



## In My Bottom Drawer

---

Mirza Waheed

**T**HE MOST ORDINARY, DELICATE, and yet precious memories of childhood, which I hope to transform into a memoir someday. These are incidents, friendships, heartbreaks, and adventures I was lucky to have as a child from the age of eight to eleven when my father's job took him to a pristine 'hill station' in Kashmir.

Why do I want to write about those three years and not all my childhood? The answer perhaps lurks somewhere in the question itself. Whether it has something to do with the place: a mountain as pretty as a tourist brochure, a spring whose waters were emerald because of the dense pine forest above it, a hillside orchard of cherry and walnut where I spent long summer days with my best friend, the school by a bend in the stream that sprang from the aforementioned spring; or all the ordinary and extraordinary events whose details I remember as if it was the other day. The escapades into the high mountains beyond which a long and dark tunnel took travellers into the wide world outside, the camaraderie my siblings and I shared with the children of the headman in whose house we were lodgers, or the hair-raising stories of the mysterious female spirit who descended from the forest in the winters and hypnotised grown-up people, men mostly, I must add, into jumping into the freezing waters of the spring.

Or probably because I remember to this day the girl I fancied then – her name was literally 'The Beautiful' – and in whose praise I composed a terrible song that I hummed as my friend and I walked in the village or by the stream that glided at the edge.



That these images, snatches of conversation, journeys, and accidents have stayed frighteningly fresh in my head all these years tells me I must write it all down. A sharp and precise recollection of those years after which we went back to the city where life was exciting, of course, but had none of the romance and mystery of what we had left behind. There was a moment where life might have turned out differently (could've/would've are essential to memoir writing, aren't they?), when my mother made inquiries about acquiring a patch of land near the rice paddies and apple orchards not too far from the main village. I suspect my mother probably went to see the land too – did we go along? I must ask her soon – and then began the arduous task of persuading my father to stay on and start life afresh in the countryside.

I see her reasons clearly, or clearly enough. It would've meant a freer life, our very own piece of land in the idyllic Kashmir countryside where we would be masters and builders. I still wonder what life might have been if she had succeeded.

If a publisher or editor happens to read this, I promise a memoir full of beauty, childhood love, perilous adventures across raging streams, with guest appearances from all kinds of creatures, bears and snakes, spirits and the possessed, and at least one midsummer snowfall.