

18



302en18



Notes

## NIGHT OF THE SCORPION

**R**ead the poem once. It is about the night when the poet's mother is bitten by a scorpion.

I remember the night my mother  
 Was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours  
 Of steady rain had driven him  
 To crawl beneath a sack of rice.  
 Parting with his poison – flash  
 Of diabolic tail in the dark room –  
 He risked the rain again.  
 The peasants came like swarms of flies  
 And buzzed the Name of God a hundred  
 Time to paralyse the Evil one.  
 With candles and with lanterns  
 Throwing giant scorpion shadows  
 On the mud-baked walls  
 They searched for him; he was not found.  
 They clicked their tongues.  
 With every movement that the scorpion made  
 his poison moved in Mother's blood they said.  
 May your suffering decrease  
 the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.  
 May the sum of evil  
 balanced in this unreal world  
 against the sum of good  
 become diminished by your pain.



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May the poison purify your flesh  
 Of desire, and your spirit of ambition,  
 They said, and they sat around  
 On the floor with my mother in the center,  
 The peace of understanding on each face.  
 More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours  
 more insects, and the endless rain.  
 My mother twisted through and through  
 groaning on a mat  
 My father, sceptic, rationalist,  
 trying every curse and blessing,  
 powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.  
 He even poured a little paraffin  
 upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.  
 I watched the flame feeding on my mother  
 I watched the holy man perform his rites  
 to tame the poison with an incantation.  
 After twenty hours  
 it lost its sting.  
 My mother only said  
 Thank god the scorpion picked on me  
 and spared my children.

- *Nissim Ezekiel*



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.1

Can you answer the following questions?

1. Was it a dark night?
2. Had it been raining for long?

Let us, now, read the following lines once again.

I remember the night my mother  
 Was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours  
 Of steady rain had driven him  
 To crawl beneath a sack of rice.  
 Parting with his poison – flash  
 Of diabolic tail in the dark room (-)  
 He risked the rain again.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.2

1. What drove the scorpion inside the house?
2. Where did the scorpion crawl?
3. Choose the correct option to complete the following sentence.  
The word 'flash' means —
  - (i) a cowardly action
  - (ii) a quick and sudden action
  - (iii) a wicked action
4. Why does he call the tail 'diabolic'?

Let us read further

The peasants came like swarms of flies  
And buzzed the Name of God a hundred  
Time to paralyse the Evil one.  
With candles and with lanterns  
Throwing giant scorpion shadows  
On the mud-baked walls  
They searched for him; he was not found  
They clicked their tongues.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.3

1. Who came into the house?
2. What is the scorpion referred to in the third line?
3. Why did the peasants say the name of God a hundred times?
4. Whose shadows were thrown on the walls?
5. Choose the correct option  
The phrase 'clicked their tongues' expresses
  - (i) The peasants' worries about the sting.
  - (ii) The peasants' sorrow for the mother.
  - (iii) The peasants' failure to find the scorpion.
6. Pick out a simile and a metaphor from the above lines.



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Let us read on

With every movement that the scorpion made  
his poison moved in Mother's blood they said.

May your suffering decrease  
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.

May the sum of evil  
balanced in this unreal world  
against the sum of good  
become diminished by your pain.

May the poison purify your flesh  
Of desire, and your spirit of ambition,  
They said, and they sat around  
On the floor with my mother in the center,  
The peace of understanding on each face.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.4

1. (a) How many times 'they said' has been repeated?
- (b) Who are 'they' in the above lines?
- (c) Why did they want the scorpion to sit still?

The peasants, in the above lines, are praying for the woman. They begin each prayer with the word 'may'. The repetitive use of the word is known as chanting. It also shows here the peasant's concern for the suffering woman.

2. List the prayers that the peasants make for the mother
  - (i)
  - (ii)
  - (iii)
  - (iv)
  - (v)

Let us read further

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours  
 more insects, and the endless rain.  
 My mother twisted through and through  
 groaning on a mat  
 My father, sceptic, rationalist  
 trying every curse and blessing,  
 powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.  
 He even poured a little paraffin  
 upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.  
 I watched the flame feeding on my mother  
 I watched the holy man perform his rites  
 to tame the poison with an incantation.  
 After twenty hours  
 it lost its sting.  
 My mother only said  
 Thank god the scorpion picked on me  
 and spared my children.



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### INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.5

1. The poet says that his father who was a rationalist tried everything. Why did he do so? Pick out the correct answer from the options given below:
  - (i) because the father had changed
  - (ii) because the father wanted to do what others were doing
  - (iii) because the father was deeply concerned
2. Why did the mother feel relieved?



### OVERALL QUESTIONS

1. Who is the 'I' in the poem?
2. What does the poem say about a mother?



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**CHECK YOUR ANSWERS****Intext Questions 18.1**

1. Yes, it was a dark night
2. Yes, it had been raining for long.

**Intext Questions 18.2**

1. continuous rain
2. under a sack of rice
3. (ii) a quick and sudden action
4. because it poisons the person it stings

**Intext Questions 18.3**

1. the peasants
2. the evil one
3. to paralyse the evil one
4. the peasants' shadows were thrown on the walls
5. the peasants' failure to find the scorpion
6. Simile- peasants came like swarm of flies.  
Metaphor – giant scorpion shadows

**Intext Questions 18.4**

1. (a) six times (b) They are peasants  
(c) because they believed that with the movement of the scorpion, the poison moved in the mother's body.
2. (i) May he sit still.  
(ii) May the sins of the previous birth be burned away.  
(iii) May the suffering decrease the misfortunes of next birth.  
(iv) May the sum of evil become diminished.  
(v) May the poison purify the flesh.

**Intext Questions 18.5**

1. (iii) because the father was deeply concerned.
2. because the scorpion bit her and spared her children.

**OVERALL QUESTIONS**

1. Poet
2. Mother loves her children more than herself. She wants to save her children from every kind of pain.