

OUR
DIFFERENT
PATHS
Book 1

M.B. MOHAN

OUR DIFFERENT
PATHS

By

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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Our Different Paths

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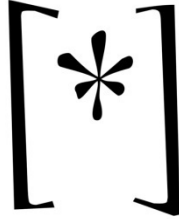
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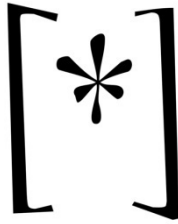


DEDICATED TO
T. NARASIMHULU,
BELOVED GRANDPA.

YOU MADE ME UNDERSTAND
WHY GRAND IS ADDED BEFORE THE WORD
'PARENTS'.

TO ME, YOU WERE MORE THAN A FATHER.
THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING.

YOU WILL BE LOVED
AND MISSED FOREVER.



CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE

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DEDICATION

PREFACE

PROLOGUE

5 AM

**THE TROUBLED CHILDHOOD AND THE
FIRST MEETING**

**MYSTERIOUS POWER AND THE
DECISION**

9 AM

**THE CRUSHED HEART: OUR NEW HOME
HER**

THE CONSEQUENCES

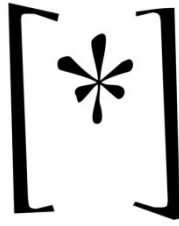
THE CONFESSION

11 AM

TO BE CONTINUED...

MEET THE CHARACTERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PREFACE

Before you begin reading the book, I would like to tell you something. Thank you for buying the book and taking your precious time to go through this. Since childhood, I used to get fascinated by the stories I used to read and the movies I used to watch. My inspiration for storytelling came from the book "Trojan War" which I read in school. I hope that you will like this book and give your support for my future books also.

I would like to thank my grandparents and parents for their never-ending support and trust in me. I appreciate and hope I can give the same love they showered upon me. These people who I am about to say are the most important ones who helped me in the process of making this book. Without them, this book would not have been completed. My brother Nagarjuna Muthyala, my friend Chandu Rao, and my editor-cum-

cover illustrator Freddy Torres Vega, these people listen patiently to my never-ending stories and give their genuine feedback. I like to thank Freddy once again and Faerie for introducing me to the literary world through their "DigitInk Magazine" author launch program. I am grateful for all the friends who supported me from the time I said I wanted to become an author to the time of completion of this book.

This first book from the three-part series came from an idea of telling a story from the viewpoint of an anti-hero. I always wanted to know what these people think and what goes on in their minds. Not all of them will have same thoughts, and not all of them will be bad from the point of their birth. Sometimes people go through tough times and become the people who we never imagined. This book tells you about the life of Mike and John, right from their childhood. Experience their world through their eyes. Happy reading.

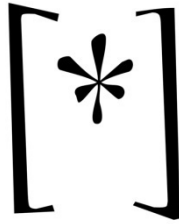


PROLOGUE

We were travelling in the Ford Mustang, the car I have always dreamed of having. "This is it," my mind told me. The soundless drizzle of rain fell on my face while the wonderful petrichor hypnotised me. I was resting my head on her lap and looking at her dimples which were playing hide and seek with her hair. It was an impressive sight to the mortals. "I am ill and yet you guys are making me drive and having fun at the back. I hope all our problems come to an end with the money we have," John said with a sigh and smiled while driving the car. "I hope so, and I also wish not to get struck by lightning on our path," Mamta said in a witty way.

I couldn't believe that we were finally moving to our destination. Our minds were full of peace, and we were leaving our anger and struggles behind us. We were celebrating and moving our bodies to the tunes of pop

songs in the car, and that's when "Wake up, baby" song started playing. I was baffled and asked John, "Where did you get this song? I don't have it on my playlist." "What song?" he replied unknowingly. I looked at the car stereo for the name of the song, to my surprise, it was a different song.



5 AM

(Continued from the prologue)

WAKE UP, BABY. WAKE UP, BABY; "Why am I keep on hearing this song?" I said to myself. I couldn't figure it out for a moment. I woke up suddenly and realised that the song which was playing, was my phone's alarm. For a second, I felt like DiCaprio in 'Inception' movie. At a particular stage in sleep, our senses carry messages to the brain and merge with involuntary imaginations. It was a pleasant dream, and I wanted it to come real.

"Let me sleep for 1 more hour, daddy," Mamta said while she was still in sleep. "She still feels that she is in her home," I said to myself. I came out of the room and noticed that John was not there in the house. I called his number a couple of times, but he did not pick up.

"That idiot might be still at our friends' house," I said to myself. I didn't want to wake her up, so I left a note

on the table near the bed lamp saying that, "Hello love, good morning. John isn't lifting the call, so I am going out to bring him home. I will be back before 7 A.M. Bye."

I took my bike, as our friends' house was 10 miles away from our house. Once I reached, I parked my bike. I rang the doorbell twice, but nobody opened the door. The door got opened as I pushed it a little. The room was filled with full of alcohol smell. All our friends along with John were sleeping in the hall. The room was messy, and each one of them was asleep in unusual sleeping positions. Pizzas were hanging on the wall, and the walls were so dirty with all the cheese and pieces of crushed vegetables.

I went near John and tried to wake him up. But he was drunk as hell. I didn't know that he drinks too. I slapped him two times and said, "John! Wake up; we are getting late." I took a water bottle from the refrigerator and poured some water on his face.

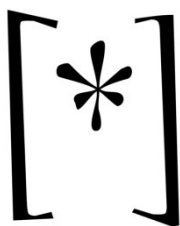
After 2 minutes, he slightly opened his eyes and said, "Hi Mike, sorry for coming late."

"No John, you didn't come. You are still at our friends' house. Now get up, we have got work to do," I said.

"Oh! Then sorry again, Mike. Pull me up, and take that bag which is on the table," he said.

I came out of the house with John and closed the door slowly. I made him sit on the bike and kept the bag on the front. He fell asleep again on the way. We reached our home by 6.30 A.M. I placed him on the couch, in the hall and decided to let him sleep up to some time, as he was still in the hangover.

I opened the bag which John told me to bring. I was shocked to see guns in it. "Guns! From where did John get them? But, why do we need guns to do a robbery, when I have the power?" I said to myself. I wanted to ask him, but I decided to wait until he wakes up.



THE TROUBLED CHILDHOOD AND THE FIRST MEETING:

My father, Danny Bradac and I used to live in an open countryside of a place called Agaara. It was an exquisite place to live which had a sea on one end and lush green forest on the other. I was 7-years-old, and it was a Christmas night. The whole streets were filled with children's playful screams and laughter. I was pouring wine into my father's glass, and my hands were trembling with fear. I lost my grip, and the bottle plummeted to the ground. The wine spilt all over the place, and it was flowing like blood. I was shocked, scared and stood there unmoving, looking at the broken pieces and crossed my fingers hoping that my father won't beat me or torture me. He slightly bent his head and took a deep breath out of frustration. The next minute he dragged me towards him and started strangling me. I tried to remove his hands from my neck, but I couldn't. All of a sudden

he stopped. He lifted me up furiously and threw me against the wall. "How many times do I have to tell you until you learn to do things right with perfection?" he said with a grim expression. The eyes of him turned red like lava. "You are as useless as this trash can," he shouted at me, pointing at the trash can in the corner.

The smell of wine engulfed the whole room. My father stood up and kicked the chair with full power. Father turned to his right and went inside the washroom. "He may have gone to wash off spilt wine, off his dress," I said to myself. I was leaning against the wall, and blood drops were falling one by one from my right temple onto the ground. I lifted my shirt up and wiped off some of it. A clattering sound came from inside, and it startled me for a moment. The door got opened with a thud sound, and my father looked like a beast. He brought a head of a toothbrush in his hand. The fingers of his left hand went through my hair slowly and caught my hair from their roots. He tightened the grip and lifted me from the floor. He stared at me like a falcon looking at its prey and ordered me to clean entire dirt in the house by placing that toothbrush head in my hands. I became speechless, and I didn't know what to do. That crazy man with no emotions made me his slave, and his destructive actions had no limits. Tears moved down from my eyes, and I fell on my knees. "Dad, no dad, please don't do this," I pleaded

with my hands around his legs. The rock showed no mercy and hit me in the face with his knee.

Though I was bleeding and sobbing, he didn't even care. The monster left, and I cleaned the whole house with that toothbrush head. The pain was unbearable. He did not just cause me physical scars, but also caused mental scars. Since I was four years old, every single day he beat me for one thing or the other, one day for the wine spilling and the other day for not having a haircut.

He was a 45-year-old medium sized man, but with strong arms and faded hairstyle, he used to look exactly like a military man. His eyebrows were thick and dark. He was a ruthless man with no sense of humour and a man of discipline. "We were a happy family until you came into this world," he used to say to me. Sometimes I think, maybe I am. My mother, Sarah left the family just after two months of my birth and my brother Bradley, left a year after. I do not remember his face, apparently. My father never revealed why my mother and brother left, but all I can guess was that my brother loved the mother, so much.

I spent most of the nights in my childhood, gazing at the stars, thinking that one of them might come down and save me from the evil. I believed that those stars were knights in silver armour protecting the universe against darkness. "The weeping

idiot", I named myself because there was no end to my tears. It was hard for me to keep up with the pain.

A day before my fourteenth birthday, it began raining intensely. I was perched on the seat, at the entrance of our home taking a gander at the nightfall. The hanging plate with the name of my dad carved on it was shaking and hitting the wooden pillar, due to the heavy wind. All of a sudden, I heard the howl of a wolf. It sounded so near. The people spotted the wild animals often, as our place was near to the forest. My dad was not there at home. At that age, being alone and the musings of a wild animal would send chills into anybody's spine. I quickly ran into the house and closed the door.

I heard a growling sound followed by the screams of a kid. I was terrified but also wanted to know what was happening. I slightly opened the window, since it was dark and being tinted by rain, couldn't see anything. "Maybe it was coming from the backyard of the house," I said to myself. I decided to be prepared for the worst. I saw my father's gun in the hall, took it in my hands and tried to remember the times when my daddy used it for hunting. It was a shotgun with the maximum holding capacity of two bullets. Though it was too heavy for me, I managed to hold it and opened the back door slowly.

So many people were running into their homes, screaming and some of them were running like mad horses. Will

it be Robbers, Wild animals or pirates; thoughts were just running in my mind. I went further, and the lightning strikes which were hitting the sea and the ground, made me feel like it was the end of the world. The land was too muddy. I was not able to determine distinctly what was in front of me. But that didn't stop me from moving further. I took a deep breath and took a step forward.

The more I went near; the snarling sound became louder and louder. I could not trust my eyes when I saw that creature. It was mammoth and had huge paws. Its teeth were about the size of an adult's finger. The look of it made my blood run cold. It wasn't just fear; it was more than that. A little boy was moving backwards and crying for help. His pup, a German shepherd, was barking at the wolf, and it was not at all afraid of it. Sometimes when our loved ones are in danger, we don't worry about our welfare. That was the same thing which the dog was doing. It cared about its owner's life more than its own. Within a moment, the wolf ran towards the boy and the pup.

I aimed and fired at the wolf. The first bullet missed, and my hands started shivering. My heart skipped a beat, but I shot it again, this time it hit the wolf. The wolf fell as the bullet hit it right in the stomach, and everything took place in a moment. The boy was covered with full of sweat, and the pup was still barking.

I moved closer to the wolf, and as soon as I am about 5 yards distance from it, it jumped onto me. I dodged to my right and ran to protect the little boy and the pup. Though the wolf was bleeding, its anger and hunger for its prey didn't decrease. But it wasn't moving like before; it became slow. I felt like it was intimidating and making me weak. The wolf wasn't something which I loved or cared for. My ego and the anger slowly eclipsed my fear. I shook my head and became totally out of control. I couldn't let an animal kill me, no, not in a million years.

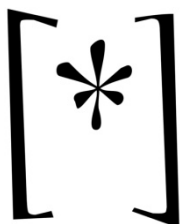
The wolf turned to our side and charged at us. But this time not giving me enough time to fire. So I quickly reversed the gun and placed my both hands on the barrel and fore-end. I hit the wolf as hard as possible; the stock of the shotgun struck its jaws. The lower jaw of the wolf broke; however, was hanging, as its edges of the skin clung to its body. The beast fell to the ground, and it was growling in pain. I landed three blows on its head again. It was like, "Thud! Thud! Thud!" and it died. Its head burst opened into pieces. It was gory and disturbing. No, I didn't want to land those three blows. I couldn't stop myself as my body wasn't in my control. Feeling this adrenaline rushing through my body like never before.

That boy hugged me, and he was shivering and crying. Though he was in shock, he thanked me. I lifted the pup up, and it licked my face. I didn't know why, but I was happy to see them alive. We heard some people shouting from far away. All I

can see was the light of their lamps, and as they were getting nearer, I can hear them yelling a name. Suddenly that boy pulled me and said, "They are searching for me." I was shocked to hear that, but without asking anything, I took him and the pup to our storeroom which was near to my house. We rushed inside, and I opened the basement door. It was pitch dark, but with much difficulty, we went down the stairs. Before coming down, I closed the door to the basement from inside. When closed, no stranger could tell whether that storeroom contained a basement or not. I didn't lock the storeroom, as I wanted them to think that the storeroom was empty. When they pushed the door, we started hearing their voices. We heard three voices. The sounds of their footsteps captivated our thoughts. After going through all that abuse, I was more afraid of humans. I placed my hand on the mouth of pup without blocking its nose, so that it won't bark. "There's no one here, let's take whatever we need from this trash and sail away," one of them shouted. "Who are these people? And whatever they are, the guy who just spoke might be their leader," I said to myself.

After a while, slowly, one by one left the room, and suddenly there was absolute silence. We were relieved, and we came out from the basement after few minutes. I leant against the wall, and my breathing was so high, I thought that I would die of a heart attack. John laid on his back on the ground and

pup slept on his right side. So calmly, he just kept looking at the roof. "Don't worry. I can understand how you are feeling. You are safe with me," I said. "No, you can't. You can't know how I feel. The areas I have stayed, the things I have seen and situations I have gone through, you don't know them," he said turning to my right while still lying on the ground. I noticed some of the things, his clothes were of slaves, his hair was messy, and his body was emitting an odour of fish. I decided to stay calm. "Ok, let's talk in the morning. I will be leaving now. You can sleep in the basement, and I know it's dark, but please adjust," I said with a smile. He nodded his head, and I left the room with my gun. I closed the room from outside and looked at the weapon. It was broken, and the stock got completely crushed.



MYSTERIOUS POWER **AND THE DECISION**

I WENT INSIDE THE HOUSE, dreading about the punishment, which my dad would give me. He was perched on the seat with his hands cross folded. I stood at the secondary passage entrance not moving an inch. I felt like my body got paralysed from neck to feet. "Where's the gun?" he questioned. I knew he was going to see my end. I didn't utter a word. He stood up and came towards me, and bent down. He smiled and slowly moved his hand over my head. "Are you deaf? I am asking you. Where is it?" he shouted suddenly and slapped me. Tears started rolling, and I slowly showed him the broken gun, which I was hiding behind me. His eyes became outsized when he saw the broken stock of the shotgun. "Dad, please let me tell you what happened, I didn't break it deliberately," I wanted to tell him this. But the words didn't come out of my mouth. I kept praying to God. I had closed my eyes and crossed my fingers. Feeling a strong force on my chest,

which was like getting hit by a truck. He hit me with his right leg, which made me slip and roll from the steps. I fell outside.

He took up a wooden log which was the size of a baseball bat. He kicked me in the stomach with his leg and lifted me up. "Your brother left us without saying a word. He didn't even think about us, never bothered how we are going to live our lives. But I have to admit, during all that time, he was never like you. No matter how much of a mischievous child, he was outside, he neither damaged anything nor did silly things. He was always focused. Looking at him doing his activities with such finesse was a pleasure. But You! You are such a disgrace to our family," he kept taunting me, and I was just looking at him without blinking. "I always hated you. My wife and my son left me; In fact, I lost my everything. It is all because of you. And you will never become like Bradley." Within a moment the wooden log struck me on the left side of the head. His words were reaching my mind. Still, I wasn't in a state to comprehend them. I lost my consciousness and fell on the ground.

Everything was white, all I can see was white and nothing else. I didn't know where I was and I was

perplexed. Then I remembered that I got struck by a log. To be exact, my dad hit me and left me on the ground. Abruptly, felt a warm touch on my hand. "Hello, are you okay? I am John Rehn, the boy you saved last night," I heard a voice, and it brought me to my senses. I slowly came out of the deep sleep. The image of him looked blurry to me at first. I rubbed my eyes and looked at him. There he was with a smile on his face, but with a bit of worry in his eyes. "What happened? What's up with that bandage on the forehead?" he asked. "Hey! How are you? And yeah, this, don't worry about it. It's just a bruise," I replied.

"What do you mean by just a bruise, your forehead is swollen, and the bandage is all red in colour, and don't try to convince me that it is not blood and is just painted," he confronted.

"You do have a funny way of arguing," I chuckled and continued, "My dad hit me yesterday, he always does. But yesterday night it was like a nightmare. He said a lot of things and I can't recall most of it. After I had come out of the storeroom yesterday, I figured out that the shotgun was broken. When he found the same, his rage stormed out of him. And I was beaten black and blue."

"I am sorry. You saved my life. The way you fought with that wolf yesterday amazed me. The strength you have and your fearless attitude isn't something which I have seen before. And seeing you, like this is heart-breaking," he said and placed his pup on the bed which was yipping on the ground.

It jumped onto my stomach and started running towards my face to lick. John stopped it and whispered in its ears to calm it down and told me, "Sorry, my Rocky just wants to play with you."

"No issues and thank you for your concern. I am not sure why I helped you. Being here with my abusive dad, helping is the last thing I would think of doing. It just struck me in my mind. There was no one to help me whenever I was in need of help, so I decided to help you. And one thing I forgot to ask. How did you find my house? And did my dad see you?"

"There were only a few houses near to your storeroom. I found you when I was peeping through the windows. No, your dad didn't see me and I guess he went out before I came. The door wasn't locked, and I came in," he replied.

"Cool, you are smart. Ok then, what's your story? I am curious to know," I asked him.

"I used to live on an island called, 'The Blue Islet' which is 300 miles away from here. My mother and dad, they are drug addicts. Since my childhood, they used to fight with each other. Due to the inclination, they were never in their right minds. They got dismissed from their jobs and spent all the money in the house. Slowly they started selling things in the house, one by one. I used to do all the work in the house when they were just doing drugs in the hall. They beat me, scolded me and destroyed my childhood entirely. When all the things in the house got sold, they decided to sell me to the drug dealers in exchange for drugs. They drugged me at night, tied my hands and legs with a rope. And they sealed my mouth with a tape. When I reopened my eyes, I was there on the ship in the corner of the deck. Those drug dealers made me wear this dirty dress; moreover, they ordered me to do cleaning and chores on the ship for a plate of rice, two times a day. I did whatever they told me, and I was just waiting for a moment to escape. I found Rocky on the deck, and I fed it with food I used to get, and it became my friend. After two days of the voyage, they anchored their

ship here, to get the required food and to eat at the hotel nearby. I looked around; there was nobody on the ship. I crawled to the edge of the ship and lifted myself up until I can see them clearly. They were drinking, eating and partying; I took my chances and jumped into the water. I swam towards the shore and ran all the way. And that's when the wolf started chasing me," he replied.

He said everything so fast without taking his breath. Though his eyes were moist with tears, he was happy. That might be because he was far away now, from his parents.

"That's a sad past. You are a brave boy, not me. Dealing with such parents and making out alive from the clutches of vicious drug dealers isn't a small thing. In this kind of situations, very rare will survive," I said and leant against the headboard of the bed.

"Yes, thanks. Luckily I did. You said your dad has always beaten you, right? But have you never defended yourself? The way you fought with that wolf and the way you are letting your dad beat you up is just not matching," he said and got up to see the books on the desk.

"How many years old are you?" I inquired him.

"Ten," he replied.

"You are asking too many questions for such a young age, but anyways I will tell you. If I want, I can leave the house anytime, but I can neither defend his attacks nor counter attack him. The sole reason I lived all this time here, is that I had a hope that he will change, now it's all gone. And more than animals, I feared humans all my life. Though I love my dad, I won't deny the fact that I hate him too. If only I had strength to change him or defeat him," I said and cried.

"You know what, today is my birthday. And I will tell you a story of a thief from my favourite book. First of all, do you like stories?" I asked him with excitement.

"Yes, yes, though I am choosy in reading. I will listen to the story since it is your birthday. But make sure it is not boring," John said and gave a wink.

He has messy curly hair and small brown eyes. Although he looks innocent, he has a funny way of saying things.

"Ok," I said and winked back at him with a smile.

I told him to bring the book which was on the desk. He brought it, and I said, "Here we go."

I started reading the story aloud, and he sat cross folding his legs on the bed. Rocky slept on his thighs. After

a few minutes of reading, when I spelt a word "Mirror", a glow formed behind the mirror which was hung against the wall. The light which was like artificial fire glimmered around it for a few minutes, and the mirror vanished.

Our jaws dropped, and heads were blown. When we were still in shock, the mirror appeared again in the same place. We couldn't understand what was happening. Thinking that it might be our imagination, we started again. I started from the beginning of the sentence. When I uttered the word "mirror" again, it disappeared the same way it happened before. We couldn't believe our eyes, and John was scratching his head.

"Holly Dolly, what the hell is happening in your house?" he said and checked the area where the mirror was placed. Two minutes passed away, we were in absolute shock and John stood there watching the wall. Mirror again appeared, this time with a delay of two minutes. He jumped right back onto the bed in a reverse way.

"I am not sure what's happening when the first time mirror got disappeared, it came back within two seconds, and now it took two minutes. Why is this even happening? Is it because I am uttering the word "Mirror",

or something else?" I said to myself. John was looking at me like how a student who doesn't know mathematics, looks at the board in the math class. "Keep calm and wait, when this is all over, I will explain what's happening," I said to John. I spelt it out, and the same damn thing happened. But I waited and waited. Half an hour passed, it didn't come back. Is it disappearing or going somewhere else? I just couldn't understand. I wasn't ready to accept it. So I decided to try it again. There was a flowerpot on the desk with the artificial flowers in it. I spelt the word "Flowerpot", but nothing happened. It was still right there. "Is it happening only when I am reading from a book or what? So many questions started to rise in my mind. I got up with much difficulty and searched for the word "Flowerpot" in every book I had. I found it at last and spelt it aloud. It disappeared the same way as the mirror did. "Damn!" Our eyes were on stalks. I just couldn't believe it and closed my mouth with my two hands while sitting on the bed. The flower pot never came back.

"They are going somewhere else," I said to John after thinking for a minute, while still recovering from disbelief.

"Like, to any area? Place? Or whole different country?" he asked me.

"I don't know. It can be anything, area; place or it can be another country too. Or there might be a little possibility of them going into a different dimension as some scientists claim that different dimensions do exist," I said and told him to search for the word "Comb" in every book.

"Dimensions! Are you serious? Or just kidding?" he asked me and agreed to my request.

"Like I said, there is a possibility. You see strange things happening here; they are not normal. We didn't know that powers exist in real life too and now we saw it, we can't deny it. Likewise, there might be things which we can't see or feel. A wise man once said, 'We don't know what we don't know.' And you act like you know about dimensions. For a boy of 10, what are the odds?"

"I know how this sounds. Still, I do know some things about science. I used to read the books only if I liked the cover pages. There was this book in the bookstore near to my house. The cover front attracted me; it was like, "A young man was standing in front of a shadowy black thing and trying to enter into it." The book was full of

topics related to dimensions, parallel universes and other weird science stuff. Though I couldn't understand everything in it, it was interesting, and I learnt some things," he said while searching for the word.

"I found it," he said.

"That's cool. Ok now, spell that word," I said.

He spelt it out, but the comb on the desk didn't disappear.

"It is only happening, when you are reading it," he said. What he said was true, it was going on only because of me. As I witnessed that many surprises and came to know those many things in a day, it was too much for me, as I was ill. "Ok, I will take some rest, and we will talk about it later. Don't worry about food; I will bring it to you," I said without telling him directly to leave.

"Bye. See ya!" he said with a broad smile and ran off with Rocky.

I took some rest and woke up in the evening. My dad didn't come home yet. Although I was in pain, I completed all the chores. I sat on the steps at the entrance of my house and started looking at all the children playing happily with their parents. There wasn't a particular day where I didn't think about how my mother looks in person.

I wanted to play with her, touch her, hold her and cry and tell all the things which I never could. And my brother, he left father and me when I was little. I hate him for that. He never thought at least once about me and how I am going to live all alone. If he had thought, he wouldn't have left.

I wanted to abandon the house because I couldn't keep up with my dad anymore. But I wanted my dad to pay the price for all the things he did. Even if there was one percent chance through which I can change him with the power I had. I wanted to do it.

It was 9 P.M, and my dad just came home. I was asleep on the steps, and suddenly he woke me up by hitting with his legs on my thighs. I kept calm, got up and shifted aside. I waited until he slept and made some food for John. When I opened the storeroom door, he was playing happily with Rocky. I sat with him and offered him food. It was heart-warming to see him happy. Once he was done with eating, I explained him about my plan. As I expected, he remained calm and was in shock to hear what I was going to do to my dad.

"Are you sure about this? You may not see him after this," he said.

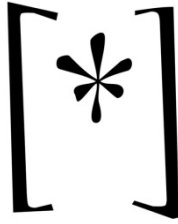
"I know, and I also know it is not right, but I have decided to do it," I said and took a comb out of my pocket. I also took out a paper and pen. "I want to try it one more time," I said. "Again?" he said with surprise. "Yes," I nodded. I wrote the word, "comb" on a paper and spelt it out. To my surprise, nothing happened. It didn't move an inch. I was baffled and gave the paper and pen to John. I instructed him to write the same word on the paper. I took the paper, once he is done with it. I spelt it aloud; the comb disappeared and didn't re-appear even after 15 minutes. I understood what happened and told him to write three words on the paper. He wrote them and gave the paper back to me. "I noticed two things. One, I couldn't vanish that thing when I have written, but it was possible when you (the other person) wrote it. Two: the things which were going into the other dimension or to any place, they will not stay permanently in that dimension or place. The first time when the mirror disappeared, it came back in a second, and for the second attempt, it took 2 minutes to come back. In the third time, it didn't even come back. All things which will disappear will eventually come back, sooner or later. Unfortunately, we can't predict when they will be back," I said without

giving him any chance to talk. His mouth was wide open, and he suddenly burst out laughing. "What's so funny?" I asked. "This power, it is illogical. It's unbelievable and ridiculous. The things you are saying about the power, even if they are true, they sound ridiculous," he replied with a gust of laugh. "I know it sounds crazy, boy. Sometimes things we can't understand can be funny, but when we can understand them or at least believe in them, they will show their true strength. When you got the power, why doubt it, mock it, or even raise questions, when you can embrace it and use it," I said and got up. "Where are you going? Listen, I am sorry," he said. "Be ready, we are leaving tomorrow from here," I said and left the room.

The whole night I couldn't sleep, I just kept staring at the roof. Handling those emotions was tough. I was not sure whether the power works on people or not. But I wanted to go ahead with my decision, no matter what. The rays of the sun hit me in the face while they crept in through the window. Though it happens daily, I felt it like a sign telling me that it wasn't the start of the day, but the start of a new beginning. Thud! Thud! I started to hear the sounds of the axe cutting into the woods, coming from the

backyard. "It must be my dad," I said to myself while going outside and took the paper with me. "Daddy!" I called him. He turned to my side and said, "What?"

I hesitated at first when I saw the axe in his hand. But I ran towards him and hugged him firmly. "Sorry," I said and went back two steps. "What are you doing?" he yelled at me. "You will know soon, dad," I said and took the paper out from my pocket. As I didn't want to hear anything from him, I spelt out the words before he could say anything, "Farewell, my dad Danny Bradac."



9 AM

I WAITED UNTIL THEY WOKE UP. I consumed most of that time thinking about the future; Thoughts of things we wanted to do, the places we wanted to see and the things we wanted to buy made me much more determined. I was confident that with my power, the robbery would be so easy. As I was thinking, Mamta came down from the first floor.

"Hey! Mike, sorry I was fully tired and slept up to this time. I thought you would wake me up," she said.

"It is ok, love. No worries," I said.

John woke up when he heard our voices. "The robbery is done, brother. We can leave now," I said.

"What? How can you do that? Why didn't you wake me up?" John said and saw Mamta who was standing somewhat far from us.

"You are such a fool, John. You got so drunk last night at our friends' house, and I brought you home this morning. And how can you wake up now and shout at me?" I said.

"Oh! I am sorry, Mike. Last night our friends forced me to drink, and sorry that I didn't tell you that I have a habit of drinking. I thought you would scold me. And hey Mamta! Is that you? How come, you are at our place?" and "Mike, you said everything to her? When did she come home?" he said.

"Yes, John. This is Mamta. And Mike said everything to me. I came here last night, and I am coming with you guys," she said with happiness in her eyes.

"Ok, I think it's time. Let me explain how we are going to rob the bank," I said, and we went into our bedroom and sat on the bed.

"John, from where did you get those handguns, and why did you get them? What's the need? I have the power, right?" I asked him.

"Yes Mike, I agree. But what if the power doesn't work out, and we fall into risk. So, before going to the friends' house, I requested one of the guys I know, and he

gave me. But once our work is done, we have to return them," he said.

"Ok, good," I said and continued, "The bank we are going to rob is Orange Leaf Bank. We can do this in 2 ways. So choose any one. One, it is an easy way. We vanish everyone in the bank, and we can get in and get the money. Two not so easy, we vanish the security cameras first, and then security guards. Then we will enter into the bank with guns, and aim our guns at the employees. And then we will tell one of them who has a password to the central locker, to open it. Then we will take the cash and come out. And I am picking the second way," I said.

"I am also picking the 2nd way," she said.

"Okay, I am also fine with the 2nd way. But why 2nd way, when we can do it easily with the 1st way," John said.

"Yes, right. We can do it easily. But trust me, 2nd way is both easy and fun," I said and told them to get ready. Once we were ready, we took the bags and kept Rocky inside the house and locked the door.



THE CRUSHED HEART: **OUR NEW HOME**

TO MY SURPRISE, my father vanished. The only one who I had in my family gone forever. I searched the house and took the money, which daddy had and whatever things John and I needed. "Let's go," I said, and then the look on John's face was unforgettable. The calmness in my face and the way I said it casually was a bit of a shocker for him. "Why can't we live in this place?" he asked. "The first thing is, we don't know anyone here. And we have to go out to explore and achieve something in the world. For that, we need to do something; also, this house reminds me of my dad and the bad things he did, every second. And staying here will only do more harm to me than good. I don't want to get traumatised by all those bad and sad

memories of my past," I said. John and Rocky joined me as I started moving forward.

We boarded a bus which was going to Caister. It was all new for us. The new places, new faces and their cultures were reminding me of the characters and stories I read in books. I had never thought I would be moving out of my place, but things changed, and there I was moving to an entirely unknown place. We had to alight at a place called Cherrytown. From Cherrytown, we had to board another bus to go to Myrefall. While on the way, somebody said, that place was comfortable to live and do work. We stopped at a bus station of Cherrytown to board another bus. It was around 7.30 P.M. We waited for 30 minutes, but no bus arrived. I asked at the inquiry for information; they said it got delayed due to breakdown. I came and sat on the bench, where John and Rocky were sitting.

"Look at that cry-baby; I wish he had some of the strength we had," John said and pointed the finger at a person who was sitting diagonally to our left and two benches away from us. "Come on boy, we don't know what happened, let's not make fun of him," I said. That man looked like a decent person. He was attired in a black

shirt and grey trouser. The long black hair pushed back his head while the short grey hair covered his sides of the head and touched the grey beard. The tears were flowing down from his dark black eyes and umber coloured cheeks. I got up and took John and Rocky with me near the old man. We sat on the bench in front of the old man, and he looked at us with his moist eyes. We kept staring at him without speaking anything. "You need anything? If not, stop staring at me. If yes, you can go to any other person," he shouted at us and bent his head down. The look on his face melted our hearts. The pain he was going through didn't seem like it was occurring due to physical damage. I handed over my handkerchief to him and told him to clean his tears. "No need," he said with a bit of seriousness on his face. "Don't worry uncle, we aren't robbers, and we didn't put any anaesthesia on this. Please wipe off the tears on your face with this," I said and handed it over to him again.

"Tears! Wiping them off doesn't change anything, boy. The only thing which left for my soul is my body. A body which I don't need now, a body which is of no help to me, a body which I want to burn, but I can't. I wish someone threw acid on me or put me on fire as I am a

coward who can't do these things myself," he said. "What happened uncle? We know you aren't in a position to speak right now. But we will do any help if we can. "Help!" he laughed with much difficulty and continued "We, human beings can only help up to some extent. Funny thing is we do have some people on this earth who call themselves as God, but when the death shows its ugliest form, they give up. They act like they are immortals, but they will fall too. I don't need your help son. No one can bring back what I have lost. No one can bring back my loving son. No one can turn back time."

"I am sorry, your son? What happened to him, uncle?" a curious but worried me asked him. "His mother died when he was still young. I raised him well, gave him everything which he asked for, and we were like best friends. He was working in a software company and was about to get married next month. We went to Larton 3 days back, by car. When we were about to return, he wanted to buy me an expensive watch, as watch collection was my hobby. He went to the shop alone by keeping me in the hotel, even after I insisted not to go alone. While returning from the shop, he was hit by a bus and died on the spot. My 26-year-old boy lost his life within an hour of

leaving me. I should have gone with him, I could have stopped him and told him that we could buy a watch in our place too, but I did nothing. He died before me which no father wants to happen. I am returning from his funeral right now, and this is the watch he bought me. It got crushed, but it is more valuable to me than anything right now. And what's there for me now? House, money and everything I have is useless to me," he said.

I didn't utter a word while he was saying. Our eyes were full of tears by the time he completed. All the pain that old man was going through reminded me of my dad. I understood the pain my daddy must have gone through when my brother and mother left. They never returned home. I slowly realised the reason behind my dad's behaviour. Sometimes going through a lot of pain makes us cold hearted and it will change us into a person we never expected to become.

"I am sorry again for your irreplaceable loss, uncle. I am Mike, fourteen years old and my brother John, is ten years old. Though we are small, we have gone through a lot of struggles in our lives and didn't have a comfortable sleep even for a few hours since our childhood. I can understand the pain you are going through right now.

When our elder brother passed away, we felt the same. My dad was in complete shock and went into a coma for one year. We had lost the hope of seeing him again, but his will to live for both my little brother and me breathed life into him. Though my dad came to life, his heart couldn't get out of the pain, and he went into depression. He lost his job, and it was very tough for all three of us to buy food or to pay rent. So, I started working as a paperboy, and my little brother began to work in a second-hand shop. Our daddy died two days back, and the torment is quite horrendous. I wanted to die too, but I couldn't. Because I didn't want to leave my brother alone. I decided to live, no matter what. Sometimes we have to live even when we have lost everything. We can't bring back our loved ones who died. But if we live at least till the end, we can fulfil our purposes. Everybody has a purpose to accomplish. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here as human beings. I know it will be tough for you now, but eventually, you will realise how much valuable this life is. And don't think like you don't have anybody to live, but think like, how you can be something to somebody. You can say that you had your brother, so you have lived. Yes, that's true. But later I found the meaning of life. It is that there will

always be somebody who needs us, they can be our loved ones, or they can be strangers too." I said.

John looked at me with surprise as I just lied to that uncle. I didn't know how to give that uncle some hope. So I thought that, if he hears that someone so small in age can bear so much pain and live, then he will realise that he can also live.

We stood up as the bus arrived and I said, "Ok, then. We will leave now; our bus has arrived."

He caught my hand, as I started moving forward and said, "I think I found my purpose."

"What do you mean? Uncle, I didn't get you," I said.

"You both are my purpose, Mike. If you have no problem, you can be with me in my house which is in Kelna. You may think me as a selfish person. But whatever you think I am, I just want to say one thing. When you were talking, I didn't see just a boy; I saw a matured person. At such a young age, you are speaking like this. How many children who are going to school, can speak like that? I am impressed. So I am requesting you both to come with me. I will send you to school and give you everything a father can give," he said.

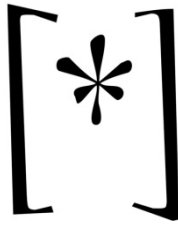
"Uncle, there is no problem for us to come with you. But I feel that what you want to do is too much. We will go on our own and do some work and earn some money," I said.

"No, it is nothing like that, son. Don't worry, if you want to do something for me, do it once you get jobs," he said.

"I don't know what to tell you. Ok, I will come with you, but only on one condition. I want my brother John to be in the same class in which I am going to study. Though he is just ten years old, his knowledge almost matches mine. If I am going to study in some grade, then he should also join the same grade," I said.

I didn't want to leave John in some other class, as I was the only person he knew. So I took a risk, but I was sure that Uncle wouldn't deny that.

"It is a difficult thing. But don't worry, I will try to do something and make sure that you both go to the same class. And from now on, please call me Joe," he said.



HER

"MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE, and from now on, this is your house. Go, check it and I hope you guys like it. There is enough food for you both in the refrigerator for today. And give me a couple of days, I have a friend who is a dean at the school, I will check with him and try to get admission for both of you. I am going out and will come by evening," he said and left. It was like a dream and a rare situation which no one will believe. Anybody will laugh at us for saying it and will call it fake. Meeting a new person and getting a chance to live at his house permanently within a day was a wonderful feeling for us. We started exploring the house. It was a simple home, but beautifully built and decorated. A hall and a dining room were there with a kitchen next to them on the ground floor. We started moving to the first floor, and the spiral staircase was like a twisted snake. Two bedrooms

were facing each other. One bedroom was locked, and we went on the other one. I spotted a photograph of Joe and his son near the bed lamp. It was his son's childhood picture, who was holding a small football. John and I sat on the bed and Rocky slept on the floor. "All the events which occurred till now taught me so much about life. Sometimes a minute can bring lots of change in our lives, no matter whether you are good or bad. A strong but bad man, my father is in an unknown place, and a loving son who went to bring a watch for his father went to the heaven. A father lost his son and found two boys. We are out of our miserable lives and found our new home," I said. "Yes, even I feel the same. Thank you for everything you did till now, saving me from a wolf, bringing me with you, and calling me your brother, everything I will remember till my death," he said and hugged me.

After a few days, Joe joined us both in a school. The whole school thing seemed like a strange thing to us. Though we read books, listening to the classes was bit difficult. We acted like we were not new to the school so that nobody would get to know about our past and the fraud way of joining into 10th grade. As the time passed by, we were welcomed by the old students, and we were

no longer new to them. We made friends and used to play a lot of football. Our whole life changed, and Joe used to look after us with much care at home.

Three years passed away like the time-lapse shot. We completed our high school. Then we joined the college to do graduation. It was the first day of our college. We sat for the lunch and started observing the people. Everybody was sitting with the people, who they made friends in the class. But we didn't want to make new friends yet, as we were still feeling sad. Because all our school friends joined different colleges. As I was about to eat, my eyes got stuck to a smile, and my body stopped moving for a second. Though it was a smile from a distance like a mile, it looked bright and lively.

Her soft pink lips enhanced her smile's elegance. Her wavy braid slid through her right shoulder, and its edges played on her waist. Her beautiful fringes tried to cover her eyebrows, but failed and revealed them slightly. Her bangs covered the sides of her glossy brown eyes and fair face.

How lucky I was to spot her through her smile. If it weren't for her smile, my eyes wouldn't have found her. I would have missed the chance to see such a beauty. She

hooked my eyes and grabbed all my focus towards her. For the first time in my life, I experienced an emotion called 'Love'. I ignored the food on my plate and the words John was uttering. It was the best cinematic experience I ever had.

Dopamine played the trick. I wanted to propose her the very moment. If she had kept any walls, I wanted to impress her and break in. But if there was one thing, I didn't do till then in my life, was talking to a girl.

"Should I feed you, or what? Your food is getting cold, eat it, brother," John shouted in my ears and hit me gently with his fist on my shoulder.

As soon as John brought me back to my senses, I said, "Dude! Did you see her? The girl in the shimmering golden dress."

"Which girl?" he asked.

"That girl," I said and pointed my finger at her.

"Are you kidding me? Where is she wearing a shimmering golden dress? It is just an ordinary yellow dress," he said and left a sigh.

"Do you think I am crazy? Maybe I am, I don't know," I replied with a laugh.

"What happened to you? Love or what?" he said.

"I am in love with her, bro. She is amazing." I said and ate everything so fast.

"Love in a moment, wow. So much progress on the very first day of college," he said sarcastically.

I waited for her every day at lunch time just to have a glance of her. I searched for her in every class and finally found her. She was in a different department. A lot of times my professors caught me when I was peeking through the windows of her class. College was no longer my priority. She was my priority, and I used to go to college just to see her. Sometimes when we are in love, our stomach will get full with just a smile or a glance of our loved ones. Even if they are doing nothing, we just want to keep on seeing them.

Two months passed away and all I ever did apart from seeing, was finding her name. Her name was Mamta. Our college took us to a resort. On that day, she wore a red T-shirt and blue jeans. Whenever I saw her, I used to give a big stupid smile, and John's reactions after that were priceless. The resort was splendid; it had a pool and some indoor games. Everybody placed their luggage and got busy in having lunch, but John and I were busy in searching for her. At last, I found her; she was playing

table tennis with her friend. After a while, John dragged me away as I was looking at her. "Every day you see her, at least play with us today," he said.

In the evening, John and I were playing card games and talking to our friends, who got so close to us in the past 2 months. The DJ started playing music near the pool. "Let's dance," one of our roommates said. I was excited to see her. John and I got ready and went near the pool. I wore a slim grey party shirt and tucked it into the black trouser. Students started coming from all departments one by one. They were all dressed well in suits and party dresses. John brought fresh drinks, though I had a habit of drinking, I never revealed to him about that. Everybody gathered near the pool and started dancing to the music. Suddenly, it slowly started drizzling, but nobody was ready to go away. We never danced before, so we just stood there watching them dance. There she was dancing happily with her friends, and moving her body to the beats. She wore a graphic white T-shirt and black jeans. She left her silky hair loose with a heavy sigh. It wasn't that so called DJ who wasn't actually DJing — just playing songs on a laptop. It wasn't those lights, it wasn't the drizzle, it was only her, her beauty, her charisma. Her moves and it

was everything about her which was making me fall in love with her again and again. She caught me while I was observing her and stopped dancing. She came towards me and stared into my eyes. She looked like she got drunk a little bit.

"You were stalking me?" she said. John, that idiot escaped and started dancing with others with his monkey dance steps.

"Me? No, no. I am just having a fresh drink and enjoying the music," I said and rolled my eyes to the left while trying to avoid the contact with her eyes.

"Don't lie to me; I saw you watching me in college and also when I was playing table tennis. Answer me or else I will complain to the dean once we return to our place," she said. "Damn!" I said to myself.

"I, I..." she interrupted me in the middle and started laughing. "Dude! Why the hell she is laughing? I am so nervous from toe to neck here," I said to myself. "Don't worry, I was just playing with you," she said and started laughing again. "You scared me. For a minute, I was a bundle of nerves" I said and gave an awkward smile. She caught my hand slowly and took me towards the dance floor. "I don't know how to dance," I said. "No issues, just

watch me and groove," she said so casually as if dancing for the first time was easy. She started dancing, and I started observing her. Being there so close to her and watch her dance was an enchanting moment. Her moves matched with my heartbeat frequency and my heart started beating, according to the way she moved. Her eyes directed my every move of my body, and after a while, I totally lost control of it. I was dancing, but she was controlling my body like a puppeteer controls his puppets. The only difference was there were no strings. "What's your name?" I asked her and acted like I didn't know. "Mamta," she said. "What's yours?" she asked me. "Nice name. And Mike! My name's Mike!," I slowly bent my head towards her and shouted, as the music was too loud. "Great! Which department?" she asked me. "Mechanical and thanks to you. If you haven't brought me here, I would have been there just like those people, who aren't dancing and just looking us," I said. She smiled, and we danced until the DJ stopped the music.

While returning at night, I boarded the same bus, in which she was there. She was sitting in the third row. I wanted to sit beside her. But I didn't want to ask her. As I stood before her and pretended like I didn't see her, she

saw me and said, "Hey, Mike. Come sit." She took the window seat and gave the seat next to her. I felt lucky and happy. All my nervousness was gone.

"So, you enjoyed it," she said.

"Our stay, or the dance?" I said and acted like I didn't know what she was asking.

"Of course, our stay over there," she said and laughed.

"Yeah, I did, and I liked the dance part too," I said and winked at her.

"Oh!" she laughed and continued, "Yeah, I did too. It was great, and your dance was funny at first, later you rocked it," she said.

"Yeah, thank you. You taught me how to dance, so undoubtedly, it will be wonderful," I said.

"I don't know why Mike, though we met just a few hours back and talked quickly, the way you speak to me is making me feel good. Whenever you are talking to me, your eyes are focused on me and me alone. The way you respect me, the way you talk like there is no one else around, makes me feel special," she said.

As I was about to speak, she dozed off on my shoulder. I didn't wake her up, as she was already too tired

because of dancing in the DJ party. The bus stopped near her house, and as she was asleep, her friends shouted her name. She took her bag and said bye to her friends and me. As she was about to alight, I decided to walk with her to her home, and I also wanted her to reach her home safely. One guy was blocking the way, so I pushed him back and told the bus driver to wait for a few minutes until I get back.

As soon as I got down, she looked at me surprised and asked, "Mike, I didn't know that you stay here?"

"What? No, No, I don't stay here. I just came to walk with you until your house," I said and walked along with her.

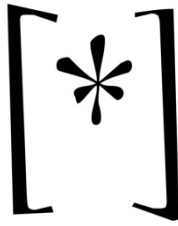
"Oh, thanks a lot. Anyways, the time we spent on our trip was one of the beautiful moments in my life. I wish there were more hours in a day," she said.

"I feel the same, Mamta. Good night, then. I will meet you in college," I said and gave a smile as I walked backwards towards the bus.

"Good night too, Mike," she said and smiled back.

Our meetings of few minutes in our canteens turned into endless talks. Our endless talks decreased our attendance in classes. Those endless conversations kept

our phones busy. Mamta's texts gave company to the lonely mornings. Within a year we became best friends. And our group of Me, Mamta and John became an inseparable one.



THE CONSEQUENCES

I WAS PLAYING a video game on the computer and John was writing something on the paper, while our Rocky was playing with its tail. "What's that? Assignment?" I asked him. "No, it's not," he said and showed me the paper. "It contains the names of 10 people who bullied me from past one week. I want you to vanish all of them," he said. "Using power for petty things, grow up. This power is not a toy to play around," I said. He placed the paper on the table under a book and went outside with Rocky.

No matter what I used to do, Mamta's thoughts were always on my mind. Though we were talking from the past one year, I couldn't tell her that I love her and adore her. I finally decided to propose her, not on the phone, not through a letter, but personally, I wanted to tell her. I didn't call her, as I wanted it to be a surprise. I

wore a white shirt and a black blazer on top of it and a black trouser. Her house was far from mine, so I had to travel on a bike. I took a bouquet of roses on the way from the shop. As I almost reached, I had to pass through a narrow lane to reach her house. There was only one street light. A person stopped me as I went further.

"What you are doing here at this moment? It's 8.30 P.M," he said with his raspy voice. He was tall with 6 feet height and broad shoulders. His face was square fit as a fiddle with enormous eyebrows and little eyes. I parked my bike and stood in front of him. "Why? Did anyone keep you as a guard to protect the road?" I replied. "Don't try to be a hero here, just answer my question. You came to see the girl right?" he said. "Yes, and I didn't know that you were her dad, sorry for being rude. Thanks to you. You are doing a great job," I said sarcastically. "No, I am not her dad. My name's Bobby O'Neil, and I am her friend. And I had seen you talking to her many times. On the day of returning from the trip, you pushed me back while I was about to drop her home. You came at the last minute and took her. And I also heard that you have become best friends," he said. "Oh! Sorry I pushed you on that day. I just wanted to drop her home safely. And yes, we did

become best friends. And I don't give a damn if you've seen us talking or not" I said seriously. "Oh well, your bro, John isn't as fearless as you. I wish your brother learnt something from you. When I tried to scare him, he acted like a scared mouse. But bullying him was such a satisfying thing," he said and started laughing.

When I heard the name John, my anger slowly started rising. And I suddenly remembered the name, Bobby, from the list John gave. "John? What did you do to him exactly?" I asked him. "Do I have to do anything to scare people? Look at the size of my body; I am a monster. I just tried to intimidate him by moving towards him in our college canteen. But he got scared and fallen while walking backwards. And listen carefully, this will be the first and last warning. Never talk to her, never see her, and don't even go near her. But before you do that, bow down to me and say that you will never do this again," he said aloud.

Words, his wrong choice of words tried to touch me by breaking the wall of my ego. My anger clouded my thoughts and my body. I dropped a punch on his face with my fist. And the blood started coming from his mouth. His hands touched the ground while he knelt down on his knees. I struck his face again with my knee, and he fell on

his back. I was furious, and I didn't even know whether I am going to leave him or not.

"You know if I had born in the ages of kings. I would have been the first one to get hanged or killed. You know why? Because as soon as some mad king ordered me to bow down to him. "Go fuck yourself," that would have been the exact words which would have come out of my mouth. Oh! And don't think that I am comparing you to a king. You are just a piece of shit. I was just saying that because if I am capable of saying that to a king, then just think what I will do to you," I said and kicked him again in the ribs.

Suddenly, police siren echoed across the street. As soon as Bobby heard it, he started running. I tried to catch him, but he jumped over the fence of someone's house and ran into another street. I forgot the purpose, I forgot Mamta, and I was not able to get Bobby's words out of my head. I rushed home; my face was covered with sweat. I couldn't think straight for a second. How can Bobby talk like that? It was the only question running in my mind. The paper which John left on the table fluttered because of the wind from the window. I quickly grabbed it, and without thinking for a split second, I spelt out all the ten names on

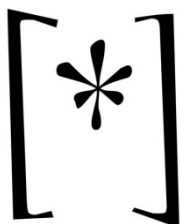
the list. It was satisfying at that exact time. Not even once, I thought about those ten people.

In the morning, when I woke up, slowly I remembered what I did last night and rushed to the T.V immediately and switched it on. I decreased the volume of T.V so that Joe won't wake up. I directly kept a news channel. "From last night, approximately 3 million people disappeared from all parts of the world. It is strange that no one left a note. Police couldn't find any evidence and are not able to tell what caused this huge number of disappearances. This is the first incident where many people vanished in a single night" a lady reporter said. In every single channel, this was the sensational news. There were debates. Protests against the governments were slowly starting.

Surprisingly, I didn't feel any regret for doing that. In fact, I felt like God, because with that kind of power no one can stand a chance against me. Still, the only thing which bothered me was, how Mamta and Joe would react when they know about this. John came from outside with Rocky, with a part worried and part happy look on his face. "I didn't know that you will do it for real. Anyways, thanks a lot for disappearing those ten guys. And you know what

you did other than that, right?" he said and looked at the news channel. "Hilarious! They already started debates on that. What the hell?" he said with a hearty laugh.

"I know what I did John. But what I don't know is how to undo it," I said. "I thought you will add our college name as a prefix for those names, before spelling out," he said. "I don't know. I wish I did like that so that only those ten guys would have disappeared. But it all happened within no time," I said and explained everything which happened last night. "That idiot, Bobby. So your ego and your moments of anger caused this much destruction," he said and sat beside me.



THE CONFESSION

I STOOD UP, and without uttering a word, I went into my bedroom. When Bobby's words hurt my ego, my thoughts became demons and made my mind evil. The house, in which John and I were living in, was a place of a great father and a late, loving son. Though Joe didn't know what I did, I felt like I was cheating him.

I called Mamta and said, "Hello, Mamta." "Hello, Hello Mike!" She said from the other side. I kept silent for a minute, and she kept on calling my name and asking me if I was okay. I said, "Hello Mamta, how are you?". "Mike! Thank God! I was so worried. Where were you? I was shouting your name like 100 times," she said.

"Sorry I went to see John, as he called me for some urgent work," I said. "You could have told me before going right?" she said seriously and continued, "Anyways, what

are your plans for today. It is so boring here. Let's go to a beach or something," she said. I hated the fact that her excitement, her opinion on me, her belief in love will decay to the ground in a matter of minutes.

"Mamta, I want to tell you something," I said.

"What is it, Mike? I am curious to know. Maybe if it is something, which I am expecting, then I will also tell you one thing." she said and giggled.

"This is just not about one thing. There are many things which I didn't tell you, but I don't want to hide anything from you, anymore. My whole childhood I have gone through abuse and insults done by my own dad. I don't want to give a chance to anyone again," I said.

I told her to not to speak anything until I was done talking. I told her everything that happened till that time about my troubled childhood, about John and Rocky, about Joe, how John and I got into college, and also about the Bobby and the disappearances. Once I explained her about these things, I heard nothing, but the sound of her cries. "I know that this is hurting you badly, as these words are coming from a person who you have always trusted. But I am also getting hurt. And tomorrow we will be leaving the city forever. I don't know whether I am right

for you or not. But I will love you till my soul loses its consciousness. If you have the same feeling, I will be the happiest person in the world. If you don't, then I hope you all the happiness in the world. I don't want to force you into the life I am about to live. I may get involved in any crime in the future, so if you love me and want to come with me, I can't assure you that the future will be safe, yet I assure you that it will be splendid and adventurous. I will be waiting for you at my house, tonight." After I had been done talking, she hung up the phone without uttering a word. Tears were falling from my eyes, and I sat down on the bed thinking about her.

After a while, I wiped off tears and came out of the room. I checked Joe's room, but it was locked. And John was playing games on his phone. I went near him and sat beside him on the couch.

"We are leaving this town tomorrow," I said to him.

"What? Why?" he stopped playing and asked me.

"But before that, we will be doing a robbery in Orange Leaf bank. Because I want to do something for Joe, as he has done so much for us and because I can't hide the things from him anymore," I said.

"You just created a worldwide mystery case, and now, you want to rob a bank?" he thought for a minute and continued, "Ok, whatever, you were always there for me, so count me in," he said with a smile.

"Where's Joe? His room is locked" I asked him.

"Just a few minutes back, he went out of town, as he got some work. He told me to inform you that he will come back after 2 days" he said.

"That's right for us actually. It will be hard for us to leave, if he is there in the house," I said.

"Right, how we are going to do the robbery?" he asked.

"Don't worry, I will tell you tomorrow morning. Be ready by 5 A.M."

"Ok, I am going out to our friends' room, bye. I will come back by 5 A.M," he said and left as he wanted to celebrate with our college friends for one last time.

Rocky and I were alone in the house. My mind was filled with Mamta's thoughts. The idea of leaving her was eating me from inside. The pain was unbearable, and I was completely heartbroken.

A few hours elapsed and it was nearly 9 P.M. I was still sitting in the exact place. Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

"Who is it?" I shouted loudly. No reply came. Again the doorbell rang for few times. I got irritated and slammed the door open. I got shocked and surprised for a second. I couldn't believe my eyes. She was standing at our house entrance and was crying by keeping her face down. I didn't utter a word and just hugged her, and we cried until our heart's content.

I made her sit on the couch. Her eyes were red in colour and moist. "You want to leave without me. You idiot, stupid," she said and slapped me several times. "I wanted to be true to you. I will do anything to keep you happy, even if it is moving away from you. But do you think I will be happy without you?" I said and took her face in my hands.

"I love you too; I don't really care if I die tomorrow. How can you even think that I will leave you, just because you have hidden some things from me or just because you have become a person who you are now, because of the situations you have gone through. I don't care if people see us as criminals. I loved you, not them. I love my Dad too, but I know he will always be there for me and believe me, even if I am not with him. I left a note for him saying

that to not search for me and that I will meet him at the right time," she said while crying.

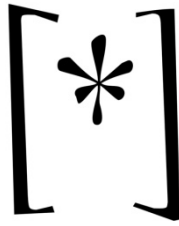
I kissed her gently on the cheeks and the lips and said, "I didn't know that you have this much love for me. Sorry for making you cry. I can't even imagine how much worse my days would have been without you."

"Tomorrow, we will be robbing a bank. So you are ready for it?" I said while wiping away her tears.

"I am not sure how I can help you. But as long as you are beside me, I will do anything."

"I know you will do," I said and touched her hand gently and continued, "Please take rest for a while in my bedroom, I will wake you up when it's time." She slept on the bed, and I fell asleep on the sofa while looking at her.

I was filled with lots of happiness and felt so blessed. How many people will get a love like that? A Love with no boundaries, a love so pure and love which can sacrifice anything for us.



11 AM

THE ORANGE LEAF BANK was one of the biggest banks in our place, and the amount we planned to rob was fifty million. When we looked from a distance of a quarter mile, two guards were guarding the bank's entrance gate. John gave me the book, in which he wrote, everything I had to vanish. I spelt out the words, "Orange Leaf bank's security cameras, and Orange Leaf bank's security guards." Within in a moment, guards and cameras got vanished right in front of us. I wasn't sure how many guards and security cameras got vanished inside the bank. Mamta was awestruck and couldn't believe what she saw. The excitement in all three of us was sky high.

Once we passed through the main gate, we wore the masks. John and I took out the handguns, while Mamta carried the book and the bags. Once we entered the bank, we waved the guns in the air and shouted,

"Everybody freeze, and raise your hands. Until we say, do not move," I said to them. "Hey, take their mobile phones," I said to Mamta.

"Don't try to do anything nasty. If you do, we will create the paintings on these walls with your blood splashes," I shouted. Everybody was scared to death, some of them were crying, and some of them were praying.

"Where do you people keep the central locker? And who has the password to open it?" John asked them. Nobody uttered a single word. "You guys want to die? huh! Okay, let's play an old, yet dangerous game. I will kill any 3 of you for every 5 minutes of silence," I said. Mamta was looking at me and was confused. She never saw me like that. I started counting down from ten. As I was about to count number one, an old woman got up and said, "The locker is on the second floor, and there she is, Renuka. She has the password."

Suddenly, the room was filled with their whispers. "Shut up! Everyone, I don't want to listen to a single word," I said. "So Renuka, I want you to switch off all the sensors in the bank, which will alert the police and take me to the second floor. And how many people are there are

on the first floor?" I said and asked while staring into her eyes. "Okay, sir. 60 people," she said.

"Ok, do they use mobiles on that floor?" I asked her.

"No, people deal with confidential information on that floor. So they will keep their mobiles in respective lockers, which are on the ground floor," Renuka said.

"Ok Renuka, I need these ground floor front doors and shutters to be closed," I said and continued, "Everybody move to the 2nd floor."

"You take them to the 2nd floor. We will join you after closing the doors," I said to John and started moving.

We closed all the doors and moved to the second floor. We entered into a huge hall which leads to the main locker. Everybody was knelt down on their knees. And John was standing in front of them. "I will take care of them, go and help Mamta, in loading the money into the bags," I said to John. John held the gun to Renuka's head and made her open the locker.

"Cowards! Cowards! You think you people are strong just by making us feel weak. Never forget the fact that you people are hiding behind your masks with the guns in your hands, while we are unarmed and knelt down

with the guns against us," an old man from the employees said.

"I wish I can kill you guys right now," a man between the age of 30 to 40 years old, yelled from behind.

I stormed towards the man and punched him in the face. "I know you all want to kill me, but it isn't smart to yell at people with arms, who can actually kill you," I said to them.

"You, old man. There is only one reason why I am not doing anything to you. 'Your age', I have tremendous respect for old people. If you were not old, your head would have hit the wall right now. A man of your age should know why people wear masks and no, they are not cowards. They wear it because they are smart. Anyways, you said we are cowards right? Let me reveal you what we can do," I said and threw the bag before him, which had all their mobiles.

"Pick your mobile phone and call the police. I will let my power do the talking," I said to the old man and removed my mask.

"Mike, why are you removing your mask? And why Police? Don't we have enough company already?" John shouted from behind while loading the money.

"Exciting," Mamta said with a laugh.

"Don't worry, John. Let them witness my power, too," I said.

Police arrived in a matter of few minutes as soon as the old man called them. Mamta gave me the book. They jumped into the building from helicopters, by breaking the glasses. And the rest of the police surrounded the building. As soon as the police came, they aimed their guns at us. "Raise your hands," they shouted at us. All the employees ran into a corner. Suddenly a gust of wind hit the police, and they flew a few feet away. They were in pain. A young man who was in his mid-twenties entered the building through the window and stood in front of me. I was shocked and surprised, but without wasting time, I opened the book.

"Don't spell the words, Mike," he said while I was about to spell.

"How do you know my name? And keep your orders with yourself. If I don't, they will kill me," I said and spelt the words, "Kelna police." All the police who were present there vanished in a moment. Their guns and their helicopters fell on the ground.

"I said not to do that," he yelled and pushed me with his bare hands. That push was fast and packed with force, it was something which I never felt before. He moved so fast that I couldn't even see him. I flew backwards and fell near Mamta, John and Renuka. My gun slipped from my hands and fell far away from me. Renuka ran towards the employees with fear.

Mamta and John were so confused and stood there frozen. They couldn't believe that there was one other person with powers. My anger started rising, and I ran as fast as I can, towards him and tried to punch him. He dodged it with less effort and hit me in the face and threw me again.

"I am your brother, you fool. I don't mean to harm you," he said.

"My brother? He left me when I was still a child. What kind of a brother does that? And he didn't even meet me for once after that," I said and moved slowly towards John and Mamta, with much difficulty.

"Yes, I am your brother, Bradley Bradac. It is true that I have left you and dad. But don't even think for a moment that I don't have the love for you. Our mother used to take me for a magic show in our place, and I liked

it a lot. That magician was not an ordinary one. He was doing some marvellous tricks. And my love towards magic grew into an obsession. Sometimes, I used to go alone and see it. Mum and dad used to fight almost daily. One day, two months after your birth, our father beat mother so badly. She was heartbroken and couldn't tolerate dad anymore. So she left us all. I thought that she would return, so I waited for one year, but she never came back. I couldn't live in that home, so I decided to leave you and dad. I went to that magician and asked him to take me with him. He took me with him, as I wanted to learn magic. He taught me every trick, and when he saw my obsession towards magic, he said, "In this world, there are some powers which are more than magic. But only six people possess them. And it is unlikely to learn all of them. You will face many difficulties on your way." Until now, I met 3 people and learned their powers. And every once in a while I always came to see you. Though dad loved me, I didn't love him. I hated him. And I saw him beat you many times. But, I didn't do anything to him, as he was the only one you had. And one day when you got beat by him badly, for just breaking a gun, my heart broke into pieces and couldn't control my tears. Since I won't be around and

I gave you the power to make you capable of protecting yourself. As you like to read books, I wanted the power to match your interest. I was happy with what you did to dad, but eventually, you have become a person who I have never imagined. Vanishing 3 million people and now trying to rob a bank, what kind of a person you have become, Mike," he said.

Tears started flowing down from my eyes, and I was surprised because my brother gave me the power and happy because I met him.

"I am glad to meet you, after so long, brother. After listening to what you have said, I don't hate you anymore. But I don't think I will like you yet. You only saw the situations I have gone through, but you haven't lived through them. My experiences in life made me who I am today, and I am proud of myself. Not even for one second, I feel sorry. And even if you don't like it, I am going to complete this robbery," I said and instructed John and Mamta to go away with the money bags.

As soon as they started to move, they were obstructed by a glass-like wall and a square glass box formed around us. Bradley passed through the glass and

entered inside. John and Mamta were frightened and ran towards me. I hugged John and whispered in his ears.

I tried to punch Bradley again. He dodged it and threw a round ball of water with brutal force. I hit the glass wall and fell down.

"I think I have lost, Bradley. All these years, I thought that I was the only powerful person. But I was wrong. I am sorry for the things I have done. I regret them. I will leave all the money here itself. Please take us with you. Before leaving please let me hug you," I said and kept all his focus on me.

"Sure, Mike. All I ever wanted, was you to become a great person. I am more than happy now, as you have changed," he said and spread his arms widely.

I rushed towards him and hugged him. "Bradley, let me tell you something to remember. In chess, mostly two kinds of players will be there. One who uses his queen wisely to fight, as he thinks it is the strongest. Two, who forms a trap and sacrifices his queen just to win and save his kingdom," I said and made a hand gesture to John to throw me the paper. I caught it as soon as John threw it and continued, "Here, I am the second type, Bradley," I said.

"What do you mean? Mike," he asked me.

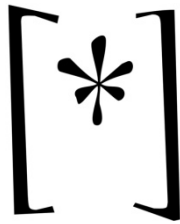
"My queen is my ego, Bradley," I said and spelt out the words, "My brother Bradley Bradac."

In an instance, my brother vanished. I felt sad for that for a second, but later I became happy because I had won. The glass box around us vanished. John and Mamta were filled with happiness, and they ran towards me and hugged me.

We left the bank with bags and went to our house. As soon I opened the door, Rocky jumped on me and licked my face. I placed ten million on the table, in the hall and left a note to Joe which said, "We are moving from here, Joe. We are sorry. Thank you for everything you have done for us. I am giving this money because I want to. No matter where we are, you will always be in our hearts. With love, Mike and John."

Once we came out of the house, John said, "Let's rob a Ford Mustang and travel in that."

I nodded and smiled.

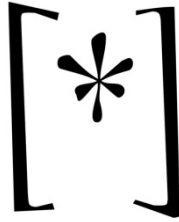


TO BE CONTINUED

IN THE NEXT PART

THE
OTHER SIDE
THE SECOND PART OF OUR DIFFERENT PATHS

COMING SOON



MEET THE CHARACTERS



MIKE



JOHN



MAMTA



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M.B. Mohan, was born in Anantapur, A.P, India. After graduation, was campus placed at Deutsche Bank Operations International (DBOI), Bangalore. He is a keen reader and a movie buff. His strong affinity towards storytelling and love for books made him to quit his job and start his career as an author. When he is not writing, he will either be playing chess or listening to music. He travels often and dreams of going on world trip someday.

"Writing is everything for me," he says.

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