



# MAMAS ENCOUNTER

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### **About Author**

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What is at hand in the world?

Abraham Lincoln says, “All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.”

**Seema S. Jagtap**

The clock of life is wound but once  
and no man has the power  
to tell just when the hands will stop,  
at late or early hour.  
Now is the only time that you own.  
You must live, love, and work with a will.  
Place no faith in tomorrow;  
for the clock may then be still.

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- Seema S. Jagtap

## Chapter IV

### THE APPROACH OF NEW KISMET

Simona came to visit her mother. She was horrified: her mother looked ten years older. “Mom, pack. You are coming with me,” she said. She stared at her for a second, and then ran to collection. She threw his belongings in a suitcase pell-mell as if she were afraid she might change her mind. She noticed. “We have time,” she said. “We won’t leave until everything is taken care of.” Simona lived in a tiny one-bedroom apartment building. It was only through the living room adjacent to the bedroom that the kitchenette, bathroom, and small entrance hall could be reached. mother wanted to sleep in the living room, but Simona convinced her, employing a little white lie, that it would be much more convenient for her to have the living room as her bedroom and office: sometimes she worked late at night and needed to go to the kitchen to make tea, or she had friends come over and stay late.

Spare time and its influence is one of important factor working directly and indirectly on everyone’s mind and Sunetra was not exception which also tries to work on her. Needless time is a significant place that is often used to balance out the unequal access to power and resources in society of human being Sunetra became its victim unknowingly. In her long span of life she was alone many time to bear sorrow and suffering. She was very busy in her duty and responsibilities. But leisure in her life made aware to think and rethink on everything. Leisure takes hold of enormous probable in the process of resistance. In the contemporary time it becomes a study of research to investigate the use of leisure as an instrument for resistance to dominant patriarchal ideologies, including capitalist globalization. Past research has focused on the reasons and the kinds of leisure women have participated in, the study presented here looks at the *intent* behind women’s participation in leisure activities and the different ways in which women’s leisure practices affect the structures of society.

With a precise center of attention on globalization, the method of war of words for a woman is a returning endeavor, well-established and continuously varying, and the results propose a model of women’s resistance practices based on the literature studied. That the emergence of this topic has; the obstacles that it forms; and the chance that it offers existing leisure theory. It seeks to clarify what new elements may exist in the current literature and in the way old issues are framed today, and in so doing to better equip the discipline to conceptualize the contributions of resistance to the international body of research.

The utilization of spare time as a tool for women’s confrontation to dominant patriarchal ideology and capitalist globalization, or on activities and spaces that transform the way traditional power dynamics are experienced, were selected as data. Via qualitative software content analysis, themes were analogized using Foucault’s theory of personal power to substantiate a perspective on resistance which proposes that women’s involvement in leisure can function to challenge socially constructed, and narrowly determined, gender role expectations defined by masculine hegemony.

On an innovative conception such as women’s leisure as a tool of clash in a globalized world. There is a trend in literature concerning women’s collective resistance to structured power institutions through participation in leisure that looks at the *precursors* and the *acts* of resistance. There is a gap, however, in studying women’s leisure practices and their

personal *intentions* and the overall global *outcomes*, of resistance. Further, there has been very little exploration into collective resistance to planned global power institutions – such as political activism - as an experience of leisure. Investigation has primarily focused on the first two stages of the cycle with three emerging areas of emphasis: illustration of individual and group fight as women's spare time; examples of the types of resistance that women have practiced as leisure pursuits; and the creation of leisure space as a form of personal resistance to dominant patriarchal ideologies. Intersecting these within the context of globalization, findings identified a trend in investigations focused on women's collective resistance to structured power institutions through participation in collective networks, including formal and informal associations, as a form of leisure that performs a political function in society. Leisure as a force that permeates all facets of modern life is a perfect setting for political practices that challenge power, patriarchy, masculine hegemony and the nation state. After Sunetra settled into her room, she explored the neighborhood and soon became friends with some of the neighbors, particularly retirees. When the weather was good, they played chess, checkers, or card games in a small courtyard; she also took long walks along Malviya streets, canals, palaces, and plazas with columns or temples. In the winter, they got together at each other apartments, or went to the movies that were cheaper during the daytime. Of course, almost every day's routine included standing in lines for groceries. Sometimes they went their separate ways, and sometimes one would buy bread for everybody, another one tea and jam, and yet another one meat. That saved them time and, most importantly, eased the joint pain in their legs that worsened from standing in long lines in the cold. In late afternoons, Sunetra cooked, set the table, and ate supper with Simona. She couldn't wish for a better life.

"Call no man happy until the hour of her death, for who knows what pains the gods may yet have in store for him while he lives," said King Solon in the book of Greek myths Sunetra was reading. The idea was worth thinking about, but apparently this B.C. guy had no concept of life's relativity: loneliness versus companionship; cultural and economic bareness of countryside versus the richness of a big city; a feeling that you are useful, that someone likes your company, that your life has meaning--all versus the feeling that you are a non-entity. In spite of Solon's wise observation, she, Sunetra Nikitin, could call himself a happy man. When Simona came home from work, she quickly looked through the mail on the small round table by the entrance, pleasantly anticipating Abeer's letter. However, the mail had no letter from him. Apparently, she thought lightly, Abeer had no time to write, what with packing, taking care of everything, and saying good-bye to his friends. She was slightly disappointed, not by the absence of a letter, but by the unfulfilled promise. For her, promises were not meant to be broken. Suddenly, she realized that she too hadn't written Abeer the promised letter. She felt embarrassed, and after dinner, sat down at her desk.

Nothing eventful had happened in the past two days, yet, her writing about small, almost imperceptible changes in nature; conversations with friends and colleagues; people she met; and a book she was reading reflected her humorous or thoughtful view on a day in life. She wrote two more letters on the following days, and then waited for Abeer's letters. There was none.

Every day and everywhere life is rushing, gushing with noise, violence hate and negative attitude in the modern world there was nothing named love, glorified by romantic stories, aesthetic and grandeur filled creations, soul stirring poems and songs and music's. The philosophy all religions called all people to share love at all the stages of human life, as a child, an adolescent, a lover, a friend and also as a teacher- charioteer. Love is the only one element which is described in all religions for attain peace, friendship in society. Love is the fine tuning

in every work- mother is an unavoidable and supreme element and content of the love. Hence the evergreen tastes of mom's dishes and true success of extra ordinary achievements. Love is an intangible but perceptible in supersensory domains. Love's river flows from birth with the feel of maternal presence by the new born to the last moments of moral life, the eyes searching for faces and scenes of love. But now a day's man is searching for information and not for knowledge, not for education and not character, wealth but not health, grabbing, not deserving, where has where has love gone so far !now a day's love is walking with an axe to fell trees, with weapons to kill an

Sunetra was a great love of reading from her early childhood, in her lifetime whenever she got an opportunity of explanation she never like to spent that and however she made available to have books to read. She was a student of Marathi literature and had completed her post graduation in it so very familiar to the name of Gajanan Ranganath Shirwadkar was Mr V V Shirwadkar's original name. She knew his detail biographical features of him and came to know the following details from it. He changed his name to Vishnu Waman Shirwadkar. He is born in Pune on 27th February 1912. His primary education was in Pimpalgaon and high school education was in New English School, Nashik, which is now called as J.S. Rungtha High School of Nashik. He passed matriculation from Bombay University. His poems and articles were published in "Balbodhmewa" magazine edited by the famous poet of Maharashtra D.N. Tilak way back in 1929, when he was hardly 17 years old. He joined H.P.T. College in 1930 and his poems were then published in "Ratnakar" magazine. In 1932, he participated in the "Satyagraha" for allowing untouchables to enter Kala Ram Temple. Since then the budding poet in him started soaring up in the sky of literature - by writing not only poems, but stories, plays, writing for the news papers like Weekly Prabha, Daily Prabhat, Sarathi, Dhanurdhari, Navyug etc. In 1942 his collection of poems "Vishakha" was published and is till date being cherished by Marathi speaking people. Likewise his collections of poems named "Marathi Mati", "Swagat", "Himraesha", "Yayati Ani Devayani", "Veej Mhanali Dhartilal" were published in 1960, 1962, 1964, 1966 and 1967 respectively. They all received Maharashtra State Awards. His first novel "Vaishnav" and his first drama "Doorche Dive" were published in 1946.

Sunetra was impressed by the literary collection of Vishnu Waman Shirwadkar. His play "Natsamrat" is one of the mile stones in not only play writing, but also for the staging of the play. Natsamrat is welcomed by the Marathi speaking population like anything. The theme of this play is very touching and an eye-opener for many old people. Many old people are said to have changed their will, after seeing this drama. Even before Shirwadkar was a playwright he was a poet. He was also a journalist, and a very upright and patriotic one. He was better known as a poet and he used the nom de plume Kusumagraj as a poet. From his early school days, he was deeply interested by theatre.

Ram Ganesh Gadkari in Marathi and William Shakespeare were his two constant source of solace. Also he read Synge, Shaw, Moliere and Galsworthy. Dr. Bhalerao requested Shirwadkar to try an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's An Ideal Husband and he wrote 'Doorche Dive' (The Distant lamp) comedy of misunderstanding and fantastic wit. She decided to read all these plays with a desire that in future she will have an opportunity. 'Vijayant' in 19950 – protagonist Jaypal was a king of Roopnagar who picked 'Vijayant' from poor family and made his queen. Ratanakar defeats Jaypal and asked valuable from palace and 'Vijayant' for night to save kingdom 'Vijayant' took a bold design and save her kingdom.

'Rajmukut' is his play which was based on William Shakespeare's Macbeth. 'Kauntaya' is based on relationship of the great Mahabharata character's Kunti and Karana. Karana was born

to Kunti from the god of sun. Later she married to Pandu. When she discloses the truth of Karna's birth to him and asked to join her sons. He did not prepare to sacrifice his loyalties to Duryodhan. The conflict of tragedy contains manifold. 'Amache Nav Baburao' highlights the common reality of people who never care about the welfare of all exploit the so called democracy. The play create comic situation with the facial similarity between the king and Baburao. The king was just like a puppet in the hands of his ministers. He is compelled to leave the palace and Baburao instead of king. This brings out a comic exposure of the secret plot in the palace. In this Satiric comedy is exposing hypocrisy of our political life.

'Yayati and Devyani' are unique among all his plays which were also originated from Mahabharata. Sharmistha and Devyani are two women in his life. 'Veej Mahanali Dhartila' (thus spoke thunderbolt to the earth) contains a story of Rani Laxmibai in poetic manner. It is a fusion of poetry and dramatic art.

In 1970 he wrote 'Natasmarat' a unique master piece in the sense that. It is inspired by William Shakespeare's King Lear. It is neither translation nor an adaptation of the latter but an independent parallel creation carrying a heavy shadow of King Lear. Instead of a royal king at the centre of the play, Shirwadkar present Appasaheb Belwalkar a greatest veteran stage actor of the yester years. Just like Lear he decided to distribute his entire property to his two children – a son and a daughter. Both children are happily settled in their respective lives. After retirement of their father from the stage. They accepted their parents in their homes, but the poor old man and his wife have to face nothing but humiliation at both the places. Appasaheb's wife dies in the illness while they were staying at their daughter's place. The greatest actor loses his sanity and wanders aimlessly like Lear at the end of William Shakespeare's play. Later his relative found him on the foot paths of Mumbai but he soon dies. This is a tale of extra ordinarily temperamental person who is his attempt to get adjust with a blunt, practical world around him and becomes ruined in the end.

There is a character resembling Lear's footprint in 'Natasmarat'. It is seen in Vithoba who is the simpleton with a strong passion for the theatre. Amidst all others ridiculing and insulting Appasaheb, he is one man who reverses and respects him. Naturally in the end it is he who discovers the mentally imbalanced old man. The language of the play is enriched with wit and emotionally loaded. There are soliloquies unfailingly used which reminds William Shakespeare's command over language and use of soliloquies in King Lear. For example - Appasaheb in his mentally imbalanced state of third act says ,

" will somebody provide me a house

To a storm?

Will somebody provide a house?

A storm without walls, without roof?

Devoid of human affections, devoid of Gods compassion.

Is roaming from jungle to jungle

In search of place

Where no one will drive it away—

Will somebody provide a house? "

However when Appasaheb says," yes, yes, yes,

You are young

That means you can copulate with female of human race.

But cows are young

And you are the vultures

Young are the stray donkeys and also pigs-----“.

This soliloquy belongs exclusively to Appasaheb and not to King Lear.

From the professional point of view ‘Natasmarat’ proved as to be a miracle in Shirwadkar's career as a dramatist. Its stage performances crossed the 1000 marks long ago. Great actor Shri Ram Lagu and Datta Bhat played role of Appasaheb and brought out minutes nuance of the character. The play received the sahitya academic award for the year and later the first Ram Ganesh Gadkeri , Jananpeeth award for Shirwadkar

Dhyneshwari Nadkarni remarked it because became of a personal tragedy. It is great because it is steeped in the theatre culture of Mahabharata. Reference to great the aspirants of earlier time such as Ganpatrao Joshi in the rest the Appasaheb Belwalkar with a unique air of reality, ‘Natasmarat’ as best. Marathi play that he or she has seen over last quarter of century. It is unlikely that there would be another play at least in this century which is held in higher esteem.

‘ Natasmarat’ belongs to the age of disintegration of family and perhaps decline of classicism. It is an important play because it shows a new direction in the construction of tragedy in Indian milieu and tradition. ‘Natasmarat’ has attained a rank of classical Marathi theatre. Protagonist of the play Appasaheb Belwalkar has become much part of Marathi cultural heritage as Hamlet, Macbeth of King Lear of English culture. Shirwadkar used a radiant language with the use of high literary dramatic prose and lyrical verse. Keeping in tune with poetry his plays upheld humanistic values. His choice for adaptation of plays from other sources also reveals this attitude. He probes the depth of human mind in a very subtle manner. While dealing with the tragedy in the life of individuals he does not forget to include conflict between individuals and the environment. She became very conscious in those days, always became serious the storm of thoughts she was carrying in her heart. Many time Simona asked her why she was upset. What may be the reason of her distress? Her daughter wanted to know but Sunetra became successful in hiding her inner feelings and emotions. When she completed reading of the drama and became very conscious about her future life in Mumbai. Every time she was used or her faith was lost from her close persons in her early childhood. A long list of them started from her father, brother and husband, all these left her without noticing or thinking her mental condition. These shocks of past memories made her to think in negative way and she started thinking and judging in different way. In her mind she made a plan which was very cruel to adopt for mother to realize. She was kind hearted mother who lived a long life for only sake of her daughter and now her brain is planning against her, she tries to keep away that thought from her mind. But the worry for future made her restless if her daughter remains unmarried then and then her stay in Mumbai was possible. If Simona will marry, then it became very difficult to accommodate in a small flat of her. Unfaithful experiences in her life changed her and mother became an enemy of her own daughter. She planned that she will hide every letter of Abeer and will arouse a new obstacle in the relationship of her daughter and her future would be husband. She decided to steal every letter from Abeer and create a critical misunderstanding between Simona and Abeer. She knew that she was doing wrong but she told her heart that it is very essential for her future. She had a very less pension with which she could make a balance of her mouth and hand. But the problem of Shelter in Mumbai was a great problem! She very well knew if Simona will marry her place in home will be replaced by Abeer and she had to search for shelter in some place where the senior citizen spent their life in any orphan. “Reading maketh man perfect” is a line used by Francis Bacon many decades ago now became guide.

“The only constant is change, continuing change, evitable change that is the dominant factor in today’s society. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be” lines by Issac Asimov are very perfectly matching for Sunetra’s mental condition. Configuration of thoughts made her realistic and critical. Day after day, when she came home from work, looked through the mail, and then went to the kitchen to eat. She wasn’t hungry, but her mother was waiting. How she wished now she had her own room where she could close the door, throw herself onto the bed, and think about her situation: here she was, in love with a stranger who forgot all about her. It was that simple, yet she found it incredulous. She would understand the change of heart after a month or even a week, but not after their very first encounter, during which Abeer talked about love and marriage. The least he could do, thought Simona, was to write just one letter, saying that he didn’t want to continue their relationship. That would be civil, polite. But he didn’t write that one letter. Simona felt hurt, insulted, even humiliated by his neglect.

“Are there any letters for me?” she asked her mother, impatiently looking through the mail one day. “I put all your mail on this table, everything,” she answered, slightly surprised.

She started coming home late, wandering around, mixing with crowds, noticing young couples hurrying somewhere, or men presenting little bouquets of snowdrops to their dates. Her heart was filled with bitterness and sadness for her own lost paradise. Finally, she decided to learn the truth. She went to the telegraph, gave a girl at the front desk the name and address of Abeer’s geological expedition, and asked to connect her. In a few minutes, she was talking to Abeer’s office manager. Simona asked him about Abeer, hoping to hear that Abeer got ill, or was far away, in the woods, where the mail couldn’t come. “Abeer? Oh, he is doing fine. The guys work in the field all day long; then at night, they return to the base, eat dinner, sit around the fire, and sing songs. Abeer plays the guitar. Should I tell him who called?” “Oh, no, no, thank you,” she said, and hung up. She came home, told her mother she wasn’t hungry, and went to bed. Sunetra tiptoed to his room and stayed there for the whole evening. In the morning, Simona drank two cups of strong coffee and went on a long walk. It was unusually cold and windy. Struggling with the wind helped her allay her pain and anger. She didn’t know how many hours she walked across bridges and along canals, wide or narrow streets, and plazas. When she came home, she found her mother sitting at the kitchen table, apparently worried about her, and a piece of paper with her friends’ names: they had been calling all day long, concerned with her sudden disappearance. She was hungry and ate everything her mother cooked, to her delight. Then she called her friends and arranged to meet with them. She promised herself not to ever think of Abeer again. On the surface, life “after Abeer” was the same as life “before Abeer.”

Usually, on weekends, Simona and her friends went backpacking to the Karelian peninsula woods--beautiful, clean woods with hiking trails, hills and meadows, rivers, lakes, and streams; there they picked berries and mushrooms, canoed and fished, and walked, hiked, and swam. It used to be a Finnish territory that the Russians invaded in 1939 and annexed in 1940, under the pretext that Russia needed a buffer zone for Leningrad, which was only 32 kilometers from the Finnish border.

After War World II it became a favorite destination for backpackers. Since nobody took good care of the woods, they were slowly deteriorating. The Russians joked that their government should return the peninsula to the Finns for about ten years, and then take it back, cleaned and restored. There were also museum exhibitions and theatre performances; movies and concerts; gatherings at someone’s apartment, with late night tea and heated discussions about

every subject concerning Russian life; evenings of poetry reading in small cafes; walks in the city during the

“White nights,” when sunsets were so late and sunrises so early, the skies never got dark . . . Yet, nothing excited Simona; she didn’t even notice how the shy, soft colors of the spring turned to bright, luscious colors of the summer; everything seemed to be drab, dull, and even colorless.

Viewers of famous black-and-white movies, such as Casablanca or Brief Encounter, don't perceive them as colorless, because of the chiaroscuro effect: a gradation in hundreds of nuances of white, gray, and black; but if well-known color movies, like The Red Balloon or Chicago, were stripped of colors, then only three washed-out white, gray, and black colors would remain. The movies would not only lose their aesthetic and cinematographic qualities, but also an idea, meaning, and concept. Stripped of color, becoming washed-out black and gray, Simona’s world now signified the loss of joy, purpose, and meaning in her life.

When she feels frustrated what she was feeling is her intense desire to make things better. Instead of fighting against your frustration, channel it in a positive, productive direction. Frustration happens when things are not the way you want them to be. And because of that frustration is a powerful precursor to achievement. When you are frustrated with the way things are it can be tempting to give up. After all it is often easier just to live with life’s shortcomings than it is to make improvements. But if it her choice is to give up, she is letting to go of powerful opportunities. In frustration there is a great energy and that can be directed to truly make things better. To tap into energy, take focused, purposeful actions with the highest expectations, work through the frustration moment bit by bit and get you are to the achievements that are on other side.

Matters of heart are very difficult to predict. It has a few centuries but today scientists understand the working of this vital organ which circulates life giving oxygen and other nutrients to various organs of the body including itself quite well but still it is difficult to predict when a particular heart will stop beating. It is more difficult to predict the working of heart as the seat of emotions. It is difficult to foresee who will be after your own heart or with whom you won’t have heart to deal with .modern science has conclusively shown that emotional heart acutely seats in the brain. It is the brain which feels the feelings rises in you. But the fact remains we do feel it in the heart.

The crucial findings were that the blood pressure and heart beat of the second group was within normal range throughout. One can understand why many people die of broken hearts when ditched by a sweet heart or on losing a dear one. It is obvious that such a vital organ would leave its stamp on our languages. It is amazing to note how many things our heart can do and how many places it can turn up. According to Swami Vivekananda, if you are in a situation where there is a clash between your heart and head, follows your heart. All scriptures say that it is the pure in heart who shall spiritual bliss. It is easy to deal with people who wear their hearts on their sleeves. They are so open and frank. What a nice world it would have been if all were like that! Then there are heartless people who do not hesitate to inflict pain on others. Either material and physical or psychological. Notorious criminals, dictators are good examples. Our marriage owes say, “mammo hridaying tava, tava hridaying mammo”. The base of any solid relationship in marriage or otherwise is based on our emotions, or heart. Separation from a loved one’s makes us heart stick the scene is heart rending. Many reasons are behind the partition of young lovers. It gives heartache to more emotional partner many times leading heart break. To be a useful member of the society one should have one’s heart at the right place. Work heart and

soul for its betterment. Failures may come but one should take heart from them and not lose hope. You may not become heart throb like a film star or cricketer, but people will appreciate your efforts in their heart of hearts and you can cross your heart.

Her friends felt that she was hiding something from them, and kept asking her what was wrong. Finally, she told them the whole story. They were shocked that she kept them in the dark for so long. They always shared with each other bad and good happenings, and helped each other in every way they could, not to mention listening, giving advice, and expressing compassion and empathy--just like in the movie Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears. "Really, why have I kept it a secret from them?" Simona wondered. Their reaction surprised her.

"You saw him once, for an hour, and you believed he was going to write you every day for six months, and then come back and marry you? You must be out of your mind!" (Alex) "You think you are in love with a man? You are in love with a phantom! With a reflection in a pond! With an invention of love! You invented a romantic story, but your romantic character doesn't exist!" (Victor)

"Thank God this guy's got brains! He understood that you both were carried away. That's why he didn't start this crazy correspondence. Don't you realize he's done you a big favor?" (Natasha)

"I bet you don't even remember what he looks like, do you?" (Ravi)

"Forget about him. Date some real guy, or just make love to someone. It helps." (Anand)

"You've had a brief street encounter. It's fun to flirt with a handsome guy for a few minutes. Your flirting lasted a little longer. No reason to take it so seriously." (Lata) "Besides, he is the scum of the earth. Not to send you a single letter! He is not worth your little finger!" (Natasha)

"Well, I'm glad we all feel the same way. Now it's time to discuss an important issue -- our next vacation." (Sujata) They usually took vacations in the fall, and fall was coming. They liked to take on a challenge, "test their mettle," as Shakespeare called it, and it was decided right there, at Simona's

place, to go to the Caucasian mountains. A few weeks later, carrying heavy tents and backpacks with food, water, sleeping bags, and ropes, they were climbing up snowy peaks, going down to summery valleys, and then climbing up again to different peaks. They were rewarded with breathtaking views, a sense of youth and strength in their bodies, and a feeling of comradeship that is always enhanced during such trips. It was so joyous, at the end of the day, to cook dinner on the fire, sit around it, and eat, talk, and sing. They came back at the end of September. Simona was glad to see her mother; she looked at her inquisitively, as if asking: are you ok? She just smiled. She missed her work, too and got absorbed by it immediately. One morning, while eating breakfast, she heard on the radio that the rainy season was about to start: October has arrived. October! The word pierced through her heart. Six months have passed, she thought on the way to work and back, and nothing has changed, neither the intensity of her feelings nor her pain. And then she saw Abeer. She stopped and closed her eyes. It's a mirage; I am getting ill, she thought. When she opened her eyes, she saw Abeer coming toward her, smiling. Suddenly, rage surged through her. She remembered her sleepless nights, her waiting for his letters, her lonely walks, and her anguish. She tried to pass him. He gently touched her arm.

"Simona, have you forgotten me? I was afraid of that. It's me, Abeer. The one who provided you with exciting reading for one hundred and eighty days!" Simona stopped dead. She couldn't believe his mockery. "Get away from me!" she screamed. "I don't want to ever see you again!" She quickly entered her apartment building and slammed the door. She ran upstairs as if she were afraid he'd follow her. He didn't. She stood by her apartment door, trying to catch

her breath, and then went outside. It was pouring rain; she didn't care: she was even glad the rain drops were mixing with her tears. When she approached her apartment building the next day, Abeer was there again.

“Why were you so upset yesterday? Have I hurt your feelings in my letters? If so, it was unintentional. I joke a lot.”

The word “letters” stung her. “What letters?” She heard her voice suddenly becoming hoarse. “I didn't receive a single letter from you.”

“It couldn't be. I wrote to you every day, as I promised. You only sent me three letters. I was absolutely thrilled, you write so well. But that was it. Just three letters in the first week. I continued writing without you ever responding.”

“It's a lie. One letter could be lost, but one hundred eighty letters couldn't be! You've never written anything. Go away.”

“Why would I lie? Why would I come here if I didn't want to see you?”

“I don't know. I am asking myself why you've bothered to come, after six months of silence, after having broken your promise.”

“Listen, Simona, what if we come back to this ‘letters’ topic later, and now just take up where we left off six months ago? Aren't we in love? Shouldn't we plan the wedding?”

“I hate you!” she screamed. “Leave me alone! I don't ever want to see you again. If you come back, I'll call the police!”

He went pale; his lips trembled. He looked at Simona with despair and disbelief, and then walked away. Simona would always remember that look. When she came home, she was shivering. Her mother asked her if she felt ill. She told him about Abeer and went to bed. She could hardly breathe; she felt she was suffocating; she tried to convince herself that she hated Abeer, but deep inside she knew the truth. She called her friends and asked them to come over. When tea was served, Simona told them about Abeer. Her friends' reaction shocked her.

“I don't believe you! Are you out of your mind? He's come back! What else do you need?” (Sujata )

“He didn't forget you. He was thinking about you for six months after only meeting you Once! He truly loves you!” (Anand)

“Thank your lucky stars, and don't push your luck!” (Ajay)

“But what about the letters?” (Simona)

“Who cares about these damned letters, you fool! Run to him. Tell him you love him. Get married. Have a child. Have a family!” (Lata)

“And then hire a detective to find out all about these letters.” (Victor)

“How could you sit here and coldly talk about it? It's obvious you love him! Shouldn't you follow your feelings? Your heart?” (Sujata)

“No,” said Simona firmly. “You don't understand what these letters meant to both of us. Some of you had been dating for years, and still couldn't decide if you should marry each other. Abeer and I didn't date. Those letters were in lieu of our dating. They were our outings together; going to the movies; discussing new books; meeting each other's friends; simply talking. Now it's all lost. He broke his promise, and he lied to me. If he'd just told me that he didn't write, because he was lazy, or he felt he couldn't express himself in the letters, I'd understand. But he didn't tell the truth. He is a liar!” She broke into uncontrollable sobbing. “You are making the biggest mistake in your life,” said Lata. “An irrevocable mistake,” added Ravi.

“God is giving you a life-time chance. Many people don't even get one. You have. If you lose it, you'll lose it forever,” said Natasha.

After that evening, the darkness of the season became Simona. Instead of going out with her friends, she started going to the movies alone. She'd always sit in the last row. Nobody could see her face or her tears. She didn't mind watching awkwardly optimistic, practically devoid of conflict Soviet movies where the good was fighting with the best, and both wanted only one thing: to make life in the Soviet Union even better than it had been. Simona remembered reading somewhere that during the Great Depression unemployed Indians spent their days at the movies, watching televisions and the more care-free these movies had been, the better distraction they provided. Impeccably dressed and groomed, ebullient Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers danced heavenly and sang enchantingly about the lightness of life: if you fall, all you have to do is “pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again”; happiness and bliss replace troubles and woes once you start dancing with your girl “cheek to cheek”; and when you are invited to a party, you could always find in your closet the best quality “top hat, white tie and tails.” Simona wished she could see these movies--they'd have provided a great distraction for her, too--but they haven't been shown to the Soviet audiences. Soviet people have been taught that there, in America, life is gloomy, drab, and hopeless; the rich exploit the poor; the poor go on strikes or die from starvation. Light, charming, joyful American musicals--Top Hat, Swing Time, or Shall We Dance, amongst many--contradicted this image. Soviet people have also been taught that everything made in the Soviet Union is the besting the world, including music, dance, and film.

But who could compete with Michael Kidd's creation of an American dance idiom--a blend of ballet, acrobatics, folk, jazz, and modern dance-

-in Guys and Dolls, Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, or The Band Wagon; with Agnes de Mille's invention of folk-dance and frontier life idioms in Oklahoma!; or with Jerome Robbins' unforgettable street fight idioms in West Side Story? That's entertainment! Yes, one would readily forget trials and tribulations of life while watching Astaire's and Rogers's singing “You like potato and I like potahto” and then roller-skating; Julie Abeers's singing “Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens” and then dancing with the children; or Gene Kelly's “singin' and dancing in the rain” and then hanging from the lamp post.

No, Indian authorities couldn't allow their people to see these fireworks of talent coming from Pakistan. While Simona has been spending her free time at the movies, her friends were getting married, divorced, or remarried; some female friends found themselves as single mothers. They had a tough life: lack of money, sleep deprivation, and children's illnesses brought never-ending exhaustion and sometimes even depression. Simona started to spend less time at the movies and more time helping her friends. One morning, when she came into the kitchen to eat breakfast, she found no food on the table; nor was the radio turned on. She rushed to her mother's bedroom only to find her dead. She died peacefully in her sleep. After the funeral, Simona's friends, neighbours, and some of her colleagues came to her place for a “remembering” meal: they ate supper and talked about her mother. Lata stayed with Simona overnight. The following nights, Simona's other friends took turns staying with her, until she told them she was fine to stay by herself. It felt strange to be alone: she missed her mother and his companionship. Now she didn't have a single relative in the world. Thank God her friends were like her extended family.

A week after the funeral, on Saturday morning, Simona decided to sort through her mother's belongings. She wanted to keep some of her letters and photographs. She also wanted to move back to the bedroom. While emptying his drawers, she discovered that one drawer was locked. She searched for a key for a long time. But she could not find it. So she left the half remaining

work. Again at evening she continued her search and finally found it in her mother's small purse. She couldn't imagine what and why she was hiding it. She was thinking and rethinking why her mother did so? Slightly intrigued, she opened the drawer.

In it laid a few thick packs of unopened envelopes wrapped in shawl of her mother's marriage. She threw it. She looked at the top one and gasped: it was a letter from Abeer. At that instant, she knew what the rest of the packs contained. She sat down on the floor, remaining motionless, almost frozen at the sheer horror of what lay before her.

At last, she opened the first letter. It was the letter Abeer wrote on the evening they met. He described how he fell in love with her during the subway ride and how he was looking forward to reading hers and writing his own letters. He wrote the second letter on the train and the third one upon arrival at the base. His humorous responses to her three letters made her laugh; in all others, he talked about his work, college, friends, hobbies, and the movies and poets he loved; many letters were his reflections on or observations about people, nature, and different events. She read them all day and all night, and then the following day. She was deeply absorbed by Abeer's world and captivated by his personality shining through the letters; yet she couldn't help thinking that none of the letters was opened by her mother, and the question of why he had been hiding these unopened letters was painfully going through her mind. Finally, she read the last letter, which was the most joyful of all: Abeer was coming back, hoping that Simona had been waiting for him. "Wait for me, and I'll return," he reminded her of their conversation.

Underneath the letter lay a note from her mother. The note was short. Mother apologized for hiding the letters, but explained she had no choice. The apartment was too small for three people. Suppose Simona and Abeer exchanged their two apartments for a bigger one. Still, who could give Sunetra guarantee that they would want her to stay? After all, Abeer is a stranger to her; why should he care about the old man? Two's company, three's a crowd. Consequently, there could be a possibility that he, Sunetra, would have to move back to his house in the countryside. The notion of it scared him to death. She'd already survived loneliness; she wouldn't be able to go through it again. Now that she was dead, Simona knew that Abeer had written to her; now she could marry him. Simona read his note a few times, trying to take in its essence. While living with her, talking to her, looking in her eye, her mother was quietly stealing a letter a day; for one hundred and eighty days, she had watched her agony, tears, and misery; for almost three more years after Abeer's return she had witnessed her despair and depression, her joyless life. No good deed goes unpunished; nobody is guilty unless proved, this is not jurisprudence, and this is deception. For if a person in authority is a wrong doer, and then fundamental wisdom is to keep her off work so that she doesn't bring in malevolent influence. Our country has adopted such type of wisdom but what could she do at that time was a big question to her because her mother was not alive to ask any trial. On one side of her life was locked and blocked by her mother. Punishment Crime without became a fate of Simona.

Simona recalled bitterly this French proverb, thinking that her mother was able to do that only because she moved her into her apartment. If only she'd asked her what would happen to him after her marriage, she'd have answered him truthfully, without any hesitation, that he would have always lived with them no matter what. She wouldn't dream of leaving him alone; she still remembered what he looked like when she visited him five months after her mother's death. But her mother hadn't asked her. With no shame or second thought, she cruelly and cold-heartedly destroyed her chance for happiness. Mother became an obstacle in happy union of her daughter and her devotee. Suddenly, she was choked with hatred toward her. She violently threw into the trash all of his belongings, including his letters and photographs, and left the empty room. She

did not realize what she should do? In her mind she was thinking on different probabilities. She wanted to overtake the mental condition in which she was suppressing herself. She was trying to find out the path and confused. Not confining the way which she had to choose. Again mother could behave in such pitiless way was another query in her mind. Mother was the witness of her separation from Abeer but her mother firmly did her work which was very important her to protect her shelter that is Simona's flat. She became restless, at a time she had to bear two types of grief, one of losing mother who lost her faith and another of losing her love life.

She did not prepare her supper and even forget to drink water. Throughout the night she could not sleep, assuming many possibilities in mind. There was no such a close person with whom she could share the secret of her mother's conspiracy. Already her heart was full of love for Abeer. The reality was in front of her. She was puzzled and thinking how could she make a way to meet him. She decided she want to request him to forgive her. In her mind she was remembering many past memories. With a strong design in her mind she lay down on her bed. Simona thought that she was alive and that is amazing, she could make a change, difference right there are boundless opportunities which she could search a way. She knew in her way there were challenges and difficulties which were more painful. But all were possibilities to her and what happened in past make her wary about future. She prepared to act in present to influence the future in positive and meaningful way. Really life became an open ended miracle for her. Every concept was very clear and she restored energy of sea and became busy in further planning. She decided that she would become a witness of miracle in that current circumstances which provide a perfect point from which to reach as near as she wish this positive thought asked her to make next action.

From the next day she joined on a mission of searching Abeer to apologize him, whatever he would say she should not bother. With this firm decision she went to sleep. But for a mother she lost all her feelings, she wouldnot imagine why her mother behave in such a way?

Then she found Abeer's home address, and the next day, after work, waited for him by the entrance to his apartment building. She saw him from far away and went toward him. He walked slowly, listlessly, with his chin down. When he saw her, he stopped, stupefied. She told him what had happened. He responded that he was married and had a son, Nick; that he got married out of loneliness and despair; and that he still loved her. He smiled and left; he went home to his wife and his son.

Simona cried all night; in the morning she called in sick, and stayed home. She could hardly talk when some of her colleagues called her to inquire if she needed anything. About an hour after her usual return from work, the door bell rang. She opened the door and saw Abeer stand there, with a suitcase. The night before, he told his wife, Anna, that he was leaving her. He told her he loved another woman. He apologized. Anna was dumbfounded at first. Then she said she didn't care for his ridiculous story; she didn't even care for his love.

"Nick needs a father!" she said. "I don't want to be a single mother, I won't survive! If you move out, you'll never see your son again. Never! He shouldn't be around a madman!" Anna thought that the threat would stop him; it didn't. Abeer couldn't lose the one chance life was giving him: to live with a woman he loved. And that's how Abeer and Simona started their life together. It wasn't an easy life. Abeer missed his son terribly; he felt guilty at deceiving Anna into marrying him; his colleagues and even close friends were shocked by his decision to leave his family. Simona felt for Abeer, as if she were Hamlet's flute: her heart bled for him when he was sad; when he was joyful, she rejoiced with him. Yet, in spite of their pains and regrets, they

cherished every moment spent together. They felt they wasted so much time having lived without each other,

They rarely invited friends over or accepted their friends' invitations. Simona sensed that Abeer's pain would lessen if they had a child, but she couldn't get pregnant. Her friends comforted her saying she shouldn't think about it, and it would come; it takes time, be patient; don't stress out about it, stress may hinder it from happening. Seven months into their life together in married life, one early morning, Abeer complained about chest pain. Simona called the ambulance. By the time it came, Abeer was dead. He had died from a heart attack.

Anna didn't come to the funeral. Those who did parted right after it. Simona didn't invite anybody over: it was too painful for her to have yet another "remembering" meal so soon after the first one. She wanted to be alone anyway. Since Abeer's death, she had one agonizing, tormenting thought: was it her fault? Maybe his heart attack was hereditary, or the result of plaque in his arteries; then if I weren't heartless, foolish, and stubborn, Abeer and I could've had a life together--a short but happy life. We could've had a child, our own child. We could've lived without any guilt, pain, or sadness. But maybe his heart simply couldn't bear so much pain: he loved me, but couldn't be with me; he lived with me, but couldn't see his son; he also felt remorse for Anna. I am guilty. I am guilty if his death was imminent, and I am guilty if his death was caused by too much heartache.

Her agony was added to by a terrible sense of loneliness which brought recollections of two European movies she'd seen on one of her parents' visits. In Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, old Professor Isak Borg revisits the places of his childhood and youth and recalls his past through day-dreams and nightmares. Again and again he is forced to watch the most disturbing, tormenting moments of his life-- his fiancée's announcement that she is going to marry his brother, or his wife's adultery that she blames on his heartlessness and indifference. In one of his dreams, Isak is told that he received punishment for his sins.

"And what is it?" he asks.

"Loneliness," is the answer.

"Loneliness," repeats Isak as if an axe had already fallen on his head.

Many Russians thought the movie was a masterpiece, but they were amused by Isak's punishment.

"Give me this punishment any time!"

"Sure we don't have loneliness! We're always squished in the crowd running to the stores at the end of each month, hoping to buy a bath towel, tea kettle, or pair of boots!"

"Packed like sardines in a grocery store, just to buy a little fruit for your child!"

"The whole life spent standing in lines for groceries!"

"No privacy anywhere, your whole life is on display!"

"Surrounded by neighbors gossiping about what you eat--what you buy--how you live--"

"By women fighting with each other in the kitchen--"

"By wives fighting with their drunken husbands--"

"Sharing one toilet with six other families, and always standing in line for it--"

"Standing in another line to use a range in the kitchen--"

"Not having a bathtub or even a shower--"

"Wasting half of your Saturday going to a communal bathhouse and standing in yet another line to wash yourself and your children amongst hundreds of naked strangers--"

"Instead you could live in your own apartment, just with your family--"

"With no line for the bathroom--"

“Taking a lonely shower every day--”

“A lonely cook in your own kitchen, using all four ranges--and an oven!”

“Oh God, please punish me with loneliness, too!”

Yet, even though Isak didn't have to stand in lines or share his apartment with six other families, he still needed love and companionship. That's why so gratifying was the end of his journey: he found in himself the ability to better understand his past that shed light on his present and tried to change his relationship with his son, daughter-in-law, and housekeeper. In turn, they let him know that they loved him and cared for him. It seemed that Isak was forgiven for his sins and that he wouldn't have dreams about loneliness anymore. Not so in Fellini's *La Strada*, where ruthless Zampano, a circus' chain breaker, leaves his ill, child-like partner Gelsomina alone in the middle of nowhere, because he doesn't want to take care of her. A few years pass by, and one day, Zampano runs into a young woman who sings a melody Gelsomina used to play on the trumpet. He learns that Gelsomina had been found on the beach, lived at this woman's house for a short time, and died. Suddenly, a sense of loss and loneliness overpowers Zampano. He realizes that Gelsomina was the only person in the world who cared about him. He gets drunk and wanders to the beach. He looks at the sea, skies, then around: he is alone in the world. He throws himself on the sand, almost burying his head and hands, and sobs; the sound of waves in the dark only adds to his sense of loneliness. He'll be alone forever and ever.

Now Simona felt that she too was being punished for her cruelty and insensibility, and the punishment was a guilty conscience and loneliness. She wanted to be forgiven, like Isak Borg, but there wasn't anyone to forgive her. She threw herself to the bed, buried her head in the pillow, and sobbed. She developed insomnia. Sleeping pills helped her fall asleep, but shortly after she would wake up, screaming, panting, or crying. In her sleep, she always had dreams: her mother hiding Abeer's letters; Abeer stretching his hands toward her and pleading for her to listen to him; Abeer falling dead by the entrance to her apartment building; the man from *Wild Strawberries* announcing her verdict: guilty. She often fell asleep at her desk at work, waking tired and confused. Her colleagues felt bad for her, and it was decided amongst them, with the approval of their boss, that they would do her job until the time when she was able to work. Simona was very grateful to them and tried to work, but she couldn't concentrate. She also started feeling nauseous in the mornings, and attributed the nausea to the sleeping pills. She stopped taking them, but it didn't help. Only when she got cramps in her legs, did she suddenly come to life, as if she were *Sleeping Beauty* kissed by the Prince. She called her friends and described her symptoms. Go to the doctor, they advised her. The doctor confirmed that she was pregnant.

After so many days of grief, it was unusual for Simona to feel that something good had happened to her, and it occurred to her that maybe her pregnancy was a sign of forgiveness; maybe she, too, was forgiven, like Professor Borg. Then she realized that Nick, Abeer's son, would be her child's half-brother, and the next day after work, she walked over to Anna's. It used to be Abeer's, she thought sadly. Anna opened the door. Since she'd never seen Simona before, she smiled and waited for Simona to introduce herself. When Simona did, Anna was startled, and her face became tense and hostile.

“I need to talk to you,” Simona said in such an urgent and pleading tone that Anna let her in. She picked up Nick and sat down, holding him in her lap, as if seeking his protection and support. Simona told Anna the whole story, from meeting Abeer on the subway train to her pregnancy.

“Why are you telling me all of this? What do you want from me?” Anna asked with animosity. Afraid of being interrupted, Simona spoke in short, abrupt sentences.

“I want our children to grow up together. I want my child to have a brother. I don’t have any relatives. Your Nick would be my child’s only relative. It’s good for Nick, too, to have a brother or sister. We could help each other with the children. It’s too much of a responsibility for one person to raise a child. If we are together, our lives could resemble something normal. There would be four of us in this world. We could be like a family.”

When she finished, she looked at Anna. Anna’s face was thoughtful. A minute passed by, which seemed like an eternity to Simona. Then Anna said softly, “All right. Let us help each other. Let’s raise our children together. Let them have each other. I don’t have any relatives either. I am so lonely. Would you like a cup of tea?” That night, for the first time since Abeer’s death, Simona had a long, deep sleep. And in that sleep, she didn’t see any dreams. The real tragedy is that the women themselves, mothers or mother-in-law are the perpetrators of mistaken. They are behind making them unstable in their lives.