

The Potter's Son

Novel

Khawaja Ashraf

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First American Edition

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C. W. Printers,
1375 University Ave, Berkeley, CA 94702. USA

Manufactured by C. W. Printers
Production Manager: Khaqan Ashraf

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

K. Ashraf, 1951
Walking in the Dark
ISBN:

1. Literature
2. Translation

C. W. Printers
1375 University Ave, Berkeley, CA 94702

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Introduction

Life continues under all sorts of circumstances. The process of life never stops. When one form depletes, it emerges in another shape somewhere else. If in this vast universe, due to an accident, life destroys one planet, it migrates to another world. Time and space are its two realms. In these two realms, it keeps appearing in its various beautiful colors.

Society, tradition and custom, businesses, culture, literature, art, civilization, politics, and state are the manifestations of life.

Laborers, peasants, capitalists, shopkeepers, doctors, engineers, saints, prophets, politicians, and storywriters are a few of its characters.

These characters' tears, sighs, turnings and tossing, sufferings, struggles to reach somewhere, crying over failures, throwing parties on success, are its various manifestations through which it continues its varieties.

We humans, in the name of religion, politics, art, and state, the way we treat it and disfigure it, and set aside its bigger goals, The Potter's Son is the story of these conflicts.

This story starts from a small village in Pakistan and acts in the most developed cities of the United States, and it helps the reader

to imagine the simplicity and complexity of life through its journey. The Potter's Son's scenes also aid the readers to view the aspects of social development of two different societies.

One society is at a level of development where religion and religious traditions are vital realities of life. In this society, a person, from birth to death, has to live within the bounds of religious traditions. Any deviation from those traditions can make them face violent consequences.

The other society has learned to keep religion and religious traditions within personal limits. Those traditions work at a level where an individual's social freedoms are not muzzled because of their belief.

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Chapter 1

Nigu, the pot maker's wife, gave birth to a beautiful baby boy many years after their marriage. It made Shero so happy he bought a bulk of sweets from the bazaar and distributed them among all passersby. He proudly informed everyone about the birth of his son.

"Shero! What good is it to have a son after ten years of marriage? What's the big deal about it? If your wife had given birth to two or four at a time, it would have been a big deal."

"Chaudhary! My wife is a woman; she is not a buffalo that she should've given birth to more than one child."

"Buffalos give birth to only one calf at a time. However, women who have a healthy man give birth to more than one child at a time. If your wife became capable of giving birth to a baby, she should have born two or three or four babies," Chaudhry taunted Shero.

"Chaudhry, I'm happy with one baby. I always thought I would go to the grave without leaving any heir. Now, I feel at least I've got an heir."

"What do you have? A few donkeys, a potter's wheel, and one small dwelling." Chaudhry Nisar continued taunting Shero.

Shero hit back. “Chaudhry, you didn’t buy all these lands. You inherited them from your forefathers. If you had bought these with your earnings, it would’ve meant something. You’re only bragging big-time based on your forefathers’ wealth.”

Shero, the potter, and Chaudhry Nisar, the landlord, were childhood friends. Their friendship grew when they were not aware of their social status. However, over time, they became aware of their social status. Shero understood he was the son of a poor potter. Chaudhry Nisar became conscious that he was the son of the town’s landlord.

In the early days of their friendship, their fathers tried to make them aware of their social and economic status. Shero’s father, Mohammad, always reminded him that he was the son of a poor man. Therefore, he should hang out with other poor boys. Chaudhry Nisar was the son of the landlord; Shero should stay away from him.

“But, Father, Nisar has never mentioned anything that shows he is the son of a landlord. Moreover, who are the rich people? Nisar has two eyes, two ears, two hands, two legs, and on the top, just one head. Then, how come he is superior, and I am inferior?”

Mohammad, the potter, always felt cornered with his son’s such arguments. Then, he would snub him and say, “You do what I say. Don’t argue with me.”

“Ok, Papa, next time when Nisar comes to see me, I’ll tell him I can’t see him because he is the son of the landlord.”

“No, no, don’t talk like that to him. He may not like it and complain to his father. He may create difficulties for us.”

“Then how can I tell him I can’t go with him nowhere?” Sheru would ask his father.

“You tell him that you’re not feeling well. A couple of times make this excuse; he will get the message and stop coming to see you,” Mohammad advised him.

“No, Papa, it isn’t possible for me to lie. Moreover, if I tell him I am sick, he will come more often to see me. I can’t pretend to be sick for too long,” Sheru replied to his father.

Sheru’s arguments made Mohammad more concerned. He didn’t know how to make his son understand.

On the other side, Nisar’s father was facing a similar dilemma. He was the landlord in the town. The dwellers of the whole village respected him as the landlord and sought his guidance in their social matters.

However, they both had such a bond among them, the more their parents wanted them to stay away from each other, and the more they spent time together. Meeting each other every day had become their habit. Once someone becomes habitual of something, good or bad, it becomes difficult to get them off of it. Sheru, the

potter's son, had become the habit of Chaudhry Nisar, the son of the landlord, and vice versa. Both their parents wanted them to come off of this habit, but, as we all know, habits die hard.

It wasn't that the social and economic gap was growing between them; over time, the circles of their lives were moving away from each other.

Every morning Shero, the potter, would feed the donkeys, then prepare the clay for his father for making the pots. His father would put mud on the wheel and start it turning. His hands and fingers transformed the dirt into different shapes.

Shero liked to see his father turning the wheel and transforming mud into pots. He wished, regardless of tiredness, he would continue to watch his father spinning the wheel and making pots of different shapes: cooking pots, vases, and sometimes, plain pots.

Day after day, life continued moving on. Over time, Chaudhry Nisar finished his education. He became an attorney. Shero took the place of his father after his death. Every day, he made pots on the potter's wheel. Traders came from the market, purchased the cooking pots, and took them away. It kept his life going, like his forefathers.

Shero was living a very contented life; he was happy with his trade and social status. From time to time, village fellows asked

him to do small jobs, which he happily performed. This way, Shero earned a little bit of money on the side. Otherwise, he kept busy with his routine work of pot making.

Chaudhry Nisar started practicing law in the city court after completing his law degree. He used to go to his office every morning, where he stayed busy all day long with legal matters. In the afternoon, he would take a short nap and then go to Shero's house for an evening walk with him.

Next to the village, a narrow stream flowed. On the bank of the stream, they both walked about three miles to the canal. Then, they would walk back. During the walk, they would refresh their childhood memories and exchange views about the daily events in the village.

Chaudhry Nisar stated the details of his day-long activities in the court; he explained to Shero the cases he represented in the court; he would tell about his interactions with the opponent attorneys and the judges. Shero listened to the details of his trials and then gave his opinion.

By having daily conversations with Chaudhry Nisar, Shero, regardless that he was illiterate, developed quite a bit of sense of law and legal proceedings in the courts. The simplicity with which he narrated legal issues amazed Chaudhry Nisar.

In amazement, he would say to him, “Shero, you work all day with asses, like an ass, or make pots on the potter’s wheel, but the way you explain legal matters, it baffles me.”

Shero would respond, “Chaudhry, people think the donkey is a foolish animal. They don’t know how intelligent a donkey is. You remember when you started law school, you shared your daily lessons with me. Afterward, when you started your law practice, you always discussed your cases with me. After all this coaching, if I don’t become a legal expert and converse about legal matters, what else do you expect?”

In response, Chaudhry Nisar would tease him. “Shero, thanks to Lord you didn’t attend a school. If you had, you would make the entire world dance around your finger.”

“It is true I never attended a school. I never knew how to read or write. However, I have done some studies too.”

“Can I ask, what kind of studies have you done?” Nisar teased him.

“Some study I’ve done by spending my time with donkeys. I’ve learned from donkeys what patience is. Donkeys are very patient. I’ve also learned from donkeys what consistency is. Donkeys are very consistent.

“The other education I received was from my father. I learned from him the art of making pots. You know, when I put the

mud on the wheel, I start a dialogue with it. Its changing shapes incite my imagination. In my childhood, when my father put the clay on the potter's wheel to make a pot, he started talking to it. Now, when I put the mud on the potter's wheel, I start talking to it.

“Dialogue is the base of knowledge. Notably, the exchange a potter holds with the mud on his potter's wheel, which he can give any shape to, the wisdom that dialogue holds, nothing in the world can compete with it.”

With that type of discussion, their evening walks used to end. By the time the sun would set in the western sky and sleep in the lap of the night, they would enter the limits of the village. With the promise to meet again the next afternoon, they would return to their homes.

Chapter 2

Jamalpur was a small village situated in the middle of Punjab. Shero, the potter, and Chaudhry Nisar, the landlord, were residents of this village. Their forefathers lived in the same town in harmony for centuries. It was a perfect example of Punjab's small communities, self-reliant in everything, enough to provide for every resident. Jamalpur's residents' lives were limited to a small circle. They lived in that limited circle happily.

Feeko, the cobbler, used to come and sit in the middle of the only bazaar in the village. He would sit there until mid-afternoon and mend everyone's shoes. Whosoever had his shoes repaired would pay a few pennies. After earning a few rupees, he would pick up his small toolbox and go to his home.

A few feet away from Feeko the cobbler, Munir, the barber, would hang a mirror on the wall, put a chair in front of the mirror and cut peoples' hair. Some people had their beards shaved. Also, he did small surgeries on newly born baby boys. He performed the religious ritual of circumcision to fulfill the Islamic tradition. From time to time he served as a cook. Whenever there was any marriage party in the village, he cooked dishes to serve the guests.

In the bazaar there were two grocers, and the residents of the village bought their groceries from them. Beside them there was a small meat shop. Those who wanted to eat meat bought it from there.

With fresh air, open space, green fields, and a lot of mangos, oranges, and guava orchards, the villagers enjoyed a clean environment. They rarely got sick. But, if they ever fell ill, there was an herbalist's clinic in the middle of the bazaar. He opened his clinic early in the morning and then closed it around noon. He would go to his house, eat his lunch, and then, after taking a short nap, he would go to the mosque to offer midday prayer. After prayer, he would come back and reopen his clinic to serve the community for the rest of the day.

Close to the evening, he would call it a day. He would close his clinic and go to the mosque to offer evening prayer.

During the night, if anyone in the village fell sick, he would go to their house. He would give them the necessary herbal medicine and wait there until the patient felt a little better.

The shops in the bazaar remained open every day till late evenings. The village had no electricity. The shopkeepers used kerosene lamps to have light to conduct business. The dim lights at night created a strange attraction. Young boys hung out near those shops and played hide-and-seek type games. Their games continued until the shopkeepers closed their shops and turned off the lamps.

Occasionally, Shero and Nisar also came to the bazaar in the late evenings. They would drink bowls full of hot milk with *jalebi* in it at the sole confectionery.

Usually, many people gathered at the confectionery in the evenings. Saifo, the confectioner, graduated from the local high school. Right after graduation, he took over his father's shop after his death. Saifo was the oldest son in the house. So, after his father's demise, managing the business and the family's financial affairs became his responsibility.

Saifo's father migrated from eastern Punjab to Jamalpur, situated in the middle of western Punjab, after the partition of India in 1947. He was a Shaikh by the caste. Division of society into several castes by professions was an old Indian hierarchical system, and Muslims living in India also adopted this system, but slightly differently. He used to have a similar confectionery in Ferozepur before the migration. After migrating to Jamalpur, he made a fresh start. In a few years, he immersed himself in the local population.

He was very fond of poetry, and he was an excellent poet. He used to compose comic poetry; no one in the village knew his original name. He used Jhatput as a pen name for his poetry. The people always addressed him with his poetic name.

Along with composing excellent comic poetry, he also confectioned very tasty sweets from cow's milk. People used to come

to his confectionery to buy sweets from nearby villages. In the afternoon, when he confected sugar candies, the village children gathered around him. The fresh smell of sugar candies watered children's mouths.

Jhatput was a bulky man. When he tried to mix thick sugar tar, his belly moved up and down. Children made fun of him, seeing his trembling stomach. As soon as the nectar became stiff, he would pour it in a large pan and spread sesame seeds on it before cutting it into small pieces.

Saifo inherited the taste of poetry from his father, Jhatput. He remembered thousands of couplets by heart. He had a beautiful style of reciting poetry. The people who had a little bit of interest in poetry gathered at his confectionary. He had a couple of benches right in front of his confectionary; they would sit there and exchange couplets. Saifo participated in their poetic exchange.

After late evening prayer, the local mosque's maulana would come there. Maulana was a great scholar of Persian and Arabic. He would recite beautiful couplets of Persian and Arabic poetry. Then, he would explain those couplets in Punjabi. Everybody enjoyed and admired the beauty of Persian and Arabic poetry. From time to time, Saifo would recite similar couplets from Urdu poetry, which would double the amazement of the people present there.

In summer, Maulana enjoyed drinking cold milk mixed with 7up. Whenever he showed up at Saifo's confectionary, someone of his admirers would offer him his favorite drink. This offer always glittered his eyes. He would smile, move his right hand on his beard and bring it down to his tummy, and agree to drink the drink.

Although Shero didn't have formal schooling, he had memorized thousands of Punjabi couplets of Bulleh Shah, Mīān Mohammad Baksh, and Shah Hussain. Whenever Maulana recited a Persian or Arabic couplet, he cross-referenced it with a couplet of Bulleh Shah, Mīān Mohammad Baksh, or Shah Hussain.

He had a beautiful voice. Whenever he recited any couplet, he would sing it. His singing would draw everyone's attention. Everyone would ask him to sing more couplets. This way, Saifo's confectionary would turn into a Sofi's gathering. Maulana was also very fond of Shero's beautiful voice and singing style. He always advised him to come to the mosque and pray. Shero, with a big smile on his face, would respond, "On the day of judgment, those who offer prayers won't have the honor to see God face-to-face."

Maulana, in total surprise, would ask him, "How come?"

Shero would say, "That's because those who offer prayers, due to their righteousness, they will go to paradise. They won't face any inquiry. Only the sinner, like us, will be brought in chains in front of God. It will be an opportunity for them to see God face-to-

face. After we see God face-to-face, why should we worry about going to paradise or being condemned to hell?”

Shero's logic irritated Maulana. He would respond, “If worshipers would go to paradise without any inquiry, the non-worshipers will go to hell without any questioning. Therefore, they won't see God face-to-face. Only we the worshiper would hear their shrieks from hell.

The people laughed at Shero's debate with Maulana. Retreating, Maulana would call it a night.

This is the kind of village Jamalpur was. Shero the potter's friendship with Chaudhry Nisar the landlord was exemplary for every resident of the town. Some of the residents looked at their intimacy with appreciation; others hated it. The poor envied it; the rich looked at it critically. They never missed a moment to warn Chaudhry Nisar about this intimate relationship. From time to time, they would taunt Chaudhry Nisar, “If you ever get some time from Shero, please spend some time with us too.”

Chaudhry Nisar always presented his friendship with Shero like friendship with life.

He would respond to his critics that the moments he spent with Shero made him feel he was in touch with the stream of life. He could never think about disconnecting with Shero.

Chapter 3

The way there are four seasons in a year, Jamalpur also had all four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter.

In spring, Jamalpur looked beautiful, like a bride. All across the village, when the gardens of mangoes, oranges, guavas, and berries blossomed, a delightful odor spread in the entire town. Every breathing body in Jamalpur became intoxicated.

Besides human beings, all animals felt tipsy. Buffalos, cows, horses, donkeys, and hens felt delighted. Their walking style expressed their joy.

Shero's son smelled the same delightful odor emanating from the mud on the potter's wheel. Taken over by the pleasant scent, he would kiss the dirt. When Shero saw his son kissing the mud, he would affectionately say, "Raju, you're not my son, you're the son of the dirt. Your grandfather was, and I am also, the son of the same soil. If you continue loving it like this all your life, your soul will remain untouched from any grief. Happiness will always accompany you. If you ever empty your heart from the love of the soil, joyfulness will depart from you. My heart tells me you will continue loving this mud all of your life."

At six or seven years of age, Raju sometimes understood his father's words, and sometimes he didn't. Whenever Shero saw his son putting mud on the wheel, it would freshen his childhood memories. It reminded him of the days when he used to put dirt on the same potter's wheel the same way for his father. His father would turn that dirt into cooking pots, jugs, pans, or vases.

The streams of such memories would take him with Nisar in the gardens of mangoes. Both of them gathered raw mangoes fallen from trees, ran after each other, or sometimes competed with each other in climbing trees.

Sometimes, many more boys and girls came to the garden. It turned those gatherings into noisy parties. In such cases, the gardener would make them run away from the garden.

One of the girls who used to come to the garden was Nigu. Since the very beginning, Shero was a big fan of her. Deep down in his heart, he had a strange feeling for her. Shero appreciated her beauty without knowing it. All he knew was, somehow, he liked her.

Nigu was his cousin. Shero's father, Mohammad, had bad blood with her father; there was no social relationship between the two families. However, there was no restriction on the kids' socialization. Sometimes the kids visited each other's homes. Nevertheless, both brothers never spoke to each other eye to eye.

There was no specific reason for the bad blood between the brothers. When their father died, he left two sons and five donkeys, a small house and a small, undeveloped lot.

Shero's father received two donkeys and the house, and his brother got two donkeys and the small, undeveloped lot. The fifth donkey became the issue. Shero's father claimed since his brother got two donkeys and the undeveloped lot, he should get the fifth donkey. His brother wanted to have the fifth donkey because Mohammad had received the house and two donkeys.

When conflict grew between the two brothers, the community intervened and gave the decision in favor of Nigu's father. Mohammad continued living in his ancestral house with the two donkeys, whereas his brother moved out with his family and three donkeys. All these things happened before Shero's birth. However, the effects of this small conflict still haunted both families.

Shero and Nigu had no restrictions on mutual socialization. They could visit each other's homes. They had the opportunity to meet each other regularly, but whenever Nigu came to the garden of mangoes, she felt like another Shero had awoken in him. This Shero was different than the Shero who visited Nigu's house without his father's knowledge.

Nigu's condition was not any different than Shero's. Whenever Shero visited Nigu's house, she would remain unaware of his presence, but deep down in her soul, she would hear a whisper. She would feel like a gulp of air had passed over the green grass, touching it softly.

While playing with the other kids in the garden, she always felt she had some strange feelings for Shero. She would forget Shero was her cousin. In some ways, he looked like other kids of the village, and in other ways, he looked different than them.

Nisar would tease Shero. "Look, Shero. Nigu, your uncle's daughter, is looking at you with strange eyes."

Shero would shush Nisar. "Nisar, look, you stop talking like this. She comes to play with us. I don't know what you see in her eyes. I don't see anything." He would shush Nisar, but deep down in his heart, he knew he liked her, and she loved him. But he didn't understand why he and Nigu wanted to be close to each other.

Shero was the only son of Mohammad, and Nigu was the only daughter of his estranged brother. A small conflict estranged them for all their lives. Since then, they never communicated with each other.

Whenever Shero found his father free and in a good mood, he would ask him why he didn't talk to his brother. His father always snubbed him. "Shero, you are too young to understand such matters.

You may never understand it because you don't have another brother and five donkeys. We've only two donkeys, and you are my only son. That's why you will never understand it."

"But, Pa, a donkey shouldn't ruin people's lives. A donkey indeed has many attributes, but it shouldn't separate two brothers for a lifetime. It isn't a good practice."

In his response, like Nisar, his father would say, "You couldn't care less about your uncle. It's Nigu that matters to you." His father's response always made him shy.

On the other side, Nigu also asked the same question to her mother. "Mama, why don't Father and Uncle speak to each other? What is the issue between them? Why don't you and Pa go to Uncle's house?"

Her piercing questions always made her mother angry. "Why don't you ask such questions to your papa? He can provide you a better answer."

"I am scared of Papa. Don't you see how sometimes he beats the donkeys with a club? I don't want to be beaten by him like the donkeys."

"No, not at all. Your father will never beat you. Beating donkeys is a different thing . . ." She would leave her words unsaid.

“Papa and Uncle don’t speak to each other, but whenever I go to my uncle’s house, they love me a lot. Similarly, when Shero comes to our house, Papa always insists he should eat.”

“Maybe there is still something common between the two brothers,” her mother would respond.

After many such springs in Jamalpur, Mohammad and his brother, realizing the close attraction between Shero and Nigu, forgot their clash over the fifth donkey when their children tied their knot.

Their marriage changed their lives. Shero felt like his life had also become colorful like Jamalpur’s spring. He started to understand why he was attracted to Nigu so much. Now, she was not only the daughter of his uncle, but she was also his love and his life partner.

Like newlywed couples, life touched them with all its beauties. With their lives full of energy, Shero and Nigu tried hard for many springs of life, but she didn’t get pregnant.

Many years later, Mohammad and his brother died of infection from tuberculosis. Once again, five donkeys, the house, and the lot became Shero and Nigu’s asset. But, somehow, Shero and Nigu’s desire to create their combined image on the page of life didn’t fulfill. Shero never expressed his concern over it, but Nigu started staying aggrieved for not giving birth to a baby. When this

grief started impacting her life, she first discussed this issue with the imam of the village mosque. The imam of the mosque gave her two pieces of talisman. He asked her to put one piece in water and drink it over the next forty days. The other piece she should keep under the bedsheet when she performs sex with her husband.

After the failure of the imam's two pieces of talisman, she contacted the only herbalist in the town. The herbalist told her she was barren and couldn't bear children; he gave her a few herbs and advised her to be patient and pray to God, who may give her a baby. If God can bless Mary with a baby without her interaction with any man and to Abraham's wife, Sara, in old age, why won't God bless her?

With the revelation that she, being infertile, could not bear a child, she started visiting various shrines in the town to pray.

Among these shrines, one of them belonged to Saint Pir Saen. One afternoon, she was getting out of Pir Saen's tomb when she ran into the attendant. Nigu's fair skin and muscular body put the attendant on fire. He asked Nigu what brought her to the shrine. She said she had heard praying at the tomb made barren women fertile and made them bear children. The attendant responded she had heard right. Many infertile women came to the shrine and bore children. However, to become fertile, they had to pray inside the attendant's hut. Some infertile women immediately bore children,

and some had to come many times and pray. Nigu heard the attendant's statement and quickly agreed to go in his hut and pray.

Inside the hut, the attendant asked her to close her eyes and start chanting, "Oh Lord, grant me my wish, oh Lord, grant me my wish." He asked her not to open her eyes or stop chanting; otherwise, she would never become fertile for the rest of her life. After performing this ritual, she wouldn't have to see any imam of the mosque or any herbalist.

Chapter 4

Raju had reached school-going age. Instead of going to school he would feed donkeys, make them drink water, prepare mud for making pots, or go with his father to haul sand or clay.

Whenever Nisar met with Shero, he advised him to send Raju to school so he could learn to read and write. Shero always responded, “He can make some money by working. If he learned to read and write, I don’t know what would happen to him.”

One evening, Nisar and Shero went for an evening walk. They started talking about Raju’s education. “Shero, you are afraid of your son; that’s why you don’t want to send him to school,” Nisar argued.

“No, I’m not afraid of my son. If he graduates and becomes an attorney like you, then his education would mean something. Otherwise, if he leaves school after completing the fifth or sixth grade and starts doing what his forefathers did, then what good would his education be?” Shero retorted.

“Maybe he’ll get a better education than me,” Nisar argued.

“No, Nisar, it’s not possible. That kind of education will move him away from the soil. Separation from the soil will fill his soul with sadness. He will become a wanderer for his entire life.

Being a potter's son, if he gets that kind of education, who will offer him his daughter for marriage?"

"Shero, if your son becomes a successful person after getting a higher education, many powerful people will offer him their daughters for marriage," Nisar retorted.

On that evening, Nisar convinced Shero to send Raju to school. However, he remained concerned about the possible expenses of Raju's education.

Shero's concerns turned the conversation to Raju's educational expenses.

"Nisar, up to elementary school it is easy, because the education is free. But for high school and college, I've heard, he would need a lot of money."

"You've heard correct. Raju will need a lot of money for high school and college education. However, many opportunities come in intelligent boys' way. Somehow, they make it through and eventually reach the top. Unintelligent boys leave school unfinished. You should send Raju to school and we will see what happens."

Motivated by Nisar, the next day, Shero took Raju to Jamalpur Elementary School for admission. The teacher gave him a form to fill out. He implored, "Sir, I don't know how to read or write. Can you please fill out the form for me?"

The teacher smiled and started filling out the form. He asked, “What is the student’s name?”

“Raju,” Shero responded.

“What? It’s not a correct name. Please tell me the exact name.”

“Sir, this is the only name I know. We gave him this name at the time of his birth.”

“No, tell me the name you registered with the town committee,” the teacher asked.

“Sir, we never reported his birth to the town committee. He doesn’t exist in the town committee’s record. They never asked me, and I never told them about his birth,” Shero responded.

“Look, Shero, a name is a vital thing. It lives with a person all his life. If you agree, I’ll register him in school as Rizwan as a first name and Anjam as a last name. At home, you can continue calling him Raju,” the teacher explained.

“Sir, I’m illiterate, like my forefathers. I don’t understand these things. Please, do whatever you think is good for him. From now on, he is your son. We will start by calling him Rizwan at home too,” Shero responded.

After Shero’s agreement, the teacher registered Raju in Jamalpur Elementary School as Rizwan Anjam. Thus onward, he started studying at Jamalpur Elementary School as Rizwan Anjam.

Raju liked his new name very much. He loved this name so much, he developed the habit of responding only to those who called him by his new name.

In school, his classmates always called him Rizwan. At home, whenever Shero or Nigu called him Raju, he didn't forget to correct them.

Other than his new name, Rizwan loved his neat and clean school uniform: In summer, blue shorts with a white shirt and in winter, blue pants with a white shirt and blue blazer. They became his favorite, so he started wearing them all day long, even after school.

After he started attending school, he continued feeding the donkeys in the morning, but he stopped helping his father in preparing mud for making pots. Instead, he would eagerly take a shower, eat his breakfast, and leave for school. Nigu also tried her best to send him to school regularly.

He always made it to school an hour or a half-hour early every morning. Before starting the class, if he found any teacher free, he would try to consult him about his difficulties in his studies. Teachers happily helped him out.

Due to this habit, other than his teachers, the entire school staff came to know him. He became the most popular student in the school.

He passed all school tests with A-plus grades. Most of the schoolteachers foresaw a bright future waiting for him in life. Some of the teachers regretted that his low-income family background could hinder his potential successes. Like many other boys from low-income families, he would rot in the village and not make any headway in life.

Regardless of all this, the good habits he had adopted in school caused his personality to blossom like a flower. His conversation style was changing, the way he addressed everyone; it made him attractive to them. His innocent face and intelligent eyes captured everyone's attention.

Seeing all these changes in his son, Shero felt proud of him. In the street, if he ever met any of Rizwan's teachers, he felt good after listening to his success stories from them.

In the evening walks with Nisar, Rizwan became the topic of their discussion. At Saifo's confectionary gatherings, he very proudly related Rizwan's success stories to everyone. He started getting upset if anyone would mention Rizwan as Raju. He would admonish and remind them that his son's name was Rizwan Anjam and not Raju.

Over time, Rizwan was showing all the signs of extraordinarily intelligent boys. He had an extreme sense of understanding things. He had a photographic memory of

remembering things. He would read or hear something once from a teacher, and he would know it by heart. Once he would listen to a new word, he would change its phonetics several times to see if he could make some new words out of it.

Then he would ask his teacher if this word means this thing, what it would mean if we changed it phonetically in a certain way. By changing the ups and downs of the word, he would try to feel its impression. Sometimes, a teacher would get irritated by his weird questions about the changed forms of words.

In his school, one violin teacher used to come to teach violin once a week. Rizwan started learning the violin from him. To the violin teacher's surprise, Rizwan learned the secrets of playing the violin reasonably quickly and easily. He had never seen another child who learned and played violin in such a short time.

In studies and learning violin, Rizwan's progression was terrific. In sports, he was better than any other player. Most of the players envied him for his skillfulness. He joined the school's hockey team. Within a short time, he was selected to play in the center-forward position, only available to very skilled and experienced players. Anytime his squad played with any other team in the surrounding towns, the Jamalpur school team's victory was inevitable because of him.

In this journey of days and nights, from Raju becoming Rizwan and graduating from the high school, his personality traits became very firm. He had a beautiful personality as a young man, full of life and youthfulness.

In high school graduation exams, he stood first in the entire country. The residents of the whole village came to congratulate Shero and Nigu for their son, Rizwan Anjam's, great success. Nisar and Shero, sitting out in the street on crates, received the people's accolades.

Anytime anyone congratulated Shero, he directed it to Nisar, saying, "Rizwan's success's full credit goes to Nisar. If it were not for Nisar, I wouldn't have sent Rizwan to school. He would've been working with me, making pots on the potter's wheel."

Rizwan's teachers also came to his house to congratulate his parents. They were happy because of his terrific success. The Jamalpur school improved its reputation because of his notable success.

Shero fell on the ground before his teacher. He said to the teacher with tears in his eyes, if he hadn't changed Raju's name to Rizwan Anjam and admitted him to the school, indeed, he would have been just another ordinary village boy.

The only drummer in the town, Sultan, also showed up, beating the spring beats on his drum. Shero and Nisar, along with

other kids gathered there, started dancing to the drumbeats. So much so that their donkeys' hooves also started moving along with the drumbeats!

All of Jamalpur started swaying with the spring songs.

Chapter 5

The street dance in front of Shero's house was still on. The reporters of all prominent newspapers arrived. They wanted to congratulate Rizwan Anjam for his great success. Also, they wished to interview him and take his pictures for their journals.

Rizwan wanted them to wait for a few minutes. He went inside the house and came back with a donkey. On the donkey, he had a sign: "I love my donkey." Then he stood by the donkey and asked the reporters to take his picture for their journals. The reporters requested he let them take his photo without the donkey. He refused to honor their request. He said he wouldn't let them take his picture without his donkey.

Shero, his father, and Nisar, tried to convince him, but he refused. He said they shouldn't feel inferior because of those donkeys.

Then he turned to the reporters and said all living things are manifestations of life. Life grants them all the rights as it gives to humans. With all these living creatures, the Earth is our mother. All these creatures play a vital role in fulfilling the grand purpose of life. To consider any creature inferior is equal to directly insulting life.

The next day, all prominent dailies printed his picture on the front pages with his donkey with the news of his terrific success. The “I love my donkey” sign was visible for every newspaper reader to glance at it. The newspaper printed his success story with his family background and his ideas about life. About his plans, the papers wrote he wanted to become a doctor and serve humanity.

As soon as his story circulated in the country, he received invitations from prominent colleges for admission, along with the offer of financial aid.

Nisar reviewed those invitations with Rizwan. They decided Rizwan would join Government College Lahore in pre-med classes and prepare for medical school. After finishing pre-med courses, he would decide which medical school to join to complete his medical education.

Moving from a small village like Jamalpur to a reputable institution like Government College in a cosmopolitan city like Lahore was a strange experience for him.

Jamalpur was a small town where the poor and rich lived like a family. Government College was part of a big city where the poor and rich lived in separate worlds. They had nothing to do with each other.

To study at Govt College was not an ordinary incident for Rizwan. His picture with his donkey made him known to everyone

in the college. Lecturers, students, workers at the college, everyone knew his story. They knew he was the son of a very ordinary and poor potter in a small town like Jamalpur.

Some bullies tried to give him a hard time regarding his family background. But very soon his charm, intelligence, and fullness of life forced them to retreat and leave him alone. His persona made them tired. Instead of bullying him, they all extended the olive branch towards him and tried to become his friends. Rizwan was like a sun. Everyone felt his heat, but no one dared to go close to him.

At Govt College he was a pre-med student, but his various skills were influencing many other departments. All pre-med lecturers became fond of him. The dean of the Biology Department, Dr. Nazir Ahmad, was particularly very impressed by him.

In Dr. Nazir's opinion, Rizwan, once he finished his medical education, would become an extraordinary medical doctor and a researcher. He would earn a lot of respect in his profession, and human beings would benefit from his God-given intelligence. He said he might find a cure for some incurable disease and engrave his name in the annals of medical history.

The head of the Chemistry Department, Dr. Badar, thought Rizwan would discover new elements that are still not known to

human beings. Also, he would solve centuries-old unsolvable chemistry issues.

Rizwan, unaware of all this, entirely focused on his pre-med courses. His popularity among lecturers and fellow students continued to grow.

In Govt College, there used to be a magazine titled *Ravi*. It carried students' writings. After the publication of his few articles in *Ravi*, those in charge included him in *Ravi*'s editorial staff. As a reward, the housing department gave him the room for living in which Iqbal, the famous poet and philosopher, lived during his stay in the college first as a student and then as a lecturer. He considered it a matter of pride to reside in that room.

In the solitude of the night, after finishing his home assignments, Rizwan would practice playing the violin. The other students in the hostel would stand outside his room and listen to him playing the violin. They would stand there until he would play.

Over time, the news of his violin playing expertise spread first to his class fellows and then to the entire college.

One day, in biology class, Dr. Nazir Ahmad was discussing the impact of music on plants. Some students informed Dr. Nazir about Rizwan Anjam's late-night individual violin sessions. He requested him to play the violin for his class fellows.

He gladly obeyed Dr. Nazir Ahmad. He hurriedly went to his room, brought his violin, and started playing. He played several tunes one after the other. Each segment was more attractive than the other.

While he played the violin for his classmates, many other students and teachers stood outside and listened to him playing.

After this event, he never introduced himself to anyone in college. Everyone knew who he was. They all adored him.

At Govt College, he continued his childhood habit. He would discuss pre-med concepts with his teachers and ask more profound questions to the teachers about the other disciplines. His curiosity to know earned him more respect. His unique inquiries became the source of inspiration for the other teachers too.

For seeking knowledge, these outside-of-the-curriculum activities unconsciously transformed into a habit in his childhood and as he grew old, they helped him develop his theory of knowledge itself. In his opinion, the body of knowledge is all one. Over time, during its growth, it divides into many disciplines. For complete understanding, the seekers of knowledge must get familiar with the fundamentals of all its branches so they can see how and at what point they separated from each other.

Whenever Rizwan discussed the subject with different teachers, they wished he continued the discussion with them.

In Govt College, boys and girls studied side by side. There was no sex-based segregation. The students at the other colleges envied it. That's why they loved to spend their free time in the cafes of Govt College.

Mainly, Govt College's Talk Shop was considered the hangout point for all such students. That's where the students socialized, exchanged ideas, discussed the country's politics, told stories about their affairs, and fought their fights. Govt College students, who came from different parts of the country, considered their institution an island of social and educational freedom. The students of other colleges made Rizwan Anjam famous in their colleges too.

Rizwan Anjam came from an impoverished background, yet, most of the students looked to him as a role model for them. They wanted to look, talk, and act like him. They loved his lifestyle.

But nature is an extraordinary thing. It uses the same material to produce different objects, and then it gives each object an individuality. This individuality becomes that object's identity, which differentiates it from the rest of its kind. Rizwan Anjam came from an impoverished background, yet he had his own identity. No one could deprive him of his distinct personality.

Rizwan was not only popular among the boys, but he was also equally famous among the girls. Many girls hung his picture

with his donkey on their room walls. Many of his fellow female students were competing with each other to get his attention. They all tried different excuses to spend time with him. However, Rizwan was not ready at this point in his life to get involved in any type of profound relationship.

The picture taken and published in papers at his high school graduation became his hallmark. In this picture, the campus girls found similarities with Clint Eastwood, the famous Hollywood actor. The girls teased each other by asking how their Clint Eastwood was doing. But Rizwan Anjam, at this point in his life, was only Rizwan Anjam. He didn't want to become Clint Eastwood.

That's why he ignored the girls' suggestive moves. The more he ignored the girls, the more they were on fire to make him their life partner. So much so, they envied the donkey in the picture which carried the sign "I love my donkey" and the girls would rub out the word *donkey* and fill in the blank with their names.

But Rizwan knew where his destination was. The attractions at Govt College were milestones for him, not his destiny.

Chapter 6

In Jamalpur, at the height of spring, the whole village looked like a vast span decorated with colorful ornaments. Soon after, summer would set in. The green color would change into yellow; the summer heat would dry trees' leaves and the winds would separate them from the branches and spread them all over.

The sun would dry the small water ponds where village animals drank water and children played water games. In drying ponds the fish died and frogs hid deep under in the wet mud until the anger of the ruler of the sky, the sun, calmed.

Then, the cold northern winds started blowing. On the wings of these winds, dark clouds spread all over Punjab. The clouds sprinkled so much water, the whole of Jamalpur turned into a wide span of water.

The frogs hidden deep under would reemerge and start croaking, chirping, whistling, ribbiting, and cooing. The up and down rhythmic noise of frog sounds became lulls of mothers for the residents of Jamalpur.

In water-filled ponds, the kids ran after frogs, but the frogs would jump out of their reach. The kids loved to play the game of chasing and catching the frogs. Sometimes, if any kid got hold of a

frog, the kids would gather around him, spread the frog's legs, open its mouth, and tried to understand the mechanism of its croaking.

Rizwan, in his childhood, loved to chase frogs. Anytime he caught a frog, he would spread its legs, looked for similarities between himself and the frog. It always amazed him to find out how closely the frog looked like him.

Then he would leave the frog. The frog would jump and disappear in the pond. When Dr. Nazir spoke in physiology class about the frogs, it reminded him of the Jamalpur frogs. Green-colored, blackish, yellowish, small, and big frogs. Their tadpoles and polliwogs. Rizwan, in his imagination, found himself picking up polliwogs and fingerlings to learn to differentiate between them and then putting them back in the pond water.

At the beginning of his lecture, Dr. Nazir said, in the next few weeks he would make students dissect a frog and learn the similarities between the frog's body parts and human beings. He told students they would open the frog's skin, look at its inner body parts, its liver, its heart, its bones, its lungs, its stomach, and its kidneys. They would also identify the frog's gender by looking at its organs and learn how frogs sustain their species.

When Dr. Nazir was speaking, the students' impressions reflected on their faces. The mixture of amazement and curiosity was dancing on their faces.

According to Dr. Nazir, students need to study the internal organs of frogs to understand the major human organs. Here students would dissect the bodies of frogs, but in medical college, they would open human corpses, and as doctors, they would operate on living human bodies.

Today, Dr. Nazir was providing the answers to many questions that Rizwan struggled with in his childhood. As a young man, he spread the legs of frogs and found similarity between their and human beings' bodies. Now, it was time for him to learn about the similarities in their internal mechanisms. He was anxiously waiting for the day he would practically dissect a frog's body in a lab. Through knowing the frog's heart and liver, he wanted to know his own heart and liver.

Rizwan was seriously interested in uncovering the process of life. In childhood, when he put mud on the potter's wheel, he always thought about many shapes of life. He wondered how life used the same material to produce so many shapes and forms.

Then his mind moved on to the other forms of life. He thought about fish, birds, and animals. In the animal kingdom, he thought about donkeys, horses, and bulls. He found the light of consciousness in their eyes. He thought, through their eyes, they look at things like he does. And perhaps they have similar emotions. But on the issue of emotions, he would get confused. Maybe animals

don't have feelings. If they don't have feelings, why do they love their offspring? In case of danger, why do they try to protect them from predators? Do they do it on the level of feelings, or do they do it instinctively? Or, in actuality, do they have souls like human beings?

He wanted to move beyond the physical level of the heart and liver and know the psychological makeup of them. He thought, once he understood their physicality, he could move beyond and continue his journey to mental, emotional, consciousness, and spiritual existence.

Dr. Nazir was a saintly person. Everyone in the college admired his lifestyle. He had studied in European schools and earned his PhD in Biology from the reputable Oxford University.

Before moving to Europe, he was a very arrogant young man. Everyone complained about his arrogance. But, after he finished his education in English schools and returned to Pakistan, he was a changed man. He had become the humblest person on planet Earth.

After meeting him, everyone would become his fan. He was like a blessed tree that provided sweet fruit and shade to anyone who came to him. If anyone asked him the reason for his metamorphosis, he would say his PhD studies were like staying in Mohammad's pre-

revelation cave. He saw so many facets of life; all fake, artificial covers disappeared.

He was an ideal teacher for Rizwan. He was aware of Rizwan's impoverished background and his extraordinary abilities. That was why he started paying particular attention to him.

Dr. Nazir wanted him to become a versatile personality before he moved to medical college so that he'd reach the highest level of his profession. He knew what kind steps were required for achieving such targets.

After the class, Dr. Nazir stopped Rizwan. He told him he was very impressed with his ability to play the violin so miraculously. Dr. Nazir urged him to play violin on an evening in front of the entire college in the open-air theater. He said the concert should be advertised in neighboring colleges too so the students of those colleges could join also.

Upon Rizwan's consent, Dr. Nazir asked the college's musical chair to make arrangements for such a concert. The musical chair agreed to Dr. Nazir's request, and after setting up the date for the show, started its publicity in neighboring colleges.

This news was most pleasing for the students of Govt College. It generated a lot of excitement among them. The students of neighboring colleges also purchased tickets for the concert in large quantities. Before they used to come to Govt College to hang

out with girls, now they had a good reason to spend a pleasant evening there.

The musical chair met with Dr. Nazir and Rizwan the last time before the show. The chair updated both about the steps they had taken so far. Then the chair told Rizwan if he wanted anything special on the stage, they could arrange it. Rizwan earnestly answered, if they could enlarge his picture with his donkey and hang it in the theater, he would appreciate it.

Dr. Nazir smiled at his simple request. He said no matter wherever Rizwan would go in his life, Jamalpur would go with him. No one would be able to separate him from Jamalpur.

Chapter 7

How could Rizwan be separate from Jamalpur? Jamalpur's soil was in his flesh and blood. Whatever he was, he was because of Jamalpur. From putting mud on his father's potter's wheel to Govt College Lahore, it was a long journey for him. Jamalpur had a stamp on his every step. Jamalpur had given him so much, he could live his entire life on it.

After graduation from high school with distinction, the photo he had taken with his donkey was becoming his trademark. And the sign on the donkey, "I love my donkey," attracted so many companies they wanted to put it on their promotional billboards.

In this regard, many well-known companies contacted him to acquire the photo's trade rights. He denied selling that photo to them. For him, it was equivalent to sin to sell it. He said this photo carried the story of his past, his present, and his future. The past is gone. The present time is passing, and the future is waiting for him with its success. He didn't want to put down his past, present, and future as collateral to earn a few coins so those companies could use it to promote their products.

Govt College's Musical Committee advertised Rizwan's concert so much that many students from far-off colleges purchased

tickets to attend it. They thought it was a concert by the country's topmost musician.

Musical gatherings were routine in Pakistan. Small groups arranged those gatherings here and there, from time to time. However, this concert's scale was the first of its kind.

Sometimes, the Musical Committee held small concerts in which top vocalists and musicians performed. Rizwan's show was the first one offered by one of the Govt College students.

In his biology class performance, Rizwan showed his ultimate talent in playing the violin. The students and teachers passing by stood outside in the corridor to hear him play. Those students and teachers advertised through their word of mouth the news of an upcoming musical event in the college. They informed their every acquaintance in the town about Rizwan and his forthcoming show. They advised them not to miss it at any cost.

It was a beautiful summer evening. The air in the college was full of fragrance because of the flowers everywhere in its lawns. Everyone felt tipsy in the arena.

It was a perfect evening for the violin concert. The college's open-air theater was full of girls and boys. Behind the stage, the Musical Committee had hung Rizwan's photo with his donkey on a big canvas. The canvas's height and width made it even more attractive. It seemed like some Hollywood popular actor was ready

to leave on a journey with his donkey to a far-off land but who had stopped for a few moments at some point to ponder to readjust his direction.

The donkey's impression in the photo was also very expressive. A little turn in the donkey's neck reflected it was simultaneously looking at Rizwan and its winding path. It revealed deep bonds between him and Rizwan. They both were travelers on the road of life. They both looked confident to walk this path together.

In the open-air theater, the deep-blue sky above the trees planted in a semicircle turned the arena into a magic land.

When Dr. Nazir and Rizwan walked on the stage, the girls and boys welcomed them with loud whistling, clapping, and shouting. The theater had never witnessed this kind of scene ever before.

On the stage, Dr. Nazir took the mic in his hand. Rizwan stood a few feet away from him, with the violin on his left shoulder and the bow in his right hand in such a way, they looked like the part of a large-size picture.

Dr. Nazir humbly addressed the crowd in the theater. "Friends, today is the happiest day of my life. I've spoken to the students of this college many times from this stage. But today, the kind of pleasure I'm feeling, I've no words to express it. I've spent

many years of my life in Europe. I attended many musical concerts over there. I can say with certainty, the kind of experience you are going to have today; you are never going to forget it.

“Rizwan is a student in the pre-med department. The kind of excellence he has achieved in playing the violin, I’ve never seen it in any other violinist. I heard from a few students that he plays the violin in his hostel room at night. The nearby resident students gather outside his room door and stay there as long as he keeps playing.

“The other day, I heard him play in my classroom. We were talking about the impact of music on plants—some of the students mentioned his violin playing expertise.

“Honoring my wish, he played the violin in the class. Then, we realized how great a violinist we had among us.

“Govt College has the honor of educating many great people in its history. Many of them worked in this college as teachers before moving to other professions. But in music, no one as great as Rizwan has attended this college or will join after him.

“His musical journey started when he was in high school. He practiced day and night, tirelessly. He polished his violin-playing skill so much, he became a great artist in himself. He understands the secrets of playing the violin like none other.

“I didn’t want to praise Rizwan so much before him. Then, I thought it would’ve been unfair not to introduce him properly. Moreover, the kind of happiness I am feeling while introducing him; it would’ve been hard for me to keep it to myself. With this, after thanking you all, I request Rizwan that he should amuse you all by playing the violin.”

Dr. Nazir walked away from the stage with a serene peace on his face.

Rizwan moved forward with his chin on the violin’s chinrest, fingers on the fingerboard, and bow on the strings held in his right hand. Then he moved bow on the strings a few times and said to the audience in the open-air theater, “The relation of music to human beings is ancient. Human beings have been creating and enjoying music since the beginning of civilization. I’m thankful to my teacher, Dr. Nazir, for all the kind words he expressed about me. I don’t know how skillful I am in playing the music. I’ve never played it at a concert, except before my violin teacher or a few fellow students. I can’t say how good I play.

“I only want to request that when I play, please set your mind free and put your bodies at rest. Let them harmonize with the tunes of my violin. You will see, in this beautiful environment, your lovely evening will become more exotic. It is because I know how much power violin tunes have to sway the feelings of the listeners.”

After saying these words, Rizwan started moving his bow on the violin strings to play some devotional tunes. A pin-drop silence engulfed the entire arena. So much so, the birds hiding in the branches of the trees became utterly silent.

He continued playing such spiritual tunes for about fifteen minutes. Then, to take the audience in a different stream, he started playing joyful notes. Then, a constant bliss took the entire crowd in its grip. Everyone came out of the state of unconsciousness or consciousness. A broad smile spread on all faces like momentary sunshine and passing shadows. For a while, he continued playing the same tunes to keep the audience in the swaying feelings of joy and seriousness. Then, he changed the mood of the audience by playing gloomy melodies.

Gloomy tunes pushed the entire audience deep into a state of sadness. Everyone felt like they were sitting in cold water that was slowly getting higher and higher around them, and soon their head would be under. This evening was the evening of the violinist who had taken in his grip the souls of several hundred boys and girls sitting in the open-air theater!

As an excellent artist, he knew it wouldn't be a good idea to end the evening with a gloomy mood. He didn't want his audience to return to their homes drowned in sadness. He slowly infused romantic tunes to change his audience's mood. The entire audience

emerged out of the river of gloom with wet bodies. Romantic feelings enveloped everyone. They enjoyed romantic tunes for the next fifteen minutes. He knew a sentimental mood should end a splendid party.

As soon as he started playing party tunes, the boys and girls stood up from their chairs and they started dancing. After a few minutes, he moved his bow on the violin strings a few times, and then like a professional artist, he bowed before the audience.

The entire audience stood up and started clapping endlessly. Rizwan looked at Dr. Nazir, who was sitting in the front row; he was trying to clean his tearful eyes with his handkerchief.

Chapter 8

The open-air concert was Rizwan's first public performance. It gave him a lot of confidence. Notably, the news and reviews in national dailies about this splendid concert gave him immense joy. For many years the artist refining, polishing, and excelling in him, through this performance, had debuted in public. After newspapers' commentaries, many commercial groups got in touch with him to pursue him to commercialize his musical skills for the enjoyment of the masses on a massive scale. They wanted him to make money and let them also make some money. However, becoming an artist was not his destination. He was more interested in uncovering the secrets of life. For this purpose, he wanted to become a doctor, help the sick, and continue his research in the biological processes of life.

Whatever money he raised through the concert, he donated all to the college's musical committee. He asked the committee to use this money to nurture more fine arts talent. In his opinion, music played a significant role in the development of the human mind.

By learning music, memory expands, understanding grows, and a person's faith and confidence in life become stronger.

Nisar read the papers' commentaries and saw Rizwan's photo with his donkey; he immediately called it a day. With the dailies under his arm, he reached Shero's house.

Shero, as usual, after finishing his daily chores, was sitting on a cart outside his house. Nisar opened the paper and put it in front of Shero. He didn't know how to read or write. However, looking at Rizwan's photo with a large crowd listening to his violin, he called Nigu excitedly.

"Nigu, come, look! The paper has printed Raju's photo."

Overwhelmed with emotions, he forgot his son's name was no longer Raju and now, he was Rizwan. Since the elementary school teacher had changed his name, Shero always called him Rizwan. If anyone called him Raju, he admonished him. Today, overwhelmed with emotions, he was calling him Raju.

Nigu, listening to Shero's call, came running out of the house. She was cutting vegetables for cooking food for dinner. Shreds of vegetables were still on her hands. She first chastised her husband. "Shero, you are forgetting, our son's name is no longer Raju; now he is Rizwan." Then looking at his photo in the newspaper, she overwhelmingly kissed it. She started crying. Nisar consoled her.

“Sister, you should instead be happy. The newspaper writes Rizwan played violin in front of thousands of students and made all of them crazy about him.”

“But he went to become a doctor. Is my son not going to become a doctor now?” she asked.

“The newspaper writes he will focus on his medical education. He will become a doctor. You don’t need to worry,” Nisar answered.

“Why does he carry his picture with the donkey everywhere? Does he want to tell the world he is the son of a potter?” she asked.

“No, sister. Instead, he wants to tell the world that coming from an impoverished class is not an impediment. It is hard work that assures a person’s success in life,” Nisar explained.

The street kids saw Nisar, Shero, and Nigu with a newspaper in their hands. They looked at Rizwan’s photo, with thousands of students standing in front of him. They started shouting, “Long live, Rizwan brother!” The elders, men, and women in the town gathered to congratulate Shero, Nigu, and Nisar for Rizwan’s conspicuous success in the city.

Here in the city, the students in all the colleges read these commentaries with great interest. Rizwan became a hero for them overnight.

The girls at Govt College, instead of competing against each other to get closer to Rizwan, started a rivalry. They crafted stories of closeness to Rizwan to create jealousy among them. One would say Rizwan invited her to Talk Shop over a cup of tea. Another would say Rizwan invited her for dinner at Lord's. Yet another would say she requested Rizwan teach her violin, and he agreed. But Rizwan, away from all these stories, continued focusing on his studies.

He spent most of his time with biology, botany, and chemistry teachers. He was very much interested in structures of organic and inorganic matter. He also wanted to learn about the nature of the forces active in substances at the molecular level. He wanted to know how those forces influenced each other. He wished to see their interaction at the universal level.

Sometimes, the botany and chemistry teachers showed frustration about his constant dialogue with them. Then, on Dr. Nazir's intervention, they would restart dialogue with him.

Rizwan had a very charming and pleasant personality. The people loved to hang around and spend time with him. It was the same situation with his teachers. However, his constant questioning was bothersome for them because sometimes they didn't have answers to most of his questions. The depth in his cross-examination forced them to reflect deeply on the related issues. Their best

solutions left shadows of curiosity in Rizwan's eyes. They felt unsatisfied with their answers.

But Dr. Nazir's case was different. He was the ultimate example of a perfect teacher. As much as he understood his subject, biology, he understood the intricacies of life too.

Dr. Nazir had access to those sources of knowledge that convert ordinary human beings into close to superhuman beings. That's why each student in his department highly regarded him. Each student thought, other than teaching biology, Dr. Nazir taught them to fall in love with life.

Rizwan's ultimate desire to know things, and Dr. Nazir's nature to pour out information like spring clouds, made a perfect match. Under Dr. Nazir's tutelage, Rizwan was successfully moving forward in life. On the one hand, Dr. Nazir, through a concert, introduced the real Rizwan. On the other, by explaining to him the basic concepts of biology, he was helping him to build a strong foundation for his medical education.

Rizwan's respect further strengthened in Dr. Nazir's heart when he turned down the offers of large corporate enterprises to purchase the rights of his picture with his donkey. On top of it, he refused offers of commercial musical companies that wanted to commercialize his music. Also, his generosity to donate all proceeds

of the concert to Govt. College's Musical Committee was astounding.

In the shape of Rizwan, Dr. Nazir saw an emerging star. He thought humanity would benefit from him a lot.

He was working hard with him so he could repeat his high school success at Govt College too. It would open the doors of all medical colleges to him. He would join the best medical school in the country to finish his medical education. He would be able to serve his people the best way possible.

Dr. Nazir knew graduation from a medical school wouldn't end Rizwan's curiosity. His inquisitiveness would put him on new paths. He would step on the stars where humankind had not stepped so far.

But Rizwan was carefree about all such thoughts. His curiosity always inspired him to keep moving in the direction of uncovering the fundamental secrets of life. He wanted to discover the mud nature uses to shape human bodies. He wanted to explore the potter's wheel, where nature creates the varieties in life. He intended to reach to the force that spins the potter's wheel on which the mud converts into human beings—men and women. Then they attract each other and their attraction turns into a flame; thus, the process of life continues.

He loved the violin for the same reason. At night, when birds rested in the branches of the trees and people slept in their beds, he would play the violin. While performing the violin, he heard the universe speaking to him. Moon and stars accompanied him; an infinity was waiting for him somewhere far off.

It was him, his violin, and calmly emanating tunes from the fiddle and a limitless state of joy.

Chapter 9

Rizwan's two years in Govt College passed like a pleasant dream. These two years, in his mind, gradually replaced small-village values with urban. His lifestyle in Jamalpur vanished and instead, a cosmopolitan lifestyle became his second nature.

Before, whatever was part of his life, it related to Jamalpur. Now, after two years, it was completely irrelevant in his life. Jamalpur didn't exist on his world map any longer. For him, even Pakistan was an unimportant country in the world—a small, insignificant state on the way to its demise. Facing death, sometimes, it opened its eyes in agony and sometimes closed.

Rizwan had appeared for his final exam, and now he was waiting for the results. Instead of going back to Jamalpur, he preferred to stay in the hostel. He had plenty of time to reflect and play the violin.

As expected, in his college exams, he received the highest remarks. He broke all previous records. Everyone in the college, fellow students and teachers, were happy and proud of him. Notably, Dr. Nazir was delighted. He felt like his hard work paid off.

In Jamalpur, Shero and Nigu had also received the news of his great success through Nisar. The papers, once again, related his

family history along with the story of his grand success. Besides his parents, all of Jamalpur celebrated his prominence.

While the residents of Jamalpur talked about his success, they occasionally expressed their doubts about his parentage. They would say a potter's son cannot achieve all these successes. He was not the son of Shero. They pointed their finger to Nisar for his fatherhood.

They knew his father, Shero's, parentage. They knew his mother, Nigu's, ancestry. They carried mud on the back of their donkeys, made pots on the potter's wheel, and sold them for a living. How could a child born to them climb that high on the social, educational, and economic ladder? How can news about such an impoverished boy's successes appear in national dailies? Then, they would refer to Nisar's closeness with the potter's family. To reinforce their argument, they would say his facial reflection was also more like Nisar's than Shero's. Maybe, at some point, Nisar and Nigu engaged in an illegitimate relationship.

Some rightminded people would condemn such a nasty conversation. They would argue Shero and Nisar are childhood friends. They knew each other when gender didn't have any meaning for them. Their parents were against their friendship because of the big gap in their class. Regardless of their parents'

opposition, not only did they maintain their friendship, they still treated each other like real brothers.

The residents of Jamalpur were happy because Rizwan was going to become a doctor. They had never had a doctor in Jamalpur. The closest hospital was a day-long walking distance with no appropriate transport to carry the patients to the hospital. They were happy to have a village fellow as a doctor.

Rizwan's remarkable success in his college exams entitled him to receive offers from medical schools from around the globe for admission. Notably, countrywide medical schools offered him various lavish packages to attract him.

The foreign medical schools offered him their country's citizenship, along with his parents, but at this point in life, he didn't want to leave Pakistan. Pakistan's circumstances were not good at all, yet he was not disappointed about its future.

The best medical school in Pakistan was King Edward Medical College. KE Medical College was not too far from Govt College. Over two years, he had developed many great friendships in Govt College. He wanted to stay in touch with them.

Three people had impacted his life the most. Two remained in Jamalpur. The third one was right here—Dr. Nazir, his most favorite teacher at Govt College.

Looking at his performance, the government of Pakistan had already taken responsibility for his educational expenses. Some business enterprises provided him a few scholarships, which made his life a little more comfortable. He started to spend more time on his educational activities.

In KE, there was a tradition to make newcomers fools. A few girls learned about his admission to KE College. They planned to make a fool out of him. They waited for him at a specific spot. As soon as they saw him, they encircled him. They told him they were from the registrar's office. Due to his remarkable educational record, the registrar has decided to give him a waiver for two years. Therefore, instead of joining the first-year class, he should study with third-year students.

Rizwan said to them they should thank the registrar on his behalf and convey to him while climbing up, "I don't believe in skipping the rungs of the ladder. I don't want to jump to the third rung without stepping on the first two." His response left the senior girls speechless. He waved them off and walked away to his department.

Usually, it takes a couple of years for newcomers to adjust to medical college. For a couple of years, they remain reluctant about the possibilities of their success in medical college. But the way teachers at Govt College prepared Rizwan, he walked into KE

with full confidence. He was sure about his success at KE College like a confident racer. Like at Govt College, he decided to spend his tenure smoothly. He knew now nothing could stop him from becoming a doctor. Now, he could visualize his entire life after graduation from KE College. He felt he could tread on his life path at the desired pace.

In the first few days, he tried to know everything about the college and its medical facility, the Meo Hospital. He wanted to learn as much as possible about the capabilities of the people working in KE College facilities. He wanted to chart his path in the amazing world of medical science. He developed a friendship with almost all the staff members at KE College. He spent maximum time with them after class hours.

In the college cafe, instead of drinking tea or eating biscuits, he spent time discussing various academic issues. Usually, he raised deep problems with the subject matter studied in the classes. He was more interested in the philosophical dimensions of the related topics.

At Govt College, he studied the functions of a frog's heart, liver, lungs, kidneys, bones, and sexual organs. At KE, he was learning the roles of similar human organs.

The residents of Jamalpur were waiting for him to come back after finishing his medical education. Here, he was receiving invitations from many medical institutions from the USA. Fellow

students envied him. They advised him to join a medical institution in the United States. However, he was entirely determined to first graduate from KE and then move somewhere else.

He thought once he would graduate from KE, many doors of opportunity would open for him. He would be in a better position to continue his research work.

At Govt College, his association with the editorial board of the college magazine sharpened his writing skills. Here at KE, he involved himself in various committees that arranged international conferences on medical issues.

In one of the conferences, he presented a paper titled “Life’s Leap from the Inorganic to the Organic Level.” In this paper, he discussed how this process takes place; what happens in nature, how various elements of matter interact with each other to make this transformation possible. He accurately described the terms and conditions.

When he presented this paper in the presence of scholars from around the globe, many took this presentation very seriously. They asked tons of questions of Rizwan, which he answered with a smile on his face. It established his position in KE as a serious scholar. After his paper was published in KE’s magazine *KEMU*, many international medical magazines reproduced his article. It provided him international exposure.

His exposure brought out many frogs hibernating deep down in the soil of the hearts of girls at KE. They all started croaking. Rizwan heard them, but he remained focused on his studies.

In the middle of nights, he continued practicing playing his violin. He conversed with the tunes of his violin, Like he did in Govt College students' hostel while living there. His violin tunes were gaining magical powers to grip peoples' hearts. Rizwan, who was a medical student during the daylight, became a violinist during dark, black, melancholy nights. He would continue playing until the stars in the deep sky would start yawning. Then, he would put his violin aside, put his head on the pillow, and get lost somewhere in the wonderlands of dreams.

Chapter 10

In spring, KE students started the preparation of the Spring Festival. They were full of excitement and energy.

The Festival Committee had already put all the nitty-gritty details of the program together. The committee allocated the musical segment of the event to Rizwan. They wanted him to play the violin at the event. For some reason, Rizwan didn't want to play the violin at the Spring Festival. In fact, after playing the fiddle at Govt College, he became a celebrity there. He didn't want to become a celebrity at KE College too. Here, he desired to build his image as a serious scholar.

After the concert at Govt College, many musical groups in the country started pursuing him to become part of them. He didn't want to become part of any of them. He didn't want to adopt violin playing as a profession. He had to make a lot of effort to shun those groups. He didn't want to get entangled in the same situation again.

The Musical Committee members insisted he must play at the Spring Festival to entertain his fellow students. When they asked too many times, he agreed to play, but he put a condition before them. He said he would play if the four girls who tried to make him a fool on the first day of his arrival at the college request him. The

Festival Committee members asked him their names. He didn't know their names; they asked him if he remembered their faces. He described to them how they looked. Notably, he recognized one of the girls. She was a tall girl with naughty eyes and a silky voice; her name was Smara, and she was one year senior to him. She graduated in Pre-Med from Islamabad College and joined KE on merit.

Smara was the daughter of an army colonel; she was the only sister of two brothers. She was very talkative and critical. Her name was stuck in Rizwan's mind because she was leading the rest of the girls. The other girls called her Smara.

The committee members heard Rizwan's condition and they became concerned. They all knew Smara really well. They knew the kind of girl she was. It would be tough to convince her to request Rizwan to play the violin at the Spring Festival.

Regardless, they promised Rizwan that she would come and request him in person for playing the violin at the festival.

Perhaps they wouldn't have requested Rizwan to play the violin except that the news of his miraculous violin playing had reached KE much before he arrived there.

Some of the KE College students had participated in the Govt College concert. The way Rizwan brought all the audience under the spell of his violin tunes was a unique experience for them. They had never experienced that kind of influence of music at any

other concert. That's why the KE students wanted him to play the violin, and the Spring Festival was the best occasion for this performance.

When the Festival Committee members contacted Smara, unexpectedly, she immediately agreed to talk to Rizwan and request him to play the violin in the festival.

In Govt College, many girls tried to get close to him. However, he had erected an invisible wall around him. No girl could cross this barricade. He didn't let this invisible wall crumble at KE College. In classrooms, conference rooms, and the cafeteria, he didn't engage in protracted conversations with girls. He didn't allow his fangirls to socialize with him too much. If he ever ended up spending a few moments with any of his fangirls, he used short phrases and moved on.

Today, when he suggested to the Festival Committee that it should ask Smara to talk to him, he was surprised, as this was an out-of-character request. He didn't know why he requested their presence.

Perhaps, deep down in his mind, the girls' effort to make him a fool on his arrival in college had left a troubling scar. He took it as an insult. Since, unusually, in KE College, he had adjusted so quickly, he wanted to return the favor to those girls. However, it was not Rizwan's character to take such small things as an insult. He had

a very thick skin. Notably, he had a lot of respect for girls deep in his heart. He couldn't think about taking revenge from girls. He only wanted to reveal the artistic side of his personality.

In this conversation about the Spring Festival, he felt in his heart the drum of war was beating and the armies were ready to engage in combat.

When Smara, along with her other three friends, came to request him to play the violin at the Spring Festival, he put a condition before her. He said he needed a girl in a peacock costume on the stage. If she promised to wear the peacock costume and join him, he would play the violin. Otherwise, he wouldn't play.

Smara blushed after listening to Rizwan's condition. Blinking her eyelids, she said she wouldn't wear a peacock's costume no matter what. If he wanted to play music, he should. Otherwise, he shouldn't.

Smara's friends liked Rizwan's proposal. They said, there is nothing if Smara wears a peacock's costume. They showed a willingness to wear peacock costumes. They urged Rizwan to do the same.

Listening to her friends, Smara agreed to wear a peacock costume and perform with Rizwan. He showed a willingness to do the same.

After the agreement with the girls, he informed the Festival Committee about his participation. He asked the committee to make his performance the last item of the night. The committee agreed.

At the peak of spring, KE students started the festivities of the festival. Stalls of various items were in place. The stage was all set for the performers to give their pieces. The Spring Festival celebrations continued for three days. On the third day, to conclude the festival, the moderator of the events announced the last item, the musical performance of Rizwan and his team.

The Festival Committee chairman thanked all those who participated in the event in any respect. Then he said, “Fellows, now the last item of the festival is about to start. I think we are fortunate to have a great violinist among us. Now, I request Rizwan Anjam to come on the stage with his fellow performers and amuse the audience with his music.”

With this announcement, Rizwan walked on the stage in a peacock costume. The violin was on his left shoulder. His chin was on the chinrest, and the bow in his right hand. His left-hand fingers were on the strings of the violin. For a few minutes, he waited for Smara and her friends to come on the stage, but they didn’t show up.

On the day when Smara asked Rizwan to play the violin, she and her friends decided to fool him once again, because they failed to fool him on the first day of his arrival. They decided to agree to

his condition and then later not to act on it. He would feel embarrassed before the crowd. And he would be forced to play alone—alone on the big stage.

After waiting for a few minutes for Smara and her friends, he said to the crowd, “You might have heard the proverb about a lonely peacock’s dance in the jungle, but there is no jungle over here. Yet, you will listen to a peacock playing the violin alone. I request you to relax your bodies and engage your minds with the tunes of my violin. I assure you an evening of fun and enjoyment.”

Then he slowly started playing the violin. The audience started swaying with the tunes of the violin. Their minds became fully tuned with the themes of the music. Rizwan’s bow was moving on the strings of the violin, but the bodies of the audience went into an ecstatic state. With his tunes, he created the state of birds’ courtship. While he was playing these themes, he gradually started moving back on the stage. All the girls in the audience came close to the stage, and they began dancing.

The tunes of his violin became louder and louder. Smara and her friends came close to the stage, dancing with the crowd.

Then, Rizwan slowly stepped forward on the stage and changed the tune, and all the boys got up and mixed with the girls. They boys and girls were dancing together. Stupefied by the fiddle’s themes, they continued ecstatically whirling around the stage. In the

students' stupefied state, Rizwan, at a point, strangely stopped playing the violin. He came down from the stage and walked back to his residence in the hostel. After a while, the students came out of this ecstatic state. Rizwan was no longer there. They were shrieking with joy, whistling and clapping.

Embarrassed, Smara and her friends, in the noise of the students, with their heads down, slowly faded away in the dark.

Chapter 11

Smara and her friends had played a game with Rizwan. They promised to wear peacock costumes and join him on the stage, but instead, they wanted to leave him alone. They thought he wouldn't be able to perform alone. Thus he would leave the stage ashamed and embarrassed. Against their plan, Rizwan performed so well, he left *them* ashamed and embarrassed.

They didn't know the skills of Rizwan. They didn't know, with constant practice, how he had mastered playing the violin. Such small incidents couldn't deter him. Not only was he brilliant to maintain his noticeable progress in education, but he had also achieved exceptional skill in playing the violin, which was enough to give him a glow to shine anywhere in the world.

Smara was upset with her friends. "I already told you I was not going to wear a peacock costume and go on the stage, but you forced me to do it. You were feeling low because you couldn't fool him on the first day. You wanted to play a game with him," she told her friends. "He made every girl at the festival dance like a peacock with the influence of his violin!" she angrily said them.

“Okay, friend, don’t feel bad. We still have many years to go at KE. We will get even with him on some other occasion.” They tried to calm Smara down.

“No, he has insulted us in public. It is badly irking me. Now, I’ve nothing to do with it. We are here to study medicine and become doctors. We are not here to make friends or enemies.” She said it all to her friends ostensibly. But deep down in her heart, there was sitting a thief. He was laughing at her. He was making fun of her helplessness.

“Who could give an insult like that to Colonel Ikram’s daughter, Major Aftab and Captain Rasheed’s sister? Specifically, a downtrodden potter’s son whose reason to fame is a photo with a donkey in which he tried to look like a Hollywood hero.”

The thief sitting deep down in her heart was laughing more loudly at such thoughts. He was further poking her ego. So much so, it became hard for her to focus on her studies.

On the other side, Rizwan was peaceful. No troublesome days or restless nights. Fully relaxed. The wave that forced him to get in touch with Smara had passed long ago. Smara and her friends were not his problem before or after the festival. His daily routines continued as usual. All day long he went from class to class for his studies, from conference to conference to learn about new developments in medical science, from debate society to the library

and cafeteria to spend his time most productively. After the fall of dusk, when birds returned to their nests to rest, he would start playing the violin.

If he ever got out of the KE hostel, he would go to a nearby restaurant to spend some time with his mentor, Dr. Nazir. With him, he would discuss all the troubling issues. Then, he would return to his room in the KE hostel fully energized and ready to face new challenges.

No one in his family would visit him. His illiterate parents were so tied up in their small circle. They couldn't afford to break away from it even for one day. After he moved to the city for education, his father had to deal with the responsibility of feeding the donkeys. Now, his father had to bring hay for the donkeys and rub their skin daily to keep it healthy. Also, he had to carry the load of mud for making pots. Then, he would have to prepare to put it on the potter's wheel to give it the desired shape. Those pots had to sit in the sun for several days before they would go in the furnace.

Sometimes Shero's wife, Nigu, helped him get his things done. However, she had to do many other things that a woman is supposed to do in the Punjabi culture. She had to prepare breakfast for her husband and herself. After breakfast, she cleaned the dirty dishes. After dishes, she cleaned the kitchen and spread a mud coating in there and all over the house. She washed the dirty clothes.

Then, she would go to the market to buy groceries for preparing lunch and dinner. If she ever found a few free moments, she would go to neighborhood houses and do their small chores to earn a few coins.

All these nonstop activities made her tired. As soon as the darkness of night engulfed the village, she would fall on the cart and go to sleep.

Nisar would come home and take a short nap after finishing his work at the courthouse. Then he would head to Shero's house. Both of them would go for a long, afternoon walk. Nisar related his daily activities at the court. Shero commented on those stories in his simple way. They would come back to the village with the last rays of the sun. At their homes, they would eat their dinner and then head to Saifo's confectioner's shop. The people who usually hang around there would show up one after the other.

These were usual routines in the village. The dwellers of the town spent their days and nights accordingly. Hardly anyone would break them.

Rizwan had never returned to Jamalpur since he left for his education. However, from time to time, the visitors from Jamalpur would update him about the critical events in the village.

Smara had caught her attention for a few moments, but then she faded away in the fog of emotional news he received from

Jamalpur. One of the visitors informed him Nisar was in jail on murder charges. His family refused to bail him out.

Rizwan was emotionally attached to Nisar, like his father, Shero. Shero and Nisar treated each other like brothers. They'd maintained this relationship, regardless of their class difference, since childhood.

Apparently, one evening, Shero and Nisar were at Saifo's shop. A few rowdy boys started messing with them. One of those boys said Rizwan was Nisar's son, instead of Shero's. Without wasting a moment, Nisar punched the boy on his forehead. The boy slipped, and his head struck the sharp edge of a large pan that sat on the commercial stove. His head crashed and split into two pieces, like a walnut. He died right on the spot. The news of his death spread in the entire town like a jungle fire. He was the son of a carpenter.

In a few minutes, the slain boy's and Nisar's family members arrived on the scene. Since Nisar was an attorney, he knew it was an unintentional murder that took place as a result of the slain boy's provocation. He stayed there and waited for the police to come. Soon after the cops arrived, they took the boy's body into their custody for postmortem. Also, they arrested Nisar and took him to the police station.

Shero followed Nisar into the police station. He tried to get Nisar released on bail, but the police refused. The police wanted to

investigate the case and present him before the judge in the court. Shero knew the court would decide Nisar's murder case based on First Information Report (FIR) noted by the police inspector.

After the family members left the police station, Shero asked the inspector to make sure to mention in the FIR that the murder was an accident and not intentional. That's what happened in reality. The slain boy provoked Nisar by blaming him for having an illicit relationship with Shero's wife, Nigu. Nisar punched him on the forehead, not intending to kill him but to teach him a lesson. He died because he struck his head on the edge of the pan on the stove, not because Nisar punched him. If he hadn't hit his head against the side of the pan, he would still be alive.

The police inspector told Shero what he was describing was right, but they both came to Saifo's shop to have trouble with the boy, to kill him. Therefore, it was an intentional murder.

"Yet, I will note what you were saying. However, for this favor, you have to pay me two lakh rupees. Otherwise, I will write the report the way I am describing. And I will only accept money from you. Not from Nisar's family, because they are too powerful, and I am not a fool." The guy who brought this news to Rizwan told him his father was extremely worried. He tried to sell his house and five donkeys to raise funds, but nobody wanted to pay him two lakh rupees.

Rizwan asked the fellow to take his message to his father. He should tell him not to worry. He said he would bring two lakh rupees in a few days and pay the police inspector.

The police requested the court for two weeks custodial remand to investigate Nisar's case.

Rizwan, oblivious of everything else, was worried about raising two lakh rupees to help Nisar. The scholarship he received from the government was hardly sufficient to get his life going. He was acquiring education at KE like a poor man. Except for Dr. Nazir, he didn't know anyone he could talk to about his dire need of money. Dr. Nazir was not a rich man. He lived a moderate life. With his meager resources, it would be difficult for him to help Rizwan. Knowing this, how could he ask him for money?

For some reason, he had sent the message to his father about raising funds, but he couldn't find a way to arrange that kind of money.

In those days, he saw Smara a few times with her friends in the cafeteria or library or here and there. He didn't pay any attention to her. In reaction to Rizwan's cold shoulder, she got upset with her friends. "What does this potter's son think about himself? He thinks he is going to become a doctor. He plays the violin. He is a hero. Therefore, he can act big and bad. According to the traditions of KE, we tried to make him a fool. He took his revenge to make us fools.

We outsmarted him and again made him a fool. Now, why does he give us the cold shoulder all the time? Hi, hello, is a far-off thing. He doesn't even make eye contact with us."

By chance, Rizwan heard everything she said. He looked at her and then said,

"Listen, lady! Life is not limited to KE. There is vast life beyond KE and becoming a doctor, which has its issues. The poor people have to deal with those day-to-day issues."

Smara felt the pain in his voice. She apologized to him. "Rizwan, why are you so worried? Is there something wrong?"

Feeling sympathy in Smara's voice, Rizwan told her the whole story.

After listening to his story, she asked him if he wanted to have two lakh rupees or Nisar's honorable release from police custody.

He replied, "Money is only a means to solve the problem. If the problem ends without money, then I don't need it."

Smara consoled him and asked him to let his family know that Nisar would be free in a few days. There would be no more murder charges against him.

Then, she called her father, Colonel Ikram, and told him Rizwan's whole story. She asked him to call the police inspector in Jamalpur and let him know that he knows about Nisar's case and his

effort to make two lakh rupees out of it. Hearing the colonel, the police inspector prepared a flawed police report. The report couldn't hold in the court. The judge freed Nisar, giving him the benefit of the doubt for lack of sufficient evidence.

After a few days, Nisar, Shero, and Nigu came to KE to visit Rizwan. They were all drinking tea sitting in the cafeteria. Smara showed up there with her friends. He welcomed her and said, "Smara, come on, meet my family. They have come to thank you. Here is my mother, Nigu, my father, Shero, and Nisar, my father's childhood friend."

Smara smiled and welcomed all to KE College. Then she said, "Rizwan, I like your family very much. I am glad they are out of trouble."

Then she moved on. She sat at a table at the end of the cafeteria and ordered tea for her and her friends. The thief sitting in her heart forgot to laugh.

Now, she was laughing unstoppably. Her friends couldn't figure out what had changed and why she was laughing.

Chapter 12

Although the case of the murder of the carpenter's son was settled with the help of Smara's father, Colonel Ikram, in Jamalpur, a new trial had started inside Rizwan. With this trial, many other trials had initiated. One case was of Nisar, who was a friend of his father from his childhood. On him, there was an allegation of illicit relations with Rizwan's mother. The second case was against his father, who always claimed he was his natural father. He nurtured him from his birth with love and affection. The third case was about his mother, Nigu, who hid the identity of his birth father from him all his life. The fourth case was against himself. How come he didn't know his birth father all these years?

Why did the slain blame Nisar of illicit relations with his mother? Wasn't he the son of Shero and Nigu? Was he the son of Nisar and Nigu? His facial complexion was like Shero's and Nigu's; his habits were like them; his conversation style sounded like them. Also, his voice was a composite of the sound of Shero and Nigu.

Then he erased this idea from his mind, thinking in small towns like Jamalpur, the people always object to close friendly relations between people like Shero and Nisar. They make up all types of wild stories about them.

However, he was not happy that Nisar killed a young lad just because he accused him of illicit relations with Nigu. No one has a right to kill anyone for any reason. He didn't like to read history books because they narrated the stories of wars in which innumerate people get killed.

People are like flowers. Every human being has a unique personality. All human beings are borne out of the dust and then return to it. Who comes out of this dust? It doesn't matter. There is no legit or illicit relationship in nature. However, like a flower, each human being has a unique odor. Some have such a pleasant scent that you like to spend all your life around them. Never want to go away from them. Contrarily, some flowers have such an unpleasant smell that you want to run away from them. You keep running away from them to save your soul from their shadow.

In a few days, Rizwan forgot everything about Jamalpur and he focused on his studies at KE. He ran into Smara and her friends here and there, but he didn't interact with them except to say hi and hello.

With these activities the spring passed and summer came to Lahore. On the streets of the city, various types of vendors started selling summer drinks like sugar cane juice, lassi, cold bottled milk, and *qulfies* and icy gooseberries.

KE administration announced many out-of-town trips during the summer vacation. Rizwan looked at the list of various proposed destinations. In one of the listings, he saw Smara and her friends' names.

Rizwan felt strange about Smara's choice; she had chosen the Nathiagali trip; she came from Islamabad. Nathiagali was not too far from Islamabad. It was part of the same geographical terrain. Why would she want to go there? Why not some other new destination? She could go to Karachi or Quetta. Was she going to Nathiagali because of him? These were his thoughts. She was not going to Nathiagali because of him. She was going there because her friends wanted to meet her parents and spend some time with them at Islamabad. They decided to go to Nathiagali on the trip and then on the way back, stay at her house.

Rizwan's reason for choosing Nathiagali was strange. He had heard, on full moon nights, the moon comes down to the level of the jungle trees. It creates such a beautiful scene, it takes away your heart. This scene has no replication anywhere else around the globe.

He wanted to go there to be part of this beautiful scene. He desired to stand in the jungle in the moonlight and play the violin and immerse its beauty in his violin tunes.

Also, his Pakistan started from Jamalpur and ended at Lahore. He wanted to see the other parts of the country. On his trip to Nathiagali, he could see a significant portion of Punjab.

Islamabad is the head of Punjab, which is lying at the feet of Kashmir. From Islamabad, he would travel in Punjab. Then he would go to Nathiagali through the Murree Hills. There he would enjoy Kashmir's daunting beauty.

As soon as KE closed for the summer vacation, the students left on proposed trips to their destinations. The students who left for Karachi had booked a full carriage on the Karachi-bound train. The Nathiagali group had reserved a private coach. In the coach, boys and girls were in even numbers; they were sitting together with their friends. Smara's three friends were sitting with her.

Rizwan, as usual, was sitting alone. He had only one small bag and his violin with him. When he hopped into the coach, he scanned the students sitting there with a carefree look. He saw Smara seated behind the driver, along with her friends. The entire coach was filled with the students. Only the seat next to the driver was empty. Rizwan sat on that empty seat with his bag and violin. He put his bag and violin under his seat and closed his eyes. Rizwan was in the habit of cutting off his mind from the external world and deeply absorbing himself in the inner world in his free moments. His inner world was beautiful, like his violin tunes.

His inner journey always started from the little mud on the potter's wheel and then expanded all the way to engulf the whole universe. He would feel the world was created right at that moment. The effects of new creation were still visible on everything. The moon, sun, stars, the blue sky, and galaxies emerged, shrank, and expanded in his inner world. Then he would feel his and the universe's heart would beat in harmony.

In this world of consciousness, existence and nonexistence would immerse in each other. In the dream, there was consciousness, and in wakefulness, there was a dream. The difference between fantasy and sentience disappeared.

Usually, he went through such hallucinations during the night while playing the violin. He would feel he had neither the bow in his hand nor his fingers on the strings of the violin. It was the spirit of the universe that created music, moving the bow and the fingers on the cords of the violin. And his self dissolved in the tunes of the violin.

Sitting in his seat in the coach with closed eyes, utterly unaware of the presence of fellow students, he was flying in the outer edges of the universe. Smara and her friends were continually throwing sentences at him to entangle him in a dialogue.

Their poking didn't bother him. He remained in the same state of mind until the driver of the coach announced a short stop at

a cafe. When he came out of this state of mind, he saw Smara and her friends moving toward the exit from the coach. He got up and followed them. After getting off the coach, everyone stretched their legs. One of Smara's friends asked Rizwan if he would like to have a cup of tea with them. He accepted their offer, scolding them about breaking their promise to appear on the stage in peacock costume on the Spring Festival evening.

"No, no, it will not happen again. Also, Smara and all of us want to apologize for that day," she said.

"It's okay. I accept everyone's apology. But Smara doesn't need to apologize," he responded.

"What? Why do we all have to apologize, and she has an exemption?" she asked.

"It's not like that. Smara did a great favor for me. I'll remain indebted to her all my life. I'm not a thankless person. I'll remember her favor all my life," he retorted.

"Rizwan, it's a fifteen-minute break. You are trying to settle an entire life's debt in this short break. Let's drink our tea, because this coach is not going to stop anywhere else till Nathiagali."

"Yes, in the hot days of Punjab, the way tea kills thirst, nothing else does it. Some people try cold milk, but the more milk they drink, the thirstier they get. Whereas one cup of tea satisfies the thirst for many hours." He said it while sitting at a table in the cafe

with Smara and her friends. Smara nodded positively and said, “And when they drink cold milk or lassi, they have the desire to drink much more. But, with one cup of tea, the desire to have another one dies.”

“Wow! What a revolution! Rizwan and Smara never agree on anything, but today they have agreed on a cup of tea.” They all thumped on the table.

“There is nothing wrong with having a different opinion. The difference in thinking is the beauty of a dialogue. When two people differ with each other, one says I am, the other says I am too.” Smara put her hand on one of her friend’s shoulder and then said to Rizwan, “Rizwan, we all know you as a fellow student, as an intelligent person, and as a very skillful violinist. But we know nothing about your life. Would you please share the details of your life with us?”

“Smara, there is nothing in my life except what you have said in your three phrases. You have used the term intelligent unnecessarily; I’m not intelligent at all. The term *intelligent* is an adjective. When we add modifiers to get above the level of originality, we lose our essence. Life moves on through the dialectical process. My life is full of contradictions. Yet, if you’d like to know the details, I am available anytime to share.”

Before Smara could say another word, the driver announced the departure of the coach. All the students paid their bills and hopped on the van again.

On the coach, a friend of Smara asked a student sitting next to them if he could exchange his seat with Rizwan's because they wanted to discuss something with him.

Rizwan invisibly requested the student not to do it. Then he closed his eyes and embarked on a journey to distant inner worlds. The coach left for Nathiagali once again.

Chapter 13

The coach reached Nathiagali when the sun was scattering its last rays on the tops of the tall trees. All the students were fatigued due to the long journey. The KE administration had arranged the students' stay at the Tourism Department's rest house.

The roadsides were still full of snow. It was cold. The students immediately went to their assigned rooms to rest.

The architects of the rest house designed its rooms in such a way that from each suite, a resident could view the oak and cedar trees down the hills.

Before they went to their rooms, the person in charge of the rest house informed the students about the animals in the Nathiagali jungles. He told them the cheetahs, wildcats, and leopards inhabited those jungles—however, there was no report of their attack on any human being. There were monkeys in the forest who loved to tease human beings. They usually ran off with food items and clothes from the houses. They particularly loved to play with underwear.

Sometimes, in the middle of the night, a lion came close to the town and roared. However, no lion ever attacked any human being.

He also warned students about the bugs in beds. It was the rest house's policy to use the medicines to terminate them from time to time. Yet, with the changing weather, they appeared all of a sudden and spread very fast. There was a can of spray in every room. "If anyone sees a bug in the bed, please use it quickly. This spray is odorless, and it has no chemical reaction. It is not hazardous to human health."

He told the students that during their stay at the rest house, they would have their breakfast and dinner; however, they would have to inform to the kitchen for lunch.

After resting for a couple of hours, the students took showers with warm water and gathered in the dining hall. They made a lot of noise in the dining hall. All of them were engaged in conversation with their friends sitting at the dining tables.

Smara and her friends invited Rizwan to dine with them. He happily joined them. They started the conversation from the same point where they'd left it at the cafe.

Smara and her friends wanted to hear Rizwan's life story from him. He wished to listen to their life stories before he would tell his.

Before they could commence telling their stories, the waiters served the food. In the dining hall, before there was only the noise of students' conversations, but now the sounds of utensils were

added in. It became almost impossible to hear each other. Instead of continuing the serious discussions, they started cracking light jokes.

Smara and her friends told the funny habits of their family members while eating. Rizwan told them many stories from Jamalpur. He said people lived out of cities like Lahore and Islamabad too. Like the dwellers of cosmopolitan areas, they also have their moments of joys and pains. He told them how every morning he fed the donkeys and made them drink water, how he prepared the mud for his father and put it on the potter's wheel for him to give it the desired shapes. Smara and her friends were looking at his face curiously while he was giving them the details of his daily life in Jamalpur.

He narrated to them how donkeys express their happiness about their favorite food and displeasure about the food they hate, and how they teased each other. How male and female donkeys show affection by rubbing faces with each other and then end up having sex. Smara and her friends were all ears while listening to him.

If common Pakistani boys and girls had been sitting at the dining table, they wouldn't discuss such things. But, these were medical students. That's why they were all at ease. The conversation around Smara and her friends' relatives' eating habits turned into a

discussion about the sexuality of donkeys, plants, birds, and other animals.

“Men and male sparrows have different sexual behavior than roosters and sparrows,” one of Smara’s friends commented. “Unlike roosters, most men live their entire life happily and loyally with one woman, bring up their kids, and fulfill their family responsibilities,” she furthered her argument.

“But, most of the men and women treat children as their property and continue efforts to increase them. All the inventions men have made, all the wars they have fought, all the religions they have created, all the government institutions they have formed, they have done so to control the women,” Smara added her point.

Rizwan heard Smara’s point and started laughing. Then he laughed and laughed.

Smara and her friends asked Rizwan about his laughter. He said the way Smara has connected everything with men’s desire to control women is impressive. She has forgotten, men are more stupid than donkeys. Men lose everything, even their lives, for women’s one affectionate look.

With these conversations, the dinner ended. The waiters served tea to those who wanted to have it. They put hot water, tea bags, milk, and sugar pots on the tables for them to prepare their tea according to their tastes.

Precisely at that time, a group of local boys entered the dining hall. They were playing Malika Pukhraj's famous song, "Allah Bailwa Ho." The students also joined them in their singing. The local boys amused the students till midnight.

Then the students retired to their rooms to have a restful sleep.

Chapter 14

After a restful sleep, by the time the students arrived in the dining hall to have their breakfast, the surrounding mountains were shining in the sun. Due to the snow on the mountaintops, the sun's reflected rays came through the windows to light up the hall. The shining snow and the sight of tall trees as far as they could see created a strange scene.

Smara and her friends were sitting at the same table as last night, waiting for Rizwan. He was nowhere in sight. From time to time they looked toward the door, but continued eating breakfast.

Smara and her friends each had a soft corner in her heart for Rizwan. Each had hung Rizwan's picture in her heart. However, none of them admitted to silently loving Rizwan.

The way Rizwan had asked the Festival Committee to make Smara request him to play the violin, all the students had some idea about his love for Smara and her friends. However, he never openly did anything that reflected his interest or passion for them.

Smara and her friends became restless when Rizwan didn't show up for breakfast. Each one of them was anxious but didn't utter a word.

Rizwan's reason to come to Nathiagali was different than the rest of the students. Instead of spending time with them, he wanted to spend more time with nature: with trees, animals, birds, wildflowers, and the moon and the sun. He got up early in the morning and went out to enjoy the beautiful scenery of sunrise and take a sunbath. He always held the opinion that the rising sun's first rays lighten up everything's in and out they touch. They connect them with nature in such a way that they become part of it. Life adopts them for its expression. Their art becomes everlasting.

When Rizwan was enjoying the sunbath, Smara and her friends started having a little hot dialogue with each other over their relations with him.

Ezra had mistakenly said to Smara she was looking restless because of Rizwan's absence.

Ezra was from Peshawar; she belonged to a Pakhtoon family. She spoke English and Urdu fluently. With her unaccented English or Urdu, it was hard to say if she was a Pakhtoon.

Her father, Faqir Hussain, was chief secretary of the province. She graduated pre-med from Peshawar Government College and got admission to KE College on merit.

Smara was not less than anyone else. She immediately said, "I look restless to you, but the fact, it is you that has tears in your eyes for him."

Yasmeen, seeing the rift between Smara and Ezra, suddenly intervened. “Don’t fight over Rizwan. He is a star in the sky. None of you are going to get him.”

Yasmeen was from New York City. She had come to KE College to get her MBBS degree. Her father owned a pharmaceutical company in New York. He sent her to KE College for several reasons. He wanted her to get a doctor’s degree from KE. Then, he wanted her to spend a few years in Pakistan. He didn’t want her to fall in love with a white or a black boy in New York. He wished her to love a Pakistani boy and get married to him.

Smara and Ezra forgot their rift and they started arguing with Yasmeen. “We know you’ve come from New York for Rizwan. That’s why he looks to you a star in the sky. You’d like us to keep our eyes closed so you flee with him to New York.”

Yasmeen was born and raised in New York. She went to elementary and high school in New York; she had fought many fights with white and black boys and girls. She responded to them in a tit-for-tat manner. “From your gutter-like brains, the lousy smell is spreading all over. Rizwan is not going to touch girls with dirty brains like yours.”

Shaista was so far sitting quiet. She was silently watching her friends poking and fighting. She couldn’t keep quiet. She said, “I know you all love Rizwan deep down in your hearts. I suggest

you shouldn't fight over him. You should leave him alone and let him decide with whom he wants to fall in love."

Shaista was the daughter of a landlord from Sahiwal. She was good at reading and writing. She had blackish features, but her complexion was extraordinarily beautiful. She had a unique attraction in her face. Anyone who looked at her face became fixated. Sometimes, she asked people why they were staring at her.

It proved very costly to Shaista to open her mouth. All of her friends forgot their quarrel. They started hitting her back. "We all were fighting for Rizwan; now Shaista has also entered in as a contender," they all said with one voice.

Smara and her friends' poking caught the attention of all the students in the dining hall. With the mention of Rizwan's name, they understood what the bone of contention among them was. They all gathered around them and started pitting one against the other.

Smara and her friends gave up their quarrel and went out of the rest house. The rest of the students followed them.

They all saw Rizwan slowly walking back to the rest house from the jungle.

His face was peaceful, like Gautama's. The sun in the sky was shining right behind him. It seemed like there was a walkway from the sun to the earth, and he was walking on it. The sunshine was walking along with him.

The students cheered him upon his arrival. “If he didn’t return at this time, there would have been a Mahabharata among Smara and her friends. Our Nathiagali trip would have gone down the drain,” one said.

Another glanced at them and said, “No one had to have Maha Bharat for him. He is indeed a student at a medical school, but he is a very ordinary human being. He doesn’t want anyone to fight because of him. Also, we’ve come here to enjoy our summer vacation. If we quarrel with each other, it will take all the fun out.”

While they were standing there, a pack of monkeys showed up. They were chasing each other; male and female monkeys sat there in the sun. They were removing bugs from each other’s hair.

The students quit talking and started gazing at the monkeys with interest. *How close are these monkeys to human beings?* they thought. “They cannot converse like us, but their social habits are our true copy,” one said.

In a few minutes, the monkeys provided the proof. A few male monkeys chased a female. She ran and climbed up a nearby tree. One of the male monkeys that was chasing the females came down and joined the other group. All of a sudden, he extended his penis and started biting the upper part of his legs. It looked like he was trying to suck his penis. Failing to put his penis in his mouth, he started masturbating with his hand. During masturbating, he

uttered strange sounds out of his mouth. The boys made noise, but the girls blushed and went inside the rest house.

The monkey finished masturbating. The boys also went inside the rest house. They teased girls. “You are becoming doctors, but the monkey’s masturbation embarrassed you.”

The girls didn’t hold back. One gave a tit-for-tat answer. “We didn’t walk in because of the monkey; we walked inside because you guys were going crazy at the monkey’s masturbation.”

Because of the girl’s straightforward answer, the boys found it easier to change the topic. Therefore, they started making a program for the rest of the day. They didn’t want to spend the day in the rest house.

Rizwan recused himself from going out. He wanted to spend all day in the rest house. He had enjoyed the beauty of the rising sun in Nathiagali. He wanted to enjoy the moonlight in the jungle.

Smara and her friends also decided to spend their day in the rest house.

The rest of the students went on a safari in the jungle.

Chapter 15

The heat of summer doesn't differentiate between the poor and the rich.

In Pakistan, rich people move to cold hill stations to escape from the heatwaves of summer in the plains of Punjab, Sindh, Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan. The poor continue living in their areas during extreme weather.

Murree and Nathiagali are two main hill stations where the well-off families of Punjab spend their summers. In summer, they move there to save them from harsh heat, whereas in winter, they go there to enjoy the snowfall.

Nowadays, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Pakhtunkhwa had turned in a burning hell, and the heatwaves were tearing down the human bodies; most of the affluent people were staying in Murree and Nathiagali, where the weather was delightful.

There were times when people used to go to hills and jungles to have solitude. Now, the rich brats had destroyed such serene sanctuaries of solitude.

The KE students, except Rizwan, Smara, and her friends, left on a jungle safari on horses. Their noise disturbed the jungle's peace.

The animals and birds responded to them with their sounds to alert their fellows.

Outside the rest house, they had seen the action of a few monkeys. In the jungles of Nathiagali, there were hundreds of monkeys jumping tree to tree, making a lot of noise.

The crows sitting on the branches of the trees and monkeys were testing each other's skills to grab the crumbs of leftover food. Although it was against the rules of the tourism department to feed the animals or birds in the jungle, Pakistani visitors didn't care much about such regulations. On the trails in the wilderness, food cans and plastic shopper bags were visible all over.

On the horses' backs, the students' caravan was slowly moving towards the Black Jungle. In the Black Forest, from time to time, leopards, and lions came in sight, but there were no reports of any attack incidents. Yet, the rest house administration were accompanied by a gunman in case of an emergency.

When this caravan was moving towards the Black Forest, Rizwan was resting in his room. Smara's arguments with her friends over him alerted him about their wishes.

The girls at Govt College spread many stories about him. He never took their stories seriously. He never forgot that he was there for a couple of years to finish his pre-med education. Those two years passed in the blink of an eye. But at KE, it was his first year.

He had to spend four more years there. He didn't want any scandal that could impact his studies at KE.

Rizwan did not carry any emotional or mental baggage because of his impoverished family history. He knew well that in a country like Pakistan, where a family's economic status played a crucial role in a person's life, he was progressing only because of his God-given abilities. He wanted to maintain this progress at any cost. He never allowed any distractions to affect his growth.

Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista belonged to economically powerful and politically influential families. He knew if any one of those families tried to interfere in his life, his dreams to become a doctor would shatter, and he would only play the violin for the rest of his life.

With these thoughts, four bells of danger started ringing in his head. He didn't want to give preferential treatment to any one of them. If Smara's father, Colonel Ikram, had Nisar released from jail in a murder case, he could make his life miserable, too.

Chief Secretary Pakhtunkhwa was also in a crucial position in the federal government. He was in charge of the whole provincial administration. However, he could create trouble for anyone anywhere in Pakistan.

Punjab's landlords were half-landlords and half-criminals. To have anyone killed was an easy job for them. Their only solution to handle their opponents was to eliminate them physically.

Yasmeen's father lived in New York. He had a sizeable pharmaceutical company there. He was a rich man by American standards. In Pakistan, where everybody was on sale, with his power and money, it wasn't too hard to create trouble for anybody.

Under these circumstances, he thought it was wise to have pleasant, balanced relations with all four of them. He didn't want to create an impression of preferring one over the others.

In the afternoon, he came out of his room and went straight to the dining hall to have a cup of tea. He found Smara with her friends sitting there drinking tea. They waved their hands towards him and asked him to join them.

For a few minutes, he stood by the rack of magazines and daily newspapers. He picked up a magazine and sat alone at a separate table. Instead of sitting with the girls, he sat alone.

Smara was the daughter of Colonel Ikram. How could she tolerate Rizwan's desire to ignore her? She got up with her friends, with teacups in their hands, and joined him uninvited.

Then she said to Rizwan, "It seems like you don't want to let go of our Spring Festival misconduct with you."

“I don’t know which misconduct you are talking about, Smara,” Rizwan replied.

“The misconduct of not showing up on the stage with you in peacock costumes,” Smara explained.

“No, Smara, I didn’t mind it at all. If you had come on the stage in a peacock costume, the audience would have enjoyed our collective performance. It would have boosted your image. However, you chose not to do so. Instead, you became part of the crowd and kept dancing around the stage,” Rizwan said.

“OK. We accept your explanation. Would you tell us why you avoid us all the time?” she asked.

“No, it’s not like that. I am a simple man from a small village. I belong to an impoverished family. That’s why I don’t indulge in unnecessary things,” he said.

“It means you consider us ‘unnecessary things?’” Smara shook her right-hand fingers, taunting him.

“No, Smara, you are giving wrong meanings to my words. We are in different classes. We don’t run into each other that often. I do not intentionally try to ignore you,” he responded defensively.

“You saw us sitting here drinking tea. How come you came and sat separately? Isn’t it ignoring?” Yasmeen jumped in the conversation in aid of Smara.

“No, I haven’t found time to keep abreast of what is going on in the world. Now, I have a few free moments, so I’m trying to catch up with things.” He turned his face toward Yasmeen as he replied.

“Aren’t we part of the things around you?” Yasmeen looked straight in Rizwan’s eyes.

Rizwan smiled at Yasmeen’s style and question.

From their line of questioning, Rizwan realized, Smara and her friends were trying to engage him in unnecessary conversation. He decided to play the game with them.

He put the magazine aside and said, “I am in a profound puzzle. All four of you are exceptionally beautiful. If I get closer to one of you, I’ll have to distance myself from the other three. And that’s unacceptable to me.”

His direct approach put all four of them on the defensive. The thieves sitting in their hearts again opened their eyes and they started teasing them like circus jokers. They thought Rizwan was cognitive of the thieves of their hearts. That’s why he stayed away from them. Yet, they remained determined to include Rizwan in their circle of friends before leaving Nathiagali.

Smara changed her line of argument. “Rizwan, you have erected strong walls around you. You don’t allow anyone to enter in those walls.”

“No, Smara, no. There is nothing like that. You took my heart in your grip the day your father helped us get Nisar released from the police without money. Otherwise, we didn’t have even two thousand rupees to pay to the police. My father had to sell his house and his donkeys to raise the required funds, but still, there wouldn’t have been enough money,” he said.

“No, Rizwan, I didn’t do anything for you. My father is in a position to settle such issues, so I did,” Smara replied. Then, for some amusement, she asked, “Rizwan, if I didn’t help you, what would you have done?”

“In my Govt College concert, a European company contacted me to buy the rights of my picture with the donkey. I refused them. I thought about contacting them again and offering the rights to that picture. They would pay me in dollars, which would have been enough money in Pakistani currency.”

“Then why didn’t you do it?” she asked.

“That picture is more than a picture for me. It’s my past, my present, and my future. How can one sell past, present, and future?”

“But for money, everything sells,” Yasmeen intervened.

“You are right, Yas, but everything doesn’t sell for money,” he responded.

Rizwan, Smara, and her friends were sitting in the lobby and talking to each other. The students who had gone on safari had

returned. They were all tired. They fell on sofas in the lobby and closed their eyes.

Rizwan, Smara, and her friends tried to engage them, but they were unable to respond. No, yes or no. They sat on the sofas wholly exhausted, with eyes closed.

Traveling on horses' backs on hilly trails was a tiresome experience for them. They wanted to rest. With their unresponsiveness, Rizwan, Smara, and her friends left them alone and continued their conversation.

Chapter 16

Smara and her friends insisted Rizwan eat dinner with them. He went back to his room without eating any food.

In the middle of the night, he woke up. He looked out of the window. A full moon had lightened up the entire jungle and the mountains.

He hurriedly took a shower, changed his clothes, wore a sweater, and with his violin, went out of the rest house. The rest house was located right at the edge of the jungle. The moment he walked out of the rest house compound, he saw the entire atmosphere was lit up with the moonlight.

He had never seen such a beautiful scene in his whole life. Bewildered and surprised, he continued walking toward the jungle. Near the forest, he found a mound. Instead of stones, mud made it. He got up on that mound. Oak trees went all the way down to the valley. He put the violin on his left shoulder, held the bow in his right hand, adjusted his fingers on the violin strings, and slowly started moving the bow. The devotional tunes of the violin, like the ocean waves, began spreading all over. As the tunes of the violin got louder, the noise of insects in the jungle died down. A complete

silence took over the entire surroundings. It felt like the whole universe had stopped breathing.

Rizwan continued playing devotional tunes on the violin with eyes closed. After a while, all the monkeys from the jungle gathered around him. Usually, it has hard for monkeys to sit still. To avoid boredom, if nothing else, they sit together and start getting bugs out of each other's hair. But, in front of Rizwan, those monkeys sat like high school students sit in the classroom before their teacher. They were all listening to the violin with full attention.

After the monkeys, other animals of the jungle came and stood in circles behind them. They were so attentive, the one was unaware of the presence of another. Leopards, bison, wild bunnies, all were standing next to each other. There was no difference between a predator and the prey.

If all the other animals were there listening to the violin, why should the birds stay behind? They also flew from their nests and gathered around Rizwan; crows, sparrows, pigeons, doves, all silently listening to the violin. The owls' eyes were wide open in amazement. The eagles hid their beaks under their wings to announce that no one should feel threatened by them tonight. Tonight, we will not attack anybody; we will not kill anybody, nor will we eat anybody's flesh.

Rizwan had played the violin many times before standing in the window of his room. But he had never seen this scene before. He never experienced that insects, birds, and animals would become so silent by the influence of the violin tunes. He had never seen them sitting next to each other free from all fears.

This scene made Rizwan selfless. He felt the moon had stopped moving in the sky. It was also listening to the devotional tunes of the violin. Gradually, he felt he was too absorbed in the themes of the violin. The melodies of the fiddle were not separate from him, and he was not different from them. There was no difference between him and the jungle, between him and the animals listening to the music. They were all one.

It was a strange gathering. Neither the old world had seen such a unique concert nor the new world. In this concert, one man was playing the fiddle standing on a mound on a seven-thousand-foot-high mountain on the edge of a jungle, and animals and birds were listening to it, fully absorbed in it.

In this hypnogogic state, between the earth and sky right by the side of the moon, he saw an apparition was emerging. The tunes of his fiddle became higher and higher. Then that apparition turned into a body of light and stood before him.

It looked like universal beauty had manifested in this body of light. That body of light had the entire universe under her wings.

Beyond the moon, billions of shining stars, under the moon, far-spread jungle; on the edge of the forest stood Rizwan with his violin on his shoulder and a large number of animals and birds around him; all were part of that body of light. The face of this body of fire was of a beautiful woman. It was lovely, engaging, and evident.

Rizwan, while playing the violin, asked the apparition, without using words, who was she? The question raised in Rizwan's mind and transmitted to the spirit.

She transmitted the response in Rizwan's mind without using any words. *"I'm the spirit of the universe. Your violin's devotional tunes have manifested me here."*

"Is it your real body?" Rizwan asked.

"In this universe, only I am real. The rest of the forms appear on the page of time and space and then disappear."

"Where do those forms disappear to?" he asked.

"Colorfulness and colorlessness are two states. These forms continue passing through these two states. They emerge on the page of time and space in the state of colorfulness and then disappear in the state of colorlessness. This process continues forever. These forms never perish; they only change," the apparition answered.

"What is God?" he asked.

"God is a thought. Human beings created it. It is still passing through the stages of completion," she answered.

“What is the truth?” he asked.

“Truth doesn’t have a permanent form. With changing forms, it also changes. When one form changes, its truth changes along with it,” she replied.

“Then why do human beings fight?” he asked.

“It is because every human thinks only his truth is the truth. Everyone else’s reality is an illusion. The fact is, every truth is a mirage. Over time, like forms, the realities and mirages continue converting into each other,” she explained.

“Can a human ever reach a reality?” He transmitted another question.

“Yes, when he enters the state of colorlessness, he reaches to his reality,” she answered.

“Then what happens?”

“He achieves eternal peace. He becomes part of me. He merges in his origin.”

“What is paradise?”

“A wish.”

“What is hell?”

“A fear.”

“What is life and death?”

“A mirage.”

“Who is the killer and the killed?”

“There is no killer or killed. Neither a killer can kill anybody nor does the dead one die. They only act. One acts as a killer, the other as dead,” she said.

“Then who are those who daily kill and get killed every day? What kind of play is this?” he asked.

“Just a clash of two egos. The war of two apparitions. The battle of two forms. Each other’s effort to deny each other’s illusionary truth,” she explained.

Rizwan was playing the violin, and the spirit of the universe was revealing to him the essence of God, humans, paradise, hell, war, peace, life, and death.

Animals and birds, absorbed in the tunes of the violin, listened to the dialogue between the spirit of the universe and Rizwan with deep interest.

Last night, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista each decided to have him as her life partner and spend the rest of her entire life with him.

In the last part of the night, Smara woke up. She pulled her window curtain and looked at the jungle. She saw Rizwan standing on a mound playing the violin. She ran to the forest in a nightdress without any shoes on her feet. The scene she saw there, it scared her.

She wanted to shriek, but the tunes of the violin took her in their grip. She came close to Rizwan and sat with the rest of the animals and birds.

Smara was keeping an eye on Rizwan but Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista were keeping an eye on her. They knew she did a favor to Rizwan at one time. Now, to return it, he was more inclined toward her.

They also got up and hurriedly ran after Smara into the jungle. Like Smara, when they saw Rizwan standing on a mound and playing the violin, and the large congregation of animals and birds sitting around him, they got scared. Then, absorbed in the violin tunes, they also sat along with the animals and became the part of the congregation.

Like all the animals and birds in the arena, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista forgot who they were, their identities and names. All they knew were the tunes of the violin and Rizwan's dialogue with the spirit of the universe.

Rizwan asked the spirit of the universe who he was, who were his parents, and who were his relatives?

The spirit told him; neither anybody was the father of anybody, nor anybody was the son of anyone. Neither anybody is the mother of anybody, nor was anybody the daughter of anyone. All are sons and daughters of the mud; everything has a circle. It

keeps circling within it. During this circulation, relativities occur. These relativities turn into relations. These relativities change. Then relationships change. The sons and daughters of mud eventually return to dirt.

Rizwan's devotional tunes were still playing, but they were gradually fading away. The moon was ready to set in the western sky. The stars were also fading out. Before long the sun, the king of the universe, would appear in the eastern sky.

The way the apparition appeared, it slowly dissolved into space.

The eagles brought their beaks out of their wings; the birds flew and sat on the surrounding trees' branches. All the other animals disappeared into the jungle. Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista gathered around Rizwan with their heads bent down.

On that day a new Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista were born. They all walked back to the rest house as a group. Their fellow students were already sitting at the breakfast tables in the dining hall. All five of them didn't talk to anybody. Instead, they went straight to their rooms and fell on their beds.

Chapter 17

After about a week-long field trip to Nathiagali, the KE students returned to Lahore. The summer heat was still unbearable.

Smara and her friends stayed back at Islamabad. They invited Rizwan to stay with them, but he preferred to return to Lahore with the rest of the students.

He didn't have to do anything special in Lahore. However, he wanted to give time to Smara and her friends to fully absorb the experience they went through. He wanted their souls fully connected with his soul so he could share their visions with his.

He thought if he stayed in Islamabad, Smara and her friends would become his slaves. He wanted them to maintain their individuality so they could successfully live their lives and simultaneously act as his spiritual agents.

Every brain can't digest metaphysical experiences in a formal, logical way. Notably, in the frames, young Pakistani minds were trapped; they were either extreme rebels or extreme slaves. They are rebelling their originality up to the deplorable extent. Instead of sharpening their creative skills, they get used to insignificant activities that do not let them face the ultimate beauties of life. In the youth of free nations, there is always a strange

carefreeness and a peculiar charm. Instead of copying the other cultures, they become large pictures on the stage of life; the rest of the world is forced to copy them.

Rizwan didn't want Smara and her friends reduced to mere slaves. That's why he told them he would wait for them in Lahore.

Smara said she wanted him to meet her parents; she stated her father, Colonel Ikram, and her two brothers wanted to see him. He said he too wanted to meet them, yet it was not the time. He would meet them at an appropriate time.

Although the students had gone back home due to summer vacations, some of them preferred to stay in the hostel. Rizwan also wanted to visit Jamalpur, but he preferred to stay. He intended to study some of the academic concepts in such a way so that he could fully understand the structure of the medical sciences. Shut up in his room, he would create images of fundamental concepts of different subjects and then let those images self-create into new forms. The more he went into the depth of those concepts, his desire to understand life itself further strengthened. He had already done basic research on how being-ness had leaped from inorganic to organic matter. He had already written a comprehensive paper on it. Now, he was focusing more on RNA and DNA.

The most astonishing thing for him in DNA was its ability to replicate itself. He wanted to spend the remainder of his summer

vacation researching DNA. That's why he didn't want to indulge in anything else. However, Smara and her friends had returned from Islamabad. Smara's family lived in Islamabad; she was used to the official lifestyle. Yet, her friends were bored there after a few days. They told Smara they didn't like the city of clerks. So they rushed back to Lahore.

Colonel Ikram permitted Smara to return to Lahore with her friends.

Smara and her friends' arrival dissipated Rizwan's RNA and DNA plans in metaphysics.

The aloofness between Rizwan and Smara before going to Nathiagali transformed into intimacy after returning from there.

Due to vacation, there were not many students in the hostel. But those who were there, they knew how close Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista had grown toward each other. Their closeness was so unique, they would give their life for each other.

In the hostel, they all had separate rooms. But, all five spent their time together. They would go to the cafeteria, to market, to the restaurant for dinner together. Until late at night, they all stayed together in Rizwan's room. Some fellow students became super jealous of their friendship.

Before resumption of classes, they decided to leave the hostel, rent a house somewhere in the city, and move over there.

Shaista said her father had a house in the defense area. Luckily, it was empty these days. She could ask her father's permission to move to that house with all of them.

The availability of Shaista's family house was good news. Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, and Shaista were happy to leave the college hostel and move into the house. Now, all five could live in one house under one roof instead of living in separate rooms in the hostel. Yasmeen called her father in New York and got permission from him on the same day to move into the villa.

Over the next few days, all five of them left the college hostel. They started living together in the house. A few days ago, Rizwan was thinking about walking away from those girls. Now, it was not one, two, or three; he was living with four girls at the same time. They lived like very close friends. There was no difference between them. Whatever they did, they did it together. Wherever they went, they went with each other. It looked like they had a silent agreement among them that come what may, they would spend their lives together.

The most exciting thing was Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista mutually agreed to accept Rizwan as their guru. They committed to Rizwan that they would dedicate their lives to him. For them, his word would be the last about everything.

Within summer vacation, they had made such a bond with each other, they all looked like members of one family.

After summer vacation, when they returned to the college together, it became a piece of sizzling news for all students and the staff. Before them, many love tales ended up in marriages and bearing children, but theirs was a unique story. In this story, four girls had given their hearts to one boy. They'd decided to live together without marriage under one roof in a single house.

In Pakistani folklore, a lady sacrifices her life for the sake of her beloved man, but she doesn't accept another woman in his life. Here, four girls were living with one man in unison without any jealousy, and that too without any religious matrimonial decree.

But this was only the apparent side of the story; they loved each other and lived together, but there were no sexual interactions among them. Their love was like the love of innocent children. Neither sexual desire reflected from anyone's eyes nor was found in any one's heart.

They only wanted to spend their time together, with each other, side by side, in each other's company.

It was a unique family. It came into existence on the hills of Nathiagali under the blue sky in the moonlight in the presence of the spirit of the universe, while Rizwan played the violin.

The spirit of the universe taught all the species of animals and the birds that they were all sons and daughters of the dirt, and eventually, they would return to the same mud. All other preferences are meaningless. Life is all one, from the ant to the elephant, from the sparrow to the eagle. Anybody who remains in touch with the dirt maintains his peace. Anybody who disconnects from the earth loses all his grace.

The sparrows, pigeons, doves, owls, eagles, monkeys, bunnies, cheetahs, Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista, all heard this message on the mountain of Nathiagali and accepted it from the depths of their hearts. However, the students and staff members of KE College, Colonel Ikram, Chief Secretary of Pakhtunkhwa, the landlord of Sahiwal, and the owner of the New York-based pharmaceutical company didn't hear this message. They didn't know what drama took place on the mountain of Nathiagali in the moonlight under the blue sky.

The first one who asked them to appear before him was the registrar of KE College. When all five arrived at his office, he said the college dean had heard their love story. "He has asked me to investigate it and report it back to him. Instead of collecting information from here and there, I thought it wise to talk to all of you directly and clear the matter."

Everyone remained silent. Smara then spoke. She said, “Whatever stories are circulating in the college about us are correct. All five of us live together night and day. We all live together because we all like it.”

“But this lifestyle is hurting our college’s reputation. The students are making up stories. Tomorrow, if these stories spread in the town, we will all face doomsday. Before you, boys and girls fell in love with each other. They got married. But nothing like this happened before. Never did one boy love four girls simultaneously—in public!” the registrar reiterated his concerns.

“Mr. Registrar, you don’t know how many KE girls love Rizwan. As for the tomorrow you are talking about, what would happen if all KE’s girls would start living with him? Then what would college principal do?” Smara replied.

“Look, Smara; this institution has some traditions. It is not easy to get admission to this college. It is a professional institution, and we impart a vocational education here. This profession has some moralities. It’s our responsibility to teach you those moralities along with training you in the medical profession,” the registrar argued.

“Look, sir. We are five friends. We have bonded ourselves with each other. At class time, we separate and attend our classes. After that, what we do, where we go, where we live, how we live, it’s none of KE’s—or your—business,” Smara calmly replied.

“Ok. You have said what you had to say. I’ve carefully heard your every word. Does anyone else want to say something?”

They’d heard the registrar and Smara’s dialogue, but they remained silent. The exchange was a bit harsh, but there was peace on their faces—a serene peace, because they knew they were in touch with the dirt. It can bear every burden. When the need arises, it buries the weight in its bosom.

They left the registrar’s office laughing and teasing each other, then went to the mall Road to take a light walk.

Chapter 18

After talking to Smara, the registrar presented the investigation report to the principal. He wrote, “Smara admitted that Rizwan and his girlfriends are living together in Shaista’s family house in the defense area. Rizwan, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista verified Smara’s statement. They also confirmed the students’ allegations about them were right. Out of their classrooms, they go everywhere together. They spend time in the library; they hang out in the cafeteria with each other. At night, they go to have dinner as a group. And for many weeks, they are living together.”

He also wrote they belong to very influential families. “If the college takes any disciplinary action against them, it will have to face a lot of pressure from their families. However, Rizwan comes from a very impoverished family. His family lives in a small town, Jamalpur. His father’s total assets are five donkeys.

“Rizwan’s father transports mud on those donkeys. He uses that mud to make pots on a potter’s wheel and then sells them for livelihood. If the college takes disciplinary action against Rizwan and expels him, there will probably be no backlash. However, regardless of his impoverished background, Rizwan is brilliant. He is a master of playing the violin; he topped in high school and

college graduation exams. He got admission to KE on merit. Many international medical institutions have offered him admission. There is a possibility that if he graduates from KE, he will become an excellent doctor. He has a deep interest in medical research.”

The principal read the registrar’s report about Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista and became concerned. He couldn’t make his mind up about taking any action against them because of their families’ influence in the government. He was also worried about the media reaction, because Rizwan had become a celebrity due to his music concerts. On top of all that, many international companies were interested in buying his picture with the donkey for commercial purposes.

The principal was a pragmatic person. He ignored the report and left the boy and the girls alone. However, who could silence the Islamic students in the college? They had already made it a big issue. Those Islamic students took this issue to the other students’ organizations in the other city colleges. They collectively started protesting outside KE College with oversize banners demanding Rizwan, Smara, and her friends’ ouster. They presented the registrar with a memorandum of similar demands.

The Islamic reporters highlighted those protests with pictures in their papers. In a few days, Rizwan, Smara, and her friends became the talk of the town.

Their parents read these media reports and got concerned about their safety. Nobody wanted to mess with the Islamists. They were a force to reckon with in the country. They had a lot of nuisance power.

Their parents called them to show their concern about their safety. The girls told the truth to their parents. No one other than Ezra's father, Faqir Hussain, reacted strongly. Smara's father, Colonel Ikram, told her that if she smelled any danger around her, she should immediately call him and he would dispatch a company of rangers. Smara gave Faqir Hussain's phone number to her father and requested that he calm him down. Faqir Hussain was very upset about newspaper reports. Colonel Ikram consoled him, "They are grown up. They like each other. They want to live with each other; there is nothing wrong with it. Soon they will finish their education and get on with their business. Nobody will remember all this."

"But what should we do about these newspapers? They are constantly hammering the issue," Faqir Hussain asked.

"I have asked the commander of the rangers to ensure their security. They will be there in no time if there is any threat. As far as the newspapers are concerned, we have to think about it," Colonel Ikram explained.

While Colonel Ikram and Faqir Hussain were talking on the phone, the progressive organizations called their meeting to counter the right-wing propaganda.

Rizwan, Smara, and her friends were not ideologically progressives. However, their lifestyle was an open challenge to the right-wing conservative forces. They decided to stand up to them on every available platform.

The next day, the progressive organizations' volunteers reached the KE College gate with large banners in support of Rizwan and Smara. They warned the KE administration that if it took any action against Rizwan and his friends, they would arrange countrywide protests against them.

Progressive dailies printed Rizwan's picture with the donkey and wrote articles about him. These articles relieved their parents from their worries.

The KE principal had shelved the registrar's report without taking any action. The right-wing students' protests made him worried too. However, progressive dailies articles and Colonel Ikram's phone call gave him confidence.

The principal alerted Rizwan, Smara, and her friends about the evil intentions of the Islamists. He told them to remain vigilant about any mishap. "Some of them are ruthless. They can go to any length against the people who don't agree with them."

Rizwan, Smara, and her friends thanked the principal and got busy in their educational activities.

It was against the Islamists' nature to sit still. They were determined not to let Rizwan and Smara live in peace. They contacted the mullah of the defense area mosque and told him about Rizwan living with four girls without marriage in the mosque's neighborhood.

After prayer, the mullah talked to the congregation in the mosque; he said, according to the Scriptures, before doomsday, young boys and girls will live with each other under one roof without marriage. No one will object to their sinful matrimonial partnership. Isn't it like asking for doomsday that Colonel Ikram's daughter is living with an adult man along with her three other friends without proper marriage? All five of them are adults. Only Allah knows what kind of sins they are committing next to the four walls of the mosque.

The people heard the mullah's sermon; they advised him to leave the boy and the girls alone and let Allah look into the matter.

The mullah asked the objectors, on the day of judgment, when Allah will question them about this sinful act in front of their eyes, how will they respond to him?

They advised the mullah not to interfere in people's personal life. Better their private matters remain with Allah.

One of them taunted the mullah; he said Allah would question us on the Day of Judgment, but he was interrogating us today in this world.

Mullah was a member of Jamaat-e-Islami, a right-wing religious party. He had received instructions from the Jamaat headquarters to inflame the situation. He wanted the congregation to attack the residence of Rizwan and Smara and set it on fire. Then, the Jamaat would use its countrywide outlets to start violent protests everywhere in the country.

The mullah admonished the members of the congregation who opposed him. He told them not to stop him from performing a religious duty. He said he would not allow any activities that undermine the fundamental principles of Islam. He said he would discuss this issue in his sermon on Friday and then leave this issue up to the members, however they view it.

By chance, one of the members of the congregation knew Colonel Ikram and his daughter Smara. Understanding the sensitivity of the issue, he immediately contacted him and informed him about the mullah's plans.

If it were not the issue of his daughter, the colonel might have ignored the mullah's plans to inflame the situation. Due to his daughter's safety, he informed the commander of the rangers in Lahore about the mullah's plan to exploit the situation.

The same evening, after the late-night prayer, when the mullah was returning to his residence, a group of rangers picked him up and put him in their jeep and took him to an unknown place.

Rizwan, Smara, and her friends were sleeping at home, unaware of what was cooking against them. The colonel's daughter was sleeping, but he was up watching her security.

Chapter 19

The mullah of the defense mosque disappeared overnight. Jamaat-e-Islami alerted its countrywide outlets about his disappearance.

In its internal memo, Jamaat informed its office bearers about the activities of the mullah. The note said he was trying to deal with KE College's five students, one male and four females, living in his area without marriage. It is explicitly against Islamic codes. Their activity could spread anti-religious lifestyles and sentiments in the country.

The memo also narrated their profile. The boy's name is Rizwan. He is the son of a potter from a small town called Jamalpur. The girls' names are Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista.

Smara is the daughter of a serving colonel; Ezra is the daughter of Pakhtunkhwa's chief secretary; Shaista is the daughter of a landlord from Sahiwal, and Yasmeen is a Pakistani American. She is the daughter of a businessman from New York. She was born in the United States; she completed her education up to college in New York. Her lifestyle is un-Islamic. She doesn't wear a hijab, and lives in Western dress all the time.

Jamaat-e-Islami specifically asked its Pakhtunkhwa outlets to look for the mullah in the tribal areas. The Pakhtunkhwa chief secretary may have kidnapped and kept him there.

Secret agents provided a copy of Jamaat-e-Islami's memo to the commander of the rangers. He ordered the soldiers who were holding the mullah to blindfold him and drive him around for ten hours and then lock him up in an underground detention center. He also ordered them to post only Pashto-speaking soldiers around him so that he would think he was in a tribal area.

The rangers' commander wanted to take these steps to misguide the Jamaat-e-Islami workers about his whereabouts, and to divert their attention from Rizwan, Smara, and her friends.

When the mullah didn't come back by Friday, Jamaat-e-Islami asked its mullahs throughout the country to bring out protest marches across the country about the disappearance of the defense mosque mullah. In protest marches, they should demand the release of the disappeared mullah. Also, they should stress that the KE administration should expel Rizwan, Smara, and her friends from the college so that other students do not adopt their lifestyle.

Rizwan, Smara, and her friends also heard the mullah's disappearance story. They asked each other, who could have done it? Who could have kidnapped the mullah? Since mullahs pointed fingers toward Ezra's father, Chief Secretary Pakhtunkhwa, she

denied her father had anything to do with the kidnapping. Shaista also refused to accept the possibility of her father's involvement in it. She agreed, the landlords did this type of stuff in Pakistan, they have people kidnapped, torture them in private jails, get them killed, but her father never engaged in that type of activity.

Yasmeen's family lived out of Pakistan in New York for a long time. Her father had no interest of any sort in Pakistan. He had flushed Pakistan out of his system a long time ago. Therefore, he wouldn't intervene in any such act in Pakistan.

Smara didn't know the rangers had done it on the orders of her father, Colonel Ikram. But she didn't rule out the possibility.

However, after deep thinking, they decided to denounce the mullah's disappearance publicly and deny their families' hand in this case. They also agreed to appeal to the kidnappers for the mullah's safety and release. For this purpose, Rizwan, Smara, and her friends, a day before the mullahs' planned protests, held a press conference at the press club.

In the press conference, they said, "We've heard the defense mosque's mullah disappeared a few days ago. Some people are linking his disappearance to us.

"We have also heard that a day before the disappearance, he tried to incite the congregation in his mosque against us. He directed the members of the mosque to raid our residence and set it on fire.

Some of the members tried to stop the mullah, but he indignantly refused and announced he'd go ahead and do it alone.

“We have no complaint against the mullah. It was a peculiar mindset that dictated the mullah to act this way.

“We understand that if some members of the mosque had connived with him and harmed us, they would have violated the laws of the state. The state would have acted against them, which might have had dire consequences.

“Regardless of all this, we want to state, clearly, our families or we have nothing to do with the mullah's disappearance. There are reports that his kidnappers have taken him to the tribal area where Pakistan's law is ineffective. Ezra's father is Pakhtunkhwa's chief secretary; he knows we are responsible citizens. He doesn't interfere in our affairs. He has granted us full freedom to live our lives the way we like.

“Through the media, we'd like to request that the kidnappers of the mullah, if they have kidnapped him because of us, they should set him free. If they have not done it because of us, they should still let him go. He is a respected citizen of our area; he is the mullah of the local mosque. It would not benefit anybody to kidnap him. Therefore, we request, please release him immediately.”

Rizwan read a pre-written statement. Then he invited the reporters to ask if they had any questions. The first reporter stood up to pose the question that belonged to Jamaat-e-Islami.

“Is it true you five are living in the same house without marriage?”

“It is true we live together in one house. We don’t consider it wrong by any standards,” Smara replied.

Smara’s response infuriated the reporters. They were not expecting this type of straightforward answer.

“They have confessed they are living together. It’s against the values of an Islamic society. It’s an open rebellion against the community!”

Before any other reporter’s question, Smara asked the same reporter how many brothers and sisters he had. He said he has five sisters, and he is their only brother. To further develop her argument, she asked him if he lives with his sisters in the same house. The reporter acknowledged he lived with his sisters under one roof. Smara said to the reporter, “You are a male, and your sisters are females. Are you living with them after getting a religious marriage certificate?”

Smara’s line of argument made the reporters even angrier. Rizwan intervened and controlled the situation.

“Look, folks, we are not here to do this press conference about our issue. We are here to talk about the disappeared mullah because some irresponsible people are linking his disappearance with us. In this regard, I’ve presented all the facts. You’ve received a copy of my written statement. If you keep your questions limited to the mullah’s disappearance issue, we’d appreciate it,” Rizwan explained.

Another reporter asked, “We’ve heard some reports that the army’s rangers have kidnapped him. We know Smara’s father works for the Pakistan Army as a colonel. Only he can order rangers to do it. Are these reports correct?”

Smara opened her mouth to respond, but Rizwan started speaking before her.

“Smara’s father is a colonel in the army, but he is in the Punjab regiment, and nowadays, he is serving at Islamabad. Her two brothers are also in the military, and they are serving at Bahawalpur and Multan. None of them has any relationship with rangers. As you must know, in the army, soldiers only follow the orders of their commander.”

“If rangers have kidnapped him, what would you say to them?” another reporter asked.

“We make the same request to the rangers. They should let the mullah go. Nobody is going to benefit by keeping him in

detention. We wish for his safe return to the mosque as soon as possible so he can lead prayers. The members of the mosque are worried about him. The people of the area are also getting irritated,” Rizwan replied.

When Rizwan was addressing the press conference, Smara and Ezra were standing on his right side, whereas Yasmeen and Shaista were on the left. The reporters captured their many snapshots with their cameras. The next day, almost all the dailies printed their photos on the front page. The images included their press conference and their appeal to the kidnappers to release the mullah.

The rangers’ colonel saw their pictures in the newspapers along with their appeal to release the mullah. He couldn’t resist smiling. *How simple are they? They don’t know what the mullah was going to do with them. If we had not picked up the mullah, instead of their press conference details, there would have been the pictures of their dead bodies*, he thought.

“Religion is like liquor; the older it gets, the more intoxicating it becomes. When it immerses in traditions, its intoxication turns into poison. Its followers become like wild animals. They start killing each other. With time, it gets refined. Its poisoning mellows down. Its followers learn to tolerate each other. Then it turns into rivers that flow in plains, which nurtures cultures

and civilizations and becomes the dominant ingredient of aesthetic creativity.”

The ranger’s colonel was talking to himself. A phone call from Smara’s father woke him up. He asked the ranger’s colonel how the mullah was doing.

“We’ve injected enough chemicals in his blood. He will remain calm for a while. He thinks he is somewhere in the tribal area. He doesn’t know he is right here in Lahore in an underground detention facility,” responded the colonel.

“If it is so, please let him go. Keeping him in detention for too long can cause serious problems,” Smara’s father advised him.

The ranger commander ordered his major to blindfold the mullah, drive him around in a jeep for about ten hours, and then leave him in a nearby jungle. “The son of a bitch will make it to his home. Before dropping him off, let him know whatever he says or does in the mosque, we get its report daily. He should keep his sermons limited to Allah and the prophet. He shouldn’t get out of line. If he again crosses the limits, we will pick him up again, and the next time, we will ship him to paradise.”

With the return of the mullah and Rizwan’s press conference, the peoples calmed down, but under the surface, the issue of their sharing the house never died down. The people talked about them occasionally but mostly, they shut their eyes and ears.

Chapter 20

As social pressure let up a little, Rizwan, Smara, and her friends refocused on their studies. They started their daily discussions on the concepts they studied in their classes. In these discussions, Smara and her friends learned that Rizwan's brain was like a computer. He remembered teachers' lectures word for word and in images.

Smara and her friends also learned Rizwan consumed a bare minimum of food. He was continually trying to free himself from food requirements. His point of view was, all the elements that a human body needs to survive are present in the environment around him, and when a person stops eating, his body learns to extract the necessary elements from the environment. His internal systems that deal with food consumption and excretion become inactive.

For this purpose, Rizwan was working on the DNA that control these systems and convert the required energy to the human body from the food he consumes. At the imaginary level, he was convinced it was possible to reprogram the DNA to enable the human organs to get the necessary energy from the air the human lungs suck in. The energy his body gets from the environment connects him directly with the universe's engine. After this

connectivity, he can almost live forever. The body overcomes the decay process. Also, the body eliminates the possibility of any disease.

Smara and her friends listened to Rizwan's argument. Sometimes they were amazed over these ideas, and sometimes they encouraged him to continue his research to achieve these objectives. They also discussed its ethical, social, political, and economic aspects.

Smara would say if human beings eliminated the need to consume food, it would destroy the world's entire business and economic system. It is so because all these activities are linked to human beings' food system. All labor, the members of the lower classes, do what they do because they have to have food on their tables. If they eliminate the need to have food in their stomachs, they will stop all the activities that drive these systems. Why would they listen to their boss's annoying commands? Why would they get up early in the morning and run toward their workplaces?

Ezra would comment, the elimination of food wouldn't make any difference. "There are several other reasons for which human beings work. Those reasons will remain relevant forever. Therefore, the world's collective economic system will remain intact."

Yasmeen would put her argument forward. “All agricultural activities take place because human beings have to grow food items. If they didn’t have to consume foods, why would they grow edible plants? We would lose the beautiful scenes of green fields all around us; we wouldn’t need the tea gardens. We would not need pears, plums, mangoes, apples, and pomegranates gardens. “

Shaista’s point of view was, everything will remain the way it is. “If people won’t do all this for their needs, nature will do it on its own by arranging mutual interaction of required elements. Humankind will continue organizing them to stay in line with the universal forces.”

Rizwan would listen to them and say, if humankind succeeds in changing the processes of the body’s energy consumption, their deterioration will stop. This success will free humanity from death. Human babies will be born, but they wouldn’t die.

Smara would say, if the humans would not die, the planet Earth would become too small for them.

“If planet Earth becomes too small for humans, they will move to the other planets. In that case, their relationship with dirt breaks. They will plunge into the deep ocean of grief and unhappiness,” Ezra would say.

Ezra’s points took Rizwan across different horizons. He would absorb in deep thinking. The girls loved Rizwan’s

philosophical posture. After a few minutes, when he would come out of deep thought, the girls would feel like he was the sun hiding behind the clouds and then came out.

Then he would say, this universe came into existence out of a dirt atom. Therefore, wherever humans will go, their relationship with mud will remain intact. Dirt is our origin; it is our mother and it is our father.

Yasmeen would say, “Rizwan, some people say dirt is undoubtedly man’s mother, but the sky is his father.”

Rizwan would say, “The sky doesn’t exist. It is the limit of our sight. The rest of it is space.” Then he would underscore his point. “I used the word *space*, not vacuum. The vacuum is not possible. The only possibility is space. The form of matter that makes space is incomprehensible at this time, but humans will undoubtedly know its nature and use its energy to maintain their bodies.

“If dirt’s son became free from the food requirements and he learned to reprogram his genes, he would be able to survive anywhere in the universe.”

During such types of discourses, Rizwan, Smara, and her friends’ faces glowed like bright stars. Their infinite happiness created a brilliant shine around them, a state of ultimate peace and bliss. However, in these five stars, the most powerful was Rizwan.

He always produced intellectual rays to brighten up the minds of Smara and her friends.

In KE, Smara and her friends were one year senior to Rizwan, but he was way ahead of them in intellectual depth and understanding. Their teachers were quite surprised about their extraordinary performance. Their teachers wanted to learn what was going on in their lives that made them perform that exceptionally. The teachers wanted to adopt those practices in their educational techniques. Their minds would time and again divert to their lifestyle. Before, all four young ladies lived together. Then they joined Rizwan and started living with him. It was his company that gave them all the shine.

Rizwan proved his excellence in the early few months of his presence at KE College. The institution's teachers recognized his intelligence and intellectual capacity; they continually received letters from the international talent hunters about Rizwan. Those talent hunters also invited Rizwan to join them. They offered him generous scholarships and job opportunities after his graduation.

Because of the type of environment fundamentalists created around him and his friends' lifestyle, he seriously started thinking about moving out of Pakistan.

He wished to graduate from KE and then establish a hospital, along with a research center where he would research incurable

diseases. He wanted the people of Pakistan and the world at large to benefit from his research. However, the constant intervention of fundamentalists in his personal life was becoming an irritant for him. He started thinking about accepting an invitation from an international talent hunter and moving abroad.

Playing the violin in front of large crowds gave him a lot of confidence. His mind was free from all fears and worries. He could make major decisions without any reluctance. He didn't have the elements of double-mindedness about making any decision.

One of the offers he received was from a prominent American institution, Johns Hopkins medical school. They were not only taking care of his educational expenses, but they were also offering him a reasonable stipend throughout his academic duration. They showed a willingness to provide him the opportunity to research in the areas of his interest.

Looking at all these opportunities, he decided to complete his studies at Johns Hopkins instead of KE College. He would also continue his research on DNA there. After making this decision, he submitted an application to the KE College registrar requesting him to transfer his credentials to Johns Hopkins.

Smara and her friends heard about Rizwan's decision to move to Johns Hopkins with a heavy heart. They didn't want to get separated from him. They wanted to live with him during their

education at KE and afterward. They shared Rizwan's goal to establish a hospital and a research facility after completing their education. They wanted to serve the people collectively and continue research under Rizwan's guidance.

Although their hearts were heavy and eyes full of tears, they supported Rizwan in fulfilling his dream about building the hospital and research facility. Rizwan promised them he'd stay focused on this project. He said a few years would pass in the blink of an eye, and he would rejoin them soon after finishing his education at Johns Hopkins.

He also wanted to end the social pressure on them. He wanted them to finish their education at KE, and after the internship, start working on the hospital project.

A wide smile spread on their faces after listening to Rizwan's plan. They wholeheartedly started preparing for Rizwan's departure to the United States.

Chapter 21

Rizwan landed at JFK airport on a bright, sunny day with mixed feelings of joy and sadness.

He was sad about leaving Pakistan. His heart was heavy for going away from Jamalpur's soil. Coming to America was never part of his plan. However, with the kind of events that took place in his life over the last few months, he thought it appropriate to accept the Johns Hopkins offer and complete his education there.

He never wanted things to go so bad that life would come difficult for Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista, or that his illiterate and ordinary parents might face challenges for which they wouldn't have a solution.

It was tough for him to see Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista with tears in their eyes, saying goodbye to him at the airport.

Smara's last sentence broke his heart:

"Rizwan, remember, we four girls are like female pigeons sitting in the rain."

This sentence brought tears to his eyes too. With wet eyes, he looked at a small card given to him by the immigration officer. The card read: 'Welcome to the United States of America.' This sentence spread a magical smile on his face. He thought about his

impoverished background in Jamalpur and then about the life full of the hustle and bustle in New York, Washington, and Baltimore. He tightened his grip on his picture with the donkey.

Over the next few days, he processed his necessary procedures at the admissions office and the housing office. The housing office gave him a furnished, single-unit residence to live in. He hung his picture on the wall, which was visible to every entrant in the apartment.

When he came to Baltimore, the fall season was settling in on the East Coast. Every window of his apartment opened toward trees full of red and yellow leaves. For a few days, he stood in front of window after the window for hours and continued looking at the fall-colored tree leaves. If fall is so beautiful, how beautiful will be spring around here? he thought.

Soon after, when he got busy with his studies, he forgot about fall and spring. His academic activities proved advantageous to him. In a few days, he mentally transitioned from Pakistan to the United States. He started feeling at home. Adjusting to new places had become his second nature. However, in the beginning, it was a bit difficult for him to understand the American English accent. In a few weeks, he blended his hearing to the phonetical ups and downs of the American accent. He felt like he had been living in the USA all his life. When his communication came up to speed, his teachers

and fellow students started admiring his exceptional intelligence. They started paying attention to his unique, untraditional point of view about the human body and its diseases.

Johns Hopkins had a lot fewer students in the faculty than KE College. However, the number of teachers and research scholars far exceeded KE College.

Rizwan developed a friendship with many faculty members and researchers. Due to his apartment in the faculty residential area, he ran into one or another faculty member here and there. Usually, his encounters with them quickly made him a friend.

This way, Rizwan created a vast circle among Johns Hopkins. Notably, his extraordinary skill playing the violin gave him extensive exposure among the faculty and students.

In almost all American high schools, students learn music. Every student knows how to play one or another instrument. However, very few of them take music seriously and excel in it. The others stay limited to playing the music notes in the music books. For them, music remains a mechanical act instead of the expression of the inner self of life. The music they produce does satisfy the peoples' aesthetic thirst, but it never reaches to miraculous levels.

When fellow students learned about Rizwan's exceptional skills in playing the violin, they arranged a musical evening in the faculty members' residential area. The faculty members and

students who played a musical instrument were asked to join. Dr. Thompson, who was by profession a cardiologist and taught cardiology at Johns Hopkins, was also an excellent violinist. He lived a few houses away from Rizwan's apartment; his wife, Mrs. Thompson, played a superb piano. He was the host of this musical gathering.

When Rizwan arrived there, almost all the invitees had arrived.

Neil Larson was present with his banjo; Mr. Ridge Garcia was also there with his clarinet. They all had their music books with them.

Rizwan never played any notes from any music book. He always created and performed his tunes. That's why he didn't have any music book with him. Mrs. Thompson gave him a new book, which he took from her with thanks but put it aside, saying he didn't need one.

Mrs. Thompson opened the session by playing the piano. Rizwan, along with the rest of the audience, heard her piano with interest. She played beautiful tunes. His ears appreciated her music.

After Mrs. Thompson, Mr. Neil Larson played the banjo. Everyone present there enjoyed his banjo melodies. Mr. Ridge Garcia already had his clarinet ready. He started playing it as soon as Neil Larson finished playing the banjo.

Next it was the turn of Dr. Thompson to play the violin. Before playing, he said since Rizwan has come from Pakistan, in his honor, he would play a melody titled “The Pakistani Arms Dealer’s Daughter.”

When Dr. Thompson was playing the violin, Rizwan was thinking about the title of the melody. The melody that Dr. Thompson played was beautiful; however, Rizwan didn’t like its title.

Since the Afghanistan war against the Soviet Union, Pakistan was rampant with arms. Right-wing Afghan Jihadis were using Pakistan as a springboard. Pakistan’s intelligence agency, ISI, was playing a pivotal role in this war. ISI received funds from the Middle Eastern sheikhdoms and distributed them among the Jihadi groups. ISI also received a large number of arms from the United States and passed them on to the groups fighting the Afghan war. A lot of money and arms went into unrelated hands in Pakistan due to some greedy elements in the ISI. These war activities also provided opportunities for some of the Pakistani generals to get involved in the narcotics business. They enriched themselves by facilitating the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then onward to the European countries.

Rizwan was thinking all these things while Dr. Thompson was playing “The Pakistani Arms Dealer’s Daughter” because he

had to leave Pakistan due to such extremists who were the creation of the Afghan war.

Rizwan's mind was busy with such thoughts when Dr. Thompson ended playing the violin. The audience appreciated his melody. Rizwan also applauded him very much.

After receiving all the accolades, Dr. Thompson welcomed Rizwan as a Johns Hopkins new community member. Then he requested that he play the violin for the audience.

Rizwan set the violin on his left shoulder and started slowly moving the bow on the strings of the violin. He said since Dr. Thompson played "The Pakistani Arms Dealer's Daughter," he would play "A Trip to Pakistan." While he played this melody, everyone would surreally visit Pakistan.

"Dr. Thompson has played 'The Pakistani Arms Dealer's Daughter,' but with 'A Trip to Pakistan,' you will travel to Pakistan imaginatively through the violin notes. I assure you, wherever your imagination will take you, it will be very close to the real Pakistan."

He started moving his bow on the strings of the violin, and the guests' eyelids began closing.

None of them wanted to shut their eyes, but regardless of their efforts, they couldn't keep them open. Now, their hearts, their minds, and their souls were under the influence of Rizwan's violin tunes.

They were traveling on the beaches from Gwadar to Karachi. Then they saw the deserts of Sindh and Punjab. They went through small and large cities where they saw people of different colors and creeds, wearing different styles of clothes, busy with their routines of life. In the small and large cities they saw mud houses, villas of landlords, and farmers plowing the fields. They saw rivers, canals, lakes, and mountaintops covered with white snow reflecting sunlight.

Rizwan, like an expert kite flyer, with the tunes of the violin moved their imagination back and forth, up and down, right and left, and then eventually brought them back to Baltimore from the beaches of Gwadar and Karachi.

When Rizwan stopped playing the violin, the guests slowly opened their eyes. They felt like they were dreaming, and they had just returned from a foreign country's visit. Then, they all stood up in their places and started clapping to admire Rizwan.

Dr. Thompson and Mrs. Thompson canceled the next segment of the evening, saying it wouldn't be fair to let go of the feelings that Rizwan had created with his miraculous violin melodies.

From that moment on, Johns Hopkins opened its hearts and arms for Rizwan. He felt like a butterfly that could sit on any flower it liked—all doors and hearts opened for him.

He had moved from KE College to Johns Hopkins and from Pakistan to the United States of America in the real sense.

Chapter 22

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson had two children: a son and a daughter. The son was married and lived with his wife, not too far from his parents. However, the daughter, Heather, was younger than the son, and she lived with her parents.

The evening Dr. Thompson held the small music gathering at his house, she was away for a cycling race. Her group had to race from Baltimore to New York and then back to Baltimore. When she returned from the group race, Dr. and Mrs. Thompson informed her about Rizwan's superb violin performance. Since Dr. and Mrs. Thompson were excellent music performers, Heather followed in their footsteps.

She knew how to play many musical instruments, but like her mother, she was the best in playing the piano. When she heard about Rizwan's miraculous ability to play the violin, first she didn't believe it. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she asked if their Pakistani guest was also a cyclist.

Rizwan had never used a cycle in his life. He didn't know how to ride it. The fact was, he never needed a bike. Jamalpur, his birth town, was a tiny place. It was the same case at Govt College and then at KE College. The hostels he lived in at both institutions

were located within walking distance. Therefore, he never thought about riding a bike.

Heather was a member of the Baltimore's Young Cyclists' Club. She had been crazy about cycling since her high school days. Heather went on countrywide cycling races, sometimes for weeks. Often, she returned from such races with a darkly tanned face. However, such sporting activities sharpened her body lines. Her hips and legs became more attractive. She was carefree about her blond hair. She always left it flowing back on her shoulders.

After listening to the news of Rizwan's miraculous violin playing, she got on her bike and hurriedly made it to his apartment. She rang the doorbell and waited for him to open the door.

Rizwan opened the door and looked at Heather with curious eyes:

"How can I help you?" he asked.

"Are you Rizwan?" she responded.

"Yes, I am."

"Then, please scoot aside and let me in."

"But, miss, who are you?"

"I'm Heather. I'm the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Thompson. I heard about your superb violin performance. Therefore, I've come to meet you."

Rizwan heard the names Dr. and Mrs. Thompson; he quickly let her in. She left her bike locked up outside and entered the apartment. The first thing she saw was Rizwan's big picture with a donkey hanging on the wall. She looked at the photo for a few minutes with deep appreciation.

She was looking at the photo, and Rizwan was looking at her. Her beautiful face, smiling eyes full of life, her carefree style and wavy, blond hair took his heart away. All of a sudden, she turned into a beautiful statue, made by a super artist, perfect in every respect. He wished she would continue looking at his photo with the donkey, and he would keep looking at her.

After a few moments, Heather moved her eyes from the photo and said, "This photo has a strange attraction. The young man and the donkey looking in the same direction with a slight bend in donkey's neck is making this photo a piece of art. It is worthy of putting it in an art gallery. Who took this photo?"

"This photo was taken by a newspaper reporter. I stood first in high school examinations in the countrywide Board of Education. He took this photo for his newspaper."

"Board, and examination?" Heather looked at Rizwan with questioning eyes.

"It is like the state of Maryland would have a board to give graduation exams to all the students of all the high schools in the

state,” Rizwan replied. He continued, “In the United States, we have city-based school districts that control the high schools.”

Listening to Rizwan’s explanation, Heather laughed and said, “Whatever occasion it was, whoever took this photo, he captured the moment in which everything was in perfect shape.”

“Yes, Pakistanis from time to time do such unusual things,” and then laughingly continued, “Would you like to continue looking at the photo, or you would like to sit down and drink something?”

“Yes, yes, why not? Do you have some beer in your refrigerator?” she asked.

“Sorry, Heather. We are tea drinkers. If you like tea, I can prepare it for you right away,” he smiled.

“Do you have iced tea? If you have iced tea, that will work.”

“Yes, I have many cans of iced tea.” He opened the refrigerator door and gave her a can of tea and a straw, and took a can for himself.

Heather saw Rizwan drinking iced tea straight from the can. She put away the straw and started drinking iced tea straight from the can like him.

Heather was drinking iced tea in a carefree style. Rizwan liked her carefree style. *Common American folks are good-natured. It is the American government’s policy that makes them look bad around the globe,* he thought.

“When did you come from Pakistan?” Heather asked with a smile on her face.

“A few weeks ago. Attending a musical evening at your parents’ residence was my first social interaction with Americans. Otherwise, I was busy settling down here.”

“How was your first experience?”

“It was excellent. Dr. and Mrs. Thompson invited a few quality people. All of them knew to play one or another musical instrument. I enjoyed every moment of it.”

“Aren’t the people interested in music in Pakistan?”

“No, it’s not like that; they are very much interested in music, but they take little interest in learning to play it.”

“Why is that?” She wanted to understand.

“It is because Pakistani society follows Islamic traditions. In Islam, music doesn’t enjoy any special status.”

“But it’s not like that in the United States. In churches on Sunday, congregations play music and sing religious songs as part of the praying. Without these songs, prayer remains incomplete,” Heather explained.

“People sing religious songs in Pakistan too; however, at the social level, the people do not revere musicians like in the United States.”

While Rizwan and Heather were discussing music, he felt not only was he taking an interest in her, she was also taking an interest in him.

Since she had come, her eyes were continually chasing Rizwan. She didn't move her eyes away from his face for a moment. She found more attraction in his person than his photo with his donkey. He had a strange aura around his personality. Heather felt like nature itself was embodied in him. On top of that, his newly learned American accent, which was trying to free itself from his Pakistani phonetics, was adorable.

Heather thought Rizwan was excellent company. She liked to spend time with him.

“Would you please play the violin for me?” she requested.

“Heather, you have to pardon me. I wouldn't be able to play the violin in your presence.”

Rizwan was surprised to refuse to play the violin in front of Heather. He continued looking at her in amazement. Heather was also startled by his refusal. He couldn't figure out why he refused. Rizwan saw the clouds of astonishment flying in her eyes. He said, “Heather, when I play the violin, I directly connect with nature and disconnect from everything else around me. In your presence, I don't think I would be able to do it. For playing the violin, the kind of disconnect I need, I wouldn't be able to do it in your presence.”

Rizwan's spontaneous response took Heather to a dreamlike state. She moved forward and kissed him on his lips. Rizwan felt strange. He didn't say anything to Heather. He just continued looking at her with amazement. Heather liked the way Rizwan was seeing her.

Then she asked him to pardon her for the evening. She asked him if she could come to see him and spend time with him again.

"Anytime! Whenever you like. There is no compulsion of time," Rizwan responded in a friendly manner.

Heather put her helmet on her head. Said goodbye to Rizwan and walked out of his apartment.

Chapter 23

For the next few days, Heather disappeared. Neither did she show up, nor did she call. Rizwan thought about her a few times, but then he forgot her. He got so busy with his studies, she became out of sight, out of mind for him.

One evening he was standing in the window of his apartment watching the kids playing in the parking lot across the street. He was enjoying their innocent activities.

He saw Heather walking toward his apartment; she had another unassembled cycle hanging on her bike. She locked her bike on a stand and then rang the doorbell. Rizwan almost ran to open the door.

Soon after entering the apartment, she took off her helmet and put it on a table. Then she took him in her arms, saying, “Hi, stranger.”

For Rizwan, Heather’s sudden attack was not only surprising, but it was also worrisome. He got more concerned when the next moment, she entangled her lips with his. After a short hesitation, Rizwan answered Heather’s kiss with a warm kiss back and pulled away.

It all happened so quickly, Rizwan couldn't decide whether he had to allow his pleasant emotions about her to convert into a love affair.

It was true that he liked Heather very much. He had pleasant feelings for her in his heart to the extent that he felt it challenging to play the violin in her presence. He hadn't quite yet fallen in love with her though. Also, medical students prefer to look at human bodies scientifically; this process keeps their natural desires in check. However, Heather's one kiss freed Rizwan from all such bindings.

After responding to Heather's kiss with a kiss, Rizwan's pleasant feelings about her turned into love. He thought he had fallen in love with her. And, there was no way to turn back. He had to go forward and forward only, without looking back or left or right. However, his family history, his reason for coming to the United States and his desire to return to Pakistan to serve the people, remained intact in his heart.

After the first kiss, Heather asked Rizwan about his hesitation in kissing her.

“Don't you like me?”

“Heather, the truth is, you stole my heart the moment you came to see me. But I look at love as a plant coming out of a seed. First, we have a very tiny plant, then it grows and grows until it

becomes a tall, healthy tree. Love should also grow like a plant. In the land of McDonald's, I don't like the idea of 'love to go' as 'food to go.' I love slowly cooked love, delicious, and well done.

Rizwan's explanation made Heather laugh. Then she started kissing him madly. Rizwan responded to her in kind. He saw out of the window, the first rain of spring had begun dripping. Heather pulled down the curtain on the window and then slowly opened his shirt buttons. Rizwan shrank in her arms like a pigeon coming from far-off, cold lands. He found his peace in a soft and warm environment; it was a strange feeling. He had never experienced this feeling ever before.

He felt Heather had power over him. Her beauty, her body's loving warmth was inviting him to become one with this American girl, become one forever, never to part from her. Like a pigeon from cold lands, he started dancing and sounding *coo c'roo-coo-coo*. Then, in Johns Hopkins' faculty residential zone, Heather and Rizwan became one, as earth and sky meet at the horizon. It was like moonlight had come back to the moon after wandering in infinite space for a long time. It was like the flowers had freshened up after light rain in the spring.

This evening, no traditional rituals took place. No drums, no gathering of families and friends, no gifts, no bridegroom and bridal dresses, no mullah to recite verses from the Koran, no priest in a

church to pronounce them husband and wife, yet they both became one. They both decided to live with each other for the rest of their lives.

Heather brought her bike inside the apartment. Rizwan asked about the unassembled bike. She said she had brought it for him. She wanted him to join her in biking.

Rizwan looked at her with loving eyes and said he didn't know how to ride a bike. She was surprised to hear that he didn't know how to ride. He told her he came from a very tiny village in Pakistan. "The town is so small, one can walk and go to anywhere in a few minutes. That's why no one needs a bike over there."

"Okay, if you didn't learn then, you've got to learn it now, for my sake. Otherwise, how can we go biking together?"

"Yes, dear, now learning to ride a bike is my topmost priority. I have to do everything you would like me to do to walk with you for the rest of our lives," He lovingly replied.

"Rizwan, I'm thankful to you. I was very lonely. You've made me your life partner. Now, I'll only live with you. My mom and dad are busy with their life; my brother lives with his wife. I spend my time with the club members on long races. Now, I'll spend all my time with you. Wherever we go, we'll go together."

Heather continued talking relentlessly; she wanted to unload her lifelong loneliness on him. Rizwan was listening to her with full attention. He thought every society had its issues. Pakistan is an undeveloped and backward country. Seven or ten individuals live together in a one-room house. The United States is a developed country. Here, the children of middle-class families enjoy all the facilities of life. They have separate rooms to sleep in, unlimited toys to play with, but loneliness continues to wound their souls. Consequently, as soon as they cross the limits of adolescence and enter adulthood, they start looking for someone they can share their life with.

Heather asked Rizwan how Jamalpur was. How many members his family has and what do his parents do for a living.

“Jamalpur is a small part of paradise. It’s still out of the reach of modern civilization. Farmers plow the land with the help of buffalos. There is nothing made of metal except the plow blade. The people make everything with mud or wood. In Jamalpur, I have a mother, father, and five donkeys. One of the donkeys is standing in the photo,” he said, pointing to the photo on the wall.

“And what does your father do for a living?” Heather asked him, taking a deep interest in his simple life.

“My father is a potter. He puts mud on his potter’s wheel and gives it different shapes. He makes cooking pots, vases to store

drinking water, cups for drinking water, and pans for mixing the dough for baking bread.”

Heather became ecstatic listening to Rizwan’s explanation.

“Your father is an artist! Did you ever learn to make all these things from your father?”

“No, my love, I never learned this art at all. However, I always helped my dad to prepare the mud for him. Before I started going to school.”

“Rizwan, if I were in your place, I would’ve learned all this from him.” Then, thinking something, she said, “If I go to Pakistan, will your father teach me all these things?”

Hearing Heather, Rizwan laughed and then said to her jokingly, “It is Pakistani technology. I don’t know if he would agree to transfer this technology to the United States.”

Heather liked Rizwan’s joke. She shut his mouth with a kiss. Then, she said she was getting hungry and she wanted to eat something. Rizwan opened the refrigerator door and then mentioned all the things in it one by one. She didn’t want to eat any of those foods. She asked him if he would like to eat pizza.

He nodded yes. First, Heather ordered pizza from the local Roundtable, and then she called her mom. She informed her about her decision to stay with Rizwan from then onward.

Rizwan moved forward and took her in his arms. He felt like, instead of Heather, life itself had come into his arms.

Chapter 24

After Heather's arrival, the days and nights of Rizwan's life changed. From his childhood to KE College, the way his life circled in academic activities and violin rehearsals changed.

Heather was a brilliant girl. However, like other girls, she wanted Rizwan to spend maximum time with her. She wanted Rizwan to go to Johns Hopkins in the morning on time and come back home immediately after finishing his classes. But he loved to spend time in the academic environment. He wrote many papers on the genetic makeup of life after arriving at Johns Hopkins. Those papers enhanced his standing among students and faculty members tremendously. He got recognition as a serious research scholar in a short amount of time. Faculty members loved to chat with him. Every time they discussed a problem with him, they found a new insight into it.

Heather was not only a very brilliant girl, but she also had an excellent record throughout her academic history. However, she was not interested in the medical profession at all. After college, she had said goodbye to education.

Dr. Thompson tried his best to convince her to get admission at Johns Hopkins and become a medical doctor or join Johns

Hopkins' Washington-based Public Policy Wing and become a public policy expert. Yet, she wanted to wander around for a few years and discover the various parts of her country, the United States of America. For the same reason, she developed an interest in cycling. According to her, the cheapest way to travel in the country was by bike. Many young members of the Baltimore cycling club shared this view with her. During summer, they always packed up sleeping bags and a few necessities and headed out of Baltimore. She had traveled many times from Boston to Florida with her club mates.

Other than traveling in the country and around the globe, music was the love of her life. She urged Rizwan to learn riding bikes and join the Baltimore cycling club. She wanted to be free like birds and fly around with Rizwan.

Rizwan thought more like Dr. Thompson. He wanted her to join Johns Hopkins, become a doctor, and then work on his project with him in Pakistan.

After a few days' discussion, they both went to Dr. Thompson's house. She wanted to pick her belongings and transfer them to Rizwan's apartment.

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson felt great seeing both of them together. They happily accepted their decision to live together as an

unmarried couple and have babies. They admired Heather for choosing Rizwan as her life partner.

Their first interaction with Rizwan was quite delightful. Their confidence grew in him after they saw his academic skills. He was not only an A-class violinist, he was also a brilliant student and a researcher. After Heather's relations with Rizwan, they became less worried about her. They were sure, after becoming Rizwan's life partner, she would restart her education and become a professional in her life. However, when they learned that she had bought a cycle for Rizwan and wanted him to join the Baltimore cyclists club, they became a little concerned about him, too. They wanted Rizwan to remain focused on his education, research, and the violin.

He assured Dr. Thompson he'd shift Heather's focus back to education gradually. He said she was trying to engage him in cycling, and he was asking her to go back to school and finish her education. However, things were still hanging in the balance. Neither could he convince her to rejoin a school, nor could she persuade him to join the cycling club.

"Heather is a brilliant girl. If she finishes her education, she can become a good diplomat or a doctor. Somehow, she has become so deeply involved in cycling, she doesn't like to come out of it." Dr. Thompson expressed his concerns.

“You’re right. But now, Heather’s life is more attached to me. Currently, she is my responsibility. I’ll bring her back into education. If she does not rejoin school with my persuasion, my violin will readjust her focus. My violin can change her course,” Rizwan responded confidently. His response didn’t convince Dr. Thompson. However, he understood some of what Rizwan was saying but not all of it.

Rizwan sensed Dr. Thompson was apprehensive about his confidence. To reassure him, he said, “Music is the soul of this universe. It maintains the universe’s balance. There is a song that is continuously playing in the entire world.

“Music impacts everything in this universe. It can seep deep down in everything and make necessary changes in them. Trees, stones, birds, animals, humans, streams, rivers, oceans, the moon, sun, and stars . . . nothing is out of music’s reach. In humankind, it impacts women more than men.”

Listening to Rizwan’s logic, Dr. Thompson agreed with him and then said, “Like laser rays, music has its rays too, which can pass through everything. Why it impacts women more than men is beyond me to understand.”

Rizwan said, “It’s true that music has rays that can impact everything in the universe and can pass through them, but the objects vary in acceptability of the impact. Men represent the violent forces

of nature. That's why music impacts them less. Contrary to men, women represent the softer forces of nature. That's why it has a stronger impact on them. Music can change their behavioral trends more effectively."

In their first meeting, Rizwan made a substantial impact on Dr. and Mrs. Thompson with his excellent ability to play the violin; now, his intellectual capacity revealed another aspect of his personality to them.

Rizwan's words fell on Dr. Thompson's ears like music. He trusted him. He knew Rizwan would bring the necessary change in Heather's life. She would restart her education and get her degree to become a professional.

He was not concerned about her relationship with Rizwan. He just wanted her to get ready for the changing world. The whole United States was moving toward professionalism. He wanted her to become a professional because professionals lived more successful lives vis-a-vis non-professionals.

Also, he didn't care much about her marital relationship with him. The couples of his generation had a more stable marital relationship, but things had changed in Heather's age. In his generation, people proudly mentioned the length of their marriage with their spouses. Newer generations cared for timely relations and

then moved on. However, the older generation still believed in their children's professionalism.

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson knew Heather had an excellent college and high school record. Her grades would quickly get her in Johns Hopkins' medical or public policy program.

When Heather and Rizwan had packed her stuff and got ready to leave, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson asked Rizwan to play the violin for them. Heather also liked her parents' request. She insisted Rizwan should play the violin.

Rizwan looked at Heather with eyes full of love. He said he has a hard time playing the violin in front of Heather. Her beauty is too distracting for him. Somehow, he would play the violin for Dr. and Mrs. Thompson.

He put the violin on his left shoulder, fixed his left hand's fingers on the strings, and slowly started moving the bow with his right hand.

The moment he started moving the bow a little faster, Dr. and Mrs. Thompson began to feel the influence of the violin tunes. They closed their eyes and lay on the carpet. Heather lost her consciousness and started dancing. Rizwan played the violin for an hour and a quarter. Dr. and Mrs. Thompson remained on the rug, whereas Heather continued dancing. When Rizwan slowed playing

the violin, Heather started blowing sounds like a deer displaced in the jungle. Then she recited a poem as the words came to her:

The jungle of loneliness,
The paths of fear and uncertainty,
Disappearing in the trees.
Where is my destination?
I don't know
From east to the west coast
It was never my land
Now, who does it belong to?
I don't know
This Star-Spangled Banner
Blue, white, and red
Which winds have snatched it?
I don't know
This jungle of loneliness
The paths of fear and uncertainty,
Disappearing in the trees
Where is my destination?
I don't know.

Rizwan stopped playing the violin. Heather started sobbing as her emotions were released. Dr. and Mrs. Thompson opened their

eyes; they saw Heather was crying. They got worried about her. Rizwan asked them to leave her alone. He said when she would get done with crying, all the negative energy in her subconsciousness would wash off. “We all need moments in our lives when we can reconnect with ourselves. When we reconnect with ourselves, it becomes easier for us to establish a healthier relationship with the outer world.”

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson looked at Rizwan with thankful eyes and then Mrs. Thompson said, “Rizwan, America is a blessed country where intelligent people like you come from all over the world. Whatever America gives to them, they return tenfold back to America.”

Then they asked Rizwan to eat dinner with them before leaving. He nodded yes, and waited for Heather to return to normalcy.

Chapter 25

When Heather returned from her spiritual journey, she was a different person. She went to the restroom and washed her face with cold water, dried the water with a towel, and joined the family at the dining table. Dr. and Mrs. Thompson and Rizwan waited for her. She sat quietly and continued looking at Rizwan. Her face was expressionless.

She was speaking to Rizwan in a language inaudible to anyone else. She was telling him, *“Rizwan, what did you do to me? I was a free sparrow, and I wanted to remain a free sparrow. I wanted to travel from the East Coast of the United States to the West Coast on my bike.*

On the streets of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Wyoming, Nevada, and California, I wanted to ride my bike with my friends and sing ‘This land is your land, this land is my land, from California, to the New York island.’

“But now I’m not going to ride my bike. Now, I’ll join Johns Hopkins. You finish your medical education there and I’ll do my Master’s in Public Policy. I’ll get my master’s degree before you get your MD. I’ll become your pigeon and fly in the blue sky.”

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson thought the girl sitting next to them at the dining table was not their daughter, Heather. She was a different girl. They knew her as Heather, but she was not their Heather. They loved the playful Heather, but they loved this calm and quiet Heather too. To them, this Heather looked more beautiful than the other Heather.

The whole family was still sitting at the dining table when Heather's brother, Roger, walked in with his wife, Julie. They said hello to everyone in a joyful manner. Heather didn't notice the arrival of her brother and sister-in-law. She was still absorbed in her inner self.

Roger teased her, "Sis, what happened? After meeting Rizwan, you don't even like to say hello to your brother?"

Julie also teased Heather, "She loves Rizwan so much she doesn't like to share her love with anyone else."

Mrs. Thompson silently shook her head no, telling Roger and Julie to leave Heather alone. Heather gave a thankful look to her mother. Then she said to Rizwan that she was not hungry, and she wanted to go back to the apartment.

Rizwan immediately got up, picked up Heather's stuff, put it in his car, and said goodnight to everyone and walked out with Heather.

As soon as they entered the apartment, Heather stood in front of Rizwan's photo with the donkey for a few minutes and then, putting her arms around his neck and hiding her head in his chest said, "Rizwan, I'm thankful to you."

"Thankful for what?"

"For completing me. I was incomplete without you. I had everything in life. Yet I felt I was deficient. The moment you responded to my love with love, I felt all my deficiencies ended forever. Today, I think your and my life is one. Now I am part of you, and you are part of me. Now, thinking about separation from you is a painful thing for me. Today, for the first time, I felt Papa and Mummy's home is not my home. Now, your home is my home. I'll go wherever you go. I'll live wherever you live. I'll do whatever you would like me to do."

Rizwan took her face in his hands and sealed her lips with his lips. And then said to her, "Heather, my feelings are not different than yours. I was also incomplete without you. You've completed me by including me in your life. You are my strength. You are my peace. You are a guarantee for my successes in life. Without you, my life is meaningless. With you, everything is there. Without you, nothing will be there."

Heather responded to Rizwan by passionately kissing all over his body. With Heather's kissing, life's electric current turned

into flames in his body. He picked her up in his arms and took her to the bedroom.

The earth and sky became one.

The moon and the sun became one.

Heather and Rizwan became one.

Life smiled, flowers blossomed, and the fragrance of flowers spread all over. The human body, male or female, is the masterpiece of nature. It is one of the many wonders of the soil. Even if mud tries, it cannot adopt a better shape than a human body.

Life is a ladder. Mud moves upward on this ladder rung by rung. On the top, it transforms into a human body. Then it talks to the universe, dips down in the bottom of oceans, throws its lasso on the stars, discovers the secrets of the hidden parts of the world, listens to the sacred songs of the angels, and observes the appearing and disappearing lines of grief and happiness on the face of God.

This night, Heather and Rizwan discovered all the pleasures hidden in the mud. The mud showered and flooded them with these pleasures to the extent they didn't want anything else from it.

The next morning, when they woke up, they felt pleasant weightlessness in their bodies.

When Rizwan got ready to leave to go to Johns Hopkins to attend his classes, Heather walked along with him to apply for

admission. She wanted to join the current semester to get her degree in Public Policy.

Rizwan was thrilled at Heather's metamorphosis. He was happy to see she had hung her bike on a wall with her helmet.

Rizwan teased her, "Heather, it's a beautiful, bright day out there. Wouldn't you like to go out for a bike ride?"

Heather knew Rizwan was teasing her. She responded in kind. "Rizwan, on some other beautiful and pleasant day, I'll undoubtedly go biking along with you, but after getting my degree in Public Policy."

Then, in a few minutes, they both reached Johns Hopkins. While pulling in, Rizwan saw Dr. Thompson parking his car in the parking lot. Before he would get out of his vehicle and go to his faculty, Rizwan and Heather quickly reached him. Heather embraced Dr. Thompson as she used to do in her childhood. She said, "Papa, I want to tell you, I'm genuinely pleased. Rizwan is a perfect person. He loves me so much, I can't even express it in words."

Tears flowed out of Dr. Thompson's eyes, seeing Heather so happy. He asked her what she was doing there so early in the day. He thought she had come there to drop off Rizwan. When she told him she was there to go to the admissions office to join the Public Policy class, he felt overjoyed. He said he would call the registrar

and ask him to allow her to join the current Public Policy class. Then, he turned to Rizwan and said, “Rizwan I don’t have words to thank you enough. You’ve done for Heather what I had lost hope of doing.”

Rizwan said he didn’t do it all for his sake. Heather loves him and he loves her. It is his responsibility to take every necessary step to secure her future.

Dr. Thompson, Rizwan, and Heather said goodbye to each other and walked toward their offices.

Chapter 26

The next spring, when buds blossomed into flowers, Heather had to prepare to bring the body growing inside her out into the world. She took maternity leave from Johns Hopkins and started shopping for the newly arriving little guest. After a few weeks of moving in with Rizwan, she realized she was going to become a mother.

After a few months into the pregnancy, the doctor told Heather she was going to give birth to a baby girl. This news delighted both Heather and Rizwan. For many days, both were guessing if they were going to have a baby girl or a baby boy. Heather wanted to have a baby boy that looked exactly like Rizwan. Rizwan wanted a baby girl, an exact copy of Heather.

By breaking the news of a baby girl, the doctor ended their suspense. Now, they were both filling the house with all the expected needs of the impending arrival.

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson were equally enthusiastic. Their son had married many years ago, but he didn't have a baby as yet. They both were thrilled with the news of a baby girl. They both started showing up every afternoon at Heather's house with a package and stayed with them until late evening. Every day, they discussed the

needs of newly born babies and Pakistan's and the USA's politics. The Middle East's changing situation became part of their discussions from time to time. Sometimes, their focus shifted to Europe and Latin America.

Rizwan's extensive information about all these regions always surprised Dr. Thompson. He wondered how a person like Rizwan, who was born in a very tiny town in a far-flung area of a backward country like Pakistan became so expert in playing the violin and how he acquired so much information about the global world. Deep down in his heart, he felt proud of Heather's choice.

One afternoon, Dr. and Mrs. Thompson and Rizwan were sitting in the backyard talking to each other. Dr. Thompson asked Rizwan how he acquired the ability to change peoples' mental trends with the tunes of his violin.

"It's a straightforward thing. It's evident when people hear music, either they feel joyful or become gloomy. They feel peaceful, or their hearts get filled with passion. Their feet automatically start moving with the tunes and they start dancing. However, this is just the *apparent* impact of the music. The fact of the matter is, music has much more capacity to impact the various forms of life, including human beings. This ability is not limited to a violin. Any instrument can perform such miracles. However, this ability depends on the skill of the performer. If they can lift themselves

above the apparent level, they can alter the structure of the primary forms of life and their shape and nature.”

Then, to further explain his point, he asked Dr. Thompson if he ever observed laser rays cutting metal. Dr. Thompson replied it was a pervasive technology. One can watch it in any metal shop. Thousands of metalworkers use laser rays to cut metals in various designs.

Rizwan said the way laser rays cut heavy metals, music can alter the DNA codes.

“Life’s every form appears according to the codes of its DNA. By changing DNA codes, one can change the shapes of various types of life and alter their functions as well. This process can increase or decrease the span of their life. It can happen because music is a universal language. Various forms of life communicate with each other through this universal language—the musicians who reach this level can influence all manifestations of life the way they like.”

Dr. Thompson was listening to Rizwan’s conversation with surprise. With this discussion, Dr. Thompson was getting acquainted with new dimensions of music. He was a violinist. Dr. Thompson knew hundreds of tunes on the violin. He never saw the impact of Rizwan’s violin in any other violinist.

Mrs. Thompson was listening to the discussion between Dr. Thompson and Rizwan. She asked him how he gained this kind of skill in playing the violin.

He said he learned to play the violin from his music teacher in elementary school. The primary school teacher taught him how to set the violin on the left shoulder, adjust fingers of the left hand on its strings, and how to move the bow back and forth with the right arm.

Then he always remembered his teacher's saying that art has no limits. "The way we can't count the stars in the sky, there is no limit of violin tunes. As there are unlimited particles in the universe, there are endless tunes in a violin. Since then, I play the violin every night under the open sky. Neither the stars' counting ends, nor the melodies of my fiddle. I rarely play the violin for human beings. However, I play it every night for nature and natural phenomena.

"The moon, the sun, stars, streams, mountains, trees, rocks, wild animals, and birds request me to play the violin. I happily play it for them; they listen to it. They talk to me. They appreciate my playing."

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson were listening to Rizwan's conversation. The air was becoming cold. All three of them got up and went into the living room. Rizwan asked them if they would like to eat their dinner. They nodded yes.

They were still trying to agree on dinner items when Heather joined them in the living room. Rizwan asked her what she would like to eat. She said it had been a while since she ate spaghetti with meatballs. Rizwan told them to sit and talk and give him fifteen minutes to prepare the spaghetti with meatballs.

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson were talking about the baby with Heather.

Rizwan prepared spaghetti with meatballs, fresh salad, and bottles of red wine and put them on the dinner table. He invited everyone to come to the table and enjoy the dinner.

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson didn't believe Rizwan could make spaghetti with meatballs. However, when they tasted the spaghetti, they had nothing but words of appreciation for his cooking skills. They learned that Rizwan could cook Italian dishes as excellently as he could play the violin. Mrs. Thompson asked him how he made the spice mix inside the meatballs. She said most of the time, those who cook spaghetti with meatballs fail to merge the spices inside them.

Listening to her parents appreciating Rizwan's cooked spaghetti, Heather said if they ever ate Rizwan's cooked Pakistani dishes, they would become his fan. Dr. Thompson commented that Pakistani foods are rich in taste, but after eating them, one cannot socialize for many hours. He said it usually happens after you eat at

a restaurant. Restaurants typically serve frozen foods. Freshly cooked meals do not have that type of issue.

Interjecting in the conversation, Rizwan said after Mona's birth (for Mona is the name they agreed to call their baby girl), he would host a grand party in which he would cook and serve the Pakistani foods by himself. Heather and Rizwan had chosen Mona Heather Rizwan for their baby daughter; Heather wanted to give her an American name. Rizwan wanted her to have a Pakistani name. Then, they both agreed on Mona. They thought Mona was a universal name. Many babies across cultures have this name. They added Heather as a middle and Rizwan as the last name and made it Mona Heather Rizwan.

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson liked this name for the baby girl. Dr. Thompson said Leonardo da Vinci had popularized the Mona name the world over. Everyone knows Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. The name Mona doesn't need an introduction anywhere in the world. This name leaves pleasant feelings in the listeners' hearts and minds.

Listening to Dr. Thompson's explanation, Heather and Rizwan said when they were searching for a name for their daughter, they didn't have Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in their minds. Now, they felt good that their daughter wouldn't have a problem anywhere in the world to introduce herself to anyone.

“Mona is okay, but what about Heather and Rizwan? These two names are limited to America and Pakistan,” Mrs. Thompson teased them.

Before Heather or Rizwan could respond, Dr. Thompson started singing a song:

“Mona Heather Rizwan.

A trip to Pakistan.”

Mrs. Thompson, Heather, and Rizwan also joined Dr. Thompson’s singing.

“Mona Heather Rizwan.

A trip to Pakistan.”

The moment they said, “A trip to Pakistan,” Heather went into labor. They all put her in the car and took her to Johns Hopkins’ maternity ward, where Heather gave birth to a beautiful and healthy Mona Heather Rizwan.

Rizwan was present in the maternity room throughout this process. As soon as the attending physician permitted, Dr. and Mrs. Thompson also came into the maternity room. As soon as the baby was all cleaned up, Dr. Thompson picked up little Mona Heather Thompson and kissed her on her forehead. Then they all started singing:

“Mona Heather Rizwan

A trip to Pakistan

With Granny and Grandpa,

With Heather and Rizwan.”

The duty nurse also joined in their song:

“Mona Heather Rizwan.”

Chapter 27

When Mona entered the third year of her life, Rizwan and Heather graduated from Johns Hopkins. Heather did her Masters' in Public Policy. Rizwan got his MD degree from Johns Hopkins and then, after finishing his house job internship, engaged himself in the DNA research program.

Based on his research, he published many articles in the US and European medical journals, which earned him enormous popularity around the globe.

The US government offered him US citizenship, but he refused. He wanted to maintain his Pakistani nationality. He said his life started in Jamalpur, and it would end in Jamalpur. To come to America, to study at Johns Hopkins, was his need. Since he had fulfilled his planning, he wanted to go back to Pakistan ASAP.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista also graduated from KE College and became doctors. They were in constant touch with Rizwan. He continued guiding them about his plans in Pakistan. All four of them decided to dedicate their lives to furthering his ideas of the social wellbeing of the people of Pakistan.

Rizwan asked them to acquire a large enough piece of land where they could build a hospital, research center, and which should

have a large enough area around it to maintain the natural environment. He instructed Smara to see Chaudhary Nisar in Jamalpur. He could help them acquire the land. Then, teasing Smara, he also said to look for a sculptor who can sculpt his photo with the donkey and install it at the entrance of the hospital.

Smara and her friends zealously started working on the hospital and research center project. All four friends talked to each other on how to complete this project. They divided the tasks among all four of them. Rizwan took the responsibility to ship all the necessary equipment from the United States. The other friends took the responsibility to raise the resources needed. With the help of Chaudhary Nisar, they acquired a large parcel of land by the canal and started building a hospital and research center there.

Rizwan's father, Shero, spent all day on the construction site. Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista developed a very close relationship with Shero and his wife.

Chaudhary Nisar also started spending his afternoons there with Shero and Nigu. Shero would update him about day-to-day activities.

Colonel Ikram asked the Roads and Transportation Department to pave a two-way road from the highway to the hospital, with beautiful trees on both sides of the road. He suggested

the department should plant sequoia trees. The pedestrians would feel they were walking in a European or an American city.

Smara asked Shero and Nigu to move into the residential area of the hospital. Shero said he would live in his ancestral house for the rest of his life. He said only Rizwan, Heather, and Mona would live there. He intended to continue making pots and selling them to the traders in the market. Smara and her friends would tease them about the peoples' possible criticism of them. The people would say Dr. Rizwan's parents make pots on the potter's wheel and sell them.

Shero would laugh and say, "Do you girls feel ashamed if I am a potter?"

The girls would kiss his hands with tearful eyes and say, "No, Baba, no. We are rather proud of you. You gave birth to a son like Rizwan, who has set new standards of success in the medical profession and earned respect for Pakistan all around the globe. Why would we feel ashamed of you?"

Shero would tease them too and say, "My dears, mud is the originality of everything. Whosoever remains closer to the mud, he is that much virtuous." Then he would quote the verses of Rumi he had heard from the mosque's mullah at Saifo confectioner's shop. "God's most favorite people are the gardeners who plant flowers to

beautify the surroundings and peasants who grow foods, then those who work for the wellbeing of the people. Like you four are doing.”

Shero’s responses always delighted them. They saw a beautiful person hidden inside him who didn’t get any education from any school, but who could converse beautifully. Whenever the four talked about Shero, they would say if all people in Pakistan thought like Shero, Pakistan would become the best country in the world.

Smara talked to Rizwan almost every day and updated him about the progress of the project.

In the beginning, whenever Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, or Shaista called Rizwan, Heather looked at him suspiciously. Then she realized as she came under the spell of Rizwan’s violin, they were also under his spell. Then she would feel fortunate that Rizwan fell in love with her and they both bore a beautiful childlike Mona. Those four were circling Rizwan like four uninhabited planets around the sun. Neither could they set themselves free from him, nor could they come so close to him, like her, and give birth to a child.

After a while, Heather became a very close friend of all four of them. She accepted them as part of Rizwan’s life. She developed that kind of intimacy with them; if they didn’t call for a few days, Heather would call them and inquire about the progress of the project.

Smara and her friends came from well-off families. They were financially quite capable of building the hospital and the research center without getting money from outside sources. However, they accepted Heather's offer to raise funds for the project right in the United States.

In a short amount of time, Heather raised millions of dollars from major corporations in the United States. Also, she linked Johns Hopkins and Harvard Medical School with the hospital and research center in Jamalpur. After this linkage, Johns Hopkins' and Harvard Medical School's scholars could benefit from the research in the Jamalpur research center and vice versa.

Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista loved Mona. They wanted them to come to Pakistan ASAP so they could spend time with her in person instead of just via video chat.

For raising funds for the Jamalpur research center and linking it with Johns Hopkins and Harvard Medical School, the Department of State offered Heather directorship of the South Asia desk. She appreciated their offer but kindly refused it. She wanted to spend all her time with Mona and Rizwan. She didn't wish Mona to grow up with the same feelings of loneliness she went through in her childhood. She knew how loneliness destroys kids' lives, how they have to pay for the rest of their lives with various psychological issues.

Whenever Smara asked her about their expected arrival in Pakistan, she would tell her how much further Rizwan had to go in his DNA research project. She would say to her, Rizwan is very close to decoding the DNA codes. As soon as he breaks them and presents it to the world community, they will arrive in Pakistan and spend rest of their lives working at the hospital and the research center.

Heather always inquired about Rizwan's family. She would ask about his parents' activities. Because she didn't know how to speak Punjabi, she never talked to Shero or Nigu directly. But she had become a great admirer of them after listening to their stories from Smara.

Rizwan always felt good about Heather's feelings toward his family. He was happy that American society didn't have a caste system like Pakistan. It didn't have any reservations about boys and girls living together and having children without marriage. Although he wanted to go back to Pakistan and manage the hospital and research center over there, he never forgot the society's reaction when he lived with Smara and her friends before coming to the United States. He was afraid the people would not accept his relationship with Heather and having a baby with her without marriage.

He loved Heather and Mona from the depth of his heart. He didn't want them to run into any trouble in Pakistani society. The people of Pakistan hated the United States. *If they ever learned that I didn't marry Heather before she bore Mona, they would never accept them.*

Heather was so innocent; she didn't know how Pakistanis hated the United States and how it was unlikely for them to accept her and Mona. She only knew Pakistan through Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, Shaista, Shero the potter, and his wife, Nigu. In her thinking, the way they all loved her, all Pakistanis would adore her and Mona the same way.

Mona had started learning about Pakistan too. She knew as she had Grandma and Grandpa in the United States, she also had a grandma and grandpa in Pakistan. Mona had never seen or talked to them. Every day upon Rizwan's return from Johns Hopkins, she would bring a globe to him, and first pointing a finger to the United States would say she has a grandma and grandpa here and then touch Pakistan's map and say she also has a grandma and grandpa over there.

Rizwan would pick her up and kiss her and throw her up in the air. Rizwan would do it over and over. She would laugh and laugh. Then she would again put fingers on Pakistan's map and say

to Rizwan, “Pa, I want to go to Pakistan and play with my grandma and grandpa. Would they play with me?”

Mona’s question took him far off to Pakistan. He would think about the circumstances under which he migrated to the United States. Then he would say to himself, the circle he created around him had eventually put everything in its place.

He was happy and worried about this circle at the same time; he was not concerned about himself. He was distressed about the safety of Heather, Mona, Smara and her friends, his father, and his mother, in case he returned to Pakistan. He was happy about the completion of the hospital and the research center in Jamalpur. He knew once thousands of people with incurable diseases were cured, he and his values would get acceptability in Pakistani society. He also knew it was hard to say anything about Pakistan with confidence. Things could change in Pakistan any time, like the political weather in Islamabad, which could change any time.

Chapter 28

Rizwan, Heather, and Mona's life was an illuminating example of harmony. Their family friends, both Americans and Pakistani, felt proud of them for their ideal relationship. Rizwan and Heather tried to provide every facility to their daughter to make her fit in both cultures. As a responsible mother, Heather tried her best to make Mona conscious of her father's cultural heritage.

Similarly, Rizwan tried his best to make American cultural aspects part of Mona's life. In other words, Mona had the best of both cultures to absorb in her personality.

On one morning of September, Rizwan, Heather, and Mona were having breakfast sitting in the living room. All of a sudden, TV cameras turned toward the Twin Towers in New York. A plane had struck one of the towers; it created fire and smoke all around. Another plane hit the second tower. The TV newscaster seemed confused. He was saying a passenger plane had accidentally hit the Twin Towers.

After a few minutes, when he saw the other plane hit the second tower, then he realized it was not an accident. Some terrorists had hijacked the aircraft and crashed them into the Twin Towers. Right in front of Rizwan, Heather, and Mona, the second aircraft hit

the second tower. Both towers crumbled down into rubble; the people ran in the surrounding streets like crazy. They were screaming and howling. People were jumping off the towers to their deaths rather than burn. Firefighters were rushing toward the towers to try to save people while everyone else was running away. It was mayhem. Everyone was terrified, and rumors were swirling about other planes crashing.

The people's screams, volunteers picking up the wounded and carrying them to safe places, the sirens of emergency vehicles, and people running all over, it seemed like doomsday. Or a shooting of a Hollywood horror movie.

But it was not a film shooting. It was a horrible terror attack that killed over three thousand innocent people in the blink of the eye. New York is an international city where people from the world over remain busy around the clock to achieve their objectives. The three thousand people who died in the Twin Towers belonged to all colors, races, genders, and nationalities.

In no time, the family members of the deceased reached the spot carrying their pictures in their hands to find out the fate of their loved ones who worked at the Twin Towers. The ones they were looking for were buried under millions of tons of rubble. It was heartbreaking to hear their sobs and cries.

Seeing so many people howling and screaming and running on the TV screen, Mona started crying. Heather and Rizwan picked her up and tried to console her, but she wouldn't quit crying. While crying, she was saying, "Mama, the uncle who struck the aircraft with the tower is very dirty. He has killed and wounded so many people."

Her little brain couldn't imagine as yet the thousands of dead people who were under the rubble of the Twin Towers. The workers from emergency services were moving the rubble and uncovering their dead bodies.

The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers shook both Rizwan and Heather really badly. They both wanted to keep the TV on to stay informed about moment-to-moment developments. However, Mona was continually crying. They shut off the TV and turned on the radio. The radio was broadcasting the details of the attacks in New York, at the Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania.

Rizwan said, "It is a terrible thing. It will have serious consequences. Whoever has attacked the Twin Towers has committed a horrible act."

Rizwan, Heather, and Mona were still dealing with the shock of the attack; the radio announced the identity of the attackers. They were Saudi citizens who came from Afghanistan. They belonged to Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda, a terrorist organization.

After hearing this news, Rizwan's mind diverted to Pakistan. If the attackers came from Afghanistan, it would connect them with Pakistan. Pakistan's ISI was still active in Afghanistan, providing necessary support and guidance to the Taliban. The Soviet Union had pulled out of Afghanistan. The Arab warriors who had moved from various war-torn countries to Afghanistan had also built their bases over there.

After the Soviet defeat, Bin Laden's next target was the United States of America. Saudi Arabia, his native country, had revoked his citizenship. Parts of American forces were staying in Saudi Arabia after the first Gulf War in 1991. Bin Laden challenged their presence in Saudi Arabia. He demanded their ouster from Saudi Arabia. Due to the Saudi government crackdown, Bin Laden fled to Somalia and organized Al Qaeda. Then, he started targeting the US overseas interests.

At that time, there was a non-representative government in Pakistan. The nation was not behind this government. One man was making all the decisions. The type of circumstances the attack on the Twin Towers was going to generate, Pakistan was not ready for. If Pakistan ever needed a consensus government, this was it. The absence of consensus government could push Pakistan into severe chaos.

On Heather's invitation, he had listened to the conversations of top American intellectuals from Berezniki to Henry Kissinger. He knew how they all thought about Pakistan. Deep down in his heart, he had serious concerns about Pakistan. In Washington, the leader was not up to dealing with the post 9/11 scenario.

The decision-makers in the White House and State Department were mostly thinking in terms of revenge. They were more in teaching a lesson to the enemy mode. This situation demanded a more humanistic approach. If not humanistic, at least a narrowly focused approach, not a universal action.

For the first time in his life, Rizwan prayed to God. He asked God to give wisdom to the decision-makers in Washington, DC. Help them make wise decisions for the United States and the world at large. But prayers and good wishes seldom come in handy in such situations.

When Heather sensed Rizwan's anguish, she became concerned too. She loved him so much; his small worries made her miserable.

Heather was an unusual American girl. Not only was she stunningly beautiful, she was extraordinarily loving, caring, and loyal.

When Rizwan returned from Johns Hopkins, she would take the watch off of his wrist and put it on the side table near the bed,

then help him take off his coat and necktie and hang them in the closet and put his shoes on the shoe stand and give him slippers to wear. In return, Rizwan's loving kiss would make her day.

She had learned from Rizwan to cook all Pakistani dishes. She would have his favorite foods ready before he would return from his job. She knew which food Rizwan ate lavishly and which one sparingly.

The Twin Tower attacks made her unhappy too. She understood Rizwan's situation. She consoled and assured him she would stand by his side under all types of circumstances.

With Rizwan, she was also looking at changing the situation very meticulously. She knew the world was entering the phase of a new kind of war—a never-ending war, which could take decades to conclude without any apparent advantage. This war was going to be different than all wars of the past. It was without any clear objective and purpose. Mostly, the purposeless wars kill an enormous amount of human beings and cause severe damage.

Rizwan's main concern was these unnecessary killings. He valued human life the most. He could never agree with the murder of one human being at the hands of another. His entire research was about improving human beings' life.

The Twin Tower attacks, in which thousands of innocent people died, shook his confidence in life. He said to Heather that

what happened in New York was terrible, but he didn't want the United States to make it an excuse and start a war in the world which would kill hundreds of thousands of people. And that too, the human beings who have nothing to do with this horrible incident; the human beings who can't imagine why these few crazy guys attacked the Twin Towers.

Heather advised Rizwan to not to discuss this issue with anyone at his workplace or anywhere else. Somebody could misconstrue his words and harm him. Then she stepped up to him and took him in her arms. It looked like she was trying to save him from any unexpected invisible danger.

Mona, while crying, went to sleep. She was still asleep. Rizwan asked Heather to wake her up. He said if she slept too long during the day, it would be hard for her to sleep at night. He advised Heather to keep her busy with children's games and not let her turn on the TV. Then, changing his mind, he said they should go to Heather's parents' and spend the rest of the day there.

She would feel good with her grandpa and grandma. They would also have a good time there. Heather woke up Mona, and they all left with heavy hearts over the New York event to visit Dr. and Mrs. Thompson.

Chapter 29

The bloody attacks on the Twin Towers not only destroyed the towers, but they also destroyed the global village that came into existence from the womb of the First and Second World Wars. These gory events undid the fundamental principles of states' mutual relations. Also, they changed the nature of states' relationships with their citizens. Until 9/11, the citizens looked up to their countries as their protectors. After 9/11, states started looking at every citizen with the grains of doubt. They treated each of them as a potential terrorist.

The attackers of the Twin Towers came from Saudi Arabia. However, the FBI started arresting Pakistanis in New York and around the country. The FBI didn't bother any Saudi citizen living in the United States. It was beyond Pakistanis' understanding of why the FBI was arresting them because none of the attackers came from Pakistan.

With the changing situation, the Pakistanis who could cross the borders moved to Canada. Many of them were arrested and transferred to unknown locations. Any Pakistani businessman who came across Rizwan wanted to pull his money out of the United States and move somewhere else in the world. Rizwan would try to

convince them not to move from the United States. He would console them. He would tell them the United States is the best country in the world. There is a Constitution, the rule of law, and courts that don't compromise with anyone on fundamental human rights. He would tell them it was a temporary phase that would end with time. Life would attain its balance reasonably soon.

Due to Rizwan's counseling, many Pakistani-American businesspeople changed their minds to move from the United States. They cooperated with law enforcement authorities to bring life back to normalcy.

However, circumstances remained tense for a long time. For a while, fear and terror ruled the country. Everyone was afraid; Rizwan and Heather tried to help as many Pakistanis as they could. They knew it was an unusual situation. Everyone acted the way circumstances dictated.

The attack on the Twin Towers had many ordinary American folks very angry. In many cities, they attacked American Muslims. Many Sikhs got killed across the country because they looked like Osama Bin Laden. Under these circumstances, the president of the United States played a pivotal role. In a speech, he requested to fellow Americans to ensure the safety of American Muslims, as they were their compatriots.

The president's appeal helped to ease the situation. However, bitterness remained prevalent in the country. This situation saddened Rizwan. He wanted to bring down the 9/11 fever in the country anyhow. He wanted to go everywhere in the country and play the tunes of the violin to promote peace. Anytime he decided to start this campaign, Heather stopped him. She said he looked Pakistani. Anyone could hurt him. He shouldn't do anything like that, for her and Mona's sake.

America was angry, upset, and enraged over an injury caused by someone right at home. America wanted to take revenge from whoever dared to hit her right at home ground. Americans are no cowards. They know how to offer sacrifices if needed. The way Americans sacrifice their lives for their country, the citizens of no other country can present its example. The way American parents, brothers, sisters, and wives send their loved ones toward the battlefield, no culture in the world can offer its example. American soldiers neither fight for money, nor martyrdom, nor the world, nor religion. American soldiers fight for America. They live and die for America. Once their commander in chief, the president of the United States, orders; the soldier goes anywhere in the world to do the job. Their hearts are always full of confidence and compassion. To conduct a war is like a daily chore for American military personnel, one in which they can lose their life. When the war ends, they come

back to their homes with the same zeal. Babies in their mother's arms, welcome them back. Their wives and girlfriends, husbands and boyfriends, embrace and kiss them to assure them their hearts and bodies belong to them forever.

Rizwan was always opposed to wars for the destruction they brought upon cities, the countries, and human communities . However, he loved the way American soldiers said goodbye to their loved ones to fight battles in far-off parts of the world and the way their loved ones welcomed them back home after wars.

The situation was worsening after 9/11. The US government urged the Taliban to hand over Bin Laden and other accomplices in the Twin Tower attacks. The Taliban, following their tribal traditions, refused to do so. Upon refusal, the United States started bombing Afghanistan. In a few weeks, the Taliban's government crumbled, and US forces and allies entered Kabul.

Most of the Taliban, in the hope of good times returning, disappeared in far-off, hilly areas. Pakistan's Secret Services agents working in Afghanistan returned to Pakistan before the fall of the Taliban government. Osama Bin Laden, according to the traditions of the region, went into caves in remote areas of Afghanistan to reorganize his troops.

The Taliban's defeat in Afghanistan consoled the American war machine and helped it heal its wounds caused by the Twin Tower attacks.

Rizwan also overcame his intellectual ups and downs. His worries started calming down. Heather also started feeling normal. The blood-tainted air stopped blowing across the country. However, the then resident of the White House still had to deal with a few debts of the past. Saddam Hussain of Iraq was still waving guns on the streets of Baghdad, trying to provoke the resident of the White House. He was inviting a military action against his country.

The then president of the United States, instead of consolidating the victory in Kabul, started preparations for military action in Iraq. Ordinary Americans became restless about the potential military action in Iraq. American intellectuals and average Americans wanted America to come out of war mode. But the way the current administration changed laws in Washington to suspend citizens' human rights, no one wanted to offend the administration.

However, as much as Americans love their political freedoms, they love their intellectual independence more.

When the administration in Washington started beating the drums of war in Baghdad, mainstream Americans rolled up their sleeves to oppose the war with Iraq. Gradually, an anti-Iraq War movement started gaining steam across the country. Heather,

Rizwan, and Mona also became part of the anti-Iraq War movement. They didn't want the war against terrorism turned into a US-Iraq War.

Rizwan hated Saddam Hussain. He never appreciated his dictatorial regime. He supported all those Iraqis who stood against Saddam Hussain's dictatorship. But he didn't like the idea of taking the war against terrorism to Iraq to topple Saddam Hussain's government. Consequently, he started attending all the anti-Iraq War rallies. He marked their dates and venues on his calendar and made it there with Heather and Mona. Whenever he participated in any such rally, Heather walked with her hand in his hand while Mona sat on his shoulders.

By participating in such rallies, he felt good that he was on the right side of history. He was protesting against war, which destroys cities and human communities. It was a matter of pride for him that Heather and Mona participated with him in these protests.

Gradually, those who organized anti-war rallies across the country became familiar with this beautiful small family. Before joining these rallies, he had become well-known throughout the country through his distinct research on DNA and genes. However, the organizers of these rallies didn't know about his expertise in playing the violin. As his photo with a donkey become a symbol in Pakistan, a photo taken by an American journalist, with Mona on his

shoulders, became a symbol. Many mainstream newspapers printed his photo while covering anti-war rallies.

In the photo, Rizwan, Heather, and Mona had worn blue shorts. Heather was laughing about something like midday sun, whereas Mona sitting on Rizwan's shoulders was enthusiastically waving hands toward the rally participants.

Heather saw this photo published in the *Washington Post*. She wanted to get the picture to hang it in her drawing room. Rizwan asked her to look at that day's internet edition. She should find it somewhere. Then Rizwan looked at his laptop that day's *Washington Post*'s edition. He found the picture. Heather had that picture printed and hung it next to the photo with the donkey.

Not only did people in the United States hold rallies in all major cities across the country against the Iraq War, people around the globe held protest rallies in all important cosmopolitan areas the world over. In London, Tokyo, and New Delhi, millions of people gathered and shouted anti-war slogans. However, regardless of these rallies, the White House continued its preparations to launch the war against Iraq to oust Saddam Hussain. United Nation's Security Council was holding meetings to gather necessary international support for the war.

The anti-war rally organizers heard about Rizwan's ability to play the violin. They asked him to play the violin at their New

York anti-war rally. They had asked him to play the violin, but they didn't know what miracles his violin could do.

Heather warned them about the impact of Rizwan's violin tunes. It could completely transform the listeners' thinking patterns. If Rizwan played the violin, the people who worked for the pro-war institutions might not continue working for them. The anti-war rally organizers were surprised to hear Heather's warning.

The organizers rejected Heather's claim. However, they had no means to refute her. The light of confidence on her face was enough to convince them that whatever she was saying was correct.

After getting an MD degree from Johns Hopkins and completing research on DNA, Rizwan was already thinking about moving back to Pakistan. He was participating in anti-war rallies, but he didn't want any complications with the US government. In his view, the 9/11 events had turned the world upside down. Everyone was acting out of norms. Under these circumstances, it was not a good idea to get entangled with any powerful institution. It was only sane to live through such insane times peacefully.

He conditionally agreed to play the violin at the New York anti-war rally. He asked the rally organizers to make it part of their rally advertisement to warn the pro-war institutions' workers not to participate in this rally. Secondly, they should get his picture with

the donkey enlarged and put it on the stage. He wanted to play the violin standing next to the picture.

The rally organizers accepted his conditions. He agreed to play the violin at the rally. With Rizwan's agreement, the organizers started advertising that they were arranging the most massive anti-war rally in New York in the history of the United States.

Chapter 30

Rizwan's colleagues were quite pleased with him at Johns Hopkins. He was a real genius. Any scholar who faced any hurdle in his research, he would turn to Rizwan for any possible solution. Rizwan would solve their issues in a blink of the eye.

They all wanted him to stay in the United States. They didn't want him to go back to Pakistan. They wished he'd make Johns Hopkins his permanent home.

As his departure to Pakistan was becoming a sure thing, he was getting worried about Heather and Mona. Would Heather feel at home in a country like Pakistan? If Heather adjusts, what would happen to Mona's education? He'd drenched himself in the USA lifestyle. The USA lifestyle had become his second nature. After spending so many years in a neat and clean American system, how would he adjust to Pakistan's polluted environment? But Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista had completed the hospital project in Jamalpur.

One early morning, Rizwan, Heather, and Mona were still asleep. The phone started ringing; Heather answered the phone. Smara was speaking on the other end. Heather told Smara it was too early in the morning in the United States. Rizwan was still sleeping.

Smara continued talking to Heather. She thanked Heather for her support to complete the hospital project. She informed her the medical and residential area in the hospital was ready. Dr. Ezra, Dr. Yasmeen, and Dr. Shaista had already started treating patients. Pakistani media, such as TV, radio, and newspapers, provided coverage of the hospital's opening ceremony. Almost all the newspapers reprinted Rizwan's photo with the donkey. Rizwan wanted that picture sculpted and installed on the front gate of the hospital. "The sculpture is ready for installation; it looks more beautiful than the picture. Iranian sculptor has done it. It will please Rizwan."

Smara urged Heather to come to Pakistan ASAP. Heather joked with Smara, "Rizwan and you all are doctors. You will examine patients; what am I going to do in Pakistan?"

"Someone has to run this project too. Who could be better than you, Heather?" Smara replied.

Heather laughed. "Did I do a Master's in Public Policy from Johns Hopkins to run a hospital? However, I'll do it for the sake of Rizwan. We are more concerned about Mona's education; Rizwan says there are American schools in Pakistan. They are far from Jamalpur, though. We love Mona so much, we can't think of putting her in a students' hostel."

Smara told her not to worry about Mona's education. They had started a school for faculty members' children; Mona would continue her studies right at the hospital school. "This school meets all international standards; the British school system is monitoring this school. They propose the syllabi for all the grades in the school. Also, they conduct exams. Mona will receive education according to international standards."

Smara's explanation relieved Heather's worries about Mona's education.

Smara informed Heather the hospital and research center's buildings were exemplary art of architectural designing. Built by the canal bank, spread on hundreds of acres, with lush green lawns and tall trees, the building looked like a bride. The faculty's residential area was on par with American standards. Dr. Rizwan and his family wouldn't know whether they were living in Pakistan or the United States. Heather felt good about all the information Smara passed on to her.

She asked about Rizwan's mother and father. Smara told her they come to the hospital for a few hours every day. Rizwan's father, Shero, works most of the time with gardeners. The hospital looks like a part of paradise due to his guidance to the gardeners. "However, he doesn't want to leave his ancestral residence. We tried our best to make them move to the hospital's residential area, but he

insists that his life and work is part of his ancestral house. The day he would delink himself from that house, it will be the last day of his life.”

Smara asked Heather about their anti-war activities. Heather was surprised by her inquiry. She didn't know the news of their anti-war rallies had reached a small town like Jamalpur. Sensing Heather's surprise, she informed her Chaudhry Nisar had brought some American newspapers with their pictures in anti-war rallies. “The entire Jamalpur is talking about those pictures. Many people cried after seeing the photos in the papers. They all are waiting. They want to see you all among them. They say they want to see your daughter, Mona, ASAP.” Smara's words made Heather cry. With tears in her eyes, she said she had not seen all of them, but they are all her people. She felt they had a relationship with them—a bond so deep, it was hard to explain. She wanted to be with them as soon as possible.

During the conversation, Heather asked Smara how come she and her friends were so attached to Rizwan. Their relationship with him was unusual. She'd heard Muslims can marry four women at a time, but they were not even married to him. They had no man-woman relationship with him. Then what kept them so tightly bonded to him? There was no other example. Theirs was a unique case. Notably, the way they worked on the hospital and research

center project for Rizwan was a miracle. And that too in a small town like Jamalpur, located in such a far-flung area of Pakistan. It was almost incredible.

Smara laughed at Heather's questions. When her laughing stopped, she said she and her friends don't even understand the nature of their relationship with Rizwan. However, Rizwan is everything for them. The purpose of their lives is to fulfill Rizwan's wishes. They all feel they came into this world for Rizwan.

Then Smara told her the whole story from their first meeting at KE College to their Nathiagali experience of listening to his violin along with all the jungle animals and birds and then sharing the residence and the fundamentalists' reaction against it.

Heather listened to her story in detail and then asked her if she and her friends ever wanted to marry Rizwan and bear babies with him.

Smara told her that in the beginning, she and her friends competed against each other to make him their life partner. Over time, this desire died. "The nature of our relationship changed. We were happy to be close to him and do his chores. Now, marriage with him looks like a meaningless thing to us. Our hearts and minds are in his total grip. We can't get out of it even if we want to. He is like a sun to us, and we are planets circling him. We four are bonded

with each other because of him. If he ever moved away, we would also separate from each other and walk away on our paths.

“The basis of this relationship is neither sex nor reverence. Neither intellect nor any desire to get closer. Neither any passion nor the hope to get any reward from anyone. With all our intelligence, we don’t understand why it is the way it is.”

She told Heather that when all five of them were living in one house in Lahore, the nincompoop mullahs unnecessarily made an issue out of it. They didn’t understand that there were some nameless relations that are above sexuality, reverence, intellect, or desire to get closer to someone.

Referring to her Sun and planets analogy, Heather said, “Before, only four planets were circling him; now he has grabbed the fifth planet. A little moon, Mona, is orbiting the fifth planet.”

Then, Heather told her story to Smara. Heather narrated to her how she was living a free bird’s life. How her parents wanted her to join Johns Hopkins and how she resisted and then how Rizwan’s violin changed her life.

Heather’s long conversation on the phone woke up Rizwan. From the contents of the exchange, he realized she was talking to Smara. Heather saw Rizwan rubbing his eyes. She said goodbye to Smara and handed the phone over to Rizwan.

After a few formal exchanges, Smara broke the news of completion of the hospital and the research center project in Jamalpur. She narrated to him how excited the people of Jamalpur were; how the media advertised it around the country. She informed him of a well-known Iranian sculptor who sculpted his picture with the donkey and installed it on the front gate of the hospital.

She told him they were considering a few names for the inauguration ceremony of the hospital. She said she wanted Rizwan's father, Shero, to cut the ribbon, but he suggested his primary school teacher do it instead. He said the real credit goes to him, who transformed the lives of poor Shero, the potter's son, from Raju to Dr. Rizwan. Today what and where Rizwan is, it is because of him.

Rizwan told Smara he was in consent with his father. There are three of the most influential people in his life. First, the primary school teacher, second, the violin teacher, third, Dr. Nazir Ahmed, his biology teacher at the Govt College. It would make him happy if any one of them, along with his father, inaugurated the hospital and the research center. He said they should wait for the ceremony until he, Heather, and Mona come to Pakistan.

When he hung up the phone, Heather said to him she wanted to go to Pakistan and meet his parents, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista. She wanted to go to the part of the world where Rizwan was

born. She wished to smell the mud that gave such miraculous energy to Rizwan. Rizwan picked up Mona in his arms and said, “My love, we all will go to Pakistan—and go soon.”

Mona smiled and said, “Papa, I’ll go too.”

“Yes, dear. You too,” Rizwan replied.

Chapter 31

The anti-war forces were gaining strength all across the globe. There was no country in the world where people didn't oppose the Iraq War.

After the Vietnam War, it was the Iraq War that convulsed the countries with anti-war rallies throughout the world. Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Central and Far East Asia, all stood up against the Iraq War.

Mainstream Americans have a powerful sense of justice. Whenever anyone challenges their sense of justice, they consider it their civic duty to oppose them by all possible means. Although they had taken a hit a short while ago, they didn't want the White House to initiate a war against Iraq. To express their rational thinking on this issue, they organized rallies in all major cities in the country. At certain places, the supporters of the Iraq War also brought out demonstrations to show support for their soldiers. At many places, pro-war and anti-war demonstrators encountered each other, but law enforcement authorities' timely interventions kept them at a safe distance.

On the rally day in New York, the rally organizers set up a significant stage in Manhattan. Following Rizwan's instructions,

they hung his picture with the donkey as the background of the scene. They prepared that stage at a point where pro-war demonstrators had to end their rallies. Manhattan is New York's international arena. It has the honor of hosting the UN's offices along with foreign embassies of most of the countries.

The people of different immigrant communities living in New York celebrate their festivals in Manhattan; they acquire a permit from the Manhattan police to hold their celebrations on a particular street. On the day of festivities, police ensure the freedom of the community members to display their cultural rituals. Whenever such festivities take place, mainstream Americans gather there to enjoy indifferent cultural flavors. The participants of such events remain within the conditions agreed with the police. Such celebrations continue throughout the year.

The organizers of the anti-war rallies wanted their leaders to deliver speeches before concluding the demonstrations. Rizwan asked them to drop the idea of giving speeches to finish the rally. He said he would play the violin, and that would suffice. No one would need to address the rally. The organizers didn't quite get the idea of Rizwan, but anyhow, they went along. They had participated in many concerts, but this one was going to be unique. They didn't know Rizwan was an unusual violinist whose melodies were capable of altering the mental states of the people.

Anti-war organizations brought out anti-war rallies in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, DC, but the Manhattan rally was different. Through this rally, they wanted to make the point that their rallies enjoyed the support of mainstream America. They wanted to show to the pro-war forces that the people wanted peace, not war. They wanted the kind of order where they could live their lives peacefully, where they could raise their children and take care of their families.

The police tried their best to keep the pro-war activists away from the anti-war rally, but many groups of pro-war activists did join them. They continued shouting pro-war slogans. The police would move them from one place and they would reappear at another, and kept shouting pro-war slogans. This situation enraged the anti-war protesters. They demanded that the police remove the pro-war elements from their territory. The pro-war elements continued playing hide-and-seek with the police.

TV channels were broadcasting this exciting scene to amuse their viewers. The anti-war rally organizers appealed to their supporters to throw pro-war elements out of the rally.

Heather and Rizwan, with Mona on his shoulders, were standing close to the stage. When the situation worsened, he made Mona sit on Heather's shoulders and went up on the stage with his violin.

Because of his life-size picture on the stage, the anti and pro-war protestors took notice of his arrival and became silent. Americans are great fans of art. They love to listen to music in large, crowded concerts.

The organizers of the rally realized how effective the presence of an artist was on the stage. They moved aside and let Rizwan handle the rally. One of the organizers tried to introduce Rizwan, but he stopped him. He said he could deal with the situation. He put his violin on his left shoulder, set his left-hand fingers on the violin strings, and played a few tunes. Then he said to the crowd, “Before I continue playing the violin at this anti-war rally in Manhattan, I want to issue a warning. This warning also stands for those who will listen to my melodies on their TV. Today, I’m going to adjust the DNA codes of those who engage in violence.

“War is a violent activity; through this intense activity, people kill each other. They destroy countries and cities. They take over the resources of other countries, even if they have to kill millions of people. Today, all the people who are present here or watching this performance on their TV, if they like to support a war, they shouldn’t watch this performance. Those who work for the army and want to continue working, they shouldn’t watch this performance. Because after today’s performance, you won’t be able to keep your jobs.”

After issuing this warning, he started playing the violin. First, he played a few devotional tunes. With these tunes, the listeners' eyes started closing. The violin tunes not only closed the eyes of those present in the rally, they also shut the eyes of those who were watching this performance on their TV set.

After playing devotional tunes for fifteen or so minutes, he started changing the tempo to deepen the impact. Everyone's eyes remained shut. They couldn't open their eyes even if they wanted to.

With the change of tempo, they started sinking deeper and deeper into their souls. All of them felt they were standing in water. A purple-colored flower was floating on the surface of the water. They were trying to get hold of that flower. The moment they would try to catch the flower, it would move further away in the water. They would try again; it would slip farther. The flower was pulling them into the water. With every step forward, the water was getting deeper around them. The process continued until they felt the water had reached close to their necks. At that point, the lotus stopped right in front of their eyes. They tried to catch it, but their hands couldn't reach it.

Here Rizwan again changed the tunes of the violin. The audiences drowned deep in their souls. They felt the flower's purple color had started changing. First, white shades appeared in its purple

color. Then it turned into a white flower. With the changing colors, its petals opened until they touched the surface of the water. The audience felt the flower was so close they could kiss it. They tried, but they failed.

At this point, Rizwan repaired the audiences' DNA codes. He removed the pairs that made them warmongers. He replaced them with peace codes. They all become peace-loving people. The word *war* made them feel like throwing up.

Rizwan again changed the tunes of the violin. They all picked the white flowers in their hands and start walking backward out of the water. Then, he pulled them out of the depths of their souls and brought them into consciousness.

Heather and Mona went through the same metaphysical process. The moment Mona opened her eyes, she extended her arms toward Rizwan. He put the violin on the stage and put her on his shoulders. The crowds standing around the stage started clapping and singing in unison:

War is a crime
against humanity.

War is a crime against the Spirit of the universe.

War is a crime
against the flowers

that die before they blossom
because of the ammunition.

War is a crime
against newlywed brides
whose husbands die
with the bombs falling from the heaven
or the shooting bullets;
they take a shower in their blood.

War is a crime
against all those gloomy mothers
who pray for the safety of their babies
but they are forced to kiss their cold, dead bodies.

War is a crime
against those gloomy, frail fathers
whose blurred eyes
look at the burned with bombs bodies
of their lovely sons
and their eyes drown
forever in everlasting darkness.

War is a crime
against humanity.

War is a crime
against the Spirit of the universe

We won't let another war start.

The people were singing the song. Rizwan walked out of the rally with Mona on his shoulders, the violin case in his left hand, and Heather on his right side. The participants of the rally cleared the way for him while singing the chorus.

That day, hundreds of soldiers who were in the rally resigned from the army. The next day, all the major newspapers printed Rizwan's picture with Mona on his shoulders, Heather on his right side, and the donkey in the background. All the papers showered accolades on him in appreciation. One of the newspapers wrote a caption under his picture, "The magician violinist who changed the DNA codes of thousands of people."

Another newspaper captioned the picture, "Violin miracle." Yet another paper captioned the photo, "Violin for peace."

Heather saw the picture in so many papers and took Rizwan in her arms. "Rizwan, thank you so much. You have made our world safer with the melodies of your violin."

Rizwan kissed her on her lips and said, "Dear, love doesn't need thanks, it requires love in return."

Chapter 32

The great job Rizwan's violin did for the anti-war movement pleased everyone. The countrywide anti-war movement organizer decided to hold a dinner in honor of Rizwan.

After the completion of the hospital and research center in Jamalpur, Rizwan wanted to return to Pakistan ASAP. He wanted to go back to take care of the hospital and research center's matters actively and effectively. But the impact Rizwan's violin made in the New York rally generated a new debate in the United States. Everyone was talking about the secrets of music and its influence on various manifestations of life. On TV talk shows and in newspapers op-eds, scientists, psychologists, and intellectuals discussed Rizwan's performance at the New York rally. They all expressed their amazement about how the violin tunes allegedly changed human beings' DNA. Many TV talk shows' hosts invited Rizwan to join the discussion groups to explain how he performed this miracle.

For the time being, Rizwan wanted to stay away from such discussions. He knew if he participated in any such debate, it would engage him in the United States, which would delay his departure. He didn't want to deal with this issue at the moment.

For the same reason, he had several reservations about the dinner invitation by anti-war organizations. Regardless of the notable successes in his life, he remained a humble man. Following the advice of his father, he wanted to stay in touch with the mud. The big thing at the New York rally was the attempted resignation of hundreds of soldiers from their jobs. After the metamorphosis they went through under the influence of the violin tunes, their military careers became insignificant for them. They said they didn't want to serve the army anymore. They didn't want to fight another war.

A few soldiers always become conscientious objectors to stay away from a battleground. But hundreds of soldiers once made the army administration concerned. It had never happened before. The administration's concern was if the violin performances continued, it would become difficult for them to find recruits for the army. If that happened, it would become impossible for the state to deal with foreign military threats.

With this perspective, the New York Attorney General sent a notice to Rizwan and asked him to come to his office to discuss some important matters. The attorney general wanted to talk to him about his plans. The attorney general couldn't legally send a notice to him because he was not a resident of New York. He had to contact the Baltimore attorney general to get in touch with Rizwan.

However, the AG sent him a letter due to more expected anti-war rallies in New York. He didn't want him to repeat his violin performance in any such anti-war rally.

The day the letter arrived, Rizwan was not at home. Looking at the AG's name and office address on the envelope, Heather immediately opened it. After reading it, she called the AG office. She asked why the AG needed to talk to Rizwan.

The AG said after Rizwan's performance, many soldiers had attempted to resign from their duties. It made many government agencies worried. If such performances continued, it would become difficult for them to find recruits to fight wars. It would endanger state interests. "Since this performance took place in New York, they have asked me to get in touch with Rizwan and find out about his plans." The discussion with the AG relieved her concerns. She promised the AG to bring Rizwan to his office in the coming week.

When Rizwan returned from Johns Hopkins, Heather told him about the AG's letter and subsequent conversation with him. She informed him he had to go to New York and see him and answer his questions sometime next week.

The next week, he showed up at the AG's office. Heather and Mona accompanied him. The AG welcomed him to his office. Then he applauded his violin performance at the anti-war rally. His violin pacified the pro-war protestors that were determined to

deteriorate the law and order situation. It was a big help to law enforcement authorities. They were all thankful to him. However, the performance did have some negative influences. Several government agencies had shown their concerns. Rizwan asked the AG about the “negative influences” and “concerns” of the heads of agencies.

“The negative impacts of the performance were hundreds of serving soldiers trying to leave the armed forces. Now, they don’t want to engage in war. They have lost the appetite for war. The concern is if the violin performances continue, the country will have a hard time recruiting soldiers.”

The AG’s reasoning made Rizwan want to laugh, but observing the official etiquette, he just smiled. The AG continued his conversation.

“The army is an essential organ of the country. Every nation has to have an army to defend itself. When the military conducts a war, people die. Some die because of their combat responses; some die being at the wrong place at the wrong time. That’s how countries operate.” Listening to the AG, Rizwan asked him if, in his opinion, he did anything wrong by playing his violin in the anti-war rally. Before the rally, the organizers acquired the necessary permits from the police department. Rizwan warned the soldiers in the audience about the possible impact of his violin on the DNA that triggers

violent behavior. He also informed them that after the performance, they would lose their appetite for war.

The AG agreed with Rizwan. He said if they resigned from the army, it was not his fault. Instead, he did an excellent job of controlling the out-of-control mob.

The AG said the heads of war-related departments appreciate his talent. They want him to stay in the United States and help her develop with his God-given abilities.

Rizwan thanked the AG. He informed him he had established a hospital and a research center in the town of his birth. The research center has links with Johns Hopkins and Harvard. Jamalpur, Johns Hopkins, and Harvard research centers would share their research. Therefore, it wouldn't make any difference if he was here or there.

The AG felt relieved after listening to Rizwan's plans. He understood Rizwan wanted to continue his research, and he was not interested in anti-war activities. Those activities were not on the top of his priorities list.

As soon as the meeting ended, Heather felt relieved. Her apprehensions disappeared.

By chance, the anti-war rally organizers had arranged dinner in New York on the same evening. Rizwan had not committed to

them. He decided to participate in the dinner and then return to Baltimore. Heather agreed with him.

Due to Rizwan's official engagements, they didn't go anywhere except a few anti-war rallies. They still had time before dinner. They decided to show Mona the Statue of Liberty, take an air-view of New York on a helicopter, and visit New York's other tourist spots. In the evening, they would attend the dinner and then leave for Baltimore.

As soon as Rizwan, Heather, and Mona came out of the office of the AG, several newspaper reporters were waiting for them outside. Once reporters spotted them, it became difficult for them to avoid them. Wherever they went in the city, the reporters chased them. They started flashing cameras and taking their pictures. Then, they asked them the details of their meeting with the AG.

Heather stopped Rizwan from speaking to the reporters. Then she briefly told them there was nothing special about this meeting. They just discussed a routine matter with him. The AG wanted to discuss the events of the rally with Rizwan.

The next day, all New York-based newspapers published Rizwan's day-long activities in the city. They particularly highlighted their meeting with the AG and their participation in the anti-war organizations' evening dinner.

Pakistani media also took notice of Rizwan's celebrity status in the United States. The fundamentalist reporters of Pakistani newspapers especially paid attention to American media's focus on Rizwan. Rizwan, Heather, and Mona's pictures in shorts particularly caught their attention. They thought they had enough ammunition to take Rizwan to task upon his arrival in Pakistan.

Unaware of all this, Rizwan, Heather, and Mona started preparations to leave for Pakistan. In the next few days, the Jamalpur hospital and research center remained the focus of their activities.

Chapter 33

Heather and Mona were thrilled about Rizwan's plans to go to Pakistan. Heather had already started learning Pakistani social manners. Rizwan and Heather knew many Pakistani families living in Baltimore. Heather learned from them a few basic phrases to interact with families and friends in Pakistan. How to respond to their questions, how to ask them their names, their professions, their family ties, and their day-to-day activities.

She bought dresses for her and Mona from local Pakistani stores. She learned how to wear them, and how to interact with family members and outsiders. How to express displeasure, respect, and love. In a few weeks, she became an expert in moving through family situations in Pakistan comfortably.

She was ready to land on any Pakistani airport as an ideal Pakistani woman. Had she perfected her Urdu or Punjabi, no one would know if she was a non-Pakistani.

In Pakistan, Shero, his wife, Nigu, Chaudhary Nisar, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, Shaista, and the hospital and research center's entire staff were preparing for Rizwan, Heather, and Mona's arrival. The residents of Jamalpur were also enthusiastically gearing up to receive their exceptionally successful son and his family.

But many Islamic fundamentalists who didn't approve of his lifestyle had become more powerful over time. Many of them had become media channel owners. Religious organizations had strengthened their base throughout the country. Those right-wing organizations practically ran the government. They linked everything with religion. They had tied every living or non-living thing with the ropes of faith. If anything dared to untie itself, these organizations would stand against it. They turned Islam into a prison. The prisoners could not breathe or do any social work. A dance of madness took over the country.

News and pictures published in American newspapers alerted them about Rizwan's small family. They didn't want Rizwan and his family to return to Pakistan because their lifestyle could influence the country's youth.

They started a media campaign against Rizwan; for them, Rizwan's capabilities were meaningless. A modern hospital and a research center of international standards were meaningless. They didn't value the achievements he made, regardless of his impoverished family background. They had created a framework of Islam in their minds, and Rizwan didn't fit in it. Therefore, he was condemnable.

When the US embassy learned about the media campaign against Rizwan and his family, they communicated their concerns

to him through the Department of State. Rizwan was a Pakistani national, so the Department of State could only advise him not to return to Pakistan. The department couldn't stop him. However, Heather and Mona were US citizens. The department was worried about their safety in such a charged Pakistani environment.

Mona was still a little girl. She didn't understand much about the news from Pakistan. However, Rizwan and Heather were adults. The media campaign against them also made them concerned about their safety. The reports looked gruesome. Dr. and Mrs. Thompson, Heather's brother, Roger, and his wife, Julie; everyone thought Rizwan should not go to Pakistan under the circumstances. The news of a few Americans being kidnapped made them concerned about Rizwan and his family's safety. As far as the hospital or the research center were concerned, he could operate them remotely from the United States.

However, Rizwan and Heather were determined to go to Pakistan.

Dr. and Mrs. Thompson separately tried to convince Heather to let Rizwan go alone, but she refused. She said her life and death were with Rizwan. Heather had confidence in Rizwan. She knew he was quite capable of handling any situation. If anything bad happened in Pakistan, she would stand in the front and shield Rizwan.

The news from Pakistan made everyone concerned, but Rizwan had an eternal peace on his face. He was peaceful, like an ocean that can handle a storm of any magnitude. Heather had a similar calmness on her face. She knew, as an upright life partner, Rizwan would protect her and Mona.

With such bad news coming from all sides, eventually, the day arrived when Rizwan, Heather, and Mona left for Pakistan.

Rizwan left the United States with a heavy heart; he had developed a strange love for the country over the years. He had tears in his eyes. His passion for the United States was not any different than Pakistan. America had opened her arms for him. It had given him so much; he couldn't thank it enough. However, poverty, ignorance, and impoverishment in Pakistan always made him tearful. He thought if he could improve things in Pakistan, he would try.

Heather and Mona were excited. Heather wore a purple shalwar and sky-blue kurta. She had a purple scarf covering her head in the Pakistani style. She had made Mona wear a sky-blue shalwar and kurta. However, Rizwan was in jeans and a white, short-sleeved shirt. He looked like a young Pakistani student who had come to spend a few days in Pakistan.

The Department of State had asked the US embassy in Pakistan to take necessary steps to ensure the family's security.

They also convinced the airline to maintain the secrecy of their travel plans. Regardless of all these safety measures, the fundamentalists in Lahore had already known the family's travel plans. However, they received this information so late, they couldn't plan anything against the family.

The embassy staff was present at the airport to help them out in any unpleasant situation.

Rizwan was surprised not to find any fundamentalist protestors at the airport; he felt relieved. They hopped in the embassy car and made it to Jamalpur. The hospital's architecture, the beauty of the gardens, the spaciousness of the research center, and the cleanliness and modernity of residential quarters surprised everyone.

Although they had arrived without prior notice, Shero, Nigu, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista were all there. Shero was watering the plants on the front lawns of the hospital. Nigu was helping him. Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista were attracted there by the embassy's flagged car.

Rizwan asked the driver to stop the car right there; he told Heather about Shero and Nigu. He told her they were his parents. They got out of the car. Rizwan bent down and kissed the feet of his father and mother; Heather and Mona followed him. Shero and Nigu raised them and took them in their arms; they couldn't hold back

their tears. They were crying and kissing Rizwan, Heather, and Mona.

Rizwan tried to console them, but their eyes continued flowing. Those were the tears of happiness, peace, and parents' love for their children. Heather had never seen such a scene in the United States. The style of a son's respectfulness for his father and mother and their love for their son. It was such a unique experience for Heather; she also couldn't hold back her tears.

Shero, Nigu, Heather, and Mona were still going through the storms of emotions while Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista arrived in their white coats. They all hugged and kissed Rizwan, Heather, and Mona on their cheeks. Heather felt a strange purity and civility in their love for Rizwan.

Shero and Nigu picked up Mona in their arms. They were kissing her with love and affection. They tried to talk to her, but Mona didn't know any other language except English. However, as the adage goes, love has no words; Mona felt the love of her grandfather and grandmother. She put her arms around their necks and enjoyed the warmth of their love.

Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista led Rizwan and Heather to their newly built residence. Rizwan asked the driver to bring the car to the residential quarters. They all walked to the house; Rizwan

and Heather liked the inside of their new home. They admired the outside architectural design as well.

The entire hospital and research center had modern facilities. Rizwan's residence had the back-up of all systems. If one system failed, the back-up system would take over.

Heather especially liked the kitchen area. She loved the spacious and airy kitchen; she immediately announced she'd cook food for everyone. Rizwan told her not to cook any meal. He said they would go to his parents' house and eat the meal prepared by his mother to refresh his childhood memories. Everyone liked his idea. He had returned home after a years-long journey; the journey started from Govt College to King Edward Medical College, to Johns Hopkins, and then back home.

Rizwan and Heather thanked the embassy staff for all their help and support. Before leaving, the deputy chief ambassador gave his card to Rizwan. He said if he ever felt any security threat, he should immediately get in touch with him. He and his staff would quickly provide him security with the help of local law enforcement authorities.

Rizwan bid them goodbye with a big smile on his face. Then, he got busy with Shero, Nigu, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista to catch up on the stories of the years lost in their struggles.

Chapter 34

Rizwan was happy to make it back to Jamalpur, but Heather and Mona's excitement was worth seeing. Wearing Pakistani dresses and applying the manners they learned from Pakistani Americans living in the Baltimore area, they immersed in Jamalpur culture within no time.

Heather loved to make mud pots. Every morning after Rizwan went to the hospital and Mona went to school, she would go to Rizwan's ancestral house.

There, she would briefly help Nigu do domestic chores and then join Shero to make mud pots. She learned how to prepare mud, then put dirt on the potter's wheel to turn it into jars, containers, bowls, pans, and cups. In a few months, she became an expert potter. Looking at her while working on the potter's wheel, no one would say she was new on the job.

After the arrival of Rizwan, patient traffic tremendously increased at the hospital. Because of Rizwan's A-class medical research and the hospital's linkage with Johns Hopkins and Harvard, many doctors were sending patients there from all across Pakistan.

Soon, the Jamalpur hospital became the leading hospital in the country. The members of the Pakistani elite, instead of going to

European hospitals, started coming to Jamalpur. Every facility they enjoyed in European hospitals was now available in the Jamalpur hospital. Notably, the method of treating ailments by changing DNA codes earned Rizwan fame across Pakistan's borders. Many medical researchers came to Jamalpur to learn these methods.

After learning the pottery, Heather started spending more time handling the hospital's administrative matters. After she took over the governance of the hospital, it became an active and effective operation. Everything started happening on time and rightly. Consequently, and also due to the kind of service the hospital was providing, a lot more funds started coming in its coffers. Because of the arrival of many more members of the elite, the hospital built several residential complexes close by for their loved ones to stay.

It was hard to find another example of such an outstanding hospital and research center. Jamalpur emerged on Pakistan's and the world's map.

The way Smara and her friends selected and acquired the parcel of land and developed it into a hospital made Rizwan proud of them.

The way Heather became part of Smara and her friends' lives turned their little group into a commune in which Mona was the daughter of everyone. Mona adjusted herself well in this small

commune. Shero and Nigu also felt at home with them. Nigu was a woman of few words. However, Shero's story was different. He was uneducated, but he had a lot of folk wisdom. His conversations reflected this wisdom in an impressive manner.

Due to closeness to Shero and Nigu, Heather understood everything they said. However, she was not as fluent in Punjabi as to continue a lengthy conversation with them. In such cases, Smara or any of her friends played the role of translator back and forth.

Shero usually asked Heather about social life in the United States. She would bring out her album and show him different pictures describing the social life in the United States. He would point to the surroundings and say they had created a mini America in Pakistan. Soon they would change all of Pakistan into America. She would say yes, she had come there with Rizwan to make Pakistan a developed country like the United States. Shero would laugh heartily at her response.

Islamic fundamentalists learned about Rizwan's presence in Pakistan through countrywide news about the Jamalpur hospital. They tried to know the details of his lifestyle in Pakistan. They were looking for some excuse to attack him.

They were surprised Smara and her friends still hadn't married and they lived with Rizwan in the hospital complex. To their

surprise, he had brought a white girl from America; with her, he had a daughter who lived with them.

Luckily, they didn't know that he was living with the American girl without marriage and they had given birth to a daughter. They thought she was a Christian girl; Islam allows Muslim men to marry Christian ladies. Therefore, he might have married her in a Christian way. That's why it was not an issue for them. However, whenever they talked about his wife, they always mentioned her in a hateful way as an American bitch.

Rizwan and Heather were so busy in hospital matters, they didn't know what plans Islamic fundamentalists were brewing against them.

The force behind these Islamic fundamentalists was the same mullah the rangers had picked up before Rizwan left for the United States. Those journalists whom Smara offended collaborated with the mullah. Along with them were some residents of the area where Rizwan had lived with Smara and her friends in one house.

The day they learned Rizwan had returned from America, they started visiting Jamalpur to conspire with some locals against him. They couldn't find a single person in Jamalpur who would take their side.

Although Rizwan belonged to the lowest low in Jamalpur, the entire town adored him as their son. They considered his success

as theirs. Rizwan was not only the son of Shero the potter; he was the son of an entire village. All the villagers were ready to stand with him any way he wanted.

On one Friday, the mullah from the city came to Jamalpur with his few followers and met the local mullah before the Friday prayer. They asked for the local mullah's permission to speak to the congregation after the prayer. The local mullah happily permitted them. He requested the gathering to stay for about fifteen minutes after the prayer so that the guest mullah could talk to them.

After the prayer, the guest mullah stood up and started talking to the gathering.

“Oh, people, we can't thank Allah enough for his mercy that created us among Muslims. Afterward, he sent Mohammad the prophet to guide us on the right path. Let us send our prayers to the Holy Prophet.

“Having said all that, I want to draw your attention to an important issue. Each one of you is going to stand before Allah on the day of judgment. Other than your deeds, Allah is going to ask you about your family, your street, and your city matters. He is going to ask you if you fulfilled your responsibilities about them. If you kept an eye on your family members, your street and city fellows, to make sure they conducted their affairs according to Allah's directions.

“You all should look around yourself. Is everything taking place according to sharia on your street, in your city, and your country? If everything is happening according to Allah’s directions, then you are successful. If things are happening against sharia, I swear on Allah, Allah is going to question you about it. At that time, you will wish the earth should crumble and swallow you or the sky should fall and crush you, but you won’t escape. At that time, you will look toward the Holy Prophet to seek his help, but he will turn his face away from you. Then you will face the ultimate destruction for remaining silent over what was going on in your town. You will look for refuge here and there, but that day, there will be no refuge for you. You will have to face Allah’s wrath.

“My father and mother may sacrifice their lives for the Holy Prophet. He said, ‘The believer is the one who sees evil and tries to stop it with force. If he can’t resist it with power, he should stop it with his mouth. If he can’t resist it with his mouth, he should treat it as an evil in his heart.’”

Today, in your Jamalpur, the shariah’s creeds are getting disgraced. You people are neither using force, nor your mouth. Also, you don’t consider it evil in your hearts. Tomorrow, when Allah will question you about it and the Holy Prophet will refuse to come to your aid, how are you going to answer Allah?”

After listening to the guest mullah's speech, many people started sobbing and crying. They cried so hard, their beards became wet with their tears.

According to the plan, the mullah had brought a few followers with him from the city. When they saw the emotions of the gathering had reached their heights, they started pouring the oil on the fire.

"Mullah, please tell us who is violating sharia codes in this town. We will go right now and stone him to death and dispatch him to hell!"

Mullah cleaned his fake tears in his eyes and then again, with a wailing voice, he started talking.

"Blessed are these few young boys! Allah has filled their hearts with his light and with the love of the Holy Prophet. Blessed are the mothers who gave them birth. I see Allah on his royal throne is telling the angels to go down and spread their wings under the feet of these blessed youngsters. Build golden palaces in paradise for them, their forefathers, and their next seven generations, because these are my soldiers. They are willing to die for my sharia and my messenger's honor!"

Mullah's phrases broke the people's constraints and made them hue and cry in the mosque. The mullah's followers started raising slogans:

We will kill, and we will die
We will kill the enemies of Islam
We will kill, and we will die
We will kill the enemies of Islam!

The mullah responded to the youngsters' slogans with a protracted: "Allah o Akbar!" and then said, "The threat to Islam I am talking about is Rizwan. First, Americans took him to America on their expenses. Now, they send him back with an American bitch. Here, he is shamefully and adamantly living with four unmarried lady doctors without marriage. With Jewish conspiracy and money, he has established a hospital and a research center so that he could inject such germs in Muslims' bodies that destroy the forthcoming generations." The mullah just said this, and his collaborators again started shouting:

Oh, the youngsters,
Let's go and kill the Jews' agent Rizwan.
Let's go and burn down the hospital.
Oh, the youngsters, let's go!

As soon as the residents of Jamalpur heard the name of Rizwan out of the mullah and his collaborators' mouths, they stopped crying, set aside Allah's imaginary throne and angels, and

started beating them. If anyone tried to intervene, they started punching and kicking him too. A few youngsters went to Shero the potter and brought his five donkeys. They made the mullah and his collaborators sit on those donkeys, put broken shoes in their necks, and took them shouting and beating first around the town and then to the hospital.

On the way, many people joined them. By the time they made it to the hospital, they had turned into a big gathering.

When this massive crowd was moving toward the hospital, someone ran and informed Rizwan about the oncoming mob. He quickly took Heather, Mona, Smara, and the other friends with him and waited for the crowd outside the hospital. After a while, the mob reached the grounds in front of the hospital. The residents of Jamalpur started throwing shoes on the mullah and his collaborators.

Heather, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista got scared. Mona started crying. Smara picked up Mona in her arms. In her arms, she became quiet, but clung to her.

When the mullah and his collaborators sitting on the donkeys' backs came close to them, Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista recognized him. It was the same mullah that caused Rizwan to leave King Edward Medical College and move to Johns Hopkins in the United States.

The people informed Rizwan that the mullah tried to incite them to kill him and burn the hospital. Rizwan put his violin on his left shoulder and bow in his right hand and asked the people to let the mullah go. When the people left them, they tried to run away. Rizwan immediately started playing the violin. Listening to the tunes of the violin, the entire crowd calmed down. The mullah and his collaborators also stopped right there. After a few minutes, they were all waving along with the tunes of the violin.

Then, Rizwan asked the people to move away from the mullah and his fellows. The moment the people walked away, Rizwan changed the tunes of the violin. The mullah and his followers started dancing like crazy. While they were dancing, they started making fearful monkey sounds. Then, gradually, their faces and bodies turned into monkeys' faces and bodies. The moment they turned into monkeys, Rizwan stopped playing the violin. The people saw the mullah and his fellows turned into monkeys and ran after them.

All the monkeys ran and climbed on the trees. Then, hanging on the trees' branches, they disappeared from the eyes of the people.

Rizwan went back in the hospital with Heather, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, Shaista, and Mona. The people returned to their homes.

Chapter 35

Transforming the mullah and his collaborators into monkeys was a unique incident. Before this, no one had heard of any such event anywhere. Therefore, all the newspapers printed it as news on their front pages. Many international journals lifted this news from the Pakistani papers and published it with the details of Rizwan's expertise in changing DNA codes. Pakistani mullahs read this news and became enraged. They immediately called a convention of Pakistani clergy to figure out a way to get rid of Rizwan somehow.

At the end of the convention, they issued a joint communique. The joint communique declared Rizwan was blasphemous. Defying sharia codes and living with four young women without marriage was a crime punishable with death by stoning. Rizwan, his wife, daughter, and four friends should be stoned till they die so that no one dares to challenge sharia in the future.

The Department of State in Washington, DC, heard about this communique from the mullahs and got worried about the safety of Rizwan, Heather, and Mona. They immediately sent instructions to the US Embassy in Islamabad to get Rizwan and his family out of Pakistan ASAP.

The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) at the embassy immediately contacted Rizwan and asked him to get ready to move back to the United States. Rizwan and Heather listened to the DCM carefully. Before Rizwan could answer the DCM, Heather said they wouldn't bow down to Mullahs' threat and leave Pakistan.

Rizwan agreed with Heather. He thanked the DCM and Department of State and said they were safe in Jamalpur. In Pakistan, whatever Mullahs were saying or doing, in Jamalpur, people were having a lot of fun with the mullahs turned into monkeys. Everyone knew which monkey was the mullah and which monkeys were his followers. Mullah turned into a monkey, but his beard remained intact. Although this beard was not precisely human, it was still recognizable.

Whenever the people saw the monkeys on trees' branches or rooftops, they teased the mullah. Amazingly, the mullah knew his name, and if anyone addressed him as Mullah, he would respond to the caller.

There are no monkeys in Punjab. Sometimes, jugglers walk in the streets with their monkeys to entertain the children. After the entertainment, he asks the children to give him small change. Occasionally, some people build large cages in their houses and bring a monkey or two and enjoy their presence.

The presence of so many monkeys in Jamalpur created a new circus for the people.

It was the monkeys' routine to spend nights in trees and then gather around the hospital gate early in the morning. The people tossed them edible items. The monkeys jumped and caught those items in the air and then enjoyed eating them.

If Rizwan, Heather, Smara, or any of the friends ever came toward the gate, the monkeys would get excited and start dancing. The people always thought they were expressing their repentance. The monkeys' excitement especially grew whenever Rizwan showed up there. Rizwan would look in their eyes and see they were asking for pity. He would say, "I'm tired of these animals and want to see a human being." Rizwan's phrase gave them hope to return to human forms one day. Pakistani newspapers were still printing the news about the Jamalpur monkeys.

The mullahs who declared Rizwan to be stoned to death were keeping an eye on this news. They were still planning to deal with him somehow. The residents of Jamalpur were the real hurdle in their way.

The way they defeated the mullahs' plans against Rizwan, the hospital, and the research center, the mullahs couldn't dare return to Jamalpur. They couldn't figure out how to impose sharia edicts on Rizwan and his family.

Meanwhile, because of Rizwan, the hospital, and the research center, Jamalpur was constantly in the national and international media. Due to its linkage with Johns Hopkins and Harvard, Jamalpur became an iconic name in international medical journals. Indians, Russians, Chinese, Europeans, and American research centers were continually exchanging data with the Jamalpur research center.

Unlike Pakistani mullahs, the people around the globe were taking a particular interest in Rizwan's musical miracle to change humans into monkeys. They also wanted to know if it was possible to reverse the process.

Rizwan knew it was possible. In various forms of life, the DNA are fundamentally the same, with a few variations. It was possible to change these variations with the tunes of music. He knew the levels of consciousness could also be increased or decreased, or even a new awareness could be created in different life forms.

A few Russian laboratories wanted to purchase a few monkeys to carry out further experiments on them. Rizwan refused to sell those monkeys to the Russian labs. He said those monkeys were humans, and they had rights like human beings. Therefore, it was their rights' violation to send them to Russian labs for experimentation. However, if Russian scientists wanted to come to Pakistan to examine those monkeys, they were welcome to do so.

When Pakistani mullahs heard this news, they had an outburst against this move. The mullahs called for a strike all across the country. In those strikes, only the students who were under their influence participated. The general public didn't pay attention to their call. The people's cold shoulder to their appeal was a shock for the mullahs. Usually, a large number of people responded to their requests, but by not responding to this call, the people proved they were with Rizwan—and anyone who would work for progress in the country.

After this failure, the mullahs decided to look into Rizwan's past diligently. They wanted to dig up some dirt out of his life history to incite the masses against him as an excuse to get rid of him.

For this purpose, they used all their contacts in Jamalpur and Baltimore.

After a few months, they did find a couple of things that could incite the people. What they uncovered made them extremely happy. They embraced each other to celebrate their discovery. They put ludos in each other's mouths and congratulated each other.

They learned Rizwan was not a son of Shero, the potter. He was, in fact, Chaudhary Nisar's illegitimate son. According to their resources, his mother cheated on her husband and established illicit relations with Chaudhry Nisar. Many years ago, one person was

killed in Jamalpur over this issue. The issue was resolved because of the intervention of a serving military colonel.

Their resources gave them even bigger news. They learned that Rizwan and Heather fell in love with each other and started living together. They never formally married each other. Their daughter, Mona, was also an illegitimate child like her father, Rizwan.

With these two bits of news, the mullahs' primary challenge was to incite the residents of Jamalpur against Rizwan.

The residents of Jamalpur were practically receiving the benefits of the presence of Rizwan, the hospital, and the research center. The small town had emerged on the world map because of Rizwan. They supported him from the depths of their hearts.

Rizwan collected the DNA data of all the residents of Jamalpur. An adequate system was put in place for their medical needs. Their health issues almost ended because of this efficient system.

Rizwan also let all the town's children acquire education in the research center school. This school imparted education according to international standards, way better than the local school.

The country's elite also started coming to Jamalpur for their treatment; the government was forced to improve its service there.

The residents of Jamalpur were the direct beneficiaries of these services. With this visible change, the mullahs couldn't incite the residents of Jamalpur against Rizwan. A mullah had already seen the results of messing with Rizwan. Now, all day long, he was jumping up and down with other monkeys outside the hospital gate. He had become an example for all those who resist human progress.

The mullahs decided to take serious action against Rizwan to impose the sharia code on him.

This time around, they didn't want to take the chance of making a mistake.

Chapter 36

One morning, the residents of Jamalpur were getting ready to do their daily chores. They saw thousands of mullahs from all over Pakistan gathered on the outskirts of the town. It looked like they were getting ready to raid somewhere.

By now, the whole town had known about the mullahs' conspiracies about Rizwan, the hospital, and the research center. They knocked on every door and informed the people about the mullahs' gathering on the outskirts of the town.

The moment people learned about the mullahs' presence, they came out of their homes with whatever they could get their hands on. In a few moments, thousands of young men confronted the mullahs with rods, machetes, daggers, and swords in their hands.

In this drama, the monkeys played the most crucial role. Instead of standing with the *mullahs*, the monkeys stood with the villagers. They had stones in their hands. It looked like they were waiting for the decision of the dwellers of Jamalpur. They were ready to attack the mullahs if the villagers decided to do so.

When the mullahs saw the monkeys standing with the villagers, they spoke to them on loudspeakers. "We've come from all over Pakistan to take your revenge. Rizwan has turned you in

monkeys with magic. We can't transform you back into humans, but we can stone Rizwan and his family to death. Their death may break their magic spells on you, and you may again become human beings.

The monkey mullah heard the announcement of the outside mullahs. He immediately jumped on the highest tree. The outside mullahs and the dwellers of Jamalpur could vividly see him. By making different monkey signs, he tried to convince the outside mullahs to leave Rizwan and his family alone. He was trying to tell them to learn a lesson from their condition and give up their idiotic idea to attack Rizwan and his family.

While the residents of Jamalpur and the thousands of outside mullahs were getting ready to wage war against each other, someone informed Rizwan about the confrontation. Rizwan heard this news calmly, picked up his violin, and walked toward the battleground. Heather, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista wanted to accompany him, but he asked them to stay behind.

When he was walking toward the mullahs, the monkeys started walking in front of him. It looked like the monkeys were his front line, ready to attack the enemy forces. This scene made the mullahs worried. If the dwellers of Jamalpur took Rizwan's side, it was understandable. But the monkeys aiding him as his front line was beyond their comprehension.

Despite all this, the mullahs' leader tried to incite the people against Rizwan. He addressed the people on a loudspeaker:

“You all are blessed people. You’ve come from far-off areas of Pakistan to show your love for Allah and his Prophet by destroying the blasphemous Rizwan forever. Whatever you see in Jamalpur, it is foretold in religious texts. Religious scholars have warned us about this corruption. They told us that before the doomsday, strange events would take place. You wouldn’t be able to explain them. Thus, you should know, the rejected Satan is behind them. If you see such events, understand that doomsday is around the corner. You must eradicate such corruption by force. If you succeed, you will get paradise as reward. If you die, you will proceed straight to paradise!”

After deceiving his listeners with the promise of paradise, the mullah came to the point.

“Oh, the resident of Jamalpur! To fulfill my responsibility to Allah and his beloved Prophet, the person you are protecting should be stoned to death under the sharia laws!

“We’ve investigated; he is not the son of Shero the potter. He was born out of Chaudhary Nisar and Nigu’s illicit relationship. He is a bastard child! It is a good enough reason first to stone this doctor to death and then burn his dead body so that Pakistan can be saved from his negative influence!

“It is not the last thing! Before, he used to live with four young girls without marriage under one roof in Lahore. He ridiculed the sharia laws with his shameful acts. The mullah of the defense mosque tried to warn him, but with the help of his influential benefactors, he had the mullah kidnapped. They tortured him in a torture cell for several days. When he was about to collapse, they released him!

“At that point, his Christian and Jewish masters took him to the United States. There, they attached one of their bitches with him. Out of her, he gave birth to a bastard daughter!

“Now, they all live here. The hospital and research center established by them is, in fact, the secret hub of Christians and Jews in Pakistan! Through this hospital and research center, they want to spread the germs of shamelessness among our next generations so that they all become shameless like them. Remember, sharia is your only asset that assures your success in this world and the world hereafter. If you lose this asset, you won’t be able to face Allah and his beloved Prophet on the day of judgment!”

The mullah’s speech created a severe commotion among his followers. They started shouting slogans: “Allah-o-Akbar!” and, “Long live the Holy Prophet!” The residents of Jamalpur responded to them by waving their swords, rods, and machetes. They were

determined to eliminate the mullahs if they moved a step further toward Rizwan or the hospital.

When the mullahs saw the determination of the residents of Jamalpur, they loosened up a bit. They had come there to stone Rizwan and his family and friends to death, but it was a different scene over there. All of Jamalpur was standing in defense of Rizwan and his family. The monkeys were also part of Rizwan's defenders, with stones in their hands.

The mullahs' leader again asked Rizwan to surrender to sharia and they would disburse peacefully. Otherwise, they would sit there until they stoned him, his illegitimate wife and daughter, and his friends, to death.

Rizwan calmly heard the mullahs. In response, he asked them to leave; otherwise, the way they were inward, their outward would reflect their inward. Their appearance would transform according to their inner reality.

When the mullahs heard Rizwan's warning, they started moving toward him reciting *Lá Iláha Illallah*, and there is no God but Allah. They all had rocks in their hands to stone Rizwan to death. The residents of Jamalpur moved toward them, waving their swords, rods, and machetes. The monkeys jumped up on the trees and then started throwing stones toward the mullahs.

Rizwan saw the situation getting out of control. He put the violin on his left shoulder and started moving the bow on its strings.

The violin's tunes slowed down the mullahs' movement toward Rizwan. The stones fell from their hands. Then, gradually, they came under the influence of Rizwan's melodies.

The residents of Jamalpur also became stagnant in their places. Slowly, the battlefield turned into a valley of peace. However, the people who were on Rizwan's side were in rest. But the process of DNA transformation had started in the mullahs. The monkeys in the trees were peacefully watching the change. It was a strange scene. Rizwan's violin tunes were getting louder and louder. The mullahs' faces and bodies started changing into animals' faces and bodies. Some became monkeys, some jackals, some coyotes, some bears, some cats, and some elephants. It looked like a jungle was on fire and all the animals were trying to escape. All of them were making noise according to their newly formed species.

Rizwan slowly stopped playing the violin. The monkeys that helped him had returned to their human form. All the Jamalpur residents gathered around Rizwan.

A few days before, they had seen a mullah and his collaborators turned into monkeys; today, they saw them returning to human form.

The mullah and his collaborators fell on the ground in front of Rizwan after returning to human form. Their beards became wet with their tears. They were repeatedly saying they didn't know the real meanings of faith. By turning them into monkeys, Rizwan introduced them to the reality of faith. The real judge is God. If anyone wears religious attire and preaches religion day and night, and he thinks he can judge the people, he has no right to do so. God and only God has the right to do so.

When they saw the other mullahs transformed into monkeys, bears, coyotes, dogs, cats, and elephants, they begged him to forgive them. He said, "They are ignorant, misguided people who imposed their ideologies on the ordinary folks. They don't know what real knowledge is. After a few days, they will see the reality with their own eyes."

Then, he left everybody there and slowly walked back to the hospital.

Chapter 37

None of the ideal mullahs of Pakistan participated in the protests against Rizwan. Only the miscreant mullahs, dictated by their evil natures, had arrived in Jamalpur to stone Rizwan to death. They looked like human beings, but they were animals trapped in human forms. Rizwan transformed their appearance according to their inner selves with the power of his violin tunes. Rizwan had learned something over time. He knew that during the evolution, human beings evolved through different animal forms for hundreds of thousands of years. Those animals' traits still exist in humans' psyches. That's why some humans behave with other humans like various types of animals.

Usually, people don't understand why some people behave the way they behave. Their behavior reflects their connection with the form of animal they passed through during their evolution.

The miscreant mullahs Rizwan converted into various animal forms wandered around Jamalpur all day long. Jamalpur's old and young people teased those animals and enjoyed their reactions.

The mullah and his collaborators who returned from monkeys to their human forms decided to live permanently in Jamalpur and teach Islam according to their revised understanding.

After their mystical experience, they stopped scaring people with God. Now, they taught people to love God. Instead of creating divisions among people, they worked for their unity. They preached humanism, peace, and equality.

For their spiritual experience, they were both happy and unhappy. The sources of unhappiness were their acts before they went through the mystical experience. They were unhappy because what they did in the name of faith was not faith.

They were happy because they eventually found the secret of life's oneness. They had learned that from the leaf growing out of the ground under the stone to human beings, that life was one. Every manifestation of life should respect all other expressions of life.

Rizwan had returned to Jamalpur many years ago. The mullahs' opposition had disappeared. One day Smara reminded him that the inauguration of the statue at the hospital's gate was still waiting. He remembered the conversation he'd had with her over the phone many years ago from the United States.

“Yes, yes, events have kept me so busy in Jamalpur, I almost forgot about it. Monkeys and bears sidetracked me. We should’ve done it a while ago.”

“It was essential to go through this process. After going through all this now, we must inaugurate the statue.”

“Yes, you are right. You remember the names we agreed upon to conduct the ceremony. Did you contact any of them?”

“I did. I tried your primary school teacher, your music teacher, and your favorite Dr. Nazir Ahmad at Govt College. Unfortunately, none of them are alive to witness your success,” she said.

The sad news of their death ached his heart. Then he asked about the sculptor who sculpted his picture with the donkey. She said he was a close friend of his father, and he was still available. He said she should get in touch with him and ask him to add the statues of all three persons to the current figure.

Rizwan and Smara were having this conversation sitting on chairs in the garden of the faculty complex. Winter was almost over, and spring was settling in. Summer was still a couple of months away. The air was neither hot nor cold. The plants in the gardens of the hospital and research center were bearing flowers. The fragrance of those flowers made the air smell exceptionally pleasant.

In a little while Heather, Mona, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista also showed up there. The entire garden became the hub of waves of laughter; Heather and Ezra sat with Rizwan and Smara. Yasmeen and Shaista started running back and forth with Mona. Heather asked Rizwan what he and Smara were discussing.

Rizwan said they were having a conversation about the inauguration of the statue by the gate. He wanted three of the essential people in his life to inaugurate the statue, but sadly, all three of them died a long time ago. Now, they were trying to figure out how to honor them. Hearing Rizwan, Heather laughed. She said there was an American solution to this problem. Everyone looked toward Heather. She said, “We should install the statues of all three of them right behind the sculptured picture in such a way that they become part of it.”

Heather’s proposal made everyone’s eyes glow. They all liked this idea. Smara and Ezra said this would put all the essential personalities in Rizwan’s life in one spot.

Rizwan said they all were his past. If they wanted to preserve history, why not all those who played an essential role in putting this whole thing together become part of it? Then he explained his idea. He said he meant Heather, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista should become part of it.

Ezra looked toward Heather with naughty eyes and said, “Why did we forget our little angel, Mona?”

“How could we? She is part of our lives. She is where we are, and we are where she is,” Rizwan answered. When this conversation was going on, Mona came running and sat in Rizwan’s lap. Yasmeen and Shaista were running after her; they came and joined them too.

Continuing the conversation, Rizwan said, “If we order that many statues, it may take a while. We’ve two options: either we should inaugurate the statue we have, or we should delay the inauguration ceremony.”

Smara and Ezra agreed. “We should inaugurate the statue we have, and install the rest of them when they are ready.”

Heather had a different idea. She said the inauguration could wait. Continuing her point, she said, “Since there is no tradition of installing statues in Pakistan, some people may not like it. They might criticize it. We must respect people’s cultural traditions.”

Rizwan laughed and said, “Of those who could object, some of them already have been reformed. The others are wandering around here as monkeys, bears, hyenas, wolfs, cats, and elephants. They are going through the reformation process. Therefore, we don’t need to worry about them. Once we get ready for the inauguration, they will complete the process.”

Everyone agreed with Rizwan's point. Smara took the responsibility to get in touch with the Iranian sculptor and have the other statues ready for installation.

The air was getting cold in the garden. All got up and went inside the house while all the mullahs in their animal forms continued making noise outside.

Chapter 38

After the summer, the northern winds opened the mouths of water bags. The entire Punjab was soaked with water.

When the lightning lit the skies and the clouds thundered, it seemed like the armies of Raja Porus were moving forward. Being unable to cope with the hardness of the season, many mullahs turned into animals had died in the fields of Jamalpur.

With the death of that many animals and the unpleasant odor all over, the residents of Jamalpur came to Rizwan and requested he get rid of the animals that were still alive. Rizwan promised them he'd return the animals to their human forms at the occasion of the inauguration of the statues. Smara and Ezra had already reported to Rizwan about the finishing of the figures.

The Iranian sculptor skillfully blended the statues of Shero the potter, Nigu, his primary school teacher, music teacher, and Dr. Nazir Ahmad of Govt College with the sculptured picture so that Rizwan's entire history became visible for the visitors. He also blended his future aspirations by adding the statues of Heather, Mona, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista in the sculptured mosaic.

Now, it was time for the big decision. Who should be invited for the inauguration? Heather wanted to ask Nelson Mandela to the inauguration ceremony. In her opinion, Nelson Mandela was the most celebrated living legend. He played an essential role as a common man, as a prisoner, as head of state, and as an anti-war activist. She thought his visit to Pakistan would increase Pakistan's credibility around the globe. Also, it would uplift the image of the research center worldwide. She said if Rizwan, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista agreed, she could seek the US embassy's help to invite Mr. Mandela.

They all loved the idea of inviting Nelson Mandela. They all opined his arrival was not going to make any difference to the reputation of the hospital and the research center. To them, the hospital and research center had already earned enough credibility at the international level. There was hardly any international research center that was not benefitting from the research taking place at Jamalpur's center.

Therefore, if an ordinary, lower-class Pakistani inaugurated the statue, it would help to uplift them. Smara said Rizwan wanted his father, Shero the potter, to unveil the statue. She suggested Rizwan's father and mother should inaugurate the figures, and all known elite celebrities, including the president of Pakistan and the ambassador of the United States, should be invited. Everybody

liked this idea. Heather also supported Smara's suggestion. She said there could be no better option than them. It was their son who, regardless of having such an impoverished background, became known all over the world.

Listening to Heather's words, Rizwan's eyes swelled with tears. He loved his father and mother a lot. He respected them from the depths of his heart. They were illiterate, but they made him reach the top rung of the socioeconomic ladder.

They belonged to the most exploited class of the people in the country. It was severe enough for them to survive in a class-based society like Pakistan's. He knew how hard it was for them to hear the taunts of the people about him being a bastard. They listened to this all with aching hearts, but they couldn't do anything except continue to suffer within.

For this reason, he collected the medical data of all the men and women living in the town. By using this data, he wanted to provide the best medical treatment to his patients. Also, he wanted to know who his biological father was.

Most of the townspeople blamed his mother for having an illicit relationship with Chaudhary Nisar and declared Rizwan his illegitimate son. He compared his DNA with Chaudhary Nisar's, but the result was always negative. There was nothing common among them that would biologically relate him with Chaudhary

Nisar. These results relieved him of his doubts. The people's charges on his mother and Chaudhary Nisar were not correct. However, it ached his heart like a wounded bird. How difficult would it have been for his poor mother to go through all the pain caused by these false allegations?

Rizwan gave a lot of importance to women in the universal play of life. He believed in women's sanctity. In his opinion, women were the custodians of life. They are not only the collection of the most beautiful elements of life, but they also perform the function of continuity of life.

Nothing was more painful for him than seeing a woman in pain. He wanted to make an ugly example out of the people who caused pain to women. He particularly collected data from all across the globe to keep the record of women's suffrage. At some point, he wanted to run a worldwide awareness campaign against injustice toward women.

He was outraged about the women's status in Pakistan. Sometimes he thought it was the women's pain in his violin's tunes that dipped down through the waves of consciousness to the people's souls and changed their DNA. It would clean all unbalanced codes and replace them with balanced ones.

When Smara proposed the names of his father and mother to inaugurate the statues, he pleasantly said, can't she think anyone

other than his parents for this outstanding job? Then he said, you girls' parents are equally great. They allowed you, in a ruthlessly conservative society, to work with me closely to dream and make such great achievements like the hospital and research center. He said, had it not been for them, he wouldn't have gone to Johns Hopkins, met Heather, done research on DNA, and created this great hospital and the research center. These things and incidents are so tightly interconnected; had anything moved here or there, nothing would've come into existence.

Smara said she didn't forget anybody. She had already informed their parents about the inauguration. They all were anxiously waiting for the day.

Then he asked her if she informed Dr. and Mrs. Thompson and Roger and his wife. They all must come from the United States and participate.

Mona was sitting in the lap of Rizwan. As soon as she heard the names of Dr. and Mrs. Thompson, she jumped in Smara's lap. She asked if her grandpa and grandma were coming to Pakistan.

Smara kissed her on her cheeks and said, the moment we inform them about the date of the ceremony, they will arrive.

When the decision was finalized that Shero the potter and Nigu would inaugurate the statues, Rizwan asked Smara to send an

invitation to all national and international guests about the event. He also asked her to ensure the participation of all the residents of Jamalpur in the ceremony. They all should become part of this historical event.

“Certainly, the people of Jamalpur must participate. All this is theirs.” She nodded her head positively.

Chapter 39

After sending out the invitations, everyone got busy with making the arrangements for the unveiling of the statues.

Eventually, the day of the unveiling arrived. Everyone was waiting for this day. Jamalpur looked like a festival town. Children, grown-ups, and the old took a shower early in the morning. Everyone wore new clothes. They stuck little cotton swabs wetted in rose and jasmine oils in their ears to smell good. By the time the sun came up one-quarter high in the sky, everyone was present on the open grounds of the hospital.

Young girls and ladies also wore their best, colorful clothes; they wore ornaments in their ears, on their necks, and around their heads. They put red lipsticks on their lips and arrived at the hospital grounds with their men.

All national leaders, from the president to the Information Minister, were there. Smara's father, Colonel Ikram, dressed in his uniform, with shining military medals on his chest, with his wife, was present on the stage. Next to them were Ezra's father, the chief secretary, and his wife. Next to them were Yasmeen and Shaista's parents.

From the United States, Heather's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Thompson, their son, Roger, and his wife, Julie, were present on the stage.

In the front row, the mullah monkey was sitting with his followers. The shrine's priest was also sitting in the front row. Behind them, on the right, were the boys and men, and on the left, girls and ladies. Way back were all the monkeys, hyenas, bears, wolves, wild cats, and elephants. On their faces, instead of animal wildness, they had remorse, repentance, and mercy appeals.

Behind the stage was the mosaic of statues; on one side, Nigu, Shero the potter, and his donkeys. Behind them on a little higher pedestal were the statues of Heather, Smara, Ezra, and Shaista. On another pedestal were the statues of Rizwan's primary school teacher, music teacher, and Dr. Nazir Ahmad of Govt College.

All the statues blended with the hospital and research center buildings like they were part of the design. The Iranian sculptor had done an excellent job. He had created a piece of art that could last for thousands of years. All the guests appreciated the skill of the Iranian sculptor. Specifically, Dr. and Mrs. Thompson discussed the authentic aspects of the statues. They said they had traveled around the globe and seen many beautiful statues, but nothing like the ones in front of the hospital.

Heather, Smara, Ezra, Yasmeen, and Shaista were also present on the stage. Mona was sitting with her grandfather and grandmother.

Smara stood up and told the story of the hospital and research center to the audience. She narrated the whole story from their first meeting with Rizwan, the animal's concert in Nathiagali, and then the circumstances that led Rizwan to join Johns Hopkins in the United States. She told the story in an engaging and moving style. The shadows of gloom, joy, and hope constantly changed on the faces of the audience.

When Smara was telling the story, Rizwan, wearing doctors' white apparel, with the violin on his left shoulder, with Shero and Nigu on his right and left side, appeared on the meeting grounds. Shero was dressed in a long, white kurta and dhoti. He had a white turban of Punjab's peasants on his head. His face was glowing with infinite inner peace and happiness. Nigu was dressed in a long, white kurta and shalwar. Also, she had a white dupatta around her neck, its ends hanging on her breast. She had the shadows of gloomy sadness on her face.

Her facial impressions took all the audience in their grip. The happiness glowing on the face of Shero represented the emotions of a satisfied father. However, the shadows of gloom and sadness didn't express the real feelings of a mother. Apparently, on such

occasions, a mother should look happier than a father. However, there was an opposite situation.

Stopping her story, Smara announced the arrival of Dr. Rizwan with his father, Shero, and mother, Nigu. She said, “Now, the most important guests of the event, Shero and his wife, Nigu, will unveil the statues and then join us on the stage.”

Rizwan stepped forward. He gave the thread of the veil on the information plate of the statues to Shero and Nigu and asked them to pull it. They pulled it. The silky cover on the plate moved aside. The writings on the plate became visible.

The people on the stage stood up and started clapping. They congratulated Rizwan, Shero, and Nigu. Afterward, all three of them sat on their allotted seats on the stage.

Then, upon the invitation of Smara, the prominent guests on the stage expressed their feelings one after the other. When they were expressing their thoughts about Rizwan’s great work, Shero’s face was glowing like a midday sun. Nigu sometimes showed expressions of joy; then again, the impressions of her inner pain would take over her face. Then, she fixed her gaze on the saint of the shrine, sitting in the middle of the front row. She continued looking at him. The expressions of momentary joy disappeared from her face.

Rizwan was keenly reading the impressions of appearing and disappearing of the story on her face. Smara invited Rizwan to come to the mic and address the audience.

He stepped forward in front of the mic, the violin on his left shoulder and bow in his right hand. He briefly scanned the audience and said:

Oh, the dwellers of Jamalpur,
please accept my greetings.
Today, Shero, the potter's son,
a doctor,
a violinist,
is standing in front of you.
Who am I,
what am I?
I don't know.
What I know is,
I am the son of the mud.
You all are sons of the mud too.
All humans,
men and women
are sons and daughters of the mud.
What is religion?

What are rituals and traditions?
I know nothing about them.
All I know is
the mud turns into our faces,
and the current of life
brightens us like light bulbs.
Afterward,
we, the sons and daughters
of the mud,
clash with each other
in the name of religion,
in the name of rituals and traditions,
in the name of values,
in the name of ideologies,
in the name of commercial interests,
in the name of politics,
in the name of the state.
We make the wisest among us
wear the crown of thorns
or shower
the petals of flowers
or present
gifts wrapped in colorful

sheets.

We make our lives

hell, or paradise.

Then, he slowly moved his right hand, moving the bow on the strings of the violin. He continued his address:

“Oh, the dwellers of Jamalpur, whatever Dr. Rizwan did, it is right in front of you in the shape of the hospital and the research center. They are making a difference in your lives. Your lives are continually improving because of them. But today, the son of this mud, Dr. Rizwan, is standing before you. I’ve played the violin on many important occasions in front of hundreds of thousands of people.

“Sometimes, the people of Lahore enjoyed the melodies of my violin and sometimes the animals in the jungles of Nathiagali. Sometimes, the anti-war protesters gained energy from these tunes, but today, I’m only going to play the violin for my mother.”

While he was expressing these thoughts, the bow started moving faster and faster on the strings of his violin.

“Today is the most important day of my life. My father, Shero, unaware of the importance of my work, seems extremely happy. His face is glowing like the sun of summer with his inner happiness. However, my mother, because of the burden of years and

ache in her heart, she can't smile. Today, I want to remove this burden of years and pain of her heart with the tunes of my violin." Then he turned to his mother and said, "Oh, my lovely mother. Right in front of all the residents of Jamalpur, I want to tell you that I am the son of Shero the potter and the grandson of Mohammad the Potter. As a doctor and DNA expert, I know, I'm the fruit of your and Shero the potter's love.

"But, in front of all these residents of Jamalpur, I want to tell you, if the accusations of the residents of Jamalpur would have been right, it wouldn't have lessened a bit the love and respect I have for you in my heart. The purity of your heart and the sanctity of your body would have remained intact in my heart and mind. On this planet, for me, you are the reflection of the Spirit of the universe. You are always a beacon of light for me. I know what it means to be poor, weak, and beautiful in a chauvinistic society."

While Rizwan was talking, the saint of the shrine tried to get up and run away. The mullah monkey and his followers wanted to arrest him, but Rizwan stopped them. Then, the tunes of his violin became louder. The face and the body of the saint of the shrine started taking animal form. The gush of tears began flowing from Nigu's eyes. The entire audience became still.

Nigu stood up. She wiped the tears from her eyes and face and said to Rizwan:

“Raju, they all are sons of the mud. Please forgive them. They are naive and ignorant. They don’t know when they trespass each other, how much pain they cause to the mud. Because of this pain, eventually, the mud ends up giving its sons and daughters refuge in itself.”

Obeying his mother, he changed the tunes of his violin. All the animals standing way behind regained their human forms.

Rizwan stopped playing the violin. He stepped forward, kissed his mother on her forehead, put his arm around her shoulders, and started walking toward the residential quarters of the hospital.

Shero the potter, Heather, Smara, and her friends slowly followed him.

The End