



MAINAK AND I
One night in the ocean

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She had wonderful skin, smiling eyes and a small frame.

I was madly in love with her in college. When I knew I would not be successful in love, the flame of love had turned itself into a throbbing ache on the nerves. The pain came back in the summers. In the winters it was reasonably less.

I had not seen Debolina for years. Last I had seen her looking at me with a mocking smile a few days before her marriage.

I must confess; I had wanted her to fail in marriage and even gone to the extent of cursing her in my mind.

I would enquire about Debolina from common friends and acquaintances. When I gathered, she was happy in marriage, had a loving husband, two healthy sons, a fabulous house by the lakeside and a side career of a cuisine writer; I stopped fishing news about her.

I knew my curses had failed as much as I had failed with her.

While on the way to Debolina's house, I realized something special: a blanket of clouds covered our sorrows and invisibility so well that no longer we were sad to make a new beginning.

Should I tell Debolina for once how much I loved her in college, her fall of hair that reminded me always of a wild mountain stream?

That afternoon I saw Debolina standing on the verandah sipping coffee looking vacuously at the lake.

Strangely there did not exist a single ball of cloud between her and me then. I tried to look at her hair and eyes as closely as I could from that distance. She had become older gracefully. She looked more ripe and desirable now. My body was filled with a pain whose origins I knew.

I stood there for a long time.

She went inside. She cooked a Spanish omlette first and ate it with a loaf of brown bread. I looked at the motions of her lips and cheeks as she was eating. She instructed her housekeeper for some time to do this and that. Her voice had changed. It sounded fuller and contented. Then she went inside her

study, a room lined with wooden panels containing millions of books and manuscripts and at the center a writing table with a finely polished upright wooden chair.

She sat on the chair, looked outside the window with her smiling look as if she was smiling in slow motion and soon started writing with a black Mont Blanc on handmade paper.

I touched her shoulder lightly with my right palm.

She looked back and focused her sight on me. At first she did not recognize me instantly. When she did she jumped from her chair and embraced me like a friend, planting a fleeting kiss on the right cheek.

I felt happy and gay.

Then I saw a rush of clouds rising up from the lake, crossing the adjacent streets and entering the room where we were.

Debolina said, "Sandy dear what do you do nowadays?"

I said, "I collect taxes."

She looked surprised and said, "Taxes, oh dear! What a waste of a life! Do you love me still?"

I was shocked by her question. How did she know that I loved her?

I had not told this to any body.

I kept quiet.

I think the silence miffed her.

She said gleefully, "Remember you were such a foodie in college. I'm a great cook now. Can I cook something for you Sandy?"

The clouds had engulfed us.

I found Debolina sublimating in my hands.

She had become a cloud.

As I walked back home still feeling the warmth of Debolina's embrace, I saw the city had become normal.

The clouds were gone.