

Fall

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Lined with polished, sparkling teeth that effectively bordered a gasp of minted air rolled within a loose ball of dry-blooded muscles and cushioned against lips of redness of skinned carcass, it was a faultless smile. Against a mild humid air, when she smiled down at Sara, with such contentment and happiness owing to a glass of soft drink that was in her hand, Sara felt her lips moistened out of a thirst hitherto unknown to her. Situated at a height of several feet, the latest advertisement of Pepsi smiled at her with assurance that all was well with the world for people smiled in it with such perfection. And then with the pleasure of an aesthete, she admired her hair, her eyes and that perfectly shaped nose, and then she went below to the perfectly shaped breasts and stopped at the flat abdomen. She lifted her eyes to the top, the border of the hoarding and was immediately struck by an aberration. Shaped like little cakes of dung, a pair of hands held the border to support a figure which lifted herself up by inches. Her unkempt hair, her shoulders and her chest appeared to complete the picture of a ghostly floating head, and then in one stride in which she showed her legs and attested that she was stark naked under the yellow v-neckline frock of hers, she situated herself on top of the hoarding. A laugh broke out through her poorly manned teeth to her mates who clapped for her from below. Sara obliged her by looking away.

She looked at those who surrounded her, waiting for the driver to come with someone to fix the van. The man who sat next to her had been reading some book, whose title was difficult to read without appearing rude. Sitting in front of her, was an elderly but functional lady and a young man who was drooping. Of the four of them who were waiting in the van, the old lady was the only one who had employed her time to some use. She knitted profusely, occasionally smiling at her with that rue courtesy that women are forced to pay to each other on roads, like when one admires beauty of the ugly things or calls whiny kids angels. She had moments before leaned over to her, speculated as to how long would it take to fix the van, admired her work and asked her where she had to drop, and then tired with performance, withdrew to herself.

In all this while, the man who sat next to her had had opened his eyes several times, looked around with the terror of one who wakes up after having lost the count of hours, and then fell back to sleep. Despite the fact that she was running late, she had not felt as relaxed lately as she did in that moment. There was not even a booth around to make calls. She looked satisfactorily at the long wide road that led to that metropolis where she wore what she liked, ate what she liked, talked to whom she liked and most importantly earned enough to be liked.

She peeped a little out of the window for air and was disappointed. The finely filtered light treated everything with such fairness that despite the discomfort, the day could not be looked at with disgust. And that may be the reason why Sara felt peculiarly light today. In fact, it resembled the evening so much that despite the many checks of otherwise, Sara fell into an odd recollection of the evenings. Evenings in the close confined of the home, recreations under the guarded eyes of the elders or torments under the pangs of the early youth— followed one after another without any regard to time or space, and played over her mind as one timeless and spaceless agency called

childhood. Suns fell after suns, and days died after days with no identity of their own. Time passed appeared as a unity, a whole and she stood somewhere out of it, at certain distance looking at it. As she looked down at the roads, an odd sense of power, purpose and belief stole upon her. Considering the closed confines of her childhood, adolescence and of course the confinement of a feminine body, to travel all by one self was such an achievement. The world was definitely becoming better and more liberal. To be mobile was such an achievement for her blooming, blossoming and ravishing womanhood that she almost nodded at herself in approval and pride. This fortunate check helped her from falling into that pit called memory and in order to safeguard herself further she turned to look at her companion. Since the old lady was busy with her wool and knitting needles, she seized the opportunity to look at the man next to her who was barely keeping on to his seat. Was he drunk? But there was such certainty over his face, that it was hard to accept that the man was anything but wholly alive.

How immensely tired must he have had been that he chose such a moment for repose! Dressed in a pair of jeans and blue t-shirt with the top buttons undone—Sara caught a glance of the whorls of black hair that alternately served as a garment and skin for his chest. This observation gave birth to a wave of sensations that had lately been claiming her every now and then. Somehow divining her ideas, he opened his eyes and looked at her for a moment. Sara was startled but he did nothing other than make some movements, pass a groan and settle at his place—this time with more modesty.

Young women nowadays are so immodest, thought Ratna. How shamelessly this one had been staring at the man to her side and then her ideas about him were so transparent, that Ratna felt grateful that she had not liked her since the first instant. Powdered and perfumed, she looked like a poor imitation of the woman in that hoarding. Even if she had slept in a garden of roses, she could not have smelled more of them! How much these young people spend upon themselves! While growing up neither she nor those of her time, knew such plenty. Perhaps this was what they promised, all those nationalists whom she as a little girl had thronged to hear. There was this colour of prosperity, like the pinkness of this girl's cheek that was unseen in her generation. Most of the things that this plenty had ushered in, she neither knew nor heard of. But it always surprised her, like it did yesterday when she went to market with her son, how each of those had a use and was in fact needed. That's how the times go—elders work hard so that children can live in plenty. Like she still does for her son—traversing distance of twenty kilometres daily for more than forty years...only to leave him with a richer and larger legacy!

As she enclosed another loop of the sweater she was knitting, she looked out of the window. She caught a glimpse of an urchin majestically sitting on the top of that hoarding. The mere height of it induced fear in her and she cursed the child's mother for being so careless. But then they are always so—most of them. Fathers drink, steal or beat their wives and mothers chew tobacco, curse or toil. They don't know what it is to save—the whole class of theirs. They lead their lives chasing little pleasures and leave the little ones to their own devices. Wasn't it her maid's son who is missing now? Yes, it is three years now since they saw him last.

She looked at the child again and saw her dangling her little legs. One day this one would grow up and like her, would also fall into the circle of life and then it would dangle and throw her from here to there. And then that smile would be wiped off her face and numerous concerns would wrinkle her

like it has done to her. And so would happen to this man who is reading some book on eyes Ways of Seeing (must be preparing for medical!) and also, to this woman who has taken so much care about her appearance. For women, it all changes after you have been with a man, and that's the only way change happens despite what they say. No number of wedding vows can do you what a man does. This one's time would also come, may be in few years! And if she doesn't remain as shameless as she is now, she may remain happy for some time. Sooner or later, the life encloses and encroaches upon you. And once you have children, you are really trapped. Carrying each of them in your arms following him who begot them, one has to fall into the circle of life. Only the worst ones do not take the fall...

This was the worst of all the times, thought Tejveer. He was ascending a long winded stair case, and a child sat on the last step dangling her legs. One step taken up, two steps fallen back... Despite the proof of the contrary, he believed that he was reaching somewhere. Some place where women peeped at him with interest and look as if undressing you... Multiple faces who looked the same and smelled of roses, smiled at him with a dazzling smile. And then he looked at the child, and felt it was really possible to live with little. He wanted so hard to reach her and collect her that too without the desire to add to her or add another of her. He groaned as she disappeared from his eyes, and he felt impossibly heavy at heart. He felt himself slipping, and falling down through the infinite number of stairs. It felt light to fall and he adjusted himself a little, to make falling a fuller experience. He had never known himself to be so light yet full. It was possible then, like he thought before, (he didn't know when) that it was possible, really possible to live in vacuum, in nothing, without any thing. He knew it when he sniffed in the snow, and he tried to sniff it in as much as possible to cool down something that burnt in him, but then he started to choke or cough...

“What? What is wrong with you? Are you choking?” said the woman in such panic that Kanhaiyya had to put his book down. In a moment, he stooped in and offered his shoulder to support this fellow who had rarely opened his eyes in all this time.

One look at him, and he knew what was wrong with him. He was stoned and by the look of his fingers, it looked like he was quite a regular at it. Living in the hostel for four years had taught him a lot about stoners. He tried to take his pulse. Experience told him that he was not in danger and therefore, it would be wise to not to mention it to the ladies lest they run away in horror, tumble and fall.

“What is wrong with him?” asked the old lady.

“I don't know” said he. “His pulse looks all right.”

“Now where is the driver? Will he ever come back? And he has fallen sick.”

Ignoring her, Kanhaiyya asked “Do you want to eat?”

He nodded. And in a minute he handed him the tiffin that his mother had prepared for him to eat on the way. He opened it for him and then with little regard about which ones were paranthas or mere dips or vegetables to go with it—he ate and ate. And the two women, who first pitied at him for being hungry, grew increasingly bewildered. He took the seat next to him and the old lady moved to his place.

Some minutes passed and all began to relax. He was on his third parantha and Kanhaiyya looked at

him with a wry smile as the tiffin was supposed to last him a day. There's nothing more impossible to satisfy than the hunger of the starved and stoned, and so he sighed to himself, and managed to catch a fleeting glance of the face of the young lady. Up till now he had only seen her from sides and it was the first time he had a frontal view of her, and could not help appreciating what he saw. But then, it was not possible to appreciate beauty for long when a stoner leans over your shoulder! This is what is wrong in the world. Everyone wants to be someone else but never know what is it to be one, a singular. For example the woman who was sitting in front of him was beautiful but now indelibly stamped as the product of the masses, with makeup of such commonality and clothes of such similarity, that she was in effect nothing but abstract.

He felt certain dryness on his tongue and took out his water-bottle to drink. But the water was so warm that it did little to quench his thirst. How wonderful would it be to get a glass of ice-chilled soft drink, may be peps.

The thought made him to turn towards the hoarding, perhaps to second that woman's claim that a glass of peps is likely to make one's life happier. The first thing that caught his sight was a figure seated majestically, on top of the world! She was a breath of beauty in a world plagued with ugly copies. Oh! What a relief, joy and pleasure was it to see her! Her hair was spread all over her face, creating a pattern of irregular lines over her delicate brown skin. She was so unique that she could be nothing but beauty. His companion slipped from his shoulder and he was forced to turn towards him. He had stopped eating and was breathing heavily. Kanhaiyya held him by his shoulders and placed him against the wall of the van. Either he was going to pass out or puke—in either of the cases, it was safe to maintain some distance. He silenced the anxiety of the two women by the palm of his hand, gesturing them to have patience. With no reason but a belief in the hierarchy of the sexes, they bid by his decision.

He turned towards her again and noticed the nakedness that she betrayed by constantly dangling her legs. Instead of being repulsed by the sight, it brought to him an odd mixture of sexual security and peace. He concluded that grotesque nakedness of even a child augurs well for the world, in which he had to immediately live. She continued to dangle, and laughed more vigorously. It was the first time that it struck to him that she was in danger or had been in danger, for with that height... He tried to do something to protect her but from the back of his head came the sound of a fall, followed by the shrieks. As he turned to look towards it, he caught from the corner of his eyes the sight of a yellow skirt flying down to the earth and stumbled out of the wagon, to seize her. All he knew before the moment to act, was that she was falling and he had fallen.