

So that evening, after he'd settled Hamlet down for the night, Chulak called at the Firework-Maker's workshop. It lay down a little winding alley full of crackling smells and pungent noises, between the fried-prawn stall and the batik-painter's. He found Lalchand in the courtyard under the warm stars, mixing up some red glow-paste.

'Hello, Chulak,' said Lalchand. 'I hear the White Elephant's going to be presented to Lord Parakit tomorrow. How long d'you think his money'll last?'

'A week, I reckon,' said Chulak. 'Though you never know - we might run away before

then. I've nearly enough to get us to India. I thought I might take up Firework-Making when we got there. Nice trade.'

'Nice trade, my foot!' said Lalchand. 'Firework-Making is a sacred art! You need talent and dedication and the favour of the gods before you can become a Firework-Maker. The only thing *you're* dedicated to is idleness, you scamp.'

'How did you become a Firework-Maker, then?'



'I was apprenticed to my father. And then I had to be tested to see whether I had the Three Gifts.'

'Oh, the Three Gifts, eh,' said Chulak, who had no idea what the Three Gifts were. Probably Lila did, he thought. 'And did you have them?'

'Of course I did!'

'And that's it? Sounds easy. I bet I could pass that test. I've got a lot more than three gifts.'

'Pah!' said Lalchand. 'That's not all. Then came the most difficult and dangerous part of the whole apprenticeship. Every Firework-Maker—' and he lowered his voice and looked around to make sure no-one was listening – 'every Firework-Maker has to travel to the Grotto of Razvani, the Fire-Fiend, in the heart of Mount Merapi, and bring back some of the Royal Sulphur. That's the ingredient that makes the finest

fireworks. Without that, no-one can ever be a true Firework-Maker.

'Ah,' said Chulak. 'Royal Sulphur. Mount Merapi. That's the volcano, isn't it?'

'Yes, you pestilential boy, and already I've told you far more than I should. This is a secret, you understand?'

'Of course,' said Chulak, looking solemn. 'I can keep a secret.'

And Lalchand had the uneasy feeling that he'd been tricked, though he couldn't imagine why.

Next morning, while Lalchand was at the paper merchant's buying some cardboard tubes, Lila went to the Elephant House to see Chulak. When she heard what Lalchand had told him, she was furious.

'Mount Merapi - Razvani - the Royal Sulphur - and he wasn't going to tell me! Oh, I'll never forgive him!'

'That's a bit drastic,' said Chulak, who was busy making the Elephant ready for his new job. 'He's only thinking of you. It's dangerous, after all. You

wouldn't catch me going up there.'

'Hub!' she said. 'It's all right to let me make Golden Sneeze and Java Lights. I suppose - little baby things. But not to let me become a real Firework-Maker. He wants me to stay a child for ever. Well, I'm not going to, Chulak. I've had enough. I'm going to Mount Merapi, and I'm going to bring back the Royal Sulphur, and I'll set up as a Firework-Maker on my own and put my father out of business. You see if I don't.'

'No! Wait! You ought to talk to him—'

But Lila wouldn't listen. She ran straight home, packed a little food to eat and a blanket and a few bronze coins, and left a note on the workshop bench:



Dear Father,  
I have completed my apprentice  
ship. Thank you for all you have  
taught me. I am going to seek the  
Royal Sulphur from Razvani, the  
Fire-Fiend, and I shall probably  
not see you again.  
Your ex-daughter,  
Lila

'Did you tell Lila about Razvani and the  
Royal Sulphur?' he panted.

'Course,' said Chulak. 'You should have  
told her yourself. Why?'

'Because she's gone, you wretch! She's  
gone off by herself to Mount Merapi – and  
she doesn't know the rest of the secret!'

'Is there more, then?'

'Of course there is!' said Lalchand,  
struggling to keep up. 'No-one can go into  
the Fire-Fiend's Grotto without protection.  
She needs a flask of magic water from the  
Goddess of the Emerald Lake – otherwise  
she'll perish in the flames! Oh, Chulak,  
what have you done?'