

## Valerie

### Dr. Ranjana Sunil Alexiose

Colors!-vivid and bright, common and sober- mixed and renewed by the seasons of life enchant you and me. These featured Valerie in new perspectives each time I attempted to talk about him, though hardly any color highlighted his course of survival. Walking the busy, crammed streets, shouldering a ragged cloth bag, Valerie was a common sight to the daily observer, though he rarely opened his bag, he knew as his sole companion Mosaic knew, that it was his only mark of identity, that, and the box of dried up water colors and torn discolored drawing book he carried in the primeval woven bag.

I met Valerie, a rendezvous perfect enough for Keats or Shelley to poetically enchant a couple of generations, sitting on a descending hill slope, quite uncertainly, yet not bothered of his unsure position. My camera had taken me to that singular scenario, and I surprisingly shot this dissuading figure in the middle of a cluster of trees.

I belong to a couple of perfectly practical, or may I say sane parents. Valerie would have stood out like an alien- sticking his elongated head and spikes, had he shared a family photograph with the well-kempt, smiling, shining, faultless images of my parents, brother and sister. Our house was spotless and so were our lives, like a well-bound book. If we presented a picture that was too good to be true, Valerie represented a subsistence that was too wrong to be believed. Yet I felt he was too true to be left alone.

If I had really believed in extraterrestrial creatures, I would have had no difficulty in believing that Valerie was one, who had lost his way. He was so out of place! Once or twice I came close to talking to him that is when he wasn't flanked by Mosaic. The moment he saw me, he tilted his weightless head and walked away. Mosaic would later tell me' "I suggest you try not to..."He didn't give me a reason, rather just a general guideline, as when we visit a zoo or wildlife sanctuary.

"Oh! Why...?"

"But who...?"

Sometimes I felt that Mosaic was more secretive than Valerie himself. He kept a near guarded relationship with Valerie, too enigmatic to comprehend. 'Who was he to Valerie?' I wondered. 'Moreover what were they both to me that concerned me?' A natural conclusion to the whole situation was to be semantically figured out, to solve my dilemma.

Days and months passed by without an answer to this predicament. I met both Valerie and Mosaic regularly, with Valerie refusing to acknowledge me and Mosaic passing by vigorously shaking his head, as if to dissuade me. I had read about magnetic fields and pre-life reminiscence. Would any of these apply to my prying in Valerie's case?

As far as my investigation carried me, Valerie had no parents, no home; he had no background of an orphanage, no history of appearing in the neighborhood suddenly 'one fine morning!' Nobody remembered anything about him, except that Valerie is seen around, almost like a ghost, except that everyone had become accustomed to the hardly there legs seen post-ankle, out of his tarnished baggy pants; the forged double sized shirt he carried on his body and of course the inexplicable bag on his shoulders!

Mosaic was the master key to the lost lock! He was the most loyal subject to Valerie's majestic secret. It continued to be so, for a long time, till when I had stopped being inquisitive and killed all suspicion. A decade later when I returned to my hometown to visit the homestead now converted into an obscurity of ancient survival, a whiff of the story carried me back to the hill slopes I had wandered in search of a curious discovery.

I heard from the aged postmaster about Valerie's last days. He would lie quiet and motionless, opening his eyes, when Mosaic would dutifully pour water into his parched mouth. This continued for a week till he closed his eyes forever. Mosaic shifted uneasily for days over the hill slopes as if he had lost a precious gem.

Mosaic still roams over the now green pastureland, a living testimony to the fallen muted king of colors. Valerie died uncrowned for his colors had failed him, the colors he had chosen, over his voice, the colors which had become his voice.

Blessed be he who silenced his anguish when love hurt him!

Blessed be he who quietly nursed his failure when the whole world wallowed in curiosity!

Blessed be his soul-companion who buried his secret deep in him.

Blessed be the mute lover who could keep his torment safe, even when he wanted to tear his heart out!

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