

Gautama (A. Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock*) Cold

Character Gautama is a lawyer who marries Maya, but he is more the friend of his wife's father than he is her husband. He is described as 'tall, stooped and knowledgeable.' He is a rational person, uninterested in emotions, only reality or facts. When Maya challenges him for only feeling 'bored' at a party and not registering anything stronger, he defends himself by saying that the boredom was just a fact. 'Facts are made to be accepted and to be studied,' he says. 'Not to be wept over.' He is totally devoted to his work as a lawyer and shows little interest in his wife as a person. He is forever finding reasons, mostly financial, not to agree to her plans for doing things outside their normal routine. He is kind to her, according to his own lights, especially in external things. He gives her an opal ring, but 'does not see blue and flashing veins of pleasure every time I wear it.' He brings her a cup of tea when her pet dog dies, not realising the depth of her despair. He takes care of her when she is ill, has headaches or lies in the bed with some kind of 'female ailment.' Despite this superficial kindness, he is censorious and constantly tells her to 'sit up' or 'change your sari.' When she tells him that her does not love her, he is puzzled.

Activities Gautama spends long hours in his office, not only the one in the city but also the one in his home. Clients come in the morning and evening, bringing him more cases. He sometimes goes to visit his parents or friends. He also reads not only case law but also religious texts, like the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Illustrative moments

Cold The cold distance that Gautama puts between himself and his young wife is displayed early in their marriage. It is the beginning of the hot season, when people who can afford it often go up into the cool hills of the Himalayas. He has forbidden Maya, his wife, to speak about summer holidays because he can't take them: he is, he says, too busy with work. Forgetting his injunction one day, Maya says, 'Let's go on a holiday,' and he says, " 'Why don't you? Your father can take you wherever you want to go.' 'Can't you get away for a short time?' Maya asks. 'Unlikely,' he says, snapping open his cigarette case with a metallic click that matched his voice.' "

External Gautama is a man without access to the interior world of emotions and feelings. Everything is seen and experienced in terms of the 'nuts and bolts' of the measurable, external world. This is a world that Maya does not understand or appreciate, as we hear in her description: 'In Gautama's [lawyer] family, they did not talk of love, far less of affection. One spoke--they spoke--of bribery and corruption revealed in government, of newspaper editors accused of libel...sometimes, in order to relax, they played cards. But they played so intensely that they found they had to release the mounting pressure by conversing and began to talk again of politics and government.'

Practical Gautama's extreme pragmatism is seen throughout the novel, in his profession and at home. A clear demonstration of this outlook is given in the first scene, when his wife's pet dog dies. While she is shattered and lies in tears, he takes control. 'He was very late,' Maya tells the reader, 'but as soon as he came, he did all that had to be done, quickly and quietly like a surgeon's knife at work. He telephoned the Public Works Department, he had them send their scavenging truck to take the corpse away.' Then he wiped his fingers on his handkerchief, still in neat folds, and calmly told his still-grieving wife that all she needs is 'a cup of tea.'