

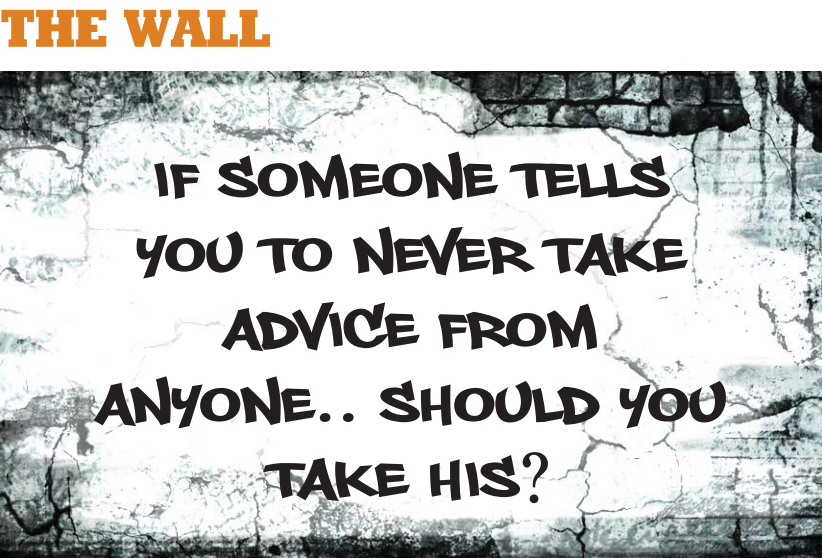


# Dhaulti's Painful Waiting

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This is not a short story or an essay. I do not know in which genre of literature does this piece of writing fall in? It is a simple, genuine and heart-felt narration of my conversation with a peahen, who hails from the same village to which I belong to. Her name is Dhaulti or the 'White One'. I keep bumping into her whenever I visit my village. You can assume that by now we have made good friends with each other. I am a regular visitor to my village which lies tucked away in one corner of the Great Indian Desert or the Thar. Since my village lies along the western slopes of the Aravalli Mountain Range, it occupies a relatively greener tract of the Thar Desert lying sandwiched between seasonal streams flowing down from the mountains. During a good monsoon, our lands get quite well-watered and the resultant greenery, despite being short-lived, lets us forget the rigors of the desert for a few months. This year happens to be one such year and we have been blessed with abundant rains. My village is looking like a nikhistan.

Usually, when I visit my village and stay in the beautiful, little castle which



I have known Dhaulti for quite some time now. She is a chirpy and gay creature who rarely gets perturbed. What was it that was making her wreathe in pain like this? While standing atop the roof, my face was turned towards the direction of the Imli tree and despite the considerable distance between the tree and the castle, Dhaulti's cries were clearly audible. Something was utterly bothersome to her. Her wailing had become so heart wrenching that without making any effort, her grief exerted a strange pull on me. Enough was enough! I decided. I had to get to the bottom of the matter. My anxieties and concern for my friend's agony were overwhelming me now. I climbed atop the pony wall, shouted aloud calling out to her in a typical sound imitating a peahen's scream and asked her to fly to me. Sometimes experiencing the bliss of a conversation with a friend is all one needs.

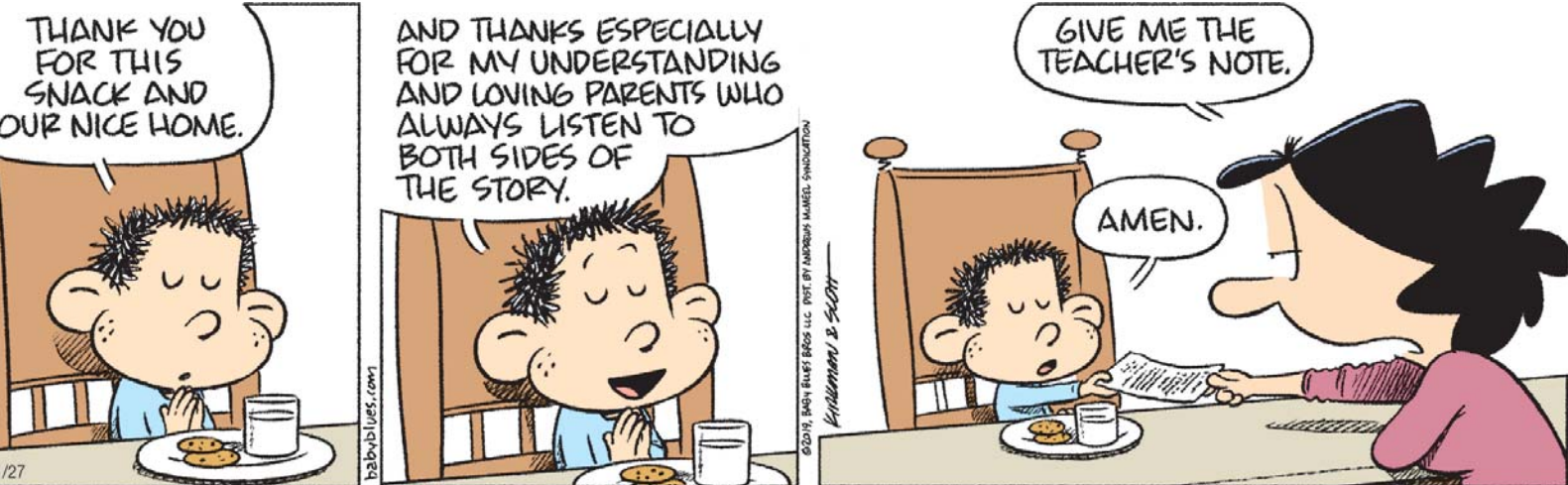
## #SAWAN

her shoulder and seemed conspicuously dejected. It was clear to me that she was upset about something and I didn't want to pester her any further. I drove off quickly because after having a happy evening, my cool bed was beckoning me. On full moon nights like these, beds laid out on the terrace floor and covered with white cotton sheets become so cool that when you lay your tired frames on them, you feel like taking a dip in a bath tub filled with rose water.

So, I returned, changed my clothes quickly, asked for a kunja (water) of water for myself, took leave from my helper and retired to my bed. After making myself comfortable on the bed, I got busy checking my phone. The inebriation flowing out of a few posts on Instagram, engaging videos on YouTube and some interesting messages on WhatsApp soon engulfed me and transported me into a La La Land.

Just then, very close to the striking of the 12 o' clock gong, the raucous cooing started echoing from the distant Imli tree located near the village temple. There was a strange restlessness and melancholy in Dhaulti's voice that night. The pain and pathos of her voice imparted a spooky appearance to the silver washed night marked by a black and white contrast. The huge white moon whose light was fading and flickering due to the hasty flow of the floating clouds around it, also appeared to be agitated. There was a compelling sense of uneasiness in her voice, so much so that it was difficult to ignore it. Her boisterous shrieks urged me to detach myself from the phone and I sprang up from the bed like a cork. I walked up to the edge of the roof and stood near the pony wall on the terrace with my palms placed on it. I have known Dhaulti for quite some time now. She is a chirpy and gay creature who rarely gets perturbed. What was it that was making her wreathe in pain like this? While standing atop the roof, my face was turned towards the direction of the Imli tree and despite the considerable distance between the tree and the castle, Dhaulti's cries were clearly audible. Something was utterly bothersome to her. Her wailing had become so heart wrenching that without making any effort, her grief exerted a strange pull on me. Enough was enough!

## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



## World Puppetry Day

Step into a world of imagination with puppetry. From simple hand puppets to elaborate marionettes, these lovable characters will delight audiences, young and old. Come join the show and let the magic begin! While it can take on a variety of different forms, puppetry involves creating animation from inanimate objects, with the purpose of telling a story. Puppetry has been used for thousands of years to communicate ideas theatrically, whether in a comedic, dramatic, political or tragic fashion. World Puppetry Day is here to celebrate the creativity and art.



me. One word of assurance from him and I can wait for a lifetime for the fructification of our togetherness. I am willing to walk that extra mile by conceding to him the comfort that even if any fructification cannot be possible tangibly, a mere mind-bond is enough for me. If not Rukmini, I am happy being his Radhika but I am not capable of becoming his Meera."

Dhaulti let out a big sigh and a long pause followed thereafter. She had expressed her state of mind so articulately and beautifully. Grief has the power to lend even the most reticent creatures, the ability of impeccable expression, a skill that no other emotion in the world is capable of bestowing. My heart went out to her and I was touched by her despondency which she carried, none the less, with remarkable grace and élan. How deeply she felt? How unfathomably she loved? How patient and intense was her longing? No wonder, the cooing of this peahen is so penetrating and so forlorn. I believe that in the age of 'Artificial Intelligence', the age of social media and the age of 'gadgets galore' in the twenty-first century, humans are rendered incapable of feeling so genuinely for someone. The options are way too many. Can there be a man today who can wait so long for his beloved who lives so distant and so far away from him? Can there be a woman, who can love like Dhaulti?

With a heavy heart, I hugged Dhaulti. I offered her help. I told her that when I return to Jaipur, I shall try to find Raju and reach out to him. As a true friend, I decided that in this love-story, I shall play the role of a perfect Prem-dhoti (Messenger of love) and pull her out of this misery. When I confided my plan to her, she got a bit anxious. She exclaimed

with worry. "But what if you actually meet him and he denies his love for me?" I replied, "All the more better! Didn't you yourself say just now that you were left in the lurch? A denial will set you free. And an affirmation will light up your soul and being. So, kindly allow me to do what I think is the best for you."

This time Dhaulti gave me a bear hug. I asked her to give me some clue as to how to identify Raju? She said, "Oh! Trust me you will recognise him the moment you see him. He is the most gorgeous peacock ever to exist!"

"Relax Dhaulti! It is you who are besotted with him, not me. I can find better peacocks than him, any day. And, by the way, why the hell will I find any peacock for myself? Come out of your obsession for him and tell me something practical," I said.

"OK! Raju wears a golden ring in his left foot."

The next morning, I drove back to Jaipur and resumed my teaching at the University. Since then, it has become my daily habit to go for a walk in the campus looking for Raju. I carry a binocular with me and whenever I see a gorgeous peacock, I try to look for a golden ring in its left foot. Alas! I have not been able to find him so far. If you come across one, please ping me.....

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## #REVIEW

## Crown Royal Roots

The Pan Shots – a sweet liqueur made from gulkund is divine – now especially as the mercury rises. It was once considered the elixir of life when temperatures in the Thar became life threatening. Gulkund to date is best made in Pushkar, with the petals of pink desi Gulab where it's cultivation is done on a commercial scale.



Social media, food bloggers and even Zomato, a multinational restaurant food aggregator site should be taken with a handful of salt. Or how else do you explain the exclusion of Royal Roots - a fine dining restaurant of Crown Plaza, from the list of white table cloth restaurants in Jaipur on the social media?

Royal Roots, as the name suggests, delivers a range of Awadhi cuisine together with the local flavours. The table ware, the cutlery, the lay out, the ambience is not only upscale but unique.



Pan Shots

The usual suspects of Paneer items are all there but the Kandhari Paneer Tikka, marinated in yellow mustard sauce, added to this, the beetroot pomegranate seeds, roasted in clay oven turns it into a saliva inducing signature Kandhari dish.

The Nadrooki Shammi or a Lotus stem braised patties stuffed with cheese is as enticing as Mahi Kagzi Tikka, Tandoori Jhinga, the Royal Root Galauti Kebab. The latter are soft lamb patties with a distinct taste of cloves and other masalas that are essential ingredients in the quintessential Indian Khada Garam Masala.

For non-vegetarians, the fare is as flavoursome as it is fulfilling. The Khade Masala Murg and Avadhi Murg Biryani stuffed scented chicken in Basmati rice cooked on slow charcoal fire is combo to savour.

The lacarte menu of Royal Roots is curated for a five course meal - as any fine dining restaurant should have.

Some of the most popular dishes mentioned in the reviews are Murg Masala Korma, Sab Dum Biryani and Chule Ka Shikar. The latter is tender lamb meat cooked in

wood fired Bhatti. Korma is saffron scented chicken. What gives the Royal Root it's distinctive taste? Be it Dal makhani, Rajgharano Ka Sag or the non-veg-fare is the generous but judicious use of Khada Garam Masala and Royal Root signature gravy.

Add to this, the copper vessel and wood fired chulha's slow cooking, that gives the food-fare an authentic flavour. The Dal Makhani for once is just right. It is a pity that a city with overwhelming majority of foodies who love their meat and mutton is yet to discover Royal Roots.

It's vegetarian repertoire is as inviting as it is innovative. The Warqi Malai Parantha, Jafran Tattah - the latter is a flat round Persian bread, though resembling a Naan, is much softer, lighter and fluffier. The presence of selenium makes it a hot favourite with fitness freaks as it ups the good cholesterol - HDL.

The Pan Shots – a sweet liqueur made from gulkund is divine – now especially as the mercury rises. It was once considered the elixir of life when temperatures in the Thar became life threatening. Gulkund to date is best made in Pushkar, with the petals of pink desi Gulab, where it's cultivation is done on a commercial scale.

Desserts in the bygone era in this part of the world were neither many nor were they exotic. More often than not, it was Laddoos, Halwa, kheer and sweet rice. The latter being a sole preserve of the



Dal makhani

well-heeled, as rice in the dessert was once a delicacy.

The desserts section is somewhat limited to kulfi, rasmalai and gulabjamuns. One could do with some regional specialties like coin ghehar or token sized Mawa kachoris or even malpua!

Yet next time round, you look for a royal culinary experience and service, head to the "Crown" nestled beautifully in the Plaza.

So, refresh the culinary heritage of the Thar and celebrate the more , gastro-nomic traditions of the region.

