



The Text

An International Peer Reviewed Online Journal of Language, Literature and
Critical Theory
ISSN:2581-9526

A Lonely House... Windows Ache

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“So I wait for you like a lonely house
Till you see me again and live in me
Till then my windows ache”

-Pablo Neruda

He came yesterday. Like every other day he said he is occupied but yet he will make time. The last time they spent a day together they wandered from one end of the city to the other. In the morning they were aimlessly wandering telling each other forgotten histories of nooks and corners bathing in sunlight, talking to strangers smacking lips as they tasted the street delights as they hopped on and off the buses. He appeared to be the most carefree and kindest person on planet as he conversed with the elderly and children on streets. At noon they landed up at his home to check on his ailing mother. She waited in the drawing room as he went in to administer her medication, catching bits and parts of the conversation he was having with the mother and her nurse, she wondered, if he the same person she walked into this home with or was this another man? His voice was stern and he spoke with long pregnant pauses. He came out a while later and told her that they had to meet some colleagues in an elite club nearby.



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As they sat down on the neatly arranged dining table and waited for others his demeanor changed yet again, neither he was the happy go lucky boy with whom she spent the morning with, nor was he the strict and concerned man of the noon. He wore the expression of smirk and with an overbearing dismissive voice he countered all small talk on the dinner table. He metamorphosed into a total stranger for the second time that day. Today when he called she guessed he was writing, thinking, “being” what he is all the time: different person at different times of the day like the waning and the waxing of moon.

He said, he was thinking now that he needed a break. And he thought of her; the punishment of silence he proclaimed on her. That was four days back. He decided to never tell her that he hated her or being a spoil-sport, a cold blooded reptile in the shoddy light of the prying moon under the canopy of trees. He was surprised to see her fangs unwarned, poisonous and dark. If he could ask her may be she would have told him how its not really her fault. She turns into a mirror at times, inadvertently, and reflects her surroundings. Soulless and inert, just a reflector, like the moon.

But perhaps, he voted in his mind for “Silence is golden”. Typed official looking words with pretentious purposefulness. Threw them on her phone screen in the guise of twinkling messages. Just to make a point he sent it twice.

Later on, like he always does, he will blame the poor poor network for unintended interruptions and unemphasised repetitions.

One of the best lesson he ever taught her was the silent. short, persuasive lectures on the resounding power of Silence. Silence, the most potent tool when we work with persons outside ourselves; a weapon that is sharp and more effective than any anti-dote ever discovered in this whole wide world. The key to keep our crazy talking selves, to our-selves and not talk, their talk, in public. Zip up and add the dash of “performance”. “Tada! Composed. Presenting a the most presentable man white-collared man in front of the world. Passive aggression does not really count in the world of active aggressions?



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As she watered the plants in her balcony she pictured herself flipping open the flap of her phone to check greedily for missed updates but she decided to wait for the lifeless device to make some noise. Like always, he never apologized when he called, but what he said to restart dialogue she does not remember now.

He said he will open a window when he finds time and jump quickly from his timeline to hers. He whispered “We should stand together and erase all traces of our temporal over-lappings. Somebody must be watching all the time”.

“How can I tell you how many ghosts I see. Your *Time* is watching us too, oh my lovely lovely fool”

“I am so glad you never see the bigger picture. Always fretting and fussing in bad-faith”, she thought, but swallowed the words before they were born in this world for she knew that they would sting him again.

“Will he keep jumping in his own time for me? Do I never get to return the favour”, she pondered with a hint of disappointment in her tone and mumbled a feeble “yes” into the mobile microphone, to the voice speaking, from beyond. That’s how things are when the masculine governs, she thought. The monotony of order rules over the beauty of uncertainty embedded in chaos.

“Will he be lost forever if this “connecting device” is lost?” “What will I do then?” she mused longing for him the nth time that day.

Ironically, of all the things she hated the most, it had to be a bloody electronic gadget that had to be now pasted to her body. She hated the sweaty feeling it left in her hands and kept it away, every now and then despite her hearts warnings. Rubbing the beady wet hands on her saree’s *pallu* she could not help but wonder how dear this aberrant dampness would be, if only, it had his scent. The beads of pearls born on the coarse nakedness of her palms were born to slither into the slippery icy brown hues of his body. She disconnected with care to jump to the *raag* playing in her earphones. After his unceremonious auditory interruption, the sonorous song sounded like a cheap imitation of a crony.

Closing her eyes, in a meditative trance she tries to recall his face. Her feet mechanically tread along the long empty verandah of the place she contributed her labour unquestioningly five



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hours, five days a week. Consuming the flickering light, corners shimmering in darkness at regular intervals she thinks of the face that has “launched a thousand ships” in the repetitive rhetorical certainties of her life. It was just yesterday perhaps it appeared like a god with unforgettable radiance, every feature complementing the beauty of the other. Such clarity, such majesty, such power and today its just a blank canvas. She tried thinking hard this time and recalled the trick of seeing him in the eyes of her imagination. The first step is to take a step back. Close your windows and remember that his was an easy face to remember, if you remember, that it never is to begin with. You need to set you eyes in the cast of a portrait painter and set a perspective for your vision. Please note, this subject has a deceptive face. I mean his face is as misleading as his actions could be. Judgments aside, its all about developing ways of seeing. Perspective. Change your perspective, move a bit and you see a new face emerge from a new angle you make with his dubious mask that she calls his face. Like him his beauty is slippery forever yearning to be touched but never yielding to the tangible and to the definiteness of the sensory. Like a purse’s drawstring that is stretched to close its open mouth shut, she desperately bunches up and contain her recreations in her mind’s eye, desperately trying to lock them inside her forever. Only these recreations and memories were hers, everything else, she believed, and he did, were star dust and ashes, lost in the sands of eternity.

Last time they happened to meet him at a friend’s wedding and the probability of them befriending each other was as impossible as two needles meeting in a haystack. At the wedding dinner too their introductions were the shortest. Seated at the farthest end of the table they didn’t even pay attention to each other and when everyone bid adieu, hugged, kissed, exchanged final niceties. Not even once they looked to see the other. They were there on the same table like the bottle of sauce carefully arranged with the spoon stand and tissue holder. Placed together for certain reasons and necessities but nothing really to do with the nearest distant neighbour.

He was just like any other man named M, somber looking, in a blue shirt with beard and moustache, wearing dark rimmed spectacles. And she was just any other woman named W who wore a white dress with pink flowers and seemed to be peculiarly happy for no reason. She



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entered with the man who wanted to be her husband, WH, tall, proud nose, dark and handsome. The mostly silent WH had a strange edge of sharpness in his demeanor.

They looked like the most perfect couple. WH, in an all white *kurta*, sparkling, dripping of old world elegance and charm. His choice of traditional men's sandals with brown straps conspired well with his look. She wore a deep v-necked pleated sleeveless white dress with small, occasional yet well spaced out block prints of dull pink bunches of flowers with lapis blue weeds tying them together. She was the first to walk in from the big-black door and he floated in with the mystrey of her essence silently behind her. Like him, his clothes, the whiteness of his *kurta* nurtured her modern looking dress with the source of her radiance, flowers and bloom in the land of spring's reign. None could guess but like Emily D said "there is no first or last in forever" he was her "Centre, there, all the time". No him, without her, and no her, without him yet together they were an oxymoron. Together they never appeared so inevitable, but they in all naturally seamlessly entangled into one for as far back they could go back.

M told her, many days after they became friends, that he could not forget the light pink lipstick and the black *bindi* she appeared in when they met for the first time. He said together, they were, oddly even. When she heard him say that she couldn't help thinking of Donne's *The Good Morrow*. He and she, like two hemispheres rolled together in perfect radiance occasionally sprinkled with the pale English colours of spring flowers. No casual onlooker could tell that the gaps between her fingers was designed for his, together they were like the hand and glove. Destined to fight only to again fall in love. Two odd items seamlessly merging together to make something glorious and new away from the prying eyes of the world.

Humans forget, may lose track, err but destiny never goes wrong. It unrolls the mysteries of life and universe at the most unexpected yet most opportune moments of life. And then it so happened that right before leaving M's singing talents were announced by his friend, F, who was incidentally staying at WH's house that weekend. It all happened so quickly, sheer curiosity instigated W to invite him home for a singing session. His date diary was full but he said he could squeeze us in that evening if everyone was game.



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For them the only truth was how they felt about each other those days. Everything else that was so monumentally important till yesterday faded like a much loved painting carelessly forgotten in sun and rain. Blushing like a teenager she confessed to a friend, A, how M's singing session transformed everything. As he hummed the popular *ghazal* "When I saw you, the thought came to me, my life was basking in afternoon sun till you offered respite with your soothing shadow..." their gaze met each others. Those moments were magical. It was as if the musical voice broke the spacetime continuum and they were transported to the moon beams caressed winter evening they first met. She came out of her hostel room to have tea with her friends to beat the October chill and to cherish the sweet smell of Saptaparini flowers while she fished for some ideas in her head for the term paper. Amber lights cut through the fog illuminating the cemented bench partially hidden by the shadows cast by bouganvilla shrubs where they sat. Their chitter chatter was coated by the rhythms of the same *ghazal*, as the group sitting next to them was chorusing on it while they were trying to figure someone who could teach her table tennis. A sharp featured face neatly tucked in a brown *chadar* emerged from the shadows and uttered "Assalam Waliqum". Her friend responded with a customary greeting in response and suddenly screamed with excitement: "Here ends the search for TT teacher!" and invited him to join in. He was nothing like them. They were a bunch of chaos makers and he was ever calm, composed and soothing like the shadow in the afternoon sun of the song or the soothing moon beams of a winter evening. She never ended up mastering table tennis but they nevertheless ended up spending time together reading, watching movies, playing, walking, appreciating each others strengths and flaws... falling in love.

Music seemed to have opened the closed, firmly locked shut gates of her safe heaven. She confessed that since that fateful unplanned day, whenever she thinks of him, excitement starts tingling the insides of her body and the brain has zillions of mini orgasms, eruptions like a volcano. They called it "nature-conituo-gasms" and laughed about it, like children, all afternoon. M came by as promised, and, in the most unexpected manner left monumental quantities of the most melodious notes in the place called home. "Music", "the food of love" played on.



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They sat side by side watching the distance that time has brought about between them as they made small talk with their guests.

For the first of many moments they felt like guests to each other, who over stayed their short visit in each others life. What could have been one short ecstatic encounter has now become a long tiring journey. The soulful lull cast them into the notes of the song, different yet set side by side. But weren't they strung together to make meaning? At least that's what the world believed. With time sweeter became the distance they had to traverse, to be together, that a moment before, seemed, distant and long.

There was a time when they just couldn't be with people if they were together. Their unruly hands meandering in the valleys and hills of their bodies made them keep, mostly to themselves. But now, the chill in the air hinted at the coldness that has crept into their bodies and routines.

He looked tired and she, hopeless and distant. Yet every note reminded them of the joyful mystrey two art-less yet, skilled lovers, could explore through the rhythms of their togetherness. New cartographies etched on known old worlds, a seamless intermingling of their beats of rock and roll.

He remembered:

he could never hold her
for his hands were her fuel,
the *eendhan* that would
incinerate her for once and forever.

If he ever dared to touch her
she would disappear in a flicker
consumed by the thousand flames
of their tumultuous desire.

She too knew on him,
she could never abut
For he once warned,



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one sunny morn
How he would for forever escape
her invisible hands grasp
vanish into thin air like a wasp
becoming immortal if their bodies
Were together ever cast.

Everyday they escape each other
But find interminable
reasons to connect,
Like the needle and the hour
Distant yet together hour after hour.
He the unconquerable Sea
and she the shore?
Playing games of tug and war
Never winning, never to conquer?
Rolling salty waters dark and far
Promontory watches the banks' bar
Under the watchful guidance
of ageless stars.
Destined to be together
But cursed by Gods:
To caress yet never hold,
see but never behold
Remembering love: when retold?
As they bid others farewell she felt his shoulder brush against her skin rekindling the possibility
of finding the fire that she so yearned for, yet lost. Together, they closed the door of their home,
and then, they shut the windows too.
Sometimes interruptions are necessary for regenerations.