

Lapis Lazuli

An International Literary Journal

ISSN 2249-4529

www.pintersociety.com

VOL: 10, No.: 1, SPRING 2020

REFREED, INDEXED, BLIND PEER REVIEWED

About Us: <http://pintersociety.com/about/>

Editorial Board: <http://pintersociety.com/editorial-board/>

Submission Guidelines: <http://pintersociety.com/submission-guidelines/>

Call for Papers: <http://pintersociety.com/call-for-papers/>

All Open Access articles published by LLILJ are available online, with free access, under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial License as listed on <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Individual users are allowed non-commercial re-use, sharing and reproduction of the content in any medium, with proper citation of the original publication in LLILJ. For commercial re-use or republication permission, please contact lapislazulijournal@gmail.com

“Demons, Pray Do Not Rise!”Ronica Wahni

No, I was not going to die, I told myself that fateful day of last October. Had the two *babas* I consulted at different points of time, in different parts of the country not told me I was going to live for more than 65 years? Anyway, my “problem” did not – or so I reasoned – kill people usually. *Usually.*

The “trouble” started when I was eight. We were holidaying at a beautiful *hill station* – the term a legacy of colonial rule during which it signified an established space of refuge from the terrible heat of the plains, and now applied by Indians to any town located in mountainous regions. By “we”, I mean my parents, my sibling, and I. The hill station of Karjat, beautiful and tranquil, offered us an amazing three-day retreat and many cherishable memories. However, there was one bad incident. This was the first instance I fainted. Post this, there have been numerous instances.

*

That October day when I told myself I was not going to die, I had required tremendous strength – the source of which I have yet not ascertained, so miraculously did the strength appear – to not faint, and do what my duty as a human necessitated.

I am grateful for that miracle because it saved me much guilt. It was okay to not share notes or a laugh when everybody in the room discussed the *Game of Thrones* series, for one had been unable to watch a single episode. It was also okay to not go for horse riding, since the anticipation of the possible aftermath of a possible fall outweighed the anticipation of pleasure. Wait. Are horses not among the finest creations of the ultimate artist? Majesty, grace, beauty, spiritedness, and fluidity in forward motion – what is not a treat to the eyes? It was not *so* okay to be not horse riding. But it could be lived with. Guilt cannot be lived with.

*

By definition, hemophobia is an irrational fear of blood. This, of course, does not mean that the sufferer is an irrational being. Take me, for instance. I believe my academic and professional achievements, my success at competitive exams, and my abilities at analyzing and resolving problems do establish my credibility as quite an intelligent and rational individual. More importantly, I am self-aware and that self-awareness extends to the acknowledgement that my fear is irrational.

It was the severity of the triggering incident, I believe, that has made my phobia an extreme one. From what I remember from the first eight years of my life, I had had numerous injuries that made me bleed but I had never been much ruffled by them. But my father suffered an injury during that holiday at Karjat – he had been swimming when one of the in-disrepair tiles lining the pool had released a big fountain of blood from his right arm. The shock of it all, the laughs so suddenly replaced by panic, the shouts of my mother to the staff of the resort we were staying at to urgently arrange medical help, and the terrified screams of my little brother proved too much for my eight-year-old self. Instead of rendering some support in the moment of crisis, I simply had a blackout.

*

As I was returning to New Delhi that Sunday evening of last October post a weekend getaway to nearby Manesar, I observed someone lying on the road and hit the brakes of my Honda City. I got

out and rushed to the spot, with my head throbbing and heart racing, fearful that I might encounter blood. I saw, I stopped, I staggered. *No, Simran, you cannot faint. You cannot let someone's loved one die.*

The scoundrel, whoever he or she was, had hit a biker and left him bleeding on a deserted stretch. His bike lay a few feet away. *No, Simran, if you faint, nobody could help the victim – or you.*

Driving the victim to a nearby hospital was not an option I could exercise. The sight of blood had robbed me of the capacity to do that. I was determined to help. I kept my face averted but. My fingers trembled as I dialled the emergency number 102 for the ambulance, and with difficulty, could articulate the situation and relate the location.

I collapsed on the road and found even breathing a strain. I told myself to concentrate on anything other than the blood, and found myself thinking of a recent research I had read that spoke of the possibility of fear leading to death – but had it not said such cases were rare and occurred when hearts stopped suddenly on being exceedingly alarmed? Had that potentially fatal moment not passed for me? Besides, I had already reminded myself of the words of the two *babas*. What if they had been wrong? *No, you must not think like that.* I forced my brain to focus on the fact that my motive was to fight to remain conscious. I won the fight.

*

“Are you related to him?” asked the police officer who had come to the hospital for dealing with the accident case.

It was on the third and extremely agitated repetition of the question that I realized a response was expected. “No.”

“Madam, please cooperate and narrate the sequence of events.”

“He got hit. I...I...called the ambulance.”

The officer looked suspicious and angry. “Did he get hit by you?”

The strain had been too much already. Thinking and speaking was proving to be harrowing.

The question was shouted at me the second time.

Long pause. “Hmmn...No.”

The officer was fuming. “What is it that you are hiding?”

“Nothing...I...blood...can't take it anymore...” Then, I broke down.

*

The screaming wife and daughter of the accident victim made me more ill. The thought of calling up his family had not crossed my struggling mind. The hospital staff, of course, had done that after he was admitted. There was still one call left to be made. I could not understand to whom.

Then the person called.

“Where have you reached?”

“Hospital.”

“What?” my panic-stricken father asked.

Panic. Characteristic reaction. My father’s overprotective attitude towards me and his own fear of my reaction to seeing blood had ensured I never visited hospitals alone. I could have chanced upon the sight of an injured, bleeding person. Even for a blood test, he had never failed to accompany me, even deferring important business meetings to be able to do so.

“What are you doing at the hospital?” His panic made me even less able at articulation.

“Blood...”

“What are you talking about? Are you okay?”

My brother – the calm, cool sort – took the phone from Papa. Come difficult situation, my brother is ready. Always the willing fighter. Always in control. “Are you hurt?” No panic. No palpable apprehension. A matter-of-fact question asking for a clear, straightforward answer.

“No.”

“What are you doing at the hospital?”

No, no need to panic. Tell him what happened and where you are. He will come and take you home.

“A man...was hurt...blood...”

“You saw somebody else’s blood and fainted? How did you reach the hospital?”

“Didn’t faint...I called the ambulance...”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“You should be proud of yourself then. Greatest achievement of your life.”

*

Even if not the greatest, it was an achievement.

Hemophobia is treatable. There are even therapies and medication available for those who need help coping. I had resisted going in for medical assistance, despite the fact that my phobia was not a mild one. As far as medicines are concerned, I am not a big fan. I genuinely believe in letting the body and the mind heal without much interference. No medicines unless there is no choice.

Since control over thoughts and responses were what I needed, I felt there was a choice. To deal with disturbing thoughts, the individual and his/her will to change are always the most important elements. The realization of the irrationality of the phobia that formed a crucial element of the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy I already had. The strategies to cope, I had always convinced myself, I would develop on my own. I reasoned that at some point, as I get married and have kids, I might have to face situations wherein I encounter blood. Remaining crippled for life was not a desirable

option. Gradual elimination of the phobia had long been an essential item on my bucket list for life. The difficulty was in initiating the process.

An important step I needed to take was to begin to see blood without turning away from it. That step I was always postponing for another day – every blood test had me averting my eyes while my father held my hand, and every violent scene in a movie or TV show had me running out of the room.

But that October day, I had taken the long-pending step. I had seen blood and not run away. I had not even lost consciousness. I promised myself that I would not allow myself to turn back.

*

Kabir faced a trying time convincing the police officer that his sister truly did suffer from hemophobia, and that once restored to her calm self would surely cooperate well. He assured the officer that he would bring his sister to the police station the following day to narrate all the details.

During our conversation, I had told him the hospital I was at. I had also told him that I could vaguely recall having parked on the side of the road and having locked my car before I boarded the ambulance. But the car was to be thought of later. Kabir understood that I could not possibly get back safely to home – and obviously not just because New Delhi is among those places that do not treat their women well.

Having assured the officer, he rushed to hug me.

Second breakdown.

*

My mother said the achievement called for a celebration.

“Celebration?”

“Of course, darling. I am proud my daughter saved somebody’s life. I certainly want to celebrate.”

“Hmmn.”

“And I want you to continue that show of bravery. Blood flows through your own body. Why should you fear it?”

“I can’t help it.”

“You can. You did.”

“Hmmn.”

“It is a step, at least. Obviously the phobia is not going to just vanish. But you can continue facing your fear and one day, you will be rid of it.”

“I understand that. I am going to try.”

I had started the fight against the demon that had since years plagued me, and played the angel for a man and his family. My family was proud.

We went with what is the chosen way of celebration for many: delicious food and delicious drinks. All agreed one must-have food item was to be *Butter Chicken*. As a matter of fact, since the last few decades, *Butter Chicken* has played a special role in Punjabi celebrations. With the top item decided – a decision which really did not merit the discussion we had but the discussion took place anyway because not even the smallest of celebrations can start without investing considerable time planning it, the task was to shortlist the place to eat out at. Right at the outset, we all knew where we were headed but half-an-hour of coming up with and disagreeing on other places was needed. The celebration has to be the right way, after all. No doubt or regret should come up afterwards.

Gulati at Pandara Road is definitely among the best options in New Delhi for gorging on *Butter Chicken*. The other dishes served are superbly prepared too. The ambience is nice. The crowd is nice. The service is consistently good.

My enjoyment this time, however, was not equal to my usual level of it, when at *Gulati*. Something about celebrating did not seem quite right.

*

Mind you, demons of the mind are among the worst. The lesser to fight with, the better. I indeed had had lesser demons to fight with than some other sufferers of hemophobia. For hemophobia can give rise to other associated fears – such as algophobia, the fear of pain, and trypanophobia, the fear of needles or injections.

My fear remained blood – and the anticipated sighting of it, yes. That was what made me fearful of blood tests, not the needle that would be inserted into my vein. When I did not go for horse riding, it was not the fear of pain of a possible injury – it was the fear arising from the anticipation of seeing blood.

But that one demon had to finally lose too. Celebrations later, I remained certain that there had been a miracle that October day. Miracles do not repeat themselves. I was guilt-free, for I had not been a coward. Glad too for the man and his family. Whether I could be proud and whether my family could for long be proud was yet to be tested.

The test required some simple act. The simplest I had to do was see whether I could watch *Game of Thrones* without running out of the room. For the gradual vanishing, repeated exposure to the fear and repeated show of strength were necessary. I kept the test for another day.

*

The day for the test was not chosen by me. My procrastination was not ending. Had it ended, the *last* reaction might have been different. Had I compelled myself to continue to fight as I had done that October day, perhaps I would not have failed the surprise test.

About five months post my show of bravery, I experienced dizziness as I felt blood trickling down my forehead, and fainted as a drop fell on my left wrist. This last reaction of fainting might have been avoided.

*

The next thing I know after having fainted is regaining consciousness in a hospital. I know that the old demon has not gone away.

My injuries were minor; I had been very lucky. My father's excessive concern annoyed me, for another serious concern loomed large ahead of me. That concern I have been yet unable to share with my family.

*

Yes, I fainted when I saw blood. But the reason that blood appeared was my inability to act.

A timely swerve to my right could have saved the collision with the speeding truck approaching from the opposite direction. But I could not swerve. My eyes as if saw a demon arising that seemed to choke me. My hands left the steering wheel and clutched my own throat instead. I could not breathe and could not act. The crucial second passed.

The demon was not the anticipation of blood in case a collision occurred. My impulse is to avoid blood. That impulse should have made me swerve. This demon that choked me was a new one, as frightening and crippling as the old. Its name is dystychiphobia, the fear of accidents.



BIO-NOTE

Ronica Wahi completed her MA in English from the University of Delhi in 2014. She was engaged in writing, editing, and content development for GMAT prep for three years with the firm *Experts' Global*. She has also worked as a Language Instructor at the *Zabaan School for Languages*, teaching Hindi, Urdu, and English to students from varied geographies, and as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Galgotias University. Besides, Ronica started writing book reviews in December 2017, and won the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize book review contest, June 2018 for her review of *The Tree with a Thousand Apples* by Sanchit Gupta. In May 2020, she created a blog for publishing her book reviews.

E-mail id: roniwahi@gmail.com