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## The Saturation

Sreelekha Chatterjee

Anita waited for the egg to boil in the pan on the gas stove. Tiny bubbles of vapor rose, disappeared—one worry mingled with another like bubbles to create a greater one, a bigger bubble; the surface of water quivered, as if disturbed by budding, painful thoughts.

It had been two months since her 25-year-old daughter Shaily had returned from her husband's house—feeble, traumatized, sparkle lost in eyes.

Anita stared vacantly at the 100-watt bulb—a mindless, blank look, which indicated a brief escape from her absorbing, gloomy thoughts; a sudden respite from her queer apprehensions. It seemed as if her mind, burdened with deep sorrow and resignation, had departed temporarily on being tormented by the surge of worries that swept in through open floodgates of her senses taking advantage of the momentary derangement. For sometime, everything stopped as though she and her surrounding were dead. Only a solemn silence and a sudden emptiness prevailed. The interval of her obscurity didn't last long as the intensity of the light soon blindfolded her. Her eyes blinked, signaling her recovery back to the world of reality. She felt the accustomed twinge of despair as the nagging regret resonated once again—“shouldn't have insisted on this arranged marriage.”

Her eyes fell on the accumulation of bubbles that formed and vanished at the bottom of the pan. But the bubbles could no longer be suppressed; they refused to remain confined to that level, as the heat got dispersed imperceptibly—and uncontrollably—through convection currents from one molecule to another, and they started making their way to the surface, disturbing the quiet of the seemingly still water.

“He looked perfect—a well-established, handsome guy,” she thought, while gas bubbles from sides, bottom of the pan continuously rose to the agitated surface which throbbed with excitement on being overloaded by their unending, systematic intrusion.

She muttered imprecations for her lack of judgment, for not putting in any effort to enquire more about the bridegroom. A feeling of self-reproach, agonized helplessness engulfed her.

The rattling sound of the almost-boiled egg dictated by the tormented water was loud and distinct but unheard like Shaily's occasional complaints during her 3-month married life—“I can't stay with him.”

Shaily's husband was schizophrenic, a lover not in love with the real world, who pushed his wife to join his imagination. She returned forever with a broken skull and a failed marriage.

Noisy bubbles broke at the surface of the pan regularly, trying to jump off. A film of vapor escaped, divorced from the bonding with boiling water which overflowed into the gas burner, extinguishing the flames.

The room filled with a dense haze, accompanied by a smell of unburnt gas fleeing into the atmosphere. The windows were shut, inviting a stifling sensation, and an overpowering desire for a closure.

Anita lighted a matchstick. There were bright, orangish-red flames all over.

Flames ending desires, expectations, responsibilities, guilt...

“What's taking you so long, ma?” A shrill voice broke in all of a sudden. It was a voice that brought back desires, expectations, responsibilities, guilt... and life.

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Sreelekha Chatterjee lives and writes in New Delhi, India. She is a researcher and an editor of scientific/social science books and journals. She has a postgraduate degree in science from Calcutta University, India, and is also a trained singer with a degree in music (Geeta Bharati). Her short stories have been published in Femina, Indian Short Fiction, The Criterion: An International Journal in English, World of Words, Writer's Ezine, The Literary Voyage and Estuary, and have been included in print and online anthologies such as *Chicken Soup for the Indian Soul* series (Westland Ltd, India), *Wisdom of Our Mothers* (Familia Books, USA), *'Hope': An Anthology of Literary Pieces* and *'Chaos': An Anthology of Literary Pieces* (Lituminati, India), *Crumpled Voices: Shades of Suffering* (Gargi Publishers, India). Her short story 'CNG', which she read at the Tall Tales Storytelling show in New Delhi in June 2014, received wide acclaim from audience for its unique narrative style and compelling story.