

Acquaintance

WE both live in the same house.

I have no way of knowing whether he's aware of my presence or not; nevertheless, I often see him visiting various nooks and crannies around the place.

I don't know how long he's been here, but not much time has gone by since my one-sided acquaintance with him began. A couple of months ago I saw him on the kitchen floor, struggling with a morsel of food much larger than he was, and with a sense of pleasant surprise I lauded his perseverance and zeal. Then a few of his comrades moved in, and after dragging the morsel to them and delegating the work, he meandered off to some distant turf as if he had to attend to more pressing matters. I failed to understand why he chose to take off in a different direction when his abode was somewhere close to the kitchen and there was an abundant supply of food in the immediate vicinity! My curiosity increased greatly. I started tracking him and he promptly traversed the grounds of the portico making his way to the courtyard ... but then he vanished from my sight beneath the tall blades of grass.

After a few days I saw him descending from a tree on the edge of the courtyard. No doubt he was returning after an excursion to each and every branch and leaf. I wondered what it was that elicited such feverish searching from him. It seemed as if he was a restless being who had embarked on an odyssey to unveil deep mysteries and explore new worlds. My interest in him kept on multiplying and I began journeying vast distances around my own house along with him, passing through unscalable mountains, dark, forbidding caves, deep forests, foaming rivers and sprawling oceans. I often traversed the seas on a leaf or a blade of grass. The flapping of some bird's mighty wings would conjure up a storm of dust, sweeping me away in its whirlwind, and I would land back on the ground after sliding down the pinnacle of some mountain, descending

through the unending expanse of my surroundings. Residing in his form, a cognizance of my true existence eluded me, but at the same time it was an extremely invigorating experience. I would try recalling my past existence but it couldn't be encompassed by my minuscule brain. I wanted to see far into the distance from some lofty summit, but I couldn't see a thing beyond a few inches. Then I would start feeling restless and would thrash around wanting to return into my own body!

After several long days, dark clouds reigned in the sky. Along with a cool, moist breeze, the first raindrops announced their arrival. I was arranging and organizing the things sitting in the courtyard, when the thought of him crossed my mind—lest he was venturing out in this season! I found my binoculars and began to look for him. After searching a while I found him roaming on the parapet of the terrace. But the rain became stronger before I could reach there and he probably sought shelter in a nearby crevice.

It rained all night. Water and earth became one. I was thinking about him constantly. Who knows, the crevice may have been totally overrun by water! Who knows, he might be miserable with pangs of hunger and thirst! He might be cold or be shivering with fear!

The next morning arrived with sunshine and I set out again to look for him. I looked in every nook and corner but he was nowhere to be found. Feeling dejected, I was about to give up the search when my eyes came to rest on the water accumulated around the drain. I stepped forward to remove the sprigs and other obstacles from the mouth of the drain and the stagnant water began gushing toward it unhindered. Suddenly I saw him trapped in the current. He was being propelled in the direction of the drain. I reacted quickly and rescued him.

I had this uncontrollable desire to make him aware of the immense danger he had been in and of the immense favor I had done him in giving him a new lease on life. But alas, there was an insurmountable barrier which prevented communication between the two of us. We could neither address each other nor acquire information about each other. And although I have relatively more knowledge about him, I still get him confused with someone else. Even when he's in front of me, I can't say with confidence that he's the same one! Of course, when he happens to be on my shirt collar or when he bites my neck he also has no idea that it is I, his benefactor, the one who has repeatedly retrieved him from the clutches of death and because of whom he is alive and secure. He's not even aware that if I had not erected this house, in which he resides so comfortably, he probably would never have seen the light of day; and if

he happened to have been born somewhere else, he wouldn't even be the one, but someone else entirely. And despite the fact that he doesn't concern himself with the question of how it is that he acquires food with so little effort, the fact remains that he owes his life to these generousities from me. Not only this; if I wished I could blow him away with a single puff of breath, I could pinch him between my fingers in an instant, or crush him to death with one deliberate placement of my foot so that every trace of him would disappear.... If only he were enlightened about all these things!

But alas ... although I can crush him or vanquish him with a fatal puff of air, I can't hear a single word of gratitude from him in return for my munificence. At the same time my intense desire to establish contact with him doesn't consist merely of a longing to hear words of gratitude. There's some other emotion too, which even I don't fully comprehend. It's a dull, melancholic ache: being in the same place, residing in the same house, still we can't establish any communication between us simply because of the difference in our bodily forms and brains. We can't tell tales about each other's worlds.

Time and again I've made a firm resolution to ignore him, to cast him out of my mind and stop thinking about him; but then suddenly I spot him crawling so persistently on the pillow cover or the blanket, along the edge of the dust bin, on the walls or the ceiling ... and I start following him all over again, trying to understand what, after all, the mystery is in this commotion in his life; why abandon the kitchen and the storeroom, why continue exploring places of little value?

I often think up fascinating things about him. For instance: that he's the most intelligent one among his companions and his species, and that one day he gathered everyone together and revealed that a highly exalted Being, namely me, was present somewhere close to them; but everyone mocked him and he was deemed misguided and insane. It's very possible that all of them together subjugated him to force him to retract his claim, or else consume a cup of poison or end up on the gallows.... And now, he has ventured off to map out the world and discover me!

When I see him visiting different rooms and corners, or different cracks and out of the way spaces in the house, my conjectures change into a strong belief that he is truly looking for some very special thing. I have a distinct urge to help him, to make him aware that the one he is looking for all through the house, in the rooms, on the walls, on the ceiling, inside the pots and pans in the kitchen, inside the trunks tucked in the storeroom, on the sofas in the drawing room, among the fresh plants in

the garden, and on each and every brick of the house, is ME ... and I am tangibly present in front of him! But alas, even in my presence, he isn't capable of discerning me, he can't hear my voice. It would be beyond him to even gauge how feeble and inconsequential he is compared to me ... and even if he were granted countless lives and were able to sustain his spirits and his vigor, he still wouldn't be able to attain me.... But at the same time, I'm constantly constrained by my own helplessness and my limited resources which prevent me from communicating my thoughts to him. Despite all the desire and inclination, my acquaintance with him is not to be; I cannot create any extraordinary sensations in his mind!

Sometimes, I imagine that if it is hypothetically accepted that he does sense my presence through sounds, and that he really is on a mission to look for me, then the findings of his great search would be so spectacular... He would think of this house, which he has explored for weeks and months on end, as the whole universe; and they would mock him ruthlessly when he gathered his species together one day and declared that although he had failed to actually set his eyes upon the exalted Being who was present somewhere close to them, all the evidence suggested that it did, nevertheless, exist! ... And when he says this he himself will be under the mistaken impression that he has fathomed the whole world! How can the poor soul know that what he imagines to be the whole universe is a mere house, and there are scores of such houses on a street ... and hundreds of such streets in a city and thousands of such cities on the earth.... If only he could understand and appreciate that, in relation to the whole cosmos, the earth on which such numerous cities sprawl is nothing but an imperceptible granule of sugar, or *Bezamor*, on the kitchen floor! ... But sadly, he himself cannot gain such insight and I cannot impart it to him ... because even though we live in the same house there is no communication between us, nor does there seem to be a possibility for it in the near or distant future. □

—Translated by Riyaz Latif