

to shave. Looks at his nails. Glances at the pair of tire-made sandals. Sunshine trembles on the side opposite to the house. Leaves rustle. The children are screaming their heads off. His youngest son follows them, dragging his crippled foot.

While pulling down his heavy, wet, cotton pants his third son, unknowingly kicks the crippled one, who rolls down the verandah. The man looks at the fallen creature's pitiful, scared face. With two feet skyward, naked, as his son heads down to meet his fate, the man screams, "I've fallen, I've fallen."

His wife comes running, lifting her foul-smelling sari to stand near him and asks, "You have fallen?" Dumbfounded, he says, licking his lips, ignoring his tea and puffed-rice for a moment, "No, not me. There, Badshah, it's Badshah that's fallen down. Chengiz made him fall down." While picking up the child they see blood, a lot of blood and a smell to his shirt.

He starts chewing the puffed rice again as if nothing has happened. Everybody is crowding around in a knot staring wide-eyed at the hurt child when out of the blue his wife starts to beat all the boys and girls around her. Wife, son, daughter, a family. I have everything, don't I, he thinks all of a sudden.

"The bleeding isn't stopping," his wife complains

in a contemptuous voice. "Wash it with Dettol," he says. "We have no Dettol," she cries. "No Dettol?" He is becoming the man again, "Are you swallowing up everything? Do you think everything in the world is food? Why do you eat everything?" His wife answers, "If that's the case, why don't you get me some poison. That will do me some good at least." Like a snake he then hisses, "The bastard has a lot of blood, how much can he lose?" With blood all over him his son cries out "Papa, Pappa." But he doesn't have any time now. He goes to the water tap, clears his nose, coughs, massages some oil on his navel, and pours buckets of water on his head. Then eats and starts for office.

When he returns from his office early in the afternoon, nobody recognizes him. In his shapeless shoes, dirty clothes, a canvas bag in hand, he is just like another one in the crowd. He stumbles, halts, then looks at the shops, reads the billboards, neon signs and stops in front of the cinema hall. He reads the movie poster and comes to know that tonight they will show the movie of an old man going out to the sea for fishing. Since he got his salary today and knows the story, he buys a ticket without the slightest hesitation and enters the movie house.

He comes out with a memory of the lion. The sea remains imprinted on his heart.

Then he enters the best hotel in the town, eats a sumptuous dinner utterly ignoring the neglectful attitude of the waiters and the hotel guards. He comes out, buys a dress for each of his children. Buys some cosmetics for his wife. Buys some other things his wife has been asking for long. With all his purchases, he returns home, chewing betel nut. Well, I got some extra money, he told his wife beforehand in order to relieve her anxiety.

A festival starts in that small room. His wife wears her best sari, the children don their new clothes. The bed linen is changed, and he sits in their midst like a king. Talking, laughing, smoking. Later, the children go to sleep, and he, embracing his wife willingly for the first time in many years, goes to sleep too. He smells naphthalene balls in his wife's sari and suddenly the *neem* fragrance rushes into the room through the open window.

But next day's morning is the one that first discovers that the man had kicked away this family life brimming with sweet happiness to hang from the ceiling.



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(TRANSLATED BY SABREENA AHMED)

He cannot imagine that it has happened to him. In fact, he cannot believe that such an incident may have happened at all. He has seen it taking place in others' lives earlier. But never for a moment has he been prepared for the same thing to happen to him.

Where is he now? Suddenly he remembers that he is lying in his room. The stench of urine tickles his nostrils. Maybe it's Nilu. She has stepped into her eighth year, but the habit of bed-wetting has not stopped. Her mother seems to be busy managing this mishap. Like a crucifix, she has hung a bunch of

amulets round their daughter's neck. Still, Nilu happily wets her bed. He does not feel like sleeping in the room. He is up to his neck in a stinking pond of urine. The damp air brushes against his nose, eyes and body - drowning him bit by bit. The airless, stuffy atmosphere is suffocating. He tries to move his arms. But what's this? He becomes numb with fear - his arms are not there!

He tries to move his legs. But no! His legs are lost. Has he turned into a armless and legless thing? As he tries to open his eyes, darkness entraps him as if he is in a tomb. Such grave darkness looms only on nights of the new moon. Birds are not singing - the leaves

have stopped rustling. Even the wind has forgotten to breathe and everything is quiet and motionless. He tries to open his eyes again. A spot of light dazzles his eyes as his lids open a little. The darkness slowly wears off. It is frightening! Seven suns are dancing together! Not merely one or two but seven suns! Is he on earth? Or is it some other world? Is it the world after death? He opens his eyes again and the number of suns reduces. Now he can see five suns. Slowly, they become fewer: five, four, three, two, one... Yes, now it is only one sun shining brightly ahead of him. Gradually it moves away, the distance increases. And after a while, the sun