

When I Was Twelve

Getting Started

- * Most of us enjoy drawing cartoons. With pencil or pen in hand, we sometimes cannot stop ourselves from creating cartoons for all the ideas we have. Have you drawn cartoons in your notebooks during class hours?

We all went to a *Kannada Municipal school. It was a most elegant school—not the kind of Municipal schools we have today. Don't forget that the Maharaja of †Mysore himself took a special interest in the school!

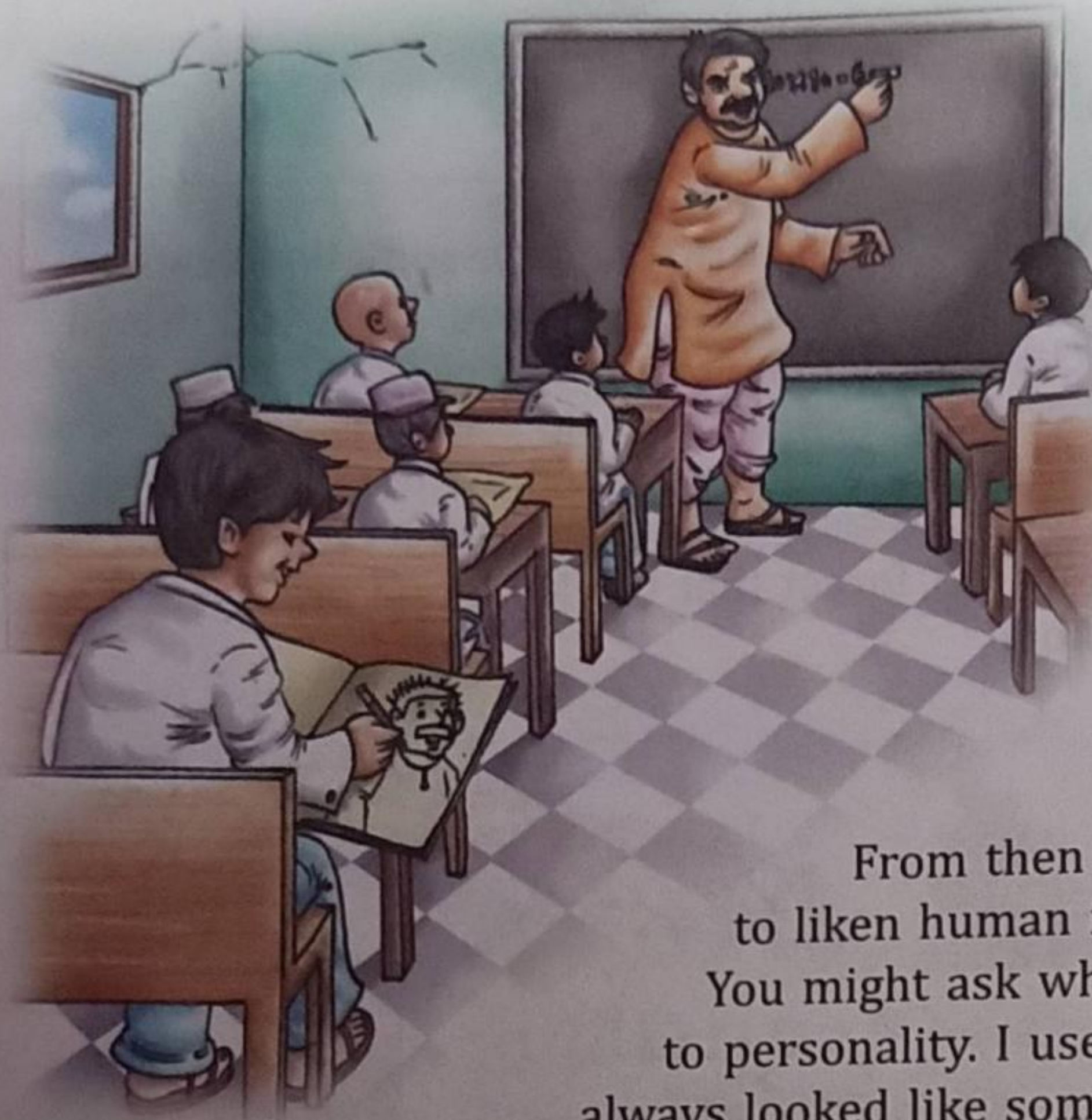
All the teachers, with rare exceptions, were excellent. All our younger days were completely wrapped up in the experiences we had at school, the teachers...having to pass an examination.

Every child dreads the presence of a teacher but I had a particularly nasty one. Being an arithmetic teacher, I don't think he had any sense of compassion or pity. He was only committed to his arithmetic. Somebody has 3 mangoes, someone has 4—together how much? This simple thing we couldn't get the hang of. We could have, but he was such a formidable character that we felt that even if we'd got the right answer, we'd be beaten



*Kannada is a Dravidian language spoken in South India, mainly in the state of Karnataka.
†Mysore is a city in Karnataka, India and a former seat of the Wodeyar dynasty.

anyway! So we mumbled and he twisted our ears and shouted. He was the target of my caricature. One day he'd written the usual sum on the blackboard—Ram has 3 mangoes, Krishna has 4. It was a simple sum but quite beyond me! I thought he'd not ask me so I sat hiding behind the others, who, like me, were all short little boys. I started sketching. It looked very much like a tiger. A man with **bristling** moustache, teeth and all that developed as the questions went on. He was in the first row. I was in the last. I got involved in the caricature. Suddenly, I felt a piercing pain in my left ear. I turned.



This monster was twisting my ear for having drawn him! He said, 'So you have drawn me?' I said, 'No sir, I did not draw you!' But he could recognise it through all that likeness to a tiger, that it was he! Of course I was punished.

That was the time I realised the art of caricature. I saw: 'My god, indeed he does look like a tiger!' My attempt was not to draw a tiger but I drew the face of a tiger **subconsciously** as an extension of the man's personality. To me, he was a tiger!

From then on it almost became a hobby for me to liken human figures to **inanimate** objects or animals. You might ask what it is that relates things or creatures to personality. I used to stand and watch the city bus. It always looked like someone I knew. People spilling out of the

bus began to take the shape of a giraffe or a monkey or a **Cadillac** belonging to one of the Maharajas of Mysore which used to stand in the porch next door. To me, it looked like a prince! There is a personality that gets rubbed off onto inanimate objects.

Even today, I feel that I got nothing out of the $2 + 4 - 1$ but I gained something invaluable that day in the classroom.

I'll tell you of another incident that is connected with the art of caricature. The art I've chosen is one which rubs everyone on the wrong side. From the prime minister to the policeman, from the President to the priest—they are all ridiculed. That is my profession. So long as it's about others, people like it.

It was my sister's wedding—a very big affair. In the south, the one who is very important at the time of the wedding is the cook. He was treated like a prince because the entire reputation of the wedding depended on this man's cooking. So that day, when he came, there was a general cry, 'He's come! He's come!' People who never stood up for anyone

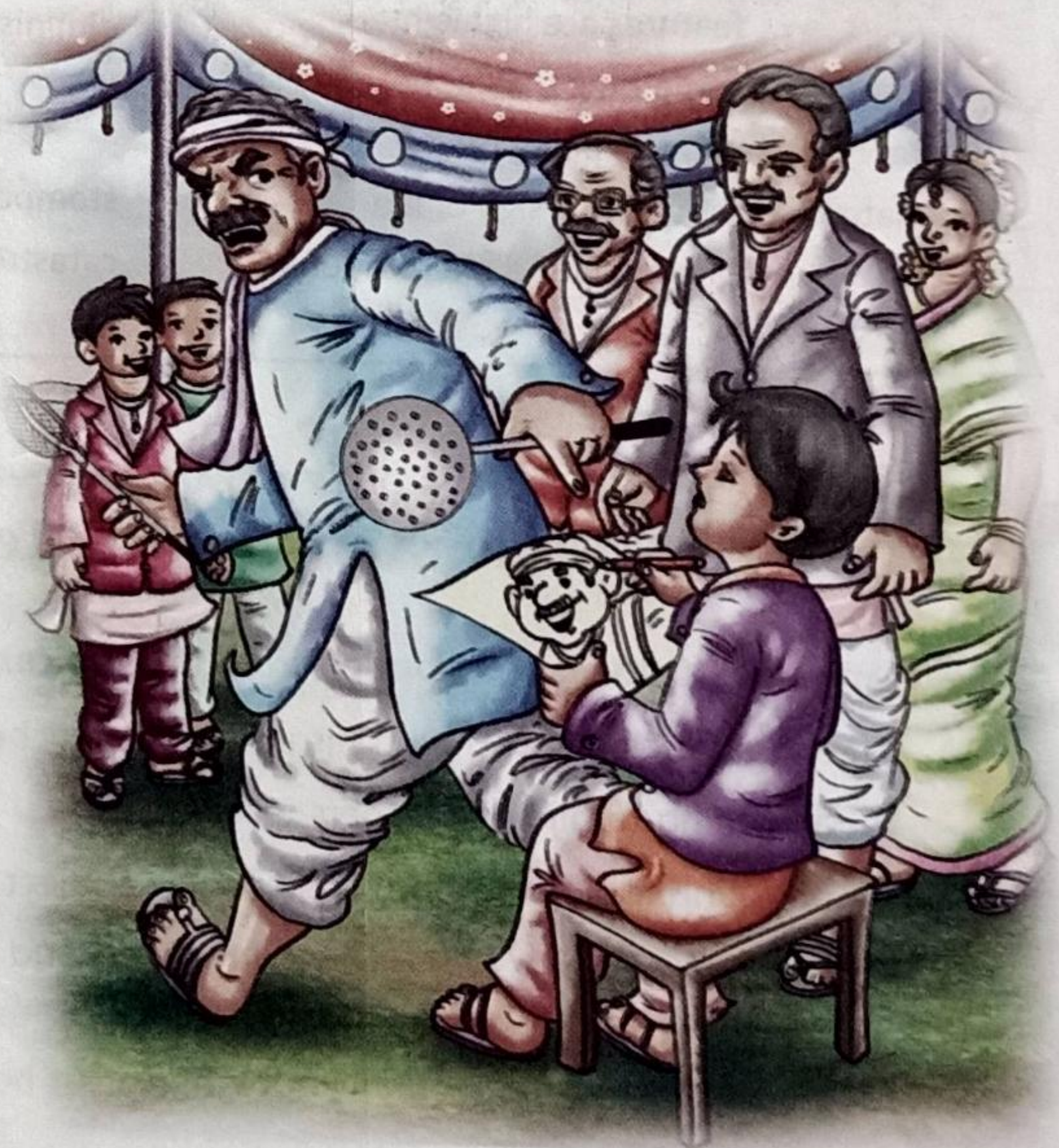
also stood up! How to entertain him? To offer coffee to him is just not done because he's the one who makes excellent coffee! Discussions began. Everyone hung upon his words. 'What do you want?' he asked. 'We don't have to tell you what we want. You know best!' That pleased him. After an hour he said, 'I want this much rice, this much ghee, this much...' While all this was happening, I was in a corner of the room sketching as usual because I was a **compulsive** sketcher right from the age of three. While I was sketching, I was listening to the conversation. It seemed like they were ordering enormous quantities of food but in those days everything was so cheap. Discussions ended, he was about to go when someone said, 'You can't leave without coffee! Of course, it won't be good but we'll be highly honoured.' So he sat on.

Everybody was relaxed. To get the man himself was difficult but to get the man to sit down and have coffee! At that time one of my cousins saw my caricature and began to giggle. Ha ha ha...the laughter spread like wildfire. Everyone wanted to have a look at the sketch. The group started moving towards me behind the pillar. The man found that his circle had **diminished**. 'What is it?' he asked good-humouredly.

Everybody thought it was a good likeness but he took one look and fell grimly silent. 'I am not going to cook for this marriage,' he said and began to make his way out. Members of the family—senior **ICS** officers and others in high government posts—ran after him. 'You have called me here to insult me!' he said. 'I have cooked for the Maharaja. I have cooked for Supreme Court Judges...I have cooked for...but never have I been insulted like this. Goodbye! Thank you!' And he **stomped** out. Then a very clever uncle was called upon to woo him back. How he did it is another story!

You might think I was roundly scolded for this major **catastrophe**. I wasn't. My family always supported me. I don't know why.

As an enlightened family, my parents neither encouraged me nor discouraged me. Mercifully, they left me alone. These same parents left me with a piece of chalk at the



age of three. This changed to a pencil at the age of six or seven. Then came colour pencils and paint boxes. I'm grateful to them. And they were very proud of me as I progressed from class to class.

—R K Laxman

About the Author

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Laxman (1921–26), famously known as R K Laxman, was an Indian cartoonist, illustrator, and humorist. He was best known for his creation *The Common Man* and for his cartoon strip, *You Said It*.

Words to Know

formidable	to respect or fear somebody who is powerful	rubs everyone on the wrong side	to irritate or annoy
✓ caricature	a picture in which a person's features are highlighted	✓ compulsive	to act on an irresistible urge
✓ bristling	something that is short and stiff	diminished	to make or become less
subconsciously	without being fully aware	ICS	Indian Civil Service in the 19th and 20th centuries
✓ inanimate	showing no sign of life	stomped	to tread heavily and noisily
Cadillac	a luxury brand of automobiles	catastrophe	a sudden event causing great damage or suffering

Engine Trouble

Getting Started

- * Have you ever been in a situation when the prize awarded to you feels more like a problem or nuisance to you?

The story 'Engine Trouble' is from R K Narayan's famous collection of short stories entitled Malgudi Days.

There came down to our town some years ago a showman owning an institution called the Gaiety Land. Overnight our Gymkhana Ground became resplendent with banners and streamers and coloured lamps.

Gaiety Land provided us with all sorts of fun and gambling and sideshows. For a couple of annas in each booth, we could watch anything from performing parrots to motorcyclists looping the loop in the Dome of Death.

There was a particular corner of the show which was in great favour. Here for a ticket costing eight annas you stood a chance of acquiring a variety of articles—pincushions, sewing machines, cameras or even a road engine. On one evening, they drew ticket number 1005, and I happened to own the other half of the ticket. Glancing down the list of articles, they declared I became the owner of the road engine!

It was not the sort of prize one could carry home at short notice. I asked



the showman if he would help me to transport it. He merely pointed at a notice which decreed that all winners should remove the prizes immediately on drawing and by their own effort. However, they had to make an exception in my case. They agreed to keep the engine on the Gymkhana Ground till the end of their season, and then I would have to make my own arrangements to take it out.

My friends and well-wishers poured in to congratulate me on my latest **acquisition**. No one knew precisely how much a road engine would fetch; all the same they felt that there was a lot of money in it. 'Even if you sell it as scrap iron you can make a few thousands,' some of my friends declared. Every day I made a trip to the Gymkhana Ground to have a look at my engine. I was a poor man. I thought that, after all, my troubles were coming to an end. How ignorant we are!

When the showman took down his booths and packed up, I received a notice from the municipality to attend to my road engine. When I went there next day, it looked forlorn with no one about. The ground was littered with torn streamers and paper decorations. The showman had moved on, leaving the engine where it stood. It was perfectly safe anywhere.

I received a notice from the municipality ordering that the engine be removed from the grounds at once, as otherwise they would charge rent for the occupation of the Gymkhana Ground. After deep thought, I consented to pay the rent, and I paid ten rupees a month for the next three months. Dear sirs, I was a poor man. Even the house which I and my wife occupied cost me only four rupees a month. And fancy my paying ten rupees a month for the road engine.

It cut into my slender budget and I had to **pledge** a jewel or two belonging to my wife!

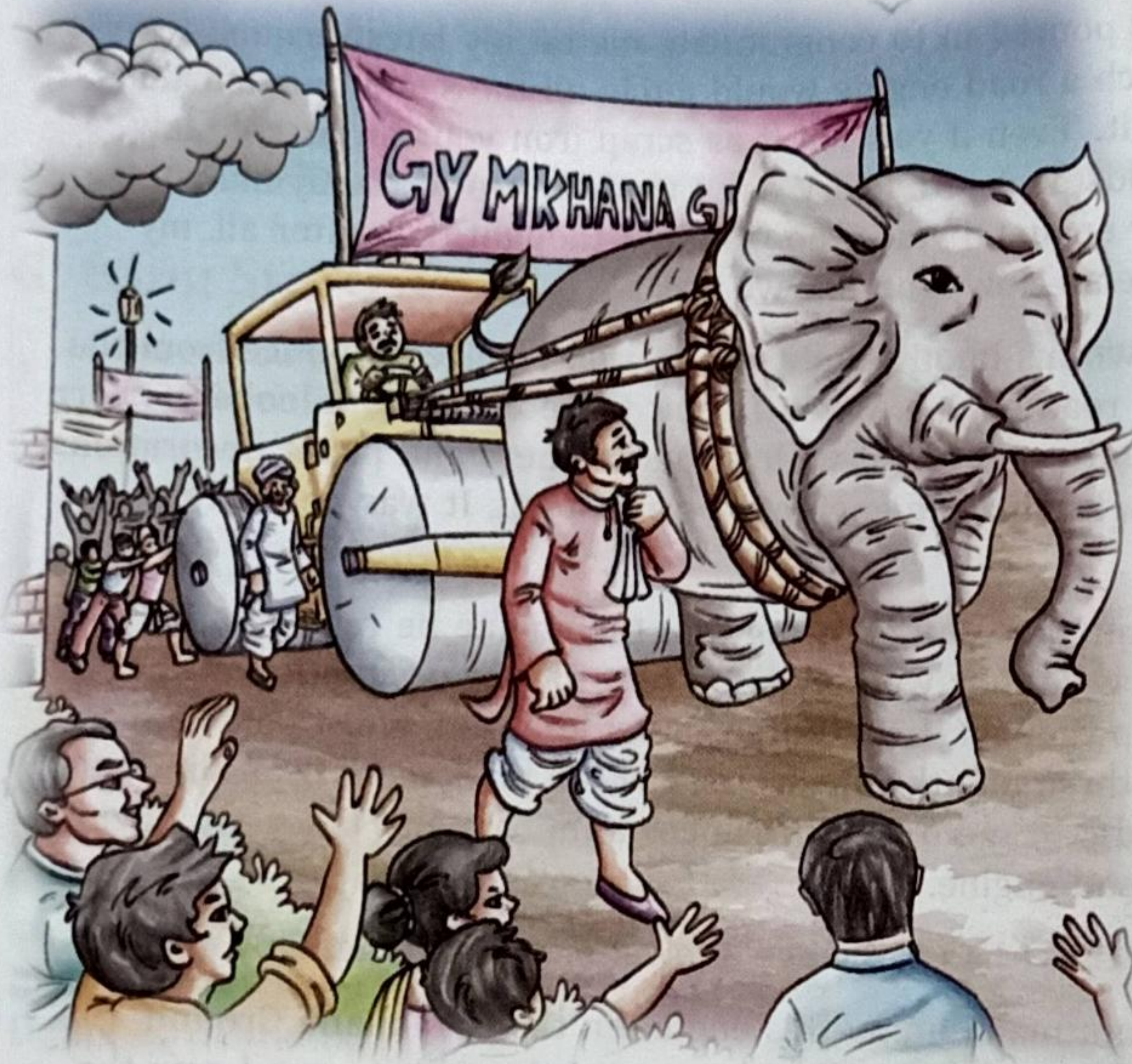
I was making myself a **bankrupt** maintaining this engine in the Gymkhana Ground. Meanwhile, the municipality was pressing me to clear out. I thought it over. I saw the priest of the local temple and managed to gain his sympathy. He offered me the services of his temple elephant. I also engaged fifty coolies to push the engine from behind. You may be sure this drained all my resources.

The coolies wanted eight annas per head, and the temple elephant cost me seven rupees a day and I had to give it one feed. My plan was to take the engine out of the Gymkhana and then down the road to a field half a furlong off. The field was owned by a friend. He would not mind if I kept the engine there for a couple of months, when I could go to Madras and find a customer for it.

I also took into service one Joseph, a dismissed bus-driver who said that although he knew nothing of road rollers he could nevertheless steer one if it was somehow kept in motion.

It was a fine sight: the temple elephant **yoked** to the engine by means of stout ropes, with fifty determined men pushing it from behind, and my friend Joseph sitting in the driving seat. A huge crowd stood around and watched in great glee. The engine began

to move. When it came out of the Gymkhana and reached the road, it began to behave in a strange manner. Instead of going straight down the road, it showed a tendency to move zigzag. The elephant dragged it one way, Joseph turned the wheel for all he was worth without any idea of where he was going, and fifty men behind it clung to it in every possible manner and pushed it just where they liked. As a result of all this confused dragging, the engine ran straight into the opposite compound wall and reduced a good length of it to powder. At this the crowd let out a joyous yell. The elephant, disliking the behaviour of the crowd, trumpeted loudly, strained and snapped its ropes and kicked down a further length of the wall. The fifty men fled in panic, the crowd created a **pandemonium**. Someone slapped me in the face—it was the owner of the compound wall. The police came on the scene and marched me off.



When I was released from the lockup I found the following consequences: (1) several yards of compound wall to be repaired by me; (2) wages of fifty men who ran away (they would not explain how they were entitled to the wages when they had not done their job); (3) Joseph's fee for steering the engine over the wall; (4) cost of medicine for treating the knee of the temple elephant, which had received some injuries while kicking down the wall (here again the temple authorities would not listen when I pointed out that I didn't engage an elephant to break a wall); (5) last, but not the least, the demand to move the engine out of its present station.

Sirs, I was a poor man. I really could not find any means of paying these bills. When I went home my wife asked, 'What is this I hear about you everywhere?' I took the opportunity to explain my difficulties. She lost her temper and cried that she would write to her father to come and take her away.

I was at my wits' end. I was seriously wondering why I should not run away to my village. I decided to encourage my wife to write to her father and arrange for her exit. Not a soul was going to know what my plans were. I was going to put off my **creditors** and disappear one fine night.

I made preparations to leave the town in a couple of days, leaving the engine to its fate, with all its commitments. However, nature came to my rescue in an unexpected manner. You may have heard of the earthquake of that year that destroyed whole towns in North India. There was a **reverberation** of it in our town, too. We were thrown out of our beds that night and doors and windows rattled.

Next morning, I went over to take a last look at my engine before leaving the town. I could hardly believe my eyes. The engine was not there. I raised a hue and cry. Search parties went round. The engine was found in a disused well nearby, with its back up. I prayed to heaven to save me from fresh complications. But the owner of the house, when he came round and saw what had happened, laughed heartily and **beamed** at me. 'You have done me a service. It was the dirtiest water on earth in that well and the municipality was sending notice to close it, week after week. I was **dreading** the cost of

closing, but your engine fits it like a cork. Just leave it there.'

'But, but...'

'There are no buts. I will withdraw all complaints and charges against you, and build that broken wall myself, only leave the thing there.'

'That's hardly enough.' I mentioned a few other expenses that the engine had brought on me. He agreed to pay for all that.

When I again passed that way some months later, I peeped over the wall. I found the mouth of the well neatly cemented up. I heaved a sigh of relief.

—R K Narayan



About the Author

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (1906–2001), popularly known as R K Narayan, was an Indian writer best known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. His other well-known books include *Swami and Friends*, *The Guide*, and *The English Teacher*.

Words to Know

KRISHNAGAR ACADEMY.

Class - VI, SUBJECT - ENGLISH - II.

Chapter - When I was Twelve

12.06.2020 Engine Trouble.

Good Morning Students,

Based on my previous teachings of English - II, today we shall be doing some practice session class. Today we shall solve few Questions based on the text part of the following chapters.
i) When I was Twelve
ii) Engine Trouble.

Answer the following Questions:

Q1. When I was Twelve.

"This monster was twisting my ear for having drawn him! He said, 'So you have drawn ~~him~~ me?'"

- Who is the monster in the extract?
- Why was he twisting the narrator's ear?
- Give two examples to show that how the narrator related things or creatures to personality.
- Name the story and the author.
- What was the monster teaching on the blackboard?

Q2. Engine Trouble.

"Someone slapped me in the face - it was the owner of the compound wall. The police came on the scene and marched me off."

- a. Why did the police arrest the narrator?
- b. Who was Joseph?
- c. What made the narrator's wife to be angry?
- d. Where the road engine was discovered after the earthquake?
- e. Name the story and the author.

In the next class of English - II we shall start a new chapter following the answers of today's discussion. Till then stay safe and healthy at home.