

SÎTA<sup>1</sup>

Three happy children<sup>2</sup> in a darkened room!  
What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?  
A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,  
And in its centre a cleared spot.—There, bloom  
5 Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace  
Tall trees; there, in a quiet lucid lake  
The white swans glide; there, “whirring from the brake,”  
The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;  
There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;  
10 There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light;  
There, dwells in peace the poet-anchorite.<sup>°</sup> *recluse*  
But who is this fair lady? Not in vain  
She weeps,—for lo! at every tear she sheds  
Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,<sup>°</sup> *quickly or strongly*  
15 And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.  
It is an old, old story, and the lay  
Which has evoked sad Sîta from the past  
Is by a mother sung. . . . ‘Tis hushed at last  
And melts the picture from their sight away,  
20 Yet shall they dream of it until the day!  
When shall those children by their mother’s side  
Gather, ah me! as erst<sup>°</sup> at eventide?<sup>°</sup> *earlier / evening*

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<sup>1</sup> Sîta is the wife of Rama, the great hero-king of the *Ramayana*. In addition to her time in the forest with Rama and Lakshman, which led to her kidnapping by Ravana (Rama’s arch-enemy, king of Lanka and of the demons known as Rakshases—see note 1 to “Lakshman”), she also later is exiled by Rama himself. Worried that the potential perception of Sîta’s time with Ravana as improper and thus sully to her might undermine his ability to lead his people, Rama leaves Sîta in the forest even though she is pregnant at the time. She raises her twin boys at the secluded residence of Valmiki, the famous holy sage to whom the composition of the *Ramayana* is attributed. She shed many tears between the time of her abandonment and Rama’s discovery of his sons years later, so it is to this second time of exile that the poem refers.

<sup>2</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.