

**"ATTACHMENT"**

**A  
COLLECTION  
OF  
SHORT STORIES**

**"ANURAAG"**

**By  
Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad**

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# **ATTACHMENT**

## **A Collection Of Short Stories**

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**October, 2015**



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*All characters in this novel are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.*

**SLP PUBLICATIONS 2015**

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# 1

## EPIGRAPH

There are a few folks who fuss because the  
society won't act  
There are others who fume because they  
cannot react.  
They all create problems rather than creating  
something new  
RLP used the society and the culture to create  
literary stew.  
The readers sometimes control the fate of the  
writers  
They criticize, comment and critique, the  
blighters.  
Some whimper, others enjoy but most do not  
care  
Short stories can be fiction or be a real life  
affair.  
These stories of RL make good reading at any  
station  
The ideas are wake up calls and good for the  
nation.  
The writer has presented the stories as best as  
he could  
The readers can start reading and read as they  
should.  
When the writers create they push for some  
change

Sometimes everything is emotive but ideas  
remain strange.  
It gives them fulfillment to step into the  
unknown  
They still remain artists but soon become  
known.  
Stories of this structure often do open our  
eyes  
We do comment with care and learn to  
criticize.  
They inspire us to become enlightened and  
creative thinkers  
Let us turn back the clock but not to be idea  
sinkers.  
The author has shared many of his ideas and  
expressions  
The journals show his talents, experiences  
and differences.  
If he has not influenced and inspired us to  
take action  
Can we blame him or search the depth of our  
passion?  
I am a silent admirer of all types of creativity  
in people  
A lot is in this collection it is treasure for the  
people  
I can comment and make some judgment on  
my own  
I really like them all so there is no need to  
frown.  
RLP has become an innovator and an agent of  
change.

# 2

## PROLOGUE

**By Mrs Padma Singh,  
Former Principal of SVHS Nadi Fiji**



Many writers inadvertently bring their life into the world of the readers with them and want the readers to read about their world. After his beloved wife and my dearest friend Saroj passed away, Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad was indeed devastated, completely distraught and totally bewildered but he went on a path to heal his sorrow and loneliness through his literary art and creation. He used various genres to express his innermost feeling and unconditional love for his departed

soul mate and his life partner of over half a century.

In the last three years Dr Prasad has created and published many poems, DVD presentations, articles, short stories and novellas for his beloved wife and tried to heal himself of immeasurable loss he felt in the absence of his beloved lotus. This collection of short stories is perhaps its reflection that he is growing from strength to strength as a writer of creative dimension.

RL, as he is known among his colleagues, has been pouring his heart and soul out to create presentations as homage and loving tribute to Saroj, his pretty lotus but he has a long way to go to complete this journey of ultimate joy and compassion. This according to him would be the day that the two souls reincarnate and merge again to resurrect their love life.

The phrase 'history repeats itself' is not accepted without challenge but we have to acknowledge that certain chains of events in the life of a person bear marked resemblance to incidents of earlier family life. These short stories that are the continued creation of this matured writer are symbols and signs of some of his emotions, conflicts and frustrations that make interesting, cool and attached reading.

What is presented in these pages as an art is perhaps an ultimate in the refinement of the craft of this writer who has over thirty publications to



his credit and I am confident that the news of created construction is going to guide him to produce many more in the future. We wish him all the best.

My family was very closely related to the family life of this artist but that is not the only reason for empathizing with, appreciating and understanding his inner most feelings that he so meticulously and tactfully expressed in his creations.

I am mindful that anyone who has known RL as an educationist, humanist and a trade unionist would be able to relate well and respond healthily with all his presentations.

Finally, I must admit that reading RL's anthology brought back the beautiful years I shared with Saroj not only as a friend but as a sister and my confidante. I am indeed proud to be given the opportunity to share my feelings to respond and recommend this anthology of great stories to the readers.

***Padma Singh.***

# 3

## INTRODUCTION

**I** had a passion for creating short stories, poems, novellas and novels in Hindi language from my early school and college days but suddenly an urge came to develop novels, novellas, short stories and poems in the English language when my wife passed away. This interest became one of the ways of healing my sorrow and loneliness.

Here are a few of my initial creations in this specific genre for my readers to read, appreciate, critique and enjoy. I hope to add many more as my mood and interest develop and strengthen. It may be my next project.

One thing that needs to be considered is that English is my second language; hence a lot of my ideas and settings would come from my own cultural and social background and from my own reading and scriptures. These have naturally enriched my creation.

A story has five basic but important elements. These five components are: the characters, the

setting, the plot, the conflict, and the resolution. These essential elements keep the story running smoothly and allow the action to develop in a logical way that the reader can follow.

The characters are the individuals that the story is about. I have tried to introduce the characters in the story with enough information that the reader can visualize each person. This is achieved by providing detailed descriptions of a character's physical attributes and personality traits. Every story should have a main character. The main character determines the way the plots and sub plots will develop and is usually who will solve the problems and conflicts the story centers upon.

However, the other characters are also very important because they supply additional details, explanations, or actions and counter actions. All characters should stay true to the author's descriptions throughout the story so that the readers can understand and believe the actions that are taking place—and perhaps even predict which character may do what next.

The setting is the location of the action. An author should describe the environment or surroundings of the story in such detail that

the readers feel that he or she can picture the scene. Unusual settings (such as a fantasy world) can be interesting, but everyday settings can help the readers to better visualize the story and feel connected to the plot.

The plot is the actual story around which the entire story is based. A plot should have a very clear beginning, middle, and end—with all the necessary descriptions and suspense, called exposition—so that the readers can make sense of the actions and follow along from start to finish.

Every story has a conflict to solve. The plot is centered on this conflict and the ways in which the characters attempt to resolve the problem. When the story's action becomes most exciting, right before the resolution, it is called the climax. Of course there are a few stories of mine which have some form of anti climax and attempt to reach denouement.

The solution to the problem is the way the action is resolved. For example, Rani often resolves a conflict by finding a compromise for two fighting characters or helping fix any mistakes she made while switched into someone else. It is important that the resolution fits the rest of the story in tone and creativity and solves all parts of the conflict.

I have used a variety of literary devices in my stories to make them interesting and exciting to read. My use of symbolism, foreshadowing and foregrounding are used in various situations and circumstances. Whereas there are others with a minimum of usage, for example, similes, alliteration, metaphors and personification have been sparingly used.

Thus all my ten short stories or novellas cannot be strictly called short because some are too short, others a little longer and one is almost a novel. The lengths of my stories depended largely on the time it took me to reach my resolution. Almost all my stories have a hidden prologue that introduces my stories and sets the tone for the story to enable it to act as a bit of a backgrounder.

The title “Attachment” or its translation in my language “Anuraag” symbolizes various forms of connection be they social, cultural, economic or political. The style and diction of my stories are somewhat personal to me too.

My stories do have an intense feeling that an audience goes through while waiting for the outcome of certain events. This is my use of suspense which basically leaves the readers holding their breath and wanting more information. Of course, without my themes,

tone and tragedy I would not have successfully completed my task. These are intertwined aspects of my presentation but are easy to detect.

One of my strongest devices is imagery where I have used words and phrases to create mental images for the reader. Some of these are from my native language of Hindustani and are not limited to only visual sensation but may also refer to igniting kinesthetic, olfactory, tactile, gustatory, thermal and auditory sensations as well. Often I found that there are no equivalent translations so I used my own interpretation. Some people call this mother tongue interference but this interference has enriched my stories.

I have one reservation about my collection. Some of my short stories are not really short and can be classed as a novella but they do hold the suspense element for the readers. Please accept my apologies for this indulgence.

My wish is that the readers appreciate my ideas that I have tried to convey in my creations. I will feel good if people enjoy these in the same spirit that I displayed when creating them. Good luck.

# 4

## **ATTACHMENT**

**(A True Story of Love and Passion)**

**Krisn** was born in a small village of Botini in the western districts of Fiji in December of 1939 during the time when the world was at war and the people were living in fear as well as uncertain future. Krisn was born to remove fear and construct his future.

The parents of Krisn were Bhagat and Kunti who were fairly famous farmers of the district and were living on a large farm of Sarju Residence in an extended family structure. They had worked hard to establish themselves as a respectable and well-known family with the main objective of becoming worthy and responsible citizens of the nation. They all wanted to contribute well to live and let others live in harmony in a multinational community.

The own parents of Bhagat were Sarju and Ganga who had been brought from India as indentured workers by the Australian Company that owned various sugar mills and

sugarcane estates all over the western districts of Fiji. They became free farmers after their indenture contract expired. This seemed a blessing in disguise in many respects.

Birth of the first child of the family was not that easy for the family. While the grandmother of Krisn, Ganga acted as an active midwife, his mother Kunti passed away after Krisn was born because of complications and absence of medical assistance. Grandmother Ganga and aunt Ramila had no choice but to become alternative mothers to Krisn.

Bhagat, father of Krisn was distraught at the lost of his wife but he was fortunate to have Krisn as the only relict. Although Bhagat was a busy farmer he made certain that Krisn grew up in perfect harmony and in good care with excellent upbringing atmosphere. Consequently Bhagat secured the services of an additional child care assistant Radhika from the village. Krisn had lost his mother but he was blessed to have the care, attention, love and affection of three dedicated people. So he was three times blessed in many respects of growing up and upbringing.

Radhika whose parents agreed for her to be the third caretaker of Krisn was the eldest of the four daughter of the village priest Rajbali



Maharaj and his wife Yashoda. They lived with their family across the creek from Sarju Residence.

Radhika was a healthy being, a well-groomed child and a positive thinker with precise and in-depth knowledge of the Hindu scriptures because her father and mother regularly conducted prayers and recited ideas from the Vedas, Upanishads and other holy books such as the Bhagvat Geeta, Mahabharat and Ramayan.

So all the family members at Sarju Residence were greatly indebted to the priest Rajbali Maharaj and his wife Yashoda for the sacrifice they had made to let their daughter Radhika join them to care for Krisn. Radhika was an excellent eight year old student of the nearby primary school when she joined her new family to care for Krisn. In the day time she would be at school but loved to be with Krisn after school. She slept with the boy and continued caring for Krisn at night.

In fact, Radhika herself was overwhelmed with the thought of having a living doll such as Krisn to play and interact with. Krisn was a chubby baby with the fortune of having three mothers and each of these mothers was so dedicated, loving and compassionate that Krisn never missed his natural mother.

As time moved on and Krisn was growing up, Radhika would read to him from various scriptures and sing devotional songs as lullaby for him. She set up a corner in the house for regular prayers. She firmly believed that Krisn was a gift from God and a product of the previous karma of Bhagat and Kunti. Radhika treated Krisn in such a diligent and delicate way that he had the best brain and consequently she was not surprised that Krisn developed that type of special brain.



Time flew and by age six Krisn was ready to go to school as well. Radhika was a senior student at the school by now and was so pleased to get Krisn enrolled there as well because she had the opportunity to boasting about Krisn being her baby.

This assertion and revelation did not make much sense to the teachers and the students initially but soon they understood her deep

feeling for the child she had cared for, for the last six years as a substitute mother.



Even at school during recess and lunch times Radhika was seen playing, reading, talking and caring for Krisn. Of course, she walked to and from home daily on the dirt road and made sure that Krisn wore his hat, shoes and clothes in the right way to avoid sunburn, dust inhalation and tiredness.

One of the greatest rules of life for Radhika was freedom and she provided that freedom of thought and action to Krisn but practised a form of discipline that was conducive to Hindu way of life where love was foremost in all day to day dealings. She wanted her Krisn to be the epitome of truth, beauty and goodness. So she performed all her responsibilities for Krisn with these ideas in her mind.

Such were the deep and genuine concerns of Radhika who had become a true friend, a

mentor and an additional guru for Krisn. Krisn on the other hand had developed a special relationship with Radhika and this became a discussion point, a role model of social co-existence and a regular talk of the community. Radhika for Krisn in many respects was like Radha of the Hindu scriptures for Lord Krishna but more revered in nurturing the natural life of her disciple or her fosterling.

Radhika conducted herself as Saraswati, the Hindu Goddess of enlightenment and knowledge for Krisn and began providing him with all the necessary tools of tackling the problems and challenges of adolescence and adulthood. The entire intervention of Radhika for Krisn was as astute and pious as that of Radha and Lord Krishna of Vrindavan of the Hindu scriptures. So Krisn was not only growing up in a small village but he was being groomed to be a being with a different makeup and composition.

At the end of the year however, Radhika had to leave school because she had completed her primary education and now that Krisn was settled well in school her responsibilities as an alternative mother had to come to an end. The duties that she was recruited for had been accomplished admirably and the baby was

now an adolescent doing exceptionally well at school.

Sadly for everybody, Radhika was recalled by her parents to live with them but after school and during weekends Radhika and Krisn continued their pure, pious and sanctified relationship in and around the Sarju Residence and the village parks, orchards, farms and other natural locations. It was during these times when Radhika would joyfully enrich the developing life of Krisn with wisdom, knowledge, talents, skills and spiritual specialities.

Time and tide do not tarry for anyone and the clocks of life keep ticking away as usual. Krisn kept doing well at school and brought home excellent school reports for the delight of the family and especially for Radhika. Krisn was the first student of the village to be successful in the examination of primary school leaving certificate to be gain admission to a prestigious government high school as a boarder.

Radhika was given the responsibility by Bhagat and his family of taking Krisn to his new school and settling him there. This was a special privilege for her and while returning from completing her task Radhika shed tears after tears for the separation of two very

special people that had uncontaminated and divine link in life.



Many proposals came to the parents of Radhika to get married but she turned all of them down to say that her duties of building the life of her baby had not been completed yet and she would wait until she was totally satisfied that she had given her Krisn the needed wings to fly and reach for the sky. Krisn on the other hand would rejuvenate and rekindle his virtuous relationship with Radhika during all his school term holidays.

During these occasions they would visit temples, theatres, markets, shops, libraries and various other places of importance and deepened their sacral and devout interactions and relationships.

At one of these pilgrimages to a Hindu temples where they prayed together constantly Radhika presented Krisn with a plaque with her blessings. Krisn always kept this plaque with him for his personal motivation for ages

until it was washed away in one of the furious floods of Fiji but by then Krisn had engraved the message in his mind.



Such were the powers and wisdom of his confidante that Krisn had developed a sincere dedication and deep devotion to his guru mother, Radhika. In another of their sacred meetings Radhika demanded an assurance from Krisn by saying that she did not want him to be the same every time she met him. She wanted him to be better and bolder.

These were some of the wise words of Radhika that made Krisn excel in every possible field of study, in sports, in drama, in discourse and his other high school life.

The four long years of perseverance at high school paid good dividends and Krisn was destined to become a teacher when he was selected to undergo teacher training programme for three years far away from his home and further away from his faithful friend Radhika.

They kept communicating with each other through various means but the methods of interaction were very slow in those days. The first letter that Krisn received from Radhika had these special words among other essential things that 'a life without love was like a year without seasons' and 'all good relationships do not just happen but they take time, patience and two special people who are determined to be together'.

When after a year of hard educational psychology studies Krisn wrote back that he wanted to put his ear on her chest and listen to all the heart beat that dished out wisdom, Radhika wrote back, 'Dearest Friend Krisn, The time has come for you to close the window of your past and open the door of your future and take a deep breath to pray. Then step on the first step of the ladder of your new life to walk up with faith, trust and commitment to do it yourself to your plans. Start n new chapter in your life right now.'



That was the last written communication that Radhika and Krisn had between them and Krisn could not fathom the rationale for that deviation but years later when he had got married and had a few years of teaching experience to return to his village, he took his wife Rukmani to meet Radhika who still lived in the old shack after her parents had passed away and the other sisters were happily married. Krisn collected enough courage to ask Radhika for the reason to abandon him as her friend and a student.

Radhika gave a very short and sweet answer for her detachment by saying that she wanted her Krisn to grow strong wings and fly out to find his rightful place in the world. Krisn then looked at his wife Rukmani for any possible response but she nodded and acknowledged the words of Radhika. After spending some time together the beloved wife of Krisn asked Radhika the reason for her not to take on a family life.

Radhika looked at the image of the huge mountain range called the Sleeping Giant for a while and then gently held the hand of Rukmani to say, "One day someone will walk into my life and make me feel and see why it never worked out with anyone else." This statement was not only loaded, emotive and comprehensive but came out from the depth of

her heart. There were many questions that Rukmani wanted to ask Radhika but could not because it became clear to her that all the answers were known to her husband Krisn.

As time moved on, the Sarju Residence was sold and Krisn and Rukmani migrated to Australia with their family only to regularly return to their village to be in the wise and sweet company of Radhika for a few moments. However, these short spells were like a thousand years in their life because of the wisdom that Radhika so lovingly presented to them and the family.

Like any other good adventure the spiritual life of Radhika had to end. She passed away at the age of eighty four in the retirement home and her sisters gave her the final farewell befitting an Angel like Radhika. Krisn was given the sad news after a week of her passing away by one of the cousins of Radhika.

### **Foot Note**

*The above story seems a fiction but when the reader substitutes the name of the author for Krisn, the entire episode becomes a true story worth re-reading and taking some aspects of the life and living of Radhika and Krisn as worthy epitome of love, devotion, friendship and divine human interaction.*

# AN ADJUNCT

The epilogue of the author has to be read in conjunction with the story to complete the episodes with the dignity it deserves.

While I was growing up in a little village of Botini in Sabeto Nadi Fiji I had a very reliable confidante, a faithful friend and a virtuous lover by the name of Radhika who was eight years older than I was and more mature in outlook. We were a lot more than friends and related with each other as teacher and student. She was my guide and adviser on various aspects of growing up and life.

There are many worthy and wise teachings she dished out to me while we were interacting freely as village companions. She told me that life without love was monotonous and brought no appreciation of seasons. I kept in touch with her until recently but sadly she passed away last week at the age of eighty four, eight years my senior. Every time I visited my village I made a point of seeing her and renewing my interaction with her at her home where she lived alone.

She never got married because as she explained to my wife that she was waiting for that special relationship. "One day someone

would walk into my life and make me see why it never worked out with anyone else.” That never happened for Radhika and she went away unattached. I know that good relationships do not just happen but they take time, patience and two people who want to be together. We were like the two banks of the river never to rejoice harmonious and lasting relationship. Although we had disjointed relationship I was the greatest beneficiary of this eventful and resourceful adventure. My late wife and I admired and loved Radhika’s company and conversations every time we visited her. I will miss her.

Radhika always wanted me not to be the same but be better every time she saw and met me and I tried to fulfill her wish to make her happy. She loved to listen to my stories of progress in life. She asked me never to wear a fake smile and then you will never be able to fake your feelings. I walk around like everything is fine but deep down I feel for my true friend, my sakhi, my saheli and my early life confidant. May the divine soul of Radhika Rest In Peace and she reaches salvation.

The worst kind of pain for me is when I am smiling just to stop the eyes from revealing my sorrows. While driving to and from Port Dickson with my children I remembered a few more specific things that Radhika told me

when I graduated as a teacher in 1959. She found out that I had just terminated a close relationship with one of my college mates and I was somewhat a broken person. Radhika warned me to be careful when trying to fix a broken person because if I did then I may cut myself on the shattered pieces. So she wanted me to change the way I looked at things, then maybe the things I looked at would change as well. A definite change came to my way of thinking and I have never looked back on my terminated relationship ever since.

So after getting the sad news this morning, I did two things as homage to my mentor. I wrote a short story and then I developed a poem in Hindi for Radhika to understand my true feelings while she is Resting in Peace in Heaven. I know that her soul is still here to keep guiding me and providing me with additional wisdom and strength. I was fortunate to have such a pious angel like Radhika to show me the route to a happy family life and a successful living.

Where would I have been had it not been for the initial intervention and dedicated conduct of this goddess? I know not but one thing I can certainly say, "There is no equivalence to this kind of love in any of my scriptures so this was a unique relationship and a very deep attachment."

A related poem in Hindi Language is attached to salute the contributions of the protagonist.

## **RADHIKA KO PRANAAM KARUN**

Bachpan ki yaden jab aati hain to us saheli ki  
yaad aa jaati hai  
Wo sakhi jo mujhe jeewan ki lahron ke  
madhur yaad dilaati hai  
Radhika uska naam tha aur maan sammaan  
aur gyan hamko deti rahi  
Ghar mein, sadak pe, chauraha par aur saala  
mein hamko sikhati rahi  
Gaon ke purohit ki beti thi hamse lagbhag  
chhe saal badi thi  
Pyar ki saagar thi gyaan ki bhandaar thi wo ek  
farishta thi

Dosti ke us pawitr rishte ko ham dono maante  
the aur jaante the  
Wo hamko apna shishy maanti thi aur ham  
use guru maante the  
Saath saath khelte the padhte the aur apna  
naam kamaate the

Log hamare paawan dosti ko na jaane kitne  
naam dete rahte the  
Koi Radha Krishn to koi Ram Sabri ka  
namoona dete rahte the  
Meri sakhi hamari wo saheli thi jisko main  
dilo jaan se chaahta tha

Uska izzat aur maan maryaada rakhna mere  
ragrag mein bara tha  
Koi hawas na thi na hi koi swarath tha bas ek  
pawitr pyar tha  
Hamare liye to wo gyan ki dariya thi aur main  
uska munna tha  
Radhika ne hamko jeewan mein aage badhne  
ka protsahan diya tha  
Wo hi mujhe prem, bhakti aur rahen sahen ka  
sahi illam diya tha  
Bachpan beeta jawaani aayi mainto ek saaheb  
ban gaya tha

Par jab jab hamari mulakaat hoti hamko  
bachpan yaad aata tha  
Ham apne madhur yaadon mein kho jaate  
bada anand aata tha  
Radhika ke aachaar vichaar aaj bhi hamko  
raah dikhati hai  
Hamari har ek unnati ki paheli seedhi uski hi  
gyan ka dhan hai  
Kya kya batawoon wo mere liye aur kya thi  
aur kawn thi  
Mere patni aur mere liye Radhika hamare  
gyan ki mandir thi

Kal ki hi baat hai Radhika ka nidhan bayalish  
saalon ke baad hua  
Mera aatma ro pada par unke kar kamlon se  
hamko kushi hua  
Jab tak yeh jeewan hai ham Radhika ke  
raahon par chalte rahenge  
Unka maan rakkhenge unke sikchha ko apne  
gale lagayenge  
Dhanye hai Radhika aur meri dosti dhanye  
hai unki dharm karam  
Waysi sakhi jisko milegi uski siddh ho jaygi  
sab dharm karam

Jaawo Radhika Ji shayan karo mere aatma ko  
pulkit karte rahna  
Is mann mandir mein aysa jyot jalado seekh  
jawoon main rahna  
Aapne hamko bahut maan diya shaan diya  
gyan se bhar diya tha  
Is param anand ka kya kahna aap ne to mera  
sammaan kiya tha  
Ayse paawan mintrata ka prachaar karun  
dosti ka maan karun  
Radhika ke yash ka gaan karun uske jeewan  
ko parnaam karun.

@

There is no equivalent translation for the  
emotions and feelings contained in this poem  
but the readers can try Google translation.

August 20<sup>th</sup> 2015



*Sadly I have no photographs of Radhika because of two reasons. Firstly, while she was my early childhood carer we did not have any camera. Secondly, when later in life we visited her she did not want her photograph to be taken. But she was one of the most beautiful ladies I had ever met in my life, both internally and externally, physically and spiritually.*



*This is where Radhika lived attached for more than eighty years and dedicated her life to my welfare and well being. I sincerely thank her for her love, compassion and all the wise words she passed on to me.*

## **An Anecdote**

*Lord Krishna once asked his Radha, “Dear Radha, can you tell me a place where I do not dwell?”*

*Radha smiled and replied, “Yes, My Lord you are not in my fate.”*

*Then Radha asked Lord Krishna, “Why aren’t we married?”*

*Lord Krishna smiled and replied, “Dear Radha, we need two people for marriage but we are ONE.”*



## 5

# A Ridiculous Dream

**What** shall I call myself? I am a normal human being enjoying life as it comes. I am doing things as best as I can most of the times. I have all the needed feelings of human beings. I know what to love and what to dislike. I am on a journey on this earth for a reason.

I have been sent on a journey in this world. I had no choice about when or where it started. I do not know when, where or how it will end. I have no map for my future. All I know for certain is that it is bound to end sometime.

Of course, there are rules that apply to this great journey of human life but I have to learn them as I go. Although I cannot control them I have the ability to manage them. Even though

some of us claim I may not know the real purpose of this journey.

All I know is that once started, I must continue every day, whether I feel like it or not. I started my life with no possession and when I finish I must turn in all I have accumulated.

In the end, it is believed that I will be rewarded or punished depending on my actions or karma. However, I do not know this for sure.

That is my set life and I cannot change it. However, with a little faith, hope, discipline, some sense of humour and belief in the powers of the Supreme Being fortunately I can help cushion some of the bumps in my life.

As a rule,  
We are a fool,  
When it is hot,  
We want it cool,  
And when it is cool,  
We want it hot,  
Always wanting  
What is not.

But many of my friends think that I am a ridiculous, absurd and ludicrous person. Now

some even call me a madman, silly and crazy. At times I think that we all can be classed as such but my friends are free to make their own judgement on my character, condition and construct.

That would be a promotion for me if it were not that I remain as ridiculous and childish in their eyes as before. But now I do not resent it, they are all dear to me now, even when they laugh at me - and, indeed, it is just then that they are particularly dear to me. I could join in their laughter - not exactly at myself, but through affection for them, if I did not feel as sad as I look at them. Sad because they do not know the truth and I do know it. Oh, how hard it is to be the only one who knows the truth! But they won't understand that. No, they won't understand it.

In my younger days I used to be miserable at seeming ridiculous, foolish and illogical. Not seeming, but being. I have always been ridiculous and half - baked and I have known it, perhaps, from the hour I was born. Perhaps

from the time I was seven years old I knew I was ridiculous, foolhardy and laughable.

Afterwards I went to school, studied at the university, and, do you know, the more I learned, the more thoroughly I understood that I was ridiculous. So that it seemed in the end as though all the sciences and the arts I studied at the university existed only to prove and make evident to me as I went more deeply into them that I was ridiculous. It was the same with life as it was with science and art.

With every year the same consciousness of the ridiculous figure I cut in every relation began to grow and strengthen. Everyone always laughed at me. But not one of them knew or guessed that if there were one man on earth who knew better than anybody else that I was absurd, it was I, and what I resented most of all was that they did not know that. But that was my own fault; I was so proud that nothing would have ever induced me to tell it to anyone.

This pride grew in me with the years; and if it had happened that I allowed myself to confess to anyone that I was ridiculous, I believe that I should have blown out my brains the same evening. Oh, how I suffered in my early youth from the fear that I might give way and confess it to my schoolfellows.

But since I grew to manhood, I have for some unknown reason become calmer, though I realised my awful characteristic more fully every year. I say *unknown*, for to this day I cannot tell why it was. Perhaps it was owing to the terrible misery that was growing in my soul through something which was of more consequence than anything else about me: that something was the conviction that had come upon me that nothing in the world mattered. I had long had an inkling of it, but the full realisation came to me some fifty years ago when I fell in love with an angel who later became my wife, my life and the one who tamed me to be a different and calmer person.

I suddenly felt that it was all the same to me whether the world existed or whether there had never been anything at all: I began to feel with all my being that there was nothing existing. At first I fancied that many things had existed in the past, but afterwards I guessed that there never had been anything in the past either, but that it had only seemed so for some reason.

Little by little I guessed that there would be nothing in the future either. Then I left off being angry with people and almost ceased to notice them. Indeed this showed itself even in the pettiest trifles: I used, for instance, to knock against people in the street. And not so much from being lost in thought: what had I to think about? I had almost given up thinking by that time; nothing mattered to me. If at least I had solved my problems! Oh, I had not settled one of them, and how many there were! But I gave up caring about anything, and all the problems disappeared. I became a calm person but I was still regarded as illogical and indecorous by many.



And it was after that that I found out the truth. I learnt the truth on March 14<sup>th</sup> two years ago and I remember every instant since. It was a gloomy evening, one of the gloomiest possible evenings. I was going home at about eleven o'clock from hospital where my wife was on life support after her massive heart attack. I remember that I thought that the evening could not be gloomier. Rain had been falling all day, and it had been a cold, gloomy, almost menacing rain, with, I remember, an unmistakable spite against mankind.

Suddenly between ten and eleven it had stopped, and was followed by a horrible dampness, colder and damper than the rain, and a sort of steam was rising from everything, from every stone in the street, and from every by-lane if one looked down it as far as one could. A thought suddenly occurred to me, that if all the street lights had been put out it would have been less cheerless, that the darkness would make my heart sadder because it would extinguish the light of my family life. I had had scarcely any dinner that

day, and had been spending the evening with my children, and few other friends who had been there also.

I sat silent in the waiting room - I fancy I bored them. They talked of something rousing and suddenly they got excited over it. But they did not really care, I could see that, and only made a show of being excited. I suddenly said as much to them. "My friends," I said, "you really do not care one way or the other. I am waiting for a miracle to happen for my wife to wake up from her coma." They were not offended because they knew my suffering, but they just looked at me in disbelief. That was because I spoke with genuine concern, simply because it mattered to me. They saw it too, and it saddened them.

As I was thinking about the lights in the street I looked up at the sky. The sky was horribly dark, but one could distinctly see tattered clouds, and between them fathomless black patches. Suddenly I noticed in one of these patches a star, and began watching it intently.

It looked like the image of my wife, my Pretty Lotus.

That star had given me an idea: I decided to kill myself that night. I had firmly determined to do so three months before because I could no longer stand the sufferings of my wife who was on continuous oxygen supply waiting to end her life. I took out the revolver that my father had bestowed to me and loaded it. But three months had passed and it was still lying in my drawer; I was so utterly indifferent that I wanted to seize a moment when I would not be so indifferent - why, I don't know.

So for three months every night that I put my wife to bed, I thought I would shoot myself. I kept waiting for the right moment. And so now this star gave me a thought. I made up my mind that it should certainly be that night. And why the star gave me the thought I don't know. This was because we had taken a vow to live together happily ever after on our marriage night.

And just as I was looking at the sky, this little girl took me by the elbow. The street was empty, and there was scarcely anyone to be seen. A cabman was sleeping in the distance in his cab. It was a child of eight with a kerchief on her head, wearing nothing but a wretched little dress all soaked with rain, but I noticed her wet broken shoes and I recall them now. They caught my eye particularly.

She suddenly pulled me by the elbow and called me. She was not weeping, but was spasmodically crying out some words which could not utter properly, because she was shivering and shuddering all over. She was in terror about something, and kept crying, "Mummy, mummy!"

I turned facing her, I did not say a word and went on; but she ran, pulling at me, and there was that note in her voice which in frightened children means despair. I know that sound. Though she did not articulate the words, I understood that her mother was dying, or that something of the sort was happening to them,

and that she had run out to call someone, to find something to help her mother.

I did not go with her; on the contrary, I had an impulse to drive her away. I told her first to go to a doctor or a temple. But clasping her hands, she ran beside me sobbing and gasping, and would not leave me. Then I stamped my foot and shouted at her. She called out "Thaji (Dad) Let us go and save her!" It was then that I realized that she was the image of one of my own daughters but she suddenly abandoned me and rushed headlong across the road. Some other passer-by appeared there, and she evidently flew from me to him.

I entered my home and went to my bedroom. My bedroom is small and poor, with a window overlooking the fence on the roadside. I sat down on my bed, looked at the prayer cupboard, opened the door of it and lit the incense stick and began thinking and praying. I prayed for the recovery of my wife and then lay quietly on the bed looking at the ceiling.

I sat up all night and forgot all my pains and sorrows completely. It was amazing that I stayed awake till daybreak, and have been going on like that for the last three days since my wife fell with a severe heart attack.

I sit up all night in my arm-chair at the study table, doing nothing. I only read from the scriptures by day. I sit - don't even think; ideas of a sort wander through my mind and I let them come and go as they will. A whole candle is burnt every night.

This morning Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March, I sat down quietly at the table, took out the revolver and put it down before me. When I had put it down I asked myself, I remember, "Is that so?" and answered with complete conviction, "It is." That is, I shall shoot myself. I knew that I should shoot myself that day for certain, but how much longer I should go on sitting at the table I did not know. And no doubt I should have shot myself if it had not been for that little girl.

You see, though nothing mattered to me, I could feel the pain, for instance. If anyone had stuck me it would have hurt me. It was the same morally: if anything very pathetic happened, I should have felt pity just as I used to do in old days when there were things in life that did matter to me. I had felt pity that evening. I should have certainly helped my child.

Why, then, had I not helped the little girl? Because of an idea that occurred to me at the time: when she was calling and pulling at me, a question suddenly arose before me and I could not settle it. The question was an idle one, but I was vexed. I was vexed at the reflection that if I were going to make an end of myself that night, nothing in life ought to have mattered to me. Why was it that all at once I did not feel a strange pang, quite incongruous in my position?

Really I do not know better how to convey my fleeting sensation at the moment, but the sensation persisted at home when I was sitting

at the table, and I was very much irritated as I had not been for a long time past. One reflection followed another. I saw clearly that so long as I was still a human being and not nothingness, I was alive and so could suffer, be angry and feel shame at my actions. So be it. But if I am going to kill myself, in two hours, say, what is the little girl to me and what have I to do with shame or with anything else in the world?

I shall turn into nothing, absolutely nothing. And can it really be true that the consciousness that I shall completely cease to exist immediately and so everything else will cease to exist, does not in the least affect my feeling of pity for my children nor the feeling of shame after a contemptible action? I stamped and shouted at the unhappy child as though to say - not only I feel no pity, but even if I behave inhumanly and contemptibly, I am free to, for in another two hours everything will be extinguished.



Do you believe that that was why I shouted that? I am almost convinced of it now. It seemed clear to me that life and the world somehow depended upon me now. I may almost say that the world now seemed created for me alone: if I shot myself the world would cease to be at least for me. I say nothing of its being likely that nothing will exist for anyone when I am gone, and that as soon as my consciousness is extinguished the whole world will vanish too and become void like a phantom, as a mere appurtenance of my consciousness, for possibly all this world and all these people are only me myself.

I remember that as I sat and reflected, I turned all these new questions that swarmed one after another quite the other way, and thought of something quite new. For instance, a strange reflection suddenly occurred to me, that if I had lived before on the moon or on Mars and there had committed the most disgraceful and dishonourable action and had there been put to such shame and ignominy as one can only conceive and realise in

dreams, in nightmares, and if, finding myself afterwards on earth, I were able to retain the memory of what I had done on the other planet and at the same time knew that I should never, under any circumstances, return there, then looking from the earth to the moon - should I care or not? Should I feel any shame for that action or not?

These were idle and superfluous questions for the revolver was already lying before me, and I knew in every fibre of my being that it would happen for certain, but they excited me and I raged. I could not die now without having first settled something. In short, my child had saved me, for I put off my pistol for the sake of these questions and began thinking of my wife who was on life support.

At that point, being a long time patient with sleep apnoea and NSIP I suddenly fell asleep in my chair at the table - a thing which usually happened to me before. I dropped asleep quite unawares.

Dreams, as we all know, are very queer things: some parts are presented with appalling vividness, with details worked up with the elaborate finish of jewellery, while others one gallops through, as it were, without noticing them at all, as, for instance, and through space and time.

Dreams seem to be spurred on not by reason but by desire, not by the head but by the heart, and yet what complicated tricks my reason has played sometimes in dreams, what utterly incomprehensible things happen to it! My father died five years ago, for instance. I sometimes dream of him; he takes part in my affairs, we are very much interested, and yet all through my dream I quite know and remember that my father is dead and cremated. How is it that I am not surprised that, though he is dead, he is here beside me and working with me? Why is it that my reason fully accepts it?

But enough is enough. I will begin about my dream. Yes, I dreamed a dream, my dream of

the Thursday 14th of March. They tease me now, telling me it was only a dream. But does it matter whether it was a dream or reality, if the dream made known to me the truth? If once one has recognized the truth and seen it, you know that it is the truth and that there is no other and there cannot be, whether you are asleep or awake.

Let it be a dream, so be it, but that real life of which you make so much I had meant to extinguish by suicide, and my dream, my dream - oh, it revealed to me a different life, renewed, grand and full of sorrow and devastation. Neither I nor anyone else could save my wife. No miracle happened for me. She was gone. A relationship of over half a century just melted away.

I have mentioned that I dropped asleep unawares and even seemed to be still reflecting on the same subjects. I suddenly dreamt that I picked up the revolver and aimed it straight at my heart - my heart, and not my head; and I had determined

beforehand to fire at my head, at my right temple. After aiming at my chest I waited a second or two, and suddenly my candle, my table, and the wall in front of me began moving and heaving. I made haste to pull the trigger.

In dreams you sometimes fall from a height, or are stabbed, or beaten, but you never feel pain unless, perhaps, you really bruise yourself against the bedstead, then you feel pain and almost always wake up from it. It was the same in my dream. I did not feel any pain, but it seemed as though with my shot everything within me was shaken and everything was suddenly dimmed, and it grew horribly black around me. I seemed to be blinded, and it benumbed, and I was lying on something hard, stretched on my back; I saw nothing, and could not make the slightest movement.

My wife was looking at me from heaven and was planning to attend my funeral. Then suddenly there is another break in my dream and I was being carried in a closed coffin. And

I felt how the coffin was shaking and reflected upon it, and for the first time the idea struck me that I was dead, utterly dead, I knew it and had no doubt of it, I could neither see nor move and yet I was feeling and reflecting. But I was soon reconciled to the position, and as one usually does in a dream, accepted the facts without disputing them.

And now I was cremated at the funeral house. They all went away; I was left alone, utterly alone. I did not move. Whenever before I had imagined being buried the one sensation I associated with the grave was that of damp and cold. So now I felt that I was very cold, especially the tips of my toes, but I felt nothing else.

I lay still, strange to say I expected nothing, accepting without dispute that a dead man had nothing to expect. But it was damp. I don't know how long a time passed - whether an hour or several hours. But all at once a drop of water fell on my closed left eye, making its way through the coffin lid; it was followed a

minute later by a second, then a minute later by a third - and so on, regularly every minute. There was a sudden glow of profound indignation in my heart, and I suddenly felt in it a pang of physical pain. The drops of water were the nectar of life to repair my wound.

"That's my wound," I thought; "that's the bullet . . ." And drop after drop every minute kept falling on my closed eyelid. And all at once, not with my voice, but with my entire being, I called upon the power that was responsible for all that was happening to me:

"Whoever you may be, if you exist, and if anything more rational than what is happening here is possible, suffer it to be here now. But if you are revenging yourself upon me for my senseless suicide by the hideousness and absurdity of this subsequent existence, then let me tell you that no torture could ever equal the contempt which I shall go on dumbly feeling, though my martyrdom may last a million years!"

I made this appeal and held my peace. There was a full minute of unbroken silence and again another drop fell, but I knew with infinite unshakable certainty that everything would slowly change. Then suddenly I saw that I had got out of the funeral pyre and was flying up with my wife who was travelling ahead of me at the speed of a rocket. I tried to catch her but all in vain.

I suddenly regained my sight. It was the dead of night, and never, never had there been such darkness. We were flying through space far away from the earth.

I did not question the being who was taking me; I was proud and waited. I assured myself that I was not afraid, and was thrilled with ecstasy at the thought that I was not afraid. I do not know how long we were flying, I cannot imagine; it happened as it always does in dreams when you skip over space and time, and the laws of thought and existence, and only pause upon the points for which the heart yearns. I remember that I suddenly saw



in the darkness a star. "Is that Saroj?" I asked impulsively, though I had not meant to ask questions.

"No and yes. That is the star you saw between the clouds when you were coming home," the being who was carrying me replied.

I knew that it had something like a human face. Strange to say, I did not like that being; in fact I felt an intense aversion for it. I had expected complete non-existence, and that was why I had put a bullet through my heart. And here I was in the hands of a creature not human, of course, but yet living, existing.

"And so there is life beyond the death," I thought with the strange frivolity one has in dreams. But in its inmost depth my heart remained unchanged. "And if I have got to exist again," I thought, "and live once more under the control of some irresistible power, I won't be sad, sorrowful, lonely, vanquished and humiliated."

"You know that I am afraid of you and despise me for that," I said suddenly to my companion, unable to refrain from the humiliating question which implied a confession, and feeling my humiliation stab my heart as with a pin. He did not answer my question, but all at once I felt that he was not even despising me, but was laughing at me and had no compassion for me, and that our journey had an unknown and mysterious object that concerned me only.

Fear was growing in my heart. Something was mutely and painfully communicated to me from my silent companion, and permeated my whole being. We were flying through dark, unknown space. I had for some time lost sight of the constellations familiar to my eyes. I knew that there were stars in the heavenly spaces the light of which took thousands or millions of years to reach the earth. Perhaps we were already flying through those spaces. I expected something with a terrible anguish that tortured my heart.

And suddenly I was thrilled by a familiar feeling that stirred me to the depths: I suddenly caught sight of our sun! I knew that it could not be our sun, that gave life to our earth, and that we were an infinite distance from our sun, but for some reason I knew in my whole being that it was a sun exactly like ours, a duplicate of it. A sweet, thrilling feeling resounded with ecstasy in my heart: the kindred power of the same light which had given me light stirred an echo in my heart and awakened it, and I had a sensation of life, the old life of the past for the first time since I had been dead in my dream.

"But if that is the sun, if that is exactly the same as our sun," I cried, "where is the earth?"

And my companion pointed to a star twinkling in the distance with an emerald light. We were flying straight towards it.

"And are such repetitions possible in the universe? Can that be the law of Nature? . . . And if that is an earth there, can it be just the

same earth as ours . . . just the same, as poor, as unhappy, but precious and beloved forever, arousing in the most ungrateful of her children the same poignant love for her that we feel for our earth?" I cried out, shaken by irresistible, ecstatic love for the old familiar earth which I had left. The image of my poor child whom I had repulsed flashed through my mind.

"You shall see it all," answered my companion, and there was a note of sorrow in his voice.

But we were rapidly approaching the planet. It was growing before my eyes; I could already distinguish the ocean, the outline of Australia; and suddenly a feeling of a great and holy jealousy glowed in my heart.

"How can it be repeated and what for? I love and can love only that earth which I have left, stained with my blood, when, in my ingratitude, I quenched my life with a bullet in my heart. But I have never, never ceased to love that earth, and perhaps on the very night I parted from it I loved it more than ever. Is

there suffering upon this new earth? On our earth we can only love with suffering and through suffering. We cannot love otherwise, and we know of no other sort of love. I want suffering in order to love. I long, I thirst, this very instant, to kiss with tears the earth that I have left, and I don't want, I won't accept life on any other!"

But my companion had already left me. I suddenly, quite without noticing how, found myself on this other earth, in the bright light of a sunny day, fair as paradise. I believe I was standing on one of the islands that make up on our globe the Fijian archipelago, or on the coast of the mainland facing that tiny island of Denarau.



Oh, everything was exactly as it is with us, only everything seemed to have a festive radiance, the splendour of some great, holy triumph attained at last. The caressing sea, green as emerald, splashed softly upon the shore and kissed it with manifest, almost conscious love. The tall, lovely coconut trees stood in all the glory of their blossom, and their innumerable leaves greeted me, I am certain, with their soft, caressing rustle and seemed to articulate words of love.

The green grass glowed with bright and fragrant flowers of roses, hibiscus and pretty lotus. Birds of familiar shape and make were flying in flocks in the air, and perched fearlessly on my shoulders and arms and joyfully struck me with their darling, fluttering wings. And at last I saw and knew the people of this happy land. That came to me of themselves; they surrounded me, kissed me.

The children of the sun, the children of their sun - oh, how beautiful they were! Never had I seen on our own earth such beauty in

mankind. Only perhaps in our children, in their earliest years, one might find some remote faint reflection of this beauty. The eyes of these happy people shone with a clear brightness. Their faces were radiant with the light of reason and fullness of a serenity that comes of perfect understanding, but those faces were gay; in their words and voices there was a note of childlike joy.

Oh, from the first moment, from the first glance at them, I understood it all! It was the earth untarnished by destruction; on it lived people who had not sinned. They lived just in such a paradise as that in which, according to all the legends of mankind, our first parents lived before they sinned; the only difference was that all this earth was the same paradise in the Pacific.

These people, laughing joyfully, thronged round me and caressed me; they took me home with them, and each of them tried to reassure me. Oh, they asked me no questions, but they seemed, I fancied, knowing

everything without asking, and they wanted to make haste to smooth away the signs of suffering from my face.

I woke up and found out that it was time for me to go to the hospital to be with my wife. On arrival there we were told that no miracle would save her life. Her life support was turned off at ten thirty in the morning of Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March. We could do nothing to save the angel who meant so much for all of us. Such is this life on this earth.

And do you know what? Well, granted that it was only a dream, yet the sensation of the love of those innocent and beautiful people has remained with me forever, and I feel as though their love is still flowing out to me from over there. I have seen them myself, have known them and been convinced; I loved them, I suffered for them afterwards. Oh, I understood at once even at the time that in many things I could not understand them at all; as an up-to-date Fijian progressive and contemptible member of the Prasad Family, it struck me as



inexplicable that, knowing so much, they had, for instance, no science and art like our.

But I soon realised that their knowledge was gained and fostered by intuitions different from those of us on earth, and that their aspirations, too, were quite different. They desired nothing and were at peace; they did not aspire to knowledge of life as we aspire to understand it, because their lives were full. But their knowledge was higher and deeper than ours; for our science and art seek to explain what life is, aspires to understand it in order to teach others how to love, while they without science and art knew how to live; and that I understood, but I could not understand their knowledge.

They showed me their trees, and I could not understand the intense love with which they looked at them; it was as though they were talking with creatures like themselves. And perhaps I shall not be mistaken if I say that they conversed with them. Yes, they had found

their language, and I am convinced that the trees understood them.

They looked at all Nature like that - at the animals that lived in peace with them and did not attack them, but loved them, conquered by their love. They pointed to the stars and told me something about them which I could not understand, but I am convinced that they were somehow in touch with the stars, not only in thought, but by some living channel.

Oh, these people did not persist in trying to make me understand them, they loved me without that, but I knew that they would never understand me, and so I hardly spoke to them about our earth. I only kissed in their presence the earth on which they lived and mutely worshipped them themselves. And they saw that and let me worship them without being abashed at my adoration, for they themselves loved much.

They were not unhappy on my account when at times I kissed their feet with tears, joyfully conscious of the love with which they would

respond to mine. At times I asked myself with wonder how it was they were able never to offend a creature like me, and never once to arouse a feeling of jealousy or envy in me? Often I wondered how it could be that, boastful and untruthful as I was, I never talked to them of what I knew - of which, of course, they had no notion - that I was never tempted to do so by a desire to astonish or even to benefit them.

I began to wonder. If only we had lived in that world my wife and I would have lived happily forever but in our world which is self destructive by our own culture and conduct we have to face death which is a necessary end for all of us. We cannot do anything about it except to mourn and feel sad, sorrowful and despondent about things in and around us.

To the contrary the people of my new found earth were as gay and sportive as children. They wandered about their lovely woods and copses, they sang their lovely songs; their fair was light - the fruits of their trees, the honey

from their woods, and the milk of the animals who loved them. The work they did for food and raiment was brief and not laborious. They loved and begot children, but I never noticed in them the impulse of that cruel sensuality which overcomes almost every man on this earth, all and each, and is the source of almost every sin of mankind on earth.

They rejoiced at the arrival of the children as new beings to share their happiness. There was no quarrelling, no jealousy among them, and they did not even know what the words meant. Their children were the children of all, for they all made up one happy and lovely family. There was scarcely any illness among them; there was no death and their old people lived happily and peacefully, giving blessings and smiles to those who surrounded them to take care of them with joy and interest. I never saw grief or tears on those occasions, but only love, which reached the point of ecstasy, but a calm ecstasy, made perfect and contemplative.

I want to think that we should still be in contact with the departed after death, and that our earthly union was not cut short by death. This would have enabled me to be in harmony with the soul of my beloved wife. However, after my dream I have begun to feel that I am living with the soul of my Pretty Lotus although she is physically detached from me.

They scarcely understood me when I questioned them about immortality, but evidently they were so convinced of it without reasoning that it was not for them a question at all. They had no temples, their homes were the places of prayers that were free from all forms of hypocrisy and unnecessary ceremonies but they had a real living and uninterrupted sense of oneness with the whole of the universe.

They had no creed, no caste and no religion to divide them but they had a certain knowledge that when their earthly joy had reached the limits of earthly nature, then there would

come for them, for the living and for the dead, a still greater fullness of contact with the whole of the universe. They looked forward to that moment with joy, but without haste, not pining for it, but seeming to have a foretaste of it in their hearts, of which they talked to one another lovingly and with great passion.

In the evening before going to sleep they liked singing in musical and harmonious chorus. Music was their way of life and an adjunct to sooth their soul. In those songs they expressed all the sensations that the parting day had given them, sang its glories and took leave of it. They sang the praises of nature, of the sea, of the woods. They liked making songs about one another, and praised each other like children; they were the simplest songs, but they sprang from their hearts and went to one's heart. And not only in their songs but in all their lives they seemed to do nothing but admire one another. It was like being in love with each other, but an all-embracing, universal feeling.

Some of their songs, solemn and rapturous, I scarcely understood at all but they gave me such a peace that I felt the harmony of the atmosphere. Though I understood the words I could never fathom their full significance because the words had much deeper meaning than I was used to. It remained, as it were, beyond the grasp of my simple mind, yet my heart unconsciously absorbed it more and more.

I often told them that I had had a presentiment of it long before, that this joy and glory had come to me on our earth in the form of a yearning melancholy that at times approached insufferable sorrow; that I had had a foreknowledge of them all and of their glory in the dreams of my heart and the visions of my mind; that often on our earth I could not look at the setting sun without tears. . . that in my dislike for the people of our earth there was always a yearning anguish: why could I not hate them without loving them? Why could I not help forgiving them? And in my love for them there was a

yearning grief: why could I not love them without hating them?

They listened to me, and I saw they could not conceive what I was saying, but I did not regret that I had spoken to them of it: I knew that they understood the intensity of my yearning anguish over those whom I had left. But when they looked at me with their sweet eyes full of love, when I felt that in their presence my heart, too, became as innocent and just as theirs, the feeling of the fullness of life took my breath away, and I worshipped them in silence.

Going back to my absurdity I now find that everyone laughs in my face now, and assures me that one cannot dream of such details as I am telling now, that I only dreamed or felt one sensation that arose in my heart in delirium and made up the details myself when I woke up. And when I told them that perhaps it really was so, my God, how they shouted with laughter in my face, and what mirth I caused!



Oh, yes, of course I was overcome by the mere sensation of my dream, and that was all that was preserved in my cruelly wounded heart; but the actual forms and images of my dream, that is, the very ones I really saw at the very time of my dream, were filled with such harmony, were so lovely and enchanting and were so actual, that on awakening I was, of course, incapable of clothing them in our poor language, so that they were bound to become blurred in my mind; and so perhaps I really was forced afterwards to make up the details, and so of course to distort them in my passionate desire to convey some at least of them as quickly as I could. Whatever it was, that world was serene and sacred and I loved it.

But on the other hand, how can I help believing that it was all true? It was perhaps a thousand times brighter, happier and more joyful than I describe it. Granted that I dreamed it, yet it must have been real. You know, I will tell you a secret: perhaps it was not a dream at all! For then something

happened so awful, something so horribly true, that it could not have been imagined in a dream. My heart may have originated the dream, but would my heart alone have been capable of originating the awful event which happened to me afterwards? How could I alone have invented it or imagined it in my dream? Could my petty heart and fickle, trivial mind have risen to such a revelation of truth? That world existed for me in reality.

Oh, judge for yourselves: hitherto I have concealed it, but now I will tell the truth. The fact is that I corrupted them all! Yes, yes, it ended in my corrupting them all! How it could come to pass I do not know, but I remember it clearly. The dream embraced thousands of years and left in me only a sense of the whole. I only know that I was the cause of their sin and downfall. Like a vile trichina, like a germ of the plague infecting whole kingdoms, so I contaminated all this earth, so happy and sinless before my coming. They learnt to lie, grew fond of lying, and discovered the charm of falsehood. What a teacher I was!

Oh, at first perhaps it began innocently, with a jest, coquetry, with amorous play, perhaps indeed with a germ, but that germ of falsity made its way into their hearts and pleased them. Then sensuality was soon begotten, sensuality begot jealousy and jealousy brought cruelty . . . Oh, I don't know, I don't remember; but soon, very soon the first blood was shed. They began to blend in my ways rather than me adopting their culture.

They marvelled and were horrified, and began to be split up and divided. They formed into unions, but it was against one another. Reproaches, upbraidings followed. They came to know shame, and shame brought them to virtue. The conception of honour sprang up, and every union began waving its flags. They began torturing animals, and the animals withdrew from them into the forests and became hostile to them. They began to struggle for separation, for isolation, for individuality, for mine and thine. That was how we were polluted on our sinful world.

They began to talk in different languages, about different gods and different way of life. These disunited the human race and humans began eating humans. They became acquainted with sorrow and loved sorrow; they thirsted for suffering, and said that truth could only be attained through suffering. Then their art and science appeared.

As they became wicked they began talking of brotherhood and humanitarianism, and misunderstood those great and worthy ideas. As they became criminal, they invented justice and drew up whole legal codes in order to observe it, and to ensure their being kept, set up a guillotine. Even their justice system demands much more because often justice is either denied or delayed.

They hardly remembered what they had lost, in fact refused to believe that they had ever been happy and innocent. They even laughed at the possibility of this happiness in the past, and called it a dream. They could not even imagine it in definite form and shape, but,

strange and wonderful to relate, though they lost all faith in their past happiness and called it a legend or a fairy tale, they so longed to be happy and innocent once more that they succumbed to this desire like children, made an idol of it, set up temples and worshipped their own idea, their own desire; though at the same time they fully believed that it was unattainable and could not be realised, yet they bowed down to it and adored it with tears!

Nevertheless, if it could have happened that they had returned to the innocent and happy condition which they had lost, and if someone had shown it to them again and had asked them whether they wanted to go back to it, they would certainly have refused.

They answered me: "We may be deceitful, wicked and unjust, we know it and weep over it, we grieve over it; we torment and punish ourselves more perhaps than that merciful Judge Who will judge us and whose Name we know not. But we have the art and science,

and by the means of it we shall find the truth and we shall arrive at it consciously. Knowledge is higher than feeling; the consciousness of life is higher than life. Science and art will give us wisdom, wisdom will reveal the laws, and the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness."

That is what they said, and after saying such things everyone began to love himself better than anyone else, and indeed they could not do otherwise. All became so jealous of the rights of their own personality that they did their very utmost to curtail and destroy them in others, and made that the chief thing in their lives.

Slavery followed, even voluntary slavery; the weak eagerly submitted to the strong, on condition that the latter aided them to subdue the still weaker. Then there were saints who came to these people, weeping, and talked to them of their pride, of their loss of harmony and due proportion, of their loss of shame. They were laughed at or pelted with stones.

Holy blood was shed on the threshold of the temples. Then there arose men who began to think how to bring all people together again, so that everybody, while still loving himself best of all, might not interfere with others, and all might live together in something like a harmonious society. Regular wars in all corners of the world sprang up over this idea.

All the combatants at the same time firmly believed that science and art, wisdom and the instinct of self-preservation would force men at last to unite into a harmonious and rational society; and so, meanwhile, to hasten matters, the so called wise endeavoured to exterminate as rapidly as possible all who were not so wise and did not understand their idea, that the latter might not hinder its triumph.

But the instinct of self-preservation grew rapidly weaker; there arose men, haughty and sensual, who demanded all or nothing. In order to obtain everything they resorted to crime, and if they did not succeed - to suicide.

There arose religions with a cult of non-existence and self-destruction for the sake of the everlasting peace of annihilation. We now have extremists and terrorists among us proclaiming that God wants them to take over and rule the world with their governance. At last these people will grow weary of their meaningless toil, and when signs of suffering come into their faces, and then they would proclaim that suffering was a beauty, for in suffering alone was there meaning.

They glorified suffering in their songs. I now have no choice but to move about among them, wringing my hands and weeping over them, but I love them perhaps more than in old days when there was no suffering in their faces and when they were innocent and so lovely. I love the earth they had polluted even more than when it had been a paradise, if only because sorrow had come to it. Alas! I always loved sorrow and tribulation, but only for myself, for myself; but I wept over them, pitying them and praying that either they be



taken to another more destructive world or lead us to a better and safer world.



I stretched out my hands to them in despair, blaming, cursing and despising myself. I told them that all this was my doing, mine alone; that it was I who had brought them corruption, contamination and falsity. I besought them to crucify me; I taught them how to make a cross and respect Om. I could not kill myself, I had not the strength, but I wanted to suffer at their hands.

I yearned for suffering, I longed that my blood should be drained to the last drop in these agonies. But they only laughed at me, and began at last to look upon me as crazy. They

justified me, they declared that they had only got what they wanted themselves, and that all that now was could not have been otherwise. At last they declared to me that I was becoming dangerous and that they should lock me up in a madhouse if I did not hold my tongue. Then such grief took possession of my soul that my heart was wrung, and I felt as though I were dying; and then . . . then I awoke for the second time.

This time it was the next morning, that is, it was not yet daylight, but about six o'clock. I woke up in the same arm-chair; my few candles had burnt out; everyone was still asleep in my world and there was stillness all round, rare in our part of the earth. First of all I leapt up in great amazement: nothing like this had ever happened to me before, not even in the most trivial detail; I had fallen asleep like this in my arm-chair a few times before but no such dreams would come to me.

While I was standing and coming to myself I suddenly caught sight of my revolver lying

loaded, ready - but instantly I thrust it away! Oh, now, life, life! I lifted up my hands and called upon eternal truth, not with words, but with tears; ecstasy, immeasurable ecstasy flooded my soul. Yes, life and spreading the good tidings! Oh, I at that moment resolved to spread the tidings, and resolved it, of course, for my whole life.

I now go to spread the tidings; I want to spread the tidings - of what? Of the truth, of the beauty and of the goodness of humanity that I have seen, have seen it with my own eyes; have seen it in all its glory.

Ever since my realization and awakening I have been praying and preaching for peace. Moreover I love all those who laugh at me more than any of the rest. Why that is so I do not know and cannot explain, but so be it. I am told that I am vague and confused, and if I am vague and confused now, what shall I be later on? It is true indeed: I am vague and confused, and perhaps as time goes on I shall be more so. And of course, I shall make many

blunders before I find out how to pray and preach properly, that is, find out what words to say, what things to do, for it is a very difficult task.

I see all that as clear as daylight, but, listen, who does not make mistakes? And yet, you know, all are making for the same goal, all are striving in the same direction anyway, from the sage to the lowest robber, only by different roads.

It is an old truth, but this is what is new: I cannot go far wrong. For I have seen the truth; I have seen and I know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing the power of living on earth. I will not and cannot believe that evil is the normal condition of mankind. And it is just this faith of mine that they laugh at. But how can I help believing it? I have seen the truth - it is not as though I had invented it with my mind, I have seen it, seen it, and the living image of it has filled my soul for ever. I have seen it in such full perfection that I

cannot believe that it is impossible for people to have it. And so how can I go wrong?

I shall make some slips no doubt, and shall perhaps talk in second-hand language, but not for long: the living image of what I saw in my life time and in many countries of this world will always be with me and will always correct and guide me. Oh, I am full of courage and freshness, and I will go on and on if life and journey were for a thousand years!

Do you know, at first I meant to conceal the fact that I corrupted them, but that was a mistake - that was my first mistake! But truth whispered to me that I was lying, and preserved me and corrected me. But how can we establish a paradise on this earth? - I don't know, because I do not know how to put it into words.

After my dream I lost command of words. All the chief words, anyway, the most necessary ones but never mind, I shall go on and I shall keep talking, I won't leave off, for anyway I have seen it with my own eyes, though I

cannot describe what I saw. But the scoffers do not understand that.

It was a dream, they say, delirium, hallucination. Oh! As though that meant so much! And they are so proud! A dream! What is a dream? And is not our life a dream? I will say more. Suppose that this paradise will never come to pass as I understand it, yet I shall go on praying and preaching for it to come to fruition. And yet how simple it is: in one day, in one hour everything could be arranged at once! The chief thing is to love others like yourself, that's the chief thing, and that's everything; nothing else is wanted - you will find out at once how to arrange it all. And yet it's an old truth which has been told and retold a billion times - but sadly it has not formed part of many lives!

The consciousness of life is higher than life; the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness - that is what one must be contend with. And I shall. If only everyone wants it, it can be arranged at once. It can be

done and we all can have that dream and endeavour to make it happen for the good of humanity.

Do I fit the definition of ridiculous, laughable and absurd human being? If yes, please forgive me. I am what I am. I love the life that is bestowed to me and I want to make the best use of it while I live.



# 6



## WHY OH WHY?

I don't know why I'm going after the star that is now out  
of reach for me!  
I'm like an injured bird whose wings are broken and I'm  
now as useless as me!  
I have forgotten how to fly and I have now even  
forgotten to locate all my ways  
But I love to stare at the heaven and look at my Angel  
who dwells in the skies  
She is gone but not forgotten and I love to get her back  
to be with me again  
I am trapped in the acts of this world but long to be  
with my love once again  
I am not sure what would the galaxies want from a  
wondering soul like me  
I am only interested in that comet that is shining in the  
sky away from me  
I'm ready to fly without my wings to get to my shining  
comet any day of my life  
Even if I crash and crack on the way I would love to be  
with my beloved wife  
I have no doubt that I will be with my star that is  
waiting in heaven for me  
Can't I go and join her to shine in heaven as if she was  
still a part of me?



# 7

## Set Your Goals and Follow Them

**Friends**, this is not strictly a short story but a mid-point of resting and an interval for us to revise and renew our thinking about the various themes that are depicted in the preceding and later stories in this collection.

I believe that we are a bunch of individuals who are very unpredictable at times but other times we are regarded as the most intelligent of all the creations of nature. We should be proud of that universal fact and live up to our expectations. Let us together see what we can do to free ourselves from our bondage.

As a consequence of our birth we all are bound by natural rules and directions. We all are some kind of prisoners and are tied to an illusionary post with a rope. Naturally then we do not have much value until we release

ourselves, free ourselves to think well and liberate our souls.

In other words we all are wearing some kind of spectacles that often prohibits us to see our future clearly enough to conduct all our essential actions as enlightened human beings. We develop a wrong perception of the world, its people and its functions. Often these opposing understandings put us in greater danger and our bondage to the illusionary pole becomes more realistic and stronger. We keep lying. Indulging in sins and doing all sorts of unwarranted activities. We keep moving away from the core values of humanity that are truth, beauty and goodness.

As a result of that attachment to our illusionary post, we tend to misunderstand our core values and are unable to distinguish the truth from falsehood, reality from illusion and good from evil. Therefore we begin to live a dual life. We begin to create a rift between our attitude and personality. Our behaviour and conduct becomes incongruent to our ideal and other paradigms. We begin to drift aimlessly.

If we have reached such a crucial stage in our life then we have a problem with our human existence. Therefore there is an urgent need for some kind of enlightenment, awakening or internal revolution to broaden our perception

of ourselves and our world. Such inspiration would automatically motivate and lead us to immediately adjust our future goals, current objectives and the required aims of living a happy and peaceful life.

It is believed that to keep walking on the long, difficult and the ever winding and unknown path without any real goals would not only be a journey in futility and hopelessness but would create an atmosphere of uncertainty, frustration and weariness. Thus we would be lost in the wilderness and it would become a lot more difficult and impossible to reach our destination.

There is always a good way ahead; a better path that can bring peace, progress and prosperity for us and a road that has not yet been taken and is waiting for us to get on it for our salvation. It has often been repeated by the wiser people that where there is a will there is a way.

I think that if we want our life to be of any use to us, to our family, to our friends and for our fellow beings then there is an immediate need for us to get released from that illusionary post that is holding us back and making things difficult for us. Untie the knot of the rope that attaches you to the illusionary pole.

Of course, there are many other ways of getting out of the rut we are in or the prison that holds us so that we can liberate and free ourselves for the service of our people and the nation. First and foremost, a bold step that is an absolute requirement of all salient and enlightened beings is to define the worthy objective and workable goals of living in this world so that the direction, the path and the road that we take become meaningful, smooth and fruitful.

There may be many requirements to achieve this aim but the only way is to free ourselves and be deeply determined to take that necessary step to liberate ourselves and keep moving ahead with the needed vigour.

Nothing would be impossible for us and many accolades, successes and achievements would befriend us if we make that vital move. The world will honour and respect you all for these actions. Good Luck.



# 8

## The Time is Never.

**This** story begins in a small town but people with big hearts and ambitions. A dentist who is fed up with his life wants to end his life. He is hanging at the edge of a roof on a nearby building in that tiny township.



If anyone at the ground level had bothered to look up, they would have seen a lonely figure at the precipice head bent forward, looking down at the street below him. Busy people don't look up. They are too busy doing their daily activities as they want. Most of them are the Mind Your Own Business (MYOB) type.

So there he stands unnoticed, trapped in the act that he wants to perform, an act that could end his life. He surveys the scene complete with potential landing spot and sees an old horse cart passing by which reminds him that life has to be a journey worth moving on. Yet he was here doing just the opposite.



Then there were a few people going about their business. However, none was so eager to worry about him because in the past few years the world has become a place to mind your own business. On seeing the approaching death everyone begins to see the past happenings of their life quite clearly. So a lot of events began flashing in the screen of his memory but none seemed relevant now that he had made his decision to go.

He began to think. 'Who cares? Well, at least I will go out in style. It's the closest I will ever

get of being a witness.’ He expands his view to the surrounding area filled with scurrying people who are too busy to notice him. Look at them running around in their ignorant little lives. So completely oblivious of what is going on around them like thousands of tiny little ants.

He floats a foot in front of him squashing each little human bug in turn making a splat sound each time. They continue to scurry around seemingly too busy to notice their demise. But Rani could not continue to torture herself with this dreadful scene. “What are you doing up there?” she yelled.

"Ah! ... What?" Caught totally off guard by the voice that just should not have been there, he jumps uncontrollably, losing his footing in the process.

"Oh my God!" He tries desperately to regain his balance, his arms swinging around in the hope that if he manages to grab enough air then he could somehow pull himself back from oblivion. His mind screams at him, *‘I am going to die. Yes I know that is why I was here in the first place but now it is actually going to happen and I cannot change my mind. It is too late.’* “O God, help me!”

This is not new for some desperate human beings. Whenever they reach a point of danger they either start praying or begin to think of God Almighty. This is realization in futility.

Time seems to crawl as if wanting to stretch out the torture of his demise for its own sadistic pleasure. Every second is traced in slow motion and minute detail like you see with those fancy slow-motion cameras they use for sports replays.

For a while, the person on the roof seems to balance right on the edge before gravity wins out and he tilts forward headlong into the abyss of his inevitable end.

"No!" Everything is a blurred, spinning, colors and shapes blending into one crazy kaleidoscope. Seemingly, in no time, he is lying on his back on a pile of hay that was there for sale to the dairy farmers. He is gasping for air both from the breath being knocked out of him and the sheer terror of the ordeal.

Wow, that was quick! Somehow, he was expecting it to take longer with him floundering in thin air, his voice slowly trailing off into the distance just like in the movies. But wow, he actually did it. He took his first



step in committing a suicide, even if accidentally and unsuccessful.

He is actually dead, isn't he? He must be because there is an angel hovering above him, surrounded by the sky so blue in which puffy white clouds sauntered without a care. She was a vision of incredible beauty. Her hair is a glowing cascade that falls down towards him like a golden shower.

Even if we are unable to decide what the color of her hair is, she is still gorgeous, unbelievably gorgeous. Like the most gorgeous creature that had ever lived. 'Oh My God,' he thinks, 'if I knew Heaven was going to be like this I would have ended my life years ago!' The angel seems to be studying him. This is probably what angels do with new and despondent people. It struck him that she seemed vaguely familiar even though he had never seen her before. Maybe this is an angel trick to make people like him feel at home.

"Are you ok?" Her voice sounds like an orchestra of harps all played in perfect harmony. Actually it probably just sounds like a voice but in his dazed state he took it as his life saver. His internal monolog repeats, 'yes I suppose. I mean I am dead, of course, and I have got a rotten headache but apart from

that, all this is not too bad. Death does not seem to agree with me.'

"You were lucky I managed to grab you in time and let you fall on the heap of hay otherwise you were gone forever," the angel continues.

At this point, he reluctantly tears his gaze from her and turns his head to see the familiar surrounds of the roof. "Ah. So I am not dead then and you are not an angel. Oh, but you are still a heavenly beauty." He manages to control himself.

He wants so much to rip her clothes off, bathe in her beauty and then ravish her until the end of time itself but he crazily settles for, "I am Raju."

She takes his outstretched hand, "I am Rani."

'Rani, the Queen. Sweet Rani of Raja, the King. If only he was called Raja then this would be perfect. Wow, I bet no one has said that before!' But what are the odds that on a lonely day some helpful stranger would happen to turn up right at the moment he was preparing to take his last step ever? Was this destiny? She beat him to the question. "Why were you up there?"

He grimaced slightly as he sat up, "Committing suicide."

"Oh and I ... I'm so sorry ... I didn't realize. You didn't actually look like you were going to jump. In fact, you looked like you were trying not to."

"No well I was up there committing suicide alright but a lot of thoughts of the past were worrying me."

"I see ... you don't seem very good at it."

"Well, I have not had a lot of practice. I thought I would give it a try to see if it worked out for me."

"And?"

"I am not sure it is the career move I am really looking for." Raju stands up slowly still shaky from his experience. 'Maybe one day I will have the guts to actually see something through to the end,' he mutters to himself.

"Sorry?"

He changes the subject quickly in order not to have to explain him. "So what brings you up here then to save me from myself?"

"I just moved in the house next door and was having a look around when I saw you on the roof." She pauses, "You could still do it, assuming that you were desperately interested in doing it. I could stay away until you were gone so you could spend your last moments alone. You want to give it a second try?"

"No, I have kind of lost the mood now after seeing you as my saviour."

She nods her head in an understanding manner. "I understand."

There was a slight pause, then Raju, perhaps still in a state of shock, did the one thing he thought he would never do, he asked a girl out. "Do you want to help me shorten my life with some drinks instead?"

She smiles, "A much nicer way to go. Sure."

And so, moments from supposedly ending his sad lonely miserable life, Ragendra Prasad Shriwastow found an angel and a reason to hang around just a little bit longer. There was a problem of course. While Raju had managed to ask the girl out he had no idea what to do with her next. Of course, the age difference was obviously revealing old age and youth.

Raju's local haunt was not the classiest joint in the town by any means. Even if you redefined classy to mean total crap this place still would not make the grade. It was dingy, falling apart and smelt like things had been done in it that were really not worth thinking about. Not only that, but it smelt like those things were done some time ago and no one bothered to clean them up. Also, it was not a place where pretty girls visited very often judging by the way the local inhabitants reacted to Rani's arrival.



Suddenly there was an eerie silence as everyone stopped muttering to each other and turned to stare. It was rather unsettling, made worse by the fact that the locals then decided that they wanted a closer look at the strange looking but pretty woman. They gathered around her like Bollywood zombies each trying to grab a bite. It was only when Raju opened the curtains at their table did the drinking dead retreat back into the shadows ever peering but still waiting.

They sat at the table peering uneasily into the glasses of their amber liquid. It was Rani who took it on to start the conversation. "So what do you do for a living?"

"I am a dentist."

"Oh, and how is that working out for you?"

"I was on the roof contemplating suicide and that should explain something."

"Point taken." Pause ... long pause ... awkwardness rising. "What about you?"

"I am ... um ... at Uni."

"Ah, studying what?"

"Law ... I think."

"You think?"

"I don't turn up much."

"So what do you do with your time?"

"Oh ... you know ... stuff. Earn and pay for my studies."

"Like rescuing desperate men from committing suicide from the roof top?"

Her face lights up in response. "Exactly!"

From that point, they start to relax and gradually share each other's life stories. Raju feels what it is like to be a normal human being and even as a dentist be able to talk to another normal human being without having to stick things in their mouth first.

Eventually, when evening threatened to take away their protective light, they left the dump and wandered back to their places of residence, which so happened to be another dump. At the entrance to her door, they say goodnight. "I enjoyed today."

"Me too. How about we do it again, perhaps even tomorrow?"

Raju is astounded, like unexpectedly slapped in the face kind of astounded. "Really?" He is too astounded to conceal how astounded he is. She smiles, "Sure, you are a fun kind of guy. I am glad I saved your life today." She kisses the now speechless and still astounded Raju on the cheek and retreats to her flat.

He regains his composure, sprouts a smile, spins around, does a little jig and falls down the stairs! Probably should have looked where he was standing first. Many people do this when they are either confused or excited.

"Are you OK?" a muffled voice queries from the other side of the closed door.  
"Fine ... nothing to see here," the idiot responds, hurt.

And that is how it began. The man tired of life meeting up with the beautiful young girl so full of it. What adventures will they have I wonder? That is a rhetorical question. I already know what happens. You will just have to find out.

Raju wasn't really that old, not physically anyway. But mentally and emotionally he had lost his youthful edge at quite an early age. He was eroded by disappointment until smooth and featureless early life.

Now he just spends each day going through the motions as dictated by routine and an inability to break free. He didn't really want that much out of life. He never sought fame or fortune just a simple happy life and yet somehow even that seemed too much to ask for. He had contemplated suicide before but somehow he could not take that final step.

And that was Raju's life really, unable to go that one step further, to take a chance. He was the guy who would run away from a fight, who couldn't ask a girl out, (today being the exception due to his apparent shock) who couldn't stand up for himself. He would be one of those people who would steer away from someone in trouble because he didn't want to get involved. Not because he didn't care, but ... well actually he didn't really know why. The upside of all of this was he didn't have to care about anyone else or face the prospect of them leaving him.

The simplicity meant that he lived a risk free life that left him free to do anything he wanted. Except this was Raju and it seemed that he couldn't do anything other than what he was doing now. But suddenly, there was this pretty young thing actually asking to spend time with him. This was a bit much to process and Raju was getting a headache



trying to digest all this. He was feeling a bit dazed and confused.

Part of his problem was that Raju didn't have a lot of experience when it came to successful interactions with younger members of the opposite sex, particularly pretty ones. His only other intercourse, for want of a much better word, in the last God knows how many years involved the all too brief conversations with his receptionist, Maya.

Conversations were usually brief with his receptionist mostly because they spoke different languages. Well, technically they both spoke English but she spoke modern urban English whereas his was a somewhat more dated rural version that was in serious need of an update.

Much about Raju was in need of an update. To be fair, he had recently installed a patch that helped him to finally understand words such as internet, website and email although social media and illegal downloads were still beyond him.

"So what are you doing?" Raju often asked Maya.

"Facebook," came the disinterested reply.

"Facebook? I see." This was a strange concept because Raju couldn't remember a time when

he ever saw her face in a book. In fact, he wasn't overly convinced that she could even read let alone writing and publishing her photo in a book. But he didn't want to her to know that he had no idea what she was talking about in case it made him look more stupid than what he had so far displayed himself.

To be honest, he had hired her for her looks and the slightly delusional possibility that something might happen between them. It did, and it was called awkwardness. It helped to lower his self esteem that little bit further. So while they were working in the same place their physical distances seemed that one was in London and the other in Tokyo.

Tomorrow took ages to arrive mostly due to a long night where he couldn't sleep due to the excitement of actually spending a day with someone else. Not even the time-tested act of relieving the tension worked for him tonight. Eventually though, in an act of mercy, the Saturday morning did arrive.

There was a nervous tap at the door. It opened to reveal the same vision of beauty that had saved his life the previous day. "So where are we going?"

He hadn't actually thought that far ahead. He had become so wrapped up in the excitement of actually going on a date, if that was what this was, that he completely forgot to plan where. Anyway, Raju was in a dilemma. He was also in jeans and sneakers and he had tucked his shirt in.

“Um ... how about we just walk and if see something good we can go there.” She smiles.

“Cool.” Raju says to convince Rani that he knew a few modern conversation pieces.

They vacate the building and head towards the park that borders the river. Eventually they find a cafe where they drink coffee and eat cake in the sunshine. Then they wander and do some more chatting about nothing in particular. Sometime later, after the almost mandatory visit to the local tourist haunts, they grab a bite to eat whilst watching the sun slip below the horizon. Then they see a movie.

Several hours after the movie had ended Raju still hadn't figured it out but he never let on and gave up trying. After the movie, they ate some Mexican food. By the end, they had managed to fill in an entire day and most of an evening as well ... most impressive.

Once again, they found themselves at her door saying goodnight and once again, to his surprise, another date was suggested at a time to be arranged. This time however, the dance occurred well away from the stairs. It had occurred to him that suggesting a nightcap might be the go but in the end he chickened out. It was probably just as well.

All that chilly and bean stuff had caused somewhat of a disturbance in Raju's intestines and he was grateful to finally be by himself in his apartment so he could relieve the pressure by farting to his heart's content, if you know what I mean. It escaped with such force that he was convinced that he was forced forward several centimeters as a result.

The next day was Sunday. Sunday normally consisted of waking up, spending the day wandering around in his under wears and worn t-shirt and subjecting himself to the torture of what constitutes entertainment in his apartment. As usual, he woke up in his under clothes and worn t-shirt and was thus prepared for the forthcoming day's events.



There was a knock at his door. That did not usually occur on a Sunday or indeed any other day. He opens it to a bright beaming face. "I've come to take you shopping."

"But I don't need anything."

She looks him down and up, "Yes you do. Come on."

She grabbed his hand and dragged him out of the building. It should be said at this point, to protect what was left of Raju's dignity, that he was permitted to clean himself up, put on fresh under clothes and t-shirt, and cover them in something more suitable for wearing in public. Then she grabbed his hand and dragged him out of the building.

Anyway, soon they were on the bus to the main shopping precinct. This was not a place Raju was familiar with. Fashion was something that skinny pouty poker faced barely post pubescent girls wore. It was not the place for sad lonely men who had become old before their time. But, he went along with it because well he was with her and while he was with her he was not a sad lonely old man so what the hell.

He tried on clothes, reluctantly at first but then he started to join in the act. He even started to improvise with his combinations, something that was quickly stamped out! Raju had to admit that while he had originally felt a bit peeved by the whole experience by the end he had to agree he did look good. At the end of the day, he had a new outfit. A shirt plus one or two other items.

He wasn't sure how much this had hit his credit card but what the hell. It had been years since he had bought new clothes. He sort of figured that if you hung onto something long enough then it would become fashionable again. Of course, you would have to continue to wear them during the unfashionable years as well.

This was a small price to pay for paying as little as possible. Besides, no one could tell under his dentist garb so it didn't really matter. Now he had new clothes thanks to the lovely Rani, and his credit card. The question was ... why?

It struck him that she had decided to turn him into a project. The question was ... why? And who was this person who suddenly popped into his life? The young vibrant beauty, who wanted to spend time with him and not with

people who were her own age, the question was ... why?

The fact was he didn't know anything about her, even after all that talking the other day, apart from her name, her waist and an estimation of her bra size. Well, let's face it, up until now he didn't care but now he was learning to admire what was displayed before him as a beautiful young girl.

The whole hanging out with such a heavenly beauty was more than enough. At some point during the day, he even started calling her Angel after the first day they met. She didn't seem to mind so he kept on doing it.

Something else struck him this day and he felt happy. He hadn't felt that for so long that at first he thought there was something wrong with him. But no, something was right. Something was very right. A hard day shopping can sure build up a hard-earned thirst and beer was definitely on the menu. But not at his usual haunt. He didn't want to go back there and have Rani gawked at again. In fact, even if he was by himself he didn't want to go back there. He was learning to be dignified.

Something had changed. His taste seems to have accidentally improved. The company of

this beauty had changed the thinking of the beast somewhat. Instead, they found somewhere a bit more upper class. Somewhere that smelt of good food not something has died somewhere and no one can be bothered finding out what. I think this may just become my new local. They consumed their beer unmolested and this time the talking was easier.

In a second of honesty, he had to agree with her. "I did think about working in the outback at one point or even overseas in a rural community. I even got the brochures."

"So what stopped you?"

"I don't know what," He pauses, "I always do."

"Why?"

"I figured that I wouldn't be up to it. I'm not good with change. Leaving behind moments in time has never been easy for me. Change has always been a dirty word."

"But you could so easily change everything, live a whole new life. Become a whole new person." She quickly put her hand up in a stop sign, "not that I'm saying there is anything wrong with the old person. But if you are not happy then why not change things? Change is one of the best things for all of us. To change your thinking you need just four things and these include your brain, your



wisdom, your self-confidence and the clear understanding of defeat and win.”

It all sounded so easy when she said it but she wasn't him. She was everything he wasn't and he almost resented that fact.

“It's OK for you. You are young and free and have your whole life stretching way out in front of you. You can do anything. Go anywhere.”

She had an instant response. “But so can you. You've got stacks of years ahead of you and you have no commitments. So why not go?”

He hung his head like a schoolboy who had just been scalded. He didn't want to face the truth, he wasn't sure he wanted to be part of this conversation anymore.

But he thought, ‘God she was pushy. Stunning but pushy. She was efficient and professional in one smart package.’ If it wasn't for the fact that he wanted to her so much he could have thought otherwise.

She reached forward and lifted his chin with her finger so she could look into his eyes. Somehow, she seemed to know what he was thinking. She kissed him and said, “You need

to believe in the impossible as against what is possible.”

A fortnight flew by as quickly as time has a nasty habit of doing when you're not paying attention. The visits and outings remained regular and they slipped into a kind of familiarity that people who normally spend a lot of time in each other's company do. The questions regarding whom, how and why disappeared and he slipped into a happy acceptance of his situation. And so after all this time all he knew about her was her name and the fact that she is beautiful beyond compare. But that was all.

She remained a mystery, a beautiful mystery that fuelled fantasies in all the men that observed her including him, he just couldn't help himself. His clients started to note that he seemed a little different to the norm. He seemed, well, somewhat brighter, almost like he had an injection of personality.

There was even a bit of light chit chat and a few occasions to joke. Well it was so bad that it was hard to tell. Only his receptionist seemed to notice the changes. She just kept on as normal completely ignorant of what was going on around her. Although there were a few times when she would give him an odd glance, he did see her.

When he wasn't looking, there was just a little flick of the eye as if she was noticing him for the first time. It was soon over and she returned to whatever she was doing which was probably facing or defacing a book, I'm not sure. Maya was contemplating something plausible but when she could not get the right vibes.

Raju had stopped thinking about how meaningless his life was even though it was pretty much the same as it always was, Rani being the sole difference. Ah, but what a difference! It is amazing how easy it is for one person to completely change someone else's view of the world by giving them the attention they never had before.

Suddenly there was a reason to be positive. Whenever he was with her, he felt good about life. She was someone he could really look up to especially since she was a good two inches taller than he was. And for all intents and purposes, she seemed more than content to spend her evenings with him and not anyone else even though she easily could have anyone she wanted.

He had no idea what she did during the day when he wasn't around. He assumed it was study. What else could it be? She didn't seem

to work which raised the question of how she was able to pay her way. Probably has a rich daddy somewhere busy underwriting his little princess' life style. Although, considering the apartment block she was living in, he was not being massively generous.

He wondered what her daddy would say if he knew that she was hanging around with some old crusty like him. He probably wouldn't be too pleased. Raju smiled to himself. 'Well it's not my problem.' The song 'Common People' popped into his head thanks to the local radio. It seemed to fit the situation so it stayed there for the rest of the day buzzing around without much else to distract it.

Life is good, thought Raju to himself as he wrenched out a septic tooth and cast it into the tray, life is good. It was another beautiful sunny day as he made his way to the surgery with the rest of the workday crowd. His thoughts were, as was usual, with his youthful often present friend. It occurred to him, fleetingly, that he would really miss her if she was ever to lose interest in him and move on. Actually, he hadn't previously considered the concept of her moving on. 'Oh my God!'

His world began to close in on him. His life had become so wrapped around her that the concept of her not being there didn't occur to

him. But why would she stay? She had no real reason to. But what if she goes? What would he do then? The prospect of returning to his old pre-Rani life was almost too much to take. His thoughts returned to the rooftop. Maybe that is where he will return one day. 'No not yet please, give me a little more time.'

Is that too much to ask for? He wasn't chirpy that day. There was no chitchat or terrible jokes just quiet polite responses. Even his receptionist seemed to be showing some concern or she could have been confused by a big word in one of those books she was facing. It's hard to say without actually asking her. Maya was happy because Raju often gave her a pleasant look and greeted her nicely in the mornings.

It was a long hard day, an endless parade of drilling and filling in his surgery. Of bad breath, bad teeth and inane nothingness. It was a slow form of torture and showed him no mercy as the day dragged on its anchor until it finally berthed in the evening letting him disembark.

At the end he was happy to leave the world on the other side of the door that clicked shut behind him. As soon as he reached home, two seconds later, there was a knock. He sighed. Once upon a time, a knock at the door would

have been an event worth noting but now it had become a regular event.

"Hi, what are you doing?" She seemed to be in a particular perky mood. Well she was in fact all round perky.

"Um ... Nothing exciting. I was just going to drink some beer while watching the football."

"I like beer and football and I think it is a good mix for today," she beamed.

"Right ... um ... do you want to share?"

"Thought you would never ask." She danced past him, jumped and landed on the couch with a lot of the grace that one would expect of someone with her beauty and charm. She was quite simply dazzling today and anything can be on the menu of romance.

He gave a look to no one that reflected the conflict of wanting to be both with her and to have some quality sulking time alone at the same time. Then, resigned to his fate, he played host. Beers were open. Snack food was placed in an assortment of mismatched bowls. On went the programs on the television and a bit of chit chat. Down went the snacks and beer.

Soon pizza turned up. It was eaten and followed by more beer. They talked, laughed, watched and cheered, went boo at the appropriate time and generally behaved like

thousands of other people all over the country. And that's when it happened.

Whilst sitting on the couch next to her, Raju became aware of a creeping feeling that had managed to consume him bit by bit until it could no longer be denied. Raju had fallen in love and there was nothing he could do about it. 'What the hell am I going to do now?' he thought and the day went by happily.

There were occasions in the past where he had felt something similar but nothing like this for quite some time. This was so over-powering that it was almost impossible to contain. Something drives him to do something about it, to take it to the next level. Break through that final barrier.

But that's not what Raju does. He doesn't take chances. I mean what if it all goes wrong? Oh God. He feels sweaty, like a teenager about to go on a first date.

Oh my God that's it! He is just like a pimply teenager just before the first date! Well, without the pimples that is, or actually being a teenager. Then it just blurts out while he was distracted with the whole teenager date thing.

"Dinner?"

"We've already eaten."

“Yes ... No ... not now, but soon. Proper dinner. Restaurant, wine, candles, waiter ... you know ... dinner.” She stares at him stony faced and silent.

That wasn't the response he was expecting. He has ruined everything. He has gone too far. Told you so. Never take chances you idiot! He can only imagine what is going through her head. Perhaps pity for this pathetic old man who thought he might actually have a chance with her. You stupid moronic fool!

Then slowly her face morphs into a smile. “I'd love that”, she said ever so softly.

Raju's heart skipped a beat, hopefully from joy but maybe arrhythmia, it's a bit hard to tell.

Raju had found out that 'The Bounty' was a restaurant in the city that set the benchmark in presentation and taste with each creation.'

Right, so he decided to take her to a really expensive restaurant. He stopped and thought for a bit, ‘What was this? Why was she hanging around with me? It can't be for my money because I clearly don't have that much and, to be brutally honest, I am not the best-looking boy in town, I know that. Yet here I am about to have an expensive meal with her.



How can this be? It is clearly providence, but why?’

So many questions and so few answers. Tonight the city is sparkling. This was a new sight for Raju. He had never seen the city at night. Why would he? He never went out. Wow, it’s amazing how much better this place looks in the dark when you can’t really see it!

The taxi pulls up outside 'The Bounty' and a gloved hand opens the portal to sophistication and apparently a benchmark in presentation and taste. They step out, he in a hire suit all black and formal and she in a red number that is almost sprayed on before swishing out in a thigh high split. There was nothing about how she looked that wouldn't anyone say amazing. They waltz into the restaurant arm in arm steps perfectly synchronicity. They are guided to their table, seated and presented with their leather bound menus. She stands up a second later. “Order some bread oh and the fish.” She swishes off towards the toilet turning heads in the process.

A perfect impersonation of someone supporting a rectally inserted pole pounces over to the table digital accessory at the ready to tap out the order.

Rani returned to the table after carving a swathe of admiring glances, along with a few potential domestics, in her wake.

That's when it occurred. Raju felt something that he hadn't felt before, someone else's respect. Admittedly, it wasn't a lot of respect and it was probably begrudging, but it was there and Raju bathed in its glow. 'Take that you twat!' He snapped the menu shut. "We will both have the same along with a bottle of the '09 White Bordeaux."

White Bordeaux hey? Someone has done their homework. That's two non-perverted uses for the internet Raju has discovered. The black and white scuttled off to deliver the order but not before one quick peeve at the beautiful Rani. Raju noticed and he was filled with a bit more ... well ... glow.

They ate and drank, laughed and played a game consisting of making up stories about some of the other diners. He tried first but couldn't come up with anything interesting. He just didn't have that kind of imagination. Now it was her turn. She gazed around the room clockwise and in an amazing act of perception or creativity, summarized each table clockwise in an instant.

They finish their meals with polite chit chat and at the end of the evening, fully satisfied with three superb courses and wine, they take their leave, arm in arm of course, for the full effect. In no time, they were back at his door. "Thank you for a wonderful night."  
"I'm glad you enjoyed it."

They linger a bit longer than before both sensing that there is something important between them keeping them tied to this place until it is resolved. They turn to face each other, lips so close. Cue the romantic music, here we go! This is it! Oh my God! I'm so nervous. I can't believe this is happening! Just a small tilt forward and ... he closes his eyes and places a firm kiss on her lips.

Can the imaginary music stop? Something is not right here. He opens his eyes, frowns at the offending digit, and then at her face now more distant. "I'm sorry," she whispered, "but we can't."

Ever had that deflated feeling? Well for Raju, someone really let the air out of his balloon. "Don't get me wrong, I really really love you but -"  
"But? What?"  
"You could be like my former husband, Ramesh."

Everyone has a summer of love. Her husband had it way back in 1994. She was a red headed beauty with a singsong voice, a cheeky smile and eyes filled with laughter. They were in love even before the first words were spoken. A lot of flirtier glances exchanged from the other side of the beach fire, the dinner table, conversations anywhere anytime. In no time, their hands touched. Not long after that everything else got touched as well. They made love under the stars – all that kind of stuff.

After a long silence Rani began to explain, “It was the best summer of our life. It would remain the best summer of our love life for many years to come. We even started talking about the future. Wow, we were going to have a future! But when the first clouds of autumn bruised the horizon, he was gone. I waited. Day after day, I would return to our favorite spot in the hope that he would suddenly appear and fall into my arms telling me how much he missed me and we would never be apart ever again. But each day I returned home alone.”

It was a summer thing that was all. She never saw or heard from him again. Her one true love had gone. It hurt and ten years later it still hurts. She never learnt to move on until she met Raju but why was the reluctance to rub it all off and starting again.

She continued with tears in her eyes, “I receded into the safety of boring routine and like a chameleon, took on its persona. The years crept by. Nothing exciting happened to me mostly because I never again put myself in a position where exciting things could happen. All those years ... all those lost years.

Raju collapsed into his favorite chair, which actually was the couch, it being the only sitting piece of furniture in his flat. He had an astounded look on his face. Not the same astounded look he had when she suggested that they should go out again way back when. This was like his whole life had been turned upside down kind of astounded.

Husband disserting a lovely wife! There must be some reasons and rationale and some explanations but this was not the time and place to reveal all.

WTF?

I suppose I could say something like WTF stands for *Wow That's Fantastic* but you know what it really stands for don't you? Of course you do. Its moments like these that one needs to be alone and sweet Rani respectively gave him his time. There was a lot to take in. It's not every day that a guy finds out that he is

an ardent lover left abandoned and marooned in an uninhabited island.

There was also the issue that he had spent an inordinate amount of time not only staring at someone's wife but fantasizing about her as well and all those things he wanted to do to her.

I'm not going to go into detail but wow I'm sure some of that may actually be illegal and certainly painful if their divorce has not gone through. However, Raju, the deflated lover has a choice. Proceed or stop.

Right about now would be a good time for the earth to open up and swallow him whole. Actually swallowing whole was one of the choices but there are others. She is a used commodity, a second hand material still stuck to the previous owner. How does one resolve that problem?

Magnanimity, acceptance of the past life and eagerness to change in order to move on are some of the solutions. Raju needed time to think and respond so that the poisonous serpent is destroyed and the tool of destruction is intact.

This is way beyond anything he had ever experienced but then again, so were most

things. It is fair to say that Raju didn't handle change well. It is just something I felt the need to express to give Raju time to ponder and provide Rani an opportunity to reflect on her past few days.

Anyway, the next time they met was a bit awkward. A different kind of awkward to the first time they met but still awkward. Kind of understandable, compromising and accommodating, given the circumstance. It was time to talk and there was so much to talk about.

They sat by the river close to each other as if to make sure the rest of the world didn't hear and see them. They talked about Rani's past married life and what happened to her in the later years but could not resolve their differences until a week later when Rani came to Raju with a letter from the lawyers of her former husband Ramesh.

*Dear Rani*

*Your husband Ramesh is no more. He left you because he was diagnosed with brain cancer but did not want you to suffer the consequences because he loved you so much. I have disposed off his assets and sorted out his liabilities after conducting the necessary final ceremonies for him. Here is a bank draft of*

*the residue. You are free to use this in any way you want and move on with your life.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Gibson, Warren & Co*

*Solicitors for Rameshwar Singh.*

You would think that death could have a serious impact upon one's ambitions, but this may not always be the case. For example, if your ambition was to scare your enemies into an early grave by haunting them then death is pretty much a pre-requisite. Rani had no such intent but passing on of her one time husband Ramesh did not seem to be the hindrance that one would expect. In fact, it was made easier by suddenly having access to divine resources. She felt the tears well up in her eyes.

Rani was sobbing and was indeed very repentant but began her explanation at last, "Raju, I did not know that he was suffering with sickness and now I am guilty of a lot of treacherous things and so I should be punished for my trespasses. Silly woman I am."

He nodded his head, "He did love you. I thought he was the one who dissented you."

She nodded and that just made her feel even guiltier.

"But guilt doesn't kill people."



“No ... but cancer does and he couldn't exactly afford the best of care in time.”

She hung her head, “I spent much of my life cursing Ramesh but now is the time to truly repent about my conduct and attitude. I am now ready to suffer for the rest of my life but you are free to lead your life the way you want and I wish you all the best. We can be the best of friends.”

She turned away so he wouldn't see her cry. He grabbed his handkerchief and turned her face towards him so he could wipe away the tears. At that moment, their roles were reversed.

She was the one in need and he was in control. It was an unusual feeling for Raju but one he quite relished. He didn't ask too much about the life and living of Rani and Ramesh because it was clearly still upsetting her. She regained her composure.

Rani wasn't telling him the whole story but that was OK. He didn't need to know everything, not yet anyway.

As time went by, what was once unusual became the norm and Raju became used to the idea that he had a faithful friend. He also became used to the idea that he was never

going to have sex with the most beautiful woman he had ever met. That sort of thing is not the go in civilized society.

As for other places ... well. Raju had to deal with some pretty major changes over the last few weeks and to be fair he had come out the other end pretty much intact. Especially considering he was on the verge of committing suicide not that long ago. But underneath it he was still Raju. Sure, it was a slightly better dressed Raju but it was basically Raju and that was the problem. Deep down, he wanted to fill that ever-present feeling that there must be more. But deep down there was that thing that was stopping him. The ever-present barrier, himself. He would never be truly happy because he just wouldn't allow it to happen.

Rani had tried to make him think differently but he just wouldn't. Just when she thought she was close, he would retreat back into his shell and she would have to start all over again.

It was so frustrating. It was almost as if he was resisting the possibility of becoming a better version of himself.

Anyway, it was a Sunday again and she was in his apartment as she tended to spend much of her time. She was watching him tearing half a

chicken to pieces for just a minute longer than she could take.

"You know, considering that you are a doctor, shouldn't you be taking better care of yourself?"

"I'm not a doctor, I'm a dentist."

"You still look after people's health, what's the difference?"

"Teeth."

"What?"

"I just look after their teeth."

"So why didn't you become a doctor?"

"I didn't think I could do it."

"So you thought this was all you could do?"

"It seemed to be the right choice at the time."

"And does that make you happy?"

He stopped ripping the flesh from the bone and stared at her. "I remind you of the first time we met."

"But you have a skill."

"That no one appreciates."

"No one here perhaps."

"I understand perfectly, no one ... here appreciates me." She slaps a palm against her head in frustration and yells at him, "THEN LEAVE!"

"What?"

"Leave ... go ... get out of here."

"And go where?"

“Does it matter? Go explore the world. Find your destiny. There’s nothing for you here. All you are doing is slowly killing yourself going through the motions ... you aren’t happy ... you aren’t living.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I remind you of the first time we met.”

Why is she always right? He drops the now picked clean bone on to his plate.

“Don’t get me wrong. It’s not that I don’t want to. I just...” He stopped and then with a resigned voice admitted the truth. “I’m ... too scared ... I just can’t deal with change.”

“Really? Two months ago you didn't know you have a sincere friend, you got used to that OK.”

Only just, but this was too much, he was being forced to deal with too much. It’s one thing to be miserable with your present life; it’s another to actually have the guts to do something about it. “I ... can’t. I ... just ...can’t.”

She makes a noise that sounds a bit like a mouse and storms out of the apartment, down the stairs and out into the alley.

She paces back and forth clenching her fists in frustration. Stupid. Stupid! She had

become impatient and pushed him too far too fast. Maybe this was too big a job for her. Maybe she should have never have tried to interfere. But she couldn't let two friends live in frustration and bored living their life filled with regret not without trying.

She was so caught up in her thoughts that she didn't notice the shadowy figure lurking in the shadows but he saw her and had one thing on his mind. He steps out of the shadows, "Hello sweetheart."  
Startled, she jumps.

"What do you want?"

"C'mon darlin', I'm a dark shadowy figure with one thing on my mind, what you reckon I want?"

"Stay away from me."

"Now, that's not going to happen." He lunges at her.

She jumps out of the way scratching his face in the process. Now she has her back to a recessed doorway. She tries the handle ... damn ... locked. There is nowhere to run. His face folds into a snarl as he feels the blood trickle down his cheek. His hand clenches into a fist and he steps towards her.

She watches him raise his fist. Of course, it never came.

Under the right circumstance, anyone can be a hero and the circumstance in this case is a friend under threat. So Raju wanted to prove that he can change.

Either way, the sickening thud she heard did not belong to her but the thug who intended to deliver the fatal blow. She opens her eyes. She sees Raju but this is not the Raju she had come to know. This one was different. This one was angry. One look into his eyes almost chilled her to the bone.

The man staggers to his feet only to reel backwards as Raju swings hard his fist slamming hard into the other's face. Blood and teeth erupt from the thug's mouth. Raju swings again. He wasn't holding back. Years of pent up frustration, of avoiding conflict, of not facing his fears.

Everything is unleashed like a burst dam releasing a raging torrent of pent up ... whatever it was that was pent up inside him. Picking up a piece of galvanized pipe lying discarded in the alleyway, he stands over the other raising his arms over his head ready to deliver the fatal blow. She reaches forward in an attempt to stop him. "Raju no ... no!"

He stops mid action shaking with fury still wanting to end that bastard. He raises his head and looks at her with those eyes so full of anger. She talks him down. "No ... no."

Gradually, the softness returns. He drops the weapon but still groaning, otherwise inert figure surrounded by a crimson halo. She grabs him by the arm, "We need to go ... quickly."

They ran from the alleyway driven by adrenaline. Around the corner, they came across a pay phone that actually worked. She grabbed the handset, dialed triple zero, reported that there was a victim of a bashing and gave the location. Hanging up, she dragged him to the riverbank where they collapse on the grassy bank gasping for breath.

For what seems like ages, they don't speak. They were too busy staring wide-eyed and breathless into space trying to figure out what just happened. In the background, sirens grow in volume until they are suddenly silenced not too far away, in an alleyway.

Raju stares at his bloody and now swollen hand examining it as if noticing it for the first time. "You know," he said after a moment of investigation, "that felt good."

She looked at him with a somewhat surprised look on her face. "You nearly killed a man and you say that felt good. That's a bit of a worry."

"Yea ... I mean no. I stood up. I acted. I didn't run away. That was change for me."

She grabs his arm still shaking. "And I'm very glad for that. The truth is you always could but because you thought there was no reason to, you didn't."

"You were my reason."

"I know ... thank you, but you can also be your own reason. You need to live for you, not someone else."

They hug each other, sharing a moment of incredible closeness. By coincidence, Maya Raju's secretary happens to be passing by and sees them. Raju gets that strange feeling of respect again. It makes him get his glory back. She announces that she is getting married next month and she wants Raju to act as her father. He pauses deep in thought as the realization dawns on him. "I really can do this. I can leave. I can start a new life."



Rani smiles, "Yes you can. In fact you probably need to in case there happened to be a witness to the whole bashing thing."

"What?"

Then it hits him. 'I nearly beat someone to death! I'm a criminal! I'm going to be a fugitive!'

She put her hand on his arm, "Don't worry, I don't think anyone saw anything and that guy isn't going to be too willing to talk to the cops. Just play the innocent when they come around asking if you happened to see anything that day."

How does she always know what I am thinking? He looks at and addresses his secretary, "Maya, you will have a father to give you away on your wedding day but you need a mother as well, don't you?"

Without waiting for any response from Maya, Raju kneels down in front of Rani and says in his trembling voice, "Rani, my darling, will you marry me?"

Another pause. "Raju, my dear I like you but need time to respond to your proposal."

"I want to go and work in Fiji."

She smiles, "You will do a lot of good there."

"You are coming with me."

“And do what?”

“I don’t know. I’m not sure what you do here. What do you do here?”

She deflects the question. “I do have to go back and tie up a few loose ends but then I will visit you in Fiji and we will get married the island style.”

She brushes his cheek. "I found you once, I can do it again. Please go live your life but wait for me." They kissed to seal the deal.

Events change lives. Unexpected events change lives unexpectedly. What has to happen happens and we are not able to do anything to control the events.

The next few weeks were going to be hectic. For a start, he would have to give away his receptionist at her wedding. Tell her that he was leaving and she would have to make alternate arrangements for her work. Then there was all his stuff. He looks around his apartment. It can all be left behind. I started my life without any possession and I must turn in all I have accumulated to Maya, I’m taking nothing with me. No baggage! For the first time ever, no baggage!

Then finally the day arrives and he is ready, shaking with terror but ready. Good-bye

miserable city, Good-bye miserable apartment block, goodbye miserable life. “Fiji, here I come!”

That last incomprehensible word was the result of his face coming into contact with a light pole. One should really look where they are going when they are saying goodbye to their old life.

Rani meets him at the cafe by the river where they first had coffee. “What happened to you?” He looks sheepishly at her, “Wasn’t looking where I was going.” He hands her a copy of the placement form. “This is where I will be for the rest of my life waiting to live our life in paradise.”

“I will find you.”

“There may not be any phones out there.”

“I will find you.”

He was about to come up with something else but she put her lips to his lips to seal the final words.

“I ... will ... find ... you.”

He relaxes, “I know you will.”

They hug their farewells. “Are you all ready for your adventure?”

He nods his head, “Yes.”

“Have you got everything?” Raju thought for a second and then with a smile was able to say, “Nothing! I am going to change and re-start

my life. That is what you wanted and I am inspired.”



Our story ends where many do: At the international airport on board a Fiji Airways flight. The plane takes off from the runway bound for paradise in the Pacific with Raju as an expectant passenger. Maya is married but Rani is still not quite ready to take the next vital step. All things left and unsaid are not that easy for her. She has a lot on her plate. She has waited long and has been constantly asked to join Raju.

I mean going up to someone who is your faithful friend and has been waiting with open arms to welcome you in his life is not that easy to reveal everything about your past by saying, “Hi I lost my parents when I was twelve. I grew up in a convent. My husband left me and later passed away with cancer wanting a better life for me and now with all these dreadful events I am also dead. Can you

live with a dead person and let her come alive?”

Depending upon the state of mind of your friend that could either make or break the day! Rani would need to pick her time. In the end she decided that time was never. It may not be the truth, but sometimes the truth is not always the best option.

So is Rani safe to go up and strike up a conversation and lead a pleasant life with Raju who has assured her that he would wait for her? Just don't blame me if she faces another bad luck in life. In the end luck is dependent on many factors and Rani has decided not to take that chance.

Raju who was inspired by Rani to take up his assignment in Fiji is now an independent and courageous man but has accepted the wishes of his mentor Rani to remain her best friend.

He still calls Rani his angel not really realizing just how right he is ready to strike. Two or three times a year Rani visits Raju and when they meet she closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and waits for the inevitable.



# 9

## Friends Indeed

**“Friendship** is always a sweet responsibility, never an opportunity,” so said Kahlil Gibran.

Ramesh and Sadiq lived in a small village of Botini in Fiji and grew together as neighbours. They played together, ate together, sang together and went to school together. This togetherness developed a very special relationship for them.

The kind of upbringing that they had enabled them to conduct themselves as more human beings than divided social or cultural entity. Ramesh was a Hindu and Sadiq hailed from Islamic society but they were true friends.

A true friend cares for a friend like a mother, scolds like a father, teases like a sister,

irritates like a brother and loves the friend more than self. These were the attributes of these two friends.

As time went by they kept blending well with the social and cultural structures of different families and relatives around them. Eventually they got married and raised a few of their own children who also grew in this friendly atmosphere as great friends.

Whenever Ramesh and Sadiq met each other after work and their respective busy farming and family life they had the opportunity to relax and reminisce their childhood days and events. This was not only because a lot of their love and understanding of their respective societies but because they had multiple fond memories of their growing up process in the Sabeto Valley where the sleeping giant lives.



They missed their childhood and also missed the way they took pleasure in small things, even as greater things crumbled around them. They knew that they could not control the world they were growing in, could not walk away from things or people or moments and events that hurt them, but they took joy in the things that made them happy.

One day while sitting in the verandah of the village shop where older people were enjoying their usual evening discussing the good, bad and the ugly sides of their life, Ramesh paused a question to Sadiq, “ Do you remember when one day at school you had rung the bell before the school day was to end and all the children ran home?”

“Yes, I do Ramesh and I also remember the punishment that I was given by the teacher on duty for my mischief,” said Sadiq.

“That day I loved you being belted by the teacher,” laughed Ramesh.

Real friends do not get offended when you insult them but they usually smile and call you something more offensive.

So Sadiq took his friend’s remarks with a pinch of salt and reminded him of his folly as well.



“Ramesh, my friend, have you forgotten your foolishness when you had eaten the food from your teacher’s container and put a toad inside it?” retaliated Sadiq.

“Oh yes, my dear friend. How can I forget the stupidity of my childhood?” agreed Ramesh.

“And you know what Ramesh, when at lunch time the teacher found a toad in his food container then he punished you by making you stand like a rooster for ten minutes. I must admit that I really enjoyed the way you were sweating and shaking with pain,” teased Sadiq.

In country schools, one punishment that was very dehumanizing and very common too in those days was when the victim was asked to hold his ears through his legs. They called it *MURGA BANANA*. The standing murga punishment is similar to remain sitting in the air without a chair. The punished person must remain as long as in sitting position looping the arms behind the knees and firmly holding the ears. In standing murga, the recipient of the punishment is required to position the buttocks as high as possible.

This is the most intense and severe punishment, as it requires constantly working

against gravity to keep the bottom raised, and therefore becomes extremely painful within a matter of minutes. For an average person, muscle fatigue starts to set in within a couple of minutes of getting into the standing rooster or murga position. Holding on even for a total of two minutes becomes very painful. As the punishment continues, it gets unbearable and legs start to tremble. It is nearly impossible to hold this position for 3 minutes or longer. That said, it is possible for a person to improve their ability to do this longer by practicing regularly.

“Yes my dear friend,” began Ramesh, “those days of absolute innocence was so true and entertaining that we now feel a little odd to remember them. But I still have very fond memory of the special attire that your father, my uncle or my kaka, who used to sew for me to wear on Diwali Day.”

“You are so right Ramesh Bhai I also have great love for your mother, my aunt (chaachi), who used to construct a special hat or topi for me to wear for Eid celebration. The joy that I had to wear that hat cannot be compared with the best hat of the modern market.” responded Sadiq.

Unfortunately neither Sadiq’s father is alive to prepare such appropriate and fitting clothes

for Ramesh during Diwali celebrations nor is the mother of Ramesh around to construct such special hats for Sadiq to do his prayers during Eid. But even today on Diwali day both the children of Ramesh wear new and colourful clothes that still come from the home of Sadiq and for the celebration of Eid, the two children of Sadiq get their appropriate attire from the family of Ramesh.

However, the ideas of modernization and urbanization began to bring a lot of changes to the village which had now increased in population, infrastructure and complexity which had great impact on the social organization of the people and the society. The social revolution had at last come to Botini where new people had arrived with new ideas and complex views.

Therefore the simple village began to feel the poisonous impact of globalization and modernization. Various religious preachers, sects of people, politically indoctrinated leaders and a variety of new thinkers began to influence the total social structure of this village and its people.

One bright Sunday morning when Ramesh met Sadiq on the crossroad of the village he enquired, "You seem to be in some hurry. Where are you going Sadiq?"

“A new Moulvi or priest has come from the city and I am going to the Maszid to hear him preach and since you are also in your religious attire you must also be on a special mission, Ramesh,” said Sadiq.

“I am off to the Mandir to hear a new Pandit who has come from abroad.” After this both friends, Ramesh and Sadiq parted ways to reach their respective destinations of enlightenment.

Both the Moulvi and the Pandit in their preaching and sermon began asking their congregations to safeguard the further pollution of their society and religion and asked the people to be careful about the destructive forces that are spoiling their religion. These lectures were more preaching and presentation of divisive ideas than maintaining and keeping the unity of all human beings.

Similar meetings were regularly organized by politicians and new businessmen from the nearby cities to change the thinking of the people of the village.

On all these occasions of the so called enlightenment lectures, Ramesh and Sadiq used to meet regularly to discuss the impact

and after effects of these presentations. Whenever they began their discourse they felt disappointed and extremely frustrated with the division that was being promulgated and promoted among and between the various religious and business groups. The farmers were suffering because their land was freely bought by business people to open up new factories and develop residential apartments.

When Ramesh and Sadiq passed away their children who formed the new generation of the village became part of the modernization and developmental processes.

The village is now a township with all the farms gone, all the people divided in their thinking and ideas, young people enjoying their time in clubs and pubs but the greatest destructive element that began to emerge was the rise of all sorts of crime that neither the education system nor the religious or social groups could solve.

The souls of friends like Ramesh and Sadiq are still wondering if the modernization of their village was a good idea. But they are friends indeed in another world. Their souls still meet regularly as love and friendship. Love keeps asking friendship the same question, "Why do you exist when I am already here to assist my people of the village?"

Then the reply of friendship remains constantly the same, "I wish to place some smile where you left a lot of tears for the people." That is being friends indeed.



# 10

## Bond of Love

(As You Sow, So Shall You Reap)

**Nirmala's** mother Kamla was hospitalized and the doctors had told her that she had only hours to live. Her cancer had seriously entangled her life and she was in a lot of pain and was really suffering. Nirmala was at her bed side lost in thoughts. She had ambivalent emotions about her mother. On one count Nirmala loved her mother very much but for a specific reason she had a dislike for her as well. She knew that the word dislike for any mother was one of the sins of the children and people would be surprised to hear that notion. But what else could she do. She was helpless.

Kamla was Nirmala's own real and not a step mother and she was now counting her last breath in hospital. All the past words and actions of her mother were dangling in her

thoughts like the church bell. The intolerable conduct of her mother was now Nirmala's ghostly memory which she wanted to forget but it was really hard to let go. She had no choice but to stay there and see the end.

Even today it all seems that it all happened only yesterday. All the events of the past and hurtful memories were fresh in Nirmala's mind. For some odd and unknown reasons her parents got divorced as soon as she was born. Nirmala had no clear recollection of her father when she was living with her mother. She was experiencing one of the worst deficiencies of life and this was often striking her conscious and making her feel uncomfortable.

A child did not only need good clothes, delicious food, educational toys and a mansion to live because apart from these essentials one other very vital need is the love and affection of the parents and the happy family. Unfortunately and sadly this was not part of Nirmala's present life but she was determined to move on and make the best of what was dished out to her.

Time moved on and Nirmala remembers the time when people around her were saying that her mother had decided to get married again. In fact they said that she was leading a lonely



life and had the responsibility of a daughter to look after. So why not?

Prior to her second marriage Kamla adored her daughter Nirmala. Nirmala's days began and ended with her mother's love and care. However, this did not last long after the new husband entered the home. Nirmala began to feel the wind of change in the love and affection of her mother towards her. Nirmala's step father came with his son Adarsh. Nirmala and Adarsh soon clicked with each other and became the best of friends and as time moved on they realized that they had developed a deep bond of brotherly and sisterly love. Indeed they resembled the full meaning of their names. *Adarsh* meant *ideal* and *Nirmal* meant *serene*. Everlasting love and pure relationship between them began to grow with time.

After the marriage of her mother Nirmala had the opportunity to meet Adarsh who came out of his room and sat beside Nirmala who looked sad and lonely all because her mother was no longer spending any time with her. Nirmala's mother was now spending almost all of her time with her new husband in her room or out on a ride somewhere for pleasure. Nirmala had some fear of being alone in her room at night without her mother by her side. She prayed for some solution to her problem and was happy

that this Angel in the name of Adarsh had appeared to assist her.

Adarsh extended his hand and said, “Hi! My name is Adarsh. What is your name?”

“My name is Nirmala. My mother calls me Nim.”

Adarsh had a welcome smile on his face and responded, “Well and good, from today I will also call you Nim, is that OK?”

Nirmala quietly nodded and held the hand of Adarsh lightly so that he could not run away somewhere. Thus the true love of a brother and sister was born.

Adarsh became an eight year old brother and Nirmala turned out to be a sister of five years. However, it is often said and believed that children who are growing in difficult and rigorous situations mature early as a result of these hardships. That is exactly what happened to brother Adarsh and sister Nirmala.

Adarsh first lost his mother early in life and then his father got married thinking that Adarsh will get the love of his new mother. But what a dilemma! What a fate! Now Adarsh had lost the love and blessings of his mother as well as the company of his father who was too attached to his new wife.

Nirmala on the other hand had her mother who was engrossed in her new life. However, Nirmala's step father was initially expressing a lot of love and care for her maybe to please his new wife. But Adarsh was craving to get the love and affection of his father. Nirmala often noticed sadness and sorrow on the face of her brother and was worried as well.

To make matters worse, Nirmala's mother was no help for him because she usually displayed her dislike for him by regularly scolding him and dishing out various observational interactions. Adarsh was tolerating less of his mistakes and getting blamed for more of the errors of Nirmala from the step mother.

Despite all these difficulties they loved each other very much and tried their best to keep the melancholy hearts of the step parents far from them. They went to school together, studied at home together, ate and drank together and best of all played and had a lot of fun together. Nirmala did not know when eventually her brother Adarsh took the ideal and respected place of both her father and mother in her life. But she had full confidence in him and loved and relied on him for everything.



Raksha Bandhan is a popular annual festival, usually in August, during which a girl or a woman gives a cotton bracelet or thread (rakhi) to a brother or someone she considers as one, who in turn treats her as a sister. For Nirmala this chaste bond of love was one of the deepest and noblest of human emotions. For Nirmala this was a special occasion to celebrate this emotional bonding by tying a holy thread around the wrist of her new found brother Adarsh. She was indeed proud because this thread was to pulsate with her sisterly love and sublime sentiments. For her it was to mean a bond of protection and she looked forward to this sacred ceremony.

She went to her mother and asked, “Mom is it Raksha Bandhan today?”

When her mother said yes it was, Nirmala said she was looking for her brother Adarsh. This brought fiery response from Mrs Kamla Pandey, mother of Nirmala.

She burst out angrily, "How many times I have told you that there is no brother of your around here. Why don't you understand that?"

Nirmala tried to justify her relationship," Mom, when our mother and father are the same then why are Adarsh bhaiya and I are not brothers and sisters?"

Kamla put her off by asking her to go away and let her do her work in peace.

By now Nirmala was a seven year old girl and Adarsh had just turned ten. She collected the tray loaded with the silken thread, some sweets and a lamp or a diya. She started looking for her brother Adarsh who was nowhere to be seen in the house. Disheartened, she went out in the backyard and quietly sat down when she heard the sounds of someone weeping and sobbing nearby. She ran to check and found her brother Adarsh sitting on a bench.

"What is this Bhaiya? Why are you crying? What has happened to you? Has mom said anything to you? Please tell me quickly,"

Nirmala put so many questions to Adarsh in her amazement.

Adarsh began talking after wiping his tears, "No, nobody has said anything offensive to me but I miss my own mother very much today. She used to say that she would soon get me a pretty little doll like sister but she went away before that leaving me alone."

Nirmala could not control her emotions and tried to give some assurance to her brother, "So, am I not looking like your doll sister? Am I not your beloved sister? Assure me bhaiya!"

As soon as Adarsh said, "Yes you are my only sister!" Nirmala commanded him thus, "Then stop your weeping and quickly give me your hand because I want to tie this Rakhi to seal our relationship."



When the pearly looking tears of Adarsh turned into smile, laughter and joy he did not know but with that holy thread both their

instinctual love of a brother and sister was sealed forever.

When so much happiness and love was still penetrating their heart and soul their mother had some other vicious plans. That evening Kamla crossed all the boundaries of her cruelty and announced that Adarsh would be going for his studies and live in a boarding house overseas. Nirmala could not understand what kind of scriptures her mother put before her stepfather to convince him to part from his son and agree to such a cunning ploy to separate a sister from a brother she loved so dearly.

Nirmala and Adarsh pleaded before Kamla and kept begging her to change her plans but that ruthless and stone hearted lady did not listen to them and did not budge at all.

So at last when that day arrived, Nirmala's twelve year old beloved brother Adarsh was separated from his mother and father as well as his loving foster sister. Adarsh's father had arranged a school in Brisbane for his boarding and studies. When Adarsh was leaving the Nadi Airport for immigration clearance to depart, his red swollen eyes that had cried for hours were telling everyone that he was very disturbed and saddened to leave his dear ones behind.

Nirmala hugged him and could only say with heavy voice, “Bhaiya come back quickly. I will eagerly wait for you.” Then she started sobbing unstopably but the pitiless plane snatched her brother and flew away. Nirmala could not stop staring at her mother with dislike and could not understand why she was unable to accept her as her mother anymore.

As soon as they reached home Nirmala’s mother called her own mother to relay the departure of Adarsh and Nirmala heard their phone conversation like a detective. Kamla was saying, “Yes mother, I have got rid of Adarsh. I am happy that he has gone to a boarding school overseas. There would be no more Adarsh and no more problems.”

Nirmala could not believe what she just heard but the more she understood the cruel ploy of her mother the angrier and more disheartened she became. Her mother today had fallen so low in her eyes that she felt the brunt of her step motherly feelings and treatment for Adarsh. Nirmala’s heart and soul began screaming inside and she could not fathom what the objective of her mother to punish them was. Nirmala thought that Adarsh was a child with no mother and was expecting a lot better treatment than this from this step mother.



Nirmala was very disappointed because her mother made a plan to separate them. At least they both were sharing their sadness, joy and hardship by understanding each other. Even if she was obliged, she could not forgive her mother for this cruelty and misdeed.

Nirmala's step father could not live long with this unwarranted separation of his only son. After his death Kamla was again lonely and distraught. So Nirmala tried her best to persuade her mother to get Adarsh back home but with no success. Nirmala never failed to send a Raksha Bandhan to her brother Adarsh over the years that separated them.

Time and tide do not wait for anyone and the time kept flying fast. Now Nirmala was going to celebrate her eighteenth birthday but there was no rejoicing and celebrating because she badly missed her beloved brother. She was sitting outside in the garden when she heard the sweetest voice that she had not heard for years and her whole body and soul lit up with enthusiasm. Adarsh had returned home and was looking for by calling her, "Nim, where are you?"

This familiar voice was like nectar or honeydew for Nirmala who began to chant, "Adarsh Bhaiya! How are you? It has been a

long time! Why didn't you come earlier? I missed you...but did you miss me?"

"Oh, my doll like dearest sister I missed you a lot that is why I have come on your birthday."

"..Hm and you have come empty handed."

"First close your eyes and then I will tell you."

Nirmala laughed with joy and closed her eyes and began thinking that for her there was no better and more expensive gift in the world than the arrival of her beloved brother on her birthday.

After a few seconds Adarsh said,"Now open your eyes and look at this."

"What? This is a very expensive mobile phone Bhaiya, an iPod. Where did you get so much money to buy this?"

Entrance of Kamla, Nirmala's mother had to happen with her own bitter comments, "Yes Adarsh, where have you stolen the money from?"

Adarsh bent down and respectfully touched his step mother's feet for her blessing but she did not respond normally.

“No, mother no! I would never steal or use funds from thieves to buy an appropriate gift for my only beloved sister. I earned a lot of money while working as a student,” retorted Adarsh.

Kamla was not pleased with the candid response from Adarsh and as usual reprimanded him, “How many times I have said that I am not your mother and Nirmala is not your sister.”

Adarsh had tear in his eyes and felt very sad indeed because his mother was still not able to accept him as her son and did not regard him as the only brother of Nirmala. The internal sorrowful feelings of her brother were deeply felt by Nirmala who could fully comprehend all his emotions. So she hugged him and whispered in his ears not to feel bad about the evil words of Kamla, her mother.

At this moment the home phone rang and Kamla went inside to answer the phone call. After waiting for a few seconds Adarsh and Nirmala followed their mother inside and found her talking with her doctor.

“Yes Doctor, what is in my medical report?”

The doctor must have said something that was serious so Kamla began to assure him to be

forthright and reveal all because she was strong and capable of sustaining any calamity.

Kamla kept listening for a while to the details that were being presented by her doctor but Nirmala could see that her countenance was gradually changing. Then she burst out, "What? Cancer! Doctor this can't be. Check carefully. Are you reading from the report of Mrs Kamla Pandey?"

The doctor must have assured her that he was relaying the correct message so Kamla left the phone receiver dangling and sat on the floor with a thud. She began to mumble to herself, "This can't be! This is not true."

There was a pin-drop silence in the house as if someone had passed away. Nirmala began consoling her mother but when Adarsh said something to comfort her by putting his hand on her shoulder Kamla pushed him away.

Time and tide do not wait for anyone. During the next few weeks time in the Pandey home was flying at the speed of a rocket. Adarsh had to go back to Brisbane to begin his work because he was now a permanent resident of Australia. After all, how long could Adarsh tolerate all these dislikes for him to keep living there and receiving abusive words and cruel treatment from the stepmother he genuinely

loved and tried to accept her as his own mother?

Nirmala, on the other hand had very little choice but to feel sorry for her mother who now was given only a few weeks of life. Despite these affectionate and caring feelings Nirmala had a notion that God Almighty was the greatest judge of how some people conducted themselves and acted in real life. Their *karma* had to be considered for just punishment right here on this earth. There was no hell and heaven anywhere else but on this earth. That was the reason the scriptures have admitted that '*jaysi karni waysi bharni*' which when translated means 'as you sow, so shall you reap'.

Nirmala began to provide the best care to her mother with all the love that she could muster in the process. However, when the doctors asked her to go to hospice care Nirmala knew that her time to depart from this world was near. She immediately called Adarsh to convey the message.

Hospice care was an end-of-life care for Kamla. A team of health care professionals and volunteers provided this needed care very meticulously for Kamla who was about to pass away. They gave all kinds of medical, psychological and spiritual support to her. The

goal of the care was to help people who were dying so that they can go peacefully with comfort, and dignity they deserved.

When her brother Adarsh arrived, Nirmala used to spend most of her time with him at her mother's bedside. Today was the day when Adarsh and Nirmala were sitting on the bed occupied by Kamla who was frail and helpless. The doctors and the nurses who were attending to her needs knew that the final time had come for Kamla so they asked the children to be with their mother alone.

It was at this solemn moment that Kamla put both her hands together and looked at Adarsh to genuinely present her repentance and ask for his forgiveness. She also asked him to look after Nirmala. She had tears of repentance rolling down her cheeks like her eyes were a flooded stream. At this moment Adarsh touched her feet and while crying assured her with his usual tender words, "Mom, you do not have to worry about anything. Believe me that it would be my pride and honour to care for, love and look after my beloved sister Nirmala. I will always ensure that she never ever faces any obstacles and hardship in her life. Mom, I have always loved you and I will love you forever."

Adarsh could not take the sorrow anymore when the doctors declared that Kamla was no more. However, Nirmala stood there next to her mother and began putting her thoughts together for her own consolation. She did not care if her mother was not able to hear her. She knew that her mother never listened to her when she was alive and it did not make any difference to her now. She pressed on regardless.

*‘Mom, have you seen? It was not that my brother was a stepbrother but it was your heart and soul that acted so much like a stepmother. Mom, it was indeed odd that you could not believe that the ceremony of Raksha Bandhan had bonded us together with that golden thread to display the love of a brother and sister. Mom, the institution of mother is not for only her who gives birth to her children because a stepmother can be as motherly as a birth mother.’* Nirmala waited for a while to collect her thoughts as well as strength to go on and held her mother’s cold hand.

*“Mom, I would have been more than happy if you had only granted just a bit of motherly love and compassion of motherhood to my beloved brother Adarsh. It would have given him a different life and you would have felt even better too. My brother Ardarsh had already lost his mother but Mom, you tried to separate him*

*from his father and his sister. This was not fair for all of us. The expression of true love is Godly Mom and no one has the right and audacity to take it away from us. Mom I ask God Almighty to forgive you for all your trespasses. Goodbye Mom, I love you.”*

Nirmala felt the vibration of repentance from her mother's hands and although the eyes were close Kamla could have felt the extent and effects of her torture of the family. But it was all too late now...Just too late.

Adarsh conducted all the final traditional ceremonies for his mother and he was proud that he never had any animosity for her. Nirmala on the other hand could never comprehend discrimination behind the meaning of stepbrother, stepmother or stepfather because for her all relationships she knew she had a sincere brother, once a very loving mother and a sensible father.

Nirmala's all the concluding questions have remained unanswered.

Why do we see so much of indifference in people?

Why don't we cultivate and keep watering the garden of love among us?



Why is the human race so much divided and fragmented?

Why?

Why?

Why?



# 11

## **SILENCE IS SACRIFICE**

**I** was just married and brought my newly wedded wife home to live with my parents in my extended family. She was my College girl friend and we were in deep love. This extended family was made up of my mother, father and two sisters who would soon be married and depart for their respective homes. We were not only Indians but traditional Hindus.

For Hindus, marriage is a sacrosanct union. It is also an important social institution. Marriages are between two families, rather two individuals. There are stringent gender roles, with women having a passive role and husband an active dominating role.

My wife was a university graduate and was raised by her parents in an urban environment. On the other hand my mother had never seen the door of a school and had

lived in her small village all her life. However, she was a woman with adequate religious, social and cultural knowledge all because of the daily discourse that my father conducted using his scriptures such as Ramayana and Bhagavat Gita.

The relationship of a mother-in-law (MIL) and (daughter-in-law) DIL has always been a complicated process and requires a lot of positive attitude, patience, understanding and empathy on both sides of the field. I have known of major conflicts between the two and have also experienced the MIL and DIL relationship become so full of love and understanding that there generates a total mother and daughter feeling between them.



Initially I had a frank discussion with both the important women that were there to make my life better.

Firstly, I had a heart to heart talk with my mother to explain her different backgrounds of my wife. I asked her to take things easy and gradually accept her daughter in law as her own daughter. I explained to my mother that in the end she would find that she has a more educated and wiser daughter.

On the other hand although I did not have to do this, I managed to have a very frank and useful discussion with my wife. I did not have to give her any academic spills but I prayed to her to be conscious of the fact that my mother was an uneducated rural based lady and needed to be treated differently and understood with a lot of empathy. I emphasized that at the end of the day we had to realize that this is the woman who had given birth to me and if she did not exist then I would not exist as a husband.

I finished off my discussion with my wife by saying that the nagging, meddling mother-in-law is often the cause of worry and the central idea that can help better the situation is to have a positive attitude, learn to be patient and to show respect to the older woman.

Whatever I could do I had done to ease the expected clashes and then I decided to keep my silence because I firmly believed that the

two adults would be able to sort their differences out amicably.

However, an urge to stay with the married son, stems from a strong possessive feeling on the part of the mother. Slowly, the tentacles of possessiveness started spreading around in every aspect of the adult son's life, throttling the daughter-in-law. My wife started gasping for breath and was forced to look at her choices. I knew that if nothing was going to work out, she would finally opt for peace of mind maybe by walking out of the marriage. On no condition I was going to let that happen. So I began to look for alternative solutions from as soon as I got the messages of confrontation.



My wife who had experienced the pleasures and thrills of urban living all her life found it hard to adjust to the rural amenities and environment but she did try to accept the hardships of the situation. My mother on the

other hand could not understand what the real difficulty of my wife was because my mother had never had any experience of the urban living.

As a consequence of these different standards of living we began to witness the beginning of a sort of family feud between the MIL and DIL. My father could not and did not want to intervene because of various reasons. Firstly after the hard day's complex and time consuming farm work when he came home he needed time for other social and religious activities. Secondly, he wanted the responsible adults to learn to sort their differences themselves. Thirdly, a lot of this adverse information did not reach him because he was busy with a lot of public service.

Even after my early interventions I had to concentrate on my own business which was getting very competitive and cumbersome. I used to leave home very early in the morning and arrived back late at night. So what transpired at home between the MIL and DIL did not fully come to my notice as well. In fact both my father and I were of the understanding that everything was hunky dory because we used to get all the needed services and care. However, one specific thing I noticed about my wife was her tiredness and her withdrawn behavior. She never ever made

any complaint to me or informed me of any mistreatment by her MIL. Naturally then I too thought that everything was running smoothly between the MIL and DIL.

Time kept moving and the relationship between MIL and DIL began to deteriorate and cracks began to appear openly for us to notice them. However, for various reasons as already explained my father and I let the sleeping dog lie and maintained our silence thinking that the storm in the tea cup would soon subside and peace will prevail in the home. This was one of our misjudgments.

It was election time in the country and since I was one of the hopeful candidates of my political party I was extremely busy in my campaigning. In fact I had to succeed in two elections; one on the national level to enter the parliament of the country and one at home to sort out the domestic disturbance.

The national election seemed a lot hopeful but to win the election on the home front and decide the winner was not that easy and straight forward. I had to elect and choose either my mother or my wife. My greatest obstacle was that I had a lot of love and affection for both of them. One had given birth and raised me while the other gave birth and raised my children. I found it extremely

difficult to choose one against the other because both were my very own. But I was not that kind of person who would take defeat that easily. Therefore I was looking for a win-win situation.

I was confused and was finding it hard to reach an appropriate and compromising solution. It became difficult to maintain two sharp swords in one sheath. In my home one woman was fast becoming an enemy to the other and it had reached a critical stage.

My mother who had very enthusiastically planned and conducted my marriage so efficiently to establish a new relationship for me could not be deprived of her love and all the consideration.



On the other hand how could I deprive that innocent lady who had become my wife and we



loved each other immensely. My wife who had left her mother was not being regarded by my mother as her daughter. Whoever was at fault was not my concern but my immediate wish was to find an amicable resolution to the problem.

I was naturally and definitely confused and my mind was not functioning well so that I could decide to easily elect one against the other. This was not a simple social battle and as such to find a peaceful solution was not that easy but something had to be done before the whole relationship gets shattered.

There were a few relatives and friends of mine who had begun to smell the rat to even blame me for my inability to act, my silence in the deteriorating dispute between my mother and my wife. They even went so far as to say that I was fighting an election for the nation but I was not able to elect and make decision at home.

My mother on the other hand was justifying her actions and conduct when she used to meet her village friends. She even went so far as to regard me as tied to my wife's apron strings or in her language as '*joru ka gulam*'.

My wife had her own conclusions all because of my inaction and silence in the case. She

began calling me 'Mama's boy'. I was neither good for my mother or for my wife and at every moment this situation kept my confusion deepening. I did not know that in the last three years I had gone from bad to worse and although the love and affection of the two most important ladies in my life had made me somewhat hopeless I still had not given up hope.

Before my marriage wasn't I a brave, thoughtful and confident person but now my own had begun to cull out despondent names for me as if I was turning into an empty vessel stuck somewhere in the desert. How long could I afford this silence? My inaction and being quiet had not found any solutions to the problem at hand so I decided that I had to speak out and do something positive. Someone has to win in this worsening situation and predicament.

This morning when I woke up I conducted my usual prayer with my father and an understanding came into my thoughts. The arrival of my wife had caused some disturbance and diminished my mother's love for me and she was feeling that it was now divided between my wife and her. Therefore this new and old love demanded that I broke my silence through further discussion with my father who was my mentor.

Before going to work and getting busy with my election campaign, I went to my father who was having his breakfast alone in the shed and put my suggestion before him, "Pitaji, I needed to protect my deep love for the two important women in my life, my mother and my wife. I cannot choose one against the other because both are equally adorable for me. Therefore, to avoid any further cracks in the family, I suggest that I move out of this house with my wife and children to my new house that has been completed and needs occupants so that the love and affection of my mother remains intact and my life partner and I are able to live together in a happy and affectionate family life."

After listening to my suggestion with his open mind and dispassionately, my father completed his breakfast, washed his hands and face and wiped himself with the clean napkin. I was waiting in the shed anxiously in great anticipation for him to break his silence. After a while he stood up, hugged me with his wiser words thus, "Son, I am glad that you have made a mature decision and I am totally in agreement with you. Not only this after the national election is over we will help you settle in your new home with specific prayers."

There was no end to our joy and satisfaction when I conveyed this news to my wife whom I had driven to her school before going on with my own business. Although our family had found a workable solution to our problem, our friends and relatives had other ideas and kept criticizing us. We knew that it was almost impossible to please everyone every time but we had broken our silence to please my wife and my mother.

The voting for general election had ended and the result was that our political party had won majority of the seats to form the new government. Guess what? I was honoured to be appointed the Minister of Education and Social Services. So I won both the elections when I was able to break my silence.

As an aftermath of our endeavours to find peace and harmony in the extended family my wife presented a medal to her mother in law.



Today it is the first anniversary of our move into our new home and my mother and my wife are the best of friends. My children are looked after, cared for and greatly adored by my parents. We have been spending most of our evenings with and at my parents' home where we all would share our meals together only to retire into our own sweet home to relax and continue our family life.

Our greatest happiness is that the entire family is well settled with the love and affection that is second to none in our community. My advice to everyone is simple. When the situation and occasion demands we should be brave enough to break our silence and arrive at a solution that solves our problems. This remains the best family medicine for health, wealth and wisdom.



# 12

## THE ANGEL I LOVED

**We** were at the nearby shopping mall. I was beside her, longing to hold her hands. Wanting to sneak out and steal some kisses, hold her, and never let go. But most of all, I desired her attention, for her to look at me, talk to me, hold my hands and look into my eyes and see and know how I felt about her. But she was arrested by something else, someone else. Her eyes were twinkling as if they were hypnotizing me and they were focusing at something, someone only I couldn't fathom what or who.

She was beautiful beyond description. She had the looks of a wise angel. I believed she had a perfect heart in a healthy body. A woman who had a soul that was searching and peaceful. She was almost the goddess of beauty and perfection.

I couldn't take my eyes off of her and she couldn't meet my eyes. I acted like a stupid

obsessive boy friend and maybe I was and she remained an aloof stranger hypnotized by something else. This was very disappointing for a lover boy like me but I could not accept any defeat as yet.

We were walking together and she had her head tilted towards the glossy, glassy shops of this modern shopping mall. Her face had the expression of being in a scene in the ghazal concert of Pankaj Udhas. As if she was in tune with the greatest tabla and the sweet sounding sitar I had ever heard! I wish it were me, I wish it were the sight of me that gave her that satisfaction, that look in her eye. I would do everything possible in the game of romance to be the reason behind that nirvana state of her!

I was still figuring out what was giving her that satisfaction, that Buddha state of ultimate peace. What or who was it?

I looked closely as to what she was looking at. We sat down at the old café called Surahi. Her eyes were still meditating at something, her posture mindful and her expression ecstatic. What exactly was she looking at? What was giving her the infinite gratification? It wasn't me and that hurt me tremendously.

I looked at her and then at the thing she was looking at. At last I found what she was

looking at. At first I couldn't believe. I looked again. Was she really looking at those mannequins? Those plastic or ceramic bodies with no life, no age, no gender and apparently no movement but artificially created lump of statues. Was that the thing gratifying her? Was that the thing arresting her from giving me even the minuscule attention that I craved and deserved?



I felt that she craved for a body that was perfect and will retain its perfect shape for all its life. She longed for the body that was radiating and had no hairs or the scales my body had. What was so appealing about a body that had no history? What was attractive about a body, whose biography will have blank pages? I wondered and I wanted to know.



Was it agelessness that attracted her? Was its fragility and vulnerability? Was it its dependency on someone else totally that made her crave for that? I wondered and again I wanted to know more.

Devastated I looked on. I felt my soul exiting me. I felt my heartbeats stopping. Why wasn't I the focus of her concentration? I thought I was handsome, well built and healthy young gentleman but for her I was just another customer of the café.

I saw my face brooding, my body still, but I kept concentrating on her. As she looked at the stall of mannequins I began to assess my credentials for a romantic adventure with her. Why had I fallen for her, I questioned.

My soul left me and wandered around. Now I could see and think but couldn't walk, couldn't move my eyes, my hands, my legs. I couldn't smell the coffee in front of me. I couldn't do anything but dream. I just couldn't do anything!

All I wanted was to dance with her or have a passionate Tango even in my dreams but what I got instead was a sentence of captivity for life. This was heartbreaking indeed and made me imagine my love with this angel. I was highly underrated in the realm of romance.

It's tough to look at someone you are willing to do anything for, even if it costs your life. How could I feel nothing, nothing at all about me? If Newton had ever loved he wouldn't be able to give the law, 'every action has equal and opposite reaction.'

In this kind of one-sided love and in pseudo relationships all laws and reasons fail. I won't be able to tell at when and how and why I fell in love with her or that why I still love her even when it means hurting me infinitely just to get her attention. I don't know what, when and how it all went wrong between us or if it ever was right!

There are infinite permutation and combination of things that can go wrong in a relationship of two people and just one or at the most two combinations to get it right. I failed at getting the right combination.

Did I really love her or just craved her attention, I thought. Maybe it wasn't meant to be, but maybe, just maybe, it was and this was the way to be! I had begun to question why this happening was dished out to me. Why was I leaving my body- the one I was born with, the one that had been through all ups and downs of my life? Was it because the girl I loved rejected me for it or because I had

grown tired of me? None of the above because I still want her to look at me with some compassion and understanding.

In this battle of romance my soul has left my body and if this has happened will I ever be able to go back to my body, I feared. Was I really that desperate to be with her? Shall I wait for her to meet me as my soul mate in heaven?

With those entire questions, internal chaos, I became numb. For the longest period of time I saw my life pass me by. I watched my life as if I was at some festival or watching a movie. The only difference was that I wanted to be part of the mannequin parade that she was admiring. In those precious moments I wanted her to touch, hold and take that statue with her that was going to capture my soul. Even in those moments all I wanted was for her to look at me lovingly.

Adamantly, my soul wandered and was now entering one of those glossy, glassy shops. My consciousness was now with my soul. I entered into the shop. I moved into one of those plastic dolls. Now I was a mannequin. I had a perfect body. I was ageless. Wear and tear proof unless someone manually decided to destroy me. I felt happy and then I felt trapped.

I was trapped inside of a body that's not free to do anything. The body that couldn't put its nose in a book, drink coffee, fall in love, drive and can't even move on its own. It seemed it was trapped in something that was soulless but had a soul. What was I thinking? Why did I do this to myself? Why did I become what I never wanted to become just to please a girl who doesn't even look at me?

As I began cursing me, I thought at least now she will look at me with admiration. At least I would have that love that I was searching and craving about. But my curiosity soon turned into despair.

I looked at the girl I loved, her phone rang with the ringtone *Ghungharoo Toot Gaye*, the song of Pankaj Udhas that I was addicted to for days and there she was sitting with some other mannequin. She switched off her phone, looked at herself in the mirror with admiration. Gazed at her and had the Buddha state of ultimate happiness. She took the other mannequin and walked away from the shop.



I let my soul move out of my mannequin and get into my body. My romantic imagination was gone and I wanted to laugh at my foolishness and stupidity. I couldn't even do that. Not anymore when I had no one there to admire me anymore. The show stops when there is no audience.

So many questions in our life are answered with ridicule and many of my valid questions about my love have no answers for me. When will I be able to find another soul mate to register my love for her I do not know? What I do know is that everything is possible in love and war.

Nowadays I sit in my study and create more such stories and in constant battle with self, many of my screams are trapped in my stare that is still searching for my true love.

So many boys like me fail their test of romance. I mean one sided romance but as Lyricist Majrooh Sultanpuri said in his lyrics:

*'Tu hai harzaai to apna bhi yahi taur sahi  
Tu nahi aur sahi aur nahi aur sahi.'*

*'If you are a heart breaker then this be our  
way,  
If not you, then another, if not another, then  
someone else.'*

But I am also convinced that one sided love is not the end of our passionate feeling for anyone. It is just the beginning of a different kind of love which other lyricists like Galib have defined a lot more adequately.

*Ab kuchh is tarah maine apne jindagi ko  
aasaan kar liya  
Apne mehbooba se maafi maang li aur unko  
maaf kar diya  
Apne dil ki aawaz ko sunte hain aur unke  
aankhon se dekhte hain  
Sirf paane ka naam pyaar nahi khone ko bhi  
ham isq kahte hain.*

@

I have somehow made my life a lot happier  
I have asked for forgiveness from my lover  
I have forgiven her to make her life easier  
Now I keep listening to the call of my heart  
Now I am able to see the world with her eyes  
Only to win the battle of romance is not love  
Rejection, denial and loss are also called love.



# 13

## It Is Late But Perfect

Life is a song - sing it. Life is a game - play it. Life is a challenge - meet it. Life is a dream - realize it. Life is a sacrifice - offer it. Life is love - enjoy it.

For many enlightened people life definitely is not a problem to be solved but it is a reality to be experienced. For wise people life can be a dream, it can be a game for the fool, often it is a comedy for the rich, a tragedy for the poor but ultimately life is a luxury for lovers.

In order to feel good and relaxed Rohan took a deep breath to inhale as much fresh air as he could. He was paying his heartfelt gratitude to his doctor, Doctor Rahul Sharma, a Cardiologist, who had insisted that Rohan

make this trip. He reluctantly made this short trip from Sabeto to Lautoka Hospital. He was living a lonely life and so isolated himself after losing his first and only love. A heart problem developed and after his surgery his doctor recommended him to visit the hill station in Nandarivatu to recuperate and rejuvenate.

He was quite sure that it was completely preposterous suggestion for him but at some point he also wished to give a last chance to life. He had been missing his love, his soul mate. A ray of hope was still there. So he obeyed his doctor's suggestions.

He booked a villa at the hill station and asked his village friend Satend to drive him from his home to Nandarivatu. The journey began in the morning and it was noon, when they reached their destination. Rohan got down from the car and started inspecting the cool and pleasant environment. Definitely, on the first impression this was an ideal place to recuperate and rejuvenate.

Rohan was entirely amazed to see the beauty of Nandarivatu. He soon settled with his friend Satend in the villa he had booked. By the afternoon he began wandering in the valley, observing the beauty and admiring the power of the Creator who has used multiple and extremely pretty sceneries. The lush green



grass, the thick tropical forest, the ever fresh water falls and the huge mist covered mountains as the backdrop of the scenery were taking the beauty of this heavenly place to its perfection.

He also smelled a cold breeze, filled with the unique fragrance. Suddenly he fell in love with the commendable beauty of this splendid hill station. He found himself, a little revived. He was contented. Who would not?



Rohan was feeling a little tired. He sat down on the soft grass and closed his eyes for a while. He wished to capture the beauty in his eyes forever. A pretty face appeared in his

thoughts. It was Shanti's face, her big eyes with heavy eye lashes. She had talking eyes. He spent all his life in the sweet memory of Shanti.

He murmured, "Oh darling, why did you leave me and have given me such pain, plight, panic, perplexity and even purgatory?" He was lamenting. He muttered, "Better to die."

"Hmmm"? Bad words." A soft voice entered into his ears and brought him into the present.

Rohan surprisingly opened his eyes. He saw there was a cute little boy standing very near to him. He was constantly staring to Rohan.

Rohan smiled, "What? Bad words? Who are you?"

The boy sat next to him and said, "Why so many questions? Ask one by one please. I am hardly a five year old boy."

Rohan started laughing. He felt a little better after so long.

The boy resembled someone very precious to him. He had big eyes with heavy eye lashes. After some time he ran away to catch his ball. Rohan could not ask anything about him.

He found a glimpse of Shanti in him. He had plethora of his lovely memories. He started floating into his past.

In his youth, at the Nasinu College he felt a deep love with a girl. She was the prettiest girl of the college. Her name was Shanti. She had stolen his heart at the first sight. He liked her so much. The way she dressed. The way she used to help others. The way she looked and walked. Rohan was quite sure that it's nothing but love. He cared for her very much but could not gather courage to propose to her.

Rohan, himself was a handsome boy. He had a ripped body. Many girls wished to get friendly with him. But his eyes were always longing to get a glimpse of Shanti.

Once Rohan saw her talking to his best friend, Mohan, he asked him to fix a meeting with her. Mohan laughed. He told him not to ever try since she was his. Then he started laughing loudly as if it was a joke.

When Rohan got a first prize in the final exams, Shanti congratulated him and wished him well. She also lost her heart to him but she could not confer this to her new consort.

At times it takes no time to fall in love but sometimes it takes years. They talked less but

their eyes exchanged their feelings. When heart transfers emotions through eyes, then words lose their identity. And the same happened with them. They became good friends but longed for a lot more affection to develop between them.

Rohan and Shanti both were in deep love with each other. Only formal proposal had to be made. They both were planning to open their hearts on the right time. But God had different plans for them. They could not muster enough courage to proceed further even if their hearts were eager to pounce.

Mohan and Shanti on the other hand belonged to the same village. Mohan wished to have her as his life partner anyhow. He was a paranoid. It was all because of him that Rohan and Shanti could not unite.

It was getting dark. Rohan headed towards his villa. He was not feeling well for many reason, the most important being his craze to be with his lover. By this time his friend Satend had already prepared a good and sumptuous dinner which was well enjoyed by the two friends before retiring to their single beds with the minimum of luxury.



As soon as he went to his bed he went into a deep sleep. On the very next day Rohan reached the same place where he had met that cute little boy. He was excited to see the boy who was already playing there.

Rohan stretched his hand to shake and said, “Hi, I am Rohan. I am from Sabeto. Tell me something about you.”

The boy replied, “Hi dude, I am Kanti.”

Rohan murmured, “Kanti, a nice name. In my dictionary it means ‘charming’ and you are a charming little mate.”

They became friends gradually. Now Rohan forgot to inquire about his mother. They played together. They laughed together. Actually they were filling each other’s vacuum.

Rohan realized that the boy's big eyes with heavy eye lashes, starved for love. The two little sparkling, mesmerizing eyes attracted Rohan. He also found that some invisible, yet strong string is somewhere between them which gradually took them closer and closer.

Rohan had a heart surgery recently. His Doctor advised him to visit some refreshing and lively place and inhale fresh air and here he was at last.

With the help of fresh atmosphere and his new little friend's company, he started recovering fast. Nothing in the world could heal him as this small boy's company. For the very first time Rohan felt to be loved and cared. He felt completely contented. Nothing more he required from his life now.

After playing with the Kanti, Rohan returned to his room in the villa and took a long bath with slightly warm water. He was a little tired. Instead of having dinner he preferred a cup of hot coffee and some cookies. He was eager to go to his bed and dream the same dream which he had been having for last few years. He finished his coffee and slipped in the not so warm and comfortable bed. Eventually he found his slumber and he took himself to his beautiful and pleasant past.

In his dreams Rohan was heading towards the college, he overheard some sounds behind the bush next to the recreation room.

“You have to marry me or else I will die. You will be charged for this. I will commit suicide. Please say yes to me. I beg you, please.” He heard his friend Mohan saying.

”I am really concerned about you Mohan but for me you are just a friend,” he heard a female voice.

“Look here, I have a knife. I can cut my wrist and can die right here in front of your eyes. Please say yes. Come to me forever. I love you so much,” he heard his friend Mohan plead.

“Love? Do you really know the meaning of love? It’s nothing but lust. Love is a very pious emotion. Why don’t you understand? I really don’t have any such feelings for you.”

“So, to whom do you feel like that? With whom you want to sleep? These rosy cheeks belong to whom? Damn it. That must be Rohan. Isn’t it? But, I warn you, he is a poor guy. He can hardly give you a roof over your head; clothe you or feed you, leave along a loving life to live. Got it?” Mohan was saying with some anger.

“You are sick, Mohan. You need a Psychiatrist,” uttered the female voice.

“Oh I see, you mean to say that I am mad.”

Nobody had the idea that Mohan was schizophrenic. He had a different world of his own. He suffered from hallucinations.

When Rohan looked carefully at the female he recognized that she was Shanti who had started sobbing now.

Rohan appeared there at once, when he heard Mohan’s name. He was trembling out of fury. He was stunned. To his surprise, Mohan was proposing to Shanti forcibly. What a ferocious boy was he?

Rohan was shocked. What to do? How to save his Shanti from this devil?

Suddenly, Shanti embraced Rohan tightly, as tight as she could. Rohan got his conscious back. Mohan disappeared swiftly.

Rohan patted her shoulder to console. He took her to a nearby chum’s shop. After a while she felt a little relaxed.

Rohan asked politely, “Shanti, are you ok now?”



Shanti replied, “hmmm”

Rohan asked, “How do you know Mohan?”

Shanti replied, “We are from the same village. You know him too because he was at the college with us. I think he is a paranoid or schizophrenic. He scares me. I don’t like him.”

Rohan asked, “Oh I see. I will speak to him. Relax.”

Rohan ordered two cups of coffee and let her relax. Rohan took her hands in his hands and pressed a little to console her. Out of shyness her cheeks were ablaze. Her black suit was nicely fitting on her slim body. Her silver ear rings dangled and touched her cheeks so often. She left after finishing her coffee.

Rohan was still in shock for Mohan’s behavior. He decided that he will certainly speak to Mohan.

For some reason he had to move to his home town and it took a month. When he got back, he could see neither Mohan nor Shanti. He wandered for his love. He prayed to God to help her and to save her. He was very much worried about Shanti. He did not get any clue.

He searched on Facebook, inquired from her friends and the entire search engines on internet but all in vain. He understood that he had to spend his entire life all alone, without his love.

After that he never went to any date, never talked to any girl. He indulged himself in his studies and further in his job. He was so depressed. He left the idea of even a glance of Shanti. He cursed himself for not being able to express his feelings to her.

And as people say, 'the show must go on'. He has now crossed his thirty. He isolated himself totally and became a heart patient.

It was a sunny fresh morning. Rohan was feeling much better. It's so strange that love has a magical role in our lives. Sometimes medicine fails but some compassionate love and tender care can do miracles.

Rohan got up quickly and rushed to meet his little friend Kanti. While sitting on the soft grass, he sensed some familiar fragrance. He opened his eyes at once. A lady was carrying Kanti back. Rohan was desperate to see her but he could not.

On the very next day Rohan came in the valley a little earlier. He wished to see the lady at

least for once. He waited for long but Kanti did not appear. Rohan again found himself in a deep and dark isolated well. He drowned in that great grief.

After spending a couple of days at the hill station, Rohan was sitting and inhaling the fresh air outside in the verandah. He was asking the God to give him the reason to live. For whom should he live?

It is often said that to pray, one needs not to go to the Temple or to the Mosque. There is a direct, heart to heart connection or communication with the God Almighty. If the feelings are real and pious, God certainly listens and always does the best and the right things.

While praying and to Rohan's utter surprise, Kanti appeared from nowhere.

Kanti exclaimed, "Hey dude, I am here to take you to my home today."

Rohan surprisingly asked, "Hey Kanti, where have you been? I was looking for you my friend."

Rohan was delighted. He tried to lift him but Kanti was reluctant to let him do this and so he denied Rohan this favour.

Kanti said, "You should not lift me up, it may hurt you. I know you are a heart patient."

Rohan got wet eyes to witness so much compassion and concern for him from the little child.

Kanti spoke sadly, "It was my father's death anniversary, so we were busy in that."

Rohan asked in low tone, "Oh, I am extremely sorry. When did it happen?"

Kanti replied, "Mom told me that he was an impulsive person. He died all of a sudden. We could not even provide him first aid. Now we two are left alone in the family."

Rohan consoled him by wrapping his hand around his small body and gave him a warm and passionate hug.

Suddenly he pranced merrily and said, "I have something very special to show you."

Rohan asked, "What is that?"

Kanti replied, "A letter."

Rohan was very surprised to hear this, "Oh, a letter?"

Kanti shied a little and said, "But in the entire letter you will get only two words, Rohan and Shanti."

Rohan snatched the letter from his hands hastily. He tried hard to read that but could not. His tear filled eyes could not see clearly. He was as happy as a kid feels when he feels the joy to get his favorite ice cream. He started turning and rolling the letter.

Rohan wondered, “Where is Shanti? Is she your Mom?”

A tender and familiar voice came from the back. Shanti said politely, “I am right here Rohan. We suffered for the unknown sin. It would not have happened, if we were ever able to express our true feelings for each other at the right moment.”

Rohan looked at Shanti. She had not changed much. She was standing with her evergreen pretty face and one can die for kind of smile.

Rohan was ashamed, “I am sorry. I am your culprit. It is all because of me that you had to suffer all those hardships. I have been a coward all my life when it came to love.”

Rohan was sorry and had tears in his eyes. He sighed, “Oh Shanti, my soul craved for you forever. All the way from Nadi to Nandarivati, how come?”

Shanti said all in a single breath “When you left to your home town, Mohan forcibly brought me here because he was working for the Monasavu Dam and then married me. He had been in the delusion that I loved him. He had a fear to lose me too. He always used to torture me against your name and our relationship.” Shanti was saying and choked a little.

She continued, “I tried to make him understand but he never listened to me. Mohan was really a schizophrenic. I tried to help him but he used to throw the medicines. He wanted to win me but he could not win my heart Rohan. So when he used to lock me in the room after beating badly, writing your name was my only hope.”



Tears had started roiling down on her cheeks.

Rohan said, “Oh my God, you suffered a lot Shanti.” Shanti wiped her tears and asked Rohan to tell her about him.

Rohan replied, “I spent my life in loneliness and in your fond memories and kept remembering you only. I am still as bachelor as you left me.”

After a few minutes of stark silence Shanti managed to justify her living, “Mohan was never nice to our son Kanti and I. We never had a wife-husband or a father-son like bonding. With you Rohan, Kanti will definitely have a bonding of love and security.”

Kanti hesitatingly asked, “So would you come along to our place, dude? May I call you Dad?” Shanti blushed at the words of her son.

Rohan nodded and lifted up Kanti and placed him on his back. Now, Kanti didn’t deny Rohan this pleasant privilege.

He replied, “You are most welcome my son.” Kanti insisted, ”So, what is the delay, Mom and Dad?”

Rohan looked at Shanti and questioned from his eyes, for which Shanti lowered down her big eye lashes as usual to seal her agreement.

Rohan now felt lighter just like a feather. He wished to fly high in the sky of the valley of Nandarivatu.

Rohan asked merrily, “So, you people came here to take me along? Hah, I am ready to go with you but I have a condition.”

Shanti understood his romantic mood so sent Kanti to play. Shanti widened her eyes, lifted her heavy eye lashes with sparkling and mesmerizing eyes behind and asked, “And, what’s that?”

Rohan came closer to her now. Rohan whispered in her ears softly, “I need the same tight hug, which ....”

Shanti could not help but burst into tears. Rohan consoled her and took her in his arms. She embraced him tightly with her lean arms.

Rohan placed a warm kiss on her cheeks. Took out his ring and placed it on the finger of Shanti, “Oh Shanti, I love you so much, Please never leave me alone. By God’s grace we have united even though it is too late. Will you marry me Shanti?”

Shanti also whispered in Rohan’s ears, “Yes, it is late but perfect.”



The heavy white mist and frost started clearing in the arms of the vast mountains of Nandarivatu giving way for the two lovers to sing many songs of love and comfort all their life.

Now the beauty of nature presented Rohan the reason to live a better and worthy life. He got love of his life. It was a fresh cold breeze having the fragrance of sandal wood from the tropical forest adding a radiant romance in the air.

Now Rohan also had a family to love and care.



Dono bandhe huye is pyari zindgi se  
Phir bhi udne ko pankh pasaare  
Kabhi band pinjare se duniya dekhe  
Kabhi kankhiyon se ek dusare ko nihare.

@

Both are bonded tightly to their love life  
Spreading the wings to fly with no strife  
Looking at the world from their love cage  
Watching each other with love and craze.



# 14

## SHADES OF LOVE

**This** story begins around 1958 when I was at a college that was situated near the capital city Suva in the south eastern part of the Fiji Islands. The place was called Nasinu and I was there to be trained as a teacher.

I had just completed my high school education with excellent academic and sporting records at the old Natabua High School that was situated in the west of the country, five miles from the second largest city of Lautoka towards Nadi. I am eighteen years old and everyone who I should have been able to count

on in my life has helped me. This is one of the reasons of my success so far.



My Classroom of final year at Natabua

My life so far was mostly spent in the rural areas of the west side of the country. It is not hard to shake the family tree to find the truth about my past when one hails from a farming background.

The only touch of urban experience for me in those days was once a month visit to the municipal markets with my parents to sell our produce from the mixed farm where my ancestors after extracting themselves from their indentured system established as successful farmers.

The story is true as far as places, people, periods and purposes are concerned but when I began to add some of my own ideas, views and fantasies it could not be helped but it

gradually proceeded towards a somewhat fictional presentation. Every story an author narrates or writes has a journey behind it and this story has no exception.

After leaving so much of my past baggage of the early childhood and adolescent life, I arrived all excited and full of inspiration implanted by my old carriers' teachers of Natabua to land at this colonial educational institution of higher learning at the end of the first month of the year. In the hustle and bustle of the new but a lot more mature students I was able to settle down in one of the open dormitories. A new life began with a touch of urban experience.

Some initial orientation helped me to locate the necessary outlets such as the dining hall, the library, the assembly hall, the lecture rooms, recreation areas and the administrative building. My days of indoctrination and initiation began the next day after we were welcomed by the college administrator at the dining hall during the mass service. The rest of that night was spent to have a good sleep but not after getting the support of some of the new acquaintances and making them my friends or confidante.

The college administrative structure was made up of first, second and third year students

with principals, vice- principals, lecturers, prefects and other staff totalling about a thousand in all. So if I say that a rural based youth like me was somewhat lost in the amalgam of this setup made up of urban dwellers, is no exaggeration. However, things got manageable and familiar gradually as time and events proceeded and unfolded.



Nasinu Teachers' College

I think it is enough of the preliminaries. Lectures begin and students come out from their dens to mingle and manage their new relationship and status. A lot of human qualities are revealed in the interaction. I almost became a philanthropist by judging people from their conduct, character, charisma and communication.

*“WE acquire a particular quality by constantly acting in a particular way.”—Aristotle said this sometime long ago but it is so true even today. In my young days through interaction with*

wiser adults I learnt that much of this foundation comes from our parents and other elders, but we also learn these qualities from our mentors, spiritual teachers, and ideally, from the leaders for whom we work.

I was searching for some specific human qualities among my new colleagues and compatriots and look what I found in the collection. I was amazed but not surprised.

The people I began interacting with displayed a variety of good human qualities such as empathy, intuition, creativity, passion, and the desire to learn throughout their career. Of course, the qualities that made me more effective when working with them as individuals or as teams included being a good listener, being persuasive, being responsible, and being a leader. These and others like those qualities that formed the foundation of all other human qualities included honesty, integrity, courage, self-awareness, and wholeheartedness. These qualities defined who we were as human beings and more so as future teachers of an independent nation.

I soon found out that there were no greater human treasures than the highest human qualities such as compassion, courage and hope. Not even tragic accident or disaster

could destroy such treasures of the human heart and soul.



My Village School in Sabeto Nadi

Right from my childhood, my parents and teachers continuously tried to instill various good qualities in me not only because I came from a disciplined family but because the humanity dictated these actions for us to be truthful, good and beautiful in our words, actions, thoughts, character and heart.

Many of these qualities soon became known to be the true mark of peace, progress and prosperity for me not only at this educational institution but in the country I was destined to serve as an educator. I came to realize that it was up to the individual to imbibe these in order to become a good person and to lead a happy life.

In today's fast-paced and commercially orientated world, many of these human qualities are either low on priority or are



forgotten by some people. One question that bothered some of us then was 'when was the last time we actually helped a needy person by making an extra effort from our side?' but I am still eagerly looking for a suitable answer to this notion. However, I was fortunate to find many faithful friends among the congregation at the college.

It is at this juncture that my real story takes off to add honey to the mother's milk. I met a very pretty girl on Sunday at the gathering of religiously inclined people in the main hall of the college. It was a prayer meeting for the Christian students and I had strolled along there out of curiosity and my own comfort.

Being a Hindu, somewhat new and unaccustomed with this cultural group, I placed myself quietly at the back of the gathering thinking that no one would be taking any notice of my peaceful presence. This was not to be for that pretty girl in her white and serene attire did me a special favour. I had laid my humanistic eye on her heart and soul upon my entrance to the hall. Both of us were constantly conscious of our presence there but for some unknown reason she kept looking at me while singing the hymns and saying her prayers. I had never experienced such recognition in my life before but there is always the first of such memories.

This reactionary and automatic human conduct gave me slightly uneasy feeling in the beginning but gradually I began to respond to her with my smiles and even collected the hymn and prayer booklet to join in the singing of the glory of God. Gee I began to feel I already was part of the gathering. I had to tell myself to breath. *In and out. Out and In.*

The Sunday service ended and there was some refreshment so that we could socialize and interact with each other for future meetings. I was about to move out of the crowd because I did not know the people well and the ideas that they were promoting and preaching were foreign to me but my pretty little admirer stepped forward to introduce herself to me, "Hi, I am Daisy, the organizer of this Sunday Church service and I am glad to see you here today."

"Thank you for your welcome," I caught my breath; swallowed past the lump in my throat and responded with a smile and took her hand to tell her who I was; "I am Ron, a first year student looking to fit and adjust myself in the system."

Daisy very kindly and warmly invited me to share some refreshment with her and it was at this lucrative moment that I realized how

perfectly nature had constructed this piece of human being. She was depicting and presenting all the qualities of the girl I often had witnessed in many of my dreams.

While Daisy was getting the orange juice for me I began to internally imagine and visualize the personification of that modesty and the godly art form which was dangling artistically in front of my eyes and captivating my thoughts to tickle my heart and soul. She was not only beautiful physically but she was dazzling with brilliance and had no doubt taken my breath away forever. I do not know if I could term this incident as my love at first sight but it was almost akin to it.

I was very disappointed that such a pleasant atmosphere and such a glorious meeting had to be terminated because we had to respond to another scheduled programme of the college that was our lunch in the dining hall. However, my heart was still lingering and reacting to calm and collected atmosphere that Daisy had created for me at the main hall. No one at the dining table could notice the permanent smile on my countenance.

My eager eyes kept searching the magnanimous dining hall that housed the students to see if I could spot my newly found friend but I had to abandon the idea because

the seating arrangement was allocated according to the year of student entry. So somewhat disappointed and after the quick lunch I went to my dormitory to assess my predicaments. The day ended with our dinner in the same dining hall but still I had no luck to face my friend. That night was longer than usual and my slumber had been stolen by someone I could not positively identify as yet.

However, I had to wait for another Sunday before I could see my pretty companion because of the different lecture rooms, timetable arrangements and programmes for first, second and third year students. The busy first year programmes kept me engaged in other events until at last that long awaited Sunday morning arrived.

This Sunday morning brought a different way of thinking and perception for me that made me take extra care and precaution to get ready for that specific participation. After a hasty breakfast I began moving towards the main hall where the Christian group met for their Sunday service but in my eagerness and enthusiasm I had forgotten that it was only nine in the morning so I had to anxiously wait for another hour. I had to spend my time in the nearby library to update my current affairs and some other information.

A whisper in my ears astonished me because it was from Daisy to ask me to accompany her to the Sunday prayer meeting. I stood up pretending to be somewhat reluctant and followed her making her feel good and god knows what else. Today I was very warmly asked by Daisy to plant myself next to her and it all felt heavenly when the service began.

Every now and then in between the hymns, prayers and Bible reading our hands used to touch each other and that created a sensational effect that was so electrifying for me. I could not properly assess the emotions of the heart that was beating in the body next to me. However, one thing I knew for certain was that my centre of concentration was not on the words and actions of the preacher but elsewhere. I think this usually happens when a boy meets a beautiful girl for the first time.

So for many Sundays I kept my appointments in tact with my second year colleague and was eagerly looking forward to the next meeting of more entertainment, indoctrination and enlightenment. After every service and meeting I went back but began enumerating the idea of beauty whenever I was alone. The catalogue of her charm and beauty had become a regular repetition in my thoughts.

Daisy was a very pretty girl and she was a well-behaved lady. Her face was young without one blemish to mar her perfectly adorable complexion. She was not tall nor short, but somewhere in between. She held her noble head high with the air of confidence. Her hair was thick, soft and straight that blew softly in the mid-morning breeze. Her brow was soft, quizzical, and serene with purity and wisdom. Her jaw was set and her mouth was thin and straight. Then her eyes were deep as a great body of ocean just as blue, they looked through you without fear as if they already knew what they were looking for to find. Her dress was simple and she was very sensible.

After the mid semester the second year students had to go on teaching practice in their respective education district schools and Daisy had to be away for twelve weeks to be in the township of Ba where her parents lived. The catalogue of her charm and beauty that I had developed became my companion in her absence. This conduct turned my friendship for Daisy to a lot deeper kind of affection but I still could not confirm it as love.

On her return from her practical teaching assignment I met her with a hug and a kiss on her cold cheek. These and many subsequent warmer contacts gave us reason to say that we were gradually developing affectionate feelings

of love for each other. We began to communicate, converse and conduct our communion with greater interest, compassion, emotions and feelings. We began to feel that we were in love because we longed for each other's company.

Time was our enemy and moving ahead of us at the speed of a rocket. So when the school year ended Daisy graduated as a teacher to go out and take up a teaching assignment at a school near her home township of Ba and I went home on my Christmas holidays to Nadi.

The farewell party for the graduating students was a great event for the college where a lot of food, entertainment and enjoyment filled the occasion but departures from colleges do have their own aspects of sadness and tears. We too were part of this emotional presentation and predicament but managed to overcome because Daisy and I promised each other to consolidate our tender relationship soon when I was invited to visit her parents during the Christmas holidays.

We temporarily parted ways, Daisy went to Ba using the King's Road and the Sunbeam bus service and I boarded the Pacific transport heading on the Queen's Road to Nadi. We were both glad that we were with our respective families to rejuvenate, recharge and refill. As

we had agreed we would let them know our plans to turn our imminent love into some form of permanent relationship. Marriage was of course one of our real options but as I envisaged there were some plausible specific cultural incompatibility that could become our hurdle.

I arrived home after an absence of almost a year and my parents were very glad to renew my company. They together with my childhood 'lover', my nanny Radhika crouched around me to enquire about the college culture. Although I told them that it was an institution of higher learning where adult students intermingled and in the process some even developed that sort of deeper relationship which often required parental and societal intervention to strengthen them and give them validity, my parents as well as Radhika could not fully understand and appreciate the complexity of college culture.

My parents told me that I was now the most eligible bachelor of the village and they showed me photos of some girls whose parents had come with their proposal to betroth me in marriage. I indicated to my parents that I had some other plans. They did not pursue this any further but Radhika as my guardian took me on in a one to one conversation later.



I could never hide anything from Radhika and she was able to read me like an interesting open book. I confided in her about my intimate relationship with Daisy but she too had her reservation when I told her that she was a very staunch Christian. Although Radhika was quite amenable to such religious divisions and mixed marriages, she clearly saw danger ahead when it came to getting past my parents on the one hand and the parents of Daisy on the other.

As usual one evening she took me for a walk along the nearby stream and when we had settled down under the large shady tree, Radhika opened her sermon on family life. She emphasized that although two individuals who were considered to be compatible to form a lifelong partnership, marriage among the Hindus was not an individual relationship but a family affair where two families unite to interact in harmony.



My village was part of the Sleeping Giant

Radhika could not see the achievement of that vital objective in my case but she asked me to go and discuss these details with Daisy because as Radhika said, 'true love often shows lovers the way ahead and if it was not able to then some form of diversion was inevitable and maybe the only way'.

So when we returned from our 'sermon under the shady tree', I began planning to visit Daisy and her family to clarify some of the important issues that seemed incompatible in our case. I was in love and at least was prepared to discuss and find a solution to our religious indifference. I was not sure about Daisy and that was my reason to agree to meet her people.

I let one of my brother-in-laws who lived not far from Daisy know of all my plans and problems and Shiu, my brother-in-law, was able to arrange a suitable day and time for us to confer. A day or two before the scheduled meeting I arrived in the township of Ba where my love lived. I did not meet Daisy separately because I did not want to impose any of my views on her to put her under any obligation. A frank and open discussion was warranted because it was matter of spending the whole life together for us.

The day was Wednesday two days before Christmas and my brother-in-law, Shiu and I arrived at the humble home of the parents of Daisy just after ten in the morning. Daisy together with her mother, father and an elder sister were ready to welcome us. A special prayer was conducted by the elder sister for the success of our meeting and then we were served with the morning tea and some delicious homemade cakes and biscuits.

Someone had to start the ball rolling and when I saw that the time was rolling along at its own speed I dared to intervene. I was one of the best orators of my school so I collected some of those intrinsic skills and began articulating my discourse.

*“Mr and Mrs Bali, Miss Indira Bali, Daisy and Shiu, let me explain the rationale of this meeting. My name is Ron and I come from a farming background. My family has a history of dedicated Hindu following of over two centuries. I would soon be graduating as a teacher to work for the department of education. Daisy and I have spent very fruitful time together at the college for about a year. We have developed a special feeling for each other that can be termed as an affectionate situation that we have described as our love for each other. We have decided to get the blessings of our elders so that we can happily enter into a*

*lifelong partnership. However, there are a few socio cultural issues that need to be sorted out before we proceed. We will appreciate if we are frank enough and can come to some agreement to move ahead.”*

At this moment Daisy’s elder sister Indira took over the reins and began bombarding us with religious rhetoric and various forms of diatribe upon Hindus generally. The harangue that she dished out to us in her own home was never ever seen in our books and scriptures of etiquette where we honour and respect our guests as godly. *Atithi deva bhava.*

I felt ashamed to be there and was rather embarrassed at the conduct and treatment that was being accorded to me. Although Daisy attempted to calm her down, her parents nodded their support for what she was presenting as if it all was pre- arranged and rehearsed. So we were told to halt all our affection if there was any notion that we were going to remain as divided as we looked.

I did say that our different religious beliefs were our reason for the division of human race and we should believe in unity in diversity. I emphasized that while Daisy could follow her Christian way of life, my parents would gladly allow me to either support her or continue with my beliefs regardless. I told them that

there was no way I could disrespect the wishes of my parents and break the two century old Hindu tradition. My compromise to live with Daisy as a simple human being was my solution. All these ultimately fell on deaf ears maybe because of some form of religious bigotry, prejudice or hatred for Hinduism. I kept wondering why people preached love and passion when they were in places of prayers but failed desperately to honour these ideals in their real life. Naturally I was hurt and very disappointed.

Very blunt remarks were dished out at me by the father who gave me only one choice if I wanted to maintain any relationship with his daughter and that was to convert myself and be baptized as a Christian. The mother and sister supported this idea but I never came to know what Daisy felt about that stipulation.

The concept was a strange one for me because I always belonged to the world I inhabit and did not bother about a fake atmosphere that people had created for them when they changed their religion. My socialization had always been with people of similar background and status. Today I found that I was in a wrong company.

I knew that my parents had worked their guts out and butts off to afford a good life for me.

They instilled a balanced way of life that they called Hinduism. We were born as Hindus and there was no conversion or process of baptismal. We were original people and I loved the way I was brought up. I found it very difficult to cope and criticism for my way of life. There was never any mentality where *us and them* came in my life.

I looked at my brother-in-law Shiu who seemed to indicate to me that enough was enough as far as the search for any compromise was concerned. I then changed the topic of discussion and enjoyed the rest of the delicious refreshment. We then talked about the destruction caused by the recent floods in Ba.

This gave me some consolation to my broken heart but my body and soul were burning with rage and disappointment. I felt like giving a lot more of my piece of mind on the matter of cross cultural marriage and the hypocrisy that was displayed before us but then I knew that it was no use brushing the black pot with any other colour.

Everything was over in about an hour and the love that had not even fully bloomed as yet was thwarted by the enemies of human unity and compassion. In the name of religious indifference two lovers were told to part ways

forever. Religion definitely proved to be the opium of the society for some people.

However, one thing did please me and that was a gift that Daisy passed on to me that contained her sari clad photo and the Bible. At least I kept her photo with me and regarded her as a friend and the reading of the Bible enriched my understanding of humanity a little better.

All this socio cultural fiasco did not hit me hard immediately but as we were driving away from Daisy's home a feeling of indifference was slowly developing within me. By the time I reached home I was totally devastated and distraught because I lost my lover. I have never known what kind of response, reaction and feelings were contained and sustained by Daisy. In a way that was good because I did not develop any hatred for her.

I took my comfort and refuge in the pious company of Radhika once more and narrated the whole depressing story of our separation and split on the basis of our religious beliefs and our inability to reach an acceptable compromise to maintain our love. Radhika consoled me with her wisdom, "Better now than later."

She fully understood that I had just terminated a close relationship with one of my college mates and I was somewhat a broken person. Radhika among a lot of other sound advice on the issue, warned me to be careful when trying to fix a broken person because if I did then I may cut myself on the shattered pieces. So she wanted me to change the way I looked at things, then maybe the things I looked at would change as well. A definite change came to my way of thinking and I have never looked back on my terminated relationship ever since. I have always been indebted to Radhika for her indulgence.

Radhika asked me to go and visit my grandmother and I was glad I did that because my grandmother was like some sort of psychic-mind-reader, a real voodoo- mamma. She held my hands and it appeared to me that all my secrets, pains and sorrows had been revealed to her. She gave me some rice pudding to eat using the same spoon and the same dish that she was eating from.

After remaining silent for a while she began to bless me, "*Badkana*, (my eldest) you are everything to me. I love you as if you are part of my own. Every so often someone special comes into your life and it is so monumental that it begins to mark time. It is like a date is forever imprinted on your heart. After that



everything else is of no value to you and you begin to wonder what you will do without them. That my child is love and soon you will meet the lady of your life who will tame you, guide you and direct you to happiness in your life. My blessings are with you.”

I wrote and wished Daisy well and said she was always free to do whatever she liked with her life. I did confirm my wish to remain her faithful and sincere friend. I never received any reply to my communication. I knew that she did not take the whole affair well because she did tell my brother-in-law sometime later that she would neither forgive me nor try to forget me. How sad?

After spending the rest of the holidays with my family and friends I went back to the college to finish my course in February, 1959. By this time I was elected as an important member of the student council and became their treasurer. Thus I was given a lot more responsibilities to supervise and manage the duties of fellow students. This was a position of leadership and it helped me to reorganize my priorities and press on regardless with my life.

Life began moving and there came a lot of OMG moments where I was surprised by my

friends and colleagues with their love and affection. I developed a love for books and began reading a variety of authors in English as well as Hindi languages. As a result of this I found that there was nothing better to get lost but in books. Consequently, as time moved I too became a writer and began writing short stories, articles and poems for various media outlets and newspapers. Many of my stories and poems began publishing and some even got broadcast as musical presentation by radio stations. They were called Geeton Bhari Kahani.

My love for books brought me into close contact with a very smart librarian who would help me find and select books of my liking and interest. As time passed she became a valuable asset for me and I began to like her company. She was kind, considerate and very discreet in her disposition and dealings. In matters of human affection I was once bitten twice shy to proceed with any confidence.

So my instinct warned me to let the sleeping dog lie and continue developing my network of good as well as faithful friends. Soon I had almost all the college as my trusted mates who included people of all the ethnic groups, socio-economic sets and cultural as well as religious sections. I was one of the luckiest and richest participants in the social fabrics of that

institution. This and my other attributes such as dramatic skills, sporting displays and literary flare made me popular. Naturally I was proud of my contributions as a student and student leader.

Daisy appeared nowhere on the screens of my life or radar of my thoughts and I was glad to hear that she got married to a priest from her church. This news was very soothing for me because I got rid of all my guilt and deception that I may have inadvertently developed within me about myself because of our sudden split and separation. I assured myself to honour the friendship of my one time lover and let my life proceed with no hangover and no extra baggage. I felt good and I was certain that Daisy would have had similar feelings and live a happy married life with her Christian husband.

My life began to move in the faster lane of useful living and I began to enjoy things with a lot of meaning and better understanding. I began to spend most of my spare time in the college library where I kept meeting Rose, the lovely librarian. I came to realize that persistence and resilience only came to us if we took advantage of the chances and opportunities to work through our difficult problems. I was glad that Rose began to provide me with all those opportunities.

I was a changed person wanting to get a lot more out of my life. I wanted someone to enter my life to change me so that I could better appreciate, comprehend and enjoy every aspect of my living. I was ready to take that important step in my life but I wanted someone who could develop affection for me after knowing my past. I felt that there should be no dark spots and doubts in my new found love. Then and then only that love would develop and flourish in its pure form. I was eagerly waiting for that memorable moment.

I had some broken dreams but I did not take them as the end of the road. I began discussing various things with my librarian friend. She was a great listener and had some wonderful advice to give. One day after listening to some of my past stories, Rose advised me that the time had come for me to develop some new dreams and find a new direction in my life. I took those ideas seriously and began to see things differently.

I believed that sailors could not change the direction of the wind but they certainly could adjust their sails to always reach their destination. I needed to adjust my thinking and my perception of my future. Although Rose and I were from different leagues we managed to merge at some point in our future

paths. Consequently, I began to see Rose differently and she began to respond to my needs with greater interest and care. We began to like each other's company and our new world of affection was gradually emerging on the horizon. Her deep brown eyes were often glaring in to my soul to see every dark secret that was there. I was slowly but surely being addicted, intoxicated by the looks of the lady I began to adore and maybe drugged by her charm.

It was a bright Monday morning and I was on my way to supervise and check the activities of students on special duties and I had to walk past the library. Today Rose, the librarian was standing in the verandah with the sun shining directly on to her divine figure that I had never witnessed before. I stopped, looked and listened to my heart that was singing altogether a different song of beauty, love and joy this morning.

I then realized that Rose had a sculpted figure which was well-groomed. Her waist was tapered and she had a burnished complexion. A pair of arched eyebrows looked down on sweeping eyelashes. Her delicate ears wore a pair of dangling gold ear rings. A set of dazzling, angel-white teeth gleamed as she gently moved from the sunshine to the shade. It was a pleasure to see her there this morning

with her sun shadow-black hair. Her enticing, constellation-brown eyes gazed at me over her puffy, heart shaped lips. She had a bouncy personality and a sugary voice, which I adored. I still remember the brilliant shine of the gold necklace that had a special pendant.

I was fully convinced that she was one of the Angels from heaven that had descended to anoint me and she wore vibrant clothes. I was mesmerized but managed to greet her, “Good Morning, Rose.”

The reply that came to me with a mystic smile pieced my heart with the sweetness of fresh honey and I could not just stand there and wonder but I moved nearer to whisper, “I love you, Rose.”

It turned out that I disturbed the pretty shadow of an Angel in the pond because she shyly moved inside the library and reluctantly I kept going on my way but still walking backwards so that I could get the glimpse of the fairy that had just vanished from sight yet was still lingering in my thoughts. She was gorgeous, sweet and intoxicating. There was something about her that I could not get out of my system.

On my return journey from my duties, I walked through the verandah of the library

just to get another clear glimpse of Rose and she came out and whispered to me in a dulcet voice as sweet as any songbird could ever sing, "I love you too."

That made my life and I kept going on with my daily chores thinking that she was a very pretty girl and I knew that at first sight that she was the one specially sent for my welfare. She was a well-behaved lady with a face that was young without any blemish to mar its perfectly pink complexion.

I went straight to the person who was in-charge of the seating arrangements in the dining hall and requested that Rose be placed next to me henceforth for all our meals. From then on we began to enjoy our talking, walking and eating together almost daily. This developed our life and escalated our love to a new height.

We strengthened our affection and continued enjoying our reading for pleasure in the library, in the gardens and in the college compound but the year had to come to an end for me to depart from college on my graduation. Rose on the other hand had another year to spend corresponding and communicating with me through various distant means and methods before we decided

to tie the knot of marriage and lead a happy family life.

I vividly remember Rose saying on my departure from college after my graduation in December 1959, “At any time you can decide to change the road you are on in life and take a new direction to follow a new trail. You are the only one who really knows what you want from life and if you are on the right path.”



So I did decide and was indeed happy that I found a new direction, new trail and a perfect road that I had not taken before. I loved to travel on that road for over fifty years before we had to change our directions again but this time it all was for our unconditional love, affection, compassion and passion for each other. Rose gave her everything to and for me. She came empty handed and went away empty handed as well. However, the treasure that she gave me is my family and I miss her.

My Rose, My Pretty Lotus, My Love Life and my beloved wife are no more but all her fond words, actions, thoughts, character and heart



that I have been able to treasure are my survival kit of life. They are my fond memories. Nothing and nothing would ever change this ever or until I am around on this earth.

We hope to rekindle our everlasting love life when our souls amalgamate once again somewhere in heaven. Until then I live for my Rose and I will continue to love my Rose instinctually because she was the only person who loved me unconditionally.

I did say in the beginning of this presentation that this is a real life development and I now feel I have poured my heart out to express my shades of love. The first one was a judgment misplaced and the second one became mine forever all because of sound judgment and deeper understanding. We were compatible in most of our human qualities.

I have a specific regret though. After our marriage Rose told me that she was ridiculed by one of Daisy's friends by saying that Rose had stolen Daisy's first love. She found a photo of Daisy in my wallet and asked me to return it to her with an apology. I returned the photo to Daisy but did not send any apology because I thought that the issue was dead and forgotten. That is where I found out that they were like chalk and cheese in their conduct.

However, towards the end of her life Rose had her last wish to either make her accept her apology or let her be ready for many more curses and punishment for the misdeeds and rumours she had spread.

After the demise of Rose I wrote to Daisy conveying the simple message and the last wish of Rose but Daisy was so adamant, foolish and rude that she completely misunderstood the good intentions that Rose had to apologize and keep that friendship alive.

It was not to be and just as well.

I am happy without the friendship and company of people who are living as hypocrites and are dodging from reality in life. I have no place for people who conduct themselves as sanctimonious and prudish individuals. They always fail desperately because simultaneously they endeavour to be double faced without much success.

I have developed a dislike for such people because of obvious reasons. The two different shades of love that I experienced in my life gave me a very sound understanding of core values of human beings. On the one hand I had Maya, an illusion that was trying to encompass my life with some temporary

emotion that was not deep enough to materialize. Then on the other side were the qualities of reality, clarity and purity of the pretty lotus revealing enlightenment and a deep sense of sacrifice. They were the two sides of the same coin called females, but Maya was the tail and my Rose was the head.



# 15

## Life Is Full Of Colours

**One** of my childhood friends, Julia used to say that life was full of colours by circumstances and situations. However, after witnessing all the colours, all that I saw in the end was grey. I do not think if grey is even a colour. This story begins from where most stories end so it is a narrative in retrospect.

Nathan and I had spent our afternoon at the nearby gym on the treadmills, exercise bikes and other devises and did some pushups and sit ups as well. What happened after our afternoon at the gym was the greatest pleasure and then left us all painful for the rest of our life. We met each other a month ago and were getting used to our relationship as friends.

It was a Friday evening and I was at the Gym with my sister Clare but she left early because she had a date with her boy friend Joshua. Since our apartment was going to be unattended that evening I decided to finish off my time at the gym and head off home. On my last sit up I faced off with a very amused looking Nathan who had come to do his bit at the gym as usual but he did not know that I was there as well.



He was smiling that gorgeous crooked smile and crouched down in front of my workout ball. He was dressed in his gym gear and had on long black shorts, a grey singlet and black trainers. As usual he looked adorable, edible and delicious.

“If I had known that you were going to be here in those tight little workout pants then I would have started my work out a lot earlier.” Nathan said allowing his eyes to rove over every inch of my body. That look alone was setting my blood to boil. I could not help but smile at him. He was really charming and as much as I knew he was not the guy for me because he was the son of the richest business man in town and I was an ordinary personal assistant to my celebrity sister Clare. But I really like him and I was so dangerously attracted to him that I often forgot my humble persona.

Nathan stood from his crouch and unfolded his long glorious body like a panther that was ready to pounce. My breath faltered once but I gained my composure. I did not want to be more than just a friend to him for obvious reasons. There was not one ounce of flesh on his body that was not toned and taut. He was incredibly handsome and therefore totally out of my league.

Since my sister Clare had an appointment elsewhere, I was planning a quiet night in the apartment with a book and some take away. As I was finishing off my work out, I saw Nathan watching me through the mirrored walls. I could not deny that it gave me a special thrill to know that he was doing that

but I tried to act as nonchalant as possible and got ready to leave the gym. Just as I was about to head out of the door, Nathan called me. "Wait Evelyn."

I turned to look at him. He was covered in sweat that made him look all so sexy that I could not stand it. My body went in to that kind of overdrive that made me crawl before him when he was in my space.

"Can I take you to dinner tonight? As friends of course," he added almost as an afterthought.

"Actually I was planning a quiet night in." I said calmly and was proud of myself for trying to turn him down but I could see that he was not going to take a no for an answer.

Nathan cocks his head to the side and looks at me through his thick long lashes. He smiles and I could notice his white teeth and dimples. "I could do that and bring over the best take away and we could watch a movie!"

I wanted him to do that but then my thoughts of incompatibility withheld me for a while. Then the thought of good food and watching a movie with Nathan tempted me. Then another thought rushed off in the mind of a single unattached girl. That was not a good idea for

how would I resist him when we were alone at the apartment? What if he tried to do something odd? I would not be able to say no or the truth was that I would not be able to say no.

*'We had agreed to be friends though so I should have been able to enjoy a dinner with him,'* I thought and before I could think any further Nathan said, "Okay, how about 7 tonight. I bring the food and you arrange the movie.

Nathan looked relieved and I accepted the proposition. I turned toward the door and walked away feeling that I had just made a deal with the devil.

"I can't wait Evelyn." However, even if I did not turn around I could feel that sexy smile in his voice and I knew those eyes were just staring through the back of my head like a laser beam.

Nathan arrived at Evelyn's apartment a little earlier after collecting some of the best take away foods in the town as well as a six pack of Corona to match the food. He knocked twice and waited.





*The door swung open to reveal Evelyn dressed in the best of her evening wear. Her clothes were sculptured to her body and hugged her hips and legs perfectly. No make ups and yet she looked gorgeous for the evening.*

I smile and push the door further back so that Nathan could enter. “Here let me help you with those.” I took the six-pack and led us through the apartment towards the patio. We settled and were happy to eat in the balcony with an awesome view of the city.

Yum, the food was amazing and the drinks went well. It was time to do some chit chat before the movie. I could not resist letting Nathan know a little bit of my past. “You know Nathan, it is just that sometimes I wonder if meeting the man of my dreams is on the card for me because the last relationship I had has left me a little torn apart.”

Nathan was listening to me very attentively and asked, “But how?”

“Well after two years together I found out that he had been cheating on me with numerous other girls while talking to me about marriage and the life together,” I take a deep breath and calm myself down. With a few more revelation about each other we rose from the table and started cleaning the place.

Nathan took the large bag of popcorn over to the sofa inside the entertainment centre and was ready to watch the movie. I settled on to the large sectional sofa close to Nathan to begin the show.

I did not know where to sit on the sofa because if I sat too far from Nathan, it would look weird but I did not want to sit right next to him because that could be worse. However, I plopped myself down next to Nathan but not close enough to touch. The fact was that I wanted to sit right on his lap and snuggle in to his chest while we watched the movie but that would have gone against everything I was trying to stick with.

I pointed the remote at the TV and the movie began. We were sitting in silence watching the opening credits of the movie Top Gun, the best of Tom Cruise. There is a hum of electricity in

the air and I could feel it emanating off Nathan. I was sure he could feel it coming off me too. I turned the lights off because it was too bright to watch the movie with all of them on.

As soon as I relaxed on the sofa Nathan placed his hand along the back of it and rested his right hand on my shoulder and that sent goose bumps flying up and down my arms. I do not move. I do not say anything. I do not even seem to breathe and pretended that it was not affecting me at all. But I found it hard to concentrate on the movie.

Nathan's fingers started to rub tiny circles across the exposed skin on my shoulder. Each of those rotations sent sparks flying through my veins and I was feeling all lit up inside. I was trying to concentrate on breathing normally and not letting him know that all that was affecting me. I was failing miserably. I could hear the shortness in each breath that left my lips.

Nathan moved much closer to me than before. My legs were tucked beneath me and my knees were angled towards him. He sat right next to me and draped his right arm lazily across my thighs. OMG I could not breathe. He looked so calm, so casual and so

unaffected compared to me. *How could he hold it together so easily when I was about to burst?*

Like before, Nathan started to absently draw circles with his fingers on my thighs. That began to send tingles to various places within my body and I was trying desperately to maintain my composure but he was making it so difficult. I wanted to scream at him to stop but my inside did not let me. While I was trying to rationalize all these in my head, Nathan turned his head and stared at me with those beautiful blue eyes. His face was lit up on one side from the television screen and he looked edible, delicious and palatable.

My breath stuttered as he looked from my eyes to my lips and back to my eyes again. I bit my bottom lip and tried to remove my gaze from his because I could not think straight when I was looking at him. Before I was able to think of my next step, Nathan moved towards me and warned me, "I am going to kiss you." As if he was giving me a chance to say no.

Then when his warm, sinful lips touched mine and our mouths met, I could not even try to stop that even if I wanted to. Nathan was kissing me slowly and with purpose. This was different to the kisses we shared before, a lot more sweeter, softer and deeper.

He dragged me on to his lap and I went willingly. He maneuvered me so my legs ended up either side of his. I straddled him and curled my arms around his neck to tangle my fingers in to his hair, tugging it slightly as we kissed. Nathan's arms were anchored to my hips and his fingertips were biting in to my flesh.

Nathan controlled the kiss and took his time so that we were eating at each other but taking in every moment of it. He brought his hands to cup my face and his palms were resting on my cheeks. He tilted my head slightly and changed the angle of the kiss so that we could reach every part of each other's mouth.

This was heaven, pure heaven. Nathan was saying, "I am not going to take this too far but I just want to touch you everywhere you will allow." I let him touch me anywhere he wanted.

His hands moved beneath my top and tickled across my stomach and over my ribs. I squirmed slightly at the touch, not only because it tickled but because it awakened feelings in other areas on my body that would soon need attention if he continued. His hands moved onward and upward until he reached the lace of my white bra. He dragged a hand

across my breast and I gasped at the contact. His palm cupped my breast while this thumb ran across my nipple causing it to harden at his touch.

Our kisses grew more urgent and I could feel Nathan's arousal against my thigh. My willpower had left the apartment and all the reasons that I was not going to do this had abandoned me. Right then I was his to do as he pleased. Just as I reached to undo his belt buckle, he pulled back abruptly and gazed down at me. Breathing heavily he said, "Evelyn, we need to stop."

My eyes flew wide at that comment and my mind screamed, *'why the hell would we do that?'*

Nathan sat back and pulled me up with him. I sat up, straightened up my top and wiped my face. I began to wonder what had happened or what I did wrong that brought us to this sudden halt.

Nathan looked troubled and there was a pin drop silence in the room. By now we had lost all interest in Tom Cruise movie. Nathan began to justify his inaction, "Evelyn, we had agreed that we would not do anything stupid and remain friends until we consolidated our relationship."

I wanted to tell him that I loved what he did and I wanted him to do it again and again and again but I respected his wishes. He stood up and held out his hand for me to pull me off the sofa. My inside was churning and I was still reeling because I wanted him to throw me back down on to the sofa and continue where we had left off.

Nathan turned and grabbed his jacket from the back of the chair where he had left it. "Thank you for a great evening Evelyn. I will see you tomorrow."

As I watched him leave the apartment, I realized that I had no idea what had just happened. With a deep cleansing breath I turned off the movie and headed to my room. I needed a cold shower and the go to bed.

Things did not end there and for that I thanked Nathan and the god almighty. Nathan was a very responsible person who never ever took advantage of poor me even if he was one of the richest men I met. Gradually all the colours in our life became so bright and clear with our relationship that transformed our friendship into a love that changed our physical, emotional and spiritual composition. We began to feel as if our souls had merged

and we needed to celebrate this natural human emotion.

It was early March in 2014 when Nathan was to fly to Beijing on a business trip and wanted to take me with him for some very specific reason and I agreed to travel with him. We left Brisbane on 2<sup>nd</sup> of March and after spending a few wonderful days in Malaysia, Nathan boarded the Malaysian Airline Flight 370 on 8<sup>th</sup> March and asked me to follow him three days later when he finished his business meeting in Beijing.



Nathan gave me a sealed envelope and said I should open it when I was at the foot of the Great Wall of China. I kept that envelope safely in my purse as his treasure because he said that it contained his heart and soul and a message of his life.



I booked my flight to Langkawi to spend a few days with one of my friends there after seeing Nathan off from the Kuala Lumpur Airport to Beijing.

I had hardly settled down at the Ocean Residence in Langkawi that the media started relaying the terrible news about Malaysian Airline Flight 370. Firstly, I could not believe it but when all the TV, radio and newspapers relayed the same news of the demise of the plane that was carrying my Nathan I broke down and lost all my strength.

I flew back to Kuala Lumpur to catch up with the tragic news and find out more about Nathan with a very strong hope in my mind that all the news would turn out to be false and I would join Nathan in Beijing soon. That was not to be.

I then looked at the sealed envelope that Nathan had given me. With my trembling fingers I tore the envelope and read the content therein.

*Darling Evelyn,  
I will be waiting for you on top of the Great Wall of China to make my proposal on March 14 and I want you to join me for the celebration.  
Love you heaps.*

*Yours and Only Yours, Nathan.*



Completely devastated and distraught I flew back to Brisbane and did not know what to do any more. There, next to the photo of Nathan in my apartment lay bunches of flowers that gave no hope and clue about my future. Although the flowers had come with good intentions they looked dull, lifeless and pale to me. My only solace was my sister Clare and her friends.

It had been a week after the tragic news of Nathan and my sister Clare and I searched all websites, all news media and talked to every related organization to give us any information about Nathan but our hopes began to fade as time moved on. We are still searching.

My world became colourless and everything around me turned discoloured. The words of my friend began to dangle in front of me. Life

had become colourless because of the circumstance and situation. All I could see and feel was grey and I could not understand if grey was a colour at all.

It was one of those days when my mind was drastically restless. In an attempt to free it, I left the house, allowing my wandering consciousness to search for peace, condolence and relief. One of my favourite places to visit when I needed time alone was the seashore at the Golden Beach in Caloundra.



Its immensity was of no concern to me, but in actual fact the ocean was calm, tranquil and vast; full of life. The rolling waves that were crashing onto the beach below reached in lightly touching my feet on the wet sand. Though I had not gone deeper in the sea the

water seemed to have reached deep into me for something unidentifiable. As I was leaving I observed again, the splendourous blue of the magnificent sea and its calming effects.

*Blue, the calm colour of inner strength and peace that Nathan provided me had all disappeared.*

The nearby park was a place of exquisiteness; it was a reminder of the perfect balance that nature had in place. If only my balance could be so perfect. It was a long walk before I could find a quiet location. Lying down on the spongy grass, the smell of the freshly mowed lawns was strong but soothing; bringing back treasured memories of the time Nathan was still here, when we would lie down and watch the sky run away as the world turned.

The effortless gliding of the seagulls in the air, the crawling of the ants along the footpath but most of all the gentle swaying of the huge trees above, the whispering between the leaves of the hidden knowledge they possessed. This was a splendid solace for me.

Today, however, was a much quieter day. The gulls stayed out at sea but a draft of air continued to blow in gently, lightly brushing at the trees. It was a serene atmosphere, nature always remained composed but it kept us

either disturbed or disdained depending on the circumstances and situations. I felt a part of me lying there on the luscious green grass with Nathan. I shared my imaginative relationship with him.

*The green grass touched us. Green, a restful colour of renewal, balance and harmony made us feel different.*

The sun was lowering itself towards the west and below the horizon. It was the end of another day. People were beginning to leave, the city was slowing down. As the people gathered and left, the park emptied. The only sounds left were the cars heading south down the highway towards Brisbane where I was not yet ready to go because a lot of grey was spread there.

It left an eerie feeling. The end of a day seemed to signify the end of my life too. Above the city, the sky displayed unparalleled beauty, coloured in countless shades of orange, and the darkest on the east stretching towards the golden sun where the shades of orange glowed brightly. The great star of my life had lost its gleam earlier; its new colour was mellow with a hint of gold. To me, it represented hope. The setting of the sun indicated the end of the day but with that, it brought the prospect of a brand new one.

*I could visualize images that were orange, an energizing colour of warmth and energy. There were some images of yellow, a cheerful colour of happiness and joy that seemed to drift away from me.*

As the night set in and the traffic finally died down, the lights of the city began to shine, like how the stars in the sky illuminated and animated the darkness. Stargazing brought upon me some childhood memories, my youthful days when lying in the rural fields of my parent's farm in Botini. That was a remarkable routine almost every night but it was no more. The twinkling glimmer of the celestial bodies had always amused me, the way they were all spread apart they were free from each other, free from influences and most of all free from burdens, sorrows and loneliness. I could still see the shadows of Nathan but without any colours.

As I sat up, I saw a phenomenon, far out from the shore; the darkness was lit purple, by what looked like a flowing river of glowing lights. Twisting and turning, the constant stream of neon meandered its way across the mysterious darkness. In the midst of this darkness there was a tiny light that made me feel I was with Nathan.

*That was revealing everything purple in my life, a mysterious colour of nobility and spirituality which was fast disappearing into the oblivion.*

*The business world was mourning the loss of the most eligible bachelor.*

Though the lightshow only lasted a couple of minutes, it conveyed to me an indefinable sensation but it was a pleasant one nonetheless. The feelings that had taken place were not complete but they were sufficient to sooth my soul. All these took a while to comprehend, but the natural world although is full of truth, beauty and goodness has unpredictable occurrences. However, we humans live with hope and unlike the artificial world we live in, we must find a peaceful place to exist. Then eventually all the colours should returned to me.

*Well, all but one, the colour red which is the colour of love and affection. To me, there is no one who can replace my Nathan, but now and again, I observe shades of pink, representing me, but only occasionally until I too join him.*



# 16

## THE DIFFERENCE IS IN OUR OUTLOOK

**During** my early childhood I used to accompany my grandfather to the nearby village shop in the weekends to get our essential groceries for the week.

On one of our journeys we met a few labourers who were building concrete posts and structures. My grandfather was an inquisitive old man and so he asked the first workman a question, “What is being constructed here my friend?”

The workman who was sweating in the hot sun and looked tired, stopped working for a while to say, “Don’t you see I am mixing concrete to make some pillars.”

My grandfather said, “Yes, my brother I can see what you are doing but what will be constructed here?”



The labourer then got somewhat annoyed and snapped, "I do not know. I am getting bored and tired breaking concrete and stones here but here are you worrying about what would be built here. What a joke!"

Disappointed with the abrupt and annoying response of the first labourer we began moving ahead and eventually met another workman who was also involved in some form of construction work. My grandfather put the same question to him, "My brother, what will be built here?"

The workman stopped, listened and looked at my grandfather with surprise and began saying, "Look old man. I do not care what is being built here. It can be a temple or a jail, what is there for me? I get my wages at the end of the day and that is all I care. After collecting my wages I go home to appear here again tomorrow. It is none of my business to find out what is being built here."

Both my grandfather and I were still unsatisfied in getting some positive and reasonable answer to our simple question so we proceeded ahead and met the third member of the work team. Once again my grandfather put a similar question to him, "What will be built here my dear friend?"

This worker stopped his work, came near us and sat down on a completed post. He then began his explanation.

The workman said, “Dear friend we are building a temple here. This village has no large enough temple or mandir for our people to pray and meditate. We have to go to the nearby village across the river to pray, meditate and participate in all our festivities. I am also from this village like all the other workers. When I use my spade or chisel to build these posts and pillars I hear the sound of pleasant music that comes out from these activities. I feel good because in a few weeks we will have our own place to pray, meet and sing songs of praise for our God. I keep enjoying my work so much that when I am sleeping at home I imagine the benefits that this temple is going to give to all of us. In between my work I get so enchanted that I start singing devotional songs. I have never enjoyed my work so much in my life and I feel very happy.”

My grandfather praised him for his work ethics by saying, “This is the true meaning and objective of this life, my dear friend. We should never perform any work thinking that it is a laborious task for us and feel annoyed about the work. The work life of your other

workers seems to be boring and they are only concerned with the wages they get at the end of the day. However, you have taken this duty as an enjoyable responsibility that will give you and your people tremendous benefits. I am happy that you take your work as your mission and enjoy every minute of it.”

We went on to buy our groceries but my grandfather introduced me to the essence of work and labour by saying that we must enjoy whatever work we do. Take work as our pleasant duty and be responsible for what you do with interest and pleasure. Then every worker will be happy and healthy in his or her outlook. The difference is in our outlook to perform our responsibilities with dignity, respect and honour.

I salute my grandfather for his lesson on work ethics.



# 17

## EPILOGUE TO THIS COLLECTION

These stories were written by me, an amateur writer, and therefore may not reveal all the usual elements of short stories. Most of my stories have themes that depict my own social and cultural background and upbringing.

There is an amalgam of my own language Hindustani with English, which has been my second language.

As a result of some of these factors my short stories may need specific interpretation, controlled appreciation and careful understanding but they all make enjoyable reading with some inspiration and a few lessons for the readers.

Good reading.



## APPRECIATION

My prime appreciation goes to Professor Emeritus Satendra Nandan of University of Canberra. Professor Nandan inspired me to keep writing the short stories for pleasure and kept giving me valuable ideas for creativity.

The Preface to this collection was written by one of my admirers who would like to remain anonymous and I thank her for the creative comments.

Then I thank all my teachers including my beloved wife Saroj for instilling a love of Literature in me from my early school days that continued through my life.

The initial script of this collection was read by many of my colleagues, friends and relatives for the purpose of editing and providing the needed suggestions to encourage an amateur writer. They deserve my hearty thanks.

Of course, I thank my class mate, colleague and friend Jagdeesh Sahay for honouring this collection by writing the Foreword and Mrs Padma Singh for putting in her thoughts in the Prologue and detailed editing.

Finally you the readers are my greatest hope for my further creative contributions. So let me sincerely thank you all in anticipation of your critique and comments.

Ram Lakhan Prasad. October, 2015.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad hails from a small but culturally rich village of Fiji known as Botini which is situated at the foot of the mountain range called The Sleeping Giant. Dr Prasad was raised by his parents and grandparents on a large mixed farm and received all his primary, secondary and college education in Fiji. He received his tertiary education in UK, NZ, Australia and USA. He has been a social worker, a successful teacher, an education administrator, a curriculum developer, an examiner and a human resource practitioner. He now lives in retirement in Brisbane.

Dr Prasad has written and published over fifty Hindi and English books in a variety of genres; novels, novellas, poems, short stories, religious invocations, parental guides and other managerial as well as motivational publications. All these and other publications can be read on the website [www.free.ebooks.com](http://www.free.ebooks.com) .

Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad's interest in writing continues and after the sad passing away of his wife Saroj, he loves ghazals and shaayari which have been creating a healing process for him.

**LET US LIVE AND GIVE**

**WHEN OUR TONGUE STOPS TO TALK  
WE BEGIN TO THINK CLEARLY  
OUR HEART BEGINS TO SAY THINGS  
WHEN THE HEART GOES SILENT  
THEN OUR BRAIN BEGINS TO SPEAK  
WHEN THE BRAIN QUIETENS DOWN  
THEN OUR SOUL STARTS CONVERSING  
WHEN OUR SOUL GETS SILENT  
WE MOVE TO THE HEAVEN  
THUS WE ATTAIN NIRVANA  
AND REACH OUR SALVATION  
THIS IS THE PROCESS OF NATURE  
THIS IS OUR LIFE AND WAY OF LIVING  
DEATH IS NOT AN END OF LIFE  
IT IS THE BEGINNING OF NEW LIFE  
SUPREME POWER GUIDES US ALL  
HOPE AND BELIEF MAKE US HUMAN  
TRUTH BEAUTY AND GOODNESS  
ARE THE ESSENCE OF HUMANITY  
SO LET US LIVE AND GIVE  
WE ARE HERE TO ENJOY LIFE  
KEEP TALKING AND KEEP GOING.**

## **Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad**

### **OTHER PUBLICATIONS OF THE AUTHOR**

1. **Motivating the Unmotivated –Management (M)**
2. **Motivation Towards 2000-M**
3. **History & Development of Education in Fiji-History -H**
4. **History of the Fiji Teachers' Union -H**
5. **Selling Tactfully- A Customer Driven Approach -M**
6. **A Guide To Parents**
7. **People Power- Managing People in the Business World-M**
8. **Reflections - H**
9. **Motivation Techniques for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century HR Managers**
10. **Blood Sweat & Tears of An Indentured Family -H**
11. **Power Of Parenting**
12. **Innovations Views Religious**
13. **Songs of My Soul - Poetry**
14. **The Bhagvad Gita (Translation)**
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16. **Future of Fate – Bhawishye Ka Bhaagye - Novel**
17. **Colours Of Love – Pyar Ke Rang- Novel**
18. **Love Is Fire Love Is Flame - Poetry**
19. **To Love & Cherish -Poetry**
20. **Feeling of Despair -Novel**
21. **Bond of Love- Pyar Ka Bandhan -Novel**
22. **An Anthology of Poems**
23. **A Collection of Hindi Short Stories**
24. **A Collection Of Shaayari**
25. **Home Alone- Tanhaii - Poetry**
26. **My Way The Highway- Poetry**
27. **When The Going Gets Tough- Poetry**
28. **The Angel of the Family- H**
29. **The Treasury of Fond Memories -H**
30. **The Return Of The Pretty Lotus - Novel**
31. **Incomplete Dreams - Novel**
32. **Everlasting Love - Poetry**
33. **Attachment – A Collection Of English Short Stories**
34. **Atma Ki Pukar - Poetry**
35. **Shradhanjali- Poetry**
36. **Loneliness – Poetry**



**MY ATTACHMENTS- MY ANURAAG**



**'ANURAAG'**

**ATTACHMENT**

I loved writing these stories because that is how my characters felt in their pain and joy, passion and rage, their yearning and cry against injustice. This became a window into the other world, a path to my imagination and realization of my dreams.

**A  
Collection  
Of  
Short  
Stories**

**"ATTACHMENT"**

**A  
Collection  
Of  
Twelve  
Captivating  
Short  
Stories**

**BY**

**Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad**

**2015**

# COMMENTS