

# **The Wordless End**

By

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## CHARACTERS

RABI

Rabindranath Tagore, age 80. A world-renowned Bengali poet at the end of his life.

KADAMBARI

Kadambari Devi, age 25. Rabi's first love and muse.

(KADAMBARI delivers the following as RABI builds a large chalk circle on the ground.)

KADAMBARI

I am your companion from the beginning of time, for I am your own shadow. In your laughter, in your tears, you shall sense my dark self hovering near you, now in front, now in behind. At the dead of night when you are lonely and dejected, you'll be startled to find how near I am seated to you, gazing into your face. Whenever you turn I am here, my shadow sweeps over the sky and covers the earth, my piteous cry and my cruel laughter echo everywhere, for I am hunger never appeased, thirst never quenched. I am always there, a dagger in your breast, a poison in your mind, a disease in your body. I shall chase you like a terror in the day, like a nightmare in the night. Like a living skeleton I shall prick you day and night, like a curse shall I haunt you, like fate I shall swallow you—as night follows day, as fear follows hope.

RABI

I'm lost in the middle of my birthday.

(Lights out. Lights up. RABI wakes up inside the circle. He feels only silence.)

Ha! It is gone.  
You see this chalk? No evil may enter!  
That's what I thought.

(He takes a deep breath. His body, as if suddenly remembering his age and health, wilts.)

Today...

(He tries to get out the next word, but he cannot. He heaves.)

My sack is empty.

(RABI sees the crumpled up bits of paper. He smells them.)

Oleander...jasmine...magnolia...

KADAMBARI  
You are smelling the garden, Bhanu.

RABI  
Kadambari!

(RABI cowers.)

KADAMBARI  
Rabi, it's me!

RABI  
Don't come any closer.

KADAMBARI  
There is nothing to be afraid of.

(RABI tries to leave the circle.)

No!

(RABI reaches his hand out. It shrivels in the dead cold. He pulls it back in.)

RABI  
What is this?

(He sticks his foot out. It shrivels. He falls inside the circle. His body does not take it well.)

KADAMBARI  
Rabi!

RABI  
This is ridiculous. I made this circle!

(RABI tries to erase the circle.)

KADAMBARI  
STOP!  
If you do that, all of this will have to end.

RABI

Why?

KADAMBARI

It is just so.

RABI

Are you here to punish me? Why else have you come after so many years.

KADAMBARI

I am the one who has been punished. I have been cursed these years, forced to blindly journey to the deepest depths of the abyss.

RABI

How beautiful it must have been. Wandering weightless through the world behind the veil.

KADAMBARI

It was lonely. Impossibly cold. Now my journey has ended.

RABI

So you have come here.

KADAMBARI

To be with you.

RABI

Well here I am. Feast your eyes.

KADAMBARI

Are you still angry with me, Rabi?

RABI

I have missed you so terribly.

KADAMBARI

I know Rabi. I'm here now.

RABI

Now. I am pathetic now. Sight, sound, touch, all fading.

KADAMBARI

You look the same.

RABI

I have aged so much.

KADAMBARI

Life molds the body to its will but it is the same body.

RABI

You will always be beautiful.

KADAMBARI

And you will always have the right words.

RABI

I have no more words. I have left them, or they have left me.

KADAMBARI

How is this possible?

RABI

Never fear. I have written all the words I am to write. I woke up one morning to find my mind empty and my hand grasping for a paintbrush.

KADAMBARI

This will not do.

RABI

There is nothing to do. Such is my fate. Are you disappointed at the man you left behind, Kadambari?

(KADAMBARI lays out a set of katoris.)

RABI

This smell! C-c-

KADAMBARI

Coriander.

RABI

Yes. Cor-i-an-der. C-curry leaves.

KADAMBARI

That's right.

RABI

Crushed curried potatoes, stir-fried prawns, mustard seeds popping in ghee, tossed with yesterday's rice.

KADAMBARI

With green chilis to bring it to life.

RABI

C-ch-ch...

KADAMBARI

Chorcori. Your favorite.

RABI

You used to make this for me. Oh let me have a bite.

KADAMBARI

Open.

(KADAMBARI wafts the smell to him. He savors the taste.)

RABI

You've transported me, my Hecate. You bring the world to life.

KADAMBARI

What do you see?

RABI

The garden. The one you made on the terrace.

KADAMBARI

Describe it to me.

RABI

It is all around you. You can't see?

KADAMBARI

I have to hear it.

RABI

It's coming to me. At the end of the day a mat and a pillow were spread on the terrace. Nearby, a thick garden of bel flowers on a silver plate in a wet handkerchief. A glass of ice water in a saucer, and some chhanchi pan in a bowl. You would bathe, dress your hair. Your husband—my brother Jyoti would come with a silk shawl thrown over his shoulders, and draw the bow across his violin and I would sing in my clear treble voice.

(He opens his mouth to let out his song, but only a rough, labored breath emerges.)

KADAMBARI

Singing was not your true talent.

RABI

Knocking me down a peg was always yours.

KADAMBARI

Only to keep that ego in check.  
Won't you read to me, Rabi? Like you used to?

RABI

How can I remember?

KADAMBARI

How can you forget?

RABI

Such childish things those verses were.

KADAMBARI

We were only children.

RABI

I've gone so far from them.

KADAMBARI

That's good. You must.

RABI

Life becomes so serious.

KADAMBARI

Do you remember when I first arrived at your house?

RABI

You came with my brother Jyoti, a beautiful princess from a wondrous land, thin gold bangles on your slender brown wrists.

KADAMBARI

I remember you circled the room, afraid to get too close.

RABI

I was infatuated.

KADAMBARI

Infatuation? For your brother's wife?

RABI

You fascinated me. No one had ever seen me that way before. Such a determined, piercing look.

KADAMBARI

Do I see you that way now?

RABI

You do.

(KADAMBARI and RABI dance slowly with one another, separated by the divide. KADAMBARI continues to move with vitality. RABI cannot keep up, but watches her in awe.)

There is no one here but us. No one to judge. No one to betray. Oh Kandambari. Please. I must come closer—

KADAMBARI

No! Rabi! Please don't!

(RABI sticks the top half of his body outside of the circle. He stares into KADAMBARI's face. He is frozen, terrified. His body shakes. He lets out a cry and shoots back into the circle.)

RABI

I am always there, a dagger in your breast, a poison in your mind, a disease in your body.



KADAMBARI

Rabi-

RABI

I shall chase you like a terror in the day, like a nightmare in the night. Like a living skeleton I shall prick you day and night, like a curse shall I haunt you, like fate I shall swallow you—

I am a murderer! These words are my accomplice.

KADAMBARI

No! Words were always good with you.

RABI

I know who you really are! I know you too well. My wife, my children—now you have finally come for me.

KADAMBARI

I am Kadambari.

RABI

You are Death!

KADAMBARI

I am the first great sorrow you met when you were young. I am Kadambari. I am Death. This is the fate I chose.

RABI

Why choose this?

KADAMBARI

It is just so.

RABI

“It is just so,” “it is just so”—

KADAMBARI

The destiny of all things is to end.

RABI

You made it end! You chose it!

KADAMBARI

That's right. I chose it for myself. I. Not you.

RABI

You read it without me. You didn't hear it from my voice.

KADAMBARI

Words were always good with you.

RABI

But the last ones you read were despicable. Evil!

(KADAMBARI throws a ball of paper at  
RABI.)

RABI

How did it pass through?

KADAMBARI

They are just words.

RABI

Just words!

KADAMBARI

You surround yourself with words. You build altars of words. But here you are, at the threshold of eternity. And here I am with you. What do you want to say to me?

RABI

I don't know where to begin.

KADAMBARI

Were we in love?

RABI

Were we—?

KADAMBARI

Did you love me?

RABI

You made me who I am.

KADAMBARI

So you appreciated me.

RABI

I have not been whole without you. I've roamed the earth like a ghost calling your name with every word I have.

KADAMBARI

Words words words.

RABI

Every single word was for you.

(He says the following, pulling books out of his robes. He finds a different section in a different place on his body.)

I seem to have loved you in numberless forms, numberless times...  
In life after life, in age after age, forever.  
My spellbound heart has made and remade a necklace of songs  
That you take as a gift, wear around your neck in your many forms,  
In life after life, in age after age, forever.

Whenever I hear old chronicles of love, its age-old pain,  
Its ancient tale of being apart or together.  
As I stare on and on into the past, in the end you emerge,  
Clad in the light of a pole-star piercing the darkness of time:  
You become an image of what is remembered forever.

You and I have floated here on the stream that brings from the fount.  
At the heart of time, love of one for another.  
We have played alongside millions of lovers, shared in the same  
Shy sweetness of meeting, the same distressful tears of farewell—  
Old love, but in shapes that renew and renew forever.

Today it is heaped at your feet, it has found its end in you  
The love of all man's days both past and forever:  
Universal joy, universal sorrow, universal life.  
The memories of all loves merging with this one love of ours—  
And the songs of every poet past and forever.

Unending Love. These are the words I wanted for you.

KADAMBARI

I knew. I heard them in every moment we had together.

RABI

I thought you despised me.

KADAMBARI

I love you infinitely. And I will continue to.

RABI

How I've longed to feel your touch.

KADAMBARI

Touch means death.

RABI

But death must come.

KADAMBARI

Then this will all end.

RABI

And in that end begin anew. I want my friends, their touch, with the earth's last love. I will take life's final offering, I will take the human's last blessing. Today my sack is empty. I have given completely whatever I had to give. In return if I receive anything—some love, some forgiveness—then I will take it with me when I step on the boat that crosses to the festival of the wordless end.

(RABI crosses the circle.)

KADAMBARI

All that lives, lives forever. Only the shell, the perishable passes away. The spirit is without end. Eternal. Deathless.

(They touch. They kiss, not on the lips, but on the cheeks, nose, eyes, ears, temple, hands. RABI's energy begins to slow. KADAMBARI kisses RABI on the forehead. They die. Black out.)