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Windows

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Sunbeams, large, small, and of varied sizes, filled the patch of land across the window panes. The panes have withered with sunlight, rainwater and heat. I have also grown withered and wrinkled with my lack of control over the rolling years.

I know all the shreds of this window. I know all the wood parts of it where wood-eating pests have left the marks of their wood-consumption; I know by heart the wood powders that have made lanes and by-lanes in these spots. I stare at these two window panels whenever I get time. My heart has developed a similar hole along its left side, very recently. I don't even need my eyes to look at these pieces, rather my mind's eyes keep reflecting on them, now and then. Till, suddenly, confusion rages and all vision become blurred. All human faces become hazy and they transform into windows. Each human figure or face seems a unique window unto themselves with distinctions of their own. Some have wooden frames, full of design. Others seem made of glass. Even some windows seem glass-locked that blur the perceiver's vision: and their insides seem to be full of all-encompassing fogs and its dense layers.

I did not recognise these glasses primarily, earlier. Like the famed Hawa Mahal of Jaipur thousand glasses strolled across my room, rode the buses, and some even kissed each other thirstily like the rain-craving Chatak (Pied Cuckoo) bird, behind the umbrella shades of Victoria Lake. Each window seemed like a modern-fitting furniture crafted on an aluminium frame which kept moving with a Renault duster rubbing away its presence. It is hard to recognise someone from this amazing group of movable windows; and some of these are either closed or partially open. Even those that are open have their own challenges: their old withered iron-rods or modern grills on the next side often open into either a mysterious space filled with darkness or they recede into an arena of dense fogs as the viewer tries to glimpse the scenarios of the other end.

Oly often said to me, "Kolkata becomes a Santa Claus whenever you arrive here. You come here after many moon-craving New Moon nights. I have waited a long time for your arrival."

These good words manipulated me to wane away into non-existence: even a few of these references were summons enough to bring anyone into the city of palaces.

Lost in Oly's sweet thoughts, I ironed up my favourite sky-blue shirt that I had worn for our much-awaited appointment. Outside my window, sounds of lorries roared going from Shyam Bazaar enroute the B. T. Road. Across them, I spot a number of windows hampered by wood-pests decking the neighbouring Young Bengal compounds illuminated by the passing road lights. Some of these windows are just about to fall downwards, while their dead weight rests in air withheld by old, but still, strong withering wooden frames.

I longed for the windows since childhood. I often engaged myself along the sides of window on a coal-engine drawn mail express train though coal-pecks went into my wonderous eyes and made them watery. I awhile seized the grills strongly and took in the smell of the sun-kissed fields receding by; or sometimes admired the scent of the ripened water-melons and the passing wheat-farms that the moving engine crossed by. As a new station came, the fragrance of hot puris, sabjis blessed my nose; and Gulaabi Rabri was another bliss that cheered me up in the train windows during winter. Hence, the longing for train-windows flowered with my own age.

An image of fair-skinned beauties then crossed my memory lane like a gust of wind. A new moment showed up: this was the time when I was a swain and had done away with my habit of keeping a wristwatch for checking hours. So, I inquired about time to another pretty window standing near me, "Can you please tell me madam, what is the time?"

The window looked disturbed and her voice rang chilly as she informed me of the duration. Successively she hurried into another corner and I stood alone.

I waited for Oly's arrival. The sunny winter-banishing Sun filled me with cosiness and warmth.

Sujan had once narrated to me a tale about his window. A personal window which belonged to him while he was young.

His ancestral house was located in Silchar across the banks of Barrack River. The rural construction was derived from riverine soil sediments and wooden materials with no provision for a well-furnished window. Hence, a tin-based window with numerous Jafri-holes were instilled to meet the need for air and light.

Gusts of snowy winds chilled the bones as one sat by Sujan's window. Pecks and pins of the morning sun greeted one as Sun came up in the sky and Sujan had to cover himself with blanket

to fulfil his daily sleep. However, the window could not prove strong against the stronger lashes of the infamous storm, Kaalbaishakhi and the whole window broke along with its holster carried by the furious winds like a patient oozing out blood during a sudden tuberculosis attack. Kitchen utensils, and sacks treasured by Sujan's mother, the *bindis*, cosmetics and hairclips of Sujan's sister, and the Keshabchandra Nag books so lavishly held in possession by Sujan—all razed to annihilation, united together as if a sudden military comb operation has overmastered the small thatched hut. The survivors collected all the spoils that could be extracted from the plunders made by the wind. While dried rinsed clothes landed headlong in the mouth-watering half-ripened *Amra* pickle prepared by Sujan's mother, Sujan's Keshabchandra Nag books bedecked themselves with his sister's *bindis* and cosmetics. Yet, all the leftovers could still be assimilated altogether except the tin-window that was outnumbered by the rushing winds: and a large hole was fashioned where the erstwhile window stood. The hole seemed a silent protest that survived the harshness of the ravaging monsoon winds.

Next morning, Sujan's second elder brother, Mejda, went for getting a substitute window for the hut as one cannot live in these cramped areas without scope for ventilation in the house. Equally, Sujan reasoned that one cannot live without a window because their well-designed window-curtains evidenced the small everyday comforts of its residents. In fact, Sujan's daily living was incomplete without this connecting portion that opened into the neighbourhood by-lanes and remained open all day long. The window also emitted sounds that certified the dailiness of lives blooming in the household: be it the sweet songs like "Kaberi Nadi Jaale ke go Balika..." ("who are you, O young lash who has come to bath in the Kaveri waters") that was practiced by Sujan's sister during dusk; or the melodious and comforting voice of the booming Akashbaani radio-jockey who announced heartily: "Today's News from Akashbaani. Read by Deb Dulal Bandyopadhyay".

Indeed, those were the days when Sujan longed to return home from his schools hopeful that a new window will be spotted soon and become installed in the space where a storm-kissed hole had suddenly emerged; and he hardly bothered when his dream for a window failed to become reality. Still, the reflective Sujan could easily become a bird of the far-off sky lost in his privations. Not a weak little bird, but a king of the skies who reigns the highest altitudes. Suddenly, Sujan spotted a bird, too tired to fly in the storm-tossed skies ravaged by Kaalbaishakhi, trying to saunter in the outer yards of the house. The sight made Sujan come back to real life and he flashed away to help the hurt bird.

An old dilapidated tea-quarter had been commissioned for renovation and its old window has been secured by Sujan's brother, Mejda, because the broken window has no price tag and it can be moulded easily in Sujan's house bereft of windows. His brother has carried the window on his shoulders throughout the way along with the panes held tightly in his window-eager hands; and the vision brought tears into Sujan's little eyes full of hopes to see a new window. Mejda loved Sujan a lot and this brotherly love etched a heavenly bond between the two bereft of any space for profit or manipulation; and Sujan's eyes filled with sobs as he saw the article; henceforth, the window became a possession that Sujan owned and prized since childhood. In fact, this was the first time, a wooden window was installed in the house; and Sujan saw to it that new visitors visiting the premise noticed the installation. It was a window whose panes could be locked at the resident's will barring strong winds, titillating morning rays and rude raindrops that often tried to invade the inner sanctum unwelcomed. It was the window where Sujan's mother kept the incense sticks that she offered to her gods; and his sister became lost in her wonders listening to the wonderful lyrics composed by Shyamal Mitra behind the same window as she gazed blindly towards the ever-distant horizons. All these instances were enough evidences that filled Sujan with pride for his new window. In fact, Sujan prized the window beyond every possession in the small hut and most of his last hours were spent by its side as he lifted his legs along its grills and watched the setting sun leaving the red skyline just before darkness claimed the skylines.

Sujan's stories filled me with the desire for a window that instilled sunshine in its owner's life and dispelled off all the shades of sadness and despair from his life.

I set out, hence, to locate a window: a magical window. My or Samiran's or Apratim's glasses only ring of decanters cheering one another during a festive occasion where the sound of new Silk sarees create an animated environment fit for socialisation and chit-chats. The cherished moments of one's life that we love to spend in amusement, sweet talks and cosy games. Yet, Samiran's foggy-panes could never be opened into life. Apratim's insulated automatic-shut panes controlled by the click of a remote button equally deny forever the joys of plain living.

The sun sets. The dusk *arati* chants begin in Kalibari next to the Young Bengal complex. A dusk embellished and summoned by the sweet ringing bells will soon begin. The outlets of footpath vendors selling flowers are ready with their hordes of merchandise: they have a wide range of flowers, both original and plastic flowers; the latter flowers meeting the demand for

artificial flowers during theatrical performances happening along the route stretching from Chitpur to Baagbazar. The neon lights will soon be lit to illumine the streets.

I keep waiting for Oly, alone amidst the competing crowds. She did not come. I am still waiting for a window that fills life with Sunshine. I long to see Oly's window in broad daylight bereft of the foggy glasses and their artificially designed curtains. It is a dream that I have sustained.

I don't know the address. Her address. Oly's address. Still, at the heart of my hearts, I am sure that my letter will surely reach its destined claimant whose address I have lost.