

## ACT I

[The Heralds of Spring are abroad. There are songs in the rustling bamboo leaves, in bird's nest, and in blossoming branches.]

### SONG-PRELUDE

[The purple secondary curtain<sup>1</sup> goes up, disclosing the elevated rear stage with a skyey background of dark blue, on which appear the horn of the crescent moon and the silver points of stars. Trees in the foreground, with two rope swings entwined with garlands of flowers. Flowers everywhere in profusion. On the extreme left the mouth of a dark cavern dimly seen. Boys representing the "Bamboo" disclosed, swinging.]

#### SONG OF THE BAMBOO

*O South Wind, the Wanderer, come and rock me,  
Rouse me into the rapture of new leaves.  
I am the wayside bamboo tree, waiting for your breath  
To tingle life into my branches.  
O South Wind, the Wanderer, my dwelling is in the end of the lane.  
I know your wayfaring, and the language of your footsteps.  
Your least touch thrills me out of my slumber,  
Your whisper gleans my secrets.*

(Enter a troop of girls, dancing, representing birds)

#### SONG OF THE BIRD

*The sky pours its light into our hearts,  
We fill the sky with songs in answer.  
We pelt the air with our notes  
When the air stirs our wings with its madness.  
O Flame of the Forest,  
All your flower-torches are ablaze;  
You have kissed our songs red with the passion of your youth.  
In the spring breeze the mango-blossoms launch their messages to the unknown  
And the new leaves dream aloud all day.  
O Sirish, you have cast your perfume-net around our hearts,  
Drawing them out in songs.*

(Disclosed among the branches of trees, suddenly lighted up, boys representing champak blossoms)

#### SONG OF THE BLOSSOMING CHAMPAK

*My shadow dances in your waves, ever flowing river,  
I, the blossoming champak, stand unmoved on the bank,  
with my flower-vigils.  
My movement dwells in the stillness of my depth,  
In the delicious birth of new leaves,  
In flood of flowers,  
In unseen urge of new life towards the light.  
Its stirring thrills the sky, and the silence of the dawn is moved.*

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<sup>1</sup> Neither the secondary curtain nor the drop is again used during the play. The action is continuous, either on the front stage or the rear stage, the latter being darkened when not actually in use.

## Morning

[The rear stage is now darkened. On the main stage, bright, enter a band of youths whose number may be anything between three and thirty, They sing.]

*The fire of April leaps from forest to forest,  
Flashing up in leaves and flowers from all nooks and corners.  
The sky is thriftless with colours,  
The air delirious with songs.  
The wind-tost branches of the woodland  
Spread their unrest in our blood.  
The air is filled with bewilderment of mirth;  
And the breeze rushes from flower to flower, asking their names.*

[In the following dialogue only the names of the principal characters are given. Whenever the name is not given the speaker is one or the other of the Youths.]

April pulls hard, brother, April pulls very hard.

How do know that?

If he didn't, he would never have Dada outside his den.

Well, I declare! Here is Dada, our cargo-boat of moral-maxims, towed against the current of his own pen and ink.

**Chandra:** But you mustn't give April all the credit for that. For, I, Chandra, have hidden the yellow leaves of his manuscript book among the young buds of *pial* forest, and Dada is out looking for it.

The manuscript book banished! What a good riddance!

We ought to strip off Dada's grey philosopher's cloak also.

**Chandra:** Yes, the very dust of the earth is tingling with youth, and yet there's not a single touch of Spring in the whole of Dada's body.

**Dada:** Oh, do stop this fooling. What a nuisance you are making of yourselves! We aren't children any longer.

**Chandra:** Dada, the age of this earth is scarcely less than yours; and yet it is not ashamed to look fresh.

Dada, you are always struggling with those quatrains of yours, full of advice that is as old as death, while the earth and the water are ever striving to be new.

Dada, how in the world can you go on writing verses like that, sitting in your den?

**Dada:** Well, you see, I don't cultivate poetry as an amateur gardener cultivates flowers. *My* poems have substance and weight in them.

Yes, they are like turnips, which cling to the ground.

Dada: Well, then, listen to me----

How awful! Here's Dada going to run amuck with his quatrains.

Oh dear, oh dear! The quatrains are let loose. There's no holding them in.

To all passers-by I give notice that Dada's quatrains have gone mad, and are running amuck.

Chandra: Dada! Don't take any notice of their fun. Go on with your reading. If no one else can survive it, I think I can. I am not a coward like these fellows.

Come on, then, Dada. We won't be cowards. We will keep our ground, and not yield an inch, but only listen.

We will receive the spear-thrusts of quatrains on our breast, not on our back.

But for pity's sake, Dada, give us only one -- not more.

Dada: Very well. Now listen:

*If bamboos were made only into flutes,  
They would droop and die with very shame,  
They hold their heads high in the sky,  
Because they are variously useful.*

Please, gentlemen, don't laugh. Have patience while I explain. The meaning is----

The meaning?

What? Must the infantry charge of meaning follow the cannonading of your quatrains, to complete the rout?

Dada: Just one word to make you understand. It means, that if the bamboos were no better than those noisy instruments----

No, Dada, we must not understand.

I defy you to make us understand.

Dada, if you use force to make us understand we shall use force to force ourselves not to understand.

Dada: The gist of the quatrain is this, that if we do no good to the world, then----

Then the world will be greatly relieved.

Dada: There is another verse that makes clearer:

*There are numerous stars in the midnight sky,  
Which hang in the air for no purpose;  
If they would only come down to earth,  
For the street lighting they might be useful.*

I see we must make clearer our meaning. Catch him. Let's raise him up,  
shoulder high, and take him back to his den.

Dada: Why are you so excited to-day? Have you any particular business to do?

Yes, we have an urgent business, -- very urgent indeed.

Dada: What is your business about?

We are out to seek a play for our Spring festival.

Dada: Play! Day and night play!

(They sing)

*We are free, my friends, from the fear of work,  
For we know that work is play, -- the play of life.  
It is Play, to fight and toss, between life and death;  
It is Play that flashes in the laughter of light in the infinite heart;  
It roars in the wind, and surges in the sea.*

Oh, here comes our Leader. Brothers -- our Leader, our Leader!

Leader: Hallo! What a noise you make!

Was it that which made come out of doors?

Leader: Yes.

Well, we did it for that very purpose.

Leader. You don't want me to remain indoors?

Why remain indoors? This outer world has been made with a lavish expenditure of  
sun and moon and stars. Let us enjoy it, and then we can save God's face  
for indulging in such extravagance.

Leader: What were you discussing?

This:

(They sing)

*Play blooms in flower and ripens in fruit  
In the sunshine of eternal youth.  
Play bursts up in the blood-red fire,  
and licks into ashes the decaying and the dead.*

Our Dada's objection was about this play.

Dada: Shall I tell you the reason why?

Yes, Dada, you may tell us, but we shan't promise to listen.

Dada: Here it is: *Time is the capital of work,  
And play is its defalcation.  
Play rifles the house, and wastes its spoil,  
Therefore the wise call it worse than useless.*

Chandra: But surely, Dada, you are talking nonsense. Time itself is Play. Its only object is Pas-time.

Dada: Then what is work?

Chandra: Work is the dust raised by passing of Time.

Dada: Leader, you must give us your answers.

Leader: No. I never give answers. I lead on from one question to another. That is my leadership.

Dada: Everything else has its limits, but your childishness is absolutely unbounded.

Do you know the reason? It is because we are really nothing but children. And everything else has its limitations except the child.

Dada: Won't you ever attain Age?

No, we shall never attain Age.

We shall die old, but never attain Age.

Chandra: When we meet Age, we shall shave his head, and put him on a donkey, and send him across the river.

Oh, you can save yourself the trouble of shaving his head, for Age is bald.

(They sing)

*Our hair shall never turn grey,  
Never.  
There is no blank in this world for us, no break in our road,  
It may be an illusion that we follow,  
But it shall never play us false,  
Never.*

(The Leader sings)

*Our hair shall never turn grey,  
Never.  
We will never doubt the world and shut our eyes to ponder.  
Never.  
We will not grope in the maze of our mind.  
We flow with the flood of things, from the mountain to the sea,  
We will never be lost in the desert sand,  
Never.*

We can tell, by his looks, that Dada will some day go to the Old man, to receive his lessons.

Leader: Which Old Man?

The Old Man of the line of Adam.

He dwells in a cave, and never thinks of dying.

Leader: Where did you learn about him?

Oh, every one talks about him. And it is in the books also.

Leader: What does he look like?

Some say he is white, like the skull of a dead man. And some say he is dark, like the socket of the skeleton's eye.

But haven't you heard any news of him, Leader?

Leader: I don't believe in him at all.

Well, that goes entirely against current opinion. That Old Man is more existent than anything else. He lives within the ribs of creation.

According to our Pundit, it is we who have no existence. You can't be certain whether you are, or are not.

Chandra: We? Oh, we are too brand-new altogether. We haven't yet got our credentials to prove that we exist.

Leader: Have you really gone and opened communication with the Pundits?

Why? What harm is there in that, Leader?

Leader: You will become pale, like the white mist in autumn. Even the least colour of blood will disappear from your mind. I have a suggestion.

What, Leader? What?

Leader: You are looking out for a play?

Yes, yes, we got quite frantic about it.

We thought it over so vigorously that people had to run to the King's court to lodge a complaint.

Leader: Well, I can suggest a play which will be new.

What? -- What? -- Tell us.

Leader: Go and capture the Old Man.

That is new, no doubt, but we very much doubt if it's a play.

Leader: I am sure that you won't able to do it.

Not do it? We shall.

Leader: No, never.

Well, then, suppose we do capture him, what will you give us?

Leader: I shall accept you as my preceptor.

Preceptor! You want to make us grey, and cold, and old, before our time.

Leader: Then what do you want me to do?

If we capture him, then we shall take away your leadership.

Leader: That will be great relief to me. You have made all my bones out of joint already. Very well, then it's all settled?

Yes, settled. We shall bring him to you by the next full moon of Spring.

But what are we going to do with him?

Leader: You shall let him join in your Spring Festival.

Oh, no, that will be outrageous. Then the mango flowers will run to seed at once.

And all the cuckoos will become owls.

And the bees will go about reciting Sanskrit verses, making the air hum with m's and n's.

Leader: And your skull will be so top-heavy with prudence that it will be difficult for you to keep on your feet.

How awful!

Leader: And you will have rheumatics in all your joints.

How awful!

Leader: And you will become your own elder brothers, pulling your own ears to set yourselves right.

How awful!

Leader: And----

No more "ands." We are ready to surrender.

We will abandon our game of capturing the Old Man.

We will put it off till cold weather. In this Spring time your company will be enough for us.

Leader: Ah, I see! You have already got the chill of the Old Man in your bones.

Why? What are the symptoms?

Leader: You have no enthusiasm. You back out at the very start. Why don't you make a trial?

Very well. Agreed. Come on.

Let us go after the Old Man. We will pluck him out, like a grey hair, wherever we find him.

Leader: But the Old Man is an adept in the business of plucking out. His best weapon is the hoe.

You need not frighten us like that. When we are out for adventure, we must leave behind all fears, all quatrains, all Pundits, and all Scriptures.

(They sing)

*We are out on our way  
And we fear not the Robber, the Old Man.  
Our path is straight, it is broad,  
Our burden is light, for our pocket is bare,  
Who can rob us of our folly?  
For us there is no rest, nor ease, nor praise, nor success,  
We dance in the measure of fortune's rise and fall,  
We play our game, or win or lose,  
And we fear not the Robber.*