ANEXO II – REPRODUÇÃO DO TEXTO ORIGINAL

AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

Punctually at midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook and a bundle of palmyra writing. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted. The power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position—placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks: even a half-wit's eyes would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks. He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways: a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night. A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way: medicine-sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians and, above all, an auctioneer of cheap cloth, who created enough din all day to attract the whole town. Next to him in vociferousness came a vendor of fried groundnuts, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it Bombay Ice-Cream one day, and on the next Delhi Almond, and on the third Raja's Delicacy, and so on and so forth, and people flocked to him. A considerable portion of this crowd dallied before the astrologer too. The astrologer

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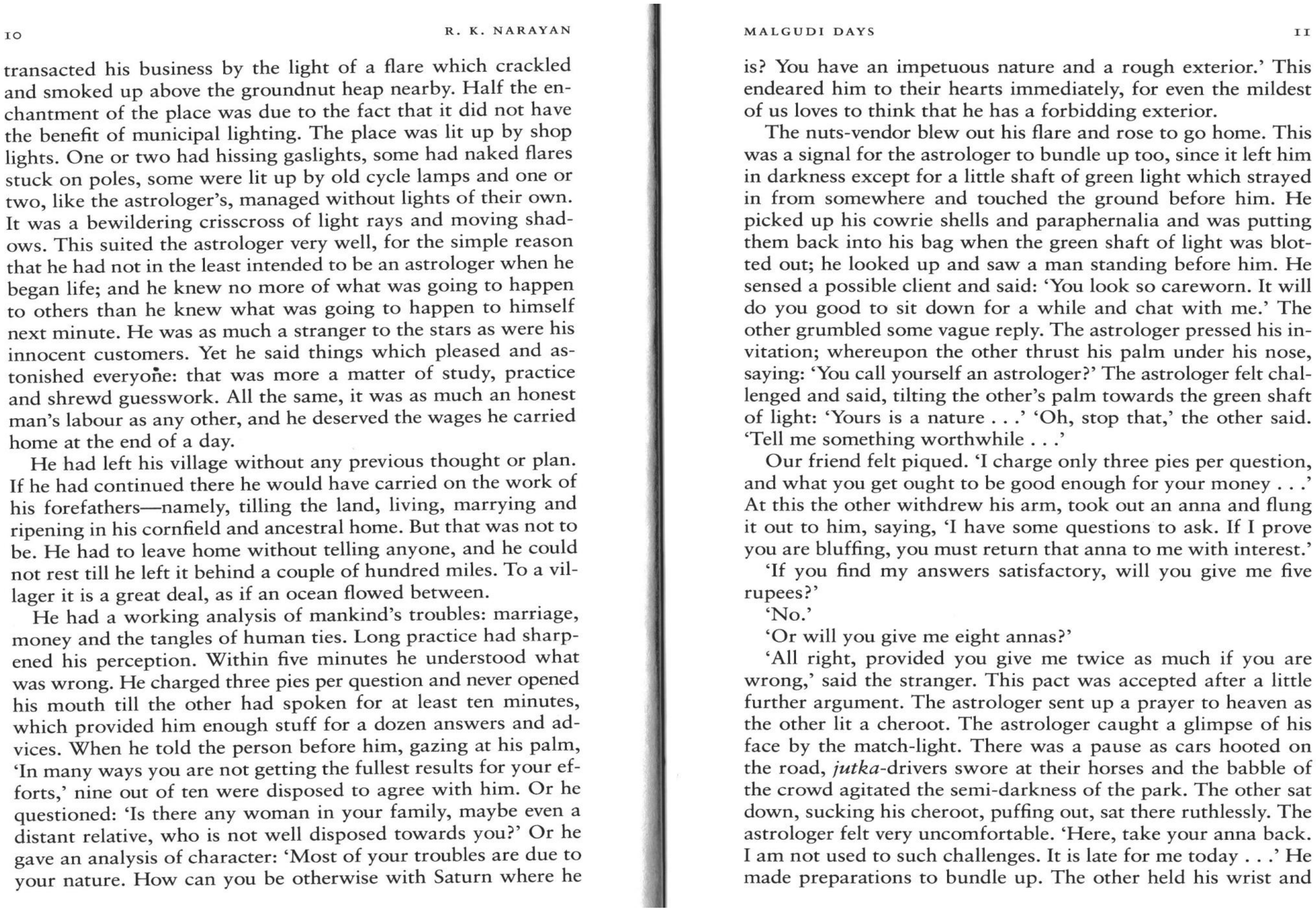

transacted his business by the light of a flare which crackled and smoked up above the groundnut heap nearby. Half the enchantment of the place was due to the fact that it did not have the benefit of municipal lighting. The place was lit up by shop lights. One or two had hissing gaslights, some had naked flares stuck on poles, some were lit up by old cycle lamps and one or two, like the astrologer's, managed without lights of their own. It was a bewildering crisscross of light rays and moving shadows. This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself next minute. He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and shrewd guesswork. All the same, it was as much an honest man's labour as any other, and he deserved the wages he carried home at the end of a day.

He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. If he had continued there he would have carried on the work of his forefathers—namely, tilling the land, living, marrying and ripening in his cornfield and ancestral home. But that was not to be. He had to leave home without telling anyone, and he could not rest till he left it behind a couple of hundred miles. To a villager it is a great deal, as if an ocean flowed between.

He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriage, money and the tangles of human ties. Long practice had sharpened his perception. Within five minutes he understood what was wrong. He charged three pies per question and never opened his mouth till the other had spoken for at least ten minutes, which provided him enough stuff for a dozen answers and advices. When he told the person before him, gazing at his palm, 'In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts,' nine out of ten were disposed to agree with him. Or he questioned: 'Is there any woman in your family, maybe even a distant relative, who is not well disposed towards you?' Or he gave an analysis of character: 'Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he

is? You have an impetuous nature and a rough exterior.' This endeared him to their hearts immediately, for even the mildest of us loves to think that he has a forbidding exterior.

The nuts-vendor blew out his flare and rose to go home. This was a signal for the astrologer to bundle up too, since it left him in darkness except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground before him. He picked up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia and was putting them back into his bag when the green shaft of light was blotted out; he looked up and saw a man standing before him. He sensed a possible client and said: 'You look so careworn. It will do you good to sit down for a while and chat with me.' The other grumbled some vague reply. The astrologer pressed his invitation; whereupon the other thrust his palm under his nose, saying: 'You call yourself an astrologer?' The astrologer felt challenged and said, tilting the other's palm towards the green shaft of light: 'Yours is a nature . . .' 'Oh, stop that,' the other said. 'Tell me something worthwhile . . .'

Our friend felt piqued. 'I charge only three pies per question, and what you get ought to be good enough for your money . . .' At this the other withdrew his arm, took out an anna and flung it out to him, saying, 'I have some questions to ask. If I prove you are bluffing, you must return that anna to me with interest.'

'If you find my answers satisfactory, will you give me five rupees?'

'No.'

'Or will you give me eight annas?'

'All right, provided you give me twice as much if you are wrong,' said the stranger. This pact was accepted after a little further argument. The astrologer sent up a prayer to heaven as the other lit a cheroot. The astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the match-light. There was a pause as cars hooted on the road, *jutka*-drivers swore at their horses and the babble of the crowd agitated the semi-darkness of the park. The other sat down, sucking his cheroot, puffing out, sat there ruthlessly. The astrologer felt very uncomfortable. 'Here, take your anna back. I am not used to such challenges. It is late for me today . . .' He made preparations to bundle up. The other held his wrist and

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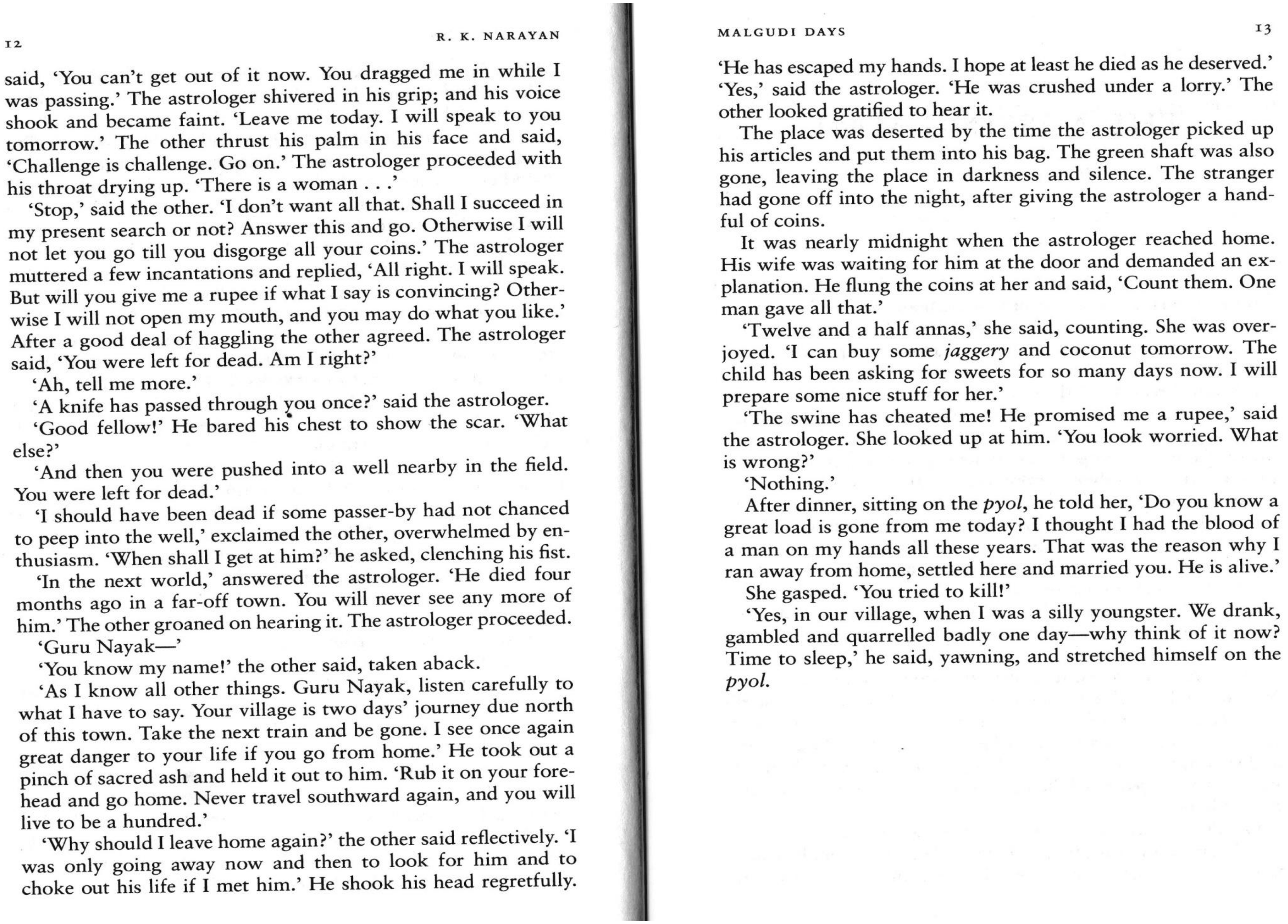

said, 'You can't get out of it now. You dragged me in while I was passing.' The astrologer shivered in his grip; and his voice shook and became faint. 'Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow.' The other thrust his palm in his face and said, 'Challenge is challenge. Go on.' The astrologer proceeded with his throat drying up. 'There is a woman . . .'

'Stop,' said the other. 'I don't want all that. Shall I succeed in my present search or not? Answer this and go. Otherwise I will not let you go till you disgorge all your coins.' The astrologer muttered a few incantations and replied, 'All right. I will speak. But will you give me a rupee if what I say is convincing? Otherwise I will not open my mouth, and you may do what you like.' After a good deal of haggling the other agreed. The astrologer said, 'You were left for dead. Am I right?'

'Ah, tell me more.'

'A knife has passed through you once?' said the astrologer.

'Good fellow!' He bared his chest to show the scar. 'What else?'

'And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead.'

'I should have been dead if some passer-by had not chanced to peep into the well,' exclaimed the other, overwhelmed by enthusiasm. 'When shall I get at him?' he asked, clenching his fist.

'In the next world,' answered the astrologer. 'He died four months ago in a far-off town. You will never see any more of him.' The other groaned on hearing it. The astrologer proceeded.

'Guru Nayak—'

'You know my name!' the other said, taken aback.

'As I know all other things. Guru Nayak, listen carefully to what I have to say. Your village is two days' journey due north of this town. Take the next train and be gone. I see once again great danger to your life if you go from home.' He took out a pinch of sacred ash and held it out to him. 'Rub it on your forehead and go home. Never travel southward again, and you will live to be a hundred.'

'Why should I leave home again?' the other said reflectively. 'I was only going away now and then to look for him and to choke out his life if I met him.' He shook his head regretfully.

'He has escaped my hands. I hope at least he died as he deserved.' 'Yes,' said the astrologer. 'He was crushed under a lorry.' The other looked gratified to hear it.

The place was deserted by the time the astrologer picked up his articles and put them into his bag. The green shaft was also gone, leaving the place in darkness and silence. The stranger had gone off into the night, after giving the astrologer a handful of coins.

It was nearly midnight when the astrologer reached home. His wife was waiting for him at the door and demanded an explanation. He flung the coins at her and said, 'Count them. One man gave all that.'

'Twelve and a half annas,' she said, counting. She was overjoyed. 'I can buy some *jaggery* and coconut tomorrow. The child has been asking for sweets for so many days now. I will prepare some nice stuff for her.'

'The swine has cheated me! He promised me a rupee,' said the astrologer. She looked up at him. 'You look worried. What is wrong?'

'Nothing.'

After dinner, sitting on the *pyol*, he told her, 'Do you know a great load is gone from me today? I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years. That was the reason why I ran away from home, settled here and married you. He is alive.'

She gasped. 'You tried to kill!'

'Yes, in our village, when I was a silly youngster. We drank, gambled and quarrelled badly one day—why think of it now? Time to sleep,' he said, yawning, and stretched himself on the *pyol*.

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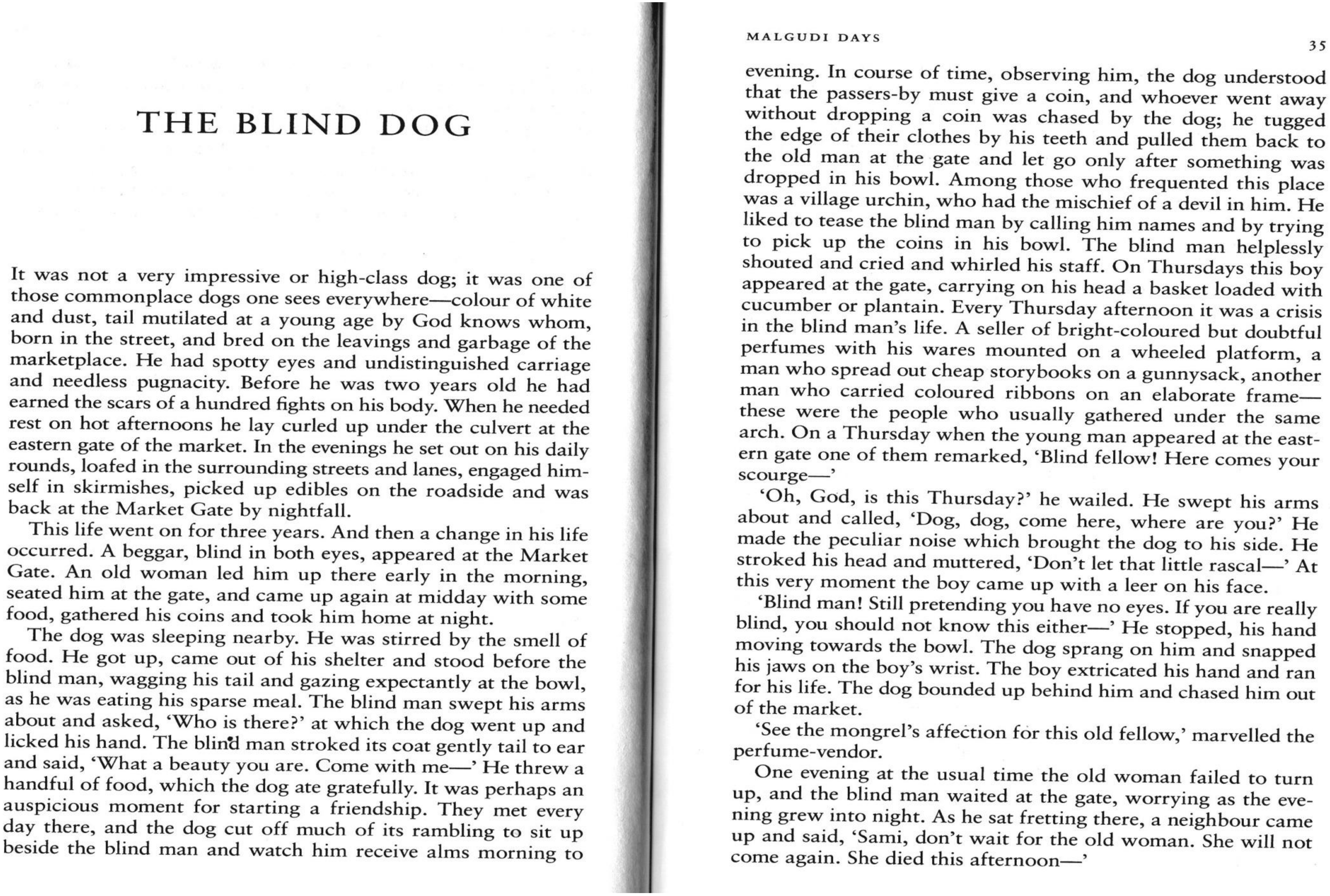

THE BLIND DOG

It was not a very impressive or high-class dog; it was one of those commonplace dogs one sees everywhere—colour of white and dust, tail mutilated at a young age by God knows whom, born in the street, and bred on the leavings and garbage of the marketplace. He had spotty eyes and undistinguished carriage and needless pugnacity. Before he was two years old he had earned the scars of a hundred fights on his body. When he needed rest on hot afternoons he lay curled up under the culvert at the eastern gate of the market. In the evenings he set out on his daily rounds, loafed in the surrounding streets and lanes, engaged himself in skirmishes, picked up edibles on the roadside and was back at the Market Gate by nightfall.

This life went on for three years. And then a change in his life occurred. A beggar, blind in both eyes, appeared at the Market Gate. An old woman led him up there early in the morning, seated him at the gate, and came up again at midday with some food, gathered his coins and took him home at night.

The dog was sleeping nearby. He was stirred by the smell of food. He got up, came out of his shelter and stood before the blind man, wagging his tail and gazing expectantly at the bowl, as he was eating his sparse meal. The blind man swept his arms about and asked, 'Who is there?' at which the dog went up and licked his hand. The blind man stroked its coat gently tail to ear and said, 'What a beauty you are. Come with me—' He threw a handful of food, which the dog ate gratefully. It was perhaps an auspicious moment for starting a friendship. They met every day there, and the dog cut off much of its rambling to sit up beside the blind man and watch him receive alms morning to

evening. In course of time, observing him, the dog understood that the passers-by must give a coin, and whoever went away without dropping a coin was chased by the dog; he tugged the edge of their clothes by his teeth and pulled them back to the old man at the gate and let go only after something was dropped in his bowl. Among those who frequented this place was a village urchin, who had the mischief of a devil in him. He liked to tease the blind man by calling him names and by trying to pick up the coins in his bowl. The blind man helplessly shouted and cried and whirled his staff. On Thursdays this boy appeared at the gate, carrying on his head a basket loaded with cucumber or plantain. Every Thursday afternoon it was a crisis in the blind man's life. A seller of bright-coloured but doubtful perfumes with his wares mounted on a wheeled platform, a man who spread out cheap storybooks on a gunnysack, another man who carried coloured ribbons on an elaborate frame—these were the people who usually gathered under the same arch. On a Thursday when the young man appeared at the eastern gate one of them remarked, 'Blind fellow! Here comes your scourge—'

'Oh, God, is this Thursday?' he wailed. He swept his arms about and called, 'Dog, dog, come here, where are you?' He made the peculiar noise which brought the dog to his side. He stroked his head and muttered, 'Don't let that little rascal—' At this very moment the boy came up with a leer on his face.

'Blind man! Still pretending you have no eyes. If you are really blind, you should not know this either—' He stopped, his hand moving towards the bowl. The dog sprang on him and snapped his jaws on the boy's wrist. The boy extricated his hand and ran for his life. The dog bounded up behind him and chased him out of the market.

'See the mongrel's affection for this old fellow,' marvelled the perfume-vendor.

One evening at the usual time the old woman failed to turn up, and the blind man waited at the gate, worrying as the evening grew into night. As he sat fretting there, a neighbour came up and said, 'Sami, don't wait for the old woman. She will not come again. She died this afternoon—'

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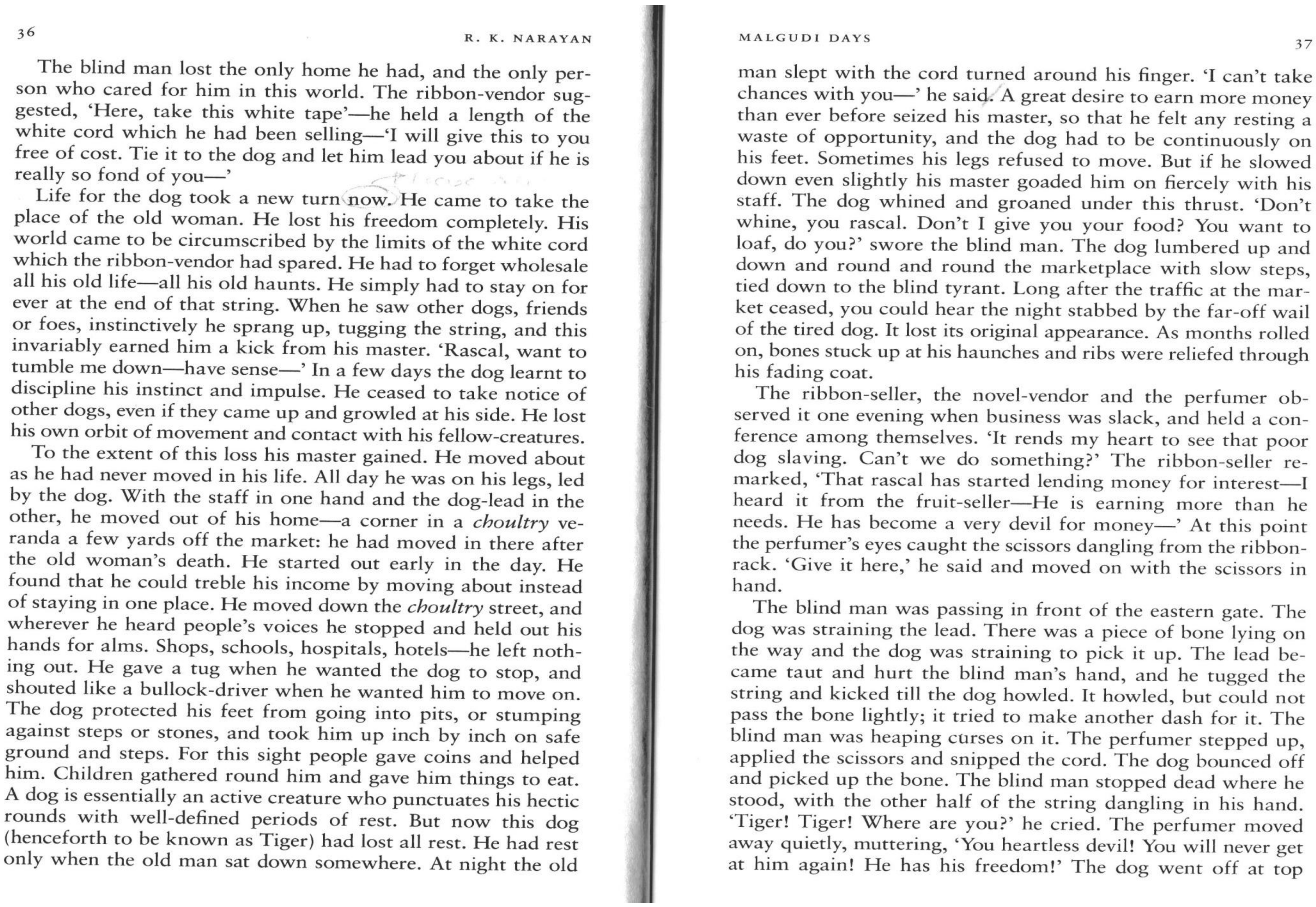

The blind man lost the only home he had, and the only person who cared for him in this world. The ribbon-vendor suggested, 'Here, take this white tape'—he held a length of the white cord which he had been selling—'I will give this to you free of cost. Tie it to the dog and let him lead you about if he is really so fond of you—'

Life for the dog took a new turn now. He came to take the place of the old woman. He lost his freedom completely. His world came to be circumscribed by the limits of the white cord which the ribbon-vendor had spared. He had to forget wholesale all his old life—all his old haunts. He simply had to stay on for ever at the end of that string. When he saw other dogs, friends or foes, instinctively he sprang up, tugging the string, and this invariably earned him a kick from his master. 'Rascal, want to tumble me down—have sense—' In a few days the dog learnt to discipline his instinct and impulse. He ceased to take notice of other dogs, even if they came up and growled at his side. He lost his own orbit of movement and contact with his fellow-creatures.

To the extent of this loss his master gained. He moved about as he had never moved in his life. All day he was on his legs, led by the dog. With the staff in one hand and the dog-lead in the other, he moved out of his home—a corner in a *choultry* veranda a few yards off the market: he had moved in there after the old woman's death. He started out early in the day. He found that he could treble his income by moving about instead of staying in one place. He moved down the *choultry* street, and wherever he heard people's voices he stopped and held out his hands for alms. Shops, schools, hospitals, hotels—he left nothing out. He gave a tug when he wanted the dog to stop, and shouted like a bullock-driver when he wanted him to move on. The dog protected his feet from going into pits, or stumping against steps or stones, and took him up inch by inch on safe ground and steps. For this sight people gave coins and helped him. Children gathered round him and gave him things to eat. A dog is essentially an active creature who punctuates his hectic rounds with well-defined periods of rest. But now this dog (henceforth to be known as Tiger) had lost all rest. He had rest only when the old man sat down somewhere. At night the old man slept with the cord turned around his finger. 'I can't take chances with you—' he said. A great desire to earn more money than ever before seized his master, so that he felt any resting a waste of opportunity, and the dog had to be continuously on his feet. Sometimes his legs refused to move. But if he slowed down even slightly his master goaded him on fiercely with his staff. The dog whined and groaned under this thrust. 'Don't whine, you rascal. Don't I give you your food? You want to loaf, do you?' swore the blind man. The dog lumbered up and down and round and round the marketplace with slow steps, tied down to the blind tyrant. Long after the traffic at the market ceased, you could hear the night stabbed by the far-off wail of the tired dog. It lost its original appearance. As months rolled on, bones stuck up at his haunches and ribs were reliefed through his fading coat.

The ribbon-seller, the novel-vendor and the perfumer observed it one evening when business was slack, and held a conference among themselves. 'It rends my heart to see that poor dog slaving. Can't we do something?' The ribbon-seller remarked, 'That rascal has started lending money for interest—I heard it from the fruit-seller—He is earning more than he needs. He has become a very devil for money—' At this point the perfumer's eyes caught the scissors dangling from the ribbon-rack. 'Give it here,' he said and moved on with the scissors in hand.

The blind man was passing in front of the eastern gate. The dog was straining the lead. There was a piece of bone lying on the way and the dog was straining to pick it up. The lead became taut and hurt the blind man's hand, and he tugged the string and kicked till the dog howled. It howled, but could not pass the bone lightly; it tried to make another dash for it. The blind man was heaping curses on it. The perfumer stepped up, applied the scissors and snipped the cord. The dog bounced off and picked up the bone. The blind man stopped dead where he stood, with the other half of the string dangling in his hand. 'Tiger! Tiger! Where are you?' he cried. The perfumer moved away quietly, muttering, 'You heartless devil! You will never get at him again! He has his freedom!' The dog went off at top

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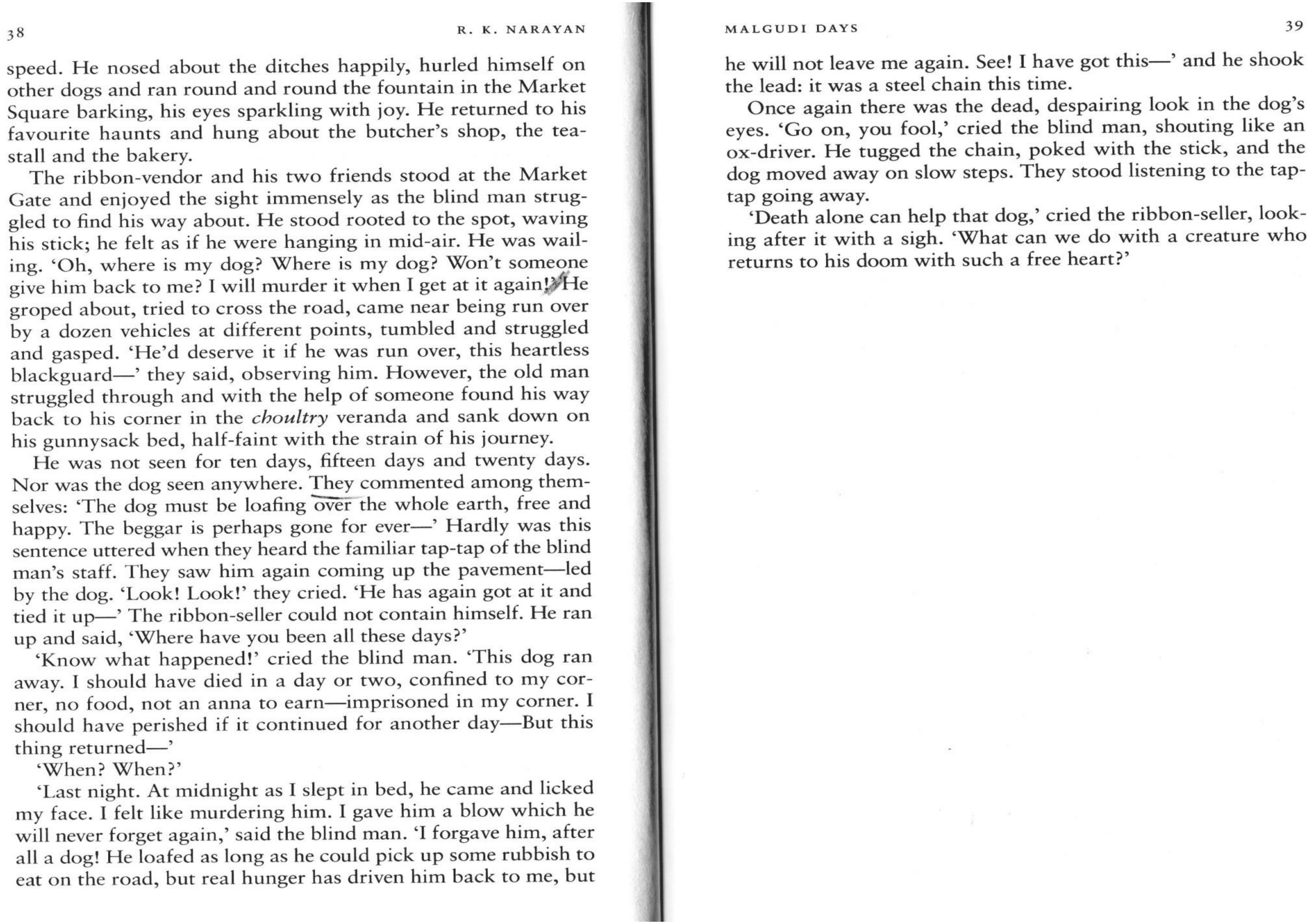

speed. He nosed about the ditches happily, hurled himself on other dogs and ran round and round the fountain in the Market Square barking, his eyes sparkling with joy. He returned to his favourite haunts and hung about the butcher's shop, the tea-stall and the bakery.

The ribbon-vendor and his two friends stood at the Market Gate and enjoyed the sight immensely as the blind man struggled to find his way about. He stood rooted to the spot, waving his stick; he felt as if he were hanging in mid-air. He was wailing. 'Oh, where is my dog? Where is my dog? Won't someone give him back to me? I will murder it when I get at it again!' He groped about, tried to cross the road, came near being run over by a dozen vehicles at different points, tumbled and struggled and gasped. 'He'd deserve it if he was run over, this heartless blackguard—' they said, observing him. However, the old man struggled through and with the help of someone found his way back to his corner in the *choultry* veranda and sank down on his gunnysack bed, half-faint with the strain of his journey.

He was not seen for ten days, fifteen days and twenty days. Nor was the dog seen anywhere. They commented among themselves: 'The dog must be loafing over the whole earth, free and happy. The beggar is perhaps gone for ever—' Hardly was this sentence uttered when they heard the familiar tap-tap of the blind man's staff. They saw him again coming up the pavement—led by the dog. 'Look! Look!' they cried. 'He has again got at it and tied it up—' The ribbon-seller could not contain himself. He ran up and said, 'Where have you been all these days?'

'Know what happened!' cried the blind man. 'This dog ran away. I should have died in a day or two, confined to my corner, no food, not an anna to earn—imprisoned in my corner. I should have perished if it continued for another day—But this thing returned—'

'When? When?'

'Last night. At midnight as I slept in bed, he came and licked my face. I felt like murdering him. I gave him a blow which he will never forget again,' said the blind man. 'I forgave him, after all a dog! He loafed as long as he could pick up some rubbish to eat on the road, but real hunger has driven him back to me, but

he will not leave me again. See! I have got this—' and he shook the lead: it was a steel chain this time.

Once again there was the dead, despairing look in the dog's eyes. 'Go on, you fool,' cried the blind man, shouting like an ox-driver. He tugged the chain, poked with the stick, and the dog moved away on slow steps. They stood listening to the tap-tap going away.

'Death alone can help that dog,' cried the ribbon-seller, looking after it with a sigh. 'What can we do with a creature who returns to his doom with such a free heart?'

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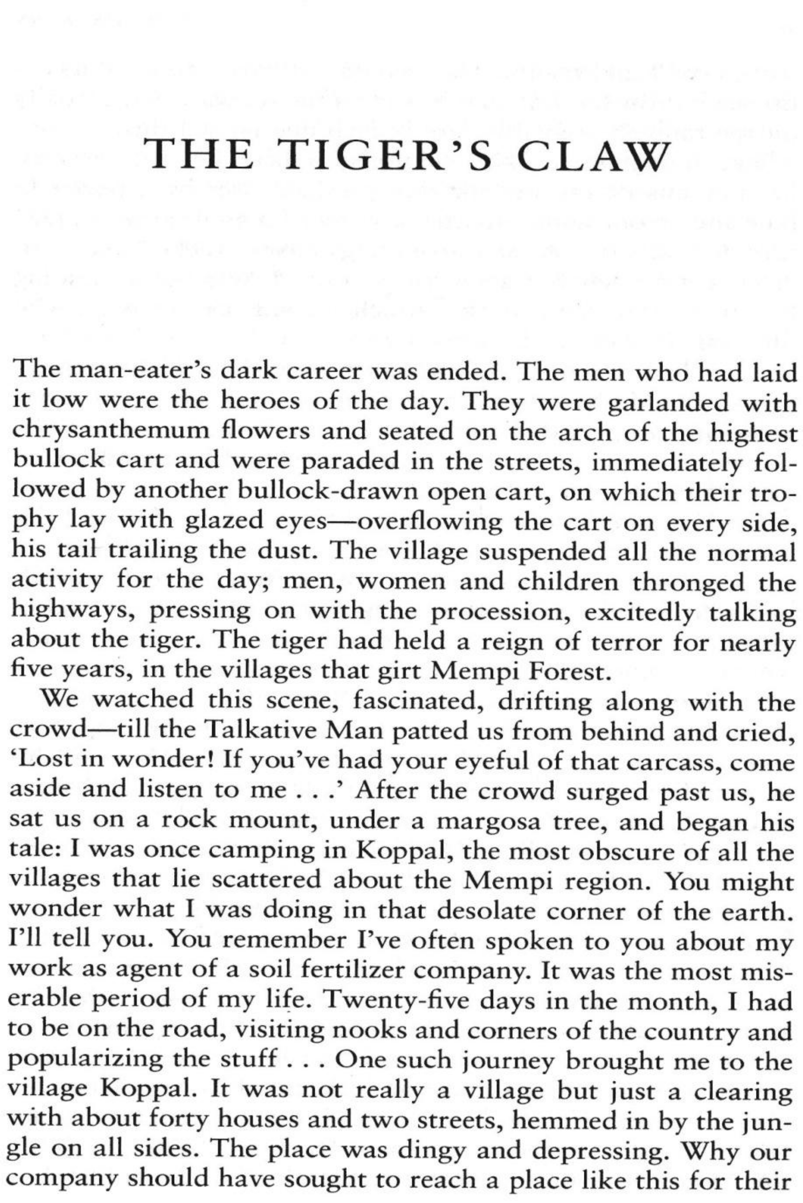

THE TIGER'S CLAW

The man-eater's dark career was ended. The men who had laid it low were the heroes of the day. They were garlanded with chrysanthemum flowers and seated on the arch of the highest bullock cart and were paraded in the streets, immediately followed by another bullock-drawn open cart, on which their trophy lay with glazed eyes—overflowing the cart on every side, his tail trailing the dust. The village suspended all the normal activity for the day; men, women and children thronged the highways, pressing on with the procession, excitedly talking about the tiger. The tiger had held a reign of terror for nearly five years, in the villages that girt Mempi Forest.

We watched this scene, fascinated, drifting along with the crowd—till the Talkative Man patted us from behind and cried, 'Lost in wonder! If you've had your eyeful of that carcass, come aside and listen to me . . .' After the crowd surged past us, he sat us on a rock mount, under a margosa tree, and began his tale: I was once camping in Koppal, the most obscure of all the villages that lie scattered about the Mempi region. You might wonder what I was doing in that desolate corner of the earth. I'll tell you. You remember I've often spoken to you about my work as agent of a soil fertilizer company. It was the most miserable period of my life. Twenty-five days in the month, I had to be on the road, visiting nooks and corners of the country and popularizing the stuff . . . One such journey brought me to the village Koppal. It was not really a village but just a clearing with about forty houses and two streets, hemmed in by the jungle on all sides. The place was dingy and depressing. Why our company should have sought to reach a place like this for their

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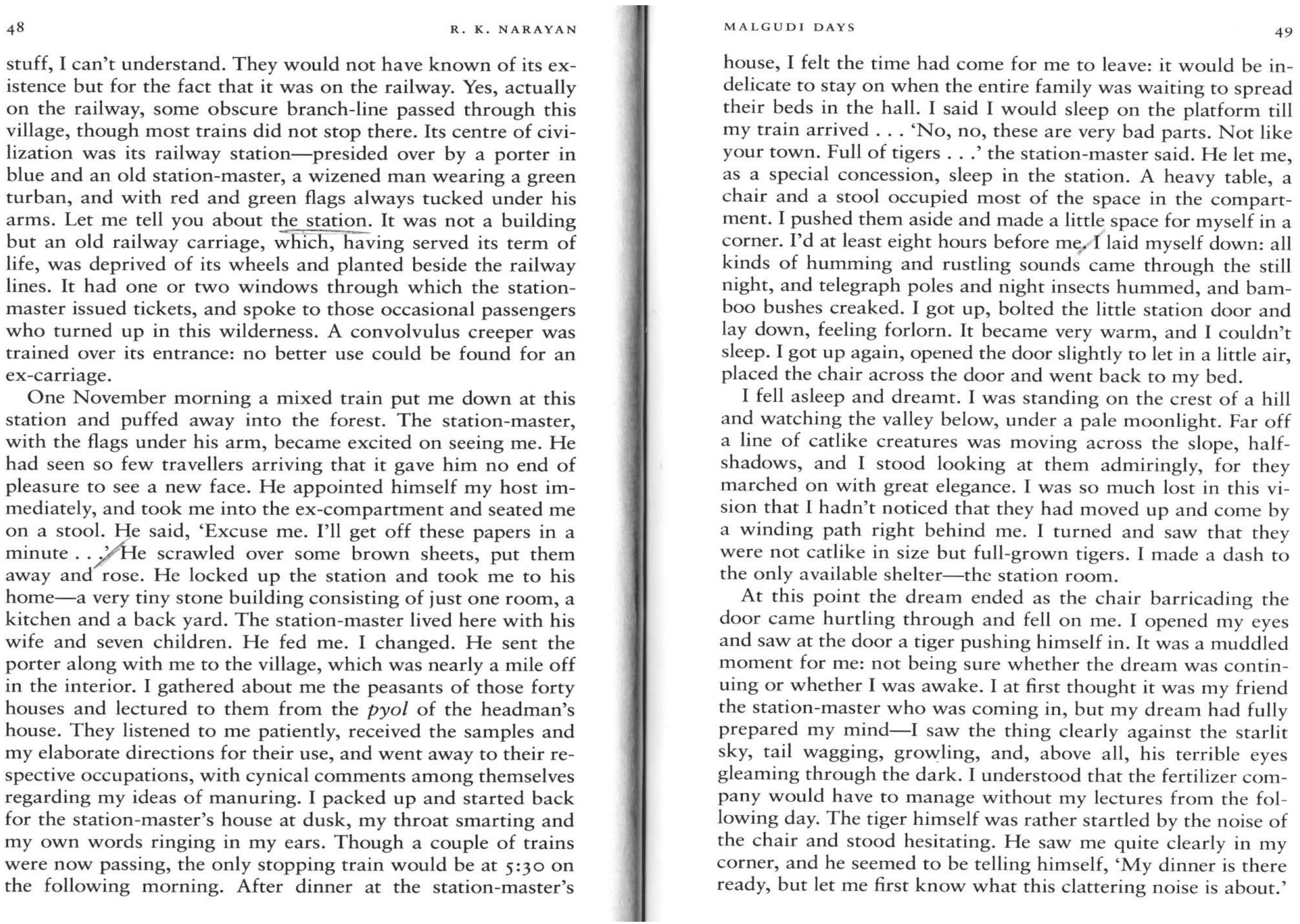

stuff, I can't understand. They would not have known of its existence but for the fact that it was on the railway. Yes, actually on the railway, some obscure branch-line passed through this village, though most trains did not stop there. Its centre of civilization was its railway station—presided over by a porter in blue and an old station-master, a wizened man wearing a green turban, and with red and green flags always tucked under his arms. Let me tell you about the station. It was not a building but an old railway carriage, which, having served its term of life, was deprived of its wheels and planted beside the railway lines. It had one or two windows through which the station-master issued tickets, and spoke to those occasional passengers who turned up in this wilderness. A convolvulus creeper was trained over its entrance: no better use could be found for an ex-carriage.

One November morning a mixed train put me down at this station and puffed away into the forest. The station-master, with the flags under his arm, became excited on seeing me. He had seen so few travellers arriving that it gave him no end of pleasure to see a new face. He appointed himself my host immediately, and took me into the ex-compartment and seated me on a stool. He said, 'Excuse me. I'll get off these papers in a minute . . .' He scrawled over some brown sheets, put them away and rose. He locked up the station and took me to his home—a very tiny stone building consisting of just one room, a kitchen and a back yard. The station-master lived here with his wife and seven children. He fed me. I changed. He sent the porter along with me to the village, which was nearly a mile off in the interior. I gathered about me the peasants of those forty houses and lectured to them from the *pyol* of the headman's house. They listened to me patiently, received the samples and my elaborate directions for their use, and went away to their respective occupations, with cynical comments among themselves regarding my ideas of manuring. I packed up and started back for the station-master's house at dusk, my throat smarting and my own words ringing in my ears. Though a couple of trains were now passing, the only stopping train would be at 5:30 on the following morning. After dinner at the station-master's house, I felt the time had come for me to leave: it would be indelicate to stay on when the entire family was waiting to spread their beds in the hall. I said I would sleep on the platform till my train arrived . . . 'No, no, these are very bad parts. Not like your town. Full of tigers . . .' the station-master said. He let me, as a special concession, sleep in the station. A heavy table, a chair and a stool occupied most of the space in the compartment. I pushed them aside and made a little space for myself in a corner. I'd at least eight hours before me. I laid myself down: all kinds of humming and rustling sounds came through the still night, and telegraph poles and night insects hummed, and bamboo bushes creaked. I got up, bolted the little station door and lay down, feeling forlorn. It became very warm, and I couldn't sleep. I got up again, opened the door slightly to let in a little air, placed the chair across the door and went back to my bed.

I fell asleep and dreamt. I was standing on the crest of a hill and watching the valley below, under a pale moonlight. Far off a line of catlike creatures was moving across the slope, half-shadows, and I stood looking at them admiringly, for they marched on with great elegance. I was so much lost in this vision that I hadn't noticed that they had moved up and come by a winding path right behind me. I turned and saw that they were not catlike in size but full-grown tigers. I made a dash to the only available shelter—the station room.

At this point the dream ended as the chair barricading the door came hurtling through and fell on me. I opened my eyes and saw at the door a tiger pushing himself in. It was a muddled moment for me: not being sure whether the dream was continuing or whether I was awake. I at first thought it was my friend the station-master who was coming in, but my dream had fully prepared my mind—I saw the thing clearly against the starlit sky, tail wagging, growling, and, above all, his terrible eyes gleaming through the dark. I understood that the fertilizer company would have to manage without my lectures from the following day. The tiger himself was rather startled by the noise of the chair and stood hesitating. He saw me quite clearly in my corner, and he seemed to be telling himself, 'My dinner is there ready, but let me first know what this clattering noise is about.'

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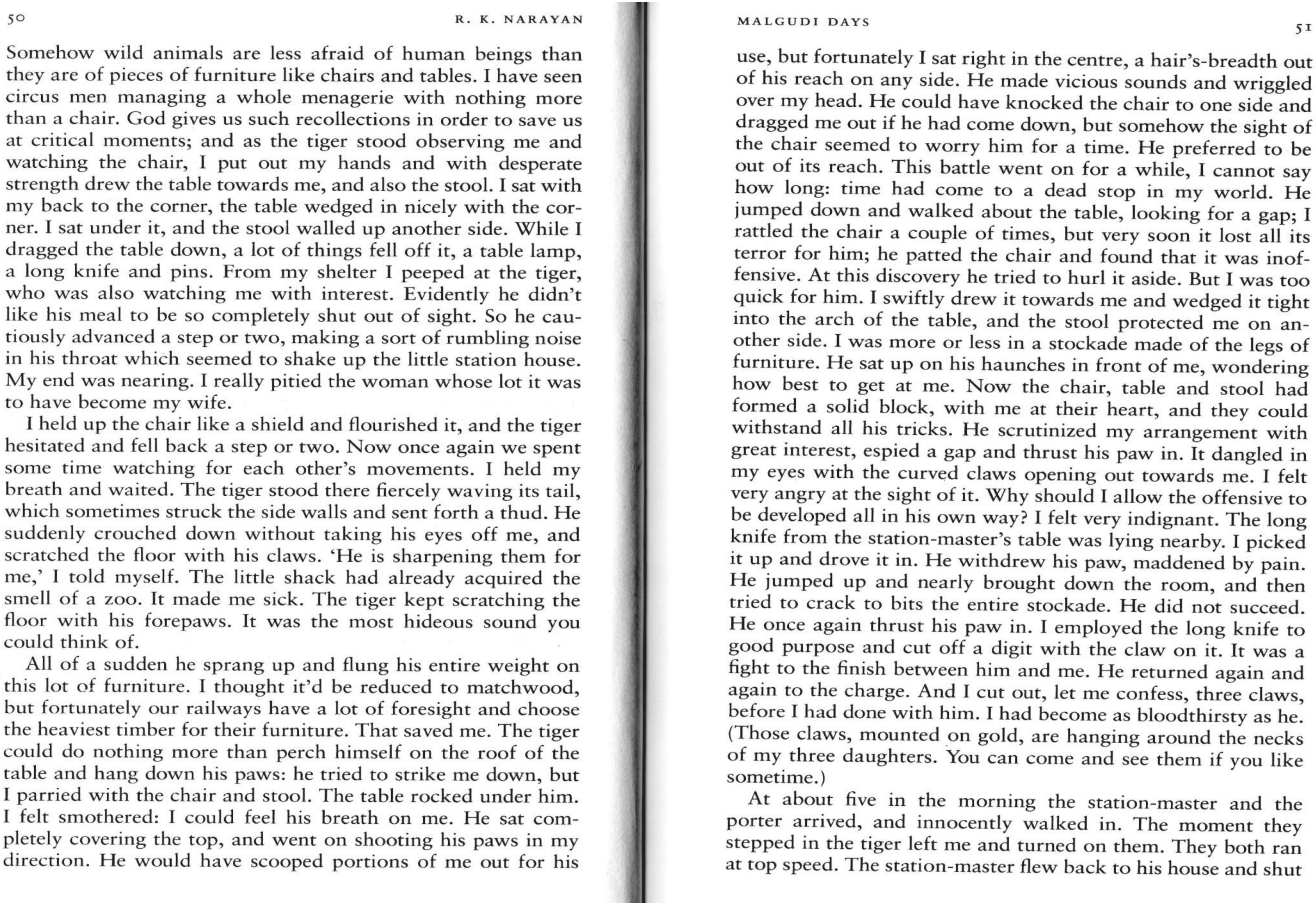


Somehow wild animals are less afraid of human beings than they are of pieces of furniture like chairs and tables. I have seen circus men managing a whole menagerie with nothing more than a chair. God gives us such recollections in order to save us at critical moments; and as the tiger stood observing me and watching the chair, I put out my hands and with desperate strength drew the table towards me, and also the stool. I sat with my back to the corner, the table wedged in nicely with the corner. I sat under it, and the stool walled up another side. While I dragged the table down, a lot of things fell off it, a table lamp, a long knife and pins. From my shelter I peeped at the tiger, who was also watching me with interest. Evidently he didn't like his meal to be so completely shut out of sight. So he cautiously advanced a step or two, making a sort of rumbling noise in his throat which seemed to shake up the little station house. My end was nearing. I really pitied the woman whose lot it was to have become my wife.

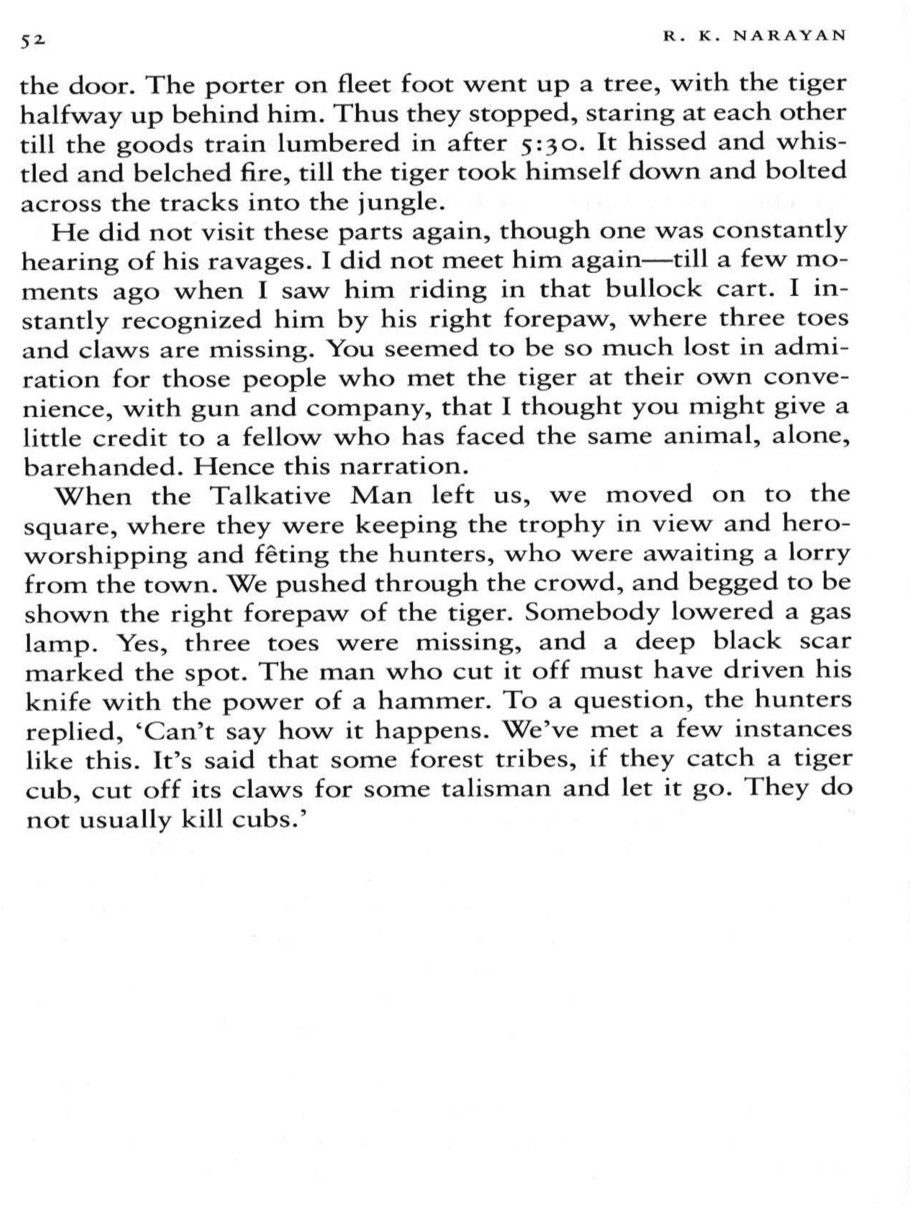
I held up the chair like a shield and flourished it, and the tiger hesitated and fell back a step or two. Now once again we spent some time watching for each other's movements. I held my breath and waited. The tiger stood there fiercely waving its tail, which sometimes struck the side walls and sent forth a thud. He suddenly crouched down without taking his eyes off me, and scratched the floor with his claws. 'He is sharpening them for me,' I told myself. The little shack had already acquired the smell of a zoo. It made me sick. The tiger kept scratching the floor with his forepaws. It was the most hideous sound you could think of.

All of a sudden he sprang up and flung his entire weight on this lot of furniture. I thought it'd be reduced to matchwood, but fortunately our railways have a lot of foresight and choose the heaviest timber for their furniture. That saved me. The tiger could do nothing more than perch himself on the roof of the table and hang down his paws: he tried to strike me down, but I parried with the chair and stool. The table rocked under him. I felt smothered: I could feel his breath on me. He sat completely covering the top, and went on shooting his paws in my direction. He would have scooped portions of me out for his

use, but fortunately I sat right in the centre, a hair's-breadth out of his reach on any side. He made vicious sounds and wriggled over my head. He could have knocked the chair to one side and dragged me out if he had come down, but somehow the sight of the chair seemed to worry him for a time. He preferred to be out of its reach. This battle went on for a while, I cannot say how long: time had come to a dead stop in my world. He jumped down and walked about the table, looking for a gap; I rattled the chair a couple of times, but very soon it lost all its terror for him; he patted the chair and found that it was inoffensive. At this discovery he tried to hurl it aside. But I was too quick for him. I swiftly drew it towards me and wedged it tight into the arch of the table, and the stool protected me on another side. I was more or less in a stockade made of the legs of furniture. He sat up on his haunches in front of me, wondering how best to get at me. Now the chair, table and stool had formed a solid block, with me at their heart, and they could withstand all his tricks. He scrutinized my arrangement with great interest, espied a gap and thrust his paw in. It dangled in my eyes with the curved claws opening out towards me. I felt very angry at the sight of it. Why should I allow the offensive to be developed all in his own way? I felt very indignant. The long knife from the station-master's table was lying nearby. I picked it up and drove it in. He withdrew his paw, maddened by pain. He jumped up and nearly brought down the room, and then tried to crack to bits the entire stockade. He did not succeed. He once again thrust his paw in. I employed the long knife to good purpose and cut off a digit with the claw on it. It was a fight to the finish between him and me. He returned again and again to the charge. And I cut out, let me confess, three claws, before I had done with him. I had become as bloodthirsty as he. (Those claws, mounted on gold, are hanging around the necks of my three daughters. You can come and see them if you like sometime.)

At about five in the morning the station-master and the porter arrived, and innocently walked in. The moment they stepped in the tiger left me and turned on them. They both ran at top speed. The station-master flew back to his house and shut

ANEXO II – REPRODUÇÃO DO TEXTO ORIGINAL



the door. The porter on fleet foot went up a tree, with the tiger halfway up behind him. Thus they stopped, staring at each other till the goods train lumbered in after 5:30. It hissed and whistled and belched fire, till the tiger took himself down and bolted across the tracks into the jungle.

He did not visit these parts again, though one was constantly hearing of his ravages. I did not meet him again—till a few moments ago when I saw him riding in that bullock cart. I instantly recognized him by his right forepaw, where three toes and claws are missing. You seemed to be so much lost in admiration for those people who met the tiger at their own convenience, with gun and company, that I thought you might give a little credit to a fellow who has faced the same animal, alone, barehanded. Hence this narration.

When the Talkative Man left us, we moved on to the square, where they were keeping the trophy in view and hero-worshipping and fêting the hunters, who were awaiting a lorry from the town. We pushed through the crowd, and begged to be shown the right forepaw of the tiger. Somebody lowered a gas lamp. Yes, three toes were missing, and a deep black scar marked the spot. The man who cut it off must have driven his knife with the power of a hammer. To a question, the hunters replied, 'Can't say how it happens. We've met a few instances like this. It's said that some forest tribes, if they catch a tiger cub, cut off its claws for some talisman and let it go. They do not usually kill cubs.'

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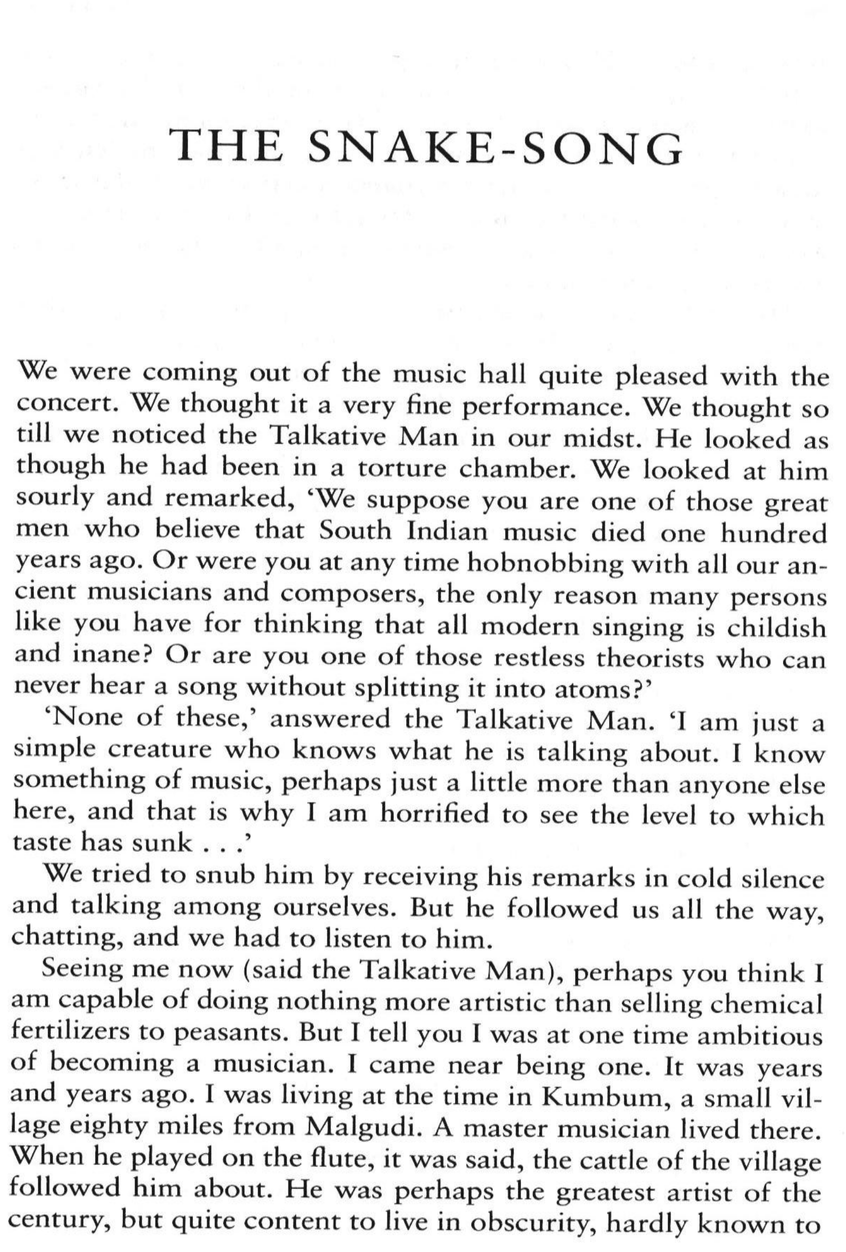

THE SNAKE-SONG

We were coming out of the music hall quite pleased with the concert. We thought it a very fine performance. We thought so till we noticed the Talkative Man in our midst. He looked as though he had been in a torture chamber. We looked at him sourly and remarked, 'We suppose you are one of those great men who believe that South Indian music died one hundred years ago. Or were you at any time hobnobbing with all our ancient musicians and composers, the only reason many persons like you have for thinking that all modern singing is childish and inane? Or are you one of those restless theorists who can never hear a song without splitting it into atoms?'

'None of these,' answered the Talkative Man. 'I am just a simple creature who knows what he is talking about. I know something of music, perhaps just a little more than anyone else here, and that is why I am horrified to see the level to which taste has sunk . . .'

We tried to snub him by receiving his remarks in cold silence and talking among ourselves. But he followed us all the way, chatting, and we had to listen to him.

Seeing me now (said the Talkative Man), perhaps you think I am capable of doing nothing more artistic than selling chemical fertilizers to peasants. But I tell you I was at one time ambitious of becoming a musician. I came near being one. It was years and years ago. I was living at the time in Kumbum, a small village eighty miles from Malgudi. A master musician lived there. When he played on the flute, it was said, the cattle of the village followed him about. He was perhaps the greatest artist of the century, but quite content to live in obscurity, hardly known to

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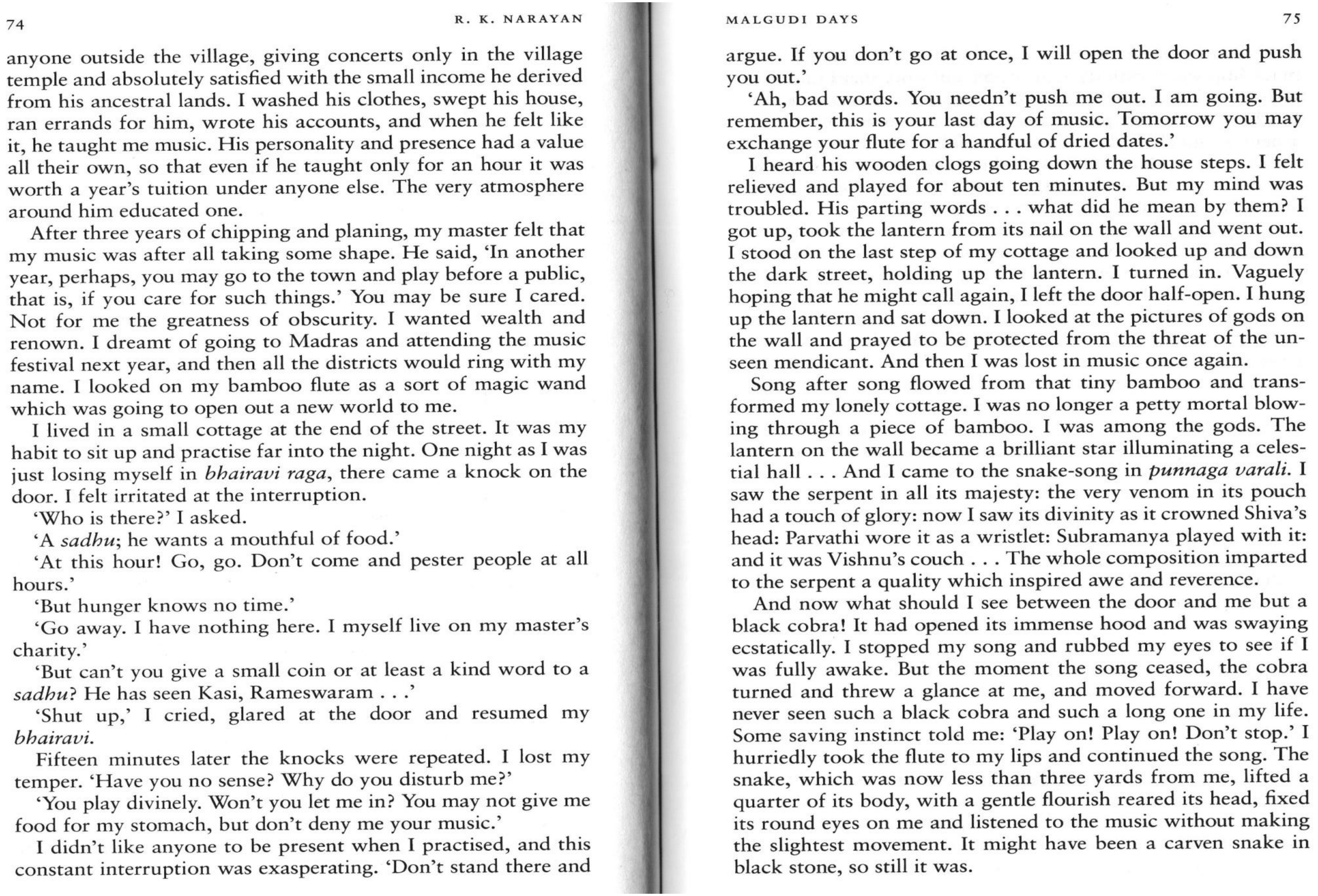

anyone outside the village, giving concerts only in the village temple and absolutely satisfied with the small income he derived from his ancestral lands. I washed his clothes, swept his house, ran errands for him, wrote his accounts, and when he felt like it, he taught me music. His personality and presence had a value all their own, so that even if he taught only for an hour it was worth a year's tuition under anyone else. The very atmosphere around him educated one.

After three years of chipping and planing, my master felt that my music was after all taking some shape. He said, 'In another year, perhaps, you may go to the town and play before a public, that is, if you care for such things.' You may be sure I cared. Not for me the greatness of obscurity. I wanted wealth and renown. I dreamt of going to Madras and attending the music festival next year, and then all the districts would ring with my name. I looked on my bamboo flute as a sort of magic wand which was going to open out a new world to me.

I lived in a small cottage at the end of the street. It was my habit to sit up and practise far into the night. One night as I was just losing myself in *bhairavi raga*, there came a knock on the door. I felt irritated at the interruption.

'Who is there?' I asked.

'A *sadhu*; he wants a mouthful of food.'

'At this hour! Go, go. Don't come and pester people at all hours.'

'But hunger knows no time.'

'Go away. I have nothing here. I myself live on my master's charity.'

'But can't you give a small coin or at least a kind word to a *sadhu*? He has seen Kasi, Rameswaram . . .'

'Shut up,' I cried, glared at the door and resumed my *bhairavi*.

Fifteen minutes later the knocks were repeated. I lost my temper. 'Have you no sense? Why do you disturb me?'

'You play divinely. Won't you let me in? You may not give me food for my stomach, but don't deny me your music.'

I didn't like anyone to be present when I practised, and this constant interruption was exasperating. 'Don't stand there and argue. If you don't go at once, I will open the door and push you out.'

'Ah, bad words. You needn't push me out. I am going. But remember, this is your last day of music. Tomorrow you may exchange your flute for a handful of dried dates.'

I heard his wooden clogs going down the house steps. I felt relieved and played for about ten minutes. But my mind was troubled. His parting words . . . what did he mean by them? I got up, took the lantern from its nail on the wall and went out. I stood on the last step of my cottage and looked up and down the dark street, holding up the lantern. I turned in. Vaguely hoping that he might call again, I left the door half-open. I hung up the lantern and sat down. I looked at the pictures of gods on the wall and prayed to be protected from the threat of the unseen mendicant. And then I was lost in music once again.

Song after song flowed from that tiny bamboo and transformed my lonely cottage. I was no longer a petty mortal blowing through a piece of bamboo. I was among the gods. The lantern on the wall became a brilliant star illuminating a celestial hall . . . And I came to the snake-song in *punnaga varali*. I saw the serpent in all its majesty: the very venom in its pouch had a touch of glory: now I saw its divinity as it crowned Shiva's head: Parvathi wore it as a wristlet: Subramanya played with it: and it was Vishnu's couch . . . The whole composition imparted to the serpent a quality which inspired awe and reverence.

And now what should I see between the door and me but a black cobra! It had opened its immense hood and was swaying ecstatically. I stopped my song and rubbed my eyes to see if I was fully awake. But the moment the song ceased, the cobra turned and threw a glance at me, and moved forward. I have never seen such a black cobra and such a long one in my life. Some saving instinct told me: 'Play on! Play on! Don't stop.' I hurriedly took the flute to my lips and continued the song. The snake, which was now less than three yards from me, lifted a quarter of its body, with a gentle flourish reared its head, fixed its round eyes on me and listened to the music without making the slightest movement. It might have been a carven snake in black stone, so still it was.

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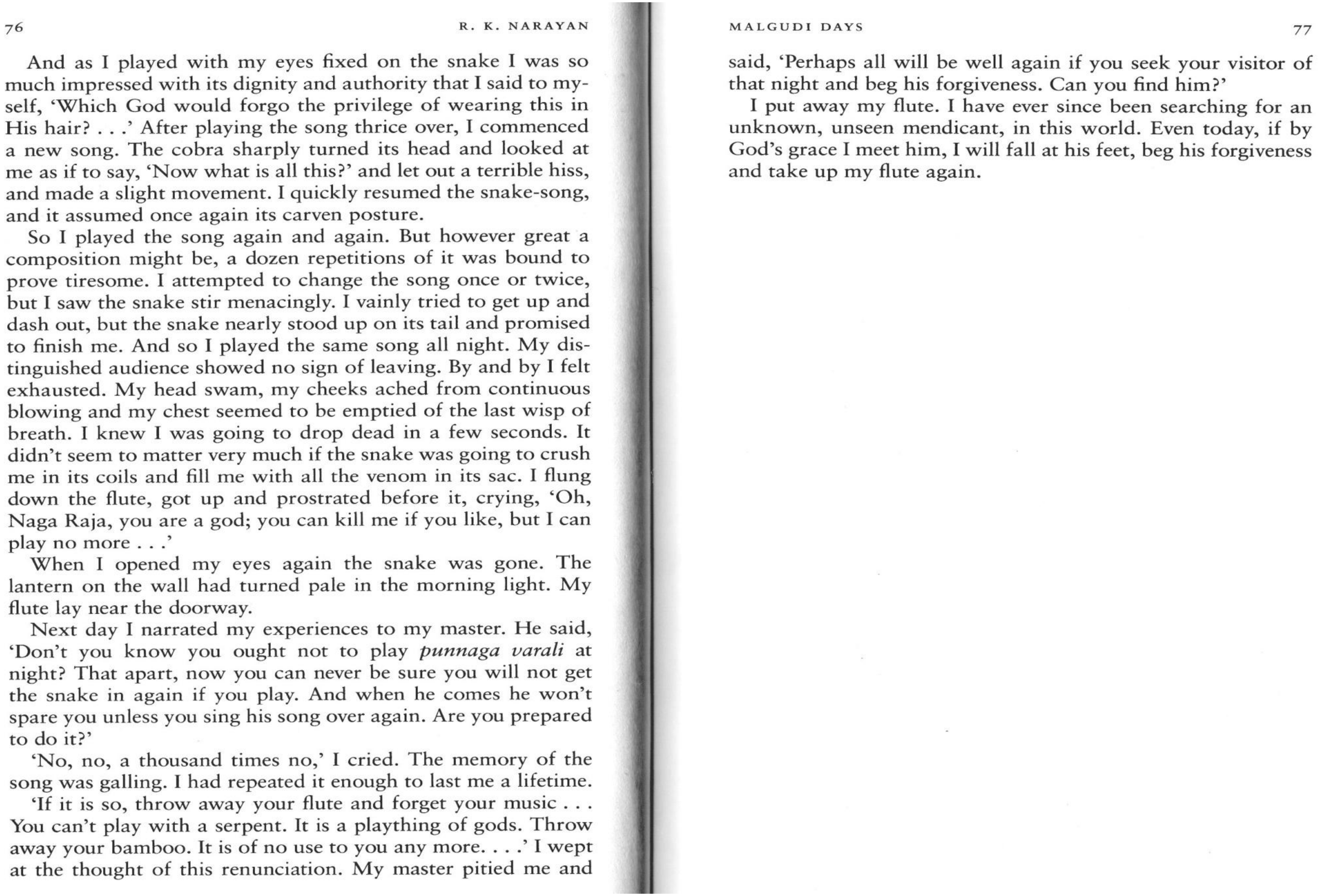

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And as I played with my eyes fixed on the snake I was so much impressed with its dignity and authority that I said to myself, 'Which God would forgo the privilege of wearing this in His hair? . . .' After playing the song thrice over, I commenced a new song. The cobra sharply turned its head and looked at me as if to say, 'Now what is all this?' and let out a terrible hiss, and made a slight movement. I quickly resumed the snake-song, and it assumed once again its carven posture.

So I played the song again and again. But however great a composition might be, a dozen repetitions of it was bound to prove tiresome. I attempted to change the song once or twice, but I saw the snake stir menacingly. I vainly tried to get up and dash out, but the snake nearly stood up on its tail and promised to finish me. And so I played the same song all night. My distinguished audience showed no sign of leaving. By and by I felt exhausted. My head swam, my cheeks ached from continuous blowing and my chest seemed to be emptied of the last wisp of breath. I knew I was going to drop dead in a few seconds. It didn't seem to matter very much if the snake was going to crush me in its coils and fill me with all the venom in its sac. I flung down the flute, got up and prostrated before it, crying, 'Oh, Naga Raja, you are a god; you can kill me if you like, but I can play no more . . .'

When I opened my eyes again the snake was gone. The lantern on the wall had turned pale in the morning light. My flute lay near the doorway.

Next day I narrated my experiences to my master. He said, 'Don't you know you ought not to play *punnaga varali* at night? That apart, now you can never be sure you will not get the snake in again if you play. And when he comes he won't spare you unless you sing his song over again. Are you prepared to do it?'

'No, no, a thousand times no,' I cried. The memory of the song was galling. I had repeated it enough to last me a lifetime.

'If it is so, throw away your flute and forget your music . . . You can't play with a serpent. It is a plaything of gods. Throw away your bamboo. It is of no use to you any more. . . .' I wept at the thought of this renunciation. My master pitied me and

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said, 'Perhaps all will be well again if you seek your visitor of that night and beg his forgiveness. Can you find him?'

I put away my flute. I have ever since been searching for an unknown, unseen mendicant, in this world. Even today, if by God's grace I meet him, I will fall at his feet, beg his forgiveness and take up my flute again.

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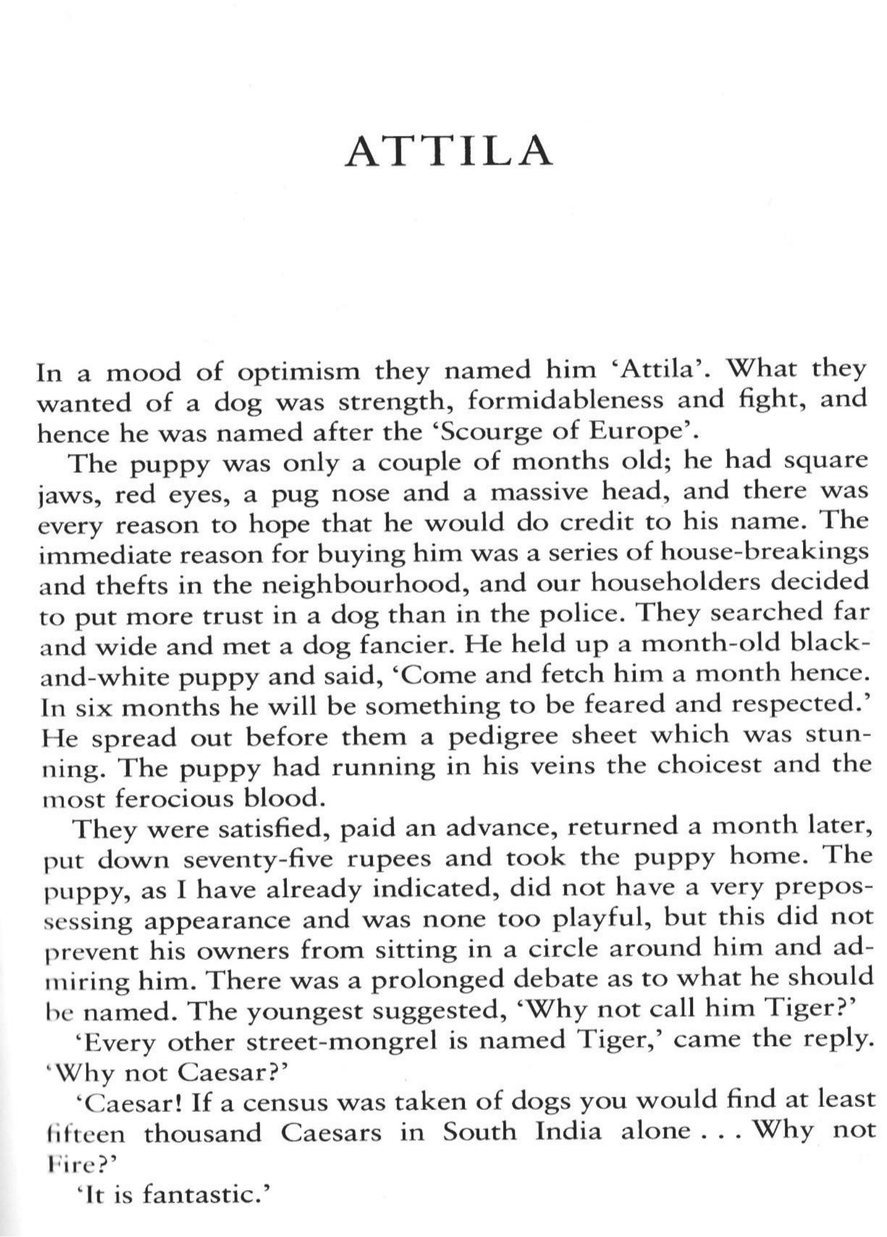

ATTILA

In a mood of optimism they named him 'Attila'. What they wanted of a dog was strength, formidableness and fight, and hence he was named after the 'Scourge of Europe'.

The puppy was only a couple of months old; he had square jaws, red eyes, a pug nose and a massive head, and there was every reason to hope that he would do credit to his name. The immediate reason for buying him was a series of house-breakings and thefts in the neighbourhood, and our householders decided to put more trust in a dog than in the police. They searched far and wide and met a dog fancier. He held up a month-old black-and-white puppy and said, 'Come and fetch him a month hence. In six months he will be something to be feared and respected.' He spread out before them a pedigree sheet which was stunning. The puppy had running in his veins the choicest and the most ferocious blood.

They were satisfied, paid an advance, returned a month later, put down seventy-five rupees and took the puppy home. The puppy, as I have already indicated, did not have a very prepossessing appearance and was none too playful, but this did not prevent his owners from sitting in a circle around him and admiring him. There was a prolonged debate as to what he should be named. The youngest suggested, 'Why not call him Tiger?'

'Every other street-mongrel is named Tiger,' came the reply. 'Why not Caesar?'

'Caesar! If a census was taken of dogs you would find at least fifteen thousand Caesars in South India alone . . . Why not Fire?'

'It is fantastic.'

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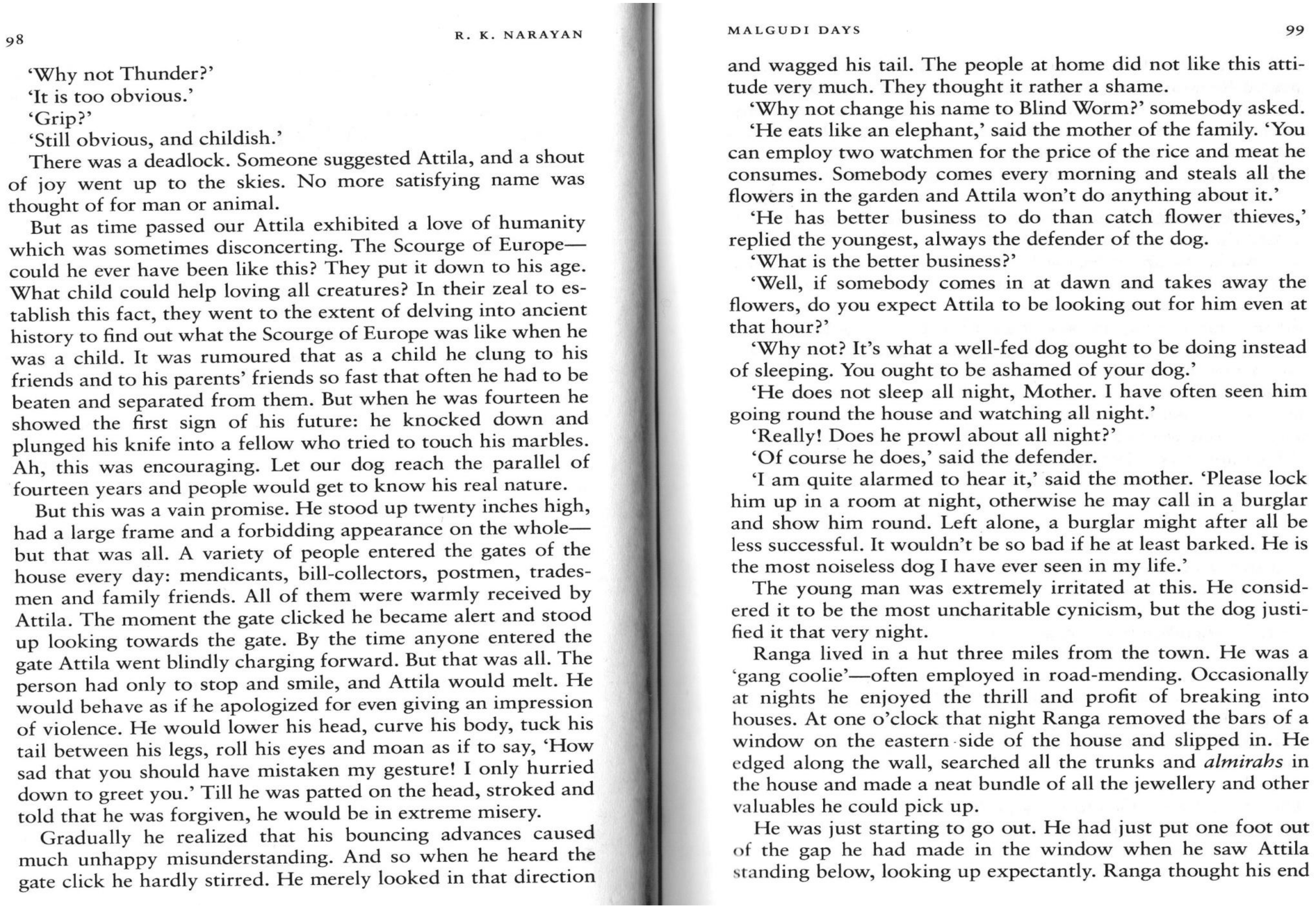

'Why not Thunder?'

'It is too obvious.'

'Grip?'

'Still obvious, and childish.'

There was a deadlock. Someone suggested Attila, and a shout of joy went up to the skies. No more satisfying name was thought of for man or animal.

But as time passed our Attila exhibited a love of humanity which was sometimes disconcerting. The Scourge of Europe—could he ever have been like this? They put it down to his age. What child could help loving all creatures? In their zeal to establish this fact, they went to the extent of delving into ancient history to find out what the Scourge of Europe was like when he was a child. It was rumoured that as a child he clung to his friends and to his parents' friends so fast that often he had to be beaten and separated from them. But when he was fourteen he showed the first sign of his future: he knocked down and plunged his knife into a fellow who tried to touch his marbles. Ah, this was encouraging. Let our dog reach the parallel of fourteen years and people would get to know his real nature.

But this was a vain promise. He stood up twenty inches high, had a large frame and a forbidding appearance on the whole—but that was all. A variety of people entered the gates of the house every day: mendicants, bill-collectors, postmen, tradesmen and family friends. All of them were warmly received by Attila. The moment the gate clicked he became alert and stood up looking towards the gate. By the time anyone entered the gate Attila went blindly charging forward. But that was all. The person had only to stop and smile, and Attila would melt. He would behave as if he apologized for even giving an impression of violence. He would lower his head, curve his body, tuck his tail between his legs, roll his eyes and moan as if to say, 'How sad that you should have mistaken my gesture! I only hurried down to greet you.' Till he was patted on the head, stroked and told that he was forgiven, he would be in extreme misery.

Gradually he realized that his bouncing advances caused much unhappy misunderstanding. And so when he heard the gate click he hardly stirred. He merely looked in that direction

and wagged his tail. The people at home did not like this attitude very much. They thought it rather a shame.

'Why not change his name to Blind Worm?' somebody asked.

'He eats like an elephant,' said the mother of the family. 'You can employ two watchmen for the price of the rice and meat he consumes. Somebody comes every morning and steals all the flowers in the garden and Attila won't do anything about it.'

'He has better business to do than catch flower thieves,' replied the youngest, always the defender of the dog.

'What is the better business?'

'Well, if somebody comes in at dawn and takes away the flowers, do you expect Attila to be looking out for him even at that hour?'

'Why not? It's what a well-fed dog ought to be doing instead of sleeping. You ought to be ashamed of your dog.'

'He does not sleep all night, Mother. I have often seen him going round the house and watching all night.'

'Really! Does he prowl about all night?'

'Of course he does,' said the defender.

'I am quite alarmed to hear it,' said the mother. 'Please lock him up in a room at night, otherwise he may call in a burglar and show him round. Left alone, a burglar might after all be less successful. It wouldn't be so bad if he at least barked. He is the most noiseless dog I have ever seen in my life.'

The young man was extremely irritated at this. He considered it to be the most uncharitable cynicism, but the dog justified it that very night.

Ranga lived in a hut three miles from the town. He was a 'gang coolie'—often employed in road-mending. Occasionally at nights he enjoyed the thrill and profit of breaking into houses. At one o'clock that night Ranga removed the bars of a window on the eastern side of the house and slipped in. He edged along the wall, searched all the trunks and *almirahs* in the house and made a neat bundle of all the jewellery and other valuables he could pick up.

He was just starting to go out. He had just put one foot out of the gap he had made in the window when he saw Attila standing below, looking up expectantly. Ranga thought his end

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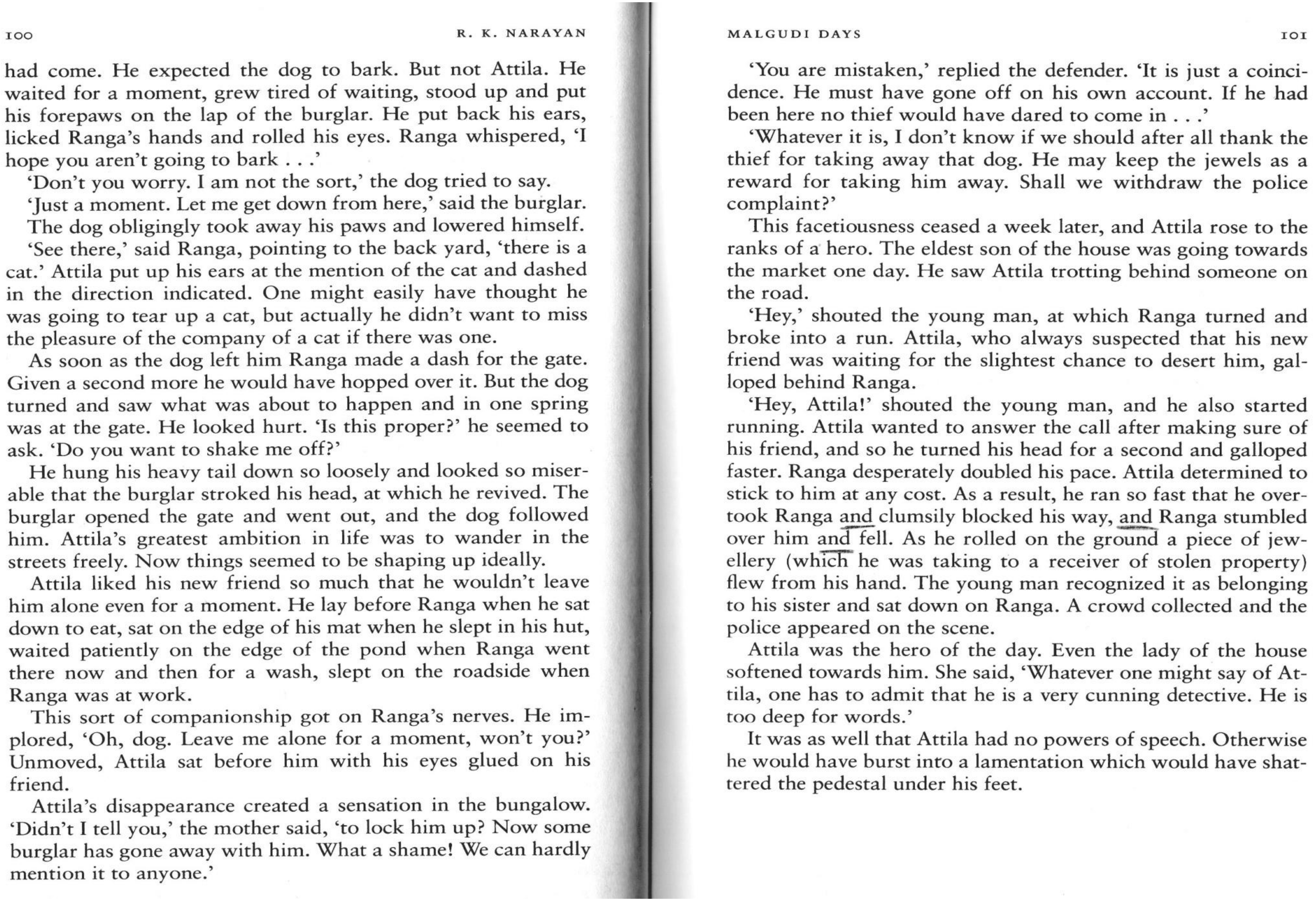

had come. He expected the dog to bark. But not Attila. He waited for a moment, grew tired of waiting, stood up and put his forepaws on the lap of the burglar. He put back his ears, licked Ranga's hands and rolled his eyes. Ranga whispered, 'I hope you aren't going to bark . . .'

'Don't you worry. I am not the sort,' the dog tried to say.

'Just a moment. Let me get down from here,' said the burglar.

The dog obligingly took away his paws and lowered himself.

'See there,' said Ranga, pointing to the back yard, 'there is a cat.' Attila put up his ears at the mention of the cat and dashed in the direction indicated. One might easily have thought he was going to tear up a cat, but actually he didn't want to miss the pleasure of the company of a cat if there was one.

As soon as the dog left him Ranga made a dash for the gate. Given a second more he would have hopped over it. But the dog turned and saw what was about to happen and in one spring was at the gate. He looked hurt. 'Is this proper?' he seemed to ask. 'Do you want to shake me off?'

He hung his heavy tail down so loosely and looked so miserable that the burglar stroked his head, at which he revived. The burglar opened the gate and went out, and the dog followed him. Attila's greatest ambition in life was to wander in the streets freely. Now things seemed to be shaping up ideally.

Attila liked his new friend so much that he wouldn't leave him alone even for a moment. He lay before Ranga when he sat down to eat, sat on the edge of his mat when he slept in his hut, waited patiently on the edge of the pond when Ranga went there now and then for a wash, slept on the roadside when Ranga was at work.

This sort of companionship got on Ranga's nerves. He implored, 'Oh, dog. Leave me alone for a moment, won't you?' Unmoved, Attila sat before him with his eyes glued on his friend.

Attila's disappearance created a sensation in the bungalow. 'Didn't I tell you,' the mother said, 'to lock him up? Now some burglar has gone away with him. What a shame! We can hardly mention it to anyone.'

'You are mistaken,' replied the defender. 'It is just a coincidence. He must have gone off on his own account. If he had been here no thief would have dared to come in . . .'

'Whatever it is, I don't know if we should after all thank the thief for taking away that dog. He may keep the jewels as a reward for taking him away. Shall we withdraw the police complaint?'

This facetiousness ceased a week later, and Attila rose to the ranks of a hero. The eldest son of the house was going towards the market one day. He saw Attila trotting behind someone on the road.

'Hey,' shouted the young man, at which Ranga turned and broke into a run. Attila, who always suspected that his new friend was waiting for the slightest chance to desert him, galloped behind Ranga.

'Hey, Attila!' shouted the young man, and he also started running. Attila wanted to answer the call after making sure of his friend, and so he turned his head for a second and galloped faster. Ranga desperately doubled his pace. Attila determined to stick to him at any cost. As a result, he ran so fast that he overtook Ranga and clumsily blocked his way, and Ranga stumbled over him and fell. As he rolled on the ground a piece of jewellery (which he was taking to a receiver of stolen property) flew from his hand. The young man recognized it as belonging to his sister and sat down on Ranga. A crowd collected and the police appeared on the scene.

Attila was the hero of the day. Even the lady of the house softened towards him. She said, 'Whatever one might say of Attila, one has to admit that he is a very cunning detective. He is too deep for words.'

It was as well that Attila had no powers of speech. Otherwise he would have burst into a lamentation which would have shattered the pedestal under his feet.

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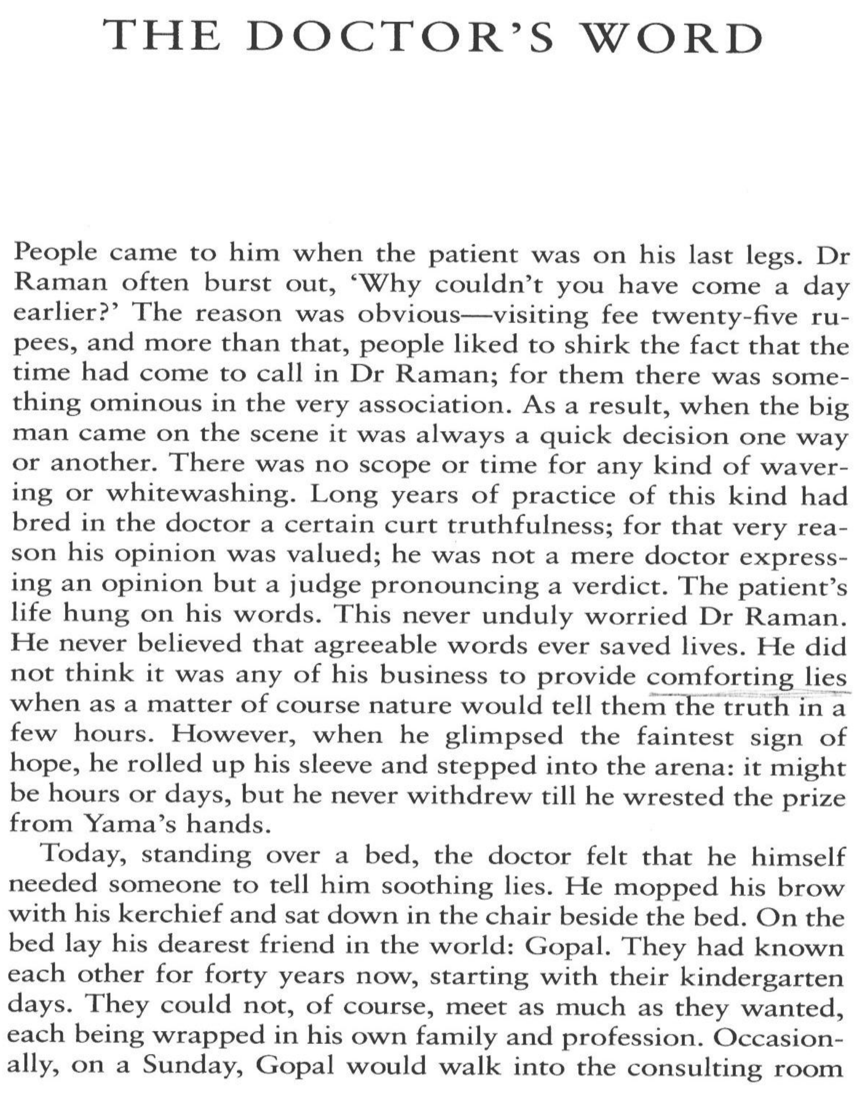

THE DOCTOR'S WORD

People came to him when the patient was on his last legs. Dr Raman often burst out, 'Why couldn't you have come a day earlier?' The reason was obvious—visiting fee twenty-five rupees, and more than that, people liked to shirk the fact that the time had come to call in Dr Raman; for them there was something ominous in the very association. As a result, when the big man came on the scene it was always a quick decision one way or another. There was no scope or time for any kind of wavering or whitewashing. Long years of practice of this kind had bred in the doctor a certain curt truthfulness; for that very reason his opinion was valued; he was not a mere doctor expressing an opinion but a judge pronouncing a verdict. The patient's life hung on his words. This never unduly worried Dr Raman. He never believed that agreeable words ever saved lives. He did not think it was any of his business to provide comforting lies when as a matter of course nature would tell them the truth in a few hours. However, when he glimpsed the faintest sign of hope, he rolled up his sleeve and stepped into the arena: it might be hours or days, but he never withdrew till he wrested the prize from Yama's hands.

Today, standing over a bed, the doctor felt that he himself needed someone to tell him soothing lies. He mopped his brow with his kerchief and sat down in the chair beside the bed. On the bed lay his dearest friend in the world: Gopal. They had known each other for forty years now, starting with their kindergarten days. They could not, of course, meet as much as they wanted, each being wrapped in his own family and profession. Occasionally, on a Sunday, Gopal would walk into the consulting room

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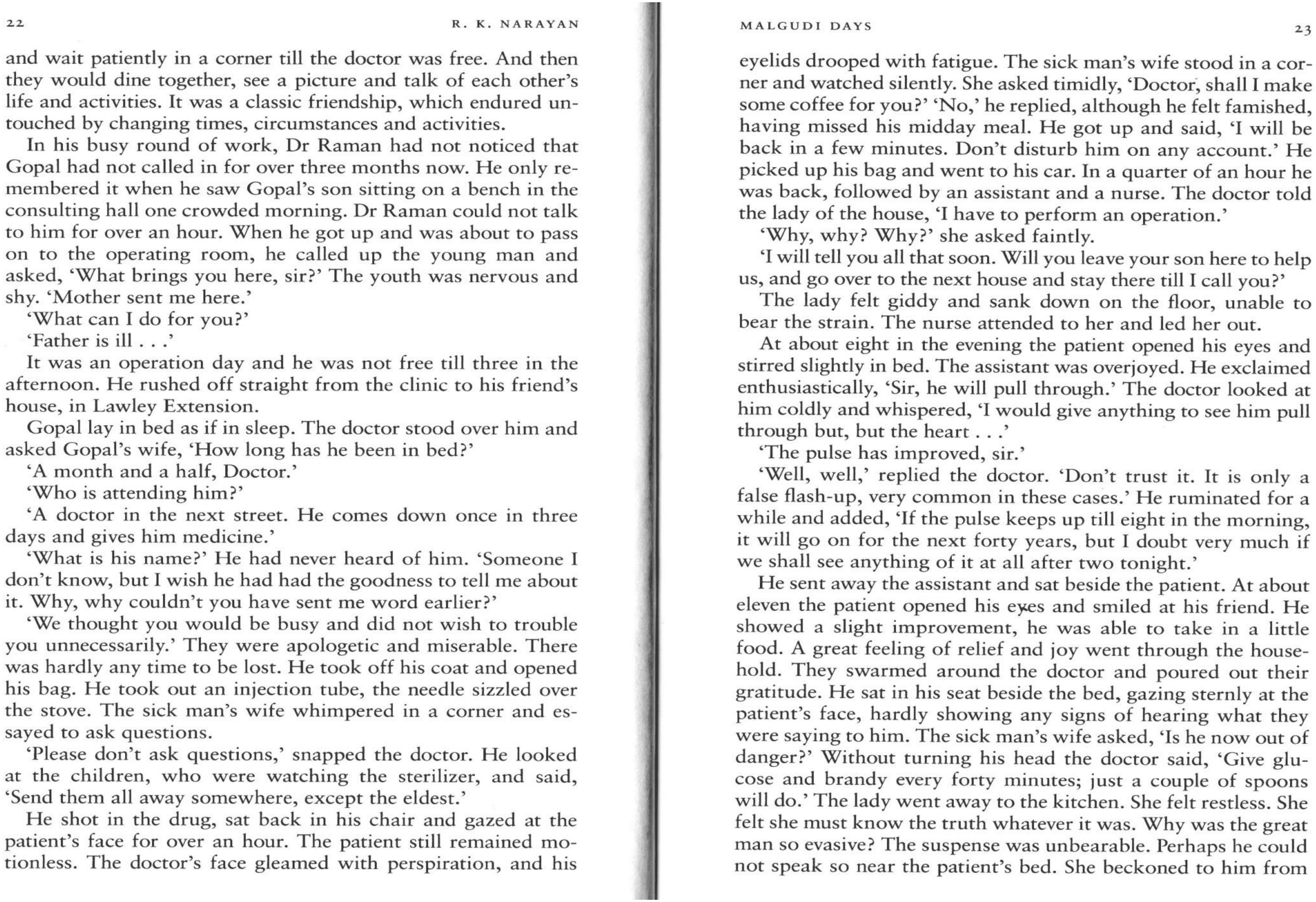


and wait patiently in a corner till the doctor was free. And then they would dine together, see a picture and talk of each other's life and activities. It was a classic friendship, which endured untouched by changing times, circumstances and activities.

In his busy round of work, Dr Raman had not noticed that Gopal had not called in for over three months now. He only remembered it when he saw Gopal's son sitting on a bench in the consulting hall one crowded morning. Dr Raman could not talk to him for over an hour. When he got up and was about to pass on to the operating room, he called up the young man and asked, 'What brings you here, sir?' The youth was nervous and shy. 'Mother sent me here.'

'What can I do for you?'

'Father is ill . . .'

It was an operation day and he was not free till three in the afternoon. He rushed off straight from the clinic to his friend's house, in Lawley Extension.

Gopal lay in bed as if in sleep. The doctor stood over him and asked Gopal's wife, 'How long has he been in bed?'

'A month and a half, Doctor.'

'Who is attending him?'

'A doctor in the next street. He comes down once in three days and gives him medicine.'

'What is his name?' He had never heard of him. 'Someone I don't know, but I wish he had had the goodness to tell me about it. Why, why couldn't you have sent me word earlier?'

'We thought you would be busy and did not wish to trouble you unnecessarily.' They were apologetic and miserable. There was hardly any time to be lost. He took off his coat and opened his bag. He took out an injection tube, the needle sizzled over the stove. The sick man's wife whimpered in a corner and essayed to ask questions.

'Please don't ask questions,' snapped the doctor. He looked at the children, who were watching the sterilizer, and said, 'Send them all away somewhere, except the eldest.'

He shot in the drug, sat back in his chair and gazed at the patient's face for over an hour. The patient still remained motionless. The doctor's face gleamed with perspiration, and his

eyelids drooped with fatigue. The sick man's wife stood in a corner and watched silently. She asked timidly, 'Doctor, shall I make some coffee for you?' 'No,' he replied, although he felt famished, having missed his midday meal. He got up and said, 'I will be back in a few minutes. Don't disturb him on any account.' He picked up his bag and went to his car. In a quarter of an hour he was back, followed by an assistant and a nurse. The doctor told the lady of the house, 'I have to perform an operation.'

'Why, why? Why?' she asked faintly.

'I will tell you all that soon. Will you leave your son here to help us, and go over to the next house and stay there till I call you?'

The lady felt giddy and sank down on the floor, unable to bear the strain. The nurse attended to her and led her out.

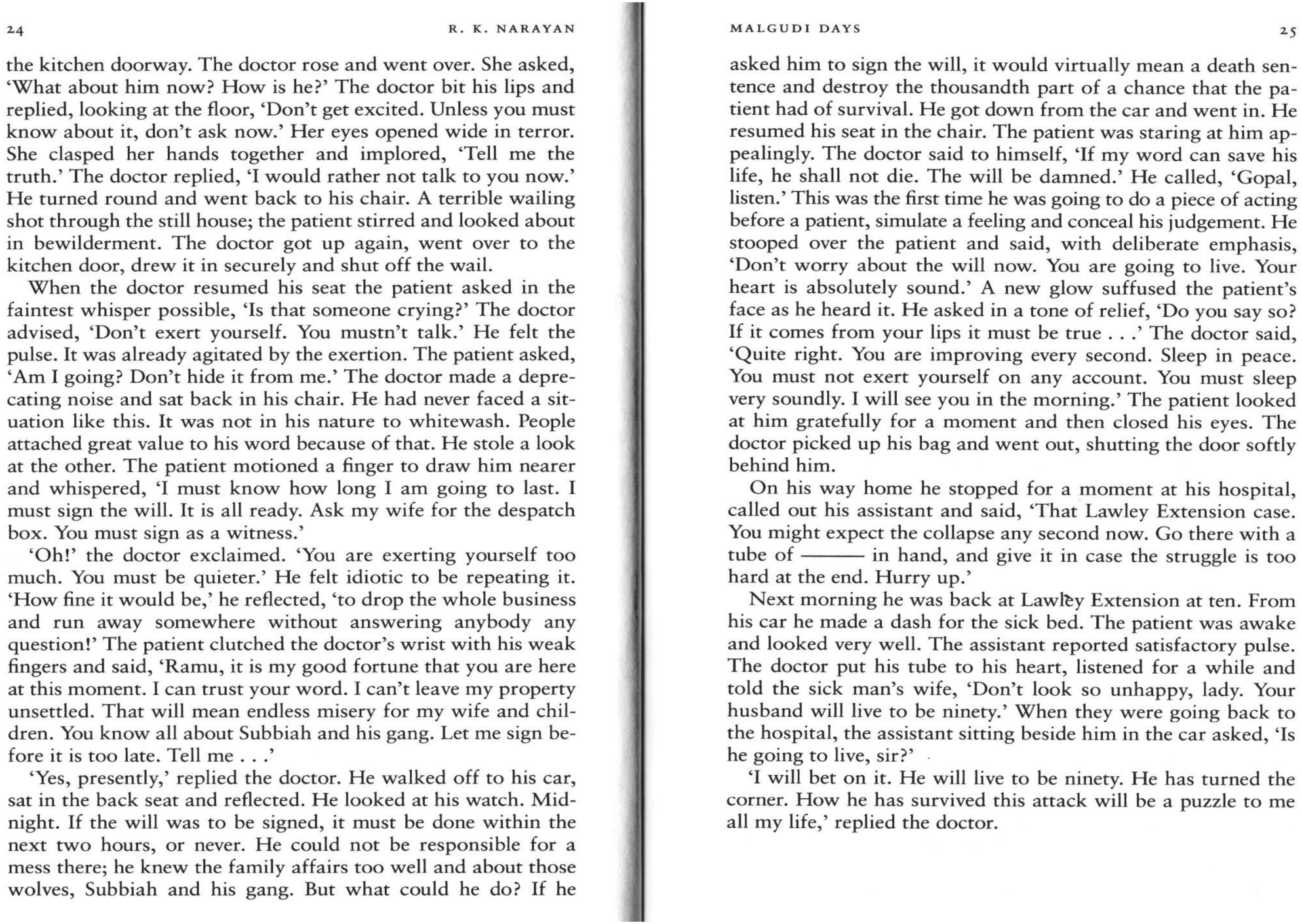
At about eight in the evening the patient opened his eyes and stirred slightly in bed. The assistant was overjoyed. He exclaimed enthusiastically, 'Sir, he will pull through.' The doctor looked at him coldly and whispered, 'I would give anything to see him pull through but, but the heart . . .'

'The pulse has improved, sir.'

'Well, well,' replied the doctor. 'Don't trust it. It is only a false flash-up, very common in these cases.' He ruminated for a while and added, 'If the pulse keeps up till eight in the morning, it will go on for the next forty years, but I doubt very much if we shall see anything of it at all after two tonight.'

He sent away the assistant and sat beside the patient. At about eleven the patient opened his eyes and smiled at his friend. He showed a slight improvement, he was able to take in a little food. A great feeling of relief and joy went through the household. They swarmed around the doctor and poured out their gratitude. He sat in his seat beside the bed, gazing sternly at the patient's face, hardly showing any signs of hearing what they were saying to him. The sick man's wife asked, 'Is he now out of danger?' Without turning his head the doctor said, 'Give glucose and brandy every forty minutes; just a couple of spoons will do.' The lady went away to the kitchen. She felt restless. She felt she must know the truth whatever it was. Why was the great man so evasive? The suspense was unbearable. Perhaps he could not speak so near the patient's bed. She beckoned to him from

ANEXO II – REPRODUÇÃO DO TEXTO ORIGINAL



the kitchen doorway. The doctor rose and went over. She asked, 'What about him now? How is he?' The doctor bit his lips and replied, looking at the floor, 'Don't get excited. Unless you must know about it, don't ask now.' Her eyes opened wide in terror. She clasped her hands together and implored, 'Tell me the truth.' The doctor replied, 'I would rather not talk to you now.' He turned round and went back to his chair. A terrible wailing shot through the still house; the patient stirred and looked about in bewilderment. The doctor got up again, went over to the kitchen door, drew it in securely and shut off the wail.

When the doctor resumed his seat the patient asked in the faintest whisper possible, 'Is that someone crying?' The doctor advised, 'Don't exert yourself. You mustn't talk.' He felt the pulse. It was already agitated by the exertion. The patient asked, 'Am I going? Don't hide it from me.' The doctor made a deprecating noise and sat back in his chair. He had never faced a situation like this. It was not in his nature to whitewash. People attached great value to his word because of that. He stole a look at the other. The patient motioned a finger to draw him nearer and whispered, 'I must know how long I am going to last. I must sign the will. It is all ready. Ask my wife for the despatch box. You must sign as a witness.'

'Oh!' the doctor exclaimed. 'You are exerting yourself too much. You must be quieter.' He felt idiotic to be repeating it. 'How fine it would be,' he reflected, 'to drop the whole business and run away somewhere without answering anybody any question!' The patient clutched the doctor's wrist with his weak fingers and said, 'Ramu, it is my good fortune that you are here at this moment. I can trust your word. I can't leave my property unsettled. That will mean endless misery for my wife and children. You know all about Subbiah and his gang. Let me sign before it is too late. Tell me . . .'

'Yes, presently,' replied the doctor. He walked off to his car, sat in the back seat and reflected. He looked at his watch. Midnight. If the will was to be signed, it must be done within the next two hours, or never. He could not be responsible for a mess there; he knew the family affairs too well and about those wolves, Subbiah and his gang. But what could he do? If he

asked him to sign the will, it would virtually mean a death sentence and destroy the thousandth part of a chance that the patient had of survival. He got down from the car and went in. He resumed his seat in the chair. The patient was staring at him appealingly. The doctor said to himself, 'If my word can save his life, he shall not die. The will be damned.' He called, 'Gopal, listen.' This was the first time he was going to do a piece of acting before a patient, simulate a feeling and conceal his judgement. He stooped over the patient and said, with deliberate emphasis, 'Don't worry about the will now. You are going to live. Your heart is absolutely sound.' A new glow suffused the patient's face as he heard it. He asked in a tone of relief, 'Do you say so? If it comes from your lips it must be true . . .' The doctor said, 'Quite right. You are improving every second. Sleep in peace. You must not exert yourself on any account. You must sleep very soundly. I will see you in the morning.' The patient looked at him gratefully for a moment and then closed his eyes. The doctor picked up his bag and went out, shutting the door softly behind him.

On his way home he stopped for a moment at his hospital, called out his assistant and said, 'That Lawley Extension case. You might expect the collapse any second now. Go there with a tube of ——— in hand, and give it in case the struggle is too hard at the end. Hurry up.'

Next morning he was back at Lawley Extension at ten. From his car he made a dash for the sick bed. The patient was awake and looked very well. The assistant reported satisfactory pulse. The doctor put his tube to his heart, listened for a while and told the sick man's wife, 'Don't look so unhappy, lady. Your husband will live to be ninety.' When they were going back to the hospital, the assistant sitting beside him in the car asked, 'Is he going to live, sir?'

'I will bet on it. He will live to be ninety. He has turned the corner. How he has survived this attack will be a puzzle to me all my life,' replied the doctor.

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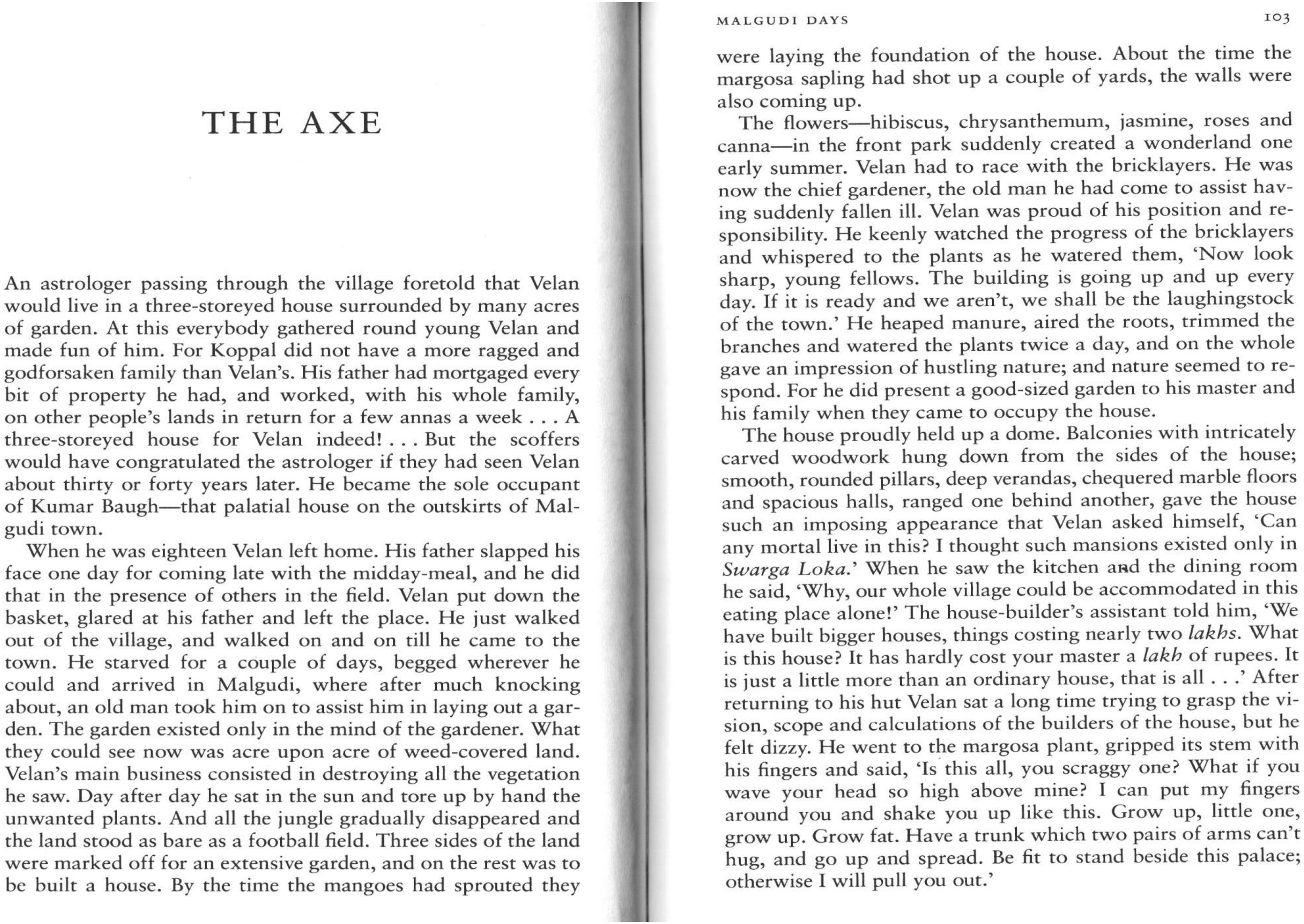

THE AXE

An astrologer passing through the village foretold that Velan would live in a three-storeyed house surrounded by many acres of garden. At this everybody gathered round young Velan and made fun of him. For Koppal did not have a more ragged and godforsaken family than Velan's. His father had mortgaged every bit of property he had, and worked, with his whole family, on other people's lands in return for a few annas a week . . . A three-storeyed house for Velan indeed! . . . But the scoffers would have congratulated the astrologer if they had seen Velan about thirty or forty years later. He became the sole occupant of Kumar Baugh—that palatial house on the outskirts of Malgudi town.

When he was eighteen Velan left home. His father slapped his face one day for coming late with the midday-meal, and he did that in the presence of others in the field. Velan put down the basket, glared at his father and left the place. He just walked out of the village, and walked on and on till he came to the town. He starved for a couple of days, begged wherever he could and arrived in Malgudi, where after much knocking about, an old man took him on to assist him in laying out a garden. The garden existed only in the mind of the gardener. What they could see now was acre upon acre of weed-covered land. Velan's main business consisted in destroying all the vegetation he saw. Day after day he sat in the sun and tore up by hand the unwanted plants. And all the jungle gradually disappeared and the land stood as bare as a football field. Three sides of the land were marked off for an extensive garden, and on the rest was to be built a house. By the time the mangoes had sprouted they

were laying the foundation of the house. About the time the margosa sapling had shot up a couple of yards, the walls were also coming up.

The flowers—hibiscus, chrysanthemum, jasmine, roses and canna—in the front park suddenly created a wonderland one early summer. Velan had to race with the bricklayers. He was now the chief gardener, the old man he had come to assist having suddenly fallen ill. Velan was proud of his position and responsibility. He keenly watched the progress of the bricklayers and whispered to the plants as he watered them, 'Now look sharp, young fellows. The building is going up and up every day. If it is ready and we aren't, we shall be the laughingstock of the town.' He heaped manure, aired the roots, trimmed the branches and watered the plants twice a day, and on the whole gave an impression of hustling nature; and nature seemed to respond. For he did present a good-sized garden to his master and his family when they came to occupy the house.

The house proudly held up a dome. Balconies with intricately carved woodwork hung down from the sides of the house; smooth, rounded pillars, deep verandas, chequered marble floors and spacious halls, ranged one behind another, gave the house such an imposing appearance that Velan asked himself, 'Can any mortal live in this? I thought such mansions existed only in *Swarga Loka*.' When he saw the kitchen and the dining room he said, 'Why, our whole village could be accommodated in this eating place alone!' The house-builder's assistant told him, 'We have built bigger houses, things costing nearly two *lakhs*. What is this house? It has hardly cost your master a *lakh* of rupees. It is just a little more than an ordinary house, that is all . . .' After returning to his hut Velan sat a long time trying to grasp the vision, scope and calculations of the builders of the house, but he felt dizzy. He went to the margosa plant, gripped its stem with his fingers and said, 'Is this all, you scraggy one? What if you wave your head so high above mine? I can put my fingers around you and shake you up like this. Grow up, little one, grow up. Grow fat. Have a trunk which two pairs of arms can't hug, and go up and spread. Be fit to stand beside this palace; otherwise I will pull you out.'

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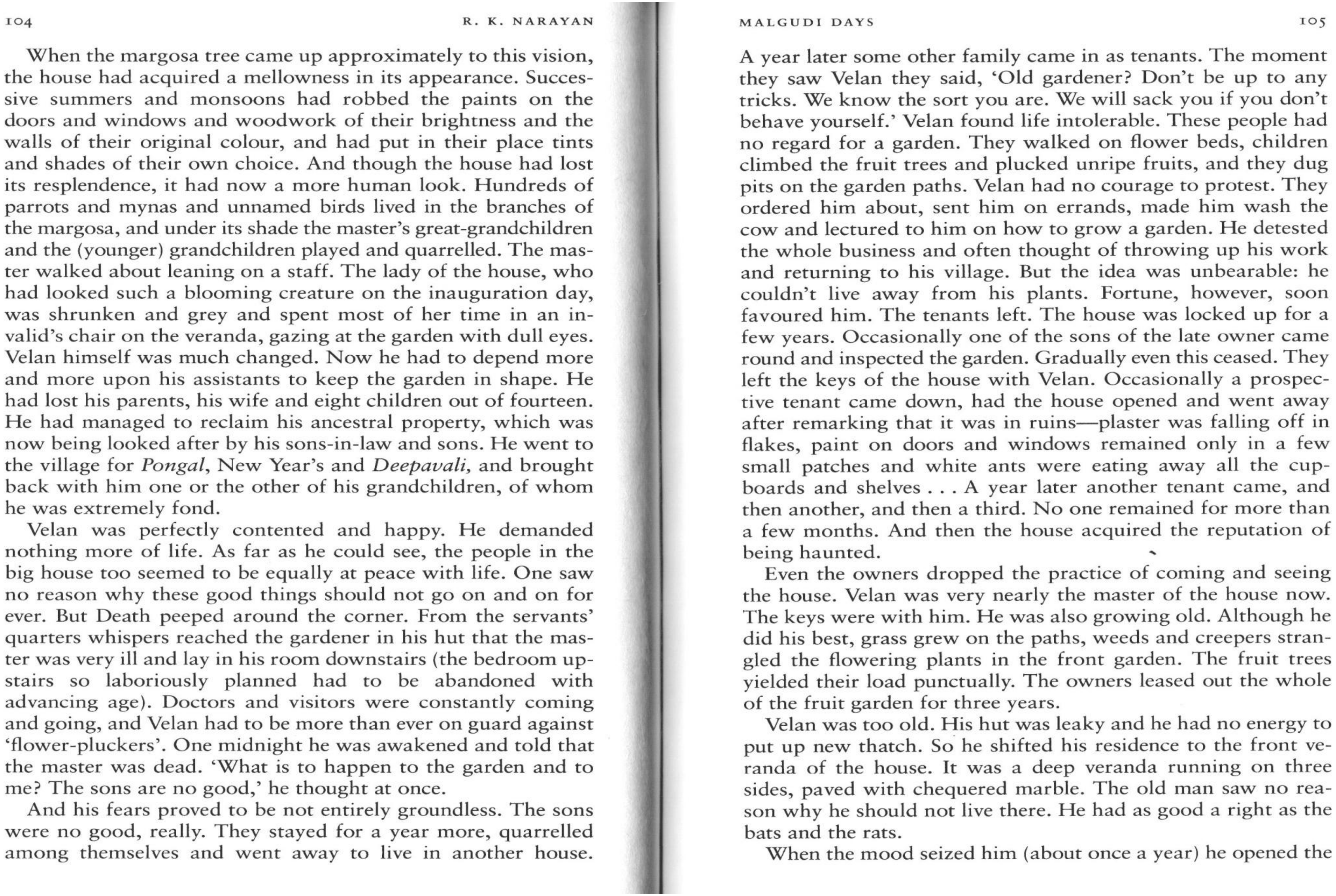

When the margosa tree came up approximately to this vision, the house had acquired a mellowness in its appearance. Successive summers and monsoons had robbed the paints on the doors and windows and woodwork of their brightness and the walls of their original colour, and had put in their place tints and shades of their own choice. And though the house had lost its resplendence, it had now a more human look. Hundreds of parrots and mynas and unnamed birds lived in the branches of the margosa, and under its shade the master's great-grandchildren and the (younger) grandchildren played and quarrelled. The master walked about leaning on a staff. The lady of the house, who had looked such a blooming creature on the inauguration day, was shrunken and grey and spent most of her time in an invalid's chair on the veranda, gazing at the garden with dull eyes. Velan himself was much changed. Now he had to depend more and more upon his assistants to keep the garden in shape. He had lost his parents, his wife and eight children out of fourteen. He had managed to reclaim his ancestral property, which was now being looked after by his sons-in-law and sons. He went to the village for *Pongal*, New Year's and *Deepavali*, and brought back with him one or the other of his grandchildren, of whom he was extremely fond.

Velan was perfectly contented and happy. He demanded nothing more of life. As far as he could see, the people in the big house too seemed to be equally at peace with life. One saw no reason why these good things should not go on and on for ever. But Death peeped around the corner. From the servants' quarters whispers reached the gardener in his hut that the master was very ill and lay in his room downstairs (the bedroom upstairs so laboriously planned had to be abandoned with advancing age). Doctors and visitors were constantly coming and going, and Velan had to be more than ever on guard against 'flower-pluckers'. One midnight he was awakened and told that the master was dead. 'What is to happen to the garden and to me? The sons are no good,' he thought at once.

And his fears proved to be not entirely groundless. The sons were no good, really. They stayed for a year more, quarrelled among themselves and went away to live in another house.

A year later some other family came in as tenants. The moment they saw Velan they said, 'Old gardener? Don't be up to any tricks. We know the sort you are. We will sack you if you don't behave yourself.' Velan found life intolerable. These people had no regard for a garden. They walked on flower beds, children climbed the fruit trees and plucked unripe fruits, and they dug pits on the garden paths. Velan had no courage to protest. They ordered him about, sent him on errands, made him wash the cow and lectured to him on how to grow a garden. He detested the whole business and often thought of throwing up his work and returning to his village. But the idea was unbearable: he couldn't live away from his plants. Fortune, however, soon favoured him. The tenants left. The house was locked up for a few years. Occasionally one of the sons of the late owner came round and inspected the garden. Gradually even this ceased. They left the keys of the house with Velan. Occasionally a prospective tenant came down, had the house opened and went away after remarking that it was in ruins—plaster was falling off in flakes, paint on doors and windows remained only in a few small patches and white ants were eating away all the cupboards and shelves . . . A year later another tenant came, and then another, and then a third. No one remained for more than a few months. And then the house acquired the reputation of being haunted.

Even the owners dropped the practice of coming and seeing the house. Velan was very nearly the master of the house now. The keys were with him. He was also growing old. Although he did his best, grass grew on the paths, weeds and creepers strangled the flowering plants in the front garden. The fruit trees yielded their load punctually. The owners leased out the whole of the fruit garden for three years.

Velan was too old. His hut was leaky and he had no energy to put up new thatch. So he shifted his residence to the front veranda of the house. It was a deep veranda running on three sides, paved with chequered marble. The old man saw no reason why he should not live there. He had as good a right as the bats and the rats.

When the mood seized him (about once a year) he opened the

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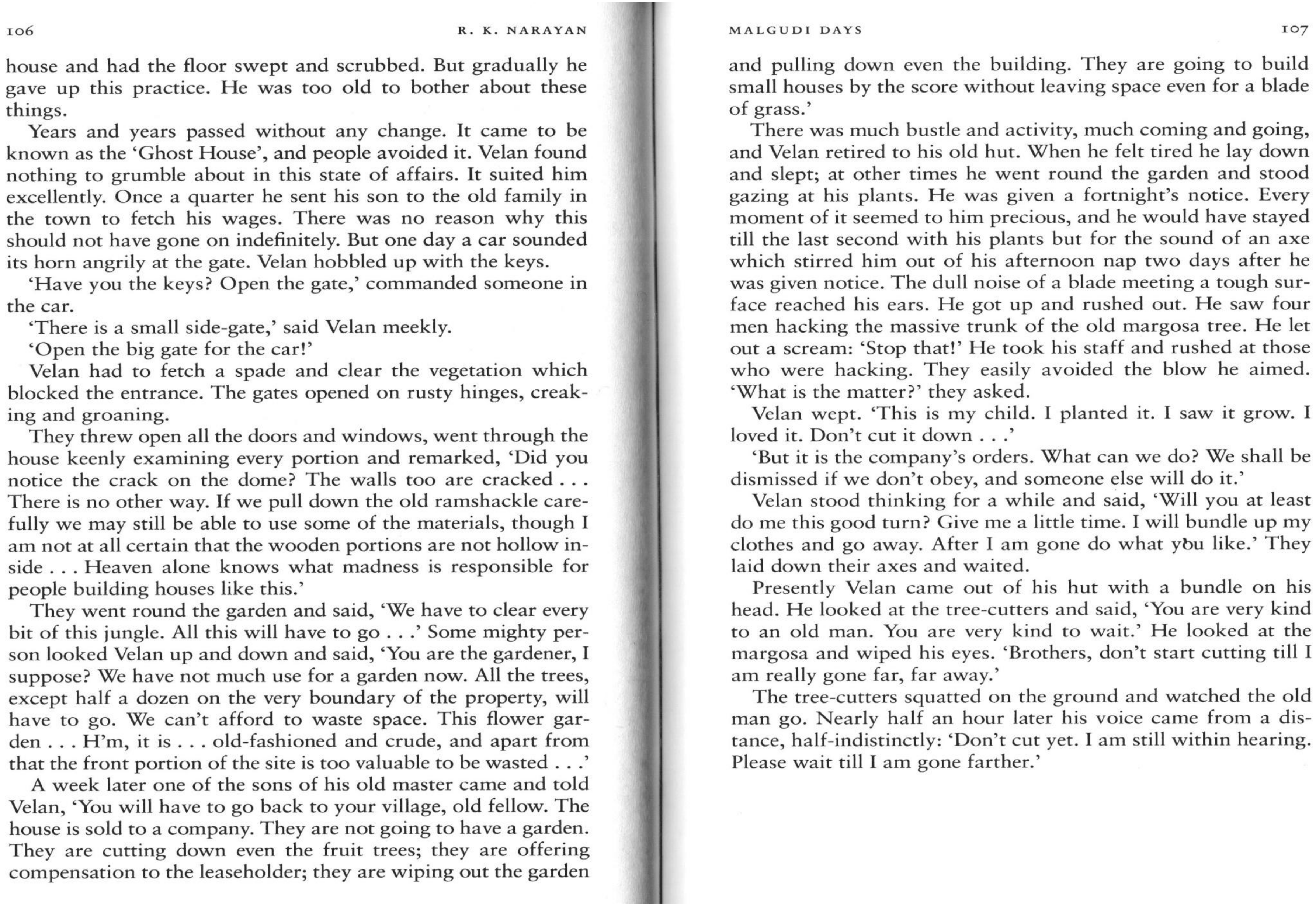

house and had the floor swept and scrubbed. But gradually he gave up this practice. He was too old to bother about these things.

Years and years passed without any change. It came to be known as the 'Ghost House', and people avoided it. Velan found nothing to grumble about in this state of affairs. It suited him excellently. Once a quarter he sent his son to the old family in the town to fetch his wages. There was no reason why this should not have gone on indefinitely. But one day a car sounded its horn angrily at the gate. Velan hobbled up with the keys.

'Have you the keys? Open the gate,' commanded someone in the car.

'There is a small side-gate,' said Velan meekly.

'Open the big gate for the car!'

Velan had to fetch a spade and clear the vegetation which blocked the entrance. The gates opened on rusty hinges, creaking and groaning.

They threw open all the doors and windows, went through the house keenly examining every portion and remarked, 'Did you notice the crack on the dome? The walls too are cracked . . . There is no other way. If we pull down the old ramshackle carefully we may still be able to use some of the materials, though I am not at all certain that the wooden portions are not hollow inside . . . Heaven alone knows what madness is responsible for people building houses like this.'

They went round the garden and said, 'We have to clear every bit of this jungle. All this will have to go . . .' Some mighty person looked Velan up and down and said, 'You are the gardener, I suppose? We have not much use for a garden now. All the trees, except half a dozen on the very boundary of the property, will have to go. We can't afford to waste space. This flower garden . . . H'm, it is . . . old-fashioned and crude, and apart from that the front portion of the site is too valuable to be wasted . . .'

A week later one of the sons of his old master came and told Velan, 'You will have to go back to your village, old fellow. The house is sold to a company. They are not going to have a garden. They are cutting down even the fruit trees; they are offering compensation to the leaseholder; they are wiping out the garden

and pulling down even the building. They are going to build small houses by the score without leaving space even for a blade of grass.'

There was much bustle and activity, much coming and going, and Velan retired to his old hut. When he felt tired he lay down and slept; at other times he went round the garden and stood gazing at his plants. He was given a fortnight's notice. Every moment of it seemed to him precious, and he would have stayed till the last second with his plants but for the sound of an axe which stirred him out of his afternoon nap two days after he was given notice. The dull noise of a blade meeting a tough surface reached his ears. He got up and rushed out. He saw four men hacking the massive trunk of the old margosa tree. He let out a scream: 'Stop that!' He took his staff and rushed at those who were hacking. They easily avoided the blow he aimed. 'What is the matter?' they asked.

Velan wept. 'This is my child. I planted it. I saw it grow. I loved it. Don't cut it down . . .'

'But it is the company's orders. What can we do? We shall be dismissed if we don't obey, and someone else will do it.'

Velan stood thinking for a while and said, 'Will you at least do me this good turn? Give me a little time. I will bundle up my clothes and go away. After I am gone do what you like.' They laid down their axes and waited.

Presently Velan came out of his hut with a bundle on his head. He looked at the tree-cutters and said, 'You are very kind to an old man. You are very kind to wait.' He looked at the margosa and wiped his eyes. 'Brothers, don't start cutting till I am really gone far, far away.'

The tree-cutters squatted on the ground and watched the old man go. Nearly half an hour later his voice came from a distance, half-indistinctly: 'Don't cut yet. I am still within hearing. Please wait till I am gone farther.'

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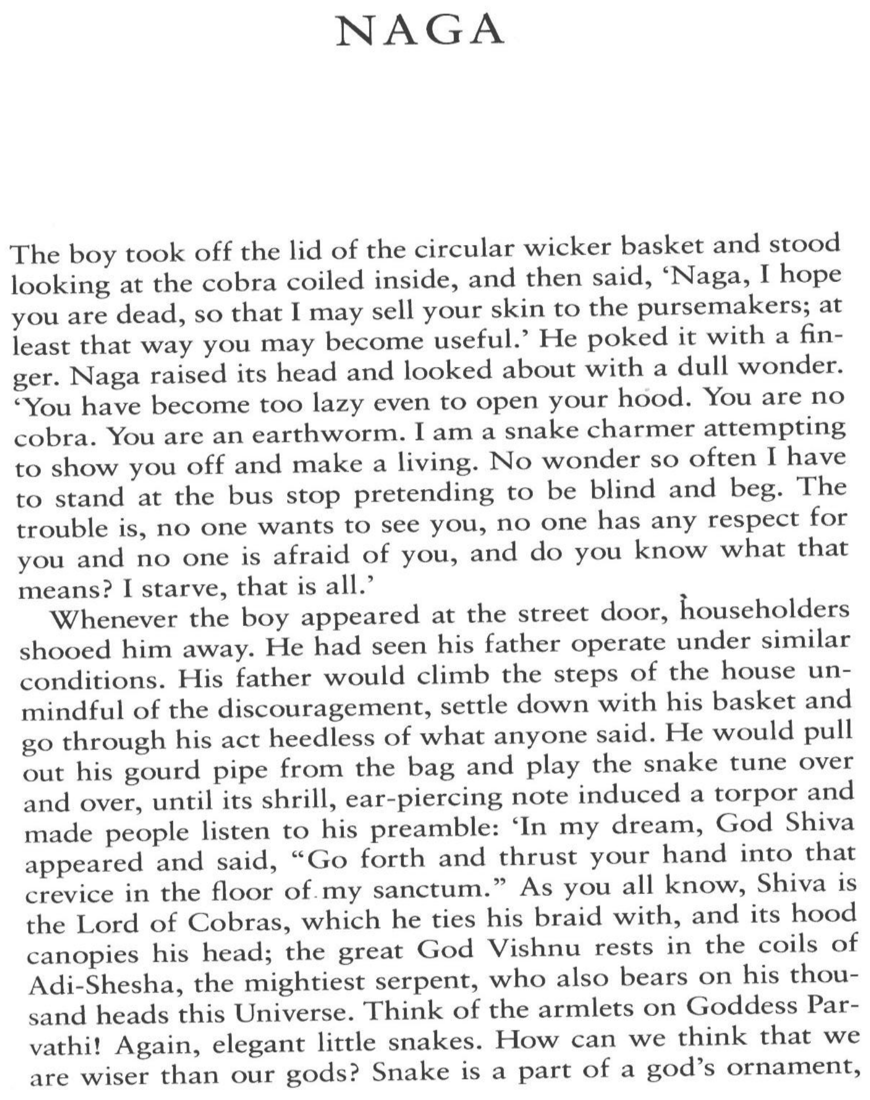

NAGA

The boy took off the lid of the circular wicker basket and stood looking at the cobra coiled inside, and then said, 'Naga, I hope you are dead, so that I may sell your skin to the pursemakers; at least that way you may become useful.' He poked it with a finger. Naga raised its head and looked about with a dull wonder. 'You have become too lazy even to open your hood. You are no cobra. You are an earthworm. I am a snake charmer attempting to show you off and make a living. No wonder so often I have to stand at the bus stop pretending to be blind and beg. The trouble is, no one wants to see you, no one has any respect for you and no one is afraid of you, and do you know what that means? I starve, that is all.'

Whenever the boy appeared at the street door, householders shooed him away. He had seen his father operate under similar conditions. His father would climb the steps of the house unmindful of the discouragement, settle down with his basket and go through his act heedless of what anyone said. He would pull out his gourd pipe from the bag and play the snake tune over and over, until its shrill, ear-piercing note induced a torpor and made people listen to his preamble: 'In my dream, God Shiva appeared and said, "Go forth and thrust your hand into that crevice in the floor of my sanctum." As you all know, Shiva is the Lord of Cobras, which he ties his braid with, and its hood canopies his head; the great God Vishnu rests in the coils of Adi-Shesha, the mightiest serpent, who also bears on his thousand heads this Universe. Think of the armlets on Goddess Parvathi! Again, elegant little snakes. How can we think that we are wiser than our gods? Snake is a part of a god's ornament,

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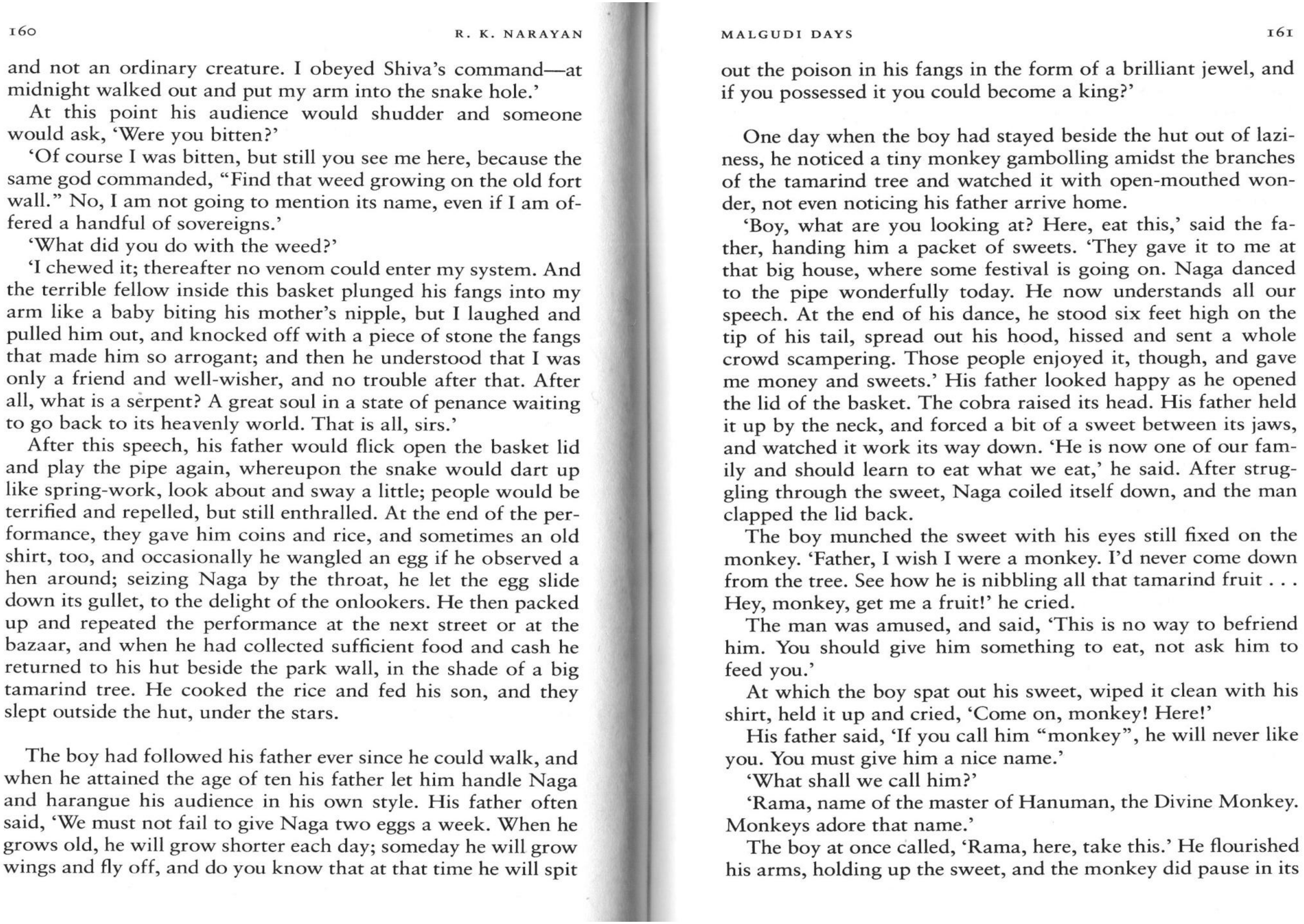

and not an ordinary creature. I obeyed Shiva's command—at midnight walked out and put my arm into the snake hole.'

At this point his audience would shudder and someone would ask, 'Were you bitten?'

'Of course I was bitten, but still you see me here, because the same god commanded, "Find that weed growing on the old fort wall." No, I am not going to mention its name, even if I am offered a handful of sovereigns.'

'What did you do with the weed?'

'I chewed it; thereafter no venom could enter my system. And the terrible fellow inside this basket plunged his fangs into my arm like a baby biting his mother's nipple, but I laughed and pulled him out, and knocked off with a piece of stone the fangs that made him so arrogant; and then he understood that I was only a friend and well-wisher, and no trouble after that. After all, what is a serpent? A great soul in a state of penance waiting to go back to its heavenly world. That is all, sirs.'

After this speech, his father would flick open the basket lid and play the pipe again, whereupon the snake would dart up like spring-work, look about and sway a little; people would be terrified and repelled, but still enthralled. At the end of the performance, they gave him coins and rice, and sometimes an old shirt, too, and occasionally he wangled an egg if he observed a hen around; seizing Naga by the throat, he let the egg slide down its gullet, to the delight of the onlookers. He then packed up and repeated the performance at the next street or at the bazaar, and when he had collected sufficient food and cash he returned to his hut beside the park wall, in the shade of a big tamarind tree. He cooked the rice and fed his son, and they slept outside the hut, under the stars.

The boy had followed his father ever since he could walk, and when he attained the age of ten his father let him handle Naga and harangue his audience in his own style. His father often said, 'We must not fail to give Naga two eggs a week. When he grows old, he will grow shorter each day; someday he will grow wings and fly off, and do you know that at that time he will spit

out the poison in his fangs in the form of a brilliant jewel, and if you possessed it you could become a king?'

One day when the boy had stayed beside the hut out of laziness, he noticed a tiny monkey gambolling amidst the branches of the tamarind tree and watched it with open-mouthed wonder, not even noticing his father arrive home.

'Boy, what are you looking at? Here, eat this,' said the father, handing him a packet of sweets. 'They gave it to me at that big house, where some festival is going on. Naga danced to the pipe wonderfully today. He now understands all our speech. At the end of his dance, he stood six feet high on the tip of his tail, spread out his hood, hissed and sent a whole crowd scampering. Those people enjoyed it, though, and gave me money and sweets.' His father looked happy as he opened the lid of the basket. The cobra raised its head. His father held it up by the neck, and forced a bit of a sweet between its jaws, and watched it work its way down. 'He is now one of our family and should learn to eat what we eat,' he said. After struggling through the sweet, Naga coiled itself down, and the man clapped the lid back.

The boy munched the sweet with his eyes still fixed on the monkey. 'Father, I wish I were a monkey. I'd never come down from the tree. See how he is nibbling all that tamarind fruit . . . Hey, monkey, get me a fruit!' he cried.

The man was amused, and said, 'This is no way to befriend him. You should give him something to eat, not ask him to feed you.'

At which the boy spat out his sweet, wiped it clean with his shirt, held it up and cried, 'Come on, monkey! Here!'

His father said, 'If you call him "monkey", he will never like you. You must give him a nice name.'

'What shall we call him?'

'Rama, name of the master of Hanuman, the Divine Monkey. Monkeys adore that name.'

The boy at once called, 'Rama, here, take this.' He flourished his arms, holding up the sweet, and the monkey did pause in its

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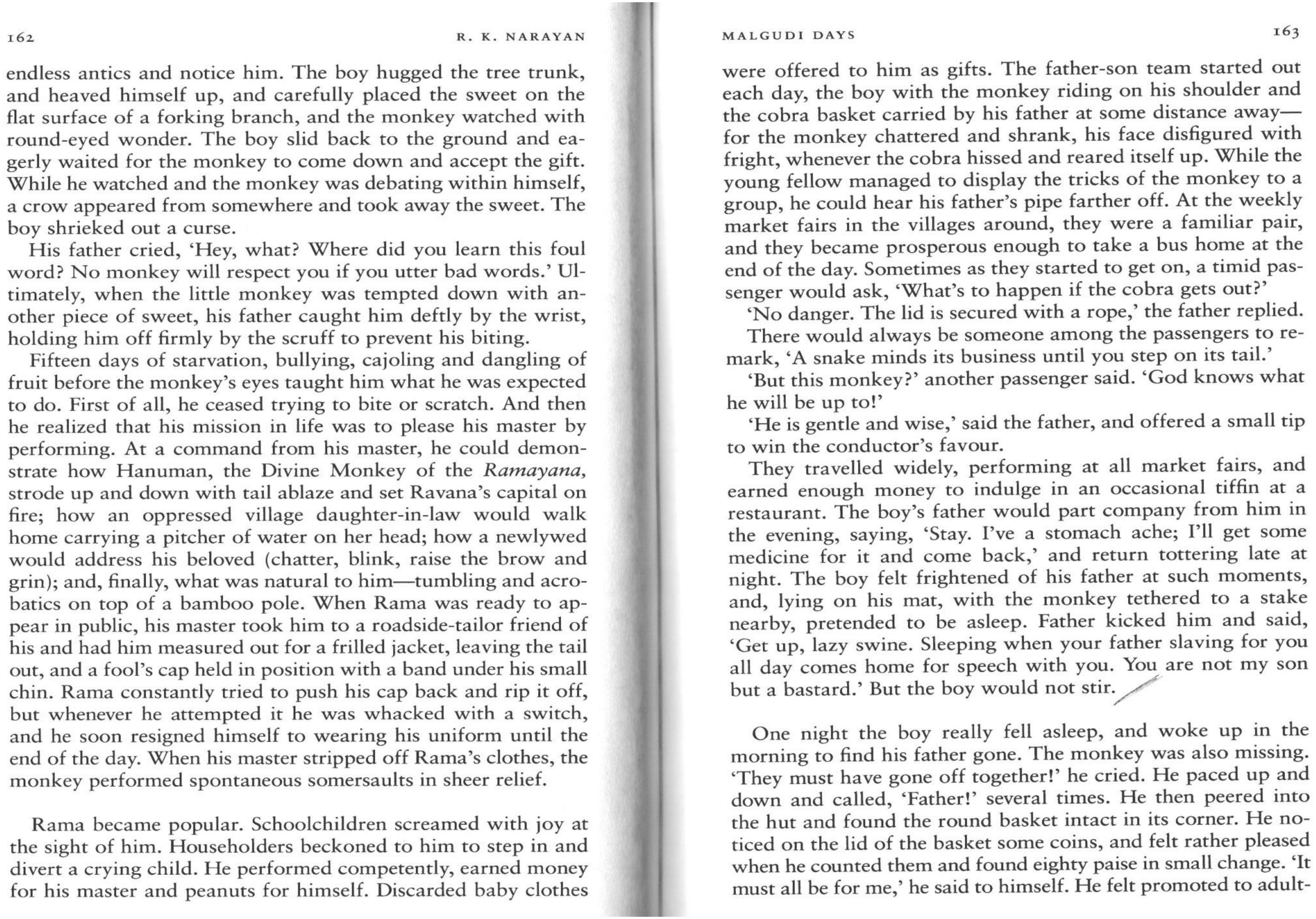

endless antics and notice him. The boy hugged the tree trunk, and heaved himself up, and carefully placed the sweet on the flat surface of a forking branch, and the monkey watched with round-eyed wonder. The boy slid back to the ground and eagerly waited for the monkey to come down and accept the gift. While he watched and the monkey was debating within himself, a crow appeared from somewhere and took away the sweet. The boy shrieked out a curse.

His father cried, 'Hey, what? Where did you learn this foul word? No monkey will respect you if you utter bad words.' Ultimately, when the little monkey was tempted down with another piece of sweet, his father caught him deftly by the wrist, holding him off firmly by the scruff to prevent his biting.

Fifteen days of starvation, bullying, cajoling and dangling of fruit before the monkey's eyes taught him what he was expected to do. First of all, he ceased trying to bite or scratch. And then he realized that his mission in life was to please his master by performing. At a command from his master, he could demonstrate how Hanuman, the Divine Monkey of the *Ramayana,* strode up and down with tail ablaze and set Ravana's capital on fire; how an oppressed village daughter-in-law would walk home carrying a pitcher of water on her head; how a newlywed would address his beloved (chatter, blink, raise the brow and grin); and, finally, what was natural to him—tumbling and acrobatics on top of a bamboo pole. When Rama was ready to appear in public, his master took him to a roadside-tailor friend of his and had him measured out for a frilled jacket, leaving the tail out, and a fool's cap held in position with a band under his small chin. Rama constantly tried to push his cap back and rip it off, but whenever he attempted it he was whacked with a switch, and he soon resigned himself to wearing his uniform until the end of the day. When his master stripped off Rama's clothes, the monkey performed spontaneous somersaults in sheer relief.

Rama became popular. Schoolchildren screamed with joy at the sight of him. Householders beckoned to him to step in and divert a crying child. He performed competently, earned money for his master and peanuts for himself. Discarded baby clothes

were offered to him as gifts. The father-son team started out each day, the boy with the monkey riding on his shoulder and the cobra basket carried by his father at some distance away—for the monkey chattered and shrank, his face disfigured with fright, whenever the cobra hissed and reared itself up. While the young fellow managed to display the tricks of the monkey to a group, he could hear his father's pipe farther off. At the weekly market fairs in the villages around, they were a familiar pair, and they became prosperous enough to take a bus home at the end of the day. Sometimes as they started to get on, a timid passenger would ask, 'What's to happen if the cobra gets out?'

'No danger. The lid is secured with a rope,' the father replied.

There would always be someone among the passengers to remark, 'A snake minds its business until you step on its tail.'

'But this monkey?' another passenger said. 'God knows what he will be up to!'

'He is gentle and wise,' said the father, and offered a small tip to win the conductor's favour.

They travelled widely, performing at all market fairs, and earned enough money to indulge in an occasional tiffin at a restaurant. The boy's father would part company from him in the evening, saying, 'Stay. I've a stomach ache; I'll get some medicine for it and come back,' and return tottering late at night. The boy felt frightened of his father at such moments, and, lying on his mat, with the monkey tethered to a stake nearby, pretended to be asleep. Father kicked him and said, 'Get up, lazy swine. Sleeping when your father slaving for you all day comes home for speech with you. You are not my son but a bastard.' But the boy would not stir.

One night the boy really fell asleep, and woke up in the morning to find his father gone. The monkey was also missing. 'They must have gone off together!' he cried. He paced up and down and called, 'Father!' several times. He then peered into the hut and found the round basket intact in its corner. He noticed on the lid of the basket some coins, and felt rather pleased when he counted them and found eighty paise in small change. 'It must all be for me,' he said to himself. He felt promoted to adult-

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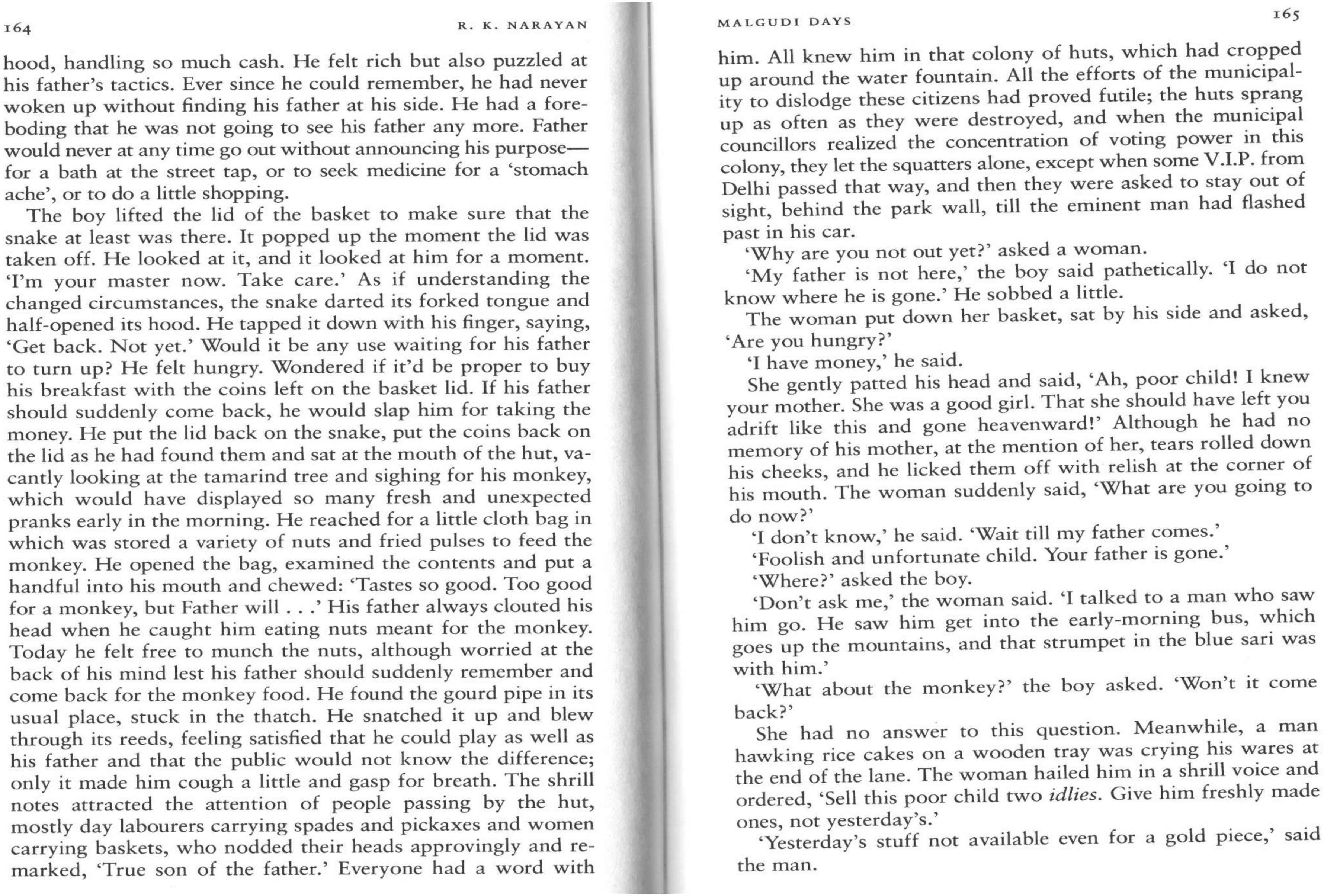


hood, handling so much cash. He felt rich but also puzzled at his father's tactics. Ever since he could remember, he had never woken up without finding his father at his side. He had a foreboding that he was not going to see his father any more. Father would never at any time go out without announcing his purpose—for a bath at the street tap, or to seek medicine for a 'stomach ache', or to do a little shopping.

The boy lifted the lid of the basket to make sure that the snake at least was there. It popped up the moment the lid was taken off. He looked at it, and it looked at him for a moment. 'I'm your master now. Take care.' As if understanding the changed circumstances, the snake darted its forked tongue and half-opened its hood. He tapped it down with his finger, saying, 'Get back. Not yet.' Would it be any use waiting for his father to turn up? He felt hungry. Wondered if it'd be proper to buy his breakfast with the coins left on the basket lid. If his father should suddenly come back, he would slap him for taking the money. He put the lid back on the snake, put the coins back on the lid as he had found them and sat at the mouth of the hut, vacantly looking at the tamarind tree and sighing for his monkey, which would have displayed so many fresh and unexpected pranks early in the morning. He reached for a little cloth bag in which was stored a variety of nuts and fried pulses to feed the monkey. He opened the bag, examined the contents and put a handful into his mouth and chewed: 'Tastes so good. Too good for a monkey, but Father will . . .' His father always clouted his head when he caught him eating nuts meant for the monkey. Today he felt free to munch the nuts, although worried at the back of his mind lest his father should suddenly remember and come back for the monkey food. He found the gourd pipe in its usual place, stuck in the thatch. He snatched it up and blew through its reeds, feeling satisfied that he could play as well as his father and that the public would not know the difference; only it made him cough a little and gasp for breath. The shrill notes attracted the attention of people passing by the hut, mostly day labourers carrying spades and pickaxes and women carrying baskets, who nodded their heads approvingly and remarked, 'True son of the father.' Everyone had a word with

him. All knew him in that colony of huts, which had cropped up around the water fountain. All the efforts of the municipality to dislodge these citizens had proved futile; the huts sprang up as often as they were destroyed, and when the municipal councillors realized the concentration of voting power in this colony, they let the squatters alone, except when some V.I.P. from Delhi passed that way, and then they were asked to stay out of sight, behind the park wall, till the eminent man had flashed past in his car.

'Why are you not out yet?' asked a woman.

'My father is not here,' the boy said pathetically. 'I do not know where he is gone.' He sobbed a little.

The woman put down her basket, sat by his side and asked, 'Are you hungry?'

'I have money,' he said.

She gently patted his head and said, 'Ah, poor child! I knew your mother. She was a good girl. That she should have left you adrift like this and gone heavenward!' Although he had no memory of his mother, at the mention of her, tears rolled down his cheeks, and he licked them off with relish at the corner of his mouth. The woman suddenly said, 'What are you going to do now?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'Wait till my father comes.'

'Foolish and unfortunate child. Your father is gone.'

'Where?' asked the boy.

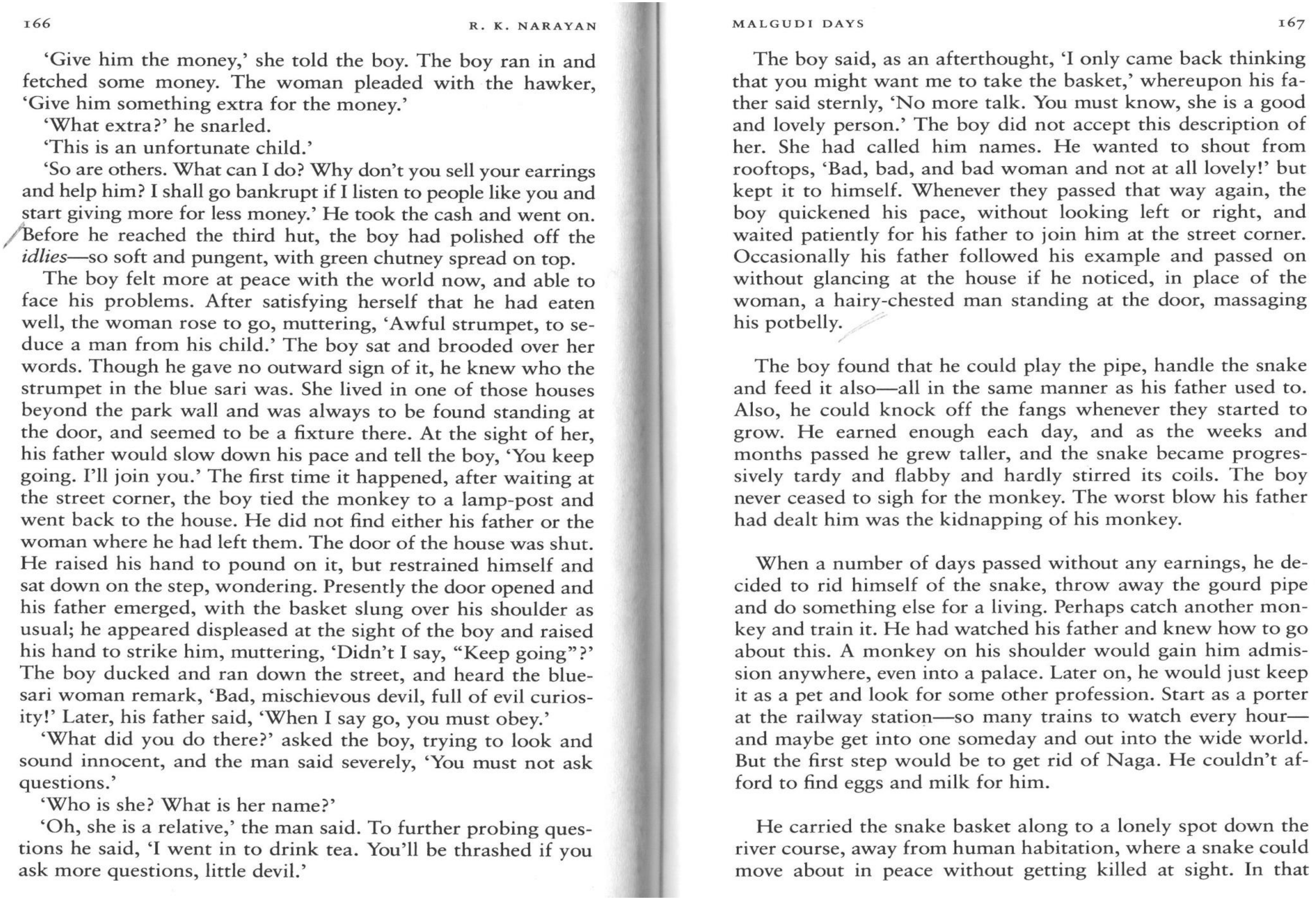
'Don't ask me,' the woman said. 'I talked to a man who saw him go. He saw him get into the early-morning bus, which goes up the mountains, and that strumpet in the blue sari was with him.'

'What about the monkey?' the boy asked. 'Won't it come back?'

She had no answer to this question. Meanwhile, a man hawking rice cakes on a wooden tray was crying his wares at the end of the lane. The woman hailed him in a shrill voice and ordered, 'Sell this poor child two *idlies*. Give him freshly made ones, not yesterday's.'

'Yesterday's stuff not available even for a gold piece,' said the man.

ANEXO II – REPRODUÇÃO DO TEXTO ORIGINAL



'Give him the money,' she told the boy. The boy ran in and fetched some money. The woman pleaded with the hawker, 'Give him something extra for the money.'

'What extra?' he snarled.

'This is an unfortunate child.'

'So are others. What can I do? Why don't you sell your earrings and help him? I shall go bankrupt if I listen to people like you and start giving more for less money.' He took the cash and went on. Before he reached the third hut, the boy had polished off the *idlies*—so soft and pungent, with green chutney spread on top.

The boy felt more at peace with the world now, and able to face his problems. After satisfying herself that he had eaten well, the woman rose to go, muttering, 'Awful strumpet, to seduce a man from his child.' The boy sat and brooded over her words. Though he gave no outward sign of it, he knew who the strumpet in the blue sari was. She lived in one of those houses beyond the park wall and was always to be found standing at the door, and seemed to be a fixture there. At the sight of her, his father would slow down his pace and tell the boy, 'You keep going. I'll join you.' The first time it happened, after waiting at the street corner, the boy tied the monkey to a lamp-post and went back to the house. He did not find either his father or the woman where he had left them. The door of the house was shut. He raised his hand to pound on it, but restrained himself and sat down on the step, wondering. Presently the door opened and his father emerged, with the basket slung over his shoulder as usual; he appeared displeased at the sight of the boy and raised his hand to strike him, muttering, 'Didn't I say, "Keep going"?' The boy ducked and ran down the street, and heard the blue-sari woman remark, 'Bad, mischievous devil, full of evil curiosity!' Later, his father said, 'When I say go, you must obey.'

'What did you do there?' asked the boy, trying to look and sound innocent, and the man said severely, 'You must not ask questions.'

'Who is she? What is her name?'

'Oh, she is a relative,' the man said. To further probing questions he said, 'I went in to drink tea. You'll be thrashed if you ask more questions, little devil.'

The boy said, as an afterthought, 'I only came back thinking that you might want me to take the basket,' whereupon his father said sternly, 'No more talk. You must know, she is a good and lovely person.' The boy did not accept this description of her. She had called him names. He wanted to shout from rooftops, 'Bad, bad, and bad woman and not at all lovely!' but kept it to himself. Whenever they passed that way again, the boy quickened his pace, without looking left or right, and waited patiently for his father to join him at the street corner. Occasionally his father followed his example and passed on without glancing at the house if he noticed, in place of the woman, a hairy-chested man standing at the door, massaging his potbelly.

The boy found that he could play the pipe, handle the snake and feed it also—all in the same manner as his father used to. Also, he could knock off the fangs whenever they started to grow. He earned enough each day, and as the weeks and months passed he grew taller, and the snake became progressively tardy and flabby and hardly stirred its coils. The boy never ceased to sigh for the monkey. The worst blow his father had dealt him was the kidnapping of his monkey.

When a number of days passed without any earnings, he decided to rid himself of the snake, throw away the gourd pipe and do something else for a living. Perhaps catch another monkey and train it. He had watched his father and knew how to go about this. A monkey on his shoulder would gain him admission anywhere, even into a palace. Later on, he would just keep it as a pet and look for some other profession. Start as a porter at the railway station—so many trains to watch every hour—and maybe get into one someday and out into the wide world. But the first step would be to get rid of Naga. He couldn't afford to find eggs and milk for him.

He carried the snake basket along to a lonely spot down the river course, away from human habitation, where a snake could move about in peace without getting killed at sight. In that

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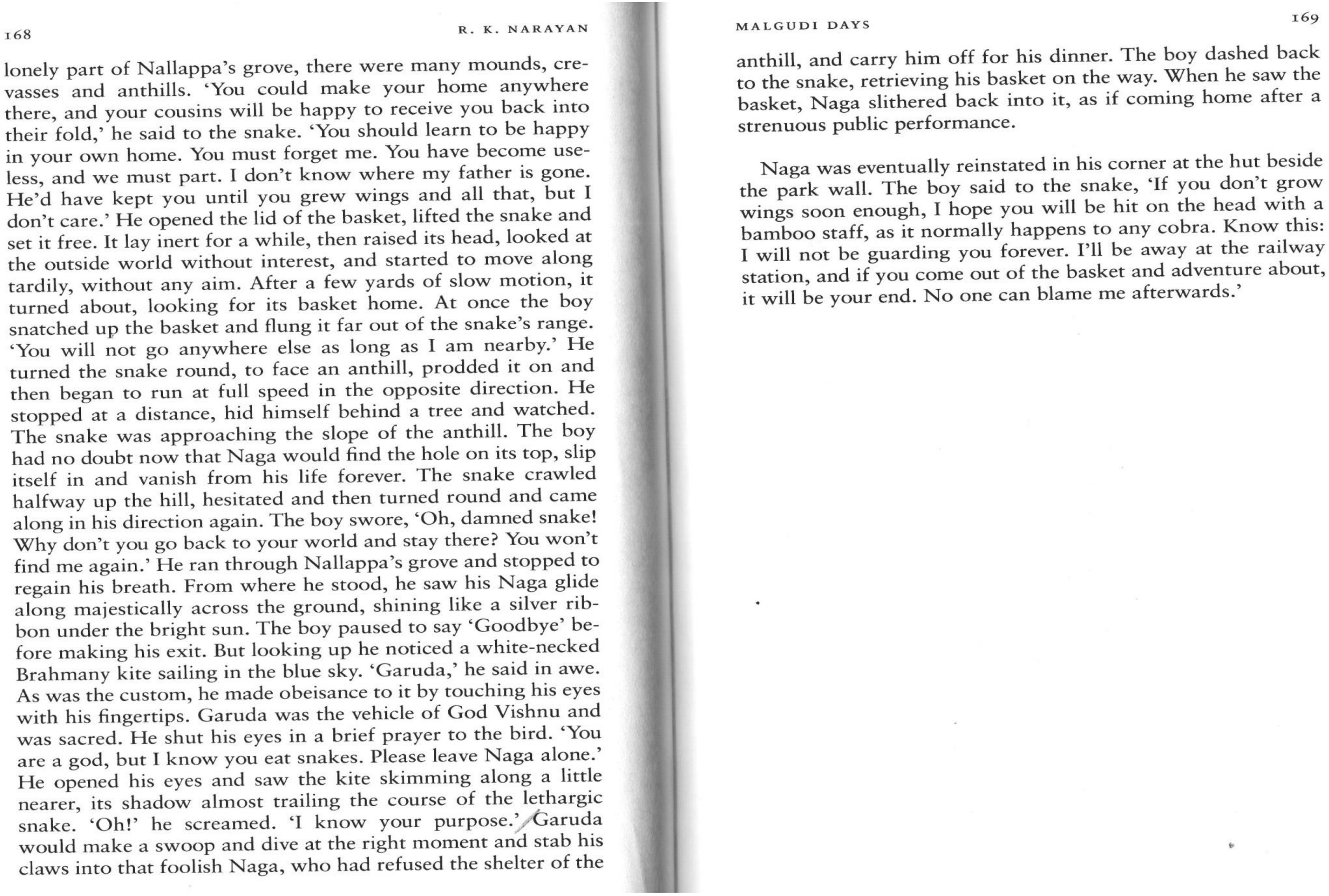

lonely part of Nallappa's grove, there were many mounds, crevasses and anthills. 'You could make your home anywhere there, and your cousins will be happy to receive you back into their fold,' he said to the snake. 'You should learn to be happy in your own home. You must forget me. You have become useless, and we must part. I don't know where my father is gone. He'd have kept you until you grew wings and all that, but I don't care.' He opened the lid of the basket, lifted the snake and set it free. It lay inert for a while, then raised its head, looked at the outside world without interest, and started to move along tardily, without any aim. After a few yards of slow motion, it turned about, looking for its basket home. At once the boy snatched up the basket and flung it far out of the snake's range. 'You will not go anywhere else as long as I am nearby.' He turned the snake round, to face an anthill, prodded it on and then began to run at full speed in the opposite direction. He stopped at a distance, hid himself behind a tree and watched. The snake was approaching the slope of the anthill. The boy had no doubt now that Naga would find the hole on its top, slip itself in and vanish from his life forever. The snake crawled halfway up the hill, hesitated and then turned round and came along in his direction again. The boy swore, 'Oh, damned snake! Why don't you go back to your world and stay there? You won't find me again.' He ran through Nallappa's grove and stopped to regain his breath. From where he stood, he saw his Naga glide along majestically across the ground, shining like a silver ribbon under the bright sun. The boy paused to say 'Goodbye' before making his exit. But looking up he noticed a white-necked Brahmany kite sailing in the blue sky. 'Garuda,' he said in awe. As was the custom, he made obeisance to it by touching his eyes with his fingertips. Garuda was the vehicle of God Vishnu and was sacred. He shut his eyes in a brief prayer to the bird. 'You are a god, but I know you eat snakes. Please leave Naga alone.' He opened his eyes and saw the kite skimming along a little nearer, its shadow almost trailing the course of the lethargic snake. 'Oh!' he screamed. 'I know your purpose.' Garuda would make a swoop and dive at the right moment and stab his claws into that foolish Naga, who had refused the shelter of the

anthill, and carry him off for his dinner. The boy dashed back to the snake, retrieving his basket on the way. When he saw the basket, Naga slithered back into it, as if coming home after a strenuous public performance.

Naga was eventually reinstated in his corner at the hut beside the park wall. The boy said to the snake, 'If you don't grow wings soon enough, I hope you will be hit on the head with a bamboo staff, as it normally happens to any cobra. Know this: I will not be guarding you forever. I'll be away at the railway station, and if you come out of the basket and adventure about, it will be your end. No one can blame me afterwards.'

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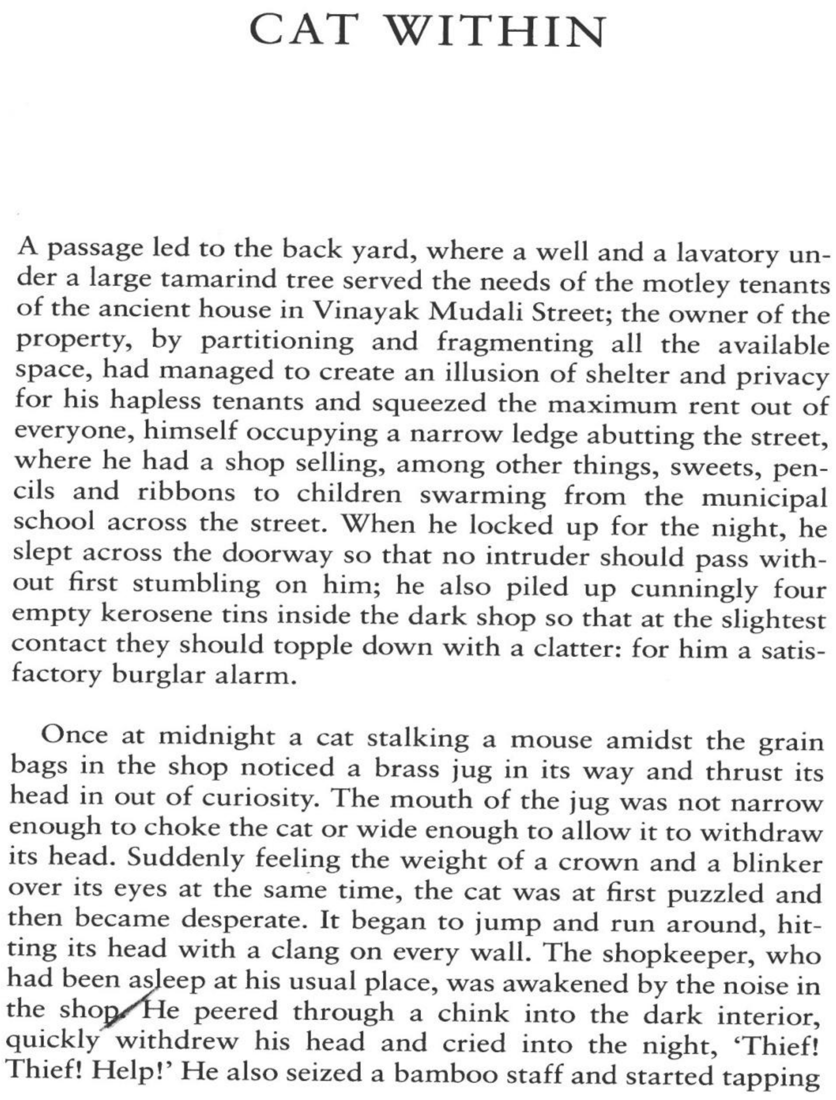

CAT WITHIN

A passage led to the back yard, where a well and a lavatory under a large tamarind tree served the needs of the motley tenants of the ancient house in Vinayak Mudali Street; the owner of the property, by partitioning and fragmenting all the available space, had managed to create an illusion of shelter and privacy for his hapless tenants and squeezed the maximum rent out of everyone, himself occupying a narrow ledge abutting the street, where he had a shop selling, among other things, sweets, pencils and ribbons to children swarming from the municipal school across the street. When he locked up for the night, he slept across the doorway so that no intruder should pass without first stumbling on him; he also piled up cunningly four empty kerosene tins inside the dark shop so that at the slightest contact they should topple down with a clatter: for him a satisfactory burglar alarm.

Once at midnight a cat stalking a mouse amidst the grain bags in the shop noticed a brass jug in its way and thrust its head in out of curiosity. The mouth of the jug was not narrow enough to choke the cat or wide enough to allow it to withdraw its head. Suddenly feeling the weight of a crown and a blinker over its eyes at the same time, the cat was at first puzzled and then became desperate. It began to jump and run around, hitting its head with a clang on every wall. The shopkeeper, who had been asleep at his usual place, was awakened by the noise in the shop. He peered through a chink into the dark interior, quickly withdrew his head and cried into the night, 'Thief! Thief! Help!' He also seized a bamboo staff and started tapping

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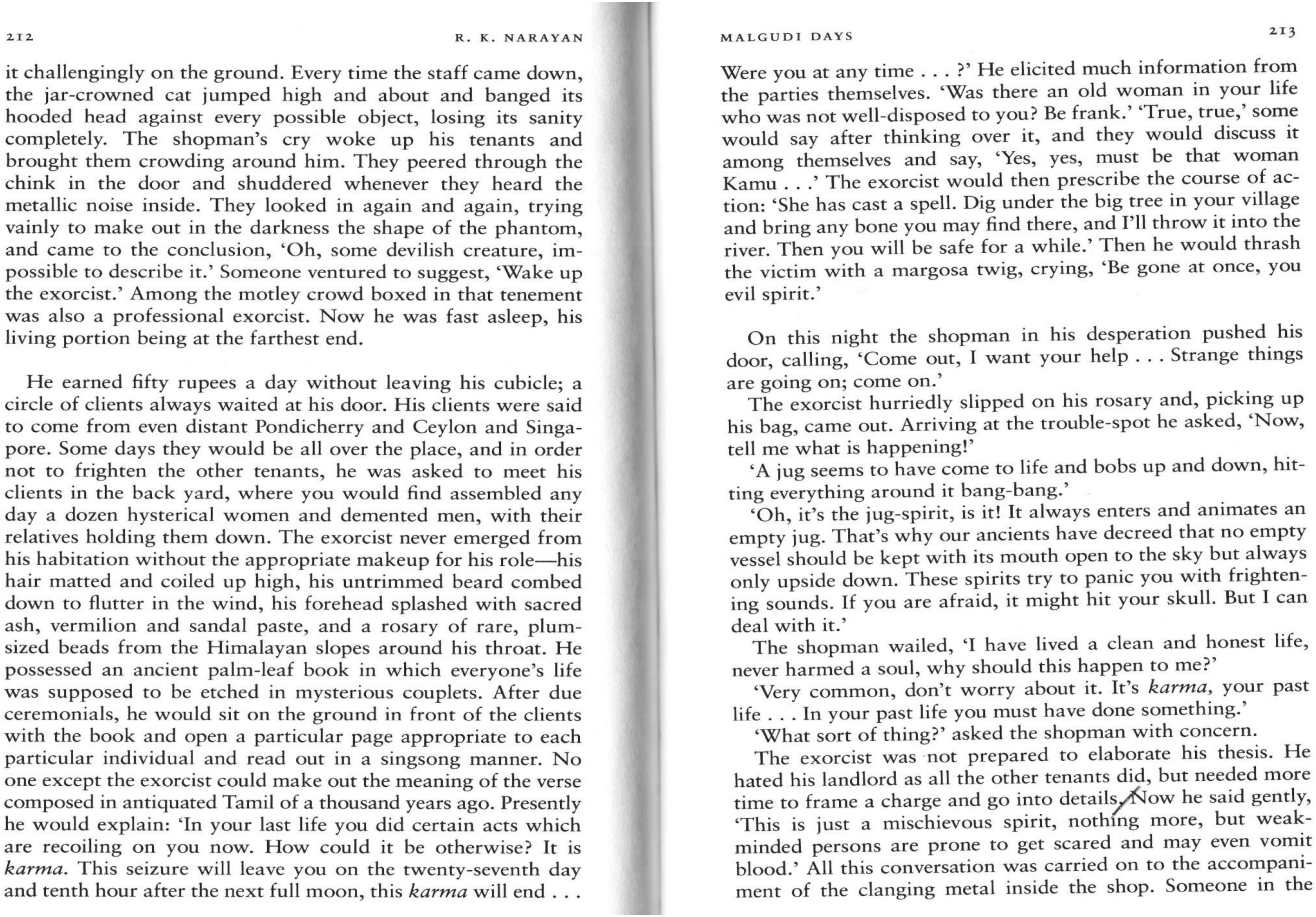

it challengingly on the ground. Every time the staff came down, the jar-crowned cat jumped high and about and banged its hooded head against every possible object, losing its sanity completely. The shopman's cry woke up his tenants and brought them crowding around him. They peered through the chink in the door and shuddered whenever they heard the metallic noise inside. They looked in again and again, trying vainly to make out in the darkness the shape of the phantom, and came to the conclusion, 'Oh, some devilish creature, impossible to describe it.' Someone ventured to suggest, 'Wake up the exorcist.' Among the motley crowd boxed in that tenement was also a professional exorcist. Now he was fast asleep, his living portion being at the farthest end.

He earned fifty rupees a day without leaving his cubicle; a circle of clients always waited at his door. His clients were said to come from even distant Pondicherry and Ceylon and Singapore. Some days they would be all over the place, and in order not to frighten the other tenants, he was asked to meet his clients in the back yard, where you would find assembled any day a dozen hysterical women and demented men, with their relatives holding them down. The exorcist never emerged from his habitation without the appropriate makeup for his role—his hair matted and coiled up high, his untrimmed beard combed down to flutter in the wind, his forehead splashed with sacred ash, vermilion and sandal paste, and a rosary of rare, plum-sized beads from the Himalayan slopes around his throat. He possessed an ancient palm-leaf book in which everyone's life was supposed to be etched in mysterious couplets. After due ceremonials, he would sit on the ground in front of the clients with the book and open a particular page appropriate to each particular individual and read out in a singsong manner. No one except the exorcist could make out the meaning of the verse composed in antiquated Tamil of a thousand years ago. Presently he would explain: 'In your last life you did certain acts which are recoiling on you now. How could it be otherwise? It is *karma*. This seizure will leave you on the twenty-seventh day and tenth hour after the next full moon, this *karma* will end . . .

Were you at any time . . . ?' He elicited much information from the parties themselves. 'Was there an old woman in your life who was not well-disposed to you? Be frank.' 'True, true,' some would say after thinking over it, and they would discuss it among themselves and say, 'Yes, yes, must be that woman Kamu . . .' The exorcist would then prescribe the course of action: 'She has cast a spell. Dig under the big tree in your village and bring any bone you may find there, and I'll throw it into the river. Then you will be safe for a while.' Then he would thrash the victim with a margosa twig, crying, 'Be gone at once, you evil spirit.'

On this night the shopman in his desperation pushed his door, calling, 'Come out, I want your help . . . Strange things are going on; come on.'

The exorcist hurriedly slipped on his rosary and, picking up his bag, came out. Arriving at the trouble-spot he asked, 'Now, tell me what is happening!'

'A jug seems to have come to life and bobs up and down, hitting everything around it bang-bang.'

'Oh, it's the jug-spirit, is it! It always enters and animates an empty jug. That's why our ancients have decreed that no empty vessel should be kept with its mouth open to the sky but always only upside down. These spirits try to panic you with frightening sounds. If you are afraid, it might hit your skull. But I can deal with it.'

The shopman wailed, 'I have lived a clean and honest life, never harmed a soul, why should this happen to me?'

'Very common, don't worry about it. It's *karma*, your past life . . . In your past life you must have done something.'

'What sort of thing?' asked the shopman with concern.

The exorcist was not prepared to elaborate his thesis. He hated his landlord as all the other tenants did, but needed more time to frame a charge and go into details. Now he said gently, 'This is just a mischievous spirit, nothing more, but weak-minded persons are prone to get scared and may even vomit blood.' All this conversation was carried on to the accompaniment of the clanging metal inside the shop. Someone in the

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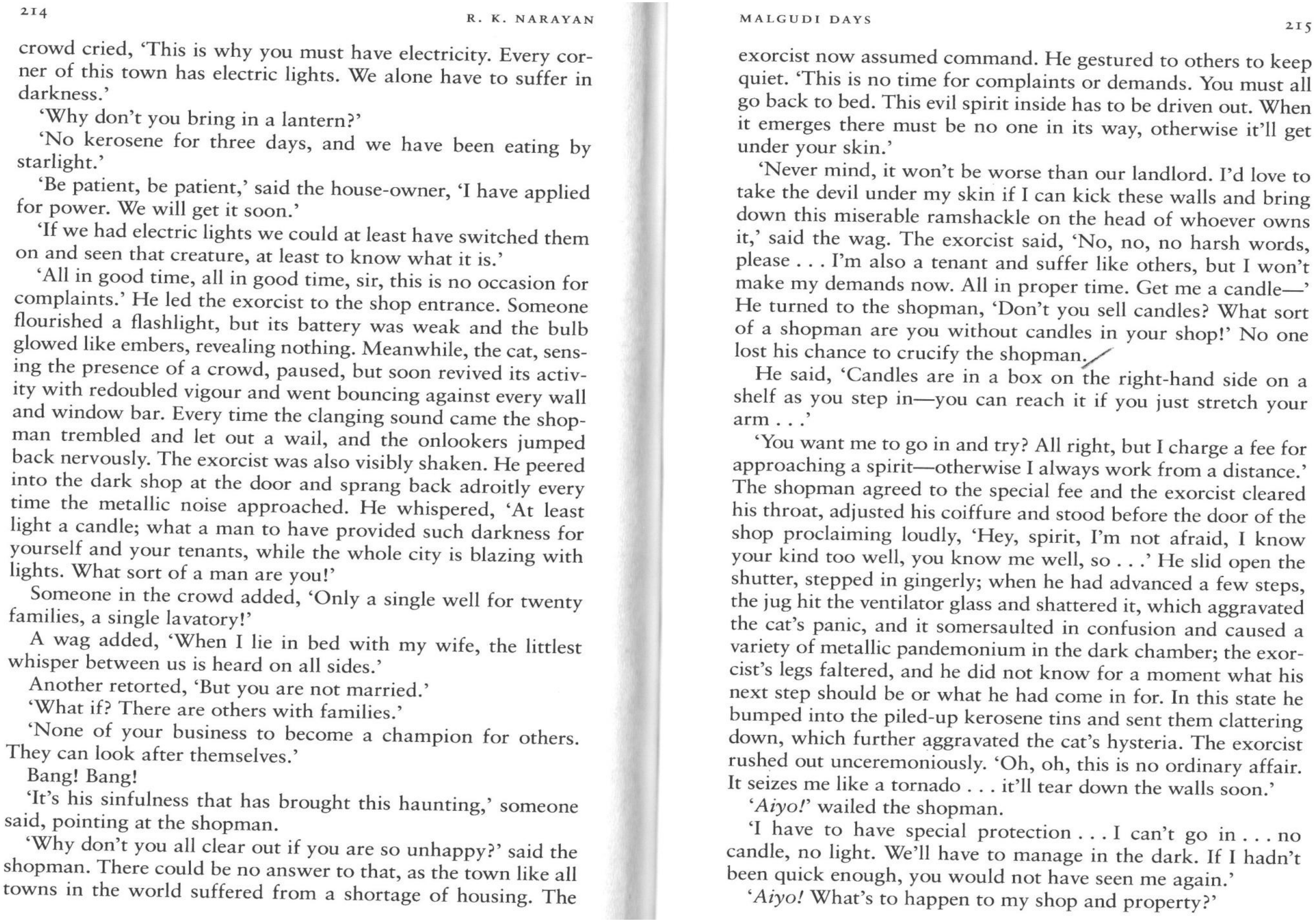

crowd cried, 'This is why you must have electricity. Every corner of this town has electric lights. We alone have to suffer in darkness.'

'Why don't you bring in a lantern?'

'No kerosene for three days, and we have been eating by starlight.'

'Be patient, be patient,' said the house-owner, 'I have applied for power. We will get it soon.'

'If we had electric lights we could at least have switched them on and seen that creature, at least to know what it is.'

'All in good time, all in good time, sir, this is no occasion for complaints.' He led the exorcist to the shop entrance. Someone flourished a flashlight, but its battery was weak and the bulb glowed like embers, revealing nothing. Meanwhile, the cat, sensing the presence of a crowd, paused, but soon revived its activity with redoubled vigour and went bouncing against every wall and window bar. Every time the clanging sound came the shopman trembled and let out a wail, and the onlookers jumped back nervously. The exorcist was also visibly shaken. He peered into the dark shop at the door and sprang back adroitly every time the metallic noise approached. He whispered, 'At least light a candle; what a man to have provided such darkness for yourself and your tenants, while the whole city is blazing with lights. What sort of a man are you!'

Someone in the crowd added, 'Only a single well for twenty families, a single lavatory!'

A wag added, 'When I lie in bed with my wife, the littlest whisper between us is heard on all sides.'

Another retorted, 'But you are not married.'

'What if? There are others with families.'

'None of your business to become a champion for others. They can look after themselves.'

Bang! Bang!

'It's his sinfulness that has brought this haunting,' someone said, pointing at the shopman.

'Why don't you all clear out if you are so unhappy?' said the shopman. There could be no answer to that, as the town like all towns in the world suffered from a shortage of housing. The

exorcist now assumed command. He gestured to others to keep quiet. 'This is no time for complaints or demands. You must all go back to bed. This evil spirit inside has to be driven out. When it emerges there must be no one in its way, otherwise it'll get under your skin.'

'Never mind, it won't be worse than our landlord. I'd love to take the devil under my skin if I can kick these walls and bring down this miserable ramshackle on the head of whoever owns it,' said the wag. The exorcist said, 'No, no, no harsh words, please . . . I'm also a tenant and suffer like others, but I won't make my demands now. All in proper time. Get me a candle—' He turned to the shopman, 'Don't you sell candles? What sort of a shopman are you without candles in your shop!' No one lost his chance to crucify the shopman.

He said, 'Candles are in a box on the right-hand side on a shelf as you step in—you can reach it if you just stretch your arm . . .'

'You want me to go in and try? All right, but I charge a fee for approaching a spirit—otherwise I always work from a distance.' The shopman agreed to the special fee and the exorcist cleared his throat, adjusted his coiffure and stood before the door of the shop proclaiming loudly, 'Hey, spirit, I'm not afraid, I know your kind too well, you know me well, so . . .' He slid open the shutter, stepped in gingerly; when he had advanced a few steps, the jug hit the ventilator glass and shattered it, which aggravated the cat's panic, and it somersaulted in confusion and caused a variety of metallic pandemonium in the dark chamber; the exorcist's legs faltered, and he did not know for a moment what his next step should be or what he had come in for. In this state he bumped into the piled-up kerosene tins and sent them clattering down, which further aggravated the cat's hysteria. The exorcist rushed out unceremoniously. 'Oh, oh, this is no ordinary affair. It seizes me like a tornado . . . it'll tear down the walls soon.'

'*Aiyo!*' wailed the shopman.

'I have to have special protection . . . I can't go in . . . no candle, no light. We'll have to manage in the dark. If I hadn't been quick enough, you would not have seen me again.'

'*Aiyo!* What's to happen to my shop and property?'

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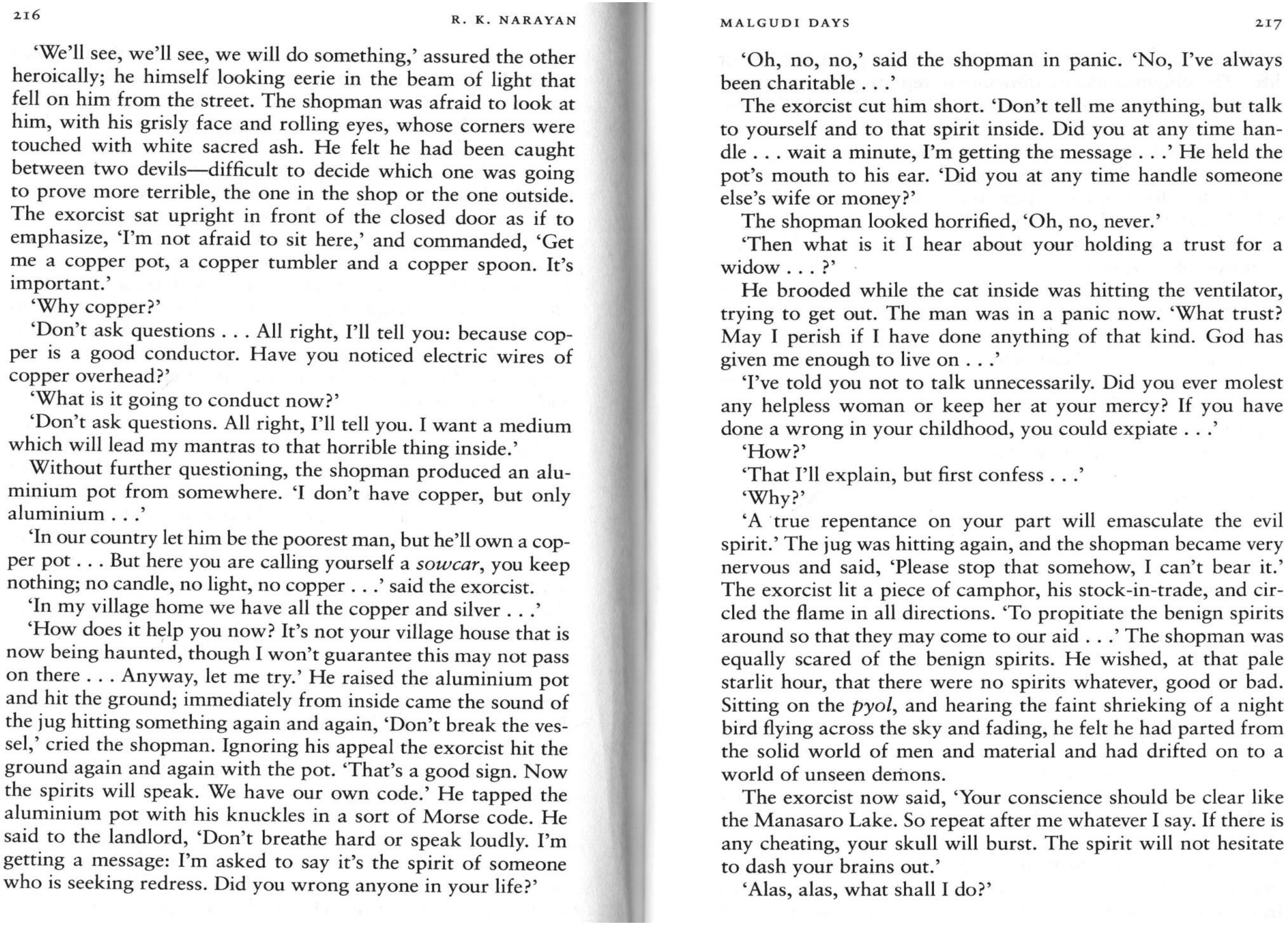

'We'll see, we'll see, we will do something,' assured the other heroically; he himself looking eerie in the beam of light that fell on him from the street. The shopman was afraid to look at him, with his grisly face and rolling eyes, whose corners were touched with white sacred ash. He felt he had been caught between two devils—difficult to decide which one was going to prove more terrible, the one in the shop or the one outside. The exorcist sat upright in front of the closed door as if to emphasize, 'I'm not afraid to sit here,' and commanded, 'Get me a copper pot, a copper tumbler and a copper spoon. It's important.'

'Why copper?'

'Don't ask questions . . . All right, I'll tell you: because copper is a good conductor. Have you noticed electric wires of copper overhead?'

'What is it going to conduct now?'

'Don't ask questions. All right, I'll tell you. I want a medium which will lead my mantras to that horrible thing inside.'

Without further questioning, the shopman produced an aluminium pot from somewhere. 'I don't have copper, but only aluminium . . .'

'In our country let him be the poorest man, but he'll own a copper pot . . . But here you are calling yourself a *sowcar*, you keep nothing; no candle, no light, no copper . . .' said the exorcist.

'In my village home we have all the copper and silver . . .'

'How does it help you now? It's not your village house that is now being haunted, though I won't guarantee this may not pass on there . . . Anyway, let me try.' He raised the aluminium pot and hit the ground; immediately from inside came the sound of the jug hitting something again and again, 'Don't break the vessel,' cried the shopman. Ignoring his appeal the exorcist hit the ground again and again with the pot. 'That's a good sign. Now the spirits will speak. We have our own code.' He tapped the aluminium pot with his knuckles in a sort of Morse code. He said to the landlord, 'Don't breathe hard or speak loudly. I'm getting a message: I'm asked to say it's the spirit of someone who is seeking redress. Did you wrong anyone in your life?'

'Oh, no, no,' said the shopman in panic. 'No, I've always been charitable . . .'

The exorcist cut him short. 'Don't tell me anything, but talk to yourself and to that spirit inside. Did you at any time handle . . . wait a minute, I'm getting the message . . .' He held the pot's mouth to his ear. 'Did you at any time handle someone else's wife or money?'

The shopman looked horrified, 'Oh, no, never.'

'Then what is it I hear about your holding a trust for a widow . . . ?'

He brooded while the cat inside was hitting the ventilator, trying to get out. The man was in a panic now. 'What trust? May I perish if I have done anything of that kind. God has given me enough to live on . . .'

'I've told you not to talk unnecessarily. Did you ever molest any helpless woman or keep her at your mercy? If you have done a wrong in your childhood, you could expiate . . .'

'How?'

'That I'll explain, but first confess . . .'

'Why?'

'A true repentance on your part will emasculate the evil spirit.' The jug was hitting again, and the shopman became very nervous and said, 'Please stop that somehow, I can't bear it.' The exorcist lit a piece of camphor, his stock-in-trade, and circled the flame in all directions. 'To propitiate the benign spirits around so that they may come to our aid . . .' The shopman was equally scared of the benign spirits. He wished, at that pale starlit hour, that there were no spirits whatever, good or bad. Sitting on the *pyol*, and hearing the faint shrieking of a night bird flying across the sky and fading, he felt he had parted from the solid world of men and material and had drifted on to a world of unseen demons.

The exorcist now said, 'Your conscience should be clear like the Manasaro Lake. So repeat after me whatever I say. If there is any cheating, your skull will burst. The spirit will not hesitate to dash your brains out.'

'Alas, alas, what shall I do?'

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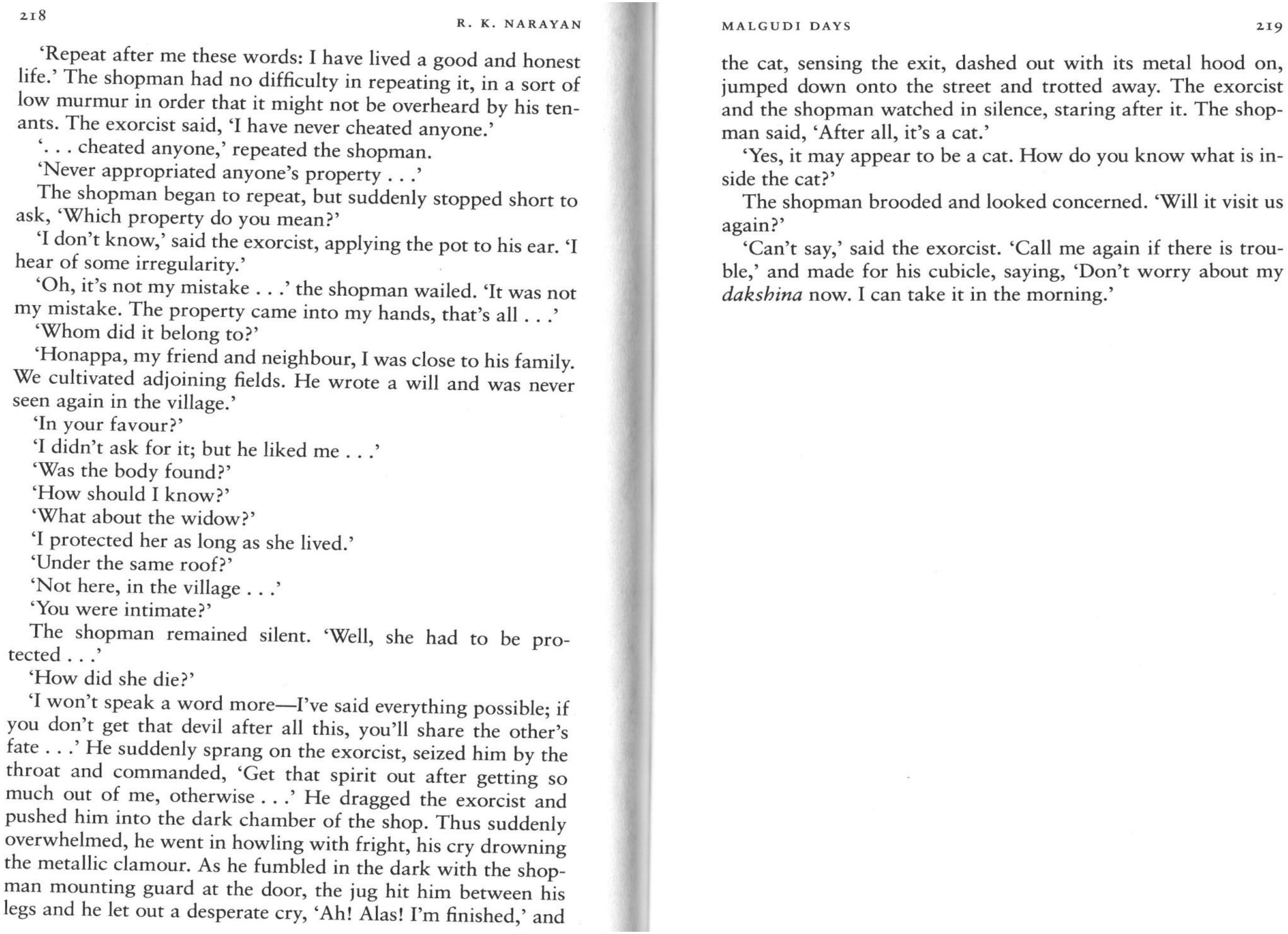

'Repeat after me these words: I have lived a good and honest life.' The shopman had no difficulty in repeating it, in a sort of low murmur in order that it might not be overheard by his tenants. The exorcist said, 'I have never cheated anyone.'

'. . . cheated anyone,' repeated the shopman.

'Never appropriated anyone's property . . .'

The shopman began to repeat, but suddenly stopped short to ask, 'Which property do you mean?'

'I don't know,' said the exorcist, applying the pot to his ear. 'I hear of some irregularity.'

'Oh, it's not my mistake . . .' the shopman wailed. 'It was not my mistake. The property came into my hands, that's all . . .'

'Whom did it belong to?'

'Honappa, my friend and neighbour, I was close to his family. We cultivated adjoining fields. He wrote a will and was never seen again in the village.'

'In your favour?'

'I didn't ask for it; but he liked me . . .'

'Was the body found?'

'How should I know?'

'What about the widow?'

'I protected her as long as she lived.'

'Under the same roof?'

'Not here, in the village . . .'

'You were intimate?'

The shopman remained silent. 'Well, she had to be protected . . .'

'How did she die?'

'I won't speak a word more—I've said everything possible; if you don't get that devil after all this, you'll share the other's fate . . .' He suddenly sprang on the exorcist, seized him by the throat and commanded, 'Get that spirit out after getting so much out of me, otherwise . . .' He dragged the exorcist and pushed him into the dark chamber of the shop. Thus suddenly overwhelmed, he went in howling with fright, his cry drowning the metallic clamour. As he fumbled in the dark with the shopman mounting guard at the door, the jug hit him between his legs and he let out a desperate cry, 'Ah! Alas! I'm finished,' and the cat, sensing the exit, dashed out with its metal hood on, jumped down onto the street and trotted away. The exorcist and the shopman watched in silence, staring after it. The shopman said, 'After all, it's a cat.'

'Yes, it may appear to be a cat. How do you know what is inside the cat?'

The shopman brooded and looked concerned. 'Will it visit us again?'

'Can't say,' said the exorcist. 'Call me again if there is trouble,' and made for his cubicle, saying, 'Don't worry about my *dakshina* now. I can take it in the morning.'

ANEXO II – REPRODUÇÃO DO TEXTO ORIGINAL

House Opposite

The hermit invariably shuddered when he looked out of his window. The house across the street was occupied by a shameless woman. Late in the evening, men kept coming and knocking on her door—afternoons, too, if there was a festival or holiday. Sometimes they lounged on the pyol of her house, smoking, chewing tobacco, and spitting into the gutter—committing all the sins of the world, according to the hermit who was striving to pursue a life of austerity, forswearing family, possessions, and all the comforts of life. He found this single-room tenement with a couple of coconut trees and a well at the backyard adequate, and the narrow street swarmed with children: sometimes he called in the children, seated them around, and taught them simple moral lessons and sacred verse. On the walls he had nailed a few pictures of gods cut out of old calendars, and made the children prostrate themselves in front of them before sending them away with a piece of sugar candy each.

His daily life followed an unvarying pattern. Bird-like, he retired at dusk, lying on the bare floor with a wooden block under his head for a pillow. He woke up at four ahead of the rooster at the street corner, bathed at the well, and sat down on a piece of deerskin to meditate. Later he lit the charcoal stove and baked a few chapattis for breakfast and lunch and cooked certain restricted vegetables and greens, avoiding potato, onion, okra, and such as might stimulate the baser impulses.

Even in the deepest state of meditation, he could not help hearing the creaking of the door across the street when a client left after a night of debauchery. He rigorously suppressed all cravings

of the palate, and punished his body in a dozen ways. If you asked him why, he would have been at a loss to explain. He was the antithesis of the athlete who flexed his muscles and watched his expanding chest before a mirror. Our hermit, on the contrary, kept a minute check of his emaciation and felt a peculiar thrill out of such an achievement. He was only following without questioning his ancient guru's instructions, and hoped thus to attain spiritual liberation.

One afternoon, opening the window to sweep the dust on the sill, he noticed her standing on her doorstep, watching the street. His temples throbbed with the rush of blood. He studied her person—chiselled features, but sunk in fatty folds. She possessed, however, a seductive outline; her forearms were cushion-like and perhaps the feel of those encircling arms attracted men. His gaze, once it had begun to hover about her body, would not return to its anchor—which should normally be the tip of one's nose, as enjoined by his guru and the yoga shastras.

Her hips were large, thighs stout like banana stalks, on the whole a mattress-like creature on which a patron could loll all night without a scrap of covering—"Awful monster! Personification of evil." He felt suddenly angry. Why on earth should that creature stand there and ruin his tapas: all the merit he had so laboriously acquired was draining away like water through a sieve. Difficult to say whether it was those monstrous arms and breasts or thighs which tempted and ruined men. . . . He hissed under his breath, "Get in, you devil, don't stand there!" She abruptly turned round and went in, shutting the door behind her. He felt triumphant, although his command and her compliance were coincidental. He bolted the window tight and retreated to the farthest corner of the room, settled down on the deerskin, and kept repeating, "Om, Om, Rama, Jayarama": the sound "Rama" had a potency all its own—and was reputed to check wandering thoughts and distractions. He had a profound knowledge of mantras and their efficacy. "Sri Rama . . . ," he repeated, but it was like a dilute and weak medicine for high fever. It didn't work. "Sri Rama, Jayarama . . . ," he repeated with a desperate fervour, but the effect lasted not even a second. Unnoticed, his thoughts strayed, questioning: Who was that fellow in a check shirt and silk

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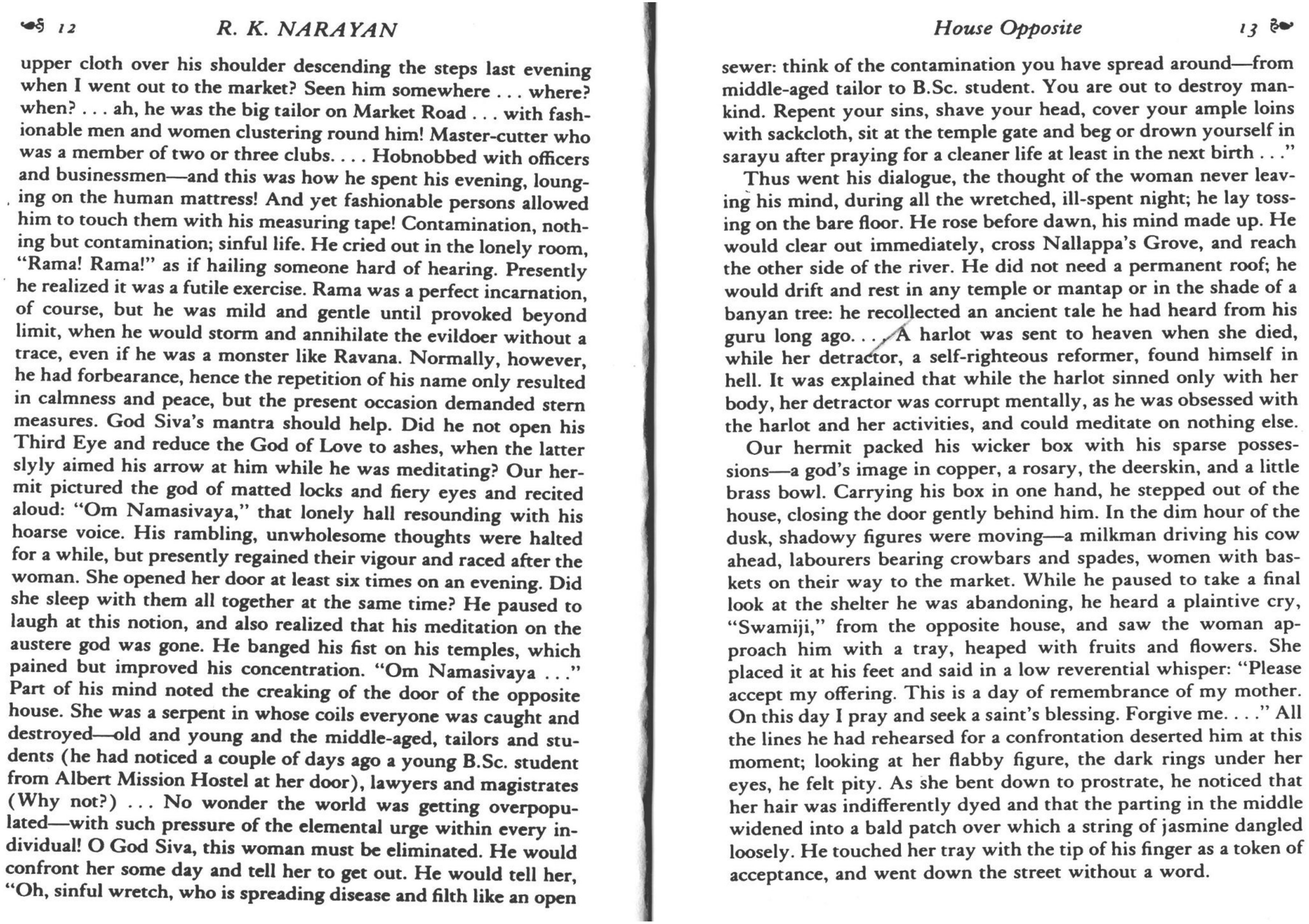

upper cloth over his shoulder descending the steps last evening when I went out to the market? Seen him somewhere . . . where? when? . . . ah, he was the big tailor on Market Road . . . with fashionable men and women clustering round him! Master-cutter who was a member of two or three clubs. . . . Hobnobbed with officers and businessmen—and this was how he spent his evening, lounging on the human mattress! And yet fashionable persons allowed him to touch them with his measuring tape! Contamination, nothing but contamination; sinful life. He cried out in the lonely room, "Rama! Rama!" as if hailing someone hard of hearing. Presently he realized it was a futile exercise. Rama was a perfect incarnation, of course, but he was mild and gentle until provoked beyond limit, when he would storm and annihilate the evildoer without a trace, even if he was a monster like Ravana. Normally, however, he had forbearance, hence the repetition of his name only resulted in calmness and peace, but the present occasion demanded stern measures. God Siva's mantra should help. Did he not open his Third Eye and reduce the God of Love to ashes, when the latter slyly aimed his arrow at him while he was meditating? Our hermit pictured the god of matted locks and fiery eyes and recited aloud: "Om Namasivaya," that lonely hall resounding with his hoarse voice. His rambling, unwholesome thoughts were halted for a while, but presently regained their vigour and raced after the woman. She opened her door at least six times on an evening. Did she sleep with them all together at the same time? He paused to laugh at this notion, and also realized that his meditation on the austere god was gone. He banged his fist on his temples, which pained but improved his concentration. "Om Namasivaya . . ." Part of his mind noted the creaking of the door of the opposite house. She was a serpent in whose coils everyone was caught and destroyed—old and young and the middle-aged, tailors and students (he had noticed a couple of days ago a young B.Sc. student from Albert Mission Hostel at her door), lawyers and magistrates (Why not?) . . . No wonder the world was getting overpopulated—with such pressure of the elemental urge within every individual! O God Siva, this woman must be eliminated. He would confront her some day and tell her to get out. He would tell her, "Oh, sinful wretch, who is spreading disease and filth like an open sewer: think of the contamination you have spread around—from middle-aged tailor to B.Sc. student. You are out to destroy mankind. Repent your sins, shave your head, cover your ample loins with sackcloth, sit at the temple gate and beg or drown yourself in sarayu after praying for a cleaner life at least in the next birth . . ."

Thus went his dialogue, the thought of the woman never leaving his mind, during all the wretched, ill-spent night; he lay tossing on the bare floor. He rose before dawn, his mind made up. He would clear out immediately, cross Nallappa's Grove, and reach the other side of the river. He did not need a permanent roof; he would drift and rest in any temple or mantap or in the shade of a banyan tree: he recollected an ancient tale he had heard from his guru long ago. . . . A harlot was sent to heaven when she died, while her detractor, a self-righteous reformer, found himself in hell. It was explained that while the harlot sinned only with her body, her detractor was corrupt mentally, as he was obsessed with the harlot and her activities, and could meditate on nothing else.

Our hermit packed his wicker box with his sparse possessions—a god's image in copper, a rosary, the deerskin, and a little brass bowl. Carrying his box in one hand, he stepped out of the house, closing the door gently behind him. In the dim hour of the dusk, shadowy figures were moving—a milkman driving his cow ahead, labourers bearing crowbars and spades, women with baskets on their way to the market. While he paused to take a final look at the shelter he was abandoning, he heard a plaintive cry, "Swamiji," from the opposite house, and saw the woman approach him with a tray, heaped with fruits and flowers. She placed it at his feet and said in a low reverential whisper: "Please accept my offering. This is a day of remembrance of my mother. On this day I pray and seek a saint's blessing. Forgive me. . . ." All the lines he had rehearsed for a confrontation deserted him at this moment; looking at her flabby figure, the dark rings under her eyes, he felt pity. As she bent down to prostrate, he noticed that her hair was indifferently dyed and that the parting in the middle widened into a bald patch over which a string of jasmine dangled loosely. He touched her tray with the tip of his finger as a token of acceptance, and went down the street without a word.

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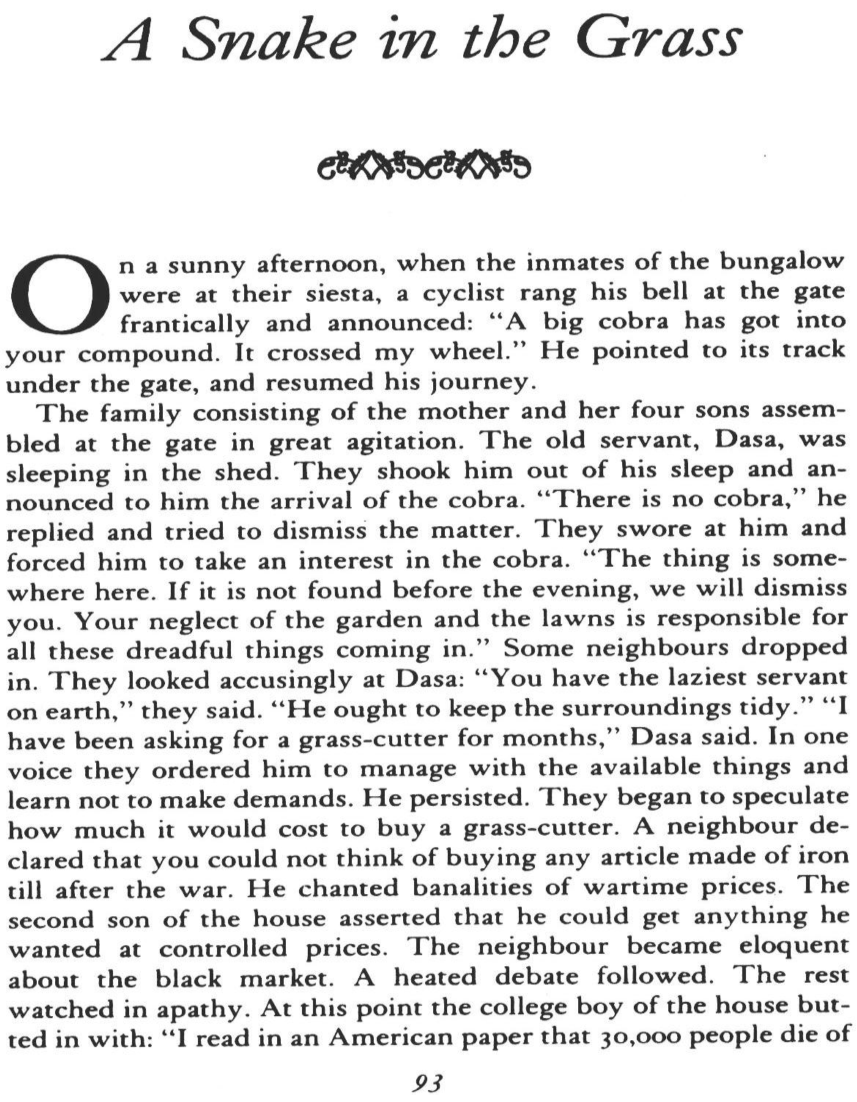

A Snake in the Grass

On a sunny afternoon, when the inmates of the bungalow were at their siesta, a cyclist rang his bell at the gate frantically and announced: "A big cobra has got into your compound. It crossed my wheel." He pointed to its track under the gate, and resumed his journey.

The family consisting of the mother and her four sons assembled at the gate in great agitation. The old servant, Dasa, was sleeping in the shed. They shook him out of his sleep and announced to him the arrival of the cobra. "There is no cobra," he replied and tried to dismiss the matter. They swore at him and forced him to take an interest in the cobra. "The thing is somewhere here. If it is not found before the evening, we will dismiss you. Your neglect of the garden and the lawns is responsible for all these dreadful things coming in." Some neighbours dropped in. They looked accusingly at Dasa: "You have the laziest servant on earth," they said. "He ought to keep the surroundings tidy." "I have been asking for a grass-cutter for months," Dasa said. In one voice they ordered him to manage with the available things and learn not to make demands. He persisted. They began to speculate how much it would cost to buy a grass-cutter. A neighbour declared that you could not think of buying any article made of iron till after the war. He chanted banalities of wartime prices. The second son of the house asserted that he could get anything he wanted at controlled prices. The neighbour became eloquent about the black market. A heated debate followed. The rest watched in apathy. At this point the college boy of the house butted in with: "I read in an American paper that 30,000 people die of

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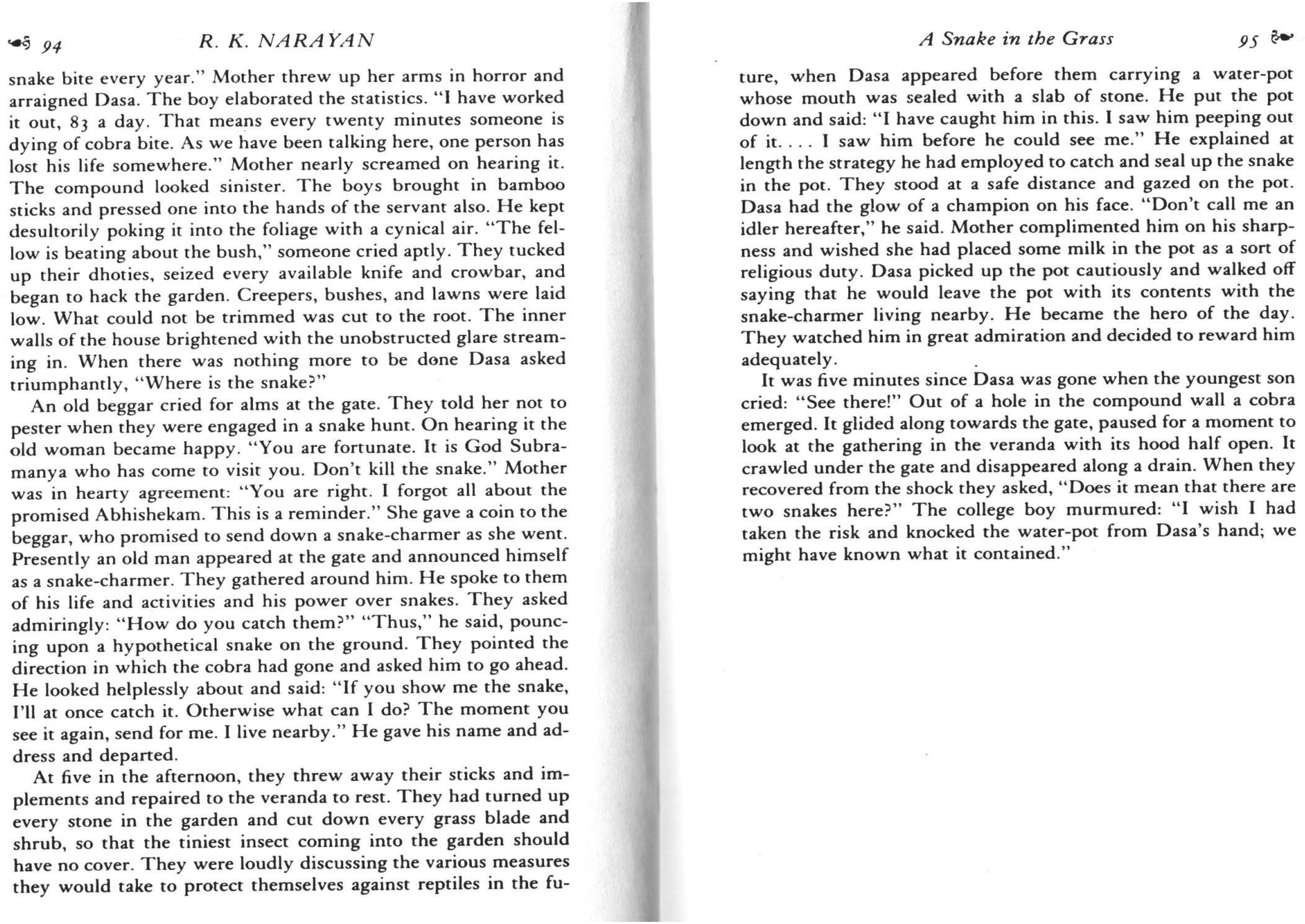

snake bite every year." Mother threw up her arms in horror and arraigned Dasa. The boy elaborated the statistics. "I have worked it out, 83 a day. That means every twenty minutes someone is dying of cobra bite. As we have been talking here, one person has lost his life somewhere." Mother nearly screamed on hearing it. The compound looked sinister. The boys brought in bamboo sticks and pressed one into the hands of the servant also. He kept desultorily poking it into the foliage with a cynical air. "The fellow is beating about the bush," someone cried aptly. They tucked up their dhoties, seized every available knife and crowbar, and began to hack the garden. Creepers, bushes, and lawns were laid low. What could not be trimmed was cut to the root. The inner walls of the house brightened with the unobstructed glare streaming in. When there was nothing more to be done Dasa asked triumphantly, "Where is the snake?"

An old beggar cried for alms at the gate. They told her not to pester when they were engaged in a snake hunt. On hearing it the old woman became happy. "You are fortunate. It is God Subramanya who has come to visit you. Don't kill the snake." Mother was in hearty agreement: "You are right. I forgot all about the promised Abhishekam. This is a reminder." She gave a coin to the beggar, who promised to send down a snake-charmer as she went. Presently an old man appeared at the gate and announced himself as a snake-charmer. They gathered around him. He spoke to them of his life and activities and his power over snakes. They asked admiringly: "How do you catch them?" "Thus," he said, pouncing upon a hypothetical snake on the ground. They pointed the direction in which the cobra had gone and asked him to go ahead. He looked helplessly about and said: "If you show me the snake, I'll at once catch it. Otherwise what can I do? The moment you see it again, send for me. I live nearby." He gave his name and address and departed.

At five in the afternoon, they threw away their sticks and implements and repaired to the veranda to rest. They had turned up every stone in the garden and cut down every grass blade and shrub, so that the tiniest insect coming into the garden should have no cover. They were loudly discussing the various measures they would take to protect themselves against reptiles in the future, when Dasa appeared before them carrying a water-pot whose mouth was sealed with a slab of stone. He put the pot down and said: "I have caught him in this. I saw him peeping out of it. . . . I saw him before he could see me." He explained at length the strategy he had employed to catch and seal up the snake in the pot. They stood at a safe distance and gazed on the pot. Dasa had the glow of a champion on his face. "Don't call me an idler hereafter," he said. Mother complimented him on his sharpness and wished she had placed some milk in the pot as a sort of religious duty. Dasa picked up the pot cautiously and walked off saying that he would leave the pot with its contents with the snake-charmer living nearby. He became the hero of the day. They watched him in great admiration and decided to reward him adequately.

It was five minutes since Dasa was gone when the youngest son cried: "See there!" Out of a hole in the compound wall a cobra emerged. It glided along towards the gate, paused for a moment to look at the gathering in the veranda with its hood half open. It crawled under the gate and disappeared along a drain. When they recovered from the shock they asked, "Does it mean that there are two snakes here?" The college boy murmured: "I wish I had taken the risk and knocked the water-pot from Dasa's hand; we might have known what it contained."

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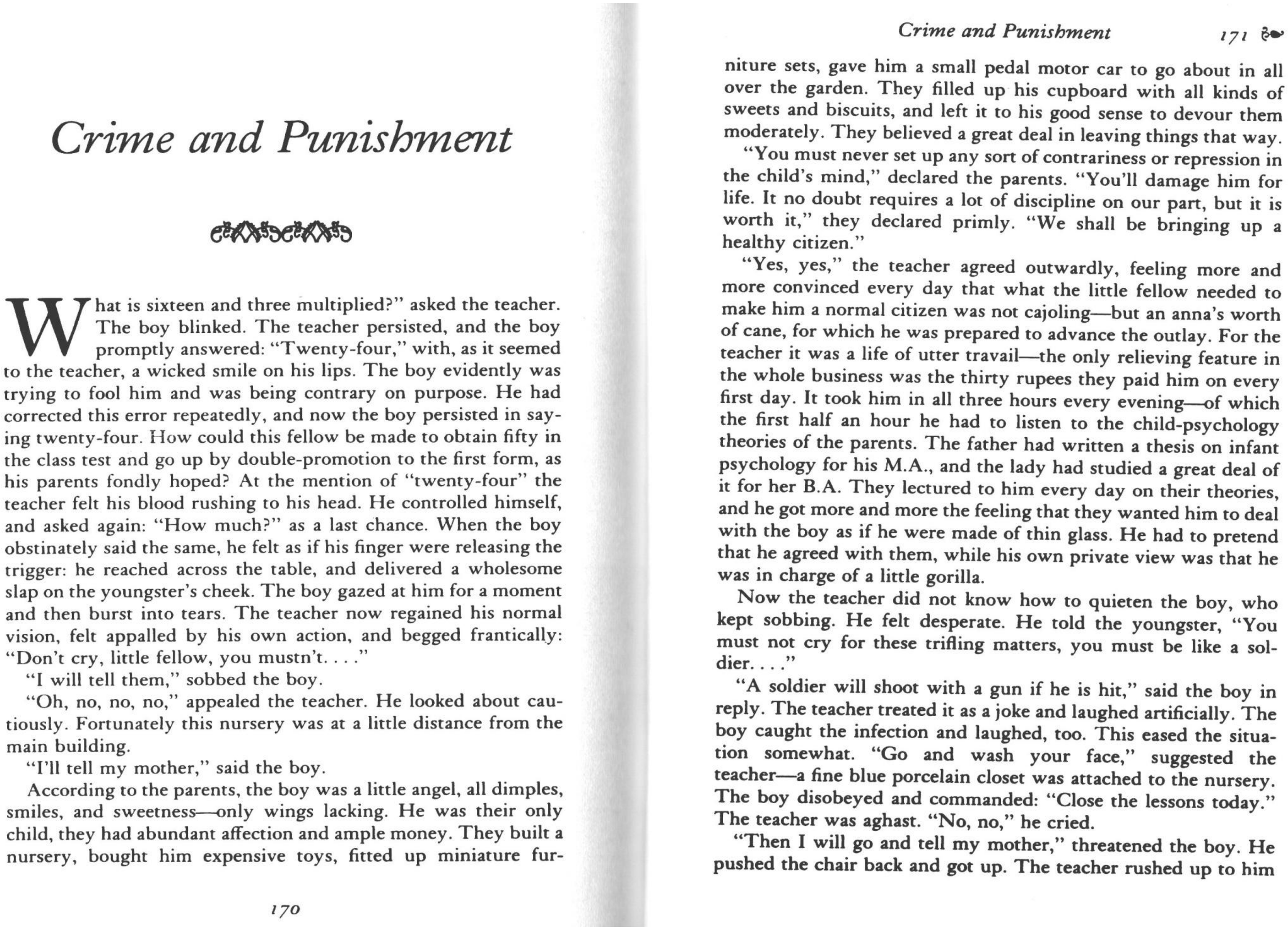

Crime and Punishment

"What is sixteen and three multiplied?" asked the teacher. The boy blinked. The teacher persisted, and the boy promptly answered: "Twenty-four," with, as it seemed to the teacher, a wicked smile on his lips. The boy evidently was trying to fool him and was being contrary on purpose. He had corrected this error repeatedly, and now the boy persisted in saying twenty-four. How could this fellow be made to obtain fifty in the class test and go up by double-promotion to the first form, as his parents fondly hoped? At the mention of "twenty-four" the teacher felt his blood rushing to his head. He controlled himself, and asked again: "How much?" as a last chance. When the boy obstinately said the same, he felt as if his finger were releasing the trigger: he reached across the table, and delivered a wholesome slap on the youngster's cheek. The boy gazed at him for a moment and then burst into tears. The teacher now regained his normal vision, felt appalled by his own action, and begged frantically: "Don't cry, little fellow, you mustn't. . . ."

"I will tell them," sobbed the boy.

"Oh, no, no, no," appealed the teacher. He looked about cautiously. Fortunately this nursery was at a little distance from the main building.

"I'll tell my mother," said the boy.

According to the parents, the boy was a little angel, all dimples, smiles, and sweetness—only wings lacking. He was their only child, they had abundant affection and ample money. They built a nursery, bought him expensive toys, fitted up miniature furniture sets, gave him a small pedal motor car to go about in all over the garden. They filled up his cupboard with all kinds of sweets and biscuits, and left it to his good sense to devour them moderately. They believed a great deal in leaving things that way.

"You must never set up any sort of contrariness or repression in the child's mind," declared the parents. "You'll damage him for life. It no doubt requires a lot of discipline on our part, but it is worth it," they declared primly. "We shall be bringing up a healthy citizen."

"Yes, yes," the teacher agreed outwardly, feeling more and more convinced every day that what the little fellow needed to make him a normal citizen was not cajoling—but an anna's worth of cane, for which he was prepared to advance the outlay. For the teacher it was a life of utter travail—the only relieving feature in the whole business was the thirty rupees they paid him on every first day. It took him in all three hours every evening—of which the first half an hour he had to listen to the child-psychology theories of the parents. The father had written a thesis on infant psychology for his M.A., and the lady had studied a great deal of it for her B.A. They lectured to him every day on their theories, and he got more and more the feeling that they wanted him to deal with the boy as if he were made of thin glass. He had to pretend that he agreed with them, while his own private view was that he was in charge of a little gorilla.

Now the teacher did not know how to quieten the boy, who kept sobbing. He felt desperate. He told the youngster, "You must not cry for these trifling matters, you must be like a soldier. . . ."

"A soldier will shoot with a gun if he is hit," said the boy in reply. The teacher treated it as a joke and laughed artificially. The boy caught the infection and laughed, too. This eased the situation somewhat. "Go and wash your face," suggested the teacher—a fine blue porcelain closet was attached to the nursery. The boy disobeyed and commanded: "Close the lessons today." The teacher was aghast. "No, no," he cried.

"Then I will go and tell my mother," threatened the boy. He pushed the chair back and got up. The teacher rushed up to him

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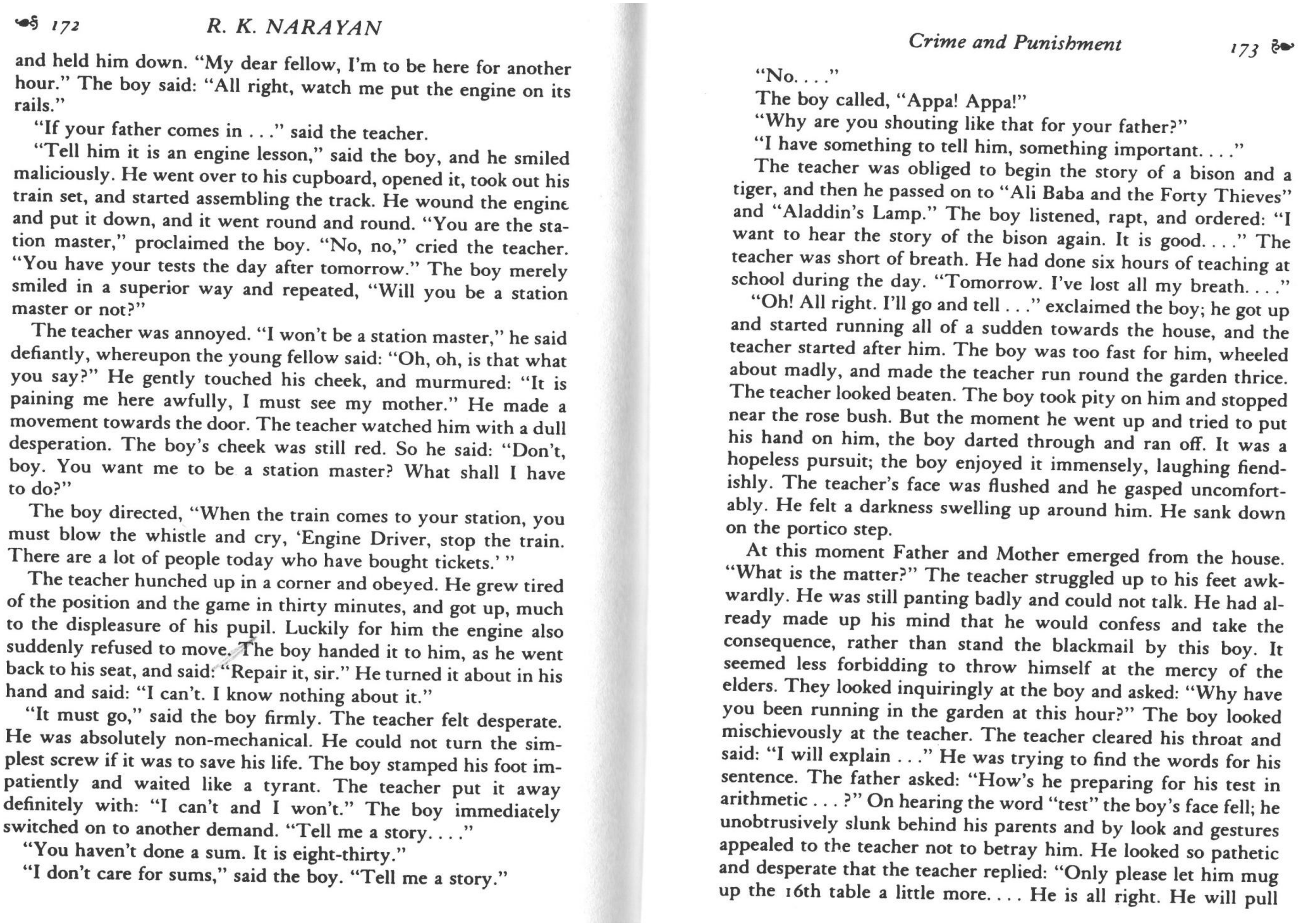

and held him down. "My dear fellow, I'm to be here for another hour." The boy said: "All right, watch me put the engine on its rails."

"If your father comes in . . ." said the teacher.

"Tell him it is an engine lesson," said the boy, and he smiled maliciously. He went over to his cupboard, opened it, took out his train set, and started assembling the track. He wound the engine and put it down, and it went round and round. "You are the station master," proclaimed the boy. "No, no," cried the teacher. "You have your tests the day after tomorrow." The boy merely smiled in a superior way and repeated, "Will you be a station master or not?"

The teacher was annoyed. "I won't be a station master," he said defiantly, whereupon the young fellow said: "Oh, oh, is that what you say?" He gently touched his cheek, and murmured: "It is paining me here awfully, I must see my mother." He made a movement towards the door. The teacher watched him with a dull desperation. The boy's cheek was still red. So he said: "Don't, boy. You want me to be a station master? What shall I have to do?"

The boy directed, "When the train comes to your station, you must blow the whistle and cry, 'Engine Driver, stop the train. There are a lot of people today who have bought tickets.' "

The teacher hunched up in a corner and obeyed. He grew tired of the position and the game in thirty minutes, and got up, much to the displeasure of his pupil. Luckily for him the engine also suddenly refused to move. The boy handed it to him, as he went back to his seat, and said: "Repair it, sir." He turned it about in his hand and said: "I can't. I know nothing about it."

"It must go," said the boy firmly. The teacher felt desperate. He was absolutely non-mechanical. He could not turn the simplest screw if it was to save his life. The boy stamped his foot impatiently and waited like a tyrant. The teacher put it away definitely with: "I can't and I won't." The boy immediately switched on to another demand. "Tell me a story. . . ."

"You haven't done a sum. It is eight-thirty."

"I don't care for sums," said the boy. "Tell me a story."

"No. . . ."

The boy called, "Appa! Appa!"

"Why are you shouting like that for your father?"

"I have something to tell him, something important. . . ."

The teacher was obliged to begin the story of a bison and a tiger, and then he passed on to "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" and "Aladdin's Lamp." The boy listened, rapt, and ordered: "I want to hear the story of the bison again. It is good. . . ." The teacher was short of breath. He had done six hours of teaching at school during the day. "Tomorrow. I've lost all my breath. . . ."

"Oh! All right. I'll go and tell . . ." exclaimed the boy; he got up and started running all of a sudden towards the house, and the teacher started after him. The boy was too fast for him, wheeled about madly, and made the teacher run round the garden thrice. The teacher looked beaten. The boy took pity on him and stopped near the rose bush. But the moment he went up and tried to put his hand on him, the boy darted through and ran off. It was a hopeless pursuit; the boy enjoyed it immensely, laughing fiendishly. The teacher's face was flushed and he gasped uncomfortably. He felt a darkness swelling up around him. He sank down on the portico step.

At this moment Father and Mother emerged from the house. "What is the matter?" The teacher struggled up to his feet awkwardly. He was still panting badly and could not talk. He had already made up his mind that he would confess and take the consequence, rather than stand the blackmail by this boy. It seemed less forbidding to throw himself at the mercy of the elders. They looked inquiringly at the boy and asked: "Why have you been running in the garden at this hour?" The boy looked mischievously at the teacher. The teacher cleared his throat and said: "I will explain . . ." He was trying to find the words for his sentence. The father asked: "How's he preparing for his test in arithmetic . . . ?" On hearing the word "test" the boy's face fell; he unobtrusively slunk behind his parents and by look and gestures appealed to the teacher not to betray him. He looked so pathetic and desperate that the teacher replied: "Only please let him mug up the 16th table a little more. . . . He is all right. He will pull

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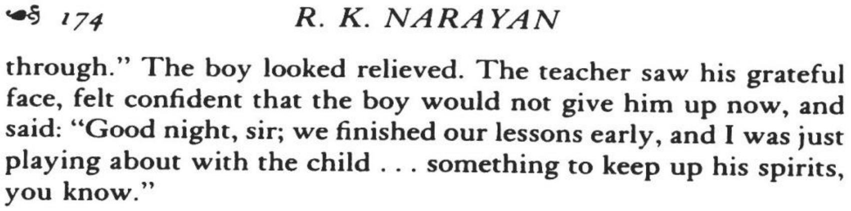

through." The boy looked relieved. The teacher saw his grateful face, felt confident that the boy would not give him up now, and said: "Good night, sir; we finished our lessons early, and I was just playing about with the child . . . something to keep up his spirits, you know."

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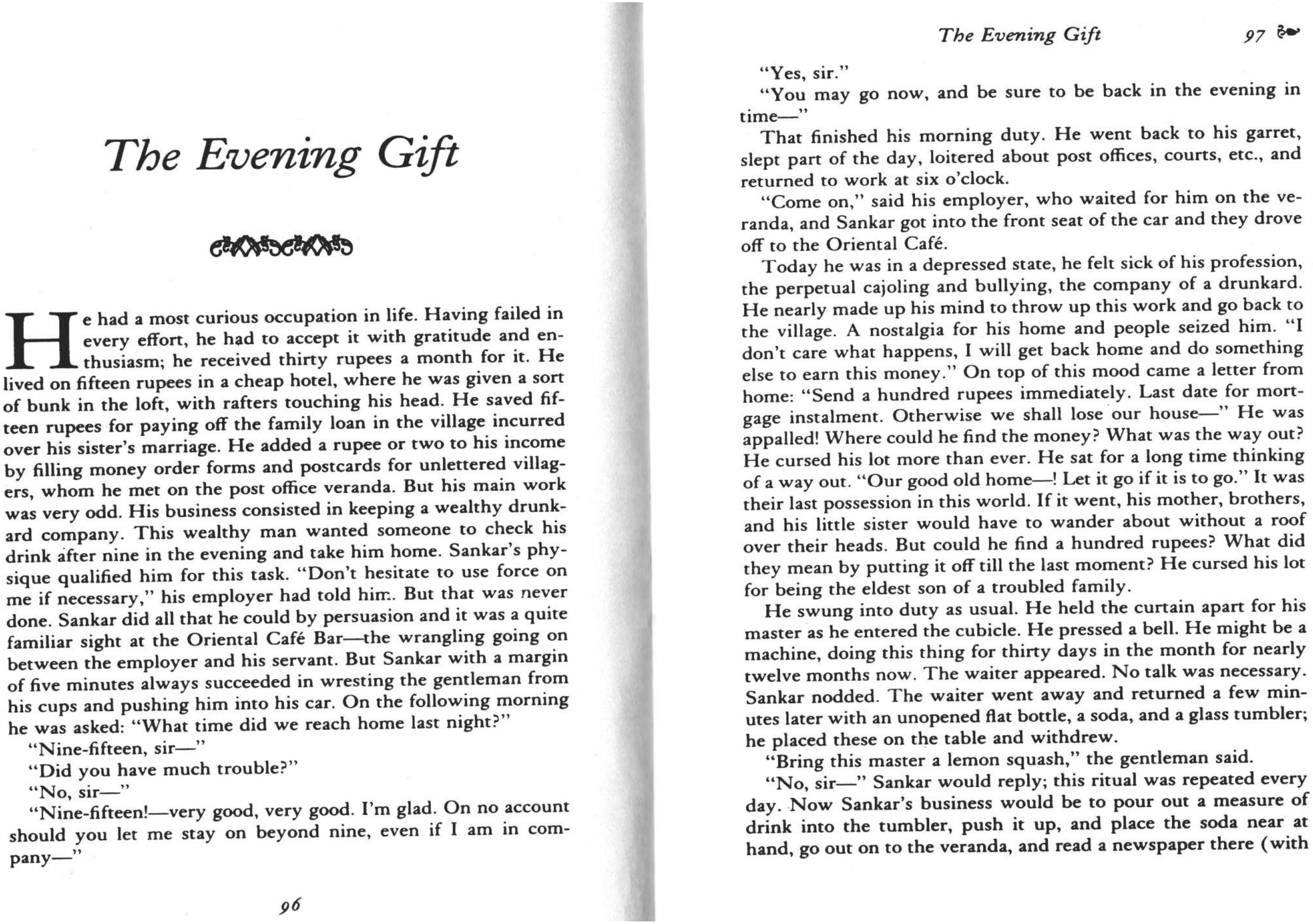

The Evening Gift

He had a most curious occupation in life. Having failed in every effort, he had to accept it with gratitude and enthusiasm; he received thirty rupees a month for it. He lived on fifteen rupees in a cheap hotel, where he was given a sort of bunk in the loft, with rafters touching his head. He saved fifteen rupees for paying off the family loan in the village incurred over his sister's marriage. He added a rupee or two to his income by filling money order forms and postcards for unlettered villagers, whom he met on the post office veranda. But his main work was very odd. His business consisted in keeping a wealthy drunkard company. This wealthy man wanted someone to check his drink after nine in the evening and take him home. Sankar's physique qualified him for this task. "Don't hesitate to use force on me if necessary," his employer had told him. But that was never done. Sankar did all that he could by persuasion and it was a quite familiar sight at the Oriental Café Bar—the wrangling going on between the employer and his servant. But Sankar with a margin of five minutes always succeeded in wresting the gentleman from his cups and pushing him into his car. On the following morning he was asked: "What time did we reach home last night?"

"Nine-fifteen, sir—"

"Did you have much trouble?"

"No, sir—"

"Nine-fifteen!—very good, very good. I'm glad. On no account should you let me stay on beyond nine, even if I am in company—"

"Yes, sir."

"You may go now, and be sure to be back in the evening in time—"

That finished his morning duty. He went back to his garret, slept part of the day, loitered about post offices, courts, etc., and returned to work at six o'clock.

"Come on," said his employer, who waited for him on the veranda, and Sankar got into the front seat of the car and they drove off to the Oriental Café.

Today he was in a depressed state, he felt sick of his profession, the perpetual cajoling and bullying, the company of a drunkard. He nearly made up his mind to throw up this work and go back to the village. A nostalgia for his home and people seized him. "I don't care what happens, I will get back home and do something else to earn this money." On top of this mood came a letter from home: "Send a hundred rupees immediately. Last date for mortgage instalment. Otherwise we shall lose our house—" He was appalled! Where could he find the money? What was the way out? He cursed his lot more than ever. He sat for a long time thinking of a way out. "Our good old home—! Let it go if it is to go." It was their last possession in this world. If it went, his mother, brothers, and his little sister would have to wander about without a roof over their heads. But could he find a hundred rupees? What did they mean by putting it off till the last moment? He cursed his lot for being the eldest son of a troubled family.

He swung into duty as usual. He held the curtain apart for his master as he entered the cubicle. He pressed a bell. He might be a machine, doing this thing for thirty days in the month for nearly twelve months now. The waiter appeared. No talk was necessary. Sankar nodded. The waiter went away and returned a few minutes later with an unopened flat bottle, a soda, and a glass tumbler; he placed these on the table and withdrew.

"Bring this master a lemon squash," the gentleman said.

"No, sir—" Sankar would reply; this ritual was repeated every day. Now Sankar's business would be to pour out a measure of drink into the tumbler, push it up, and place the soda near at hand, go out on to the veranda, and read a newspaper there (with

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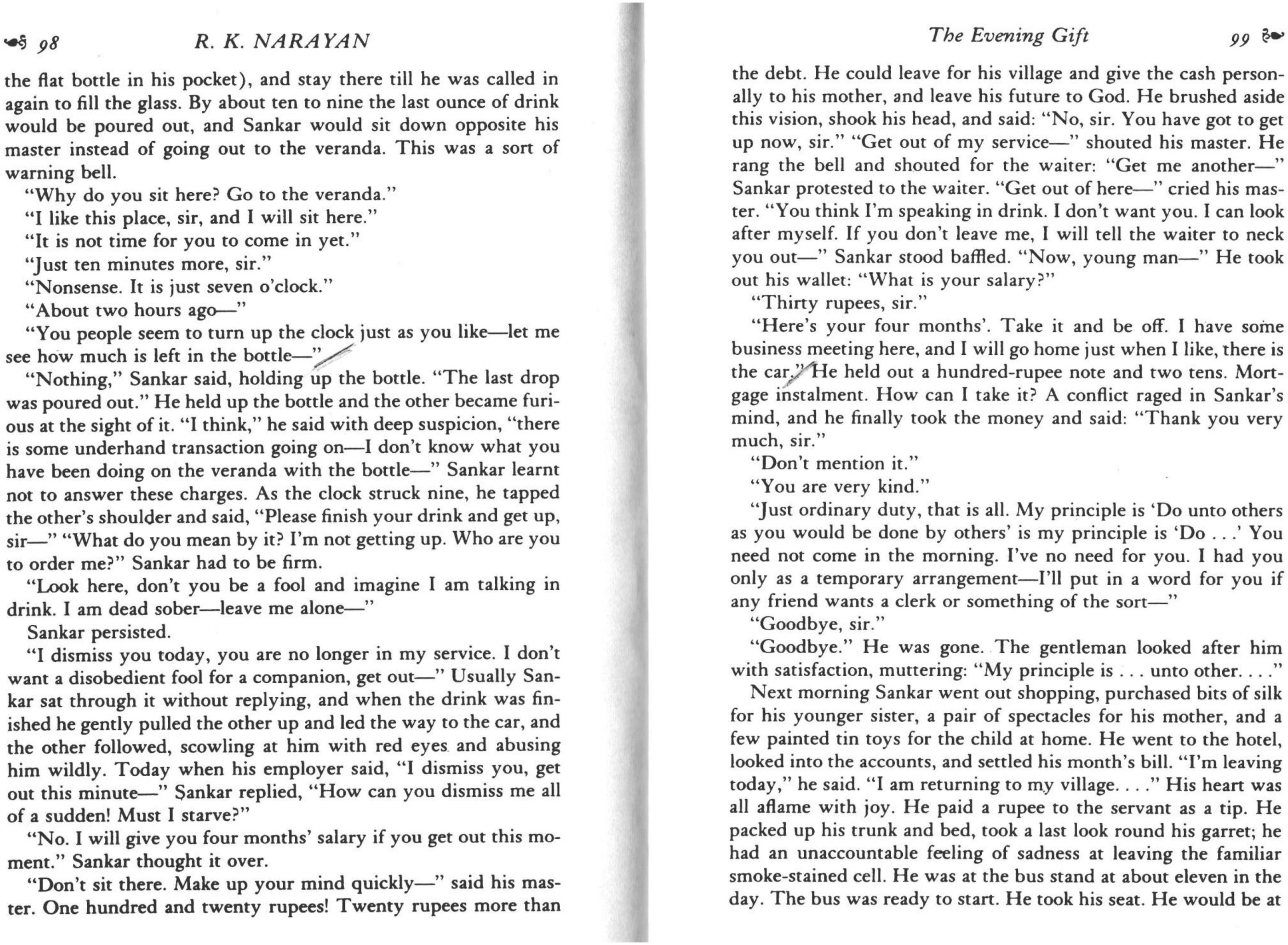

the flat bottle in his pocket), and stay there till he was called in again to fill the glass. By about ten to nine the last ounce of drink would be poured out, and Sankar would sit down opposite his master instead of going out to the veranda. This was a sort of warning bell.

"Why do you sit here? Go to the veranda."

"I like this place, sir, and I will sit here."

"It is not time for you to come in yet."

"Just ten minutes more, sir."

"Nonsense. It is just seven o'clock."

"About two hours ago—"

"You people seem to turn up the clock just as you like—let me see how much is left in the bottle—"

"Nothing," Sankar said, holding up the bottle. "The last drop was poured out." He held up the bottle and the other became furious at the sight of it. "I think," he said with deep suspicion, "there is some underhand transaction going on—I don't know what you have been doing on the veranda with the bottle—" Sankar learnt not to answer these charges. As the clock struck nine, he tapped the other's shoulder and said, "Please finish your drink and get up, sir—" "What do you mean by it? I'm not getting up. Who are you to order me?" Sankar had to be firm.

"Look here, don't you be a fool and imagine I am talking in drink. I am dead sober—leave me alone—"

Sankar persisted.

"I dismiss you today, you are no longer in my service. I don't want a disobedient fool for a companion, get out—" Usually Sankar sat through it without replying, and when the drink was finished he gently pulled the other up and led the way to the car, and the other followed, scowling at him with red eyes and abusing him wildly. Today when his employer said, "I dismiss you, get out this minute—" Sankar replied, "How can you dismiss me all of a sudden! Must I starve?"

"No. I will give you four months' salary if you get out this moment." Sankar thought it over.

"Don't sit there. Make up your mind quickly—" said his master. One hundred and twenty rupees! Twenty rupees more than the debt. He could leave for his village and give the cash personally to his mother, and leave his future to God. He brushed aside this vision, shook his head, and said: "No, sir. You have got to get up now, sir." "Get out of my service—" shouted his master. He rang the bell and shouted for the waiter: "Get me another—" Sankar protested to the waiter. "Get out of here—" cried his master. "You think I'm speaking in drink. I don't want you. I can look after myself. If you don't leave me, I will tell the waiter to neck you out—" Sankar stood baffled. "Now, young man—" He took out his wallet: "What is your salary?"

"Thirty rupees, sir."

"Here's your four months'. Take it and be off. I have some business meeting here, and I will go home just when I like, there is the car." He held out a hundred-rupee note and two tens. Mortgage instalment. How can I take it? A conflict raged in Sankar's mind, and he finally took the money and said: "Thank you very much, sir."

"Don't mention it."

"You are very kind."

"Just ordinary duty, that is all. My principle is 'Do unto others as you would be done by others' is my principle is 'Do . . .' You need not come in the morning. I've no need for you. I had you only as a temporary arrangement—I'll put in a word for you if any friend wants a clerk or something of the sort—"

"Goodbye, sir."

"Goodbye." He was gone. The gentleman looked after him with satisfaction, muttering: "My principle is . . . unto other. . . ."

Next morning Sankar went out shopping, purchased bits of silk for his younger sister, a pair of spectacles for his mother, and a few painted tin toys for the child at home. He went to the hotel, looked into the accounts, and settled his month's bill. "I'm leaving today," he said. "I am returning to my village. . . ." His heart was all aflame with joy. He paid a rupee to the servant as a tip. He packed up his trunk and bed, took a last look round his garret; he had an unaccountable feeling of sadness at leaving the familiar smoke-stained cell. He was at the bus stand at about eleven in the day. The bus was ready to start. He took his seat. He would be at

ANEXO II – REPRODUÇÃO DO TEXTO ORIGINAL

home at six in the evening. What a surprise for his mother! He would chat all night and tell them about the drunkard. . . .

He was shaken out of this reverie. A police inspector standing at the footboard of the bus touched his shoulder and asked:

"Are you Sankar?"

"Yes."

"Get down and follow me."

"I am going to my village. . . ."

"You can't go now." The inspector placed the trunk and bed on a coolie's head and they marched to the police station. There Sankar was subjected to much questioning, and his pockets were searched and all his money was taken away by the inspector. The inspector scrutinized the hundred-rupee note and remarked: "Same number. How did you get this? Be truthful. . . ."

Presently the inspector got up and said: "Follow me to the gentleman's house. . . ." Sankar found his employer sitting in a chair on the veranda, with a very tired look on his face. He motioned the inspector to a chair and addressed Sankar in a voice full of sorrow. "I never knew you were this sort, Sankar. You robbed me when I was not aware of it. If you'd asked me I'd have given you any amount you wanted. Did you have to tie me up and throw me down?" He showed the bruises on his arm. "In addition to robbing?" Sankar stood aghast. He could hardly speak for trembling. He explained all that had happened in the evening. His master and the police inspector listened in grim silence with obvious scepticism. His master said to the inspector: "Can you believe anything of what he says?"

"No, sir," replied the inspector.

"Nor can I. The poor fellow is driven to a corner and is inventing things. . . ." He thought for a moment. "I don't know . . . I think . . . since you have recovered the amount . . . how much did you find with him?"

"About one hundred and ten rupees and some change . . ." said the inspector.

"What happened to the balance?" He turned to Sankar and asked:

"Did you spend it?"

"Yes, I bought some toys and clothes. . . ."

"Well, well," said the gentleman with a flourish. "Let it go, poor devil: I'm sorry for you. You could have asked me for money instead of robbing me by force. Do you know where they found me?" he asked, showing the bruises on his elbow. "Do you know it was nearly next day they took me home? You'd left me unconscious: I will, however, withdraw the complaint. 'Do unto others as you would be done by' is my motto. You have served me faithfully all these months . . . but don't come before me again, you are a rogue. Get away now. . . ."

"Inspector, after the formalities are over you may send me the seized amount tomorrow, thank you very much. . . ."

Sankar starved for two days, and wandered about the street without a place for his head or trunk. At last, loitering near the post office one day, he had a few money orders and postcards to write, which earned him a rupee. With it he ate a meal, and took the bus for his village and back to all the ancient never-ending troubles of his family life.

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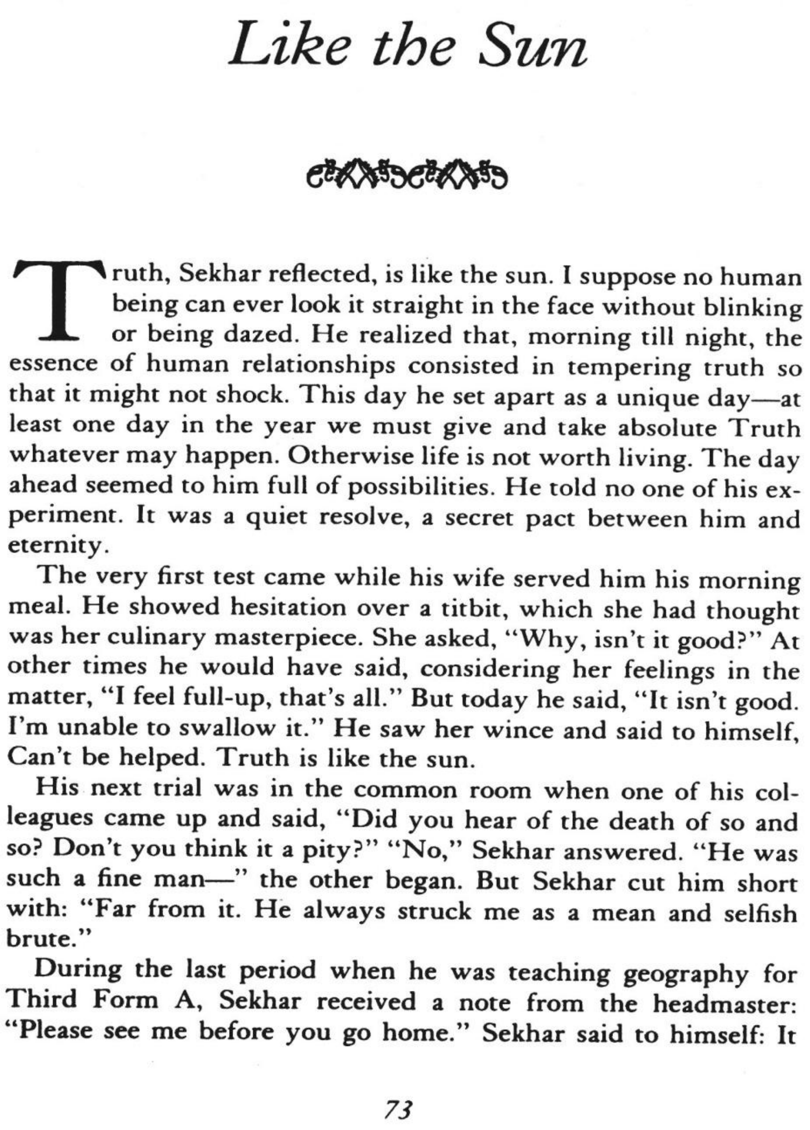

Like the Sun

Truth, Sekhar reflected, is like the sun. I suppose no human being can ever look it straight in the face without blinking or being dazed. He realized that, morning till night, the essence of human relationships consisted in tempering truth so that it might not shock. This day he set apart as a unique day—at least one day in the year we must give and take absolute Truth whatever may happen. Otherwise life is not worth living. The day ahead seemed to him full of possibilities. He told no one of his experiment. It was a quiet resolve, a secret pact between him and eternity.

The very first test came while his wife served him his morning meal. He showed hesitation over a titbit, which she had thought was her culinary masterpiece. She asked, "Why, isn't it good?" At other times he would have said, considering her feelings in the matter, "I feel full-up, that's all." But today he said, "It isn't good. I'm unable to swallow it." He saw her wince and said to himself, Can't be helped. Truth is like the sun.

His next trial was in the common room when one of his colleagues came up and said, "Did you hear of the death of so and so? Don't you think it a pity?" "No," Sekhar answered. "He was such a fine man—" the other began. But Sekhar cut him short with: "Far from it. He always struck me as a mean and selfish brute."

During the last period when he was teaching geography for Third Form A, Sekhar received a note from the headmaster: "Please see me before you go home." Sekhar said to himself: It

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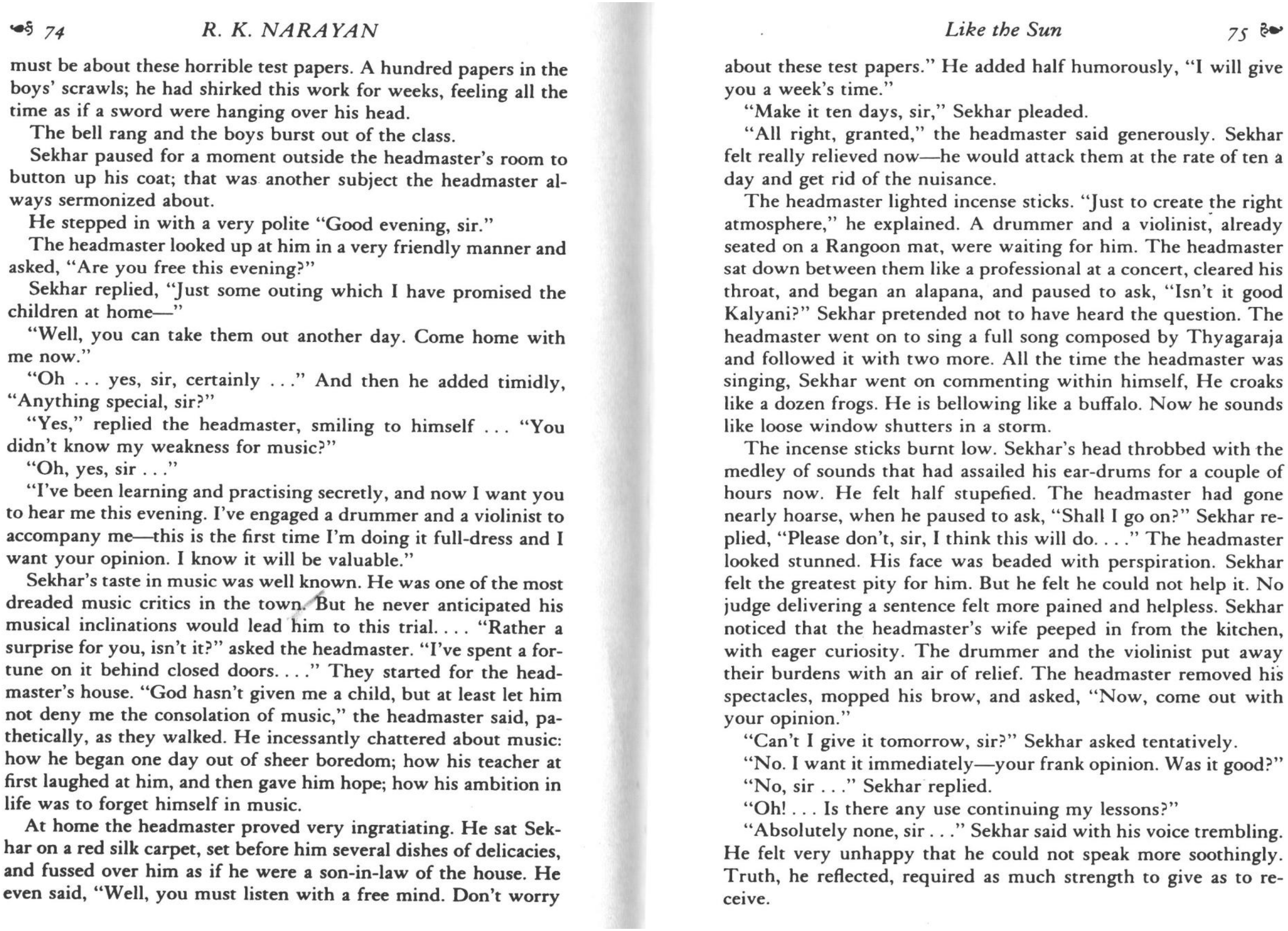

must be about these horrible test papers. A hundred papers in the boys' scrawls; he had shirked this work for weeks, feeling all the time as if a sword were hanging over his head.

The bell rang and the boys burst out of the class.

Sekhar paused for a moment outside the headmaster's room to button up his coat; that was another subject the headmaster always sermonized about.

He stepped in with a very polite "Good evening, sir."

The headmaster looked up at him in a very friendly manner and asked, "Are you free this evening?"

Sekhar replied, "Just some outing which I have promised the children at home—"

"Well, you can take them out another day. Come home with me now."

"Oh . . . yes, sir, certainly . . ." And then he added timidly, "Anything special, sir?"

"Yes," replied the headmaster, smiling to himself . . . "You didn't know my weakness for music?"

"Oh, yes, sir . . ."

"I've been learning and practising secretly, and now I want you to hear me this evening. I've engaged a drummer and a violinist to accompany me—this is the first time I'm doing it full-dress and I want your opinion. I know it will be valuable."

Sekhar's taste in music was well known. He was one of the most dreaded music critics in the town. But he never anticipated his musical inclinations would lead him to this trial. . . . "Rather a surprise for you, isn't it?" asked the headmaster. "I've spent a fortune on it behind closed doors. . . ." They started for the headmaster's house. "God hasn't given me a child, but at least let him not deny me the consolation of music," the headmaster said, pathetically, as they walked. He incessantly chattered about music: how he began one day out of sheer boredom; how his teacher at first laughed at him, and then gave him hope; how his ambition in life was to forget himself in music.

At home the headmaster proved very ingratiating. He sat Sekhar on a red silk carpet, set before him several dishes of delicacies, and fussed over him as if he were a son-in-law of the house. He even said, "Well, you must listen with a free mind. Don't worry about these test papers." He added half humorously, "I will give you a week's time."

"Make it ten days, sir," Sekhar pleaded.

"All right, granted," the headmaster said generously. Sekhar felt really relieved now—he would attack them at the rate of ten a day and get rid of the nuisance.

The headmaster lighted incense sticks. "Just to create the right atmosphere," he explained. A drummer and a violinist, already seated on a Rangoon mat, were waiting for him. The headmaster sat down between them like a professional at a concert, cleared his throat, and began an alapana, and paused to ask, "Isn't it good Kalyani?" Sekhar pretended not to have heard the question. The headmaster went on to sing a full song composed by Thyagaraja and followed it with two more. All the time the headmaster was singing, Sekhar went on commenting within himself, He croaks like a dozen frogs. He is bellowing like a buffalo. Now he sounds like loose window shutters in a storm.

The incense sticks burnt low. Sekhar's head throbbed with the medley of sounds that had assailed his ear-drums for a couple of hours now. He felt half stupefied. The headmaster had gone nearly hoarse, when he paused to ask, "Shall I go on?" Sekhar replied, "Please don't, sir, I think this will do. . . ." The headmaster looked stunned. His face was beaded with perspiration. Sekhar felt the greatest pity for him. But he felt he could not help it. No judge delivering a sentence felt more pained and helpless. Sekhar noticed that the headmaster's wife peeped in from the kitchen, with eager curiosity. The drummer and the violinist put away their burdens with an air of relief. The headmaster removed his spectacles, mopped his brow, and asked, "Now, come out with your opinion."

"Can't I give it tomorrow, sir?" Sekhar asked tentatively.

"No. I want it immediately—your frank opinion. Was it good?"

"No, sir . . ." Sekhar replied.

"Oh! . . . Is there any use continuing my lessons?"

"Absolutely none, sir . . ." Sekhar said with his voice trembling. He felt very unhappy that he could not speak more soothingly. Truth, he reflected, required as much strength to give as to receive.

All the way home he felt worried. He felt that his official life was not going to be smooth sailing hereafter. There were questions of increment and confirmation and so on, all depending upon the headmaster's goodwill. All kinds of worries seemed to be in store for him. . . . Did not Harischandra lose his throne, wife, child, because he would speak nothing less than the absolute Truth whatever happened?

At home his wife served him with a sullen face. He knew she was still angry with him for his remark of the morning. Two casualties for today, Sekhar said to himself. If I practise it for a week, I don't think I shall have a single friend left.

He received a call from the headmaster in his classroom next day. He went up apprehensively.

"Your suggestion was useful. I have paid off the music master. No one would tell me the truth about my music all these days. Why such antics at my age! Thank you. By the way, what about those test papers?"

"You gave me ten days, sir, for correcting them."

"Oh, I've reconsidered it. I must positively have them here tomorrow. . . ." A hundred papers in a day! That meant all night's sitting up! "Give me a couple of days, sir . . ."

"No. I must have them tomorrow morning. And remember, every paper must be thoroughly scrutinized."

"Yes, sir," Sekhar said, feeling that sitting up all night with a hundred test papers was a small price to pay for the luxury of practising Truth.

Under the Banyan Tree

The village Somal, nestling away in the forest tracts of Mempi, had a population of less than three hundred. It was in every way a village to make the heart of a rural reformer sink. Its tank, a small expanse of water, right in the middle of the village, served for drinking, bathing, and washing the cattle, and it bred malaria, typhoid, and heaven knew what else. The cottages sprawled anyhow and the lanes twisted and wriggled up and down and strangled each other. The population used the highway as the refuse ground and in the backyard of every house drain water stagnated in green puddles.

Such was the village. It is likely that the people of the village were insensitive: but it is more than likely that they never noticed their surroundings because they lived in a kind of perpetual enchantment. The enchanter was Nambi the story-teller. He was a man of about sixty or seventy. Or was he eighty or one hundred and eighty? Who could say? In a place so much cut off as Somal (the nearest bus-stop was ten miles away), reckoning could hardly be in the familiar measures of time. If anyone asked Nambi what his age was he referred to an ancient famine or an invasion or the building of a bridge and indicated how high he had stood from the ground at the time.

He was illiterate, in the sense that the written word was a mystery to him; but he could make up a story, in his head, at the rate of one a month; each story took nearly ten days to narrate.

His home was the little temple which was at the very end of the village. No one could say how he had come to regard himself as the owner of the temple. The temple was a very small structure with red-striped walls, with a stone image of the Goddess Shakti in the sanctum. The front portion of the temple was Nambi's home. For aught it mattered any place might be his home; for he was without possessions. All that he possessed was a broom with which he swept the temple; and he had also a couple of dhoties and upper cloth. He spent most of the day in the shade of the banyan which spread out its branches in front of the temple. When he felt hungry he walked into any house that caught his fancy and joined the family at dinner. When he needed new clothes they were brought to him by the villagers. He hardly ever had to go out in search of company; for the banyan shade served as a clubhouse for the village folk. All through the day people came seeking Nambi's company and squatted under the tree. If he was in a mood for it he listened to their talk and entertained them with his own observations and anecdotes. When he was in no mood he looked at the visitors sourly and asked, "What do you think I am? Don't blame me if you get no story at the next moon. Unless I meditate how can the Goddess give me a story? Do you think stories float in the air?" And he moved out to the edge of the forest and squatted there, contemplating the trees.

On Friday evenings the village turned up at the temple for worship, when Nambi lit a score of mud lamps and arranged them around the threshold of the sanctuary. He decorated the image with flowers, which grew wildly in the backyard of the temple. He acted as the priest and offered to the Goddess fruits and flowers brought in by the villagers.

On the nights he had a story to tell he lit a small lamp and placed it in a niche in the trunk of the banyan tree. Villagers as they returned home in the evening saw this, went home, and said to their wives, "Now, now, hurry up with the dinner, the story-teller is calling us." As the moon crept up behind the hillock, men, women, and children gathered under the banyan tree. The story-teller would not appear yet. He would be sitting in the sanctum, before the Goddess, with his eyes shut, in deep meditation. He sat thus as long as he liked and when he came out, with his forehead ablaze with ash and vermilion, he took his seat on a stone platform in front of the temple. He opened the story with a question. Jerking his finger towards a vague, far-away destination, he asked, "A

thousand years ago, a stone's throw in that direction, what do you think there was? It was not the weed-covered waste it is now, for donkeys to roll in. It was not the ash-pit it is now. It was the capital of the king. . . ." The king would be Dasaratha, Vikramaditya, Asoka, or anyone that came into the old man's head; the capital was called Kapila, Kridapura, or anything. Opening thus, the old man went on without a pause for three hours. By then brick by brick the palace of the king was raised. The old man described the dazzling durbar hall where sat a hundred vassal kings, ministers, and subjects; in another part of the palace all the musicians in the world assembled and sang; and most of the songs were sung over again by Nambi to his audience; and he described in detail the pictures and trophies that hung on the walls of the palace. . . .

It was story-building on an epic scale. The first day barely conveyed the setting of the tale, and Nambi's audience as yet had no idea who were coming into the story. As the moon slipped behind the trees of Mempi Forest Nambi said, "Now friends, Mother says this will do for the day." He abruptly rose, went in, lay down, and fell asleep long before the babble of the crowd ceased.

The light in the niche would again be seen two or three days later, and again and again throughout the bright half of the month. Kings and heroes, villains and fairy-like women, gods in human form, saints and assassins, jostled each other in that world which was created under the banyan tree. Nambi's voice rose and fell in an exquisite rhythm, and the moonlight and the hour completed the magic. The villagers laughed with Nambi, they wept with him, they adored the heroes, cursed the villains, groaned when the conspirator had his initial success, and they sent up to the gods a heartfelt prayer for a happy ending. . . .

On the day when the story ended, the whole gathering went into the sanctum and prostrated before the Goddess. . . .

By the time the next moon peeped over the hillock Nambi was ready with another story. He never repeated the same kind of story or brought in the same set of persons, and the village folk considered Nambi a sort of miracle, quoted his words of wisdom, and lived on the whole in an exalted plane of their own, though their life in all other respects was hard and drab.

And yet it had gone on for years and years. One moon he lit the lamp in the tree. The audience came. The old man took his seat and began the story. "... When King Vikramaditya lived, his minister was ..." He paused. He could not get beyond it. He made a fresh beginning. "There was the king ..." he said, repeated it, and then his words trailed off into a vague mumbling. "What has come over me?" he asked pathetically. "Oh, Mother, great Mother, why do I stumble and falter? I know the story. I had the whole of it a moment ago. What was it about? I can't understand what has happened." He faltered and looked so miserable that his audience said, "Take your own time. You are perhaps tired."

"Shut up!" he cried. "Am I tired? Wait a moment; I will tell you the story presently." Following this there was utter silence. Eager faces looked up at him. "Don't look at me!" he flared up. Somebody gave him a tumbler of milk. The audience waited patiently. This was a new experience. Some persons expressed their sympathy aloud. Some persons began to talk among themselves. Those who sat in the outer edge of the crowd silently slipped away. Gradually, as it neared midnight, others followed this example. Nambi sat staring at the ground, his head bowed in thought. For the first time he realized that he was old. He felt he would never more be able to control his thoughts or express them cogently. He looked up. Everyone had gone except his friend Mari the blacksmith. "Mari, why aren't you also gone?"

Mari apologized for the rest: "They didn't want to tire you; so they have gone away."

Nambi got up. "You are right. Tomorrow I will make it up. Age, age. What is my age? It has come on suddenly." He pointed at his head and said, "This says, 'Old fool, don't think I shall be your servant any more. You will be my servant hereafter.' It is disobedient and treacherous."

He lit the lamp in the niche next day. The crowd assembled under the banyan faithfully. Nambi had spent the whole day in meditation. He had been fervently praying to the Goddess not to desert him. He began the story. He went on for an hour without a stop. He felt greatly relieved, so much so that he interrupted his narration to remark, "Oh, friends. The Mother is always kind. I was seized with a foolish fear ..." and continued the story. In a few minutes he felt dried up. He struggled hard: "And then ... and then ... what happened?" He stammered. There followed a pause lasting an hour. The audience rose without a word and went home. The old man sat on the stone brooding till the cock crew. "I can't blame them for it," he muttered to himself. "Can they sit down here and mope all night?" Two days later he gave another instalment of the story, and that, too, lasted only a few minutes. The gathering dwindled. Fewer persons began to take notice of the lamp in the niche. Even these came only out of a sense of duty. Nambi realized that there was no use in prolonging the struggle. He brought the story to a speedy and premature end.

He knew what was happening. He was harrowed by the thoughts of his failure. I should have been happier if I had dropped dead years ago, he said to himself. Mother, why have you struck me dumb ... ? He shut himself up in the sanctum, hardly ate any food, and spent the greater part of the day sitting motionless in meditation.

The next moon peeped over the hillock, Nambi lit the lamp in the niche. The villagers as they returned home saw the lamp, but only a handful turned up at night. "Where are the others?" the old man asked. "Let us wait." He waited. The moon came up. His handful of audience waited patiently. And then the old man said, "I won't tell the story today, nor tomorrow unless the whole village comes here. I insist upon it. It is a mighty story. Everyone must hear it." Next day he went up and down the village street shouting, "I have a most wonderful tale to tell tonight. Come one and all; don't miss it. ..." This personal appeal had a great effect. At night a large crowd gathered under the banyan. They were happy that the story-teller had regained his powers. Nambi came out of the temple when everyone had settled and said: "It is the Mother who gives the gifts; and it is she who takes away the gifts. Nambi is a dotard. He speaks when the Mother has anything to say. He is struck dumb when she has nothing to say. But what is the use of the jasmine when it has lost its scent? What is the lamp for when all the oil is gone? Goddess be thanked. ... These are my last words on this earth; and this is my greatest story." He rose and went into the sanctum. His audience hardly understood what he meant. They sat there till they became weary. And then

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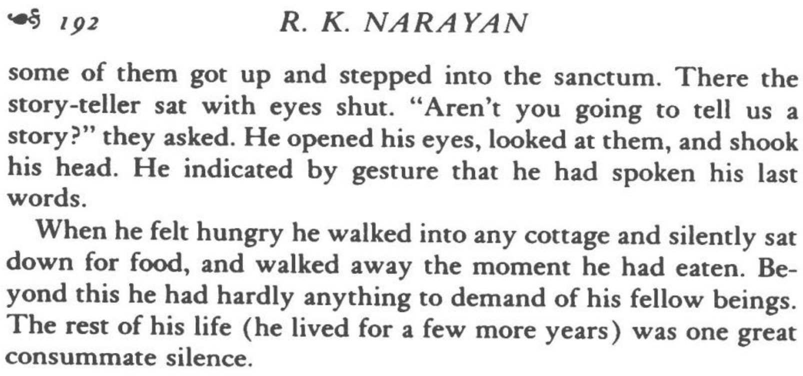

some of them got up and stepped into the sanctum. There the story-teller sat with eyes shut. "Aren't you going to tell us a story?" they asked. He opened his eyes, looked at them, and shook his head. He indicated by gesture that he had spoken his last words.

When he felt hungry he walked into any cottage and silently sat down for food, and walked away the moment he had eaten. Beyond this he had hardly anything to demand of his fellow beings. The rest of his life (he lived for a few more years) was one great consummate silence.

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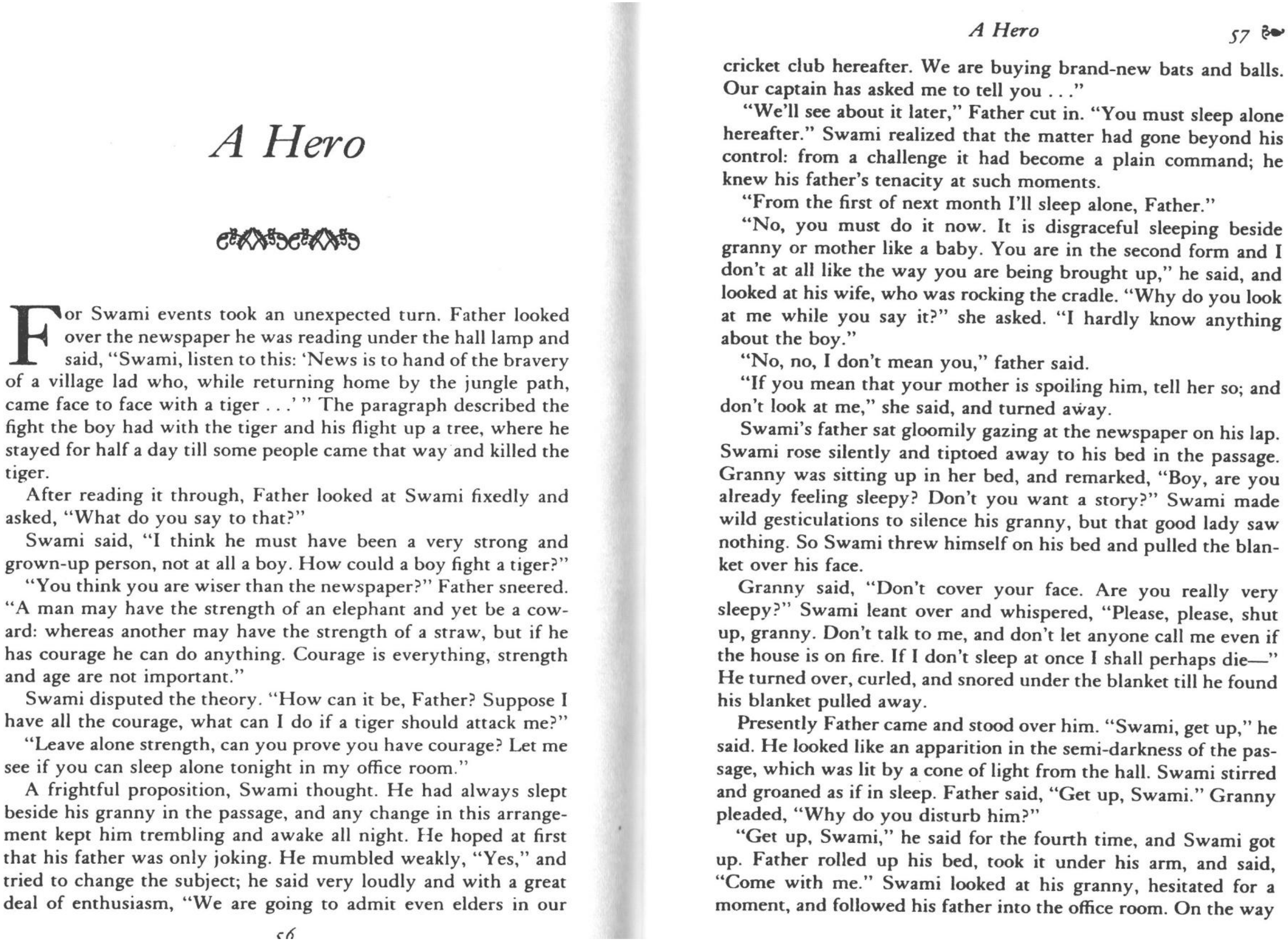

A Hero

For Swami events took an unexpected turn. Father looked over the newspaper he was reading under the hall lamp and said, "Swami, listen to this: 'News is to hand of the bravery of a village lad who, while returning home by the jungle path, came face to face with a tiger . . .' " The paragraph described the fight the boy had with the tiger and his flight up a tree, where he stayed for half a day till some people came that way and killed the tiger.

After reading it through, Father looked at Swami fixedly and asked, "What do you say to that?"

Swami said, "I think he must have been a very strong and grown-up person, not at all a boy. How could a boy fight a tiger?"

"You think you are wiser than the newspaper?" Father sneered. "A man may have the strength of an elephant and yet be a coward: whereas another may have the strength of a straw, but if he has courage he can do anything. Courage is everything, strength and age are not important."

Swami disputed the theory. "How can it be, Father? Suppose I have all the courage, what can I do if a tiger should attack me?"

"Leave alone strength, can you prove you have courage? Let me see if you can sleep alone tonight in my office room."

A frightful proposition, Swami thought. He had always slept beside his granny in the passage, and any change in this arrangement kept him trembling and awake all night. He hoped at first that his father was only joking. He mumbled weakly, "Yes," and tried to change the subject; he said very loudly and with a great deal of enthusiasm, "We are going to admit even elders in our cricket club hereafter. We are buying brand-new bats and balls. Our captain has asked me to tell you . . ."

"We'll see about it later," Father cut in. "You must sleep alone hereafter." Swami realized that the matter had gone beyond his control: from a challenge it had become a plain command; he knew his father's tenacity at such moments.

"From the first of next month I'll sleep alone, Father."

"No, you must do it now. It is disgraceful sleeping beside granny or mother like a baby. You are in the second form and I don't at all like the way you are being brought up," he said, and looked at his wife, who was rocking the cradle. "Why do you look at me while you say it?" she asked. "I hardly know anything about the boy."

"No, no, I don't mean you," father said.

"If you mean that your mother is spoiling him, tell her so; and don't look at me," she said, and turned away.

Swami's father sat gloomily gazing at the newspaper on his lap. Swami rose silently and tiptoed away to his bed in the passage. Granny was sitting up in her bed, and remarked, "Boy, are you already feeling sleepy? Don't you want a story?" Swami made wild gesticulations to silence his granny, but that good lady saw nothing. So Swami threw himself on his bed and pulled the blanket over his face.

Granny said, "Don't cover your face. Are you really very sleepy?" Swami leant over and whispered, "Please, please, shut up, granny. Don't talk to me, and don't let anyone call me even if the house is on fire. If I don't sleep at once I shall perhaps die—" He turned over, curled, and snored under the blanket till he found his blanket pulled away.

Presently Father came and stood over him. "Swami, get up," he said. He looked like an apparition in the semi-darkness of the passage, which was lit by a cone of light from the hall. Swami stirred and groaned as if in sleep. Father said, "Get up, Swami." Granny pleaded, "Why do you disturb him?"

"Get up, Swami," he said for the fourth time, and Swami got up. Father rolled up his bed, took it under his arm, and said, "Come with me." Swami looked at his granny, hesitated for a moment, and followed his father into the office room. On the way

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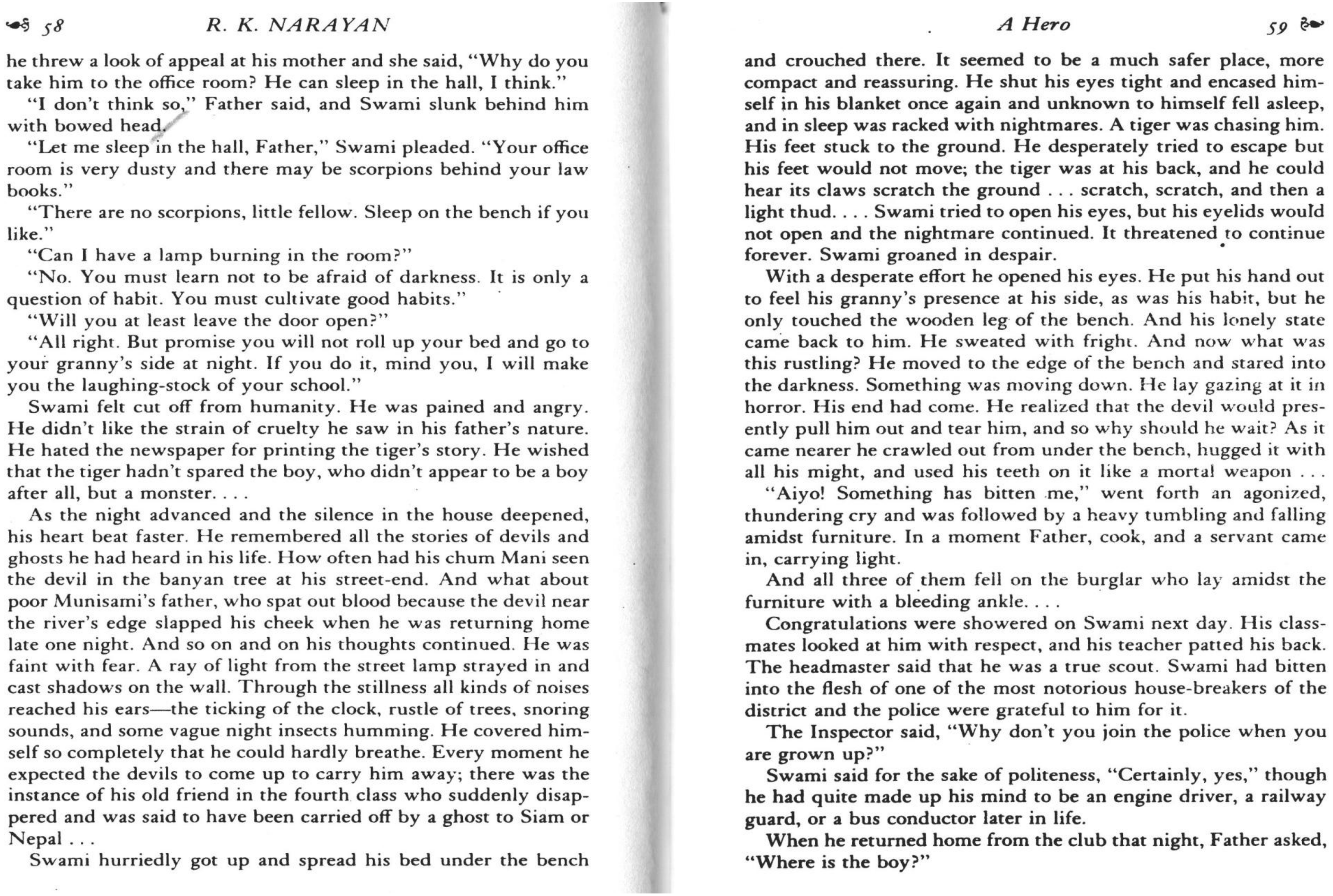


he threw a look of appeal at his mother and she said, "Why do you take him to the office room? He can sleep in the hall, I think."

"I don't think so," Father said, and Swami slunk behind him with bowed head.

"Let me sleep in the hall, Father," Swami pleaded. "Your office room is very dusty and there may be scorpions behind your law books."

"There are no scorpions, little fellow. Sleep on the bench if you like."

"Can I have a lamp burning in the room?"

"No. You must learn not to be afraid of darkness. It is only a question of habit. You must cultivate good habits."

"Will you at least leave the door open?"

"All right. But promise you will not roll up your bed and go to your granny's side at night. If you do it, mind you, I will make you the laughing-stock of your school."

Swami felt cut off from humanity. He was pained and angry. He didn't like the strain of cruelty he saw in his father's nature. He hated the newspaper for printing the tiger's story. He wished that the tiger hadn't spared the boy, who didn't appear to be a boy after all, but a monster. . . .

As the night advanced and the silence in the house deepened, his heart beat faster. He remembered all the stories of devils and ghosts he had heard in his life. How often had his chum Mani seen the devil in the banyan tree at his street-end. And what about poor Munisami's father, who spat out blood because the devil near the river's edge slapped his cheek when he was returning home late one night. And so on and on his thoughts continued. He was faint with fear. A ray of light from the street lamp strayed in and cast shadows on the wall. Through the stillness all kinds of noises reached his ears—the ticking of the clock, rustle of trees, snoring sounds, and some vague night insects humming. He covered himself so completely that he could hardly breathe. Every moment he expected the devils to come up to carry him away; there was the instance of his old friend in the fourth class who suddenly disappered and was said to have been carried off by a ghost to Siam or Nepal . . .

Swami hurriedly got up and spread his bed under the bench and crouched there. It seemed to be a much safer place, more compact and reassuring. He shut his eyes tight and encased himself in his blanket once again and unknown to himself fell asleep, and in sleep was racked with nightmares. A tiger was chasing him. His feet stuck to the ground. He desperately tried to escape but his feet would not move; the tiger was at his back, and he could hear its claws scratch the ground . . . scratch, scratch, and then a light thud. . . . Swami tried to open his eyes, but his eyelids would not open and the nightmare continued. It threatened to continue forever. Swami groaned in despair.

With a desperate effort he opened his eyes. He put his hand out to feel his granny's presence at his side, as was his habit, but he only touched the wooden leg of the bench. And his lonely state came back to him. He sweated with fright. And now what was this rustling? He moved to the edge of the bench and stared into the darkness. Something was moving down. He lay gazing at it in horror. His end had come. He realized that the devil would presently pull him out and tear him, and so why should he wait? As it came nearer he crawled out from under the bench, hugged it with all his might, and used his teeth on it like a mortal weapon . . .

"Aiyo! Something has bitten me," went forth an agonized, thundering cry and was followed by a heavy tumbling and falling amidst furniture. In a moment Father, cook, and a servant came in, carrying light.

And all three of them fell on the burglar who lay amidst the furniture with a bleeding ankle. . . .

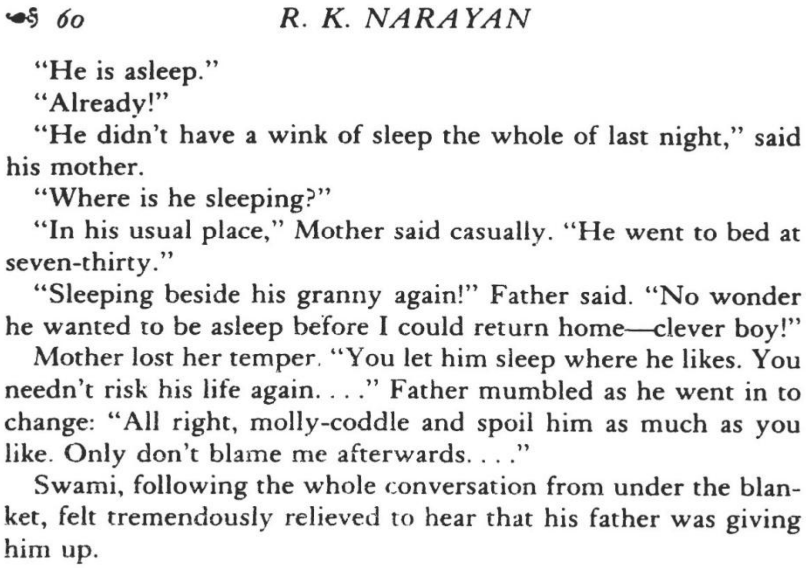
Congratulations were showered on Swami next day. His classmates looked at him with respect, and his teacher patted his back. The headmaster said that he was a true scout. Swami had bitten into the flesh of one of the most notorious house-breakers of the district and the police were grateful to him for it.

The Inspector said, "Why don't you join the police when you are grown up?"

Swami said for the sake of politeness, "Certainly, yes," though he had quite made up his mind to be an engine driver, a railway guard, or a bus conductor later in life.

When he returned home from the club that night, Father asked, "Where is the boy?"

ANEXO II – REPRODUÇÃO DO TEXTO ORIGINAL



"He is asleep."

"Already!"

"He didn't have a wink of sleep the whole of last night," said his mother.

"Where is he sleeping?"

"In his usual place," Mother said casually. "He went to bed at seven-thirty."

"Sleeping beside his granny again!" Father said. "No wonder he wanted to be asleep before I could return home—clever boy!"

Mother lost her temper. "You let him sleep where he likes. You needn't risk his life again. . . ." Father mumbled as he went in to change: "All right, molly-coddle and spoil him as much as you like. Only don't blame me afterwards. . . ."

Swami, following the whole conversation from under the blanket, felt tremendously relieved to hear that his father was giving him up.

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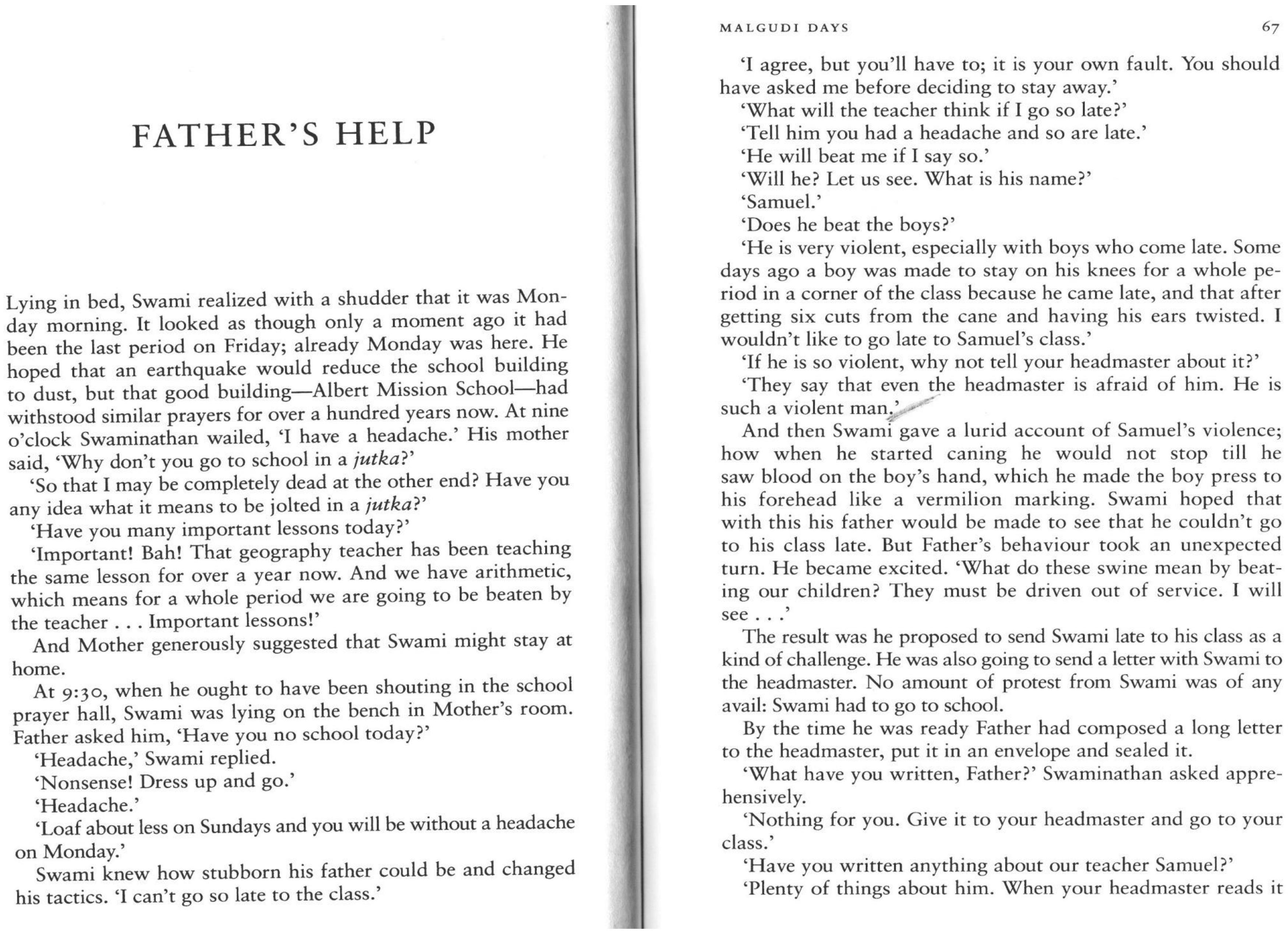

FATHER'S HELP

Lying in bed, Swami realized with a shudder that it was Monday morning. It looked as though only a moment ago it had been the last period on Friday; already Monday was here. He hoped that an earthquake would reduce the school building to dust, but that good building—Albert Mission School—had withstood similar prayers for over a hundred years now. At nine o'clock Swaminathan wailed, 'I have a headache.' His mother said, 'Why don't you go to school in a *jutka*?'

'So that I may be completely dead at the other end? Have you any idea what it means to be jolted in a *jutka*?'

'Have you many important lessons today?'

'Important! Bah! That geography teacher has been teaching the same lesson for over a year now. And we have arithmetic, which means for a whole period we are going to be beaten by the teacher . . . Important lessons!'

And Mother generously suggested that Swami might stay at home.

At 9:30, when he ought to have been shouting in the school prayer hall, Swami was lying on the bench in Mother's room. Father asked him, 'Have you no school today?'

'Headache,' Swami replied.

'Nonsense! Dress up and go.'

'Headache.'

'Loaf about less on Sundays and you will be without a headache on Monday.'

Swami knew how stubborn his father could be and changed his tactics. 'I can't go so late to the class.'

'I agree, but you'll have to; it is your own fault. You should have asked me before deciding to stay away.'

'What will the teacher think if I go so late?'

'Tell him you had a headache and so are late.'

'He will beat me if I say so.'

'Will he? Let us see. What is his name?'

'Samuel.'

'Does he beat the boys?'

'He is very violent, especially with boys who come late. Some days ago a boy was made to stay on his knees for a whole period in a corner of the class because he came late, and that after getting six cuts from the cane and having his ears twisted. I wouldn't like to go late to Samuel's class.'

'If he is so violent, why not tell your headmaster about it?'

'They say that even the headmaster is afraid of him. He is such a violent man.'

And then Swami gave a lurid account of Samuel's violence; how when he started caning he would not stop till he saw blood on the boy's hand, which he made the boy press to his forehead like a vermilion marking. Swami hoped that with this his father would be made to see that he couldn't go to his class late. But Father's behaviour took an unexpected turn. He became excited. 'What do these swine mean by beating our children? They must be driven out of service. I will see . . .'

The result was he proposed to send Swami late to his class as a kind of challenge. He was also going to send a letter with Swami to the headmaster. No amount of protest from Swami was of any avail: Swami had to go to school.

By the time he was ready Father had composed a long letter to the headmaster, put it in an envelope and sealed it.

'What have you written, Father?' Swaminathan asked apprehensively.

'Nothing for you. Give it to your headmaster and go to your class.'

'Have you written anything about our teacher Samuel?'

'Plenty of things about him. When your headmaster reads it

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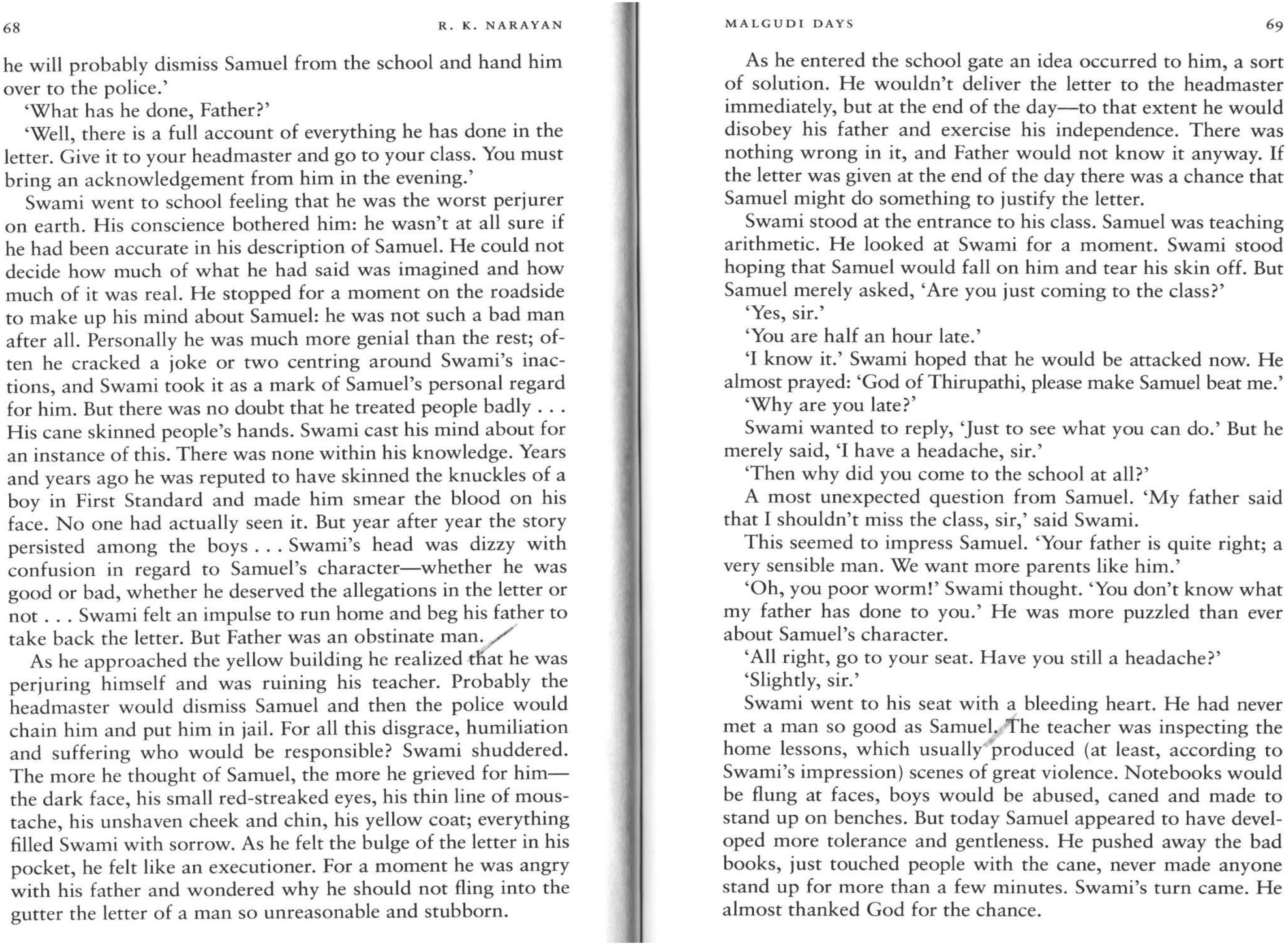

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he will probably dismiss Samuel from the school and hand him over to the police.'

'What has he done, Father?'

'Well, there is a full account of everything he has done in the letter. Give it to your headmaster and go to your class. You must bring an acknowledgement from him in the evening.'

Swami went to school feeling that he was the worst perjurer on earth. His conscience bothered him: he wasn't at all sure if he had been accurate in his description of Samuel. He could not decide how much of what he had said was imagined and how much of it was real. He stopped for a moment on the roadside to make up his mind about Samuel: he was not such a bad man after all. Personally he was much more genial than the rest; often he cracked a joke or two centring around Swami's inactions, and Swami took it as a mark of Samuel's personal regard for him. But there was no doubt that he treated people badly . . . His cane skinned people's hands. Swami cast his mind about for an instance of this. There was none within his knowledge. Years and years ago he was reputed to have skinned the knuckles of a boy in First Standard and made him smear the blood on his face. No one had actually seen it. But year after year the story persisted among the boys . . . Swami's head was dizzy with confusion in regard to Samuel's character—whether he was good or bad, whether he deserved the allegations in the letter or not . . . Swami felt an impulse to run home and beg his father to take back the letter. But Father was an obstinate man.

As he approached the yellow building he realized that he was perjuring himself and was ruining his teacher. Probably the headmaster would dismiss Samuel and then the police would chain him and put him in jail. For all this disgrace, humiliation and suffering who would be responsible? Swami shuddered. The more he thought of Samuel, the more he grieved for him—the dark face, his small red-streaked eyes, his thin line of moustache, his unshaven cheek and chin, his yellow coat; everything filled Swami with sorrow. As he felt the bulge of the letter in his pocket, he felt like an executioner. For a moment he was angry with his father and wondered why he should not fling into the gutter the letter of a man so unreasonable and stubborn.

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As he entered the school gate an idea occurred to him, a sort of solution. He wouldn't deliver the letter to the headmaster immediately, but at the end of the day—to that extent he would disobey his father and exercise his independence. There was nothing wrong in it, and Father would not know it anyway. If the letter was given at the end of the day there was a chance that Samuel might do something to justify the letter.

Swami stood at the entrance to his class. Samuel was teaching arithmetic. He looked at Swami for a moment. Swami stood hoping that Samuel would fall on him and tear his skin off. But Samuel merely asked, 'Are you just coming to the class?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You are half an hour late.'

'I know it.' Swami hoped that he would be attacked now. He almost prayed: 'God of Thirupathi, please make Samuel beat me.'

'Why are you late?'

Swami wanted to reply, 'Just to see what you can do.' But he merely said, 'I have a headache, sir.'

'Then why did you come to the school at all?'

A most unexpected question from Samuel. 'My father said that I shouldn't miss the class, sir,' said Swami.

This seemed to impress Samuel. 'Your father is quite right; a very sensible man. We want more parents like him.'

'Oh, you poor worm!' Swami thought. 'You don't know what my father has done to you.' He was more puzzled than ever about Samuel's character.

'All right, go to your seat. Have you still a headache?'

'Slightly, sir.'

Swami went to his seat with a bleeding heart. He had never met a man so good as Samuel. The teacher was inspecting the home lessons, which usually produced (at least, according to Swami's impression) scenes of great violence. Notebooks would be flung at faces, boys would be abused, caned and made to stand up on benches. But today Samuel appeared to have developed more tolerance and gentleness. He pushed away the bad books, just touched people with the cane, never made anyone stand up for more than a few minutes. Swami's turn came. He almost thanked God for the chance.

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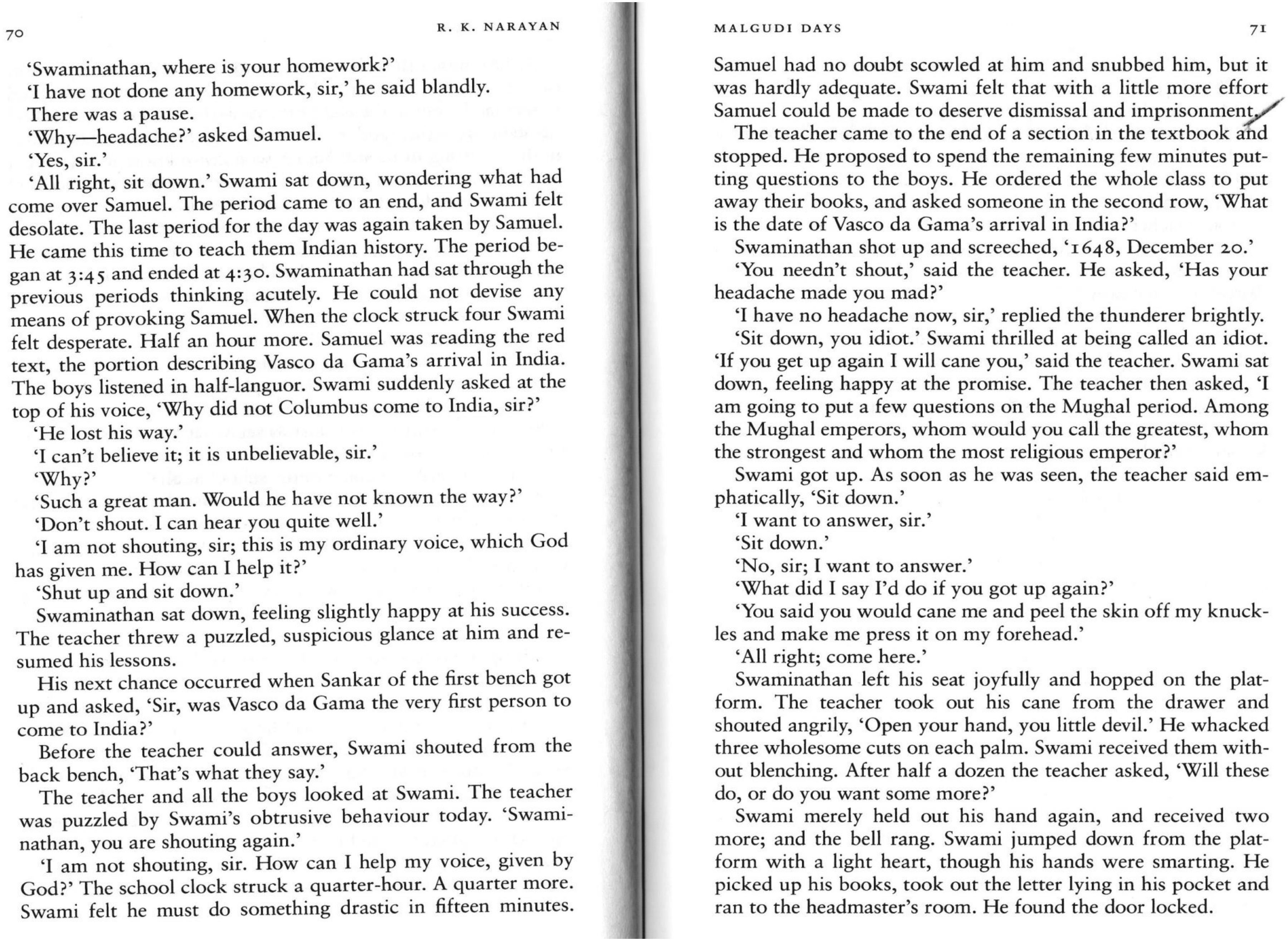

'Swaminathan, where is your homework?'

'I have not done any homework, sir,' he said blandly.

There was a pause.

'Why—headache?' asked Samuel.

'Yes, sir.'

'All right, sit down.' Swami sat down, wondering what had come over Samuel. The period came to an end, and Swami felt desolate. The last period for the day was again taken by Samuel. He came this time to teach them Indian history. The period began at 3:45 and ended at 4:30. Swaminathan had sat through the previous periods thinking acutely. He could not devise any means of provoking Samuel. When the clock struck four Swami felt desperate. Half an hour more. Samuel was reading the red text, the portion describing Vasco da Gama's arrival in India. The boys listened in half-languor. Swami suddenly asked at the top of his voice, 'Why did not Columbus come to India, sir?'

'He lost his way.'

'I can't believe it; it is unbelievable, sir.'

'Why?'

'Such a great man. Would he have not known the way?'

'Don't shout. I can hear you quite well.'

'I am not shouting, sir; this is my ordinary voice, which God has given me. How can I help it?'

'Shut up and sit down.'

Swaminathan sat down, feeling slightly happy at his success. The teacher threw a puzzled, suspicious glance at him and resumed his lessons.

His next chance occurred when Sankar of the first bench got up and asked, 'Sir, was Vasco da Gama the very first person to come to India?'

Before the teacher could answer, Swami shouted from the back bench, 'That's what they say.'

The teacher and all the boys looked at Swami. The teacher was puzzled by Swami's obtrusive behaviour today. 'Swaminathan, you are shouting again.'

'I am not shouting, sir. How can I help my voice, given by God?' The school clock struck a quarter-hour. A quarter more. Swami felt he must do something drastic in fifteen minutes. Samuel had no doubt scowled at him and snubbed him, but it was hardly adequate. Swami felt that with a little more effort Samuel could be made to deserve dismissal and imprisonment.

The teacher came to the end of a section in the textbook and stopped. He proposed to spend the remaining few minutes putting questions to the boys. He ordered the whole class to put away their books, and asked someone in the second row, 'What is the date of Vasco da Gama's arrival in India?'

Swaminathan shot up and screeched, '1648, December 20.'

'You needn't shout,' said the teacher. He asked, 'Has your headache made you mad?'

'I have no headache now, sir,' replied the thunderer brightly.

'Sit down, you idiot.' Swami thrilled at being called an idiot. 'If you get up again I will cane you,' said the teacher. Swami sat down, feeling happy at the promise. The teacher then asked, 'I am going to put a few questions on the Mughal period. Among the Mughal emperors, whom would you call the greatest, whom the strongest and whom the most religious emperor?'

Swami got up. As soon as he was seen, the teacher said emphatically, 'Sit down.'

'I want to answer, sir.'

'Sit down.'

'No, sir; I want to answer.'

'What did I say I'd do if you got up again?'

'You said you would cane me and peel the skin off my knuckles and make me press it on my forehead.'

'All right; come here.'

Swaminathan left his seat joyfully and hopped on the platform. The teacher took out his cane from the drawer and shouted angrily, 'Open your hand, you little devil.' He whacked three wholesome cuts on each palm. Swami received them without blenching. After half a dozen the teacher asked, 'Will these do, or do you want some more?'

Swami merely held out his hand again, and received two more; and the bell rang. Swami jumped down from the platform with a light heart, though his hands were smarting. He picked up his books, took out the letter lying in his pocket and ran to the headmaster's room. He found the door locked.

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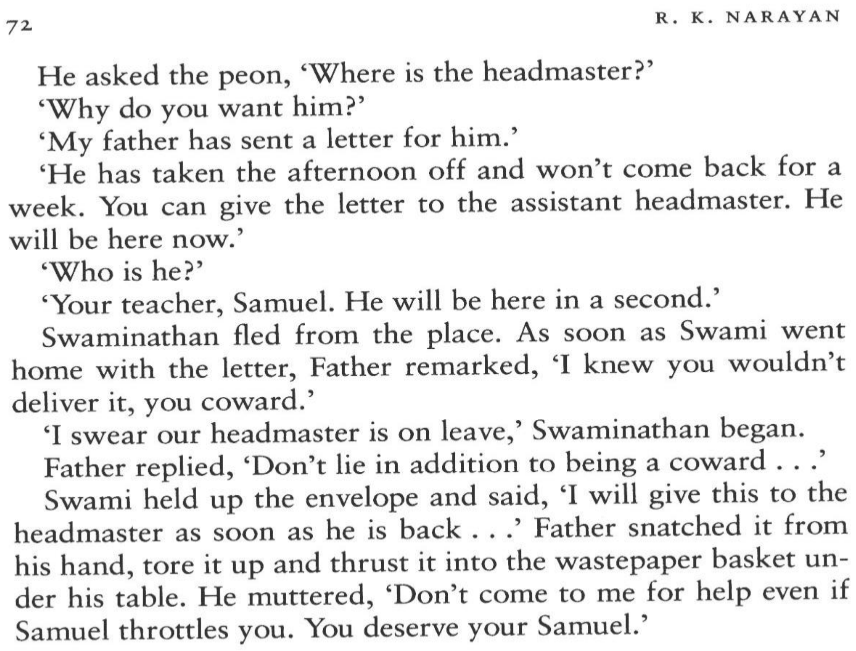

He asked the peon, 'Where is the headmaster?'

'Why do you want him?'

'My father has sent a letter for him.'

'He has taken the afternoon off and won't come back for a week. You can give the letter to the assistant headmaster. He will be here now.'

'Who is he?'

'Your teacher, Samuel. He will be here in a second.'

Swaminathan fled from the place. As soon as Swami went home with the letter, Father remarked, 'I knew you wouldn't deliver it, you coward.'

'I swear our headmaster is on leave,' Swaminathan began.

Father replied, 'Don't lie in addition to being a coward . . .'

Swami held up the envelope and said, 'I will give this to the headmaster as soon as he is back . . .' Father snatched it from his hand, tore it up and thrust it into the wastepaper basket under his table. He muttered, 'Don't come to me for help even if Samuel throttles you. You deserve your Samuel.'