

opening extract from
grandpa chatterji's third eye

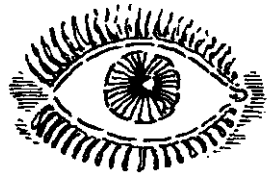
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Cry Baby

Grandpa Chatterji sat in the aeroplane that was bringing him to Britain to see his grandchildren again. He was squashed right in the middle of the middle block, with no aisle on one side, and no window on the other. Hours had gone by. He would like to have got up and walked about, but he didn't want to disturb the other passengers, many

of whom were sleeping soundly.

He didn't want to watch the in-flight film either, or listen to music on the headset, so he wriggled his toes, stretched his arms above him, and rotated his head.



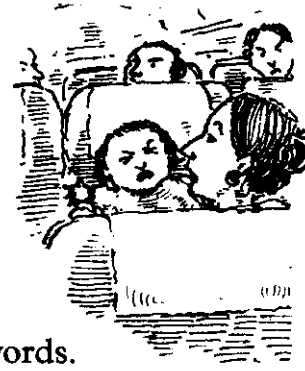
'Bah . . . weh . . . yah . . .' A baby was bawling somewhere in front of him. She seemed to have been at it for ever.

'Hush, baby, hush!' he could hear her desperate mother trying to calm her.

A ripple of movement ran through the plane. People who were trying to sleep shuffled about and changed their positions as

much as they could in the cramped seats. Those who were watching the film, or listening to music, wriggled their headsets, clamping them tighter on to their ears so as to block out the bawling.

'Bah . . . weh . . . yah . . . eh . . .!' the baby continued.



Grandpa saw a little head bobbing up and down, as Mother jogged the baby on her shoulder, patting her back and whispering soothing words.

Next to Mother, Father looked embarrassed. He was a new father. 'Can't you keep her quiet?' he asked with irritation.

'You try,' whispered Mother. 'I don't know what to do!'

So Father took the baby, holding her away from him, not wanting all its dribbling and tears to mess up his shirt. Bob, bob, bob! Father, too, could think of nothing else to do but bob the baby violently up and down.

'Bah . . . weh . . . yah . . . ahhh . . .' the baby cried even louder and struggled with arms outstretched to go back to Mummy.

Mother fumbled for a bottle. Back came baby, clasping Mother round her neck in a stranglehold. 'Bah . . . weh . . . yah . . .' she howled. 'Bah . . . weh . . . gulp!' The crying stopped abruptly as the teat of the bottle was pushed into her mouth. 'Splat!' The baby jerked her head away and with mouth wide open began her bawling again. Mother looked as if she too could cry. She thrust the baby back to Father.

From his seat, Grandpa could see the little head bobbing first with Father, then disappearing as if under a wave, and reappearing with Mother.

And so, back and forth the baby went between mother and father, wailing and screaming, till now everyone was awake. Passengers sighed with patient fortitude, trying not to feel irritated by the persistent cries. Even ear plugs didn't help.

'Oh dear,' sighed Grandpa Chatterji to himself. 'We have many more hours to go. Perhaps I can do something to help.' He uncurled his feet and tapped his neighbour. 'Excuse me!' he smiled apologetically. The neighbour tapped the person sitting next to him, and jerked his head in Grandpa's direction as if to say, 'It's not my fault I've

woken you from your sleep. The gentleman here wants to get out.'

With a lot of heaving and puffing, the two passengers on his right tipped themselves out of their seats and allowed Grandpa Chatterji to wriggle free. Then they settled themselves back as quickly as they could and resumed their sleeping positions.

'Thank you, thank you, so sorry to have disturbed you,' Grandpa muttered, and made his way down the aisle towards the bawling child.

Mother was violently rocking her child to and fro, while Father made vain attempts to tickle baby's toes and make funny faces. But still baby yelled. 'Bah . . . yeh . . . weh . . .'

'Oh dearie me!' Grandpa Chatterji paused beside the desperate family. 'Why

don't you let me walk your baby up and down a bit. It will give you some rest. Eh?' He cocked his head, smiled his smile of sublimity, gazed at them with his deep as ocean eyes, and held out his arms.

Mother and Father looked up at him like startled rabbits. Father frowned and looked at Mother. Was this a mad man? What did he think he was doing, interfering in their business.

But they had failed to stop their baby crying, and people were now glaring at them with accusing faces, as if they were such bad parents. Mother and Father exchanged silent messages with each other. Could they hand over their baby to a stranger? Yet, what harm could come of it? After all, there they all were flying high at 33,000 feet, and he couldn't

exactly run away with her.

'I'm a grandfather,' murmured Grandpa soothingly. 'I'm used to children. I already have six grandchildren. I'm on my way to visit two of them in England, Neetu and Sanjay. Lovely children. This is your first baby, yes?'

They nodded blankly. 'And last,' muttered Father under his breath.

'So you see, I'm used to babies. Come, let me take her for a walk, and you can get some sleep.'

Father looked at Mother. Mother looked at Father. Baby bawled loud as ever. Passengers sighed with exasperation. Father nodded in surrender. 'Well, if you think you can do something . . .' he muttered grudgingly.

'Thank you, sir. It's very kind.' Mother passed her baby parcel to Father, who handed her to Grandpa Chatterji.



Grandpa folded the baby into his arms, and beamed down into its furious little face. 'There, there, there . . .' he rocked her gently. 'Let's go for a walk, shall we?'

'Bah . . . weh . . . yah . . .' Baby screamed, as Grandpa trundled off down the aisle, the wails diminishing into the distance. Father shrugged almost triumphantly.

'There's always someone who thinks they know better. He'll soon be back.'

Grandpa Chatterji reached the tail end of the plane. Baby was still crying and spluttering and was so red in the face that he thought she would explode. Grandpa loosened the warm, zipped-up-to-the-chin baby suit which seemed to be cooking the baby, and breathed cool air down her neck.

He rocked her gently instead of bouncing her up and down. He cooed into her ear with his deep, husky voice, and sang a Bengali lullaby. The wail began to be punctuated with gasps for breath. Instead of one long, unbroken sound, it stopped, started, stopped again, and started, but a little less explosively. Then silence.

Baby looked up with great round tear-

brimming blue eyes, into Grandpa's dark brown kindly gaze. 'Bah . . .' she started . . . then softened it to 'Gooo.'

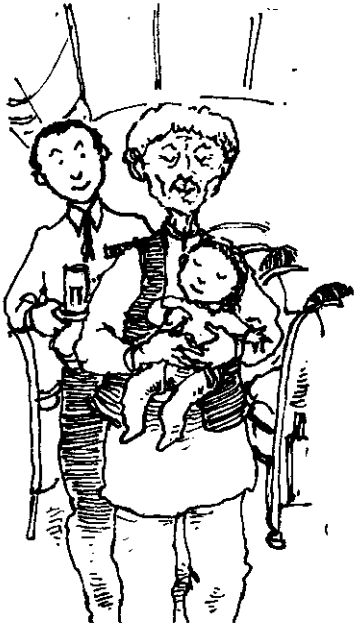
'Goo Goo!' chuckled Grandpa, tickling her under the chin. He gazed back into her deep blue eyes as if he looked into the first ocean of creation; into the sea of milk from which the whole world had come into existence.

'Gurgle, gurgle,' warbled Baby like a little bird. Then her large blue eyes blinked as the tears dried. Perhaps as she looked into the worlds of his eyes, she saw love and patience and wonderment at the miracle of her creation.

Grandpa Chatterji patted Baby like a little drum, with a gentle rhythmic hand, beating in time to her heartbeat. She stared

– not just into his two eyes, but perhaps into his third eye, which only a newly created being could see glimmering in his forehead.

She blinked again, but more slowly and heavily. The lids closed and opened. The next time she blinked, her eyelids stayed shut and all the tension went out of her body as she gave way to sleep.



'Are you a magician?' whispered the air steward. 'I wish you'd fly with us more often.'

Grandpa smiled. 'Travel is so exhausting for little ones,' he said, 'but she will sleep now.'

Still rocking her gently, Grandpa Chatterji

walked back down the long, darkened cabin. People lolled in slumber, some with heads thrown back and mouths open, others leaning up against their neighbours, or curled up against their pillows.

He reached Mother and Father. Father was asleep with headphones still clamped to his ears. But Mother looked up with wide anxious eyes as Grandpa arrived. Baby was now breathing in some deep, peaceful place where nothing could reach her to wake her up. Grandpa gently offered her into Mother's arms. 'I think she was a bit too hot,' he whispered. 'We're not in England yet!'

'Thank you!' Mother mouthed her words. 'Thank you.'

He made his way back to his seat.

'Excuse me! I'm so sorry to disturb you,'

he said, disturbing his fellow passengers with mumbled apologies. 'Sorry. So sorry. I beg your pardon. Forgive me. Thank you.' Grandpa managed to get back into his seat. Settling back, he closed his eyes.

Anyone passing by could have thought he was sleeping, but they may not have noticed that he had tucked his bare feet up into a cross-legged position, with his arms resting on his knees. Though he looked so still and quiet, Grandpa Chatterji was seeing with his third eye, his inner eye, his eye of



thought and contemplation.

His mind created a beautiful pale lotus, floating on tranquil water. He felt that he was floating too. He began to see images, as if reflected in the water. He saw his daughter's house, where he was going for a holiday, and the street lined with maple trees. He saw his grandchildren, Neetu and Sanjay, and smiled fondly. They were both in school, trying to concentrate. But he knew they were thinking about him, just as he was thinking about them.

'I'll be with you soon,' he sighed, then he too slipped into a deep sleep.