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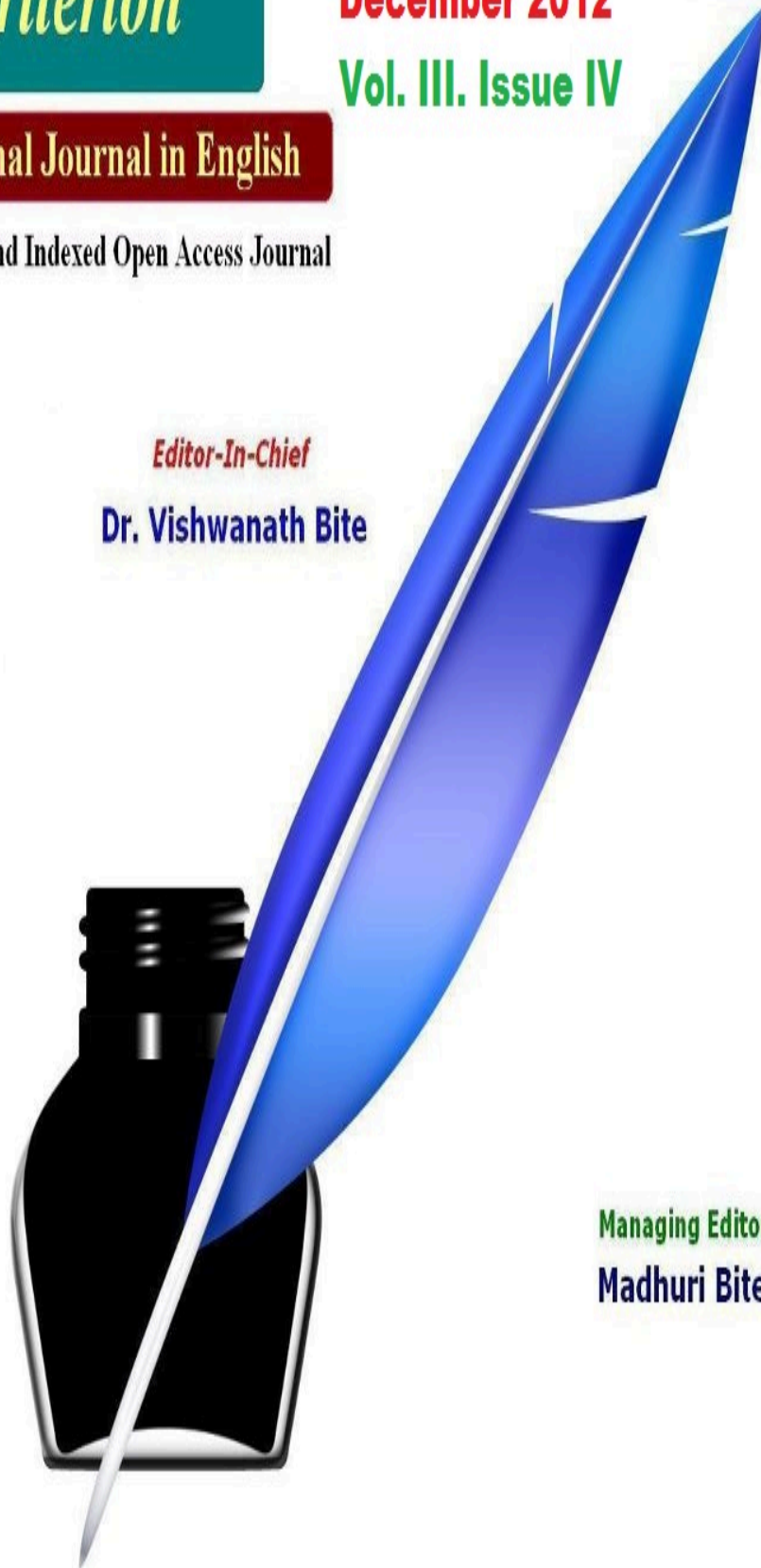
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Editor-In-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite



Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

A Charitable Act.

Hettie Ashwin

The doctor said there should be no problem,

"No problem at all Mrs. Teesdale," he said, "There is no reason why you cannot have another child." Just like that. Douglas squeezed my hand then. He was always squeezing my hand these days. Douglas is such a brick. Always has been. But then men don't...well they don't feel what we women do. It's not in their make-up.

"Well," he said all bright and breezy. "That takes care of that." As if the doctor had all the answers. We didn't talk on the way home. Douglas isn't exactly a speed freak so it was a good half hour that we sat without talking. Although Douglas doesn't say much at the best of times. Not that I mind really. But I would have thought he'd have something more to say than 'that takes care of that.' I thought to myself, that doesn't take care of anything at all. Nothing at all.

When we got home it was late-ish in the afternoon and so I suggested we have an early tea and then just settle down in front of the tele. We like the television. I feel it's a bit of a comfort these days. I like the chat shows. Douglas said he wasn't really interested in watching. He went off it completely after the...our little Bobby passed away. He said he didn't mind if we never saw the tele again. The way he said it, well I felt he thought it was all my fault. I know it wasn't, but Douglas sometimes looks at me like he blames me all the same. The ambulance man said it could have happened at any time, not just when I had settled in to watch my Police Force show. It was just an accident he said. Kids vomit all the time and sometimes it can be quiet and you would never know, and they choke. It happens all the time he said. Douglas doesn't watch my show anymore but I like it. Like the ambulance man said, it happens all the time.

I like to get settled down by around seven. That way I can see my favourites then switch channels to the movies or sometimes they have a documentary. They call them doc-os these days, but I really prefer my favourites. Douglas might sit in the easy chair I bought him for Christmas, just after Bobby died, and I curl up on the settee. Although these days Douglas seems to prefer to go out into his shed and just potter about. We had a ding dong row once about how I'd bought the easy chair with the remote control pouch and drinks holder and he didn't use it. He said he wondered how I could just sit there and watch that drivel when

I knew what he was going to say. But I find it a comfort these days.

"I miss Bobby too," I said. I said, "I have feelings too." Then I said, "It's not like you go out of your way to help me." People say things in the heat of the moment. It happens. But once said, it can never be un-said. He looked at me like I was a piece of dirt. Filthy dirt and said I was a useless cow. I know he didn't mean it like that. I know he is hurting because of Bobby, I do too, but on the afternoon talk show the resident psychologist said we have to face our failings, get on with life, and live for the living. I said

"Douglas, we have to get on with life, live for the living." He said

"Sod off." Dr. Phil said we have to move on I told him. He said "Dr. Phil wasn't married to a useless cow." I know he doesn't really mean those things. He's just going through the stages of grief. They tell you about those things on the afternoon shows. They say I just have to be supportive and he will work his way through it. That's why we went to the Doctors. Douglas said we should try again. It had been a goodish while since Bobby and he said we should try to have a family. I pointed out on the morning show they said that one child can never replace the lost one, and I felt I needed a bit more time. He was sweet about it and said he could

wait and squeezed my hand. He can get really romantic, mood lighting and all the extras, but it's always at the most inconvenient times. He knows I like to watch the seven thirty report and then the quiz shows. They go right up to eight thirty and by then it's a bit late for all that, if you know what I mean. Not that we don't have a quite normal sex life. It's just that by the time I'm done with the shows it's usually just a quick commercial break and put the kettle on and then the movie starts. Douglas, most nights, goes to bed before me and he's asleep before the movie finishes. I like the American late night shows that come on after that. They are so funny and before you know it, Douglas has been asleep for about two hours. I don't like to wake him, he works so hard, and to be honest I'm not really that taken with all the sweating and heaving. I can't see what all the fuss is about really.

Douglas said I have to be more adventurous. He said

"Deirdre you have to try a little harder." He used to call me De De, but now he says Deirdre, let's try this or that or God forbid the other. Not really my cup of tea. He tried to butter me up with a nice Chinese takeaway once, and then a cheesecake from the supermarket. I could see what he was aiming for and I told him,

"Douglas," I said, "You are sweet, but well I'm not in *the* mood." He'd been and bought a book on all the ins and outs and proceeded to go through the chapters, pointing out the different merits of each type of position. Some were only for the more advanced and I tried to take an interest. But it didn't press any of my buttons. I mean if you have to scratch your ear with your big toe and eat yogurt to get in the mood, well I'd rather take my chances with a Chinese takeaway.

I saw an X rated movie on tele one night on the alternative channel and they were at it just about everywhere and every how. But it didn't do anything for me. Then they had a follow up the next week about the female orgasm. The big O they called it. The women were quite candid. They made a lot of noise, grunting, panting, and generally carrying on. I mentioned it to Douglas and he seemed quite interested, but well you can only go at it for so long before you think the ceiling needs painting, and the curtains could do with a wash. So I settle in with a cup of tea and he falls asleep waiting for a commercial break. It's better that way I think. Dr. Phil says go with the flow.

We had a scare the other day. I'd been feeling a little off colour. Not really sick but a bit queasy if you know what I mean. Douglas said I might be pregnant. Morning sickness and all the hormonal change he said. He was getting quite excited about it all. I said I hadn't actually missed my cycle or anything but Douglas said it sometimes happens like that. I wasn't really convinced you know, but he came home with a pregnancy test kit from the supermarket and said we should have a go. He put it in the bathroom on the windowsill because he'd read the instructions and it has to be done in the morning. I pointed out the statistics I'd heard on a programme about false pregnancies and all the tricks the mind plays on your hormones, never the less he was really taken with the idea. He said, De De, this will be so good for us.

"I don't care what it is," he said. "Boy or Girl makes no difference to me," he said. Well I did the morning test. And it felt like an eternity waiting for the little blue line.

"Next time," I said. "Maybe it's too soon," I said. "Sometimes it doesn't work until you're a few weeks in," I told him.

"Where did you get that from, Mornings with Leonne on channel 6," he yelled at me. I don't know why he lashes out at me like that. I know he loves me. Then he said I wasn't fit to be a mother.

"It wasn't my fault Douglas," I said, but he'd already gone by then.

Television is such an education. After that particular episode Douglas said he knew it wasn't my fault. He bought me a lovely bunch of flowers and said we should really try to make it happen. More heaving and grunting. The neighbours must think we are ravers the way the walls are so thin. He said we had to co ordinate our efforts and he bought a calendar. Well I could see right away he had it all wrong. The days he had picked were the finals of Find a star and Dancing with the winners. I said he needed to rethink his ideas if he wanted my participation. He said I was bloody selfish. I know he was just lashing out because of his stages of grief. Anyway later on I said I'd seen a programme on television where you can sponsor a child in an undeveloped country. They get to go to school and have a real chance in life. Pra'ps we should do that I said. The programme went on to say that it didn't cost the earth and people had a real sense of doing something worthwhile. One woman on the show said it changed her life. Less heaving and grunting I thought. Douglas said he'd think about it. But the programme said the sooner the better I pointed out. I said

"I want to make you happy Douglas. I want a family too," I said. He can be really sweet when he wants to be. He said he'd think about it.

Sometimes Douglas has to go away for work. He's usually gone for a couple of days at a time. Although after his last time when Bobby died he didn't go away for quite a while. He said his boss put him on home roster until he was ready to go off again. Well he said the other week that he was going away.

"A bit of a break," he said. Dr. Phil was right after all I thought. Back to the routine. Normal again. Dr Phil said we should try to re connect with each other. I said

" Douglas, Dr. Phil said we should try to reconnect." He said he'd ring when he arrived at his hotel. "It's a start," I said. "I love you," I said but he'd already backed out the drive by then.

Well I was watching the television and they were talking about how children really benefit from a loving relationship. The expert said we should encourage children by showing them how much we care for them.

"Spread the love," the woman said and it got me thinking. Thinking how our Bobby was such a nice little baby. How he was loved. I have a lot of love. The expert said people have a huge capacity to love. It was like she was talking directly to me.

"Deirdre," she said, "You have to love." They say if you give money to their charity then you are spreading the love. So I sent them my credit card number and a donation.

That programme is on every morning really early. Morning Affirmations it's called. They say that if you really want to, you can make a difference. Lots of people do they say. It just takes a special kind of person. Someone who can share, someone who can give.

"Deirdre," the man said, "We want you to make a difference. Stand up Deirdre," he said "And tell me you are going to make a difference." So I did.

"I am going to make a difference," I told him. Shout it he said,

"I AM GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE," I shouted.

I never miss my programme now. And I feel much better for it. Douglas rang and said he would be another week. He seemed quite relieved that he wasn't coming home. I could hear it in his voice. When you've been married for a bit you get to know what the other is thinking just by how they say something. I was right in the middle of the Bill and he knew I would be, I'm sure that's why he rang. I brought the phone into the lounge room and he soon got the hint. I said I'd been watching this and that and then he said he had to go.

"Love you," I said, but he'd hung up by then.

I went out today to the shops and passed the school playground. Those kids are so energetic. They bounce around all over the place. Bobby would have been around school age by now. He would have done well too. I wondered if he would have liked school. Those kids are so full of life. Then I saw one small boy in the corner of the playground. He was sitting all alone. My Bobby wouldn't be like that. I'm sure he would have been right in the thick of things. I stood at the fence for a bit and then the bell went and they all scooted inside. I started to think about those little children. Those less fortunate and I kinda knew I could make a difference.

I make it a point to go past the school every day now. I like to watch those young kids, so full of life. Douglas rang and said he had extra work but he'd be home the week after all going well. He seemed happier, like he'd made a decision. Done some self analysis like Dr. Phil suggested and come up with the right answer. I said

"You sound happy." He said he was. I can make a difference I thought and so I sent another donation. It all goes to a good cause. I'm sure of that.

Last week I went past the school at home time and all the little children were running out of the gate. They skip along the footpath some into waiting cars, others walking, others on bikes. It's just bedlam for the ten minutes as they all file out and then it's just the stragglers. They are the shoe scuffers, the ragtags and usually the latch key kids. I saw that little one who was on his own and he took my offer of a drink of coke. He said he lived on Trelore Street and I said I know where that is. His name is Kevin.

I see Kevin every day. Sometimes he waves. Sometimes he is playing with his mates and doesn't bother. Bobby would have been like that. Mucking about with his friends, too busy to say hi, always on the run. Often I bring a treat for Kevin and his bunch of friends. A teacher saw me handing sweets through the fence and we had a good long chat. She said if I wanted to I could come and be a teachers' aide. They help the kids with reading and such and it's really rewarding. I said I'd have to think about it because I do have a pretty full schedule in the afternoons.

They are having a re run of the soap operas just now and showing them back to back so it's a bit of a rush to get to the shops and school for the afternoon bell and I've taken to driving the car. Walking is slow and as I do my morning exercises with Lindy on channel 4 I don't really need the exercise. I just manage to race around between the channel 6 quiz show and channel 1's magazine show. The children are going on holiday soon. They were telling me how they are excited. Some are going to the seaside, others to their Grans because their mum works and Kevin said his big sister will be keeping an eye on him, although he doubted if she would be a very good babysitter because she has a part time job at the supermarket. He said she sometimes takes him to the shop but most times she lets him watch the tele. Anything he likes. He told me he likes the cartoons in the afternoon.

"I do too," I said.

Douglas is coming back tomorrow. I just know things will be different when he gets home. I can feel it. It's as if all good things come to those who wait. That's what Morning affirmations said on the television. Deirdre he said,

"If you want it, just think it. All good things come to those who wait. Say it Deirdre, and mean it."

"ALL GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT," I said.

I saw Kevin today. He smiled at me as he got into my car. He was drinking his coke and I said

"I know I can make a difference." I remembered Douglas said he didn't care, boy or girl, it didn't matter.

"We have a lot of love," I said to Kevin, and I said

"You can watch as much tele as you want, we have satellite."