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The Girl

(Take care not to feel afraid!)

Ramesh Chandra Tiwari
Bahraich, India

“All of a sudden the train jolted and then it came to an abrupt halt,” began Jay. “A few minutes later, when it did not start, there rose a babble of voices in the noiseless coaches. Slowly the news that the engine had failed spread everywhere and with that the passengers started to disembark in ones and twos. At first I decided to remain on my seat, waiting for the train to move, but when it did not budge for a long time, my patience with the sultry air inside snapped and I too got off. The outside atmosphere was white in the bright and silvery moonlight. The people had thronged along the train and were talking to each other. Since I had no friend to talk with, I stood watching them and the surrounding area which looked to be wooded because there was nothing in front of us, but low trees and vegetation as far as the eye could see.”

“What happened next?” asked Harish, looking at him anxiously.

“I walked forward,” he continued, “towards a group of people with a view to listening to them; but as I edged closer, I saw a girl in white standing by them on the grassy slope. She was stunning. My eyes riveted on her face. She gave me a quick, upward glance then lowered her eyes. Then again she shot me a sideways glance as she turned to the right. Now I slid down the slope and came face to face with her. The charm of her beauty and vivacity eventually led me to feel a surge of love and desire for her.”

“Did she look like your Annu?”

“Exactly. At first I mistook that girl for her. But shortly afterwards, her strange behaviour aroused my suspicion. Anyway, our eyes met for a split second and we both looked away. My clumsiness embarrassed me, but after a short while she beckoned to me, swooping down the slope. At first I could not gather the courage to go near her but after her repeated signals, I stepped forward to reach her and to my surprise, she eluded me. The further I moved forwards, the further she stepped backwards. But as I halted, she too did the same, giving me an enchanting smile. I thought perhaps she wanted to be alone with me, so I began to walk again, but for all my efforts I could not get closer to her this time too.”

“It’s strange how you could not chase after her!” shot back Harish in surprise.

“I couldn’t indeed,” Jay enthused. “Instead, after a few minutes’ walk, I turned to look back and found that we were a long way from the people standing near the train. I thought it was not safe for us to go any further in the secluded forest around midnight. I finally stopped but, you know, she came up to me and held me by my arms. Her soft grip felt like some angel had taken me under her care. She pointed to a large flat rock a few yards away from there. Now I knew what she meant so I agreed to walk with her.”

“What was it you knew?” he asked, with a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“Oh you... but you must know what she did to me.”

“Did she let you screw her or not?”

“Well, now you listen. When we reached there, she helped me to climb on the rock, jumped up onto it herself and hugged me tightly from behind. Then, after kissing me on the cheek, she rested her head on my shoulder, with her right cheek touching my left and her mouth exhaling warm air on my neck. I forgot everything except for the heavenly experience that I was having. For a few minutes we sat in that posture, and afterwards releasing me from her hug, she pushed me over on the surface and went all the way.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Yes! When it was all over for us, I looked at where my train was standing. There looked nothing but a waste land with sparse deciduous bushes, divided by a thin line of railway track, shining in the moonlight; and the woods were seductively silent except for an occasional murmur from the dry leaves. I was shocked and in my hurry I shook her by the arm. ‘Look, it looks our train has gone!’ I said to her excitedly. ‘My God, what will happen to us? Get up, you fool! Get up!’ But, to my surprise, she did not stir; instead, she lay smiling as though she had nothing to do with the train. ‘Won’t you listen to me?’ I shouted. ‘Mind I’ll leave you alone here.’ Then, not knowing what to do, I pulled her hard to me and jumping to my feet, I raised her to her feet too. But as I jumped down the rock, I saw her standing on the ground already. I held her hand and tried to hurry away to hail the next train, but she did not let me take a step forward. Now I pulled her with all my might and with a firm grip on her hand, which finally, as I noticed her turning black, offended her. Then, you know, her face slowly blackened; two long and pointed teeth grew out of her mouth; eyes turned red like the glowing embers of fire; and the tongue hung out, with drops of water dripping from it. Her hands too looked as black as a rubber rod, with long, pointed nails grown at each of the fingers. I was too terrified to move. Then she laughed nastily, which seemed like she was going to devour me. I cried out in fear, and then fell down on the ground, unconscious.”

“My God, what a deadly witch!” Harish exclaimed in horror.

“When I regained consciousness,” went on Jay, “I was confused; and it was after a long while that I could be aware of where I was. It was a big room, with tall windows and high ceiling, which looked as though it had not been cleaned for a long time as there was a thick covering of dust over everything and piles of dry leaves from the trees outside had gathered in a corner. Lying alone on the floor, I inferred from the golden rays coming through the window that it was the time in the morning. On the one hand, I was haunted by the frightening image of that witch, and on the other my arms and legs were failing to support my weight. I lay helpless, looking at the front door which, if flapped slightly in the breeze did to scare the hell out of me. I wanted that nobody opened it till I was able to make my escape. Just then it looked like someone was pushing the door from outside. I quaked with fear. Sure it must be the same witch I thought and began to flutter my hands and legs disparately trying to get to my feet, but in vain. The old

planks of wood shook once again and finally swung open. I covered my eyes with my hands but the sound of someone approaching was still more frightening. The footsteps came closer and then halted. As I peeped through the fingers to see who that person was, I cried out, 'God help me! The fiend will chew me up.' But I soon thought it was no use crying and so paused to gather my courage instead. 'I've done nothing to you,' I said to the weird looking figure, uncovering my eyes. 'Go somewhere else and for pity's sake leave me alone here! I have to catch my train – could you let me go to the railway line, please?'

“He shook his head in response. His long hair, hung down both his back and chest to his waist, swung and his tusks and bulb like eyes showed through them. A cry of horror broke from me and I could not help covering my eyes again. He growled in an abnormal voice, put his hard hand on my head, grabbed the whole bunch of my hair and suddenly lifted me up with a jerk. In no time I was in the air and felt as though all my hair would get rooted out. I could do nothing except for crying, 'Help, help, help...!'

“It was after a pretty long time that he lowered me to the floor, but his grip on my hair was still tight. 'You seduced my wife and then had her, too,' he hissed, bending over and removing my hands from my face with his other hand. 'I'll kill you in return,' he added to threaten me. I screamed as I looked at him. 'No, it was not I but rather...' I could not finish the sentence. 'Who took her here, then?' he rejoined. 'You didn't spend the entire night with her?' I looked towards him with huge, frightened eyes, then trying in vain to free myself from his grip, I said in a muffled, tearful voice, 'No, not at all, and besides, I don't know how I came here.' He clenched his teeth. 'So she is not here, you mean?' He twisted my head sideways. 'Who's that in the next room, sneaking behind the window?' he roared, pointing to the window of an adjacent room. 'Have mercy on me,' I whimpered, my heart palpitating like a frightened bird's. 'For God's sake leave me and let me go out!' He let go of my hair. 'Who is God and what is mercy that I should have?' So saying, he grabbed me by the throat. As he tightened his grip, his nails stuck in my muscles and my eyes began to bulge.”

Jay paused, waiting for Harish to respond; then he looked in his face but when he saw he was too stunned to speak and staring at him blankly, he continued, “At first I cried out like a goat, but my fear rapidly vanished as it became a matter of life and death. I cannot remember how I pulled myself free and with what strength I fell to hit him. All I finally saw was blood, welling from his broken nose. Now stunned by the unexpected and swiftness of the assault, he was overwhelmed and gave me more chance to punch him in the stomach, on the chin and the side of the head which at last left him too injured to retaliate. I had by now made up my mind to kill him, so I quickly bent down, clasped my hands around his legs and pulled them towards me very hard. His head crashed on the floor like a coconut as he fell flat on his back. He fainted and with that I quickly jumped over his head and started hitting him on the neck with my right leg. It was only after I was totally hot and breathless that I stopped hitting him.

“When I got my breath back, I ran out of the old mansion with a view to escaping from that wicked witch and going back to the railway line. But my hopes were dashed when I found myself unable to have a sense of direction outside, for there was a trackless forest of beeches, maples, elms, oaks, with the dense undergrowth of laurels, huckleberries and many kinds of fern all around. However, the sun light filtering through the canopy gave me a bit of hope and

courage. I jumped in and started running through the trees, saplings, shrubs and herbaceous plants in the direction that my extrasensory perception took me in. Many times my feet tangled up in underbrush, face brushed against intricate spider webs, pine needles got stuck in shoes, the briars caught at my clothes, hanging moss tickled and twigs snagged at hair; but ignoring all such obstacles, I crossed thickets, rivulets, uneven ground and knobby roots and did not stop until my fear of that witch was allayed. I gasped for breath, my chest heaving. Eventually, I took a halt and scanned the outlying area for any sign of the railway line. It did not come into view. However, the direction of last night's wind was still in my mind, which helped me thread my way through the groves, with my feet sliding through the leaves.

“Suddenly there came a rustling sound from among the leaves, which ultimately led me to think of the presence of reptiles and amphibious animals around there. Every time I put my foot on the leaves or near the bushes draped in ivy seemed like I was going to tread on a snake; or if a bramble pricked my legs, it felt like I was bitten by one. Even the creaking of branches and the whistling of wind around trunks scared the life out of me.

“I did not know what to do. There was a dense forest all around me - no man, no house, not even a hermit's hut wherein I could take refuge. My only companion was the daylight, beaming through the treetops, which I thought would not give me an escort all the way if I failed to find the railway line by sun set. Then it entered my head that the area of the jungle might be very vast and it might take me weeks to cross. ‘O God, what will happen to me?’ I said to myself. ‘Save me from being prey to some fierce animal.’

“Then, while I was looking around like a startled rabbit and was hurrying with sporadic pauses, vigilant for the appearance of wild animals, by some wonderful miracle, a train sounded its whistle in the distance. I beamed with delight and sprinted across the dense vegetation until I caught a glimpse of the railway line. The same ground of sparse scrub covered with partly dry grasses lay shining in the sun between me and the railway line. Now I was hopeful of catching the next train, but how it would be possible for me to flag it down was something that still puzzled me. ‘I'll stand by the line, waving my handkerchief,’ I thought. ‘They'll stop the train to see me standing alone in the jungle.’

“While I was deep in such thoughts, I heard a bellow, so I paused and looked around apprehensively. The same sound came once again. Now I emerged pale and shaking, my face contorted with fear. ‘My God, there's some big animal around here!’ I said to myself. Just then I caught sight of a massive bull elephant with huge tusks lolloping behind a copse ahead. At first I shook with fright, but soon I nerved myself to think about how I could dodge the beast. But as I tried to bypass it, two more of them emerged, ears flapping, from either side. Finally I felt compelled to glance back, but before I could think of anything else, the one on the right trumpeted, raising its trunk high, and then took a quick step forwards which looked as though it was going to run me down. In my hurry, I turned around and retraced my way.

“I became crazed with fear and did not even think that they would chase me down if I ran back. I saw them running after me every time I looked back and therefore galloped as fast as I could. Many times I evaded getting tangled up in the creepers and had a few near misses in the chase. I was constantly short of breath, yet hung on to duck down behind the trees. But they too were

determined to close in on me. Suddenly the trunk of an elephant touched my back. I shuddered; my mouth became dry, eyes widened, and legs started trembling. I was too tired and weak to run. I glanced desperately back, and with that I twirled around and fell flat on my back in a leafy bush.

“Now I was sure that they would kill me. But, to my surprise, they did me no mischief except that they stood around me swinging their trunks. A little while later one of them stretched out its trunk and began to turn me over. I wanted to cry but soon it struck me that I should feign dead with my eyes closed and leave myself to the mercy of God.

“I had been lying there for half an hour when I opened my eyes; and much to my surprise, they had already gone. I felt a surge of excitement run through me. But as I sprang to my feet to flee, I saw them standing only about two hundred yards away, still looking towards me. Now I had no time even to repent my decision. I dodged behind a big tree to hide from them. But as I peeked, I saw them stalking me. I began to thread my way through the woods again; and it was after a long run that I succeeded in hiding myself in a dense thicket before they could come close to me.

“Now and then I peeped to see if they were going to leave the place; but they kept meandering around in search of me. Meanwhile, I caught sight of a mansion just across the underbrush and managed to sneak in through its half opened door while they were not looking.

“But the inside of the house seemed as though it was the same where from I escaped in the morning. The thought of the dead body of that demon and also of the fierce witch filled me with dread. I looked around and found no trace of them; instead my eyes fixed on a window through which I could watch those elephants, so I made my way silently to it, where I pressed myself flat against the wall before peering through one of the broken panes.

“They were moving ahead, probing around in the bushes. I was excited to think that they would soon be out of sight and I would be able to get back to the railway line again. But when the time came and I turned round towards the door, I saw a girl in white sitting still in front of me facing the door. I could see her back with her hair hanging loose over it. She was motionless. I screamed and was paralyzed with fright.”

“I think it must have been the same witch,” said Harish, breaking the long silence, “as it is very difficult for anybody to escape the evil trap of their occult powers. By the way, what happened next?”

“Yeah, you’re right. When she turned towards me, I found she was none other than the same girl. Then I thought, ‘Perhaps I entered the same house through the back door. Her husband must be lying dead in the hall on the other side. She’ll certainly take revenge on me. Boy, you’re dead!’

“But as she stood up and turned to me, I saw a captivating smile on her face instead. She had wonderful clear skin and the same gamine charm which I found irresistibly attractive when I first saw her. She came forward, cupped my face in her hands and kissed me, then embraced me and stroked my short dark hair. ‘You must be hungry,’ she said genially, looking into my eyes. ‘Sit down on the stair and wait till I come back with some fruit and fresh meat.’ Then she let go of

me and went out closing the old and broken door firmly behind her. Although I felt the pleasantest part of love in the shade of her care, yet I could not help thinking she was a witch, so after waiting for her to be away, I made a dart for the door and tried it. Fortunately, the bolt on the outside had rusted and to my surprise, it opened. I craned forward to get a better view. There was no sign of her. I was buoyed up and in no time at all hurtled out in a flat-out sprint in the direction of the railway line.

“But I had only gone a few hundred yards when I saw a pack of wild animals coming towards me. It was too much for me, particularly when I was weak with hunger. I was sure I could not be able to save my life this time, yet I flew back to the house involuntarily and eventually succeeded in slipping in through the door. But before I could bolt it they forced their way in, their tails wagging and jaws open. Then they rushed me with a view to eating every piece of my meat.

“I made a dash for the other room, hotly pursued by them, then jumped out into the corridor through the other door and began to pound along it, trying to shut myself in one of the rooms down it on the left. But as I glanced back, I found them streaming closely behind. I carried on running until I reached the end of it where the door was closed, but there was a staircase on the right side of it. Quickly I turned round and made my way up the stairs and on reaching the top of it, I was out of breath. Since those laughing hyenas were still growling and grunting behind me, I had no chance of gathering my strength. I raced ahead on the flat roof top, not knowing what to do. Just then one of them bit me on the calf. I had no option but to leap forward and throw myself onto the ground.

“I fell on the brambles awkwardly, and not only did I become caught in them, I broke my leg and was unable even to move about. I screamed with pain, but as I looked up at those ferocious predators that were leaning over the rails of the roof peering down at me, my fear overcame the pain. Moments later one of them dived off, snarling and baring its teeth, and tore at the flesh of my leg. Then followed another which playfully took away one of my arms and started chewing its blood dripping bone. A third one jumped right onto my neck. ‘Help help..!’ I cried out. But before it could cut my neck, my eyes opened and I was in the train, lying on the floor below my berth, panting terribly.”

“You had a terrible dream, Jay. It looks like the loss of your love has left a lasting impression on you; or maybe it was because of the long talk about your friend that we had before we lay down on our berths. You know, soon I fell asleep and don’t know how long I had slept before I woke up to the thud of something falling onto the floor. When I got up to see what it was, I saw you had fallen off your berth.”