

Night of the Scorpion Poem

Writer: Nissim Ezekiel | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Night of the Scorpion (Original Text) Nissim Ezekiel

I remember the night my mother was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours of steady rain had driven him to crawl beneath a sack of rice.

Parting with his poison - flash of diabolic tail in the dark room - he risked the rain again.

The peasants came like swarms of flies and buzzed the name of God a hundred times to paralyse the Evil One.

With candles and with lanterns throwing giant scorpion shadows on the mud-baked walls they searched for him: he was not found. They clicked their tongues. With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.

May he sit still, they said May the sins of your previous birth be burned away tonight, they said. May your suffering decrease the misfortunes of your next birth, they said. May the sum of all evil balanced in this unreal world

against the sum of good become diminished by your pain. May the poison purify your flesh

of desire, and your spirit of ambition, they said, and they sat around on the floor with my mother in the centre, the peace of understanding on each face. More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours, more insects, and the endless rain. My mother twisted through and through, groaning on a mat. My father, sceptic, rationalist, trying every curse and blessing, powder, mixture, herb and hybrid. He even poured a little paraffin upon the bitten toe and put a match to it. I watched the flame feeding on my mother. I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an incantation. After twenty hours it lost its sting.

My mother only said Thank God the scorpion picked on me And spared my children.