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GOD IS IN THE WORDBijoyini Mukherjee

After the breakup Shreyas became ambitious. He has seen frustrated housewives looking out for him in pubs. Their husbands never have time for them and after divorce these women flourish, rejuvenate like a phoenix to live life with a variety of spices. "Pain is beautiful," Arundhati's voice speaks through the walls of memory. Everyday disenchantments make him fall in love with pain more and more. His mother's spirit calls out, "masochist," and he thinks, "So be it..." Melancholy rides over other emotions after Arundhati vanished.

That same girl who waited for his "Hey, you!" forever left without a proper goodbye and no trails behind. He has forgotten his breakfast, the timepiece has stopped, and to brush his teeth would be futile because Arundhati is not there to be kissed. She loved him 'body and soul' so completely, to leave her mind devastated, be it eighteen (when they met) or twenty eight (when she left). What is worse, she kept repeating mistakes – falling in love with that good looking, benevolent, intelligent playboy in him.

A fortune-teller told ten years old Arundhati, "She has a knack of choosing the wrong men." Yes, he was right. If he was alive I would ask him how to find her and convince her to repeat that mistake. Why have horoscopes never answered the ultimate questions of existence? Livelihood has gone for a toss; his eyes are tired of staring at the blank screen. Every plop, bing, ping is waiting with him... sigh. The rich housewives call, ask for the male escort in demand, he states his price and most of them do not haggle. He thinks, "But they bargain for vegetables that are way cheaper." The screen should be overloaded with word documents, raw manuscripts of his missing girlfriend, filled with stories of an adventurous lover (he imagines himself), or the torturer (the last word from her). Does this vicious cycle occur in everybody's life? My friends wail, cry, scream, beat up and forget the girl. The last time I cried was, let me think, well, not in public ever, in private, at the age of six.

Men in India are taught not to cry. Beating up girlfriend or wife is acceptable, sexually abusing them for your needs is usual, psychologically inflicting pain is a man's birthright; but crying!? That act which shows a man also falls under the human species with humaneness in him is a sign of weakness. He thought sleeping with so many women will help the mind to get over her, move on. With every orgasm, her memory filters through pleasurable nights and takes away his pleasure. The day his thought stops, he will move on. She will come for his last rites and wail for him. Spoilt vegetables in the refrigerator imitate his psyche, naughty! Sour milk is no good for kitty; how to cook fish for her? "Arundhati would take care of all of us like the goddess with ten hands," thought Shreyas; "me, the plants, kitty cat, neighbour's grandma, landlady's son and still find time to absorb herself in writing like Venus descending from heaven." He takes her pen while kitty munches on fish bones. The pen is mightier than cribbing, and it begins to flow; overflowing with unspoken words, unshed tears, unhealed hands, and unforgiving deeds.

He writes about his father's belt, the third degree in police station for stealing a loaf of bread, his mother's constant money demands, sister's comparisons with his brother-in-law, that rich girl's offensive language in school and Arundhati – that one woman who thought he has a soul. Stomach growls at noontime to warn him if the pen is given more attention hereafter, the former will get him to pay hospital bills. Though, his customers will pay them, the stay is never agreeable.

Strawberry and cream and cornflakes and cherries are about to be devoured — there is a light blinking — the mobile. “So come around 8pm,” the text is short and an order. Too lazy to get up, so he finishes his bowl of delicacies and reaches out for the mobile with a smirk. Ten missed calls from the number of that rich girl in school who listened to “twenty five minutes too late” and does not recognise him or knows his existence. This is his wealthiest customer. Arundhati had written somewhere, “story is complete, the stomach is full, house is clean, and publishers waiting are taken care of.” That one day when she started doubting her belief that he indeed has a soul was when he got drunk in the bar, was enjoying a threesome and when asked questions, he slapped Arundhati as hard as to be hospitalised. The next morning he could not recognise his face in the mirror. He began to build up excuses in his head to justify his actions and remind her of his violent upbringing. The reflection spoke, “Time, I tell you stranger, is a powerful abstract.” It was not the rearing anymore, he enjoyed beating up women and the adrenaline rush, Arundhati's pleading was another kick and that angry sex to top it all was relaxing.

He raped her days after days not ever registering what was his behaviour called. Dr. A told him, “write it all down” and now he has taken Arundhati's route. That day her bruised face keeps coming back each time he scribbles like today. The playboy, the torturer, the colleague, wants to ask her, “You won't remember my name, eh?” As the rocking chair sways in Seattle, Arundhati's husband plaits her hair, her twins play around, all she remembers is the accomplished awards. Time and again, the man who swept her off cornflakes, kitty, routine and plunged her being in porridge, German Shepherd, stability, had exclaimed, “If, by chance, Shreyas was right you won't be mine! I'm so grateful to him!” “Kisi aur ko shayad kam hogi, mujhe teri bohot zarurat hai” (Someone else may need you less, But I need you a hell lot).

At night Arundhati's last prayers have ever since consisted of thanking God for being so kind as to never give her what she wanted. She looks at her newest collection:

“The ships being sailing for thirty three years and the ship seemed to have had a flair for hitting icebergs instead of safe shores, but it was steered against its will into a beach awaiting the tattered ship for long. Too long... years have created words in different colours painted on different canvases. My pen alone stayed steady through icebergs and sea storms. The one man who had the patience to endure unconditional love has never occurred in any of my wordy enterprises and the psychic in my head says that my husband will never be a character sketch. The man who left, he gave disfigurement to ponder over... time, paradoxically time is what the anonymous iceberg never had for me.”

She loves this ending in her life and the book. Shreyas fiddles through the book miles away in a town called Meerut in India. Mrs. Ahuja gave him this gift for being available the whole week. Dr. A reads Shreya's diary and starts writing his article, "Oppressed becoming Oppressor: The gradual distortion of a distorted mind."

Arundhati's husband reads Dr. A's article and her book, keeps a tab on the psychologically disturbed boyfriend he had saved her from. He is a banker who does not write much. While walking in the park with her he looks up and asks God silently, "How will you explain her meeting Shreyas before me? Did she ever deserve this?"



BIO-NOTE

Dr. Bijoyini Mukherjee dedicates all her creative ventures to her mother through her penname Dr. Bijoyini Maya. Her professional expertise includes editing, content creation, teaching and public relations. She has created and edited reusable learning objects (RLOs) for soft skills and published research articles, poems and short stories in refereed journals and magazines.

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