

That Thing About YOU

Abhaidev is the pen name of Mayank Chandna, an MDI Gurgaon alumnus. After working for a while in an investment bank, he took the plunge and quit that boring job of his to venture into the exciting world of writing, something he always wanted to do.

His penchant for continental philosophy and craze for progressive house music has nettled his simple parents. He is an avid reader and devours classics and science books.

He loves challenging his limits and believes that there is nothing nobler in this world than possessing an intense desire to learn and utilizing the gift of curiosity to its full potential. He seeks transcendence in the practice of art and hopes to pen down stories which are not run-of-the-mill.

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Dedicated to all those men and women, who, despite all odds and overwhelming peer pressure, refuse to grow up, thus keeping the possibility of achieving greatness well alive.

Chapter 1



At a place not on Earth, two men were sitting next to each other on a bench made from something, some substance not to be found in the human world. One of the men, old, in his late seventies, was gleefully looking at a thing he was holding in his hands.

“Stop it!” said the other man in his early twenties.

“Or what?” replied the old man.

“Nothing, it is bothering me.”

The old man sniggered. “Why?” He looked at his companion playfully.

“Because I know you are going to use it.” There was a brief pause. “Aren’t you?” the young man added at last.

“Yes.” The old man smiled at him.

“It doesn’t feel right,” the youngster objected.

“It’s not your fault,” asserted the white-haired man. “You still have a mindset of a young man. Remember, we are beyond the boundaries of right and wrong, or good and bad now.”

“I get that.” The young lad got agitated. “What I don’t understand is why. Why do you want to do that?” he asked.

“Curiosity.” The old man grinned.

“Curiosity is a bad thing sometimes.”

“Curiosity is never bad,” retorted the old man, shaking his head. “Don’t you know? God is in love with the curious.”

“I am worried about the consequences.”

The old man smiled again. "I know."

"How long will you be there?" The young man sighed.

The old man's face turned sage-like. "Time is immaterial for us," he proclaimed.

"Still, if I may ask?" the persistent stripling questioned.

"Won't be long. Three to four Earth days."

"You are really going, aren't you?"

"Yes," the old man said with an air of smugness.

"Nothing can change your mind?" questioned the fledgeling, eyebrows raised.

"No."

"Okay." The young man looked down, disheartened. "I guess I will be alone for a while."

"Three, four Earth days are nothing for us. Just a few moments of eternity."

"I know. I just have never been alone since the day I came here, even if it is for a few moments."

"You will get used to it," said the old man with certitude. "You have to. I can't be here forever."

"I know." The dispirited young man nodded. "I feel nostalgic."

The elderly man lifted his eyebrow archly. "About what?"

"About good old days," the young fellow went on. "It is amazing that you can travel."

"You will learn it too," the old man said. "One day you will," he assured. "I will guide you."

"Thanks. But I will never misuse my abilities. Never."

"You are still trapped inside the walls of morality. People who are new here come with the baggage of their past life. One day you will be able to shed it."

“If you say so,” said the young man. “Can I have a look at it?” he implored.

The old man nodded and passed the thing in his hand to his friend.

“It is alluring yet so simple,” said the delighted young adult with a twinkle in his eye. “I can feel the power it possesses.”

The old man reciprocated to his companion by smiling back at him.

“How did you get a hold of a thing like this?”

A wide grin lit up on old man’s face. “I am a man of modest means,” he replied.

“Was it favour? A gesture of goodwill?”

“Something of that sort,” replied the old man with a smile.

“Did your benefactor know—”

“Knew what?” the wise man interrupted him.

“That you are going to use it for fun?”

“Yes. But it’s curiosity to be precise.”

“I think, it is a sort of perverted pleasure.”

The old man laughed aloud for a while, and then when his laughter subsided, he looked at his young companion with a sombre expression.

“Listen, my young friend,” the old man said. “You are making a naïve mistake by identifying my curiosity with perverted pleasure. What do you think was the reason this universe sprung all of a sudden into existence from nothing? It was curiosity. What do you think was the reason why time was finally set into motion? It was curiosity. And why did the first single cell life appear on Earth? It was nothing but curiosity. It is curiosity, my dear friend, which is driving this whole universe.

What I am trying to do is what the Almighty has already been doing for so long. Bigger the player, bigger the stakes. Since I am an individual of little means, my curiosity is small as compared to the divinity. Nevertheless, I have been granted what I wished for. I will not let it go waste. I will take this thing to Earth and set it free.”

The old man stopped. Moments later, he spoke again, “It is destined. Otherwise, why would I have it at all in my possession?”

“You can still make a choice,” reasoned the young man.

“No. I can’t will against what I have willed,” asserted the elder. “Do you know, my friend, what is the biggest enemy of humankind? It is boredom — the monotony. The mundane life of ours that passes day by day uneventfully without any special moments of joy or pain is dreadful. I too want to roll the dice, like the divinity. How small the game would be, I too want to roll the dice, my friend,” the old man said with a determined face.

“Perhaps one day I will understand; clearly as of now, I can’t.”

“Yes, you will.”

Silence enveloped the two men. Both of them looked at the ground for a while. But then, all of a sudden, the old man raised his head and looked at his pupil with endearing eyes. He knew that his mentee wanted to say something.

The young lad faced his mentor with his eyebrows raised. “You know,” he said, “a slight change, a small tinkering with the affairs of the human world, may result in something big and disastrous.”

“I know.” The old man chuckled. “The humans call it the butterfly effect.”

“Look, it is not about me understanding you and your motives,” the young man protested. “It is about the consequences that your actions would cause.”

“And you are concerned that the consequences may be bad?”

“No. I am past the concept of morality. You have clearly explained to me that right or wrong has no bearing on us.”

“Then what part of my venture concerns you?” asked the old man pensively.

“I think any kind of interference with the human world, be it good or bad in human terms, any kind of intervention is totally uncalled for.”

The old man sighed a little and then said, “How long have you been here, my friend?”

“One Earth year,” the young man replied. “Eleven months to be precise.”

“And in those eleven Earth months, you must have learned about the history of the world?”

“Yes, I have.”

“History as it is?” the old man questioned.

“Yes, as it is.”

“Then you must also know about the great wars that changed the world forever. The greatest wars which now find a place in the religious books.”

The young man looked at his mentor with inquisitive eyes. “You mean wars like the ones mentioned in the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas?” he asked.

The mentor nodded his head. “Uh-huh.”

“What about them?”

“In those wars, my young man,” said the old man, assuming a wise face, “not only did the higher beings like Devas and Asuras interfere with affairs of mankind, but they also took sides.”

“Yeah, they did.”

“Then why can’t I?” The elderly man gestured. “Why stop me from meddling with humankind?” He shrugged his shoulders.

“You are not a Deva or an Asura,” retorted the young man.

“Yes. I am not either of them.” The old man bobbed his head. “But you know what? Even a pawn makes a move, sometimes two steps in the beginning. How small or limited it may be, it can never be overlooked. Remember, it is a pawn and only the pawn which gets promoted once it reaches the other side of the chessboard. If a pawn, saddened by its abilities, stops making any move, it can never evolve into something greater. We have to make moves, my friend, to progress.”

Having said that, the old man tapped his foot on the ground.

“I get it,” the mentee replied after a pause. “Men and water shouldn’t stay at the same place for long. I won’t question your intentions anymore,” he yielded.

He gave the thing he had in his hands a closer look and rubbed it a little with his thumb. A thin layer, dark greenish, appeared on his thumb as a result.

“It looks quite old,” the young man spoke.

“It is. Two hundred Earth years at least.”

“How and when did it come to possess this other-worldly power?”

“I don’t know,” said the old man. “Sometime in the past, one of us, someone powerful enough, tampered with it.”

“Why would someone like to do that?”

The old man let out a gleeful laugh. “The answer would be curiosity again, I guess.” He looked at his companion with playful eyes.

For a while, it seemed that young man’s inquisitiveness had come to an end. But it wasn’t so. He scratched his head for a few moments and then asked once again, “So, where are you planning to unleash it?” He screwed up his eyes. “Do you have a place in your mind?”

“Yes,” replied the old man.

“Tell me,” the young lad entreated his mentor. “Tell me, please.”

“Calm down, my friend. The place is none other than my home.”

“So, you will be visiting your family after all?” asked the young man.

“No. No, my dear friend. By home, I mean my hometown. I feel nostalgic about it.”

“There is no place like home, indeed.” The young man lowered his head. “Don’t know how long we have to be here.”

“Have you forgotten, my friend? It is something that we have to decide. The onus is on us. The day we find a life worth living, the role designed just for us, we will return once again.”

“I know.” The young man nodded. “I know,” he repeated.

“We all love playing roles, don’t we?”

“Yes, we do.” The young companion agreed once again.

A hush descended over them. But it was not for long. The young man inquisitively looked at the old man yet again.

“Hey, have you chosen your subjects?” he asked. “For this little experiment of yours?”

“No,” replied the old man. “I haven’t decided yet.”

“Anyway, what’s there to decide? The humans behave the same. Don’t they?”

“It isn’t true. As a crowd, humans are indeed predictable, but as individuals they are different.” The old man seemed self-assured. “They are all different, my friend. They are all unique.”

“It will take you some time. Choosing the right ones for your game. Isn’t it?”

“Yes,” replied the old man, “it may take some time but not much. I have shortlisted a few.”

“Can I know who they are?”

“Be patient. With time you will come to know everything.”

“Okay,” said the young interlocutor. “But how would you know if the person is the right one?”

“Actually, I don’t have to do much.” The old man pointed towards the object in the young man’s hand and said, “The right ones will themselves find it. The thing in your hand has a mind of its own. It will draw the attention of only those whom it considers right.”

“Oh. Very well.”

“Can I have it back?” the old man asked.

“Yeah, sure. It is after all yours.” The young man handed over the thing to its owner. “I wish I could come with you. It would be fun.”

“You can amuse yourself from here too. You too can see everything that is happening on Earth. Can’t you?”

“Yes, I can, but—”

“But what?” the old man cut him short.

“Seeing things as they are from up close is different from watching it from far away.”

“Don’t be disappointed, my friend,” the mentored tried consoling his protégé. “As soon as I unleash this thing, I will come back. We will then together watch how things unfold on Earth.”

“Oh, thanks. That is so considerate of you.”

“Well, my friend, you are all that I have.” The old man placed his hand on his companion’s shoulder. “I can’t think of a world without you.”

“When are you leaving?” asked the young man.

“Now, my friend. Now.” The old man stood up and smiled at his companion, who had been looking eagerly at him.

“Be careful,” the lad warned. “You can’t afford to be visible to your family members. It will mess up their minds. Humans are neither mature enough, nor are they emotionally ready to handle the existence of beings like us.”

“I know. But the time is opportune. My relatives won’t come to know anything about me. Besides, it’s up to us. It’s we who decide who can see us.”

“Yeah. I had forgotten. But I can’t be blamed for that. I have never visited the Earth since the day I discarded my body. And I have never used my powers on humans.”

The old man smiled. “One day, you will,” he assured. “It’s a first for me too.”

The young man responded by smiling back at him.

“That’s it.” The resolute old man gesticulated in the air. “Without any further delay, I must leave,” he chirped.

“Goodbye.” The young man waved his hand.

“Goodbye.” The old man too waved his hand at his interlocutor. “Off I go.”

With that, the tête-à-tête between the two ended, and in a flash, the old man vanished, leaving the young man wondering alone at that desolate bench.



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