

Hotel Highway Very Most Famous

Sudha Challa

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A woman seeks meaning and connections after being abandoned by her husband in the musing novel Hotel Highway Very Most Famous.

Sudha Challa's spiritual novel *Hotel Highway Very Most Famous* is about a woman's triumphs and despairs after being abandoned.

After receiving a letter from Prabhakar, her absentee husband of sixteen years, Radha decides to meet him at a restaurant. As her assistant, Tony, drives her there, Radha recounts all of her insecurities about her marriage. Prabhakar, it is revealed, left her—and their children—to be with another woman in London.

Radha worries out loud about her appearance, her ability to be a good wife, and her education level; she remembers how Prabhakar's extended family struggled with finances, yet notes their kindness in taking her and the children in. She reflects that she learned to make a living for herself, opening a botanical nursery. And she makes a verbal record of all of the people whom Prabhakar impacted by leaving.

Indeed, much of the book is devoted to Radha's reflective flashbacks. She remembers how Prabhakar's parents, Mamayyad and Atthayya, expressed shame and anger over their son's decision. Mamayyad cursed his son for being so irresponsible, while Atthayya, who was facing a fatal chronic illness, laughed about Prabhakar being a big risk taker. But Radha also draws upon her knowledge of plants and nature to discuss people's mental states: the shattered eggs of a sparrow's nest are made to reflect her family's despondency and hopelessness; a matured mango tree becomes a symbol of her pride after she becomes self-sufficient.

This efficient imagery extends to encounters with people outside of the family, as with a remembrance of a family outing to the Hanuman Temple, where an abandoned woman shared "multihued cotton candy" with her children, resulting in whimsicality. Because of the consistency of their language, Radha's memories flow in a natural way. But they also become repetitive: the pain of her past is a recurrent subject; her present struggles with her femininity, status as a wife, desires, education, and personal abilities are all revisited in the course of the short book, which emphasizes women's power in an assertive manner. The story stutters toward the couple's eventual meeting as a result.

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ALI ORTIZ (May 12, 2022)

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