The mother was chatting with their elder son Jon when the boy named Son entered the house after washing his hands & feet.

"I have a terrible headache. Can you prepare a cup of hot tea for me, mother?"

"Let me see! You are running a fever I fear."

The mother ran her hand over the forehead. "So hot! Don’t you care anything about your body?"

The elder brother tried to ease up the situation. "Ah! No fever at all and he is not feeling cold either. Just the head is feeling heavy."

"Don’t you know there is dew at night?" – the mother retorted angrily. "You never care to wear the cap. As if I advise you out of jealously. Now who is suffering from headache? – you or I?"

Sun felt as if his mother is suffering from a more severe headache than his brother. That is why she is scolding him so. "If you go out without your cap at night I will not care for you again."

"Do you want me to choke inside the monkey cap? It’s not cold at all. It is warm till late evening."

"A cold is always a cold. Be it in the evening or at midnight. You act as if people will find you odd if you wear the cap at night. You fear someone will reject you for that."

Jon felt like laughing inspite of his headache. But in a quarrelling tone he replied – "You first wear it and see. When it will itch you will understand."
“Why should I wear it? Who stands as a guard -- you or I?”

“I will wear it when it gets cold. If the firing continues till the months of December, January, I will go out with the cap and sit in the fog throughout the night.”

The mother must have got up to light the hearth for tea. Before stepping in she commented -- “Now your go and tell about your illness to whoever is concerned. Explain them that you have a fever and it will be difficult to keep guard tonight.”

The elder brother sent Sun. on the errand. “Sun, you go and tell Bhairab Khura about my fever. Let the other five manage the work somehow.”

Sun went out like a Torrent. He loves to roam around like this. At home he feels quite subdued. The moment he opens his books, he doesn’t know why the big yawns disturb him. On top of that his mother’s naggings -- “Sun, are you smoking opium or studying? It’s already sleep time for you and your head is bending lower every moment. But during the day time you are just loitering and loitering.”

“Hey Listen! Come back quickly” -- Jim shouter after his speedily disappearing brother.

“I am coming” came back an irritated reply from the distance.

He came running back very soon. Now panting quickly. He doesn’t look scared or tired. His eyes are shining bright. Still his mother enquired.

- “All you scared? Why are you panting?”

The brother added -- “Has the battalion said anything to you?”

“No! They haven’t.”

He bended his knees to sit down near his mother. Then in a pleading tone said --
“Oh mother, May I go today?”

“Where?”

“To keep guard.”

His mother and brother opened their eyes wide and said – “What?”

“Mother! Mother! Sun turned his back to his brother and obstructing his mother’s way reported – “Today Adhan will also keep guard.”

“Have you gone mad? Showing off like a hero! But so tender that milk will ooze out if lips are pressed.”

His brother asked – “What happened to Bhairab Khura?”

Jun and Sun address Adhan’s father as “Khura”.

“Bhairab Khura is suffering from fever. He has covered himself up in a blanket and continuously coughing. He is really running a fever.”

The mother replied in a worried tone – “Then how can he keep guard? Just because of that he should not send Adhan who is barely one-and-a-half year older than Sun.”

Will our country be saved if such boys keep guard?

“It is mandatory to go.”

“Who said so?”

“Bhairab Khura said this. It was his turn three days ago. That day he was feeling unwell and did not come out. At night the army people came. They enquired why he was not doing his duty and even scolded in a rough tone. They even said “Pitega.”

The mother got angry. “Only this boy hears such words. The meaningless tales of this world.”
Jun said — "it is true. The army people have a registrar book with them. Names of people in every household are written there. At night they make two-three rounds, to check who has come and tally the names."

"Let them check" — said his mother "What else can they do? Won't anyone ever fall ill?"

"If they check and go away then you are lucky. Usually they drag and out of your house and scold. If one of them is drunk, they even beat you."

"You are running a fever, you have a headache and on top of that can you spend the long night outdoor?" A note of helpless resentment could be heard in her voice.

"Mother! Let me go tonight" — Sun again cajoled his mother.

The mother steadily gazed at his face. Jun; keeping aside his love tenderly asked — "Can you?"

He jumped up — "I can. Adhan is also coming. We both will stay together."

When the arrangement was made, the mother quickly prepared rice for dinner. The rule is to go out at 8 pm. One battalion which was drunk — ordered one team to be on guard from 6 pm. One person gave a daring reply — "A few of us are shop owners. The shops are closed at 7 pm only. Then they ordered that till the time the owner of the house does not reach home other family members will do his duty. The daring voice stopped there. What if they write the names of the women & girls of the house in their register! Place — Samuapar, time six pm to eight p.m. — names — Miss. Mrs. etc...... !"

While serving the rice the mother kept grumbling — only god knows whether this is a county or a prison. Only the talk of army, CRP, battalion, Police and
different discussions of the terrorists can be heard. My ears have rotten hearing such words.

The mother folded the borkapor and covered Sun. The boy jumped like a wild grasshopper and went out.

Early November is like this always. Hot daytime, pleasant evenings and as the night proceeds, the shivering reaches the core of the heart.

Bijoy, Maneswar were teasing Sun & Adhan in the unripe night.

"Tonight we have to depend on the courage of these two only."

"Yeah!"

"Nothing to worry. With the borkapor Sun has brought, we can atleast cover and capture more than ten terrorists"

"Yeah!"

"Oh! You are right! We will cover and tie them up in a bundle like the washerman's washload"

"Yeah!"

"Yea —h! Sun started digging holes on the ground with the big toe in embarrassment."

"Hey, do you have your Baoka (One half of a bamboo pole)

"Its at home. Do you need it?"

"Doesn’t matter. The moment Sun and Adhan grab the terrorists you will fetch it. On one side Sun will shoulder it and on the other side Adhan will shoulder it. By taking them to the police station at night we will surprise everyone, I swear!"

"Ye—ah! I’ll go and report it to mother" Sôn again started digging holes with his big toe and complained. Adan was smiling shyly. He presumed that Bijoy
Khura, Mansewar Khura and party was mainly teasing Son because the borkapor with which they are planning to catch the terrorist belonged to sun.”

Son had no option but to carry it. Otherwise his mother wouldn’t have allowed him to come out. Even now he can keep this aside. What will happen if his mother comes to know of it? Will she ever allow him to keep guard?

That is why Son came a little away from that spot. Adhan fallowed him. They reached the junction where the main road and the rail line was creating a big plus sign. This place was nice. Neat and clean and expanded.

One can see Maneswar Uncle and others clearly and hear their conversation if a little attention is paid. The Hurricane lamp was hanging from the mango tree. They both can even talk to them from there. Just they have to raise their voice

But it will be letter not to invite unknown danger.* (Tatkoi bator kachu gat ghahi lowai bhal). They will again keep shouting and teasing from that point. “We will grab them, put them in a bundle, bewilder the Policeman”.............. Let those boastings be heard by people from within their homes, let it be heard by the police and the army and let them be reproached and be beaten. Will they then be able to ever do their guard duty?

All of them took black tea in small glasses after a short while, Bijoy’s mother has sent even a tea-pot. Salted tea, Son never takes salted tea. He prefers tea with sugar or jaggery. He relishes it mixed in tea or simply to lick it. Salted tea does not taste good, bitter in taste. Rather he would take an olive or guava or an acid fruit like Kardoi.
But to day he takes it. The tea is piping hot. He has covered it with the end of his Barkapur. Otherwise his hands would have been inflamed. Then he sips tea making a sound with his tongue. Good. The tea served during the guard duty is quite good. The tea prepared like this at home is really bitter in taste.

The night gradually turns into a cold and heavy one. The earlier mood of teasing the young boys is gone. Still Maneswar tried to bring in the mood by force.

“Your are good friends. Yes.”

Be somewhat taller. We will get you married the some day to two sisters of the same family, understand.”

“Shhh.........................”

“Or will you get married in two different dates?”

“Sh....................”

“All right. No need to feel shy. We would look for twin sisters even tomorrow. Don’t worry.”

“Sh............” uttering it in a longer tone Adhan and Sôn ran away. Then they came to the railway track to sit upon.

Though Maneswar has been cracking jokes he repeatedly massages his right shoulder. A pain nags him for several days. The newly bought pair of bullocks gave him much trouble during the first – few days. He slipped on the field and lay flat. From that time the pain started.

Bijoy Said – “It will be somehow managed to day. I’m concerned about the two young boys falling sick. But they don’t mind, do they?”

“Who? The boys? Maneswar asked.”
“No, the boys don’t mind, they are having fun. But “these people?” at this point Bijoy lowered his voice and murmured – “Army, battalion or police they are the least concerned. For them the regular count is important.”

They will open the register. Put tick marks, what else? And these boys of ours! They have been loitering around. They kill this one, that one, write letters demanding money. Roam around under our very nose.

“What to do? We are doomed.”

We sweat working throughout the day. And again we spend sleepless nights keeping guard.

Bijoy changed the topic – “We will be short of people on guard duty even tomorrow”

“Why?”

“News comes of Deben’s bother-in-law’s demise. On the other hand Banamali’s wife also fell sick all of a sudden”

“Whence?”

“Since this evening. According to the mother of my children it is too early for the delivery. The former one also aborted like that”

During the conversation Balo remembered Sön and Adhan. He shouted towards the direction of the railway track – “Are you two awake? Or gone to sleep?”

“Not asleep. We have been talking”

“Do not go to sleep. Come here if you feel sleepy. Or else, come now.”

“We won’t sleep. We’ll go on talking. Both of them replied in clear voice.”

Maneswar resumed the earlier topic of discussion – “This Banamali is also guilty, you know. You share your bed with her. Have not you noticed her
constraints. You should have arranged for your windowed aunt to stay here, or your mother-in-law also could have come. No. An idiot. As if he knows everything. He said – “Why so soon? I’ll bring someone at proper time.”

Bijay yawned. He had been working the whole day with the mason, Pangku Mistri. The tired feelings have now pressed on his eyelids. He must go to work tomorrow as early as possible. To-day he was late for work. Panku Mistri also was on guard last night. If you sleep late at night it is very difficult to open your eyes. The boss behaved rudely for that.

Balo also finds it difficult to keep his eyes open. In the evening he managed to sell a load of arum and then hurriedly taking his meal at home he has been keeping guard here. He even felled some firewood. A man’s body, after all.

He stood up. He thought of walking a few paces. No longer sleepy. Then he went towards the train line to have a look at the two boys.

Sön and Adhan have been talking a lot sitting on the track.

“Bora Sir had such a rage, you know””

“Why?”

Sön laughed a little – he was explaining concept of the point (Bindu). It is written in the book – Two straight lines coming from two opposite sides meet in a spot and there we find a point. The teacher was trying to make us understand. He went to the blackboard asking whether we have understood or not.

Then with a piece of chalk he drew a line from top to bottom and said – “Suppose this line is a road. It is coming this way from Paneri.” “And this road” – he said drawing a line from the bottom to the top – “coming from Kalaigaon, with the other road, on this spot. – saying so he drew a point by pressing the tip of the
chalk to the blackboard. And he said — have you noticed, just at this spot two roads are joined. At this meeting place we have the point. Yes or no? Do you understand now?"

We shouted in Chorus — Yes, Sir we understand.

In order to test us sir said — "Khagen, you tell us what is a point?"

Khagen stood. He cleared his throat in uncertain manner. Then looking at the black-board he said — "A road comes from Paneri." Another comes from Kalaigaon. Coming, point — he again cleared his throat. Then stammered — point, point, from Paneri, Point."

Bora Sir instantly rushed at Khagen and grabbing his ears shook him. What a scolding — "Idiot! Point comes from Paneri! From Kalaigaon! What I am teaching these people, what these stupid people understand!

They laughed heartily.

Balo also couldn’t sleep. He joined the laughter. Hearing them Haren and another guard approached.

“What fun you have! Let me share” — he also sat there.

How many topics. Bhutiya sweaters displayed in the village fair, Nakuldana, at Rajani’s shop, the TV series “Shaktiman” seen in set of Saikia Uncle, Shaddock, the citrus fruits at Renu aunts’ yard. “The talking parrot at Lahori’s place can sing songs from Hindi cinema. Does it sing Lata Mangeshkar’s songs.”

Talk, talk, talk — at first they sat talking. Then they took a lying position bending their elbows. In the meantime Adhan also wraps the coarse cotton chadar around his neck.
But later they straightened their legs. Then in the midst of their conversation they put their heads on the railway track. Haren said – “Do not go to sleep. If the train comes it will grind you.”

Both of them replied together – “We won’t sleep. We’ll keep talking.”

Bolo said after a while – “Look, spread the cloth this side. Oh! Good! It is hot with your body warmth.”

They have been talking. And yawning. Yawning gradually increased. The words became fewer. Adhan goes on talking haltingly.”

So many straws by the tank ......................... birds are building nests .......... With its mother ............... goes swimming.

No answer from Sôn. Only Haren asked – “Who has been swimming?”

No answer. He again called – Adhan! Hey Adhan! Are you sleeping? Do not sleep. Trains might come any time. Haren pushed at his body.

Adhan awoke, confused. Opening his eyes he asked – “What?”

Who swims with the mother?

I don’t know.

Why? Hey, you said just now”, Thrashing grass by the side of the tank.............”

Yes, yes, the moor hens are there on the side of the tank. One mother. Six or seven chicks. Can’t count. They never stay still. One advances. Then another. Then hides in its mother’s belly.”

“What do you say? It hides in the belly!”

Yes! As the eggs remain for incubation, like that. But there is no hey, only water, they come out immediately.
Bolo tries to shake off sleep. So he started asking repeatedly, "How big are the Chicks."

"Quite small!"

"What colour?"

"..............."

"Hey, Adhan. Tell me. Are the birds of the same colour?"

Adhan did not say anything. Only the sound of deep breathing.

Haren said yawning, "Very bad. We must wake them up. Let them go and sleep under the mango tree."

Bolo consented. At the same time he entered far inside the Bar-Kapor. He lethargically said, "After a while. We have been staying here. We'll certainly hear the sound of the coming train."

"Won't we hear the sound of the train? It blows the whistle in the station and I wake up at home. Of course we will remain 'awake now.'"

Haren also put the end of the Bar-kapor over his body. "Oh very warm" he said – "the body of these young boys are every warm."

"Bolo remembered his youngest son, but he did not like to talk about him"

He thought – "The child might be sleeping now. He was able to sleep in peace only when he stopped coughing. How he suffered? He changed the topic. He said – "My mother said- we neglect Endi and use Endi rags to wipe our face. Earlier we teased the boy so much only for this cloth! Now it has given us warmth and shelter."

"Only joking" Haren Said "How else can you react if the two young boys come for keeping guard?"
Bolo covered carefully the head of the two boys—“They said that they won’t go to sleep. Keep talking.”

He also yawned. To ward off sleep he recollected the moor hens Adhan had been talking about. As he was thinking of them the small moor hens with their soft beak and soft feathers started swimming in his eyes and gradually drowned in them. He did not know what happened afterwards.

Once Maneswar considered calling out the boys. Bijay also mentioned, “We must find out whether they are sleeping or keeping ground. Both of them supported each other, but as they thought of going and calling, the boys, they fell asleep reclining on the mango tree.

When the blinding light fell on them sideways Maneswar felt irritated and covered his face with his hand. He heard the sound also—Hiss! Hiss! Hiss! His mind records noting at the moment but hazily thought it must be the 1pm train. He tried to sleep astride but his head slipped and then only he straightened.................

Then the train blew the whistle.

He stood up jumping. He was so dazed that he forgot the name of Bijoy to call him. He only went running and shouting—“the tr........ ra ........in”

The light falls on the railway line. He has seen the Barkapor but how does he know how many of them are sleeping inside it. Shouting, “hey, get up, get up” he moved away the first one. That was Haren. When he drags away the second Haren also jumps out and carries away one of the sleeping men. One is Adhan and the other Bolo. By that time Bijay also arrives at the spot. All of them are moving in a hurry to pick up Sôn and-------- the train sped away making great sound.

What may be the outcome? Pieces of flesh. They remained in the railway track for a long period of time. The mother, arrived. She is not crying. She is shouting with all her might—Sôn! Open your eyes .............”
Railway police came. Sweepers came. The pieces of flesh entered into a sack. Mother’s hair was disheveled. She had no sense to tie it into a bun. She continued shouting – Sön! Open your eyes.

The sack came back from the police station, office and hospital.

Even then mother had been shouting “Open your eyes – Sön” – It burnt as fire. Turned to ashes. She continued crying – My Sön! Open your eyes, Sön!

Slowly the day dawned, time to listen to the morning bird. No. no one has heard it.

The Bura Bhakat always sings at this time ----

“Your moon like face ................. let me see
Wake up ............ Go ............. Vinda.”

No, he is not singing, even Jasoda is not calling the cowherd God to wake up, only Sön’s mother is calling out – “Open your eyes, Sön.”

The villages woke up. The birds flew out. The breeze started blowing. Sun rose. The cows began bleating. Lotus flowers bloomed in the lake. The bumble bee murmured. The moor hen started swimming at the pond with her chicks. One of them, goes forward, then another. Then hides by its mother’s side. Then surface again. Keeps enjoying the swimming with their mother.

Only Sön did not wake up
So his mother is calling out –
Sön!
O my Sön!
Why don’t you open your eyes,
Open your eyes, my Sön.

_Borkapor_—A hand-woven coarse cotton cloth large in size, worn as a shawl.