



THE
CARNIVAL
a play in three acts

M.V. Rama Sarmā
M.A., Ph.D. (Vales)

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(A Play in Three Acts)

by

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1960

[Rs. 1 = 25 nP.

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By the same author:—

MILTON'S PARADISE LOST : *A Study*

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MEN

SURESH : *Secretary to Shiv Lal*

RAMESH : *His friend*

SHIV LAL : *The industrialist*

CHAUDARY : *His friend and flatterer*

RAVINDER : *The capitalist*

WOMEN

PREM : *Suresh's friend*

SOBHA : *Shiv Lal's daughter*

ASHA : *Her companion*

REKHA : *Ramesh's friend*

PRATIMA : *A rich widow*

Servants

living. Most people labour under this misconception and make themselves miserable. If Life is to be glorious, one can never satisfy oneself with pleasures and pleasures alone. A life that is worth living is one that has made an unceasing effort to justify its existence. The spark of ambition, the urge to serve mankind, the courage to withstand the ills of life—these constitute Life in its real sense. Any other way of living is parasitic and a negation of existence. Life is not meant for fun and frolic. It has a mission and it has to be fulfilled.

Another peculiar misleading notion connected with Life is that some are lucky, whereas some others are not. The truth is something different. We get what we deserve and human effort is never wasted. Even things unfinished have their own reward. Any sincere act or at least the feeling to do it is rewarded in some form or other. To some, emoluments seem to be coming in quick succession. But to some others they come rather through struggle. This need not discourage anyone. The due reward is bound to come and the ultimate analysis in every success is desert and nothing else.

Life understood in the proper perspective is bound to be exciting, interesting and glorious. We can make it or mar it according to our attitudes towards Life. This play has presented different approaches to Life, but the stress is on the idealistic attitude, not on the purely mercenary one. The title is indeed an interrogation—is life a Carnival ?

Tirupathi,

M. V. Ramasarma

6-4-1956

THE CARNIVAL

ACT I, SCENE I

Constitution Club, New Delhi.

The first anniversary of the Progressive Youth Association is just over. Suresh, the President of the Association is standing opposite Ramesh, the Secretary. Suresh is indeed the brain behind the party. He is in his twenties, full of life and spirit. He gives one the impression of a born leader. He is rather shy and reserved but full of confidence in himself. He is employed by the industrialist Shiv Lal as his Secretary.

Ramesh is almost of Suresh's age, but he exhibits more of animal spirits. He is youthful and energetic with a Byronic pose. He is wearing a flamboyant slack shirt, one of the American types, presenting almost the whole world. Suresh is rather tallish with a broad forehead. He is refined and cultured.

They are near the rostrum watching the crowd slowly moving. They are in the best of their spirits.

RAMESH : I am glad, the meeting is over. It meant a lot of strain, making all sorts of arrangements...

SURESH : I know it's a tiring job. Anyhow we have done our duty.

RAMESH : (*Enthusiastically*) We have done more than that. We have created a terrific stir in the minds of our listeners. I am sure, the Association will get more recognition now.

SURESH : I suppose so...

RAMESH : Don't be so modest. Well, look, Rekha is coming to see us.

Rekha nears them. She is the friend of Ramesh. Her hair is bobbed and she has a fairly good complexion. Her nails are painted; her eye-brows are pencilled; she wears lipstick; she uses a lot of make-up. In one word she is sophistication itself. She walks, with a certain, confident air, exposing much of her delicate bosom to an advantage. She shakes hands with Suresh.

SURESH : I hope you liked the function.

REKHA : O it was wonderful. A grand performance.

She beckons to her friend Prem.

Suresh, I like to introduce to you my friend Prem. This is Prem.

Prem bows and Suresh acknowledges the bow. Prem is rather slim and tallish. She has a rich, golden complexion and expressive eyes. In her is found the delicacy of an elegant woman, highly educated and cultured. She has more or less the artistic form which is so often praised by the poets and the visionaries. She is simple and unsophisticated. There is an awkward silence for a minute or two.

RAMESH : Why shouldn't we sit and talk for a while ?

SURESH : I suppose we could . . . provided the ladies are in no great hurry.

He casts a significant look at Prem. She gets the hint and replies.

PREM : I am all right. I don't mind staying.

REKHA : I would rather love to stay.

RAMESH : Let me go and see whether we can get some drinks.

They are seated on the sofas of the front row, meant for the distinguished guests. Ramesh goes out for the drinks.

I suppose you are employed. *(Looking at Prem)*

PREM : Yes, I am a teacher.

SURESH : Do you like teaching ?

REKHA : O she loves it. She is very fond of children.

PREM : *(Smiling)* Rekha, don't be funny. *(To Suresh)* In a way I like teaching. It gives me

a lot of leisure. Besides, one always feels happy in the company of children.

SURESH : Yes I agree. The innocent faces of the little kids will always kindle in you zest for life.

REKHA : (*Smiling*) Suresh, you are a great dreamer. You are an idealist. I am sure you will have many a disillusionment to face.

SURESH : Don't you worry, madam.

Ramesh enters.

RAMESH : We will soon have some drinks. The bearer is bringing them. Well, Prem what did you think of our meeting? Did you like it?

PREM : Yes I did. On the whole it was a grand show. I liked the speeches immensely.

RAMESH : (*In a matter-of-fact manner*) We are used to such speeches. Nothing wonderful about them. But you know our Suresh is a funny fellow.

PREM : (*Anxiously*) Why, what is wrong with him?

RAMESH : Nothing wrong but

PREM : But what

RAMESH : He always talks of ideals. You can't have any ideals when you are starving, can you?

SURESH : Perhaps not. But you can't talk of bread and butter all the time.

The bearer brings some cool drinks, holding them on a tray. He offers them the drinks and leaves the hall.

RAMESH : (*Teasing Suresh*) Prem, Suresh is an anti-feminist.

REKHA : (*Surprised*) Is he? Really?

SURESH : (*Smiling*) Ramesh, don't try to mislead her. (*To Prem*) To tell you quite frankly I am not a woman's man.

PREM : Who tells you, you are not? You are sociable....(*pausing*) and charming.

REKHA : (*Teasing him*) Prem, be careful. I note what you say. Suresh is sociable and charming; that is what you think, don't you?

PREM : Of course....He is a pleasant type of man.

REKHA : Well, what else

PREM : Stop teasing me I know what you are trying to get at.

RAMESH : (*Sportively*) Suresh, my dear Suresh, your jolly days are over. I am indeed sorry for you. A woman is after you. The trap is set.

SURESH : (*Smiling*) Don't be silly. You are always like this ... playful and mischievous.

RAMESH : Surely you don't want me to be a philosopher.

SURESH : Of course not, but be a gentleman

RAMESH : (*Pretending to be offended*) Rekha, you see, I am not a gentleman. You'd better avoid me.

SURESH : O stop it. Miss. Prem may have a poor opinion of us if we go on being silly like this. (*To Prem*) Hope you'll excuse us for having been a little informal.

PREM : (*Gesticulating*) Don't you bother I like the way you all get on. I don't have much respect for cold formalities.

SURESH : I am glad to hear that.

REKHA : Prem, you are in the good books of the President. So you are now a member of our association.

PREM : (*Smiling*) Thank you.

REKHA : Don't thank me. Thank the President and also thank your stars.

SURESH : (*Smiling*) Rekha, we really want women like you who are friendly. You'll make everyone feel at home. I should say it is a rare gift.

REKHA : (*Blushing slightly*) Thank you Suresh.

RAMESH : (*Teasing Suresh*) Suresh, mind you, you are talking to my girl-friend. You have no business to praise her. You see, she is already bloated. That's the whole trouble with you people, who call themselves idealists. You look through coloured glasses. And women appear to be beautiful, charming, wonderful.....

SURESH : (*Amused*) What else ?

RAMESH : You consider women to be roses and jasmynes. But of what earthly use are these lilies and roses ? After all what is beauty ? Lipstick and powder, plus the lover's dream of his lady-love's supernatural beauty !

SURESH : (*Smiling*) So you suggest that women should not be praised.

RAMESH : By all means praise them if they deserve. But for goodness sake don't say that they are angelic, phenomenal and ethereal.

SURESH : Rekha, I wonder how you get on with him. Does he pay any compliments at least to you ?

REKHA : Of course, he does. But he does not like to admit to himself that he has within him the finer elements of Man. As a devotee of industrialisation he refuses to pay homage to the aesthetic aspect of life. But we all of us

have an eye for beauty. That he does not realise

SURESH : True, true indeed. Beauty in its manifold aspects is bound to have a strong influence on us. We can't help it.

PREM : Beauty in fact stands for ultimate perfection. And that perfection is synonymous with God. By admiring anything beautiful we admire God's workmanship. This workmanship is often reflected in the physical appearance of a woman, in a landscape or sometimes in a man's attitude towards others. But surely we all of us admire harmony in life.

RAMESH : You are all in the land of beauty. I see no such exhilarating picture. To me the busy call of the factory, the bustle and activity of the worker, the thrill of production—these, these alone will be the objects of attraction.

SURESH : In different ways we all aspire for the same thing and struggle to achieve the same object. We all believe in enriching man's noble heritage.

PREM : (*Smiles*) Shall we go now ?

SURESH : (*Looking at his watch*) It's pretty late now. Let us get along.

They leave the hall in a happy, cheerful mood.

ACT I, SCENE II

A few months later—

Suresh and Prem walk side by side in the Moghul Gardens. It is late February. The gardens are in their resplendent glory. Men and women move about the place with intense satisfaction and pleasure. Sweet fragrance emanates from the beautiful flowers. The rich foliage of the Gardens is suggestive of early Spring. Prem and Suresh stand and look admiringly at a rose creeper.

PREM : Look Suresh, look at this creeper. It has multi-coloured roses. Lovely....

SURESH : It's indeed beautiful. In fact this happy mingling of colours is a symbol of the essential peace and harmony in this world.

PREM : (*Looking at him mischievously*) You know, you have a clever way of generalising everything. You never tell me anything about yourself. That's indeed funny.

SURESH : Prem, we have been friendly for the last six months. And we are good friends too. Aren't you satisfied with this ?

PREM : Of course I am. But

SURESH : But what

PREM : I wish to hear certain details relating to you.

SURESH : You know everything about me. I have no secrets from you. My attitude towards life is pretty well known to you. What else do you want ?

PREM : Tell me something about your plans for your future.

SURESH : I wish to serve my country

PREM : Don't be ridiculous

They move a few steps forward. Prem observes a slender creeper supporting itself against a strong tree. She looks purposely at Suresh and observes.

I wonder whether you don't feel lonely.

SURESH : Why should I ? Are you not with me ?

PREM : I know I am with you. But I feel that we cannot possibly go on like this. Nothing in this world is single. Look at that creeper twining itself round that sturdy tree. Is not this an expression of companionship ?

SURESH : (*Still pretending to be indifferent*) Yes it is.

PREM : Don't just say 'Yes it is.' Surely you can say something more.

SURESH : (*Surprised*) Prem, you seem to be in an awful mood to-day. What's wrong with you? I hope, you are not trying to quarrel with me.

PREM : Of course not. What makes you think like that?

SURESH : Well, you are not satisfied with anything I say. What can I do for you?

PREM : Nothing....

SURESH : Then let us sit and talk something about our Association.

PREM : (*A little irritated*) You and your Association all the time. Can't you feel the warmth of a woman? Don't you understand the language of love? Are you not human?

SURESH : Prem, don't be silly.

He leads her to the nearest bench and they are seated on it. Nearby the fountain is producing a melodious sound with its waters shooting up and falling. The whole place is a lovely paradise, intoxicating to the lovers and inspiring to the poets. No wonder Prem waxes eloquent and perspires a little due to her animated talk with Suresh. But he watches her closely and smilingly. Outwardly he is unperturbed. After a minute or so, Prem gets up preparing herself to leave that spot. But he urges her to be seated.

Now my dear, listen to me. I know what you want. I am no doubt fond of you. But I am wondering whether I can give you happiness.

PREM : (*Anxiously*) Why, why do you say that?

SURESH : I am rather fastidious. I expect everything to be faultless. With me marriage is no gamble.

PREM : I am glad you say that

SURESH : When I think of marriage, the picture of partnership inevitably suggests itself to me. Marriage is companionship — I mean it. It's no tall talk.

PREM : I know how you feel about it. (*Smiling*) But may I know the qualifications of your future bride?

SURESH : (*Seriously*) Prem, don't try to pooh-pooh my ideas. I am quite sincere in what I say. I want my wife to have her own individuality. I hate to see her helpless and dependent on me.

PREM : You mean to say she should take up a job.

SURESH : No, not exactly that. But what I mean is that she should be educated, enlightened and sympathetic.

PREM : (*Looking at him mischievously*) Have you found any blessed woman like this ?

She looks fixedly at him. Suresh avoids her gaze.

SURESH : (*Casting a look at the sky*) Look at that sun-set. Isn't it lovely ?

PREM : (*Angrily*) Suresh answer my question or else I leave you now, immediately.

Prem gets up preparing herself to leave.

SURESH : (*With mock politeness*) Please sit down.

He pulls her by her hand and she is seated. He looks at her with an amused smile.

Prem what's all this fuss about ?

PREM : Suresh it is your duty to answer my question. You think I am a child.

SURESH : No, you are not a child. I know that. But you are behaving like a child.

PREM : I again ask you, tell me who that bride is.

SURESH : (*In a deliberately slow manner*) Six months ago a beautiful woman came to me. The very first day she saw me she said I was charming. The woman pursued me most relentlessly and now I am a captive in her hands.

PREM : (*Laughing*) No, you are not a captive. You are sitting quite at a distance from me.

I haven't even taken you in my arms and you feel you are already a captive.

SURESH : O, no, don't embrace me here in these Gardens.

PREM : No fear, I won't do that.

SURESH : (*Earnestly*) Prem, I loved you even the first day I saw you. But I wanted to be pretty sure of myself, my own emotions and feelings.

PREM : Now, are you sure ?

SURESH : As sure as anything. (*In an affectionate manner*) I love you and promise to be faithful to you all my life.

Prem moves a little nearer to him and takes his hand into hers.

PREM : (*With half-shut eyes*) You have indeed made me the happiest woman in the world. Suresh, I love you to madness. O what a torture it was all those months !

SURESH : (*In a gentle tone*) I am indeed sorry for that. But all that is over now. This very moment we are married. Marriage doesn't necessarily mean ceremony. It is enough if two persons sincerely love and promise to be true to each other. I will always stand by you.

PREM : Suresh, my heart is full. I cannot express my happiness....

SURESH : I look forward to a happy, peaceful life with you.

PREM : We will indeed be happy...Sincere love always ennoble its subjects. It makes them develop within them a spirit of sacrifice and nobility.

SURESH : Let us try and do our best in serving humanity.

PREM : Yes, we will. Suresh, to-day I was bent upon getting a proposal from you.

SURESH : How clever of you! But you have not forced it from me. I myself would have proposed.

PREM : Anyway I am glad that the period of suspense is over. Now you are mine, my own dear Suresh.

SURESH : And you my sweet little Prem

PREM : What a glorious feeling it is...to know that someone loves you, cares for you and longs for you.

SURESH : Indeed it's a glorious feeling. I suppose the attraction of men and women is not sollye

based on sex. There is something more in it than this simple, biological factor.

PREM : Yes there is. I feel as if I have entered upon a new life, a life in which I always feel the nearness and comradeship of someone else.

SURESH : Love motivates all our actions. I am indeed happy to have met you. I find the sublimation of all my desires.

PREM : (*Smiling*) Now I believe you are really in love with me. (*Casually looking at the surroundings*) You see, almost all the people have left. I feel as if we have been sitting here for ages.

SURESH : My dear, we have been in a different world altogether.

ACT II, SCENE I

A few days later—

Garden Party in Shiv Lal's house on the occasion of his only daughter's twenty-first birthday.

A soft tune is being played. Suresh, the Secretary to the industrialist Lal, is busy looking after the guests. The elite of the city seem to be there. There are quite a few persons in immaculately white caps also. Women are parading in all sorts of fantastic costumes. Some have come in transparent silk saris; some others in the typical Panjabi style. Here and there some women are to be seen in Western clothes too. There are others who have come with wide, open necks, perhaps too forbidding a sight for a moralist! Hair styles are numerous—oriental as well as occidental. On the whole a grand sight indeed!

Tables with fine cloths are arranged lengthwise and breadthwise in the garden. The tables are filled with sweets and tasty delicacies. At one end of the table the industrialist is standing, surrounded

by a circle of admirers. He is quite an imposing person, tall, fine and bald-headed. He is in his fifties, but very active and strong. He is a widower and a great worshipper of wealth and power. It is rumoured that he is fabulously rich. He is popularly known as the Millionaire.

Beside him is his daughter Sobha, a frail, thin figure. Her hair is wavy and bobbed. She is wearing high heeled shoes and they add a little to her stature. She has a slender waist and thin, long hands. Her nose is pointed and her lips are artistic. She has with her, Asha, her friend. Asha is one of the gay types. She is talkative and showy. Nature unfortunately hasn't been very kind to her, but she makes it up by rouge and lip-stick.

Two other important persons in that small circle are Ravinder and Chaudary. Ravinder is in his thirties and he is a capitalist. He comes from a family of moneylenders and he is quite rich. He is not unimposing. But Chaudary is a man about the town with no definite job or avocation. He is in his late thirties, showing signs of baldness. He comes from a respectable, bankrupt middle class family. So his only solemn aim in life is to be a veritable devotee of the industrialist and the capitalist.

LAL : Sobha, my darling, many happy returns..

RAVINDER : Wish you lots of luck

CHAUDARY : Good luck and speedy marriage ...

ASHA : Happy birthday

SOBHA : Thank you all. I am indeed happy to receive your good wishes.

LAL : (*In a grand, dignified manner*) Ravinder, what do you think of the party? Are the arrangements satisfactory?

RAVINDER : Satisfactory! More than satisfactory!

CHAUDARY : I have never seen such a party in my life. Such a combination of the pick of society! Grand! Splendid!

LAL : The credit goes to my Secretary. He spent nearly a fortnight on these arrangements.

RAVINDER : He is earnest and sincere in what he does.

LAL : Yes he is. Look at him, how he conducts himself with all types of people! He is all courtesy and politeness.

He points to Suresh at the other end, busy moving about, looking to the needs of the guests.

CHAUDARY : But he is an echo of his master.

LAL : *(A little tickled by that compliment)* True, true indeed. But it requires initiative on his part also.

Sobha and Asha whisper to each other

SOBHA : Asha, I like the way Suresh has conducted the whole affair.

ASHA : Perhaps a poor service to a lady like you. Sobha, your beauty is unrivalled. I feel Suresh is in . . .

SOBHA : *(Interrupting her)* Don't be silly. Asha, who is that girl near Suresh? She is rather pretty.

ASHA : She is Prem his friend.

SOBHA : *(Surprised)* His friend! You mean to say he is in love with her.

ASHA : I don't think so. But for the last few months I have seen her running after him.

They take a few sweets and eat them in a very leisurely manner.

LAL : Sobha, have some sweets. Ravinder, don't feel shy. Chaudary, please get some tea for us.

Chaudary leans over the table and fills four cups with tea and gives them to the industrialist and others in that circle.

CHAUDARY : I am very fond of tea. Somehow I don't like coffee. It has a very bitter taste.

LAL : I don't mind coffee for a change, but very occasionally, mind you.

SOBHA : In the South, coffee is very popular.

ASHA : Over here tea is a common drink.

The industrialist suddenly recognises some familiar face at a distance.

LAL : Ravinder, you see that lady there. She is Mrs. Pratima. She is the most sociable and charming woman I have ever seen. I should go and see her. Excuse me...

He leaves them.

ASHA : (*To Ravinder*) Tonight there is a dance performance.

RAVINDER : Oriental....

ASHA : Yes oriental. A performance by a great artist. She is an exponent of classical dance. Are you interested ?

RAVINDER : (*In a jovial mood*) Not particularly.. but we have to oblige ladies like you.

ASHA : Thank you....I am happy to hear that.

RAVINDER : You know I am not much interested in women. But somehow I find in you the type of woman I admire. You have a flair for clothes. Exquisite taste.

ASHA : You have a bewitching way of talking. Very few men have this gift. Most often they are dull and conceited. They are never likeable. Men like you are exceptional.

RAVINDER : Thank you.

ASHA : I wonder why men are so prosaic and bald in their talk. You know, I often curse myself when I am in such company. But you are different. You are delightful.

RAVINDER : Asha, my dear Asha, you are sweet. I am indeed fond of you.

ASHA : (*Beaming with expression*) I am glad to hear it.

RAVINDER : My dear Asha, you are uniformly charming.

The industrialist Lal talks to Mrs. Pratima and Suresh. Pratima is a fat lady in her early forties. She is a widow but she is still having quite a few admirers about her. Her riches are a source of comfort to her.

LAL : Hallo Pratima, I am glad you have come. Suresh I am proud of you. You have done everything splendidly.

SURESH : Thank you. I shall go and look to the needs of others. May I?

LAL : Sure; surely you can go. I shall make Pratima feel quite at home.

Suresh leaves the spot.

Pratima, come, let us join that group over there.

He conducts Mrs. Pratima to his daughter.

Sobha, this is Pratima my old friend. Asha, meet Pratima. Pratima, these are my friends Ravinder and Chaudary.

They bow to her.

Pratima, I hope you like this party.

PRATIMA : Of course I do. It is indeed a success.

CHAUDARY : What else can it be when it is given by a millionaire like him? And when the occasion is graced by ladies like you?

PRATIMA : (*Looking at him sweetly*) I dare say you are quite interesting.

CHAUDARY : (*Making an elaborate bow in the grand old fashion of knights*) Thank you madam, much obliged.

LAL : (*Smiling*) Pratima, Chaudary is quite a sociable person. He is the universal friend. For everyone he has a ready smile and a nice word.

PRATIMA : (*To Lal*) I am happy to meet him. (*To Chaudary*) I hope we will be more and more acquainted in course of time.

CHAUDARY : Surely we will....I am always at your service.

PRATIMA : You are the most dashing young man I have ever met.

At the other end Suresh is in the company of his friends Ramesh, Prem and Rekha.

RAMESH : (*In a light vein*) Suresh, you'd better go and join your boss. You'll have better company.

SURESH : I am all right here. I have no intention of joining that group.

RAMESH : But mind you, Sobha is watching you. Perhaps she is having an eye on you.

SURESH : Don't be silly.

REKHA : To-day Sobha looks more than beautiful.

PREM : It's only natural. She is a millionaire's daughter and she has all the beauty specialists at her command.

REKHA : Surely there must be some natural grace also.

PREM : Well, artificiality to a large extent can cover up the natural deficiency.

Pratima and Chaudary are busy talking.

PRATIMA : I am glad we met. Life is always like this bringing together unfamiliar faces.

CHAUDARY : Perhaps we were friends in our past lives. The moment I saw you I liked you.

PRATIMA : I felt the same way.

CHAUDARY : Perhaps destiny has brought us together.

PRATIMA : I hope you have no encumbrances in life.

CHAUDARY : None....Absolutely free....

PRATIMA : Easy enough for both of us. You can as well come and stay with me as the manager of my estate.

CHAUDARY : Very kind of you, sweet lady. You are my patroness and I am your humble servant.

The industrialist who has been moving about and talking to his various guests comes back to his little group.

SOBHA : Dad, we'd better go in. I feel rather tired.

LAL : (*All affection*) Darling we will go.

The industrialist goes out arm in arm with Sobha.

RAVINDER : (*Admiring Sobha*) Such a sweet little creature!

ASHA : (*Looks at him seriously*) Hope you haven't forgotten me.

RAVINDER : (*Becoming alert*) O no, I haven't.
How can I, my dear, dear Asha.....Come,
let us go.

Ravinder and Asha leave the place.

CHAUDARY : Madam, shall we go ?

PRATIMA : Yes, we go.

They leave the spot in a happy mood. The whole congregation then breaks up and the party comes to a successful close. Suresh is the last person to leave.

ACT II, SCENE II

A few days after the Garden Party—

Sobha's drawing room-

Everything about the room indicates a certain luxury and profusion. It is heavily furnished and decorated. Large, silk curtains with beautiful patterns on them are conspicuously displayed near the windows and the doorway. The floor is thickly carpeted. Sobha is gracefully reclined on a sofa. She is meditative and expectant. In that graceful pose she is alluring, if not seductive. Her bosom heaves and falls and with that movement the curves are fascinatingly exposed.

Suresh gently knocks at the door and enters. She is unmoved, but casts a bewitching look at him.

SOBHA : Suresh, do take a seat.

He sits on the settee. He is a little confused by the whole situation. Sobha looks at him fixed and smiles. Suresh is all the more puzzled.

Suresh, how is life ?

SURESH : O it's all right. Not much of a change.
Well, we pull on.

SOBHA : Why, you don't sound very energetic.
What's the matter ?

SURESH : Nothing....(*After a pause*) Your friend
Asha told me I should come and see you.

SOBHA : (*Smiles*) Yes, that's right. I did want
you to see me. I thought of thanking you in
person for all the trouble you took in arrang-
ing my birthday party. I am indeed grateful
to you, Suresh.

SURESH : (*Smiles*) That's my duty. I don't think
I deserve any thanks. I am paid for it, am I
not ?

SOBHA : Suresh, I strongly suspect that you didn't
do all that just for the sake of money.

SURESH : That's true. I have some sort of res-
pect for you. So I thought it should be a
great success.

SOBHA : (*With an air of gratification*) I am
pleased, most pleased to hear that. It makes
me feel honoured to be liked by you. That
day I was observing you all the time. I liked
the way you moved about with an air of
confidence. Dad is proud of you. So am I.

SURESH : You make me feel embarrassed with your rich praise.

SOBHA : (*Tactfully*) Suresh, I saw some good looking woman by your side. I hope she isn't

SURESH : (*Smiles*) She is Prem, my friend.

SOBHA : Only a friend.

SURESH : Well, of course. . . .

SOBHA : (*Looking at him sweetly*) Wouldn't you like to have a rich woman as your wife ?

SURESH : Wife ! I never thought of it. I don't have the time to bother about women.

SOBHA : (*With a mischievous look*) Don't tell me you are a saint. . . .

SURESH : No, not a saint, but I have a definite attitude towards life. We have all come here with a purpose in life. We are expected to fulfil our mission. I refuse to take life as a fiesta or holiday. A life full of ambition—that is what is needed for me.

SOBHA : What is your ambition then ?

Suresh : It's difficult to answer. I wish to explain to myself the riddle of life and then interpret it for others. To many, life is a big gamble. To others it is just a matter of 'cursed fate'.

And all these persons accept life in a blind, unthinking manner. To me it's plain that life is based upon a system—a great plan of Beauty, Love and Justice. In other words it is a synthesis of these three dynamic forces that keeps men and women balanced and righteous.

SOBHA : How do you account for ugliness, hatred and injustice — the three negative forces that move human beings ?

SURESH : Truly speaking, these do not exist. Disruption of Beauty, Love or Justice leads to these negative qualities. But these are only circumstantial; they do not form a part of man's original nature. His noble heritage is often muddled when once it gets involved in the environmental lures of the world. But his original nature asserts itself soon. For accidental lapses never govern man completely. That's why a criminal even after escaping the rigour of law is seen committing suicide. Surely it is a proof of the sense of Justice that is fundamentally alive in him.

SOBHA : Do you really think that there is justice in the world? I don't know much about the ways of the world, but I hear people doubting it.

SURESH : Yes, people talk of injustice. But that's once again a popular fallacy. We have to pay for all that we have done. None of us can go scot-free. It is a question of time. Out of desperation and even impatience we often remark bitterly that there is no justice in this blind and indifferent world. Surely the man who deceives you will be deceived in his own turn. So the best way to accept defeat or deceit is to take it philosophically, for your betrayer is not at all safe from harm.

SOBHA : What you say is true. But one doesn't have that sort of patience and if I may call it, heroic martyrdom.

SURESH : There is no martyrdom; it is a healthy, logical way of looking at life's problems.

SOBHA : (*Sweetly*) Suresh you are very different from other men. The moment I go out with them they don't think of anything else except my physical charm. I am fed up with them. I wish I had been your disciple.

SURESH : (*Sportively*) It's never too late.

SOBHA : (*Cheerfully*) You mean I could be your disciple even now. How wonderful! You know, as you talked to me of Life I felt a mysterious elevation—from a purely physical

existence to an ethereal one. (*Highly emotional*) Men are such stupid creatures that they never conceive of women in any other respect except as toys meant for their sport. Isn't it disgraceful to take women as dolls, pretty dolls? Like a peevish child you throw them away when once you are satiated.

SURESH : (*Smiles*) I quite understand your point. You sound very like the emancipated woman.

SOBHA : Suresh, did you ever imagine I was fond of you ? (*Looks at him hopefully and anxiously*)

SURESH : (*Calm and unperturbed*) No, I never imagined it was possible.

SOBHA : (*A little depressed*) Why, why do you say that? Am I not beautiful enough for you ?

SURESH : O, no, I don't mean that. I am not unaware of your good looks. But you see, you are a millionairess. So you have a world of admirers at your feet.

SOBHA : (*Slightly pleased*) That's true. But somehow not one of them stirs in me the deeper feeling of love. I have no respect for them. I am no doubt amused by their flattering words. It always gives me an indescribable pride to see them running after me. That's all. I never take them seriously. It feeds

my feminine vanity to be the darling of so many.
But never, never have I met a man like you.

SURESH : (*Trying to be nice*) My dear Sobha, you are kind, awfully kind to me.

SOBHA : But do you intend to be kind to me ?

SURESH : (*Looking at her doubtfully*) Yes, of course. But why do you put that question ? You can be sure of my service.

SOBHA : Supposing I make you rich.

SURESH : I am not much interested in being rich, when the whole country is poor.

SOBHA : But do you think it is sensible to despise riches ? The best way of solving the economic ills is to make the poor richer, not the rich poorer.

SURESH : That's true, but somehow money is not a great attraction for me.

SOBHA : Suresh, I think I have detained you for a long time. (*Keeps silent*)

SURESH : Yes, Miss Sobha. Please tell me if there is anything I can do for you.

SOBHA : (*Feels a little shy and stammers*) I wish to.... (*Stops abruptly*).

SURESH : (*Looks at her baffled*) Please go on.....

a)

SOBHA : (*Mustering up courage*) I wish to marry you.

SURESH : (*Surprised*) Sobha, I feel honoured, but you see....

SOBHA : (*Gesticulating*) Please don't say 'no.'

SURESH : I am afraid I can't quite satisfy you on this score. I intend marrying....

SOBHA : (*Interrupts him*) I know you wish to marry Prem. But no one loves the way I love you. You have been with us for two years. All along I had an eye on you. The other day when I saw you with Prem I decided to let you know my mind. I know Dad will be enraged if I tell him of my choice. But I am not worried about it; I am determined to have you or remain unmarried.

SURESH : SOBHA, you are highly emotional. Perhaps this is a fancy; it is bound to pass off.

SOBHA : (*A little enraged*) Suresh, don't despise me and my affection. I know you don't have much respect for the rich, but you fail to understand that we too are human. It's not impossible for a rich woman to love as sincerely as a poor one. It's a foolish notion

entertained and encouraged by poets and philosophers that only the poor have character, with a capital 'C'. In fact, poverty is a crime, it's a disease. It paralyses a person physically, mentally and even spiritually.

She stands up and walks with dignified rage. She is restless. Suresh too stands and faces her.

Suresh : (*Apologetically*) Sobha, I am sorry for what I have said. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but if I did it unknowingly I apologise for it. Please forgive me. I now understand you. I know you are so very different from women of your class. You are independent ; you despise traditions and meaningless customs. I have nothing but admiration for you. But on the question of marriage, I am afraid, I have to disappoint you. I am fond of Prem.

SOBHA : (*A little annoyed*) Don't talk to me of your fondness for Prem. I know, men are polygamous by nature. I am sure you can change your mind if you wish to. (*Nearing him*) Look at this beautiful mansion, all this wealth. Don't be silly. Of course I don't wish to tempt you with these material comforts. I love you. Nothing matters to me except this ennobling desire of possessing the person I love.

SURESH : Sobha, you are eloquent. I feel tongue-tied before you. I am indeed grateful to you for this proposal, even though I am helpless to accept it.

SOBHA : Promise you will consider. . . .

SURESH : Of course I shall. . . .

Sobha beams radiantly. She casts one cheerful look at Suresh and he takes leave of her, rather puzzled and distracted by the unusual turn of events that day. Sobha heaves a sigh of relief immediately after the exit of Suresh.

SOBHA : (*Dropping on the sofa lazily*) Thank God, I have got him.

ACT II, SCENE III

Sobha's drawing room—

Time 4 p. m. Sobha and Asha converse. They are seated on a settee and seem to be enjoying each other's company.

SOBHA : Asha, you know that last time I saw Suresh I think I made some impression on him.

ASHA : (*Enthusiastically*) Some impression ! Don't try to be modest. I am sure he will marry you and leave Prem to her fate.

SOBHA : Let us see.....

ASHA : But my love for Ravinder is something marvellous. I saw him at your party and immediately I fell in love with him.

SOBHA : You are indeed lucky in getting him.

ASHA : Indeed I am lucky. He is extremely rich. I will have a fine time. Life will be a

perpetual holiday. O, how I love to be with him! I wonder what will happen to me.

A knock at the door and in comes the industrialist.

LAL : I hope I am not intruding

SOBHA : No, not at all.

ASHA : Sobha I'll see you later. Bye-bye

Asha leaves the room. The industrialist sits opposite Sobha on a sofa.

SOBHA : Dad, I have good news

LAL : What's it ?

SOBHA : Asha is getting married to Ravinder.

LAL : *(Shocked)* Getting married to Ravinder! my goodness!

SOBHA : *(Surprised)* Why, what's wrong with that ?

LAL : Marriage between Asha and Ravinder—Impossible. Absolutely impossible.

SOBHA : *(Puzzled)* Dad, I don't understand you.

LAL : *(Affectionately)* No, you won't. You are a child, my dear, you are a child. You have to know much before you can ever think of depending on yourself. Dear, dear, you are so lovely and gentle that you can't understand the ways of the world

SOBHA : (*Bewildered*) I know I am ignorant of the ways of the world, I quite agree with you. But in this particular instance I don't see why you should be horribly upset.

LAL : (*Interrupts her*) No, not upset. Shocked is the right word for it. I am indeed dazed. (*Emotionally*) Upstart pretensions of Asha for the hand of Ravinder....No, no, this can't be tolerated.

SOBHA : Why, what's wrong with it ?

LAL : Of course, there is everything wrong about it. We, the rich have our own traditions, our own culture and our own attitude towards life. We can't possibly think of demeaning ourselves by all sorts of alliances with persons far below us in status.

SOBHA : (*Smiles*) Ridiculous ! Dad, you are funny.

LAL : (*Seriously*) No Sobha, I am not. It is our duty to uphold our traditions. In almost all the countries we find differences of caste or class. But the underlying idea behind these differences is always the same. It is to preserve and cherish one's own culture. It's not for nothing that these differences are introduced.

SOBHA : I quite appreciate the system. But why should it come in the way of two persons loving each other ?

LAL : (*With contempt*) Love ! There is no such thing as love. It's a mad man's job, an idle man's devilish thought. Nothing more than that. It's a delusion. For goodness sake, please do not allow yourself to be deceived by this fascinating, but hypocritical term.

SOBHA : Dad, you seem to be in an awfully cynical mood. You are not your usual self today.

LAL : Sobha, marriage is a great institution. It is intended for the well being and safety of races and communities. In the interest of these groups all sorts of undesirable unions are best avoided. Asha can never be happy with Ravinder ; nor can she expect Ravinder to be faithful to her all her life.

SOBHA : Dad, their marriage will not be a conventional one. It is based on love.

LAL : O no, Sobha, you are misled. Men and women get together purely because of a simple, physical urge. Idealism is tall talk. In everyday life there is no place for visionary longings.

SOBHA : I know, but you see, love is something ennobling. We, moderns, we want something new. We want a re-orientation of the past.

LAL : Well, well . . . I see my own child revolting against me.

SOBHA : (*Appeals to him*) Please do not misunderstand me. I just expressed how I felt about certain things in life; that's all. Peculiarly enough Suresh feels the same way about marriage.

LAL : (*A little perplexed*) But what is Suresh to you? Nothing.

SOBHA : Dad, he is wonderful. I have never seen a man like him. Others bore me to distraction but he leaves me spell-bound.

LAL : No doubt he is clever, but surely he has no business to come and talk to you. He is after all our Secretary. I hate to see my Secretary making love to my daughter.

SOBHA : (*Teasing him*) How about your daughter making love to your Secretary?

LAL : (*Worried*) You don't mean that, do you?

SOBHA : (*Seriously*) Dad, I mean it. I am very fond of him.

LAL : (*Walks in an agitated mood*) Fond of him! You are mad; Sobha, you are mad. O what

a shame ! (*Comes back to her and stands before her*) My dear, be reasonable. What sort of life you expect to have with Suresh ? Can he afford you the luxuries you have had all your life ?

SOBHA : I don't mind leading a simple life with Suresh. What is needed is mutual understanding and sympathy. And that I will have from Suresh.

LAL : (*Interrupts her*) Don't be silly. My dear, life is a blessed carnival. It is a grand picnic, a glorious holiday. We, the rich, we are destined to enjoy life with its pleasant round of joys. Our riches are our sole comfort.

The industrialist goes and sits by her side on the settee.

(*Affectionately*) Sobha, you are all the world to me. I hate to see you ruined. Yes, it will certainly be your ruin if you involve yourself in an unfortunate alliance with Suresh. You won't be happy.

SOBHA : But Suresh is such a good soul that he will surely make me happy.

LAL : I know Suresh is good. But it's no use being poor. Everything goes by riches. In this busy, modern world who cares for spiritual values or for lofty ideals ? As a matter of

fact no one likes to be poor. Even the communists who are supposed to be the champions of the poor do not like a life of poverty. No, certainly not. My dear Sobha, don't be silly. Do not dream of Suresh. Think of Ravinder, a man suited to you in all respects.

SOBHA : But he is in love with Asha.

LAL : (*Gently pats her on her back*) In love....
Never believe a man to be in love, more so a rich man. Ravinder may like to take her as his mistress but not as his wife.

SOBHA : Dad, you are strange today.

LAL : I am not strange, but the ways of the world are strange. No one can escape the lure of money. Ravinder will jump at the idea of getting you, a millionairess.

SOBHA : (*Smiles*) So he will love my riches not me.

LAL : (*Rather puzzled*) No, not exactly that. Still your large inheritance is bound to be a deciding factor with anyone.

SOBHA : Not with Suresh. He flatly refused to marry me. But I am still hoping to get him.

LAL : Leave him alone. He will be all right with a woman of his class. And I shall soon get rid of him.

SOBHA : But I can't marry Ravinder. He is very dull and unimposing.

LAL : Now, now be careful. Darling, be nice to him. Won't you comfort your poor old Dad?

SOBHA : I love to....But this is an impossible situation.

LAL : No, it's not. From my experience I tell you, you will never be happy with Suresh. After all there is nothing like experience. We learn so much from our lives that we like to warn others.

SOBHA : I take your warning. But let me have my own experience.

LAL : No Sobha, I hate to see you going through a process of ups and downs. Let your life be a fiesta.

SOBHA : Leave me alone for a couple of days.

LAL : By all means I will. But don't disappoint me.

SOBHA : I shall try not to

ACT III, SCENE I

A few days later —

A pleasant morning —

The industrialist is in his room. He is moving about restlessly. He is smoking a cigar. With every puff of it he gets more and more intoxicated. At times he looks at the ceiling, watching the circular undulations of the smoke. Evidently he is puzzled by a knotty problem.

Chaudary comes to see him. The former, who is in Mrs. Pratima's service, is in the best of his moods. He enters the room quite enthusiastically and receives a warm reception.

LAL : Hallo Chaudary, how are you ? How is Pratima ?

CHAUDARY : O she is quite all right. She is wonderful. I am quite happy in her service. The moment she talks of you she goes into raptures.

LAL : (*Pleased*) I am glad to hear that. You know Pratima is a sweet lady.

CHAUDARY : How is Sobha ? I hear you are a little worried about her. Pratima is much concerned about it. In fact she intends paying a visit to you.

LAL : I will be honoured ; it will indeed be a pleasure to see her. But as regards Sobha's infatuation for Suresh there is no fear. I think I can manage her. I am very near success in convincing her to my way of thinking.

CHAUDARY : Hope you will succeed and be done with it. You may believe me, Ravinder doesn't care a pin for Asha.

LAL : (*Evincing great interest*) What ! What did you say ? Please take a seat.

They are seated on two sofas facing each other.

CHAUDARY : (*Settling down*) You see Ravinder has no particular fancy for Asha.

LAL : Then what the hell does she mean in giving us these stories of love.

CHAUDARY : (*Chuckling*) You ought to know women better than I do. Anyway Ravinder is coming here to talk to you. He may be here any minute.

LAL : Wonderful. Chaudary, you are remarkable. You always bring good news. But tell me one thing – how can I dispose of Asha? She is Sobha's dear friend, you know that, don't you?

CHAUDARY : Of course I do. But it is very easy to manage Asha. What she wants in life is fun. It is immaterial whether it comes from Ravinder or from you.

LAL : (*Surprised*) From me! What do you mean?

CHAUDARY : I mean you can as well marry her.

LAL : (*Laughing*) Marry her! Chaudary, you are funny.

CHAUDARY : I don't see why you shouldn't. Any woman would run mad for you. Don't you know that Asha's first, perhaps the only consideration for Ravinder's hand, is his wealth?

LAL : Yes I believe it is. Still it doesn't look nice for me to marry at this age. (*Pausing for a while*) I've got an idea. Chaudary, why can't you yourself marry her?

CHAUDARY : (*Nonplussed*) I would love to, but she wouldn't....

LAL : You mean you don't have sufficient wealth to attract her.

CHAUDARY : In a way that will be her great objection.

LAL : I will make sufficient provision for both of you. After all, money is everything in this world. Let us see how things develop.

A knock at the door and Ravinder enters. Lal is all kindness to him.

Hallo Ravinder, you are the very person whom I have been dying to see. Glad you came. Be seated. Make yourself comfortable.

Ravinder feels rather shy and embarrassed. He is seated on a sofa and the industrialist stands before him. Chaudary watches Ravinder carefully.

CHAUDARY : *(With a mischievous smile)* How is your Asha ?

RAVINDER : *(Almost stammering)* My A .. Asha..

CHAUDARY : Yes, your Asha..

RAVINDER : What do you mean ?

CHAUDARY : It seems you have proposed to her.

The industrialist waits for the reply anxiously.

LAL : Yes that's what Asha has been telling us.

RAVINDER : She must be awfully silly. How could it be possible ? I am sorry I gave that impression to her. I suppose I ought to explain.

LAL : (*In a grand, imperious tone*) You'd better. You see, the whole thing is complicated. I am personally much grieved to hear of your indiscretion in this matter.

RAVINDER : Please listen to me. You know, the first time I saw her was at Sobha's birthday party. I was in a jolly good mood. She complimented me profusely. I responded quite warmly, more from a sense of chivalry than from love. I don't suppose she is so simple as to take my words deadly seriously.

LAL : I dare say there is some mistake somewhere. It's rather unfortunate. Anyway you are sure, you don't love her.

RAVINDER : (*Vehemently*) Love her! Impossible. I am no fool to be caught in her trap. Money is her chief attraction.

LAL : It's the attraction of everyone. It is no vice. In a way I sympathise with Asha's aspirations. I shall make her rich.

RAVINDER : By all means you do. But you see that she doesn't pester me. I wonder what my dear Sobha is thinking of me. She may have been misled by Asha's words.

LAL : Of course she is annoyed with you. She has an eye on Suresh.

RAVINDER : Suresh ! How can she demean herself ?

LAL : Ravinder, you need not entertain any doubts about Sobha. She is a dutiful child. She will marry you all right, provided you promise to be faithful.

RAVINDER : I am indeed sorry for my foolish prank with Asha. How can I ever leave my beautiful Sobha ? What's Asha before Sobha ? Nothing. Chaudary, you come to my rescue and be done with Asha. I shall reward you. We have been good friends ; I hope you will not disappoint me.

CHAUDARY : (*Laughing*) How lucky I am. I seem to be doubly blessed. Everywhere there is money for me. Pratima throws money on me, the millionaire promises to settle a good annuity on me and now you have made a gesture of a huge fortune. What are those lines of Shakespeare ? (*Scratching his head*) Yes, I get them. 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness and on some others greatness is thrust.' I come of the last category. Never mind, I shall be rich and great.

LAL : (*Roaring with laughter*) You Machiavelli, you are indeed a subtle rogue.

RAVINDER : Chaudary, my hearty congratulations. Surely Asha will be a fitting companion to you.

LAL : Chaudary, please go and tell Sobha and Asha to come and see me immediately.

Chaudary leaves the room with an elaborate bow.

Ravinder, don't you think that Chaudary is quite invaluable to our families? My desire is to get him married to Asha. Thereby Sobha can have Asha as her companion and we can have Chaudary to ourselves.

RAVINDER : (*Feeling happy*) Quite a good proposal. You are terribly clever.

LAL : (*Feeling flattered*) Of course I am. How else do you think I can get on in this world? You are pretty inexperienced. You have to learn much more before you can ever get to the real problem of being rich.

RAVINDER : Your wisdom will be an asset to me. But what do you think of your Secretary Suresh? Don't you think, he ought to be dismissed?

LAL : Don't you worry, I have already done that.

Sobha and Asha enter, accompanied by Chaudary. Sobha casts a sly look at Ravinder. Asha turns a little pale due to Ravinder's presence.

Darling Sobha, come, come to your Dad. Here is your fiance Ravinder.

Asha looks annoyingly at Ravinder.

SOBHA : I don't know what you mean.

LAL : You will very soon be married to Ravinder.

SOBHA : (*Frowning*) Without my consent I suppose.

LAL : Now, now, be kind and sweet. How can I ever see you with that frown? It'll kill me.

ASHA : (*To the industrialist*) Ravinder loves me. How can he marry Sobha?

LAL : Dear lady, you are mistaken. We, the rich, take life in a realistic manner. We are not carried away by meaningless words like love and romance. Ravinder was never in love with you.

ASHA : (*With a contemptuous look at Ravinder, addresses the industrialist*) How can you express the feelings of others? Let Ravinder speak for himself. I will be content with his reply.

RAVINDER : (*Rather apologetically*) Madam, I am sorry for your unfortunate mistake. What was fun for me was an act of faith with you. I never expected you would take me so seriously. I am....

ASHA : (*Interrupting him*) Enough..I had enough of your wonderful love. You mistook me for a gay, frivolous type. I may look gay, but my emotions are always steady.

LAL : Asha don't get disheartened. You love Sobha and you know that she is meant for Ravinder. Be generous to your friend.

ASHA : (*A little touched and softened*) By all means I will. Surely I will do anything for my Sobha. But she doesn't love Ravinder.

LAL : (*Promptly*) My dear little children, listen to me. You don't know what you are talking. Sobha talks of love, you think you are in love. You are all moon-struck. What is real in this world is money and all the comforts it gives.

ASHA : (*A little convinced*) Of course it is true to a certain extent.

LAL : (*Emphatically*) It is completely true; no question of partial truth. Now a word about your problem. You can marry Chaudary. A legacy will be yours and Ravinder will give a huge fortune to Choudary. You two can live in comparative opulence and be with us.

CHAUDARY : Asha, you need not doubt my sincere devotion to you. But for my poverty, I would have proposed to you years ago. Now we can lead a comfortable life.

ASHA : I suppose so. But it takes time before I can get used to liking you.

LAL : (*Satisfied and pleased with himself*) O it will work out very well in the long run. That is in fact the beauty of the Hindu marriage system. Men and women — quite strangers, mind you — are joined in wedlock. The little angularities disappear in time and they make fine couples.

ASHA : (*Rather doubtfully*) Or perhaps they get into the rut !

LAL : Now what says my pretty Sobha ?

SOBHA : (*Still indifferent and sulky*) Nothing. Dad no doubt you are clever but your wealth can attract only certain types, not all.

LAL : Don't be sullen and sulky. Be a dutiful child and marry Ravinder.

SOBHA : Dad, I have no respect for your strange views on love and marriage. You think you are an all-seeing God. Don't be ridiculous, Dad. How can you ever pair off men and women ? Don't you think they have their own emotions and feelings ? (*With contempt*) You and your money ! (*Pausing*) fortunately the world is not so poor as you imagine.

LAL : (*Taken aback*) Mine own daughter talking to me ! Is this true or am I dreaming ? You little Miss. Impudent, it is only for your sake that I have been a widower all these

years. Your dear mother was soft as a lamb. Wherefrom did you get this imperious attitude?

SOBHA : From my own father who is so very domineering and proud.

LAL : (*Angrily*) Enough. No more of your rudeness. You should marry Ravinder or else you have to leave my house at once.

SOBHA : I won't mind.

LAL : (*With threatening looks*) You won't mind!

He marches towards her and shakes her violently by her shoulders.

SOBHA : (*In a dignified manner*) You dare not touch me. Take off your hands.

CHAUDARY : Sobha, please be kind to your Dad.

RAVINDER : (*Coming forward*) Sobha, I am awfully sorry for this. I have no intention to marry you by force. I am no brute. Dear Sobha, give me time to woo you. I shall try my best to deserve you. I know how you feel about marriage and my sympathies are for you. Your Dad loves you to madness. So he is over-anxious to see his only child happy. In a way I am responsible for this unpleasant strife. I apologise to you. I realise I do not deserve you at present. But I shall patiently

wait till I can get you by desert and not by wealth.

SOBHA : (*Surprised*) Ravinder, I am glad you have taken a human approach to the problem. I promise to encourage you in your efforts and for the present we'd better remain as friends.

RAVINDER : (*Enthusiastically*) I quite agree with you Sobha. (*To Chaudary and Asha*) You two try and make an effort to understand each other, before you start leading a married life.

The industrialist is standing apart, still feeling wounded in his pride. Sobha, cooled by now, notices her disconsolate father. So she goes to him.

SOBHA : (*Taking her father's hand*) Dad, I am awfully sorry. Please forgive me for what I have said.

LAL : (*Again bubbling up with cheer*) My dear Sobha, (*He looks at her sweetly holding her at an arm's distance*) how sweet and angelic you are! Now you remind me of your dear mother. (*With a smile*) Dad is a bad fellow. Don't imitate him. (*To others*) How about celebrating this event.

CHAUDARY : Fine. I shall get some drinks.

He leaves the room in high spirits.

ASHA : *(Whispers to Sobha)* Isn't he a fine fellow ?

SOBHA : *(Smiles)* Already in love with him ! My goodness ! Let the pace be moderate.

A liveried servant brings wine. Chaudary enters. They offer the first toast to Sobha.

ALL : To the good health of Sobha.

ACT III, SCENE II

A few hours later— Evening 4—

Suresh is in his drawing room with Prem.

There is a gentle knock at the door. Rekha and Ramesh enter in a happy, cheerful mood.

Rekha runs to Prem and embraces her. Suresh shakes hands with Ramesh. They are all seated.

RAMESH : How are you ?

SURESH : Fine !

REKHA : (*Whispers to Prem*) I am getting married to Ramesh next week.

PREM : (*Exultantly*) Wonderful ! I am indeed glad to hear that. Suresh, Rekha and Ramesh are getting married. Isn't it nice ?

SURESH : Of course nice. My hearty congratulations to you (*To Rekha and Ramesh*)

RAMESH : (*Looking at Prem and Suresh*) How about you two ? When is your marriage ?

PREM : (*A little depressed*) We are in a pretty mess.

RAMESH : I hope you haven't quarrelled....

PREM : O no, nothing of that sort. Nothing wrong with us.

RAMESH : Then....

PREM : You see, just now Suresh received a letter of dismissal from his boss.

RAMESH : (*With surprise*) Really!

PREM : Yes.

RAMESH : Prem, I am sorry. I am awfully sorry. But why is he dismissed ?

PREM : His boss suspects Suresh to be influencing his daughter.

RAMESH : What a shame! Why should he think like that ?

SURESH : Let us not bother. How about having tea. Prem, please look to the arrangements.

Prem leaves the room to instruct the servant.

RAMESH : Sure, you are mild. It's no use being just in an unjust world.

SURESH : No, please don't say that. There is justice in the world. We can't ignore it. The

balance is always struck between good and evil.

RAMESH : Then how do you explain the present injustice done to you ?

Prem reenters the room.

SURESH : I am not at all bothered about it. If today someone cheats me, tomorrow some other person will cheat him. We all of us condemn ugliness. We can't possibly tolerate injustice.

REKHA : Then why should there be criminality at all.

SURESH : Even a criminal has a sense of justice. From your standpoint it may be a false one, but he does care for justice. He feels he is wronged by society or by someone dear to him. In a mood of bitterness he does something horrible.

RAMESH : Sometimes his crime may go unpunished.

SURESH : Just possible. But the sense of justice which is ever present in Man, makes him hate himself for his wicked deeds. Even a criminal is under this great influence. So he condemns himself by committing suicide.

PREM (*Smiles*) I know you always justify everything.

RAMESH : (*To Prem*) No wonder he is a dreamer.
How funny ! He believes that even a criminal
is a normal man.

SURESH : (*Emphatically*) Of course, he is normal.
He is just an ordinary man ; nothing strange
about him.

*The servant enters with a tray full of cups and saucers.
He arranges tea for them on a small table nearby and leaves
the room.*

PREM : Let us have tea.

*They take their seats near the small table and begin taking
tea and biscuits. Prem and Rekha help the others.*

REKHA : (*Sipping tea*) I know it is easy to argue.
But Suresh, what will happen to you now?
Don't you think you should hate the millio-
naire for giving you the sack ?

SURESH : (*Almost obstinately*) Why should I ? I
shall soon get some other job. If one has
merit one is bound to succeed.

REKHA : (*Impatiently*) I can't possibly appreciate
your detached attitude towards life. Why
don't you admit that there is injustice, corrup-
tion and rottenness in the world ?

SURESH : I don't....I can't.

RAMESH : But tell me why the millionaire sus-
pected you ?

SURESH : (*Looks at Prem and smiles*) The other day Sobha proposed to me. She did her best to get my consent.

RAMESH : (*Teasing him*) And you refused. How silly ! A millionairess proposes to you and you refuse. O help me. Shame on humanity ! Why are people like you born, people who can't enjoy life ?

SURESH : Don't be funny.

RAMESH : No, I am not. I am quite serious. You are a blessed fool.

PREM : (*Anxiously*) You mean to say that Suresh should have accepted Sobha's proposal.

RAMESH : (*In a light humoured tone*) Of course yes. What else do we want ? Give me a millionairess. I'll be the first person to marry.

REKHA : Ramesh, be careful. You are talking nonsense. You can't leave me for a millionairess.

RAMESH : (*Teasing her*) Of course I will. My dear, I am not a cuckoo like Suresh. For me, money is everything. If I have money I shall have the best of life. Go for a holiday and all the year enjoy the sunny spots of the world. That is life for me, not this dull routine.

SURESH : (*Laughs*) Ramesh, I never knew you were such a good orator. Fine sentiments though ! But let me tell you that life is not a holiday. It has a purpose, a mission and everyone of us is expected to fulfil that mission. We can't take life easy. We have to fight and struggle even to the last day of our lives. It's rather dull to have the same unbroken chain of thrills and joys. We have to accept life with its shortcomings and make the best of it through our individual efforts.

PREM : I quite agree with you Suresh. Besides one can't marry for money alone.

SURESH : What else is there in marriage? It is just a bargain and woman coupled with money becomes good enough material for man.

REKHA : How horrid of you !

SURESH : Ramesh, I know your feelings pretty well. I have sympathy for you.

RAMESH : Sympathy for me ! I should rather sympathise with you for your childish attitude towards life.

SURESH : Ramesh, perhaps you are justified in saying that most men marry for the sake of money. But the inevitable urge in man — to love someone, to annihilate selfishness — is bound to come out even after marriage, per-

haps in the shape of children ! No one is free from that great quality, Love. This is found even in a robber.

RAMESH : Ridiculous. If he has that feeling of love, why should he rob ?

SURESH : He robs because he is poor. He feels that injustice is done to him by others in society. But surely he too has a soft corner for someone. It may not be for some other human being. It may be for his dog or for some other pet.

PREM : We'd better leave Suresh to his thoughts. It is difficult to argue with him. Let us move on to the sofas.

They move to the sofas and they are seated on them.

REKHA : We have had quite an interesting evening.

PREM : Yes the talk was quite stimulating. But the whole trouble with Suresh is that he is too dreamy and unrealistic.

REKHA : And the difficulty with Ramesh is that he is downright practical-minded.

PREM : *(Smiles)* Well, let us try to strike a mean. We can't possibly live in a dreamland.

REKHA : Nor can we shut our eyes to the higher aspects of life like Beauty, Love and Justice.

Money is not everything in this world.
A world solely dominated by money is bound
to be sordid.

Suresh and Ramesh smile.

SURESH : I think we need women like you to
guide us.

RAMESH : (*Still in that mock-serious vein*) But I
shall not budge an inch. For me there is
only one thing precious. That is money and
all the material comforts it brings. I don't
have much patience for theoretical assump-
tions. For instance I can't possibly reconcile
myself with the idea that someone who has
done me injustice will pay for it some day. It
is rather silly to leave him unpunished.

SURESH : No you are mistaken. You haven't
understood my arguments. No one escapes
punishment for his cruel deeds. Justice roots
out everything effete and ugly.

RAMESH : Well, what else ? (*Smiles sarcastically*)

*They hear a knock outside. To their great surprise they
find Asha dashing into the room.*

SURESH : Hallo Asha, glad to see you.

ASHA : I have some good news for you.

SURESH : (*Surprised*) Good news from the millio-
naire's house ! Incredible !

PREM : (*Sarcastically*) We had enough of it a few hours ago.

ASHA : You will have a pleasant surprise now.

REKHA : Sounds hopeful.

ASHA : Yes, it is. Suresh, Sobha came to know of your dismissal. She became annoyed with her father and she refused to see him unless he called you back to his service. He was helpless. So he agreed to take you back.

RAMESH : Suresh, you are lucky.

ASHA : Sobha was so very pleased with the news that she wanted me to communicate it to you immediately.

SURESH : Very kind of her. Thank you.

He almost dances with joy. He looks triumphantly at Ramesh, and Prem watches Suresh, pleased and happy.

CURTAIN

