

# A Tale of Two Lovers

(a short story by Gulzar)

Let me tell you a story; a story of two lovers. Once upon a time, there were two young lovers in a village. They were together since their childhood, and that friendship grew into a romantic love when they grew up. Both dedicated to each-other, madly in love, and used to promise that they would live and die together. The villagers too knew about their bond and considered them inseparable.

Time passed by, they were about to marry when the WW-II struck. The man was sent to fight Japanese soldiers as a part of British-Indian troops. While leaving, he promised the girl that he would return and upon returning they would marry in the Lord Shiva's temple located out of the village. (Till this date, most villages in the eastern side of India have Lord Shiva's temples as its borders.)

The war was eventually over, but the man did not return. Years after years kept piling up yet there was no sign of him. The girl kept waiting. Villagers tried to convince her that probably he died in the war and she was waiting in vein. However, she was adamant and protested people by saying: "No! He promised that he would return." Time kept running; her lover did not return. By now, she had become a name in the village, a synonym for crazy and children sometimes pulled prank on her.

Some forty years passed by and the girl has now turned into an old woman, frail and sick, but still kept waiting. As a lonely old woman, she would bring a chair out of her home in the morning and wait until sunset. One day, she got a postcard. It didn't have a sender's address but it had the name of her lover. When she turned, she was elated to see that it was indeed his handwriting, although looked a bit different. She called the villagers and said: "You see. I told you guys that he would return." Anyway, the letter wrote: "I have returned, as I promised. Let's meet in Lord Shiva's temple and marry as we promised."

She ran to the temple, and villagers kept waiting for them to return. After a few hours, she returned; sad and heart-broken.

"What happened?" Asked an old lady who was a well-wisher.

"Nothing! Possibly, someone pulled a mean-prank this time. There was no one near the temple. The place was deserted as usual... except for an old homeless man sitting on temple's railing. He had no teeth in this mouth, wore dirty clothes, and had long shabby hairs."

On the other side, the old man kept waiting on the temple's railing until dusk, thinking: "She didn't wait for me. Who remembers? I knew that she won't come. No one came... except for an old lady, leaning on her sticks, with cataract in her eyes... but none other than her."

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