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 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.