



JESSICA

Under the apple tree, he planted a kiss on her right red cheek against the chill breeze and hugged her tightly to play her the love song of his heart, she slumbered on his shoulders. Jessica was asleep until the next morning, Major Matthew saw his little angel's beautiful face shrouded inside her Kabul merino and he bade farewell to Maria, his wife.

Jessica woke up with the reminiscence of her childhood waiting for David's return. She was reading her father's diary "...her legs were dipped into the heap of rice on my leaf plate making two small pits allowing me to pour the ghee to blend with dhal" Jessica recalled how her father used to emulate female dancers to console her mother after a fight and how she wished to get a Barbie doll and was fond of the Nestle Milkmaid.

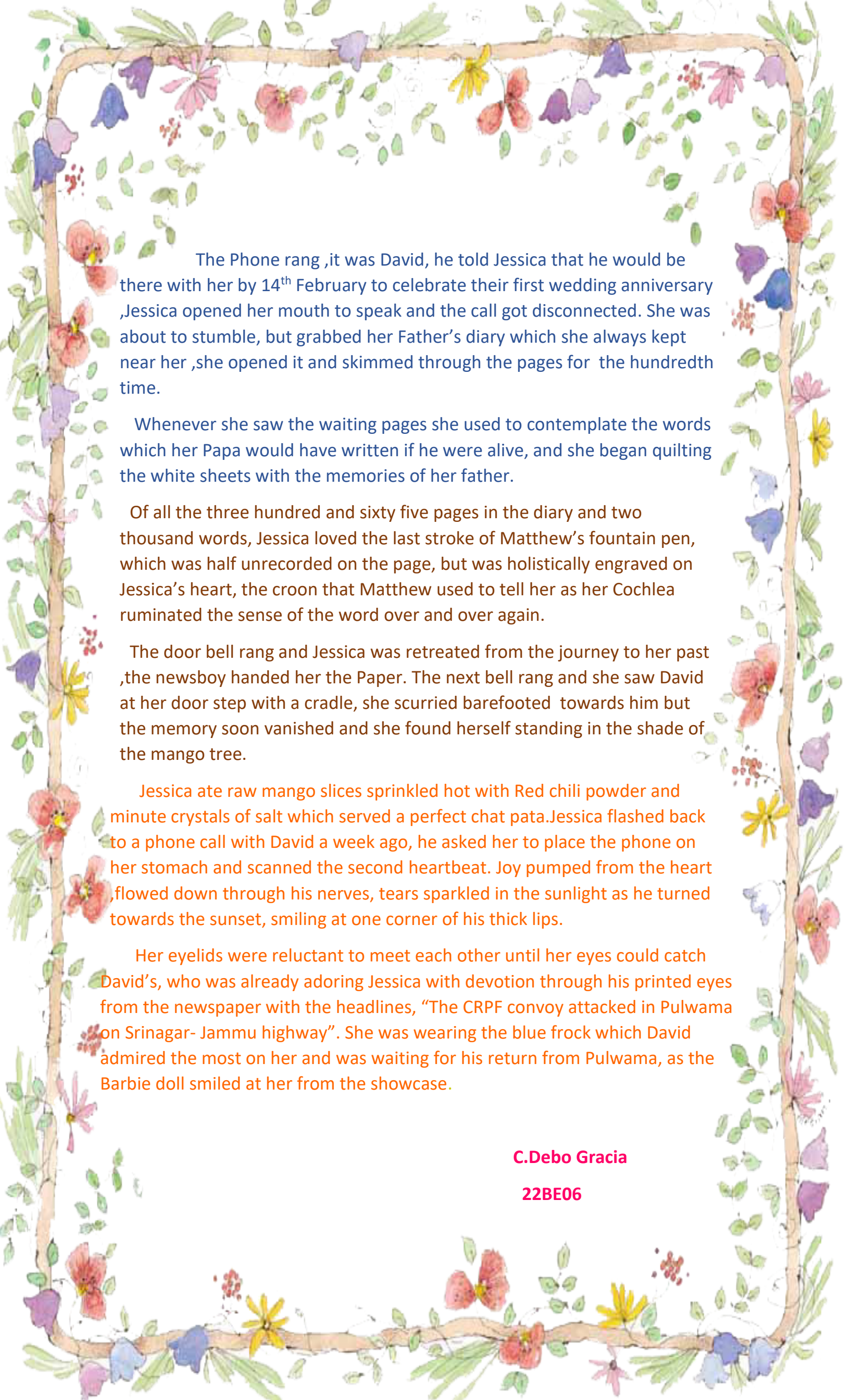
Jessica thought of the indelible day of her life when she waited for her father's return, he came as he had promised but packed up in a glass cage smiling and feeling proud that he had kept his word with her by getting her favorite doll and the toothsome tin of milkmaid .

28th July 1999, Circled big with a green marker on the calendar announced her Papa's arrival, Jessica saw her father through the aperture of her door, his face was thoroughly pale and rigid to smile at her, and he was having the Tricolored Flag spread over his body.

The Anthocyanin faded as Jessica saw the petals flying across her face fleeing to hug Major Matthew's coffin. She got carried away to the Independence day at her school for which Matthew was invited as the chief guest ,her heart flew up in the air as the National Flag unfurled and the Pink petals gently pecked her chin, Jessica's eyes scintillated with ecstasy to have Matthew at her school, she introduced him to her friends and they took pictures which remained close to her heart .

This time Matthew couldn't hoist her on his shoulders and throw her into the air to catch her and admire her as she giggled into the sky until the blue yonder turned pink. Jessica was told that her father was inside the air-conditioned box ,since he was tired after the Kargil. Jessica tried to get inside the box to comfort her tired father and sing his favorite song but to her dismay the box was compact enough only for her Papa ,so she requested John to increase the chillness of the room .

Jessica couldn't resist herself from asking Colonel John, ... "Uncle John, why are they lamenting after a great victory ,is the day not for a merry celebration? "Colonel John tugged his hot tears inside his eyes, forbidding the flood with lid gates before it could bathe her doll, and handed it over to Jessica, she looked at it ,the doll Smiled at her and that became an epic reply to her question.



The Phone rang ,it was David, he told Jessica that he would be there with her by 14th February to celebrate their first wedding anniversary ,Jessica opened her mouth to speak and the call got disconnected. She was about to stumble, but grabbed her Father’s diary which she always kept near her ,she opened it and skimmed through the pages for the hundredth time.

Whenever she saw the waiting pages she used to contemplate the words which her Papa would have written if he were alive, and she began quilting the white sheets with the memories of her father.

Of all the three hundred and sixty five pages in the diary and two thousand words, Jessica loved the last stroke of Matthew’s fountain pen, which was half unrecorded on the page, but was holistically engraved on Jessica’s heart, the croon that Matthew used to tell her as her Cochlea ruminated the sense of the word over and over again.

The door bell rang and Jessica was retreated from the journey to her past ,the newsboy handed her the Paper. The next bell rang and she saw David at her door step with a cradle, she scurried barefooted towards him but the memory soon vanished and she found herself standing in the shade of the mango tree.

Jessica ate raw mango slices sprinkled hot with Red chili powder and minute crystals of salt which served a perfect chat pata.Jessica flashed back to a phone call with David a week ago, he asked her to place the phone on her stomach and scanned the second heartbeat. Joy pumped from the heart ,flowed down through his nerves, tears sparkled in the sunlight as he turned towards the sunset, smiling at one corner of his thick lips.

Her eyelids were reluctant to meet each other until her eyes could catch David’s, who was already adoring Jessica with devotion through his printed eyes from the newspaper with the headlines, “The CRPF convoy attacked in Pulwama on Srinagar- Jammu highway”. She was wearing the blue frock which David admired the most on her and was waiting for his return from Pulwama, as the Barbie doll smiled at her from the showcase.

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