

The Mistake

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Prisoner

I had a very quiet childhood as I was not good at sports or study either, my parents were always worried about, what will I do when I grow up. Being their only son, was very protected but they realized later this was not helping me, though a late realization to change my behavior.

When I started to understand the world, in the huge city of Delhi, the only person who was closest to me was my mom. Father also used to love me a lot but since I spent most of the time at home, the bonding with mom was very special. During my childhood I was so shy that mom had to often push me out of the house to play games with the kids of my neighborhood. I used to hate the period when I was not at home. Sometimes to avoid the outdoor, if I saw those kids come towards our home I used to hide in our dark attic upstairs. Mom used to tell me that one day I would grow up and would need friends, so should try to make friends at the earliest, as childhood friends are usually for life. Somehow the concept never seeped into me, I used to try making friends like a task given to me , but with faint success. Every year during the Independence Day our neighborhood hosted some cultural activities and snacks and lot of folks used to visit to watch, enjoy, celebrate together. One year few neighborhood kids came to my place requesting my mom to allow me to participate in this function they had organized. They had planned a drama and proclaimed it will be the best play till now but somehow, I was not feeling good about this event. I was praying that mom says "No", but she agreed.

Little did she knew that I would lose my closest friend that day.

I went with those kids to the function to play the drama and the day became a turning point in my life. When I came back mom was asking about the event, but I locked myself in my room, I just cried and cried and did not talk to anyone for a week, I was a changed person after that night.

Dark Hour

Myself Anupam, now I own a restaurant "MACCHER DAALNA" meaning "Fish Curry" in a small village near Kanchenjunga. I moved towards this part of the country once my parents got unwell and mom wanted me to get married. Both my parents expired quite early after the marriage and have no one left now except my wife and her family.

My wife from Siliguri knows well about this locality and as she is very hardworking, I could establish the restaurant well with her help. "MACCHER DAALNA" has got quite famous in the recent years for the special "Fish Curry" we serve in bamboo bowls. As usual even today my wife Subhashini who is the head chef of the restaurant wrote the day's menu on our restaurant's welcome board and asked me to give her a one rupee coin, which she used to put in her piggy bank every day. I opened the drawer and was about to give her a coin, a lizard jumped on my left hand and I screamed like a school kid.

The next five mins everyone around me including my wife and the staff, was laughing. I felt embarrassed but the day started with this omen.

Over the day the usual people came for their tiffin and meals but during afternoon one tall and strange looking person entered my restaurant and asked a place to sit, I checked with him, if he was alone and on the affirmative showed him a corner place to sit. I told my waiter boy to take his order and I resumed my accounts work.

Few moments later another tall man entered and to my surprise he was identical to the first one, he asked - "Where is he?" While I was still looking at him and then turned to the

first person, a bullet shattered the welcome board next to me and suddenly it was chaos all around.

Everyone in the restaurant was shouting and running, hearing the gun shot. The tall person was trying to say something, but I was confused and scared. I saw my wife running towards me, I was shouting at her not to come near me when another bullet crossed me, and it was silent and dark.

Trapped

I opened my eyes, saw everything white, "Am I in heaven? " Then Subhashini appeared suddenly trying to say something but I couldn't hear her. She looked beautiful and I closed my eyes.

I opened my eyes again when the nurse was injecting me some medicine. I asked what has happened to me and started looking around. I was connected to pipes and wired to equipment, the nurse was mumbling, I asked her to speak loudly, she again mumbled. I could not hear! Then it struck...

I started screaming, "I am deaf now how will I live, why don't you kill me?" The nurse was still trying to hold me back and relax me, when the same tall man from the restaurant entered the room in a white coat with a stethoscope hanging out of his pocket. Suddenly I was pale with terror and stopped shouting.

The tall man was very calm and looked at me as if he had done nothing. He seemed to ask about my health, he then scribbled on a letter pad and handed it over to me.

"I will take care of you and soon you will be able to hear, till then just relax and take rest, this is my hospital."

The Lie

I spent a week and had no visitors, I asked the nurse every day, where is my wife and my family? She used to smile and leave me alone and I was so scared of the doctor that did not want to go out of my room as well. I came to know I will be operated soon but that just gave me more anxiety. I had no phone, no computer, no visitors why did this happened to me? There was no TV in my room so thought, this can be an ask to push for. Next day I told my demand to get a TV in the room and then the nurse's smile changed to a scorn. For few days she ignored me but when I continued with my daily pestering, she started injecting sleeping pills to me, I got tired and left this demand as well. I was not sure what is being hidden from me, but I had a gut feel that I am part of some big conspiracy. This time I got adamant to run away from this place and started thinking about ways to do so. Once the nurse was not there, I tried to get up but found that there were two many wires attached to me and looked hopeless attempt and then something struck me on the ceiling. There was a security camera on the left most corner of the ceiling, I was being watched!!!

On a bright morning suddenly, the nurse was smiling at me, I think it was the tenth day. The nurse took the pad and scribbled I have a visitor "Tushar", do I know him. I nodded and she smiled again and went out.

Tushar was my brother in law and stayed in Germany so I was quite happy he had flown to India to see me. I was thinking about the relief, finally someone I know is going to visit me, may be today I will get answers to all my questions and hope my wife can also visit

me in someday , I was happy in my thoughts when in a while Tushar entered. His eyes had dark circles and he looked weak. I signaled to take a chair and sit next to me. He came near my bed and looked at me with an empty gaze for a while. I asked, “how are you when did you come?” He took a pad and started scribbling.

"How are these people keeping you? Once you regain your hearing sense, do not tell anyone anything about the other day. I will be leaving tomorrow but will stay in touch with you." I was not sure what was going on in his head but looked he has been tortured, knew the nurse was staring at me so I nodded and told him to take care and not worry about me, I asked “How is Subhashini?”

He looked very sad and scribbled “do not worry about her, once you get better, we will talk.” I knew he’s hiding something but as I knew about being watched, felt helpless and did not ask any further.

He scribbled again that he must leave now and got up.

Then something struck him and wrote on the pad “try to remember if you know anyone by the name Humar from your childhood?”

I was surprised by that question and immediately moved my head to say “No”, he stared at me, said something then waved bye and left.

Humar

The day I was taken to a function without my consent during my childhood days I was asked by my neighborhood friend Mayank to portray a peasant's role. They were part of a play named "Dodhaari" meaning two-sided blade. The plot was about two zamindar (village landlords) brothers who were opposite in character and how one used to beat the farmers and the other used to save them.

I and a boy named Humar were playing the role of peasants and Mayank was the account keeper and there were few more kids from neighborhood playing various roles. Myself and Humar were wearing only shorts with bare chest and had to say "leave us" every time the zamindar would whip us. Lot of people had come to see as it was Independence Day function, the play started.

I and Humar opened the play talking casually something and then Abhinav the boy who was playing the zamindar entered and started whipping us, I started saying "leave us" but to our surprise, Abhinav became more cruel and took out his belt , with both hands one with whip and the other with belt squashed us like anything and scene ended. I thought I was the only one crying with real punishment but to my surprise saw Humar still lying on the floor. I yelled for help, Mayank and all others came up on the stage and realized that Humar was seriously injured. I do not remember much after that but was the main witness to send Abhinav to jail as Humar succumbed to the injuries.

The Falcon

It was almost a month after my operation I realized my hearing is getting better. Now I could hear the nurse and the doctor whose visits were rare now.

It was more than two months I was in the hospital praying every day to get released soon and then the doctor gave me a visit. The tall man entered smiling and said now you will get released very soon but I want to tell you something before giving the discharge.

"My name is Vikrant, Abhinav's identical twin brother and I had beaten Humar and you in childhood that night" the night of the play just came like a flash and I froze.

This tall man saw my anxiety but continued to tell the story.

"That night Abhinav was not ready before the act and was little nervous, he asked me to play his role, I always used to love competitions and I took this as an opportunity. I was happy to help him and then took the script from him. You know I played the role of the bad zamindar perfectly well that night and everyone in the audience was silent, awestruck by my act, but when Humar got seriously injured, somehow I got scared and ran off. Then later when Humar died and Abhinav was convicted, he kept pleading that it was me, but no one heard him. In the court you also mistakenly identified him as the culprit.

The guilt of killing Humar and my innocent brother's conviction continued to haunt me and I pledged to become a doctor to save lives. I became a successful military doctor in the long 20 years and then left the job and built my own hospital. In the meanwhile, I had been searching for you all these years so that both me and Abhinav, once released can

meet you and tell the real story. Luckily when I saw your name published in a local article I planned a visit with Abhinav.

I was late in reaching your restaurant and the moment I started talking to you, he knew you were Anupam. Little did I realize that Abhinav's mind was clouded with vengeance and he wanted to kill you. When he shot you, in protection I had to pull a shot from my pistol, which I generally carry for my safety but unfortunately, I killed my own brother. Abhinav's bullet had already killed your wife, we both have lost our closest".

Shocked, I muttered, "Why did you cure me?" and closed my eyes...