

ACT II

SONG-PRELUDE

[Spring's Heralds try to rob Winter of his outfit of age.]
Rear stage lighted up, disclosing Old Winter teased by the boys and girls representing Spring's Heralds.

SONG OF THE HERALDS OF SPRING

*We seek our playmates,
Waking them up from all corners before it is morning.
We call them in bird-songs,
Beckon them in nodding branches
We spread our spell for them in the splendour of clouds.
We laugh at solemn Death
Till he joins in our laughter.
We tear open Time's purse,
Taking back his plunder from him
You shall lose your heart to us, O Winter.
It will gleam in the trembling leaves
And break into flowers.*

SONG OF WINTER

*Leave me, let me go.
I sail for the bleak North, for the peace of the frozen shore.
Your laughter is untimely, my friends.
You turn my farewell tunes into the welcome song of the Newcomer,
And all things draw me back again into the dancing ring
of their hearts.*

SONG OF THE HERALDS OF SPRING

*Life's spies are we, lurking in ambush everywhere.
We wait to rob you of your last savings of withered hours
to scatter them in the wayward winds.
We shall bind you in flower-chains
where Spring keeps his captives,
For we know you carry your jewels of youth hidden in your grey rags.*

(Noon)

[The rear stage is darkened. The band of Youths enters on the main stage. No actual change in the scenery is necessary -- this being left to the imagination of the audience.]

Ferryman! Ferryman! Open your door.

Ferryman: What do you want?

We want the Old Man.

Ferryman: Which old man?

Not which old man? We want *the* Old Man.

Ferryman: Who is he?

The true and original Old Man.

Ferryman: Oh! I understand. What do you want him for?

For our Spring Festival.

Ferryman: For your Spring Festival? Are you become mad?

Not a sudden becoming. We have been like this from the beginning.

And we shall go on like this to the end.

(They sing)

*The Piper pipes in the centre, hidden from sight,
And we become frantic, we dance.
The March wind, seized with frenzy,
Runs and reels, and sways with noisy branches.
The sun and stars are drawn in the whirl of rapture.*

Now, Ferryman, give the news of the Old Man.

You ply your boat from one landing stage to another. Surely you know where----

Ferryman: My business is limited only to the path. But whose path it is, and what it means, I have no occasion to enquire. For my goal is the landing stage, not the house.

Very well. Let us go, let us try all the ways.

(They sing)

*The Piper pipes in the centre, hidden from sight.
Ah, the turbulent tune, to whose time the oceans dance,
And dance our heaving hearts.
Fling away all burdens and cares, brother,
Do not be doubtful of your path,
For the path wakes up of itself
Under the dancing steps of freedom.*

Ferryman: There comes the Watchman. Ask him. I know about the way; but he knows about the wayfarers.

Watchman: Who are you?

We are just what you see. That's our only description.

Watchman: But what do you want?

We want the Old Man.

Watchman: Which old man?

That eternal Old Man.

Watchman: How absurd! While you are seeking him, he is after you.

Why?

Watchman: He is fond of warming his cold blood with the wine of hot youth.

We'll give him a warm enough reception. All we want to see him. Have you seen him?

Watchman: My watch is at night. I see my people, but don't know their features. But, look here, every one knows that he is the great kidnapper; and you want to kidnap him! It's mid-summer madness.

The secret is out. It doesn't take long to discover that we are mad.

Watchman: I am the Watchman. The people I see passing along the road are very much alike. Therefore, when I see anything queer, it always strikes me.

Just listen to him. All the respectable people of our neighbourhood say just the same thing -- that we are queer.

Yes, we're queer. There's no mistake about that.

Watchman: But all this is utter childishness.

Do you hear that? It's exactly what our Dada says.

We have been going on with our childishness through unremembered ages.

And now we have become confirmed children.

And we have a leader, who is perfect veteran in childhood. He rushes along so recklessly that he drops off his age at every step he runs.

Watchman: And who are you?

We are butterflies, freed from the cocoon of Age.

Watchman: (aside): Mad. Raving mad.

Ferryman: Then what will you all do now?

Chandra: We shall go----

Watchman: Where?

Chandra: That we haven't decided.

Watchman: You have decided to go, but not where to go?

Chandra: Yes, that will settled as we go along.

Watchman: What does that mean?

Chandra: It means this song.

(They sing)

*We move and move without rest,
We move while the wanderers' stars shine in the sky and fade.
We play the tune of the road
While our limbs scatter away the laughter of movement,
And our many-coloured mantle of youth flutters about in the air.*

Watchman: Is it your custom to answer questions by songs?

Chandra: Yes, otherwise answer becomes too unintelligible.

Watchman: Then you think your songs intelligible?

Chandra: Yes, quite, because they contain music.

(They sing)

*We move and move without rest.
World, the Rover, loves his comrades of the road.
His call comes across the sky,
The seasons lead the way, strewing the path with flowers.*

Watchman: No ordinary being ever breaks out singing, like this, in the middle of talking.

Chandra: Again we are found out. We are not ordinary beings.

Watchman: Have you got no work to do?

Chandra: No, we are on a holiday.

Watchman: Why?

Chandra: Lest our time will be all wasted.

Watchman: I don't quite understand you.

Chandra: Then we shall be obliged to sing again.

Watchman: No, no. There is no need to do that. I don't hope to understand any better, even if you do sing.

Chandra: Everybody has given up the hope of understanding us.

Watchman: But how can things get on you, if you behave like this?

Chandra: Oh, there's no need for things to get on with us, so long we ourselves get on.

Watchman: Mad! Quite mad! Raving mad!

Chandra: Why, here comes our Dada.

Dada, what made you lag behind?

Chandra: Don't you know? We are free as wind, because we have no substance in us.
But Dada is like the rain-cloud of August. He must stop, every now and then, to unburden himself.

Dada: Who are you?

Ferryman: I am the Ferryman.

Dada: And who are you?

Watchman: I am the Watchman.

Dada: I am delighted to see you. I want to read you something that I have written. It contains nothing frivolous, but only the most important lessons.

Ferryman: Very good. Let us have it then.

Watchman: Our master used to tell us that there are plenty of men to say good things, but very few to listen. That requires strength of mind. Now, go on, Sir, go on.

Dada: I saw, in the street, one of the King's officers dragging along a merchant. The King had made up a false charge, in order to get his money. This gave me an inspiration. You must know that I never write a single line which is not inspired by some actual fact. You can put my verses to the test in open streets and markets----

Ferryman: Please, Sir, do let us hear what you have written.

Dada: *The sugar-cane filling itself with juice
 Is chewed and sucked dry by all beggars.
 O foolish men, take your lesson from this;
 Those trees are saved, which are fruitful.*

You will understand that the sugar-cane gets into trouble, simply because it tries to keep its juice. But nobody is foolish as to kill the tree that freely gives fruit.

Watchman: What splendid writing, Ferryman!

Ferryman: Yes, Watchman, it contains great lessons for us.

Watchman: It gives me food for thought. If only I had here our neighbour, the Scribe! I should like to take this down. Do send round to tell the people of the place to assemble.

Chandra: But, Ferryman, you promised to come out with us. Yet, if once Dada begins to quote his quatrains, there will be----

Ferryman: Go along with you. None of your madness here. We are fortunate now in having met our master. Let us improve the occasion with good words. We are all of us getting old. Who knows when we shall die?

All the more reason why you should cultivate our company.

Chandra: You can always find another Dada. But when once we are dead, God will never repeat the blunder of another absurdity like us again.

(Enters Oilman)

Oilman: Ho! Watchman.

Watchman: Who is there? Is it the Oilman?

Oilman: The child I was bringing up was kidnapped last night.

Watchman: By whom?

Oilman: By the Old Man.

Youths (together): Old Man? You don't mean it. Old Man?

Oilman: Yes, Sirs, the Old Man; what makes you so glad?

Oh, that's the bad habit of ours. We become glad for no reason whatever.

Watchman (aside): Mad! Raving mad!

Have you seen the Old Man?

Oilman: I think I saw him in the distance last night.

First Youth: What did he look like?

Oilman: Black. More black than our brother here, the Watchman. Black as night, with two eyes on his breast shining like two glow-worms.

That won't suit us. That would be awkward for our Spring Festival.

Chandra: We shall have to change our date from the full moon to the dark moon. For the dark moon has no end of eyes on her breast.

Watchman: But I warn you, my friends, you are not doing wisely.

No, we are not.

We are found out again. We never do anything wisely. It is contrary to our habit.

Watchman: Do you take this to be a joke? I warn you, my friends. It is dangerous.

Dangerous? That's the best joke of all.

(They sing)

*We are neither too good nor wise,
That is all the merit we have.
Our calumny spreads from land to land,
And danger dogs our steps.*

*We take great care to forget what is taught us.
We say things different from the book,
Bringing upon us trouble,
And rebuke from learned.*

Watchman: Ah, Sir, you spoke about some Leader. Where is he? He could have kept you in order, if he were with you.

He never stays with us, lest he should have to keep us in order.

He simply launches us on our way, and then slips off.

Watchman: That's a poor idea of leadership.

Chandra: He is never concerned about his leadership. That is why we recognize him as our Leader.

Watchman: Then he has got a very easy task.

Chandra: It is no easy task to lead men. But it is easy enough to drive them.

(They sing)

*We are neither too good nor wise,
That is all the merit we have.
In a luckless moment we were born,
When the star of wisdom was the dimmest.
We can hope for no profit from our adventures,
We move on, because we must.*

Dada, come on. Let us go.

Watchman: No, no, Sir. Don't you get yourself into mischief in their company.

Ferryman: You read your verses, Sir, to us. Our neighbours will be here soon. They will be greatly profited.

Dada: No. I'm not going to move a step from here.

Then let us move. The men in the street can't bear us.

That's because we rattle them too much.

You hear the hum of human bees, they smell the honey of Dada's quatrains.

Youths (together): They come! They come!

(Enter Village folk)

Villager: It is true that there is going to be a reading? Who are you? Are you going to read?

No. We commit all kinds of atrocities, but not that. This one merit will bring us salvation.

Villager: What do they say? They seem to be talking in riddles.

Chandra: We only say things which we perfectly understand ourselves, and they are riddles to you. Dada repeats to you things which you understand perfectly, and these sound to you the very essence of wisdom.

(Boy enters)

Boy: I couldn't catch him.

Whom?

Boy: The Old Man, whom you are seeking.

Have you seen him?

Boy: Yes, I thought I saw him going by in a car.

Where? In what direction?

Boy: I couldn't make out exactly. The dust raised by his wheels is still whirling in the air.

Then let us go.

He has filled the sky with dead leaves.

[They go out

Watchman: They are mad! Quite mad! Raving mad!