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## For Elkana



*Nissim Ezekiel*

The warm April evening  
 tempts us to the breezes  
 sauntering across the lawn.  
 We drag our chairs down  
 the stone steps and plant them there.

Unevenly, to sit or rather sprawl  
 in silence till the words begin to come.  
 My wife, as is her way,  
 surveys the scene, comments  
 on a broken window-pane.



Suggests a thing or two  
 that every husband in the neighbourhood  
 knows exactly how to do  
 except of course the man she loves  
 who happened to be me.  
 Unwilling to dispute  
 the obvious fact

that she is always right,  
I turn towards the more  
attractive view that opens up  
behind my eyes and shuts her out.

Her voice crawls up and down the lawn,  
our son, who is seven,  
hears it—and it reminds him of something.  
He stands before us,  
his small legs well apart,  
crescent-moon-like chin uplifted  
eyes hard and cold  
to speak his truth  
in masterly determination:  
Mummy, I want my dinner, now.  
Wife and husband in unusual rapport  
state one unspoken thought:  
Children Must be Disciplined.  
She looks at me. I look away.

The son is waiting. In another second  
he will repeat himself.  
Wife wags a finger.  
Firmly delivers verdict: Wait.  
In five minutes I'll serve you dinner.

No, says the little one,  
not in five minutes, now.  
I am hungry.  
It occurs to me the boy is like his father.  
I love him as I love myself.  
Wait, darling, wait,  
Mummy says, wait for five minutes  
But, I am hungry now,  
declaims the little bastard, in five minutes  
I won't be hungry any more.

This argument appeals to me.  
Such a logician deserves his dinner straightaway.

My wife's delightful laughter  
holds the three of us together.  
We rise and go into the house.

### ABOUT THE POET

Nissim Ezekiel (1924–2004) was born in Mumbai. He is today perhaps the best known Indian poet to have written in English. He had his education at Wilson College, Bombay and later at Birbeck College, London. A professor of American Literature at Bombay University, Ezekiel has written several poems and some plays. A proficient critic, Ezekiel lectured at a number of universities in the U.S.A. and the U.K.



### UNDERSTANDING THE POEM

1. Comment on the subtlety with which the poet captures the general pattern of communication within a family.
2. Poetic effect is achieved in the poem through understatement and asides. Discuss this with examples.
3. How is the idyllic juxtaposed with the pedestrian in the poem?
4. Explain the undertones in the statement:  
'Wife and husband in unusual rapport  
State one unspoken thought':
5. Comment on the capitalisation of all the words in the line:  
'Children Must be Disciplined'.
6. What makes the urgency of the child's demand seem logical?

### TRY THIS OUT

1. Paraphrase the poem and notice the change in effect. Comment on the deft touch with which the poet transforms ordinary events into evocative poetry.

### SUGGESTED READING

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*The Night of the Scorpion and Other Poems* by Nissim Ezekiel.





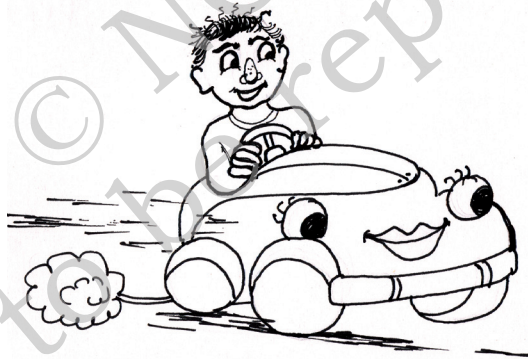
## The Limerick

The limerick is a small five line poem, expressing a single thought. It is usually funny with a punch or joke in the last line. In fact, the limerick is to poetry what slapstick is to comedy.

The rhyme scheme is 'a a b b a' : the first and second lines rhyme with the fifth, while the third and fourth lines rhyme with each other.

One reason why the limerick is popular is that almost anyone can try his/her hand at it. May be you could too!

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A novice was driving a car  
When, down the road, his son said "Papa,  
If you drive at this rate  
We are bound to be late—  
Drive faster!" He did, and they are.

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Earth's plan had a hopeful beginning  
but man spoiled its chances by sinning.  
We hope that the story,  
Will end in Earth's glory  
But at present the other side's winning!

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There was once a man from Peru  
Who dreamed he was eating his shoe  
He woke up with a fright  
In the middle of the night  
And found that it was perfectly true!

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There was a teacher named Ms Brass  
Who was blessed with an unruly class  
They slept and snored  
And completely ignored  
Theorems like Pythagoras.

