

That One

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Translated from Urdu by

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When his eyes opened, he was unaware of the time.

He stretched his right hand and picked up a pack of cigarettes from the bedside table, and held one between his lips.

After throwing away the pack of cigarettes, he stretched his hand again and searched for a matchbox.

The matchbox was empty.

He tossed the empty matchbox in the room.

The empty matchbox hit the ceiling and fell to the floor.

He switched on the table lamp.

Four or five matchboxes were lying haphazardly on the bedside table.

One by one, he looked at each of them.

They were all empty.

He threw off the quilt and switched on the light of the room.

It was 2 a.m.

The floor was cold like ice.

It is 2 a.m. now. I was unaware of the time; I was thinking that it was going to be morning soon.

How was my sleep disturbed today at this untimely hour?

Once sleep gets disturbed, it is not possible to get back to it!

He rummaged the entire room.

Book-shelf, trash-bin, trouser-pockets, jacket-pockets ... he did not find a matchbox anywhere.

He overturned every single book but he did not find even a matchstick.

The condition of the room worsened.

Books were lying haphazardly, clothes were lying hither and thither, and the trunk was lying open.

What if anyone visits at this hour?

It is 2 a.m. at night... and such is the condition of the room!

The cigarette was quivering between his lips.

How similar are a lit cigarette and a beating heart!

Where can I find a matchbox?

What if I don't find it ...?

Perhaps...

My beating heart might stop!

How did my sleep get disturbed today at this odd hour!

I was unaware of the time.

It is difficult to sleep again if sleep gets disturbed.

Where can I find a matchbox?

He put a bedsheet on his shoulder and came out of his room.

It was a chilly December night. The darkness ruled and the silence guarded.

He stood in the middle of the road for a few seconds before proceeding in any direction.

When he started walking, he was not familiar with the way.

It was a dark night; it was a silent night. As far as eyes could see, no one was visible.

The dim light of the lampposts was exacerbating the darkness and the silence of the night.

And ...

His feet halted at the crossroad.

There was bright light here as the milky-white tube lights were shining, however, the silence still prevailed as all the shops were closed.

He started moving towards the sweetmeat seller's shop.

It might be possible to find a lump of coal in the furnace – an ember or a piece of half-extinguished ember.

On the platform of the sweetmeat seller's shop, like a bundle, someone was sleeping under a quilt.

No sooner he peeped inside the furnace, the bundle on the platform unbundled.

"Who is that? What are you doing?"

"I am looking for an ember inside the furnace."

"Are you mad? The furnace is cold now!"

"Then what?"

“Then what! Go home!”

“Do you have a matchbox?”

“A matchbox?”

“Yes, I need to light my cigarette.”

“You are insane! Bugger off! Don't disturb my sleep. Go!”

“So, you don't have a matchbox?”

“The owner has the matchbox. He comes in the morning and lights the furnace.. Run along.”

He returned to the road.

The cigarette was quivering between his lips.

He started moving.

The crossway was left behind; the bright lights were left behind – everything was left behind!

He was taking steps at a fast speed.

Lamppost... lamppost... lamppost... countless lampposts were left behind. Dimly lit lampposts – those that darken the darkness and deepen the silence of the night.

All of a sudden, his feet stopped.

Someone was coming from the other direction.

He reached near him and stopped.

“Do you have a matchbox?”

“Matchbox?”

“I need to light my cigarette.”

“No, I don't have a matchbox. I have kept away from this addiction.”

“I thought...”

“What did you think?”

"That you might have a matchbox."

“I don’t have a matchbox. I have saved myself from this addiction; I am going to my home, as should you”

He started walking.

The cigarette was quivering between his lips.

He was walking at a slow pace as he was tired.

Unaware of the time, his weary steps were trudging along.

He came across the lampposts; he could see the patches of dim lights followed by darkness. And then again, he could see the lampposts, the patches of dim lights followed by darkness.

Holding the cigarette between his lips, he was taking steps slowly.

The urge to inhale smoke deep down to his lungs had become intense.

His entire body was fatigued.

He was feeling cold in his nightsuit and bedsheet.

He was shivering and was moving slowly with trembling feet. Unaware of time, unaware of the lampposts ...

Once again, his feet halted.

A warning sign was before his eyes.

A bridge was before him – the bridge that needed repair.

A lantern wrapped in red cloth was hanging from a board right in the middle of the road to avoid accidents.

No sooner he took a step to light his cigarette from the wick of the lantern ...

“Who is that?”

He kept mum.

In the darkness, emerging out from some strange layer, a constable pounced on him.

“What were you doing?”

“Nothing...”

“I am asking you, what were you doing?”

“Do you have a matchbox?”

“I am asking you what were you doing there, and you are asking for a matchbox...Who are you?”

“I have to light my cigarette. If you have a matchbox then...!”

"You were doing something here."

“I wanted to light my cigarette with the wick of the lantern...If you have a matchbox ...”

“Who are you?... Where do you live?”

“I...”

“Where do you live?”

“Model Town!”

“And you need a matchbox...you live in Model Town...Where is Model Town?”

“Model Town!”

He turned and pointed in a direction.

There was darkness as far as eyes could see.

“Come with me to the police station...Model Town...? Model Town is ten miles away from here ... you want a matchbox. Right? You will get it at the police station.”

The constable held his hand.

He went with the constable.

The police station was on the same unending road.

He entered a room of the police station with the constable

In the room, many people were sitting around a big table.

They were all smoking cigarettes.

Many packets of cigarettes and matchboxes were lying on the table.

"Sir, this man was standing near the bridge. He says that he lives in Model Town, and he is asking for a matchbox repeatedly.

"What man!"

"If you permit, may I use your matchbox? I need to light my cigarette."

"Where do you live?"

"Model Town. Can I borrow your matchbox?"

"What do you do?"

"I am a stranger! Can I take the matchbox...?"

"Since when have you been living in Model Town?"

"From three months! ... matchbox ..."

"Matchbox... matchbox... You son of a...! ... weirdo ... return to your home now ... otherwise, I will arrest you ... matchbox ...?"

When he came out of the police station, he was dead tired.

He started trudging through on the unending road.

His nose started running, and his body was giving up.

Smoking is a disease!

Why am I nurturing this disease?

Where will I find a matchbox?

What if I don't find it?

He was unaware of the time; he was unaware of the lampposts; he was unaware of the road; he was unaware of his own body!

He was stumbling and was moving ahead.

His tottering feet exhibited some sort of intoxication.

Morning broke; he halted for a moment.

He stopped for a moment and controlled himself.

He controlled himself, and as he was about to take a step ...

Someone was coming from the other direction; his steps were tottering.

He came and stopped near him.

A cigarette was quivering between his lips.

“Do you have a matchbox?”

“Matchbox?”

“So, you don't have a matchbox?”

“Even I was looking for a match....”

He walked away without listening to what he has to say.

Ahead, in the same direction from where he had just come.

He took his step.

Ahead, in the direction from where he had come.

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First published as “Woh” in *Surkh-o-Siyah* (Ed. By Sarwarul Hoda, Educational Publishing House, Delhi, 2004)