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A Table for Two

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The grey sky rumbled along with the rusted engine of the pickup truck parked in front of the shed. The plain wardrobe found its way heavily into the vehicle supported by four people with little strength. Their grunts synchronised with the occasional thunder. The swirling wind picked up dust along its course and rattled the iron bucket hung on the rails of the door grill.

As the rain descended, sheep bleated in unison from the right corner, inside the barbed fence of the farm area that stood as a miniscule part of the outstretched meadow.

“Alex! Take an umbrella! Will you!” Sarah shouted while swinging her kitchen apron in aggression.

Alex sprinted into the cacophony of the sheep orchestra, ignoring his mother completely.

Rain pelted the shallow earth as it hissed like a venomous snake. Moist air echoed from behind the hills, probably from the city. It might be raining incessantly there. He must have forgotten his umbrella as usual, running in the rain, with the newspaper bundles in one hand while his other hand must be gripping his shabby hat. I have assured myself of his presence in the city countless times over the burning truth of his absence all these years.

“Dad, what are you thinking?” Alex walked in holding Nick, his beloved ccat

“Its nothing kid.” I brushed off the thoughts along with any possible conversations that may arise out of it.

“Come on Dad! I have seen you staring at the hills with such heavy eyes as long as I can remember.” Alex took a chair beside me piqued up with interest in the subject.

“You are drenched, Alex. If you catch a cold again, your mother would definitely discard you in the woods.” I tried to redirect the lead of the conversation only to find Alex shrugging his shoulders as if he never took his mother’s warnings seriously.

“Do you think your friend is still alive?” I studied his face. It was serious with no particular feeling embedded on it.

“You hope for the best for your friend, don’t you?” I sighed with heaviness.

“Don’t dwell too much on what I have asked, Dad. I was just curious.” I might have sounded offended. He abruptly ended our conversation, leaving me alone with my wandering thoughts.

The twenty year old table stares at me adamantly, demanding its owner. The owner is a closed chapter to the outside world. He might have ceased to exist in the documents of the law.

We were more like brothers than friends. His yearning towards letters and reading landed him in the city’s newspaper agency which he enthusiastically cherished. He loved travelling which made him take multiple rides from our village to the city weekly. He was a happy jovial living laughter that loitered around the village.

“You are born to be a crafter of amusing things, John.” He declared while I struggled with the tools on the bark of an Oakwood.

“Why do you exaggerate things Mark?” I questioned him with disbelief.

“Can’t you see that I am struggling to keep the occupation of my ancestors alive?” I raised my head only to meet his grin.

“You have been smiling a lot lately Mark and I smell this has to do something with your city life.” I twisted my eyebrows looking at him keenly.

“You’ll know it soon brother. Why are you in such a hurry to find it out. It’s not like I am running away.” He made a poker face which I instantly ignored.

My strained inner palm traced the table as I dusted off its surface carefully. This has become my routine ever since he went missing. It has been crafted according to his wish. It was meant to decorate his living room where he would cherish his food with his family, with his beloved. It was to be handed over to him specially and ceremonially, as demanded by him, on his wedding day which he anticipated with much anxiety and excitement. Still the wooden table lies here as a memorial haunting me each and every day with his memories.

He went missing twenty years ago on a rainy day. It was raining incessantly for days and no news of him reached my ears since then from the city. We hoped it was the rain that cut off all the information from the city during the heavy downpour. Whenever I visit his house, I am conscious of their demeanor. I wonder if they believe that I have not searched for him with earnestness. I doubt myself on certain nights waking up with soreness in all the corners of my heart.

“I am in love Mark”, he announced as a love struck man with a dramatic pace, a day before he went missing. He was dramatic in everything he did.

“I guessed so.” I smiled at him with an obvious face.

“Don’t ask me all the details now Mark. I will reveal it in an extraordinary manner to surprise you.” His face showed all the excitement of a youth madly in love.

“I didn’t expect you to reveal everything with out being dramatic and not to mention I don’t like surprises. Well, does the city girl be willing to marry a village boy?” I looked at him with apprehension.

“You don’t know her John... as much as I do. She loves me too. Tomorrow I will leave for the city and the next time we meet, I will be talking with you about my marriage with her.” He assured me with all the confidence he had.

“Fine! Do mention her name and whereabouts next time. I can’t believe that I am your best friend because of your habit of keeping surprises and sudden revelations.” I said annoyingly, only to see him laughing.

“Come on John! I never had any secrets that I didn’t share with you. In the end, you are my gatekeeper of secrets.” He liked to reveal everything in the end, to excite me. He was in love for a few months. He wanted to have it turned into a marriage as soon as possible. He was sure of his relationship. I keep blaming myself for not asking her name because if I had insisted or pestered him on that day, he would have mentioned it. I would have received a lead to find him with her address or name. All I could mention the police was that he was in love with a woman whom I, his best friend since birth doesn’t know.

“I can’t remain alive if she is not in my life John.” He said abruptly. I noticed an unusual stillness his life. I scrutinized his face to find traces of usual calmness only to find a frightening despair of a man who cannot be united with his love.

“What do you want to have as your wedding gift, Mister.” I tried to divert his attention from the disturbing thoughts.

“I want a table for two to cherish my food with her.” He was grinning at me.

“Oh! How selfish of you to have a table for two! I will make a large table for all of us including me!” I made a serious face to show my determination.

“You have such a short time, John. Begin the work as soon as possible. I can’t delay my wedding because of your table”.

“You have a large family here Mark...Do not forget that...ever...” Those were the words I uttered to him for the last time I saw him or otherwise our village saw him. He didn’t reach the newspaper agency that day. I hesitated when I asked the police if any missing report of a woman in her twenties was filed. They were reluctant to check but despite desperate pleadings from his parents, they searched and found none. I spent days wandering the streets of the city, its outskirts to see him alive once again. I couldn’t envisage him forsake his life for an unrequited love. I earnestly believe that he has eloped with her somewhere only to live blissfully.

It is heavily raining now. Whenever it rains, I hope he would come home with his family or perhaps, whenever it rains he would be having a cup of coffee with his wife at a table for two. I have cherished this wish in my heart for a very period of time.