

The Monstrous Fly

Vijaya Bhaskar

One night no one seemed to be there in the seashore except the Monstrous Fly. With enormous loneliness, he looked at the sky and said, "I am not that strong as the wind or that weak as a mosquito. Yeah, I am strong in my own way. That is why people call me 'The Monstrous Fly' (MF). Nobody can define my charisma unless and until they come across me. Once they cross me, a fresh thought in them is sure to say 'Certainly he is special of some kind. Great person, I suppose.' I wished to be the King of Flies and I am the King till date. It needs a lot of courage and determination to rule these unsystematic and unlively flies that solely depend on the dry fish that lies on the seashore. All the time, these flies have no other chance but to steal their meal. Ideally, it has become the law of the day, irrespective of the position and the power. I too prefer the same way to fill my stomach; after all stealing is a handy job for me. Nobody would appreciate me for this act but for my generosity. Yes, I steal for my two assistants too...sorry idiotic and lazy assistants. They share the credit for solely accompanying me and at times for putting me in problems. Many a times my heroics are established only when problems come across my ways. And these two guys are the incarnation

of problematic deeds. I never tried to call their names as they are good enough in responding to any means of gestures.”

With a big heart and many things to share, he continued with eyes fixed at the sky “Frank enough, I feel guilty for my offence of stealing food from the people residing in this Coastal Street. People in this street are fishermen who run their life by selling fishes caught in the sea. It doesn’t end here; at one stage, I decided to hunt from one particular place to run my routine life with no food shortage. And thanks to Potbelly Pandi and his shop, which I turned into a permanent base for food. Days passed on and I felt bored of the same stuff and started to look for a new leash of food items. Also, the people of the Coastal Street had never tried anything new. If one prepared the shark curry, the very neighbor would prepare the same in the next day. All the while, their dishes became outdated for me and my assistants too had nothing to entertain me except their horrible chat. The Potbelly Pandi turned to a non-stop abuser owing to my permanent stay in his shop. I was good enough to bear his abuse as a matter of fact, all including himself knew ‘how much a fly eats’ and practically not that much stock would get reduce expect the damage that occurs in each item. And that’s more than enough for a customer to deny it and ask for a better one. I believe it’s a sort of good deed done to the customer from my side. But change is the need of the hour as I am fed up with Potbelly Pandi’s shop and expect it as early as possible...Also Potbelly Pandi too waits for a chance to drive me.” He stopped for a moment and looked around. His two assistants were standing close to him, on both his left and right side respectively. He asked, “When did you come?” One of them

replied, "Long back, when you looked at the sky and prayed for a change."

Soon his prayer was answered and his expectation turned around, in the form of Chandu and his family. It was afternoon and Chandu along with his sick father (lying on a bed), wife and two kids – a girl and a boy – waited outside his house for the truck to come. To reduce the incurring expenses due to his father's illness, he had decided to vacate the house and got ready to move to a place where the rent is below average. One such place is the Coastal Street; the houses here are of good condition and the rent was not a matter of concern. Here he has to pay only half the amount of the rent paid to the house to be vacated. The truck, which is to carry the household things, hasn't reached till now. Patience seemed nowhere and all five looked each other's face with disappointment. His wife mechanically fanned his aged father whose both legs – injured in a recent fire accident – were covered with cotton cloth and his son Vicky squeezed his hands with restlessness and a pale face. His distressed daughter Arati sat on the footsteps of the house with knees folded and her right hand on her cheek. It had been nearly more than two hours and at last the truck arrived. Chandu, Vicky and Arati climbed the front side of the truck and all got adjusted in the only seat next to the driver. His father and his wife were at the backside of the truck, along with the household luggage and things, where his wife sat on a small wooden stool and continued fanning her father-in-law till they reached the destination.

The sun was about to set while they entered the street. People scattered along the street casted strange looks on them with a

question 'Who they are?' When the truck stopped near the Potbelly Pandi shop, many of them had already assumed that 'They are the newly come tenants.' First Vicky jumped from the truck holding his father's hand, next jumped Arati, then Chandu and finally his wife got down from the backside of the truck. One by one all the things were brought down including Chandu's father and were taken into the room. Also Vicky and Arati ran into the house with light weighted things in their hands. Everything was dumped into the house and later the old man in the bed was taken inside. After sometime, the things were arranged neatly in the house consuming that night till eleven o' clock. By the time, both the kids were fast asleep without any food and the elders slept, as soon as they had their supper.

The morning broke and the Coastal Street was busy with its activities. Vicky and Arati came out of their house to board the school bus, which at present waits at the corner of the street. They slowly treaded on the street while Arati suddenly felt like tasting the delicious items in her bag — slated for lunch. It was special as they were her favourite ones — Cheese Burger, Noodles and Fried Rice. She looked at Vicky sideward and dipped her hand into the bag and after a rattle in her lunch box; she came out with a Cheese Burger. When she tried to go for a first bite; she found MF and his assistants in the front end of the Burger close to her mouth. She sparked with awe and shouted "Oh there are flies in my Cheese Burger." She waved her hand over the Burger but it served no purpose. Taking back the Burger and pointing towards them she said, "They are still sitting and tasting my Burger. I hate it." Vicky looked at MF and tried to blow effortlessly. But it was not enough and

MF continued till it had its share completely and also his assistants too paid no respect to Vicky's job. Later Arati decided to put it on the road and stamp the Burger to kill them. Before she could put it down, MF flew away at ease followed by his assistants. That day was not at its best for both Vicky and Arati. They knew that they got disturbed early in the morning by those flies and lost one of their delicious items. They carried their anguish till evening and it ended once they narrated their sadness to their grandfather along with their school stories.

That night there was a big discussion between MF and his assistants about the aroma and the taste that evoked them to follow Vicky and Arati until their school. With an air of authentication MF told "I thought there would be nothing but heaps of rice and pools of sambar and rasam but the food items present in their bags; Oh god! Unbelievable and unimaginable. I agree I don't know the names of the food items but they were of heavenly in taste and smell. And to know more, we need to enter into their house. Alas, why did they come so late to our location? Haven't we missed something in our lifetime? I believe their kitchen is the newly honed heaven for us. It's time to bid good bye to this Potbelly Pandi's shop." After his thoughtful words, a breezy silence prevailed and all of them were mutually motivated towards their so-called goal — entering into Chandu's house.

The next day early in the morning, all three waited outside Chandu's house. Their purpose was clear — to enter the house and taste things as fast they could. All three were unable to control their taste buds from the time they whirled around the lunch boxes of Vicky and Arati. As a result, MF and his

assistants reached the spot without each other's knowledge. With a sort of competitiveness they waited quietly for someone from his family to come out for some reason either to buy milk or to fetch water. Time swelled, people around moved in and out of their houses but none from Chandu's house. Their anxiety soared as they knew morning is best time to enter Chandu's house whereas the rest of the time, the door used to keep closed. The only source of ventilation is the window in the room next to kitchen, which is always netted to avoid the entry of flies and mosquitoes. Hence, this door stands as the unavoidable option for them.

Their wait continued; Potbelly Pandi who opened the shop at his usual time around seven o' clock was sure his shop had become a-one for all deserted place for them. His joy was boundless and he deliberately yelled, inviting MF to visit his shop at any time. But MF showed no interest and viewed at his assistants in way that they could make use of the opportunity. They also gazed somewhere with a stern ignorance to his invitation. Potbelly Pandi was the happiest man in the world contrast to these three poor fellows. When it was eight o' clock, Vicky and Arati slipped out of their house. Even before these three could enter the house, their mother shut the door. They waited for Chandu to come out to leave for office. He came out but once again they couldn't get into the house. MF was upset and his angry face shone like a red-hot iron. All he wanted was an immediate entry into the house through any means. His assistants came closer to him with a sheepish look. He too had no other chance but only to smile at them. All three marched towards the seashore to plan their entry into Chandu's house.

On the seashore one of his assistants, scratching on and on came out with an idea. He said to MF "Boss, Why don't we hide into their lunch boxes and get into their house?" MF replied "That won't work out you idiot. They may even spray poisons on the lunch bag and kill us if they sense we flies are inside. And don't panic my boys, there is a way to enter into their house." "But how?" Asks one of them. "It's not how? It's bow...It's vow...haven't you got it? I mean it's bow-vow." "You mean...the dog! The Chooti." Said the other one. And he continues "But how does he comes in play to help us. He is nowhere and even if he does the job he would ask for a share boss. It's pretty complicated." "It's not complicated my boy. I think this is payback time for him. I have helped him in the past by informing the activities of his present beloved Sherry and ultimately he had impressed her on one of my ideas. Let's leave the past; all we need now is the entry into the house." Taking a breath for a while, he gestures one of them to bring Chooti. "Right now" Asked one of them who is ready to go. "Yes." Replied MF.

After a couple of hours, the assistant comes with his face hung saying "Boss, that dog is least bothered about our emotions. I requested him to come and meet you. But he abused you in mean and indecent words." MF in serious tone "What, did he bark at you?" "Boss...he said, I may not be available for your cheap tricks on others. And above all he took the chance to narrate the dark side of your character in the presence of his beloved Sherry. And I believe he did this just because to impress Sherry and nothing more. He's still the same stray dog who craves for the bread pieces in the dust bin but when it comes to Sherry, he portrays himself as the hero of the street.

It seems he expects you to come and call him." MF grinned his teeth and said, "To make things move, sometimes people have to go places. I am ready. Where is that dog?" "He is near the boat zone having a good time with Sherry." Said his assistant.

MF reached the boat zone in a great hurry. He shouted at his best "Hey! Chooti where are you? You malicious, disgraceful dog. I have done a lot of things to you to brighten your life. Never forget, the life you lead at present is on my efforts. Why don't you come out and see my face?" There was no reply from Chooti's side. Silence prevailed and MF shouted again in a lower tone with a saddened face. "I know you don't betray people who come to seek help from you. And above all I am your friend. I wish you understand my situation." This time even there was no reply. He further changed his approach and said "I beg you Chooti; I am desperately in need of your help." Nothing worked out for him. As the last option, he flew to the boat where Chooti was there. For his surprise, he was sleeping without any movement and nearby was Sherry. MF contemplated for the wastage of words – in different expressions – for no use. He shouted close to his ears "Hey! Wake up you stupid dog. I have come to meet you with a purpose. "Yes, tell me...I am always at your service." Replied Chooti in half sleep. After a couple of minutes he got up and said, "How can I help you? Whom should I bite and where?" MF stared at him for a while. Chooti understood the reason for his weird stare and continued, "Hey, hey! I apologize for disgracing you in Sherry's presence; as I get chances of those kinds on very rare basis. Hence I thought, to make use of the opportunity to enlarge my personal image. MF with a pale look said, "It's okay, forget it. I have an important reason to

come here. I wish you come near the Potbelly Pandi's shop at eleven o' clock tonight once all are asleep. I will wait for your arrival...hope you don't shatter my hopes." Chooti with a promising note said, "My friend, I will be there in time. No worries." MF left the place taking Chooti's promising note.

It was eleven o' clock in the night and almost the street drifted into silence. Only four people: MF, his two assistants and Chooti were present near the Potbelly Pandi's shop. MF looked at Chooti with gratitude and said, "I knew you will make it for me. Thank you!" Chooti replied with honour, "It's my pleasure." "Do you know you are to play a crucial role in helping me to get into this house — indicating Chandu's house." "Tell me what should I do?" "Chooti, what did you have for your supper?" "I had some pieces of rice cakes, chicken and a bit of dry fish." That's great...the smell of chicken and dry fish would help things go well. The point is that I want you to spill your saliva at the very entrance of this house. It's not for a few minutes but it should continue till morning five o' clock. The foul smell of your saliva would force anyone of the family members to open the door and look at it. By that time I would enter into the house and hope my job is done." Chooti absorbed his words, took it by heart, and got ready to start the process.

The three of them sat, waiting for Chooti to do some miracle. Before starting, Chooti looked all around and opened his mouth with his tongue let outside. He made some sounds – may be an indication to bring out the saliva – trying to make MF and his assistants believe, he is on target. After five minutes, only the sound prevailed and no signs of saliva. Chooti felt himself cheated. Unaware what to do, he looked at

MF who had sensed the emptiness in him. MF fumed with anger and shouted, "When you are with Sherry, you drool in litres drenching the whole surrounding. But now, you seemed to be nothing more than a useless creature. It's all again disappointment for me." Hearing his words Chooti opted for another try and said, "Shall, I run a couple of times touching both the ends of the street. Hope something turns out after it." "Okay, you better try it out instead telling." Chooti vanished in and out of the street for a couple of times and at last slowly he came dragging his tired legs to the experimental spot. This time too his mouth opened and he expected the saliva to pour out but only a few drops spilled — similar to an out of order tap. The darkened faces of MF and Chooti faced each other. MF was helpless as the plan flopped. At last, he made up his mind to look up for a better idea.

As the day broke all of them vanished from the spot. Chandu's door opened up for a couple of times for the known probable reasons. That day the door opened for one more time but for an unpredicted one. It was for the doctor, who came to treat Chandu's bed ridden father. He got inside and examined the wounded legs of his father and applied ointment stating, "It takes more than a month to heal as it's a fire accident. And the wound is so deep that the flesh has to get tighten and dry itself. If any sort of infection in the course of treatment, there's only a little chance to get cured. Be cautious." Probably because of this, most of the time, his legs used to be covered with a cotton cloth to avoid infection by either germs or flies.

MF trying to relax in the boat zone, knew he would get a chance to enter Chandu's house. But all he had to do is to find out the right person to execute his plan. In the meantime, his

assistants approached him with a good news. One of them said, "Boss, we are close to the target, I suppose." MF very much impressed asks, "Where did the confidence come from?" "From the Jelly Fish." "You mean the soapy fish that moves without control and taps from one water place to another water place." "Yes, Boss. You are absolutely right." "I knew he is generous enough to do anything for me but how could he help us?" "I was told that, the members from that house are planning to buy fishes to set up a beautiful fish tank in their house. And Jelly fish is on the top for sale for its colour and beauty. I wish you meet him once and explain the situation." "I'll meet him tonight once his master is asleep."

That night MF walked towards the hut where Jelly Fish was put up by its master to sell for an impressive price. The darkness was a hurdle to find out where Jelly was? Luckily, its shining skin helped him to identify it easily. He went close to the tank and said in a low tone, "Hello Jelly wake up...Jelly get up please. I need your help; don't you hear my voice?" With no response, MF flew down and thought for a while and again went up the tank and close to the water it blew the water heavily. Drowsy Jelly moved from one end to another hitting the glass on both the sides. After repeating this for a couple of times, Jelly woke up and looked up. It realized there is a face looking at him. Jelly with a stream of surprise asked "Hey Monster! What have you come here for? Nothing seems to be here to suit your taste?" MF with eyes low said, "I need your help." "My help! How could I do a favour for you? I have nothing in my hands." "You are my saviour. Listen, as per the information I received, tomorrow you are to be sold to a family. They have newly come to our location. All you have to

do is to help me in getting inside the house." "While I am in the tank; where is the chance for me to help you to get in?" "Think! Think you can do it. If you do something, I can get in and taste the heavenly edible items in their kitchen. You are the best of my friends and I am sure, it can be done only by you." "I will try my best to pave way for you into that house."

Early morning Jelly's owner was busy keeping all the fish tanks for display to impress the customers. Vicky and Arati accompanied Chandu to buy the fishes. MF was the first person to reach the spot. He waited beside Jelly's tank for Chandu to arrive. They came near his tank and suddenly all three were impressed by Jelly's shining skin, beautiful tail and eyes. Chandu looked at both Vicky and Arati for a final nod. Vicky said, "Yes" with a big smile and Arati too came out with a smile but said, "No". Chandu asked "Why?" "I don't like its eyes. They are too big like balloons." MF stared at Arati...he felt if he had had a big hand, he would have smashed her to a state of unconsciousness till Jelly's deal is over. But he is helpless for he has only wings. He prayed to God so that things go well. His prayers were answered in the form of Vicky. Vicky said, "I like those balloon eyes and I want only that fish; I love it." "Arati cried, "I don't want it. I want something else with smaller eyes." MF was restless and his heartbeat palpitated at a greater pace. Finally, Chandu decided to buy some small coloured fishes with small eyes along with Jelly Fish. Once the deal was struck, he felt happy. Jelly along with other coloured fishes was taken to Chandu's house. On the way MF stole a chance to converse with Jelly. MF asked, "How are you to help me my friend?" Jelly said, "Some way or the other I'll." MF driven by anxiety "But how? Once you are put

into the tank you can't come out...and you have only fins and not hands to open the door." Jelly thought for a while and said, "In any means...even I'll die and help you my dear." After a pause he quipped, "You know I am good at jumping out of the tank. I can only live in water...once I am out; I am dead. And no one keeps a dead shining fish inside the house. Also they will be shocked to see me out of the tank and will open the door to see what had happened. When they open the door, you could enter and savour the edible things whatever you wish." MF saw the unnamed items in his vision and dreamt of having all of them in one gulp. Before leaving, he asked for one last time "When shall I come to fulfill my desire?" Jelly said, "After a couple of days." He thanked Jelly and walked his way to share the good news with his assistants. While Jelly was taken to Chandu's house with due respect and scorn by Vicky and Arati respectively.

After a couple of days, MF was ready for the task. It had become his lifetime goal and he never knew why it happened all of a sudden in his life. That morning, he was well early in time and waited before Chandu's house to happen something. Even after more than two hours nothing turned to his favour. His patience seemed to disappear slowly and he thought of leaving the place when the clock struck 10:00. But his conscience forced him to stay there. Suddenly, a scream echoed at his ears, "Hello, dad something had happened to the newly bought Jelly Fish." It was Chandu's voice. Immediately his wife came rushing to him and peeped into the fish tank and searched for the missing Jelly Fish. His father lying on bed asked, "What's up? Where's that fish? It's my grandson's favourite one." Chandu screamed back to his

father "That's what we are looking for. Oh God! We found it dad...it's lying on the floor." His father with his voice raised, "Please look if it's alive or not? Try to restore it in the tank as fast as possible." Chandu said "Dad, it's dead." And he opened the door unknowingly what to do. MF took advantage of it and entered the house for the first time.

His eyes were filled with joy and he began flying all around the house with a jubilant mood. Finally he settled in the kitchen – his destination. With no moment to waste, his eyes captured the delicious items he dreamt to taste and enjoy. He whirled around the bottles that contained the eatables like honey, badam, pistia, cheese, butter, cashews etc. Also jumping to another shelf he found the fresh food materials prepared by Chandu's wife and began tasting it with great awe and satisfaction. Blindfolded by the activity of his dream coming to reality, he forgot his friend Jelly Fish.

All of a sudden, thousands of flies entered into the house and hunted for their prey and found Chandu's father and 'his wounded legs'. That was enough for them. The reason behind this cause was MF's assistants who took pain in spreading this news to other fellow flies. The old man's pain increased as the flies began tasting his wounded legs. His shouts and cries made Chandu and his wife to run towards him. His wife began to wave the hand fan over his legs. But there seemed no movement from the flies. His wounds were gradually getting deep and infected. MF while crossing Jelly fish with joyous mood, heard Jelly's voice in a sinking tone. Jelly said, "MF, taste all as much as you can. I have kept my promise to make my friend's wish get fulfilled. But, please take away your flies from the old man's wounded legs. He might die if they

continue to pester on his legs. Unaware of this, he went into the room to have a look what was happening and it was a killing sight. Unable to drive the flies away Chandu and his wife were helpless. MF turned back and looked at Jelly Fish having his last breath and again looked at the old man suffering to death with the flies infecting the legs. MF's heart began to melt...He cried to his flies "Stupid, all of you come here for God's sake and carry my friend Jelly Fish and put him back in the tank or he will die. I want you to do it immediately. It's my order...the King's order." All the flies turned to MF and looked at the Jelly Fish who struggled to breathe. They flew towards him and put themselves together to carry the Jelly Fish. They tried and carried him with their wings to the top of the tank but they failed to drop him into the water. Jelly Fish was hurt when it hit the ground from such a height and his breathing level too became low. When all of them tried for the second time, MF too chipped in to carry his friend. This time, they made it and they dropped him into the tank. It was the moment of his lifetime for MF and he heaved a sigh of relief with his eyes at Jelly Fish. Jelly Fish was thankful to MF and his people to spare the old man and to save his life too.

Situation was strained enough and MF had already decided to leave the house. He looked at the kitchen once again. His decision was strong and it overcame the trivial idea of tasting the food items. In the backdrop, the painful cry of the old man echoed. The old man's cry chased MF and his fellow beings to the seashore. MF for one last time looked at the sky and said, "I need reformation in myself... and it is happening."

Vijaya Bhaskar is a teaching fellow with the Department of English, Anna University, Chennai, India. Has published papers in both national and international journals. One of his short stories 'The other side of me' has been published with Alive Magazine for publication.

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