

POETRY

KACHA AND DEVAYANI

Rabindranath Tagore



7. Kacha and Devayani

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Young Kacha came from Paradise to learn the secret of immortality from a Sage who taught the Titans, and whose daughter Devayani fell in love with him.

KACHA : The time has come for me to take leave, Devayani; I have long sat at your father's feet, but to-day he completed his teaching. Graciously allow me to go back to the land of the Gods whence I came.

DEVAYANI : You have, as you desired, won that rare knowledge coveted by the Gods;—but think, do you aspire after nothing further?

KACHA : Nothing.

DEVAYANI : Nothing at all! Dive into the bottom of your heart; does no timid wish lurk there, fearful lest it be blighted?

KACHA : For me the sun of fulfilment has risen, and the stars have faded in its light. I have mastered the knowledge which gives life.

DEVAYANI : Then you must be the one happy being in creation. Alas! Now for the first time I feel what torture these days spent in an alien land have been to you, though we offered you our best.

KACHA : Not so much bitterness! Smile, and give me leave to go.

DEVAYANI : Smile! But, my friend, this is not your native Paradise. Smiles are not so cheap in this world, where thirst, like a worm in the flower, gnaws at the heart's core; where baffled desire hovers round the desired, and memory never ceases to sigh foolishly after vanished joy.

KACHA : Devayani, tell me how I have offended?

DEVAYANI : Is it so easy for you to leave this forest, which through long years has lavished on you shade and song? Do you not feel how the wind wails through these glimmering shadows, and dry leaves whirl in the air, like ghosts of lost hope;—while you alone, who part from us, have a smile on your lips?

KACHA : This forest has been a second mother to me, for here I have been born again. My love for it shall never dwindle.

DEVAYANI : When you had driven the cattle to graze on the lawn, yonder banyan tree spread a hospitable shade for your tired limbs against the mid-day heat.

KACHA : I bow to thee, Lord of the Forest! Remember me, when under thy shade other students chant their lessons to an accompaniment of bees humming and leaves rustling.

DEVAYANI : And do not forget our Venumati, whose swift water is one stream of singing love.

KACHA : I shall ever remember her, the dear companion of my exile, who, like a busy village girl, smiles on her errand of ceaseless service and croons a simple song.

DEVAYANI : But, friend, let me also remind you that you had another companion whose thoughts were vainly busy to make you forget an exile's cares.

KACHA : The memory of her has become a part of my life.

DEVAYANI : I recall the day when, little more than a boy, you first arrived. You stood there, near the hedge of the garden, a smile in your eyes.

KACHA : And I saw you gathering flowers—clad in white, like the dawn bathed in radiance. And I said, "Make me proud by allowing me to help you!"

DEVAYANI : I asked in surprise who you were, and you meekly answered that you were the son of Vrihaspati, a divine sage at the court of the God Indra, and desired to learn from my father that secret spell which can revive the dead.

KACHA : I feared lest the Master, the teacher of the Titans, those rivals of the Gods, should refuse to accept me for a disciple.

DEVAYANI : But he could not refuse me when I pleaded your cause, so greatly he loves his daughter.

KACHA : Thrice had the jealous Titans slain me, and thrice you prevailed on your father to bring me back to life; therefore my gratitude can never die.

DEVAYANI : Gratitude! Forget all—I shall not grieve. Do you only remember benefits? Let them perish! If after the day's lessons, in the evening solitude, some strange tremor of joy shook your heart, remember that—but not gratitude. If, as someone passed, a snatch of song got tangled among your texts or the swing of a robe fluttered your studies with delight, remember that when at leisure in your Paradise. What, benefits only!—and neither beauty nor love nor...?

KACHA : Some things are beyond the power of words.

DEVAYANI : Yes, yes, I know. My love has sounded your heart's deepest, and makes me bold to speak in defiance of your reserve. Never leave me! Remain here! Fame gives no happiness. Friend, you cannot now escape, for your secret is mine!

KACHA : No, no, Devayani.

DEVAYANI : How "No"? Do not lie to me! Love's insight is divine. Day after day, in raising your head, in a glance, in the motion of your hands, your love spoke as the sea speaks through its waves. On a sudden my voice would send your heart quivering through your limbs—have I never witnessed it? I know you, and therefore you are my captive forever. The very king of your Gods shall not sever this bond.

KACHA : Was it for this, Devayani, that I toiled, away from home and kindred, all these years?

DEVAYANI : Why not? Is only knowledge precious? Is love cheap? Lay hold on this moment. Have the courage to own that a woman's heart is worth all as much penance as men undergo for the sake of power, knowledge, or reputation.

KACHA : I gave my solemn promise to the Gods that I would bring them this lore of deathless life.

DEVAYANI : But is it true you had eyes for nothing save your books? That you never broke off your studies to pay me homage with flowers, never lay in wait for a chance, of an evening, to help me water my flower-beds? What made you sit by me on the grass and sing songs you brought hither from the assembly of the stars, while darkness stooped over the river bank as love droops over its own sad silence? Were these parts of a cruel conspiracy plotted in your Paradise? Was all for the sake of access to my father's heart?—and after success, were you, departing, to throw some cheap gratitude, like small coins, to the deluded door-keeper?

KACHA : What profit were there, proud woman, in knowing the truth? If I did wrong to serve you with a passionate devotion cherished in secret, I have had ample punishment. This is no time to question whether my love is true or not; my life's work awaits me. Though my heart must henceforth enclose a red flame vainly striving to devour emptiness, still I must go back to that Paradise which will nevermore be Paradise to me. I owe the Gods a new divinity, hard won by my studies, before I may think of happiness. Forgive me, Devayani, and know that my suffering is doubled by the pain I unwillingly inflict on you.

DEVAYANI : Forgiveness! You have angered my heart till it is hard and burning like a thunderbolt! You can go back to your work and your glory, but what is left for

me? Memory is a bed of thorns, and secret shame will gnaw at the roots of my life. You came like a wayfarer, sat through the sunny hours in the shade of my garden, and to while time away you plucked all its flowers and wove them into a chain. And now, parting, you snap the thread and let the flowers drop on the dust! Accursed be that great knowledge you have earned!—a burden that, though others share equally with you, will never be lightened. For lack of love may it ever remain as foreign to your life as the cold stars are to the un-espoused darkness of virgin Night!