MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL

SHRIPAD DHARKAR
Sadashiv Mohite lay dead before the big mirror. Kiran was standing near the body, with the murder weapon in his hand, blood still sloshing through the fresh wound. Two days back Kiran had a fight with him on the street in full view of all and Sadashiv, revenge in his mind, was waiting for Kiran to give him a good thrashing. But now, he himself lay dead at Kiran’s feet.

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Shekhar Vaidya was about forty when he married Urmila. She was young, younger than him by twenty years. This difference in age rankled in Shekhar’s mind, especially as she was so beautiful. She was born in a poor family and so her father could not afford a costly marriage. So when Shekhar Vaidya’s offer for marriage came, it was a great relief. Shekhar was twice her age, but he came from a rich family. Shekhar himself was endowed with a handsome visage. What’s more, there were no untoward demands. Urmila was happy and devoted to her husband.

Shekhar used to tease her about his age. “Look, another grey hair on my head. Soon the whole crowd would turn grey and people will tease you – old husband...old husband... How would you feel then?”

“I wont care for them. Now don’t tease me like that.”

This merry banter livened the atmosphere and actually increased the love between them.

One day as Shekhar, accompanied by Kiran – Urmila’s cousin – went for hunting in the near by forest, he stumbled on a hard object. It was buried under a heap of dead leaves, stones and muck. Kiran dug under the soil and found a rectangular plate of steel. Who would have left this steel plate in the jungle? When Kiran removed the debris on it, the plate shone with the sun on it.

Kiran cleaned it with a cloth and to his surprise found that the plate was like a highly polished mirror and reflected images of trees, bushes and falling leaves. But the most astonishing thing of all was images of monkeys jumping from one branch to another, when there was not a trace of these mammals anywhere around. “It is like a mirror, reflecting the jungle above it but where the hell are the monkeys coming from,” said Shekhar. “Is this some miracle mirror? Let us take it home, it would be a beautiful piece, a bag of tricks.” Both tried to lift the object but it was so heavy that not an inch could be moved.

“It must be heavier than a ton,” said Kiran. “We will have to engage a gang of workers to lift and take it home.”

The gang of workers came and went, but the mirror did not budge. Kiran then engaged a crane to dig out the mirror. Not only was it difficult bringing it home but later erecting it on the wall, with concrete pillars on both sides, was an exhausting exercise.

“Well, it is home at last. Let us hope it brings with it good luck and cheer all round.”

But did it!!

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“Tanaji,” shouted Shekhar Vaidya, “Tanaji, what are you doing. I have been shouting for you to get me a cup of tea – quick.”

“Just bringing sahib. I was listening to the racket made by the rats in the locked room. So many rats playing about and the room has never been opened for God knows how many years. If you open it sometime I can put rat poison and finish them.”

Shekhar Vaidya, now sixty-five years old, thought about what Tanaji said about the locked room. It had never been opened after the murder of Sadashiv. He had been found with a stab wound in his back—long back, some 25 or 26 years ago! Most unfortunate that it should have happened at all. But young people with hot blood do not worry about consequences.

The history of that fateful day flashed before Shekhar’s eyes as he opened the lock of the room. The room was dark. As Tanaji flashed a torch, the dilapidated condition of the room became evident—the plaster on the walls had fallen off, everywhere there were cobwebs. Tanaji had to remove the cobwebs as he advanced forward. This was the mirror room but after a lapse of two and a half decades, Shekhar had completely forgotten the mirror fused to the wall.

Tanaji cleaned up the mirror. Shekhar stood before the mirror expecting to see himself but instead saw a largely proportioned hall full of grandeur. It was decorated with beautiful furniture of olden times—the walls painted and smooth. He saw servants cleaning the room—the furniture and the walls.

Just as he was wondering about this miracle, suddenly a figure appeared. He recognized the figure—it was himself, but quite young! It was his image when he was forty years old and was just married to Urmila. He saw himself and Urmila and also her cousin. There was a calendar on the wall—it showed the date 25th August 1950. “Why is it showing the date twenty-five years ago?” Shekhar exclaimed.

Shekhar had no inking. He thought it was magic of some sort—or may be not. May be some science behind this untoward, bizarre happening. Should he contact some scientist? Would it be possible for a scientist to unravel this mystery? Whom should he contact?

The he remembered his friend Sudhir Sen with whom he shared a room in the dorm. They were friends. Shekhar, after his B.Sc., joined the family business of farming and Sen pursued his career as a professor of physics after getting a doctorate in that subject. But will he recognize him now after a lapse of some forty years! Nevertheless, he decided to see Dr Sen, some worry eating at his heart.

“Professor Sen, do you remember me? An old friend of yours—Vaidya—Shekhar Vaidya—from the B.Sc class?”

Professor Sen stared at Shekhar for a full minute. The same handsome face, but now wrinkled with age, but the resemblance could be noticed. “Oh, yes, indeed I remember. How are you and what brings you here after so many years?”

“Dr Sen, I have a mirror I got in the forest. It is showing people coming and going. Servants shifting furniture, sweeping the floor and so on as it all happened some twenty-five years ago. The date on the calendar is also showing the day as 25 August 1950.”

“What!! That’s very intriguing. I must rush with you to your house and see it.”

“This is the mirror, Sudhir—the enigmatic mirror. It is showing this hall as it was twenty-five years ago—see the calendar on the wall. And servants coming and going but they are as they were twenty-five years ago!”

“It is surely most surprising. Who is this lady...and this man...looks like you but younger.”

“Yes, that’s my wife, she is no more, bless her soul. The mirror is showing us when we were going for a marriage ceremony all spruced up about twenty-five years ago.”

The professor was in deep thought. Then he spoke slowly.

“You see, Shekhar, when we stand before a mirror, the light waves taking our image go through the glass surface and are reflected back by the reflecting surface. But this happens instantly because the speed of light is tremendous—their lach kilometres per second. But in this case, if I am not mistaken, the light taking the images and going through the glass surface is getting reflected back very very slowly. What does it mean! It means that our images are going through the surface in twelve and a half years and are getting reflected back to come out after another twelve and a half years. So you are seeing scenes that happened twenty-five years ago. My dear Shekhar, what you have here is some miracle of nature. Through myriads of ages, the constant pressure exerted on it has turned the material so dense that it slows down the speed of light tremendously. I have read reports that Americans have produced dense material that slows down the speed of light. But this one is just phenomenal. I will have to come here and stay with you to carry on research on it.”

“Oh, of course, you are most welcome.”

After this Shekhar started doting on the strange mirror. He would look as it night and day. Tanaji would call him for lunch and dinner but he would order it to be brought to him in that room and eat it in front of the mirror. He liked some of the pictures, especially that of his wife whom he loved dearly. Once or twice he saw himself but walking quite unnaturally—as if in sleep. He then remembered that in those tense days he had developed sleepwalking. Of course, he had been through therapy and had been cured.

And then it happened! A picture flashed out of the blue—it struck him like lightning, leaving him speechless!

He saw Sadashiv sitting in that room in front of the mirror, waiting for somebody—for Kian—Tanaji had told in the court. He then saw himself walking in the measured strides of a sleepwalker, a long knife in his hand. And then he saw himself stabbing Sadashiv in the back, the long knife going straight through his heart! Sadashiv fell with the knife still sticking in his back. He then saw himself going away from the room in the same manner of a sleepwalker. Shekhar was transfixed with horror and disbelief!

Then in this benumbed state he saw Kian standing near the body, all perplexed, removing the knife. Suddenly there were people flocking around Kian with the blooded knife in his hand. So, this was it!! And the poor fellow had to go to jail for seven beautiful years of his young life for a crime committed by him.

Suddenly, Shekhar clutched at his heart...and fell to the ground...on the same spot where Sadashiv had died twenty-five years ago.

Will somebody see this scene after twenty-five years!!

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