

LOVE { LOGIC }

& THE GOD'S ALGORITHM



SAPTARSHI BASU

LOVE, LOGIC AND THE GOD'S ALGORITHM

(A STORY HOW INNOVATION SURPASSED CTRL-C AND CTRL-V IN INDIAN I.T. INDUSTRY)

"In his debut novel, Saptarshi ventures into an untouched arena altogether with unique style of writing. A beautiful tale of a person's search for his inner self. An Inspiring story for today's youth"

- Kunal Bhardwaj, Author of the best-seller 'Love was never Mine'

"Basu writes in a suave and candid manner, portraying the shades of the IT industry and covering it with a tale of an individual's search for his identity, his soul"

- Faraaz Kazi, author of the best-seller 'Truly Madly Deeply'

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*To my parents and Lopa,
My sole reason for happiness*

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*To Mr. N. R. Narayana Murthy,
My sole reason for being in IT*

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Something, somewhere is very much divine.

That's what I had always felt while me doing mistakes in every facets of life and someone helping me out from troubled zones. I feel this is because I am blessed to stay with two living God, My Maa and Baba.

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Prologue

As the patrolling van's suffocating thick soot slowly died, Nabo silently stalked the van disappearing into the shadows of that gloomy night. Horrified and timorous, for a few minutes, his brain sank into a total logjam.. Drilling deep into his trouser pockets he mined for his mobile. His shivering fingers botched on the mobile's keypad, confused about whom to call first. Saptak's dad? He thought. However, he buried that thought presuming the news may not be tolerable for that man's feeble heart. Srini? Second thought pounced upon Nabo's clustered mind. He allowed that thought too to drain out. He felt like blowing up Saptak's nose with a hard punch. Nabo quivered as he scrolled top to bottom, and top again through his contact list – Aisha, Anand, Antara, Bijoy, Bishnu, ... Chandru... 'Oh yes, yes yes! Chandru can save us,' Nabo cajole his soul.

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The police station at Kestopur had merrily drowned in the drowsiness of a catnap when the police officer Narayan Seal, thundered into the room, holding Saptak and Oxy by their collars. Saptak was completely out of his trance by now. A firm blow had miraculously evaporated the intoxications of whisky and grass. Falling at the officer's feet, he moaned, *'please sir, extremely sorry sir, r konodin o korbo na sir, please sir.* (Please Sir, forgive me, I will never do it again)' *'Chop Saala,'* Narayan roared hurling another slap at Saptak. 'Put these bastards in the cell,' he ordered a drowsy constable before angrily storming out of the room.

Chapter One

The Performance Appraisal Cycle

From Saptak's Notebook:

Quarterly Performance Appraisal Meeting

What bull shit! I know I will be getting a rating 1, UNSATISFACTORY, anyway.

Attendees: Srini, Chandru, and me.

value addition towards the organization in last quarter!

Errrgh, I have learned to copy-paste faster. Ah! But I can't say this to Srini. Damn!

I flunked in the Six Sigma exam.

Srini's Comments - Needs to improve

Project performance:

Highly unsatisfactory. Commented Chandru, the sick dick who bums around with girls most of the time.

Srini's Comments - Needs to improve

Communication Skills

Chandru's Comments - Doesn't communicate properly with team.

Srini's Comments - Needs to improve

Leadership Ability

Nil, he demotivates people - Chandru

Srini's Comments - Needs to improve

Targets for next quarter - Need to clear the six sigma exams, take up some of Chandru's work as he is over-loaded (over-loaded??? He is always playing bantumi in his mobile.)

*The sudden darkness kissed the night,
Flashes of beam going past,
Swirling bees all drooping in,
The honey dew petites curl within,
Shaking deeply in tequila blast.*

“Shimmer and Swirl” was shaking heavily in that grave punk music.

It resembled a ghost house with dancing lights flashing randomly all across the room and continuous shrieks that very distinctly aural from outside.

‘Repeat,’ yelled Captain Oxy passing his glass to the bartender. He smiled at Oxy while replenishing the glass with Smirnoff peg. . Oxy sat on a tall bar stool near the bar counter relishing the petite beauties with his eyeballs and vodka with his lips. Friday nights were to repose – a principle that everyone on the dance floor obliged to.

Like the usual Friday nights, this one too was raucous.

On the dance floor, a chubby middle aged man, like a snake charmer, swirled his belly to the hip Eminem rap. His deep pink shirt shabbily tucked in an ostentatious yellow trouser amused Oxy.. A frivolous fair girl with large, perfectly shaped breasts danced closely, caressing that brazen personality at times. The rainbow coloured beams from the chandelier above flashed randomly, that continually lit the dance floor and the girl’s hair look auburn. Quite appealing, thought Oxy as he finished his Smirnoff bottoms-up. Whilst the alcohol flowed, the girl started to appear more appealing, as Oxy could not control taking his inebriated eyes off that girl’s bust and heart shaped behind; truly making it a “Night to Remember”, as the Bryan Adam’s track aptly played in the background.

Not able to control further, Oxy hurtled to the dance floor. Not able to find any partner, he enjoyed in one corner of the dance floor, all by himself, tapping to the music. .

Oxy had noticed a girl dancing alone in the crowd. To his delight, that shimmering hot girl in tight tank tops turned towards him Oxy and started dancing closely. He had been a regular to “Shimmer and Swirl”, as it provided an excellent opportunity to hook on to hot babes. Besides

there was no risk as those frequenting “Shimmer and Swirl” were of noncommittal types, believing in one-night-stand.

Gradually the distance between Oxy and that girl was waning. He could smell her mildly erotic perfume interspersed with exotic hair odours. His spectacle traversed down from her eyes to her lips, and then to her bosom, where he could see her comely breasts rhythmically popping to the musical tunes.. Oxy tried to exchange few smiles. She returned them with an inconspicuous gesture and continued dancing.. She must be too drunk to understand anything, Oxy thought.

The DJ hollered few lines in rap style and played a Pink Floyd track. The crowd reciprocated with deafening applauds.

A group of youngsters, mostly teenagers, were engaged in a Tequila competition. A thin girl of tiny stature from that group whirled around and jeered aloud, totally uncontrolled gulping down taut shots of Tequila one after the other. *They must be the Call-centre ones working next to my Office.* Oxy could recognize few girls from that group; they seemed familiar. “Perhaps they are from the call center next to my office,” Oxy murmured and continued his mild dance moves.

Suddenly the Tequila shooter girl collapsed to the floor and barfed. The drunken lassie had become the center of attraction.. A hefty pink-turbaned Sardarji hurriedly carried her to the washroom.

The music paused. Only for a moment though. Hooting, shouting, hopping, jumping began immediately. No one cared a fuck, as if.

Oxy's proximity to the auburn haired beauty had reduced to micrometers now. He slowly moved his hand around her waist and tightly gripped her, pulling her so close that he could now feel her Old Monk flavoured breath. She looked up at Oxy for a moment. She tried to say something. However, her decibels were too low to beat the thumping music that night. She continued boogying to Pink Floyd tunes. She drooped on Oxy at times. Trying to maintain her balance, she tried to get hold of Oxy. Her voluptuous breasts rubbed against Oxy's chest. He felt pleased.

‘Hi, I am Kuntal. What's your name,’ Oxy shouted in her ears while shaking his legs in sync with her. ‘*Nita, Nitashree*’ she rumbled. *Do you want a drink?* She gestured Oxy to stoop down closer to her mouth and then she whispered something inconspicuous into his ear. ‘*You want Vodka?*’ Oxy cross checked while she nodded and went back into alcoholic trance.

. Oxy ordered his drink and waited his time gazing a couple that was passionately lip locked, happily enjoying their waiting time.. The crowd was increasing in number. Numerous legs were now grooving to the dance tunes. *'Two Smirnoff large with Lime cordial'*, Oxy shouted at the bartender who astonished the crowd with his juggling genius. Neatly balancing the glasses, Oxy cruised through the dancing crowd, making his way straight to his new discovery, Nita.

Lot of new faces had now crowded the dance floor. Oxy rifled for the squint eyed girl through the flashy dancing lights. He could notice few known faces enjoying with their respective girlfriends.

Precipitously Oxy spotted a bald head blazed with the rainbow shades of the disco beams. It was Srinivasa. Oxy was quick to recognise him. Chandru accompanied Srinivasa. Oxy had met them several times at "Pick and Stick Technologies" parties. To save himself from troubles of cooking, at times Srinivasa accompanied Nabo and Saptak. Oxy looked at them suspiciously wondering what those brats were doing there.

What Oxy witnessed next literally shocked him. His newly found lust lady was shaking hands and exchanging licentious smiles with Srinivasa group. Oxy quickly positioned himself within millimeter range eavesdropping on their conversation.

'Srini, this is Nita. Meet my Boss, Srini,' Chandru introduced them.

Chandru apologized for being late blaming it on the city traffic. Nita pardoned him. How long have you been here?' Srini enquired.

'I came around 9. ,' Nita replied smilingly.

Oxy was in extremis as it was evident that Nita and Chandru knew each other.

'So, where are we going tonight?' Nita asked, 'we can't go to my place, as my roommate is back from Delhi.'

Looking at Srini's nervous face, Nita got into a mischievous mood, 'is this your first time?' she queried impishly. 'Damn fuck! The deal is already done. You moron, Oxy, you have lost the chances for tonight,' Oxy cursed himself. . He had rosily visualized fantasies for the night while getting her vodka. All dreams were slashed now. His heartbeat went into diminishing notes, a typical heartbreak like. It pained a lot. Not in his heart though, much below it, right in the center between the thighs.

Angered Oxy gulped down both the pegs, bottoms up. Vodka shots didn't help much though. The heat made his eyes water. No, he wasn't crying. The shots drizzled straight down

his throat nearly burning it and sank into his belly charring the intestines. His experience of one night stand at Shimmers was always accidental. He had been lucky most of the times to hook onto someone but it never went beyond that. This frustrated Oxy all the more. And this time here, everything was happening in front of his eyes, right from the planning of the game to its implementation, who, where, when, discussed very neatly. He felt like kicking Chandru in his balls. 'That wily bastard has snatched my prey, my pleasure of the night,' Oxy murmured with his vodka soaked heavy tongue.

It was known to all that Shimmers also doubled up as a pick-up point at times. Oxy had heard about that in his close circle. Most girls from the eastern border of the country who came to study in city colleges were into that business to accommodate their leisure expenses. However, Oxy had not been propitious as yet to find such a girl who could grace his male libido. As he recovered from the cycle of his misfortunate thoughts, Oxy saw that Nita, Chandru, and Srini were leaving. 'Ah! So threesome tonight,' Oxy thought to himself. He decided to follow them, a temptation her could not resist. Srini appeared very happy as he walked close to Chandru with his hand around Chandru's shoulder. A faint hawkish smile spread all over Oxy's face looking at Chandru's all out effort to please Srini. 'Bloody ass licker,' Oxy's brain was clouded with all sorts of thoughts as he kept following them, 'at times an IT engineer has to stretch more than his accustomed scope of work to get things done'.

How the Enterprising Software Engineer does earn a Promotion?

- 1) *Never leave behind a single moment to praise the appraiser, who will be most likely your reporting manager. Appreciate his hair style (even if he is bald!), his dressing sense (a bright yellow shirt with a pink trouser) and every nitty-gritty details of his existence.*
- 2) *Appreciate his tremendous hard work at all the meetings although you know he plays FarmVille all the day and was just snoring off in the meeting.*
- 3) *Follow his shadow everywhere he goes, even to the loo. (but don't look into or start praising his size, it might send some wrong signals)*
- 4) *Look deep into his interests in the girl (or girls) of your team and try to fix them for a Café-Coffee Day conference.*

- 5) *At times lateral thinking helps, like looking into his likes or dislikes (e.g. a particular brand of cigarette or scotch he takes) and fetching them to him.*
- 6) *Have at least four to five birthdays in a year, which gives the opportunity to take him out and let him drink on your hard-earned money.*
- 7) *Show yourself busy (even without business) at all times in front of your manager.*
- 8) *When the appraisal time comes, repeat the above points religiously each and every day.*

The wild chase through the deserted roads of Kolkata with its melancholic swirl infused a sudden life into the dying night. Srini's Honda city was cutting through the haunted roads. Oxy had hard time keeping pace with them in his 160 CC Apache. The sudden red light at the signal came to his help. The Honda city came to a sudden halt with a shrieking noise.

A shrill laughter could be heard from inside the car. It must be Nita, Oxy thought.

Chapter Two:

The Present Perfect

*For all your days prepare,
and meet them ever alike,
when you are the anvil, bear,
when you are the hammer, strike.*

- Charles Edwin Anson Markham (1852 - 1940)

Jan 07, 2011

10 AM at TechnoPolis, Innovation TechLabs Pvt Ltd. Office Boardroom.

The boardroom, although small, literally sparked with energy and vibrancy.. Around the table sat four men and two women, all clad in business attire and trading serious stares with each other. The *Harvard Business Review*, with its flickering pages, sat on top of the table watching everyone. Outside, the cold breeze has spread its wings sending chill waves of excitement throughout Kolkata. Sipping hot coffee in such weather is imperative. The smell of hot coffee filled the room. On one wall of the boardroom had a poster clung to a big red nail. The poster read:

*When the heart meets the mind,
When the unbreakable sails through,
When devotion meets labor,
All the dreams come true.*

The room had a closet at one corner. The fresh Mauve Berry coating on the walls had given it a smart new look.

Having exchanged few smiles with everyone present, Saptak stood up to speak.

‘Very good morning to you all. You might have surmised why I have called this meeting today. Primarily it is to synopsise how we have contoured in last 3 years, what have we accomplished and most importantly envision our future steps to keep the momentum going. We have had astounding ride coupled with perseverance and dedication, which has brought us to this position and helped us grow to this size in such a short span. We are one of the most exciting companies among the new ones in our industry today, all attributed to our all-round efforts, concrete vision, and teamwork. . It indeed makes me feel proud and I am sure you all

feel the same. 'This very boardroom has had extremely nostalgic moments, remember Nabo,' Saptak took a pause looking at Nabo. Nabo returned the gesture with a cherished smile.

'We, Nabo and I, started our respective IT careers in this very boardroom. Yes, this building once belonged to "Pick n Stick Technologies Pvt. Ltd.". Today, after acquiring PNS, Nabo and I have materialized our dreams. However, we still have miles to go. In last three years we have managed to increase our revenue twofold, we are growing at 200%, I can very well say that. Nonetheless we can neither afford nor dare to be complacent, as the whole world has its eyes set on us. This New Year brings with it lot more challenges as we position ourselves among the top players. The competition is getting stiff.

Saptak paused. His looks were so intense, full of inspiration. He infused encouragement as he spoke. He looked obsessed like an explorer who has just landed on the shore of a new world, dying to unearth what lies ahead. He hurriedly took a sip of coffee. As he took his hand near the mouth, his diamond studded Rolex sparkled from beneath the cuffs.

'In the coming year, our principal objective will be to sell our financial Business Intelligence product 'IntelliStatics' to a wider customer base and to expand further into new geographies. Our target is to go global. We will need 200 new professionals, highly skilled, to achieve this goal. We will have to be sure that our new talent makes us stronger, wiser and bolder so that we don't miss on our target and commitments. Remember we have set very rigorous targets and tight deadlines for ourselves,' Saptak had arrived at the trail end of his speech.

Saptak asked Nabo to send the list of new customer prospects. He requested everyone to meet again on coming Friday to finalize things further for the year and chalk out a detailed success plan. He thanked everyone looking straight at his richly experienced team, and took leave from the boardroom. The team thanked Saptak in return. The silence then broke into hustle bustle of chairs, whispers, smiles, giggles, and sighs.

Saptak carried his coffee and the Harvard Business Review with him to his cabin. Saptak slowly finished his coffee taking pleasure in his own personal space. He became contemplative of those rare moments of the journey he took to come to this level. He flipped through the Harvard Business Review, made some sharp observations and parked few pointers in his mind.

Looking out through his glass cabin, he could see people going about their work. City of joy was booming with its billions of inhabitants all out on their way. A shivering kite flew past his sixth floor window. His eyes wandered until they settled on the bus stand. People herded at the bus stand. School children with their mothers, men eagerly waiting for the bus, hawkers plying their wares – all were there.

Saptak smiled. A swarm of past memories blew past him.

‘It was there my journey started,’ Saptak mumbled.

Chapter Three

The Past, but not so Perfect

From Saptak's Notepad:

```
/// <summary>  
/// this class performs an important function. What?? God knows // feeling very sleepy ☹  
/// </summary>
```

```
Private void SendMail_Click (object sender, System.EventArgs e)  
{  
    PicknStick.killMan KillMan = new PNSTech.killman();  
  
    // Srini is a kill man  
  
    KillMan.UnlockComponent ('you have to do it!!!');  
  
    Mail.Subject = 'This is bomb';  
  
    Mail.Body = 'You are dead';  
    Mail.AddTo('PNSTech Support','support@PNS.com');  
    killMail.From = 'SrinivasaPk < SrinivasaPk @ PNSTech.com>';  
    if (!KillMan.SendMail(Mail))  
        {  
            KillMan.SaveLastError ('ErrorLog.xml');  
        }  
}
```



```
/// Aisha is hot, Nabo thinks ☺☺
```

*The dimness of neon echoed,
As he sat there,
All through the night,
Toiling hard through the lines of code,
Laid out like lines of saluting Knight.
Not a sound could be heard,
Except his fingers relentlessly
Tapping at the key board
Like monsoon on an iron roof.
Deep inside, he was bored,
He looked up and the neon laughed at him,
The code danced before his eyes
But just at his lowest point
A sudden sweet breeze blew past him,
No one knows from where it came,
But it whispered in his ear,
What are you doing here?*

July 07, 2007,

9:30 AM at JyotiNagar

A gigantic pang gripped his heart. The tremors were felt a little below his belt though, between his pair of hairy legs, to be particular. He desperately tried to do something; however, the situation did not allow him to do anything. Holding his crotch firmly with his left hand, he signaled for patience with his right hand. But desire had clasped him in its trance and as the time ticked, his urgency kept rising.

Sitting at a window seat in the first row of the bus he could see the driver plainly. 'How far is it?' he asked the driver. The bus driver appeared familiar. After a few moments he recognized him as his project manager at the IT organization where even he worked. 'What is the project manager doing here?' he asked himself. At least he was on time for once.

The bus was speeding up the rough road, jerking severely. Looking outside, he could see plumes of smoke gliding lazily over the path. In the greeneries by the road sides, men answered their nature calls.

'It's only a few kilometers away,' the bus driver aka project manager grinned at him rocking his head and torso back and forth in sync with the movement of the bus - so much so that it looked as if he was dancing to an unheard tune. He twisted and twirled the steering wheel frequently as if he was on a fair ground but not once did the passengers raise their voice in discontent against his ridiculous behavior. At times, it even felt like they would be thrown out of the bus window.

Saptak felt uneasy, overstrained, and grew more and more melancholic with every passing minute. He could see many co-passengers standing by his side holding on to the rods overhead. One among them, with a knife in his left hand, was staring at him for no particular reason. 'If I get up from this seat, I might lose it and will not be able to sit for the rest of my journey,' he told himself and asked the driver again, a little louder this time, 'How far is it?'

'Only a few kilometers more,' repeated the driver loudly while he continued spinning the steering wheel like a child's toy.

A co-passenger, who was watching him, told him reassuringly, 'It is fine that you attend to your need from the bus itself. Go ahead, do it through the window.' Thanking him with a nod, he pushed aside the window pane and relieved himself. The force of his pee resembled water gushing out of an open dam. Luckily the window was low enough for him to do it sitting on the seat. Occasionally he looked behind to ensure everyone else on the bus was sleeping. After a while, he zipped up his pants and said 'Cool...' with a ear to ear grin as a sign of great satisfaction.

Having accomplished the job, he fell sound asleep within a minute. The relief did not last long enough though. Now that he was comfortable he wanted to micturate again. It puzzled him when the bus conductor called out his name: 'Saa-ppp-taa-kkk...'

'Fuck! The conductor has identified me. I need to wind up,' he thought.

But the unpleasant liquid didn't seem to stop. Contrastively, it regenerated itself like the river water replenished from an unknown source in the Himalayas. As he tried to zip up the fly, he could see the salty water getting sprayed in the air bedewing many places on its course.

'Hey Sapta,' the voice came closer.

'It seems the conductor knows my nickname too,' he murmured.

The conductor tapped him on his right shoulder.

'Get up, you idiot. Aren't you ashamed of sleeping like this?' shouted Bimal, who stood by Saptak's bed staring straight at him with an expression that would make even a tiger turn tail and run. He was seething with anger at his son who lay curled up in bed, wrapped in a beautiful dream, while rest of the world was up and awake.

The frown on Bimal's face matched the folds of the bedspread on which Saptak slept. Without waiting for his son's answer, Bimal pulled the cover with such force that Saptak fell off from the bed banging his butt on the floor. Bimal in all his 56 years and 201 days had always rose at dawn. Blind with anger, he hurriedly folded the lower portion of his candy-striped lungi and stormed out of the room, without issuing another word.

But just as his foot crossed the room's threshold his conscience assailed him: 'You are the one responsible for his carefree nature.'

'What? I didn't do anything. How can you say like that?'

'Yes, you didn't do anything. You didn't tell him your story.'

'Stop! stop! That is not my mistake,' Bimal tried to defend himself, 'I felt that I should not burden him with my sorrows. I wanted him to be happy. But that doesn't mean he can forget his responsibilities.' With that statement, the conscience saw Bimal's blood pressure rising. Having achieved the intended result, the conscience stepped back in search for some more means to trouble Bimal, who by this time was striding outside to draw fresh air and clear his mind.

The first thing that Saptak had seen that morning was his father's furious eyes, followed by his bulged out waistline hidden under the white vest. Saptak reacted little to his dad's anger. He was simply more relieved that the whole embarrassment of peeing from the bus window was just a dream. Little did he know that the dream, which he took so lightly, reflected his personality – in times of strife, he would do anything to maintain his inner harmony.

'Did I wet anywhere?' he asked himself while he checked his bermudas and the mattress carefully. After ensuring the bed was indeed clean and dry, he pulled himself up to the table by the bed. The table had a couple of drawers and stood elegantly near the window that faced Debaroti's house.

The town of JyotiNagar, where they lived, had lots of Banyan trees. Bimal was proud of his furniture made from the wood of Banyan that grew in his own backyard. He would often be heard boasting loudly about the furniture to his friends. By now, Saptak had got used to his words. 'Did you see this?' Bimal would call his guests' attention to his furniture. 'I designed it myself and personally instructed the carpenter in every step of its construction. I picked the right wood myself. You know, it isn't easy.' The guest is then expected to look the furniture over admiringly and exclaim, 'Hey Bimal, this is marvelous! You are a great artist.' If that description didn't suffice, leaving the guests unimpressed, Bimal would add some more points, 'This is genuine wood. You will not see this type of wood anywhere other than JyotiNagar. It has special properties and is much cheaper too.' Bimal would continue to add a long list of features about his wood until eventually the guests feel forced to agree with him and nod their heads in appreciation – after all no other furniture in the world must have been so repeatedly and lovingly polished by so many superlatives.

On that renowned glorious table, Saptak found his black Sony Ericson between his personal file and Harry Potter. The phone displayed 10:40 AM, Saturday, July 07, 2007.

There was an unopened sms in the inbox. He opened it and it read:

TD-Jotish

Good Morning. Today is a great day to win love, affection and respect.

To know more, dial 033-44443333

He jumped out of his bed and rushed to the restroom making a distinct thumping sound with his footsteps. 'The damned Project Manager, Srinivasa, troubles me in my dreams also,' he murmured.

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The *City of Joy* had woken up much earlier. It stirred endless whirls of honking buses, smoke clouds puffing out from the chimneys, school children and their mothers running on the road, city trams moving lazily, beggars howling and hawkers shouting. Few health conscious guys could be seen running on the road meandering past the horny auto-rickshaws. A thick plume of dust glided away as the sweepers started their morning chore.

The air filled with burning petrol smell tried to pluck out the last bit of oxygen from the lungs.

In that small, inconspicuous office in Technopolis, Srinivasa Padukonda was drowned in thoughts while sipping his first coffee of the day, sitting in the boardroom. The white plaster had pooped out at places making the brick work within clearly visible, which looked very shabby making the room look more like a “boredroom” than the boardroom.

The words ‘**Let our motto drive us to our goal-Creating the Stick that beats its Pick**’ bright yellow and red were inscribed on the black coloured poster neatly designed inside a wooden frame that loosely hung on the wall.

Srinivasa was staring out of the window resting his left palm on one edge and tapping his right hand finger nails on the window glass. The sky of Technopolis looked dark and gloomy. . He conjectured that it might rain heavily.

‘May I come in, Sir’, made Srinivasa’s heavily brooding clouds evaporate. He was back from his ecstasy to business and Pick and Stick Technologies. He saw Chandrasekhar better known as Chandru standing in front of his chair. With him, a new face, whom Srini did not recognise. ‘Sir, he is Soham, our new recruit. He has joined us a trainee Software Engineer. I think he can be a good replacement for Saptak,’ Chandru introduced the new guy to Srini. Srini looked deep into his eyes, as if he could pierce right into his soul and check the new guy’s conscience. The new recruit was trembling a little. ‘That’s a good sign. Nothing like little fear can motivate one to work hard,’ Srini thought to himself. Srini liked that, the feeling of power and control, the fact that his words and actions could change lives and he always wanted his employees to know it.

He smiled.

‘Welcome to PNS. I think you must be proud to be part of one of the finest IT companies out here. Chandru, I hope you will make him productive as fast as possible,’ Srini spoke as if he was talking about an expandable memory drive or a new processor upgrade, ‘Ok I think we are done. I have a call now with a client. Best of luck Soham,’ Srini ended the conversation and signaled them to leave.

And without another glance in his direction, Srini reached for the telephone receiver and turned his back. Soham was left bewildered with his hands hanging loosely by his sides without a word to say. The expandable memory had already lost its drive.

Chapter Four

The Past, Continuous

A shiver ran down his spine,

He looked everywhere

But no one was there,

Still he heard the whispered words

What are you doing here?

In the luster of a 60-watt bulb, the restroom mirror reflected the image of an averagely built man with a face shaped like cucumber, curly, uncombed hair and wheatish brown complexion clad in a light yellow T-shirt. Saptak had looked better, but who wouldn't have looked their best after the awakening he had had. The cobweb weaved thick bait across the corners of the mirror. Now safe from his father's wrath, at least for a little while, his thoughts returned again to his nemesis, Project Manager Srinivasa, and he went into moody silence.

In the restroom mirror, he also saw all the known faces in TechnoPolis where he worked and lived. Srinivasa Padukonda, a man with tight upper lip and bald head accompanied by his Man Friday Chandrasekhar Pattavaiya aka 'Chandru'. His colleague-cum-roommate, Nabo, a studious guy, usually seen with his spectacles gliding down his nose, and who would later turn into his rival. A beautiful colleague, Aisha. Many of his male colleagues had tried to woo Aisha. And finally, the 'joint man', Captain Oxy, a tall and lean roommate, who use to often hang around with Saptak and Nabo. Yes, they were all part of his life. As were the silly talks at night, playing football in the rain during holidays, enjoying porn movies together on Nabo's laptop in silent mode, in order to maintain their sophisticated IT 'GOODS GUYS' impression with Mr.Nimai Lal, the mess-owner, and the "joint-sessions" with Captain Oxy, in which Captain exhibited his exceptional grass rolling skills). A life he had lost faith in. A life that was now behind him.

As he wretchedly searched through the debris of memory, it only churned the filth and dirt, along with the package of pain in his wounded soul.

Saptak flashed back into the memory and remembered the day he had his first bitter experience with Srinivasa, his manager. 'It was a Monday evening in February...' he recalled. However, as soon as the clouds of past events raged his mind, a rude interruption asked him to refrain. 'Hey wait, proceed no further. I don't like to revisit the past now,' his heart begrudged painful memories, for it always wanted to remain calm. By then however, entire thought process had taken shape, the picture was forming rapidly – first an outline, gradually drawing into figures

gently getting filled with colours, the entire setup lacked only lights, sound, action and the story could be relived.

‘Come on dude, wake up...’ his mind sent an alert, it’s finely perfected radar realized that the day could worsen. He needed to act quickly; else his provoked father could fling open the restroom door exposing half-naked Saptak to the world thus damaging his reputation.

‘Who cares?’ Saptak sneered at himself, ‘I have just as much time as any other person in this world. I can be slow and steady, thoughtful and considerate, reasoned and logical. No need to rush. It is for these simple joys in life that one is living on this earth, after all. How can you appreciate its beauty if you are moving so fast you cannot see it?’

Sitting on the commode, Saptak tried to pacify his mind and defend himself from his current enemy, Bimal. He could feel the uneasiness growling in his stomach. It needed that extra thrust. He reached out to search for the hidden matchbox kept behind the cistern. He was extremely delighted to find it at the same place where he left it the last time. He lit a cigarette.

The smoke of Wills Navy Cut filled his craving lungs. He felt relieved. The memories started haunting him again, flipping back and forth in front of his eyes. Flashes of the night at the police station bounced in front of his eyes. He could still sense the tight smack that the pot-bellied police officer had landed on his cheek. Pot-loving Oxy’s words echoed in his ears, ‘Chase your dreams Saptak, chase your dreams,’ while trying to calm down in the match-box sized prison cell. The current state of his confused mind made him slowly fade away from the dream-run, on the contrary the situation filled his mind with mammoth levels of frustration and self-doubt. Hastily, he erased the painful thoughts that irritated him. He tried to go back into a relaxed state..

‘Okay, dad might get angry if I am a bit slow. So what? Nothing is going to bother me. I am only one in this world,’ he started boasting to himself looking into the mirror.

A few moments later, he whistled one of his favorite tunes, the sound of which echoed loudly in the confined space of the bathroom. This only served to irritate his father, who had just come in after buying fish from the nearby market. He kept the plastic bag full of fishes in the kitchen and was passing from nearby the bathroom when he heard his son whistling song in relaxation. Bimal was completely aware that his son had found a hiding place that even he does not dare to enter. He went to the living room and sat on his rocking chair flipping the pages of the newspaper. He stumped over one of the advertisements which said:

“Jobless? Sitting idle? Don’t worry, you can earn more than 40,000 per month working at home. To know more, call...”

Bimal’s conscience made an appearance once again. It sat next to Bimal in the sofa. The roguish conscience played its trick again, ‘Your son’s actions will not remain hidden from people for a long time now. They will come to know some day about your son’s capabilities. They will ridicule you. They will laugh at your inability to influence your own son. You are well aware that these days thickness of son’s wallet is the measure of parent’s success.’

Before the conscience could taunt and haunt Bimal further there was a heavy banging on the door with a neighbour shouting, ‘Bimal... Bimal... It’s me, Shyamal.’

‘Shyamal!’ Bimal popped out from his chair on hearing that voice. It looked as if his conscience could make Bimal’s worst fears come true. However, he put up a brave face and opened the door. He had to maintain his face. He had made up his mind not to allow Shyamal into the house and preferably send him back from the door step itself.

‘Ah! Shyamal,’ Bimal greeted a man clad in dull shirt and a dirty lungi.

‘Has our software engineer arrived home?’ Shyamal enquired half-mockingly.

Bimal thought, ‘It seems he has come directly from the bed without minding to brush his teeth or wash his face.’ He replied, ‘yes, yes. He came last night around 9.00 pm.’

‘How is he? How is the climate in TechnoPolis?’

‘He is fine as always,’ he said. ‘...only we are not fine because of him,’ an after thought occurred to Bimal.

‘Where is he now?’ Shyamal’s eyes searched for Saptak inside the house.

‘He just got up. He is in the bathroom,’ Bimal said edging sidewise to block Shyamal’s view with all the art of a river crab.

‘Oh, is he? I just wanted to convey my regards. Okay, I will meet him sometime later,’ Shyamal, waved his hand and departed a broad smile on his face.

‘Envious fellow. Our miseries are mainly because of these green-eyed people in the town,’ Bimal cursed Shyamal

‘Is that Shyamal?’ asked Saptak’s mother, Mrinalini from the kitchen.

‘Yes, the same snoopy Shyamal,’ Bimal said. He remembered a conversation he had had with Shyamal five years back that made him conclude this opinion about his jealous neighbour.

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Bimal was in the living room sitting on his plastic chair. Electric supply was disrupted. The fans hanging over head stood still. The same was true for the leaves on the tress outside. There wasn't any breeze either. Bimal fanned himself with the morning newspaper. Moments later he suddenly saw Shyamal barging in without knocking the door.

'Hey, I heard that Saptak got admission in TechnoPolis Institute of Technology. Is it true?' Shyamal enquired gaspingly.. It seemed he came running all the way from the other side of town as soon as he heard the news.

'Yes, he joined Electronics & Telecommunication,' said Bimal, sounding happy about his son's achievement.

'Hey that's great man. Congratulations! Your son is a genius'

'Thank you! Well, sit down,' Bimal offered his chair and shifted to the sofa.

'What is his final score?' Shyamal was keen to know more about how Saptak got the seat at TIT, a very famous college on the outskirts of TechnoPolis.

'Err... he got around 215 out of 300. I don't remember the exact figure but I am sure that he got around 215,' Bimal said vaguely and called out to his son, 'Hey Saptak, what are your examination marks?'

Before Saptak could answer, Shyamal continued, 'Hey but my daughter Debaroti's final score is 260. And they told her there was no seat for her in TIT. How is that possible?' he was astonished and his pupils dilated.

'Is it? Did you check with the counselors properly?' Bimal asked.

'Yeah they said there is no seat for our girl, Debaroti. Finally we chose the local college in JyotiNagar itself,' Shyamal said ruefully.

'Oh man. The local college doesn't have any campus placement, right? How are you going to manage the issue?' Bimal said.

Shyamal chose to ignore the question like that of a seasoned politician and after a short pause, he enquired, 'You are BC or MBC?' It seemed he was more concerned about Saptak's success than his daughter's future.

Bimal answered proudly, 'We belong to UMBC - Ultra-Most Backward Caste.'

'UMBC? You are really lucky. We are just BC – Backward Class,' said the crestfallen Shyamal. But only Bimal knew how he walked from pillar to post to get that fake certificate. After all father's love can go to any extreme to see his son successful.

Later that night, Bimal was stewed that evil spirits might have entered his house through their nosy neighbour. He insisted his wife to perform traditional rituals at home to chase away the malevolence.

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After Shyamal left, Bimal let out his anguish, 'I don't know why idiots like these are interested in other people's affairs, 'he is always poking his nose in other people's business.' It was at this point when Bimal was reminded of Shyamal's face and he remembered that Shyamal did have a rather big round pointed nose, protuberance that no one can miss.

A loud interruption from Mrinalini intruded Bimal's analysis of Shyamal's face features. 'I think...,' she hollered from the kitchen.

'What?' Bimal asked irritated.

'I think he wants to get his daughter married to our son.'

'Ah! If he comes to know about your great son's adventures, both his daughter and he will vanish from JyotiNagar,' Bimal exclaimed derisively.

Bimal started thinking of lots of children each with one proudly bearing a big snout.

Mrinalini kept mum.

'Saptak, you want coffee or tea?' she asked from the kitchen.

'Yes Yes, why not. It's need of the right to go and serve the Lord,' Bimal sounded ruthlessly sarcastic.

Meanwhile, Saptak was still in the restroom brushing his teeth. The toothbrush moved in his mouth like a dog in search of food, pulling out the garbage from the dustbin. Irrked by the conversation, he shouted from the bathroom, 'give anything, but at least something.'

'Oh my dear Lord, please help the people in this house to finish their morning chores, they have been waiting since long.' Bimal was loud enough to make sure Saptak hears him.

Bimal's knock hit bang on target. Saptak heard Bimal loud and clear. Saptak heard everything that his father said. However, one alarmed strikingly in his ears - *Co-operate*.

'Co-operate,' he sighed. This very word has governed his pitiful existence all the while when working in TechnoPolis. The monotonous mingling of Ctrl-C and Ctrl-V governed his wretched software life. He felt terribly suffocated about it. Every time he wanted to revolt that very word, "Co-operate" pacified him swaying him miles away from his rebellion.

You have to co-operate Saptak, after all it's a team work,' Srini's strong words banged on his eardrums creating a vacuum in his brain.

That word, synonymous to a bad word now, had triggered a cold war between him and Nabo. His mind wished to traverse back and visit those TechnoPolis days however, the memories of Nabo's scary glare from behind his spectacles shook away the wish.

'Get out of the room now!' his mind commanded.

The sucked out, dry cigarette bud glided on the flushing wavy water in the commode, waiting to meet the sea somewhere, someday.

Chapter Five:

The Past, Beautiful

*He wanted to answer,
But his voice stifled
In his throat,
Glaring at the screen he thought,
It's so true,
What am I doing here?
He felt someone was smiling,
Then he heard the same voice,
It was so divine and serene.*

Debaroti had just completed her graduation. She was fighting the pangs of unemployment with herself and with her mother for her continuous demands of getting married. Debaroti was a girl of solitude who spent most of her time by herself. She liked idly sailing through her days of joblessness, whiling at home with no job in hand. Passing the days with her pre-occupied thoughts and small repetitive tasks gave meaning to her life. It made her feel irritated and surprised, at times, that for her mother that marriage was the next ultimate thing, the best thing. Every morning Alokanda deeply gobbled up the power packed matrimonial snippets in the newspaper which read, “***bride needed for only son of Highly qualified Chartered Accountant...MBA, IIT, CFA, Also knows scuba diving...Only sister very fair, very beautiful...***” Sometimes it is confusing to understand for whom the ad is. Is it really for his son? Or is it for the CA father who at his hearts of hearts wants to marry again and disguise a young heartthrob trying to shed away the 1960's look.

Playing alone with cards, constructing a card house was Debaroti's favourite pass time. Her computer engineering books waiting to be touched, cuddled were lying close to her. Remaining jobless for a long stretch of time is indeed frustrating. She had almost given up. The long wait to see an appointment letter in her hands had withered not only her hope but also her physical health. She had tried enough to crack the interviews. She would study hard for the interviews with lot of concentration and detailed attention to every bit she had learnt in her engineering. However, repeated rejections had tanked self-confidence. Debaroti now lived in hopelessness. The thought, the whole joy of being employed had got buried deep inside her heart with no signs of recovery, whatsoever.

Her dad's footsteps caught her attention. She discontinued her card house construction and meekly inquired, 'How is he?'

Shyamal caught the curiosity in daughter's eyes. He guess what she meant by 'he'. Looking into his daughter's eyes, he thought to himself 'My guess is right.'

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That morning, she woke up early. In an unusually restless manner she finished her morning chores.

'What is the matter with you?' he mother inquired.

'Nothing' she replied at first. After a pause she exclaimed, 'You know mom, Saptak is arriving today. I think in fact he must have reached by now, ,' she said looking up at the clock that showed 9:35 AM.

'So what?' her mom interrogated.

'Just informing,' she continued to sweep the floor.

Shyamal spotted his daughter's gladness about Saptak's arrival. He at once put on his shirt and walked to Bimal's house.

'Where are you going without having this coffee?' his wife Alokanda screamed.

'I will be right back,' he said. On his way out, whispered to his daughter, 'Let me see whether Saptak has come.'

Debaroti finished sweeping the floor quickly. She then waited for her dad to return. To kill her time she began with her favourite pastime, building card houses.

Like the card houses, Debaroti's dreams were high and shaky. During her college days, she was an ambitious girl with sky-scraper aspirations.. When her classmates aimed at getting married, having kids, Debaroti made them feel inferior by talking about her goals, working for a reputed company in the field of her choice, excelling in her career, going to become a CEO on day, and so on. While her friends talked about the sizes of their respective grooms and their naughty flings before marriage, Debaroti focused on transforming into a role model for the female generation.

However, the castles of her dreams came down shattering when the much promised companies did not turn up for the campus recruitments and despite her best efforts she could not taste success with the mediocre companies.

Adding to her dismay, her mother invariably and unreasonably came up with the discussion of Debaroti's marriage, which aggravated Debaroti's frustration. Her mother would start the sadistic marriage chants every morning Debaroti woke up. Day after day, Aloknanda stirred new prospects and rejected them eventually... *Na na! E chele cholbe Na! Sunlam Or Mama r meye ekta para r mastan r songe paliyeche* (No No...This guy won't work out at all...His uncle's daughter fled with a local Hooligan). Her drilling got tougher and tougher....*He is just 5'3...Yakk!! He is so dark complexioned...His nose seems tilted...this salary won't support a livelihood.*

'Why don't we get her horoscope matched with of Haribabu's son?' she asked her husband. 'Don't ever take up that topic, Aloka. I know when she should get married,' said Shyamal at the top of his voice. Alokananda stared at him. She was not happy, which always led to unpleasant consequences. Shyamal knew the aftermath of his disobedience - couple of utensils smashed on the kitchen floor. Later he would be denied coffee. Sometimes, her anger persisted well until the evening disrupting their nocturnal romance. He dared to take the risk though, just for his lovely daughter who seemed to show little enthusiasm towards marriage.

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Arranged Marriages:

Marriages are made in heaven and arranged marriages are made in *Bharat Matrimonial* or *The Sunday Ananda Bazaar* (*that's how they claim*). At times, relatives play important role of brokers dealing in that rare commodity of love and inheritance. They bring in relatives from all nooks and corners claiming that they share a very close bond, even if that means the last time they spoke to each other was a decade ago.—

The bride's father has a real hectic job but then it's a question of whole life of his daughter and his pride. So the gradual drilling turns stiffer and stiffer over a period of time.

The groom's father on the other hand, lands up in state of somewhat disappointment as his son wasn't able to find a proper girl on his own even at the age of 30.

The two families sit facing each other with plastic smiles on their faces, on opposite sides of the table, exchanging specious gestures. . The boy has started with his long sweet and flirtatious stares at the girl's cousin sister. The bride enters with a tea tray in her shaky hands. Ah! Shaky

hands? Is it the strong Tequila shots at the Tantras last night? *Eso Ma, Ki misti dekhte (Come my daughter! So chhweett)*...The groom has already started dancing around the trees...Thanks SRK!!

All well that ends well...So was the marriage and the reception....barring some minor incidents... The bride had too much makeup ...The groom's red underwear was clearly visible throughout the wedding. Some optimistic hearts here and there...This is my number...Please call me...I have the full Brilliant Tutorials IIT material...Although I am studying BCOM now ... OMG! The groom was bald on the marriage day and now he has full grown hair!...Thanks to Habib's. Ambarish got a bit carried away with two pegs of Royal Stag and tried to kiss the bride's cousin sister...She is hot man!!!!.....all well that ends well....

Poor humans!!! It never ends!! The painful saga has just begun...

And then the clock ticks 11:30. All too tired after the reception, except for the groom. Come on man! This is the night! His wait for 30 long years was finally going to end. Besides little naughty hanky panky with Ruchi in Nicco park, the groom had never experienced any sensual encounters. And today was his day to pump to glory. The room was full of aromatic roses. The fragrance had spread into every corner of the room. Groom's elder brother had very beautifully decorated the entire room with red and pink roses, everywhere on the bed, all over the room. The bride, covered with the bridal costume and shyly looking at the floor, occupies the farthest corner of the bed. The boy walks in with soft steps looking around the room; the same room which he had inhabited for last 30 years was now appearing a complete strange place. The scent of the flowers in the room was replaced by tensed atmosphere. While silence prevails in the room, abrupt hushing sounds were being heard outside the room – “OMG! They haven't started yet! When will he finally do it?” The groom's boudis too excited, tried to peep and see what's happening inside...It's getting late!!! Tension levels rise inside the room. Hearts thumping inside the ribcage. The groom finally approached his newlywed, ‘Shono na, why don't you change your saree...It can get spoiled...It is quite expensive’

‘Oh!!! So you want to see me naked so early....Bapiiiii!!! Whom did you select for me?’ anger expelled from within the bride, ‘I don't sleep so early, and where's my glass of milk...haven't you told your mom that I can't sleep without a glass of milk at night,’ she continued.

‘Good lord! She needs milk. I thought I was the one who is supposed to be served with a glass of milk. Excuse me for today...I totally forgot to tell mom, tomorrow onwards everything will be perfect,’ he sounded irritated and confused.

‘Now, can we please go to bed? Errrghh I mean to sleep,’ he continued his angst further.

'Please go out. I need to change. Get my bag,' she ordered him.

'What!!!! Please, I can't go outside...All my Boudis are standing at the door I know,' he was startled, 'I am your husband...for the next seven lives.'

'Moron....I think this is my seventh and last life with you,' she mumbled within her heart.

The groom reaches very close to his beloved. He sits next to her. He plays his fingers on hers as if playing a sweet melody on the piano. Irritated, she pulls her fingers away. The silk sherwani adds to the groom's discomfort so he plans to change into something simple, loose, and free flowing. He suggests to her that they change into something comfortable....He gets up and walks towards his table without looking back, although a passionate desire to jump into the bed has grasped his entire body, especially between the legs. He looks at his short pants, which he has been wearing for the last 5 years, he picks it up but reluctantly puts it back thinking that the idea of an old short on the first night won't be too good...he turned his attention to the pair of pajamas that he had recently bought from the road side market. As he is changing into a comfortable outfit of his desire, a rhythmic jingle of bangles trickles into his ears. Being careful that he doesn't get caught, he frightfully stares at her soft milky back and the shoulders that are mildly getting draped into a silky night gown. The fire within gets intense and is waiting to explode out like a raging volcano. He craves to kiss her fervently but worried that she might term him as a sex maniac, he controls his desire. Meanwhile, thoughts start gushing in the bride's mind – "He is so cold....At least could have kissed my The bride feels as she quickly changes.... Riju Da was far better....He use to kiss me so passionately...Bapi is sick, she dumped him just because he was a sales representative..."

The couples lay on the bed pretending to sleep. The boy is still contemplating about the starting move. Should I start with a kiss or directly hug her tight and give soft bites on her ear or move my tongue softly around her neck, all over her face. The groom is much ahead in thoughts though, getting irritated with the entire episode, cursing him for his slow and cold approach. The groom finally breaks the ice by asking his spouse about her wellbeing and thanking that the entire process of wedding went well. The bride is however interested more in the process of the first night after the wedding. The aura of the 0-watt red bulb has cast its erotic spell around the entire room, it has spread its wings of romance to cuddle the newlyweds into the nuptials. He looks deep into her eyes, holds her face, and moves his thumbs over her ears while still staring deep into her, he sight then reaches the lips followed by neck and finally resting at the pounding

big round voluptuous bosom. The voice of their breath can now be heard vividly. Besides the Subho Drishti time, she feels like hugging him and running her fingers through his neatly cropped hair but controls her fire. The conversation dies out gradually. Both are tired but the stares continue. ...Both look deeply into each other's eyes, exchange sweet smiles and giggles. She loves his tired smile. He slowly starts caressing her hair....And then the '*first night together*' and the bliss of the marital life begins with a deep long kiss...

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With dad on her side made Debaroti happy.

'You can still pursue your dreams, you know dear!' he told her one day. She looked up at him quizzically. 'You can go to TechnoPolis and try searching for a job there,' he continued.

'Will mom agreed to this?' she asked. To an outsider, Shyamal may appear to be hen-pecked, which was true in a sense. It was imperative that any decisions made should have an affirmative nod from Alokanda. Shyamal ensured that devoutly.

'You are not going to stay alone dear,' he smiled

'Are you going to accompany me then?' she asked innocently.

'Not me...'

After noticing her annoyed face, he came near her and said, 'You see a deal can be made only if it's a win-win situation for both the parties. Your mom wants you to get married quickly. But you like to take up a job and excel in your career. Hmmm, what if we do like this?'

'Like what?'

'You agree to your mom's wish but on condition that the groom should be employed in TechnoPolis. And while meeting your groom, you can demand his commitment to pursue your dreams after marriage.'

For some time she remained reluctant, gazing at the floor. He whispered, 'And I guarantee that you will not have to marry Haribabu's son. I have already framed a story to dismiss her idea altogether. What say? Deal?' He raised his thumb up.

She blushed and both burst into laughter.

'Dad...' Debaroti tried to catch Shyamal's attention

'Hmm...'

'Did you meet Saptak? How is he?'

'Nope, he had just woken up. Give him some time, dear!' Shyamal patted his daughter's head and went inside.

Her interest for Saptak had grown over days, not just because he was working in TechnoPolis but that he was her favourite childhood buddy. She felt comfortable with him and knew all his little habits. His tomfoolery at impressing her and his interest in her assets at times aroused a certain degree of predilection for him. She was quite aware of his *'Drop the eraser and under-skirt adventure'* game in her teens which irritated her terribly but that Saptak was the most reliable and trustful guy she could ever bank on was also equally true.

She wrote many 'how are you?' mails and sent 'forwards' to him with a little bit of gossip or some local humour. It was always a hit and miss affair with Saptak – little like the postal system in the early 19th century. You never knew quite what to expect. Some of her mails got immediate responses while few went unanswered. She consoled herself thinking that Saptak might be busy.

Eventually Debaroti developed a warm relationship with Saptak's mother Mrinalini. Debaroti had got to know about Saptak's arrival from Mrinalini.

Debaroti waited for Saptak with the curiosity of that like a little child. She was going to see him after a long time. Her happiness knew no bounds. However, this time their relationship wasn't going to be same as earlier. She had begun to weave a new perspective; slowly entwining the threads of love. Her fully developed adulthood stimulated the feeling and slowly nurtured it deep inside her bosom.

She wasn't satisfied with her father's response. It all seemed a little tawdry, but remained calm nevertheless – after all her father only had her best interests at heart. She sat in the corridor and gazed at the road.

On the small glass-top table in front of her, the card house remained half-built.

Chapter Six

The Constructors

'Look inside,' The voice said,

'Look deep inside,'

'Is it what you wanted?'

And he sensed the hollowness inside.

Finishing his subsequent cigarette and transforming the lavatory into a smoke chamber, Saptak came out and saw his grandpa - a lonely soul in white dhoti – waiting for him. His bare body exhibited the drooping nipples and wrinkles of old age.

Whenever he looked at the simple, bald man and his relaxed way of living, he remembered the forwarded mail that he got from the Captain Oxy in Technopolis - the mail that had always kept him fascinated about energy, time and money.

The mail read:

We have three stupid stages in our life...

Teenage: Have Time + Energy; but No Money

Working Age: Have Money + Energy; but No Time

Old Age: Have Time + Money; but no Energy

Moral of the story: Have a balanced life.

'No problem... You have done enough calculations and discovered this stage of life where you can have ample amount of all the three – energy, time, and money,' Saptak thought to himself proudly. And just then the reflection of a jobless fellow jammed him eroding away his pride.

'Hello grandpa. How are you?' Saptak greeted his grandfather.

'Hmm...'

Grandpa attempted to raise his voice but it petered out like a fountain in summer. He staggered into the bathroom and shut himself inside. But not before farting squeakily and leaving behind some pungent impressions in the air.

Saptak always knew his grandpa to be a man of few words. He literally stopped talking when his wife, Saptak's grandma, Amala Bala, died at the age of 70, three years back. Nobody could read his mind since then. Staring at the road which meanders just underneath his window, he would pass hours after hours.

'A good conversation,' he mocked at his grandpa.

Bimal sat on the sofa deeply immersed in the morning newspaper. A headline, ***'Chicken thief got hacked to death by mob in Podphata'*** had caught his entire focus. Suddenly, creaking sound of the restroom door shook Bimal. He at once stopped reading the newspaper, folded it, and kept it aside. He took a quick glance at his silver wrist watch. 10.30 AM! The inferno of rage started burning and slowly engulfed his whole existence.

It seemed he was determined not to get up from the seat unless he got an answer to the persistently nagging problem. Rotating his shoulders in clockwise and then in anticlockwise direction, he warmed up, as if for the final act. He bombarded Saptak with question as soon as he saw him, 'Hey, what is your plan now?' Saptak was stumped at this question, a question as mysterious as life is.

'Plan?' Saptak blinked. The mobile phone in the shirt pocket beeped and buzzed loudly, adding fuel to the fire.

Bimal felt really sorry for delaying his question for 10 minutes. Anger simmered in him as he thought he would now need to wait indefinitely to get answers to his questions from his very own son.

'Just a sec dad,' and Saptak and walked back to his room in order to attend the call. It was Captain Oxy.

'Hey man, what's up?' asked Saptak.

'You know what? Last night Nabo was robbed of his palmtop,' Captain Oxy shrieked.

'Oh man...how?' he asked.

'You knew right? Earlier in the morning he gave his bike to the service station...'

'Yeah...'

Captain Oxy started narrating, might be for the fifth time in a day. 'The incident happened in the evening around 8.00 PM. He was walking from the office to the service station. Two guys on a bike waylaid him and snatched it from him.'

'Oh... didn't he resist?' Saptak asked anxiously.

'He went completely blank after one of the robbers slapped him.'

'Poor soul...'

'You know, it was a bad day.'

'Yeah, yeah I know...Where is he now?'

'He is with me and both of us are going out to get another palmtop. May be a cheaper one this time,' he said.

'Oh okay'

'What are you doing now?'

They talked for about 25 minutes. He hung up the phone and sat on his bed. 'It is quite horrifying. The city is turning more and more unsafe nowadays,' he shrugged as he remembered the time when Aisha got attacked by local hoodlums.

It was around 11pm when she came out of Pick and Stick Technologies office waiting for a shuttle. The road was completely deserted except one or two small tea-stalls still waiting for the call-centre guys to warm up their cigarette trade. The air was packed with the sweet stink of marijuana. It came from the bonfire side where the late night cabbies waited while warming themselves up. All of a sudden, a group of four drunken thugs in a decaying Indica came near Aisha and started gesturing obscenities. A pony-tailed one came down from the Indica with a beer bottle in hand. Still reeking in alcohol, he struggled to walk and tried to reach out for Aisha's T-shirt which read 'Beauty lies in the eyes of the beer holder'. The moron took it literally and got too carried away, may be. The hasty occurrence of the incident had totally taken Aisha by surprise. Luckily her piercing and terrified screaming went as an alarm bringing the cab drivers for her rescue. 'Bahenchyo, Saale' filled the air as the Indica left off hurriedly and vanished into the hearts of the City of Joy.

Saptak lazily glanced at the mobile screen to check the time: 10:55 AM. Having realized he hasn't chomped for long and is craving for a cup of tea, he called out to his mom, 'Ma ...tea'. He crossed the living room pretending not to notice his dad, who is furiously sitting on the sofa.

His mom didn't respond to Saptak's request.

'Ma...' Saptak pleaded as his day couldn't start without a tea.

Even Mrinalini knew it, but she was determined to break the silence. 'Answer us first. Then have the tea,' Mrinalini turned towards Saptak with a cooking pan in her hand. Her eyes were dilated with pain and fear.

'What is there to answer?' Saptak raised his voice in disdain. 'Why are you looking sad as if the ship has sunk? What is all this pother about?' he asked his mom.

Meanwhile, his dad, like a lion waiting for his chance to pounce on the prey, bounced from the sofa hurling the paper away. He started yelling at Saptak. 'What are you going to do now is our question?' The fire that blazed his eyes travelled past his glasses and left Saptak searing. The silence that followed was briefly interrupted by the screech of the bathroom door that was flung

open by his grandpa. He moved like a tortoise from the bathroom unaware of a war-like situation around him.

Saptak shouted with his head down, 'I will do whatever I can' and left the house in a jiffy.

'I will do whatever I can,' he used to tell Nabo in Technopolis. Like a cold wind, Saptak's words sent a chill down their spine.

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11:25 AM

Bimal was boiling with anger. He wandered restlessly through the house like an animal on the prowl. 'Where on earth did he go now?'

Mrinalini, who had earlier issued a short-term bandh to her household chores owing to the chaos, said in a sympathising tone, 'Poor boy... he left the house without even having anything.'

'Don't feel sorry for him. He doesn't care about his parents. Why should we be concerned about him?' Bimal fretted over his son's irresponsibility. Mrinalini, wanting to pacify him, turned to the kitchen immediately.

Bimal was dazed and his mind wandered in a mist of memories. It took him to the days when his son got a job. The time when he underwent a mix of emotions and the same time he gave priority to his son's feelings above his own.

'The entire money that I invested on him has gone for a toss,' he murmured. He was referring to the amount paid to the IT Company, *Pick n Stick Technologies Pvt. Ltd.*, under the guise of security deposit before his son could join as an employee. Saptak had to serve the company a minimum period of two years or else, a clause in the contract stipulated that his security deposit would not be refunded. After much calculation and persuasion from the relatives, he had paid the bond amount of Rs 1 Lac to the organisation.

'Why should we pay and then work for them?' his wife hadn't understood the logic for a long time. Mrinalini failed to understand why the IT companies ask for security, that too from her son. It should have been the other way round.

'Coffee...' Mrinalini handed over the third cup of the day. She knew how to cool him down. The caffeine gave Bimal a temporary relief from his worries. She watched him sip the coffee loudly. Sitting on the veranda, he glanced at the gate expecting his son to return anytime.

Interrupted by the footsteps of Saptak's grandpa, Mrinalini turned back. Grandpa wore a white dhoti and stood near the dining table awaiting his breakfast. Mrinalini read his mind and said, 'Yes father, I am coming.'

A lot of futile calculations wedged Bimal's mind as he tried hard to cope with the monetary loss caused by his reckless and immature son.

Chapter Seven

The Threads

His bare feet stung as he walked on the sun-baked road. His mind was too pre-occupied to notice the absence of shoes in his feet. It juggled back and forth between his newly found freedom and loss. In his worry, he barely noticed that he was crossing Debaroti's house.

'Saptak...' a female voice called him.

The voice felt like a pleasant breeze that stopped Saptak in his stride, He turned around to see who called him. It was Debaroti. Seeing the beautiful girl, Saptak said to himself, 'Hmm... not bad. She has grown more beautiful over the years.'

She was slim and wore a short-sleeved white shirt that covered her ripened bosom. The black mini skirt showed her curvy hips. Her charm was like caffeine for him that stimulated his brain cells. He felt refreshed instantly. A thin strand of hair dangling from her head danced on her long nose. The hastily arranged mass of hair indicated that she had rushed out to catch before he crossed her house.

'Hi Saptak. How are you?' she smiled.

'She has an angelic smile,' he thought. 'She has matured.'

Calmness settled in his spirit. He liked the natural colour of her lips unlike the varnished lips of the girls in Technopolis.

'Hey Debaroti. I am fine. How are you?' he said while fiddling his mobile phone.

'Why do you reply my mails so late?' her nose became red for a moment.

That question shook Saptak a bit. 'Hey nothing, I was busy yaar...' he said. His mind scolded him for ignoring Debaroti all these days. It warned him to beg her pardon and regain her feelings for him. He spoke to her affectionately, 'You will forgive me, won't you Debaroti? Please...'

'I was just joking. In fact, I'm aware of your busy schedule, Saptak.'

'Oh really!' he exclaimed.

'Yeah. I frequently enquire about you to your mom' she said.

'Oh I see. How is your life going on?' he asked earnestly.

'Me? I am just a useless girl sitting idle at home, watching TV, chatting with friends and pestering you with my mails.'

Before she could complete her statement, Saptak interrupted, 'Hey come on yaar... Please don't say that. I don't like when you talk like that'

She smiled happily at him and asked, 'Is everything going smooth on your side?'

'Yeah of course,' he lied.

'Confessing everything to a girl is equivalent to committing suicide,' his mind commanded. He remembered the phone call he had with a girl in Technopolis that ended abruptly. 'Hey you know what? I know this is temporary, but I feel your voice sounds sweeter than before. Can you simply keep talking to me (grin).' Of course he was honest to that girl that day but it had unexpected consequence. Since then, he thought twice before telling the truth to any girl.

'Sometime back we heard your papa shouting?' Debaroti enquired teasingly.

'Nothing, like that,' he said. While he was struggling for words, his mobile phone rang much to his rescue from the uncomfortable situation. He grabbed the chance to escape.

'Okay yaar... Let us meet after sometime leisurely,' he said to Debaroti.

'Sure Saptak. Bye bye,' she said closing the gate.

As if the mission was accomplished, she moved towards her house while Saptak was engrossed in the mystery behind the call that he just got from Aisha, the colleague and the dream girl of Nabo in Technopolis.

Debaroti saw Saptak walking back home. 'There is something wrong. Saptak is certainly trying to hide something from me,' she thought to herself. She could notice it from his reclusive body language and the manner in which he dodged her questions on the confusion and chaos at his home. The memories of similar experiences, during their adolescence, were still etched on her mind.

It was about eight years ago. They were the neighbourhood friends who wore shorts and mini-skirts. They were often seen together at the playground opposite Saptak's home. They were happy playing hide and seek, flying kites, teasing each other, fighting and enjoying until the day the little girl Debaroti cried aloud from the bathroom. Her mom rushed inside and came out with a smile on her face. Having understood the reason, her dad also smiled. For the first time in her life, Debaroti noticed her parents celebrating while she was bleeding.

The next day when she wanted to go out and play as usual, her mom stopped her from being the same playful girl thereafter. She asked why.

'Enough of playing, you have grown older now,' came the reply.

After about 15 days of coaxing, she was allowed to go to the play ground. The little boy Saptak asked her, 'Hey, why did you go away suddenly without informing me?'

'No, I was here only. I was made to stay inside the home,' she replied.

‘You mean house arrest?’

Debaroti put her head down and said, ‘My mom told me that I’ve become a big girl now and I should not talk with boys anymore.’

‘Is it? But my mom never said anything like that to me,’ Saptak was bewildered and continued, ‘If you are big, then I am big too... Who knows? I might even be bigger than you,’ he said and immediately felt sad. But his sadness was short-lived as he sensed a different kind of smell from her body which he felt pleasant. ‘Hey, what perfume are you using?’ he asked her, ignorant of the science behind the new fragrance from her body, a telltale sign that she has attained puberty.

‘Perfume? I’m not using any. I don’t know where it is coming from,’ she replied.

While she spoke, her voice blended with the new fragrance from her body and raked in something inside his brain. He felt a sudden rush of excitement which he liked. He felt his head spinning.

Noticing an odd expression on his face, she asked, ‘What Saptak? What’s the matter with you?’

He suddenly came back to his senses and said, ‘Nothing...’

‘No, tell me... you thought something and you are hiding that from me,’ she came forward.

‘No, I am not hiding anything...’

‘Saptak...’

‘No... I think, I think my mom is calling me. I’ve to go.’ Saying that, he ran away.

Debaroti was puzzled by his strange behaviour despite having noticed the instant bulge in his trousers. It took five years for her to understand the mystery.

Debaroti, even when she was a little girl, could read it from his body language if Saptak tried to hide something from her. After the present incident, she said to herself once again: ‘This guy is really hiding something...’

Chapter Eight

The Destructors

*He felt he was only running,
In a race where others were there,
He knew it was hard to win,
As it leads nowhere....*

Saptak was walking towards his home while attending the phone call:

'Hello Saptak?'

'Yes Saptak here.'

'Saptak, I am Aisha.'

'Yes Aisha, tell me, what's up?'

Aisha started the talk formally 'How are you?'

Saptak laughed a painful smile.

'Enjoying my new found freedom, How about you?'

'Yeah I am fine, Saptak... Saptak you have any whereabouts of Nabo? I tried reaching him many times since this morning and his mobile is switched off all the time,' she said in a worried tone.

'Oh that...' he recollected, 'You know, he lost his mobile last evening; actually not lost, he was robbed.'

'Is it? Oh god, so frightening,' she said.

Enthusiastically he shared the details with her.

'Was he physically assaulted?' she wanted to ensure Nabo was safe.

'No, don't worry. He is going to get a new mobile. Just wait for some time; he will call you,' Saptak assured her.

Aisha closed her eyes and said a silent prayer for Nabo and continued, 'Okay, thanks Saptak. Let me wait for his call.'

'Sure, not a problem,' he said.

'Also sorry for disturbing you...huh?' she said.

'Hey come on Aisha,' he said reassuringly.

'Okay then, will call you when I have an update. Thanks Saptak,' she said.

'Thanks Aisha, bye.'

'Bye,' she ended the call.

By the time he finished his talk, his legs had brought him before his dad. He looked into the red eyes. 'Oh man!' he thought 'What have I done to myself?'

Bimal stood up with his hands on the hip and hollered, 'Hey...'

'Dad...' Saptak trembled in fear.

'What man? What's on your mind?' he asked in a harsh tone 'What are you thinking?'

'No nothing. What should I think?'

Mom quickly cleaned the table where grandpa just finished his breakfast and assembled at the spot with a cloth in her hand.

'You are continuously insulting me...' he complained.

Saptak's mobile phone rang again. Bimal was infuriated by the annoying mobile phone at such situations. Before Saptak could escape from the place, he quickly seized the mobile from his hands and without a second thought, threw it away.

It was at the same time that grandpa appeared there for his morning walk. The mobile phone flipped twice in the air before it hit grandpa's head and landed on the floor, leaving a red spot on his head. Grandpa fainted to the ground with a thud, gasping.

Bimal turned around not realising what his action had resulted in.

'Father...' Mrinalini cried aloud while trying to support him. Bimal and Saptak rushed to the spot forgetting their fight for the moment.

Grandpa's news spread like wild fire in JyotiNagar. Soon the ambulance was called and after about 30 minutes, everyone including neighbour Shyamal and his daughter Debaroti were seen standing outside the general ward of the government hospital in JyotiNagar.

The doctor said, 'The patient had got a sudden shock. It will take a bit time to bring him out of it'

He said shortly, 'Nurse, put him on drips,' and walked away from that place.

Mrinalini sobbed with her head down albeit with little tears. Bimal patted her shoulder and asked Saptak, 'Are you happy now?'

To ease the situation, Shyamal took Bimal and his wife to the hospital's cafeteria.

Dad's words hit Saptak like a hammer. He wanted to flee the scene. He came out of the hospital and stood at the entrance for some time. He searched for his cigarette pack and lighted one. As the smoke went into his lungs and rejuvenated his brain cells, he tried to think what

should be done next. While sitting in the prison cell and sharing the joint with Oxy, he had created rosy illusions of some distant innovative idea but the whole morning saga had shaken him thoroughly.

Suddenly he noticed Debaroti approaching him. He wanted to ignore her and remained silent. She stood before him, her bosom resting on the folded arms and asked him, 'Saptak, tell me what happened really?'

He spoke bluntly as he was aware that it was no use beating around the bush.

'I quit my job,' he said.

'Oh man!' She was taken aback. At once she felt her career dreams collapsing like a heap of cards. She stared at him unbelievably and moved a few steps backwards as if to warn him not to propose to her now or she might slap him.

'Why did you quit? What happened?' she asked

Saptak took a deep breath gazing at the ground. He felt the pangs of memory as he tried to recollect his journey.

The dry leaves swirled up in the wind.

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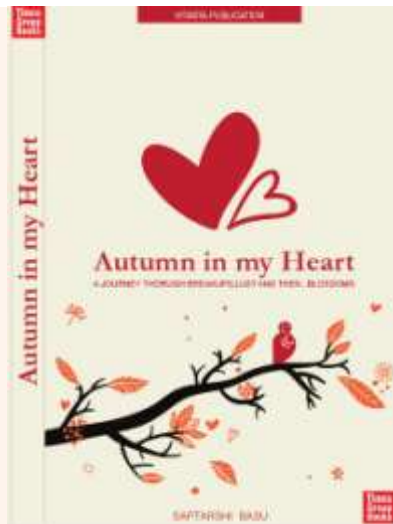
AUTUMN IN MY HEART- PUBLISHED BY TIMES OF INDIA

A Journey through Breakups, Lust and then...Blossoms

Does love really end when you have a breakup?

Does life really end when your long time love leaves you?

Does Love always mean you have to be with the opposite sex?



Deb, I will be waiting for you. You know I just did the waxing yesterday! Oh God! Pooja, not now!

-A big flirt

How much he was mad about her! And then it was all over. The razor shined the last unforgiving minute. A puddle of blood formed on the white carpet as Deb lay there, his soul still fighting to unite with his creator

- An attempted suicide

Ayantika's mother was shouting...this conversation had been going on for long...since last November and it was already April....I don't want to marry now mom, I have told you a million times...Please Dad, make mom understand

- Arranged marriage blues

Na Hanyate Hanyamane Sarire-Consciousness is eternal it is not vanquished with the destruction of the temporary body. My son, you need to seek the truth within yourself, and that will set you free

- Guru Lama's word

And Vinod started his story... When Ashwini Uncle knocked the door, he was already all wet. And then... All I could feel was the prickling of the moustache and my lips locked

- A confused Soul

As the rain slowly kissed his face soaking him, he couldn't stop thinking about Ayantika and how much he loves her. It was difficult to look up as it had started raining heavily. He silently thanked someone, somewhere up above .Love never dies

- A transformed Soul

LOVE {LOGIC} & THE GOD'S ALGORITHM

"Close your eyes and think about your College days - What you see? Girls, Grass, N-10, Crush, Whiskey, fight with seniors over a football match.....and no studies...What a life!!!!

Saptak's life was based on 3G- No, not about the latest mobile technology but GUITAR, GRASS AND GIRLS- 3G (let's un-complicate :))

Now, again close your eyes and think about your professional life. What you see? Oh shit!!!! f**k I am screwed.

PNS Technologies, Precisely Pick n Stick Technologies Limited where Saptak works - their motto "Creating the Stick that beats its Pick" - reigns supreme. Day in and day out Saptak's bewilderment continues to rise doing the monotonous Copy-Paste work. Strangled between the war of his mind and heart, Saptak finally quits his job and returns to JyotiNagar where Debaroti, his childhood companion waits for him.

Love keeps them confused and bewildered - Both Saptak and his room-mate Nabo. An incredible idea struck Saptak which slowly leads to the creation of his Software product company "Innovation Techlabs Pvt. Ltd."

What is the idea? Will he have a life? And Love? Or both?

Love, Logic & the God's Algorithm asks every reader the sole question - How long can you wait to you hear your inner voice? How long can you wait to clear your heart's doubt?"

Author Profile

Saptarshi, a Gold Medalist in Mechanical Engineering, has been in IT industry for last 7 years and has worked for top 3 IT companies of India. However, writing has always been first love, his passion. He has been regularly been published in several online magazines as well as in-house magazines of his earlier organisations. Saptarshi has written quite a few short stories and poems. Playing guitar is Saptarshi's another pursuit, he has been a lyricist for his college band.

"In his debut novel, Saptarshi ventures into an untouched arena altogether with unique style of writing. A beautiful tale of a person's search for his inner self. An Inspiring story for today's youth."

- Kunal Bhardwaj, Author "Love was never Mine"

"Basu writes in a suave and candid manner, portraying the shades of the IT industry and covering it with a tale of an individual's search for his identity, his soul."

- Faraaz Kazi, author of the best-seller "Truly Madly Deeply"

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