



Mirage

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Romance

THE PHOTONS BOUNCING on the earth's little satellite that performing timeless duty since ages before the mankind had inhabited, fly-by-night, thinning out a bed-light, making the earth's nights idealistic and erotic. One such a night, I parked myself wretchedly on the brim of a river drooping and peeping at the image of a lackluster face of myself accompanied by the splendidly twinkling full-moon's.

Lately I retired to sleep inadvertently, fixing the sturdy rock as a downy bed, render speechless—awaken next morning startlingly with afresh a fleeting look into the tranquil river, at my own egg-face—still monotonous. But instead of my bed-time comrade, replaced a new acquaintance, much indistinguishable in shape but rather contradictory in characteristics, unlike the other, scorching zenith furiously.

Out of the blue, underneath the sky's blue, alongside me and my sizzling new-acquaintance, prospected an unruffled loveliness, a square-faced lady. Peering into the water and monitoring the reflections, I fancied: The sun and the moon on either side of me.

“Kavya!” I taken aback for her unexpected rendezvous. Never I imagined that she would again come to me.

“But why did she come?” I thought. “To soothe me? To bestow her condolences to me for the death of my adorable old woman living in the adjacent cottage but close to my heart? Or with a yearning to convene with me?”

“How are you, Krishna?” said Kavya with her unique saccharine enunciation which embedded into my ears, transmitted to the brain, decoded the question and coded a response, but the signals were wrongly sent to eyes instead, where tears lingering for a long time poured down all at once.

For a moment, hushed up the girl. Only the nature whispering around me—now winds whistling, and stems

fluttering; now birds grunting, and animals moaning.

“Krishna!” exclaimed she with a gloomy tone. I mortified for my outlandish behavior. My brain needed a repair. It had been forgetting its duty and flattering more poignant like its scrawny little friend, heart.

“Sorry, Kavya. I’m a tad arousing,” said I wiping my tears with shirt sleeve and added hesitatingly, “how are you?”

“I’m fine!” said she, as we started walking down the rim of the river.

Anon my eyes desiccated, she continued, “my sister’s marriage has been fixed next month, I came to invite you.”

“Wow!” exclaimed I trying to express a smile. “So, Priya is getting married soon? Great news. I will attend for sure. Convey my hearty wishes to her.” But I wanted to inquire about Kavya’s husband and children. She was three years elder to Priya. Consequently, she must’ve been married for years and gifted with a child or two by now. But she didn’t invite me for any of her occasions. If so, she had loved me. She loved me as secretly as I did.

“What are you thinking, darling?” said Kavya.

Hair on my skin spiked for a moment, for the phraseology she spewed out. She used to call me so when we were great friends.

“Nothing, Kavya,” but couldn’t I dare to name her ‘dear’ or ‘darling.’ I was puny. I was a coward. “How do you know that I’m here?”

“Where else you would be for whenever you needed your best friend?” She meant to state about the nature, about which I lectured her many a time. But didn’t she know there was one entity more amorous than nature to me?

Enormously spread, beautiful and unprejudiced sky—not much changed since it had been known to me. The first impression of its beauty, when the old woman who lived beside ours in one of those poverty-stricken cottages, took me into her lap when I was only six, sobbing in the veranda, thrown out by my step-mother, and locked from inside; the old woman fed me that night with overcooked rice, but very tasty for the amended love she doled out, pointing at the big, round glowing ball glued to the extremely stretched sheet, across which twinkling uncountable number of tiny lights, and narrated a fancy tale. Since then I had connected to the nature, than to any human being ever, except the old woman who had enlighten me the exquisiteness of the nature.

I had been: kissing the first photons of the crack of dawn; embracing the drained squirt of twilight; relishing

the melodic whistles of the zephyr; jazzing to the rocking tune of the blowing wind; savoring the evening drizzles; taking pleasure in of the heavily pouring rain; dancing for the cadenced drumming of thunderbolts; posing at the gargantuan flash of the lightening; breathing with the green of the countryside; flying with the wings of the birds; fearing to the cruelty of the wild animals; hearing to the tuning of the nature. Summer or winter, cold or mild; naught excepting to my depiction. Birds or animals, mild or wild; nothing barred from my verse.

One sun-drenched evening of a sizzling May, I walked along with Kavya, through the countryside which was beautiful around the small village where I lived. The chestnut trees were in full flower and the hawthorn was white along the hedges. To reach the big sanctuary arranged by nature itself, we had first to walk down a narrow hedgy lane for at least half-a-mile. Then we must cross two railway lines, and go round the big lake where wild ducks and coots and ring-ouzelts lived. Beyond the lake, over the hill and down the other side, lay the area full of trees where I always sat alone staring at unchanged yet fascinating nature every day. I had fabulous ideas for myself while sitting in this sanctuary. The birds here were of so many distinct breeds which seldom I witnessed around busy streets.

But today I couldn't relish either the green of the trees or the songs of the birds. Even the enormous blue sheet zenith my head had been dominated by something. The poetic artist in me craved for a new verse. All it was because of the woman standing alongside me. She is the merely entity in this planet, more beautiful than the nature, I thought.

We walked closely rubbing the shoulders now and then, but hardly had a dialogue. Didn't I know what was her present emotion, but myself in a trance, sunk in a thick cloud which taken me to a place which neither I visited nor imagined. Heaven—it should've been named. There were divans smoother than the smoothest skin of the women. There were drinks tastier than the tastiest drink ever produced by human. There were flowers more blossoming than any flower in the largest garden on the earth. There were talking animals and walking trees. There was magic. There was lots of love.

"So, how's your profession?" inquired Kavya, smiling broadly. "Combating against lots of code, ah?"

"I resigned to that job. I'm working on literature."

"Literature?"

"I'm writing novels."

"Novels?" exclaimed she, flabbergasted. "Never you told me about your writing talent?"

“Hmm—”

“Any of them has been published yet?”

“Few months ago, one slim novel had been released, but not a successful piece it was.”

“But you’ll thrive one day.”

“Hope so.”

“Any other?”

“Some poems have been published in a literary magazine.”

“Can I get them?”

“I’ve two copies remained,” said I, briskly. “I may confer one to you.”

“I’ll be pleased,” she said. Then added, “they are about?”

“Love and tragedy,” said I, hesitatingly. We were silent through the rest of the walk.

After a little walk we reached my home. She had a coffee and a little chat with my father and step-mother. All of a sudden, looking into her wrist watch, she said turning to me, “can you drop me at the station?”

“Wait a moment,” I said and shrugged, “I’ll call for an auto.”

“No,” she said hastily. “We shall go by bike.”

I astounded for a moment. “Kavya’s going to sit on my bike!” I exclaimed to myself a hundred times. I had down pat, we were finest acquaintances for four years in engineering, but never she requested me to drop her somewhere on my bike, nor I insisted her to sit behind me.

Six years left behind, since we had been done with our graduation. So, my bike had served me for ten long years, for I had bought it in the first semester of engineering. But never I counted nor celebrated for it. But today, despite the rust embedded rims, dust entrenched gears, we’re enchanted—myself and my bike.

I swung my right leg across the bike and booted kick-rod heavily. My heart grunted along with the bike. With the most beautiful goddess of my heart sitting behind me, laying her hand over my shoulder, in an eye’s wink we disappeared. I was in great spirits after a long time. Most of the ride went wordlessly until she had broken the silence.

“I think, your father and step-mother have changed a lot?” she said. There was no sarcasm in her voice.

“Their pre-eminence commotion drowned for their knees have befallen fragile.”

“Ha ha, poetry?” she laughed aloud and went on, “but not you tainted a bit.” There was a concealed sarcasm in her tone. I hushed up till we reached the station. Train was on track. It would start from our station itself. So

we have about twenty minutes for the train to be started.

I handed over the little magazine touching her bony fingers with my quivering finger tips and said, “page numbers: 7, 8 and 9.”

“Ok,” she took the magazine and said without looking into my eyes, “I’m tired. I’ll go and sit in the train.”

Not she had another word and paced heavy strides towards the motionless train. I stood erect as stock-still as the train and stared at her back. Didn’t she turn. In a minute, she occupied a window seat, and dropped her eyes on her lap. Indeed on the little magazine spread over there. Still I was in the former position and staring at the window. She didn’t raise her head at all. Meanwhile, a flash of reminiscence stroke my head.

I woke up by an alarm that had awaken me for years—the dazzling voice of a pop star—I fancied. But not exactly—today. It’s a singular tone of voice. More striking. More adorable. But when did I amend it? Despite the fact that all the stuff running in my mind’s eye, I leisurely lifted my eye-lids when the early quantum dots smacked at the periphery of the ajar glass window at my right side, some fallen on my retina aiding vision, whilst others scattered ahead of me, producing a yellow transparent foreground, through which appeared a breathtaking woman. My eyes recorded the longest eye-wink ever—for the lids had not batted for at least a minute.

The woman bear a resemblance to a deity, a fictional character, a pristine carving wrought by the world’s greatest artist eternally the world had produced: Long curls of the hair, razor-sharp curves in the hip; aroma of the adolescence, lazy womanish walk; alacrity of the breath behind the young breasts, few drops of sweat pouring down the neck; magnificently glowing round eyes, piercing sharp glances; color-less color in the indescribable beauty of the orifice, quixotic smile that had started at one end of the orifice coupled and fulfilled at the other end; alluring brownish skin, behind which blended sweltering blood and fluffy flesh.

She wore a yellow skirt and a scarlet top—in the midst of which left the shy, stripped waist with a curve either side, in which drowned my eyes, before they met hers. Goosebumps all over my body. Naive sensation—ingenious poetry—implausible melody—instigated in unison.

The mannish crave might’ve started at the back of the torso, for it grasped the legitimacy—there was a gender opposite in the human race—one among to be chosen—and the one to be fallen in love with. Perfect jiffy, so was I.

I had joined in the engineering college just the other day, which was not so outlying from my house, rather a stroll able distance. This girl sharing the bench with me, told her name was Bhavya or something yesterday in

the class room. I didn't listen pretty well, for myself engrossed in her eyes. And now she's in front of me in an enticing costume right amid my bedroom. All it's a reverie, I fancied.

But she explained she'd rented a room sharing with another girl in the same lane where my house constructed ages ago.

"So why haven't you chosen hostel in the college itself, Bhavya?" said I covering my bare chests with the blanket bashfully.

"My name is Kavya, for your kind information!" exclaimed she with rage glances.

I embarrassed and paid for not giving her my ears properly on the other day, and for not bolted my bedroom door before retiring to sleep, the other night.

But notwithstanding reprehensible prologues soon we turned into great acquaintances. And I'd been loving her noiselessly and clandestinely from the very first look.

And I'd have strapping *raison d'être*s for that.

For not gifted with an appealing facial facets, I used to cope things accentuated on energy, one that had been gifted and the one I had supplemented by hard-slog. Consequently I grew forgetting about my skin's color, lip's smile, hair's style, eye's brow, chin's beard, cheek's temple, and forehead's pimple. Scarcely, the uncanny and ugly skin texture of my face, consent me to glimpse at a mirror.

Windfall to the aforesaid physical repulsiveness, poverty- stricken life I had been lingering with, and a step-mother pestering, I's accustomed to. Myself and my twin sister who was seven minutes younger to me, cursed to our mother who had been deceased immediately giving birth to us.

My sister loved swimming inasmuch as she adored me, so did I. We used to swim in the river edging one side of the village. My little sister had a dream of swimming in the well, but never we tried.

My illegitimate dad married to a twice divorced woman who was five years elder to him. They had been gifted with three boy children one after another, year after year, subsequently. Since then myself and my little sister had been tormented for years. At the age of twelve, my sister had been forced to marry a rich middle-aged man for money. The very next day, she found herself swimming inside a well, fulfilling her dream, but forever as a corpse.

Despite the unbecoming state of affairs, couldn't I convey my heart not to fall in a love. Indeed, it must've known better than the five senses which had been transmitting signals for eighteen years—nearly all of them been excruciating. Not it listened to those senses which foreshadowed a disaster obscured behind the first

sensation of love. It had fallen in love. So had I.

There were at least a fifty applications arrived at our table, proposing love to Kavya, throughout the engineering, where she, and I had been sharing a bench in the Computer Science block, from different branches and assorted batches in the college, from those guys who were very much charming than me, and very much taller and stronger than me. But all of them had been rejected smoothly. Most of them suited her well, when they stood beside her. They seemed apposite for her, by their persona, tongue, deeds and pecuniary rank in the society. She too was acquainted with that. But not I comprehended what she was expecting, and what kind of a person she had dreamt for. I couldn't alter her dreams. However I knew I's least suited to her, and ineligible to stand beside her exchanging wedding rings and posing at the cameraman. If it had happened, the cameraman would've laughed and think, what an inappropriate couple. And in no time the word would spread around the wedding hall, then around the village. For which Kavya would suffer a discomfiture, whilst I would feel inferior. Friendship was fine—nobody would ask for a suitability test. But for love and all the later on stuff—everyone needed to be answered—their eyes to be satisfied—their expectations to be reached—both physically and psychologically. If not, wrong words would spread around. They would pierce her. The love would be broken. Indeed the friendship too. And we should be fine actors for rest of the life—smiling ostensibly but anguishing indoors silently. Either of our lives would be ruined out. So I thought, instead, better to love her noiselessly everlastingly, and not to divulge it at any cost. All that I did for a decade and might be for few more to be coming. But also I think she too loved me as silently and secretly as I did, whilst she too might've a fine reason—for never to reveal it—and forever to articulate it.

Since the last day of graduation, I had been sleeping sideways, as one would slumber when down in the dumps, laying on the floor, folding the hands close to the chest and legs creased to the thighs. Awaken amid the mid-nights, sobbing through the mornings, I had drowned in the hands caved in over the knees. Night and day, hunger haunted, but not a chow enticed my stomach's appetite. Day for day, thirst mounted, but not a runny contented my tongue's dryness. Neither a shave nor a hair-cut I had. I bunged obtainable to the workplace devoid of a preceding notice. I switched off my phone. Now all I was solitary. All I was secluded. And all these days of darkness, for fourteen months, I had worn-out in Chennai, the place where not the lingo comprehended by me; not a human being related to me. Now, more I was a yogi, for the beard touched the chest, and hair had fallen over the shoulders. Dark spots encircled beneath the drowned eyes. Except the times of starvation, the room's doors were fastened with myself sunk in a ragged couch, ahead of which placed a little

reading-table, on which spread a low-quality rough book, over which dancing a ball pen, I had been garlanding my tragic love stories.

All of a sudden, I remembered the old woman who had been living adjacent to our house in my village of Srikakulam, and I craved to see her and talk to her enormously. What a fate? It laughed at me aloud. The day I arrived at my village after all these years of seclusion, I found my adorable old woman deceased. I's upset and spent the whole evening near the rim of the river staring at the nature, and unconsciously fallen asleep over there. But Kavya was standing beside me on the very next morning. The fate again laughing at me. My life—more it appeared a fictional tale.

A blow of horn brought me back from the quick recall—again I's in the station with my most endearing lady parked herself by a window, still drooping her head and peeping down at her lap. Indeed into the magazine. The train's engine had started. Still she didn't raise her head. The train started moving. Still she didn't raise her head. The train was crossing me. She rouse her head and turned to me. Tears had been pouring down her eyes. She knew about whom I had written in the story. But I knew I's late. My love was visible to my eyes, but never could I reach it. Because a mirage it was to me.

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