Appendix

Target Language Text 1

The Gift of a Cow
A Translation of the Classic
Hindi Novel
Godaan

By
PREMCHAND

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permanent black
CHAPTER 1

HORI RAM finished feeding his two bullocks and then turned to his wife Dhaniya. ‘Send Gobar to hoe the sugar cane. I don’t know when I’ll be back. Just get me my stick.’

Dhaniya had been making fuel-cakes, so her hands were covered with dung. ‘First eat something before you leave,’ she said. ‘What’s the big hurry?’

A frown deepened the wrinkles on Hori’s forehead. ‘All you think about is food. But I have to worry that I may not even get to see the master if I reach there late. Once he starts his bathing and prayers I’ll have to wait around for hours.’

‘That’s exactly why I’m suggesting you first have something to eat. And what harm would be done by not going at all today? You were there just two days ago.’

‘Why do you go poking your nose into things you don’t understand? Just hand me my stick and get on with your own work. It’s thanks to all these visits of mine that we’re still alive. God knows what would have become of us otherwise. You know how many people here in the village have been thrown off their land or had their property taken away. When someone’s heel is on your neck, it’s best to keep licking his feet.’

Dhaniya was less sophisticated in these matters. They ploughed the land of the zamindar, so all he should care about was the rent. True, these twenty years of married life had taught her that however much she cut corners, skimmed on food and clothes, and clung to every cowrie, it was still hard to pay the rent. But why should they have to flatter the landlord or lick his feet? She argued the question daily with her husband, refusing to admit defeat.

Only three of their six children were still alive—Gobar, a boy of about sixteen, and two girls—Sona, twelve, and Rupa, eight. Three sons had died in infancy. Dhaniya still believed that medicines would

1Hindi terms are only given in *italics* the first time they occur and are all explained in the Glossary at the end of this book.
have saved them, but she'd been unable to afford even a pice worth. She was not very old herself—just thirty-six—but her hair was completely grey and her face wrinkled. Her body had grown weak, the wheat complexion of her youth had turned dark brown, and her eyes had become dim—all because of the struggle for survival. Life had brought no joy—only a constant weariness which had worn away all concern for self-respect. Why bother with all this flattery for land that couldn't even provide food for their stomachs? Rebellion kept welling up in her heart—but then a few harsh words from her husband would jolt her back to reality.

Defeated again, she brought Hori's stick, jacket, turban, shoes and tobacco pouch and flung them down in front of him.

Hori glared at her. 'What's this outfit for? You think I'm going to your father's house? And even if I were, it's not as though you have some young sisters there that I should dress up for.' A trace of a smile softened his dark sunken features.

'I suppose you think that if some gorgeous young thing were there, she'd get a big thrill out of looking at you?'

Hori folded his tattered jacket carefully and placed it on the cot. 'So you consider me an old man, do you? I'm not even forty yet. And men are still lusty as bulls at sixty.'

'Not ones like you. Go look at your face in the mirror. Just how are you going to be lusty when you can't even get enough milk and butter to make a few drops of ointment for your eyes? It scares me to see the condition you're in—makes me wonder how we'll manage in our old age. Whose door will we beg at?'

Hori's momentary mellowness vanished as though consumed in the flames of reality. 'I'll never reach sixty, Dhaniya,' he said, picking up his stick. 'I'll be gone long before that.'

'All right now, that's enough!' Dhaniya snapped. 'Don't say such evil-omened things. Even when someone speaks nicely to you, you can't give a civil answer.'

Hori shouldered his stick and left the house. Dhaniya, standing in the doorway, watched him for a long time. His despairing words had shaken her already battered heart. Blessings for Hori welled up within her, inspired by all the devotion and self-sacrifice her womanhood could command. Her marriage was the one straw to which she clung in crossing the bottomless ocean of poverty. Hori's thoughtless remark, though close to the truth, had shaken her, threatening to tear even that one feeble straw from her grasp. In fact it was the very truthful-
ness of the statement that made it so disturbing. The taunt 'Hey One-eye!' hurts a one-eyed man more than it does a two-eyed one.

Hori hurried along. Looking over the green expanse of young sugar cane plants rippling on both sides of the footpath, he told himself that if God would just send enough rain for the crops to come up well, he'd certainly buy a cow... and not just one of those local ones, which give no milk and whose calves are no good except perhaps to turn the oilman's press. No, he would have a western cow, a Punjabi cow, and he'd take such good care of her that she'd give at least four or five quarts of milk. Gobar longed for milk. And if he couldn't be properly nourished now, when would he be? If Gobar could just get milk for a year, he'd be a boy worth looking at. Besides, the calves would become good bullocks, and a pair would bring a good two hundred rupees. What's more, it would be an excellent omen to have a cow tied by the front door where they could see it the first thing each morning. But there was no telling when this dream would be fulfilled, when that auspicious day would arrive.

Like all householders, Hori had for years nursed this longing for a cow. It was his life's ambition, his greatest dream, since any ideas of living off bank interest, of buying land or of building a mansion were too grandiose for his cramped mind to comprehend.

The June sun was rising over the mango grove, turning the red of dawn to brilliant silver, and the air was beginning to warm up. Farmers working in the fields beside the path greeted him respectfully and invited him to share a smoke with them. Hori had no time for such pleasantries, but they brought a glow of pride to his wrinkled face. It was only because he associated with the landlords that everyone showed him such respect. Otherwise who would pay any attention to a farmer with just three acres of land? As it was, though, even three and four-plough farmers greeted him—no small honour.

Leaving the path through the fields, he came to a hollow where so much rainwater collected during the monsoon that a little grass remained even in the height of summer. Cattle from the nearby villages came here to graze, and there was still a cool freshness in the air. Hori took several deep breaths and thought of sitting down for awhile, since he'd be dying of heat in the scorching loo wind the rest of the day. A number of farmers were eager to lease this bit of land and had offered a good price, but the Rai Sahib—God bless him—had plainly told them it was reserved for grazing and would not be relinquished at any price. If he'd been one of those selfish zamindars,
he’d have said the cattle could go to hell, that there was no reason for him to miss the chance to make a little money. But the Rai Sahib still held to the old values, feeling that any landlord who didn’t look after his tenants was less than human.

Suddenly Hori saw Bhola, the milkman from the adjoining village, approaching with some cows. Bhola sold milk and butter, and sometimes, when he could get a good price, he would also sell cows to the villagers. Hori eyed the cows longingly. If only Bhola would let him have that first one! He’d pay for it in instalments. Hori knew that there was no money at home, that the land rent was still unpaid and that the loan from Bisesar Shah was still outstanding, with one anna to the rupee interest mounting on it monthly. But he was driven on by a boldness learned in poverty, a shamelessness that ignores demands, curses and even blows. Shaken by the yearning that had been disturbing his heart for years, he greeted the approaching milkman and said, ‘How are things with you, brother Bhola? I hear you bought two new cows at the fair.’

‘Yes, two cows and two calves,’ Bhola answered casually, guessing Hori’s intentions. ‘My old ones had all gone dry, and you can’t make a living if there’s no milk for the customers.’

Hori stroked the flank of the lead cow. ‘Obviously a good milker. How much was she?’

Bhola began to show off. Prices are high these days. Eighty rupees I had to pay—and thirty for each calf as well. And yet my customers still demand four quarts to the rupee.’

‘You people are really lion-hearted, brother. But then again, there’s nothing like what you’ve got here in any of the villages around.’

Bhola swelled with pride. ‘The Rai Sahib offered me a hundred for her—and fifty each for the calves. But I wouldn’t sell. God willing, I should make a hundred rupees on her first calves.’

‘No doubt about that. And how could the master afford them anyway? He’d probably take them as a gift of course. But only you people have the guts to trust to luck and risk handfuls of money that way. Ah to have the blessing of looking at this cow forever! How lucky you are, being able to spend your time serving cows. I can’t even get their dung. It’s shameful for a family man not to have even one cow. Year after year goes by without the sight of milk. My wife keeps pestering me to speak to you, and I tell her I will when we happen to run into each other. She thinks very highly of you—keeps saying she’s never
seen such a man before, one who always keeps his eyes down when speaking to a woman."

Bhola's pride swelled even more with this brimming cup of praise. 'A good man always treats others' daughters and daughters-in-law as though they were his own. Any villain who would stare at a woman deserves to be shot.'

'You're a hundred per cent right, brother. A gentleman is one who respects another man's honour as though it were his own.'

'When a man's wife dies, he's just as crippled as a woman when her husband dies. My home's a desert now, with no one to offer me even a cup of water.'

Bhola's wife had died of heatstroke the year before. Hori knew this, but he had not realized the passion that still coursed through Bola's decrepit, fifty-five-year-old frame. Now Bhola's eyes were glistening with longing for a wife, and Hori, his practical peasant shrewdness alerted, spotted his chance.

'There's truth in the old saying that a house without a woman is haunted by ghosts. Why don't you marry again?'

'I'm looking around, but no one's about to get trapped easily, even though I'm ready to shell out a hundred rupees or more. Well, it's in God's hands...' I'll keep an eye out too. God willing, you'll soon have a home set up again.'

'Believe me, brother, that would be a big relief. By the grace of God there's plenty to eat in my house, and twenty quarts of milk a day. But what good does it do?'

'Well, there's a girl at my in-laws' place whose husband left her some three or four years ago and went off to Calcutta. Poor thing squeezes out a living grinding flour. No children... good-looking... talks nicely... a real goddess!'

The wrinkles vanished from Bhola's face. Wonderful the rejuvenating power of hope! 'I'll count on you then. When you're free some time, let's go take a look at her.'

'I'll let you know when it's all settled. Rushing things is likely to spoil them.'

'Whenever you think best. There's no point in hurrying. And if you like that black and white cow, then take her.'

'I'm not worthy of such a cow, brother. And I don't want to put you to such a loss. It wouldn't be right for me to get a strangle-hold on a friend. I'll manage as I have in the past.'
‘You talk as though we were strangers, Hori. Go ahead and take the cow, for whatever price you wish. Having her at your house will be no different than at mine. I paid eighty rupees. You can give me the same. Now go ahead.’

‘But remember, brother. I don’t have the cash.’

‘So who’s asking for cash?’

Hori’s chest was bursting. Eighty rupees was not at all high for this cow—sturdy, able to give six or seven quarts of milk twice a day, so gentle that even a child could milk her. Each of her calves would be worth a hundred rupees. And how handsome his door would be with her tied there. He was already four hundred rupees in debt, but he looked on these loans as a kind of gift. Then too, if he could arrange another marriage for Bhola, that would keep him quiet for at least a year or two. And if no marriage worked out, it would still be no loss to Hori. At worst Bhola would come demanding the money, trying to start trouble and shouting curses. But it took more than that to shame Hori by this time. He’d become used to such things, thanks to his life as a peasant. Granted he was tricking Bhola, but that was only to be expected in his position, and he would have treated a written contract in the same way.

Hori was a God-fearing man, as far as that goes, constantly aware of the destructive side of God’s nature, cowed by anxiety over the threat of drought or flood. He didn’t consider this kind of deceit as deceit, however. It was just a matter of self-interest, and there was nothing wrong with that. He did it all the time. Though he had several rupees at home, he’d swear to the moneylender that he hadn’t a pice. And it seemed only right to increase the weight of jute by soaking it, or of cotton by leaving seeds in it. Besides, this present situation involved more than profit—it was also good sport. An old man’s lust is always amusing, and to make it pay something would surely be no crime.

Bhola handed the cow’s halter to Hori. Take her. She'll remind you of me. As soon as she calves you’ll start getting six quarts of milk. Come on—I’ll lead her to your house. Otherwise, not knowing you, she might give some trouble on the way. And now I’ll tell you the truth—the master was actually offering ninety for her. But what appreciation do those people have for cows? He’d have passed her on to some official, and what do they care about serving cows? All they know is how to suck blood. They’d keep her as long as she gave milk and then sell her to someone else. Who knows where she’d end up?
Money’s not everything, brother. A man’s sacred duty counts for something too. She’ll do well at your place. You’re not likely to eat and then go off to sleep leaving her hungry. You’ll look after her and fuss over her. The cow will bring us blessings. And anyway, though I hate to admit it, there’s not even a handful of straw in my house. The bazaar took all my money. I thought of borrowing a little from the moneylender for some straw, but I haven’t yet paid back the last loan, so he refused. Trying to feed so many animals worries me to death. Even a handful each would add up to over a bushel a day. Only God can see me through...

Hori sighed sympathetically. ‘Why didn’t you let me know earlier? I’ve just sold off a cartload of straw.’

Bhola beat his forehead and said, ‘The reason I didn’t tell you, brother, is that a man can’t go around crying about his troubles to everyone. People aren’t going to share them—they just make fun. I’m not worried about the cows that have gone dry—they can be kept alive on leaves and things. But this one can’t go without proper fodder. What you might do is let me have ten or twenty rupees for some straw.’

Now it’s true that a peasant is mercenary. It’s hard to squeeze a bribe out of his purse. A shrewd bargainer, he’ll haggle for hours with the moneylender to get the interest reduced one pice. And as long as he has a single doubt, he can’t be inveigled into anything. But he also spends his whole life co-operating with nature. Trees produce fruit for men to eat. Fields produce grain which feeds the world. Cows produce milk—not for themselves, but for others to drink. Clouds produce rain which quenches the earth. In such a system there’s no room for petty selfishness. As a farmer, Hori had been taught that one doesn’t warm his hands on the flames of another man’s burning house.

So, hearing Bhola’s tale of woe, Hori’s attitude changed. Handing back the halter, he said, ‘I don’t have any money, brother, but there’s a little straw left which you can have. Come and take it. If I were to accept a cow that you’re selling just because you’re out of fodder, I’d be inviting the punishment of God.’

‘But won’t your own bullocks starve?’ Bhola asked. ‘Surely you don’t have that much straw to spare.’

‘Not at all, brother. The crop was good this year.’

‘It was wrong of me even to mention it to you.’

‘If you’d said nothing and I found all this out later, I’d have been
very hurt that you treated me like an outsider. How could we get along if men didn’t help their brothers in times of need?”

‘Anyway, go ahead and take this cow.’

‘Not now, brother. Some other time.’

‘Then let me give you some milk to pay for the straw.’

‘Why all this talk about payment?’ Hori reproached him. ‘If I ate a meal or two at your house, would you insist on my paying for it?’

‘Your bullocks won’t starve then?’

‘God will open up a way. The rains are almost here—I’ll grow another crop of something.’

‘In any case, the cow is yours. Come get her whenever you want.’

‘Taking the cow now would be as bad as buying my brother’s bullocks at an auction.’

If Hori had been smart enough to realize the implications of this discussion, he’d have taken the cow home with no misgivings. Since Bhola had not demanded cash, he was obviously not selling her to buy fodder. But Hori was like a horse which hears a rustling in the leaves, stops abruptly, and, though whipped, refuses to take another step. Ingrained in him was the idea that taking anything from a person in trouble is a sin.

Bhola could hardly contain himself. ‘Then should I send someone for the straw?’

‘I’m on my way to the Rai Sahib’s house right now,’ Hori replied, ‘but I should be back shortly. Send someone in a little while.’

Bhola’s eye’s filled with tears. ‘Hori, brother, you’ve been my salvation. I now know that I’m not alone in the world, that even I have a friend.’ He hesitated a moment and then added, ‘Now don’t forget that other matter.’

Hori set off in high spirits, his heart swelling with satisfaction. What if eight or ten bushels of straw have been lost, he thought. I’ve saved the poor fellow from having to sell his cow in a time of trouble. And as soon as I get some more fodder, I’ll go collect the cow. God help me now to find a woman for him. Then there’ll be no problem.

He turned and looked back. There was the spotted cow, tossing her head, flicking away flies with her tail, and sauntering along with the careless dignity of a queen in the midst of her slave-girls. What an auspicious day it would be when that giver of all blessings was tied up at his own door!
GODAN
A Novel Of Peasant India

PREMCHAND
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JAICO PUBLISHING HOUSE
Ahmedabad Bangalore Bhopal Chennai
Delhi Hyderabad Kolkata Lucknow Mumbai
After serving the two bullocks with feed and water Hori Ram said to his wife, Dhania, “Send Gobar to hoe the sugar cane. I am going out and may return late. Hand me the staff.”

Dhana had been making cow-dung cakes and her hands were smeared with the dung. “What’s the hurry,” she said, “Have something before you go.”

Hori puckered up his wrinkled brow. “You talk about refreshments when I am worried about the delay. If I am late I won’t be able to meet the Master. If he sits down to his prayers I may have to wait for hours.”

“That’s why I say, have something.” Dhania said, “Besides, what’s the harm if you don’t go today. You went to him only the day before yesterday.”

“Why do you try to meddle with things which are beyond you?” Hori said impatiently. “Give me the staff and mind your chores. It’s all due to keeping on good terms with the Master that trouble has remained at arm’s length from us. Otherwise we would have been wiped out of existence long ago. Out of scores of people in the village can you name one who has not been ejected from his land or been served with attachment orders? When your neck is being trampled under the tyrant’s heel the safest course is to keep on tickling his feet.”

But Dhania was not so well up in worldly matters. She thought that at the most what the Zamindar could claim was the rent in exchange for tilling his land. Then why play the sycophant? Why should one touch the soles of a Zamindar’s feet? To be sure, during the twenty years of her married life she had fully realised that even if she lived a niggardly life stinted on foot and clothes, scraped together every elusive anna, it was difficult to liquidate the rent of the Zamindar. But even then she would not admit defeat. On this matter the husband and wife had differences every now and then.
Of their six children only three had survived—one son, Gobar, who was now sixteen years old and two daughters, Sona, aged twelve and Rupa, eight. Three sons had died in infancy. She was convinced that with proper medical care their lives could have been saved. But she had not been able to buy even an anna worth of medicine for them.

And what was her age? Ordinarily nobody would describe a woman of thirty-six as old. But her hair had already turned grey and her face was creased with wrinkles. Her youthful body had declined, the glow of her swarthy complexion had turned sallow and her eye-sight dim. All because of the canker of poverty.

Her life had been bleak and this state of constant penury had cast a pall of sadness over her self-esteem. Why so much obsequiousness for a life which did not provide even the daily bread? Her mind would often rebel against such a state of affairs. But a few scoldings from her husband would jolt her back into reality.

She went in a huff and flung the staff, quilt, turban, shoes and the pouch of tobacco at Hori.

Hori flared up. "Am I going to my father-in-law's house that you have brought all this finery? Besides, there is no young sister-in-law of mine waiting there to charm me with her beauty." A faint smile flitted across his dark wizened face.

Dhanaia said shyly, "What a dashing youth you are to think that young girls should fall for you!"

Hori carefully folded the torn quilt and placing it on the cot said, "Do you think I have grown old? I am not forty yet. Men are not men before sixty."

"Go and look at your face in the mirror! It's not men like you who get into prime of manhood at sixty. How can you think of manhood when you do not get even milk and ghee to sustain the body. Your state of health dries me up in worry. How shall we pass our old age? At whose door shall we go begging?"

The flippancy of Hori vanished. "Dhanaia, I shall never get to the age of sixty," he said holding the staff. "I shall be gone long before that."

Dhanaia said reproachfully, "Let it be, please. Don't utter such ominous words. Even if I say something good, I only get hard words
in return.”

When Hori went out with the staff resting on his shoulder, Dhania came to the door and stood gazing at him for a long time. Hori’s dispirited remarks had shaken her wounded heart to the very core; she was all trembling, as if with the austere strength of wifely devotion she was trying to enfold Hori in a protective halo of blessings which rose from the inmost recesses, the only means by which she could hope to reach the other shore safely. But now it seemed that the cruel words of Hori, though very true, wrenched away from her the only means of support. Their truth perhaps surcharged them with so much pain. Can a two-eyed ever feel the hurt that a one-eyed man feels at the taunt of being called a one-eyed man?

Hori walked swiftly. Seeing the swaying greenery of the young sugar cane plants on both sides of the path he thought that with the grace of God if it rained abundantly this year and all went well he would buy a cow. Not a cow of native breed, thought! Oh no, those were no good. Their yield of milk was poor and their calves good for nothing. Only fit to be yoked to an oil-expeller. He had set his heart on a foreign pedigreed cow. He would swamp her with care. She would yield plentiful milk. Not less than four to five seers, in any case. Poor Gobar, how he pined for milk. If he did not eat well at his age, when else would he eat. With a wholesome diet, in one year’s time, he would grow into a fine specimen of lusty youth. What a proud sight he would make. The calves too, would grow into fine bullocks. The cow of course would not cost less than two hundred rupees. What did it matter? Didn’t a cow tied by the door enhance the prestige of the house? And how auspicious to see a cow the first thing in the morning!

Like every householder, Hori for a long time had been cherishing this desire for a cow. It was the brightest dream of his life, his greatest ambition. The desire to live comfortably on bank interest, to buy land or to build a palatial house was too lofty to find room in the narrow confines of his poor heart.

The sun of June, ascending from behind the mango grove, touched with radiance the crimson glow smeared over the sky. It had started getting warmer. As Hori walked along, the peasants working
in the fields greeted him and invited him to smoke the chilum. Hori had
no time. A faint glow of pride flit across his gaunt face. It was all on
account of his cordial relations with the masters that people treated
him with such respect. After all, what is the worth of a man who owns
a mere five bighas of land. It was no mean honour that even farmers
who owned three or four ploughs bowed to him deferentially.

Hori had now come to a hollow where on account of accumula-
tion of water during the monsoon the land was still damp and some
traces of greenery were visible even in June. The cattle from the
surrounding villages came to graze here. Even at this time the place
was cool and fresh. Hori took a few deep breaths. He felt like resting
for a while. The whole day he would have to put up with blasts of
scorching wind. Several peasants were eager to buy this plot of land;
they were offering a fancy price for it. God bless the Rai Saheb—he
had told them plainly that this land had been reserved for the cattle
and he was not going to part with it at any price. Had there been
some other greedy Zaminadar he would have said, “To hell with the
cows. I get jingling coins, why should I refuse them.” But the Rai
Saheb was still steeped in the old tradition. The Zaminadar who does
not look after his tenants, is he worthy of being called a man?

Suddenly Hori glimpsed Bhola with his cows coming in his
direction. Bhola was a goala of the adjoining village and traded in
milk and butter. If the cows fetched a good price he would
occasionally sell them to the peasants. Hori could not hold himself
back on seeing the cows. How nice, if the first one could be his. He
had still to pay his rent. He had also to square up the debt of Bisesar
Saha which had been accumulating interest at the rate of one anna
per rupee. But lack of carefulness is characteristic of indigence; a
sense of shameless obstinacy which defies demands, abuses and even
beatings was now goading Hori into action. The pent-up desire which
had been storming his heart for an outburst for years together now
suddenly made him restless.

He accosted Bhola: “Ram, Ram, Bhola, bhai. How’s life? I hear
you’ve bought new cows at the fair.”

Bhola guessed what was in Hori’s mind. “Two cows and two
calves,” he said shortly. “My other cows have gone dry. How can I
carry on if there’s no milk to sell?"

Hori patted the flank of the first cow. “Seems to be an excellent milk cow. How much did you pay for her?”

“Prices ran high this year Mehta,” Bhola said with a touch of vanity, “I had to shell out eighty rupees for this cow. What a sum! I nearly had a fit. And I had to pay no less than thirty rupees for each calf. And think of the audacity of the customers! They still insist upon eight seers of milk for a rupee.”

“You people have tough hearts, brother. But what a beauty you’ve bought. I doubt if there’s another like her in the countryside.”

These remarks puffed up Bhola. He said, “Rai Saheb was offering me a hundred rupees for the cow and fifty rupees each for the calves. But I said no. Why, I shall rake in a hundred rupees when she calves next time.”

“Certainly, brother. Has the master guts enough to buy her? It’s one thing to buy and quite another to accept presents; they cost nothing. It’s only you people that have the courage to depend on sheer luck and risk bagfuls of money on a cow. But what a cow! I can’t have enough of her. You’re lucky indeed that you have the good fortune to be of service to a cow. I can’t even procure cow-dung. How humiliating that in a big family like ours we have no cow. Years pass and we have to go without milk. My wife often asks me to talk to you about it. But I put her off by saying that I shall do so when I meet you next. She has such nice things to say to you. She says she has rarely come across a man more modest, who talks to her with downcast eyes, never raising his head once.”

This brimming cup of praise made Bhola more heady. He said, “A gentleman always regards womenfolk as his own daughters. A man who looks lustfully at women deserves to be shot.”

“What a gem of a thought, brother! You are right. A gentleman regards other’s self-respect as his own.”

“A woman feels orphaned and forlorn at her husband’s death: a man feels crippled when his wife is gone. My home has gone to rack and ruin. Now I have no one left even to offer me a bowl of water.”

Last year Bhola’s wife had died of loo. Hori knew this. But what he did not know was that man of fifty, apparently a mere skeleton,
could boil in passion. Desire for a woman had made Bhola's eyes eloquent. The shrewed Hori was quick to take advantage of this.

"The old saying is true, bhai: Without a wife the house becomes an abode of ghosts. Why don't you get married?"

"I am on the look-out, Mehto. But it is not easy to catch a wife so quickly. I am even ready to spend a bit, if it comes to that. But God has the last word, of course."

"I'll also keep it in mind. If God wills you will again set up a home."

Bhola said eagerly, "Marriage will be a liberation for me. I am quite well off. In my house there's no dearth of milk. But to what avail?"

"In my father-in-law's village there is a girl whose husband deserted her three or four years ago and went away to Calcutta. Now the poor creature grinds corn and lives. She has no children either and is quite comely too. Briefly, bhai, she is a veritable Lakshmi."

Bhola's shrivelled face suddenly mellowed. How delicious Hope is, like ambrosia.

"I leave everything to you, Mehto. If you have time, why not let us go and see her one of these days."

"It is best to go slow brother. I'll let you know after I have settled the matter."

"Take your own time. There's no special hurry. If you have taken a fancy for this mottled cow, it's yours for the asking."

"It is not becoming for a man of my humble position to take such a fine cow. Moreover, my sense of duty forbids me to put you to loss."

"You talk as if we were strangers. Pay me when you can. It makes little difference to me whether she stays at your house or mine. I bought her for eighty rupees. Pay me the same."

"I have no ready cash."

"But did I ask for on the spot payment?"

Hori's breast swelled with joy. The cow was worth every rupee of the eighty. Sturdy, with promise of good yield of milk, and so docile that even a child could milk her. True, he was already in debt to the tune of four hundred rupees. But he considered debt unobligatory. If Bhola's marriage came off he would hold his peace.
for at least two years. But even if the scheme of his marriage fell through Bhola could hardly do him any harm. At the most Bhola would press him for settlement of his debt, get wild, and if it came to the worst, abuse him. But such things were common features of every peasant's life. He was quite aware that he was being deceitful. But this did not go against his grain. It made little difference to him whether he raised a loan by signing a document or without it. The calamities caused by the inclemencies of nature had made him craven-hearted. The diabolical face of a vengeful Nemesis always danced before his eyes. But the small deceits that he practised were expediency born of self-interest and no more. Such stratagems were part of everyday life. In his code of morality it was permissible to inflate the weight of hemp by moisture and mixing cotton seeds with cotton. These things added rest to life. Senility has its comic aspect and to touch befuddled old men for small inconsequential gain was no sin.

Handing the halter to Hori, Bhola said, “Lead her away. She will start giving six seers of milk the very day she calves. But perhaps I had better take her to your house. To speak the truth, the master was offering me ninety rupees for her. But do people of his type appreciate the worth of a cow? He would have passed it on to some official and the official in turn would have got rid of her as soon as she ran dry. God knows in whose hands she would have fallen. Money is not everything, brother. There’s such a thing as goodness too. At least, she will be well looked after in your house. May I confide in you, brother, though I don’t feel equal to it? The fact of the matter is that there’s not even a handful of straw left in the house. My funds have all vanished on these purchases. I thought I would manage to lay in fodder by borrowing money from the money-lender. But he refused me point blank. How am I going to feed so many animals? This worry is killing me. Even if I give each animal just one handful of straw it adds up to one maund per day. Only God can rescue me from this plight.”

Hori said sympathetically, “Why didn’t you tell me earlier? I have just sold a cartload of fodder.”

Bhola beat his forehead in despair. “I didn’t, because I don’t like to tell my woes to everyone. Every one is ready to mock at another’s
distress but none is willing to share it. My new cow cannot live without straw. Give me a few rupees, if you can."

There is no doubt that the peasant is selfish to the core. It takes a lot of wheedling to get a bribe out of him. He is a past-master in driving a hard bargain. To get a single penny of interest condoned he supplicates himself before the money-lender for hours. It is difficult to tempt him against his conviction. Nevertheless his entire life is wedded to nature. The trees bear fruit but for others; the land yields grain to appease the hungry mouths; the clouds send showers to assuage the parched earth. In such a scheme of things there is hardly any room for selfishness.

Hearing Bhola’s tale of woe he changed his mind. Handing back the halter to Bhola, he said, “I don’t have the money. But there is some straw left. You can have it. Shame on me, if I should demean myself by buying your cow for a handful of straw.”

Bhola’s voice became strained. “But won’t your bullocks starve? Surely, you haven’t any straw to spare.”

“It’s not so, brother. The harvest this year was good.”

“How silly of me to have talked about it at all.”

“If you had not, I would have felt sorry. Things will come to a pretty pass if brother does not help brother.”

“Anyway, you take the cow.”

“Not now. Perhaps some other time.”

“In that case, get the price of straw adjusted against the milk.”

“Why harp on such trifles? If I take good at your place once or twice should I expect you to charge me for it?”

“But the cow is yours. That’s settled. Take it whenever you feel like it.”

“It’s as sinful to take your cow at this stage as bidding for my own brother’s bullock at the auction.”

Had Hori been shrewd enough to see through the game he would have taken the cow without compunction and gone his way. The state of Hori’s mind was like that of a horse which stops short at the faintest rustling of leaves and does not budge in spite of being spurred on. The notion that it is sinful to make capital out of others’ distress had become an inescapable part of his conscience.
When Hori resumed his journey he was glad at heart. What did it matter if he had to part with a few maunds of straw. But he had saved Bhola from making a forced sale.

He looked back. The spotted cow was walking majestically, swaying her head gently, and flicking the flies with her tail. She looked like a queen in the midst of maid-servants.
THE SECOND WIFE
TRANSLATED FROM HINDI BY
DAVID RUBIN
PREMCHAND

Orient Paperbacks
DELHI | MUMBAI | HYDERABAD
Although there were scores of relatives living in Udaybhanu's household — maternal and paternal uncles, nephews and nieces — we are not concerned with them here. Udaybhanu was a fine lawyer, fortune had smiled upon him, and to give shelter to the impoverished members of his clan was only his filial duty. But our concern is only with his daughters, the elder named Nirmala and the younger Krishna. Until only yesterday both were still playing with dolls. Nirmala was fifteen, Krishna only ten, but in their temperaments and habits there was scarcely any difference. Both were lively, playful and mad about shows and excursions, both married off their dolls with pomp and circumstance, and both constantly shirked their household duties. Their mother kept calling out for them, but unsure about the task they were being summoned to, they would hide themselves on the terrace. They fought with their brothers, scolded the servants and as soon as they heard the sound of music in the street would rush to stand in the doorway. But today, quite suddenly, an event occurred which made the elder a grown-up while the younger remained only a child: Krishna was her old self, but Nirmala had now become serious, shy and fond of solitude.

For months now Udaybhanu had been negotiating Nirmala's marriage. Today his labour had borne fruit, for he had finalised her alliance with Babu Bhalachandra Sinha's eldest son, Bhuwan Mohan. The groom's father had declared that he didn't care whether
Udaybhanu gave a dowry or not. Of course, the members of the marriage party ought to be treated with the customary respect and hospitality, so that there was no occasion for either of the families being held in ridicule. Now, Udaybhanu was a lawyer, he had never known how to save money. The dowry was a difficult problem before him. So when the groom's father himself told him he was not the least concerned about a dowry, he almost got back lost eyesight. He had feared that he would have to go begging to all and sundry, and had already made arrangements with a couple of money-lenders. He had estimated that even with strict economies the wedding would cost him not less than twenty thousand rupees. Reassured now by Babu Udaybhanu, he could scarcely conceal his joy.

This news sent the naive girl to sit in a corner with her face covered. A peculiar doubt had entered her heart, and her whole body was possessed by an unfamiliar dread. She did not know what was going to happen. She was not aware of any of those ecstatic feelings which find expression in the girls’ sidelong glances, the sweet smile on their lips and the languor in their limbs. On the contrary, she experienced not longing but only doubt, worry and fearful imaginings. The full blaze of youthful awareness had not yet dawned on her.

Krishna knew something, but not everything: her sister would get fine jewellery, the musicians would play at the door, the guests would gather, there would be dancing. And so she was happy. She also knew that her sister would embrace everyone and weep and make her departure from home in tears, while she herself would be left alone. And knowing this, she was sad. But she did not understand why all this was happening, or why her mother and father were so eager to drive her sister out of the house. She had said nothing offensive to anyone nor quarrelled with anybody. Would these people throw her out of the house, would she, too, sit like that in a corner and cry with no one to pity her? And so Krishna was also frightened.
One evening Nirmala went up to the roof alone, staring up at the sky with yearning eyes. She had fantasised how if she had wings she would fly away and escape these aggravations.

Of late the two sisters had been going out frequently for buggy rides. If the buggy wasn’t free they would go strolling in the garden. So Krishna had been going around looking for her sister; when she couldn’t find her she came up on the roof and as soon as she saw her laughed and said, ‘Here you are hiding and I’ve been looking for you. Come along, I’ve arranged for the buggy.’

Indifferently, Nirmala said, ‘You go on, I’ll stay here.’

‘No, my dear Didi’, you really must come this time! Just feel how cool the breeze is.’

‘No, I’m not in the mood, you go along.’

Tears came to Krishna’s eyes. Her voice trembling, she said, ‘Why won’t you come now? Why won’t you talk to me? Why are you always hiding? I get upset just sitting around all by myself. If you won’t come, I won’t go out either, I’ll just stay here and sit with you.’

‘And after I’ve left, what will you do?’ Nirmala asked her. ‘Who are you going to play with? Tell me, who’ll you go out walking with?’

‘I’ll leave with you, I couldn’t stand it here alone.’

Nirmala smiled. ‘Ammaji? wouldn’t let you go.’

‘Then I won’t let you leave. Why don’t you just tell Ammaji you won’t go?’

‘That’s what I’ve been saying, but who listens to me?’

‘But isn’t this your house?’

‘No — if it were, would they be forcing me to leave it?’

‘And will I too then be made to go away some day?’ Krishna asked.

‘If you’re not, will you just stay here doing nothing? We’re girls, we don’t have a home anywhere.’

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1 Elder sister.
2 Mother.
‘And will Chandar be sent away, too?’

‘Chandar’s a boy, who’d send him away?’

‘Then girls must be very wicked?’

‘If they weren’t,’ Nirmala said, ‘would they be chased out of their homes?’

‘But Chandar’s very naughty, still nobody chases him away, while you and I never do anything bad at all.’

Suddenly Chandar came up on the roof with a great clatter and when he saw Nirmala, said laughing, ‘So this is where you are! Soon there’ll be music, Didi will be a bride and climb into the palanquin.’

Chandar, whose full name was Chandrabhanu Sinha, was three years younger than Nirmala, two years older than Krishna.

‘If you tease me,’ Nirmala said, ‘I’ll go to mother and tell her.’

‘Why are you so huffy? You’ll hear the music too.’ He laughed. ‘Now you’re going to be a bride! Kishni, you’ll hear it too, music such as you’ve never heard before.’

‘Even better than the band?’ Krishna asked.

‘Oh yes, even better than the band, a thousand times, a hundred thousand times better! You know what? When you heard one band you began to think there couldn’t be any better than that. But these musicians will wear red uniforms and red hats, they’ll look so wonderful — how can I tell you? There’ll be fireworks too and rockets shooting up in the skies and when they reach the stars then red and yellow and green and blue stars will explode and drop down. You’ll love it.’

‘What else will there be, Chandar, tell me, bhaiya!’

‘Come for a walk with me and I’ll tell you everything on the way. You’ll see spectacles that will make your eyes pop. There’ll even be fairies flying in the air, real fairies.’

‘Let’s go then, but if you don’t tell me I’ll beat you.’

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2 Brother.
Chandrabhanu and Krishna went off but Nirmala stayed, sitting alone. She was very depressed by the way Krishna had deserted her, Krishna whom she loved like her own self and who had now been so unkind, going away and leaving her alone. Nothing had actually happened; but the grieving heart is like an injured eye, hurt even by the breeze. Nirmala wept for a long time. Her brothers and sister, mother and father would forget her like this, all of them would become indifferent to her. And perhaps she would probably find herself yearning for them.

In the garden the flowers were blooming, giving out their sweet fragrance in the cool light breeze of early April. Stars were scattered across the sky. Lost in her melancholy thoughts Nirmala fell asleep and the moment she closed her eyes she began to wander in a land of dreams. What she sees is a turbulent river before her and herself waiting on the bank for a boat. It is evening and the darkness is closing in on her like a frightful beast. She is terribly anxious about getting across the river, about reaching home. She weeps, hoping it won't turn to night for how is she to get home alone? Suddenly a beautiful ship appears, coming towards the shore. She springs up joyfully and as soon as the ship reaches the shore she steps forward to board it. But just as she is about to set foot on the deck the boatman cries out, 'No room for you here!' She entreats him, falls at his feet, sheds tears but he insists, 'No room for you here!' In an instant the boat breaks loose. She screams and sobs. Unable to face staying alone on the deserted riverbank the whole night she jumps into the river and tries to catch hold of that ship when suddenly a voice warns her, 'Stop! The river's deep, you'll drown! That ship is not for you. I'm coming, just get into my boat and I'll take you across.' Terrified, she looks all around to see where this voice is coming from. Soon a small rowboat appears. It has no sail, no rudder, no mast. The hull is cracked, the planks broken, it's full of water and a man is bailing it out. But it's a wreck! How can it make the crossing? The boatman says, 'This has been sent for you, come aboard and sit down.' For a moment she hesitates, 'Sit in that' but finally decides that she must. Sitting in the boat is at least better than being left alone here. Better to drown in the river than end up in the belly of
some horrible wild animal. Who knows, maybe the boat will actually make it across the river. With these thoughts and expecting the worst, she sits down in the boat. For a while it moves along, wallowing and rolling, but at every instant water comes flooding in. Like the boatman she too begins to bale out the water with both the hands until they grow numb, but the water keeps on rising. Then the boat begins to whirl around. She feels as though she's drowning, drowning. She flings out her arms for some help she cannot see, the boat slips under her feet. She screamed, and as soon as she screamed she opened her eyes and found her mother standing before her, shaking her by the shoulders.
Nirmala.
PREMCHAND

Translated, and with an Afterword, by
ALOK RAI

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
Chapter One

Although there were dozens of people in Babu Udayabhanulal's household—cousins maternal and paternal, sons of brothers, sons of sisters—there is little reason to concern ourselves with them here. He was a good lawyer, the goddess of wealth smiled on his labours, and providing shelter to the less fortunate members of his family was neither more nor less than his duty. We are concerned here only with his two daughters, the older of whom is called Nirmala, the younger Krishna. Till but yesterday both were happy playing with dolls. Nirmala was in her fifteenth year, Krishna in her tenth, yet there was little difference between their temperaments. Both were playful, mischievous, full of fun and frolic. Their dolls would frequently be married off with great extravagance, and they did their best to avoid doing any work at all. Their mother would keep calling away, but the two would stay lurking on the terrace as if unaware altogether as to what the calling might be about. They quarrelled with their brothers, scolded the servants, and would dash to the front door at the merest sound of an itinerant musician. But something has happened today, something that has suddenly made the older one that much older, the younger one decidedly younger. Krishna is much the same as ever, but Nirmala has suddenly become sombre, bashful, and a seeker of solitude. For the past several months Babu Udayabhanulal has been on the lookout for a husband for Nirmala. Today his labours have been
crowned with success. A match has been arranged with the elder son of Babu Bhalchandra Sinha, Bhuwan Mohan Sinha. The groom’s father has declared he has no demands whatsoever in the matter of a dowry—Babu Udayabhanulal may choose to give or not give anything, just as he pleases. But the members of the baraat must be treated with generous hospitality, he insisted, so as to protect both parties from all possible ridicule. Babu Udayabhanulal was a lawyer all right, but he did not know how to accumulate wealth. The question of the dowry had been a tough nut for him to crack. Thus his relief knew no bounds when the groom’s father declared that the dowry was purely optional. He had been apprehensive about all the debts he would have to incur and had even made provisional arrangements with a few moneylenders. His most conservative estimates of the likely cost had been in the region of twenty thousand rupees. He was overjoyed at being relieved of that anxiety.

This same piece of news has made the innocent girl hide her face and take refuge in a lonely corner of the house. There is a strange fear that fills her heart, a nameless dread is gathering in every fibre of her being—for what does the future hold? There is no joy in her heart, no trace of that rapture which expresses itself in the shy glances of maidens and in half-smiles that play on their lips, which overcomes their limbs with a deliberate languor. No, there are no aspirations there, no fond expectations, only fears, anxieties and dark imaginings. She is of a tender age.

Krishna understands something of what is going on, but only something. She knows her sister will get all kinds of jewellery, there will be musicians and festivities, guests and dancing—and she is pleased with all that. But she knows also that her sister will part tearfully from all the members of the household, she will leave her home with much weeping and wailing, and Krishna will be left all alone—this she is not too pleased with. But she doesn’t understand why all this is happening at all, nor why her mother and father are so keen to drive her sister from their home. It’s not as if her sister has said anything unpleasant to anyone, nor
quarrelled or anything—so, she thinks, will I too be turned out in
this way one day? I too will sit in a corner and weep like my sister,
and no one will take pity on me? That is why she too is afraid.

It was evening and Nirmala was sitting by herself on the
terrace, staring at the sky with eyes full of longing. If she could,
she would have flown away somewhere, far away from all these
complications. Normally, the two sisters went out together at
that time of day to take the air. If the carriage was not available,
they would just stroll in the garden. That is why Krishna was
looking for her. Not finding her, she came to the terrace and,
seeing her there, said laughingly—Here you are, hiding yourself,
and I’ve been looking for you everywhere! Come, the carriage is
ready.

Nirmala replied tonelessly—You go on, I’ll stay here.

Krishna—No, my dear sister, you must come today. See how
pleasant the breeze is.

Nirmala—I don’t feel like going, please.

Krishna’s eyes filled with tears. In a quivering voice she said—
Why won’t you come today? Why won’t you speak to me? Why
are you hiding yourself in this place and that? I feel afraid sitting
alone all by myself. If you won’t come, I won’t go either. I’ll just
sit here with you.

Nirmala—And what will you do after I’m gone? Whom will
you play with then, whom will you then go out with, tell me?

Krishna—I’ll go away with you. I won’t stay here by myself.

Nirmala replied smilingly—Amma won’t let you go.

Krishna—Then I won’t let you go either. Why don’t you tell
Amma you won’t go anywhere?

Nirmala—I’m telling them all right, but who’s listening?

Krishna—So isn’t this your home too?

Nirmala—It obviously isn’t, or else how could I be sent away
forcibly?

Krishna—Will I too be turned out this way one day?

Nirmala—So d’you expect to stay here forever? We’re girls,
we don’t really belong anywhere.
Nirmala

Krishna—Will Chandar too be turned out?
Nirmala—Chandar is a boy. Who’ll turn him out?
Krishna—Are girls very bad then?
Nirmala—if they weren’t bad, would they be thrown out like this?
Krishna—Chandar is such a rascal, but he’s allowed to stay. You and I, we never do anything mischievous, do we?

Just then Chandar arrived noisily on the terrace and, seeing Nirmala, announced in a loud voice—So, this is where you’re hiding yourself! So, there will be bands playing, and Didi will be decked up as a bride, and be carried away in a palanquin, so!

Chandar was Chandrabhanu Sinha’s son. He was three years younger than Nirmala and older than Krishna by two.

Nirmala—I’ll report you to Amma if you tease me, Chandar.
Chandar—So why d’you get teased? You’ll enjoy the playing of the musicians, won’t you? What fun! So, you’ll be a bride soon! Say Kishni, you’ll enjoy the music too! Such music as you’ve never heard before!

Krishna—Will it be better than the bands that come wandering by?
Chandar—Better, much, much better, a hundred times, a hundred thousand times better. What d’you know? Listen to one band, and you start thinking it must be the best around. The musicians will be in red uniforms and black hats. And how wonderful they’ll look! There’ll be fireworks too, rockets will shoot off into the sky and hit the stars and bring red and yellow and green and blue stars crashing down. What fun!

Krishna—Tell me more, little brother.
Chandar—Come for a stroll with me and I’ll tell you all. There’ll be such wonderful entertainments as you’ll never believe possible. There’ll be fairies flying about, real fairies I tell you.

Krishna—Let’s go then. But you’d better keep your promise or else I’ll give you a beating.

Chandrabhanu and Krishna went off for a walk, and Nirmala was left all by herself. She was hurt bitterly by Krishna’s going off
at this time. Krishna, whom she loved more than life itself, could be so cruel to her. Abandoning her at such a time! It was no big matter, but a grieving heart is like a hurt eye, even the passing breeze causes it pain. Nirmala sat sobbing for a long, long time. Her brother and sister, mother and father, all had turned away from her, forgotten her quite, she might well find herself pining before too long to see just their faces.

The garden was in bloom, pleasant fragrances wafted in. The cool breezes of the month of Chaitra were blowing softly. Stars were spangled across the night sky. Lost in her melancholy thoughts, Nirmala fell asleep and was soon wandering in the land of dreams. She saw before her a river in which there rose big waves, and she was sitting on the bank, waiting for a boat. It is evening and the darkness is growing apace like some fearsome beast. She is overwhelmed with anxieties about when and how she will cross the river. She is weeping because she is afraid it will turn to night, and then how will she ever be able to stay in such a place by herself? Suddenly she sees a beautiful boat approach the bank. She leaps up with joy, but as soon as the boat touches the bank and she makes to step onto it, the boatman cries out—‘There’s no place for you here!’ She pleads with the boatman, falls at his feet, whimpers plaintively, but he keeps repeating, ‘There’s no place for you here.’ In a moment the boat is off again. She starts wailing aloud. Fearful of how she will spend the night on that desolate bank, she leaps into the water in order to clamber onto the boat, when suddenly she hears a voice—‘Stop, stop, the river is deep, you’ll drown at this rate. That boat is not for you, I’m coming, come sit on my boat and I’ll take you across.’ Frightened, she looks around her for the source of the voice. In a little while, a small dinghy appears. It has neither sail, nor rudder, nor paddle. Its bottom is leaking, its boards are broken, the boat is full of water and a man is patiently baling it out. She says to him, ‘But this is all broken, how will it ever get across?’ The boatman replies—‘It has been sent for you, come and sit down!’ She thinks for a moment—Should I or shouldn’t I sit in this boat? In the end
she decides she'll take the chance. Better than spend the night all by herself. Better to drown in the river than be devoured by some fearsome beast. Who knows, the boat might even make it across the river. Thus consoled, she takes courage in both hands and gets onto the boat. For a while the boat moves shakily; but it is taking in water rapidly. She too joins the boatman in baling out the water with both her hands. Try as hard as they will, the water keeps rising, until the boat begins to float out of control—as if about to sink at any moment. Just then, as she raises her hand towards some invisible source of succour, the boat slips away from under her and she loses her footing. She shouts and wakes herself up with the shouting.

She saw her mother standing above her, shaking her by the shoulder.