

## Short Stories and Non-fiction

### The Nightingale and the Rose - Oscar Wilde

“She said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses,” cried the young Student, “but in all my garden there is no red rose.”

From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

“No red rose in all my garden!” he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. “Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched.”

“Here at last is a true lover,” said the Nightingale. “Night after night have I sung of him, though I knew him not: night after night have I told his story to the stars, and now I see him. His hair is dark as the hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion has made his face like pale ivory, and sorrow has set her seal upon his brow.”

“The Prince gives a ball to-morrow night,” murmured the young student, “and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose in my garden, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break.”

“Here, indeed, is the true lover,” said the Nightingale. “What I sing of, he suffers: what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the market-place. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.”

“The musicians will sit in their gallery,” said the young Student, “and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to

the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her. But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her;” and he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.

“Why is he weeping?” asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

“Why, indeed?” said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

“Why, indeed?” whispered a Daisy to his neighbour, in a soft, low voice.

“He is weeping for a red rose,” said the Nightingale.

“For a red rose?” they cried; “how very ridiculous!” and the little Lizard, who was something of a cynic, laughed outright.

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student’s sorrow, and she sat silent in the oak-tree, and thought about the mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden.

In the centre of the grass-plot was standing a beautiful Rose-tree, and when she saw it she flew over to it, and lit upon a spray.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are white,” it answered; “as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sun-dial.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are yellow,” it answered; “as yellow as the hair of the mermaid who sits upon an amber throne, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow before the mower comes with his scythe. But go to my brother who grows beneath the Student’s window, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing beneath the Student’s window.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are white,” it answered; “as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sun-dial.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are yellow,” it answered, “as yellow as the hair of the mermaid who sits upon an amber throne, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow before the mower comes with his scythe. But go to my brother who grows beneath the student’s window, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing beneath the student’s window.

“Give me a red rose.” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are red,” it answered, “as red as the feet of the dove, and redder than the great fans of coral that wave and wave in the ocean-cavern. But the winter has chilled my veins, and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I shall have no roses at all this year.”

“One red rose is all I want,” cried the Nightingale, “only one red rose! Is there no way by which I can get it?”

“There is a way,” answered the Tree; “but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you.”

“Tell it to me,” said the Nightingale, “I am not afraid.”

“If you want a red rose,” said the Tree, “you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart’s-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine.”

“Death is a great price to pay for a red rose,” cried the Nightingale, “and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?”

So she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She swept over the garden like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed through the grove.

The young Student was still lying on the grass, where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry in his beautiful eyes.

“Be happy,” cried the Nightingale, “be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart’s-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense.”

The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.

But the Oak-tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little Nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

“Sing me one last song,” he whispered; “I shall feel very lonely when you are gone.”

So the Nightingale sang to the Oak-tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar.

When she had finished her song, the Student got up, and pulled a note-book and a lead-pencil out of his pocket.

“She has form,” he said to himself, as he walked away through the grove – “that cannot be denied to her; but has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish. Still, it must be admitted that she has some beautiful notes in her voice. What a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good!” And he went into his room, and lay down on his little pallet-bed, and began to think of his love; and, after a time, he fell asleep.

And when the Moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale flew to the Rose-tree, and set her breast against the thorn. All night long she sang with her breast against the thorn, and the cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened. All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her.

She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the topmost spray of the Rose-tree there blossomed a marvellous rose, petal following petal, as song followed song. Pale was it, at first, as the mist that hangs over the river - pale as the feet of the morning, and silver as the wings of the dawn. As the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, as the shadow of a rose in a water-pool, so was the rose that blossomed on the topmost spray of the Tree.

But the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. “Press closer, little Nightingale,” cried the Tree, “or the Day will come before the rose is finished.”

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and louder and louder grew her song, for she sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid.

And a delicate flush of pink came into the leaves of the rose, like the flush in the face of the bridegroom when he kisses the lips of the bride. But the thorn had not yet reached her heart, so the rose's heart remained white, for only a Nightingale's heart's-blood can crimson the heart of a rose.

And the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. "Press closer, little Nightingale," cried the Tree, "or the Day will come before the rose is finished."

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and the thorn touched her heart, and a fierce pang of pain shot through her. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

And the marvellous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky. Crimson was the girdle of petals, and crimson as a ruby was the heart.

But the Nightingale's voice grew fainter, and her little wings began to beat, and a film came over her eyes. Fainter and fainter grew her song, and she felt something choking her in her throat.

Then she gave one last burst of music. The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.

“Look, look!” cried the Tree, “the rose is finished now;” but the Nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

And at noon the Student opened his window and looked out.

“Why, what a wonderful piece of luck! he cried; ‘here is a red rose! I have never seen any rose like it in all my life. It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name;’ and he leaned down and plucked it. Then he put on his hat, and ran up to the Professor’s house with the rose in his hand.

The daughter of the Professor was sitting in the doorway winding blue silk on a reel, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

“You said that you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose,” cried the Student. Here is the reddest rose in all the world. You will wear it to-night next your heart, and as we dance together it will tell you how I love you.”

But the girl frowned.

“I am afraid it will not go with my dress,” she answered; ‘and, besides, the Chamberlain’s nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers.’”

“Well, upon my word, you are very ungrateful,” said the Student angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter, and a cart-wheel went over it.

“Ungrateful!” said the girl. “I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don’t believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain’s nephew has;” and she got up from her chair and went into the house.

“What a silly thing Love is,” said the Student as he walked away. ‘It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making

one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics.”

So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

**An extract from ‘Colin Cowdrey Lecture’**  
**– ‘The Lahore Attack’**  
**Kumar Sangakkara**

I was fortunate that during my life I never experienced violence in Sri Lanka first hand. There have been so many bomb explosions over the years but I was never in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In Colombo, apart from these occasional bombs, life was relatively normal. People had the luxury of being physically detached from the war. Children went to school, people went to work, I played my cricket.

In other parts of the country, though, people were putting their lives in harm’s way every day either in the defence of their motherland or just trying to survive the geographical circumstances that made them inhabit a war zone.

For them, avoiding bullets, shells, mines and grenades, was imperative for survival. This was an experience that I could not relate to. I had great sympathy and compassion for them, but had no real experience with which I could draw parallels.

That was until we toured Pakistan in 2009. We set-off to play two Tests in Karachi and Lahore. The first Test played on a featherbed, past without great incident.

The second Test was also meandering along with us piling up a big first innings when we departed for the ground on day three. Having



been asked to leave early instead of waiting for the Pakistan bus, we were anticipating a day of hard toil for the bowlers.

At the back of the bus the fast bowlers were loud in their complaints. I remember Thilan Thushara being particularly vocal, complaining that his back was near breaking point. He joked that he wished a bomb would go off so we could all leave Lahore and go back home.

Not thirty seconds had passed when we heard what sounded like fire crackers going off. Suddenly a shout came from the front. "Get down they are shooting at the bus."

The reaction was immediate. Everyone dived for cover and took shelter on the aisle or behind the seats. With very little space, we were all lying on top of each other.

Then the bullets started to hit. It was like rain on a tin roof. The bus was at a standstill, an easy target for the gunmen.

As bullets started bursting through the bus all we could do was stay still and quiet, hoping and praying to avoid death or injury.

Suddenly Mahela, who sits at the back of the bus, shouts saying he thinks he has been hit in the shin. I am lying next to Tilan. He groans in pain as a bullet hits him in the back of his thigh.

As I turn my head to look at him I feel something whizz past my ear and a bullet thuds into the side of the seat, the exact spot where my head had been a few seconds earlier.

I feel something hit my shoulder and it goes numb. I know I had been hit, but I was just relieved and praying I was not going to be hit in the head.

Tharanga Paranavithana, on his debut tour, is also next to me. He stands up, bullets flying all around him, shouting "I have been hit" as he holds his blood-soaked chest. He collapsed onto his seat, apparently unconscious.

I see him and I think. “Oh my God, you were out first ball, run out the next innings and now you have been shot. What a terrible first tour.”

It is strange how clear your thinking is. I did not see my life flash by. There was no insane panic. There was absolute clarity and awareness of what was happening at that moment.

I hear the bus roar in to life and start to move. Dilshan is screaming at the driver: “Drive...Drive.” We speed up swerve and are finally inside the safety of the stadium.

There is a rush to get off the bus. Tharanga Paranawithana stands up. He is still bleeding and has a bullet lodged lightly in his sternum, the body of the bus tempering its velocity enough to be stopped by the bone.

Tilan is helped off the bus. In the dressing room there is a mixture of emotions: anger, relief, joy. Players and coaching staff are being examined by paramedics. Tilan and Paranawithana are taken by ambulance to the hospital.

We all realized that what some of our fellow Sri Lankans experienced every day for nearly 30 years. There was a new respect and awe for their courage and selflessness.

It is notable how quickly we got over that attack on us. Although we were physically injured, mentally we held strong.

A few hours after the attack we were airlifted to the Lahore Air Force Base.

Ajantha Mendis, his head swathed in bandages after multiple shrapnel wounds, suggests a game of Poker. Tilan has been brought back, sedated but fully conscious, to be with us and we make jokes at him and he smiles back.

We were shot at, grenades were thrown at us, we were injured and yet we were not cowed.

We were not down and out. “We are Sri Lankan,” we thought to ourselves, “and we are tough and we will get through hardship and we will overcome because our spirit is strong.”

This is what the world saw in our interviews immediately after the attack: we were calm, collected, and rational. Our emotions held true to our role as unofficial ambassadors.

A week after our arrival in Colombo from Pakistan I was driving about town and was stopped at a checkpoint. A soldier politely inquired as to my health after the attack. I said I was fine and added that what they as soldiers experience every day we only experienced for a few minutes, but managed to grab all the news headlines. That soldier looked me in the eye and replied. “It is OK if I die because it is my job and I am ready for it. But you are a hero and if you were to die it would be a great loss for our country.”

I was taken aback. How can this man value his life less than mine? His sincerity was overwhelming. I felt humbled.

This is the passion that cricket and cricketers evoke in Sri Lankans. This is the love that I strive every-day of my career to be worthy of.

## **The Lumber Room - Saki**

THE CHILDREN WERE to be driven, as a special treat, to the sands at Jagborough. Nicholas was not to be of the party; he was in disgrace. Only that morning he had refused to eat his wholesome bread-and-milk on the seemingly frivolous ground that there was a frog in it.

Older and wiser and better people had told him that there could not possibly be a frog in his bread-and-milk and that he was not to talk nonsense; he continued, nevertheless, to talk what seemed the veriest nonsense, and described with much detail the colouration and markings of the alleged frog. The dramatic part of the incident was that there really was a frog in Nicholas's basin of bread-and-milk; he had put it there himself, so he felt entitled to know something about it. The sin of taking a frog from the garden and putting it into a bowl of wholesome bread-and-milk was enlarged on at great length, but the fact that stood out clearest in the whole affair, as it presented itself to the mind of Nicholas, was that the older, wiser, and better people had been proved to be profoundly in error in matters about which they had expressed the utmost assurance.

'You said there couldn't possibly be a frog in my bread-and-milk; there was a frog in my bread-and-milk,' he repeated, with the insistence of a skilled tactician who does not intend to shift from favourable ground.

So his boy-cousin and girl-cousin and his quite uninteresting younger brother were to be taken to Jagborough sands that afternoon and he was to stay at home. His cousins' aunt, who insisted, by an unwarranted stretch of imagination, in styling herself his aunt also, had hastily invented the Jagborough expedition in order to impress on Nicholas the delights that he had justly forfeited by his disgraceful conduct at the breakfast-table. It was her habit, whenever one of the children fell from grace, to improvise something of a festival nature from which the offender would be rigorously debarred; if all the children sinned collectively they were suddenly informed of a circus in a neighbouring town, a circus of unrivalled merit and uncounted elephants, to which, but for their depravity, they would have been taken that very day.

A few decent tears were looked for on the part of Nicholas when the moment for the departure of the expedition arrived. As a matter of fact, however, all the crying was done by his girl-cousin, who scraped her knee rather painfully against the step of the carriage as she was scrambling in.

‘How she did howl,’ said Nicholas cheerfully, as the party drove off without any of the elation of high spirits that should have characterised it.

‘She’ll soon get over that,’ said the soi-disant aunt; ‘it will be a glorious afternoon for racing about over those beautiful sands. How they will enjoy themselves!’

‘Bobby won’t enjoy himself much, and he won’t race much either,’ said Nicholas with a grim chuckle; ‘his boots are hurting him. They’re too tight.’

‘Why didn’t he tell me they were hurting?’ asked the aunt with some asperity.

‘He told you twice, but you weren’t listening. You often don’t listen when we tell you important things.’

‘You are not to go into the gooseberry garden,’ said the aunt, changing the subject.

‘Why not?’ demanded Nicholas.

‘Because you are in disgrace,’ said the aunt loftily.

Nicholas did not admit the flawlessness of the reasoning; he felt perfectly capable of being in disgrace and in a gooseberry garden at the same moment. His face took on an expression of considerable obstinacy. It was clear to his aunt that he was determined to get into the gooseberry garden, ‘only,’ as she remarked to herself, ‘because I have told him he is not to.’

Now the gooseberry garden had two doors by which it might be entered, and once a small person like Nicholas could slip in there he could effectually disappear from view amid the masking growth of artichokes, raspberry canes, and fruit bushes. The aunt had many other things to do that afternoon, but she spent an hour or two in trivial gardening operations among flower beds and shrubberies, whence she could keep a watchful eye on the two doors that led to the forbidden paradise. She was a woman of few ideas, with immense powers of concentration.

Nicholas made one or two sorties into the front garden, wriggling his way with obvious stealth of purpose towards one or other of the doors, but never able for a moment to evade the aunt's watchful eye. As a matter of fact, he had no intention of trying to get into the gooseberry garden, but it was extremely convenient for him that his aunt should believe that he had; it was a belief that would keep her on self-imposed sentry-duty for the greater part of the afternoon. Having thoroughly confirmed and fortified her suspicions, Nicholas slipped back into the house and rapidly put into execution a plan of action that had long germinated in his brain. By standing on a chair in the library one could reach a shelf on which reposed a fat, important-looking key. The key was as important as it looked; it was the instrument which kept the mysteries of the lumber-room secure from unauthorized intrusion, which opened a way only for aunts and such-like privileged persons. Nicholas had not much experience of the art of fitting keys into keyholes and turning locks, but for some days past he had practised with the key of the school-room door; he did not believe in trusting too much to luck and accident. The key turned stiffly in the lock, but it turned. The door opened, and Nicholas was in an unknown land, compared with which the gooseberry garden was a stale delight, a mere material pleasure.

Often and often Nicholas had pictured to himself what the lumber-room might be like, that region that was so carefully sealed from youthful eyes and concerning which no questions were ever answered. It came up to his expectations. In the first place it was large and dimly lit, one high window opening on to the forbidden garden being its only source of illumination. In the second place it was a storehouse of unimagined treasures. The aunt-by-assertion was one of

those people who think that things spoil by use and consign them to dust and damp by way of preserving them. Such parts of the house as Nicholas knew best were rather bare and cheerless, but here there were wonderful things for the eye to feast on. First and foremost there was a piece of framed tapestry that was evidently meant to be a fire-screen. To Nicholas it was a living, breathing story; he sat down on a roll of Indian hangings, glowing in wonderful colours beneath a layer of dust, and took in all the details of the tapestry picture. A man, dressed in the hunting costume of some remote period, had just transfixed a stag with an arrow; it could not have been a difficult shot because the stag was only one or two paces away from him; in the thickly growing vegetation that the picture suggested it would not have been difficult to creep up to a feeding stag, and the two spotted dogs that were springing forward to join in the chase had evidently been trained to keep to heel till the arrow was discharged. That part of the picture was simple, if interesting, but did the huntsman see, what Nicholas saw, that four galloping wolves were coming in his direction through the wood? There might be more than four of them hidden behind the trees, and in any case would the man and his dogs be able to cope with the four wolves if they made an attack? The man had only two arrows left in his quiver, and he might miss with one or both of them; all one knew about his skill in shooting was that he could hit a large stag at a ridiculously short range. Nicholas sat for many golden minutes revolving the possibilities of the scene; he was inclined to think that there were more than four wolves and that the man and his dogs were in a tight corner.

But there were other objects of delight and interest claiming his instant attention; here were quaint twisted candlesticks in the shape of snakes, and a teapot fashioned like a china duck, out of whose open beak the tea was supposed to come. How dull and shapeless the nursery teapot seemed in comparison! And there was a carved sandalwood box packed tight with aromatic cotton-wool, and between the layers of cotton-wool were little brass figures, hump-necked bulls, and peacocks and goblins, delightful to see and to handle. Less promising in appearance was a large square book with plain black covers; Nicholas peeped into it, and, behold, it was full of coloured pictures of birds. And such birds! In the garden, and in the lanes when he went for a walk, Nicholas came across a few birds, of which the largest were an occasional magpie

or woodpigeon; here were herons and bustards, kites, toucans, tiger-bitterns, brush turkeys, ibises, golden pheasants, a whole portrait gallery of undreamed-of creatures. And as he was admiring the colouring of the mandarin duck and assigning a life-history to it, the voice of his aunt in shrill vociferation of his name came from the gooseberry garden without. She had grown suspicious at his long disappearance, and had leapt to the conclusion that he had climbed over the wall behind the sheltering screen of the lilac bushes: she was now engaged in energetic and rather hopeless search for him among the artichokes and raspberry canes.

‘Nicholas, Nicholas!’ she screamed, ‘you are to come out of this at once. It’s no use trying to hide there; I can see you all the time.’ It was probably the first time for twenty years that any one had smiled in that lumber-room.

Presently the angry repetitions of Nicholas’s name gave way to a shriek, and a cry for somebody to come quickly. Nicholas shut the book, restored it carefully to its place in a corner, and shook some dust from a neighbouring pile of newspapers over it. Then he crept from the room, locked the door, and replaced the key exactly where he had found it. His aunt was still calling his name when he sauntered into the front garden.

‘Who’s calling?’ he asked.

‘Me,’ came the answer from the other side of the wall, ‘didn’t you hear me? I’ve been looking for you in the gooseberry garden, and I’ve slipped into the rain-water tank. Luckily there’s no water in it, but the sides are slippery and I can’t get out. Fetch the little ladder from under the cherry tree-’

‘I was told I wasn’t to go into the gooseberry garden,’ said Nicholas promptly.

‘I told you not to, and now I tell you that you may,’ came the voice from the rain-water tank, rather impatiently.



‘Your voice doesn’t sound like aunt’s,’ objected Nicholas; ‘you may be the Evil One tempting me to be disobedient. Aunt often tells me that the Evil One tempts me and that I always yield. This time I’m not going to yield.’

‘Don’t talk nonsense,’ said the prisoner in the tank; ‘go and fetch the ladder.’

‘Will there be strawberry jam for tea?’ asked Nicholas innocently.

‘Certainly there will be,’ said the aunt, privately resolving that Nicholas should have none of it.

‘Now I know that you are the Evil One and not aunt,’ shouted Nicholas gleefully; ‘when we asked aunt for strawberry jam yesterday she said there wasn’t any. I know there are four jars of it in the store cupboard, because I looked, and of course you know it’s there, but she doesn’t, because she said there wasn’t any. Oh, Devil, you have sold yourself!’

There was an unusual sense of luxury in being able to talk to an aunt as though one was talking to the Evil One, but Nicholas knew, with childish discernment that such luxuries were not to be over-indulged in. He walked noisily away, and it was a kitchenmaid, in search of parsley, who eventually rescued the aunt from the rain-water tank.

Tea that evening was partaken of in a fearsome silence. The tide had been at its highest when the children had arrived at Jagborough Cove, so there had been no sands to play on—a circumstance that the aunt had overlooked in the haste of organizing her punitive expedition. The tightness of Bobby’s boots had had disastrous effect on his temper the whole of the afternoon, and altogether the children could not have been said to have enjoyed themselves. The aunt maintained the frozen muteness of one who has suffered undignified and unmerited detention in a rain-water tank for thirty-five minutes. As for Nicholas, he, too, was silent, in the absorption of one who has much to think about; it was just possible, he considered, that the huntsman would escape with his hounds while the wolves feasted on the stricken stag.

**An extract from “Wave” – A Memoir of Life after the Tsunami**  
**Sonali Deraniyagala**

It was then she saw the wave. “Oh my God, the sea’s coming in.” That’s what she said. I looked behind me. It didn’t seem that remarkable. Or alarming. It was only the white curl of a big wave.

But you couldn’t usually see breaking waves from our room. You hardly noticed the ocean at all. It was just a glint of blue above that wide spread of sand that sloped sharply down to the water. Now the froth of a wave had scaled up this slope and was nearing the tall conifers that were halfway between our room and the water’s edge, incongruous those trees in this landscape of brittle thorny scrub. This was peculiar. I called out to Steve in the bathroom. “Come out, Steve, I want to show you something odd.” I didn’t want him to miss this. I wanted him to come out quick before all this foam dissolved. “In a minute,” Steve muttered, with no intention of rushing out.

Then there was more white froth. And more. Vik was sitting by the back door reading the first page of *The Hobbit*. I told him to shut that door. It was a glass door with four panels, and he closed each one, then came across the room and stood by me. He didn’t say anything, he didn’t ask me what was going on.

The foam turned into waves. Waves leaping over the ridge where the beach ended. This was not normal. The sea never came this far in. Waves not receding or dissolving. Closer now. Brown and gray. Brown or gray. Waves rushing past the conifers and coming closer to our room. All these waves now, charging, churning. Suddenly furious. Suddenly menacing. “Steve, you’ve got to come out. Now.” Steve ran out of the bathroom, tying his sarong. He looked outside. We didn’t speak.

I grabbed Vik and Malli, and we all ran out the front door. I was ahead of Steve. I held the boys each by the hand. “Give me one of them. Give me one of them,” Steve shouted, reaching out. But I didn’t. That would have slowed us down. We had no time. We had to be fast. I knew that. But I didn’t know what I was fleeing from.

I didn't stop for my parents. I didn't stop to knock on the door of my parents' room, which was next to ours, on the right as we ran out. I didn't shout to warn them. I didn't bang on their door and call them out. As I ran past, for a splintered second, I wondered if I should. But I couldn't stop. It will stall us. We must keep running. I held the boys tight by their hands. We have to get out.

We fled towards the driveway at the front of the hotel. The boys ran as fast as I did. They didn't stumble or fall. They were barefoot, but they didn't slow down because stones or thorns were hurting them. They didn't say a word. Our feet were loud, though. I could hear them, slamming the ground.

Ahead of us a jeep was moving, fast. Now it stopped. A safari jeep with open back and sides and a brown canvas hood. This jeep was waiting for us. We ran up to it. I flung Vikram into the back, and he landed facedown on the green corrugated-metal floor. Steve jumped in and picked him up. We were all inside now. Steve had Vik on his lap, I sat across from them with Mail on mine. A man was driving the jeep. I didn't know who he was.

Now I looked around me and nothing was unusual. No frothing waters here, only the hotel. It was all as it should be. The long rows of rooms with clay-tiled roofs, the terra-cotta floors of the open corridors, the dusty, orange-brown gravel driveway thick with wild cactus on both sides. All there. The waves must have receded, I thought.

I hadn't seen Orlantha run with us, but she must have done. She was in the jeep. Her parents had rushed out of their rooms as we came out of ours, and now her father, Anton, was with us too. Orlantha's mother, Beulah, was hoisting herself into the jeep and the driver revved the engine. The jeep jerked forward and she lost her grip, fell off. The driver didn't see this. I told him to stop, I kept yelling to him that she had fallen out. But he kept going. Beulah lay on the driveway and looked up at us as we pulled away. She half-smiled, in confusion it seemed.

Anton leaned out the back to reach Beulah and drag her up. When he couldn't, he jumped out. They were both lying on the gravel now, but I didn't call out to the driver to wait for them. He was driving very fast. He's right, I thought, we have to keep moving. Soon we will be away from the hotel.

We were leaving my parents behind. I panicked now. If I had screamed at their door as we ran out, they could have run with us. "We didn't get Aachchi and seeya," I yelled to Steve. This made Vikram cry. Steve held on to him, clasping him to his chest. "Aachchi and seeya will be okay, they will come later, they will come," Steve said. Vik stopped crying and snuggled into Steve.

I was thankful for Steve's words, I was reassured. Steve is right. There are no waves now. Ma and Da, they will walk out of their room. We will get out of here first, and they'll join us. I had an image of my father walking out of the hotel, there were puddles everywhere, he had his trousers rolled up. I'll ring Ma on her mobile as soon as I get to a phone, I thought.

We were nearing the end of the hotel driveway. We were about to turn left onto the dirt track that runs by the lagoon. Steve stared at the road ahead of us. He kept banging his heel on the floor of the jeep. Hurry up, get a move on.

The jeep was in water then. Suddenly, all this water inside the jeep. Water sloshing over our knees. Where did this water come from? I didn't see those waves get to us. This water must have burst out from beneath the ground. What is happening? The jeep moved forward slowly. I could hear its engine straining, snarling. We can drive through this water, I thought.

We were tilting from side. The water rising now, filling the jeep. It came up to our chests. Steve and I lifted the boys as high as we could. Steve held Vik, I had Mal. Their faces above the water, the tops of their heads pressing against the jeep's canvas hood, our hands tight under their armpits. The jeep rocked. It was floating, the wheels no longer gripping the ground. We kept steadying ourselves on the seats. No one spoke. No one uttered a sound.

Then I saw Steve's face. I'd never seen him like that before. A sudden look of terror, eyes wide open, mouth agape. He saw something behind me that I couldn't see. I didn't have time to turn around and look.

Because it turned over. The jeep turned over. On my side.

Pain. That was all I could feel. Where am I? Something was crushing my chest. I am trapped under the jeep, I thought, I am being flattened by it. I tried to push it away, I wanted to wriggle out. But it was too heavy, whatever was on me, the pain unrelenting in my chest.

I wasn't stuck under anything. I was moving, I could tell now. My body was curled up, I was spinning fast.

Am I underwater? It didn't feel like water, but it has to be, I thought. I was being dragged along, and my body was whipping backwards and forwards. I couldn't stop myself. When at times my eyes opened, I couldn't see water. Smoky and gray.