



My Lord the Baby

Rabindranath Tagore

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

RABINDRANATH TAGORE was one of the most celebrated Bengali-language poets of his time, although he has received greater acclaim for his short stories. Tagore won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for 'Gitanjali'. He was the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in the field of Literature. He was a Bengalese who was born in 1861 at Calcutta. His work has been venerated by countless critics. His stories are sufficiently straightforward.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE



LESSON'S INTRODUCTION

'In My Lord, the Baby' by Rabindranath Tagore we have the theme of sacrifice, guilt, responsibility, gratitude, letting go, selflessness and shame. Taken from his 'Collected Stories' collection, the story is narrated in the first person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that Tagore may be exploring the theme of sacrifice.

My Lord The Baby, and many of Tagore's other short stories, is a precursor to sprawling stories of Indian families. Its central themes are duty—particularly the duty to one's master and one's son and father—and sacrifice.

MY LORD, THE BABY

My Lord The Baby begins with a twelve-year-old boy named Raicharan. He leaves his village and enters the home and service of a man who shares the same caste as Raicharan. Raicharan becomes the private servant of the man's son Anukul. From birth up until the day that the boy leaves for college, he is Anukul's personal attendant.

MY LORD, THE BABY

After Anukul marries, he makes Raicharan the servant of his new son, who is called The Little Master in the story. Raicharan takes pride in his work and finds great pleasure in the child. The story contains several passages in which the reader sees Raicharan's joy in reading to the boy.

MY LORD, THE BABY

When the child begins to walk, it is an “epoch in human history.” He plays with the child night and day. When it utters the words “Ba-ba,” “Ma-ma,” and “Chan-na” (this is what the baby calls Raicharan), “Raicharan’s ecstasy knew no bounds.”

MY LORD, THE BABY

Anukul buys a small go-cart for his son, and drapes him in silks and finery, including golden ornaments, bracelets, and more. When the rainy season approaches, the child is dreadfully bored while confined indoors. One day, on which the rain has lifted, Raicharan puts him in the cart and pulls him down to the riverbank.

MY LORD, THE BABY

The boy sees a lovely tree covered in flowers, and Raicharan can tell that he wants one. He tries to distract the boy by showing him birds and various other diversions, but the child is intractable. Finally, Raicharan asks him to stay in the cart, forbids him from going to the water, and wades in to get the flower. When he returns, the child is missing.

MY LORD, THE BABY: RABINDRANATH TAGORE

When evening comes and Raicharan has not returned with the child, Anukul and the mother go out searching. They find Raicharan running along the banks, calling out “Little Master!” over and over, heartbroken. Under questioning, he says that he knows nothing about what happened. They promise him anything if he will tell them, but he has no answers. He is sent from the house. The mother tells Anukul that she suspects that Raicharan had stolen the child, possibly to sell it to the gypsies, who were also rumored to be in the area at the same time. “The baby had gold ornaments on his body,” she says. It is enough to convince her.

MY LORD, THE BABY

Raicharan returns to his village. His wife bears him a son named Phailna and then dies. Raicharan initially feels an intense resentment of the child, feeling that it someone intends to replace the little master who was so recently lost. He feels extreme guilt at the prospect of being happy about his own child in the aftermath of such tragedy.

MY LORD, THE BABY

Soon he is as affectionate and loving with his own son as he ever was with the little master. However, there is an unsettling development. As the baby develops, begins to walk, and to do all of things that babies do, Raicharan is reminded of the little master. His son's actions seem uncannily similar, and he manages to convince himself that it is the little master, reincarnated in his own home.

MY LORD, THE BABY

He considers the following **THREE FACTS** “beyond dispute”:

- The new baby was born soon after his little master’s death.
- His wife could never have accumulated such merit as to give birth to a son in middle age.
- The new baby walked with a toddle and called out Ba-ba and Ma-ma.

The logic is far from ironclad, but he remembers that the mother accused him of stealing her child. If this is truly the little master reincarnated, he feels that he deserves her accusation.

MY LORD, THE BABY

In the final sequence of the story, Raicharan begins spoiling Phailna just as Anukul did for the little master. He spends money he does not have to clothe him in satin, and send him to fine schools. When he visits Phailna, the other students are amused by his country manners and they wonder how the elegant Phailna could have such a bumpkin for a father.

MY LORD, THE BABY

Soon Phailna is asking for more money and there is nothing Raicharan can give him. He visits the city where Anukul is practicing as a magistrate and tells him that he lied about the little master. He had kept him all along and now wishes to make it right. Anukul is suspicious of the claim, as there is no proof that Phailna is the little master. However, his wife's reaction makes it irrelevant. She accepts the child whole-heartedly, believing that he is hers, and they send Raicharan away.

The story ends with Anukul sending money to Raicharan's village, but there is no longer anyone there with that name.