

Rear View

Tuhin Harit

I look at the mobile. It's 12:30AM. I am running late for home, need to rush. Everyone would have eaten dinner, without me. Wife will shout again, as if I do this on purpose. No matter how much I plan it, this always happens, even though I never accept passengers traveling on oblique routes to my house at night. But as I'm closing the night, some passengers always come ahead, going long distance, fat charge. How can I say no? It's difficult to say no when a rich man is waiving hand, with a scantily-clad lady, nay angel, beside him. It's hard, these big people deserve such small privileges. I feel some weird form of safety by appeasing them, by stopping the car next to them, letting them in and driving it to their destination, ever so gently and subserviently. They never tip, neither do I expect, yet I do this, I don't know why. Their slightly off-route destinations along with the busy roads always get me late for home.

I check the mobile again. It's 12:40AM. The lanes are relatively free and my petrol tank is full. The weather is pleasant and from my open window I can smell the night: it smells sweet, like freedom. I'll be home soon. Some boys

and girls, standing on the roadside, are waving hands. They want to hire me. I'm not going to stop, not for some stupid, obnoxious, rich punks who get drunk in parties and then have sex in the night, at their plush homes. I look at them, I think of my son. I fear if my son will ever be as irresponsible as them! I can't afford all that flash. But then I laugh, imagining my son in those expensive clothes, with those pretty girls, oozing success, I feel oddly funny, and sad at the same time. A part of me wants to see him like that... someday.

Suddenly one of the boys waiving hands breaks free of the group and steps out on the road. He hardly takes one step, but then stumbles on his feet, as a drunkard does, and falls flat on the road, in-front of my car. I stop with a jolt, few feet away from the kid. I stare out of the window. A couple of boys hold him back up even as he has by now completely lost his senses. A couple of boys and girls come near my car and request me to take him home.

"His servant is there, outside his house. He'll carry him out of the cab" One of the girl says.

"Take this bhaiyya!" One richly dressed boy hands me two Rs. 2000/- notes, almost ten times of the actual expected fare.

I've taken the money. It's decided now, just like that. Rich folks, fat fee, and an unconscious kid!... I can't say no to them. I just cannot...

I sit quite, say nothing. I open the rear door as the kids place their unconscious friend on the rear seat.

I drive now. I glance at the unconscious boy, every now and then. He lays with his face pushed in on the seat cushion. He looks young, maybe 17 or 18 years old, around the age of my son.

“Stop it. Stop. Stop” he meekly mumbles under his breath. I look back, feeling irritated. Such tantrums!! These stupid, idiot rich people! I focus on driving, it feels kind of relaxing to see a deserted road, running ahead of me, passing by me. There are no impatient cars, or angry horns. I feel peaceful, I feel good.

“Stop the car” he snaps again, loudly this time, jerking his hand in an indifferent manner. I don’t want to give wings to his tantrums, I keep driving. “Stop it, stop it, stop it” he pushes my shoulder, with whatever violence he could muster in the feeble state he is in.

“The car will stop at your home.” I tell him, in no-nonsense manner.

“I’m going to vo...” and even before he could finish, he pukes. I jam on the breaks hard, get out and quickly open his door. He crawls out, dragging his body, as I stand on the side watching him, not willing to help. A small pool of thick, white, smelly gunk now stares at me from the floor of my car.

The miserable bastard now lies on the road, in the pool of his own vomit. He’s conscious, he’s speaking something softly. I can’t make it out, neither do I care. I just want to get him to his home and then be on my way. I reluctantly grab him from the back of his clothes and push him away

from the puke. I wash his face with water, then raise him and help him lie back on the rear seat. I get back on driver's seat, cursing him and my other problems, and start the ignition.

It's 1:10AM. The drop-point is not very far now. I should hopefully be home by 2ish. I pray to god that this gets over soon, that this stupid boy doesn't create anymore complications, as rich kids are so used to making. He has been motionless for past 20 minutes, but his eyes are open, staring blankly at the back of my seat, at something but nothing in particular.

"You must be disgusted with me" he speaks up. I gaze at him from the rear-view mirror, he looks back. I keep quite.

"Please stop here. Don't drop me home. Just drop me here, I'll be ok" he says. I look back at him. He looks weak.

"Let me drop you home. It's not safe here. Let your parents take care of you" I tell the kid.

"Haha! 'Care'? None cares" he mocks viciously. "My dad is an a*****e, my mother is a w**re!" he shouts and then laughs off.

I keep quite. Rich people and their tantrums. Is so much money not enough?

"Come-on stop here!" he reasserts, still lying on the seat.

"Every mother and father care for their child. They want the best for their child. Too much money has spoiled you! What did they nurture you for? This? How would they feel if they

know that you're talking about them like this?" I admonish him to his face. Truth is sour.

"Hahaha..." he bursts into laughter. "They cannot wait till I'm dead. Haha... I was born because my dad, the educated a*****e, didn't wear a fucking condom, and my mom realized it too late for an abortion. That's why I was born..." he continues, laughing unashamedly.

"The place you're taking me to is not home, it's not anybody's home. My dad would probably be at some slut's place and my mom would be at her boyfriend's. The place you're taking me to is a mess. It's a black hole. It's a war-zone" By this last sentence, his eyes become morbid, losing any sense of playfulness. I observe him from the rear-view mirror. Something in his eyes influence me. He isn't lying. Behind the fancy carelessness and indifference, I now see an extremely scared and lonely kid.

"Please drop me here. I don't want to go home, uncle" he repeats, his voice getting softer with every word.

The road is deserted. I don't know what to do. It will be unsafe for him if I drop him. I'm confused.

I slowly stop the car near a desolate curve. The kid gets out and gets seated on the footpath. I get out and sit on the footpath too, next to him. We don't talk, but something tells me that I should be here, with him. I get a call from my wife. I tell her I'm dropping the last passenger. She rudely disconnects.

We sit there for 10-15 minutes. The kid doesn't say a word, he just keeps staring, on the other side of street, at

discolored, old walls of dilapidated, poor houses. I wonder what he is staring at.

“Everyone has their problems. You have yours, I have mines” I finally speak, hoping it’ll strike some chord. He keeps dead silent.

Then suddenly he starts crying, one of the wildest cry I’ve ever seen. He puts his head on my shoulders, sobbing relentlessly; I notice the corner of my shirt getting wet. Few seconds later, he becomes quite again.

“Let’s go” I say. He sits there for few more seconds, and then gets up and lies down on the back of the car. My old car starts with an aging gurgle.

Few minutes later his home arrives. A young rude servant opens the car door and helps the boy out. I watch him being carried away. I notice the boys’ mobile lying on the back-seat. I call out the servant and hand it over to him. I stay at that place for few more seconds, and then slowly drive away.

My eyes inadvertently gaze at the rear-view mirror, watching the seat where the rich boy laid, throwing tantrums, travelling between consciousness and unconsciousness. His mobile had no missed calls, no concerned messages. And just like that I realize why he was watching those dirty, old houses in the deserted alley. Because they were somebody’s home...



Tuhin Harit is a published author of the celebrated social satire, *Mannu Rikshewala*, released in 2016 ([Amazon](#)). The book was called a riveting, mind-changing experience by renowned author Jerry Almeida. Aside, he writes short fiction and poems for reputed national and international magazines such as *The Edge*, *Muse India*, *Bangalore Review*, *Ashvamegh*, & *Amar Ujala*. Tuhin's fiction writing mainly focuses on human interactions and the interplay of their emotions. Tuhin lives in Mumbai.

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