

Gospel Called Parenthood

Collins J P

Somewhere far, at an indistinct hour at night, a man and his woman lay quietly on their bed followed by a neat, heated communion. Their only window showed a cloudy night sky and occasional reverberations of a thundercloud somewhere far. The man kept his eyes hesitantly opened as he felt frequent jolts of throbbing pain in his abdomen just above his manhood. Though the woman kept her eyes closed, she witnessed a carnival gala deep within a place in her abdomen, a place unfathomable for her, beyond comprehension. The profound emotion which pervaded their souls was an anticipated preparedness filled with gracious love, enormous care and a mutual consent for a stressful adaptation needed to enter a solemn yet an anonymous territory.

Romer opens his paraplegic eyes to a clear morning sky visible through the window. 'Yesterday it had rained feverishly so the sky had undergone a neat cleansing but I am not. Only a clean sky and a clean heart can effuse happiness; other hearts and skies propagate only paleness.' These were his beginning musings for the day. Being a concierge in a hotel, he resides in a medium sized apartment which has three small rooms: one for their heads, one for their bowels and urethras, and one for their nourishment. He gets one day off from his devoted practice of hospitality once every of his monotonous months which he calls an invigorating luxury. And today is one of those luxurious days in which he will visit the library, have lunch in a hotel, and take a silent stroll on the beach.

LIBRARY

Library as a vast reserve of wisdom and knowledge brings only boredom to Romer whereas when it is seen as a church filled with devotees, dead and living, brooding in silence, arrayed in a pattern, always enthuse him. He looks at the librarian, an elegant thirtyish woman with a self-assured deportment with her belly beautifully protruded with a life, and nods his head. She in turn nods back; intention was solely to greet. Romer walks past science section, abandons it coldly. He is heading towards Flaubert's lustful woman, lays hand on her spine and pulls her out from among other old, yet to be worn out but already corroded books. For reasons unknown, inexplicable he is eager to see once more that bulged belly of the librarian. He reaches the counter and hands over the Chosen One to the librarian.

Romer asks, "How old is your baby?"

"Five months and ten days", she said smilingly, piously as if she is referring to a divine gift.

'But isn't it truly a gift from heaven, carefully woven, gracefully sent to a woman followed by scores of enormous yet silent phenomena happened inside her. Yes it is.'

"So five more months of great anticipation, for you two."

"Yes, if God willing."

"Yeah.... if God willing."

He takes his book gently, smiles at her. She in turn does the same with the sole intention of greeting.

'A life within a life, a story within a story, a history with a size and shape in another history.' he thinks as he steps down from the library. 'He was a life, story and a history once but now the life giver, the author and the historian had been long buried', he thinks

as he comes out of the library. 'What if God does not will? A life un-lived, a story untold, a history unwritten', he walks towards his lunch.

LUNCH

Maxwell and Audrey were already reclining at the table, waiting for Romer. He walks past a few diners, maintaining a fair eye contact with the couple. Maxwell is Romer's editor, a fine human with a relaxed temperament, one who derives silent happiness or should it be called pleasure in pruning the stories crafted by his writers. Audrey is one of his many women who has neither any social obligation nor any fixed subject position in relation to him. Maxwell is a country in which Audrey does not have any legal documents to occupy. Romer sits courteously, greets them both.

"Finally you have found yourself a good publisher, Rom."

"Thank you Max and indeed we're happy that my work is coming to fruition."

Audrey, "I'm glad to see you Rom. You know I was carrying a question for you. Can I shoot it?"

Romer takes a quite sip of water before saying "Of course, you can."

"As a writer what was the advice or suggestion that influenced your writing? Was there any?"

"Yes. I had been writing stories in which characters or humans were set in an enclosed space, most often, suffocating enormously from within. I decided to free them, allow them some fresh air. I did not realize this until someone pointed it out."

A concealed smile pervades over Maxwell's face.

Maxwell "Ready to be a father Rom?"

After a careful, brief silence Romer answers, "I would like you to imagine a huge wall, me standing on one side and a real Father standing on the other side of it. I know exactly what's going on the other side of the wall, what he does – talk, eat, read, wear as a real Father. But I have not seen the other side with my eyes. I only possess certain assumptions, thoughts, and speculations about the other side. I did not even try to jump across the wall and do not know whether I would ever do it in my life. This thing I know for sure, the yearning to be on the other side of the wall, to be a large yet small human called Father would keep me going as a father."

Max looks at Audrey devoid of excitement or wonder only to throw his arm across Audrey's tender, thin shoulder.

"Well Rom, you have a new reader as well and I had handed over the manuscript to Audrey for an objective analysis on the episode of Lucy's abortion in Russia."

"I really liked the chapter's name, 'Yolk Lost in Russian Quagmire'", Audrey remarks with the air of an expert.

"Thank you Audrey."

Audrey, "Who reads you first?"

"She reads me first. I write because she reads me and the day she stops reading me my pen would cease to puke the indigested substances of my mind".

"Oh wow!"

Audrey gently pushes the table and stands gently only to sit. Her calculated movements and added fragility makes the other two men careful. Romer sees her slightly protruded belly.

"Sorry folks, it's just that I cannot sit idle for long."

Romer, "How does it feel to carry a life inside you?"

“Nothing in particular but now every activity has a dual purpose. If it’s elimination of waste, we eliminate, if it’s nourishment, we both get nourished, if it’s expression, we both express”.

Romer smiles and looks at Audrey’s movements with much curiosity.

Three of them give considerable time to each other to have what was served before them.

“Abortion is one thing which does not have dual accountability, a decision which always comes from outside the womb”, Maxwell releases this remark into the cool, heavy air of the hotel room.”

Audrey fidgets with the spoon, casts her glance downwards, stands up tenderly and begins to leave.

“Excuse me Rom I’ve got to leave now”.

The room turns hot for Romer and Maxwell. Maxwell straightens his back and lights a cigarette.

“It’s just that I do not want the child”.

Romer throws a plain look on Max.

“An organic entity came as a result of two humans’ folly and ignorance. A life with a disastrous history, a pseudo paternity, and a catastrophic existence”, Romer looks at the pace and anger of a pregnant lady, who is still cautious with her movements so as not to pass any negative vibes to her child, who walks away.

STROLL

‘It was clamorously raining on an uncertain day of a month, the day which could not be found in any cellar of my memory. It was the year when I was dragging along through my twenties. On that rainy day I saw a lonely girl in a long skirt drenching her in the rain. She was looking at me and knowing that her gaze was upon me, I stood

fixed. Rest of the world was melting away in the rain but the two of us remained intact. Rain was colorless, cascading as hard, thickened icy distilled drops. She was beside a car, ready to hop in. I heard someone closing the door followed by a hoarse male voice calling the girl. She was taken away from that picture but not from my heart. No one had looked at me with so sharp yet breezing a look. I knew that she lived somewhere in the town in a wealthy home. And on that enormously wet cold day I realized that I had a life to live, a world to see, and a love to caress.'

A pointed end of a shell pricks Romer's right foot. He always likes to walk barefoot on the shore, pressing tightly on the earth. A lukewarm wave floods his feet.

'I was thrown from one labor into another with only the intelligence of deciphering stories and not science. But one day the heat of that rainy day came back to me. I saw her again while I was cleaning the floor of a fruit stall. The very impulse made me hide behind a fruit rack. Newly dressed but again in a long skirt and hair pulled tightly to the back for a pony tail. Her facial features were sharp, tender redness spread here and there, eyes gone deep into the socket, and overall she was brittle. So I was careful not to break or make her fall apart even with my eyes. This series of intermittent, surreptitious visions of her recurred more elegantly in church courtyards, train stations, even on her verandah and some part of me strongly knew that she too was aware of my gaze. Denouement was unanticipated and sudden.'

Romer allows himself to be cleansed by tiny waves. Each one brings along new freshness, new designs for clothes to clothe his life ahead; each wave reminds him that he still has a life to live, a world to see, and a love to caress. The night grows over the horizon, the demise of last orange rays, final burning of an ember.

'I began to attend church services to capture her with my sight, to cup her voice in my ears when she sang hymns. On one such

glorious morning, I saw her cautiously keeping a piece of paper safely under a hymnbook after the choir service. A sudden coldness gripped my feet. Yet after everyone left the church, when it became so empty and peaceful, along with the host of angels on the high roof I took the note and read the tiny little words fell from her fingers. It requested me to run away with her from the familial and sexual tyranny of her stepfather, to begin a new story with her as pure strangers.'

Romer paces up to his room through the lighted street. As night comes to life he seeks to be at his home soon. He searches for the keys as he climbs the stairs. He reaches at the door to their home.

'As strangers we boarded the train, sped past highlands and steep hills, serene huts and vicious towns, to an unknown hamlet. I labored hard and she fed me the delicacies which were altogether strange for my buds. She slept quietly in one corner and I hid near the door, as a watcher even in my sleep. We undid our dresses and had put on new ones but never had encountered even a slightest nakedness. Months rushed by and our love bloomed through smiles and occasional long conversations over a meager supper. Even her slightest cough frightened me. She taught me stories which depicted labyrinthine emotions and plots. She guided me through the intricacies of weaving words into a new robe which could win various hearts. On such a night, coming home after a long day's labor, beside an open book she asked me to take her hand as Man and Wife. For the first time we undid our clothes for each other, to madly read the hidden story locked in each others' body, once drenched in rain.'

Romer settles himself on to a chair along with a glass of water. He waits in silence as the night wore on. A thin strip of bright light of the corridor seeps in through below the door. Romer turns off the dim light inside the apartment so that he could see her shadow through the gap below the door when she stands on the other side

of the entrance and to see her in full bright light when she opens the door. He is now waiting for that brittle companion with whom he will enter a solemn yet an anonymous territory called parenthood.

Collins Justine Peter is currently residing in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada and pursuing his diploma in Advertising and Marketing Communication.

His writings are mostly an exploration into the characters' psyche and thoughts. He is passionate about copy writing and concept development for brand marketing.

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