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The Sensuous Stargazer

Dr. Quleen Kaur Bijral

Part I – The No-Man

I was looking at the stars and the man in the opposite building believed I was staring at him.

Furious over something, he had a strange surreal glint which scorched his eyes. Covered in a robe which behoved a raven, he had shoes unlike a gentleman's. Hair was undone on his scalp while pores on his skin pulsated with sweat and rigour. Archaic symbols crowded his skin into an uneven cluster of blisters and clots. Wherever I could see, his metastasised hands and veins, his deep-pocketed face and his cold head were rigged with black ink.

As a man he didn't stink but his shadow did.

Curiously, it was not a stench of a slaughtered calf but the smell of sacrificial blood all over it. Nothing about him shone in the moon light, otherwise I would have sensed his presence. I would have known he was there. Still despite my obvious ignorance, the no-man thought that I was staring at him! I was standing with my mouth open and my eyes were dreamy like the twinkle in the sky. So lost I was in the gaze of the night and he thought I was looking at him with lascivious pleasure!

The no-man was irately presumptuous to believe I was looking at him!

Part II – The Star-gazer

Immersed in a reverie over the stars, I was a sensuous stargazer of the night. And he, swept by the swan stretch of my neck, thought I was lewdly gazing at him.

Flagrant as it was, I couldn't at first notice his violating presence before me as my fancies were heightened by the vast virgin space of the impenetrable night sky. No matter how intensely he kept fixating himself on me, I was lost in the mnemonic orgasm of the cosmos.

Engrossed hence I was hooked into the night while he perpetually fixated on me.

On the roof, under the starry banner, I had taken a little break from round-the-clock work to stretch my strained neck, shutdown eyes and slaved mind while looking at the stars.

Was then, the time at fault for making me look so indecent, and even vulgar?

The shine of the cosmos which had rubbed off on me, was it guilty?

I didn't wish to upset myself over such insipid doubts; if only the man knew his place in my reverie. If only he could see that even when the stars hit my eyes like pins and needles, I continued to be pleased by them than churning the thought to pleasure him!

Part III – The Seductress

The moment I saw him across the roof, I was naturally offended. Horrified. Even ashamed that instead of blaming him for his profligacy, I electrocuted myself with dishonour!

It was expected from me that I reel in shame for inviting, provoking and even abetting an innocent man to sin.

Damn the beautiful seductress inside of me who had converted that hapless man into an infidel. The treachery of my skin. Its wickedness. Devilry.

Fie the disease of beauty!

Curse the carriers of it!

Seconds hence passed in self-reproach as such diktats and sermons stoned me for my crime on the roof. The no-man was right to stare as I was wrong to look at the stars at night; exposed and alone on the roof. If I had not, the blood of the innocent wouldn't have been spilt. The no-man would have stayed in heaven and the angels wouldn't have needed to wail over him. All could have been avoided if I had not looked at the stars. If only.

Part IV – The Righteous

Minutes lapsed into minutes while the no-man kept wooing as if I was standing on the roof for him. Seeing him hover perpetually, I then bit my tongue to muster anything alive inside of me. Anything which was still living and not deadened due to shame. I mustered the oft-prosecuted will of my mind and frowned at him to look away. Look away! I had to be vindictively rude as the no-man made me feel uninvited in my own reverie. I frowned at him

while pulling together the loose nuts of my spirits. Seeing the snobbish reaction of my egotistical beauty, he acted insulted, slighted and disgraced!

The no-man was startled that I did not like his staring. He was beyond words; flabbergasted. That I could displease him over something so erotically pleasing for both of us. Was he right? In the right? Righteous? Such a thought had me vacillate with delirium; perchance I was wrong to begin him.

Indignant at the show of my displeasure, he then mumbled something in the air. Confused over who was at fault, and not wanting to affront him any further, I drained whatever respect I had for myself and nervously asked him.

“What? What do you want?”

Stirred by the height of my impropriety, he vacillated whether to show it or let it pass. Then after a moment’s delay, as I lay quivering, he questioned me with a stern countenance. It was a question laced with a right to insult me.

“What are you doing? Here, at this hour of the night?”

Righteously, he asked as if I was wasting his time while looking at the stars. He spoke with a shrill pitch while staring at me like the condescending heavens upon hell.

The night was silent, I was there by myself, and had taken an official, legal and moral break to be there. He had no right to own me as his employee or flog me for gratifying myself over the stars. Agitated, I lambasted at him though with a demure brevity.

“What?”

Amusingly piqued at the kitty clawing out of me, he grinned. I was a riot of emotions; susceptible to fear then shame and then chaos. He preened himself seeing the kaleidoscopic neediness of my feelings, and then strangely inquired.

“I thought you were going to fall? Wanted to fall?”

It was even more presumptuous of him. Even violently limitless of him to think I would want to fall. Why would he even think that and say such a thing to me? He was again certain that I had come to fall. He was so consumed by it that it was written all over the grinning loot on his face.

Twisted and turned, I vomited without holding back.

“Yes, yes fall for the stars! Who are you? What do you want?”

As expected, he acted hurt to hear the irritating scorn in my tone. Despicable as the certainty of his emotions was, it rattled whatever sense I would try to make of it. The meaning of his presence, and then the inquisition and allegations over my social tendencies.

Part V – The Scandal

When I was merely looking at the stars, he was certain I wanted to fall. To escape the gnawing pulls and pushes of noise at work, I had merely taken a break which was still allowed. Why was he then turning the calm beauty of the night into a scandal?

The silent sauna of the roof. Its telescopic position aimed at the stars. The levitating ground hanging in the cosmos of the universe.

In a minute I had gained years and years of lost repose while looking at the stars. Life had become too dreary while living for those above me. Below me. Over and under me. That I needed a break. Needed to take a break. To run, flee and escape. I had come to the roof to look at the stars. Earn what was lost; even a penny worth of it all. But that no-man didn't understand it.

Part VI – The Patriarch

Sanctioned by the wise sages of demagogy, the no-man was hard-pressed to misunderstand me. The patriarchs had given him a gun and had taped his finger to the trigger. Even when he wouldn't want to, he was incentivised and bound to use it. Against me.

As I tried to measure the degree of my crime, irked at my silence, the no-man bawled at me.

“Tonight is the night. You wish to fall!”

“For the last time I was looking at the stars!”

If I was nervously troubled, he was confidently vexed and certain that behind the veneer of my innocence, I was up to no good.

Part VII – The Cloister

I had lived in a building which was too high to touch the ground and too low to touch the sky. A place where I could neither achieve the vastness of the sky above nor the gravity of the earth done below. Detached, aloof and barren, the building was cloistered, cut-off and claustrophobic.

The daily waking up one minute before the alarm. The daily shower with lukewarm water. Daily breakfast of corn and milk. The daily breaking of sunlight in the sleeping eyes. The daily whistling to get the taxi. Rush hour. Daily prowling of the peers at office. The incompetent no-woman boss judging and envying the length of the skirt and the brain cells on me. Lunch hour. Tea break. Working late to write the boss's speech. As the no-woman boss was jealously incompetent to do it herself. Then doing her daughter's homework. Then writing her Speech again and doing her financial statements and Speech, Speech and words that she would steal to step on me and promote herself. After such debasing I would then move on to suffer the daily dinner with no appetite. Finally the repetitive three hour sleep with a dry dream about a bland day at work.

It was not the hard work which hurt but the vitiating jealousies, imposed assignments and abusive ambience which had taken the hospitality out of humanity.

Forced to work on the wages of humiliation. Reproach. Bonded servitude. And ransomed life; if I didn't do her Speech, I could lose the job. This and that threat.

How was I then to look at the stars from my building?

The pit of such dreary banality had almost violated the curious spirits of my mind. I needed a break from it into the night. I couldn't let such imposed dreariness infest the childlike ecstasy of looking at the stars. So I chose a new building even if it meant a temporary thrill; an escape that was evanescent like the last gasp before death. I chose it even if it was a make-believe feeling which was beyond the grasp of my hands outstretched. Though temporary, I still chose it as I needed it.

The no-man like the no-woman boss of mine but couldn't understand.

If the no-woman was vindictive that I would overshadow her, the no-man was certain I was a suspect of every sin.

If she as a fellow woman had decided to be a no-woman, he as a fellow companion had chosen to be a no-man.

Part VIII- The Hostage

The devil in the workplace and the deep blue sea in the streets. Because of them I was stuck as a hostage in my own reverie. All I wanted was to look at the stars, and the no-man thought I was looking at him. That I wanted to fall. Fall from grace.

“Why? Why? You wish to fall?” Impertinent to judge me, he roared at me with vigour.

Deterred, I pitifully tried to reason.

“At the stars. That was all I wanted. To come onto this roof and gaze.”

“Fall! Fall! Why Fall?”

Presumptuous, he wouldn't let it go. Wouldn't let me go. The man had cornered me with the soreness of his allegations. I needed a break, and he made me feel like a criminal. Killer. Murderer of every life on earth! When I needed to escape some parts of its dreariness, he thought I wanted to fall! End it all in one fell swoop!

Part IX – The Sinner

“Why are you after me? This is not right! Leave me alone!”

Tears had begun to inundate my nostrils that my voice broke while sniffing like a puppy. And that further provoked him to wrench the heart out of me.

“Sinner! That is what you are! Admit! Confess! Do penance! What stars? You want to fall!”

He became violent. Egregiously insidious. More violent. I never wanted to give up on life. The thought of it was repulsive, unfounded and it never occurred to me. The building where I used to live before was only dreary. The office was also dreary, the people too were dreary. The no-woman even when a vulture was only dreary. I wouldn't have fallen for them. Never. The no-man's words but were too provocative. Like an itch. Persuasive. Convincing.

I didn't want to fall but the more I heard him, I damn well wanted to! Was that his strategy all along? Was it the same with the no-woman? That I fall? Fail? Falter? Forever?

It was all so surreally chaotic to make any sense of.

Part X – The Puppet

So I jumped across. It was unexpected. It was swift. Certain. I jumped across. I jumped while heaving a long whiff of air. In a hurried motion of eloquence, I jumped not to fall, but to land on the building where the no-man stood; his side of the world. The world of the no-man and the no-woman.

He but didn't flinch as was expected from his cold stature. But he was certainly stirred that I had it in me. To confront him. Meet him. Scare him. He was moved. Sad? Offended? Beaten? It was not clear, but he was.

In a matter of five to six seconds, we then stood face to face. Tired of his cold persona, I looked into his eyes. To know him beyond his bloody stench.

He had a puppet in his mind. A puppet in his heart. The strings but were not in his hands. Seeing thus, I embraced him in pity. I pitied him. Even when he didn't embrace me back, I still clutched him with a forgiving heartbeat.

He didn't browbeat me anymore as if defeated. I didn't beg anymore, as if victorious.

While holding him, I went back to looking at the stars. For as long as the sun didn't scare away the twinkles of the night sky, I kept rejoicing in my evanescent win and his evanescent defeat.

The no-man kept still for a while and then walked across to some other building. To stalk and ambush some other sensuous stargazer hooked into the night.

He left to find the others. I left him and the no-woman to stargaze. Again.

About the Author:

Dr. Quleen Kaur Bijral is a writer, journalist, musician and an avid lawn tennis player. She works at The Logical Indian, as a bureau chief (J&K) to unearth the ignored stories of

the region and capture the important issues of the world at large. She also is a freelance columnist at Daily Excelsior and The Greater Kashmir.

Recently she had her novel titled “The Witch Some Witch” published by Partridge India, a Penguin company. As a musician, she is looking ahead to make a music album of her ghazal renditions of Iqbal,

Ghalib, Meer, Dehlvi and Faiz’s acclaimed Urdu poetry. Academically, Quleen clinched First Position in her Masters, and lately was conferred Ph.D. degree for her research work on the works of Mahasweta Devi, who is a formidable voice of the subalterns in India and abroad.