

THE BLOOD CRISS-CROSS

Mihir had left school behind and joined college. As luck would have it, Dr. Jane Tomble, a senior innovative scientist and Professor of chemistry lived near his house. She used to live alone in her bungalow as both her daughters were abroad, in U.K.

From childhood, Mihir's grandparents had encouraged him to do various experiments so and the spirit of curiosity was very much alive with him. Now Dr. Jane Tomble's proximity gave a specific direction to his curious mind. Jane was happy too as she got an enthusiastic lab-assistant.

Jane was very hardworking. In addition to that, she had time, money and inventiveness in ample measure and so her experiments also turned out to be fantastic.

One event is worth relating.

Once there was a cloudburst over the town and the river was in spate. Everything around, it rained constantly and the water level

kept on rising menacingly. Water flooded into the ground floors of the riverside houses and people were helpless victims. Many women and children were trapped with their homes.

People were extremely frightened. They all approached Jane for some solution.

Jane thought it over and with Mihir's help started her out-of-the-box experiments.

Mihir was a small schoolboy at that time but he could always follow her signals. The town was still under the siege of water. She thought and experimented on simulated computer model.

After four days, Jane created four unique machines. These machines could emit megapowerful magnetic waves and dividing, cutting through water, they could pierce through the land also. And of course, they would reach the river floor.

The townspeople took four huge waterproof bags and filled them with stones. Then they fixed the machines on these bags. The most difficult part still lay ahead.

They had to sink these machines at both ends of the river within the town, exactly opposite each other, on the two banks of the river. The river was swollen with roaring, rising water. Who would be ready to reach these points and who would sink them at the precise spots?

But some people took their courage with their hands and set out with a steely determination. Cheering each other they started. Not an easy task to swim against the current! But they did it! And the bags sank at the right place.

Jane activated the machines from her lab...

Bang.. Bang.. Bang..

There deafening explosions under the water.

You won't believe it, but the land under the river collapsed and slid down. The explosion was so powerful that the depth of the river now went down to 19 meters and water rushed into that hollow depth furiously.

Very soon, the water that had invaded the houses and lanes and markets within the town receded and the river assumed a calm, benign look.

Highly incredible, but that was Jane's USP. She had an instinct for such astounding experiments.

Jane used to spend six months with her daughters, in London. Every year, towards the end of January, she would yearn to go to her daughters. Then Mihir would take over the charge of her laboratory.

This year too, Jane deposited the 'keys of her kingdom' with Mihir and left for London.

One evening Mihir was on the terrace of Jane's house.
He was alone.

Suddenly, he heard some noise, of the fluttering and beating of heavy wings. He turned around and sighted an owl, of the Salome species. It was resting on the parapet of the terrace and was gasping. Perhaps it was severely injured.

As Mihir opened his arms to it, lo, what a surprise, very painfully it got itself up and nestled against his chest.

How did this exotic wild owl come here..?

Mihir was perplexed!

How was it injured, with so many gashes and wounds?

What will it eat here, where will it reside...?

All these thoughts buzzed in his mind.

He didn't know how to save it.

Anyway, he brought that heavy, fat, feathery bundle into the laboratory.

Placing it on the long lab-table Mihir started obsessing it.

It was an altogether different species of owl, quite distinct from the usual Indian owl!

It's feathers were glistening, gleaming with a peculiar dampness.

Its bulging eyes were yellow like molten sulphur and ready to pop out.

Even on the eyelids there were clutches of greenish tiny feathers while on its head was a triple crest of grey green colour.

This owl swallows the fish in the glaciers while the icerats it gnaws and nibbles with its sharp pointed claws.

Its most favorite food was the virgin fish in the icy, glacier regions.

Mihir knew everything about it.

There were severe injuries across its stomach and a lot of blood was lost. It had become very weak, with imploring eyes it was looking at Mihir.

Mihir first gave it some water with a cotton swab.

But.. ..

what it really needed was blood transfusion and medicines.

Mihir thought about the line of treatment and then gave it medicines to heal its wounds.

He was clueless, puzzled. Keeping the owl on the table he came out on the terrace and started walking to and fro.

Suddenly he saw something drop down from the branch of a nearby tree.

He ran down and as serendipity would have it, found a half-dead, exhausted parrot under the tree. It was gasping desperately.

Mihir picked it up.

Saw that the beak of the parrot was broken too. He knew that the bird had only a few minutes life left in it.

Mihir decided to take a certain risk.

A brainwave prompted him to extract blood from the dying parrot. Even before he could collect 97 ml of blood, the parrot dropped dead.

In the lab, Mihir compared the respective blood samples of the parrot and the owl.

Mihir found that the viscosity of the parrot's blood was relatively less and it contained simonetrans in excess.

On the other hand, the owl's blood was deficient in mephylocynotne viscohydra 13.

He just decided to push ahead.

He mixed methyloacinate and viscatetra in equal measures in the parrot's blood. Then heated amenocitracomb and gigmasulphonitrate, dissolved it in adoselva acid and injected it in the owl.

As Mihir started transfusing this blood into the owl's body, it showed signs of revival.

The exhausted owl, shook itself and rose to its feet. Moving its neck around and blinking its eyes it started responding to Mihir.

Mihir was excited with joy and felt that he couldn't wait to tell this news to his mentor, Jane.

Mihir opened his tiffin-box and gave slices of bread to the owl. The owl finished it in no time.

Then he applied some medicines to the owl's wounds and gave it some sedative.

Within minutes it stretched itself on the table and started snoring... Then he took the dead parrot, down into the garden and digging a pit gave it a decent burial.

He was happy that he had saved the life of at least one bird. With a great sense of relief, he went home.

Mother was anxiously waiting for him as he was late almost by an hour.

Before she could ask him anything, Mihir gushed, "Mom, I am very hungry. Please serve me my meal."

Throughout the night he was uneasily turning around and fretting thinking of the owl.

As soon as the day broke, he ran to Jane's place. He opened the lab door and was shocked.

This he had hardly imagined!

The owl's feathers had grown greenish and its beak had turned and curved.

Its yellow eyes shone like amber.

Gingerly, Mihir stepped inside.

The owl greeted him with a strange cry, "ty-hut-squawk-squawk-squawk" it cried, it was neither an owl's, nor a parrot's.

He pulled back...

The lab-door was open.

As usual Ganpat came in to clean the house and the lab.

Hearing those weird cries, he rushed to the lab, he had a longstick broom in his hand. The owl was frightened and whirled and scooped instantly and on him, and tore off a chunk of Ganpat's hand. He started bleeding profusely.

The sudden attack unsettled him and he hit the owl hard with the stick in his hand.

Unfortunately, he hit exactly on the owl's raw wound, tearing it. A jet of blood gushed through it and in self-defence, it fiercely on Ganpat.

Ganpat was smeared in the owl's blood from head to foot...
While the owl quietly disappeared through the open door.

All this happened very fast, in just a few seconds!

Mihir was awestruck by the flurry of events.

Ganpat, trembling with fear, slumped down on the floor.

The owl's blood that trickled down Ganpat's body, found its way into Ganpat's open wound and dripped into his body... And this blood was a lethal mixture of the original Salone owl's blood, the parrot's blood and the various chemicals Mihir had processed it with.

Mihir put on his gloves and started attending to Ganpat. Ganpat tried to get up with Mihir's support but collapsed again in that strange pool of blood.

Mihir at last seated him in a chair, cleaned him, cleaned the floor with water, gave him a cup of tea from the thermos.

Ganpat collected himself and slowly started his work.

Mihir too turned to his work, allotted to him by Jane.

He had to note down the findings of the ongoing experiments, make charts and had to prepare five bottles each of aminosulphate, tetrathosymel, hydrocabacid for future experiments.

He was totally engrossed in his work.

When he looked up he saw it was 11 a.m.

He was very hungry and called Ganpat to share the breakfast.

When he saw Ganpat..

His knees gave way.. his throat went dry.

He began to sweat and for an instant his vision blurred.

Tuffs of thick greenish feathers had grown around Ganpat's eyebrows.

The eyelids had drawn back and jaundiced yellow eyes were bulging out.

His nose was curving.

The fingers and toes were slightly and getting pointed like claws.

The hair on his hands had been replaced by small, peeping gray-green furry feathers and so the damp skin was shining with a unique gleam.

His face too was swollen.

The strangest thing was, Ganpat was totally unaware of the transformation taking place in him.

He was amused to see that Mihir was so frightened.

He wanted to call Mihir but no words came out. There was a growl first and then shrill gibberish cries.

Mihir ran for his life.

Taking a few duck like steps Ganpat followed him.

Mihir shouted at him, "Ganpat, don't come ahead. If this acid falls on you there would be havoc. Just stop and wait."

Ganpat stopped.

As he turned and by chance saw himself in the mirror on the wall, he shrieked as if he had seen a ghost.

That shriek was neither like that of a human, nor like an animal, nor a bird.

And then he slumped down to the floor.

He sat down and started moving his claw-turned fingers on the feathery skin of his head.

He could not believe what he saw.

How did this happen?

Why?

A litany of questions arose in his mind. He was seized with fright. 'How will I get out from here? People will be frightened and would start stoning me and may even lynch me. I can't even utter a single word. What we will happen to me? Shall I just rot here and die?' His head was splitting with ache.

He looked up helplessly at Mihir.

Mihir, standing near the table, was in deep thought.

He was totally unsettled by what he saw.

The enormity of the situation stunned him. He did not know how to reverse this sequence of horrible events.

Should he contact Jane and ask for her advice? But what was he going to tell her?

And there was no time at all.

Ganpat was trying to stand upright.

But couldn't manage to get up. He could hardly find his feet. Crawling, slithering, he moved near the wall.

Even the hair on his scalp had started dropping and a soft fur of greenish feathers was sprouting through it. It rose and spread all over his face too.

He fell down prostrate on the floor.

Just at that time there was squeaking scampering noise near him. Ganpat was instantly alert and instinctively pounced on a huge field rat, his yellow eyes gleaming with glee, his hands trembling with anticipation, he caught it.

Tearing the rat with his claws he ate it and mopped every bit clean off the ground.

Both his hands were spattered with the rat's blood now and blood slobbered around his mouth too.

Mihir was aghast and started trembling when he saw this blood-drenched scene.

'Suppose he attacks me now?' The thought crept over his mind, he was afraid to go near Ganpat, and slowly started inching towards the door.

But Ganpat was getting charged with cannibalistic urges now. The Selino owl's blood, the parrot's blood and the sundry chemicals Mihir had mixed in it made for a lethal combination. It was invading Ganpat's original character.

This horrid poison-filled blood was surging towards his brain and his body could hardly withstand the impact of these horrid consequences.

He was turning into a weird, inhuman creature, half-human, half-owl and what not!

He was thirsting for fresh blood now and was looking at Mihir smacking his lips.

Since his feet had turned bow shaped and bent, he could not even stand.

He started crawling towards Mihir.

Mihir was fully alert and was gradually moving towards the door.

Before he could reach the door, Ganpat fiercely pounced on him, Mihir escaped and jumped on the table.

Now, Ganpat cunningly moved towards the door and completely blocked it.

He was desperately gesturing to Mihir, trying to tell him something, waving his hands, shaking his head he tried to say, "Don't go please."

Mihir stood motionless on the table and was observing Ganpat minutely.

He noticed that the swelling on Ganpat's face was subsiding very fast, his mouth was shrinking and narrowing, while his hands and feet were moving at a vigorous speed.

May be because of the rat's blood!

Mihir's head was spinning with various possibilities.

What would happen to Ganpat now, he was restless and was perhaps aware of the transformation taking place in him! But he couldn't control his movements and couldn't sit still.

Seeing that Mihir was engrossed in his thoughts, surreptitiously he started crawling towards Mihir. Taking the support of a stool near the table, he wanted to reach Mihir.

He reached the stool, holding it with both hands, tried to haul his body up and then reaching for the edge of the table.

Mihir was totally oblivious of these developments.

While trying to climb on the table, Ganpat's hand on the table slipped and as it dashed against the bottles on the table, a bottle of tetraphosymel and another of hydrocarbacid broke. Ganpat's left hand was totally dipped in this mixture.

Ganpat squaled in a strange voice and wincing with pain fell on the floor.

Mihir who was lost in his thoughts, was shocked that his foot resting on the table slipped down and he also fell down beside Ganpat.

Ganpat had closed his eyes.

The blood boiling in his brain and the head splitting with pain were driving him mad.

Seeing all this horrendous scene Mihir was trembling with fear.

And then... a miracle took place.

Because of the mixture of tetraphosymel and hydrocarb acid the feathery, greenish fur which had covered his skin was singed.

Even his pointed nails burnt away and the human hands came back.

Mihir promptly got up, took up the two bottles of tetraphosymel and hydrocarb acid, and poured them on Ganpat's left foot.

Ganpat started shrieking and vomited blackish greenish blood.

He held his head in both his hands and sat stunned and motionless. His head was spinning but he desperately tried to assault Mihir.

Now Mihir had got a clue and could see the way out of this mess.

He moved very fast, at Ganpat's back, and before Ganapt could know, gave him a sedative.

Within two minutes Ganapt slept like a log.

Gradually, many changes were taking place in his body. His bent leg was straightening up, the feathery cover down his skin had developed and his claw like nails burnt and turned into ashes.

A burnt, smoky smell spread in the room.

Mihir knew that Ganpat would sleep for only 27 minutes more. He had to take quick decisions and making some novel experiments had to bring Ganpat back to normal.

But if anything went wrong, Ganpat would become uncontrollable, with his gigantic might and in his thirst for blood he could tear Mihir's neck.

Or another possibility was he might come close to being a human being and still miss it.

Ganpat's face and his nails were still covered in rat's blood. Mihir collected that blood for analysis and compared it with the owl's blood. And he discovered something new. He felt that the mystery, why a particular animal eats another particular animal when hungry, was unraveling before him. But of course, without first discussing everything with his mentor, Jane, he was not going to utter a single word about it.

The Selino owl contained very little of aminopentrocyn while the rats blood had it in plenty. In the case of the owl the count was 32.78 while in the rat's blood was 78.69.

The owl has 20 little lippocytotin that if it didn't eat a rat in a fortnight, he might in all probability, begin to lose its eyesight and might go blind. But to prove this Mihir must examine the virgino fish also.

Nature has gifted all animals with an instinct to choose the right food, that food which will precisely fill the deficiency in

their bodies. They never overeat or never eat the wrong food. So they don't suffer from indigestion or even the loss of vision.

The clock was ticking fast, now only 13 minutes were left.

Mihir moved like lightning.

He applied a mixture of tetraphosymel and hydrocarb acid to Ganpat's right leg, right hand and face.

Heating a compound of aminopentrosyl, sigma 60 lippocytone and sulphocambenzyme (3:2.5) he dissolved it into andoselva acid and injected it in Ganpat's body.

Now only two minutes left!

He tied the clasp of the door to a nail in the wall, so that the door should not slam shut.

And if the worst came to the worst as an escape antidotal route held a bottle of potassiumcynsulphide hand in hand. Because even if a drop of it falls on the body it can burn a hole there. It is that poisonous and fatal.

And now only 40 seconds were at hand.

And suddenly he decided to take a risk, that risk which no scientist had even taken before!

He kept the phial of potassiumcynsulphide on the table, a little far off. Putting on his gloves he sat behind Ganpat on a chair.

And Ganpat opened his eyes.

A miracle was indeed taking place.

Ganpat's hands and feet were straightening up and reverting to their human shape. The yellowness of his eyes had softened and the eyelids had loosened and unsw

Ganpat was struggling to get up.

His eyes frantically searching for Mihir

...

And...

Suddenly, as if by some magic, he shot up and stood erect in front of Mihir.

Mihir was startled and he too got up.

As Ganpat heard the scraping of the chair he turned around and saw Mihir transfixed in a state of shock and awe.

Ganpat started salivating profusely and vomited to length and gave ashriil cry. He raised both his hands...

And after that... ..

What do you think?

Guess what must have happened in that laboratory.

Shall I tell you the truth?

What occurred to you first, did not happen at all.

But...

The second thought that came to your mind...

Things happened exactly like that in that unique laboratory.

Do you really think
Mihir would be hale and hearty?
And what about Ganpat?
After all the monstrous twists that happened to him?

Will you give me your reactions?

I am waiting..

in fact, for the second answer that occurred to you.

.....

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