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Death of the Reader

---- Bonoful (Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay)

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Ten years back.

I was waiting for the train at Asansol station. Another person was sitting just beside me. He had a book in his hand. It was a novel of a good volume. Introducing with that person, i came to know that he had to wait for train for the whole day.

I had to wait for three hours also for my train.

We both were Bengalee.

So, after five minutes i asked him, "Can i see your book?"

He promptly answered, "Yes, of course..."

I expected such response.

In no time i took charge of the book.

It was an intolerable scorching noon. The roof-shade of Asansol station was of tin. But all these were in complete oblivion. Novels are astonishing!

The owner of the book peered me once, expressed a little disgust and concentrated on a time-table.



I continued my reading in a breathtaking manner.

Beautiful book!

Actually i had never read such a good novel before.

I was intoxicated.

Two hours elapsed. Out of frustration.

The owner of the book was repeatedly going through the time-table and at last told me, “your train is about to arrive. Now...”

I was completely absorbed.

Suddenly saw my wristwatch. I had still one hour. The book was not half-finished yet. So, I wasted no time in answering. Continued swallowing it.

What a book!

The next one hour just flew away.

The train-bell rang.

The book was still unfinished.

I became desperate.

I said, “I will go by next train. I am not moving without finishing this book.” The owner was speechless.

The train left; I continued my reading. But could not finish the book.

Some of the pages at the end were missing.

I told the owner, “Oh! The pages are missing at the end! Why didn’t you tell me? Damn it!”



The gentleman just started at me. He was boiling in anger.

2.

Ten years later I came across the book again at the house of the in-laws of my niece.

I accompanied her in her journey to her in-laws house. I was supposed to return that day. But stayed three for the book.

Accordingly, I took the book and started it with great enthusiasm. I decided to read the book again from the beginning, not merely the last portion.

I staggered after reading few pages. Saw the front page – “yes, it was the same book!”

Again, i read few pages – “no, something is going wrong!”

Still I continued reading.

Sometime later I thought, “no, its intolerate!” “Is this the same book which I read so attentively in the burning noon at Asansol station?”

“How can someone write such rubbish!”

“It was impossible to finish.”

Just could not perceive, when did that enthusiastic reader often years back had died. Could not finish the book again!