

A Teasing Story

~ U Atreya Sarma

The quadruplets born of a village couple grew up well into impish and playful five-year lads. They were the delight of their parents and the talk of the village and of the neighbouring ones too.

The family carted their way to an annual fair some twenty miles away. The proud parents showed them around and showered them with eats and eatables, toys and bric-a-brac. They made merry. On the second and peak day of the fair, the thronging crowd was multitudinous and tumultuous. There was lot of jostling and shoving, as the melee thickened wild and raucous. The parents were very possessive in holding and guiding their tots. An unwary moment caught at them though, as is usual with such hectic and weary occasions. And the price was: the foursome dissolved in the milling crowd and lost their way, weaned forever away from their loving parents. They latched on to different maternal hands and landed in different and distant parts of the country.

The foster parents, childless, brought them up as best as they could and the quadruplets blossomed into full-blown youth and were among the most eligible bachelors. One became a farmer owning ten acres of land and lived in the attached farmhouse. The second turned into a miscellany writer to the vernacular press. The third bloomed into a classical dancer; and the fourth led himself to be an MLA.

Now wouldn't it be interesting to have a glimpse of what they were doing at the present moment...?

The farmer was tending the plants in his orchard, watering them, re-stemming the channels and removing the weeds. Suddenly he straightened up, grimaced and paused for a while. He rushed to his farm well, ran a noose around its wall and started hectically pulling and tugging at the ends of the rope. He dropped down his hold and groped in his pocket and took out a

bottle and emptied the contents into his mouth and guzzled them down. Now much reinvigorated, he resumed his horticultural chore, humming off a pastoral tune.

The writer in his studio was feverish to meet the deadline of his publishers; his favourite quill-pen moved ahead sideways and was rapidly merging the black past and the white future of the paper. Suddenly he stopped and so did his pen. His visage showed signs of a cramp. He lay back for a few seconds and appeared to remember something. He reached out to his inkstand and whirled and stirred it briskly, caring not to spill a drop. He withdrew his hand and directed it into his pocket to produce a glistening and sizzling coloured bottle. He uncapped it and quaffed the liquid. Blood came back to his face, and on he raced with his pen pushing.

The dancer was rehearsing his solo in the benign presence of his guru. Sunday next was his programme fixed. Every step was nimble and liquid, matching the guru's *taala* (beat) perfectly. The guru was happy with the synchronisation. To his surprise, the raised step of the *shishya* (disciple) froze and he stopped as if he were stonewalled. The disciple came to in a few moments and landed his foot down. He appeared to recall something, with a shade of gentle smile blushing on his face. Now he digressed from his classical and changed his posture. With twists and turns of his body, he jerked his limbs and flexed them in a fleeting, acrobatic and contorting speed. Now it was no longer the classical. It was only the break-all break dance for full three minutes! The guru was agape and nonplussed. The disciple halted his dance of 'time-travel,' reverentially looked at his guru, reached out to his bag and whipped out a bottle. Respectfully he popped it open, arched his head backward and thumbed the contents down his gullet. He flashed an apologetic-cum-winsome smile to the guru and blithely pirouetted back to his classical rhythm. The guru sighed in relief.

The legislative assembly was in a special session. Our MLA, burly in shape and clad in spotless khadi-whites, with tousled hair and large-bracket shaped moustache stood up and poised. He was haranguing heatedly and passionately, giving shock after shock to the treasury benches. He was taking dig after dig at the ruling side for what he called its anti-people stand: the government cruelly punished the people with its manifold hike in the

electricity tariff. He was at his galvanising best. Presently, he became abruptly silent; there was a pause, but it wasn't a rhetorical caesura; it appeared as if his memory nervous system were short-circuited. He looked blank for a while. Then a sudden glow-sign flickered on his face, and he jumped down the aisle and into the well of the house. He stamped, and stomped about, ramming down every marble of the floor and its seams with tremulous and hysteric gesticulations, but uttering no word of protest or invective. He almost exhausted himself when he slid into his pocket and swished out a bottle. Before anyone could make any demur, he gulped down the liquid. Coolly he plodded back to his seat, mumbled some apologies, readjusted his glasses and resumed his uncompleted speech.

Teaser

So, my dear readers, why did the four behave curiously alike the way they did and take to the bottle? Rack your brains...Have you got it? Or haven't you...? Anyway, now check your guess...

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Answer

Their doctors prescribed a tonic to the foursome and advised them to "Shake well" before its use whenever they felt unstrung. So our farmer shook his farm-well, the writer shook his ink-well, the dancer shook well his lissom body, and the MLA shook the well of the house, to be in readiness to consume the tonic!

Bio:

U Atreya Sarma is Editor (Fiction & Reviews) of *Muse India* ezine, the prime organisation behind Hyderabad Literary Festivals. He has also edited and contributed to two special sections for *Muse India*: "A Focus on Telugu Literature" (Nov-Dec 2011) and "Adivi

Bapiraju: A Versatile Telugu Litterateur” (Nov-Dec 2013). With *Bharatiya Pragna*, an English monthly and *Cyberhood*, a neighbourhood weekly included, he has sixteen years of editorial experience.

His poetry, views, reviews, articles, and translations – about 450 (including editorials) – have appeared in English print media: *The Hans India*, *Metverse Muse*, *Triveni*, *Business Vision*, *Bharatiya Pragna*, *SBI Hyderabad Circle News*, *Cyberhood*; in anthologies/compilations: *A Posy of Poesy* (2009), *Poets Paradise* (2010), *Celebrating Creativity* (2010), *Viswanatha: A Literary Legend* (2012); on websites: *museindia.com*, *poemhunter.com*, *boloji.com*, *indiavarta.com*, *socialcause.org*, *sulekha.com*. In Telugu print media: *Andhra Bhoomi*, *Nelavanka Nemaleeka*. A few of his pieces won prizes in *Mother India*, *Himmat* and *Deccan Chronicle*.

He composed in English the profiles of 132 modern Telugu stalwarts for the bilingual book *Marapuraani Maanikyaalu* (2010) (with wordy & pictorial sketches in Telugu by BNIM, a noted writer & artist). He has edited two books: *Memoirs & Musings of an IAS Officer* (2013) by KV Natarajan; *Lung Care* by Dr Shyam Sunder Raj (yet to be published). Right now he is editing the revised fictional autobiography by Gian Singh Shatir (a Sahitya Akademi Awardee in Urdu) and is also on a panel translating *Veyipadagalu*, a mega novel by Jnanpith recipient Viswanatha Satyanarayana into English. His translation of 16 select Telugu short stories by Dr Mallemala Venugopala Reddy has been published under the title *Salt of the Earth* (2013) which has been reviewed in/at *The Hans India*, *boloji.com* and *museindia.com*.

With about 250 poems in English from his pen, he hopes to see his maiden poetry volume in 2014.

Email: atreyasarma@gmail.com