

# **Malgudi Days Study Guide**

**Malgudi Days by R. K. Narayan**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Malgudi Days Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">An Astrologer's Day, The Missing Mail.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">The Doctor's Word, Gateman's Gift.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">The Blind Dog, Fellow-Feeling.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">The Tiger's Claw, Iswaren.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Such Perfection, Father's Help.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">The Snake-Song, Engine Trouble.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Forty-Five a Month, Out of Business.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Atilla, The Axe.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Lawley Road, Trail of the Green Blazer.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">The Martyr's Corner, Wife's Holiday.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">A Shadow, A Willing Slave.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Leela's Friend, Mother and Son.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Naga.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Selvi.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Second Opinion.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Cat Within.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">The Edge.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">God and the Cobbler.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Hungry Child.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Emden.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">50</a>



Style..... 52

Quotes..... 54

Topics for Discussion..... 56



# An Astrologer's Day, The Missing Mail

## An Astrologer's Day, The Missing Mail Summary

These 32 stories are all distinct, but certain themes recur frequently, and they all occur in and around the mythical town of Malgudi, in South India. Malgudi is a diversified town with everything from a film studio to cafes and temples. Shopkeepers struggle to earn a living, while well-to-do young men hang around talking and dreaming about their future. Avoiding danger by being clever and quick is a theme of "An Astrologer's Day." The astrologer sets up wearing bright colors in the Town Hall Park. An unidentified man comes by late, when it is near dark and the astrologer is ready to leave. The astrologer accurately says that the man was left to die after a fight. Then, the man says he was saved and taken out of a well that he was thrown into. The astrologer becomes very confident, and says the man's name, Guru Nayak. The man asks if he will get revenge. The astrologer says that this is not possible because the man's assailant died already in an accident. The astrologer goes home to his wife and shows her the money the man gave him. He is mad because it is not a rupee, but his wife is pleased, it will buy some treat for their daughter. Then, the astrologer says that he feels better, he is the man's assailant and thought that he was dead. The wife is shocked, but the astrologist explains that a fight happened after gambling and drinking.

### The Missing Mail

Thanappa is a mailman in Malgudi for many years. The girl, Kamakshi, is nearly 17 years old, and her father wants to get her married soon. Thanappa finds out that another man had a male suitor, but the negotiations fall through, so he recommends that Ramanujan attempt to negotiate with this family. Thanappa also makes sure that the father goes to Madras, to successfully negotiate the arranged marriage. The father, Ramanujan, has the dowry, but he is missing the human connection with the other family, that lives in Delhi. The marriage is successful and the family and Thanappa, the mailman, are very happy. At the last minute there is tension, because the marriage must occur on May 20th, or else never happen. After the wedding, Thanappa brings Ramanujan a card that tells of Ramanujan's uncle being very ill and then a telegram that the uncle died, which would have stopped the wedding.

## An Astrologer's Day, The Missing Mail Analysis

### An Astrologer's Day

The man is calm and able in dealing with people on a day-to-day basis as an astrologer, though he has no special powers. When he meets the man at the end of the day, the astrologer at one point wants to escape, but then he sees that he can get through the meeting. He tries his usual leading statements but he cannot get away with this. Then, suddenly the astrologer is amazingly accurate. He knows the man was stabbed and



nearly killed. The astrologer also tells the man that he is in danger if he goes away from his hometown, and the astrologist is confident he can get money from the man.

### The Missing Mail

The mailman realizes that it is his responsibility to make something happen, in this case, the wedding of Ramanujan's daughter. The postman fears that Ramanujan is too fatalistic to take direct action to get his daughter married. Likewise, the mailman conceals the letter and telegram with bad news until two weeks after the wedding. He realizes that Ramanujan, along with most of his neighbors, is too used to accepting fate. If Ramanujan had received these letters on time, the wedding would have been called off. The postman explains his motive, and is tacitly forgiven, since the reasons are understood. The postman withheld this mail to make sure that the wedding would take place.



# The Doctor's Word, Gateman's Gift

## The Doctor's Word, Gateman's Gift Summary

### The Doctor's Word

Dr. Raman is known as a straight-forward and to the point Doctor. He reasons that he might as well tell the truth about his prognosis for his patients, since nature will take its course one way or the other. Dr. Raman is suddenly told that his good friend from boyhood, Gopal is seriously ill. Dr. Raman goes to his friend, and gives Gopal an injection, and he and his two assistants perform some type of operation on Gopal. Gopal becomes conscious and asks his friend Dr. Raman if he can expect to live. If not, Gopal must immediately sign his prepared last will and testament. Dr. Raman takes a break, then comes back and lies that Gopal is in good shape and must rest. The doctor realizes that the man could die that night. The next day Gopal seems to be improving and has survived the crisis.

### Gateman's Gift

For many years, Govind Singh is a guard at a place where many people work, called Engladia's. After 25 years, his vision and hearing decline, so he asks to retire, and receives a small monthly pension. Govind begins to make small models out of clay and sawdust, of people and places, and mounts them on thin wooden boards. Govind goes to his old employer once a month to collect his pension check. He begins bringing in models that attract admiration. Then he gets a registered letter and is terrified because he has never received a registered letter before. He spends weeks with the letter in his pocket, and even tries to have it x-rayed. Finally, as he draws attention from the police, the accountant of Govinda's firm is stopped on his bicycle and comes over and opens the envelope. It contains a 100-rupee money order and a letter of encouragement from the General Manager.

## The Doctor's Word, Gateman's Gift Analysis

### The Doctor's Word

The doctor is normally very strict about telling the truth about a patient's condition, and not wasting time making up an optimistic prognosis. He insists to himself that no matter what he tells people, nature will take its course anyway. However, in the case of his sick friend, Gopal, the doctor is confronted with a case where he breaks with this. If he can help his friend by lying that his condition is improving than he will. If the Doctor tells Gopal that he may die, then Gopal will go and review his will and sign it. The strain of doing this may kill him immediately. Therefore, the Doctor does some play-acting and tells his friend that he is recovering. The Doctor is astonished to find that the sick patient is improved the next morning and recovers.



### Gateman's Gift

Govind is a quiet unassuming man, who never has attracted attention before. Now, he is retired and lives quietly with his wife. His clay models attract a new sort of notice. When he receives the registered letter, Govind immediately suspects the worst. He thinks that he has disrupted his former employer by bringing in the clay models and wrecking business time with foolish distractions. Govind is also afraid that by opening the envelope, he will somehow trigger some bad action against him, like the cancellation of his pension. He finally goes mad and throws a rock at a street light, drawing a policeman to stop him. Even after Govind realizes that he is getting 8-months of pension and approval for his artistry, he decides he has had enough. Govind swears he will never again make the cute clay models of villages and street scenes. Govind's fear and littleness make it impossible for him to receive extra income and grateful acknowledgement for his art work.



# The Blind Dog, Fellow-Feeling

## The Blind Dog, Fellow-Feeling Summary

### The Blind Dog

The dog spends its first 3 years hanging around the market. Then one day it approaches the blind man, the blind man gives it food, and befriends it. The blind man is defended by the dog from a teenager that abuses him. Then the old woman who helps the blind man dies. The blind man gets another merchant to give him a rope, and to attach the dog to it. The blind man can now move around because the dog guides him. He gets more money begging, and can entertain passerbys that watch him and the dog interacting. The blind man drives the dog mercilessly. One day, some of the merchants are upset, and one of them cuts the rope with a pair of scissors and frees the dog. For a couple of weeks the dog roams free. The blind man is guided to his home on a porch, and is helpless. Then one night the dog comes back to the blind man. The dog helps the blind man again, and this time is attached to a metal chain leash.

### Fellow-Feeling

Mr. Rajam Iyer gets on the train to Bangalore. The train is crowded, but he gets a seat as passengers get off. A newcomer gets on and forces a sleeping man to move, taking most of his space. The newcomer makes various speeches and dirty remarks and is asked by Mr. Iyer to calm down, but the newcomer then gets angry at him. Iyer insults the man and threatens to kick him. They both get up, and Iyer realizes that the newcomer is much bigger than him. Iyer is frightened and then decides on a strategy. He says that he will do something worse than kicking, moves his arm and then says that perhaps he should not do it. The newcomer asks what is Iyer talking about. Iyer claims to know ju-jitsu. The newcomer gets off at the next stop.

## The Blind Dog, Fellow-Feeling Analysis

### The Blind Dog

The blind man gives the dog food and companionship. The dog appreciates having a purpose and the leadership of the blind man. For a time, both the blind man and the dog are happy. Then the old woman who helps the blind man dies. He has no choice but to leash the dog and have the dog guide him around. This arrangement is actually a vast improvement for the blind man, who can move around and beg at the school, the hospital and other places and who triples his income. His increased activity is oppressive to the dog that has to work all the day, and only gets to rest when the blind man is not moving, resting or sleeping. When the blind man is able to even start to loan out money and go into business, the other merchants become envious of his success. They claim to be concerned for the overworked dog, but jealousy seems to be as much their motivation in having one of their own number cut the rope and release the dog.





The dog seems to enjoy his being free again and goes back to his usual places. However, the dog misses the companionship and leadership of the blind man. The dog returns and the blind man continues to oppress the dog. The story is a metaphor about the many people who adopt a slave mentality and are their own worst oppressors. The one who is really blind is the dog.

#### Fellow-Feeling

Under the new Indian nation, the rights of the upper caste, the Brahmins, are not upheld anymore, and everyone is considered equal. Mr. Iyer is a Brahmin, and perhaps still has a touch of upper-caste Brahmin pride and a feeling of superiority. Iyer gets into a shouting match with the newcomer, who quickly begins to make fun of Mr. Iyer's Brahmin sensibilities. The newcomer knows that this is the easiest way to pick a fight with Iyer. Iyer realizes suddenly that he is at a big physical disadvantage. However, Iyer is a clever man and uses the psychological superiority he has to frighten the newcomer. Iyer makes up a story about how he knows the secret martial art of ju-jitsu, and is able to permanently disfigure the other man's face. He uses the fact that the newcomer is a married man with a wife and four children to make the newcomer fear that he will be disgraced before his wife and children. The description of this potential assault from Iyer gets the newcomer so frightened, that he forgets that he is much bigger and able to beat up Mr. Iyer with ease. Mr. Iyer is ready to get off at the next stop and escape this confrontation, but the newcomer gets off first, lying that he has reached his destination. Psychological terror is seen triumphing against physical superiority.



# The Tiger's Claw, Iswaren

## The Tiger's Claw, Iswaren Summary

### The Tiger's Claw

The talkative man goes to a village in the middle of the jungle, in the Mempi region. He can get there because a railroad goes there, but only stops there once or twice a day. The talkative man is selling fertilizer and gives a lecture to the village farmers on how fertilizer is used. The talkative man talks to and eats with the station manager, and the talkative man has to sleep in a train car that is converted into a railway station. He leaves the door open to let in some air and goes to sleep. Then the man-eating tiger comes into the train car. The talkative man hides behind furniture and is able to fend off the tiger, under a table and behind a chair and a stool. Finally, he grabs a knife that he finds on the floor. When the tiger tries to slash the talkative man with his paws, the man stabs the tiger's paw and cuts off a digit with a claw. He is able to do this three times. In the morning, the man escapes when the tiger is diverted by other people and the train comes.

### Iswaren

Iswaren is a boy who has taken the Intermediate level exam many times. By now he is a young man. His family is convinced that he will fail again and are not interested in the results. Iswaren eats at a restaurant and then goes back to see the same movie again at the Palace Talkies. Iswaren becomes demoralized when other boys come into the movie theater to celebrate their passing of their exams. Iswaren goes out and decides that he should kill himself. Iswaren then decides that he might as well check the test results. To his shock, Iswaren finds out, looking at his number 501, that he has passed in the 2nd class. He runs around at midnight celebrating, but is deep in the fantasy of the movie, imagining that he is riding a horse. He rides the imaginary horse into the river and drowns.

## The Tiger's Claw, Iswaren Analysis

### The Tiger's Claw

The hunters are celebrated for chasing down and killing the tiger with guns, but the talkative man claims to have had a much more dangerous experience. He survives the tiger's attack alone without guns. The point seems to be that it is possible to survive a man-eating tiger using the tools of human ingenuity. The talkative man remembers seeing the circus, where the tiger is afraid of a chair. He uses this knowledge to hide under the table and behind a chair and a stool. Luckily for him, they had a very strong, well-made table. If they had something thin and cheap, when the Tiger went on top of the table, it would have collapsed, and that would have been the end for the man.

## Iswaren

Iswaren is a boy who has taken the Intermediate level exam many times. By now he is a young man. His family is convinced that he will fail again, and is not interested in the results. Iswaren has some hope, since he has studied, but he is treated like a big joke. He goes to the movies after taking the examination, and sees a Tamil film with all the Indian gods singing and fighting, over heaven and earth. Iswaren eats at a restaurant and then goes back to see the same movie again at the Palace Talkies. Iswaren becomes demoralized when other boys come into the movie theater to celebrate passing of their exams. Iswaren goes out and decides that he should kill himself. Iswaren then decides that he might as well check the test results. To his shock, Iswaren finds out, looking at his number 501, that he has passed in the 2nd class. He runs around at midnight celebrating, but is deep in the fantasy of the movie, imagining that he is riding a horse. He rides the imaginary horse into the river and drowns.



# Such Perfection, Father's Help

## Such Perfection, Father's Help Summary

### Such Perfection

Soma is a sculptor. Over the last five years, in secret he has made a statue of god, called a Nataraja. Word gets out that Soma has created an incredible Nataraja statue, and there is fear that it is too perfect. Soma defies the town priest and he refuses to damage the statue, even slightly. He decides to present the Nataraja statue to the people at his own house. The god moves and there is lightning that hit houses, causing fire, death and destruction. Soma still refuses to listen and lights the worshipping lamp once more. Again the winds blow and a horrible storm gathers. Soma is ready to offer his drowned body in a nearby lake, to placate the god. Then a tree falls and hits Soma's house. He looks through the wreckage and finds that the Nataraja statue is unhurt, except for one toe that has been knocked off.

### Father's Help

On Monday morning, Swami does not want to go to school. His mother would let him stay home with a headache, but father does not like this. Then, Swami claims to be afraid to come to school late. He makes up an involved story of a strict teacher who hits students. Father writes a letter, complaining about this teacher, Samuel, to the headmaster, and gives it to Swami. Swami is overwhelmed by the teacher's kindness, but continues to plot how to provoke the teacher. In the history class with Samuel, Swami provokes the teacher by making ridiculous answers, and asking stupid questions. Finally Swami is caned by the teacher, with his palms cut facing up. Swami's hands hurt, but he is happy. He goes to the headmaster's office, but the man is out. Swami goes home and is called a coward by his father, who rips up the still undelivered letter.

## Such Perfection, Father's Help Analysis

### Such Perfection

Soma is described in the story as being guilty of the crime of defying the gods, or as the Greeks called it, hubris. His Nataraja, or god statue is too perfect to be made by a human being. A Nataraja is the Indian god of dance, representing an incarnation of the god Shiva. By dancing, the Nataraja can both destroy the world and create a new world. Soma can humanize the statue, or take away its godlike powers, by causing some slight damage to it. Then it will be imperfect enough to be used in worship at the temple, but Soma's pride in his creation stops him from doing this. Nothing happens when the statue is isolated in Soma's house, but the statue's force is triggered when the statue is presented to the public for worship. The singing, dancing and lit flames of the worshipping crowds cause a miracle to happen. The Nataraja begins to dance and



destructive forces are mobilized. The message of the story is that man should not seek perfection, because then he is like a god descending to live among men. Man's imperfections make him a man, and therefore should be tolerated, to avoid offending the gods, or different representations of the Godhead.

#### Father's Help

Swami is a lazy boy, probably about 10 or 12 years old. Swami says that he is afraid of the teacher, but this only gets his father interested in the teacher's behavior. So, Swami makes up a long, complicated story of how the teacher hits with a cane and punishes students, which is totally untrue. Swami realizes that he likes the teacher, but still needs to provoke him. His father wants proof that the letter demanding punishment of the teacher is delivered to the headmaster. The teacher must be provoked to do some sort of violence, or else Swami will look ridiculous. Swami makes a total fool of himself, by attacking Columbus for not successfully finding India. Swami is shouting and making a scene, even after he is warned that he will be hit by the cane. Swami is finally hit and punished, but the headmaster is gone, and Samuel's teacher is the substitute headmaster. He runs home, and is treated with contempt by his father, who says that the teacher can beat up Swami as much as he likes.



# The Snake-Song, Engine Trouble

## The Snake-Song, Engine Trouble Summary

### The Snake Song

In this story he tells, the talkative man is studying the flute in his youth. His teacher is a great musician, but is content to play only at the village temple. However, the talkative man has big plans of becoming a rich and successful musical star, and winning a contest in Madras. One night at his door is a sadhu, a religious hermit who begs for a coin. The man refuses him. The sadhu comes back, hearing the music and asks the man to just let him in to listen to the beautiful flute music. Again the man refuses the sadhu. The sadhu then says that the Talkative Man will never play music anymore. The Talkative Man continues to play, leaving the door open, and hoping the sadhu will come back, so he can apologize to him. Shortly after, the man plays the Snake Song, and in glides a large threatening black cobra. The cobra enjoys the snake song, but threatens to strike whenever the man stops playing, or tries to play a different song. The snake finally leaves when the man collapses. The next day the man asks his teacher what to do, and is told that the snake may return if he continues to play. The Talkative Man never plays again.

### Engine Trouble

The Talkative Man acquires a large engine, called a road engine in a raffle at the town fair. He has no idea what to do with the road engine when he gets it. He first pays rent to the town to keep the road engine on the town fairgrounds. The engine goes off course when the man drives to move it with coolies and an elephant and hits a compound wall, causing an additional expense. The man thinks his luck has changed when a swami comes to town to demonstrate the power of yoga. He asks for a road engine to run over him, to be driven by his assistant. The Talkative Man volunteers his road engine and all is set to do the show. Then this act of running over the swami is outlawed by the municipality. Finally, an earthquake hits India and vibrations are felt in Malgudi. The next morning, it is found that the road engine has fallen into a well, which pleases the owner who pays the Talkative Man.

## The Snake-Song, Engine Trouble Analysis

### The Snake-Song

When the Talkative Man is a youth, he has the ambition to become a successful musician. He is an ambitious youth, full of pride in his ability. The Talkative Man does not realize that playing beautiful music is a gift of the gods. When the sadhu comes to his door, the man has no sense that the sadhu could be someone important. To him, it is just an annoying beggar. The Talkative Man will not even let the sadhu inside to listen to his music. Soon after, the cobra comes in, and it is seen as a visitation from a god. The



cobra symbolizes the gods, truth and power in the universe. It comes to test the Talkative Man to see if he is truly dedicated to his music. Also, the sadhu has prophesied that the man would have to stop playing music. The Talkative Man fails the test, because his love of music involves mostly his worldly ambitions. He is not willing to risk death to continue to play music. It is too late for the man, who must give up his music, unless he someday finds the unseen sadhu and receives forgiveness.

### The Talkative Man

Many people are fascinated by technology, but then they have no idea what to do with it when they have it. The Talkative Man is interested in the road engine. He thinks it must be valuable, but has no idea what to do with it. The man cannot move it under its own power and tries to move it with muscle and elephant power, but it is a disaster. The man is nearly saved by the needs of the magical swami to show off his fantastic yogic powers, by withstanding being run over. However, the town stops this exercise as being too dangerous. Finally, before leaving town, the talkative man is saved by luck and an earthquake. This is one of the only "Malgudi stories" where a natural miracle saves the character with a problem. The road engine is hit by an earthquake, and has a totally unexpected use as a plug for a dirty well that it falls into. Life is shown to be uncertain, with a sudden change of fate saving the Talkative Man.



# Forty-Five a Month, Out of Business

## Forty-Five a Month, Out of Business Summary

### Forty-Five a Month

Shanta wants to leave her class immediately. She is a young girl just learning her alphabet and how to tell time. Shanta's teacher sees that the girl is agitated and lets Shanta go home early. Shanta is trying to make sure she is ready to go to the movies by 5 pm. Shanta dresses to go to the movies by 5 pm. She dresses in her best clothes and make-up and even tries to find her father's office, but cannot. That morning, Shanta has asked that her father take her to the movies. The father is unhappy because he works overtime all the time, and has no time to be with his child, Shanta. Nevertheless, the father agrees to take the child to the movies. At the office, father, whose name is Rao Venkat, is doing endless clerical and accounting tasks. He asks to leave around 5 pm, but the manager says no, he must find an accounting mistake. Rao writes his resignation letter but then the manager tells Rao that he is getting a raise from 40 to 45 rupees a month. Rao, the father, works late and by the time he comes home, Shanta is sleeping.

### Out of Business

Rama Rao used to have a good business selling records, but the company goes out of business. For a year, he is unemployed and his wife must fire their servants, and send the children to a free public school. The family moves from their nice house and rent it out, moving to a very small house near the market. Rama cannot get a new job in town. He starts going to the local reading room and reading a magazine that gives out prizes for the correct solution of a crossword puzzle. He sends in his solution of the puzzle every week by registered mail, but never wins. Then one week, the prize money is doubled. Rama spends 5 rupees for postage, almost the price of a week's worth of food. Again, the entrees do not come close to success. Rama feels totally worthless and plans to commit suicide. but this too fails. When he runs home, Rama finds out that the tenants in his house have offered to buy the house. Rama plans to take 500 rupees and leave his family for a while, so he can set up a business or find a job in Madras, the big southern Indian port city. He promises he is not going to waste time or money anymore on crossword puzzles.

## Forty-Five a Month, Out of Business Analysis

### Forty-Five a Month

Rao Venkat, Shanta's father is one of the hordes of bureaucrats, who earn just enough to have a comfortable living for their family. The neighbors have a servant, money is adequate, but Rao is forced to work seven-days a week and also overtime. Shanta gets





her father to agree to take her to the movies. The mother knows that Rao, the father, will not be able to do this. Shanta leaves school early and dresses up, but it is all for naught.

The father, Rao, wants to be a good father and writes a resignation letter for being forced to do endless overtime and not even getting a raise. Just then, the manager, perhaps seeing the frustration on Rao's face, offers him a raise to 45 rupees a month. Rao withdraws his resignation and comes home four hours late. At home, Rao wails that he cannot even quit his job.

### Out of Business

The Gramophone record company that Rama is an agent of suddenly collapses, due to financial speculation and intrigues. Rama's fairly successful business is no more and he is unable to get a job in an office or elsewhere in Malgudi. Previously, Rama purchased a house, or bungalow, in a good neighborhood. Now, to have some income, his wife arranges to rent the house out and the family moves to small quarters. Rama becomes desperate, and starts to speculate about winning a large amount of money doing crossword puzzles. He has to pay a substantial amount to send out the entries by registered mail. After spending a fairly large sum to send out extra entries for a larger prize, Rama realizes his foolishness. Rama is overwhelmed by his desperation and lack of success. He decides to commit suicide, but the train does not come to run him over. Rama is glad that he has another chance at life, especially after his wife has a deal to sell his house, so he has some capital to try to go back into business. Rama decides to look forward to an uncertain future, away from his family, in the big port city of Madras. He gives up trying "get rich quick" schemes, and hopes that in the big city there will be a possibility of finding success.



# Atilla, The Axe

## Atilla, The Axe Summary

### Attila

A family buys a puppy that they hope will grow up to be a good watchdog. They name the puppy Attila, after the warrior, Attila the Hun. However, the dog is not like Attila the Hun at all. He grows up, first greeting everyone, then being quiet so as not to disturb people, but in both cases, the dog is always friendly. The dog does not bother anyone.

That night, Ranga, a laborer, is looking for extra money by breaking into houses. Ranga breaks into the family house at night and grabs the family jewelry and other valuables. As he leaves, Ranga encounters Attila the dog, but the dog does not bark. Instead, he makes friends with Ranga and follows Ranga back to his hut on the other side of town.

A week later the older son in the family sees Attila following Ranga. The young man starts to chase the dog and the man. The dog follows Ranga and trips him, causing Ranga to drop some of the stolen jewelry that he got from the family last week. The young man restrains Ranga, and the police are summoned.

### The Axe

Velan leaves his home village and walks to the nearest town, Malgudi, after a dispute with his father. After a few days, he gets work as a gardener's helper. The trees grow big but the rich family living there grows old. Then, the master of the large house dies, and after a year, the house is rented out. The house is locked up later, and Velan gets to enjoy the garden he grew in peace. As Velan becomes old, he moves from a hut outside the property to a large porch or veranda on the three sides of the house. Then one day, a car comes to the property and Velan lets it in. The house is seen to be beyond repair. A developer buys the property and plans to destroy the house and the garden. Velan must go back to his village. He tries to stop the wrecking crew but cannot. The wrecking crew does Velan the courtesy of waiting for him to leave the area, before chopping the trees down that Velan loves.

## Atilla, The Axe Analysis

Attila is a friendly dog, but he is too friendly to be a watchdog. When a thief comes, he does not bark and instead follows the thief home, as a friend. However, the dog is so friendly and unthreatening that the thief does not know what to do with him. If the dog is friendly, how can even Ranga the thief harm him, though he wants to get rid of him? So, the dog, after a week, is spotted and leads an older son to the criminal. The story shows that even under unexpected circumstances, the dog Attila fulfills his purpose in deterring crime. He does this, not as a watchdog, but as the lady of the house says, as a detective. In a way, this story is amusing, though strictly speaking not believable. Dogs



are attached to their owners and seldom would a dog become attached to a new person immediately. If the thief had been followed by the dog, the thief could have lost him, or killed him if necessary to block any trail back to the thief and his crime.

### The Axe

This is a melancholy story and a metaphor for the passage of time, looking at the construction of the house and its history. Perhaps the story begins when Velan is 18 years old and ends when he is over 60, more than 40 years later. At age 18, Velan leaves his family and finds work as a gardener. In the beginning, the trees that Velan plants are young and tender. Later, they grow to be large and yield fruit. The large house too goes from being shiny and new to becoming weather-worn and comfortable. Then there is a crisis, when the master of the house dies. The house is no longer properly maintained. Tenants come and go and then the house is abandoned. Velan ages and watches the house, tending the garden. He enjoys years as the caretaker of the house, but eventually this must come to an end. The house is sold, the land is developed, and all of Velan's work is destroyed. Though he is still alive, his active life is over.



# Lawley Road, Trail of the Green Blazer

## Lawley Road, Trail of the Green Blazer Summary

### Lawley Road

The municipal government wants to nationalize the street names and the names of other public locations, and get rid of the British names. It is noticed that there is a 20-foot tall statue of Frederick Lawley. It is claimed that this British Empire official was a vicious colonialist and enemy of India. The Talkative Man decides that he wants the statue. He thinks he can take it down for a lower price and sell it for scrap metal, or possibly to a collector or to a British museum. After unsuccessfully trying to take down the statue with muscle power, the statue is blown off its pedestal with a couple of sticks of dynamite. It is then carted over to the Talkative Man's house. The Talkative Man writes an article in the paper he writes for, about the taking down of the evil Frederick Lawley statue. This is a big mistake, because soon there are reports that Frederick Lawley had founded Malgudi, and worked to help Indians. There are demands and demonstrations to re-erect the statue. Luckily, the demonstrations are done in a non-violent manner. Finally, due to the statue mess and other town problems, there is a call for new municipal elections. The Talkative Man successfully urges the rich municipal chairman to buy his house and the statue, and turn the site over to the town as a monument.

### Trail of the Green Blazer

A man wearing a green blazer is being watched by Raju. The man in the green blazer looks wealthy and Raju wants to pick his pocket. Raju is dressed in a loincloth, with a big turban on his head. He follows the green blazer around making his purchases at a town fair. The man in the green blazer goes and buys a balloon, which he says is to amuse a motherless boy. Then, when the green blazer squeezes into an exhibition, Raju is able to snatch his purse with the man noticing. Raju goes off in the distance behind a well. He sees that there are 30 rubles there plus some change. Raju plans to give the change to a blind beggar. Before he tosses the empty purse down a well, he sees the balloon and is upset that the motherless boy that the Green Blazer spoke of will not get it. Raju decides to slip the purse with only the balloon in it, back into the Green Blazer's pocket. He tries to do this and is immediately caught, beaten and jailed for 18 months.

## Lawley Road, Trail of the Green Blazer Analysis

### Lawley Road

In the passion involved in making India independent, the Malgudi Municipal Council wakes up. They try renaming the town streets, but get into a lot of problems. They are not used to governing their town and taking an active role all the time, but they consider



it their duty to change. The Talkative Man thinks that somehow he can make a lot of money by taking the statue. His plans are disrupted when it is found out that this Lawley was a friend of India. However, luckily for him, the pressures of a new political system soon give him a new opportunity to make money and get out of the mess he is in. The final joke is that the street where the Talkative Man has his house ends up being changed from "Kabir," an Indian name, to "Lawley," a British name.

#### Trail of the Green Blazer

Raju has a talent and makes a living as a pickpocket. He tries to find some one who is definitely wealthy, and picks out the man in the green blazer. Raju is partially in disguise as a peasant, with a loin cloth and a huge turban. He obviously has been caught committing this crime before. Raju has a funny hypocritical sense of right and wrong. He is a pickpocket and thief yet he mentally criticizes the green blazer wearing man for bargaining and being cheap with his money. After Raju commits the crime, he plans to give the extra coins to a beggar, and he is mad at the other people for not given the blind beggar enough money. When Raju sees the balloon, he thinks back to what the Green Blazer said about the motherless boy needing it. So, after successfully making his 20 rubles for the month, Raju risks his safety by putting the purse back with the balloon. Raju is caught and cannot understand why the police and everyone else laugh at him for merely wanting to return the purse.



# The Martyr's Corner, Wife's Holiday

## The Martyr's Corner, Wife's Holiday Summary

### The Martyr's Corner

Rama has a good business. He goes out most days on Market Street and sells Indian snacks and coffee to evening crowds. The customers like the food and some people buy stuff there every day. Rama and his wife are happy about his business. Each day working costs 5 rupees in supplies and yields 10 rupees in sales at the end of the day. When Rama goes to sleep he has some nightmares about police and health officials, but nothing major ever happens with them. Then, there is a political disturbance in town. Rama goes out and finds that there is fighting going on. Eventually, the police fire their guns. Rama hides, and then the next day, must set up further down the road. When things settle down ten days later, Rama hopes to return to business, but he is met by a committee which is setting up a memorial at his corner for the "martyr" who died there during the disturbance. Rama quickly loses all business and goes out of business. Rama ends up working for a low wage as a waiter in a large restaurant.

### Wife's Holiday

Kannan takes the opportunity to take several days off from work while his wife is out of town on holiday. His work is to climb coconut trees, clean them from bugs and take down the coconuts. All he wants to do is gamble at a place called Mantapam later in the afternoon. Kannan starts looking through his small hut for money, where he lives with his wife and young son, both out of town. At first Kannan cannot find any money in his wife's tin trunk. Then he sees his son's cigarette tin in the trunk. He knows it is bad, but decides to get money to gamble from his little son's tin box. Kannan gets out of it 6 annas, enough to go gamble. Kannan goes to gamble and quickly loses all his money. As he goes back home, to his shock, he sees his wife and son returning. Kannan shudders at the fight about to break out in his house when he is caught losing the child's money, not working, and leaving his wife's possessions in shambles.

## The Martyr's Corner, Wife's Holiday Analysis

### Martyr's Corner

Rama seems to have the perfect business. He cooks food all day at his home, and then he sets up his shop by the cinema. In less than two hours every day, he makes his profit in sales. He buys raw material, turns it into good Indian snacks and 5 rupees a day, or at least 100 rupees a month. Such good luck is not bound to last, because life always involves change. Rama has the perfect business, at the perfect location, with no rent to pay, and everything is going well for him. His vulnerability is that he has no legal right to the site of his business. When the political riot happens, Rama is unable to react to save



his business. He is permanently ousted and has to get a job that is much harder and pays at a much lower rate.

#### Wife's Holiday

Kannan is not a very bad man. He does a tough physical job and lives in a little hut with his wife and son. He wants to go gamble, but because he has not worked for days, he has no money. His wife does not leave Kannan any money. She probably knows his tendency to waste money by gambling. Kannan makes a mess of his hut, looking for where his wife is hiding money. He gets more and more crazy and in his resentment decides that it is alright to steal his little son's money. He is actually insane, because by destroying the tin box, he is sure to be discovered by his wife. Kannan is unlucky too. If his wife and son would have come back a few days later, he could have earned some money and tried to replace the tin box, making up a story to explain its destruction.



# A Shadow, A Willing Slave

## A Shadow, A Willing Slave Summary

### A Shadow

Sambu is a young boy of about 12 or 14 years old, who demands to see a movie that stars his father. Since the movie has been made, his father has died. Sambu's mother agrees that he can see the movie one time each day. The son and mother are well-to-do, but miss father. The scene of the movie is very much like in Sambu's home. In the movie, Kumari, the 14-year-old daughter does not want to marry, but instead wants to study. The father asks the girl questions about her school work, and is pleased when she gets them right. Sambu comes home saying he loves the picture, but his mother still refuses to go. Sambu leaves the cinema sad each night. Finally, the last night, the mother goes too, and sits in the woman's section. She sees her husband reading a newspaper in the movie. This is the position he was in when he died. Sambu's mother sobs and faints. She recovers and mother and son take a cab home, both of them crying.

### A Willing Slave

Ayah has worked at a rich family's house for almost 20 years, caring for the five children. The one she cares for, the last, is 4 years old. She can only take care of young children, but she does other extra unpaid tasks, like harass the other servants when they are late. Ayah is getting old, and her children are already grandfathers. She is afraid that the children in the family are treated harshly by their tutors. Ayah takes care of Radha, a 4-year-old girl, for 12 hours a day, from when the girl gets up until when she goes to bed. Ayah says that if the girl does not sleep, the "Old Fellow" will come and get her. Every few months, Ayah goes home to her home village. Also every month, her children or other relatives come to take most of her wages. One day Ayah goes to her home village and comes back days late. She is feared to be dead. Ayah says that the Old Fellow has come for her. He was working for many years in the Ceylon Tea Gardens, but now has come home. He needs the Ayah, who is his wife, Thaiyi. Thaiyi says goodbye to everyone, but the little girl, who is in hiding.

## A Shadow, A Willing Slave Analysis

### A Shadow

Sambu's father has died, but can be seen in a movie. Sambu is excited, though he is also sad because he knows his father is not really alive anymore. One is confronted with the old fashioned conservative Indian society. Women are first gaining the right to not be forced to marry young and get a chance to learn a trade or go to school. This conservative Indian society is shown again in the fact that the women have a separate section to sit in at the movies. Unlike many of the other stories, the mother and the son





are economically well off from the earnings of the husband as a screenwriter and as an actor. They suffer not economically, but rather the loss of their husband and father. For Sambu, it is a fun game to see his father alive again in the film. As he sees it each day over a week's time, Sambu becomes sadder at the end of each showing. Finally, at the last showing, his mother's breakdown interrupts the film. Now, Sambu breaks down and weeps too, when he realizes the pain of his mother that his father is gone.

#### A Willing Slave

The Ayah, or nursemaid has been caring for the children for years. Her own children are grown-up. The Ayah is totally devoted to the wealthy family she works for. The reader finds out when her husband comes for her that the husband has been away working as well. These are simple people, who after being able to have and raise children at a young age, then spend the rest of their lives away from home, doing menial work. The Ayah enjoys her work, at a low educational level. First she is the slave of the family and companion to the children. Now Ayah, whose real name is Thaiyi, must go to take care of her husband. She always works for somebody.



# Leela's Friend, Mother and Son

## Leela's Friend, Mother and Son Summary

### Leela's Friend

Sidda is hired when he sees Mr. Sivasanker looking out into the street. His job is to watch the 5-year old girl, Leela, and to do some errands. Sidda is paid a minimal salary. Sidda is able to amuse the child, though he cannot read and write at all. He tells the child great stories. One day after an errand that Sidda and Leela do together, the mother sees that Leela's gold chain is gone. The mother questions Sidda harshly and at the first opportunity, Sidda disappears. Mr. Sivasanker comes home and tells the police. Meanwhile, the mother is incapable of amusing the child. Leela continues to ask for Sidda. The girl Leela screams that Sidda did not do it. After a few days, Leela's mother finds the chain in a cooking pot, the tamarind pot. The child does not know why she put it there. When the Father comes home, he brushes the whole episode off. He will tell the police tomorrow that the chain has been found.

### Mother and Son

Ramu and his mother are having dinner. The mother argues again that Ramu must marry his almost 14-year old cousin because the girl has a large dowry. The mother thinks to herself that if Ramu refuses to listen, she will ignore him and not take responsibility for him anymore. Ramu has failed his school exams and is unhappy and depressed. He and his mother have a nasty argument and then Ramu leaves the house, saying he is going out. Later, in horror the mother thinks that Ramu may have been driven to suicide by her and drowned himself in the town water tank. The mother screams and goes out, but realizes that Ramu may just be busy, so she goes back home. The mother wakes up at 6 in the morning and decides to go to Kukanahalli tank. She gets there and finds Ramu sleeping on a bench. She makes him up and Ramu says he slept there because he was tired.

## Leela's Friend, Mother and Son Analysis

### Leela's Friend

This is a sweet story of Leela's love for the servant Sidda, and the bad treatment the servant receives. The story shows the rich couple treating the servant, Sidda, with almost unbelievable brutality. Leela's mother not only immediately suspects Sidda of stealing the chain, but confronts him and threatens him immediately with the police. The police inspector plays his part in the charade. He immediately accepts that Sidda is a criminal, and claims he has a long record of stealing from children. This sounds like something that is made up by the police chief. If it is not a total lie, then Sidda may be known to the police for a few petty crimes. After all, Sidda is illiterate and unskilled. He is dirt poor and accepts a job for a very low wage even in India. He may be a good



person who steals occasionally out of desperation. The parents are so sure that Sidda is a criminal that they ignore what the child, Leela, says in his defense. It is unclear if the child knows what happened to the chain, or not.

### Mother and Son

Ramu's mother thinks that if Ramu marries his cousin with the large dowry, his problems will be solved. Ramu is not interested in the girl. She is not beautiful like the actresses that he sees in the movies. Ramu has failed his school examinations and seems to have no ambition. He sits around and reads at the local reading room. The mother gets enraged at him and Ramu goes out. Then she realizes that being angry solves nothing and only hurts Ramu, like her anger may have shortened the life of her husband. Suddenly, Ramu's mother's resolved to not care about Ramu anymore evaporates. After all, Ramu is still young, and he cannot be older than 16 or 17. The mother wakes up and has a vision of Ramu drowning himself in the town water tank. Perhaps Ramu has threatened to drown himself before, or else the Kukanahalli tank is a place that he goes to sometimes. The first thing in the morning, the mother goes to the tank. Ramu is there, but he is alive, though sleeping. Obviously, Ramu has no intention of committing suicide. He just went to the tank to be alone and falls asleep.



# Naga

## Naga Summary

The boy is with the snake that has become old and useless for snake charming. The boy is a snake charmer, but the snake, Naga, has lost its ability to frighten and thrill crowds. The boy remembers how his father used to work before he leaves the boy alone. At the age of ten, the boy learns from his father how to handle and charm the snake himself. The boy studies a tiny monkey in a tree and the father manages to capture it. The father knows how to train the monkey and the monkey becomes their main attraction. Then one morning, when the boy gets up, the father and the monkey are gone. The boy is relieved that Naga the snake is still there. The boy plays his pipe and people say hello to him. A woman stops and tells the boy that his father ran off with "a woman in a blue sari." For a couple of years, the boy is able to continue to make a living as a snake charmer. Then, the snake grows too old and flabby to do its act. The boy decides to abandon the snake in a field, and get another job. He is taller now and wants to be a porter on the railroad. The snake refuses to hide in an anthill and is about to be carried away by a bird, for dinner. Quickly, the boy comes back and rescues the snake, Naga. Naga is left in his container in the boy's hut, as the boy goes looking for a job.

## Naga Analysis

This is a coming of age story. In the beginning the boy is dependent on his father. The father teaches the boy how to handle the snake and the monkey. Then one day, the father disappears. The father cannot handle the responsibility anymore for the boy, and runs off with a woman. The boy is young, but able to survive by getting money through charming the snake. Naga the snake becomes old. The boy can work as a porter or another physical job. He tries to get rid of the snake, but then decides that it is his responsibility to take care of it. Unlike his father, who abandoned him, the boy does not abandon Naga. Naga stays in his container in the hut, but both the snake and the boy have an uncertain future.



# Selvi

## Selvi Summary

Selvi is dominated by her husband Mohan, who is also her manager. Selvi is a famous and adored Indian singer. Mohan discovers her and tells her how to dress, act and wear subtle make-up. Mohan had followed Gandhi in freeing India, but now lives in this huge house. Mohan picks out Selvi when she is in school, becomes a friend of family, and one day, marries Selvi. Selvi is a wonderful singer for 25 years, and people fight to get tickets to her concerts and see her. Mohan is contemptuous of Selvi's humble background. As soon as he can, he separates Selvi from her mother, brother and sister, all of whom are musicians as well. In fact, Selvi's first music teacher is her mother. This goes on for years, and Selvi stops having contact with her mother. Then, one day on the road, Selvi hears of her mother's death. Selvi refuses to sing and demands to go back to her mother's home in Malgudi, on Vinayak Mudali Street. The couple goes back to the mother's home. Selvi wants to hear all the details of her mother's death and cremation. Mohan tries to cut short her talk with the neighbors, but Selvi announces that she is staying in her mother's home. She is finished with Mohan.

## Selvi Analysis

Mohan is impressed by Selvi's singing, but does not seem to ever love her. She is a commodity to bring him money and fame. Mohan is very sneaky and manipulative. At first Selvi accepts this treatment because she wants to be able to sing to large audiences and make a career. Selvi may be uninterested in monetary success, but she wants to be a successful musician. Later, Selvi accepts Mohan's manipulation of her out of habit and to avoid a fight. She wants to see her mother, but is not a person to fight and argue, when Mohan obstructs her from seeing her mother. Selvi is shocked out of this routine by the sudden death of her mother. This is compounded by the fact that Selvi is not able to help her mother in her last days, or be part of the lighting of her mother's funeral pyre. She tries not to condemn Mohan, but loses all desire to continue her career or her relationship with her husband. Selvi decides to spend the rest of her life in her hometown Malgudi, on the street where she grew up in poor circumstances. She certainly can continue to earn small amounts of money and receive gifts, and she does not want Mohan anymore, since he has betrayed her.



# Second Opinion

## Second Opinion Summary

The son, whose name is Sambu, lives in a large comfortable house. Sambu generally spends a lot of time being philosophical, and reading philosophical books, such as Plato and also Indian philosophers. After about 6 months after the death of Sambu's father, the mother starts to irritate Sambu a lot. One day, Sambu overhears a man with a tufted beard talking to his mother. The discussion relates to arranging a marriage between Sambu and this man's daughter. This is an old friend of Sambu's father, and actually Sambu had been intended for the daughter since the girl's birth. Sambu objects to this, saying that such an arranged marriage is idiotic. The mother wails, saying she wished she had jumped on the father's funeral pyre. The son manages to escape and go outside. There, the son meets Dr. Kishen, his mother's doctor, who wants money for the many medical visits of the mother. Sambu is told that his mother faints, and this is a sign of a serious cardiac condition. The doctor says that this is the reason that Sambu's mother is so anxious that Sambu marry immediately, because she may die soon. Sambu decides that if his mother is going to die soon, he must give her peace by agreeing to this arranged marriage. Sambu then decides to get a second medical opinion on his mother's condition. After a thorough examination, the second doctor declares that the mother is in good health. Then at the house they receive a postcard saying that the father of the girl is coming. Sambu does not want to meet him, but mother stops Sambu before he leaves, and Sambu agrees to go meet the man with the beard.

## Second Opinion Analysis

Sambu is the son of a well-to-do family. He does not have financial worries. He has failed his university exams and spends his time talking and dreaming at the Boardless café. Sambu's father has died, and for the first six months, things at the house are quiet for him. After that, Sambu's mother starts annoying him about various small things, as well as his lack of success at school. Then suddenly, Sambu's mother is on a campaign to get Sambu married right away. They have a big argument, and then Sambu goes out and then meets Dr. Kishen. The doctor tells Sambu that Sambu's mother has a heart condition, and that is why he must listen to his mother and agree to an arranged marriage. Sambu is ready to yield to the marriage, now that he hears that his mother is dying. First he decides he needs a second medical opinion. The second doctor is much more thorough in his examination and announces that the mother only needs to eat meals more frequently and not starve herself.

Now Sambu has the problem of reversing himself. He has already agreed to go ahead with the arranged marriage, in order to have the mother die contented. Now he hears that his mother may live longer than him. The next scene confirms that the driving force behind Sambu's mother's insistence on an early marriage is her health situation. The



mother knows that she is healthy now and is willing to negotiate with Sambu. Sambu's mother only demands that he greet the father of the girl who is offered as a marriage partner, to avoid a social disgrace. She has, after all, invited the man to visit them this time. Sambu attempts to escape, but agrees to meet the man with the beard at the bus station and bring him to the house. It is an open question if Sambu is then convinced to go ahead with the arranged marriage.



# Cat Within

## Cat Within Summary

The landlord is also a shopkeeper and runs a shop out front. He sleeps across the building doorway to guard the building. He also has empty cans around the shop, as a primitive burglar alarm. One night, a cat chases a mouse and somehow gets a metal jug stuck on its head. The cat starts making a huge amount of noise trying to get the jug off its head. The shopkeeper wakes up and thinks that a thief has struck. The local exorcist who lives in the building is called out. The exorcist tries to go into the shop and grab a candle, but is frightened by the falling empty cans, the shopkeeper's primitive burglary alarm. The exorcist tries to communicate with the spirits and ask the shopkeeper to confess if he has committed crimes against a woman. The shopkeeper's true confessions upset him, and he grabs the exorcist's throat, threatens him, and shoves him into the dark shop. The cat hits the exorcist, and then senses how to get out of the shop. The cat then runs out, still with the vase on its head. The exorcist explains that the cat is possessed by an evil spirit and asks for his bill to be paid the next day.

## Cat Within Analysis

The shopkeeper, who is also the landlord of the building, is a nasty fellow. Since there is no electricity in the building, no one sees that a cat that is going crazy in the shop, because it cannot be seen. The tenants come out complaining about the lousy conditions in the building. If the shopkeeper installed electricity then he would not become the victim of the sly exorcist. The exorcist seems to have some mystical knowledge, but his trade succeeds more by manipulation of those needing something to be exorcised. The exorcist concentrates on plying his trade and trying to learn more about the crimes of the shopkeeper. The Hindu religious teaching is that evil spirits that bother people are due to people's crimes and sins in both this life and in past lives. Spirits are reincarnated as living creatures, animals and humans, until they can achieve spiritual consciousness and join the Godhead. Through his manipulations, the exorcist finds out about the shopkeeper's past crimes and murders. The exorcist shows his own corruption, since he is only interested in pronouncing the cat possessed by demons, and collecting his bill.





# The Edge

## The Edge Summary

In Malgudi, Ranga lives in the corner of an abandoned building. This way he can send most of his wages to his family in his nearby village, twenty-five miles away. In his home village, Ranga works with the blacksmith first, but the blacksmith takes too large a percentage of profits. Next, Ranga tries moving up and down the streets of the village, soliciting business to sharpen knives. Ranga starts a routine where he works in Malgudi, sharpening knives for a couple of months and then he comes home for a few days to see his wife and daughter. One day, a yellow car stops for Ranga, with a sign on it promoting birth control. Ranga's friend has told him that the words on the sign mean that two children are enough. The man also promises Ranga 30 rupees, about what Ranga makes in 10 days of work. After a nap, Ranga is brought somewhere else when he gets up and is asked questions about his family. Even though Ranga has only one surviving child, his daughter, the officer in charge writes that Ranga has 7 children. Ranga is told not to have any more children and puts his thumbprint onto the form. Ranga, in the operating room, remembers the newspaper story his friend read to him, that said that the government was setting up camps to sterilize people. Ranga feels a hand on his genitals, screams and struggles out of the room, wrapping himself in a bed sheet and yells, "I won't be cut."

## The Edge Analysis

This story is written to oppose a brutal birth control campaign in India, probably in the late 1970s, which involved forced sterilization. Ranga lives in a primitive world, without the use of electrical technology. His knife sharpener operates using his own foot power. Since Ranga cannot make a decent living in his village, he moves to Malgudi, visiting his family only once every couple of months. He wants to give his one surviving daughter a chance to go to school and become a professional, possibly a doctor. Since Ranga has to hitchhike to get back to Malgudi, he is fair game for the government official from the sterilization campaign. The official picks him up and brings Ranga to the camp. Ranga is told he will get money and a radio, but not that he will be sterilized. When Ranga figures out what is going on, he jumps off of the table, surrounded by a doctor and restraining personnel, because he does not want to be cut up. It is interesting that to make their quota, the chief government official is willing to lie. He puts down that Ranga has 7 children, not that only 1 has survived infancy. Otherwise Ranga would not qualify for the sterilization program, which claims that it only sterilizes people who already have 2 children.



# God and the Cobbler

## God and the Cobbler Summary

A hippie from somewhere is watching a cobbler sitting outside of a temple, somewhere in India. The cobbler is also looking at the hippie, and the hippie comes over to ask the cobbler to repair his sandals. The hippie feels that there is a tremendous amount of peacefulness about the cobbler, as if he only exists to fix shoes, and does not care about money. The cobbler feels nervous that somehow this could be an apparition of the God Shiva coming to test him. The hippie gives the cobbler a home-rolled cigarette and gets him to talk. The hippie asks if the cobbler believes in God. The cobbler is careful, and talks about God's eternal watchfulness. The cobbler describes his struggle to provide for his family. The cobbler alludes to committing violence and burning a house with a family in it, in his younger years. Now, he lives with his grandson, not his son, who died. The hippie in turn describes once bombing people from the air. He was a soldier in a war and bombed people he did not know. The hippie pays the cobbler and offers him a statue of the goddess Duraga, but the cobbler refuses it, fearing that it is stolen goods.

## God and the Cobbler Analysis

The hippie thinks he has found a place of perfect peace by the temple. He needs to have his sandals fixed by the cobbler. The cobbler looks to him to be totally at one with his surrounding and to have no desires except to fix shoes. The cobbler is nervous, since the hippie is a foreigner, or perhaps a god in disguise. However, after talking to the cobbler, the hippie sees that what he thought about the cobbler turns out to be wrong. The cobbler is desperately trying to make money to support his family. The cobbler admits to be in intense suffering due to his poverty. The sense of peace of the cobbler is more due to his resignation to his fate than any enjoyment of his surroundings. Likewise, the cobbler has not always been peaceful. He is old, but in his youth he was fighting and killing people. The hippie has a warlike past too, serving in an air force and bombing people. It could have been in Vietnam, Afghanistan, or somewhere else. To top it all, the cobbler fears that the hippie is a thief, and refuses his gift.



# Hungry Child

## Hungry Child Summary

Raman goes to the town fair in Malgudi. Even though it is loud, and wild, Raman seeks its distractions. Then he hears an announcement about a lost, crying child. Raman buys cotton candy and goes to the fair's central office. He holds up the cotton candy and the boy of about 7 years old runs over to him. Raman thinks about his girlfriend, Daisy, who had been promoting birth control and the "no more children" campaign. Raman wonders if Daisy, despite precautions, is pregnant with his child. Raman buys the boy more cotton candy and they both go on a ferris wheel. Raman thinks about how his life is messed up. Daisy left him just before they were to be married. His house is empty. Raman feels that if the boy moved in he would feel better taking care of the boy and sending him to school. The boy does not like school, but likes going on rides and playing pranks. Then Raman drags the boy over to see an outdoor movie. The boy yells for Momma and manages to get down from Raman's shoulders and runs to his parents.

## Hungry Child Analysis

Raman is sad because his girlfriend left him just before their wedding day. Raman is wandering around, and then wants to see the boy. Raman thinks that if his girlfriend is pregnant, that would serve her right. Daisy campaigns for birth control, but Raman likes the idea of having children. Perhaps that is why Daisy ran away from him. When Raman goes to the fairground center to see the boy, he buys cotton candy, as if subconsciously trying to appeal to the boy, and it works. The boy goes off with Raman, but is mainly interested in having adventures and eating treats. Raman is in a depressed state. He has stopped working at his sign painting business and is not eating properly. Being with the boy helps to cheer Raman up for a while, but then his fantasy world is shattered when the boy sees his family. Perhaps these moments with the boy encourage Raman to seek a new girl friend to marry and have his own family.



# Emden

## Emden Summary

Rao is the oldest man in town, close to 100 years old. His senses have dimmed, but he is still able to walk, eat and read a newspaper. Rao's favorite part of the day is after his afternoon nap, when he drinks coffee, reads the newspaper, and then goes out for a long, slow walk around town. On one of these walks, a photographer sees Rao, and tells his customers about him. Rao was an Excise Department official who checked on liquor licenses and made a lot of money. He was a terror to the boys in town, whom he caught doing various pranks. Rao was known for his affairs with single women. He was forced to retire due to threats to indict him for taking bribes, but is not financially ruined. Rao is in his study looking at his papers. He reads a diary from 51 years ago about a single woman that he visited and that he slapped. He remembers a sexy woman he had visited at midnight. Rao decides that he can remember where the woman lives and that he wants to apologize to her. He goes out and stops at a sweet shop, buying some sweets for the woman. At another shop he buys a bar of sandalwood soap. Rao takes various turns looking for Gokulam Street. He asks for directions but no one knows where it is. Finally, Rao gives up and gets back to the main street. He stumbles a bit as a dog barks, and drops the sweets, and the dog picks them up and runs away. Rao wonders if this is his girlfriend in another reincarnation.

## Emden Analysis

Rao is near the end of his long life. He is totally retired and spends his time reminiscing over his younger days. Rao loves to go out for a walk every afternoon. One of the men in the town shops gossips about Rao, who cannot hear it, saying he used to be called Emden. Emden is someone tough, like the German ship that bombed Madras during World War I. Rao was tough, with lots of girlfriends. He preserves his fortune even when investigated for receiving bribes. The old man is not senile and still has plenty of secrets and papers, some of which he would like to burn. Rao is intrigued by a woman that he wrote about long ago. He tries to see her, but then realizes that everything that he used to know is largely gone. Most or all of his old friends are dead. The dog that grabs the sweets may be his old girlfriend in reincarnation. Indian religious beliefs help to give Rao a sense of peace and reconciliation with his fate.



## Characters

### **the Astrologer appears in An Astrologer's Day**

The Astrologer cannot really read the stars, but is a good judge of character. He did not prepare for this line of work, but helps his clients take a look at their future.

### **Guru Nayak appears in An Astrologer's Day**

Guru Nayak comes to the astrologer when all the lights are almost out and it is night. At first he is an unknown customer.

### **The Mailman, Thanappa appears in The Missing Mail**

Thanappa is the mailman who gets deeply involved in the lives of the people that he delivers mail to, especially with Ramanujan and his family.

### **Ramanujan appears in The Missing Mail**

Ramanujan is a man on Thanappa's mail route for many years. Ramanujan now wants to get his daughter married.

### **Dr. Raman appears in The Doctor's Word**

Dr. Raman is a very straight and to the point doctor. He tells patients and their family if he thinks the patient will die or has a chance.

### **Gopal appears in The Doctor's Word**

Gopal is Dr. Raman's boyhood friend. Suddenly Dr. Raman finds out that Gopal is sick.

### **Govind Singh appears in Gateman's Gift**

Govind Singh works for a long time as a gatekeeper or security guard at a large firm. When he retires, he gets a small pension and develops a hobby of making clay and sawdust miniature models.



## **The blind man, the blind beggar appears in The Blind Dog**

The blind man is a beggar who is brought out to beg everyday by an old woman. He becomes friendly with a dog that helps him, but that he abuses.

## **The Dog, Tiger appears in The Blind Dog**

The dog is a friendly dog who roams wild by the market, until the blind man befriends it. It gets pleasure in helping the blind man, but then is subjected to a difficult daily routine

## **Rajam Iyer appears in Fellow-Feeling**

Rajam Iyer is a Tamil speaking member of the Brahmin caste. He is riding on a train and becomes disturbed by one of the passengers that comes onto the train.

## **the Newcomer appears in Fellow-Feeling**

The Newcomer who gets on the train is a disturbing man and a bully. He makes a man who is sleeping move and provokes Mr. Rajam Iyer with his disturbing speeches.

## **the Talkative Man appears in the Tiger's Paw**

The Talkative man is a fertilizer salesman who goes to far-flung villages in the jungle, as long as they can be reached by the railroad. He appears in the village of Koppal, a place near the jungles and tigers.

## **Iswaren appears in Iswaren**

Iswaren is a student who has failed his Intermediate examination many times since he was a boy. He has just taken it again, in one last try.

## **the Sculptor, Soma appears in Such Perfection**

The sculptor Soma has made the perfect Nataraja, a statue of a god. He refuses to damage its perfection, despite the warning of the priest.

## **Swami, Swaminathan appears in Father's Help**

Swami is a young boy in the early grades of school. He is trying to avoid going to school and claims his teacher punishes the students.



## **Samuel appears in Father's Help**

Samuel is usually an easy going teacher of Swami, but is provoked by Swami's antics.

## **the Talkative Man appears in The Snake-Song**

The Talkative Man studies Indian music and flute playing in his youth. This version of the Talkative Man has little relationship to other stories with this character.

## **the Sadhu appears in The Snake-Song**

The Sadhu is a holy man who renounces the world. He comes to the talkative man's door and is rejected by him.

## **the Talkative Man appears in Engine Trouble**

In this story, the Talkative Man wins a road engine, and then has problems deciding what to do with it.

## **Shanta appears in Forty-Five a Month**

Shanta is a young girl who is just learning to read and write. She wants her father to take her to the movies.

## **Rao Venkat, father appears in Forty-Five a Month**

Rao Venkat is Shanta's father. He is an overworked man who does clerical work in an office. He would like to pay more attention to his family but cannot.

## **Rama Rao appears in Out of Business**

Rama Rao is a businessman, who suddenly finds himself unemployed and desperate for work.

## **Atilla appears in Atilla**

Atilla the dog is a fine-looking dog, but he is too friendly to be a good watch dog. Since his thoughts are shown, he can be considered a character.



## **Ranga appears in Attila**

Ranga is a coolie gang worker, or laborer, who turns to robbing houses at night.

## **Velan appears in The Axe**

Velan leaves his home village, Koppal, when he is 18 years old. He walks to the nearest town, Malgudi and gets a job as a gardener.

## **the Talkative Man appears in Lawley Road**

The talkative man at this time is a news reporter on local affairs for a small newspaper. He decides to take the Frederick Lawley statue to his house.

## **Raju appears in Trail of the Green Blazer**

Raju is a known pickpocket. He is disguised as a peasant and looking for a target at the town fair.

## **Rama appears in Martyr's Corner**

Rama is a vendor of snacks on Market Road. He has a good business for a long time and he and his wife are very happy.

## **Kannan appears in Wife's Holiday**

Kannan is a husband and father who uses the fact that his wife is on holiday to take off from work. He gathers coconut from trees.

## **Sambu appears in A Shadow**

Sambu is a young boy of about 12 or 14 years old. His father stars in a movie that he watches, but the father has recently died.

## **Ayah, Thai appears in The Willing Slave**

Ayah is a not very intelligent woman who has served a family as a nursemaid and babysitter for almost 20 years. Her real name is Thai.





## **Leela appears in Leela's Friend**

Leela is a 5-year old child who adores the servant Sidda. She defends the servant from accusations of theft.

## **Sidda appears in Leela's Friend**

Sidda gets a job as a servant watching the girl Leela. He plays with her very nicely but then is accused of stealing her gold chain.

## **Ramu appears in Mother and Son**

Ramu is an older teenager who has failed his school examination.

## **Ramu's Mother appears in Mother and Son**

Ramu's mother is a widow who wants Ramu to marry his cousin.

## **the Boy appears in Naga**

The boy at the start of the story is about 11 or 12 years old. He lives with his father in a hut, then his Father abandons him.

## **the Father appears in Naga**

The Father lives with the boy and they earn their living as snake charmers and also amusing people with a trained monkey. The Father runs off with a woman.

## **Mohan appears in Selvi**

Mohan is a photographer who discovers Selvi when she is young and makes her a star and marries her. He runs her life.

## **Selvi appears in Selvi**

Selvi

Selvi is a woman who is devoted to the music that her mother taught her. She becomes submissive to Mohan.



## **Varma appears in Selvi Varma**

Varma owns the Boardless Hotel and coffeeshop, where much gossip is exchanged. He wants to present a gift to Selvi, but is stopped by Mohan in the story, Selvi's husband. He is also a fixture in other stories, where idle young men go to chat and fantasize about the future.

## **the Son, Sambu appears in Second Opinion**

Sambu is about 16 or 17 years old. He is an idler who spends his time at the Boardless Hotel café. He does not want an arranged marriage, but then hears that his mother may be dying.

## **the Mother**

The mother is a fairly energetic woman who has fainting spells. She sees a doctor who tells her that she is dying. She tries to arrange for her son to marry before her death.

## **the Shopkeeper, the Landlord appears in Cat Within**

The Shopkeeper is also the landlord of the building where, in addition to his shop, twenty families live. The people living there do not have electricity and live under overcrowded conditions.

## **the Exorcist appears in Cat Within**

The exorcist earns his livelihood exorcising evil spirits that are believed to possess people and things.

## **Ranga appears in The Edge**

Ranga is an illiterate knife sharpener of somewhere between 50 and 80 years old. His machine uses human muscle power, and his sense of time is vague.

## **the Hippie appears in God and the Cobbler**

The hippie is an individual who tries to blend in with his environment. In a sense, he could be anyone from anywhere.



## **the Cobbler appears in God and the Cobbler**

The cobbler is a poor old man who is trying to support himself, his wife and his grandchild, by fixing sandals and other shoes.

## **Raman appears in The Hungry Boy**

Raman is a young man who has a sign board business. He is upset because his girlfriend, who was his fiancée, has left him.

## **the Boy appears in The Hungry Boy**

The Boy is at the town fair and has become separated from his family. All he is thinking of is having fun and eating and he goes off with Raman.

## **Rao, Emden appears in Emden**

Rao is a rich man who is very old. In his younger days he is called Emden, signifying someone who is very tough and daring.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Town Hall Park appears in An Astrologer's Day**

Town Hall Park is in the center of Malgudi. There the astrologer is set up to do his craft by a path and under a tree.

### **13 Kabir St. appears in The Missing Mail**

13 Kabir St. is the address of Mr. Ramanujan, who is trying to marry off his daughter. Other streets the postman travels are Market Rd., and Vinayak Mudali St.

### **Engladia's appears in Gateman's Gift**

Engladia's is a company where Govind Singh works as a gatekeeper for many years.

### **The Market Gate appears in The Blind Dog**

The Market Gate is a place where various merchants and beggars gather to do their business. There the blind man meets the dog.

### **the Madras-Bangalore Express appears in Fellow-Feeling**

The Madras-Bangalore Express is a train that goes through the region of Malgudi.

### **Koppal appears in Tiger's Claw**

Koppal is a remote jungle village that has a stop on the railroad. It is known to be frequented by tigers.

### **the Man-Eating Tiger appears in The Tiger's Claw**

The man-eating tiger is now on display, after hunters kill it. Once, the Talkative Man faced the man-eating tiger, barehanded.

### **the Palace Talkies appears in Iswaren**

The Palace Talkies is the town movie theater.



## **the River, Sarayu appears in Iswaren**

The river, the Sarayu, goes through town, and is where Iswaren drowns.

## **Nataraja appears in Such Perfection**

The Nataraja is a statue of god, Shiva, in its dancing manifestation. It can both create and destroy the world.

## **Albert Mission School appears in Father's Help**

The Albert Mission School is a primary school where Swami goes.

## **the Snake, the Cobra appears in The Snake-Song**

The Cobra comes into the Talkative Man's house and dances to his flute music.

## **Gaiety Land appears in Engine Trouble**

Gaiety land is a temporary amusement park set up in the town of Malgudi, on the Gymkhana grounds.

## **the Road Engine appears in Engine Trouble**

The road engine seems to be a large engine for an old-fashioned train locomotive, or perhaps road-building machinery, also called a road roller.

## **Jutka appears in Forty-five a Month**

A jutka is a horse-drawn carriage. One passes by Shanta's house with an advertisement for a movie.

## **The Captain appears in Out of Business**

The Captain is a four page magazine that has crossword puzzles and offers prizes to winners. It is available at the Jubilee Reading Room.

## **the Garden appears in The Axe**

Velan helps to build a garden next to a house that is also built. There are plants and trees, such as the margosa tree and fruit trees there.



## **Statue of Frederick Lawley appears in Lawley Road**

There is a 20-foot tall statue of Frederick Lawley, a British Military Governor. It is on the Lawley Extension by Market Rd.

## **the Green Blazer appears in Trail of the Green Blazer**

The Green Blazer is an eye-catching sports coat that a man wears at a marketplace. This man is targeted to be pick-pocketed by Raju.

## **Market Road appears in Martyr's Corner**

On a corner of Market Road, Rama sets up his food shop in the evening, near the movie theater.

## **the Cigarette Tin appears in Wife's Holiday**

The cigarette tin is where Kannan's son is saving his change. Kannan decides to open this box to get some money.

## **Mantapam appears in Wife's Holiday**

Mantapam is a wrecked building where poor people from town go to gamble and play dice.

## **Kumari appears in A Shadow**

Kumari is the name of a Tamil-language film in which Sambu's father appears. The father has since died.

## **Saidepet appears in A Willing Slave**

Saidapet is the home village of the Ayah, or nursemaid. She goes there to visit her family.

## **the Police appears in Leela's Friend**

The Police arrest Sidda for stealing Leela's gold chain.



## **Kukanahalli Tank appears in Mother and Son**

Kukanahalli Tank is the town water tank, in Mysore.

## **Naga, the Cobra, the Snake appears in Naga**

The Cobra snake is a holy creature in Indian mythology. It appears in the story, the Snake Song, and in the story, Naga. The boy and the father charm the snake and get it to dance and perform.

## **the Building of the East India Company appears in Selvi**

The building of the East India Company is a huge building in Malgudi that used to be the residence of the British Governor. Mohan buys this building for his and Selvi's home.

## **Boardless Hotel and Café appears in Selvi**

The Boardless Hotel and Café is a popular place to hang around and socialize in Malgudi.

The Boardless Hotel is run by Varma, and also includes a coffeeshop. This is where many intellectuals hang around, talking, eating and drinking coffee.

## **Vinayak Mudali Street appears in Selvi**

Vinayak Mudali Street is a street where poor people live and the shopkeeper's building is located. The singer Selvi also grows up on this street and learns music from her mother there.

## **Malgudi Medical Centre (M.M.C.) appears in Second Opinion**

Malgudi Medical Centre is where Dr. Kishen practices, and where Sambu's mother habitually goes for medical care.

## **Sarayu River appears in Second Opinion**

The Sarayu River goes by Sambu's house. He also goes there to take a stroll and think.



## **Vinayak Mudali Street appears in Cat Within**

Vinayak Mudali Street is a street where poor people live and the shopkeeper's building is located. This street is mentioned in a couple of other stories.

## **the Cat appears in Cat Within**

The cat is chasing a mouse in the shop and by accident has a metal vase get stuck on its head. The cat then proceeds to make a lot of noise trying to get the vase off its head. It is thought to be a demonic spirit.

## **the Camp appears in The Edge**

Ranga is taken to the camp, which turns out to be a government camp where sterilization operations are performed on men and women so they cannot have more children.

## **the Grinding Wheel appears in the Edge**

Ranga carries around a grinding wheel which is operated by a foot pedal. This is the tool that he uses to make a living sharpening knives.

## **The Temple appears in God and the Cobbler**

The temple is a place of religious worship and also commerce. The cobbler sits by its outside wall, looking for customers with sandals to repair. The hippie receives free food there from the priest.

## **Cotton Candy appears in The Hungry Boy**

The boy is tempted to go with Raman because he has a large bouquet-like piece of cotton candy. Raman buys cotton candy and other treats for the boy.

## **the Expo, Expo '77-78 appears in The Hungry Boy**

The expo is a large fair at Malgudi, which takes place at night with large floodlights providing light.

## **Jilebi appears in Emden**

Jilebi is a type of sweet, that Rao buys for his old sweetheart, whom he is trying to find.





## **Sandalwood Soap appears in Emden**

Sandlewood soap is another gift that Rao buys for the lady he is seeking. He remembers that she used to like this kind of soap.



# Themes

## Overcoming Difficulties and Perseverance

Many characters in these stories face difficult lives, yet somehow endure. In "A Willing Slave," Ayah, the nursemaid watches over children for many years. She gives her pay away to her relatives. Finally, after 20 years or so, her husband comes back, also from hard work and comes to claim her. Yet, the Ayah, the nursemaid, never complains, and accepts her fate. This type of patience and perseverance is typical of many of the characters, who slave away at jobs for long hours, under bad living and working conditions. Most of these characters are able to overcome their difficult situations due to their belief in God and karma. They feel that if they do their best in their present lives, that they will become closer to the Godhead in the next life, or even be able to merge with the Godhead. Many of these characters in the story see no hope to change their lot in life in any case. Sometimes this creates conflict between an older parent and their child who is reaching adulthood. The young men do not like the idea of being forced into a marriage and repeating a life cycle that they see as frustrating.

## The Complications of Crime

Criminal activity is seldom straight-forward in these stories. Criminals can and do have good qualities that can interfere with their successful criminal life. In "The Trail of the Green Blazer," the pickpocket, Raju, also has a wife and child, and feels sympathy for the motherless boy, who is said to be getting a balloon. Therefore, Raju returns the purse with the balloon and gets caught. The thief in the story "Attila" knows that he cannot have the dog Attila following him around, no matter how friendly the dog is, but does not seem able to kill or harm the dog to get rid of it. Criminals often want to commit the minimal amount of crime necessary to make a living. They regard their criminal activity as their profession, and steal from people that they view as able to spare a bit of extra wealth. They usually do not plan on hurting anyone, though in a fit of passion, or when challenged, they may harm someone or kill them. Thieves are not usually monsters, but in these stories, men with wives and children trying to live under difficult circumstances. Even when the so-called criminal wants to get a respectable job, their criminal record and the suspicions of employers may come to haunt and ruin them.

## The Burden of Ignorance

Ignorance is something that many characters in the stories are trapped in, or else, they are not able to overcome. Many of the boys and young men are confronted with failure to pass their school examinations. In "Iswaren," the main character is so overwhelmed by his failure of many exams that he is taken over by fantasy, and ends up killing himself accidentally despite passing the exam finally. In "Mother and Son," Ramu is pressured by his mother to marry, but he is haunted by his inability to pass his



Intermediate level exams. Likewise, in the story "Second Opinion," the son is pressured by his mother to marry. The son does not know what he wants to do with his life, and also has failed his university matriculation exam. When these young men fail their school examinations, it makes it difficult for them to get a job or do anything. Other characters never get any education at all, and are totally illiterate. They need other people to read for them and write letters for them. They can work longer and longer hours, but rarely can get ahead, because they are paid such low wages. This cycle of poverty can only be broken by the hard efforts of parents to send their children to school, including paying school expenses. Only in this way, over generations, is the cycle of poverty and ignorance broken.

## **The Arrogance of the Wealthy**

In a caste society like that of India, wealthy people tend to treat the poor in an especially cruel way. Though the caste system has been outlawed in terms of job discrimination, in independent India, its effects linger. In "Leela's Friend," Sidda is hired to watch Leela, a young girl and is loved by the little girl. Nevertheless, when the girl's gold chain is missing, the lady-of-the-house immediately threatens to call the police on Sidda, and thinks he is the thief. When Sidda is found to be innocent, there is little concern to right this wrong, other than to inform the police of this fact. In the story, "Forty-Five a Month," the long suffering father cannot avoid working overtime and 7 days a week at his office job. He is not allowed to take any time off to be with his young daughter. When he is at the breaking point, a small raise silences him indefinitely. As elsewhere in the world, characters in Malgudi sacrifice love, principles and family to become wealthy and successful. They often achieve wealth and fame, but regret how they have neglected their family and friends.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view for most of these stories is the third person. The exceptions are the stories that, after a short introduction, are told by the Talkative Man in the first person point of view, which are, "The Snake-Song," "Engine Trouble," and "Lawley Road." The longer story, "Second Opinion," is also in the first person point of view. Most of the stories, though in the third person point of view, describe the inner thoughts of only one person, who is the subject of the short story. In "Second Opinion," a story of almost 30 pages in the first person, only the thoughts of the son are described, not of the mother or anyone else. In some stories, the thoughts and motivations of two people are written about and contrasted. In the story, "Cat Within," the reader finds out about the shopkeeper who is also the landlord of the building, who is frightened by the unexplained noise in the middle of the night. Likewise, the exorcist is described as knowing how to handle the situation, with some mishaps, and to handle the shop owner. In the story, "Forty-Five a Month," it opens with the motivations and plans of the little girl who wants to go to the movies later with her father. After that, the reader discovers what the father is thinking and doing.

## Setting

All of these 32 stories take place in South India, and almost all in the mythical town of Malgudi. Malgudi is a sort of combination of the towns that the author has lived in and knows, such as the port of Madras and the inland town of Mysore. While the stories are separate, some of the settings are the same. Several of the vendors and salespeople are working on Market Road, and by the Town Hall. The dissolute single adolescents and young men go to the Boardless Hotel café to waste time, socialize and have political discussions. The Sarayu River is there for many uses. One character drowns himself in it, while others walk along its banks and question its relationship to nearby wells. The Talkie Palace movie theater is there for enjoying movies and as a place to find lots of customers outside. The village of Koppal is up towards the jungle and mountains outside Malgudi, where poor people who come to work in Malgudi live, and salesmen go, despite the danger of man-eating tiger attacks. A mythical world is created that has modern technology to play with and make motion pictures with and primitive technology at the same time. There are sit-down restaurants and places where vendors sell street food. Malgudi is a very Indian town, yet sometimes it feels like a big city anywhere, in Europe or America.

## Language and Meaning

R. K. Narayan, the writer, has the distinction of being a native of Southern India, but a writer in English. He and his characters also speak the local language Tamil, but the



stories are originally written in English. The vocabulary, especially in the first two sections of story, tends to be simple and straight-forward with occasional use of Indian words, usually in italics, in the text. Some more complicated English words are used in the last section of stories. The meaning of most of the native words is in a glossary in the back of the book. So, for example, in the story "A Shadow," the boy's father is seen in a movie described to be in Tamil, though the story is written in English. Local words are used for particular food products, such as jaggery, a kind of sweet, and idli, a steamed rice cake, though they are also used for items of clothing and religious observances. These Tamil and Hindi words give the text an authentic feeling, since many of these objects do not have a word for them in English. There is a slight difficulty for the reader in understanding Indian worship, philosophy and customs. For example, only in the story "Naga" is there a romantic love relationship between the father and a woman, where the couple runs away and abandons the boy. In all the other stories, all contemplated or existing marriages are arranged, it seems. The reader should try to learn something about the concept of karma or the inheriting of characteristics and problems from a person's past life, and also the various Indian gods, and how they are united in the Godhead. Various gods are referred to, yet people still say they believe in (one) God.

## Structure

The book of stories has 32 stories. It is divided up into 3 sections. Stories from the collection "An Astrologer's Day" are fairly short, about 5 or 6 pages, and are apparently written for a newspaper, with a word count limit. These stories are written before Indian independence in 1947, and refer to quaint features of the still ruling British Empire. This is most striking in the story "Out of Business" where Rama Rao's business collapses, after a bank failure in Lahore, now not in India at all, but in present-day Pakistan. The stories from the collection "Lawley Road" are post-Independence, with the first story "Lawley Road" having the theme of the renaming of British-empire era streets with new Indian names, and the question of the statue of Frederick Lawley. These stories do not waste time in setting up a situation of a character and his or her problem. Quickly, the reader meets the main character, or one of the two main characters, finds out what the character wants, and what he or she has to do to get it. Then the plot continues on to what happens to the character as he tries to pass an exam, make money or avoid an arranged marriage. The last section of stories "New Stories" are somewhat longer and more developed, though they use the same formula of action and development as the shorter stories.



## Quotes

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

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

From "An Astrologer's Day," p. 12.

"You look quite well, you aren't mad" said the accountant. Singh fell at his feet and said with tears choking his voice, "You are a god, sir, to say that I am not mad. I am so happy to hear it."

From "Gateman's Gift," p. 33.

"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?"

From "The Blind Dog," p. 39.

He shouted at the top of his voice: "Keep off; the king is coming; whoever comes his way will be trampled...."

From "Iswaren," p. 59.

"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."

From "The Snake-Song," p. 75.

Venkat Rao watched the child for a moment. "I don't know if it is going to be possible for me to take her out at all—you see, they are giving me an increment—" he wailed.

From "Forty-five a Month," p. 90.

The only thing now was total extinction. He lay across the lines. The iron was still warm. The day had been hot. Rama Rao felt very happy as he reflected that in less than ten minutes the train from Trichinopoly would be arriving.

From "Out of Business," p. 95.

It infuriated them and made them want to kick me, but they had been brought up in a tradition of non-violence and so they picketed my house; they lay across my door in relays holding a flag and shouting slogans.

From "Lawley Road," p. 116.

"Am I right in taking my youngster's money?" "Why not?" whispered a voice within



seductively. "Son and father are the same."  
From "Wife's Holiday," p. 132.

"My life is nearly over," said the mother. "You will see me shutting up once and for all very soon. Don't be impatient. You ask me to shut up! Has it come to this?"  
From "Mother and Son," p. 153.

"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."  
From "Naga," p. 160.

Selvi understood, and resigned herself to it, and never again mentioned her mother. "If my own mother can't see me!" She thought again and again, in secret anguish, having none to whom she could speak her feelings.  
From "Selvi," p. 177.

Every gnat at death was reborn a better creature, and ultimately after a series of lives, became an ape and a human being, who merged ultimately in a supreme indivisible godhood.  
From "Second Opinion," p. 181.

"In your last life you did certain acts which are recoiling on you now. How could it be otherwise? It is karma."  
From "Cat Within," p. 212.

"No, I won't be cut up..." which echoed far and wide, issuing from vocal cords cultivated over a lifetime to overwhelm other noises in a city street with the cry, "Knives sharpened!"  
From "The Edge," p. 232.

Observing his self-absorption, while his hands were busy, the hippy concluded that, apart from the income, the man derived a mystic joy in the very process of handling leather and attacking it with sharpened end.  
From "God and the Cobbler," p. 235.

"And you know how much he collected at the end of the day? Not less than five hundred rupees, that is, fifteen thousand a month, not even a governor could earn so much."  
From "Emden," p. 256.

## Topics for Discussion

Discuss fatalism. Many characters in the stories are stuck in situations they could get out of if they really wanted to. They do not get out of these situations unless someone helps them to do so, like in "The Missing Mail." There the postman makes sure that the upcoming wedding is not ruined by bad news. Do you think that the author's characters are very fatalistic?

Discuss the search for love. In an Indian context that is dominated by arranged marriages, the search for love is not the same as in Western practice, between men and women. Instead, mothers hope to receive love and obedience from rebellious sons, whom they want to work and be married. Children, like Leela, in "Leela's Friend," try to get love from servants that a busy parent cannot give to them. Is this as valid a search for love as the romantic love we think of in the West?

Discuss coming of age. The coming of age or maturity can often be distorted. In the case of the singer Selvi, not until her mother dies, does she see that she has been manipulated and betrayed by her husband, and does she seek her own destiny. In the story "Naga," the boy is forced to mature, and provide for himself, but then must decide whether to abandon his snake Naga, as his father abandoned the boy. Are these coming of age stories?

Discuss the penalty of sin. Many of the stories involve characters who commit crimes. Sometimes they are successful, and sometimes not. Describe what these criminals feel upon getting caught. Do they feel they are only carrying out their profession? Are they afraid of bad karma?

Discuss fantasy and insanity. Some characters in the stories break down under the pressures of their lives. Iswaren ends up killing himself in a moment of fantasy, even though he finally passes his exam. Raman's fantasy of adopting the boy lost at the fair collapses as soon as the boy sees his mother. What drives these characters into a total break with reality?

In "The Doctor's Word," an old friend is discovered to be ill. How does that change the lives of the characters in this story? Is illness seen as a natural part of daily life, or an aberration or an exception to the way we live? Explain your answer.

"Gateman's Gift" shows how fear can paralyze us, often for no reason. How do fears paralyze Govind? Have you ever felt fear about something trivial like that? Relate your personal experiences.