

## Sisterhood

**Aparna Vincent**  
An Independent Researcher  
Ernakulam, Kerala

We sat cross-legged on the balcony,  
And stared into each other's eyes,  
And sometimes –  
To the horizon.  
Creepers hung low from the roof beam,  
And touched her straight brown hair.

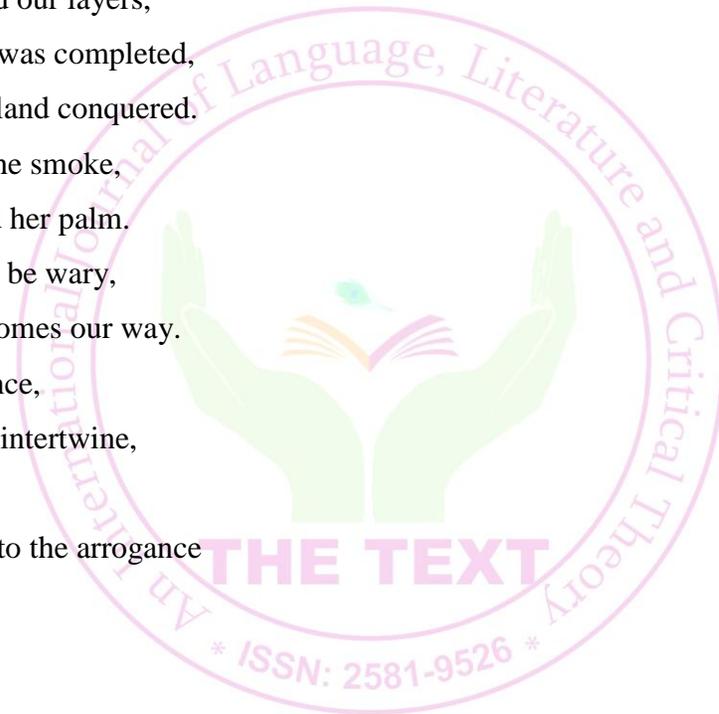
Wisps of smoke from her cigarette,  
Forged a screen between us –  
Letting us be safe,  
From each other's direct gaze.

Pitiful eyes –  
That's what we dreaded the most –  
Both of us—She, who drank wine and left –  
Lipstick stain on the glass,  
And me,  
who couldn't live without tea

We told each other stories –  
Of men in our lives,  
And what they had done to us.  
When it comes to men –  
Parallels are plenty.  
We both knew them,  
Their urge to strip us of our layers,



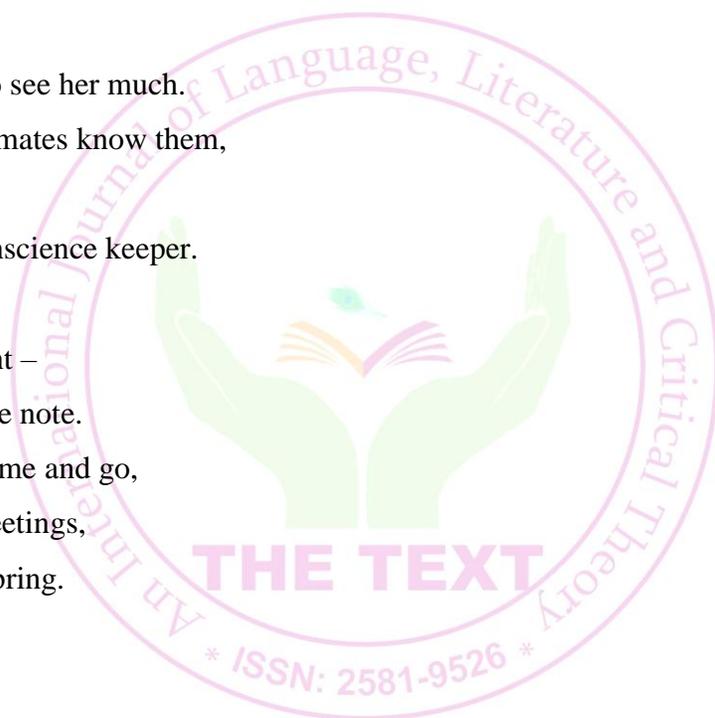
The unquenchable thirst to stare -  
At our exposed selves,  
Their impatience,  
To examine –  
Every nook and cranny –  
Of our bodies and souls,  
Only to abandon us –  
To shame and insanity.  
In getting us to shed our layers,  
Another adventure was completed,  
Another mystery island conquered.  
I reached through the smoke,  
And gently touched her palm.  
We have reasons to be wary,  
Of any touch that comes our way.  
Yet, we took a chance,  
And let our fingers intertwine,  
In solidarity.  
There's something to the arrogance  
Of conqueror men,  
It is always,  
And always,  
A prelude to sisterhood.



## Friendship

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Mother has friends,  
That the world knows nothing of.  
She hides them away,  
From her father,  
Who loves her like a precious pearl,  
And my father,  
Who doesn't care to see her much.  
Neither her church-mates know them,  
Nor the priest –  
Supposedly, her conscience keeper.  
They're too tiny,  
Perhaps insignificant –  
For the world to take note.  
I have seen them come and go,  
Seen their secret meetings,  
Privilege of an offspring.  
I know the cat,  
who waltzes in,  
After father leaves home every morning,  
He is offered remains of fish for his belly,  
And he rubs against mother's ankles,  
As if to say "all is well."  
There are others,  
Less performative about affection,  
Crows who like to shower,  
In the water pool under the nutmeg tree,  
Mother lets the water run into the yard,



A little more than needed always.  
There are also squirrels –  
Up the coconut tree,  
Who steal my socks for their nest,  
Without any shame.  
They don't get reprimanded,  
Not even when they gnaw –  
At coconuts – kept out to dry.  
Like how the parakeets –  
Who steal our rose apples,  
Don't get told off.  
And the coucal's claim to scam berries,  
Is accepted without negotiation.  
There is the drongo –  
She likes to tease the cat,  
And the wagtail,  
Who likes to use –  
The clothes line as footrest.  
They're all let loose,  
That's until sunset –  
When father makes his return,  
And his voice thunders,  
Through our beings like a quake,  
Which destroys - any order we knew before.  
Everyone retreats,  
Mother is left alone to face the noise.  
She told me she thrives,  
Because of her little friends –  
Who don't pry or prod,  
Who don't advise or insist.



They offer her a world,  
Without violence and accusations,  
Without cruelty and betrayal,  
They speak in silent trust,  
And gentle gratitude.  
They come and they go,  
Without a point to prove.



## Until Tomorrow

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You have to give me,  
Until tomorrow,  
To nurse my broken heart,  
Wallow in self pity and hurt,  
Weep into sheets and pillows,  
Also,  
To make excuses for betrayal,  
Dream a lie about returns and kisses,  
Pretend like I am at the end.  
Tomorrow,  
I shall look into the mirror,  
Adorn my eyes with kohl,  
Paint my lips red.  
And,  
I shall end the mourning,  
Emerge unscathed by loss,  
Let life breathe into me again.  
Until tomorrow,  
Let me be broken,  
Let me gasp without help,  
Let me be the foolish wife –  
Once married –  
to a lie about love.

