

floorboards groan beneath my weight as they had always done. Hello yourself, old friend, I said.

Inside, I made those rooms my own again, drew the curtains back, threw open the window, pulled the covers from the furniture, slapped at the upholstery with my hands. I could feel fresh air move in through open windows, replacing a season's worth of staleness with a smell of moist earth, a hint of flowers. After all the months of darkness light poured again into the house, fell in familiar angled patterns across furniture, walls and floors. Where light beams passed through moving air, even the dust seemed alive; I watched it swirl, dance, resettle.

I made myself at home, kicked off my shoes so I could feel the floors beneath my feet again. I tilted my head, read the titles on the spines of all my books. I played old songs I hadn't heard in months, felt the summer music move through me as if my muscles were the strings. It carried me from room to room while I swept away the mustiness of winter, shook the rugs, cleaned cobwebs out of corners, hung laundered linens on the line to whip dry in the outdoor air. I pulled closed boxes out of closets and unwrapped all my things, slowly, one by one. I held and turned them in my hands before I put them out again on shelves, in cupboards and drawers. And when I had each room all full of me again, I showered and washed away the last of winter's claims in hot lather and steam.

Night fell and brought a chill to the air outside. I built a fire in the stove, drank tea that smelled of oranges and spice. I warmed my fingers round the

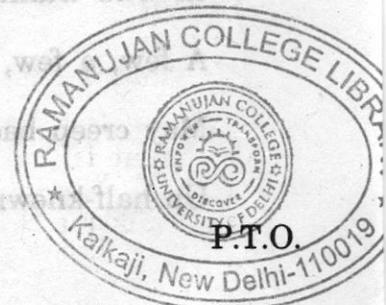
cup and thought of how my house would look to passers-by, drowsy and content, with soft rectangles of light on the ground below the windows, a breath of smoke from the chimney. She's come back, they would say as they walked through the dark night. She's home again.

For me, the end of grief was a homecoming like this one, a returning to myself made sweeter by the long separation. I remember well the months that had followed that most unexpected death, when I felt cut loose, caught in my own cold storm, far away from all that made me feel at home. I wondered if I would ever again belong to any time or place. People spoke to me of sadness and loss, as if they were burdens to carry in my hands. I nodded in agreement, afraid to tell them that I felt no burdens only weightlessness. I thought the world had pulled itself away from me, that I would drift, beyond reach, forever.

But winter ends, and grief does pass. As I had reclaimed my house and made it my own again, so I slowly reclaimed my life. I resumed my small daily rituals: a cup of coffee with a friend, long walks at sunset. I felt like myself again, and when I laughed, it was my own laugh I heard, rich and full. I had feared that, in my absence, the space that I had left behind would close over from disuse, but I returned to find that my house still stood, even after the cruelest of winters

Passage 2

Down the close, darkening lanes they sang their way
To the siding-shed,
And lined the train with faces grimly gay.



Their breasts were stuck all white with wreath and spray
As men's are, dead.

Dull porters watched them, and a casual tramp

Stood staring hard,

Sorry to miss them from the upland camp.

Then, unmoved, signals nodded, and a lamp

Winked to the guard.

So secretly, like wrongs hushed-up, they went.

They were not ours :

We never heard to which front these were sent.

Nor there if they yet mock what women meant

Who gave them flowers.

Shall they return to beatings of great bells

In wild trainloads ?

A few, a few, too few for drums and yells,

May creep back, silent, to still village wells

Up half-known roads.

Passage 3

SULBHA (*sitting on the bed at his side and offering the letter*) : Look at this.

SUBHASH : Hmm ? What is it ?

SULBHA : Why don't you read it ?

SUBHASH : (*reading aloud*) : Sangamwadi Mahilashram Superintendent's post. (*He is ready to hand the letter back to her without reading any further.*)

I see, so that's what you have been thinking about all day ?

SULBHA : Subhash, I want your opinion.

SUBHASH : What opinion can I have ? Write and tell them that it's not possible.

SULBHA : Why ? Why should I tell them it is not possible ?

SUBHASH : Are you going to accept the job then ? Have you gone mad ?

SULBHA (*earnestly*) : Subhash, I am not joking. I want to take up this job.

SUBHASH (*sighing in exasperation*) : But—listen, you feel uncomfortable in this household because you have no work here that would satisfy you. (*He looks at her*) But to leave home and go and live in a village like a ghost—that's no solution.

SULBHA : Why like a ghost ? What are you talking about ? Subhash, I am taking Rani with me.

SUBHASH : Which means that for your own selfish purposes, you are going to take that child away from this home, and from Vahini ? (*He puts his arm round her.*)

Sulu, you want to leave me too for the sake of just a job ?

SULBHA : It's not easy for me either. But Sangamwadi is not so very far from here. It's a distance of only two or three hundred miles. (*Subhash removes his arm from her shoulder and listens to her.*) Subhash, it is only because of you that I could go to Bombay and complete this course after my marriage, standing first in my class. I had a glimpse of the wider world outside. Now how can I spend my life here like this ? I feel stifled here. (*She puts her head on Subhash's shoulder*)

SUBHASH : Sulu, we shall find some work for you right here.

SULBHA : I've tried that already. But there isn't any one suitable work, there really isn't! Women have been neglected by society for a long, long time...

SUBHASH (*interrupting*) : And that's why you want to neglect your home ?

SULBHA : No, Subhash ! Subhash, look ! This is the only institute near our home. I got this job without having to be obliged to anybody. I might also start such an institution here later.

Subhash, I am only going away from home for a short while, and that too with Rani. (*Subhash moves away from her.*)

SUBHASH (*with deliberation*) : Rani will stay here. She has to go to school.

SULBHA : But, Subhash, there may be a better school there.

SUBHASH : Not like this one.

SULBHA : All right. I will go alone.

SUBHASH (*turns to her and speaks loudly*) : You are not going either !

(*Sulbha looks at him. Lowering his voice.*) I am sorry. I didn't mean it that way. (*Sulbha turns away and stares at the bed. He takes off his glasses again and puts them in the case*) If you have set your heart on it, then there is nothing more to discuss. But this is a matter that doesn't affect just you and me. It affects the whole family. We will have to take everybody's opinion.

SULBHA (*looking at Subhash again*) : But, Subhash, I must let them know within two days-

NANI : Who am I to take a decision ? It is up to you both to decide on the matter. I can't understand why she has to leave home to do social work when there is enough work to be done right here. And that too leaving you and your daughter behind.

SUBHASH : No, she was quite prepared to take Rani with her. It is I who said 'no'

NANI : And how do you feel....

NANI : about her leaving :



SUBHASH : Nani, we must try to understand her point of view. I think your kind of work would not satisfy her. She received a degree in social work from Bombay; came first in her class. So she can no longer sit idle at home like other women. She has got this job fairly easily, and it is the kind of work she is interested in. She feels this is an opportunity for her to demonstrate her capabilities.

NANI : And you agree ?

SUBHASH : If I look at it from her viewpoint, yes.

NANI : Do women of respectable families leave their husband and home for the sake of a job ?

SHUBHASH : But she is not leaving her home, Nani. She says that it is only a question of adjustment for a short period of time.

NANI : Don't give me a lawyer's arguments.

NANI : Do you accept it ?

SUBHASH : I accept it.

NANI : That's fine then! As for me, I'll have my reply if people ask for an explanation. But it is you who will have to live like an ascetic even though you have a wife. And at such an early age. But I cannot understand

NANI : how you can approve of such a decision.

NANI : What do you say, Mohan ?

MOHAN : Hmm ?

Mohan : Well, Nani, if she wants to go, why don't you let her ? What difference does it make ? But it's for Subhash to decide really, isn't it ?

NANI : IF Your Maya wanted to leave...

NANI : would you allow her to go away ?

MOHAN (*with an apologetic smile*) : I really can't tell. Maybe I wouldn't let her go. It is difficult to accept such a situation, isn't it ?

NANI : Subhash, all I can say is, think it over before taking a final decision. I am old now, I have fulfilled all my duties to my home, been a daughter-in-law, a wife, and a mother. I have had a lot of problem. People cast doubts on my character and tried to poison my father-in-law's mind. I too had to go outside the home to work. But, Subhash...

NANI : ... I did not leave my home !

SUBHASH : Yes, Nani. I won't come to any decision without thinking it over
(*Nani walks away through the door next to Subhash.*)

SULBHA : Subhash! Let me do it ! (*She hurries to the right of the bed.*)

SUBHASH : No, no let it be. I must learn to do all this work now. Oh ! What's this ? Huh ? Come, get up. (*He pulls her up gently.*) You shouldn't cry like this ! Why -

SULBHA : Subhash, Thank you !

SUBHASH : Thank you ? Hey, listen! Whatever I told Nani was not what I believe. I was only pleading your case.

Part A

Answer any *three* of the following in **250-300** words : (3×10=30 marks)

Questions 1 and 2 are based on Passage 1.

Questions 3 and 4 are based on Passage 2.

Question 5 is based on Passage 3.

1. In passage 1, compare the opening sentence and the second half of the last sentence in the text. What is the effect of this repetition ?
2. In passage 1, what does the writer mean when she says, "People spoke to me of sadness and loss, as if they were burdens to carry in my hands. I nodded in agreement, afraid to tell them that I felt no burdens, only weightlessness."
3. In passage 2, bring out the central idea of the poem in your own words.
4. In passage 2, explain the lines, "So secretly, like wrongs hushed-up, they went/They were not ours."
5. In passage 3, why does Sulbha decide to leave home ? Do you support her decision ? Give reasons.

Part B

Answer any *three* of the following in **450-500** words : (3×20=60 marks)

Question 6 is based on Passage 1.

Questions 7 and 8 are based on Passage 2.

Questions 9 and 10 are based on Passage 3.

6. Write an essay imagining the writer's background and other circumstances of her life with clues from the text.

7. Write a letter to your friend expressing your anti-war sentiments.
8. Write a conversation between two soldiers who share their feelings while departing for the battlefield. (10 turns each)
9. Compose a job application letter along with the Resume for the post of Superintendent, that Sulbha must have written to the Director of Sangamwadi Mahilashram.
10. Imagine you are Nani. Write a Diary entry unfolding your thoughts after you have known about Sulbha's decision and conversed with others in this regard.

