

A Teenager's Prayer Each day brings new beginnings, Decisions I must make. I am the only one to choose The road that I will take. I can choose to take the road of life, That leads to great success Or travel down the darkened road, That leads to great distress. Please open up my eyes, dear Lord, That I might clearly see Help me stand for what is right, Bring out the best in me. Help, Lord, to just say "no" When temptation comes my way, That I might keep my body clean And fit for life each day. When my teenage years are over, I know that I will see That life is lived its very best With you walking next to me. - J. Morse

An Encounter of a Special Kind My father was a medical professional working for a private company in Raniganj in West Bengal. The officers of the company were housed in individual bungalows inside a large campus. Our house was in a corner of the campus. The officer's club was adjacent to the boundary wall of our garden. The compound was luxurious with green grass, colourful flowers and a host of tall and majestic trees. The seasonal vegetables in the kitchen gardens of the households and the magnificent trees constantly attracted squirrels and many species of birds; a group of langurs had even made their den in an aswatha tree nearby. They had all become a part and parcel of our existence and daily life. A small incident on a Saturday afternoon left a profound effect on me and unfolded before my eyes a whole new dimension to the wonders of God's creation. It was a few days into the Puja vacation. Just like for any other child, the holidays provided an opportunity for me to become engrossed in various magazines and storybooks published specially for children in the festive season. After a hearty lunch, my parents and my younger sisters lay down for an afternoon nap and I settled down with a storybook. The quiet afternoon presented the perfect backdrop for reading an adventure story. The silence was occasionally broken by the sound of my family snoring, the intermittent chirping of house sparrows, the harsh cawing of a crow the shrill call of a kite flying high above the ground. Minutes ticked by. I became deeply absorbed in the book. Suddenly, I heard a group of street dogs barking furiously in the distance. I chose to ignore the commotion thinking that the pack of dogs might have cornered a hapless pig. But soon, the barking became louder and more aggressive and the alarmed cawing of a flock of crows added to the cacophony. I also heard the disturbance approaching closer.

Curiosity got the better of me. Leaving the book aside, I rushed to the veranda to see what was going on. I glanced towards the roof of the club house and saw something horrible. A big male langur, apparently the leader of its group, was holding a baby langur in his hands and mercilessly biting it all over with a definite intent to kill. The helpless mother of the baby and other lesser members of the langur group were scattered on the roofs of the buildings nearby watching the baby being killed. I recalled the terrible custom in the animal clan according to which a dominant male usually does not allow another male baby or adult to survive within its group. Without losing any time, I gathered a stout stick in one hand and hurled a piece of stone at the marauding langur. The langur was so infuriated that it hardly took any notice of my assault. But then I started throwing more stones. The dogs on their part raised their pitch of cry. The changed circumstances and the sudden unexpected attack from unknown quarters forced the langur to drop the baby from the sloping roof over the veranda. The baby was listless and appeared to be dead. As its body started to slide down, the excitement of the pack of dogs grew manifold at the prospect of a good kill and meal.

Keeping the dogs I mercilessly : cruelly I clan : a very large family I listless : without any energy I slide down : move downwards I manifold : more and more I got the better of : overpowered, defeated I prospect : future benefit ö What wicked custom is practised by animal who live in groups ? I dominant : powerful, superior I hurled : threw forcefully I marauding : searching for something to steal or attack I assault : attack I stout : heavy 10 at bay with the stick, I managed to catch hold of the baby langur's tail just as it tipped over the edge of the tiled roof. The baby appeared inert and lifeless. It was indeed a male baby. By this time, my parents and sisters had come out on to the veranda and were witnessing my rescue operation. Some of our neighbours had also gathered in the distance. I took the baby langur to our backyard and gently laid him on the floor inside the poultry coop. His body was full of deep bite marks and scratches. Blood was oozing from some of the wounds. The baby remained motionless. My father provided first aid to clean the wounds and stop the bleeding. I was relieved to find out that the baby was breathing, even though his breaths were shallow. Splashes of cold water made the baby stir and after a few shaky attempts, he sat up. He was in state of shock and started trembling like a leaf in the wind. His two little twinkling eyes welled up with tears and he started to sob with a muffled cry - just like a human child would after experiencing trauma. I offered him a peeled banana which he accepted with his unsteady hand and began taking hesitant bites. My attention was fixed on the revival of the baby langur. Suddenly, I had an uncanny feeling of being watched. I turned away from the coop and looked up. There sat the mother langur on our kitchen roof, watching every move I made. She simply sat there quietly, as if convinced that no harm was being done to her child. Meanwhile, the baby sensed the presence of his mother and started to sob and cry a little louder. I retreated from the door of the coop to allow the mother access to her baby. Immediately, the mother descended on the floor of the coop and picked up the baby in her arms. She gave the baby a thorough body inspection to check his injuries and then cuddled him tightly in her bosom. The baby found great solace in her