

THE TALKING STORIES

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THE WRITING ACADEMY

By

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Acknowledgement

Journeys and destinations have a strange story entwined together. For many, destinations are perpetual and journeys are ephemeral. When my first book got conceptualized, I was sure to choose a maverick approach. I interchanged the ephemeral became perpetual and vice versa.

In this perpetual sojourn of completing this book, there is a trail of thank you tokens which would never do the justice to express what I feel. I will take a bow in front of my parents Kumud Joshi and Om Prakash Joshi for making me who I am today. Mukul Shrivastava, for all the love and encouragement.

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-Heena Joshi

A Vision for Sight

'Out of all gestures, Love is about letting go'

They both were deeply in love. Love transforms a person not only in becoming a better human being but also adds some additional sense to your faded or dead senses.

Sometimes an unearthly thread binds the souls of the ones in love which is a way stronger than the bodily connection. The same was the case with them. Physical limitations never could let them bring a second thought for each other.

He never felt that he was blind, because he had been gifted two of the most beautiful eyes in the world, which were physically hers. Like any other true lover, she played her duties well and whole heartedly. She never left any stone unturned in weaving his dreams and also in materializing them. She did everything and anything for him. His dreams were the ones she saw with her eyes wide open, in the lieu that they shall be completed someday. His life was what she lived. Each and every moment she stayed with him to make sure that he never feels devoid of eyes. Even he could see the world with her eyes and her mesmerizing perception. Yet she wanted him to see and explore the world on his own and so she enquired an eye donation center. Every time she went to discuss about the possibilities of donations, his curious mind thought of thousands of giddy questions which started eating up their serene relation.

Many a times, in the middle of their lovey-dovey conversations, she had to leave. He was left infuriated. Yet this all was for him to experience the colors of life, the wonders that supreme power had made. And one day,

after four long months, he saw her entering the house with a wide and captivating smile on her lips. He wondered, what could be the reason behind his love's shining happiness reflected in her gestures.

"What happened, love? May I know the reason of your happiness", his catechized mind enquired.

"You know what, I feel to be the happiest one for I have got the right to disclose this news to you that, that we have got a donor for your eyes and all these days I was busy arranging the system for your eye operation. Now, you will not need my physical presence to be your eyes. You yourself would instigate the sense of life in you", she replied with a fading smile.

Though the news was exciting but the worry took the better of him. He was more of nervous than being zealous.

"I want you to be the first person I see through my new eyes, so you will have to be there." His face glowed in anticipatory joy when he revealed his first wish to her.

"Yes, I will be there always", she replied and smiled with a less curved smile and biting her lower lip in helplessness. The fading smile showed the signs of despair her heart carried. She thanked the Almighty of not letting him listen to the gulp of her tears. She swallowed inside her pain while speaking. Only God and she was aware of the fact that what was going to happen.

The surgery went successful. The doctors were satisfied and they decided to open up his bandages.

He had two reasons to be happy for. First, he was going to be able to

see the world now and second, that he could finally see his world in *her*, the love of his life. He asked the doctors to hurriedly wrap the procedure up of opening up the bandages that tied his newly attached eyes as it had already been more than twenty four hours and he was getting desperate and anxious to see her. Finally, his eyes were unwrapped and from there on, began his incessant wait for her.

Myriad imaginations struck his mind of how she would be looking and what she must be wearing. He was very assured that he would recognize her from distance itself since he could feel her smell. He knew that their soulful love needed no recognition test. He wondered, what could her expressions be when he would first stare at her. Would she blush? Or would she break down in his arms whilst being tired of all that happened in the last four months?

His eyes refused to blink so that he doesn't miss her first sight and he was glued to the door. Ant step made him jump, cringe or flinch in mirth and anticipation of her arrival but all turned into dismay when she did not turn up till evening.

Life sometimes puts a jigsaw puzzle in front of you and hides one piece out of it. Your every move becomes a mockery on yourself when in last you find out that one block itself is missing to complete the picture. You imagine your victory beforehand while putting the pieces of jigsaw

puzzle and all comes to a crash like air slipping out of balloon in a whoosh.

Some lies are better than truth. Some distances do better than just good. Some things are better left unexplained.

She was not able to find a donor and wanted him to something for him. She didn't wanted him to know and feel guilty about his eyes. He would have never approved for it. Leaving him was her best option.

She called him. "Where are you?", the voice came over the phone. "It's over, I don't want to see you again", she said and hung up the phone. His calls were unanswered. She didn't pick up the calls. It was raining outside when he came. His tears with the raindrops fell on ground and disappeared in the pool of water. He had lost her, she broke up.

He could see now:

"She smiled. She was the reason.

She broke up:

He cried. She was the reason."

Little did he know that her vision gave him his eyesight. She donated her eyes to him and that this time for real he could see through her eyes. And little did he knew that this "breakup was a life for him" given by her.

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Because

"What will you do if suddenly the people whom you rely so much on, vanish from your life. Reason may be any, ranging from death to untold, irrational or mutual separation. How would you deal with it? How to cure loneliness?", asked Rajan, after waiting for long time to be queued raising hands to ask queries.

"So many questions! I guess my real test is on now", giggled Natasha and her nose cringed with utter cuteness. Her short boy cut hairdo, dusky complexion, ragged light blue jeans with a loose, white and red striped checkered shirt with blue casual boots were failing her every attempt of looking like a professional life skill trainer, but her one witty sentence outdid the wrong effect. Natasha's first class as guest speaker in Creation College was pacing towards an interesting conversation.

"Ok. I would like to begin answering them one by one but before that, I would want to do two things. First, asking your name and second, warning you to brace yourself for a much practical answer to sort out such issues and trust me, it would pinch like ouch!" Natasha's each word spurred out confidently was casting a spell on students or maybe it was just Rajan, who felt mesmerized. He tried guessing her age and could not think beyond 25 at max. His cheeks felt warm when he was thinking and then he jerked off the thought and looked around. That is when he understood, that it was not just him, but the whole bunch of his batch, who were not able to take eyes off her.

"Hello, Mr? Am I audible to you? Would you please tell me your name?" Natasha interrupted Rajan's thoughts after waiting for a minute. "Oh! Ma'am, aaaaa I aamm am Rajan Shukla", Rajan felt like burying himself

under the Earth on stammering and wobbling while standing to respond to her. His eyes met other batch-mates' and he was relieved to find sympathy in them. This satiated him as he felt on the same page with them on this strikingly appealing life skill guest faculty. He thanked his father for selecting this college for him against his wishes for his writing diploma. Sometimes, one should abide blindly on advices and results are much sweeter than imagined.

"Ok Rajan. So here you go. As I said, brace yourself! Talking about relying on someone emotionally, I am sure we all have at least five people in life, whom we rely blindly on and when they leave, the breakage happens for sure. What I would do in such situation is damage control. There are few steps of mending the breakage. Starting from shock, reaction, rejection, dejection, acceptance and again action. We first get shocked and react and we reject the fact that the person left us. Gradually, we realize that the comeback is not possible and thus dejection creeps in for sometime and gradually acceptance mode ripples and accordingly we take apt action to revive our emotional wreckage." She took a pause after explaining one part of his query.

"So you mean, emotional breakdowns are like physical fever, which needs to be cured through good plan?" Rajan's interest was now taking the better of him and he sounded much more confident and curious this time.

"Yes you can say so, but unlike fever, we cannot give the same paracetamol for every emotional breakdown. The reason why the person left, attributes so much to the final action you take to revive your situation. Like if the cause is normal like death or mutual separation, the healing will be for you in action. But if the person harmed you and

deceived you, the one has to take the anti-dote of tiny revenges to get healed." She winked to make it sound a bit lighter.

"Ok Ma'am, I guess, you have answered the dealing part here too. Can you shed some light on curing the loneliness part?" Rajan was now keen on getting a complete response for his query, which seemed to amuse Natasha as well. "Well ! Why not Rajan, please take your seat. I would tell you a story here to cure the loneliness part. Many of you might have heard it." She smiled making eye contact with almost everyone and continued the story, " At a restaurant, a cockroach suddenly flew from somewhere and sat on a lady. She started screaming out of fear. With a panic stricken face and trembling voice, she started jumping, with both her hands desperately trying to get rid of the cockroach. Her reaction was contagious, as everyone in her group also panicked.

The lady finally managed to push the cockroach away but it landed on another lady in the group.

Now, it was the turn of the other lady in the group to continue the drama.

The waiter rushed forward to their rescue.

In the relay of throwing, the cockroach next fell upon the waiter.

The waiter stood firm, composed himself and observed the behavior of the cockroach on his shirt." She paused and resumed with unfathomable confidence in her sparkling eyes, " Now tell me, was the cockroach responsible for their histrionic behavior? If so, then why was

the waiter not disturbed?" She paused again and waited for students to digest the information.

"He handled it near to perfection, without any chaos. It is not the cockroach, but the inability of those people to handle the disturbance caused by the cockroach, that disturbed the ladies.

It's not the traffic jams on the road that disturbs me, but my inability to handle the disturbance caused by the traffic jam. It is not the loneliness that disturbs me, but my lack of planning to utilize that time does. The world is full of knowledge and with right attitude and time management, one can be alone but never lonely. There is huge difference between these two seemingly synonym terms. While the former is self chosen and the later is imposed as burden in times of lack of planning, will power and right set of attitude." She ended with a smile.

The hall roared of claps and praises.

Rajan walked faster to catch up the pace with Natasha, who immediately left post soft skill training class. Her brown coloured, jute tote bag was adding more casual look to her. "Ma'am! ,Ma'am" Rajan managed to speak while panting. Natasha turned back and slowed down spotting Rajan. "Hey! Rajan. How are you? I really loved your gesture of acute curiosity for today's class." Natasha tried her best to sound formal to avoid further conversation and kept walking.

"Thank you ma'am but the credit goes to your content and style of teaching ma'am. Any student will be highly interested to take such real-

time life lessons from you." He praised her in utter awe and respect, which was visibly reflecting in his tone.

"Oh! Let's take equal credits then. A good teacher is nothing without a good student and vice versa. What say?" ,she chuckled and he gushed in awe again with the pink shade on his cheeks.

"Ma'am, I have a request. Please don't take me wrong. I am a writer and I am stuck in between my story. I have been looking for people to help me out. I think, God has sent you for this to me. To be my guide. Can you please discuss my book idea?" His brows shrank while pleading and lips got dry in anticipation of her response.

"Well! Rajan, I would love to. But the thing is, I have got some real urgent task back at home. Why don't we meet at Writer's cafe tomorrow at 5 PM?" Natasha spoke while increasing her pace.

"Alright ma'am, Thanks a lot. See you tomorrow then. I am really thankful." He said it all with a sheepish grin. A sudden hope surged in his veins and his blood seemed to run faster than before. The adrenaline kicked high and once Natasha drove off, Rajan could not resist but jump in air and walked back home whistling happily.

Writer's Cafe 4:50PM

Natasha was waiting for Rajan. Dressed in a black well fitted patiala, sleeveless embroidered salwar kameez, she was looking resplendent. Her only accessory was a dangling bracelet gifted by Vaani and had

alphabets of Vaani hanging down from it. She was busy sipping her frappe while her eyes were glued to her kindle.

Rajan was eyeing around while parking his bike and spotted Natasha's car there. He cursed himself for taking trainers for granted. He never imagined that a trainer of such national repute will be there before time. He was donned in blue denims with a white shirt, which was the classic combo. He ruffled his hair to give them bounce after taking off the helmet. He checked himself in mirror once more and proceeded towards the cafe. There she was sitting, with her back at the entrance. He was again enchanted by her persona and felt his hands sweating in nervousness already. This was not the nervousness borne out of love but it was the stardom.

"Ahem. Hello Ma'am. I am really sorry for being late. How are you?" Rajan forwarded his hand for handshake, which was immediately responded by Natasha. The two seated comfortably and Natasha asked Rajan to order something and came to the point directly.

"So what is your story about?", Natasha enquired with her hands entwined together under her chin and placed them on table. Her twinkling eyes were telling that she was really into it. His eyes fixated on the kindle, trying to see the name of the book, she was drowned into. This was his bad habit and he rebuked himself immediately for it. "My story is about a lesbian family, which adopts a transgender kid and together they try to fit into the jigsaw of the society. So the book talks about their incessant struggle and an effort to reshape the definitions of society." He told and looked into her eyes for response.

"Oh! A unique concept indeed." Natasha said and took the last few sips of her frappe. "So where is the problem?", she asked with a raised

eyebrow.

"Ma'am the problem is that I am somehow creeping into depression and I feel, I have a writer's block."

"Hmm. So that's the problem. No worries. I can help you in that", Natasha said cheerfully in an assuring tone.

"Oh really! How ma'am? I am so thankful to you." Beamed Rajan.

"Well, there is a friend of mine. He is a psychologist. I can take you there for his sessions and your problem can be solved. He has cream de la cream clients and treats them well." She said it with her neck held high. "And together we both will beat your blues."

He took a pause, and looked at her excited gestures, while munching on the french fries. He gulped and said, "Ma'am, I am obliged to you, but being a student, I guess, I won't be having enough funds for such a best psychologist. And what if people come to know that I am visiting a psychologist?"

"Come on Rajan! You being a writer, think that going to psychologist is a taboo?" She guffawed while throwing her arms in the air. "Dear, they are therapist and consultants, just like any other consultant we consult when our finances or career dwindles. And don't you worry about the payment part. Dr. Animesh has done many ", frowns signified distress on her face. He wondered what this distress meant. Was it her over helping nature or his narrow thinking on psychology. He decided to jerk off the thoughts and spoke, " Ok. Alright Ma'am", he now could feel his

eyes moist a bit. It had been a deadlock since a whole year and she came like a key to that lock. He thanked God.

Next evening when Rajan went to Natasha's flat, he got anxious when nobody opened the door. He rang the doorbells thrice and it was when he bent forward to peep into the keyhole, he realizes that the door was actually left ajar. Shocked Rajan, opened the door while calling out, "Natasha". He paused for a moment once the door gave him the full view of Natasha's living room.

The walls of her room were well painted with the elegant combo of creme and purple. The plush brown sofas with a strong mahogany built squared glass table, beneath it, were lying all the newspapers neatly cascaded on each other. There was a 32 inches plasma LCD screen glued gracefully to the creme wall. There was a white modern art painting on the purple wall. This living room had two connected spaces, the diagonal left went to the open kitchen which again looked nicely furnished with maroon colored wardrobes and the diagonal right was a door, which was closed. He assumed it to be Natasha's bedroom.

Thinking that she must be asleep, Rajan called her again. He wondered how careless she was to keep the door ajar like that. He waited for the answer but when there was no noise on the other side, he decided to knock and to his shock again, he found that door ajar as well. "Natasha, don't play pranks on me. I know that you are hiding and will come and scare me. But let me warn you, that I am entering your territory, your room." And with that, Rajan opened the door and surprisingly did not find anyone. The bed was nicely done with a pink satin spreadsheet. A big teddy was sitting just in the middle of the bed and in his lap, a diary

and pen were placed. Rajan looked around and tried to find the places to hide, but was unsuccessful in searching for one, except the bathroom.

"Natasha, are you in washroom? Bathing? Now enough of hide and seek. Come out. I want to talk to you." Rajan said in an exasperating tone and found the bathroom's door ajar too. He wondered that if Natasha was not at her home, then why the main door was open. He went further and checked the washroom and as expected, there was no one inside. He now took out his mobile and tried to text Natasha, which didn't reach. He dialed her number and found the phone switched off. A strange sensation and plethora of questions, started running on his mind. He calculated all the possibilities of her whereabouts. He dialed Dr. Animesh's number assuming she might be with him.

"Oh! Rajan. No, she is not with me. I am in a session with a patient. I will call you once I am done and she must have gone to get some grocery downstairs, you relax and make yourself home till then." Dr. Animesh sounded in hurry and still managed to calm Rajan down. Rajan then went to the kitchen and served himself a glass of water, which he gulped down in one shot.

"What if Natasha is hidden under the bed or behind the curtains of her bedroom and will suddenly come out and scare the death out of him?" He thought and headed back to her bedroom. He checked every possible corner where she can hide but of no avail. Exhausted, he sat on her bed

and dialed her number again with a sigh. The wait was unbearable since he had decided to propose her today.

His eyes fell on the diary and he noticed a page placed as a bookmark inside it. He took out the page and started reading.

Dear Rajan,

I know what you are here for and I knew it long back and could feel this rising in you. Regardless of what I feel for you, I first want to tell you that I had already planned this day. When I first read your eyes and gauged a soft corner in your heart for me, I decided that I will tell you the biggest secret of our intersected lives that day. And I guess the day has come.

Intersected life because you must be thinking that we know each other from past few months but that is not true. Not only we but our parents also knew each other. Your father knew my mother well enough to fall in love with her, before both of them got married to someone else and my mother knew your father well enough, not to let him love her since she never felt the love for him. Believe it or not this is the truth and I have the proof glued in the diary's last page.

Rajan, wiped his sweat with palm and picked up the diary. His hands were clumsy with the shock. The diary was yellow leather with a strong hound and a strip to tie. The last page had photo of Rajan's father with a group of college friends where Natasha's mother and Rajan's father encircled to highlight. Rajan kept looking at it and a tear trickled down his eye. He picked up the letter to read further.

Now that you have seen the photograph, let me tell you that the story doesn't end here but begins from here. When my mother kept on

refusing your father's love and when this incident was spread like a jungle-fire in her residential area, she was married soon. Your father did not give up and developed some insane devilish instincts. He not only attacked my father once and hit on his head but also attacked my mother with acid on her face on the news of her pregnancy.

Her whole face, including right eye and lips and throat were badly burnt. When I was born, she succumbed to injuries and passed away. My father remarried but somehow I could not strike the same cord with my new mother. That doesn't make her a bad lady. I admire her.

Rajan's head reeled and the whole world swayed after reading this paragraph. His whole world turned upside down. His father, whom he loved so much was a culprit of acid attack. His mind was gushing with thoughts of disgust and shame. He lost the courage to read further. Tears were flowing non-stop now and after 15 minutes of sobbing and crying hard while sitting down on the floor with shock, he gained composure and decided to read further.

By telling you all this, I want to tell you few things which are-

1. This is not my residence, so you cannot trace me back.
2. Dr . Animesh is my brother and we have together given you hallucinations medicines to make you lose your sanity. Now I guess, even those won't be needed after reading all this. Living with a guilt is the biggest punishment on this Earth.
3. We had planned to make you a bit mad, living with a guilt throughout

your life. We could kill you easily as you being vulnerable and alone now, but we had our ways to torture you.

4. Don't even try to get back to us or file a police complaint, because Dr. Animesh's data and clinic will not be found and nor do we.

5. Last but never the least, if you ever think that why I am taking revenge now when neither your nor my parents are alive. Then let me tell you, that every Because has its time. My because had too.

Lovingly but never yours'
Natasha.

#####

Black Canvas

"Bye Papa, please spare the newspaper's H-zone section. I will come back from school and will read my favorite column.", Vidisha blurted joyfully while boarding her school bus. I nodded in quick affirmation, while my eyes were absolutely fixed on the teenage boys in her bus, who were eyeing her. A part of me fumed and my nostrils swelled in rage. The thought, 'this is common, happens with everyone; no harm done, so no hard feelings', calmed me down. It is tough to battle within yourself.

Humankind keeps on battling at each step of life. His battle begins right from the childhood against the to-be ingrained concepts and worldly ways. Coping up strategies start taking shape of survival strategies unknowingly. The battle takes rebellious forms and then in soft shapes and sizes, when one falls in love. The battle never ceases and mine was with the coping mechanism within me for my teenage daughter Vidisha. Her growing up, her thought process, her logics and arguments, her interests and preferences, every tiny thing was under scanner and I left no stone unturned to keep my angel under my radar to safeguard her from this cruel world.

After bidding my doting daughter a goodbye from the balcony, I seated myself again into the plush bean couch and resumed my favorite morning ritual of sipping brewed coffee while reading newspaper. The habit of newspaper reading was so much injected in our lives (including my wife's) that a day without it, felt incomplete. Vidisha adopted this habit from both of us and I was proud to see that at the tender age of 16, when girls of her age are busy spoiling themselves, my daughter had a vision, a preference on newspaper pages and was much more updated

than the whole like aged silly bunch of the city. I had always despised ignorance. So much so that, I could leave everything in pursuit of knowledge.

H-zone was Vidisha's newly developed interest, which I hadn't scanned so far. The reason being, Janki (her mother and my beloved wife) had sanctioned or rather say vouched for it by saying that it is a nice column written by some female writer and is useful for females. Today, when I was on leave to prepare for Vidisha's birthday surprise, I thought to take a ride in her H-Zone world. The published article had the following written in it:

H-Zone- The Last Page of My Diary.

The world is synonym of paradox. If it is cruel, it's changing at a pace it never did before. If it's demanding, it gives you chances too. If it needs opinion, it feeds opinions too. But beware of not only what you wish for but also for what you are said to.

While talking to another good author friend of mine, he suddenly said, "Careful what you say to yourself," and I probed further whether such statements really proved fatal to oneself? To which he explained me the mechanism of it. I got to know the essence in one sentence, "If we don't love ourselves, how will we help others in loving? If others don't let us love ourselves, how will we love ourselves. So the world is interdependent and will always be".

My interdependence was on a person, the one I had put on pedestal and worshipped day in, day out. Being a newbie stepping into my profession, that too a very audacious one: journalism, I was bit apprehensive and was just praying to get good support from people. Media taught me

power, the power of awareness and this very power, I had seen getting on the nerves of many powerful of society. To me, they were yet another combination of bones and flesh like any other human being. But still, I felt the power.

The person, whom I began revering like God unknowingly, fell for me or in his language, 'rose for me'. He always disliked the term, 'Falling in love', thus he invented his own, 'Rising in love'. So he rose in love with me, teaching me the minuscule details and nitty gritty of the profession and I kept on marching ahead like an obedient soldier ready to ambush anytime. I started getting painted in his taints. The taints of power and knowledge. Little did I remember considering it a rat race.

Unlike other lovers, he never brought blossoming passion and fragrance of proximity. Rather he fetched the calmness in me or so I thought it to be. He was like a quiet lake to my chaotic ocean. I relaxed and relished the power play of politics with a doorstep view in journalism with him.

Time flew and was calling me back after collecting first few lessons of journalism with him. We bade farewell to each other by looking into each others' eyes and let them talk instead. No words were needed to

assure the further meets and future. It was as if the almighty will bridge us back. And this time, it would be forever.

Sometimes goodbyes are a better hello and so was ours. Call it a destiny's trap or our own never ceasing lust for power, we got so indulge in accumulating the more of it by delving deeper every time.

We met after ten years and everything was same, except his wife and a kid with him. I befriended her like a long lost friend and we both averted our eyes whenever it tried to talk.

"Aunty, how many kilometers is the Sun from here?", asked his tiny brilliant daughter, whom he had fed so much information, that she seemed to be intelligence personified for me. When I just shrugged shoulders in response, I heard his voice, "See, except you, all girls are girls. That is why, I have raised you like a boy." A proud smile on his lips and his eyes twinkled while saying it.

It was time, time for an actual farewell. A farewell towards nothingness, where no labelling of gender existed. This time, it was a no hello and goodbye forever. I hoped that the canvas he gave to his daughter will be colored with the right, non-judgmental shades, where she will get a chance to label her own world. I wished that she is offered a blank canvas, not the one where he has sprinkled his colors.

The End

People betray, but her words could never backstab me. The H-zone reading was a salvation to my own wrong doings. It undid what I had in my mind since long. EGO of knowledge. And with that note, I was left wondering how to tell this to my daughter, that she had actually talked

to her favorite author, when she was a small wonder to me and to her as well.

#####

Checkmate

"How is this looking?", I was spelled in the beauty of my lady, when she came out of trial room and asked me. I pinched myself and gave her a naughty smile with wide eyes emoting 'WOW!' seeing her well sculptured body's every curves and mounts wrapped in light pink net saree. Her dovey eyes looked into mine sparkling the golden work on the net innocently. Her perfectly arched lips made me lust over them and I hated the lip gloss. I leaned to her and held her from her waist and gazed her gorgeous dusky hourglass body and whispered in her ears, "Saree is more beautiful because my Reva is wearing it." I found myself unable to blink eyes, leave about taking them off her.

Her skin tone went blush pink and complimented the color of saree.

"Ok then, this one final, please do the billing with my card and I will be back from washroom", said she in authoritative tone. I always adored her authority. Her independent outlook of not getting dependent on spouse financially was something hell appealing to me. I was not chauvinist, but I was a true feminist. I always loved the fact that my girl was empowered and not enfeebled.

Once done with the billing, I too headed for washroom. As soon as I stepped in and kept her saree bag on the basin slab, lights went off. I tried reaching the door but the bleak dark made me unable to do so. I tried to take out my mobile only to be reminded that its battery conked off. Suddenly I could feel muffling voices or rather to say, heavy breaths.

A make-out in gents washroom, I smirked and a naughty smile etched on my face thinking about such intense adventures. I tried my best not

to make noise and was tip toeing out of the washroom to let the couple enjoy the privacy.

I could hear the pace was getting louder and thrusts harder. I heard a loud gasp of man and a sweet voice of girl's moan and understood that my ears witnessed the climax. I could feel my senses reacting to it. I managed to reach the door in dark and just then the lights flashed back. I instantly grabbed the handle and opened the door to go out and a voice fell on my ears, "Oh Reva! You are Goddess!", and I felt numb then and there. My heart-beats raced and stopped at the same time and so was my breath. I could not believe that I heard Rachit speaking these sinful words. Rachit the same guy, who was considered to be right hand for my dad.

I found it hard to digest the fact that it was Rachit's voice, exploring Reva inside the darkness. My body and mind paralyzed and I found myself unable to move. Every iota of my mind kept on wishing that it is not the same Rachit, to whom I bow down in reverence for all board decisions of our company. How could he, backstab his own brother? Rachit was the one, who made me believe in the sanctity of relations born out of a different blood but same soul. I still remember the day, when my mother passed away and I turned reclusive. That is when, dad brought an eighteenyear old, Rachit home. I recovered faster since Rachit took the onus of being an elder brother. After all these ten years of immense peace and strong bonding, this was least expected.

I got up with a jerk shouting Reva and found myself drenched in sweat completely. My heart was racing no lesser than a marathoner. My head was throbbing as if some hammer had hit me hard. My mind was still grappling with the shock and my rationale then kicked in to make me realize that it was a dream. If dreaming Reva with someone else was this

disastrous then I shuddered at the thought of it being real. I instantly rummaged in my bed and searched for my phone. It was 3 AM but I dialed Reva's number. Only she could calm me down.

Reva woke up with a start when her phone rang at an odd hour of 3. She managed to drag herself out of her baby pink velvet quilt and grabbed her phone. "Hello, Kiyan. Are you Ok, honey? Such a late night call?", her croaked voice sounded concerned. She sat upright while talking and constantly fought to open her groggy eyes.

"Rrreevaaa, are you ok? I dreamt something horrific. I am afraid to lose you. Can I come over to your place?", Kiyan's voice reverberated fear and extreme anxiety. "Of course you can baby. But won't uncle be enquiring about you in morning?", Reva asked since she knew that Kiyan's father had this habit of having breakfast together with both Rachit and Kiyan every morning.

"I will return before breakfast and will sneak in with the help of kaka", assured Kiyan and added, "Now don't sleep again till I come as I won't be ringing the bell. Will just knock." Reva agreed and picked up her current read, 'Gramatizator and Other Stories by Roald Dahl'.

A slight knock and she jumped off the bed to open door for her beloved. Kiyan immediately hugged her tightly, which made her feel awkward. She wondered what must be the dream to make him feel so horrible. She pacified him to best of her abilities and her signature style of letting him sleep in her lap and caressing his head. This was the first time when

she touched his head and found it throbbing badly. She could feel the nerves beating harder than a breathless heartbeat.

"I dreamt that you and Rachit were backstabbing me by dating together," Kiyan finally managed to tell her about his dream while sipping hot coffee made by her. Cuddling and caressing head and then a chocolaty doze of coffee in winters was Reva's signature style of making Kiyan calm. It had been two years of their relationship and it was time to take a next step in their story. Reva, who had been trying her luck in publishing since last one and a half year, finally got her chunk of deal for her manuscript and was about to be a published author in two months. Kiyan had secretly planned and waited for her to reach wherever she dreamt of. So that he could call her home as his to-be, to proceed in talks with his father. The day was nearing and he had been gearing up on how to say this to his dad. Amidst so much of planning, wait and patience, this dream was an unnecessary and unexpected disturbance for the time being.

Both the love birds slept in each other's arms peacefully. A ring on Kiyan's phone startled him and he saw Rachit's name flashing on screen. Kiyan groggily checked time and it was 5:30 in morning. What could be the matter at such a wee hour. Kiyan kept his fingers crossed hoping

that his father shouldn't have come to know about his uninformed absence from home.

"Hello Kiyan. Please come back home soon. Something happened to dad!" Rachit spoke in one shot in anxious voice and dropped call without waiting for Kiyan's response. Kiyan's head reeled.

After a month of Kiyan's father's demise.

Reva-

"Hey baby, how is everything? hope you ate timely and are busy reading or watching my netflix collection. Lots of love." My text message was sent with a swoosh sound on my iphone. It had been a month since Malhotra uncle left this world and Kiyan's condition was not getting any better. That horrible dream was just the beginning but the shock of seeing his father dead suddenly was something, he was not able to accept till date.

My mobile played another notification sound after 10 minutes and Kiyan's name flashed with a monosyllable in reply, "Yes." His responses had been same way whole month and now the time came that even I started feeling guilty of uncle's untimely demise. I should not have allowed Kiyan to come over that night here. May be he could save uncle in time. A severe cardiac arrest could be cured had it come in notice timely. I very well knew that Kiyan too, had limited his response in the same guilt.

I heaved a sigh and decided to take an afternoon nap, thinking that few pains can be forgotten by sleeping over them. I too wished, that this guilt will be wiped off someday, if I keep sleeping over it. I got up with the sound of my doorbell ringing. I checked time. It was 5pm. I dragged

myself in half sleep to the door and peeped through the keyhole. It was Kiyán.

"Hi baby. Are you ok?" I half hugged my panicked Kiyán, who broke down like a baby, while hugging me tight. I kept on pacifying him, knowing well that it definitely must have been another panic attack. Kiyán was under psychological observation and treatment because he had stopped talking about his father at all. As if he was never a part of his life. He used to break down but the reasons he stated were weird. He always reasoned the distance between him and me staying distantly. He often insisted me to stay at his place to which I politely denied. Rachit's presence might evoke various unwanted doubts in Kiyán's already disturbed mind.

I escorted Kiyán inside and made him seated in my living room while I went to fetch water for him. I also prepared his favorite signature coffee and gave him along with his medicine. Kiyán's medicines' two sets were there. One I used to keep at my home and other at his place, so that he never fails to take them. Kiyán fell asleep in my arms for 5 hours straight and got up around 11pm.

I had prepared pasta for both of us and was serving when I felt him hugging from back. Kiyán had turned into a kid and always made me feel like a mother these days. The role was easily acceptable and nicely performed by me. Kiyán's frequent arrivals at my place were vouching for the success of my role.

We were glued to T.V watching Koffee With Karan when my mobile beeped a notification. Kiyán had my phone beside him, so he picked up to see who it was. The phone fell off his hand when he read the message from Rachit, "Hello, Reva. Whats up? What are your plans? If you free,

can we go for dinner tonight?" Kiyam failed to see my shocked face when I read the message because he was too traumatized with his own fear of that horrible dream turning real.

"What is going on between you and that scoundrel? I so had the inkling. That is why I had been dreaming it all. Because my love for you had been real. Look what you giving me in return!" Kiyam's red eyes were bloodshot and his voice slurred in frustration and rage while accusing Reva of assumed infidelity with Rachit. He still had her mobile in his hand was looking directly in Reva's eyes. Reva on the other hand was trying to calm him down by coming close to him and wanting to re-read the message again. The more she tried to come closer to Kiyam, more Kiyam jerked her off and sat upright at distance.

Reva finally threw her hands in the air and spoke, "Kiyam, will you let me explain or take the call to clarify? I am equally shocked right now since it is the first time, I am receiving such a late night message from him."

"So you mean that dinners off late are the usual thing except this late with him?", snarled Kiyam in rage doubled up and held her mobile tighter in a gesture of reluctance to hand it to her. "And who knows whether this is the first or last message, which you are not stating in defense and have deleted the rest of them? Why should I believe you?" Kiyam's enraged irrationality has taken the better of him and he was blabbering recklessly, whatever was striking his mind. Reva attempted one last time and came closer to him only to be jerked away by him. She did not give up and sat on her knees patiently in front of him. She held his knees under her elbows by sitting down on the floor, while Kiyam was seated on sofa. With her elbows pinned on him, Kiyam found himself unable to

move, so he finally had to give in to her and this gesture calmed him down in bits and pieces.

"Kiyán, baby. Let's solve this instead of just assuming and worsening the issue. I guess, we should make a call to Rachit and clarify the reason of texting such late night. If you want, I will keep him on speaker right from the moment he picks up. What say?" Reva looked expectantly in Kiyán's eyes convincingly. Kiyán in response, inhaled and exhaled as if speculating the gruesome situation and contemplating over her proposal.

"Ok. You call from your number and keep the speaker on" Kiyán finally agreed. Reva obeyed. "Hello" came the rusty voice from the other end, which gave an impression of being woken up from slumber. "Hi Rachit, Reva this side. I guess you texted me about dinner and I was amazed to see such late night message from you. umm You know very well no that I don't entertain late night messages or calls?" Reva weighed her words a bit carefully and bit her lips while talking. The gesture must have hurted Kiyán and he punched the sofa in frustration, but somehow he kept his calm and waited for Rachit's response with bated breath. There was an absolute silence from the other end for almost 30 seconds and then Rachit spoke, "What are you talking about sweetie? Have you forgotten the yesternight we had spent together? Are you sloshed out or playing some prank with me once again?"

Reva stood agape and so was Kiyán.

"I did not expect call back from Reva and a deep silence before her cutting the call was quite intriguing. Everything was going according to the plan. Kiyán began hallucinating since I changed his medicines. If anyone will ever be doubted, that will be Reva. Now I have seeded doubt

in Kiyan's mind about her infidelity, which will add fuel to the fire and will only worsen his mental stability. Now your task begins from here. You very well know what I mean. Don't you? The remaining payment will be done post completion of task." Rachit informed on call while sipping his favorite latte.

After dropping the call, Rachit took a deep breath. His plush flat had richest wood flooring and the full window view of the city was cherry on the cake. One look at those sky scrappers and another at vehicle lights on roads. It seemed like the brightness was in rush to race with its own various shades. His emotions too, were rushing up and down. His hands trembled on the thought that had he taken Mr. Malhotra to hospital timely, this all would not have happened. But who could miss a chance, where destiny itself was offering him what he was planning since long. The whole Malhotra empire under his tow. When Mr. Malhotra got cardiac arrest, Rachit's heart melted at the first twitch on his face.

He could recall clearly that it was when he and Mr. Malhotra were having a business talk late night. These 4 am meets were very usual for both of them since he learnt the nitty gritty of business from Mr. Malhotra. There he was sitting with his glass of red wine and cigar and was lost in the presentation I made. His magnificent persona and charm and meticulous attitude in work stitched well with much needed farsightedness in business was the complete package any successful businessman would yearn for.

Before the attack, Mr. Malhotra coughed and frowned when he felt a twitch of pain in his shoulder. From there on, things kept on getting worse. Rachit on the other hand, was panicked initially and rushed to fetch water and caressed Mr. Malhotra's back but with a sudden

realization he had a sly smirk on his face. After all, God had given him direct chance to make his dream come true.

The attack had carpeted his body by now and Mr. Malhotra was on floor now, with one hand raised towards Rachit and plead in his eyes. Hope can be good, but sometimes, it becomes the greatest folly for humankind. He hoped that Rachit will save him and thus kept on expecting. His last breath must have been a hard slap on himself for trusting people.

Reva made herself coffee and sat by the window of her apartment. She could keep a tab on Kiyán, who was visible from a diagonal angle of her window to her room. It had been third day since Kiyán had a severe nervous breakdown after witnessing what happened in that call back incident. Reva had to seek immediate help of Kiyán's psychiatrist Dr. Alex Joseph.

Last two days had been daunting and taxing since Kiyán was kept on sedatives. His anxiety attack shot up his blood pressure like anything and Mr. Alex thus decided to stay there at Reva's place along with Kiyán. He did not want things to go out of control specially when Reva complained of Kiyán's weird dreams and co-incidences. Reva was relieved to see Kiyán finally settling down. Dr. Alex had expressed his concerns that if Kiyán doesn't improvise, they would need to shift him to asylum as his activities were turning violent day by day. It was different today and

fortunately Kiyán had been behaving nicely since morning without any attempt to free himself of his tied limbs.

Observing that, Dr. Alex decided to go to his clinic that day. His over generous gesture of staying with Kiyán had to do with family bond between them.

Reva's thought train was put to a pause, when her mobile beeped. She picked up and was shocked to see Kiyán's number flashing in message. A shiver ran down her spine when she read the message which said, "You bitch! untie me and I will kill you." Taking it as another cue for anxiety attack, Reva's fingers fumbled with Dr. Alex's number and she requested him to be back asap. Dr. Alex instructed her not to go inside the room to avoid any kind of provocation.

When Dr. Alex came along with his two assistants, they all entered inside her room, where they found Kiyán asleep like a baby, oblivious of his own crime. His calm face had no traces of guilt, shame or crookedness. His mobile was lying next to him and was fetched by one of Dr. Alex's assistants. On checking mobile, they found the same text in his sent items and thus Kiyán was immediately shifted to asylum for further treatment.

Reva went along with him. Once she was done filing the formalities, she turned towards Dr. Alex and said, "Sir, can I come daily to see him? And I would want to see him before going back home tonight. Please. " Dr. Alex nodded and made the necessary arrangements.

"Baby, its just for sometime. Things will fall back in place. Don't worry. I am with you." assured a teary eyed Reva. When she turned back to go home, her mobile beeped again. It fell off her hands when the screen

flashed a message from Kiyan. Kiyan's mobile was forfeited and thus was not in his possession. The message read, "Wait, till you die". She again turned back and went back to Kiyan who was behind a windowed-gate from which patients could see, meet and talk to their family and loved ones. Reva gasped and said, "Kiyan, don't you worry. You are not at fault. And I will definitely find out who actually is."

An entry in Rachit's diary in jail.

They say that a woman is behind each man's success. Reva taught me different lessons. She made me understand that how a woman can be behind many men's failure too. I had considered myself as the King and was oblivious to the power of Knight. She turned out to be that knight.

With my conspiracy of sending Kiyan to asylum, I had a master plan to take all those papers from Reva's clutch. I hacked Kiyan's mobile and started sending ugly messages to Reva, which they all took as mental instability spread in Kiyan. My plan was successful but I did a mistake.

I undervalued the woman power. Reva was known to all my plans since the beginning and was letting me play the way I wanted to. In fact, I was making her game easier by putting Kiyan in asylum and there she played her checkmate with all the proofs of putting me behind the bars. The checkmate made a knight, an Empress.

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Karma never knocks

Date: 3rd January 2015, Time: 8 AM,

"The dead body of Mr. Sanchit Patil has been found at the riverbank at the outskirts of the city. Mr. Patil was the best psychologist of the town. A bunch of washerwomen witnessed the corpse at first in morning and police was informed immediately. Mr. Patil had been living all by himself in Rockline Apartments and was said to have only one uncle named Mr. Manish Patil who was working as journalist on daily news channel and was murdered. Investigations for the case seem to have more underneath than what it looks at the surface. Police is trying to connect the dots between the murder of uncle's and Sanchit's death. Stay tuned for more updates. This is Heena Sharma, signing off. Bharat News."

π π π

Date: 3rd January 2005, Time: 8 AM.

New Year began with reservations and apprehensions for me as our exams were postponed in December and our results were supposed to be announced today. I celebrated the New Year eve with family and Risha (14 years) made it more special by convincing my parents to celebrate it at my favorite restaurant. She also had stored money for the year end so that she could tell parents proudly that they did not need to splurge and we could contribute. Such a kind gesture at this age from my little sister melted my soul.

But today, just after two days of New Year, I am scared. I am more scared of Risha scoring more than me as she always does. I am scared of the unsaid, unexpressed expectations of my family pinned on me.

Life has always been cruel to me and rosy for her. Being her elder brother

(even though just two years elder), I want to have that authoritative feel on her and want to excel than her in every sphere. Not because I am jealous of her, but because I want Risha to look up to her brother with pride. But fate had knitted something else and she became the one who holded my hand and took me to bus. Since childhood I have been especially sensitive to noises around me and Risha knows how to calm me down. I keep wondering that why don't these noises talk to any other but me? What do these honking horns want to convey to me? What do these blaring songs at corner shops want to speak? It seems like the whole world of decibels has suddenly got a tongue.

Sanchit uncle will come tomorrow for my session again. Risha pronounces it correctly whereas I being good at spelling prefer to write it: My psychotherapy sessions. She says that these will make me beat her not only in academics but also in battling with my noise-sensation. However; I have a secret wish of pronouncing the word Psychotherapy successfully after my sessions are over.

Date: 3rd January 2005, Time: 5 PM

Papa has got back from office with both of our results and I am acting asleep since I know it in advance. I had never been able to be at par with Risha's marks and somewhere I feel I should also be celebrated like she has been on her academic success. My parents have never emphasized on academic brilliance but I have seen them countering the arguments or comments thrown by relatives.

"Congratulations to Risha bitiya once again for scoring the highest. I knew she would make it so I called up without even thinking twice" the voice on phone was of my mausi who was beaming too loud to be overheard through telephone receiver. My mom had always been graceful enough to combat

such indirect comments hurled at her and never for a second in my life had she let me feel that I am different.

Date: 4th January 2005. Time: 2 PM

It is my therapy time and uncle, I and Risha are home. I don't like it when mom is not at home during my therapy sessions. Though it is not like Risha is unable to keep me calm but Sanchit uncle behaves differently in mom's presence. I have felt him gazing at Risha many a times and it's something weird about his gaze which I detest.

Today uncle has a very different therapy session which is called, 'facing the fear'. It sounds adventurous to me by its name and I am already game for it. He says that I will be facing my fear of noises while I will be tied, so that whatever unsettles me will gradually calm me down. My first reaction is of shock on this weird proposal and with that I try gulping the fact down my throat to which he says not to fear since Risha and he will be with me.

I finally agree on Risha's insistence and they both engage themselves in tying me. "Risha, tie the rope tighter since blaring songs will disturb him. Let me show you how it is done" With him saying this, I see him cupping Risha's busy palms tying the knot. I can see him pressing her palms with pressure while doing that. To my surprise Risha is comfortable which makes me jerk this discomfort off my mind. May be special children over-imagine.

Loud songs are on and I am getting unsettled with each rising note. But uncle and Risha are encouraging me from distance. I start bellowing in low tone to set me free. "This is how he will react initially Risha, trust me, the more the distance and the more the loneliness, more will he be winning over it." With his words in my ears, I found my uneasiness mounting but the reason was his hand on Risha's shoulder. The music made me unable to

focus. Risha excuses herself to kitchen to fetch some snacks for uncle and there I see Sanchit uncle trailing off to follow her.

I can hear loud thud and noises of stuff falling from kitchen and I sense something is wrong. I tried best to concentrate and called for Risha and uncle but only after 25 minutes of wallowing I saw uncle shooting out of kitchen in all sweat and rushing towards the main gate.

Risha limps out of kitchen and walks to me all shell-shocked, blood-eyed and in robotic-manner. I wonder why her beige leggings have blood stain on them. I am furious on uncle for beating Risha illogically. After untying me in walking dead manner, Risha sits in trance for an hour and only utters one line after lots of probing, "Don't tell ma papa about uncle beating me. They will try to fight with him and he is our sarpanch. Tell only if you want blood and gory at home". Her grimness in voice spookes me and I try to forget the incident and bury it in my memory lane.

Date: 5th January 2015. Time: 4 AM

I came out of my room to fill up my water bottle and see a silhouette lying on floor. The next moment the world goes blank when I switch on lights to see what is it. It's Risha's body with blood oozing out of her wrist and a knife beside her.

Date: 30th January. 2015. Time: 2 PM

I am lying here in this unknown room confined with my guilt of not being able to save my little sister Risha. I have turned myself into a self-hitting insane boy with innocence ripped into shreds. I look like a mess and have lost my voice completely. My parents have got me in this asylum where they

think I will find remedy to insanity, but I want to tell them that it's not something temporary, its rather the repercussion of cacophony in my head.

π π π

Date: 4th January 2010. Time: 9 AM

"Hello son! How are things? It's been a week since we talked." The husky, authoritative and manly voice from the other end on call woke Sanchit up upright. He was groggy eyed and heavy headed due to last night's hangover with Disha. His eyes got transfixed on the mesmerizing, serene beauty in Disha, who was wandering in her dream world. For a moment, he forgot the call and smiled thinking of the time they had last night. He got carried away by the cosy, yet divine thoughts about their eternal bond and it etched smile on his face.

"Hello, Sanchit. You there? "His dream bubble busted with another sentence from his journalist uncle, Manish Patil.

"Yes uncle, Good Morning. Umm. You are coming today right? Or you already outside? We can go out to grab some bite as I was working till late yesternight and absolutely forgot that it's our Sunday time." Sanchit tried his best to sound concerned and apologetic whereas at the back of his mind he was inquisitive to know whether he needed to hide Disha if uncle was already downstairs.

Sanchit had only his uncle to name as a family since his parents passed away in an accident. Sundays were always a reserved entity his uncle claimed on him as rights. He too, used to look forward to weekends, not only to see uncle on Sundays and listen to his spicy and adventurous journalistic anecdotes but also for the rendezvous with his lady love, Disha.

Sanchit and Disha had been head over heels with each other from last two years and since then Sanchit is always wandering in the dream world knitted by him and Disha together. His life was so monotonous in practicing

psychology. Shuttling from his hospital to home had been so robotic and stressful, and growing age was not helping him either. Imprisoned by a tumultuous past, Sanchit was seeking solace in his life. A void needed to be filled with love and there came Disha with all her tenderness, wisdom, tranquility and maturity. The perfect concoction of virtues he was seeking in his woman. With Disha's entry in Sanchit's life, it was gamut of emotions, rainbow of colours and vibrancy was infused in him and his surroundings.

He was clear in his thoughts about marrying Disha and making her the happiest had always been on his mind. He had undergone a dramatic change in him, from a nomad to a settled one, from a heartless to a dedicated lover, from a just psychologist to an empathic human being, and all kudos were meant for Disha. He wished if Disha could have met him long back. Nevertheless, it's never too late. But the wait of Disha taking time in fulfilling her dream of becoming editor in her dream publication house seemed a little too much to Sanchit at times.

"Well Son! I called up to apologize for today since I have been assigned a murder mystery to cover. I need to get into the nitty gritty of the matter since the accused party is very affluent and carries lots of political influence. But my task is to dig out the truth. Right! I will surely make up for this missed Sunday time in someday during next week. Till then you take care and stay fit. I am in bit hurry", with that Manish uncle dropped the call.

The first reaction instigated in Sanchit was of disappointment. He had always relished his tete-a-tete with his uncle and this was somewhere an assurance of having a family and he could have kept an eye on Manish uncle's health by meeting weekly.

A sweet, enticing groan and tossing of Disha on bed brought him back to the present and he smiled looking at her. He never could get enough of looking at her. He typed a text to his uncle for being alert and careful during

the stint and then embraced Disha to cuddle. He wondered how she managed to smell heavenly always.

Date: 5th January 2014. Time: 8 AM

The doorbell always served as an alarm to Sanchit and he used to love his milkman for favoring him to wake him up on working days. He had specially instructed his milkman to keep ringing the doorbell till Sanchit personally doesn't open the door and takes the delivery of milk and newspaper. This was his way of waking up instead of shrieking mechanical alarms set in smart phones. It also made him feel presence of human beings in his lone and deserted flat.

He took the milk and newspaper and headed to kitchen to make himself a coffee. He grabbed the coffee mug and instantly dropped it in shock when he opened the paper and read the headlines.

It said, "Journalist Manish Patil and team of two attacked and murdered brutally." The news report further read that the team was attacked while they were coming back from a stint. It was dense forest area on outskirts of city and the immediate help was given from the city asylum nearby.

The world went blank and his senses got numb. The Earth seemed to shake and head swirled in reaction. Sanchit stood stupefied.

He opened his eyes and saw the green white walls of hospital and immediately shrieked. "He killed my uncle. He will kill me too". Disha who was standing beside him pacified him, but his statement sent her into quandary. She wanted to ask him but thought to put it on backburner.

Sanchit was discharged till evening and Disha decided to stay at his place till he was brought back to normal. He stopped speaking and just kept on

mumbling few unclear words with few fits of panic. Doctors said that he went in a shock state due to loss of family and it might take time.

π π π

Date: 2nd January 2015, Time: 11:30 PM

Dear Sanchit,

Life is the greatest teacher as it takes exams which are extremely hard to pass. The advantage which life gives us is the benefit of doubt through warning us before we commit a sin.

Life with you had always been much more than a fairy-tale. I was suddenly poured with all love from you and today after reading diary of Rishabh (Risha's brother- I found this in your drawer), I feel naked wrapped in your love. I feel deceived and my heart feels wrenched. My soul is too numb to

react on the fact that my to-be husband raped a girl and never felt regretful about it.

You met me for a reason, either you were blessing or you were a lesson. With this I bid a farewell from your life. Never try to search me, for you will never be able to.

PS: I might have stayed but your actions of hiding the diary all these years unmasked the monstrous side of you.

Once yours,

Disha.

π π π

Date: 2nd January 2015, Time: 1 AM

"The murder mystery of renowned journalist Mr. Manish Patil has been resolved finally. Police has investigated and has arrested accused politician for committing the heinous crime. Stay Tuned for more updates."

π π π

Date: 2nd January 2015, Time: 1:30 AM

Sanchit sleepwalked directly towards the river or may be the unbearable pain of losing his only love and family was too much to act like a human.

He released his possessed mind (of guilt) with a splash in river.

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Posthumous

Avni -

"Dance, wobble or sway,

I would not let you stay.

Plead, cry or deny,

I am neither a killer nor a spy."

A loud burst of laughter was audible in the closed surroundings of Mercedes Benz, where four of us were traversing. I never thought that my first attempt at poetry will be mocked such way. It didn't hurt but it pinched. Since Rohit and Farhaan never mocked me when I used to lay official strategies in front of them. Being my business partners, they both could have been a bit gentle rather than guffawing into a high pitch laughter. To the top Reva added fuel to my fiery, burning pinch by joining them in laughter.

Window is always the biggest escape when you want to forget the world around you. Second escape is known as whatsapp. I texted, "Hey, enjoying the ride with her? I am bored".

Soniya -

"STOP", I shrieked and Darsh followed my instruction instantly. His brand new Mercedes was screeched to a halt. I instantly got out of it and gasped for the air. While I bent down with my face covered with hands, Darsh came rushing from the driver side to assist me.

"You ok baby? asthma attack or bad dream?", I could feel worry in his voice. His cold palms touched my burning hands and face as he was shocked to see my raised temperature.

"Oh! So it was a bad dream. Don't you worry baby. Forget it. Here, have water. Dreams are just dreams.", he uttered to pacify me. Even though being panicked, I was not failing to notice his efforts to pacify me. A sudden surge of guilt surfaced. I should not have hit him.

"I, I saw that, six of us, woke up", I broke while panting and sobbing badly while narrating the dream to him. Darsh's pampering put my initial worries to rest, but the dream resurfaced, when he asked me again once I was handed over a packet of chips with coke.

"See Soniya, if you are not comfortable, let's do this some other day. But doctor has asked us to communicate about your insecurities. So we have to", Darsh made every attempt to make an eye contact with me while cupping my face in his now warm hands. I felt at bliss to be pampered by this man.

"No, I understand Darsh, but I saw all six of us waking up in an unknown room, all chained with poles erected on their left side. Poles were of hard iron metal. And all of us were in white tee shirt except me. And then our eyes laid on wall where it was written that one of us is the culprit and if we

want to know who that is, we should check our pockets.", I again broke down and Darsh pacified.

"Did you dream further or it ended abruptly?", he enquired with sympathy in his eyes while caressing my head.

"Yeah, then we checked, and again my chit had 'kill her' written on it, whereas others' had written:

"Some colors dance,
Some color lie,

Some color bring shame,

Red is the damsel of game."

I cuddled into Darsh's arms and broke down in inconsolable sobs. Darsh kept on pacifying me till another Mercedes stopped by us.

Rohit –

Time flies but there are rare times, when we fly with the time. High spirited and lightly stoned, I and Farhaan were having best of our old buddy times on this journey with our business partners, Reva and Avni tuning in. Hectic meetings, time-sparing lunches and dinners, quick naps and all that mental torture was put to rest for few days with this amazing trip.

While driving and singing in joy, I suddenly saw that Darsh's Mercedes was parked on the roadside and Soniya was on haunches with her face covered and was crying profusely. The sight of helpless Darsh, trying his best to

cajole this psycho provoked my rage. I ignored the feel sensing the emergency or the made up one and stopped by them.

"Oh no! Not again", were the words of exasperated Reva to which we all nodded mentally in affirmation before getting out of the car. "How many times this chick will lose her mind to her dreams? After all they are dreams only right. So what if one of them resembled to reality. Why doesn't she realize that many other dreams never turned into reality.", added Reva further while rolling her eyes and collecting her sling and stuffed from the back seat of car.

"I agree but I guess she needs our emotional support. Come on guys, let's help,", Avni spoke with empathic tone and pleading expressions. "Come, Ms.philanthropic, I am going to open the door for you,", mocked Farhaan who never left a chance of mockery to anyone.

"Hey Soniya , what happened, sweetie? everything alright?", Avni rushed forward and bent while caressing Soniya's back and head. Darsh immediately made space for the girls which looked like a gesture of getting respite with their arrival.

"Another bad dream. I just hope that this trip does her good", said Darsh while explaining to them since he found Soniya would not be in the best condition to respond to various queries. "Don't worry Soniya, I guess you should be with the girls for the rest of the trip till we reach Jaipur. Some girl time would do you good baby," Darsh suggested while pursing his lips in sympathy.

Soniya adhered to that and I opened the car's gate taking the onus to drive these beauties. Or should I say two beauties and one psycho beauty. Being best of friends, we were never oblivious to Soniya's scary dreams and ongoing treatment. The last time she remembered not having them was

when she was beginning her second novel after her first one rocked the charts as best seller one.

Whenever she was probed by the psychiatrist the probable reason of these dreams, she always used to say, "The day I will complete my second novel, these nightmares will stop."

Farhaan -

How would you feel if your own words start haunting you? The same words which made you what you are today. How would you feel when you suddenly feel crippled for scribbling furthermore after one story by you? What could be the reason behind those hijacked words? And amidst all of this, what if your friends, who are your only family begin to smirk you, mock you or distrust you? What decision would you take if your own boyfriend, who slid a ring on your delicate finger the day your first novel hit the chart busters, and is now acting like a jerk.

This absolutely is not my tale or nor of my girlfriend, but it troubles me more than it does to Darsh- Soniya's so called boyfriend and fiance. Only I and Soniya can understand the power of words. Like 'Fiance' pinches real hard.

I often land in a battle between words and memories. Words which Soniya has scribbled have illusioned her to no limits. The first illusion comes with Darsh. There are memories, which I have shared with Soniya since childhood. A smile erupts every time the flashback lights up showing I and Soniya reading together every day in library and keeping a track journal of reading. We named it 'readometer'. We nurtured it like a baby for almost 12 years and the thick journal which each of us have was treasured years on

and on. I don't know about Soniya, but I still have it, one part of our readometer.

I can feel her pain since the childhood as I was her only companion who never teased her of being an absolute geek. In fact I owe my reading habit to her. Since then, there was no looking back. We both turned into super avid readers and we still are. The only difference is Darsh in her life and now these worst nightmares. I often try to speculate and solve the matrix of her weird dreams, but she never seems to forget her first dream which turned into reality of we may call it resemblance.

Her first dream was where she saw her mother walking into the well by herself, whereas she couldn't help her. The same dream showed Soniya's room like the next shot, where a golden trophie was gleaming on her bedside table. Soniya got up with a jerk and saw that her mother as fast asleep beside her. Seeing that Soniya comforted herself to sleep after gulping water. But she was never more terrified when in morning her mother never woke up. It was a silent heart attack. The dream's co-incidence shocked her again after 20 days when she was awarded as Indian bestselling author.

I personally took the onus to stand by Soniya no matter what and took her out of trauma by psychiatrist's help. I made sure that Darsh takes a step forward of engagement soon to make her forget what she went through, which worked to a large extent. But her dreams never ceased. They were always weird and turbulent and very rarely happy ones. We all thought to get her involved into her next novel to which Darsh objected and offered her to co-author.

Soniya would have given in easily on his proposal, hadn't I made her understand. The co-authored novel would have been Darsh's debut novel, which if weighed professionally, was only beneficial to Darsh. I remember getting many threat calls and never can I forget the attempted accident. But

for Soniya, she did not have anyone, so I decided to stand strong with her till my last breath.

Reva-

I want to kill Soniya at times. Like seriously! This girl has swirled so much of ruckus in our lives. I thought getting into our Book Beans cafe would be a distraction for all four of us. But Darsh and Soniya could never be ousted from our lives. I admit that Soniya's bestseller fetched a lot of pennies in, when she launched her book in our Book Beans cafe, but that was a win-win deal. She also did not need to pay for space's rent.

Farhaan too has a soft corner for Soniya which seethes more anger into me. I fail to understand what stimulates his desire for her. If talked about being successful and independent, I am no less than her.

While I was contemplating all this back at home before heading out for this planned wonderful picnic, my trail of thoughts was screeched to halt by doorbell. Already exhausted with packing, unpacking and piles of clothes scattered on the bed, I somehow managed to tumble out and crawled to the door in funny way. Whole flat was a mess.

When I peeped through the keyhole, I saw no one. Confusion rung the bell but smirking it off and thinking that the visitor might not have stood directly in front of keyhole, I opened the door. And there was no one. I went out to take a better look in the gallery of our building, but could not see anyone. When I turned back and was just about to enter inside my flat, my slippers

felt some friction against some paper. I looked down and stepped back from the envelope and picked it up.

The white crisp paper envelope had something written on it with red, "Do Good, Get Good."

The Tale Tells:

Soniya, Darsh, Avni, Farhaan, Reva and Rohit, six best friends embarked on a journey. A journey to relax, a journey to combat stress and a journey to change the equations of relationships.

Reva, Farhaan, Avni and Rohit had been business partners for their book cafe named Book Beans and were running it successfully. Soniya who left a mark in the writing industry with her first novel itself, was traumatized after one dream's resemblance to her mother's death. Since then, she is on psychic treatment. Her dreams keep getting worse.

On the other hand Darsh, Soniya's beau, is yet to establish himself and thus has a seed of jealousy somewhere hidden inside. He keeps throwing deals to Soniya to which Farhaan stands as guard and protects her from being

ripped apart. This cold war between Farhaan and Darsh is impeccable and relentless.

Reva who has a secret envelope with some plans is the one who sets the rest of the game in motion.

Darsh-

"Rhyme, Rhyme come to me,

Else I will go on killing spree.

My search is my own story,

Which is all lost in her glory."

I closed my laptop after scribbling these four lines which seemed nothing more than fruit of a frustrated mind. I had tried it all whatever it takes to write and get ideas- sitting alone, sitting in cafe, by lakeside, drinking and writing, thinking of story while making out and even thinking while funerals. It felt disgusting and I started hating myself, but no story came to my mind. I felt cursed every time, I typed a page on my laptop and trashed it while re-reading.

They say that a writer should write for audience, but I consider that writer himself is also one of the readers and thus has full rights on his story to be first liked by himself. I keep finding reasons of how Soniya finds stories like she was born with them and they are meant to be with her forever like her breaths till the last breath. I also contemplated on causes of my writers' block which had hit way before I turned into an official writer and that is what keeps pinching me.

Today after reaching Jaipur, six of us checked in to Jaipur Mahal palace and I am sharing room with the love of my life. Sometimes I doubt whether out

love will make it that far. It is not about me liking anyone else or Soniya infatuated by someone. But it is more of a guilt of being a failure in front of my own girlfriend. I know Soniya never makes any bone about such issues and has always loved me beyond the wordliness of words.

Today it was more frustrating and sometimes the anticipated leisure taken out of your hectic schedule together, turns back to you, snarls like a hungry lion ready to dig its teeth into you. You are left without any option except to just keep running in a hope and that is what I started feeling since this journey began. Since our time taken will bring more questions and plans for further expansion for Book Beans and would require more book launches. Soniya also once suggested chirpily that it would be amazing if two of us write our respective novels and launch at the same time. Couples' launch fetches more footfalls that way. The moment she was speaking about it, I felt butterflies in my stomach and head felt giddy. I was left wondering and shocked at my own shaken confidence. May be her success snatched my peace away. I was torn between the guilt of not being jealous and the guilt of being nothing in front of her.

Love sometimes feels like sympathy.

Admist this turmoil, I could not resist anymore. After giving Soniya her anti-depressant pills, I tiptoed out and found myself standing in front of Reva's door and knocked it softly. Avni opened it and was surprised to see me. "Leisure holiday and you roaming outside? I thought it was most needed one for two of you. But here it seems like you running away. What's the matter dude? Not performing well and thus got kicked out? Well if that is the case, we are of no help.", she teased while giggling.

My gloomy face somehow conveyed her that I was not in mood for fun and

mockery, so she made space while looking sorry. "Reva, in there? You two care to go for a walk?", I asked.

Welcome to Bharat News. I Heena Sharma is going to give you updates for the day in coming 10 minutes. Let's begin with the breaking news of the day. The best selling author Karan Kapoor, was spotted in a cafe, inebriated, he was found misbehaving with the staff and when one of the staff members tried to warn him, the writer broke down bitterly in tears. What could be the mystery behind such a legendary writer to lose control on his emotions in public this way? Is it professional or personal? Some of the staff members of cafe and few other readers wanted to ask him but the writer soon recollected himself and tore the crowd apart and hurriedly got into the cab. Stay tuned to decode the mystery of Karan Kapoor and his behavior!

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Venue: Karan Kapoor's home.

Reva and Darsh were escorted inside by the maid and they are waiting for Karan to come down. Darsh tries to soak the luxury in by eyeing the room. The plush purple velvete sofa and underneath was the classy wooden floor. The room smelt of sandalwood and two walls were completely made of glass. The table had floral petals' shape flaps beneath, which were self lit.

Karan was probably the only author who was living a lavish life being a writer, Darsh thought to himself. He used to put Karan on pedestal, since his first book itself brought him so much of glory. He had read his book but even though he did not find it extraordinary, he accepted Karan's Godmanship without any questions or logic.

When Reva told him on beach that she got an envelope in which this address was given and it was instructed to both to come alone without telling this to anyone. Darsh was quite shocked that Reva hadn't told him

yet. Reva explained, that she wanted to tell it in private as instructed and co incidentally they got to walk together alone.

Karan came in his bathrobe and when he was coming down of his royal stairs, he looked no less than a Greek God. Not much tall, but with a well built, toned body and apt dark complexion to give himself a sultry but not tanned look. The sleek waistline was quite evident with just one belt tied in his bathrobe. Reva felt her heart fluttering, even though she was not much into reading or writing, Karan's first look left her stumped. She had seen Karan before on T.V interviews and magazines but little did she know that his real look will defy the virtual ones so badly. She was absolutely besotted to the level that Darsh needed to nudge her with elbow to bring her back from her slightly naught and sultry reverie.

"Hello Reva, Hello Darsh, please be seated and make yourself comfortable. I hope, I did not make you wait longer. Please have the refreshments", uttered Karan in one go while making a firm and balanced a handshake with both of them respectively. Reva who was out of her reverie but was still smitten only managed to smile sheepishly in return whereas Darsh nodded and smiled.

"Well you guys must be taking it in cryptic manner the way I called you over. Actually, I know you Darsh and Soniya as well.", Karan started the conversation and tried his best to make them feel home by offering them snacks and talking in a very down to earth tone.

Darsh was taken aback when Karan said that he knew Darsh beforehand. The feeling of proud and guilt blended and kicked in his psyche. What Karan must be thinking of him as failure and Soniya as big time success. He should abandon Soniya soon as her stardom is going to kill him someday, he thought to himself.

"Now, if you are thinking that I called you here because you are jobless and she is not then please consider me in your category," he broke into a weird

laughter.” Since I too am unable to produce my next work and that is why you guys are here for”, declared Karan hastily to clear the doubt cloud to which Darsh amusingly chuckled and said, "Oh no Sir! In fact we are mesmerized by your aura and it would be our fortune to work for you". Darsh measured and weighed each spoken word afterwards, in fear of not over speaking and uttering gibberish.

"Well then, let's come to the point. I have changed my writing style this time and it would be a play as my second book. However to create an edge, I want to do it a bit differently but before I tell you that, I want you guys to first sign this confidentiality agreement letter, so that I can be assured that you and your team won't be spilling the beans to anyone, till the work is published", proposed Karan to them with expectant eyes.

Stage Set: Drama going on

Reva: (dressed in casual blue jeans and black tee, thinking to herself and speaking aloud)

It's time for revenge. I married Darsh, so that I could take revenge of my cousin. He killed her. Because of him, she had to abort her baby against her

own wish. While driving back, her disturbed mind got the better of her and she couldn't survive.

(She is seen mixing something in her husband Darsh's dinner, post which Darsh dies)

Rohit's role in the play was to take revenge from Reva of his brother Darsh's demise. Rohit is behind the bars for Reva's murder.

.....

The Tale tells:

The hall full of audience and fans roars and echoes with claps. Karan's eyes shine in proud after reading out the excerpt of his second novel, Posthumous.

Now the author Karan's session is open for questions. A hand rises in the air. It is Farhaan.

Farhaan- Sir, why could not Reva forgive her own husband? Why did she need to marry to kill him?

Karan- Because the pain of getting stabbed by a loved one is the highest. Farhaan in my book, was backstabbed by Darsh for protecting Soniya.

Farhaan- (almost teary eyed and enraged) Then why did Rohit needed to kill Reva? Why so much of revenge?

Karan- (with a smirk) Well consider these as some sacrifices.

Farhaan- (With clenched fists) Last question! What happens to Karan in the end?

Karan- May be he dies or maybe he gets himself arrested. Let's not spill the beans. Read my book to know further.

Karan smiles and storms out of crowd to reach his car. Inside his car, inspector Kumbhle was ready for his arrival. Karan happily surrenders.

THE END

(For those who couldn't understand, this whole story was part of Karan's already written novel-Posthumous. Karan, who turned into a lunatic writer to the extent, that he got these people killed in real through deal with Reva and Darsh for assistance in drama. In last, Karan surrenders himself to the Police.)

#####

Red

"Sir we are full. Sorry", the manager apologized.

"Please would you check again because I am very tired and desperately need a place to crash down", said Harsh to the manager. The manager took a glimpse at him and thought he should assist Harsh for searching a room .

"As I have already told you sir , there is no room available in our resort .But we have a room vacant in our out house .It would be better if you see it once because at this moment you won't be getting a room anywhere else in the whole town ."

Harsh had no choice but had to agree .

He paid the rent to the manager and he was handed over the out house's key .

The manager ordered the lobby boy to guide him properly to the out house. While following the lobby boy ,Harsh could notice that he was quite reluctant to go to the outhouse .

But his fatigue overshadowed.

The lobby boy guided him and stopped few feet before the out house indicating Harsh to unlock and expressed a desire to retire from there itself. Harsh felt it to be a bit odd because neither had he rented the normal room

and a spare room was given to him nor it was the time right to expect the lobby boy to be wide awake and active.

He unlocked the door and felt the smutty smell which remains with the places which are kept locked for longer time. Strangely, the place still was cool. The warm red walls against two peach ones made it look more vibrant.

The room had one bed, a closet, a table, a big antique mirror and creme colored curtains. The whole furniture was in coherence with the royal aura caused by curtains and walls. There was also an attached washroom along with it. Harsh tossed his bag on the table and placed his guitar carefully at the bed's left corner. He then went to freshen up in washroom.

While splashing cold water, Harsh felt revived and relieved at the same time. The long journey from his small town Kotala to Jaipur was tedious and tiring but his aims could not be stabbed to death due to these tiny hurdles. He was here to be a musician and he was determined for his first audition after two days.

He came out whistling his favorite tunes which he created on his own guitar. He had reached two days before the final audition, so that he could meet some good musicians and also could think of a few more rhythms before he finally hits it. He drew the curtains apart and his eyes fell on another room just at the back of his room. The locked room had black color gate which was a bit awkward.

Lost in his own thoughts about music, he quickly jumped on to bed and started humming tunes. Some of which finally made him fall asleep and he kept on dreaming about some tune or may be he was listening to it in real.

Next day was full of schedules and meetings for Harsh, so he quickly nibbled on breakfast and headed out . In city bus, he plugged on his earphones and clicked on his playlist. Strangely, the mobile played the same tone which he was dreaming of yesternight. He tried changing the song, but

every song had the same music and nothing else. He got quite perplexed about his mobile getting crashed at unexpected times in the new city.

Reluctantly, he made a mental note of getting the mobile repaired either in evening or the next day.

Harsh got back to his room around 7pm and called for room service dinner. He thought to take a stroll in the lobby after ordering the food. While passing through the black door room, his instinct pricked him to peek through the keyhole and he did. All he could see was red.

He came back to the room and picked up his guitar. While he was practicing some tunes, he noticed a distant music, the same one which he heard on his mobile as well as in his dream. His curiosity reached to the maximum level and he got up to locate the source of it. He followed the tune and found that it was coming from the black doored room.

He was now standing outside it. He peeked into it, but could not see any other thing than red color. He touched the doorknob and the music

stopped. Baffled minded, Harsh went to the reception and asked the manager about why the room stays locked.

"Sorry sir, I am recently appointed here, so all I know is that room stays locked and I do not have much information about it."

Disappointed Harsh turned back to his room and found the same lobby boy quietly tip toeing. When their eyes met, the lobby boy straightened his back and started walking normally.

Harsh wondered whether the lobby boy was behind the music mystery of the locked door.

That night the same music was in the air. Harsh did not had guts to go out at such an odd hour of night and fatigue overcame every other worry inside his head. Next day Harsh decided to stay inside to practice.

Around 2 in noon, when same tune blew, Harsh instantly went out in search of the same lobby boy. It was better to ask than to leave a doubt forever. He found the lobby boy mopping the floor in front of reception.

"Hey brother! What is your name?", asked Harsh in pally tone, which shocked Raju. "Raju, sir", he replied wiping the sweat off his forehead. Harsh found this gesture a bit weird since, winters were already setting in. "Raju, can you tell me that why the room opposite of mine stays locked always?" Harsh tried to sound as humble as he could.

"Me? Nnnno Sir. How would I know anything about it?" Raju's stammering was telling something else. He spilled the beans on being probed harder by Harsh. "Where does the music come from then? Are you the one who plays it at night and scare the hell out of other people? Or should I call the police to look into the matters?" Harsh was strict this time.

"Sssir, no, I am telling you. Actually, there was a girl who had her own band. She was staying in that room and one day she killed herself, since she failed to get through her auditions. But this information is never leaked out

as people will stop coming to our place. I plead you not to disclose it to anyone sir. My life will be endangered," Raju's plea sounded very gullible.

Harsh was bit taken aback, but soon regained his composure and spoke, "Ok Raju. I understand your anxiety and concerns. Its my promise that I would not tell it to anyone but you have to listen to a request of mine."

Harsh requested Raju to show him the girl's photo to which Raju replied, "Sir, I did not get to see her. Only thing I heard about her and which made her unique was that she had red eyes."

#####

The Deceptive Stars

The sky grew darker. The moon-dust scattered everywhere with the radiant stars enhancing its beauty. The tall sky-scrapers were telling many stories with blinking lights of its apartments. A look down at the road from 25th floor made me feel as if I were living between those grey clouds. Another bird eye view at the running roads seemed like lights were traveling; too fast to stop and breathe and beyond the sense to feel anything else other than speed. I stood on the boundary of the terrace with my five year old toddler in my arms. Where I found the Earth so fascinating and the city life so flamboyant to suck in the startling ambience, I wondered what made him constantly look into the sky.

If childhood is the best relishing period, then having your children is reliving the childhood. I never took parenting as teaching and imbibing values but it was other way around for us. Parenting was a way to learn; an age where you start understanding what is humility and what it takes to make it a great family and bountiful relations. I used to find myself

joyous, whenever I found that I and she, shared the same likemindedness.

I could still remember the day when she felt the first kick in her womb, when I was at work. She called me home on the pretext of not feeling well. Perplexed I, ran only to see her bubbling in joy to feel the first kick. I was around her the whole day, waiting to feel the kick again. The day when Rihaan was about to be born was somewhat dreary for us. Due to high bp, Suhana suddenly started having blurred vision. It was a matter of huge anxiety and my mind was tossing and turning at the possibility of immense havoc.

I decided to be with her in labor room at the time of birth. Amidst all the tensions, she kept pushing with all her might and gifted me Rihaan as the gift of my life.

Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted by his fire of questions.

"Dad, what is glowing in the sky?"

"My boy, up there in the sky, the stars shine and twinkle when you smile."

"But dad, Miss Marrie told only birds can fly up in the sky. Are these birds?"

"No ..No my child, stars are not birds and birds can never be stars."

"Then! What are they dad? Why do they twinkle?"

For a moment his questions irritated me, as I was already upset with the situations. I quickly gathered my senses, kicked aside my irritation and

frustration and then started explaining him the stories I was told about stars.

"My child, the people who die become stars. They enlighten our lives and twinkle to spread happiness for the ones.

God gifts them the shine and make them stars, when wonderful people leave the world."

"Mumma must have become a star too, right ?", his catechized eyes brought tears in mine.

"Yeah baby, the star that shines the brightest amongst all is your mom."

Her face after delivering Rihaan and content was again flashing in front of my eyes. She blinked at me with a smile, with all her power gone and her hands in mine. She breathed her last. My heart was torn to pieces and my mind gave up thinking. I started finding faults in myself or my decision of asking her to plan a baby soon. May be my insisting had landed her where she was right now. Even after knowing that I was nowhere at fault, my mind gave up rationale.

The same lost rationale seemed to have kicked back in action at this moment under the shed of stars with my son Riyaan. And then I realized, in some way or the other I am deceiving my child. For a year or more only, he would believe his mom is with him as the brightest star, but when his life will be enlightened with science, life and death, he would again loose all the hopes for seeing his mom.

The stars are deceptive, I thought. As at first they appear to be welcoming and sparkling outside, but on probing further, they tend to

make us lonely and still. The defied stories would blend a sense of perplexity in the little mind of my child.

And then, I noticed my boy slipping into his dreams to meet his dead mom.

I bid a farewell to the starry sky, in fact my so called 'star wife' and then took him to the bed. For he would be sleeping unaware of the things and I would again experience a lonely, sleepless night without the love of my life.

#####

Whats your story?

What's your story?

What's going on in your mind?

And what's the trouble?

That you leave in this time?

The song was blazing hard in car which kept Rohan absolutely captivated. His eyes were fixated on road but were so blank as if he was staring into oblivion. The song somehow felt like his soul sang at that moment. Rohan took a deep breath and tried to inhale its lyrics.

The road was pitch dark and the gigantic trees of deodar were adding mystic to its dreadfulness. Rohan was detached, detached from the dreariness and was deeply immersed in his own anxieties. His incessant attempts to search for a story after ground breaking success of his previous five novels was failing miserably. The main reason was Rohan's reluctance of not picking up normal erotic reads which were selling like hot cakes in market. Rohan always maintained his level of being a reputed and established author. His novels had always been about some life teaching lessons and not any such intense scene was usually described in his novels. His resistance to break this tradition took him out of Jaipur.

After a long time, Rohan was taking up a road unknown of the fact where he wanted to go. Thinking that, sometimes being directionless,

gives you the direction, kept Rohan going. While driving, he thought that he would stay at some hotel in the midway and will go to Alwar or may be Delhi. His only hope was meeting new people.

Rohan -

I could hear my muffled breathing and then I tried opening my eyes. Every atom of my body, every inch space on my skin, ached big time while my mind was still puzzled in solving the mystery of how it all happened.

The sight of truck and me jam-packed in my half smashed car answered all my questions. I tried moving my leg, which seemed to be cramped and when I tried to crane my neck to get a better view of the amount of damage done in mirror, I realized the shock of my life. I was looking like a personified zombie, with one eye bleeding and it was the one which made me see the rest of the world. I instantly crumbled back to my position and tried to unlock the door.

Somehow I managed to slip out of my accident-hit car. It took me about 25 minutes to come out with a fracturing pain in my wrist. Fortunately, the lorry was in slow speed, may be this was the reason, I was not squashed completely. I thanked God and covered my paining eye with my handkerchief and looked around. I almost crawled to stand up with the support of my broken car and started staggering towards the lorry, in hope of getting some help from people. Strangely, the lorry was vacant. I estimated that I must have been unconscious for quite a long time, whereas the driver must have run from the accident spot.

I stood dejected for a while and checked time. My watch told me it was 12:15. I walked a bit more limping through and my eyes located

headlight's light flickering from around 500 meters' distance. A car parked at such an odd hour of night at highway, may have sounded gravely weird or dangerous but I felt like I got what I had asked for; human beings to help me. I started walking towards it.

When I was almost few steps away from it, I repented my mistake of coming without even waving. The perplexed girl inside the car, got scared looking at my zombie look and limping walk. She instantly pulled up the window glass and was terrified and comatose in fear.

I folded my hands and indicated to the accident sight that my car had been smashed. That is when she looked towards the direction of my fingers and wiped her sweat, took a deep breath and gulped water before finally sliding the window down.

"I am stuck here since my car is not moving. Can you please help?", a honey coated sweet voice erupted out of her and despite of just facing a life threatening accident, it sounded musical melody to my ears. She had normal eyes, in fact smaller eyes than normal but deep ones, with fair complexion and sharp features. Her long oval shaped face was only accentuating her beauty. I blinked for a moment and replied with courtesy, "Sure, Ma'am. Would you in return help me to get back to my city Jaipur? Not that its a condition, but take it as a request.", I blessed my wits to add some humor in such a situation to make her feel at ease.

My effort of breaking the ice , did not work the way I wanted it to be but hesitatingly she agreed. I should have thought that being a girl, she is supposed to be hesitant. While looking into the intricacies of what happened to the car, I enquired her name. She told me it was Shweta Malhotra. My further probing revealed that this resplendent , slender, beauty in blue salwaar kameez was working as an HR manager in some

company in Jaipur itself. I finally mended the car and thus began our journey back to Jaipur.

Shweta -

Rohan turned out to be a nice fellow and made me comfortable throughout our trip. Due to his severe eye injury, he was looking more of a zombie than a human. Otherwise, this tall, dark, and sturdy guy was no less than a model and to my surprise, he turned out to be a writer. Life sometimes takes you to the things you try to run from. Rohan came into my life when I started escaping from books.

Since he was injured badly, I offered him home packed sandwiches, which he seemed to relish.

“So, Shweta, what do you love doing in leisure?” , asked Rohan in a muffled voice with his mouth full of sandwich. His childlike innocence while munching sandwich made me smile first and then gulp. I wanted to say that I used to love reading and writing but not anymore but I restrained, because certainly he did not know my story.

“Umm. I watch TV and I talk to friends. I love to talk you know”, I managed to come up with a genuine sounding answer. Well, at least it sounded one to me.

“How about you? I mean I know your answer”, I instantly pounced on him with questions so that I don’t need to answer much. I laughed a bit since I had asked a silly question about his hobby. “Let me guess, were

you on a trip for your writing work?”, I tried diverting his mind off me, with the best question this time.

“Hey, Shweta. My God! How do you come to know? Well exactly I am. I was highly dejected and I feel ashamed to say that after scribbling five best sellers, this wordsmiths’ charm has suddenly dwindled down”, said he with drooped shoulders and disappointed eyes, while looking in the other direction. It pinched to see him helpless, I don’t know why.

“Oh. I just guessed it right. Generally writers take up tours like that ; come on, you will definitely get a story. Who knows, this journey of ours becomes a new story for you?”, I muttered to cheer him up but failed miserably. He was looking ahead on the road, lost in his own world of pain, with helplessness, dejection and no hope in his eyes.

After driving for five minutes in silence, where none of us seemed uncomfortable being quiet, I suddenly came up with an idea and suggested him.

“Hey. Rohan. Why don’t I tell you a story. May be you can write or modify it according to you?”, I suggested with utmost doubts of rejection of my idea. Fearing that writers may have their own ego and may not accept stories from non-writers.

“Oh! Wow , you have a story? Great. That would be amazing. But Shweta, we are half an hour away from the city now. So what if you

don't get to complete it?" , his acceptance and curiosity took me aback, and I felt good and valued, yet again.

Shweta's proposal of story telling was happily accepted by Rohan and somewhere sent tingles to his heart from the relief that despite of an accident, he finally got to hear some story.

"There was a boy named Rahul, disheveled clothes, deprived of education, since his father passed away early and mother was fending for both of them. When he turned eight, he took up the responsibility on his shoulders to share work with his mother.", Shweta began and spoke it all in one go and waited for Rohan's response.

"Ok. Good going Shweta. Then what happened?", Rohan asked with curious look. "Rahul knew the basic alphabets and spellings as he had attended few primary classes till he turned five. He could read and write tiny words in English too. One fine day, when he was cleaning up the the stationary on his master's son's table, he saw that two of the pens were not working and were trashed in bin. He picked up the pens from there, and asked his master that whether they were of any use or he could take them. To which the master happily agreed to give away them to him. Rahul joyfully went back home, promising himself to buy a refill and keep practicing with these pens in his old notebooks. He wanted to remember what all he learnt in school.", Shweta revealed and paused to have a sip of water from her pink colored bottle, which had a quote on it saying, "Writing is writers' struggle against silence".

"Wow, nice quote on writing!", remarked Rohan. Shweta was taken aback suddenly and frowned in a knee jerk reaction. Rohan found it

weird and thought may be she had an axe to grind, but he chose to ignore and remain zipped on the issue.

After two minutes of torturous silence, Shweta resumed, "Rahul started writing from one of the pens after buying refills in the notebooks he carried at his master's home where he used to study in spare time. One day his master saw him and by having a look at his handwriting and his curiosity to learn, he talked to his mother for funding his school education. His mother's eyes twinkled in thousand hopes and dreams for her child but she was hesitant in taking any favors from anyone. So she agreed on the condition that she will be working at their place without taking wages and just food will be enough for them, since Rahul's education was already being funded by them. Rahul studied in the best international school and learnt faster than other kids and always passed with flying colors. He still had kept safe those two pens as token of respect. When he turned 16, a story writing competition was held and he picked one of those two pens to write a story." Shweta stopped abruptly.

"What happened? Why did you stop Shweta?", enquired Rohan. "There is a hospital right ahead of us and I think you should first get some medication there." Shweta suggested and opted to stay in the car as Rohan was quite comfortable going by himself. They resumed their journey but now since they had entered the city, it was time to depart.

"Thanks Shweta, I have got the gauging done and we have entered the city, but I seriously want to listen to the full story. Can we sit somewhere outside?", pleaded the enthusiastic writer in Rohan.

Shweta looked at her wrist watch and her eyes said it all before she could. "I guess, it won't be a trouble if I drive to my home which is

another 30 minutes from here and tell you the story on the way. Since it is 3:30 in the morning, can you please drop me till my flat upstairs and then get a cab and go? Our purpose will be solved?" Shweta suggested with a gulp.

"Yeah sure! Perfect, now please resume the story", Rohan agreed happily like a kid. "Rahul won the competition and he kept on winning every story writing and soon became an author. He never threw his pens away. Little did he know that one of those pens had a power. A power to make you win if you are not harming anyone. The pen rewarded its owner through success and victory till the time, it was not misused.", Shweta became quiet after saying to check Rohan's reaction.

"Oh wow! But how and when did the owner misuse it ?", Rohan's excitement was not ceasing. "When Rahul once changed the pen , his novel flopped, it was then he came to realize the power of his pen. He once wrote a story in which he killed all the other writers wishing it to be true. So that there would be no competition. He was trying to misuse the power of pen. The moment malice entered his heart, he met with

an accident and could not survive that day itself.", Shweta completed the story.

"Oh! That's tragic", said Rohan. "I wish such a pen existed", he laughed and smirked and she joined him in the laughter.

"What if it does? What would you do? Will you misuse it?", asked Shweta while stopping the car in front of a residential building.

"Oh well! Why would I? When I already am achieving success with my good work. And is this you building Shweta?", Rohan asked.

"Yes. But Rohan, I would just say one thing. Greed kills", And with that, Shweta got out of car and so did Rohan. He did not forget his promise to drop her upstairs.

When they reached lift, it was not working. So they chose to go by stairs. On second floor's stairs, Shweta handed him the keys and told him to go in 313 on third floor, as she had forgot her mobile in the car.

Rohan agreed and went upstairs. He searched flat no 313 and unlocked it. He tried to rummage his hands on the entry wall inside to find switch for light. As he switched on the light, his eyes fell on Shweta's photo on the opposite wall, serene, beautiful with enchanting smile. But a garlanded photo with a pen placed neatly, on a table underneath the photo. Shweta who went downstairs to get her mobile, never came back since she went away from this world long back. The garlanded photo was the testimonial.

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You and I -An incomplete story

The clouds were breaking and shining to just give a hint of sun into this wonderful picture. The temperature was one that was dreamed of on the hottest and the coldest days. It was not too hot, and it definitely was not too cold. This new sunlight seemed to change the color of everything. The grass which was once a forest green had now turned glistening green. The trees which seemed dark at first, now actually resembled brown bark and green leaves. Even the metal fence that went around the softball stadium had turned from grey to silver. There seems to be more movement now, and Ritesh could hear a bird chirping nearby .The sun seemed to be playing hide-and-go-seek with the clouds. He could definitely spend all his day at this heavenly place as it was such a magnificent site an artist should cover.

The clouds imprisoned the sun. The trees, in the breeze, shook like little kids on their first day of school. The sound of the cars and people reminded him of how busy the world is. An old abandoned softball stadium looked as though it had not seen any player in years. The

playground, that once held the smiling faces of children, now too was as lonesome as an old widow. The rain had left behind puddles.

Amidst all this, Ritesh decided to capture the beautiful art of nature since he could feel the reincarnation of a long lost artist at the sight of the alluring park.

As he entered the park, no one were to be seen. Ritesh thought of sitting under a golden apple tree and then start off with his art.

The moment he sat, he could see a girl hiding behind the tree. His curiosity made him more eager to see who was hiding behind the tree and what could be the reason.

As he moved towards the tree, he felt spellbound with the not so earthy aura of a young maiden.

The girl he saw, wore a medieval gown with red ribbon in her pigtails and a scarf draped all over her neckline and her beautiful face. Since he

could not see her properly, he just noticed that her eyes were hazel blue. The girl seemed to be a perfect model for his painting.

'Hello. I must say you are elegantly gorgeous.'

The girl did not reply instead she nodded with a smile.

'Can I ask a favor from you?'

The girl again nodded in anticipation.

'I want you to be my painting model. I request you ma'am. You are extremely beautiful. May I know your name?',Ritesh said.

'Samaira',she said and smiled making him know that she was all ready to be his model.

Ritesh knew he would not be able to finish the painting in a single day and was happy for he knew that now, until his painting is completed he would meet Samaira.

'Love at first sight' or just a fatal attraction it was. But yes he was heavily drowned in her blue shiny eyes.

With a very unusual feel his heart experienced, he asked Samaira to adjust according to the positions she was supposed to maintain. With

the onset of evening, Ritesh found that Samaira was being a little anxious.

And out of courtesy he asked her to drop her back to her home.

Samaira agreed.

That day, Ritesh had the best walk of his life with the girl he could feel attracted to.

'So, will you come tomorrow so that I can complete my painting?'

She nodded in a yes.

'So tell me something about yourself.'

'I don't like talking much, will you be quiet for a moment', she replied bluntly.

They all were silent until Samaira reached her house.

It was a big colonial house, with a marble encasing the front view. The gate was as big as an elephant. Bats and birds howled nearby. And most of all, the house was engulfed in the middle of the forest.

It somehow looked scary to him.

Yet he managed to bid her a goodbye with a smile.

'Don't forget to come, I will be waiting', saying this Ritesh left the scary fields.

Days went on and they both started meeting regularly in the same alluring park.

They both started sharing a bond.

And one day in the middle of the painting session, Ritesh stood up.

He went to Samaira and cupping her face he said , 'The day I saw you was the day I started getting attracted towards your unearthly beauty, your mystical smile and your not so fashionable, yet stylish behavior. I don't know when I fell for your aura, your smile and your hazel blue eyes. I

love you and I want to be your morning tea. I don't care where you live, what your family does. All I know is, I want you in my life.'

Samaira did not utter a word, tears flowed from her eyes like the purest Ganges. She clutched his hands and dragged him to a place well known for both of them, that was Samaira's house.

Ritesh was completely confused.

As the gate opened, the ambience turned into a strange one.

Crackled leaves , broken fences all marked that something unusual was going to happen.

As the entered the house, Ritesh could not stay quiet and said, 'Where are your family members Samaira and why is this all so dull and dark?'

'I don't have a family, Ritesh. And I will let you know why this is so. Just come with me.'

Ritesh followed her and then on reaching a dusty store room she stopped, opened the gate of the room and made him enter too.

She tried to lift the broken furniture and some bundles of old torn clothes.

An old cupboard was visible to both of them.

Ritesh noticed there were tears in Samaira's eyes which had turned blood red to hazel blue.

She asked Ritesh to open up the cupboard.

As he opened the closet, he was shocked to see what fell off the cupboard. It was a body, yes, a corpse.

The body looked exactly like Samaira, the same clothes were on the body which she wore when they first met in the park.

He could not even shout, yet he sat there broken with tears flowing from his heavy eyes.

He searched for Samaira but she did not responded.

He could not help but howl for her.

She was now sitting with one of her hands on his lap and the other on her own dead body.

'Ritesh, I am not a human. I am a soul, a wandering soul, searching for justice. I wandered here and there until the day I met you. I don't know how and why a soul fell for a human but yes this has happened. I am in love with you. But when you confessed what you feel in the park, I felt you are the only one I could tell what the truth is. Why I sit there lonesome in the park and why I feel anxious on the onset of evening.'

Ritesh just cried and was almost lying next to Samaira's corpse.

'Ritesh, it happened 5 years ago. I was 20 then. I used to live with my family in Delhi. Being a punjabi girl I was full of life and chirpy. I made friends, loved and lived. Until the day, I met a guy, Rahul. Rahul was the son of a rich man and he wooed me in the best possible way he could, because I was considered to be the most beautiful one of our college. Soon we were together as a couple. Everything went well. He was the

perfect one a girl could dream of. We smiled, laughed, cried loved and spent time together. I was falling for him all the more. And then one fine Friday we decided to visit the hills of Macloedgunj.

This very place is his farm house.

All his friends, Ravi, Aisha, Dinesh were enjoying with all of us. The trip was the best one I supposed. We were about to leave for Delhi the next morning. I was feeling the breeze there in the park and then suddenly I felt someone clutched me from behind. I turned and saw ,it was Rahul and he was fully drunk. He tried to take control of me and I resisted. And then in the wake of his alcohol and lust he threw me followed by which my head was injured by a boulder fence. I cried for help, blood flowed from my head, but no one came. Ravi, Dinesh, Aisha everyone was busy in hiding me as they thought I am dead. Dinesh took me and kept me in this cupboard. I was alive. I was breathing. Yet he paid no heed and I was locked in here, with blood flowing and I was suffocating. Soon with no air to breathe, I died, in fact my body died and my soul yearned for justice. Justice for what Rahul did to me, justice for what Dinesh did to me by my own hands. I was wandering to take revenge and then I saw their car crashing down by a mountain sliding due to land slide. God did justice to me. Yet, my soul yearned for revenge. And I could not go to the other world, the world of souls. I wanted to but then it was too late. I was blessed that one day I might find my true love and he would be the

one who takes me to the world. And then after five long years, I met you in the park that day.'

'I wished to be with you forever Samaira and now I know its impossible. I love you and I would do anything to set you free but I wish, I wish we could stay together.'

'Ritesh, I love you and my soul loves you. You will be there and we shall meet in the parallel world.'

Samaira asked Ritesh to hand over her body to her family and told everything to her father and perform her cremation rituals.

Ritesh called the morgue ambulance. As he was going towards Delhi, he felt Samaira holding his arms. They both had tears in their eyes, as they knew it was the last time they could feel each other.

The two hours long journey seemed to have passed in a moment to them.

And then as ordered by Samaira he cremated her body.

With her body going into ashes, he and Samaira hugged for the last time and suddenly she eloped out of this world. Suddenly, she left him to meet in an unparallel world until the day comes.

Ritesh sat there and cried, howled like a wolf for her moon, Samaira and he knew he would never feel her again and he knew theirs was an incomplete story.

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