

MAGIC

By

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She was the perennial wallflower in the new class. The new class called intercollegiate, lasting for two years, was the period after the completion of high school and before admission into college. It was a girls only institution and she was part of the new class consisting of eighty sixteen-year-olds. In all probability, I would have never remembered her. She just blended with the crowd. Dark complexioned and plump. "Unforgivable" according to the Indian List of Sins We Are Born With. Of course, a girl could overcome the sins of skin and weight if she was bright and excelled in academics. Oh...these days ...one might include sports too. But she wasn't great at either.

But then life's like that. Unfair. One accepts it and moves on. The first few months of the new class were spent in making friends. Gradually, groups emerged and most of the girls stuck to their groups. The rich restricted their interaction with the rich, the nerds with the nerds and the average invisibles who constituted the largest population formed their groups randomly depending on whom they liked. The few remaining ones looked lost, and nobody wanted them in their groups. So, they hung around with each other and formed an unorganized cluster. They were The Leftovers. She was a member of The Leftovers. Unnoticed. Non-existent.

It was towards the end of the first semester that the class teacher decided on the production of a musical play.

"Who would like to act in it?" she asked.

Those who were part of the drama society raised their hands. Good looking confident girls.

"Well...I'm going to need dancers too. Who all are interested? Preference will be given to those knowing how to dance or taking dancing lessons."

A few girls raised their hands. It was an expected show of hands. Naina who loved to dance to Bollywood hits and had garnered attention since the welcome party for the freshers. Anupama who had started taking classical dance lessons and wouldn't stop talking about it. Enthusiastic Parul who wanted to take part in everything. Finally, She. The perennial wallflower.

Everyone looked surprised. One didn't expect The Leftovers to be dancing in a theatrical production.

The teacher signaled to her. I thought it was a polite way to gloss over the fact she had forgotten the wallflower's name.

"So...do you dance? Are you attending dance classes to learn?"

"No Ma'am," she answered softly and paused. "I mean...yes. I dance. But I don't attend dance classes to learn. I teach dance."

There was undisguised surprise on the teacher's face.

"Teach? What dance?" she asked.

"Bharatnatyam," she replied.

Bharatnatyam? One of the oldest classical dance forms originating in Tamil Nadu in India. A mix of disbelief, skepticism and awe was tangible in the air.

"When did you start learning?" the teacher queried curiously.

"At the age of four."

One could hear a few sharp intakes of breaths and exclamations at her statement.

"OK. I'll be holding the auditions at lunch break today in the auditorium. Be there," the teacher said smiling. "This is really impressive."

A few titters could be heard as the teacher dismissed the class.

"Where the heck does she teach dance?"

"Poor thing...is that how she helps out the family financially? Teaching dance?"

Of the seventy-five girls present that day, sixty girls made it to the auditorium to watch the auditions. A panel of teachers sat in front facing the stage. Neha, Meeta and Parul put up their show accompanied by music from a phone of one of the teachers. Polite applause greeted them. It was finally her turn. She stepped onto the stage. Sanskrit *shlokas* rang out from the phone. Her posture suddenly became erect. She rolled back her shoulders, lifted her elbows, and moved her hands and fingers to start with the prayer thanking God and nature. She wasn't the wallflower anymore. Nor an invisible. Nor a Leftover. She was Dance. Mesmerizing. Her hands moved with the grace of rivulets gurgling on the way to mingle with the expanse of the ocean. Her eyes lit up with fire. Her knees bent and her feet stomped like the wind, undeterred and free. Bharatnatyam is a dance to worship Lord Shiva. No one really understood the intricate and precise meaning of the dance conveyed through minute gestures and movement of the body, but she embodied the spirituality of worship. Is that what you called poetry in motion?

There was a quiet in the air as she closed the dance recital with a *namaskaram* and stood gazing at the audience. Her eyes no longer had that luster. Her limbs stood stiff. She bowed at the ovation that erupted in the audience. Unruffled. Tranquil at being a wallflower again.

We walked back to the class. It was difficult to spot her in the crowd. I called out to her.

"Hey! How did you do it?" I asked.

She turned to look at me. "Do what?" she asked.

"What you did on stage...you just transformed into another person."

She shrugged. "I love it. That's all."

"Whatever it was....it was sheer magic...err...ahem," I paused.

She smiled. "Thanks," she nodded. "It's Moushumi. My name is Moushumi."

TERMINOLOGY:

bharatnatyam: a classical form of dance originating in Tamil Nadu, India.

namaskaram: prayer and greetings to God, guru, and audience before beginning and after closing of a dance piece in Bharatnatyam.

shloka: A Sanskrit word referring to a verse, proverb, hymn, or poem that uses a specific meter. It is considered the classic basis for epic Indian poetry as its use is widespread in traditional Sanskrit verse.

Author Biography

Sushma R.Doshi completed her undergraduate in History from Loreto College, Kolkata. She went on to acquire a master's degree, MPhil, and PhD in International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She dabbles in writing fiction and poetry. Her work has been published by *Contemporary Literary Review India*, *Green Shoe Sanctuary*, *Emblazoned Soul*, *Impspired*, *International Human Rights Art Festival*, *Indian Periodical*, *Writefluence* and *Culture Cult Magazine and Press* amongst others.