HAVE YOU SEEN BINCY?

No, I haven't seen her. She was not there in the garden hunting frogs. Nor was she catching butterflies. I couldn't find her at Didoo's- the shoddy attic up north. I asked Bahadur. The reply came almost instantly in the form of a finger pointing towards the red clay path that meandered into the pine woods.

"Bincy", I whistled a couple of times before climbing up the lush slope. Still an hour to go before it gets dark and I lose it completely. I don't know these woods. I know Bincy. I know the poor thing will never leave me alone out here in the cold night. I can hear the night already. I have heard it before but then it is one thing to hear it on your warm bed under a cozy blanket and another thing to hear it devouring you all ends up out in the open.

There is a glimmer out there. The last rays of hope blinking from behind the tall trees. I haven't even made it halfway into the woods. Bincy needs to find me somehow. I cursed Bahadur for not having stopped Bincy on her way to this insane adventure. My brain and my heart are already at odds splitting me in two. One pulling me out of the woods, the other making me stay.

I shouted, "Bincy". The mountains mocked me. Night was no more in my mind but all around my body. I flashed my pocket torch and realised that it was far less scary without it. Darkness is without direction and distance. All those spicy stories of death, demons and wolves that I relished during bedtime were starting to play on my mind. Memory can be a monster at times. I cursed Didoo for all that nonsense... now making perfect sense.

The fear of the unknown in the form of a dark mass was digging into my skin with its icy fangs. My ninety odd Didoo with her trembling body and mind can only scare herself to death worrying about me. Bahadur can at his very best point a finger towards the woods. And there isn't anybody else in the house.

I am famished. Bincy too... if she is not being served already for dinner. I have stopped searching for her. I am lost. Can Bincy find me? Just then the thought crossed my mind and with a shiver sprinkled goosebumps all over my body: What if Bincy is already home? I don't know. Maybe, she found another way out of these woods and is now cuddled under Didoo's warm blanket. It took me a while to understand that I haven't even moved a finger on my body and am standing there in that perfect blindness for quite some time now.

The fear of seeing the horror has completely outshined the very existence of horror. But then there can be a snake somewhere, I don't know and so I decided against my will to flash my torch on the face of my fear. The circle of light like an isle only revealed the ocean of darkness that was around me. The light was floating about in the darkness that was me. So little is known and so much more to know. The Universe is weaving itself out of the unknown. Knowledge is infinite. Knowledge can be eternal.

This hunger, this cold and this darkness have always been there all around me, in me. I was not aware of it. I am made out of this nothingness. Didoo, Bahadur, Bincy we are nothing but Nothing: One found in the night, many lost in the light.

DEVLOK

After having served his office for a little more than four years, Eshe was asked to practise the pursuit solo. He was ordered to leave the premises of the Mission with immediate effect and pursue the Quest in the austerity of the Devlok — a mountain range to the north of the plateau where the Mission is situated.

Eshe took his belongings — his body, mind and a cloth bag that had nothing except the mark of the Mission. It took him two full days to reach his destination — a cave some

three thousand metres above sea level. There was nothing in the cave except for the energy of his predecessor who once meditated here. It was dark outside, very dark and probably that's what poisoned the cold even more. The next day even before a daybreak Eshe had already surveyed the place: He found a stream not very far and a few vegetation even, some fruits he never knew existed before.

The cave was in the luxury of the Nature. Everything was bright and beautiful around. The day brought him songs of birds and a gentle breeze on a tender Sun. Eshe performed the necessary rituals and sat down in the required posture just a few feet away from the cave. The serenity and the opulence of the place had an immediate effect on his body and mind. The breeze, the fragrance of the flowers, the chant of the birds, the warmth of the Sun and life of the place took to him. Eshe was not able to concentrate at all and was hungry. He tried a few fruits from the trees nearby and was even hungrier. He drank some water from the stream and his thirst was more.

Eshe was feeling sad all of a sudden. He remembered his Mission fondly and was craving to join his brothers back there. He recalled how they used to be together all the time in the Mission and how they used to have fun amongst each other: The prayers, the activities, the classes...Eshe saw his family right in front of him. His father — oh, what a loving man he was. He used to shower Eshe with gifts when Eshe was a child. He could see the sad smile on his Mother who died when Eshe was so young. Eshe was very fond of his sisters and how they used to play hide and seek in the woods nearby... Tears were rolling down Eshe's cheeks.

Eshe opened his eyes. The Devil was smiling at him.

BEN WAS RUNNING

Ben was running. He was running like mad. The darkness was chasing him ferociously. Ben dared not look over his shoulders. He didn't want to look at the unknown in the eyes.

His lungs were about to explode. His legs were starting to fumble when suddenly out of nowhere appeared a little glitter of light afar.

Ben wasn't running anymore, he was trying to live. He was hoping in that ocean of darkness as that little glitter was slowly, very slowly, evolving into a 100 watt electric bulb.

Ben stormed in... Stumbled on a few wooden chairs before finally landing on one. He was then trying to remember his breath. Slowly, very slowly, Ben was starting to hear voices and sounds of people around him. Ben opened his eyes. It was an inn.

Ben made a gesture to the young man who was serving drinks. The lanky little fellow smiled at him. A hand came and placed a glass full of beer in front of Ben on the table. Ben followed the hand to see its owner, but had to stop at the elbow. There was nothing more to that hand.

Ben felt empty. He could feel the shiver down his spine. Ben looked around him. He saw faces. Faces staring at him. Ben staggered as he reached for the door.

Outside, it was dark. Ben could feel his head spinning. He was reeling from fear. Slowly, very slowly, he pulled out his head, shook it a little and put it back on his neck.

The darkness was prowling somewhere nearby...

THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

A dead body is lying on the floor. Only the gaping throat is telling the truth. But nobody around the cadaver seems to be aware of it. Neither the forensic experts, nor the police are no longer interested in the slashed throat. They have seen it all. And now they are busy gathering evidence that lay here and there. Except of course one man. Squatting

on his toes, he appears to be examining the mortal wound very closely, as if he can hear the gash talk. For he knows that the slash in the throat is trying to tell him 'SUICIDE IS A CRIME.' A crime he finds himself guilty of.

THE ENLIGHTENED

A breeze strayed about for some time before dropping a seed on the ground by the riverside.

The river flowed...

Sid wandered about for a few months before falling unconscious with a fever. He was unconscious for quite some time and one day in the morning when he opened his eyes he found that his fever had gone away.

Sid got up and looked around him. He found that he had been lying under a huge tree. He saw a river flowing not very far from where he was. Then he saw the mountains and the forests.

Sid was tired and famished. He sat down under the tree. He rummaged his rucksack for some cake or biscuit; didn't find any though. He was in despair.

Something fell on his lap. Sid saw that it was a fruit. A big yellow fruit. It smelled appetizing. Sid ate the fruit. It was delicious! He was full. He leaned against the trunk of the tree and closed his eyes.

Somewhere afar a cow was mooing. The birds were chanting. The river was flowing.A gentle breeze was blowing. The sun was shining. It felt aware under the shade of the

tree...

And then there was light when awareness met Me.

ANDROID

At the foothills of the Himalayas, just where the forests of the Siwaliks turn left to meet the river Ganges a sandbank was formed. A few centuries later, the sandbank as if by a freak of nature had already evolved into a solid piece of land right in the middle of which stands the Aloy palace.

A huge zamindar mansion three hundred and fifty years old. Three wings. Altogether one hundred and seventeen rooms with large windows and doors. In one of these rooms a newly manufactured ceiling fan from the then-famous Doyle and Co. had been installed one hundred and thirty-two years ago on a summer morning just like today.

Its heavy iron body hangs from a ceiling beam near the middle of the room with the help of a rather large hook-like object. Two blades extend in opposite directions from a disc and right in the middle of the disc is a pointed iron spike fifteen centimetres long pointing downward.

When the fan starts spinning the spike too spins. Viewed from below it seems as though the spike is gradually descending as it spins. Again when the fan stops while still spinning it seems as though the spike is somehow shrinking and gradually disappearing into the disc. Ever since the fan arrived the sparrows have been fascinated by this movement of the spike. Whenever they find an open window while the fan is in motion they fly into the room, dart towards the fan and stick out their tiny beaks as if to tease the spinning spike.

The spike lunges down furiously and descends quite a way but unable to reach the birds

it pulls itself back again.

The mischievous birds continue to pester the spike. They come in and flutter all around it.

Morning and evening, winter and summer, seconds minutes hours, days weeks months years even an entire world war.

The spike keeps descending and receding... impaling the sparrows one by one.