

THE LAST RACE

JAI PRAKASH DANGWAL is highly regarded for his Hindi fiction. Now his many admirers will be intrigued and enchanted by his English novel 'The Last Race'.

This work of fiction is based on a sensitive social issue. This is the story of a family owning a horse farm in India. The family's dream is to win a world class horse race, and to groom high breed horses. The book reflects the value of life through varied characters and incidents.

The novel deserves to be read by all who wish to recognize the complex workings of the Indian bilingual writer.

—RUKUN ADVANI

'The Last Race' is a very interesting story. Once you start reading, it is difficult to put the book down. There are various emotions including fear, mystery and suspense very well interwoven by the author. The different aspects of human nature and characters are very well brought out in the novel.

The developments in the story are full of surprises and as the story unfolds it makes the reader curious to know further. A gripping novel with strong social message, it is not only interesting but thought provoking also. My heartiest congratulations to Mr Dangwal for this novel which is emotional, mysterious and powerful work.

—PRATIBHA NAITHANI

Lecturer, St. Xavier's College
Mumbai

The Last Race



JAI PRAKASH DANGWAL



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To my parents

LATE K.P. DANGWAL AND
GODAMBARI DANGWAL

Preface

I had a thrilling experience during my stay in Lamba Garh (Uttarakhand, India) where I worked in a hydroelectric power project. Engulfed by the peaks of Himalayas, in this place of breathtaking scenic beauty I witnessed disastrous weather conditions. During rainy seasons, there were strong currents of floods creating a havoc. Landslides and rocks not only blocked the passage, but caused heavy casualties as well. In winters, avalanches resulted in heaps of snow piling on the roads that challenged both man and machines for bringing life back to normalcy.

I was aware of the fact that any rolling stone from those hills could wash me away if I were in its trajectory, but I was so mesmerized with the nature and its scent that I couldn't stop myself from religiously following my morning walk schedules. These walks paved the way for the burgeoning thoughts in my mind, and one day there was a kind of an illusion in which I heard an echo "Hey, have you forgotten to write about us?" I tried to recall and identify the voices which were perhaps the characters of one of my works and instantly I got the response from within—they were Shan the boy child and Tanya the girl child. I reduced the pace of my steps and was slow enough to be hit by a falling rock. I stood still and wondered whether it was my good fortune or my little characters saved my life.

Shan and Tanya had pondered my subconscious for a long time. A connection was built with them and subsequently

their innocence compelled me to pen down this work. The novel started taking its shape.

William, Nancy, the beautiful Lucy, Henry, Helen, Arthur, Don the Wild, Jacob, Father Albert, the Police Commissioner Chinmaya and a lot of other characters made me a medium to express themselves.

And, 'The Last Race' is complete for you . . .

Acknowledgments

On this day I am nostalgic about the time I spent in the hills of the Himalayan range, because the thought of writing this novel cropped up in my mind at this place.

I would like to thank all the people who have been a part of the long journey in writing this fiction and without whom the book would not have been published.

I thank S.P. Dangwal for his excellent professional assistance in formatting the book.

The contribution of Rajneesh Agnihotri has always been a great support in my works.

I need to mention specially my daughter Anuja for her valuable suggestions and participation throughout the novel.

The assistance given by my son Amit, daughter-in-law Shweta and daughter Richa also helped me in enhancing this work.

I am deeply indebted to my better half Nita Dangwal who has been an immense support in my work and life.

My three year old grand daughter, little Mihika, also gave her support for always maintaining a peaceful environment while writing this book.

I express gratitude to my father's horse Siddhu for his heroic deeds that inspired me to depict Don in this fiction.

Most importantly my deep association with the characters of this novel brought life into my writing and resulted in the successful culmination of *The Last Race*.

1

In the Catastrophic Weather

Thunder and lightning had disturbed the peace of the night. Heavy rains followed by the storm made the atmosphere terrifying. The only source of light visible in the nearby areas that was coming from an isolated church suddenly went off due to the breakdown of power supply and now everything plunged into darkness.

A man riding a horse could be seen in the flashes of lightning, approaching the church. The frightened horse stopped at some distance from the church and neighed expressing his displeasure for the outing in such a bad weather, but the sound of his neighing was barely audible in the thunder. Nature seemed to be dancing on her devastating tune.

The gong of the clock tower struck thrice. Father Oliver kept on changing sides on the bed. After some time he got up, managed to locate a candle and lit it. He put on his night gown and entered the church. He placed the candle on the stand. A dim light was spread out. Father Oliver prayed, "Oh Lord! Save us from this disastrous night. You are the only refuge to all. Kindly shower your mercy on those who are needy in this bad weather."

A low sound of the gong diverted his attention. He wondered who was beating the gong at such a time.

He concentrated on the resonance which was diminishing gradually. He thought, "Is it my illusion? May be." He opened

the Bible and started reading silently. After some time he heard the sound of the gong again. He moved towards the door and opened it. A heavy blow of air gushed in that blew the candle off and Father Oliver was drenched by the showers. A deep darkness surrounded him.

He peeped out but nothing was visible due to darkness. The thrust of storm and rain made it difficult for him to stand there. Father Oliver enquired in a loud voice, "Who is there? Come in my child, I can't stand here any more."

There was no response. Only a torch light dazzled his eyes. A lightning in the clouds gave a glimpse of a horse and a man. Father Oliver shouted, "Who are you and what do you want?"

An inebriated voice replied stammering, "I want shelter."

Father asked him, "Are you astray?"

The drunkard switched off the torch and said to him, "No, it's my guilt and that is disturbing me."

"Are you here for confession?"

"May be."

"Please show me the light so that I could go to my side of the confession box to hear you," Father said.

"Okay," he said showing him the light.

Father Oliver took his place and called him, "Come in and shut the doors."

The drunkard stepped inside the Church with staggering steps. He tried to shut the door but some force pushed him back. Before he could understand the situation, the horse jumped in. He balanced himself, held the reins of the horse and pushed him back. The horse resisted aggressively.

He lashed the horse and tried to push him out.

He shouted, "Bastard! Get out."

Father Oliver said politely, "Mind that you are in a pious place, don't beat and abuse the poor animal."

The drunkard still holding the reins and pushing the horse out said to him, "Sorry Father, he is scared of the bad weather, I am just trying to show him the way out."

But the horse went on resisting and neighed in anguish, beating the floor with his hooves.

"Leave him, the poor animal also needs shelter, shut the door and confess," Father said. The man followed the advice. The horse snorted and his body was quivering. The man brushed off the water from his clothes.

He focused the torch light on the confession box, reached there and then turned it off.

Father asked him politely, "What brought you here at this odd time, in such a menacing weather?"

The man didn't reply. Father Oliver encouraged him, "Don't hesitate, express yourself and feel relaxed."

The man heaved a deep sigh and said, "I am trying to confess my sin but . . . but I can't."

"Do you repent for your sin?"

"No, I don't repent for what I did, but I hate myself for betraying her," he said.

Father asked him with surprise, "What is it? Who is she?"

But he did not reply.

"Okay, don't tell about her, just make an honest confession and repent for the sin you committed. Almighty is great, He will forgive you," Father said to him.

For some time the man remained silent. Finally he spoke firmly. "I won't make any confession."

"Then what do you want?" Father asked him.

The man breathed deep and said to him, "I am disturbed and I need peace. For some time I want to stay here alone and pray to God." In that moment, the power was resumed and the hall glittered with light. The horse was breathing heavily.

Father Oliver broke the silence, "Okay, you can stay here. May the Lord bestow peace on you."

"Thank you," the man said.

Father Oliver came out and without looking at the stranger patted the scared horse and left for his room.

In the morning Father entered the church and looked around for the stranger and his horse but nobody was there.

2

Strange Incidents

In a cold winter night William was enjoying a pleasant sleep in the bed. But his wife Nancy who was sleeping besides him, was turning sides frequently. Her movements disturbed his sleep. He turned to Nancy and asked her, "What is wrong?"

"I am restless."

"Why?"

Nancy was perturbed. "I don't know," she replied.

"Is it because I lost the race?"

"It is not concerned with that."

"Then what is it?"

"I don't know."

"Better forget it and let's sleep."

"Okay."

William gently cuddled her. The soft touch excited him. He pulled her hair and kissed her. Nancy moaned and said pushing him away, "Stop it." Her rude response hurt him.

He asked her, "What's wrong with you Nancy?"

"I am disturbed, and right now I don't want to have sex."

For the last three nights she had been behaving oddly. Whenever he tried to make love with her she refused. Usually she was the one who used to initiate and at times when he didn't respond warmly she teased him calling a cold man.

But lately he could notice her behavior was different.

“Cold woman,” he reverted in her style. Nancy didn’t react and just turned her back to him. William was all the more surprised by her silence. After some time she was half asleep.

Suddenly she quivered and whispered, “Hey! Stop it.”

“What happened,” he asked in surprise.

She turned her face to him and said in a sleepy tone, “Don’t pull my gown. I have told you that I am not in the mood.”

“But I did nothing,” he said.

“Don’t lie, I know you well, don’t fondle me, it is irritating,” she said with a flustered look and turned her face.

He was confused and thought it better not to argue and let her sleep. However Nancy’s weird behavior worried him. Suddenly she sat down and stared at him.

He was astonished, “What is wrong?”

“As if you don’t know,” she said angrily.

“Really I don’t know,” he tried to convince her but Nancy got irritated. She just took off her gown and threw it away.

William asked her, “What is this now?”

“You don’t understand any feelings, right? Okay, satisfy your lust . . . come-on, rape me,” she said in a highly agitated way.

“Put on the gown, you will catch cold,” he said.

“Hardly matters. You want to play with my body? Then go ahead,” she said lashing back again.

“Trust me, I didn’t touch you,” he tried to convince her.

She asked in anger, “Am I lying?”

“It must be a dream,” he said.

“No.”

“Why are you so upset? Is it because of the money problems we have?” William said but she didn’t reply.

“If it is because of the huge money I am spending on my horses to fulfill my dreams of winning those races, I will stop it anytime. Nothing is more important than you,” he said.

"I have told you before, it has nothing to do with your horses and race," Nancy replied promptly.

"Please relax honey, and share your problems with me. I want to know the trauma you are going through?"

Nancy was silent. She moved slowly, slipped in to the bed and resting her head on his chest started crying bitterly. William caressed her gently and said, "If you don't tell me your problems how can I help you?"

"I am feeling . . ." she sobbed.

William encouraged her, "Yes tell me."

"Someone . . ."

"Yes, go on . . . someone . . ."

"Someone is pulling my gown . . . fondling and sucking my breasts," she cried.

"Oh darling, it may be an illusion, forget it."

"It is not, it is real," she said confidently.

William had never seen his wife in such a state. He pulled her in his arms and said, "Come close to me and throw your fears away. It is such a cold night and you are sweating."

"Trust me it is true," she said.

"I think you are not well, we will consult a good psychiatric."

"Hold on, what are you trying to say? Am I abnormal?" She asked with fury in her beautiful eyes.

"No, but Nancy you are behaving very strangely. You seem to be under a deep stress and you are not even ready to share it with me," William said to her.

Nancy heaved a deep sigh and didn't reply. She turned her back to William and fell asleep.

In the morning William woke up late and looked around for Nancy. He called her, "Nancy . . ."

His eight-year-old son Robin entered the room.

"Where is your mom?" He asked.

“Dad, you woke up late. Mom has gone to school.”

“What? She didn’t give me the morning tea. She knows, without tea I don’t leave bed,” William said to Robin.

“Mom prepared the tea, it is in the thermos. You were in a sound sleep so she didn’t disturb you, I will get it for you,”

“Okay, I was awake till late night. Where is Rose?”

“Today our school is off, she is still sleeping.”

“Okay,” William said.

Robin left the room and returned with tea.

“Dad, do you know what the time is?” Robin asked with a naughty smile.

“What,” asked William, sipping the tea.

“It’s nine.”

“Really?” He asked with surprise.

“Yes,” he said laughing.

William said to Robin, “Call Rose.”

“You call her, she will be angry if I disturb her,” he said.

“Rose! Get up and leave the bed,” William called her.

“She won’t, if you call her again she would shout at you.”

“She is like her mom, they both hate to be disturbed while sleeping,” William said.

“And me?” Robin asked him.

William embraced him, “Of course you are like me. Always smiling, never frown like them.”

Robin pointed towards the door, “Dad, see there.”

William turned and saw Rose rubbing her eyes. For a moment he couldn’t stop his laugh.

“Dad, you are very bad,” Rose said rubbing her eyes.

William placed the cup on the side table, spread his arms and called her smiling, “Come . . . my dearest Rose come.”

Rose said with childish rage, “I won’t.”

William laughed, "Why?"

"You were just talking bad things about mom and me."

"I was kidding."

"I know you dad, you love Robin not me."

"Oh no, I love you the most. Come my sweetheart," he said laughing and spreading hands.

"Sure?" She asked.

"Of course, undoubtedly."

Rose rushed to William and cuddled around his neck. He took her in his arms and kissed her cheeks. Rose said stopping him, "Stop it dad, your beard hurts me,"

"Sorry dear."

"Okay, you just told Robin that he is like you and I am not?" Rose said.

"You too are like me," he said.

Rose looked straight into his eyes and said, "But you just told that I frown like mom."

"I never said so."

"You are lying, I heard you," she said.

"No dear, you heard me wrong."

"What did you say then?"

"I said, Rose is rosy like mom and Robin is tough like me."

"Dad, you are very clever," Robin said. He climbed on his back and pulled him down for fun.

"Stop it Robin," he said laughing.

Rose also joined Robin, she pulled William's cheeks and rubbed her nose with his nose and said, "I will tell mom that you and Robin were making fun of us."

William said in fun, "Who cares?" Rose helped Robin to flatten him and said, "Oh! Who cares?"

Robin and Rose sat on him and did not let him get up.

“Okay, you win. I give up, now leave me,” William surrendered.

“We won’t,” Robin and Rose said together. They were still enjoying the wrestling with dad.

“Stop, it is enough, now get fresh and let us meet for the breakfast within an hour,” William said.

But Robin and Rose did not pay heed to it and freed William only when they were exhausted. After some time William checked his watch and entered the dining hall. He joined Rose and Robin who were waiting for him.

“Today we are late for breakfast, you know your mom doesn’t like this,” William said.

“We are late because of you.” Rose promptly replied.

“Is it so Robin?”

“Yes dad.”

“I agree, but don’t tell your mom, she would fire me.”

“I won’t,” said Robin applying butter and jam to the toast.

“But I will,” Rose smiled teasingly.

“You are my darling. I know you won’t,” he said smiling.

She passed a naughty smile, “Okay, I will see.”

William’s attention was diverted by loud neighing of a horse.

“Is that Rocky?” William asked Robin.

“Yes dad, today he is upset, has been neighing wildly since morning,” Robin said.

“Did your mom go for a ride in the morning?”

“No, today she was in hurry,” Robin said.

“May be it hurt the poor horse?”

“May be,” Robin said.

“Okay, finish breakfast, then we will go to Rocky for a ride.”

Both of them nodded. Throughout their breakfast Rocky continually neighed vigorously.

“The animal is expressing his anguish,” William said.

After breakfast they reached the stable. Rocky was neighing restlessly in his shed. He went on lifting his forelegs trying to jump over the log which was a hurdle in his way. William asked the in-charge called Joseph, "What is wrong with Rocky?"

"I don't know, since morning he is out of control," Joseph said. On seeing, William, Robin and Rose the horse stopped his wild movements for a moment. He stared at William calmly.

"Rocky, what is wrong? Nancy didn't come to see you in the morning?" William said approaching the horse.

But it made him more furious. He started digging the ground with his hooves and shaking his head violently. He stretched out his neck, neighed wildly, lifted his forefeet and thumped on ground repetitively.

William patted him, it irritated him more. William fondled him but the horse violently dug his teeth on his shoulder.

"Oh God . . ." William shrieked with pain and scolded the horse, hitting on his face, "I will see you."

"Dad, leave him, he may hit you again," Robin shouted

Rose was frightened but she tried to pacify the horse, "Cool down Rocky! Cool down." But Rocky did not listen to her. He stretched out his neck and neighed showing his teeth angrily.

"Bloody beast, now I will give you a lesson in your language," William abused Rocky. He picked a whip from the hanger and lashed him badly. As William continued beating him, the horse turned wilder and wilder. Rose started crying.

"Dad, stop it, you will kill the poor animal," Robin shouted.

Rose pleaded to Rocky crying, "Cool down . . . Cool down Rocky, Oh! Rocky . . . Cool down."

William got tired lashing Rocky but couldn't control him. Blood began oozing out from his wounds. Now the horse started hurting himself by hitting the log with his body with the intention to break it and free himself. Robin shouted, "Dad, free him otherwise he will kill himself."

William had no other option except to free him.

He lifted the log. Rocky rushed to the ground and stopped at a corner calm and quiet for some time. Then he trotted gently and took a round of the ground. In the next two rounds the beautiful horse started galloping.

“Dad, see on the back of the horse!” Robin exclaimed.

William asked, “What is there?”

“Don’t you see a little shadow rider?”

“No I don’t,” he ignored.

“But I can see.”

“So what, the shadow may be of some object,” he said.

“No dad, it is a little baby,” Robin said.

“What nonsense,” William shouted at him.

“Dad, I want to see the baby, please lift me up,” Rose said.

“There is nothing. Robin is just confused,” William said.

Rose insisted, “Dad, please . . .”

William picked her up, “See there is nothing on his back.”

Rose looked at the galloping horse. She smiled pointing to the horse, “A cute baby is riding Rocky. He is waving his hand . . . but . . .”

William was irritated, “But what?”

“Suddenly the baby disappeared,” she said. William angrily thumped her back to the ground. Her eyes became tearful.

“You both are confused,” William said.

All of a sudden Rocky stopped. The horse slowly came back. He stopped in front of William calm and quiet. William rubbed his face, put his hand around his neck and kissed him. Rocky also responded with affection.

William patted him, “What happened to you Rocky? Why were you so wild my boy? Sorry, I have lashed you so badly for the first time, I am really sorry.”

Rocky's eyes turned moist, he looked into William's eyes and moved to his stable. William put the log back.

"Now he is cool as usual, let us go," William said to the awestruck children and they returned.

On the way back Rose asked William hesitantly, "Dad, what happened to Rocky?"

"I don't know, it is quite strange," William replied.

"There must be some reason," Robin said.

"I am worried about the race to be held just after two weeks. This is not a good omen."

"Dad," Rose called him hesitatingly.

"Yes?"

She said crying, "You lashed Rocky badly. His skin is peeled."

William turned more serious. "I am sorry," he said.

Rose cried. William held her in his arms and said kissing her, "I am really sorry."

Rose wiped her tears and descended from his lap.

While returning from school Nancy went to the farm first. She was shocked to see Rocky's bleeding body. The horse snorted feebly. She patted his neck.

The horse sniffed her face and looked at her with wet eyes. Then he turned his neck and ignored her. Nancy rubbed his back gently. Her touch pained his wounds.

The horse made a sharp movement and pulled himself back. She asked him, "Are you annoyed Rocky?"

She felt her hand sticky with the blood of the horse. She pulled his face to her and patted him, "What happened dear?"

The horse neighed in low pitch as if he was complaining. She looked around for the handlers. Jacob came running to her. She asked him, "What happened to Rocky?"

"Better ask William," Jacob said.

With a heavy heart she patted him and rushed back to home.

William was working in the garden when Nancy reached home. She asked him, "What are you doing dear?"

"I am tilling around the plants."

"What happened to Rocky? I saw lash marks on his neck and back, his skin is still bleeding," she said in a sad tone.

"I don't know, suddenly he turned furious. I tried to control him but failed. He cooled down only after I set him free," William replied.

"Why? Rocky is a very cool horse."

"I was also surprised to see his unusual behavior," he said.

Nancy was annoyed, "But why did you beat him so badly?"

William said to her, "I did not mean to hurt him but the situation turned so odd that I had no other alternative."

"This is disgusting, you showed your wrath on the poor animal," she looked irritated.

"You wouldn't believe it, just see, how deep he dug his teeth," William said showing the mark on his shoulder.

"Oh no! He is such a cool animal, how can he turn so violent? It has never happened before," she was perturbed.

"It appeared as if some unseen devil rode him and took control of him, the horse was behaving unusual," William said.

She was astonished, "Devil! What are you saying?"

"Believe me, his behavior was quite strange today. He turned wild, I lashed him to tame him, but with every lash he turned all the more violent," William said.

"You know, he can't bear harsh words, then how could he tolerate lashes? Now he would remain upset for a long time," Nancy said.

"I know, that is bothering me also," he said.

Nancy walked towards the house perplexed.

William accompanied her and said, "But you know when the horse returned to the stable he was quite cool and was repenting on his misbehavior."

"Really?" She looked with surprise at him.

"Yes, but I am worried."

"Why," she asked.

"If he behaves like this during the race my dreams would be shattered. He has to be mentally and physically fit for the race," William said.

"If the horse is not fit, withdraw him from the race."

William snapped at her, "How can you even think that? You know that I am desperately waiting for that day."

"I know, but for winning the race, both jockey and horse must be fit and have a good understanding with each other."

William heaved a sigh and said, "You don't bother, I would handle him. By the way, did you consult the psychiatrist?"

"Why," she asked rudely.

"For your illusions in the night," he said.

"I am fine, don't bother," she said indifferently.

"I have to attend a party with Sam, I will stay at his place tonight," William said to her.

"Okay," she said and entered the house.

Stunning Mystery

Nancy entered her bedroom. She noticed that a small part of the bed sheet was wet. Instantly, her mood turned sour. She called out loudly, “Robin! Rose! Come here at once.” The children rushed to the room.

“Tell me who spilled water on the bed?” She asked angrily.

“I didn’t,” Robin replied promptly.

“Rose, did you?”

“No Mama,” she said.

“Who did it then?” Nancy asked.

“I don’t know,” Robin said.

“I also don’t know,” Rose said. Nancy was confused, she looked around.

Rose asked her with curiosity, “Who did it Mama?”

“May be I,” Nancy replied giving her a hug.

Robin also went close to her and said, “That is a good joke.”

She realized that she had been quite harsh to the children. She kissed them and said, “Okay, go to your bed, good night.”

Robin and Rose said together, “Good night,” and they left.

Nancy pulled the bed sheet to change it. To her surprise, she heard a thumping sound as if some thing kept on the bed had fallen down. It was followed by a non stop cry of a baby.

She looked all around but could not trace anything. “What happened? Who fell down? Who is crying?”

All the questions came in her mind but could not reach any conclusion. She thought again, "Was it her illusion?" Suddenly she noticed something on the floor.

She was shocked to see a trail of blood. "From where did the blood trickle out?" It scared her. She wanted to call Robin and Rose but changed her mind. All of a sudden, she realized that the crying of the baby had stopped. She looked at the floor again and observed the trail of blood had vanished.

"Was she really abnormal?" She asked herself and cried in despair, "Oh God, save me from this, whatever it is," she prayed. Her eyes were fixed on the bed in anticipation of what would happen next.

She remembered William's words: "It seemed that some unseen devil was riding the horse and controlling his mind." For a moment she trembled, and then consoled herself, "This may be happening because of her fear." She tried to convince herself that whatever she felt was only an illusion and there was nothing to be scared of.

She spread a fresh sheet on the bed but could not dare to switch off the light. She lied down on the bed but could not sleep. The incident continued to haunt her. She turned her side on the bed and to her shock there were fresh blood spots on the bed sheet. She was surprised to see the bed sheet crumpling and wrinkles moving towards her. It looked as if a small baby was floundering on the bed. She wanted to scream but could not, her throat was choked. "Why was this all happening? Was there a shadow of some devil on my bed?" She asked to herself and was very frightened.

Her body was shaking and it turned cold. She was sweating profusely. She felt her tongue twisting and shortening. She decided to go to the children's room. She stepped down staggering but could not move as some one had held her gown tightly on the

bed. She pulled the gown to free it from the unknown grip but her action resulted in crying of a baby.

“If she goes to the children’s room, the spirit may follow her but she would not let the shadow of the spirit fall on her children,” she thought and while trying to be brave she returned to the bed. She lied down on the bed trying to maintain maximum distance from the blood spots. But an unknown fear was still ruling her mind. She observed the wrinkles on the bed sheet were showing some movement.

For a moment she became numb. Gradually a shadow of a cute baby appeared approaching her. She felt a tender touch of a little hand trying to pull her gown.

Strangely for a moment her fear was lost and a mother’s affection took its place. Nancy took off her bra. She faced towards the shadow for his easy approach to her breast. She realized the baby took her nipple in his mouth and started sucking. She fixed her eyes on her breast and to her surprise noticed milk dripping out.

She felt the shadow of the baby was very hungry and wanted to suck all the milk from her breast. She moaned with pain and tears floated in her eyes. Somehow, she freed her breast.

She heard humming of the baby and thereafter his sweet laughter. She experienced a conflict within her, the conflict between the motherly affection for the cute and innocent baby, and the fear of something supernatural. Nancy was very upset. She was missing William. The night appeared to be very long.

Next morning Robin and Rose were perplexed to see her. Robin asked her, “What happened mama?” Instead of replying she questioned him with a weak smile, “Why, what happened?”

Robin asked her, “Why are you looking so pale and disturbed?”

“I am fine son,” she said.

“No mama, you are hiding something,” Rose said.

“Nothing,” her voice vibrated. She hugged her and Robin.

“Don’t lie mama, tell us the fact,” Robin pleaded.

“I saw a nightmare,” she whispered.

“What was that?” He asked.

“I don’t want to remember,” she said.

“Okay, forget that, no need to get scared, after all it is merely a dream,” Robin said.

She passed a smile, patted Robin and Rose and left for the kitchen. But Nancy had no peace; she could not forget the incident. Was it a nightmare or a creation of her subconscious brain? She could not reason it out. She was very puzzled.

She was in a dilemma, should she tell it to William when he comes back? She could not decide. In any case, she would tell him not to leave her alone in the night.

She wondered, “Who could be the best person to help her?”

She remembered Father Albert. His preaching not only helped people to face the odds of life but gave peace to mind and soul also. She closed her eyes and prayed for the peace and prosperity of her family. Then she got up and dialled Father Albert’s number, “Good morning Father, this is Nancy.”

“Good morning Nancy! Your voice is not sounding good, are you fine?” Father Albert asked her.

“I am very disturbed, I want to meet you,” she said.

“Is there any problem?”

“I can’t tell you on phone,”

“Okay, today I will be free after lunch time, will it suit you?”

“Yes, I will be there on time,” she said.

“May God bless you,” Father said disconnecting the phone.

At the given time she reached the church and met Father Albert. He asked her, “What is wrong Nancy? You are looking perturbed.”

“Yes Father, I am,” she said moving her tongue on her dry lips. He offered her a glass of water and said, “Relax.”

“Please save me father,” she said almost crying.

“Tell me, what happened?”

Nancy was frightened. She described the incidents to him.

Father listened to her with patience and asked, “What do you feel? Is there some spirit that is troubling you?”

“Yes father I feel so, but I don’t know why.”

“It may be your illusion,”

“How can it be? It was not a dream, I saw blood on the floor, on the bed and I felt the baby sucking and I saw my dry breast trickling milk,” She said with agitation.

“Be cool my child, very frankly I tell you, I have not heard so far about any infant ghost.”

“But it is there.”

Father asked her, “Okay, If you think a ghost is troubling you, why would he trouble you in the form of an infant?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

Father meditated to find a solution. Then he broke the silence and asked her, “Why don’t you consult a psychiatrist?”

“He won’t trust me. He would diagnose it as a case of mental disorder. I know, I am not abnormal.”

“Did you tell your husband?”

“He knows I am disturbed. He also advised me to consult a psychiatrist. He is out of station so couldn’t tell him the incident.”

“Okay, tell me one thing, did you observe any sudden abnormality in any other member of your family?”

“Well, yesterday my husband noticed a sudden change in the behavior of our horse,” she said.

He asked her, “What kind of change?”

“Rocky, our horse was restless and turned unruly, hurt himself in attempt to be free from the stable. My husband tried to calm him down but he dug his teeth into his shoulder.”

He asked her, “After that?”

“William freed Rocky, the horse was sweating and rushed to the ground as if a devil was riding him,” she said.

“Do you know it is said that animals like dogs and horses are very sensitive to the presence of ghosts,” Father said.

“Yes I have heard that but what should I do now?”

“Don’t get scared, have a strong will power to face the situation and try to know the spirit and remember Christ for help when it appears again. After that it won’t trouble you,” Father said confidently.

“Father give me some thing to strengthen my courage and to stop the devil from entering my house,” she requested.

“Keep this holy cross always with you and have faith in God,” Father said giving her the cross.

She said, “Thank you Father.”

“Be in touch and do let me know if you still feel the presence of the spirit in your house,” he said.

“Okay Father.”

“God bless you. He is very kind and showers His blessings on His children so that they could get rid of their troubles easily.”

She bowed and thanked him.

Devil and Sultan

Next day when William returned, Nancy told him about the previous night. “Well, it may be just another nightmare, just forget it,” he said.

“You can’t understand my suffering. A nightmare! Very simple to say,” she broke down.

“Nancy, I know you are very disturbed. But trust me I feel whatever you experienced last night was just a bad dream.”

She asked, “And what about Rocky?”

“The horse had lost his temper and turned violent, but after some time he was again normal.”

She asked, “Why?”

“What can I say about the temperament of an animal,” he said.

“You are escaping from the truth,” she said. There was a complete silence for some time.

“Nancy what do you want to say?” He asked.

“A spirit is haunting my family.”

“What are you saying?” He exclaimed.

“Yes . . . I feel so.”

He laughed, “Spirits are merely illusions, you really need to consult a psychiatrist.”

“No, I don’t need. I am not suffering from any mental sickness,” she said in an agitated way.

William hugged her, rubbed her back and said, "Certainly not, but sometimes it happens due to stress and I think that a psychiatrist can surely be a great help in such a case."

She looked with tearful eyes at him. He kissed her and said, "You are so sensible, how can you believe in spirits? I am sure after a proper treatment you won't see such dreams." Nancy sighed. He said further, "I have discussed your case with Dr. Lawrence. He has given an appointment for next Monday."

Nancy touched the holy cross and said, "By that time let us see whether Father Albert's holy cross helps me or not."

"I hope, it will," he said.

But it did not help. Her nights were passing restlessly. The little baby used to appear often. He was lovely and harmless but not real. She could feel him but could not touch.

Was this her illusion? She asked herself repeatedly but there was no answer. This thought was not only disturbing her life and family, but her health also. William was also worried to find out a solution of her problem. On Saturday night she was trying to sleep but could not. Suddenly the baby appeared again and this time he was screaming. This moved her sentimentally. What was wrong with him? She could not understand.

On this day she was not scared. She had a sense of pity for the poor child. A feeling of affection began to sprout in her.

William was in sound sleep, she wanted to show him the baby to tell him that it was not her illusion. She pulled him gently. A fear reflected on the baby's face and he disappeared. Was the baby scared of William? She thought and whispered, "Come-on baby." On her call he appeared but looked annoyed.

"Are you angry?" She asked the baby. He nodded.

She asked, "Why?" He looked at William and his expressions changed to those of fear.

"Don't you like him?" She whispered. He nodded.

“Come on, he is a nice man, he won’t hurt you,” she coaxed him. But he disappeared.

In the morning William woke up. He was disturbed to see the pale face of Nancy. He tried to understand her problem. He recollected the unusual incidents that had been taking place since the past few days. Nancy’s words that a spirit is haunting the family had started hammering his mind.

After having breakfast, William left home. He returned in the evening with a stranger and two jet black German shepherd dogs. Nancy was surprised to see the man with the dogs. William introduced the man, “My friend Joe and our dogs, Sultan and Devil.” Nancy passed smile to Joe.

The dogs wagged their tails with a friendly gesture. She said offering Joe a seat, “Meeting you for the first time,”

“Yeah,” he said nodding.

“Are you not surprised to see the dogs?” William asked her.

“No,” she said.

He asked, “Why?”

“You like giving surprises, I am used to it by now,” she said.

William laughed, “That is true, did you like the dogs?”

“I don’t know much about dogs but these are good.”

William said to Joe, “Tell her about the dogs.” Joe eased his position on the chair and said, “The dogs of this breed are known as German shepherd. They can be easily trained and they get friendly with the family soon. They are strong, well built and good watchdogs.”

“Okay, how much time it would take to be friendly with these dogs?” Nancy asked.

“Soon, you call any one and pat him,” Joe said.

“What if the dog does not like it and attacks me,” she said.

“Don’t worry, both the dogs are very cool and friendly.”

She nodded and called the dog, “Sultan!”

The dog approached her wagging his tail and licked her feet. She patted him lovingly, "Good."

She patted Sultan again and asked Joe, "The other one is Devil, right? Doesn't the name sound odd?"

Joe smiled, "He is a dare devil that is why he is named Devil."

She said, "But I don't like this name, may I change it?"

"Well, he knows that name since he was a puppy, he won't respond if you call him by any other name."

"Okay," she said with slight disappointment.

"Nancy, don't bother, Sultan is your dog and Devil is for the farm," William said.

"Good idea," Nancy said.

"Okay, I want to show my horse farm to Joe and manage a place there for Devil," he said leaving the chair. Joe called Devil and they walked along with William.

When William reached home he was very happy to see Robin and Rose enjoying with Sultan. Robin shouted with joy to see him, "Thanks dad for this nice gift."

Rose hugged him, "You are the best, Sultan is my dog."

"And not mine?" Robin asked promptly.

"You can take Devil," she said.

William picked up Rose, hugged her and said, "Devil and Sultan both are our dogs." Robin and Rose both liked this idea. Sultan was wagging his tail to see his master.

"Sit down," William said and the dog followed the instruction.

Robin asked with curiosity, "How does Devil look?"

"Almost like Sultan. You can see it yourself," William said.

"Dad, let us go to see Devil," Rose said.

"It is late now, tomorrow we will see Devil," he said.

Just then Nancy joined them and stared at William. He asked her, "What is wrong?"

"Nothing," she said smiling.

He asked, "Why are you staring at me?"

She said, "Because you are unique."

He asked her, "How?"

"The children were pressing hard for a dog for the last one year, but you never gave an ear to it."

"Because you were never in favor of pets," he said smiling.

"Yes, I can't bear a single dog in the house," she commented.

"That is why without telling you I brought two. I knew we could convince you and for our happiness you would agree."

"Very clever, it is difficult to understand you at times. It is true that I was not in favor of dogs but for the sake of children I never opposed. I refresh your memory, you never liked dogs."

"Yes, I prolonged this only for the reason that it would displease you," William said laughing.

"Don't try to be over smart," she said.

He said seriously, "This all is for the happiness of my family."

"I know." She concluded the discussion with a smile that suggested that she understood.

Dr. Lawrence's Clinic

On being constantly pressurized by William, Nancy went to Dr. Lawrence's clinic the following day. She greeted the receptionist with a smile, "Good morning."
She replied, "Good morning, are you Ms. Nancy?"
"Yes," she said.
"Dr. Lawrence is waiting for you, please go."
"Good morning doctor," she said entering the doctor's cabin.
"Good morning Nancy," he said and offered her a seat.
"Thank you," she said, Dr. Lawrence stared at her face.
"It seems you have not slept well last night," he said.
"Not for last three nights doctor," she said perplexed.
He asked, "Reason?"
"Restlessness," she said
He asked, "Some family related tension or worries?"
"No," she said.
"Has it happened for the first time?"
"Yes first time."
"Did you take any medicines?"
"Sleeping pills,"
"But still couldn't sleep?" He asked scribbling on a pad.
"Yes," she said. He stopped writing and said, "Don't treat me as a doctor, be frank with me as you would be with a close friend . . ." he paused.

He smiled and continued, "I may ask some personal questions, reply them without any hesitation. A psychiatric can only help if he knows all about his patient."

"I won't mind."

"How is your relationship with your husband?" He asked.

"It is good,"

"Is he short tempered?"

"No," she said.

"Does he fulfill your sexual desires?"

"Yes," she blushed.

"Are you going through menopause?"

"No, I still have periods,"

"Any disorder you observed in periods?"

"No, I have regular periods,"

"Are you suffering from any feeling of guilt?"

"No," she said.

"What is disturbing your sleep?"

"I hear . . . a baby crying," she said.

He asked, "What else?"

"Baby's cries, blood and . . ." she suddenly turned restless.

He asked, "And what?"

"When I close my eyes, I hear a baby crying and feel my hands wet with blood."

"Okay, please close your eyes,"

"No, I can't . . ."

"Don't worry, I am here to help you, please close your eyes."

"I can't doctor!"

"Hold my hand, feel my presence with you and close your eyes," doctor Lawrence said. She held his hand.

Her eyebrows narrowed, she closed her eyes and shouted in panic, "The baby is crying doctor, a pathetic cry, my hands are wet with blood." Her body was trembling with fear.

“That is your illusion, forget that. Try to remember some pleasant moment of your life,” he said.

For a moment there was silence, and then she screamed and fainted. Her face was sweating and had turned white. The doctor freed his hand from her. He was disturbed to find his hand wet with blood and on his shirt many droplets of blood were scattered. The doctor was shocked. He sprinkled water on her face. After some time she returned to her senses.

She asked in a feeble voice, “What happened doctor?”

“You got scared, a fear had entered deep in your mind, you have to strengthen your will power to fight that fear,” he said.

“See my hands are wet with blood . . .” she said nervously.

“You were scared, in your nervousness you scratched my hands with your nails deeply to feel my presence and support.”

“Am I mentally sick?”

“No, you are suffering from depression.”

“Can you cure me?” She asked with hope.

“Sure, but it may take some time,” he said encouraging her.

“I want to sleep but can’t, I will go mad,” she said sobbing.

“Don’t get disheartened, be bold and have strong will power to fight your depression.”

“Okay.”

“I am giving you medicines for three days, take it regularly and come for checkup after that, one thing more . . .”, he said.

She asked anxiously, “What?”

“Always try to be around people, avoid being alone and loneliness.”

“Okay.”

“And no driving, no horse riding.”

“I have my driver with me.”

“In your next appointment with me, tell all the special events of your life, good and bad, both.”

“Okay,” she said.

Lawrence checked his hands minutely but could not find any scratch marks there.

He was confused whether that was his blood or hers? Certainly it must be hers.

“What are you thinking doctor?”

“It is a typical psychotic case in which blood pours out from the pores of hands on getting overly excited.”

“Have you ever dealt with such a case before?”

“No, never,” he replied.

“Can’t you see this case from a different angle?”

He asked, “From which angle?”

“Like let’s say there is something paranormal like a spirit in all this,” she said.

Lawrence laughed and said, “What are you saying? Do you believe in spirits?”

“No, but all these incidents force me to believe.”

“Rubbish, kick out this feeling otherwise it will overpower your subconscious mind and take a longer time in your treatment.”

She continued looking stressed.

Lawrence smiled looking at her and asked, “Do you want a fast recovery?”

“Yes,”

“For that you will have to cooperate with me.”

“I will,” she assured him.

“Whatever you see or feel, take it as creation of your subconscious brain. And that can be treated by medicines. Gradually stress will reduce and you will feel relaxed and fine.”

“Okay,”

“I am writing some tests,” he said.

“Can this problem be related to brain?”

“I can't reach any conclusion before going through the reports,” he said.

“Okay,” she said. He looked at stains of blood on his hand and shirt, and said to her, “Wait, I will just come back from the wash room.” He went to the wash room but was shocked to see that there were no blood stains on his hand and shirt. How could it be possible? He thought and got perturbed.

He washed his hands, went to his rest room, changed his shirt and returned to Nancy. He wrote the prescription and said, “Take the medicines as mentioned here.”

Nancy noticed the change in Lawrence, she asked him, “What happened doctor? You are looking disturbed.”

He asked her, “Is it so?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Do you think I too need a Psychiatric?” He asked laughing.

“Sorry, I did not mean that.”

“I was joking, but sometimes there are such incidents which are really difficult to believe and the doctor himself starts doubting, if he too needs a psychiatric,” he said.

“Did it ever happen with you?” She asked.

“Fortunately not, but if I start believing your story of spirits I may also start feeling so,” he laughed jokingly.

“Sorry,” she said little embarrassed.

“Never mind, soon you will recover and feel fit and fine, I am fixing your next appointment on next Monday.”

“Thank you,” she said and left the cabin.

Lawrence was really disturbed. This was a case of its own kind. The sudden disappearance of blood stains from his hand and shirt did not have any scientific or psychological reason. He concentrated again and again on the incident but could not see any logic.

6

Melodious Dream

Somehow Nancy was convinced, that the incidents that had been occurring recently in her life, certainly had no connection with any mental sickness. But she continued to have medicines prescribed by Dr. Lawrence only for William's satisfaction and to her surprise, the medicines did work beyond her expectations.

Last night she had had a sound sleep after a very long time, and did not experience any apparition. She felt relaxed and peaceful on closing her eyes. William was lying close to her and watched her face that showed no signs of stress that had been evident lately. Some days back, he was also completely shaken with the trauma his wife was going through.

He asked stroking her forehead, "Are you fine now?"

"Very fine, there's a wonderful feeling all around me, let me sleep please," she said.

"Okay," William said switching off the light.

Nancy was soon lost in a beautiful dream. She heard a melodious tune that gave her a thrilling pleasure.

She looked all around searching for the musician playing with his instrument but couldn't find him. She called out loudly in the dream, "Who are you?"

She heard a man's voice that sounded distant, "I am a musician."

“Which instrument are you playing?” She asked.

“Violin,” he said.

“Sorry, I disturbed you,” she said.

No answer came from him. She said, “I like your music, please continue.” Again the melodious tune thrilled her mind and body. The blissful joy could not be described. It was just to listen and be lost in it.

She was overwhelmed with joy and called him out loudly, “Where are you? I want to meet you.” The music stopped.

Next morning she woke up fresh and fine, the melodious music she had heard in the dream was still prevailing in her mind. The composition was so clear that, had she been a musician she could have played it.

On holidays William often prepared the morning tea. He entered with tea and said serving to her, “Good morning.”

“Good morning,” she passed a sweet smile.

“Looking good.”

“Yes,” she said sipping the tea.

“Well, this is the magic of the psychiatrist,” he said joining her.

“No, this is the magic of the musician.”

William furrowed his brows, “Magic of the musician? What do you mean?”

She sipped tea, “Do you want to know?”

He said, “Of course.”

“You won’t understand.”

“Why?”

“I am not a musician so I can’t play the music I have enjoyed immensely,” she said.

William could not understand what this was about.

In the meantime her phone rang, she saw the number, it was Father Albert. “Good morning Father,” she said.

“Good morning. Did you sleep well?” He asked

“It was wonderful.”

“It means the medicine is working.”

“I feel, it was the music.”

He wondered, “Music?”

“Yes Father, it is the music I heard in my dream, it’s unforgettable, it was a rare composition of tune and melody.”

He asked, “Really? Who is the man who composed the music?”

“I don’t know, I heard the music only.”

“Dreams are dreams, creation of our subconscious mind. Sometimes their memories enhance pleasure, and sometimes bring sorrow or horror.”

For a moment she became still. William observed the lost expression on her face. Father asked her from the other end, “Nancy! Where are you lost?”

“In the sweet reminiscences,” she said smiling.

“Does the child or his crying still disturb you?”

“No, not anymore, not since last six nights.”

“Good, God bless you.”

“Thank you Father,” she said.

“You may come to me any time you need,” Father said and disconnected the phone.

Suddenly Sultan started howling. Nancy looked at William and said, “I don’t like such howling of dogs.”

“Stop it Sultan,” William ordered the dog. For a moment he stopped to honor the master but continued again.

“Stop it,” he shouted but Sultan didn’t stop.

“Did you notice something in the eyes of both the dogs at night?” She asked him.

He felt uncomfortable and asked, “What do you mean?”

Nancy said, “Their eyes turn red and spark.”

“I know, that is a birth defect, you need not worry,” he said.

"May be," she said and left the bed.

"Are you going for the ride?" He asked.

"Yes, do you want to join me?"

"I want to rest," he said.

"Okay," she said and left.

At the farm she was stunned to see Devil riding Prince. She called the dog, "Devil!" He jumped down from the horse and came to her running and wagging his tail. She patted him.

Joseph brought to her Rocky ready for the ride. She pointed to Devil and asked, "How did Devil climb on the horse?"

"Devil often rides the horse," he said.

She asked, "How does the horse react?"

"Friendly," he said.

"Does William know about this?"

"Yes, yesterday Devil on Prince had raced with William on Rocky."

She exclaimed, "What!"

"I too won't have believed but I saw the race," he said.

"What was William's reaction?"

"He laughed, patted the dog and called him Dare Devil."

"Can he race with me too?"

"He can, he is intelligent and understands language," he said.

"Bring Prince here," she said. Paul one of the attendants brought Prince. She jumped and rode Rocky.

"Devil, you ride Prince," she commanded Devil.

The dog hesitated. She asked the dog, "Can't you?". Next moment Devil jumped and dug his claws on Prince's back.

She looked with praise at Devil, "What a perfect riding!"

The dog just wagged his tail. She said looking at the dog, "Let's start the race, show me your riding skills."

She observed a change in him. His eyes were burning to accept the challenge. She lightly kicked Rocky, the horse moved forward, she tapped him, the horse picked up speed and soon started galloping. She looked back, there was no trace of Prince.

Many times in the past she had raced with William, but whoever rode Prince always lost and Rocky won. The cool breeze passed a pleasant sensation to her. Rocky was running fast. To make the horse feel comfortable and for maintaining speed she clung to his back. Nancy passed through the two big Banyan trees standing opposite to each other on both sides of the road. She heard a loud and sweet laughter of a child there but she had no time to stay and observe. The amazing speed of the horse warmed her up.

She was pretty sure, that today no horse could beat Rocky. She admired and encouraged the horse for his speed and it was magical. She felt as if the horse was flying. But suddenly she noticed some one was chasing them. She could hear the tapping hooves of another horse following her. She didn't look back as it would have diverted Rocky's concentration and affected his speed. But after a few moments, Prince passed by her side as a storm and leapt ahead. She was stunned to see that Devil was riding the horse standing on two legs. She poked Rocky to beat Prince but it was in vain, Prince had gone far ahead. It disheartened Rocky, his galloping laps had reduced, and Prince had defeated him. Nancy had yet to cover six hundred yards to reach the end point when she saw Devil, returning with Prince at high speed.

She reached the end point and returned from there. She saw Devil waiting for her. He was staring at the Banyan trees and howling loudly.

She stopped Rocky and looked at Devil. He stopped howling. "Come-on," she said to Devil and kicked the horse.

Rocky started trotting and Devil followed her riding Prince.

On returning home she told William what had happened.

He said, "I know Devil is a very good dog and a wonderful rider too."

"Did you pick him up from circus?" She asked.

He laughed, "No, his old master was fond of horse riding, Devil learned riding skills from him."

"Devil is not an ordinary dog," she said.

"Of course,"

"How much did you pay for both the dogs?" She asked.

He was irritated, "I don't need to tell you."

Okay," she said avoiding further discussion.

He asked, "Anything else?"

"No, but tell Joseph not to let Devil go around freely with any horse," Nancy said to him.

"Okay," William said.

"And the dog would never follow me while riding."

"Okay, but Devil is fond of morning walk if he follows you without horse, would you mind?" William asked her.

"No," she said and left him in the room.

Next morning when she reached the farm she found Devil waiting for her. He jumped upon her with joy wagging his tail, rubbed his body with her, expressing his love.

She patted the dog. Joseph reported to her with Rocky.

"How is Prince?" She asked.

"Fine," he said. Devil started jumping and barked looking at her. She knew he wanted to accompany her. She rode the horse and said to Devil, "Come-on." She kicked the horse and passed out from the farm on her usual track which was often lonely in the morning. She looked back and smiled at Devil who was running behind the horse. Sometimes he overtook, and sometimes was left behind.

On reaching near the Banyan trees she felt a pleasant fragrance spreading all around. She slowed down the speed of the horse and saw a man sitting on the platform around a Banyan tree playing a violin. She stopped the horse and looked at the stranger. At the same time Devil started barking and rushed to the man with the intention to attack him. The man looked at her and shouted, "Hey lady! Stop your dog."

Nancy shouted, "Devil! Stop."

But the dog didn't listen to her and jumped upon him. But the man swiftly turned and ran away. Devil followed him barking, but could not catch him. When Nancy reached the dog she found him restless and looking all around for the man.

She descended from the horse and angrily lashed Devil for disobeying her. The dog did not like this and showed his canines grunting. She shouted at him, "Go back."

Devil looked at her with sparking anger in his eyes and went back. Nancy was ashamed with the aggressiveness of the dog, she wanted to apologize to the man but he was not there.

She told William not to let the dogs be free and keep them always chained as their aggressive nature could be dangerous to other people and problematic for the family. William agreed.

Nancy often used to go for horse riding in the morning. But after that day Devil never followed her and the man who was attacked by the dog never met her again.

Nancy continued the medicines for some time and remained in touch with Father Albert who was a great moral and spiritual support for her. The result was amazing. Her nights were passing peacefully and the shadow of spirit in her mind gradually faded.

She believed that it was nothing but a figment of her imagination which was cured by the medicines and her positive attitude towards life.

But one thing that she could not forget was the music she had heard in her dream. Her brain was still thrilled with joy and excitement by the music which nourished the sweet and tender feelings of life.

Thus, five years passed on. William spent a lot of money in grooming horses of the best breeds but in these five years none of his horses won any significant race. He was broken and to forget his failure he started indulging in alcohol. Nancy advised him to sell the farm and after paying the heavy debts to start some new business. But he didn't listen to her. Horses were his passion and winning a big race was the goal of his life.

He couldn't survive without horses. She knew that a family can't live on dreams. For all this time the huge farm and all their expenses had been running smoothly with William's inherited wealth. But, with the passage of time and the subsequent incurred losses their finances were falling rapidly.

She felt that at this rate, it would be just a matter of some years when they might just lose everything. Her small earnings from the teaching job that she had initially taken up for keeping herself occupied was insignificant. She loved William and her family, and all her thoughts revolved around their well being.

"Let us have faith in God," she thought and used to pray for strength. She tried her best to boost William's morale and to pull him out from frustration. He was also aware that she was not only his love but a pillar of strength in his life. And knew it well that Nancy could live with him in any circumstances, but would not forgive him for any betrayal.

"Betrayal?" This question always disturbed him.

It was gradually becoming difficult to face the financial burden. William had only the capital of horses which couldn't achieve any respectable position in races so far but they deserved a good price for their breed, and stamina for long races.

One of the international groomers Mustafa whose horses were good enough and often scored good positions in many races had hinted him several times for buying Rocky at a good price. While William had an eye on black Don, the two years old black thoroughbred colt in Mustafa's farm. But neither the deal for Rocky nor for the colt could be materialized.

Now the situation had changed. William was badly in need of money. So he proposed to Mustafa to buy any one horse from his farm except Rocky, provided Mustafa agreed to one more deal. And the deal was that he would give away any one horse again other than Rocky from his farm in exchange of Mustafa's Don. Mustafa agreed. He visited his farm and after inspecting the horses thoroughly opted to buy Prince and to exchange Don with Hero.

William discussed about the deal with Nancy. She advised him to sell Rocky instead of Prince.

William shouted at her, "Are you a fool? You can't compare Rocky with Prince?"

"Rocky is in the middle span of his life and Prince is quite young," she said calmly.

"I take pity on your wisdom, Rocky is a high breed stallion and Prince is a mixed breed middle class Arabian horse," William said.

"But we have two star horses Prince and Princess and I don't want to sell any one out of them," she said firmly.

He got irritated, "How can you say that?"

"I have seen it, Prince defeated Rocky when he was in his best form, I told you when Devil was riding Prince he had left Rocky far behind," she said.

He said, "How many times? Rocky lost only once."

"I agree, I had the same opinion but that day when I saw the speed and style of the horse I changed my mind," she said.

"It was because of Devil not of Prince," he said.

“That is what I say, a better jockey can change the fate of the horse,” she said.

He laughed, “No doubt Devil has good chemistry with Prince but you know that a dog can’t be a jockey in any horse race.”

She said coolly, “I know, but Prince can give better results, Mustafa can select any other horse.”

“He won’t agree even for Princess,” William said.

“Because he knows the potential of Prince,” she said.

“Okay, I won’t discuss this issue further. We need money. I have decided to sell Prince and exchange Hero with Don,” he said.

“Do as you wish but don’t repent later,” she said.

“I won’t” he said loudly.

Finally after long negotiation with Mustafa he sold Prince for \$100,000 and exchanged Hero with Don.

7

Don the Wild

Don was aggressive and wild. William tried to tame him but couldn't control the horse. He tried many trainers but Don didn't allow anybody even to place saddle on his back. William complained to Mustafa. He laughed at him and said, "Now the deal is over, I had given you the hint that it is not easy to handle Don, don't buy it but you didn't listen, you were mad after the horse."

William said in dejection, "Okay, but Don is of no use for me, you can take it back and return Hero."

"No, not at all, the deal is over and Don is your liability now," Mustafa cut it short and closed the chapter. William was upset with this deal.

Nancy consoled him, "Business is business, loss and gain are all part of it, so don't worry."

"But why it happens with me only?" He asked her in depression.

"You saw the beauty of the horse, but didn't ride it."

"I knew you would blame me for that," he reacted angrily.

"I am not blaming you. I am only trying to suggest that be careful in future before finalizing such deals," she said.

"Okay," he said, "Now, tell me what to do about Don?"

Nancy held his hand and said smiling, "No need to be tensed, for some time leave Don free."

“Okay, but . . .” he stopped.

“Yes go on,” she said.

“I wish that you try to tame Don,” he said.

She laughed, “When you and your trainers failed in handling him, how do you expect me to tame the animal?”

“Because you tamed me,” he joked.

“But you are still wild and obstinate,” she said laughing.

“But you control me whenever I behave so,” he said smiling.

She looked into his eyes, “If I tame Don, would it not hurt your male ego?”

“Definitely, but I won’t mind,” he said.

“Selfish,” she commented.

“I am, but I love you.”

“I know.”

William hugged and kissed her. She pushed him away gently and said, “You don’t see time and place, start any time anywhere.”

“Sorry,” he said leaving her.

“But I like it,” she said naughtily.

“Nancy, you don’t know what you mean to me. Whenever I feel broken you inspire me and give me the strength to live life full of enthusiasm and joy,” he expressed his sentiments.

“Wow, that’s a good compliment, I love you dear and can do anything for you. I have never betrayed you and I will never, ever do it. And that is all I expect from you as well.”

“Why do you doubt me, have I ever betrayed you?”

She laughed, “No, I don’t think so,” and said firmly, “But the day I come to know that you have betrayed me, you will lose your place in my life.”

“I know,” he said and lost.

She knew that he was worried. She noticed a fear in his eyes and asked, “Where are you lost?”

She held his hand, pressed it lightly and said, "I shall try to train Don. Even if I fail don't worry, just sell the horse at the right time and for the right price. After all a horse can't dampen the happiness of our family."

"You are right, forget to train the horse," he said

She asked with surprise, "Why?"

"He threw away an expert trainer from his back, his ribs fractured and he is in hospital. I can't put you on risk."

"Don't worry, I would try to win his faith first and if I succeed only then I would proceed further," she said.

"Be careful."

"Okay," she said.

He kissed her, "Good luck," and left for the office.

On Sunday early morning Nancy proceeded to the farm.

Devil was the first one to greet her with his howling. She loved the dog and had a watchful round of the farm.

Joseph came to her running and said, "I was not aware that you would come so early, just give ten minutes to prepare Rocky for the ride."

"I don't need Rocky today, I have to see other horses."

"Okay," he walked with her towards the stable.

Rocky neighed to draw her attention, she rubbed his face and moved ahead. She asked Joseph, "Who is attending Don?"

"The old useless handler," Joseph said expressing his disrespect. She asked him, "You mean, Jacob?"

He said, "Yes."

"He is a freak but nonetheless a very experienced handler."

"William doesn't like him," he said.

"I know," she said.

"He is surviving here only because of you," Joseph said.

She reached her favorite mare, Princess, who sniffed her face. Nancy kissed her and asked Joseph, "Is she fine?"

“Yes,” Joseph said.

“Did you notice any change in her?” She asked.

“No,”

“Okay,” she smiled and asked, “Where is Don?”

“He is in the next stable?”

She frowned, “This is a better stable, why not here?”

“William transferred him there,” he said.

“Okay, call Jacob,” she said. Nancy went to the next stable.

She saw Don there with the other horses. The place was neat and clean and well maintained. She patted the horses but when she tried to touch Don he refused her shaking his head violently. She stopped and left neglecting him.

She saw Jacob coming stumbling to her in haste with Joseph.

“Good morning madam,” Jacob said.

He was bald, with a mix of black and grey haired beard. His eyes were looking intoxicated. In an unkempt T-shirt and half pants, he was lost somewhere in his own world.

“How are you?” She asked him.

“Fine, till you are kind to me,” he laughed loudly. The smell of cheap liquor spread all around.

She asked fixing her eyes at him, “Drunk?”

“Yes, any problem? See my stable, it is better maintained than the others, see my horses, they are fresh and shining,” he said.

Nancy said to Joseph, “You may go.” And he went back.

Nancy stared at Jacob and shouted, “Yes I have a problem, I can't see one of my best handlers ruining himself.”

“Sorry,” he muttered, then got irritated and shouted back at her, “I have no family, no dear or near one, no love for life. Now tell me for whom I should live a decent life?”

She rebuffed, “At least live for the horses, I think you love them most in life.”

He calmed down and smiled, "True, beauty with brains, that is why I regard you." And he began to move.

"Wait," she said.

"I won't, I am ashamed," he said without stopping.

"Wait, I have to discuss an important issue with you."

He didn't stop and said, "You may discuss it with Joseph."

"No, I want to discuss with you," she shouted at him.

He turned and asked smiling, "Hey! Giving me an honor?"

She looked at the innocent face, smiled at the question of the drunkard and said, "Yes."

He bowed to pay regard, returned to her and said, "My pleasure."

"Let us sit down and discuss."

"Okay," he said and followed her.

They sat down on the beautiful green grass.

"You are handling Don, tell me about the horse," she said.

Jacob laughed. She had not said anything funny then what was he laughing at, she wondered.

She asked him, "Are you mad?"

He stared at her, "Mad! Me? Not at all."

"Then please share the joke, I may also join you."

"No joke to laugh at, I am laughing at foolishness," he said.

She asked him, "What do you mean by laughing at foolishness?"

"Laughing at the foolishness of Mustafa and William."

She said sharply, "Jacob!" And continued, "Always remember, there is a line between a master and a servant. Never cross that line, do you understand?"

He realized his mistake and said, "I understand."

She tried to be cool, "Now tell me about the foolishness."

"I can't," he said firmly.

She asked, "Why?"

"I am a servant and William is my master, I won't cross my limit," he said rubbing his face.

"Tell me, otherwise I know how to crack a hard nut," she said.

"Okay, I tell you, Mustafa lost a jewel and he is happy that he got rid off that. Is he not a fool?"

She asked, "And what about William?" He hesitated in replying.

"Don't hesitate, I won't mind," she said.

He laughed and said, "William gained a jewel and he is sad. Is he not a fool?" He realized his mistake and took out his tongue between the teeth and looked at her for her comments.

"You mean to say that Don is a jewel?" She asked him

"Of course he is," he said firmly.

"William is not a fool, you are," she hit him back.

"I am not," he said.

"Can you prove what you said?" She asked.

"Yes," he said.

She asked, "How?"

"I know how to cash Don?"

She asked with humor, "Really?"

"Yes," he said.

"You know that William and all our trainers failed in taming the horse?"

"I know," he said.

Nancy thought that Jacob was under the influence of alcohol so she changed the subject.

"William asked me to tame Don," she told him. Jacob laughed.

"Can I tame him?" She asked.

"I can't say," he laughed again.

She asked, "Why are you laughing?"

"William wants to tame Don for race but Don is not for race," Jacob said.

“Then why do you call him a jewel?” She asked with surprise.

“He is a bull, can breed many super race horses.”

“Did you tell William?”

“Why should I tell him? He treats me like dirt.”

“Can you help me in taming the horse?”

“Yes, but you will have to present something special to Don.”

“What is that?” She asked.

“I will tell you at the right time.”

“What about Devil? Is he not a good rider?” She asked.

“He is superb.”

“Do you know his trainer?”

He asked, “Why do you want to know about him?”

“We can hire him to train Don.”

“I don’t know him.”

“Tell me some thing about Devil,” she said.

He became serious, “Oh good lady! You are very innocent,” he laughed and looked at Devil but as their eyes came across a wave of terror passed in his body.

She asked, “What happened?”

“Nothing,” he smiled.

“Okay bring Don in the ring.”

He asked, “Why?”

“Don’t question, do what I say.”

“Okay,” he said and left.

She did not have to wait for long. Jacob came there pulling the horse that resisted stepping forward.

Jacob maintained his cool and persuaded him with sweet words and gestures.

Nancy proceeded to the ring with Devil.

“Leave the horse in the ring,” she said.

Jacob looked at her astonished and asked, “What do you want?”

“You are a good jockey, try to ride Don,” she smiled.

“Sorry madam! I have an experience of riding tamed horses not wild ones,” he said holding Don’s reins tightly who was trying to be free from his grip.

“Okay! Leave the horse free and come out of the ring,” she said.

“As you wish,” he said and left the reins in anguish.

The horse started galloping in the ring.

Jacob stared at her and asked angrily, “Now who will handle Don and take him back to the stable?”

She smiled and said, “Jacob, the handler.”

He imitated her, “Jacob, the handler,” and shouted at her, “It is not easy.”

“I know you can do it,” she said. Jacob remained quiet and went on watching the galloping horse.

Suddenly an idea cropped up in Nancy’s mind, she looked at the dog and called him, “Devil!”

The dog came to her wagging his tail. She pointed to Don and passed on her instruction, “Ride the horse.”

Devil hesitated. Jacob shouted at her, “Stop, you don’t know what a blunder you are going to do.”

But she didn’t listen and shouted, “Devil! Ride the horse.”

Devil jumped into the ring, started running parallel to the horse and at the right opportunity jumped upon him. It bewildered Don and before Devil could fix his paws on his back he threw him away. Devil reacted violently and prepared to attack the horse.

“Devil! No, don’t attack the horse,” she shouted. Devil looked at her and returned unwillingly.

Jacob cried. She realized her mistake and said, “Sorry.”

“You don’t know Devil, he can’t take any insults. Now he won’t let Don live with peace,” he said sobbing.

“Don’t worry, I will tell Joseph to take care.”

“Okay, leave us alone. The horse is furious now, I will try to cool him,” he said in frustration wiping his tears.

“I don’t understand why are you so panicky?”

He shouted at her, “You don’t know your dogs, for sure Devil won’t let Don live safely.” The dog became alert hearing his name from him and started barking, she patted Devil, made him calm and said angrily to Jacob, “Can’t you talk properly? What do you know about the dogs?”

“I don’t know but time will tell you,” he said calmly.

“Okay, for your satisfaction I am taking Devil with me and would send Sultan instead,” Nancy said and left for home.

Handsome Henry

One Sunday, Nancy, Robin and Rose were in the city club enjoying the holiday. Beautiful flowers, well maintained lush green lawns, fountains and swimming pool gave the ambience a very refreshing feel.

The swings and bright colored slides of different attractive shapes made it a good entertainment place for children.

“Mama let’s go for swimming,” Rose said to Nancy.

“Dear, you go with Robin, I am tired and want to relax for some time,” Nancy said.

“Okay mom, you relax,” Robin said and left with Rose, carrying their swimming kits.

Nancy comforted herself on the soft grass under the tree. Whenever she came here, she spent some time at this place and felt at peace watching her children enjoying themselves. She looked at young couples in romantic mood, unaware of ground realities of the world that one realized after marriage. She closed her eyes and smiled remembering her own sweet moments of life that she had passed with William. She opened her eyes, breathed deeply and inhaled the freshness that was all around her. She was thrilled by a familiar scent that was brought by the cool breeze. It was unique. She tried to recollect the time and place when she had experienced the same. Which scent was that? She thought but could not remember.

She looked around but didn't see any familiar face. Suddenly her eyes were fixed at a handsome man sitting alone on a bench at some distance from her.

A new face but she might have seen him somewhere, but where? A cool breeze with the same fragrance passed by her again and diverted her attention.

She again looked around her, and a barking dog drew her attention. Suddenly, the thought of Devil came to her mind and she realized that she had experienced the same fragrance some years back when Devil had attacked the man playing the violin under the banyan tree.

Was he the same man? She fixed her eyes at him; he was also looking at her. He smiled but she ignored him.

Should she apologize for the incident that had occurred some years back? She feared that if he were not the same man she may end up looking foolish, and if he were the same man then he may have forgotten it.

That unforgettable and pleasant fragrance had again refreshed her today. But it did not mean that he is the same person. Of course, there must be thousands of people using that scent.

But the dim memory of that day suggested that this could be the same person who had escaped that day from Devil.

She noticed the man was still staring at her. She made up her mind and walked in his direction. As she passed in front of him he left his seat and passed a charming smile but she went ahead without noticing him. Nancy was used to such flirtatious moves from men who got attracted to her. She always managed to avoid them. But, she did enjoy the admiring look in their eyes that reminded her of her good looks. She lifted her eyes and casually looked at him, he had taken back his seat but his eyes were still fixed at her.

He smiled and waved his hand.

“It means he knows me,” she thought and moved towards him, he also approached her.

“I am Nancy, I think I have seen you somewhere,” she said coming close to him

“Are you sure?” He asked.

“I hope so,” she said.

He asked, “How did you reach this conclusion?”

“By the uncommon perfume you are wearing, I am familiar with it,” she said to him.

He offered her a seat on the bench and said, “You are right.”

She asked, “Do you recognize me?”

He said, “Once who has seen this beauty, how could he ever forget?”

She blushed, “I remember I saw you once but where I can't recollect.” Nancy wanted to listen from him about the incident when he had seen her.

“But I have seen you several times.”

She asked with surprise, “Several times! When?”

He said, “Once with your horse and dog . . .”

She interrupted, “Now I remember, really I am very sorry. Generally Devil is a very calm dog but God knows what happened that day. He was beyond my control.”

He smiled, “Your Devil is really a Devil.”

“I am extremely sorry, I wanted to meet you to apologize but you vanished and today suddenly we meet.”

“I was busy on a mission.”

“I see, but I don't remember seeing you on any other occasion,” she said.

“But I have,” a naughty smile appeared on his face.

She asked, “Where?”

He laughed and said, “In my dreams.”

“A good joke, but don't dream about me, I am married.”

“I know, you have three kids,” he said.

“No, there you go wrong, I have two kids.”

“Don’t bother, I would give you the third one.”

She was stunned. She had never expected he could dare to say something like that.

He laughed and said, “Don’t misunderstand me Nancy!”

He called her by her name, his voice was very sweet and he looked quite innocent and charming. He looked very handsome in his sober suit. His eyes were shining black and were quite mesmerizing. She wanted to burst out at him for his mischief but could not.

“No doubt you are very beautiful and you can attract anybody, but I see only a good friend and a good person in you.”

She said, “You didn’t tell about yourself.”

“I am Henry, a musician,” he said.

“That is what I presumed.”

“When are we meeting again?” He asked.

“Come home, my husband would be glad to meet you.”

“I am not interested in meeting him, I want to be friends with you,” he said bluntly.

It hurt Nancy. She asked, “Why?”

“He may not like me.”

She asked, “How can you say this without meeting him?”

Instead of replying, he asked her, “Won’t he be jealous?”

She asked, “Why should he be?”

“Okay, I can meet him some other time.”

“Why are you interested in friendship with me?”

He said, “Because, I like you.”

“If I don’t like you,” she said.

He laughed, “Then the friendship ends here.”

“It has not even started yet, so there is no question of ending it,” she said.

He asked her, "So we are strangers?"

"You are right, long time back my dog had attacked you, I saw you escaping from him just in time, and I don't know more than this," she said.

"Is that the only relationship between us?"

"I have no relationship with you, I caught your glimpse only once as I told you," she said.

Henry became upset to see her changed behavior and said, "I am shocked to see the beauty being so rude."

"The beauty is not for you, so don't bother if its rude," she said and left the seat.

He asked, "When are we meeting again?"

"Never, I don't meet strangers."

"But next Sunday you would find this stranger waiting for you any time you come here," he said.

"I won't come," she said rudely and left him.

"I will wait, but come alone," he said.

She shouted at him, "What do you mean by come alone?"

"Sorry," he was disturbed as he had no explanation for what he had said. She looked angrily at him and walked fast towards the pool to join Robin and Rose.

She felt his eyes were following her. She looked back and heaved a sigh of relief; nobody was there on the bench, he had left. Unwillingly she had behaved rudely with him just to keep a check on his advances.

He was right if he would accept her invitation to visit her home and meet William it could have made him jealous. She knew that when it came to her, William was extremely possessive. When she complained to him about it, he used to laugh and say, "Don't blame me, I am sure it happens with husbands of beautiful women. I feel insecure when anyone's eyes are glued to your beautiful body."

She returned to the swimming pool and saw Robin and Rose were swimming. Robin caught her watching them and called her, "Come-on mom! Join us."

"You go on, I don't feel like," she said.

Rose pleaded, "Come-on mom! Jump into the water, then you would enjoy."

She was about to change her mind but was startled to see Henry at the other side of the pool smiling and staring at her. She lost temper and muttered, "Bastard!" Robin had seen the changing expression of his mother, he asked raising his head, "What happened mom?"

"Nothing," she said, smiled looking at Rose and tried to persuade her, "Not today dear! Next time we would swim together."

She said, "Okay mom," and turned to swim in the opposite direction. And Nancy proceeded fast to Henry.

She burst at him, "Why are you following me?"

"How did you presume I was following you? I am here for swimming," he said and without hearing her reply walked away. After some time she saw him in a swimming suit and without paying any attention to her he dived into the pool.

He remained under the water for a pretty long time. She wondered how long he could stay there holding his breath and kept a watch, but in vain. Her heart beats increased. Had he drowned? She was going to raise alarm but before that she saw him coming up. She heaved a sigh and thanked God. Why was she so much worried about him? She asked herself and thought it was only sympathy for a human nothing else.

Robin and Rose returned from swimming, Robin asked Nancy, "Are you disturbed mom?"

"Not at all," she smiled.

Rose asked holding her hand, "Why you didn't swim then?"

“Oh God, I didn’t think you will take it so seriously.”

“Who was the man you were talking to?” Robin asked her.

“A friend,” she said.

“But we never saw him before,” Rose said.

“He is a new friend,” she said.

“He is a very good swimmer, for a long time he remained under the water,” Robin said.

“Yeah,” She said.

Rose asked, “How can he remain so long under the water?”

“By practice,” she said. Rose asked her, “If I practice, can I also do it for such a long time?”

“For that you need a good trainer.”

They reached the parking and Nancy drove the car for home.

Robin asked her, “Can you introduce us with your friend?”

She looked at him and asked, “Why?”

“I want to learn his diving skills,” Robin said.

“I too,” Rose said.

Nancy said, “Okay, I will speak to him.”

Excited Rose asked her, “When?”

“When he meets me next time.” Now there was silence.

Robin broke the silence, “Does dad know the man?”

She stared at Robin and asked him frowning, “Is it essential that I introduce everyone to your dad?”

Robin was frightened with such a reaction and said, “Sorry mom, I did not mean that.” A pin drop silence prevailed. She was herself confused why she had got irritated over such a simple question. She thought Henry was not her friend; then why did she lie that he was a new friend?

She tried to handle the situation and said softly, “I am sorry. I don’t know what happened to me and why I lost my temper. Your dad doesn’t know him, for me also he is a new person but if your dad wants to meet him I won’t mind.”

Robin said meekly, "Okay mom." They reached home and after some time they behaved normal with Nancy. She prepared their favorite dishes to please them.

But she couldn't sleep well. Henry dominated her. His sweet smile, handsome personality, fascinating fragrance and his mesmerizing eyes were attracting her like a magnet; but why? She loved only one man in her life and that was William.

In the beginning she talked to Henry politely just to apologize for her dog. She won't mind meeting and being friends with him. But what is his motive for calling her alone?

He looked like a decent person, his praise for her beauty was mischievous but at the same time there was some dignity in that also. His remark for not seeing beauty being so rude had touched her. Does she have something for him? She thought, not at all.

She remembered, how he had stared at her. She quivered, his scent was exciting, his eyes were running over her and that touch was magnificent. She was lost in another world.

It was nothing but a fantasy created by his magnificent personality. A feeling of guilt developed in her and to get rid of that she held William's hand tightly who was sleeping by her side. He awoke, looked at her and asked, "What happened?"

She whispered, "I love you."

He laughed and said, "I know."

"No one can snatch me from you," she said.

"I know," he said, pulled and kissed her. And the memory of Henry sublimated from her mind like camphor.

Poor Buyer Big Deal

William, Nancy and Paul were watching Princess being trained by Joseph in the ring. The mare was sweating and was following Joseph's instructions obediently.

William called out, "Joseph." He stopped the mare, she was panting. Joseph rubbed and scratched her back gently. He came out of the ring and reported to William.

"Sorry, I disturbed you during the session," William said.

"It is enough for today," Joseph said.

"What is your opinion about Don?" William asked him.

"A liability, better you dispose him off."

William's eyebrows rose to see Jacob coming there. Joseph also didn't like his presence. William looked at Nancy and said, "I get so irritated to see him, turn him out." Jacob giggled.

Nancy said, "Be cool, he won't disturb you."

William neglected him and told Joseph, "I can give you time, Don is a class horse if he could be tamed."

"It is difficult to tame him, he is wild and useless," Joseph said. Jacob did not like Joseph's reply and he reacted angrily, "You are useless, you don't know Don's worth."

William shouted, "Nancy! Take him away otherwise I would fire him and won't listen to any of your pleas in his favor."

Nancy said to William smiling, "Don't mind, Jacob is a bit eccentric, Joseph knows it."

“God knows why you always protect him?” He said angrily. Nancy calmed down William. He looked at Joseph and said, “Don’t mind, you know he is a fool.”

“I know,” Joseph said to William neglecting Jacob.

“Okay, at what right price we can sell Don?” He asked Joseph.

“I have shown Don to some horse traders, nobody agreed to pay more than twenty thousand bucks,” he said.

“Very low, try at least for thirty thousand,” William said.

Jacob called him, “William!” He looked at Jacob with hatred.

“I can buy Don in half million dollar, will you sell?” Jacob asked him. William laughed at his foolishness.

“I swear, I will buy Don, give me one week’s time only.”

William asked him kidding, “If you fail?”

“You have nothing to lose but I would lose my job.”

William shouted at him, “You beggar, how dare you?”

Nancy knew any time William may burst and the situation would turn out very odd. She gave Jacob a hard look and said rudely, “Come along.” Jacob quietly followed her.

She walked towards the stable and asked Jacob seriously, “If I agree to sell Don from where will you manage the money?”

He promptly replied, “You would lend me.”

She laughed at his nonsense and said, “You are really mad.”

He sharply reacted, “I am not.”

She laughed, “You are such a fool, you know we are facing a financial crisis, from where would I arrange that money?”

“I know,” he said. Up to some distance they walked together.

Suddenly Jacob’s pace became slow and he was few yards behind her. She waited for him and asked, “When you know that William can’t tolerate you, why did you come there?”

“I am his well wisher, what I said is true, trust me,” he said.

“Amazing, it seems that today you are not drunk, but why this unexpected change in you?” She asked going ahead.

"I thought I have nobody in my life and wasted my self with liquor but the other day when you told me that I had my horses, I realized, yes I have my horses to care for and decided to quit drinking."

She exclaimed with joy, "Really!"

"Yeah," he said

"But you must avoid facing William, he doesn't like you and can fire you any time."

"I knew William would boil to see me but I came there to only stop him from selling Don."

"And for that you offered him half a million dollars without a single penny in your pocket."

He laughed, "True, but what I said I mean that. You won't believe that I quoted lesser price for Don. His worth is more."

She said to him, "You are mad?"

He giggled, "I have a secret to share with you."

"What is that?" She asked. He came close to her and whispered, "Rocky is jealous of Don."

She shouted at him, "What nonsense?"

"I swear," he said.

She asked him, "Why?"

"Don is in love with Princess and she also likes him," he said.

She scolded him, "What rubbish?"

He giggled, "Believe me, it is true, Rocky is jealous of Don."

She fumed, "Get out of my sight."

But he was least bothered and said, "I have promised Don to help him in reaching his love."

It was beyond her tolerance now. She warned him strictly, "Don't dare to do anything of this sort, do you know Princess is in season? If you do such foolishness and it comes to William's knowledge he would kill you." He was startled.

He said, "I thought, only I know this, how did you know?"

She jerked him, and threatened in a suppressed voice, "If I find Rocky, Don or any other horse near Princess you would be kicked off and I won't come for your rescue this time."

"Okay," he said cutting a sorry face and setting his collar.

She moved to check Don in the stable. Jacob followed and called her loudly, "Listen!" She looked back angrily at him.

He shouted, "Nobody tries to understand me, I had faith in you but I have lost that also. To hell with your Don, hell with your Princess, I am returning to my old world."

She thought that William was right, Jacob was a hopeless man and it was useless to continue his services. Now instead of defending she would advise William to shun him out. William asked her while driving on the way back home, "Are you fine?"

"Absolutely, don't I look so?"

"You seem to be lost somewhere," he said.

She smiled and said, "Listen!"

He slowed the speed of the car and said, "Listening."

She said hesitatingly, "I wish, you fire Jacob."

He looked at her with surprise, "Is that really you?"

"Yeah," she said.

He asked, "You mean it?"

"No, but just to avoid a big loss because of him," she said.

"I know, he is an undisciplined drunkard but he is faithful also, he can't cause any loss."

"Do you know he is a big fan of Don?" She asked

"Yeah, that is why he bid half a million dollar for him," he said laughing and changed the gear for speed.

"He is a fool," she muttered.

"But I liked his foolishness, he knows the worth of the horse, Don deserves more," William said.

"What? You said Don is useless and agreed to get rid of him even in thirty thousand bucks," she said.

“But the bid of half a million dollars changed my opinion.”

She laughed, “Who is the buyer? You mean poor Jacob?”

He smiled, “Yes.”

“Sometimes it is difficult to understand you, how can you trust the mad man?” She asked.

“You know that he was not drunk today?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Whatever he said that was in complete sense,” He said.

“Yeah, because even the idea of selling Don irks him, so to prove Don’s worth he quoted the price,” she said.

“It means he knows the worth of the horse.”

“May be, he is an experienced handler.”

William’s eyes glittered, he said, “He is right.”

She laughed loudly. He asked her, “Why are you laughing?”

“If I tell, you will kill the poor man, so I won’t,” she said.

“I won’t, I promise,” he said.

“He told me you and Mustafa both are fools,” she said.

“What! How dare he say that and you listened?” He boiled.

She continued laughing and said, “Jacob said: Mustafa lost a jewel but he is happy and William gained the jewel but he is sad. Are both of them not fools?”

He asked looking into her eyes, “What did you say?”

She said seriously, “I warned him to learn to respect his master otherwise I would sack him.” William stopped the car, she thought that he would start abusing Jacob but instead of that he embraced and kissed her.

Then he drove the car and laughed, “Tell him there is only one fool and that is Mustafa not me.”

Nancy was perturbed with his strange behavior. She said to him, “How can you rely on the opinion of that mad man?”

“I never liked him. He is a drunkard and has no etiquettes. Whenever I wanted to sack him you objected on the plea that he

is an intelligent and experienced handler. And I always honored your opinion,” William told her.

Nancy asked him, “You know what he is planning?”

“Tell me,” William said.

“His opinion is the same as yours and as that of Joseph.”

He asked with surprise, “What?”

“Don is wild and can’t be trained for races.”

“Then why he wants to pay so much?” He fumed.

“He has a different plan.”

He asked rudely, “What?”

“I will tell you later, first tell me do you know that Princess is hot for mating?”

“Who told you?” He asked angrily.

“I knew by her smell and Jacob also confirmed.”

He asked carelessly, “So what?”

She said, “That’s surprising, Princess is your star mare for the coming races and you are least bothered with this news.”

He scratched his head, “Tell me what do you mean?”

“Jacob wants to use Don as a bull.”

He applied brakes, and the wheels of the car made a screeching sound. He shouted at her “What?”

Nancy kept quiet. William frowned, “I will shoot him.”

He was about to reverse the car but she stopped him, “You are very short tempered, I have already threatened him. Have patience, tomorrow morning take action against him.”

The car moved ahead. There was silence, he broke that and asked her softly, “What is his logic behind this?”

“He considers Don to be a high breed horse and believes that in a short time a chain of high priced super breed can be developed.” William got a jolt.

He looked at Nancy and said, “I never thought about this.”

“Jacob wants mating of Princess with Don,” she said slowly.

He lost his temper, "What?"

She whispered, "Yes."

It added fuel to the fire, he abused him, "Bastard!"

They reached home. William parked the car and said, "Tomorrow morning we are going to the farm."

"Okay," she said.

When they entered the home Nancy was surprised to see a stranger waiting in the drawing room. The man was middle aged, had long hair that were neatly tied up in a knot. He was wearing a long tunic and a beaded garland.

Devil was sitting with his head on his feet.

She looked at William and was surprised to find him greeting the stranger with a smile. He didn't bother to introduce the man to her. William said to Nancy, "You may relax, I have a meeting with him," and he joined him. She walked to the children's room. Robin and Rose were watching a cartoon film.

She asked Robin, "Why did you allow the stranger to wait?"

"He is not a stranger, dad knows him," Rose whispered.

She asked, "How do you know?"

"He comes often with dad in your absence," Robin said.

"But you never told me," she said.

"We thought that you knew about him," Robin said.

"Okay, after watching the movie meet me in my room," she said and left. She heard William telling the man in a low pitch, "You must not come here."

The man muttered but she couldn't make out what he said.

After that William said loudly informing her, "Nancy, I am going out."

By the time she reached there, they had already left.

She was trying to read a book on horses but could not concentrate. Robin and Rose came there and hugged her.

"Leave me, I am suffocating," she said trying to free her.

Robin loosened the grip, "What is for dinner?"

"I am tired, just place the order for home delivery."

"Okay, are you upset mom?" Robin asked her.

"A little," she said.

Robin asked her, "Why?"

"Who was the man?" She asked.

"We don't know, you may ask dad," Robin said.

"What do you know about him?" She asked.

"Nothing," Rose said.

Nancy looked at Robin. He said, "Long back when you were not in the house, he had come with dad and visited every corner of the house as if he was searching for someone."

"Long back, when?" She asked. He tried to recall and said, "When you had that depression, and were taking medicines."

"Oh I see," she said.

"You know, one more thing I noticed," he said.

"Tell me," Nancy said.

"Whenever he comes Devil and Sultan appear to be scared of him. He looks into their eyes, and they approach him unwillingly as if they were being forced to do it, and then they rest their heads on his feet," Robin said.

"You know, you should have told me," she said to Robin.

"I thought you would unnecessarily get worried," he said.

She smiled to make him feel relaxed, "Great! I am glad to know that my children are so concerned for me."

In the night, William returned home. He joined her on the bed. The smell of alcohol blew her mind. He was drunk. She gently pushed him away. He did not resist. He knew it would be better to sleep down, as he was not in a position to answer her questions about the man.

In the morning William noticed an unusual silence during breakfast. He asked Rose, "Why my bird is not chirping today?"

"Because mama is serious," she said meekly.

"Rose, finish the breakfast and be ready for school," said Nancy.

William asked Nancy, "Are you free today?"

"Yes," she replied, "You wanted me to be with you to sort out the problem of Jacob."

"Oh yes," he said.

She looked at him and asked, "Who was that man?"

"I will tell you later," he said stealing his eyes from her.

"I feel, there is some mystery around him," she said.

He dropped the fork and raising his voice said, "Yes there is a mystery."

Nancy didn't react. William realized his misconduct and apologized humbly, "I am sorry."

She asked peeping into his eyes, "For what?"

"For losing temper," he said. She passed a smile to him and taunted, "Hardly matters, now I am habitual."

He did not react, finished the breakfast and said to Nancy, "Meet me at the farm after dropping the children at school."

"Okay," she said.

When Nancy reached the farm, she saw William and Joseph waiting restlessly for her. She asked him, "What happened?"

"That bastard has left," he said.

"Who?" She asked.

"Jacob," he said.

"Good riddance, he has left on his own."

"He had taken three thousand bucks in advance."

"Don't bother about that, I know for sure he is an honest man, sooner or later he would return your money."

"Yeah, I know," William agreed.

She asked Joseph, "How did you know that he has left?"

"He is missing from last night."

"He is a drunkard, would be lying somewhere," she said.

“We searched for him, he told me yesterday that he was leaving because he was hurt,” Joseph said.

“Let us go back, forget him,” William told Nancy.

“Just wait in the office, I will take sometime,” she said.

She went to the stable. Princess neighed to greet her. She was relaxed to see that Harish, one of the handlers was placing the saddle on the mare. He wished her, “Good morning.”

She smiled and left for the next stable. The horses neighed to see her. She stared at Don. He shook his head up and down. She felt that it was a friendly gesture and approached him. As she rubbed his neck, the horse liked this and rested his neck on her shoulder. She was happy to see this change in Don.

But next moment she lost her temper. Somebody was sleeping between the legs of Don. She patted the horse, slowly removed his neck from her shoulder and shouted, “Who is lying there?” Jacob woke up confused and came out carefully.

He giggled to see her. She shouted at him, “Are you mad, what are you doing here?” He said laughing, “Sleeping.”

“Stupid man, everyone is looking for you and you are hiding here,” she burst at him.

“Am I so important?” He giggled.

“Shut up,” she shouted at him.

He turned serious and said, “The best place to search a handler is near his horse.”

“Get fresh, and meet me in the office and clear your accounts,” she said in a harsh tone.

“I am fresh and ready, but why are you ditching me?”

She said angrily, “How can you say that?”

“I know you can’t” he laughed and continued, “I am your well wisher, I have an advice for you,” he said coming near her.

“What is it?” She asked.

“Save William, he is playing in the wrong hands,” he said.

“What do you mean?” She asked perturbed.

“I tell you, but don’t let William know that I passed this information to you.” Nancy said softly, “Okay,”

“Yesterday when you left with William for home he came back to this place with a mysterious man.”

She said, “So what? It is his farm, he may come here any time with anyone.”

“Try to understand, he is not a good man.”

She asked sharply looking at him, “You mean William?”

“No, the man he accompanied.”

She asked keeping herself calm, “Why?”

He said “Whenever he comes Devil and Sultan both get scared. He takes them in the private room, stays there around one hour and when the dogs come out they seem to be dying.”

“Does he come often?” She asked.

“Once in three or four months,” he said.

“Listen!” She turned harsh again.

“Yeah,” he said.

“In future never talk such nonsense about William or his friends,” she warned him and walked out from there.

He laughed, “Okay clever Lady!” And he followed her.

William and Joseph were startled to see Jacob with Nancy approaching the office.

William said to Joseph, “You may go.”

Joseph left at once. Nancy and Jacob met him entering the office. Jacob laughed at him and commented, “Useless fellow.”

William asked Nancy smiling, “Where did you catch him.”

“He was with Don,” she said taking a seat.

“What is this? You have been missing,” he shouted at him. Jacob didn’t reply. William asked him rudely, “Do you know why I have called you?”

Jacob took out some money from his pocket and put it on the table. William asked him, "What is this?"

"Returning your money, I had taken this as advance from Joseph, now you may clear my account," he said seriously.

"I would but not now," William said.

"If not now then when?" He asked

"After two weeks," William said.

He asked, "Why after two weeks?"

"I want to make a deal with you."

"What deal?" He asked.

"I want to sell Don. You asked for one week's time for arranging money, I give you two weeks."

He exclaimed, "What!"

"Well, I know you can't buy Don. Yesterday you were just joking, isn't it?" William taunted.

Jacob was excited. He pulled a chair and sat down facing him. William shouted at him, "What is this nonsense?"

"Be cool, now I am not your servant, a buyer is sitting in front of you," he said.

William asked him looking at Nancy who was trying to stifle her laughter, "Overdrunk?"

"I don't drink now," he said seriously.

William asked him, "Joking?"

"No," he said firmly.

He was amused, "Who brought this change in you?"

He giggled, pointed his finger to Nancy and said, "She."

William smiled and asked him, "Are you serious about buying the horse in half million dollars?"

"Yes," he said posing as if half million dollar was not a big amount for Don.

William laughed and asked him, "Okay, tell me from where you will manage the money?"

“It is not necessary to tell you,” he said.

“Jacob! Till the time you don’t tell us about the source of the money it sounds like a joke only,” Nancy told him.

He asked her, “Do you want to know?”

“Yes,” she said. He was silent and lost in deep thoughts.

“No, but I won’t tell you, a good business man never opens his cards,” he paused.

William could not tolerate him further, “Businessman! You are making us fools, get out.”

“William! Behave yourself,” Nancy interrupted.

Jacob giggled. Nancy turned to him and shouted, “You are really an idiot, either tell us the source of the money or settle your full and final account and quit.” The insult hurt him.

He changed his posture on the chair and looking into her eyes said, “You both abused me, didn’t even care for my age, I would quit, but before that I would like to clear your doubts.”

For creating curiosity about what he was going to clarify he kept quiet for some time then changed his focus from Nancy to William and asked him, “What do you know about Don?”

“Not much but I agree that Don is a good horse,” he said.

Jacob got irritated, “Only a good horse?”

William didn’t reply, he looked at him trying to read his mind. Jacob said, “I know Don, I will tell you what he is.”

He paused then grumbled, “Don is a high breed horse, if I tell you about his family history you would get astonished, but why should I tell you? Go on abusing me, actually you don’t want to know about Don.”

“I am sorry,” Nancy said.

William joined her, “I also.”

Jacob was amazed. He asked, “Really!”

William and Nancy nodded. Jacob started, “Some years back I was working in a big horse farm. The owner of the farm was

very rich and knew the worth of his horses. But he was a rude and unkind man like . . ." he paused looking at William.

He asked him, "Like?" And before the situation could worsen Nancy said to Jacob, "Continue."

Jacob said, "I was his faithful man, he knew it but didn't like me. He had categorized his horses in many classes and the best one was classified as ROYAL. I was made responsible to mark a round seal on the inner thigh of the newly born based on their breed and family history."

Nancy asked curiously, "What happened after that?"

"Wait," he said, took out a cigarette pack from his pocket, offered one cigarette to William, lit his cigarette and then his own, took a long puff and continued, "On that unfortunate night I was drunk, the Royal mare suddenly developed delivery pains before time, I was unaware of it and couldn't call the doctor on time," he paused and heaved a sigh.

He continued, "The mare struggled whole night and died after the delivery. It was a big blow on my career."

William asked him, "Then?"

He continued, "When it came to my master's notice, he was maddened and kicked me like a football from one corner to another. His wife stopped him giving the plea that they need me and she saved me. I was shocked with such an insult. I decided to take the revenge and marked the ROYAL seal on another colt of an average breed that was born unhealthy on the same night." He stopped and tears rolled down from his eyes. William thought he was dramatizing the scene.

Nancy asked him, "Why are you crying?"

He broke down and wiping his tears, got up and left the office room. William and Nancy were surprised with his behavior. William asked Nancy, "Do you rely on what he said?"

"Do you?" She asked him.

"I think he is just dramatizing the story," William said.

"Before reaching any conclusion, let him finish," she said.

William nodded, "You are right."

After washing his face Jacob returned to the office.

Nancy asked him with sympathy. "What happened to you Jacob? I never saw you so upset and crying like this before?"

Again tears appeared in his eyes.

He heaved a long sigh and said in a voice soaked with pain, "Suddenly, I remembered my wife who is dead. And I am still alive, sorry for being emotional." William and Nancy were uneasy thinking over that how to come out from this emotional situation. But Jacob resolved it, he smiled, looked at William and asked him, "Do you know what is true love?" William was startled with such an unconcerned question.

Nancy smiled and said, "You tell us, what is true love?"

"Togetherness," he said, "Live together and die together."

"Great," Nancy admired him.

He looked at Nancy and said, "I learned it from a horse."

William asked with surprise, "What, from a horse!"

"Yes from the Royal King," he nodded.

William asked him getting excited, "Royal King! You mean the horse that won almost all the prestigious races in his time?"

"Yes, the same horse, you might have heard about the famous Royal mare who made a royal pair with the Royal King."

"You mean the Royal Queen?" He asked.

"Yes, my old master was very clever, he knew the breed developed from the King and the Queen would be superb and he acted on this theory," he paused and continued, "After death of the Queen, the King left eating and drinking and on fifth day of the death of his love, he also died. This is true love." Jacob lit another cigarette, flicked off the ashes and smiled to see the stunned faces of William and Nancy.

He said further, "After some time my master sold some horses. The Royal colt being treated in average category was also sold and he was bought by a vagabond," he paused. William and Nancy were looking at Jacob with great curiosity.

Jacob broke the silence, "The unhealthy colt was being nourished with great care but his progress was dull. The master doubted and made his DNA test, which clarified that the colt was not Royal."

Nancy asked him, "What happened after that?"

"An enquiry was initiated, I agreed that by mistake the royal seal was marked on the sick colt instead of on the Royal. My master cursed me and tried to trace the buyers of the horses. All others were traced except the vagabond, buyer of the Royal colt," he stopped. William said with curiosity, "Tell further,"

"What further?"

"Jacob, don't play riddles, complete the story," Nancy said.

He asked her rudely, "Is it a story? What do you mean?"

"I mean. Tell what happened finally," she smiled.

"My master sacked me and said, "Trace that horse and return to me, I would buy the horse in one million dollars and reward to you separately as well. So, here we are . . ."

"Oh my god! Is Don the same horse?" William asked him.

"Am I telling all in vain?" He questioned and continued, "The vagabond sold the horse to Mustafa and you bought it from him."

William asked, "Were you aware about the deal between Mustafa and the vagabond?"

"No," he said.

William asked, "When did you come to know about Don?"

"After you bought him, I inspected the horse. While swapping the unhealthy colt with the royal breed, I had secretly placed a mark on Don for my own identification."

“So you want to buy Don in half million dollars, sell it in one million and keep half the amount with you,” Nancy said.

“I may sell him for more than one million dollars,” he said.

She asked, “This way you can make a huge sum?”

“Yes that is business,” he said.

William asked Jacob, “How many people know the secret you just revealed?”

“None except we three,” he said.

William asked, “What price you demand to keep it a secret?”

He hesitated and tried to make up his mind before replying.

“Be quick,” William said. Nancy didn’t like William rushing it, but she knew it was his nature that whenever he was excited he would take prompt decisions and won’t listen to anyone.

Jacob smiled, “I won’t sell my secret at any cost.” William was surprised at what he said. He looked at Nancy to negotiate further but she had a dumb expression on her face.

William said firmly to Jacob, looking straight into his eyes, “I have dropped the idea for selling Don at any price.”

Jacob laughed, “The fool knew the worth of his gem.”

William just smiled and Nancy also looked happy.

William was relaxed and he said to Jacob, “From today you are my partner. This agreement is not on papers but is between us. You may not trust me but you can trust Nancy, she is the witness and your solicitor to look after your interest.”

Jacob couldn’t believe this, he was startled.

He became emotional, stood up, his eyes were wet, he held and kissed his hand and smiled, “I am honored but,” he paused.

William asked, “What do you mean by but?”

“I want a price for the deal,” he said.

“Greedy and clever,” he thought and asked, “What price?”

“I want to buy someone’s love,” Jacob said.

William said to Nancy, "I don't understand what does he mean?" She smiled and looked at Jacob to know what he wants.

"You know Princess is hot and Don is mad after her."

She said smiling, "That means you want Princess for Don?"

Jacob knew that William would get irritated with his answer. He said stealing eyes from him, "Yes."

Nancy said to Jacob, "You are not demanding this as a price for the deal. It is just to begin your partnership with William for the business of breeding super class horses. Isn't it so?"

William turned serious, he looked at Nancy with tilted eyes and said to Jacob, "On one condition I agree."

Jacob was excited, "What is that?"

"You would tame Don," William said.

"I would try my best," Jacob's face glittered with joy.

He asked Jacob, "So, is the deal done?"

"Done," he said happily.

William pointed to the money lying on the table, "Take it back, it is off the record and not as an advance."

Jacob collected the money and put it in his pocket.

"You may go," William said.

They shook hands and Jacob left the office.

William asked Nancy, "How was the deal?"

Instead of replying she asked, "Do you trust what he said?"

"I trust, and you?" He asked.

"I too, but you take very fast decisions," she said.

He asked, "Don't you like that?"

"Sometimes yes," she said,

He asked, "And this time?"

She smiled and said, "Yes."

Henry and the Kids

Nancy was at the swimming pool of the city club. She looked gorgeous in the swim wear. Many eyes were focused at her beautiful curves. She enjoyed the attention. Suddenly her eyes were fixed at Henry coming to the pool accompanied by two cute children, both around five years old.

He looked at Nancy and then ignored her. She waved to the kids and to her surprise one of them was overjoyed to see her and started running towards her. Henry shouted at him, “Shan stop, don’t mix-up with strangers.”

The kid stopped and thumped his foot in disappointment. Nancy didn’t like Henry’s attitude of calling her a stranger. She started ignoring Henry and the children with him. But the child whose name was Shan kept on looking at her with anguish. She passed a smile to him, but he did not reply and returned to Henry.

For a moment she was taken back in the past. Shan was her favorite name, and she had wanted to name her next child with that name if it were a boy. She returned to the present and saw the kids with Henry coming for swimming. Shan’s eyes were still fixed at her with affection and some complaints. She could not understand his feelings. She diverted her attention from them and dived into the pool. While swimming she felt some movement under her.

She dipped her head into the pool and saw Shan swimming

parallel to her trying to approach her. His smile had left her spellbound. He was very delighted and he called her, "Mama!"

He reached below her, extended his hands to cling her. Suddenly Henry appeared as a gust of wind in the water, held Shan in his arm and speedily swam far away.

She could not see Shan further, only a crying sound rang in her ears and Henry's extraordinary fragrance was left behind.

She lifted her head above the water, breathed deep and looked all around to find a glimpse of Henry and the kids.

She found them swimming at another corner of the pool. Shan's eyes were also searching someone. Nancy waved to Shan but Henry diverted his attention from her. She came out from the pool and entered the changing room.

She thought what kind of trick Henry was trying to play with her. Henry's indifferent behavior with her and preventing Shan from approaching her, this all disturbed her. When she came out after changing, she decided to meet Henry and clarify all this. But in spite of her best efforts she could not find them there and at last she returned home with an empty feeling.

Nancy went to the club alone for the next three days with the hope that she could meet Henry there, but the man did not appear. And one evening, when she was with William in the club unexpectedly she found Henry face to face. He wanted to neglect her but she blocked his passage and addressed him, "Hello Henry!"

He looked at her and returned her smile, "Hello!"

"Meet my husband William," she said.

William was impressed with him, he stretched out his hand to shake hands with him but he ignored it and just said, "Hello!"

William didn't like his rudeness. He looked at Nancy and said, "Your friend seems to be in hurry."

Henry smiled and said, "Of course I am in hurry, my kids are alone at home and waiting for me. And, for your information I know your wife but she is not my friend."

“Okay!” He said and looked at Nancy. She felt quite embarrassed.

William proceeded and at some distance waited for her. He felt insulted by Henry and on finding Nancy still standing with him, he got more annoyed. Nancy looked at Henry with hatred and said, “Thanks for insulting me and my husband.”

He narrowed his eyebrows and said in plain words without any feeling of guilt, “I did not insult anybody.”

She bit her lower lip in anger and said, “I am not dying for your friendship, do you understand!”

Henry trying to avoid her said, “I know.”

“But I want to fix a meeting with you,” she said emphasizing.

“Me too,” he said.

It irritated William to wait for so long. He called her out loudly, “Come-on Nancy, why are you wasting your time with strange people.” A fire reflected in Henry’s eyes.

She turned to William and said, “Just coming dear,” and before leaving whispered to Henry, “On coming Sunday, I would wait for you in cafeteria in the evening.”

“Okay, but come alone. I don’t want to see this man again with you,” he said slowly. Nancy left him and joined her husband.

William asked her, “How do you know this fool?”

“He is the man whom Devil had chased off,” she said.

“And on your next meeting you apologized for that, am I right?”

“Yes,” she said pacing with him. He teased her, “That matter is over. Why are you interested in him now?”

“I am least interested,” she said angrily.

He taunted, “You are not interested or he is not interested?”

“What do you think?” She asked him.

“The way you greeted him with the sweet and warm smile, and he ignored you, that showed you are interested, not he,” William said watching her reaction.

“Okay, fine I am,” she said chewing every word.

“Don’t be annoyed, it is not your fault, his personality, his fragrance can make any woman interested in him,” he said.

Nancy remained silent but she was too hurt to comment.

“Am I not right?” He poked her.

“You are hurting me and making fun of me,” Nancy said.

He pulled her close to him and said, “Sorry, I was just joking.” She didn’t reply, just walked away unhappily with him.

One Sunday evening Nancy entered the club’s cafe and noticed Henry sitting there alone. He approached her and said, “I feel suffocation here, I hope you won’t mind to sit in open for some time.” She replied in short, “I won’t.”

Henry swiftly walked out of the cafe and she followed him. He stopped at a lonely place in the park. She felt awkward to follow him, but there was some force that was pulling her towards him. He asked her to sit on the bench.

“Where are the kids today?” She asked sitting on the bench.

He took his place besides her, keeping some distance, but didn’t reply. There was silence for some time and she was feeling odd in this situation. He was lost somewhere, she drew his attention telling him, “Where are the kids, I asked you but you didn’t reply.”

“Oh yes,” He paused and said, “Sorry.” He closed his eyes, looked tensed and tried to find words to start talking.

“I feel I am wasting my time with you, if you continue to behave like this, I better leave for home,” she said.

He opened his eyes, smiled and said, “Go, if you can.”

She was scared and felt herself helpless but gathered courage and asked him angrily, “What kind of a man are you?”

He laughed, “Simple and lovable.”

“It is not you I came for. The children attracted me. They are sweet, but that too might have not brought me here.”

He asked her, “Then who brought you here?”

“Perhaps the relationship Shan established with me.”

He asked her, "Why did he call you mama?"

"I don't know, it seems that you know the reason."

He asked, "How can you say that?"

"The child was attracted towards me when he saw me."

He said, "So what?"

"He ran to me but you prevented him from coming to me and called him back."

"Yes," he said.

"He came swimming to hug me, called me mama but you didn't like it and took him away from me."

"May be his mother's features resemble yours, I don't want him to develop any emotional relationship with you," he said.

She asked him, "Is he your son?"

"No," he said.

"Who is he?" She asked with curiosity.

"He is an orphan and I take care of him." It shocked her.

She asked, "Who is the other kid?"

"Tanya, my daughter," he whispered.

"She is very beautiful but her features are different than yours," Nancy said.

He smiled and said, "Yes, she is beautiful like her mother and kind like me."

Nancy asked him, "Is her mother not kind?"

Henry's face turned pale and he said with a heavy heart, "Can't say, I will tell you about her later on."

"Okay," said Nancy closing the topic. Now she felt comfortable with him. She looked at him and asked, "Can I meet Shan?"

He peeped deep into her eyes and said, "He is an emotionally hurt child. He could be more hurt on meeting you, so for both of you it is better not to meet each other."

She asked raising her voice, "How can you say that?"

He smiled, "Your question is short but difficult to answer."

“You know, I feel you make simple things complicated. You told me he is an orphan so I just wanted to give him love to make him feel better. There is no specific reason to meet him for which you are so concerned and thinking so seriously to give your consent,” she said in one breath.

“Okay listen, you can’t meet him till Sill and Bill are with you. He is scared of them,” Henry said.

“What are you saying? Are you mad? Who are Sill and Bill?” She glared at him, but he didn’t move at all.

“You seem to be queer, to hell with you, I am going and I won’t meet you ever again in life,” she burst out at him and stood up. Henry became upset for a moment.

“Be cool and sit down,” he pleaded.

Nancy could not refuse him and she took her seat. Henry continued politely, “You are right, I am a mysterious person, I am a parapsychologist and I am on a mission. For that I need your help, trust me I won’t mislead or betray you.”

“I don’t understand what are you talking about,” Nancy said perturbed wiping the sweat from her forehead.

He smiled and said, “Don’t bother to understand it, because this is not the right time for that.”

“Who are Sill and Bill and where do they live?” She asked.

“I will tell you, but not now. First I want to be your friend, a close friend with whom I could share my secrets,” he said.

She asked impatiently, “But why? What kind of friendship do you mean? And why should I accept a friendship with a stranger?”

“Okay, first I would tell you about my life so that you could know me, after that if you accept my friendship it is okay otherwise it doesn’t matter,” he said leaving the seat. She was confused.

The man had no meaning in her life, then why should she even consider to accept his friendship on his terms. He said, “I am not in hurry, think over on my offer and tell me your decision, but it must remain a secret between you and me.”

She asked him, "How would you contact me?"

"If you wish, you can meet me here on Wednesday evening, if not, forget the entire thing," he said and left. Nancy was standing stunned. After walking for some distance he stopped, looked back and said to her, "I would reveal everything gradually but don't ask about the kids, Sill, Bill and any other incident till I finish."

She saw him going away gradually out of sight.

On returning home before sleeping she told William hesitatingly about her meeting with Henry.

He listened to her patiently but in the end lost his temper and asked her loudly, "What nonsense are you talking about? You are so naive and trust people easily. But one day you will have to repent for this badly."

She felt very sad and bowed her head. He asked her rudely, "For what does he want a secret friendship?"

"I don't know," she replied slowly.

He asked her, "Why did you go to him? Did you want to impress him with your beauty?"

She looked hurt, sobbed, wiped her tears and asked William, "Do you think I am that kind of a woman?"

He asked again harshly, "Then what for?"

"I am a woman, when the child called me mama, my heart went out for him with all motherly feelings," she paused.

"And listen," she said.

"Go on," he said.

"I would rather live away from you than to have you doubt my integrity," she said.

He was startled and he asked her, "What do you mean? For that man you would prefer separation from me?"

"Correct yourself, not for that man but for your suspicious nature and narrow thinking," she promptly replied.

"He looks a fraud, can't I doubt his integrity?"

She softened her tone, "You can doubt him but not me."

He took a deep breath and said, "I never doubted you."

She became emotional and rested her head on his chest. He moved his fingers in her hair. For some time they remained silent. Nancy broke the silence, "Please be assured, I didn't go to meet him but Shan is so cute and affectionate to me that I wished to see him and for that it was essential to contact Henry."

William kept quiet. She asked him, "Do you trust me?"

"Yes, but I am worried about you," he said.

She asked, "Why?"

"I don't trust Henry, he seems to be a crook and he is trying to trap you," he said. She asked teasing him, "Can't you protect your wife from him?"

"I can, I am not weak," he said.

"Then may I accept his friendship?" She asked looking at him. He was shocked. He pulled her close to him and said to her feeling badly shaken, "Don't ruin our peaceful life. Forget the bastard."

"I have no interest in him; I am restless to meet Shan. I can never forget the love and affection in his eyes. Henry is only a medium to meet him, nothing more than that," she said.

He left her and prayed, "Oh God, save my family from him," he paused, then told her, "I know you. It is difficult to change your mind once you have decided on something. So do as you wish but if you find yourself in trouble don't forget to call me."

"You also never lose your trust in me, I am always yours and who else can support me in bad times other than you," she said. William pulled her in his arms and kissed her.