

# **Musings of a Usual Mind**

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Dedicated to NST.... My love and my hope

## ***Gordon's Shadow***

Gordon had difficulty connecting to people. He could speak to people as long as speech was functional. But as soon as speech would convert into anything near conversation, Gordon would clam up. His mind would stop working, words would dry up and his outward demeanor would change for the worse. People would generally take this as a cue to say goodbye and usually made a mental note to avoid the awkward situation in the future. Gordon had taken steps to treat his social awkwardness but no amount of personality development courses could cure the mental breakdown he would face while conversing with people. Unfortunately, most people mistook his lack of social skills for mental retardation. His office colleagues made snide remarks about him even when he was within earshot not realizing that Gordon could comprehend and feel the pain. His expressionless face would mask the humiliation and the frustration but he would feel the pain nevertheless. Even though he was good at his job as a machinist, he could never make progress in his career. He did not mind the lack of career upgradation as much as he minded the lack of human contact. Gordon's age was 33 and let alone marriage he had not even dated yet.

The only reason Gordon had survived was due to his 4 dogs. All of them stray ones. Somehow, he could connect with stray dogs and he especially bonded with the 4 dogs he kept as pets. He had never talked to his dogs like he had seen the other dog owners do. But the dogs never

minded. The dogs loved his company and this is what kept Gordon going.

Gordon was once feeding his dogs with milk and biscuits when he heard a meek voice behind him say "Can I play with the dogs as well, Sir?" It was his 9 year old next door neighbor. They had never met before but it seemed the kid had a liking for dogs. "Yes. Ofcourse" Gordon replied. "Wow. Thanks a lot. That's really nice of you. I love dogs. By the way, I am Steve. What's your name?"

Gordon waited for the usual clamming up sensation which would engulf him and would make him stutter his name nervously. But this time something was different. "Gordon" he replied confidently and clearly and with a smile to boot. Maybe it was the kid's enthusiasm and his cheery tone of voice or maybe it was the shared affinity of two dog lovers. Nevertheless, Gordon, for the first time in a long while, did not mind conversing.

"What are their names, Mr. Gordon?"

Gordon had never thought of naming his dogs. The thought of calling out his dog's name had never occurred to him. But saying all of this to the kid would surely disappoint him. Gordon replied "This one you see here, he keeps scratching his ears. So I have named him Scratchy"

"Scratchy. Hahaha". Laughter. The sweet sound of laughter. Gordon had forgotten how to make anyone laugh. Steve's laughter was the sweetest sound he had ever heard.

"And what about this dog, Mr. Gordon. He is so monstrous. What's his name?"

"I have named him Little John" Gordon replied with a smile.

"Hahahahahaha" Steve broke into uncontrollable laughter "Just like in Robin Hood. And what about this dog Mr. Gordon" pointing to a completely black dog.

"Oh. That's Shadow. She is dark and she always follows me around. Just like me Shadow"

"Wow. That's so cool. And what about this dog. The one wagging its tail"

"That's Gordon Junior. He reminds me of me. You can call him Junior if you want"

"Yes. He is like you. Mysterious, but kind. You are an awesome neighbor, Mr. Gordon. Will you be my friend?"

"Yes, ofcourse. I will be glad to" Gordon replied happily.

"Thanks! Gotta run now Mr. Gordon. Mum might get worried. See you later!"

"Bye Steve"

Gordon could not remember the last time he had felt so happy. He went into his garage and quietly threw something into the dustbin. It was the rope he was planning to kill himself with.

## *A day in a diary*

Tue, 21 Mar: This is one of those days where you feel the whole world conspires to ensure you remain bogged down.

After 8 days of sobbing over Ted and not leaving my room I had finally mustered the courage to go to office and face my colleagues. Ted was the most difficult person to face but even though I am weak, I did go to office. When I entered it was with my head held high. The 8 day break had sobered me up. I knew I had to put everything behind me and get on with work. Trust me, I had done my best and had wanted to put my best foot forward. But as I entered my office, I saw people glaring at me and staring at me and mocking me. Their face had that look where you try to control your grin when someone trips on a banana skin and makes a fool of himself. I instantly realized that people had been talking behind my back and most possibly making fun of me. But as I told you before, I was planning to put my best foot forward. I just tried to shake off the feeling of foreboding and humiliation that was engulfing me by brushing off the stares and the glares as mere office gossip. I just kept walking until I reached my cubicle.

I knew office work would prove to be a good distraction so I started organizing my pending work. Heartbreak, it seemed, was not a good enough reason to take a long break. Some people wanted to prove that point by giving me more work than necessary. But I did not mind. More work meant less thoughts of Ted. And so I got about my

work. I prepared a report diligently for 3 hours but I reached a point where I just could not go on. I just had to see Ted. I was trying to convince myself that I had stopped loving Ted but it wasn't that easy. I had really loved him. Sincerely. Fine, he did not love me in return but we did share some special moments. How was I supposed to forget all of that? These were the thoughts that were going on in my head at that time. So I decided to take a 10 minute break and just go to the floor where Ted generally hung out. The coffee floor. I would just pretend that I was dropping in to have a cup of coffee. And if I was lucky I would see Ted and maybe even say hi to him politely. I had made up my mind I would be extra civil to Ted. And make sure he did not realize how much the break-up had affected me.

I took the lift to the coffee shop and there he was surrounded by a couple of his guy friends. He did not seem sad by any stretch of imagination. That was the first thing I noticed. Infact he seemed to be having a jolly good time. He was being really witty and humorous and was making his friends laugh heartily.

Ted's back was towards me and so he could not see me when I took a few steps towards him. When I came within earshot I suddenly realized I was the topic of conversation. "And she was wailing like a Banshee 'But Ted what will I ever do without you. You completed me. Please don't leave me. I love you.' And I was thinking to myself 'Ted, you really have to get rid of her. She is so clingy. The

melodrama and the soap opera seems interesting for a while but after a point of time you feel like saying CUT THE CRAP"

Each sentence that he was saying was hitting me like a slap. Their laughter was nauseating me. I could not breathe. I knew I would fall if I did not lean against the wall. I felt like letting out a scream but the comparison with the Banshee was stuck in my head. The way he had mimicked me. All of a sudden, I realized the reason for the stares and the glares. It was not mere office gossip. It was something really disgusting.

I desperately tried to control my tears and almost ran to the restroom where I burst out crying immediately. It does not feel good to write all this. But I can't help it. Nobody else cares to listen and I can't suppress it anymore...

## ***Memoirs of a sleepless traveler***

I have a particularly mixed record of sleeping during train journeys. In some fortunate journeys, I fall asleep instantaneously. Almost as soon as I put my head onto the pillow. But not so in most journeys. During these journeys it's a constant battle between sleep and just tossing and turning restlessly in the rather smallish bed you find in Indian railways. This particular journey that I am recounting was one such battle. It was three AM and sleep thus far was successful in evading me. The more I longed for sleep the more it ran away from me. Like a wily temptress. For some obscure reason I always think of sleep as a feminine entity. Perhaps, due to the unpredictable nature the better sex commonly possesses.

I finally gave up longing for sleep and decided to venture out to the station that had just arrived. It was a chilly night and I had an irresistible urge to purchase a steaming hot cup of tea that was being sold in the station. The tea was excellent but whatever semblance of hope for sleep I had were dashed. The tea had made me wide awake. Instead of going back to my allocated bed I decided to sit near the entrance of the coach. When the train would start, a gush of windy fresh air would strike my face. It's quite a pleasant experience especially if you are in a reflective mood deep into the night. But it seemed I was not the only one with the same idea. The person who was sharing my cabin in the train was already seated there. I sat next to him, slightly irritated because I was looking forward to some solitude and reflection.

"So you are not able to sleep as well" He asked me cordially

"Yes. Sleep has been elusive tonight. You are Manjunath if I remember correctly" I replied. We had already exchanged pleasantries and made small talk in the evening. I wanted to test whether I could remember his name. I generally have a bad time recognizing faces and remembering names. So I preferred to sort out the issue at the onset rather than get corrected later on.

"Yes. My name is Manjunath. Sleep has not been kind to me either. So I thought I might as well get some fresh air"

"You look especially tired. When was the last time you had some good sleep. Because it looks like you could do with some"

"Hehe. I would love some sleep. I haven't slept a wink the last 4 days to be honest"

"No wonder you look so tired. What's bothering you if I may ask"? I have generally noticed that people do not mind if you are intrusive in a train journey. So I felt it was a perfectly legitimate thing to ask.

"Well, there are things of the past that bother you. You know something that keeps haunting you"

"You mean something of the past that you regret now". There is something about train journeys that makes you talk. In one instance, a person had revealed to me his

darkest and most intimate secrets. Maybe it's the fact that you may never meet the stranger again and that makes people tell stuff to strangers that they would never dare to tell anyone they know.

"Exactly. You have the right word. Its regret"

"Regret? What sort of regret?" I was kind of piqued. These sorts of things make me really curious.

"You know, general things" he said vaguely. He was suddenly becoming uncomfortable. As if realizing that I am a complete stranger rather than a confidante. I did not want to pester him but my curiosity was getting the better of me

"Even I have regrets" I replied "Had I studied harder for the entrance exam I would have secured a better college". I hoped me stating my regret would tempt him to reciprocate.

"I do not mean any offense but I advise you to not lose sleep over that. It is a bit childish if I may use the word. Is that all you regret about?" He asked me in an obviously envious tone

"It may seem childish to you but it is something I regret. What about you. What's your regret?"

"The thing I regret happened a long time back. Around 6 years ago. When I was around your age"

"Back when you used to worry about exams" I said tongue-in-cheek

"Yes. Those were the golden days when I had still not grown-up. I had gone to visit a friend in a neighboring town. I remember we had gone to watch a movie that evening. While we were coming back we witnessed a bunch of people with swords and sticks in their hands going after a man carrying a child. It was a mob. The mob was chanting religious slogans continuously and in front of our eyes they managed to catch up with the man they were chasing"

He began to hesitate at this point. This time I was not keen on goading him to talk. Even I remained silent. I had half a mind to terminate the conversation and go back to my bed. While the other half was resisting the temptation and wanted to hear the whole story. Before I could decide he got over his hesitation and began again.

"What I saw next was unbelievable. The mob caught up with the person and in their frenzy started brutally assaulting the person with their swords. And they did not spare the child as well. It was a little girl. Both were being butchered. Their cries were like scared chickens shrieking during their deaths. Luckily, as it was dark, my friend and I were not noticed. After around 10 minutes, the mob started walking away from the scene. My friend and I were shaking heavily during the carnage. But once everyone left we came out of hiding and approached the man and the child. The man was writhing in pain. He was not dead yet

but we could see he would not survive. He had been viciously slaughtered. In spite of the pain the man was pointing towards the kid. His daughter. As if pleading to us to save the kid. The girl was bleeding as well but not as much as her father. I asked my friend 'We should take the girl to the hospital. I think she may still survive'. My friend thought for a while and then replied 'But they started it 2 weeks back when they had slaughtered one of us. Why should we spare these idiots? Its better we leave'. And do you know what I replied"

"What?" I asked

"I said 'You are right. Let's leave at once. The idiots need to be taught a lesson'. And I left that little child, that little girl lying there in the pool of blood. I just left her. Heartlessly. Mercilessly. Mindlessly. I even conveniently forgot about it and successfully removed from my mind all traces of guilt that I should have felt. Until a few days back. A few days ago a little girl was born to me. To remind me of my sins.

And he started sobbing thereafter. A grown up man sobbing in front of a stranger. My mind had become blank after listening to his narrative. I put my hands on his shoulders and tried to console him. He withdrew his shoulder and wearily retreated to his bed trying hard to control his sobs.

A couple of hours later his station had arrived. Before leaving, he came towards me, nodded his head and gave me a slight grin. With that silent goodbye, he unloaded his

luggage and climbed down into the platform of the station.

## ***A dinner conversation***

"Robin, Pass me the juice"

"Sure Mama"

"Did you taste the Risotto Robbie? It is just the way it's made back home"

"Absolutely Mama. It reminded me of Aunt Teresa's cooking"

"Yes dear boy. Did you read the thank you letter sent by Chatterjee? It was so sweet of him don't you think?"

"Yes Mama. It was nice. It's good he has not forgotten us after becoming President of this country. That's sort of humble"

"Forget us? My foot! He will never forget us. Not because he likes us. But he knows which side of his bread is buttered. He is a wily cat that Chatterjee. But he is always loyal to the family and you have to grant him that. That's why I chose him for Presidency"

"But Mama, if he does not like us why did you make him the President"

"Because you cannot be an emotional fool. Robin, hasn't Politics still taught you that trust no one, like no one and respect no one except your family. This decision was for the family. Even if Chatterjee loathes us from the bottom of his disgusting heart, which I think he does, I would still reward him. He has been loyal to the family and that's

what matters. Judge everyone by their loyalty first and last. I know that Chatterjee will choose our family over his country any day"

"That's true Mama. Chatterjee deserves a promotion after all the doggie work he has done for us. I have to appreciate your thinking Mama"

"Plus, he knows things. If he had not been such an invaluable soldier for the family I would have considered disposing him. In Chess, it is sometimes important to sacrifice minor pieces like soldiers so that other important pieces get a superior positional advantage"

"Other important pieces like the Queen. Right Mama? Can I watch the news, Mama? Please."

"Not today. The news is too depressing. The Saffronites are hounding us again today. That new scam which they uncovered must be all over the news. Put on something nice and pass me the roasted Lamb"

"What do you want to see? Can we watch some soccer?"

"Yes. If you wish. And Robin, you still need to learn to be discreet about Rosemary. Tell her to quieten down. She cannot be all loud and belligerent. The Saffronites are always on her lookout so this kind of behavior is not tolerable. One slip and our reputation goes poof into thin air"

"I am sorry Mama. I will inform her you were displeased with her behavior"

"And be discreet about Tanya as well. You see, I don't want Rosemary to ever know. When you displease a woman you risk your whole empire falling apart"

"But how did you know about Tanya?"

"Oh, Robin. I thought you would be more sensible than your sister but you have a totally different set of problems. You are turning out to be so gullible, so naive and so innocent which just does not befit the man in the family. Try to understand that even if you want to let go of Tanya she will not want to let go of you. You are the goose that will lay her the golden eggs. Really Robin, I am getting sick of your affairs. You think you can hide things from me. If I was so stupid I would not have been in this position. You should be ashamed of yourself. Hiding things from me like this. And make sure you keep your hot-bloodedness in check the next time"

"But Mama, she was saying things like she cannot be without me and that she worships me and is devoted to me like no one else can ever be. She said she could not live without me"

"You fool. You get suckered into those things. Next time she contacts you inform me immediately. If you cannot tackle a silly girl how will you be able to handle your cunning party people and those horrendous Saffronites?"

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