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## **THE TRIVIAL TRIO**

### **THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE CAR BREAK-INS**

By 2013, the trio of Jamshed Narayan Iyer (**Jammy**), Madhav Kumar (**Maddy**) and Vinayak (**Vinu**) were known by the nickname – **The Trivial Trio**, specifically coined for their interest in ‘investigating’ matters which were of trivial significance to the rest of the world.

After all, who cared about seemingly insignificant events like why the candidate for The Brahma Maharishi Trust elections withdrew his nomination just two days before the Chairman Elections. Did it really matter as to why the Govt. School at RMV Extension progressively requested for more funds for their mid-day meal scheme even though the number of students enrolled there did not increase significantly. Who cared about why the number of mosquito related incidents was increasing in Nagashettyhalli?

These were not incidents or issues that too many people actually knew about, let alone cared about, but The Trivial Trio took it upon themselves to ‘read between the lines’ and ‘investigate’ these issues further and the findings made the rest of their world (ie, immediate families, friends, and a few ‘notorious’ others) sit up and take notice.

**Jammy**, the B School graduate, veteran of having lived in 3 different cities and avid connoisseur of the movies was the undisputed leader of the lot. By virtue of his father’s diverse, varied and substantial volumes of books at home, he also had the advantage of having a lot of information at his fingertips. This coupled with the fact that he was the most eloquent and ‘jobless’ of the lot meant that he was a natural candidate for being the ‘leader’ of the trio.

**Maddy**, on the other hand was the real brains of the group. His ongoing PhD in theoretical physics, consequent interest in applied physics, and general scientific attitude in life meant that his logical reasoning and analytical ability was second to none.

**Vinu** more than made up for his apparent lack of ‘smarts’ by being the only member of the trio who could single-handedly handle physical challenges of any kind. This coupled with the fact that he was loyal to both Jammy and Maddy for entirely different reasons, and the fact that he was the ‘people person’ of the trio made him the most valuable and probably the most critical cog in the three pronged wheel that The Trivial Trio was.

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Sanjaynagar 4<sup>th</sup> Main was where Jammy and Vinu had lived for almost 25+ yrs now and they therefore pretty much knew all the residents of the 20 odd houses on both sides of the street. Vinu was more up-to-date with the current residents as he was the more jovial, people-friendly person of the trio. While Jammy and Maddy knew all the old timers on the street, Vinu was the man who had this information at his fingertips.

One fine day in June 2013, when Vinu woke up in the morning and came out to wash his car as was his usual norm, he noticed policemen standing near the house of Mrs. Ganga down the road. His curiosity piqued, he went there to find out what was happening.

It turned out that the car parked outside her house, which belonged to Sandy, her son was stolen last night. Sandy who was standing there told Vinu – “See how neatly they have torn open the rubber beading of the back window and gotten into the car. They took away my billing meter, stereo system and my car mobile charger.”

“Damn, replacing all of this is going to cost me at least a good Rs. 10,000 and the worst part is that I can claim insurance only for the back window as the Insurance Company does not cover car stereos or any other accessories as part of their policy.”

By this time, Vinu was joined by Maddy as well who happened to be returning from his morning walk that way. However, given the fact that they could not go around investigating each and every small little theft in the locality, they decided that this was not something that The Trivial Trio could get involved with and decided to let the local cops deal with this.

A fortnight later, when the car next to Jammy's house was stolen using the same modus operandi, the trio was spurred into action. This time around the thief had cut open the beading of the front glass of the car and stolen the car stereo and the GPS device kept in the glove compartment. Jammy took this very personally given his proximity to the theft itself and called Vinu and Maddy upto his room immediately.

"Macha, this is just not happening boss! First we thought this was a one-off case and we didn't take it too seriously, but now, this is just too much. All 3 of us have cars and Vinu, the whole world and its cousin knows how much you love your new Wagon R with alloy wheels and neon lights. It probably is just a matter of time before your car stereo, the DVD Player, your sub woofer and all those other fancy gadgets you have in there get stolen too. It is an affront to The Trivial Trio and our abilities if we don't do something about this soon."

At the mention of his Wagon R, Vinu jumped up – "Dude, Jammy, don't you even dare to think that some petty thief will lay his hands on my car. I will beat the stuffing out of anybody who even dreams of doing something like that."

Maddy smiling at Vinu's aggression brought back the conversation on track – "Guys, it is quite obvious that both the thefts were done by the same person. The thief carefully removed the beading of the glass, stole only things that can easily be sold second hand and did not bother touching any of the internal components of the car."

Jammy then got into his usual task allocation mode – "Ok, here's what we will do. Vinu, you are the people person. So go and talk to Sandy and find out everything you can about the night his car was broken into. Where exactly did he park the car? What time did he park the car? What time did he turn off the lights at home? What time did he go to sleep? Did he hear or see anything funny that night? We need to know everything about that night. Ok?"

"Maddy, you and me will go to all the car accessory dealers within a radius of 5 Km from here and try to find out if anybody has tried to sell them second hand car stereos, GPS devices, or anything like that. Let us all of us regroup here in the evening today."

In the evening when the trio regrouped, Jammy and Maddy had hit a dead end. While some of the car accessory shops were at least open to the fact that they purchased second hand accessories from people, a couple of shopkeepers had almost physically assaulted them for even suggesting something like this.

Vinu then updated them about his conversations with Sandy and Krishna. "There was really nothing special about the nights on which both these cars were broken into. While Sandy came home at around 9.45 PM and parked his car at the usual spot outside his house, right opposite the street light. He had his dinner, watched some TV, came outside at around 10.30 PM to lock the gate. Even at this time the car was at its usual spot, nothing unusual. He then went back inside, switched off all lights and went to sleep. What happened when he woke up next morning is something that we saw ourselves."

"The story with Krishna is also quite ordinary, nothing unusual. He came back by around 9 PM that night, parked his car outside his gate, opposite the street light, had dinner by around 10 PM, came out for a smoke after that, his car was right there. Went back in, switched off the lights at around 11 PM and went to sleep."

"Neither of them or anybody in their homes saw or heard anything unusual that night."

Jammy stood up, put his hands on his hips – "Hmm, looks like we are hitting only dead ends today. Tell you what guys, sleep over what Vinu just shared and think of anything that strikes you as unusual. Let us see if our wonderful brains or my stimulating smokes come up with any brainwave tonight."

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Not one to be easily put off by such seemingly ‘unsolvable problems, Jammy by the window of his second floor room that night looking outside thinking about the sequence of events. Suddenly he noticed that the streetlight right next to his house went off and the one next to Vinu’s house came on. And then suddenly ‘Eureka’, a brainwave struck him, and he immediately message Vinu and Maddy to join him for a morning walk the next morning at 6 AM.

The next morning, suited up in his good old Adidas Track Pants and a nice round neck Angry Birds T Shirt, Jammy waited at his gate for his ‘partners’. When Vinu and Maddy arrive, they set off on a brisk walk. Maddy and Vinu knew better than to rush Jammy for answers, they had been friends with him long enough to know that when he got into one of these contemplative moods, they just had to let him get through it and then start talking.

“Ok, Vinu, when you spoke to Sandy and Krishna, where exactly did they tell you that they had parked their cars?”

“Outside their gates, opposite the streetlights” said Vinu.

“Exactly, and consider the orientation of both the cars, while Sandy’s back window was well illuminated, Krishna’s front glass was better illuminated. What does that tell us?”

Maddy’s eyes widened “The thief used the streetlights to ensure that he could clearly see what he was doing!”

“Exactly, and the thief also exactly knew which streetlight would be switched on during the night on which he planned the theft. He knew exactly which streetlight would be switched on and based on that he decided which car would be stolen. After all, he didn’t bother to come near my car or Vinu’s car.”

Vinu stepped into the conversation “So, what are you trying to say? That the thief has the schedule of which streetlight will be switched on in terms of the exact dates?”

“That kind of information is easily available. All you need to do is to give the Electricity Board linesman some money and he will immediately share this information with you and if you pay him enough money, he will even turn on and turn off the streetlights for you” said Maddy.

“Exactly my point. Vinu, haven’t you mentioned that the Chief Engineer of the Electricity Board is also a member of The Sanjaynagar Club and that your dad is friends with him?” asked Jammy.

The trio then decided the next course of action. Vinu was to get the Chief Engineer’s contact details from his dad and arrange for a small meeting at The Sanjaynagar Club. They chose the club so that the Chief Engineer did not get too nosy about why Vinu was making these enquiries.

On that weekend, Vinu then hosted Mr Gowda, the Chief Engineer at the club’s bar. Vinu knew that Gowda was partial to single malt whiskeys and ordered two large pegs of Amrut, the costliest available at the bar. He also went on to order Gowda’s all-time favorite starter – Mushroom Pepper Dry. By the time Gowda arrived, the drinks were served and the Mushroom was also served piping hot. Gowda was extremely impressed with Vinu’s hospitality and by the time he was two rounds down, he would have even sold his soul to him. Not for nothing was Vinu known as “*The people person*”.

Once Gowda was completely at ease with the ambience and his tongue had loosened, Vinu casually asked the Chief Engineer – “Uncle, I have observed that the streetlights on our road, the 4<sup>th</sup> Main are switched on and off on different days of the week. Is there some kind of preset pattern or does this happen at random?”

“*Illa pa* Vinu, that is not how it is. Even today, after all this computers have taken over the Electricity Board, there are still some works that are done manually only. All this on-ning and off-ing of the lights and all are done by linesman only” answered Gowda.

“You stay in 4<sup>th</sup> Main, no?? Mmmm, the linesman for that area is Sankara, that *galeej* fellow who always keeps gambling and losing all his money. He comes to the junction box between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Main every evening and on-s the lights. And once again in the morning, he comes back and off-s the lights.”

“Nowadays because of cost cutting measures-u, we have been instructed to switch on only 2 lights in every street. That is why you see that the streetlight opposite your house is on sometimes and off sometimes” he laughed.

His mission accomplished, Vinu then messaged the others asking them to join him for a morning walk the next morning. However, his next half an hour was spent in taking Gowda to the rest room as he seemed to have forgotten his way there. As if that was not enough, he also had to take him to his car, wake his driver up and ask him to drop Gowda Sir off at home safely. The things Vinu had to do to solve cases. He was determined to ask Jammy and Maddy to buy him a couple of drinks once this Car Theft case had been solved.

The next morning after Vinu had briefed them about the conversation with Gowda, Jammy was convinced that Sankara was the missing link on the other side of the dead ends they had encountered. And the fact that Gowda had mentioned the fact that Sankara was a habitual gambler meant that he had more than enough reason to do anything just for some additional money.

The next course of action was for Jammy and Vinu to try and tap into their old Florence School network. Since this school had existed in Sanjaynagar pretty much forever and Jammy and Vinu had also lived most of their lives in the area, this network proved especially useful when it came to collecting information about people in the area, local happenings, rumors, gossip, etc.

And Vinu hit a pot of gold with the first school-mate he got in touch. He not only got Sankara’s address, but also managed to learn that in the recently concluded IPL, Sankara had bet quite a bit of money and lost it all due to a particular Malayalee cricketer’s antics with towels and sweat shirts and the entire spot fixing scandal. He was heard walking around his house grumbling about how he would now have to pay Rs 25,000 to Vasu Anna, the only bookie through whom all bets from the Sanjaynagar area were routed.

What was especially heartening about the news was the fact that Vasu Anna knew Sankara. Vasu Anna and The Trivial Trio had quite a bit of history actually. Back when Vasu Anna was still in his early twenties and the trio were teenagers, they were the only people who always allowed Vasu Anna to play with them despite the fact that he completely sucked at the game. Back in those days, the trio used to allow him to play just for the sake of having some fun at this expense. And although Vasu Anna realized this he allowed the kids to have some harmless fun. He liked them a lot, and was sure to help them out if they were in any trouble.

So that evening when the trio went to Vasu Anna’s house and found him there with his pack of Wills cigarettes and a half tea ordered from the bakery opposite his house, he was more than happy to catch up with them after quite a while. After a good three rounds of half teas and more than a few cigarettes smoked, Jammy brought up the topic of Sankara and asked Vasu Anna about how much money he lost in IPL betting.

Vasu Anna took out his small red book of accounts and flipped a few pages.

“Boss, *aa joker* Sankara lost Rs 25,000 but he made it seem like he lost one crore bucks. He took so many days but managed to repay only Rs 20,000 to me and I have given him two more days to repay the rest of the money, otherwise I will chase him all over Sanjaynagar and beat him up. After all, Vasu Anna *andhre* the whole area should shiver no??”

Now this piqued Jammy's attention. For somebody like Sankara who was working as a linesman with the Electricity Board, arranging a sum to the tune of Rs 20,000 was not a small matter. He had to have done something fishy to arrange for this sum. And finally, some missing pieces of the puzzle started falling in place in Jammy's devious mind.

On the way back to Jammy's place after the meeting with Vasu Anna, Maddy immediately mirrored Jammy's thoughts when he said

"Guys, now I am completely convinced that Sankara is surely behind these car thefts man. Think about it. The glass which was broken faced the lights. The only things that were stolen was stuff that can easily be disposed off for quick money. Sankara owed Vasu Anna Rs 25,000 which he paid reasonably comfortably, although people had heard him grumbling about the amount some days before he paid it up."

Jammy stopped him "Wait, at this point in time, all of this is conjecture. How do we even know that Sankara is involved in these thefts? Just because the thefts happened right opposite the streetlights? Or just because he managed to repay Vasu Anna a significant sum of money? That just doesn't fly folks. We need solid evidence. What do you propose?"

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Maddy started off "Well, he still has to repay Rs 5,000 and if my theory is correct, he will surely try to get his hands on another car stereo. If only we could try and tempt him with something, then we could surely catch him red-handed in the act. But what would be tempting enough for him?" He smiled and looked at Jammy to which Jammy also smiled a mysterious smile.

Vinu immediately understood what was happening "Buggers, don't you even dare think of it. If you guys are planning what I think you are planning, then I am going to strangle both of you with my bare hands" he started shouting.

"Macha, my car is old and has only a stupid stereo with a tape player and radio. It is not a brand new Wagon R with the latest state of the art music system, sub woofers, tweeters, and you also have the latest imported GPS system that your cousin from Singapore bought you. Vinu, dude, take this hit for the Trio man, and in any case, it is not like we will let him break into your car, we will intercept him well before that, won't we Maddy?" said Jammy.

Anybody who knew Vinu even a little well would have realized that by now he was frothing at the mouth. If there was anything that Vinu really loved, it was his vehicles. Right from his fancy bicycle which cost all of Rs 36,000, to his Bullet motorcycle and his brand new Wagon R, Vinu took care of them better than he took care of himself. Whether he bathed or not, he would wash and wipe all of his vehicles in the morning and keep them shiny neat. And the very thought of using his beloved Wagon R as bait for a thief simply boiled his blood.

But that being said, Vinu was the ultimate team player and The Trivial Trio was the one team that he would trust his life with. So, after a reasonably amount of convincing, and the promise of a couple of free meals at the BEL Road Nandhini restaurant, he finally agreed. His only conditions were that not even a scratch should be put on the car and that they would nab the thief before he could do any damage to any part of the car.

The next thing that the trio did was to pull out Maddy's old CCTV Camera which his brother had sent over from Muscat two months ago. The original plan that Maddy had for the camera was to install it on his first floor balcony so that he could keep an eye on the car parking area in the ground floor of his house. But somehow, he had never got around to getting it installed.

They managed to position the CCTV Camera at Vinu's house's front window in such a manner that it was not visible from the outside but gave them a reasonably good close up of the entire front portion of his house including the car.

And as a sample video, they even shot Vinu wiping his car to which Maddy said that it reminded him of a soaped up wet supermodel cleaning a car, except that in this case, the supermodel looked like a hippopotamus.

The only thing remaining now was to tempt Sankara to come and try to steal some gizmos from the car itself. This task was handled by Vinu who parked his car as close to the junction box as possible at around 5 in the evening and started playing loud music which accentuated the full effect of his stereo and the amplifier. And when Sankara came around to switch on the lights, Vinu pretended to answer his phone.

“Hello, yes, this is Vinu here.....yes, yes, my address is 67, AEC Layout, 3 Stage, 4<sup>th</sup> Main, Sanjaynagar.....yes, I will be awake till around 10 PM, please come over before that” and hung up.

Sankara seemed to have taken the bait as Vinu noticed him turning back more than a few times to check the car out. The fact that Vinu had a stereo and sub woofers were evidenced by the 50 Cent song blaring from the speakers. Only time would tell as to when Sankara would make his move.

That night the trio requested Vinu’s parents to sleep on the first floor when they occupied the ground floor themselves. They had to give a cock and bull story about how they were planning to play some board games which they hadn’t done for a good 15+ yrs now and how that would end up disturbing his parents’ sleep. After a lot of convincing they managed to get the ground floor for themselves. They were 99% sure that if Sankara was indeed the thief, he would strike today, and this was evidenced by the fact that the streetlight bang opposite Vinu’s house was switched on tonight.

They switched off all the lights and the TV at around 10 PM and sat silently staring at the monitor on Maddy’s iBook which was connected to the CCTV Camera. They were recording all the proceedings. After around two hours of patient waiting by Jammy and Maddy when Vinu dropped off to sleep on the floor leaning against the wall, Maddy first noticed some movement near the gate on the monitor. He tapped Jammy on the arm and both of them clearly saw Sankara’s face in the light of the streetlight. Their plan had worked.

They didn’t wake up Vinu as he had a tendency to be startled when woken up from sleep and he also has this funny habit of yawning with a loud noise as soon as he woke up. They had no choice but to do this themselves without involving him. But they let him cut open the rubber beading of Vinu’s back window to get themselves clear evidence that Sankara was indeed trying to break into the car. This was the solid evidence they needed. Knowing that Vinu would flip if any more damage was done to the car, they decided to act.

Since the door was not locked, Jammy quietly slid open the only bolt and pulled open the door very quickly, while Maddy who was ready for some action immediately ran out and held Sankara with his arms under Sankara’s armpits from behind. Hearing the door open, Vinu also woke up and helped Maddy overpower Sankara and made him sit on the front steps of the house. Hearing all this commotion, Vinu’s parents and neighbors had switched on their lights and had come out of their houses to see what was happening.

Jammy then brought out Maddy’s iBook and confronted Sankara with the recording “Boss, your story is over. You have been captured on camera trying to break into the car. You are caught now. And trust me, when the police deal with you the way they usually do so, you will also confess how your broke into Sandy’s and Krishna’s cars. We have no choice but to hand you over to the police. Sorry boss, but you knew the risks of getting caught when you started robbing people, didn’t you.”

It was only when he saw the video that Vinu realized that Sankara had actually cut open the beading of his back window. Almost in tears and mad with rage, he would have surely strangled Sankara had not his dad and Maddy physically pulled him away from the thief. It took around 10 mins of smooth talking and convincing from Jammy and

Maddy to bring Vinu's temper down and make him understand that they allowed the car to be damaged only to ensure that they had concrete evidence against Sankara.

They then handed over Sankara and a pen drive with the video to Inspector Reddy from the Sanjaynagar Police Station who had been informed by Vinu's dad when the commotion occurred and he realized what was happening. Once the cops left, it was around 2 AM in the morning and Saturday had already started dawning in the east.

The trio then briefed Vinu's dad about their entire investigation and how they finally managed to trap the thief who had broken into the cars. Impressed with their efforts, Vinu's dad agreed to sponsor the free meals that was owed to Vinu at the Nandhini restaurant for offering his car as bait to trap Sankara.