

**UVic Diversity Writing Contest 2015, First-Place Fiction Winner**

**By Bidushy Rahman**

**Wild Berries, Trail Mix**

Although the mountains make up the back drop for a town littered with farms, to the forest on the hill, the mountains paint evergreens in the right corner of a panoramic frame. Behind the frame however, rests an all seeing lighthouse, like a guard dog, ready to bite.

Orange peacocks lazily overhead while its shadows draw themselves longer limbs. The buzz and bust of the suburban farm town gallops at the heels of young bodies blooming furiously into their shirts. The sounds jump and echo off shops and cars before tagging back to each callous like a child to its piper. As if they were pebbles hurdled from shore, footsteps keep running until they're farther from the forest. Asleep safe and sound, rustling leaves lining their nightmares.

"Did you notice you actually finished this time?" Parvati smiles to Choma. Making his way behind her midst the thicket, he smirks as Parvati turns back around. "Yeah, I sure did, eh? I came so fast my eyes hit my brain."

"Finals probably, has everyone in school or at the library or worse," widening her eyes she mouthed, "home." Joining Parvati in her sarcasm, Choma briefly leans on a tree as if for support.

Making their way through the foliage, they reached the clearing below the lighthouse overlooking the field of yellow wheat. As if painted, the town sat at the corner like a fictitious image of tiny shapes. Mountain tops gray glistening blue, stretched to meet the never ending gold as it swam left to meet green.

"When're you off for good?" Parvati ties her left shoe after placing it on the nearest stump. With his hand behind his head, Choma stretches his back and neck and in doing so expands his rib cage. As if maybe an angel was born between flesh and imprisoned just as its wings began to breathe.

"My exam? Nineteenth? Yeah-"

"Lucky ass."

"Yeah." Looking into the distance in front of him, his face plain before he looks back to Parvati and a sly smile creeps over.

"Yeah I have time for fun." Coming up behind her, he grabbed the insides of her thighs sending a shy tremor through her chest. As playful as the moment, rang Parvati's quick squeak of a laughter. Choma's smile still gleaming.

"My first one's the day after tomorrow," After pushing him away, Parvati half-heartedly pouts quickly mimicked by Choma.

"Yikes Khondokar right? It's okay though - don't you graduate next year?" Playfully, he begins punching her, "Par's going to the west side."

Turning around to face him, he punches each syllable into her arm, "U-C-L-A," before stopping to look at her and smiling. Both familiar with the other's rhythm. Before romance can embellish itself and just after the fog sets in, a passion unnamed and innocent kindles a fire to keep two warm.

Parvati rolls her eyes dramatically twirling away before walking to the edge of the clearing, her arms relaxed at her side. How many times had she walked to this, been fucked looking at this, thought about all the things in her head with this view in her mind? From her classroom to her bedroom until she finally arrived, this scene escapes a few, or so she felt.

Turning his gaze from Parvati towards the vine – like path they just climbed, Choma exhales, “Huh –“ breaking Parvati’s daze. “Guess finals aren’t such a buzz – kill after all.”

“You know them?”

“Nope.” Choma gestures his eyebrows towards the town. “Let’s go?”

“Yeah...” Parvati agrees. “It’s getting pretty late actually.” Joining Choma’s hand with hers, Parvati guides them down the hilltop with ease. The two friends silent like siblings stirring in the waters of their familiarity.

“It’s past this clearing but we can really go wherever.” Naresh reminds Purvi and Hyeon as they enter the clearing. After setting Purvi down on the nearest stump, Naresh stands back and lazily glances over at the lighthouse. Passing Purvi his crutches, Hyeon hurriedly begins edging them both into the direction behind them. “Let’s just go somewhere it’s almost dark. I heard they started catching a few people last week. It –“

“Bull,” Purvi guffaws. “What’s the rush?” Without a moment to pass Hyeon quickly rebuttals, “It’s not. Security’s amped ever since word got out and people are getting jumped by the cops and just about anyone who feels like it. Besides I haven’t even seen you guys since-“ Embarrassed by the sentiment vomited out, Hyeon blushes before turning unexpectedly into Naresh’s chest.

“Hai hai, mere jaan (my love).” Bringing Hyeon into his unwelcomed embrace, “Don’t get too senti na?” Laughing, Purvi whistles. After shifting his weight to his crutches he joins them, Hyeon now playing with Naresh’s arm hair.

“Oy Purvi,” winks Naresh, “Hyeon’s just horny na?” Wincing in pain from Hyeon’s pinky fingered wrath, Naresh releases him.

“Chal,” gestures Purvi after disappearing into the foliage. “I found this sweet spot between my balls and asshole-“

“You mean the one I found on your birthday?” Exclaims Hyeon following behind him.

“AND WHO FOUND YOURS? SANTA?” Disheartened, Naresh disappears too.

The sun cut like a lemon, dipped lower leaving mango pulp smeared across the sky. A sanguine silence hovers between necks of grass and salty leaves. Kissing the horizon deeper and deeper, the sun weighs heavier leaving shadows darker and steeper than before. With its head above the clouds, nose out of sight, she peaks over to remind herself of what she’s leaving behind.

“Polygamy’s weird.” Mariam deduced as she entered the clearing moments later. The twisted paths that left her slightly breathless, Hamed seemed to know by heart.

“Isn’t it just one more person?” Hamed laughs. “Well... this is it.”

While Mariam looks around Hamed sat on a stump looking at his phone. He looks up before looking back down, “Have you really never been here?”

Mariam smiles guiltily, “Never felt like it.” Hamed raises his eyebrows briefly, amused. “Can’t say the same,” Smiling he looks at Mariam, “Why come now? So late? Kinda dangerous? Regular hours are during the day.”

Mariam laughed nervously, “I had to see it. I felt like if I had to hear about it one more time- you know. Thanks for taking me last minute.” Nodding understandingly, he puts his phone away.

“Do you think I’m gross?”

“What? No... To each his own right?” Mariam smiles to herself, begrudgingly a little proud of the impartial character she implied. Scoffing Hamed smiles and looks away, “To each his own... each his own until it gets too close right? Everyone loves diversity until we get too diverse. You’re you because you’re not me, I’m me because I’m not you. Lines and lines of diversity. Fun. Fun. Fun.” Looking down, again amused.

“Well yeah, I mean, normal – “ Hamed’s unforgivingly childish laugh interrupts her.

“Normal? What? Who? Are you normal? Normal where? Here??” Laughing even harder, “I can’t blame you can I?” Fiddling around the insulin shot and paperclips in his pocket he finishes, “what’s normal ever done for you? You probably think I have a penis, I mean look the fit don’t I?” Walking towards Mariam, “Doesn’t matter much, never needed one.” Leaning over Mariam, Hamed parts his lips when Mariam interrupts, “I was just curious about coming here okay, chill. God. I don’t... don’t belong here, I’m not...”

Looking her over, unsurely. “You’re not what?”

“I’m not.. I’m a virgin... I guess.” Darting her eyes around, they land on the ground. Hamed blinks before breaking into a laughter that would take several minutes to fizzle down. Her embarrassment could have drowned her when Hamed interrupts his own laughter.

“Yeah? You’re a virgin? Why? Because a grizzly looking didn’t jump in and out of you with his member? Didn’t grunt or sweat over you? Hah!” With a final, “Woo!” he wipes his face and looks at Mariam smiling kneading out the chuckles still lodged in his throat. Were it not for his charm his loud mouth might’ve made him inexcusable.

Several minutes pass and their breathing gets heavier, their hands filled. Had Hamed not noticed the sun had snuck away, their friction could have sparked a forest fire.

Laughing, Hamed teases, “I know you couldn’t have forgotten what happens at night. Am I that good? I knocked a Virgo to amnesia? [Winks.] I’ll drive you home.”

Following behind him, sprung in her erotic contentment, she followed until an unfamiliar figure pushed her back against the tree. “Hamed? Wha –“

Her moans grew deeper until they shot through a parabola into whimpers. Midst the darkness of the evening the figure bobbed their head in and out of Mariam until a higher pitched giggling made it clear Hamed wasn’t the one between her legs. A blood curdling scream, a wailing siren, and a fluorescent light in eyesore white. The lighthouse was awake when Mariam looked down at two brown eyes that screamed fear right back at her.

“GET DOWN.” Parvati manages through her teeth. She swings them both behind the adjacent tree and waited until the sirens simmered down and the two lights began chasing each other. Moments pass. Slowly. Lazily.

“You’re a freak.” Mariam’s monotonous voice etched on to Parvati who smiled. Feeling unaccomplished Mariam turns to her, “This is all your fault, what’re you even fucking doing here?”

Unaffected, “isn’t that obvious?” Parvati picks at her nails.

“DO YOU JUST – “

“Like to watch before I lay my tongue down? Yeah. Is that it? You wanna hear I’m a pervert? Your ego feeling better isn’t doing shit here Mother Mary.” Parvati’s indifference was barely felt by Mariam, now looking back down at her hands.

“You’re fucked.”

“Actually I didn’t finish.”

“Was Lilith your mom– “

“I was watching you, you know.”

“So I fucking hear.”

“You’re no virgin.”

“Shoot. Darn. Golly – “

“You’re not even a straight virgin.” Pricking her conscience, Mariam’s eyes widened as her mouth fell asleep. Smirking, Parvati remembers,

“It was like watching a string quartet, MY hands felt sore.” Looking over to Mariam, Parvati sees her head against the bark, looking at the sky, midst peaceful defeat, eyes gleaming with a new softness.

“I’ve never been with a girl.”

Moments pass.

“Sucks.” Mariam looks to Parvati who glances over, sharing a laugh that seemed to shake the weight of dirt off of their shoulders.

“Really, truly, I’m grieving for your loss.” The light from their eyes seemed to bounce back and forth as did the new spots of light near their feet.

“I know you’re there. Come out.” The harshness of the tone stabbed their lungs with a jolt. Locked in each other’s eyes, Parvati and Mariam sat.

“I’m not FUCKING AROUND. COME OUT.”

Stricken and frozen, Parvati was unable to stop Mariam from entering the clearing to face the officer. Caught in a fishing net, her throat could gag if she opened it for air. As if he was near a rabid frothing dog, the officer’s disdain wasn’t hidden.

“Guess you wear the pants? Huh? BRING HIM OUT BEFORE I KICK HIS FUCKIN’ HEAD IN.”

Looking up to the stars as sinners always do, Parvati pleads to the Gods she had forsaken over the years. Two dead animals stood in front of the officer, both unsure how or when their legs brought them in front of him. Squinting his eyes, he unapologetically flashes the light at Parvati before turning around soon after.

“Alright ladies, follow me.” Screaming their eyes at each other was as far as their numbness would allow. However, turning halfway around to face Mariam, “There’s a lot of deviants running around right now.” *A deviant? I’m not... I’m... I’m...*

“So damn dark, they wouldn’t know a whore’s limb from a branch...” Looking over to Parvati he continues, “Can’t be too trusting nowadays I get it but you’re safe with

me. Mongrels running around... boys going through puberty." Waving the two behind him, he begins pushing through plants.

"What're you gonna do. Boys will be boys."