

## The Twilight Valor

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Maya, with eyes that danced like the shimmering waters of a serene pond, a nose sculpted with precision, and cheeks reminiscent of soft, ripened peaches, was fuller and of a shorter stature than many Bengali women. Yet her allure was undeniable. In Bengal, anyone could mistake her for a model or film actress. But her physical beauty paled in comparison to the beauty of her soul. Her deep love for her family, especially her daughter Rini, shone brightly. Her kindness reached out to all, and her words were always gentle and compassionate. Those fortunate enough to converse with her couldn't help but be captivated by her grace.

Amit, Maya's husband, may not have had riches, but he celebrated life passionately. The couple, prudent in their spending, prioritized their desires. Maya harbored a dream: to buy Rini a beautiful gold earring and chain. Rini, now in the 2nd grade, drew many suggestions from relatives about the Bengali tradition of adorning girls with gold during festive times. To make this dream a reality, Maya and Amit saved diligently, making their pursuit even more heartfelt.

The year was 1989, and the bustling city of Bardhaman echoed with life. Determined, Maya took young Rini to Parijat, their favored jewelry store, named after the divine tree symbolizing peace and prosperity. The ambiance mirrored a bygone era, where advanced security systems were a luxury. At Parijat, instead of the usual Nepali guard with a traditional kukri, a Bengali guard, armed only with a baton, sat casually at the entrance. The store was alive with the vibrant colors of saris and the murmurs of patrons, with Maya and Rini fitting right in.

Upon entering, the dazzling jewelry seemed to dance in the afternoon sun. Display cases showcased masterful designs, from intricate gold necklaces to delicate diamond earrings. The store's ambiance, with the gentle tinkle of silver bells and the gleam of gold, was electric.

Amidst this beauty, Maya placed her bag nearby. Engrossed in a necklace, she felt a gentle shove. Reaching for her bag, she noticed it agape. Fear gripped her; an expensive, sentimental gold ring she'd brought for repair was missing. Her gaze landed on a woman, baby in tow, making a hasty exit. Connecting the dots, Maya gave chase.

Bardhaman's streets, alive with vendors and rickshaws, bore witness to Maya's relentless pursuit. The woman, perhaps slowed by her infant, made a desperate choice—tossing the ring onto the street. Retrieving it, Maya's emotions swirled: relief at finding the ring, concern for the thief's baby, and then, a gut-wrenching realization—where was Rini?

Blinded by adrenaline and the ring's sentimental value, Maya momentarily lost sight of her true treasure. How could she, a devout follower of Ma Kali, falter like this? Just as panic peaked, Rini's voice

anchored her back to reality. Maya embraced Rini, their bond unshakable. Whispers of gratitude and reassurance flowed between them.

Hand in hand, they boarded a rickshaw. The sun's descent painted the skies, and a comforting breeze enveloped Maya. The day's trials deepened her appreciation for life's intangibles. She reflected on Tagore's words:

You shall relieve me that is not my prayer,  
May I hold strength to relieve others.  
On the happy days my offerings to you submissively,  
On the suffering nights when the world is against,  
May I not lose faith in you.

Today, not only did Maya's faith in the divine protector, Ma Kali, intensify, but so did her gratitude for life's genuine treasures.

**The End**