

The Mistress of Spices

CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

1

- 1 The pirates had come to capture her because they had heard about her magical powers. If she had not made herself famous by using these powers, the pirates would not have come and destroyed the village. This is why she thinks that the destruction is her fault.
- 2 As soon as the storyteller realises that she is naked, the Old One takes off her shawl and puts it round the girl's shoulders.

2

- 1 *Student's own answer.* The student should suggest that the girls who are prettiest will find it most difficult to give up their beauty.
- 2 Tilottama, the dancer at Indra's palace, was a proud, vain girl, and the Old One thinks that the storyteller is a proud, vain girl too.
- 3 Oakland is a place which contains both beautiful districts with rich, happy people, and also ugly districts with poor, unhappy people.

3

- 1 Uhuja's wife often wears sunglasses to hide the bruises on her face. Tilo also still has the powers that she had as a child — she can see into people's hearts and into their lives. This means that she can read their thoughts.
- 2 She wants to protect him from evil. She has had a dreadful vision. In this vision, Haroun has been attacked in his taxi. Tilo thinks that he will be in danger in his new job.
- 3 Jagjit has difficulty finding the things that his mother wants in the shop. She pretends that this might be because there is something wrong with his eyes, but she doesn't really think this. She is using the language of *irony*, or *sarcasm*. She doesn't really want an answer to her question. It is a *rhetorical* question — she already knows the answer.

4

- 1 *Student's own answer.* The student might suggest that Tilo guesses the American is a person who has special powers. She is unable to close the door of her mind to him, so he can see into her thoughts in the same way that she can see into other people's thoughts. He seems to know that Tilo isn't the old woman she seems to be.

- 2 Because this spice will harden his heart — it is the antidote to love. Perhaps this will stop him from feeling lonely. *The student might add that* it is Tilo's own heart she really feels the need to harden against love.

- 3 *Student's own answer.* The student will probably suggest that it is not still true, and that Tilo is in danger from the temptations of American life because she is becoming too interested in the lonely American.

5

- 1 He thinks that his son does not care enough about traditional Indian values. He thinks that Ramu should control Geeta's life more, to make her more 'Indian' and less 'American'.
- 2 The rules for Mistresses do not allow them to leave the places where they live and work. Tilo should not leave her shop to visit Geeta.
- 3 *Student's own answer.* The student will probably suggest that Tilo has the dream because she has decided to break the Mistress rules.

6

- 1 *Student's own answer.* The student might suggest that a magical power has moved the fennel to the magazines so that Tilo will give Lalita one of the magazines as well as the spice. Later Lalita sees a notice in the magazine with a telephone number for battered women to call if they need help. The number belongs to an organisation that helps Lalita to leave Ahuja.
- 2 He looks at the kind of people who come to Tilo's store, and he can't believe that any of them wants to learn martial arts.
- 3 *Student's own answer.* The student should guess that Jagjit is probably hiding something illegal — e.g. drugs or a gun — for the older boys. Tilo is afraid that Jagjit will get into serious trouble.

7

- 1 *Student's own answer.* The student should guess that Geeta is unhappy about the argument with her family. She hopes that her father wants to make things better between them.

2 *Student's own answer. The student should suggest that Geeta's values are really more traditional than her family believe, and she is pleased that Tilo thinks she has done the right thing. She probably also smiles because she believes that there is now a chance of improving her relationship with her family, and she really wants this to happen.*

8

1 Evvie is the lonely American's mother.
2 He is the lonely American's great-grandfather.

9

1 He wants to teach them martial arts.
2 Because the medicine will also give him, for one hour, the power to make people believe anything he says.
3 She upset Haroun when he warned her about Raven. She thinks that he will not come to the store again. But she is afraid for him and needs to help him. This is why she wants to apologize for upsetting him.
4 Tilo is probably still afraid for Haroun because she remembers her terrible vision in which he had been attacked in his taxi.

10

1 She thinks that the dress will only look good on a young woman, and she knows that she looks like an old woman. People will think that she is vain and silly to wear the dress. She is also afraid that people will laugh at Raven for being with an old woman who is trying to look young.
2 She means that she can't understand why a handsome, fairly young man like Raven should want to be with an old, vain woman.

11

1 There is a lot of crime and violence in Oakland. The Old One is using a metaphor in which the city itself seems to be angry.
2 He has pretended that Tilo's plan has failed and that he is angry with her for trying to make him speak to his daughter.

12

1 Because her body now looks much younger than it did previously. Nobody will believe that she is Tilo, the old woman who owned the store.
2 She wants him to use the power which he will gain by learning martial arts for good reasons, not for bad reasons. So he must use his fighting skills to achieve good things. If he uses them to do bad things then he will not be in control of his new power, the new power will be in control of him.

13

1 Tilo needs to give Haroun something to improve his life. She was going to give him a gun, to defend himself. But she now knows that this is a bad idea. More violence is not the answer to his problems. So she gives him lotus root — the spice of love. She was going to keep this spice for herself, to make her final meeting with Raven go well.
2 We learn that Raven expects to be with Tilo for the rest of their lives. He still wants to find his paradise, but now he wants to share it with Tilo.

14

1 Tilo needs the chilli to perform the magic which will start Shampati's fire.
2 '*He is saying that all the animals in the Oakland Zoo have been behaving strangely, crying and calling all night.*' — it has been quite widely observed that animals can become restless or anxious before the onset of an earthquake.

15

1 After she had taken the *makaradwaj*, Tilo's body had changed from the body of a rather ugly old woman into the body of a beautiful young one. But when Raven found her in the ruined store, her body had already started to change again, into the more ordinary body—neither young nor old, pretty nor ugly—that it has now become.
2 Raven's idea is that paradise can be found in beautiful, lonely places, far away from other people and the bad things of everyday life. But Tilo thinks that paradise can only be found among ordinary people, in the places where they have to live their everyday lives.