**THE SHADOW MAN**

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Contents

[**THE TWO MEN** 2](#_Toc43899989)

[**THE MYSTERIOUS ROOM** 4](#_Toc43899990)

[**THE ESCAPE** 6](#_Toc43899991)

[**ONE WEEK AGO** 8](#_Toc43899992)

[**THE POWER REVEALED** 10](#_Toc43899993)

[**THE CONVERSATION** 13](#_Toc43899994)

[**THE QUESTION** 15](#_Toc43899995)

[**TRAVEL THROUGH SHADOWS** 18](#_Toc43899996)

[**THE NEW ROOM** 21](#_Toc43899997)

# **THE TWO MEN**

The two men emerged from their van. No one saw the color of the van but the outline of the van could be seen easily. The shape was like a school bus but it was slightly elongated at one end, just like the face of a maglev train. The men went towards a large structure which was the biggest villa in town.

They took a crowbar and slit open the door and surprisingly for them, not a single alarm rang. They thought that it was going to be an easy robbery. They went to the first floor and they found that there was a couple sleeping there. They went into the store room and found that there was nothing to steal in there. They looked into other rooms where they found nothing. The two even took the risk of looking in the couple’s room. They only found a remote there, they didn’t know what the remote was for so they just kept it the room.

One of them, whose name was Varun, went sliding along the wall and found that there was a hidden door over there, they tried their best to open the door, they also tried to break the door using their crowbars like they did to the main door. They found out that the door was locked and there was neither keyhole nor the keycard lock. An idea struck Virat (the second man), that the remote could be the key for the door, so he ran for the couple’s bedroom and got the remote, he saw a lot of buttons on the remote and had no idea of what they did. So, he said to Varun who was examining the door “Hey Varun, come here and look at this, there are a lot of buttons on this and I don’t know what to do.” “I think that there should be a lock and unlock button on this” said Varun. They looked for at least fifteen minutes and they found the button used to lock and unlock. They finally opened the door, “I will go and check if there are any traps inside, if there aren’t any, I will tell you when to come in.” saying that Virat went into the room. Virat found himself in a dark, circular room, without anything in it, so he wondered why the room had so much security. While he was wondering, he stepped on a pedestal, the only piece of furniture in that room and the ground and pedestal just disappeared and he fell into a dark, black void.

# **THE MYSTERIOUS ROOM**

Varun waited for a long time, what felt like hours even though it had only been ten minutes, but there was only one thing in his mind, that they were to take only the money from the house and leave as quickly as possible. He looked at his watch and found out that they were off schedule and they had to leave the house by 3 a.m.

Virat was shouting louder than he ever had but his voice was drowned by the flow of air. His body slammed into the ground and he found that he was in some kind of a basement with nothing but a few experiment apparatuses. He tried calling Varun on the walkie talkie. Luck was with them, the call had worked and Varun found out what had happened, so he went into the circular room and stepped on the pedestal and found himself in a lift. He was surprised that he did not fall like Virat and hurt himself. He found himself in a basement but it was not at all like the one Virat described to him. All he saw was one chair but he knew better than to touch it. When he went and stood next to the chair, he saw a room which looked like the one Virat had fallen into, through his binoculars. But it looked like it was a kilometer away, so he ran as fast as he could and reached Virat in ten minutes.

He was horror struck when he saw Virat. There were cuts across his hands and legs, his shirt was tattered and it looked like he had broken a few bones here and there across his body. Varun told Virat the way he had gotten into the room. Then, Varun lifted Virat on his shoulder and ran towards the other side not at all paying attention to what was around him. Once he reached the lift, he hoisted Virat into the lift and he himself got inside it. There was only one button in the lift which said ‘ascend’ and he could have sworn that it wasn’t there at the time he came down. When he pressed the button, the lift started going up and he found himself in the same dark, circular room, except it wasn’t dark anymore.

# **THE ESCAPE**

There was a small boy standing next to a small bed with the lights switched on as the switches were only a foot away from the ground. He looked like he was just three years old. The two robbers were surprised that the room had a lot of furniture and there was a pedestal with a small statue on it, the same pedestal they had stepped on. There was a very small door through which they would have to crawl through to get out of the room. They thought that the child would have a tantrum and call his parents, but he just stood there staring at them as though they were statues. The two started to move towards the door, the one being blocked by the small boy. The boy made a move and tried to block them from reaching the door by spreading his hands, Varun would have been too fast for him but as Virat was on his back, he was slowed down and he could not crawl through the door. The light created the shadow of the two men and the baby. The baby was fascinated by the big shadows of the men and started jumping on the shadows. The next moment the most miraculous thing happened! Whichever part of the shadow the boy stepped on, that was the exact part which got injured on the body of the real men. The small boy danced like that for twenty minutes, till he got tired and went and slept. These two robbers were unconscious because of the pain afflicted by the three-year-old boy. Next day when the parents(couple) came to check on the boy and they were frightened to find that there were two unconscious, close to dead humans. They woke the child and took him out of that room and they called the police as soon as possible. The police came and examined the van and found that there was a lot robbed loot in that van and in that maglev-shaped front there was a cockpit in which the two sat and drove, other than that nothing more. The two robbers Varun and Virat were arrested by the police.

# **ONE WEEK AGO**

Well, as Varun and Virat got arrested, I’ll just tell you the background story. The boy, Yuvaraj was the son of a rich business man, Pranav. His mother, Meena used to work as the branch manager in his dad’s business. But this was his parents professional background. Once home, they used to experiment and try to find and make some random super powers.

One week before this Virat and Varun robbery, it was a normal day. The parents returned from their office together in their Mercedes. They found Yuvaraj playing games with the maid – servants. Meena picked Yuvaraj and took him to the dark, circular room (I’ll just call it the mysterious room). They stepped on the pedestal and went to the basement using the lift. As they knew how to use the lift, they went to the area where all the experiment apparatuses lay. Yuvaraj was sitting on a chair behind the experiment apparatuses. Pranav went to the sitting area which was one kilometer away, through the lift. They were experimenting on shadows. The parents had cracked the secret to shadows and they were going to be testing it on Pranav. Meena got all the apparatuses ready and the maid – servants were coordinating with her from the power control room. When she started the countdown to experiment on Pranav, Yuvaraj got very excited and started clapping looking at the experiment. The countdown ended and Meena tried to shoot the bolt of energy with full power towards Pranav but it backfired. Meena ducked just in time but Yuvaraj was hit with the full force and he just literally flew back and fell hard on the ground. The parents and the maid – servants came running to Yuvaraj, who was unconscious on the ground. They took him to the doctor’s station in the Villa and treated him. Not at all did they know that he had powers. The parents tended to him and helped him get back to his full strength in just a couple of days. He was sent to his school where unknowingly he did step on shadows and hurt his school friends. The little children did not find out what was happening, they just cried, the teacher calmed them down and they then went to playing games again. This is what happened till the end of his kindergarten. Then everybody moved on to their new schools. Eleven years later till the end of ninth grade he did not tell anyone that he had powers and had kept it a secret from his parents.

# **THE POWER REVEALED**

Yuvaraj figured out that he needed someone to help him hide his powers, so he told his best friend, Sachin. “Hey Sachin, I need to tell you something important” Yuvaraj whispered to Sachin while eating lunch at school. “What is it Yuvi” said Sachin.

“I have a superpower…...”

“Of course, you don’t” Sachin interrupted him

“You listen to me now Sachin, I can hurt a person by stepping on their shadows.”

With a dead serious and frightened tone Sachin said “Prove it”

“Now?” asked Yuvaraj

“Yes, right now”

“So, Sachin please show me your shadow.”

“Hey! Don’t do it on me, do it on someone else. I am your best friend.”

“If you don’t show me your shadow then, I’ll show it to you at my house”

“No problem Yuvi” said Sachin. Happy that he had not gotten any injury, especially by a superpower.

The school day finished and Sachin went with Yuvaraj to Yuvaraj’s house. Once they reached, Yuvaraj took Sachin to the mysterious room with the pedestal, which actually was Yuvaraj’s room. Both of them stepped on the pedestal together and got into the lift to go down into the basement. They saw Yuvi’s dad in the basement, so they went to the part of the basement which was allotted for Yuvaraj only. Yuvaraj entered the password and they went into that section of the basement.

It was a small section with posters of their school house and, Yuvaraj’s old birthday photos and recent junk like, few old homework sheets, and few board games lying here and there. Sachin had never looked at Yuvi’s family closely. He realized the difference between them that Yuvaraj was unkempt unlike his parents. His parents kept everything neat and clean, Yuvi’s room was never clean.

Suddenly, he felt pain on his chest and came back to his senses and saw that Yuvi had stepped on his shadow while cleaning the room.

“Ah, so that’s what you are talking about?” asked Sachin

“Yep” said Yuvaraj

“I need to know how and where can I utilize it, but I don’t even know how to use the power properly.” said Yuvi, “And I don’t even know that should I utilize it”

Surprisingly, Sachin had the answer to that question ready “I think you should Yuvi, I think that you have been given that power for a reason”

# **THE CONVERSATION**

Night had fallen, Yuvaraj was feeling uneasy and was not able to sleep. So, he thought of how he had gotten his powers and he suddenly remembered the failed experiment that his mom had told him about once. “There must be a reason for his parents to conduct an experiment like that. So, why did they do it?” this is what rang in his mind for a long time, till he came up with the courage to ask his mother. Getting out of bed he went to the living room where his mom was watching television. “Hey, ma” he said walking up to the couch and sitting next to her. “Still didn’t sleep, what is the problem?” she asked.

“I want some answers ma.”

“Answers about what?”

“About why the experiments were conducted.”

With a shocked look on her face Meena said “Go to bed right now, you will get the answers when I think the time is right.”

“But ma…” “GO TO BED NOW …” she interrupted with an angry tone.

Yuvaraj obeyed and went to his rooms. He switched the lights of and slumped onto his bed.

There was a different case in his parents’ room.

“I think we need to tell him everything once and for all.” said Pranav.

“He is too young to know about the project we are doing for *it*.” said Meena

“But he will have to learn about our project one day to carry it on if we are not able to complete it.” - Pranav

“Yes, but that is *if* we cannot complete it.” - Meena

“You know that the strongest product of our experiment was when Yuvaraj got hit with the energy. That too accidentally. Think about it has there been any change in Yuvaraj, no. I don’t even think that the project we are doing is possible.” – Pranav

“Let us end this conversation once and for all. I will tell him when I think it is the right time.” said Meena, stopping the conversation.

Yuvaraj, who had sneaked out of his room, heard this conversation between his parents.

He quietly went back to his room and fell on his bed. His head was aching with questions ringing in his mind. What is the project? Is it legal? Who/What is this *‘it’* they were talking about? Why are they doing the project? etc.

# **THE QUESTION**

Many days went by, only thinking about the project and who this it was. One day at high school Sachin asked Yuvaraj “Did you find any reason of why you have the power?” “It seems that I might have gotten some information on my powers” and Yuvaraj told him everything he had heard that night. “I still can’t believe it; your parents are working for someone illegal?” said Sachin after hearing about the conversation. “Nor do I, Sachin.” said Yuvaraj with a tone of sadness in his voice.

“I think we should get to the bottom of this Yuvi”

“Yes Sachin, but before that I want to talk to my father once and try to find out what this is all about.”

That night during dinner time he didn’t ask his father in front of his mother. After dinner when his mother went to the washroom, he took his chance.

“Hey, dad. I need to ask you something.”

“Ask without any hesitation.”

“OK. I overheard your conversation in the bedroom few days ago and I have a lot of questions to ask.”

“Only one question, but quick, Meena shouldn’t know that I am telling you this.”

“What is this project and who are you working for?”

“That’s two questions, choose one.”

“Fine, tell me who are you working for.”

“Ah, that question I cannot answer as it is top secret. I will tell you when needed, I got to go.”

“Go where?” before Yuvaraj could ask this question, Pranav went to the second bathroom and locked himself in.

The doorbell rang. His mother came out of the bathroom and went for the door while Yuvaraj sat pondering on what would be top secret.

He heard his mother’s call “Yuvaraj, there is a girl waiting for you at the door.” He thought that why would a girl be waiting for him at the door and then he remembered it. He had told Anya that he would help her in the Physics chapter which she was having trouble with. He said “Hi Anya, why don’t you come in. We will have to go to the basement because that’s where all the experiment apparatuses are.” “No problem Yuvaraj, let’s go”

They didn’t go through the mysterious room, but went through the steps to the basement. He helped her with the assignments and explained the concepts through experiments to her.

Three hours later when Anya was leaving the house, she said “Thank you Yuvaraj” and left. He went back to the dining room still pondering about the top secret. He saw his father emerge from the washroom but he did not bother his father but went to his room quietly and slept. He had just discovered a new thing. The next two days were going to be long days. That was what he knew.

Look- alike. Servant villain. People disappearing everywhere.

Many shadow men.

# **TRAVEL THROUGH SHADOWS**

He woke up the next day, went through his daily routine and went to school. Over there, the moment he met Sachin, he told Sachin what he had discovered.

Once Sachin heard Yuvaraj’s idea, he said “Yuvi, an ingenious idea, but when will we manage to implement this idea?” “Sachin we are very close buddies, remember. So, you can come over to my house and we can investigate after school. But there is one problem, that Anya is coming over for help with Physics.”

“Wait, Yuvi you called Anya today, why don’t you call her on any other day? You just go and tell her that you are busy and you won’t be able to help her today.”

“Alright Sachin, I will tell her later.”

Yuvaraj forgot to tell Anya that he was busy. So, when Sachin came that evening for investigation, Anya also turned up with him.

Sachin was overexcited when he went to Yuvaraj’s house. All his excitement went for a toss when he saw that Anya also coming to Yuvaraj’s house.

Sachin took Yuvaraj into another room, a room in which Anya was not present and asked him “How do we investigate when she is here?”

“I don’t really know Sachin… Or wait, I think I’ll tell her that I am busy today please come tomorrow.”

“Okay Yuvaraj, so go tell her.”

Yuvaraj went into the room Anya was waiting and told her “Anya I am sorry but I won’t be able to help you today, as Sachin and I have planned something for the evening. So, can you come tomorrow?”

“Oh! Not a problem Yuvaraj, I’ll come tomorrow at the same time. You and Sachin carry on.” Said Anya.

Yuvaraj was so happy from the inside. He told Sachin to come out after Anya left, and took him to the room in the basement, *basically the mysterious room*. Sachin asked Yuvaraj “Why are we here, I thought we were going to go to a bathroom?”

Yuvaraj said “We should first note down all my powers and give me a super hero name.”

So Sachin took few sticky notes and told Yuvaraj to present some of his powers. The first one was stepping on shadows. Yuvaraj tried a few more powers which he thought were cool and none of them came properly. So, Sachin said “Why don’t we go out in crowd to see your whether your powers work differently in public?”

Subsequently, both of them went to the city center. As usual the city center was bustling with activity and pretty crowded too. This was the perfect time for the experiment. The sun was about to set, so they had to experiment quickly. Sachin told Yuvaraj “Try to jump from one shadow to another but not be seen on top of the ground.”

“You mean that I have to travel through shadows, do you Sachin?” asked Yuvaraj.

Yuvaraj walked to the edge of the crowd where there were few people related to the center. On his first try he stood on a person’s shadow, leaving the man crying with agony, but he could not move through the shadow. So, he ran from the man who was shouting at the few people next to him for hitting him. This went on till at least five attempts. On the sixth attempt when both of them had given up hope of travelling through shadows, Yuvaraj stepped on a shadow and thought of being able to reach Sachin’s shadow and stepped on a man who was watching the news on the big screen at the city center. He just felt like he was being pulled into a quicksand trap and all he saw was darkness.

# **THE NEW ROOM**

He appeared at Sachin’s side just as quickly as he had been pulled into the shadows. Both of them looked at each other. Yuvaraj realized that the mysterious incidents that took place over the years like jumping into his mother’s shadow and suddenly appearing near the school bus, all made sense, just that he didn’t know how to control his powers. Now that he had just learnt how to control his powers, he apprehended that he had to practice the powers, these were the thoughts going on in Yuvaraj’s head. Sachin interrupted those thoughts and said “We need a superhero name for you Yuvaraj. But first let us go back to your house and discuss this in the basement.”

They reached home and started discussing superhero names for Yuvaraj.

“What about Captain Shadows?” said Sachin on his fifth attempt after the shadow bandit, Shadow king, God shadow and Good shadow.

“Boy, this is harder than I thought it would be, there are no names coming to my mind. Yuvaraj have you thought of any name?”

When Sachin looked at Yuvaraj he found him dozing of in the armchair he was sitting in. Sachin thought that he should let Yuvaraj sleep and head back to his house without making a lot of sound