



BEHIND THAT CLOSED DOOR

6 Kickass Thriller Stories

Mastho Vamsee

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Behind That Closed Door

- 6 Kickass Thriller Stories

MASTHO VAMSEE

FREE Book

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DEDICATION

Bowing down with gratitude,
I dedicate this work to
my mother Dr Tenneti Sudha Devi,
my father Siromani Vamsee Ramaraju and
my Guru Sri Gurudeva Dattatreya.

Contents:

1. The Man In The Blue Shirt
2. The Torchlight
3. Behind That Closed Door
4. The Goggles
5. The iPhone
6. The Wight Horse With Wings

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- Author

1

The Man In A Blue Shirt

When the last moments approached and death was at arm's length, a strange man tells a stranger, one of the most mysterious stories the stranger has ever heard.

"Don't be so worried. When death comes, you would die in a fraction of a second... There is simply not enough time to feel anything..."

The 'A' lounge in the airport was a bit too crowded that day with hundreds of waiting passengers. There was an air of perceptible uneasiness. It being a weekday, most of the people were travelling on business and the wait was

weighing too heavy on them. Everyone in that lounge had everything he perhaps needed, except time. This perception of time breeds impatience.

Suddenly, the invisible speakers came to life. At first, the voice of the female announcer was barely audible in the heavy hum of the crowd's chatter but then people slowly fell silent to listen. The flight that was supposed to take off to Switzerland about fifteen minutes ago, will be running a couple of hours late due to a technical glitch. While the lady on the microphone expressed how sorry she was in an ironically flat tone, the lounge burst out into sounds of protest and disapproval...

'As if making those sounds would turn things around... Huh! People are strange...' thought Vakeel to himself, shaking his head sideways, as he kept working on his laptop. Vakeel was a hefty man, one hundred and twelve kilograms in weight and six feet two in height. He was really not affected by this 'unforeseen' delay. 'If you cannot swim, better drown peacefully' is his kind, he always told himself. He shifted his gaze from his laptop and looked around at all the others in the room with a condescending gesture of head. Just then, his eyes fell upon a man in a blue shirt, seated opposite him.

Vakeel had been watching this 'man in blue' for a while now, secretly!

Wait! Now, don't start imagining that this

Vakeel guy, is a spy on a mission to nab an international criminal. Get a hold please... the author of this story is not Robert Ludlum ☺

It is just that, somehow, this man in a blue shirt aroused Vakeel's curiosity. There was something about this man that made Vakeel return his prying gaze at him. This man's face reflected a deep-rooted anxiety in him. Yet his eyes were ice-cold. And for a person who nurses anxiety, this man is too agile, with quick & alert eye-and-body-movements. This, Vakeel thought, was a contradiction. A person who is anxious is either in the future or in the past, mentally; and is generally disconnected with the present. But not this man...

When the delay in the flight schedule was announced, the man in the blue shirt frowned a bit and mumbled something to himself. Vakeel observed this and made a mental note, saying to himself 'note this point, your honor'.

Vakeel and the man in the blue shirt waited to board the flight to Switzerland... At the moment, both of them did not know that they would find themselves inches away from death, very soon!



As the 'expected' two-hour wait turned a little less than threehours, the speakers came to life again. The female announcer informed that she was happy that the technical problems were now resolved and passengers travelling to Switzerland,

should kindly board the flight. People bee-lined to the tunnel-like entrances towards the flight.

Vakeel and the man in the blue shirt had their seats just next to each other. Well, it was really too tempting to say that... but isn't that too convenient? Just because the central characters of our story happen to be these two men, it would be too much of a coincidence that their seats should be next to each other.

Actually, the man in the blue shirt had nobody seated next to him. It was a working day, remember? The airlines would normally have unsold seats on weekdays, as you probably know. And Mr Vakeel was seated five rows behind the man in the blue shirt.

The international flight was quite comfortable. It had blue and pink interiors. The seats were in a boring sky blue and the headrests were covered in pink sheets. The plane was spacious with larger seats towards the front. It was indeed a bit packed towards the rear, marked the economy class. Of course it was so, why mention that? Well, that was just an attempt to paint a picture of the interior of the plane in your mind. To continue the description, there were beautiful women dressed in pink, moving around the blue and pink interiors of the plane.

A lot of women passengers were stealing looks at the female flight attendants. This airline is particularly popular for their pick of airhostesses

with gorgeous looks. The female passengers were looking at the airhostess's hair-do, their figure and as such. Meanwhile, almost all of the men were devouring them with their eyes. If eyes had hands, the men were almost feeling them. It's a strange psychological fact that most men feel that nurses in hospitals and airhostesses in airplanes, were somehow public property and they could do anything to them, if such a chance should arise.

Now, what is Mr Vakeel doing at this moment? He was not blinking... watching the beauty who was standing in the aisle, demonstrating how belts are tied, how oxygen masks were put on and which doors to kick open in times of emergency. 'Why doesn't my wife have such a perfect figure? Look at that waistline, man...' was what was precisely going on in his head.

The flight was about to take off now, and the passengers were requested to tie their seat belts. A middle aged European woman with a slightly heavy chest, approached Vakeel, gave a huge plastic smile showing about twelve of her perfect teeth. Not that the remaining teeth were not perfect or white, they were. Just meant to say that the rest of the teeth were hidden inside her mouth while she smiled ☺

She reminded him politely to tie his seat belt. Vakeel told her that he had done so already.

The airhostess casually bent forward to check his seat belt. He could feel her too close to his chest as the fragrance of her hair filled his lungs. At that moment, Vakeel felt that life was really beautiful... 'Oh! Life... you could be so bloody interesting at times!' he thought to himself.

The airhostess straightened herself up and declared the result of her investigations. The belt was tied, for real. But the sign was not showing. There could be some problem. "Could you kindly move to another seat, Mr.?" she asked. "Only if you promise that you will tie my seat belt, again..." he said, with a naughty grin. This time, the European lady gave a natural and beautiful laugh. No data was available on the count of her teeth, though 😊

Vakeel shifted his seat. The flight started pacing on the runway... and the next moment it was in the air and then it was adrift the pale blue sky...



Now, Vakeel found himself next to the man in the blue shirt. And suddenly, his pent-up curiosity pounced out of him. He decided to find out more about this strange guy, now that they were sitting juxtaposed and had plenty of time.

As a chick synthetic smile emerged on his lips, Vakeel shot his right hand towards the man in the blue shirt. But the man in blue did not move an inch. He did not as much as shift his gaze to look at

his new neighbor. He just sat with a straight back, sporting a stoic expression and staring straight ahead of him. If it hadn't been for the profession he was in, it would have been a very awkward situation for Mr Vakeel. Feeling only slightly offended, Vakeel took his hand back thinking 'Well, this man probably does not enjoy the company of human beings around. Fine...' and shrugged.

Another ten minutes passed. And so did the feeling of being offended. The more difficult it was getting to make this man talk, the more intense grew his curiosity. So then, he gave it another try...

"Hey, I guess you're on a business trip to Switzerland. Hi, I am Vakeel. And I am an attorney by profession. The profession and the name are a perfect match. That's a sure rare thing, I bet. I am going to this place to collect crucial evidence regarding a case. Trust the juniors, these days and you would have to close down shop and sell tea in bus terminals. I am a busy man you see, I rarely place myself on such ordinary chores. But this time it had to be me... Gosh... I am going on about myself... what about you? You on to something?" he said as casually as possible.

Silence.

It was the same erect posture, same stare, straight ahead into nothingness. The man in the blue shirt did not even seem to hear what Vakeel

just said.

Yet, after sixty-one seconds passed, just when Vakeel gave up and decided to immerse himself into the little television screen set before him... there was movement! The man in the blue shirt, like the slow motion visual they show in cricket matches on television, turned his head very slowly and looked at Vakeel.

‘And then he spoke’ you must be thinking. No, absolutely not! He simply turned his head back slowly and resumed his ‘stare straight ahead into nothingness’ posture. Well, that was at least something!

But when the blue shirt guy was turning his head away, Vakeel’s eyes met his eyes... And, Vakeel felt a stab of pain in his heart. It was a feeling of fear mixed with utter sadness. Vakeel had become sensitive inside, after he practiced this secret yoga he learnt from a genuine Guru. He could ‘sense’ the other’s ‘vibes’ now, somehow.

‘Why is this guy giving me this feeling? What could be his story?’ thought Vakeel. And that... he would find out soon enough.



Another half an hour passed slowly. Vakeel stopped his escapades and started watching what was playing on the television fixed to the back of the seat before him. He put on his headphones, connected them to the mini television and started

watching a film called 'Dilwale'. Vakeel fondly remembered that he watched this Bollywood flick Dilwale, in Sapna Theatre with a packed crowd. Nadeem Shravan's music and Kumar Sanu's rendition was a rage and is legendry. His heart was in sync with the same feelings that he had in the days of the past... He remembered that he had tears in his eyes listening to the song 'Ek Aisi Ladki Thi'.

Just at that very moment, he felt as if he heard a sound from the direction of the adjacent seat. He took his headphones off and looked at the blue shirt guy. But the strange man was in the same position as when Vakeel last paid him attention.

"Excuse me, I thought I heard something. Did you happen to say something to me?" asked Vakeel anyway. There was but no answer. 'Probably I'd been mistaken' thought Vakeel as he got back to watching his movie. But just as he was about to put his head set on, the man beside him talked!

"Sorry, I do not have a right arm" he said... still looking straight into nothingness. At that moment, Vakeel dropped his gaze to look at his hand. Yes! The long sleeve on his right, was completely empty! My God! How did I miss THAT?" thought Vakeel. 'Poor guy... Aah! That's what kept him from shaking hands with me, then... hmmm...' he thought.

And if you thought that this is the time,

they actually started conversing, you are wrong. The man in the blue shirt simply went back to his favorite 'silently looking forward into nothingness' posture.



And then, in the next half hour, all hell broke loose in that pink and sky-blue plane. Suddenly, the aircraft tilted 30 degrees to its left and started to make weird noises like the rattling of stones in a big tin box!

At first, nobody paid much attention... these things keep happening in airplanes, don't they? They eventually subside in a while, anyway... thought the passengers. But one, two... ten minutes passed and there was not a single indication that the noise or the tilt would subside.

Slowly, there began a sort of unrest in the people. Someone who became just anxious enough called one attendant and asked what was going on. And then another enquiry... and then followed the others... Soon there was a huge commotion in the plane. The attendants were having a tough time, trying to act normal, assuring the people that nothing can possibly go wrong...

A moment later, the pilot's voice boomed on the speakers!

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry for the inconvenience the tilt and the noise is creating, but there is nothing to worry in deed. One of the

engines has stopped functioning. It is just a little technical glitch, kind of happens all the time. I request you to stay calm. We are running fine even without the faulty engine... and we will be landing in a nearby airport in an hour's time. We would get the engine repaired quickly and we'd be good to go in no time. Your safety is our most important priority. Thank you for your cooperation" said the pilot in a very assuring tone.

Vakeel's heart skipped a beat. It is one thing to create a cool image in people about oneself... it was easy to go around telling people 'If you cannot swim, better drown peacefully'... but it's a another thing altogether when you face a probable death situation. 'Nothing to worry in deed said the captain... probably there is nothing to worry' he tried to console his pounding heart, unsuccessfully.

But the blue shirt guy was simply undisturbed. He looked unperturbed like he was sitting on a warm summer evening on a park bench. Looking at him, Vakeel felt a welling suspicion inside him for the first time. 'This guy must be deaf!' he thought, 'Ah, now! That explains it all! He is deaf, by God! Anyway, ignorance is bliss, they say. Good for him'... he told himself.

For the next fifteen minutes the tilt and the sound continued in the airplane. As everybody in the plane sat in tense silence with pent up anxiety, something even more terrifying happened! All of a sudden, the aircraft went silent for exactly ten seconds. At the end of the tenth second, it made a

bigger notice and tilted to it's right now!

Pandemonium!

The captain's voice started off without a warning... "My apologies for what happened, but the second engine has just developed a technical problem. I assure you that this is still manageable. We have identified an airport nearer to where we are now. If we could manage to fly for the next fifteen minutes, we would be able to land there, safely. May the Almighty protect us"...And the speakers fell silent.

Vakeel was perspiring now. He could hear his own heart beat like exploding landmines inside him. Never in his life did he look at death in such proximity. 'What if we cannot "manage to fly for the next fifteen minutes"'?' he thought in horror... 'What if the Almighty suddenly gets a phone call right at the time he is supposed to save us?' He yelled at his overtly anxious mind.

"Don't be so worried. When death comes, you would die in a fraction of a second. In these kinds of accidents that are accompanied by huge blasts, the casualties do not feel pain at all. There is simply not enough time to feel anything. And if we die, we die. We would not have to worry about things of this world anymore, anyway. We simply go blank. Cluck. Disconnected. So, obviously there is noting to worry for something that's not painful... for something that we can't help but sit and wait..."

As he heard the deep tone that spoke these words, Vakeel turned his head sharply and looked at his fellow traveller. The one handed man in the blue shirt, is now looking straight at Vakeel as he continued...

“If these were to be my last moments, I would want to tell my story to you, a stranger” he said. Vakeel somehow felt a great relief and something akin to peace while he listened to the deep soothing tone of this strange man about who he had been curious all this while. His curiosity returned, diverting him from the threat on hand.

Vakeel thought, ‘this man’s hand was completely amputated. What grotesque things might have possibly happened this poor soul?’...

“My name is Rajan...” said the man in the blue shirt, in a serious tone with abysmal intensity... Vakeel started listening to him, mesmerized by his narration...All that the man said, in his own words for you...



“Trust me, I have not revealed my past to anybody, until this day...

I was a sharp shooter. That is, I was a specialized and crafted rifleman, who maintained a close visual contact with the enemy and shoot them from concealed positions or incredible distances so that the enemy personnel could not detect me. I am what you call a sniper. I worked with the Indian

Army as their commander for several important covert operations.

This was a year ago in Afghanistan, when my troop was stationed twenty-five kilometers from Kabul, in a village surrounded by the most hideous rocks and arduous hills one could find on this planet.

Not going into the secret details, it so happened that my entire team had been completely annihilated because of a mistake. My mistake. All of them died, but I. I was captured by the Taliban militants and put in a dark room that had iron sheets for its roof. For two weeks, I was subjected to the most heinous of tortures in the hands of the barbarians. Yet I divulged nothing, absolutely.

Two weeks! I had to endure fourteen full days and nights of pure hell in that dark god-forsaken shackle.

But as the 15th day dawned, the strangest of things started happening... something that perhaps nobody would ever witness! Let me tell what exactly took place, then...

On the 15th day of my capture, a man that looked like a huge white camel with bulging eyes came into the dark room where I was kept captive and promptly started crushing my toe nails, one by one. He chose a blunt and flat stone for the purpose. He interrogated me for six hours without the slightest sign of fatigue. I was simply silent and never divulged any of our country's secrets. And

then he left. I saw that man walking out of the shackle's door and locking it.

After this huge white camel like guy with bulging eyes went home, he found his wife terribly sick. She was all right till that evening but apparently she fell ill suddenly and within an hour's of this guy's reaching home, she was dead!

The next day, a very short Taliban who looked more like a toad than a human, took on to himself the task of getting me to talk. For several hours, he started plucking off hair from my head and beard, asking the same questions, again and again. I endured all the pain, diverting my mind from it... and used the techniques they taught us while in training. The toad-like Taliban became bored and walked out of the dark room, shutting it close behind him. And then, again, something bizarre happened!

That same night, the toad-man's mother, father, both his wives and all his eight children were killed in a single stroke of fate. It was an American airstrike, I guess, that took all of their lives!

Of course, I knew of all these details later on... and not while I was tied tight in that dark room with a tin roof.

I was always alert and tried to listen to and pick up any information I could, even as I suffered the pain of the cruelest torture that I was ever subjected to. And anyway, I had nothing else to

pass my time with, than listening to the sounds and chatter of people outside.

I could somehow gather that something strange was happening since two days and that there was a very disquieted vibe, on the other side of the closed doors of the tin shaft. There was a lot of talking and discussing that went on and I strained my ears to try and comprehend what was up exactly.

The third day after the first fourteen days, which means the day after the American airstrike dealt that deathly blow to the 'toad-ish' Taliban's family... in came the leader of the Taliban.

By far, he was the most inhuman of the lot, judging by his techniques of interrogation, of course. He came in precisely to prove a point. He wanted to banish fear and re-instill the now waning confidence in his companions! The strange thing is that, after he left, nothing happened to him... at least not until the wee hours, anyway.

That night after he left... at about 4 am in the morning, this leader of the Taliban outfit had a massive heart attack! His right hand and right leg got completely paralyzed!

As I narrate this to you today, I feel chills up my spine... The happenings were so queer and unsettling that they still give me nightmares.

Anyway... after these three incidents, no one came in. The door to my dark torture room was

rarely opened except the times when they gave me food. None dared to venture in, I guess...

When a week had passed, two people who were dressed differently than the Taliban, walked into my room. But they did not interrogate me. All they asked me was, 'Why are these deaths happening?' I shrugged and said that I did not have a clue. Strangely, they just left, without another word.

Six hours had passed. The night had set in. I was tied down to a chair at that time and was in a slumber when my nostrils caught a strange smell that shook me out of sleep. Undoubtedly, it was the smell of petrol! Somebody was drenching the shack with petrol. 'So, they have decided to torch me alive', I thought.

I tried hard to wriggle myself out of my shackles. I must have tried doing that for about six or seven minutes, when I suddenly stopped my activity. 'They should have thrown a burning matchstick on tin shack by now! But no such thing happened. I strained my ears to see if I could get a clue. But I could hear nothing!

As I already understood that it was impossible to free myself from the ropes that tied me, I waited patiently and rather peacefully for the sound of the matchstick being struck. Instead, I heard a sudden commotion from outside that made me sit erect.

There was chaos and a lot of shouting

happening outside. And then happened something... something I never expected!

The doors opened. I turned my head in that direction wondering what would happen next. One lone Taliban stepped inside... and then he ran towards me... he untied me quickly and ran back to the doors! He stood as far as possible from me and signaled me to 'go away'... get lost.

But I am a difficult man, you know... I did not so much as move an inch from my chair. I yelled back at him and told him that I will not go until he tells me what happened.

The Taliban guy looked at me with horror and disgust. Right from where he stood, that's at the door, far off from me... he told me in broken language, what actually happened. The two 'differently dressed' gentlemen who talked to me earlier, were their religious leaders. They came here to confirm if I was a sorcerer of some kind, and was responsible for what all was happening. After they spoke to me, they gathered all the Taliban men in a meeting and advised them not to go near me. They asked them to simply torch the shack and kill me. And then they received startling information. It had been five hours since they left this place but the two gentlemen had still not reached home! So, panic stricken, they finally decided to get rid of me by asking me to leave.

With a lot of difficulty, I came back to India. I resigned my job and started off with an Import-

Export business and that is pretty much what happened...



As the narration ended, Vakeel sat there like a statue... unmoving, not blinking and unable to think... Two minutes passed before he could bring himself back to his senses.

And then he said, "My God! That is the strangest narrative I had ever listened to all my life, in spite of being an advocate. Tell me, Mr Rajan, all those who talked to you died or got harmed... or their families died. Why did such a thing happen?"

The ex-sniper replied with a philosophical smile. "My friend, in life, we find answers but to just a very few questions... the rest are never answered. Life is a mystery, I guess... never to be solved, only to be lived... Personally, I asked myself the same question several times... but the answer eluded me, honestly!"

Vakeel and Rajan had completely forgotten their surroundings. They were in a plane that was about to crash, if the Almighty would not choose to intervene... yet they had lost all sense of it. The rattling sounds of the airplane have increased in volume now! And at that moment, it struck Vakeel...

"Mr Rajan, how did you loose your hand? Your story never raveled *that!*" cried Vakeel.

“Oh, that... that’s nothing, my friend. Three months back, I was driving my car, fully drunk. The right indicator was not working fine and so I stuck my hand out of the window to indicate that I was turning right... didn’t know that a speeding truck was overtaking my car at the very moment. The truck whizzed past my car and so did my poor hand. Tch...” said Rajan.

Vakeel’s mouth fell wide open.

The weird sounds in the plane died down.

The pilot was announcing that they have landed safely now, the peril has been averted.

2

The Torchlight

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 peeled 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 untill 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

‘kashhhhhhhhhh... kashhhhhhhhhhhh

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... 'kashhhhhhhhhh... kashhhhhhhhhh'

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... "Yaaaaaaaaaaaaa"

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.

★ ★ ★

As Shreeyan stared at his grave...

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.

𑌕ostho Vamsee

Ghosts get terrified too,

when they see ghosts !!!

3

Behind That
Closed Door!!!

"... I am already there. But I am not I. Yet I am there too. It's the I from another life. I from a past life. That and this are all happening right now! ... This is not a house, mate, it is a door...The time here is totally different... You just go away! Go!" said he.

"Taxi!" called out the young lady in the purple Punjabi suit.

She was standing on the pavement at the

Loony Tunes Pub, next to four guys dressed in formal attire. The time was one pm in the night, exactly. The whole place was lit up with powerful lights. It didn't quite look like it was night.

Paresh Kumar's taxi screeched to a halt. The young lady in the purple Punjabi suit opened the door and got in saying "Narayan Nagar". The taxi moved on slowly as Paresh pressed the accelerator removing his leg from the break. He had been in the business of driving a taxi for the past ten years in New Delhi.

Ten seconds passed before Paresh Kumar tried to catch a glimpse of his passenger in his rear view mirror.

"A middle-class girl... What has come on to these girls! They party and booze with guys until midnight. Making merry is all they care about. What kind of a brought up is this... I wonder how her parents would sleep in peace," thought Paresh Kumar to himself.

Suddenly, the young lady in the purple Punjabi suit caught Paresh peeping at her in the mirror. Paresh averted his gaze hurriedly.

Then the passenger spoke, like she had heard what Paresh thought in his mind, "I had been to the hospital to visit my aunt. That one next to the Pub... the Life Again Hospital. Just felt like telling you this... because you might think that I got drunk in the Pub and going home late... It's just that I called for taxi standing at the Pub..." she

said.

Paresh was embarrassed. "No, ma'am. I didn't think that way," he blurted out. The young lady smiled... and taking a pause, asked, "where do you live?"

"Ma'am, I live in the Paswan Basti. I have a cute little daughter. We call her Sweetie" he said, smiling affably, giving out extra information that she did not ask for.

"Looks like you love you daughter dearly," she said, trying to look at him in the rear view mirror.

"Oh, she is my darling, my life, ma'am" said Paresh as a smile appeared on his face.

"Great! I am Mandakini. My dad works for the Water Works Department. And you are... hmm... Paresh Kumar, right? Its written on the dashboard" said she.

"Yes ma'am. I am Paresh Kumar" he confirmed with a tinge of pride "and I am an MSc Microbiology graduate. Of course, the education was not of much help in driving this taxi" he said, smiling. Mandakini laughed.

There was not much traffic on the roads. It being the rainy season, the wet roads had a chick look about them with street lights glittering on their surface... It had been drizzling for a while now and suddenly the sky opened up thrusting a

sudden heavy downpour.

In these mechanical days, when no one cared to pause and think about a taxi driver, the respectful conversation with this young lady, felt gratifying to Paresh Kumar. He felt an admiration for her.

The taxi moved in heavy rain, the wipers at full play on the windshield of the taxi. After exactly twenty nine minutes from when it started off at the Life Again Hospital, the taxi entered Narayan Nagar. Paresh and Mandakini were in a lively conversation all the while.

After turning two lanes in Narayan Nagar, Mandakini asked Paresh to stop the taxi. It was a deserted lane and Mandakini's house was to the right side of the lane.

The house they stopped at was an old one and had a strange eerie feeling to it. Old Delhi still had these kind of old buildings. There were no streetlights on the road. There was a gate and on either side of the gate was the compound wall. Inside the compound wall, there was an empty rectangular space. On the front part of the rectangular space was the gate and on the other three sides stood a building. The construction resembled schools in Delhi. The building was a bit too old with almost no paint left on it. A few patches of faded paint made the building look worse... more so in the dark rainy night...

The wall on the left side of the gate when one

faced it had a flight of open stairs on the inside. The stairs ended at the entrance to the building; a yellow colored door. There was no roof over the stairs.

The moment Paresh's eyes fell on the yellow door, a sudden creepy feeling sent a chill up his spine.

"Paresh, how much do I need to pay?" asked the young lady in a purple Punjabi suit, startling Paresh out of his observations. He looked at the meter. The digital clock on the meter showed one thirty one pm. He read the amount aloud "Two hundred and fifty seven rupees, ma'am".

Mandakini opened her purse and fished for money. And then with an embarrassed expression said, "Oh, I apologize, I do not have enough money to pay you... If it wouldn't be too much of trouble, could you please come up stairs and take your cash? I would have to take it from my dad". Paresh nodded his head in agreement.

By the time Paresh got down the taxi and locked it, Mandakini had already entered the gate and started ascending the stairs on the left side of the gate. Paresh walked to the gate, opened it, turned left, and started climbing the stairs.

It was still pouring and Paresh was drenched as was Mandakini.

Paresh Kumar was not even half way the stairs when Mandakini reached the top. He saw her

open the door and step in. The door promptly closed behind her when she stepped in. Paresh went up the stairs and stood on the last step, at the yellow door, waiting for the young lady in the purple Punjabi suit.

It was raining heavily and Paresh was getting drenched. He stood there; waiting for five long minutes... his clothes were dripping water.

Standing there, waiting for Mandakini, Paresh started feeling irritated. All he wanted was to take the money, go home, change into dry clothes, have his supper and go to sleep in the comfort of his warm quilt.

He glanced at his digital wristwatch. The time was one forty two pm. It has been ten minutes since he had been waiting there, getting drenched in rain. He decided to do something about his plight.

He pushed the door. It was bolted from inside. He pressed the calling bell. He heard a faint sound of the bell ringing inside the bowels of the godforsaken house... But there was no reply.

Summoning all his patience, Paresh waited for two more minutes. He then pressed the bell repetitively. He heard a noise inside; as if somebody was approaching the door. Then in a moment, the yellow door opened slowly making a strange noise.

As the door opened, it revealed a plump old

woman. Her hair was totally white and was standing up in all directions... She was wearing a green colored flowing nightwear. Her face was full of wrinkles and the expression was of extreme distress and anger. She looked at Paresh with a choleric expression and asked, "What do you want? Why are you disturbing us at this hour?"

Paresh was taken aback. He stumbled for an answer and said "Actually... ahm... your daughter, Mandakini... she traveled in my taxi... She had to pay me two hundred and fifty seven rupees... she asked me to come upstairs to take the cash..."

The ugly old lady stared at him for two full seconds and then yelled without warning... "Oy, Sanjay, look at this fellow... this drunken crook wants money... call the police... call them right now..." she said tilting her head into the house like she was talking to somebody inside.

"What is this ma'am? Not fair at all. Call Mandakini ma'am and ask her if you will..." protested Paresh. "Mandakini? Who is this Mandakini, huh? Get lost you moron, before I would make your life miserable... just get the hell out of here" shouted the old lady. The next moment, she shut the door with a bang, on Paresh's face.

Paresh was mad with rage. He felt as if his ears were steaming. But in a moment, his anger dissipated. All the ten years of experience as a taxi driver counseled him that if he did something

stupid there, he would simply be inviting trouble.

Sighing heavily, the dejected Mr Paresh Kumar turned back and started descending the stairs with drooped shoulders...

The rain took on frightening proportions and it was pouring cats and dogs... As he descended the fourth step, he heard a noise! It was the sound of a door opening. He turned back. There was a dull blue light shining behind the open yellow door. In the door's frame was the blur figure of Mandakini... currency notes in her right hand...

"Mr Paresh... why are you leaving without taking your money?" she yelled over the sound of the rain, stepping down a couple of stairs. Paresh felt anger surging up his gut. "Are you kidding me? What games are you playing, ma'am? I am standing here for fifteen minutes and that old lady abuses me and shouts at me saying there is no Mandakini ma'am here... And now you come as if nothing has happened!" he said trying desperately to control his anger, ascending the steps.

In spite of the curtain of heavy rain, Paresh watched Mandakini's face turn pale. "I don't understand, Mr Paresh. There is nobody at home. You saw me unlock the door and go in. My dad has a night shift today, my mother is at the hospital and my aunt is a doctor who is looking after her... And... and I have just been inside for two minutes,

not fifteen minutes!” she exclaimed innocently.

Paresh, not knowing how to explain things to her, looked at his wristwatch. And then a sudden shock paralyzed him!

The time was one thirty three am!

It has just been two minutes since they disembarked the taxi! “What the hell... What about all that had happened in the past fifteen minutes?” Paresh head spun... he felt nausea overtaking him. He took the money from Mandakini’s hands, and started walking down the stairs like in trance...

Paresh did not count the money. He walked like a lifeless machine. He did not respond to Mandakini’s “thank you”, either. He simply unlocked the taxi, sat in it and sped off... His mind was totally blank. The incident had for some reason, shaken him up completely.

He went home and ate his supper, that his wife served silently. Then he fell on his bed and closed his eyes. Sleep was difficult to come. He was just filled with the image of the ugly old lady in the flowing green nightwear... Sleep took pity on him, an hour and a half later...



Sleep resets the memory button in humans. Paresh felt better in the morning, if not great. He

showered and took to the roads on his taxi.



Two days passed without any eventuality. Paresh started easing out of the memories of that night; they became less and less burdensome on his psyche now.

But the third night after the strange incident, Paresh was knocked over by a disturbing dream. He dreamt that there were many people around him, most of whom he knew very well. He was trying to shake hands with them but none of them seemed to recognize him! The now familiar nausea and the feeling of fear gripped him in the dream. "I am Paresh! Why doesn't any one recognize me?" he yelled at each one of them... The moment he stopped yelling, a heavy figure jumped on him out of nowhere... It was the fat old lady in flowing green nightwear... her shabby grey hair and wrinkled face, right in his face!

Paresh woke up with a jolt. It was dawn already... he felt weak in his legs. It felt as if he had driven his taxi for a thousand miles without taking a break...

That day, after dropping his daughter at school, Paresh visited the Ganesh Temple and took the taxi to the roads. He did not feel like working, but he started driving anyway.

"Narayan Nagar" said a voice startling him into reality. A Christian nun was adjusting herself

in the rear seat of the taxi.

After twenty-four minutes, the taxi screeched to a halt in Narayan Nagar. There was an old Church to the left side of the road. The nun got down the taxi, paid the money and walked into the Church. Paresh moved the taxi forward...But without completely realizing what he was doing, he steered the taxi towards the strange house of Mandakini ma'am...

As he turned into the street where saw the house the other night, he could see the terrible building far away, in daylight now.

Paresh was back to his senses. He realized that a strange fear lurked inside him. His taxi was inching forward, slowly... As he moved another hundred paces, the gate of the building was now clearly visible. And then the staircase to the left side of the gate came into view. He observed that the yellow door's paint was pealed off in a lot of places... It looked strangely less enigmatic and more mundane in daylight.

The taxi moved forward a little more, getting closer to the house... And then he saw a figure on the stairs! She was brushing her crooked white curly hair! Paresh's gaze narrowed in on the figure as he watched it keenly... 'Who is that?'

And the next moment, his foot hit the break hard... as his brain recognized her! The confusion was so complete, that what his foot hit was not the break but the accelerator! The taxi dashed forward

in uncontrolled speed. But luckily, Paresh came to his senses after speeding a hundred meters when he hit the brakes with all his might. The car came to a screeching halt, the danger being averted... Fortunately for him, the street did not have much traffic at that hour.

His heart pounding away, Paresh Kumar sat still and frozen. He could hear his heart beat in his ears. He spent the next twenty-six seconds breathing heavily, trying to get a hold on himself. And then, very slowly, he put his head out of the window and and turned to looked back at the building that was only a hundred meters away.

She was now clearly visible. The lady, who was on the stairs a moment ago, was now standing at the gate, as if to give him a better visibility. She was looking at him from behind the gate, still brushing her cooked curly white hair. She was still in the flowing green nightwear. Her eyes were focused on him... her wrinkled ugly face, looking more terrifying in daylight. The moment Paresh's eyes met her eyes, she gave out the reprehensible and nastiest of smiles he had ever seen... "Hee hee hee heeee..." and Paresh knew that that sound would haunt him forever, even after life. He quickly opened the taxi door and puked on the road, unable to control himself.



Raja Tea Stall on the Sardar Patel road was swarming with tea edicts. This tea outlet was quite

popular in town and when somebody passes by, he makes sure that he spends a couple of minutes to stop by and savor the unique taste of Raja Tea Stall's Special Chai.

About ten tables were crammed into a little space and on one of them, sat Paresh and his mate Patil. Patil was staring at Paresh while Paresh sipped on the tasty tea. Patil was stunned and was taking time to assimilate what he just heard from pal, Paresh. It took Patil a few minutes before he could speak. Meanwhile his tea got cold and Paresh ordered for fresh hot tea for Patil.

Now, sipping on his tea, Patil asked "then, didn't you enquire about the building in the locality?"

"I did. They said that they did not know much about the history of the building. It was a ladies hostel some time ago. But now no one lives there any more. The owner of the building lives in Dubai. As far as they know, the owner did not as much as visit the building the past five years. But one sneaky fruit vendor told me that there was a woman who rented the house. She is there for quite a while, perhaps but curiously, he didn't see much of her!" said Paresh.

With a confused expression, Patil took another sip of Raja Tea Stall's Special Chai.



That evening, the friends went to enquire at

the Life Again Hospital.

“Ma’am, there is a patient who’s the mother of a young lady, Mandakini. Her aunt is a doctor here. We don’t know the name of the doctor, though... could you please guide us to her?” Paresh asked the receptionist politely.

“I don’t know,” said the receptionist without looking up from her computer screen.

“Ok, could we at least meet Mandakini ma’am’s mother who is a patient here?” asked Patil, this time.

The receptionist looked up from her screen and gave a strange look. “Look, I don’t know who you are talking about. If you don’t get proper details, I cannot give you any information... or can I?” asked the receptionist.

The friends looked at each other helplessly and turned back with dejected expressions. They got the taxi out of the parking lot and started off. As they taxied past the Loony Toons Pub, Paresh’s gaze caught the glimpse of a young lady in a Pink colored Punjabi suit. The next instant the taxi stopped to a sudden halt. It was Mandakini, waiting at exactly the same spot as Paresh picked her up the other night.

Paresh looked at Patil and gave a head gesture, hinting at the young lady. As he understood instantly, Patil’s heart started beating heavily in sync with Paresh’s racing heart. The taxi went

ahead and stopped near Mandakini.

Paresh rolled the window glass down and smiled at Mandakini. Mandakini recognized Paresh and smiled back.

“Hello, ma’am, are you heading home?” asked Paresh, trying hard to disguise his fright with all affability he could muster. Mandakini nodded in affirmative and went around the taxi, opened the door and sat down on the rear seat.

Paresh turned back and said “Ma’am, this is Patil, my childhood buddy. We were on an errand together. If you don’t mind, he would sit here with me while I drop you at Narayan Nagar. It would be fine even otherwise; he would get down right here if you so wish, ma’am. “

“Hey, that’s not a problem Mr Paresh, lets go...” she said with a bright smile.

The dudes breathed a sigh of relief in secret and the taxi moved. After forty-one minutes, the taxi halted at Mandakini’s strange residence. By that time, darkness has completely engulfed the area.

Mandakini got down the taxi and asked “how much?”

Paresh glanced at the meter. “The usual, ma’am. Two hundred and fifty seven rupees” said Paresh, smiling casually.

Mandakini opened her purse and pulled out a five-hundred rupee note. Looking at the currency note, Paresh said "Oh, sorry ma'am. I don't have change" and then he turned to Patil. Patil understood Paresh's scheme and shrugged nervously "sorry... I don't have the change, either"...

"Well, then I have to go upstairs and ask dad if he has change. Would it be alright for both of you to wait a bit?" asked Mandakini, visibly embarrassed.

"That's not a problem ma'am, we will accompany you upstairs and take the money..." said Paresh, opening his door and setting foot on the road.

This time, Paresh made sure that he was close enough to Mandakini while she ascended the stairs. Filled with a strange sense of excitement coupled with a generous dose of fear, he moved quickly and followed Mandakini through the gate... on to the stairs. Meanwhile, Paril's heart was racing with anticipation. Quickly, he made the decision and got down the taxi to follow his friend, making sure he did not look suspicious.

Mandakini climbed the stairs, pushed the door and went in. The door was closing behind her. But just before the door could close completely, Paresh dashed forward and put his foot at the bottom of the door, stopping it from closing. The next instant he slipped in and the door closed shut behind him! All of this happened in a fraction of a second. And Patil was only half way up the steps by that time.

Patil did not know what to do. Feeling lost and frightened, he stood on the stairs, waiting. The darkness of the locality and the horrid haunted look of the building were making his plight worse. Two minutes have passed like two hours when...

The door opened with a creepy creaky noise and out came Paresh Kumar!

There was something very unsettling about his manner. He was trembling! He looked around as if thousands of people were gathered around the place. Looking into his mate's eyes, Patil felt a terrible stab of pain in his gut. Those were the eyes of a mentally disturbed human... vacant yet full of violent energy... Without his knowledge, Patil moved down a step in fear. And then, Paresh started talking in a rush... incoherently and yet, making a strange sense.

"This is a door, dude, it's not a house. Portal! That's what they're calling it... a Portal! A door that does not belong to this world... it's of some other world. It belongs to another life. I... I am already there. But I am not I. Yet I am there too. I, from another life... It's the I from a past life. That and this are all happening right now! There is no past or future there, all there is, is the present. The Present! This is not a house, mate, it is a door... The time here is totally different. There is no 'here' and there is no 'there', there. You go away. Just go..." said he. And the next moment, Paresh Kumar the courteous taxi driver stepped into the house and the door slammed close!

Silence...

Patil felt as if the world was spinning around him. He was feeling devastated. His mind was not able to comprehend what just happened. He was filled with fear and confusion in every atom in his body.

Surrounded by dreary darkness, he looked around like a mad man. He banged the door hard and pressed the calling bell. He ran up and down the stairs. He kept yelling out his friend's name...

Time fled and he did not have a clue as to how long he was in that state. But then, he heard a noise from the other side of that door. Barely audible at first, the noise grew in volume and intensity.

Patil froze on the stairs and strained his ears. It felt as if the noise was not human at all... Yet it was like a grunting sound made by an old lady! And then it happened...

The strange yellow door flew open at once! In the frame of the door, he saw Mandakini, with cash in her hand. On seeing her, Patil's heart started pounding so hard that he felt it would burst any moment. Mandakini smiled, descended a few steps, thrust the money into Patil's hands and the next moment she turned back and was gone... the door shutting close behind her...

That was it!

That was the end of Patil's sanity! His mouth opened and let out a scream from deep down his gut. It was a horrific, traumatic scream that was let out from the depths of his soul, even without his knowledge... "Aaaaaaaaaaaghhhh"

Exactly at that moment, floodlights lighted the whole building!

All the cameras, cameramen and crew that were covertly hidden behind the screen of darkness, suddenly came into view! There was pandemonium! Laughs, hoots, claps and lots of noise!

Half-a-dozen people mobbed Patil and started talking to him, all at once, in animated expressions! Patil was looking at them, wide eyed... clueless.

"Dude, we got you! You are the star of our 'Take It Easy' show this week!" somebody said. "You are going to be popular, my friend. By far, this would be our best episodes," said someone else.

The yellow door opened and out came Paresh and Mandakini... They were all smiles. Paresh hugged Patil and said, "Sorry, bro... but we sure had fun... The whole idea was really so exiting! That's the reason I agreed to it".

Patil started coming back to his senses... very slowly. He started comprehending what happened and his breath started returning to normalcy.

“Mr Patil, we pranked Mr Paresh too, earlier. All that he told you was true except that he skipped telling you that we pranked him. Honestly, that was our plan and it hit the bull’s eye, didn’t it? You are our star on this prank show... You know, we had hidden cameras in the cab when you travelled down this place today...” said the programing director Ms Sunaina.

As everything started sinking in, a tremendous release began to paint a smile on Patil’s lips. But just then, his expression changed as he remembered a significant point to enquire about.

“Then... who is that old lady in the flowing green nightwear? Was she an actress?” asked Patel, looking at Ms Sunaina seriously.

“Frankly, we don’t know much about her, Mr Patil. We talked to her and requested her to help us out and she agreed... In fact, she was the one who told us that this house has that mysterious aspect about it. We got inspired to plan this prank after chancing upon her three days ago. After we planned everything, we zeroed in on Mr Paresh and got our actress Mandakini to get into his taxi... We revealed that this is a prank after he almost got himself into an accident here the other day, when he hit on the accelerator instead of the break...” explained the programing director excitedly.

For the next six minutes or so, everybody talked about the prank and how great it’s going to

look on television next week. And then, somebody suggested that they should leave now... The crowd on the staircase turned back and started descending the stairs...

What happened after they descended four or five steps was completely unexpected.

All heard the yellow door up the stairs, open slowly... making a strange noise. Everybody turned back at once.

In the doorframe was the old woman in a green flowing nightwear. Her hair was completely grey and looked like a disgusting wild bush. Her face had ugly wrinkles and her jet black eyes shone with commination.

Behind her, they saw a watery vertical film of blue shimmering glow! It looked like a movie screen in translucent blue... The old lady was laughing... her shoulders were shanking and so was her body... Her laugh was increasing in intensity with the passing second. It was truly disgusting, the way she laughed with her body shaking wildly... she was even jumping up and down while she continued her laughter; and that was not exactly a sight one would want to cherish.

Everyone watched her, open-mouthed. It was like her laughter had frozen their ability to move

And suddenly her laughter stopped.

Silence...

"You have only seen one room in this house! There is a door in the hall... Come... you all. Let me show you that door... Let me show you what lies behind that door... Come... I'll show you..." she said in a screechy voice accompanied with a horrifying grin that exhibited her crooked brown teeth. And then she ran into the house with a kind of an awkward jumpy-gait.

The frozen lot suddenly came to life. Staring ahead into the open yellow door, their legs ascended the stairs involuntarily. Everyone's mind was simply blank. They moved as if some kind of irresistible force pulled them towards itself.

All of them, ascended the stairs and went in through the open yellow door... one by one! When the last man, Paresk Kumar entered the door, it closed shut with a huge thud.

It seemed as though the door was silently sporting a nefarious smile...

The nine people who walked into the door didn't know a couple of things. One... How did the watch go back fourteen minutes, when Paresk Kumar visited the house the first time? And two... When the old lady summoned them in... why did all their watches stop?

And after that night, none of the nine people were seen around. None of them returned from that yellow door... Not until one hundred and

eight years passed...!

Including the one in the Himalayas that Yudhishtir passed through to enter Heaven at the fag end of Mahabharata...

They say that there are eighteen such portals on this planet, today.

4

The Goggles

*Your beliefs are conclusions you have drawn
basing on your experiences. You look at the world
through the tinted glasses of your beliefs. But if the
glasses are miraculously replaced... the soul shall
experience a quantum shift that will change things
forever!*

Two days to New Year...

An SAP Professional, Saraha Sharma, was at a place called the RTC Cross Roads... He was seated in a three-wheeler transport, popularly known in these parts as the “. He fidgeted restlessly in his seat in the Auto.

Saraha dreaded the traffic signal at Bawarchi Biryani Joint right at the RTC Cross Roads area. The road was jammed with a long queue of vehicles and one green signal was simply not enough for them to pass through.

The train bound to Delhi from the Secunderabad railway station would be arriving not too long from now. Saraha needed to catch the train. He fidgeted again, a little more restlessly in his seat this time, when a beggar woman suddenly popped her head into the Auto to sing her sad lines... Her sudden appearance startled Saraha. The beggar woman was going on and on with her sales pitch and Saraha's blood pressure started shooting up.

'The bloody red light is still on...' thought Saraha trying desperately to ignore the beggar woman. Just a few moments later, she finally succeeded in annihilating his resolve. Saraha had no intent to give her any money but felt he could not bear to listen to her voice for even a second more. She was getting on his already stressed out nerves. He drove his hand into his pocket checked the currency notes he had in there, and pulled out a ten rupee note to push it into the beggar woman's hand that had now started palming his arm. The moment he gave her the money, she was gone... in a jiffy.

Saraha felt a little relieved. He looked again at the red light in frustration. After a while that seemed like an hour, the auto got a green signal...

‘One hundred and eighty seconds of the red signal, twice! This is inhuman’ thought Saraha as the auto plunged into the now vacant crossroads.

As the auto was turning right, in the direction of the Secunderabad railway station, something unexpected happened. A public transport bus, popularly known as the ‘RTC Bus’ jetted past the auto, rudely scraping the auto from the left and swooshed away. The bus driver’s action was so rash that it left an ugly scratch on the left side of the auto.

The auto came to a sudden halt as its driver hit the brakes. Saraha popped his head out of the Auto and shouted colorful obscenities at the bus driver. The auto driver was surprisingly not the least bothered. He shot an amused look at his passenger, spat on the road with glee and got the auto into movement right away.

Thirty seconds passed without any eventuality. And then rang the phone. Saraha pulled it out of his pocket and saw the caller’s identity. It said ‘Wife’. “How far did you reach? Will you be reaching on time? Did your boss reach the railway station already? Did you call him up about your status?” Saraha’s wife went on as if she had no intention to stop even to listen to the answers for the thousand questions she was posing. “Hey, stop freaking me out. Leave me alone for a while...” spat Saraha and disconnected the call...



Saraha Sharma finally reached the railway station and met his boss, Mr Sabarwal. They travelled to New Delhi together, took a plane to Nepal, and then got into a taxi that took them to a remote village that was an hour's drive from Nepal. From there, they walked for an hour up a mountain to a concealed cave.

It is important to mention here, that all this while; Saraha nursed the same restlessness inside him... His mind was relentlessly churning out unending chatter breeding uneasiness; his state of being was perpetually choleric.



Sabarwal was Saraha's boss. His Guru was Shri Samyogananda. Presently, Saraha and Sabarwal were relaxing on a huge boulder on a steep slope of a gigantic mountain. The hour long walk up to that spot had tired them more than the journey they made by train, flight and the 'jeep'.

Saraha had agreed to Sabarwal's request to accompany him on this tedious journey for only one reason; his inability to say no. And this helplessness was pissing Saraha off even more than the journey and the wait. He cursed himself to have made this nonsensical journey for the sixth time in the past one hour while they waited sitting on the boulder. His restlessness was making him feel like pulling out his hair.

The two gentlemen waited for three hours in chilly winds. They were seated at the entrance of the cave where the Guru was deep in meditation. A saffron robed young man, who was a disciple of the great Guru, had asked them to wait when they first arrived at the place and tried to venture into the cave. They would be called in when it was time, he informed.

Saraha fell asleep while sitting and then woke up. Then he counted the number of mountain peaks that were visible. Very slowly did the time pass, before the disciple popped out of the cave again asked the two men to come in.

Sabarwal and Saraha entered the cave. Soon as he was in, Sabarwal fell prostrate at the feet of his Master. Saraha felt obligated to do the same... and so he fell flat on the Guru's feet as well.

They say that the Himalayan Mountains carry an aura of tremendous peace about them. Perhaps true. But for someone like Saraha, who was filled with continuous restlessness, peace is a long cry. He was busy planning and strategizing the forthcoming celebrations of the New Year's Eve even as he fell on the Guru's feet. There was no space inside him for poor peace to come in.

The Guru looked at Sabarwal with affection and caressed his head. He then took a fruit and a wristwatch and gifted them to Sabarwal. Sabarwal took them with utmost reverence and joy. And

then, for a while, Guru Shree Samyogananda and Sabarwal discussed something in a very low tone.

It was so low that Sahara could not hear a thing of what they talked. He did not have an inclination to listen to them, anyway.

Later, it was Saraha's turn to approach the Guru. His boss gently nudged Saraha towards the Guru. The Guru signaled Saraha to sit down. He did. For a moment, the Guru stared straight into the eyes of Saraha. Saraha felt that the Guru's looks overflowed with almost tangible vibrations of love. Saraha felt odd, because such feelings or poetic descriptions were alien to him.

Shree Samyogaananda gave a mysterious smile. Saraha felt a tingling sensation all over his body the moment his consciousness registered that smile. For the first time in God knows how long, Saraha felt a rush of peace in his heart for a long yet passing moment. The Guru then gave Saraha a fruit and black colored goggles and tenderly patted the back of his head. Can't say if Saraha cared for such a loving gesture; he was only a humble, practical and rational human.



Saraha got down the train in Hyderabad city, waved a 'tata' to his boss, called an auto and got into it.

As the auto taxied along the busy roads of the city, Saraha was feeling the familiar restlessness

inside him. He started musing... 'I just cannot understand why I had gone all that far. This Sabarwal fellow must be nuts. What had come of it? We met the Guru and took his blessings. Great! But what difference did it make? I still have only two hands, didn't grow extra ones... We are exactly what we were before we left. Crazy, man... what a waste of time and money...'

As he sat thinking, Saraha put his hand in his pocket to salvage his mobile phone. And when he did that, his hand fell upon something else that was there in the pocket.

It was the black goggles that Shree Samyogaananda had given him. 'Oh! Wow! Look who has turned ultra modern now! The Gurus have also started updating themselves... they now give expensive goggles and wristwatches for gifts to attract disciples...'

Saraha examined the goggles and wore them. 'Hmmm... these are really comfortable. Good stuff, this...' thought Saraha.

At this moment, the auto reached a traffic signal. 'Today's the thirty-first. I should start calling people and arrange for a kickass party tonight...' he thought in excitement, while he fished for his mobile in his pocket. As he drew the mobile out from his pocket, the auto jolted to a stop owing to a red signal on the busy cross roads. The jolt loosened Saraha's grip on the mobile and it fell

on the Auto's floor. Saraha bent down to pick his mobile in a hurry, cursing the traffic signals of the city... he felt the presence of someone at a distance.

Still bending down to pick the mobile, Saraha turned his head to check out whose presence was attracting his attention so much. It was a beggar woman standing a little away from the Auto. She was asking people for money in a well-practiced sad tone...

As the Sun's rays were fading into the dusty twilight, Saraha looked at her. That moment, he felt he was looking at her through a mist of smoky patterns dimmed by the darkness of his goggles... the next moment, what he saw... changed.

The beggar woman was now a little girl in her daddy's arms. The dad was playing with the love of his life. The girl was wearing only a cute little underwear... was laughing out very loud drooling all over her dad's arm... With only two teeth, she looked like a little mouse. And then the vision changed! The girl was perhaps six years old now. She was weeping for her daddy... she was not able to understand why her daddy was not waking up... Saraha now saw her beside her father's dead body. And then the vision changed. The little girl was in her mother's arms and they were on a road... when a man in a white shirt slapped the girl's mother hard. Wide eyed, the girl cried in fear... In just two seconds' time, all these visions had flashed and disappeared before Saraha's eyes and then he saw the present form of the beggar

woman standing and asking for money on a busy road...

Saraha's eyes filled with tears as he straightened up taking the mobile from the floor of the auto. That very moment, the beggar woman instinctively looked at Saraha Sharma and gave a sheepish smile and then started moving towards a car further ahead...

"Stop! Chinnoo, Stop!" cried out Saraha suddenly. The beggar woman got startled and stopped in her tracks. 'Chinnoo!' that's her name, she thought... the name her dad called her...!

She moved towards the auto with a surprised expression.

Saraha put his hand into his pocket and pulled out whatever cash his hand held on to. He put the money into the beggar woman's auto. There was a two thousand rupee note and then some more. But he never looked at the cash for a moment.

The beggar woman looked at the currency notes and back at Saraha.

There was a strange sparkle in her eyes as she did so... a sparkle that gave a feeling inside Saraha's heart that he had never experienced before... a feeling he could not name. At that precise moment, the auto moved on as the green light flashed...

Saraha sat like a statue for the next three minutes. He was blank... his rational mind could not comprehend what just happened...

As the auto moved on in the dizzying peak time traffic in the failing day light of Hyderabad city, another strange thing happened to Saraha after a few minutes...



The auto was now moving towards a place called the RTC Cross Roads.

Like it happened the day before, suddenly, an RTC Bus jetted past the auto that Saraha was travelling by. The auto had gotten scratched on its right side and the auto driver was in a rage. He started yelling the best obscenities he had ever learnt in his slum life.

But Saraha Sharma's eyes fell upon the rear view mirror that was fitted to the right side of the bus driver. The driver of the government transport was clearly visible in the mirror. As Saraha stared at him, the dim vision dimmed even more and then through mysterious misty designs he saw visions... again...

Saraha saw the bus driver getting into the driver's seat. The driver's mind was occupied with too many things. Saraha then saw that the driver's kid was sick. "Take him to the hospital, today..." pleaded the driver's wife. The poor wife was also sick since long now and could not take the kid to a

doc. The driver was not granted a leave that day. Saraha could now feel the heavy feeling that the driver had in his heart.

And then, visions flashed in quick succession. The driver was skillfully maneuvering the huge and heavy vehicle through congested roads with super heavy traffic. Other people on the roads were driving like there had just been a national emergency declared and they had to reach home in the next five minutes. Nobody was in a mood to follow traffic rules or think for a moment if they were causing inconvenience to others on the roads. The bus driver had to take all this and make all the mandatory trips, back and forth on the same route, again and again, all through the day. And yet, he was driving very well, driving with skill and driving home hundreds of people to their destinations.

In just three seconds, all these images flashed before Saraha and as the vision cleared and the bus driver's face resurfaced on the rear view mirror.

As an after effect of the vision, Saraha felt as if he knew the bus driver for very long. Strangely, he felt a close affinity with him... like he was a cousin he had spent weekends with.

Meanwhile, the auto driver was still shouting obscenities. Saraha looked at him with a deep meaningful smile and touched him gently on his shoulder and said "let go, my friend, don't be hard

on him.” And then happened, something that never happens. The auto driver stopped yelling instantly!

After ten minutes, the auto came to a final halt. Saraha got down from the vehicle, paid off the auto driver, picked up his luggage and walked into his home.



As Saraha stepped into the open door, his wife Shreyoshi moved swiftly and stood before him, blocking his way.

“What’s wrong with you, anyway? Your phone is switched off and you do not have the sense to call me up with your whereabouts. What did you plan for tonight? It’s New Year’s Eve remember? Or did you forget that too? You feel that I am nagging and shouting at you. But you don’t realize your own follies. How about having some responsibility in life, for a change Saraha?”

Sreyoshi went on and on in an emotional outburst on seeing her husband. But Saraha did not react or argue, as it was the custom. He was somehow very silent today. He stood there, luggage both hands, staring silently at his wife. When about thirty seconds passed, Saraha felt dizzy and Sreyoshi’s form blurred before his eyes... The oncoming of another bout of visions, he sensed...

A grand party was on. Saraha was looking

at a farewell party in a college. On the dais was Sreyoshi, talking with conviction, in an emotional tone. She said that it was her dream to be an ace administrator to serve people honestly. She was being coached to clear the Civil Services examination. All she wanted in life was to see herself as an IAS officer. And that she will achieve, said she with utmost determination sparkling in her wide opened eyes...

The vision changed. It was a cool cloudy day and Sreyoshi and her father were sitting on the floor of their terrace, under a coconut tree.

"Please darling, you should say yes to this proposal. Listen to me; it's for your own good. Get married to this guy... I am sure that you'll be happy with him. Just forget the Civil Services and stuff... not for people like us... please listen, baby doll..." the dad was pleading with her. Tears welled up her eyes. With the tears, she dropped her dreams too... Saraha could feel her pain in his chest when, the vision changed again...

He could see Sreyoshi happily cooking and getting things ready for Saraha at their home. She had forgotten all about her past and dedicated her life to him at home. Thinking about him while she cooked in the kitchen, she accidentally held a hot bowl on the stove. She cried out in pain, "Aaah"... the poor woman burned her fingers bad. And Saraha saw himself shouting at her 'why can't you pay attention to things you do? You can't do a simple thing like cooking without hurting

yourself?’

Saraha saw Sreyoshi’s pained expression when he was reprimanding her.

In another vision, Saraha saw the same girl in her younger days, getting herself hurt on her knee. Her father then made a big deal of it and was blowing on the wound applying a white ointment on it...

All these visions flashed and disappeared in a matter of a few seconds.



Sreyoshi was still yelling at Saraha... Saraha was standing with luggage in hands and the couple was still standing facing each other. In a swift movement, Saraha dropped the luggage on the floor, bent forward and locked his lips with Shreyoshi’s. A tender and expressive vibe of love emanated when his lips pressed against hers. And then he hugged her tight.

For the next five minutes, neither loosened the hug.

For the next five minutes, neither broke the silence...

Saraha Sharma still had the goggles on.

The New Year dawned the next day.

Saraha got a new perspective.

Moſtho Vamſee

The goggles diſappeared from the houſe,
mysteriouſly.

But Saraha did not need them anymore.

5

The iPhone

*All he asked God for was an iPhone 6Plus.
And what he got will thrill the stars out of
you...*

June 21st 2015

Mr. Avadhani was seventy years old.
He lived alone in Vijaynagar Colony, in a
building that's not actually in a great shape.

As he usually does all through the year, Mr Avadhani woke up early in the morning. Yet, this day was not going to be like any other day in his life. He would not know this right now, but it's not a long wait anyway.

He got down from his bed and started walking to the rest room.

Both his sons live in a foreign land doing just fine. Mr. Avadhani's wife had left him for the heavenly abode a long while ago. He was quite popular in the area where he resided. Should we say popular or infamous? They nick-named him Thor, owing to the feeling of being hit with a hammer on the head, as he talked for lengths of time without the slightest intention of stopping.

Back to the day in question, Mr. Avadhani stopped suddenly in his tracks, moments after he set off to the rest room. Now what? Nothing much... he just wanted to chat with his favorite God. Really? No...actually... he wanted to talk to his favorite God's glossy, high-resolution picture printed on a calendar that hanged on one of his walls. God must have tried to hide behind anything available at that time, when Mr Avadhani prepared to talk to Him.

“What is wrong with you, God? What did I ask for? Just an iPhone 6 Plus. That’s all! Is that so difficult for you, that you did not give it to me? I asked my sons to send it to me. And they didn’t. Fine with me. But it shall not be fine if YOU don’t give it to me. You should! That’s your most basic responsibility. Please do the needful. Hmmm? Thank you”

With that super-short talk, Mr. Avadhani resumed his walk. God must have opened His mouth in astonishment. ‘Wow! He finished so quickly!’

Suddenly something fell on Mr Avadhani’s head and crashed to the ground. It took a few minutes to the frightened Mr. Avadhani to comprehend what just happened. Rubbing his hurt baldhead with his right hand, he bent down to look at what had struck him. And there, on the floor was... a brand new iPhone 6Plus!!!

Mr. Avadhani started jumping with joy. For a moment he was so thrilled that he went back to being a seven-year-old kid, forgetting the rest of the sixty-three years that he spent on this planet. He was so happy, so excited that he praised his favorite God for eighty-nine seconds, non-stop.

Yeah, that was a little too miserly for the Thor's reputation but he promised God that he would continue his praises soon after he returned from the bathroom. God must have felt a great deal of frustration, knowing that he would come back to praise him... but we really don't know. Perhaps that's heavens' classified information.

But really, what has happened? Did God begin answering the demands of mortals? That, my friend, would be revealed shortly. Maintaining suspense is a virtue, just as patience is ☺

That evening, Mr. Avadhani had set himself on his bed. He took a shower, wore clean white clothes and sat down on a neatly washed and ironed white bed sheet with blue flowers on it.

He had charged his God's Gift's battery to the full and now started feeding it with all the phone numbers that his old mobile contained for seven years now. Adjusting his reading glasses, he painstakingly entered each number into the iPhone 6Plus. It took him about three hours to finish entering all the numbers.

Now you would say that's a long time to feed just about thirty contacts. Yeah, I know, but kindly consider his age and how outdated he must have been in using technology. If we would have been there with him watching this activity, we would have been bored to death and would have prayed the Lord to turn this place into Afghanistan so that some kind country's compassionate general would think it worth throwing a bomb on it. Being bombed would have been a better option than to watch what was going on. Yet here we are, happy souls, not having to watch that.

Anyway, by the time the contacts were fed into the iPhone, Mr. Avadhani had a burning sensation in his eyes. He had already got his neighbor Ramgulati to fetch a nano sim for him. The sim card was ready and raging to get inserted into the virgin iPhone.

Before he inserted the sim, he put down the mobile right at the center of the bed and admired it for three and a half minutes. Then he smiled at it. And then he looked at the calendar at his favorite God and sent Him a flying kiss.

Then he slowly picked up the sim card and inserted it into the instrument. He hit the home button and clicked a selfie that he posted

immediately on Facebook. 'Oh, super bro! My first selfie with my first iPhone 6Plus. Feeling awesome!'...

'Who do I call first? My sons? No way! The idiots did not send me an iPhone. Why should I call them? Hmm... then, who is that lucky one who would get my first iPhone call?' he thought. He suddenly remembered Sambaar Murthy, his friend. 'Yes!' He said to himself, 'I should call Murthy. It would be fun waking him up and narrating him my iPhone story!'.

The iPhone 6Plus was showing 11.21pm. He searched the contacts for 'Murthy - Sambaar' and hit dial.

There was just silence. Somebody honked on the road. Someone was watching an old movie in the neighboring apartment. Except these sounds, there was no other sound to be heard. Not from the iPhone. Mr. Avadhani then looked suspiciously at the screen. 'Dialing', is said. But it was not getting connected.

When he disconnected the call tosearched for the phone number of another one of his friends... the iPhone started ringing!

‘Who is calling me at this hour? Is it one of my sons? Could there be something wrong?’ he thought. It was an ‘unknown number’ on display. With unsteady hands, he answered the call.

“Hello? How are you, my love?” said a voice.

“Hey, your voice sounds very familiar... but who is this?” asked Mr. Avadhani... a little excited now.

“Oh, come on, love... you didn’t recognize me? It’s me! Simmee!” the voice replied.

“Simmee? Simmee who? Oh, Smitha, is it? You were my classmate in the tutorials! You are the one who gave me a rose and stalked me for two years... I clearly remember you... Isn’t that you, Smitha?” said Mr. Avadhani with excitement doubled now.

“No. I am not Smitha! I am Sitamalakshmi. Your wife! Too bad, you won’t recognize me till I tell you who I am...” said the lady’s voice in mock anger...

Mr Avadhani went blank.

“Who... Who did you say you are?” he asked, fear seeping into his mind from far off corners.

“It’s me, Simmee” the voice on the phone said,
“Veera Venkata Padmini Paarvati
Raagamaalika Lathaa Seetamaalakshmi.
Shortly your Simmi... It’s me, honey!”

Mr Avadhani got irritated now. “Hey hello,
whoever it is, please stop these practical jokes.
My wife is dead for twenty years now” he said.

“What are you talking, old man? It has been
eighteen years, four months and four days
since I died” said the voice!

Mr Avadhani felt like he just got down a
ride on the giant wheel.

“Enough! Enough is enough” he said and
disconnected the call.

He put the mobile away on the bed and
rested his body on a side. His heart was still
racing. ‘Whoever imitated that voice, I should
confess that they had done a great job... they
have almost got a seventy year old man, a
heart attack’ thought Mr Avadhani as he
switched the bed light off preparing to sleep.
He laughed at himself for getting frightened by
silly pranks.

As Mr Avadhani slipped into sleep, he had a dream. In the dream, appeared Seetamaalakshmi a.k.a. Simmee!

Seetamaalakshmi was serving breakfast. Mr Avadhani who tasted the breakfast, looked up at her. She was standing right beside him. He said “there is excess of spice today”, looking at her with an irritated expression. The next instant, Simmee caught hold of her husband’s hand, screamed out loud, pulled the hand to her mouth in a swift move and dug her teeth into it! Mr Avadhani gave an awkward cry and woke up, perspiring. He saw iPhone ringing, as he regained his senses.

Unknown number, again.

Wiping his sweat with his shirtsleeve, Mr Avadhani slid his finger on the ‘answer’ option and lifted the iPhone to his left ear.

“You won’t answer the phone unless I wake you up from your slumber, will you? You always had this habit of sleeping like a log...” said the female voice, now laughing out loud...

At loss for words, Mr Avadhani blurted out “Who... who is this?”

“It me! Me! Me! Me! Simmee. Remember? You never took me to films, though I loved watching films with you. Long after we got married, you took me to a film, finally. It was... yeah, ‘Aakali Raajyam’. And then you bought me an ice cream on the beach in Madras. Remember now? I am the same Simmee, your wife, my dear!” said the female voice on the other side of the phone.

Mr Avadhani was shocked listening to the perfect details.

“Simmee? Is it really you? How... how is it even possible? You are not alive; how can the dead talk to the living on phone?” asked Mr Avadhani, strangely getting excited...

“Why, my dear? You cannot see the radio waves. You cannot see the Television waves. Yet you use these invisible things and get entertained with them. But you don’t want to believe it when the dead converse with you on a phone, Jumbo?” said she.

“Jumbo”... that word ushered in myriad memories into the old man’s psyche. His wife used to call him ‘Jumbo’ only in private... in rare occasions of intimacy...

Tears now welling up his eyes, Avadhani asked, "Simmee... how are you?" in an affectionate tone.

Simmee's laugh created beautiful soundscapes in Mr Avadhani's ears... "Honey," she said, "thank God, you finally believe that it's really me. Hey... you know something?"

"What?" asked the old man.

"You had never called me by my name with such affection when I was alive..." she said, as if she was sulking for something that happened ages ago.

"That's true, Simmee..." said Mr Avadhani in an apologetic tone... and asked "but tell me, how is it that you are talking to me on phone from the other side? Where do you live in that world? Heaven or Hell? You actually have phones there, is it? How does it look around you? Hey, I was always curious, does reincarnation happen as mentioned in our epics? God and ghosts are all for real? All that our country has been telling in Puranas is true, right? Simmee, talk to me... I want to know..."

Seetamalakshmi laughed merrily. "I had given you this mobile with a purpose. When

my purpose if fulfilled, I will tell you everything you wanted to know”...

“What? What did you say? You had given me this iPhone? It’s not God, then?” asked Avadhani with a confused expression.

“No, Jumbo. It was I who threw the iPhone on your head. Just you and I can talk on this phone. No one else. And you cannot make any calls on it; which means you cannot call me either. Only I can call you on this phone and you can talk” said Simmee, suddenly sounding mysterious.

“Bull shit! That’s it? There goes the joy of iPhone 6Plus... blunkk... into the drain” thought a disappointed Avadhani in his mind.

Simmi laughed out loud, as if she heard what he secretly thought. After a few seconds of silence, she continued in a serious tone...

“You may use all the other features in your iPhone 6Plus. But I will be calling you and you should answer my calls. You have to listen to every word I talk. For thirty years, you had lectured me on and on, remember? You went on instructing me on what’s right and what’s wrong. You never let me open my mouth. You said I was a dummy; you called me a ‘useless

fellow'. Every time, in every situation, it was just you who talked! I wanted to say so much, but could not.

And now is my time. Now, I will talk and you will listen. You actually have to, honey. Unless I finish telling you all that I wanted to tell, I cannot move on to higher spheres of existence" said Seetamaalakshmi...

★ ★ ★

June 21st, 2015

Time : 11.21pm

The iPhone was ringing. Mr Avadhani woke up with a start. Rubbing his eyes sleepily, he looked at the mobile. It was vibrating with vigor... almost jumping up and down. Irritated, he answered the call.

"Hello, Simmee?" he said.

"Yes, it's Simmee. Who else would it be?" she said.

"Do you remember? We just got married and it was my first day in your place. You slapped me that day, because I broke your favorite

teacup..." she said with a trace of nauseating heaviness. She continued, "Know something? My dad used to smile whenever I broke something at home. He used to tell me that I may break anything; everything in the house was mine and I could do whatever I wanted to do with it. He asked me never to feel guilty about anything in life. Being brought up that way, your slap across my face on the first day of my married life marked the beginning of a deep hurt that only grew deeper for the next thirty years..." Her voice sounded as if it were a volcano ready to erupt spraying out a lava of suppressed feelings.

Mr Avadhani felt bad for her. He observed a sense of honest remorse and regret arising in him. "Simmi, what I did was very wrong. But I was young and imbalanced. I apologize for what I did. Won't you excuse me for my behavior...?" he said sadly.

"If I have to excuse you, you should first know how a woman feels when she steps into her husband's home for the very first time..." Listening to that, Avadhani's head started to spin. He felt uneasy and in an instant he felt sleep overtaking him. And then there was this dream...

In the dream, he was a woman. He was standing before a seven-foot husband who was bending forward looking hard into his eyes. All through the dream, the husband tortured Mr Avadhani with his actions in various ways. Mr Avadhani felt hell could certainly be a better place.

And then he woke up. It was morning.

Mr Avdhani's body felt as if he had worked hard on the fields all night. The iPhone was on the bed, right beside him and when he looked at it, Mr Avadhani felt like puking. The next moment, with incredible speed, he picked up the damn mobile and threw it out of the window.

★ ★ ★

June 22nd, 2015

Time : 11.21pm

What woke him up? Then, he heard the ring of a phone!

"This can't be happening! I threw the god-forsaken phone out of the window. How can I hear it ringing again?" he thought as he

searched the bed in the direction of the sound. And there it was! His iPhone 6Plus! It was right under his pillow... good as new!

He did not have much hair left on his head, but that could not stop him from pulling the left over hair in frustration.

The phone kept on ringing. He took it into his hands angrily and disconnected the incoming call and switched the phone mode to silent. Two minutes had passed as he watched it in anticipation. It was just lying there, silently, like a Buddha. 'Thank God!' thought Mr Avadhani and he slowly closed his eyes, inviting sleep. But the moment he did so, the phone came to life again. This time, he knew he had to answer it. Simmi was not giving him a choice.

That night, Seetamalakshmi went on talking for a few hours into the night. Mr Avadhani listened out to her patiently. And then the one sided conversation ended. That night, in his dream, Avadhani saw his wife Simmee again. She had given him an experience in how money is spent at home by a housewife. What constraints limit a middle class housewife and how difficult it was to manage the finances and how many times she had to sacrifice her wants for the family. She

showed him how he had not understood her standpoint and how he had sometimes made her life unbearable with his inhuman criticism.

The night passed. Mr Avadhani woke up with an aching body, again.

The moment he woke up, Avadhani took the phone, went into the street and threw it under a speeding truck. But... yeah, just as you thought... the story did not end there. The iPhone came back to its cozy abode... below Mr Avadhani's pillow.

★ ★ ★

December 16th, 2016

Time : 11:21 pm

The iPhone 6Plus started ringing.

"Hello, Simmee" said the old man.

"Hello, Jumbo... do you remember, you shouted at me one day, saying that our elder son was not being able to get into a proper job. You said that I was a hopeless mother who did not know how to raise children. You called me a moron. Do you know that you had lectured

me two thousand and sixteen times, on the right way of bringing up children? I wanted to tell you what went on in my head whenever you did that. Wouldn't you listen... please..." she said in a soft tone.

"Simmee, I shouldn't have done that, honestly. But it would not make a difference if I apologize, would it? Just go on with what you have to tell me... I am happy that this is doing well to you, dear..." he said with a smile.

That night, Seetamaalakshmi talked till it was 4am in the morning.

★ ★ ★

June 21st, 2017

Time : 11.21 pm

It has been exactly two years since Mr Avadhani found the iPhone 6Plus.

Simmee talked to her old husband every single day, for these two years. She did not miss any day. Strangely, Mr Avadhani felt gratified. There was a pleasure, a warm intimacy, a true joy of companionship with his wife now. He never felt such affection for her

for the entire thirty years when she was alive. Perhaps it is man's strongest trait that he accepts and surrenders to things that are inevitable... like women have surrendered to being thwarted down and suppressed by men, through the centuries...

As he understood that throwing the mobile away or destroying it would make no difference; it would simply come back to its place on the bed, in a healthy condition, the old man stopped trying long back.

Seetamalakshmi's soul talked and talked to her husband. She spoke to him about everything that she wanted to tell him, but was not allowed to, for thirty long years. Although it was very difficult for Mr Avadhani in the beginning, slowly, he got used to it. Eventually, he started appreciating the conversations and her standpoint.

When it becomes inescapable, man owns up fate as if it is his own design.

Coming back to the mentioned day, June 21st, 2017, the iPhone was simply silent at 11:21am that night! Mr Avadhani felt depressed and worried and asked himself a dozen times... 'Why has she not called yet?' He started feeling very sad.

Time seemed to pass very slowly that night. Mr Avadhani waited and waited and felt sleepy at around one 'o clock. He fell asleep, after waiting long for his deceased wife Mrs Seetamaalakshmi to call him on his iPhone 6Plus...

It was dawn now...

But Mr Avadhani did not wake up...

Witness to this strange story... the iPhone, was lying beside him... its battery completely discharged.

Mr Avadhani did not need his iPhone anymore, to talk to his beloved companion.

6

The White Horse With Wings

*For people... three stories of treachery... two
miracles... one thrilling twist!*

Koulini got down the public transport and stepped on the pavement. She started striding purposefully on the foot path of Vidyanagar, an area in her city that has more educated population than the others. She was walking towards her home.

Koulini smiled. 'Oh! This is how it is to walk, then! The legs start aching when you do... Hmmm... It's like I have almost forgotten to walk for the past seven years!', she thought. After she joined Microsoft, she'd gotten used to the car that the company provided her with. And today, she had resigned her job, returned the car and boarded two connecting busses one after the other, and got down at a bus stop that was closest to her home.

Koulini had trusted Vinay Varma, her superior in her organization. The trust was so complete that she never bothered to take any credit for all the crucial work she had delivered so diligently. She just left it to her boss Vinay Varma to handle what was right for her. Most talented as she was, she only focused on managing the project well so as to finish and deliver with perfection.

And so, the sudden development at the end of the project seemed more like a shaky dream to her. She was simply asked to resign or they would fire her due to her 'incompetency'. Forced to resign, she returned the car and started back home. She wasn't even allowed time to take her personal belongings with her. 'They would be sent to your house, don't bother' she was told! 'Such graceful treatment after you pour your blood and sweat into a company for so many years' she thought. 'That's life... business like...'

Vinay Varma! Somebody that she trusted so completely had taken advantage of her trust... the betrayal was just total and perfect. 'If it was

someone else in my place, she would just have been shattered', she thought.

But she felt a never before peace in her heart, presently, as she walked in the most relaxed fashion on the pavements of Vidyanagar... observing everything and everybody around her. Vinay Varma took the credit for her work, got promoted in his job and worked hard to get her fired. Was the peace she experienced now, due to this? Obviously not. Why would anybody feel peaceful when such a tragedy happens?

Notwithstanding the fact that she had been through the worst of betrayals and she had been through the humiliation of being fired in spite of her super performance... Koulini perceived the issue in a very different light. The way she looked at the matter at hand, was so gratifying, that she couldn't help a beautiful smile.

As she walked, she passed an orange colored poster on a wall...



Naadaroop has three children. Each was born within a gap of one year. A daughter and two sons... five, six and seven years old.

It was 8:30pm. Chilling winter winds were at play... On a soft white bed sheet, on a bed with a soft cushioned mattress, three children were lying down, waiting for their father to come. The ceiling fan was in full throttle in spite of the cold weather.

When dad entered the bedroom finally, they made noises of joy. The kids settled down; with their father in the middle, the two boys on either side and the cutie pie on daddy's paunch. This was a ritual they followed every day... that daddy would narrate interesting stories at bedtime to the kids. The kids loved the stories so much that they waited for 8.30pm every day. What the little ones did not know is that they loved their father more than the stories, although the stories were absolutely enchanting to them.

That day, daddy started off with a very strange story that happened hundreds of thousands of years ago, in India. As the story proceeded with suspense and thrill, the little girl on daddy's paunch interrupted her father, unable to contain a question that was jumping up and down inside her little head.

"Daddy, does 'Naagalokam' the World of Serpents really exist?" the girl asked.

"Yes, my teddy bear, it does exist," said dad with a 'trust me' smile.

"What about 'Chandralokam' the Moon World and 'Swarga Lokam' the Heaven?"

"Yes darling, all of them are not just products of imagination. All of them do exist", said the father.

"And the other living beings of the Universe, 'Yakshas, Kinneras, Apsaras... are all these really there?" This time it was the kid on father's right.

“Oh! That is nothing, it’s not just them, there also exist the White Horse with Shining Wings, ‘Kaamadhenuvu’ – the Godly Cow that grants anything you want, the Mighty Powerful Elephant ‘Airaavatam’, Angels that shower in ‘Manasa Sarovaram’... Every one of them is as real as I am to you, bunny boy,” said dad, tickling the kid...

“Then why can’t we all see them, daddy?” the girl asked lifting her head and looking into dad’s eyes with her fiercely innocent look.

“Kucchi Bear,” said the dad “when the new age called the ‘Kali Yugam’ happened on earth, all of them had gone into their hiding place... they are just playing ‘peek-a-boo’...

In reality, what we call the ‘Paathaala Lokam’ – The Underworld and the strange World of Oceans, still exists in the abysmal depths where no scientist could reach till this day... all the things that you hear in fairy tales and the ‘Puraanas’ still exist... where would they go, if they were there in those times?”

This time, the kid to the father’s left cried out in excitement, “Dada, won’t you show all of them to us... please please please please please...”. And then, all the children three took up the cause... “please please please please...”

Naadaroop looked into the pristine clarity that each kid radiated in his/her eyes, in expressing their deepest desire. He took a moment.

And then said,

“Sure, my children, this is your daddy’s promise. You see that door? Which one? Yeah, the main door to our home... Aaah! One day, through that door shall I come, at exactly 6pm... I will be riding a big White Horse with Shining Wings... and I will take you all three Lokas and show you all that you have asked for...”

And all three kids stood up on the bed and jumped in ecstasy... clapping their hands.

“Yeh yeh... thank you daddy, thank you!!!”

The father was overwhelmed with joy looking at their happiness... He added “You remember, we have the photo of a Guru with six hands in our ‘Pooja’ room where we pray? We will all see him too... Just remember, trust a miracle and a miracle awaits you...”

That night, Naadaroop narrated the story of ‘Siddha Lokam’ and all its glories... while the kids slipped blissfully into the black silky folds of sleep...

The next day, Naadaroop, while stepping out of the main door to their home, turned back and waved to the kids. The kids, who were getting ready to school, shouted loud ‘Bye Bye Daddyyyyyyyyy’... recollecting the promise dad had made the previous night.

After that day, twenty-one years have

passed... but Nadaroop never returned home. And never did a day pass, without the kids waiting at the main door to their home...for their father to return... at exactly 6pm.



Samar had tears in his eyes. His hands were shaking. He just dropped himself on the iron bench at the bus stop... unable to muster strength to keep standing any longer...

His shivering hands were holding a white colored mobile phone. Whatsapp messenger was open on it. And the message on the screen was one that Krishna Priya sent him. It was an invite. An invitation to her wedding. Krishna Priya had taken a snap of the wedding invite and had sent it to Samar on Whatsapp. It said 'Krishna Priya Weds Ramanjaneya'...

Eleven years had passed since he was in a relationship with Krishna Priya. They were in love since they were in their eleventh standard in school. He hated the idea of moving away from her... and this single point had influenced every choice he made for all these years.

Samar got selected in the National Defence Academy but did not get himself enrolled. He did not join the coaching to the entrance into the Indian Institute of Technology... that would cut down the time he would spend with his beloved. He never tried to apply to the engineering colleges from

other states in the country, lest he should be away from her.

To the disappointment of his mother, who was a doctor, he joined a course in Commerce that would fetch him a modest Bachelor's degree. Samar thought that when he would marry Krishna Priya, he would be in need for money. So he started off with four different business ideas but could not succeed in anyone of them. He lost all his money...!

And at the moment, Samar had nothing substantial to settle down in life with. So, Krishna Priya had left him and was getting married to someone her parents arranged her wedding with. She had written one word of apology on Whatsapp, along with the wedding invitation. Just a lone miserable... 'Sorry'.

Samar replied to her message. He congratulated her on the wedding and said he wished her a great life ahead. As he hit 'send'... he went into deep thought. 'That was pure, unadulterated treachery! And how sad should I have been? Sad, I am. But along with the feeling of sadness, I am experiencing a strange feeling of joy as well!' he thought, observing himself keenly.

Samar was facing perhaps the most depressing moment in his life. Yet, he found sheer joy permeating his being... and that was because he was able to perceive something beautiful, right at that very moment. As tears filled his eyes, his lips had a trace of something akin to a smile.

On the opposite side of the road, there was an old wall that was ready to fall down any moment. There was an orange colored poster on that wall.



It was a Saturday... and it was time for the Hindi film to be telecast on Doordarshan, a television channel. The three children of were right in the television room but they were not facing the television. They were all sitting facing the main door, just like they do every day at six pm.

Every day, all three of them come home after school in the afternoon. They change and go out to play. But their friends know that the sister and her two brothers would simply leave, no matter what, before **it was** Six 'O clock in the evening. That had been the ritual.

Presently, the children were looking at the door. Not a word was spoken. The clock struck six and then passed a few more minutes. 'It has been long... but he will come as promised... nothing to worry...' was what the three had on mind as they left the room.

'Daddy has not come, even today...'



Nityanand had a white hardbound book in his hand. He felt as if the book was mocking at him. 'God! The vagaries of working in creative fields... even your thoughts are bozokish! Dude, books

have no life, how would they 'mock at' you? Huh?', Nityanand asked himself.

And then he threw the white hardbound book into the huge overflowing garbage bin. He gave a brief glance at a rag picker girl moved towards the book with enthusiasm.

Nityanand felt that the huge garbage bin strangely had a similarity to the majestic mansion that stood on the opposite side of the narrow lane he was standing in. Moments ago, Nityanand walked out of that mansion... moments ago, he was sitting there with a shocked expression... and about thirty minutes before that, his life and his love for life had been totally different.

Yet as he came out of that mansion and threw the book in the garbage... for some strange reason, he started feeling relieved.

Nityanand walked past the garbage bin towards a tree under which his motorcycle was parked. He sat on the bike that could be easily mistaken for junk... He depressed the kick rod nine times. Then, the bike relented and its ancient engine started giving out noises that were closer to the sounds of beasts that roamed the planet in prehistoric times. As he rode on, all that happened in that grand mansion a while ago started appearing before his mind's eye... like the reel of a film...

"Like the real of a film? Oh, that poetic approach in thought, again. Dude, of late, film reels

are not used to make movies... It's the age of digital chips and hard drives," thought Nityanand to himself... And then, he recollected everything in detail...

In a flash, one of the most popular authors, Virat Vishwam appeared in his mind's eye.

Virat Vishwam! He was the author Nityanand admired all his life. The towering personality whose literature influenced him since his school days... Nityanand was sitting in the presence of his God... none other than Virat Vishwam himself... in Vishwam's own abode...

"Nithya, this novel 'Ascetic' that you had written... I loved it, my friend!" said Virat Vishwam.

"Sir! You are a Guru to me... you are the one I admire the most in the literary world. It's your inspiration that led me to write. It is you who had always been in my heart, pushing me a little ahead each day... It is because of you that I had dreamt for fifteen years... of being a novelist one day...

For five years I had written so much and junked it. For years, I had toiled to write the 'Ascetic'... and this compliment from you is a dream come true, honestly... Thank you so much, sir, you do not know how much that means to

me..." said Nityanand almost in tears of joy.

"Very good, then, give it to me. Think of it as a 'Guru Dakshina', the payment you give your Guru... now that you had used that word yourself... Give the 'Ascetic' to me, my boy..." said Virat Vishwam coldly.

"A few changes here and there would suffice... and Ascetic would be added to the list of my novels. You leave that copy here and I'll take care of it... And yeah, I am going to gift you with the first copy of my latest novel, the yet to be released one... that is surely an honor, is it not?" he added pushing a book across the desk that lay between the men.

Nityanand was flabbergasted. He stood there aghast not able to believe a word that fell on his ears. He was shocked numb and felt as if his senses had all suddenly stopped working. After a painful few minutes passed he mustered just enough energy to talk...

"But sir, this is my novel... How could you... you... you are the greatest of novelists of this country... Vir"

"Virat Vishwam... yes. I know..." Virat cut him off sharply "have you ever heard of the term 'the Ghost Writer'? 178 novels and thirty years of career! How could it be possible for one man, my friend? Ha ha... you are too innocent, just born into this arena. Don't worry; you will soon understand

a lot of things that happen here... Don't be too sensitive. You say I had inspired you to be here today, but I would say a lot of people like you worked hard to put me here, at the top of the ladder, buddy."

Virat Vishwam had a smirk on his face that gave Nityananda bitter taste on his tongue. The reality of this man was just too much for Nityanand. He felt like puking on the table...

Now, as the flashes disappeared as quickly as they appeared, Nityanand focused on the bumpy roads and the groaning noises that his dilapidated motorbike was making. 'This bike coughs like the human beings do', Nityanand thought.

'Fifteen years of admiration... all for this man? God! What treachery! My ten years of focused work... the Ascetic... he says he would publish with his name on it! I just can't believe this... peaks of unjust behavior.' thought Nityanand to himself.

His lips were trembling and he felt a shudder through his spine. And as he was trying to get to terms with the overwhelming feeling... another emotion started to take over him... This one was actually positive, something that suddenly made him feel better... No, not better... he suddenly started feeling great... feeling joyful!

And in a moment, Nityanand was sporting a smile; but why? Was it because he was cheated? Nah... It was because he realized something incredibly good in spite of being in this wretched

situation. This took the form of a very beautiful smile...

As his bike crawled on, Nityanand did not notice the orange colored poster he just passed on the road side.



Koulini, ex-software employee, left her footwear at the door, opened the lock and entered the house. She changed into something comfortable and washed her feet hands and face. The great feeling she had some time back, was still lingering in her heart. As she wiped herself with a clean towel, she sat at the dining table... when she heard sounds at the main door.

Nityanand, the aspiring novelist, parked his motorbike, left his footwear, entered the house, washed himself and walked towards the dining table to sit with his sister. None of them tried to break the silence...

It was five thirty in the evening.

After fifteen minutes of silence between the siblings, Samar – the lover, entered the house. As he strolled in and looked at his siblings, all three moved at once, into the main hall of the house.

The old chairs were now replaced by a sofa. All three sat down in their usual places opposite the door. The door was not bolted but was closed shut. Nityanand glanced at Koulini and she got up

and opened the door wide. Eleven minutes remained before the clock would strike six in the evening.

At that precise moment, an unexpected guest pushed himself in. Nakshatra. He had been a close friend to Koulini and Samar in childhood. He was sent to London at a young age and had returned to India this same day, after a long gap. He now looked fair and round...

Nakshatra came in with a truckload of energy and greeted the siblings with a loud shout. All three of them slowly turned their heads in his direction and gave an expression that roughly meant 'What's your problem? Why did you come at this time?'

Nakshatra simply ignored the way they looked at him and practically barged in to sit down on a vacant chair. And then he started talking... non-stop...

The three siblings did not even as much as look at him while he talked away to glory. They were all looking eagerly at the door without bothering to respond to him, even for the sake of good old manners.

"Hey folks, what are you all still looking out at the door? I am already in, remember? Is it not me you had been waiting for?" asked Nakshatra.

There was no answer. And then the clock struck six!

The siblings adjusted themselves in their seats. There was an air of expectation that day in the room. And though Nakshatra did not understand what the siblings were up to, he too caught on the general mood. He started fidgeting in his chair owing to the excited feeling that started making him restless. He wanted to talk but nobody was listening. He was waiting along with them but did not know what he was waiting for...

Every second passed heavily. Nakshatra felt he had to do something to ease the mood. He opened a rolled-up poster that he was carrying. The orange colored poster shone bright in the dimly lit room...!

And at that moment...

Precisely then... a mist started to seep into the house through the main door. A pleasant odor accompanied the thick mist that filled the room in pleasant smoky designs. A low hum, like that of a generator being run was clearly heard by all in the room. And through the mist, something huge was floating into the room!

At first it was not clear. And then it came started becoming visible through the mist... Its long ears, the majestic mane, the long hairy tail, its tall built... the shining white... wings! A White Horse with Shining Wings, it was!!!

It was huge, you could say gigantic... and yet it passed through that humble door, but how? That was a question that seemed to trouble no one present in the room... they were all simply

awestruck.

Koulini, Samar and Nityanand were watching with eyes wide open. As the mist started thinning a bit, they started to see the most beautiful of horses anybody would ever witness. They saw the shining wings...

Nakshatra sat stiff, unable to move, in his chair. His feelings were beyond what words could describe.

And then... they all saw... him! Seated royally on the horse, this man had a majestic white beard that was even more beautiful than the exquisite mane of the horse! The long white haired man was wearing a traditional white Indian dress and the most pleasant of smiles on his lips. His eyes were overflowing with what could be best described as divine love.

Although the beard and the attire made him look much different now, the siblings instantly connected to his eyes and a flash of recognition ignited a feeling of unbearable joy that was impossible to contain in their hearts!

All three shouted in unison... "Daddy!!!"

"Sure, my children, this is your dady's promise. You see that door? Which one? Yeah, the main door to our home... Aaah! One day, through that door shall I come, at exactly 6pm... I will be riding a White Horse with Shining Wings... and I will take you..." Words of a distant and yet not so far off times... started

echoing in the room...

“That is daddy’s voice!!!”

Koulini, Samar and Nityanand stood up. It was the same excitement... they were all the same kids again. They were jumping, they were crying out loud, they were clapping and all of them had tears flowing...

Just as they did that day, they all clapped and shouted “Yeh Yeh...! Thank you daddy, thank you...”

As the father got down from the heavenly beast, the children ran into the mist and hugged him. Daddy had kept his promise! The next moment, all four sat on the White Horse with Shining Wings and then it was seen flying out and into the twilight...

It took a few more minutes for the mist to disappear. But for Nakshatra who was sitting like a statue, the shock would probably not wear out so soon.

In spite of being terribly betrayed in life, even in the darkest of moments, the siblings had perceived something that had made them smile. What was it?

Though they had been betrayed, they still did not lose the ability to trust. Treachery could not kill their trust... they had lived it up for their father, who said...

Behind That Closed Door

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And hey, your friendly pat on Mastho's back would do wonders ☺... Please take a minute to visit my page to **join my mailing list**. Also, for a **FREE peak** into my novel - the weird and whacky Chronicles Of A Spookoholic: Kanchi. And for my **Facebook link, exiting updates** and as such.

MasthoVamsee.com

We shall meet soon in a sequel for the novel I had mentioned above... when the Spookoholic would reappear, this time at... hmmm... let me think... Mexico! How does that sound? Please let me know, give me your feedback and keep in touch on MasthoVamsee.com

- Author Mastho Vamsee

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mastho Vamsee holds a couple of MBA degrees from India and UK. He left a sleepy corporate career as a training consultant to take a leap into the colorful arena of media.

He is an adored entertainer and he entertains people on radio, Youtube, stage, television and feature films. He is an ace voice artist and a music composer too, who churns out lovable Neo Kirtans month on month.

Talk to him about short stories, novels, film making, Tarot, Reiki, Kundalini Yoga, Kriya Yoga, Mantra Yoga and the occult; and you can get to listen to very interesting things in animated expressions.

He treads on path of 'Saadhana' walking towards Enlightenment in this birth.
Connect on fb... facebook.com/MasthoVamsee