



THE FAKIR

(Translated by Volna)

It was another unbearably hot summer day in city X. (India)

By evening, it became slightly more bearable.

The wide unpaved road had emptied. The dust raised by scooters and rickshaws settled, and the air regained its original essence, no longer tasting like the finest ground sand in your mouth. Even though the heat still clung tightly to this small Indian town, the air had grown clearer.

That was the time I loved to meditate in a field stretching out next to the road.

The wide, bumpy road, covered in ancient dust, lazily unfolded from somewhere beyond the horizon.

It passed indifferently by the satsang house, and further on — by the little lane leading to my house, then slowly curved to the left.

That was where the road lost its individuality and merged into a strip of asphalt that sliced its dusty edge like a sharp blade.

The field lay halfway between the satsang house and my home.

From the road, only a small part of it was visible.

It was a miracle that this piece of land had survived — untouched by the monster named “civilization.” A surviving fragment of Indian soil, Indian soul.

When I first discovered this place, I was struck by the vibration rising from the earth.

Esoteric people would call it “a place of power.”

The right side of the field gently sloped down toward a small river, and then suddenly dropped, leaving only the view from above: a blue snake of water surrounded by lush greenery and palm trees.

It was a true oasis.

Amidst the dry, faded ground — scattered with rocks and stones of all sizes — a small river lay hidden, like a buried treasure, with juicy green banks bursting with life.

Buffaloes, which occasionally trudged through this desert, knew about the river and had carved out a steep path down to drink. They also knew the ford.

Sometimes Indian women crossed the river there.

Sitting among the boulders, I watched from above as the women, lifting their saris and balancing baskets on their heads, stepped slowly into the water, as graceful as caryatids.

There were four of them.

One squatted at the water’s edge, in that exact way little children do when they need to pee.

Still sitting, she scooped up river water with her hand and splashed it under her sari several times.
Everything about it was so natural, innocent — even aesthetic — that I felt no embarrassment at having involuntarily witnessed it.
All four women tucked the ends of their saris into their waistbands. Their bronze thighs, nearly up to their buttocks, were exposed. They looked about 30 to 35 years old.
Their movements were natural, unhurried, rounded, complete — erotic. I thought of tales from One Thousand and One Nights.
They slowly stepped into the water, one by one.
Each carried a basket or large bundle on her head.
Their backs and necks held upright, they moved with the elegance of temple sculptures from Khajuraho. Their curving hips swayed beautifully above the water.
All the movement came from the waist.
Their bare, sun-kissed bellies were framed below by the tucked-up sari and above by a short, tight blouse that hugged their full, round, papaya-shaped breasts.
They crossed the river in a line, focused.
The ford was narrow.
Watching them, my mind involuntarily reviewed the checklist of what it takes to be considered “sexy” in the so-called civilized world.
I remembered women constantly obsessed with appearing seductive — even at satsangs.
All the “accidental” flashes of breast or shoulder, the slipping strap, the side slits in skirts, sheer blouses...
And don’t even mention the strip-tease routines of pop stars.
How lucky these children of nature were — untouched by the “civilized” standards of beauty.
They didn’t have to do anything to be erotic, feminine, or beautiful.
They just were.

Today is my birthday.
As usual, my mood is awful.
All morning I’ve been thinking about my mother and wanting to cry.
I haven’t had a letter from her in six months — not even for my birthday.
Most likely she forgot again that she happened to give birth to me on this day.
I had left for India in secret, telling no one. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have let me go.
Only after I was there did I call to tell her.
To my surprise, the reaction was calm.
I came to the field and sat on a large warm stone.
A little further away was a mound, the only one on the field with a tree.
The tree was old, with a massive canopy and deep blue shade.
Under it stood a turquoise-painted tomb — or, as they say in India, a Samadhi.
Only gurus, saints, or highly respected people are buried like this.
Sometimes I would sit by the tree, meditating beside the Samadhi.

And each time, in my inner vision, an old man with a white beard and white clothes would appear.

But today I was sitting in the middle of the open field, hurt, sad, trying not to burst into tears.

I knew that if I let myself cry, I wouldn't be able to stop — and tomorrow I'd wake up with swollen eyes and a heavy head.

But really — what's the use of crying?

I sat biting my lip when I saw someone walking down the path — perhaps used by cows or those who sometimes touched up the tomb's paint.

From afar, I saw a man in a large, dusty white turban.

He wore something like a grayish shirt, his legs were bare.

He held a stick in one hand and a hookah or hubble-bubble in the other.

He was barefoot, and three donkeys walked lazily beside him — the stick, apparently, was for them.

Aside from this beggar, his donkeys, and me — there was not a soul on the wide field.

I had wandered quite far from the road. I could feel that he had noticed me, too.

Please don't come closer, I thought.

It's so hard for me to keep from crying.

My stomach was already trembling from the sobs I was suppressing like a tiger tamer.

God, if he comes and asks for money, I'll burst into tears right in front of him.

I will wail. I know I will.

All my old wounds — from childhood to now — were bubbling up.

Let him walk past. Let no one touch me.

Let this beggar remain untouched by me, and me by him.

I was still thinking all this when the beggar turned and walked in my direction.

So that's it — it's happening, just like I feared.

And at that moment, I clearly heard someone whisper in my ear: "Fakir."

I was surprised by the voice, but paid it no mind.

I watched the approaching figure with resignation.

Noticed the pipe between his lips — he was smoking.

His stick had disappeared.

I quickly reached into my bag, found a 5-rupee coin in my skinny wallet, and prepared to hand it to him the moment he got close.

All I wanted was for him not to linger — so my barely restrained self-pity wouldn't erupt.

He walked slowly, without looking at me, but toward me — calmly sucking on his pipe.

Then he did something totally unexpected — at least for a beggar.

Instead of begging from a distance, crying out "Baba! Khana!" like they usually do, he passed by me respectfully and sat on the ground — with his back to me — about seven meters away.

There we were: the empty field, me, and his back.

He didn't turn around. Just sat, smoking his hookah.

Relief washed over me.

He didn't intrude on "my suffering."

My stomach still trembled, trying to hold back sobs.

The word “Mama” — it was the trigger. The pain, the wound, the silent inner howling.

“Mama... God, what happened to her? Why is she like this with me?”

The beggar didn’t interfere.

I was free to indulge in my rhetorical questions, my emotions, my sad philosophizing and self-pity.

I was at the height of self-compassion when suddenly — the spasms stopped. My body stilled.

And that’s when I noticed something else — a fresh wave of energy entering me. Like a cool stream, strength was pouring in.

The “suffering” was cut off as if someone had snipped the string that hung from around my neck.

Peace. Comfort.

I remembered the beggar’s presence.

His back was still there in front of me, unmoving, a soft lilac thread of smoke curling above his turban like Arabic script.

Astonishingly, a new, playful energy was filling me!

I couldn’t even remember what my “drama” had been.

Laughter bubbled in my belly — literally.

My stomach trembled from the giggles.

A smile spread across my face.

I stared at the Fakir’s back.

Now I was sure — the voice had been right.

He was the Fakir.

He slightly turned his head — I caught a glimpse of his cheek.

I could swear he was smiling.

I was full of laughter.

I wanted to burst out laughing.

Then the stranger stood up and, without looking back, walked on in the same direction his donkeys had gone.

I pressed my palms together in Namaste toward his retreating back and said silently:

“Thank you, Fakir.”

I sat on my warm stone, basking in the transformation that had just happened.

I remembered it was my birthday.

And how wonderful it felt not to want to cry anymore!

How wonderful that everything now seemed funny!

And then, I clearly heard a voice say:

“Look up. This is your gift.”

I lifted my head.

In the clear blue sky above me, a circle of tiny white clouds had formed.

A perfectly round circle — not oval, not egg-shaped — but a true circle.

A white ring.

“Happy Birthday,” I whispered to myself.

