

An Eternal Love Story

Amit Khan



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An Eternal Love Story

By : Amit Khan

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

Dedicated to

Zeani

My Wife & My Valentine

*Without her inspiration & co-operation this novel would not
have born!*

Acknowledgment

Dear Friends,

My first novel in English ‘An Eternal Love Story’ is in your hands right now. It has been my dream that is coming true with the publishing of this novel.

Dreams, Dreams are strange, amazing part of our life. I believe that every person must dream and should dream big. One must dream such dreams that seem difficult, even impossible to achieve. Effort to achieve such dreams sets our life on an exciting mission.

I was merely twelve years old when I dreamt of being a story writer. I was so excited that I scripted a story ‘*Vinamrata*’ (The Modesty), based on life of American President George Washington. Overcoming some hurdles, my story saw daylight and was published. My dreams had found wings and were ready to fly high. After that I did not look back and many stories were born. Stories, Children’s Novels, Diamond Comics, Poetries...I went on venturing into so many realms of creative writing. Today, when I look back, I feel as if some invisible force was leading me in all those creations. My stories were piling up into a huge collection.

My works- My stories were published in National level newspaper and magazines like *Punjab Kesari*, *Navbharat Times*, *Filmi Duniya* and *Manohar Kahaaniyaan*.

I had realized my dream of being a story writer. Now a new dream was before my eyes. I wanted to become a novelist. My first Hindi novel was published when I was

only fifteen years old. Today, when I look back at that time, I find it very mystical.

Time rolled by as I penned many novels one after another. Till this date, over such a long period, I have written novels which have been bestsellers. Of course, it was not so easy. In life, nothing commendable is easy to achieve. There were difficulties. There were hurdles. Success tastes sweeter after struggle and pain.

After first Hindi novel, my work in the field of fiction novels prospered. I feel proud in mentioning that more than ninety of my novels have been published in Hindi till date. My protagonist 'Commander Karan Saxena' has become a milestone in the world of Hindi novels. More than fifty-eight of my novels belong to 'Commander' series.

Dream is a thirst that never ends. Fulfillment of my dreams so far was beginning of new ones. That is how it should be. As long as a person is alive, he should envision new dreams.

I had a new dream now. I wanted to be a part of the magical world of Films and Television Media. I had to leave my home, my city to achieve that. Leaving my family- my people was the hardest part. Isn't it true that the dreams seen when we are wide awake are the ones we are able to accomplish? There is pain. There is sacrifice. The highway that takes to fulfillment of dreams is tough and painful. I parted with my loved ones. They have been my true treasure, my true wealth. I can still feel the pain of moving away from them.

I arrived in Mumbai and my new dream shaped up into reality. I was involved in films like 'Karz- The Burden of Truth' and 'Krantiveer- The Revolution' as a writer. I was making my presence felt in television world with my work in serials like 'Suraag', 'Hello Inspector', 'Neem- Neem,

Shahad-Shahad’ and ‘Haunted Nights’. These shows written by me were popular and achieved good TRPs. Currently I am writing films for ‘Manmohan Desai Production House’ and ‘Himesh Reshammiya Production’. Along with Hindi films I am also writing Marathi and Bengali films.

After settling in Mumbai, I dreamt of writing English Novel. Today with the publishing of this novel, I have accomplished another dream of mine. This is an era of globalization and we are becoming global citizens. English has become an important and indispensable language for us. I must mention and thank ‘Chetan Bhagat’ and ‘Amish Tripathy’ who have given Indian writers a new identity in global market.

I would like to thank few people. First of all, Dr Alok Jadhav who has played important role in strengthening the language of this novel. I must also thank Mr. Gurpreet Singh and Mr Sunder Rajan who have enriched English language of this novel.

Well, the novel is in your hands now. You, the reader will be the best judge of my work. Your opinion about whether and how much you like this novel is very important to me. Be kind and frank to let me know your reactions through e-mail. Your mails will inspire and encourage me.

Awaiting your response...

Yours sincerely,

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1

Yes, it is true. We often underrate a person's importance in our life. We fail to appreciate the person who is close to us or maybe we just take that person for granted. It is only after death, that the person's value is perceived.

This is exactly what happened with me. Panchali and her love entered in my life like a blessing from God. Soon it became the most precious gift of my life. All I had to do was to treasure it. She was my better half and I should have respected and loved her like she deserved. Unfortunately, I could never completely understand her passion and affection for me. I am talking about the times when Panchali was with me, when she was alive. It is unfortunate not to cherish love when you have it in your life; because once you lose it you may never find it. I did learn this lesson but by the time I learnt it, it was too late.

I can never forget her. Panchali- everything about her was magical.

I can still feel her with me, in my every breath.

Some people say- 'Death is a horrible thing'. Some differ in opinion and say- 'There is nothing more beautiful than death, as it is considered 'a new beginning'. 'It is nothing but change of costume for the soul and a new journey begins'.

Panchali was different from all. She was unique and I never met anyone like her.

She embraced death but the desire to live life was also very much persistent in her. She could never let go of her thirst for life.

Blame it on 'Love'. Love can make your life so blissful!

Life and Death are nothing. Love plays by its own rules. Love is beyond the realm of life and death.

Once in love, a person can even cross swords with God. Love pours that sanctity in you. The energy it triggers inside a person is so strong that even elements bow before the realm of love.

Panchali had so much love in her that elements could not make her surrender.

My Panchali clashed with destiny and fought with God for her love- for me!

My name is Parimal Ghosh. I am an English novelist and I have written five novels so far. All five of them have been best sellers. My novels have been very successful in European fiction market. Most of them have set new benchmarks of success in terms of sale and popularity. In short, I am at the peak of my thriving career which has remarkable future prospects.

I love my writing work and it is 'Love' that my writing deals with. I write romantic novels. Love is a universal feeling that everyone can identify with. No matter what part of the world my reader belongs to, he or she understands the passion and intensity in the romantic world that I try to create in my novels. After all, everyone falls in love at least once in life. My readers are young and urbane. My romantic work touches their hearts and lives. I often feel

that my thinking matches with my readers; and it is an essential thing for any writer.

It is not that I can't deal in other genres, but a writer has to be convinced about his beliefs as well as his readership. I cannot imagine my young readers to believe in ghost stories. Spirits-demons are blind beliefs that are utterly discarded by them. Even I do not believe in such things at all. In today's modern times, who would believe such an old fashioned crap! Life and death are the only certainties. Ghosts and spirits are just the games played by human minds. It is that simple. Why would a person believe in something which he has never seen or experienced? Our common sense does not allow us to do that. So ghosts, spirits and the whole 'paranormal world' thing is just a façade. At least that is what I used to believe.

But then, one never stops learning in this remarkable school of life. The world does bring forward and teach new things that we must accept. Being open minded is, of course, a pre-requisite. Then the possibilities of learning are endless. So often, books cannot teach us what our experience can!

It happened with me.

The love in my life took a tortuous course and enlightened me. There were many surprises and shocks en route. Smiles were abundant and so were tears. Love is after all a complex emotion. Like night and day, like sunshine and rain, it plays with our mind and sometimes our life. This is a kind of love story you have never heard or read.

Kolkata is my home town. I used to stay in the famous 'Gole Market' area. Panchali was from the same locality. We met in college and the reason we met was nothing but a 'story'. I had contributed a love story to the annual edition of college magazine. Panchali was crazy about that story. I

clearly remember it- I was in the college library where she approached me. She had no words to express how much she loved my story. The thought of my story, the language and characterization had touched her. Panchali had fallen in love with my love story.

Our very first meeting had a spark and it led to many more meetings.

We used to be much eager to meet each other.

Phone conversations used to go on for hours. It used to be a frank exchange of words. We never needed a topic to talk about. It was very tender to keep talking- to keep sharing our feelings.

Life was full of love. Our feelings were blossoming like flowers of spring. Fragrant and colorful! Meeting of eyes was hypnotic; touch of hands was sensational.

Let me confess that I used to be having uneasy meetings with her in public places. At least in the early days I used to feel awkward about being seen with her.

One day Panchali said, “Love is not something to be embarrassed about, not something to be done away from the watching eyes of society. Come out in open and express it. You will have a better chance to win a heart. Do it in hiding and girl will disappear one day.” She was smiling when she said that.

Even I started laughing. She could make me smile at any moment.

It weren't just her words that cheered me up. She had her own philosophy of love.

Her words had desired effect on me. I was no more hesitant to meet her in public place. Watching films together became a regular event. Visiting theatre for watching plays was even better.

I still remember my first date.

First date

Nobody forgets the first date. It is just so thrilling. First date, First Kiss, First Night. Everything. Memorable and awesome. The magic cannot be recreated. The very first feeling gives the ultimate experience.

Just like the magic of first love, first date creates an impression in our mind which cannot be erased ever. No matter how many dates follow after that, the thrill is never quite the same again.

And, my love was Panchali. The most special girl in the whole wide world.

Panchali was really special in every respect. Not just because I was in love, she indeed had special qualities that gave her a magnetic personality.

How could first date with such a special girl could not be memorable!

Rabindra Sadan in Calcutta was a famous venue for theatre plays. I had decided to take Panchali there on our first date. A romantic Bengali play in a perfectly romantic setting. That was what I had chosen for our first date and hoped that it would work out great.

I know that it was not the usual setting guys want on their first dates. A romantic lonely place is what mostly choose. Some place where not many people are around to disturb. Quiet classy restaurant is another common choice where time crawls at an easy pace. In the comfortable climate of not so crowded restaurant, two people in love can talk forever. Soft whispers of two hearts in love. Time can walk as slowly as it can and yet the romantic conversations never end.

Well, I chose Rabindra Sadan. An auditorium jam packed with spectators.

Panchali loved watching plays. I thought the best place to take her would be a setting where emotions come alive and expressions create a drama before our eyes. As real as life! As intense as possible!

I did not know that my decision would backfire.

I expected the romantic play to bloom before our eyes. I thought, it will turn on the romance in our hearts. Panchali will feel romantic and then we will talk for rest of the evening. Sharing my thoughts and listening to hers was intended.

Nothing like that happened.

Yes, the play was romantic and it did set our hearts afire. Yet, as it approached climax, depressing events started unfolding. The end of the play was tragic. The hero died leaving the heroine lovelorn. The heroine crushed by her lover's death, cried in agony. She looked for her lost love everywhere. Her tears were ceaseless and heart-wrenching.

Tears on the stage were soon followed by tears in my next seat. Panchali's eyes filled with tears. Panchali had got so involved in the play that she shared the character's pain and actually started sobbing.

Shaken by the tragic events unfolding on the stage, she grabbed my hand and held it tightly.

It was her first touch. Yes, it was the first time we had come so close. My heart raced as she touched my arm. There was tenderness in that touch but also there was restlessness and pain. Pain of someone else's broken heart. Pain of someone's lost love.

"Prem," she said. Her voice was choked with emotions.

“Tell me Prem; tell me that you will never leave me like that!”

The candid agitation in her honest voice reached deep inside my heart. I was too struck too speak.

“P...Panchali...” I could only struggle.

“You know Prem,” she continued, “love can make us so strong and so weak at the same time. People in love feel so strong inside and fight so hard for the triumph of their love. They won’t care whom they are fighting against. They won’t stop even if the whole world is up against them. But then Love can make us feel so weak. One person... One person becomes so important for us that we cannot live without that person. Life without the one we love is unimaginable. So tell me Prem, promise me that you will never leave me!”

“P...Panchali!” I was merely whispering and rest of my words drowned in emotions that rushed like waves in my mind.

“I can’t live without you, Prem. I can never live without you.”

We were in a theatre.

A theatre that was packed with people.

Panchali was so lost in the romantic play that she had completely forgotten where she was. She was not a part of that crowd anymore. Although surrounded by people, she was not aware of her existence. She was not Panchali at that moment.

Panchali had become the character in that play. The woman overtaken by love; the character whose life was guided by nothing else but love! The lover whose life will be meaningless if love was taken out of her life!

Everyone in Rabindra Sadan was now looking at her. Our conversation had attracted everybody's attention. Panchali's tears and words were too real to ignore. Hence people were struck by her expression.

When Panchali realized this, she suddenly felt too embarrassed to sit there. Panchali left the auditorium in a hurry. I followed her. Entire Rabindra Sadan was acknowledging with an applause that echoed in the grand hall.

Our first date turned out to be unique and memorable. Not in a way I had planned but it was unforgettable anyway. Thousands of people witnessed it. The Rabindra Sadan in Calcutta witnessed it.

How can I ever forget that first date?

It was Panchali and Panchali alone that made it special. I was her companion, no doubt but the charisma was all hers.



Equally memorable was our first kiss.

First Kiss

It was something out of this world.

Neither I nor Panchali had expected that something will happen that way.

It started strangely. Isn't it amazing how destiny designs such beautiful things in such an unexpected ways?

Panchali loved to eat *Gol Gappe*. We often visited New Market especially for relishing *Gol Gappe*. In Calcutta, *Gol Gappe* are known as *Puchka*. This famous venue of New Market was just ahead of Chowrangee Road. It has always been a happening place in town.

"Let us have a bet," Panchali smiled at me and said.

I could see that she was being naughty. Something was cooking inside her head. She looked excited like a kid.

"A bet?" I was surprised. "What kind of bet?"

"Whoever eats more *Gol Gappe*, wins."

"What?" I was shocked to hear the challenge. "Have you lost your mind?"

"Why?" She was laughing. "Scared?"

“No! Not at all!”

“Then we are on. Let us see how good you are in eating. Prove that you are better than me.”

“But...”

“If and But are for faint hearted people, Prem. Dictionaries of confident people do not have that word ‘but’.”

“Okay. The bet is on,” I accepted.

Now, I was also all charged up. After all, when a girl friend throws a challenge like that, it becomes a question of honour and ego. There was no turning back. If it takes eating *Gol Gappe* to impress her, then so be it.

We started eating *Gol Gappe*.

It was a slow and steady start for both but soon speed picked up. It did not take long to figure out who’d win.

My God!

Panchali was an eating machine when it came to *Gol Gappe*. It was unimaginable how this tender girl could take in so many *Gol Gappe*. Soon I realized that she was going to beat me hands down. She was gulping down *Gol Gappe* like one bites ‘Chana’.

I had to stop at the count of thirty. Panchali was just getting warmed up by then.

I lost that bet.

A boyfriend may choose to lose from his girlfriend. Just to win her heart; to make her feel better.

I did not lose purposely.

I had tried my best to beat her at eating *Gol Gappe*. I was not good enough and she was a pro.

Panchali could not stop giggling. She teased me and kept laughing.

I was happy to see her so delighted.

It made me forget my humiliation of defeat.

Her smile was so pure, so auspicious. When she smiled, she made me forget everything else. I used to lose myself in that beautiful smile.

When she used to smile, it sounded like as temple bells were chiming propitiously.

You might wonder what this has to do with the first kiss. My friends, this did lead to first kiss.

The *Gol Gappe* episode started a turn of events that culminated in first kiss. I won't deny that these things are planned. Most of the guys use to plan their first dates and even first kiss. They want it to be perfect.

The more you plan, more are the chances that something will go wrong.

I think Love is like a flowing river and you just have to go with the flow. Start planning too much and there is a risk of drowning. Love is a matter of heart and it is better not to invest too much brain in it.

Planning and strategies are used in business and whatever love may be, it is definitely not business.

Coming back to *Gol Gappe* challenge, it had to show its effect and it did. Losing that challenge was a healthier choice. Panchali's health suffered. Not a surprise after you eat 'God knows how many' *Gol Gappe*.

Next day, I visited her at her home. I wanted to make sure that she must be fine.

Panchali's parents were a religious couple; well educated, cultured and peace-loving people. Her father had been retired after teaching literature at Calcutta University. He was a keen researcher of paranormal world and events. His interest in that field had led to profound reading and writing on the subject. A book written by him on the subject

of paranormal world had also been published and widely acclaimed.

Panchali's parents were glad to see me. I could easily see that they liked me. My acquaintance with Panchali was approved from their side.

I used to respect and love them like as my parents. Meeting them, talking to them and seeking blessings from them were matters of pleasure for me.

My parents had died few years back. Meeting Panchali's folks made me feel comfortable and as if I was in company of my parents!

That day, after being greeted by them, I entered Panchali's room.

Panchali was really unwell. Even in her uncomfortable position, she had not lost the magical smile on her face.

"Great," I said, "This is the result of winning the bet. Now celebrate it lying in the bed."

She laughed heartily.

"Surprising!" I said. "How can you laugh having so much discomfort? You are amazing and a little crazy."

"If laughing is craziness then I don't mind being called crazy, my dear Prem," Panchali confessed confidently.

Panchali just could not stop smiling. Her personality was like that. She was the kind of person who could make anybody feel better with her kindness and smile.

My eyes were glued to her face.

"You know Prem," she said profoundly, "how can we spread happiness if we are not happy ourselves? To cheer everyone up, we must learn to be happy all the time. That is why I start my day with a smile and try to stay cheerful throughout my day. Then I try to spread happiness. It is

not as difficult as we think. Happiness is so infectious. It spreads easily.”

Her every word was delightful and even now her smile was so beautiful that I could not stop myself.

I felt a strange rush in my body and I pulled Panchali close to me. The closer we came the more beautiful she looked.

Not only beautiful in looks but also beautiful at heart! So much caring, so much kind like a holy river that sanctifies everyone!

I embraced her and soft, warm embrace was too magical to let go. I sensed myself melting away in that warm hug.

Panchali’s arms were eagerly wrapped around me. Her affectionate fervent cuddle had the tenderness of satin and warmth of Sun.

It was like flowing away, losing myself, unaware of time and place.

Everything that happened, thereafter, was spontaneous. Even we hardly realized until our lips met. The soft, eager expression was a blissful rush that we both felt. There are no words to express the magic of that first kiss.

When we were back to alertness, it suddenly felt embarrassing. We moved away from each other’s arms and could not look into each other’s eyes.

I felt too uneasy to stay there anymore. So, I left the place in hurry.



I still remember our first night.

First Night

The circumstances that led to our union were quite shocking. I also had to wait long for the first night.

One tragic event triggered a lot of successive events.

Panchali lost her parents in a tragic road accident.

They were travelling in a taxi. The family had decided to visit Taki, a famous picnic spot some seventy-five kilometers away from Calcutta. Panchali's father was fond of that place and often used to visit it. He had also purchased a cottage there. The family often used to spend some time in that cottage.

This time Panchali dropped out of the plan and only her parents left for the picnic.

The taxi, they were travelling in, dashed against a truck on a highway. Nobody in the taxi survived. Panchali's parents lost their lives on the spot.

The news crashed upon us like a bolt of lightning. We were stunned. Panchali was alone now. There was no one to take care of her except me.

We got married soon after that.

Wedding was my decision but the thought behind it was Panchali's. She was very clear about important things in life. Panchali used to say- "At any stage of life, if you are making an important decision then listen to your heart. When in doubt, listen to your heart. Heart might be beating on left side but its decision is always right."

I listened to my heart and got married to Panchali.

Then came the first night. The eager, nervous, magical first night. Not just a guy but also the girl eagerly awaits it.

Have you ever seen snow clad mountain tops melting away with the warmth of Sun?

Oh! The night was like that.

Beautiful, exciting, new and never ending! The tepid tenderness was melting us both away. We were losing each other and sharing existence.

I must confess that there was some sadness too in that night.

After parents' death, Panchali had turned a little grim. Her smile was not as elegant as before. Her mood was not as cheerful as it used to be.

When she smiled earlier, it used to be like a rushing spring of water, a waterfall dancing down a hill. Now her smile was like a placid peaceful lake. The calmness was not so comfortable anymore. The shine in her smile had faded but our love was as strong as ever.

I gifted Panchali a love bird on the wedding night.

"Love Bird?" She was surprised.

"Yes."

"Why Love Bird?"

"Because the two of us are like Love-Birds," I said,

“we can’t live without each other. We are inseparable. If separated by force, we will die.”

Panchali did not say anything. She stared at the birds blankly.

“You didn’t like my gift?” I asked.

“Oh, not that. It’s nothing like that,” Panchali tried to convince me that she was fine.

But Panchali was not fine. She was not happy.

“Okay, let us go out,” I said to lighten her mood. “Let us go to the New Market again and have *Gol Gappe*. And I want to challenge you again today.”

“You want me to fall sick again?” Panchali smiled weakly and said.

“No, I want you to win again.” I looked in her eyes. Her deep eyes where I always found peace, love and comfort.

“I don’t want to win anymore, Prem!”

Panchali’s voice was throbbing.

“Why?” My heart sank.

“I want to lose myself to you, Prem,” she said and rushed into my arms suddenly.

Her words had dedication. Her embrace had commitment.

“I want my husband to win, always,” Panchali whispered in my arms. “I don’t want to see you lose ever again, from no one.”

“Oh, Panchali!”

I held her tightly. Emotions and feelings were on a peak. Like a high tide had come rushing to a shore! Love was ignited and found the moment of intimacy.

We were melting away in each other’s arms. The magical moment was arriving.

Soon Panchali was before me like she had never been. Uninhibited, undressed. No boundaries remained between us now. I was staring at her as she lay before me. I had to stop a moment and admire the amazing sculpture nature had created and she was mine. It was such a proud feeling.

“What are you looking at?” Panchali said cuddling herself.

“Looking for the girl that loved me; the one that smiles all the time.”

“Did you find her?” Panchali inched closer to me.

“No,” I said without taking my eyes off her. “I think the girl is all grown up; blossomed into an angel.”

“You are so naughty,” she flung a pillow at me and then plunged herself in my arms passionately.

Our breaths were warm and fast. Our hearts were racing now. Pressed hard against each other, we could hear each other’s throbbing hearts.

Tenderness turned to warmth and warmth turned into flames.

Our excited breaths helped us melting in to each other, become one. Why just snow, metal could lose its being in the heat of that passion!

That was my first night.



4

My world changed after marriage. So many people experience this.

Panchali was indeed a fabulous person. Gems of her character opened before me like unfolding petals of a beautiful flower. I grew as fond of her as she had become mine. Our love blossomed into an eternal relationship.

It is correctly said that wife is like Lakshmi, the Goddess. She brings in good luck and wealth.

I had started tasting the success. My novels were being published now.

My first novel was published by a British publisher. It was a best seller in the world market. It created new sales records in the world of novels. There was no looking back after that.

I poured as much passion as possible in my work and the results were there to be seen. My novels were fast gaining recognition and appreciation. It is a very important phase for a writer when his career is picking up. All he thinks about is his work. Success and fame become his only targets. Everything else becomes secondary. I was no exception and I focused all my attention on work. My work soared higher and success caressed me.

Today, when I look back at those days, I understand that it was Panchali who had brought me luck. There are many talented people who work hard but to no avail. Only Love can work that magic in your life. It can help your work shine and make your fortune glimmer. In reality, Panchali had opened doors of success for me.

I wish I had understood it. My mind was so much soaked in success that I almost stopped appreciating Panchali's love. I was too busy with my stories to realize that it was Panchali who had brought all the fortune and success in my life.

Then life took a new turn.

"Bro," my publisher one day called me and said, "I think it is the right time you consider moving to London. You can settle down there."

"London!" I was surprised. "Where would I stay in London?"

"You don't have to worry about that," my publisher said, "I own a cottage in West London, right where you will like it- South Hall. That cottage has been unoccupied for some time. It will be perfect for you. I am sure you will feel at home here. First few days will be tough for your family but sooner or later everyone settles down."

He had certainly thought it out. The plan appealed me right away and I started pondering over pros and cons. I promised him that I will give it a serious thought. I also asked for some time to think.

"What's there to think about?" my publisher insisted. "Take my word for it. Your writing work will speed up. We can plan publicity and marketing of your work together. That's perfect. I think it is time you start fishing in a bigger pond. Can't you sense a bigger opportunity in this plan?"

Actually I did. Not just bigger, but I sensed the biggest call of my destiny in my publisher's voice. And these kinds of opportunities don't come knocking on your door every day.

It was also about connecting me with an international market in a more dynamic way. For someone who works in an international language, it was not only good but also essential. 'This is a time to globalize,' I felt. 'Then why should I hesitate?' It did not take me long to reach a decision. I was young and a bright future was calling out to me. I decided to become a global citizen. The country I was migrating to was also perfect. Britain- the centre of English Literature; the land where great English Work has been created; the population that understands and appreciates the wealth of English Fiction!

While I was excited with this new prospect, Panchali had a difficult time accepting my decision. She did not agree with my plan to move abroad. Kolkata had been her home forever and she did not want to move away from it. She was emotionally attached to her hometown. The streets of Kolkata, the trams and rickshaws had become a part of her life. The sights of the city of joy and its essence had become inseparable from her existence. Moving away from her relatives and college friends felt too difficult for her.

But I had put my foot down. The decision was final. Whether Panchali liked it or not, I was adamant on moving to London. That is what happened in the end. I knew Panchali would be a little upset but I also knew that she loved me and will accept my decision.

We packed up our life in Kolkata and flew to London. South Hall had a hospitable feel and our cottage was fantastic. I instantly felt acclimatized because the atmosphere in our cottage was just the kind I was looking

for. With all the peace and liveliness present in our new home, I found perfect ambiance for my writing work. My scope as a writer was also widening. Interacting with those who were already successful in the trade was necessary. Only a writer can connect completely with thoughts of another writer. I joined the writers' club in London. It was a remarkable feeling to spend hours in company of world famous writers, discussing world literature. A lot of my time was also spent in discussions with my publisher. We planned my forthcoming novels together. Even at home I was completely immersed in my work. I used to lock myself up in my writing room. Sometimes from morning to evening, day after day, I focused on nothing but writing. My world had changed after moving to London and I was busy oblivious to the other person in my life.

Panchali! It must have been a tough time for her. She was not working there, neither had she any other occupation to spend her time. Her world revolved around me and I was not there for her. In spite of being under one roof, I had secluded myself. I thought it was dedication to my work. I didn't realize the selfishness of my behavior. Panchali had come in to my life with unbound limitless love. She had dreamt a happy life with me. All she wanted was to spend as much time with me as possible. That was precisely what I could not give to her.

Whenever I spent long hours in writing room, Panchali would come and join me. I remember her. Sitting in my room, watching me and waiting for me to come out of my writing trance! There was so much she wanted to talk to me but I had no time for her. I should have understood her loneliness. How was she supposed dealing with isolation when there was no one else in her life except me? Her presence in my writing room was her desperate effort to share time with me.

“Please!” I lost my temper one day and shouted at her. “Do you have to come here again and again? It disturbs my concentration. My writing gets affected so stay away from my writing room.”

Panchali was stunned with my outburst. She did not speak a word in response. It might just be the shock but, I swear I could see tears gathering in her eyes. But, I was too upset to control my irritation. I wish I had not been so harsh that day. At least, I should have apologized for my behavior. This, of course, is an afterthought and afterthoughts don’t count, neither do they repair the damage already done.

Every action does give rise to a reaction. So often, one event in our life gives rise to another. The outburst on that day pushed Panchali’s life on a track that led to unimaginable consequences. Had it not been for that day, this story- this strange series of events in my life would not have happened.

I could see a major change in Panchali’s attitude after that day. She stopped bothering me in my writing room. It was instant and complete reversal in her behavior that struck me. I did not complain. After all that’s what I had told her. I got the undisturbed solitude, which I wanted in my writing room.

Almost a month passed. I went on with my work. Panchali did not disturb me even once after that day. I was surprised that she was turning out to be such a strong willed person. I would have expected her to get restless or at least she would have talked to me about it. Anyway, I refused to give it any more thought and chose to ignore it.

My entire day, during that period, was dedicated to novel writing. Engrossed in my work I would hardly spend

time away from my desk. It might sound far-fetched to you but, it is true that a writer needs this kind of complete involvement in his work. Creative work cannot be achieved without such dedication. After all, we writers are trying to create an imaginary world for our readers. In that process, we start living in that world ourselves. Anybody else's arrival in that world is annoying. Anyway, now Panchali's arrival in my room was out of question. Our encounters narrowed down to time spent in bedroom. On dining table we used to chat a little. It was mostly insignificant chat about the minor things in life. Even in those conversations, I clearly noticed that her usual liveliness and energy was missing.

It was understandable. Panchali was still upset with me. 'It is common with women,' I convinced myself. 'No matter how much a woman loves her person, after a traumatic incident she keeps away for a while. Even avoids conversation.' I hoped things will get back to normal in few days. I knew Panchali. She could not stay away from me for long. Playing little mischief with me was an absolute delight to her heart and she will soon start doing it again. After that her behavior would turn back to normal and she would forget about the episode that hurt her feelings.

That was what I thought but situation had really changed. Nothing that I expected was happening anymore.

Panchali's silence continued longer and longer. She was out of my sight for most part of the day. My ears longed to hear her voice. My eyes began yearning for her sight. I rued myself for driving her out of my writing room. Now her absence began bothering me. Our mind is funny, isn't it? When someone is paying us too much attention, we tend to get irritated. We even drive that person away. But

when that person stays away from us, we secretly wish that person's company. We wait for that person to come and disturb us. I was secretly hoping that Panchali's calm and secluded behavior would change soon. It was ironic that I wished Panchali would come into my room and disturb me for a while. The inevitable happened. Once again I found my writing affected, this time because of absence of Panchali. I would often remember her in the middle of writing session.



5

One day I stopped writing. I suddenly felt an urge to be with Panchali. I could not concentrate anymore and hence walked out looking for Panchali in the cottage. She was nowhere to be seen. Not in living area; neither in kitchen. I thought she might be resting in the bedroom, but she wasn't there too. I was beginning to worry about her. It was not like her to disappear like that.

Where was Panchali?

I was restless. This had not happened before. I desperately searched rest of the cottage. My mind started panicking with fearsome possibilities. Panchali was a sensitive person and I had been rude to her for a long time. I was almost running through entire cottage. Every corner and every room in it! I did not find her. She wasn't in the garden either. There was one final place to search- a small outhouse attached to the cottage. I could not have imagined Panchali to be there. But she was there! As much relieving finding her there was, the circumstances were that much mind boggling.

The door was closed.

I knocked at it desperately. Panchali opened the door. She was surprised to see me standing before her.

"What are you doing here?" She asked, confused with my presence.

“I should be asking you this question,” I threw back the question at her. “I have been looking for you all over and here you are in the outhouse. What are you doing here anyway?”

Panchali was still standing in the door not letting me in. Still curious, confused and a bit irritated with Panchali’s strange behavior, I shoved her aside and entered the outhouse. The scene inside stopped my heart for a second. It was more than surprising, even more than a shock. Anybody would have got stunned with the sight I saw inside.

The outhouse had turned into a mysterious room. My eyes scanned the books lined up in one corner. The books were based on Tantrik Culture, Black Magic, African Voodoo and Western Dracula Myth. A horrendous book collection that blew my senses! No person, with a stable mind, will turn to these books. Yet there they were nicely lined up for reference. That was nothing as compared to what I saw next. The collection of unimaginable objects was waiting to turn my brain numb. Human bones and animal skulls adorned the assembly. I started having goose bumps seeing the horrible items. Also present there were snake skins and lizard skins. With every sight my breathing was disturbed and mind was confused beyond all comprehension. It was like a Museum of horrible objects and Library of Mantra-Tantra out there. Panchali was not reacting, nor was she trying to explain. She just allowed me to scan the room completely and waited for my questions. I did not know what to ask her. So many questions were storming in my mind and driving me crazy. I was trying to decide whether I was more angry, more shocked or plain scared. Seeing Panchali standing quietly in that room was the most disturbing fact. As if she owned that bizarre zone!

The outhouse truly looked like a den of a Tantrik

practicing magic and witchcraft. A paranormal world has taken shape over there. All the equipments and literature clearly suggested that Panchali was attempting some crazy experiments in the outhouse. I saw a Planchet spread out to summon spirits. That was too much. I was never in to those beliefs but, I knew enough to know that such things should not be messed with. Not believing in some things does not take away the fear factor those things create in your mind.

“Panchali!” I was almost freaking out now. “Tell me what’s going on? What are you doing here?”

“Prem, you live in a world of stories; a world of fiction,” Panchali explained in a calm, composed way. She had always called me ‘Prem’ instead of Parimal. “This is the world I am living in nowadays,” she informed as easily as if describing a hobby. “A mysterious world of Tantra-Mantra. A world of spirits! I have found peace of mind in this world. It has also helped me in my attempts to deal with a loss. You know how I lost my parents in a car accident. It was a painful time for me and I have missed them ever since. But now I can talk to them.”

Panchali’s every word was shocking. I stood there wordless, hearing about her new world.

“Yes Prem, I can talk to my parents now,” Panchali continued, “do you see that Planchet? I summon my parents’ spirits every day and talk to them. I am not alone anymore. My mom and dad are with me. They are always around after I summon them. I have found solution of my loneliness. And what could be a better company for a person than her beloved parents? When you are busy in your world of stories I am busy in this new world of mine. A fascinating world which gives me company and happiness.”

I could read her face as she explained her endeavors in the outhouse. She was indeed at peace with her new

ventures. There was not even slightest feeling of guilt in her words. I was the one who had lost temper completely.

“Panchali!” I screamed. “Have you gone mad? Have you completely lost it? Spirits...Ghosts? All this is crap! You are imagining all this. There are no spirits, Panchali!”

She was undeterred from my outburst and faced my angry accusations with calmness and confidence. Only a person very sure of his beliefs can be so cool, calm and collected.

“No Prem, you are wrong.” Her voice had a strange conviction in it. “This is not my imagination. Spirits are for real. People who die early, those who die with unfulfilled tasks and desires, have unfinished business. They can’t rest in peace after death. Their spirits do wander around us. Looking for ways to fulfill their wishes! It is true that spirits wander around us. Our eyes can’t see them. We can feel them faintly. But if we open proper channels and summon them, then they respond. They come closer. We can see spirits if we desire as much as they do.”

“Panchali, stop this nonsense!” I could not control my rage and did not know any other way to stop her. So, I screamed again. “I can’t believe what I am hearing. And from you? Not even in my dreams! You need to get out of this hole. You will go crazy if you stay here anymore.”

I believed I was doing it for her own good. This was unacceptable behavior from her. I grabbed her arm and pulled her towards door. She was reluctant to come out. I was determined not to allow that nonsense in our house.

“Panchali! Please! Get out of here,” I shouted at her again.

“No Prem, you get out of here!” Panchali shrieked, freeing herself by jostling me away. I remember her voice

as she spoke back to me. I had gone cold with her words. Never in our married life, had she yelled at me like this. I simply froze. That voice, that freaking yell came from some deep dark place inside her. I looked at her wondering if it is the same Panchali who loves me. Perhaps the crazy rituals had changed her attitude. Her anguished eyes spoke even more than what she actually said.

“This is my world Prem and this is my life. You can’t tell me what to do all the time. You don’t want me interfering in your writing work. I am not welcome in your world of story-writing. So you are not welcome here in my precinct of spiritual belief. I am not getting out of here but you are. Please leave Prem and stay away from my spiritual world.”

Her words were weakening my soul and I stood there paralyzed. Panchali drove me out of the outhouse and banged the door shut.

Completely shaken inside, I tried to comprehend what had just happened inside the room. I wondered if our lives had changed forever. ‘The woman I loved so much and who loved me even more than I did’ had just given me shock of a lifetime.



6

This encounter with Panchali actually scared me.

Loneliness can make a person behave strangely, but I had not imagined this. Panchali drifting away into a world of Spirits and witchcraft was a horrible consequence even beyond my dreams. Now Panchali was walking the dangerous path where I could lose her forever. It was important to return to priorities. Marriage with Panchali was the best thing that ever happened to me. I did not want to lose her. I knew what I had to do.

I started taking care of Panchali after that day. Taking time out of my schedule I gave her company in the cottage. It was important to keep her occupied inside so that the spiritual zone created in outhouse would not beckon her. That Tantrik stuff had become a part of her life. Only way to untangle her from that, was to keep her away from that place.

I tried my best to cheer her up. It was not easy but I thought my company would be at least a little helpful. Conversations and sharing feelings was one way to bring her back. It was time to revive our love- all that deep love between us during early days of our married life.

Panchali did recover. The clouds of spirits that had

gathered over her head slowly cleared and Panchali came out of that crazy spiritual spell.

There was a reason for this development.

Panchali was pregnant.

That moment, when pregnancy was confirmed, was the happiest moment of her life. She found her life moving towards completeness. Motherhood- the biggest joy for a woman was knocking on her door.

Panchali felt as it was a Godsend. God was sending an angel to drive her loneliness away. All the gloom in her mind disappeared and she returned back to her lively nature.

The news filled her with boundless energy. There was so much to look forward to. A life was about to be included in her world. Part of her body! Part of her soul! The Baby!

Suddenly, her mind set out on the single mission of the arriving baby. Her mind worked overtime imagining a dreamy future that would soon become reality.

Panchali planned everything to the last detail. She selected a room from the cottage and declared it as the baby's room. She indeed converted the room to perfection. Lots and lots of toys arrived in that room. Floor and corners were baby-proofed. Walls received coats of attractive paint. Pictures of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Doraemon were mounted on walls. A beautiful cradle was ordered by her. She selected a perfect spot for that cradle. Purchasing was endless. She did not want to wait till the baby to be born. Baby clothes were bought well in advance. She was very particular in everything she brought for the baby. After all, she was going to be a mother soon.

Panchali was spending those days in total happiness. It was good for her as well as the baby. I was happy with her pleasant mood. We had been through such a dark phase

but now everything looked fine. We were far beyond the reach of dark shadows of our past. That crazy world of Tantrik experiments was left behind by Panchali. She had completely forgotten about it. It was not needed anymore. I never saw her walking towards outhouse again.

I can say with confidence that those were the happiest days of our married life. We were anticipating arrival of our bundle of joy and spending lot of time together in that sweet expectation. I was planning my day so as to stay at home whenever possible. My visits to Writers' Club had stopped completely. I used to be out only for very important meetings. When at home I would complete writing work in my room and then spend rest of the time with Panchali.

Just like we used to do back in Calcutta, we started enjoying plays in London's famous West End Theatre. Whenever we got chance, we went to Prince Charles Cinema to see movies. I wanted Panchali to remain completely relaxed and happy. All my efforts were directed towards that goal. Then of course, London was our new home and I had been so tied up in my work since arrival that we had not gone out much. The city was still like a strange place.

Now that we started spending time at various parts of the city, we got well acquainted with it. Panchali was very happy to spend so much time with me.

We were falling in love with London for first time. Now it had truly become our home.

This is exactly the kind of life, kind of companionship Panchali expected from me. I had promised myself that I would never make her unhappy ever again.

"You know Prem," Panchali said to me one night, "this is what I wanted. Your love and a little attention." She was sprawled in my arms on our bed. I was caressing her hair.

“Now I am really happy,” she continued, “with you and our baby coming soon, I have found everything a woman could ever desire. I don’t want anything more. Nothing more to pray for! Now I am waiting for the day when our baby is born, when the baby will be in our arms and together we will give the baby all the love in the world. Right?” I nodded and kissed Panchali on her forehead. “What a day it will be Prem, when I hold the baby in my arms and nurse it!” Panchali said, “I have even chosen names. If we have a boy we will call him Ansh. Our ‘Ansh’- the part of both of us- the symbol of our love. And if we have a girl, she will get a part of your name. She will be ‘Pari’.”

“And what about your name? That baby will also be a part of you,” I looked into her deep blissful eyes. Panchali smiled back at me holding my hand tighter against her heart.

“I am nobody Prem! My whole life and my existence is nothing but you,” she said.

I saw her trembling lips and moist corners of her eyes. She was very emotional as she continued, “Without you, I am nothing. Like a drop of water that vanishes in hot sands of desert, I will lose all my being if I am without you.”

Her words soaked me up with emotion. “Panchali...” I could hardly utter and embraced her. I could not control my tears.

Panchali was also in tears- tears of happiness and contentment.

This was the height of Panchali’s love. It was beyond words and expressions. Our hearts were overflowing with it.

Panchali could not imagine existence without me. In fact, she had lost herself in my life. It was my life and

happiness that gave meaning to her life. Today when I think about that time and the events that unfolded thereafter, I feel otherwise. It was in fact her existence that gave meaning to my life.

An immensely heartbreaking event stirred my life soon.

The event that crushed Panchali's all happiness and crumbled her every dream. Destiny decided to play rough on our lives.

For nine months, Panchali took care of the life budding inside her. The life inside her was the symbol of our love. And what a sensitive mother-to-be she was! Slightest movement of the baby in her womb would wake her up. If the baby felt discomfort, I could see it on Panchali's face. She was already a mother sensing every need of the baby. All that remained was to hold the baby in arms. And the day came. It was time to give birth to the adorable symbol of our love. It was time to caress the baby and feel the blessing- the blessed feeling of being a mother. Yes, it was time for Panchali to feel that greatest joy any woman can ever experience. But alas, misfortune struck our lives and Panchali died due to complications during her delivery. The baby was born, but the unfortunate mother was not alive to enjoy motherhood.

I was shocked.

I was numb. Panchali is no more? My Panchali!

It was a pain like no other.

Panchali had so many dreams in her eyes for our child. She had planned so much. She had prepared so much. Destiny had so cruelly not allowed her to even see her baby once.

It was unbelievable. I had never imagined that I will

lose Panchali like this. She had promised to be with me forever and she had broken the pact. It was not fair. It was impossible to live without her. Completely unimaginable for me!

Our son had arrived. He was an adorable little angel. He looked just like Panchali. It is said that if a son looks like mother then he will be very lucky. I don't understand what luck was written for him. He was stripped off mother's love right at his birth.

When life departed from her, she was holding my hand. I can still feel that grip. As breaths began to defy her, she held it tighter. She died with her fingers clenched around mine.

Doctor had to make some effort to unclench Panchali's hand. She really wanted to hold on to me till her last breath and she did.

"She really loved you." Even the doctors could not hide their emotions. "She must have looked forward so much to her future life with you and your son; she did not want to leave."

All those consoling words were a blur for me. I was drowning in pain and oblivious to the world around me. All I knew was I had lost the most precious person in my life. I was choking with emotions and when I could hold them back no more I started crying like a child. My Panchali was before me. Lifeless. She was never going to speak to me ever again. I held her body in my arms and kept crying.

I wasn't the only one crying in that room. Ansh, our son was also crying in the hospital room. The kid she loved so much, the child she would have taken so much care of was crying and Panchali wasn't moving at all. She had left behind the love of her life in a state of despair.

Then the time to say final goodbye came. It was the time to perform funeral of my beloved Panchali. Life and death can put us through such strange circumstances. We take such a good care of our body throughout our life. Death changes it all. The body is soon handed over to fire for final ritual. Fire does its job and smoke rises from the funeral pyre. Dust to dust. Ashes to ashes.

When Panchali's funeral began and fire was lit up all around her body, a strange thing happened. The fire began to devour my Panchali but suddenly it extinguished without doing its task.

"This is not good. In fact, this is a bad omen," *Pandit ji* said. "I have never seen fire go out like this during a funeral. This happens when spirit is reluctant to leave the body. Whatever be the reason, this is very inauspicious that body should resist final *sanskar*."

Once again fire was set up to accomplish the funeral correctly. Again it happened. The fire went out leaving Panchali's body intact.

It had to be done again. Panchali's funeral was finally achieved but with great difficulty. It was a matter that troubled minds of everyone present there.

"Can I tell you something, *Parimal ji*," *Pandit ji* came closer and said to me. I could see genuine worry on his face. "Your wife had a strong desire to live. She did not want to leave and hence all the resistance. It is an untimely death. Something, she is very fond of, has been left behind. Something important to her. Unfulfilled tasks and desires can make these things happen."

"How could I explain to the *pandit* that Panchali's life was nothing but me and our son? How her spirit could be at

peace? I wondered, when she couldn't even hug her heart's greatest joy, once."

Panchali's death did not end the story.

In fact, it was the commencement of an astonishing story- a story that made it to the history books.

Love is a four letter word, all right. But what a man wouldn't do to achieve it! Striving to accomplish love is one thing but sometimes someone might even cross swords with destiny. Love can awaken that passion within a person. Love can make people do craziest of things with ease.



7

Next few days were testing times for me.

Panchali's sudden demise was a shock. I was confused and had no clue how to deal with her loss.

Panchali's love in my life was as essential as salt- which is present in food but cannot be seen. But if there is no salt in food, we miss it. In fact, all other flavors don't work without it.

I was missing Panchali so much at that time. It is impossible to describe it in words.

There was also matter of taking care of the house. I was under the impression that Panchali did not have to do housework ever. I thought she was relaxed and resting all the time. Now I realized that she was taking care of lot of responsibilities. My life had been peaceful and active because of her.

Whether it was my clothes or my food; whether it was the small stuff that belonged to me or bigger tasks related to me, Panchali used to handle everything so efficiently. I must confess that I felt guilty about all these things since Panchali was no more. Does it take death of the beloved person for us to realize significance of that person? Why can't we be thankful for the persons who love us and work hard for us all the time?

All that house-keeping work suddenly fell on my shoulders.

Writing was out of question. It was as if I had forgotten my craft.

Ansh's care was handed over to a maid. She used to work for us ever since we moved to London. Her name was Brinda. Earlier she needed to handle small matters of house-keeping. Now suddenly she was the caretaker of a newborn who had lost his mother. It was not an easy task and it was obvious. She was just not able to manage Ansh. He used to cry all day and her efforts to calm him down were to no avail.

"Sir, what should I do? Baba just won't calm down," Brinda came to me hurriedly and said. She was distraught and helpless with Ansh's crying situation. "I have tried everything," she continued, "nothing seems to work. He is still crying. He hasn't had his milk since yesterday. Please tell me, what I should do?" She was genuinely worried for Ansh.

It brought tears to my eyes.

Sound of his cries was reaching me. 'Why was he crying so much? And how could he cry so loudly if he had not drunk any milk?' I was desperate but could not think of anything. Ansh's crying was getting louder. It was as if he was calling out to his mother. Wasn't my son aware that his mother would never pick him up and caress him?

Crying of a baby is very depressing. Ansh's loud weeping filled the entire cottage with dreadful gloominess. Brinda was waiting for my suggestion and I had none to offer.

"You will have to keep trying," I confessed to Brinda. "Nothing comes to my mind. I don't know how to solve this problem."

Brinda went back to Ansh.

I followed her to Ansh's room- the room Panchali had decorated with her own hands. The room she wanted her Ansh to play happily in! Ansh was crying endlessly in the same room.

Being in that room reminded me of Panchali. In spite of Ansh's loud wailing, Panchali's words reached my brain- 'the people who die early; those who die young before their time and those who have unfulfilled wishes, their spirit keeps wandering close by. It cannot achieve peace unless that wish is fulfilled. Right around us, they wander. Our eyes can't see them easily. If we summon the spirits and communicate; if they are methodically invited, they do respond. The spirits come closer to us and then we can see them.

I looked around desperately.

"Is it really true?" my mind was clouded by doubts and questions. "Is it really possible what Panchali used to say? In that case, is Panchali's spirit somewhere around here? Is she roaming around me and Ansh- the people she loved so much?"

More important than that I asked myself- "Can Panchali's spirit be summoned?" all other thoughts took a back seat now. My mind was focused so much on the thought that I could not hear Ansh crying anymore. I had to act on this latest storm of thoughts. It made up my mind and walked out urgently. I was walking in the direction of the outhouse. Within seconds, I was at the door of the outhouse. I checked my steps as Panchali's voice resonated all around me.

"This is my world Prem and you are not welcome here in my precinct of spiritual belief. Please leave Prem and stay away from my spiritual world."

I stared at the door for a long time. The closed door was beckoning to be opened. As if there was a force I was acting under!

I never believed in spirits, ghosts and all other paranormal things. This was different. I had a purpose in my mind- a very strong purpose. It was the strong desire seeing my Panchali one more time. I was standing on the verge of the other world created by Panchali in that cottage. The circumstances were forcing me to enter that world for the sake of my love that had withered in the middle of full blossom. I wanted to express it again to Panchali. The thought of never seeing her again was crushing my soul.

I pushed away my belief system that advised me against it and entered the paranormal world where my desire could be realized. It was not a complete conviction but there was a slight hope. It was a chance worth taking. Panchali had talked of all those things so confidently. I latched on to these possibilities and decided to try my luck.

I pushed open the door of outhouse and entered inside.

Everything was just the way Panchali had left behind. No one was allowed to touch those things and no one had. The room was filled with nothing but air of mystery. Being there again felt strange. Every time I had entered the room, the circumstances were mind-boggling to me. This time it was wrenching my heart. The room and all objects within had Panchali's memories written all over them.

Planchet was still spread out waiting to be used to send celestial invitation to spirits. Books of magic and witchcrafts were on shelf waiting to be browsed. A faint ethereal light arriving inside through windowpanes was adding to the mystique of that room. All other paraphernalia of magic and witch craft was present there just like before. The person who knew all about it was not there. The room

had a deserted feel but there was a strange quality that had kept the room alive. Also twitting softly was a love bird in a cage.

Sight of that love bird brought a lump in my throat. I had to fight emotions as I walked closer to that love bird. It was my wedding night gift to Panchali.

She used to adore it. I remembered the look on her face when she saw it for the first time. I remembered my words- the precise words I had said while giving her the bird.

“We are like Love Birds. Do you know how?” I lost myself in her deep mesmerizing eyes and said, “We will never be separated from each other. No one can do that. If anything happens and we fall apart, we will die. Both of us. We just can’t live without each other.”

Those were my own words. My eyes oozed with tears again. After Panchali’s demise, they had never missed a single opportunity of soaking my feelings with their expression of grief.

Panchali always loved my gift. That bird was darling of her heart. She took good care of it. Everything I had said about the bird, she had believed. I was the one who could not keep my word. I had promised to be with her forever, but I had failed. Panchali had to walk alone after death. I should have been with her but here I was. Alive! Alone! I had broken my promise.

I touched the love bird. It wasn’t just a bird. I tenderly touched it as if I was touching Panchali. I felt her close to me. She had not left me after all.

“No,” my heart resolved. “No one can separate us. Not even Death...not even God. I will bring my Panchali back in my home. I will bring my love back in my life. No matter if I bring her back in the form of a spirit. I want her before me and I shall have her.”

A new hope was getting stronger in my mind. This was possible. All I had to do was follow my instincts and make use of this world created by Panchali. Yes, I felt things were destined to turn up like this. I walked to the book shelf and looked for the right reading material. ‘Talk to the Spirit’ was a title that caught my eye. I sat myself down in Panchali’s rocking chair. I started reading the book with concentration and speed.

The book was indeed helpful. There were questions in my mind and I needed answers. I wanted to know how to summon a spirit.

It was a new experience for me. I was stepping in an unknown world. No doubt, there was hesitation in my mind but it was definitely an exciting prospect as the purpose of all that was to see my beloved Panchali again. Everything that was happening around me was suggesting me to go for it.

Faint sounds of Ansh crying, could still be heard.

My resolution got stronger and I opened the book. Once I started reading the book, I went on and completed it in one sitting.

The book mentioned Planchet and the ways to use it. Definitely, Planchet was the medium I needed to summon Panchali’s spirit. I had found most of the details regarding the adventure I was about to undertake.

I cannot deny that I could feel a strange energy inside me. I was excited. There was some shopping needed to be done and I did not want to lose any time. I went to market in the evening and purchased all necessary objects. It was a strange mix of objects that the procedure demanded. Candles and *Loban* seemed to be important constituents. Camphor, lemons and *sindoor* were also needed. I did not

miss a single object and purchased it all before returning to the cottage.

I decided to go ahead with the ritual that same night. I shut myself up in the outhouse again and started following the instructions in that book.

Ansh was still crying. It had been almost twenty four hours since he had been crying continuously. Brinda was still trying to calm him. It did not look like she could. Crying continuously had changed Ansh's voice. His sobs were thick and hoarse now. It was almost scary to hear him cry.

I focused all my concentration to the ritual. It went on for a long time. I followed all the steps mentioned in the book and went on for four hours. Even after four hours of my attempts to summon Panchali's spirit, nothing happened. After four hours I was tired and dejected. It was looking like a wasted effort. Suddenly a strong drift of air swept over the outhouse and all the candles in outhouse extinguished. *Sindoor* was blown all over the place and the burning *Loban* turned to ash.

I did not understand it. Whatever it was, I did not sense Panchali's spirit anywhere around me. The procedure had failed and I was unable to retrieve Panchali's spirit.

'What was I thinking?' I rued my own actions. 'How could I believe in this crap?' It was my love for Panchali that had pushed me to such extreme of undertaking those foolish attempts. I had believed in something that was not true and not logical either.

I dropped all the objects in one box and walked out of outhouse. I needed to rest so I came to my bedroom and decided to try and sleep.

I did not realize one thing immediately and it was a

pleasant feeling. Ansh had stopped crying after that event. The child was inconsolable for twenty four hours but now for some reason he was silent. I did not know the reason and it was immaterial anyway. I was glad that Ansh was comfortable. In fact he had some milk and was fast asleep.

I needed a night's sleep and I had it. First thought that entered my mind upon waking up was Ansh. I wanted to know how he was doing this morning. I could not hear him crying. I was feeling refreshed too. That morning did feel different. More energetic, more pleasant.

Brinda was working in living room when I walked out.

"Is Ansh not up yet?" I asked her.

"No sir," she answered, "he woke up early in the morning. He drank milk and now he is in his cradle, playing with his toys.

It was a surprising news for me.

I went to see Ansh and found out that it was true. Ansh was in a good mood too. He was in his crib, playing with toys and smiling. Once in a while, his smile would turn into giggle. I had never seen him in such a good spirit.

I was relieved and about to return when I saw something in the mirror on wall. It looked like an image- Panchali's image. I saw a flash of her in the mirror. I looked closely and she was not there. My mind was playing tricks with me.

Now that Ansh was fine, my mind should have been at peace. I walked closer to his cradle and picked him up. We had a life before us and I had promised Panchali to give all the love and care in the world to him. I kissed Ansh and placed him back in his cradle. It was time to get back to the study room.

Brinda had brought tea for me. I pondered over events

in last few days while sipping tea. Every time my mind set out to think of something, only thing it could settle on was Panchali. I was thinking about her when suddenly I saw her face- right before me- forming in the steam of hot tea.

I was startled and somehow managed to keep the tea cup aside. Twice in last few minutes I had seen Panchali's face and this time so close to me. This was not an illusion, not this time. I had seen it so clearly. I did not have to stay confused for long.

I sensed breeze sweeping towards me. Around me, close to my face and then closer to my ears. I heard Panchali whisper- "I love you, Prem, I love you. I am right here, close to you...in our home."

I sensed a chilling sensation paralyzing me. I stood without any movement when that breeze was caressing my body.

Oh my God, it was Panchali! She had come back. I knew her voice and she was the only one who called me 'Prem'. I was definitely not imagining things. But then, why wasn't she clearly visible? I had summoned her spirit with the desire of seeing her again. If her spirit was around me, wanted to be seen then I should have been able to see it.

It could mean only one thing. I had not carried out the ritual perfectly. There was something amiss and I felt that I should correct it immediately.

I left my tea there and ran towards the outhouse.

"Are you going out, sir?" Brinda asked.

"No," I answered nervously, "I will be in the outhouse and I will be busy working. It's very urgent and important. Take care of Ansh and be with him. I don't want to be disturbed. Understand?"

"All right, sir!" She said.

I closed the door of outhouse behind me and opened the box. I needed all the objects once again. I drew them out hurriedly and set up the entire setting again. Candles were placed all around the Planchet. Lemons were cut and placed along with *sindoor* and camphor.

I started again. I was doing better than the previous time. At least, that's what I felt. My actions were smooth. My chanting was clear and the mantras were coming out of my mouth with a proficiency of a Brahmin. More than anything else, I was more confident that this could work and I could see my Panchali once again.

I kept chanting for a long time.

Once again, strong wind blew suddenly and the windows of outhouse thrashed open. All the candles extinguished. The saffron scattered everywhere and camphor went haywire. This time the *Loban* kept burning. The smoke coming out of it was different now. The smoke was also emanating faster than before. Soon the outhouse was filled with smoke and a figure started appearing in that smoke.

It was Panchali.

I could not believe my eyes. It was her- my Panchali. 'Oh my God!' I shivered in disbelief, surprise and happiness.

Panchali had come back.



8

My sense of reality and illusion was mixed up. She was before me and yet I was hesitant to accept.

“You are...you are back...” I was choking with emotion.

“Can you see me?” Panchali was equally elated. “You can see me, Prem!”

“Yes, I can.” This was one of the happiest moments of my life. I smiled and yet tears rolled down my face. “I can see you, Panchali.”

I was jubilant. I stood up and reached closer to Panchali. I wanted to touch her, caress her and hold her tight in my arms. I could not. I realized that it was impossible to touch her. My hand simply passed through her ethereal presence. She was a spirit. I could see and feel her but could not touch her.

Even Panchali wanted to hug me and she tried. We wanted to come closer but we could not. There were boundaries for spirits. The bodily pleasures were not permitted and we were going to face that problem. It was anyway a jubilant moment. I had my Panchali before me. She was back in my life- our life. ‘Ansh’- she whispered.

Panchali rushed to Ansh’s room after meeting me. She was eager to see him, touch him. She looked back at me

with sadness when she could not. A mother who could not touch her son! Her spirit then caressed Ansh like a tender twig embracing its support. I watched them with tear filled eyes.

Ansh could also see her. He was giggling with joy.

“What happened sir? Baba looks very happy today.” Brinda said entering the room.

I was startled with her arrival worried about the new presence in room. Brinda walked around in the room looking at Ansh. I realized that Brinda could not see Panchali. Ansh and I were the only ones who could see her and it made a perfect sense. It was convenient to as no explanations were needed.

I was happy to find Panchali back in our life. It was as if a new life altogether. My love felt rejuvenated.

These were times of celebration for us. I did not remember when I was so much happy to find Panchali by my side. It was only after losing her, I had sensed her significance. Now, I loved her more than ever. I wanted her before me all the time.

There was Panchali’s photograph in the living room with a garland on it. I removed the gloomy flowers from the photo.

“What are you doing, sir?” Brinda was surprised with my actions. “Why are you taking off the garland from that frame?”

“Those flowers are for people who leave us,” I said, “But Panchali is not gone. She is with us all the time. I can always feel her around. This is her house and she will always be here.”

Brinda could see the emotions in my words. She thought I was merely referring to my love for Panchali.

I had more to say to her. “Brinda,” I said, “you don’t have to stay here twenty four hours now. You were saying something about another housekeeping job offer. Something about your old job...they wanted you back or something? You can go and work there. We will need you for minor work. You can work part time and come for three to four hours every day. How is that?”

Brinda was surprised with my offer but, she did not say anything.

“All right,” she said and left the cottage soon.

That’s what I wanted. I wanted Brinda to leave the cottage so that Panchali and I could celebrate with our son, Ansh. Brinda’s presence was a worry. She could have found my behavior suspicious. Sooner or later, getting rid of her was important.

I had completely forgotten that Panchali was dead and what we had with us was her spirit. Her presence was more real and satisfying than ever before. For Ansh, there was no difference perceivable. He was glad to find her by his side.

I made sure that Brinda had left and came back.

Panchali was still in Ansh’s room. Now there was no one else to disturb us. Just the three of us, together. Our family!

We were sharing some very emotional moments.

Panchali had wrapped herself around Ansh and she was crying inconsolably. She held Ansh so tight as if she would never let him go. No one could separate her from her child.

Not just a lifetime, it seemed like an eternal bond that would last many more lifetimes to come.

To see Panchali with Ansh was very emotional

experience for me. Something I had not imagined since Ansh was born.

“Don’t cry,” I approached Panchali and said, “this is a moment of happiness. Just see how happy Ansh is! He can’t stop smiling.”

Ansh was really enjoying his mother’s company.

“I never thought that disaster would strike like this. I still can’t believe that I am dead. I had never imagined that I will leave my beloved ones so early. It was all so sudden.”

“Destiny, what else! Nobody can predict these things. Love and death are uninvited guests. Just show up suddenly one day. Both are similar. Love takes away our heart and Death takes away heartbeats.”

“But isn’t it cruel? Why did God separate me from you the very moment he poured so much happiness in our life? We were gathering pieces of our lives and everything ahead looked so promising. Then Ansh was born. I had been looking forward so much to the day. If He had to take away all this from me why did He give me these joys in the first place?”

“Only God can answer all these questions. But I will tell you something.”

I went closer and sat beside Panchali. I looked at her. She was still the same beautiful Panchali. Her eyes were on me.

“My life is incomplete without you and only after you passed away, I realized this fact. Panchali, it is impossible to live without you.”

“Prem...” Panchali was moved by my confession.

Panchali sighed and stared at me. It was a heartbroken glimpse. So much had changed and now we were helpless.

“Really...really...I feel terribly alone. Living without you is like a punishment.”

I could not control myself and started crying. Like a kid, I cried before my Panchali.

“Prem...” Panchali left Ansh and hugged me. She was crying with me.

“Don’t cry, Prem, please.”

“You know Panchali,” I tried to control my tears. “You were right. You had said it once.”

“What was that?”

“Love makes us really strong,” I said in a trembling voice. “And it also makes us so weak. People in love can be so strong that they can take on the entire world. For the sake of love they would cross swords with anyone. But then a strange weakness makes them so vulnerable. One person... just one person that they love, becomes so important. It is impossible to live without that person. I cannot bear your absence anymore.”

I dropped in her arms and kept sobbing.

“Do you think I can? I need you more than you need me.”

I saw her face. I could hear the anxiety in her voice. Panchali was stirred by the strong emotions rising inside her.

She was in my arms. My Panchali was back with me. It was like finding the most valuable treasure in the world.

“Our love finally won,” Panchali said. “That is why I am back. Even after death, here I am with you, with my son.”

“Promise me that you will never leave me,” I demanded.

“Never...I will never leave you.”

Even her confident answer could not convince me. I was still restless.

“What are you worrying about?” Panchali asked.

“I am worried...more like scared.”

“Scared about what?”

“I fear that this may not last long,” I expressed my worries. “I feel that you will have to go away. You will be forced to leave me.”

“What? What are you talking about? Forced to leave? You are not making sense,” Panchali wiped her tears. “Nothing like that will happen. We are inseparable now.”

“But you are dead. How can you stay with us? You are a spirit. You have left this world. Do not forget that this world does not allow your existence in this world.”

“I have not forgotten anything,” Panchali’s voice was confident now. “I know I am dead. I also accept that I am a spirit. But still I am positive that nobody can separate us. Believe me that I can be around as long as I want. Do not tell me the laws of nature, Prem. We will break them all. For my love, for my family, I will break any rule, any law of this world.”

“Do you really think so? Nobody can break laws of nature.”

“We will,” Panchali was adamant.

“But...”

“I have returned to my love. Now nobody can make me go away. I want to be by your side. I want to be with Ansh. This is my home and I want to be inside this home. This house, this family is my world. This is where I belong and this is where I should be. No matter if in the form of a spirit, but, I will stay with you in this home.”

Her words were confident but as she spoke about her feelings and plans, she became emotional again. She embraced me once more and started crying.

She was a spirit, an ethereal existence. But there were feelings and emotions. There was pain.

I could understand it all. I had loved Panchali so much. If I could not understand her feelings, then who could?

She was so much in love with me and now Ansh was around. Our Ansh- the symbol of our love!

Panchali's love and passion for us was so intense. My eyes filled with tears once again.



9

Panchali started staying with us in our cottage.

It was a strange arrangement. One spirit and one body together in the cottage. And they were in love. Even more surprising.

Love that was true. Love that was endless. Love that was beyond any rules and laws.

I remember the long drive we had along with Ansh.

I was driving and Panchali was in front seat beside me, along with Ansh.

We lost track of time and kept driving on the streets of London for hours. As our car raced speedily around, three of us had a great fun time. We had given up all inhibitions and enjoying the drive. Screaming and shouting. Laughing till we were breathless.

My family had come together. Who could stop us from having fun? As if Panchali's death never happened! Her presence was so real and satisfying.

"Stop the car," Panchali said suddenly. "Stop!"

"Why? What happened?" I was confused.

"Just stop it."

I slowed down the car and stopped it by roadside.

The car had hardly stopped when Panchali left Ansh in car and glided out.

“Wait...what are you doing? Where are you going?”

But Panchali giggled naughtily and ran away. I did not know what was happening. She was surely up to some mischief but, I did not know what was in her mind.

Suddenly Panchali took off and started flying. Yes, she could do that. Just like birds; happy carefree birds. Panchali was actually gliding in air from one place to another. I was stunned.

Panchali was a spirit and it was possible for her to fly. I was happy to see the joy that overflowed on her face.

Flying around in air, Panchali started shouting. “Prem, I love you...I love you!”

“Hey...keep it down,” I told her. “There are people around. They will hear you.”

“Nobody can hear me, Prem,” she laughed loudly. “Only you and Ansh can hear me.”

Suddenly, she flew up and landed on the top of a thirty storey building. She just could not stop laughing. From top of that building, Panchali looked at us and shouted.

“I love you Prem...I love you so much.”

As if she wanted the entire London to know! It was a carefree expression of her love for me. The love that had been challenged by destiny but survived nevertheless.

“Do you love me, Prem?” She asked me from top of the building.

It was a moment to get crazy and answer her.

“Yes!” I screamed. “I really love you very much.”

A youngster on bike passing by me startled and turned to me.

“Hey bro, is your lover dead or something? Have you lost your mind and screaming out to her?” He shouted at me slowing down his bike.

“Yes! My lover is dead and I have lost my mind,” I answered.

The motorcycle sped away.

When I looked up again at Panchali my heart jumped in my mouth. Panchali had thrown herself down from the thirty storey building.

“No!” I screamed and shut my eyes in shock.

The next moment Panchali was standing before me, smiling.

“You will drive me crazy,” I looked at her and said. My heart was still racing. “People around are going to think that I have gone mad.”

“So what! Every person who falls in love is mad! Don’t you know love and craziness walk hand in hand?”

A car was passing by in speed. Panchali jumped before the car.

“Panchali...” I screamed again.

That car could crush my Panchali, I feared.

But then I realized. My Panchali was not a living person anymore. She was a spirit. The car went straight through her without slowing down a bit.

“I love you Prem!” Panchali shouted again. “I love you. Look at me. I don’t fear death anymore. Death can end a body but, I am a soul and I am eternal. This life after death is the real life- never ending, long life. This love after death is the real invincible love. So strong and unyielding! Look at me, Prem. I can do anything.”

Saying this, Panchali threw herself on the street. Five or six speeding cars passed right over her.

Still in a reflex action I closed my eyes in horror.

Panchali was fine. She stood up and smiled at me.

That night was the most memorable night in my life.

The child inside Panchali- the bubbly, naughty child I had seen roaming streets in Calcutta, had surfaced again. This time I saw her on London streets.

I don't know how much time passed. I don't remember which all places we went to.

I remember that it was dawn when we returned to the cottage. The morning brought new light and hope in my life.

I put Ansh in his cradle. Panchali was right there, in Ansh's room.

Suddenly she turned gloomy. She pondered over all the objects in that room. All those things were close to her heart. She had designed that room before Ansh's arrival.

Her eyes turned moist as she walked past all the objects in that room.

"So many dreams, we see, Prem. When we are alive, the possibilities are endless," Panchali was in a surreal mood. "Life is all about excitement but, we do not know that creeping towards us in the dark corner is death. Inching slowly towards us till the fateful moment when it pounces on us and everything ends. Every plan fails. Every dream shatters."

"That's life, Panchali," I tried to comfort her. "We live in an illusion. We think it is real but it is all *Maya*. We see dreams. We make plans. We run behind money and success. We are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve what we want. Good means, bad means...everything. And then in the end we realize that it was all so futile, so meaningless. Death finally knocks on door. One blow and it takes away

everything. In fact, it frees us from all strings of relationships, wealth and success.”

“But our string of love is intact, Prem. Even death could not break us apart.”

“That is true.”

I looked in her eyes.

“Even I had lot of dreams and plans when I was alive. When Ansh was growing inside me, when our life was changing, I planned so much. Suddenly my world had so much more meaning and so much more colour. It was like living a different life. A new world was shaping up. I made plans for Ansh. I had desires blooming inside me. I was thinking so much and most of my thoughts were about Ansh. I planned how I will take care of him. I almost saw him growing up before my eyes. How I would prepare him for school every day! His school bag... his books... his Tiffin...his studies! Everything...Oh Prem! Everything! I even wondered about the day my son gets married. We get so much lost in our thoughts and plans that we forget that death is an eventuality that will come one day and destroy everything. Death is as real as life.”

“But you are the lucky one,” I said. “Every dream of yours will come true. Every plan that you thought of will realize. And you don’t have to worry about death anymore. You need not fear death.”

“I know,” Panchali smiled. “I don’t have to worry or fear death. Death is anyway something that we should not fear. Death is longer than life and hence it better be embraced than feared.”

“Well,” I looked at Panchali and said, “I am feeling sleepy. I will go to bed now.”

I looked at Ansh. Ansh was fast asleep.

“Won’t you rest?” I asked Panchali.

“I don’t need to. Death frees us from all such daily rituals. I need not to sleep or rest but I will tell you something.”

“What?”

“Not much difference between sleep and death. Call them sisters if you want to. In our life we sleep every night. It is like surrendering to unconsciousness or death for some time. Embrace of sleep need not be much different from embrace of death. Then every morning we come alive. New day...new life. A life filled with hope and dreams. There is just one difference between sleep and death. There is morning after sleep but there is no morning after death.”

I was stunned to hear Panchali speak such profound thoughts. She was right, absolutely right. They are sisters-sleep and death.

Every night we die. Every morning we come alive. It is like re-birth.

The thought kept my mind occupied as I walked towards my bed. My Panchali was back. The same beautiful, loving and kind Panchali but now so much wiser!

I couldn’t believe that this was the same Panchali whom I used to ignore in the frenzy of my work. Earlier I had no time for her and now I wanted to be by her side all the time.

Day or night, we were together. Late through the night we used to chat lying on bed. Finally, I used to doze off but Panchali would be awake. There were no bodily functions for her anymore. She was free from human restrictions because she did not have a human body anymore.

Then came Saturday.

Saturday used to be very special for Panchali. That used to be the romantic night when we used to make love. I remembered that Panchali used to prepare herself for the night. She used to dress up and wait for the night. Sometimes I hardly cared and used to be too tired for any romance. I realized later that it was very rude of me.

Now, after Panchali's death, this was the first Saturday night when I felt as romantic as Panchali.

She was sitting very close to me looking at me with adoring eyes. As if she was still a part of me and she wanted to lose herself in me. I could sense her passionate love for me.

"You know what?" Panchali's spirit embraced me and said.

"What?"

"I have never seen you in such a romantic mood before. You used to be asleep by now."

I smiled.

"Is it not true, Prem," she looked right into my eyes and asked, "that you love me more after my death?"

"Yes," I confessed after hesitating initially. "It is true."

"Oh, Prem," Panchali could not control her emotions and she tried to caress me more tightly than ever. "I love you, Prem. I love you." Emotions were overflowing with joy. We wanted to be one again, not just together, one! Physically!

The problem was 'Panchali had no human form'. We could not fulfill our wishes to complete satisfaction. Our union was not yet complete. For Panchali, the pain was twice serious. She could see her son, Ansh, but could not pick him up. She wanted to hug him tightly and kiss

him. She wanted to nurse him. How could a mother be at peace unless she breast feeds her child! For Panchali, the expression of motherhood was incomplete and her heart was stricken with grief because of that. The mother in her was still suffering.

Panchali now started wishing that she had a normal human body. She started imagining how her life would come close to normal if she had a body.



There was a twist in the tale waiting for us. A very big twist. Kiara arrived in London all the way from Delhi. Kiara was Panchali's childhood friend from Kolkata. Five years back, her family had shifted to Delhi. I had never met Kiara but, I had heard about her from Panchali.

When Kiara came to know about Panchali's death, she flew to London to meet me and express condolence.

As soon as she arrived in the cottage she hugged Ansh and could not control her tears. She started crying intensely.

Standing before Panchali's photo must have brought back so many memories for her. She was simply inconsolable. I could see her grief and I could share it in my heart.

"Please," I tried to comfort her, "we must be strong. Panchali wouldn't want us to be so devastated. This will hurt her spirit."

I wasn't lying. Panchali's spirit was standing right there at that time. Seeing her long time friend so miserable was a heart breaking thing for Panchali. I could see that she was indeed really sad. But the situation was beyond her control. She could only witness her friend expressing grief. I tried my best to calm Kiara down.

"It's not fair. To depart so soon..." Kiara said. Tears

flowing from her eyes were incessant. “Nobody should leave the world so early like that and to leave loved ones behind... she was so young. You two had a life before you. She just had a kid. She must have wanted so much to raise the kid. She must have died with so many dreams...so many wishes.”

Kiara’s reaction was beginning to worry me. She was crying louder now and had no control over her sorrow. Such severe heartache was worrisome. I feared it could give her heart trouble any moment.

“Listen Kiara...please control yourself. Don’t cry so much. Everything is not over yet. You see...you see Kiara, Panchali is still with us. Look at her!” I pointed at Panchali’s photograph. “See? There are no flowers on that photo. You know why? Because we do that with the ones we have lost forever. Panchali has not left us. She is with us, with all of us. Right here, in this house!”

I just went on saying everything. It was necessary to control Kiara and hence I just committed to a lot of things in that flow.

Now Kiara was alert. She had heard me and she wanted to know what exactly I meant by that. She looked at me quizzically.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean...I mean,” I had revealed so much that now I had no option but to tell her everything.

“What I mean is Panchali is right here with us, in this house,” I said, “there she is, sitting in front of you. She is very sad to see you so miserable over her death.”

“She is here? Sitting in front of me?” Kiara looked around her. She was more scared than surprised. “Where is she?”

“There, on the couch,” I pointed and said. There indeed she was! My Panchali was sitting there sad and overcast.

Kiara’s eyes followed my finger. She looked in that direction and then looked back at me puzzled.

“But...” she muttered, “I can’t see anyone there? Really, I can’t see her.”

“I know. You won’t be able to see her but you must believe me,” I said, “only, I and Ansh can see her. We can see her and even talk to her. It is a fact that I am living a normal life with Panchali in this house. She had too much to hang on to. Too many unfulfilled wishes and dreams! She could not leave us. Even after death, Panchali has not deserted us.”

Kiara was more scared than surprised to hear my explanation. She stared at me with confusion and then came closer to see if I was all right.

“Parimal,” she asked, “are you all right? I mean this has been a difficult time for you. You have been through so much. If you feel that this stress is getting better of you, you should consider seeing a psychiatrist. Panchali’s death has caused you a great emotional trauma. Take my advice. See a specialist.”

“I am not speaking in a state of shock. I am only telling you the truth and you must believe me,” I replied confidently. “There she is and she is asking you to come closer. May be she is glad you cared so much about her and she wants to share something with you. Just walk closer to the sofa.”

I grabbed Kiara’s hand and tried to take her closer to the sofa. Kiara panicked at my attempt.

“No...No,” she screamed. “Please leave me. Just let me go.”

Kiara was really scared. Either the possibility of a spirit scared her or she must have thought that I had gone insane.”

She freed herself from my grip and ran out screaming. She was worried that I was pulling her in some paranormal world of ghosts and spirits. The shock was too much for her. Without caring about what I would think, she kept running outwards.

Her car was parked outside cottage. She had driven to our place in that car. It actually belonged to Hotel Thompson.

Kiara did not stop running till she reached the car. Somehow she managed to open the door and got inside. She started the car and put it in high speed to drive away from our cottage as soon as possible.

She was too afraid to spend any more time within our cottage.

Then something happened- something really horrible!

It had been almost half an hour since Kiara left, when I received her call on my phone.

“Parimal...Parimal,” Kiara said in a deep choking voice. She sounded in trouble. I pressed the phone against my ear to hear clearly. “Please help me...please. I had an accident... my car,” she was barely audible.

“Accident!” I felt as though someone had dropped a bomb close by me. I asked, “Where? Where are you?”

“Near the bridge...Hilton Bridge. My car...my car is about to fall down. Parimal...please help me fast!”

Her final words were a scream. She was crying. She was shouting. Clearly Kiara was in grave danger. Her voice was grim and her words were gloomy.

I kept shouting ‘Hello’, ‘Hello’ on phone. There were no more words. I could only hear silence on the other side.

I hung up my phone and darted outside. There was no time to lose. I got inside my car hurriedly. The next minute, my car was speeding towards Hilton Bridge like a bullet.

Soon I saw Hilton Bridge. I drove towards the bridge. My car screeched to a halt. There was no sign of Kiara's car in that area.

I got down from the car to have a clear view. I had to bend forward across railings of the bridge. It offered a full view of the valley. Next moment I felt weak in the knees. It was a numbing sight. Kiara's car had fallen down in the valley hundreds of feet deep under the bridge. The car was damaged and shattered parts could be seen lying around the wreckage. I started thinking fast. I had to check the situation down there.

Alongside the bridge there were steps to descend into the valley. I ran towards the stairs and next second I was walking down them swiftly.

Finally, I reached Kiara's car.

I peeped inside driving window. What I saw was shocking.

Kiara was still inside. Her head was resting on the driving wheel and her nose was bleeding. She didn't look like breathing. I tried to find her pulse. There was none.

Oh my God, Kiara was dead!

This turn of events was stunning. This girl, Kiara was in my house some time back, expressing grief over my Panchali's death and now here she was- dead!

I pulled out my cell phone and started dialing police number.

Suddenly I could feel breeze coming up against me. Along with the sensation I could hear a whisper.

“Prem, what are you doing Prem? Wait. Just wait, don’t call cops.”

I was surprised again.

It was Panchali’s voice. A restless voice urging me.

“Why? Why not call cops?” I was puzzled. “Why?”

“Look at her, Prem. Look at Kiara’s body. Even after death, her body is fine. It has not been damaged much in spite of the accident. What I need is exactly a body like this. Just imagine Prem, if I can get inside Kiara’s body then it will be a new life for me. A completely fulfilling life. My every dream will come true. I will be able to touch you, Prem. I will be able to hold our Ansh. I want to feed him like every mother does. Isn’t it the complete sense of motherhood? All this is possible and now there is a perfect opportunity to achieve all this.”

Panchali’s every word was rejuvenating me. I was honestly excited at the prospect.

“Is it possible?” There was disbelief in my question. “Can you be alive again?” I wanted to know.

“Definitely possible.” I heard Panchali’s voice very close to me. “Whatever I said can happen. Just follow my instructions and we can make it happen.”

“Right now, what should I do?”

“First of all, forget about calling cops. You will have to take Kiara’s dead body to our cottage. We can proceed with next steps there. One more thing- nobody should have the slightest doubt about what is going on! Kiara’s death must be kept a secret. Only then our plan can work out.”

“All right,” I said.

After that I did not ask any more questions to Panchali.

It was very difficult to pull out Kiara’s body out of

the car. The car was damaged and her body was stuck in driving seat. I had to pull her out from behind the driving seat. Panchali was right. Kiara's body was really not much damaged. After being through such a fatal accident, it can only be a miracle that the lifeless body looked so intact. May be it was destined.

After taking her out, I lifted the body and climbed the stairs to arrive on the bridge. Soon Kiara's body was on the back seat of my car.

I had to ensure something else before coming up. There was a lot of foliage lying around which I assembled. I wanted to cover the car with broken branches of trees and leaves. There were enough available for that. Now the car was not visible at all. I wanted to make sure that a casual look down the bridge would not catch the car. After covering the car, nobody could say that an accident had happened there.

I tried to be as careful as possible.

While returning to the cottage, I called up Brinda and gave her the day off. I told her that I was going out with Ansh so she need not come.

I had started planning everything out carefully.

However, the actual plan was still a puzzle for me. Panchali had said it so easily. But, I was wondering how Panchali could enter Kiara's body.

Was it really possible?

I thought it would take some kind of miracle for that to happen. Well, so many strange things were already happening. I was a complete non-believer earlier but now I had started believing in miracles. I was not the old Parimal Ghosh anymore. New realms of paranormal existences had dawned upon me.

I kept Kiara's dead body in the outhouse.

Panchali was already there.

“Prem,” she said as soon as I reached the outhouse. “Now you have to incorporate my soul in this body as soon as possible. There are some rituals and you will have to undertake those tantric rituals. I will also tell you the mantras necessary for the task. It is a difficult thing to achieve but it is not impossible. We can do it. I believe it is my destiny to relive as Kiara. We have to accomplish it before the dead body goes into rigor. After that it will become too rigid for any spirit to enter.”

Then Panchali explained me the process. It sounded like a very difficult thing to achieve. She showed me the books that explained this ritual. There were mantras in the book—the mantras that were essential part of this task.

I got busy with arranging everything for the procedure. Before we could start, there were preparations to be done.

I placed Kiara’s body right in the center of the cottage. It was to be kept on the floor. Next step was to make a fire-line in all directions around the body. Fire started burning around Kiara’s body. We had begun our quest of providing a body for Panchali’s spirit.

The burning fire created a mystique scene. It looked like Kiara’s body was offered to *Havan Kund*.

This was the point when mantras were to begin. I read out the mantras from that book and followed instructions. *Sindoor*, rice, clove and other articles were to be offered at this stage. I was performing the procedure to the best of my ability. The chanting and offering of different objects went on for an hour.

After one hour, I saw a miracle. An unbelievable turn of events that I could hardly believe! We had started the ritual

hoping for a miracle but when it actually started happening, it was mesmerizing.

Panchali's spirit entered Kiara's body.

First I saw Kiara's fingers quivering. My complete attention was on her now. I could see her trembling lips. A surge of energy thereafter, made Kiara's body spring up. I was witnessing an event that was unforgettable. Right in the center of the fire-line was Kiara's body in sitting position.

A strong gust of air entered the outhouse and extinguished flames around Kiara. The sudden energy that I felt circulating in the room slowly calmed down. Atmosphere was back to normal. A strange lull ensued.

For a moment, Kiara absorbed her new existence then looked at me and exclaimed- "Prem!" She hugged me tightly and said, "Oh Prem, I am alive again. I have found new life. For the sake of my love for you and Ansh, I have achieved triumph over death. We have done it. We have conquered death that separated us and now we are together again." She started kissing me and couldn't stop herself.

Her love had found an expression now.

I was also excited and I embraced her tightly with an irrepressible passion.

Those moments were definitely unimaginable. It was like a dream coming true. The body I was seeing before me was Kiara's but the voice I was hearing belonged to Panchali.

Triumph over death!

It was indeed. It had begun as an attempt to find love again and it has ended as a triumph over death.

I wonder if it had ever happened before. I am talking

about an event which I suspect could be the first ever! A person holding on to love even after death was rare. To relive again for getting back the lost love was incredible. Panchali had achieved it and now she had a body to fulfill all her unfulfilled desires. Her dreams that had died with her were alive again. Now she had Kiara's body to continue her life.

There were more surprises coming our way. Just when we thought we could live happily ever after, destiny had planned more twists and turns in our story.



It was truly a new life for Panchali.

(Please Note: From here on in the story, Kiara will be referred to as Panchali. Although the body belonged to Kiara, the new life belonged to Panchali. In the form of Kiara, Panchali was about to live her life and fulfill all her desires.)

Panchali ran out of cottage and rushed towards Ansh's room. She picked him up and hugged her like she would never let go.

I could understand her restlessness. A mother was caressing her child for the first time. Emotions were bound to overflow. Even, Ansh could feel the connection. He looked happier and stayed glued to her. Panchali tried to breast feed him. It was practically not possible since she was not lactating but the feeling of motherhood was enough to satisfy Panchali. Even Ansh seemed to enjoy it.

He had finally found his real mother. I believe he must have longed for her touch. He had been seeing her around, no doubt. But to be able to be in her arms was a new experience for him. It is the most enjoyable experience for any child.

Many events followed that day. On the same night, we tried to have sex.

It was a strange new experience.

Strange, exciting and thrilling.

Beginning of romance was extremely exciting. The body belonged to Kiara. A new form! An unknown body.

When I touched her, I hardly felt that I was about to make love to Panchali. It was awkward and uneasy. Restlessness was palpable in my every movement.

“What is it?”

“It does not feel the same. I never felt so uneasy,” I said.

“Why?”

“Because the body is different. May be that is why I feel so different and awkward.”

“Even better for you. You are a lucky man. You get to fall in love with the same woman twice; and getting to enjoy her in different forms. It should be exciting for you,” Panchali teased me.

“That is correct. I mean I am a lucky man,” I said teasing her back.

Then I pulled her near in my arms. I felt warm. It had been some time since I had felt such intimacy. After the grief stricken period, these exciting times felt even more exhilarating.

Panchali was also pleased with my proximity. She closed her eyes and surrendered herself in my arms.

It was simply fantastic. The pleasant storm in my mind was beyond any words. I can't describe how satisfying those moments were.

Such moments of intimacy can only be experienced and cherished by the one who indulges in them.

We started undressing. Right before my eyes, there she

was again. My Panchali! For me, she was Panchali. My mind knew it, but what my eyes saw was equally real. I was seeing Kiara. A new sensational form with Panchali hidden inside.

I was mesmerized to see her. There was no need for words. The sight was something to be savored forever. I kept looking at her.

“What are you thinking?” Panchali asked.

“You are so beautiful; really very beautiful.”

“You mean Kiara is so beautiful,” she smiled again.

“You...Panchali. For me, it will always be you. No matter what face, no matter what body, I will see only you. I cannot even think of having sex with anybody else.”

“Oh Prem,” she pressed herself against me. There was more intensity. There was more passion. She kissed me all over and said, “You are so good, Prem. You are the best. I love you. I love you so much.”

My arms around her tightened and we came even closer. Her face was against mine and our lips yearned to meet. We obliged and what followed was a passionate kiss that lasted for so long. It was time to forget whom that body belonged to. It was time to let go and become one.

Our eyes were closed and we were kissing repeatedly. It did feel new. It was like falling in love with her again. It was like the first night. It was like the first sex. The tender juicy lips were irresistible. I simply could not pull away from the soft pink magical lips.

“I love you Panchali. I love you so much. It’s great that you have come back. I can’t say how happy I am!”

Our bodies were beginning to pulsate with pleasure. Hearts were beating faster and breaths were heating up.

Every part of her body was beautiful as I explored it. Kiara was more beautiful than Panchali.

We were in the bed and our bodies entangled in each other. We had started the passionate play and heading to the ultimate pleasure.

“Prem!” Panchali gripped me and sighed in excitement.

We were losing senses and becoming one. The world around did not exist anymore. Everything was turning into an abysmal iota of pleasure.

That’s when it happened.

A terrible thing that we had least expected.

All the heat, all the passion and zing of sex evaporated in a flash.

We had just started playing with each other’s bodies. The feelings were just about ignited when Panchali screamed.

“No...!”

It was a deafening shriek, as if someone had hurt her. As if someone had stabbed her with a knife right in chest.

Painful and loud, that shriek blew me away.

For a moment, I did not realize what was happening. I looked at her to see what was wrong. Next moment I screamed even louder than she had. I was horrified. I had never felt so scared in my life.

My eyes were wide with fear. What I had in my arms was Kiara’s dead body. I was trying to make love with a dead body. It was irksome and horrible.

Panchali’s spirit had left the body.

“No!” I screamed and moved away from the bed. I flung the dead body back on bed.

“No...No.” I still did not believe what happened. Neither did I understand why it happened!

Kiara’s ashen face was looking horrible. It was a face of a dead person. It was supposed to be scary.

“Panchali...Panchali,” I called out to her, looking for her. “Panchali, where are you?” I was still trying to understand. Confusion had clouded my senses and I kept looking around for Panchali. Only she could explain what was happening.

I did not hear any answer.

“Panchali!” I called out louder. “Answer me...where are you?”

There was deadly silence all around. I was clueless as to the events just unfolded.

Then something happened.

After some time, Panchali’s spirit re-entered Kiara’s body.

Within seconds everything returned to normal. Panchali was back with me and she was appearing perfectly normal. As if nothing had happened!

“What...What was that?” I asked her still trembling with fear. “What just happened to you?”

“We can never have sex like this, Prem.” Panchali’s voice said from Kiara’s body. I listened as she explained, “this body belongs to Kiara; and sex is the union of bodies not souls.”

“Oh!” I sighed. I understood the situation now.

It is true that God’s work is an enigma for us all. We feel that we understand our destiny but it always surprises us. In our case, we were pretty sure that Panchali has triumphed over death but it was not like that. There were limitations to

what Panchali could do or could not do. It was disheartening but that was our destiny. We had to accept that.

So it was decided between us that we will never try to have sex. First time it had been a minor crisis. Another attempt could lead to some irreversible disaster. It was possible that Panchali's spirit could have to leave Kiara's body permanently. What if she could never get back inside the body! I did not want to lose my Panchali again.



We also faced problems because of Brinda.

Next day when Brinda arrived for house-work, she saw a stranger in house. She was surprised. A strange woman with me must have brought many doubts in her mind and it was not good for our arrangement.

What a coincidence it was! She entered our bedroom and saw us when I was on bed beside Panchali. The moment she saw us together, she must have realized what was happening. Of course that would be her perception of the reality.

What Brinda must have thought is ‘I am having an affair with this woman. After Panchali’s death I have found myself a new partner.’

That day when she entered our bedroom and saw us, she had startled badly. She wanted to leave immediately and even apologized for her unannounced entry. “I am sorry,” she said and turned around to leave.

“Listen Brinda,” I called out to her.

Brinda stopped at once.

“Make a black coffee for me, please.”

“Yes sir.”

“And a normal coffee for me.”

Brinda was shocked to hear that voice. Not just plain shocked, it was like an electric shock that shook her from within. The face of the new woman was not familiar but she knew the voice she had just heard. Brinda had heard it so often before that she needed no clue.

She turned back and stared at Panchali. This is different face, her eyes were telling her. Her mind was adamant on suggesting her that she had just heard Panchali's voice.

"Yes... Yes Ma'am," Brinda managed to answer and left the room with a confused mind.

After that, there were many encounters between Brinda and Panchali that left Brinda wondering about the new entrant of the cottage. The incidences were surprising for her and they must have added fuel to her doubts and misunderstandings.

Once she saw Panchali in Ansh's room. Panchali was holding Ansh close against her breast trying to feed him. Ansh was elated to be so close to his mother. He was even giggling from time to time.

For Brinda, the sight was mindboggling.

Without letting Panchali realize, Brinda left the room hurriedly. But, Panchali had realized what had happened.

This was not the only troublesome incidence. One or two times, it so happened, that Panchali said something from the earlier days about Brinda- something that only Panchali could have known.

Day by day Brinda's confusion grew and so did her suspicion.

"Brinda's presence bothers me sometimes," Panchali finally confessed to me one day. "I am scared sometimes."

"Scared?" I asked. "I understand your concern but why should you be scared?"

“She is a part of this house. She spends so much time around and she has been around for so long now. I am worried about some things that she might know. Some secrets should remain under cover. What if she finds out?”

“Secrets?”

“Yes, secrets, what else would you call them?”

“I don’t get you. Tell me about it.”

“The other day she saw me breastfeeding Ansh.”

I was shocked to hear that. I was not aware of it myself. I gave it a thought. After a while, I felt that it might not be as big a problem as it sounds.

“I accept that it is worth worrying about. But even if she saw you feeding Ansh, we need not be so alarmed. What’s the problem?” I asked.

“It’s a big problem. How can you take it so lightly? I am worried that she might come to realize that I am Panchali. How will she react if she is convinced that I am Panchali and I have returned after death?”

It was a shocking possibility.

I had not thought about it so far but now it sounded dangerous. Too many things were under cover and one exposed secret could lead to many more surfacing.

“Do you think she will know? How will she? Has she ever said anything suspicious?”

“She does suspect. I am sure,” Panchali said. “The biggest clue to suspect me is my voice and she has noticed that. Don’t forget that Kiara speaks in my voice, Panchali’s voice. It has happened so often that she startled after hearing me. She must have thought that this voice belongs to Panchali. Of course, it will take a really wild guess for her to imagine that I could be inside Kiara’s body. Spirits, souls is a concept difficult to digest. May be that has kept

our secret intact and she has not openly spoken about it. But I am sure she has suspected.”

“Oh!”

This was worth a concern.

“There is more reason to worry. Many times, I speak about things that only Panchali could have known. I don’t do it purposely, you know, but it happens. No one can be too careful all the time. Brinda reacts strangely when I speak of such things. I am sure that all this is adding up in her mind. She might land on to some conclusion and if that happens then we are in trouble.”

Now I was tense.

Panchali was right. I agreed that Brinda was a threat for our secret.

In days to come, her presence was going to prove much more dangerous for us.

“Tell me one thing,” I said. I felt that Brinda issue needed to be explored and dealt with urgently. “Imagine that Brinda comes to know what exactly is going on here. How bad will it be? I mean will it really be a big problem for us?”

“Of course, Prem. It will be a disaster.”

“How?”

I wanted to know what Panchali was thinking. I wanted to know her real concern. I also wanted to know the exact problems we might be facing if Brinda knew our secret.

“If people come to know about our situation, you think they will just accept it? People coming to know that you are staying here with a ghost? They will make your life miserable...our life miserable. You know me, Prem. You love me. But Panchali is important for you, not for others. You accept me because you love me. For rest of this world, I

am a ghost. Once everyone knows, everything will change. Even your publisher will want you to leave this cottage. If media decides to blow this news, your career will be at risk. People will call you crazy. What if it affects sale of your books? Will you be able to move around with me openly? Can we have a normal life after that? I don't think so. Too many disasters can happen, Prem. It might seem a small thing right now but the consequences could be so dangerous that it might destroy our lives."

I was stunned to hear Panchali's recital of possible disasters.

"My God!" I said. "I did not think of all this. It is difficult to imagine that we are living such a risky life. So many possible after effects of this secret will haunt us for a long time."

"These are not results. These are possibilities but if we are not careful, they are eventualities," Panchali warned.

"So easily possible!" I said. "One mistake and all this will become a haunting reality."

"Yes, you are right."

I slumped in a chair and started thinking.

"We cannot let this happen. We will take care of it. We must," Panchali said.

"There is only one way out of it, Panchali."

"And what is that?"

"We will have to tell Brinda to leave," I had decided.

"You mean. Permanently drive her away?" Panchali asked.

"Of course. There is no other option. Our secret must be protected."

Now Panchali looked concerned with my suggestion.

“Brinda has been a good maid, almost perfect. What will you tell her? She would want to know why she is being told to leave. So far, she has performed all duties properly. She has never given us a reason to complain,” Panchali said.

It hurt my kind-hearted Panchali. After all it was not Brinda’s fault. She was a threat to our secret. That was our only concern.

“You are right but do we have a choice? Keeping her on duty is the biggest risk. Brinda must leave. I see no other option.”

Panchali gave it a deeper thought. She probably looked for other possibilities.

“I think,” she finally said thoughtfully. “We will wait before taking such a drastic decision. We will see how Brinda behaves. If her presence continues to be a problem then we will think about it. If our problem increases and her actions jeopardize our secret then may be, we will ask her to leave. I don’t want us to be so unfair with her. We should not fire her simply on the grounds of suspicion.”

I agreed with Panchali.

There was no harm in waiting for few more days.

Today, when I look back, I think Panchali had taken a sensible decision. If we had got carried away that day and fired Brinda, we would have repented it forever. Panchali had shown great patience in keeping Brinda on job.

So often, we misunderstand people around us. A great surprise was in store for us. Brinda was not destined to create trouble for us. In fact, she was a godsend. Destiny had sent her to solve our problems.

Something happened after that. Something that changed our way of looking at Brinda.

One day Brinda came to see me.

“Sir,” she whispered. “I want to talk to you about Kiara madam. There is something that I must tell you.”

I went cold. She had found out, I feared.

“Kiara madam? What about Kiara madam...?”

My heart was beating faster. I was sweating. I was convinced that our worst fears were going to come true. We should have removed her. We had taken too much risk and soon we were going to pay for it. My mind drifted away imagining all those fearsome possibilities.

“What do you want to talk about Kiara madam?” I asked again.

“Sir,” she was still whispering. “Ever since Kiara madam has entered this house, everything has been going so well. She loves Ansh baba. She also takes care of you. We were all so distraught when Panchali madam left us. But now everything is returning to normal. The reason is Kiara madam. She is handling everything just the way Panchali madam used to handle.”

I did not understand her point. What was she trying to suggest, I wondered.

“I don’t get you,” I was confused. “Tell me clearly, what do you mean?”

“May be I should not talk about it. I am just a maid of this house,” Brinda hesitated. “But...I think...you should marry Kiara madam. Why don’t you marry her?”

“What? Marriage?” I was shocked.

I had not expected at all that Brinda will come up with a suggestion like that.

“Yes sir, why not?” Brinda said. “You two care for each other and Kiara madam takes such good care of Ansh. If you two get married, Ansh baba will get a loving and caring mother. He has already accepted her as a mother.”

I was stunned.

Even in my wildest dreams I would not have expected Brinda to come up with a fantastic solution to my problem.

It really sounded like a perfect idea. Even me and Panchali were to be benefitted by this new possibility. We were facing awkwardness at many levels. ‘This would ensure us a peaceful social status,’ I thought.

“Brinda is absolutely right,” I told Panchali that same evening. I was so excited that I felt there is hardly anything to think about. According to me it was a perfect plan.

“Marriage!” Panchali almost fainted at the idea. “We are already married, remember? Back in Calcutta?”

“I remember, but you are forgetting something. You were in your real existence back then. Now in spite of being Panchali, you are not because the world identifies you as Kiara. Marriage is a union of two souls. I know what they say but won’t you agree that in this world our real identification is our face and our appearance. Right now your identification is Kiara. If we want to make this relationship official, we must get married. Then and only then we can stay together in this society. We can freely go anywhere and do whatever we want after marriage. Otherwise, we will have to play a lifetime of hide and seek with this world.”

Panchali got my point.

Marriage was a magnificent solution for our problem.

After I explained her the reality, Panchali was ready for the second marriage.

Our new decision filled us with excitement.

Panchali was happier than before. She realized that we were going to have a normal married life soon. We could go on with our life without being asked any questions. She

was so excited that she hugged me and kissed me again and again.

“I love you Prem!” she said with tremendous excitement. “I love you so much!”

“But when do we get married?”

“14th Feb,” Panchali said at once. “We won’t have to wait for long. Hardly a month more. We will wait for that magical date. The same date we got married once on! The day whole world celebrates love. It is the destined day for commitment. What better day can we find for our marriage> Prem, we will get married for the second time on the same day.”

Panchali was right. We could not have found a better day for starting our new life. It would be auspicious and romantic as well. After all we needed all the luck for our life to go on smoothly.

“We will also arrange a small celebration party of our marriage in London,” Panchali suggested. She was already planning a lot for this second marriage. I could see how happy she was. She said, “Let us do something today-without any delay. Let us get our wedding cards ready. We will give them for printing today only.”

“All right,” I said.

I did not want to dampen her excitement at all, so I got ready to go to market with her.



This was the moment, which brought along the biggest twist in our life story.

Be prepared to witness what we went through after that because it changed our lives forever. It was not just a surprise or a shock. It was like an earthquake turning our world upside down.

Doorbell of the cottage rang. There was someone at the door.

I wondered who that might be. I could not guess. Recently we had become conscious of our visitors. There was always doubt and precaution on our minds whenever anyone arrived. We had secrets in our life and that made us wary of any suspicious visitors.

Brinda was not at home. I opened the door.

A young handsome guy was standing there.

He was a tall good-looking guy with long curly hair. Long side-locks suited his face well. I noticed that his eyes were brown.

“Yes?” I had no clue who he was.

“Mr Parimal Ghosh?” He stared at me with those deep brown eyes and asked.

“Yes.”

“I am Robin. I am from Delhi. I was wondering if Kiara came here to see you.”

“K...Kiara?”

I felt as if I had been pushed down from a high mountain peak in to a dark deep valley.

“Yes. She is a friend of your wife Panchali. She is my fiancée. We are already engaged and getting married on fourteenth of next month. She was here in London since last few days but then suddenly disappeared. I am worried about her. Her phone is not reachable. She had said that she will be seeing you here in London. You are the first person I have come to. I am really worried. Do you have any information about Kiara?”

“K...Kiara,” I mumbled sounding like I am trying to recollect the name. I was confused and did not know how to hide all those things I knew. My voice was a bit strained.

“Yes. Kiara. That’s her name. Do you remember anything?” Robin said.

“No,” I controlled myself and lied. “I have never met a girl of this name.” I had to try and look normal. I was not used to lie to the face like that. May be that guy, Robin noticed some confusion on my face.

“You have probably forgotten,” he said nervously. “Look at this. I have Kiara’s photograph with me. Take a look at it and may be you will remember her.”

Robin took out a photograph and held it before me. It was a photo in which Robin could be seen with Kiara. They were hugging each other and looked in very romantic mood. My eyes got glued to that photograph for a while, but I knew what I had to say. I recollected myself and got ready to lie again.

“Do you remember now, sir?” Robin asked. “Please try hard. She said she was going to come and see you here at your home.”

“No,” I said firmly and with a bit of irritation in my voice. “I have never met a girl with this name and this face,” I repeated myself.

Robin’s face suddenly changed. I could see clouds of disappointment all over him.

I bet there were tears in his eyes.

“I had come to you with lot of hope, sir,” Robin’s voice was trembling with emotion. “We love each other so much. And Kiara? She was so excited about our marriage.” Kiara’s mention and memory brought a desperate smile on his face. His smile was quickly wiped away by pain that followed immediately. “She has had so many dreams of our marriage and she is the one who did all the planning. The date of marriage, the venue, the setting...everything! She even had plans about things to do after marriage. And now...she has disappeared. I don’t know what to do. I am looking for her everywhere. I really thought...you know that you will have some information about her.”

I was listening to Robin and my heart was beating faster with every passing moment. I could see the pain on his face and hear the anguish in his voice. It seemed that the young man would start crying any moment.

My mind was numb with his words.

I could not even look into his eyes.

Panchali was standing behind the door, listening to him. She was even more shocked than me. I did not know of any words that could console Robin. I realized that I had not even invited him in.

“Won’t you come in?” I asked Robin. “Please come in.” It took a lot of courage for me to say that.

“No,” Robin wiped his eyes dry and said. “I must leave now. I have to look for Kiara. That is why I have come all the way and I will not rest till I find her. I will not leave London without her.” There was so much confidence in his voice. I knew how that conviction comes in a man. It comes with love. My mind was pondering over life of that young man who had set out on a quest to find his lost love. No doubt it was commendable. Irrespective of the reality.

Robin was still restless, but he remembered something. He pulled out a visiting card from his wallet and held it before me.

“This is my contact number. If you come to know about Kiara, anything at all, please let me know. I will be waiting for any information that will help me.”

“All right,” I said and accepted the visiting card.

Robin walked away, still dazed with concern for his beloved Kiara.



So much had changed after Robin's visit. All the happiness, all that excitement gathered in our mind was washing away fast. It was like a season changing suddenly. It was like one looks out the window and finds a blooming spring; but upon walking out the door one realizes it is a gloomy winter devoid of any happiness. Love is probably a cursed blessing. There are so many clouds of misfortune waiting to overshadow it.

What a time Robin had chosen to show up! He had arrived at our doorstep like a tornado comes roaring over blossoming garden. Within moments he stirred our life and our future so vigorously that everything ahead looked bleak.

We had somehow found a way to sidestep Panchali's death. She was back in my life. We were under the impression that we had created that miraculous twist in destiny. We had forgotten that He is sitting up there devising the twists and turns that no one can imagine. His work is always mysterious and confounding.

Panchali had Kiara's body to dwell in but even she did not know about events in Kiara's life. Every person in this world is surrounded by people and every person's life has series of good and bad events happening in it. Now finding

out the consequence of taking Kiara's body were dawning upon both of us.

As soon as Robin left, Panchali ran towards Ansh and hugs him tight. The slightest hint of losing him again had disturbed her to the point of madness. She started crying with Ansh still in her embrace.

"No...I am not going to leave you. I am not going to leave the two persons I love most in this world," Panchali said. She was scared. "This is my life. Robin wants to take it away from me but I love you, Prem. This body belongs to Kiara but everything else is me. I don't even know Robin. How can he claim me now? This is not fair."

"Relax Panchali," I tried to convince her. "You don't have to worry about it. Nobody is claiming you. Robin cannot take you away from me. If death could not separate us then what can Robin do? He is just a human being. Trust me. Nothing unpleasant will come our way."

"I am worried about Robin," Panchali was still on the edge. "Didn't you see him; he is so disturbed. He loves Kiara more than anything else in the world. That kind of love never accepts defeat. We know, don't we?" Panchali was speaking very fast. I could sense the panic rising in her voice. Before I could calm her down, she continued, "Robin has too much passion to give up his quest. We heard the confidence in his words. He said he won't leave London without Kiara. And look at the coincidence. Their marriage is fixed on fourteenth of February. All this means something. We were planning our wedding on the same day. What if he loves Kiara as much as we love each other? It makes him even with us, Prem."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Listen Prem," she looked in control of her emotions

now. But, she was holding me and Ansh tightly as if someone was snatching her away right now. She said, “There is only one way to get rid of this new risk of Robin.”

“What is that?” I asked eagerly. Robin’s entry in our life had made me equally restless and I was determined to do anything to get rid of this problem he had posed before us.

“You will have to convince Robin,” Panchali said. “Somehow you must convince him that his beloved Kiara never came to London. Tell him that it is useless that he should look for Kiara here. She has never arrived in London. She must be in Delhi. You suggest him that he should go back to Delhi as soon as possible and search her there. Only then Robin will return to Delhi soon.”

It was not a bad idea. It was essential that Robin leaves London as soon as possible. I felt that Panchali had worked out a convincing solution to our problem. Misleading him with this kind of information was the only way. Once confused and convinced that he had done a mistake by arriving in London, there was a hope he would go back to look for Kiara in Delhi. Our problem would then be solved. Besides I had realized that Panchali would never relax as long as Robin was in London.

His presence in London was a big danger for us. All the while both of us would be under constant stress. It would have been impossible to live freely when he was around. If he left London, it would be relief. I seriously thought of resolving this situation as soon as possible.

Unfortunately this new planning took our time and energy. We were beginning to plan our wedding when Robin arrived. Now getting rid of Robin had become a priority.

The most essential thing was Panchali could not go out as long as Robin was in London city. All the planning would have gone down drain if he spotted Panchali who

was now in the body of Kiara. The disaster that would lead if Robin and Panchali met was unimaginable. It would be like an earthquake. There was no way to explain the real situation to anybody. Particularly Robin was the last person on earth we would have liked to reveal what had actually happened.

Staying inside the cottage, all the time, would have been irritating but not for Panchali. She had Ansh to take care of. Besides that, she had once again taken charge of everything so her day was, anyway, very busy. What dampened her spirit was that she could not begin the preparations of our marriage like she wanted to. We both decided that we will be seen out together only after Robin is out of London.

After that, I did what Panchali told me to.

It seemed that there was no other option. I did not want to lose my love again. As far as Robin was concerned, he had in reality lost Kiara already. He just didn't know it. Someday he had to return without Kiara anyway. That is how I convinced my mind.

Next day I called Robin. I told him that we should meet. He asked me to visit the hotel where he was staying. I went there. 'Hotel Paradise' was the name of the hotel.

There were two reasons for meeting Robin.

First reason- I wanted to find out what Robin was up to in London. In few days of his stay I thought he must have found out something. I wanted to know how much he knew. I also needed to know what his future steps would be. There must be a lot of things he was planning to undertake to find Kiara. From here on I wanted to watch his every step.

Second reason- I wanted to mislead him and change his mind. I was going to try and convince him to go back to Delhi.

After meeting him I tried to be friendly and sympathetic with him. I expressed my regret that Kiara had gone missing like that. I also told him that I knew how it felt when true love faces such star crossed separation. I wanted to win his confidence.

“You know what I really feel,” I came to the point. “You are being seriously mistaken that Kiara is still in London. If she really was here, she would have come to see me. At least she would have called me. May be she did not reach London or changed her plan but forgot to inform you. I think she might be in Delhi. You must confirm...”

“No,” Robin did not let me finish. “I am very sure that she is in London.” He was speaking with tremendous confidence.

“How can you be so sure?”

“I was there on Delhi airport when she flew for London. I wanted to see her off. I was there till the flight took off. She did not get down or anything. It was a direct flight to London. There was no question of her getting down anywhere in between. And, the most confirming evidence is that she has checked out at London Heathrow airport. I enquired with the authorities and she did undergo custom check out at the airport. If she had left London she would do so from airport. I would have found record of her departure from London. There is none. What more confirmation do we need that Kiara is still in London?”

“Oh!” I was speechless.

There was nothing more to argue about on that point. Robin was on the right track as far as finding the whereabouts of Kiara was concerned. He was doing everything with speed.

“Now I am trying to find out the hotel she checked in

after arriving here,” Robin continued. “I have lodged a report in Scotland Yard’s ‘missing persons squad’. Even Scotland Yard is on the case now. They are looking for Kiara now and I am confident that they will soon have some development on the case.”

“So you have already informed the police?” this was a new shock for me.

“Of course, I had to,” Robin said. “This is very important for me and I will try everything in my capacity to find Kiara as soon as possible.”

One after another, Robin had many bad news for me.

Now along with Robin, police was also looking for Kiara.

I returned to the cottage without any success. I narrated my conversation to Panchali. She got even more nervous after hearing what Robin had been trying to find Kiara.

Every day our tension was mounting. We were running out of options. Whatever we planned was failing. Suddenly, we were running out of luck.

Next day another event spoiled our morning.

Brinda came to the cottage early in the morning. She was in a state of panic. I wondered why she was looking so pale and frightened. She had a newspaper in hand.

“Sir...sir,” she mumbled. “Have you read today’s paper? There is Kiara maam’s photograph in newspaper. Police is looking for her.”

“Photograph in newspaper!” Panchali and I jumped with another shock. The morning was ruined. As it is, the matter was a constant burden on our mind. Now there was something more to worry about.

We saw the newspaper hoping that the news won’t be a prominent piece. It was right on the front page. A

photograph that could not be missed by anyone who reads the paper. Scotland Yard had given that piece of news as a part of their measures to find Kiara. There was also a number that belonged to Scotland Yard. Anyone who had any information could call them.

With thumping hearts we turned on the television set and turned to a news session. Kiara's photo was being displayed there too. Information was also being given that Robin was her fiancé.

"Oh my God!" Panchali said with utter displeasure. Her mouth was agape with exasperation. "This is going out of control. Prem, the matter is getting too big to handle." I had the exact feelings in my mind. Brinda had new questions in her mind.

"Maam, is it true? Were you really going to marry that Robin?" Brinda could not control her curiosity.

"Yes, it is true," Panchali answered without hesitation. "We were engaged and soon we were going to get married."

I looked at Panchali with a question mark on my face. I could not believe her honesty at this point of time. Besides Brinda was after all an outsider.

"Then what happened?" Brinda wanted to know more. "Why have you changed your mind? Why are you not marrying him now?"

"Things changed after our engagement. I was wrong about Robin. He was not at all the gentleman that I thought he was," Panchali made up a story with remarkable ease and started narrating it to Brinda. "He is a very short tempered man and does not respect women. He used to torture me time and again. It was unbearable. Even smallest of my mistakes were unforgivable. He used bad words for me

again and again. How far could I tolerate? I decide that I will not marry such a bad person. It would have ruined my life.”

“You have made the right decision. Absolutely right!” Brinda was eloquent in her admiration. Sympathy for Panchali was evident in her words and her eyes. She said, “Such cruel men do not deserve to get married. They can ruin lives easily. You have saved your life by separating from that man. In fact, there is nothing for you to worry about. You are the innocent one. You should go to police and tell them clearly. Let them know the reality. You are an adult. It is perfectly legal. You can choose the man in your life. It is your decision which person you want to marry. Scotland Yard police will understand the case easily and then stop looking for you. Robin’s report will hold no good.”

Brinda was speaking like a lawyer and she was making perfect sense. By the time she completed her advice, we were struck with the thought that Brinda has given us a fabulous solution. Unknowingly she had almost solved our problem.

In a condition when our minds were clueless, Brinda had given food for thought. We discussed that option in detail, later that night.

“What do you say, Prem? Should we work out that plan?” Panchali asked me. “Should I approach police and testify that I do not want to marry him anymore. I will tell them that I have chosen you as my life partner. What can they do? What can Robin do? If we are lucky and all goes well, this whole turmoil will be over.”

“Very tempting solution, most of it is good. Police will take a woman’s testimony more seriously,” I said. “But I think...” I was still measuring other possibilities.

“What are you thinking? Is there another way out?” Panchali asked.

“I feel if everything winds up in a peaceful way without involvement of the law, it will be better. Suppose you say what you are planning to say before police, do you think Robin will accept it peacefully? In spite of your refusal to go with him, he will show resistance. He is madly in love with Kiara and he is an adamant guy. He may create a scene which will again be a matter of embarrassment.”

Panchali was restless again.

“Come on Prem! Think of something. We have to come up with a plan soon,” Panchali pleaded.

“I have a plan,” I said firmly. Indeed something was cooking up in my mind. “I will come up with a simple and effective solution to this problem. Don’t worry now. Trust me. I am about to break this troublesome barrier in the way of our future life.”



Next day I worked out the plan I had in mind.

I made a phone call early in the morning. I was an informer and I was dialing Scotland Yard's number. I had to use a public booth for that call. 'There is a car under Hilton Bridge,' I told them. 'May be there has been an accident. It looks serious.'

This was the best plan I could come up with. I was hoping that things would go in our favor after this call. I had thought about consequences of this phone call. I knew how such information leads to series of developments.

After making that call, I went to see Robin. It was a part of my plan. It had become necessary to closely observe next developments and his reactions.

Robin had just returned from the police headquarters. He had not received any information about Kiara so far. He had tried to find out the hotel Kiara had stayed in, but he had failed to. Robin was in the similar state of confusion and grief regarding Kiara's disappearance. But he was trying nevertheless.

When I reached his hotel room, he was watching TV. News was being telecast and he was listening, hoping for any leads police might have got on Kiara's case.

My arrival probably helped him relax and cheer up. He had shared so many things with me. He ordered coffee from room service and started talking to me while still keeping an eye on news. He had more planning in his mind and he told me all that.

Waiter arrived with coffee and served us. We were sipping hot coffee, sharing future possibilities and planning.

The television news was still on. We were still having coffee when the news reader mentioned about breaking news. Suddenly the TV frame showed the accident hit car under Hilton Bridge. The updates and police predictions started flashing on screen. There were images of the crushed car. A crane was later shown pulling out the wreckage of car. Several patrolling cars of Scotland Yard could be seen around. It was mentioned that- ‘The accident was severe. Scotland Yard believes that several days have passed since the accident. No dead body has been found inside or near the car but some ladies stuff has been recovered.’

Then they started displaying the articles recovered from that car. There was a vanity bag and cell phone. Soon the vanity bag was emptied in front of camera. Make-up articles were its main contents. I saw Robin’s reaction. He had forgotten that he had a coffee cup in hand. He had straightened up in chair and his expressions were changing very fast. Eye-shadow, mascara, compact and lip-liners were shown on television.

Coffee cup in Robin’s hand shook very badly spilling all the coffee down. Robin had sprung up from his chair and he was shaking.

“This stuff...” his voice trembled with a harsh reality sinking in his mind. “This stuff belongs to Kiara.” He could not take his eyes off the TV screen. He was hoping

to hear more but no further predictions or possibilities were mentioned.

I acted surprised. “Really? Are you sure?” I stood up and showed him how shocked I was.

“Yes, I am sure. I am very sure,” he said. For a moment his mind was numb and clueless about what to do. But in the next moment he controlled the rush of emotions and said, “I must go to police station right now.”

Robin ran towards door.

I followed him.

Everything was happening according to my plan. I was happy and praying that events that follow will also be according to my expectation.

We reached Scotland Yard headquarters soon. The scrutiny of the case was in full progress. Kiara’s belongings had reached there.

Identification was a mere formality. At least that was how I saw it. For police, it was an important step. They wanted to make sure whom that stuff belonged to. Robin’s arrival made it easy for them. He was shown all those articles. It did not take long for Robin to confirm. Robin was shaken badly and started crying right there. It was Kiara’s stuff, he knew. I tried to support him.

“We have not found any dead body near the car, so the worst fear is yet to realize,” the Scotland Yard officer said. “Looking at the site of accident and considering the height from which the car crashed down, there is a very low chance of survival,” he confessed. “Our team is combing the place for any evidence of survival or presence of a body. You must control yourself, Mr. Robin. One team has gone to Hotel Thompson. That is where your fiancée checked in. Let us see what we get to know from them. I think you

should join our team at Hotel Thompson. May be we will get some lead from there.”

Wiping his eyes, Robin got ready to leave.

I offered to accompany him. Robin thanked me for my co-operation.

We reached at Hotel Thompson.

The police did get a lot of information upon reaching there. She had checked in and we got the room number where she stayed. The hotel management was explained the situation by police officers. They agreed to co-operate completely. Register was opened where in the room was booked by the name ‘Kiara’. Under surveillance and full investigative precautions, the room was opened and Kiara’s luggage was found inside. The room was closed for so many days and hotel people were still expecting her to return. Now there was no doubt that it was Kiara who had faced the deadly accident.

It was a moment to break down completely for Robin. His quest had come to an end and he could not bear the shock. Seeing no hope in love can be an immensely troublesome feeling. Accepting that the person you love the most will not be seen ever again is a ruthless shock for mind. I knew it. I had experienced it. Robin’s desire of returning to India with Kiara was almost impossible now and he was seeing that harsh reality.

I did not know how to console him. All this time my mind was content with the fact that my plan was working well. This is what I wanted. ‘To firmly establish Kiara’s death in Robin’s mind!’ then and only then Robin would return to Delhi and we will be free to go on with our lives.

It was necessary that Kiara’s story comes to an end and that chapter is closed forever. I was praying that luck smiles

at us for some more time and my plan reaches its desired consequence. It depended on how Scotland Yard work on this case and till when.

For next three days, Scotland Yard tried hard to find Kiara's body. They worked to the best of their capacity to find any clue or hint. The area near Hilton Bridge was combed. They also searched the nearby areas but did not find Kiara. How could they find it anyway?

Finally, Kiara's death was confirmed by the police based on all the evidence they had collected. It was concluded that the body must have drifted far off in the water. They saw no further point in continuing investigation. Ultimately Kiara's case was declared closed by Scotland Yard. Robin was informed of this decision. Scotland Yard expressed their deep regret about the unfortunate event and also offered heartfelt condolence.

"No," Robin screamed in agony. He was crying like a child. "My Kiara will never leave me like this."

"We can see only one meaning in this, Robin. Destiny! We have no control over it," I said. This was the moment. Now and now alone was the time when Robin could be finally convinced to return to India. I consoled him and emphasized the fact that Kiara was no more. "May be this was her destiny. Everything is written in advance, Robin. Perhaps she came to earth with a short life span. No doubt, it has hurt us all but what can we do? We can only pray that she rests in peace."

"No," Robin contorted with pain. "I don't believe it. Whatever they say, whatever the evidence says, I feel that my Kiara is alive. She is alive and well. My heart says Kiara is somewhere in London. Why? Why am I so sure that she is not dead?"

“It’s your love,” I said. “I understand what you feel. The ones we love never really go away from us. They are always so close to heart that we feel their presence nearby. Your feeling that Kiara is alive is because you loved her so much.”

Robin was so distraught that he was inconsolable.

He had come to London with great hope. He had so many memories of Kiara that accompanied him.

He was clutching a photo album. Many sweet memories were captured in that album. So many magical moments were trapped in that album for preserving for a lifetime.

Robin opened the album. Kiara’s images before him swept him away once again. It was so painful that he started crying again.

Even I saw the photographs.

They were in love, all right. Every image spoke volumes about their affection for each other. They were made for each other. Anybody could see that.

The way they held each other, the way they hugged and the smiles on their faces. That kind of happiness comes only with true love.

Especially Kiara looked too much in love with Robin.

Robin kept gazing at her images. Tears were flowing incessantly. I had never seen a man so distraught.

Robin just kept crying. Not caring about my presence, not wondering about how I will feel, he just gave way to his feelings.

It took a while for him to come to senses. The inevitable finally happened. Robin had no choice but to accept that he will never see Kiara again. It was not easy and it did not happen immediately. Robin’s mind sometimes got adrift.

He would go the Hilton Bridge and climb down the steps. Quite often he wandered near the accident site hoping for a miracle. He even roamed the nearby area looking for his love. Sometimes Robin even called out her name and waited for her to appear miraculously.

Like a man who has lost his wits, he would walk around.

“Kiara...Kiara,” he used to call out.

His heart-wrenching voice would echo in silent streets of London. Brain was resisting but hope was not willing to give up. Love knows no logic and no reason. But then a moment would come when he felt helpless.

Robin would start crying suddenly.

Even my eyes would turn moist. His condition was so bad. I feared for his health, for his life.

There was no doubt that Kiara was the most important person in Robin’s life. He had loved her more than anything else in the world.

So often I felt guilty. I felt that I should reveal everything to Robin. I wished I could do that. Tell him the truth and take him to Kiara!

But I had to control myself. His Kiara was also my Panchali.

If he loved Kiara, I loved Panchali even more.

If he needed Kiara, I needed Panchali even more.

My love Panchali! ‘No way, I can lose her again,’ I was determined.

Every drifting mind finally finds solace. Sense returns to mind sooner or later. It happened with Robin too. Emotions were still pretty charged up but it was more about grieving rather than hoping for a miracle.

Robin finally expressed plans to return to Delhi. He said he saw no more point in staying in London. In fact it would keep reminding him that this city took away his love from him.

For us, it was time to celebrate. After a long time I could feel myself relaxing. I am sure Panchali was feeling it too. We had waited so long for this. Robin's decision of returning to India was a magical moment for us. I took initiative and told Robin that I will take care of arrangements. He was thankful to me for all the support. I booked tickets for him. Next day flight was available and I confirmed his seat. It was an evening six o'clock flight. It was the hour of our freedom. From that moment our path for future married life would be clear. I rejoiced with that thought. The nightmare called Robin was over.



I was determined to be with Robin right till he leaves London. So I was with him on that day. I personally drove him to airport and talked to him before he would check in.

“Love is unforgettable, Robin and love is divine; but we are human beings. We must move on no matter what destiny has written for us. We must leave the past behind and look to the future. Start a new life now. My best wishes are with you,” I said.

There was a painful smile on Robin’s face. He looked into my eyes and said, “Is it so easy to forget love? Is it so easy to live without the one we love? I don’t know. If only it was as easy as you make it sound...”

Robin’s final words were stirring my soul when I returned to the cottage. Being at home cheered me up. The dark clouds were gone and sunshine was all around us. Panchali was there waiting for me. She was ready to go out to market with me. Now that Robin was gone, we were free to be seen together.

She had confined herself to the cottage since the day Robin had showed up. After so many days, she was going to breathe easy and enjoy some freedom. I could see that excitement in her when I reached home.

As soon as I reached home, she shouted with joy and hugged me. Abundant smile was shining on her face.

“Now there is no problem left in our life,” Panchali said and she just could not stop smiling. “We have been in so much tension, Prem and I am so glad it is over.” She moved around like a young girl full of happiness and energy.

“You are right. No more sleepless nights and restless days. No tension at all,” even my voice was filled with euphoria. “So, tell me. What do you want to do tonight? Where should I take you? Tell me, what’s on your mind?” I asked.

“Marriage!” Panchali reached for my arms and said in a mesmerizing voice. “That’s all on my mind. Fourteenth Feb is approaching. We have only ten days left to prepare for our wedding. Let us get our wedding cards printed. That’s the first thing we should get done. Then there are so many things to care of. Ten days is too short a period to arrange a wedding. Let us not waste any more time.”

I obeyed Panchali. I did not want to dampen her excitement and she was right. We were going to get married in ten days. I was as eager as her to get married. I knew that from here on she will be the one deciding everything and I will be merely following.

The thought of second marriage was even more exciting. Our souls were already one. The string of love had tied them up nice and tight. This time the marriage involved bodies. It was our passport to live happily ever after.

We walked out of our cottage breathing fresh air. It was so relieving. All these days, our minds were laden with guilt, worries and plans. Now there was pure love. We felt like our married life had begun again.

Without wasting time, we went to a mall. The mall had many printing shops- the ones that offer numerous designs

and patterns of wedding card. All we needed to do was simply choose the kind we like.

It took us two hours for that. The color, the design work and the calligraphy; Panchali was so choosy about everything. She wanted it to be perfect. Getting married the second time was turning out more special than the first time.

I remember when we got married in Calcutta; we had selected wedding cards faster than this time. It had been a matter of few minutes but now things were different. We were much more precious for each other. We were much more sensitive towards each other. Both of us were ready to do anything to make each other feel special.

I really felt that I was falling in love afresh. Just like the first feeling- the first love!

Love hasn't been a new entity for me. I had fallen in love with Panchali long back. I had even written many successful love stories.

The level at which I was appreciating love now, had changed. After loving Panchali madly, losing her was a catastrophe. Now after finding Panchali's love back in my life, a new elegant sensation of love had touched my heart. Yes, the four letter word has an entire language hidden inside it. I had just been introduced to that language of love.

Oh! Truly a majestic feeling it was!

Maddening and out of this world! Even madness makes sense in love and sense fails to understand love. It is a world where logic takes a back seat. Feelings fly high and even sky is not the limit. Love roams in a limitless universe and beats all cosmic rules. The passion, love overflows with is incomparable. No drug can match its daze and no drink can equal its delight. Forget about other things, even poison

like potassium cyanide cannot make you zoom around like love does.

To love and to be loved is like a blessing. To lose love and find it again is like finding paradise. To lose love to death and yet find it again is like being touched by God.

I was feeling like being touched by God.

“Here Prem, I like this one,” Panchali’s words brought me back from my train of thought. Panchali had finally chosen a card. “This is perfect,” she said. “Even from our Bengali traditional point of view. Mother Durga is right here and so is Ganesh ji. Inside, we will write in gold letters- ‘Parimal weds Panchali’.”

“Not Panchali,” I corrected her immediately. “Parimal weds Kiara.”

For a moment she was confused but then realized her mistake. I saw a pink shade taking over her complexion. She was almost like a new bride. Excited about her marriage; looking forward to a new life! That day I saw the cutest smile that graced her face. Yes, it was all Panchali. To my eyes and to my mind, the face was immaterial. I knew that the person I had by my side was my Panchali.

“Yes,” she repeated as if to hear how it sounds. “Parimal weds Kiara.”

The wedding card was final. Color combinations and fonts was a small matter that we dealt with immediately. We confirmed the order and came out of the printing shop.

We were told that the cards will be ready in twenty four hours. After that we planned to send them to our invitees.

“We have to prepare the list tonight. List of all guests,” Panchali said as soon as we walked out of the shop. “Whom should we invite? Do you have anything in mind? How many should do you think we can invite?”

Panchali's mind was full of questions. She was so excited that she could think only of questions and not answers.

"Don't worry sweetheart," I said, "don't think too much. I have a list in mind. We will go through it and finalize it. I don't think there should be too many guests. We don't know many people in London. So, only the close friends will be there to wish us."

"That's right," Panchali agreed. "You are absolutely right. Only close friends."

Robin's departure had set our wedding preparations on the right track. We were not thinking about him anymore. Wedding was our only thought now. Next few days were going to be very busy. We could feel that excitement as we walked towards the escalator.

"Oh," I realized and said, "My cell phone...I left it in the shop, I think." I started checking my pockets.

"Are you sure? Was it in your hand or you kept it somewhere?" Panchali was also surprised.

"Just wait here. I will be back. It will only be a minute. I will bring my phone. It must be there in that shop," I said.

I left Panchali at the escalator and walked back to the shop.

It was right there. My Blackberry! I had left it on counter.

I dropped it in my pocket and rushed out.

Before I could reach near Panchali, I saw something that shocked me. I could not believe my eyes and my head started spinning.

I saw Robin standing in the mall.

The same Robin I had personally left at Heathrow airport. I had talked to him before he went in and I had bid him goodbye.

And now, there he was! I hoped that I was mistaken but I was not. He was really Robin. Our nightmare Robin!

The worst thing was his eyes were on Kiara (Panchali). He was staring at her without blinking. It was like he was under some spell. Not moving a muscle, not blinking even once he was looking at the face he had been searching for so many days. What was more disturbing was- even Panchali had spotted him.

In that moment, all the cards had opened. Days of our planning and the execution had gone down drain. Panchali had stayed away from his sight for so long and now when we least expected our game was over. The cat and mouse game was truly over.

Finally, I saw Robin moving and the first word that came out of his mouth was 'Kiara!'. He called out loudly and tried to stop Kiara (Panchali).

I saw him running towards Panchali.

Panchali startled with his actions, decided to escape and got down using escalator. Without waiting for me, she ran out of the mall.

Robin was not far behind her.

I ran behind Robin thinking about what would happen next. Right now my first plan was to stop Robin.

I reached Robin before he could catch up with Panchali. I stopped him and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Robin!" I acted really surprised. "What? How? What are you doing here? You should be on that flight to Delhi."

"Brother!" Robin was breathless yet excited. "It's a miracle. I knew it. God is with me and my love. My flight got cancelled due to bad weather in Delhi. It has been postponed till tomorrow morning. I caught a cab and came here to buy some stuff. My hotel is not far from here. It was

God's desire that I come here. Guess whom I saw here just now. Kiara, my Kiara. I saw her with my own eyes. It's a miracle. Kiara is alive. My Kiara is alive, Mr. Parimal."

He was full of new energy. He said all that with tremendous confidence and then ran out again to look for Kiara. She was nowhere to be seen. I had no words to speak to him. I just followed him outside.

I was worried that he will chase Panchali and find out her whereabouts. That would have truly the end of everything. I was still trying to distract him and keep him away from Panchali.

"Robin, it must have been an illusion or something. You have been thinking so much about her. That woman you saw must have been someone else. You just felt she was Kiara," I tried convincing him again. "Kiara cannot be alive. We looked for her so much. The Scotland Yard looked for her for so many days. Robin, trust me..."

"No," Robin was incorrigible. "Kiara is alive. I can't make a mistake in identifying her. I saw her right there in the mall. She was my Kiara and I am going to find her. Why don't you believe me?"

Robin was getting more and more confident now. I had to surrender before his confident words.

We were in the driving seat so far. I had planned events with the help of Panchali so far. It was our desperation to be with each other. We had broken all rules for the sake of our love. Luckily we were successful so far. We almost triumphed over death during our efforts. Panchali's wandering spirit found a body again through remarkable co-incidence. We had not bothered about what was right or what was wrong. We had hardly shown any respect for nature's rules and ethics.

Now destiny had made its presence felt. The almighty had played a trick on us. A simple trick which threatened to destroy the little world I was trying to rebuild with Panchali. There were no more options left apart from refuting Robin's words.

"Robin, tell me one thing. If Kiara is in this city then why has she not called you or got in touch with you?" I started confusing Robin again. My earlier attempts to mislead him were undone by latest development. This was my last desperate effort to change his mind. "Kiara loved you. If she was alive, don't you think she would have come and met you? You were love of her life. Why will she stay away from you?"

"It is true," Robin agreed." Even I cannot understand that. Why has she stayed away from me?"

His mind picked up my point. It was encouraging for me so I applied my creative brain and continued, "When you saw Kiara in the mall, did she also see you?"

"Of course, she did. She saw me very clearly. I even called out to her."

"Then what was her reaction after seeing you?" I asked.

"Nothing," Robin was hesitant while answering that question. "She ignored me. I called out to her but she did not pay attention. Then she got down from the escalator and ran away."

"Then I can bet that she was not Kiara," I emphasized with complete confidence. "There is no way she can be Kiara. Can you imagine her acting this way? If she was Kiara she would have run into your arms not away from you. She would have danced with joy. Just imagine if she was your fiancée Kiara, this would have been the happiest

moment for her after being away from you for so long. Tell me; am I right or wrong?"

"No...I mean you are right."

"Then, that's it. This is the ultimate proof that she is not Kiara. Are you convinced now? Just look at things in a practical way and you will see the truth," I concluded my final effort of turning Robin away from our lives.

"Well, I am still pretty sure I saw Kiara," Robin was still adamant. "Everything you say is acceptable. But now, things are complicated than before. At least I know that Kiara is alive. It is a matter of great relief for my heart, Mr. Parimal. I am so happy that Kiara is alive and in this city. Now I must reach her as soon as possible. Once I meet her I will get all the answers I need. I can't wait for that moment when she talks to me."

"But you are leaving tomorrow, remember? You have a flight to catch tomorrow morning."

"Mr. Parimal, now I am really not leaving this town alone. Whenever I leave I will leave with Kiara. Forget about this ticket now."

Saying this, Robin took out the flight ticket and tore it apart into pieces. He was very confident while doing so and his face was now glowing with new hope.

Not only were his words final and impressive but the way he clearly expressed his intention by destroying the ticket, I felt that he was really determined to reach the bottom of this matter.

I had nothing more to say to him.

I watched him wander away hurriedly looking for Kiara. All the uncertainty, doubts and fears were returning to my mind. Robin was still in London and determined more than ever to find Kiara.



This development crushed Panchali's heart. She had new hope that evening when we went out. All that had disappeared and her face was covered with worries.

When I reached home, Panchali was with Ansh. She had hugged Ansh tightly against her chest and crying vigorously.

She looked like a person who had lost all hope. Oblivious to my presence she continued to cry like a child.

Ansh was the most valuable possession of her life and she was holding on to him like someone would come and snatch him away from her. Her fears were not unreasonable. The events had unfolded that way.

When she saw me, she came running into my arms. Three of us were a complete family and now someone was trying to separate us. The thought was too painful and even I could feel emotions heaving inside me.

Oh! What had I done wrong that I was being punished for! Was there no family happiness destined for me?

I touched Panchali and I was worried to find out that her skin had gone extremely cold. Her hand, her touch, everything was so dedicated and so divine for me. Only a woman can love so passionately.

Love is a feeling that can be best understood and best experienced by a woman. The sensitive expression of love can only be exemplified by a woman. Panchali was my idol of love and I was miserable with the fear of losing her.

“Prem, I don’t want to leave you,” she said, still in my arms, crying. Her words were soaked in emotions. “I am not going anywhere. I don’t want to leave this world again. Even death can’t separate us. But Robin wants Kiara’s body and he is determined to take it away from me.”

“No,” I said firmly. “He can’t take away this body from you.” I was speaking with so much confidence for the first time.

“How can you say that?” Panchali was surprised at my words. “Why can’t he force me out of this body which belongs to Kiara?”

“Because Kiara is dead,” I screamed. I had lost patience and found Robin’s quest unreasonable. After all he wanted back his fiancée who was already dead. “We know that Kiara is dead. All that remains is her body and only thing one can do with her body is burn it. Isn’t it true Panchali, that if you had not taken up Kiara’s body, it would have undergone funeral by now. It would have turned to ashes. As long as your spirit is inside the body, it has a life and a meaning. Once you leave this body, it will be useless and turn to dust in no time. What will be the purpose of this body without any soul? Kiara’s spirit is nowhere around. It has already passed on.”

“No, it hasn’t,” Panchali said. My heart stopped for a moment. “Kiara’s soul has not passed on to the next world.” Panchali had revealed something that was nothing less than a bombshell.

I was stunned.

It was a shocking revelation.

“What did you say?” I asked. “What do you mean by that? Kiara’s spirit is still hanging around?”

“Yes.”

“But why? I mean...how is it possible?”

“Because Kiara is not dead yet!”

That was unbearable. I was used to surprises and shocks but that was something more than that.

I felt my brain was exploding. I could barely stand.

Panchali’s this secret was really a shocker. I kept staring at her as if hoping that she would smile and say that she was lying. But she wasn’t.

“Kiara is not dead? But then what we saw with our own eyes; what was that?”

“It was all an illusion,” Panchali said tearfully. “I had arranged that accident. It was my plan.”

“Why?”

“Because I wanted to seize her body. I wanted to come back to you and Ansh. That was my only intention so I had to do this. Not just that accident but I also had to control Kiara’s spirit. In spite of her not being dead, I am in her body because her spirit is in my control. The moment I leave this body, Kiara’s soul will return to this body and claim it. Her spirit is waiting for me to leave anyway. Kiara will be alive in no time once I leave her body. I had to hide this reality from you Prem. I love you too much and I can do anything to be with you.”

“Oh!” I sighed.

All the energy had left my body. My power to think was gone. My mind was paralyzed with all that information.

There were no words left to exchange.

“In fact, I am the one who has died,” Panchali said. There was a sense of guilt in her voice now. “I should not be here. My body has been burnt to ashes. I have lived the life that was written for me. Kiara should be alive. Her body is in my control- alive and well. She has more life left. I have forced an untimely death on her.”

“Then what you have done is a crime, Panchali.”

“I know I have committed a crime,” Panchali said and embraced me tightly. “But whatever I did, I did it for you. I could not leave you Prem and then there was Ansh. Was it fair that I could never touch him after giving him birth? Isn’t that a crime to take away a mother from a newborn? Only because of that crime I could come back in your life.”

She had just confessed everything. Her emotions were not in her control anymore. She was crying again leaning against my chest.

I was looking at my Panchali. I would never have believed that she would go to such extremes for the sake of my love.

She had committed a murder.

A murder to claim back her love!

It was a crime but she did not look guilty. She was my Panchali madly in love with me and she I could understand how much anguish she must have felt when death was dragging her away from me.

Even now after hearing her confession I looked at her. She looked as innocent as a child. Her eyes were filled with love. Every element of her body was restless with the fear of separation from me. I had seen people in love but I had never seen this kind of passion. No one would have blamed her for what she had done. And who was I to judge her? Everything is fair in love and war!

The complications in the story were increasing rather than simplifying.

There was another person as restless as us. Robin! And he was not sitting quietly with folded hands. After seeing Kiara with his own eyes, he was rejuvenated. Now he had new energy to search Kiara. His confidence was back. He was thinking of ways how he could meet Kiara.

Next day he started with the same mall. He believed that he had seen Kiara there so there was a chance that he will get another clue from that mall. That day, he carried Kiara's photograph with him.

Robin thought that Kiara must have visited some shopping mall. That is how he made his plan. With Kiara's photo in his hand, he started visiting every shop in that mall.

"Have you seen this girl, sir?"

"Please take a look at this photograph. Have you seen her here?"

"I am looking for my fiancée. Please try and remember if you have seen?"

Robin was asking questions to every shopkeeper and every person he came across in that mall. Some of the people looked at him with sympathy; some laughed at him. Some tried to remember but answered in 'No'. Some of the people simply ignored him.

Robin was not discouraged.

He was moving on from person to person and shop to shop. And, finally, he entered the shop that printed wedding cards.

The shopkeeper stared at the photograph for few moments and immediately smiled. Robin was excited with his response.

“Yes, I have seen her,” shopkeeper informed. “She was here yesterday. Her fiancé was with her and they were in my shop for a long time.

“Fiancé?”

The word stuck in Robin’s head.

“Yes, I am right. They were here to choose wedding card designs. They are getting married on fourteenth Feb. I am supposed to print and deliver the wedding cards soon.”

“You must be having her fiancé’s name? They must have given complete names to you. Will you please tell me?” Robin asked.

“Why not? Wedding cards have all the details. Why just names, you will also get their address.”

The shopkeeper started searching some files. He finally found the correct one. There was a handwritten paper in that file. That paper had all the details. Shopkeeper showed Robin that paper.

Robin’s head swirled when he read Kiara’s future husband’s name. It was right there before him.

Parimal Ghosh.

Robin was shocked to read that name.



It was beginning to accept defeat. All the plans were over and all the cards were open. Panchali was before me in Kiara's body and the sensational confession heard from her was fresh in my mind. I was trying to think rationally now and wanted to convey my point to her.

"Listen Panchali," I explained her. "I know how much you love me. Your love for Ansh is boundless. Even after death you came back to us. It was divine to have you back in life. But we can't be selfish. Have you seen what Robin is going through for; last several weeks? He is equally crazy about Kiara. He is so restless to see Kiara and you can imagine how eager Kiara would be to meet him. Don't you think it is unfair to keep them separate? Just like us they had plans of marriage. So many dreams Kiara must have seen! So many arrangements Robin must have planned! We, for our selfish motive, have destroyed their plans. Because of your efforts they are not together. Your plan became the reason of their separation."

"What are you trying to say, Prem?" Panchali demanded to know.

"I want you to leave Kiara's body. I really feel you should," I said.

Panchali had not expected to hear this. She looked at me

with disbelieving eyes. Her brain for a moment completely rejected what I said. Her face was confused as if she did not believe what she heard.

“Yes Panchali, I am not lying,” I gathered more courage and said. “Losing you forever will be painful for me as well. And I know how it will crush you but we cannot just think about us. Our love is not that selfish. It has never been! Every time we see Robin or think of him, we will feel guilty. Can we ever be happy? Can we ever forgive ourselves? Even his love deserves a chance to relive. Don’t you think?”

My words were hurting her and shocking her as well. She was still looking at me bewildered.

Even more bewildered than Panchali was Robin who was secretly listening to our conversation. He had quietly entered the cottage to find out what we were up to. He ended up witnessing our conversation.

I held Panchali’s hand in mine and caressed it. “Yes, leave Kiara’s body,” I said. I could feel Panchali’s hand gripping my fingers. “Let Kiara go to her love, her Robin. Let them live happily ever after. We have lived a short but happy life of togetherness. It is their turn to be happy. You have anyway lived your life span. We have no right to manipulate their life.”

“Prem!” Panchali sighed. Her eyes were glistening with tears. “Are you saying this from the bottom of your heart? I must know for sure Prem, because there is no turning back now. Do you really want me to go away forever?”

“Yes. You are more precious for me than anything else. Yet I am asking you to leave against my will because we have no choice left. We both got carried away in the quest to defy death. We could never triumph death, Panchali. Look, the death has claimed you back. Even I could not see sense

that once a person is dead, there is no coming back. Only after Robin came in our life, we saw our mistake. He has opened my eyes. What we were trying was a sin. We must redeem ourselves, Panchali; we must...”

I stopped in the middle of my sentence. My heart was heavy with emotions. It was natural. I was asking my love to depart. If this wouldn't bring tears in my eyes then what would?

Robin was still hiding and listening to everything we were saying.

He had arrived at our place in a state of anger. He had planned to confront us and even fight if need be. But the reality had been exposed before him in a stark way that left him spellbound. The cards had opened in such a way that he did not know how to react. Oblivious to his presence we were sharing our feelings on that matter with an open mind.

I was really feeling the surge of emotions like undulating waves of high tide. I hugged her and said, “You had unfulfilled wishes when you died but you got a chance to fulfill them. Not for long, but at least for a short time, you got a chance to enjoy motherhood. You wanted to spend time with your son. You did. You wanted to be with me for longer. We did spend some magical moments together after you came back. We are so lucky that we could accomplish all this. Wishes have no limits, Panchali. We humans are never satisfied with what we get. It will be an endless thirst if you continue to strive for this life. Let it go, sweetheart. It is time you return and allow Robin and Kiara to live their life full of love. We had our chance of married life. Now it is their turn to get married. This fourteenth Feb., they will start a new life.

Panchali was silent.

Her eyes were speaking of her pain. Her feelings had found a way through tears. She was shaking with the inevitability.

Robin chose that moment to come out of hiding. He came and stood before us. It was a strange chaos of emotions that was driving all of us mad.

Robin had tears in his eyes too.

This time, Panchali did not startle or try to run away. The running and hiding was over now. It was time to face reality. We were tied together in strange ties of destiny and we had to find a way out. Robin was a fine young man in love. And he had no fault in this entire episode. Now he stood before us mesmerized with twists and turns of his love life.

Robin's presence surprised me. So much was being confessed and decided there. I wondered how much of it had been witnessed by him.

"Mister Parimal," Robin walked towards me and said, "I have heard everything. Now I understand what was happening for last so many days. Believe me, it is nobody's fault. And, Panchali is completely innocent. No matter what she has done, she is innocent. Love can make us do all sorts of things- unbelievable things. We can do anything for the person we love and we never want to leave that person. Not even after death! That is true love.

Panchali was admiring Robin's words with moist eyes.

Then the moment arrived. The dreadful, heartbreaking moment when Panchali deserted Kiara's body.

Oh! My heart stopped for a moment. Emotions were choking me.

Feelings had never swept me off my feet like that before.

Panchali had Ansh in her arms for the last time. Her beloved possession, Ansh- the most precious person in her life, and she was touching him for the last time.

It was motherhood- the holiest of feeling and the most auspicious touch between two human beings.

Mother and only a mother can perceive her child with such intensity and pure love.

Then Panchali held Ansh against her breast for the final time. It was an expression of motherliness and no other joy in the world can be greater than that. One has to be a mother to understand it completely. Panchali closed her eyes tight but tears flowing through her eyes would not stop.

It is an eternal truth that we must leave this world one day. But it is very difficult to deal with, when you know that you are about to leave. Sudden separations are better. To wait for the inevitable knowing that it is about to happen, is painful. People say- “There is heaven after death. Something to look forward to!” How could heaven be better than earth? To be around people that love and care for you! To spend life with family that takes care of you! To love and be loved! Heaven can never be better than earth where love and tenderness resides. That makes separation so difficult.

Panchali was saying good bye to me now. When she hugged me, I prayed that we dissolve in each other’s embrace. She was so warm, unusually warm. Such a painful feeling it was, that I was hugging Panchali for the final time.

I held her close hoping that would stop her tears but it looked impossible. She was looking at me with thirsty eyes. The fact that she would never get to see my face again was killing her. No words; just our eyes did the talking. We were remembering our life time in that moment. Every moment

since we had met in the library to this point. Every ounce of love, we had shared, was being re-lived. Our minds were playing montage of the magical ride of love we had experienced together.

I broke down.

I cried like a child. A moment before I was the one consoling her. Now I fell in her deep embrace holding on to her tight. I was not ready to let her go.

“Oh God,” I sighed with Panchali still in my arms, “Why did you write death for us? And if lives are meant to end, why start them? The pain and the anguish are unbearable. Why did you pour our hearts with boundless love?” I was complaining frankly to the almighty. I had a right to. He was taking away my beloved Panchali from me. He was taking away a mother from a son.

I was still sobbing but Panchali had gone quiet. Had she found peace in my arms? Probably. After embracing me, I saw her serene face. In the arms of love she had cried her final tears and now ready to go. But I was not ready for that moment. With screaming mind and a bleeding heart, I let go of her hand. That was the final touch, the final caress of our hands; her fingers slipping and moving away. My Panchali was ready for her final journey.

Panchali walked towards the outhouse and entered the zone where her final transition was to take place.

Love bird was still there.

Robin and I quietly followed her to the outhouse. We were going to be mere witnesses of what happens from there on.

Panchali burnt a candle inside the outhouse. She closed her eyes and sat down before the candle.

She started chanting some mantras.

I could not make out what she was saying. The only thing I understood was that the ritual had begun. These were different mantras from the ones she had made me read during the earlier ritual.

The intensity of mantras slowly increased. Her voice was getting sharper and louder.

Panchali's body started shaking.

The mantras were resonating in the outhouse with strange mystical echo.

Suddenly Panchali collapsed and her lifeless form slumped to floor. A breeze blew out the candle and rushed outside the window.

At the same moment, love bird kept there, fell down and broke.

A waft of air emanated from the love bird and moved towards Kiara's body.

That's when I realized. I had gifted the love bird to Panchali on our wedding night. Panchali had trapped Kiara's spirit inside the love bird.

After a while, Kiara's spirit entered her body. It happened right before us. The waft of air that had come out of the love bird entered Kiara.

Kiara was alive now.

And now she was no one else but Kiara.

As soon as she came to senses, she spotted Robin and ran towards him. They embraced each other passionately. It was also a divine reunion. They were meeting after a long time. In the turbulent times in between, their destinies had crossed with ours and so many painful moments, it had given to all of us.

But now, Robin and Kiara were together and they hugged each other like no one could ever separate them.

Love brings tears to eyes whether it is of happiness or grief.

The broken love bird was still lying there.

If only human life was like that of love birds. When the beloved one departs, life should simply cease. It is anyway difficult to live without true love. The ones we love so much are ruthlessly taken away from us and yet we cannot do anything. We have to live without them. Helplessly and hopelessly! There are responsibilities to be accomplished and duties to be undertaken. This is human life. A life so strong and yet so weak!

There were consequences that needed explanations and understanding. I am talking about Kiara. She was completely unaware of what had transpired in this period after her accident. It was essential that she knows. For the sake of future, Robin had to make her aware of the past. He told her the entire story.

Kiara was stunned to hear all that. Panchali's demise was also a pain to her heart. She had lost a childhood friend.

Ansh got his mother back. Yes, it was a divine development. Ansh had accepted Kiara's body as his mother anyway. Now he started appreciating her presence again. Kiara became his mother. Whenever he cried, Kiara would pick him up and he would calm down. Whenever she smiled at him, he would giggle.

Kiara felt the connection too. She was attached to Ansh all the time and a special bond had developed between them. It was good for Ansh that he now had a mother figure to look forward to.

"Till he grows up," Kiara asked me, "can I be Ansh's mother. I want to take him with me. I promise I will take good care of him."

“Of course, you will. Now you are his mother. How can I deny?” I said and handed Ansh over to Robin and Kiara. They were his new mom and dad from that moment. Ansh looked so happy in his mother’s arms and his happiness was contentment for my soul. I prayed to God that Ansh never separates from his mother again. The child had been through so much in his early life but I hoped that all the pain will be forgotten as he grows up in loving care of Kiara and Robin.

Robin, Kiara and Ansh left for Delhi soon.

Epilogue

Today is Fourteenth February.

Valentine's Day!

The wedding invitation card of 'Robin and Kiara' is right here before me. They are getting married today in Delhi. Their new life is beginning today. They have been taking such good care of Ansh. My heart is full of blessings for them. They have vowed to take care of symbol of mine and Panchali's love- Ansh. Very few people in this world have a heart that can undertake such kindness. I wish them a happy married life. I am invited for their wedding. "You have to come! Without you...we can't imagine!"- were Robin and Kiara's words. I am not attending the wedding. I can't. I have other plans.

The entire cottage is silent right now. It is not that peaceful silence that steadies a mind. It is a deadly silence that screams inside our mind and unsettles it. Nobody, nobody lives in this cottage except me. The silence so often mocks me and I cannot fight back.

I was wrong. I must accept today that my decision to come to London was wrong. I should not have left Calcutta. Panchali was right. She was urging me not to move to London. If only I had listened to her, she would be alive today. Everything would have been fine. May be! That's what I feel. That's what my guilty mind reminds me all the time. The people who love us can never be wrong about us. Every word they say is divine. I have realized it too late. Here in my cottage, alone in the deadly silence, I confess that I ruined my perfect life by not listening to my love.

I am not attending Robin and Kiara's wedding but I am going to send them a message. I am writing my final letter to them- the two very important persons remaining in my life who are taking care of the most important person in my life- Ansh.

Robin and Kiara are so much like me and Panchali. They know love. They are living love. Every time I visualize them, I see myself and Panchali. Lovers walking eternal path of love hand in hand.

I have something to say to them...

"Dear Robin and Kiara,

I cannot attend your wedding in Delhi. Forgive me for that. My blessings are always with you and you know that. The reason I can't attend your wedding is obvious, isn't it? Today is Valentine's Day and I have to go somewhere. I have promised and I can't break it. Someone somewhere is still waiting for me. My Panchali is waiting for me, my friends. With arms wide open and eyes on my path, there she is! Waiting eagerly for me! I have to join her in that other world. Panchali proved her love for me. She returned to this world from the other world just to be with me. So why can't I leave this world and join her in the other? I can and I must. And then nobody will ever separate us. We will be together forever. Take care of our Ansh.

- Parimal Ghosh

I sealed the letter in an envelope and wrote 'Robin & Kiara' on top of it.

Coffee was ready on the table. The coffee that would put me to never ending sleep. I had mixed enough Potassium Cyanide in it. Drinking a poison can be something one looks forward to. It depends how eager you are for that final journey and I was really excited about it. That coffee was going to take me closer to my Panchali.

An easy death!

A relieving peaceful death!

The whole world looks at death as the end. It was the end of pain for me. It will all be over soon.

I remember Panchali's words today. *"At any stage of life, if you are making an important decision, then listen to your heart. When in doubt, listen to your heart. Heart might be beating on left side but its decision is always right."*

Every person in love obeys his heart. I am doing just that. I am listening to my heart today. Yes, I am choosing death. An intelligent person like me is choosing death. My heart is yearning to beat in company with its loved one. For crossing over to the other side where Panchali awaits me, my heart must stop beating.

This is my final novel, which I have written for my readers.

A supernatural love story.

This is true story, my beloved readers.

It is an elegant story of my true love. What more can a writer do than share his own life in the form of a story! May be you will like my story.

I picked up the coffee mug and looked up.

There she was. My Panchali! I saw her standing before me.

The soul of my soul mate was standing before me with her arms wide open. She was smiling. As if, she was inviting me in her world.

Fourteenth February!

Valentine's Day!

The day that cherishes love was indeed lucky for both of us. We could not live together for long in life but there was nothing that could stop us after death.

Panchali used to say- "Why fear death? After all, death is longer than life!"

I emptied the coffee mug in a single gulp. On the novel manuscript, I wrote my final words with my pen- "Happy End!"

