

Dossier of the Muses

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Kavita

Dear Adi,

I am sure you must be surprised to receive this letter. I had never written to you, nor for that matter did you ever write to me. Why am I writing this letter to you - and that too after such a long time? I don't know. But why analyse? I don't know whether you even remember my face - what I looked like, how I smiled..."

Aditya stopped reading and closed his eyes. Kavita - Kavita Narasimhan - how could he ever forget her?

She was his neighbour - studying in class twelve while he was in Engineering second year.

She had been his neighbour for nine years but he had never really thought of her.

He didn't know when the realisation hit him - that he had fallen for her - fallen in love with her. He wasn't even sure whether it was love or infatuation- but when one is eighteen one doesn't analyse these things. One just gives in to the onslaught of feelings.

How could he forget her? His Kavita - not very tall, not very slim, not very fair, - certainly not very beautiful when she was solemn. But when she laughed - she looked enchanting - her eyes sparkled and her face lit up. She would throw her head back and laugh - a very unselfconscious, innocent, childlike laugh. He fancied he had a terrific sense of humour - and he would try his best to make her laugh. And when she did, it made her look lovely and made him feel great.

One day she had come home to borrow a Wodehouse. He was alone at home. Father had gone to the office and ma to her school. He had gathered courage and told her he had fallen in love with her and wanted to go steady with her. He had very carefully prepared his little speech and rehearsed it countless times in front of the mirror.

Her reaction caught him by surprise. She threw her head back and laughed. Then standing on her toes she gave him a peck on his cheek and left.

He didn't know what to make of her reaction. For the next two weeks he tried to meet her alone - but either she was doing it on purpose or it was just a coincidence, he just couldn't make out. Then finally one day she came home.

“Adi, I am sure you must be cursing me. But seriously I wasn't ready with my answer. Even now I am not sure I am. I have always thought of you as a friend - a very dear, reliable friend. I am fond of you - I like you very much but...”

Her words kept echoing in his mind for days for weeks, for months....

They continued to meet but he never raised the topic. She seemed to have forgotten, but he hadn't. How could he?

He opened his eyes and began reading the letter.

“You remember that day in your house when you told me that you had fallen for me and that you wanted me to go steady with you. I am sure you must have felt hurt that I laughed. Actually, it came as a complete surprise. I thought, like me, you too regarded me as a friend. You looked real earnest as you reeled out your carefully rehearsed speech. I had never seen you so nervous. I really couldn't help it and burst out laughing. And then the last time we spoke to each other. Do you remember?”

Of course he did. It was more than two years since he had declared his love for her. In these two years they had gone for movies, hung around in Madhuban, the fast food joint, played Table Tennis together and gone for walks. All his friends were convinced that they were going steady. He was sure her friends too teased her about him.

That day was going home after borrowing a book from Arun's Library when he found her standing in line in front of the ration shop. Her father was a heart patient and since she was the only daughter, she frequently had to run errands.

He stopped and they got talking. She was looking extremely pretty that day. She was wearing a yellow top and a black skirt. She collected five kg of sugar and stepped out of the queue.

Her house was a kilometre away and they started walking.

“Come on, let me take the bag,” he said.

“No, its okay.”

“Come on Kavita, let me hold it.”

“Really Adi, it is okay. I can manage.”

He bent down and tried to take the bag from her hand.

“Come on Adi, don't try all that on me,” she snapped.

He froze. She had never used that kind of tone with him. It came as a whip lash. It was as if he had been slapped. He didn't say a word. He continued walking with her and after a couple of minutes, muttered a terse 'bye' and walked away. He was in a rage - mad rage. What did she mean by that statement? What was he trying on her? Did she think he was trying to impress her with his chivalry? Or was she under the impression that he was trying a filmi stunt?

Dammit she had no bloody right to talk to him like that. For two years he had treated her with so much affection, so much care and concern. Whenever she wanted anything, whenever she needed any help, he had always been there. He had never wanted any thanks or gratefulness. But this was too much. She was taking him for granted.

That day something snapped inside him and he started ignoring her.

His eyes went back to the words in her letter.

"I know I shouldn't have said that. The minute I said those words I could have bit my tongue. But I was sure you would soon forget my impertinence. After all, one flippant remark would really not cause a rift between such good friends. But you started avoiding me. That day in the bakery I smiled at you and you just looked through me. I was really hurt. I know I should have apologised but I was too proud to do that. I was also confident you would let bygones be bygones. After all you had declared that you loved me.

But you never tried to make up and neither did I.

Then a couple of times I saw you with your class mate - what was her name - Mitali. Both of you were whizzing away on your bike. Was I jealous? You bet I was. But why? I didn't love you. You were only a friend.

After your Engineering you left for Bhilai and then I lost track. I did my B.A. and got into IIM, Calcutta. After passing out I got a job in Proctor and Gamble as a Management Trainee. There I met Harish. He reminded me a little bit about you. The same intense eyes, the boyish charm and the wacky sense of humour. We got married a year later.

From day one our marriage proved a disaster. We were just not made for each other. As a boyfriend Harish was liberal, broad minded and a lot of fun. But as a husband he turned out to be extremely possessive. I started feeling stifled. Two years later we broke up. I got a chance to work in the Singapore division of P&G and jumped at it.

Singapore was a welcome change. It helped me get over Harish. I had decided to concentrate on my career and stay single. For five years I resisted all advances till Hemant came along. He was working in Citi Bank. He started pursuing me with the zeal of a fresh convert. He too

was a divorcee. We decided we'll experiment with a live-in relationship. I moved in to his flat eight months ago, while still retaining my flat. I moved out yesterday. This too didn't work out. I really don't know why. I can't explain....

Why am I writing all this to you? I know you are married. Geeta, your cousin, who was my senior in school, told me. She had come to Singapore on a holiday and we bumped into each other on Sentosa island. She told me your marriage was in the second week of March. I took your address from her thinking that I'll send you a card. But somehow, I didn't.

So why am I writing to you? I thought I'll let you know that I love you. I always did. I was too shy, or too proud or too stupid even to admit to myself let alone tell you. I think I realised it only after I lost you. And once the realisation sunk in I went around looking for you in everyone - in Harish, in Hemant... That is why I think the relationships failed.

I am now tired, really tired of life.....of living...of existing like a vegetable. I have decided to end it all. A fist full of pills is all it will take.

Why am I writing to you - to confess - to apologise? I really don't know. I sending this letter by snail mail so that by the time it reaches you I'll be gone. Let me end with your favourite Beatles' number - I just called to say I love you.....

Kavita.

He put the letter down. His heart was beating wildly and he was drenched in sweat. Kavita, his Kavita, his love, his obsession - Oh God! How stupid she had been. If only she had given him the slightest of hints - he would have left everything and.....

But was she alone to blame? What about him - he had been a bigger idiot - caressing his ego when he should have been reaching out to her.

What was he to do now?

He went in to his study, logged on to the net and began his search. After an hour or so he got her office number in Singapore and dialled.

"Hello. I am calling from Kolkata, India. Could you give information about Kavita Narasimhan. I am her friend."

"Kavita," the male voice was clipped and heavily accented.

"Yes."

"She is in the hospital."

He felt a surge of relief. Thank God she was alive.

"What happened?"

"Well," he hesitated, "I don't know the details."

"How is she now?"

“She is convalescing.”

“Okay! Thanks!”

He took the address of the hospital and replaced the receiver.

He rang up his travel agent and told him he wanted to get on the first flight to Singapore.

13 hours later he was entering the cabin in which Kavita was admitted.

She was lying on the bed with her eyes closed. She looked almost the same - as fresh, as beautiful - as angelic as ever. She hadn't aged at all since he had last seen her. The trauma she had gone through wasn't mirrored on her face. She looked as serene, as lovely as she always did.

“Kavita” he whispered. She opened her eyes and looked at him and then closed her eyes again.

“Kavita,” he spoke softly.

She opened her eyes.

“My God Adi, is it really you? I thought I was dreaming. B..but you here...how the hell?” she tried getting up.

“Relax, Kavita, I'll tell you everything,” he said sitting on the chair beside her.

“I got your letter yesterday. I managed to get your office number and rang up. They told me you are here. I thought I'll surprise you.”

“You bet you did - the loveliest surprise I had in years.”

“Did you actually try to kill yourself?”

“Yes, I did. I swallowed a handful of pills. I think I would have popped off but for my colleague Nancy Ling who dropped in to pick up an urgent office document and saved my life.”

“Thank God you are safe. But Kavita how could you be so stupid?”

She kept quiet.

After a few moments or so of silence Kavita asked, “Adi, does your wife know why you have come here?”

“She certainly would, if I had one.”

“What do you mean?”

“I never did get married.”

“But you were engaged.”

“The girl's parents had lied about her age. She turned out to be two years older to me. Ma broke the engagement.”

“You didn't object?”

“I was not keen to get married. I hardly knew the girl. She was a distant relative. Ma had bulldozed me into accepting. Later, she came up with another proposal. But I put my foot down. I decided I would not get married.”

“Why?”

Aditya looked at her and smiled.

“What do you want me to say Kavita? I didn’t get married because I couldn’t forget you.”

She smiled the same innocent, childlike smile which had hooked him.

“Yes, I was hoping you would say that.”

“I won’t, because the last time I opened my heart out to you you....”

“I know Adi. I hurt you.” She took his hand in his.

“Adi”

“Yes.”

“Can you hold me tight?”

He got up and sitting beside her on the bed held her close.

“Adi, will you marry me?” she asked. It was a simple question uttered with a childlike innocence.

He took her lovely face in his hands and looked into her eyes.

“Do you ever give me a choice?” he said and kissed her soft, vulnerable lips.