

# The distance between us

*by* Rachna K.

My husband, Raju, went to Dubai to work as a construction worker. Before he left, he bought a cellphone for me and promised to send money every month. The first few weeks we talked about the early monsoon and how it used to make us horny. He asked if I still laughed in my sleep. I mentioned the wandering gypsies who kidnapped kids and stole chicken from nearby farms. He sang songs and I imagined him sauntering through the front door, whistling and settling on his cot, his legs spread out like giant logs of wood, taking my breath away.

My husband went to Dubai and come monsoon time, he switched to calling once in two weeks because we kept shouting hello and while I heard him clear as thunder, he claimed he couldn't. When the money order arrived, I bought a saree and a stack of multicolor bindis. Every morning, I stuck the cellphone in my blouse and went to work in the paddy fields. Shin deep in mud and rain water, I pulled out weeds and planted the seeds. All along the day, I imagined the tall, golden buildings where he worked, the men and women he saw: their long robes and hijabs. The occasional high pitched ringtone followed by his voice always made me jump. And I stretched like sky in the distance between us.

My husband went to Dubai and when the dark, dense clouds hovered, they reminded me of the color of his skin. I hugged the mattress at night and ignited a private hectare of my body. My legs rubbed against each other and the lust subsided with strangers in my dreams. "The money is good, I'm here for both of us," he tried to justify. I wanted to hint about the blurred faces and glistening bodies in my sub-conscious. I wanted to know how long he can go on without needing his skin over another. Instead I pressed my face against the phone and my ears turned hot, filtering the echo of his promise from the static.

My husband went to Dubai and I fasted once again on the Karva Chauth festival for his long and healthy life. I made clay statues of

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Parvati, Ganesh and Shiva. In the evening, I dressed in a green lehenga and put on a hot pink lipstick. When he called I heard the clinking bangles and a woman's giggle in the background. "Raju *jaan*," she spoke softly and he hushed her. My heart punched, my body stiffened, and then went numb for a few seconds before disconnecting. The gibbous moon rose and as per the custom I offered rice, sugar and water to the Gods. I thought of him touching other women. Women who talked dirty like me, their legs spread on his bed, his closed eyes and the quick surrender. And the memory of his leaving sharpened. I didn't cry. I didn't scream. Instead I smashed the phone against the wall. Then I carefully picked up the pieces like they were parts of my body, taped them somehow and stared at its dark display for a long time.

