

California Story

October 12, 2019

I read [A California Story by Namit Arora](#) while traveling and it kept me company through flight delays, rainy weather and jet-lagged sleeplessness. This is an important detail because it has to do with the atmosphere of the story. It invokes a great nostalgia for things past, a time of innocence and the end of irrational exuberance that was 2003.

For those of us who lived in America in the years the protagonist, Ved speaks of, we could relate to this story many different ways. If you had been a cog in the wheel, doing your meaningless part to advance the mission of one of the many technology over-lords of the day, like Ved, you would recognize the emptiness you found where your soul should have been.

He asks himself why he lives a life that does feel genuinely his own. You hear his angst in his conversations with Liz when they go on dates - both in the good and bad phases of their emotionally tentative relationship. You can agree with a lot of what he says and think about what you took for granted a bit differently.

His relationship with Sasha, a Russian escort, while unconventional is without pretense and artifice. In our single years, many of us have known people like Sasha who don't fit any societal model of good dating or marriage material and yet they offer much needed solace. So we clung to them sometimes against our better judgement because there was only so much "alone" we could deal with.

Then finally there is the fact of being an immigrant in America and what it means to "succeed" or "fail" to people keeping score back at home. The more you fail to conform to their standards the more rootless and un-

tethered you feel. Ved grapples with the needs of the various facets of his personality and experiences an overarching sense of discomfort he can't seem to shake-off. He comes across as cold, aloof and hyper-analytical. Like many immigrants he struggles to overcome the inertia of what he has grown familiar with and trigger change.

Yet change does come to Ved's life in the end and in a cataclysmic way - perhaps the only way such profound change could come. Reading the last few pages of the book on my flight home, I thought not all of us have been as lucky - we were not hurtled out of our dubious comfort zone and forced to reckon with what our real purpose in life was. A wonderful, intelligent and unvarnished traverse through the life of an immigrant in America.