



English

Rajam and Mani

RIVER SARAYU was the pride of Malgudi. It was some ten minutes walk from Ellaman Street, the last street of the town, chiefly occupied by oilmongers. Its sandbanks were the evening resort of all the people of the town. The Municipal President took any distinguished visitor to the top of the Town Hall and proudly pointed to him Sarayu in moonlight, glistening like a silver belt across the North. The usual evening crowd was on the sand. Swaminathan and Mani sat aloof on a river-step, with their legs dangling in water. The peepul branches overhanging the river rustled pleasantly. A light breeze played about the boughs and scattered stray leaves on the gliding stream below. Birds filled the air with their cries. Far away, near Nallappa's Mango Grove, a little downstream, a herd of cattle was crossing the river. And then a country cart drawn by bullocks passed, the cartman humming a low tune. It was some fifteen minutes past sunset and there was a soft red in the West. 'The water runs very deep here, doesn't it?' Mani asked. 'Yes, why?' 'I am going to bring Rajam here, bundle him up, and throw him into the river.' Rajam was a fresh arrival in the First A. He had sauntered into the class on the reopening day of the Second Term, walked up to the last bench, sat beside Mani, and felt very comfortable indeed till Mani gave him a jab in the ribs, which he returned. He had impressed the whole class on the very first day. He was a newcomer; he dressed very well--he was the only boy in the class who wore socks and shoes, fur cap and tie, and a wonderful coat and knickers. Swami and Friends 12 R. K. Narayan Dear Friends, this is a backup copy of the original works in my personal library. I had a bad luck in getting back the books I lend to my friends. I am trying to make the text in digital form to ensure that I am not going to loose any of them. As I have an original printed edition, its sure that the writer/publisher already got their share. As on my knowledge there is no legal issues in giving my library collections to my friends, those who loves to read. Kindly delete this file after reading and it would be taken as I got the book back. With Thanks and regards your friend Antony. mail me to antonyboban@gmail.com He came to the school in a car. As well as all this, he proved to be a very good student too. There were vague rumours that he had come from some English boys' school somewhere in Madras. He spoke very good English, 'Exactly like a "European"'; which meant that few in the school could make out what he said. Many of his class-mates could not trust themselves to speak to him, their fund of broken English being small. Only Sankar, the genius of the class, had the courage to face him, though his English sounded halting and weak before that of Rajam. This Rajam was a rival to Mani. In his manner to Mani he assumed a certain nonchalance to which Mani was not accustomed. If Mani jabbed, Rajam jabbed; if Mani clouted, he clouted; if Mani

kicked, he kicked. If Mani was the overlord of the class, Rajam seemed to be nothing less. And add to all this the fact that Rajam was a regular seventy percenter, second only to Sankar. There were sure indications that Rajam was the new power in the class. Day by day as Mani looked on, it was becoming increasingly clear that a new menace had appeared in his life. All this lay behind his decision on the river-step to bundle up Rajam and throw him into the river. Swaminathan expressed a slight fear: "You forget that his father is the police superintendent.' Mani remained silent for a while and said, What do I care? Some night I am going to crack his shoulders with my clubs.' 'If I were you, I would keep out of the way of policemen. They are an awful lot,' said Swaminathan. 'If you were me! Huh! But thank God I am not you, a milk-toothed coward like you.' Swaminathan bit his lips and sighed. 'And that reminds me,' said the other, 'you are in need of a little warning. I find you hanging about that Rajam a bit too much. Well, have a care for your limbs. That is all I can say.' Swami and Friends 13 R. K. Narayan Dear Friends, this is a backup copy of the original works in my personal library. I had a bad luck in getting back the books I lend to my friends. I am trying to make the text in digital form to ensure that I am not going to loose any of them. As I have an original printed edition, its sure that the writer/publisher already got their share. As on my knowledge there is no legal issues in giving my library collections to my

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friends, those who loves to read. Kindly delete this file after reading and it would be taken as I got the book back. With Thanks and regards your friend Antony. Did Mani think that Swaminathan could respect anyone but him, Mani the dear old friend and guide? What made him think so? As far as Swaminathan could remember, he had never been within three yards of Rajam. Oh, how he hated him! That vile upstart! When had Mani seen him with Rajam? Oh, yes, it must have been during the Drawing period on Monday. It was Rajam who had come and talked to him in spite of the cold face that Swaminathan had turned to him. That ass had wanted a pencil sharpener, which he did not get, as he was promptly directed to go to a shop and buy it if he needed it so urgently. Oh, there was no comparison between Rajam and Mani. This pleased Mani greatly. For the first time that evening he laughed, and laughed heartily too. He shook Swaminathan and gave such an affectionate twist to his ear that Swaminathan gave a long howl. And then he suddenly asked, 'Did you bring the thing that I wanted?' My mother was all the time in the kitchen. I could not get it.' ('It' referred to lime pickles.) 'You are a nasty little coward--Oh, this riverbank and the fine evening.

How splendid it would have been!' Swaminathan was to act as a cord of communication between Rajam and Mani. They were sitting in the last bench with their backs against the yellow wall. Swaminathan sat between Rajam and Mani. Their books were before them on the desks; but their minds were busy. Mani wrote on a piece of paper 'Are you a man?' and gave it to Swaminathan, who pushed it across to Rajam, putting on as offensive a look as possible. Rajam read it, crumpled it, and threw it away. At which Mani wrote another note repeating the question, with the addition 'You are the son of a dog if you don't answer this,' and pushed it across. Raja hissed into Swaminathan's face, 'You scoundrel, don't disturb me,' and crumpled the letter. Further progress was stopped. 'Swaminathan, stand up,' said the teacher. Swaminathan stood up faithfully. 'What is Lisbon famous for?' asked the teacher. Swaminathan hesitated and ventured, 'For being the capital of Spain.' The teacher bit his moustache and fired a second question, 'What do you know about the Indian climate?' 'It is hot in summer and cold in winter.' 'Stand up on the bench!' roared the teacher. And Swaminathan stood up without a protest. He was glad that he was given this supposedly degrading punishment instead of the cane. The teacher resumed his lessons: Africa was a land of forests., Nile was the most important river there. Did they understand? What did he say? He selected someone from the first bench to answer this question. (Nile was the most important river in Africa, the boy answered promptly, and the teacher was satisfied.) What was Nile? (The most important river in Africa, a boy answered with alacrity and was instantly snubbed for it, for he had to learn not to answer before he was asked to.) Silence. Silence. Why was there such a lot of noise in the class? Let them go on making & noise and they would get a clean, big zero in the examination. He would see to that. Swaminathan paid no attention to the rest of the lessons. His mind began to wander. Standing on the bench, he stood well over the whole class. He could see so many heads, and he classified them according to the caps: there were four red caps, twenty-five Gandhi caps, ten fur caps, and so on. When the work for the day was over, Swaminathan, Mani, and Rajam, adjourned to a secluded spot to say what was in their minds. Swaminathan stood between them and acted as the medium of communication. They were so close that they could have heard each other even if they had spoken in whispers. But it