

# An Astrologer's Day

*R. K. Narayan*

## Summary

‘An Astrologer’s Day’ is a story from the Indian author R. K. Narayan’s 1943 collection *Malgudi Days*. The Malgudi of the collection’s title is a fictional city in India, where all of the stories in the collection take place. The opening story in the book, ‘An Astrologer’s Day’ is about an unnamed astrologer who is confronted by a stranger who questions his abilities.

The story is about revenge, the past, and the reasons why we make the decisions we make in our lives. If you find this analysis helpful, we also recommend this discussion of another R. K. Narayan story, ‘The Doctor’s Word’.

The story is about a man who makes a living as an astrologer, sitting under a tree in a busy street every day and offering to tell the fortune of any passer-by who is willing to pay for him to do so. However, the ‘astrologer’ in reality knows little of the stars, and instead tends to rely on shrewd guesses, cold reading, and letting his clients talk for long enough for him to gain enough background to their lives in order to create the illusion that he somehow knows things about them which they have not told him. He also tends to tell them things which he senses they want to hear, knowing that people are more likely to be willing to hand over money to someone who tells them positive things rather than someone who delivers bad news.

One night, as he is preparing to head home having finished his evening’s work, the astrologer spots a man and invites him to sit with him and have his fortune read. However, the stranger calls into doubt the astrologer’s abilities, and challenges him. He will give him an

anna (one-sixteenth of a rupee) but if the astrologer's answer is unsatisfactory, the astrologer must pay him the anna back, with interest.

They negotiate, and the stranger agrees to pay the astrologer eight annas if he gives him satisfactory answers, but the astrologer must give the stranger more than that if he fails to prove his talents.

After an unpromising start, which fails to impress the stranger, the astrologer correctly identifies that the man was stabbed and then thrown into a well, where he was left for dead. He also tells the man his name, Guru Nayak. When Nayak asks the astrologer when he will meet the man who tried to kill him so he can exact his revenge, the astrologer replies that the man died four months ago in a far-off town.

The astrologer then tells Nayak to return home to his village and never leave again. If he does this, he will live to be a hundred. Nayak is only too happy to agree to this, revealing that he only left his village to try to locate the man who almost killed him. Now he knows the man is dead (the astrologer tells him he was crushed under a lorry), he is satisfied.

When the astrologer arrives home to his wife, there is a twist. It turns out that *he* was the man who attacked Guru Nayak and left him for dead. This is how he knew the man's identity. He was able to throw Nayak off the scent and save himself from the man's vengeance, using his authority as an astrologer to advise the man to return home.