

The Final Goodbye

Gauri CP*

I am being taken to the hospital,
She is scared and so am I.
I don't want her to leave my side,
Yet these white coats are taking me away-
To dress me in blue and to put the plastic mask on my face in the room where only they could
step in
My kids, amma-I want them all here,
Prabha? Please come to my side
Aiyoo it's hard to breathe!
The pain is subduing but why is the light fading and my head feeling lighter?

I can see clearly now
But why did they close my eyes?
Did they just say "Time of death"?
Why am I unable to move my lips?
How am I seeing when my eyes are still closed?
Why? No! Prabha? Mwole? Ammae! ..Ediye?!
Prabhae? Why is it that I can't hear my voice? Did I die?
Aiyoo I'm not ready to die.

Where are they taking me?
Is this mortuary?
I can't feel any cold though,
How long are they going to keep me here?
I really hated the cleaning work they did on my face
It wasn't good but I guess I look younger
Good! Prabha and children won't have to feel embarrassed about my looks anymore
For last few months I have not groomed myself well because of my illness
But now that they have done this
I would look good for their friends to see.
How will they react?
Have my children been informed?
How will they come for the ceremonies? By train? Will they be able to get train at this time? It
may cost a lot if they try to book now though.
I wish I had saved some more money
How is Prabha going to manage dowry for their marriage?

Neither of them have any stable job
 I should have forced them to write PSC but now what will they do?
 How is amma going to take it?
 Sisters are still young and can manage with support
 But amma is too old to take in bad new, she is also very sick
 I should have visited her more
 How long are they going to keep me here in this dark shelf?
 Prabha I'm scared to be alone
 I wanted to live a little bit more
 Just enough to see my kids settle so that she could retire from work
 Now what is to be of them?
 Will they listen to her?
 They were never scared of her though
 When will I be able to see them?
 When are they taking me home?

Oh they are finally taking me home!
 I can see everyone for one last time
 Is it going to hurt when they burn me?
 I have not felt any cold in the mortuary so I think I won't be able to feel the fire as well
 The ambulance is waiting unnecessarily
 Why are they not going faster?
 I want to see my family.

They have put the blue tarpa on the front top of our house
 Good! it will keep off the rain
 But how much would it have cost?
 Oh it's so crowded here
 So many people have come?
 It's Prabha, Aiyoo she is crying a lot
 Weak body she has! Please don't cry too much
 It will make you ill
 Is that amma?
 She looks very pale and tired from crying
 Amma you are very old
 You know how ill you are
 Please don't pressurize yourself
 Kunjaavae, Valyaavae, console them
 Where are you?
 It's a huge crowd but I'm not able to find you two
 Did you not get train?

Ah! Here you come!
 Is that churidhar? But You don't usually wear those-
 Kunjaava why are you standing like that?
 Don't worry acha is here
 Valyaava is trying hard to be strong
 But her struggle is
 evident in her face
 Kunjaavae! stop shaking my body mwole-
 It hurts since I can't touch you or hold you back
 But it also feels good to be kissed by you
 When was the last time you hugged me like this?

Valyaava you are very strong
 I'm sorry for leaving you with so much responsibility
 Acha did whatever I could do
 I know both of you hated me because of my drinking habit
 But I had tried a lot to stop it
 I could not do it mwole
 Please don't hate me anymore
 I loved you and cared for you with all my heart
 Acha was not in a position to do anything more makkale

Prabha! You took care of me like no one else would
 I know you suffered a lot
 Our children will take care of you well
 I have no doubt in that
 They may be a little disobedient or unruly but they are still our loving children and will always
 be there for you.
 Amma, take your medicines on time.
 I'm relieved that my sisters will be there for you in my absence
 How big they have all grown! Our Ramani Usha, Indira and Suni have all grown up well!
 I often used to wonder about my age as well-
 Sixty-three years! Ah How time does fly!

I think they are taking me to the funeral pyre to burn me
 What is to be of me once it's done?
 Will I be going to swargam or will I be in Punarjanmam?
 Will I be taken to hell for drinking?
 Prabha will you be coming to say the last goodbyes?

They might not allow you there maybe
 I don't know why these rules exist.
 We have reached, so fast?

Makkal are already here,
 I was right, the wife will not be allowed here
 Who is going to do the rituals?
 Both are holding thorthu with them
 Maybe they will do it together
 Why is there this much sound? Is there an argument?
 Valyaava is asking the others to let Prabha here,
 No, she is not asking
 She is arguing for that.
 My big girl!
 She has always had a temper, but is also the most sensible when it comes to taking decisions
 She knows that I want Prabha here,
 Prabha would also wish to see me once more before I turn to ash
 Yes! Prabha is being brought
 I will be able to see her once more
 I'm so grateful to you mwole
 They have left a car to bring my wife here to me.
 I remember waiting for her on our marriage where this all started
 And now it's all going to end.

Kunjaava is very silent now
 I should have talked to her yesterday night when Prabha called her
 Her exams are also near
 I hope this doesn't affect her academics
 She has always been a bright student in English subject
 If only her college considered medical leaves for attendance
 She could have easily cleared it last semester,
 She had also told me about her plan to study masters in Oxford
 She was working for it
 But if she performs bad in the upcoming exams then that plan will also fail.
 Aiyoo mwole don't worry much
 Acha will always be with you all,
 Don't let this stop you from achieving your dreams
 I cannot bear to be the reason for anything like that to happen to you mwole

Here comes Prabha
 Her face looks like that of a child

Delicately beautiful and innocent
 And also looks so small
 She had always been so,
 But now that I see her
 I realize how happy I was to have her with me
 How lucky I had been!
 All these years after so many fights and struggles
 We have made it from the marriage hall to here together without ever leaving each other.
 You have exhausted more than half of your life in tending to me,
 Now you can be free of me.
 It hurts me so much to say this
 But I could never really treat you well enough
 Still, you stayed
 No no, do not cry for me again
 I no longer exist.
 I wish I had told you how much I loved you when you took me to hospital or at any other time.
 Your ankle is still injured-
 Do consult a doctor soon
 You are getting old so be very careful of injuries.
 They are starting the rituals?
 Kunjaava is following valyaava - walking in circles around my body.
 As I said they are doing it together.
 I am not able to smell the karpuram that you are putting over my body,
 But I guess it will make the burning faster.
 Why is she stopping with the pot?
 You should be throwing it backwards,
 Oh mwole! She is scared
 She is hesitating
 Mwole you have to let go
 It's time!!
 They are moving me again?

Yes, I am being taken to the dark room for burning my body,
 Do they have to do this?
 Aiyoo Prabha do not look at me like this
 It makes me long more to be with you
 Makkale do not be afraid of anything
 Achan is always watching over you.
 They have lit it, the fire is spreading
 Are you all leaving?
 No! I want to see you again
 Mwole, Prabhae, Povalle! (Please don't go)

*Gauri CP is a 21year old Indian Poet and aspiring writer who has co-authored a few anthologies in which she shared poetries dealing with themes of animal cruelty, discrimination, love, and human perceptions of justice. Her works include ‘The Devil ‘, ‘Differences’, and ‘Longing to be in your arms again’.

Gauri did her undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature from Madras Christian college and has ever since been working actively in different fields related to writing and learning English. She is currently working on her debut novel and dreams of becoming an impactful writer.