

## OUR CASUARINA TREE<sup>1</sup>

Like a huge Python, winding round and round  
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars  
Up to its very summit near the stars,  
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound  
5 No other tree could live. But gallantly  
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung  
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,  
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;  
And oft at nights the garden overflows  
10 With one sweet song that seems to have no close,  
Sung darkling<sup>o</sup> from our tree, while men repose. *in the dark*

When first my casement is wide open thrown  
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;  
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest  
15 A gray baboon sits statue-like alone  
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs  
His puny offspring leap about and play;  
And far and near kokilas<sup>2</sup> hail the day;  
And to their pastures wend<sup>o</sup> our sleepy cows; *move slowly*  
20 And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast  
By that hoar<sup>o</sup> tree, so beautiful and vast, *venerable*  
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence  
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:  
25 Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,  
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,  
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!  
Blent with your images, it shall arise  
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!<sup>3</sup>  
30 What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear  
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?<sup>o</sup> *gravel beach*  
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,  
That haply<sup>o</sup> to the unknown land may reach. *perhaps*

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!  
35 Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away  
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,

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<sup>1</sup> The casuarina is an ornamental conifer tree with a resemblance to the larch.

<sup>2</sup> Kokilas, better known as koels, are a type of cuckoo sometimes called the Indian nightingale.

<sup>3</sup> Dutt had two siblings, a brother named Abju who died at the age of fourteen (when Toru was nine) and a sister named Aru who died at the age of twenty (when Toru was eighteen). Thus, both were dead at the time Dutt wrote this poem, making its nostalgia all the more poignant.

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith° *water-spirit*  
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore  
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,  
40 When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:  
And every time the music rose,—before  
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,  
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime  
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

45 Therefore I fain° would consecrate a lay° *gladly / song*  
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those  
Who now in blessed sleep, for aye,° repose, *ever*  
Dearer than life to me, alas! were they!  
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done  
50 With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,<sup>4</sup>  
Under whose awful branches lingered pale  
“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,  
And Time the shadow;”<sup>5</sup> and though weak the verse  
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,  
55 May Love defend thee from Oblivion’s curse.

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<sup>4</sup> Borrowdale is a mountainous valley in England’s Lake District.

<sup>5</sup> Dutt here is quoting (albeit not entirely accurately) William Wordsworth’s poem “Yew Trees,” which pays tribute to four particular yew trees in Borrowdale.