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Editor's Note

Dear Readers & Contributors,

We all love a good story. All of us turn into a kid when somebody gets to start narrating one. This is an attempt of IJELLS to have a short story special issue in August 2014 to bring out the child in us. Read along these interesting stories with the wide eyed wonderment of a child. Some stories reflect the angst of women, to trigger good thought and action amongst us all. The ten stories we have published this time is only the beginning for many more issues to promote creative writing.

Happy Reading!

Mrudula Lakkaraju

Chief Editor



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Stranger In The Middle Of the Night

R. Poornima Sasidharan

“Couldn’t you sleep?”, I asked. It was just 6 in the morning. Usually, Swetha slept till 10 after her hectic schedule in a BPO firm. I leave home by 8 to catch the school bus where I teach.

“No. it’s one of those days where sleep has a mind of its own. Tried all the tricks in the book but nothing seems to work.” She plopped down on the cushion next to me.

“Have some of it extra?” she asked me nodding towards the coffee I was drinking.

“Sure! But caffeine is not going to get you sleep either.”

“No worry. I am too bored to sleep.” She muttered as I went to the kitchen to get her a cup.

When I returned, she was staring at the newspaper with a bemused look. I looked over her shoulder and saw it was a report on a recent burglary in the locality.

“What’s wrong?” I asked her handing over the mug. She took it from me without taking her eyes from the paper. I saw her eyes were trained on the grainy photograph of the robber rather than on the news. Her voice was strange when she told me, “ I know this man.”

“This man? You mean the robber or the police man standing beside him?” I was puzzled.

“Uh..the robber”.

“My, my! What a company you keep! What an interesting life you had led before you ended up with an ordinary school teacher like me!” Though I jested, I was curious.

It has been a year since Swetha moved in as the paying guest in my home. My mom and I thought it was ideal to have a paying guest rather than renting it to a family. We had several people cruising in to check the house but mother was not comfortable with any one of them. It was heaven send the day Swetha knocked our door. I was worried to leave mom all alone during the daytime I went to work.

It was a complete solution that Swetha worked during the night and was home during the day. You can’t call her shy but we felt she was a very private person. We didn’t dig much information about her. All she told us was that she was divorced and was staying with her father in another part of Chennai. Last year her father went to US to be with her



brother so she opted to stay with us as paying guest. My mother was friendly with her. But my mother was a firm believer in a person's right to guard his or her privacy. There was a slight smile on Swetha's face when she turned to look at me.

"Interesting? Yes. You can say so. My life was pretty interesting before I came here." I merely looked at her.

"You know I was divorced." I merely nodded my head. I had this natural curiosity to know why such a nice person went through divorce. "It was a disaster from the beginning. It was an arranged marriage. I was not much interested in marriage because it meant my father would be lonely".

I understood that perfectly as I also share similar sentiments for my mother. "but my brother assured me to take care of our father and papa was anxious to get me married off. My husband's name was Deepak. He was working in a private firm. He was uh.. not earning as much as I was but somehow all the minor mismatches were smoothed out by them. Now I know it was all an act. Those people were greedy for money but they couched their requests well. Deepak and his parents were all very good at camouflage. My father was completely bowled over by their charm. I didn't get much time to be with them before the wedding. I didn't suspect anything. But... she took a swig from the cup and gave me a sad little smile.

"But," I said sitting cross-legged and looked intently at her. We were of almost similar age. She might be just two or three years elder to me. I could anticipate her next words but knowing that she had lived through a tragedy was making me feel sad.

"Soon after the wedding they began to behave like themselves. Little barbed comments over my financial status and education and many other things. They expected me to buy everything for the house, pay for anything they purchase. It was humiliating when I had to pay for our honeymoon and the wedding reception. My salary was another bone of contention. Deepak insisted I should hand it over to him completely the day I receive it. I could have borne all these provided I was given a little love and care. It was suffocating to live with people who had their eyes only on my purse. It started to get worse as they wouldn't let me visit my father or misbehaved when my father came to visit me. None of my friends could visit too. I was tired of preventing my friends or relatives from visiting me. When Deepak started to beat me in front of his parents for any comment I made, I drew the line and went to stay with my father. He was even against me getting pregnant thinking I wouldn't be able to go for job then. Now I am happy that I don't have a child. It also would have suffered. My brother was very angry. He came from the States and went to talk with Deepak's family. They were insulting to him too. My father fell ill. It was the worst time in my life. Luckily for me, my family, friends and colleagues stood by me. In the end I applied for the divorce. It was messy. They tried to tarnish me but my brother had a very good legal adviser to take care of the case."



We were silent for some time. Her tone was light. But I know it must have been hell for her and her family during those days.

“How long have you been married?”

“Five months but somehow it seems longer than that”. I was shocked at the travesty of her life.

“It is like that dear. Happy moments seem ephemeral while sadness lingers but that’s life.” We both turned towards the voice. My mother was standing at her bedroom door. From the look in her eyes it was clear she had heard most of the conversation. She came towards Swetha and patted her shoulder. I looked at Swetha. She was not uncomfortable. Maybe she wanted to unload from her chest. Her next words confirmed my assumption.

“I never talked about it much. I really missed not having a mother or sister at that point of my life. The wounds were so raw for me to discuss it with my friends too. So I locked it all in and moved forward with my life. Much of it was for my father. I wanted him to believe that I was alright. My poor papa! He was wracked with guilt that he didn’t choose a good husband for me. I assured him it was not so. No one can see much into other people’s minds. But it was imperative for my father to see me back into my normal life. I would have convinced him somehow. I am happy that he is now with my brother. He needs good medical care.”

I asked her the question that was nagging my mind. “If Deepak and his family are that money-minded, why did they abuse you/? I mean, why should they alienate you?” My mother too looked at Swetha.

“I too have thought about it. I think maybe his complex of me earning way more than him might have taken an upper hand. He was quite irrational towards the months leading to our separation.”

I too had thought that. My mom was silent. Something struck me. I immediately asked her. “How does this connect to that thief?”

“Thief?” my mother was confused. I pointed the paper to her. Swetha started to laugh. “yes. The robber had a significant part in ending my marriage from hell.” Before I could ask her how, she continued.

“More than I could ever believe it seems I was traditional and sentimental at heart. Many a time in my marriage, I had felt to throw my *thali* away. I hated the symbol it stood for but I never could. Even after the divorce I couldn’t remove it from my neck. A part of my mind knew it was foolish to wear it but another part of me was hesitant to close that



chapter of my life completely. Its finality unnerved me slightly. Then one night when I was asleep, I felt a hand touching my neck. I was terrified. Slowly I turned my head and saw a hand reaching for my neck through the window. To this day I don't know from where I got the courage. I sprang up from the bed. The thief didn't expect it. He started to sprint across the terrace but I shouted at him to wait. Before he jumped down I threw the chain at him. To say he was shocked would be an understatement. I think in his entire thieving days no one would have been as accommodating as me. I practically begged him to take the chain with him. He was hesitant. I could see his suspicion. But all I could think was that gold chain would be of some assistance to him. It was only a burden for me all the time I had it with me. I thought it was a poetic justice. He picked up the chain and ran away."

"I see. Now I understand. He closed the chapter for you." I was feeling funny. This turning point seemed marvellous.

"No.. The chapter was not over. It had a surprising epilogue." Her voice suggested we were going to be astonished. "Excuse me, I will be back in a moment." Saying so, she went to her room. Mom and I looked at each other. We were very curious. By then time was almost 8. I knew I would miss the school bus but it didn't concern me much. I felt I was transported to another land. The whole morning seemed surreal. Swetha returned with a small box. She opened it and showed to us. In it was a *thali*. We looked at her puzzled. She was smiling. "Yes. It's the same one I offered to the thief."

"But..?"

"Roughly one month after the incident police came to our house. The C.I was an old friend of my father. It seems this thief was arrested on some other case and when he was thoroughly searched, the police got this chain as well. He was suspicious of my motive in throwing the chain at him so he didn't sell. He might have thought that I was a lunatic. Upon questioning, he informed them the whereabouts of the chain. Obviously they didn't believe him. The C.I brought the chain home. When he narrated what had happened, my father was upset. I didn't want the C.I to think I was mad so I just told him I had kept the chain somewhere and didn't know it was stolen. He was convinced. But I think my father wasn't. He didn't ask me anything about it later. Now I keep the chain as a solemn reminder about my past and somehow I can see a humorous side to it now. Like that incident has taken away some of the unpleasantness attached to my marriage."

We were all laughing by then. Suddenly she looked at the clock and there was dismay on her face.

"Oh, Neha. I made you miss your bus."

Before I could reply mom said, "Why don't you both take today off? Let's go out and enjoy. I think it's time to celebrate life. Come on kids, let's enjoy the day." Swetha and I looked at each other. After so long we were feeling like kids bunking the class. We smiled at each other. We all could feel that our relationship was graduating to the next level. We felt



closer and could feel a lifelong friendship blossoming between us. Outside the climate was pleasant and welcome. We went to prepare for a day out and on the coffee table, the newspaper lied carrying the photo of that thief.



And life will go on!

Rimni Chakravarty

I

The twittering swallows woke up Mini.

‘What’s the time?’ Mini wonders.

Quickly she grasps for her handset. Its 4.30 A.M, 6th July 2013. The music of the tiny winged creatures pulls her out of the bed. She opens up the windows all wide. The sky in luminous white seems to be a canvas painted by silver shades.

She tunes her radio F.M. ‘*aisi lagi lagan, meera ho gayi magan...*’ Its Anup Jalota’s record.

Mini takes a deep breath and closes her eyes as she stands near her table to visualize *Meera bai* playing on her Veena, chanting the name of her lord. This pious lady had the power to win her lord’s favor. Can any other lady has the strength to be revered along with Radha? ‘No’, Mini laughed ‘Now I must go out for a brisk walk, but then let me have a glass of Luke warm water with lemon and honey.’

The birds continue with their morning duty of singing to the world. ‘May be these birds are singing praise in glory of the sun!’ sipping the Luke warm water of lemon and honey Mini views the sky turn crimson. Her eyes fall on a red color book lying on the table; High Spirits by Ronald Rehan.

The colour red fascinates Mini. She looks at her room. Red artificial roses on a red vase look gorgeous. Mini smiles. She remembers in St. Joseph’s Convent from class IV to class X, she remained in Tagore team with red colour tie, badge and sash. After red, comes blue, green yellow, black, and orange, purple; all the seven numbers of the spectrum white. ‘Isn’t life colorful?’ she thinks going down the memory lane. Mini visualizes those summer days when after a day’s scorching heat the sky would turn black and the vernal showers with its cadence accompanied by hails and the cool breeze aftermath would cast a mesmerizing effect on her.

She patiently waited for the rains to stop. As the rainbow on the south east horizon may appear for her to throw a wish that would be fulfilled soon. The wind rustled and whistled, while the trees found difficult to hold their branches. All off a sudden the dark clouds appeared to paint the sky black, with thunder and lightning. The nor’westers shook the ground. Mini would then hold her hands out in the balcony to feel the drops pouring down from the deep sky.

Mom would scold her. ‘It’s raining and you are out getting drenched, playing with the dirty water? You did not close the windows and see the bed is wet.’ Mini had no time to give any ear to her mom. She smiled to see the lawn; streets water logged which took the shape of a huge pond. May be these waters are carrying small fish! She will now make paper boats to float them, which may sail on a voyage, invade many territories and conquer



many kingdoms, establish suzerainty. Such is the power of the paper boats for a seven year old girl.

II

The conch shell blows. Mini has just returned from her job. Mom is in her prayer room; one of her daily chores to be here morning and evening time. Mini wonders is it possible to fulfill the entire wish to reality? 'You wish upon a star and wait for its return?' What mom is doing is also the same? This is the secret voiced in High Spirit by author Ronald Rehan. The same Mini had done during her childhood days for fun, wish on the rainbow; the flamboyant colors, curved smile to enrich her life with promises to fulfill the life and live with a zest. 'But then why do people starve? Why our peasants take to last resort when our crops fail? Did they wish for a crop failure?'

All off a sudden her eyes fall on a black and white photo frame; a man of forty with black spectacles, serious looks, hands clasped on the shoulder of his eight year old daughter.

'*Baba* was so concerned of me, but why did he leave then? Did he wish to part me and ma before I settle down at least with a job? Oh! Too tired I feel to think of these philosophical stuffs,' murmurs Mini, 'let me listen to my favorite numbers for a while'. The green bulb glows and Mini closes her eyes to feel the piano recital of Richard Clayderman as she inserts the C.D on the disk. She hums to the tune. It's her favorite number from the famous lyrics of Bette Midler '*I can fly higher than an eagle for you are the wind beneath my wings.*'

III

The door bell rings. Mini startles up. '*Baba* must have returned from the *Bidhan Market* purchasing the fruits and vegetables. A few seconds back she had visualized in a trance her father procuring her favorite fruits; bananas, grapes, sweet lime from the vendor. Sweet lime juice happens to be her delicious drink since childhood. She jumps from her bed to receive her '*Baba*', who might have bought delicious fruits for his one and only daughter. But Mini stops. Her eyes fall on her mom draped in a white sari in the living room. No sign of vermilion! *Ma* loved the color red; red hibiscus, red coral, red saree, as of course red vermilion on her forehead with the red *bindi* too. *Ma* is talking to the *Baba* still in the photo frame. White tuberose has been offered at his photo frame along with a lighted candle and incense sticks. 'Oh! No, how could *Baba* come home with my favorite fruits! He is now locked inside our heart, our memories, deep down hidden inside our soul.'

Since eight long years mom has erased red from her life. Or red has wiped her out? May be both! And on this day those eight summers back Mini had to face an ordeal, too harsh, but reality is at times stranger than fiction! The black carriage with white glass cover



waited outside for the last journey. The sun had long sunk down the horizon. The sky turned purple and black. The stars twinkled bright. Mini took her father to the final destination on the banks of river Mahananda. Her father did not take much time to melt in to the thin air and become a part of nature. The ashes lay on the urn and Mini besmeared it on the river according to the Hindu rites. Not a single cloud trailed across the sky and the stars shone brighter than ever. Exhausted Mini saw a glowing star rising from the ground and shooting high up the sky. Quickly the star vanished out of the sight.

IV

Eight years is a long time. Precious moments are however always persevered as fond memories that live eternally in our minds! Life however moves like the flow of the tide Mini takes a deep breath. Her *Baba's* voice echoes, 'nobody is indispensable in this world. The stage is set; you play your part and exit. Remember 'Ma', everybody salutes the rising sun.' Her father made his final exit when the sun set on the western horizon leaving the mother and the daughter to fend for themselves. Visitors poured in to pay their last respect and console the two inconsolable. The elderly lady remained benumbed while the younger thanked them with proper courtesy. Mini remembers as a child whenever her father took her out for a stroll he always advised her to be 'humble', 'polite', 'docile', whatever be the situation as one should never lose his/her dignity.

The land phone buzzed. It was *Aparnadi* on the line. She is the Head of the department; English, of Progressive Women's College where Mini is engaged as a part time lecturer. Both Dr Aparna Mitra and Mini are fond of the Romantic Poets of 19th century England. Mini never expressed her thoughts on William Wordsworth to her senior, but the elderly lady understood and gave Mini the responsibility to teach 'Lucy poems', to the girls of the College. Her father loved Lucy poems and wanted to see his daughter grow up like Lucy '*sportive as the fawn*' and be '*a breathing balm ... of mute insensate things*'.

Mini managed to say 'hello', and preferred silence. It's the time to listen and not speak. Mini can ever forget in life time to what her senior said. These sentences have become a maxim for her. 'Dear remember your father has gone up to take care of you as your guardian angel!' Mini's voice choked.

'Yes, the fairy that guided Cinderella to the ball was her guardian spirit!' soliloquies Mini after an episode of eight years. 'How silly I was to believe these stories: Mini laughs. 'But then there is no harm to look up at the sky and enjoy seeing the stars sparkling on a cloudless night.' Mini walks up the stairs to the terrace and sits beside a basil tree to feel the emptiness that life often offer just like the manna pouring down from the heaven.

A voice echoes from somewhere that Mini cannot locate from which direction. The voice is not unheard. Mini heard several time years back. 'Mini, my darling remember, I am always with you and within you. You are my only child who happens to be my mother too.'



Tears trickle down the eyes and start flowing like the gushing fountains. These tears have remained in the form of dark clouds all these years. Today it may cause a flood or a deluge to sweep Mini to the brink. 'I don't mind getting drowned. Oh Krishna! Let all my organs fail and I lay in your lap motionless and still.' The breeze blows to carry the aroma of *sandhya malati* spread the terrace.

V

Time flows. The mosquitoes come out for their hunting. The cell phone rings twice. Mini picks up. 'Didi, hame pehchena?' Am Arun, your student of Global Academy .You conducted our morning spoken English classes. Mini remembers some years back after her father's recent demise had taken up another part time job in a Spoken English Institute as a voice and accent trainer . 'Oh yes Arun tell me how are you? Mini managed a reply. Arun was her student though he did not need the course as was already established in the corporate house with good perks. 'Di, I would like to meet you with my sister .So could I meet you now 'as tomorrow I have to leave for Bangalore on an official tour.' 'Ok fine 'replies Mini.

VI

Mini returned to her room. She looked at her 'High Spirits' on the table. The author suggests one should always harbor positive outlook and being optimistic inevitably lead to positive results.

In the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Dejection: an ode

"we receive but what we give, and in our life alone does Nature live :"(stanza IV)

Mini smiled as she remembers this philosophy of robust optimism. She asks herself, 'did I ever throw any negative energy to the universe' No, the answer she received deep within her heart. 'I was certain would complete my PhD on poetry. I met Kaka five years back and received materials from him for my research , read his poems voraciously, spent many a nights preparing the synopsis , but then, how can I ever forget Shelley in 'Mutability', '*all that we wish to stay tempts and then flies. What is this world's delight? Lightning that mocks the night. Brief even as bright!*'

'The words lightening, bright, night are very striking ', Mini muses. 'As these words are very flickering for their nature.' There was a time nights allured Mini. She waited eagerly for the nights to arrive. Rohan would call her. How eagerly she waited for his calls. Nights seemed to be a benediction, a balm that healed her wounds. She would share her feelings with him and he too shared with her. 'May be *Baba* has sent him for me from the skies. ', Mini wondered. Her father would at times tell her to stop day dreaming as for he felt his daughter always loves to build castles in the air. 'But then, you need to build castles



in the air to build the same castle on earth, 'affirms Mini. 'A student of English Literature dreams, then does all turn Coleridge as did he in Kubla Khan?' Mini is wonderstruck.

Dreams matter. 'Or how could Vasco da Gama reach Calicut on 20th May 1498? He had a passion for voyaging, so he became the first European to reach India what his predecessors could not. Why did he not then give up when other sailors got drowned on their voyage? The answer always lies in the question. The answer is you need to have a passion to live with or life becomes sordid in this mundane existence of life. This passion is your dream to live and die with. At the same dreams flatter as also shatter, you fall on the dust, bleed, blood gushes out .tear you out into pieces, die and again come back to life. You detoxify and grow. You may suffer for your sanity as the world was never meant to be as simple as you." soliloquies Mini. 'But then still you should dream ,as dreams let you sail to those green fields ,where the whizzing of the breeze ,the murmuring of the leaves ,the gushing of the fountains, the hip hop of a young dace playing summer salt in a pond full of lotus ,the fluttering of flowers beneath the deep blue, where trail the white clouds and down the catkin gently nod their heads ,while the chamomile spread the fragrance, the beating of the drums announce the autumn festival, when *Ma Durga* would arrive on earth with her family ; all in glory and grandeur rejuvenate you with hopes ,promise amidst the mundane existence"

Mini visualizes the days when dressed in pink, mauve white, lemon yellow, she prattled all the way to the pandals holding her father's hand .Her father 's face burned bright see his princess happy. Mini laughs. These fond memories are like haunting melodies loom large before their vision. '*Ding Dong*'! The door bell rang.

Mini returned to her present. 'May be Arun? 'Mini wanted to utilize the day in remembering her father nowhere yet now here. Her father can only arrive at her dreams. Professor Roy used to discuss about dreams and Freud in long sessions. 'Our innate desires float in dreams. May be you felt like horse riding and landed up sitting on a horse back in your dreams...*Ha...Ha...Ha*" The entire class roared into laughter. Mini burst out laughing. '*Ding dong!*'Mini reaches the entrance gate.

VII

Arun gives a broad smile. After five years Mini meets her ex student, her brother, the branch Manager of Royal Care Company medium height, now grown in size with a lot of responsibilities. He introduces a young girl of eighteen who stand beside him seems to be somewhat shy. 'Di, sorry to have disturbed you at 9.P.M .You see 'am in a hurry to introduce my sister to you. She has appeared for her 10+2 exam and is waiting for her results. I would feel happy if you guide her with English Grammar and Spoken English speaks Arun at length. "Arun please come and have your seat, be comfortable under the ceiling fan and then I will listen." Mini replies managing a smile.



The guests take their seats. Mini goes inside the kitchen to fetch glasses of water. The young girl come and touches her feet for which she wasn't prepared. 'It's embarrassing if anybody touch my feet as am unworthy of such respect.' Mini muses. 'What is your name dear?' 'Anamika' the girl replied.

'Di, Anamika is my aunt's daughter. Uncle passed away previous year. She has come in our town to prepare for the competitive exams .We would like to see our sister succeed with a government job; especially in the banking sector. And for that she must be have a strong command in English Communication skills. You can be the best guide for her'. 'But why it's got to be me and not any coaching institute? Startles Mini.

VIII

It's the sixth day of July month and the weather is fiery. The ceiling fan is in full motion. Yet Mini perspires as drops of hot water soak her dress. Or maybe the heat hidden inside her is pouring at this moment in the form of perspiration! 'Whatever be a young girl takes bold steps to come out from a remote village to a city for developing her life skills is no joke. She must be a Braveheart' Mini feels. Arun understands Mini seems to be in a dilemma .He wastes no time, but speak straight: 'Di, you know better that destiny is not same for all. As you have struggled and is still struggling with the hard realities that life offers you to make you stronger as a woman. I want my sister too be like you who fend on her own and not count on anyone.'

Mini became speechless. She managed to walk up to Anamika and clasps her hand.

'God bless all the *Anamikas*' who don't have names yet carry a name.'



Magic Math Master

Dr. B. V. Rama Prasad

When Mudalagiri came to report as assistant teacher, math and science, to Government high school, Kumbaradi, it was pouring down. Three girls in the eight standard- Noor, Savithri and Sakavva- were trying to avoid listening to mad Meher madam's shouting history lessons. It was Noor who looked out of the window and saw him first, so she always claimed from then onwards a kind of ownership over him. He was a strange sight- all covered up in raincoat, gloves, even socks, with a ridiculously pink hat- does not the fellow know that there are things called umbrellas, Noor told her friends, and as soon as the class was over, the three girls set out to find out who the fellow was.

During what was called the 'recess' time in that small high school set in the middle of a forest, boys would run to the woods and the girls if they were not shy would go to the school cook's house half a kilometer away. Those who were shy would wait till the evening when they would walk to their homes in the forest. Noor was not shy, but today she decided to postpone 'it' and went to the head master's room –ostensibly to get a piece of chalk, but really to look at the strange man again. Two minutes was all that took her to find out that he was the new math teacher that he was very 'red' – and he had strange, very strange eyes.

Now a nickname had to be thought of. 'Mad' would have been perfect, but that belonged to Meher who was really crazy. He was strange, this man Mudalagiri. He was funny and looked helpless even in the class. Even the most 'decent' girls would joke with him. Noor always felt that she had to protect him from other girls. She thought she would call him 'the poor one'. However, somehow the word magic became connected with him. He himself will say in the class that he will do magic. By the time you come to tenth class, he would say, you will all become Ramanujams. And he added that this magic he had decided to work only on them, the eight standard girls and boys, not on their seniors. Just believe in me, he would say, and you will see.

So they had called him magic maths master. He would not touch the text book in the class, sometimes would tell stories (stories, in a math class, Sakavva would exclaim), sometimes would ask them to repeat tables, like a primary school teacher, and the students already knew that they would not pass the math, let alone become Ramanujams. But they liked him. They liked him for his strangeness, for the eccentricities, for the weaknesses, but most of all because he did not seem to take himself seriously. And the three girls would talk about him every day for some months, and then talked about him once in week, till finally he had become a part of the place, like the trees and the rain and the streams. He became just a presence like everything else in that place. Though all three of them, particularly Noor, still crushed over him in a childish way, other things soon would occupy his place. The tele that they watched in their homes, the films that they heard of, the 'mobiles' that some of the boys and even a couple of girls had, all these things would take up their time



and excitedly they were growing up like all adolescent girls do, even if they were in a small place, in the middle of a forest, with their houses being kilometres away from one another. And as they were young, they still believed in magic, love, crush, even if they did not know the words.

The three girls had changed by the time they came to ninth. And Giri sir had changed too. Rather the views about him had changed. Now some people had started wondering about his magic. His magic, Noor's classmate Kiran said, is bad magic. The kind of magic, that evil people who eat little girls use. Now, the teacher was taking special classes on Sundays. He would go to parents' houses. All nice and above suspicion, really! No one thought of him 'that' way, not withstanding Kiran, who was probably jealous of the teacher's popularity. But somehow Giri sir was more assured of himself. The image of a helpless man whom Noor had to protect was vanishing. The three girls talked about this, they talked about the rumours about him. They now heard that he 'drank', in the city. He even 'drank' in some students' houses also where they would give him toddy. He ate non veg, Kiran said. This did not bother the other two girls, but Sakavva said he even ate pork and beef. Shii, even we don't eat beef, she said with disgust. Noor shared the disgust about pork, but she did not understand why eating beef should be a problem. But the problem was they could not now with certainty decide his caste. Even those high school girls felt uncomfortable with a person whose caste was unknown. Who eats both beef and pork? And was drinking such a bad thing? They had many 'drunks' in that place, but still a teacher should not drink in public, they thought. They were trying to frame him in to a scheme, in to a pattern, make him either good or bad or immoral or religious. Till she finished tenth, Noor could not really decide, and even then she was not sure.

But the magic of the 'maths master' was spreading. They said those who took his tuitions improved. It was not that he taught well. It was Kiran again who said that he used magic to teach. He told them the story of Prathima, who was really poor in math and who could not come to the special classes because her father would not let her come on Sundays. Giri sir said, alright, and he touched her forehead and from then on Prathima did not have to study at all. How did he touch her head, the three girls asked, what did he say when he touched her head they shouted. They said, there is no magic, we know Prathima meets him every Sunday, he goes to her house, they said. But that somehow made them feel bad even more. Was it about his magic that they were worried about?

But another strange thing happened which made Giri sir seem more mysterious. The mad Meher would sometime become really mad and would start shouting and throwing things and hitting anyone who came near her. When she had these bouts, students would avoid her and teachers will hide and if any villager passed by the school, he would knowingly smile and retrace his steps to some other place where Meher's voice cannot be heard. So that day it was a violent bout of madness and everyone avoided Meher and magic Giri just got up and went into the room in which Meher was shouting and throwing things around. Everyone tells a different story of what happened that day. One



story says he closed the door though Noor still argues that he did not. How will a man ever close a door in a room where only a woman is present? But everyone heard his voice, barely above a whisper, but still audible to everyone. He said ‘madam’, that is all there is agreement about. Some say he just slapped her hard on the face. Noor and Sakavva and Savithri did not believe that. Some say he did some magic inside, touched her forehead, whispered a prayer or a hymn and Mad Meher was cured completely. Some say he almost cried and said, why do you do this to yourself, madam, it is all in your hands, you can stop doing this. Kiran was again the nasty one and he said that the magic sir just held her and kissed her and she was cured. Noor did not know why she became very angry with Kiran and stopped talking to him. And Noor after sometime wondered if any such incident happened at all. Was not everything, the school, the teachers, the problems, the happiness, just a figment of our imagination? Was she herself real? Was magic sir real, or was everyone making him up in their own way? Problem was that there were so many things about the magic sir that she could not be certain about. Was he really a bad man? What did he do in his special classes? Why did he meet Prathima secretly? Had I not once seen him talking to her and she crying, and they were talking about something secret, what could it really be?

It was this Prathima’s death that ended the innocence for Noor and Sakavva and Savithri. One day Prathima was dead, floating in the well. It became big news. Many people started suggesting foul play. The boys and the girls and the village people were all talking. That small village and school already had scandals. Probably, there were always scandals, but it is only now that these girls noticed them. The boys had the mobile and one of the teachers checked a boy’s mobile and thrashed the boy. A girl in another school nearby was molested and no one complained. Prathima’s sister, Prakrithi would faint down in the class and complain of chest pains and when they rush her to the hospital, doctors would find nothing wrong with her. It was Magic Giri who went to the hospital one day to talk to the doctor about Prakrithi. Why should he have gone when other female teachers were around? Why should he imagine that he can understand and solve girls’ problems and women’s problems? Noor and Sakavva and Savithri did not put the questions in this form, but this was the gist of what they were thinking.

At that time Noor was in tenth, the exams were near. But strangely, magic Giri did not have guilt in his soft womanish eyes, he spoke to the students in the same manner, he went and drank with the students and their parents and even went to Prathima’s home. There were only rumours, and no one could prove anything. But after a week, Prakrithi left the school. Her mother took her to another school, not in this forest but in the city. Strangely, she spoke to magic maths master. The three girls saw that and wondered what they were talking about. She did not seem to be angry, this Prathima’s mother. She seemed to thank him, and she cried and he touched the forehead of Prakrithi and said you will not have chest pains.



After a month, magic Giri was transferred. He left the place in summer. It was not raining now. It was Noor again who saw him leaving. She had to talk to him, find out she did not know what. She ran after him just as he came near the tree where he had to wait for the bus. She said 'sir' and looked at the eyes and tried to find if there was any guilt in those strange eyes. No, there was none, there was only sadness. She asked him, 'sir, why'? And he said, 'what'? Noor did not say anything. Then he patted Noor on the shoulder and said, remember the magic I promised and then got in to the bus and disappeared.

Noor and Sakavva and Savithri talked about it for sometime afterwards, and much later Noor would think that there was no magic maths master. He was like the chest pain that Prakrithi used to have. She and Sakavva and Savithri made him all up, just to 'pass time'. But somehow, they had all scored well in the math paper. Everyone had passed and Sakavva even had first class, that being the first time anyone scored a first class in Math in that school. At least, Noor decided, the magic was real and the magic maths master had worked some magic in her school and in her life, even if no such person really existed.



Fingers Sister

Dr. Nirmala Shivram Padmavat

Jennifer Fingers was a doctor working in St. Louie Multispecialty Hospital, Washington DC. Twenty nine years old lady was successful senior doctor even at this due to her hard work and talent and was still unmarried, living alone. She had no one but only a younger sister, Natalie. Natalie Fingers was a journalism student studying in New York. Both sisters were opposite in nature and had totally opposite choices and priorities but one thing was common. They both unconditionally loved each other a lot. In every happiness and sorrow, problems and fun, health and sickness, they always stayed together.

Their parents, David and Sarah Fingers were Computer engineers, working in Multinational Company. When Jennifer was 15 and Natalie was 8, they died due to a car accident. After their passing away, Jennifer and Natalie were admitted to orphanage house. Jennifer used to work and local café shop and at the age of 18, she got admission in university for Medical Sciences and also scholarship. She completed her education and scored 90% in her final year. The place where she was taking her training course, she got placed as a junior doctor and soon was promoted to senior doctors. She used to work for 48-50 hours continuously. Her whole life was her hospital and Natalie. She got placed at the age of 23 and as soon as she got placed, she took whole responsibility of Natalie as her parent. When Natalie grown up, she decided to go for Journalism and of course Jenny supported that. Natalie used to call Jennifer as Jenny. She loved her so much. She was upset when she was about to leave for New York but did pretend that she was happy as she could not see Jenny crying.

It was raining heavy since morning. Jenny was quite upset and was feeling unstable. She could not figure out what was happening but refused to go hospital for that day. This never happened to her before. She never took leave but did it today. She was lying in her bed for entire day; did not take any meal but drank only water. She was not feeling happy at all and suddenly she found that she was crying. She could not understand anything. She was crying hard and not knowing the reason but just cried.

At 11 P.M., the door bell rang. She got up with heavy eyes and stepped towards the door wondering who it could be at late night. She suddenly stopped when she saw herself in mirror. Her eyes were dark red and swollen, her hair was uncombed; her skin colour was turned white. She was feeling weak but only till she opened the door. As soon as she opened the door, her weakness ran like it saw a tiger in front. But Jenny felt like she was on cloud nine. It was Natalie in front. They were meeting after 2 year. Both hugged each other tightly with tears in eyes. They were so happy that Jenny even forgot to let her in. But after five minutes, the sisters controlled emotions and got in.

Natalie was looking more beautiful than before. She was on her holiday and decided to meet up her sister. Both Sisters were talking till four in morning till Jenny felt asleep.



Next morning, Jenny was feeling very light weight and fresh. She got up while Natalie was still sleeping, baked breakfast for Natalie and went for Hospital deciding to come up earlier than usual. Whole day she was consulting her patients and did not feel tired even while leaving. She came back home and found Natalie watching television. She had cooked Jenny's favorite dinner for the first time. Jenny was so happy to know that because Natalie never cooked anything but she did just for her sister. They took dinner and went out for night walk. They both were talking, laughing, giggling, and walking on street. People were staring in confused look but they never cared for people. Soon it became their schedule. Jenny would go for work and Natalie used to stay home.

After a week, Jenny was in hospital while she got that call which took her life from sunshine to darkness of eclipse. She was consulting a patient while her phone rang. It was Natalie's friend Kiara from her college. She was totally nervous and felt like was afraid of something. She could not speak properly but managed to utter that she wanted to meet Jenny urgently. It was something important about Natalie. Jenny thought her friend was out of her mind or gone insane. She told her that she could not come to see her as Natalie was at her home but her friend was repeating the story again and again. Jenny hung up and called up Natalie. Natalie was at her home and was enjoying a horror movie. That was strange. Natalie was afraid of horror movies and always refused to even have a look of its cover. But Jenny vanished that thought. Natalie might have become stronger after her admissions. Jenny got back to her work. Remaining entire day was normal like usual.

Next day again, Kiara called up and said the same thing and again Jenny hung up. This thing repeated four times which made Jenny think that Kiara had lost her control over her thoughts. So she decided to go New York to see her. She felt a bit clichéd seeing that Natalie was not at all happy while Jenny was leaving. Jenny did not tell Natalie where she was going but Natalie felt like she was known where Jenny was going. Jenny boarded the plane with these thoughts but passed it away thinking that she was thinking too seriously and chose to read magazines.

It was dark outside when Jenny landed to New York. Kiara was waiting for her on airport. Kiara was a tall, thin, fair woman. Her eyes were swollen. "She might have cried last entire night", Jenny thought. Kiara took her to her hostel room. Kiara was talking normally but was looking at one corner of room continuously after every 2 minutes. Jenny noticed that but did not react till she got freshen up and settled on the bed. After a few minutes, Kiara took her to Morgue house. Jenny entered the Morgue. She followed Kiara till Kiara stopped to one drawer. She requested to pull the drawer. When Jenny pulled the drawer, she was stunned. Her heart beat stopped. She fell on the ground floor.

Natalie was a very beautiful and confident scholar student of class. She had topped every examination held inside and outside the university. Every boy in the university wanted her as his girlfriend but she was totally aware of hard work of sister and had totally concentrated on her career. Every teacher was proud of her.



James Christen was a tall, handsome, only child of famous Hollywood movie Director Lilly Christen. He was most attractive and very handsome chick of the university. Every girl wanted him to take her at least on a ride. He also enjoyed the attention and took advantage of it. He had many hang ups. He was not at all interested in journalism but took admission for his mother. He was most wanted guy for every girl in university but his heart was stolen by somebody else. He was mesmerized when he first saw Natalie in college corridor. Natalie was already late for her classes and was in hurry. James was always a late comer so he was in his regular walking speed. Natalie was so much in hurry when they bumped into each other. Natalie's was collecting her stuffs when James was looking at her. Long hair, Fair colour, tall, bold and attractive personality yet innocence eyes. He was looking at her, stunned. She said sorry and left for class. He could not understand what was happening but he was flowing in it. He had dated many girls but those girls had proposed him, he was never interested in those girls yet dated them. But Natalie was something else. He could not stop himself from thinking of her.

After a month, Natalie and James were sitting in their college canteen. James had asked her to teach him and in return he would buy her books. They became good friends later. James had broken up with his every girlfriend and was totally concentrating on Natalie. Natalie thought he just wanted her to be good friends and she was just a good friend from her side. Everything was alright, till James proposed her on the evening of results of Examination. James was second ranker and Natalie was first topper in the class. James owed Natalie a celebration party and he agreed that. They went for a movie and then to top restaurant of New York. They were having good time when James asked her out.

“Natalie, I want to tell you something. Actually I want to ask you something. May I?”

“Go ahead, James”, said Natalie.

“Let me come to the straight point. The day I saw you, I felt like I was in heaven watching an angel. I know it's too early to ask but I am in love with you. Will you be my girlfriend?”

Natalie did not know what to say. But she managed to ask him for some time. He dropped her to her hostel. On the way, they both were silent. They separated wishing each other a good night. But both knew that they would not sleep entire night. They stayed up whole night. James was nervous and Natalie was upset.

But next morning, Natalie got up with same spirit and went for colleges with same smile on her face. In the recess James came to see her. He was with his friend Jimmy Walker. Jimmy was their classmate and also James's childhood friend. She knew what James wanted to ask and also knew what to answer. They both settled on the bench in the park of campus.



“James, I know what you want to ask me. I want you to listen to me carefully. James, I am very simple girl. I just want to settle my career and get back to my sister as soon as possible. I am sorry James but I can’t accept your proposal. We are good friends and I want us to remain same till my last breath. I am sorry.”

James was upset but more than that he was angry. James was a narcissist. He loved himself a lot and could not listen NO for any answer. He was hurt. That night he was drunk so much.

Natalie was in her room. Kiara had bought a brand new camera and Kiara and Natalie were shooting a video. Kiara went in another room to ask her another friend to come up when she heard someone speaking. He was arguing with Natalie. Suddenly Kiara heard Natalie’s loud scream and suddenly everything stopped. Kiara heard someone running very fast and she ran to her room. Natalie was lying on floor. She was stabbed badly with a knife and the knife was left there. Natalie could not speak anything. She was writhing in pain. Kiara and her friend took her hospital when she was declared to be dead. It was 11 P.M., when Kiara told the investigators that she had doubt on James, they refused to take the complaint. Kiara was also told not to tell this to anybody. She was threatened by policemen. Kiara was already threatened but something threatened her more. She saw Natalie in the corner of their room where Kiara found Natalie lying. Natalie would tell Kiara to call up her sister and would disappear.

Jenny was broken into tears when she came into consciousness. One and only family member of her were also taken away by destiny. She was in bed for two days eating nothing. Kiara would sit beside her, for whole day and would sleep on the floor. After two days, Kiara took Jenny to the Cemetery. When they reached to the grave of Natalie, their hands went cold due to fear. It was a raining only on her grave. Her grave was totally black and cross was missing. They found Natalie sitting there. Natalie looked up and started crying. “Save me, Jenny. Save me.” And suddenly she disappeared.

Jenny was sitting on bed of Natalie’s hostel room. Suddenly she got up, making up her mind for revenge. She wanted justice for her sister. But she knew that policemen would not listen to her. She thought and thought. And she reminded him.

David Radcliff was deputy inspector of New York City. He was a 34 year old brave and kind hearted man. He was taking treatment in Jenny’s hospital, under Jenny’s observation for severe Kidney infection. His father lived in Washington and wanted him to take treatment in the St. Louie Multispecialty Hospital. He was a funny man and later totally friendly with Jenny. He liked Jenny but never said it. He was back to his city after getting cured.



Jenny searched for his office number and got success in searching him. She was eager to call him up. So, she called him at 5 P.M., when he was in his office. He suddenly recognized her voice and was very happy to hear her and so was she. She told him nothing but just that she wanted to meet him up. He asked her to meet her at 6 P.M. at a café near her stay.

David listened to her carefully. He spoke nothing until she was done speaking. Suddenly, she broke down in tears. He started consoling her and thinking of the case. It was not tricky that much. But the only issue was that James was Mrs. Christen's son. But, he did not care for that. He just wanted the proof. He personally went to Natalie's room with his team of investigators. He investigated everything. He investigated about every little detail. But they found nothing. The footage of corridor camera of that time was missing and so was the guard.

David was sitting in his cabin thinking about the Natalie. He had invited Kiara to his office for investigations. Nobody was ready to speak anything. He was not sure about Kiara as none of else told anything. He could not meet her before because she was admitted in the hospitals due to high fever and cold. Kiara entered the office with a fake smile on her face. David welcomed her with smile. Kiara repeated the story told by Jenny. He asked if she had any kind of proof so that he could arrest him and send him to high court. Kiara thought for while and something clicked her mind. 'The Camera.'

At the time when Natalie and Kiara were last time together, they both were shooting in the camera bought by Kiara. She was sure that there must be a footage recorded in that camera. David could not help but almost ran out of the office. Kiara followed him. They searched for the camera but could not find it. But, suddenly Kiara felt a breeze from behind. There was intensity in that breeze. There was something behind. They searched for camera in that direction. And found the camera fallen out of window. 'It must have fallen down when James tried to hit Natalie', said the Kiara.

Camera was in a good condition as it was fallen on a plant. They reached to the camera. It was switched off. Its batteries were dead and had to be replaced. David went to store and bought new batteries. He desperately switched on the camera and started watching the footage.

Natalie and Kiara were dancing on a song when Natalie asked Kiara to go and bring her friend, so they could shoot a video. Kiara went out and in few minutes a drunken boy entered. It was Jimmy! He was so drunk that he could not even stand properly. He argued for a while and then took out the knife and started stabbing Natalie to the death. When he became conscious, it was too late. Natalie was lying on floor. He ran away leaving her there. While running, he got injured on his knees but he ran away.



David was silent. He never looked anyone doing this kind of harm to other. But he was happy having that proof. It was enough to prove Jimmy guilty.

Jimmy loved James as his best friend. He was so obsessed with him. He could not see James sad and could do it anything for him. When Natalie rejected James's proposal and left, James cried a lot and went home. Jimmy followed him. When he entered James's room, he found James trying to eat sleeping pills. He threw away the pills, slapped him hard and ordered him to sleep quietly. That night Jimmy was drunken alcohol a lot and managed to go to Natalie's room. He stabbed her to death and ran away.

Jimmy was proved to be guilty and was ordered to be hanged in two days. He lost not only his best friend but also his life. The court was dismissed. Jenny left the court as soon as it got dismissed not stopping even for David to come. David followed Jenny. Jenny went straight to the grave of Natalie. It was holy white having cross on its top. When Jenny reached, there was Natalie waiting for her. There was a bunch of light with small stars with Natalie in the centre. She was smiling. She hugged Jenny and pushed her softly. The light became lighter and so the Natalie. It got vanished with Natalie. In the place of Natalie, there was a small plant of Rose. Jenny kept a flower on the grave and sat silently.



Nutan

Tanushree Choudhary

It was a grimy, sultry afternoon. Nobody in the wing was around except for Nutan and her work. Nutan loved to be in her wing all day. Whether others were around for some time or no time at all, it did not bother her much.

She was happy in her own companionship, with the desktop, sans the uninterrupted power supply machine and a printer. The college did not think it was worthwhile to give a printer to a teacher who wanted to prepare new lessons for her class. It would go a long way. I mean, in creating and reviving interest in the course she was teaching this semester. She was teaching a subject very essential not only for the course the students were doing but also for their entire lives. But it was like breaking your head against the wall. These people were so ignorant. There was no doubt about it. But she had to carry on, isn't it?

Nutan went on typing at her own speed but it was too hot and humid now. She wanted to take a break, maybe have a cup of tea and resume her work. Tea, even at this odd hour, in this heat? Oh yes! Tea gave her the break, the interval needed to get away from the work. She could get up and walk around. She told herself, "Go towards the staircase and the open area preceding it. Have a look and stand there for a while, perspire a little more but get an eye soothing picture of the greenery around the building." If she was lucky, she would be able to see a face or two of other teachers around.

The faculty rooms were distributed all around the circular building, on both sides of the passage. There were three floors over the ground floor. It was a huge building, circular in shape, housing the entire college. The ground floor housed the administrative staff and the three floors above it all the teaching staff. Obviously the senior most on the first and others on the second and third floors respectively, depending on your seniority. So if there was an entrant, obviously she would be seated at the top. This was one of the good things that the college had. People were not stagnant- they were kept on the move.

Nutan was reminded of her schooldays. The teachers at school would never let the girls sit with their best friends. The besties would be separated- the teachers knew their job well. They gave everybody the chance to mix up with each other in the class. To be frank- they forced them to sit with almost everyone. And they did not listen to overbearing parents. In the affairs of the classroom the teacher was omnipotent. On the other hand, there were hardly 20-22 students in class, so unlike today, where the classes were crammed with at least 50 students each. Also there weren't too many nosey or high profile parents who interfered with classroom business. The teacher was supreme, the one who was *wholly-solly* (solely) in the language of dilliwallahs, in charge of the class.



Talking of classes and students, Nutan's mind was automatically drawn to the roles the teachers play during and after classes. No wonder then that teachers play very important roles in training, guiding and parenting students. Teachers are custodians of discipline, responsibility, behaviour, you name it. Teacher involvement was everywhere, only if teachers conceded. Teachers are revered for this guardianship apart from the teaching they do. Very much in line with her thoughts came the seminar that was held in the college a month back.

It was called the Shift in the Roles of Teachers from Role Models to Mentors. There was active participation from the faculty members and some participants had really a good grasp on the topic with real life examples. The teachers were very eloquent on the need of the teachers to become supporters and guides of students and not just remain as examples to follow.

One of the faculty members, Dr Nanji said "Teachers remain aloof from the actual student-dom and do not understand the psyche of the students these days. We should change our attitude towards the students."

Another member, female, Dr Karsari said "The role of girl students is very complicated today. She has to undergo lot of pressure at home and outside."

Adding to Dr Karsari was Dr Kurtha "The girls have double roles to play. They might have one personality at home and another one outside home."

This last comment gave rise to an onslaught of comments in favour of women-dom. Most of the female members asserted the role of women, not double but triple or quadruplet times. They agreed that the role of women in mentoring was very important and their involvement with girls was of extreme importance. There were all sorts of people around from friends to family members ready to dig in the moment girls looked away. So it was all the more necessary for girls to be wary of such elements. The discussion at this juncture was all pervasive. Nutan had noted that every one of the females had something or the other to convey. One or two of them started to indulge in the kind of work they had to do and the result was a zero. Nobody understood them so this was the opportune moment to give way to their woes!

Nutan, herself was amazed at the kind of responses given by female members. She was happy that women were very aware of the situation of other womenfolk. Today they participated actively and passionately which was generally difficult to find and see in such people. They were very eloquent about the kind of feeling that others should have for womenfolk. Dr. Karsari talked of the difficulties and problems women were prone to and offered all help by way of counseling to be done to the girls in the college. Nutan was surprised at the willingness shown by Karsari as she generally kept away from all such thankless work. As long as people did not suffer as individuals themselves, they did not



bother. The fact of the matter was that there was loss of sensitivity towards others. So as long as it was happening with others, we were untouched and therefore not bothered. However today, the scene was different. It was good to see people sensitive and ready to sensitize others as well. Most of her colleagues would like to stay out of any problematic situation and that is why such vehement agreement to the need for understanding and simulating the situation was an eye opener for Nutan. Vipta, her colleague and close friend, agreed we had to take care of our young ones as they could be misled easily.

As Nutan tried walking around the circular building, she felt an awkward silence gnawing at her. Suddenly she heard somebody speaking in a loud voice. She recognized the voice. It was Dr Jhinkis. He was shouting at a boy who had been loitering around, maybe snooping, for some sort of help. It struck her then. Yes, it was exam time and hence the silence. Nutan had been so involved with her writing that she had completely forgotten that it was exam time and that is why the eerie silence. The college hustled and bustled with activity and noise when students were around, whether in class or outside the class. But apart from the students there were very few teachers around doing their routine stuff. Exam time meant staying back at home, unless you had an invigilation duty. Examination staff was seen running around- some distributing extra sheets, some tea to the invigilators and some as usual, lazing around.

Nutan said to herself “No wonder people wanted a teaching job! No attendance, no accountability!”

She remembered her ma-in-law feeling very elated when she had found out that Nutan would probably work in a college. It would give her extra time than having a 9 to 5 office job.

“She will be able to look after her family well.” Ma-in-law had said. You could tell she was all for it. And Nutan did land up with a college job eventually. But the truth was she did not spend those extra hours at home, much to her ma-in-law’s dismay.

Of course you had all the time to yourself if you were like Nipunj, her colleague, who was never around, you know, never taking classes or doing exam duty. Well she had gotten all her promotions without even making her presence felt, what more could you ask for? No wonder then the respect for teachers was fast losing ground. But then there were several of them who joined this field- running some other business like coaching or politics- at the same time. Why bother to go to classes when the teachers claimed that students were smart enough. But they said this was life. And there were people like this everywhere. So Nutan should not mind about these. Really? She could never be complacent about this particular issue. This was like cheating. Or even people who came but did not go to the class. Her friend Karseri was one of them- went late to the class so that the class vanished.



After walking around for a while, Nutan proceeded towards the Ladies' Toilet. There were two sections in the spacious toilet. Neat and clean they were, as there weren't too many people using it. To top it, Nutan tried to have the toilets kept clean by getting after the cleaners. You needed these since you were around the entire day. It was more like a private, homely toilet where one didn't have to cover the nose.

One of the sections was empty but Nutan never went to that one. The one that she did use was occupied. The door was closed so she came back and stood in the corner jutting out, looking into the park below. It was nearly 4 o'clock- one more hour to go before the exams got over. She stretched herself a little and went back to her room to check for any missed call. There was none so she came out of the room again and walked into the toilet. The door was still closed. Nutan wondered...who could it be since there weren't many people around. "Maybe the cleaners" She thought. After having waited for a minute or two she went back and knocked at the door of the toilet. There was some sound, maybe a ruffle of clothes. She did not pay attention and walked out for the person to hurry up. She knew it was odd, knocking at a bathroom door but she had to. I mean, get over with the toilet business and settle down to work and go back home after that. It was strange that despite the knocking nobody came out. Now it was getting on to Nutan's nerves. Well a toilet was a toilet and not a bedroom or a tea room. One goes there only when one needs to and not spend the entire time there. She made up her mind and knocked at the door loudly.

She said: "Please come out soon, whoever it is."

This time there was some vague sound, probably someone talking. There was some movement and ruffle of clothes.

Nutan started thinking. Was there somebody taking a bath before going home? But it was not possible as there was just a seat and a mere tap. But you know people could go to any extent. Well come you out and then you would receive a piece of her mind. Then there was no sound. Complete silence. It baffled her. What was wrong? The person inside must be afraid now and therefore not coming out. So Nutan walked out and waited for the person to walk up and where she would give way to her bout of anger and complete the picture.

Nutan got tired waiting. So she started walking towards her room and stood outside the door from where she could see the person coming out. The moment she turned her head towards the door of her room, she heard footsteps running out of the toilet. There was no further doubt. There was something wrong here. Why would anybody run out at such a speed? She was sure she had heard a number of feet. She ran towards the staircase where the sound of footsteps had vanished. It could not have gone any other way because the other way was the terrace where there was no hiding. She thought she had seen a boy running out. But that was impossible. From a women's toilet- just not possible!



The footsteps had run out so fast that she could not really see who it was running down from the top of the stairs.

At that point, Vipta emerged from the stairs and was taken in by Nutan's look.

"Did you see anyone going down?" Nutan asked.

"No, I didn't see anybody." Vipta said.

"Crazy you are! You must have encountered somebody who was rushing down?" Nutan queried again.

"Oh them?"

"What them? Somebody came out of the lady's loo. And I think it was a boy!" Nutan tried to get the answer.

"Yes, yes. There was boy anda girl." Vipta said.

"Are you mad? I said he came out of the loo. It should only be a girl" Nutan said. She was trying to convince herself. No it could or should not be a boy!! She had hoped Vipta would say a girl and then Nutan would be satisfied. But Vipta stuck to her answer. Her eyes were twinkling now.

"What if there were two of them?"

Nutan almost lost her temper.

"Is it funny to say so? How can there be a boy in the lady's loo? Think about it.." Nutan was now shouting.

"Alright so there was only a girl." Vipta laughed and went to her room.

Nutan was thinking hard. She had caught a glimpse of the boy. She had taught him earlier. She would recognise him if she saw him again. Yes, she could for sure. There was no point running after him now. The college was huge and had too many alleys. One could hide anywhere. Kids were smart. Well smarter than Nutan.

Nutan did not know what to do. But she could not let it pass like this. What was that boy doing in a girl's loo? It was none of his business. And to top it, as Vipta had said, there was a girl too. She was confounded. What was happening? Now the boys could be found in the lady's room? Not done.



Suddenly she found Neeshri facing her.

“What is wrong? Why are you looking so upset?”

Nutan explained to her what she had seen. She did not miss to mention Vipta’s comments.

Now even Neeshri was shocked.

“Are you sure you saw a boy?”

Yes, I am sure about the boy but I am shocked with the mention of the girl”

“Will you recognise the boy?”

“Yes. That I will”

Neeshri was quick. She had decided what the next step would be.

“Come with me.

They ran down to the Exam Cell. Their colleague Jhinkis was surprised to see them.

“Is there anything wrong in your rooms? He meant the exam room.

“No. We are not doing exam duty today. We just want to know which group is having exams today.”

By this time Nutan had tried to remember which group the boy belonged to. She was sure she had him in her class at least three years back. That would put in the final year.

Neeshri asked “Is the final year doing exams today?”

Working on the hint I had provided her, she too was very worried about things that were happening around them. We started thinking quickly.

“No they have a paper tomorrow. In the afternoon.”

“Where will they be seated?”

We knew the classes were already marked out. So we would be able to comb him out.

The mission would be incomplete without finding out why the boy was in the lady’s toilet. But it would have to wait till the next day. The next day came.



The wait was a prolonged time. But it was difficult to find out without the exam time. Nutan knew she had to talk to that boy but what would she say to him? She did not know. Let's cross the bridge first. She kept her fingers crossed- she should recognise the person. Otherwise the effort of two people would go waste. But more important was the behaviour of the students. There was absolutely no reason why he was in the lady's toilet. At the same time she kept thinking about Vipta's slow response. Why did she not find anything strange in the way the two had been running down? And on top of that, Nutan had been so upset. That she could have made out. But she was careful not to show it. Otherwise Nutan would have forced him to spill out or do the present exercise. But generally most people were laid back, not wanting to be caught in these small issues. What if a boy was found in the lady's loo?

Afternoon came and Nutan and Neeshri went to the allocated room. They went inside the room after the invigilator's permission and looked around. Nutan was now nervous- what if she pointed at the wrong boy, what if the boy refuted her charges...there was no end to all this. One round and Nutan could not find the face she had seen yesterday. Her heart was leaping-surely the boy should commit to some serious matter. She could not point a finger at anybody without any proof. Suddenly, she saw him. It was writ large on his face. The moment she saw him, she knew it was he. And he knew that Nutan had found him, and for something that both of them shared. Nutan looked at Neeshri and then nodded her head towards the boy. Nutan left the room. Now it was Neeshri job to talk to the boy.

Neeshri walked up to the boy and looking straight at him said, "Come to see Maam and me after your exams." She mentioned our rooms and both of them went back to their rooms.

Five o' clock came. The bell rang. The papers must have been collected. Students must be streaming out. People from the top must be walking down the stairs. They gave themselves ten minutes for some of them to climb up. Obviously they were waiting for the boy to come up. They could do nothing in case he did not turn up.

Suddenly the boy was standing in her doorway. With him was a girl. Nutan remembered this girl too. Both of them were good friends, always found sitting together. Nutan asked the boy in and enquired about the girl. By now Neerish had left the room. She would question and talk to them alone. It was difficult to handle today's students.

"She was with me, yesterday" The boy said.

So Vipta was right. Now her smile started to mean.



Nutan was aghast. The girl was inside was understandable but not the boy. What was happening? Obviously something was happening, and that too very fast, too fast for Nutan to comprehend.

She made both of them comfortable. She did not want to offend or punish them. She wanted to know why they were inside. Nutan started talking to them, building up their confidence, making sure they felt she was not going to take any action against them. She asked her about their parents and siblings. As she kept asking them questions defly skirting the toilet issue the boy's composure started crumbling.

The boy started feeling fidgety and burst out after answering quietly for a while. He started confessing everything. Both of them got into the toilet as they could not emotionally control themselves. The girl started crying. Nutan got up from her seat and tried to comfort the girl again. She was afraid Nutan would complain to her parents. Nutan convinced them she would do nothing of that sort. She just wanted to talk it over with them. She was just trying to understand them. She was only trying to bring them to a logical conclusion that they were not quite right in doing these things in a ladies' toilet. By and by, both of them opened up and committed that they had been using toilets recently. Nutan told them she was not interfering in their lives just that she wanted to advise as a friend would do. Romance had its place but certainly not in the loo. The moment Nutan spoke about how the parents would feel about this incident, even the boy felt ashamed. He felt he had been hasty and had not done the correct thing. Nutan made sure they would not use a toilet again for such a purpose. The two of them started laughing. They went on talking for a long time. Nutan was happy that they had realized their overzealousness.

Two days later the two of them came again. Their last exam was over. They would not come to college again. Both of them were very comfortable and happy. They thanked Nutan for her guidance and turned to go. Suddenly, the girl came around the table and touched Nutan's feet. Nutan felt proud that she had counselled someone well. Her role as a mentor was complete.



Sulekha

Dr. Nivedita Maitra

It is Sulekha's wedding night and after an almost week long ceremony it is for the first time Sulekha would be with Suresh. Sulekha is looking forward to the moments of their togetherness. Her spirits are high and she is able to feel the magic in the air. Dressed in an exquisitely designed saree especially designed for this occasion Sulekha is feeling elated. Lovingly glancing around the room beautifully decorated with sweet smelling flowers and aroma candles she starts visualizing her life ahead. In this room her new life is about to begin, her new identity. In every activity she would from now on have beside her, her husband, her companion, her love.

Love! How would that experience be, Sulekha wondered. How would his first touch be! Sulekha closed her eyes and a warm glow moved up her body sending tingling sensations all over. Sulekha was an educated girl. Her post-graduate degree in Economics had brought her into lime light. From a mere rank in the first division in graduation she had catapulted into a University topper, a gold medallist, and ETV had telecasted her interview. It was this interview which Shri Mr. Kalicharan had viewed and had immediately selected her as his daughter-in-law. An eminent economist himself he had seen in her a very promising future. Her vibrant personality and amiable disposition had appealed to Shri Mr. Kalicharan and he wasted no time in procuring Sulekha's parents' address and asking for her hand for his only son, Suresh. Mr. Harishankar Tiwari too had wasted no time in fixing his daughter's marriage with such an eligible bachelor who met all the criteria of a desirable bride-groom; a handsome salary, good academic background and a good family lineage.

Within a fortnight everything was finalized and within a month the marriage was solemnized. Everything happened in such a hurry that Sulekha hardly got time to think or reflect upon the course of life she would have liked to tread upon. Marriage was always talked about with the greatest reverence in her family and her parents' life and her elder sister's married life stood before her as great testimonies of the beauty of this institution called marriage. So she did not object to her marriage being settled by her parents or show any greater preference for a career to marriage rather believed that all her dreams, her aspirations, her desires would conjoin with that of her husband's and they together would work towards their fulfillment.

Suresh entered the room and looked towards her hesitatingly. After closing the door of their bedroom he came towards her and sat beside her on the bed. He then took out a diamond ring and taking her hand slipped it on her finger. Then very slowly and softly he spoke to her. 'Sulekha, I have something to tell you, we are married and you are my wife. I don't want to hide anything from you from now on. I know the importance of tonight, I know how valuable every moment is to both of us, but I am in a fix. I love Netra wholeheartedly and it is difficult for me to replace her with you all of a sudden. I know it is



tremendously rude on my part to say these things tonight but all I ask of you is to give me time. I can't bring myself to touch you tonight and speak endearing words to you which the occasion demands. I am extremely sorry". Sulekha's dream castle collapsed. She looked at him and what she saw pained her. She saw genuine pain on his face. She could sense a tremendous battle going on within him. His sagging shoulders, lowered eyes, trembling voice told of a great defeat. A huge wave of sympathy rose in her heart as she saw in him not a husband but a man torn between his love and his duty. Suddenly she felt an urge to know more about him. She got off the bed and stood near him. Suresh turned towards her anticipating tears and a volley of questions. He had prepared himself for it but instead of tears he saw friendliness in her eyes. He stared at her not knowing what to say. She asked "Where did you meet Netra?"

"At my office, she joined as a programme designer a year ago. We have worked together on many projects. It was during one of those projects that I realized I liked her more than anyone I have known so far."

"Does she too like you?"

"Immensely"

"What do you like about her?"

"Her intelligence, her manners, her attitude towards life, her working capacity... come to think of it... everything about her."

A smile played upon his lips as he spoke of Netra. He caught his breath when he spoke of her and his body twirled in response to her invisible presence. Sulekha noticed these movements and realized Netra had made a place for herself somewhere deep in his heart.

They passed the whole night speaking about Netra. He told her everything, shared all his feelings with her, for Netra.

Next day with the departure of all the wedding guests the house of Shri Mr. Kalicharan fell back to normalcy. Both Suresh and his father left for office and Sulekha had the whole day to herself. Suresh's mother brought his clothes that evening to her room and said, "I am handing over my son's care to you from now on. I have taken care of his clothes, his necessities till now, now you take over. Come, I'll show you how I keep his things. Opening a closet she said," On this first shelf I keep his warm clothes, shirts on this shelf, pants here, daily wear there, undergarments at that corner; money in this drawer and all his bank account books in this safe. Here, take these keys and keep them with you." What could have made Sulekha elated had things been normal, filled her with a sense of aversion. A sudden anger seethed within her. How is it that as a mother she did not know



about her son being in love with someone? Or did she know? What did taking care mean? Does taking care mean serving at just the physical level without even a peep into ones emotions? She turned towards her mother-in-law and in a steady voice asked, “Ma, did Suresh ever tell you about his love for his colleague called Netra?” The surprise on her face was proof enough to tell she was totally unaware of this aspect of her son. She looked at Sulekha aghast, confused at what she heard.

Suresh came home early that evening and after a brief talk with his parents downstairs he came up to his room and seeing Sulekha said “Care for a drive? It’s beautiful outside.” Sulekha agreed and they both set out on a long drive. Suresh spoke animatedly about his work, his friends, his office and his passion for cars. Sulekha listened attentively then interrupting him suddenly said, “When are we going for the *pugphera* ceremony?”

“What’s that?”

“Within a week of the marriage, the girl has to return to her parent’s house, with her husband of course.”

“Oh! Is it so! Why do we have to go so soon? Can’t we go sometime later?”

“No, I think not. I want to go.”

“Why? Is there any problem?”

“Problem? Yes of course.”

“Look I understand. I know, but please give me some time. Let me think”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I am saying. We really need to think. That’s why I must go.”

But, how will your going away help? You are my wife and Well what is there to think, your every comfort will be taken care of.

Sulekha kept quite. How could she make him see that marriage to a woman did not simply mean getting a shelter, food and clothing in her husband’s house, but something much beyond that. It is a very subtle emotional tie which becomes the bond between the two, a bond which time strengthens. Faith and trust become the two foundation stones on which brick by brick the edifice of married life gets built. Sulekha had wanted to build her dream home on trust, faith, love and respect. But, could she now add any brick when the foundation itself was weak? She felt she needed time to think over her relationship with Suresh. She could not carry on living like this.



Unusual quiet settled between the two. All the fun of the drive vanished and they returned home.

Next day when Suresh returned home from office he found Sulekha had her suitcases packed and ready. Suresh did not understand what to say or do. He looked sheepishly at her, unable to piece together the events that were taking place in his life.

“You have decided to go?”

“Yes”

“Have you talked to Ma about this?”

“Not yet.”

“What will you tell her?”

Sulekha looked at Suresh. Anxiety, fear, embarrassment all changed colors by turn on his face. She could feel his dilemma, the embarrassing situation he was into but she could do nothing at the moment.

“Why don’t you talk to her and tell her everything” she asked.

Suresh almost crumbled and in an agonized voice said, “I?”

Sulekha had always put all men into one category. To her a man stood for courage, boldness, capability, determination.... Seeing such indecisiveness and reluctance in Suresh, she felt quite surprised.

“I am afraid you will have to tell your parents about our visit to my parents’ house.”

“I... do you mean I have to accompany you to your father’s home? What will I say to them?”

“Well, if you do not wish to accompany me, no problem, I shall manage alone”.

“Listen Sulekha, please stay a few more days, everything will be alright.”

“I need to go Suresh, please do try to understand.”

The firmness of Sulekha’s voice left no doubt in Suresh’s mind that she had made up her mind to go and no amount of persuasion would make her change her stand.



Reluctantly Suresh packed his bag and slowly they descended the stairs to take leave from Suresh's parents for the journey. They were shocked beyond measure to see them leave at such a short notice, that too without their permission.

Throughout the journey Suresh remained restless and agitated. He could not sit quietly and talk to Sulekha. Both remained quiet and pre-occupied in thought.

Seeing Sulekha and Suresh back so soon, made HariShankar Tiwari nervous. He could sense that all was not well with his daughter. Suresh exchanged a few polite greetings and begged for being excused. He returned home by the next train to. His parents were waiting eagerly to know the reasons for Sulekha's departure so soon and Suresh had to tell them what had passed between him and Sulekha.

Shri Mr. Kalicharan was surprised at Sulekha's reaction. He considered her action impulsive and childish. He immediately rang up Mr. Harishankar Tiwari to inform him of his visit to his place and with his wife and son immediately set out for Lucknow. Reaching there he directly broached the topic. Speaking to Sulekha he said in a fatherly voice, "Sulekha, I had no idea that my son had some kind of feelings for a colleague of his but he has married you and you are his legally married wife."

"Yes Papa, I know and understand that, but there is a difference between being a legally married wife and an emotionally accepted wife. Ours is a settled marriage and an emotional acceptance of each other is more valuable than legal rights. The first step of a married life is mutual acceptance. In a settled marriage two complete strangers agree to share their lives together, so acceptance is very necessary."

"Has he not accepted you as his wife? He has accepted you in front of the entire society."

"Yes he has, socially and legally, I am not denying that, but individually at the personal level?"

"I don't understand this" said Mr. Kalicharan, a little exasperated. "What are your fears? Are you afraid that he might be unfaithful to you?"

"No, I am not afraid of that".

"What then?" Mr. Kalicharan looked at Sulekha intently.

"I don't want to live with a sense of guilt that because of me Suresh could not achieve his love. Somewhere Netra would lurk behind my mind and I would always feel myself an intruder and so would never be at peace with myself."



Mr. Kalicharan looked at Mr. Hari Shankar questioningly, unable to comprehend all that Sulekha was talking about. To him a woman's place was in the house and her prime duty to look after her husband and the house? What was all this question of mutual acceptance, emotional acceptance he could not understand? The Marriage ceremony was itself a testimony of acceptance and once that was over each discharged his/her responsibility and fitted into his/her role. A wife had a certain role to play and in return she got all the comforts of life; house, status, identity, material comforts... Was Sulekha foolish enough not to realize these things? He thought.

Hari Shankarji looked at Mr. Kalicharan and said, "I have always allowed my daughters to take their own decisions, I will not interfere in this too. I will stand with my daughter in whatever she decides upon."

"What is your decision? Do you need time, or some promise from Suresh, me or your mother-in-law? Do you want Suresh to assure you he would never meet his colleague whatever her name may be, or you want him to take a transfer from this place, or change his job?"

"None. I want both of us, Suresh and I to be freed of the bond of marriage?"

A dead silence fell upon the room. Nobody spoke for some time. Then Mr. Kalicharan's anger rose as he felt he and his son had been insulted enough. He rose and with him his wife and Suresh too rose to leave. Without a word they left the house, boarded the train and reached Allahabad. Just before they entered Allahabad Mr. Kalicharan said to Suresh, "Take me to, what did you say your friend's name is?"

"Netra."

"Yes, Netra's house. I want to meet her."

"Now? But why?"

"I want to fix your marriage with her."

Suresh was stunned. His mother looked with disbelief at her husband.

They proceeded towards Netra's house. The suave, cool, collected and well poised Netra struck Mr. Kalicharan with a sense of awe. He never thought woman could also strike a sense of awe or would make it difficult for a man like Mr. Kalicharan to speak unhesitatingly. With caution he chose his words.

"I came to know today that Suresh and you like each other. I am sorry I did not come to know of it earlier but it is never too late to correct a mistake. I have come to ask



you when it will be suitable for you to marry Suresh. I will talk to your father of course and discuss all the things in details.”

“I have no plans whatsoever of marrying Suresh. It is true I like him and at one time contemplated marrying him too but he is married now and I have no wish to break his marriage.”

You are not breaking his marriage but because you both like each other and Sulekha knows of it she wants to annul her marriage with Suresh and free him to marry you.”

“That’s kind of her but do I need someone’s sympathy and sacrifice to make my marriage to happen? The base of my marriage with Suresh will be someone’s sacrifice, I can’t bear it. I would rather remain as I am than be the cause for a break of someone’s marriage. I am not desperate to marry Suresh. Yes I liked him, he a good human being but that’s not enough reason for making him break his marriage to marry me. I have an image, a position and any act like this would severely affect my image. I am extremely sorry. I can’t marry him.”

Mr. Kalicharan was aghast. As he returned home with his wife and son, tears swelled up in his eyes. His wife saw them and asked, “Why are you crying?”

“How time has changed! My son, one in a million, is simply shoved off, rejected, considered undesirable by these women. Their image, position, opinion... all such things have gained priority for them. Do we men have no value in their lives? In future what will be the value of a man for a woman? He has always been seen as a provider, provider of shelter, food and the very identity of a woman, but now women have far outreached men. She is capable of providing all means of livelihood for herself, then what is left in the man’s share? I foresee a terrible future for men. God save us.”

Suresh’s mother smiled. Though it was a sad day something more vital had happened. Years of pain of non existence has been avenged.



The Tale of Bharmal and Kanwarsi Sankhla

Dr. Divya Joshi

Khinvisi Sankhla was the ruler of Jaanglu kingdom. His son's name was Kanwarsi Sankhla. The region named Sot was ruled by another community called the Kharala community. When drought and famine broke out in their land, they thought of migrating to some fertile land for water and fodder. So they advanced a proposal their neighbouring community, the Khinchi community and requested them for the use their land for four months. Since the Khinchis were under the authority of Khinvisi Sankhla, it was necessary to seek his permission. When Khinvisi counselled with his people, they agreed to this proposal. All of them opined that, after all, the Kharalas are friends and they will not stay forever. A letter of permission was dispatched and the Kharalas migrated along with their livestock and cattle. The Khinchis offered their resources and extended hospitality to them.

Many days passed. One day the Khinchis suggested to the Kharalas that they need to go back to your land as favorable days have come. But the Kharalas seemed reluctant. On the contrary they started creating trouble. The Khinchis toiled hard throughout the night and collected water in their reservoirs but the Kharalas deliberately used it for their cattle. Distressed Khinchis complained their rulers about this troublesome behavior and the rulers further informed the Sankhla. When the Sankhla asked the Kharalas to leave, they answered in affirmative, but did not go. Finally the Khinchis and Sankhla collectively used force to overturn them. Some were killed, few fled away. When the Kharala community came to know about this assault, they did not reciprocate and decided to wait for the opportune moment. Five to six years have passed.

Khinvisi Sankhla had taken a vow not to decline any conjugal proposal and return the coconut brought as its token. Bharmal, the daughter of Kharalas was blind since childhood. When she was fifteen years old, the Kharalas who knew about this pledge of Khinvisi played fraud and sent a Brahmin with a proposal for marriage to Kanwarsi Sankhla. Kanwarsi was out for hunting when the Brahmin arrived. When his father heard about this proposal, he immediately summoned the Brahmin and sent him back. On the Brahmin's way back, Kanwarsi saw the Brahmin who seemed unfamiliar and therefore called for him. When the Brahmin told the purpose of his visit, Kanwarsi willingly accepted the offer. He asked the Brahmin to come back again after finalizing an auspicious day for marriage on which he can proceed to tie the knot with Bharmal. He rewarded the Brahmin and bid him farewell.

Back home Kanwarsi narrated the whole incident to the Rajputs. His father was disappointed to know that his son had consented to marry the daughter of Kharalas. Kanwarsi persuaded his father that even if the Kharalas did this out of enmity, turning back the offer would have been disgraceful and against their honour.



Many days passed and the Brahmin returned to fix a day for the marriage. On the fixed day Kanwarsi set out with his marriage procession. Kharalas welcomed and embraced the Sankhals but their hearts were full of guile and malice and they decided to kill Kanwarsi while in sleep.

Kanwarsi proceeded for the nuptial rites and as soon as the wedlock was tied, Bharmal regained her eye-sight. She happily communicated this to her mother who was also very happy to know but feared the murder of her son-in-law. The mother advised Bharmal to convey this to Kanwarsi. And Bharmal indirectly suggested her anxiety by pressing Kanwarsi's thumb. Immediately after marriage Kanwarsi left for the place where he and his party were accommodated. He said; "Friends, I anticipate some conspiracy, let's move". So, all of them quickly and quietly left the place.

Two to three years have passed. On one rainy day Kanwarsi had gone for hunting. Colourful clouds in the sky reminded him of Bharmal. He saw his men off and he mounted the horse and moved towards Bharmal's place. When he reached there, he saw Bharmal milking the buffaloes. It was drizzling. The clouds bowed down to touch and embrace the earth. It was indeed a dark night and nothing was visible, suddenly with a flash of light Bharmal saw Kanwarsi. She carried the milk coop in her hand and walked stealthily towards her house. From outside the house she asked her mother – How do I come? Mother replied, 'Daughter, Come the way you are. And both went inside. No one else but the mother knew this.

An underground vault was built where Bharmal and Kanwarsi stayed for 6 months, Bharmal conceived. One day her brother saw Bharmal and inquired about her state. His mother said, you did not allow her to live with her husband, for how long can a grown up girl live religiously? On this her brother insisted to call Khinvti to discuss the matter.

Meanwhile, Kanwarsi prepared a cart from logs of wood and ordered to prepare a similar cart for Bharmal. The Rajputs arrived to take Bharmal and Kanwarsi back home. This side all was ready. Kanwarsi and Bharmal ascended the cart surrounded and guarded by armed horsemen for security. All the Kharalas gathered and came out of their houses to meet Kanwarsi. As soon as the cart reached closer to the Sankhals, Kanwarsi descended the cart, pulled the reins of his horse, went and joined his army. He said – "No one should scoff the Kharalas because Bharmal is carrying my child. I have been staying with the Kharalas for the past 6 months and now I take your leave, Ram Ram to all." When Kanwarsi and Bharmal returned home his father refused to accept Bharmal as his daughter-in-law. Bharmal started living at Raisisar and Kanwarsi ordered for a new palace to be built for her.

One day Khinvti Sankhla went for hunting and while his horse was following a pig he reached Raisisar. When he was passing through Raisisar, he saw Bharmal sleeping under the shadow of the cart and feeding her baby. Khinvti was very delighted and moved



to see the sight of the daughter affectionately playing with the mother. He ordered for a palanquin to bring Bharmal back home. He also granted her the ownership of a village. Kanwarsi showered his love and affection on Bharmal. And all lived happily thereafter.

This story has been taken from the collection titled 'Rajasthani Vaat Sangrah' edited by Manohar Sharma and Srilal Nathmal Joshi published by Rajasthani Granthagaar , Jodhpur. 2011. The stories in the collection introduce the readers to the oral tradition of Rajasthan known as 'Vaat', a word from the Sanskrit word 'Vaarta' (talk) which means dialogue or talk, a category which transcends the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, gossip, moral inquiries, a mixture of story and a personal anecdote. The translated vaat is the twelfth story in the collection.



The Day of Enlightenment

Gautam Ambhore

The Patil (Head) of the village was in tensed mood. All the family members got bewildered due to his unnatural behaviour. Having a strict nature of his, nobody dared to dip his fingers into the hot furnace. After half an hour, the lava started flowing when he called on his servant Ramu. He was the only person who could go and face the orders of Patil in such condition. He bowed before him and prepared his face to listen the master. “We have to move right now to police station at Chikhli Tahsil”, said the Patil. Ramu was always ready to become shadow of the master. The motor bike was ready. Ramu played a role of a good advisor-cum-friend. The Patil too, never treated him like a servant. At the same time Ramu’s honesty never crossed the status of his designation. He was straight forward in nature and was able to make clear cut demarcation between right and wrong. Since twenty years, he was with the Patil. As there was no age difference between them, they were the best friends rather than servant - master relationship.

After reaching to police station at Chikhli, the police inspector (P. I.) handed over complaint of a gang rape to Patil. It took no time to know Patil the name of culprits. His head was about to burst because before it also, the same goondas violated an innocent teenager girl and killed later inhumanly. Then it was the prestige issue of Patil and the village. To manage the case, he had undergone through severe insults from Tahsildar to Deputy C. M. The girl belonged to the lower caste. Throughout Maharashtra, the local leaders and so called national leaders staged Morcha before the collector offices of every district. It was a blot not only on the village but on the state as well because major social reformers took birth in this state. The leaders don’t miss a single chance to utter their names in their speeches at various social and political gatherings. To mitigate the stressful atmosphere in the society, the police arrested the criminals and very soon left them on bail.

The Patil could not take any action against them because at the time of election they supported and worked for him day and night. As an adjustment in politics he knew their role. But at social level, these things are not to be tolerated. The Patil was more humanitarian than the dirty politics. In the first case, his own daughter and wife scolded him saying, ‘If you can’t protect the women, leave politics. Tomorrow we may become the prey of offended people.’ His daughter was a friend of the girl who was raped. She could not bear the assault on her dear friend, Namrata. Her words made her father restless when she said, ‘Papa, the supporters of sinners, are equally guilty as sinners when they cooperate with them. They should too, be hanged with them.’ These expressions were enough for Patil to understand the indirect involvement of his in the crime. He had given assurance to his family along with the villagers, ‘Here after, no criminal would be saved in the name of caste or creed or religion including myself.’



Now, all the people were looking at the decision of Patil. There were only two ways—either punish them or leave the politics in coming election. Till now, the village had not seen a good person like Patil. Otherwise they had the experiences of traditional politicians.

The new generation has started thinking irrespective of caste. The reservation policy has given opportunity to search the quality people from every class. As casteism is a stain on Indian society, it would take some time to lighten it and definitely it would be vanished.

The Patil was found in scissors. Ramu did not take more time to cool the master. The police inspector got shocked at the decision taken by Patil. He told him to wait till the evening before he would take any final decision regarding the filing of an FIR. Ramu, as usual, was trying to bifurcate the mixed up brain cells of justice and injustice of the Patil. For Ramu understood, the seriousness of Patil's behavior. Otherwise, on the spot, he would have told the inspector to dismiss the case. Generations together, at many places, in India, the oppressed don't expect good judgment against a crime in favour of them.

In the evening, Patil reached home. The family members did not notice much change on his face. The daughter Amita used to have lot of discussion on different issues with him. Therefore she was the only figure who would tackle him very easily. She had no fear in her mind regarding his father's nature though he was a terrific person outside the home. When he became fresh and was about to sit in arm chair, she stood before him with smiling face taking a tray of tea and a glass of water in her hand. For some moments he forgot the tension of a day. But Amita did not want to miss the chance of hitting a hammer on hot iron.

During sipping tea, she weaved an emotional net between their discussions. Looking at the books of social reformers, she pointed at them and said, "Papa, I am very fortunate to have a father like you because had you not brought these books for me, I would not have dared to speak with you. I got one thread in all the reformers that a man is judged either a good or bad on his actions only. They never hesitated to support the good and oppose the evil things throughout their life span. The oppressors may belong to any caste but the oppressed is always defeated in life, Papa. I can understand your politics and supporters. But don't you think to stop these nonsense things in the society. If you take decision in favour of subjugated people, it would be a mile stone for others. And you would be known forever- 'the man of action.' Papa, work in a way that people would say 'he was a man who went far ahead of casteist ideology.'" Again pointing at portraits of the social leaders, she made her voice louder than before and said, 'only due to their actions, they are remembered centuries together after their death. Papa, take a strong decision against the culprits and prove you as a man of decision. Today's prejudiced caste based politics would turn into casteless society. The villagers would consider you their idol.'



Patil did not drink his tea completely. His eyes were making a way for tears. He could not remove his eyesight from Amita. His facial expressions were giving full satisfaction of being a great father. Ramu and Amita removed all the complications from his disturbed mentality. His past decisions did not make any interference. His father's politics proved faithless for the society. Instead of wasting time on dead time, he wanted to make present and future bright. Taking long breathe, he pressed some numbers on mobile with full confidence and authority. He told inspector to file an FIR against the criminals. In reply to the inspector he continued, 'Refund all the money you have taken by the culprits, I am coming tomorrow with the offended.' Many people of his caste went against him to teach a lesson in the upcoming election. At the same time, all the suppressed decided to devote themselves for the Patil and his politics.



Poovizhi

Nalini Singaravel

“Poovizhi is pregnant,” hissed Vanaja, hiding the betel stained huge, irregular teeth with her left hand as she scratched her parched hair with the other.

Punitha athai stopped stirring the sambar that had come to a boil. Absently she pushed the firewood further into the oven and sneered, “What else can you expect from that hussy? Two years since husband died and . . . she is pregnant? No self-respecting man is safe with these harlots around.”

“And to think Pandyan made much of this *Chirukki!*” scoffed Vanaja “As if she had descended from heaven! Thoo . . . !” She spat.

Indeed Pandyan Mama, my mother’s poor cousin celebrated his wife. Elsewhere it would have drawn not more than an idle curiosity. In Challapatti, where men lorded it over women it was the talk of the village. When a family went on a trip a visibly pregnant woman will be carrying a huge heavy basket on her head. Tucking the older child on her hips she walked demurely behind the man, her husband in sparkling white dhoti. The tip of his dhoti would be secure in one hand exposing one dark sinewy leg; a few buttons from his bright shirt would be open revealing his hairy manly chest. He swaggered with his head held high a good ten paces ahead of her. These men heckled at Pandyan Mama when he walked together with his wife carrying the basket on his head, chatting cheerfully with her as she tenderly held their baby on her hips as they headed to the village bus-stop. Even when they had five children in quick succession, the older boys eight and six would walk a pace or two ahead as Poovizhi walked with her husband with the youngest one on her hip, holding the hand of the two year old as Mama still carried the load, holding the four year old in his hand.

‘*Pondatti dasan,*’ they called him derisively. But Pandyan Mama didn’t seem to mind. He was used to people laughing at him because he was short, a shade or two darker than the other men, eyes that were no more than a slit, thick spring-like hair that made his head look much bigger than his small body. He was considered to be ugly and people told him so any number of times. Whether it was as a defence one didn’t know but he smiled exposing the most beautiful set of teeth I ever saw. And then he married Poovizhi, a stunning beauty. With large eyes, finely chiselled nose and lips she was the cynosure of all eyes. She was slim and her body was perfectly moulded by the hard work she had put in in her father’s house. She had dimples which in our village was considered auspicious.

Pandyan Mama did not for a moment think Poovizhi was too good for him but loved her and unabashedly sang praises about her beauty. In the evenings, after the day’s toil was over, she washed herself in the crystal clear mountain stream that meandered through



Challapatti. Then, she would wear the bright ribbons that Mama bought her frequently on her long thick well-oiled hair plaited neatly. She drew her beautiful eyes drawing flak from some woman who passed by, “You think you are a cinema star?” said one “A bride-to-be, hanh?” said another. Her Mother-in-law would hurl back an insult at these self-made critics and both women laughed as if they had trounced their victims.

Coming on a holiday to Challapatti from wherever my soldier father was posted, I had nothing much to do except wander around the village. My cousins followed me wherever I went. One of our favourite haunts was Pandyan Mama’s hut. Outside their little hut, fire blazed in the furnace and the padaneer - palm syrup in the huge, flat iron cauldron came to a boil and bubbled furiously for hours till it left the sides of the cauldron. The hot thick jaggery syrup was then poured into empty coconut shells that stood like squat sentinels in neat files. But before it was quite ready Mama would say, “Poo... make small cups with these palm leaves. I am going to give these kids a treat.” We all agreed that this half-ready jaggery mix tasted yummy with coconut gratings dry ginger and til seeds that were added to it.

We were too young to entertain social differences that seemed to be well-marked between our landlord grandfather and landless toddy tapper Pandyan Mama’s father was. Pandyan Mama’s mother and my grandmother were sisters but my fair lovely Pattiamma was chosen to be the bride of the landlord’s son whereas her sister, the dusky beauty married a landless man. Pandyan Mama’s mother told us that our grandfather who passed away even when my mother was young was very fond of her children. My grandmother too showed her affection to her sister but the social distance somehow remained. If anything, it was getting more pronounced now because we were quite severely reprimanded by Diwakar Mama, my mother’s brother, for visiting Pandyan Mama’s hovel.

Pandyan Mama would come every day to visit Pattiamma to find out if she needed any help. Whether Pattiamma asked for help or not Diwakar mama and Punitha Athai would order him around. “Why can’t you speak to him more gently?” My mother asked once. “Keep your city trends to yourself. Enjoy your stay here without preaching” seethed Diwakar Mama. My mother wiped her tears hurriedly and pretended as if nothing happened lest my Dad shortened our stay in Challapatti and took us to his parent’s house. After this, I hated to be in the house where Diwakar Mama was and hung around Pandyan Mama’s house just to spite him till it was time for us to leave.

The day a telegram bearing the news of Pandyan Mama’s death was received my mother broke down and wanted see his face before they buried him. I too went with her to Challapatti but the body was buried long before we could reach our village.

“He fell headlong from the tree. Can you imagine? He was a monkey when it came to climbing trees and to think he fell from a tree!” Pattiamma shuddered to relive the past.



“When you are drunk you will have a black-out,” countered Diwakar Mama, with a pucker face.

“Diwakar. Stop it,” thundered Pattiamma. “You know and the whole world knows that no one consumes toddy before the day’s palm-tapping is done. Do you have anything against him? You seem to be constantly deriding him.” Now Pattiamma was visibly shaking with anger.

“Ha! What can I have against that cur?” Diwakar Mama got up and left as if he suddenly remembered some duty he had at hand.

Thinking back of all that happened after Pandyan Mama died, I wonder if he really had something against Pandyan Mama. He could not accept the fact that an ugly man like Pandyan Mama had such a beauty for a wife. And what was worse? She seemed to love him! And he had to marry Punitha Athai.

Like all men inChallapatti he got to see Punitha Athai after the marriage was fixed. Punitha Athai was my father’s second cousin and elders felt she would be a perfect match for Diwakar Mama.

“Is that woman with teeth like a coconut scraper my bride? So dark and scrawny she looks. Your husband is good-looking and I thought his cousin would also be beautiful. This woman looks like a sweeper.” He let out his fury on my mother who brought the alliance and was in her mother’s house one month before the wedding.

“What is there in looks Diwakar?” the fair and lovely Pattiamma spoke. “Your Appa married me because he thought I looked good. He left me a widow when I was twenty-eight. Did this beauty help in anyway after that? As long as she is good-natured it is enough”, Pattiamma said sagely. Punitha Athai was far from being good-natured. She took out her anger on all farm workers and pinched on whatever was due to them. It could have been because of Diwakar Mama’s constant reference to her looks and her family who cheated a guileless man as him. Diwakar mama could easily have adorned any plush magazine page advertising men’s garments if only he wore a smile instead of that angry scowl. May be he thought a beauty like Poovizhi matched him better than Pandyan Mama.

The afternoon of our arrival, we went to see Poovizhi. Tears welled up my eyes for the first time. Those beautiful eyes were already swollen and on seeing my mother she sobbed uncontrollably. My mother cried loudly. He was her favourite cousin after all. Pattiamma held her sister’s emaciated hand and shed silent tears.

A little later Pattiamma said “Poo, I will tell Diwakar to give you steady work in the farm. Take care of your Mother-in-law also along with your kids. Come to me for any help. I am worried about what Punitha will say when you come to see me though.”



“No Akka. Punitha will chafe her already raw wounds. You come and see us whenever you can. May be you can ask Diwakar about giving her a job every day. Poo has not worked in the farm regularly. Pandyan took her to work in the fields, only when the palms became dry.”

“I will do my best Amma,” spoke up Poovizhi bravely.

The poor cannot mourn for long for the savings had gone in the ceremonies performed for the dead. In about a fortnight Poovizhi was working for Diwakar Mama. Though there was a steady income it was difficult to feed four children and her mother-in-law who doggedly stayed with her though all her other eight children were better off. Poovizhi was feeding the last one who was three month old baby when his father died. Now he was six months and she wanted to give him an egg now and then. It was a struggle.

The old woman did scarcely recover from the demise of her dear son who had taken care of her since the day her husband died. Now to see her daughter in law struggle was heart rending and when the baby was seven month old she died quite suddenly. Poovizhi had barely any tears to shed when my Pattamma sat by her side mourning the death of her sister. Pattamma took to bed that day and died two weeks later. We came down from Delhi. Two days later I scouted around the village. I stood gawkily at a distance from Pandyan Mama’s house. Poovizhi saw me and beckoned me with a wave of her hand. I ran to her. She hugged me and kissed my forehead. I took the baby who crawled to my feet in my hands. The baby gurgled but somehow I could not smile back at the child. Tears were choking my throat.

We went back after a week. Poovizhi continued to work for Diwakar Mama even after Pattamma was gone.

Once when Poovizhi was working in the field, the baby crawled out of the cradle and hurt himself. “Who is asking you to bring the baby here?” growled Diwakar Mama. “Your son John is twelve and can’t he take care of his brother. A perfect oaf he is and you send him to school. A big collector he will become someday.” He heckled. Like everyone Poovizhi was scared of Diwakar Mama and pleaded with her son to keep him in his class. In a village school anything was possible. She didn’t have the heart to pull John out of school.

“Did you collect all the palm fronds?” Diwakar’ Mama’s friendly voice threw her completely off-guard and she dropped the palm fronds she had collected to make into tattis used to roof the huts.

“Why, am I a demon?” he laughed and his eyes roved all over her young body. She adjusted her sari which had slipped a little and tried to smile back. “I will give you the day’s



wages even though all farm work is over and you are just weaving this tatti. I have stopped all the workers for a two while. But you don't go to others asking for a job. Understand?'

Though the smile had gone from the face his eyes were still on her making her very uncomfortable.

She was very confused that day. Her mother-in-law or my Pattamma could have offered her solace were they alive. The next day she went to work as usual. He smiled at her, "No one would say you are a widow. You look as fresh as ever. Only nowadays you don't draw your eyes." He laughed as if it was a joke. The advances were only getting bolder. Other women who came back to work started gossiping and soon it reached Punitha Athai's ears. "Oh that hussy thought my husband would fall for her guiles?" she smirked as if it was Poovizhi's mistake. "No self-respecting man is safe in this village."

Poovizhi did not go to work one day for the gossip was getting too very ugly for words. That evening she was cooking rice and making a curry with some dried fish. She heard Diwakar Mama at the door. "Come John, take this," he said extending a parcel to him. John took the parcel and opened it. There was some halwa and savouries, something the children had not seen since their father died. He seated his three brothers and his sister in a circle and patiently divided the goodies. Poovizhi looked at them helplessly.

"Hmmm . . . ! Nice smell. Karuvattu kozhambu! Won't you ask me to eat?" he asked sitting down on the pyol, a little away from the children.

"Oh such poor fare Ayya and the rice is so coarse," she blustered.

"If you want to live better and feed your children better, vacate this pig sty and move into the hut in my farm. The ceiling is new now with all the tattis you made," he leered.

"No. No. Already everyone is gossiping. That is why I didn't come to work today," she managed to say.

"Those gossip-mongers are jealous of you. If I wink at one of them she will be at my feet. But you are so different. Can't you make out I am pining for you. I will take care of better than Pandyan could have imagined. Draw those eyes again. In the saris I buy you, you will look like a queen. At last I will have someone who can be my match."

Poovizhi loved her husband too well to forget the happy times they had had, a mere nine months later. Though it had been a struggle she had food to eat and her determination was too very strong to fall for such bait.

"Please don't talk like that. John is not a baby anymore. He can understand. So many people are watching. Please Ayya. Leave us alone."



“Is there a record-dance going on here?” he thundered at the motley crowd which had assembled to see the landlord sitting at the poor man’s pyol. “She is my brother’s wife.

I got some snacks for the children. What is your problem, eh? Go and tell the monster in my house- some call her my wife - that I am here. Tell her she can go back to her father’s if she so desires,” he shouted and under his breath he muttered looking into Poovizhi’s eyes, “Then we can live in my house, with my children and your children, the zamin’s consort.”

Poovizhi went into her hut and remained there. “Give everything I said a thought. I will be waiting for you.” He took a few steps and came back and said loudly, “If you don’t want to do what I told you, don’t come looking for work.” He left wondering how a woman cannot fall for him.

Poovizhi took out her thali that was made of four grams of gold and pawned it. She bought rice and lentils for about ten days. Then she asked for work from the smaller farmers but they had received instructions from their wives that sluts should learn the lesson the hard way. More importantly they did not want to earn Diwakar Mama’s disapproval. Diwakar Mama waited for her back to break so that she would come crawling back.

The village was abuzz with tales about Poovizhi being a hussy. Even those who saw Diwakar Mama on her pyol said that it was so unfortunate that such a great man’s name was sullied by a widow behaving like a whore. Poovizhi wanted to leave the village and made a distressed bid to sell the house. A stroke of luck – a man who was engaged to be married bought the hut at market price.

Across the river she so loved, another small village was springing up. It was pooramboke land and the landless occupied pieces of land that they could cultivate with their meagre resources, turning the virgin land into small farms. Poovizhi occupied a small piece of land and engaged a man to build a very small shack. There were no doors or windows. At least not for now.

Here women were wary of her and men thought she was theirs for the asking. At times she felt it would be easier to go back Diwakar Mama. At least the other men will leave her alone. She could talk to no adult. Her son was twelve but she could not treat him like an adult. She still sent him to school along with her second and third kids. The youngest was going to be one and took tentative steps. Just nine months since her husband died and there had been so many twists and turns. The money that she had was fast depleting. It was three weeks since she moved here.

Every day the silence around the house was broken by the noises the two little ones made. She tended the small garden in which she grew some brinjals, okra, tomatoes and



chillies. Then she went to the river to catch small fish. She had to take the two children along wherever she went because no one would even look at them. She started buying broken rice since it was cheaper and made some curry with a fishes she caught. If they were lucky a small tomato from the garden added flavour.

One day an old woman came and sat in front of her house with her muram with beedi leaves and tobacco and asked her, “What is this I hear about Diwakar?’ No reply from Poovizhi. “Poovizhi, tell me. I am not like others. I am like your mother,” she encouraged her. Poovizhi looked at the old lady’s crinkled face. She herself was much abused by her daughter in law. The old lady made her sit by her side. All that Poovizhi had held back since the Diwakar Mama episode came pouring out in uncontrollable sobs. “Amma, I am a victim.” She said no more.

The old woman came to her house every day and then she taught her to make beedis. She introduced her to the beedi agent. Money started trickling in again. She could make some friends. A year rolled by peacefully. She could leave the young one with someone when she went out.

Sowndar, Pandiyan Mama’s younger brother who had come down from Bombay, came to see them. He hadn’t come to mourn the death of his brother or mother. He did not get a break, he explained. “Anni,I would have exposed that bastard Diwakar if I had he been in Challapatti. My four brothers are perfect eunuchs. They couldn’t challenge that Diwakar. And my sisters are monsters. No one thought of helping you? They were gleefully watching you suffer?”

Sowndar visited them every day. He told her how he would help her till the soil and she could start growing nendhiram bananas like others. He promised to take her son to Bombay when he finished his tenth standard. He drew plans to build a better house. He even redeemed the gold thali from the pawn broker and gave it to her.

Just when she thought all will be well, one night Sowndar simply walked into the house with no door and lay with her. He did not come after that. A week later they said he had gone to back to Bombay.

Two months later they said “Poovizhi is pregnant.”

The old woman asked, “Are you a victim now also?” Poovizhi looked at her speechless. “And I thought Diwakar was to blame all along. I trusted you.” She left.

Poovizhi knew the beedi business would grind to a halt.

The next day she sold the cauldron she held on to so dearly all these while to a palm tapper. She called John. “I am going to the hospital in the town. I will return only in the



evening. On the way back, I will go to the pawn broker and sell this thali. Let us build a proper house with a door. May be you should stop going to school from now.” She pointed to people who were pulling the plough like bullocks and said, “Both of us will plough this land like them. We will work harder than ever. I wanted you to study but . . . !” She fought back the tears and walked away.

John saw her striding past the river. Her gait was different now from the crushed timid steps she took after his father’s death, the frightened tentative bearing she had as she slinked away from the gossip-mongers. The long, confident treads made him more secure than ever. He loved her and kept watching her till the frail figure turned into the street to reach the bus-stop with strident steps.



Silent Teachers

L. T. Hemalatha

My mother gave me the choice on my wardrobe, whether I wanted to wear skirts, pants or frocks, was fine with her. Mother's love brings beauty and purpose into our lives. It is something that is much sought, but not always found.

'The mother's heart is the Child's schoolroom.' _ Henry Ward Beecher

My father's love is, of course, an equally important element in my life; it is one of the most important bedrocks of my growing up. My father takes me wherever he went and helps to experience the difference between good and bad.

'One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters' _ George Herbert

I snap out of my thoughts and I'm brought back to the present as everyone greets me in unison "Hi, Shivani!"

"Why did you move here?" The teacher asks with a smile.

I smiled and said, "Dance is my passion but I feel problem in understanding the language ma'am."

She replied, "I will be there to teach you and language will not be a problem."

I followed her footsteps blindly from dawn to dusk. Days, months, years passed but I didn't find any difference in me except I was dragging back in my subjects for unknown reasons. I and my teacher were very close to each other and our relationship left us with many fond memories to cherish for a lifetime.

But, time had shown its weird colours when I came to know that it's none other than my teacher who criticized me with the other teachers and dragged me down for unknown reasons like "She is well-off. She doesn't have involvement in the subject. She had language problem."

I was shocked and decided to give up. As a miracle, I heard a voice.....

"Don't give up."

"Move on."

"You can do it."



Even then, I was not able to be normal and was not able to digest her attitude towards me being a teacher. Her actions of being a warm person reached into the coldest place inside me and ignited the fire to fight the battle. I believe any subject easy or hard actually depends on the teacher.

My heart says what to do with life....what to do....what to do.... My eyes stared blankly and I felt depressed.

“I don’t want to be a burden to anyone”; I hate myself telling everyone asking me, “Why you are not regular to classes?” My mind focuses on her ego to torture me in all aspects. Her eyes stared down blankly on me bringing silence across the room. Her cane banged on the floor twice as if she tells the other dancers who showered her with her materialistic needs to turn away and meets her at her residence for further practice. After spending so much of time, weeks, months and years on the floor, I felt quite uncomfortable.

Many times I questioned myself, “What am I doing here?” as my tears splattered on the ground.

I’m not a damsel in distress waiting for Prince, but I’m a soldier who fights the battle. But, soldiers also to be saved by their rulers and as a blessing in disguise, I have met the two twinkling stars, my other subject teachers of the same department who constantly injected in me,

“Don’t give up.”

Who saved me and shared my joys and jublations and brought me back from the depression level. Yet, I’m alone battling for my success, my dreams blissfully continued. I got better grades till the moment I met her. Days passed by..... A sweet memory cherished to be has changed into soar memories. I kept my eyes at the dance floor in my classroom with full of nervousness. All my classmates came one by one on the dance floor to move closeted with her.

It was my turn....She smiled and said to the musical troupe, “What she knows....It’s waste of my time and your time....just leave her.”

At that moment I wouldn’t be exaggerating if I said that the floor slipped underneath me. Every part of my body got hurt by her looks.

I started moving away from her instead of cursing. Her delicate, little voice showed just how cruel she can be.



I cried, I felt tears stinging the back of my eye. I looked on the outside as if I did not care, but helplessly breaking on the inside. I lost the precious moments of my life. I remembered the advice of my Prof. Dr. Dharmaraj “Time is the only thing we cannot get back once we have lost.”

Life has taught me a lesson with bitter experience that there is no reset button of life. I was overwhelmed by emotions, I couldn't think of anything but crying. But I noticed that her ego speaks, “I don't care for anyone. I just have no emotions and sentiments.”

There I remembered the advice of my loved ones, “Look, we want you to live happily and upgrade your life meaningfully.

I knew, what they mean to say, was true at some limits but “I wasn't going to give up my dreams and my passion, as they are equally important as my studies.”

Finally, I made up my mind with counselling from my loved ones. The following day I woke up early which appeared rather strange to my own self, for I have decided that nothing would disturb my peace of mind or disrupt my sleep.

I said this repeatedly “Don't give up” and never had I known when tears started to flow with extreme happiness, positive thoughts with positive energy. I understood I can win the battle with hard work. I decided to meet the teacher who encouraged me to help me. I started practicing day and night with their constant support till I reached my goal and I proved my mettle. I realized hard work and regular practice can make any impossible thing to possible. My search for self ended in success. But, after that came recognition.

Woman is the pillar of the society supporting, strengthening and enduring everyone around her. She is the guardian of culture and the advocate of tolerance and acceptance. Misfortunes engulfed me when I was suffered by her but I felt lucky enough to be accepted by the teacher who gave the tender and loving approach at the last moment.

There will be challenges to face and changes to make in our life. It may not be easy at times, but in those times of struggle we will find a stronger sense of who we are and only the challenges and changes will help us to find the goals to reach in time.



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