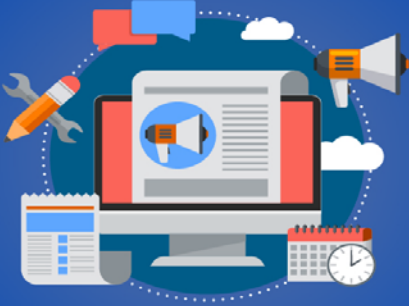


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Homework

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Mudit runs – donning a child's nonchalant giggle – towards the familiar metallic sapphire coloured moped. His mother stands in front of the moped, welcomingly, watching his 7-year old's priceless run and a bottle – bigger than life – dangling from his neck, oscillating.

"Hello Mumma", says Mudit looking up at his mother's sunglasses smiling face with his big brown eyes.

"Hello puttar, how was school? You look as happy as everyday."

Both perch up on the moped, first Mumma, then Mudit.

"Short Haired Librarian gave me another book today as I returned the last one. This one is big with Big Words.", explains Mudit, hugging Mumma's waist as they drive home.

"Aha! Why do you read so much? Do your friends read too?", asks Mumma loud enough for Mudit to hear.

"Naaah. All my friends watch cartoons on TV. Books are my TV because Papa doesn't get cable connection."

Silence ensues except for the sound of air molecules waking to motion by the mother-son duo on moped.

Once home, Mudit hastily pulls out his new book 'STORIES' by Anton Chekhov, "Miss said it's a Big Child's book, so I must write all the Big Words as Homework"

"Good then. First finish your regular homework or you know what Papa does."

Silence again. Word 'Papa' seems to precede a high tide of silence.

Mumma changes to old clothes and starts cleaning the house. Mumma is a teacher so she leaves in the morning and Papa does not let her have a maid. So, the job and household are Mumma's responsibility.

In the evening, Mudit begins with his 'STORIES'. He reads and finds it very bland. No Big Words. Not a lot, as anticipated. 'Simple short stories', he thought to himself. He keeps reading and taking his Big Words Homework to the Short Haired Librarian.

"You have to try to imagine Bigger if you want to find the Big Words. They are not written. They are in the miniscule spaces between the written.", Miss says sensing the despondent look on Mudit after 3 days of seeing him like this, hoping he'd figure out Big Things. But needed a nudge.

Today, when he reaches home, he gets down at reading the book from page 1, trying to figure out the Whiteness between the Blackness of words. But only met Blankness from Fulness.

"Papa!", calls Mumma from the kitchen, doing dishes and Mudit relegates himself to homework.

In the evening, he begins anew from the Unread STORY 'The Death of a Clerk'.

'What an odd and macabre title', he thought but then again, this is a Big Child's Book, with not so many Big Words in written but hidden in Small White spaces.

He began, imagining Bigger.

'Oh, what is he feeling?'

'But, why would he do that?'

'No.'

He could only read one. Write one word 'Malice'.

That night, like every other night, Papa returns after Mudit has gone to bed. Like every other night, he pretends to be asleep while Papa calls Mumma by filthy names, abuses her, beats her, sometimes with a belt, rapes her at other times. Mudit thinks this is what all parents do when it's dark. In the morning, everything's normal, everyone's smiling and going to school.

Except tonight, he understood Malice. Malice. Of all things. He gets on his feet and walks to his study table warily, in the dark and uncomfortably normalized sounds. He switches on the table lamp and the light inundates its vicinity. Sounds cease. Mudit immediately feels the heaviness of a pair of Malicious eyes and a pair of Helpless eyes on him. Takes out his Homework copy and lands immediately on the page written Malice over it. 'Intention to harm or deprive in an illegal or immoral way. Desire to take pleasure in another's misfortune.', was written below it. Frantically

rummaging for the eraser, the heaviness grew over the 7-year-old. He understood Frenzy then. In Whiteness. In Blankness. Having found the eraser, he erased the meaning. A pair of Footsteps grow near him.

"What are you doing?", asks a very certain Papa.

'Homework', says a quick-witted Mudit, with a trembling voice.

"Let me see", says Papa as 'Papa', Mudit writes in the resurrected Whiteness.

Summoning courage to turn around to see un-sunglasses face of Mumma, without smiles and with wretchedness, Mudit does see. See the blandness of STORIES. Papa hovers over the Homework. Too long for two words, he stays. New Truths. Big Words.

Papa switches off the lamp, giving the Uncomfortable Dark its space, "Go to bed."

Bio-Note:

Abhinandan Nandrajog is B.Pharm student at University Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He believes in multidimensional exploration of science through literature and tries to write for manifesting a better world. By addressing the veiled yet omniscient vices of today's world, he audaciously attacks the glorifyingly dappled system, so the newer architecture for tomorrow can be built, upon kindness, empathy and excellence. His association with societies in locale, he guides and leads lesser privileged kids to have a vision by teaching them and celebrating with them their little joys and successes.