

The Flight

Rajesh Kumar

Some of the most engrossing tales are those concerning men and women who have gone over the brink and are now under care in some mental asylum. Their pasts and sufferings reveal the excesses mankind can succumb to, the torture of a woman by her in-laws, a student unable to bear the pressure of the examination system, a perfectly healthy man caught in the crushing vices of loneliness, a billionaire faced with bankruptcy - all these are fine raw material for aspiring and established writers but it is rare indeed to find the confessions of a killer who has overvaulted the rubric of both sanity and art.

The account that follows is a verbatim copy of the scribbling of such an inmate in the Hazaribag Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Research Facility; he was one of the most celebrated lithoderm artists in the last decade of the 20th century. The doctor, who was treating him, told me that Asim Dass had tried to murder his wife because he was sexually incompetent while with a woman but took obsessive recourse to self-eroticism when alone. He plotted to put his wife in the car with the brake fluid removed to kill her but the diabolic plan had rebounded upon him. The girl managed to escape from the expensive coupe somehow as it fell down a cliff near a famous hotel at a mountain resort but the artist himself was trapped in it. Miraculously, his life was saved too but his mental balance was found gone when the police took him out of the smashed vehicle. — Author

Whisk this away! A samovar, a dash of dahlias, some sesame seeds, and the xylem of dreams - if one could really call it art. Art of the millennium, universally acclaimed, stolen brazenly for glossy coffee-table magazines. A girl with pear-shaped breasts arching backwards in a travesty of passion, the matrix overdone in satiny, silky hues of a jasmine evening in the hills. So much aesthetics! In one skimpy hotel perched eagerly on an antediluvian slip of windrow earth.

“This particular lithoderm is a definiteness of the intuitional pirouette, defined crustily by the fluid stirrings of a bestial tendril. Asim Dass has touched unexplored frontiers in his latest artifact.”

All the shit of a lizard spreads in double tone on the frontispiece of *Playboy*. A pantheistic rejection of cultural lies!

I am all wet with perspiration. My sweaty indentations adorn the creases of the beige bed sheet embalmed in the incandescent hotel room. My wife hums genetic themes of water in the bath.

How I hate her! Except in those gummy rollicks when skin is welded to skin, the eye to the fair pair of breasts swishing just above the reach of the mouth, and when you try to sup the nipple, you miss the rhythm. You ache, supplant a vision. And then the uncontrolled eruption, stillborn, the mock-thrusts, the pantomime. But the face above rejects my impatient virility. Oh, the look! The look!

So, now I ride my phantom-girls on lonely beds while the wife disports erotically in the steaming Jacuzzi. Streaks of prurience imprisoned in the linen. The insensate tumble. She will emerge, wet on the outside only, look at my supine substance and explore her physical nastiness in the mirrored oracle.

The morning writhes again. A dry excuse of a day refusing to materialize, the wind battling in the quartz recesses of the growling mountains. I wish, oh, how I wish the siren would leave me alone in the translucent scroll of clouds unfurling on the double peaks of the Vindhya! Tonight, I shall plot. The whole day too. But only if she goes away. For the day, the morning, even for an hour. I shall sharpen my talons of hate, heat the brands of disgust, blood-red, and oil the thumb-screw of my vengeance. Then I will do her in! Slash her cheeks, pierce her throat, stab wounds in her mounds of flesh! And I will carve one word on her marble thighs each - Hex! Hex!

The tip of her pert nose glows from the heat of her bosom. Diamonds on her fingers, sapphires in her neck. How innocent the seductress looks! And I, how gullible! My groins, so trusting! Vixen, depart! Go! Vanish!

Her stiletto heels have left tiny, deep depressions on the Bukhara rug. The curtains have bred a soft cube of florescence in the suite. Today I shall create my greatest masterpiece. Persevere O nerve, thud not my heart! Let the mortise click; let emptiness prevail!

But where shall I find the ammunition for my harangue of gore? Here, in this dusky cobweb of condemnation, I can't think altruistically, not about the cicadas hovering curious over suppurating whites of the bones. Out there, where the rains spatter the yews, and the birds burnish the throes of insecticidal verve with a fatal gleam in their eyes, I would strut for a decaying hour and

pour out my complaints of quicksilver lust to the rock I have marked for the terminal sacrifice. It juts out just beyond the driveway, a promenade hewn out of a monolithic, primeval upthrust. One push upon the throttle, a premeditated tardiness of brakes, a little bound through the clanging hatch, a surreptitious glance of confirmation is all that is required of the quietus of the coital ineptitude. Forever! Forever!

The brush is dry, ready for a bonfire. A stylus of pebbles should mark my tryst with motional destruction. No, I shall not reveal my plan yet, not to the officious conscience. The art of self-deprecation must be perfected before the crystal pickaxe of loathe is swung. There is a horde of revellers shinnying up the circular staircase to the observatory beyond the gazebo. Hark! a couple of them are holding binoculars to their eyes. Let me wait, O, though I can't! Let the azure of the sky be guzzled by restorative darkness. Blast the sun! Pare off its luminous shards! Confound all creatures of light! I shall return to my synthetic cell, to grind my teeth of venom on the dregs of remembered beauty. Ah, the balm of private fornication!

The key to the suite, insert and turn, like a kris. Is she there yet? No, her bazaar hours are to her more sacrosanct than the nuptial gratification of greedy love. She, the serpent of sustained passion, unwilling to match my libidinous intelligence, why did I marry her? Why not her nubile sister, so fresh, like the dew on a deer's brow, like the first snow on callow pine crests, uninitiated, undemanding, all giving, virtuous! But I had to be seduced by flaming beauty, more guileful than this awarded twig of rapine creativity, haloed and catalogued - the epitome of lithodermic art. Even the bellboys know me and whisper inane innuendos when I turn to retrieve the bills and tip them. The guests in the lobby, swooning over my median métier, paw all over me to divine my flair. I don't let them touch my palms though. Gloves on the hands, arrogance on demeanour. I have ordered the maids too out of the suite lest they should interfere with my pulsating torrents of gusty love. She is away, good, now I shall make love to myself and impregnate my pragnanz.

The door chime it is, thawing my frozen tornado of retribution. My sweat-soaked limbs stir, my ears hum, pinpoint of light pre-empt my efforts to stand. The resolve, ah, the resolve for absolute must retain my sovereign hour. She is there now, getting in the other bed, tempting in a negligee; will she also play with herself while I lie defenseless, mothballed, oblivious to her continual moistnesses? Oh, to walk towards her is a regimen of weakening will. There she glistens, her eyes, amethysts; her breath, the rose heavy waft; her lips, pink ambrosia!

No, speak not, just listen my love, for quiet is the night, and the wind rustles gently through the shivering ferns, and the moonshine has dimpled the imperious glen. What, eh, about a romp on the outside, a tiny mile to the silent ecstasy of the twin peaks rising in regal majesty? You demur, my love? Don't. For my sake. My gait is weak but my tread is light. Tonight if you accompany me, I shall edify mortality in this toppling woodland. Don't look at me with such deep eyes, love. Avert them, but agree! Assent!! Accede!!! Acquiesce!!!!

Forbearance, self; the adze of anger should remain sheathed. A rival moment of naked revenge will arm her, make her crouch for flight, or a lethal spring. My preservation must come first, I am a venerable laurel of the artistic dome, priceless, unique. She is the expendable kitsch. The sinful garbage. I must be adroit. So easy O hunter, easy. The prey is within reach, the wind must be heeded.

Love, slide your palm into mine. It is so terribly tragic, the bulge of your Venus against my shrivelled Luna. I know of your torment, imprisoned in my cage of fame. But just this once my love, this night only, and I shall be free, and you shall be free, of our vicious duet. My darling, step out of this love-charnel, here are your slippers, I shall slide them over your roseate soles; hold my hand, hold destiny with your corporeal softness, walk along the night-brushed corridor, gently, sweetheart, rise like an April dawn. But stay awhile, here, here are the keys to our car, the whispering chariot to my imminent grace. You shall cruise tonight the moonbeam paths, you shall ascend, my fawn, a witness to my supreme handicraft on this unforgiving bailiwick of gran-

ite. You shall watch the waters coming up to meet you, my lilac, and your petals shall open, flutter and flail unspoken denials of amaranthine reticence.

Your eyes do grow large with sentient wonder. Dare follow my cragged monologue? Shrink not. I shall not touch you over. I shall not be defiled!

Out, finally. The landscape basks in silvery radiance, cruelly smothering my seething bulbs of wrath. The hotel turrets cast mildewed shadows in the car park. The icy foreplay of the twin peaks in the north is invisible in nightly opulence. Ah, the surge of blood is overpowering. She must not hear my pounding veins, must not sense my rising desires through my flimsy gown, else she will taunt and mock me, with a look and a gesture, extinguishing my avenging fire, squashing my beetle vanity, crushing my jewel of lewd sanity! O self! The act of slaughter must be quick for this wanton wench with her angel face!

Here is the car. Ten paces away. By the rear or the front, lies the other door. I shall open it, there, sit down and relax. Look through the glazed windshield at the rock drop beyond the cordoned driveway. The night is nippy. Don't slide down the window although your inner heat, unquenched, seeks the mountain chill. The motor is turning, purring a dirge to our rubbed out fret. See, now the tyres roll, picking up sundry gravel and sprinkling a shower of dust over the very fine growth of crunching grass blades. You look alarmed, my dear, that I don't turn the steering, and the behemoth propels faster and faster on this obdurate incline, moving towards the handrails at the rim of the promenade. See, gravity has gripped with glee this hurtling falcon, I shall now redeem my personal debauchery, liberated of your fleshly reprimands. In an instant shall I be disentangled of the sullied chord, to live and love voluntarily, without a woman's essence, with a woman's memory. Ha! I shall be my autarchic lover, the slain and the slayer!

The coquet! It obeys not, the door does not yield, how shall I exit? But you are gone! With one feline vault, you have repaired, leaving me alone with my terror! No power, the brakes

sink with pervert ignorance, the wheel remains aloof to my frantic cajoles! Evil sorceress, once again your subterfuge has belied your raw youth!

The earth tilts. The gorge rises in erotic swiftness.

I soar.

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A Poem by Navtej Bharati

Pouring tea

Pouring tea
is a simple act
measured and rhythmic
The flow fills
the cup with tea
the teapot with emptiness

Pouring tea
is a simple act
like breastfeeding
the flow fills
the breast with love
the baby with milk

Pouring tea
is a simple act
like making love
the empty and the filled
meet in the flow

in a single moment
they empty each other
and then fill

The flow fills
always.