



SATYAM MANDAPATI

A Date with Death

And other Non-Resident Indian Stories

TRANSLATED FROM TELUGU

BY

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Made In America

Living in the United States of America, we fell in with the American habit of going straight to dinner on return from work. It was around six PM. The routine was so well set that Prasuna was already setting the table when I hit the driveway. Hunger pangs drew me directly to the table even without casting off my office dress.

As I devoured the food off my plate greedily, Prasuna sat opposite me and asked

“You didn’t have lunch, or what?”

“Oh, I did, but it wasn’t enough” I replied, continuing to hog.

“I’ll pack a snack for you from tomorrow. Maybe you can have it around 3 O’clock.”

I nodded with my mouth full. Suddenly I stopped, remembering something.

“Where is Saraswati?” I asked.

“She has to go out with a friend. She is eating out,” replied Prasuna.

I raised my head and asked quizzically,

“Friend? Or date?”

“Friend, I think. Why don’t you ask her? She is upstairs.”

I was still thinking about what Prasuna had said as I washed my hands. The phone rang. It was Subbarao from Phoenix.

“Hello, Babu. What are you doing? Finished dinner?” he said.

“I just finished dinner. Anyway, how come you called at this time?” I asked.

“Malathi is not yet home from work. It seems she will be slightly late today. I have to talk to you about something important.”

“Go on” I said, settling myself in the Lazy-Boy recliner with my cordless telephone. Might as well be comfortable, I thought. Judging by his manner, it seemed that Subbarao had a long story to tell.

“Here in Phoenix, I have a friend called Balasubrahmanyam. We call him Balu. He has a daughter by name Vasundhara, Vasu for short, who was born here twenty-six years ago. When they went to India

The Knave

Taking the exit from Lawrence Expressway, Raju parked his car in the parking strip there and entered *Sarovar*, the Indian restaurant. The manager wished him as he stepped in, escorted him to a nearby table and placed a menu card in front of him. Raju ordered his favourite dishes, *idli-sambar* and *masala dosa*.

Borough towns like Santa Clara, San Jose, Paulo Alto, Sunnyvale, Mountain View and Milpitas, are situated close together in California, the whole area being known collectively as Silicon Valley. It is the centre of the world's best-known hi-tech companies, abounding with hardware and software engineers. Being close to dinner time, the eating-place was crowded with people

of different nationalities, mainly Americans, but including many Indians, Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese.

Raju works for a hi-tech company as a systems analyst. Those surroundings gave him great pleasure to observe different people and the happenings around him. The waiter placed a plate of *pappadams* before him as an appetizer and left. As he bit into the crackling savoury, he noticed her.

She was sitting two tables away from him with her back towards him. He couldn't see her face clearly, but he was immediately attracted to her shapely form in her well-fitting Indian suit. A young American male was sitting next to her and a young Indian man sat facing her. The Indian was the only one Raju could see clearly. They were obviously working together on the same project, which they were discussing animatedly.

She turned towards the American and said something. He replied to her with a smile, in a tone of easy familiarity. He had blonde hair and was very tall. The Indian sitting opposite spoke with great fervour and fluency in a pronounced American accent.

As soon as Raju finished his appetizer, the analyst in him was aroused. To aid his analysis, Raju named the men as American boy and Indian boy. He

Gayatri

Gayatri tossed her head nattily to shake off the black strands flitting on her charming brow. Wave after wave of breakers rose before them and smashed themselves to pearly droplets in the cool breeze blowing in from the evening sea. The street lights on the Ramakrishna beach road at Visakhapatnam city fought the darkness to brighten their surroundings. She carefully rearranged her hair around her moonlike face. Nazir sat near her, gazing at her with unblinking eyes.

“Why are you staring at me like that” asked Gayatri, trying to conceal the smile playing on her sensuous lips.

“I could keep watching you like this all my life” replied Nazir looking into her lovely eyes, shining with the reflected lights.

“Fine!” she teased, “what about your studies? And who will feed us?”

“The one who created us” said Nazir, caressing her hand.

“I love you, Gayatri” he whispered.

Gayatri smiled.

“I love you too, Nazir” she replied softly.

“Let’s get married” she said, after a pause.

He remained silent.

“Don’t you want to marry me?”

“You know I do, Gayatri, but will our families consent to our inter-faith marriage?”

“No, they won’t” she replied instantly. “At least not at first instance”

“Oh?” exclaimed Nazir, alarmed.

“I will try to get my family’s consent” replied Gayatri, her jaw set in determination. “But if they don’t agree, I won’t give up, although I will be disappointed. This concerns my life. After all, I am responsible for making my life’s choices. I have to take the decision and I will, for better or for worse.”

A Date with Death

I asked Girija over dinner, “How was your day at the office? Was it as usual, or was there anything different?”

“Yeah, today there was something different” she replied.

I turned to look at her while savouring my favourite stuffed egg plant curry, waiting to hear the story.

“I never thought I would see such people amongst us Indians” she observed.

I remained silent, unwilling to disturb her train of thoughts. Girija was a counselling psychologist in the local state prison. She resumed the conversation after a while.

“Sunetra is an Indian American from Orissa State. She lives in a nearby town called McAllen. She is a citizen of the United States. The woman has been sentenced to death for killing her husband and is awaiting execution of her sentence in death row.”

Much as I was shocked to hear this, my curiosity was aroused.

“What? She killed her husband? Why? How old is she?” I bombarded her with my questions.

“She must be around thirty” Girija replied, “Since we are both Indians, they assigned the case to me, perhaps in the hope that counselling would be easier. I haven’t seen her file so far. All I know is that she confessed her crime after killing her husband. That speeded up her sentence. She will stay in death row until they fix a date for her execution.”

“Poor thing” I said, “why would she do such a thing, unless there was some compelling provocation? Was her husband an American or an Indian?”

“I don’t know” she replied with a hesitant smile, “I can only tell you after they give me the file.”

“But” she added after a pause, with wifely emphasis, “These are confidential matters. Don’t mention them to anyone, anywhere.”

“Why should I tell anyone? Don’t you know me?” I said, countering the look of distrust in her eyes.

She smiled as if to assuage my hurt feelings.

“Is that all the trust you have in me after fifteen years of marriage? All right then, don’t tell me anything

East and West

Raju parked his car in the driveway and entered his house. He was stressed out after a day of many hassles in the office.

He pulled out a can of orange juice from the refrigerator, poured some into a glass, switched on the stereo and settled himself on the sofa. Just as the muffled strains of old Telugu film songs emanated from the stereo, Lalita came in from the bedroom holding the cordless telephone. Seeing Raju, she said,

“Oh, you are home”, and took a seat beside him. She appeared to be lost in thought. Something seemed to be troubling her.

“Is anything wrong, Lalita?” asked Raju.

“Nothing”, said Lalita, but added after a pause, “Gita just called from Chicago.”

“What? Did she have another car mishap?”

“No, no.”

“What then?”

“What we didn’t want to hear, has happened” said Lalita, in a low voice.

“Tell me what happened.”

“Our daughter called to tell me that she is in love with a classmate of hers in North Western University. They are planning to get married.”

“She went there saying she wanted to do her Ph.D. Is this what she is up to?” said Raju in irritation.

“She is no longer a child. She is twenty-five years old. If we were in India, we would have got her married by now.”

“So”, said Raju but suddenly a thought occurred to him at that moment. He looked at Lalita,

“Who is he? Is he from our community?”

“No” said Lalita.

“Is he at least an Andhra, from our State?”

“No” mumbled Lalita.

“Is he a Punjabi?” asked Raju, putting his doubts aside.

“Oh no” sighed Lalita, “He is an American. She said his name is Jeff.”

The Global Family

Monday morning. I was sitting in the office in front of my computer, getting the slides for the power presentation ready for the Executive Management Review scheduled for the following day. The phone rang. It was Danny.

“Hi Danny. How’re you? When did you return from India?”

“Last evening”

“Got over your jet lag? How come you are in the office so early?”

He laughed.

“It will take a couple of days to get over the jet lag. I came to office because my vacation is over.”

“How was your first visit to India?” I enquired, curious to know how it went.

“Just great. This is the best trip of my life. I have much to talk to you about. What’s your plan for lunch?” asked Danny. He sounded enthusiastic.

“None, so far. Shall we meet in *Pasand*?”

“Sure, I’d love it. I will be there at 11:30. Is that OK?”

End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @

<http://kinige.com/book/A+Date+With+Death>

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