

Seema Jain

Symphony of Love

The wounded bird of hope
its wings fluttered frantically
it bore on its bosom
the tremendous burden of sorrow
oodles of dreams floated in its starry-eyes,
like a fetus in amniotic fluid,
unaware of the tempestuous winds
raging fiercely in the world outside
the thick blanket of snow enveloped
the bare tree branches, the barren ground

Soon the storms subsided the snowstorms ceased
nature slowly changed its course
the rising sun with its resplendent rays
dispelled darkness and chill
strewn in abundance radiance and warmth
melting the frosty layers of frozen snow
bringing to life small blades of grass
the tiny tender saplings sprouted from the earth's bosom
their delicate shiny leaves opened their arms
to embrace the shining sun
the chirpy birds atop the green tree-tops
sang symphonies of love, harmony and hope
like a soothing lullaby for the craving ears of humanity.

Seema Jain

God's Will

*I*t was one o'clock at night. Sleep was far away from Tina's eyes. She could not get the whole thing out of her mind. Tomorrow would be the death anniversary of that young, vibrant, vivacious and brilliant girl who was called Gudiya; but in Tina's mind, everything was as fresh as if it had happened only yesterday. In her mind, the past became the present as she relived the happenings of that fateful day one year ago.

The telephone bell rang early in the morning. She half opened her eyes and looked at the clock. It was 5.30 a.m. Who would call at this early hour? She picked up the phone. It was Rishu, the son of a very dear friend of hers. He was unable to speak, sobbing hysterically. In a shaky tremulous voice, he was only able to mumble, in broken bits – "Aunty, Gudiya didi.... accident!" Alarmed and panicky, she tried to keep her sense of shock to herself and enquired about what had happened, how and where.

Rishu could only say, "Aunty, we are leaving right away. Please come over to our house."

In a dazed state of mind, Tina somehow rushed to Neena's place which was nearby. When she parked her car outside, she was alarmed to find the car of another common friend who she knew was scheduled to catch the evening flight to America and should have been very busy herself with her own preparations to leave. In fact, both Tina and Neena had spent the previous evening together at that common friend's place, helping her out with her packing and taking packed dinner for her. Why would Neena call her up in the given situation? Was something terribly wrong? An uneasy fear gnawed at her heart. She held her breath in apprehension and entered the door.

She soon got the answer as she stepped in. Neena was crying inconsolably. Their common friend Aparna broke the tragic news to her that had been received half an hour ago; Gudiya was no more as she had met with an accident the previous night and had breathed her last in the wee hours of the day!

How unbelievable! There must have been some mistake somewhere. Maybe they didn't hear the message correctly-- this was her instinctive first response, unable to accept such dreadful news. How could such a beautiful, charming, intelligent girl in the very prime of her youth die like that? But unfortunately, there was no such error.

She remembered how Neena had been heart-broken after her husband's death a year ago. And how Gudiya, being the eldest child, had taken on the mantle of the family's guardian and caretaker, and had become a healing force for her mother, and a source of inspiration, guidance and support, a true role model, for her younger siblings, a sister and a brother.

Neena had provided her with excellent educational opportunities as she had always believed that in the present day world, it was personality—an all-rounded, polished and charismatic personality—that was a passport to success rather than hard cash or bank balances that you had. So she had spent liberally on her children's education within the country and also abroad. Her children were her real assets. After completing her education very well, Gudiya had been working in an MNC in a metropolitan city for some time now. It was only the day before when Neena had shared that Gudiya was seriously thinking of marrying a guy she liked. Tina's blood chilled at the irony of it.

All these thoughts raced through Tina's mind. She did not have any words to console her friend, herself benumbed and tearful at the enormity of the tragic situation. She could only put her hands on Neena's shoulder in an attempt to console her and give her strength, and could feel the profundity of the pain and grief bleeding like a raw wound. Tina in those moments realised that perhaps there was no pain in the world worse than the anguish of having to face the death of your young child—and that too, a child who was like a beacon light to her whole family.

Gradually, some other local relatives poured in. Neena mechanically rose and started making arrangements to go. She seemed like someone sleep-walking. Dazed and confused, she kept talking of Gudiya -- "Gudiya always says this, she always says that..." Something stuck in Tina's throat. She felt how difficult it was for a mother to talk of her child in the past tense.

Within half an hour, Neena with some relatives had left for the eight hour long journey by car. For three days, she was walking and taking care of all the requisite formalities robotically. When she came back home, she was like a ghost, a shadow, bearing death-in-life, bloodless and pale, all vitality sucked away from her face, her whole being. Her two children, Rishu and Dimple, were as dumb-stricken by this sudden and severe blow.

Time moved on. Whenever she went to Neena's place, her eyes would always move towards Gudiya's beautiful and vibrantly smiling photograph kept on the mantelpiece. One day, she found Neena sobbing hysterically with Gudiya's medals, prizes and academic certificates lying in a pool in front of her, saying, "Was it for this end that my daughter strived so hard to get all these? How futile life can be? How could God be so cruel? My daughter could not even hurt an insect. Her charm and beauty, her lively smile could put life into anything. How could God sniff life away from this blossoming flower? Tina, tell me, is there a God at all? And if he is there, how could He be so unfair to a person like me, who has never harmed anyone in her life?" she asked with cynical scepticism.

Tina was utterly speechless. She wanted to utter all those clichés like, "God's will is supreme; we have to bow before it; we humans are helpless; God has His own scheme of things that we mortals can't understand etc." But they appeared so stale and meaningless before the melting grief that was as molten now as it was earlier and refused to congeal.

And today, after one year, the mother was as crest-fallen as before. Though on the surface, the routine of life was resumed, but Tina knew that the wound still lacerated, that it seemed it would never quite heal.

Tina began wondering about the strange scheme of things in God's world. She saw the aged and the elderly around her, completely bed-ridden and emaciated, continuing to live each day in the shadow of death. They still lived on. Then how could fate trample upon a young flower so soon before it could be allowed to fully blossom. Perhaps, it was rightly said:

*As flies to wanton boys are we to Gods:
They kill us for their sport.*