

GLASS MONARCH

THE VANISHING on CONNEMARA STREET

Written by **NAG**



PROLOGUE: DET. NACHIKET RANA

Nachiket Rana wasn't born. He was reverse-engineered by silence, failure, and rooms he never quite belonged to.

Nachiket grew up in Bowenpally, Hyderabad—but only barely. His childhood drifted through three cities, none of which ever felt like home. No siblings. No allies. Only the stale silence of a house that treated comfort like a borrowed luxury. That silence didn't raise him. It trained him—to listen not for words, but for shifts. Not what was said, but what bent around what was said.

He began school like a comet—fast, bright, uncatchable. But brilliance faded, not from a lack of ability, but from an increasing disinterest in people. College passed like a fever dream. He doesn't remember the name of his degree. Memory, like everything else in him, is selective. Merciless.

His mind doesn't think—it processes. Constantly. Scenarios line up in his thoughts like train schedules. Sleep, when it comes, is a forced shutdown. Intelligence, to him, is not a gift. It's malware, coded to erode normalcy.

He doesn't flinch at gore. In fact, he watches things most people can't describe without gagging—not for thrill, but for pattern. Chaos is familiar. Predictability, unsettling. But what terrifies him is quieter: the possibility of being truly alone. Forever.

His body is a map of routines. No coffee. No tea. No soda. Just water—or lemon soda on bad days. He's always chewing something—not for hunger, but to stay tethered. He wears analogue watches and hates digital. "If I can't hear time tick," he once told Mark, "I forget it exists."

His wardrobe is ritual. Pale pink shirts. Navy striped ties. A marbled purple pant, always creased. Brown belt with a Swastik buckle. White socks. Brown slip-ons. A silver ring on his left index finger—precision. A gold emerald on his right pinky—memory. A silver bracelet and iron *kada* on his right wrist—calm and discipline. Every piece means something. Every crease, a boundary.

He doesn't talk much. Not because he's shy, but because every sentence feels like a drop leaking from a limited tank. Except with Markandey Vilom—Mark. A childhood presence turned forensic whisperer. They met in school, clashed in instinct, aligned in execution. Where Nachiket saw the invisible, Mark confirmed the real. He never asked for labels. Never needed thanks. Mark was Watson, minus the sentiment—handler to the storm.

No one's sure how Nachiket became a detective. His parents say he did an MBA in Delhi. His resume agrees. He doesn't recall applying. He returned one year, solved a petty theft. Then a domestic dispute. Then a suicide that wasn't. Mark was there through all of it—even when Nachiket invented crimes out of boredom, just to keep entropy away. Mark always cleaned up the fallout, quietly.

Because Nachiket doesn't solve mysteries for truth. He solves them because if he doesn't, he risks becoming one himself.

"People tell the truth when they think you already know it," he once said. "That's why I dress like I do—I want them to assume I've been to their funeral and back."



That Wednesday morning, Mark's message read:

"Not a murder. Not a death. But he's gone.
Room locked from inside.
No exit. No entry.
You'll want to see this."

Attached: a GPS pin—**Villa #4, Wellington Enclave, Connemara Street, Bangalore.**

A voice note followed:

"It's not about how he died, Nachiket.
It's about why there's no body."

Shridhar Narayan, 75. Retired literature professor. Lived alone in a villa nestled inside a high-walled micro-community of eight—identical homes for the selectively social. Designed for wealthy intellectuals, aging elites, and people who preferred silence to sentiment.

Each villa was independent. Private gardens. Personal security systems. A shared central courtyard where wine was sometimes sipped and grievances rarely spoken. It wasn't a community—it was an ecosystem of egos separated by hedges.

That night, a neighbor heard his old radio playing. The next morning, no response.
When the committee unlocked the door—everything was intact.

Except him.

No corpse. No signs of exit. No signs of struggle.
Just a still-warm dinner tray.
And a radio playing a man's voice on loop:

"To forget is to surrender. To remember is to resist erasure."

Nachiket read the message three times, finished his lemon soda, and packed nothing.

He left from a rental flat in Mysore before sunset. Tea long gone cold.

A spiral flashed in the attachment—blurred, but unmistakable. Not violence. **Design.**

He didn't like Bangalore. Too much noise pretending to be urgency. Too much silence pretending to be peace. But the city wasn't what called him. It was the house. Or rather, someone inside it who had stopped speaking.

No police tape.

No officials.

Just seven other villas, and a silence that was beginning to rot.

They hadn't called the police.

They hadn't called the press.

They had called **him**.

A man who doesn't advertise. Doesn't carry a license. Documents cases not for justice—but for **pattern recognition**. Because sometimes, what's missing isn't a person.

It's the version of reality everyone quietly agrees to pretend is still intact



CHAPTER 1: THE HOUSE THAT WAITED

The third day began before the sun did.

Villa #4 on Connemara Street had not slept. Its bones—a mix of teakwood beams and synthetic upgrades—felt brittle with secrets. The curtains hadn't moved in days. Even the plants on the porch, overwatered by a timer, sagged unnaturally—as if mimicking grief.

Nachiket Rana didn't sleep either. He arrived just before dawn, dressed as always: pale pink shirt, marbled purple trousers, analog watch ticking like a warning. He didn't knock. He stood before the door, hands in his pockets, and listened.

The old radio inside was still playing. A man's voice looped, calm and disembodied:

"To remember is to resist the erasure. To forget is to surrender."

He tilted his head.

From his left, a gate creaked. Villa #5. Curtains shifted. Someone watching.

From his right, a soft cough. Villa #3. Balcony light flicked off.

The enclave had woken, not with alarm—but with practiced curiosity. Eight villas, including this one. Seven left now. A tight, wealth-draped cluster of retired thinkers, foreign-return consultants, and lives carefully pruned into routines. It wasn't a community. It was a neighborhood in denial.

Shridhar Narayan had lived alone in Villa #4 for 17 years. Literature professor. Reclusive. Once published a memoir thinly veiled as fiction, which several residents took personally. He attended monthly brunches with punctual disdain. Spoke little, but watched everything.

Now, he was missing.

The door had been found locked from the inside. No tampering. No sign of forced exit. When they broke it open the morning after the birthday—nothing had been disturbed. Just the still-warm dinner tray. The radio. And the spiral—traced in white ash along the windowsill.

Not scratched. Traced.

Mark, already inside, handed Nachiket a glove.

"Nothing touched," he said.

Nachiket didn't respond. He stepped into the house like one might step into a confession box.

The air inside felt curated. The kind you'd expect in a museum wing no one visited. Faint incense—possibly sandalwood, diluted by time. The living room was obsessively neat. Not warm. Not cold. Just arranged.

Books lined the walls, but not alphabetically. Chronologically. And not by publication—but by the year Shridhar *re-read* them. Dated sticky notes hung like tabs of memory. In the far right corner sat a worn reading chair. It faced nothing.



Nachiket's eyes scanned the walls. A painting of a spiral. A mirror without a reflection—just dust. A clock stuck at 7:38.

He muttered to himself, "Intent, not panic."

Mark pointed to the tray.

Half-eaten *kheer*. Single spoonful left. One almond untouched.

"Reheated at 10:11 PM," Mark said. "Gas turned off at 10:13."

"He didn't finish it," Nachiket said. "Because he didn't plan to."

They moved into the study.

Stacks of spiral-bound journals. A locked drawer, easily picked. Inside— A gold ring, a Metro train card, and a folded paper:

"If you're reading this, you've already missed the point."

Nachiket chuckled once, then stopped himself.

"What's the association doing?" he asked.

"Tiptoeing. They're scared. But not sad."

By 8:00 AM, the first villa gate opened.

Villa #1: A former bureaucrat with a limp and a suspiciously young maid. He stared at Nachiket like a meter reader.

Villa #2: Two sisters. Widowed. Too friendly. Always watching. They whispered to each other like children practicing alibis.

Villa #3: A software retiree who still wore his ID badge. His son visited last month. That was already too much noise.

Villa #5: An art critic with painted eyebrows and unmatched socks. Once accused Shridhar of plagiarizing from an unpublished thesis.

Villa #6: An ex-army colonel with polished shoes and a twitchy Doberman. Held grudge-level hatred for literature. Once called Shridhar a "moral fungus."

Villa #7: Vacant for two years. But someone had turned on the porch light last night.

Villa #8: The chairman of the enclave. Elegant. Surgical. Knows everyone's secrets. Pretends not to.

Nachiket noted the faces. The tension wasn't mourning. It was the fear of disruption.

Not one person asked, "Where is he?"

They asked, "How long will this take?"



At noon, he sat in the central courtyard. A dead fountain burbled once, like a hiccup. Mark handed him a cold soda.

"Pattern?"

"He *didn't disappear*," Nachiket said. "He *withdrew*."

"To *where*?"

Nachiket didn't answer.

He stared at the spiral carved faintly into the stone table beside him. A second one.

He looked around at the villas, like chess pieces arranged mid-game. Each with its story. Each with a witness. Each with a lie.

The house wasn't waiting for truth.

It was waiting for the right question.



CHAPTER 2: THE TRUTHS THAT BLINKED

By 9:00 AM, Nachiket had assembled them—not by request, but by inevitability.

The courtyard chairs had been dragged into a loose circle, their placement deliberate. Not quite symmetrical. One chair always slightly angled off. It made the neighbors uneasy, which was the point. People lie best when they're just a little off balance.

Mark stood off to the side, leaning against the dry fountain. He had a notepad. Not to take notes—he remembered everything—but to give people something to be afraid of.

Nachiket began with the chairman.

Villa #8 – The Chairman

Mr. A.M. Desai wore a linen suit with a stiffness that suggested he ironed it twice and sat like the furniture should thank him for the privilege. His voice was the auditory equivalent of a handshake you didn't want to shake twice.

"I suppose you'll want a list of our help staff, comings and goings?" he asked, already fishing out a tablet.

"No," Nachiket said. "Just tell me what Shridhar feared."

Desai blinked slowly. A practiced gesture. "Feared?"

"Yes. Everyone fears something. You seem like the kind of man who remembers others' fears better than his own."

Desai paused. Not offended. Calculating. He steepled his fingers like a courtroom veteran.

"He feared irrelevance," he said. "Or rather, being remembered for the wrong thing. He told me he'd rather vanish than leave a flawed legacy."

Nachiket nodded. "And you?"

Desai smiled thinly. "I fear loose ends."

"When Shridhar vanished, you were quick to act. No police, no press. Why?"

Desai's smile didn't waver. "This community values discretion. I advised we handle it quietly—internally. No need to stir panic over a man who might've just... left."

Nachiket's eyes narrowed. "You advised everyone?"

"Someone had to keep order," Desai said, tapping his tablet. "I drafted a memo to the board. Standard procedure."

As Desai stood to leave, a paper slipped from his tablet sleeve—a memo draft, stamped "Confidential: No External Inquiries." He retrieved it quickly. Too quickly. Mark clocked it.

Nachiket did too. Not just the paper—but the reflex. The reflex of a man who buries truth before it's questioned.



Villa #2 – The Sisters

Leela and Mira arrived in floral kurtis and noisy bangles, finishing each other's sentences like a two-woman Greek chorus. Mira always seemed two expressions behind the moment; Leela, one too far ahead.

"Shridhar used to water his plants at night," Leela offered cheerfully.

"At exactly 8:10," Mira chirped. "We could see his shadow on the curtains!"

Nachiket raised an eyebrow. "You timed it?"

"Of course! It was like a little ghost play every night!"

"And when was the last time you saw that shadow?"

"Two nights ago," Leela said.

"No... maybe three," Mira frowned. "He skipped Thursday because the water pressure was low."

"Or was that last week?" Leela mused, tapping her chin.

They both giggled. Nachiket didn't.

"What was he listening to lately?" he asked.

"Oh, that loop!" Mira said, wide-eyed. "Sounded like some boring poet trying to be profound."

"To forget is surrender," Leela quoted dramatically, then leaned in with a grin. "Personally, we surrender all the time."

Nachiket noticed the delicate flask on their table. The rim crusted with what looked like chamomile residue.

"For sleep?" he asked.

"Ours, of course!" Leela said, her smile tightening briefly.

"And last Thursday?"

Mira blinked. "I think we shared it... with someone?"

Leela shot her a look. "She means we made a double batch for Suresh. He asked for it. Stress week!"

"Of course," Nachiket murmured. "For forgetting."

They didn't respond. Their giggles stopped.

Villa #3 – The Engineer

Arvind Krishnan arrived five minutes late, juggling a phone, a stress ball, and his coffee—all nearly dropped twice. His badge—still clipped to his collar—read "Project Lead" in faded font.



“I barely interacted with the man. Reclusive type. Not my wavelength.”

Nachiket flipped his notebook. “You reported him once.”

Arvind blinked. “That? He threw away an old modem in the community bin. E-waste. Illegal.”

“Which you reported at midnight?”

“I had insomnia. I recycle stress.” He chuckled. No one else did.

Nachiket’s gaze fell on Arvind’s smartwatch—its screen lit up briefly. He caught the timestamp: last night’s backup log—disabled. Just after midnight.

“You talk much to Goyal?”

“Who, the bureaucrat? Not really. He’s polite. Efficient. Bit nosy. Kept suggesting I check the logs for ‘community privacy.’”

“Did he ever advise you about privacy laws?”

Arvind shrugged. “All the time. Like I’m not in tech.”

Nachiket smiled. “Of course.”

And jotted down one word: manipulable.

Villa #5 – The Critic

Zarina Kapoor floated in like she was on her way to a gallery opening. Her two different shoes made no apology, and her posture made the courtyard feel underdressed.

“Shridhar was a plagiarist of thought,” she said, before anyone asked.

“Isn’t all criticism a form of reverse theft?” Nachiket replied.

She grinned. “Touché. But no, really—he borrowed brilliance without paying homage. Even his doodles—those little spirals—were stolen from some obscure artist.”

“What did he say when you accused him?”

“‘Everything I stole, I improved.’ He was fond of making mediocrity feel curated.”

Nachiket leaned forward.

“Did he ever mention wanting to vanish?”

She exhaled dramatically. “He once said the only way to win in a world of noise was to become a silence no one could explain.”

“And you agreed?”

“I rolled my eyes. But then I quoted it in an editorial. Leela loved it—she even asked me to polish a draft of hers with his words.”

Nachiket tilted his head. “Would you say he had a flair for staging his exits?”



“A narcissist always does,” she replied.

“Or someone else stages it for them—and lets the narcissist take the blame,” Nachiket said softly, mostly to himself.

She didn’t catch it. Or pretended not to.

Villa #6 – The Colonel

Col. Brij Mohan arrived early, boots dustless, Doberman leashed so tight the leather looked white. He sat like a court martial waiting for its verdict.

“I didn’t like him,” the Colonel began. “He was too clever. Cleverness without loyalty is dangerous.”

“Were you loyal to him?” Nachiket asked.

“I was loyal to order. He disrupted it.”

“He once called you ‘a man so disciplined, cats march in line.’ Thoughts?”

“He’d know. He spent his life with guilt and no discipline.”

Nachiket pointed at the rolled canvas by the wall. “What’s that?”

“Gift from Leela. Landscape or something. Heavy for a painting.”

“You didn’t open it?”

“Not mine to judge.”

“But yours to store?”

The Colonel’s nostrils flared. The dog beside him began to growl softly, as if catching a faint, sour whiff from the canvas.

Nachiket simply nodded.

Villa #1 – The Bureaucrat

Mr. Suresh Goyal wore his polo tucked in, his glasses pristine. His words were measured, but his left foot never stopped shifting.

“I try not to get involved in people’s affairs,” he said. “Especially vanishing acts.”

“Yet you watched the locksmith break the door,” Nachiket noted.

“Curiosity isn’t guilt.”

“No, but it often walks ahead of it.”

Nachiket pulled out a photo—taken by Mark—of a half-burned envelope in the Villa #1 trash.

Goyal’s nostrils flared.



“That wasn’t mine.”

“Shridhar’s handwriting. Your address. A note about ‘disappearing cleanly.’”

“He sent everyone notes. He was poetic that way.”

“What did yours say?”

Silence.

Nachiket let the silence linger until it soured. Then:

“How often do you talk to the sisters?”

“Barely,” Suresh said. “Too chirpy.”

“And yet you left a package at their gate three nights ago. Mark saw it.”

Suresh’s foot twitched again.

“It was just... herbs. For sleep. They make a good batch.”

Nachiket nodded, as if that confirmed something. “And for forgetting.”

Villa #7 – The Vacant House

Nachiket and Mark stood at the edge of Villa #7’s porch.

The door was locked. But not dusty.

No sale notice. No movement. No one registered as a current resident.

“Someone came here last night,” Mark said.

“Someone never left,” Nachiket replied.

He pointed to the lock. Scratched. From the inside.

Then to the spiral carved on the inner doorframe. Smaller than the others. Not a threat.

A signature. Shridhar’s signature, etched like a final note.

As twilight bled into the stone, Nachiket returned to Villa #4. He sat cross-legged in front of the spiral etched into the stone.

One spiral. Two spirals. Three spirals now.

He closed his eyes.

Each villa had told him a version of Shridhar they wanted to believe. But none had asked the real question:

What if the disappearance wasn’t about Shridhar?

What if the vanishing was a **message**—to someone who hadn’t yet read it?



He stood up.

"Tomorrow," he said to Mark, "we go back in. Not to find him. To find out **why he left us a riddle only liars can solve.**"

And just as he turned—

A faint click. From Villa #7.

A light turned off.



CHAPTER 3: THE SPIRAL THAT ANSWERED

The next morning, Villa #7's door was unlocked.

No signs of break-in. No shoes at the entrance. No smell of stale air. It was as if someone had opened the door just for them and stepped out of sight.

Nachiket entered first, followed by Mark. The foyer was too perfect—airless, staged. The smell of citrus polish hung in the air like a lie.

Above the fireplace—not the coffee table—hung a heavy brass frame, dulled with time, almost camouflaged against the patterned wallpaper. What sat inside wasn't a photo. It was older, deliberately cryptic. A brittle, yellowed sheet, possibly torn from a private notebook. The ink had bled, but not entirely—there was still structure beneath the mess.

At first glance, it looked like a doodle. But Nachiket didn't look at things that way. He adjusted the curtain just slightly, letting the morning light rake across the surface, the shadows lengthening the impressions.

A spiral. That was the anchor. Not drawn, but carved in. Deep and confident. Like someone meant for it to last longer than words ever could.

The spiral had followed him. On the radio dial—stuck, playing the same phrase in nauseating loop. On the underside of Shridhar's bench—burnt into the wood like a warning. In the folds of a napkin—creased in circles like a nervous tic. And now, in the heart of this room—framed, carved, obsessed over.

He traced it with his eyes—not just its direction, but its intention. Clockwise. Inward. As though the mind that made it believed reality itself collapsed toward a single truth. A truth only they remembered. A truth only they bled for.

Then came the breaks. Three of them. Asymmetrical distortions in the flow, the kind that made your pulse misfire. Not just mistakes—interruptions. Annotations in pain.

He crouched. Tilted his head. Watched how light shifted through the carve. He saw something only someone trained to see chaos could see: Each break intersected with another, fainter spiral—intertwined, like a double helix. As if the rage wasn't solitary. As if it had been shared.

The entire carving was a duet of madness. Two spirals, two sets of pain, feeding each other.

It wasn't just a symbol—it was a timeline. The outer spiral? Shridhar's victories. The inner one? The erosion of Leela and Suresh.

And those points where they collided? The betrayals. The death of Anand. The institutionalisation. The disownment. The years spent watching Shridhar's accolades mount as their own lives rotted in obscurity.

The spiral was a map of becoming monsters.

He stepped back from the frame slowly, not because he had solved something, but because he'd entered it. Felt its pull. Understood the elegance in its horror.



This was no ordinary murder. It was a design authored long before the act. A story written backward.

He turned—and there they were. Suresh and Leela, like bookends to a tragedy that never left the shelf.

Not afraid. Not gloating.

Just waiting for someone to read them correctly.

The Unmasking

Nachiket stepped into the courtyard with the spiral still burned into his eyes. Not a symbol—an echo.

“This wasn’t chaos,” he said. “It was choreography.”

The residents stirred. Whispers floated like dry leaves.

“Five of you were marionettes,” Nachiket continued, his voice razor-sharp. “But the strings... were pulled by two.”

He turned to face them. “Leela. Suresh. Why?”

A hush fell that made the birdsong sound like thunder.

Leela stepped forward, her posture poised, like she’d rehearsed this moment a thousand times in the dark.

“We were classmates,” she began. “Back when he was just Shridhar. Before the Saint.”

She paused. Then, with terrifying softness: “We were friends. The three of us. We built forts of words. Drew spirals in the margins of our notebooks. Called them portals. Said one day, we’d fall through them together.”

Suresh’s jaw was clenched, voice like sandpaper. “We believed him. Even after he started turning them into weapons.”

The spiral was theirs. A childhood thing. A bond. Until Shridhar took it and made it something else.

He’d read their diary entries aloud to impress girls. Mocked Leela’s stutter in debate club using her own written spiral as metaphor. Leaked a forged love letter signed under Anand’s name to the headmaster.

“He used our spiral as signature and curse,” Leela said, eyes glassy. “Then published a story called ‘The Spiral of Innocents’. Won a medal. We lost Anand.”

Suresh nodded slowly. “He took our childhood and made it performance art. He built his genius on the ashes of people who trusted him.”



The tale spilled out like blood from a long-sealed wound. The expulsions. The suicide. The misdiagnoses. The silence. All of it buried beneath Shridhar's rise—literary columns, academic panels, retirement in luxury.

They waited decades. Watched. Grew successful. Bought into his circle of trust. And when the villas opened for 'like-minded retirees'—they saw their chance.

The Orchestration

Nachiket didn't speak immediately. He let the weight of revelation simmer—a silence thick with implication. One by one, the faces around him began to unravel, shifting in posture and gaze as if their subconscious minds already knew they'd been pawns.

Then he stepped forward. Calm. Precise.

"Let me walk you through the dish," he said. "Each of you played a role. None of you knew what was cooking, but you were seasoned into it, blended into the mixture of guilt, silence, and implication."

He gestured at Arvind first.

"Arvind. You think your insomnia was the reason you deleted footage at midnight? No. You were nudged. Suresh dangled the notion of 'community privacy.' He told you to check the logs, didn't he? That's when they sedated him."

Arvind opened his mouth, then shut it.

"Zarina," Nachiket turned. "Leela played you well. She came to you with a draft. Unpolished, she said. You did what you always do—you made it sing. What you didn't see was that you were editing the posthumous justification of a murder. Your edits turned a ramble into a eulogy."

Zarina paled.

"The Desai sisters. You were the soft sugar in this bitter meal. Suresh asked you to deliver herbs. Chamomile, valerian—harmless, familiar. But that flask? Already laced. You gave it the innocence of giggles and routine."

The sisters stopped smiling.

Nachiket turned sharply.

"Desai. You've spent decades wrapping the grotesque in procedure. You were the gatekeeper of silence. When Shridhar vanished, you drafted a memo—'No External Inquiries'—ensuring no police, no media, no questions. You told everyone it was for discretion, but it was to bury the truth. Suresh leaned on you, didn't he? He knew you'd fear loose ends enough to tie them into a noose."

Desai's jaw tightened.

"Colonel Brij. The last piece. You store everything meticulously. So when Leela handed you a rolled-up tarp—one she said held her 'unfinished landscape'—you stored it in your toolshed. You



never questioned it because discipline blinded you. That tarp wrapped more than a canvas. It wrapped consequence. Didn't your dog smell it?"

He turned back to the group.

"Suresh and Leela didn't kill Shridhar with their hands. They killed him with yours."

He let the words land.

"They knew your rhythms. Your blind spots. Your trust. They didn't recruit you. They composed you. Each of you played a note. Some sharp, some flat. But together? You wrote a requiem."

Then to Suresh and Leela—no longer veiled.

"You orchestrated this like a spiral drawn in blood. Each loop tighter. More exact. You needed them all. Not for help—but for guilt. You made accomplices out of innocence. Witnesses into conspirators. You made the truth unreportable."

He paused.

"This wasn't murder. It was manuscript. A story only you two knew how to write. One you started with a spiral in your childhood—and finished in the silence of Villa #4."

The courtyard was breathless. The air, as still as pages waiting to be burned.

Nachiket let the silence stretch, like the breath before a plunge.

"You didn't kill him alone," he said softly. "You made them help. You made them guilty. And in guilt, you made them silent."

He turned to the others.

"You all thought you were helping with something trivial. But you were slicing the ropes that held a man to life."

Leela didn't deny it.

Suresh didn't blink.

Their stillness was louder than grief.

Nachiket exhaled. "Where's the body?"

Leela's voice was almost tender. "In the place he loved the most. Where he used to write."

Suresh added, "We returned him to the page."

The Self Justice

What followed didn't feel like consequence—it felt like gravity.

Mark's voice, urgent but steady, echoed through the compound as he dialed the authorities. The morning haze grew heavier. A single siren broke the stillness, then more—until the villa groaned with the weight of uniformed clarity.



Suresh and Leela stood together in the courtyard, hands unshaking. Their expressions didn't carry panic. They carried closure. The kind that only comes when something long-buried is finally over.

The five others—Desai, Zarina, Arvind, the Colonel, and Mira—were pulled aside, each with confusion scribbled across their faces. Guilt, fear, betrayal—they all tried on those emotions like coats that didn't fit. Interrogations began. Not with accusations, but with disbelief.

Then it happened.

A scuffle. A flash of metal.

Two hands—Suresh's, then Leela's—reaching for the officer's holster.

Two sharp reports cracked through the villa like glass against granite.

Time fractured.

Mira's scream carved through the courtyard.

Leela stumbled first. Her face turned to Mira, to say something, but it never made it past her lips. A smile? Maybe. Or maybe a memory.

Suresh fell second. Straighter. Like a man collapsing into his own silence.

Red soaked the pale gravel beneath them, growing like ink on paper. One spiral. Then another.

Nachiket didn't move at first.

Everyone else did. Officers lunging. Shouts. Mira shrieking. Zarina covering her mouth. The Colonel grabbing at air. Desai, finally... speechless.

But Nachiket just watched.

Not because he didn't care.

Because he *knew* this was how it was supposed to end.

They weren't escaping justice. They were finishing a sentence. One they had started long, long ago.

Later—hours or maybe lifetimes later—Nachiket sat on the villa's back steps, sipping cold lemon soda from a bottle someone forgot.

Mira sat beside him, knees pulled to her chest, bangles silent for once. Her eyes were swollen, her voice a thread unraveling.

"They told me everything was fine," she whispered. "They said it was a... ritual. That Shridhar was ill. That they were just helping him pass peacefully."

Nachiket didn't interrupt. He let her spill—not confession, but collapse.

"I didn't know," she said, looking at her own hands like they might betray her too. "I thought they were just being kind. I thought... I thought they were the only family I had left."

"You believed them," Nachiket said gently.

She nodded. "Why wouldn't I? Leela never lied to me. Not once. Until this."



Nachiket looked away. Toward the courtyard. Toward the blood long dried on the gravel.

“What did they mean by ‘we returned him to the page’?”

Mira’s voice cracked. “They were writers once. All three of them. When we were young. They used to say—if someone wrongs you in life, rewrite them in fiction. But I guess... they couldn’t wait that long.”

A bitter wind passed between them.

“They thought they were writing an ending,” she said. “But all I see now is the wreckage.”

Nachiket nodded slowly.

“Then maybe it’s time someone else picks up the pen.”



EPILOGUE: THE FINAL FOLD

Nachiket sat alone in Shridhar's study as the morning sun bled through gauze-thin curtains. The dust floated like static. The room hadn't been touched, not even by the chaos of justice.

Mark had gone. The police had retreated. The five remaining neighbors were being questioned across town.

Only Nachiket stayed.
Because something still didn't make sense.

He stood at the center of the room, turning slowly.

There.
The spiral on the wall.

But something about it had started to itch—not just as a symbol. As a **placement**.

He studied the spiral again. It was drawn in segments. Twelve loops. Each a little tighter, more jagged. The final coil was thicker than the rest, as though pressed with greater force.

His eyes scanned the room. The desk. The floor. The ceiling fan. The bookshelf.

Then back to the spiral.

One thought echoed.

"We returned him to the page."

He approached the bookshelf. Not for books, but for gaps.

The shelf was divided into twelve compartments. Each had a letter etched faintly into the wood. Faint—but deliberate. Spiral-loop placement matched to the compartments?

Nachiket mapped them out on a page.

S - P - I - R - A - L
V - I - L - L - A - S

Twelve letters. Twelve loops.

His fingers grazed the 'R' in the top-right shelf. It rattled.

He pressed it.

Click.

One section of the bookshelf slid sideways with a soft wooden groan, revealing—behind it—not a hidden room, but a crawlspace.

Inside: cool air. The scent of camphor and iron.

A long rectangular trunk sat alone.

The lid opened with resistance. Inside:

Shridhar Narayan.



Curled like a comma, eyes closed, his pen still tucked into his palm.

Beneath him: reams of paper. A manuscript, soaked but preserved in pockets. Handwritten. Each page a confession. A chronology. A spiral of memory that turned in on itself until it cracked.

On the wall of the crawlspace, carved in his own hand:

"To forget is surrender."

Below it, one more spiral—drawn in blood.

As the body was carefully retrieved, Nachiket stood silent, head bowed—not in mourning, but in reverence.

"They didn't just bury him," Mark murmured. "They enshrined him."

"No," Nachiket said. "They **edited** him. Made his final chapter unreadable unless someone knew his language."

Mark frowned. "The spiral?"

Nachiket nodded.

"It was their game. But he turned it against them. He hid himself in the folds of their guilt, made sure only someone who *understood* him would find the truth."

They sealed off Villa #4 by sunset.

Yellow tape fluttered in the wind like it was trying to fly away from memory. Shridhar's body was sent for post-mortem, though Nachiket knew it was pointless. The real death had occurred years ago—in silence, in notebooks, in a spiral they all ignored.

Mark stood beside the car, arms folded, still chewing on questions that had no edges left.

"You done here?" he asked.

Nachiket nodded.

Mark tilted his head. "And this won't haunt you?"

Nachiket didn't respond immediately. He just looked up at the villa one last time.

"It already did. Long before I got here."

Mark unlocked the car, slid in. "There's a breakfast place near Yelahanka. The idli's average. But they never ask why you're quiet."

Nachiket gave a small smile. "That's exactly why I'm not going."

Mark chuckled, put the car in gear. "See you on the next absurdity?"

Nachiket nodded once. "Don't call me. I'll feel it."

They didn't shake hands. They never did.



Mark drove away. Dust trailed behind the car, curling like a short-lived spiral.

The next morning, Nachiket was back in Mysore. The sun through his curtain was too polite. The walls smelled like nothing. His kettle whistled.

He watered the three plants on his balcony. Two were thriving. The third had been dying slowly, rebelliously, for weeks.

He didn't fix it. He just let it try.

That evening, he walked to the tea shop around the corner. The vendor greeted him with a nod. Nachiket asked for lemon soda. No sugar. No straw.

Kids played cricket across the street. A dog barked at nothing. Somewhere, someone practiced violin badly. Life was happening again. Mundane. Indifferent.

But Nachiket felt it—the spiral still spinning somewhere inside him. Not tighter. Just... deeper.

Online Journal Entry

(Dated: 02:14 a.m. – Hidden URL. No tags. No name.)

Entry #78 – The Ones Who Edit

The worst crimes aren't committed with knives.
They're committed with memory.
And silence.

Shridhar wasn't murdered.
He was **revised**.

A man became too heavy for memory to carry, so they rewrote him—first in life, then in death.

But paper doesn't lie. And spirals don't forget.

Maybe that's why I do what I do.

Not for truth. Not for justice.

But to make sure the final page isn't dictated by the wrong hands.

– N.

Fin.

