashion is sometimes better than new fashion."

"Yes, I agree. They say the plates are white and ringed with a deep blue circle. Royal blue. The outer edge of the plate is gilt. In the centre of the plate is a flower on a royal blue background. It sounds very nice and the price is not expensive, but I think it will *look* too grand." The Dorasani frowned.

Abraham had never contradicted his Dorasani before, but she needed his help now and he would guide her.

"No, Dorasani, not too grand."

"But the gold?"

"The gold is good, Dorasani. It will look beautiful. When your guests see it they will get pleasure. They will not think, the Dorasani is a bad person, she has gold circles on her plates. Everyone knows you live simply for an English, a New Zealander also, but Dorasani, however simply you may live, you will always seem rich to us, and gold circles or not gold circles will not change that."

The Dorasani was quiet.

"I see. Thank you, Abraham." Then she smiled. "So, we are to have a new dinnerset with gold circles. Do you approve, Abraham?"

"Oh, yes, Dorasani."

He approved of this new dinnerset, but even without it he would have stayed with the Dorasani. Samuel was leaving Dr Ammagaru's employment to go Bezwada-side, but Abraham would not be applying for his job at the hospital bungalow with the Royal Worcester dinnerset. And when Abraham told Jacob this, Jacob approved.

A villager pushed open the gate of the school bungalow. He staggered a little. Rachel was picking marigolds in the garden. Harriet and Ross were about to share a cup of tea on the verandah.

"Doragaru, you must help. These soldiers from India, they do not speak our language, They are beating and killing us. We cannot keep our Muslim women safe. These men are worse than the Razarkars and Communist together."

Ross went to change into his cassock and get together the essentials for the trip – his Communion vessels, a flask of drinking water, and pencil and paper to write down the places and dates and names and incidents to take to the military authorities on his return.

I am Anand, aged 20 years, only son of Luke and Graceamma. My nation is India, my bhasha Telugu, my desha Telengana. I was born in the village of Cheddapalli and am currently residing in the army prison in Kalampett. An unknown person of this town gave my name to the military authorities as a Communist conspirator. It is known here only that I had a Communist friend in Hyderabad. Had this person seen me in Cheddapalli, he or she would not think of me as Communist.

This prison is crowded, all of us it seems enemies of India. Not only Communist fighters captured in the countryside, and Razarkars, including Hajji Hassan's son, but also three Divinity Students from Dornakal, traders accused of profiteering, teachers, High School students, all manner of people accused of this and that. It is a matter of daily interest as to who will next be brought in. Sometimes men who are sworn enemies outside find themselves confined together. There are fights, but the loudest prisoners are the

Communists and the Christians. The former wish to organise strikes, the latter to hold prayer meetings.

I keep myself apart. In this I am helped by my blindness, and the bandage around my head covering my eyes. There is much for me to think about, and in this crowded prison I have the time to reflect.

My life was saved by my servant Ganesh. After Satyan shot me, he and his men departed leaving Ganesh unharmed and me lying on the ground. I did not respond to Ganesh's cries, but he could see I was still breathing. This strong boy picked me up and carried me I do not know how far till he came to a house. These were farmers with their own land. Ganesh spoke to one who owned a bullock cart. He told him some tale about how important a man his master was, how influential with missionaries in Kalampett, how my return alive to the hospital would be rewarded with a fabulous sum of money. The farmer said that the bullocks were costly, the cart was costly, and his time also, that he did not believe in such a fabulous sum, and even if there was money in it for him, he would require a part payment upfront. Ganesh, of course, had no money. He has never owned so much as a paisa and has no understanding of the value of a single rupee.

This I must remedy when I am out of prison.

So Ganesh offered himself, and the farmer took free advantage of this. After the bullock cart arrived at the hospital, after Higgs Dorasani had paid the driver, not the lakhs of rupees that Ganesh had promised, but an ample amount, the farmer, as they sheltered that night under the bullock cart outside the Hospital walls, demanded further payment from Ganesh, to make up he said for the shortfall.

It pained me to hear that. I asked Ganesh to promise he would never again do such a thing on my account. I told him that, as he had saved my life as my father had saved his, his obligations were discharged and he was free to return home. I was afraid that if he remained with me, his life and dignity might be further endangered, and I never wanted to find myself in the position of telling Ratnabhai that her firstborn had come to harm.

Ganesh's distress was unexpected. He asked me if I was dissatisfied with his efforts, said he would try harder. He begged me to let him stay, and pointed out that as I was now blind, my need for him would be greater. I in my turn was dismayed. I said that I felt no dissatisfion. That I had been overwhelmed with Ratnabhai's gift and was only anxious that he would not come to harm, but if he truly wanted he could stay. I said that I would be a better master in the future, that when I was in a position to do so I would pay him a regular salary, buy him a new suit of clothes, and hoped that in time he would take a wife. His manner brightened at this, and the thought came to me that Ganesh with a wife would also mean children, many children. I secretly weakened at such a thought. Instead of freeing myself of a responsibility, I had only added to it, many times over.

I remember nothing of Ganesh or the farmer during that journey by bullock cart. But my face became wet from rain that seeped into my eyes. And it brought to mind the journey made by bullock cart when I was three years old. That also was a journey from Cheddapalli to Kalampett. That time my face was wet also, not from rain but my mother's tears. I remembered that. And I remembered a fly, how it buzzed and buzzed even though it was night, over the bloody sheet that covered my father's dead body.

It is a strange thing, but I take it to be a fact, that not all men wish to be masters. There are some for whom a life as a servant is not a humiliation. In saying this, I think of

Abraham. In his position at the school bungalow, he is part of a larger enterprise. He sees the comings and goings of the Doragaru and Dorasani, he knows what their work is and its difficulties and rewards. He knows these things without himself having to share their burdens, but he knows that he has a necessary place in their lives, a place that allows him to exercise his talents. He knows he is valued.

Ganesh also has no objection to having a master, and while I go along with this, I cannot truly think of him as my servant. My father's action brought this person into my life. He is a part of our family now. Amma understands this. She accepts Ganesh also. He is my tamadi.

At Rimmergaru's request, Ganesh is presently occupied with helping to build the new printing office, a project that is now going ahead. It would be difficult for a blind person to be Manager of such a place, but nevertheless Tundrigaru visits me to keep me in touch with its progress. It seems that though I did not complete my training with Benjamingaru, it is thought I have learnt enough. Dr Ammagaru must have told Tundrigaru what she told me. First that the bullet was almost spent when it entered my skull. Secondly, she thinks there is a chance that my blindness is temporary. A matter of swelling and bruising rather than lasting damage.

She seems to be right concerning the eyes. I have begun to be conscious of light at the edge of my bandage. I open my eyes and meditate on this radiance for a few minutes at a time, giving thanks for this miracle.

For now it is best that I tell no-one.

Satyan has been captured and brought into prison. He has been apprehended, not as Satyan Reddy, the Red Tiger, dangerous communist insurgent and would-be killer of one

G.P.Anand, also incarcerated here, but as Shiva Rama Rao, robber, belonging to a large clan of robbers and dacoits, caught in the act of removing the gold chains and jewels that a widow and her son had about their persons as they travelled to her dead husband's brother's home.

There seemed to be a greater excitement than usual when Shiva Rama Rao was brought in shackled and clanking in chains. Perhaps the soldiers regard the capture of Communists and Razakars as now so routine that it takes the capture of a robber from a legendary clan to rekindle a sense of drama to their job. Certainly Satyan just by his presence makes any situation more vivid and exciting. It was by his voice that I knew him. The same voice that greeted Hyderabadi urchins as tamadi, and me as Christian boy, now addresses his soldier guards as Friend.

I asked a fellow prisoner to describe to me the robber, Shiva Rama Rao. It was not the first time I have asked him to describe a new inmate, and he has taken on this job of being my eyes with some enthusiasm. He is observant, with a gift for description.

The robber was a handsome fellow, he said. Tall and well-built. Thick curly uncombed hair tied back in a knot. No beard, but a moustache so luxurious and extravagant that it curled across his cheeks almost reaching his ears. Merry eyes, were mentioned, an engaging laugh. If the fellow were not such and out and out ruffian, he would be happy to have such a person as his friend. One more thing, a scar on his temple. It looked to be new.

I thanked my friend and told him his description had brought the robber Shiva Rama Rao vividly to mind.

This portrait was not that of the unsmiling and grim Satyan I knew at Cheddapalli. This robber's nature seems to be more like the old Satyan, as though this latest incarnation

has given him a new lease of life. The hair, the beard, these things are different, but easily altered.

Why did Satyan pretend to be a robber and allow himself to be captured? I am sure he staged his capture. Perhaps he foresaw his cadre would by surrounded and trapped. Better then to be captured as an everyday robber than as a political foe. This known risk-taker may be gambling that the army authorities will seek his co-operation as a witness against the crimes of the Communists, and he, while agreeing to help, could put them off the scent of valued comrades, and earn himself a shorter time of imprisonment.

I do not know this. It is what I think. But I did know it would not take him long to notice me.

One morning as a guard took me to the prison latrine, another prisoner followed behind. Satyan, joking with his guard. I entered the latrine and this prisoner followed and squatted beside me.

We did not speak as we pursued our private business, then Satyan whispered to me.

"Blind man, why are you in prison?"

"I am accused of being friends with a Hyderabadi Communist, of following him to the countryside. It is thought I helped him in his crimes."

"Is that the Communist called Satyan Reddy?"

"It is."

"The Satyan Reddy who still eludes the military?"

"In a manner of speaking."

The guards shouted that we should hurry.

Satyan shouted back, asking for patience, that he was constipated as he tried to pass an elephant turd. He also added how unpleasant it was to be trapped next to one with diarrhoea. The guards laughed loudly.

Satyan lowered his voice further.

"I thought to have killed you, Christian boy."

"If the gun had been in my hands, I would have killed you."

"You tried your best without the gun. I will carry that mark for some time."

And I your bullet for the rest of my life, I thought.

"May I feel it?"

He took my fingers and placed them against his temple. I felt the roughness of the skin, and his heart beating behind it somewhat quickly.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I have shown myself to be one who keeps your secrets. This is another. I do not think the army will be looking for testimony from a blind man."

Satyan stood up and shouted to the guards that he was coming out. I felt the pressure of his hand on my shoulder. Whether he was steadying himself, or whether that was a last touch of friendship, I could not say.

I do not know if Satyan will trust my word, or whether that will be a risk that in the end he will not take. He could arrange for me to be killed in gaol, or perhaps he has plans for an early escape.What ever eventuates in his life, I know that I will no longer have a place in it. That is a sadness.

It is possible that I too will be released before trial.

Tundrigaru came to say that "a woman called Shakuntala" came to his bungalow. With David and Tundrigaru as witnesses she wrote out an account of how I had spoken out against the Communists, how I was threatened by them, how I had helped to save the life of the landlord, and other things. She also brought with her a letter and testimonial from Rev. Moses. Tundrigaru intends to take these papers to the military. He says that the case in my defence is much stronger than the hearsay against me, that even if I am not released early, there will be so many witnesses supporting my innocence (he listed some of these) that my acquittal must be a foregone conclusion. He gives me much needed hope.

It seems that even the landlord is prepared to speak for me.

That landlord. His miseries continued for some weeks. Not only did he have to put up with the pain from his wounds, the noises and smells and polluting power of his untouchable hosts, to sleep on the floor like a servant, to eat coarse cholam like a peasant, he also endured the shivering fevers of malaria, and had it not been for Shakuntala's care, may have died.

Each time he asked if he could return home, Rev. Moses replied that he was not yet ready. Even after the wounds had healed, Rev. Moses said he was not fit to return. After his fever the landlord began to change. He addressed Ratnabhai without his usual arrogance. He was seen to show amusement, instead of his usual displeasure, at the antics of the children. When Ratnabhai's youngest cried and she was busy, he took the child and held her in his arms, uttering soothing words, pulling comical faces to distract the child from her tears. At that moment if the Party fighters had burst into the hut, they would surely have believed the story that this grey-haired man was Ratnabhai's father.

It was only after the landlord had shown these and other signs of humanity, did Rev. Moses declare him to be ready, and arranged for his return.

Ratnabhai's husband was to work in a field near the landlord's house. He went to work each morning in a group of eight men. One morning, one of these men stayed at home and the landlord took his place. He dressed as a farm worker in loincloth and turban, and having lost weight his ribs were visible. Going thus he did not arouse suspicion. His greatest difficulty, Ratnabhai's husband told us, was being allowed entrance into his own home. But his youngest daughter appeared at a window and by calling out to her, using her pet name, he was recognised.

When I was lying on the hospital bed, I was much shocked to hear about Rosie. That was a dark time, my blindness coupled with the knowledge of the evil done to her.The heavy burden she had kept secret for months. The tortures that drove her to the well. I cannot know the extent of her suffering, but I understand some of it. If her plan in life was to marry a suitable man, and my plan was to be that person, we have both failed completely. Rosie, through no fault of her own is no longer a maiden and this is a matter of public knowledge. She will think that no-one will now make her an offer of marriage, except out of pity, something she would spit on. Or perhaps that an offer might come only from another harmed person, like a blind jailbird. That offer also would be unacceptable.

If I still hope that some day, somehow there can be a marriage between us, it rests in being found innocent, and being no longer blind.

Only yesterday I noticed the hem of Amma's sari, it was a brilliant but blurred orange. I could not remark on that without giving myself away. I am of course without my glasses, and whatever small portion of the world I see it is always indistinct.

I have asked myself if the knowledge that Rosie is no longer a virgin affects my desire for her. At one time, I would have said, Yes, she is no longer worthy. Have I not kept myself pure? But I am older now and can acknowledge that my 'purity' is one of deed, but not of thought. Have I not played in my mind what may have happened had I returned into the prayer room with Shakuntala? What her fingers, her mouth may have done to me, what I may have done to her? Have I not taken great pleasure in such thoughts? I cannot be critical of Rosie or judge her for an enforced act.

But I acknowledge that an innocence, a youthful bloom has been lost in my picture of a marriage between us. We will both of us carry invisible scars from these past months. Even if my sight recovers, I shall not be whole and unmarked. There will always be the bullet in my brain and there may be, Dr Ammagaru has warned, later consequences. A trembling of the limbs, perhaps even paralysis.

I have never seen Kumarraj and hope I never shall. Amma told me he is reported to be a changed man. After a period of lying low, he went to the Bishop in Dornakal and made a full confession. He also said he felt called to enter the ministry. To test his faith and his resolve the Bishop gave him a year to sweep and clean the Cathedral daily, tend the garden outside, and read and study and pray, living off the wages of a servant.

The Bishop has since died. They say the Cathedral was spilling over with mourners. Now another Bishop must be chosen. David came to this prison to visit me. He told me that a group of people from the Church went to see Tundrigaru, and asked if he would be the next Bishop. He replied, No, it must be another Indian. Then they went to Rimmer Doragaru, and asked him. He said that the next Bishop must be a Telugu. I can think of two men suitable for this job. Isaiahgaru and the Rev. Moses. There may be others also.

Amma has her plans. To return to Cheddapalli. She spoke to Shakuntala when she was in Kalampett, and heard that Mrs Moses would welcome help in teaching the village children. It is Amma's aim to teach with Mrs Moses and take up her old life. She speaks of this with much pleasure.

It is the imprisonment of her son that is delaying her return. She does not grumble at this or even mention it. She has heard of a language of touch for the blind. Braille. She has suggested that I learn it, and maybe in time teach it to others. I have not told her of the signs of returning sight. I do not want to raise hopes, I do not want to appear a greater threat to Satyan.

There is a man in a corner here. Why he is here is unknown, but he is a hopeless drunk, unable to obtain what he craves. He trembles and shakes and calls out, made fearful by strange visions. In his quieter moments he collapses in his corner, as forgotten as harmless as a pile of rags. He hums a tune, one tune only, and that melody contains the three notes that I hear in my head. When I ask him what the tune is, he is silent or makes mocking noises. No one wants anything from him except me, and that he denies. It brings me back to him to ask him yet again.

One time he was humming when Amma was visiting. She asked who he was. She peered at him.

"Is that you, Sundar?" she called out.

The humming stopped.

"It is I, Graceamma. What are you doing here?"

She coaxed him to come close. She introduced me as her son, and told him she was returning to Cheddapalli.

"When you are out of this place, you must return home. In Cheddapalli we will look after you."

She told me that as a boy Sundar lived next door to us.

I asked Amma about the tune.

"It is one of your father's."

"Then why have I not heard it? Why is it not sung in church?"

"It is not a hymn. He wrote it for you. A lullaby."

"Do you know it?"

"I know the tune. The words are on a piece of paper locked in my trunk."

I look forward to seeing those words one day.To singing this song.

Amma has told me that she is very impressed by Shakuntala. The Bishop had sent a message to say that he wanted to meet her.

"Before she left for Dornakal, Shakuntala had ready her plans and schemes for educating villagers about health. These she was going to present to the Bishop, to ask him for his support and backing and the money required." I hope the new Bishop whoever he is, will also see Shakuntala's worth.

This morning Amma came with more news of her. A few days ago Rosie gave birth to a daughter that she rejected. Amma told me the Shakuntala who had met Kumarraj in Dornakal, accompanied him to Kalampett to collect his daughter from the hospital and to arrange for a wet nurse. She also took him to face Mr and Mrs Amos.

"I would not be surprised," said Amma,"if she has decided to marry this Kumarraj and turn him into a decent man. That woman could do anything she puts her mind to." If Amma is right, and she so often is, Rosie's daughter will have a very good mother.

I myself have some more humble schemes. This printing office when it is ready, should print the stories of our people. What their lives have been like these past two years. I propose to travel through Telengana and interview people from all sides. I will listen to them and write their stories, print and distribute them so we can know and understand each other. And another idea, we could print a health pamphlet for Shakuntala's work, giving simple instructions and clear diagrams. These ideas I will put to Tundrigaru when he next comes.

I salute Tundrigaru and the other missionaries. They have been alongside us through all this, caring for us, ready to intervene. They are like midwives, who do not themselves experience the pangs of labour at this birth of a new nation.Their influence will pass as we take over our own destinies.

Now that we live in a free, democratic country, this is our big chance.

Will the rich and powerful learn humility and the ability to share?

When we seek to correct an evil, will we do so without committing further crimes?

Will our governments act for the landless, the untouchables and the minorities?

Will the Telugu people, with our beautiful language, enter another great age in our long history?

Will we also keep the friendliness, the spirit of the village?

Can we learn to forgive?

These things I hope for:

That Amma be happy in Cheddapalli.

That Rosie, studying in Madras, will learn to want more than a suitable husband, and a new sari at Christmas and Easter.

That Satyan will be reunited with his wife and two boys who need him. That he will find how to pursue his causes peacefully.

That the landlord will give Ratnabhai her feast and grow in his new-found humanity.

For myself, that I regain my sight. That I write down our true tales. That I will be a good son to my Amma, a good master and brother to my tamadi, Ganesh. For now I cannot see further.

I am Anand, a Christian boy. These are my prayers,

Amen

THE END