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## Born Warriors

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The tranquil waves at this coast beneath the isolated lighthouse had dawned a lethargic calmness on them. Distant roar of the waves, the clamour of the merry life at the seaside fair, swing, lights, lamps were replaced there by the natural music of the romance of wind with fluttering large coconut leaves and the ever singing sea. The hypnotizing calmness at that distant part of the beach had composed them all who were completely unaware of an imminent blessed epiphany, the everlasting serenity that the destiny was to bestow upon.

An hour ago a few solitude seekers who perhaps had fled there from their city din were contributing to the noise, singing latest songs of Burfi movie, playing guitar, dancing merrily around the bonfire but by and by when it was around eleven at night, hardly anyone was present except them. It was their last group holiday of student life before being professionals and doing practical on all the theories they learnt so they lingered here late to enjoy that last chapter before flapping open the new.

After the cheery clamour next turn was for different songs, poems and endless discussions, some dedicated to sea and some to life and some to their co-relation. They too felt the death of each minute from their life with each passing wave quoting Shakespeare "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, so do our minutes hasten to their end." They agreed, "Yes...this must be the sadness Arnold saw at his Dover Beach." Everyone attempted their best to pose their intellectuality but then it began to irritate them as being futile before the grandeur of the sea and pushing all the thoughts out, they just hushed themselves, only enjoying the music of the waves. It was then, it happened to them.

Each passing wave was pillaging the shore of its sand, compensating each plunder with the new bounty but what it could not rob was the life beneath the sand of the shore. With each passing waves, tiny holes erupted through the sand making a vault for breathing to the creatures underneath it. Suddenly one among them signalled at the hole, pointing at the secret life under it, making everyone smile at the wonders of the earth. It was then when no human sound persisted, it happened. There began to sprout from the vaults, the tiny hoary white crabs, one, two, few, many and in no time, there was nothing but tiny small crabs crawling all around the beach on their eight legs. The whole sea shore snowed, where ever they turned her eyeballs, saw the tiny white marbles rolling. They looked at one-another, mouth half-open, eye-lashes reluctant to shut itself. It was as if they were on a Crab Island, a different world made just for crabs. Playing, jumping, sprinting crabs in their own different world.

She too enjoyed the tickling as some crabs crawled on her leg but suddenly her brain raced to a horrible thought, 'if it were poisonous.' All serenity fled in a macro second and she gave a hushed cry that made all alert crabs get into their hide in a jiffy. Her friend reading her

contracted face, said, “not poisonous, the white one. It’s red.” And next second she was calm again. The fickle racing human mind! This time everyone abstained from any speech and Crab Island brought to them the epiphanic revelation of the beautiful existence of these warring creatures in the warring world of which they too were the part. The trance engendered through intoxicating calmness of ambience annulled all the itching of human existence and brought them the everlasting serenity that would always bring smiles to them even at the back breaking moments. They experienced this state till midnight when they were made to awake.

As if crab’s combat with the sea was not enough, a crab catcher joined the battle searching big edible crabs that were scarce. She shouted, “why hurt crabs, bhaiya?”

“Beiznas Ma’da’m, roji roti , my daily bread. See wicked crabs, not growing. Hardly got few. Tough beiznas ma’da’m.”

“Can you catch a little one for me.” She demanded with her naïve smile and he gleefully sprinted at her command, found her one and seemed exuberantly pleased perhaps at his experience for being useful to some who talked with him reverentially, equally. When she tried to pay him, he respectfully denied until they thrust the money into his pocket. Before going, he requested, “madam pray for my beiznas.”

She only nodded her head unable to discern for whom to pray between the two warriors.



Suddenly Tapaswini Express at Hatia railway station gave the first signal of departure and She turned her swollen eyes out of the nostalgia that was too obvious to come on the day when the sea recalled them. With a difficultly gathered smile, a wretched grinning, a futile attempt to cover her pain that her face was anyway giving away, she looked at her friend, Aikse, who in turn patted her shoulder as if to say, ‘don’t worry, everything thing will be fine” though she actually didn’t know what had to be fine and said, “lets go.” They alighted on their compartment, reluctant to speak lest it may hurt her.

They both were too shocked to hear her trembling voice on phone, her whom they had ever seen smiling at the worst of the circumstances, never giving herself away, always jeering at the problems as if to mock its timidity before her temerity. “Don’t bother.” was her perpetual dialogue. It was not that she was not bothered but she never fretted about them, never complained. What could pester such a person!!

Randomly they were taking up matters to discuss that would be promptly dropped as the tremble in her voice made them nervous. When she went to toilet, they ventured into discussion.

“Zaide, did she tell you anything.” Inquired Aikse.

“no, you must know. you have arranged this trip at short notice. You know how I managed my leave? Well....what she told you?”

“Nothing except she needs us and wants to go away.”

“anything else? I’m nervous at her hurt. Matter must be intense.”

“hummm...a bit but its better she imparts it with you. It’s something about slandering of which I don’t know much except it has hurt her beyond means.”

“slandering!” exclaimed Zaide in disbelief, “when did rumour began to effect her. Don’t you remember how she would mock at story makers? We have witnessed, haven’t we?”

She nodded silently, ‘ yes this is the very reason I am more nervous.”

Their discussion halted as she came, took no food, went to the upper birth and pretended to sleep. Though there was commotion in the compartment, there was ghost like silence among them. Both too scared to utter something that may hurt her, her who could never be hurt otherwise.



The weather too seemed affected by the storm inside her as torrent of rain welcomed their arrival at Puri. Lounging on the easy chair at the glass covered balcony of their hotel in front of the sea, sipping their favorite hot turmeric milk, looking at the roaring sea with its high waves, they found themselves lost into their own worlds of memories. Seven years of gap, irregular contacts because of their jobs in different cities seemed to swallow their previous jocularly. Everyone was at lost as what to start with so after casual inquiries, they went silent. Besides they both were quite bewildered to see the strongest musketeer among them in such a loss.

Seven years ago, they separated with their great Tanderous oaths to plan a trip at least once in a year, talk every day, look after one another as they had been doing for last fifteen years since the days of their schooling but their resolution didn’t last even for a full year as their intimacy got swallowed by the burden of life. It was not that they had any grudge against one another, any conflict, any misunderstanding, they, simply, carelessly had broken the thin line of mutual understanding that distance creates. Then suddenly she called and they found an excuse to gather. But seven years of irregularity seemed to create a gulf of acquainted emotions that regular correspondence promises to set. So after formal inquiry after one another, they were at loss for further words. Finally Zaide ventured into conversation,

“Out of sight, out of mind. Statement is right. see us.”

“Who says you both were out of my mind. You place in my heart, my soul” exaggeratingly defended Aikse.

“yes.. bestest friends are those whom the distance of time cant devour. Even the decades of distance bring no breach. See us.” Zaide said, contradicting his own previous statement just to carry on the conversation.

They both seemed to prepare their cases before her, she who had done her best to keep themselves close for years. She endeavored to produce a smile at their rethoric, a wiggling of the corner of the lips and then leaned out of the glass, intently noticing something.

There was straight line of hotels across the road and opposite it, the kilometers of running beach. It was three of afternoon now and still it had been raining. Streets were brimming with water to the plinth. Then and there, some people were passing. A hawker that must be selling some edibles was passing on the bicycle. On the back carrier, he had a little girl in school dress sit, apparently his daughter. Half of his bicycle was dipped in water. He was waddling holding an umbrella in one hand whose most of the part he had secured to protect the girl and from other hand dragged the cycle.

Noticing her so absorbedly looking at something, they both too came to the glass. Jaide exclaimed, “oh, the man is fighter, true fighter. See how he fights rain.”

As if rain felt slighted at this remark of being addressed as meek before the paddling bicycler, it started the war on him and the chain of the bicycle came off. All the three exclaimed “oh” in unison, desperate at their inability to help. The man propped the bicycle on his waist, pulled down his daughter to the high plinth, careful not to let her wet, told her to hold the umbrella. Then he, dripping in rain pulled his bicycle to pedestal and struggled to fix the chain. The little girl holding the umbrella came near to the man, trying to save him from rain. The man looked at her with a broad loving smile, patted her hair from the back of his hand since palm was sooted, mumbled something at which the little girl giggled.

“Good words have magic. See the little one’s laugh. I just can’t understand why people use harsh words.” Said Jaide.

“simple, its because they are full of venom. Their toxicated life is so poisonous that they can spit nothing but venom.” replied Aikse.

“toxicated life? What do you mean.?”

“haven’t you heard the phrase: one who goes blind in spring, sees greenery all around.”

“so?”

“So. Have you ever heard any parson who is satisfied in his life and says ill things?”

“no” said Zaide musingly, adding, “besides I know very few who are satisfied.”

“Its because they are more busy in others lives than their own, more busy in slighting others than securing their own happiness and so unhappy, they slander others, miserable people. “

“what boots them to slender? No profit, I say.”

“Oh, its insecurity, its because they feel everyone is after them; trying to cut their position down, replace them so they cut others. I pity them.” Said Aikse.

“but why don’t the people understand that no one can replace another. Everyone is unique in themselves, an antique piece of the supreme creator! What require is proper molding. Keep embossing externally, internally, from body to soul and nobody can replace you.” Words flooded out of her, breaking her long silence. Words, the liquidizer of the emotions, a necessary act to ebb away the exacerbated pain at its climax and her both friend maintained to play their part in the act as perfectly as they could in the expectation of reaching a point when her friend could release her pain and Aikse continued,

“This is something that people don’t want to do. They want their value perennial without any constant effort.”

“effort, they do the greatest of the effort cutting others. Haven’t you heard Birble’s story?” jested Zaide.

“which one?” asked both in unison.

“The one in which Akbar draws a long line and challenges Birble to shorten it without cutting.”

“and what Birble did?”

“He drew a longer line beside the previous one. Simple. If you want to nurture, make your line bigger than already drawn around you. Why waste time cutting others.” Said Zaide.

“Its because people find destroying an easier task than building. Besides such people are always scared that some lines may surpass theirs so besides building their up, they keep cutting others too.”

“But they must know everyone gets what one sows.” Said Zaide in irritation as it flashed in his mind that there must be such a case of slandering that has bothered her friend which they don’t dare to ask directly lest it should reopen her wound.

“These are disgusting people. Where will we lead our society with so much of poison in our mind and tongue. But who will understand them. Leaving them on their own devices is the best way to handle them.” Suggested Aikse.

“That’s what I have, we have always done throughout our lives. Make criticism on my work, my appearances, my behavior, my attitude, my knowledge, I allow, I don’t care but when people

crosses these limits...how can anyone stoop too low to slender, rumor about one's.....” before she could utter a single more word, the deep pain within her choked her, tears tumbled down competing the torrent of rain outside, eyes turned red. It was the pain of losing something so dear, so carefully acquired, so long preserved. Further discussion was futile.



Aikse found her twisting restlessly on the bed whenever she awoke throughout the night. She wished she could persuade her to speak which may alleviate her pain but didn't know how to begin so waited for the next day. When Aikse suddenly awoke the next morning, she found her missing in the room, horrified at the negative flood of thoughts that swiftly arrives faster than the lightening at a critical moment, making simple terror turn into pure horror. Stark terror began to hold her, making her tremble, feel a load of darkness descending in the brain, Aikse began to check fervently all around her room, she was not found. Next she checked Zaide room, entering she found him in sound sleep so checking there was of no use. And it was then, she found her at the outer gallery facing sea. Aikse went there and placed her arm on her shoulder in the old way of companionship and both began to look at the sea.

It was around four in the morning and was still raining, though not as heavily as the previous day. Distant waves seemed almost as high as their hotel but coming to the shore, it receded. The waves were reaching nearer to the side of the beach than usual, almost to where the high plinth starts, where seaside shopkeeper sell their wares. Aikse said, “ assume that long wave reach here. I think tsunami must have such face.” And her friend nodded without any sense of emotion. Aikse wished if she could also vision the tsunami inside her friend, find solution out and could return her of something that they had gotten from her throughout.

Suddenly they both screamed at the wonderful sight. Four boys in one small boat suddenly leaped out of the waves as if thrown out of it but retaliated with thrusting the oars back to the sea, jumping on the watery bed and vanishing for a few seconds before they were tossed again. On the hotel-high waves, young sailors were sailing against the current in the small boats. The exotic sight made them nostalgic of distant past epiphany. They held their breath at this beautiful sight of the dim silvery light of morning, drizzling rain, tempestuous sea, and the brave sea warriors.

“Bravo !” she said, “now it is the original WWW fight, World Water wrestleling.” With her smile, her copyrighted one which her lips could not hold long. Aikse was happy to see the original self of her friend emerging at last, even for a flickering moment which guaranteed that it was not lost, only had been suspended.

“we are going to have a dip at sea by six Aiksee, tell Zaide too.” She demanded something after long hours of silence and turned only to find Zaide standing behind them with a mischievous smile on his face and said, “plans without me, eh!!”

“But its still raining.” Said Aikse.

“It will stop then. Now let’s sleep for two hours and set the alarm, please.” She requested in the tone of order that was her chic when she talked with their chicks as she called them.

And, indeed, the rain had stopped when alarm awoke them. Though there were hardly some souls at the beach, they went for the bath. Sea was still not gentle, waves were too high. Each wave had such a force that it seemed either to throw them out or drag them in completely. It was rough, punishing yet awfully different like chilly, bitter yet relishing. They began to enjoy. Suddenly unexpectantly, an enormous wave came. Both Aikse and Zaide ran to the shore to alleviate the push of the wave but she stood there turning, facing and running to the sea as if inviting it to engulf her and it did but not for too long. Thankfully the wave receded to the sea as much back as it had come forth, swallowing her for few seconds, say forty, then vomited her back.

They both pulled her to the high plinth but she laughed and said, “ I thought the demonic sea would flung me up and down and devour my existence for my impudence of standing before it as the barbarous people of so called civilized world do but alas, sea is more humane! It tossed me and flung me out, body intact, soul untainted.”

“We were so scared. A minute seemed the age. How can you be so careless.”

“oh! Nothing. I gulped down some water, got some bruises.” Indeed the bruises were many, though not too deep. She insisted to bath for some more time and they complied, knowing well that resistance was useless and she behaved as if nothing happened.



A long line of beggars from toddlers to dotage were pleading in their most pathetic phrases for alms to the passersby before the lord Jagganath temple. Their pathetically contorted faces were enough to draw the commiseration and with it money from the devotees who at least would not refuse charity before the holy shrine for the fear that their passage to the heaven would be blocked. Some of them were so emasculated that one could count their bones and ribs while other were too fat for the trade. Some were badly handicapped and some had open wound on which flies were hovering.

There were few common traits though, all were extremely dirty with layers of dirt and soot on their skin, blacken unpared nails, teeth full of cavities and foul smell, unwashed hair on which one could see louse crawling all around, covered in rags, reeking, hunger and strange expressions of wildness lurking from their eyes, a begging bowl and a basket or bag to hoard the bounties, a pure sense of wilderness and a constant plea for donations. Something that would make the most heartless feel pity, not to talk of the person with heart and sympathy and so was Aikse.

Before entering the temple, they had to submit their shoes, gadgets and any article made of leather to the free service counter and had to clean their feet and hand. As they were on the way to temple, Aikse's pathos drew her to the beggars but when she had almost opened her purse for money, she interrupted Aikse, "you deserve to be jailed for your criminal activity, dear."

"what!" said Aikse in her bewilderment, "what are you talking about?"

"one who bribes is as culprit as one who takes." Said she and Zaide nodded accentuating, "she is right."

"Now please. Would you both stop your puzzles and be straight."

"well. By giving alms, you are promoting beggary and so you are as culprit as those who kidnap them, handicap them to make them fit for the trade. You must know that at the end of the day all their money is snatched. Besides the independent beggars are the worst." Said she.

"Independent beggars!"

"yes..there are many who find begging more easy than doing hard labour. They take it as business and earn quite fat out of it. I know some with large house and score of beggar under their command, their staff they call them." Aikse knew her friend's habit to explore the surroundings and not claiming anything without proof so discussing on this point was futile so she took the left one and said,

"but what is the fault of those who were brought into this trade, were they to be left without mercy?"

"no, serve them with food, cloth if you really want. Do you really think money can change their situation? Keep an eye on a particular beggar for a whole day and you will find that he earns more than your honest watchman or maid and yet these are most undeserving creatures alive on the earth. No Aikse, giving money to them is promoting the business."

"but they have no proper home, no shelter, no cloth nothing that they deserve as human being.."

"and you really think your money can bring them these."

Aikse mused and reluctantly consented with her but still not willing to give in, she said, "what is the alternative, be humane."

"Being human is the worst excuse for not taking firm steps. It is as if a doctor stops operating or teacher stop punishing their wayward students for the present mercy sake. If we pledge to not to offer monetary alms to beggars and if we promote others to do the same, this business will automatically be failure and then there will be no child trafficking for at least beggary. Number of parents whose children are kidnapped will bless such steps then. I would rather have an official command issued if I were allowed. See them, only refinement and education can change

their situation. No alms of yours. Now I hope you wouldn't claim that they use money for such purpose"

"but if they don't gather money, they are not given food and beaten, I have heard, no, seen in tv...." she said, making a last claim but before the discussion go further they heard the prayer of evening Aarti start in the temple and they realised that their discussion had taken a long time and all the while the beggar had been waiting to be served but Aikse put the money back to her purse and gently asked, "let me buy you something to eat baba." At which the beggar got angry and began to shout, " why wasted my time? Should tell before. Big people, big talk. Go to hell."

"Are you going to heaven baba?" asked Zaide mockingly and he affirmed, "yes" most confidently and Zaide said, "very well, then I prefer, hell..." and dragged Aikse to temple who was still half convinced as to give the alms or not.

The rhythm of jingling bells, aroma of camphor, sandalwood, ghee, flowers and the chanting of Vedic mantras in the evening prayers had cathartic effect and when after offering their prayers, they sat among the Kirtanias, the practitioners of sound yoga, a congregation chanting god's name, "Hare Rama, Hare Krishna." with the tune of Mridang and other instruments, they forget everything except their blessed existence under the custody of the almighty Lord Jagganath, nath of Jag, protector of the world. It made all their petty grievances become lighter.

Suddenly she noticed a mother monkey whose baby monkey had some bananas that all other of the tribe were trying to grab. Mother monkey had baby monkey sit in a safe corner where it had been eating peacefully while mother monkey was warring with all other, screeching at all, not letting anyone come near. A micro picture of the world, the constant fight between defenders and attackers. She smiled contently.



It was almost ten when they returned their hotel. Next day they had to return back so they decided to visit the place where they had the epiphany years ago beneath the lighthouse so they walked taking the route of seaside. The fair of life was still blooming at the beach with swings, lights and lamps. Entering the beach, the first welcome was through the piercing Smell of fried sea food that almost all second food-stalls were serving in a row. People were ordering their favourite fish and it would be served, fried in no time. Going ahead, there was a large number of shops selling large number of items for every age of person. A woman was trying to persuade his little obstinate son to go ahead from the toy shop where he was thumping his foot at some demand. Married young woman's resort was cosmetic and jewellery stall. Old age people were mostly interested in buying the idols of the God and young men were mostly posing guardian and walking behind the former three. The huge crowd was usually dashing into one another. Among the crowd there were young boys selling key rings made of Sea shells, shouting loudly, "two of ten, two of ten.." . At such a boy, they stopped as Zaide said, I think I will also buy key rings for my staffs."

“but you already have bought much for them.” Said Aikse.

“will buy one more. After all they work for me.” And they smiled remembering their long experience of their friend’s nature, a living idol of goodness, the one who practised but never preached.

He said, “How much bhai?”

“Two of ten Sab” said the boy, hardly fourteen years of age who looked quite refined.

Jaide was about to order when Aikse interrupted with her usual habit of bargain for which number of time she was mocked by her both friends, “give three of ten, we will buy a large number.”

“You are again up to this.” Said she while Zaide remarked in mocking seriousness, “see this happens when she is left alone for few years.” And they both laughed at which Aikse made a face and Zaide added, “we will take her to negotiate the discount on pizza bills at malls and hotels.” As usual he had cracked a joke with a deep meaning.

“Sab, you want to buy or not. Its Beiznas time.” The seller boy who was in hurry said.

“Give fifty” ordered Zaide and the boy seemed happy at this big demand. Usually selling this much must have consumed his whole evening.

He began handling the rings by counting them, “two, four, six and so on...” but he didn’t have carry bag so when they demanded, he went to arrange leaving his bag of keys under their protection and fetched one in no time. Meanwhile she decided that she would also buy to present it to others so when the boy returned he was ordered for more fifty rings, he felt exalted, happiness lurking in his eyes and he counted them more fifty. Again the problem was for carry bag so he went again leaving his bag with them and came back with a carry bag. Meanwhile Aikse decided that if they both had bought the rings, why she should be left so she would also buy and again the process was repeated.

The boy seemed in pure joy and asked laughingly, “more fifty?”

He was asked to count the bill. While he was making calculation, she asked him, “suppose, we had fled with your bags and rings that you left with us three times. Suppose how much you would have lost. You must be aware.” The colour faded from the face of the boy for a second but he composed himself quickly. His reaction was splattered in deep faith. He, very stylistically rubbed his palm on his forehead from one side to another as if rinsing his destiny, posed to sprinkle the sweat from his brow upward using three middle finger hold by the thumb and release it with force and said in grave but grand manner, “if Maa Tara (mother goddess) wishes it then be it so.” And all laughed. They were amazed to witness his fighting spirit, paid him and went ahead.

Passing the crowd, reaching near sea shore, the ambience was different. People were calm, speaking silently, lounging on easy chair. Young couple walking by the shore, hand in hand, old looking at them perhaps was visioning their youth. Some camels and horses were strolling that can be rode in exchange of money. They took the route of beach and began to walk towards lighthouse. After a kilometre, when the crowd began to recede, there were young couple leaning on one another, Few performing unspeakable lover's ritual. But when they reached the previously deserted part of lighthouse, things were not as before.

Years had changed everything. There were lines of lavishly grand resorts around lighthouse which had been a deserted a few years ago and with it the crowd. They spotted the spot where they sat years ago and waited the crowd to reduce. Meanwhile they had tons of talk of all these years except one issue that Aikse and Zaide still couldn't bring themselves to ask in the hope that she herself would share her pain at proper time. They expected to see the crab island once again. It was the last day of the month of sawan, the spring of Indian calendar in which meat eating is prohibited so when there was silence, large giant crabs sprouted from the sand whose crawling looked like the infantry march. It was Zaide who noticed them and shouted, "fly, its enemy attack." And they ran laughing, holding hands as in the days of old. On their way back Zaide exclaimed that he never thought that crabs could look so horrible and that his all previous conviction had gone in dilemma. They were again in their natural self.



Next day early morning both Aikse and Zaide came to her and after framing the background properly, they asked her the most delayed and dreaded question, "what happened, who said and what and why?"

She simply laughed, her genuine smile and peacefully said, "Does it matter now after remembering, meeting, watching, facing, confronting so many BORN WARRIORS, does it really matter, who, what, why. As you said Aikse, slenderer are weakest people and you pity them, I pity them too. Nothing is constant. A face of something brings epiphany while its opposite horrifies. All of us are warriors with our different ways, someone's straight, someone's crooked. Besides should I bother until you both love me." They three hugged one-another.

Aikse went downstairs to clear the bill while she helped Zaide to pack in his room. Just when they both were coming out of the room, the waiter was bringing another customer to check in who happened to be an acquaintance of her who gave a very cunning smile to look at her coming out of the room with a man and luggage. She laughed to look at Zaide, "material of fresh rumours.." and they both laughed.



Shrota (listener): but who is she?

Shutradhar (narrator): She is 'she', a victim of slandering in this slanderous world. Let's call her "Y"

Shrota: Then her friends are "X"(Aikse) and "Z"(Zaide).

Shutradhar: Aha... you have grown very intelligent Shrota. Of Course, She is Y who if placed between some X and Z remains safe.