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## Paari's Groom

**Sonali Basu**

Durgapur,  
West Bengal

Paari walks slowly down the path leading to the super market at one end and a Shiva temple at the other in the small town of Rajgunj. There her brother Prakash has a small stall of flowers which she opens every early morning and closes at the evening after seven. Prakash collects the flowers from the farmers and then gives Paari to sell them. Paari opens the stall sprinkles water lights incense stick closes her eyes and pray to lord Ganesha and goddess Laxmi before attending the first customer. After she opens her customers starts pouring in mainly those visiting the temple. At the middle of the day when flow of customers decrease Paari gets time to eat her tiffin which she carries from her home. She mainly brings roti(bread) and dal which her bhabi(sister in law) packs for her. Her hunger don't fulfill as her bhabi don't pack enough food for her but Paari don't say anything. The reason which her bhabi gives for packing less food is that if Paari eats full stomach she will feel sleepy and can't attend customers which will be the cause of loss in the business as there is two more flower shop around. Paari don't ask questions because she knows her bhabi's mentality.

Paari is not matured according to her age. She suffered from disease too much when she was very young some two or three year's age which damaged her brain to such an extent that she couldn't study more than class four where she was detained for consecutive three years. Then her father Pyaremohan stopped her schooling and asked her mother Kanchan to teach her household jobs so that when she is married off she don't face any difficulty at her in laws house. Kanchan, a simple housewife wasn't happy with her husband's decision though she understood the reason behind it. She did as her husband asked but taught Paari the subjects she had studied in the school till then so that Paari don't forget to read write after some years. Prakash wasn't interested with his mother or sister's great efforts and always ridiculed them. But they never stopped trying. Her mother's effort helped Paari to sit in board examination at the age of twenty, but she didn't pass. Pyaremohan consoled Kanchan saying "Both of you did your best and passing in the examination is not the final answer." After this Pyaremohan started searching perfect groom for his daughter but this stopped after his sudden death from suffering a severe heart attack. Prakash became the guardian of the house and within a month announced his decision of do's and don'ts to be followed from then. He stopped finding suitable groom for Paari and brought Lovely as his bride within six months after Pyaremohan's death. With Lovely's entry in the house Paari understood with her immature brain that they are just protégé and can be thrown out of the house if gone opposite Prakash Lovely's will.

Today Paari's first customer is Lalita aunty. She is a lady of sixty or sixty two who visits the shiva temple every Monday. Aunty always orders for yellow marigolds. Then she leaves her

sandals near Paari's shop and walks bare foot to the temple. Though Paari never asks anything to her customers but she can understand aunty has some sad moments in her life which she offers as prayer to god. She never saw smile in her face. But today seemed different aunty came to the shop with a big smile on her face and a young boy with her. She ordered for tuberose garland and marigold. Paari packed them and said the price. Aunty opened her purse to pay when suddenly she said "Do you know I am very happy today." She stopped for a while then said again "My grandson Ritesh passed board exams with highest marks. The promise I made to his mother fulfilled today. So I will offer my prayer for a longer time"

Paari smiled and at the same moment thought when will god fulfill her wish, she wishes to have her own family her children but it seems her brother won't get her married as some amount of money have to be spent and secondly their father's property will get divided as written in Pyaremohan's will. She sighs after aunty leaves the shop.

After a heavy rush of customers Paari manages a recess of some ten minutes when she opens her tiffin box and starts eating. She has hardly finished when a young girl in ragged dress advances and said "Maa ji my flowers?"

Paari smiles and directs her to takes a bunch of rose and ten sticks of tuberose and two garlands of jasmine and says "Did you have your breakfast today morning Juhi?"

Today Juhi smiled and answered in bright eyes "Yes, two pieces of roti which baba made yesterday night."

Paari smiled and nodded her head and signed her to leave. She is aware that her brother often comes to the market to pay a sudden visit to the shop and by any chance if he notices Juhi he will create a chaos. After Juhi leaves Paari smiles and remembers the day when she first met her. That day too after handling the rush of customers she was having her tiffin when a shabby dressed girl comes for alms. Paari makes her sit beside her and shares her tiffin with her. The girl was very much surprised at Paari's behavior as no one behaves so kindly to her. Her experience when asking for alms isn't good at all. After she finishes her eating Paari says "What's your name dear?"

She answers "Juhi"

"Well Juhi do you ask for alms every day?"

"Yes"

"Doesn't your father earn money for the family?"

"Yes but father is ill for last few months and ma died in road accident last week"

"No one else in your family"

“Yes one big brother but he ran away from home after baba smacked him for joining a gang of petty thefts and one small sister.”

“What your father used to do when he was fit?”

“He owns a small shop of eatables which is shut above one year.”

“Ok will you be able to sell flowers at the bus stands to the going public?”

“Why not but who will give me flowers?”

“I’ll but you’ve to promise you will take the money home”

Juhi’s eyes brightened “Really you’ll give me, I will do as you ask me to do.”

Juhi is working from that day and always pay some money for the flowers she takes for sale though Paari never asked for it.

“Please give me a bouquet of red roses”

The voice made Paari come to present time. She handed the bouquet to the customer and took the money. The day passed away as usual. At night Paari gives all the income in her brother’s hand and goes to bed having her meagre dinner.

Next morning Juhi came as usual to take her flowers. When she was selecting her flowers Prakash caught her and screwed her ears “How cunning thief are you, stealing flowers from the shop in front of me?” and turning towards Paari he screamed “Do you sleep in the shop; how could this little thief take flowers when you are present here? This is the cause of less amount of money you are giving last few days. Lovely too said me to look into the matter but I didn’t pay any heed to her words at first but now I understand that you are the main culprit. Come to home today night then you’ll know what is to be done with you.” Then he smacked Juhi severely and threatened to hand over to police. The other shopkeepers of the nearby shops ran to the spot and were advancing to stop Prakash but stopped at the scream of Paari “Stop, I said stop!” Paari who otherwise never answers to any of her brother or his wife’s questions or humiliation today retaliated. She rushed immediately and caught her brother’s hand and then shouted “Stop! Stop at once. She isn’t a thief and I know she takes flowers from my shop as I’ve allowed her to.”

“What?! So you know everything; good; return to home today night and then I’ll teach you a lesson for this.”

“Do as you wish but you can’t beat up this child”

“Still you are answering back, and not feeling sorry for the work you have done..” Prakash raised his hand to slap his sister but some hands stopped him. The oldest person among the shopkeepers

scolded Prakash in stern voice “How dare you scold her? She did it to help the little girl and your threatening to your sister proves that you don’t treat her well in home too.”

Prakash hissed “That’s none of your business.”

“We know that’s none of our business until you keep the matter confined within the walls of your house but when you take it to the public place then we can poke our nose in it.”

Prakash didn’t speak any word more but his eyes told Paari that today something very bad is going to happen in home. She couldn’t think what can happen but today she didn’t fear about the coming storm.

In the evening Paari went back to home as usual and waited for the beatings she will get from her bhaiya bhabi. Her mother looked at her daughter and sighed alas if Paari could be married off while her father was alive; maybe she could have lived a happy life and not like this. Prakash returned drunk as usual and called Paari to ask her about the incident when someone knocked on the main door. Lovely opened the door and then backed seeing a group of people. She called out in loud voice “Hey see who have come to save your sister.”

Prakash advanced and said “What’s the matter chacha....have you come to save Paari from the incident she created....then go back to your home and have a good sleep.”

The person answered “No we have come to talk to your mother about the marriage of Paari.”

“What?... Are you all gone crazy.... Who will marry that nonsense girl?”

Today Kanchan advanced towards the door and asked them to come in without fearing her son’s temper. The group of some six people entered the house and said all the facts about Juhi and her father Raghu, who too have come with the group and introduced him to Kanchan. Paari’s mother wiped her tears of happiness that at last her daughter will be married off. Though the groom is poor and also have children from first wife but still she is sure that Paari will be happy; much happy than she is here now. Kanchan answered “Let me call her and know about her opinion too.” Paari was in her room until now but when she heard her mother’s call she came out. The old vegetable man Vishnu chacha of the market asked “My dear daughter answer me a simple question... would you like to be Juhi’s real mother?”

At these words Paari could see Juhi coming running towards her with open arms calling ma ma. She nodded her head in acceptance.

Nitin is returning home total exhausted. Ten hours bus travelling is the cause of his tiredness but he is more tired out of tension. His sister Deepika’s in-laws had informed him to come and settle the conflict between his sister and family members. When he arrived at her house in Rampur, Deepika seemed very sad and her family members in rough mood. He talked with his sister and then with her husband Bikash and tried to understand the root of the problem.