

A Mystical Encounter

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The mist was hanging heavy as I entered the forest. After a short walk, I came across a huge old concrete structure that appeared to loom out of the fog like a dinosaur from Jurassic Park. Broad slabs of stone stairs invitingly led up to the top. Impulsively, I climbed the stairs till I reached the platform on the top. A large bell hung from a heavy stone frame in the centre. Behind, the edifice was partly anchored on a rocky mountain that rose up from a calm blue sea. A short flight of steps led to a green terrace on the mountain slope.

'He...llo...!' I called. My voice travelled through the forest and echoed back from the mountains with extraordinary vibration that hit the bell and set it ringing. Softly, magically, a sound like that of a 'tanpura' playing flowed out from the bell accompanied by a soulful melody of raaga *bhairavi*. It was as if the raaga was alive. It enveloped me completely—lightly teasing the hair follicles on the skin like pin pricks of camphor. A strange calmness took over as I sat down and closed my eyes.

Each and every cell in my body went to a state of supernal vibration. I drifted deeper and deeper into meditation. A lovely scent of rose and jasmine was in the air.

I don't know how long I was in this trance like state. My reverie was broken by a strange feeling of someone close by. I opened my eyes. No one was around. I pulled myself up and went down the steps to the terrace on the mountain slope. There was a beautiful garden with an abundance of sweet smelling flowers. So this was where the scent was coming from! A paved pathway led to an alcove at the end of the garden, overlooking the sea. Strange! I had not

noticed this when I first came in. Twining vines of jasmine bush climbed over the pergola and formed a flowery canopy over a wrought iron seat. Someone was now sitting there.

The mist was still thick with poor visibility. From the distance, I could make out the silhouette of a man in a bright reddish-orange T-shirt. A strange compulsion pulled me towards that figure sitting there. As I came closer I also noticed his shoes—deep brown in colour with thick soles made for walking. Even though I could not see his face which was covered in

the haze, something about him seemed very familiar. Wait a moment... it was the T-shirt and the shoes! I had bought a similar T-shirt for Kamal from Canada! I remembered how Sunny and I went shopping for T-shirts. Kamal always liked them with pockets. We literally combed the stores in Barrie and downtown Toronto looking for a T-shirt with a pocket. Sunny showed me several very good ones but I rejected them because of no-pockets. "Man!...pockets on T-shirts

are so out of fashion!! Why would Kamal Fufa want a T-shirt with a pocket?" Sunny quipped in exasperation. Finally we found one with a pocket...it was only in one colour, a reddish orange.

Kamal was amused with the colour and asked quizzically, 'Isn't this too bright for my age?'. Yet I noticed that he packed the T-shirt in his suitcase when he went to Argentina for the World Congress on Psychiatry. I have pictures of him in that shirt. The paleness of his face (from the cancer he was harbouring inside at that time) was masked by the bright aura of the outfit. And those shoes....didn't we buy them from Hassan Calzature in Rome?

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It is weird, that this person here should not only be wearing Kamal's T-shirt but also his shoes! Just then the mist lifted and I could see his face. My heart skipped a beat. Quickening my steps, I rushed forward. When I reached him, I fell on my knees and put my arms around him...but I could not feel him. Yet he was there, with the same soothing smile and love in his eyes. He looked so handsome, so healthy and happy. I sat beside him on the bench.



Still Life, Vase with Twelve Sunflowers (August 1888) by Vincent van Gogh.

Even though I did not feel his physical touch, it did not matter, I was happy just to see him. There were so many things to tell him! Important things I wanted to share. Silly things that I could share only with him! He listened to my incessant chatter with a smile on his face. I told him how much I had missed him and said that I was so happy he had come back. I went on excitedly. "You know, your patients have been missing you too, very much. They will be very happy that you have come back. In fact there is a little boy who needs your help. Do you want to see him now?" I asked. He gently interrupted me, saying, "I don't want to see any patients. I came only

to see you". I felt a rush of happiness and the emptiness in my heart lifted. Yet, the transience of the illusion did not escape me. Nonetheless, I felt a desperate urge to plead, "Please stay with me, don't leave me again" I implored.

"You must accept the truth," he said gently and continued, "There is a law and all things living and non-living in this vast universe, from the gigantic stars to the infinitesimal grain of sand, are bound by this law....the absolute law." I looked at him in awe. He smiled and went on, "There is no chaos, no contradiction, no uncertainty only the dazzling light of pure truth..." "But isn't love the greater truth? And don't you know how much I love you?" I cried. He smiled and said, "I know, but you must understand." My eyes filled with tears. For want of better words to express myself, I recited the much clichéd sonnet of Elizabeth Barrett Browning with my eyes closed.

'How do I love thee? Let me count the ways... I love thee with the breath, Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death'.

The warmth of sunlight on my face made me open my eyes and I found myself lying on the cold stone floor. I must have fallen asleep here. High above, the sky was blue azure with floating white clouds. Slowly I got up and looked over towards the green terrace on the mountain slope. But there was no

paved path, no large garden with a canopied bower, no wrought iron seat...

Below, the forest was alive with sounds of birds, bees and gentle rustle of wind on the trees. As I stood there in a daze, I could hear Kamal's voice whispering with the breeze, as he recited from his favourite poet, Jibonanondo Das: "Abar asibo phire Dhanshirhi-tir tire ei Banglay....."

In remembrance of Dr Syed Kamaluddin Ahmed who was Professor of Psychiatry, Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College, Dhaka and left us on 21-12-2011 to continue his journey into the Great Beyond.