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“The Unknown Giver”

Sharing with others

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Khairati had placed his upturned palm over the cretonne cloth and then softly ran his fingers over it to get the feel of the fabric that attracted him for long. Umeed Singh, the enthusiastic owner of the makeshift street shop put his morning cup of tea and came running to attend to his first customer of the day. However, his face soon wore a frustrated look to discover that he was the same old visitor like every day. His rosy cheeks had become pallid with all the enthusiasm dying down.

‘You wish to buy this cloth?’ His tone was irritated as ever. ‘Why do you come and touch the same cloth every day when you don’t wish to buy it? You make me mad.’ He then hastened back in anger to gulp down the leftover tea that had become cold.

Khairati didn’t even care to hear the shop owner as he slowly moved his hand away from the cloth while his eyes remained fixated on it. He turned away putting both his hands in the pocket of his trousers. He looked extremely hopeless when he turned to cast another lasting and depressed look towards the makeshift shop before moving into the side lane. He had nearly bumped off an elderly woman winding down hurriedly to the corner of the narrow curving lane. The terrible return of the gaze from the woman alerted him – instantly dislodging the thought of the cloth from his mind that tormented him.

Kasturi Lal had been watching this strange man from his balcony visiting the makeshift shop every day and going away without buying anything. *Why was this man acting strangely? What was ailing him?* These thoughts had begun to haunt Kasturi Lal and he wished to get involved in this dramatic affair, and was determined to unravel it.

The Nature seemed to have marvelously weaved this strange incident to culminate it into a heavenly delight for the threesome unknown to each other – Umeed Singh, the small-time cloth merchant, Khairati, the strange visitor to former’s shop, and the wealthy businessman Kasturi Lal. It had now become certain that Kasturi Lal’s involvement would’ve a crucial impact in deciding

this strange affair in a dramatic manner. However, there were many situations when the threesome experienced the torture of being related to each other for unknown reasons.

Umeed Singh as his name suggested kept his hope alive on his strange visitor and prayed that he bought the piece of cloth some day for which he came every day and touched it passionately. Though many female customers had begged with him to part with that piece of cloth but Umeed Singh wouldn't sell it for strange reasons. They even offered to pay an exorbitant price but he refused them every time.

Umeed Singh would place the cretonne cloth among the other heap of clothes in the hope that finally it would be bought by the strange customer who longed for it; the cloth belonged to him and nobody else. He had to resist his mind against selling the cloth on many occasions and he failed to understand why he was doing so. He would often hold the cloth in his hands and look up at the skies for an answer. It was an inexplicable situation where the strange customer occupied his senses and unknowingly attracted his sympathy.

On the other hand, an excited Kasturi Lal would come and sit on his chair in the balcony. His eager eyes remained hooked on the makeshift shop of Umeed Singh in the busy marketplace outlining the street below his house. He was equally baffled like Umeed Singh for not seeing Khairati. The strange customer had not visited the latter's shop for more than a fortnight now.

A preoccupied Kasturi Lal was growing impatient thinking about the mystery remaining unsolved forever. He threw the Urdu newspaper in disgust that he had brought with him to read. His mind was drifting back to the strange customer again and again. *Where he had vanished? Would he come visiting again?* He hopelessly stood up from his chair to run his eyes through the busy marketplace to get a glimpse of Khairati. He was just going to land on his chair again to rest when he saw his man slowly scampering across the street. On this occasion, Khairati, the strange customer looked sick and weary with a thin shabby shawl wrapped around him.

Umeed Singh also saw his strange customer and was filled with a mystified hope this time. He observed that Khairati was slowly approaching his makeshift shop. He had decided to treat him decently unlike previous occasions. He also wanted to probe the strange customer's mind as to what kept him from buying the cloth that he was so passionate about.

Meanwhile, Kasturi Lal who did not wish to lose the man again came down swiftly to accost Umeed Singh. He unwittingly placed his hand on the cretonne cloth that the strange customer was obsessed with.

“I want to buy this printed cloth. How much is it?”

Before Umeed Singh could answer Kasturi Lal, he observed that the stranger who had by this time started to move the clothes up and down in frenzy. He finally touched the one that he was so passionately attracted to. This act had surprised Umeed Singh and he was filled with some hope that this occasion he had come to take it away for good. He was surely for some surprise now.

Umeed Singh stood baffled when the stranger alias Khairati shoved a five-hundred rupee note at him while he held tightly to the cloth he was obsessed with. The mysterious gleam in Khairati’s eyes scared the wits out of him. He quietly accepted the five-hundred rupee note and returned two hundred rupees to him. Before he could offer him a paper bag to put the cloth in, Khairati had already left his shop. He was in such a hurry that he even dropped the money on the way and had madly pounced on it jostling people on the busy marketplace in the bargain.

Umeed Singh remained in a mystified state after the deal had been finally struck with the strange customer. He wondered for his faith in that man had finally been proved true. He discovered that hope is an enlivening tool that would unfold the true happiness in human lives. He folded his hands and looked up at the sky and prayed for keeping his hopes alive.

For once, even Kasturi Lal had wished to reveal the truth but he knew that the true worth of his humanly deed would be rendered meaningless. He understood that everything lay in human hands – as what kind of a life one wanted to lead. He had led an opulent life throughout and wished to add a different dimension to it now. He had already given a twist to it with his compassionate and noble act.

Kasturi Lal had been watching everything quietly with a mysterious smile on his face. He had quickly understood that this man Khairati had no money on him when he saw him madly throwing the clothes stacked before him. His shabby outlook revealed his state to a great deal and Kasturi Lal knew that he was making a showoff that this occasion he had come to buy the cloth. Kasturi Lal was already inclined to change the course of this everyday mystery that tormented both him and Umeed Singh. He had quietly slipped two five hundred rupee notes underneath the stack of clothes that Khairati discovered.

Kasturi Lal felt extremely ecstatic that day after sharing a small part of his hard earned money. His involvement finally helped to end the traumatic experience of days that bound two men with a dwindling hope and liberated them with heavenly bliss. It was strange to observe how unwittingly both these men, and without explaining each other of their innate feelings protected each other's hope. He discovered what a joy it was to look into life with a keen eye and feel the myriad needs of people in distress; and then become a witness at close quarters to see them getting fulfilled. He was glad to be involved in this miraculous and extraordinary event. Nature had taught him how to observe life and he wondered if others also were open to such unique and divine experience.

Kasturi Lal felt that Nature had ordained him to participate in this unusual affair that examined his humanitarian side. He had never felt so happy before and he decided to keep the matter a secret – he was going to play the role of an '*Unknown Giver*' to bring happiness to others' lives by parting his wealth for a noble cause. It was a divine experience for Kasturi Lal who had decided to follow Khairati to his abode to know his true background.

Khairati who had hurriedly scampered home with the cretonne cloth tucked under his armpit was unaware that he was being followed by his well-wisher.

Kasturi Lal followed Khairati who led him to an old and dilapidated house at the end of the narrow, crooked lane. He observed that Khairati had entered the house without caring to knock or press a bell to announce his arrival. He discovered later that the house was in complete mess.

Kasturi Lal peeped over to watch from the half-opened window when Khairati handed over the cloth piece to his bed-ridden wife. Her eyes glistened with happiness, which reflected in the expressive face of Khairati in the obscurely lit room.

'You'll get better soon as I've bought the cloth you desired for.'

The feeble and sickly voice of Khairati's wife could be heard faintly through the window.

'I knew that you would buy it for me. I never let the hope die.' However, she knew that he had no money on him as he had lost his job. 'How did you get the cloth when you had no money on you?' Khairati narrated the strange experience of the day to his wife while an enthused Kasturi Lal listened to the conversation delightfully. He enjoyed every moment of this extraordinary affair to which he had become a willing partner. This is sharing with others – their grief, their sorrows, pain and happiness.

‘You know God shared His money with me!’ Khairati said lightheartedly. ‘I hope to get a job too very soon. God has started following me. I’ve followed him for all my life.’ He felt excited.

Kasturi Lal was impressed to hear this statement from Khairati’s mouth who had been honest in admitting the divine deliverance. This strange development moved him and his eyes became moist with tears pouring down his cheeks – the holy water from heaven had come pouring down through his eyes. He would not wipe them out of reverence. He returned home with a mixed feeling of delight and dejection. He had some more service to render to redeem Khairati and his wife’s life. Kasturi Lal learned from a neighbouring source that Khairati was an automobile engineer who had been falsely implicated in a theft case and removed from the job. He decided to absorb the latter in his own automobile engineering unit to resurrect his life.

Khairati was a changed man after getting a new job. Kasturi Lal often saw him, perched above his balcony moving with his beautiful wife in the marketplace. Umeed Singh too was surprised to see his old but strange customer in a new outlook. It was destiny that rebounds to change the course of human lives. Once again both these men remained oblivious to what was next in store for them. Khairati approached Umeed Singh’s makeshift shop with his wife and they both exchanged a smile without uttering a word. His wife started to turn over the suits and saris.

Suddenly, Khairati noticed that an elderly woman would pick up a suit and then open her left palm and look at it. The cloth was expensive and she didn’t have enough money to buy it.

Umeed Singh, a choleric by nature had been watching the woman for some time now. He couldn’t control his anger and blurted out in his usual irritating manner.

‘You come here to buy a suit but never bring enough money with you. This is perhaps your hundredth visit that you would go without buying anything. You’ve created a record of sorts.’ Umeed Singh looked scornfully at the woman after delivering his dialogue.

‘It is not like that. I’d brought the money with me. I dropped my money somewhere. I’ll come again to claim this suit. Please keep it for me.’ The woman obviously felt humiliated. She tried to lend some decency to the unpleasant situation.

Khairati who listened to their conversation decided to break the jinx of ‘*hundredth record*’ for Umeed Singh. He dropped two five-hundred notes near the feet of the woman. As she bent down to pick her bag she noticed the money and picked it up immediately. When she raised her head up again, Khairati saw that her face was lit up with a divine glow. He was filled with a strange and

immeasurable delight of his lifetime. He sensed how a great happiness had been bestowed upon him by Nature for performing this simple act of sharing with others.

Umeed Singh was visibly stunned when the woman thrust a five-hundred note at him. This was the second instant that he received a jolt from the blue. He felt that someone must be keeping the hope alive for her similarly as he had done for Khairati. He was not aware that Kasturi Lal was also secretly involved in the strange affair.

‘Here take this and pack two suits I’ve selected. I’d carelessly dropped the money at my feet and I found it at the right time.’ The woman said in a dominant mood with her hands on her hips.

Umeed Singh packed the suits in a paper bag and gave it to the woman who walked away in a gleeful mood. He had never seen her walk in such a manner. He realized -what a momentary happiness can do to anybody.

In the meanwhile, Khairati’s wife picked a sari and showed it to him.

‘We will buy it some other time next month.’ Khairati said without looking at his wife.

‘You only asked me to select a sari. You can buy it for me.’

‘Not today. I forgot to tell you that I returned the money I’d borrowed from a friend of mine.’

Kasturi Lal who had developed a prying eye after his involvement in the dramatic affair related to Khairati and Umeed Singh decided to go after the woman. He quietly accosted her and asked politely.

‘How did you buy the suits when you had no money on you?’

The woman answered confidently, ‘God shared His money with me!’

A bewildered Kasturi Lal returned home thinking who could be the other person to don the role of an ‘*Unknown Giver*’ in the case of that woman. However, he felt happy that the good work he started was spreading mysteriously. Whatever one has in abundance must be shared with others to redeem the distressed souls. Nature had repeated its act of kindness to change another life. He felt happy performing the role of an ‘*Unknown Giver*’ without a trace of pride in him. Sharing with others had become an important and divine task for him.

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Khairati couldn’t afford to deceive his truly devoted wife. He finally decided to share the truth with her.

‘I wish to tell you the truth behind my inability to buy you the sari the other day.’

‘You already told me that you returned the money that you borrowed from a friend of yours.’

‘That’s not the whole truth. You may remember when I told you how I found the two five-hundred rupee notes in the stacks of clothes at Umeed Singh’s shop. With that money only I’d bought the cloth for you.’

‘What this has to do with your friend then?’

‘I don’t know who kept the money there but I know that some good soul shared it with me. That was divine deliverance or you can say a divine borrowing and I’d to return it by sharing with others in a similar manner.’

‘I don’t understand what you mean then with whom did you share the money.’ Khairati’s wife appeared confused by the entire happening.

‘You may remember the woman who had come to buy the suits and how Umeed Singh had humiliated her with his scathing remarks.’

‘I remember her buying two suits only after the humiliating remarks otherwise she would’ve left like every time toppling over the clothes.’

‘You’ve interpreted it wrongly. The woman actually had no money on her.’

‘Then, how come she suddenly bought the two suits?’ Khairati’s wife said with a surprise.

‘I dropped the two five-hundred rupee notes near her feet and I knew that when she would stoop to pick her bag she would find them.’ Khairati said with a smile.

‘You mean she bought the suits with our money.’

‘In a manner yes but it was not our money in the true sense. I got the money from there and returned it at the same spot. It was borrowed money.’