

### The Rose Not Taken

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We had shifted to a new neighbourhood. Ours was a flat on the first floor, with a balcony overlooking the lane below and row of houses on the other side. The house exactly opposite to our building had a small beautiful garden, with a round patch of green grass encircled by rose bushes.

It soon became my habit to seat myself in the balcony with my morning cup of tea, gazing at the numerous scenes of everyday life below — the enthusiastic walkers, newspaper boys, customers at the milk booth, etc. However, it was the rose bushes that would unfailingly draw my attention. I noticed how only two or three bloomed at a time but their fragrance was such that almost every passerby paused to breathe in their sweetness.

One day, a beautiful rose welcomed the morning. Its deep yellow hue competed with the sunshine and its fragrance was carried by every waft of air. A little girl, who was on her way to buy milk, noticed it. She stopped to inhale the fragrance. A smile of joy spread across her face. She gazed again at the rose, this time with desire. She looked furtively up and down the street, and then, at the closed shutters of the house to ascertain if anyone was

watching her. She did not of course see me. Her hand slowly reached out to open the garden gate. It creaked and the girl gave a startled jump. Again, she looked swiftly in all directions and moved irresolutely towards the rose bushes.

She stopped near the rose bushes and took a deep breath. She stretched a trembling hand towards the yellow rose. She had almost touched it when she suddenly jerked her hand back, and ran away from the rose bush, the garden and her temptation.

For it was ‘Temptation’, with a capital T, that she had overcome. Not all moral lessons learnt in school, not all fables in textbooks, not all lectures of her teachers would ever have such a strong impact on her as this one real life experience had!

The little girl had faced a moral dilemma, and even though strongly tempted, had resolutely turned away, without so much as a backward glance of regret. It moved me to tears. I am convinced that the incident would have left an indelible impression on her mind and that the wisdom to differentiate between ‘Right’ and ‘Wrong’ would continue to guide her in years to come.

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