



9



Yashodharā

As always Gopā woke up early, but on this morning
She found the room inert like a lifeless body

Bitter anguish swept through her mind and as she heaved
heavy sighs;
In all directions she turned, her eyes were wet with tears.

She found no morning melody filling the air,
And her palace maids were motionless like figurines on a canvas,

Now even figures in scroll paintings drawn by a gifted painter can
engender mirth
But the living maids even lacked smiles, much less the urge to move
about

One or two standing there had their garments trailing on the ground,
As some turned toward the door with their temples supported by their
clenched fists.

A jade lamp-stand with extinguished wicks lay on the ground, broken in
two,
On one side stood a pretty jeweled bowl next to a gold vessel with a spout.

Broken flower garlands were strewn here and there,
Near other faded flowers cast about, all in a mess.

Things were scattered about, but no one there attended to them as
Only the heartache agonizing those living there could be seen.

To her, the beautiful maidens seemed as
Many stars twinkling in a moonless sky

On the no-moon day in the pitch-dark blackness of the night—
The lord of her life had absented their raised bejeweled bed.

—
—

Her mind in disarray came to ache, “Something happened to my beloved one!
Something happened to the noble one,” she said, feeling utter certainty.

The duty of the lovely is to feel suspicion about her beloved,
So his physical absence further anguished her mind.

Her face reflected the whirlpool of emotions spinning in her heart
And the corners of her eyes were clouded and bedimmed.

She seemed ready to ask, “Where has the prince, my life partner, gone!”
But her outburst was choked off and no words escaped her mouth.

She burst into convulsive sobbing, muttering only, “O Lord, My Master!”
As she sat still pressing her face against the pillow and sighing deeply.

Her sobbing having alerted all the ill-fated ones,¹
So Manoharā later went nearer to cheer her up.

Clasping her and rubbing her back gently, she said, “Your life mate
Where can he go as the tether of your love will assuredly pull him back here!”

This solace from her lips only fanned the flame of her mental agony,
Stopping to heave long sighs and sobs, she then replied—

“Do you know where my revered lord has gone, leaving me alone?
Today I feel an endless twitching on my right side;

By some cruel twist, we have been separated from each other!
How am I to live with this hot cinder within me. Soon it will turn to fire.”

After saying this, she burst into sobs and joined the palace maids’ hands
with hers;
But finding no answer, they simply kept clearing disheveled hair from her
face.

Others came and once many friends arrived and gathered around her,
Manoharā recounted the events as they had appeared to her—

“Early this morning when I awoke in the adjacent room
I found the house door wide open so

In no time, I rushed here
And found this room weeping because it had lost its master.

¹ That is, all those now or who have ever been separated from their loved ones.

Knowing this, I went directly to the courtyard
And heard the gatekeepers report as follows—

“The palace gateway was found wrecked and in pieces
As the prince, horse, and charioteer are all missing.

With the intention of knowing their whereabouts, the king
Sent messengers on horseback in all directions!

So wherever he may be, even in heaven or in the nether worlds
The king will certainly see his son recovered and brought back.”²

“This may be the very cause of my nightmare last night!
Without him, the lord of my life, why not snap the cord of my own
lifespan!

I do not want to live on any longer.” After saying this, she beat her chest
Threw away her scarf, then tugged at and pulled out her hair with her left
hand.

After the swift currents of unbearable sorrow swept away all her awareness,
She fainted and fell onto the luxurious and soft bed.

One then immediately brought her a golden urn filled with perfume,
Then dashed some cold water on her hair, mixing it with the scent.

Some of her companions cooled her with yak-tail whisks and other fans,
Others forced her to gulp down some water, holding her nose and mouth.

Through this first aid, she regained consciousness and opened her eyes,
renewed.

But Gopā did not eat anything, as though she were fasting.

When the infant prince Rāhula, Gautama’s son, was heard crying,
A nurse rushed there and came back holding him.

She then took her son and held him close to her heart,
Though we know not what her innermost feelings were, she soon burst
into sobs.

A palace maid consoled her, saying, “Lady Lord! Excess crying is no good,
Rheumatism may ruin your health, so please eat some food,

Confusion
and the
Conse-
lation of
a New-
born Son

² We add the closing hearsay quotation mark, but it is absent in the printed text.

Look at his face and please take great solace in your son.³
Compassionately, Yashodharā replied to her through her crying—

“This child must certainly be ominous with
His father and mother separated like this,

Though we have been like milk and water
This one has led to our separation.

Alas! When I had this child in my womb
His highness⁴ used to ask, “What do you fancy beloved?”⁴

When I once said I felt like eating clay,
He rushed to serve me bamboo shoots.

Alas, who else could ever care for me like this—
What misfortune this child has brought!

Ill-destined and ill-fated he surely is
We know not what has been written on his forehead!⁵

Return of
Chandaka
and
Events
Recounted

As she then brushed her son’s hair with her hand, her lips quivered
And she lamented day and night like this for several days.

Then a palace maid appeared bearing a message—
“Chandaka, the prince’s loving companion, has returned.”

On hearing her say the word “prince” Gopā mumbled, “*Hail!*”
and smiled,
But later when she learned only the charioteer was back, she burst into
violent sobs.

Like Hanumān holding a jeweled signet ring with the name
Rāma on it
When he went into the Ashoka garden of Dashānana⁶

Chandaka came there holding all the prince’s jewelry and crown,
Showing his tear-stained face before the Shākya princess.

³ The high honorific is used here.

⁴ We correct the use of hearsay quotation marks in this section.

⁵ A common South Asian expression expressing how, at birth, karmic destinies are set to ripen.

⁶ In the *Rāmāyana*, the monkey king Hanumān steals into the demon Rāvanā’s palace (here referred to as Dashānana) to give imprisoned Sītā a sign of her husband’s being alive and coming to her impending rescue. Here the poet compares Chandaka’s appearance with Hanumān’s.

Upon seeing him, her mind's anguish doubled,
As the sight of her beloved's belongings further inflamed her
agony.

What can any person do! Nothing but break down and cry!
She knew not even what to ask about her master.

But Manoharā who knew her thoughts hastened to blurt out—
“Sir! You always come into this room to accompany the prince,

But what happened today as you come here alone? Where did you desert
the lord?”

His patience was pierced by these dart-tipped heartrending words.

“Aw! What unfortunate karma!” he repeated and heaved a deep sigh,
Then squatted down and unpacked the bundle he had carried there.

With folded hands he started shedding tears, too
As his body trembled violently in fear of the king.

So with head downcast, he spoke in a choked-up voice and while
Still trying to be brave, gave the following report of the happenings—

“Then! O Then! Yes on that dark night several days back
My own heart pounded violently when

‘Fetch my horse, Fetch my horse,’ the prince commanded
So I fetched the horse, such is a servant's duty, so what could
I do!”

Overpowered by her grief and not discerning right or wrong,
Yashodharā lifted up her head and hissed this challenge—

“Is this what you did in return for your being raised here all your life?”
Stunned, Chandaka stepped back, then replied—

“I was shouting and shrieking so beneath this window,
But whether drowned out by the thunder or your being overcome by
sleep

No one arose from bed to stop the Lord.
So I went along following him as he rode off on his horse.

By morning we reached the bank of the Anomā River,
Merciful mother! There he cut off his locks of hair and

Removed all the fine multihued jewels,
Silken clothes, crown, sword and

He ordered me to take them and the horse back.
Thus sent, the horse died along the way.

I, too, am finished and since I have displeased the king so,
So you alone can be my savior.

Yet your servant's wrongdoings are serious, indeed,
Gracious, merciful mother! Do forgive them all,

Whatever my Lord told me, this very response he made to me and
Having listened to all he said, I will relate the summary to you—

'From the waters of love dammed up in the ocean of my heart
The clouds of universal love will rain on the parched lands of
humanity,

Merciful mother! As I have now donned the orange robes,
Stay and spend your days looking after Rāhula.'⁷

After breaking this dagger-like news, Chandaka retreated a little
Consigning to his heart the rest of the matter.

Gopā's
Misery
and
Musings
on Her
Marriage

Though this shook her whole body, as a tree root quakes when an axe
violently lays into it

Gopā prepared an arrow with the essence of compassion—

"Right up to the realm of death went Sāvitrī together with her husband,⁸
Jānakī also went along with the gem of the Raghu dynasty,⁹

To the Dandakāraṇya forest contending with heat and cold
Repeating the chant, 'Dear husband, Dear husband...'

If I, too, had the pleasure of being taken into the forest together
I would be roaming those woods with him as if they were a pleasure grove.

⁷ Note that the poet does not have Chandaka repeat the exact words at all.

⁸ The poet here may be making a reference to the Vedic goddess who is the personified, initiatory verse for twice-born Hindus, whose husband is the sun. Or it could be to Sāvitrī, the wife of Brahmā. But it is probably a reference to Sāvitrī, the daughter of a king of Madra named legendary king Ashvapati, who in the *Mahābhārata* is the "model of conjugal love" (Monier-Williams 1899, 1211).

⁹ That is, Rāma.

Pages 157, 158 and 159 were skipped to get to Yashodhara's lament.



Yashodhara laments with her palace attendants.

There was a pair of ruddy geese oblivious to their separation¹³
Who made love pecking at each other's feathers.

Upon hearing their sweet sounds when she went to the pond's edge to
see them,
She did not see her husband as she once did reflected with her in its waters.

Only her palace maids were found when she looked back and then she
Recalled past incidents when she and her husband looked in the pond
with hands joined.

The jingling made by her golden anklets that sounded like duck cries
Caused the geese and many other water birds to flock close to her feet.

So on the marble steps she squatted, as if laying aside a heavy burden
With half her foot submerged beneath the water.

Shaken by the hurricane that separated her from her husband
Her foot dyed red with *alaka*¹⁴ seemed like a full-blown lotus.

Upon seeing her pitiful plight, a ripe and luscious pomegranate fell from its tree
And broke nearby, exposing its own heartache.

¹³ The fowl pairs of *Anas casarca* mate for life but are thought to be separated at night and
mourn their separation every evening.

¹⁴ Traditional red dye with which manicurists paint the toes.

When Gopā caught sight of this, in her mind's eye she saw it thus—
 “Having seen a suffering woman, this happened just to mock me.”

So she insisted plainly, “Leave it not before me, throw it away yonder.”
 On one side she saw the autumn queen invoking her beloved—

A little distance away, trees such as citron, lime, orange, blackberry, sweet lime,
Nhishi fruit, and more were bent down with their loads

And half-covered in a wrap of yellow leaf growth
 They turned to the east and unfurled their eye-like leaves.

As she bent down there to examine her youthful beauty and held her
 maid's hand tightly,
 Recalling what her husband once said, she spoke—

“It was one day, my companions! While cavorting together in this garden
 The prince as we reached here said to me— ‘Gopā! You must have been
 cursed

In a previous birth, to have been incarnated on this earth as a woman,¹³
 You must have been a celestial nymph sent from a heavenly city.’

I also recall the occasion when my husband gathered oranges that had
 fallen
 When then he whispered these words in my ear—

‘Only a very little beauty has this one stolen from you yet
 See how tempting it looks, Darling! And yet look at that complexion!’

‘I don't like this sort of teasing, so try being more tactful!’
 At these words of mine, my lord became even more cheerful than before.

When I recall what the lord of my life once uttered while pointing to that
 blackberry
 It drives me almost mad, so I really don't want to do any more
 reminiscing.

My noble prince said to me with his eyes fixed upon this placid pool
 Binding me with steadfast love to the core of my heart—

¹³ The traditional Buddhist view is that women enjoy inferior karma compared to men, having to suffer their monthly periods and childbirth. Here, however, her misfortune is having been born a woman after having previously been a celestial being.

'The cool season has not yet arrived, yet the sun's heat scorches no more
The streams and the pools have turned clear, my dear, just like your very
heart.'

Dear companions! Drawn by love and affection for their youngsters
We see countless birds flying through the blue air

Winging back to their nests and making sweet warblings,
'Let us return to our house' the husband is certainly saying.⁶⁶

Having said this, she wiped the tears from her eyes, heaved a long sigh,
Then accompanied by her attendants, she plodded back aimlessly.

From the distance came the *mala/bri* tune⁶⁶ played by a flute,
Then a *paschim* drumbeat that sounded like, "Mohini festival is over."

Also overheard was, "The festival of lights⁶⁷ is fifteen days hence, isn't it!
Your brother this year will give you rich clothes as presents, won't he?"

"You, too, will receive more fine clothes from your husband next year."
Thus conversing, two women garland makers came along, laughing.

One had a basket laden with chrysanthemums that she held close to her
chest
The other held a colorful string of filigree and nut flowers.

The elegant evening breeze was playing a game with their sari and shawl
fringes,
Stalks of fully grown marigold flowers were feeling the touch of their
broad hips.

Such pleasure with their own lives was felt keenly within Gopst's heart as
"Ah," she exclaimed, looking down and leaning on a *sham* tree.

After a little while when she lifted her eyes, she saw two stars rising
Pointing all around to them, she said while sobbing—

"The delightful pleasures of autumn! This is where, for enjoying them
We came together on the run for our daily round to just there.

⁶⁶ A pleasant melody played during the Mohini festival (called Dasain in Nepali, Dasheera in India), conveying the sense of this season's family reunions and harvest time rejoicing.

⁶⁷ Alluded to is Saanti, also known in northern Indic languages as Tihar, the festival of the goddess Lakshmi, which falls a month after Mohini.

This is where, when we stopped to see the beautiful evenings,
My husband, my lord, used to point out the stars for me, 'Look at that
one there,' he said.

When I was unable to see the exact one he pointed to despite my best
efforts
He would join his hands with mine, point to the sky and repeat—

'See how a pair of stars twinkle just there, cuddling each other.'
I leaned on him and said, touching him, 'Now I've seen them.'

Then my lord took me to that place there under the tree, and held me
tightly
Right there, exactly from where the moon can be seen rising in the east.

See the light suffused there even now, making me sure the moon is soon
rising,
But now, foe-like, the moonlight comes to frighten me.

Sunk into the burning furnace of separation, who can save
The life of a heart-broken heroine? But the full moon

Tried by spreading its icy-cold hands with loving care
But its hands were burnt. Look how the moon's face is spotted with black
burn marks.¹⁸

Seeing the beauty of a maiden missing her beloved distant husband
To be like the sea, the moon might have come to bathe in it

But today if it had spread its hands out in the autumn night
She might just have spit in his face, *pbu-si pbu-si*.

Or, perhaps for soothing the aching heart of one suffering the pangs of
separation
And for sending a message of love to the lovelorn beloved now out of sight

Kindhearted nature might have given the full moon on which to write
'Darling! You must not forget me!' that would have been his message.

Dear companions! My noble husband also must similarly have written a
note to me so
Lift your eyes and look carefully once more to see if there is also one for me.

¹⁸ In the Indic poetry tradition, the moon is a romantic, erotic symbol; it can also be used as a
symbol on which to project unfulfilled desires.

For my part, I am weary of casting my unblinking eyes constantly on it
When not even a single letter in his handwriting have I been able to make
out.²⁰

Seeing their mistress again in lamentation, the maids also became perturbed.
One among them, losing her self-control, decided to break the silence and

Squatting on the carpet of grass, she pressed her right hand down on the
ground
So that her golden bangles jingled; after wiping her eyes with her left
hand, she said,

“The high price of true love the male heart does not understand
So it has been their task to wound female hearts since the time of the
golden age.”²¹

Another one spoke in agreement, “You have spoken the truth.”
Still another told stories of lovelorn married women separated from their
husbands—

“Nala ran away leaving Damayanti all alone in the forest fast asleep,²²
‘In quest for the truth’ Harischandra brought Saibyā to grief,²¹

By being so devoted to his brother, Lakṣman caused Urmilā²² to live in
tearless grief²³
Still another added to it, forcing a little smile to her [Gopā’s] lips—

“King Vishvāntara after completely giving away his sons and daughters
Even gave his wife as alms, saying ‘perfection of giving’²³—

I would like to curse all such wicked males; they make me so angry.²³
But these words instead of cheering her up again moved her to tears. Said
Yashodharā—

²⁰ *Sarjā yaga*.

²¹ In a story already annotated from the *Mahābhārata*, Damayanti and her husband, King Nala, lost their kingdom. While wandering alone through the wilderness, Damayanti had to endure severe hardships, but in her devotion to her husband remained entirely unshaken.

²² See chapter 2, note 6.

²³ He was so much attached to his elder brother, Rāma, that he accompanied him during the fourteen years of his exile while leaving his wife Urmilā behind in Ayodhya. Being so staunch a devotee of his brother, Lakṣman caused Urmilā to suffer the pangs of separation.

²⁴ *Dāna pārasaitā*, a term central to Mahāyāna Buddhism. One expects that the author is drawing upon the *Vibhūṣaṇa Śāstra*, the text recounting the last human birth of the future Buddha. In it, his wife in that life is reborn as Yashodharā here. Her smile might be the poet’s subtle and erudite indication of her having at least an inkling of the memory of being Vishvāntara’s wife in a previous incarnation.

"My case is different from theirs since they certainly had hope, but for me,
The days ahead are pure suffering, full of fears and tears.

Since when their evil days passed, the beloved were reunited with their
loved one again.

I know not what I did in previous births, friends! O what bad karma!"

Bursting into convulsive sobs again, and after she stood still,
One of her wise companions held up the shawl that had slipped off her
shoulder

Then reprimanded the bad-tempered maid in this way,

"Apt words never escape from her lips, what a poor talker she has been!"

Wiping away the tears from her own eyes, she said to Gopā, "Queen, all your
Lamentations suit you no longer. Steel yourself with the power of
equanimity."

Then she embraced her and added—"You are still the consort of the
Hermit prince, so what is it that makes you grieve so much?"

"Mountains and forests were peaceful abodes for your ancestors in the
Ikṣvāku Dynasty
Your Highness! For true Shākya women, their houses are forests for
austerities."

These words helped her forget her depression a bit and after she stopped
weeping

Gopā resolved to live the life of a female ascetic in her own house.

She said, "So what are the ascetic precepts the Lord of my heart is
observing?"

I will also try to follow them, too, however difficult this proves to be."

"You were a dutiful consort, but now you have embraced an even nobler path,"
The wise maid answered, adding much more, telling the friends other details—

"Injuring life, stealing, and sexual misconduct
You certainly abstain from, so no more need be said!

Abstention from uttering every kind of falsehood,
Restraining one's own mind,

Eschewing intoxicating drinks,
Taking only one meal a day,

Gopā's
Asceticism
within
the Palace

—
—
—

Giving up singing and musical entertainments,
And not playing games or dancing,

Avoiding the use of perfumes and make-up,
Eschewing adornments around the neck,

And all other golden decorations and jewelry,
All abandoned, these too may be vowed,²⁴

The use of colorful silken clothes can be avoided,
Only yellow robes may be put on,

Sitting on lofty beds may be eschewed,
All these precepts you will do well to observe.²⁵

Consoling her in this manner, when they reached the palace gateway,
The Shākya princess looked up and saw a lamp suspended from a bamboo
pole.²⁵

In an absentminded way as she looked at it twisting in the wind
A thought crossed her mind, “Despair cannot blow out my hope.”²⁶

Mustard seeds of memories having been fried by grief’s fire in the oil mill
of her heart;²⁶
Once well-crushed in the oil press of separation pangs, these in turn

Produced “tear oil” and this ignited the lamp of hope to see her lord so.
Then she went inside with her clay lamp—like eyes²⁷ flickering tearfully.

²⁴ All of these vows anticipate the rules for Buddhist monks and nuns that will be later specified in the canonical code of conduct, the Vinaya. Of course, as he has yet to reach enlightenment, this is out of historical sequence.

²⁵ *Akaywater*. Every day between the full moon of Kartika month and the next full moon, called Sakimā, in the late fall, many Newar households suspend a wick lamp called *Akaywater* from a long bamboo pole set up on their rooftops and keep it burning all night, every night. Both Hindus and Buddhists follow this custom and make the lamp offering each evening to the local deity called Gahatwā Dyah, “the Snow Mountain God,” visible on clear days on the northern horizon. Hindus identify this deity as Viṣṇu; Buddhists as the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

²⁶ Although this long sentence and its extended mustard oil metaphor may seem peculiar to a Western reader, for older Newars the traditional use of mustard oil for lamps and cooking is familiar. The oil press is a regular feature of every city, with a special caste, the *Manandhars*, following their traditional occupation as millers.

²⁷ The comparison here is Gopt’s eyes with round clay bowls (*sañ*) that are used for simple lamp making, needing only oil and a wick. The poet here artfully implies that her eyes were both large and serving her vow of ascetic devotion.