

## E SG12

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Volumen

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Sección temática 0

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Observaciones Recortes de diarios, páginas de revista

Fuente

AÑO	MES	DÍA	FUENTE	OBSERVACION	FOLIO
89	X	12	Universal	3	

### **Cronista de guardia**

## **Pequeño amor por la mañana**

Por JORGE LUIS SAENZ

No me gustan los grandes temas universales, prefiero las sencillas cosas cotidianas, como el café negro, las toallas húmedas tiradas en el piso del baño, el olor de la loción para la piel que usas.

Todo huele a ti, desde las servilletas hasta el detergente. Y ese maldito animalejo tuyo que no termina por callarse. Si tan siquiera lo hubieras llevado contigo, pero no. Sus lamentos me quedan de herencia, como recordatorio, como un péndulo que me arrastra al tiempo, al aquí y al ahora. ¿Cuándo terminaré por matarlo?

"Te quiero tanto, ay, tanto", dijiste mientras el frío se resbalaba por tu cuerpo semidesnudo frecuentemente. Tu ropa interior y tu mirada tan profanas y huecas como expectantes; testigos de ti y de tus movimientos sensuales, de tan absurdos, cotidianos.

"Te deseo esta mañana, amor", me despertó la sorpresa de la reconciliación contigo misma. Ahora sé que sólo se trataba de una incierta prepotencia del instinto, del hastío, de hacer más llevadera la espera. Así, tu "te necesito tanto" te aprisionó el deseo contra las ahora manchadas sábanas, contra la taza del café negro y el "adiós, que te vaya bien".

"Te quiero", repetí también, haciéndome eco del miedo en tus ojos. "Te quiero", temblando en la ira del puro deseo, la desesperación, la mentira; en el desasosiego intermitente, en la inquina soterada de voces sonando día y noche en mi espalda larga y fría como tu lengua que solía recorrerme por la mañana.

Tu cama despide el aroma de tu mano vacía y lenta sobre la sábana; la toalla comienza a perder la forma de tu cuerpo y el agua que lo recorrió horas después de la salida del sol, de ese repentino fuego matutino, del "adiós, que te vaya bien", que no termina.

Te espero tanto y nada se mueve excepto el sonido del gato y uno que otro extraño cruzando la sala. Hace horas que callaron a las vecinas. Quisiera verte entrar con la charola y la jarra de agua de fruta como la que aguardaba sobre la mesa.

Tu enojo, tu sombra inquieta, el fondo mismo de tu deseo que se arrastra en el espejo, hasta el hastío se antojan desables en esta abandonada estancia.

La alfombra y tu mano a lo lejos. ¿Por qué tardan tanto en recogerlo todo? Mientras, en silencio, aquí yo espero saboreando lo que queda de nuestro pequeño amor por la mañana.



AÑO	MES	DÍA	FUENTE	PAG.	OBSERVACION	FOLIO
90	1	12	UTU	11		

5/25

## Hacienda de Enmedio ¡Arde Coti, arde!

César Benítez Torres

Hace escasos cuatro años, *Coti* era la niña Cleotilde, la hija menor de la vecina. Hace diez, *Coti* y su familia aún vivían en la colonia de junto que se llama Prensa Nacional, que igual está llena de baches, torceduras, callejones sin salida, topes *contlapaches*, coladeras chayotescas, oscuridad, policías, vagos... La colonia Prensa Nacional limita con el Distrito Federal del lado de Azcapotzalco y pertenece al Municipio de Tlalnepantla, ergo: sálvese quien pueda.

Sus calles llevan los nombres de periódicos y revistas mexicanos, excepto de aquellas publicaciones de menos de quince años. Así, es hilarante que hagan esquina periódicos de tendencias encontradas justo en la pulquería llamada *Los Francotiradores*; conmueven las casas de adobe y cartón de la calle *Buen Hogar*; preocupa que entrecrucen en la iglesia los nombres de un periódico clerical con el de otro marxista; que hagan cu-chilla *El Imparcial* y *La Familia*; que el nombre del *Diario Oficial* sea un lote baldío; que en la calle *El Hijo del Ahuizote* haya niños pache-cos por cemento; que se haya instalado una funeraria donde empieza *El Despertador Americano* con lo cerca que estamos de Panamá zo ellos de nosotros?

Pero sigamos con la niña *Coti* que a los doce años (hace cuatro), quería ser Barbi ama-zona cuando con su familia se mudó a la unidad habitacional *Ex Hacienda de Enmedio* (previo crédito del Fovissste) en cuyo casco varó un barco hace años.

En la unidad habitacional de marras los departamentos (como en todas las mentadas unidades) son idénticos entre sí; es un monstruo rojizo (por el color de los ladrillos que la forman) que inhibe gacho al peatón, se siente uno devorado, preso, apachurrado, triste de tanta mansedumbre y pequeño ante tanta hostilidad visual.

El agua escasea, la basura hace montañas y no hay sermón, ni pájaros, sí muchos perros y niños que gritan; de verla uno sabe que por aquí pasó el PRI. ¡Y todavía hay quien asegure que si hoy hubiera elecciones los del

partidote ganarían hasta lo perdido! Ganas de abaratar al paisanaje, es más peligroso un torvo líder trajeado a lo Harvard que un inofensivo viejito con machete que se ve que no ha comido mariscos la mar de tiempo, afortunado él que por lo menos le alcanza para un oxidado fierro. ¿Que, de plano seremos deficientes del entendimiento como para creerles a aquestos? Sueñen.

Sin esfuerzo conozco (de oídas) la vida, pasión y milagros de mis vecinos del edificio 75 como ellos saben mis cosas jah, hipócritas!, nos saludamos en complicidad, nos odiamos a través de las frágiles paredes de paredón, nos envidiamos a destajo, nos espiamos con fidelidad, nos ignoramos dignamente. Pero la otra noche *Coti*, la muchacha gorda del edificio, me dio qué escribir.

Terminaba de leer *Inmaculada* de Juan García Ponce con esas ganas de escribir que nos dejan ciertos libros, cuando oí risitas y pujidos detrás de la puerta. Con eso de la *modernidad* ya no pongo foco en el pasillo, porque se lo vuela el licenciado de allá arriba, por lo que la oscuridad invita al romanceo. Por supuesto me asomé por el ojo de la puerta alternativamente con el pegar del oído. Di cuenta de cómo *Coti* chupeteaba el cuello de cierto muchachón flaco de por el rumbo; miré con qué gracia le escudriñaba la entrepierna; volví a escuchar "Quiero ver, a ver, a ver, ay, nomás tantito"; me asomé de nuevo a mirar cómo la gorda se allanaba en hábiles escenas consignadas por Sade; le aprendí arrimos insospechados; me asombré de su velocidad y capacidad de destanteo. Lleva semanas con eso.

Mi voyeurismo no dio para más. Antes de que otra cosa sucediera puse en el tocadiscos a buen volumen el *Aeterne rerum conditor* atribuido a San Ambrosio e influido por *Las Confesiones* de San Agustín.

Mi mujer se extraña de lo bien que me saluda ahora la gorda *Coti*, de mi indoblegable negativa a poner foco nuevo en el pasillo y de ciertas manchas raras que aparecen afuera de la puerta en las mañanas.



AÑO	MES	DÍA	FUENTE	PAG.	OBSERVACION	FOLIO
90	II	4	U+U	10		

## Colonia Romero Rubio **Luisa y la Reverte:** **paseos tangenciales**

César Benítez Torres

La primera salida nocturna de *Luisa* fue en enero de hace tres años.

Dispuso para esta ocasión, un vestido azul marino, pantimedias caladas en negro, zapatillas de charol sin adorno, suéter largo de punto de cruz, mascada roja atada al cuello, bolsa de mano, maquillaje discreto, falsa cola de caballo para su tefido ocre marrón y pulsera de gancho en su muñeca izquierda. Por poco olvida —cuenta— ponerse brasier con lo que lleva adentro. Su primera autoimpresión —confiesa— fue la de una verdadera *marimacho*.

La primera *marimacho* conocida fue nada menos que *María Salomé Rodríguez Triplana: La Reverte* “el más extraño y singular personaje que haya pisado los ruedos españoles” según el taurómaco Francisco Rodríguez Batllori. *La Reverte* nació en Senes, provincia de Almería en España el 28 de agosto de 1878. Desde la infancia se empleó en faenas de campo destacándose por su audacia y valor. Durante la primera década del siglo figura entre los buenos novilleros de entonces; actúa en Jaén, Madrid, Zaragoza, Granada, Valencia, Sevilla y Cádiz hasta el terrible día del 2 de julio de 1908 en que es *cogida* por un reglamento expedido por el ministro Juan de la Cierva en el que prohíbe a las mujeres lidiar reses bravas.

*Luisa*, en cambio, no toreó más que su chamba en Aeronaes de México durante 36 años, cuando se jubiló a los 53 de edad para estrenar su vestido azul aquella noche, paseando por Cairo, Marruecos, Oceanía, Hong Kong y demás oscuras y fatigosas calles de la colonia *Romero Rubio* no para ligar —que a esa edad ya ni ligar es bueno— sino para subvertir la impiedad de tantísimos días negándose ese recanijo gusto de vestirse así, pese y sobre lo que pudieran decir de ella los vecinos de la colonia que tanto y tan bien habían ignorado su soledad de torera en el centro del ruedo.

Con todo y que *La Reverte* había alternado con *Lagartigo* y *Machaquito*, después de aquel legajo prohibitivo de De la Cierva no volvería a torear como tal sino hasta su triste reaparición en septiembre de 1934 en *Las Ventas*: “Una

señora de casi 60 años, toaleta de pantalón negro y guayabera blanca, despachó dos becerros entre revolcones, risas y achuchones en un permanente desasosiego”. Así terminó su vida taurina María Salomé Rodríguez conocida como *La Reverte* para esas fechas de 1934 justo cuando nacía *Luisa* en una calle sin nombre cercana al Canal del Desagüe de la capital, a cuya orilla se levantó una ciudad perdida que se pavimentaría 25 años después y que se llamaría colonia *Romero Rubio* en memoria de un no se sabe si torero, gobernador porfiriano, artista o mártir jesuita según tienen duda aún los lugareños.

El cambio de apariencia de *Luisa* no lo notaron los vecinos, así supo ella cuánto no la conocían; pero unas semanas después ya se contaban fantasías y barbaridades sobre su persona: la dieron por aparecida, por muerta, por *La Llorona*, por aventurera, por loca, por pariente de un tipo que vivía en esa misma vecindad y que nunca salía ni hablaba con nadie y que no tenía familia conocida.

La verdad era muy otra.

*Luisa* sigue paseando en las noches con nuevos vestidos para sentir cómo se cuele el aire entre sus piernas depiladas; para llegarse hasta el buzón a depositar cartas de amor que envía a desconocidos cuyo nombre y dirección escoge del directorio telefónico según las asonancias o concordancias eufónicas de su apelativo.

Ella es vecina de mi tío, que fue luchador y quien ni sospecha que *Luisa* se llama en realidad Mario, que fue mecánico de aviones por 36 años, que se jubiló hace tres y que a pesar de tanta ronda solariega a medianoche sigue siendo señorita(o).

Igualito que *La Reverte* de quien al final se supo que se llamaba Agustín Rodríguez: novillero sin suerte que tuvo que vestirse de mujer para seguir toreando y quien acabó sus días como guarda jurado del coto minero *La Española* del término de Vilchez “Vistiendo como hombre y conduciéndose como tal”.



**15 El Nacional**  
Sábado 11 de julio de 1992



*LOS BAÑISTAS en el Sena (Foto: Ismael Gómez Dantés).*

## **EPISTOLARIO**

Jorge Arturo Ojeda

### **Felación**

Sueño que estoy en casa de dos alemanes que son pareja. En la parte de arriba de la casa los alumnos de una escuela ven películas. Yo doy el dinero de entrada a la señorita que tiene el proyector. Entro al salón pero no pasa ninguna película y varios alumnos están sentados como en espera. En la sala yo le chupo la verga al alemán, me quito los pantalones y mi verga tiene una erección mucho más grande que la suya, él la toma y comienza a chupármela. Veo que su compañero es muy tolerante. Le pregunto al alemán que me lame la verga:

—¿No tienes miedo al sida?

Me dice que no. Estamos en el sofá de una sala. Una anciana baja por las escaleras seguida de mucha gente.

Siento vergüenza de que me vean y trato de ponerme el pantalón sentado en la alfombra●



## EN LAS TERMAS

Horacio Guerrero

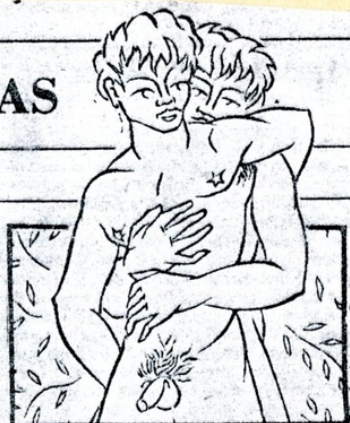
**D**esnudo. Solamente cubierto por una pequeña sábana perdida, entro al baño de vapor general. Expectante, inicio el ritual, como uno más de los varios oficiantes. El lugar me sorprende por su completa oscuridad, únicamente violada por la luz que entra junto con un nuevo participante a la comunión.

La luz ha regresado a las regaderas. Imagino que tal vez las tinieblas cubrían la labor de los masajistas que, por algún pago, vivifican con su tacto pieles anhelantes de manos rudas que las hagan volver al mundo.

Inicio el recorrido. Primero que nada quiero ver, ejercer el voyeurismo en todo su esplendor, con calma, con científica paciencia. Mis pies son conducidos por mis ojos a las tres habitaciones nubosas que parecen una tarde lluviosa. Sólo que no hay frío ni calor, únicamente la templada certeza de encontrar por unos instantes dilatados un hombre, unos hombres que sienten en su cerebro y en su cuerpo el lenguaje buscado afuera, que en ocasiones se encuentra, en la normalidad. La cárcel —ya se sabe— permite escapar por entre los barrotes de sus rejas.

Entro a uno de los cuartos, en donde dos jóvenes, resguardados en su anonimato, transitan quedamente en este como pedazo de cielo; se entrelazan, se tocan, se recorren a la vista de otros que —como ellos— se dan, se prodigan en caricias lentamente urgentes. Salgo.

En otro de los espacios decido elegir. Me gusta aquel muchacho de largas piernas esculpidas por el agua y la humedad; sus nalgas morenas, redondas, duras como dos piedras de río, con la débil cintura en transición, soportan la rotunda y triangular espalda, flanqueada por lánguidos brazos en reposo. Y coronando la efígie, la Medusa, negra cabellera. Voitea, y su cegadora voluptuosidad permite apenas que intuya su inacabable presencia volcánica. No me percibe en su universo, y me alejo del eclipse. Dejo de vagar como ánima del purgatorio. Con la sábana puesta aún, me disfruto, me gozo, me conozco. He sido visto. Coincidimos. De rojo empezamos el cortejo,



con la mirada construimos líneas sensuales que solapan el acercamiento inminente. Nos damos tiempo.

Mientras pasan los segundos nos erguimos, nos despojamos de nuestras breves vestiduras, y abrazados, ya sin tregua, nos entregamos. A cuatro manos pulsamos notas incendiarias, cual consumados pianistas. Mi sexo en su boca, mis dedos en su entrepierna, su lengua en duelo con la mía, su pelo mojado restregándose en mi cara; y así, canibales, nos confundimos en uno solo hasta casi morir devorados.

En su giro violento me voy al siguiente orgiástico recinto; me abro paso por entre los elegidos que inventan distintas imágenes: grupos de tres o más, que semejan esculturas encarnadas, parejas en mudo parlamento, o solitarios en medio del tumulto. Como imán acaricio el vientre satinado, sin vello, de un efebo. Con él quiero perecer; nos besamos, cada una de nuestras manos es habitación convulsionada de nuestras vergas, que producen terremotos constantes en las piernas-columnas de los dos, que se niegan al derrumbe. Irremediablemente sobreviene la hecatombe. Recibo el pago oceánico del compañero fugaz. Es mío para siempre.

Conforme, en paz con la existencia, me doy un baño de agua fría. Ya seco y vestido, y antes de cruzar la entrada de este santuario, unos peluqueros absortos en su jornada parecen ajenos a lo que sucede más allá de su trabajo, mientras un boiero lustra los zapatos de un cliente, el último toque de pureza. Me voy.



# UTOPIA: un tiempo para amar.



## POLARIDADES

Ahora que me perdí en el tiempo, ahora que soy una mujer sin edad, quiero hablar de los dos extremos que delimitan nuestra vida.

Hace tiempo que dejé de ser niña, sin embargo todavía creo y tengo fé, creo en las prince--sas y los dragones, creo en las brujas y en las hadas, aunque debo reconocer que han adquirido matices diferentes. Me gusta la feria y los hot cakes con cajeta y embarrarme la nariz, me gustan los algodones de azúcar, los patines y la bicicleta y sentirme indefensa; me gusta espantar a las palomas y a veces me asusta la gente. Recuerdo cuando mi madre nos contaba historias a la luz de la vela, recuerdo que le tenía miedo a la noche. Ahora, a veces todavía le temo.

Todavía tengo fantasías: Soy capitán de --barco o Doncella en apuros, indio apache o soñadora de tierras lejanas.

Creo que todavía hay una pequeña dentro de mí pero también una anciana.

Que será de mí cuando tenga que caminar --lento, tan lento que la gente pase de largo sin detenerse, que será cuando ya no pueda valerme --por mi misma, ¿quién estará ahí para ayudarme?, ¿que será de ellas? de las que ya están más cerca que yo en el camino.

Que será de nosotras: Mujeres, lesbianas, ancianas.

Que será cuando esta sociedad me deseché porque ya no sea útil a sus necesidades.

Cuando necesite ayuda para subir al camión



y el chofer no quiera esperarme.



Ví mujeres que le ofrecían una flor a la luna e inmediatamente después enterraban una daga a su compañera de cama, de sexo.

Ví mujeres sentadas, entrelazadas de sus pies, por las raíces de los años y que luchaban por arrancar las, pero eran tan fuertes y profundas que sólo lo graban lastimarse, y sangrarse.

Ví mujeres que se sentían tan grandes, tan grandes que su voz se perdía en la estratósfera, entonces nadie las escuchaba, entonces hablaban para nadie; pero preferían seguir sintiéndose grandes.

Ví mujeres que aún tenían el telón en los ojos.

Y suspiré. Y siguió escurriendo agua cristalina de mis ojos.

Y vi una mujer que en cada relación buscaba al unicornio, buscaba a la luna, buscaba la magia, y no encontraba nada, la estaban asfixiando; y en cada relación dejaba trozos de esperanza... pero siguió buscando.

Ví mujeres oportunistas, oportunistas de la suave-línea de la razón y la locura. Aunque ellas bien sabían que ya habían traspasado la razón.

Y dejó de escurrir esa agua cristalina de mis ojos.

.....Después de esto, qué, sólo me queda voltear a mí y empezar el doloroso placer de conocerme .....  
.....Ahora sí, podrido mundo, ven a -  
mí, que ya soy parte de tu misma mierda.

*Graciela Rodríguez*

Primavera del 91.







Puede llevarnos con las diosas o llevarnos al infierno; en este último la sexualidad es brutalmente mecánica, pasión del espíritu que se entrega con entusiasmo desmedido a la denigración, y entonces no hay "dolor más atroz que ser feliz", el amor y el masoquismo son lo mismo aunque nadie lo reconozca. La vida se convierte en una sucesión de pequeñas muertes que van constituyendo la definitiva. Se descubre que la maldad no reside en las cosas sino en las relaciones viciadas que los hombres y mujeres establecen entre ellos y ellas. Se entiende entonces, que la monstruosidad es parte integrante de todos los seres humanos, que todos y todas somos morbosos y destructivos en nuestra más recóndita intimidad y quien se atreve a negarlo asustado y se cree a salvo es quien más esfuerzos hace para no despertar la bestia que acomete con fuerza.

Quien se asoma a este mundo, aunque sea por un orificio diminuto, se contagia ante lo

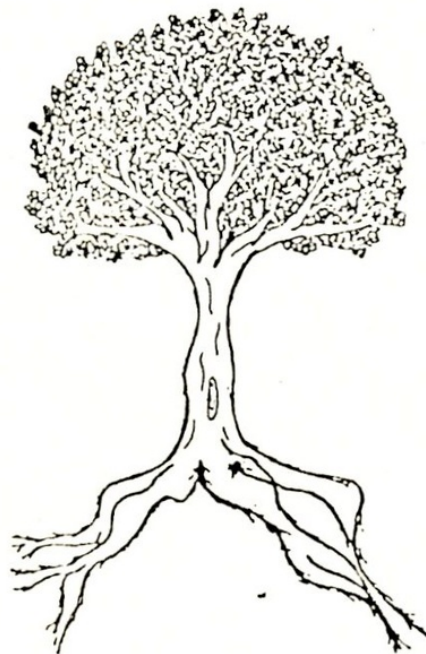


que descubre, vislumbra el universo y per-



Zarse irresponsable al vulgar, al desesperanzador despilfarro de las emociones". \* \*

Maria José Roche.



\* Frase tomada de la película "Henry and June".

\* \* Marco Tulio Aguilera Garramón: El juego de las seducciones. Ed. Leega, S.A.  
México, 1989.

MEMORIA DE NUESTRA AMÉRICA



Alisó sus cabellos y salió para encontrarse con las -  
hojas del cuento que nunca terminó y que ahora servían -  
para tapar la falta de vidrio de la ventana, roto en un-  
día de depresión.

Encendió a bajo volumen la radio, en la única esta---  
ción que transmitía música del recuerdo (y para "enamo--  
rados") a esa hora de la madrugada. Detestaba el insom-  
nio cotidiano, siempre buscaba hacer algo para irlo pa--  
sando, pero ahora no quería hacer ruido, pues desperta--  
ría a Claudia y, sabía que de levantarse correría a sus-  
brazos para adorarla cual se adora a una virgen, o peor-  
aún, cual una madre.

Se acerca a la recamara para cerrar la puerta, y obser-  
va a la joven reposar en su cama. Una sensación viseral-  
la envolvió. Pensó en la piel joven y firme de la mucha-  
cha, junto a los pliegues colgantes de su cuerpo. Si-n--  
tió asco de sí misma y jaló de la puerta para correr a -  
la ventana a sentir el aire frío de la madrugada.

Reconocía esa sensación, la experimentaba siempre, des-  
pues de esas aventuras. Se despreciaba, odiaba ser les--  
biana y además estar sola a esa edad.

No negaba que a alguna de sus "nenas" le gustara, pero  
prefería no imaginarse amando a alguna, le parecía sucio  
y deshonesto, sobre todo porque lo había escuchado de --  
sus amigas. Enfrentar la crítica era peor que una mordi-  
da de víbora.

Se sentó a fumar un cigarro y esperó que el día la en-  
volviera poco a poco, eso le ayudaba a creer en la mono-  
tonía con la que se conformaba; ... en la radio Tania --  
Libertad cantaba: "...tanto amor y avergonzada.,...tanto  
amor y avergonzada".

Lurdes Barbosa



*Nuestra*

Teresa se levanta lentamente de la cama, aún con olor a sexo; bosteza un poco y camina descalza por la superficie grasosa de la vieja alfombra cuyo color tenue refleja la vida opaca de la única habitante de ese departamento lóbrego.

Llega hasta la cocina y dice maldiciones cuando descubre que no tiene nada para tomar, más que un litro de leche que había comprado tres días antes.

Entra al baño y toma un trozo de papel sanitario, con el que limpia, agresivamente, los restos de fluido que - aún mantienen húmeda su entrepierna y seca, lentamente, el poco bello púbico que cubre su vulva.

Levanta la cara y encuentra su reflejo en el pequeño-vidrio oscuro que cuelga del mosaico ya mohoso del viejo baño. Teresa observa las canas cada vez más abundantes - de su escasa cabellera haciendo juego con las arrugas deformantes del rostro conformista que la acompaña desde - que la abandonó Paola.

No le gustaba recordarla, menos ahora que había entregado su cuerpo a la pasión quemante de una joven sedienta del placer sabio. No era la única, había estado en la cama con otras mujeres que ardientemente comían su sexo y su ser con el ímpetu de atragantarse. A Teresa le gustaba, era un divertido reto impactar a las "nenas" para que después le suplicaran una noche en su casa.

Teresa no quería nada más, no le importaba relacionarse emotivamente, sabía que las "nenas" podían dejarla en cualquier momento para vivir otra relación, sus 45 años no eran para cometer ese tipo de errores.





cibe. que si sigue no sólo alcanza una visión más rica y deliciosa de todo lo que existe, sino que también se ve la posibilidad de convertirse en un sabio, un santo o una bestia.

O puede ser un ritual de placer, este es el objetivo final frente a la vida. Los cuerpos y los sentidos estructurados en el pensamiento son instrumentos y objetos de goce, medios y fines, distancias desafiantes y arribos anhelantes, se entra en el vértigo de los deseos.

Es ritual de la conciencia que no puede durar, de la felicidad momentánea que es ilusión. Es un escalofrío que corre y juega, es la ceremonia de la desnudez y entonces "los placeres anormales, le restan placer a los normales". \*

Si te consideras normal, no te asomes, no busques, cuidate, pero si ya estas contagiada antencionas la siguiente frase que se constituye como la puerta de este mundo:

"La seducción consiste en aplazar el amor por el amor, en lugar de la





Quando tocamos a las puertas de este triángulo, el placer se abre como un mundo de inquietudes conjuntas donde se aclaran los puntos oscuros y sus vaguedades, Son las puertas a un Otro Mundo que está en este mundo en el cual se trazan haces de luz que indican vías hacia los orígenes.

El orgasmo es fuente de vida cuando estamos en comunión.

Todo adquiere un matiz diferente, un tono... tonos pastel... o colores agresivos, oscuros, grises... La experiencia de vivir se abulta y ensancha en el cerebro y la piel.

En el interior del Erotismo - Pasión - Seducción, los pecados y las debilidades, pierden valor moral y se transforman en objeto de contemplación y material moldeable. Todo adquiere una realidad impresionante: Porque todo sucede, sino en el terreno real, sí en la mente, y eso basta para que exista.

Y como todos los mundos, este cuenta con



extremos que se juntan como un círculo:

POR EL DOLOROSO PLACER DE CONOCERME.

Se ha caído el telón de mis ojos.  
Cómo poder evitarlo si más de tres se encargaron -  
de ir arrancando jirones, de irlo agujerando. Y es  
que cada girón del telón iba acompañado de pedazos  
sangrantes de mi corazón y trozos ya muertos de mi  
espíritu.

Sin embargo me resistía, a veces lo remendaba con-  
rabia, otras, lo detenía suplicante con mis manos.  
Llegó el momento en que mis ojos quedaron al descu-  
bierto, mi mundo rosa se pintó de tonos que jamás-  
me imaginé. Tenía miedo de ver aquéllo que a todas  
les urgía que viera, y empecé mi recorrido y empe-  
zó a escurrir agua cristalina de mis ojos.....

Ví mujeres atrapadas en las telarañas de sus 40 a-  
ños, o más, o menos.

Ví mujeres secas por su soledad, que sin darse --  
cuenta, hacían todo por seguirlo estando.

Ví mujeres limosneras de amor, de una mirada, o de  
un minuto.

Ví mujeres que entre sí se solapaban, ocultando la  
miseria, sus miserias, que llevaban a flor de piel.

Y sentí asquerosa lástima por ellas.

Ví mujeres ávidas de poder que se enmarcaban en el  
oxidado discurso de la democracia.

Ví mujeres huecas que sólo las sostenía la falsa -  
estructura de la cotidianidad.

Vi mujeres con rostros lascivos, siempre y unica--  
mente, dispuestas a juntar su sexo y su desnudez -



con otro cuerpo.

sole que estaba ansiosa por ir), me senté junto a ella sin decir nada y después de unos minutos empezamos a platicar, entre otras cosas, le dije que vivía sola y me propuso que viviéramos juntas para que nos dividiéramos la renta, yo acepté, me pareció muy buena onda que alguien me quisiera ayudar, todavía no sabía exactamente lo que sentía, pero me gustaba.

Una madrugada oí ruidos en mi cuarto, me quedé quieta sin hacer ruido, ví a Inés que se metió a mi cuarto, de pronto ya estaba en mi cama y me dijo que me describa, que yo le gustaba mucho y empezó a besarme y a tocarme, empezamos a forcejear, yo me resistía, sentí miedo y de pronto ella se quedó quieta y me dijo:

- "no te asustes, si no lo quieres me voy" -  
Mi primer deseo fue de que se fuera ... pero también quería que se quedara... le pedí que así lo hiciera.

Fuimos pareja durante 5 años, era muy padre al principio, después la relación se hizo insostenible hasta que una situación muy violenta le puso fin.

Hace 4 años que vivo aquí en México, no he vuelto a tener pareja, este tiempo me aislé no quería saber nada de mujeres ni de relaciones, pero creo que ya pasó el "trauma". El programa de t. V. me hizo cambiar de opinión al ver el entusiasmo de las dos chavas que salieron a defender esto.

Creo que aquí en la CNLF voy a aprender mucho sobre esto y a conocer otro tipo de chavas. Ahora sé que las mujeres me gustan y pues, estoy abierta a tener otra relación, menos conflictiva, que me sirva de algo lo que he aprendido, quiero aprender de otras mujeres y uno de mis deseos es decir sin miedo esa palabra:  
LESBIANA.



GUADALUPE

Painting by Mithila woman artist



## SHORT STORY

VIJAY DAN DETHA

# Naya Gharvas\*

*The author is one of the first prose writers in Rajasthani. Many of his stories, including this one, are based on Rajasthani folk tales. He is popularly known among his friends as Bijji.*

*This story was originally written in Rajasthani. It was published in Hindi under the title "Dohri Zindagi" in Rajkamal Publications' collection "Duvidha." It has been translated from Hindi into English for the first time by Manushi.*

MAY Eros, the formless One, be gracious and give to each one of us two lives. Once upon a time there were two villages situated at a distance of 24 and 24, that is, 48 miles from each other. The Seths of those villages were famous throughout the country for their stinginess. It happened that two moneylenders of similar age and status lived in those two villages. Though they lived far away from each other, they were close friends. And as luck would have it, the two got married on the same night. Their hands were joined to

those of two extremely beautiful brides, and pearls were generated simultaneously in the two oysters. Then, in their joy, the two moneylenders promised each other that regardless of which of them had a daughter and which a son, the two offspring would be united in marriage. Thus, while still in the womb, these two children were linked together.

Carried away by their intimacy with each other, and mad in the pride of their wealth, the moneylenders became oblivious to nature's waywardness. In the ninth month, under the influence of the same planet, two girls were born. Intoxicated partly by his pledge and partly by his greed, one Seth played false. He announced his daughter's birth by beating a copper plate instead of a winnowing basket. He sent the barber to his friend's village, with the news of a son's birth. Both Seths celebrated the occasion by distributing molasses.

At first, the mother thought this was a private joke between the two friends. When the time came, the facts would be revealed. Until then there was no harm in maintaining the illusion just for fun. After all, in childhood, what is the difference between a boy and a girl? It's only when youth overshadows one that one is forced to recognize this complicated distinction.

But the father made no attempt, conscious or unconscious, to dispel the illusion. He brought up the girl like a boy. Well in advance, the child was equipped from head to toe with turban and *angarkhi*, girdle and *dhoti*. At first, the mother treated the whole affair as a cute game, but when even the girl's maturing figure did not cause her father to change his tune, the mother grew perturbed. One day she tried warning her husband. In a tone of tender remonstrance, she said: "How can you shut your eyes to reality like this?"

Bristling up, the Seth retorted: "Who says my eyes are shut? I am alert to every reality, throughout the whole universe." Clasp ing her head in her hands, his wife replied: "If you are so alert, how come you can't see your daughter's youth blossoming in a boy's dress?" The Seth told a white lie. "Do you think I have nothing better to do than to waste time on such trifles?"

"What is this madness that has seized hold of you!" cried the Sethani, "Your daughter has reached marriageable age, and you call it a trifle."

"Well, I am not forbidding the marriage, am I? In fact no one can equal my good sense in such matters. I settled the marriage long ago, before the child was born." Stepping closer to him, the Sethani answered: "What has your settling got to do with it? Have you ever heard of a girl being married to another girl?"

\* A new home unit, a new way of settling down and living together.



"Why not? What does it take to get married—you decide to do it, and it's done. But a pledge is a pledge—it can't be broken even for fear of death."

The Sethani's eyebrows shot up. This certainly did not seem like a joke. How should she convince her husband to open his eyes to this truth, which was as dazzlingly clear and palpable as the sun? Are these matters to be discussed and explained? She sat still, bewildered, but soon realized that silence could lead to disaster. So she screwed up her courage and began: "My dear, how do you think your pledges will make up for what will be lacking in bed? Have a little sense, do. All these years I kept quiet only because I thought you were joking."

"Well, you just continue to keep quiet then, and see how well I manage everything. You'll see—we'll get a huge dowry. I'll arrange a grand marriage procession for my son. A man's word, once given, cannot be taken back. And after all, why should I have to lose on account of nature's mistake?"

The Sethani sank into confusion. Either her husband was still pulling her leg or else he really was determined not to break his pledge. But her mind could not be at rest while the matter was undecided. Burning with suppressed anger, she said: "To hell with your profit and loss! What about the loss your poor daughter will have to suffer in bed on account of the doings of her precious father? Have you thought of that at all?"

Not a whit disconcerted, the Seth replied: "Of course I have thought of it. When men go out on business for eight or ten years, their wives, if they are sensible women, wait patiently. When women are married to incapable men, they somehow still the desire of their wombs. After all, a child widow also lives out her life, doesn't she? A girl has to endure whatever is written in her fate. She'll make the best of it one way or another."

When she heard this, the Sethani was convinced that it was no joke. Her husband was not willing to untie a single knot in the web he had woven. As though in a mist, her daughter's face swam before her eyes. Through her tears, she exclaimed: "The girl is our own daughter, born of us. How can we tie her to a stake and burn her like this? You say she will manage. How can she possibly manage, once she is married to a girl? I just cannot consent to such a misdoing."

Irritated, her husband broke in: "When did I ask for your consent? I am quite able to arrange everything on my own. I warn you, if you poke your nose in once more, I'll kill myself. Far better to die than to break one's word. And don't pretend to be such an innocent lamb—as if you don't know how any lack in the bed of a mahajan is compensated for. The whole district knows how your dear father's name was saved from dying out. Didn't I swallow that fly, though my eyes were wide open?"

The Sethani had never dreamt that her husband would fling this taunt at her. As soon as she heard it, her lips felt as though they had been sealed. The blood congealed in her veins. Truly, everyone knew how her mother had openly indulged herself with every man in sight. Her unmanly father had stayed buried in his business and his account books, while her mother, as though intoxicated, forgot even the distinction between high and low castes. She had had an open affair with a chamar. The chamar was fair and handsome. The Sethani looked exactly like him—the same features and the same build. When the lid was suddenly removed from that seething cauldron, she was defeated and stammered: "Do as you please."

Her husband was very pleased at having successfully hit the target with this arrow and settled the matter once for all. As chance would have it, the very next day, at an auspicious hour, the *sava* was sent to our moneylender's house. He happily accepted it, but his wife felt cut to the heart. Yet she did not open her lips to protest. The girl's own fate would decide.

The girl herself was a naive little innocent. She neither thought about her fate nor paid heed to her blossoming youth. Brought up as a boy from infancy, she considered herself a boy. Though she did not understand the meaning of marriage, she was thrilled by the prospect of this new adventure.

She was sure that after marriage her smooth cheeks would sprout a beard. Her fingers itched to stroke and curl a moustache. This childish pleasure was like fuel added to the fire smouldering in her mother's breast.

One day a girl of her own age had seen her bathing and had realized the truth. Thinking the parents were perhaps performing some magical ritual, she had kept quiet at that time, but when she saw her friend's excitement growing as the wedding preparations were set afoot, she could wait no longer. Taking her aside, she said: "Look, sister..."

The other interrupted: "Hey, what's this? How come you are calling me sister instead of brother, as you usually do?"

The girl smiled and said: "You are my sister, so why should you mind my calling you sister? You little idiot, you're a woman, and you dream of becoming a bridegroom? How long do you think you can make up for your lack of manliness by this playacting?"

"What do you mean, how long? All my life long. But what do you find lacking in my manliness—in my *dhoti*, my *angarkhi*, and my 16 foot long turban?"

Suppressing her smiles, her friend replied: "A 16 foot long turban can't make up for the lack of a man's equipment. You had better flatly refuse to enter into this marriage. My dear, you need a bridegroom, not a bride. What furrow do you think you two girls will plough together? How come you can't understand such simple facts, even though you are so grown up?" The Seth's naive daughter still failed to understand. Frowning, she said: "You're just jealous of my beautiful wife. You can't bear to see me happy."



"What's to be done with you?" cried her friend, embracing her, "You'll come to your senses only after you've taken a hard knock. It will be too late then. Your father is greedy for dowry but how is it your mother didn't explain anything to you? I can't understand how she has brought herself to do this."

"I'll go right away and ask mother!" said the girl impatiently, "She won't hide anything from me."

"She had better not." So saying, her friend went home, while the girl rushed to her mother, and cried: "Mother, today a girl said something very strange. She said that I only wear a man's clothes but I am not really a man. Of course I am not such a fool as to believe her! I know, you won't hide anything from me. Tell me, isn't she lying? I told her to her face that it was nothing but jealousy—she couldn't bear the idea of my having a beautiful wife."

The mother turned away her face and wiped her eyes. After a while she said tearfully: "If it had been so, wouldn't I have told you long ago? These silly girls have a habit of teasing people."

"Well, I'm not going to be scared by any amount of teasing", cried the girl, filled with enthusiasm, "Even if I had been a woman instead of a man, I would not have refused this marriage. After all, marriage is a union of two hearts. If the hearts of two women unite, why should not they get married?"

"Your father says the same", replied her mother in a low voice. Dancing away, the girl cried: "Of course! My father is very wise." Now she had asked her mother the crucial question, there was no need for her to linger there. Off she went, tossing the fringe of her turban, leaping and dancing, while her mother remained standing there like a stone statue, lost in thought, holding back her sobs.

The next day when she met the neighbour girl, the Seth's daughter berated her soundly. She was no fool to be misled by anyone, not she! Proudly she declared: "Even if I had not been a man, I would still have married a woman and shown you how it is done. We two women would not have had the slightest objection to one another."

The other girl had been married two years but had not yet conceived. She could barely stop herself laughing at this nonsensically innocent declaration. She tried to explain: "Surely there must be some intoxicant instead of water in your family well! You mad creature, you may rub two grinding stones together as much as you please but you won't get anywhere! It's only a man who can perform a man's function."

"Oh come on, what great shakes do you think a man achieves, reducing everything to sixes and sevens! It's the grinding stones which nourish the whole world. They grind the flour as well as the pulses." At this, the other really couldn't control her laughter. She clapped her hands and cried, through spurts of laughter: "Oh dear, don't you two be behindhand with grinding pulses!" Hearing her laughter, the innocent girl felt shy. Pretending to laugh too, she said: "Why, what's wrong with grinding pulses?"

"You'll find out when the time comes", said the other, smothering her laughter in her veil.

"You too must have found out something?"

"Oh sure, but then, what comparison is there between your marriage and mine!"

"Well, yes, the king and the pauper are worlds apart. Even your ancestors could never have dreamt of such a dowry as I am going to get." The neighbour girl didn't take offence. Lightly pinching her cheek, she said: "Why drag the poor ancestors into this absurd babble? It's not humanly possible for anyone to bring you to your senses."

Truly that innocent daughter of the Seth did not understand anything nor was she able to comprehend what others tried to explain to her. As the appointed hour drew nearer she felt swept along by waves of impulsive delight. Finally the long awaited moment did arrive. After a whirlwind of feasts given by the relatives and the community, her marriage procession at last set out. What a fine marriage procession it was—seven horses, eleven camels and twenty bullock carts. The groom's father was seated on a brown camel and the groom in a decorated bullock cart.

Announcing its arrival with drumbeats and music, the marriage procession reached the girl's village. A cocount was offered at the village border. After the proper rituals, at dusk the two were seated in the pavilion. Two soft hands were joined in the hand taking ceremony. As their hands touched, a current ran like lightning through their bodies. Two strangers were joined together for life.

In the flickering lamplight, the groom sat on a flower bestrewn bed, waiting for the bride. At midnight, the tinkle of anklets and the whispers of her girlfriends were heard. Her face veiled, the bride stood on the threshold of the room. A hundred buds began to bloom in the heart of the bridegroom.

As the bride hesitated, her friends pushed her in and bolted the door. Slowly, very slowly, the bride came and sat down on the bed, close to the groom. The groom lifted the veil and looked at her face. Here was a veritable moon hidden behind the veil! The groom's joy could hardly be contained in the four walls of the room. Stroking the bride's cheeks, the groom said: "I had heard much in praise of your beauty, but I never dreamt of or hoped for such perfection!"

The bride's pink lips opened. In a sweet voice, she said: "You are no less beautiful. My beauty is as nothing before yours."

The two gazed at each others' faces, drinking in beauty through their eyes. The women standing outside tired themselves out peering through the cracks in the door, but could see no light except that of the lamp. They thought that perhaps other thirsts would arise once the thirst of the eyes was quenched.

But the next night showed them the same scene. The women's eyes grew glazed with staring but they saw not a glimpse of what they wanted to see. When their feet began to ache with standing on tiptoe, one by



one, they descended the stairs. Shyness is all very well but this was really taking it too far. The couple had wasted two precious nights. It was not as if they were babes in arms. After all, when can the thirst of the eyes ever be quenched? A moment's glance shows you the same sight that you would see if you were to gaze all night long. Well, each to their own thirst and their own taste!

The bride came to her in-laws' house, yet the groom's shyness did not abate. The mother's anxiety too continued to grow. Though it was the height of summer, this strange marriage caused the mother to shiver and tremble. The Seth snored peacefully, but the Sethani's eyes refused to close. How must those two girls be confronting this empty night, she wondered. How would the daughter-in-law feel when she saw the reality? The daughter had not understood anything. She had happily set out to get married. She had fallen into the pit even though her eyes were open, but the poor daughter-in-law was still unaware of the reality.

In the other room, the lamp was glowing softly. Stroking the edge of the turban, the bride said: "It's so hot in here, isn't it? Why don't you remove your turban and be comfortable? I'll fan you for a while."

So saying, she picked up a multicoloured fan. The husband said: "The turban is the chief ornament of a man. Manliness pales without it. But if you say so, I'll open my *angarkhi*."

The bride continued to wave her delicate wrist, and the husband, without any hesitation, began to open the *angarkhi*. As it opened, the bride saw her husband's bare chest. A scream escaped her, and she collapsed on the bed. Half swooning, she cried: "You are also a woman! Oh why have you taken such a revenge on me? For the sins of which birth?"

For the first time, the husband's illusion was shaken, and as it shook, the vision of a whole life spent in men's clothes swam before her eyes. Now she understood what the neighbour girl had been trying to explain. Indeed the demon of illusion is able to render a person blind and deaf. One neither sees nor hears. One sees only that shadow cast on the screen of illusion which one is desirous to see. Truth loses its meaning and purpose.

After so many years, her eyes now began to throb with eagerness to see the naked truth. Mad with anxiety, she tore off her turban and shirt. When she had pulled off all the clothes of her bride, her eyes grew wide at the reality which confronted them. How was it she had not seen this truth all these long years? Both bodies were built in the same way. Like a pink fish, the bride lay unconscious on the bed. And just such another "fully conscious" fish stood beside her. Was such a drama ever enacted since the creation of the universe? Suddenly the "conscious" fish began to shake the unconscious fish and cry out: "Open your eyes. I am rid of my illusion. I have sinned against you. You can punish me any way you like."

The bride opened her eyes. She looked around. Then with a start, she got to her feet. The two fish, shaped in one mould, gazed at each other. The fish who had been a husband, once again acknowledged her fault, and said she would feel at rest only after undergoing the severest of punishments. She had herself invited this disaster but the bride had unknowingly fallen into the fire. She had been tricked. No punishment could be too severe for such trickery.

The bride was a good and intelligent girl. She knew that to acknowledge one's fault and to sincerely repent is the greatest possible punishment. She at once understood that all this had happened unknowingly. Then, though she repeatedly said there was no need, the fish who had been a husband related to her the whole story of her childhood. She realized that the father had woven this web, inspired by his false and nonsensical concept of honour and by his greed for dowry. The poor mother had tried her best to prevent it but had failed.

Lost in thought, the bride listened to the whole story. Then she said: "I have borne the pain of this illusion only for a week, but you have borne it for years. Your pain is greater than mine. The same lightning has struck both of us. Now we must unitedly face this crisis."

"But I was the one who became a bridegroom and took your hand. I am completely to blame. You have been deceived by me." Impatiently, the bride interrupted: "You have been equally punished for the deception."

"No, not even death can free me from the weight of this sin." Then the bride stroked her cheeks, and said in honeyed tones: "Now we two will seek our freedom together."

Weeping copiously, the other replied: "If I had knowingly married you, there would be no obstacle to our freedom, but now I cannot rid myself of the guilt of this deception. Otherwise I would have set up a matchless model of marriage between two women."

"Nothing is lost yet", said the bride, encouragingly, "Stop these childish regrets now. We will have to find our own path to freedom. What is so wonderful about marriage between a man and a woman? Everyone knows that the sun rises in the east. If it were to rise in the west, that would be something really special!"

Then the bride opened her trunk and took out a set of her clothes. With her own hands, she dressed the other girl. She decked her with jewels and applied collyrium to her eyes. Then she wore her own clothes. Both of them began to sparkle like the flame of the lamp. Dropping her eyes, the bride kissed the other's cheeks, and said lovingly: "From today your name is Beeja and mine is Teeja. How blessed we are that this fortunate chance has brought us together. Now don't you ever say another word of regret in my presence!" Examining her dress with care, Beeja said: "I hope this is not a dream?" Holding her in her arms, Teeja replied: "Silly, this is a truth which has never before been revealed."



When the darkness of night was dispelled, the sun rose at its accustomed place, but the blaze that was revealed when the door of his daughter's room opened, blinded the Seth's eyes with its dazzle. He seemed as astounded as if he had no idea of the truth. Like a mad dog, he pounced on his daughter and shouted: "How dare you dress up like this? Have you lost all respect for the family honour and for my words?"

Beeja felt like laughing at her bristled up father. She replied: "It was I who wanted to ask you for an explanation of the deception you have practised all these years. But now I will neither ask any questions nor will I answer any of your questions." Stamping his foot, and spitting with disgust, her father said: "You shameless creature, of course you are unable to answer my question. Under no circumstances will I permit you to dress like this, understand that once and for all."

Hearing the uproar, the mother came running out. She had not slept a wink all night. When she saw her daughter thus decked up, she felt as if a scorpion's poison had run through every vein in her body. It was more painful to see her daughter dressed like this than it would have been to see her lying dead. When the truth, nourished in silence for years, suddenly showed itself in this form, for a moment she was unable to bear the revelation. As her daughter's lips opened, she embraced her and burst into tears. Through her sobs she exclaimed: "Don't ask anything, my dear, don't ask anything. I tried my best, I fell at his feet and pled with him, but I was just as helpless as you are. With folded hands I beg you not to curse this father of yours."

A smile flickered on Teeja's lips. She said: "Are you still worried about curses? Don't worry. Neither will I curse anyone nor will she. On the contrary, we are grateful to you both since through you we have learnt something very valuable."

As soon as he heard Teeja say this, the Seth put his turban at her feet and began to plead with her: "*Bahurani*, now my honour is in your hands. Please, somehow or other, persuade her to take off this dress and wear the dress she used to wear."

Bubbling over with laughter, Teeja said: "You still call me *bahurani*! Blessed indeed is this honour of yours! I don't understand how a false dress will preserve your honour. And what will you do with such honour even if you do preserve it? So far you have done as you wished, now let us do as we wish. We only want to openly accept this deception of yours as a gift and a blessing."

The Seth only needed a pretext to emerge in his true colours. Teeja's words immediately brought out his real self. His eyes turned red with anger as he shouted: "In this house my wish is law. If you want to do as you wish, there is no place for you here."

At this Beeja spoke up. "This house doesn't suit us either. That is what we were coming to tell you, only we got distracted by nonsensical nothings. We are leaving now. If you feel like it, you can give us your blessing. We feel suffocated in this house." The Seth came down to brass tacks. "You are welcome to leave, but I won't give back a single paisa of the dowry. So don't you rely on that hope."

The father was in a rage but the daughter couldn't help laughing. Still laughing, she said: "Now we rely on no one but ourselves. Why are you getting upset for no reason? We don't care a straw for your dowry. In fact, if you don't feel ashamed at the idea, we are ready to go naked." Throwing off the mask of fatherly care, the Seth said: "Well, this was bound to happen. Of course you will now dance naked in public. You can do as you please, but these jewels are mine. If I hadn't brought you up, could you ever have dreamt of such dowry or jewels?"

"Thank you, we don't want such dreams. You are welcome to them." So saying, Teeja and Beeja began to take off all their jewels. They had been so thrilled with the sheer pleasure of dressing up that they had not spared a thought for the monetary value of these jewels. When Teeja had taken off all her jewels, and began to remove the head ornament, the mother's heart overflowed. Through her tears, she said: "Fortunate one, don't remove this symbol of your marriage."

There was no limit to the Seth's greed today, but actually he was tortured more by the challenge to his power as master of the house than even by his greed. He was almost out of his mind with rage at the sight of his daughter making so light of that power and glory which had lasted for so many generations. It was as though clarified butter was gradually being poured into his flaming indignation and obstinacy. The Sethani's senseless remark infuriated him once more. Gnashing his teeth, he said: "What has marriage got to do with an ornament? Poor women can't afford to wear gold head ornaments. Does that mean they are not married? Whatever happens, I won't give them even a single pin."

Smiling, the two girls took off their head ornaments and handed them over. For the first time in her life, the Sethani rebuked her husband. She said: "Has a mad dog bitten you or what?" The Seth growled back: "A mad dog has bitten these two but of course how should you realize that? Catch me trying to appease them. If they want to trample on lakhs of rupees and walk off, let them."

Feeling unable to draw another breath in that polluted atmosphere, the two of them quietly walked away. But the mother's heart was also not free of illusion. She had an idea that tears were the proof of motherly love. She asked tearfully: "Daughter, where will you go?"

"Wherever destiny leads us", Beeja replied softly.

Such matters cannot remain hidden. So far, the villagers had knowingly pretended to be unknowing.



They had turned a deaf ear to whispered rumours. Under our clothes, which one of us is not naked? And then, who would dare step forward to bell the cat? The rich can do anything and get away it. One can manage without the sun, but not without the moneylender. Though such outrageous behaviour had never been heard or seen, no one dared break the silence. To open one's lips would be to get a drubbing. So everyone feigned ignorance.

But when the Seth's son was seen emerging from his house, dressed as a woman, and accompanied by his bride, the people got the shock of their lives. Better that god had not given them eyes than that they should see such a sinful sight! The air began to crackle with whispers. How was it possible to swallow this camel without blinking? Can an elephant pass through the eye of a needle? People ran out of their houses and gathered together. It was as if someone had disturbed a nest of hornets. Marriage between two women! My god, two girls have got married to each other! This is a slap on the face of manhood. This new style will destroy both caste and community! It will blacken the face of the sun! How did the Seth manage to suppress the truth all these years? Can there be any greater deception than this? If this matter is not settled that will be the end of the panchayat's authority. This python cannot be allowed to slip away.

Hastily, the village panchas surrounded the two girls. A cry rose up: "Don't you dare take another step till this matter is settled. If a woman marries a woman, what is man to do—go and find a mousehole for himself?"

Teeja retorted sharply but her words were lost in the din created by the panchas. The air echoed and re-echoed with shouts of "Justice, justice!" Then Beeja raised her hand and made a sign asking for silence. When silence fell, she said in a loud voice: "We do not want any justice to be done, but if you are so eager for justice, wait a moment while I go to the house and come back."

So saying, she went towards the house. People made way for her and stood, waiting. When she returned, she was holding a scarecrow. The same turban, the same *angarkhi* and *dhoti*. Then she sat down to dig a hole in the ground. People watched in silence as she planted the scarecrow there at the edge of the village square. The fringe of the turban brushed the ground. The moustaches under the flat nose were intimidating in appearance. Then she stood up and declared: "Do you think we are afraid of you moustached men? We might as well be afraid of this scarecrow! You men are even more of a gone case than is this scarecrow. Look your fill. We are going ahead now, and we challenge you to stop us. Let us see which son of a man dares try?"

These words cast such a spell on the men that each one of them began to see his own face reflected in that of the scarecrow. While the panchas were busy staring at their faces mirrored in the pot which served as the scarecrow's head, the two women walked away. No one even looked at them. As soon as they disappeared, everyone felt as if the scarecrow was laughing. What was there to laugh at? How dare a scarecrow laugh at living human beings, and deride them? Everybody felt disgusted by the scarecrow, and as one man they fell on it and tore it to pieces. Some fortunate ones were able to lay their hands on a scrap of turban, *dhoti* or *angarkhi*. Everyone felt relieved when the scarecrow was torn to bits. Then they all quietly dispersed and as soon as they got their heads under their own roofs, each man began roaring like a lion at the women of his own house.

Beeja and Teeja, arms around one another, went out of the village. The earth was green as far as the eye could see. In the fields millet stood head high, waving in the breeze. Flowering creepers lay across the borders between the fields. Small bushes and trees stood buried in webs of greenery. Clouds wobbled drunkenly in the sky. The beauty of this earth lay before them, limitless, stretching out in every direction. For the first time, these beloved daughters of Nature met with Nature. Leaping like does, they climbed a hill. Mad with joy, they chased each other to the highest peak and began to whirl round and round, holding hands. The houses in the village looked like so many smallpox eruptions on the face of the earth.

A group of clouds touched the mountain. Rain fell in torrents. The air vibrated as though with drumbeats of joy. Flashing around them the lightning throbbed with eagerness to see the beauty of the two friends. Wiping Beeja's face, Teeja said: "The lightnings are thirsting to meet us. Perhaps their thirst cannot be quenched through these veiling clothes..."





Beeja answered : "What use have we for veils ? Why keep the poor lightnings thirsty ?"

As the blouses fell open, the lightning flashed. As if it too, hidden in clouds, had been thirsting for centuries. The glimpse of these pairs of lotus flowers quenched its thirst. Once more the joyful drumbeats burst forth.

After a while, the lightning flashed again. This was a more prolonged wave of lightning. Like ladybirds, the two stood, embracing, lost to the world, longing to mingle with one another, drinking nectar from each others' lips.

Like the clouds, they discharged their passion and then slackened their embrace. The inanimate life of that mountain was infused with new meaning, and a new glow was dissolved into the lightning. When consciousness returned, they put on their clothes. The lightning growled and flashed once more, as if it bore a peculiar grudge against clothing. As the growls echoed around, they again fell into each others' arms.

As they came down the hillside, gambolling in the rain, they felt light and fresh like the flowers that grew around. Streams of joy flowed around them. With relaxed limbs the soaked earth was blessed by the pure love of the clouds.

It was only when they reached the foot of the mountain that they fully realized the heights of their love. If there was anything in the world clearer and purer than the untouched water shed by the clouds, surely it was the deep love between them !

But in this human world one cannot live by love alone, and then they were two girls. They wanted to set up house together in a new way of their own, thus making enemies of all the village men. One might as well hope to overturn the mountain. If it were left to them, they would much rather not even look at any human habitation.

Unthinkingly, busily talking to each other, they went straight to the haunted *bawri*. Darkness was gathering on the face of the earth. As the rainfall stopped, they wrung the water out of their clothes .

The forest, sighing in the wind. The deserted *bawri*. A hundred and twenty eight ghosts had their dwelling here. Not a bird could flap its wing here after dark. Whoever ventured here never returned home alive. In broad daylight men trembled when they had to pass within a couple of miles of this place.

They sat down on the brink of the *bawri*. Fearlessly talking away. Above them the moon played hide and seek with the clouds. Suddenly Beeja said : "The moon just whispered a spell in my ear. If you give me a kiss I'll tell it to you." Teeja answered : "If you give me a kiss, I won't ask for the spell."

"No, the spell is worth asking for" replied Beeja. "Then tell me without my asking." said Teeja. "The moon keeps asking me why I look at its plain face instead of looking at the moon who is sitting next to me."

"Nonsense, the moon whispered that to me, not to you." The two moons had just begun to drink each others' nectar, when suddenly a voice echoed near them. "I knew you would come here." They started, and looked around. A dazzling white man was standing nearby, and smiling at them. He looked as if moulded in moonlight. Smiling, he said : "Today our deserted lake has been purified. But I'm astonished that you didn't feel afraid to come to this *bawri* of ghosts."

Taken aback, they both stood up. Beeja replied softly : "There is reason to feel afraid of human beings. What is there to fear from ghosts ?"

"You are absolutely right", said the ghost chieftain, smiling, "We are consigned to this existence because of the black deeds of those dishonest humans. We revenge ourselves on the fearful ones by frightening them still further. We hate the very word 'human'. Why, just this morning, didn't those bastards spare no effort to torture the two of you in the village square ?"

Surprised, Teeja enquired : "How do you know about that ?" The ghost explained : "We heard the humans whispering about your marriage. We love to have some fun so our whole tribe went down to watch this morning's scene. All of us liked the two of you very much. It was we who arranged the scarecrow episode, otherwise do you think those savages would have let you escape ? In fact I stayed with you right up the mountain, to protect you from any attempt at violence."

At this both of them were suffused with shyness. The ghost chieftain began to laugh, and said : "When you were not shy before the lightning, why should you feel shy at my words ! The sight of your love made me feel that life is worth living. I'm the chieftain of this tribe. You can live here without fear. Near this lake I will set up a palace which a king might envy. The state treasury may run dry but you will never be



— Live drawing of dancing girls, Rajasthan, 18th century A.D.



in want. All your wishes, small and big, will be fulfilled. Women can come here, but the shadow of a man will not be able to cast a sharp glance at you. Now you can disport yourselves to your hearts' content in this palace."

Looking in the direction that the chieftain pointed out, they saw a snow white palace gleaming in the dark. What unique carving and what wonderful windows! Inside, the palace glowed with light. Outside, the moonlight wove its web.

They had not realized that their love was such a blessing! When they entered the palace they were struck speechless with wonder. Saffron courtyards. Crimson walls. Vermilion ceilings. A bedstead of lotus. A bed of roses. They swung in the swings of joy. Brighter than the hue of saffron, those two birds so lost themselves in the joys of togetherness that they became altogether oblivious to this world and its affairs. After all, what can compare in bliss with that primeval trance of Eros?

Finally they emerged from the trance, and consciousness returned. Looking into each others' eyes, they smiled. Mixing her tuneful voice in that pure smile, Beeja said: "The ghost chieftain must have once more felt that his life is worth living!" The words slipped out of Teeja's mouth: "The gods in heaven too must have felt that immortality is worth having."

At dawn when they came out of the palace and saw the sun rise, they felt as if today the sun was rising from the pure petals between their thighs. Ever since that night, the sun has forsaken its former dwelling, and has started rising from this new abode, whence it rises even today. All the joys of the world throbbed with eagerness to dwell in the bed of that palace. All the thirst of the whole universe was encompassed in that one thirst of theirs.

A fortnight flew by on wings of rapture. Nothing was lacking in the solicitude of the ghost chieftain. One day, the ghost chieftain said to them: "In your happiness you have forgotten the world, but the world has not forgotten you, even for a moment. You can visit the village if you like. There is nothing to fear since I will be ready to protect you from danger. The village women are free to come here. Even the sun gets tired of being alone. So does the moon."

The words escaped them both simultaneously: "But we are two."

Smiling, the ghost chieftain replied: "But you are one life and being—in fact even less than one at the moment of physical union."

They had gotten over their shyness now. At the chieftain's words they burst out laughing. The chieftain's smile paled before their unrestrained laughter.

Then, flying and fluttering in circles like a couple of butterflies, they reached the village of the humans. The same encirclement of walls and barriers. The same huts and roofs. Each with its own limits and boundaries. Each with its own kitchen and its own stove. Each with its own fire and its own smoke. The squabbles of thine and mine. Piles of rubbish lying here and there. Amidst all the squabbling to secure peace and happiness, bankruptcy showed its face. Worries and anxieties over children. Stinking baby clothes. Filth everywhere. Conflicts and quarrels in every house.

How had they lived in this hell for so many years? How did they grow up here? Today, remembering that past life, they were filled with disgust. How dreadful! But the villagers remain immersed in their life. They decorate the courtyards with red and yellow *alpnas*. They draw pictures on the walls. They sing songs on special occasions. They cook special dishes at festival time. They swing. They dance and sing. No one sees filth anywhere!

Today, seeing them together for the second time, nobody made any attempt to secure "justice." Instead, they hurriedly closed their doors. Everyone was terrified of the ghosts. Those ghosts could waylay you on the road and wring your neck. One's own neck is dear to everyone. As for these two ladies, they were fit only to live with ghosts. They had sought the right company for themselves. Well, it would take someone of their own nature to deal with them. Whoever met them passed on with eyes downcast. Even the star carved *lathis* betrayed signs of trembling.

Beeja's father was sitting in the courtyard, busy drawing up his accounts when suddenly he saw his daughter and daughter-in-law approaching. First he nearly swooned. Then he managed to stand up, though he was trembling like a leaf. His dhoti came undone. Folding his hands, he said: "I am ready to give back all the jewels and dowry with interest, only be gracious to this poor man."

Irritated, Beeja stepped forward, and said: "We don't want your jewels or dowry. We have come just to meet you. We don't want even a straw from this house." Swallowing his spittle, the Seth replied: "Why not? Are you not my daughter?"

"I know well enough that I am your daughter. I know what a father's love is, too! But if in future you ever mention giving and taking, I'll never set foot here again." The father was at a loss for an immediate answer. Trying to master his agitation, he again folded his hands and said: "Now you are living in royal style. It's not possible for you to keep coming here. Whenever you send word, I will be only too happy to attend on you."



He deliberately did not mention his fear of the ghosts. The daughter was filled with disgust. She felt as if she had slipped into a mire of excrement. She immediately turned around to leave. Teeja in any case had not the slightest desire to step into her in-laws' house. She also turned away.

Holding up his dhoti with both hands, the father stumbled along behind them, saying: "Daughter, are you going off without meeting your mother? The poor thing is half blind with constant weeping." As she left, Beeja said: "Ask mother to come there and meet us. She will be quite safe."

With that, Beeja strode off and Teeja hurried to keep pace with her. She could sense the turmoil in Beeja's mind. When they were well beyond the village boundaries, Beeja screwed up her face and said: "I'll need to bathe in perfumes to get rid of that stink!"

Laughing, Teeja replied: "Isn't our breath perfume enough for you?" and took Beeja in her arms. The screaming peacocks bent and bowed in dance. The frogs mingled their sweet music with the breezes. The leaping does stood still to gaze at that union. Full of joy the pigeons cooed and danced. The cricket spread magic waves of sound through the forest. It was as if that uniquely uniting embrace had blessed all nature with liberty. In a short while, they began to yearn for the solitude of their palace so they raced towards the *bawri*. Far behind them indeed was that hell of a village.

Early the next morning, a loud knocking on the door woke Beeja with a start. She hastily awakened Teeja, wore her clothes, and ran down the stairs to open the sandalwood door. There stood her mother and her cousin sister. Before Beeja could speak, her cousin said, smiling: "Even married women don't get up so late!" Beeja was still not quite awake. Forgetful of her mother's presence, she said, rubbing her eyes: "We are no less than married women."

When they set foot in the palace, those two were wonderstruck. Who could create such a marvel unless they had control over the tribe of ghosts? But how had that happened? So dazed were they that the splendour of the palace appeared four times as dazzling as it actually was. They had come prepared to say a great deal but found themselves unable to utter a word. They felt like two spiders suddenly introduced into a golden castle.

After gazing around to her heart's content, the Sethani stared in wonder at Beeja and muttered, as if in a trance: "Did I really give birth to you from my own womb?" Smiling, Beeja answered: "Well, you or the midwife should know. How am I to answer that question?" The cousin was irritated by the Sethani's tactless question. In a warning whisper she said to her: "Is this what you came to ask?"

"Don't tell me you are regretting having come", Teeja said. Meanwhile Beeja was busy serving up a number of delicacies. After they had eaten their fill, she asked them to rest on the golden bed while she and Teeja ate together. When Beeja went to her mother, she found both women fast asleep, their backs to each other. They had tried their best to resist sleep, but even a person kept awake by agonizing wounds would have fallen asleep on that velvet covered golden bed. These, after all, were healthy women worn out by work. Some hours later they woke up with a start, sat up, and looked around. A king would have envied that splendour. How painful it is to see such a dream when one is wide awake! The mother nudged her niece. "Why don't you speak out? If you keep quiet like this, how will they get to know the reason for our coming here?" The niece sighed deeply and replied: "Anyone would go into a daze at the sight of this glorious palace. I don't know what to think or what to say."

The four sat together and chatted for a while. Then the cousin screwed up her courage and said: "Within five days of your leaving the village, the news about this castle spread like wildfire. Such things don't need to be conveyed by anyone. The wind blows them to all ears. If it were not for the fear of the ghosts, a second Mahabharata would have been waged by men competing to marry you. The king himself set out for the conquest but when he was halfway here, he took to his heels. Once the lord of the country admits defeat, who else would dare try? But all of them—young and old, great and small—are writhing with the same inner torment."

Teeja interrupted: "Why, what harm have we done to anyone?" Mother answered: "What greater harm could there be? Your way of making a home together has made men lose face altogether."

To this, Beeja replied, addressing her cousin: "Well, we have no remedy for that." This gave the cousin her chance. Encouraged, she began to explain: "You do have a remedy. In fact, that is why we plucked up the courage to come here today." Now the two lovers began to pay attention. The cousin went on with her sermon: "Your marriage was a farce. The sweat of a man has not touched even your shadows."

"Nor will we let it", retorted Teeja at once.

"No, daughter, that is not possible, not even in a dream. A woman can survive without water but not without the sweat of a man. Your father has received a great many offers. The finest and wealthiest young men of the province are willing to marry the two of you—separately, of course. Give up this false pride now. Settle down and be happy. Start a family. Bathe in milk, have many sons, and prolong a lineage like a creeper with many leaves. Your father is only too eager to give both of you a double dowry each."



Smiling faintly, Teeja said: "We've already tasted the fruits of that endeavour to prolong the lineage by means of us! Now this creeper has to be pulled up by the roots. As for happiness, our present state is the greatest happiness for us. We have no answer to your proposal except to clap our hands and laugh heartily."

The mother's face fell. Turning to Beeja, she asked: "What is your intention, daughter?"  
 "What makes you think my intention is any different? In future please don't trouble to come here with such advice." The mother's heart began to sink when she saw the anger in her daughter's eyes. She remembered the troop of ghosts and her hair stood on end. She looked at her niece and said softly: "It's getting late, we'd better go now." The niece quietly stood up. Enough that they had seen life inside the palace, as though in a dream. Beeja did not even go to the door with them.

The next morning, there came the same knock on the door. A startled Beeja opened. There on the threshold stood her cousin with bowed head. Surprised, Beeja said: "Do you know, last night I dreamt that you were standing at the door, exactly like this. As soon as I kissed you, you ran away. I called and called after you, but you didn't even look back. Well, now I'll kiss you again, and let's see how you run away from me!"

Smiling, she quickly kissed her cousin's left cheek. As she kissed her, tears began to flow from her cousin's eyes. Beeja's smile vanished. Pulling her inside, she said: "Are you upset because I kissed you? I only..."

"How can I possibly be upset by your kiss?" broke in her cousin tearfully, "These tears have been stored up a long time, and your kiss opened the floodgates. I've thought and thought about it, but I still can't understand how you two were so bold as to do what you have done. I am not even worthy to look at your union. Yesterday I didn't get a chance to say this in front of aunt, so today I came on my own."

When she saw Teeja, her tears began to flow once more. She kept looking from one to the other of the two lovers' faces, and crying helplessly. Her pain could express itself only through those tears, so they did not try to stop her. Each tear contained in itself the bitterness of a whole ocean.



— Eastern Indian painting, late medieval

When the tears stopped flowing, she began to reveal this bitterness in words. She told them that when she had married, she had felt sad to leave her parents yet had also felt happiness at going to her in-laws, but the first night with her husband saw the beginning of all her woes. Though he was a male, the husband who had taken her hand had not an ounce of maleness in him. Her in-laws knew this yet they had cheerfully conducted the wedding with much pomp and show. They had thought that perhaps the touch of a youthful virgin bride would stir up his youth and heat his blood. But they had thought wrong and the innocent girl had to suffer for their mistake. When all his force was of no avail, the husband appeased his wounded pride by biting her body all over with his teeth.

After telling them this story, she showed them her body. Her back, chest, arms, buttocks, thighs—all were covered with blue scars. She had told her parents but they had not come to her rescue. The honour of great families must be safeguarded in public but who would dare expose all that goes on in secret? How long could she escape the lust of her father-in-law and brother-in-law? She was forced to give in. Can a sheep save itself while living in a leopard's den? Though her husband came to know, he did not raise any objection. He began to absorb himself much more in his business affairs. The business prospered immensely after his marriage. The family assets and property increased. Everyone was happy with this bride who had brought good fortune.

Beeja broke her silence and said, sighing deeply: "And you also had to be happy in their happiness!"

"What else could I do?"

"Are you still happy?" asked Teeja.

"Well, I was happy enough so far but when I saw your courage, all my sorrow came welling up again."

"Now you need not go back", said Beeja, eagerly, "Who can dare defy the three of us together?"

"No, no", she replied, shaking her head, "I haven't come to stay here. I have lightened the burden of my heart by weeping and telling you my woes. Only death can save me from my in-laws. They have lakhs' worth of property, sheep and cattle, seven storeyed houses. It is not so easy to shake off all those attachments. And I have not yet had a child. I will be at rest only after producing an heir to all that wealth. My brother-in-law has come to fetch me. I will have to leave the day after tomorrow. But I can never forget your kindness to me. Seeing your courage and your happiness has consoled me, but I don't have the kind of strength required to live with you."

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She had much more to say but her eyes filled and she could not speak further. After a while, she wiped her eyes and said: "Yesterday you made me eat separately from you. Today I will eat with you. Perhaps I will get some good sense by eating your left over food."

"You have good sense already", said Teeja, "But you can't get rid of the ghosts of your *sanskaras*." As soon as she uttered the word "ghost", the ghost chieftain appeared on the scene but the cousin did not get scared. She gazed in wonder at that dazzling sheen. "Why did you think of me?" asked the chieftain.

Teeja burst out laughing and said: "You are not the ghost I thought of. You are the immortal flame which the visionary sees in the future. Anyway we are always glad to see you. After all, we are able to struggle only with your backing." Embarrassed, the ghost chieftain said: "Better not praise me too much or I will get a swollen head." Then he looked at Beeja's cousin and said: "I heard your sad story. Now you can happily return to your in-laws. You will find your husband has become potent. Your father-in-law and brother-in-law will not dare even look at you. You will conceive by your husband and will give birth to five Pandavas."

The woman was overcome with joy. "Take care that you don't go out of your mind with joy", said Teeja playfully. Beeja turned to the ghost chieftain and asked: "Is this also within your power?" The ghost chieftain answered proudly: "There is nothing we cannot do."

The four of them sat and ate together in celebration of the unexpected boon. After chatting for a while, Beeja and Teeja walked down with the cousin to the village. They kept reminding her to keep them informed of her happiness, once she reached her in-laws' place.

On the way back, Beeja seemed lost in thought. "What are you thinking?" asked Teeja, "Won't you tell me?"

"Can I hide anything from you?" replied Beeja, hesitantly, "It's really something worth thinking about. If you pay attention, I'll tell you."

Teeja blinked. "You silly girl, do I ever fail to pay attention when you speak?"

Looking hard at her, Beeja said: "Didn't anything occur to you when you saw this boon being conferred?"

Teeja took her in her arms and replied: "The same thing occurred to me as has occurred to you, but it is useless to think of it. There is nothing lacking in our happiness, is there?"

"No, nothing is lacking but this boon has revived the regret in my heart. If you are willing, the deception inflicted on you can be undone."

"I have never considered it an infliction."

"That may be, but how can I ever close my eyes to the blackness of my sin? In any case, such blackness cannot be erased by shutting one's eyes to it. On the contrary, it spreads even faster. Won't you give in to this small desire of mine?"

Moaning softly in the tightening embrace, Teeja said: "If I hadn't given in, could this joy have been ours?"

"But why do you think this is the furthest our joy can go?"

"I think this is the furthest because it is the furthest."

"Oh no, the furthest is still a long way off."

"That's nothing but an illusion, a mirage. But anyway, if you think there is still more joy to be had, then ask for your boon."

Freeing herself from the embrace, Beeja said with mock anger: "Why don't you understand? Only if you ask for the boon will my sin be washed away."

"But I don't want to be a man, in any incarnation whatsoever. You were brought up like a boy. If you still have the desire to be one, I won't stop you. Let's see what this new syrup tastes like." Since Teeja absolutely refused to yield, Beeja had to agree. Once again, her upper lip began to itch for a moustache. Now she would be a real man in men's clothing.

As they neared the palace, they saw the ghost chieftain standing at the door. Beeja could not hold herself back a moment longer. She ran ahead of Teeja, and asked the chieftain: "Can I also have the boon you gave to my sister's husband?" The ghost chieftain replied in a loud voice, so that Teeja also should hear: "Why not? I was hesitant to take the initiative, but I have no shortage of boons if you want them."

Teeja flushed deeply. Digging her big toe into the loose soil, she lowered her eyes and said: "What is the hurry? Let us experience this togetherness for the last time today." Smiling, the ghost chieftain replied: "Since you are so enamoured of this togetherness, I'll leave one possibility open for you. Should Beeja ever feel that she has had enough of being a man, she has only to acknowledge her wish, and she will become a woman once more."



Beeja, who was lost in her dreams of maleness, reproved the ghost chieftain, saying: "Once I get the boon I have so long desired, why should I express any such wish?"

"As you please", answered the chieftain.

The stars had just begun to gleam in the darkening sky. Looking up at them, Teeja said: "Anyway tonight at least is my night. I won't let you sleep a wink."

"Well then, after tonight, you will have to stay awake every night for ever", answered Beeja, "So think again."

"After tonight, I will never have to think again."

Even though she clearly heard Teeja say these words, Beeja did not grasp their import. Closing the door, the two of them walked, anklets tinkling, to their bedroom. Teeja was in a great hurry today. She flung off all her clothes in the time Beeja took just to untie her blouse. Pulling Beeja's hand, she cried: "How come you are so slow today? Usually you are always impatient."

After that, the two pink flamingoes fluttered, entwined, and took not a moment's rest all night. Teeja wished that night would never end, but Beeja was longing for dawn to come before its time. Indifferent to their wishes, night ran its course and came to its accustomed end. The mild warmth of morning fell like a scorching fire on Teeja's eyelids.

As the sun rose, Beeja felt a tremor run through her body. All at once, her breasts flattened out, and hair sprouted on her cheeks and upper lip. She felt her limbs and ran her hands down her thighs. Yes indeed, she was now a fully developed young man. Her body was covered with curly black hair. Bubbling over with joy, he looked at his face in the mirror. For a moment, he felt scared by those huge curling moustaches. But how could he allow himself to feel scared? The glory of curling moustaches lies in their ability to scare others!

Seeing a turban, *angarkhi* and *dhoti* hanging on a peg, he leapt forward. For years he had dressed himself in these manly garments. Hastily, he wore the *dhoti* and *angarkhi*, and tied on the turban. The knee long fringe of the turban waved proudly. Attired in his full glory, he looked around. Teeja was nowhere to be seen. She should have been here at this moment. Calling loudly for Teeja, he strode through the palace. Then he heard Teeja's voice from the bathroom. "I'm bathing, don't come in here."

What new modesty was this? The husband leapt forward, pushed aside the curtain and went in. Doubling up with shyness, Teeja said: "Just look away while I wear my clothes, will you?"

The husband went out, surprised. "You were never so shy before," he remarked.

"It was different before."

"But we are the same. Just have a look at my new form. Look at these moustaches, this turban!"

"The turban was there to begin with." The husband grew irritated, and said crossly: "Why are you standing inside there, chattering away? Why don't you come out fast?" Teeja stepped out, beautifully dressed. She looked at her husband from head to foot. What an attractive figure! Curled moustaches! A muscular frame! Curly black hairs! Looking away, Teeja said: "We should avert the evil eye. Come, let me tie a black cord on your wrist for good luck."

Today Teeja looked absolutely different to her husband. What nectar filled eyes! What intoxicating youth! Sparks began to fly from every pore in his body. When Teeja's fingers touched his wrist as she tied on the black cord, he had great difficulty in restraining himself. Lightning darted through his body from head to feet. Catching hold of Teeja's arm, he said: "Today I will settle all the old accounts with you."

Teeja stood silent, with bent head. She wondered what made her husband use such language. To tease his wife further, he added: "Today no candle will be needed in the bedroom. I'll engender such light and heat as you will never be able to forget."

"That's enough", Teeja replied, rebuking her husband, "You've barely become a man, but you've already learnt all their ways."

"It seems as if the sun will never set today."

"It will set soon enough, be patient. You must be sleepy, after staying awake last night. Why don't you have a nap while I take a walk down to the village?"

"You stayed awake as well—but what's this new idea? You'll go alone and leave me here?"

"Why, do you expect me to go with you? It seems you have no shame at all, but I am not out of my senses. How do you expect to survive if you ignore the ways of the world?"

Smiling, her husband said: "It looks as if I'll have to teach you the ways of the world, after all." And with that, he picked Teeja up in his arms. All her struggles were of no avail. Laying her down on the bed of roses, he fell on top of her. As darkness swam before the eyes, a new light spread. The petals of the lotus seemed about to break asunder yet did not break. Teeja felt as if the whole universe had



entered her body. When they separated, it took a while for them to return to consciousness.

Then the husband, his eyes still closed, remarked: "How many days we wasted, just fooling around."

Turning away, Teeja replied: "Wasted? What do you mean, wasted? Those joys can never be forgotten, not even after death."

The same scenes again at night! While enacting those scenes, the new knowledge gradually began to dawn in the husband's mind that a man is stronger than a woman. In fact, a frail woman is of no account at all in the face of a man's unlimited strength. A man is indeed tremendously powerful.

That night Teeja received the seed of her husband into her womb. In the last hour before dawn, both of them, exhausted, fell into a deep sleep. When the husband's eyes opened, the sun had already climbed into the sky. Its rays shone into the room. Seeing the rays, pride awoke in his heart, telling him that it is man's heat and power which rises in the heavens in the form of the sun. Woman is merely his shadow. Earlier, the two of them equally owned this palace. Both of them had the same rights and the same importance. Perhaps Teeja still thought in those terms! That would never do. The matter must be settled once for all. Wonder of wonders, he did not even wait for Teeja to awaken. Instead, he began to shake her and call loudly: "Teeja, Teeja!" Teeja sat up with a start. "What made you wake me up so abruptly?" she asked, rubbing her eyes.

The husband's ears were not pleased by his wife's question. "You can sleep whenever you like", he replied dryly: "Right now I want an answer to one question. Who is the owner of this palace? You or I?"

Teeja could not quite grasp the import of this. She did not answer at once, but sat silent. Her husband impatiently repeated his question. Looking at his curled moustaches, Teeja answered: "Why are you worried about who owns it or doesn't own it? The two of us live together in this palace, isn't that good enough?"

"I'm not asking who lives or doesn't live together. Give me a definite answer to my question. Who is the real owner of this property?"

"The ghost chieftain", said Teeja in a low voice.

This answer disconcerted him at first, but he soon recovered, and said crossly: "Why are you beating about the bush? Now that it has been given into our possession, who is the owner? Answer me. To whom does this invaluable wealth belong? To you or to me?"

Teeja's brain felt benumbed. Such a change of colour in one night! Teeja had never asked such questions or sought such answers. As soon as a man took over, everything went topsy turvy. It would be fatal if she were to prevaricate now. She said: "We have equal rights over this property, but if you are still in doubt over the matter, you can ask the ghost chieftain to clarify it."

The husband felt every nerve in his body tense itself. "Don't you try to frighten me with your talk of the ghost chieftain", he said tauntingly, "Why should he ever take my side against you? What will he gain by favouring me, pray? But I never realized that you could harbour such infidelity in your mind."

"You've realized it now!"

This infuriated the man with the curled moustaches and he grew mad with anger. "Don't think I will be cowed down by this lover of yours", he shouted, "I'll establish my own kingdom. I'll collect unlimited boards of treasure and prepare a huge army. I'll build a mighty fortress, and hundreds of queens like you will wait on me in the harem."

Teeja interrupted: "How can you talk such nonsense so early in the morning?" So saying, she got off the bed of roses and went out of the room. This palace was hateful to her now. How had this "I" come between them in the course of a single night? This was the same base and wicked path that their ancestors had trodden. If they followed this path, they could not escape falling into the same swamp. Just as darkness envelops the sky the moment the sun sets, so had blackness filled Teeja's pure soul the moment she became a man.

Teeja found no peace, even after she had bathed in the spring of nectar. Even the sun and the moon are powerless before an eclipse. If she stayed here, squabbles and arguments would only add to the bitterness. It would be better to go and pay a visit to the cousin sister at her in-laws' place. Why not go there instead of waiting here for news of her? Perhaps a few days' separation would help the conflict to subside.

She dressed in simple clothes, and then opened the door to go out. Enraged, her husband caught hold of her veil, and demanded: "Where are you going off now after setting my heart on fire like this?"

"You won't believe me if I tell you the truth", replied Teeja quietly, "So what is the use of telling you?"

"Never mind what the use is—how dare you go anywhere without asking my permission?"

What a gulf had opened between them in this one day! Trying her best to keep the peace, Teeja answered: "You are not in your senses today. I will go and see how your cousin sister is doing at her in-laws' place."



place. In a couple of weeks, you are bound to come back to your senses. Then you can send me a message and I will return immediately."

"Don't you give me any of your sauce! As if I don't know that you want to gang up with the troop of ghosts and make an end of me! I know all about such whores as you! Get inside this minute, otherwise..."

"Otherwise what will you do?" said Teeja, smiling.

The smile on her lips made him lose the little self restraint he had left. Leaving hold of her veil, he grabbed her hair. One yank, and Teeja fell to the ground. Dragging her by the hair, he proclaimed: "I am not one of those fools who become enslaved to their wives and put up with women's nonsense."

Then he dragged Teeja in and threw her on the bed. She clenched her teeth and shut her eyes. After that not a sound escaped her lips. She felt it would be a degradation even to cry out in front of such a base husband. She felt as if she was suffocating. In a little while she sank into a deep well of unconsciousness.

Leaving her unconscious he went out of the palace. He bolted the door from outside and then began to wander about in the forest like a madman. In the course of his wanderings he came to the same mountain and began to climb it. That unshapely mountain which was like a heap of dry stones seemed colourless and ugly to him. Nature, steeped in sorrow, seemed to be mourning a death.

As soon as he reached the peak, the memory of that day came before his eyes. Even by closing his eyes he could not get rid of that picture, so he opened his eyes with a start. Oh those showers pouring down from heaven! Those lips! Those unrestrained embraces! That unbroken image of love! Every pore of his body throbbed with the yearning to become Beeja once more. And with that yearning his form changed. The same smooth cheeks. The two lotuses blooming in the blouse. Eager for the touch of Teeja's hands!

Beeja ran down the mountain, unbolted the door of the palace, and rushed in. Shaking the unconscious Teeja, she cried out: "Teeja... Teeja... I've given up being a man. Open your eyes and recognize your own Beeja."

After much shaking, Teeja came back to consciousness. Her eyes opened to see Beeja leaning like a creeper over her. The same tender affection spilling over from the eyes! The same soft as saffron body! The two fell into each others' arms and that is where they still are today.

Thanks to the ghost chieftain's magic, not only that filthy seed of a man but Teeja's womb also burnt up for ever. The creature named man dare not venture within a distance of 24 and 24, a total of 48 miles around that place. However, just once I did manage to visit them, on Teeja's express invitation. I saw that wonderful palace with my own eyes and I wrote this story at Teeja's dictation, in her words. Would the ghost chieftain have spared me alive if I had dared add a word to her account? □

It has been recently reported that a certain section of the Akalis has made a move to demand a separate personal law for the Sikhs. So far Sikhs like Jains and Buddhists have been governed by Hindu law in matters relating to marriage, succession, guardianship, maintenance, and adoption. It is reported that the main innovations in the projected Sikh personal law code are:

1. abolition of divorce except in extraordinary circumstances, since, it is claimed, marriage is an indissoluble bond according to the Sikh religion;

2. denial of succession rights to daughters;

3. legalization of the custom of *chadar andazi* as a permissible form of marriage. According to this custom, a widow is married to her husband's brother, even if he

happens to be already married. Thus it is possible for a man even to have three wives, if two of his brothers predecease him. The main purpose of this custom seems to have been the retention of land and other property in the hands of male members of the family. The legalization of this custom would mean the legalization of polygamy. It should be pointed out that the custom is not originally of Sikh origin.

There is a need for widespread discussion of and protest against this move which seeks to introduce retrogressive and anti women measures under the guise of religion. The Sikh religion is egalitarian in its origins and aspirations,

and should not be used to countenance polygamy and denial of inheritance rights to women. The attempt to present this attack on women's rights as in the interests of a minority is not valid since it means that the minority is being identified only with the men within it. The interests of women, who constitute half of any minority community, must be safeguarded whenever matters regarding the community, are being dealt with, since any such move invariably affects the lives of women. Such moves on the part of one powerful and articulate section of the community must be resisted since they clearly go against the interests of a large section of the community. □

## A Dangerous Move

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