

## The Perpetrators

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A little splash here and there, and the time goes by. he was humming as he smiled at her. She smiled back .. She straightened her apron as she was finished putting sugar in the water. She said " So this is your theory nowadays." he turned " What theory, this is the fundamental truth Mother, Mahakaal. Time .." She said " So it is the latest fancy now?" He raised his brows" Fancy? Fancy did you say? No no Mamma it is what is in my mind mostly .... But leave it, Dad is not happy that I am here." She said as she stirred the sugar syrup." So you are nowadays talking to the dead?" He laughed " Uh oh, very unemotional comment, but is he really dead..." - - " You forgot that he was assumed dead by the police" He threw up his arms towards the ceiling " How can I forget, The belting, the screaming, the whack whack on my bum..all stopped, disappeared with him. freedom ... Did you see me dancing that day, When the police said he might be dead too? I did, honestly I did , for full five minutes in the rain that day." ----" It was winter , no rain that day." He laughed again, " No rain? but it felt like , washing my tears away finally." She switched off the Induction heater. the syrup looks thick enough. She carefully put the lid on the bowl and looked at her son. A tall young man with a fine nose, a square jaw, a cleft in the chin, small but sharp eyes, lean legs, narrow waist, probably most women find him desirable. The red T shirt over sized, making him look thinner. She asked, " Do you still wear loose shirts? " He said "comfort"

Ten years ago as he left home. She knew he had to go, the police was investigating the bank robbery in the area, the murder that was suspected. The sudden disappearance of Mr. Rodriguez, along with Mr. George. While Rodriguez was found two days later dead under a tree., George was not found anymore. The police came everyday with a new thread of investigation. One day it was a love triangle , the other day the revenge of an angry son. She had to let the boy go. She packed his bag carefully , and one morning took him to the bus station. The bus was direct one from Bangalore to Ooty. The boarding school assured that they would have him picked up from the designated stop. From Ooty , she didn't let any bus bring him back. He left for Italy from there. The citizenship of UK helped. George didn't let his son, change the citizenship to Indian. That helped. The boy could escape.

She came into the garden through the kitchen door. The clouds were forming in a dense cluster, it looked so thick that as if a knife can cut a chunk out of it. Thick dense, aromatic, Yes the clouds before the rain had a strange aroma , she was very familiar with it. She knew it would rain heavily now. But rain was not a problem ,the problem lied in sending her son back to where he came from . She didn't want him to spend too much time in this hole of a house, where memories took over the reality. She tested the wet ground with her toes. It had been raining on and off and this part of the garden the shades created by the fence didn't let the sun dry the ground. It remained wet almost all days throughout the monsoon. Wet with rain drops and tears. She pulled her housecoat close to her and walked back to the living room.

Her prediction was right it rained. First the gush of wild wind, turning the cloth hanger , upside down, the weaker plants bent to the maximum limit in order to let the wind do minimum damage. Then came

the rain, lashing on the window pane. The wind made the rain drops almost horizontal. The cypress in the lawn moved as if they were saying " No No No" The swinging bushy head of the plants suddenly turned into the head of a boy. " No , No No Daddy No" She shuddered. Sunny should leave in few days.

" You still have coffee in the afternoon? " Her son stood at the door of her bedroom. She couldn't help smiling looking at the handsome face " Why you want some?" He smiled " How well you read mind." She replied "Magic." ... " Really Ma , how do you do that, always, like this... Read my mind, my thoughts" She got up from the bed, " The magic of motherhood. " .." You don't take the credit" ... "What credit? This debit credit thing in relationships are getting boring, thanks to social media". She said as she walked to the kitchen. He followed her. " Black but with little bit more sugar." ---" You didn't tell that the morning one was not enough." ---" That's because I was enjoying home so much, overlooked it". Her steps faltered. Did that mean, he would stay longer? " What happened?" He asked seeing her stop. She shook her head and entered the kitchen. She put aside the sugar syrup carefully, poured water in the saucepan, and kept two cups near the hob. As the water boiled she heard him humming. she listened to the perfect tune and put two spoons of coffee in each cup. He said " You know what , there is a change in you." She froze. He was leaning against the wall and could not see her face. " Yes you have changed. Your face looks longer, I mean narrower, your eyes are darker, and your hair, yes you hair is curlier. " She let her breath escape. " You mean I am old". He said thoughtfully " No , you look different, as if you have changed. As if you are yanked out of the body, and treated with a chemical and then put back." --" Oh ,that is too graphic" She laughed lightly. The priest had said, when someone does something evil, their soul is changed, it is spoilt. She remembered the long narrow face of the devil in the story books that had a moral lesson. She made the coffee and handed him a cup. He said " Let's sit on the swing Ma like old times" ..." But it is raining." .." That ok, let's sit and drink our coffee like we did before. " ----" You drank milk , I drank coffee." She smiled. He laughed " Yes you didn't give me coffee that time." He pulled her by the elbow and guided her towards the swing. The swing was a bit wet, but the shade on the top didn't let too much water on it. They sat on it . The rain dropped around them.. The smell of the wet ground was strong. The young man kept quiet. She knew her son couldn't help going back to the past, the events that happened around the swing, the rose bushes, the thorny branches, the braised skin, the salty taste of blood ...She said silently " Go back. This is why I never wanted you to come here... Go back. if possible tomorrow."

Sunny talked during the dinner, his usual cheerful manner, the late afternoon was forgotten This is the good thing about young age, you bounce back, you don't walk , you run and the things move behind you faster. That's good. That's really good. The dinner was simple. Sunny enjoyed the pork vindaloo. Praising her culinary abilities to the skies. Making oos and aaas like he used to. After dinner they came to the living room. She settled in her single sofa. He lounged on the recliner. He lit a cigarette. He didn't ask her if she minded that or not. She braced herself and looked straight into his eyes. She knew by the rate of his breathing, that he was going to say now, what he had avoided throughout the day. She also got the uncanny feeling that this was what he had come for. She suddenly remembered that he had only a duffle bag with him when he walked in the house. So no plans for staying long. She said with a calm voice " Ask, what you wanted to the whole morning. " silently she added, the impulse that you

hid behind the cups of coffee. Ask my son, you can ask. He coughed and cleared his voice " Ma, Dad never came back?" ---" Not to me" --" you mean he didn't come to Bangalore too"--- " Don't know" ---" The police disconnected his disappearance from the murder of Uncle Rodriguez" ---" Yes. Rodriguez was murdered by the bank robbers as he recognized one of them. George was not there. " --" But police were thinking that Dad was also killed . " \_\_\_" They thought at first, but they dropped the investigation..." ---" Because the body was not found?" she nodded " Yes" She got up from the sofa and went to the kitchen . She took a piece of the cake she baked last night and brought to her son . " Your favorite' . His eyes brightened up " Oh, you made this one, you remember Ma. I thought you were making some Indian sweet as I saw the sugar syrup. " she smiled and shook her head " Of course not, The sugar syrup is for something else." He finished the cake and looked at her with beaming eyes "Same , exactly the same! I missed your cake even in Italy" she smiled " Nonsense. They make such great pastries" She settled comfortably in the sofa now. This was the first time she felt comfortable since her son's arrival. It is like you had expected a storm, but it ended up in a light drizzle. He put down the plate on the table and said " Ma, I hate to tell you the truth. There were so many rumors that Dad got murdered, that the family that is you and I were implicated, that ...oh well , it was like a spider's web. ..." -- " So you came to ask me in person." --- " No not that , I wanted to see you, I wanted to know why for ten years you didn't let me come to Bangalore, why even now you sounded so reluctant when I said I am coming home. What is it Ma, why didn't you let me come home?" She kept quiet. He went on , this time there was a bit of tears in his voice " Ma, why didn't you let me come" --" Memories, to get you away from memories. that's all. ' She said simply. He kept quiet for some time, then said " Were you happy when you heard he could be dead?" She didn't take time to reply " Yes." --- " Because he was a bad husband, a bad father ?" ---" Because he brought threat to the environment , but definitely happy now. Seeing you ." --- ' Thank you. But Ma why didn't they find his body, where did he die? or whether he still alive? Ma how do we know he is not alive? "

She switched off the lights in the living room. Sunny , after a battery of questions that mostly started with whys, gave up and went to his bedroom. This is the problem with human beings, they go on searching for a why ,when the answer is no longer relevant. That her son went to sleep with this question didn't bother her, for at least he was going to sleep with a question not fear. The young man had overcome his fear, because Time, in this period of ten years, have pushed the fear into a remote corner of his mind. She walked to the kitchen and poured the sugar syrup in a bowl. She didn't switch on the lights as she walked out of the kitchen door to this part of the ground which remained wet most of the time. The rain had stopped , she walked slowly to a spot. She kneeled and put sugar syrup on the ground. She waited for a while and then smiled as the ants came out slowly. She was grateful to them as for the past ten years they had been doing a good job.