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“Tell Me Your Dream”Subhash Chandra

Meet Anup and Ninky, a cerebral couple in their late thirties whose innovative ideas drive Multinational Corporations they work for. They receive enviable pay packets which has also secured them a place in high society and a house in Maharani Bagh, one of the most desired addresses of the Delhi elite. Yet a deadness has sneaked into their lives. The sameness, the lack of zing, is driving them apart. Their wealth is devoid of meaning. Their souls are parched. They are not happy.

#

“How did we get here?” asks Anup one day.

“Search me,” says Ninky.

“You always claim to be smarter and brighter.”

“There’s no doubt about that,” she says.

“Get off your high horse, man.”

“Why don’t you come up with a bright idea, Superman? Though I doubt you can,” Ninky taunts Anup.

“When will you shed your complex?”

“What shit are you talking about? Sanitize your thinking,” says Ninky.

“Are we condemned to die of boredom?” Anup asks.

“There’s an in-between stage. More dangerous!”

“What?”

“Depression, turning into manic depression. You become a piece of antique furniture in the room...useless junk. You keep staring at the floor or horizon without seeing. Appetite is lost. Your brain turns into liquid wax and melts away. You make suicide attempts and people pity you till you succeed,” Ninky explains.

“Horror! Horror!” exclaims Anup.

“Don’t flaunt your Conrad.”

“Idiot, I spoke for both of us,” Anup says.

“You’ve already gone bonkers.”

“Cut out the dross. We need to think up something fresh to start living. Fast.”

“Yeah. To pep up our bland days,” agrees Ninky.

“True. Now for a change do some thinking.”

“Umm...an idea!” Ninky exclaims.

“Toss it.”

“Let’s tell our dreams to each other,” she suggests.

“Wow, brilliant!”

“But on a condition,” she adds.

“What?”

“Truthful narration. Every little detail included -- loose threads, chaotic images, events, confused experiences and sensations, everything.”

“Well said again,” commends Anup.

“Done?” she asks.

“Yes!”

They hug and kiss. The very anticipation of the new has pumped adrenalin into their veins.

“Let us celebrate,” Anup suggests.

“How?”

“Dine out.”

“Bah! Nothing new.”

“This evening will be different,” Anup winks.

At Claridges each has their favourite drink – he swilled his Scotch, she sipped her Gin. The food tastes better, the tip is fatter, and the waiter bows lower and retreats respectfully. Like people do in a temple.

Each is eager to hit the bed. Tonight, they make love like old times – intense, passionate, grasping, and losing in the other.

In the following evenings, whenever they get home early, they relax on the terrace, nursing drinks and sharing dreams.

#

“Okay, ladies first.”

Ninky: *I am on my way back from Jaipur after meeting my aunt. The heat is unbearable. I feel thirsty. But the driver says, there is no water in the ice box. I ask him to stop at a wayside shop. He brings an empty bottle of Bisleri and tells me it has cost a hundred rupees. We drive into a guest house on the way. The Manager informs there is not a drop of water. It has not rained in this region for two years. Thorns have sprouted in my throat and I feel choked.*

Ninky pauses and looks at Anup. “Strange, dreams can be so real when you are dreaming.”

“You’re so right,” Anup agrees.

She continues:

We are again on the road. The driver looks back and smiles. I shout at him and ask him to mind the road. Instead, he repeatedly looks back and grins and winks. I am furious but helpless. I open the door of the car and jump out. The impact of the fall wakes me up.

“I look at your side of the bed. You are sprawled on your back and snoring.”

“Bullshit! I don’t snore.”

“Now shoot,” Ninky asks him.

Anup: *I come out of the office, but there is no trace of the driver. I go to the parking enclosure and begin to look for my car. Yes, it is there. Before I can insert the key, it starts moving. I watch it manoeuvring its way out and heading towards the main road. I ring up 100, but a courier comes to me with flowers and tells me they are from Police headquarters.*

“Funny, isn’t it? Imagine the police sending you flowers!”

“Impossible!” she endorses.

The next moment I find myself in the police van which chases my car. We espy a huge truck trundling down the road from the opposite direction. I think it will smash into my car and crush it. But the car rises above the truck and lands softly on the road and continues to speed. The Policemen’s eyes widen. Then suddenly, the car vanishes. The Policemen get angry and shout, there was never any car and I had put them on a wild goose chase.

After ten days.

Ninky: *The drizzle has stopped and I get out of office after a hectic day. Street lights have acquired a halo around them and are garlanded with hundreds of insects. I find myself in a strange lane. I have forgotten the location of our house and go round and*

round. Then I remember the address and ask a rickshaw-puller– they are the ones who know addresses very well. He mumbles something which I can't understand. Suddenly, Nintesh, our CEO, appears and plants himself in front of the car, waving his arms crosswise, you know, like they do at the airports to indicate the place of stoppage. Then I find both of us are in a plane, with him piloting it. Instead of going someplace, he keeps hovering over one area. Then he opens the window on the side and points to our house below.

Anup: *I am in Switzerland to discuss collaboration. I am picked up by a placard-holding driver at the airport. The hotel I am staying at is eerily empty. Not a single guest. Every now and then a waiter knocks to ask if I need anything. When it is repeated the fourth time, I tell him to fuck off. But the knocking does not stop. Then something uncanny happens. I open the door and find nobody. I go down to the Reception, agitated. The Receptionist stands up, apologises and calls the Manager. Lo and behold, I see Pinky, your sister, walking towards the counter. She tells me she has been working there for five years. She was jilted by her boyfriend.*

After five days.

Ninky: *Nintesh has come over. He tells me he has shifted into a house nearby. He insists on driving me to and from office every day. On the very first day, instead of the road to office, he gets on to NH 8, the road leading to Jaipur. I ask him where we are headed. He smiles and says we are going to the Garden of Eden. Then smiles again and says, 'Bangalore.' He tells me I need a break.*

Anup: *As I get out of the airport in Mumbai, I find Pinky is standing by the side of a driver in uniform, who is holding a placard for me. She takes me to the Hanging Gardens and tells me that she has a cottage in Mumbai. Her cottage has lots of Cacti of all types and sizes. She tells me she has planted them for me. I wonder how she got to know I love Cactus.*

After a week.

Ninky: *I come home one evening and the CEO brings a tray with my favourite drink, Gin. He and I are sitting in the drawing room. He asks me about you. I go from room to room, but don't find you.*

Anup goes to Switzerland for office work. On the second day he calls Ninky to tell her his dream.

I find myself at the same hotel. Pinky is still working as the Manager there. But she tells me she is thinking of resigning. She says weirdoes come to stay at this hotel -- most of them are homos, or members of a Cult who inflict cuts on each other and then worship the blood. Suddenly, Pinky and I are in her Cactus cottage in Mumbai. Ninky, too, tells him her dream on the phone. Strange, I also saw Nintesh again in the dream.

A huge carrier stops in front of our house. It is Aggarwal Packers and Movers. Nintesh comes down the truck and tells the guys to put the stuff into our house. He has shifted here for good, he says.

There is no call from Anup for one, two, three, four weeks.....

Ninky, too, does not ring him up. She and Nintesh are busy decorating the house with display pieces they had bought from the Cottage Emporium. Both keep smiling at each other for no particular reason. When through with the job, they get locked in a long, soulful kiss!



BIO-NOTE

Dr. Subhash Chandra retired as Associate Professor of English from Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi. He has published four critical books and several research articles. He has also published short stories in Indian and Foreign journals. His maiden collection of short stories titled “Not Just Another Story” was published by LiFi books in early 2017. He is on the advisory board of the e-journal, “Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific” (ANU, Canberra).

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