

# Tame The Mind

An exploration of

Love | Sex | Happiness

A Novel by

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All the characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to the living or dead is coincidental and unintentional.

## Dedication

This Novel is dedicated to my parents. My father, fondly called K.Y, was a legend in his lifetime who instilled in me the love of literature. He introduced me to books in my childhood, bringing me the Enid Blyton series when he returned home after his tours and then helping me graduate to AJ Cronin, Somerset Maugham, and Boris Pasternak.

My mother, Ammu, a homemaker who prodded me to get a good education for then, "I could be independent and not have to ask a man to buy me the things I wanted." She encouraged me to sing and write and surely is my greatest critic.

To my husband, who has held my hand through this journey.

To my friend Bushu, who read my manuscript and gave me the 'go-ahead' nod.

To my friends who have believed in my writing, my philosophy and requested me to write.

For all those writers before me who have inspired me.

“When I sit down to write a book, I don't say to myself; I'm going to produce a work of art. I write because there is some lie, I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.”  
— George Orwell.

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# Prologue

Greed and Generosity will vie with each other.

Love and hate will lie beside each other.

Such is the human mind.

These are stories of human existence, stories of escape from the trappings of the human mind, from the tricks our mind plays with us.

We could imprison our minds by the shackles of our perceived inadequacy or liberate it from the chains holding us, from our diffidence, our fears, our insecurities—for the human mind can enchain the human psyche or emancipate it.

This book is about a woman's exploration of sexuality, relationships, and a quest to define happiness, what love means, what life means, and above all, what matters most.

Perhaps, not for the first time in a novel, the male protagonist and his dilemma as he cruises through life have been brought to light as 'men do not talk about their issues.'

# The Rejected Husband

Neil entered his white picket fenced house, shoulders slumped on his tall, broad frame, briefcase in one hand, the evening shadow following him as he dragged his legs along the long-curved driveway. Fumbling for keys, he looked at his mansion with its three-car garage and immaculately manicured gardens located in the posh suburb of Warren, New Jersey. He felt no joy as he opened the front door and entered his home. Sonia, his wife, looked up, smiled at him, and went back to chatting with her friends on the phone.

“How was your day?” he asked her.

“It was all right,” she answered absentmindedly.

Over the years, their conversations had plateaued. That night as most nights, they ate dinner in silence.

That night as most nights, he initiated the sex, fearing her moods, her rejection. Perhaps she was tired or had a confabulated headache. That night she acquiesced to his relief.

Sonia lay on her back, waiting for the sex to get over, her mind racing through the myriad chores she needed to

get done the next morning. He knew as he had known through the ten years of their marriage that she was not present. He kissed her neck, her breasts, wanting some foreplay, all of which irked her.

"You looked, ravishing in the green dress this morning," he said, hoping flattery and sweet talk would stimulate her.

She was pleased. "I am glad you find me pretty after ten years."

"Do you find me good looking?" he enquired, needing some affirmations.

"I have never liked the thick lips and the paunch you have."

His libido began to ebb. "Is that why you don't like sex?" His voice quavered as he spoke.

She felt obliged to cajole the cry baby.

"Oh, come on." Placing her arms against his back, she cooed, "come inside me."

His erection had shriveled. He forced himself a few minutes later, thinking of a movie character he had found interesting—Mrs. Robinson.

He had to, to keep his sanity. His wife complied so as not to feel guilty. She did not want to deal with his sulks the next day.

The next morning the night was forgotten. As she brought him some tea, her sleep-drowned eyes enamored him. He loved her as he had when he had met her for the first time. He remembered the time when he had saved her from a few male friends who were determined to molest her.

The damsel in distress and one of the prettier girls in the university had fallen for this decent, will-be-there-for-her, caring, loving man who had rescued her from the wolves.

That night determined to rectify this flaw in their marriage, he blurted. "Shall we go for counseling?"

She was shocked. "For what?"

They had nice cars, a beautiful home, servants, and great careers. Above all, their friends envied them.

"Counseling to improve our sex lives," he muttered under his breath.

"I allow you anytime you want, don't I? My friend Sheela allows her husband to touch her just once a month."

"You don't seem interested anymore." He spoke softly, not wanting to seem accusatory.

"You get your orgasm. For me, sex doesn't matter much."

"I need you to respond, not just lie there." He did accuse, trembling.

"After ten years, kids, responsibilities, sex is not the most important thing on my mind."

Neil kept quiet. He hated for the war of words to escalate. They turned their backs to each other. He tossed and turned, covering his ears as he heard her sleep ridden rhythmic breathing.

The creaking of the bed woke her up. He was jerking himself off with a seminude photo of a woman on his cell phone.

She was disgusted. Huffing and puffing, she took her pillows and scooted to an empty bedroom.

"Pervert," she mumbled.

He heard her. "It is better than having sex with you," he screamed.

They did not talk to each other for days and needless to say they did not have sex either. A few nights later, Sonia felt the need to break the ice, which was getting thick. She wanted to keep the marriage intact. She cared for him. She wanted to preserve the facade of a happy marriage. More importantly, she did not want her friends judging her, whispering to each other, 'All that glitters is not gold.' No, she could not bear that. She would keep the marriage intact, she thought, but at her terms.

"Come on, Neil, let's have sex today." He welcomed the attempt. The house was beginning to seem dead and cold. They made their way to the bedroom. Sonia hugged him. "Come on, baby," she said. He started kissing her lips. She tolerated. When he went down on her, in an attempt to pleasure her, he asked, "Do you like it?"

"Come inside," came the curt reply.

He came inside her, spent.

She was glad the ice had melted, and all would be the same again.

# The **Wedding Anniversary**

The car came to a dead end. Neil looked around angrily and honked at the indifferent kids playing on the street.

His head seemed to be exploding, dreading the nights. It all seemed unfair when Sonia seemed so contented.

Sonia was a dutiful wife. The auburn hair—silhouetting her smooth, pale face, curled onto the shoulders of her tall, petite figure. She had small, slightly slanted eyes. Her best feature was the perfectly straight nose, which made her strikingly photogenic. She usually posed for photographs with her head slightly turned to a side, her chin somewhat raised, to accentuate her straight nose. When they walked hand in hand, heads turned.

“Smile,” she told Neil as they entered the banquet hall.

It was their friend’s first wedding anniversary. Lights glittered all around. The dais was decorated with real flowers, and the air felt fresh as the sweet scent of jasmine whiffed through the house.

Sonia took a deep breath, taking in the fragrance, the changing colorful strobe lights, the balloons floating in the

air, the chandeliers, and the pink and white flowers on the table. Above all, she was happy that she and Neil were walking hand in hand, and the world would continue to think that they were a happy couple.

Sammy, her friend, approached them. "I saw your vacation pictures on Facebook. You guys look so happy together." Looking at Neil, she added, "I envy her. You take her everywhere."

Neil smiled uncomfortably.

*When one is at a loss for words, a smile is perhaps an apt reply.*

"Oh come, I have to show you something." Sammy took Sonia's hand and wheeled her away to show off the expensive jewelry she had bought that month.

Neil, not having anything better to do headed for the appetizers, checking the platter of food, decided to go for the baked chicken puffs. He was relishing the warm crunchiness when he heard a voice behind him.

"A bit lost, aren't you," he heard a somewhat familiar female voice. He turned around to find himself looking at a long-lost school mate of his.

"Sylvia!" he exclaimed.

*The sudden revival of old friendships always brings a lot of cheer in one's heart.*

The moroseness Neil was feeling diminished. He hugged Sylvia. "God, how many years has it been and look at you," he was wondering whether to articulate the truth.

She helped him. "Stop. I have aged, and I have let go of myself. But you look young and handsome as ever."

He hid any surprise he felt at those remarks. "Really?" he questioned, checking his reflection in the brass cupboard.

"You surely have stood the test of time," she laughed.

His wife's comments about his lips and paunch resonated against Sylvia's remarks. He was eager to know more about Sylvia's opinion of him and fervently wanted to continue talking to her.

They spent the next fifteen minutes learning about what each was doing.

She was an assistant professor on the tenure track. Hesitantly she added, "I have a career, but my personal life is in shambles." "I divorced my husband recently," she remarked.

Neil waited for the 'why.' His eyebrows raised into an implicit question mark.

"He was cheating on me."

"Oh!" came Neil's empathetic exclamation.

*'Oh' at times is a befitting reply when one wants to avoid a factual one.*

"What have you been up to?" Sylvia asked.



As he was formulating a reply, Sonia butted in, dragging Neil away.

“I want you to meet some VIPs.”

“Sonia, this is...”

Later, they are leaving. They are very influential people, and I want you to meet them.” He was pulled away. Somehow ‘influential people’ had not meant much to him. Feigning interest, he patiently made small talk while getting restless to return to authenticity.

Sonia was exuberant. Words of flattery found their way out of her mouth. ‘This was the moment she would use all her charms to help Neil climb the ladder.’ She shrugged away the uneasy thought that Neil was not an ambitious corporate climber. She bit her tongue, annoyed at him. He tried his best not to display irritation.

That night he told her he was tired and went to bed.

# The Long Night

The night seemed long. The initial heady days of romance had not prepared Neil for the domestication of his romantic dreams, these unromantic nights. 'Did most women not prioritize sex, were they frigid, asexual?' The movies never indicated that. Most books written, most films made had a man and a woman falling in love and living happily ever after. Sex was depicted as an out of this world experience if the movies and books were to be believed. He was eager for answers. He did not have any female friends. He thought of Sylvia, whom he had abandoned unceremoniously at the party. 'Wonder if she cares about sex?' he thought.

Sylvia was some years his junior at school. He had noticed some greying strands in her chestnut brown hair. There were a few crows' feet at the corners of her eyes when she smiled. He wondered why they were called crow's-feet. Sylvia was slender with a sculpturesque figure and shapely legs. Her large, dewy eyes, which exuded a certain calmness, reminded him of a tranquil lake—her lips reminded him of soft flower petals. She was not a beauty but not unattractive either.

Neil found his musings entertaining him. He would call her tomorrow. That was the first thought that gave him solace that night.

He got up, a bit groggy after an almost sleepless night wishing he had had sex with his wife and slept off the night. Maybe he was expecting too much from life, from his wife.

He had missed the alarm. As he rushed to get ready for work, he saw breakfast laid out on the table with a note. 'Enjoy the toast and marmalade. The orange juice is in the fridge. Hot tea in the flask. I have an early breakfast meeting with the team today. Didn't want to wake you. Bye.' Love Sonia.

# The Crush

Neil grabbed the toast, got into his car. 'The traffic in the city was getting bad to worse. Why was it so slow?' he cursed.

*The theory of relativity must be acknowledged here. It always took him forty minutes to reach the workplace. Today the forty minutes did not seem to arrive soon enough.*

Julia, his twenty-two-year-old secretary, smiled at him as he barged through the double doors. "You are late for the meeting."

"Tell me something I don't already know," he barked.

"Sorry, sir, but the VP has closed all access to the meeting," she was apologetic.

He grunted at her and walked to his office.

"Shall I get you some coffee?" he heard her say. She was trying to make amends.

"It is not your fault." He emphasized on the word fault. "But the coffee would be good."

She knew he liked it light with two creamers and half a teaspoon of sugar. He took a sip savoring it. She waited to find out if he liked it.

“Good.”

She was pleased. Now she could get on with her work.

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“Yes,” she replied, wondering why he had asked that. He had never really cared about her personal life.

“How is he?” That was too general a question. “Do you love him?”

“I suppose so.”

He looked at her quizzically, raising his eyebrows. “Are you planning to get married?”

“We have been living together for the past two years, and we are planning marriage by the end of next year.”

“Are you sure?”

Now it was Julia’s turn to look quizzically and raise her eyebrows.

“You just said you are not sure if you love him.” He felt the need to defend himself and refrained from asking the one question that was on his mind. ‘How is the sex?’ Luckily, another way of asking the same question hit him like a bolt. “Are you two compatible... I mean in bed?”

It was the time of the #Me Too movement, and as Neil uttered these questions, he regretted them. He was not sure how these words would be construed. ‘Invading my privacy, asking intimate questions, asking unwarranted

questions, making me uncomfortable, asking questions unrelated to work or plain sexual harassment.'

"I am sorry. I didn't mean to ask you that. My friend's son is researching on female sexuality, and we were discussing this last night, and I blurted a question from his questionnaire. I hope you understand." And as if the concocted on the spur explanation was not enough, he added timidly, "I hope I have not offended you in any way."

"You have not, sir. I have known you for the last three years. You have been a great mentor and very kind to me, sir."

As he heaved a sigh of relief, she went on, "How is your sex life? Is it fulfilling?"

He stared at her. He wanted to say, 'I am your boss, and you have no right to ask me such things.' He had needed to vent his bottled frustrations. He had not been able to divulge this raw area, which perturbed him, to his male friends.

*Men only talked about their conquests. He would appear too much of a failure. He could hear their laughter deafening him.*

A shrink might give him medications for the depression, which was beginning to engulf him. He knew the exact cause of his misery, and he knew the cure. The cure he despaired of attaining because even though all the self-help books mentioned that we had the power to change our lives, his antidote depended on another, the woman he had taken as his wife.

“It is horrible.” Stooping onto the table, he covered his face with his palms. ‘There it was. Now she would tell the whole office, and he would be the laughingstock—this man who had seemed to have everything squared.’

He felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up to find Julia standing very close to him, patting him gently. Her breasts would touch his face if he looked up anymore. He dared not, hoping she would go away and wishing she would not. For the first time, he became aware of her sexuality. She had always been this mechanically servile lady who brought him coffee, informed him about the day’s appointments, canceling them, and rescheduling them at his beck and call. Here she was, pacifying him.

He had bared his vulnerabilities to this young woman whose skin was smooth, whose face was covered with a thick layer of foundation—the well fitted artificial eyelashes enhanced her green eyes, which revealed no crows’ feet. Her thin lips shone with lip gloss. Youth had made her flaws inconsequential, and she had the body of a woman whose contours were not lost to pregnancy.

His hands trembled; his lips quivered at the thought of having her. She was aware of the want in his eyes. He was the epitome of all that she admired. He had a master’s degree, was a tall, dark, charming man with high cheekbones, a chiseled jawline which enhanced his straight nose, whose steel-grey eyes focused on getting work done. A quiet yet approachable man, he was gentle yet demanding of his subordinates. She had never seen him raise his voice.

People respected him.

She respected him.

*Neil had seemed to have it all. How misled most of us could be. Here he was, disclosing his innermost secret to his secretary. She was secretly elated to be the chosen one. Somehow vulnerability and grief when shared, created, or exalted friendships.*

That night when Julia's boyfriend made love, she imagined her boss on top of her kissing her gently with his luscious lips, his seemingly taut belly, thrusting his virility into her. And she came like never before.

The next morning for the first time, she looked forward to going to work. She frantically rummaged through her closet, deciding what to wear. A tight blouse with a slightly low cut? She did not want to appear too obvious or trashy. She chose a rose-tinted top. It reflected well on the pallid skin of her youthful face. She glowed with love, love for this wiser, older man.

She waited for him to enter through the double doors, nervous, holding her belly in an attempt to calm and be free of the fluttering butterflies churning at the thought of seeing him. Finally, her knight in shining armor arrived, and time stood still. She smiled, coyly acknowledging their shared secret. The secret of his asexual marriage, and her love for him. She would give him her body and soul, make him happy, wipe his tears away.

"Shall I bring you some coffee?" She asked, getting close to him, waiting to see his lips quiver, his hands tremble with want for her.



"I am fine. I don't want coffee. It is time for the board room meeting with the vice president." He said in a business-like tone.

Her mouth went dry. Her throat made some noise as she swallowed her spit, rudely awakened from her reverie. She went on with her mundane work expecting to hear Neil's voice with every phone call. He did not call, and her heart sank into a bottomless abyss, the wait unbearable.

As Julia was leaving after a long day had gone wrong, Neil came up to her workstation. Her heart stopped. The world stopped. He would say, 'I love you' and take her. She would love him back ardently, and all would be well. This day with all the upheavals, the wait, the emotional roller-coaster would be erased forever. He would be hers and she his.

"Maria has been appointed as my new secretary. She has been working at the company for over thirty years and was my secretary before you joined. If you wish to continue working for the company, then Rusty will be more than happy to have you work as his secretary."

She was silent, disappointment cloaked in a steel veil over her unfazed face.

As she drove home that evening, tears fell off her face. She blinked to clear her eyes of the blurriness.

As she entered her one-bedroom apartment, she saw her boyfriend lounging on the sofa, bottles of whiskey and pizza on the table. He had gotten the pizza from the pizzeria where he worked as a cashier. "Been waiting for you, munchkin. It is hot," he pointed towards his genitals. He was sweaty, red, and drunk. She suppressed an urge to vomit.

# Love or Respect

After a week of their meeting, Neil found the courage to call Sylvia. He had been debating the opening line. 'Called you just to say hi, called you to apologize for leaving you stranded at the party as my wife dragged me away to meet with the VIPs.' He was inclined towards the latter. The phone rang, putting a hold on his thoughts. It was Sylvia. He was relieved about not having to find an excuse to call her.

"You deserted me and took off with your wife." Sylvia's voice was exuberant. For a moment, Neil was puzzled. She was referring to 'that' uncomfortable moment last week.

"So sorry about last week. I meant to call you and apologize."

"Really," came the retort. Next time you want to apologize or intend to call me, just do so. You are safe." 'Safe,' he was not sure what she meant. Maybe this was some kind of reassurance during the '#Me Too' movement.

He felt glad to have found a safe friend, especially a safe female friend during these times. He now felt so secure that he asked her out without thinking, without blinking. "Would you like to have some coffee after work. I can pick you up." He was confident she wouldn't misconstrue the

pickup phrase nor his intentions. He wanted to uncover myths about female sexuality and in the process, perhaps salvage his own. He was nervous and excited at the same time. A voice in his head cautioned him 'I should pop this question, not at first but the next rendezvous. He didn't want to scandalize her.'

Neil felt anxious as he carefully chose a cozy restaurant far away from his home and work. Sylvia greeted him with a smile as she got into his car. He wished she were more attractive, maybe colored her hair with those fashionable highlights, and didn't wear the baggy clothes, which seemed to be a norm with her. "We can go to the Trilleca," trying to impress her with an expensive high-end restaurant in New York City. Most women would have summed him up as a well-to-do, suave man who enjoyed elegance and was generous enough to treat others to it. He had not cared, but the women he knew did. He was not sure why he felt the need to impress her. He was roused from his preoccupation.

"Never heard of the Trilleca," she said.

He suppressed an urge to raise his eyebrows.

"Are you in the mood for some Thai, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, or Italian?"

*Cuisines of the hundred and ninety-five countries of the world could be grouped into five or six main courses.*

"All I want is to go home, put my feet up, eat some home-cooked baked fish with piping hot lentil soup."

He wondered what would impress her. 'Surely restaurants were not her thing, clothes and hair dyes were not either. Had her husband left her because of this?'

"Would you rather go home?" Neil asked as politely as he could muster.

"Sounds great, why don't we go over to my place?"

He blinked, 'wondering if this was an invitation.' Surely, she didn't make it seem like that. It was just one safe woman inviting one safe man into her bachelor pad to share their common childhood nightmares. He agreed, pleased that it would save him a long drive through the city traffic.

## New York

New York was a maze of roads. Once an exit was missed, it took that much longer to get to the destination. The peak hour with impatient drivers added to the commotion. Drivers seemed to be in a hurry, speeding only to be slowed down by accidents caused by life's need to rush. Also, the Trilleca was way too expensive, even by New York standards. That was money saved. A restaurant surrounded by strangers hardly seemed a place to probe into female sexuality.

"Turn right, turn right," she shrieked, not wanting him to lose his way.

Twenty minutes later, they were at her apartment complex. She swiped open the lobby door, pressed the elevator button. He followed her into the elevator, which

stopped on the fifteenth floor. As he stepped out, the view of New York with its well-lit skyscrapers kissing the clouds exhilarated him. The skyline was studded with beautiful buildings, some boasting of architectural splendor—others were regular box-shaped buildings where aesthetics had not only been compromised by economics but also by sheer indifference.

Neil was relieved not to be driving in circles trying to locate a parking spot in downtown New York City. Above all, he was happy that the prying eyes of strangers would not be on him as he sought answers to his dilemma.

As she unlocked her apartment door, he mentally convinced himself. 'They were both safe, and he was merely rekindling an old friendship. Thank God she was not his type. His very next thought was, 'who was his type? His wife, who dressed impeccably wore the 'Sakki' designer, burnt credit cards. Thank God it was her credit card.' He had decided not to indulge her, early on in their marriage. She loved to show off her bags, one for every attire with shoes in tow. Once at a fundraiser for orphans, she was seated next to the philanthropic wife of a millionaire, and he had heard her say, "this dress cost me three thousand dollars." He had rolled his eyes and left her with the philanthropic wife of the millionaire as the philanthropic wife of the millionaire refilled her glass of wine twice, appalled. Again, he reminded himself, Sonia loved to cook, made him tasty delicacies, kept the house tidy all this while working at a corporate job she hated. Well, she had the right to indulge in designers and brands. If only she loved him the way he desired her, it would be perfect, and the vagaries could be forgiven.

*Does God always keep something away from us so that we reach out to him all the time?*

Sylvia came out of the shower, her hair tied in a pony, wearing a tank top and a flowy ankle-length skirt. There was a hint of maroon lipstick on her face, which he had not noticed earlier.

She sat on the sofa facing him. "Tea or wine?"

He was not sure. It seemed a bit too early for wine. He opted for tea.

"So, tell me, how is life?"

'Was she just as interested in probing into his psyche as he was?' "It has been alright."

"You have a good job, money, a beautiful home, and a pretty wife. You must be pleased as punch?" Well, she had numerically rattled out why a man having all of the above ingredients should be buoyant with happiness.

He was not interested in talking about himself, and it would be too early to disillusion her. "How has your life been?"

She laughed, her perfectly well-aligned pearly white teeth sparkling at him. "You are a parrot. You just parroted my words."

"Go on, why did you divorce your husband," he jumped to the question impatiently.

"He fell out of love with me and went for a much younger woman but uglier." She was not sure why she had been compelled to add the word uglier.

"Beauty is skin deep, but ugliness can be bone-deep," he quipped jovially. "How was the sex?" He had not meant to pop the question so soon, but there it was. He twiddled his thumb while waiting and wondering how she would react?

"Sex was good. Our needs matched in the initial days of courtship and marriage. Now that I am single, I cover myself in rags and bags to avoid male attention. No unwanted men," she reiterated.

'Was that a warning to him,' he wondered. "I thought sex was the most important reason people divorced over."

"Sex and Money," she replied. "The two nouns that can drag a relationship down into a chasm and, of course, chronic abuse of any kind." There she had summed up the three reasons for divorce.

"What about falling out of love," he was curious.

"Love is overrated. If you respect each other, love should resurface even if it has ebbed. The keyword is respect."

"And love?" he queried.

"You are a romantic," she laughed. Neil could see her cleavage and desperately tried to look away. She noticed him looking away and was pleased. With a smile on her lips, she dished out some fish, salads, and some lentil soup to go with it, inviting him to the dining table.

"Oh, I don't want to impose on you."

"Nonsense, help yourself. I am not a great cook, but I can fend for myself, and, as you can see, I can toss a meal

together," she smirked. "So, tell me about yourself. How is your marriage?"

"It's ok, I suppose."

"Do you love her?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"Are you never sure of yourself?" She asked peevishly, clearly agitated with his not sure lines.

We hardly sleep together," he blurted.

## Erectile Dysfunction

Sylvia stared through the window, not knowing how to react. Neil was looking for answers, and she was a bit embarrassed to pursue the conversation. "Why?" She finally managed to break the silence.

"I think my wife is frigid. Do you find me attractive?"

"Of course, you are," she replied as she took in his thick mop of hair carefully brushed in place, his broad frame, and if he had a paunch, it was well-hidden under the loose shirt. It was his turn to be pleased.

"Sylvia, my self-confidence is low and has been ebbing. Of late, I have been suffering from erectile dysfunction. My head and body feel like they want to explode."

"I believe you have been personalizing your wife's lack of interest as a sign of your inadequacy."

"You talk like a therapist."



She smiled, trying to ease the air. She had not parroted every word of his. 'My head and body feel like they want to explode. I haven't made love in two years. No man has touched me in two years, and I am scared of being hurt.'

She remained quiet.

"It is getting late. Go home before your wife reports you missing."

Sylvia went to bed happy that night. She had found a friend, that too a male friend who had revealed his innermost debacle to her.

That night she wrote in her diary:

*Men rarely shared their emotions with others. They discussed their conquests but not their failure. They discussed sports and politics but not what bothered them. They did not discuss their wives but tooted their girlfriends, even so, more about the quantity than quality. They were different.*

# Don't Feel Like Going Home

A few weeks went by, and Neil was getting restless. He had not heard from Sylvia. He enjoyed her company. She was cerebral, or so he thought. She did not seem interested in shoes or bags like most of the women he knew. He decided he would call her today just to talk.

She answered at the first ring. "Why haven't you called me?" she demanded.

He was slightly taken aback but pleased all the same. He was glad that Sylvia's eagerness to connect with him mirrored his own.

"I am coming over," he said.

"Waiting," came her reply. She hurriedly tidied her apartment, lighted the scented candles, dimmed the incandescent lights, threw her baggy work clothes in the washer—rummaging through the wardrobe, she couldn't find anything to wear. She wanted to dress for him. She wanted to feel desired by him. As she desperately searched for the appropriate attire, she found the blue shirt and the dark blue skirt she had worn a few days into her marriage. The blue had enhanced her smooth olive skin. She had glanced at the mirror and smiled at her reflection. The