

The Treatment Of Bibi Haldar

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Setting: Haldar's Stall and home



Brief outline of story

- Bibi is a 29 year old who lives with her cousins, her cousins manage a beauty shop. She has been suffering from an illness all her life and nobody can crack why she has it, nor can they prescribe a suitable remedy. symptoms of the illness include: falling unconscious uncontrollably, severe seizures and delirium. She is suggested that maybe having a relationship with somebody because it will "calm her blood". A newspaper article is put out advertising Bibi to men who would wed her, but no takers. her cousin and the family become increasingly frustrated with having to look after Bibi continuously and see her as a curse to all bad things that happen to them, the family leave her behind and Bibi becomes a recluse. months later she is found in her small storage room, and she is pregnant, she will not tell who the father is. However, the child is born and Bibi finally has a companion and is "cured".

Characters



Characters: Bibi Haldar

- Bibi Haldar is a 29-year-old woman who suffered from a disease that no doctor, priest or therapist could interpret. Bibi Haldar was infamous for her illness, and everyone knew of her suffering. “She was not pretty. Her upper lip was thin, her teeth too small. Her gums protruded when she spoke.” She was quite intelligent and had a somewhat bitter attitude with spouts of positivity.
- She grows as a character and finds her true self by the end of the short story. She gives birth to a baby boy, yet we do not find out when or who the father was. Bibi is very mysterious, but her happiness is finally found. She emerges from being dependent on everyone around her and escapes the malady that was holding her back for so many years and seeks happiness in her son.

Characters: Haldar

- Haldar is Bibi's older cousin who owns a cosmetics shop in which Bibi and a couple other women work. Haldar is very passive and makes a lot of decisions that impact Bibi in this story; such as placing the ad in the newspaper to find Bibi a husband, he takes orders from his wife to lock Bibi away and essentially cares for Bibi. He is quiet, yet makes a big impact in the story.

Perspective

- Society narrates this story, which gives it a judgmental vibe. The women from the store give us an insight to Bibi Haldar's life. They speak about her negatively or speak down on her.
- They seem to always talk about how they wish they could help, or do the most they can to help, but there is nothing they can do.

Characters: Haldar's Wife

- Haldar's wife has a big personality, which impacts the way that Haldar treats Bibi. Haldar's wife believes Bibi was the one to make her newborn sick. "She's done it. She's infected our child."
- Haldar's wife is quite popular and it is apparent that a lot of people like her. She is intimidating, as the women want to help Bibi but would rather keep quiet as they do not want Haldar's wife to think of them differently.

Links to other stories

- "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" is very relatable to the story "Interpreter of Maladies", the fact being that nobody of any profession can help treat Bibi for most of the story, nobody can... Interpret her malady... Much like Ms Das'.
- The treatment of Bibi Haldar is also quite similar to the story "A Real Durwan". The protagonist in that short story is also someone that becomes a recluse. Both of these stories are set in Calcutta, the only two stories in Interpreter of Maladies set in India.
- The evident Indian culture demonstrated throughout the story is also much like that in the title story "Interpreter of Maladies" in relation to food and the role of woman.

Important Quotes



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- “It became unendurably apparent that Bibi wanted a man”
- “For the first time, we noted the clarity of her complexion, the length and languor of her eyelashes, the undeniably elegant armature of her hands.”
- Selling Bibi: “GIRL, UNSTABLE, 152 CM, SEEKS HUSBAND”
- She is worthless: “Waste our profits on a wedding?”
- Food reference: “Frowning like a rice pot will get you nowhere”
- Bibi’s positive attitude: “Apart from my condition I am perfectly healthy”
- The women pretend they care about Bibi but they don’t: “She was not our responsibility, and in our private moments we were thankful for it”

Important Quotes

- Everyone is talking about Bibi: “We made our children gargle with warm saltwater and wrap mufflers around their necks. But it was the Haldar baby who ended up getting sick.”
- Blaming Bibi on everything they can: “She’s done it. She’s infected our child.”
- Bibi’s positive attitude leads her through life: “The world begins at the bottom of the stairs. Now I am free to discover life as I please.”
- The women pretend they care about Bibi but they don’t: “Each night we left her alone.”
- The mystery? Was it planned? Was it rape?: “She was about 4 months pregnant.”
- She knew who it was but she didn’t say: “She would not reveal the man’s identity.”
- It didn’t matter as her malady was finally cured: “There was no point carrying out an investigation. She was, to the best of our knowledge, cured.”

Key Themes



Key Themes: Ailments

- One key theme in 'The Treatment of Bibi Haldar' is the theme of ailments and maladies, and how they affect those with them and how it changes the way society looks at them.
- The whole story revolves around Bibi's sickness, possible cures and society's treatment of her because of her issues. The story begins with the introduction of Bibi, and in this opening sentence her ailment is also introduced, meaning we as the audience do not know Bibi without her sickness as they are shown to us as one and the same.
- This continues throughout the story, and it is made clear to the audience through the narration that the community around her only pays her attention as they feel sorry for her condition, however none of them can see through the 'imperfection' of her sickness. Men refuse to take her as a wife, "even the lonely four-toothed widower who repairs handbags in the market could not be persuaded to propose" as they felt that her ailment defined her.
- When Bibi was finally cured from her illness, the community lost their wariness for her and stopped their detached judgments, instead working towards helping her as they began to forget their old fears of her and see her as the woman she really was all along.

Key Themes: Gender Roles

- Throughout the whole book of Interpreter of Maladies, women are treated inferiorly to men. Bibi Haldar's story highlights this theme as Bibi, and all the other women in the story, have no purpose in life other than to become wives and then mothers.
- In the Indian culture this specific story revolves around, Bibi's life shall not persevere or be known as successful until she finds love.
- The women of the shop do not stand up for Bibi as they have been taught to follow the same procedure of life as well.
- Essentially, Bibi Haldar had to be impregnated to be considered desirable again.

Key Themes: Love and Relationships

- The second theme in this story was the theme of love and relationships, and how people were seen as living a better life and becoming a better person when you got married. Through the entirety of the book, Bibi's main aspiration and dream is to become a wife and attain a husband. The narrator constantly refers to different couples in the stories, and young women and men looking to find their spouse or courting each other. Ridiculously, it was determined by a doctor in the story that Bibi's last hope to be cured of her sickness was to find a husband, and then she would be cured once and for all.