



## P&W

### Saranyan BV

Not long after I left the quiet little town, I wanted to pay Kollapatti a quick visit. Nostalgia is a good thing, out there in that realm your reminiscences are not collared by spywares, you have the liberty to let willful imagination run muck while recollecting, allowing flow in any direction even upwards or in the reverse unlike river, beating the columns of reason or reality. What came in mind was to look after the bitch that had crossed my path while I lived in Kollapatti years ago. Life has two paths, one on which you tread and the other where life leads you on.

Some rascal had picked the four months old pup, made it fat for two or slightly over two months for his surrogate pleasure, later abandoned it forcing the poor soul to fend for itself without giving it the instinct or knowhow to hunt for food. It had also to fend itself against the packs which thronged. It was standing desolate and forsaken with an ornamental collar around its neck during one of my morning strolls. Strangely, it was not looking for nourishment, food was the last thing in its mind, it was looking a safe place to sleep. The eyes showed it had not slept quite a while, the night must have been a nightmare. I named the pup P&W. I patted its head and it wagged its tail – that was our relationship. By now P&W be a full-grown adult, had it survived.

For nearly two and a half years, I fed P&W, chased the other dogs away if they came to quarrel with P&W, I half fed P&W, allowed the other half to find its own food. The idea was to augment security while still offering the means to total independence. Animals are territorial by nature, P&W eventually began to own the garden in my courtyard, it was able to drive away compatriots fearlessly, albeit its puny size. Later it had melded, as all dogs eventually do, into a pack, went roaming the streets with the energy of a young adult. Circumstances forced me to move to another town, though I was perfectly happy at Kollapatti.

In the street in which I lived there were eleven houses. many plots in between were vacant with outgrowth of *Prosopis Juliflora*, called *Seemai karuvelam* in Tami, thorny bushes found everywhere in the drought prone districts of the state. The lady who was then my opposite door neighbor wanted to know why I called the pup P&W, she also said the name was difficult in her mouth, although I seldom heard her calling out P&W. I guess her idea was to mock, the ladies of the street did not like my apparent and noble effort to rear a displaced pup. The pup according to them affected the children playing in the street and the old parents who went for walk without

assistance. I was a bachelor then, the families do not like bachelors living in their midst. Bachelors and dogs were alike feared by these women, not revered as the two groups ought to be. I replaced the old collar with a leather collar attached to brass leash. I didn't want any claimants for P&W or the dog catchers from the municipal pound net it.

If P&W still continues to live in Kollapatti, it would come running to me and pounce all, of that I was sure. I also wanted to procure one or two saplings of the hybrid mango variety they graft at the local nursery. I was on my way to Trichy where I had business meeting, the visit to Kollapatti involved only a small detour. Two of the ladies belonging to the houses in the street were taking a casual stroll. Their intention was to gossip out of the earshot of others, nobody takes stroll in the noon. The mercury was high with intentions to climb higher. They were happy to see me and inquired about my welfare. One of the husbands had hung a basketball board and he was shooting baskets, the ball made a big hue and cry bouncing back from the board. The man saw and waved, and went on with his shoot. Half of them found the target, the rest fell on the concrete pavement and made more noise. It was funny to see the man shooting baskets all by himself on a hot noon which makes skin leathery. I would have joined him, had he invited, I love basketball, enjoy watching the ball puttering around the ring before slipping through the net and hitting the floor.

The two ladies informed they had not seen P&W for nearly six months. They confessed in chorus that the mongrel was leading a healthy life. Through the women I came to know that P&W had gotten pregnant a couple of more times, she kept giving birth to pups in the very garden of the house I lived in. The women also said in jest that when P&W began to wean her kids, the male pups were stolen by locals. What came of the female pups, the women did not know. They said I was a kind man who attended with equal compassion to bitches. I

resented the comment which should have been reserved for later, after I left. Nevertheless I walked away with a smile. I did not know P&W was a bitch until it was one year old and I noticed the teats appear under the belly. The basket baller waved on seeing me leave. I didn't turn my attention to the house I lived, it would hurt to see if some of the trees I had planted and patronized had withered.

I noticed appreciation the guy next door to mine had added new birds to his exotic collection, he had built a tree top house which tended to meticulously. There were wings and tails with new colors inside the cage. He used climb on the precariously positioned wooden ladder to feed the birds and clean the coop of the poop. Sometimes I have seen him admiring them standing on the rungs. The man used to express time and again his apprehension that if the cage was kept on the ground, cats and snakes might attack. The man was not seen, an industrious man busy with this or that, he handled the government officials for a big Aluminum plant forty kilometers from there, he had contacts, he came home only at nights only to leave in the morning after feeding the birds and clearing the bird poop. His wife was at the sewing machine in the unventilated veranda closed with glass panes. She was stitching furiously a cloth the color of parrot green, I couldn't figure what it was she was making. I have heard the neighborhood gossip that she was suffering depression after superannuating from local school as teacher. She never lifted her head, then or now, she never fancied birds nor cared to admire them. Every evening she would water the bird bath in the middle of the garden, pigeons and crows came to drink water at dusk, during the noon peacocks drank from the bowl and cooled themselves. I wished her husband took more care of her, talked to her often. The children were married and living elsewhere and loneliness is a terrible feeling.

I was feeling famished, I decided on having munch at market in Sector IV next to the Vidhya Mandir school. Children would

be playing under the trees during lunch break while the mothers chit-chatted after feeding the wards. For students in higher classes, the fathers would be waiting in motor-cycles to take them home and bring them back. In the middle of the sector market was the little eatery which served Mutton briyani and chicken on Wednesdays, mostly take aways. There were two big factories and ancillary units nearby, the workers came to relish the food served there, they came in gangs and made clamor. It was Wednesday and I looked forward to the feast.

The food was cooked by a family of two brothers and their wives, assisted by an aged mother. I presume the father died, a photo of the old man hung in the wall above the cash counter. The food would smell of wood smoke, so would be the air inside the restaurant. The food served would be piping hot, directly from the stove to the banana leaves on the table in which the food was served. I used to be their regular customer.

Most of the shops were closed for lunch, in those that were open, the lights were switched off, no one was to be seen. I was disappointed to find the shutters of the eatery shut, there was nobody I could inquire about the reason for it. I drove past the Toyota Etios without stopping. I reached the highway and settled for a roadside restaurant, plenty of cars were parked in the ample parking space. I ordered food, the woman who came to take the order was a young girl, she was not conversant with the menu, it took some time to complete the order.

While waiting for the Chicken fry and plate of plain rice to arrive, I rang Simon who lived in the neighborhood of the Sector IV market. The call caught him in the process of retiring for his midday siesta, his wife answered the line. She was excited on hearing I was in Kollapatti, and immediately she invited me home. Simon snatched the phone and we got on to catching up. It was a long encouraging conversation. The waitress was serving the food clumsily, a wedge of the gold-

browned onion sodden with a drop or two of the oil from the fry fell on my pants near the thigh and soiled it. I gave her a sharp look. She pretended to wipe with her hand and walked away.

Finally, I inquired Simon about the eatery and the reasons for its closure. His reply reeked of contempt. One of the wives he said, the younger one, wife of the second brother had run away with someone. The family felt humiliated, shifted elsewhere to avoid facing the shame. Nobody knows where, Simon concluded. The news came as a rude shock, the family was friendly, a cohesive unit which enjoyed tremendous goodwill. I tried hard to recollect the face of the woman, generally I do not forget faces but she was not returning in my memory that very moment.

A family of seven was waiting for me to vacate the table, I had occupied the table meant for six. I had ravished the meal, the leaf was empty except for the chewed chicken bones. Broiler chickens are butchered before they come of age, the chicks never get to enjoy sex before getting their throat slit and coming to the table. The family was waiting for the table to clear, I got up and paid the bill at the counter. The woman who served looked at me with a dour face. I beckoned her to the counter and paid tip, before hitting the road. She kept looking at my thigh.

I didn't buy myself sweet pan at the pan shop, pan helps to keep awake while driving after heavy meal. The shop was crowded, people were smoking cigarettes waiting for the pan to be ready. My concentration turned to the business at Trichy.

Later that night back home after the long drive to and fro from Trichy, I had two pegs of IMFL and was relaxing. IPL match was going on in the TV, my wife supported the team which was already at the top of the table in the league. Her cheering and comments irritated me, but it was not adequate to

produce nasty comments. Women get into the business of marriage with eyes for bigger things. The more they get, the higher they keep adjusting the target. They tease the husbands like matadors in bull fight, they dangle the children in front as if they are the red cape, the muletas. I have never seen the estoque in wife's hand, but have felt her estocada over my nape often.

A married man is destined to get exhausted and fall on the ground. I hated it, got up and went out for a stroll, it was pleasant outside, the moon hung low on the east behind the veil of the Portia tree. The tree had flowered, bright yellow flowers with deep red interior. The flowers played host to red ants the size of finger nails, the flowers cast its typical fragrance in the air, the fragrance added to the ambience. Something slithered under the path filled with tinder leaves, I moved to the center of the road. Mongooses and bandicoots infested the road at night, better to keep off.

The moon was clambering up the sky, the craters resembled image of someone digging the ground under the person who was standing upright and looking up. The digger was kneeling while at it, the tresses touched the ground. It was a woman. I closed my eyes in frustration and opened, the craters resembled craters. I had not prolonged the conversation with Simon on the issue of the eatery family, since Simon was with his wife. I was sure Simon would have mouthed foul language. Conversation of such misdeeds would motivate the wives to contemplate similar action, I was afraid. I had not spoken to my wife about the episode. She had gone to sleep leaving the door unlock so that I could get in without unlocking and making noise. I opened the google on my mobile to check the outcome of the IPL match, I was happy the team she had supported had lost. I crept into my bed after switching the lights off. In half sleep she inquired if I had bolted the door, if I had switched off the light in the porch, the routine stuff I perform day in and day out. I grumbled and went into sleep.

The slumber was so deep, I dreamt. In the dream, P&W licked my face and I kept telling her not to. The man appearing in the moon's crater was counting the stars, the woman kept digging, anytime he could fall inside the pit.

Wife's snore reached higher pitch by the wee hours, I considered smothering her face with pillow and end the miseries. What prevented me from doing is not the possibility of being clawed by her if I were to, not being prosecuted by the authorities for getting clawed and not being found guilty of homicide and not facing the prison sentence, not even that deterred me, I can be peaceful in my prison cell, reading books and swatting mosquitoes. It was the fear of having to share those the unclean and ugly looking toilets they show in the prison movies.

I left her alive, turned my thoughts to P&W whom I missed terribly. The bitch was a cute one, fawn colored and soft coat of its fur matching the same. It was by end of her first year I discovered why the village folks hated bitches and instead were eager to steal the male ones. In local language male pups are called Kidai, which is the name for rams. Umpteen number of male dogs used to invade into my garden wanting to screw P&W. The males in the pack vied over one another to pick up the scent and achieve the objective. Dogs have higher perception of smell, the olfactory nerves can even detect cancel inside the body, but when it comes to mating, they need to jostle the snout under her tail. This was perhaps the reason why village folks avoided rearing female dogs, as it would invite other males. In the dogs own kingdom, I doubted it was a taboo. I didn't see the fear of being raped in P&W's eyes. She would stand quietly accepting the outcome. The neighborhood in Kollapatti continuously complained of the dog menace and I used to get bugged. We have to share the earth with the animals.

I got up to drink water. Water was not kept on my side of the bedstand, it was one her duties to provide me a cool jug



especially when I come from business trips. I didn't want to cross over and drink from her jug.

I went to the wash room to relieve myself of urine, my bladder was bursting at the seams. My wife opines that if you contain urine, you are sure to get urinary infection, it was something she believed more than she believed in God. She would say it is like storing water in a tank for long, the walls would gather moss causing further infection. I didn't want to dispute or prove her theory wrong, it became my intrinsic habit to pee whenever I wake in the middle of the night. I flushed the closet handle gently in order not to disturb her. But draining created racket, I stepped out with trepidation and slipped quietly into the living hall like a mule. My legs were stiff and paining because of lack of exercise that day. Lack of exercise and constantly working at the clutch, the brake and the accelerator. The latest Frontline magazine was lying on the center table, the street light fell over it. The journal predicted the outcome of the polls that was due coming fortnight. I picked it and tossed it back, didn't want to switch on the lights. It might wake her up and invite reprimand.

She is the habit of rebuking whenever I watch TV at night or read books. She said I behave like a ghost. She thinks the earth spins in her axis. If I display unwillingness while asleep to assist her meet exigencies such as peeing, she would be terribly annoyed. She would complain to her friends that I get drunk and sleep like a dog. Her fear of going to the wash room at night without assistance is as phenomenal as her obsession at containing urine.

Dogs don't sleep, they are alert although they keep their eyes shut most of the nights. Dogs guard the place, mind you. I drank the water collecting it from the RO, wiped my chin with the back of my hand. I felt fresh and considered sitting out in the veranda, it had gotten stuffy inside. I peeped through the window, the neighbor switched on the light briefly and switched it off. That's what people do when they fuck, they

need to switch the light on to wash themselves after the fuck. Their activity made me horny. I considered the possibility of waking my wife and screwing her, she would resist. She had funny concepts of when to screw and when to get screwed. There was no spark in anything not spontaneous anymore. I put the thought away as I knew what the end result would be. I wanted to check on the neighbor if they go for one more session. Fortunately, the front door did not creak when I opened, it let in fresh air, it was balmy. It also brought in the whiff of the night jasmine, the tree had flowered copiously.

Suddenly I remembered the second brother's wife. She always adorned her hair with white jasmine, she carried with her the fragrance of jasmine wherever she went sauntering in the restaurant, it attracted customers and satisfied their appetite for the food she served. Her real name was Ponnuthaiyi. Customer addressed her Ponnu which means gold, she was fair complexioned and had seductive smile.

Why did Ponnu run away and with whom? What made her do, the family was okay, a conglomeration of friendly lot. She would walk the aisle of tables as if her thighs rubbed on itself. You get the feeling the thighs rubbed. She was tall and wore her saree with dignity. Now I remembered her face, she looked educated. Whenever I went to collect dinner, I never ate there, they serve parottas at night and vegetable Korma or Dosa with tomato chutney. She would accord me special attention, ensure my parcel was first to be handed over although customers were in queue. She was the draw, people visited the eatery to ogle her, though the food was by itself very good and convincing. The husband made parottas, which is a skilled job. The elder brother made hot and crispy dosas. She packed the takeaways and collected money at the counter. She was not good at accounts, or maybe he was, there were errors while mentioning the amount to be paid. Nobody cared or questioned her, I pretended not notice the errors, did not question. She would smile benignly.

In between her chore at the busy restaurant, she would go inside the cramped little room, where perhaps she lived with her husband and two children, two girls. Both I guessed less than five, the kids with grape-like eyes would wait for the mother to help them with the homework or the lessons while people waited for being served. The husband was handsome too, and no less. He looked fine, as good as the wife, but was always sodden with sweat and grime because of oil splattering from the tawa and the smoke from the mud stove. They closed the shop by eleven and I wondered if he bathed before sleeping next to her.

I got up from the chair, its legs made noise rubbing on the floor. I waded in darkness through the drawing hall and reached the bed room. My hand automatically went to switch the lights off, I had not switched it on, it was a habit. I sat on the cot, legs on the floor. I was troubled, could not figure what went wrong in their life, definitely, it was not lack of sex I concluded.

When sleep overtook, I leaned against the pillow and went to sleep, the pillow which could have been my weapon. I didn't like the idea of Ponnu being railed as bitch. In fact there is nothing wrong with being a bitch.

When P&W gave birth to the first set of litter, I was present. I was called by my neighbor and informed about the imminent labor. The bird watcher guy, he called me over phone and informed that P&W is going to deliver in my garden. There was nothing I could do to help her in her labor. I was present in a power point presentation at the office, the slides were moving at painfully slow pace. I waited with impatience, the presentation was still reeling out the past data, the line of argument hinted it would take a while. I informed the guy seated next to cover for me, there was an emergency at home and left. Two pups had come out already, they were blissfully and furiously drinking milk from the mother. I stood watching the aperture from which the pups had come out, the opening

was inclined to shut itself, then it widened again, another pup came out and two more behind. It was like good wagons coming out of a tunnel. The new born pups moved by instinct towards the P&W and tugged at the teats. There were five of them, their eyes still closed, the pups knew what to do the moment they come out. That is not in the case of human birth, the midwife would wash the infant – the infant would be smeared with blood. Then the midwife would wrap the babe in white linen and place it in the crib next to the mother. All eyes would be over the mother with legs spread and the nurse swabbing the gate while the baby cried for attention. It would be hours before the mother could look at the baby now placed next to her in the bed, beam with joy, look at the people in the room with pride and sense of achievement, only then she would uncover her breast and instinctively start feeding. If the baby doesn't know to how to suckle, the woman would press her nipple forcing it in the infant's mouth. The baby would initially reject, then would learn to suckle.

Human beings are species which does not know to find its way on their own, but are adept at prescribing what is right and what is not, that's how we come to take on the world with mankind as the center of attention and everything. We have more moral codes regarding matters related to sex, than rules for peaceful living. Then we violate them all. For P&W sex was an act of species preservation, an act of nature, an act of God. I watched her at it, her eyes waiting to get over with the ordeal, nothing more than us having bath in the morning before we go to work. The losers (Kedais) watched the act with disappointment, but are not turned on. This is the big difference.

I leaned back and reminiscence if dogs fucked for pleasure. Dogs fornicated only for reproduction, dogs indulged in sex only during the season meant for fornication, only when the organs were wet with ripeness, performed only through the avenues designed by nature, not permitted by design, no anal

sex, no same-side sex, no watching porno, nothing. Animals are pure in thoughts and focused in purpose. We perform sex like we drink Coffee or Bournvita. Sex becomes a habit with us and we attribute it to the hormones, we attribute it to physical and biological need in the disguise for the pleasure to be derived from it. We mix pride with sex, we mix lack of health with deficiencies, we mix innumerable other things not associated with sex as God envisaged sex. We make rules, we transcend the rules, we do not even spare the breasts, which are organs meant for feeding the babies, while we discuss sex in the high alter of law and judiciary. Animals have none of it. Sex is clearly focused on what it was intended for.

I woke up in the middle of sleep, my legs felt as though they stopped to exist, a strange numbness bewitched my senses. After certain age we are aware of the body only through the pain the body parts inflict. The strange feeling of painlessness in the bones and muscles of the limbs, made me relax. I sat up waiting for the dizziness to vaporize. Suddenly her face came back in my memory and thoughts. She used to walk like a queen in her restaurant, her house or wherever she went including the market for buying provisions and vegetables for the restaurant, to leave the children at the school or when she brought them to play in the park, she wanted the best things for her children, the children wanted to learn and overcome the situation, of having to make mutton briyani and chicken fries when they grow up, to roll out parottas and dosas for the proletarians with lazy proletarian wives at home. She wanted to save them from the grave compulsion that was perhaps why she eloped. The eloping is an act of self-preservation like sex, even if sex itself is a tool used to abet the elopement. And this cruel society cast aspersions and look down upon the second brother's young and beautiful wife for having to save her children from the drudgery in future. The society makes fun of letting it to happen.

Did she achieve what she wanted to accomplish for her children, who was that man who engaged her while the husband stood in front of the hot tawa through the day. Was the man she chose an animal of sex or of compassion?

In the morning when my wife woke me from bed, I no longer bore her the grudge. I got up quietly, fluffed up the pillow and put it in its place neatly, went to the washroom while waiting for the coffee wife would be preparing to hand me when I am through with flushing. I felt the legs were no longer present below my waist, yet I could move about freely wherever I wanted.

## **Saranyan BV**

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Saranyan BV is Bangalore based poet and short-story writer. Many of his works are being published in Indian and Asian journals. He came to the realm of English by mistake and loves being there. He is a big fan of Raymond Carver and thinks that the genre short story is going to rule literature in the days to come, if the writers are ready to take up the challenge.

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