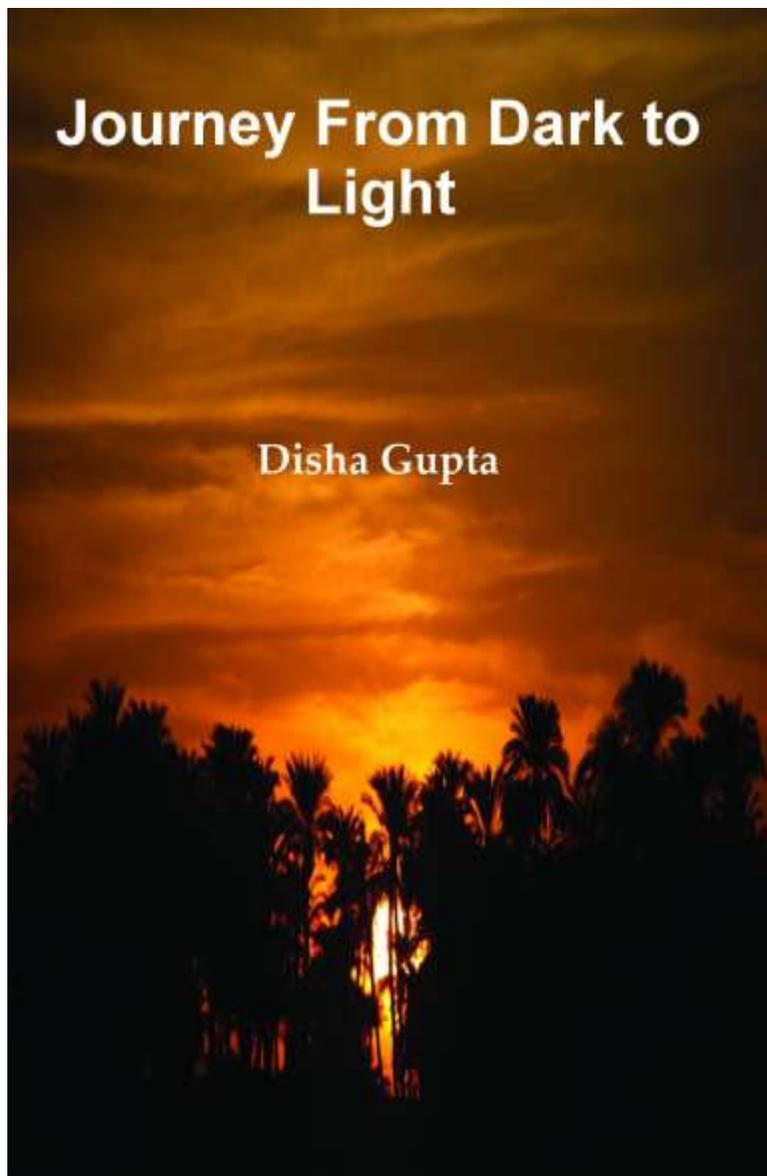


Journey From Dark to Light

Disha Gupta



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By

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Chapter 1 – The Biggest Shock

It was a rainy chilly July night when a young 17 year old girl reached Shimla and boarded down her train. Though she was intelligent enough to gain admission in any college of her choice, but she had chosen a non-descript College in Shimla for her studies. This would be the last place her pursuers would ever think her to be in and so this place was best for her to hide from them. She has been residing with her maternal uncle from the time she was 6 years old since her mother died. Her mother heart has failed because of brutal cheating by her father who after 7 years of being involved in an extra-marital relationship with her, refused to grant her a wife's status and chose his other family over her and her mother. Since, then she had been living with her uncle's family. A family which had no regard for her dreams and happiness and who have fixed her marriage with a boy of their choice as soon as she turns 18, without even asking if she is ready for marriage or not or if there is something her heart desires. Why should they have asked when the boy in concern was a minister's son who was going to grant them permission to start another illegal factory? She was just a business deal for them. They never considered her a part of family and she was allowed to live with them only on her grandpa's insistence. But he too had passed away last month and so her uncle had found the perfect opportunity to gain business benefits out of raising this liability. And that is why she had decided to finally take her life in her own hands and stop being a liability on others. Her school principal had helped her get admission in this college. And so here she was, Tarana Sharma standing on Shimla Railway Station wondering about how to reach her college hostel. She asked a passerby about the way to the hostel and he told her that there are two routes, the longer route goes through the road and will take her 1 hour to reach the hostel in foot as there was no transport facility available at this time of the night. The shorter route however

will just take 10 minutes, but it goes through the jungle and the jungle is very dangerous. But, the girl was a brave heart. She decided to take the jungle route to reach her hostel. Little did she know that this decision of hers was to change her life forever.

I was taking the short cut through the jungle to my hostel. I only had one small carry along suitcase containing a couple of dresses and books; since I never really had many belongings with me. The jungle was unusually quiet, but then it was 10 pm in night. The animals must have gone to sleep. I have been walking through the jungle for last 15 minutes, but still the hostel was nowhere in sight. Was I lost? The very thought scared me. I hastened my steps but the more forward I walked, the more I seemed to be getting lost in the jungle. I did not know for how long I continued running in circles like this, when I heard some human voices. I instantly felt relieved but next instant another fear gripped me. Who were those people and what were they doing in the jungle at this point of time. But I shrugged the thought that maybe they too were students or tourists who had lost their way. I decided to follow those voices. Within five minutes I reached the place from where the voices were coming. The sight that greeted me froze me in shock and I was rooted to the spot. My mind was telling me to run for my life but the fear was gripping my entire body and I could neither run nor shout for help.

Just about 10 feet in front of me were carcasses of two leopards and two people were bent over them with their long canine teeth dug deep inside the leopards' throats sucking their blood out. I could not believe my eyes. What kind of creatures were these people, who were drinking leopards' blood? From what I had read in books and watched on TV, my mind screamed that they could only be vampires. But, did vampires really exist? Apparently they did and were standing right in front of my eyes unless I was having some sick nightmare. But since I always have dreamless nights, I knew that this was no nightmare and in

other words I was indeed witnessing two vampires having their dinner. My only good luck was that I was not that meal, but those leopards were. Wait a minute, this thought should have scared me, but surprisingly I was only fascinated with this unusual sight. "Run Tarana Run!" was what the right part of my brain was yelling to me. But, "Wait a minute, you don't see such sights daily" was what my left hemisphere was telling me, and I was foolishly obeying my left hemisphere.

Soon the vampires finished off the leopards and looked up in my direction and fear returned again. Their faces were covered by a hood, so I could not see them, but the way they were looking in my direction, I was finally afraid for my life. "Too Late Tarana. Now you will have to pay for your foolishness" spoke my brain. One of the vampires spoke up, "She has seen us!" This was a female voice. Now the male voice responded, "We have no option! We have to kill her!" I was shocked to realize that they were discussing my murder in a manner in which humans discuss which movie to watch on the weekend. I could finally feel the terror when the two vampires nodded in agreement and started approaching me. I tried to run or scream but neither my feet nor my lungs supported me. My entire body was gripped in fear. In a fraction of second, the vampires encircled me and were about to dig their fangs in me. I shut my eyes close in fear. As I was stood there waiting for my death, I suddenly felt a pair of strong masculine arms lifting me in air, somersaulting with me in air and landing some twenty feet away from the place I originally was. I opened my eyes to see a man standing protectively in front of me facing the vampires.

"Who was he? How could he lift me up in air? Could he fly? How does he expect to fight two vampires alone?" my mind was buzzing with all these questions, when I heard the other two vampires talking to him, "We have to kill her. She has seen us." To which he replied, "When your faces are covered with your hoods, how could she have seen you?"

The other vampires continued to argue, “We can’t let her go, she will spill our secret.” But, this man had all the answers ready, “And who do you think will believe her? She is new to the city, no one knows her here and she has not even seen your faces. If she tells this to anyone, they will just think her to be mad and laugh at her.”

The vampires were getting furious, “Don’t try to protect her just because she looks like Vaidehi. She is not her”

This sentence left me confused, but before I could think, the man shouted at them, “I know, she is not her! But she is a human. And I will not let you hunt a human and lose your humanity again”

Now, this was seriously getting too confusing. I mean was this man trying to say that these vampires survive on animal blood and that they still had humanity left in them. My mind was just boggling, so I decided to give attention to their argument instead.

The vampires seem to be running out of arguments, so they just said, “But we can’t let her go like this!” To this the man replied: “What if she promise to not reveal the secret?” “But can we trust her?” asked the vampires back. The man replied: “I will take care of that.” “How?” they asked. “By joining the same college as hers” was his simple reply.

The vampires made me promise that I would keep my mouth shut. I was so scared that I just nodded my head in confirmation. They finally agreed to let me leave on the man’s guarantee. I breathed a sigh of relief and the man offered to drop me to the hostel. I was so scared that I agreed immediately. As we were walking through the forest, the questions returned back to my mind and I was desperate to

know who my savior was. Without bothering about the pleasantries, I just blurted out:

“Who are You?”

“Karan, Karan Singhania”

“I am Tarana Sharma”

“I did not ask you!”

I was shocked at such a rude response. I wondered, if I should ask him anything more, but the curiosity got better of me and I stupidly asked,

“Were they really vampires?”

He rolled his eyes at my stupidity probably thinking how I could still have a doubt, but just replied,

“It will be better if you just forget about this night as if it never happened and never think about it”

I took his reply as an affirmative answer to my question and pressed on:

“Do you know them? I mean you were talking to them as if you know them? And they never tried to even harm you. And you too were not scared of them at all. Why?”

He kept silent at these questions, and it was at this point that the realization dawned on me and I almost screamed: “Oh My God!!! Are you a vampire too?”

For the first time he turned towards me and stood before me face to face and I found myself staring at the most handsome face I have ever seen. He looked at me menacingly making me a little uncomfortable before threatening me:

“One word about tonight and I will myself kill you” he said showing his razor sharp long canines scaring me so much that I fainted on the spot.

Chapter 2 – Friends or More?

When I woke up I found myself in my bed in my hostel room. Last night seemed like a dream, only I knew it was not. And I could not believe that I was dropped to my hostel by a vampire and if last night was not a dream, then that vampire would be keeping a strict eye on me in this college itself. I can't believe that my mission to take my life in my hands has unknowingly dragged me into a supernatural world of vampires. I was scared and worried. What should I do next? Should I run away, but what if they follow me? How long will I be able to run? The best option right now seemed to take their advice and keep my mouth shut. Maybe if I keep quiet, they won't hurt me. I will have to take my chances. As it is I have nowhere else to go. There is no way I am going to return to Mumbai and let my uncle ruin my life. Becoming the meal of a vampire is preferable to me than becoming a namesake wife of a spoilt brat at the age of 18. With the decision now made, I got down from my bed and got ready for my first day in my new college and new life.

As I was walking along the corridors, I was frozen to the spot, to see the same handsome face of that vampire in front of me. I was scared what he will do next. I was just rooted to the spot in fear and he was approaching me. He stopped barely a breath's distance away and whispered, "Act normally or else people will get suspicious." Saying this he walked away leaving me scared, shocked and angry. Angry because how does he expect me to behave normally around a vampire? Does he think I have spent my entire life around vampires walking in broad daylight attending lectures with me? Not even in my wildest fantasies had I ever thought that I would one day have to get used to presence of vampires around me. I started walking towards my class in anger when I bumped into a girl who looked like the college bimbo to me. Her books fell down and she started shouting at me for being so clumsy and careless. I could not

understand her such an angry attitude. What was wrong with this city? Vampires roam around freely here and humans behave so arrogantly. The rude girl's words brought me out of my thoughts. She was shouting at me:

"How dare you collide with Mini? Now I will have to send my clothes to laundry and take a bath again?"

"Excuse me!!" I was shocked at such rudeness.

"What Excuse me? Low lives like you should not pollute us rich people's atmosphere. You should not be allowed to study in the same college as me, and here you are ruining my dress. I think it would be better if I just donate this dress to you as a charity. I am sure you never had something even half as good to wear", Mini continued to ramble.

It was too much for me to tolerate. But before I could open my mouth to reply her back, one tomboyish girl came there and addressed her sternly:

"Of course she does not own these silly dresses, because she prefers to invest her money in buying books and increasing her knowledge as she does not like spending three years in a row stuck in one class like you"

I could not help myself from laughing at these words. And the three times in a row failure Miss rudeness personified Mini walked off in anger making me and the new girl laugh even more. The new girl introduced herself as Tani and we both went off to the class. There she introduced me to her childhood friend Rocky, who was also her boy friend. They both seemed to be a fun-loving good at heart couple. Our chemistry class was about to start so everyone took their seats. Tani sat with Rocky in the middle row. Mini was one of the back benchers, and I sat at the empty bench in the front row. The bell for the class rung and everyone settled in their seats and only seat next to me remained vacant but just a second before teacher's arrival he came and sat beside me. I could not control myself this time and asked him angrily:

“Why are you after me? Can’t you sit somewhere else?”

“Can’t you see all seats are occupied, otherwise I have no interest sitting next to you”, he replied with an attitude.

I knew he was right, but my ego did not allow me to accept defeat silently, so I shot back, “I very well know that you are doing this on purpose to keep an eye on me”

“If you know it, then why are you asking me? Now stop wasting my time and concentrate on the lecture. I have read this subject many times, but for you this is your first time. And I am sure you don’t want to fail like that back-bencher bimbo.” He replied with so much attitude and confidence that I could not help myself from admiring his wittiness.

The next of the lecture passed with me trying to concentrate on the lecture, but invariably my eyes would move in his direction. Undoubtedly he was the best looking guy I had ever seen. Add to that his wit and attitude and he was the perfect guy for any girl to boast as her boyfriend. The only problem was that he wasn’t exactly a human. In fact, he was a vampire. I was staring at him while day dreaming about him, when our teacher Miss Kapoor called out to ask me a question. I was startled from my dream and I obviously had no clue as to what teacher was teaching or even what question had she asked. I stood up a little scared and was about to say sorry to the teacher, when I saw Karan quickly scribbling benzoic acid on a piece of paper and sliding it towards me. I just blurted out “benzoic acid”, without even knowing what question teacher has asked. The teacher looked disappointed in losing out on an opportunity to scold me on the first day and so returned back to her teaching, while I sat down heaving a sigh of relief. I gave a Thank You smile to Karan who just gave me a bored look. I so don’t get this guy. One minute he would help me and next moment he would treat me like I don’t exist. Maybe its something to do with his vampire genes.

“God Tarana what are you doing? You are day dreaming about a vampire! What’s wrong with you?” my brain asked me.

“Exactly! What’s wrong with you?” asked Karan in a whisper.

I was shocked. Did he just read my mind? And does that mean he read all my other thoughts too when I was day dreaming about him? Oh God! I felt so embarrassed, while he just gave me a wicked smirk as if he was laughing at my embarrassment. The class finally got over and I just rushed out of it in embarrassment without giving him a second look. I was talking with Tani and Rocky in the corridor when I heard Mini outrageously flirting with someone.

“OOH Baby! You are the hottest guy in the college and I am the hottest girl of the college, so we are a match made in heaven!” she was saying to the guy.

“Sorry not interested!” I heard the now annoyingly familiar voice of Karan reply back.

A part of me wanted to laugh out loud imagining the expressions on her face, but the other part of me was suddenly conscious of his presence. He was standing just with his back facing my back. But the other part of me found more amusement as Mini refused to give up on Karan and continued to flirt with him:

“Oh Come on baby! Don’t you know that every boy of this college wants to date Mini, but Mini dates only the best, and you are the best!” Mini was going on and on about her so called oomph factor, while I was enjoying the expressions Rocky and Tani were having on their faces while mimicking her.

“I know I am the best, but unfortunately you are not!” Karan replied back to her, making the three of us laugh out loud.

Mini heard and saw us laughing and got mad. But she chose to vent out her anger entirely on me. She pulled me roughly by my shoulders to face her and yelled at me. But before I or Tani could stop her, it was Karan who shouted at her:

“How dare you speak to her like this?” he asked her angrily.
“Why are you favoring this low life? She dared to laugh at me.”
Mini snapped back.

“You are yourself making a joke out of you, it not her fault. But there is no way I am going to tolerate anyone insulting my girl friend” Karan said threateningly. But his words shocked me as well as Tani and Rocky. I could not believe that he was actually claiming me to be his girl friend. I turned back to stand beside him and facing Mini. Mini too was shocked and asked:

“How can this low life be your girl friend? She just arrived in this city yesterday? For how long has she been your girl friend?

“For ever. We both came from the same city yesterday and have known each other forever.” He told her a white lie.

“I do not believe this. Prove that she really is your girl friend”
Mini was not ready to accept defeat.

“Though it is none of your concern, I will still prove it to you.”
With that he took out an old photo of mine in a Victorian gown from his wallet and shoved it under Mini’s face. “Here, now tell me why would I carry her picture with me if she would not have been my girl friend?”

I suddenly had a flash of last night where those other two vampires had argued with Karan saying I was not Vaidehi, I just look like her. I finally understood what Karan had done. He had escaped Mini’s clutches using Vaidehi’s photo to claim that I was his girl friend. As soon as I figured it all out in my mind, I felt a hand circle around my waist and I saw Karan pulling myself closer to him and then walking away from there dragging me along. Once we were safely out of Mini’s reach he quickly let go of me. But by this time I had gone too mad at him. I shouted at him:

“What do you think of yourself? What was the need of dragging me in all this? Why did you tell Mini in front of whole college that I am your girlfriend?”

“So that no other girl makes the stupid mistake of falling for me. With you, I am safe as you know my truth so will mind your own business if you have any brains”, he replied arrogantly.

His arrogance never ceases to amaze me. But I had not forgotten my anger and so told him that I won't put up with his behavior of his and this lie. But he threatened that I would have to if I want to remain alive. Before I could say anything more to him, Tani and Rocky came there and started questioning me:

“Hey you never told us that you already have a boyfriend and that he too has joined college along with you?”

“I...I never got a chance”, I mumbled.

“Actually she is too shy to talk about us”, Karan said adding to my already boiling anger.

“So, are you also staying in hostel?” Rocky asked Karan.

“No I moved here with my parents. They are starting a new business here. I have my own house at the other end of the city” replied Karan.

So were those vampires his parents? I could not believe it. Did that mean that he had actually fought with his parents last night to save my life? All my anger towards him melted at this possible realization and my heart was filled with gratitude for him. My chain of thoughts was broken by Tani as she was asking us to attend a party at her house in the evening to celebrate her elder sister's engagement with Manish, Rocky's cousin. Before I could say anything, Karan had agreed that we will be going there. He promised to pick me up at 6 pm from my hostel.

As promised, Karan came to pick me up at 6 pm, but instead of waiting for me at the hostel gate, he directly jumped into my room from the window shocking the living daylight out of me. All my forgotten anger returned and I shouted at him:

“Can't you at least behave as a normal human? First you announced me as your girl-friend without asking me, then

blackmailed me into carrying on with this white lie, then you promised Tani that we will go to the party together again without asking me, and now you just jumped into my room instead of waiting outside for me. At this rate you would blackmail me to sleep with you next.”

I realized that I have spoken too much by the sudden change in his expressions.

“Do you really think, I would do that?” he said while moving closer towards me.

I was scared and started moving back without answering his question, while he kept moving towards me. Soon I found myself pressed against the wall and he was standing dangerously close to me. He brought his Face close to mine and as his breath caressed my face, I began losing my senses. He brought his face even closer and my eyes automatically closed themselves savoring his closeness. He blew off the hair strands falling on my face and I felt shivers running through my spine. I could feel him moving southwards and rest with his lips almost touching my lips. My lips parted themselves in anticipation, but he suddenly moved back, shocking me at my own conduct. I saw him giving me a devilish grin. He smirked giving me a naughty wink and said,

“See, if I want to sleep with you, I won’t have to blackmail you. You would give in yourself. You can’t resist my charms baby, even after knowing what I am!”

I could not believe that I actually lost my senses and that his closeness had such an effect on me. He was right, something was definitely wrong with me. Even after knowing that he was a vampire, I could not control myself around him. What was in him that attracted me so much? I should run miles away from him, but my heart actually wanted to get closer to him. Was it just looks, or the fact that he saved my life from his own parents and even stopped Mini from insulting me? I did not know the

answer. Karan Singhania was creating havoc with my senses and my sensibilities. And I could see no way out. Even more worrisome was the fact that my heart did not even seem to want a way out. With a sigh, I asked him to let's just go to that party.

We reached the party and Tani and Rocky welcomed us. They told us that right now there's a youngster's party going on and the elders will be joining later for the ring ceremony. I and Karan stood in a corner looking at people enjoying drinks and dancing on the dance floor. Honestly I had enough of these parties in my uncle's house and they bored me to death. Karan too seemed to be feeling bored. I thought that the time was right to ask him about Vaidehi, though I was apprehensive about his reaction. But I still gathered courage and asked:

"Errmmm... Karan, can I ask you something?"

"What if I say no?" he questioned back clearly showing his complete lack of interest in talking to me, but my curiosity got the better of me and I still continued,

"But I want to know about Vaidehi"

"And you think your friend's sister's engagement party is the best place to talk about my ex-girl friend?" he questioned in mock shock.

"I don't like such parties. They bore me too much", I replied back, refusing to be put off. "So tell me about her." I pressed on.

"There's nothing to tell. We used to love each other 200 years back. But her father found us out and sentenced me to death, but she managed to set me free but her father came to know so set fire to her room. I went to rescue her, and died along with her"

His careless admission of his own death shocked me, but I still wanted more answers, "So is that when you became a vampire? Who made you a vampire, your parents? I mean those vampires

I met in jungle last night? And what about Vaidehi? Why did you not make her a vampire too along with you?" I continued to ask.

"Do you have any plans of becoming an examination committee head, by any chance? You never get tired of asking questions, do you?" he exclaimed.

"That's not the answer to my questions. And wait a minute, you said that her father sentenced you to death, was he some king or something?" I asked some more questions.

"Why don't you use Google search and write your thesis on me yourself." He replied rudely.

"Why would Google give results about you? Are vampires registered on the net or something?" I asked in shock. Having come face to face with a vampire, nothing seemed to be impossible to me now. But he just rolled his eyes and said, "I meant my history!"

I was confused, but before I could ask him any more questions, Tani and Rocky pulled us to the dance floor. As soon as we reached the dance floor, the DJ suddenly changed the track from dance numbers to a romantic number I was uncomfortable dancing and that too with Karan, but he just held out his hand in front of me and I had no option but to hold his hand. He held my hand in his and looked straight in my eyes. The moment our eyes locked, the world seemed to vanish for me. It was just him and me. We started swaying to the song having a close romantic dance, with me coming in his arms every time he would twirl me. Each time our bodies touched, I felt electric sparks flowing through me. He gave me another twirl and then held me by my waist. His touch did some shocking things to my system and I felt some unknown desires waking inside me.

"Oh why does he have so much effect on me?" As if reading my mind, he suddenly started distancing himself from me and mercifully the DJ ended the song. I came back to the reality and Tani and Rocky came and complemented us on our awesome

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