



The House of Saturn

THE HOUSE OF SATURN

(The first fictional writing from my pen is based on a Sri Lankan folk tale. According to Sri Lankan mythology the planet Saturn causes all the disasters on earth. Astrologers believe that during the time this fearsome planet rules a person's destiny, he or she will be ruined. The tale explains why the poor get poorer and the rich, richer, and our vision of a kinder, gentler world is now out of sight).

(Illustrated by Sanjay Amaratunga)

THE HOUSE OF SATURN

The House of Saturn
Stands amidst opulence.
Rainbow falls cascade;
Beyond blue-green lawns, peacocks parade.
Lotus ponds with fountains squirting;
Between lily pads, goldfish darting.
Cobbled paths twist and turn,
In jasmine beds edged with fern.
Fragrance fills the air.
A feast of sights so rare
Charms the seer.
These wondrous gardens lie
Under the dome of a boundless sky.

“Strangers to opulence
Miserable wretches prone to violence,
Enter the House of Saturn!
By the rays of my lantern
Walk thro’ this cavernous hall.
Tread brisk, do not stall!”

“Is this a palace or cavern?”
‘Tis the House of Saturn!
Fear not the sonic boom,
‘Tis thunder at the edge of doom.
A petition, did you say?
To my Lord Saturn, guide your way?
Him you fear,
Or Her, you hold dear?”

“We tread in fear, we have no cheer.
Helpless are we; we live in misery.
Our suffering is Saturn’s doing.

For the poor He cares not;
Their pleas He hears not.
Offend the rich He dares not;
Their fame and fortune He hurts not.
Callous, capricious, sullen and severe,
Wild and wicked, Him we fear.
His Lady, we adore.
Saturn is our foe.
With our offering of curd and honey,
This petition to Her, we bring.
In it Her praise we sing;
Tell Her of our suffering,
Which is His doing.
Our plight the mighty Saturn ordains;
Our pleas for mercy He disdains.
May the fair Lady hear our pleas
And blunt the ruthless weapons of His!

Their purpose he heard and laughter suppressed;
The vulgar crowd sneeringly addressed:
“My Lord’s victims are carefully selected:
The unfortunate, the disadvantaged, the dejected;
The downtrodden, the deranged, and the deprived.
I’ve never known Him to strike at whim.
So why all this fuss? But, if you must,
Complain. At least refrain from making such noise.
Your rude voice
Will stir my Master, to wreck more disaster upon you.
My Lady cannot save you
From the perils He’ll heap upon you.
Hark! The rustle you hear beyond the door
‘Tis the flow of her gown over the marble floor.”

“List, dear Lady of beauty, so comely a face
As Thine have we seldom seen.

Radiant Thy smile, matchless Thy purity;
Thou hast the charm to overcome His authority.
Sweet Lady, hear our cries!
This petition is for Thy lustrous eyes.
Read it, kind Lady, compassionate and wise!
Our gracious Lady, it contains no lies.
We implore, we beg, we beseech thee, intercede!
If He relents not, concede not!
He endows the wealthy;
We're sick, while they're healthy.
Our lives too awful;
Our destiny too fearful.
How can Thou watch us perish?
Our plight, surely Thou doest not relish.
Restore us to happiness and health;
Forget not to grant us power and wealth!
When Thy mission is done,
Thou wilt have won
Our abiding loyalty.
We shall eternally adore Thee.
Thou shalt forever be
Our Supreme Deity.”

Terrified though she was of His Majesty
Showing not her temerity, she met them with serenity.
Vanity clouded the air, she did not dare
Tell this seething mass of humanity,
To contest her Lord would be an act of futility,
Nay, of insanity.
Dazzled by her beauty, distracted by voice and
And the attention from so rare a person,
The petition, they thrust into her quaking hand,
They saw not the heaving of her bosom;
Nor felt they the tremor in her voice,
So fascinated by her poise

And grace. Her charm, they thought, could quell
A raging beast, or calm the swell
Of the oceans. Such notions
She inspired.
In wild illusions, they were mired.

Though repelled by their sight,
She was impelled by their plight
To approach her Lord, and reproach Him
For His lack of equity as unbecoming of a deity;
Intoxicated by compassion
Eyes brightening with softness,
She accepted the mission
Of intercession
Would she arouse in Him passion
Of love or hate? Some bait
She must use to diffuse
The anger she would arouse in her Mate.
While the poor, they were ecstatic
With a mediator so majestic.

They departed, with cheer,
Leaving her in despair,
Brooding over an assignment so rare.
Would she dare? Would she dare?

That same night, in the moonlight,
Sat they on the shore of their enchanted lake.
He stretched His hand to take
Hers. "Behold, the sight!
Hast Thou seen the moon so bright?
Her reflection on the lake
Two beauties triplicate;
Thy and her glowing light
Dispel the night.

See, my love, the trees and streams
Gleam in the radiant light of silver moonbeams!
How thou glow in silver sheen!”

From her royal brow, gems and jewels gleam;
But within her bosom, darkness reigns.
Pain smote her heart, her face she hid in shame.

“Why hide thy face and conceal its light
My fair mate?

So serious thou appear, my dear;
Hast thou some cause to fear?”

Trembling in fear and anguish,
She meekly replied, “My righteous Lord,
My Savior, My God!

I recall the poor

Who came to our door

Today. Their plight

Canst Thou not set right?

They accuse; nay, nay, they say

If Thou hast the will, Thou wilt find a way

To lift the rot and decay

That surround their tasks, day by day.

Hardships abound in their daily strife

For survival. Joyless in their life,

So cheerless is Thy wife.”

His strong hand gripped hers,

Causing her to pause.

His cruel eyes glared into hers.

She stiffened, because

Unforgotten abuse, dark and dreadful

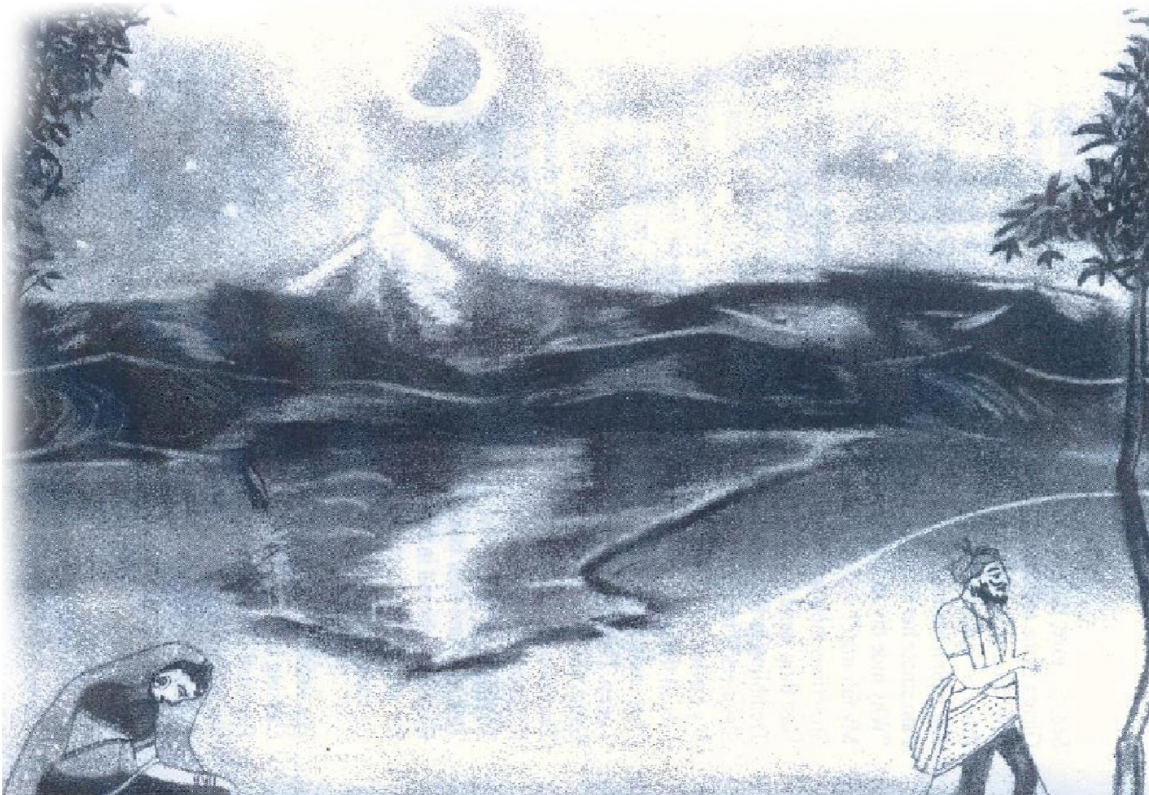
Cast trembling shadows, sad and painful.

She stuttered,

“I implore.”

Fearfully, she uttered,

“Be kind to the poor.”



“strode off leaving in a quivering heap”

She would not heed,
The inner voice that forbade
Her defiance.
In a quivering voice
Of non-compliance,
She pleaded,
“Reward not
The evildoer.
A gentler world
Thou must make
For my sake.”

Ferocious became His countenance,

And His body shook with black passion.
He responded not, but her
Slender wrist felt the pressure
Of His unarticulated annoyance
At her interference.
Her teeth chattered in the cold night air,
And heart ached in despair.
Tormented by new fears,
Her eyes became pools of tears.
He thundered,
“Thou hast the audacity,
To challenge My authority.”
Fire flamed in His head;
From His eyes, darts of lightning spread.
She withered.
He kicked the fizzling lantern,
Hurling it through the air,
In a shower of sparks.
She shivered.
“What doest thou know of equity?
Brains thou hast not; only frailty, aplenty.
Shelter not in they heart love of poverty.
Become not a victim of My vengeful ire;
Perish not in the flames of the raging fire
Thou hast stoked in Me.
Get thee out of My sight, flee!”

Darkening the landscape about her,
A cloud spread over the moon above her.
He strode off leaving her
In a quivering heap.
She hurried back inside to hide
From the furies He had unleashed.

His anger slumbered through the night.

She stayed awake in immortal fright,
Wondering whether He would remember,
After a deep slumber,
Her plea for compassion, kindness and equity,
Toward all humanity;
Or would sleepless anger
Aggravate the unrelenting hate for her?
Despite His fury,
She felt it her duty,
To tell, nay remind Him,
That the world would be a gentler place
Should Saturn lend all His grace.

At the crack of dawn, He awoke,
Broke His fast; ne'er a word He spoke.
Grabbed His staff, to the terrace went
The scheming Saturn, on sinister purpose bent.
What it was, she knew not.
But resolved she to fear not
His temper; however, she would not
Cross His path again.
Avoid she must, this anguish and pain.

He strode inside as the clock struck eight.
From His eyes flew sparks of hate
At His mate, who had dared to contest
His will; to air her protest.
Gulping down His tea in one move,
He shouted, "Go fetch me some fruit!"
She fled from the Brute
To the banana grove.

Clear was the day, blue the sky;
The sun shone brightly; she heard the wind sigh.
The leaves danced sprightly, but the birds up on high

Sang of her sorrows. Like arrows, their song rent
Her heart in twain. One half spent
On visions vain; the other bent
On the beauty of the peaceful abode
Which with golden splendor glowed.

She wandered through the grove with labored gait,
Seeking refuge from her ferocious Mate.
From every tree, ripened fruit in bunches hung,
Swollen and tender to her touch;
Nourished by the sun of which it had much.
Never had bananas a more golden sheen
Than those that hung between
Cascading leaves of verdant green.
So ripe they must have grown
By magic, from the seeds He'd sown.
To destroy such beauty, she thought is wrong.
But it was her duty, to give Him fruits aplenty;
Cause satiety and swing His mood to gaiety.
But destroy she could not such awesome beauty!

Unable to make up her mind,
She roamed through the grove hoping to find
A bunch of lesser splendor,
To pick without regret and render
Unto Him the fruit He demanded.
Fearful that she be reprimanded
If she hurried not,
She ran from one to another spot,
Frantically searching for a dispensable tree,
And found only one amidst plenty.

Hidden from the sun
It stood looking forlorn.
Shunned by birds and bees,

Its fruit a trifle diseased.
Skillfully her knife she drew
With a thrust, the tree to slew.
Sinewy arms lunged at the tree
Once, twice, thrice; it fell shapelessly.

The fallen fruit gathered she,
And hurried back, fearfully.
The slighted poor seemed irrelevant
Amidst her worries so incessant.
Memories of past violence;
Reunions and silence.

“Why didst thou tarry?” He bellowed,
“That fruit slowly mellowed,
But ripened sooner than Thou
Took to bring it to Me.
Aha! Carrying it thither
In thy hands did they wither?
On the way
Did they decay?
Such luscious fruit, I see
Hanging down from every tree,
So abundantly.
Why pray didst thou bring
This sickly thing
I behold
In your fold?”

“Fret not My Lord,” she implored.
“More luscious fruit I did behold.
The beauty of Thy grove
Moved me,
Nay, it drove me to tears.
Despite the fears

Of thy fury, I could not
Nay, I felt I should not
Destroy such beauty.
A feeling within me surged;
It urged
Me to make Thy grove more beautiful
By destroying the tree less bountiful.”

“Aha!” thundered Saturn, flashing a smile so rare;
“Thou couldst not destroy its beauty,
Nay, Thou wouldst not dare.
So do I reason when I behold mankind;
I seek out and find
The feeble, the poor, those in distress;
Wipe them out, flush them down; them I suppress.
I console not those in pain.
Methinks they live in vain.
Cleanse the world of the blighted, that’s how I feel,
As thou didst in the grove with much zeal.
Unfair? Maybe, but delightful nonetheless.
So My dear, forget thy distress.
Together We’ll make the world a better place.
But first, cleanse We must the human race.”