


EBONY & IVORY *Priya Kuriyan*



PLEASE LOOK AT THIS E-BOOK IN THE „FULLSCREEN MODE“: strg+L
TO LEAVE THE „FULLSCREEN MODE“: ctrl+L OR 



EBONY & IVORY *Priya Kuriyan*



THERE IS A PICTURE OF MY GRANDPARENTS THAT LIES WITHIN THE PAGES OF AN OLD FAMILY ALBUM. THE PICTURE IN ITSELF IS UNSPECTACULAR. (IF YOU DON'T COUNT MY GRANDFATHER'S STRANGE BOW-TIE THAT IS); A MUNDANE PHOTOGRAPH OF A NEWLYWED COUPLE STARING STOICLY INTO A CAMERA. I THINK A LOT OF MY ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THEIR MARRIAGE WERE BASED ON THAT PICTURE - THAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE THAT OF ANY OTHER MARRIED INDIAN COUPLE FROM THE 1940'S---



THEY PROBABLY HAD A MARRIAGE ARRANGED BY THEIR PARENTS...



AFTER WHICH, LIKE MANY EDUCATED PEOPLE FROM KERALA, THEY MOVED TO THE MIDDLE EAST FOR WORK...



WHERE THEY HAD THREE LOVELY CHILDREN OF VARYING SKIN TONES--



ROSALIND, MY GRANDMOTHER WORKED AS A NURSE IN A HOSPITAL.



MATHEWS, MY GRANDFATHER, WAS A BANKER OF SOME SORT



AT A VERY YOUNG AGE, THE THREE KIDS WERE SENT OFF TO STUDY IN INDIA



THEY WERE TO GROW UP UNDER THE GUARDIANSHIP OF AN AUNT FROM GRANDFATHER'S SIDE.



THE KIDS GREW UP INTO STRAPPING YOUNG TEENS.



A FOURTH CHILD WAS BORN TO THEM...



AND WAS SOON SENT OFF TO INDIA TO JOIN HIS OTHER SIBLINGS.



PICTURES OF THE KIDS WERE SENT TO THE PARENTS SO THEY COULD SEE HOW WELL THE KIDS WERE DOING



MATHEW AND ROSE WOULD COME TO INDIA DURING THE CHILDREN'S VACATIONS BRINGING WITH THEM ALL KINDS OF GIFTS.



THE KIDS GREW UP, MARRIED WONDERFUL PEOPLE AND HAD CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN.



AT SOME POINT, GRANDFATHER MOVED TO ENGLAND FOR WORK WHILE GRANDMOTHER CONTINUED WORKING IN KUWAIT. THEN HE HAD A HEART ATTACK AND DIED.



HE HAD A PRETTY FANCY FUNERAL WITH LOVELY FLOWERS AND A HEARSE. GRANDMOTHER RETURNED TO INDIA A FEW YEARS AFTER.

and that was that about their marriage...

I NEVER REALLY KNEW MY GRANDFATHER. HE DIED WHEN I WAS BARELY TWO. WE HAD NEVER MET, BUT I HAD PIECED TOGETHER A PERSONALITY FROM THINGS THAT HE HAD LEFT BEHIND.

FROM THE TRINKETS, NOTES AND LETTERS HIS DAUGHTER, MY MOTHER, HAD PRESERVED, I CONCLUDED HE WAS A MAN OF FINE TASTE



WITH VERY INTERESTING HOBBIES



AND POSSIBLY A FEMINIST! IN A LETTER HE WROTE TO MY MOTHER AFTER MARRIAGE, HE SEEMED TO GIVE HER SOME VERY SANE ADVICE

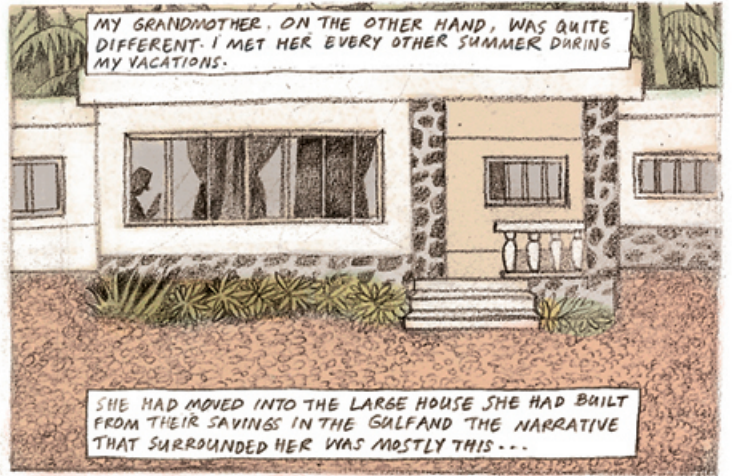
Remember, your health is the most important and you must prioritise it. So, there is no need to wait for your husband if late for dinner. social engagements? save my x

OVERALL HE SEEMED LIKE A COOL GUY I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN ALONG WITH.

THEN, THERE WERE THE LEGENDS THAT SURROUNDED THE MAN. THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE HE HELPED GET JOBS IN THE GULF, THE RISKS HE TOOK BY MOVING TO LONDON, HIS GUTS AND HIS GENERALLY LARGER-THAN-LIFE PERSONALITY.



MY GRANDMOTHER, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS QUITE DIFFERENT. I MET HER EVERY OTHER SUMMER DURING MY VACATIONS.

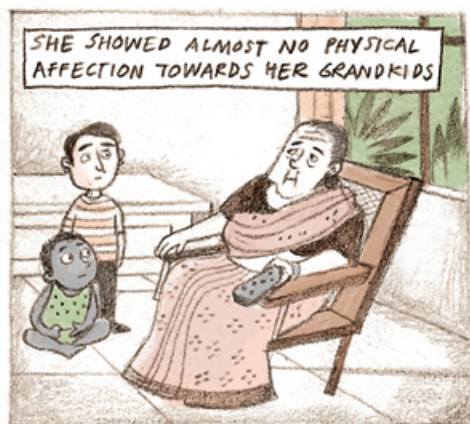




I HAVE TO ADMIT I AGREED WITH ALL OF IT. ROSALIND MATTHEWS HAD NO TIME FOR HOBBIES. NOR DID SHE SEEM TO HAVE THE PATIENCE TO DEVELOP FINE TASTE.



FOR A GRANDMOTHER, SHE SEEMED TO CURSE A LOT, AND WAS QUICK TO LOSE HER TEMPER.



SHE SHOWED ALMOST NO PHYSICAL AFFECTION TOWARDS HER GRANDKIDS



AND ATE REALLY FRUGAL MEALS. THE HEAD OF THE FISH BEING HER BIGGEST LUXURY.



AND OF COURSE, WHEN IT CAME TO MONEY...

10 RUPEES!! Holy mother of GOD

7 RUPEES!! GOOD LORD!!

5 RUPEES!! JESUS CHRIST!

(TAKE A HIKE.. FIRST COMMANDMENT)



SHE ALSO GAVE SOME BIZARRE ADVICE...

HERE... SOME POCKET MONEY FOR HER. BUY HER SOME FAIR AND LOVELY*

SO DARK THIS ONE IS.

!!!



THAT ONE OF HER GRAND-CHILDREN (THAT TOO A GIRL. GASPI!) WAS NOT A FAIR LILLY WAS ONE OF HER GREATEST SORROWS.



* MOST POPULAR FAIRNESS CREAM IN INDIA.

IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT IF THERE WERE TWO PEOPLE MORE OPPOSED IN PERSONALITY, IT WAS MATHEWS AND ROSE.

IT WAS LIKE THE COLOUR OF THEIR SKIN WAS JUST A PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF THIS DIFFERENCE.



THEY WERE LIKE EBONY AND IVORY. MATHEWS AND ROSE

TO ME, THERE WAS DEFINITELY SOMETHING MORE APPEALING ABOUT MY GRANDFATHER. I HAD INHERITED HIS COMPLEXION IT SEEMED, BUT I HOPED I HAD SOME OF HIS PERSONALITY AS WELL

FROM MY GRANDMOTHER, I INHERITED -- HER NAME -- WELL, ALMOST

IT IS COMMON PRACTICE AMONG CHRISTIAN FAMILIES IN KERALA. FOR THE SECOND BORN, TO TAKE ON THE NAME OF THE GRANDMOTHER FROM THE MOTHER'S SIDE. A SMALL EXCEPTION WAS MADE IN MY CASE.



NOT THAT I WANTED TO HAVE HER NAME, BUT THAT'S HOW I GOT NAMED AFTER A HERB.



A DECENT MAN, A GOOD JOB IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY. NICE KIDS SHE DIDN'T REALLY HAVE TO LOOK AFTER..

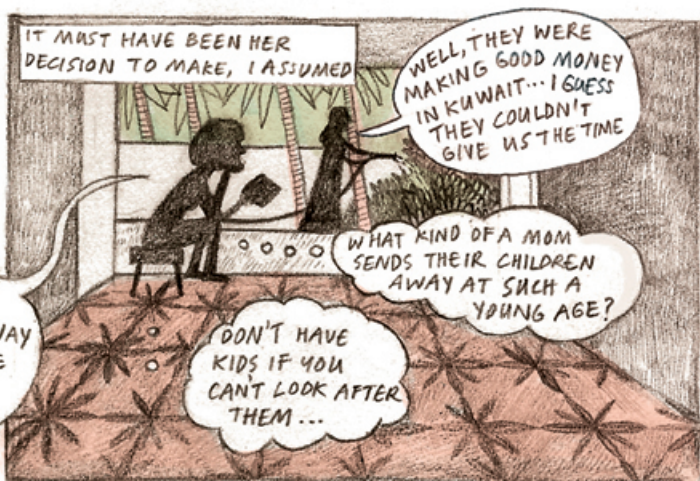


SKIMMING THROUGH OLD PHOTOGRAPHS, I CONTINUED TO SILENTLY JUDGE HER



MA, DID SHE REALLY SEND YOU ALL AWAY WHEN YOU WERE SO LITTLE?

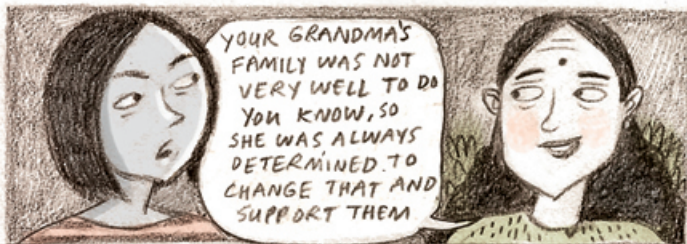
IT MUST HAVE BEEN HER DECISION TO MAKE, I ASSUMED



WELL, THEY WERE MAKING GOOD MONEY IN KUWAIT... I GUESS THEY COULDN'T GIVE US THE TIME

WHAT KIND OF A MOM SENDS THEIR CHILDREN AWAY AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE?

DON'T HAVE KIDS IF YOU CAN'T LOOK AFTER THEM...



YOUR GRANDMA'S FAMILY WAS NOT VERY WELL TO DO YOU KNOW, SO SHE WAS ALWAYS DETERMINED TO CHANGE THAT AND SUPPORT THEM



YOUR GRANDAD ON THE OTHER HAND, CAME FROM A RICH FAMILY... BUT THEY FELL IN LOVE... AND HE WAS CONSIDERED A GOOD CATCH...



WHAT!! THEY CHOSE EACH OTHER? IT WASN'T AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE?

THEY WERE BOTH WORKING IN MUMBAI FOR A BIT. THEN THEY BOTH MOVED TO KUWAIT FOR WORK AND GOT MARRIED THERE



THIS NUGGET OF INFORMATION SURPRISED ME. I DIDN'T REALLY CONSIDER ROSALIND MATHEWS TO BE THE ROMANTIC TYPE...

I MEAN, SHE HARDLY EVER DISPLAYED ANY SIGNS OF EMOTION UNLESS THEY WERE SUDDEN OUTBURSTS OF ANGER.

THE FEW TIMES SHE DID HOWEVER, ARE ETCHED IN MY MEMORY BECAUSE THEY WERE SO FEW AND FAR IN BETWEEN...

HER VOICE CHOKED OVER THE TELEPHONE.. WHEN A GRANDCHILD CAME OUT OF AN UNPLEASANT RELATIONSHIP

BETTER THAN LIVING THROUGH A BAD RELATIONSHIP... YOU KNOW (CHOKES!)

AND WAVERED WHEN ONE OF THEM DID WELL ENOUGH TO GET INTO A GOOD COLLEGE

THAT'S SO... (CHAKE)
GREAT.. TO BE CHOSEN AMONG (CHOKES!)
SO MANY...

Baboom Baboom Baboom

AND IT WAS THIS HEART THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING.

ONE DAY, MY MOTHER RECEIVED THAT CALL ANYONE WITH AN AGING PARENT DREAMS RECEIVING.

ROSALIND MATHEWS HAD SUFFERED A MASSIVE STROKE, BUT SOMETHING ELSE ALSO HAPPENED....

SHE'S HAD A STROKE, L. LAST NIGHT. HAPPENED SUDDENLY.

THE DOC SAYS SHE MIGHT BE BEDRIDDEN HERE ON.

Hee... Hee... Hee...!!

ROSALIND MATHEWS STARTED SMILING A LOT.

SHE DRIFTED BETWEEN LUCIDITY AND DREAMS AND IT WAS ALL MUCH TO THE AMUSEMENT OF HER CHILDREN.



SHE'S ON A ROLL. SHE'S BEEN CRACKING JOSES SINCE YESTERDAY.

MOSTLY AT OUR EXPENSE

HE.. HE WHY ARE YOU ALL STARING AT ME LIKE I'M A SPECIMEN? HE "HE

IT'S STRANGE.. I'VE NEVER SEEN HER THIS HAPPY BEFORE.



MY MOTHER WAS RIGHT. THIS WAS A COMPLETELY NEW ROSALIND.



MAYBE WE ALL NEED TO LOSE OUR MIND A LITTLE BIT TO BE TRULY HAPPY.

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS MY GRANDMOTHER DID WHEN SHE WAS WELL ENOUGH TO SIT UP, WAS GET HER HAIR CUT. AND I BEING THE 'ARTISTIC' ONE, HAD THE HONOUR OF GIVING HER THE HAIRCUT.



I THINK SHE LOOKED A BIT LIKE SINEAD O'CONNOR AFTER IT

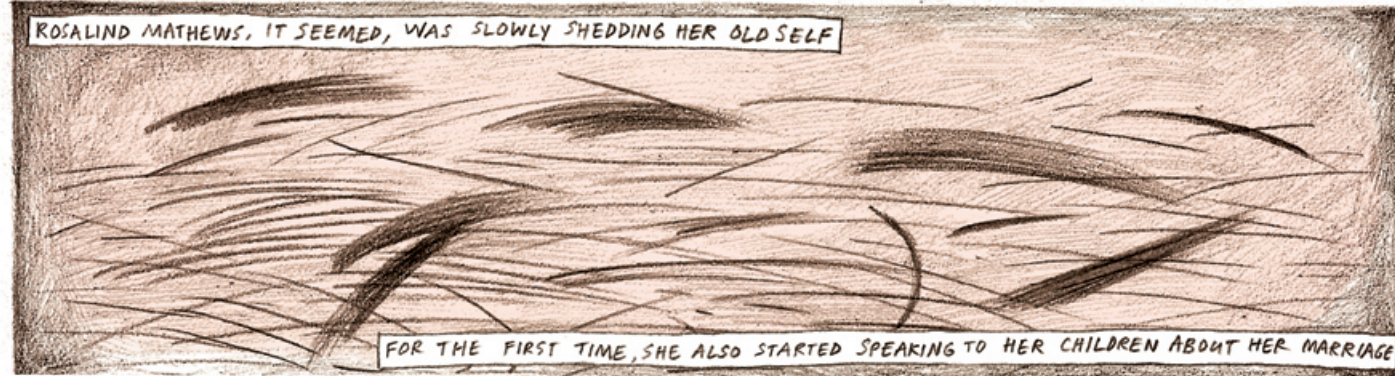


HER APPETITE SEEMED INSATIABLE AT TIMES



AND IT WASN'T THAT FISH-HEAD SHE CRAVED.

ROSALIND MATHEWS, IT SEEMED, WAS SLOWLY SHEDDING HER OLD SELF



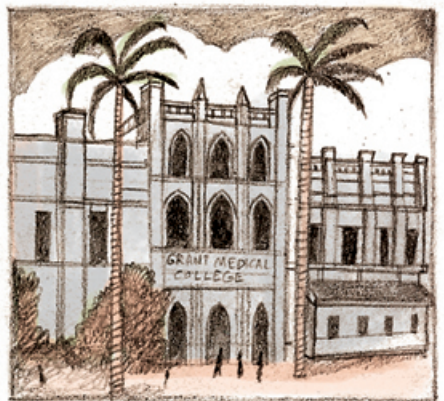
FOR THE FIRST TIME, SHE ALSO STARTED SPEAKING TO HER CHILDREN ABOUT HER MARRIAGE



SHE TOLD THEM ABOUT HOW MY GRANDFATHER SPOTTED HER AS A TEENAGER PASSING BY HIS HOUSE.



HOW HE BEGAN TO WOO HER IN THEIR TINY HOMETOWN IN KERALA.



GRANDMOTHER, EXTREMELY SERIOUS ABOUT HER CAREER, REFUSED HIS ADVANCES AND WENT AWAY ALONE TO STUDY NURSING IN BOMBAY.



IT SEEMED MATHEWS WAS EXTREMELY PERSISTENT



HE HAD LANDED UP IN BOMBAY



ROSALIND THEN GOT A GREAT JOB IN KUWAIT AND WENT OFF, ONCE AGAIN ON HER OWN STEAM.



ONLY TO FIND THAT MATHEWS HAD FOLLOWED HER THERE AS WELL.



THINGS WERE GETTING A BIT EMBARRASSING; PEOPLE WERE TALKING AND ROSALIND WAS ALMOST 27.



SO SHE JUST DECIDED TO MARRY HIM IN KUWAIT ONE FINE DAY.



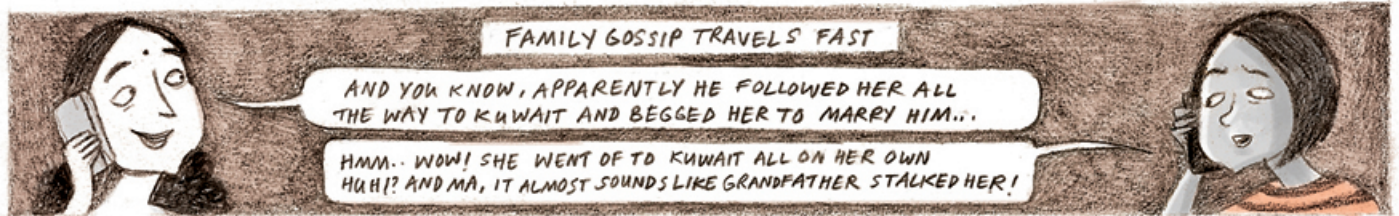
MUCH OF THIS WAS NEW TO THE FAMILY

DID YOU KNOW THIS STORY ABOUT BOMBAY?

NO, BUT CONSIDERING IT WAS OUR DAD, IT'S TOTALLY BELEIVABLE

I'D HEARD SOME THINGS, BUT WAS NEVER SURE.

WOW! I THOUGHT SHE WENT TO KUWAIT AFTER DAD!



FAMILY GOSSIP TRAVELS FAST

AND YOU KNOW, APPARENTLY HE FOLLOWED HER ALL THE WAY TO KUWAIT AND BEGGED HER TO MARRY HIM..

HMM.. WOW! SHE WENT OF TO KUWAIT ALL ON HER OWN HUH!? AND MA, IT ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE GRANDFATHER STALKED HER!

THERE WAS CLEARLY MUCH MORE TO THIS COUPLE THAN MET THE EYE. EACH TIME I CAME HOME FROM COLLEGE OR WORK TO VISIT MY PARENTS IN KERALA, NEW AND SURPRISING BITS OF INFORMATION WOULD SLIP OUT THROUGH CASUAL CONVERSATIONS. OFTEN LEAVING ME EVEN MORE PUZZLED. PERHAPS, WHAT FLUMMOXED ME THE MOST WAS HOW LITTLE MY MOTHER AND HER SIBLINGS HAD THOUGHT ABOUT THESE THINGS OVER THE YEARS.



HOW OFTEN DID YOU SEE YOUR PARENTS WHEN YOU WERE KIDS.

ONCE A YEAR. THEY WOULD COME DURING OUR SCHOOL VACATIONS.

BUT ONCE FATHER MOVED TO ENGLAND, FOR WORK, HE COULDN'T COME

WAIT.. SO YOU SAW HIM LAST WHEN YOU WERE 10!!?

IT WAS RIGHT AFTER YOUR YOUNGEST UNCLE WAS BORN. THAT'S WHEN I SAW HIM LAST...



BUT, HE DIED WHEN YOU WERE AROUND 24, RIGHT? AND YOU DIDN'T SEE HIM FOR THE REMAINING 14 YEARS HE WAS ALIVE? WHY??!!

WELL, HE WROTE TO US QUITE REGULARLY. IT WASN'T LIKE HE DISAPPEARED...

YES, BUT DIDN'T YOU WONDER WHY HE DIDN'T COME? 14 YEARS IS A LONG TIME. DIDN'T YOU ASK GRANDMOTHER? DIDN'T YOU ALL FEEL BAD ABOUT ALL OF THIS??

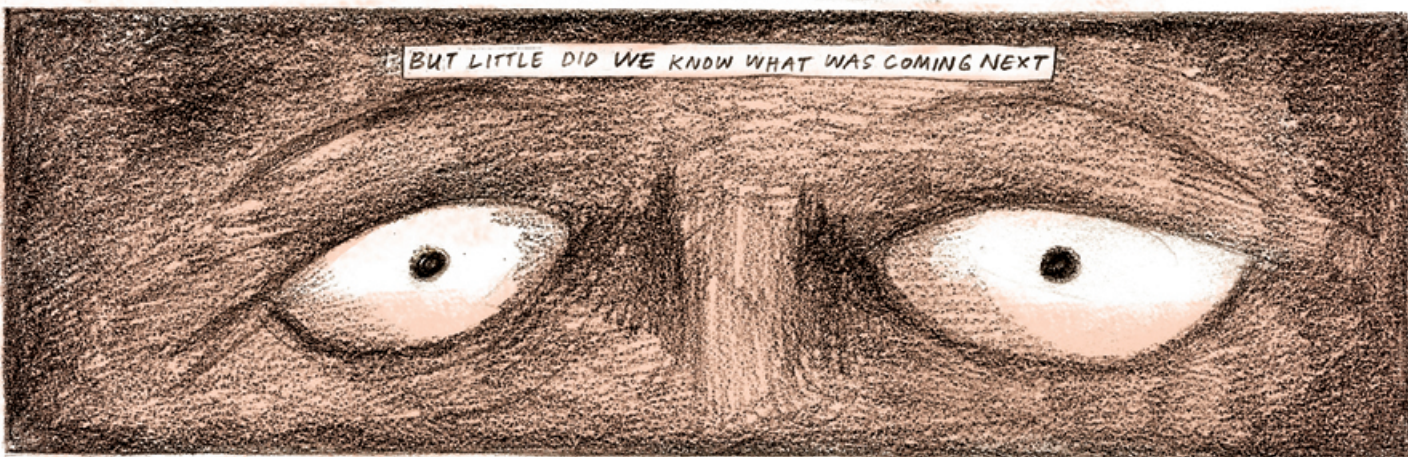
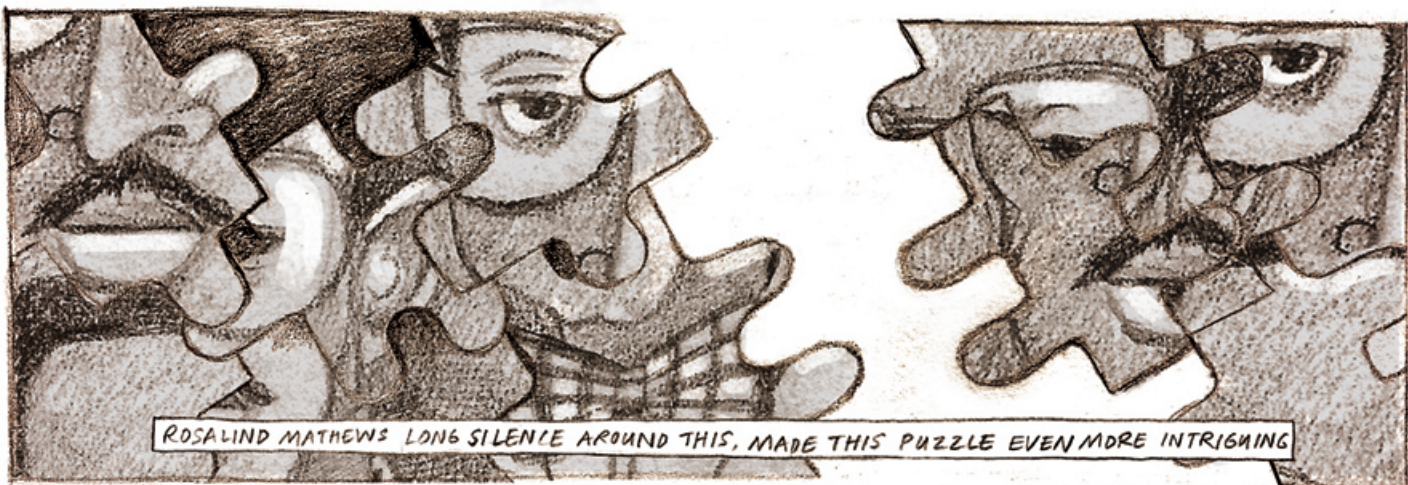
UHM... I DON'T KNOW... WE WERE ALL JUST GROWING UP HAPPILY TOGETHER AT OUR AUNT'S, WITH ALL OUR OTHER COUSINS. IT NEVER REALLY OCCURED TO US TO ASK...

AND YOU KNOW YOUR GRANDMA. SHE ISN'T ONE TO TALK

SOMEHOW, I COULDN'T WRAP MY HEAD AROUND ALL THIS. MAYBE IT WAS JUST A VERY DIFFERENT TIME. THINGS WERE QUIETLY TAKEN FOR GRANTED. HAD IT BEEN NOW...



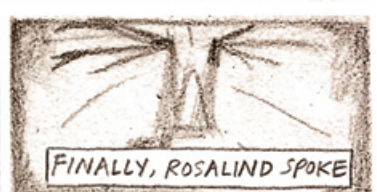
COME TO THINK OF IT, I COULDN'T REMEMBER HER MENTIONING GRANDFATHER EVEN ONCE... NOT ONCE...



IT ALL STARTED LIKE THIS



NO, SHE SAYS...
SHE SAYS IT'S
HER HUSBAND
SHE SEES...





SHE SPOKE OF THE MAN'S SLOW DESCENT INTO ALCOHOLISM



THE MONEY HE SPENT ON HIS SUITS...

THE BILLS THAT HIS EXPENSIVE TASTES RAN



FRIENDS WHO TURNED INTO BAD DEBTORS

THE GAMBLING-- DESPITE MOUNTING FINANCIAL TROUBLES.



AND THE POSSIBLE AFFAIR WITH A WHITE LADY WHICH TOOK HIM TO LONDON A LOT.

QUESTIONING ALL THIS WAS ONLY MET WITH RAGE...

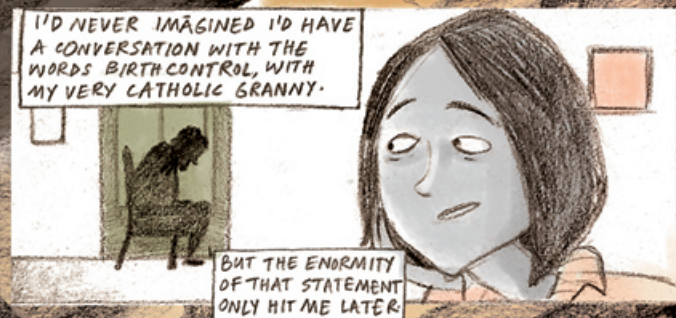
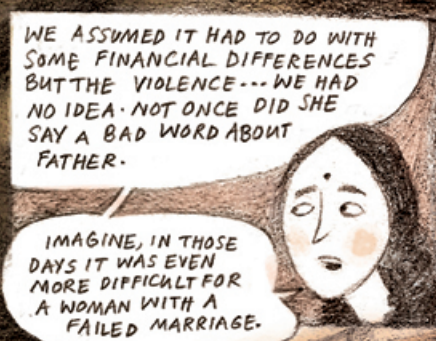
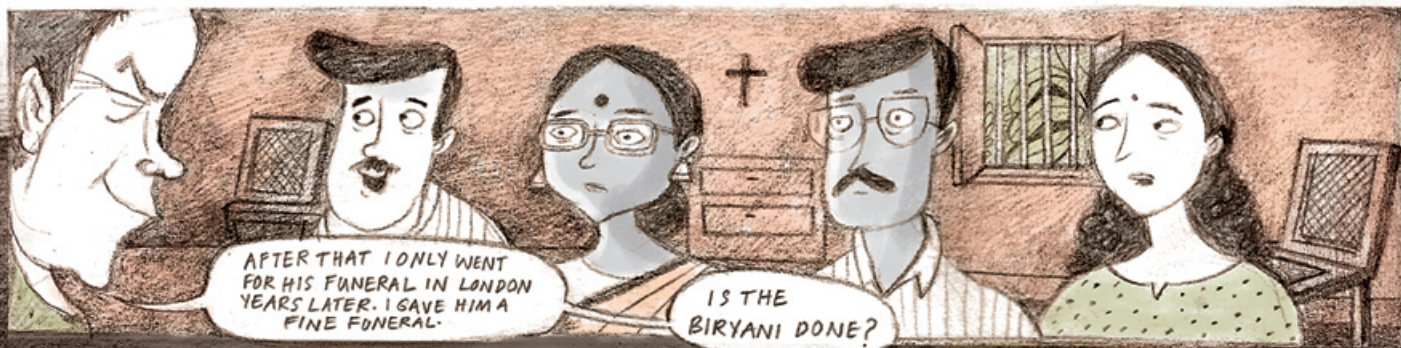


LIKE THE TIME HE BASHED UP HIS BEEMER AFTER HE'D HAD A SPAT WITH HER.



"ONLY TO SPITE ME... ONLY TO SPITE ME"





HOW QUICKLY AND CRUELLY I HAD JUDGED THIS WOMAN.
ALL THESE YEARS SHE HAD SILENTLY BUILT THIS BUND TO
PROTECT HER CHILDREN FROM THE DARK WATERS THAT
HAD ENGULFED HER MARRIAGE.....







.. AND WHAT I HAD SEEN AS AN ABANDONMENT WAS
· MOST LIKELY AN ACT OF KINDNESS

THE BUND HAD FINALLY BROKEN AFTER YEARS,
BUT THE KIDS WERE ALRIGHT...

THE KIDS WERE ALRIGHT..



ALL THESE YEARS, I HAD ASSUMED I KNEW
THIS WOMAN. I THOUGHT THE STORY THAT
NEEDED UNRAVELLING WAS MY GRANDFATHER'S.
BUT I WAS WRONG. THIS WAS THE STORY.

POSTERITY OFTEN HAS A WAY OF CONVENIENTLY SPINNING A KINDER NARRATIVE, THAT OFTEN VEERS ON GLORIFICATION, FOR ITS CHILD-MEN

OH MATHEWS!
NEVER AFRAID
OF TAKING
RISKS, YOU
KNOW.

KRASH!!

... HA, HA..
AND THEN YOU KNOW,
HE CRASHED HIS
BRAND NEW BEEMER
MAD GUY!!

OH HE
WAS EXTREMELY
SOCIAL. LOVED
HIS DRINK

I'VE OFTEN WONDERED
WHAT PEOPLE WOULD
SAY IF GRANDMOTHER
HAD BEHAVED SIMILARLY

KRASH!!

AT MY GRANDMOTHER'S FUNERAL, EMOTIONS WERE UNDERSTANDABLY RUNNING HIGH.

MY OLDEST AUNT WHO HAD OBVIOUSLY NOT INHERITED ROSALIND MATHEWS STOICISM, WAS SOBBING UNCONTROLLABLY. SHE PRODDED THE YOUNGEST GRANDCHILD.

OKAY NOW SING A SONG FOR GRANDMA! (SOB)

THEN JUST TELL A JOKE, BOY!

BUT I DON'T KNOW ANY SONGS!

I THINK ROSALIND MATHEWS WOULD HAVE LIKED THAT.

END

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