

THE WELL-WISHER

(Hitaishi)

**a one—act play on leprosy
by
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**The Leprosy Mission Health Education Centre
Muzaffarpur. Bihar-842 002**

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326, V Main, I Block
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Cast :

Sunil Prasad	—	A bank clerk
Mrs. Prasad	—	Mother of Sunil
Nagina	—	The Dhobi (washerman)
Asharfi	—	Dhobi's assistant
Dr. Vijay Kumar	—	General Practitioner
Kamala Prasad	—	Sunil's wife

SCENE SETTINGS ;

Scene 1 The stage is divided into two halves by a wall. One side shows the living room of the Prasad's house. The other side shows the verandah.

In the living room is a table and two chairs. The verandah is empty, except for a chair and some plants in pots.

Scene 2 The Doctor's Office. The Doctor's desk and chair with two chairs for patients at one side.

Scene 3 As Scene 1.

SCENE 1

(As the curtain opens Mrs. Prasad is laying the table for breakfast and generally tidying the room. Sunil enters.)

Sunil Good morning Mother.

Mrs. Prasad (annoyed) Oh, you are late again for breakfast. Sit down and hurry or you'll be late for the office too. (Sunil sits at the table)

Sunil What is for breakfast then ?

(Mrs. Prasad brings in a plate with his breakfast. She slams it down in front of him.)

Mrs. Prasad Your omelette was ready an hour ago. You take so long in the bathroom.

(Sunil starts eating. He picks up the newspaper).

Sunil Let me see what is today's news.

(He reads as he eats. Mrs. Prasad brings in the teapot & pours out a cup for him.)

(On the verandah the Dhobi and his assistant enter. The assistant is carrying a bundle with clean clothes.)

Dhobi (in a harsh whisper). This is the house I told you about. The Young Sahib is all right. He works in a bank. He's a peaceful man ; but his mother ! Oh, what a woman ! Always nagging ! (he imitates a woman's voice). Dhobi-you're late again ! Dhobi-this shirt is not clean ! Dhobi-where are the buttons ! She's always complaining and angry.

Asharfi (shrinking back in alarm and shaking with fear). Oh, I'm afraid to meet this woman.

Dhobi (putting out his hand to pull Asharfi back). No, don't be afraid. You just say (in a mocking tone) yes Madame ! No Madame ! So sorry Madame ! and she will be alright. (He shouts in a loud voice) The Dhobi is here Madame.

(Mrs. Prasad comes out to the verandah carrying a large bundle of dirty clothes which she throws to the ground.)

Mrs. Prasad (scornfully) Oh, the Dhobi is here, but one week late as usual. Are the clothes really clean and well-ironed ?

Dhobi Yes Madame, you will be really satisfied this time (turning to

Asharfi). Show the Madame her clothes you slow top.
(Asharfi holds out the clothes but his hands are shaking with fear.)

Mrs. Prasad Who is this new fellow ? I haven't seen him before ?

Dhobi He is my new assistant.

Mrs. Prasad Ho, you save so much of soap and starch that you can afford an assistant now can you !

Dhobi No, no, Madame. My son used to help me but he is studying for his matric so now he can not spare the time. I have had to take on this new man. (To Asharfi) Count the dirty clothes you dim wit. (Asharfi counts the dirty clothes).

Mrs. Prasad How many ?

Asharfi (Stuttering) Th...thirteen madame.

Mrs. Prasad Well, at least he can count. Now see that you come at the right time next week, (She turns to go inside but is halted by the Dhobi's voice).

Dhobi (very humbly) Madame please excuse me, but I have something to say. (He turns to Asharfi) you go on, I'll catch you up at the next house (Asharfi picks up the bundle of clothes & goes off stage).

Mrs. Prasad What is it now ? Another advance ? It can't be your sister's wedding again, she must have been married twice already !

Dhobi (very humbly) No, no, please forgive me Madame, but I couldn't help noticing it—that patch on your arm, and now I see you have another on your neck.....

Mrs. Prasad Oh that ! That's nothing ! I've had it for many months and it's never troubled me. (She again turns to go but again the dhobi's voice stops her).

Dhobi Please listen to me Madame. My sister had marks like that on her arm. I took her to the Doctor who said it was serious. He said that she had come in time, but that if she had not taken treatment early her hands might have become deformed.

(Mrs. Prasad is now very interested and turns to hear more).

Mrs. Prasad What happened to her ?

Dhobi The Doctor gave her tablets to take. The patches slowly disappeared.

Mrs. Prasad Did he say what it was ?

Dhobi Yes Madame. He said it was leprosy.....

Mrs. Prasad (recoiling in horror) Leprosy ! Are you saying that I have leprosy ? Don't be a fool. We have never had leprosy in our family. Why, we are decent, religious folk.

I couldn't possibly have leprosy !

Dhobi — The Doctor told us that leprosy is a disease like any other. It is caused by a germ which can attack anyone, rich or poor, good or bad. But it is easily curable in the early stages.

Mrs. Prasad Oh go away ? I don't believe you at all.

Leprosy indeed—huh !

(She goes indoors and the Dhobi goes off stage rather sadly).

Sunil (looking up from newspaper).

Oh Mother, have you been quarrelling with the Dhobi again ?
What was it this time ? Is his sister getting married again ?
Surely she must have two or three children by this time !

Mrs. Prasad No, it wasn't his sister this time. It was some thing else.

(She sits on a chair & begins to cry quietly).

Sunil (astonished) But why are you so upset ? He can't be allowed to worry you like this ! I'll beat the life out of the man for this !

Mrs. Prasad No, no, he was trying to help. He told me his sister used to have patches like this one on my arm. She got cured, but the Doctor told them it was leprosy.....

Sunil Oh, please God, no ! Not leprosy ! You've had that patch on your arm for ages, but I didn't know you had others.
What can we do ?

Mrs. Prasad The Dhobi said this is an early sign of leprosy but if I don't take treatment it could get worse.

Sunil Mother don't worry ! This evening I will take you to the Doctor for full examination. (He gets up and collects his brief case ready for work). He will tell us what is wrong.

Mother (brightening). Could we go to that nice young Doctor you met last week ? What was his name ?

Sunil Doctor Vijay Kumar, yes, I'll phone him from the office and make an appointment for this evening. I must go now or I'll be late. (He goes out-on to the verandah. Mother remains at the table with her head on her hands).

Sunil (Speaking to himself) Oh this is terrible. My mother with leprosy! And at such a time too ! I'm getting married next month. What would my in-laws say to this ? (He moves off as the curtains close).

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Curtain

SCENE 2

(Dr. Vijay Kumar is sitting at his desk in the clinic. Sunil & Mrs. Prasad appear in the doorway).

Doctor Come in please. Oh, it's Sunil and Mrs. Prasad. Please sit down.

Sunil Doctor, we have come to consult you about my mother.

Doctor Well Mrs. Prasad. What is the trouble ?

Sunil See Doctor, (he lifts Mrs. Prasad's arm & shows it to Dr.). Mother has had this pale mark on her arm for some years. Now she has a new one on her neck. We would like your advice about it.

Doctor Oh, yes. Does this patch itch at all ?

Mrs. Prasad No, it doesn't itch. Occasionally I get tingling in my arm, that's all.

Doctor I am going to touch it with this cotton wool. Can you feel anything ?

Mrs. Prasad No.

Doctor Can you feel this pin prick ?

Mrs. Prasad No, I cannot feel anything there, It is quite numb.

Doctor Let me see the back patch (he again tests with cotton and pin but Mrs. Prasad feels nothing). Now I'd like to feel the nerves in your arms & legs, (does so) Right.

(To Sunil) It is very good that you brought your mother now. The disease has been growing very slowly, but if she does not take treatment regularly there may be paralysis and further loss of feeling due to damage in the nerves.

Sunil So it is not leprosy Doctor ? We were told that it might be leprosy.

Doctor Oh yes, it is leprosy, but it will be cured. All leprosy can be cured, even in the later stages, but of course some of the damage may remain if there has been any paralysis. How good that your mother came before serious damage had been done.
Now Mrs. Prasad, you will have to take these Dapsone tablets daily for the next four years. (He shakes out a tablet on his hand). See they are quite small. One tablet each day will put you right. Here are enough tablets for one month.

Mrs. Prasad But Doctor, leprosy is very infectious isn't it ? My son is getting married next month. What should we do about the wedding ?

Doctor Never fear. Your leprosy is not the infectious kind. Most people with leprosy are never infectious, only a small number are infectious

before taking treatment, and can spread the disease to others. When they are on regular treatment the germs die out and they too become non-infectious. You can certainly go ahead with the wedding arrangements.

Mrs. Prasad Oh thank you Doctor. We are so relieved. I hope you will come to the wedding.

Sunil Yes Doctor, please come to my wedding,

Doctor Send me a nice invitation card and I will certainly come. Good bye.

Sunil Good bye Dr. and thank you.

Mrs. Prasad Good bye

(Sunil & Mrs. Prasad exit.)

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

(Setting of living room and verandah as in scene I. Mrs. Prasad is working in the living room. She is singing to herself. Sunil is just finishing his meal at the table. Kamala is standing shyly in the background).

Sunil (Rising from chair). I'm off to the bank now. Where is my brief case. Oh thankyou (as Kamala hands it to him). Don't forget we are going to the Doctor's tonight mother. It is six months since you started treatment, he will be pleased to see the patches have gone.

Mrs. Prasad I'll be ready when you get home from the bank.

Sunil (Putting his hand on Kamala's shoulder as he passes her). Have a pot of tea and some of your nice special dishes ready for me when I come home darling. (Kamala shyly hides her head, Sunil exits). (The Dhobi and Asharfi arrive on the verandah).

Dhobi The Dhobi is here madame.

Mrs. Prasad (To Kamala) Oh the dhobi has come. I'll see to him, you go out to the kitchen and start the work there (Kamala leaves & Mrs. Prasad goes out on to the verandah with a bundle of dirty laundry). Oh Dhobi here you are ! You have actually come on time today (smiles).

Dhobi Yes Madame. (To Asharfi) Give madame her clean laundry. (he hands it to her).

Mrs. Prasad Oh how nicely it is ironed. How much do I owe you ? (She takes money from the corner of her sari)

- Dhobi** The total is Twenty three rupees and fifty paise madame.
- Mrs. Prasad** Here is twentyfive rupees, (She hands it over. The Dhobi feels in all his pockets for change).
- Dhobi** Sorry madame, I do not have any change.....
- Mrs. Prasad** Oh, that's all right. You keep one rupee for yourself and give 50 paise to your assistant here. (Asharfi is counting the dirty clothes on the ground. He looks up startled)
How many dirty clothes today ?
- Asharfi** Oh thank you madame. There are fourteen pieces.
- Dhobi** (To Asharfi) Tie up the dirty clothes & go on home. I wish to speak to madame. (Asharfi goes of). Madame, you seem very happy today. I see the patches have gone from your arm.
- Mrs. Prasad** Yes Dhobi, thanks to your wise advice and the doctor's good treatment. Of course I am still taking the tablets but I am being cured. Isn't it amazing that this frightening disease can now be cured so easily by eating one small tablet a day.
(Asharfi creeps back and tries to listen into the conversation).
- Dhobi** God has been very merciful to supply doctors with new good medicines to heal people.

Mrs. Prasad Yes indeed I am most grateful and thank God in my prayers every day, but also I am glad you had the courage to tell me and not wait until my hands were deformed. Thankyou Dhobi, my well-wisher.

Dhobi Good day madame.

(He turns & bumps into Asharfi)

What are you doing here. I told you to go on home !

Asharfi Whew !—you told me that Madame was bad-tempered, but I overheard her saying thankyou to you ! I heard her ! She's the only one of our clients who says thankyou to a dhobi for washing her dirty clothes.....

Dhobi (Thinking aloud to himself). That's true. Perhaps if we tried helping people more, being kind to them, wishing them well, we would bring out the best in them and not the worst. Look at Madame, she is well now and she is certainly much more happy and friendly since I spoke to her. Such a change in only six months. If only more people were aware of the early signs of leprosy, how much sorrow and deformity could be saved.

CURTAIN

THE END.