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## Toy

(English Translation of Nabarun Bhattacharya's Bengali short story, "Toy")

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For a long time, Mithil and Mimi have not been out together leaving Toy alone at home. Neither there was any plan. But it was Mithil who called Mimi from his office and gave her the news of watching Tarkovsky's 'Nostalgia' on VCR at Mahendra's place. To tell Amitadi to look after Toy. There is no one on the upper flat of the three-storied building. In the narrow mansion there is only one flat at each story. Toy stays with his parents on the first floor. Amitadi stays at the ground floor. Before proceeding farther let us know about the aquarium.

Last year there had been a chaos at Mithil's office. Mithil's divisional Boss retired. In his place came a new man from Bombay. He was there at some Tata Concern. No sooner he came started a series of troubles for Mithil—about this today and that tomorrow. Mithil's tension started. Mithil then started to do yoga exercises. *Paranayam*, *Shabasan* etc. The trainer-boy who used to come instructed him to bring an aquarium. He was a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In some of the Mother's writings he found that an aquarium in the room brings mental peace. Some people have got results by following this. Hence, as an aid of treatment the aquarium appeared in their flat. Not very big. Not even a large number of fish can be kept in that. Swordtail, Guppy, Angel, Black Molly, Gourami. Latter came a Catfish. The earthworms were kept in the bathroom. Under a system of water-drops. It's a big problem. So dry food was brought. Following Mithil, Toy was also addicted to watch the aquarium instead of the TV. Mithil and Mimi brought Toy a book named 'Multicoloured Fins' from the book fair. After reading the book once Toy asked,

—Dad, why there is no fighter in the fish-room?

—They are worthless. They'd fight among themselves and die.

—But it's written in the book that they don't kill, only tear up the fins. The fins grow again.

—You read that?

—Ya. Can you tell me the original name of Angel?

—What?

—*Pterophyllum scalare*.

That evening Mimi told Toy what he had to follow hour by hour. Let him be a good boy and take his Complian at 7. Fruit custard at night. Apart from that there could even be a surprise for Toy. There is no children's programme on the TV. Otherwise it would be good. Let Toy study after taking the Complian. Amitadi would come at 8 to see Toy. The gatekeeper would also keep a watch. The gatekeeper would tell anyone to come later if he is someone lesser known. However, no one is supposed to come. Moreover, Mimi and Mithil would be back by 9:15. In fact, both Mithil and Mimi knew that there is nothing to worry as Toy is so calm and quiet and gentle. Mimi got into a minibus from the bus stop in front of their flat. Toy waved at her from the balcony. It was 6:15. Mahendra's place is four stops away.

For a long time Toy counted cars from the balcony. He played that game. Bringing cars of one's wish. There is not much cold this year. Still the sun is setting early and it is smoky around the lights. The game of bringing cars of one's wish is invented by Toy himself. Nobody but Toy knows of this game. Now an Ambassador would come. It came. One-nil. Now a Maruti. Instead came a police van. One-all. Again a Maruti. Maruti two-to-one. Bicycles, two-wheelers, buses and minibuses—they are not counted in the game. Lights were switched on in all three rooms of the flat. After winning 45-37, when Toy went to take his Complian, it was five past seven on the clock. Mithil and Mimi called at 7:15. Is everything alright? Ya. You aren't afraid, right? No. He has to finish seven sums as home task. He would finish the handwriting tomorrow morning. After keeping the phone, Toy sat with the maths. The last one was big and tough. A number of multiplications and divisions. There was a bell at the door during this last sum. Amitadi!

—What are you doing Master Toy?

—Doing my home task. The maths.

—Never seen such a good boy. You aren't afraid, right?

—Not at all.

Amitadi gave Toy four Hajmola Candies. Toy kept two on his own table. He put the other two on the bedside table beside his parents' bed. The sum was not done till the end. It was ten past eight at that time.

Then Toy went to the bathroom and spent a penny there. Drew the flush. Then by standing on the commode he opened the box which was on the sidewall of the bathroom and out of his reach. A nice smell came out. *Eau de Cologne*, after-shave-lotion etc. When Mithil goes on a tour, he takes with him a small, miniature and very cute looking immersion heater, for heating water for shaving—Toy brought that down.

Mithil and Mimi got back exactly at half past nine. They found Toy watching TV with concentrated attention. On the Cable TV, there was a live performance of Pink Floyd in Australia. Psychedelic light. Smoke. Slow-motion wave of hair. Lightning like flash of light on the strings of guitar. They brought ice-cream for Toy. So after eating that Toy did not eat fruit custard. Toy went to bed. Mimi also got asleep beside Toy while talking to him. Mithil was awake. He felt as if the candles of 'Nostalgia' were burning around him. Later to save

the light of one candle . . . Mithil found the same unrest in his head. It would be good to sit in front of the aquarium with a cigarette.

The light of the aquarium was on. The tin shade was removed and a pencil was placed sidewise. Hanging from it was the small immersion heater. The fish are all dead. Since the immersion heater was burning, there was an invisible current of ascending hot water and descending cold water. In that invisible current the dead fish were moving—sometimes topsy-turvily, sometimes sidewise! The water is sufficiently hot. There are bubbles coming out of the mouth of the diver doll. There were bubbles coming from the body of the immersion heater as well.

The next day Toy did not go to school. His parents took him to the psychiatrist Dibyendu Mukherjee. He is known to Mimi's maternal uncle. Mithil and Mimi were sitting outside. Dr. Mukherjee was with Toy for nearly an hour. Later when Toy came out with him both of them had smile on their faces and Toy had an Amul chocolate in his hand.

—Mr. Toy, you sit here and see this picture-book, let me have a small talk with your parents.

Toy nodded. Dr. Mukherjee said, oh, we had a great chat.

Inside Dr. Mukherjee told Mithil and Mimi.

—The incident seems very macabre to you but I don't think it's that serious. After talking to him, the thing with which I am impressed is that, there is no aggression in your boy. So sweet and calm mind. . . . I'd suggest you to ignore this matter. This is not at all a problem. He is perfectly normal. Sort of curiosity . . . almost scientific. . . .

After a few days of the incident, even in a foreign journal there was an article on some murderous children of England and France that Mithil was reading. A debate is at its height regarding the analysis of the incidents. Among them, one French psychiatrist noted that the way these children described their own crimes so cold-bloodedly and so aloofly, that it seems that somewhere there is a scientific mindedness too. Mithil also made Mimi read that article.

Toy's parents did not have any more worry regarding Toy.

**\* Translation of Nabarun Bhattacharya's Bengali short story, "Toy"—from the collection, *Nabarun Bhattacharyer Chotogalpo* (Calcutta: Pratikshon Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1995; pp. 104-106).**