

## The day my mom didn't slap me

I hate cold winter mornings. I have been woken up abruptly. It's still dark-ish. Alarms have not gone off anywhere in the neighbourhood. Newspaper hawkers have yet not left their homes. The clouds are still resting on the ground and birds have not yet started to chirp. It's chilly, soggy and definitely not a time to break your dreams or nightmares even. I wonder who would have won the match had I been allowed to sleep till the final over.

A bucket of cold water and a mug is kept alarmingly near me. I've been asked to get ready in half an hour. I am thinking of dry cleaning myself. Is it acceptable? Should I do it? Will it hamper my chances of getting inside the gates? I will not take chances, I emptied the whole bucket atop my head in one courageous lift.

The genie will soon ask for my wish, I fear I might waste it on a hot cup of Darjeeling.

Now is the time for some worshipping. I am having difficulty in choosing the right god from about 84 crores of them to worship at this decisive event of my life. I can't take chances. I can't take risks. I took names of as many gods as I could remember. Heck, I tossed in allah, Jesus and even some voodoo ones as well just to be extra safe.

Suddenly I was not feeling that cold now. Wore new and clean clothes, after a long time. Felt good. Double checked my hairstyle with my fingers. I wanted to look at myself. They should have provided me a mirror at least. Doesn't matter. Nothing matters now.

Kept 'that' photograph in my pocket. Sat down for breakfast. The food was edible this time. I was however craving for Abdul's biryani. He makes a wonderful biryani. I can't even remember when I ate his magnum opus the last time, but I still remember the price, the taste, the aroma, the ..... I've been asked to hurry up. My appointment can't wait.

As I walked through the corridor, I saw Mohan's room. I peeked inside, he was comfortably asleep all wriggled up inside his cosy warm blanket. Mohan is my best friend. My only friend. A friend I met only a month back. We had stayed up late last night, all talking and laughing till it just struck to me that I should not miss the sleep before the sleep. Ha ha ha, I still remember me asking him what did he do. He had said that he had just gone to a bank to withdraw some money. So what? I had exclaimed. To which he gave a reply which had me in splits. He had said that he had gone to a bank in which he didn't have an account. We had laughed at this for quite some time.

I first thought of waking him up, thought of saying 'adios buddy', thought of telling him I was checking out early. But then I thought he might be hating cold winter mornings as much as I do.

It was a short walk compared to a long life that I had. I tried to remember as much as I could. There was so much that I could have done differently, had I been given a choice. But then, I was never given a choice.

People had asked me , do I regret what I did? Do I feel sorry? Do I repent? Truthfully speaking , I don't know. I do feel sad though. Is it ok? Is it enough? I don't know. Am I a beast? Am I a danger to the sheep? I don't know.

But I know that they have promised. They have promised to look after my family. Ohh god , please make them keep their promise. I did what they told me to do , I know they are not good , what if they are liars too? May be this is what I will ask from the genie when he asks for my wish as I stand on the podium with the audience watching from below the stage.

I remember the taste of 'imli churan' that I bought from 2 rupees that I had stolen from papa's pant pocket. Papa had asked me to bring his handkerchief from his pocket where I found those dreadful life altering 2 rupees. I had later told mom about this little robbery of mine. She had just put her hand on my head and tried to fake a smile on her bruised face. My papa used to beat up mom daily. He used to take all whatever little she earned for his dose of pig transformer potion. So she could not deprive me of a rare delicacy of 'imli churan'.

But that seemingly insignificant incident left a permanent dent on my conscience. The distinction between a halo and a horn had diminished forever. The 'right' has always since cried while paying on a see-saw with the bulky 'wrong'. Today I will pay the interest on those 2 rupees.

As I approached the podium , I saw a group of unremarkable people , people with faces which are tend to be forgotten in time between it took to shake hands with them and the next person who enters the decorated gate of your child's wedding ceremony.

They wanted to get it done fast. They wanted to get home so that they could drop their kids at school. They soon will be with their families , so will I.

I anxiously asked one guy who was reading a newspaper about yesterday's India-pakistan day-night match result. He was continuously nodding his head while reading as if he was cramming the news which were to come in some exam he was preparing for. He without ever lifting his eyes and nodding at even more rpm replied that the match has been postponed due to rain. It will now be played today. I gave a sad smile.

Everyone was ready. I was ready. The sun had started to peek from behind the veil. It promised to be a beautiful sunny day ahead. I however wanted to experience the rain once again.

I wasn't scared. In fact standing on that stage I felt like a showman , a magician who was about to pull off a magnificent disappearing act. The audience watching below , I knew , would not clap though.

I asked for some water , I was feeling just a bit thirsty. The unremarkable faces said that I should have asked for it a bit earlier. Once on the stage eating and drinking is against the rules. Ha ha ha , at last I must follow the rules. What if I had to urgently go to the bathroom? Ha ha ha.

I see a bird flying high in the sky or is it a kite? Can't be too sure. Hmm I think it's definitely a ..... wait , what? The black cloth blocks the view.

My heart is beating like a drum in a heavy metal concert. I want to calm down. I want to hum my favourite song , but somehow I can't recall the lyrics. I just want to see 'that' photograph again , which is kept in my pocket right over my heart. I want to relive my life again , restart , reboot.

They had said nobody can hear sound of the lever , I did.