

A Cup of Tea

a short story by
Monte Pradhan



Every sip is old smiles and missed chances


A Cup of Tea

(A SHORT STORY BY MONTE PRADHAN)




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Moon and Dreams

I sat that evening, wrapped in a quilt of sorrow, Like dry
leaves scattered in autumn's hollow.



Beneath my pillow, the lines of dreams run deep, Like
tears in rain, silent secrets they keep.

I gaze at the moon, lonely and mild, No longer like her—
just a shadow exiled.

The whispers of stars, like wind echoing far, Like a
broken heart's beat in the cold of night's jar.

Shadows of sadness gather like clouds over me, And in
every dream now, her absence I see.

Even the scent of flowers has grown faint, Like the void
in my world after her restraint.



- Monte Pradhan



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Prologue

Some meetings remain forever incomplete, Some relationships never find words to speak, And some moments... simply dissolve into a cup of tea— Wordless, unfinished.

"A Cup of Tea" is one such story— Of unfulfilled desires that never fade with time, But grow deeper with every passing season. This is a tale of waiting, of quiet emotion, And of that one cup of tea... Where countless memories brew.



A Cup of Tea

“Keshav, you’ve arrived just in time. Snowfall is about to begin in a few days.”

I smiled lightly and replied, “Yes, it’s been many years since I’ve seen falling snow...”

Bishnu chuckled, “There must be something special about that day when it finally does fall.”

We all laughed. My PA, Raghav Nand—older than me, asked seriously, “Sir, you could’ve chosen any district in India, why Srinagar?”

With a knowing smile, I replied, “Let time answer that, Raghav ji. You’ll understand soon enough...”

Keshav Singh ‘Rahi’, newly promoted IAS officer from Delhi, now posted in Srinagar. My hometown was Chamoli, which I had left years ago for education. I had a deep love for music, and so, my home was always filled with the soft hum of the radio. Strangely enough, the radio always played the exact song that mirrored my state of mind.

Today, I sat in the garden of my government bungalow with a few colleagues. Official files were sealed on the table; a cigar in my hand. My friend Bishnu, a commander here, said something, but I didn’t catch it—because just then, the ghazal began playing on the radio:

“Aawaaz de rahi hai meri zindagi mujhko...”

At that exact moment, the watchman whispered a name in my ear: “Radhika Ma’am.”

The name froze me.

No one noticed. Something pulled me toward the door...
And there she stood.

A Cup of Tea
BY MONTE PRADHAN



Kaise sukun paau tuje dekhne ke baad
Ab kya ghazal sunaau tuje dekhne ke baad?
Kaise sukun paau tuje dekhne ke baad?

Aawaz de rahee hai meri zindagi muje
Jaaon main ya naa jaaon tuje dekhne ke
baad?

Kaabe ka ehtiram bhee meri nazar mein hai
Sar kis taraf jhukaau tuje dekhne ke baad?
Ab kya ghazal sunaau tuje dekhne ke baad?

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a cigar. The hand has light purple nail polish. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

A Cup of Tea

How can I find peace, after seeing you again? What ghazal could I recite, after seeing you again? My life itself is calling out to me... Should I stay, or should I walk away, after seeing you again?

It was Radhika— My childhood friend. A meeting after twenty-six long years.

“How are you, Keshav?” she asked politely.

I forced a smile, “Radhika! You here? It’s been so many years... So many questions just flooded my heart.”

She ignored the emotion and quietly handed me an envelope.

“Keshav, my husband’s files have been stuck for months. Some documentation is pending. If you wish... maybe you can help?”

I took the envelope quietly and said only, “Alright.”

Without another word, she turned away.

I stood there, motionless... Like someone had forced me to write a poem without words.

That night, I couldn’t sleep. I kept wondering— “Did I come to this city only for this reason?”

The next morning, I called my driver, got into the Ambassador, and headed to the office.


He stopped the car in front of a sweet shop.

“Sir, it’s your first day. Should I get some sweets for the staff?”

I nodded and opened the newspaper.

As the car began to move again, my eyes caught something.

A school was letting out for the day.



A Cup of Tea

I sat there, simply watching. Perhaps she didn't notice me—maybe her responsibilities made her blind to me.

At the office, everyone congratulated me, offered sweets, welcomed me. But my mind wasn't there.

That night, as I returned home, I couldn't sleep again.

Rain tapped against the balcony railing.

The wind was cold.

But the restlessness inside me was colder.

She had become a habit—like tea.

Something I tried to quit many times... but even when I did, did I really?

Like rain after unfinished words, she lingered.

In every sip, something was left unsaid... even when spoken, what was truly said?

Time had frozen when she came close.

My heart had much to say... but my lips didn't move.

Even after fate brought us together again, the distance remained.

Our eyes held questions, but lips stayed quiet.

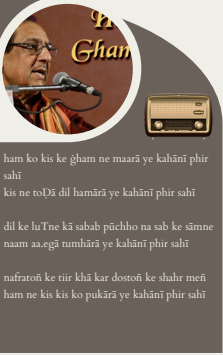
Quietly, I threw a shawl over my shoulders, poured a peg of rum, placed it aside, and picked up my pen.

I was about to write Radhika a letter. But before I began, I paused to think—

Love, in life, walks both the road of tea and of wine.

Tea gives love freshness and yearning... While wine dissolves it into pain and longing. From longing rises desire. And if that desire stays unfulfilled— Then man seeks peace... Peace that never truly arrives.

A Cup of Tea



Ghulam Ali's voice echoed through the radio:

*"Nafraton ke teer khaakar doston ke sheher mein,
Humne kis-kis ko pukaara — yeh kahaani phir sahi..."*

I quietly got up, Felt something stir within, Then reached over and turned off the radio.

"Radhika,

Your husband's file will be cleared soon. But this letter... isn't just about that. Meeting you after so many years brought back everything. If you wish—could you come over for a cup of tea?

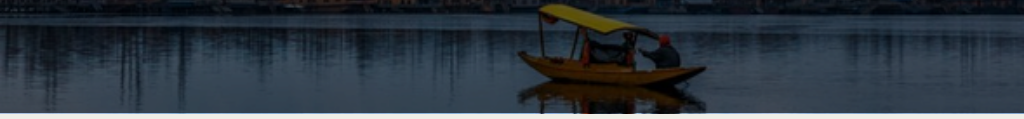
Yours, Keshav."

For two days, I waited. Every knock, every shadow outside stirred hope. But no reply came.

Had I made a mistake? Would she think I was asking something in return for my help?

On the third day, The watchman brought a letter.

A Cup of Tea



“Keshav, I can come tomorrow. Three o’clock. If that works for you...”

I showed no emotion in front of the watchman. But inside—I smiled like a boy.

I knew she would come...

Not for me, perhaps—

But for the gathering, the setting,

The one she was once so used to.

Where the aroma of tea and the rhythm of song

Would gently halt her wandering steps.

A place where even the walls once listened to her silence,

Where every corner waited patiently for her return.

Maybe she still remembers...

Those unfinished words, those smiling silences,

And that one cup of tea—

In which we had once stirred each other completely.

I gave leave to all my house staff that day. I didn’t want anyone to see me with her. Even I wasn’t sure what I’d do when she came...

But still—I waited.

Not for her, maybe... but for that old melody, That fragrance of tea and music she once brought with her.

The walls still remembered her touch. The corners still waited for her presence.

Maybe she remembered too... Those half-spoken words, those smiling silences, And that one cup of tea— In which we had once dissolved into each other.

I paced my room. The hands of the clock seemed frozen. With each minute, my heartbeat rose.

A Cup of Tea

I peeked out the window. Rain had begun to fall. The wind carried a soft chill. And a foggy hope fluttered within me.

I turned the radio on again—maybe an old song would echo my unrest. Lataji's voice flowed through the air:

"Lag jaa gale ke phir yeh haseen raat ho na ho..."

I smiled. Even my smile seemed soaked in memory. I believed—Radhika would come.

And even if she didn't—what then? This longing, this waiting, this silence... they were mine now.

I looked at the clock—3:16 PM. And at that very moment, I saw her... Standing at the door.

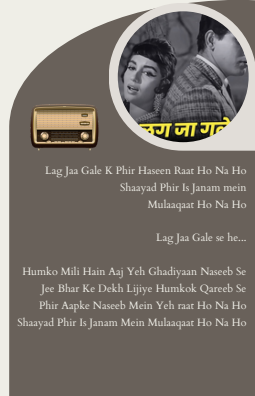
She wore a blue sari, a deep maroon shawl draped around her. Kohl lined her eyes. And that familiar, hesitant smile...

I opened the door. Without a word, she stepped inside. I gestured toward the living room, "Come, let's sit."

As we walked in, I asked softly, "How are you, Radhika?"

She smiled—a real smile this time. One that rose from within. And for a moment, I wondered—was that joy because of me? Or simply the warmth of an old memory?

We spoke of ordinary things— Her family. My work. The city. Things two long-lost friends say when they don't know how to speak of the past.



परिणीत

A Cup of Tea

After fifteen or twenty minutes, I finally asked, “Shall we go upstairs? I’d like you to see the house.”

She nodded, eyes curious. I led her up slowly, pointing out corners, old paintings, shelves.

When we entered my study, her eyes immediately fell on my bookshelf. She walked toward it without hesitation. Her fingers traced the spines. She read titles. Touched covers. Absorbed the texture.

I stood behind her, quietly watching.

Then her eyes paused on one book—Beloved. I reached for it. Just as I did, she turned. Our faces—close. Too close.

She stepped back, flustered. For a brief second, our breath tangled in the quiet between us. She quickly looked away and reached for another book—*Parineeta*.

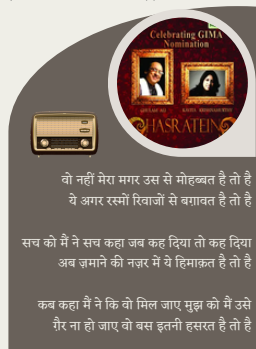
Opening it, she found a dried rhododendron flower inside.
“This flower?” she asked.


I smiled. “Every book I read... I place a flower inside it. When the flower withers, I know the story is complete.”

She looked at me silently. As if understanding the weight of those words.

And maybe—just maybe—she too had kept stories inside, waiting to wither.

Outside, the rain grew heavier. Raindrops lashed against the glass like hurried whispers. The air turned crisper, colder. But inside, it was a different storm.





A Cup of Tea

I broke the silence with a smile. "Let me make us some tea."

She looked at me, amused. "You'll make tea?"

"Yes," I laughed gently. "Our story has always been tied to a cup of tea, hasn't it?"

She nodded. "Alright. I'll wait on the balcony—just five minutes."

I walked into the kitchen. Crushed fresh ginger and cardamom, just the way I remembered she liked it. Boiled the milk slowly. Let the tea leaves simmer. Arranged two cups and carried them to the balcony.

She was seated, watching the rain. Lost in thought.

As I placed the tray, she looked at me with soft seriousness. "Do you smoke?"

"Sometimes," I replied. "But not today. Today feels clean. Like it deserves just tea."

She smiled again—slightly mischievous. "And alcohol? You don't drink either, do you?"


I smirked. "Not really. But yes, there's wine in the house—for guests."

This time, she laughed aloud. Not out of politeness, but with something real. For a moment, we were not forty. We were not burdened. We were just us—twenty again. Sitting there, sipping tea under a rainy sky.

And then... silence returned. Not the awkward kind. The kind that arrives when the heart is full.

I wanted to ask her so much. Wanted to say something. But words had always been strangers between us.

I stood up slowly, leaned on the balcony railing. Watched the water trail down the leaves.



A Cup of Tea

Then, without looking at her, I asked quietly, “How’s your life now? Your marriage?”

She took a moment. And then answered with a soft, sad “It’s fine.” That “fine” didn’t reach her eyes. It sat there between us like an unopened letter.

I nodded, said nothing. The tea was getting cold.

She noticed. “Keshav, I should go now. They’ll be waiting at home.”

I wanted to stop her. Hold her hand. Say something reckless. But I didn’t. I simply pointed toward the door.

She stood up, adjusted her shawl, and walked to the exit.

As she opened the door, Mehdi Hassan’s voice emerged from the radio inside:

“Agar tu ifaakan mil bhi jaaye, teri firaaq ka sadma kam na hoga...”
(If by chance we ever meet again... this ache shall never lessen.)

She paused. Turned back. Our eyes met.

“This won’t be our last cup of tea, Keshav,” she said.

And just like that—she was gone.

To Be Continue in “Again A Cup of Tea”.....



mohabbat karne vaale kam na hoñge
tirī mahfil meñ lekin ham na hoñge

zamāne bhar ke ḡham yā ik tirā ḡham
ye ḡham hogā to kitne ḡham na hoñge

agar tū itirifāqan mil bhī jaa.e
tirī furqat ke sadme kam na hoñge

Last Lines



In the folds of time, some moments quietly hide,
And without a word, they say all that's been denied.

When silence becomes the language of eyes,
A single cup of tea lets forgotten tales rise.

Neither was it a meeting complete, nor a farewell fully done,
Some bonds remain paused—where half-spoken words had
begun.

A faint smile, a silence deep and wide,
And questions unasked, buried inside.

No blame, no longing for reply,
Just a memory that lingers, like a whispered goodbye.
The sweetness of remembrance, the ache of what never came true,
Steeped gently in a teacup, with every sip—something new.

About the Author

My name is Monte Pradhan.

My first book, Raktika – The Sword of Gallant, was based on a fictional historical narrative.

Just a Cup of Tea is very close to my heart. I began writing this story in 2023, but it took time to complete—not because it was just a story, but because I wanted to weave emotions into every line. For me, words are not merely a medium—they carry the weight of every feeling.

If you connected with this story, or if you wish to share your thoughts—I would love to hear from you. I want to read every emotion, understand every experience.

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NOTE: CLICK ON THE SONG TITLE TO LISTEN WHILE YOU READ. 🎵