

# Love is an **abstract** noun

**AHMAD SALEH ABDULLAH**

for SAP

What is love? Ask any ten-year old, she'll say  
Love is an abstract noun wafting  
Flawlessly on the page of a grammar book.  
*Noun. Abstract. That which cannot be touched.*  
But between holding hands and silent sobs  
on wet shoulders,  
Withered and faded petals in fragrant  
letters,  
Blood slowly soaks the page, flames slowly  
turn  
The pages yellow; the edges crumple.  
Emotions gallop in through the sluice gates  
of the sky.  
And what remains is the memory of a lost  
innocence,  
The promise of eternity in your ring  
With the past carved as diamond on top  
of it.  
When clouds array themselves in white  
ribbons

And the dawn wraps itself around you,  
Waves rise in the sea of time  
And the abstract tide stops, falters, spills  
Filling the room with a mercurial gloom.  
The distance is what binds us. The empti-  
ness.  
Why are we as immiscible as the oceans?  
Touching  
At the borders yet never becoming one?  
The tunnel stretches further the closer we  
reach the light.

But *love* is an abstract noun, its ways  
Unknown to our mere mortal hearts,  
And through many a fateful turn  
We become just another Troy ready to  
burn.  
Yet in its name we become martyrs.  
And in words I dream  
Of one kiss on one dying star.

*Abdullah lives in a world as Finnegans Wake  
and talks with Dostoyevsky. Tell him Ça suffit  
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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## Dr Aslan's Husband during a Telephone Call

**ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**

"Hello, Dr Aslan speaking... Oh! My dear Margot, whatever's the matter?"  
Dr Aslan's husband carefully tucked away the sigh that was about to escape him as he watched his wife answer her patient. Giving her a small smile, he went back to his dinner. He was aware of the joy she derived from helping these troubled individuals. He could not begrudge her that.  
"No, no, there is nothing for you to be sorry about, it's nothing... First, tell me what happened."

The daughter of working-class parents, his wife had struggled teeth and bone to acquire the position of a practising psychiatrist. He really was very proud of her. The late-night conversations about her patients they had in bed, both carrying a welcome exhaustion from their respective days — hers spent in her clinic and his running after their two girls — was one of the highlights of his humble life.

"I need you to take a few deep breaths. In and out, just like that."

If Dr Aslan's husband was asked what was the one quality of his wife that he admired the most, he would say it was her kindness. Day after day, she spent countless hours listening to the sufferings of her beloved dears.

"Y-you are having a panic attack... No, there is nothing wrong with you."

The few instances that he had seen her staring off into space, a strangely

blank expression on her face, could only be attributed to the burden she carried from her patients. This was also true for that one incident when he had found Dr Aslan in their dressing room, muttering *monsters* under her breath as she sobbed like he had never seen her sob before. Shocked, he had not known what to think of her sudden bitterness. But now he understood, it was only the rambling of a poor woman feeling sorry for the horrors her patients endured.

"I understand how you are feeling, my dear. You are overwhelmed, your

senses are overstimulated."

Yes, Dr Aslan's husband was married to an exceptional woman. Not only was she to be lauded in her professional sphere, her personal accomplishments were also great. Dr Aslan was, after all, a devoted wife and a caring mother.

"While I can't say the knife was a good idea... Oh no, believe me I am only trying to help."

Despite the fatigue she unquestionably felt after her hours spent at work, she never failed to spend time with her family at night — the night time

belonged to her family alone. Except for the occasional after-hours call she got from her patients. Like now.

"I suggest you not take any hasty steps and wait for the morning."

But her husband couldn't very well tell her not to take those calls. He didn't have any wish of doing so either.

"I really do hope you are sure."

It was true that in the afternoons, while standing in the kitchen preparing lunch for their children, Dr Aslan's husband sometimes let himself wonder what his life could have been like if he hadn't met her. He would probably have been unmarried, employed in a nine-to-five job working towards a retirement plan. But just as he thought he could hear the bustle of unsatisfied employees going about their day, he broke himself out of the reverie.

"Alright, I'll see you tomorrow."

Dr Aslan's husband looked towards his wife as she wrapped up her call and let lose the sigh that he had suppressed at the beginning. But he sighed not for her, nor her unfortunate dear. But for himself. Alas, he thought, Annushka has already spilled the oil.

*Zaima wrote this as a nod to Mark Twain's 'A Telephonic Conversation' and Mikhail Bulgakov's 'The Master and Margarita'. Write to her at zaima2004adrita@gmail.com*

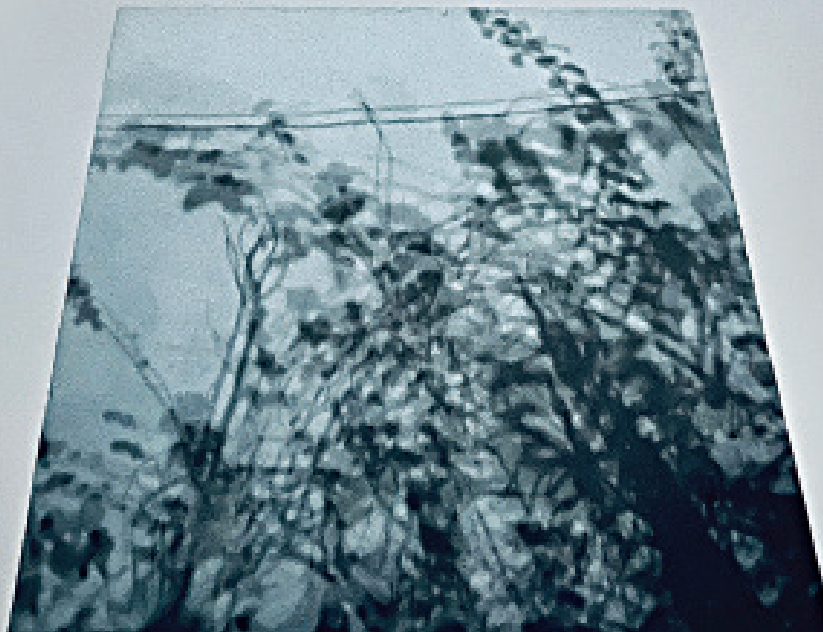


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