Text of the Passages From **CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY** (1980)

1 (PP. 77-79)

Life spread in a pool around her, low and bright, lapping at her feet, but then quickly, treacherously rising to her ankles, to her knees. (1,25) She had to get out of it. (2,7) She had to lift herself out before it rose to her waist, to her armpits. (3,15) If only they had not wrapped her in those long swaddlings as if she was a baby, or a mummy - these long strips that went round and round her, slipping over her eyes, crossing over her nose, making her breath stop so that she had to gasp and clutch and tear - (4,51)

Not to panic, not to panic, she whispered to herself. (5,10) It is a pool, it must not spread. (6,8) Gather it, contain it. (7,4) Here, in this bottle. (8,4) A tall, fine bottle. (9,4) She had it by its neck, her fingers went round it - almost round it, not quite - but she could, could grasp it - just. (10,23) She would contain it. (11,4) Pour it into a glass. (12,5) See, how it trickled in, colourless, but she could feel it, smell it: it was real, she had not imagined it. (13,21) When she lowered her mouth to the rim, it leapt up to meet her, went scorching up her nostrils and burning down her throat, leaving it raw and bleeding. (14,29) She drew back in fright, her eyes leapt quickly in and out of their red sockets. (15,16)

That was the way life was: it lay so quiet, so still that you put your fingers out to touch it, stroke it. (16,23) Then it leapt up and struck you full in the face so that you spun about and spun about, gasping. (17,20) The flames leapt up all around, rising by inches every minute, rising in rings. (18,14)

At first they had been only little flames, so pretty in the dark. (19,13) So many candles at a celebration, a festival. (20,8) She would hear their voices ringing, as pure as glass, or flame. (21,12) Raja and Bim, tall and straight and true, their voices ringing out: 'will be a hero', one had called out from the pure white peak of a candle flame, and the other had echoed back, as in a song, 'And I will be a heroine.' (22,46) But then they had shot up into such tall, towering flames, crackling and spitting, making her shut her
eyes and cower. (23,21) Down at her knees the little Tara whimpered 'Masi, they say I'm silly. (24,13) Masi, they called me a fool.' (25,6) The child's fingers stuck to her, waxy and white, and the flames crackled up above them, taller and fiercer every minute. (26,21) When she put out her hands to stop them, the flames pricked her like pins, drawing out beads of blood so that she dropped her hands with a cry and backed away from them. (27,34) This made them jump higher. (28,5) They grew taller and taller. (29,5)

They cast huge shadows on the walls around her. (30,9) White walls, livid shadows, lurching from side to side. (31,9) 'Bim and Raja,' she called desperately, 'stop it, stop it!' (32,10) But the shadows did not listen. (33,6) The shadows lurched towards her, and the flames leapt higher to meet them. (34,13) Flames and shadows of flames, they advanced on each other, they merged with each other and she was caught between them, helpless as a splinter, a scrap of paper. (35,29)

She could not manage them, she could not cope - they were too big for her, too hot and fierce and frightening. (36,21) It was no good petting, consoling - they did not listen. (37,10) They made such harsh, piercing sounds in her ears. (38,9) She wished they would stop, it hurt so, it was torture. (39,11) She pulled her white hair about her face, shielding herself. (40,10) And some soft cloth to stop up her ears, her nose, shut herself up, hide from them. (41,17) They prowled about, searching her out, menacing her. (42,8) She moaned in fright. (43,4) She needed protection. (44,3) She wanted help. (45,3) She reached out for the hand that would help her, protect her... (46,12)

...Here it was. (47,3) Here, in this tall, slim coolness just by her hand, at the tips of her fingers. (48,16) If she got her fingers around it, its slender pale glassiness, and then drew it closer, close to her mouth, she could close her lips about it and suck, suck little, little sips, with little little juicy sounds, and it would be so sweet, so sweet again, just as when they were little babies, little babies for her to feed; herself a little baby sucking, sucking at the little trickle of juice that came hurrying in, sliding in... (49,78)

And she sucked and laughed and sucked and cried. (50,9)
Then Bim's rage was spent at last. (1,7) It had reached its peak, its acme, like a great glittering wave that had hovered over everyone and that now collapsed, fell on the sand and seeped away, leaving nothing but a soggy shadow in the shape of Baba's silence. (2,40)

No afternoon in all that summer had been so quiet, so empty as the one Bim spent that day, lying as still as a bone left on the sand by the river. (3,32)

Silence roared around the house and thundered through it, making her press her hands against her ears. (4,17) She would have relished the sound of the gramophone if it could have drowned out the sound of silence. (5,19)

Now she pressed her hands across her eyes but the resulting flashes and pin-pricks of light darting and dashing across her eyelids did not amount to an answer. (6,28) Only the questions thundered and thundered, one dark wave succeeding another. (7,11) Why had she chosen Baba to vent her hurt and pain and frustration on? (8,14) Why had she not written a letter to Raja, pouring out all she had to say to him over the years? (9,21) Or attacked Tara instead since she could never be driven quite away, but always came back crawling to cling out of the habit of affection and her own insecurity? (10,29) Or Bakul, smashing his complacence into satisfying smithereens with one judicious blow for he would only pretend nothing had happened, remain certain no one could do this to him? (11,29)

She knew why of course: she could so easily have drawn an answer out of them - she already knew the answers they would have yielded up. (12,26) Their answers were all so open, so strident, so blatant, she knew every line and nuance of them. (13,18)

It was Baba's silence and reserve and otherworldliness that she had wanted to break open and ransack and rob, like the hunter who, moved by the white bird's grace as it hovers in the air above him, raises his crossbow and shoots to claim it for his own - his treasure, his loot - and brings it hurtling down to his feet - no white spirit or symbol of grace but only a dead albatross, a cold package of death. (14,77)
Like the smashed egg and the bird with a broken neck outside. (15,12) Filth to be cleaned up. (16,5)

Her eyes opened at this sight against her will and she looked around the room almost in fear. (17,18) But it was dark and shadowy, shaded by the bamboo screen at the door, the damp rush mats at the windows, the old heavy curtains and the spotted, peeling walls, and in their shade she saw how she loved him, loved Raja and Tara and all of them who had lived in this house with her. (18,56) There could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one, she knew. (19,16) No other love had started so far back in time and had had so much time in which to grow and spread. (20,22) They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that the anger or the disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself. (21,39) Whatever hurt they felt, she felt. (22,6) Whatever diminished them, diminished her. (23,5) What attacked them, attacked her. (24,5) Nor was there anyone else on earth whom she was willing to forgive more readily or completely, or defend more instinctively and instantly. (25,23) She could hardly believe, at that moment, that she would live on after they did or they would continue after she had ended. (26,23) If such an unimaginable phenomenon could take place, then surely they would remain flawed, damaged for life. (27,17) The wholeness of the pattern, its perfection, would be gone. (28,10)

She lay absolutely still, almost ceasing to breathe, afraid to diminish by even a breath the wholeness of that love. (29,20)

Although it was shadowy and dark, Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough, and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally. (30,72) She did not feel enough for her dead parents, her understanding of them was incomplete and she would have to work and labour to acquire it. (31,26) Her love for Raja had had too much of a battering, she had felt herself so humiliated by his going away and leaving her, by his reversal of role from brother to landlord, that it had never recovered and become the tall, shining thing it had been once. (32,48) Her love for Baba was too inarticulate, too unthinking; she had not given him
enough thought, her concern had not been keen, acute enough. (33,24) All these would have to be mended, these rents and tears, she would have to mend and make her net whole so that it would suffice her in her passage through the ocean. (34,33)

Somehow she would have to forgive Raja that unfor-givable letter. (35,10) Somehow she would have to wrest forgiveness from Baba for herself. (36,11) These were great rents torn in the net that the knife of love had made. (37,15) Stains of blood that the arrow of love had left. (38,10) Stains that darkened the light that afternoon. (39,7) She laid her hands across her eyes again. (40,8)

3 (PP. 175-177)

'Tara, Tara,' Bim shouted, as tense and impatient as Bakul. (1,10) She stood staring at the shuttered door in fear that Tara might bring Baba out with her, or that Baba might follow Tara and get into the car with her to go to Hyderabad. (2,34) Had she not ordered him to go, asked him to go? (3,11) At any moment, at any second, Baba might come out and leave with them. (4,14) 'You'll be late,' she fretted aloud, shifting from one foot to the other as if it were she who was to travel. (5,22)

'I know,' he fumed. (6,4) 'Tara!' (7,1)

Then Tara darted out. (8,4) Alone. (9,1) Bim felt herself go limp, her tension recede. (10,8) 'Hurry, hurry,' she said, brushing aside Tara's last affectionate squeeze and trying to propel her towards the open door of the car. (11,22) But Tara put out her hand to block the door and would not go in. (12,15) She stood stiffly, stubbornly, beside the car, refusing to let everyone's impatience budge her. (13,14) She was frowning with the distress of unful-filment. (14,8)

'Baba won't come out,' she murmured to Bim who still tried to bundle her physically into the car. (15,18)

'Let him be,' Bim said, relief blowing her words into large light bubbles that rolled off her tongue and floated effervescently into the orange air. (16,25) 'He feels fright­ened by all this - this coming and going. (17,10) You know he's not used to it.' (18,7)
Tara nodded sadly. (19.3) But this was not all that was on her mind. (20.10) There was another block, halting her. (21.6) She tried to force her voice past that block. (22.9) 'Shall I tell Raja -?' (23.4)

'Yes,' Bim urged, her voice flying, buoyant. (24.7) 'Tell him how we're not used to it - Baba and I. (25.11) Tell him we never travel any more. (26.7) Tell him we couldn't come - but he should come. (27.9) Bring him back with you, Tara - or tell him to come in the winter. (28.14) All of them. (29.3) And he can see Sharma about the firm - and settle things. (30.11) And see to Hyder Ali's old house - and repair it. (31.10) Tell him I'm - I'm waiting for him - I want him to come - I want to see him.' (32.17)

As if frightened by this breakdown in Bim's innermost self, this crumbling of a great block of stone and concrete, a dam, to release a flood of roaring water, Tara unexpectedly let go Bim's hand and fell forwards into the car. (33.41) At once, the driver, who had been waiting with his foot on the accelerator, released the brake so that the car gave a sudden jolt, then stalled, throwing them all backwards. (34.31) The girls laughed, Tara squealed. (35.5) The driver started the engine again. (36.6) Bakul sank back with a groan of relief. (37.5) The suitcases on the carrier wobbled. (38.6) Tara and the girls began to wave their hands at Bim and the servants lined on the steps, as the car glided forwards, at first slowly in first gear, then accelerating with a spurt, making the gravel fly from under the wheels and Tara sink back so that her face was wiped out from the window with a brisk suddenness. (39.60) It reappeared at the rear window now, and again her hand rose, to wave. (40.14) Bim waved back, laughing, doubled over as if she were gasping for breath, heaving with laughter helplessly. (41.17) Badshah sprang after the car, barking. (42.6) It turned out of the gate. (43.6) The bougainvillea closed upon it. (44.5)

It had grown too long, it needed trimming. (45.8)

'Chandu,' Bim said, straightening up and turning soberly towards the servants who were watching with her, 'that bougainvillea needs to be trimmed.' (46.22)

But now they had all lost their ingratiating smiles. (47.9) They looked sullen again. (48.4) The tips had been moderate ones, nothing lavish. (49.8) Chandu nodded non-committally and sidled off. (50.6) When they had all gone, Bim went up the steps and sank down into one of the cane...
chairs with the slow movements of an old woman who feels she is no longer watched and need no longer make a pretence. (51,41) Her black cat came to her and climbed into her lap. (52,11)

Then the terribly familiar rattling and churning of Baba's record slowed down and came to a stop. (53,17) The bamboo screen lifted and Baba came out. (54,8) For a moment he stood blinking as if he could not quite believe that the veranda was to empty, so quiet. (55,21)

'They've left,' Bim assured him. (56,5)

He came and sat down beside her. (57,7) It was very still. (58,4) Lifting her black cat's chin on one finger, Bim said, staring directly into her green glass eyes, 'would you have liked to go with them, Baba - to the wedding, I meant?' (59,31) With the cat's chin still balanced on her finger, she looked at his face from under heavy, tired lids. (60,19)

Baba, gazing at the cat, too, shook his head quietly. (61,10) Then the cat grew irritated and jumped off Bim's lap and twitched the tip of her tail angrily. (62,18)

They sat in silence then, the three of them, for now there seemed no need to say another word. (63,19) Everything had been said at last, cleared out of the way finally. (64,12) There was nothing left in the way of a barrier or a shadow, only the clear light pouring down from the sun. (65,22) They might be floating in the light - it was as vast as the ocean, but clear, without colour or substance or form. (66,22) It was the lightest and most pervasive of all elements and they floated in it. (67,15) They found the courage, after all, to float in it and bathe in it and allow it to pour onto them, illuminating them wholly, without allowing them a single shadow to shelter in. (68,33)

They were sitting - wordlessly and expressionlessly -

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