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November 24, 2004
Punyashloka Biswal

Mozail

This composition is based on Saadat Hasan Manto's *Mozail*, and is structured as an epistolary short story. I have not attempted to remain completely faithful to the original: facts have been modified, and the plot has changed in some ways. I have tried, however, to keep the essence of the characters.

21 January 1947

Dearest Mozail,

I hope you are well, and are having a great time with your friends in Deolali. I've heard there will be some Congress-led protest meetings there on Wednesday, and I would advise you not to attend. It's for your own safety, you know.

Words cannot begin to describe how I have missed you this weekend. You are like a ray of light in my life, and when you are away, everything seems empty, pointless, meaningless. Believe me when I say that you are my first love. I am 'upto my knees' in it, and when I look into your eyes, I feel that I could drown and not regret it.

I wonder if you remember the first time we met? The occasion is still fresh in my mind—it was exactly six months ago. I was moving furniture into my apartment when you arrived from downstairs in your adorable wooden sandals, stumbled and bumped into me. From the first touch of your body, I was a goner.

Which train do you plan to take on Friday? I'll meet you at the station, and then we can go catch a movie. Write to me!

Yours (and only yours),
Tarlochan Singh

26 January 1947

Tarloch Darling,

Sometimes I wonder if you're really insane or just pretending. You need to stop worrying about me! I have every intention of going to Pt Nehru's speech, and I assure you that I will be just fine. What kind of a fearless Sardar are you anyway, if you don't even dare to go to a political meeting?

Anyhow, I've spent a wonderful week here. Just yesterday, I met up with one of my old flames (Michael D'Souza—I think I've mentioned him before), and I must say we had a ball. Michael is so funny at times! I think our names sound so well-matched too: "Michael and Mozail D'Souza"; don't you agree? Unfortunately he's also completely broke, so I suppose there's no potential there. Therefore fear not, I shall come back into your arms in a few days.

I think I'll take the 5:30 back from Deolali on Friday. I'm not too sure about the movie though.

Hope you're keeping well,
Mozail Rosen

2 February 1947

Mozail,

Why do you delight in torturing me thus? I waited for you all evening at Dadar, and you never showed up. I can barely sleep at night now, imagining where you must be and the things you must be doing. I love you so much; can't you return even an iota of that?

I'm fed up with hearing stories of your old lovers. If you like Michael so much, why don't you go and live with him? Sometimes I wonder if perhaps I am the one at fault. When I think about the purity and sanctity of the women from my village, my homeland, I wonder if I am being punished for loving someone like you. May the Gurus guide me!

Still, for better or for worse, I am stuck with you. Write to me soon, and let us meet some time this week.

Truly,
Tarlochan Singh

5 February 1947

Dearest Mozail,

This is too much—now you won't even respond to my letters any more! Please don't take everything I write so seriously, darling. You know that I still love you from the bottom of my heart, and I'd do anything for you. I know that you say these painful things to test my love, not because it pleases you to see me suffer. Do write to me, and put me out of my misery.

Yours,
Tarlochan Singh

10 February 1947

My Darling Sikh,

When will you ever understand me? I suppose I should give up even trying to put some sense into that giant stuffed turban of yours that I love so much.

I didn't show up on Friday because the protest march went on for another day, so I had to take the Sunday train instead. And I'm hale and hearty, just as promised. I wasn't trying to punish you by not writing back, it's just that I was really tired from Deolali and in no mood to write or go out.

How about taking the local up to Mulund this Sunday? I've heard there's a new play by Tilak productions showing there. It's so funny that I'm introducing *you* to Indian theater and art, when you keep calling me a foreigner.

See you soon,
Mozi

15 February 1947

Dearest Mozail,

I read in the newspaper today that yesterday was Valentine's Day, a day to celebrate love and lovers. In the west, lovers exchange gifts and promises on February 14, to commemorate the sacrifice of St Valentine who died for helping lovers in mediaeval times. Isn't that such a romantic story? It is said that couples who are together on this day and pray to God will remain together forever. I think it's very appropriate that we went out yesterday—now I see that our union must be blessed.

You too must pray to your God that our love stays strong. I don't like the way you constantly ridicule my religion. I think you should respect my Sikhism, just like I respect your Jewish faith. I know you don't believe in these spiritual things very much, but my experience from life tells me that faith helps at times when it counts. You'll thank me for this advice one day.

Sat Naam Vahe Guru,
Tarlochan

19 February 1947

Tarlochan Singhji,

Whoever stuffed your head with all these religious ideas? Was it your parents? I don't understand how you can possibly argue that faith is everything. Just look around you, or read the news. In Europe, Hitler is butchering Jews, wiping out millions in his concentration camps. And even here, at home, I feel that evil things are brewing. Jinnah and the Hindu Mahasabha are rabble-rousing in the north, inflaming Hindus

and Muslims against each other where they have lived in harmony for hundreds of years. Your Mahatma Gandhi's passive resistance is no good when our own people fall on each other like hungry wolves. And here you are, singing sweet lullabies about Valentine's day! Shame on you.

I'll tell you what, Tarloch. You keep asking me to marry you, to 'become one with you.' Well, I'll grant your wish. I was serious when I said today that you would look dishy if you were to cut off your beard. If you forswear Sikhism, *I will marry you!*

Love and kisses,
Mozail

22 February 1947

Mozail,

Could you come to see me some time today? I'm not feeling very well, and I have something to show you.

Tarlochan

24 February 1947

Mozail,

So, what did you think? Now that I've given you your pound of flesh and cut off my beard, it's time for you to keep your end of the bargain. I'll be waiting for you outside your office at 5:00pm, near the usual taxi stand. Don't forget to dress nicely; this is a solemn occasion!

Yours impatiently,
Tarlochan Singh

4 March 1947

You heartless bitch!

How could you lead me on and play with me like this? I made a fool of myself, standing outside your office in Fort in my best suit-pant, while you were off gallivanting with that bastard Michael from Deolali! Fuck you, and fuck all your heathen kind! We need more Hitlers to save the world from women like you.

I hope you have a miserable life, and that I never have to see you again. I am going to be a good Sikh and atone for the sin of loving you. Perhaps the Gurus shall forgive me some day. Goodbye.

Tarlochan Singh

~ POSTSCRIPT ~

7 March 1947

Dear Diary,

Where shall I find solace? I, loved, hated, desired, misunderstood—I, Mozail. Tarlochan loved me for my swelling breasts and my ready humor, and I him for his simple mind. We got along so wonderfully for the first few months. Why do men always want control? I tried to give him everything I could, but I knew he wasn't ready for me yet. We wouldn't have been happy together, I know—that was how it ended the last time.

It's nightmarish, the way life repeats itself. And I have to wonder each time, is it my fault? Did I go too far when I told him I would marry him? And I meant it too. If he had left his faith, I would have stayed with him. But cutting off a beard does not unmake thirty years of being a Sikh. He was still the same man, only handsomer.

I see the cycle beginning again, with Michael this time, and I fear the end. He laughs and jokes, he approves the 'women's lib' movement, but so what? Still, I see the old, familiar streaks. Will I ever find a man who can fulfill me? I can dream. . .

Mozail

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