

Bloody Winter

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Chapter 1

It was a dark evening in Acarn Hills town. The clouds hung low in the sky, casting a shadow over the landscape. The cold, breezy wind sent shivers down the spines of the few people who were out on the lonely road that cut through the hills. as a bus approached, the people gathered at the side of the road, eager to escape the chilling weather. They boarded the bus one by one, seeking refuge from the cold. But as the bus pulled away, a young woman carrying a bag on her shoulders came running, calling out for the bus to wait.

"Hey.....hey.....stop the bus....i said stop the bus.....hey, wait for me "

She was too late, and the bus disappeared into the distance, leaving her stranded on the deserted road.

Feeling the chill of the evening creeping into her bones, the woman looked around for shelter. She spotted a small path leading into the forest and decided to follow it. The tall sugar pine trees loomed overhead as she ventured deeper into the darkness of the woods. after a while, she came upon a lonely house, its door standing ajar.

Hello ?....is anyone there ?....hellooo ???

She called out, but there was no response. Ignoring the eerie feeling that crept up her spine, she entered the house. It was dark inside, and everything was covered in a thick layer of dust.

is...is someone at home ? hello ????

She called out, yet there was no response from anyone. minutes later, after realising that there was nobody in the house, she turned to leave, but to her surprise, a man appeared at the door. he was tall and wearing a black hoddie. his face obscured by the hoodie and the shadows, He stood there silently. seeing the mysterious person all of a sudden, the young woman became nervous.

Hi,...are you...are you the owner of this house ? well...am..am sorry to enter in without taking the permission. the thing is...I...I missed my bus, and I was trying to seek some help...could you...could you help me out please ?

the man still stood there, all silent like a statue. the young woman found his silence very strange and creepy.

"what's wrong...why...why are you not saying anything"

the woman questioned nervously.

All of a sudden, the man pulled out a gleaming knife, the woman's heart raced with fear. She knew she was in danger.

With a sudden burst of adrenaline, she ran out of the house and into the forest. But the man followed, his presence looming behind her like a dark shadow. In her panic, she lost her footing and tumbled down a slope, injuring her ankle.

As she lay there, helpless and in pain, the man approached her with the knife in hand.

"Who are you...and why are you trying to kill me ? what have I done to you ? please...please I beg you ...don't kill me please....please don't kill me"

She begged for mercy, but he showed none. he pulled her up by holding her hair in his hand, and made her to stand on her feet. With a cold, calculated motion, he brutally stabbed on her stomach with the knife repeatedly, until she was dead completely.

LATER...

It was all dark, the night had taken it's complete form .

The young women's lifeless body was lying on the forest floor, blood pooling around her. the man dragged her body to the edge of a river in the woods and tossed it in, watching as it floated away into the darkness. And as the night closed in around him, he disappeared into the shadows, leaving behind only the echoes of his sinister deeds.

7 MONTHS LATER...

A lonely black Scorpio was driving down on deserted road. inside the car were 4 friends- Nitesh (driving the vehicle) , Saif, Nisha and Kriti.

Nisha: so how many hours more will it take us to reach at Acarn Hills ?

Nitesh: not much...just another 2- 3 hours, that's it.

Nisha: OH MY GOD...WHAT ????? another 2- 3 hours ? damn! that's too much.

Saif: Nisha, no one forced you to come along with us...it was your mutual decision...

Nisha: ya ya ya...I know...(Nisha replied by rolling her eyes up)

Saif: by the way Kriti, do you really think that you will get some info related to your sister once we reach the town ?

Kriti: I don't know Saif, but I atleast need to give a try from my side...

Saif: ya...ofcourse...you need to...

Nitesh: don't worry Kriti...you will get to know some or the other thing related to your sister ...am very much sure about it.

HOURS LATER...

Nitesh suddenly stopped the scorpio...

Saif: hey, what's wrong bro...why did you stop the vehicle ?

Nitesh: take a look infrontthe road ends here...there's a big forest ahead...

Nisha: so ? does that mean there's no other way to drive the vehicle towards the town ??

Kriti: but how's that possible...there has to be some way....

Nitesh: yes there is a way...if you look at the forest, than there's a unmetalled road that goes through it. and I think it is the way that will lead us towards the town.

Nisha: so you mean to say that, we have to cross the entire forest to reach the town ?

Nitesh: there's no other option left for us, so yes, we have to drive the vehicle through it.

Kriti: I need to reach the town somehow...if the forest is the only way left for us, I don't care. let's move further

Nitesh started his scorpio and drove it inside the forest. the unmettled road was in its worst condition, hence, Nitesh drove the vehicle slowly and carefully. as they drove more deeper, their eyes caught the attention of the forest, which was full of tall sugar pine trees.

Kriti: don't you guys think that this forest looks very much strange ?

Saif: yes Kriti, absolutely. inspite of being such a huge Forest, it is completely filled with silence.

Nisha: the silence itself makes it look even more scary...

Nitesh: well, it seems like you guys are in love with the forest. I'll stop the vehicle, so that you all can enjoy the beauty of it (Nitesh replied sarcastically)

Nisha: oh just shut up Nitesh, and don't you dare to stop the vehicle in this creepy forest...keep driving, untill we reach in town.

Nitesh, Saif and Kriti smiled back at Nisha's reply...they knew very well that she was a very coward person, who use to get scared very easily.

AN HOUR LATER...

The night had fallenNitesh was still driving inside the forest. Suddenly, the vehicle stopped.

Saif: what's wrong Nitesh ? why did you stop the vehicle...

Nitesh: I didn't stop it on my own bro....let me check it out...

Nitesh came out of the scorpio, and noticed that one of the tyre was punctured.

Nitesh: damn Guys....one of the vehicle tyre has lost its life....it's punctured, we are stuck now....

all were heavily dissapointed hearing Nitesh's reply.

Saif: what the hell man....

Nisha: oh God...that means, we won't be able to move forward now...oh no....

Kriti: so what are we gonna do now ?

Nitesh: I don't know guys...I guess we have to sit inside the scorpio and wait till the morning arrives...

Nisha: oh no...not at all...am completely f****d up sitting inside the vehicle for so many hours...can't think of spending a whole night in it...

Saif: come on Nisha...nothing's in our hand ...let's all move out from the vehicle, stretch our body's a bit and get some fresh air...

Kriti: I think Saif is right ...lets move out...

as all 3 of them came out from the Scorpio, their eyes went on Nitesh, he stood there like a statue...

they were all confused seeing him standing in such a strange manner...

Nisha: now what's wrong with him...why's he standing like that...

Saif: hey Nitesh...what's wrong bro...are you ok ? you seems to be completely frozen...

Nitesh: stop staring at me guys...and look at the view infront of us....

as they looked at their front, the view took away their breath for a moment, they all stood there frozen just like Nitesh. they saw a majestic tiger, its eyes fixed on them and was hardly few meters away from them.

Chapter 2

The tiger took a step forward, its gaze unwavering. It seemed to be preparing to attack them as it ran towards them in speed, but out of nowhere, a young man appeared between them and the tiger. seeing the man, the tiger stopped immediately. The person stood tall and confident, his eyes locked with the tiger's.

With a calm demeanor, the man, with his hands, signaled all 4 of them to stay where they were, and not to move. The tiger left out a loud roar, but the man did not flinch. He continued to maintain eye contact with the tiger, his body language exuding confidence.

The tension in the air was palpable as the man and the tiger engaged in a silent standoff. Finally, he dropped his eyelids, and a sense of calm washed over the tiger. The man approached the animal, kneeling in front of it and offering

a gentle smile. Through a series of hand gestures and sign language, the man communicated with the tiger, the wild cat nodded in understanding and with a final glance at the man, it turned and disappeared into the depths of the forest.

The 4 friends stood in awe, amazed by the young man's ability to communicate with the wild animal. as he turned towards them, they finally got a chance to have a proper glance of their saviour. he was a tall young handsome guy, with long hair cascading down to his shoulders, His piercing blue eyes seemed to hold a world of mystery and depth within them. His fair skin glowed in the dark, accentuating his well-built athletic physique. Dressed in a black sleeveless t-shirt and black jeans, he exuded a sense of effortless coolness and confidence. his name was Prithvi.

Prithvi: are you guys alright ? (Prithvi asked with concern)

Saif: bro....did you...did you just communicate with the tiger ??? (Saif questioned in amazement)

Prithvi: yes I did...

Nisha: and ...and what exactly did you tell him ?

Prithvi: well, I told him that you guys are my friends, and that, he should spare you all... he can find some other prey to satisfy his hunger for tonight...

Nitesh: Thank God, you came over here at the right time...or else, we would have ended up being his dinner for tonight. damn...that tiger was so scary ...

Prithvi: don't worry...his name is Guddu, and he's just a sweet little wild catthat's all.

Nisha: a sweet little wild cat ???? have you gone crazy ???? how can you even consider that wild beast as cute? we could literally see our death in front of us in the form of that animal. and who the hell names a tiger as Guddu ??? I mean, seriously "Guddu" ????wow...

Prithvi: look, these animals might look monsters in your eyes....but for me, they are my friends...specially Guddu...I have been knowing him for years...whenever I come in the forest to cut down some wood...he makes sure to accompany me, so that I doesn't feel bored...

Nitesh: a tiger accompanies you ha ???? bro....your saying all these things so easily as if you are not accompanied by a tiger but by a small cat....

Prithvi: HAHAHA...well what can I say...actually I have been grown up in these forests...that's the reason most of the animals over here knows me...and I find myself completely safe here...this forest is like my second home...

Kriti, who was all silent from so long and seems to be impressed by Prithvi and his fearless, brave and cool nature, finally spoke out.

Kriti: what's your name by the way...

Hearing Kriti's voice, Prithvi turned his gaze towards her, and kept looking at her for a moment....he too seems to have found likeness towards her right at the first sight...

Prithvi: am Prithivi, and you all ??

The 4 of them introduced themselves to Prithvi...

Prithvi: so what exactly you guys are doing over here in the middle of the night ?

Nitesh: actually we were travelling to Acarn Hills...and all of a sudden, one of the tyre of our vehicle got punctured..and rest...as you know

Prithvi: well, why did you guys choose this route to enter the town ? I mean there's another proper and safe route from which the buses travel.

Nitesh: well that's the problem. actually with the thought of reaching fast, I chose to take the short-cut instead of the main route, and now, here we are...

Prithvi: Don't worry, you guys are almost in Acarn Hills. This forest actually marks the beginning of our town, and

the main town isn't so far from here. In fact, we can reach it in 30 minutes if we just walk.

Saif: that's fantasticso can you take us over there ???

Prithvi: sure, but not tonight...I'll take you there in the morning...

Kriti: but why not now ? (Kriti questioned with curiosity)

Prithvi: the thing is, at this point of time....it's too risky to walk through these forests....as there are a lot of hungry animals searching for a prey....

Nisha: But why should we be afraid when you're with us? I mean, like you said, the animals in this forest know's you. So am very much sure that if any animal tries to attack us, you'll communicate with them and stop them from harming us

Prithvi: Well... Miss Nisha, it's good to hold such positive thoughts. But I think you didn't hear me properly a few minutes ago. I never said that every animal is a friend of mine. I said that most of them are my friends. There are still some animals out there who aren't so friendly with me, and I won't be able to stop them if they try to attack you.

Nisha: ohhhhhh God....with such talks, your scaring the s**t out of me dude....

Saif: so where are we gonna spend rest of the night ...?

Prithvi: don't worry guys...there's a safe place here in the forest itself, where most of the animals, hardly even pay a visit...will spend rest of the night over there ...

Nitesh: and about the vehicle ?

Prithvi: don't worry....I have a friend of mine who's a mechanic...I'll send him over here in the morningmeanwhile, let the vehicle remain here....nothing's gonna happen to it.

As Prithvi walked towards the safe place, rest of them followed him. on their way, all 4 of them noticed an old house (it's the same house mentioned in chapter 1)

Kriti: wait a second Prithvi ?....what's this house doing in the middle of this forest? does it belong to someone ? (Kriti questioned with curiosity)

Prithvi: there was a time when someone use to stay in this house.... but now, it's been years since it's abandoned.... (Prithvi replied holding intense expressions on his face)

Saif: so where are the people who use to stay here ?

Prithvi: nobody knows anything about it....

Nitesh: i really have a good idea in my mind. instead of going to the place which you mentioned ...why don't we spend the night in this house ?

Prithvi: No....staying in this house won't be a good idea....there's a legend related to this house

Nisha: a legend ? what is it ?

Prithvi: First of all, let's all move to that safe place I was talking about. We can discuss the legend once we get there.

LATER

after minutes of walking ...finally they had reached the spot. the night had grown younger...the weather had started to get even more colder.

Kriti: uff ! it's so cold....am freezing

Prithvi: don't worry...I won't let YOU...ah...I mean, I won't let ALL OF YOU freeze...I'll make arrangements of bone fire...it will keep us all warm....(Prithvi said playfully)

Kriti smiled back in return

Minutes later, all 5 of them huddled around the crackling bone fire, their faces illuminated by the dancing flames.

Nisha: so Prithvi, now tell us about the legend which you had mentioned...

Prithvi took a deep breath and started narrating the legend in a low, haunting voice.

Chapter 3

The group listened intently as Prithvi recounted the chilling events that unfolded in the town.

Prithvi: It was in the winter of 1984 when a wave of terror swept through the town. Mass murders began to occur at night, with no apparent motive or connection between the victims. the people of Acarn Hills lived in fear as the killings continued, each one more brutal than the last. The police were baffled, unable to catch the elusive killer who seemed to strike at random. as the murders escalated, the town became a ghost town after sundown. No one dared to venture out after dark, for fear of becoming the next victim. the police devised a plan to catch the killer, setting a trap for him by using a decoy. Their plan worked, and they managed to corner the killer, but somehow he escaped and ran up towards the hills. the police followed him till he

reached at the peak of the hill. there was no other option left for the killer except to surrender himself to the law. however, instead of getting into the hands of the police, the killer jumped down, and disappeared into the river below, never to be seen again. however, through the years there have been many claims made by the locals that they have seen the killer inside the forest. the people still believe that the killer is still lurking in the shadows of the forest. some people also believe that one fine night, he will return back to create the havoc which he created in the winters of 1984....

Nisha: damn...that was scary

Saif: But hold on for a second, Prithvi. When we were passing by the abandoned house, you told us that the legend has a connection with that house. I'm still not able to understand the connection between the house and the story you just told us.

Kriti: Saif is right...tell us about the connection of the house with the legend.

Prithvi: after that incident, when the police did some further investigation...they came to know that the killer was not an orphan...but he had a family. he had a younger brother and a mother who have been staying far from

everyone... inside the forest, in a small house....and it's the same house which you guys saw tonight.

All 4 of them were shocked after Prithvi revealed the story of the house.

Prithvi: when the police interrogated the mother and the brother...they revealed that the killer was suffering from a mental illness known as S.P.D (Schizoid personality disorder), where a person develops an unusual desire to kill random people. hence, they had kept him locked away in one of the rooms of the house... but he had managed to escape and unleash his terror on the town.

Nitesh: so what was next...what did the police do ?

Prithvi: since the brother and mother were not guilty, the police decided to set them free, but kept their identities very much confidential....they didn't reveal it to the media nor the public, as they had the fear that the people might try to hurt both of them. but some things just can't be kept within the walls....somehow, the location of their house got leaked among the locals. and what the police had thought, it turned out to be all true....the anger which the people holded towards the killer, they decided to pour it on his mother and brother. one night, A group of angry people went inside the forest in search of the house, and after

almost an hour of search, they did find it...but it was too late, the house was empty.

Nisha: empty ? but where did the mother and the brother go ?

Prithvi: nobody knows, some believe that the mother and the brother might have realised that their life was in danger, hence, they left the house and the town forever....

Nitesh: Oh God! now that was some really scary legend...

Kriti: yes it is...but what about you Prithvi...do you believe in the legend ? I mean, do you believe that the killer is still out there lurking in the Forest, and that, he will return some day ?

Prithvi: well every small town carries such legends and stories that are forwarded from one generation to the other....but personally what I feel is, if the killer was still lurking in the Forests, than he would have been dead by now...as there are so many wild animals out there, living in the forest.but as there's a saying "you never know"

There was a moment of silence among the 4 friends....Prithvi noticed the silence, and tried to make the moment lighter by changing the topic...

Prithvi: Hey, come on, guys...relax. It's just a damn legend. There's no need to take it seriously. I travel through the

forest and the mountains all the time, and I'm still alive, sitting over here with all of you. So relax and just chill...

Prithvi turned his gaze towards Kriti...

Prithvi: by the way, I hardly know anything about you guys...so tell me something about you all...(Prithvi questioned, doing a complete eye contact with Kriti)

Kriti smiled in return, as she understood the reason behind Prithvi gazing only at her, and asking the question ... he was interested to know more about her, rather than anyone else.

Kriti: so what do you wanna know about "ME" ...ah..I mean to say, about "US" ...?

Prithvi too smiled back, he scratched his head in nervousness, as he realised that Kriti understood everything...

Prithvi: ah anything, whatever you would like to tell ...

Kriti: well, we all 4 belongs to Delhi, and have been best friends since our childhood...

Prithvi: alright, so you guys have come in Acarn Hills for a vacation ha ?

Kriti: not exactly a vacation....(A expression of sadness appeared on Kriti's face)

Prithvi: hey what's wrong ? is everything alright ? (Prithvi showed concerned towards Kriti)

Kriti: months back, my sister had come over here in Acarn Hills...and she went missing...

Prithvi: went missing ? what do you mean by that ? (Prithvi questioned in shock and curiosity)

Kriti: she had the habit of travelling alone and exploring new places, specially mountainous areas...9 months back she had come to this town...we use to talk on phone calls everyday ...she was very happy over here, but the day she was about to leave the town, that was the last time I ever talked to her on call...after that, there has been no news about her...she just went to become missing as if she never existed.

Prithvi: did you register a complain at the police station ? (Prithvi questioned immediately with curiosity)

Kriti: I did, Prithvi. But the police found no clue about her. They even made an inquiry at the hotel where she had been staying. According to the hotel manager, she checked out on the same day she was supposed to leave town. Later, since there was no progress, the police closed the case completely.

Prithvi: so you are here to investigate things by yourself right ?

Kriti: yes, she was my only sister, and my only family...we were more like friends rather than sisters...we use to share everything with each other...her going away from my life all of a sudden, left me devastated. I just want to know what exactly happened with her that she was not able to make it back to Delhi...(Kriti's eyes were filled with tears as she spoke)

Prithvi: hey don't be sad...whatever was meant to happen, it has happened. we can't change it. but am sure, now that you are here in this town, you will surely find some clue related to her. (Prithvi comforted her)

Kriti: I hope so...

Prithvi: by the way, do you have a photo of her ? i hold a strong memory power, if once i see someone, than i never forget their faces. i too live in this town, what if I have seen her somewhere ?

Kriti: yes your right...chances are there that you might have seen her during the time when she was in this town....(Kriti immediately handovered a photo to Prithvi) here...that's my sister..... her name is Kaira.

Prithvi took a look at the photo very carefully ...but failed to recognise her.

(the girl in the photo was the same person, that was killed in chapter 1)

Prithvi: sorry Kriti...I have never seen her before.

Prithvi's reply left Kriti dissatisfied...he noticed the expressions of disappointment on her face.

Prithvi: hey, don't worry Kriti...from now on, am there with you guys. I'll do whatever I can, to get any info related to your sister, and that's a promise.

Kriti: thanks Prithvi (Kriti found a bit of relief and comfort hearing Prithvi's reply)

Prithvi: by the way...where you guys are staying ?? have you booked any hotel ?

Nitesh: no, not yet....

Prithvi: well, in that case, why don't you guys stay in my cottage ?

Kriti: your cottage ? (Kriti questioned with curiosity)

Prithvi: yes...I have a cottage which I give for rent for the tourist who come to visit our town.

Saif: oh wow...that's fantastic...so the problem of our stay is solved.

during the talks, Nisha had started to feel sleepy...she left a yarn...

Nisha: haaaaa!....am feeling damn sleepy....but am scared...what if any wild animal comes over here and attacks us ?

Prithvi: don't worry Nisha...like as I said...this place is completely safe. you can sleep without any worries.

Prithvi had already done the sleeping arrangements...he had gathered lots of leaves and spreaded them on the forest ground, to create a soft and comfortable surface for everyone to sleep. as they all lied down, Prithvi and Kriti were just not able to take away their eyes from eachother. their eyes spoke about their feelings which they had started to develop within their hearts towards eachother.

NEXT MORNING

After waking up early in the morning, Prithvi took them to his cottage, which was nestled in a serene green grass area towering mountains in the background. the 4 of them were in awe of the peaceful and tranquil surroundings. they felt like as if they had found a hidden gem in Acharn hills.

Nitesh: oh my God bro...this place is fantastic....

Nisha: hmmm, indeed it is.

Prithvi smiled hearing praises for the place, and his cottage
...

Prithvi: thanks guys...

Kriti: by the way, where do you stay Prithvi ?

Prithvi: well, I have a small room in the cottage itself...i stay in there, without disturbing the customers

Saif: really Prithvi...this place looks like a part of heaven...

Prithvi: thanks saif...by the way...the main town is just 5 minutes away from here. you guys come in and get fresh...meanwhile, I'll make the arrangements for the breakfast, and I'll also send a mechanic to repair the vehicle.

Chapter 4

All 4 of them got fresh and came out in the balcony of the cottage, but what they saw in front of them arised questions in their minds. they saw Prithvi coming walking towards the cottage, carrying a small bag on his shoulders, and along with him, they saw a middle aged police officer who looked like he was in his late 50s.

Prithvi: hey guys...I had gone out in the market to bring breakfast....but right there, a thought came up in my mind. so everyone, meet Uncle Sinha, he is a police officer here in Acarn Hills.

Inspector Sinha: hello kids...(Inspector Sinha greeted them holding a pleasant smile on his face)

"Hello Sir"

All 4 them replied together.

Inspector Sinha: hey come on kids, please don't call me "Sir". you are the guest's of my nephew (Prithvi). call me uncle...

Kriti: thanks for making us feel so comfortable Uncle...the moment we saw Prithvi walking towards us along with a police officer...we kind of got tensed thinking what might have happened...

Prithvi: oh come on guys...you no need to be scared of my dearest uncle....he is a strict police officer for the world only when he is solving a case.... but deep within....he is a soft hearted jolly person.

Inspector Sinha left out a loud laugh hearing Prithvi's reply...

Inspector Sinha: HAHAAHA! he's absolutely right kids... i dont understand why people always get baffled and scared seeing a police officer. after all, we too are human beings. just because am a police officer, you no need to be scared or nervous infront of me without any reason. just relax.

hearing Inspector Sinha's reply, all 4 of them smiled back in return.

Prithvi: Actually...the thing is, I brought him over here hoping that he might help Kriti in getting some info related to her Sister.

Kriti: oh...thats so nice of you Prithvi....

Prithvi: I told Uncle whatever you had told me...rest, you can talk to him by yourself...

LATER...

all 6 of them came inside the cottage to discuss things related to Kriti's missing Sister. they set on the sofa holding intense expressions on their faces.

Inspector Sinha: I still remember, months back we had received a missing report from the Delhi police about a girl from their city named Kaira, who went missing in our town. later, we did an investigation from our side as well...but we couldnt find anything related to her.

Kriti: but as much I remember, the police reported me that one of this town's hotel manger did confirm about my Sister's stay in their hotel...am I not right?

Inspector Sinha: yes absolutely, but that was the only info we could find related to her, that's it. we even enquired the buses, and trains that were travelling to Delhi...but we found nothing related to her. later, the investigation continued for more than 5 months, after that, we had to close the case due to zero evidence.

Kriti: but has any similar incident ever occurred in Acarn hills? I mean, any other person going out missing like this?

Inspector Sinha: no, not at all. if we keep the 1984 mass murders aside, Acarn Hills has always been the most safest place to travel. every year, there are so many tourist visiting this town...but never ever has anyone went missing over here like this. in fact, the crime rate in Acarn Hills is almost zero percent.

Kriti: THAN WHERE THE HELL DID MY SISTER GET DISSAPEARED ??? (Kriti's eyes were filled with tears, as she questioned in a louder and frustrating manner, but soon she realised her mistake...she brought her tone back to normal) am...am Sorry Uncle, I should have not raised my voice like that.

Inspector Sinha: that's completely fine kid...I do understand what you might have been going through...but we tried our best...we just couldn't find anything related to her...

Kriti: please uncle...i have a request, if you could start the search back again, it would be a great favour on me.

Inspector Sinha: am Sorry kid...but that's not possible. the case is already closed, I can't do anything now...

Kriti: please uncle...I know you can. plesse uncle, try to help me

Inspector Sinha: try to undertand kid...the case is closed.

Prithvi couldn't see Kriti in sadness...he too tried to convince his uncle from his side.

Prithvi: uncle please....I have brought you over here with a lot of expectations..don't dissspoint us. please uncle, do something. just look at Kriti, her sister Kaira was her only family, and all of a sudden she went missing. just think about her, what kind of emotional pain she might be going through right now. just try to help her please .

Inspector Sinha remained silent for moments...he did a bit of thinking.

Inspector Sinha: hmmmmm, alright, I'll help you kid. but keep this in mind, the case is closed, so officially I might not be able to do anything , but personally from my side, I'll start the investigation once again.

there appeared a smile on everyone's faces after hearing Inspector Sinha's reply...Kriti was the most happiest among them all. her hope of finding info related to her Sister had risen up.

Kriti: Thank You...Thank you so much Uncle...Thank you so much...

Inspector Sinha: no need to thank me kid...just take care of yourself....I'll do my best what I can...

LATER...THAT EVENING...

Since Inspector Sinha had assured that he will try his best to find out the reason behind Kaira's disappearance..... Saif, Nitesh and Nisha decided to go out and discover the beauty of the town, as the vehicle was also brought back by the mechanic after changing the tyre. however, Kriti was in no mood to go out....her friends tried their best to convince her, but she didn't agree. finally in the end, Saif and Nitesh were the only two person's who ended up going out, while Nisha decided to stay with Kriti as she didn't wanted to leave her alone.

Nisha was sitting inside the room and was busy with her mobile-phone, while Kriti came out and stood in the balcony. a sudden smile appeared on her face the moment she saw Prithvi. he was busy in chopping woods in the front yard of the cottage with a hatchet. he was so deeply involved in his work, that he hardly even noticed that Kriti was watching him. the way he chopped the woods in just one hit, it clearly depicted his physical strength. Kriti was just not able to take her eyes away from him. meanwhile, Nisha who was busy with her mobile-phone suddenly noticed Kriti watching him. she kept her mobile on the desk and went towards her, holding a mischivuous smile on face. Kriti was so involved in Prithvi, that she didn't even noticed Nisha standing besides her.

Nisha: aahaaaa! what's going on ha...? (Nisha questioned playfully)

Kriti: Oh, Nisha? When did you come over here? I thought you were just sitting inside the room with your mobile phone.

Nisha: Ohhh... so you were so lost in your thoughts that you didn't even realize I came up and stood right beside you? Hmm... something's really wrong with you, my friend.
(Nisha replied playfully)

Kriti: oh come on Nisha...what's gonna happen to me? I was just ... I...I was...I....(Kriti was not able to speak due to nervousness)

Nisha: you were just what ha ?....stop stammering and don't try to hide anything. last night, the way you were going on looking at Prithvi, we all noticed it. nothing is hidden from us....

Kriti: Hey, come on Nisha, don't think too much. There's nothing like that, alright?

Nisha: oh really my dear ??? you might lie to me, but what about your eyes? they can't lie to anyone. your eyes just can't stop staring at him.

Kriti: uff! alright baba...I accept it. right from the time I have seen him, I just can't take my eyes away from him....I have never experienced such feeling for anyone ever before. God, i dont know what's happening to me...

Nisha: I guess you could call it love at first sight... and honestly, who wouldn't fall for that guy? I mean, just look at him — he's so handsome and hot, yaar. I had my eyes on him too, but from now on, I guess I'll have to control my feelings... for your sake. (Nisha replied playfully)

Kriti: oh stop it Nisha....and don't you dare to eye on him....

Nisha: Ohho! So you finally admit it... you do have feelings for him.

(Nisha replied in a teasing tone)

Kriti: yes I do ...but what about him...?

Nisha: Oh come on yaar, Kriti... haven't you noticed him? He likes you too. I mean, last night, you couldn't take your eyes off him, and he was doing the same thing — he kept looking at you. And this morning, the way he brought his uncle here for your sake, and later, how he convinced him to help you... it clearly shows how he feels about you. He likes you too, trust me.

Kriti: you really think so ? (Kriti was still unsure about it, she had her doubts)

Nisha: ofcourse...just go and talk to him

Kriti: are you sure about it ?

Nisha: ofcourse Kriti...don't act stupid...just go towards him....

Chapter 5

After Nisha's encouragement, Kriti slowly made her move and approached Prithvi with a mix of nervousness and excitement.

Kriti: Hey...whats up! chopping down some woods huh?
(Kriti questioned)

Prithvi: Yup, I do that all the time. after chopping down, I sell them to a local dealer of woods in the market.

Kriti: But I thought small town people cared a lot about nature and never believed in cutting down trees....

Prithvi: Oh no no no! don't get me wrong. I'm not cutting down a whole tree, just the thick branches. I love nature a lot, and believes in protecting it.

Kriti: Hey, don't worry, I was just kidding

Prithvi smiled in return...

Prithivi: so you didn't go out with your friends ha ?

Kriti: hmmm no...(Kriti replied in a sad tone)

Prithvi: why ? any specific reason behind it ? I guess, our town didn't excite you much...

Kriti: hey, it's not the reason. this town looks beautiful. no wonder its full of visitors throughout the year...

Prithvi: than what is it ?

Kriti: nothing much...it's just that I didn't have the mood to go out anywhere ...

Prithvi understood the real reason ...

Prithvi: hey listen...like I said before, whatever was meant to happen...it has happened, we can't change it. but yes, there is one thing that we can do...and that is, to move forward in our life. you too should move on. am not telling you to forget your sister...am just telling you to move on and live your life to the fullest. and don't you worry, my Uncle has assured you that he will try his best to get any info related to your sister...so chill...

Kriti: I don't know why ...but your words gives me a lot of comfort...

Prithvi smiles ...

Prithvi: well than, I guess... finally your getting back in mood...

Kriti: yes I am...n your the reason behind it.

Prithvi: hmm, that's great. so now that your mood is back to normal, I don't wanna miss this opportunity. if you don't mind, than can I take you out with me?

Kriti raised her eyebrows with a mysterious smile on her face...

Prithvi: ah, I mean to say...I can give you tour of our beautiful town. would you allow me ? (Prithvi questioned in nervousness)

Kriti: yes I will...(smiles)

Prithvi: great, I'll go in my room and change my clothes. meanwhile, you too get ready...

Kriti came inside the room where Nisha was eagerly waiting for her...

Nisha: hey hey.....what were you guys talking ? tell me fast, tell me... (Nisha asked with excitement and curocity)

Kriti: yaar Nisha, he is taking me out now...(Kriti replied with excitement and happiness)

Nisha: wow ! that's great yaar.....now go and get ready ...

Kriti: But you get ready too, because I want you to come with us.

Nisha: me ? (Nisha questioned with confusion)

Kriti: Of course you. When I wasn't in the mood to go out, you stayed here for me. And now that I am going out, how could I even think of leaving you all alone? You're coming with us too.

Nisha rolled her eyes up hearing Kriti's reply ...

Nisha: ohh please, you don't need to act so good. I'll manage over here, you go out with him alone...and have a great time...

Kriti: ah...are you sure?

Nisha: uff! yes I am baba...

Kriti: ohhh Nisha...your such a sweetheart...Thank you so much ...

Nisha: hmmm, your welcome (Nisha blinked her right eye along with the reply)

Meanwhile, Prithvi came inside the room...he was wearing a Red T-shirt and blue denim jacket and jeans.

Prithvi: hey...am ready(he looked at Kriti, who was yet to change her clothes)

Prithvi: oh, your not ready yet ?...

Kriti: Actually, I was talking with Nisha... I'll get ready and be back soon.

As Kriti went inside the changing room, Prithvi turned his gaze towards Nisha, who was smiling mysteriously by looking at him.

Prithvi: Hey! you too coming with us right ? (Prithvi questioned with curiosity)

Nisha: Do you really want me to join you two, or are you just asking out of formality?

(Nisha questioned holding expressions like a detective on her face)

Prithvi: am...am sorry what ???

Nisha: Nothing, Prithvi... the thing is, I've fallen in love with this cottage. I don't feel like leaving it even for a second, so I've decided to stay here. Meanwhile, you go out with my friend and have a great time.

the way Nisha replied him sarcastically , Prithvi understood that she was very much aware about his feelings towards Kriti.

Prithvi scratched his head with nervousness ...

Prithvi: ah...ok...alright, as you say Nisha.

Meanwhile, Kriti came back changing her clothes. she was wearing a Red sleeveless top with blue jeans.

Nisha: wow...what a match ha...perfect couple (Nisha teased Kriti as she was wearing something similar to what Prithvi was wearing)

Prithvi understood the sarcasim of Nisha very well...he tried to ignore it..

Prithvi: Alright, I'll get my bike...

As Prithvi went out, Kriti looked toward Nisha and widened her eyes at her.

Kriti: damn you Nisha....how could you even say something like that infront of him...what he's gonna think yaar ?

Nisha: oh just chill my friend...your Prithvi is a very smart guy...he understood my sarcasm very well, and don't you worry sweetheart, as I said earlier also, he too likes you. now go, and enjoy...

LATER...

Prithvi took Kriti to a cafe, named as "Bean Street"... situated on the mall road of the town.

As they entered and set at the table, the manager of the cafe immediatly got up from his seat and came towards them...

Manager: hello Sir, Good Evening...how are you...it's been days since you visited the cafe ?

Prithvi: Hi Ansh, I'm fine. And yes, I've been busy for the past few days. That's the reason I wasn't able to pay a visit.

Manager: No problem, sir. So what would you guys like to have?

Prithvi: like always, I'll have my regular Assam tea..

after taking Prithvi's order, the manager turned his gaze towards Kriti...

Manger: and what would you like to have ma'am ?

Kriti: ahh...one cafe latte for me please...

Manger: alright ma'am..

After taking the orders, as the manager went away, Kriti turned her gaze towards Prithvi in surprise....

Kriti: wow Prithvi....am impressed, your such a good customer that the manager itself got up from his seat and came over here to take the order ???

Prithvi smiled...

Prithvi: well...the manager didn't come to me because am a good customer, he came to me because am the owner of this cafe....

Kriti got even more surprised knowing Prithvi as the owner of the cafe ...

Kriti: What! Really ? you meann, this cafe...this beautiful cafe belongs to you ????

Prithvi: yes, actually it belongs to the past generations of my family as well. it's a vintage cafe....and one of the oldest places of this town that still exist even today. my family has been running this cafe right from the British era.

Kriti: oh wow that's amazing. and what's more is left about you, which you are yet to disclose ?

Prithvi: hahaha...nothing more....

Kriti: hmmm...so tell me something Prithvi, what does a good looking guy like you still doing in this small town, haven't you ever thought of moving out from here into the big metro cities ?

Prithvi: Well, to be honest...not really. I'm not interested in living that big-city life that a lot of people crave for. I love the kind of life I'm living right here in this town. It's so peaceful. Big-city life is very noisy. And besides that, I love and admire nature, and the kind of beautiful nature you find in small towns like this... it's hard to find in the cities. I'm a small-town guy, and I will remain one for the rest of my life.

Kriti: and what about girlfriend ha ? do you have one ?

Prithvi: not at all...am single ...

Kriti: shut up...I don't believe this at all. how come such a good looking guy like you can remain single...haven't you ever felt anything for any girl ?

Prithvi: Well, what can I say, Kriti? All the girls from my town are running after guys who live in big cities, because they want to settle there and live the lavish life that you can only find in those big places. No one is interested in a guy who doesn't want to move out of a small town.

Kriti: And what about the girls from big cities? You must have met so many visitors from other cities coming to your town. In fact, you might have even rented your cottage to plenty of beautiful tourist girls. Haven't you ever felt anything for them?

Prithvi: Not really. I've always thought that big-city people use a lot of artificial things to enhance their beauty. I'm the kind of person who has always admired real, natural beauty — where a person doesn't need to add anything artificial to look beautiful. I personally believe that a real beauty comes from a beautiful heart, not from a person's outward appearance.

Kriti: hmmm....so you think that we big city people are fake ha ?

Prithvi: I use to think like that, but my misconception got cleared when I finally met a big city girl who doesn't need any artificial things to make her look beautiful, infact, she is more beautiful by nature and heart....(Prithvi looked deep in Kriti's eyes as he spoke)

Kriti had understood the fact that the girl about whom Prithvi mentioned was not anyone else, but her ownself. however, she still decided to ask Prithvi about the girl.

Kriti: so...who's that girl who broke your misconception ?
(Kriti questioned in a bit of shyness)

Prithvi stayed silent for a few seconds, and Kept looking into Kriti's eyes ...

Prithvi: look carefully into my eyes....n you shall see the face of that girl clearly in them....

Prithvi's answer was very much unexpected for Kriti....she blushed and turned her face down...

Kriti: I didn't know that small town guys are so much straight forward....guys from big cities should learn something from you

Prithvi: hahaha, well I don't know about others...but am a kind of a person who believes in sharing my feelings without any hesitation. now next, everything depends upon that person, whether she wants to accept me or not...

Kriti turned her gaze back towards Prithvi....this time her love towards him could be clearly visible in her eyes.

Kriti: if the girl had not accepted you, than by now, she would have left the cafe...but she didn't.

A bright smile appeared on Prithvi's face...he was so happy knowing that Kriti had accepted his feelings towards her.

LATER, AT THE COTTAGE

Since Nisha was left all alone at the cottage, she came out and stood on the balcony, admiring the serene beauty of the forest. Suddenly, she noticed something strange in it.

Chapter 6

A figure was standing among the trees, staring directly at Nisha. The distance was too great for her to make out any features, but she could feel the intensity of the gaze. she tried to ignore, but the figure didn't move and Kept staring at her. Intrigued and slightly unnerved, Nisha decided to investigate. She made her way towards the forest, her curiosity getting the better of her. As she approached the spot where the mysterious figure had been standing, he seemed to vanish into thin air. Nisha began to doubt her own eyes, wondering if she had imagined the whole thing.

"huh! where did that person get dissapeared ? was I just imaganing things"

Nisha thought to herself

Determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, Nisha ventured deeper into the forest. The trees loomed

overhead, casting eerie shadows on the forest floor. Every path seemed to lead her in circles, and she felt a growing sense of unease. minutes passed away, and the moment Nisha finally decided to go back to the cottage, all of a sudden, she caught a glimpse of the figure once again. he was wearing a black hoodie, Nisha was not able to see his face as it was absured by the hoodie. the mysterious man was the same person who had killed Kaira, and he was holding the same sharp knife in his hand by which he had murdered her. his gaze was fixed on Nisha with an intensity that sent shivers down her spine. Before she could react, he hurled the sharp knife in her direction. With quick reflexes, Nisha dodged the attack, the knife ended up hitting a tree behind her. Nisha didn't waste a single moment, she ran for her life.

Back at the safety of the cottage, Nisha locked the door and tried to calm her racing heart. The sound of heavy footsteps outside made her blood run cold. there was a knock on the door.

Nisha: WHO THE HELL ARE YOU...JUST GO AWAY FROM HERE PLEASEEE! (Nisha shouted out with fear)

Suddenly, a familiar voices called out to her from the other side of the door.

"Nisha...what's wrong yaar...it's me"

(voice of Kriti)

"Nisha...are you alright in there"

(voice of Prithvi)

hearing their voices, Nisha relieved beyond words, she opened the door to find Prithvi and Kriti standing over there, concern etched on their faces seeing Nisha.

Nisha: Thank God you both reached here at the right time...

Kriti: oh my God Nishaaa !!!! what is wrong with you...why are you looking so scared ?

Nisha: there'sthere's an intruder out there ...he's after my life...

Prithvi and Kriti were shocked hearing Nisha's reply ...

Prithvi: a person is after your life ????? but why ??? and where is he now?

Nisha poured out her harrowing experience to them ...both Prithvi and Kriti listened to her very carefully.

Prithvi: Nisha, I think you are just imagining things

Kriti: exactly, even I too feel the same.

Nisha: NOOOO....am...am not imagining anything...there's actually an intruder inside the forest...

Prithvi: alright, chill Nisha, chill. I'll go by myself and check inside the forest....just tell me how he looks...

Nisha: no Prithvi...he seems to be dangerous...you don't risk your life by going out there.

Prithvi: relax Nisha....nothing is gonna happen to me. just tell me how he looks.

Nisha: i wasnt able to see his face, but he was wearing a black hoddie....

Prithvi: hm, alright, you both just wait in here ...I'll go and check it out....

Prithvi went inside the forest....as he searched for any signs of the mysterious figure, he came across the tree where the knife had struck. Though the knife was gone, but the mark on the branch confirmed Nisha's story. Prithvi was shocked....

"That means, what Nisha said was absolutely true....there was an intruder, but who was he ? and why was he after Nisha"

Prithvi thought to himself.

As Prithvi returned back to the Cottage....he noticed that Nisha was still in trauma, and Kriti was trying to comfort her.

Kriti: Prithvi...your back ???

Nisha: did you...did you find anyone there ?

Prithvi smiled and tried to act normal ...

Prithvi: relax Nisha, there's no one out there...you were just imagining things ...

Nisha: no am not, there was an intruder, and he tried to attack me....

Prithvi: please Nisha try to understand, there was no one out there. it's all in your mind...relax

Nisha: are you...are you sure about it?

Prithvi: yes Nisha...trust me...there's no one out there ...I checked the place by myself....

Prithvi replied in such a confidence, that it made Nisha to believe that she was just imagining things...

Nisha: that means...this was all of my imagination ??

Kriti: Oh yes, it was all your imagination, and I was so sure of it. We all know very well that, among all our friends, you're the most cowardly person — you get scared very easily. I still remember how loudly you screamed when we all went to watch that horror film last year. Actually, it's my mistake that I left you alone here. I shouldn't have done that.

Nisha: uff Kriti, now stop teasing me, and don't call me coward.

Prithvi realised that he had successfully managed to make the situation back to normal.

Prithvi: alright than...now that everything is fine...I'll leave...you guys carry on.

Later, Saif and Nitesh returned back from town, Kriti narrated them the entire incident that had happened with Nisha during their absence.

IT WAS LATE NIGHT....

Prithvi was standing in the front yard and gazing at the forest holding intense expressions on his face. meanwhile, Saif and Nitesh came over there.

Saif: hey dude...what's up !

Prithvi: hey guys...hope you all had your dinner

Nitesh: yes we had...it was delicious...thanks man, we are really having a great time in Acarn Hills.

Prithvi smiled hearing their kind words towards the town.

Prithvi: thanks man...

Nitesh: by the way, we came to know about the things that had happened in the evening...we are sorry for Nisha's silly behaviour.

Prithvi: you no need to say sorry for her behaviour...Nisha was all alone over here. and by the way, she was not really imagining things...an intruder did try to attack her....

Saif and Nitesh were shocked hearing Prithvi's reply.

Saif: what are you saying Prithvi ???

Prithvi: that's true Saif, when Nisha narrated me the incident, I too didn't believe her. Later I went inside the forest and tried to do a bit of investigation...and what I found just shocked me. I found the tree where the knife had struck. there was really someone out there ...

Nitesh: but why didn't you tell all this in front of Kriti and Nisha ?

Prithvi: Nisha was already scared after that incident, and Kriti was trying to comfort her. If I had told the truth, then Nisha would have gotten even more scared, and so would Kriti. I just didn't want to give them unnecessary tension, that's all.

Saif: so what do you think, who was it ? and what was his motive ?

Prithvi: I no nothing Saif. this incident has shocked me as well. such things have never occurred in this town from years. there has to be a reason behind all this.

Chapter 7

Around 2 AM at night, the streets and roads of Acarn Hills town were completely empty. The only sound that could be heard was the faint hum of a car engine. The car was being driven by a guy in his early 20s, who was clearly intoxicated from a night of partying. He took a swig from a bottle of beer, his eyes barely able to focus on the road ahead.

Suddenly, the bottle slipped from his hand and fell to the floor of the car.

"Damt it! f**k"

Cursing under his breath, the guy leaned down to pick it up.

As he straightened up, his heart skipped a beat. Standing in the middle of the road was a man in a hoodie, his face obscured by the shadows. panicking, the guy slammed on

the brakes, but it was too late. The car collided with the mysterious figure, coming to a screeching halt.

"oh my God...what have I done....no....no"

Trembling with fear, the guy got out of the car and approached the motionless body lying facing down on the road .

"Heyyy man...are you alright? ...please say something man...Hello?....f**k, what have I done"

As the guy bent down to approach the man more closely, to his horror, the man in the hoodie suddenly sprang to life. he turned back and lunged at him with a knife.

"NOOOOOOOO"

The guy let out a scream as the blade sliced through his wrist, blood gushing from the wound.

It was then that he realized he was in grave danger. with adrenaline coursing through his veins, the young man turned and ran for his life, the hoodie man hot on his heels. He sprinted through the deserted streets,

"HELP!.....SOMEBODY HELP ME PLEASE....HELP!

The guy shouted for help, but there was nobody out there who could listen to his cry and reach out for help.

on the old street of the town, there was an old abandoned colony, the guy ran towards the colony hoping to find some

place to hide, but the killer was following him by running at such a fast pace, that the guy didn't even get a chance to disappear from his Sight. finally he had reached at the end of the path, ahead was a huge wall, he knew he was trapped. Turning around, he saw the killer standing before him, the glint of the knife in his hand.

As the killer closed in, the guy gazed at him in fear with his eyes wide open, he knew that his fate was sealed as the killer raised the knife for a fatal blow. With a chilling strike, the killer plunged the knife into the young man's forehead, ending his life in an instant. Blood gushed from the wound, he withdrew the knife as the young man fell dead to the ground, with his eyes and mouth still wide open even after his death. later, the killer did something and vanished into the darkness, leaving behind a trail of blood and terror in his wake. And so, the streets of Acarn Hills town fell silent, haunted by the echoes of a chilling crime.

NEXT MORNING, 5:05 AM

Prithvi was still fast asleep when all of a sudden he got a call from his Uncle. the news that he received on the call just took away his entire sleep.

LATER

Prithvi reached at the spot with his bike where the mysterious killer had killed the guy. the entire place was filled with crowd. some of them were the locals, while some

of the people were from the media and the police. Prithvi noticed his Uncle, Inspector Sinha having a conversation with another police officer. he immediately walked towards him and approached him.

Prithvi: Uncle....

Inspector Sinha: Prithvi? what are you doing here ?

Prithvi: the moment I received the call from you...I just couldnt stop myself from coming over here. so tell me uncle, what exactly has happened here ?

Inspector Sinha: well, you take a look at the crime scene by yourself...you'll understand everything.

As Prithvi turned his gaze towards the deadbody, he was shocked seeing the murder sight. the lifeless body was lying on the ground, his face fully covered with blood that had poured out from the wound on his forehead. Prithvi also read the chilling message written on the wall from the blood of the dead person-

IT'S BEEN 45 YEAR'S, I AM BACK !

Expressions of terror came upon Prithvi's face, he was all shocked reading the message. he immediately turned his gaze back towards his Uncle.

Prithvi: uncle....this message on the wall, what does it mean? is this murder committed by the same person, who's thought is coming up in my mind right now ?

Inspector Sinha: yes Prithvi...I think the serial killer from past has returned to repeat the history of the 1984's bloody winter.

Prithvi: damn....that means, the fear that the people of Acarn Hills have been holding in their hearts is finally coming true.

Inspector Sinha: your right. the people of this town always believed that one day the killer will return...and now, through this murder, he has given the sign of his comeback.

LATER, AROUND 6: 30 AM

Kriti had just woken up and come out onto the balcony, stretching her arms. Right at that moment, she saw Prithvi on his bike, coming back from somewhere.

Kriti: hey Good Morning...where are you coming from ?

Prithvi got off his bike. He didn't say a word... there were expressions of tension on his face.

Kriti: hey what's wrong ? is everything alright ? you look tensed ?

Prithvi: Today early in the morning I received a call from Uncle Sinha...there's a murder that has taken place at the old street of our town.

Kriti: oh my God...who committed the murder? has the culprit been caught ?

Prithvi: no, not yet. but there is one shocking reveal the killer has made through the murder.

Kriti: and what is it....

Prithvi: the killer claims to be the same person who had terrorised this town in 1984.....at the murder spot, the killer left a message written on the wall- IT'S BEEN 45 YEAR'S, I AM BACK !

Kriti was shocked hearing the news...

Kriti: Whatttt ???? oh my God....that means the killer has been alive all these years ...

Prithvi: I guess yes, after falling into the river, he might have not diedand has been living all these years inside the forest...

Kriti: so the legend is true. all the people who have claimed to have seen him lurking in the Forests...all those stories were not fake, they were true...

Prithvi: I hate to say yes...but seeing the murder at the old street...it's confirmed that the rumours of people seeing him were not fake, but all true...

Kriti: this is really Shocking....the people of this town really needs to be alert now.

Prithvi remained silent for a moment, it seems, he wanted to say something more aswell.

Prithvi: there's one more thing that I want to tell you
Kriti....(Prithvi hesitated a bit)

Kriti: what is it? tell me

Prithvi: I should have told you and Nisha everything
yesterday itself... but I thought I needed to remain silent.
Though last night, I told Nitesh and Saif everything

Kriti: Prithvi, am getting tensed now...don't create
unwanted suspense, just tell me what is it ? (Kriti
questioned with curiosity and tension)

Prithvi narrated everything to Kriti about the things he saw
at the forest when he had gone to do the investigation...he
told her that Nisha was not imagining things, but there was
really someone out there in the forest.

Kriti was all terrified and shocked after hearing it.

Kriti: why didn't you tell us this yesterday Prithvi....? how
could you even think of hiding all this from us?

Prithvi: I just didn't wanted you girls to get more tensed
and scared. but the murder at the old street compelled me
to reveal everything to you.

Kriti: what do you mean by that? you mean to say that the
mysterious person who attacked Nisha and the person who
committed the murder are the same ?

Prithvi: well am not sure...but the current situation does
makes me to think that way.

Chapter 8

LATER

As rest of them woke up, Prithvi narrated the entire scene to all of them. they were all tensed after hearing it, but out of them all, the most scared and worried person was Nisha. she couldn't stop thinking about the fact that the person who tried to attack her was not her imagination, but it was all real. she had already started to tremble with fear.

Nisha: how could you hide all this from me Prithvi ?

Prithvi: am really sorry Nisha, but don't you worry, the police is doing their investigation, the killer will be under the bars soon...

Nisha: plz don't give me such false hopes. 45 years back the killer which was not able to get caught, do you really think that the police will be able to catch him now ??? not at all
Prithvi...

Prithvi: try to be positive Nisha...

Nisha: I can't, Prithvi... the killer has clearly confirmed his comeback. Which means he'll start his terror on the town once again by murdering people one after the other. He tried to kill me as well, but somehow he was unsuccessful. Now there's a chance he might try to attack me again.

Prithvi: don't worry Nisha, we all are here. nothing is gonna happen to you ...I promise.

Saif: yes Nisha...we won't leave you alone even for a second.

Nisha: In the past, when the killer had murdered so many people, was anyone able to stop him at that time? No. So how can you guys assure me that you'll be able to protect me from him now?

Nitesh: so what exactly you want to do now ?

Nisha: I want to go back to Delhiand that too, right now.

Nitesh: What? Have you gone crazy? You're saying it so easily, as if Delhi is just around the corner. It'll take hours to get back over there...

Nisha: I don't care...I just want to go back to my hometown, that's it.

Saif: Come on, Nisha. Have you forgotten why we came to Acarn Hills? We're here to investigate Kriti's sister's

disappearance. Until we find some information about her, we won't go back.

Kriti: guys guys guys....please stop it. if Nisha wants to go back to Delhi, than she has all the right to leave. we should not force her to stay here.

Nisha: am...am sorry Kriti, I know am being selfish...but am feeling very much scared. I feel, as if death is just a step away from me. (Nisha broke into tears as she spoke)

Kriti: hey, come on Nisha, you no need to be sorry. and you are not at all selfish, if any other person was there in your place, even that person would have reacted the same way as you did. I completely understand if you choose to leave this town.

Nisha: thanks for understanding me Kriti...

Saif: but am not going anywhere ...

Nitesh: yup, me too. we will stay over here in the town... untill unless Kriti gets some info related to her Sister.

Kriti: come on guys, this is not done. someone has to go along with Nisha...otherwise, who's gonna take her back to Delhi ?

Prithvi: Don't worry, Kriti... There's a bus that leaves for Delhi in the evening around 6:45. But if someone wants to travel on that bus, then that person has to book the ticket

in advance, because the bus is always full. You won't get a ticket at the last moment.

Nisha: alright than...I'll go and get the ticket right now...

Nitesh: No, Nisha, you're right. The killer might have missed his chance to kill you, but he could try again. In that case, it would be risky for you to go out alone. You stay in here. I'll go and get the ticket for you myself.

Prithvi: but still, it's too early, the ticket counter won't be opening so soon....you can go later Nitesh....

LATE AFTERNOON TIME...

Nitesh had gone to the main town to get the bus ticket for Nisha. Suddenly, there was a change in the climate. A cold breeze hit the weather. the sky, which was a clear blue, was now covered with dark, ominous clouds that seemed to loom over the town like a heavy blanket. thunder rumbled in the distance, followed by sharp cracks of lightning that lit up the sky in a blinding display of power. And then, heavy rain began to fall in sheets.

Since Nisha was bit disturbed and scared, she stayed inside her room, while Prithvi, Kriti and Saif stood in the balcony and watched the heavy rain fall.

Saif: What the hell, man...just moments ago, the sky was so clear... but now, all of a sudden, where did this rain come from?

Prithvi: Well, welcome to Acarn Hills, my friend... we experience climate changes like this every single day here.

Kriti: But it's raining heavily, Prithvi, and Nitesh has gone out to get the tickets. He didn't even take his Scorpio — he just went on foot. What if the rain doesn't stop until evening? There's a chance Nisha might miss the bus.

Prithvi: don't worry, even if the rain doesn't stop, I'll drop Nisha at the bus stand by myself....she is all scared, and she needs to return back to Delhi as soon as possible. by the way, what is she doing ?

Kriti: as she was all scared, I suggested her to stay inside the room till Nitesh comes back with the ticket.

Prithvi: but we need to keep an eye on her...it's been an hour since she is inside the room, just go and be with her for a while.

Kriti: hmmm, I think your right

Kriti went to Nisha's room, meanwhile, Nitesh returned back from the town with the bus ticket.

Nitesh: Guyysss!

Saif: hey Nitesh, thank God you reached...we thought that you might remain stuck in town due to the heavy rainfall.

Nitesh: I would have stayed in town till the rain stops...but bringing the ticket on time was also important ...so I came just like that. uffff...am all wet...I feel so cold ...ooohohoho!

Prithvi: you take a hot shower Nitesh, or else you will end up catching severe cold.

On the other side, Kriti went and knocked on the door of Nisha's room, calling out her name.

Kriti: Nisha ?....Nisha ? are you alright in there ?

there was no answer from Nisha.

Growing worried, Kriti opened the door and found Nisha lying on the bed, wrapped in a bed sheet, only her face visible with her eyes closed.

"there she is, I have been calling out her name so loudly, and here is the princess, sleeping so peacefully on the bed"

Kriti said to herself.

Kriti: Uff... come on, Nisha... get up now and have your lunch quickly because later you'll need to get ready, as Nitesh might be on his way back with the bus ticket.

surprisingly, there was still no response from Nisha. With a sinking feeling in her stomach, Kriti approached Nisha and gently shook her.

Kriti: Nisha ?...Nisha get up...Nisha?

But still, Nisha didn't stir.

With a sense of dread creeping over her, Kriti pulled back the bed sheet and screamed in horror. she saw that Nisha's neck was twisted unnaturally, facing the front while the rest of her body lay on the bed. It was clear that someone had twisted her neck and killed her.

Hearing the scream, Prithvi, Saif and Nitesh immediately came running inside the room, all 4 of them were in shock as they tried to process the horrifying scene in front of them. Saif, Nitesh and Kriti stood there like three statues, completely in shock, While Prithvi's eyes fell on a piece of paper lying on the table beside Nisha's bed. He picked it up and read the chilling words written on it. it was a message from the killer-

"I will turn this town into a burial ground. None shall escape me. I will hunt them down, one by one, for their screams are a pleasure no words can describe. Try to catch me if you dare. I am the devil this town has feared for 44 years... and that fear will last forever."

After reading the message, Prithvi crushed the paper with his hand, holding anger in his eyes.

Prithvi informed his Uncle about the murder. Soon Inspector Sinha and his team reached at the cottage, and the crime scene was meticulously examined for any clues that could lead them to the killer. But the room yielded no answers, leaving everyone feeling helpless and vulnerable.

After the investigation at the murder spot was done, Nisha's body was taken for postmortem.

LATER THAT NIGHT

The cottage was filled with silence all around. Saif and Nitesh were sitting in the main hall, totally disturbed after the incident. Kriti was in her room, she was standing numb at the window with grief and disbelief. Prithvi entered in, and stood behind her. he kept his hand on her shoulder, feeling Prithvi's touch, Kriti turned her gaze towards him.

Prithvi: come Kriti....the dinner is ready ...eat something.

Kriti: am not hungry Prithvi....

Prithvi: I do understand Kriti...what you must be going through...

Kriti: She was my dearest friend, Prithvi. We all used to make fun of her because she use to get scared very easily. She was stubborn, yet she had a clean heart. Even yesterday, when you were about to take me out, I asked her to come along with us... but she refused, because she wanted to give me some space with you. She was such a dear friend of mine... and now... she... she's no more.

Prithvi: I still can't believe how the hell the killer entered the cottage and managed to kill her. I mean, we were all there... we didn't even get the slightest hint.

Kriti: What Nisha said was absolutely right, Prithvi. If the police weren't able to catch him 44 years ago, then how are they going to catch him now? He's too dangerous... he's unstoppable.

Prithvi: Don't think like that, Kriti. Every evil has its day... and so does this killer. Trust me, police will catch him soon. This time he won't be able to escape.

Kriti: he is too smart, after Nisha's death...a thought has started to come up in my mind...

Prithvi: what is it ?...

Kriti: what if the disappearance of my Sister has anything to do with this killer? what if the murder that happened in old street was not the first murder ? what if the killer has even killed my sister ?

Kriti's questions made Prithvi to think...

Prithvi: You're right, Kriti. All this does make sense. I need to meet Uncle Sinha and ask him in person what steps they're taking next to catch the killer.

Chapter 9

Next day Prithvi payed a visit to Inspector Sinha at the police station

Prithvi: hello Uncle....

Inspector Sinha: oh Prithvi! all of a sudden, what brings you here my kid ? come have a seat...

Prithvi set on the chair

Prithvi: Uncle, the thing is, Kriti and her friends wanted to know that when would they get the permission to take Nisha's body back, so that they can perform the final rites ?

Inspector Sinha: Her postmortem was conducted last night itself. The reports are in, and it's clear that her death was caused by cervical fracture from neck twisting. Now that everything is done, her body will be handed over to her friends by this afternoon.

Prithvi: alright, and what about the killer ? what steps you and your team has taken to catch him ?

Inspector Sinha: well...we are trying our best to catch him as soon as possible. Police guards have been put under duty almost everywhere in the town. any suspicious person will be taken under the custody. don't you worry kid, we will catch that bastard soon. he might have been able to escape from the police 44 years back, but not this time, we will get him for sure.

Prithvi: please catch him as fast as possible Uncle. Because of him, innocent people are loosing their lives.

Inspector Sinha: after making his comeback, he might have killed two people, but I assure you, no more lives will be lost further. we will catch him before he makes someone as his 3rd victim.

Prithvi: That's good, but what if Nisha and the man who was killed on Old Street were not the killer's only two victims? What if he has killed someone else as well, after making his comeback?

Inspector Sinha: what do you mean by that Prithvi ?
(Inspector Sinha questioned with curocity)

Prithvi: yesturday Kriti expressed her doubts, she told me, what if her Sister's dissapearence has anything to do with

the killer ? after making his comeback, what if Kriti's Sister was his first victim?

Inspector Sinha: Damn! Why didn't this ever come to my mind? You're absolutely right, kid. I'll keep this point in mind, and don't worry... you go home. I'll inform you about any progress regarding the case.

Prithvi: thanks Uncle, I'll go home, and inform Kriti and her friends about Nisha. let them do their preparations for the final rites.

LATER THAT EVENING...

After receiving the body, a Hindu Priest was brought up to perform the final rites of Nisha. her body was cremated in the traditional Hindu style in an open area of the town.

LATER, AT NIGHT

Saif sat in his room, holding a photo in his hands. His eyes were fixed on the image, his emotions swirling within him. He was completely lost in the moment, reliving memories that seemed like a lifetime ago.

Just then, Prithvi entered the room. He noticed Saif's intense gaze on the photo and approached him curiously. As he got closer, he saw that it was a picture of a couple in their late 50s.

Prithvi: Who are they Saif? (Prithvi asked, breaking the silence)

Saif was startled out of his reverie by Prithvi's voice. He looked up, his eyes filled with a mixture of sadness and nostalgia.

Saif: Hey Prithvi, when did you come in? I didn't even realise

Prithvi: I came in, when you were completely lost in the photo which your holding in your hand. who are they Saif ?

Saif: They are my parents, they died in a car accident almost a years ago.

Prithvi's expression softened as he realized the depth of Saif's loss.

Prithvi: oh, am so sorry to hear that. You must be missing them a lot.

Saif nodded, a tear escaping his eye.

Saif: Yes Prithvi, every single day of my life. The pain of losing them never truly goes away.

(He paused, his gaze returning to the photo)

Saif: And today, when we said our final goodbye to Nisha, that same pain resurfaced. She was like a family to me, just like my parents were.

Prithvi placed a comforting hand on Saif's shoulder, offering his silent support.

Prithvi: I do understand what you must be going through....all I can say is, just be strong .. these hard times will surely pass away.

Saif: thanks man, by the way...any progress on the case ?

Prithvi: I visited Uncle Sinha today at the police station....he told me that he has put police guards on duty, almost everywhere in town. they are doing their best what they can.

Saif: oh...that's...that's good. am sure, the killer won't be able to escape now...

Prithvi: hope so...

Saif: Prithvi, am confident that Uncle Sinha will be giving you every update about the case even further. make sure that you share everything with me...as am very much desperate, I just want that killer to be caught as soon as possible.

Prithvi: sure Saif, I'll share everything with you. don't worry my friend. by the way, where is Nitesh?

Saif: he is with Kriti in her room...she's also very much broken emotionally after loosing Nisha...

Prithvi: hmmm, I know...I'll go and check them out.

Kriti was sitting on the bed, her eyes couldn't stop from shedding tears. while Nitesh was sitting besides her, and was trying his best to give her some comfort.

Kriti: I still can't believe that Nisha is not with us anymore. First, I lost my real sister Kaira, and now I've lost Nisha as well, who was also like a sister to me. I don't know why I'm losing all my dear ones one after the other. I just can't stop thinking about Nisha.

Nitesh: ssshhhh! stop thinking about her, the more you think, the more you will feel the pain. she is gone now...thinking about her and getting sad won't bring her back.

Kriti: I know Nitesh....but I can't, I can't stop thinking about her.

Nitesh: stop it Kriti, you know very well that I can't see you in tears.

Kriti: I know Nitesh....but...but...

Nitesh: but what? won't you listen to me ? am I not your friend ?

Kriti: Of course you are. You mean a lot to me. I know you care about me a lot. All of you friends are like a family to me.

Nitesh: so won't you listen to me now ?

Kriti: hmm, I will...I will listen to you

Nitesh: so stop crying....or should I call Prithvi? I guess, he is the only person now who can bring you back to normal

Kriti: what...what do you mean by that Nitesh?

Nitesh: oh come on Kriti....we all know how much you are in love with Prithvi...I guess, he is the only person who can make you feel better...I need to call him now

Prithvi: no need to call me Nitesh, am already here. (Prithvi was standing at the door of the room)

Nitesh: hey Prithvi...good that you are here. just look at her....she is continuously shedding tears. am sure that you are the only one who can make her stop from crying.

Prithvi: Yes I will Nitesh, you go. I'll handle her.

Nitesh smiled and nodded his head

Nitesh: sure friend...

As Nitesh went out of the room, Prithvi came and set besides Kriti. he gazed at her holding a lot of care and love in his eyes.

Kriti was still going on shedding tears.

Prithvi: So, Princess, how much longer will you take to finally put an end to these tears? Hasn't someone told you that your tears aren't just tears — they're precious pearls?

Don't waste these pearls like this. They're very much precious, just as you are precious to me.

Kriti turned her gaze towards Prithvi...she was touched by his kind loving words.

Kriti: what magic does your words hold Prithvi, that they always end up giving me so much of comfort, no matter what the situation is.

Prithvi: it is not any kind of a magic Kriti, but it's my love and care towards you. I really can't see you crying this way...and am sure, no matter where Nisha is today, even her soul won't remain in peace if she watches you shedding tears like this.

Kriti: but her memories are making me to cry even more Prithvi....

Prithvi: you know Kriti, I have always believed in one thing. when our loved once leaves us and this world, we should not cry thinking about them, instead we should think about all the happy moments which we had spent with them. and trust me, when you think about all those happy moments, only smile will appear on your face, and not tears. we should not make the dead once as a reason to bring tears in our eyes, but we should make them a reason to bring a smile on our faces. that is the best thing we can do if we really want them to rest in peace. so now, not for

anyone of us, but for the sake of Nisha, please bring a smile on your face.

Prithvi had successfully abled to put an impact on Kriti's mind through his positive words, finally a smile appeared on her face.

Prithvi: THERE YOU GO! finally, I can see the smile on your face which I was eagerly waiting for. now come on, have something now. you didn't eat anything since afternoon.

Kriti: no Prithvi...I don't have mood to eat anything ...please don't force me.

Prithvi: alright....but atleast have a cup of coffee with me...will you ?

Kriti nodded her head with a smile ...

Prithvi: FANTASTIC! I'll go in the kitchen and make some coffee for both of us.

Chapter 10

As Prithvi went inside the kitchen to make coffee, he realised that the coffee powder has got over...

"Shit, man... this coffee powder had to run out right at this hour? It's already too late — all the shops might be closed. Hey, wait, Akshay's General Store might still be open... I'll go and check.

Prithvi said to himself.

He went back to Kriti's room, where she was still sitting on the bed...

Prithvi: hey...

Kriti: hey, has the coffee got ready so fast ?

Prithvi: no yaar. actually, the coffee powder has got over, I'll go at the general store and get some.

Kriti: it's ok Prithvi, already it's too late. let it be....

Prithvi: don't worry, it's near by. I'll just go, and come back soon.

it was a stormy night as cold and heavy wind was blowing, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Lightning lit up the sky, casting eerie shadows across the small town. Despite the ominous weather, Prithvi walked towards the general store that remained open late into the night.

The owner of the store, a man named Akshay, sat behind the counter, engrossed in his work on the computer. He was a young man in his early thirties, with a friendly smile and a welcoming demeanor. As he worked, Prithvi entered the store.

Prithvi: Hey Akshay, how's it going?

Akshay: Oh hi Prithvi. am doing well, thanks. How about you?

Prithvi: am good too. I hope you're not about to close the store? I just need to grab a few things

Akshay: No problem, take your time. there's another customer in here aswell, so feel free to browse (Akshay reassured him)

Prithvi smiled and started looking through the products in the store. As he browsed, he caught a glimpse of the other

customer Akshay had mentioned. The man was dressed in a black hoddie, his face obscured. Prithvi didn't think much of it and quickly gathered his purchase of a Coffee powder box, before heading back to the counter.

Akshay: oh, just one item? (Akshay asked as Prithvi approached him)

Prithvi: Yeah, actually am in a bit of hurry tonight. I'll come back tomorrow morning for a proper shopping trip (Prithvi explained)

Akshay completed the transaction and bid Prithvi goodnight as he left the store. However, as Prithvi made his way back to the cottage, a nagging feeling tugged at the back of his mind. As he reached, Kriti was standing at the balcony and waiting for him with concern.

Kriti: hey, Thank God your back...just look at the weather...it seems heavy rainfall is about to start soon...I was so worried.

Prithvi didn't react much to what Kriti said to him, he seems to be lost in some thoughts.

Kriti: Prithvi ? is everything alright? you seems to have lost in something ?

Prithvi couldn't shake the sense that something was really wrong, Suddenly a thought struck in his mind.

Prithvi: Kriti...do you remember that Nisha had given us the description of the person who tried to kill her...do you remember it?

Kriti: Yes ofcourse, how can I forget that. she had told us that the person was wearing a black hoddie, though his face was absured.

Hearing Kriti's reply, Prithvi remembered the customer that he had seen inside the general store.

Prithvi: OH MY GOD ! (Prithvi's eyes were filled with shock and fear)

Kriti: what's wrong Prithvi....why do I see expressions of shock on your face ?

Prithvi: something terrible is about to happen Kriti.

Kriti: what is it ?

Prithvi: I don't have time to explain...I need to get back to the general store as soon as possible ...

Kriti: what? but why? just look at the weather, it's horrible....I won't let you go out.

Prithvi: try to understand Kriti....if my guess is right, than someone is in great danger. i need to go back to the store, I'll come back soon.

Prithvi turned back and hurried towards the store. What he found inside left him stunned. The lights were off, the store was in disarray, and Akshay was nowhere to be seen. As he ventured further in, Prithvi stumbled upon a horrible sight – Akshay’s lifeless body, a knife wound on his back, and yet another message written on the floor with blood-

”Another gift of mine for the town, I hope everyone likes it”

Shock and horror gripped Prithvi as he realized the gravity of the situation. Before he could process what had happened, a figure emerged from the shadows, Prithvi was hardly able to see him, as it was dark. but suddenly, there amidst a flash of lighting, which gave Prithvi a clear sight of the figure standing over there. he was the same hoddie person which he had seen in the store during his visit. he was holding a bloody knife.

Prithvi: HEY YOU!!!!!! (Prithvi shouted out looking at the killer)

The killer turned back and ran out of the store. Prithvi didn’t waste a single moment and ran after him. he kept chasing him on the empty streets of the town. it was lighting and thundering, the wind also blew heavily, but that didn’t stop the killer, he ran as fast as he could. Prithvi

was driven with a mix of anger and determination, he too didn't stop, and chased the killer with all his speed. The killer ran inside the forest, as Prithvi too reached over there, he seems to have lost him. the killer had almost got vanished after reaching inside the forest, he was nowhere to be found. Prithvi searched him for a while but didn't find him, finally he decided to leave with disappointment, but all of a sudden, someone attacked him from back on his head with a strong piece of wood, as he turned, it was the killer. but before Prithvi could do anything, he fell on the ground and became uncounsiou. finally the killer took his knife out to kill him, but all of a sudden, he saw someone coming towards the forest. seeing the person, the killer ran away. it was Inspector Sinha, he came there and set down infront of uncounsiou Prithvi.

Inspector Sinha: OH MY GOD! Prithvi wake up ? Prithvi ? GOD!

he tried to woke him, but Prithvi didn't respond.

LATER

As Prithvi came back to his senses, he found himself in the cottage lying on the bed, and surrounded by Kriti, her friends and Inspector Sinha.

Inspector Sinha: Prithvibeta are you alright ?

Kriti: Prithvi please, say something

Prithvi: don't worry everyone...am...am fine...just a bit of headache, that's it.

Inspector: Thank God that I reached there on time, or else the killer would have killed you.

Prithvi: were you...were you able to catch him uncle ?

Inspector Sinha: unfortunately no...he got vanished into the darkness of the night.

Prithvi: Damn it! that bastard even killed Akshay....

Inspector Sinha: Yes I know son, we have found his dead body...and also the message from the killer.

Prithvi: but Uncle, what were you doing at that time near the forest?

Inspector Sinha: I was patrolling the nearby area. Anyways, you take some rest... I'll see you later.

Nitesh: me and Saif will also leave the room. You get some rest, my friend.

Saif: take care dude...

Prithvi: Thank you guys...

As all 3 of them went away, Prithvi turned his gaze towards Kriti, who was still present in the room.

Prithvi: you please don't go anywhere, sit here besides me.

Kriti didn't say a word, and set besides him quietly. she looked scared and very much worried. her eyes were filled with tears, Prithvi understood the concern of Kriti towards him. he gave her a smile.

Prithvi: hey don't be so worried....am absolutely fine...nothing is gonna happen to me.

Kriti: I had warned you not to go out, but you ignored my words.....and now you see the result. I have already lost my friend Nisha. I can't imagine losing yet another person who's close to my heart.

Prithvi: Hey... if I have such a loving person like you by my side, then nothing can harm me. Trust me... I'm not going to leave you so early. In fact, I'm not going to leave you at all.

Kriti: uffff Prithvi !!!

Kriti couldn't hold her emotions any longer and hugged Prithvi tightly.

HOURS LATER, THAT SAME NIGHT

it was around 3 AM at night, Prithvi was still awake, sitting on the bed and lost deeply in some thoughts. he was again and again visualising the chase that he had with the killer, also all the messages the killer has been leaving at every crime scene. it seems, Prithvi was trying to reach a

conclusion by visualising everything. suddenly there was something that struck his mind and widened his eyes...he was shocked.

"OH MY GOD! now i have completely understood the reason behind the police still not being able to catch the killer. the way am thinking, if all that is true, than i need to inform Uncle Sinha before it's too late, I need to call him right now"

Prithvi said to himself.

Chapter 11

THAT SAME NIGHT AT INSPECTOR SINHA'S HOUSE...

The night was quiet, Inspector Sinha was in deep sleep. suddenly, his phone rang, breaking the silence of the room. Sinha's eyes snapped open, his heart racing as he fumbled for his phone on the bedside table.

It was a call from Prithvi. Sinha's worry grew as he wondered why Prithvi would be calling him in the middle of the night. He quickly answered the call, his voice filled with concern.

Inspector Sinha: Prithvi, what's wrong? Why are you calling me at this hour? are you alright ?

Prithvi: don't worry uncle am fine. the reason why i have called you at this hour is because there is something important that I need to tell you related to the killer.

Inspector Sinha: what is it Prithvi ?

Prithvi: Uncle I have finally understood why the police has still not been able to catch him...

Inspector Sinha: why ?

Prithvi: There's a very famous saying, Uncle... "Sometimes, things are not exactly the way they look." And when it comes to the case of the killer, he has smartly made us believe exactly what he wanted us to believe.

Inspector Sinha was very much confused hearing Prithvi's reply.

Inspector Sinha: hold on for a second Prithvi, am still not able to understand your point....what are you trying to tell me...be clear

Prithvi: till now all the people of the town, including the police, mistundertood the killer to be the same person who committed the murders in the winters of 1984, but he is not. the truth is, the person who committed murders in the past, and the person who is committing murders in present are two different people.

Inspector Sinha was in a complete shock hearing Prithvi's reply....

Inspector Sinha: what are you even saying Prithvi ??? how can you be so sure that both the killer's are two different people and not the same ???

Prithvi: well....let me ask a question from my side. how come you are so sure that both the killer's are the same ?

Inspector Sinha: Why do I even need to be sure? The killer himself confessed through the messages he left at every murder site. He wrote that he is back to create the same terror he created in 1984. He himself confirmed that he is the same person.

Prithvi: EXACTLY UNCLE! That was his entire motive — to make us believe that the killer from the past and the killer in the present are the same person. And what better way than to leave a message at every murder site, so that everyone gets convinced that both killers are the same.

Inspector Sinha: but why would anyone think of doing like this...

Prithvi: it's simple uncle, if he succeeds in making everyone believe that he is the same killer from the past, than that would make his chances of getting caught to zero percent. as the police will be in a belief that the murders happening now are done by the killer from the past, hence the entire

investigation on the case would be going in a complete wrong direction...in this way, the new killer would never be able to get caught.

Inspector Sinha: Oh my God... now I understand everything completely, Prithvi. That's why that bastard was leaving messages at every murder site — he wanted to fix it in our minds that the killer from 1984 and the killer in the present are the same. Well played... well played. He not only fooled the people of our town, but also fooled the entire police department of Acarn Hills. But tell me one thing: how did you come to know about all this?

Prithvi: First of all, there's a huge difference between the killing styles of both killers. The killer in the past used to kill people in a very gruesome way. He used to make his victims suffer before killing them, and that killing style reflected his mental state. He was a complete psycho.

But when it comes to the murders committed by the present killer, these murders are very simple and not really that gruesome. The person committing murders now is not a psycho. His way of killing is not gruesome. The previous killer murdered people because he was a psycho suffering from SPD — he enjoyed killing. But the person murdering

now has different motives. He just used the identity of the past killer so that no one would be able to catch him.

Inspector Sinha: really my mind has blown away after hearing all this. I just don't know what to say

Prithvi: To tell you honestly, Uncle...I had my doubts right from the beginning when I came to Old Street to see the crime scene. But my doubts became clearer tonight when I chased the killer. In 1984, when the previous killer spread terror in our town, he must have been in his early 20s. So in that sense, during the present time, he should be at least in his early 60s. But when I chased the killer, I noticed that he was physically very fit and active. Especially the way he ran — no average person in his early 60s can run that fast. It was during that moment that I was fully confirmed the present killer is not the same killer from the past. In fact, the present killer is much younger. Unfortunately, I was not able to see his face.

Inspector Sinha: but what are his motives ? why is he going on killing random people? what does he wants ?

Prithvi: that's the biggest mystery uncle. but whoever the killer is, he is very much smart....he might be anyone out there in the public. you and your department needs to be very careful, he should not get the slightest hint that you have understood his actual plan.

Inspector Sinha: don't worry Prithvi, I'll take care of that. and thank you so much for sharing all this with me....this will really help us in catching the killer more faster than we had thought.....Thank you once again.

Prithvi: you no need to thank me uncle. am a responsible citizen of this town, it was my responsibility to offer my help in any way I could.

After talking to Inspector Sinha as Prithvi went to sleep, there was someone outside his room, who had quietly listened to Prithvi's entire conversation with his uncle.

NEXT MORNING

Prithvi was chopping down some woods with his hatchet, Nitesh came out of his room after completing his sleep. he saw Prithvi in the frontyard, he walked out and approached him.

Nitesh: hey Good Morning Prithvi....so today you have started your work early in the morning ha ?

Prithvi: yup....i need to deliver new stock of woods soon to the buyer. by the way, where is Kriti and Saif ? I haven't seen them this morningare they still sleeping ?

Nitesh: Well, Kriti is still sleeping. I guess the kind of comfort you gave her last night really worked for her, as she is sleeping peacefully. Thanks, man.

Prithvi: no need to thank me Nitesh. Kriti has become a part of my life now, and no matter what happens, I shall never let her remain depressed or sad.

Nitesh nodded his head with a smile.

Prithvi: and what about Saif ? where is he?

Nitesh: he went out for jogging before the sunrise.

Prithvi: oh really ? I didn't know Saif had the habit of waking up so early.

Nitesh: hahaha...well, Saif is a complete fitness freak....in fact, he is a good athletic. i still remember, during our collage days, he always use to remain very much active in sports, specially when it comes to running, no one was able to match his speed. he was a very good runner.

Prithvi: hmmm, a good runner ? I see.... fantastic.

Chapter 12

It was mid night, the town was in deep sleep, Prithvi heard a cracking sound of the main door of the cottage getting opened. His sleep broke and he opened his eyes immediately. He slowly came out of his room and saw that it was Saif who had opened the door and was going out somewhere.

"Where is he going in the middle of the night ?

Prithvi wondered, and decided to follow him.

It was very cold outside as Prithvi followed Saif into the forest beside the cottage. Suddenly, Prithvi realised that Saif was going in the middle of the forest, towards the abandoned house of the killer. as Saif reached over there, before entering in, he gazed in both the side's to make sure that no one was watching him. Prithvi immediately hid

himself behind a tree. after making sure that no one was watching him, Saif entered inside the house.

A while later, Prithvi too entered in. he noticed that Saif was searching something very desperately inside the house. Prithvi was shocked aswell as confused.

Prithvi: What the hell are you doing over here Saif ?

Hearing sudden voice of Prithvi, Saif became scared and nervous, he didn't know how to react. He slowly turned towards Prithvi and gazed at him.

Saif: Prithvi ? what...what are you doing here ? (Saif questioned, with tension on his face)

Prithvi: well, am the one who questioned first, and I expect a reply...(Prithvi replied in a serious tone)

Seeing the serious expressions on Prithvi's face, Saif became more nervous, he didn't know what to say and how to react.

seeing his silence, Prithvi questioned him once again.

Prithvi: am asking you once again, what are you doing here in this house ? (this time, Prithvi questioned in a bit louder tone)

Saif: actually, it's my profession that brought me up here in this abandoned house...

Prithvi: your profession ? (Prithvi was confused)

Saif: yes...i have never told you Prithvi, I write blogs about abandoned places and houses that holds some interesting legends behind them. when I saw this house for the first time, I felt that the story of this house would be perfect for my next blog.

Prithvi was still holding serious expressions on his face.

Prithvi: alright, but why you had to come here in the middle of the night, and that too, without informing anyone ?

Saif: actually the thing is, I knew this very well that if I tell everyone about my decision of visiting this house, than no one would have allowed me to come here, hence, I decided to visit this place secretly when everyone was fast asleep (Saif explained)

Prithvi: hmmm, you seems to be having a perfect reply to every question that I ask, I hope everything that you told me is true, and your not hiding anything from me. (Prithvi replied in a suspicious way)

Saif: of course Prithvi, why would I lie ? anyways, now it's too late, let's go back to the cottage.

Prithvi: why, what happened? you had come here as you wanted to write a blog on this house...now won't you complete your work ?

Saif: Well...not now, it's...its ok, I'll come back tomorrow in the morning. I think...I think, we should leave now...come Prithvi...let's...lets go back.

Saif walked out nervously, it was clear that he was trying to hide something from Prithvi.

Prithvi still stood there, holding Suspicious thoughts. he realised that there was something very fishy about Saif's behaviour.

NEXT DAY....

Prithvi and Kriti were taking a walk on the busy streets of Mall Road. Kriti noticed the seriousness on Prithvi's face; he seemed to be lost in deep thought.

Kriti: hey...what's wrong ? is everything ok ? (Kriti showed her concern)

Prithvi: Kriti....can you tell me something about Saif...

Kriti: about Saif ? all of a sudden what do you want to know about him ?

Prithvi: just tell me Kriti...

Kriti: alright, I'll tell you...but what exactly you wanna know ...

Prithvi: anything ...just anything.

Kriti: well...as you know, Saif, Nitesh and Nisha...they all have been my friends since childhood. they are like a family to me....Saif was the only child of his parents, he loved and respected his parents a lot...but last year unfortunately... they died in a car accident, it took Saif months to recover from the grief. well that's all....

Prithvi: and what about his proffesion ? what does he do ?

Kriti: He's actually a blogger, and he writes blogs on various topics... but mostly he writes about places that have scary legends behind them. Blogging is not just his job, it's his hobby aswell.

"hmmm, that means Saif spoke the truth about his proffesion"

Prithvi thought to himself.

Kriti: hey, what's wrong, Prithvi? you have got lost in some thoughts yet again...what are you thinking ?

Prithvi: ah...nothing...nothing.

Kriti understood that Prithvi was trying to hide something from her.

Kriti: Prithvi....if you really accept me as part of your life, than your gonna tell me everything very clearly....please don't hide anything.

Prithvi: Yes Kriti, there is something...but I can't tell you, atleast for now. there are few things that are going in my mind...but untill unless am not sure about them ... I won't be revealing anything to you....but trust me, when the right time comes, I'll surely tell you each and everything.

Kriti smiled showing her faith in Prithvi's words.

Kriti: alright Prithvi, I trust every word that you say. I'll wait...

LATER, THAT NIGHT....

Prithvi had come to Inspector Sinha's house. he rang the door bell..but no one opened the door.

Prithvi: Uncle....uncle....are you there ???

There was no responsePrithvi gave a push to the door, and found the door to be open. as he entered in, he looked here and there. but there was nobody at home.

Prithvi: Uncle ? where are you ?....Uncle ?

Suddenly Prithvi's eyes went towards a old photograph kept on a table. he went near the table and took the photo in his hand. there were two people in the photo, a young guy possibly 18-19 years old, and a old lady in her late 60s.

the moment Prithvi gazed on the photo, he found the young man's face to be very much familiar...as if he has seen the person somewhere.

"This young man in the photo, I think...i think I have seen him somewhere....but Where ???...where did I see him"

Prithvi thought to himself...

Suddenly something struck Prithvi's mind...

"OH MY GOD, the person in this photo is Saif's father, this might be a photo clicked in his younger days. I remember Saif showing me his parents photograph. but who's this old lady ? am sure she must be Saif's grandmother. but wait a minute, what is this Photo doing in Uncle Sinha's house"

Prithvi wondered

Suddenly Inspector Sinha stepped inside the house...

Inspector Sinha: hey Prithvi...when did you come in ?

Prithvi: just moments back Uncle, but where were you ?

Inspector Sinha: oh, I had gone at the shop near by

Prithvi: Uncle, can you tell me who are these people in this photograph ? and what exactly this photo is doing in your house ?

Inspector Sinha: Well, as you know, at first we all thought that the present killer and the past killer were the same person. But thanks to you, you cleared everything up. this photo was kept in the case file for the 1984 murders. I brought it home from the department, hoping it would help me or give me some clue to find the killer... but now there's no use for this photo. Since we're now aware that the present killer and the past killer are not the same, I need to put this photo back in the case file.

Hearing Inspector Sinha's reply...Prithvi was all confused...

Prithvi: wait a minute Uncle, what this photograph has to do with the past killer ?

Inspector Sinha: Prithvi, the two people that you see in the photograph are his mother and brother. don't you remember, I had told you, during those days...we had interrogated them, this photo was clicked at that time...n later...once they were set free, all of a sudden, they dissapeared from the town.

Prithvi was shocked beyond words. He was completely stunned after hearing Inspector Sinha's reply. His eyes were wide open in shock.

"If the people in this Photograph are the killer's mother and brother, than that means...Saif is the nephew of the past killer"

Prithvi thought to himself in shock.

Chapter 13

Inspector Sinha: what are you thinking Prithviis something wrong ?

Prithvi: nothing...nothing Uncle, I'll...I'll see you later...

Inspector Sinha: but.....

before Inspector Sinha could complete his sentence, Prithvi walked out of the house in hurry.

IT WAS LATE EVENING, ON THE WAY

As Prithvi was riding his bike back to the cottage, lot of thoughts were arising up in his mind.

”so all this time, it was Saif who was committing murders in the town, but why ? why was he murdering people like this ? what was his motive ? is Saif suffering from SPD, the way his Uncle was ? is this the reason why he is murdering people like this ? but his pattern of killing is so

different...the murders done by Saif are not really gruesome. damn! there are so many questions arising in my mind...and only one person can answer all these questions, and that is- Saif”

Prithvi thought to himself.

Finally, Prithvi reached the cottage. He parked his bike and hurriedly made his way inside.

Prithvi: SAIF ? SAIF WHERE ARE YOU ? (Prithvi called out as he entered the cottage)

There was no response. He frantically searched every corner of the cottage, but Saif was nowhere to be found.

Just then, Kriti and Nitesh emerged from their room's, drawn by Prithvi's loud voice. They looked concerned as they saw the look of tension on Prithvi's face.

Kriti: Prithvi ??? what's wrong ? why are you shouting like this ? (Kriti questioned, her voice filled with concern)

Prithvi: where is Saif ? I want to see him right now

Nitesh: but what is wrong Prithvi...why are you so eager to see Saif ?

Prithvi: I don't have the time to explain everything Nitesh...but I want to see him right now ...it's important.

Nitesh: well, he's gone out ...

Prithvi: but where? did he...did he say anything about where he's going?

Nitesh: Not really. He just said that he had some important work to do.

Prithvi: Hmm, I think I know where he is right now. Alright, guys, I have to leave for now. But you both stay in here... and please, don't go anywhere outside. It's dangerous.

Kriti: Prithvi, now am really getting worried, please tell me what exactly is going on ?

Prithvi: am sorry Kriti...like I even said earlier, I can't reveal anything right now...I'll tell you everything later.

Prithvi walked out, leaving Kriti and Nitesh clueless about the situation.

LATER, AT THE ABONDENED HOUSE...

Prithvi gave a hard push on the door of the abandoned house, as it swung open. His face was twisted in anger as he stepped inside, his footsteps echoing in the empty rooms. and as he expected, Saif was inside the house, his eyes widened in fear as he saw the anger on Prithvi's face, knowing that he was in trouble.

Saif: Hey Prithvi...(Saif brought a fake smile on face to pretend as if everything is normal)

Prithvi: Don't give that damn fake smile Saif....I have come to know everything....I know why you are here.

Saif: what...what are you talking about Prithvi ? am here, as I had told you about my proffesion of writing blogs...

Prithvi: no more lies....no more. I have come to know that you are the nephew of the psycho killer, who had terrorised this town in the past. that Psycho killer was the elder brother of your dad. am I not right ? speak up

Saif had no other option but to accept the truth.

Saif: Yes...your right. the killer from the 1984 incident was my Uncle. he might ended his life by jumping down into the river, but the anger which the people of this town holded towards him didn't end up with his death. they wanted to pour all their anger on my uncle's family, that is my dad and my grandmother. but they both had got the hint, and hence, they left the town forever and got settled down in Delhi. they started living in a rented apartment, due to illness, my grandmother passed away. later, my dad did a lot of hard work in his life, and it was all paid of, as he successfully ended up buying a lavish apartment for himself. when he was around 34, he got married to my mother, a year later, i was born. my dad didnt hide anything about his origins....he told me everything about their families past history. i decided that i will never, ever set foot

in this town. but destiny had planned a complete different thing for me. Kriti's sister went missing in this town. She decided that she would come to this town and investigate her sister's disappearance on her own. Nitesh, Nisha, and I were all Kriti's childhood friends. She asked for our help on her quest. Because Kriti is a good friend of mine, I couldn't say no to her. At the same time, I couldn't reveal my family's history to her or to any of my friends. So, I quietly decided to come to this town with them.

Prithvi: and later, after coming to this town, you chose to walk the same path as your uncle. You too decided to kill random people, because you are a complete psychopath — just like he was.

Saif: STOP IT PRITHVI, STOP IT! I can hear all sorts of allegations upon myself, but not the allegations of being a serial killer. (Saif had become bit emotional and frustrated)

Prithvi: am not putting any kind of allegations upon you, but speaking the harsh truth....you are the serial killer...you are walking on the path of your psycho uncle.

Saif: no am not. when I came here in this town with my friends, I too was shocked after learning that my Uncle was still alive and he had started his rage of murders back again. I felt this was the right opportunity to save my families name and respect. I decided to secretly investigate the

murders by myself, find my Uncle, and handover him to the police...and later reveal everyone about my origins and roots. in this way, my family would get their lost respect back. that's the reason, I decided to visit this house, hoping to get some clue related to my Uncle. that's the reason I came here....

Prithvi: that means, your not the killer ???

Saif: no Prithvi, am not. I too hate my Psycho uncle as much as this town hates him, but I can't bare the hate which people of this town carries towards my dad and my grandmother due to my Uncle. by catching my Psycho Uncle, I want to prove to the people, that if one person in the family is evil, than that doesn't mean the entire bloodline is bad. I want my families name to be taken in respect by the people of this town. I WANT THE LOST RESPECT OF MY FAMILY BACK! (Saif's eyes were filled with tears as he spoke)

The tears in Saif's eyes were the witness of his innocence.

Prithvi: am sorry Saif, when I learnt that you are the nephew of the past killer, I thought that you might be the person who is murdering the people presently. but wait a second, if you are not the killerthan who is he ?

Saif was confused hearing Prithvi's reply.

Saif: what you mean by who is the killer ? ofcourse, it's my Uncle who is back, and murdering the people of this town yet again.

Prithvi: no Saif....it's not your uncle...but it's someone else who is smartly murdering people using his name...

Saif was shocked with the revelation

Saif: WHAT!is it ? but how are you so sure ?

Prithvi revealed everything that he had learnt till now about the killer...Saif too was shocked after knowing everything.

Saif: but Prithvi...just because am the nephew of the past killer, it doesn't make me a killer too...how could you even think that way ?

Prithvi: it's not just your connection with the killer ...but before that, I had also learnt of you being a good athletic and a good runner...all these things in total compelled me to doubt on you.

Saif: hold on Prithvi, who told you that am a good athletic and a good runner ?

Prithvi: it was Nitesh who had told me all this

Saif was totally shocked hearing Prithvi's reply.

Saif: WHAT! Nitesh told you all this ??? but I don't understand why he would tell you something like that ? am not at all athletic...and am not at all a good runner. infact, even during my collage days, I use to maintain distance from sports activities....my friends use to tease me for being lazy and not active in sports. it was Nitesh, who use to be very much active in sports activities...it was Nitesh who was a good runner. no person in the entire collage could match up his speed. but I don't understand one thing, why did Nitesh tried to pretend his running qualities as mine ?

Saif might have been with full of questions running inside his mind, but Prithvi seems to have understood everything.

Prithvi: I have understood everything clearly Saif, Nitesh wanted to grow seed of doubt in my mind towards you by calling you as athletic and a good runner.

Things seems to have been getting cleared in Saif's mind as well...

Saif: that means....that means....

Prithvi: that means, the killer is Nitesh. OH MY GOD....we need to inform Uncle Sinha about this

Chapter 14

Meanwhile, evening had passed away, and night had taken its full form.

Prithvi immediately called up and informed Inspector Sinha about the situation. After knowing the real identity of the killer, inspector Sinha immediately headed to the cottage.

Prithvi: Uncle Sinha might be going to the cottage, but by now I've realized one thing about Nitesh: he's very cunning. He will do everything he can to escape from my uncle. This time, though, I won't let him get away. I'll go to the cottage too.

Saif: alright than, let me also come along with you.

Prithvi: No, Saif, you wait here. If Nitesh tries to escape from Uncle Sinha, then I'll try to stop him. But if he escapes

even from me, then we'll need someone out there who can act at the last moment. That's why I want you to wait here. If Uncle Sinha and I both fail to catch him, then everything depends on you, my friend. I'm going there now. If you don't receive my call within 20 to 30 minutes, assume that something has gone wrong. You need to go to the police station and explain the entire matter to them.

Saif: alright Prithvi...I'll do as you have instructed. ALL THE BEST DUDE...

Prithvi: Thanks man...

As Prithvi headed towards the cottage, Inspector Sinha had already reached over there in his Police Jeep. as he entered in, Nitesh and Kriti, who were sitting on the sofa in the hall, stood up seeing him.

Inspector Sinha: Nitesh! your game is over...YOU ARE UNDER ARREST !

Kriti was shocked, she was not able to understand the situation.

Kriti: what's wrong Uncle ? why do you want to arrest Nitesh...what crime has he committed ?

Inspector Sinha: beta Kriti, your friend Nitesh is the serial killer, who's been terrorising our town for the past one month....

Kriti was not able to believe her ears...

Kriti: WHAT!....that's not possible Uncle...there has to be some serious misunderstanding going on over here. how can Nitesh be the killer ?

Inspector Sinha: if you don't believe me, than ask Nitesh by yourself....

Hearing Inspector Sinha's reply, Kriti turned her gaze towards Nitesh, who was standing there quiet, holding expressions of nervousness and fear.

Kriti: Nitesh, what Uncle Sinha is telling, is it true ?

seeing his silence, Kriti questioned him once again.

Kriti: Nitesh please speak up...don't remain silent...speak up. Nitesh ?

Nitesh didn't say a word....

Inspector Sinha: I guess, his silence has given you the answer to your question beta...

Kriti's eyes were filled with tears and anger, she was feeling ashamed to call Nitesh as her friend.

Kriti: I have known you since my childhood Nitesh...I always thought you to be a person with a clean and pure heart. but today, after knowing your reality, I really feel ashamed to call you as my friend. today you have proved

that even a lifetime is not enough to know a person's true nature. but I still don't understand one thing, why....why did you kill so many people ? and Nisha ? she was our friend. why did you kill her...why ?

Inspector Sinha: Don't worry, Kriti beta. Once the police question him, he'll answer everything we want to know.

Inspector Sinha turned his gaze towards Nitesh.

Inspector Sinha: now come on, let's go to the place, which is meant for a person like you- The Jail.

Nitesh walked closer to Inspector Sinha, and gazed at him holding anger in his eyes.

Inspector Sinha: what are you looking ha ? how dare you to stare at a police officer like this ?

Nitesh didn't move his gaze even a bit, and continued looking at Inspector Sinha.

Inspector Sinha: stop staring at me like this....or else...

Nitesh: or else what ?????? you did a big mistake by exposing my deeds towards Kriti, now you have to pay for it...you have to pay for it Uncle...you have to...(Nitesh spoke holding rage in his voice)

Inspector Sinha: what do you mean by that ?

Before Inspector Sinha could understand the meaning of Nitesh word's, Nitesh moved with lightning speed. In one swift motion, he pulled out the gleaming knife from his pant pocket and slashed at Inspector Sinha's throat. The sharp blade cut through flesh and sinew, causing a gush of blood to spurt out, and splatter across Nitesh's face.

Kriti left out a loud scream seeing the horrifying scene. while, Inspector Sinha fell to the ground. Nitesh stood over him with a look of triumph in his eyes. as Inspector Sinha took his last breath, a flash of lighting illuminated outside in the sky and a heavy rain started to pour down.

After Inspector Sinha was completely dead, Nitesh turned his gaze towards Kriti...who was trembling with fear...

Nitesh: hey hey hey Kriti, come on, yaar. Don't be scared of me. I'm... I'm still the same Nitesh you've known forever. I didn't want you to find out about this, but Uncle Sinha messed it all up. Anyway, just drop it. Keep quiet and forget everything that happened here. Just chill, okay?

Kriti: have you gone mad ? you have murdered so many innocent people and now, you have even killed a police officer ...and you expect me to chill !!!! your crazy Nitesh...your crazy....

Hearing Kriti's reply, Nitesh walked closer to her with frustration.

Nitesh: STOP IT KRITI...JUST STOP IT. am...am not crazy...am not crazy...

Kriti: Yes you are a crazy guy...and don't you dare to come closer to me....

Kriti's reply was growing Nitesh's anger.

Nitesh: Kriti....don't make me angry...or else, I have to kill you aswell....

"STOP IT NITESH...DON'T YOU DARE TO HARM HER"

It was Prithvi, who had burst into the cottage, his eyes filled with rage. as he entered in, his gaze went towards the dead body of Inspector Sinha. pain and anger struck Prithvi's heart at the same time.

Prithvi: Nitesh, you monster! How could you do this?
(Prithvi shouted, his voice filled with anger)

Nitesh turned towards Prithvi, holding a wicked smile on his face.

Nitesh: Ahaa! Prithvi. So you've come too. How fitting. The murders I once committed in the shadows... it seems I'll have to commit them in the open now.

Prithvi: from now on, you won't be able to commit any more murders Nitesh.

Before Nitesh could make a move, Prithvi lunged at him, knocking the knife out of his hand. The two grappled with each other, their struggle echoing through the room. Kriti watched in horror as the two men fought, each determined to come out on top. She knew she had to do something to stop Nitesh before he could harm anyone else.

With all her strength, Kriti picked up a iron rode, kept at the corner, she heat the rode on Nitesh's back. He let out a scream of pain before collapsing to the ground and getting uncounsious.

LATER...

As Nitesh slowly opened his eyes, he realized he was sitting on a chair, he tried to move, but realised that he was tied up securely. as he looked around, he saw Prithvi and Kriti standing in front of him. Nitesh gazed towards them like a wild animal locked up in a cage, but ready to come and attack it's prey, the moment it is released.

Nitesh: you fools...do you really think that you guys have won against me ???

Prithvi: Yes we have Nitesh. now start speaking....why did you murder so many people of this town ? and Nisha, she was one of your friend, why did you kill her aswell ?

Chapter 15

Nitesh remained quiet...he didn't answer Prithvi's question and kept staring at him.

Prithvi: I SAID SPEAK UP !....(Prithvi shouted in anger)

Nitesh: am sorry Prithvi, the thing is, am not in a mood to answer your boring questions...

Hearing Nitesh's reply, Prithvi raised his fist and delivered a hard punch on Nitesh's mouth, causing blood to spurt out and dribble down his chin. Nitesh winced in pain.

Prithvi: am sure after tasting my punch, you have developed the mood to answer my questions.

Prithvi's hard punch made Nitesh furious...

Nitesh: YOU F*****G ASS***E ! JUST SET ME FREE ONCE, I SWARE, AM GONNA RIP YOU APART !

(Nitesh spat out, his voice muffled by the blood in his mouth)

Hearing Nitesh's reply, Prithvi delivered yet another hard punch on his mouth.

Prithvi: currently the ball is in my court you fool. it's better that you reveal the reason behind murdering people of this town and Nisha.

Nitesh was very much angry, but he felt helpless, he had no other option but to reveal everything to them.

Nitesh: not only the people of this town and Nisha...but it was me...who killed Kriti's sister Kaira aswell...

Prithvi and Kriti were shocked with the reveal...Kriti's eyes were filled with tears...

Kriti: bastard, you were one of my best friend, and you ended up killing my sister aswell ? WHY NITESH WHY ? WHY DID YOU DO ALL THIS ...WHY ??? (Kriti shouted out with anger and pain)

Nitesh: I DID ALL THIS FOR YOU DAMNIT! I DID ALL THIS FOR YOU...because I...because I have been in love with you...

Nitesh was giving shock after shock, with every revelation he made.

Kriti: what ??? you were in love with me ?

Nitesh: Yes, Kriti... I've been in love with you since childhood. I never had the courage to tell you how I felt, but... but I made sure no other guy came near you. Do you remember Nitin? The guy from college who was madly in love with you? And later, you started to have feelings for him too. Do you remember?

Kriti: Yes I do remember him...but later, all of a sudden, he left our collage and even the city.

Nitesh: Yessss! But he left college and the city for a reason. During our college days, when he used to flirt with you, it would burn me up inside. And when I realized you were starting to have feelings for him too, I decided to act. I warned him to stay away from you, but that fool didn't listen. Then one day, I beat him badly — so badly that he ended up with serious injuries all over his body. He finally understood how much I love you... how far I'd go. He understood that if he didn't keep his distance, I was capable of taking his life. That's why, without telling anyone, he quietly left college and the city for good.

Kriti was completely stunned after hearing everything...

Kriti: I...I can't believe this. am...am stunned seeing such dark-evil side of yours.

Nitesh: Unfortunately, your sister saw me while I was beating up Nitin, and my dark side was exposed to her too.

She was horrified and warned me to stay away from you. Because she was your sister, I didn't want to hurt her. I tried to reason with her, to make her understand why I couldn't stay away from you... but she wouldn't listen. Finally, I decided to remove that obstacle from my path. I decided to kill her. I was just waiting for the right opportunity. I found it when I learned she was traveling to Acarn Hills for a holiday. It's a remote, mountainous area — I thought it would be the perfect place. So I did what I'd planned. I went to Acarn Hills without anyone knowing. I killed her on the day she was supposed to leave town and threw her body into the river. Luckily for me, when the investigation started, her body was never found... and she vanished from this world without a trace.

Prithvi: than what happened later? what was the reason behind killing the people of Acarn Hills and Nisha ?

Nitesh: When Kriti decided to come to Acarn Hills to investigate her sister's case, I joined her along with Saif and Nisha. After we got here, I noticed that you and Kriti were starting to get attracted to each other. In a very short time, you two became close. I wanted to kill you just like I killed Kaira, but I needed to do it in a way that wouldn't make anyone suspect me. So I came up with the perfect plan. I used the legend of the 1984 killer to my advantage. I made

the people and the police believe that the killer from the past had returned.

Prithvi: but I don't understand the logic of killing other people....why did you kill them ?

Nitesh: if I had killed only you, than the police would have doubted the crime to be the work of some other person. so to create the atmosphere of the killer, I decided to murder other random people aswell, besides that, i also left messages at every crime scene, so that the police doesn't get chance to doubt any other person, and their entire focus remains on finding the past killer.

Kriti: you didn't even hesitate to kill our childhood friend Nisha?

Nitesh: Trust me on this Kriti, I...I didn't really want to kill her. The first time I ran into her in the forest, I only wanted to scare her. I had no intention of killing her. I knew that once everyone got back to the cottage, she would tell them everything that happened. I planned it that way. By scaring Nisha, I wanted to plant the idea in everyone's mind that the rumors were true — that the killer from the past was still lurking in the forest, getting ready to make his comeback.

Prithvi: hold on for a second, I remember very clearly, on that day...Saif and you had gone to roam into the town, than how come you ended up coming back at the cottage ?

Nitesh: oh that was so easy. Saif has always been a crazy movie-buff...while we were roaming in the town, he noticed a local movie theatre and insisted watching a movie. I thought this was the best opportunity to keep Saif busy with the movie, so that I get the chance to come back near the cottage and scare Nisha. during the movie, I pretended to be getting bored, hence I told Saif that he can carry on with the movie, while I'll wait for him outside the theatre. he agreed, and that's how I came back near the cottage, scared Nisha, and then returned back at the theatre, while no one even doubted me.

Prithvi: if killing Nisha was not part of your plan than why the hell did you ended up killing her ?

Nitesh: that's because she had seen something which she should have not.

Prithvi: what...what did she see ?

Chapter 16:

The final chapter

That day I was getting ready to go out, for buying the bus ticket. suddenly, Nisha entered in my room.

FLASH BACK...

Nisha: hey Nitesh...I hope your not upset on me....

Nitesh: not at all, why would I be upset on you ? what you have said is absolutely right, the killer has missed the chance of attacking you...so there are chances that he might try to attack you once again...it would be better if you go back to Delhi.

Nisha: Thank you so much for understanding me, Nitesh. Alright... you leave. Kriti told me to rest in my room until you get back with the ticket.

Nitesh: oh yes...you should. go to your room, and get some rest my friend.

Nisha: ya...by the way Nitesh, my mobile battery is about to die...could you please give me your charger ?

Nitesh: Yes ofcourse, it's kept on the table...you can take it, I'll take a leave...

Nisha: Thanks....

Nitesh left the room, while Nisha went towards the table to get the charger. suddenly her gaze went on the drawer of the table, which had some blood stains on it. Nisha found it fishy and as she opened the drawer, her eyes fell upon a gruesome sight - a knife covered in dry blood. her heart raced as she felt a chill run down her spine. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. Panic set in as she quickly closed the drawer, her mind racing with fear and confusion. Just as she turned around to leave, she was met with a horrifying sight. Nitesh was standing right in front of her.

Nikita: Nitesh.....the knife....the knife covered in blood....what....what does it mean ? Nitesh...what...what does it mean....?

Nitesh: you know very well what it means Nisha...

Nikita: that means...your the killer ? Oh my god...no...nooooo!

Nitesh: your such a stupid girl Nisha...you could have just borrowed the charger kept on the table and should have left the room, why did you had to act smart by opening the drawer ? now look....you have called your death by yourself.

Nisha was trembling with fear, her eyes were filled with tears.

Nikita: no Nitesh...please...am...am your friend...please...I...I promise, I won't tell about this to anyone...I...I swear..I won't tell anything to anyone...please...please spare me...

Nitesh: oh Nisha...I fear it's too late...

Nikita: huh...what...what do you mean ?

A devilish smile appeared on Nitesh's face. Before Nisha could understand anything and react, he lunged towards her, grabbing her head with a strong grip. With a swift and brutal twist, he snapped her neck, ending her life in an instant.

FLASHBACK ENDS...

Later, I came out of my room, and noticed that Saif and you two were standing in the balcony and busy in some random talks. I took this as a opportunity, and took Nisha's lifeless body to her room, and laid it on her bed and covered it with a bed sheet. and then, I quietly went to the town to buy the bus ticket.

Kriti: oh my God...your worse than the devil....didn't you feel any pain while you killed your childhood friend ???

Nitesh: like I said earlier, I never had the intentions to kill her...she called her death by her own. that's not my fault....

Prithvi: and later, you smartly tried to plant doubt in my mind, regarding Saif being the killer ...right ?

Nitesh: yes, everything was going fine, when all of a sudden, that night I heard your conversation with Uncle Sinha. you expressed your doubt about the killer being two different people. I realised that you are much more smarter and sharper than I thought...and that's the reason, before your investigation leads you to me...I decided to plant doubt in your mind against Saif, by telling you that he was a good sportsman and a good runner.

Prithvi: but no matter how hard you tried...finally i got you....

Kriti: your the most selfish person I have ever seen Nitesh...

Nitesh: Kriti ??? can't you see the things that I have done for you ? I became a murderer for yoursake...I killed one of my childhood friend....what else do you want to check the depth of my love towards you ? does this Prithvi has the guts to commit murders for yoursake ? is his love that strong ?

Kriti: love is not about taking life of others...love is all about giving your life for others.

Prithvi: exactly, and what you did is not love...that's called madness and stupidity. your murders might not be as gruesome as the murders committed by the past killer, but that doesn't make you different from him. he was a psycho ...and your too a bloody Psycho!

Kriti: this mad-man deserves severe punishment for his deeds Prithvi...

Nitesh: SHUT UP YOU B***H ! i did so much for you, yet you wanna punish me ? just set me free from this rope...am gonna kill that Prithvi first, and than you for not accepting my love.

Kriti: you can't do s**t of us you bastard.

Prithvi: Relax Kriti... he's time is over, he will get a well deserving punishment now.

Hearing Prithvi's reply, Nitesh started laughing out loudly.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

his laugh was so loud, that it could be heard in every corner of the cottage.

Nitesh: so you guys are gonna punish me ha ? The best thing you can do is to hand over me to the police, but you know what...one day I'll escape from the prison, come out, and than am gonna hunt you both. and later, am gonna kill you in the most gruesome way possible. I'll chop your bodies into thousand pieces and will throw them into a dirty brook.

Prithvi smiled...

Prithvi: don't worry Nitesh, am not gonna hand over you to the police...am gonna do something more horrible.

Nitesh: and what's that ha ? kill me like the way I kill people ? haha haha ! but remember one thing, by killing me you too will end up becoming a murderer. is that what you want ?

Prithvi: your right Nitesh, by killing you am gonna turn into a murderer just like you. and yes, I don't wanna end up being a killer.

Nitesh: hahaha...so what you gonna do ?

Prithvi: I'll definately murder you....but not by my hands...

Nitesh became bit tensed and confused hearing Prithvi's reply...

Nitesh: than ? with who's hands your gonna kill me ?

Prithvi smiled again...

Prithvi: let me call my friend inside....(Prithvi turned his gaze towards the front door) GUDUUUUPLEASE COME IN

As Prithvi called Gudu's name, the wild tiger from the forest walked inside the cottage.

Seeing the Tiger, Nitesh trembled with fear....his eyes and mouth were wide opened in shock

Nitesh: what the hell is this Prithvi ??? what's this tiger doing up here ?

Prithvi: you have been a waste on this planet...but sometimes, even a waste can be turned into beneficial. and that's exactly what am gonna do now. my friend Guddu is damn hungry....so why don't you end up being his delicious dinner for tonight ?

Nitesh: NO NO NO....PLEASE PRITHVI...PLEASE DON'T DO IT...PLEASE!COME ON DUDE...HOW...HOW CAN YOU BE SO CRUEL...PLEASE SET ME FREE....PLEASE !

Kriti: the people whom you killed ...even they might have cried out for their life the way your crying now...but did you show mercy on them ? no.

Prithvi: your times up Nitesh...

Prithvi and Kriti helded eachothers hand, and walked out of the cottage. as they left, the tiger gazed towards Nitesh and slowly walked closer to him, and than, all of a sudden jumped upon him leaving a loud roar.

Prithvi started the bike and revived the engine, Kriti wrapped her arms around his waist, holding on tight as they speed down, and headed towards the road of the main town. while, the cottage was left back behind with the loud screams of Nitesh, as the tiger ripped him apart.

NEXT DAY, EARLY MORNING AT THE RAILWAY STATION...

As Saif and Kriti stood on the platform of the railway station, Prithvi had come to see them off.

Saif reached out and gave Prithvi a friendly handshake, expressing his gratitude.

Saif: Thanks for everything that you have done for us Prithvi. am going away from this town, but not with empty hands... am taking along our friendship that will last forever ...

Prithvi: ofcourse Saif...the friendship will remain forever. I'll be soon coming to Delhi to meet you ...

Finally Kriti stepped forward and enveloped Prithvi in a tight hug, holding onto him as if she never wanted to let go.

Prithvi too wrapped his arms around her in return, feeling the warmth of their love in that moment.

As they stood there, locked in a heartfelt hug, their eyes closed in a silent exchange of emotions. When they finally pulled away, they looked into each other's eyes, their gazes filled with unspoken words and memories of the time they had spent together. Prithvi and Kriti knew that this was not a goodbye forever, but just a temporary parting.

Kriti: I lost lots in this town, but in return, God has gifted me a person like you Prithvi.

Prithvi: you won't forget me after reaching to Delhi right ?

Kriti: I can forget myself, but not you. the things that you have done for me...nobody does that for anyone in today's times. am lucky to have you as my partner...

Prithvi: so does that mean, this big city girl is ready to be mine forever ???

Kriti: with pleasure

they smiled at eachothers words, and hugged back once again.

The bond had strengthen, and a relationship was build up between Prithvi and Kriti, which would last FOREVER.

THE END

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