

# THE TEA CUP

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Vijay found them apparently sleeping peacefully- the old man on the bed and his wife on the ground. The young Deputy Superintendent of Police gently touched them. Both were cold- the life gone out a few hours earlier. It was the final pact of suicide in their long journey of 52 years of marriage.

Vijay looked around the place. An empty steel glass and a cup with left over tea were on the table. Though cleaned, the glass smelled of poison. The house was undisturbed. The old couple seemed to have committed suicide on this auspicious day of the festival. It appeared to be a clear case of suicide. Or was it? Something troubled the DSP. The whole thing appeared to be too clinical. He again looked over the place with a toothcomb but did not find anything to cement his apprehension. However, the teacup with leftover tea attracted the attention of Vijay. Obviously someone had visited the house in the morning. Who could it be? He started probing further.

Srichand and Nirmala were married when they were very young- he 21 and she, 16 years. They hailed from a conservative family. Children were the gift of God and the concept of planning a family never crossed their mind. No wonder, they had ten children! And their favorite was their son- the youngest in the family. After 9 daughters, Srichands were blessed with their favourite child- the son, Ashok.

Srichand was a successful businessman and though not very rich, he was financially comfortable and gave his children a comfortable life. " Time and Tide wait for no man"; so also time seemed to have just flown for the Srichands. Their children grew up and inevitably were married. These children had their own

children and Srichand became grandfather many times over. But it was their son Ashok, who was their favourite. They pinned all their hopes on him but he disappointed them the most. Ashok not only left them and went to Germany but worst still, he married a German. This completely shattered them. It was left to the daughters to look after their parents.

With the children married, Srichand and his wife stayed in their flat all alone. Their daughters would visit them once a while. The servant would come in the morning and leave by noon. It was a lonely life. This dragged the Srichands to various god men. They attended discourses and talked to other devotees. During one of these visits, they met Hariprasad, a young man. Being a part time priest helped Hariprasad to come close to the couple. He started visiting the house of Srichand and became something like a family priest to the couple. As the old couple continued to miss their son, the priest advised them to perform certain rituals to appease the Gods' for the return of their son. Hariprasad played on their weakness and promised to perform puja for their son's return. Hariprasad believed that the old couple had lot of gold ornaments and as they were lonely, he planned to steal the gold, taking advantage of the couple's love for their son.

He choose the auspicious day of Dasera for his heinous act. Hariprasad borrowed his friend's scooter, went to Abids and purchased poison from a shop. He went to the flat of Srichand at about 8 in the morning for performing the puja. Nirmala served tea to Hariprasad in a cup. After tea, the priest first offered prayer to the God for the well being of Srichands son staying in Spain. He then offered prayer for the return of

their son to India. While performing the puja, Hariprasad mixed the poison in a glass. After completing the puja, he offered the "Holy Water" to Nirmala and Srichand. As she put the glass near her mouth, there was a pungent smell. Hariprasad assured her that this "Holy Water" would bring back her son to India. Blindly believing the priest, she drank a part of the poison and offered the remaining to her husband, who then consumed the remaining portion of the poison. Immediately both of them felt drowsy. Hariprasad put Srichand on the bed and Nirmala on the ground. The couple died shortly thereafter.

Hariprasad, then took the almirah keys from the dead Nirmala and meticulously searched for the gold ornaments. Despite his desperate search, he did not find any gold ornaments. After the shock of committing the murder and not finding the gold ornaments subsided,

Hariprasad systematically removed all clues and quietly left the place at about 11 in the morning. But there is no such thing as a perfect murder. Hariprasad had overlooked the cup.

The bodies were found when a daughter visited the flat the same day to greet her parents. The Police was informed. Vijay took up the case and when Hariprasad was questioned he denied visiting the flat on the day of the murder. Confronted with the evidence of the scooter, purchase of poison and other evidence, Hariprasad continued to deny the crime. But when confronted with his fingerprints on the teacup, he broke down and confessed to the double murder. He cried his heart out for killing the innocent couple but it was too late, as greed had overtaken him.

It was the end of the Srichands- a life pining for the son who never came.

