

The Evil eye

It was past seven in the evening and the sun had summoned whatever little light was left in the evening sky. I hurriedly went to the door and knocked. After around five minutes my eldest sister opened the door. I entered confidently without any hesitation like a queen entering her court only to grace everyone with her presence. It was a rare moment; actually, it was rarest of the rare moments as mom wasn't home.

She sarcastically said, "Oh! finally you realised you have a home. Where were you till now? You were supposed to be home before it gets dark."

Badi didi, my eldest sister, was just as strict as mom. Suddenly, the queen transformed into a scared mouse. I couldn't look at her, my eyes were stuck to the floor and I quickly ran towards the backyard without uttering a single word.

I was overwhelmed with the extra time added in my evening play time. Mom being a strict disciplinarian had ordered us to be back home before sundown. Dad on the other hand didn't worry much about the time we spent outside; for him it was important for us to taste a little dust every day. But we always over did it.

We had a huge house. It was a row house from British colonial times with a spacious balcony in the front which mom and dad had converted into an indoor garden. There were two money plants hanging in the corner on both sides of the balcony, creeping from one end to another, making a beautiful canopy covering almost the entire ceiling. We also had beautiful hanging plants in wooden pots and around five different rose plants each with different coloured roses. Our balcony garden was envy for many and many pinched shoots out of our ever flourishing money plant to grace their home with prosperity. Dad loved his garden, but he never made an issue out of these small thefts. There were two huge rooms which could easily pass for a badminton court and a small room which we had converted into our kitchen.

We had a spacious backyard with the actual kitchen which we had converted it into our storeroom, followed by Bathroom and then toilet at the end towards the back door. Just before the door there was a small washing area on the left which was directly connected with a drain outside. Mom never allowed us to sit inside or roam around the house until we had washed ourselves clean after coming back from our evening play time. The moment we were home, mom would direct us to this washing area where she used to keep a bucket of water and soap ready for us.

Even on that day, I directly ran to the wash area in the back yard and like a good girl washed myself clean the way mom would have liked me to. I was seven then but a smart and to an extent obedient girl. Coming back home before dark was just a formality my sisters and I followed to keep mom happy, in fact it was just the beginning of our second round of play time at home. I could play the entire day; I was never tired. But that day, things weren't the same.

I was already feeling tired and sleepy. My eyes felt heavy and I was not conscious of my steps. This feeling was neither known nor common to me; there was something wrong. It was difficult for me to even walk. I dragged myself to the bed and crashed. It was almost like I threw myself on the bed. I had no control on my actions. I was completely lost and fell asleep in no time.

Badi didi came and asked, "What happened to you? Don't you have any homework today?"

Just then my elder sister said, "She and her Dramas!"

I could hear only fading voices around me and nothing made any sense.

Badi didi had always been the studious child. Even at that time she was busy studying. Getting no response from me did not raise any suspicion. She was sure that I was taking advantage of mom's absence as I looked absolutely normal when I entered the house. She sighed and went back to her best companions, her books.

I don't know for how long I was sleeping. When I gained a little consciousness I was shivering so hard that my muscles were hurting. My mouth was dry and I could feel the heat. As far as I remember all the blankets, bedsheets and woollens available in the house were on me, but I was still burning with fever and shivering hard. I could not see clearly; everything looked faded and after every two three seconds my eyes used to get clogged with something thick and creamy blocking my vision completely.

From whatever little I could see, I realised that badi didi was standing near my bed holding something in her hands; though I could not see clearly, it looked like a big role. My elder sister was standing at a distance, leaning against the wall close to her cot. According to the dim yellow light in the room it was way past sleeping time but still all three; badi didi, my elder sister and dad were wide awake. None of them had even slightest trace of sleep in their eyes.

Dad was sitting very close to my bed, towards my head. By now I had gained a little more consciousness, but I still could not see properly because of the frequent fading out of my vision.

Dad asked badi didi to get some more cotton from the storeroom. She quickly got cotton role and gave it to him.

My elder sister was scared and asked, "What happened to her dad? What is happening?"

Hiding his anxiety dad said, "Nothing beta, she has got some extra heat inside her body. She will be fine ones her body cools down." My elder sister said, okay and then asked, "Is she dying daddy?"

Dad pulled himself together and answered with conviction in his voice, "No beta, she isn't."

There was a thick creamy liquid, like puss oozing out of my eyes continuously and enormously blurring my vision every few seconds. Dad was sitting with cotton in his hands and was wiping my eyes alternately. Before he was done wiping the right eye the left one would get flooded with the ooze. I didn't know what was happening. It was like the horrific scenes of exorcism shown in most Hollywood horror movies with the possessed person shivering hysterically and vomiting out something dirty. Here it was the puss like ooze flooding my eyes.

Dad was confused, worried and without mom, he was feeling lonely too which he could not even express. Though she wasn't well, her presence would have helped him emotionally. Even after three hours my shivering continued, and the sticky ooze kept flooding my eyes.

Sometimes life becomes so unpredictable that even your mind rejects to analyse the situation. With time things went out of control. No one knew what was happening to me. The person who was affected the most during all this was dad. He was worried about the incongruity of the situation, frustrated as it was going out of control and scared of losing his beloved daughter. And one thing that he didn't even want to face was telling Mom what happened to me once she is back.

Suddenly dad called badi didi and asked her to take his seat and wipe my eyes for some time just the way he was wiping them. Didi quickly took her position and started wiping my eyes clean.

It was past midnight. Dad had tried everything possible to control the situation, but nothing worked. Dad went to the kitchen and came back with a cotton wick dipped in mustard oil. He then started circulating the wick over me murmuring something, like a silent prayer. He often did that whenever we used to fall sick and I used to find it funny. Whenever I asked him why he does that, he used to say it is to kill the impact of the evil eye. I would always ask him, "what is an evil eye?" But today, I had no strength to question the ritual or laugh on it.

Dad went to the back yard and set the wick on fire. The moment it started burning, everyone got startled: Every drop of oil that dripped from the burning wick made an irritating crackling noise; tch...tch...tch... it stopped only when the entire wick had charred.

Badi didi continued to wipe my eyes as instructed by dad and suddenly she screamed...Dad...dad... Come fast.

Dad came running from the back yard, worried.

What happened. Why are you screaming? Is she alright?

Badi didi said, "See dad".

Dad could not believe his eyes. The oozing had reduced. This was the only moment in the last four hours when they had seen relief on each other's face. It was a precious moment full of hope. It was like the faint rays of sunlight on a cloudy day, the light at the end of the tunnel. The danger was not over yet as the oozing had not stopped completely. There were chances that it was a coincidence, but within half an hour the oozing stopped completely. Though my body was still burning with fever, my shivering also stopped. For ten minutes everyone just looked at me with relief and bag full of questions in their eyes. Is it going to start again? What was it? Was it just fever? Eye discharge is common in children and adults too, but was the flood of puss or mucus oozing out of the eyes common? Though the hearts were relieved, the minds were still heavy with these questions.

After everything stopped I was fast asleep. My muscles were tired of shivering and I felt weak. I had no strength to even speak or ask what happened. Next day morning when I woke up I could not see anything. No! It didn't happen again. I could not open my eyes as my eyelashes got stuck to each other because of the left over puss in my eyes. But I couldn't help screaming out of fear as the first thing you expect after opening your eyes, is to see something; anything. My eyes were closed and all I could feel was darkness... thick, never-ending darkness.

"Dad... Dad, I can't see anything".

My words were enough to alarm everyone at home after previous night's unexpected drama. Dad came running to the room. I was trying to walk with my eyes closed and frantically moving my hands in front searching for dad. He held my hand and hugged me tight transferring all his warmth into me.

"Calm down my girl, calm down. I am right here my dear."

Dad checked my eyes, washed my face and carefully cleaned the sticky remains from my eyes with the help of cotton and lukewarm water. When I opened my eyes I could see his smiling eyes looking at me with love and loads of disbelief.

"Can you see now?"

And I joyfully said, "Yes, everything."

It is difficult to answer what it was and how it stopped by that funny cleansing ritual. It is believed to clean our aura. It sounds superstitious but I can't stop thinking, what infested my aura? Was someone watching on me? Was I alone when I knocked at the door that day? Did I get an uninvited guest with me? Or was there someone in the backyard? No one can answer these questions, but one thing is clear that it stopped immediately after the funny procedure of burning cotton wick dipped in mustard oil. I don't find it funny anymore and though I may not accept it publicly but I have started believing in that thing called the *Evil Eye*.

- Asha Singh Gaur