

Night of the Scorpion

I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.

Parting with his poison - flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room -
he risked the rain again.

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.

With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the mud-baked walls
they searched for him: he was not found.
They clicked their tongues.
With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved
in Mother's blood, they said.

May he sit still, they said
May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May your suffering decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.
May the sum of all evil
balanced in this unreal world

against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain.
May the poison purify your flesh

of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
they said, and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre,
the peace of understanding on each face.
More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,
more insects, and the endless rain.
My mother twisted through and through,
groaning on a mat.
My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
He even poured a little paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.
I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with
an incantation.
After twenty hours
it lost its sting.

My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children.

Acceptance

Lyrics: Nissim Ezekiel

Music : Nandu Bhende-Ezekiel

I am alone
and you are alone.
So why can't we be
alone together?
Why can't we talk,
and why can't we go
for a walk?

I needn't say more.

You can ring me up
when you are alone.
I can ring you up
when I am alone. Then we won't be alone
any longer, my dear.
We won't be alone
any longer.

Need I say any more?

Yes, I understand
my dear, I understand...
you can't be alone
together with me.
We can't meet to talk,
we can't meet to go
for a walk.

You're afraid to ring me up
even when you are alone.
They will suspect you...
They will be angry.
Somehow they will know
that you and I
were alone together.
And that's not allowed.

When you are alone,
you have to be alone.
And when I am alone,
I have to be alone
We can't be alone together,
my dear, we can't be alone together.



Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel (16 December 1924- 9 January 2004) was born to a Bene Israel family of educators in Bombay. He is often referred to as the founder of India's post-colonial English literary movement. He was a poet, playwright, editor, literary critic and lyricist. His first collection of poetry, *A Time to Change and Other Poems*, was published in 1952. He was a prolific writer and went on to publish over ten collections as well as a body of work in other genres.

Ezekiel received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for *Latter Day Psalms* and the Padma Shri from the President of India in 1988. He was professor of English and reader in American literature at University of Mumbai during the 1990s as well as the secretary of the Indian branch of PEN.

Later in his career he began to write song lyrics for his nephew Nandu Bhende produced in a collection called *Songs for Nandu Bhende*. A later collection, *More songs for Nandu Bhende*, included the song "Acceptance". As Usha Bhende, the wife of nephew Nandu, proudly explains, "The words of this particular song are often quoted by the President of Israel Mr. Shimon Peres and he quoted them last year at the Maccabiah Games."

Nandu set this song to music and performed it live at the Israel Independence Day function in Mumbai in April 2010. It was recorded in his studio, Insync Studio, and the CD was sent to President Peres personally. ♪