

THROUGH MY LENS

UK storm. Meteorology office extends rare “red” warning as rail, road, and air travel is impacted badly. This news was constantly flashing for the passengers stranded at Paddington railway station. The mayor of London has advised people to stay at home as the high-speed gusty wind was blowing with a heavy downpour. There was a regular announcement that passengers should take care of their belongings and wait for updates given regularly.

The CCTV camera lens was seeing the desperation of passengers who had to reach their destination. An infuriated wife was constantly blaming her husband for this. “Why do you book tickets in advance so early? You do not like my mother coming and spending her holidays with us that is why you booked this trip. See how we are stuck up here for God knows how many days. I should not have agreed to your plans.” The husband said, “How will I know that a storm will disrupt our plans? I had booked tickets early because the prices of tickets were less than what it is now.” Their daughter Lara was feeling suffocated by her parent’s constant bickering. She said “Father I want to buy some chocolates from the store. Can I take your card and get them?” She went to a store and the shopkeeper seeing a small girl with a card looked at her a bit skeptically. The girl immediately waved at some senior women sitting there and having coffee. One of them smiled and waved back. The shopkeeper looked assured. The old lady who had waved at her said, “Isn’t she an adorable little kid? Her parents seem to have so much confidence in her that they have given her their credit card to buy things all by herself. I must say they may be a bit careless to do so.”

The three old ladies having coffee were neighbors and had a book club. Once a week they meet and decide upon a book to read. The next week they discuss it and sometimes even try to practice some events described in that book. This

time they read an Agatha Christi murder mystery “Evil under the sun” where Hercules Poirot solves a murder mystery while holidaying. Such an idea was too fascinating for these ladies to plan this trip to go to Bell Warf beach. They too were stuck here but never mind, they had a lot to talk and today's hot topic was another old lady sitting there who talked very vaguely. She did not know why she was there or where she was going. Her husband had died in a cardiac arrest on the way and she had become numb may be out of shock. These three ladies were trying to talk to her. One of them said The Station Master is trying to contact her next kith and kin. Till now it has not been possible. The telephone lines are all out of order. So, connecting with someone on mobile has also not been possible. The weather is so bad that not even the Police are going out unless it is necessary. The rail staff has her ticket but beyond that, they have not been able to proceed much. The lady was sipping coffee and giving confused answers to her queries. These three ladies were confusing her even more. Anyways, it is always good to be in company than sit alone and brood. That way all four ladies were passing their time well. This fourth woman glanced at the little girl skipping and running out of the store. A flicker of recognition seemed to cross her. This little one reminded her of someone. She wanted to call out a name but stopped confused. The three old ladies looked at each other and asked her “Do you know this little girl or does she remind you of someone?”

A young pop singer from India named Kituraj had got a chance for his first debut performance in London and Wales. Unfortunately, this storm had made all plans topsy-turvy. The program had been canceled at the last moment. Imagine the frustration he was feeling. This program had been arranged with great difficulty and his entry was a fluke of destiny. This was his chance of becoming known internationally. Very frustrated he sat near the coffee shop. With nothing to do, he started playing his guitar and singing softly. Soon people waiting in the airport

gathered around him. They started recording him on their mobile. One of the passengers was a friend of the famous pop singer of England Ed Sheeran who liked it and shared it with millions of his followers. Very soon his program was in social media. It was getting viral. God, he had five million followers now who had given their thumbs up. This was his dream come true.

A lady with a cocker spaniel was feeling very irritated and stuck up with her dog in the station. She was grumbling to one of her fellow passengers sitting beside her. My son had brought this dog and named it Buddy. He finished high school and has joined an internship leaving Buddy behind. What a nuisance. I cannot leave him in a kennel as they are charging a lot. Besides Buddy does not accommodate other dogs there and starts a fight. Therefore, I must carry him along on all my trips. See now, I need to clean his poops and urine regularly so that he does not smell and fellow passengers do not complain. I wish someone would take him away. Buddy was listening to her owner. He also longed for a partner and a home with many puppies. The little girl who was playing nearby heard her and came and asked if she could take her dog for a stroll on the platform. The lady was too willing to be free for a while. The little girl held the leash and ran to another side of the platform where a family with two children was sitting with their Labrador named Bella. These children were pulling her tail and constantly irritating Bella. Buddy seeing this started barking loudly. His manliness got aroused seeing a helpless female dog. Bella almost in tears said how she wished to go away from this family. These children were constantly troubling her and making her life hell. Buddy told her that tonight when people will mostly dose off to sleep, we both will sneak out from here and start a life together. That night they managed to get out of the platform when their family members were dozing and the security staffs were relaxed and chitchatting as there were no incoming or outgoing passengers. Buddy and Bella ran in the

torrential rain. The roads were all empty and there were no policemen to catch them. Finally, they reached an old dilapidated barn where there were enough old rags to keep them warm. Buddy caught a rat and a rabbit and they had their stomachs filled. How they slept cozily snuggled to each other.

There was an announcement that food trays and drinking water will be served to all passengers free of cost. That was a great relief for all and especially for some students stuck up here. Their wallets were running out of money. One of them wanted to smoke badly but the railway station had recently declared its area a nonsmoking zone. He entered the room meant for prayers and seeing no one inside took a few shots and came out. A railway staff entered that room and could know that the passenger who had just left had smoked in that room. She thought that it would be better if she did not report this matter as she had not caught the young lad red-handed and the situation tonight was an emergency.

By daybreak the intensity of the rain gradually reduced. The rising sun seemed to peep from amongst the clouds which were no more having the fiery grey hue. The passengers who were resting here and there became busy with their morning ablutions. The coffee and teashops looked crowded with passengers holding steaming cups. There was again the sound of the usual hustle and bustle. After a while, there was an announcement that the train will resume its onward journey. There was a feeling of relief on every passenger's face. The rail staff had been able to contact the daughter of the woman who had lost her memory. When they connected her to her daughter and when the lady heard her daughter's voice, she seemed to get back her memory but sat numb not speaking. It was her granddaughter's voice that made her talk. She started weeping piteously. She was just the age of the little girl on the platform. Her sweet and soothing voice comforted her and she gradually became composed.

The other three old ladies comforted her and told her that whenever she felt lonely, she can talk to them over the phone. They would also meet her wherever she would feel like.

The railway guard blew the whistle and everyone hovering on the platform walked briskly to board the train. Some had made new friends and acquaintances with people who had become their acquaintances and shared their joys and sorrows with them in the last few hours on the platform. They exchanged their mobile numbers. The train had been cleaned and fumigated so that the passengers would have a clean bogey to go on their journey and reach their destination.