

The Post Office by Rabindranath Tagore

[Translated from Bengali to English by Devabrata Mukherjee] [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914]

CHARACTERS

MADHAV	DAIRYMAN	BOYS
AMAL, his adopted child	WATCHMAN	KING'S HERALD
SUDHA, a little flower girl	GAFFER	ROYAL PHYSICIAN
THE DOCTOR	VILLAGE HEADMAN, a bully	

THE POST OFFICE - ACT I

[*Madhav's House*]

- MADHAV** What a state I am in! Before he came, nothing mattered; I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, my heart is filled with his dear self, and my home will be no home to me when he leaves. Doctor, do you think he—
- PHYSICIAN** If there's life in his fate, then he will live long. But what the medical scriptures say, it seems—
- MADHAV** Great heavens, what?
- PHYSICIAN** The scriptures have it: "*Bile or palsy, cold or gout spring all alike.*"
- MADHAV** Oh, get along, don't fling your scriptures at me; you only make me more anxious; tell me what I can do.
- PHYSICIAN** [*Taking snuff*] The patient needs the most scrupulous care.
- MADHAV** That's true; but tell me how.
- PHYSICIAN** I have already mentioned, on no account must he be let out of doors.
- MADHAV** Poor child, it is very hard to keep him indoors all day long.
- PHYSICIAN** What else can you do? The autumn sun and the damp are both very bad for the little fellow—for the scriptures have it: "*In wheezing, swoon or in nervous fret, In jaundice or leaden eyes—*"
- MADHAV** Never mind the scriptures, please. Eh, then we must shut the poor thing up. Is there no other method?
- PHYSICIAN** None at all: for, "*In the wind and in the sun—*"
- MADHAV** What will your "in this and in that" do for me now? Why don't you let them alone and come straight to the point? What's to be done then? Your system is very, very hard for the poor boy; and he is so quiet too with all his pain and sickness. It tears my heart to see him wince, as he takes your medicine.
- PHYSICIAN** effect. That's why the sage Chyabana observes: "In medicine as in good advices, the least palatable ones are the truest." Ah, well! I must be trotting now. [*Exit*]

[Gaffer enters]

MADHAV Well, I'm jiggered, there's Gaffer now.

GAFFER Why, why, I won't bite you.

MADHAV No, but you are a devil to send children off their heads.

GAFFER But you aren't a child, and you've no child in the house; why worry then?

MADHAV Oh, but I have brought a child into the house.

GAFFER Indeed, how so?

MADHAV You remember how my wife was dying to adopt a child?

GAFFER Yes, but that's an old story; you didn't like the idea.

MADHAV You know, brother, how hard all this getting money in has been. That somebody else's child would sail in and waste all this money earned with so much trouble—Oh, I hated the idea. But this boy clings to my heart in such a queer sort of way—

GAFFER So that's the trouble! and your money goes all for him and feels jolly lucky it does go at all.

MADHAV Formerly, earning was a sort of passion with me; I simply couldn't help working for money. Now, I make money and as I know it is all for this dear boy, earning becomes a joy to me.

GAFFER Ah, well, and where did you pick him up?

MADHAV He is the son of a man who was a brother to my wife by village ties. He has had no mother since infancy; and now the other day he lost his father as well.

GAFFER Poor thing; and so he needs me all the more.

MADHAV The doctor says all the organs of his little body are at loggerheads with each other, and there isn't much hope for his life. There is only one way to save him and that is to keep him out of this autumn wind and sun. But you are such a terror! What with this game of yours at your age, too, to get children out of doors!

GAFFER God bless my soul! So I'm already as bad as autumn wind and sun, eh! But, friend, I know something, too, of the game of keeping them indoors. When my day's work is over, I am coming in to make friends with this child of yours.
[Exit]

[Amal enters]

*****1

AMAL Uncle, I say, Uncle!

MADHAV Hullo! Is that you, Amal?

AMAL Mayn't I be out of the courtyard at all?

MADHAV No, my dear, no.

AMAL See, there where Auntie grinds lentils in the quern, the squirrel is sitting with his tail up and with his wee hands he's picking up the broken grains of lentils and crunching them. Can't I run up there?

MADHAV No, my darling, no.

AMAL Wish I were a squirrel! —it would be lovely. Uncle, why won't you let me go about?

MADHAV Doctor says it's bad for you to be out.

AMAL How can the doctor know?

MADHAV What a thing to say! The doctor can't know and he reads such huge books!

AMAL Does his book-learning tell him everything?

MADHAV Of course, don't you know!

AMAL [*With a sigh*] Ah, I am so stupid! I don't read books.

MADHAV Now, think of it; very, very learned people are all like you; they are never out of doors.

AMAL Aren't they really?

MADHAV No, how can they? Early and late they toil and moil at their books, and they've eyes for nothing else. Now, my little man, you are going to be learned when you grow up; and then you will stay at home and read such big books, and people will notice you and say, "he's a wonder."

AMAL No, no, Uncle; I beg of you by your dear feet—I don't want to be learned, I won't.

MADHAV Dear, dear; it would have been my saving if I could have been learned.

AMAL No, I would rather go about and see everything that there is.

MADHAV Listen to that! See! What will you see, what is there so much to see?

AMAL See that far-away hill from our window—I often long to go beyond those hills and right away.

MADHAV Oh, you silly! As if there's nothing more to be done but just get up to the top of that hill and away! Eh! You don't talk sense, my boy. Now listen, since that hill stands there upright as a barrier, it means you can't get beyond it. Else, what was the use in heaping up so many large stones to make such a big affair of it, eh!

AMAL Uncle, do you think it is meant to prevent your crossing over? It seems to me because the earth can't speak it raises its hands into the sky and beckons. And those who live far and sit alone by their windows can see the signal. But I suppose the learned people—

MADHAV No, they don't have time for that sort of nonsense. They are not crazy like you.

AMAL Do you know, yesterday I met someone quite as crazy as I am.

MADHAV Gracious me, really, how so?

AMAL He had a bamboo staff on his shoulder with a small bundle at the top, and a brass pot in his left hand, and an old pair of shoes on; he was making for those hills straight across that meadow there. I called out to him and asked, "Where are you going?" He answered, "I don't know, anywhere!" I asked again, "Why are you going?" He said, "I'm going out to seek work." Say, Uncle, have you to seek work?

MADHAV Of course I have to. There's many about looking for jobs.

AMAL How lovely! I'll go about, like them too, finding things to do.

MADHAV Suppose you seek and don't find. Then—

AMAL Wouldn't that be jolly? Then I should go farther! I watched that man slowly walking on with his pair of worn out shoes. And when he got to where the water flows under the fig tree, he stopped and washed his feet in the stream. Then he took out from his bundle some gram-flour, moistened it with water and began to eat. Then he tied up his bundle and shouldered it again; tucked up his cloth above his knees and crossed the stream. I've asked Auntie to let me go up to the stream, and eat my gram-flour just like him.

MADHAV And what did your Auntie say to that?

AMAL Auntie said, "Get well and then I'll take you over there." Please, Uncle, when shall I get well?

MADHAV It won't be long, dear.

AMAL Really, but then I shall go right away the moment I'm well again.

MADHAV And where will you go?

AMAL Oh, I will walk on, crossing so many streams, wading through water. Everybody will be asleep with their doors shut in the heat of the day and I will tramp on and on seeking work far, very far.

MADHAV I see! I think you had better be getting well first; then—

AMAL But then you won't want me to be learned, will you, Uncle?

MADHAV What would you rather be then?

AMAL I can't think of anything just now; but I'll tell you later on.

MADHAV Very well. But mind you, you aren't to call out and talk to strangers again.

AMAL But I love to talk to strangers!

MADHAV Suppose they had kidnapped you?

AMAL That would have been splendid! But no one ever takes me away. They all want me to stay in here.

MADHAV I am off to my work—but, darling, you won't go out, will you?

AMAL No, I won't. But, Uncle, you'll let me be in this room by the roadside.

[*Exit Madhav*]

*****2

DAIRYMAN Curds, curds, good nice curds.

AMAL Curdseller, I say, Curdseller.

DAIRYMAN Why do you call me? Will you buy some curds?

AMAL How can I buy? I have no money.

DAIRYMAN What a boy! Why call out then? Ugh! What a waste of time.

AMAL I would go with you if I could.

DAIRYMAN With me?

AMAL Yes, I seem to feel homesick when I hear you call from far down the road.

DAIRYMAN [*Lowering his yoke-pole*] Whatever are you doing here, my child?

AMAL The doctor says I'm not to be out, so I sit here all day long.

DAIRYMAN My poor child, whatever has happened to you?

AMAL I can't tell. You see I am not learned, so I don't know what's the matter with me. Say, Dairyman, where do you come from?

DAIRYMAN From our village.

AMAL Your village? Is it very far?

DAIRYMAN Our village lies on the river Shamli at the foot of the Panch-mura hills.

AMAL Panch-mura hills! Shamli river! I wonder. I may have seen your village. I can't think when though!

DAIRYMAN Have you seen it? Been to the foot of those hills?

AMAL Never. But I seem to remember having seen it. Your village is under some very old big trees, just by the side of the red road—isn't that so?

DAIRYMAN That's right, child.

AMAL And on the slope of the hill cattle grazing.

DAIRYMAN How wonderful! Aren't there cattle grazing in our village! Indeed, there are!

AMAL And your women with red sarees fill their pitchers from the river and carry them on their heads.

DAIRYMAN Good, that's right. Women from our dairy village do come and draw their water from the river; but then it isn't everyone who has a red saree to put on. But, my dear child, surely you must have been there for a walk some time.

AMAL Really, Dairyman, never been there at all. But the first day doctor lets me go out, you are going to take me to your village.

DAIRYMAN I will, my child, with pleasure.

AMAL And you'll teach me to cry curds and shoulder the yoke like you and walk the long, long road?

DAIRYMAN Dear, dear, did you ever? Why should you sell curds? No, you will read big books and be learned.

AMAL No, I never want to be learned—I'll be like you and take my curds from the village by the red road near the old banyan tree, and I will hawk it from cottage to cottage. Oh, how do you cry—"Curd, curd, good nice curd!" Teach me the tune, will you?

DAIRYMAN Dear, dear, teach you the tune; what an idea!

AMAL Please do. I love to hear it. I can't tell you how queer I feel when I hear you cry out from the bend of that road, through the line of those trees! Do you know I feel like that when I hear the shrill cry of kites from almost the end of the sky?

DAIRYMAN Dear child, will you have some curds? Yes, do.

AMAL But I have no money.

DAIRYMAN No, no, no, don't talk of money! You'll make me so happy if you have a little curds from me.

AMAL Say, have I kept you too long?

DAIRYMAN Not a bit; it has been no loss to me at all; you have taught me how to be happy selling curds. [*Exit*]

AMAL [*Intoning*] Curds, curds, good nice curds—from the dairy village—from the country of the Panch-mura hills by the Shamli bank. Curds, good curds; in the early morning the women make the cows stand in a row under the trees and milk them, and in the evening they turn the milk into curds. Curds, good curds. Hello, there's the watchman on his rounds. Watchman, I say, come and have a word with me.

*****3

WATCHMAN What's all this row you are making? Aren't you afraid of the likes of me?

AMAL No, why should I be?

WATCHMAN Suppose I march you off then?

AMAL Where will you take me to? Is it very far, right beyond the hills?

WATCHMAN Suppose I march you straight to the King?

AMAL To the King! Do, will you? But the doctor won't let me go out. No one can ever take me away. I've got to stay here all day long.

WATCHMAN Doctor won't let you, poor fellow! So I see! Your face is pale and there are dark rings round your eyes. Your veins stick out from your poor thin hands.

AMAL Won't you sound the gong, Watchman?

WATCHMAN Time has not yet come.

AMAL How curious! Some say time has not yet come, and some say time has gone by! But surely your time will come the moment you strike the gong!

WATCHMAN That's not possible; I strike up the gong only when it is time.

AMAL Yes, I love to hear your gong. When it is midday and our meal is over, Uncle goes off to his work and Auntie falls asleep reading her Ramayana, and in the courtyard under the shadow of the wall our doggie sleeps with his nose in his curled-up tail; then your gong strikes out, "Dong, dong, dong!" Tell me why does your gong sound?

WATCHMAN My gong sounds to tell the people, Time waits for none, but goes on forever.

AMAL Where, to what land?

WATCHMAN That none knows.

AMAL Then I suppose no one has ever been there! Oh, I do wish to fly with the time to that land of which no one knows anything.

WATCHMAN All of us have to get there one day, my child.

AMAL Have I too?

WATCHMAN Yes, you too!

AMAL But doctor won't let me out.

WATCHMAN One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand.

AMAL He won't; you don't know him. He only keeps me in.

WATCHMAN One greater than he comes and lets us free.

AMAL When will this great doctor come for me? I can't stick in here anymore.

WATCHMAN Shouldn't talk like that, my child.

AMAL No. I am here where they have left me—I never move a bit. But when your gong goes off, dong, dong, dong, it goes to my heart. Say, Watchman?

WATCHMAN Yes, my dear.

AMAL Say, what's going on there in that big house on the other side, where there is a flag flying high up and the people are always going in and out?

WATCHMAN Oh, there? That's our new Post Office.

AMAL Post Office? Whose?

WATCHMAN Whose? Why, the King's surely!

AMAL Do letters come from the King to his office here?

WATCHMAN Of course. One fine day there may be a letter for you in there.

AMAL A letter for me? But I am only a little boy.

WATCHMAN The King sends tiny notes to little boys.

AMAL Oh, how lovely! When shall I have my letter? How do you guess he'll write to me?

WATCHMAN Otherwise why should he set his Post Office here right in front of your open window, with the golden flag flying?

AMAL But who will fetch me my King's letter when it comes?

WATCHMAN The King has many postmen. Don't you see them run about with round gilt badges on their chests?

AMAL Well, where do they go?

WATCHMAN Oh, from door to door, all through the country.

AMAL I'll be the King's postman when I grow up.

WATCHMAN Ha! ha! Postman, indeed! Rain or shine, rich or poor, from house to house delivering letters—that's very great work!

AMAL That's what I'd like best. What makes you smile so? Oh, yes, your work is great too. When it is silent everywhere in the heat of the noonday, your gong sounds, Dong, dong, dong, — and sometimes when I wake up at night all of a sudden and find our lamp blown out, I can hear through the darkness your gong slowly sounding, Dong, dong, dong!

WATCHMAN There's the village headman! I must be off. If he catches me gossiping with you there'll be a great to do.

AMAL The headman? Whereabouts is he?

WATCHMAN Right down the road there; see that huge palm-leaf umbrella hopping along? That's him!

AMAL I suppose the King's made him our headman here?

WATCHMAN Made him? Oh, no! A fussy busy-body! He knows so many ways of making himself unpleasant that everybody is afraid of him. It's just a game for the likes of him, making trouble for everybody. I must be off now! Mustn't keep work waiting, you know! I'll drop in again to-morrow morning and tell you all the news of the town. [*Exit*]

*****4

AMAL It would be splendid to have a letter from the King every day. I'll read them at the window. But, oh! I can't read writing. Who'll read them out to me, I wonder! Auntie reads her Ramayana; she may know the King's writing. If no one will, then I must keep them carefully and read them when I'm grown up. But if the postman can't find me? Headman, Mr. Headman, may I have a word with you?

HEADMAN Who is yelling after me on the highway? Oh, you wretched monkey!

AMAL You're the headman. Everybody minds you.

HEADMAN [*Looking pleased*] Yes, oh yes, they do! They must!

AMAL Do the King's postmen listen to you?

HEADMAN They've got to. By Jove, I'd like to see—

AMAL Will you tell the postman it's Amal who sits by the window here?

HEADMAN What's the good of that?

AMAL In case there's a letter for me.

HEADMAN A letter for you! Whoever's going to write to you?

AMAL If the King does.

HEADMAN Ha! ha! What an uncommon little fellow you are! Ha! ha! the King indeed, aren't you his bosom friend, eh! You haven't met for a long while and the King is pining, I am sure. Wait till to-morrow and you'll have your letter.

AMAL Say, Headman, why do you speak to me in that tone of voice? Are you cross?

HEADMAN Upon my word! Cross, indeed! You write to the King! Madhav is devilish swell nowadays. He'd made a little pile; and so kings and padishahs are everyday talk with his people. Let me find him once and I'll make him dance. Oh, you snipper-snapper! I'll get the King's letter sent to your house—indeed I will!

AMAL No, no, please don't trouble yourself about it.

HEADMAN And why not, pray! I'll tell the King about you and he won't be very long. One of his footmen will come along presently for news of you. Madhav's impudence staggers me. If the King hears of this, that'll take some of his nonsense out of him. [*Exit*]

*****5

AMAL Who are you walking there? How your anklets tinkle! Do stop a while, dear, won't you?

[A Girl enters]

GIRL I haven't a moment to spare; it is already late!

AMAL I see, you don't wish to stop; I don't care to stay on here either.

GIRL You make me think of some late star of the morning! Whatever's the matter with you?

AMAL I don't know; the doctor won't let me out.

GIRL Ah me! Don't then! Should listen to the doctor. People'll be cross with you if you're naughty. I know, always looking out and watching must make you feel tired. Let me close the window a bit for you.

AMAL No, don't, only this one's open! All the others are shut. But will you tell me who you are? Don't seem to know you.

GIRL I am Sudha.

AMAL What Sudha?

SUDHA Don't you know? Daughter of the flower-seller here.

AMAL What do *you* do?

SUDHA I gather flowers in my basket.

AMAL Oh, flower gathering! That is why your feet seem so glad and your anklets jingle so merrily as you walk. Wish I could be out too. Then I would pick some flowers for you from the very topmost branches right out of sight.

SUDHA Would you really? Do you know more about flowers than I?

AMAL Yes, I *do*, quite as much. I know all about Champa of the fairy tale and his seven brothers. If only they let me, I'll go right into the dense forest where you can't find your way. And where the honey-sipping hummingbird rocks himself on the end of the thinnest branch, I will flower out as a champa. Would you be my sister Parul?

SUDHA You are silly! How can I be sister Parul when I am Sudha and my mother is Sasi, the flower-seller? I have to weave so many garlands a day. It would be jolly if I could lounge here like you!

AMAL What would you do then, all the day long?

SUDHA I could have great times with my doll Benay the bride, and Meni the pussycat and—but I say it is getting late and I mustn't stop, or I won't find a single flower.

AMAL Oh, wait a little longer; I do like it so!

SUDHA Ah, well—now don't you be naughty. Be good and sit still and on my way back home with the flowers I'll come and talk with you.

AMAL And you'll let me have a flower then?

SUDHA No, how can I? It has to be paid for.

AMAL I'll pay when I grow up—before I leave to look for work out on the other side of that stream there.

SUDHA Very well, then.

AMAL And you'll come back when you have your flowers?

SUDHA I will.

AMAL You will, really?

SUDHA Yes, I will.

AMAL You won't forget me? I am Amal, remember that.

SUDHA. I won't forget you, you'll see. [*Exit*]

*****6

[A Troop of Boys enter]

AMAL Say, brothers, where are you all off to? Stop here a little.

BOY 1 We're off to play.

AMAL What will you play at, brothers?

BOY 2 We'll play at being ploughmen.

BOY 1 [*Showing a stick*] This is our ploughshare.

BOY 2 We two are the pair of oxen.

AMAL And you're going to play the whole day?

BOY 3 Yes, all day long.

AMAL And you'll come back home in the evening by the road along the river bank?

BOY 1 Yes.

AMAL Do you pass our house on your way home?

BOY 3 You come out to play with us, yes do.

AMAL Doctor won't let me out.

BOY 1 Doctor! Suppose the likes of you mind the doctor. Let's be off; it is getting late.

AMAL Don't. Why not play on the road near this window? I could watch you then.

BOY 3 What can we play at here?

AMAL With all these toys of mine lying about. Here you are, have them. I can't play alone. They are getting dirty and are of no use to me.

BOY 2 How jolly! What fine toys! Look, here's a ship. There's old mother Jatai; say, chaps, ain't he a gorgeous sepoy? And you'll let us have them all? You don't really mind?

AMAL No, not a bit; have them by all means.

BOY 1 You don't want them back?

AMAL Oh, no, I shan't want them.

BOY 2 Say, won't you get a scolding for this?

AMAL No one will scold me. But will you play with them in front of our door for a while every morning? I'll get you new ones when these are old.

BOY 3 Oh, yes, we will. Say, chaps, put these sepoy into a line. We'll play at war; where can we get a musket? Oh, look here, this bit of reed will do nicely. Say, but you're off to sleep already.

AMAL I'm afraid I'm sleepy. I don't know, I feel like it at times. I have been sitting a long while and I'm tired; my back aches.

BOY 1 It's only early noon now. How is it you're sleepy? Listen! The gong's sounding the first watch.

AMAL Yes, dong, dong, dong, it tolls me to sleep.

BOY 2 We had better go then. We'll come in again to-morrow morning.

AMAL I want to ask you something before you go. You are always out—do you know of the King's postmen?

BOY 3 Yes, quite well.

AMAL Who are they? Tell me their names.

BOY 1 One's Badal, another's Sarat. There's so many of them.

AMAL Do you think they will know me if there's a letter for me?

BOY 2 Surely, if your name's on the letter they will find you out.

AMAL When you call in to-morrow morning, will you bring one of them along so that he'll know me?

BOY 3 Yes, if you like.

CURTAIN

*****7

THE POST OFFICE - ACT II

[*Amal in Bed*]

AMAL Can't I go near the window to-day, Uncle? Would the doctor mind that too?

MADHAV Yes, darling, you see you've made yourself worse squatting there day after day.

AMAL Oh, no, I don't know if it's made me more ill, but I always feel well when I'm there.

MADHAV No, you don't; you squat there and make friends with the whole lot of people round here, old and young, as if they are holding a fair right under my eaves—flesh and blood won't stand that strain. Just see—your face is quite pale.

AMAL Uncle, I fear my fakir'll pass and not see me by the window.

MADHAV Your fakir, whoever's that?

AMAL He comes and chats to me of the many lands where he's been. I love to hear him.

MADHAV How's that? I don't know of any fakirs.

AMAL This is about the time he comes in. I beg of you, by your dear feet, ask him in for a moment to talk to me here.

[*Gaffer Enters in a Fakir's Guise*]

AMAL There you are. Come here, Fakir, by my bedside.

MADHAV Upon my word, but this is—

GAFFER [*Winking hard*] I am the fakir.

MADHAV It beats my reckoning what you're not.

AMAL Where have you been this time, Fakir?

FAKIR To the Isle of Parrots. I am just back.

MADHAV The Parrots' Isle!

FAKIR Is it so very astonishing? Am I like you, man? A journey doesn't cost a thing. I tramp just where I like.

AMAL [*Clapping*] How jolly for you! Remember your promise to take me with you as your follower when I'm well.

FAKIR Of course, and I'll teach you such secrets too of travelling that nothing in sea or forest or mountain can bar your way.

MADHAV What's all this rigmarole?

GAFFER Amal, my dear, I bow to nothing in sea or mountain; but if the doctor joins in with this uncle of yours, then I with all my magic must own myself beaten.

AMAL No. Uncle shan't tell the doctor. And I promise to lie quiet; but the day I am well, off I go with the Fakir and nothing in sea or mountain or torrent shall stand in my way.

MADHAV Fie, dear child, don't keep on harping upon going! It makes me so sad to hear you talk so.

AMAL Tell me, Fakir, what the Parrots' Isle is like.

GAFFER It's a land of wonders; it's a haunt of birds. There's no man; and they neither speak nor walk, they simply sing and they fly.

AMAL How glorious! And it's by some sea?

GAFFER Of course. It's on the sea.

AMAL And green hills are there?

GAFFER Indeed, they live among the green hills; and in the time of the sunset when there is a red glow on the hillside, all the birds with their green wings flock back to their nests.

AMAL And there are waterfalls!

GAFFER Dear me, of course; you don't have a hill without its waterfalls. Oh, it's like molten diamonds; and, my dear, what dances they have! Don't they make the pebbles sing as they rush over them to the sea. No devil of a doctor can stop them for a moment. The birds looked upon me as nothing but a man, quite a trifling creature without wings—and they would have nothing to do with me. Were it not so I would build a small cabin for myself among their crowd of nests and pass my days counting the sea waves.

AMAL How I wish I were a bird! Then—

GAFFER But that would have been a bit of a job; I hear you've fixed up with the dairyman to be a hawker of curds when you grow up; I'm afraid such business won't flourish among birds; you might land yourself into serious loss.

MADHAV Really this is too much. Between you two I shall turn crazy. Now, I'm off.

AMAL Has the dairyman been, Uncle?

MADHAV And why shouldn't he? He won't bother his head running errands for your pet fakir, in and out among the nests in his Parrots' Isle. But he has left a jar of curd for you saying that he is rather busy with his niece's wedding in the village, and he has got to order a band at Kamlipara.

AMAL But he is going to marry me to his little niece.

GAFFER Dear me, we are in a fix now.

AMAL He said she would find me a lovely little bride with a pair of pearl drops in her ears and dressed in a lovely red saree; and in the morning she would milk with her own hands the black cow and feed me with warm milk with foam on it from a brand new earthen cruse; and in the evenings she would carry the

lamp round the cow-house, and then come and sit by me to tell me tales of Champa and his six brothers.

GAFFER How delicious! The prospect tempts even me, a hermit! But never mind, dear, about this wedding. Let it be. I tell you when you wed there'll be no lack of nieces in his household.

MADHAV Shut up! This is more than I can stand. *[Exit]*

*****8

AMAL Fakir, now that Uncle's off, just tell me, has the King sent me a letter to the Post Office?

GAFFER I gather that his letter has already started; but it's still on the way.

AMAL On the way? Where is it? Is it on that road winding through the trees which you can follow to the end of the forest when the sky is quite clear after rain?

GAFFER That's so. You know all about it already.

AMAL I do, everything.

GAFFER So I see, but how?

AMAL I can't say; but it's quite clear to me. I fancy I've seen it often in days long gone by. How long ago I can't tell. Do you know when? I can see it all: there, the King's postman coming down the hillside alone, a lantern in his left hand and on his back a bag of letters climbing down for ever so long, for days and nights, and where at the foot of the mountain the waterfall becomes a stream he takes to the footpath on the bank and walks on through the rye; then comes the sugarcane field and he disappears into the narrow lane cutting through the tall stems of sugarcanes; then he reaches the open meadow where the cricket chirps and where there is not a single man to be seen, only the snipe wagging their tails and poking at the mud with their bills. I can feel him coming nearer and nearer and my heart becomes glad.

GAFFER My eyes aren't young; but you make me see all the same.

AMAL Say, Fakir, do you know the King who has this Post Office?

GAFFER I do; I go to him for my alms every day.

AMAL Good! When I get well, I must have my alms too from him, mayn't I?

GAFFER You won't need to ask, my dear, he'll give it to you of his own accord.

AMAL No, I would go to his gate and cry, "Victory to thee, O King!" and dancing to the tabor's sound, ask for alms. Won't it be nice?

GAFFER It would be splendid, and if you're with me, I shall have my full share. But what'll you ask?

AMAL I shall say, "Make me your postman, that I may go about lantern in hand, delivering your letters from door to door. Don't let me stay at home all day!"

GAFFER What is there to be sad for, my child, even were you to stay at home?

AMAL It isn't sad. When they shut me in here first I felt the day was so long. Since the King's Post Office I like it more and more being indoors, and as I think I shall get a letter one day, I feel quite happy and then I don't mind being quiet and alone. I wonder if I shall make out what'll be in the King's letter?

GAFFER Even if you didn't wouldn't it be enough if it just bore your name?

[Madhav enters]

MADHAV Have you any idea of the trouble you've got me into, between you two?

GAFFER What's the matter?

MADHAV I hear you've let it get rumoured about that the King has planted his office here to send messages to both of you.

GAFFER Well, what about it?

MADHAV Our headman Panchanan has had it told to the King anonymously.

GAFFER Aren't we aware that everything reaches the King's ears?

MADHAV Then why don't you look out? Why take the King's name in vain? You'll bring me to ruin if you do.

AMAL Say, Fakir, will the King be cross?

GAFFER Cross, nonsense! And with a child like you and a fakir such as I am. Let's see if the King be angry, and then won't I give him a piece of my mind.

AMAL Say, Fakir, I've been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. I long to be quiet. I don't feel like talking at all. Won't the King's letter come? Suppose this room melts away all on a sudden, suppose—

GAFFER [*Fanning Amal*] The letter's sure to come to-day, my boy.

*****9

[*Doctor enters*]

DOCTOR And how do you feel to-day?

AMAL Feel awfully well to-day, Doctor. All pain seems to have left me.

DOCTOR [*Aside to Madhav*] Don't quite like the look of that smile. Bad sign that, his feeling well! Chakradhan has observed—

MADHAV For goodness sake, Doctor, leave Chakradhan alone. Tell me what's going to happen?

DOCTOR Can't hold him in much longer, I fear! I warned you before—This looks like a fresh exposure.

MADHAV No, I've used the utmost care, never let him out of doors; and the windows have been shut almost all the time.

DOCTOR There's a peculiar quality in the air to-day. As I came in I found a fearful draught through your front door. That's most hurtful. Better lock it at once. Would it matter if this kept your visitors off for two or three days? If someone happens to call unexpectedly—there's the back door. You had better shut this window as well; it's letting in the sunset rays only to keep the patient awake.

MADHAV Amal has shut his eyes. I expect he is sleeping. His face tells me—Oh, Doctor, I bring in a child who is a stranger and love him as my own, and now I suppose I must lose him!

DOCTOR What's that? There's your headman sailing in! —What a bother! I must be going, brother. You had better stir about and see to the doors being properly fastened. I will send on a strong dose directly I get home. Try it on him—it may save him at last, if he can be saved at all. [*Exeunt Madhav and Doctor.*]

*****10

[*The Headman enters*]

HEADMAN Hello, urchin!

GAFFER [*Rising hastily*] 'Sh, be quiet.

AMAL No, Fakir, did you think I was asleep? I wasn't. I can hear everything; yes, and voices far away. I feel that mother and father are sitting by my pillow and speaking to me.

[*Madhav enters*]

HEADMAN I say, Madhav, I hear you hobnob with bigwigs nowadays.

MADHAV Spare me your jests, Headman, we are but common people.

HEADMAN But your child here is expecting a letter from the King.

MADHAV Don't you take any notice of him, a mere foolish boy!

HEADMAN Indeed, why not! It'll beat the King hard to find a better family! Don't you see why the King plants his new Post Office right before your window? Why there's a letter for you from the King, urchin.

AMAL [*Starting up*] Indeed, really!

HEADMAN How can it be false? You're the King's chum. Here's your letter [*showing a blank slip of paper*]. Ha, ha, ha! This is the letter.

AMAL Please don't mock me. Say, Fakir, is it so?

GAFFER Yes, my dear. I as Fakir tell you it is his letter.

AMAL How is it I can't see? It all looks so blank to me. What is there in the letter, Mr. Headman?

HEADMAN The King says, "I am calling on you shortly; you had better arrange puffed rice offerings for me. —Palace fare is quite tasteless to me now." Ha! ha! ha!

MADHAV [*With folded palms*] I beseech you, headman, don't you joke about these things—

GAFFER Cutting jokes indeed, dare he!

MADHAV Are you out of your mind too, Gaffer?

GAFFER Out of my mind, well then I am; I can read plainly that the King writes he will come himself to see Amal, with the state Physician.

AMAL Fakir, Fakir, 'sh, his trumpet! Can't you hear?

HEADMAN Ha! ha! ha! I fear he won't until he's a bit more off his head.

AMAL Mr. Headman, I thought you were cross with me and didn't love me. I never could think you would fetch me the King's letter. Let me wipe the dust off your feet.

HEADMAN This little child does have an instinct of reverence. Though a little silly, he has a good heart.

AMAL It's hard on the fourth watch now, I suppose—Hark the gong, "Dong, dong, ding," "Dong, dong, ding." Is the evening star up? How is it I can't see—

GAFFER Oh, the windows are all shut, I'll open them.

[A knocking outside]

MADHAV What's that? —Who is it—what a bother!

VOICE *[From outside]* Open the door.

MADHAV Say, Headman—Hope they're not robbers.

HEADMAN Who's there? —It's Panchanan, the headman, *(calls)*—Aren't you afraid of the like of me? Fancy! The noise has ceased! Panchanan's voice carries far. —Yes, show me the biggest robbers!

MADHAV *[Peering out of the window]* I should think the noise has ceased. They've smashed the door.

*****11

[*The King's Herald enters*]

HERALD Our Sovereign King comes to-night!

HEADMAN My God!

AMAL At what hour of the night, Herald?

HERALD On the second watch.

AMAL When from the city gates my friend the watchman will strike his gong, "ding dong ding, ding dong ding"—then?

HERALD Yes, then. The King sends his greatest Physician to attend on his young friend.

[*State Physician enters*]

PHYSICIAN What's this? How close it is here! Open wide all the doors and windows.
[*Feeling Amal's body*] How do you feel, my child?

AMAL I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.

PHYSICIAN Will you feel well enough to leave your bed with the King when he comes in the middle watches of the night?

AMAL Of course, I'm dying to be about for ever so long. I'll ask the King to find me the polar star.—I must have seen it often, but I don't know exactly which it is.

PHYSICIAN He will tell you everything. [*To Madhav*] Will you go about and arrange flowers through the room for the King's visit? [*Indicating the Headman*] We can't have that person in here.

AMAL No, let him be, Doctor. He is a friend. It was he who brought me the King's letter.

PHYSICIAN Very well, my child. He may remain if he is a friend of yours.

MADHAV [*Whispering into Amal's ear*] My child, the King loves you. He is coming himself. Beg for a gift from him. You know our humble circumstances.

AMAL Don't you worry, Uncle.—I've made up my mind about it.

MADHAV What is it, my child?

AMAL I shall ask him to make me one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door.

MADHAV [*Slapping his forehead*] Alas, is that all?

AMAL What'll be our offerings to the King, Uncle, when he comes?

HERALD He has commanded puffed rice.

AMAL Puffed rice! Say, Headman, you're right. You said so. You knew all we didn't.

HEADMAN If you send word to my house then I could manage for the King's advent really nice—

PHYSICIAN No need at all. Now be quiet all of you. Sleep is coming over him. I'll sit by his pillow; he's dropping into slumber. Blow out the oil-lamp. Only let the star-light stream in. Hush, he slumbers.

MADHAV [*Addressing Gaffer*] What are you standing there for like a statue, folding your palms.—I am nervous.—Say, are they good omens? Why are they darkening the room? How will star-light help?

GAFFER Silence, unbeliever.

[*Sudha enters*]

SUDHA Amal!

PHYSICIAN He's asleep.

SUDHA I have some flowers for him. Mayn't I give them into his own hand?

PHYSICIAN Yes, you may.

SUDHA When will he be awake?

PHYSICIAN Directly the King comes and calls him.

SUDHA Will you whisper a word for me in his ear?

PHYSICIAN What shall I say?

SUDHA Tell him Sudha has not forgotten him.



CURTAIN

*****12

About The Post Office (play) From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

Original language: Bengali

Setting: Contemporary rural Bengal

The Post Office (Bengali: Dak Ghar) is a 1912 play by Rabindranath Tagore. It concerns Amal, a child confined to his adoptive uncle's home by an incurable disease. W. Andrew Robinson and Krishna Dutta note that the play "continues to occupy a special place in [Tagore's] reputation, both within Bengal and in the wider world."^[1] It was written in four days.^[2]

Amal stands in Madhav's courtyard and talks to passers-by, and asks in particular about the places they go. The construction of a new post office nearby prompts the imaginative Amal to fantasize about receiving a letter from the King or being his postman. The village headman mocks Amal, and pretends the illiterate child has received a letter from the king promising that his royal physician will come to attend him. The physician really does come, with a herald to announce the imminent arrival of the king; Amal, however, dies as Sudha comes to bring him flowers.

W.B. Yeats was the first person to produce an English-language version of the play; he also wrote a preface to it.^[3] It was performed in English for the first time in 1913 by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, directed by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory; this production transferred to the Court Theatre, London, later the same year.^[4] The Bengali original was staged at Tagore's Jorasanko theatre in Calcutta in 1917.^[5] It had a successful run in Germany with 105 performances and its themes of liberation from captivity and zest for life resonated in its performances in concentration camps where it was staged during World War II.^[6] Juan Ramón Jiménez translated it into Spanish; it was translated into French by André Gide and read on the radio the night before Paris fell to the Nazis. A Polish version was performed under the supervision of Janusz Korczak in the Warsaw ghetto.^[1]