

Short Stories

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An Unwelcome Guest

- N D Dani

He has overstayed his welcome. He is a kind of guest who cannot be welcome in any home but we hoped that he would go away on his own after a couple of days, discouraged to prolong his stay in our house by our coldness and indifference towards him. As things are he has converted himself into perfect nuisance. His misadventures in our house could be put up with initially but he has now crossed all limits of decent behaviour. The way he nibbles at apples placed on our dining table when nobody is at home is a piece of behaviour that not even the most sensitive and magnanimous host would tolerate. Then, he has scant regard for manners. He loves to grope for food in pots and pans and in the act of groping throws utensils off the kitchen slab. Initially, our two little sons were merely curious about his presence in the house, as they had never seen a creature like him before, but now they are simply frightened by his movements. He has the undesirable habit of running very fast, having no regard for things that might be lying in his way. Look at his eating habits. He is not very particular about choosing his lunch or breakfast. He can eat kneaded flour for lunch if chapattis are not available to him. Now this is unbecoming of anyone. Also, he has no table manners. He leaves half eaten biscuits and slices on the table. Sometimes, the floor of our dining room is found to have been used as a place to have fun with. You may find crumbs and pieces all over the floor. Sometimes, you might find milk flowing on the floor. This is absolutely disgusting for two reasons. First, milk is expensive. One may drink it but not throw it on the floor. Secondly, who can afford to wipe the floor clean, repeatedly? Maidservants are quite choosy these days and asking them to 'do the floors' a second time after their agreed upon 'ponchha' in the morning, is to see a frowning female face. No, we are simply fed up with this fellow. We may lose our maidservant.

How can you eat a piece of eatable if it has been half eaten by your guest? In India the concept of 'jootha' is ingrained from our childhood into our minds like the fact about the existence of God. "No, no. Dear don't eat that. It is 'jootha'. I'll give you a fresh bun," mummies in all Indian houses are heard saying to their child with a strong instruction to the child to go and wash their mouth if s/he has put a leftover crumb in their mouth. But this guest of ours is a complete stranger to the Indian manners and beliefs!

If one is capable of stretching one's manners, one may tolerate the dirtying of the floors, the noise in the kitchen of groping for food in the utensils. Yes, he has no training in eating habits. He never eats at a fixed time like we do. He prefers to eat at any time of the day. He may even

wake up at night and go to our kitchen in search of food. Now what is this? Who eats in the dead of night? But this fellow has probably never had a chance to be socialized into having manners. One may even put up with one's irregular eating hours. But how can one put up with a guest who shows preference for nibbling at expensive socks? Now that is too much.

But the fellow is quite impervious to our gestures. We have tried to say this to him, not with words, but through our behaviour, "Now leave us alone. We have had enough of you Your Highness. You are NOT welcome in our house." But the fellow won't pay any attention to our gestures and signs. He takes us for granted. He thinks as if we borrowed heavy loans from him in our previous lives and didn't pay off those loans and in this birth he has every right to force him upon our house and our hospitality and eat and do whatever he wishes to do. He seems to be thinking, "Friends, you are in my debt. You should be grateful that I am here in your house to claim back what actually belongs to me. You shuffled your coil in the previous birth without paying off the gold coins you borrowed from me for your daughter's marriage. You know I was a kind creature in my previous birth. I didn't pester you with return of the loan. I was even ready to waive the interest. But you gave me a slip. Now be grateful to me. You know the unpaid loan has got to be paid off. Even in the next birth. You are a Hindu and you would understand." I don't remember having taken any loan from anyone in my previous birth. Yes, you can't remember your previous birth. But you can make out a safe picture of a person's character in his previous birth by closely examining his conduct in this life. Both, I and my wife, are dead against borrowing money or things. We simply say no to bank offers of loan. Our friends are surprised, "Everybody is taking house loans, car loans these days. What is wrong with a loan? After all they will charge interest on the loan, Guptasaab." We are strong believers in Shakespearean wisdom. The bard said, "Never a borrower or a lender be/ Borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry..." We put greater store with this bit of Shakespearean advice against taking a loan than taking advice from banks.

What do you do if a guest refuses to leave your house? What do you do if he refuses to be threatened or to listen to the words to the effect that he would be thrown out of the host's house if he doesn't leave the house now?

Killing a guest is against accepted social custom. Even Macbeth, the ambitious Macbeth – ambitious for the throne of Scotland – understood this. That is why among the three objections that he had against killing King Duncan, his royal guest in his castle Inverness, the objection against killing a guest was an important objection. Listen to Macbeth himself as he contemplates killing Duncan, "*He's (Duncan) here in double trust:/ First, as his kinsman and his subject,/ Strong both against the deed;/ then as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself.*" Infact, in our situation the roles have been reversed. While in Shakespeare's play, it is Macbeth who is assailed with doubts about going ahead with his King's – his guest's – murder, in our case Lady Macbeth, my wife, if you will, didn't buy my outright suggestion to execute a guest

who has converted himself into an absolutely unwanted pest. She suggested cajoling the guest out of the house. She suggested disturbing him in his hiding places so that he would scamper out of the door kept conveniently open for him. Consequently, I took a mosquito net pole and poked under the kitchen slab because my wife, bent on her knees and armed with a torch, had just spotted him hiding there. Strangely enough, my poking under the kitchen slab didn't startle the guest. She wondered where the fellow had disappeared. She suggested that I poke the pole under the opposite side of the slab. Out came scampering the guest. But instead of rushing out of the open door, as we wished him to do, the fellow, ran inside the bathroom. My wife, who was a picture of determination and bravery in the Operation Unwanted Guest, gave a performance of the reverse kind at the appearance of our scampering guest. She jumped and shrieked, jumped and shrieked. Which made me spontaneously burst into praise, "What a fine performance you have given there! This would put Zulu dancers to shame!"

Till the time of writing this piece, the guest is safely lodged in our house, creating greater havoc and giving us worried days and nights. How do you get rid of a guest without breaking the social code, without breaking that injunction against killing the guest? For the life of me, I don't know.

Misfortune of Gauriya

- Dhruv Shankar

Long ago, there lived an old woman in a village, Kashipur situated at the bank of a river Mandakini. She had a very beautiful daughter whose name was Gauriya. In the family, there were only two candidates as Gauriya had lost her father when she was very young. The old woman brought up her daughter with love and affection, and there was a very intense bond of love between the two Gauriya and her mother. Hence, Gauriya always remained with her old mother whether she was working at home or at the farming-field.

Kashipur was a big village of small houses scattered here and there in the natural greenery and scenery. Besides, there were many gardens adorned and embellished with flowery and natural dowry that sprayed the sweet and fragrant smell into the atmosphere throughout the year. The Mandakini was the spirit of Kashipur as it provided water to all kinds of flora and fauna existing in the vicinity of the village. In the day time, the river might be compared to a shepherd boy rushing behind his cattle while at night it looked like a newly married bride whispering and murmuring uncounted love to her bridegroom in a sweet voice. As a matter of fact, Kashipur was looking just like the valley of natural beauty that is found either in Kashmir or in Switzerland.

The old woman's life was full of critical ups and downs. She had to work in the fields and go to market to purchase all the house-hold things. Gradually, Gauriya became young and now the old woman was anxious about her marriage. She went in the neighbouring villages in search of a suitable match for Gauriya, but she could not get success anywhere as all

the boys, she had seen, wanted to get some dowry that she did not have. In addition, they were not suitable for her daughter because Gauriya was tall, smart, very beautiful and religious-minded. This was the reason why the old woman was not going to get a suitable match for her daughter easily. Having grown up, Gauriya herself started to search anyone as a life partner, but her efforts also were in vain.

One day, Gauriya was plucking rose-apples in a garden while the old woman was working in her field. Suddenly, Gauriya saw that a young and handsome boy was coming into the garden. Now, she stopped plucking rose-apples and paid attention to all the activities of the handsome boy loitering to and fro in search of some rose-apples and ripe mangoes as the garden had two types of trees jambos and mangoes. After wandering here and there, the boy came under the same tree where Gauriya was standing with some rose-apples in his cotton-bag. Although Gauriya and the boy glanced each other a hundred times in the span of ten minutes, they did not start to speak. Both of them, plucking and picking the rose-apples, were thinking about each other. Gauriya thought that he was a suitable bridegroom for her, and the boy imagined that the girl was a proper and appropriate bride for him. However, after some silent moments, the boy broke the human silence that was prevailing in the garden.

“Where do you live?” asked the boy.

“I live at Kashipur.” answered Gauriya shamefully.

“What's your name?” questioned the boy again.

“My name is Gauriya.” uttered Gauriya reverently.

Now, Gauriya was very happy as the boy was taking interest in her. She collected her courage and strength and decided to be fully acquainted with the boy.

“What's your name?” asked Gauriya imploringly.

“My name is Mohan.” answered the boy.

“And where do you live?” asked Gauriya.

“I live at Rampur.” replied Mohan.

“Why didn't I see you anywhere earlier?” muttered Gauriya.

“I passed class XII examination from Shyampur, a very famous city for educational institutions and became a teacher there. I came to my village whenever it was mandatory. This is the reason why you couldn't see me anywhere earlier.” responded Mohan.

“But I carried out my fifth class and after that I could not continue my education as the school was far away in the city. It was not possible for me to go to the city as there were only two persons in my family “I and my mother.” said Gauriya.

“And, in my family, there are three candidates “I and my parents.” said Mohan.

Though they wanted to talk more and more, but it couldn't be happened as the sun was setting in the west and Gauriya's mother was calling her to move towards the home. Hence, both of them made a promise that they would meet again the next morning at the same place as they wanted to talk about something that was much influential and consequential. Then, they departed unwillingly. Mohan moved towards his village and

Gauriya ran towards her mother who was still working in the field. On the way, Mohan was thinking that Gauriya was none but a fairy of Kashipur. In reality, he had fallen in love with Gauriya in his first meeting and wanted to marry her. From the beginning of his teenage life, he had not met such a girl that was so beautiful, poised, and purified. He reflected that he would propose her for marriage on the next day.

Gauriya along with her mother was moving towards her home and telling her mother about her meeting with Mohan. She assured her mother that he was a handsome, wise, educated and loving fellow, and he seemed to be a suitable match for her from every angle. She, further, told her that they would meet again the next day in the garden. Hearing this, the old woman was overjoyed and imagined that Gauriya was going to get her husband at last. On reaching home, they cooked food, took it and lay on an old cot. They talked about Mohan till midnight and then they slept. Next morning, the old woman prepared breakfast and went to market as she had to purchase some household things. Gauriya went to the garden where the meeting was appointed. When she reached the garden, she saw that Mohan had already arrived there and had been waiting for her. As soon as, he saw Gauriya, his face began to shine with the halo of gladness and began to cry:

“I knew that you would come surely. You have come Gauriya?” uttered Mohan.

“Yes, I have come. It's the matter of my future.” replied Gauriya.

“Have you informed your mother about the meeting?” stated Mohan.

“Yes, I did, and she was extremely happy.” answered Gauriya.

Mohan and Gauriya were standing under the same tree, and plucking and eating rose-apples. At that time, eastern wind was blowing slowly and some birds were chirping and singing on the branches of the trees. In the sky, there were some clouds which were ready to spray the fountainous rain at the pleasant unification of the couple “Gauriya and Mohan. Though it was their second meeting, it seemed that they had been acquainted with each other from the last seven lives.

“I want to ask you a very important question.” said Mohan.

“What's problem then? Why do you make delay?” questioned Gauriya.

“Will you speak the truth?” said Mohan.

“By God, I'll.” replied Gauriya.

“Do you have anyone in your life?” asked Mohan.

“No, I do not have anyone in my life. Indeed, I have never got a suitable person for my match-making earlier.” replied Gauriya.

“Would you like to marry me?” asked Mohan.

“If it is so, then, it's my boundless pleasure for what I have been waiting for many years.” put forward Gauriya.

Hearing this, Mohan's pleasure knew no bounds. He began to dance for some moments. In point of fact, both of them had been waiting for each other since the time of their adolescence. Gauriya was going to get her husband and Mohan was going to get his wife. Only it was the matter of

the matrimonial rites that were to be carried out to complete their union. During his conversation with Gauriya, Mohan asked her some philosophical questions which were responded wisely by her. Then, Mohan again came on the same topic.

“When did you want to marry me?” asked Mohan meditatively.

“As soon as it's possible.” forwarded Gauriya with a sweet smile.

Probably, at this answer, the clouds became glad, hence, they began to rain heavily. Then both of them “Mohan and Gauriya ran towards the thatched hut that was made in the garden and took shelter in it. The curtain of rain draped the garden very soon. Some drops of water were falling even from the thatched roof as it was shabby and outworn. In fact, there were only two persons “Mohan and Gauriya, besides, there was none in the surrounding of the garden; they sat on the cot lying in the hut. Undoubtedly, God of Nature had provided them an opportunity for complete union. Since Gauriya was trembling with frigidity, Mohan sat very close to her and this resulted in perfect unification of the two souls. The clouds and the torrents of raining were producing musical sounds of the marriage and the role of wedding night had taken place in the dim light of the hut. As the raining stopped, both of them were awakened from their unconscious state by some natural noise and, then, they came out of the hut. Now they decided to do preparation for the marriage and left the place.

When Mohan told his parents about Gauriya, they agreed to his decision, but they wanted to see Gauriya. Hence, the meeting ceremony was organised at Gauriya's home on 30th July, 1980, and on meeting Gauriya and her mother, Mohan's parents were very happy and wanted to get them married as soon as it was possible. The date of 30th October of the same year was fixed for the marriage ceremony and both the parties started to do their arrangements. Mohan again went to Shyampur for his profession of teaching. Now he would come in the month of October with a long leave for his marriage.

Gauriya and her mother made a long preparation and collected a number of things that were needed in the marriage. The period of two months passed very fast and the month of October started. Though both the parties made their complete preparation, there remained some more. Mohan's mother had purchased some jewellery for her daughter-in-law. When Mohan came on 20th October, he helped not only his own parents but Gauriya's mother also in purchasing ceremonial things. He also finalized confectioner, flute-blower and some drummers. Very soon the day came for which both Mohan and Gauriya were waiting.

It was 30th October and in both the villages “Rampur and Kashipur” the preparations of the marriage were in full swing. Nearly, all the arrangements had been done and the people of the both villages were excited and overjoyed as they were going to attend a marriage party. Mohan along with his friends went to take a bath in the river “Mandakini as it was one of the ceremonial rites that were to be carried out on the matrimonial day. Even in this month, the river was flowing roaringly, therefore, Mohan and his friends decided to bathe cautiously. Moreover,