



Rajendra Kumar

Love Story
Series

3

TANDAV

TANDAV

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Cover photo by Rajendra Kumar

Formatting and cover design by Debora Lewis arenapublishing.org

The series:

This series of love stories presents many different ways in which humans express love, the most personal of emotions, and all the varied ways in which they experience its consequences, both sweet and sour.

This story:

Tandav is a sad story of unspoken love between two men, Kevin, a successful and rich structural engineer, and Patrick, a financially strapped HIV positive dancer in recovery. Kevin is uncomfortable living with his wife, Annie, without knowing why. He seeks divorce and loses custody of his daughter, Kimberley, age 12. But when Kimberley runs away from her mother's home to be with him, Annie is livid but he is happy. Still feeling lonely, Kevin joins a hiking group, meets Patrick, and brings him home as a live-in companion to him and his daughter and as a dance teacher to both of them. A strong emotional bond ties the three lives together. One day while Kimberley is home sick, she is sexually attacked by an invader. Her scream brings Pat to the scene who subdues the attacker, shoves a Perrier bottle in his anus, and gets arrested for sexual assault. Kevin is furious at the police, gets Pat out of jail on bail, and hires a private detective to find out the truth about the Kimberley attack. The private eye investigation reveals the attacker to be a member of Faggot Hunt club sent specifically to kill Pat but engages in opportunistic assault on Kimberley. There is speculation that Annie is behind all this. Kevin is now in revenge mode. Tragic events follow.

TANDAV

A wide wall of water cascaded down 500 feet into a translucent pool. A thundering splash surrounded by a placid spread. Liquid silver crashed on descending series of jutting rocks creating a perpetual shower and a thick blanket of mist. The pool gently poured out into a brook which danced around the boulders into dizzying moves, disappearing behind rock droppings and tall trees. A secluded spot reached by four hours of hard bushwhack from the nearest blacktop. I looked at it solemnly. It had nurtured a love within its bosom.

* * *

Kevin came to see me about two years ago. When he walked into my office for the first session, I noticed him to be in his forties, slim but muscular, about six feet and 180 pounds, with chiseled features in a clean shaven face and with slightly curly hair. All that rendered him quite handsome. He was expensively dressed in a tailored wool suit, fine Egyptian cotton shirt, silk tie, diamond cufflinks, Rolex watch, and Italian leather shoes. I later learned, he was a structural engineer and financially well off.

After placing himself in the client chair, he looked around my office curiously, as if wondering what was he doing there?

Introductions out of the way, he apologetically explained that he never thought there would be a need for a shrink ever in his life, however, now he needed to talk to someone about a situation he did not know how to handle. He added that my name was picked from the yellow pages because it was the first one under 'Psychiatrists', but more importantly, because it sounded foreign, Anand, believing that an outsider to his culture might be more understanding of his problem.

The first reason was understandable, the second reason totally escaped me. But then, it was not my reason. So, I ignored it and asked, "What is it that you can't handle?"

“My loneliness. Also the loss of Kimberley, my daughter.”

“How? What happened?”

“About six months ago I divorced Annie, my wife of 15 years, and lost the custody of my 12 year old daughter.”

“Why did you divorce?”

“I don’t know why, but I never felt comfortable with my wife. Not that there was anything wrong with her. I just didn’t seem to fit. When I could not put up with my silent misery much longer, I took the bold step and asked for divorce. At the time I was not thinking that I might lose my daughter and I would be lonely. I do have visitation rights, but it’s not the same as having her with me.”

“How did your wife and daughter feel?”

“I don’t know how they felt, but I can tell you what they said and did. My wife went through several phases. First, there was confusion, ‘Why? What’s wrong? I don’t see any problem.’ Then self-deprecation, ‘Something wrong with me? Tell me, I’ll correct.’ Accusations followed, ‘Is there someone else? I can deal with it. I’m a big girl.’ Attacks came on the heel, ‘How could you? Don’t you have any sense of responsibility? Don’t you love even your daughter?’ Finally vindictiveness, ‘You’re not getting out so easy. I want...’ My daughter told the court that she wanted to be with me, yet... I guess the courts are always prejudiced against fathers.”

“This special bond between you and your daughter, how did it come about? And was this a problem between you and your wife?”

“Actually, yes. You see, before Kimberley was born, we attended parenting classes, just to be ready. The psychologist teaching the class emphasized the need for close physical skin-to-skin contact between parents and the child for the child’s healthy development. I agreed with it and practiced it, spent all the time I could afford with my daughter, bonding. Annie did not. Although nothing serious, but we did have occasional arguments about it. Like when I gave Kimberley a bath or went swimming with her, my wife complained, I thought jokingly, that it was sexual molestation. Disagreement about parenting

philosophy was just that, disagreement. What couple doesn't have disagreements? I don't think that was the reason for divorce."

"The reason for your divorce may not have any thing to do with your present feelings. I think you are depressed because of a drastic change in your life style and loss of your daughter. Don't worry, it's situational, and you'll get over it."

"But what about my loneliness? Can you help me with that? You see, I do understand the cause of my loneliness, it's not so mysterious. It's because I want to be with my daughter. I just don't know how to deal with it."

"Develop some outside interests. Life's boundless, there are many things you could do. Develop new relationships."

"Huh! I hadn't thought of that. All right. I'll try." After a moment's hesitation, he said, "Even though this was not the reason why I came to see you, but I do want to understand why I did what I did, particularly when I had nothing against my wife or the institution of marriage."

"That will require exploration of your personality."

"Let's do whatever needs to be done."

It took only one more session to unravel some of the mystery. Deep inside him, there was another Kevin, largely unknown to him, the source of all the turmoil that was going on for as long as he could remember. The real Kevin always felt a gap between himself and the women with whom he contemplated intimate relations.

He said, "It was like women could peek into me and I did not want them to, like I was afraid of exposing myself to them, like I had to protect what I possessed and not share it with them. I could like them, even love them, without ever letting them know who I was."

"But you didn't completely shun them, did you?"

"No, certainly not. I knew how to play the game. I participated in dating rituals, and even had a few sexual liaisons, but it was like sailing at ocean surface, totally oblivious of the immense life underneath. I would have an occasional glimpse of it, but I would promptly shut it out of my consciousness,

not wanting to admit its existence. So, one day I even got married and after three years had a daughter and thought I loved my family. The irony was, I did love my family, but I never felt happy. Like a Myna bird, I was singing happy songs in a cage without betraying the underlying sad notes.”

“You should have been a poet.”

“I am a poet but I have to make a living, too. Would you like to read my poems?”

“Love to. They might be illuminating. ... So, tell me, are you gay?” I wasn’t sure of my strategy, but at the time it seemed to me that a direct question was the only way to confront the issue.”

Kevin answered the question like it was a non-issue, “I don’t think so. Apart from some curious explorations in my teens, I have never had sex with men.”

His answer made the topic easier to discuss. So, I said, “You don’t have to have sex with men to be gay.”

“You don’t?” Came a bewildered question.

“No. It’s how you feel that’s more critical than what you do.”

“How true.” He expressed his agreement with my statement but denied its implication, “No, I’m not gay. I’m sure.”

Maybe he wasn’t gay. It was not my place to argue with him. My task was to help him, help him get answers to his questions. So, I said, “Okay. Back to your questions. I think you dissolved your marriage and left your wife because you saw no purpose in marital relationship. Maybe you don’t see any purpose in any relationship. What do you think?”

“No, no, No. I think your analysis is all wrong. It’s true that life is a series of random events, related causally but not purposefully. Purpose is a cognitive manipulation. It isn’t just out there, it has to be created. So I am sure I had a purpose when I got married and I had a purpose when I got divorced, all created by me, most likely unconsciously, because I don’t have a clue what those purposes were.”

“In addition to being a poet, you’re also a philosopher. Perhaps someday,

under different circumstances, I would like to enjoy your poetry and philosophy. Now so far as your issues are concerned, well, I'm sorry. I don't have ready answers, but I'm sure, in due course, you'll find them, with or without my help."

"That's interesting what you just said. Yes, you can't provide answers, I have to find them."

That meant Kevin really did not need any therapy but he insisted on seeing me at least once a month, just to have an intelligent conversation. It was fine with me.

Once a month, for several months, Kevin talked mostly about Kimberley. One time he said, "She is very unhappy. Every time I see her, she wants to come with me. Of course, I don't want to get a charge of kidnapping, so I tell her to accept the reality. She tells me, reality sucks."

Another time, "You know what Kimberley said to me when I visited her last week?"

I looked at him questioningly, and he answered, "She said, 'Mom doesn't want me to see you, says you're a bad man and that you want to do bad things to me.' Can you believe that?"

"No, but this got to be resolved. It's bound to hurt Kimberley, deeply. Might even mess her up emotionally, permanently. Talk to her mother."

"I tried, she won't talk to me. Calls me a scum for divorcing her for no good reason. Maybe she is right."

"Still, something has to be done. Think of other ways."

About four months later, Kevin came for his session with a sheepish grin on his face. Before I could ask him about it, he said, "Doc, I got to tell you this. About three weeks ago I joined a hiking club. I thought it might be an answer to my loneliness."

"Is it?" No talk about Kimberley. I was surprised but happy that Kevin acted upon my suggestion and got results.

"I think so. You won't believe what happened last week." Without waiting for my answer, he continued, "We were on an exploratory trek in the mountains

and found this really neat waterfall. We were hot and sweaty after a long hard walk over brush, rocks, and boulders in a canyon. Our guide, she went skinny dipping in the pool. Some of us followed her.” After a moment of silence he said, “It was awesome. Uninhibited frolic of untamed bodies. Why does society frown upon it?”

“Could it be that the real purpose of society is to control us, enslave us?”

A mischievous smile crossed our faces at having discovered the truth no one wanted to admit.

Since his last question and my answer were tangential to what was the focus of our session, I asked, “Why are you digressing?”

“You’re smart. You can read me. Yes, I was hesitating to bring this up. Anyway, I guess I don’t know what it means, but here goes. ... In the pool I bumped into this man. He had a kind and gentle face and a slim body which was sagging although still strong enough to do the strenuous hike, like he was recovering from some illness. I said to him, ‘Sorry, you okay?’ He said, ‘Yes. I am sorry I’m not as agile as everybody else and couldn’t get out of your way fast enough.’ That was the beginning of our relationship.”

“Relationship?”

“I mean we continued to talk, even after getting out of the pool and throughout the rest of the hike. I also learned a lot about him. I think we became friends.”

“Friends?”

“Yes. You see he is a recovering drug addict and HIV positive. No, he doesn’t have full blown AIDS yet, but you know how it is. His T-cell count is dropping, and even a minor infection could become fatal. Used to be a dancer. He has been clean and sober for about a year, trying to rebuild his life. Goes to AA meetings regularly. Somebody told him to join a hiking club to boost his physical, mental, and spiritual energies. He says that because of years of abuse he has a long way to go to regain some of his life, but he is determined to do it.”

“Is he gay?”

“Yes. He lived and worked in New York. After contracting the virus, he decided to get away from the crowd which was responsible for his condition. In the process, he sacrificed his career. Right now he is functional, although not as functional as before, but functional nonetheless. He can work, but he has not been able to find work in his field. He is on partial disability and has hard time meeting his needs financially.”

I knew where it was going, “So you offered to take him in?”

“You can read minds. Yes. I told him he could stay in my guest house. Won’t cost him a thing, and I will have company. He will move in next week. In exchange, he offered to take care of my house and to teach me dancing. I never could dance. What do you think?”

“I think that’s wonderful. Does he have a name?”

“Pat for Patrick.”

After Kevin left, I leaned back in my chair and muttered to myself, “Dancing! He’s in love.”

‘We suffer in love because of the joy it gives,’ I had read it somewhere. The paradox fit Kevin and Pat perfectly. The two were happy in their relationship, but they traversed a very treacherous path and suffered a lot of injuries along the way. I was a witness to it.

A few months later, I was awakened by the ringing of my phone at about one in the morning. It was Kevin, “I’m sorry, but it’s urgent. I need your advice.”

I said nothing and he continued, “My wife, ex-wife, Annie, called a little while ago. Kimberley has run away. She thinks she might be headed my way. What do I do?”

“Call the police, if your wife hasn’t done it already.”

“She has. She wants me to bring Kimberley back to her when she shows up at my place. If she does show up, would it be sensible to force her to go back to her mother with whom she obviously doesn’t want to live?”

“Sensible or not, you’re legally obligated to do this.”

My advice was quite logical but totally absurd in the context of the real life. I

found out about the details of the incident later during Kevin's next session.

Kimberley sneaked out of her bedroom window at about midnight. She took her bike from the backyard and rode it to Kevin's place. Soon thereafter the police arrived and ordered her to get into the police car so that they can take her back to her mother. Kimberley would not cooperate. At that the police threatened her with arrest. Kevin protested which did no good. Not wanting to end up in a juvenile detention center and then facing a judge, Kimberley relented. A couple days later, on advice of his lawyer, Kevin filed a motion in the court for the custody of his daughter. He used Kimberley's flight as a basis for his contention that the mother-daughter relationship was strained and harmful while the father-daughter relationship was strong, therefore, healthy for the child's physical and mental well-being.

He thought he had a strong case. He had counted on some counter attacks from Annie but not the kind that were made. Annie claimed that Kevin had sexually molested Kimberley when they were a family and could not be trusted. She also claimed that he was gay and had a gay lover in his home, which made him an unfit father. Kevin denied both claims.

The court ordered psychological evaluation of Kimberley by a psychologist and an investigation of Kevin's home and lifestyle by the CPS. The results came out mixed. The psychological report stated '... Kimberley is emotionally attached to her father and, because of this, is often subjected to physical and psychological abuse by her mother. Under these circumstances, the subject will be better off with her father. ...' The CPS report stated, '... Kevin has a permanent house guest, Patrick, who is gay, and there is no female caretaker in the home. This living arrangement does not afford a healthy environment for a preteen girl. Since Kimberley does not want to live with her mother, she should be placed in a foster home. ...'

The judge then talked with Kimberley privately in his chambers. After that he gave his judgement in favor of Kevin, although he appended, "... this is conditional on the subject's continued well-being."

Kevin's confidence in the justice system, which had been shattered before, was restored somewhat.

Kevin thought his problems were solved. He already had a friend and was not lonely anymore. Now he also had his daughter with him. Two souls close to his heart. What could be better?

Still, I had some concerns about Kimberley's adjustment to an environment where there was no female guidance and about her reaction to a gay person who, although a prominent part of the household, was a stranger to her.

I expressed my concerns to Kevin. He replied, "I had a talk with Patrick about my daughter even before I sought the court's intervention. Pat told me that he would move out if Kimberley did not like him. That turned out to be a non-issue, because, after I told Kimberley about Pat during my weekly visit with her, she said in a light hearted way that she'd have two dads. When I brought her home after the court's verdict, Pat greeted us both at the door and took upon himself to show Kimberley the whole house and her room which he himself had furnished and decorated. Then he advised her in a mischievous and joking tone to come to him for everything because he ran the house. The two clicked nicely."

I was relieved.

After that Kevin sat silent for several minutes. Even though what he said had eased my concerns, his silence made me anxious. I asked, "What's the matter?"

He answered gloomily, "Doc, I feel uneasy about Kimberley and Pat. They spend a lot of time together. I feel jealous."

I smiled, "Of course, you would. That's natural but not logical. You see, you work, you don't have the time. You should be happy that there is someone to take care of Kimberley in your absence." After a moment of pause, I added, "To help ease your jealousy, think of things the three of you could do together."

"Like in the evenings and weekends?" After an appreciative nod, he said, "You always have a solution to every problem. I guess I will continue to see you for the rest of my life."

I did not know how prophetic those words were.

Weeks passed. One Friday evening I got a call from Kevin, “How would you like to go hiking with us tomorrow to the waterfall where my new life started. Pat and Kimberley thought we should invite you, too.”

So, the three of them were doing things together, I was pleased.

I wasn’t sure about the ethical aspects of socializing with my client, so I hesitated a moment, but only a moment. I rationalized that going on this hike would help me understand the structure and functioning of Kevin’s family which would be therapeutic; therapy did not have to be limited to my office. In fact, I was excited about the opportunity of doing something different, something fun. I accepted the invitation.

My doorbell rang at about seven in the morning, the appointed time. I walked out of the house in my hiking attire and gear, and saw Kevin, his 4 X 4, and his companions: Kimberley, a budding beauty, slim and tall, with long blond hair tied in a knot, almond shaped blue eyes embedded in an oval face, and oozing sexuality; Patrick, a slim, medium height, delicately structured man with somewhat feeble yet functional limbs and joints, short brown hair, dark complexion, a thin face, curious brown eyes, ready to smile mouth, a bold theatrical-sensual posture.

Quick introductions, and we were on our way.

Soon, free from technological traps of the city roads, we were slowly making our way on foot into a world where there were no paths. I was not used to wilderness, and it was hard and slow for me to negotiate stubborn bushes, unforgiving rocks, threatening brooks, and menacing slopes. But, I made it. I slumped on a boulder; my legs were sagging and muscles were aching. I sat there looking at the falls in awe. I was thankful that I was invited and happy that I came. I remembered what someone once said, ‘Pain is temporary, joy is forever.’

Kevin, standing beside Kimberley and Pat, announced, “This is where it began. This is where I want it to end. If I should die before you two, make sure my body is cremated and ashes thrown into these waters.” He had left me out of

the equation.

“I want the same,” echoed Pat.

“Yeah, but someone will be the last. Who will honor that person’s wish? What if both of us were to die together?” Kevin raised a serious question.

Both looked at Kimberley expectantly. She looked confused and a bit shaken by this morbid conversation. Besides, the whole thing seemed more romantic than rational.

I raised a logical question, “Why Kimberley? She is not old enough to handle such matters. Besides, if both of you were gone, who will take care of her? Haven’t you thought of that?”

“Then we have only one other person, you,” Kevin said seriously.

This was totally absurd. I was able to rationalize coming on this hike but I could not rationalize taking over family responsibilities of my client. Not wanting to sound negative, however, I asked, “Don’t you have any family who could take care of Kimberley?”

“Yes. I have my parents, but Kimberley does not know them well. We exchange Christmas cards and things, that’s all. You have become my family.”

‘In just one contact?’ I thought incredulously. Yet, I knew what Kevin was saying. He trusted me more than his own family when it came to the two people he loved most in the world. I could not shatter that trust. So, I agreed, “Okay, I’ll do it, provided I outlive you guys. Otherwise, you’ll have to find someone else.” I did not think I would ever have to carry out that responsibility. Romantic fantasies tend to erode with time, and it would, too, I was sure.

I was wrong.

Kevin was quite at ease with his little family and spent all his non-work time with it. Rather unconventional. So, in one of the therapy sessions, I raised a question, “Don’t you ever want an adult female companionship?”

He had to think before answering, “Companionship? You mean a female friend, a future wife, a lover? No. I have casual friends, both male and female. But closeness, I don’t need. I have my family, and we do many things together.

Wife? I have been that route. No, thanks. Sex? Yes, I thought a few times, but I find it unexciting, rather boring, even frightening when you consider that for most women sex is a way up to marriage or some other rewards. Doesn't that sound like prostitution to you? Personally, I have nothing against prostitution as a profession. It's just that I'm not in the market, not my style. Who knows, maybe I am asexual."

Whatever, his sexuality was his business, but the changes taking place in him were my business. Over a period of time, I noticed that he had acquired softness of demeanor, precision of gestures, communicative facial expressions, and a powerful delivery of ideas through effortless bodily movements.

"You're becoming quite a dancer." I tried to validate my observations during one of our sessions.

"It shows?" he asked.

"Yes, very clearly. Where do you dance? Does Kimberley join?"

"Kimberley joins. We dance mostly at home. I have turned a large room into a dance studio with mirrors on the wall and all that jazz. Pat used to go to gay bars for social dancing. I have no problem with that, but I can't take Kimberley there. So, we do our thing at home. Pat is a very good teacher and a creative choreographer. He has taught Kimberley some intricate and delicate movements which enhance her femininity. It's a thrill to see her move. With me, it's simple steps, both slow and fast. I'm not as good as Kimberley, but it doesn't matter. We have fun. Most of our dances are full of passion, vigor, power; they are about heaven and hell; they are fluid poems; they are manifestations of the *panchtatua*, the five elements, earth, fire, water, air, and space; they are the creation of *Trimurti*, the three faces of God representing creation, maintenance, and destruction of the universe."

"You are talking about Indian dances?"

"Yeah. Pat told me. He is fascinated by classical Indian dances. He says there is nothing equal to them. To him they are the ultimate celebration of life and death. I had difficulty understanding the concept of celebration of death and

destruction until Pat explained it to me. He said that death and destruction were part of life, that creation must be destroyed when it descends into incurable pathology. I understood it even better when I learned the *Tandav*, the dance of the final destruction of the universe performed by the god Shiv. The final pose seems to transcend all physical boundaries with body extremities penetrating the unfathomable expanse of the horizon.”

I listened to his adulatory description with amazement and I was impressed with his grasp of a totally foreign dance philosophy and its execution. I wondered if the dances he was learning were becoming part of his life and personality.

Months slid by without a dark cloud, then suddenly there was a thunderstorm. I was in my office with a client when my secretary interrupted, something allowed only in an emergency, “A hysterical man on the phone for you.”

I accepted the call. It was Pat. I was surprised, but I was more alarmed at what he had to say, “I’m sorry to disturb, but for Kevin’s sake, I have to let you know what happened. I’m home but may not be here long. I have been arrested for sexual assault. They, the police, let me use the phone before taking me away. I have already informed Kevin about it. He is on his way.”

I knew better than to press for details. I dismissed my client, asked my secretary to cancel all my appointments for the rest of the day, Checked Kevin’s address in his file, and drove to his place like crazy, once more, not caring if my behavior crossed the boundaries of ethics set by my professional license.

This was my first visit to Kevin’s house, a huge ranch style structure in the countryside sitting alone on acres of land with the nearest neighbor about two miles away. As I neared the house, I noticed several police cars and an ambulance. I was stopped by the police blockade. Once I identified myself and stated the purpose of my visit, I was asked to wait. A policeman went inside the house and came out with Kevin who testified for me and took me into the house.

In the living room, I found Kimberley in tears and sobbing, sitting in a couch

and covered with a blanket. Kevin Pointed to a chair and said to me, "Please."

I took the chair and saw him sit next to his daughter, encircle her in his arms in a comforting gesture, but looking very angry.

I opened my mouth, words barely came out, "What happened? Where's Pat?"
"They have taken him away."

Totally bewildered and confused, I looked at Kevin. He must have taken the hint because he gave me a summary of the events, most of them learned from Pat, Kimberley, and the police, the rest from his own observations.

"Today Kimberley stayed home with a cold. After refusing breakfast, she stretched out in a daybed in the family room. I left for work at about six in the morning and Pat, after taking care of breakfast chores, retired to his living quarters at about ten with a Perrier and got his nose in a book. About half an hour later, he heard Kimberley scream. Worried, he ran to her, Perrier in hand. He found two male figures, naked below their waists, struggling with Kimberley. Pat's noisy entrance elicited an about-turn by the men who looked to be in their twenties. Pat instinctively hit one of them over the head with his bottle. The man, wet and bleeding, fell backwards. The other man quickly gathered his pants and ran out of the house. Still enraged, Pat turned the fallen man over, sat on his back, and shoved the glass remnant into his rear end. The man screamed and became unconscious. Pat used the unconscious man's own discarded slacks to tie his hands behind his back and called 911, sat next to Kimberley on the sofa holding her protectively, and waited for the police to arrive. The police came, followed by an ambulance. They registered a case of attempted rape against the injured man and sent him to a hospital under protective custody. They also charged Pat with sexual assault and arrested him. The forensics team along with the police investigators remained in the family room collecting evidence until a little while ago. Kimberley was emotionally shook up but was not hurt physically, because Pat had showed up at the scene before the men could do any damage to her."

At the end of his narration, Kevin denounced the police arrest of Pat, "Can

you believe it? They don't see that we are the victims." The use of the word 'we' was significant. The intruders' attack on Kimberley was seen as an attack on all three of them.

After a moment of reflection, Kevin said, "I feel guilty. I brought two people I love most to live with me, and look what happened? They would have been better off where they were."

Irrational thinking brought about by a disaster. I had to get Kevin out of his despondency laden self accusative mood. So, I said, "Yes, it happened, but not because of you. How could you be sure that a similar calamity would have not fallen on them somewhere else?"

He didn't seem to be listening to my philosophizing. Obviously, he had other important things on his mind, because he said, "I got to go and get Pat out of jail. Need to find an attorney, arrange bail. Also, hire someone to take care of Kimberley and the house. ... By the way, I don't know how I will ever repay your kindness, but I will surely reimburse you for the loss of client fees you suffered by coming here."

"That's not necessary." I wasn't thinking about getting paid. I was more concerned about the future of the three people who had become my intimate friends.

Kevin kept me informed of the developments.

He did not waste any time doing what he intended to do. He got on the phone with employment agencies and had a housekeeper within a few hours. It took him a few days, however, to find a lawyer who met his exacting qualifications to represent Pat.

Then the drama began, the kind that gnaws at your heart until nothing is left. I got the story from many different sources, Kevin, police announcements, and the news media.

Pat got out on bail.

The injured man, who called himself Robbie, told three stories, probably all lies.

First. He met his companion in a bar whose name he did not remember. They cooked up a plot to burglarize rich homes to make some dough. They ended up in a house where he got raped by a pervert. No, they did not attempt to rape the girl, didn't even know there was a girl in the house when they entered it.

Second. His companion was his drug dealer who kept his identity secret. They were high on coke, didn't know what they were doing, and ended up in a house accidentally where he got raped by a homo.

Third. A woman found him in a casino, promised to pay him five grands if he bashed a homo. She furnished the address and the description of the man. Chicken that he was, he couldn't do the job by himself, so he enlisted the help of another guy, name unknown, with whom he did drugs. They went gay hunting, instead he got raped.

Robbie was charged with attempted burglary, ordered to complete a diversion program, and put on a one-year unsupervised probation. His companion and the woman who supposedly hired him for the hit job could not be found. Kevin attributed it to police incompetence.

Kimberley's statement was discounted by the police on the grounds that she would say anything to protect Pat, a member of the family.

Of course, Robbie's companion did exist, even if the hiring woman was a figment of his imagination. Kevin was going to find this man and get to the bottom of the matter. He hired a private eye to tail Robbie after he was let out of jail.

In the meantime, Annie called, accused Kevin of providing a totally unfit home for Kimberley, and threatened to go to court again to regain the custody of her daughter. Kevin discounted the threat.

A month's surveillance by the private detective yielded a stunning result. Robbie was a small time thief, a drug addict, and a member of a group called 'Faggot Hunt' whose sole purpose was to harass and kill gay men and women. The group was small with only 28 members, all men, which met whenever it could and as often as it could. During a meeting, the members would find a

target and discuss means of handling it. In one meeting they agreed to get even with Pat for the indignity he had caused Robbie and to honor an obligation they had contracted recently. They did not discuss what the contract was and how its obligation would be met. What this proved was that Robbie and his companion came to the house to attack Pat, under contract with someone, maybe a woman as Robbie had claimed in one of his stories, found Kimberley who became an opportunistic target, but Robbie got attacked by Pat while his companion ran off. This also suggested that Pat's life was still in danger.

Kevin wanted to know who contracted 'Faggot Hunt' to attack Pat. The private detective agreed to find that out, too, through a plant but for a hefty fee because of the danger involved. Kevin was willing to pay anything.

Turned out, it was Annie. Kevin was furious and wanted to file charges against her, but the private detective refused to get involved in the legal proceedings. His job was to gather information, nothing else. Kevin decided to handle the matter personally. He called Annie and shouted, "You bitch, you tried to get Pat killed."

She spewed, "I wish he were dead, so were you, to save my daughter from the poison, but I didn't do it."

Without proof, the matter did not go any further, but Kevin was convinced of his wife's complicity in this sordid affair.

Then one day Pat disappeared.

Kevin came to see me the next day. He was despondent. He sat silent for a few minutes then broke down in tears, "Last night Pat had gone to a grocery store. When he did not come back even after two hours, I went looking for him. The car Pat drove was there in the parking lot of the grocery store where we usually shopped. I called the police, but they refused to do anything, saying that because Pat was an adult and, therefore, they would have to wait at least 48-hours before considering it a missing person's case. I know something has happened to him. These 'Faggot Hunt' people probably got him, and the police aren't doing anything." Kevin's upset and anger changed into despair, "I miss

him so much. How could I go on without him?”

This was the first time I became aware of the intensity of Kevin’s emotional dependency on Pat. At one time I had mused, ‘He’s in love’, but this time it was for real. The trauma he was experiencing could lead to some devastating consequences. It had to be checked right away. I tried to dilute his sense of hopelessness, “It’s not the end. The police will investigate if Pat does not come home by tomorrow evening. Just wait. Maybe nothing happened. Maybe he had some personal issues which he wanted to deal with privately. Don’t lose heart. He is likely to show up with a convincing explanation.”

I knew what I said was all nonsense, because I myself didn’t believe a word of it. I said all that only to keep Kevin from sinking deeper into depression.

I should not have worried about his depression. I should have worried about his anger. Yeah, I should have, but how could I have? At the time, neither Kevin nor I had a clue that it was coming.

Kevin called me two days later to tell me that Pat had not returned and the police finally had registered a case of missing person and implemented their impotent search procedures. A week later, I read in the newspaper that Pat was found, not by the police, but by a hiker in a nearby national forest. Pat was tied to a tree with ropes and was used as a dart board. Twenty-eight darts protruded from various parts of his body, all above the waist.

Kevin must have read the same story, because within minutes of my reading it, he called me angrily, “Twenty-eight darts. You know what it means? Torture. I wonder how long did it take for Pat to suffer and die?”

I didn’t know what to say.

A couple days later, I got a call from Kimberley who was sobbing, “Please do something, help my dad. He doesn’t work, sleep, eat, or clean up.”

Kevin was obviously withdrawing from the world, a bad sign. I went to see him.

He was reluctant to talk to me, another bad sign. I used several approaches to enter his closed world or to get him out of it without success. Then I hit upon

something that worked. I said, “By withdrawing you are hurting Kimberley who needs you now more than ever. I thought you loved her. How could you abandon her?”

“Abandon Kimberley?” He was jarred by my purposefully false accusation.

“Exactly. Do something.”

All of a sudden, he was excited. “Yes, of course,” he said, then sat silently for a few minutes. I did not want to disturb his progression toward normalcy, what I thought was normalcy. After that he became calm, very composed.

Within a moment, I was concerned. I was wrong to use the words ‘calm’ and ‘composed’ synonymously. Kevin’s composure did not suggest calm. It suggested inner turmoil which had been pacified by some resolution of action, I did not know, but I had a sense of foreboding. I wanted to know.

“What are you going to do?” I asked.

“I don’t know. I am worried about Kimberley. She and Pat were so close. She is always crying. I’m, too. I don’t know how to console her. What will happen to her when I am not around?”

Why was he thinking like that? He was healthy, had many years ahead of him, and Kimberley had only a few more years before she would be on her own and be able to take care of herself. Maybe he was thinking of some sudden calamity. Calamities do happen. In the past, if anything happened to Kevin, there was Pat who would have taken care of Kimberley. Now there was no one. Yes, it was a real concern. “She would have to go back to her mother, to save her from the clutches of Child Protective Services,” I said.

“To someone who got Pat killed? She is a murderer. How can I let my daughter go to her?”

“But we don’t know for sure if Annie was involved.”

“I’m sure she is, and that’s all that matters. I’m going to make sure that Kimberley’s future is assured. I’ve already placed my property and money in trust and have hired a fiduciary to manage my estate in my absence until Kimberley is an adult.”

“Her future can’t be assured by money. She needs you,” I pointed out. He wasn’t thinking right. Besides, there was something unnerving, unsettling about all this planning. Actually, I always thought it wise to make advance financial plans, but in Kevin’s case, it seemed like he was planing his demise.

Kevin forced a sad smile which penetrated my heart like a lance and said, “You’re in charge. Remember?”

It came as a jolt. No, I wasn’t thinking about it. Kevin seemed to have a plan for his death but was not telling me about it, perhaps for fear that I might prevent him from carrying it out.

A few days later, he carried it out.

It was after dinner time and I was watching TV. The program was interrupted by a ‘Breaking News’ bulletin, “This just in. A lone gunman walked into The Bullpen, a steakhouse, and opened fire on a group of diners. He was felled by a single bullet from the gun of a patron. The police are on the scene. No other details are available at this time. Keep tuned for further developments.”

At the time it meant nothing, such news bulletins being quite common. A couple hours later, it became personal. I had a frenzied call from Kevin’s housekeeper, “The police are here. Something happened to the master. Kimberley has fainted. I don’t know what to do. Could you please come here?”

I guessed that Kevin had instructed his housekeeper to get in touch with me in case of any emergency. I rushed to Kevin’s house.

I found Kimberley to be conscious but in a daze. Two policemen were there, apparently waiting for me. One of them said, “We found the ID on the gunman in The Bullpen which brought us here. Kevin just walked into the restaurant and fired on a dinner party of 16 men. Four diners and the gunman are dead. The forensics team is on the scene. What can you tell us about this man?”

“Kevin, you mean? He was my patient. I am a psychiatrist. I can’t tell you anything about him without a court order. Right now I must attend to his daughter.”

My firm response had the desired effect. The police left. I knew they would

be back with a search warrant, and later I would be subpoenaed to the court to make public the details of Kevin's life. But that would be later.

I took Kimberley with me. As we were leaving, the housekeeper handed me an envelope and said, "I found it on the master's dresser. It's addressed to you."

After giving sobbing Kimberley a mild tranquilizer and settling her in a bedroom in my house, I sat at my desk in the den with the envelope in my hand, and a scene unfolded before my eyes:

'A reincarnation of Shiv. Granite hard face; left leg firmly planted on the ground, right leg bent, angling sideways with the foot positioned on the left knee; rippling muscles like angry ocean waves; arms stretched outwards piercing the invisible boundary of the universe; fiery volcanic eyes penetrating the endless space. The *Tandav* had started; the spinning body shaking the matter into particles, the mighty legs pounding the earth into tremor, the fabric of creation in shreds.'

The dance of the ultimate destruction of a degenerate world beyond redemption slowly faded, and I opened the envelope. There was a brief note in it. I kept it to share it with Kimberley, after she was calm enough to receive its contents.

The next day I heard from Annie. She demanded custody of Kimberley. I intended to keep my promise to Kevin, and I told her so. She threatened a lawsuit. I prepared myself mentally for it and would deal with it when it came.

I took possession of Pat and Kevin's bodies after the autopsies and other formalities had been completed. I had them cremated and the ashes put into one urn. A few days later, I and Kimberley took another somber journey to Kevin's waterfall with the urn of ashes. We sat on a boulder, scattered the ashes on the flowing water, and watched them perform a slow dance on the rippling waves, finally disappearing behind some trees and rocks.

Then I pulled out Kevin's note from my pocket, gave it to Kimberley, and said, "I think you should keep it."

She read it silently and wept. I remember its contents.

My private detective informed me about the next meeting of Faggot Hunt. I am going there. Sorry, it has to be done.

A long time ago I had promised to share my poems with you. Here's one:

*On this piece of rock
Hurling through space
Our battered bodies
Cease to move,
Our dispirited lives
Lose their essence,
Only to choreograph
A new slow dance
In the ethereal expanse.*

About the Author



Author photo by Bob Cardell

Rajendra Kumar, a retired psychologist, divides his time between writing, hiking, and traveling. Writing has been a passion with him since age 12. His work reflects unconventional ideas which rattle the cage of tradition. It also makes you, the reader, feel all kinds of emotions and prods you to think about a variety of issues. For comments and questions, contact:

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