

The Seller of Silk Shirts by G.M.Brown

I crossed yesterday to the island of Quoylay to sell silk shirts to the people. I am a Sikh boy. My name over here is Johnny. First was the boatman. He says to another man in the stern, in a voice that goes up and down like singing:

'Do what you like, says I,
But when in future
You want a loan of two pounds,
Don't come, says I, to my door,
Inga,
After what you said and did in the village on Saturday
night.'

At the croft above the pier a man was building a new pigsty. He was carrying stones from the beach. A boy was carrying tones from the beach. A girl also was carrying stones from the beach. The girl stopped and made tea. . . Those pigs have the expectation of living in a beautiful little house made of stones that have been under the sea.

There is a house where is a telephone and also a shop. Going to such a place I have made a mistake, they also sell shirts though coarse of cotton and wool, not silk shirts. This is strange, also they sell tobacco, sugar, rope, many things. The lady there was most fat and most kind.

I have gone then to a house on a hill. Many hens promenade at the door. I have much fear of the dog but there are words in the inside darkness that say, '*Down, Laddie, down.*' What an old lady dusts the chair for my backside to sit! What an old man of words! His wrists were ornamented with blue anchors. Their ale was such that I might have fallen asleep on the chair. I have sold a silk scarf to the lady, that she will wear to the agricultural show next week, I am thinking.

Now did the next big house prove to be the minister's house. There are many unused rooms, none but the minister and his woman, what shame, a hundred of my people might live and sleep there. He has made remarks about bathing in the holy River Ganges that show signal knowledge. No refreshment, neither tea nor ale nor cigarettes, though I have complimented him on the immense number and blackness of his books.

Here is a beautiful girl !iving alone in a place with broken windows beside the loch. I make myself delightful to this girl. There is no dog. There is no old person behind the door angry. Instead there is a new round cake smoking on the table. This girl says, 'Lucky you have come today. At the week-end I had no money, my national assistance was spent. On Saturday night by hard means I got money in the village. Lucky you have come, I must buy a birthday present for Tom the boatman, a silk shirt would be beautiful.'

Yet she has not enough money for a silk shirt. Yet I have sold her one cheap, a bargain, a yellow sill shirt spread out wide like a sleeping butterfly on the little flowered bed she sleeps in.

Such was the beautiful poor girl I sold a shirt to, beside the loch. Her name was called Inga. Even so with the cheapness of the sale I had thirty-five per cent profit. Pretty was Inga.

Three things troubled me crossing the field to the hospitable farm of Greengyres. First, I entered inadvertently my foot into a rabbit hole. Second, I was threatened by a female cow with horns. Third, needing to pass water I was faced wherever I turned by near and distant windows. Yet at the delightful farm of Greengyres were met all my difficulties. There I sold no less than one shirt, four pairs sox, six handkerchiefs, all articles silken.

The schoolmistress was forbidding and in a mood to send me away till I have told her of my graduation from the University of Bombay with B.A. degree and the imminence of my Ph.D. studying at the University of Edinburgh in October on a thesis, 'The Topography of the Mystical Books of William Blake'. She has graduated from that same university. She is not like Inga, pretty. She has long black hairs on her lip, and a wart.

Much walking I did on that island.

On the other side of the hill were three spreading peats, a man and two women, in the sun. Here was much mirth. I say to the man, 'You have no shirt, therefore you must buy one of my silk shirts.' All laid down their implements with laughter. A woman said, 'Nobody wears a silk shirt cutting peats.' We laughed greatly. I then responded with this remark, 'Yet when the peats are cut and brought home, then will come the hour of celebration that will necessitate the wearing of a silk shirt!' There I stayed with merriment for five-and-twenty minutes, drinking tea from a flask and smoking two cigarettes. Truly

