

Story: Karmic Catastrophe

By Alysha Javer with her grandmother Zeenatara Allakrakhya

The phone call left me cross and irritated. I felt my editor had been a little too critical of the first draft of the beginning chapters of my novel, and I did not like it at all. Fuming inwardly, I stomped off to the study, annoyed at all the rewriting I would have to do. When I reached my desk, the printed draft of my novel was nowhere to be seen. “It was here just a minute ago!” I exclaimed, my annoyance escalating. I shouted our housekeeper’s name and when she appeared a few minutes later, I really let her have it. All the irritation and anger I had towards my editor exploded in the form of a tirade against the housekeeper. Some of it even in broken Swahili.



“I have told you never to touch my desk! Don’t even go near it! Don’t even look at it! Is that too difficult for your thick head to understand? How dare you touch my papers! Apana sikia? Wewe jingaa?”

I went on and on, fuelled by my anger. The housekeeper, her head bowed down, said nothing and this infuriated me even further.

“I am not talking to the walls! I am asking you something! Has the cat got your tongue? Why did you touch my papers? I should have you sacked, right here and now, you imbecile woman!”

Just then my grandmother entered the room and, in a mild tone of voice, sent the housekeeper out on an errand. As the poor woman thankfully scuttled from the room, my grandmother looked at me reprovingly.

“Shut the door and come and sit here,” she said, patting an armchair next to hers.

I meekly did as I was told, already feeling slightly mortified at my lousy behaviour.

“Listen to this carefully,” and thus began her narration:

Late one night, New Year's Eve, a desperate and wild-eyed Jennifer urgently hails a cab and demands that the driver immediately takes her to the Queensborough Bridge. "It is a matter of life and death!" she exclaims. "Hurry! We have to be there before midnight, or else someone will die!"

Before the cab had the chance to pull away from the curb, a furious looking David jumps into the cab next to Jennifer.

"Oh no, you don't, Missy!" he says, gritting his teeth and pointing a finger at her accusingly. "You are going nowhere until you pay your bill."

Ignoring the irritated owner of the bar and restaurant at which she has just spent several (wasted) hours, Jennifer once again urges the taxi driver to go to the bridge. With a squeal of tyres, the cab is off. Jennifer then looks at David and tells him to calm down and tries to explain to him why she is in such an urgent hurry. At first, David refuses to believe her and says she is just a cunning woman who is making up crazy tales just to get out of paying her bill. Jennifer then recounts to him how she had been waiting, for several hours at a corner table in the restaurant, nursing her solitary glass of wine, for her date to appear. It had taken a long time for her to give in to his constant pleas for a date with her and now that she had agreed, he had stood her up, and that even on New Year's Eve! An intense feeling of frustration and anger suffused her entire being.

"It was truly unfortunate that at that very moment you approached my table, to ask if everything was alright. Before I could answer, your cellphone started ringing. Without thinking, I snatched your cellphone out of your hands, peeved at its loudness, and flung it into the nearby fish tank.

As a result of that action of mine, you missed an important call that you were expecting from your bank, didn't you? This made you very angry and you yelled at your dishwasher Pedro, ordering him to stop daydreaming and get on with the job. Well, because of you, Pedro, miffed at being reprimanded, and upset at not having found his brother whom he had come all the way from Mexico to look for, yelled at his girlfriend, the waitress. The cycle continued with the waitress yelling at the bartender who yelled at the customers. First, he yelled at Beth, a petite lady who burst into tears and rushed out of the restaurant immediately she was yelled at. Then, he was also rude to a smartly dressed, officious and dignified looking gentleman. That was indeed a travesty for you because that gentleman was the bank loan officer! Having been unable to get you on your cellphone, he decided to walk the two blocks to talk to you personally at your restaurant and grant you the extension that you were really hoping for to keep your restaurant running."

By now, David loses his steam and is in fact gaping at Jennifer, his mouth open in shocked surprise.

"H-h-h-how do you know all this?" he stammers.

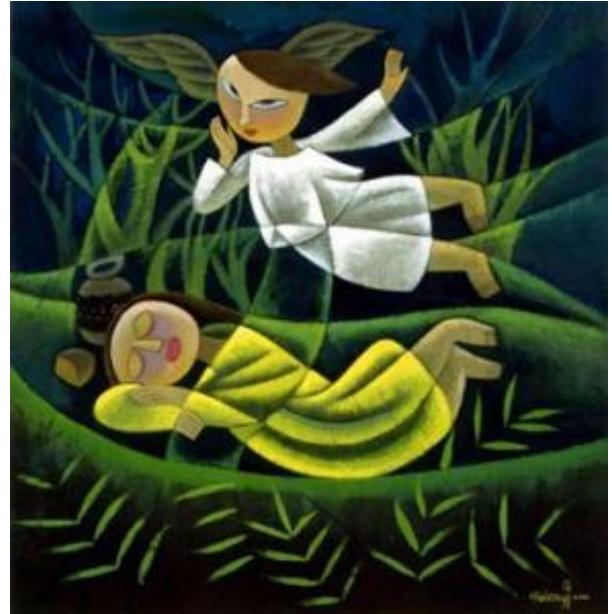
Grimly, Jennifer continues her tale, reminding David how, after the bank officer had huffily told him to forget about his loan extension and walked out of the restaurant, David had marched over to her table, shaking his fist at her, ranting and raving at the top of his voice, blaming her for having ruined his whole life. "He wouldn't have come here at all if I had just been able to speak to him on my cellphone, you witch!"

"Already emotionally distraught at having been stood up so cruelly, your angry accusations were too much for me to bear and I fainted. I am sure you remember that."

David nods, recalling vividly how long it had taken him to revive her, and how upon gaining consciousness, she had just rushed out of the restaurant without a word and also without paying her bill.

"When I fainted, I had a vision in which an angel – tall, white with a halo of glimmering light surrounding his entire body – appeared before me. The angel told me that he understood how angry I was feeling that evening and why, but I should not have directed my anger towards you(David) in this manner. It was the angel who described the chain of events that was started after I flung your cellphone into the fish tank. This chain of events resulted in your losing your restaurant and would now further result in Beth losing her LIFE. Shocked and surprised at this revelation, I requested the angel to explain more clearly about Beth. It so happened that Beth was completely depressed after the death of her husband and had been toying with the idea of ending her life. It had been an uphill task for the angel, assigned by God to look over Beth, to dissuade her from her suicidal intentions and give life another chance by going out on New Year's Eve. The bartender yelling at her at the restaurant was the final nail in the coffin for Beth, foiling months and months of concerted efforts by the angel. In fact, she was now heading towards the Queensborough Bridge, planning to jump off it at the stroke of midnight. It was at this moment that I came to and I had to rush out immediately to try and stop Beth. I hope you understand now that I was not trying to cheat you."

David now joins Jennifer in urging the cab driver to step on the accelerator. As soon as the cab arrives on the bridge, both David and Jennifer run towards Beth who is about to jump. Jennifer reveals to Beth how she is responsible and



apologises to her for her role in the chain of events. David also apologises, on behalf of his bartender, to Beth. Thankfully, Beth accepts their apologies and allows them to lead her back to the cab and upon arriving at the restaurant, David invites everyone in, including the cab driver, for a last drink at the restaurant before it closes down the next day.

You will be interested to know that Jennifer's bravery at accepting her mistake and then trying her best to put right what went wrong had miraculous results. It turned out that the cab driver, Carlos, was Pedro, the dishwasher's brother whom he had come to find from Mexico. Their reunion was indeed heart-warming. It also turned out that Beth's late husband had left her a sizeable fortune and Beth offered to become David's partner in the restaurant, thus bailing him out of his financial predicament. As for Jennifer, she learnt a very important lesson from all of this, didn't she?

As did I. Sighing heavily, deeply ashamed of myself, I went in search of our housekeeper and taking her hand into mine, I offered heartfelt apologies for having been so upset and angry with her over such a trivial matter. She was quite gracious and told me to forget all about it. Immediately, I felt better and returned to my grandmother who smiled benignly.

“Anger is man’s worst enemy. Just as Holy Pir Sadardin has said, Eji kaam krodh jenaa ghat mahe zaher jaagya, tene jeetya jeetya daav sarve haariya. But of course, anger is not at all easy to overcome. And it is really, really easy to vent your anger on the first person you come across at that time. But as we learn from the story, this will set forth into motion a chain of events that will have far reaching, destructive and devastating consequences. Therefore, if you are ever angry, you should immediately ISOLATE yourself. Walk away from everybody. Be by yourself until you have calmed down. In this way, you will be able to avoid karmic catastrophe for which you would have been held responsible. Secondly, it can happen that someone else has vented their anger on you and this, in turn, has made you angry. Same thing. Do not let the chain of events continue on to a third person now. Isolate yourself immediately and give yourself time to calm down.”

This is the life-changing lesson I have learnt from my grandmother today.

Alysha Javer is a teacher. After completing her studies in the field of Education and Psychology in the UK, she taught English Language and Literature for a few years before joining the Writers’ Bureau, UK. Currently, she lives part of the year in the UK and part of the year in Kenya (with her grandmother Zeenatara Allakrakhya) and she’s working on writing her first novel. In her own words: “I’m very interested in learning more and going deeper into the subject of faith and ethics, and my grandmother is a

great source of inspiration and knowledge in this vast subject.”

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