

A Hazard in a Graveyard

It was my maternal uncle, who was chose to tell a story. Among all the story tellers in my family, he was spine chilling. It was a rainy day. The rain drops was pounding on the window, as if also wanting to hear the story. The lightning crackling and laughing out loud over us and over Calgary. We were excited and I was feeling goose bumps as the cold atmosphere engulfed us. I said, ' Nipun Mama, what is your story?'

Uncle chuckled a bit, then scratched his Tagore beard and finally started telling the story:

' Today, you all are now sitting in Calgary and listening my story with considerable electricity around you. But think about us struggling during the 1970s in Kolkata. In the olden times parts of Kolkata occurs load shedding due to poor electricity. It looks like a dark, desolate area at night time. But now let's focus on my incident. It was night time and I was returning from college. It was dark. The streetlights failed to response. I have wonderful eyesight though and during night time I almost have a nocturnal eyesight. The atmosphere was damp that night. The muddy grounds scratched on my feet. A light fog occurred. It was getting late, so I started walking fast. I had to pass through a graveyard. A big and old graveyard. As I was walking, I noticed Anil (my friend) coming. He had a bag on his hand. As we met each other I said,

"Anil, wha- what are you doing out here in this chilly weather?"

" Going to the grave yard."

" What! Why?"

" I am going to take some coconut from that coconut tree there. And I need your help."

" Suddenly why did you thought of taking coconuts at the dead of the night?"

" Today I promised my brother that I will give him a coconut. The whole day I didn't have time to get it. So when I saw you coming, I immediately came to ask for help. I can't break a promise."

" But why a tree in a spectral place?"

" Because that's the only place I can find."

" Why don't we just go home. Mum would be worried."

" Why? Just once. Look, we will be quick. As soon as I get the coconut, we will run away."

" But still, it's risky. The Bihari caretaker of the graveyard is very grumpy and doesn't allow kids of 18 yrs to some weird and dangerous place."

" Come on. Nothing will happen. Trust me."

After a lot of thinking, I said, "Ok, fine. I'll do it. But we must be quick. The caretaker of the yard is very dangerous to us."

" Ok. Thanks. Now, follow me."

After properly placing my bag on my shoulder, I followed him. We came at one of the walls of the graveyard. At one part, there was a big hole. A hole fit for us to crawl in. The slight dew occurred around us. The surrounding was even muddier than the place where I was standing previously. As Anil fell down and started to crawl through the hole, I did too. I had kept my bag at the side of the wall before I crawled in. As I came out of the other side of the wall, I stood and saw the graveyard. A vast desolate area with long and fat bricks erect on the ground. Everywhere was surrounded by these bricks. And below us, were filled with bodies of those dead people. Then Anil led me to the coconut tree. As I expected, the fog had engulfed the area. I noticed beside the coconut tree, was a grave. A grave of an English merchant named, Thomas Alexander. From the year 1860 to 1939. This wasn't a good idea to grab a coconut now, I thought to myself. Why couldn't Anil go for it tomorrow in the morning? But it would be in vain to make him understand. Anything for his brother.

'Listen, Nipun, I am going to get the coconut but you have to go outside the hole and out in the street. When I will drop the coconut from the tree, you must hear the dropping and be alert. By chance my drop causes the care taker to wake up from his sleep, in that hut and you see him coming, you will whistle once, so I can understand that the caretaker is coming. Then, I will quickly run towards you and we will together run away to our respected houses. Got it?' He said. I nodded in answer. Before going, I just took one last look at that grave.

So, I went back to the wall, crawled through the hole to the other side, leaned against the wall and waited. 2 mins went by..... 3 mins went by..... 5 mins went by. How many

times am I going to just stare at my watch? Questions started hovering in my mind along with tension. Is Anil ok? Did he succeed? If yes why isn't he dropping? Did he even dropped or did he forgot to drop? What's taking him so long? While waiting, a green eyed black Felis Catus (a cat) went by, almost frightening me. Now I'm becoming impatient. Why isn't he-

Suddenly, I heard a thud from the graveyard. Finally, Anil has dropped the coconut. Now is my role. I started looking at my surrounding to see if the caretaker is coming or not. No sign though. But the coconut has fall, why is Anil taking so much time yet. This is intolerable now. So I gathered my courage, looked around for one last time and then crawled through the hole. As I reached the graveyard, I was utterly surprised. Instead of the coconut on the ground, I saw my friend sitting, shocked, on the ground in front of the coconut tree. There was no sign of any coconut.

I ran to him and said, "Anil, what happened? Why are you like this? Were you the one which made the thud?"

But he said nothing. He had a mute silence. Then I carried him on me and helped him go through the hole. After coming out of the hole, I let him sit on a nearby bench. I jerked him a bit as he panted in shock. He regained to his senses. I helped with a bottle of water and said, "Anil, how many times did I told you not to take the risk, yet you did any way. Why don't you listen to anyone? Anyways, forget about that. Why did you fall?"

"Nipun, listen. When I climbed to the tree, at considerable times I fell. But silently. As I was climbing the last time, I thought I heard someone scratching on something. Ignoring it, I climbed forward. As I was about to break a coconut or two, I thought something went through my ears. That's when I lost my grip and fell. Luckily I fell on soft grounds, so I wasn't hurt. But what was that thing that went past me?"

"No worries. Fine. We will think about that later. And, also, we will get those coconut next time. Give an excuse to your brother or something. Come on! Get up! Let's go home."

"How can I?"

A sudden doubtful tone came to me and said, "Why not?"

"Look." He pointed.

A shot of eeriness occurred to me. He now had wide eyes. He jerked me to look behind. I followed his direction. To my utter horror, I saw another Anil only sitting at

the entry of the hole. Sitting like the way a British person sits. My eyes widened with horror too.'

~ **Antareep Sinha**