



A LITTLE SKY OFF THE WINGS

DR. BHARTI RANE

An Award-winning Gujarati Novel
Translated by DR. RAJEEV RANE



A Little Sky off the Wings

by

Bharti Rane

Translated by

Rajeev Rane

PROWESS
PUBLISHING

Copyright © 2019, Bharti Rane
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the copyright owner, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper or broadcast.

Published in India by Prowess Publishing,
YRK Towers, Thadikara Swamy Koil St, Alandur, Chennai,
Tamil Nadu 600016

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5457-4722-3
Mobi ISBN: 978-1-5457-4723-0

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

CONTENTS

Foreword to the Translation

Prologue

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

CHAPTER 1

PARNAVI

The lush green farm, its grass swaying in the breeze all day long, is now glowing immensely after getting immersed in a shroud of darkness, as if someone has come stealthily and placed green lanterns on the tip of each blade of grass. Scattered around the lanterns, hanging on the waist-high grass, are fireflies painting luminous circles in the air. Gradually everything here will melt in the darkness. This house which belongs to Julio's grandfather Mr. Alberto, the farms adorning the slopes opposite the house, the rigid fence guarding the farm, the dependent creeper entwining the wooden fence, the dusty olive tree, the wooden bench crafted by Julio's grandfather, me sitting on it and you pulsating in my heart, all of this will merge into the darkness and then for the rest of the long night, there will only be the verdant glittering of fireflies, as far as I can see.

It seems as if I have been sitting here since ages. I cannot see the sunset from here, but I can definitely feel the veil of darkness descending slowly from the eastern slopes unassumingly enshrouding me. Every day, at this very place. I wait for the infinite dark cloud. Within the realms of my vision, I see no one and no one is expected to be seen either. Grandpa Alberto has gone for his evening walk and will return leisurely after his daily dose of gossip with the bartender. Grandma is done with her daily chores and has gone for prayers, finishing which, she will seek solace in the Bible. Lucy has ventured to the forest with her easel and paraphernalia with a unique idea in her mind. She said that she wished to paint on canvas the sky overlooking the tall pine trees flanking the high eastern slopes at the time of dusk, when she could see a crescent moon and a tiny starlet twinkling below it. This was precisely the apt moment she wished to capture. Julio lounging himself on an armchair, must be reading a book on ancient cultures, sitting in the west-facing

balcony of Grandma's guest room. No one is expected to intrude upon my solitude. I am fascinated by everyone's lifestyle here. All are warm-hearted, cheerful, and cordial, still they have a peculiarly unique individual way of living within one's own self. Each person is a guardian of the privacy and freedom of others!

I am spellbound by this newfound solitude. I try to smell it, feel it and even taste it a bit just like a child rejoicing with a new toy. Here, I am an independent person. An individual with no strings attached. Parnavi, just Parnavi. In this stoic feel of existence there abounds happiness, but the coin of independence has a flipside too. Out of this very feeling of independence stems a definite gravity of unbearable loneliness. The toy of solitude which I have held with curiosity, now casts its spell on me and starts dominating me. I tremble in this fear of loneliness and instinctively seek your dependence. Akin to the innumerable fireflies glittering in the grass when darkness settles, my mind is full of your boundless memories. I imagine myself in the waiting of the fireflies clinging to the grass tips and I start missing you. My stretched hand seeking your dependence unknowingly gropes in the air and as usual I try to recover slowly, staring at the dark sky with helpless eyes.

Grandpa Alberto often says, "The glitter of the fireflies is their language of love. Their love-talk in the sign language of the twinkling eyes." The female firefly cannot fly and so she just clings desperately to the tip of the grass awaiting the beloved. When I see the she-fly waiting for its beloved I am reminded of our relationship. When I remember you, at that very instant, it reminds me of your first touch which had charged through my whole body like a symphony played on a Jaltarang* and your last touch which slipped from my fingertips while bidding farewell at the airport and of course, all the delicate moments scattered in between. I feel a crazy longing for reliving all those tender moments again! Do you remember Aditya, many a times, we also talked in a secret sign language? Every day I come here to meet you amidst these fragile luminescent intimations. Daily the sparks from these flashes pierce my heart and I struggle desperately in the dark until I recover all by myself. At times I wonder why have I come here? Alas for what? The question keeps haunting in the shadows of an answer and the answer remains elusive and unanswered!



NOTE:

**Jaltarang*: A traditional oriental musical instrument.

CHAPTER 2

PARNAVI

“Just imagine Parnavi, what would happen if one day, the earth were to suddenly do a somersault?” Julio’s imaginary proposition had a childlike inquisitiveness.

“But why would the earth have to go upside down? I don’t expect it to be crazy like you and do something so bizarre.” I tried teasing Julio.

“I’m not joking, I am talking very seriously. If the earth does have its regular movements like rotation and revolution, is it not possible that it could have a movement in a third dimension, occurring in an endless time span? Say something resembling a somersault or upside down and so on, or can the earth not tilt under the influence of the tremendous gravitational pull of an gigantic comet passing very near to its trajectory?”

The discussion was getting a bit serious so to make it a shade lighter Lucy chipped in, “Well, as we do not understand, you may well explain to us what happens if the earth actually takes a somersault. I feel nothing significant will happen as the earth rotates day and night and we hardly even feel it.”

“No, definitely things will change.” Julio quipped. He added, “First of all, the oceans and land will merge. Where there is an ocean today, there would be land and where there is land it would be covered by the oceans. All our cities, plateaus, farms, and mountains will get submerged and all creatures living in the depth of the ocean bed will gasp for water on the open exposed land. The North Pole and Greenland would become the equatorial region and the snow there would melt, transforming it to lush forests. The place where you live, India would then be like the polar region submerged in ice!

I am very sure that something like this has happened in the prehistoric period. Or else how can one explain the finding of fossils in the polar regions. So, everything changes, yes, I mean everything. A sudden change in every particle of the earth occurring in a flash. What a strange and enormous phenomenon!”

I could not help giggling at Julio’s ‘strange and enormous’ hypothesis. “Are you in your senses today? This morning your brain is churning out quite imaginative ideas. Julio, may I give you some unsolicited advice? Please avoid reading those horrible books on ancient civilizations till late night before you go to bed. I am sure they will drive you insane one day.” I teased.

Humor does not go well with Julio. His eyes always appear surprised. Behind his robust and sporty physique, he is more like a child. Most of my jabbering goes over his head! It has been my experience that Italians have a weak understanding of English. Julio being a research scholar could read English. He has travelled widely to many countries for his research, he can even write a little, but speaking English is a daunting task for him. He speaks in his own style, not caring a heck for the rules of grammar. It is fun to hear him and imitate him in his own sweet way. For instance, for saying “this is not possible” he would say, “No possibion”. For saying “This is not good” he would just say, “No gud”. To explain, “You may wish to go, but it is not possible for us to go there.” He would say, “You no problem, but me big-big problem”, If he wanted to say the bus has arrived he would just shorten it to “boos coming”; so just like this he added in his natural style, “You no serious but me speaking serious.”

“Yes, whatever you say always makes sense, Julio” I tried pulling his leg, but doubted whether he could understand even a bit of it. Fifteen days of touring with him had familiarized me with his language and style. In fact, I have started enjoying his childish and funny jargon.

It seems Julio has no concern with the future. He is a person who delves in the past and has an irresistible passion for history. He is forever lost in statues, relics, paintings, palaces and temples where he can discover the centuries old past. Sometimes he talks about the fossils of the North Pole and sometimes he dwells on the topic of the pyramids of Egypt. Occasionally he talks about

the ancient temples of the Greek islands and sometimes he tries to decode the meaning of the Michelangelo paintings and tells us about the hidden mysteries associated with it. He does not excavate the past from the mounds, but chisels the past into figments of his own imagination and by doing this he tries to mould history into beautiful forms of his own fascination. For him all that is past is beautiful, glorious and covetable.

Lucy however, is altogether a different kind of person. She loves to live in moments, sipping them and kissing them. She is never tired imbibing the various shades of nature. Be it a streak of light lost in the clouds after sunset, or a dry leaf shining like gold when the sunrays filtered through the dense foliage descend upon it, or the verdant hue of a moist leaf seen floating in the water, in the span between the two waves of the ocean; The fineness of the delicate petal of an unnoticed wild flower growing in the woods; a dewdrop clinging on a Cyprus leaf waiting to slide and fall on the ground; the tide of sanguineous sunrays rushing to the earth ignoring all frontiers; the sky going astray between day and night; the silver sun and the golden moon; she harbors an astute ambition to capture on canvas, every drop of the grandeur of nature imprinted on her mind.

When I see Lucy so strongly involved in the currents of the present, steadily marching towards the future and Julio always sunk in the memories of the past, I am reminded of the caves of Ajanta & Ellora. **I see them as a meeting point for their aspirations. I strongly wish to take them there one day, where Julio will be lost in the past and Lucy will go mad in admiration of the paintings. Whenever I see them walking hand in hand, embracing each other without a care in the world, arguing over petty matters and again coming together, I always wonder what must be the mystery of their mutual attraction? What must be their vision of tomorrow? Could they have dreamt of a future together? Could they have vowed to stay together for a lifetime like us or would it be in an association lasting just until mutually convenient or a relation till the bodily attraction prevails. I try to weigh their relationship on my scale, but soon my thoughts flee hither thither.



NOTE:

****Ajanta & Ellora: Ancient caves in the India famous for its carvings and paintings.**

CHAPTER 3

PARNAVI

It seemed, as if the week had passed in a blink. Once again, we packed our luggage for our much-awaited trip ahead. It was time to bid adieu to Grandma, her tiny hamlet and the world of luminous farms of the glowing fireflies. Tomorrow we will be proceeding to Val Badia, the land of Julio's ancestors. In my mind, I have a hazy picture of this land of indigenous Europeans from the various descriptions mentioned by Lucy and I am eagerly waiting for a real-life encounter with this enchanting and mesmerizing dreamland. A dream coming true! A surge of emotions has made my mind restless. Colorful thoughts have invaded my mind and are fluttering like butterflies. How will be those tiny far strewn remote Alpine villages concealed in the remotest North Eastern Italian Alps? What will the Ladins be like? The Ladins who have vehemently preserved their ancestral language, attire and customs. I wonder how would be their communes which they call 'villas' wherein the entire village lives as a large joint family, and how strange is it to imagine of a joint family in Europe. All this seems so amazing!

Its evening again, my last in this house. Sitting alone as usual in the verandah which faces the garden I am pondering about tomorrow and all the imaginary impressions of Val Badia start flashing in my mind. I dream of the colorful shadows created by the incident sunrays falling on the marbelline rocks at the tip of the Dolomites. I think of the pinkish hue of the Dolomitten evenings. I also think of the prehistoric caves hidden in the dense forests which surround the village. I think of the Ursus Spelaeus — the mammoth cave-bear like mammals which roamed majestically in these forests only to be lost into oblivion during the second ice age. Why does Julio have to go to this strange settlement every summer? Is it something to

do with the research on the remnants and fossils of these now extinct animals? Did he go there to profile the layers of time hidden in the darkness of the caves? or to find in the forest some undefined aspect of one's own existence? I do not understand. Many unanswered questions are emerging in my mind, but whom do I ask? The excitement of the strange land, we will be visiting tomorrow and the anguish of having to part with grandma's lovable family both are playing hide and seek in my mind.

Today, I did not feel like going to the garden and sitting on my favorite bench. I just felt like sitting in the verandah and gazing at the fields and the slopes surrounding them. I felt drained of power to face the darkness rushing along from the horizon. It was as if my subconscious mind wanted to freeze the time which I had spent here. The seven days spent in this village felt like some event in my previous birth. Time did not have any relevance here, as if it did not exist. If at all it did manifest it was only in the present and me dwelling in it fully composed within myself.

Gradually the sunlight looming on the westerly door started to fade and I rose to put on the lamp. The farewell sunlight cast an elongated shadow on the floor. My eyes traced the elongated shadow reaching towards grandma who was in the kitchen praying in candlelight. Feeling that I would disturb her in her prayers I decided not to put on the lamp and settled on my seat in the verandah. I realized how soon I had become so strongly attached to this place. How peaceful it felt here, as if it was here that I had got a new life! But alas, this place where I had discovered my self-esteem did not belong to me. I was merely a guest here and now it was time to wind up my emotions and to bid good bye! Sadness engulfed my mind. Was it a premonition of a dreadful night to come or a remorse of an ending relationship? I could not understand.

Grandma and I were alone at home. The moment she finished her vespers I went and sat beside her. "Bye, Grandma, we may never get a chance to meet again but I shall always fondly remember the wonderful days I have spent with you." Tears showed up in my eyes as I uttered these parting words. I could see her light green eyes, like that of Julio's overflow with motherly affection. "Why do you say so dear that we shall never meet? Why do you think so negative? The doors of this house are always open for you and you

may drop in again anytime. Julio visits us every year and sometimes if it suits you do come along with him. We are not separating but just departing with a wish to meet again. God bless you my dear but never be so sad and anguished. Life is very long and abounds with possibilities. Who knows where, why and when we may meet again?"

Grandma may be right, but I am sure that the possibility is remote. The sands of the hour glass of time are sliding fast. I wonder how the sadness felt by the thought of time dribbling away from the vessel of life, which I had effortfully driven away suddenly resurfaced in my mind. Whose vessel of life would give away first... Grandma's, Grandpa's, or mine? I am not sure, but I shall not tell this to Grandma or anyone else either. "Can you tell me something about Val Badia, please." In a bid to dilute the discomfort of my mind with some talking I posed a query for grandma.

The name of Val Badia itself was sufficient to cast a glow on the aging wrinkles of grandma's face. "Val Badia is nature's wonderment, a heavenly rosary. Every inch of it embodies our existence. We may be staying far off but we are inextricably linked with this ancient land. We may stay anywhere but our soul dwells there. Julio too experiences the same, and wherever he is, this land compels him to come here every year. How can someone resist the charm of the princess from the moon when she sends her invitation?"

A princess from the moon and heavenly rosaries, Grandma seemed to be weaving a sinister plot difficult to decipher. Not willing to disturb Grandma in her thoughts I just kept listening. It seemed as if the thoughts of Val Badia catapulted her into the past. Her miniature eyes could trace the dusty horizon of a trail left by the passing caravans of time.

Grandma started narrating, "I remember several years ago when Julio's mother Marinella and my son Roberto were staying in a live-in relationship. Marinella was a simple and straight forward girl. When I met her for the first time she was on her way to motherhood and looked eager to give birth to her child. She had asked me several questions pertaining to the upbringing of the child growing in her belly. After Julio was born I had visited her at the hospital and she seemed to be very happy as if on cloud nine! She started telling me "Look Mom, how well the Ladin family features are glowing on

his face! ...and he also looks akin to you. But Julio was an unfortunate offspring. Soon after his birth Roberto and Marinella became estranged and before he was five years old they separated. For many years in a row I had no knowledge about Julio or Marinella. How tragic it was that despite having parents Julio was raised like an orphan in a government hostel. Then one fine morning I received this letter from Marinella.”

Grandma brought an old engraved box and started reading from a pale yellow faded paper. The letter read like this...

Dear Mamma

I hold no right to address you thus, but for sure my mind believes that you have always been a loving mother and so, I am daring to write this letter. My differences with Roberto and our subsequent break up are old matters now. Both of us tried to seek bliss in our own sweet way and there was nothing wrong with it. That we walked together for a while until our roads separated. Today I hold no regret in my mind but only one thing gnaws my heart. Still many a times I feel sad for Julio.

After my separation with Roberto I got married and it so happened that I could not keep Julio with me. Julio never complains but I very well know he hates Roberto and me. If Julio did not harbor a strong desire to know about his past and ancestral roots he would have severed his ties with me like he did with Roberto, but he wishes to know about the past, know about his forefathers and their lives. The very thought of seeing this land fascinates him.

I have promised him that at the right moment I shall tell him the truth and all he wishes to know. I have no touch with Roberto, but I had this old address of yours and I hope this letter reaches you. I have no intention of making Julio and myself a burden upon you but I am helpless in front of the strong wishes of an innocent child. After exactly a month he would be celebrating his eighteenth birthday. Shall I, as a birthday gift give him your address? Will you meet him? Will you tell him stories of his Ladin ancestors? Will you escort him to Val Badia?

You are free to deny but still I shall eagerly await your response. Regards to Papa

*Lovingly yours,
Marinella*

...That year was Julio's maiden visit to this place and since then he comes here every year. He loves me more than his mother. He still sleeps like a baby with his head resting in Grandpa's lap. He is never tired of listening to the tales of the Dolomites and about the customs of our Ladin families. Year after year in a row he visits Val Badia. For hours together, he wanders in the forests and caves. He participates in their annual festivities, dancing to the hilt, forgetting himself for the time, only to return later to his world of research and study. For years we used to accompany him to our native land but now with advancing age we cannot take the arduous journey there. Nowadays whenever we bid him farewell from here a thought flashes in our mind as to whether we would be alive to welcome him in the next year? The years fade away from life but fortunately the life does not fade away from years and hence we do get a chance to welcome him again and again. Every year in these fixed months he comes here, and we stay in touch. Honestly from the day Julio leaves the long wait for his next visit begins.

All along the road to Val Badia, which passed through lush green mountains and pristine lakes I could see the face of Grandma kissing Julio's forehead and bidding him farewell with unflinching affection. It seemed Grandpa too, with his white flowing beard and diminutive blue eyes engulfed in the skin creases, in his printed checked shirt and braces held trousers, his stooping gait aided by his walking stick was trudging alongside me.



You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>