

Dharmana K Chaitanya

Life's Fiction

"Did any crow come?"

"No."

"Why did mamma hesitate?"

"Hmm?.."

"Keep watching carefully, Mona darling" said the young girl to her three years old sister. "Mamma will come and eat."

"Mamma?"

"Hmm..." the young girl said through her wet eyes. .. "I mean the crow." Dawn had already cracked, but the sun has yet not been sighted over the beautiful landscape. The crows might have still been yawning in their nests, punting the bed sheets.

Suddenly, a big monster stood instead of a crow amid the girls with the banana leaf filled with rice pudding before them. Both the chins raised up and gazed at the huge figure.

"What the--" screamed the devil. "Feeding rice to whom?"

"Crow, mamma..." the little sister said.

"Crow?" the big lady shrugged her shoulders and darted a sharp glance at the other girl. Slapped on her dreary face and kicked the pudding from the porch, which had fallen down into the brook of stagnant water beside the house. The young girl fell on the floor whilst the long-awaited tears jumped and poured enormously off the eyes cleaning the pupils to shine brighter.

"Nourishing superstitions to my bloody little child?" yelled the big lady, dragging the three years girl down through the stairs.

While left alone on the terrace, the young girl, who was half-laid on the floor, through her tears glanced at a beautiful red rose which was sagging in the air and smiling at her broadly, spreading its petals whereas the stigma stood erect. The girl wiped her tears with her work-worn fingers and smiled back. Now through the aroma of the pretty rose, she could see at the entire village surrounded by the empty meadows as the rice crop had already been seasonally finished and they would be unfilled until the end of the summer for the next sowing.

A hushed breeze encircled the cottages bringing the purest feelings from nowhere, while the cloudless sky was as clear as the young girl's heart; although when night would fall, the girl's heart fills with emotions, such as the stars filled an intact of black sky. For the sky, the moon would be the most glossy and lovely; whereas for the young girl, her love for her mother.

Now she could see men at their cottages climbing up with the help of ladders; holding banana leaves full of rice pudding in their hands. Now placed them at the top deliberately, for the crows to eat. This was a belief, not only the whole village had faith in but also the entire district had had; that the people who died earlier in the family would come as crows and eat the rice puddings on this auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti (*Light of the Sun* in Sanskrit), a village festival of Hindu theology. It marks the first day of sun's transit into the Makara (Capricorn), marking the end of the month with the winter solstice and the start of longer days.

Though the young girl's family was one among the few those belonged to minor Christian community in the district, her mother taught her everything the major religion of the country had had. But she never thought a day would come too early to apply the teachings for her own mother.

Just before she paced downstairs, something drew her attention down there few cottages next to her house.

Bratty for fuel made up of cow's dung been cuffed on the muddy walls of a poverty-stricken hut, by a mother who must be in late thirties. Her old, silk petticoat watered by the pour of sweat, although sun hadn't had made the first-smile of the day yet. Now a boy appeared all of a sudden jumping onto her and kissed on her sweat-drenched forehead. He was tall and handsome but wore ragged clothes of black shirt and a grey French knickers.

He must be in his late teenage and probably the son of the busy mother. His face was shining like a sun shone on a midday of a mid-May, despite the deprived life the little family infused in. Now the young boy clutched handful of cowpat piled in plenty on the ground, he knead thoroughly and sandwiched amid his palms like an attenuated Italian pizza, but only sojourned with scarabs instead topping of tomatoes and cheese. Now he tossed it over the wall, but most of it had toppled while other pieces splattered. Through the spatters, a loud laugh echoed at the wall from a tall middle-aged man, his stout and handsome appearance resembled the former young figure, only that he was far elder. He must be the father of the young lad.

"Those are women's jobs, dear," said he still laughing amid the words. "Not that easy for us; as cultivating must be far easier than these little things, for they appear."

"May be," said the young lad, grunted. "You are right, dad."

For some reason the young girl's heart trembled, but in an unknown contentment. It seemed the youth had arrived suddenly carried by the early photons of the sun, those first electric feelings. But why only after looking at him, and why not before? She never knew, but started a strange mirth from deep inside her heart. Now the complacency doubled. One that brought by the first rays of the sun: before the sun had arisen it pervaded and propagated some rays into the sky where the photons

bombarding the atmospheric particles flying all the day and night carrying loads of voices around the little village, and now and then the empty clouds moving here and there changing the colors transparent for the light, now yellow, now white. And now the rays bouncing and dancing connecting the waves formed across the little river rimmed by the coconut trees for which the village incredibly famous for. So totally a wonderful landscape formed in front of her just a while back drowned but now magnificently shining eyes: the little but artistically arranged cottages covered by the early bluish light as a reflection of the imaginary sky; followed by empty fields at one side and on the other side little river protected by plenty of trees, shrubs and reeds behind which light shone as a goblet of fire concealed underneath like a yellow painting over the enormous blue background with partially white stains of clouds. Now for her eyes, the village looked never like before, but more like a beautiful painting drawn by the greatest artist ever the history had produced.

Now reminded the young Lucy, this feeling hadn't just been an attraction for his manly looks, rather for what the kindness his heart crafted by, resembled nature. His name must be, she remembered it on the tip of her tongue because she memorized him every single day for three years it had been, since the day he, Rama, aided her when nobody else did, indeed every other man pleased at her pain, one blood-raining day.

* * *

The dead body was still fresh. Only few hours it had happened for the soul left the flesh alone. Women gathered and wept. For few of them were late, who sobbed right from the main gate, came clapping on their breasts with their bony palms, while others pretended a cry concealing their faces in their hands.

The village was too small that it seemed a single big cloud could pour rain over every single house. For most of the households, the boundaries of the earth were those of their village. They never went anywhere else. They cultivated. They cooked. They ate. And they slept. That's how they're accustomed.

Whether the earth was flat or spherical, never they thought, nor they had a quest for. All the same, the crops grew. And it's all by the Goodness.

Some little skinny fingers clutched the old-fashioned sari wore by the lady without a soul. And a voice came from the little figure with an egg-face and a long-resided broad smile as a new-moon over the clear and fantastic evening sky.

"Mamma!" said the little girl. "Come. Let us play Hide and Seek."

The girl grew and grew in pain and seclusion. Needles piercing the heart, though; the growth didn't stop. Until the stabbing intensified, hardly she recognized what had happened, for the body laid on the floor that day.

Not so easy for one to comprehend. Those were girl's things. Absolutely. But what if the one... The only one, who cared about her was no more?

Yet there was a dad. Oh! who on earth the best author could describe the worst of such a fool?

Through the grunting and growling of pigeons gathering at their nests on an oak tree, a wind blew suddenly across the sunset while the sun lost its heat as the cold air advanced and the dusk swallowing daylight. Now through the flapping of the windows unbolted, an ugly figure appeared. He was a short man, who must be hardly five feet, brushed his long hair which had fallen on his nape, cleanly shaved and a moustache sprouted a bit such that he might've trimmed it too, but only recently. He wore a khaddar top and a lungi which blown off by the wind. He tied the lungi around his waist tightly and bolted the windows angrily. Then hurried into his bedroom which had already been engaged by someone.

"Papa! let us play--" the little Lucy entered into the room without tapping at the door and hesitated for what she had seen inside. And the father rebuffed and kicked on her stomach for which she had been tossed into the balcony and wounded badly. Through the pain she listened him say, "Never interrupt me!"

Boys and men, who knew her offered her chocolates and cakes for a kiss. But she knew that she hadn't had that

cheaply coated character. Every time, so ended in tears and piercing words.

She needed a bra to wear. But her miser, selfish, introvert and narcissist dad never bought one. While she hadn't been a child any more. When the rainy season came, the little heart raced; as her blouse without a bra inside, would become wet and only with a banana leaf she could close her newly sprouted breasts; for not being transparent, as the boys staring like blood-sucking wolves. Everyone laughed at her... But for her own pouring of tears every day, wetted her own breasts, more than the rain did.

"What the hell this being a girl!" she thought and wept. "And how more difficult the hell must be for a girl without a mother!" And it wasn't a question.

No one knew why she hadn't yet got an idea of death.

But death would come...

One had to live!

And life would end...

One had to die!

* * *

Tonight the man would be coming again. And this time he wouldn't just warn and go, but....

But little Lucy was only thirteen, now. Muddled store room was her bed room now. What could she do?

The great clock sagging over the wall in the living room ticked twelve. The night was very still and darkest than ever, it appeared.

The stems of the coconut trees were as still as a stone, as if the wind had been stolen by the perilous night.

The only sound Lucy could listen was tick-tick by the long stick of the great clock.

"Mamma!" said Lucy.

No reply.

"Mamma....." repeated wonderful Lucy.

No reply again.

"Mammaaaaa....." cried beautiful Lucy coming out of the house.

Suddenly a gentle wind gusted. Nothing she could listen someone say, except the whispering wind and due to which the sound produced by the swinging windows.

"Mamma..." screamed the little girl.

But Mamma would never reply. Because Mamma was dead. She knew her mother was dead some years back,

but she had faith on her soul would wander around the house and listen her problems. As one could share one's happy moments with those near to him or her, but for a problem aroused could be shared only with those who were near to one's heart.

The whole night she had been holding her breath in terror. But by Goodness, John did not come that night.

Dawn swallowed the tired darkness, for one more time, as it did for about a million times.

The maximum temperature was only about thirty five degrees centigrade. Phone towers weren't in big count. The sparrows were still grunting and growling; means they hadn't almost extinct. Cities were only too far from the countryside. Official count of humans was lingering about nine hundred millions in Hindustan. Farm fields were full of rice, paddy, sugarcane, and sunflower plants; means, not yet sold for shopping malls and liquor factories. Combined families were still in full swung.

After all, it was the year number 1996 in the Gregorian calendar.

This was a small village called Devadi in the least developed district, Chicacole, in the southern parts of India. Only three hundred households had been living in it. All the houses were made up of mud except one big two storied building which was made up of brick and cement. There were no televisions in the entire village except one black and white television amid the living room of that two

storied house. No refrigerators, washing machines, air coolers; except all in that one house.

Despite the existence of a lot of "the first things in the village," the father in that house had been called as a miser and a fool and a narcissist. Because he acted so for his child and wife.

When the little girl, Lucy was seven years, her good mother died of cancer, who was the only hope of her.

Now only love left with her unconditional was the village and all the stuff it had. But only until she was twelve. She sexually matured at this age and the little Lucy was no more a little child. Although the childish stains lingering here and there, now and then, inside her.

The treatment of the young boys and men changed upon her. She could easily sniff the difference. They were staring with a purpose. By a sexual intention. Her aunt (father's sister) once told about men, especially of those in this village that they were as bad as a devil. Now she could imagine bad things.

She had to walk over a mile through the bushy trees to reach a public school (to where she was going secretly to study) in the neighboring village.

The mangoes dangling at the stems were no more mouth-watering. The pigeons voices were no more savoring. The green reeds over the surface of the pond and amid them the lotuses were no more appeared beautiful. The jumping rabbits across the ridges of the sugarcane fields

were no more startling. The breeze over the paddy fields was no more untainted. Now everything seemed fearful. Now the little girl's heart started quivering.

One morning when Lucy was walking on the road by the way to her school, a man who must be in late twenties followed her. In a while, stood parallel and walking with her.

"Hey Lucy," said he.

She didn't reply. Her heart started racing.

"Hey Lucy," repeated he and went on. "John likes you so much and sent me to talk to you and to make the arrangements."

Lucy's eyes became wet. She shrank herself. Sweat sparkling off her brown and work-worn skin. Now the body was shivering like never before. But not a word spelled out of her mouth. Her feet seemed sunk in a gluey mud.

"If you accept," continued he, "it'll be good for you. After all, it'll be a secret affair. Nobody ever knows."

Now it's dead silence except the chuckling of the wind and giggling of the dangling stems of the mango trees.

"But if you don't accept," said he with a ghostly smile, "it'll be very bad for you."

She ran without listening any next word. Not turned back until she had reached the school.

The man's torture to Lucy went on and on everyday for over a fortnight.

The other students who were walking along the road were only getting pleased.

After some days, a rumor had been created and spread all over the village that the little Lucy had a sexual affair with John. And the John was nobody, but one who teaches mathematics in her school.

The little Lucy could only suffer herself from the piercing needles of words, in her childlike heart.

She could only complain to her father, who was an educated fool. He never comes out of the house and very shy to communicate with the people. After all, Lucy didn't complain him; considering a waste of time.

* * *

An imprudent father;

An early dead mother;

An obnoxious weather;

An unfeeling step-mother;

An isolated village;

An abode full of garbage;

An uneducated village-brute;

An insipid unhealthy fruit;

An anguishing school teacher;

An enormous dirty creature;

An egotistical neighbor;

An injurious laborer;

An enchantment should come as a curl;

An idol could only save the little village girl;

Young Lucy wrote her own piece of accustomed poem on her bedroom door with a piece of chalk and jumped into the bed, satisfactorily.

Stared at the highly self-depressing peculiarly self-written poem, and jumped off the bed and swabbed with her hands hastily.

Tartan the door bolted once for twice, she picked up her mom's half-filled old diary that concealed away from eyes of some beast, underneath the wardrobe.

Then swinging and dancing the cheapest ball pen over the economical-quality paper and making a fabulous garland by beautiful roses of words.

She continued from where she had ended the other day. She wrote everything she wanted to be. She wrote everything that she hadn't been gifted with. She wrote everything that how much she loved her own village--it's culture, environment, traditions and festivities she delighted in earlier but couldn't celebrate ever again since the devil had been arrived.

Suddenly listened a knock-knock. So closed the diary and sunk into the bed but now slowly closed the eyes and thought of never to open again.

Now reminded herself...

It was in the mid-day of May; the hot air penetrating through the windows and thumping the soothing skin of a seven year old little girl. The heat of the air didn't alter her. Because she had already been anxious by something more rigorous. Something more throbbing. Something more squeezing.

She was staring at something through the window. Something very seriously without batting her eyelids. But nothing solid appeared in front.

She was listening to some voices coming for her. Some sweet voices of love. But no indication of a human smell.

Then the little Lucy reminded herself, 'she never come again.'

Now the eyes slowly turning wet. Now wetter than ever. She said aloud to herself through the tears, "she's dead."

* * *

It's exactly six years by now that Lucy's mom, Mrs. Sidebottom died of stomach cancer and people kept on murmuring about the negligence of Mr. Luis Sidebottom prepared her to graveyard. And also they had had been perturbing for the little girl's future. After all it's only for their evening talks, and passing time grinning and

pleasuring. But never they helped nor cared about the little Lucy.

In villages of these blackest days ever, always those blood-sucking eagles and flesh-piercing wolfs existed around everywhere. Two of such human-dressed wolfs stirred Mr. Sidebottom to marry for the second time. And the woman they had introduced was a twice-divorced big lady. Her name was Isabella. She was almost six feet tall which means one foot taller than Mr. Sidebottom and not less than ninety kilograms. The two wicked villagers took money from her to make the setup. Now Isabella became Mrs. Sidebottom - 2.

For heaven's sake, Lucy eagerly waited for the new mamma's love, for it would replace her lost one. But it's only 'go to hell' sake. She was a monster woman. She tormented the little girl right from the very day.

Mr. Sidebottom only looked after his twenty five acres coconut plantation before he married Isabella. Now he started a brick business. Initially he thought of not having another kid, but Isabella forced to have one for their love.

An year later, Isabella gave birth to a baby girl. Lucy loved the baby so much. She played with her every day. But Mr. and Mrs. Sidebottom didn't like the baby. They wanted a baby boy, so that he can own the every property of them and could be their heir. So they never cared for her, all the same as for Lucy. After all Lucy was treating her little sister with utmost priority and loving her so much. The saddest

part of the episode was the baby hadn't been given with any name by Mr. and Mrs. Sidebottom. So Lucy herself had given the baby a name -- Mona.

Two years past by uneven sex everywhere in the house; careless words poured all over the vessels; and monstrous yells on the little Lucy. Now the ugliest couple gifted with another baby. For the goodness, this time they got a baby boy. Lucy loved him either.

Lucy was sixteen by now. It had already been for three years she had stopped going to school, forcibly. Mr. and Mrs. Sidebottom didn't want her to be educated; as if she gets enough knowledge, they thought, she may go against their mistreatment. Nevertheless it never intended in the lovely heart of Lucy. By this time she didn't even know how to read or write any language in the world, thought Mr. and Mrs. Sidebottom. But she was learning secretly.

"Now you are sixteen," yelled Isabella. "you should've got enough knowledge for washing dishes, cleaning floors, ironing clothes, making tea, preparing breakfast, buying groceries, arranging my bed, and anything I may forget to mention. So don't let me get irritated, and you know well what will be the consequences...."

* * *

One day, Lucy's aunt (her mom's sister), Mrs. Catherine Wormwood visited their home to see Lucy. On the very day, Mr. Peter Sidebottom, brother of Luis also visited their home to see Lucy. Those two like Lucy very much.

A day later to the unfortunate visit of Peter and Catherine, Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell (paternal grandparents of Lucy, who were divorced long back and living in separate countries) arrived there to see their lovely Lucy.

On the very evening of the old couple's arrival, an old friend of Lucy's mother visited to see her. His name was Glenn Fleming. He also liked the little Lucy very much.

And next morning, another young lady named Josephine Schwarz arrived, saying that she was a school friend of Lucy's mother and now came to see lovely Lucy, as she didn't make a visit at the time of her mother's death.

Mr. and Mrs. Sidebottom were no good in entertaining their uninvited guests, who all came for the young girl. They also very much worried whether Lucy would complain about the ill-treatment. Now there were six visitors in total. And had already been three days over but none had left the house.

Lucy was pretty cool staying with all of them. She loved to stay with people. She's an emotional young girl. She wanted a big loving family. She had had the guts to love any human being from any corner of the world.

The interesting thing here was, all the six visitors had been staying abroad. Yearly once, they would visit India to see Lucy. But the peculiar question had incepted in Mrs. Sidebottom's mind, why all had arrived in the same week? It wasn't a Christmas period either, or any special family occasion. A forebode it's?

On a sun-drenched third Friday morning of this sizzling May, the little Lucy walked along with the six guests, through the countryside which was beautiful around the small village where she lived. The chestnut trees were in full flower and the hawthorn was white along the hedges. To reach the big sanctuary arranged by nature itself, they had first to walk down a narrow hedgy lane for at least a mile. Then they must cross two railway lines, and go round the big lake where wild ducks and coots and ring-ouzelts lived. Beyond the lake, over the hill and down the other side, lay the area full of trees where Lucy would always sit alone staring at the peculiar birds every day. She had fabulous ideas for herself. Especially while sitting in this sanctuary. This was all unused land belonging to no one or possibly owned by someone from the ruling authorities and the lake itself was a sanctuary for waterfowl.

"What's the matter?" said Glenn.

"Ah.. who knows?" a voice came from behind him. It's young Peter.

"I got letters from all five of you..." said Catherine.

"What letters?" cried Glenn. "I have never sent a letter." He added with his amazing tone but perplexed. "Indeed I got five letters from all of you separately."

"What the--" yelled Peter. "I never wrote a letter for past six months. After all, I got five letters each signed by one of you separately."

"Ah.. Err.. This is looking so odd," said Mr. Wormwood, puzzled. "Even I got five letters for this meeting from all of you separately. "

"Even I got letters though none of you five I've ever met," came a final but beautiful young voice. It's Josephine's.

"I've send them to all of you separately claiming a signature from other five," the little voice came slowly. It's Lucy's voice and amid her words she's grinning.

"Why sweet heart?--"

"Why honey?..."

"But why darling?...."

"But why?.."

"Why Lucy, dear?...."

"Why?...."

The six distinct voices came almost simultaneously. A lull for a while until Lucy spoke.

"To kill Isabella," said she coolly. All the six jumped at once. Josephine almost fainted in shock. All enlarged their eyes and staring at the little girl in bolt from the blue.

"What?" this time same word came from six mouths and simultaneously.

"Yes," said Lucy, suddenly shifting her face and voice dangerously. "And I didn't expect you all ask me WHY! She's a monster. I didn't much care about myself. But

when the same ill-treatment she has started to my lovely Mona, I couldn't put up with for a minute. And Mona's only three now. When Mona and I were on terrace with rice pudding earlier this year, she dragged her downstairs and hit her badly. And that blood-sucking monster didn't know how to love kids. OK. I'm a useless one for her," she went on as now tears pouring down heavily. "Isabella, but wasn't Mona her own daughter? And do you know? Do-you-know-- she didn't even want to name her--to my little love. What on earth worthy, this beast?"

"So what's your plan, darling?" said Peter.

"Ah..." said Lucy laughing mechanically through her tears. "The murder might've already been happened. The monster should've been dead by now."

"What?" jumped Mr. Wormwood.

"How on earth, dear?" said Mrs. Wormwood, flabbergasted.

"Hmm... Mona should've done it by now."

"Mona?" cried all the six at once. "But she's only three!"

"Hmm... I've been teaching Mona a small practice for past few weeks," said Lucy, stopped crying. "I used to prepare tea for Isabella at ten every morning. And the tea cup used to be placed on a small table. Then Mona would take two sugar pills from a blue box placed on the same little table, and toss them into the sizzling tea. After a minute or two, Isabella would clutch it firmly and stir it for herself and

drink." She paused here for a while to give a ghostly laugh. Then went on, "accustomed to the routine, just before we came out, I prepared tea and placed it on the little table, beside the blue box. Today, the blue box contained only two pills, but not they were sugar pills. They're poison pills. My friend Rama has given to me."

"But--" a voice came but stopped before finding whose it was.

"So I have called all of you to visit here this week for an important discussion about me, but only claimed letters were written among yourselves," went on she, "and now when the murder committed, we're all here. The greatest living detective on earth also can't find this peculiar mystery. Even if one find it's a murder, they doubt all of you. But one couldn't prove it. Because none of you did it. And even I won't. Because you all love me and cannot complain on me. Even one or two among you go against me, you cannot prove."

"But we have letters...." said Josephine but only with a smile.

"The first person who won't believe it will be my dad himself. He never accept that I've written a letter. Because for him I'm an uneducated and I don't know how to read and write any language in the world. Poor daddy.... He don't know that I know languages more than him. And I'm writing a novella by myself. He could stop me from going to school but couldn't he lock my brain, could he?"

"Even if the greatest detective come to handle the case," she went on, chuckling. "One will discover the murderer was Mona, a three year old child. An impossible case. And I think no act was yet written for such a crime.

"Come on," said she laughing loudly. And it seemed she's the only one making a noise in the entire world. "We have to make arrangements for the Isabella's death ceremony. And I've to take care of my little brother and sister until dad got inspired for a third marriage." And she thought to herself, "Life's fiction... hardly real it was."



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