

Scene of Mostly Unwilling Players

by Ajay Vishwanathan

Father outside the door

Chewing on peppered peanuts, thin flakes scattered carelessly around his squat, Father unfurls his turban and mops his clammy pate with an open palm. He can hear the muffled noises from inside. Then, running his finger over his thick mustache he squints at the village sun and at the half-open wooden door that groans in the unhurried breeze.

Mother cooking inside

Crouched in the corner over a clay oven fired by compressed cow dung, Mother stirs chick peas and potatoes boiling in a broth whose hissing rivals the sounds from behind a ragged curtain quavering on one side of the cramped room. Stifling her sniffles, she attempts to check the flow of commingled sweat and tears.

Behind the curtain

My sister is probably wishing she had died with her husband instead of returning home an uninvited widow. Now, on a creaky cot, she is forced to stomach the virile weight of a landlord who has agreed to waive Father's debt in return for time with my sister.

Me nowhere

Crushed by labored voices I don't want to hear and the silence of Father and Mother, I sit next to the wooden toy train Father built for me in happier days and stare at the glistening edge of a knife lying next to Mother's curled toes. Only now do I recognize the inbred difference between what I crave to do and what I will end up doing. The sounds have stopped. The wind outside has stepped up. Father will be debt-free.

