

KAYAYA AND OTHER TALES

PART 2

SHRIKANT MISHRA



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Kaya the Conundrum

It was about twelve years since Kayaya's death. Ragav, the limpid boy, often visited the cemetery where Kayaya was buried. His parents were not congenial company, and were forced to put Ragav in the boarding, of the same school as they parted ways in life. From the school the cemetery was only a few blocks, where Ragav spent peaceful, lonely weekends. He took his books and Tiffin and would eat at the cemetery as he did his school home work. Ragav was a topper type and was a teacher's pet.

Dr. Mark Berson, who was the surgeon who did Rajesh's liver transplant at the clinic, was a specialist in Cell and Molecular Biology. He, while removing Kayaya's liver for transplantation, had removed liver specific mesenchymal stem cells and frozen it in liquid nitrogen. When Mark moved to Nebraska, USA, to his own laboratory, he took all his samples from the clinic including Kayaya's mesenchymal stem cells.

Near Mark's laboratory, in down town Nebraska was a fertility clinic led by Dr. Mrs. Janette Kaplan, a specialist with sharp acumen. Dr. Kaplan was an embryologist and knew Mark by his good reputation. Janette was an active listener, had empathy

for her patients, maintained good communication skills in multiple languages, and was an emotional strength to her clinic. Janette on a daily basis did embryo transfer, egg fertilization, egg retrieval by super ovulation, sperm selection, in vitro fertilization culture, assisted hatching etc. She would help create viable embryos to be used in IVF or would freeze them for later use.

One day Mark chanced to visit Janette's clinic and invited her for lunch. At lunch he cajoled her thus, "Janette, I have liver mesenchymal stem cells of a tribal girl from India, who was only nine years old. Just before death, she donated her liver and we did a liver transplant. This girl impressed me so much; I want to do something with her mesenchymal stem cells. Can you advise?" Janette heard this impressive story and told him softly, "Do you want me to clone her?" Mark gave a soft nod in utter amazement! "Janette, if you help me reconstruct Kayaya, I will do all your surgery." said Mark. Janette replied with alacrity, "Mark, you know this is a lot of work, and may be has never been done before. I have to take viable eggs, e-nucleate them, purify the somatic nuclei from the mesenchymal stem cells that you will give me, perform nuclear transfer to the egg ghosts, culture them in vitro, transplant into a surrogate mother, and hope that the embryo is viable. If the embryo is non-viable I have to soon perform a suction to remove fetal placental tissue. This is an extremely difficult procedure.

Mark looked visibly dejected and pouted as the brusque Dr. Kaplan said she would try. She requested him to get the samples to her clinic. "Also Mark, you need to get me consent from the police department, without which I would have fear of losing my clinic, and certification!" said Janette. Mark said, "Fine." as he left Janette's clinic. The next day Mark visited the office of the police chief. The chief Mr. John Johnson was a tall, handsome, lanky officer, who was sipping his morning tea when Dr. Mark Berson arrived at his office. Dr. Berson was ushered into the

chief's office. The chief said, "Good morning! How can I help you Dr. Berson?" Dr. Berson took his time as he slowly told the sheriff the Kayaya episode and how he and Dr. Kaplan's clinic wanted to re-construct Kayaya. The sheriff was in disbelief as he said, "Are you serious!, can you actually bring this girl to life again?" Dr. Berson replied, "Yes sir! We want to try". "Is this a test tube baby, or human cloning?" asked the sheriff. Dr. Berson looked straight in the sheriff's eyes and said, "Both". The sheriff continued, "Under what conditions can the police department give an O.K Dr. Berson?" Dr. Berson replied, "There is no complication, no aliter motivation, no anti-social activity, no money involved, no cupidity, we are doing this only for speed of science. The girl in question is long dead, in a different country, and there will be no family complications too! This may be the first time somatic cell nuclear transfer is being tried as a clinical procedure for test tube baby.", said Dr. Berson. The sheriff said, "Test tube baby protocol does not need police consent, as they are routine, but trying out a new protocol for science, where ethics is in place, and done only for science, the police department will not be a hurdle nor abrogate your efforts. But keep us informed." The sheriff said, "The police consent will reach you by mail, Dr. Berson." Dr. Berson thanked the sheriff as he left his office. The very next day Dr. Berson received the police certificate for reconstructing Kayaya, which he promptly forwarded to Dr. Janette Kaplan. Dr. Kaplan called Mark on the phone and said. "Do get your samples tomorrow Mark." "Yes Mam, said Mark."

Next day morning, Mark went to Dr. Kaplan's clinic with the mesenchymal stem cell samples. Janette was busy with her work as she asked Mark to sit. Janette said philosophically, "We are at the cross roads of science, if we are successful in applying somatic nuclear transfer to test-tube babies, it will be so much easier for both the couples and the clinic. We should patent our method too." She added, "This will be a new direction catalyzing

human evolution, of man, and of his future on this planet.” Dr. Berson replied, “Hope we can keep this low key, in spite of police consent. We don’t want a scandal in experimental genetics.” “Exactly my thoughts.” said Janette.

Doctor Kaplan took the cells, centrifuged them, washed in the buffer of choice under sterile conditions and visualized the cells under fluorescence scanning microscope. Except a few cells, most cells looked very healthy. Further, she sorted the cells by flow cytometry and by the evening had a hundred percent pure sample for retrieval of the somatic nucleus. Doctor Berson left her clinic as she put the cells in culture. It took Janette more than a week to collect egg cells from super ovulated women from her clinic. These cells, without worrying about genetics of patient, she removed the nuclei using cell tweezers and was successful in creating more than fifteen ghost enucleated eggs.

Janette planned her experiments well. Kayaya’s mesenchymal stem cells nuclei were removed and kept cold in a petri dish. Using electric shock the nuclei were transferred to ghost eggs and were put in IVF culture. After two days of culture Janette looked into the microscope to see that only four somatic transfers were viable and one of them needed to be transplanted within next twenty four hours. Fortunately Janette had a long list of surrogate mothers who took money from her to give birth to IVF children. Doctor Janette Kaplan saw in her diary it was the turn for Mrs. Pia Swanson for the next surrogacy. Mrs. Swanson was called and was made to sign the standard documents. Dr. Kaplan performed the transplant surgery as Dr. Mark Berson waited in the lobby. After two hours in the surgery room Dr. Kaplan came out and told Mark that all was well.

Mrs. Swanson visited Janette’s clinic after three weeks for regular sonography. Mark was also there. The sonography pictures showed that the fetus was fine, limb activity was fine, the brain development was fine, and the spinal cord had already formed.

Janette was happy with the results. Months after months, Janette and Mark tracked reconstruction of Kayaya. The baby had a name, Kaya even before birth. Janette checked the gender of the baby and told Mark that “I am not supposed to give you this information, but it’s a baby girl.”

Mark jumped few feet in the air in euphoria and screamed in pleasure. Janette smiled as she understood what was about to happen. It was the last trimester for Mrs. Swanson and Janette decided to perform an induced labor C section. The date of the surgery was fixed. On the eventful day, Dr. Janette and her team of seven experts including an anesthesiologist, an endocrinologist and a neurologist were present. Post the delivery, the little Kaya looking feeble but healthy, a jet black girl was in the arms of Dr. Berson. The entire team was jubilant as Kaya was the first somatic transfer test tube baby. Dr. Berson left the clinic as Kaya was taken into the incubator.

Next day, Dr. Berson visited the mall by his residence to pick up all the nitty gritty stuff that would be needed for the baby infant. He presented the two bags to Janette who burst out laughing. Janette said, “Mark, you’re not her father and you should not be doing this shopping.” The clinic has enough supplies but thanks anyway”. Dr. Berson grinned, went into the incubator room with an accompanying nurse and crouched over Kaya’s incubator. Kaya was fast asleep and without disturbing her Dr. Berson left the clinic. Mark’s visits to the clinic were on a daily basis after his surgery sessions, whence he would spend a little time with Kaya. Within a week, he was told by Janette that one Miss Cathy, a nurse at her clinic had consented to adopt Kaya. Mark was visibly disturbed and he said, “Although I am upset, you may have taken the right decision.” Mark and Janette put all their data together and sent their patent from the Nebraska clinic to United States Patent Office. The city sheriff was also informed about Kaya. The sheriff congratulated Janette and Mark on their excellent effort.

For Cathy, it was work as usual as she knew when to feed the baby, when to bathe her, when to change her clothes, when to give her toys in the perambulator, when to make her sleep and when to talk to her. Cathy was the perfect mother for Kaya and in her supervision Kaya grew. Cathy's adoption papers came in as Kaya became a citizen of the United States by adoption. The baby grew and within a year she was in playschool and as time would have it, she joined Kindergarden School near Cathy's home. Kaya was a very sharp featured girl, dark complexion with a cute American accent. Through her class one and upward, her instructors told Cathy's during PTA meetings that Kaya was very good in Maths and strong in Literature and they were very happy with her learning process. Dr. Berson and Janette would visit Cathy and filmed Kaya doing all the kiddish raptures. Time passed by and one day, Kaya went to her mother and asked, "Mom, how come you are white and I am black?" Fortunately the door bell rang, as Cathy ushered Janette and Mark in. Cathy told Kaya thus, "Kaya you are my adopted child and there was a child exactly like you, called Kayaya, way back in India who gave her life for science. It was Janette's and Mark's determination to make sure you were born. In a way you are a reincarnation and we are all excited to know you." Kaya turned to Mark and asked, "What exactly you did to bring me to life?" Mark replied, "Dear Kaya, it's a little complicated but myself and Janette worked extremely hard in getting to know you and it's such a pleasure." Janette picked up Kaya as she twirled in the living room. They were both laughing and giggling as Mark continued to take the video clips.

In her 5th class, after her examinations were over, Kaya told Cathy, "Mom, I want to visit India and I want you to come with me." Cathy replied, with no hint of decry, peeking gently into Kaya's eyes, "Definitely my dear. We will go in your summer vacation." Cathy informed Mark about Kaya's intention and Mark smiled and understood. He gave Cathy the clinic number in India as well as the number of Raghav's parents. Raghav's

father picked up the call and told Cathy that Raghav was in 9th class and in boarding and that he himself was estranged from his wife. He continued saying, “But I will be there to receive you and also organize Kaya’s visit to her village.” He got a confirmation from Cathy regarding their landing date and took time off from office.

The airliner landed smoothly on the mountainous aerodrome as Cathy and Kaya met Raghav’s father, Mr. Hariharan. When Kaya looked at Hariharan, she had a blank expression on her face but Hariharan had tears in her eyes. He saw Kayaya in life again and it was an unbelievable moment. He sat down in the airport lounge with Cathy as he held, the non-fastidious Kaya in his arms and bombarded a lot of questions to Cathy. Cathy answered all his questions slowly and sometimes Kaya also chipped in. Hariharan was amazed at Kaya’s communication skill. Kaya modestly introduced herself and said, “I am Kaya and I am from America, and I have come to see where my sister Kayaya lived.” Hariharan told Kaya that her sister was extremely hard working, very polite and wonderful with his son Ragav. Hariharan added, “I want Kaya to visit Raghav in his dormitory.” Cathy replied, “Hariharan sir, that’s the reason we are here, and to tell you a little about Kaya, she is very good in Maths and English and is her teacher’s pet.” Hearing this Hariharan’s eyes sparkled as he beamed. Kaya said, “Dr. Berson and Dr. Jannet Kaplan are the doll makers who made me for my Mom.” Hariharan beamed a second time, this time for Kaya’s maturity. There was no difference between Kayaya and her clone Kaya. Science had won, but with a time lapse.

After reaching Hariharan’s residence, Kaya and her mother were given their independent rooms for stay. Hariharan’s house was very cosy and Kaya loved it very much. There was soft diffuse light with globe lamp, with a fire place facing the beach. Post shower, and lunch, Cathy and Kaya went through the family

photos. Kaya was just dumb stuck with her sister Kayaya's photos with Ragav. There was no difference, as if she were here at Hariharan's house even before she landed. In the mean time Ragav got a phone call from his father, and was told briefly about Kaya. Ragav was visibly upset, deleterious, and was extremely rude with his father. Hariharan didn't know what to say as he hung the phone. Hariharan went up to Cathy and Kaya and said I want you to come with me for a quick shopping. They both agreed, as Hariharan pulled his vehicle in front of a book shop. At the shop Hariharan asked for a grammar book that dealt with the dialect Kayaya used. Kaya was for the first time presented a book that will help her speak like her sister Kayaya. Kaya was very excited. She spent time long into the night learning from the grammar book. She worked day and night to learn her sister's language. Cathy also helped in.

In the week end, the assiduous Ragav arrived at his father's house and greeted Cathy politely. Not so impertinent Ragav saw Kaya, sobbed and fainted. Family doctor was called immediately who gave him a saline line. The doctor said Ragav has just finished his examinations and is tired. He needs rest. Kaya got for Ragav juice, his medicine, and his head balm. Hariharan looked in dismay and tears as Kaya helped the ineffable Ragav through his condition. Kayaya had done so infallibly so many years back. The doctor visited every day and told the family that Ragav was fine and was recovering well. Ragav was always in tears and very emotional whenever he talked to Kaya. He gazed at her with distant thought. It was as if he was in love with her. But he wasn't. He was too attached with Kayaya and that was it. Kaya understood Ragav perfectly and smiled graciously. Her accent was an utter amazement for Ragav as she filled his life with joy. Kaya told Hariharan and Ragav ebulliently that she wanted to visit her sister's grave. Ragav and Hariharan agreed to do so as soon as Ragav was better.

Hariharan pulled his car next to the cemetery, whence Cathy, Kaya, Ragav, and Hariharan alighted and made a bee line to Kayaya's grave. At her grave Ragav kneeled down, in love and respect for the departed soul. He said, "Kayaya is surrounded by trees, and vegetation that keep her constant company, when I am not there." Kaya was red faced and sobbing in her mother's arms. She said, "My sister is a motivation for the scientific world to present me to you all. Lord blesses innovation." She kept crying all the time she spent in the cemetery. Cathy was in tears too. Cathy called Dr. Mark Berson and told him of Kaya's visit to the cemetery where her sister was buried. Mark, with approbation, was also in tears thousands of miles away. It was an extremely emotional moment. Hariharan was all red faced but he didn't cry like the rest.

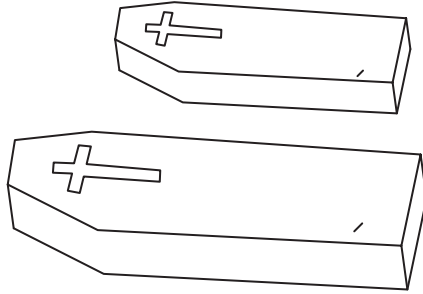
After reaching home, everyone was thoroughly entertained by Kaya's songs and poems. It was a very exhausting day and they all retired early. Ragav took Kaya to all the places he spent time with her sister. He told Kaya how she had saved his life multi million times at the garden, at the kitchen, at the living room etc. Ragav called his mother and told her about Kaya's visit. His mother hung the phone and never picked up the phone next time. Ragav gave up calling her mother again.

Days went by, as Kaya, like Kayaya became family at Ragav's place. Cathy was very understanding and helped in cooking. Cathy got to like Hariharan very well. Hariharan quipped during dinner time, "I have never had this kind of quality life ever. Hope it never ends." Kaya loved Hariharan for being such an wonderful host. Ragav helped Kaya with her grammar book and prepared her immensely for her village visit to Kayaya's parents. Cathy and Kaya were to go alone in a AC bus and come back to town in three days.

The next day, Hariharan went shopping with Cathy as Kayaya and Raghav spent quality time at home. This shopping was to

facilitate Cathy and Kaya's travel comfort for the next 3 days. After coming back from shopping, Kaya and Cathy went with Hariharan and Raghav to the clinic where Kayaya breathed her last. When they reached the hospital, there to welcome them were Dr. Smith, Dr. Ratnam and Dr. Jones. They admired and extolled the work of Dr. Berson in making Kayaya come alive again. Raghav and Kaya went to the central premises of the clinic where Kayaya's statue was decorating the lobby. After spending time with the nurses and staff, they all came home and settled down for a good night's rest.

The bus ride began 7 a.m. in the morning and the ingenuous Mr. Hariharan was there to drop Cathy and the jubilant Kaya at the bus stop. The bus ride was for 6 hours and the lunch break would be at a village where the bus generally stopped for a train. In the bus were only four passengers including Cathy and Kaya. When the bus stopped at one village before their final destination there was a lot of commotion on the road. Another bus driver came into the bus, asked him to turn the bus and head back to where he came from. When the bus driver asked the reason as to why he should turn back, the driver cautioned him that the capricious villagers in the next village, with antipathy, are carrying sticks, hockey sticks, stones, swords and sharp objects to destroy the bus which was carrying Kayaya's ghost. The harangue village had abjured Kayaya forever. The other driver continued that if they waited for another moment more, disaster would strike and people in the bus would get hurt. Just as the bus turned, a big stone came flying in through the window and hit Kaya on the head. The girl slumped never to recover again.



Kaya was buried at the same cemetery where Kayaya was put to rest.

Cathy screamed as the bus driver sped full throttle to the town. Within hours, the driver took the bus straight to the clinic which Kaya had just visited the day before and the doctor announced Kaya was dead. Cathy sobbingly took a taxi to Hariharan's house. Hariharan and Ragav were in shock. They laid Kaya's dead body in front of the house and everybody was in profuse tears. Kaya's grammar book was kept next to her body, as they carried her dead body to the same cemetery in which her sister was laid to rest. The cemetery manager buried Kaya next to her sister and chanted her last rites. Mother Earth had taken her two best souls away. No one was exculpated in this crime and no one was punished. Kaya's memory was never to be ephemeral. The enervated Cathy, with anathema, flew back to American sky empty handed, away from the hapless and laconic situation as Ragav went into nadir of his studies. Kayaya had taken her clone Kaya into her fold.

Maudlin Ragav remembered this mercurial and maelstrom situation, and death of Kaya so many years later, as Grandma offered him with another chilled glass of lemonade.

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