

Man with the Flash Light

Dr. Pushp Lata

Now that he had finished concentrating on his work, he suddenly felt stiff and tired. His ribs were sore and his arm had begun to throb. He would go home and soak in a nice bath. He turned off the office light, locked the doors and moved towards the elevators. The building was deserted except for the watchman.

He walked over to the elevator and pressed the call button. The indicator did not move. He pressed the button again, but nothing happened. At that very moment all the lights in the corridor blacked out. He could feel his heart sink and then begin to beat faster. A sudden fear gripped both his mind and body. He searched frantically for a matchbox in his pocket.

“Oh!” he panted, chiding himself, “I must have left it on my table after lighting my cigarette.”

He groped his way to the staircase. Shaking, he decided to go down into the darkness. As he stepped, he saw the wavering beam of a flashlight moving up the stairs. He wanted to yell:

Watchman! Watchman!

But he was so terrified that he could not even shout and ask, “*Who is there?*”

All his vie for some help went in vain. His mind was lashed by fear and terror. Perhaps this power cut was planned. Of course it was. And now the man was coming. Coming to block his way and kill him.

He hustled back for the office with great difficulty. When he bumped into his door and groped for his keys, they slipped from his sweaty, trembling fingers and dropped to the floor, clinking painfully. He fumbled for them frantically. Presently he managed to open the office door and banged it shut behind him. He could hear the sound of approaching footsteps. His heart lurched.

I wish I had a weapon!



mirror, mirror on our world...



He felt around for a possible weapon in the dark. He could find none. He stood there beside the visitor's chair, trying to say a quick and silent prayer. Though a feeling of desperation seized him, he recalled an event that had happened 15 years ago, when he had gone to his aunt's house back in Raipur, a village in Uttar Pradesh. It was summer.

Uncle, Aunt and six other members of the family were sleeping on the *charpoyis* lying on the open ground in front of the house. His cousin and he were sitting on the mud wall discussing films. They noticed the wavering beam of a flashlight heading towards their house. They thought that somebody might have lost their way and was coming to ask for directions. But to their utter surprise, they found themselves at gunpoint.

Dacoits threatened his uncle and aunt;

“Surrender all your money and jewellery !”

His uncle tried to retaliate initially but his aunt advised him not to do so. They gave up all their valuable possessions. The dacoits warned them not to inform the police and began to leave in succession. But his cousin hurled back some abuses and tried to desist. The chief of the dacoits fired without answering him. He lay dead.

Before he could jolt back from the reverie of the past, the man with the flashlight knocked at the door thrice. A moment later the man called,

“Mr. Agrawal! Here is a speed post for you.”

He could recognize the voice. It was the watchman of the building, Abdul Satar. The fear that had gripped him started fading away. When he opened the door, Abdul beamed at him. Agrawal's cherubic face broke into a huge relieved smile.

