

The Torchlight

By

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Shreeyan has seen a ghost for the first time in life! And what followed, is something that you had never imagined or read anywhere!

The Seeshmahal Theatre's gate was closed. It was just past six in the evening, when darkness began to engulf the age-old theatre. Chilly winter winds were at play in the melancholy setting.

Seeshmahal Theatre has been standing in the Saleem Pasha lane for over forty years now. With paint pealed off its walls, the theatre looked like a menacing monster in a lugubrious mood. The movie theatre has been in a legal dispute for long now, resulting in the owner not being able to sell it off or build a modern multiplex there. It looked like a haunted house in a Bollywood film at this day part.

The interiors of the theatre were a perfect match to the horrid exterior of the theatre. The once magnificent Seeshmahal Theatre's interiors adorned a spooky look now. The dim lights inside the theatre added to its woebegone ambience.

Jaan Meri Jahaan Meri was the film that had been playing since a long time here. Hardly, there were fifty human beings who came to watch the evening show that day.

Shreeyan stood at the door marked for entrance into the theatre, yawning sleepily. He glanced at his wristwatch. It was six forty two pm by his watch. 'Time to get down to work', thought Shreeyan.

Shreeyan would count the number of people in the theatre and inform the manager. The manager would then match the number with the tickets sold and that's about it. His work was done, simple. He could then relax until the night show starts.

Shreeyan pushed open the huge door and stepped into the dark interior of the theatre. Then, from his trouser pocket, he pulled out his torchlight and switched it on.

People who work in the dark are more terrified of the dark... because they have seen the darkest depths of it!

The feature film, *Jaan Meri Jahaan Meri* is a war story. As the war sequences happen at night in the film, the theatre is mostly in darkness through the length of the film. This being the evening show, it was a teeny bit darker than normal. Shreeyan decided to finish his work quickly.

He could not see a thing inside. The torch did not work on the first two tries. Shreeyan hit the torch on his palm a few times and then he switched it on a third time. The torch's light shot forward like a bullet from the barrel of a shotgun. The light's focus fell directly on a corner of the 'balcony' section of the theatre.

Shreeyan's eyes focused on the place, that the light illuminated. Shocking is a word that cannot describe what he saw there!

Two eyes glowed bright in the light; like the eyes of some cruel beast that lurks in the dirty damp darkness of desolate forests. The eyes were blinking continuously. But they did not belong to any cat or beast known to humans! The form that surrounded the eyes was nothing that Shreeyan had ever seen in life.

It was black, it was huge and it was swaggering to some inaudible gothic rhythm.

The sight gave the start of his life to Shreeyan. Instinctively, he switched the torch light off. His heart was beating hard. Breathing heavily, standing wide-eyed he was unable to move. And then, 'Ta Daaaan'... !!!

That was a sudden sound effect from the movie and Shreeyan jumped up in shock.

A minute passed slowly... When his heartbeat slowed down, Shreeyan smiled at himself. 'Mr Shreeyan, you are all of twenty five and still a kid', he thought nodding his head side ways with a smile. Then he switched on the torch light again... there was nothing in the place where he had seen that terrifying form a few minutes back.

He started walking, armed with the torchlight. For the next few minutes, he had gone around the theatre counting heads. Immersed in his work as he was, Shreeyan did not realize that he had now come to the same spot where he saw the unearthly form. But the moment that realization dawned on him, a sudden burst of fear overtook him. His thoughts started racing at a thousand miles per second, filled with terrible negative expectations. As his trembling hands turned the light beam to the spot, Shreeyan slowly raised his head and looked in that direction.

There was nothing there! Just empty seats....

Relieved, his body now relaxed. But as he began to turn away, he heard a peculiar sound... from farther up the rows.

'kashhhhhhhhh... kashhhhhhhhh'

Shreeyan turned his torch in the direction of the sound. What he saw was beyond words. Perhaps the most repellent sight anybody has ever laid his eyes upon, was right before him! What he saw was unpalatable and most sickening.

The first thing he noticed was the teeth. Haphazard teeth... filled with a blackish tar like fluid. Teeth that would be any dentist's nightmare. Teeth protruding from a pair of thick blue lips that looked like they were slashed with a sharp razor blade in five places! The tongue inside was like a collection of moving worms you would find in putrid food cans. And to add to the disquieting look, what might have once been a nose on that face, was half chopped off!

A pair of blood shot eyes peeped from behind a tuft of rigid looking strong black hair. But the most startling thing for Shreeyan was that the eyes had no black, brown or blue part in them!

The shock was total. Shreeyan felt as if his heart stopped beating and he was dead!

The figure that he just saw had a head... and there was no body! The next instant, he switched the torch off. His mind was going blank. He stood frozen, unable to move, drenched in perspiration... his limbs shaking uncontrollably.

But fortunately at that moment, a tremendous energy surged up his spine and he started running.

Shreeyan kept on running. He ran out of the theatre, out of the building, out of the gate into the Saleem Pasha lane and from there he ran into the main road. He kept running and running. He went into a state of shock and could not hear the traffic snarls around him, did not see people around... Filled with fear he just ran and ran and then ran more.

★ ★ ★

Shreeyan did not venture out of his room for three days. He did not as much as put his foot down from his bed. The memory of the grotesque figure kept haunting him again and again, whenever he closed his eyes...

Those gruesome eyes, the half nose, those teeth and lips and the eyes... Shreeyan had seen a ghost for the first time in life!

He was not hungry. He could not sleep. Just one thought and only one made rounds in his head. The ghost! He tried in desperation, to forget what happened. But his mind was simply out of control.

It took him three days to get out of the traumatic state. As he felt better, he came out of his rented room on the terrace of a dilapidated building and decided to do some shopping for food.

Shreeyan entered Raja Super Market. He was looking very shabby but somehow no one seemed to care or notice. He went around the place looking at what were on display. Four rounds later, he stopped at a big fridge that had a stock of yogurt.

He opened the fridge and put his right hand into the fridge to pull the pack of yogurt out, when a commotion at the cash counter attracted his attention. Three thugs were creating trouble for the lady on the counter.

As Shreeyan turned his head and watched the diatribe at the cash counter, his hand was still in the fridge trying to pull the yogurt out. Shreeyan realized that his hand has been touching something warm. 'Why is the yogurt in refrigerator, warm?' thought Shreeyan, and turned his gaze to his hand.

What he was touching in the fridge was not a pack of yogurt but a severed old head... the same head that greeted him in the theatre... the same head that was sans the body! His right hand was feeling the warm chopped-off nose of the apparition!

Shreeyan shouted out loud like crazy! He pulled his hand back in disgust and darted back instinctively. But the head was looking at him with red blood-shot eyes that had no black part! The head was now moving forward in the shelf of the fridge. It was crawling with its right side forward, then the left side forward and then the right... inching further and further slowly... 'kashhhhhhhh... kashhhhhhhh'

That very moment, Shreeyan ran again... realizing that unbearable agony bestows unlimited strength...



Shreeyan had no friends as such. All he had was an old mother who lived in his village Jillipaadu. Shreeyan lived in a shabby little rented room on the terrace of a very old building in a part of the city that was known simply as the 'Old City'.

Ten years ago, when Shreeyan was just fifteen, he left Jillipaadu and his old mother for the city. He searched for a job but got none. A day came when he did not have any food to eat and he thought he should start begging on the streets. But that same day, a man in a white shirt seemed to feel sorry for him. That gentleman was in the business of committing myriad crimes in

the city. Among others, his favorite was kidnapping teenage girls and selling them to offshore clients.

The gentleman in a white-shirt employed Shreeyan in his favorite trade. And then Shreeyan started earning some money.

Shreeyan got hold of helpless girls, terrified them and gave them away to his boss, who in turn, sold them. Sometimes, he had to do unthinkable things too. But that was, sort of rare.

As time flew, Shreeyan felt disgusted with his job. And one day, he simply left it and joined Seeshmahal theatre in the position of a 'torchlight boy' for a pittance.

Presently, Shreeyan felt like talking to somebody. He wanted the company of some human being, any human being.

So, the marathon that began at Raja Super Market ended at Seeshmahal theatre. If he knew a few people, it was only at this place.

It was already dark when Shreeyan reached the theatre. He went straight in, entering the building that he was so well acquainted with.

Empty! He could see no one inside! The manager, who was supposed to be in his cabin chewing off his nails, was also not there either. Shreeyan sighed looking at the empty cabin.

At that moment, an idea flashed in Shreeyan's mind. He went into the theatre so he could simply sit with people in the theatre and watch the film. Human presence could give him some relief, he thought. He opened the large door that led into the screening hall and stepped into the seating area. It was pitch dark inside. Shreeyan switched his torchlight on...

But as he moved a couple of steps forward, he felt as if something just went past him... through him! When this happened, there was a freezing cold, uneasy sensation inside him. Instantly, he turned back. There, he saw a white object passing through the shut door. But it was not walking... it was floating above the floor. And what freaked out Shreeyan is that this white 'thing' was upside down. Its head was down towards the floor and feet up... its hair dragging on the floor as it seeped out of the door!

He was now shouting at the pitch of his voice... while he ran hard... "Who is this? Who wants to frighten me this way? Why do you torture me this way! What have I done?"



For the next four days, Shreeyan's disposition was pathetic, to say the least. On the fourth day, he got down his bed and walked out of his room. He resolved to go back to his hometown, Jillipaadu, where he last saw his old mother, ten years ago.



Shreeyan got down the half empty bus. It was his own village... a place that made him feel safe, the moment he set foot on it. And yet, the feeling did not last long. As he started walking, there was a peculiar eerie feeling inside him.

Through the familiar streets he walked... streets that now seemed deserted for some mysterious reason!

After eleven minutes, he reached home... where he left his old mother ten years ago. The door to the house was closed. He pushed it open...

The time was past sunset and inside, the house was filled with darkness. He stepped inside. 'Why didn't mom switch the lights on?' he wondered. With a shaky tone, feeling like a stranger in his own home, he called out for his mother.

"Mom..."

"", there was no answer...

"Mom... it's me! Where are you?"

He felt as if he heard a noise from inside. Felt like somebody was coming out into the living room. 'Hmmm... looks like somebody is coming towards me...' he thought. But the darkness was making it difficult for him to figure out who it was ...

As the figure approached him, he could see a woman clad a white saree... her hair was totally grey... she was bent at the waist with old age... and the woman in a swaggering gait came closer... 'She is shaking with old age!' thought Shreeyan as the woman halted silently before him.

Shreeyan slowly bent down and looked into her face. 'Yes!' thought Shreeyan happily, 'that's mom!'... He hugged her tight as tears started flowing down his cheeks...

He stayed in the embrace for more than two minutes but there seemed to be no response or reciprocation from his mother. Shreeyan freed her from the embrace and looked into her face, doubtfully. 'Did she not recognize me?' he asked himself...

"Mom, its me... did you not recognize me?" he asked her...

As he said so, for some mysterious reason, his gaze slowly turned to her feet. A shock struck him with the speed of lightening! He stood staring at the feet in utter amazement and raw horror. Her feet were turned completely backwards!!!

At that moment, a blood-cuddling cry escaped his lips...
“Yaaaaaaaaaaaa”...

And then Shreeyan turned back ran... ran like a mad man. He ran all around the village. He ran and ran more...

When a little more than thirty minutes passed, Shreeyan stopped in his tracks, suddenly.

The reason he stopped, lay right in front of him, on the outskirts of the village Jillipaadu. What stopped him was a small structure that stood right before him. Shreeyan stared at it for a moment and then pulled out his torchlight to light up the small structure.

As light shone like bad news, it illuminated the melancholy structure.

Where he stood, was a graveyard for Muslims. The small structure that the torch's light illuminated was a grave! Shreeyan's grave !!! His name was still visible through the layers of dust that accumulated on since a year. It was a fresh grave, just a year old...

At that moment, three things flashed through his mind.

You reap the results of your sins.

Maya or illusion-ridden souls might not know it when they die.

Ghosts get terrified too, when they see Ghosts !!!