

The Bridge Across Forever

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*Hi Pimples,
It's my 8th birthday today and lots of things have been happening. Let me start from the beginning.
I woke up in the morning with this great aching tooth and decided to miss school. It was not to be. At school, I stole ten rupees off the fellow who sits next to me to have an ice cream. I was sent off the classroom once because I hadn't done my homework. You must be thinking this isn't quite the ideal birthday to have, but wait. In the next period I scored the top marks in my English composition and earned the praise of my teacher for my good vocabulary. "Try to learn at least one word a day", he said. With a smile he asked if I had learnt any today.
"Bastard", I said.
I was sent out of the classroom again. Oh, by the way, did I tell you that I also met the girl I am going to marry?*

*Dear Di,
A strange thing happened to me today while I was playing in school. One boy from our school came up to me and said, "Hi, will you marry me?"
I was thinking of what to say when he said again, "can I kiss you?"
I slapped him. Do you think I did the right thing Di? I wish I could tell my mother but I don't think I dare. I wonder how it feels to be kissed.
By the way, I found out his class. I hope to see him tomorrow.*

*Hi Pimples,
It's been a really long time since I have talked to you. You must be wondering where I have disappeared off. It's just that nothing much has been happening I my*

*life. I was elected class captain and I topped the debate competition yet again. My parents still think that I should be doing something worthwhile. I have a feeling that they have the phrases "worth their while" and "worth my while" mixed up.
Oh, I need to tell you this. I met that girl who slapped me again today and you won't believe this, but we talked for over an hour- a most satisfying conversation. And guess what, she writes a diary too. "What do you call your diary?" I asked her.
"Di. Short for diary. What do you call yours?"
"Pimples."
"Oh, but why?"
"So that I can shorten it to pimp."
I hope you are not offended, Pimples. I learnt a new word today. Osculation. You'll never guess what it means. But then you don't have to worry about making babies*

*Dear Di,
I met him again today. He calls his diary pimp. I have to ask mom what it means. He asked me to marry him again and of course, I said no. "What will you do if you marry me?" "Make babies, of course." He said, "Everybody does."
That sounded interesting. So I told him, "But I don't know how to."
"Oh, it's easy. You just have to hold each other tight and kiss and if you kiss really well, the stork will drop the baby down the chimney." I was impressed.
"But what if you don't kiss well enough?"
"Oh you get used to it. And you can do something with that thingummy too. You don't have one but I guess it's not*



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important. It was only much later, Di, that I realized that our house has no chimneys. I must remember to ask him that, the next time.

7 years later.

Hi Pimples,

It was my first day in High School and I was really excited, no less because she's in the same class as I am. Every one of us looks and sounds so grown-up now; it's a little amusing really. But then everything around has grown too. The school is bigger, the textbooks fatter and the teachers stricter. I wonder, however, if our innocence has grown consummate with our stature. Our principal is this towering personality who likes to sound grand.

"Ladies and gentleman", he intoned an effusive waggling of hands, "you have stepped into this edifice of learning to become the guardians of our heritage. Here you shall learn to learn." Stopping for effect, he continued pompously, "It is not just your teachers who shall guide you, but you yourself and your fellow students. For the next couple of years, you shall spend your time in fruitfully fertilizing each other."

The irreverent guffaw that escaped my lips sounded devastatingly loud against the background of the stunned silence that ensued after this magnificent remark. And the dark looks of my teachers were no comfort to my increasing embarrassment. I have just coined a new phrase.

Intellectual intercourse.

Dear Di,

It's been six months of college now and academically I have been doing just fine. But I'm really angry with Pimples. (Really don't know why he calls that stupid diary of his that. Typical male riffraff.) He's been behaving really

arrogantly towards me, especially after I told him that I liked one guy in school because he's got amazingly nice gait. He had the audacity to remark that it reminded him of duckbilled platypus slithering on a camel's hump.

"You really have a bad choice Pimples", I reiterated.

"I know. I wouldn't be talking to you otherwise."

I think he was jealous of all the flowers and cards (three of them, you know) I got on Valentine's Day. Serves him right. He's rude too. I invited him to my birthday party the other day and he went about rocking a snoot at all my friends.

Out of sheer exasperation, I said, "I hope you have been enjoying yourself, you twerp."

"I have to. There isn't anything else in this party to enjoy."

I wish he wouldn't get the better of me always. I wish he had given me a card too. Shit.

Hi Pimples,

College is fun. Guess what happened today? I slapped the platypus (You know that old loony bin, don't you?) And you'll never realize what happened in class today. I met this girl called Sandhya who I think really likes me. And the most comical part of it is that it is Di (I wonder why she calls her stupid diary that.

Typical female wishwash.) who introduced me to her. She's her friend, you know.

Gave me a real laugh, that. And you know Pimple boy, I had submitted an essay in college today and it so happened that the teacher himself did not understand a few words in it.

"Using big words, my dear boy", he said, "just means that you have a big dictionary."



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"I beg to differ Sir. It actually means I use my big dictionary." I think he did not quite enjoy the repartee. He drew himself up to his full weight and sneered,

"And why would you feel that a grandiose mussificence of words will win you accolades?"

I took a deep breath and replied, "The lucubration of sesquipedalian verbosity is a supercalifragilisticexpialodocious endeavour." My teacher had no reply to that. I have this feeling that neither he nor my classmates have ever heard of Mariam Webster or Mary Poppins.

Dear Di,

I am going away tomorrow. To college. In Kerala. I'm not sure that I'll like it. But I'm also rather excited about the challenge. I hope that I can do well and live up to my parents' expectations. Pimples called me up today. He wished me all the best in my personal and professional lives. I wonder if there's any irony in the order. I'm going to miss him terribly.

But he'll never realize that. He's too busy with Sandhya nowadays.

Hi Pimples,

I am in Bangalore. National Law School. Trying to get enough through all the legal tortures that my eminent predecessors have conjured up for me. Bangalore reminds me of a gaudy and pretentious one-night stand call girl with all of her cheap superciliousness.

Underneath is a very very shallow heart. Did you know that the only reason why this city is famous is because of its branded grandeur; that beneath the façade, there's no warmth, no place you can escape to, in solitude. It's a Babel of tongues, a cornucopia of cheapness and a wanton showcase of money. I hate it. I call up Sandhya quite often now, but somehow I get the feeling that the distance is telling

on our relationship. She just doesn't seem as interested. And I hate to admit this but I miss Di. She was a real sweetheart to talk to. I wish I weren't quite so rude in the last few days we were together.

Dear Di

I love Bangalore. The weekend I spent here was really lovely. There's something amazingly catchy about its diminutive size, its vibrant dynamism and its unequivocal self-sustenance. I got a letter from Pimples the other day. He doesn't seem to have settled down well in Bangalore. I wish I could help. And since his letter was so full of Sandhya, I had better tell him about Vishal. Won't mention the fact that I miss him. He doesn't care.

Hi Pimples,

Di has fallen in love again. Really nice isn't it? I swear I'm not jealous Pimples but I wish I could feel as happy as I should be.

Dear Di,

I had my first quarrel with Vishal today. And it wasn't nice. I wish he were more entertaining company. I spent almost all my working hours with him; why is it that I have to force myself into enjoying them? He took me out to this nice café after the quarrel and was really very compassionate. I wish I had been kinder but somehow the words forced themselves out of my mouth,

*"F*** you." He was so shocked he had nothing to say. I know what Pimples would have said, "Any time." And I would have laughed. Something that Vishal can never make me do.*

Hi Pimples,

Did I tell you that I formally broke off with Sandhya today? Good riddance to bad rubbish, I'd say. Di's really upset. I wish I



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could cheer her up. But then I don't want to make up with Vishal, do I? I called her up. I don't know whether you can make any sense out of this, but just try.

"So Di, how have you been?"

"Okay, I guess. I am really sorry about Sandhya."

"That's fine. I'm what they call the sadder but wiser man."

"You know what, Pimples, I think we end up making the same kind of messes in life. I mean it really is kind of funny, you know."

"Yeah, I know; you know what's funnier still? I keep coming back to tell you about all my mishaps."

"So what's stopping you from making any more mishaps?"

"You"

"And would you kindly explain that beastly statement?"

"If only I hadn't gone around comparing all the people I know with you, I wouldn't end up feeling so dissatisfied, you see."

"So why don't you just ask me?"

"What if you slap me again?"

"I couldn't. This is the phone."

"God bless Graham Bell. Would you like to make babies with me?"

"Not for a very long time."

"Then what exactly do you have in mind?"

"Maybe I'll just marry you first."

Dear Di,

I don't know if you can make any sense out of this, but just try. My son's growing really fast. I think he's going to just like him. He asked me today what the

meaning of tumescence was. I wish could write a lot oftener but life's so hectic.

Pimple says he thinks that I am becoming bald but he doesn't realize the one who's growing that tummy.

Hi Pimples,

We are off tomorrow to visit our son at college. He's studying medicine, you know. He's grown up that fast. Won't write much, we have a train to catch and I am really sleepy. See you soon.

Dr. Shashank Barooah closed the faded old diaries, slowly pushed back the chair and sat up carefully, wiping off the inadvertent tear in his eye. He had never been able to swallow that lump in his throat that appeared at that moment, ever since he had been reading his parent's diaries, everyday for the past five years, when his parents had perished in that fatal train accident.

Together in death, as they had always been in life.

