

Autumn Reminiscence

~~~ *Lanunochit Pongen*

It was late autumn and Tekasenla was rummaging through her cabinet searching for a stapler to staple her son's school assignment and something caught her eyes, a rich, rusk brown leather album and she lifted it up. It was her wedding photo album which in the bustle of life she has not looked into after her whirlwind and dream-like marriage ten years ago. A mysterious smile, the Mona Lisa smile lit up the corner of her mouth as she remembered her wedding day and in a daydream it took her back to old memories, archived in the mind and coming back like a forgotten song suddenly with gusto and she went down memory lane.

It was Wednesday, December 10, 2008, time 11: a.m., in Dimapur, Nagaland the day that she wedded her husband. Both of them were young; who was more nervous or happier she could not tell but she knew for certain that she had made the right choice when she saw the proud gleam in her husband's eyes. Unlike a December, it was warm and the day pleasant but early in the morning there was a light drizzle and she was worried that it might turn into a rainy day but the sun opened up after some time and her mother-in-law said that it was a sign that they are making a good beginning and that even nature was acknowledging it. The marriage ceremony and her day went smoothly and deep inside she was glad for it and said many silent prayers throughout the day.

The pastor solemnized their wedding. He was an ordinary looking man, not tall, unassuming and more on the reticent side to be a public figure but one thing about him that people acknowledge was that he had the kindest eyes and they say that the eyes do not lie and he was true to his profession. His wife supplemented him perfectly.

After Tekasenla and her husband stepped out of the church, they had arranged food for their well-wishers and the pastor and his wife shepherded them to the stage arranged for them and they smiled and shook hands with all the people who came to the wedding. They even had kind words for some and complimented others and the day wore on. Tekasenla was really impressed with the pastor and his wife for she was new to them as she came from another church and married in her husband's church. She thought at that time that they were really called to their profession. The sun went down.

Next day, early in the morning, news filtered in, at first incoherently but later on with certainty that something had happened to the pastor's family, more precisely to his son. The pastor's pride and his only weakness, if it can be called that is his love of his only son and child, now a grown young man, tall and handsome unlike his father and with a more distinguished career. He was a captain in the Indian army, serving in Chhattisgarh. The young captain before the dawn set in took his soldiers and on foot set out into the chill air. What was supposed to be a routine duty taking his soldiers under his command for patrolling turned out to be otherwise. The Bastar district air filled with gun smoke and everywhere there were fireworks and when it settled down the captain was down in the middle of the street with a neat hole in his heart and with all his worldly cares gone forever. They were ambushed by naxalites (Maoist Insurgents in Chhattisgarh, India) and on that day they were the victors and the victims the soldiers. They were bringing the dead body with due honour and on a special flight directly from Chhattisgarh. Many prominent leaders and elders of the town went to the airport to receive the deceased body and the captain was buried with great respect and that was the end of his life's journey on earth.

Tekasenla shivered and tears fell down her cheeks and she did not care to wipe it off. She was paying homage to the memory of the captain but more importantly to his parents. It was the talk of the town for months and people remembered it for years and maybe it would be handed down and become a legend too.

On the day of her wedding, the pastor's son was lying lifeless and cold on the earth in a faraway state. The higher authorities in the army had already conveyed the message to the pastor about the loss of his son in the encounter. It was way before the time of Tekasenla's marriage. The pastor and his wife had decided that there would not be twin unhappiness on that day and they would not spoil the special day of two young people. So, they requested the army to send their dead son's body the next day only and so Tekasenla had a memorable and happy wedding. Tekasenla remembered the grit, the sacrifice and calmness of the pastor and his wife and how they even smiled and talked compassionately with the

wedding guest. Everyone talked how they could mingle and smile the whole day with their only child dead many miles away from home and many talked in the superlatives that they were not humans but angels of God and so normal feelings of the world does not shake them. The truth was that, on that day after the sun has set and when they were alone in their room, they clung to each other, trying to console each other and were numb with grief.

After all the troubled times had settled down in the pastor's house, Tekasenla and her husband went to their house to offer their gratitude for making their day memorable and at the same time to console the grieving parents. At the gate, as they were leaving, Tekasenla held on the pastor's arm and looked him in the eyes and asked him with a searing eagerness if his faith was still intact after he has lost what was dearest to him and if he found any meaning and purpose in life. The pastor calmly and with a serene smile said to her, "...let the dead bury their own dead". Matthew 8:22. In a nutshell it summed up his whole life and his understanding of a higher purpose in this world. If only she can find that secret of serendipity in her life. She will try....

*~~~ Lanunochit Pongen is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Dimapur Government College Dimapu: Nagaland. Email Id: lanunochit@gmail.com*