

A night sky with a full moon in the upper right, a bright star with a long tail in the lower left, and a bird with its wings spread in flight in the upper right. The background is a dark blue sky filled with numerous small stars.

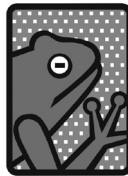
Paradise Lost & Regained



Ratnadip
Acharya

*Paradise Lost
&
Regained*

Ratnadip Acharya



FROG BOOKS

First published in India 2015 by Frog Books
An imprint of Leadstart Publishing Pvt Ltd
1 Level, Trade Centre
Bandra Kurla Complex
Bandra (East) Mumbai 400 051 India
Telephone: +91-22-40700804
Fax: +91-22-40700800
Email: info@leadstartcorp.com
www.leadstartcorp.com / www.frogbooks.net

Sales Office:
Unit No.25/26, Building No.A/1,
Near Wadala RTO,
Wadala (East), Mumbai - 400037 India
Phone: +91 22 24046887

US Office:
Axis Corp, 7845 E Oakbrook Circle
Madison, WI 53717 USA

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ISBN 978-93-52013-17-3

Book Editor: Surojit Mohan Gupta
Cover Design: Gokul Ram Singh
Layout: Chandravadan R. Shiroorkar

Typeset in Book Antiqua
Printed at Dhote Offset Technokrafts Pvt. Ltd.

Price – India: Rs 195; Elsewhere: US \$8

Dedication

'Dedicated to all the explorers of their own beings'

*Within all of us there is a small deer,
which is lively, joyous and knows no fear.
To meet it we have to plunge into our heart,
& by holding its hand can we give our life a new start.
It will lead us to life's unknown terrain,
to visit those places heart always has a deep longing.
It will show us life and love everywhere,
right from a flowing river to a distant star.
May we all soon find that tiny fawn,
& let our life see a new dawn.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ratnadip is a well-trained street magician and has demonstrated his skill to many across the country. A NIT Jamshedpur graduate, Ratnadip lives in Mumbai where he works as an Electrical Engineer. He contributed many inspirational write-ups in different collections of Chicken Soup for the Soul. In December 2012 his first novel, *Life is Always AimlessUnless You Love it* was published and was received well by the readers across the country.

Being deeply interested in life, Nature and its mysteries, this time Ratnadip has come up with a storyline the like of which has hitherto not been told. It is about a little deer growing up in a far-flung deep forest, teeming with its fellow deer, other animals, trees and rocks. Yet we can all find ourselves in this strange and surreal world that Ratnadip has created in this inspirational novel *Paradise Lost & Regained*.

Ratnadip can be reached at:
*ratnadip76@gmail.com or on facebook.com/ratnadip.acharya.5
or on Twitter: @RatnadipAcharya*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, deep regards and love for Chandra Mohan Jain, widely known as OSHO, for touching my life with his love, silence and laughter and changing it forever, for helping me see life in everything around – right from a flowing river, a silent night, a gentle wind, a falling leaf to a piece of rock.

A big thank you to Albert and Hilda Soj, dearest uncle and aunty, for their unstinting support to help me reach my first novel *Life is Always AimlessUnless You Love it* to many readers.

I am sincerely grateful to all the kind readers of my previous novel who wrote me so many warm mails, telling me that they were eagerly waiting for my next work. Hope this novel lives up to their expectations.

Deeply indebted I am to Bhaskar Maity and Meera Srivastava for their trust in me and my work. They are usually the first listeners to most of the stories I devise.

Both my born creative sisters – Mahua and Madhumita – deserve my big hugs and affection for reading and loving many of my short and long stories. They both and my mother, Lila, always believe in me and my work – a source of deep inspiration to me.

Heartfelt thanks to the entire Leadstart team for believing in me and my work. Without their cooperation this book might not have seen the light of day. Deeply grateful I am to my editor, Sri Surojit Mohan Gupta, for editing my work so meticulously and deftly.

Anindita Ghoshal, the brightest friend of mine, who trusted in this story from the very beginning. Deeply grateful I am to her for her constant inspiration during the long span of time I took to complete the first draft of the book.

And last but not least, two persons, who are the integral part of my life: Akash, the *Sky* of my little world, and Sophia, a little woman with large eyes. I start my day after touching little Akash's feet and every morning Sophia would nestle against me with her long wish-list and would not release me until I promise to fulfil a few. Their presence around me makes my otherwise imperfect life almost perfect.

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Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.

~Carl Sagan

Chapter - 1

Desire for life

There is such a special sweetness in being able to participate in creation.

The pricking sensation was the first thing I experienced once my mother delicately released me from her womb, onto the grassy earth. I cracked one eye half open while the light around me blinded my vision. My entire body shuddered with an unknown fear that I had been experiencing for the last few days. It was the only time when fear crept into my mind in my otherwise blissful life in a dark sack, partly filled with some slippery fluid, where I had had to remain bending all my four legs. Later on, I came to know that I had been rather lucky for most of the offspring like me had to share their mother's womb with no less than one or two more siblings.

Inside the sack darkness was impenetrable and for the last few days I had had a strange and incomprehensible feeling that the pouch was no longer large enough to accommodate my every-hour-growing body. 'What will become of me if I grow even more?' this thought had crossed my mind and for the first time I felt a stab of fear within me. I wished if in any possible way I could put a stop to the growth of my every limb with each passing hour. What else could one expect from life? The darkness around me and the safety and security offered inside the sack kept me completely oblivious to two things, which, later on, became the predominant and essential factors of my life. The prime one among the two was *time* and how it had a definite and strong effect on me and everything around me. And the second one was *my vulnerability*, from which, later on, developed within me was a tremendous desire to live.

Come what may, I had often taken a resolution during last few days, I would never leave this place. Although I was completely unaware of the existence of any other places, one thing I had realized for certain in my mother's womb that never would I again get such a safe and comfortable place to live in. But my resolution often wavered as at times the chamber I was in would contract from all sides, as though signalling to me to vacate it, sliding out through a narrow channel, attached to it. The fear of being thrown out of the womb intensified as the narrow channel began to expand slowly as if to accommodate my safe exit from this haven of safety and peace forever. The more certain I was that soon I had to leave the womb, the more scared I was and the more desperately I tried to cling,

though fruitlessly, to my mother's womb. But the smooth walls of the womb extended no support to me to hold it tight so as to foil the plan of banishing me from this relaxing and restful life.

For a few moments I was at my wits' end and in a state of helplessness before I realized that I was permanently separated from my mother. It was an almost silent thud once my mother rested me on earth yet for me that sound was like a warning bell as well as a welcoming bell. It was a warning bell for no more would all my needs be taken care of, for no more could I afford to be unaware of my own safety if I wanted to live an unharmed and unscathed life in a deep forest. But it was indeed a welcoming bell, too; a bell to welcome me to live a natural life in a dense jungle. A bell to intimate to me that all life on earth is a gift from nature which comes in a package that contains challenges and danger, too, and that one must be courageous and responsible enough to make the most of life, to extract the last drop of juice out of it, to share it with all its companions, to make them feel what a precious gift life is.

But being a newborn deer, a tiny fawn, beset with its own worry and anxiety, very obviously, I failed to understand the profound message that had been communicated to me through an almost soundless sound.

A few more agonizing moments passed by before I could open my eyes again, cautiously and fearfully and also wishing that things around me would give me an impression that this place was conducive to live a comfortable life. But this time also I could barely squint and failed to take in everything around me. Now I felt my mother's tongue against my body, licking the slippery and soapy wetness off my body. A strange kind of smell was issuing from it; something my olfactory organ had not experienced while I was inside my mother's womb. This coating of amniotic fluid was like a protective armour with which my mother had left me on earth, but yet she was cleaning it off me now. While her long tongue was licking me clean deftly and skilfully, her nose, just a little above her mouth, was throwing a blow of warm air on my wet skin to dry it off soon. Though it passed a sense of comfort down my spine I could not make head nor tail of it.

Now I made another effort, much more definite and conscious, to open my eyes. I turned my neck towards my mother and slowly made both my eyelids separate. I had already realized that the slower I opened my eyelids, the lesser would be the effect of daylight on my eyes. And I was correct; it was a matter of a few moments before I could have a clear and an unobstructed view of my mother. She had a supple and slim body and could move her neck very gracefully and lithely. Her smooth coat was light brown in colour and was dotted with large white spots. Her tiny tail was wagging impatiently which, I thought, was because of her anxiety over my safety. Now my eyes met her melting and speaking eyes. At once I could read in her eyes deep concern for me. Her dark almond eyes were steady and her gaze was resting upon me.

Unknowingly I sighed with relief as I knew that even now I was in the cocoon of my caring mother. But yet a nagging doubt was pestering me. I looked at my mother, a bit pleadingly, not knowing how to make her understand my doubt and query. I was yet to come to understand that there was a definite language that a flock of deer used to communicate between themselves. A deer from another herd might pick up the language of ours in due course of time but no other animal could comprehend anything of our language. I, however, being a newborn, knew only one way to communicate with my mother and it was with my pair of eyes. I did not know what she read in my eyes but, in response, she made a few low guttural sounds, and then understanding that such a mode of communication was unfathomable to me she looked into my eyes. At first it appeared like a flitting glance but then I felt her eyes rest into mine, unmoving and tranquil. And strange as it might seem, I could easily read her words for me in those two tender and affectionate eyes.

In the later years of my life, after weathering difficult times on many occasions, I realized that when we are in deep love with someone our eyes are well-equipped enough to transmit our fondest feelings or questions for our loved ones. We voice our thoughts or the other way around we devise a language to express ourselves only when the love between us reduces and the distance broadens.

I could easily read my mother's eyes saying to me, 'Poor child of mine, why do you wonder as to why I am licking your body clean? Stupid infant, you don't know if I don't lick you clean any predator may get the smell of you and will not waste a moment to pounce upon you. But don't worry, my precious fawn, I will take all care and soon you will stand on your own feet and caper and dance like all of us.'

I could not discern everything she had said to me but this much I realized that the amniotic smell that was emanating from my body could bring danger to my life.

Now she carefully cut the cord that attached her body to mine with her teeth. I did not experience any pain but a length of the cord remained with me. I looked at it curiously and then at my mother.

'Don't worry about it, little one. Slowly it will shrink and one day will fall from your body. Now you are physically separated from me forever. But remember, though we are no more physically attached both of us will always remain a part of each other's being. We will always need each other to feel complete.' I felt her loving eyes telling me.

And then I could feel her telling me something more with those two caring eyes, 'You know, you are the prettiest among all my progenies. Little one, you have a perfect body and a handsome face. I can foresee that one day you will lead a large herd of deer. Look around my child, see, so many of us have gathered around to welcome you.'

I turned my neck to both sides and was amazed to find myself encircled by a bunch of deer. Their admiring and curious glances were on me. A sense of pride filled me at once and it was the first moment in my life when I experienced personal vanity.

As my eyes met those of the other deer for a brief moment they all passed a guttural sound in unison and I realized it was to welcome me and also to accept me as a new member of their herd. A superficial look at all the deer might give you an impression that they all looked alike but once you paid attention to the detailed appearance of every individual deer, you realized that they were all different from each other in complexion, height and in shape.

I felt a sense of belonging with all the deer around me while my mouth opened unknowingly, exposing my two sets of perfect teeth. I didn't know this expression of mine was called a smile. No sooner had a smile flashed across my mouth than all the deer made a common sound, almost in chorus.

I looked at my mother to learn what that sound really meant and my mother's message through her eyes gave me an immense sense of pleasure and satisfaction.

'My precious, never does a newborn smile within a few minutes of its birth. They are all, indeed, astonished by your being at ease with life so quickly.' My mother paused and began again, 'But don't let complacency enter into your mind, my dear child. Remember the very first thing you have to learn as soon as possible is to stand on your own feet. I can give you a few gentle push but remember you have to stand on your own feet all by yourself.'

'No mother,' I said to her with beseeching eyes. 'Please don't help me with a few push. At first let me try on my own.'

'It is very strange, my precious one. Every child wants her mother to give her a push at the beginning, to help her stand on her feeble and delicate legs. But you are an exception. Go ahead, my child, and make an effort on your own. My blessing is with you.'

As soon as my mother gave me the permission I budged my legs, cogitating about a strategy as to how to stand on my own inexperienced feet. At the same moment all the deer, who were witnessing my effort to stand on my own, released a groan of disapproval in unison. It dismayed me a bit and I looked at my mother questioningly.

A glint of amusement sparked in her eyes for an instant before her eyes told me, 'Actually they are all expressing their worry over your safety by releasing the groan. They think you may break your knee joints if you try to stand on your own. They want me to stop you from performing this audacious act. But I want you to go ahead, my child, for I have already seen a spark of courage in your eyes.'

Emboldened by my mother's words, I was determined and resting my weight on my hind legs I bent my forelegs, thrusting the earth under my hooves with all my might and raised the front

portion of my body. But raising the rear part of my body was a really difficult task. Yet I tried to heave the rear part of my body, transferring there all the strength that a newly-born deer could muster. Not only did I fail in my venture but also collapsed onto the ground after my hind legs gave in after a few painful moments.

At once the herd of deer around me passed a smile, exposing their teeth. Somewhat puzzled, I passed a stealthy glance at all of them. A strange smile it was that later on I came to know as a sarcastic smile, a smile that we often pass to laugh at others and their efforts, a smile that can break someone's courage or determination. It was hovering on their lips as though they tried to tell me that collapsing on the ground was all I deserved for paying no heed to their words. But for some incomprehensible reason the jeering crowd of deer couldn't dampen my spirit and rather strengthened my determination. My eyes met those of my mother for once. They were expectant and hopeful as if she didn't want me to be a failure. Without waiting for a word of encouragement from her, I made another attempt but this time slowly and with more awareness.

Although this endeavour did not bring an immediate success at the third attempt I met my objective. For the last few minutes I had turned a deaf ear to the mocking smiles and jibes of all the fellow deer. And now I was standing on all my four feet, my knees were slightly bent forward to provide me with a better balance. How could I explain to you the joy of standing on your own feet for the first time? Suddenly a wind blew; a pleasant and textured air. I felt as though it was celebrating my determination and courage.

I passed an impassive glance at all my fellow deer. Astonishment was writ large on their faces. Looking at their puzzled faces and my mother's proud face, aglow with her love for me, suddenly a thought struck me.

Whenever you endeavour to do something unusual in which your fellow mates and elders have already failed to succeed or never had the courage to take up the challenge, they would invariably discourage and frustrate you to pursue your goal. If it happens to you don't belittle your dream, don't let your

attention get diverted from your objective. Rather be calm, ignore what they say, be more collected and continue your effort with redoubled energy and enthusiasm. And if you can really keep calm and remain focused then it is a matter of time before you meet with your objective.

‘You are one of the chosen few, my child. I am so proud of you,’ whispered my mother although I had already read her message for me in her eyes, radiant with joy.

One of the chosen few, I pondered over what she had said. Does it mean that I am destined to perform a wonder? But what wonder is there to perform in a deer’s life? Thought I and without knowing the answer to my queries I looked at my mother questioningly.

‘My child,’ said my mother with her limpid eyes, suffused with love and affection. ‘I do not know what wonder you can or will perform. As you age, you will have to find it out yourself.’

I loved her sincere answer. Her words gave me an opportunity to look at life with curiosity and wonderment. The fear of a newborn was ebbing away within me and there remained an urge to explore the dense forest around me. I raised my head and looked up. A gentle breeze that was blowing made two leaves fly from far away and on reaching me, they touched my head gently and then wafted down on the grass silently. This gentle tap of two leaves, travelled to me from distance away, appeared to me like a message Nature was giving me. ‘Little deer, you are one of the chosen few.’

A sense of exhilaration filled me. My mother could easily feel it.

‘There is a long way to go, my beloved one, but for the next few days you have to be in a place where no predators can find you. Until you can run so fast as to outstrip your predators you have to be there. Don’t worry about food, my child. I will be always around you to feed you. Now walk slowly and follow me.’

I followed her instructions and let her lead me while the flock of deer around us dispersed slowly. Later I came to know from my mother that whenever a mother deer was about to deliver a child all the rest of the deer of the flock would gather around to witness the birth of the newcomer in the clan.

I wobbled unsteadily behind my mother and soon we reached a clearing, encircled by dense thickets and up there was a canopy made by the leafy branches of the trees, meeting together from all directions. This place definitely promised safety and comfort.

'Sit on the ground carefully, my child. From the next morning we will start our practice session. I will shepherd you to the places where we usually love to hang out. After a week's time your forelegs and hind legs will be strong enough to climb uphill. You will be a quick learner. I think, within a couple of weeks you will start running faster than most of us. For today you can relax and move around this clearing,' said my mother and then stretched herself out on the grassy carpet on earth with her stomach upwards, resting on her back. At once my attention was drawn by her large udder from which projecting out was six moist nipples. They were pinkish in colour and had a marked and firm shape. From two of the nipples a thin whitish substance was oozing out, inviting me to taste it. Without any formal instruction from my mother, I inched towards her and reaching her I sat down. Now bending my knees, lowering my head, I took a nipple into my mouth. It was a matter of a few seconds before I learnt to draw the divine nectar from it. On and off I had to give a quick push to her udder with my forehead and it ensured a steady flow of a thin whitish fluid to all her nipples. Soon I had been taught to call that whitish substance 'milk'.

Clinging to my mother's udder, filling myself with her warm milk, inhaling the smell my mother's body was giving off, a pleasant ecstasy filled me and I closed my eyes. Again everything around me was dark and I felt as though I had reached my mother's womb again. Perhaps my mother was enjoying suckling me as she continued pushing one nipple of her after another deep into my mouth. She might have possessed a belief that the deeper it went inside my mouth the more easily could I drink milk from it.

Again I became completely unaware of the dimensions of time as I had been in the closed chamber of my mother's womb. I wished I had not come out of this ecstatic state ever...

Next ten days of my life passed at breakneck speed. Under the strict guidance of my caring mother and the critical glances of other deer who were elder to me, I continued learning new things every day. It had started with the techniques of tiptoeing, which, my mother had told me, was an effective method to hoodwink our predators into believing that no easy prey was around, while hiding behind a nearby bush, we watched a tiger's or a wolf's disappointment and its slinking away with a downcast air. But the best part of the training was running as fast as I could, to my heart's content, while the panoramic view of the forest always held my attention. My mother was always with me, followed me everywhere and, like me, she too was beside herself with joy once on the tenth day I could easily outrun her.

'Now you are fit to be with us, my child,' said my mother with her eyes. 'Now you are one of the best runners in our entire herd of deer. You are such a quick learner.'

I had already learnt all the communication that a deer made with its groans, grunts, sighs and guttural sounds. I knew what made them release a sound in a lower or a higher pitch. Their expressions of pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow, I could read in no time. Although my mother would use her vocal organ to communicate with other deer, she always talked to me with her eyes.

Of late other deer had also started talking to me, but, interestingly, I could not establish an eye-to-eye communication with anyone of them, even though I sincerely tried to make it. Besides, none of them could read my thoughts or feelings from my eyes either. There seemed to be an unknown gap between all of us and no one was interested in bridging the gulf between each other.

'From now on you can wander around all by yourself. You need not be watched over. But yet, it is always advisable that you be with the herd as it offers more safety and what is more, gradually a companionship will build between you and your fellow deer. They will all share the stories of pain and sorrow of losing their near and dear to predators. But remember; do not go beyond the demarked terrain that I have showed you. Outside it danger is manifold.'

I remained silent, reflecting on what my mother had said. How could I develop camaraderie with the deer who were making fun of me while the newborn me was trying to stand on my own feet for the first time, I wondered. Probably my mother could read my thoughts as she began in a more sympathetic way, 'My child, don't carry bitter memories in your heart for a long time. In the coming days of your life many more bitter events will inevitably strike you. If you keep on accumulating all the painful incidents in your heart, keep remembering when, where and why someone had hurt you, you will carry a burden of anguish in your heart. Though no one will see it or feel it, your anguished and troubled heart will make you a doleful and sad being,' my mother paused for a moment and finding me looking at her eyes with rapt attention, absorbing all her words with the utmost care, she continued, 'So to live a joyful and blissful life you have to learn to do something happily and consciously. It is called *let go*. It simply means to disassociate yourself from the grievously saddening incidents of your past which might be clinging to your heart and causing you a lot of pain. Whenever you do it knowingly no more do the painful events of your life remain attached to you, no more do they torment you. And you become rather a free being. But don't blindly believe in what I said to you. Have patience and be watchful. One day time will resonate with the truth that practising *let go* is the best way to lead a blissful life.'

I was enraptured by what my mother had said to me. A surge of love within me filled my being again. I wanted to cling to the deer who taught me such a beautiful lesson. I neared her and bending the front part of my body I reached her plump udder while my hind legs helped me balance standing. It was the first time in my life I was drinking my mother's milk standing. My mother remained motionless so that I could drink her milk undisturbed. Now and then she was licking my smooth coat, not to wipe it clean but out of affection. A pleasant zephyr was blowing, producing a melodious music as it passed through the leafy trees and long and short thickets which grew all around abundantly. There was a chill in the wind as if it was directly coming from a snow-clad mountain. The shafts of sunlight falling on the ground made a strange chequered pattern. Some birds were chirping merrily, occasionally fluttering

their wings languidly. The entire forest seemed to be in so much peace that it was beyond one's imagination that predators might exist here and now and then it brutally killed one of us.

Again a thought struck me; I am no less happy here than I was in my mother's womb. Feeling grateful to life, I closed my eyes while the milk from my mother's breast continued discharging into my mouth without the least effort of mine. I wished this rare moment had never come to an end.

Chapter - 2

Life itself is a miracle

*In wilderness I experience the miracle and mystery of
life...*

A few more days of my life elapsed very fast. By now I had lost the interest in keeping close tabs on sunrise and sundown in order to know how many days I had spent on earth. I had rather grown accustomed to living this life but unlike most of the fellow deer I did not settle in the shade of a leaf-covered tree and ruminate for the better part of the day. Almost every day I found something new to explore, a lesson to learn and a new kind of fruit or leaf to taste. Most of the new fruits, leaves and plants, ripe or unripe, that I had chewed so far, had not stimulated my taste-buds, yet I loved the task of biting new fruits and leaves while most of the deer loved to masticate the same type of leaves or plants every day. Even the idea of chewing the same food everyday filled me with a sense of boredom and monotony. One afternoon I asked one of the elderly deer about it while she was sitting on her haunches, observing everything around it in a lazy and distant fashion as if nothing around her excited her anymore. Seeing me near her she raised her head and paid me a brief glance.

‘Sit,’ she told me in a sonorous voice and observed me minutely for a long moment. ‘You have really grown tall for your age. Good,’ she continued in a conceited way, ‘do you know I had seen your mother’s birth as well? She used to come and sit by me, seeking my guidance, way back in,’ she paused and added, ‘may be a good five summers back.’

I remembered her as one of those deer who had sneered at me while I tried to stand on my feet for the first time. But since I had started practising ‘let go’ in my life, I held no grudge against any deer.

‘Don’t you feel like savouring new food anymore? There may be many leaves of different flavours that you haven’t tasted yet?’ I tried to sound curious.

A faint sarcastic smile played on her lips before she spoke, ‘My dear one, I was much more adventurous than you are when I was your age. Probably there is no place in the forest where I didn’t set my foot in. There are no trees in the forest whose leaves I have not chewed. But now being matured with age I realized that, in actual, there is nothing new to explore in this forest, all the places

in it are more or less the same in a way. All our foods taste roughly the same. In this entire stretch of jungle there is no new surprise but visiting new areas all alone is nothing but inviting danger. If you want my advice, remember, being venturesome will not pay you off. It will make you tired and exhausted soon. So I suggest you be with the herd of deer, enjoy the food they prefer and live like them. Remember, this is an advice from one of the oldest deer from your herd.' As she finished her last sentence, she was puffed up with pride as though I was fortunate to hear her.

I remained silent for a while, pondering over everything she had said to me. Then I looked at her eyes. They were vapid, dull and without any spark of joy and happiness. Although she possessed a healthy body her being bespoke lethargy. I couldn't bring myself to believe in whatever she said to me. Rather I had an eerie feeling that if I remained close to her for a long time, listening to her talking on life, urging me to settle for an ordinary mundane life, slowly a natural indolence would take hold of me. I might start finding futility in exploring the forest every day. I might stop learning new things every hour and start finding life purposeless other than eating and vegetating all day like most of the deer.

I thanked her for her insightful guidance and left in silence. As I was walking along the narrow alley, which was deserted and reclaimed by a thin layer of thorny bushes, a thought struck me.

Before me many more deer might have travelled every nook and cranny of this forest; there might not be anything or any place left here to be discovered, to make it known to my fellow deer, for they had all heard about it. We all grew up listening to our mothers narrating the stories of great adventures and sacrifices of our forebear. While they were suckling us they would tell us about the predators, venomous reptiles and other parts of the forest. But yet there remained a yawning gap between listening to others' experience and experiencing the same on your own. And to live your life to the fullest, to get the real savour of life, you cannot hang on to others' experiences, others' words and the conclusion they might have reached after encountering a singular event. You have to go through everything on your own and develop

your own understanding which is not borrowed or influenced by others' thoughts. It is pure, virgin and unique in a way. But once you have chosen to explore everything around you, to see things with your own eyes, you are likely to be alone in this venture but yet it is worth taking, for leading such a life means you live every moment and at every new bend in the path of life a surprise is awaiting you...

A pleasant train of thoughts, passing through my mind, drifted me into a state of reverie and little did I realize that the thick shrubbery in front of me would not allow me to claw my way further into the depth of the forest. I was about to turn back when something caught my attention. At a nearby bush two flowers were wafting together, lazily, in the same fashion. They were yellow in colour and all their petals were sprinkled with red dots which made the flowers very unique. They were long, conical in shape and all their delicate petals were spreading around as though smiling at every plant around them. From the centre of the flowers peeping out were a few anthers. No fragrance was emanating from the flowers yet their beauty was so arresting that one could not take one's eyes off it easily.

They were both swaying together in such an astounding harmony as if the wind played the same music in both their ears, entreated them to dance in the same fashion. Now I reached close to the shrubbery and was amazed to discover that in the entire bush there were neither any other flowers nor even a bud. I was sure that never before had I set my eyes on such a flower. But I was yet to surmise as to why this pair of flowers was drawing me towards them with an ungovernable force.

Now I was so close to the flowers that sticking my tongue out could easily bite them off. I watched them closely while time came to a halt. Near the stigma of both the flowers two bees were sitting. Probably they are taking pleasure of playing with the pollen of the flowers, using their delicate stings, I wondered. Now I witnessed another unbelievable sighting. A few moments later both the bees exchanged their positions after consulting with each other for a brief moment in mid-air while their delicate wings kept fluttering. And then their exchanging of the positions went on for several times but their short-lived meeting in the air took place every time. Both the flowers continued dancing in the same manner.

The beauty of beholding both the bees on the flowers was so intense that it was beyond me to describe its sublime splendour. Now all of a sudden the wind ceased to blow as though it was tired of trembling, shaking and thrilling the trees, its branches and bushes for a long time, as though it was curious to know how the forest reacted in the absence of the wind.

I had seen this whim and trick being played by the wind many times before and knew that without the wind at once the entire forest would turn thirsty for it and that a sombre mood would come over it right away.

I looked around and realized that suddenly a hushed silence fell over all the trees who had stopped dancing merrily and that they were rather whispering to each other to know when the wind would start blowing again. Now my attention was drawn by the flowers close to me and instantly I received a pleasant shock. Mouth agape, I gazed at the pair of flowers for a long moment while my mind was deprived of reason.

Both the flowers were swaying mirthfully without being buffeted by the wind. How is it possible? I wondered as my power of reasoning failed to offer me an explanation for this strange occurrence. I did not know how long I gazed at both the flowers unblinkingly but once I closed my eyes for the first time I felt as if both my eyes had devoured so much of their beauty that now it had become a part of me too.

I retraced my steps to our usual meeting place while the mauve sun was gliding down languorously towards the western rim of the sky. I was a little child when one morning my mother had explained to me the reason for sunrise and sunset. 'You know, my precious one, this is an age-old knowledge passed from generation to generation. Once you have your own kids do share this piece of information with them for otherwise their imaginative minds would cook up some story pertaining to it. Has it ever occurred to you why the sun rises in the east every morning and sets in the west every evening?' she paused, offering me a few moments to think on this baffling everyday occurrence. She then continued, finding me silent, affectionately but chidingly too, 'Such a simple reason has not struck you, my empty-headed child. See, every night you go to sleep and in the morning you get up fresh

and energetic. A good sleep makes you lively. Do you think who gives you light all day doesn't get tired at all? It also gets exhausted every evening. That's why you must have seen every evening before the sun sets its light gets faded. Actually it is rundown and wearied after giving light to the entire forest and the places outside it throughout the day. So every evening it turns off its light and takes rest all night. And that's why there is no sunlight at night.' My mother stopped.

This concept of sunrise and sunset mesmerized me for a few minutes but then some doubts started nagging at me.

'In the evening the sun is tired hence the sunlight slowly turns dim. But what about early morning? Why is the sunlight so faint then? After a good night sleep the charged sun should throw very bright light from dawn,' I asked my mother; like most of the young children I had a firm belief that my mother had answers to all my questions.

My mother smiled in response, a tight-lipped smile. 'Why do you feel sleepy and lazy once you get up in the morning? Sometimes you feel like sleeping more, sometimes you yawn several times before feeling fresh. So is the case with the sun. In the morning it feels lazy and slightly inactive and that's why its light is dim. But you see, unlike many of us it doesn't go back to sleep again. It gets up every morning, without fail, shaking off all laziness and gives us light all day. Just imagine, how considerate the sun is; it travels from the eastern horizon of the sky to the western at the same pace so that the entire land can get its light equally.'

There was some sublime beauty in my mother's words. It was one of the rare occasions while she was not talking to me with her eyes. Her words strangely made me feel happy. It was already afternoon and the sun had lost much of its glare. I did not need to squint to look up at it. Gazing at the luminescent disc, suddenly I felt grateful to it, to my life and to my mother as well.

And, after many weeks, this evening as I was returning alone after meeting two unique flowers again a sense of gratitude to life filled me.

Ambling in silence, listening to the crack of the dry leaves crushing under my hooves, I reached the large clearing where all my

fellow deer were sitting together to discuss the day. Every evening the discussion was usually on mundane affairs and for me it was mostly a brief formal visit that I paid every evening, chiefly at my mother's behest. Otherwise I preferred to remain alone most of the time.

This evening no sooner had I reached the clearing than their discussion came to a halt at once as they were all looking at me strangely. Somewhat bewildered, I continued glancing from one face to another until my mother came to me.

'Where did you go, my child? What happened to you? Why are your eyes so bright even in the dark of the night?' enquired my mother as motherly concern swept over her.

'But she met me sometime before sunset. That time her eyes were not glazing like this,' commented the elderly deer who had sermonized to me on life in a forest a while ago.

Are my eyes really glowing? I wondered and suddenly it occurred to me that if they were really glazing it might have come from witnessing the celebration of both the flowers who did not need the help of the wind to dance.

Probably watching their dancing with gay abandon for a long time brought some light to my eyes, I reasoned, yet now in a state of shock.

'Have you ever seen such a light in any other deer's eyes before?' I asked my mother in an undertone.

'No, my precious, none of us have ever witnessed such a strange thing. That's why we are all surprised.' She replied with her eyes.

With a small smile at my mother I left the clearing in a slow pace while many pairs of puzzled eyes behind me rested upon me.

I wanted to be alone for some time. Finding an isolated place I settled there alone as a new chain of thoughts passed through my mind.

'Probably many more wonders, many more surprises, many more inexplicable beauties were hidden in every step of life. All I have to do is keep the door to my heart and mind open all the time and allow the bliss and love of life to enter the inner sanctum of my being. And then one day, no wonder, my entire being may start glowing like my eyes. Our life starts appearing monotonous and dull not when we grow old but when we stop to look at everything with innocence

and curiosity. I will never grow old like those preachy elderly deer, no matter how old I become...’ my thinking process was slowly elbowed away by a pleasant sleep. With my heart filled with a sense of rapture, little did I know that next morning another surprise and shock was awaiting me.



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