

Rendezvous with Rain

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Rain is moving towards an obscure destination, no name, just a place, the address unknown, but the reason for its arrival is quite known. It will begin some unsavory revelations in some lives.

The sky rumbles in a cloudy, cool manner. The rain, in this way, takes a shorter route to arrive on a chariot driven by a liveried coachman, all in white armor, streaked in gold lineaments. It soon pours upon cobbled paths of a city, frightening horses tied in stables and making them raise their hooves in alarm and restraint, and the paper flowers hanging against muslin ruffles are swaying erratically with the approaching wind. Some girls in blue and white pinafores, ready to step out, are leaning out of balconies to see if the quick shower will interfere with their day's doings. The traffic lights are soon going to be congested with water pouring down their three colored eyelets, and the concrete seat of the sentry post underneath meant for the patrolling party will remain empty, the sentries will huddle in twos or threes under a large black parasol looking at rooftops and their polished bronze like effects, corroded by the salt in the rain water, while wheels of cars whistle upon puddles on potholes, and one car painted a brilliant red carries telltale smell of a gala night. The clean shirt of the driver, less clean now, looking more like the velvet vest of a ring master, after a clownish act of the previous night.

Some feel almost a maniacal love for the arriving downpour: they welcome the tumult in every drop of water. Meanwhile, the rain alters directions several times, moving this way or that, poring now here and then there taking many twists and turns at by lanes and then stops over at a quiet marshland. The oppressive weight of this patch of stagnant water seizes it somewhat, there is an ominous silence in the stillness of this pool of water, the vapors rise up and suffocate, and the fragrances from wild blossoms are gone, like yesterday's wind, forgotten. The crystalline water drops, their miasma and the debris come together at various places.

It isn't a godless downpour rejected by the poor just because it lurches through the quagmire of gathering filth at the nearby abattoir house. The offal hanging is too distasteful like a pestilence that some eyes cannot avoid. Time in these moments become mythical, almost a perverse thing. It has no adornment to enhance it; like a baby going senile at its first birth, no one can disprove it.

Paradise cannot be a salacious place unless it is enriched by affection of love because trivial material catastrophes that occur with this veritable downpour should be ignored. Though rain brings in too many miseries to usurp that right to that paradise and yet jubilation must follow invariably a bitter night metamorphosed by the slim light of dawn and by some other happy occurrences making oblivious the gathering guilt arriving because of the rain.

Tara owns a large house and fourteen acres of land and yet they make her feel rather half ruined: She is much like the tall maple tree in her backyard once that had dark green foliage are now so bare, mute and bankrupt that she can hear the soft rustle of leaves and the few dry twigs that it has had may disappear with the next fall. The pale sparse branches have been mocking her for

the past ten years since she lost all happiness the day Vishal left her. Tara lives in one of the upper rooms where souvenirs of value are here and there mounted on colored platforms. Her room in particular has a large four-poster bed where Tara sleeps circumscribed by its four square corners. A writing table is to the far right corner and an oval shaped mirror faces the opposite wall. It is a comfortable room though empty of something somewhat. She has had no choices but to live alone assisted by her housemaid Ganga and two male servants. She has been living with the awareness of a meager past that is struggling to be set free. Tara knows it. She doesn't want a loose kind of living where the ends do not meet. A consequence of depravity of the soul living too much in the past of things doesn't allow her to make some decisions independently. Tara knows that in a few years' time, her hands would turn dry looking gnarled and awry, sometimes she wants desperately to cling to the tender cusp of a man; only another man could save her from falling apart. She explores the map of her soul to rearrange those broken pieces again and at the same time, she fastens her attention on the expansion of several feelings of guilt, remorse and many other such things. This kind of observation often makes her understand her present situation a little better, and it makes her look disdainfully vis-à-vis at her own disadvantages. Her soul in this way may fit in everything including this feeling of remorse at her advancing



misfortunes.

Tara sees rain in the distance, skeins that sometimes look like long white fingers parting the shadows in the clouds. She sees opulence in their motions, and some energy seems to surround her with the sound of the approaching shower. A few flashes of light lit up her backyard for a moment: She thinks she is seeing something move or someone is arriving in a zigzag manner, as if the person doesn't know where he is going. It could be the scarecrow: It is an old-fashioned piece of tattered shirt hanging upon a thick bamboo pole that sways often with the wind to keep the birds at bay from pecking at the seeds. Though it has no reason to walk with the wind, it cannot. Her eyes scan the area which is not in darkness because of the next flash of lightning. A new flash, jagged and sharp crisscrosses across the dark thick sky that make her blink her eyes twice. She sees a man lying spread-eagled on the wet grass; his clothes too are torn just like the scarecrow on the pole, only he is breathing. There is no movement and no other sign of any one being with him. She calls out to the servants and together they carry him inside to a room upstairs. The climb shakes her badly and more so when she sees a black strip of blood clotting near his right temple. What has led him in this storm to arrive at her doorstep? He is not awake to answer her query. He seems to be from another reserve of world from where he has been running for years. She touches his hands, and suddenly they grip her fiercely as if he would not let her go away. This catches her in the centerpiece of a passion: She wants suddenly to share what is going on inside his head, all the agitations that are making him a shapeless man of flesh whose will cannot yield very easily. "Maya?" Suddenly the man mutters in his sleep. The word assures her that he should pull out of the danger that had brought him here. Nothing will be dim lit from now on.

The sad note in his voice traipses with the rhythm of rain rising to a crescendo. "Maya?" He says again more softly: The word carries the entire weight of a meaning upon her, and she wants to make a slow inspection of that name to know more about him than decipher the name of the woman he is calling; a small shadow of doubt that creeps into her like a slow slithering worm however doesn't make her happy, somewhat. It seems ambiguous when measured with the happiness that she has found simply by looking at him. He has a firm serious mouth that would not say a nonsense thing even in deep sleep. She believes that she should see a solemn pity in his eyes when he would know what she is feeling so suddenly for him without quite knowing him. Could love happen so quickly, would it require more than this short meeting? Yes, she is going to ask him too many questions when he opens his eyes finally. She wants to look into the prism of his eyes to look into the whiteness of his soul: It cannot dim lit, somehow she is sure of it and if it isn't, she would do anything to fill it up with all the things that should keep him happy and hoping.

Tara sits down beside him feeling a little wary, a little shy too to look straight at his closed eyes though she looks at the rest of him like a proprietor who must keep vigil across the entire estate. She has in the meantime measured him thoroughly in her own grid and given him the top grades though when he awakes, she may need to make some minor adjustments of her feelings to fit into the square of his own central grid. He drops his head more into the crevice of the cushion where his head is resting; it looks as if he is praying.

The minutes linger into hours beyond midnight and she is still sitting next to him going in and out with him through all the events that had happened to him, turning each event over and over again inside his brain which is probably already making its decision how much he is going to tell her. She senses from his irregular breathing that the effort to recollect is too much for him; it is coming in the way of his speech. Suddenly, his mutterings stop, and there is then only the sound of the wind threshing against the windowpane. His eyes open, look at her though they do not quite see her: He is looking for someone else who he knows is following him. A lassitude comes over her in his inability to see her: The room is not dark, there is some diffused light in the area where he is lying; he should have seen her very clearly though he probably does see the blue veins near her throat and her forehead where a few stray strands of hair are already trying to twine and throw too many questions at him.

Tara holds a glass of wine to his lips: He looks for a truth in the depth of this bowl of purple color to retrieve the debris of things that he has left behind in the far away night. He cannot make his lips reach the rim of this wine bowl: This makes him smile suddenly, strange that he should look for a past in the most unexpected place. 'Is something the matter with me?' His thoughts wander questioning here and there. He has seen the coward in him; that he has run away when he heard the sound of that first gun shot behind him. He looks at the woman who is beside him. He wonders if he should confess to her and when she would see the selfishness in his act of running away from duty, he may probably feel a little easy about the whole thing. He must at least tell her about the solemn oath that he had taken on the first day at the camp and the reason that made him break him. He does not wish to be in fear of that breach because he has found no ecstasy in leaving the camp like that: It has only exposed a kind of passivity in him. He should have prepared

his wits for the real battlefield though now going back would not mean much to him. He is no longer a part of the revolution and this would be the partisan view of those who know the reason of his deserting the camp.

He looks at her again; his face turns red as if she has just caught him while he is thinking how no one had seen him escape. Tara takes both his hands in a tight clasp; he is bewildered at this slow gentle caress from her hands: He sees a trace of a compassion growing in her eyes, and he thinks, 'She is sorry for me' and just then he sees a different dimension to this whole situation: He is the canvas of guilt where she would put her own colors of faith and make him a loyal partner to her plan to deceive him. She has almost achieved this with her warm caresses. He tells himself to be wary of this woman. And then he sees her get up to move towards the door. He is sorry to see her go. And just as the door closes behind her, he goes back to the middle of other thoughts; those five men return to his eyes again who want to accost him with much more pain. He wants to turn away from them. He doesn't wish to see them again holding a gun in each hand with a clear intention to kill him. They are standing crowding near the doorway though he cannot quite see their faces. "What do you want?" He asks in a feeble voice. He sees a hint of a glint of something vile in their eyes. Blood is pounding inside his ears; he knows that he must run. He is running several yards and then he has stopped to look back leaning against the trunk of a tree. The road behind him looks narrow and tapering towards an end like he is looking at it through a tiny pinhole: Everything then begins to grow indistinct and vague. His legs buckle and with it his breath come out in short gasps; he tries to catch something, it slips out of him, and then he is lying down oblivious to what is going to happen to him. As he tries to think of that moment, he is unsure about the right sequence of events: Did the bullets reach him before he arrived near the shrub or are those men still following him? He becomes doubtful for the third time though he remembers quite clearly what those men had said to him, "So you know all about us, tell us all!" He feels very sad knowing that he doesn't have much to tell them: He is so transparent like a new slate of papery glass with no chalk marks on it though they would disbelieve every word that would come out of his lips. They put him to sleep in a quick dip of whiteness following the prick of a needle, he gurgles in and out of it so many times though nothing could be extracted out of him, even at the face of fear of death until he is face to face with the impulse to run. He doesn't know yet if he has escaped or is he still in the grip of his perpetrators? He closes his eyes more tightly to delay the moment of discovery, and he would not let them keep their eyes on his thoughts of sedition, the real events must be kept invisible to these men. He feels a little happy thinking how he has fooled them. His confidence again buckles under the weight of dark night that slowly thickens around him. He throws aside the blanket; he thinks he hears the slow buzz of something moving beside him. He wants to snap at the mosquitoes, he is unable to do this. His hands refuse to obey him. His arms and legs no more belong to him. He closes his eyes and tries to think of something, only a pale road floats before him, a few faces are dotted in its creases, he cannot quite recognize them at first and then he sees the faces of those five vile men again very clearly: They have found him. He is sitting in one dark corner of a pit to get away from them and then one man was saying, "Hold him," and then in a soft cooing voice another says, "Now, now, why do you resist? You cannot run away from us." He lunges forward but misses as his arms and legs flay wildly, he cannot see where he is going except that there is a puddle of cool water all around him, and he is sinking.

Before the fall, there is the withdrawn hiss of a whisper, chiffon netting, and the crisscross of feelings growing turning him asunder. He should soon be moving ahead, and his feet must crunch to surrender willingly to quick speed. His eyes fix on the triangular blade of the bayonet that may slit his throat before he can gulp down his next quick breath. It is like a dark sharp nail that would pierce the flesh easily though the person holding the weapon must know how

cumbersome it is to do that. Should he be quick enough to see the face of his enemy at this moment when the rifle is pointed at him? Would then the lineaments of the other's face be reflected on his face? So far he has lived with the voices of those men, their familiar faces and the odor of death that have now become mere echoes in him.

Their faces turn into masks, everything is indistinct, insubstantial and his past, present and future are rolled into one vague heap. His agonies, his lonesome desperations to be free appall him no doubt, though he must now transcend those memories to scale towards the hope for a tomorrow that is in the quiet pursuit of his dreams. He is nestling within the newness of things and their silent splendor, and he knows it would be here and that he should regain his grace before the arrival of his death. He has betrayed and so shall be betrayed. Fate or its furies

would try once again to ruin his soul: He is in the vicious whorl of a nightmare; and he wants that someone should release him from its terrible grip. He tries to remember the name of his God, which God, his thoughts wander over the faces of several idols, all are in disarray, the wind or something resembling a gust of wind whisks these images out of his brain and soon the one with a belly and the trunk of an elephant is finally lost in the shadows behind the windowsill, like someone has just jumped out to mingle with the wind and the rain. The particular worry about this loss suddenly curdle his blood: It seems to corrode and prepares him to face some more frightening things. He knows almost what they would be. His knuckles show white in the fleeting light, his breath smelling foul like his acerbic tongue has slaked in lye.

A few distractions arrive: His eyes pick up faces of children playing in a courtyard, and perhaps it is siesta time for others in his village while he is in the most unlikely of places: He is not outside though caught in the spongy soft seat inside of bones. He is still clutching his right hand in a fist, he is yet to dismiss the thought that he is still frightened by the seismic changes of the ground beneath his feet before he buckles to fall. Earlier he had felt so much like a winged thing, maybe a jaybird, with no ways to resist the beginning of awareness. A strange tenacity however keeps his senses together though a signal of alarm is again ticking somewhere inside his head.

His head is snapping at every other noise; there is a squishing sound; he has tread on dog turd and then there is a flutter, some wings are flying off taking fright at this ominous night sound. His eyes are darting toward everything and not a sound can escape his ears: All his five senses are drawn tight to move toward all direction. His hands come together to fold and then part as if afraid to touch one

another. This is a mere sundry enterprise and the words emerging from his mouth are by and large incoherent or a mere mutter. His eyes continue to search, right and left trying to look far away and his feet feel that they are in a pair of cemented trousers. He is more or less close to being dead, altogether.

He mutters, " s-h-r-e-e-t," the word shit is disfigured inanely inside his garrulous throat: His words are all in tatters, chained within a loop. They wriggle to be free. He needs a hammer or a stick to bring them out of this mess. And then his towering words would turn humble; every line would become the line of mother

earth; a proud edifice of messages without a show of orgy or a sense of novelty. He is at ease now; he must not peck at them with a toothpick or shove them under a monotonous yawn. He cannot allow it. He cannot sulk at them for departing from him too soon. He cannot chew or spit them out.

He tries to walk once more and then falls in front of the door, it yawns opening its wide mouth to swallow him in: His whole body is lifted like one lump of jellied flesh. His own yawn is one long

monotone. And then he looks for his name: Does it begin with the letter K? Maybe. Who cares?
A new vocabulary in his school

primer crowds upon him. 'Go' is now such a lonely word, and it doesn't give him the sense of his own direction; he could be in the middle of a maze of alphabets, so to say and he wants to design a full sentence in straight vertical lines, flaunting their strength in height while someone curses under a stale breath to make him wonder how he would make some twenty tales look like one good piece of construction: He may shrink the tales to make them small and safe to tell them tersely and yet he must not frighten them by saying them differently every time. As the delirium grows volatile, more words try to rise out of him, traipsing one upon the other; some are sweet and short, sometimes unnecessarily too ponderous and proud trying to move upward feeling no weight to hold them down together. A tall word should be tall but it isn't looking tall at all when set beside the smaller feeble looking ones. Each word takes him towards a curve, and his head is thrown back to watch the rise and fall where a shoulder nestles his tender flesh. He is suddenly feeling so fresh, vigilant waiting for an appointment. There is a rounded head, his words collide against the wisps of a woman's hair, and her lips are looking luscious like red plum. Is he trespassing too much already? A white sheet gives him lots of space to sleep. His sharp derision suddenly goes limp; a challenge could give that woman some offence. Some feet shuffle to leave, as malevolent feet always do at the hour of departure. He just hopes that they would not come back again to kick him. He is not foolhardy; he is still trying to patch up two disparate unlinked syllables to make it look good and healthy, and easily acceptable, like his name. 'And by the way what is my name?' He mutters with inane strength searching for a word: He must remember to ask that woman's voice
with such tender flesh that nestles his shoulder.

Meanwhile, Tara comes to sit and hold his hands: She begins to tell him about many other beautiful things, how she has metamorphosed from the five-year old girl who crumbled poppy seeds in the palm of her hand in the hope that someday they may turn into full red petals. It never happens though this doesn't keep her
from sowing more seeds in her little garden waiting for a beautiful thing to emerge with the fall of autumn leaves. And when she has seen him lying in a pool of blood, she has seen only the red color and believes that her waiting for a beautiful thing is over: Her seed has ripened into the shape of a man. Or so she wants to believe. The soft fall of her words slowly lull him to sleep where he sees only

a face draped in green and it is surrounded by a blaze of fire and soon after he sees nothing.

That night Tara feels the beginning of a new attitude towards this man: She makes up her mind just then to remake her life with him. Her conscience, she is aware, is also by her side, it too confirms the wisdom of her thinking. At first however her realization is somewhat naïve though she feels happy being with him though she tries to set a reasonable limit on her behavior towards him. A thought then crosses her mind, 'Would I soon look like a freshly ploughed field and feel different from being just a piece of virgin piece of land?' As she sits musing over her new situation, she hears a loud chorus of applause rising toward her from the four walls of her room: She looks at the large photograph of all her ancestors, they seem to be smiling down at her. Quietly they too approve of her decision.