

PLAY

THE CROWN

Rabindranath Tagore



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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

As before, no glossary reached me with this text, so a few notes on my choices. This play is set at the court of Tripura under a historical Maharaja, Amar Manikya, and dramatizes his three sons' rivalry on the eve of a war with the King of Arakan — Isha Khan, their weapons-master, is himself drawn from history, a Pathan commander in Tripura's service. I have kept honorifics that carry no clean English equivalent — *Huzoor*, *Janab*, *Jahanpanah*, *Shahenshah* (all courtly forms of address, escalating toward "Your Imperial Majesty") — since Indrakumar's mockery depends on their sound. I have rendered **যুবরাজ** as "the Crown Prince" throughout rather than transliterating it, since the play uses the title, not the personal name, for Chandramanikya in dialogue. **ক্ষত্রিয়** remains "Kshatriya," and Tripura's tutelary goddess, **ত্রিপুরেশ্বরী**, is left as "Tripureshwari."

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The chamber of Isha Khan, commander of the armies of Tripura. Rajadhar, youngest prince of Tripura, and Isha Khan. Isha Khan is occupied in cleaning his weapons.

RAJADHAR. Look here, Commander — I have told you again and again, do not call me by my bare name.

ISHA KHAN. Then by what shall I call you — by the hair, or by the ear?

RAJADHAR. I tell you plainly — if you will not preserve my honour, I shall not preserve yours either.

ISHA KHAN. If the keeping of my honour depended on your hands, I should have sold it off in the marketplace long ago, for a broken cowrie-shell. I am quite capable of preserving my own honour myself.

RAJADHAR. If that is how you mean to keep it, then in future do not call me by my bare name.

ISHA KHAN. Indeed!

RAJADHAR. Yes.

ISHA KHAN. Ha ha ha ha! And what am I to call the great Emperor of Emperors, then? Huzoor? Janab? Jahanpanah?

RAJADHAR. I am your pupil, true enough — but you forget that I am also a prince.

ISHA KHAN. I have not forgotten it easily — it is you yourself who make it so hard to remember that you are a prince.

RAJADHAR. Nor, I see, will you let me remember that you are my teacher.

ISHA KHAN. Sit down. Be quiet.

Enter Indrakumar, the second prince.

INDRAKUMAR. Khan Sahib, what's all this about?

ISHA KHAN. Listen to this, my boy — a fine piece of comedy. Here is this fellow, the youngest of you all, and unless he is addressed as Jahanpanah, as Shahenshah, his honour is quite gone — such a delicate thing, his honour!

INDRAKUMAR. You don't say! Is it true! Ha ha ha ha!

RAJADHAR. Be quiet, brother.

INDRAKUMAR. And what must I call you, then? Jahanpanah! Ha ha ha ha! Shahenshah!

RAJADHAR. Brother, I tell you, be quiet.

INDRAKUMAR. Janab, it's a hard thing to keep quiet — my sides are splitting with laughter, Huzoor!

RAJADHAR. You are an utter fool.

INDRAKUMAR. Cool down, brother, cool down. Keep your wits to yourself — I have no wish to rob you of them.

ISHA KHAN. His wits have grown remarkably of late.

INDRAKUMAR. Quite beyond reach — we shall need a ladder to get at them.

Enter the Crown Prince Chandramanikya and Maharaja Amaramanikya, with attendants.

RAJADHAR. I have a complaint to lay before the Maharaja.

MAHARAJA. What has happened?

RAJADHAR. Isha Khan dishonours me again and again, in spite of my repeated protests. This must be judged.

ISHA KHAN. No one dishonours you — you bring the dishonour upon yourself. There are other princes besides you. They remember that I am their teacher, and I remember that they are my pupils — no question of honour or dishonour ever arises between us.

MAHARAJA. Commander, the princes are of an age now — their dignity must, after all, be properly maintained.

ISHA KHAN. In the days when Your Majesty learned the art of war from me, I honoured you no less than I honour these princes now.

RAJADHAR. I do not wish to speak of the other princes, but—

ISHA KHAN. Be quiet, my child. I am speaking with your father. Forgive me, Maharaja, but when this youngest son of the royal house grows to manhood, he will wield a pen like a munshi well enough — but a sword will never become his hand. (*indicating the Crown Prince and Indrakumar*) Look here, Maharaja — here are your true princes, the very light of the royal house.

MAHARAJA. Rajadhar, do you hear what Khan Sahib says? Have you failed to satisfy him in your training at arms?

RAJADHAR. That is the fault of my fortune, not of my training. My prayer is that Your Majesty examine our skill at archery yourself.

MAHARAJA. Very well, so be it. Tomorrow we shall be at leisure — the trial shall be held tomorrow. Whichever of you wins, I shall reward him with this diamond-hilted sword of mine.

Exit.

ISHA KHAN. Well said, Rajadhar, well said! Today you have spoken like a true son of the Kshatriya line. Should you lose the trial of arms, your honour will not suffer for it. Winning and losing rest with Allah's will — but a Kshatriya's heart must hold its pride.

RAJADHAR. Let it be, Commander — keep your praise stored up for the other princes. I have gone this long without it; I have no need of it today either.

CROWN PRINCE. Don't be angry, brother Rajadhar. The Commander's plain scolding lives entirely in his mouth, like that white beard of his — nowhere else. Let him see one single merit in you, and he forgets everything else on the spot. Should you win the trial of arms, you will see — no one will reward you more wholeheartedly than Khan Sahib himself.

RAJADHAR. Brother, tonight is the full moon — tonight, when the tigers come down to drink at the Gomati river, shall we not go out hunting?

CROWN PRINCE. Very well. If it's your wish, we shall go.

INDRAKUMAR. What a wonder! Rajadhar taking a fancy to hunting! Such a thing has never been seen before.

ISHA KHAN. He, no fancy for hunting! He goes about hunting the very largest game of all. There is not a two-legged creature in this whole royal court who has not, at one time or another, been caught in some snare of his.

CROWN PRINCE. Commander, your sword and your tongue are alike — both keen-edged. Whatever they fall upon, they never leave without cutting straight to the quick.

RAJADHAR. Brother, don't trouble yourself on my account. However sharp Khan Sahib whets his tongue, he'll never manage to scratch my quick.

ISHA KHAN. Who could ever find your quick, my boy! It's buried far too deep.

INDRAKUMAR. Take this, for instance — this sudden fancy of yours tonight, for hunting. Its inner meaning isn't easy to make out.

CROWN PRINCE. Come now, Indrakumar! You're making a habit of wounding Rajadhar with every word you speak.

RAJADHAR. And I have made a habit, in turn, of feeling no pain from those wounds.

INDRAKUMAR. Brother, do you truly mean to go hunting tonight?

CROWN PRINCE. Going hunting with you, brother, is a trial in itself. One is reduced to hunting nothing but vegetables. You go into the forest and bring back great beasts, while the rest of us wear ourselves out hunting nothing grander than gourds and pumpkins and jackfruit.

ISHA KHAN. (*clapping Indrakumar on the back*) The Crown Prince speaks truly, my son. Your arrow flies before all the rest, and never fails to strike home — who could ever match you!

INDRAKUMAR. No, brother, don't jest. If you don't go, who will there be to hunt at all!

CROWN PRINCE. Very well, let us go. Rajadhar has set his heart on it today — I won't disappoint him.

INDRAKUMAR. And why, brother — is it that we mustn't go simply because I wish it?

CROWN PRINCE. What a thing to say, brother — I go with you every single day!

INDRAKUMAR. And so, I suppose, it's grown stale?

CROWN PRINCE. It hurts me deeply when you twist my words like that.

INDRAKUMAR. No, brother, I was only teasing — come, let's go and get ready.

ISHA KHAN. Indrakumar can bear ten arrows in his breast, but he cannot bear the slightest neglect from his elder brother.

Exeunt all but the attendants.

THE ATTENDANTS

FIRST. This business doesn't sit well with me, I must say. Everyone knows well enough the limits of our youngest prince's archery — what can it mean, that he wishes to come forward against the middle prince in a trial of arms?

SECOND. Some strike the mark with an arrow, and some with their wits.

FIRST. That's the very thing that worries me. If, in a trial of arms, one uses one's wits instead of one's weapon — that's nothing but cunning.

THIRD. Look here, Bangshi — whether it's the weapon that does the work or the wits, my advice to you is: don't go running that tongue of yours in the middle of it all. If you want to keep your place, hold your peace.

SECOND. Banamali speaks truly. The moment the youngest prince's name comes up, you say whatever comes into your head. They are the king's sons — it isn't for us to judge which is good and which is ill. All the same — pray to God that our Crown Prince may live long, and that our middle prince may stay ever at his side and guard him, like Lakshman guarding his brother. Better not to bring the youngest prince's name into it at all.

FIRST. It isn't as though I bring it up on purpose. Our middle prince is a simple, open-hearted man — no fear in him, and no scheming either — and I am forever afraid of what trouble that other one, whose name I won't speak, might yet drag him into.

SECOND. Come, come — here he comes.

FIRST. And there, with him, is his cousin Dhurandhar too — Saturn joined now by Mars.

Exit.

Rajadhar and Dhurandhar.

RAJADHAR. It has become unbearable.

DHURANDHAR. And yet you show no lack of skill in bearing it. This business with Indrakumar has been going on, more or less, since the day you were born — and yet I see no sign that it has become unbearable.

RAJADHAR. What use is there in showing signs? When I show it, I shall show it in action, once and for all. An opportunity has come. This time, in the trial of arms, I mean to strike the mark.

DHURANDHAR. In Indrakumar's breast, do you mean?

RAJADHAR. Not his breast — his pride. This time I mean to win the trial, and pierce that arrogance of his clean through.

DHURANDHAR. And you call it an opportunity, simply to beat Indrakumar at a trial of arms?

RAJADHAR. Does opportunity lie in the point of an arrow? Opportunity lies at the tip of one's wits. But you must do something for me.

DHURANDHAR. I have always done your work for you — and got nothing for it in return.

RAJADHAR. Patience brings its own reward. By whatever trick you can manage, you must get into brother Indrakumar's armoury, take his name-marked arrow out of the very first slot of his

quiver, and set my own name-marked arrow there instead. Exchange my arrow for his, and my fortune will be exchanged along with it.

DHURANDHAR. I understand all that well enough — but what of my own life? If that goes, there'll be no exchanging it back with anyone.

RAJADHAR. You've nothing to fear — I am here.

DHURANDHAR. You are always here, true enough — but the fear is here as well. Remember, when you set your heart on that silver-plated bow of Indrakumar's, it was I who fetched it and hid it away in your room. And when it all came out in the end, Indrakumar, in his contempt, simply gave you the bow outright — but the insult he heaped on me will not leave me, not if I live a hundred years. You were there then too, brother, and I remember well just how much protection you managed to offer.

RAJADHAR. Now your moment has come — set about repaying that insult.

DHURANDHAR. It is never quite clear when anyone's moment truly comes. For a weak man, the better gift is the power to digest an insult; the taste for revenge is not a safe one for him to indulge. There, they're all coming now. I'll be off. The moment Indrakumar sees the two of us together, whatever he has to say will drip with anything but honey — and as for Isha Khan, I've no great hope he'll show me any more affection than he shows you.

Exit.

SCENE TWO

At the door of Indrakumar's armoury.

INDRAKUMAR. Well, Pratap, what's this about? Why have I been summoned so suddenly to the armoury door?

PRATAP. The Middle Queen Mother sent word that a living weapon has got into your armoury, and that you had better find out whether it's the Wind-Weapon, or the Serpent-Noose, or what.

INDRAKUMAR. You don't say, Pratap — do such things still happen, even in this degenerate age of Kali?

PRATAP. Indeed, my prince, it happens only in the Kali Yuga — never in the Golden Age. Open the door, and you'll understand everything at once.

INDRAKUMAR. So it seems — I can hear footsteps! (*He opens the door; Rajadhar comes out.*) What's this! Rajadhar! Ha ha ha ha — did someone mistake you for a weapon! Ha ha ha ha!

RAJADHAR. The Middle Queen shut me up in here as a joke.

INDRAKUMAR. This room is no place for idle jokes — the jests kept here are terribly sharp-edged ones. And here you've come, of all people!

RAJADHAR. Meaning to go hunting tonight, I went to fetch my weapons, and found every one of them gone to rust. I've sent them all off to be cleaned for tomorrow's trial. So I came to the Queen to see about borrowing a few weapons of yours.

INDRAKUMAR. So she's gone and lent you the entire armoury at once, has she! Ha ha ha ha! Then why come out again? Go on, go back in. Has your loan already run out? Ha ha ha ha!

RAJADHAR. Laugh, go on laughing. I shall laugh at this joke too, one day. But not now. I'm off, brother — I shan't go hunting after all, tonight.

Exit.

PRATAP. I don't much care for all this teasing of the young prince, my lord.

INDRAKUMAR. What is there to fear in a joke? Let him have his jest too, if he likes.

PRATAP. His jests will not be such simple ones.

SCENE THREE

The trial ground. The King, the princes, Isha Khan, a standard-bearer, and a court bard.

INDRAKUMAR. Brother, you simply must win today — nothing else will do.

CROWN PRINCE. And why won't it do! Should my arrow miss the mark, the world will go on turning exactly as it always has. And even if it wouldn't — I still see no likelihood of my winning.

INDRAKUMAR. Brother, if you lose, I shall miss the mark on purpose myself.

CROWN PRINCE. No, brother, none of that childishness. You must do credit to your teacher's name.

ISHA KHAN. Crown Prince, the time has come — take up the bow. Give it your full attention. See that your hand stays steady.

The Crown Prince looses his arrow.

ISHA KHAN. Ah — missed!

CROWN PRINCE. I gave it every attention, Khan Sahib — I simply couldn't manage to put the arrow where the attention was.

INDRAKUMAR. Not at all. Had you truly set your mind to it, you would certainly have managed it. Brother, you simply wave everything away with indifference — and it grieves me deeply to see it.

ISHA KHAN. Do you know why your brother's wits never find their way to the point of an arrow? His wits simply aren't fine enough for it.

INDRAKUMAR. Commander, that is unjust of you to say.

ISHA KHAN. *(to Rajadhar)* Prince, now it is your turn to strike the mark — let the Maharaja see.

RAJADHAR. Let it be brother's turn first.

ISHA KHAN. This is no time for arguing — obey my command.

Rajadhar looses his arrow.

ISHA KHAN. Well, well — your arrow has followed your brother's example exactly. It never so much as glanced toward the mark.

CROWN PRINCE. Brother, your arrow passed quite close by — a little more, and it might well have struck the mark.

RAJADHAR. It has struck the mark! From this distance you can't see it clearly. There — see, it has struck.

CROWN PRINCE. No, Rajadhar, your eyes deceive you — the mark has not been struck.

RAJADHAR. It's only because you have no faith in my skill at archery that you look and yet fail to see. Very well — go up close, and it will be proved.

Indrakumar takes up the bow.

CROWN PRINCE. *(to Indrakumar)* I am unskilled, brother — you oughtn't be angry with me for it. But know this for certain — should your own arrow miss its mark, that stray arrow will pierce straight through my own heart instead.

Indrakumar looses his arrow.

FROM OFFSTAGE, THE CROWD. Victory! Victory to Prince Indrakumar!

Music strikes up. The Crown Prince embraces Indrakumar.

ISHA KHAN. My son, by Allah's grace may you live long. Maharaja, the middle prince has earned the prize. Fulfil, now, what you promised.

RAJADHAR. No, Maharaja — the prize is rightfully mine. It was my own arrow that struck the mark.

MAHARAJA. It was not, certainly.

RAJADHAR. Let the Commander go and examine for himself whose arrow is lodged in the mark.

ISHA KHAN. Very well, I shall go and see.

Exit.

Isha Khan re-enters, arrow in hand.

ISHA KHAN. *(to Indrakumar)* My boy, I am an old man — surely my eyes do not deceive me? On the head of this very arrow, it seems, Rajadhar's name is written.

INDRAKUMAR. Yes — it is Rajadhar's name.

MAHARAJA. Let me see — so it is! We have all of us been mistaken, together, at once!

RAJADHAR. Not only today, Maharaja — I have always been the one mistaken about.

ISHA KHAN. I can make nothing of this.

INDRAKUMAR. I understand it well enough.

RAJADHAR. Maharaja, let there be a judgment today.

INDRAKUMAR. (*aside, to Rajadhar*) A judgment! You ask for a judgment! Then whose face will be blackened with shame! I shall not expose the disgrace of our own house — let Him who sees into every heart be your judge instead.

ISHA KHAN. What is it, my boy? There is some mystery in all this. Stone never floats on water, and a monkey never sings. Speak plainly, Indrakumar my son — what has happened? The quivers were not exchanged, were they?

RAJADHAR. Certainly not. Examine them and see.

ISHA KHAN. So I see — the quivers are quite in order. Very well, Indrakumar, my boy, tell me truly — did anyone enter your armoury in all this?

INDRAKUMAR. There is no need to go into that, Khan Sahib.

ISHA KHAN. Speak plainly, my boy — you know very well that someone went into your armoury and exchanged an arrow with yours.

INDRAKUMAR. Be quiet, Khan Sahib. Let it rest.

ISHA KHAN. Then you concede defeat?

INDRAKUMAR. Yes — I concede defeat.

ISHA KHAN. Well done, my boy, well done! You are a true son of the king. Maharaja, some injustice has been done here somewhere, though it is not coming to light. Nothing will be properly settled without another trial.

RAJADHAR. Khan Sahib, there is no other injustice here — the injustice is simply that I have won. But that does not mean I will submit to the indignity of another trial. If my winning has been an injustice, there is a simple remedy for it. I want no prize — let it be given to the middle prince instead.

MAHARAJA. That I cannot allow — since it is your name written on the arrow, I am bound to give the prize to you. Here — take it.

He presents the sword.

RAJADHAR. I accept the prize, bowing my head to it — but since my good fortune pleases no one here, I give this sword to my brother Indrakumar instead.

He holds the sword out toward Indrakumar.

INDRAKUMAR. (*flinging the sword to the ground*) Shame! Who would accept the insult of this prize from your hand?

ISHA KHAN. (*seizing Indrakumar's hand*) What! Indrakumar, you dare to fling a sword given by the Maharaja's own hand to the ground! This offence of yours must be justly punished.

INDRAKUMAR. (*wrenching his hand free*) Old man, do not touch me.

ISHA KHAN. My son — what is this, my son! You have forgotten yourself today.

INDRAKUMAR. Commander, forgive me. I have indeed forgotten myself. Punish me for it.

CROWN PRINCE. Enough now, brother — come, let us go home.

INDRAKUMAR. (*taking the dust of the Maharaja's feet*) Father, forgive my offence. Today I have lost, in every possible way.

ISHA KHAN. Maharaja, I have a petition to make. The trial of sport is over now — let there be a trial of true work instead. We shall see, then, which of your sons is able to bring home the prize.

MAHARAJA. What work do you have in mind, Commander?

ISHA KHAN. Your Majesty has it in mind to make war upon the King of Arakan. The army, too, stands ready. Let the princes now be sent into that war.

MAHARAJA. Well said, Commander. I have word that the King of Arakan has advanced close to the borders of Chittagong. I have taught him his lesson again and again, and yet a fool's education never seems to reach its end — there is no help for it now but to send him to Yama's own schoolhouse. What say you, my sons! Are you ready to march to war against that old enemy of ours, and take your initiation into the true calling of the Kshatriya?

INDRAKUMAR. I am ready. And brother shall go too.

RAJADHAR. And do you suppose I shall not go as well?

MAHARAJA. Then, Isha Khan, take command of the army, and lead them all to victory over the enemy. May Tripureshwari watch over you all.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Rajadhar's Camp

RAJADHAR and DHURANDHAR

DHURANDHAR. So you mean to keep back with five thousand soldiers, apart from the rest?

RAJADHAR. Yes — it was I who sent this very proposal to Isha Khan.

DHURANDHAR. That I know; I was present myself when it was discussed. A great deal was said about it.

RAJADHAR. Such as?

DHURANDHAR. First of all, Indrakumar burst into loud laughter. This, he said, is simply Rajadhar's way of making war — to love fighting from as far from the battlefield as possible.

RAJADHAR. True enough. It is laborers who fight from within the field; he alone is a true warrior who can fight from a distance. And what did Isha Khan say?

DHURANDHAR. You know well enough what trust he places in you. Were you to fall at his feet in homage, he would suspect you meant only to make off with his slippers. So Isha Khan said: that Rajadhar wishes to remain apart from the battlefield does not surprise him in the least — but that he wishes to keep five thousand soldiers with him while doing so, that he does not care for.

RAJADHAR. Did the Crown Prince say nothing?

DHURANDHAR. God did not grant the Crown Prince wit enough to suspect anyone — indeed, even you, being who you are, he does not suspect.

RAJADHAR. Now, Dhurandhar, do not speak of my brother so.

DHURANDHAR. Ah — I keep forgetting that this is your one soft spot. Well then, he said: no, no, you do Rajadhar wrong, all of you. His proposal seems sound enough to me. Should the battle turn to crisis, he will bring his soldiers to our aid. It was only at the Crown Prince's urging that Isha Khan agreed to your proposal at all; left to himself, he had little wish to. Even so, I confess I cannot quite fathom your purpose in keeping apart.

RAJADHAR. What do I gain by joining my strength to theirs in battle? Should we win, no one will call that victory mine.

DHURANDHAR. And yet someone might, by chance, speak your name — but remaining apart, should we win, the disgrace still falls to you; and should we lose, there is nothing more to be said.

RAJADHAR. With these five thousand soldiers of mine alone shall I win this war — and I alone shall be its victor.

A Messenger enters.

RAJADHAR. Well then — what news of the battle?

MESSENGER. My lord, the fighting has gone on the whole day through, but as yet our men have not broken through the enemy's ranks. The sun will set before long, and once darkness falls, the battle will likely have to be halted for today.

A Second Messenger enters.

RAJADHAR. Who are you?

SECOND MESSENGER. My lord, I am Byomkesh. The Crown Prince sent me forth — two full *prahars* have now passed — and finding no trace of you where you were meant to be stationed with your soldiers, I have come here only after long searching.

RAJADHAR. What is the Crown Prince's command?

MESSENGER. The enemy's numbers have proven far greater than we had reckoned; the battle has grown very hard. Prince Indrakumar led his cavalry against the enemy's northern flank, and had he been given a little more time, he might have driven them clear back to the river's edge.

RAJADHAR. Indeed! There is little use imagining what might have been done, given time — it seems plain enough there was none.

MESSENGER. Just as he had all but broken them, word came that the Crown Prince was in danger, surrounded by the enemy. Isha Khan was engaged elsewhere at the time; hearing the news, he said — I did not come here to rescue the Crown Prince, I must win this battle; if I stir from this spot, the enemy will seize their advantage.

RAJADHAR. Then has my brother —

MESSENGER. No, no harm has come to him. Indrakumar brought his soldiers and freed him. But amid this confusion, our position in the battle suffered. Messengers have gone out in every direction in search of you. Without your help, danger may yet come of it — so I beg you, delay no further.

RAJADHAR. No, I shall not delay at all. Go now — go and rest. I shall make ready.

Exit Messenger.

DHURANDHAR. Are you going, then?

RAJADHAR. Going, yes — but not that way. The other way.

DHURANDHAR. Toward home?

RAJADHAR. Have you too learned mockery from Isha Khan! Let valor be shown by whoever pleases — but he who returns home having won the war, he is Rajadhar. Dhurandhar, go now — see to it that no fire is lit anywhere in my camp; not so much as a single lamp.

DHURANDHAR. Very well, I shall warn everyone. But tell me plainly what you intend. If you suspect me, and I suspect you, then neither of us shall have anywhere left to stand in this world.

RAJADHAR. Tonight, under cover of darkness, I shall cross the river secretly with my soldiers. We shall fall suddenly upon the Arakan king's camp and take him captive.

DHURANDHAR. Where will you cross? There is no ford here.

RAJADHAR. I have already sought out and settled every path. The sun has set now. Tonight the moon will not rise before two and a half *prahars* have passed — our task must be finished before then. There is no time to lose. Go, make ready. And one thing more — see that the Crown Prince's messenger cannot return; hold him captive.

SCENE TWO

Isha Khan's Camp

INDRAKUMAR and ISHA KHAN

INDRAKUMAR. General, do not be angry with my brother. Let the soldiers rest tonight; tomorrow we shall carry the battle.

ISHA KHAN. Listen, Indrakumar — the sooner a fire is put out, the better; give it time, and there is no telling what may come of it. We would have won today, had your brother not, like an utter fool, gone and entangled himself needlessly among the enemy — all our plans came to nothing for it.

INDRAKUMAR. Why call it foolish, Khan Sahib — call it valiant. With but a handful of soldiers, he —

ISHA KHAN. Only a fool would go where he went —

INDRAKUMAR. (*heatedly*) No — none but a hero would dare venture there.

ISHA KHAN. Very well, child, I grant you that. But not merely a hero — only a foolish hero would have gone in that direction.

INDRAKUMAR. But surely that did not hinder your fighting in the least.

ISHA KHAN. It hindered it greatly. My soldiers, hearing the news, all grew restless — how could their minds remain on the battle? There was not one among them who could stay steady on hearing that the Crown Prince was in danger.

INDRAKUMAR. But General, what news is there of Rajadhar?

ISHA KHAN. I sent messengers in every direction. All have returned but one — nowhere can any trace of him be found.

INDRAKUMAR. Ha ha ha ha — he has surely fled.

ISHA KHAN. This is no matter for laughter, child.

INDRAKUMAR. What am I to do, General — I am glad of it. We would have fought and died, and he would have come to share our glory without earning it — that I could not have borne. Better that he has run off. This time, at least, there will be no cheating him out of the trial of arms.

ISHA KHAN. But you never told me what happened that other time.

INDRAKUMAR. That is not a thing to speak of, Khan Sahib. Ask me nothing of it. That time, I lost.

ISHA KHAN. You did not lose by the arrow, child — you lost by your temper.

SCENE THREE

The Camp of the King of Arakan

THE KING OF ARAKAN and RAJADHAR

ARAKAN. See here, prince — there is no advantage to you in holding me captive.

RAJADHAR. How is there no advantage, my lord? In this war, to have won you is the greatest advantage of all.

ARAKAN. It will not end the war for that. My brother Hamchu remains; the soldiers will make him king in my place, and the fighting will go on just as before.

RAJADHAR. I shall grant you your freedom — but not, of course, without a price.

ARAKAN. That much I know. A price must be paid. I am willing to acknowledge defeat before you and set it down in a treaty of peace.

RAJADHAR. A treaty alone will not do, my lord. Having acknowledged defeat, you must carry home some token of it as well.

ARAKAN. I shall give you five hundred Burmese horses and three elephants.

RAJADHAR. I have no need of such gifts. It is the crown upon your head that I must have.

ARAKAN. It would have been easier to give my life.

RAJADHAR. Even giving your life, you could not save the crown — and your life would be spent for nothing besides.

ARAKAN. Then take the crown — but know that with it you carry home Arakan's undying enmity. Until the day this crown is restored to me, my house shall know no peace.

RAJADHAR. Now that is speech worthy of a king. Nor do we wish for peace either, my lord — we are Kshatriyas. One duty more remains. Send word swiftly to your commander to halt the fighting — even now, across the river, the battle must be under way.

ARAKAN. My order shall go by messenger this very hour.

RAJADHAR. Then come — let us see to the drawing up of the treaty.

SCENE FOUR

The Battlefield

THE CROWN PRINCE and INDRAKUMAR

CROWN PRINCE. I cannot read the temper of today's battle. It seems to me our soldiers are still disheartened from yesterday — they are not fighting as they should. Where is Isha Khan?

INDRAKUMAR. There — his standard, to the east.

CROWN PRINCE. Brother, why do you keep so close beside me today? Surely your place is there, to the north.

INDRAKUMAR. No — I am better placed here.

CROWN PRINCE. Indrakumar, you hover near me today to guard your brother from his own recklessness. You do not care to give Khan Sahib fresh occasion to find fault with my judgment. But brother, even my recklessness has its limits — today, I think, I can act with caution. Look there — look! I do not like what I see. There, our soldiers seem to be wavering; they will break and flee before long — none but you can hold them. Indrakumar, do not delay. Have no fear for me. What is this! What is this! What is this!

INDRAKUMAR. Indeed, what is this? The enemy has suddenly stopped fighting!

CROWN PRINCE. See there — they have raised the banner of truce! There was no sign of defeat in them — why should this be? I had thought it was our own men who were faltering today.

A Messenger enters.

MESSENGER. Crown Prince, the enemy has ceased fighting.

CROWN PRINCE. So I see. What is the cause of it?

MESSENGER. The cause is not yet known, but word has come that the King of Arakan has sent to say he will fight us no longer.

CROWN PRINCE. Good news indeed. And yet one sorrow still stirs in my heart.

INDRAKUMAR. What sorrow, brother?

CROWN PRINCE. Why did Rajadhar go off with his soldiers! Had he been here, with what joy the three of us might have kept this victory together. In the midst of today's triumph, this alone is wanting — that Rajadhar took no part in the battle grieves me deeply.

INDRAKUMAR. If he chose to run off rather than share the victory, brother, what loss is that to us?

CROWN PRINCE. No, brother — we three set out together, and unless we can share and enjoy together the grace of the goddess of victory, my heart will always carry this sorrow. If Rajadhar returns home with his head bowed, if our good fortune darkens his face, then this glory will bring me no joy at all. — Look, there comes the General, riding hard.

Isha Khan enters.

INDRAKUMAR. Khan Sahib, have you learned why the enemy suddenly ceased fighting?

ISHA KHAN. I have indeed. Rajadhar has taken the King of Arakan prisoner.

INDRAKUMAR. Rajadhar! That cannot be true!

ISHA KHAN. What ought to have been false sometimes turns out true. It seems even Allah's messengers fall asleep now and then, and Satan seizes the moment to turn every reckoning upside down.

INDRAKUMAR. Can Satan himself hand Rajadhar a victory?

ISHA KHAN. He did once before, at the trial of arms — and he has done so again this time.

CROWN PRINCE. General, do not be angry with Rajadhar. If he has won, then the victory is ours as well. We knew nothing of when he fought, or when he took his captive.

ISHA KHAN. Last evening, once we had broken off the fighting and returned to camp, he crossed the river secretly in the dark and fell upon the Arakan king's camp without warning, taking him prisoner. I had told him to remain in readiness at his post, to come to our aid — but he was not there at all. I am the General; my command he chose not to obey.

INDRAKUMAR. Unbearable! He deserves to be punished for this.

ISHA KHAN. Is that all! With the Crown Prince present, he has gone and drawn up the treaty entirely by his own will!

INDRAKUMAR. It would be wrong not to punish him for this.

ISHA KHAN. Go and make your brother understand this simple truth, then.

Rajadhar enters.

INDRAKUMAR. Rajadhar! You have shown cowardice.

RAJADHAR. I did not come all this way to show manliness by breaking from battle, as you did — I came to win the war.

INDRAKUMAR. You fought? And you won? You have made the goddess of victory blush with shame!

RAJADHAR. So it may be — but that is the blush of love, not of shame. And here is the proof that she has chosen me.

INDRAKUMAR. Whose crown is this?

RAJADHAR. This crown is mine. It is the prize of my victory.

INDRAKUMAR. You fled the battle — what prize could you possibly claim? This crown belongs to the Crown Prince.

RAJADHAR. I won it. I alone shall wear it.

CROWN PRINCE. Rajadhar speaks truly. What he has won in victory, he alone shall wear.

ISHA KHAN. He defied his General's command and, under cover of darkness, took to a fox's cunning — and now he shall wear the crown! A broken shard of a pot would be more fitting for him to carry home.

RAJADHAR. Had I not been there, a broken shard is all any of you would have had to carry home. Where were you all this while?

INDRAKUMAR. Wherever I was, I was not skulking off as you were.

CROWN PRINCE. Indrakumar, you speak unjustly, brother. In truth, had Rajadhar not been there, we would have been in grave danger today.

INDRAKUMAR. No danger at all. Rajadhar hid his soldiers away only to try to bring danger upon us. Had Rajadhar not existed, I myself would have won this crown in open battle. Rajadhar has stolen it. Brother, had I brought this crown home, I would have laid it before you — I would not have crowned myself with it.

CROWN PRINCE. *(to Rajadhar)* Brother, it is you who have won today. Had you not been there, with so few soldiers, there is no telling what danger might have befallen us. This crown I place upon you myself.

INDRAKUMAR. *(his voice choked)* Rajadhar breaks the code of the warrior, and from you he receives his reward today — while I, who counted my life as nothing and stood in the very face of danger to fight, could not draw from your lips a single word of praise! I have had to hear from your own mouth this day that none but Rajadhar could have delivered you from peril! Why, brother — did I not stand before your eyes from the break of day until evening fell, fighting still?

Did I flee the battlefield? Did I not cut through the enemy's ranks to come to your aid? What did you see, that you should say none but your beloved Rajadhar could have saved you from danger!

CROWN PRINCE. Brother, I do not speak only of my own danger.

INDRAKUMAR. Enough, brother, enough. Say no more. Since you have found in Rajadhar so extraordinary a hero to stand beside you, you have no further need of me. I am leaving.

CROWN PRINCE. Brother, again! Again you forget yourself!

INDRAKUMAR. Where I am not needed, to remain is itself an insult.

Exit.

ISHA KHAN. Crown Prince, you have no right to give this crown to anyone. I am the General; it shall belong to whomever I choose to give it.

He lifts the crown from Rajadhar's head and moves to set it upon the Crown Prince.

CROWN PRINCE. (*stepping back*) No — I cannot take this crown.

ISHA KHAN. Then let it stay unclaimed. No one shall have this crown. Let the waters of the Karnaphuli take it. (*He hurls the crown away.*) Rajadhar has broken the laws of war; he deserves punishment.

RAJADHAR. Brother, you have witnessed this. I shall not forget it.

CROWN PRINCE. Is this, of all things, what is worth remembering? If the crown has gone into the water, let all its disgrace go with it. Whatever you must forget, forget it; whatever we must forget, let us forget it too. — Come, let us see whether Indrakumar has truly left us in anger.

SCENE FIVE

The Camp

RAJADHAR and DHURANDHAR

RAJADHAR. Dhurandhar, to the same waters of the Karnaphuli where my crown has gone, I shall now consign our victory as well.

DHURANDHAR. Meaning to lose again, are you?

RAJADHAR. Yes — this time I shall lose in order to win. I will not return until I have ground Indrakumar's pride into the dust. He would not accept the victory I offered with my own hand! Now let us see how well he can win one for himself.

DHURANDHAR. Do not be too certain — he might, by chance, win after all. This is no time for temper to override judgment; Indrakumar has learned something of the art of war.

RAJADHAR. Well, that argument can wait. For now, there is a task for you. The King of Arakan marches at dawn tomorrow with his soldiers. It was agreed that until he crosses the borders of Chattogram, his commanders shall remain captive in my camp. Before he breaks camp, you must go to him tonight, in secret, and carry this letter of mine.

DHURANDHAR. It would be well for me to know what the letter contains — should a word or two need saying, I could see the matter through properly.

RAJADHAR. I have written that I have been dishonored, and so I take my leave of my brothers. I shall withdraw my five thousand soldiers under pretense of returning home, and go far off instead. Indrakumar too, wounded in pride against his brother, has already gone. The soldiers, believing the war ended, are making ready to return home as well — in this very lull, should the King of Arakan strike suddenly, the soldiers of Tripura will surely be defeated.

DHURANDHAR. Defeated, certainly. And then? You yourself will not end up weeping over it, will you? If a fire must be lit, one must take care it does not catch one's own roof first.

RAJADHAR. I need no one else's wisdom to warn me of that. Go now, make ready — see that no one learns of this. Should my soldiers come to suspect anything, all will be ruined.

DHURANDHAR. Listen, Rajadhar — I too need no one else's wisdom to warn me. Set your mind at ease.

SCENE SIX

The Battlefield

ISHA KHAN and THE CROWN PRINCE

ISHA KHAN. Crown Prince, remember Allah. A hard hour has come upon us today.

CROWN PRINCE. What is hard in it, Khan Sahib? When it is God's will, neither death nor life is hard — all is simple enough.

ISHA KHAN. The Maharaja placed you in my hands and rested easy — it is this alone that grieves me now. Otherwise, death upon the battlefield is no more than sleep upon the marriage bed. Crown Prince, try to escape — leave the burden of this battle to me.

CROWN PRINCE. You are our master of arms; such counsel does not become your lips. Besides, where is there a path? Today offers as fine an occasion to die as any — but none at all to flee.

ISHA KHAN. But child, a fire burns within me. Indrakumar, wounded in pride, has gone far away — and I may not live to see him punished for that offense.

CROWN PRINCE. If you do not live to see it, General, then his punishment shall be far greater still. For he holds you as dear as a father.

ISHA KHAN. Allah! That is true. Child, I feel today that my time has come. But should you have the chance, tell him this — that had Isha Khan lived, he would have punished him; but before dying, he forgave him instead. There — no more time remains. I go now, child. Come, let me embrace you once more. I leave you in Allah's hands; He will keep you safe.

CROWN PRINCE. Khan Sahib, how many wrongs have I done you over the years — forgive them all today before you go.

ISHA KHAN. Child, I have watched you since the day of your birth, and never once did you let a wrong go unsettled — you always made full account of it, hand to hand. What is there left today for me to forgive? — Should your pure soul be taken from us this day, it shall not pale beside any flower in His heavenly garden.

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

The Battlefield

A COMPANY OF SOLDIERS

FIRST SOLDIER. Is this true?

SECOND SOLDIER. Who knows, brother — that is what we are hearing!

FIRST. Then ruin is upon us.

Exeunt hastily.

A second group enters.

FIRST. Who said it — who said it?

SECOND. Our Umesh said it.

FIRST. I do not know, brother. Hearing it was like a thunderbolt to the head; I could not bring myself to ask more.

SECOND. Come, let us go and learn the truth of it.

Exeunt.

A third group enters.

FIRST. We saw his elephant — the howdah empty, no mahout upon it. Having lost its master, it wanders on alone.

SECOND. We too have come to the very same state.

THIRD. Has no one seen which way he fell?

FIRST. That, no one can say.

SECOND. Our Shibu was saying — when the arrow struck the Crown Prince, the mahout was already fleeing the field with the elephant, and in his fleeing the mahout himself was killed. After that, where the Crown Prince fell from atop that elephant, no one can say.

Yet another group enters.

FOURTH. Ah, ruin has come upon us! Has no one run to carry word to Prince Indrakumar?

THIRD. A man went long since — the very moment the Arakan army fell upon us by treachery. If only he can be found.

SECOND. Has Prince Rajadhar had no word of this yet?

FOURTH. No word has come of where he is — gone off toward Tripura, I should think. Had he known the news of the Crown Prince, he too would be running toward us by now.

FIRST. With what face shall we return home!

THIRD. Why return at all — let us die here.

FOURTH. But the battle itself is over — how are we to die now!

Another enters.

ANOTHER. What are you standing about for! Ruin has come upon us — come, let us go and search.

FOURTH. Yes — come, let us divide and take different directions.

THIRD. Is it truly our fortune that he still lives!

SECOND. I am thinking — when Indrakumar hears this news, will he himself be able to go on living!

SCENE TWO

The Battlefield

INDRAKUMAR and a SOLDIER

INDRAKUMAR. Where — where — where? Where is my brother?

SOLDIER. We are searching for him even now, my lord.

INDRAKUMAR. And Isha Khan?

SOLDIER. At the fourth *prahar* of the day, the Crown Prince laid earth upon Isha Khan's grave with his own hands — and even as he did, his own blood was mingling into that same earth.

INDRAKUMAR. Fie, fie, fie upon Indrakumar! Fie upon you! Fie upon your savage temper! Brother! Brother! Will you not give this basest of men even a moment to beg forgiveness? (*in a loud voice*) Brother! Answer me. Answer, if only for a single moment. Is there no one left? Wherever each of you may be, come together and search for him — today I must have my brother.

A Second Soldier enters.

SECOND SOLDIER. This way, my prince. We have found him.

INDRAKUMAR. Where? Where?

SECOND SOLDIER. On the bank of the Karnaphuli, beneath that *arjuna* tree.

INDRAKUMAR. Tell me truly — is he—

SECOND SOLDIER. He lives. He waits only for you.

Exeunt.

SCENE THREE

The bank of the Karnaphuli. Beneath a tree, in the faint light of the moon.

CROWN PRINCE. There — move it aside, move it a little aside. Push the branches back a little, that I may look upon the moon in the sky once more today. No one here! Is this the shadow of the tree alone — or does a shadow now fall across my own eyes! I can still hear the sound of the Karnaphuli's current! Shall I hear the world's last farewell in this very sound! Indrakumar! Brother Indrakumar! Has your anger not left you even yet!

Indrakumar enters.

INDRAKUMAR. Brother! Brother!

CROWN PRINCE. Ah, I am saved, brother! It was only in knowing that you would come that I have lived on so long, so late as this. It was because you had gone from me in wounded pride that I could not yet take my leave. But it has grown very late now, brother — let me sleep at last; our mother has spread her lap for me.

INDRAKUMAR. Brother! Have you forgiven me?

CROWN PRINCE. Everything — everything! Whatever there was between us here, I have washed clean away with this blood, in going. I have left nothing unforgiven. Only one sorrow remains — word must be sent to the Maharaja that I have been defeated.

INDRAKUMAR. The defeat is not yours, brother. The defeat is mine, and mine alone.

A Soldier enters.

SOLDIER. Prince Rajadhar sends word, begging leave to receive the dust of the Crown Prince's feet.

INDRAKUMAR. Never! Not for anything!

CROWN PRINCE. Call him. Call him here. Call him!

INDRAKUMAR. (*angrily*) Brother — Rajadhar—

CROWN PRINCE. Again, brother! Again!

INDRAKUMAR. No, no, no — no more. I have no anger left.

Enter Rajadhar, who bows low in obeisance.

RAJADHAR. I am the basest of men. This crown I lay at your feet. It is yours alone.

CROWN PRINCE. I have no time left for it. Give it to Indrakumar, brother.

RAJADHAR. My brother's command I take upon my head. Here — take this crown.

INDRAKUMAR. I am the defeated one; this crown is not mine. This I place upon you instead.
—Brother—