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A Distressing Journey

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The mixture of old and new songs blazed throughout and jarred on Reenu's ears. Her ears could make out only two songs and there was a tight contest in the air when "*Nilavu oru pennagi*" [old Tamil song] and "*vaaya maapila vaalapala thoopula*" [new Tamil song] were fighting to gain more attention among the passengers. Reenu's limbs became weary after having travelled for about one hour or so in the bus.

The bus reached Tutucorin and halted there for a while. Nearby, Reenu came to glance at a girl and her mother with their eyes wandering for seats. Reenu's welcoming smile brought the girl close to her and she sat beside her. She has been doing her Std. VIII, and had attained the age of maturity that very day. The girl had stayed in the hostel, and the memorable moments of her life had made her mother to come and pick her up. The mother was vexed with the sisters of the convent for not informing the news immediately. But, they had delayed until 12.00 noon and consequently, she had to take the girl home so late.

Attaining puberty in India still called for many strange customs. She was holding a few branches of neem leaves to ward off any evil spirit approaching her and an "*aruva*" [machete] too lay concealed deep in the caverns of her school bag. She instructed her daughter, "Keep those leaves safe, lest we can't find it." Reenu controlled her laughter at their foolishness and welcomed her with glad eyes. For she was thin as a stick and gladly Reenu gave her next seat to her. Or else, some fatty might come and crush her.

After having worked late night for many days, Reenu was dead tired and tried to catch up her beauty sleep. The girl's mother tapped her gently and asked for her mobile to call her anxious husband at home. There went her peaceful sleep, and the call took a few minutes. When she returned it, she let out a sigh, and she put into her red "*Roshan*" handbag. Holding fast together both of its straps, close to her chest, she gave in to the bliss of a snooze. The slight slumber came to an end when the mobile vibrated and the call was now from her husband. Seeing an unknown number, she frowned. Again girls and even women of today who consider themselves still traditional, never pick up any unknown numbers. Then,

checking the call log, her arms stretched towards her direction with an air of irritation, and she grabbed it with an air of submissiveness. After getting clear instructions from her husband, she wished to make another call saying that her brother should be informed about hiring an auto rickshaw to pick them up. Sensing its emergency, she lent her mobile once again.

The little girl called and said with pleading eyes, “Thanks, *Akka* [sister]” but never was a word of gratitude uttered by her mother. “Simple folks”, “I shouldn’t mind,” she thought. Yet, she had minded a lot. The bus made a sudden stop and halted in “Happy Restaurant.” Even after that, there was no trace of happiness. After fifteen minutes, the bus started.

Reenu's eyelids shut, listening and lulling her to the lullaby of the bus. She was fast asleep. All of a sudden, it rained inside the bus. Bewildered, she woke up. Still feeling sleepy, she tried to comprehend the situation. There were splashes... from the top of her head to her arms tucked under her chest. That’s exactly the correct position which makes her cosy and comfortable. The odour of the splashes awoke one of her senses. Mm... stale chutney... There was a voice saying, "Can't you use a plastic bag?" Another voice said, "Lower the window." Oh my God! The sharp realization hit her then... She was drenched in vomit.

When she was about to sleep again, of course, wiping the splashes with the crumbled papers which magically appeared one after the other from the girl’s school bag, her misfortune continued. A big-fat foot slithered down, neared her ankle and gave a gentle prod in and around her ankle. Still, her mind was gnawing at the previous event and the insolence of the prevailing situation which in turn raised her seething anger. Flushed with hot and impulsive anger, she made a full turn quickly without getting up and the face behind, a man of about forty-five grinned and said, “*Pappa*, [Baby] it was an accident.” Controlling her rage, clenching her teeth and glowering at him, she turned around. The warning didn’t ring the bell in the dumb ass and continued his gesture of affection making small circles close around the ankle. This time, she shot up, bounced closely to him, got his collar and smashed him giving him black and blue. Not expecting such a sudden surge, he repeatedly begged for forgiveness and many hands joined her in giving him their own shares. He was ashamed and got down instantly in the next stop.

Reenu got down after two hours later and left with the regret that she could not find the source of the vomit or else, she would have just asked that genteel person, “*yennama ipdi panreengalema*”? [?Why are you doing like this?]- A famous dialogue from Tamil television show which is copied in Tamil movies too]

About the Author:

Ms C. Rosy is a creative writer and she's very passionate about writing poems specifically. She is currently working as Assistant Professor in the department of English at TBAK College for Women, Kilakarai, Ramanathapuram, Tamilnadu. The writer has published three poems which include the poem titled "Elixir of Life" in a *Souvenir* of the Department of English, Annamalai University and Poets International (The 15th Poetry Festival 2011) and the poems titled "Discovery of Destiny" and "Tearing Transgressor: A Poem on Kamala Das" were well appreciated in the peer review procedure and they have also been published in the refereed international journal, *The Criterion: An International Journal in English: Bi-monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal*. Her poem, "Part- My Pleasure?" is accepted to be published in *The Creative Launcher*, an International Journal [December issue].