

The namesake quotes

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ On a sticky August evening two weeks before her due date, Ashima Ganguli stands in the of a Central Square apartment, combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there was mustard oil to add to the mix. ” “ Like a kiss or a caress in a Hindi movie, a husband’s name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. ” “ Do yourself a favor. Before it’s too late, without thinking too much about it first, pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it.

One day it will be too late. “ He was still clutching a page of “ The Overcoat,” crumpled tightly in his fist, and when he raised his hand the wad of papers dropped from his fingers. “ Ashima means “ she who is limitless, without borders. ” Ashoke, the name of an emperor, means “ he who transcends grief. “ On more than one occasion he has come home from the university to find her morose, in bed, rereading her parents’ letters. Early mornings, when he senses that she is quietly crying, he puts an arm around her but can think of nothing to say, feeling that it is his fault, for marrying her, for bringing her here. “ For thirty-three years, she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she’s worked. She will miss throwing parties... She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered in the Ganges, it is here, in this house and in this town, that he will continue to dwell in her mind. “ When Ashima and Ashoke see their son’s pet named typed on the label of a prescription for antibiotics when they see it at the top of his immunization record, it doesn’t look right; pet names aren’t meant to be

made public in this way. " The wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice, and she tells them about the carp that's sold in Chinatown, that it's possible to make halwa from Cream of Wheat... They drink tea with sugar and evaporated milk and eat shrimp cutlets fried in saucepans. " Only then, forced at six months to confront his destiny, does he begin to cry.

" Mrs. Jones leads a life that Ashoke's mother would consider humiliating: eating alone, driving herself to work in snow and sleet, seeing her children and grandchildren, at most, three or four times a year. For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. " Each day Ashoke is pained by the half-eaten sandwiches people toss in the garbage cans on campus, apples abandoned after one or two bites. " Finish it, Gogol. At your age, I ate tin. " The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old one. Not only is it a perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning " he who is entire, encompassing all," but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol. He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he does not know. Who doesn't know him? " For their daughter, good name and pet names are one and the same: Sonali, meaning " she who is golden. " It doesn't bother him that his name is never an option on key chains or metal pins or refrigerator magnets... Though substitute teachers at school always pause, looking apologetic when they arrive at his name on the roster, forcing Gogol to call out, before even being summoned, " That's me," teachers in the school system know not to give it a second thought. " Gogol is old enough to know that there is no Ganguli here. He is old enough to

know that he himself will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life. " For by now, he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything in " in Indian. " His parents expect him to be, if not an engineer, then a doctor, a lawyer, an economist at the very least. " Her appreciation for these details flatters him; it occurs to him that he has never spoken of his experiences in India to any American friend. "...That they had an arranged marriage, that his mother cooks Indian food every day, that she wears saris and a bindi. " He cannot imagine his parents sitting at Lydia and Gerald's table, enjoying Lydia's cooking, appreciating Gerald's wine selection. He cannot imagine them contributing to one of their dinner party conversations.

And yet here he is, night after night, a welcome addition to the Ratliff's universe, doing just that. That they will not be able to touch or kiss each other in front of his parents, that there will be no wine with lunch. Along with the samosas, there are breaded chicken cutlets, chickpeas with tamarind sauce, lamb biryani, chutney made with tomatoes from the garden. It is a meal he knows it has taken his mother over a day to prepare, and yet the amount of effort embarrasses him. " He is overly aware that they are not used to passing things around the table, or to chewing food with their mouths completely closed. They avert their eyes when Maxine accidentally leans over to run her hand through her hair. " One hand, five homes. A lifetime in a fist. " Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go. When she was

only five years old, she was asked by her relatives if she planned to get married in a red sari or a white gown." Aren't you going to arrange a wedding for her? " He thinks of his parents, strangers until this moment, two people who had not spoken until after they were actually wed. Suddenly sitting next to Moushumi, he realizes what it means, and he is astonished by his parents' courage, the obedience that must have been involved in doing such a thing. "...Waking up every morning with a pillow pressed over her head. " He admires her, even resents her a little, for having moved to another country and made a separate life.

He realizes that this is what their parents had done in America. What he, in all likelihood, will never do. " It's the one thing about her parents' lives she truly admires—their ability, for better or for worse, to turn their backs on their homes. " Gogol has nothing to say to these people. He doesn't care about their dissertation topics, or their dietary restrictions, or the color of their walls. " There's no such thing as a perfect name. I think human beings should be allowed to name themselves when they turn eighteen," he adds. " Until then, pronouns. This assurance is important to her; along with the Sanskrit vows she'd repeated at her wedding, she'd privately vowed that she'd never grown fully dependent on her husband, as her mother has. For even after thirty-two years abroad, in England and now in America, her mother does not know how to drive, does not have a job, does not know the difference between a checking and a savings account. " The mindlessness soothers her nerves. As a child, she always had a knack for organization; she would take it upon herself to neaten closets and drawers, not only her own but her parents as well. " You're going to break hearts, you know. " She

wonders if she is the only woman in her family ever to have betrayed her husband, to have been unfaithful. This is what upsets her most to admit: that the affair causes her to feel strangely at peace, the complication of it calming her, structuring her day. “ Suddenly terrified, he ducks his head, feeling foolish afterward. None of the other pedestrians had reacted. “ True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere.