

SRISHTI WALIA

Thriving Loss

It is night again. The time when my eyes are swimming once more in the almond-shaped pool of my discoidal thoughts, always coming back to where I started. I don't know why I often see this pool as white with red fragile waves all-around, and I always reflected as black, squeezing myself in the centre like a globule. Actually, creating an image of the eye. The best part being, I don't make any exiguous noise while swimming in this white water, neither the paddling sound nor the resonance produced while treading water.

"Hey, Honey! You asleep?"

"No, Ma". I reply in my head.

"Is everything alright, Sweetie?"

I don't know how she hears my cerebellum-replies every time. But, I am still not in a position to answer her back. After what felt like fifteen minutes, she comes towards my side of the bed. I hastily dry the water my eyes so eagerly generate every night. I guess there is some hydro-electric plant installed deep in my eyes. My thoughts working as a turbine to generate *electricity* (energy, radiance, strength, and contentment) but unfortunately there's a leakage and what the poor machine engenders is only water. A seamless flow of emotions.

Ma comes near my bed table, has a glass of water, asks me if I am thirsty, and advances back to her side. She slept, *maybe*. The best thing about Ma — she never pushes any subject more than two questions, that too when she is in a FBI mood. Conceivably, she knows I don't feel like retorting. This being the worst thing about her too.

My Ma and Papa had a divorce when I was four, since then I lived with Ma. After eighteen long years of separation, I still cannot fathom what exactly led to the hamartia of my parents' marriage, as Ma is not vocal about this subject. What little she did tell me (upon pressurisation) is that, they were married young and weren't compatible with each other. "Not always the reason of divorce is someone's fault", she said. I always wonder why she didn't marry again. Probably, her love for Papa hasn't died in these years and marrying again when you have a child from the previous marriage is difficult here.

I too am a revenge seeker – a firm believer in V for vendetta – hence, I don't share everything with her, just the diurnal issues every girl faces and shares with her mother. Whatsoever, I meet my Papa once in a month and we enjoy each other's camaraderie a lot. Maybe, not *that* much. Nevertheless, he is a great father; I wonder why he wasn't merely a fine husband? We would've been one robust happy family. Wait a second, but this is not the cause of my tears! NO. WAY. In fact, I don't remember crying over this. My Ma never let anyone hurt or upset me, according to her thought. She doesn't know the whole things of my life, so can't blame her. She does everything she can to satisfy all my desires, wants, and aspirations, according to her thought.

But, it's time for me to leave her. I don't have much time left; don't know what will happen to her, when I'll be gone. I applied for a scholarship in UK for further studies and fortunately got an admission, however when I told Ma, she was too damn hysterical and paranoid about it. I still cannot forget that Sunday evening, the first time I was so infuriated, exasperated, and angry at her.

"What do you mean?" She asked in that unique way of hers which implied so much more than that four little words really meant.

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“I just told you, I am selected in one of the best universities of UK, that too with full scholarship. You don’t have to pay any expenses.” I said the last line nastily.

“I thought you would be *happy* about it.” I sighed.

“I certainly am!” She snapped. I couldn’t perceive whether it was sarcastic or genuine, saying this she walked into the kitchen to prepare dinner. I followed her. Full five minutes passed. Not. A. Single. Word. Uttered.

“Can you pass that bowl?” She pointed. I gave her the utensil, suppressing the anger that was threatening to emerge, if she didn’t say anything after that rhetorical “*I certainly am!*”

“Do you want to abandon me for TWO years?” *She smoothly converted the span of two years into eternity.* “What will I do alone in Delhi? Wait for you endlessly? Think about you all day? I CANNOT be some patient, docile, decision-abiding single mother in this hypocrite Indian society.” She shouted over her voice. d

If, anyhow, she was saying she cannot be a typical Indian mother, then she was absolutely behaving like one right there! *Emotionally blackmailing me.* I shook my head.

“Ma, you know, Every damn thing is fucking crazy.” *Along with you,* I said in my head. She gave me a sneering look as if she heard me. Did she? I sat down and put my hands on my forehead, looked up and continued.

“You are a *hurdle* in my success path, Ma. Why did I graduate in Anthropology? To just terminate my education? You know it very well, there is not much scope for this subject in India, yet you are creating a nuisance about something so small.” I said this, hating myself more with every passing second and letter. That day, certainly, some maniac hormones were injected into my metabolism.

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“STOP behaving like a child Ma. You can perfectly live *without* me for a few years. COME ON, it’s just two years. If *I* can do that, so can *you!*” Okay, it will be difficult for me as well to live away from her. Very strenuous, indeed! Nonetheless, I can sacrifice this peculiar feeling to achieve my goals. CERTAINLY.

“Yes, I can *live* without you honey! But, I won’t be *alive*. This society kills me every day with its opinions, ridiculous obscenities, cruelty, because I am a single mother, will burn me alive each day I’ll go to work. I confide in *you* when I return home. I don’t care what the world says about me when I am with *you*. I forget everything outside these walls when I am inside our home.” She took a breath and recommenced. “They say women are caged in the four walls of the house which seize them to rise higher. *I*, on the contrary, want to forever remain in the stomach of our home, safe with *my* daughter.” She was now crying a mournful sob. Her tears always weakened me, so did her words this time. But, my *Rationale!* I have to rise higher in the stature if she isn’t willing to. I want to attain everything for Her. For myself.

“Stop CRYING.” I said harshly and stormed out of the door that Sunday evening exactly one year from this night. I thought a lot while walking in the central park and she would’ve been doing the same at home. Yet, I wasn’t able to accept what she said. Then suddenly from nowhere a voice called “*you will realise when you’ll become a mother.*” I was appalled, thought it was Ma, looked around but couldn’t see her anywhere. I exhaled a long breath, it was my *conscience*. Whatsoever. I don’t even want to marry. Not because my Ma/Papa’s betrothal didn’t work out but ’cause this whole institution of marriage never appealed to me, especially the procedures undertaken by us, Indians (North Indians to be specific). So much bragging, so much dowry (no matter how much advance we say we are), so much noise, so much SHOW-OFF. We are just *too much!* Anyway, *my*

plan is to carry off my dreams. Hence, it was decided, I will go to UK and pursue my ambition. I was resolute in my arbitrament, when I went back home at nine. But, there — THAT SCENE; my voice caught in my throat. Ma lied on bed, STILL. For a moment, I thought she passed out; well *I* certainly did for a second! No, Ma didn't do anything to herself. She was beneath the duvet, pretending to sleep. She was trying to not even breath properly, so I believe that she is in cavernous sleep. *That*, made my lips curve a little. I was sure she couldn't sleep after my obnoxious manoeuvre. But, her sleep invoked a terrible idea in my mind – the thought of her death. What if she died before I came back from London? I seriously think psychotic neurons were flowing freely through my brainstem. Why did I suddenly think of her demise? Whatsoever. It was decided in that moment I cannot go. I WONT GO. She was at cloud nine when I told her this next morning, I smiled when she grinned.

She took my silence for acquiescence.

Tonight, thinking about all this, I remember I didn't tell her, I was leaving in two weeks. "Abandoning her" in her language. I applied for a scholarship again this year and got selected in another college this time, although it isn't better than the previous one. They have arranged everything from my flight tickets to the hostel accommodation.

After my graduation, both of us worked for our livelihood and I despised my job to an extent I cannot explain, since it wasn't related to anthropology at all.

It was a doltish bank job whose entrance exam I repent clearing. Finally, I submitted my resignation letter and the bank people are also happy to bid me farewell. "The bitch is finally going", I could read their minds while offering my termination letter. It was obvious through my tantrums, displeasing looks, and behaviour with so-called co-fellows that the ass-holes thought of

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me like that. Never mind, I was getting rid of it or maybe the other way round.

Ma doesn't know I've quit the job, because I am expected to clear all my dues and pending work until next Monday, so technically I've one week and my flight is at the weekend. This one year was a consummate megillah of torture — I got into a job, I certainly didn't adore and kept on thinking what my life would've been if I was in UK. I cannot comprehend what will happen to Ma, once I'll leave. Actually, I know. SHE WILL FREAK OUT. She will be crestfallen, perhaps she may think of dying but, NO she won't do anything like that, 'cause when I felt miserable in a few situations and denounced it's better to die than live in this woebegone world, she gave me long lectures on why suicide is disgraceful and you shall offend God by not accepting the life offered to you by him. But, I always pondered, doesn't God — the Almighty, the controller of the universe, undertake every damn thing happening in this world and knows what the future holds? Certainly, then it's his campaign that carries out suicidal missions too. Thinking about God and his proceedings exhausts every single cell of my body. Anyway, Ma will get adapted to me being absent in almost two years, I believe.

I'll surprise her by coming back with the opulence we always wanted.

The time passes so swiftly; it feels like yesterday I was twenty two packing the luggage for my sudden departure, thinking of studying further the evolution of human existence, culture, metamorphosis of human life, and to make new college memories. Now, twenty seven years later, sitting in a rocking chair inside the same room, with all sorts of bodily pains, I contemplate each and every turn my life took and realise the worst one is and always will be the queer death of my Ma.

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I DESERTED her, “*ABANDONED*” her! Just like my father. She died, did not commit suicide, suffered from tuberculosis – not a life threatening disease, nevertheless; doctors said they couldn’t save her. Anyhow, I know it was *I* who killed her, not the lunatic bacteria and I am sure she didn’t even fight to live. This happened when I was preparing for my departure from London after my post-graduation. Unfortunately, I was obliged to enrol into a two-month internship after completing my course due to which I got *late*, very late. It wasn’t that Ma didn’t stay in touch but she always dissimulated to sound cheerful when I could sense a morose tone. (I don’t know why I’ve always felt, Ma saw me abandoning her *that* day; but, she didn’t stop me.) It saddened me to hear her trodden voice but I over-looked the idea thinking I’ll go back and perfuse all the missing veins that went into both of our hearts. The enormity of her sacrifice in my life cannot be moulded into words, and even if I try it will never terminate. And can a child ever balance all the things her mother has done for her?

I have come back to the same house, didn’t marry – in the fear that karma will take vengeance through my child (yeah, the previous reason definitely holds a rigid position too) – and will stay inside these walls until death captivates me. Every night has been similar to my earlier planning-to-leave-India nights (NO, not India, my Ma). The salty water seamlessly flow through my eyes even today. Life’s kinetics is in a perpetual motion. My reminiscences of what I thought the day I saw Ma pretending to sleep, flunks to surface; *again!*

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