

THE STORY OF AN HOUR

Written by

Sagnik Patra

Based on the Short story by the same title by Kate Choplin

1 EXT. SUBURBAN KOLKATA - EVENING

A busy street in a middle-class residential neighbourhood. Street lights are flickering. In the background, we see a bunch of modest bungalows. Two 10-year-old kids are riding their bikes when suddenly they crash into each other. One of them helps the other up. They seem to have no injuries. The camera very slowly zooms in as they help each other and dust off their clothes. In the background, we see an old house with a small window on the first floor right next to the main door. In that window - standing - is MRS. BANERJEE, 35-40 years old, wearing a light blue saree, with a 'staring into the distance' kind of look. The camera slowly zooms in on her and after a certain time, she moves back into the room.

2 INT. BANERJEE HOUSE - BEDROOM - EVENING

It's a fairly small room with a double bed, a dressing table, a wooden shelf with a glass case and a ragged recliner. On the shelf, there are framed photographs of MRS BANERJEE and MR BANERJEE. They are very formal photographs and look very old. Inside the shelf, we see a bunch of showpieces gathering dust. MRS BANERJEE opens the glass door of the shelf and picks up a wooden idol of a woman greeting with her hands put together. Mrs. Banerjee looks bored, she picks up another showpiece and examines it and after a while, she closes the glass door. She roams around the house aimlessly finally stopping in front of the bookshelf in the living room.

3 INT. BANERJEE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

She takes out a book and leafs through it. Her neighbour calls her from outside the living room window.

NEIGHBOR

Hey MRS BANERJEE! How are you?

This neighbour is a 40-year-old woman wearing jogging gear. She is jogging in one place where she stands while talking to MRS BANERJEE. MRS BANERJEE doesn't answer, instead, she just smiles politely at her.

NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

Come on out! Let's go for a jog.  
Beautiful day! No sweat! No sweat  
at all.

MRS BANERJEE just laughs and nods her head.

NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

I see. I see. I gotta go. Another  
time then.

She jogs away from the house. MRS BANERJEE puts the book back on the shelf. She looks at the wall clock and then plops down on the sofa. She looks at her reflection on the black screen of the TV in front of her for a while and then she picks up the remote and turns it on. The first thing that pops on the TV are the opening credits of a horror film.

The protagonist of the film wakes up from a nightmare - sweating profusely, breathing heavily and grabbing his chest in pain. He stumbles around the bedside table and then takes out an inhaler from its drawer and proceeds to use it.

4 INT. BANERJEE HOUSE - BEDROOM - EVENING

While watching that MRS BANERJEE suddenly gets reminded of something so she stands up and goes to the bedroom. From inside the dressing table drawer, she takes out a bottle of pills. She takes a pill using the glass of water that is sitting on the dressing table. As she is drinking the water - she noticed through the bedroom window that a car is coming towards the main gate of her house. The car stops right outside her gate. A man and a woman exit from that car. The woman is MITA, MRS BANERJEE's younger sister. She is around 25 years old - wearing a black saree and numerous bangles on her wrists. The man is ALOKESH, a friend of MR BANERJEE. He's around 50 years old - wearing a khaki shirt and corduroy pants. MRS BANERJEE noticed that her Maid, TUMPA, is also coming towards the gate along with them. Though she was anticipating their arrival, she stayed still until they rang the bell. MRS BANERJEE walks out of the bedroom.

5 INT. BANERJEE HOUSE - OUTSIDE MAIN DOOR - EVENING

MRS BANERJEE opens the main door. MITA and ALOKESH are standing still - not saying anything. MRS BANERJEE has a perplexed look on her face. Suddenly, MITA hugs Mrs. Banerjee and starts to cry her heart out. MRS BANERJEE consoles her confusingly. TUMPA was about to enter the house when ALOKESH stops her and says

ALOKESH

You don't have to work today, go home.

TUMPA looks at MRS BANERJEE for approval. But MRS BANERJEE signals her to go inside. MRS BANERJEE then glares at ALOKESH for some answers while MITA is still sobbing on her shoulders.

ALOKESH (CONT'D)

Let's go inside.

6

INT. BANERJEE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM+KITCHEN - EVENING

TUMPA goes to the kitchen and starts washing the dirty dishes. MITA, ALOKESH and MRS BANERJEE enter the living room. MITA has calmed down a bit.

MITA  
(to MRS BANERJEE) Didi, sit down.

MRS BANERJEE sits down on the sofa. ALOKESH turns off the TV and stands in front of the living room window looking out. MITA sits down next to MRS BANERJEE. MITA fiddles with her fingers and then looks at MRS BANERJEE with sorrowful eyes.

MRS BANERJEE  
What wrong?

MITA  
Didi, there was an accident at the railway station today, where Dada (MR BANERJEE) works.

It starts to dawn on MRS BANERJEE that something is gravely wrong.

MITA (CONT'D)  
Didi...Dada(MR BANERJEE) is - no more. (breaking into tears)

MRS BANERJEE is shocked. Her entire face is frozen except for her lips. Her lips are quivering. She turns to ALOKESH who is looking right at her.

ALOKESH  
I...I checked the list 5 times and then I called them.

MRS BANERJEE's vision starts to fail her. Everything is blurry. She immediately started wailing uncontrollably. MITA held her tightly but she still slipped down onto the floor.

AT THE KITCHEN:

Listening to MRS BANERJEE's crying - TUMPA stops in her tracks. For a second she contemplated going to the living room - that's when a crow perched on an electric wire right outside the kitchen window. She looks at the crow and then she looks at the dishes and then she resumes her work.

BACK AT THE  
LIVING ROOM:

MITA is consoling her older sister all the while controlling her own tears. ALOKESH crouches down next to MRS BANERJEE.

ALOKESH (CONT'D)

Bouma (MRS BANERJEE), There's nothing I can say that will ease your pain or mine, But I know this: my friend loved you with all of his heart even though he didn't show it often.

MRS BANERJEE doesn't say anything. Her head is in her hands.

ALOKESH (CONT'D)

Would you like some water?

MITA was about to stop ALOKESH before he finished that sentence but he says it anyway and signals TUMPA to bring a glass of water. When ALOKESH turned back his head he saw MRS BANERJEE looking directly at him. Her face is expressionless. TUMPA brings a glass of water and hands it to MRS BANERJEE. MRS BANERJEE looks at the glass of water for a while - the shaking of TUMPA's hands has been making waves on the water. MRS BANERJEE is sniffing as she focuses on the water.

Suddenly she stands up. She looks at MITA - then ALOKESH - then TUMPA - and then she walks off into her bedroom and closes the door.

7

INT. BANERJEE HOUSE - BEDROOM - EVENING

MRS BANERJEE locks the bedroom door. She goes to the shelf and picks up a framed photograph of her and MR BANERJEE at a hill station. She looks at it for a while and then cleans off the dust on the wooden frame. She takes the photograph and sits down on the recliner which faces the bedroom window.

She puts the photograph on her lap and looks outside the window. The sun is almost below the horizon. The sky is reddish orange. The streets are not that crowded anymore. There's a short coconut tree near the house whose leaves are dancing in the wind making a silhouette on MRS BANERJEE's face. A sob comes up to her throat and she quivers with grief and sorrow - struggling to let it out - she swallows it back in.

She sits there motionless. Her greyish hair is falling on her face and getting stuck because of the tears. Outside the window, she focuses her eyes on the treetops. The green-coloured leaves sway in the wind joyfully. She focuses her sight on one leaf which doesn't move. Suddenly a strong wind comes and blows it apart from its branch and it flies away.

MRS BANERJEE's expression is slowly changing. She felt as if she is realizing something. Her tears have stopped but she is still sniffing.

**The window is a bit bigger now.**

MRS BANERJEE wipes her tears away and focuses her attention on a cloud this time. A lonely piece of cloud floating aimlessly. She observes as the wind tears apart the cloud into small pieces. She looked back at the photograph on her lap. For a moment she is content that she is happy in it but then she focuses on her husband who has an expressionless - indifferent face. The photograph comes to life and her husband exits the frame - annoyed. She looks up.

**The window is even bigger now. It is almost a quarter of the bedroom wall.**

MRS BANERJEE's expression changes again. This time it's fear mixed with guilt. She senses something approaching her through the window. Her lips part and she whispers under her breath:

MRS BANERJEE

Free...

But she comes back to her senses. She looks back at the photograph - her eyes watery - then she looks back at the window. The window is now a mirror (the whole scene is seen on this mirror) - reflecting the contents of the room - including MRS BANERJEE and her chair. The light inside the room changes and a young MR BANERJEE enters, wearing a Kurta and pyjama. He goes to the shelf and picks up a small box. He then hands it over to MRS BANERJEE.

MRS BANERJEE (CONT'D)

What is this?

MR BANERJEE

Open it.

MRS BANERJEE opens the box - inside she finds a set of gold earrings. We hear the sounds of happiness from MRS BANERJEE but her expression remains the same - grief.

MR BANERJEE (CONT'D)

Happy Anniversary!

A slight rueful smile forms on MRS BANERJEE's face. Suddenly, MR BANERJEE picks up the pace and starts organizing his luggage.

MR BANERJEE (CONT'D)

Listen, I have to head out now.  
I'll be back in a couple of days.  
There's some kind of protest at the station.

MRS BANERJEE doesn't say anything - she just blankly stares at the window.

MR BANERJEE (CONT'D)

Do you have money for groceries? Do you need some?

MRS BANERJEE looks at MR BANERJEE.

MRS BANERJEE

I'm thinking of going to Shantiniketan.

MR BANERJEE replies while packing his bag.

MR BANERJEE

Mmm...hmm Why?

MRS BANERJEE

You'll not be here so I thought I could go for a vacation.

MR BANERJEE

You don't need to go alone. We'll go after I come back. This year might be a bit cramped. But let's see.

MRS BANERJEE

But you don't like Shantiniketan.

MR BANERJEE

We'll go somewhere else then.

MRS BANERJEE

Why can't I go alone?

MR BANERJEE

Who's gonna look after the house? What are you talking about? How can you go alone? (Laughing)

MR BANERJEE finishes his packing - puts his hand on MRS BANERJEE's shoulders and says

MR BANERJEE (CONT'D)

Take care.

And he exits the room.

**The window is even larger now. It's half the bedroom wall.**

MRS BANERJEE's expression changes drastically. She starts to breathe heavily. With each passing second she feels herself transforming - realizing.

8 INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Meanwhile, MITA and ALOKESH are right outside her room. MITA has her ear on MRS BANERJEE's bedroom door. She's trying to listen in.

MITA  
Didi! Come out Didi, please!

ALOKESH is sitting on the sofa - looking at the floor.

ALOKESH  
Leave her alone for a while.

MITA  
It's dangerous for her to be alone right now. You know how her heart is.

MITA (CONT'D)  
(yelling to the door) Didi, open the door, I beg you. You'll make yourself sick.

9 INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

MRS BANERJEE is still sitting on the recliner - breathing heavily.

MRS BANERJEE  
Go away. I am not making myself ill.

In an instant fear washes over her. The sky outside the window turns blue. She looks at the sky - there are no clouds - no wind - and the treetops are still. Birds are chirping away. She slowly stood up from her chair. Walked towards the window. Outside, her neighbour was jogging. She waves at MRS BANERJEE. MRS BANERJEE waves back. She looks at the edge of the window and touches it. It immediately crumbles.

MRS BANERJEE (CONT'D)  
(under her breath) Free...Body and Soul free...

**The window is now the whole wall. There is no wall.**

CUT TO:

MRS BANERJEE stands up from her chair instantly and opens the bedroom door. Her expression shows triumph and victory.

10

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MRS BANERJEE kisses MITA on the forehead and hugs her tightly. MITA is surprised by the change in MRS BANERJEE. She is a bit afraid.

MITA

What were you doing in there?

MRS BANERJEE

Waiting. I didn't know I was waiting.

ALOKESH is standing at the door - about to leave - he is wearing his shoes. He looks at both MITA and MRS BANERJEE and smiles. MRS BANERJEE sees him from the corner of her eye and shakes his hand.

ALOKESH

If you need anything-

MRS BANERJEE

I know.

They both started to head out.

MITA

I'm staying today. I'm making your favorite - tangra macher jhal.

MRS BANERJEE smiles. ALOKESH opens the door. ALOKESH and MRS BANERJEE are now standing at the house's main door - in front of the main gate.

ALOKESH

Okay then see y-

That's when both ALOKESH and MRS BANERJEE hear the distinct sound of the main gate opening. ALOKESH turned - shocked. It is MR BANERJEE opening the main gate quite casually - just like returning from work.

MR BANERJEE

Shuncho! (Honey) There was this huge accident I had to take care of- Hey ALOKESH! what are you doing here?

ALOKESH tried to shield MRS BANERJEE from seeing her husband but he was too late.

Wide Angle from the street: MRS BANERJEE held her chest in pain and dropped on the floor. Everybody rushed towards her.

The Street lights stopped flickering.

The End.