

## SHORT FICTION

### Antara

**Dr. Sunil Kumar Sarker**

Retd. College Reader,  
West Bengal  
drsunker@gmail.com

---

The soft sun was dipping in the dapper dapple west and the fleecy cloudlets were sporting in merriment in the blue ocean of the sky. What a beauty! From her fourth floor flat of Tower no. 2, Antara was relishing the flippant play of nature far in the distant horizon through the window as far in the east as her view went while busy breeze was playing with her untied long hair.

What are the toddlers playing there in the Children's Park? Some unknown game, may be. Or some game they were taught before they were born? Let that be what that be. But the red-cheeked boys and girls there enjoyed it to the full because there was no win or loss in the game; it was all win-win. Now they ran aimlessly in huddles and then twining little legs with little legs tumbled down with giggling faces, and then the whole host of the toddlers burst into laughter - ---Ha! Ha! Ha! Life it was, indeed, the whole of what life is!

Their caring mothers and baby-sitters, who were waiting to take them home when the sun declined, stopped their gossips and smiled and smiled and leaned against one another and thus enjoyed that risible scenario. And from her window of the fourth floor Antara also smiled widely.

Just beyond the Children's Park was the highroad, parallel to the Park. Thousands of vehicles ran through the highroad from dawn to dusk fiercely, competitively, caring for none but caring only the speed. Any drop in the speed will lead to a drop in the earning. What a rash driving! What a break-neck hurry! Can't the govt. stop this wrong driving! Each day multiple accidents are reported in the dailies. Uncontrollable public, and uncaring!

Antara now was combing her hair with columbine comb. Just at that moment a long green bus with a big contingent of Lilliputian scholars halted along the left side of the highway. As the door of the bus was opened, huddling packs of them were coming down like cascades. They were bubbling with buoyant life so much so that it seemed that they were the children of some god of gaiety. Not a single tiny mouth, but they were loudly laughing showing their sparkling

white teeth. They would not walk but run and run faster and faster till they reached their waiting mothers or fathers or-----ah bad luck!-----some helping hands. Someone among them tumbled down and a muffled cry came out. Don't cry little angel, it's nothing. See it will soon go away; dry your eyes.

While all these were going on, the more diminutive of the boys and girls who were earlier merrymaking in the Children's Park abandoned their puckish pranks and gravely watched the hilarious, boisterous homecoming of their minimal seniors over there. The young mothers of these tiny tots who were sitting in the Children's Park and were gossiping while looking after them stopped their prattling and glued their eyes on the merrymakings of the minimal seniors. Seeing the gleeful hullabaloo of the minimal seniors these young mothers turned imaginative. They were fancying the days when their tiny tots too would come down from the long green busses like cascades and run towards them giggling, shouting, chirping. How lovely that would be! How exciting!

Who would not be thrilled by such pandemonium of such devilish tiny tots? Through her window Antara was also enjoying the spree down below and far away. And she was smiling softly seeing those little scholars coming down from the green bus and making hullabaloo.

All of a sudden Anita's smile faded away and, on her lips, a faint sign of sadness appeared. Among the hordes of running, capering, jumping tiny tots she saw her four-year old Bablu who died six months ago in a road accident. She saw the same figure, the same height, the same color, the same style of walking, the same style of running with a bent forward, the same lovely face flushed with a captivating smile in one of the tiny tots. But is it Bablu? Her Bablu? Her own son? Bablu, who would come back from school with his father, then to their flat and would try to jump to her breast insistently crying "Ma, take me up, Ma" But is it her Bablu? Yes, why not? The same red tie Bablu liked to wear always. She felt a compelling urge to run down the staircases and then run fast to the Children's Park. But no,..... She recalled Bablu had left her forever over six months ago, never to return. Tears gathered in her eyes and hot tears rolled down her cheeks.

She leaned against the window pane, vacantly looking at the far end of the Children's Park but seeing nothing. The memory of that horrible day over six months ago engulfed her consciousness.

Over six months ago, her husband, Mr. Ranjit Roy was taking Bablu on his motor bike to Bablu's school about two kilometers away. The school opened at 8:00 in the morning. Each day Mr. Roy would convey Bablu to school, come back about 8:30 and then take the train for office. That fateful day, Antara was waiting for Mr. Roy to come back to the Tower-2 by 8:30 but could see no sign of his returning. The clock was ticking. It was now 9:00 and then 9:30 and then 10:00 and yet Mr. Roy did not return. Antara became fidgety. She took her mobile up but noticed that Mr. Roy had mistakenly left his mobile on the dining table. Exasperated and befuddled, she could not decide what to do. She went to the window again and threw an urgent gaze at the distant road beyond the Children's Park but found no sign of Mr. Roy or his motor bike. She began to walk fast across the room, back and forth.

All on a sudden the land phone rang out. Antara flew to the phone. Someone from the other end told her in broken sentences: Madam..... Please.....hurry to the G.C. Hospital.....

Mr. Roy has had a serious accident.....and his son also. The call stopped. Antara shouted: halloo, halloo. But the receiver on the other end was quiet.

A bolt from the blue fell on Antara's head. She hurried down the elevator, took a taxicab waiting on the highroad beyond the Children's Park and reached the G.C. Hospital.

Two gentlemen and a nurse conducted the weeping Antara to the morgue. As she saw the lifeless bodies of Mr. Roy and her son, she fainted, lost her consciousness that did not return to her for long. In the evening two friends of Mr. Roy accompanied Antara to Tower-2.

Today, over six months after that sad incident, the fading image of the morgue came back to Antara with the fresh pink color of coagulated blood in the faces of her husband and her son. Tears inundated her eyes and came trickling down her cheeks.

Antara could no more stand by the window. She came back to the couch and lied across the bed, face down on a pillow. Muffled cries came out at times in spite of her.

Now it was no more evening but impending nightfall was advertised in the westward sky.

A sudden ringing of the door-bell was heard. Antara, with some effort, collected herself and opened the door. The gas-vendor asked:

\_\_\_Are you sick, madam?

\_\_\_No.... Just....It's nothing.

The vendor kept the cylinder inside, took the money, and departed silently. But Antara's two swollen red eyes could not befool him.

---

**BIO- NOTE**

---

Dr. Sunil Kumar Sarker is a retired College Reader. He has published 17 books, all published by Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi.