The Lucky Woman

Two friends run into one another at the Bhubaneswar railway station after many years. They hug each other tightly for several minutes. They were classmates at school, college, and university.

“You haven’t changed at all,” the slightly plump one observes.

“But you’ve put on a little weight,” the other friend replies. They start to catch up.

“So how is life?”

“The usual. There’s no relief from the daily grind. You know how things are for a housewife. But you’re lucky. You’ve got a job. You’ve got freedom.”

“Oh, no. The working wife has it harder. You’ve got to go to work and look after the family, too. What does freedom give you? The family is interested in nothing but your salary. You’re the lucky one.”

God knows what she understood from what the two friends were saying, but a madwoman standing nearby, wrapped up in coarse jute, says, “I’m the lucky woman.”
The Forgiving Wife

“Suruchi . . . You’re a noble soul. You’re incomparable. Full of forgiveness. You forgive a beast like me and come back . . . How can I ever thank you?” Atul’s words sounded like the canned dialogue of a cheap melodrama. Suruchi clenched her teeth, suppressing her anger.

“Yes, I’ve come back. I had to . . . to secure my son’s future. I can never forgive you, Atul Samantaray. Because you don’t deserve forgiveness.”

Could Suruchi utter these words? Her lips parted slightly, in silence.

The Rains

The rains. Not untimely rain, not sudden rain. Monsoon rain.

The touch of the first monsoon, like the stirring of first love. Krishna opened the windows. On the other side of the window, the rains . . . a melodious rain.

“Come, let’s get drenched.” The clouds called her, the rains called her, the winds called her, and the lightning called her. And so did the rain-drenched grass, the leaves, and the coquettish flowers.

“No,” Krishna shook her head.

“Why, are you a girl who doesn’t love the rains?” Krishna broke into a smile and said, “Would you wrap me in a veil of love like he does after I get drenched?”

“No, all we know how to do is drench you. You’d better wait for him and enjoy a tryst in the rain together,” replied the clouds, the grass, the leaves, and the flowers.

The music of rain carried on.

The Mirage

“That was a day of Chaitra. In your eyes, I had seen a glimpse of my devastation.”

You borrowed these lines from Bibhuti Pattnaik’s novel and wrote them to me in a letter. Why? When we met, was it the season of spring, the month of Chaitra?

Did the spring breeze pour the perfume of daisies over us? Our eyes met. Amid hundreds of faces, I could see only yours, dazzling against a procession of stars. Maybe what you saw in my eyes was devastation, but I saw myself in your eyes.

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I blossomed at your touch. It was as though I was brushed by a vermilion powder. I glowed pink. The flame trees were laden with flowers, no leaves left on their boughs; the golden shower smiled bashfully, the flame of the forest caught fire. I burned in that fire. But that burning never seemed destructive.

And yet see what a wreck everything is now. The season filled with you said farewell. The green, tender earth turned rough and grey. The sun burned away all the tender dream flowers. Alone, I walked in bare feet on the scalding riverbed. There was no water, no boat, no boatman. My throat was dry. I felt like I would die of thirst.

But whose faint shadow fell across the distant horizon? My feet picked up speed.