# 10. The Shriek: A Poetic Interlude

A man was nothing but a continent of ideas. Whereas a woman lived on shifting grounds. - Katie Kitamura, Gone to the Forest.

A not-so-young woman lives amongst tight lanes and crowded lives.

There is nothing singular about this not-so-young woman. She is but that, and could be anyone of them, one who lives the slumming. She is loud. She is dirty. She has desires to be devoured, but never gently. Living harshly, she desires it hard and harsh. She always does not say thus; she has no tongues.

But you, from where you are, can hear her murmurs.

You enter the slums cautiously, dark, dreaded and crowded as they are; or more confidently, if you grew up on its frail roofs. The not-so-young woman, more often than not, cannot be slight on her feet or heavily announce her arrival here. She rarely leaves. She imagines though, of the sounds she has not heard, the cinemas, the metros and the rails, the mechanical malls, and such. But also of love. The not-so-young woman wading through the din of dens wonders, does love have a sound? Will she know it when she hears it?

You enter the not-so-young woman always confidently, never cautiously. You are ensconced in the hearings that always hears you, and let her sounds wander about aimlessly. You do not even have to silence the not-so-young woman; she is taught not to speak. She has no tongues. You laugh, while thrusting your idiot in her. All the not-so-young-woman is hearing is your resounding, raucous laughter and the pain in her groins.

The not-so-young woman does not know yet whether love has a sound, but she knows now that pain does.

The not-so-young woman desperately desires the din of the dens, which on other evenings and in-between afternoons leave her with a murderous instinct. Where are the pathetic children? And why haven’t the ones doused in alcohol and singing songs of a loss they have not felt, arrived? And where is the old, farting woman, always in the corner, always hurling obscenities? Perhaps they cannot hear her, the silently screaming not-so-young woman reckons. And then even the silent screaming comes to an abrupt stop: they hear her, silently.

The not-so-young woman knows now she has to find her own sound, a sound which will silence the pain in the moment which is never-ending. The idiot unrelenting. She agrees upon a sound which she has never heard, that of love. She has also never been to the mountains, she has heard that they are tall, still and never leave. The not-so-young woman hears love as the sound of the mountain standing still.

The not-so-young woman is still hearing the sounds of love, the tall mountains she has never visited, or have been paid a visit by, when the idiot relents. You let it die on her when you see her smile, but you do not hear her hearing the sounds of love. It tickles the idiot, yet again; the not-so-young woman, the idiot reckons, wants it.

These days the not-so-young woman, with nothing singular about her, wades through the din of the dens like an amused child. Some even notice her smile. She suddenly stops in the middle of taking hasty steps and stares at the door. Often she has to be pushed out of the way because she is staring at the pathetic children. Or letting the old, farting, woman in corner caress her hair while hurling the obscenities.

The not-so-young woman feels the idiot in each of these sounds. Only when the not-so-young woman can wander to the sound of the mountains does she smile.

The nights are different though, the not-so-young woman needs the din of the dens to wander to find the sound of love. But the not-so-young woman has been taught to contain the cacophony brewing within, and thus white noise becomes of her. She screams as she did, as she is taught, silently.

But one night, the not-so-young woman’s body betrays her, and a shriek awakens the dens.

Many-of-you appear: some in reality, others as apparitions. You ask.

The not-so-young woman, finally having an ear to her disposal, tells: of the idiot, of the sounds, of the sound of love, of the mountains – tall, still and never leaving, of the smile, of the idiot, yet again.

Many-of-you grimly silent at first, break into a resounding, raucous laughter in harmony. The many-of-you perform a little demonic dance:

But you wanted it, you did. You smiled, you did. You did not shout, why did you not, did you? If the shriek is so loud, and the pain was so bad, how do you still live? There is a tree nearby. But, you do, you wanted it, you did. You say, your insides hurt. Why are they still inside? Did many-of-us pull it out? Why did you not pull them out yourself? You wanted it, you did.

Now the not-so-young woman wanders about the lanes wearing frocks, that many sizes too small for her, lifting it, revealing her swollen, rotting sex, shouting and singing out of tune, but I wanted it. I did. The many-of-you, your idiots still eager and unrelenting, throw stones at her, demanding her to shut up.

*Coda:*

The not-so-young woman, here, is the perennial, but not the static other. She is the woman in the slums. Slum in the city. The lower-caste, lower-class man beaten up on a whim of a middle-class woman. The transgendered person. The Other’s body is always an identified feminine.

The You is the City. The Violence-ordering middle-class woman. The Hegemonic discursive space and its practices. In its perverse masculinity, the You demands silence as a right, and practices silencing with its desire to contain, denying a becoming and voice to the Other.

But the You, in its arrogant unhearing forgets, that on certain nights, the not-so-young woman can and does shrieks, even if you momentarily silence her.

In her shrieking, the sound she finally finds, the not-so-young woman establishes she has a voice, which one fine morning, when she is not the only, will drown: The Many-of-You.