

A Tryst With Destiny

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A Tryst with Destiny

He would marry her he resolved. He would wait for her...she was about eight or nine now so he would wait until she finished her education and then marry her, The wait would make him mature and stable – he was rich, now anyway.

Perfect!

Sameer studied the young girl as she flitted between guests: smiling, laughing, exulting in the attention she was receiving. He gazed at her slim arms, her dainty hands, her light smiling eyes, and her bountiful dark hair that cascaded down highlighting her fair skin. She was, in one word, lovely.

Sameer's parents had left him a substantial inheritance allowing him to live a leisurely life. He decided he would closely follow Tanya through puberty and into womanhood. If she satisfied the idol he had in his mind, he would marry her. No 'Arranged Marriages' for him – who would arrange it anyway?

Tanya was indifferent to Sameer: who was intense, dark-eyed, quiet and always staring at her and frequently holding her arm or trying to grab her by the waist to keep her close. He wasn't like the grownups that indulged her, sat her on their laps and listened to every word she said with laughter and amused smiles at the way she spoke. She liked this; she would use her expressive eyes, her quick smile and bubbling energy to remain the center of attraction. She was turning into a little flirt, and she loved it.

Chapter – 2

Sameer

I am eighteen now and will graduate by the end of this term. I am a careful, observant person and employ a method for most things. My friends call me serious and a 'kill joy'. But that is not correct. I don't laugh loudly and uproariously at little things. I don't join in mouth-open-back-slapping laughter just because my colleagues do. I don't care if I am the odd-person out. 'Opinionated' they call me...perhaps that's true. We all become 'opinionated' at some time in life, but I mainly have my own

personal way and am reluctant to flow along and behave in unison with my colleagues for no reason other than of maintaining a cohesive group.

I see Tanya often and her loveliness pulls me to her like a magnet`. She doesn't take much notice of me, but I have time on my side. She has to finish school; she has to have her fill of fleeting romances and heartbreaks – by the time she is in her early thirties she would be looking for stability and permanence; and I'll be there to offer her stability, permanence, security, comfort and an abundance of romance.

Chapter – 3

Tanya (some years down the line and now a drop-out from college).

Ma and Pa have been here, way out in this wilderness, for the past six months; looking to up-lift the lot of the *Adivasi* tribals. I arrived four days ago and am bored stiff with the place. Flat monotonous fields stretching for millions of miles; trees around the bungalow infested with incessantly cawing crows. Three hundred meters from the Dak bungalow is a narrow macadam road that leads to god only knows where; villagers are always walking up or down the road – depends which direction you consider up and which down, it is all flat; the odd cyclist listlessly cycles up/down the road ringing the bell pointlessly; at 3p.m. the local bus goes by tooting its electric horn mainly to let people know the once-a-day bus has arrived should they wish to catch it to go up the road. The down-the-road bus goes through at 8 a.m.

I am here to wallow in the assured solace and love my parents always shower on me. Whatever goes askew, their unquestioning loving arms and ample bosoms are always there to hold me and sooth away my problems. And I have a whole large heap of them which my parents don't know about. They assume – my dearest sweet procreators – that I must need a break from another love affair gone wrong. But I must move on now and not expose my dear parents to what would take place if the Police posse' caught up with me here.

I have given my parents a large duffle bag to keep secreted. *“No one must ever know it is here.”*

“But what's in it, child?”

You don't want to know, Pa. It has my personal things and, for me, very valuable papers. Please look after it for me. I mean really look after it.

Thankfully he didn't probe any further. But the look in his eye said, 'Let any Son-of-a-bitch try and take it from me'. I was pleased.

Mandeep (my mate) would meet me at the crossroads at 11 a.m. tomorrow. I will take the *down bus* at 8 a.m. He would want to know where the canvas bag was...*Shit!*

I'll have to make up a story...a believable story. And if he becomes too tiresome, I'll use my bountiful charm failing which ... my trusted switch knife!

#

We have been travelling steadily for two hours now. Mandeep is sitting leaning away from me in his seat, *not a good sign!* He's got his elbow resting on the aisle-side armrest with his chin cupped in his palm, leaning over and staring fixedly at a small tare on the green Rexene covering the back of the seat in front of him.

"Where's the canvas case?" He had demanded when we met. I straightened my shoulders in a defensive posture.

It's safe. I looked defiantly at him.

"Safe where?" He demanded getting confrontational.

I know where – okay? I stuck my small breasts out at him.

"It's not OKAY! I have a share in it too." He snarled taking a step closer to me.

Oh fuck!

You lost all 'rights' when you injured the guard, now you are at my mercy! I flung at him.

"So?" He barked.

Back-off, arse hole.

He had a hard look, jaw muscles bunching, "You could be the next calamity, *bitch.*"

And seven days ago he was fucking me like nothing else mattered in the whole wide world. *See how money can change the equation of life??*

He withdrew giving me some space. This would come up again in a big way and I would have to be prepared in a bigger way.

The bus stopped at a roadside *dhaba* and we descended and got a cup of hot over sweet tea. He grabbed my mobile and checked the calls I had made in the last seven days –no calls. His jaw set in a more determined line. He won't give up that easy...likely he won't give up at all. But nobody could trace me to my parent's place. I had left no trail. And I had been careful and had worn a full mask for the bank heist.

Chapter – 4

The Police knocked on the front door of the *Dakbungalow* where Tanya's parents were temporarily in residence. "Mr. Jhuman, I am inspector Rannat and these three are my assistants from the local Police Station. I am sorry to wake you at three in the morning. I am aware you are a renowned social worker and an upright citizen. We are actually looking for your daughter Tanya. Is she here or has she been here?"

Mr. Jhuman blinked in the bright light from the portico and appeared disoriented. His sixth sense told him the Police only visit at these unearthly hours if they want to pick up the perpetrator of some serious crime. "Tanya is not here" he said, and it was the truth, ogling without his glasses he asked. "Why, what has she done?"

"We need to take her in for questioning. It is really the person with her that we are seriously looking for. Do you mind if we look around inside the house – we can only do so with your permission?"

They left a half hour later with an old photo of Tanya when she was twelve years old.

Jhuman plunked down in the cane backed easy-chair on the verandah. He was worried. What had his darling daughter been up to? God! He rubbed his face and scratched his beard. He'd better keep this to himself.

Chapter – 5

Sameer

A sharp intake of breath shook my hand and I spilt coffee on my pajamas as I read a short boxed news item stating the Police suspected and named two youngsters involved in last week's bank heist, Mandeep Singh and Tanya Jhuman. The Manager of the small agricultural loan bank claimed the sum involved was over five million Rupees. I couldn't believe my eyes. The CCTV cameras showed two people with face masks - my heart rate accelerated and my breathing followed. My dream girl had really fallen into bad company. I must do something. I can't let my future wife go to the bin. That won't do at all. Ideas and plans poured into my consciousness and were quickly discarded.

And then it came to me.

I had met and interacted with Alfred Xavier a couple of years ago when he impressed me with his thoroughness and professionalism. Alfred operated an exclusive detective set-up with three males and a woman. I bumped into him a number of times on the street and never once did I recognize him, He would be an old man shuffling along leaning on a stick, at times a young lad with a crew cut and faded jeans, then again wearing spectacles and supporting a beard, at other times he would look a hobo with a torn jacket and a hunch back, sorting through trash in the street bin. All these disguises were done in the line of duty and it was only when he winked at me that I recognized him.

I summoned Alfred on the phone and told him what I wanted. He was an expensive man, but my parents had left me a fortune which I dipped into only if I had to and this was a cause which certainly deserved thorough investigation.

Chapter – 6

Mandeep

I watched Tanya brush her long waist length hair humming to herself.

You sound happy, hon. what's up?

“Why shouldn't I be – we are rich...fifty one lacs the papers say.”

Yeah, but to me it looked more like twenty odd lacs. There weren't enough bundles in the bag to make fifty lacs. Maybe the Manager helped himself to thirty odd lacs from the safe – who would know any better?

“We'll have to count it to be sure.”

I want to buy a car. I want wheels. I hate this going around in busses. And then too, the bloody bus comes once a day and we have to sit around at the bus stop for hours swatting flies.

“And you would rather buy a car and draw attention to yourself. Buy a bloody Rolls if you really want to show the world you have ill-gotten wealth...a yellow Rolls Royce.”

Very funny! Perhaps you have worked out what our future plans are?

“Sure. Buy a second hand scooty and keep a very low profile.”

For how long?

For a long, long while; perhaps for many years. That's why they say crime doesn't pay. The wait is too fucking long!”

There's got to be another way; we'll just have to find it.

“Well, one way would be to give ourselves up; make up a cock-and-bull story of how we in turn got robbed at gunpoint. They won’t believe us, but a doubt will be seeded in their minds. They will throw us in jail – don’t doubt they won’t. But when we get out – with good behavior, etc. - the money will be there waiting for us and we will be free to spend it. And they will know that. And they will not be able to do a fucking thing about it – for we can’t be punished for the same crime twice.”

I think that’s the only way, I said to her. Let us now build up a full proof story. Something they can’t trip us on. We shall rehearse it over and over until it becomes a clear picture in our minds. Colour of clothes, time of day, whether cloudy or windy. Description of those that snatched the money from us, their looks, ages, etc. Of course we can say it was night time and we didn’t see much. They molested you and three of them gang-raped you and slapped you about....

“Great... and you come out of this unscathed do you? Why shouldn’t I kick you in the nuts and you can carry the scar to show them? Kick you hard enough and you could become a sexless eunuch for the rest of your life – that would convince them.”

I gritted my teeth; the wench needed some serious head-slapping treatment – but what she says does make some sense. Even if I agreed to get hooped in my privates it would have to be a controlled boot. But I want that money with me; not stashed away some place which I don’t have access to.

Tanya was washing her hands at the sink when a knife whizzed past her right ear and buried itself in the wooden wall six inches from her head.

In Nano seconds shock, bafflement, fright, anger *what the fuck* chased through her mind. She spun around...and the second knife thudded square on her chest, on her sternum causing a sudden deep piercing pain. As she staggered back the knife fell to the floor – it was a dummy wooden knife. Fright froze her as she stood mouth agape and eyes widening with fright.

I strode towards her, hard and determined; I shoved my arm past her terror stricken face and yanked the knife out of the wall. Not a word was said, but my body language hopefully said ‘don’t fuck around with me, bitch!’

Get the money. I said turning away.

Chapter -7

Alfred Xavier's instincts told him he was near. He felt the familiar tingling over his whole body which made him doubly alert. He opened his voluminous duffle bag and selected his disguise. When, after hours of painstaking detailed make-up (peering into a dim mirror of the one roomed accommodation he had procured) he emerged. He was unrecognizable for he now looked a poor gardener in a cheap cotton soiled shift and open sandals with a look of humble bewilderment on his face. He headed towards the bus stand and market to make unobtrusive investigations.

#

Mandeep headed towards the market. His stride and body-language were defiant. He had had enough of this hide-and-seek routine about the bag of money. He would bring it to a head...today! Knock her head around until something spilled out her mouth.

Tanya watched him leave. What was she to do? She would brew some tea to help her think out a plan. She plugged in the kettle cord not noticing that it had an exposed wire which now touched with her body. The electricity passed through her body and she fell to the floor, still partially in contact with the cable and receiving a weak current now as it was filtered in passing through her clothes.

Two hours later when Mandeep returned he found Tanya on the floor with the electric cable lying across her with the clothes on her body partially singed but insulating her from direct current.. He removed the cable, sat her up and gave her a glass of milk. In a little while she recovered. But she felt a strange tinkling running through her body. By that afternoon the tingling running through her body was quite overpowering. She felt a power emanating from her finger tips. She looked around – no one was about. Mandeep was likely sitting under the tree in the back smoking. She approached the collapsible steel main door and put her hand out towards the gate. There was a blue flash that hit the iron gate and shook it. She was stunned and fell back. Her eyes opened big and wide. Was this a power she had acquired by the weak electricity running through her for two hours? Could she control and use this when she wanted to? She gingerly approached the gate again and tentatively put out her hand and again there was a flash. She was staggered. What is this she wondered; could she try and control the electricity within her body? She willed her body to contain the flash and approached the iron gate hesitatingly... nothing happened. She could restrain the flash she realized. She was elated and yet anxious to know whether she still had this power or had it dissipated in those flashes? She willed her mind to flash and approached the gate once again. She felt a renewed tingling through her body. When she put out her hand there was again a blue flash that singed the paint off the gate and shook it violently

off its hinges. She smiled with the knowledge of this power she now had and felt a warm glow at the wonder of it.

This was really exciting and made her heart beat faster. What did this mean? She would have to think it out. She would keep this to herself. Would this power last or was it temporary? She noticed though that the power and tingling in her body was not overwhelming and was controllable. Perhaps, she would have to preserve this power. Would it work against any material other than iron? But she was loath to try it out for fear it may diminish and finish. Like a battery discharging itself with over use. She wanted and coveted this power...she imagined all manner of things she may be able to do.

She sat slouched daydreaming – deep daydreaming when Mandeep arrived, from a stroll around the market no doubt, and fixed her with a piercing look, “Yah, Okay?”

“Yup.”

“Then get off your fucking butt and cook something. We can’t be eating all meals at the hotel” he stressed with a sneer, and walked past her heading for the inner room. His tone was annoying and she felt like pointing a finger at his retreating arse. It could be hilariously comic to see him do an electrical jig,

Chapter – 8

Xavier saw a young woman that lounged on the portico of a low cost roadside drab bungalow. She appeared to be in deep thought. He studied her surreptitiously. A young man walked past, whilst Xavier he sat on the ground at the gate and entered the bungalow. He had a few sharp words with the woman and walked into the building. This must be them, Xavier surmised. He stood up slowly like as if it were painful to do so (he had to act the part whether someone was watching or not) and slowly shuffled to the house and stood at the bottom of the few steps leading to the veranda. He waited patiently, half bent over and wiping the sweat from his face with a not too clean rag.

“Who are you?” Tanya had noticed him and turned to investigate.

“I don’t know my name – I am lost. Please could you give me some water?”

She poured water into his cupped hands and he drank by channeling the water into his mouth.

“What do you mean you don’t know? Don’t you know who you are?”

“No. I dunno who I am, where I come from, where I ‘m, or what m’name is.”

“Did you have an accident...you know, lose your memory?”

“I dunno.”

“Do you have any money?”

“No. But some peoples gives me food...y’know.”

“Would you like some food?”

“I dunno – I’m no hungry...I musta eat somethin. But I not refuse food.”

He sat on the ground and ate food off a platter and drank from a steel tumbler. He ate hungrily, burped loudly and washed his mouth out with the water left in the tumbler.

Mandeep called loudly from inside, “Tanya, where are you?”

Xavier kept his head down. This doubly confirmed that he had the right people.

Mandeep came out on to the veranda, “What’s going on?”

Tanya told him. He listened nodding his head.

“Okay, nameless man, you can go off now. There isn’t more we can do for you.”

Xavier bowed his head, joined his hands and thanked them respectfully before shuffling off.

Fifteen minutes later Mandeep followed. He could be a Police mole he said to Tanya. When he reached the market place he espied Xavier sitting on the curb eating gram out of a paper cone made from old newspaper. Mandeep hid behind the market crowd and watched him for a half hour and left only after Xavier rolled over, put his back to a low wall on the side of the curb and went to sleep.

It would take a better man than Mandeep to catch Xavier out!

Chapter – 9

Sameer

When the phone rang I had a premonition. It was Xavier and in his terse way he informed me exactly where Tanya was: the name of the village, the one roomed decrepit lodging with a veranda running along the front and how to get there. He didn’t wait to hear me thank him but disconnected immediately.

The place wasn’t far – a couple of hours drive. I wrapped some cheese sandwiches in foil, took a flask of coffee and was on my way. I got there in two hours and found the room easily. There was a villager with sweat staining his underarm standing watching my progress up the path to the house; he had both hands on his hips and a cocky expression.

“There no one here.” he said sharply and a bit accusingly.

Where did they go? I asked

“I don’t know.” He looked sullen, “they not paid my rent. Who going to pay rent?” he asked belligerently. “I seeing them go at 6 o’clock. They go in taxi not paying me. I know’d I should asked for advance rent...they don’t look right to me. I think they was not married, they said they was. He always squeezing her bottom – married chaps don’t do that. My father kill me if I don’t have rent.”

How much is it?

“You going to pay? You related to them?”

Just tell me how much it is?

“Well they was going to stay just for short days, the rent higher. It’s always higher for little days - you ask anybody. Had them stayed for a month or more I charge them the normal rent 12 Rupees a day. And I telled them that it be 15 Rupees daily and they is agreed. How I to know they go away not pay me? Could be plan they made in mind– to go not paying me? So if I said 17 Rupees they must agreed as they plan to run without paying”

Look, just tell me how much rent they owe you, how many days were they here?

“They here three days, but I can give you rebate if you going to pay me for all three days. I’ll give you rebate one Rupee a day... there! So you can take three rupees from forty-five and give me forty-two. I think that reasonable. But you want more, you speak to my father....”

I slapped a fifty rupee note in his hand and told him to keep the change and walked away quickly before he had time to blink an eye or close his wide open mouth.

Tanya had disappeared again. I spent the night in a cockroach infested hole and left early next morning. The retainer I was due to give Xavier was only to facilitate location of Tanya, and had she stayed put for another day I would have met her and learnt the story about the bank heist.

#

When Mandeep and Tanya reached the Dakbungalow early that morning where her parents were staying, they found it locked and abandoned. They went around the back to check with the chowkidar, but his accommodation was chained and locked. He had probably gone to the market.

Unknown to them they were being watched by a plain-clothed Police look-out who reported their eventual arrival back to the police Station. When they left, their taxi was intercepted by a police jeep and they were taken into custody. After a day-long interrogation where they stuck to their story that they were never in any bank or any other kind of robbery, they were remanded to Police custody and later sent to a neighboring town which had proper Police lock-up facilities. They would be interrogated in all seriousness the next day, maybe the next few days until they broke down

They were bundled into an armored van and sent off on the two hour long drive. The driver was the only Police personnel and doubled up as the security guard as well. He was properly insulated from the prisoners' section by thick expanded metal mesh. It was late afternoon and the sun was slanting into the cabin making the drive uncomfortable and tiring. Heavy commercial truck traffic had slowed them appreciably and the going was mentally and physically taxing.

“Would you kids like a cup of tea?”

“Sure would appreciate it” they replied

“Okay, we'll halt at the next roadside tea place.”

Tanya leaned towards Mandeep and whispered urgently. “Look, when we stop and I get a chance, I will do something. Don't say anything and don't ask me anything. It will free us and we will quickly have to make our get-away. Just don't question me...just follow what I say.”

Mandeep was intrigued and unbelieving. What possibly could a chit of a girl do to free them? Strip naked and dance...? He couldn't see how that would free them. What, in tarnation else could a girl do? Well, he would wait and see. They were in custody already; it could hardly get any worse.

The driver eventually pulled off the road behind a long line of parked trucks and switched off. He sighed heavily and pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his face and rubbed his neck. He spoke through the small grill mesh communicating window: “We are in queue and will have to wait our turn for tea. You guys not in a hurry are you?” And he laughed at his joke. He lumbered out of the truck and headed for the *Dhaba*. “Wait for me...don't go anywhere.” And once again he laughed at his joke slapping his thighs in merriment.

Tanya motioned for Mandeep to keep quiet. She shut her eyes and concentrated hard. Her breathing increased in rapidity and she felt her body tingling with static. Mandeep looked on mesmerized. Tanya slowly raised both arms and threw out her fingers pointing directly at the locked steel door.

There was a blue flash and a streak of jagged electrical energy hit the bolt on the door. The doors burst open with a hissing explosion and rocked back on their hinges.

“Get out quick!” shouted Tanya.

Mandeep dived out head first landing in the dirt and had the wind blown out of him. Tanya leapt out and fell on top of Mandeep winding him again. They recovered quickly and ran into the bush skirting the road. It was a good twenty minutes later that the Police driver discovered the van's rear doors hanging askew on their hinges. By then Mandeep and Tanya were riding atop a coal truck and exiting the scene at great speed.

“How did you do that?” Mandeep asked with unmitigated awe.

“I’ll tell you one day, if you are a good boy.”

Chapter – 10

Sameer: Newspaper

I read the report in the morning newspaper. I read it a number of times. It still didn’t make sense to me, likely it didn’t to a lot of people. How can reinforced doors be blown off an armored vehicle without any explosives? The forensic team did not find trace of any explosive. Then how were they blown off, an act of God??

The result of all this is that now ‘the –love-of-my-life’ is a wanted escapee person...my God!

What, Tanya, are you doing to me? But my resolve is strong and unshakeable, I will not rest, Tanya, until you are my wife! But first, to find you.

Alfred Xavier, you will help me and I shall make you a rich man.

Chapter – 11

The Gang

At age fifteen Mandeep had maneuvered to become the Gang Boss. Eleven boys and two girls roamed the streets in batches of two or three so as to not draw attention to themselves. Petty thieving on the streets, in its various forms, was what they did.

The street Police kept a loose eye on the Gang and the Gang was aware that the Police was conscious of them. They tried never to come in direct conflict with the police and they managed this by working quickly, snatching only small amounts of money and disappearing down a crowded lane. When a boy made a snatch the other boys would give chase ostensibly to catch the thief, but once around the corner they would quickly divide the loot.

Each boy worked part-time finding time from home chores or school. They attended street schools run by volunteers and retired people where they sat on the floor and where uniforms were unheard of. This way they could slip out, do a quick job and slip back into school with no one any the

wiser. The teachers were used to seeing boys coming and going as they pleased for the school time covered four hours a day and anybody could attend.

Mandeep, when he attended, sat in the front row and paid attention. The ‘back-benchers’ slipped in and out of the back door and only learned what they thought they required.

By the time he was fourteen, Mandeep could read and write and do a little math’s. He was educated well above the level of the other street rabble and it was thus not difficult to assume a ‘gang - boss’ position.

Some had homes to go to; some didn’t and slept on platforms of railway stations. Mandeep had a sort of home to go to but preferred to sleep mostly on the platform. Roomi, a slick fingered pick-pocket, shared his sleeping-mat most nights though not always. She had other friends and Mandeep didn’t care. That’s the way they lived and only a few had more permanent attachments. Roomi had had a few abortions for she had been sleeping with boys since she was thirteen when she ran away from home where she was beaten and tortured by a drunken step- father who would have raped her had she not run away.

Chapter 12

Now she was pregnant again – it was Mandeep’s baby - she told himso.

“Huh?” was all he said in a distracted way. But he thought about it...long and hard.

“Give me money for an abortion.”

“No. No abortions...I have a plan.”

“Well I’m not going through nine months of carrying your child to satisfy some stupid plan.”

“Just shut up. I’ll let you know in three days’ time.”

Mandeep visited the wealthier merchants in the market place. “How much for the unborn child?” They asked.

“Three hundred and thirty thousand rupees.” He told them.

“You’ll never see the child ever again.” They told him

“That’s O.K.” he said.

“We’ll let you know.”

Three days went past; then a week, then ten days. No news from any of the merchants.

“Look, I can’t wait any longer,” said Roomi, “Abortion will become dangerous and the *Dhais* will charge more.”

Mandeep went to the other side of town, Govindpur, where the rich businessmen and wealthy merchants lived. He picked out a large house that had a yard in front. After a long wait he was let in – he was wearing the cleanest and best clothes he possessed.

“How much?” was the first question asked by the *Sethji trader*.

“Three lacks.” He said hesitantly.

“What caste?”

“I don’t know,” said Mandeep. “When the child is born you can make him any caste you like.”

“Bring your wife and come here in an hour or two and we’ll see.”

Mandeep returned three hours later. He had bought a new outfit for Roomi and had her groomed at the local beauty salon. Roomi was naturally a pretty girl and had wheatish coloured skin. Mandeep saw that after a manicure and pedicure she definitely did not look like a street kid.

The *Sethji* was pleasantly surprised when he saw Roomi for with a bit of grooming she might be fairly acceptable in society.

Gulprasad Sethji was 48 years old and his wife was forty two – they had no issues; though he had tried to get a child with other women whom he kept in his large house with his wife’s consent. This present offer would appear to be an adequate solution.

“Come back tomorrow and I will let you know my decision. Your wife can stay here for the night.”

When Mandeep returned next day he had to look twice before he recognized Roomi - she was washed, bathed, and fresh with a new haircut, jewelry, make-up and fancy shoes.

Negotiations got underway almost immediately.

“You are not married to her, you know. So why should I give you three lacks?”

“I am married to her,” he lied, “we exchanged garlands and the child is mine.” The others that sat in on the negotiations were *Gulprasad’s* wife, uncle, and Roomi

“If I pay you the three lacks you are never to come here ever again – is that clearly understood?”

“Yes. But can’t I come to see my wife?”

“No! She is not your wife, never was and never will be. Is that understood?”

“Will you let me know whether it’s a boy or girl?”

“Nothing! You will sever all ties now and here. You will also sign these documents.”

A half hour later Mandeep was allowed to leave with three lack rupees weighing heavy in his bag. Roomi smiled and hugged him; her eyes were brimming with tears.

“Take care, Mandeep, I am very fond of you.”

“Yes, Madam Ji, after the child is born you might get your driver to drive you over to the neck of woods where I operate from. We could even make another baby and I could then make another three lacks.”

“Don’t sound sour, Mandeep. This was all your idea, and a good one. I was just going to abort it.”

“I’m not sour. This way not only have I got paid, but you have got yourself a good life and the tiny mite in your belly has got a shot at life too.”

Chapter – 13

Tanya met Mandeep in a coffee shop. All the tables were occupied so she asked if she could share the table with him. She saw straight away that he had little education but he appeared to have a lot of money and paid for whatever she ordered.

He fascinated her for not only were his clothes clean but were probably new right off the shelf. That went for his shoes too. She wondered at the source of his wealth. Could he be a trickster of some sort? But he didn’t have the suave charm of a confidence trickster, instead he seemed quite naïve and ingenuous.

“You will eat lunch with me tomorrow.” He raised his eyebrows at her.

“Are you asking me or telling me?”

“Eh, what I don’t understand...”

“It’s O.K. I’ll meet you here for lunch tomorrow.”

He grinned at her. He was, she decided, quite artless.

Chapter -14

It was a year later that Tanya decided to rob the bank.

She stretched and yawned and put her foot on Mandeep's back and pushed him out of bed. He landed on the floor and sat up with a scowl: "You looking for a hiding?"

"I have a great plan. We are going to 'case' a bank and see if we can relieve them of some money. It's a small agricultural bank in the suburbs."

Four months later they carried out a successful heist.

Chapter – 15

Seth Gulprasad was a successful and rich businessman regarded with respect in the community. And yet, there were dark whispers behind his back. "He's a sex fiend" the soft whispers said, "who keeps many young girls in his mansion to beget a child." "And his wife," they spitefully suggested, "is spineless and petrified of the sinister threat he makes to throw her out on to the street if she doesn't produce an heir for him."

So she had to 'bite her tongue' and mutely watched as young nubile girls were arranged for him (at great cost) whom he covered again and again, but none carried his seed. That he may be barren, he would never accept.

His adopted son, Sundram, was growing into a handsome youngster: straight limbed, strong, intelligent, and with a quick smile. He was booked to attend a prestigious boarding school on reaching the age of seven. Gulprasad wished he had a daughter too. He had tried, unsuccessfully for months on end to make Roomi the mother of another child. But it had not happened and, instead, a vague doubt about his own potency was creeping in to worry him.

Should he seek out the young man who had brought a pregnant Roomi to him? Would he agree, for a large fee, to give him a daughter? Where would he find him? Roomi would surely know. He mulled this for weeks before falling asleep. It would have to be planned carefully and with complete secrecy for it must never be known that his seed was *banjhi* (sterile).

Chapter -16

Gulprasad instructed his driver to take Roomi around the lower town every day, “Just drive around until Roomi asks you to stop so she can talk to her old street friends.”

Roomi met many of her erstwhile friends and was delighted to talk with them. After greetings and small talk she would ask each if they had knowledge of where Mandeep was. Blank looks and head shakes told her she must keep seeking.

Gulprasad never told her why he was seeking Mandeep. But he said if she located him he would give her a large bonus for reasons that he kept to himself. Roomi thought about this senseless driving around looking for Mandeep. Why only Mandeep? What connection or business would he have with Mandeep? Then she thought about the secret whispers, bits of which she had picked up – he is infertile they said and has been trying for ages to have his own child. The whispers did not believe his son, Sundram, was his own; and suggested that he had purchased a pregnant girl (Roomi) from the streets and was passing her child off as his own.

Though those whispers were correct and true, she conceded, yet how does Mandeep come into the picture? Could he be seeking Mandeep now to make her pregnant again? She giggled quietly. She wouldn't mind another child...wouldn't mind to lie in Mandeep's arms once again. But she would tell Mandeep about his large wealth and his desperation to have another child. She would urge him to ask for more than he had asked the last time. Much, much, more....

“I heard through the grape-vine that you were looking for me, and so have come to meet you. What is it you want?” Mandeep leaned over the polished table with eye-brows raised. His open necked shirt and clean pressed slacks made him look handsome and smart.

Gulprasad was at a loss for words. He hummed and hawed and ordered coffee to be brought to his private study room. They chatted of inconsequential things whilst sipping coffee. When will the bugger come to the point, thought Mandeep?

“Well?” Mandeep raised his eye-brows to urge him on.

“Just a moment...let's relax a bit.” Gulprasad ordered Vodka to be brought in. “You do drink Vodka?”

Mandeep nodded. Obviously, he thought, Gulprasad had something he was finding awkward to say and was building courage to say it. After the third large drink he smiled with drunken bonhomie and slapped Mandeep on the back.

“Look my friend, I’ll tell you straight and I would expect what I am about to divulge to remain strictly between us. It is not easy for me to say this or to ask you to do what I am about to propose.”

First hesitatingly and then in a rush he told Mandeep his proposal, which mirrored what Roomi thought might be the reason for the search for Mandeep.

“You can stay here for a month and have Roomi by your side every night until she is with child. Do you accept?”

Mandeep sat for a long while in thought. “I will have to consult with Roomi.”

“O.K. I’ll send for her.”

“No, I want to meet her in private.”

After the private meeting where they hugged and kissed hard and long, Mandeep emerged.

“Well, is it all settled, then?”

“Yes, the basics of it. We still have to discuss the terms.”

Gulprasad noticed that Mandeep looked flushed – the electricity between them must still work. Which was good, he supposed.

“O.K. so what are your terms? I suppose some money will be involved.”

“Not only money, but you will have to give me rights to visit.”

“Don’t get cute. I can always opt for artificial insemination – in vitro or other methods. Don’t imagine you are my only option.”

“Right, Mr. Bigman, in which case I shall take my wife and son and decamp. I have a thousand witnesses who will vouch she is married to me. I didn’t leave her in your custody without covering my arse. Ask Roomi and she will tell you we were married by a Pundit and I hold a certificate that says so.” Mandeep smiled cruelly.

“Where’s the certificate – let me see it.” Gulprasad was shaken and was breathing rapidly.

“Ha haha!” He thought rapidly, “You must take me for a complete fool. You think I would bring such a valuable document here with me so you could get your minions to snatch it and destroy it?”

Gulprasad was getting back his wind, “I don’t think you have any such document. I think you have only just made up this story to have a hold on me.” He pushed back his chair and stomped off to the inner rooms.

Mandeep waited; he knew Gulprasad had gone to confront Roomi with this piece of dastardly news, and he was relieved he had discussed it with her and made his plan. Apparently Gulprasad was

very fond of the child, Sundram, and doted on him. That would add grist to his advantage. Gulprasad emerged dragging Roomi behind him. The sound of a child crying could be heard.

“I have questioned her,” he said “and I know she is lying. I can tell when she is lying. So you can take your precious self and bugger off.”

“No problems, Mr. Gulprasad ji. Let her collect her child...our child, and we will be on our way; and will not darken your doorstep ever again.”

“You will do nothing of the sort, you jumped up scum off the streets! You will leave now, in a civil manner or I shall get my guards to throw you out! Now go on, git, get moving. Get off my property.”

“O.K. if that’s the way you want it. Come on Roomi, get the kid and let’s go.”

Roomi squirmed out of Gulprasad’s grip and ran inside. Gulprasad faced Mandeep and raised a finger, “That is not your child and you cannot remove him. He is my son and has been ever since he was born.”

“Well a DNA test will soon settle that.”

“It will settle nothing – you sold him to me.”

“Aaha, so you also deal in human flesh and slavery!”

Gulprasad was put down and stunned. “What do you want?”

“I told you.”

“You can visit twice a year for half an hour.”

‘Fiddlesticks! If I wish I will visit twice or thrice a week and you will put me up for the night and feed me.’

Gulprasad stood up tall, expanded his chest and looked down his nose and sneered at him, “We’ll see.”

Chapter – 17

Mandeep awoke with a start and rubbed his nose; Roomi’s hair was tickling his nostrils, she lay cuddled up to him with her leg across him and her head on his chest. He tilted her face up and kissed her nose; she stirred sleepily. He had forgotten how good Roomi was...better than that bitch, Tanya whom he was somewhat vary of and scared of what trick she might produce next. She must be a bloody witch! Always threatening him nowadays and looking him in the eye. Thinking of her he shuddered; he

was of late always pleasing her in small ways....Gosh, if he didn't bring her to climax during sex...God knows she might hex him or something?

She had given him one lack (100,000) rupees and whilst doing so had warned him...with index finger held rigidly in his face. "Don't blow it, chum."

"Where's the rest?" he had asked her.

"It's with me...I'm not giving it all to you in a big rush. So go easy."

And he had not quarreled with her. But after a week when he had gone looking for her, he had not found her.

Chapter – 18

Tanya lay on a wooden bench and felt her eyelids drooping shut. Sameer had stripped off his clothes before oil massaging her naked body; he washed her feet with rose-water and sucked her toes to remove excess water and gently dried them with a soft towel. He worked around her with a *full blown* erection. It gave her special titillation when she felt little touches when he leaned over her – an experience she had never felt before; it made her body moan with excitement and expectation.

Sameer then withdrew leaving her lying on the sun-deck; left her to let her libido absorb the sexual arousal he had induced. After a nap her sexual urge would be sharper and more incisive, he expected. Sex should never be a heave and thrust job – it should rather entail gentle molding and subtle urging towards a climaxing crescendo; which he planned they would both experience aided by a couple of pre supper drinks. Not after supper drinks, as was the prevalent custom, for the senses were then dulled by a lavish dinner and the postprandial drinks which whilst exciting the senses demoted the performance.

Chapter – 19

Gulprasad leaned back in his chair at the breakfast table and addressed Mandeep in his deep voice, "Well, have you made a baby for me and my dear wife, Roomi?"

Mandeep looked steadily at him, and took his time to reply.

"And what makes you think we would be doing that?"

“What do you mean, why else are you here. And why else do you imagine I’m letting my wife share your bed?”

Mandeep smiled crookedly and sat up, “Yeah? And what will you reward me for doing this monumental favour to you?” He drummed his fingers on the table.

Gulprasad sneered (he was good at that). “You will get your stud fees comprising an extremely generous amount of Rupees three lacs.”

“And if I thumb my nose at that?”

“You’d be a singular bloody ass, for there are other stalwarts who would be very grateful indeed for the money and favour and would Salaam me with bended back to have been the chosen one.”

“Of course, you are totally correct; and I would have the extreme pleasure of telling all and sundry of what a sexually incompetent dried up asshole you are – in spite of your well-oiled, twirled moustache that you present to the public. Your well kept secrets and your incompetences will become common knowledge. You will turn into an object of derision and behind-the-hand smirks. If that is your desire go ahead and hope Roomi will accept the Lotharios you choose to service her.”

There was tense, drawn out silence at the table; Gulprasad was staring at the wall opposite him, his expression hard and fixed. “How much do you want?”

“Three crores (3, 000,000,0)”

“You are fucking mad.”

They settled for half that amount and the right for Mandeep to visit as he pleased. To the child he would be known as an uncle from the mother’s side.

Chapter – 20

“Yes, I was involved in the bank robbery.”

Sameer looked at her stunned, “Are you serious? Don’t joke around.”

“I am... serious.”

“Are you mad? What happened?” He asked eyebrows arched.

“I was suffering from a serious bout of monetary insufficiency.”

“So you robbed the bank. Do you know how serious that is?”

“Absolutely.”

“Why didn’t you come to me?”

“I would have had to explain and spread my legs – the bank was easier.”

“Shit! Are you some kind of a nut? Where’s the money?”

“Safe, mate, safe: safe with my parents.”

“So you’ve involved them – such simple honest people.”

“They don’t know anything...they are just looking after a duffle bag for me.”

“They are, nevertheless, in grave danger.”

“Then do something, man – I didn’t come here to just get fucked by you. You know a lot of people and carry quite a clout. Use it man...get me out of this.”

“So now you are using ‘fuck’ to get me to help you out?”

“You want me to leave?”

“No, of course not!”

“Then ‘fuck’ it is that I am using as a lever, “Tanya smiled knowingly, “I have a friend who too needs rescuing.”

“I was waiting for that.”

“Well, if he is caught he will squeal.”

“Will you marry me?”

“Are you for real...?”

“I’ll save you and your friend only if you are my wife. That’s not unreasonable, I’d say?”

“O.K.”

Okay to all three: me saving you, me saving your friend, and you marrying me?”

“Shit, O.K.”

“And being my wife in thick and in thin and...”

“Get on with it before I change my mind.”

“If you do, change your mind, I promise, cross my heart, I will come and visit you in jail.”

“Very funny!”

“It’ll cost you five lacks – there are a lot of grubby hands I’ll have to cover.”

“It’ll take me three to five days to get the money.”

“Right. And then on the seventh day the Lord will make you and me husband and wife!”

“You’re a fucking freak, man.”

He shrugged.

Chapter -21

When Tanya went to her flat she found five notes slipped under her door, Mandeep wanted to know:

Where are you? Call me.

You have obviously gone somewhere. Call me when you return.

Call me...Urgent!

Will visit again tomorrow.

Met your parents, they don't know where you are.

She called Mandeep, told him to come on over. He arrived in a shiny new Honda City.

"Well, well...A new car I see. Have you robbed another bank?"

"I didn't need to, it's a long story I'll tell you one day."

"I have all day – so tell me."

And so he told her.

"Oh wow! So you are filthy rich now and will get richer when she conceives,"

"Yes, and you can keep that bank money...gratis."

"What does that mean... you are not serious?"

"Yes I am; keep the money. Just tell me how you pulled off that stunt in the armored truck?"

"I told you never to ever bring that up – NEVER." She shouted belligerently, her eyes looked demonical.

"Okay, sorry." He took a step back. That was scary. Perhaps he should leave now; he was not comfortable in her company anymore. He took a last look at her deep breasts and waved a 'good-bye' with one hand over his head as he departed.

The wedding went off smoothly: it was a small gathering of close friends. Tanya's parents attended and Sameer saw they looked older and quite frail now. The suit her father wore hung loose on his frame and mother dear, looked diminutive. During the ceremony they had tears in their eyes; they were losing their only daughter to Sameer– though Sameer is a good lad they assured each other nodding and holding hands.

At the end and after the guests had been fed and fare-welled, Tanya took her father to her room and put a lack of rupees in his hands. He looked up with admiration in his eyes he was proud of her.

"We didn't know you earned so well, *bête*, what exactly do you do?"

“I am an ‘Events Manager’”, she lied, “it pays well. We’ll come and visit you every two days or so; ring me if you need anything.”

Chapter – 22

Mandeep felt a sense of loss: Tanya was married and out of reach. His stay with Roomi was uncertain. The thing to do was to not get her pregnant for as long as possible. Of course, another option would be to buy a house and get a young chick to live with him; a young, good-looking, sexy chick. Do it all proper...get her to sign a legal document laying down the terms of endowment covering the length of their stay together. No marriage will be involved and they could or would part with mutual consent. He would give her a set amount as severance to cover each year that they lived together. No children. No!

Mandeep made his way to Gulprasad. He would have to find a way to get as much money as he could off the ol’ fart whether he got Roomi pregnant or not. It wasn’t going to be easy to wheedle the sly ol’ fox. But he had plans...yes he did and he would have no hesitation to put them into action. He smiled to himself; he could see a rosy life ahead, a life of luxury and abundance.

“Where have you been?” Gulprasad looked at Mandeep with his characteristic sneer. Mandeep was slouching in a cane chair on the open verandah.

“Out and about.”

“What does that mean?”

“Whatever you want it to mean. I’m not about to give you a detailed report of my goings and comings.”

“You’re getting very cocky these days.”

“Your money is making me cocky.” He said waving his hand in a flippant way....

Roomi walked out with the kid Sundram in tow. That helped diffuse any shouting match that was building up to explode.

“Hello, darling wife, Mandeep has decided to visit us,”

“Yes I know – he came into my bedroom at five in the morning.”

Gulprasad felt a pang of jealousy. “Who allowed him into the house at that hour?”

“Your faithful menials did,” quipped Mandeep, “They are more fond of me than they are afraid of you.”

“Shut up, idiot! You want to get wupped?” Gulprasad sneered and glared at him.

“Sure do. But do you have enough slaves to do it? Maybe your Grandmother could help.”

Gulprasad exploded out of his chair breathing fire. Mandeep rose casually and disdainfully. They faced each other – Gulprasad was shaking with heightened emotion and anger Mandeep faced him dismissively unconcerned. He was brought up on the streets and was a hardened dirty fighter. One hard kick in the nuts or a head butt and Gulprasad would be incarcerated in bed for a week. Gulprasad’s sixth sense indicated that this was not a normal scene; Mandeep looked far too confident and it didn’t look like a put on job either. He’d better back-off for the time being at least. He sat down abruptly.

Roomi stood frozen with terror, one fist to her mouth, eyes big and staring with fright. The child too was terror stricken and clutched his mother’s leg as hard as he could. He now let out a shrill and piercing scream that distracted and galvanized the antagonists. Gulprasad rushed to the child lifting him to his chest kissing him repeatedly and stroking his head whilst making conciliatory and soothing sounds to calm him. Mandeep swiftly went to Roomi and hugged her shivering body tight.

Roomi calmed down rapidly and now an intense anger took its place. She pushed Mandeep away and admonished loudly, “Don’t you dare behave like a brute...like fighting dogs in my house ever again. And that goes for you too Mr. Gulprasad. You behave like an animal again and I’ll shut you out of the house. You can do your fighting out in the yard – not in front of me or my child.”

Both Gulprasad and Mandeep stood stunned and wide eyed with astonishment. Mandeep was amazed to realize that Roomi wielded such power over Gulprasad and the affairs of her home. Gulprasad was jolted into realizing that Roomi had covertly and compellingly ascended to become mistress of the house. He was befuddled and looked at her with new found respect. He felt an urge to fold his hands and ask her forgiveness; such was her sudden escalated stature.

Both Mandeep and Gulprasad looked at Roomi with unblinking eyes... and a singular thought went through both male minds: She looked utterly desirable and they both wanted to bed her. Roomi caught the look of raw desire on both males and swiftly took command of the situation.

“I am, in a way, married to the pair of you and I shall do my wifely duties to both. I shall brook no arguments and certainly no bickering. You will concede to my decision without rancor or ill-feeling. Is that understood?” Both men nodded their head with puzzled expressions. They felt subdued and positively humbled. The rapidly changed circumstance left them both un-nerved and unsure. Suddenly they realized they were reduced to playing second fiddle to Roomi. She would decide their future relationship with her. Neither of them wished to assert their ‘male superiority’ at present with her.

Gulprasad felt any overtly assertive gesture from him at this delicate moment may drive Roomi to firmly side with that ass, Mandeep, and then anything could happen – he could even lose his darling child.

Mandeep held his peace for any belligerent showing may well result in his forceful eviction from the house when he may stand to lose both Roomi and his son.

A fragile peace overlay a simmering circumstance.

Chapter – 23

Tanya exited Sameer's home and walked along the pavement in high heels and a parasol over her head to protect her from the fine misty rain that was in the air. The sky was overcast and thunder was heard to the south. But that didn't worry Tanya as her mission was short – just to the corner store for some groceries. She carried a large burlap bag in which nestled her mobile phone and a small purse with her money and credit cards. At home, Sameer was propped up in bed with a cup of coffee. He would exercise for half an hour before breakfast to facilitate which Tanya was out to collect eggs and bread.

Tanya's progress was suddenly impeded by two burly policemen in freshly starched khaki uniforms who blocked her path.

“What is it now” she said acidly.

“We are taking you into custody for questioning. Please come with us to the Police Station now and you can ring your husband or lawyer from there”

She called Sameer frantically explaining the situation in a shrill excited voice. He soothed her and assured her she would be out of Police custody in a jiffy. He would go and procure Bail from the magistrate.

After a thorough body search, Tanya was put in a cell and given a receipt for the mobile and money she had in her purse.

The Police wanted to re-question her about the Bank theft, but their main quest was to learn about her and Mandeep's escape from the Armoured van. “I don't know,” she said, “there was a loud crack...like thunder and the door hung open. We, of course, made our way out. The Lord must have wanted us to go. After all we were then, and still are, innocent.”

“You may be innocent, that only further questioning will establish; but you are certainly not innocent of breaking open a Police security van and fleeing there from” said the paunchy, mustachioed Police Inspector eyeing her closely and letting his eyes linger on her ample breasts.

“And what,” Inspector Sahib, “Did we use to break that solid steel door, may I ask? We were frisked thoroughly and cuffs were only taken off inside the truck.”

“You must have had an accomplice.”

“And you expect someone to believe that? Even a team of expert ironsmiths couldn’t do that to the reinforced van in less than an hour.”

The Inspector knew that was true. It was as if a powerful bomb had exploded inside; and if it were so the two occupants would have been dead. This was something the police bomb disposal experts were unable to explain. Only the door was blown, everything else in the van was undamaged precluding the bomb angle. It looked more and more as the girl claimed – a bolt of lightning blew the door off its hinges. And the lightning seemed to strike from inside the van. Completely unexplainable! Were these kids specially favored?

The rain was now coming down heavily and increasing by the minute. There would be no business until the rain stopped so the Inspector and the three Policemen retired to the room at the back and prepared to make hot cups of tea. With the thunder overhead and the heavy drumming of rain on the tin roof, conversation was at shouting level.

The next bolt of lightning appeared to the Policemen like as if it had hit the Station. They cowered, their hands covering their heads. They recovered presently and strode forth to inspect the hall. That is when they espied Tanya walking out of the Station quite calmly and unperturbed. They realized later that none of them had said a thing to her retreating back as Tanya gingerly picked her way across the puddles. In fact they had stood goggle-eyed and stunned watching her walk away.

Chapter – 24

Roomi hadn’t shared Mandeep’s bed the previous night. Well, how would she get pregnant if she slept alone? He was too tired and sleepy last night to question her, but he would find out today.

He passed the day with his street friends who all wanted a ride in his car. There were five of them so he put three in the back seat, a full breasted young girl next to him on the bench front seat and another boy on the other side of her. He noticed she didn’t mind when his arm kept brushing her breast

as he changed gears. When he looked at her from the side of his eye, he caught her smiling in a knowing seductive way – that made his heart race and he reckoned he could score on her with a bit of work. He tucked that away for future use.

That night again Roomi didn't come to his bed and he noticed this when he awoke to use the toilet late at night. He went in his slippers looking for her and found her asleep in the child's room. He shook her awake: "Come," he said, "the child is asleep now."

"No," she shook her head, "I'm sleeping here."

Mandeep padded away softly back to his bed. It was no point arguing with her at that hour. He would sort it out in the morning.

"Why aren't you sleeping with me at night, are you having your periods?"

"No. I want to sleep with my son."

"Oh, I quite understand that... but if you don't come to me how will you get pregnant?"

"I don't want to conceive anymore."

Mandeep looked at her with a puzzled frown. Then how do I get my money from Gulprasad?"

"I don't know. I don't want you to get money from my husband. That money will be used on my son, Sundram as part of his inheritance."

Mandeep was floored. He could picture the situation getting completely away – out of his hands. He could not force Roomi to go away with him. If she refused to support him there was nothing he could do. He would have to swallow his pride and humour her. If he showed any dissent it could well drive her into Gulprasad's arms. Mandeep would certainly then get his marching orders and he would have to leave shamefacedly. He may even have to surrender his car to the bank...No, no that won't do at all. He would have to find a way out.

Roomi was very agitated and worried all morning. She realized she shouldn't have said what she blurted out to Mandeep – not the way she said it anyway. There was no way she could take her words back... she really didn't want to either for she meant every word of it. But, gosh, he had been so good to her, really looked after her those days they were on the streets. But, then she had been good for him too. It was because of her that he had some money now. Maybe, she would find a way to give him some more money – her husband was cash flushed. She tapped her teeth with her long nails as she sat thinking.

She saw Mandeep as she took her place around the lunch table with her husband. Mandeep appeared to be in a good mood and smiled at her often. Thank god, she said to herself, Mandeep

appeared to have not taken her words to heart. He sat close to her and touched her arm often. He was an exciting man, she admitted, and she loved making love to him.

That night she appeared in his bedroom. Walking in and bolting the door from inside. He looked over his shoulder and smiled at her. She had already started to disrobe, casting her clothes on to the floor as she walked to the bed. He smiled again giving her a big toothy smile with pleasurable excitement and rising anticipation.

She jumped into bed and held her hand out with something resting in her palm. He squinted at it with curiosity. “We are going to use this tonight she said indicating the contraceptive in her palm. He kept his smile flowing – he was not going to show his disappointment. “Right,” he said, “as you please.” He would find a way to slip it off during the heavy love-play he decided.

Unknown to the two, Roomi was already pregnant!

Chapter – 25

“What kind of investigation did you two jokers do?” Asked the Chief Inspector angrily, “if you didn’t have proof to arrest her, why did you do so? You have made the force look bad.”

The two Policemen (Sepahis) averted their gaze.

“Sir, we had information that the girl was involved.”

“And the other one with her...?”

“We could arrest him – but then again we have no proof.”

“Bring him in and we can put the screws on him before he can arrange bail.”

“But, Sir, he is with Gulprasad who, as you know, is very influential.”

“Does he live with him?”

“Yes, Sir, he does. Rumors suggest Gulprasad and Mandeep share the same woman and that she is married to both men.”

“That’s interesting.” said the inspector taking off his cap and scratching his head. “I’ll have to take advice on this... could this be... sort of... bigamy, I wonder? I know in villages of India there are cases of two brothers marrying one woman. In our scriptures too, one woman was married to five brothers.”

Chapter – 26

Mandeep cruised slowly down the street. He was looking for the girl with the large breasts who sat with him in the front seat last time.

It was a bright sunny day with a light breeze rustling the leaves of the roadside trees. He saw a coffee shop and stopped for a cup. When he returned fifteen minutes later he was thrilled to find the girl he was looking for leaning against the car door.

“I recognized your car”, she said brightly, “Will we go for a spin again?”

“Sure why not? Hop in.” he said with excitement running through him. She smiled impishly looking fresh with kohl in her large eyes and loose hair that fell around her shoulders. She pulled the car door open and jumped in childlike: bouncing on the seat and swishing her hair coquettishly. His eyes devoured her charming and innocent manner that exuded unblemished youth and ingenuous glee.

They had lunch at a roadside drive-in place that had rooms for travelers. He ordered lunch and a bottle of beer to be brought to the room; he hoped he'd have an amorous afternoon. But it didn't turn out that way. Maya would have none of it. She wanted a cruise around the countryside, enjoy the ride, feel the wind on her face and let it ruffle her hair and bring tears to her eyes.

She sang a happy little song whilst he drove gently through the country side and giggled with glee. When he tried to touch her she moved away.

Chapter – 27

“Where have you been all this while?” asked Roomi. “Didn't you want to see your son or me?”

“Been busy with me own doings... I need money, hon...lots of it.” said Mandeep pulling her close and nuzzling her neck”

“You are always needing money – you've become a spendthrift. What do you need money for?”

“Need to get married, ol' girl. You are settled now. I need to get settled too. She won't let me touch her unless I marry her.”

“Who may you be talking about?” She flashed her eyes at him.

“Maya – remember Maya?”

“Don't be stupid. She's just a child.”

“O yeah? Not anymore she isn’t. She’s got the largest and most beautiful breasts in the whole world. And she’s bloody, fucking beautiful.”

“You’re not serious?”

“You bloody bet I am!”

“Did you plan all this...like to get me pregnant and squeeze money out of my husband to marry Maya?”

He grinned, “Think about it.”

“How did you get me pregnant? I used my fingers to ensure you had a condom on?”

“Tricks of the trade, honey bun.” But he was surprised and thrilled by the news that she was with child.

#

“Hey, Gulprasad, old cock, I need some money...heaps of it”

“Fuck off!”

“I will, once I get the money.”

“Sun getting to you, is it?”

“Not son, dumb arse, hopefully it will be a daughter this time.”

Gulprasad swung around and nearly toppled. He stood there staring stupidly at Mandeep. “Eh, what’s that?”

“Your wife, Roomi is pregnant, fart-arse, and you don’t even know”

A slow smile spread across Gulprasad’s face, soon he was grinning with all his false teeth showing. “You swear.”

“Go and see for yourself ...feel her up, if she’ll allow you to.”

And Gulprasad started crying. He was still grinning but the tears poured out and ran down his cheeks. He groped for Mandeep’s hand, “I am eternally grateful. Thank you, my dear friend.” Mandeep was touched and struggled valiantly to retain his own tears.

#

The Police arrived in two jeeps just as the sun, a huge red sphere, was setting behind the dark line of low hills in the distance. The Inspector saluted Gulprasad and promptly put his cap under his left arm.

“Ah, what can I do for you, Inspector?”

Gulprasad appeared to be in an exuberant mood.

“Sir, we would like a word with Mr. Mandeep, Sir.”

“I’m afraid you can’t, Inspector,” he smirked - he was enjoying this, he looked up at the cirrus clouds that were turning pink, he exaggeratedly scratched his belly and brought his eyes back to focus on the Inspector, “Ah, yes...you see he isn’t here...hasn’t been here since he gunned the engine of his car and roared away. God alone knows what brings him here or what takes him from here. A loner of sorts you know; doesn’t tell anyone where he goes. But why would you be looking for him, Inspector?”

“Oh, just a traffic infringement, Sir.”

“You don’t say? Heh, heh! The entire Police force of this little town in two jeeps to investigate a traffic infringement you’ll have me believe, eh?”

The Inspector smiled and put on his peaked cap, “We’ll be on our way then Sir, to do Police work which is our lot. We thought we’d have a quick chat with Mandeep, but that will have to be some other time.” So saying the convoy of two jeeps swept away stirring dust which swept across the onlooker’s faces.

Chapter – 28

Tanya decided to walk to the supermarket to pick up some ingredients for the soup she was preparing for Sameer. It was a pleasant day and a brisk walk would do her good. She had left Sameer propped up in bed sipping tea. Suddenly her way was blocked by two burly policemen.

“What is it now?” she said with some asperity.

“The Inspector wishes to speak with you. Please come with us to the Station.”

“I want to speak to my husband.”

“You will be allowed to do so from the Station.”

She was whisked away in the Jeep. “I am afraid, Madam, we shall have to detain you for questioning in the Bank Robbery case.”

“I have been captured and physically hauled to the Police Station on trumped up charges...Come and rescue me immediately.”

Sameer catapulted out of the bed and hurried to dress to get an Anticipatory Bail order from a magistrate.

Tanya was roughly led to a cell and pushed inside. As she refused to answer any questions she was searched and then summarily locked up.

“If you don’t answer questions, you could be here for months.” said the Inspector, giving her the once over. “Don’t expect to be bailed out as this is a murder case.” His ominous words were highlighted by deep rumblings of thunder from the south. Heavy black clouds were rolling in with flashes of lightning.

“How do you assume it was me that was involved?”

“Oh, we have our ways – you will talk in a couple of days when you are starved and forced to keep awake continuously.” The Officer clanked the door shut and strolled to the back-room where he would have a cup of tea with the other men. The weather was turning nasty rapidly and some hot tea would be most welcome. Before they could finish their cup of tea, the loud crash of thunder was around them. From the rear window of the small room they could see heavy rain advancing to swiftly envelope the Station.

“Shit, it’s a mother of a storm!” said the Inspector and the two men nodded. Just then there was a mighty crash and blinding light. The three men covered their heads with their hands and cowered. Was the Station hit? When the reverberations cleared the men went warily to the front room to investigate. What they saw left them stunned. The cell door was hanging ajar on one hinge; but stranger still, Tanya had, nonchalantly and as if without a care, walked through the Station, into the heavy rain and was rapidly disappearing behind a curtain of intense rain and descending gloom.

#

The Inspector was the first to recover. He raised his hand and pointed to Tanya’s hazy figure now almost out of sight behind the sheet of rain.

“Did you see that...did you see that?” He was almost incoherent. “What the hell ~what was that?” The other two Policemen were speechless and stood there staring out at the rain. The Inspector saw he was not going to get much help from that area. He went to the cell to investigate and found the door open, hanging by one hinge; just as it had happened to the Armoured Van. An involuntary shiver shook him and the hairs on the back of his neck rose.

The rain, just as rapidly as it had come, was as swiftly lessening and turning into a light drizzle. The Inspector sat at his desk quite flummoxed. How would he explain any of this without sounding ridiculous? He thought for a long time chewing the end of his pencil. Then at the hour when shadows started to lengthen he came to a conclusion. He called the two policemen into his office.

“Not a word of this is to go out. Not a word to anyone, you hear? I’m going to ignore the case and maintain that we never found the culprits. If they don’t believe me, or charge me with dereliction of duty and hopefully transfer me out, I’d be a happy person. I can’t understand this – it’s too spooky.

“Did you two jokers hear what I said? Take care, make sure no word of this ever goes out or you two can start calculating your superannuation. Maybe I’ll have to as well.”

The two nodded their heads – their eyes were still glassy.

“O.K. call the local work-shop and get someone to come across and weld the cell door hinge...go on, go on, dammit, move it, don’t just stand there.”

At this point Sameer entered the Police Station. “Where is Tanya?” He enquired.

“She left.” said the Inspector in a tremulous voice.

“What do you mean she left? Didn’t you take her into custody?”

“Yeah, but she is gone. We set her free.”

Sameer spun on his heels and was off without another word ~ well if she is gone, she is gone he thought with relief. He had not been able to get bail – the courts were very busy. He headed homewards. That was a strange atmosphere at the Police Station, he recalled– surreal almost!

#

Mandeep walked in a little later – a bit apprehensive as to what kind of reception he would get after the unsolved Armored Van incident.

The Inspector saw him and his jaw fell open and then he nearly fell out of his chair in alarm. He looked around wildly, his hands shook and his mouth opened and shut as he tried to say something. He suddenly shot out of his chair and saluted Mandeep. Now Mandeep nearly fell over backwards; he stood gaping! What was going on here? “I, I...err...” he managed, “I came to report the theft of my car. You see....”

“Yes, Sir,” said the Inspector bending forward obsequiously, “we’ll find it for you right away, Sir.”

“You know...err...I had parked it in front of the Supermarket just before the rain came...and, and...”

“Don’t worry, Sir, we’ll find it. Our jeep will drop you off at Mr. Gulprasad’s place. You don’t worry about it at all. We’ll bring it to your house the moment we locate it...which will be soon; I hope...I mean it will be soon.” Mandeep just stood with his hands hanging loose by his side not knowing what to make of it.

The driver was summoned and a totally befuddled. Mandeep was whisked off to Gulprasad’s house in the Police jeep...with the siren wailing like a Banshee!

“Whew! That was close.” The Inspector passed his hand over his face, “I thought he would hex us for detaining Tanya. Send word out, we want that car, Mandeep’s car, returned ASAP. Don’t let them dismantle it in any way.”

#

Tanya let herself into the house and drew a hot bath. She was soaked through and cold. But she was very happy she still had the *power* with her. She smiled at herself in the mirror over the washbasin. Though she had not looked back at the Station, she knew the Inspector was looking at her walking away. That he didn’t do anything told her he was stunned and completely confounded...and maybe a little frightened...hopefully a *lot* frightened.

She lay submerged in the hot tub - wiggling her toes to make little ripples and took deep breaths that made her erect nipples break surface.

Where the devil is Sameer, she thought languorously, if she depended on him she would still be languishing in that bloody Police cell. A thought came to her. She *whooshed* out of the tub and stepped on to the bath mat dripping water all over it. She would leave – enough of this slouching around making soup for Sameer.

She walked down the street lugging a duffle bag and hailed a taxi, “Put my bag in the boot.”

Chapter – 29

Tanya knocked on the street door and rang the bell. She heard footsteps and somebody opened the door.

“Hello Aunty Tanya.” Maya smiled and rushed to help with the bag.

“Hello...err...Maya is it?”

“Yes it is. Won’t you come on in?” Big clear innocent eyes looked expectantly at Tanya.

“Where is Mandeep? And don’t call me Aunty...just Tanya will do.”

“Sorry. Okay...I mean I don’t know where Mandeep is. He just went to the super-market and was to be back a long time ago.”

“Are you bedding-down with him?”

“Eh?”

“Keeping his bed warm – you know, living with him?”

“Yes, he lives here...” and then she blushed heavily, “I mean ...I mean ...we live together...I mean,” she realized what the inference would mean and became utterly confused and agitated.

“It’s okay, honey,” Tanya held her hand, “we lived together, in sex, for a long time. But that was a long time ago. It’s over now, so don’t worry your pretty head about it.” Tanya hugged her and felt her young body tense and trembling.

“Are you telling me Mandeep lives here and hasn’t crawled into your bed?”

“He has tried, but I won’t let him.”

“That’s amazing.” Tanya believed her and had *wonder* and respect for this young chit of a girl.

“Well, we aren’t married...you know...”

Tanya burst out laughing. She quite liked this frank young thing. “Is that the only reason? Don’t you like him?”

“Oh I like him alright...but, but, if he marries me it would be different.” She blushed prettily. Tanya was only a little bit older, but she felt ancient in Maya’s company.

“Are you going to offer me some tea?”

“Sure, of course,” Maya looked unsure and flustered, “I’m sorry. I’ll just put the kettle on.” And she ran to the kitchen leaving Tanya standing in the middle of the room with her large bag. She smiled; it was a million years since she had been so young and so rattled.

Chapter 30

Life had taken a dramatic turn for Roomi. She was treated with gentle care and waited upon hand and foot. Gulprasad ensured his wife chanced no domestic accident or any strenuous episodes that may induce an abortion. Maids were employed to care for her every need and wish. She was encouraged to take long walks, rest well and eat nourishing foods. Gulprasad prayed that the Lord would bless his small family with a baby daughter.

When the day arrived all was in readiness. She was rushed to the hospital’s maternity ward where she was expected. Four hours later a high pitched wail announced the arrival of little Guddi: bald and wrinkled with long fingers, sharp nails, and large eyes. Gulprasad’s prayers had been answered. He thanked the Lord and cried with emotion and gratitude.

Mandeep rushed in a little later. “Where’s my little daughter?” he asked in a loud voice, “I’m a father twice over now.” He puffed his chest out. “How are you, my sweet?” he went over and stroked Roomi’s arm. She opened her eyes and smiled groggily at him.

“Please keep your voice down.” Scowled the nurse who was settling bottles on the corner table.

“Get out of the room.” Said Gulprasad in a low voice full of menace. At that point the door opened and the attending doctor walked in and requested them all to leave the room as she would check the mother now.

In the corridor, Gulprasad turned to Mandeep and said in a low growl, “You don’t know what I can do to you bastard. I can have you waylaid and beaten up to an inch of death – or maybe to an inch beyond death.”

“... And I can have your balls fried for breakfast, asshole!”

I’ll have to teach this son-of-a-bitch a lesson seethed Gulprasad.

I’ll have to get Tanya to fry his balls thought Mandeep with rising anger

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“Please keep your voice down.” Scowled the nurse who was settling bottles on the corner table.

“Get out of this room.” said Gulprasad to Mandeep in a low voice full of menace. How dare you come in here and raise your voice? At that point, thankfully, the door opened and the attending doctor walked in and requested them all to leave the room as she would check the mother now.

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#

Gulprasad realized that such confrontations would continue to take place; He would have to change his approach until he thought of a suitable way to put Mandeep in his place permanently. He waited until they got home; there he uncorked a bottle of bubbly wine.

“Let us have a drink to celebrate.”

“Sure. What is that drink?” he asked suspiciously.

“It’s a bubbly white vine . . . low in alcohol.”

“Is it very expensive?”

“Not very expensive, but yes it is expensive.”

“Why are you giving me this, you know I drink the local hooch.”

“Well, it’s not every day that a daughter is born to my dear wife.”

Mandeep noted that Gulprasad said, “A daughter.” And not “My daughter.” He was pleased. He took a tentative sip and liked it. It was sweet. He drained his glass in two large gulps. Gulprasad refilled his glass, this time almost to the brim.

#

When Mandeep arrived at his two bedroomed apartment he was staggering drunk. He fumbled with the door key and eventually entered and went straight to his bedroom. He stripped off and got into bed in the semidarkness. He found a woman in his bed. His heart leapt. He presumed Maya had given up her resistance to him and showed it tellingly by getting into his bed stark nude. He kissed the back of her neck, for she was facing away from him, and fumbled with her breasts and quite easily entered her (she appeared to be ready for him), He was a bit disappointed and sad to realize she was not a virgin, but what the hell...he was in no mood to complain. He took her with rising passion and unrestrained abandon. Being numbingly drunk, it took him a long time to reach crescendo – his partner was reacting with equal passion and had climaxed several times.

Maya was awakened by the noise emanating from the adjoining room. She looked across at the other bed in the room and saw it was unoccupied. She was immediately wide awake. Thoughts crashed through her brain. Where is Tanya? And where is Mandeep? Grunting sounds of vigorous love-making were emanating from the adjoining room. Maya lay rigidly on her back, fists clenched and jaw clamped. A black rage was cursing through her. She was thinking of what she must do. In a while Tanya came noiselessly into the room and lay on the other bed with her face to the wall. Soon sounds of gentle rhythmic snoring arose from her.

Maya did not sleep anymore that night. ‘The bloody fucking bastard’ she kept repeating to herself – and she had fallen half in love with him. She felt like killing the randy bastard.

At 3a.m. Tanya stirred and sat up. She headed for the washroom. Maya kept her eyes shut and pretended sleep. Tanya returned soundlessly and picked up her bag. Maya arose, “Wait I’m coming with you.”

“Why?”

“You know why. Just leave me somewhere and I’ll find a cab.”

“Don’t be an idiot! You want to leave because we fucked.”

“Maybe.”

“Look, don’t be an ass. This means nothing to him or me. And, if you must know, he thought he was laying you. He kept moaning your name: saying how much he loved you; and how happy he was that you understood. So don’t be a moron, have a happy life together – he’s not a bad sort. He’ll look after you.”

“I still want to leave. I need time to sort this out.”

“O.K. get into Mandeep’s car. His car is newer and I’m taking it for services rendered.”

#

Mandeep slept the sleep of one who had a lot to drink and topped it off with vigorous ball-wrenching sex. He awoke at mid-day with a satisfied smile and a niggling headache.

“Hey, beautiful, where are you, honey?” he cooed. When there was no answer for the seventh time, he hauled himself out of bed and padded out stark naked to look for her. He didn’t find her. He sat on the couch to wait for her. She must have gone out to pick up something.

He slept all day and woke up at 4p.m. Spittle drenched the cushion he lay his head on. He was hungry and thirsty and wanted some tea. The house was strangely quiet. Now where could she have gone? He padded through the house again; in the kitchen he put a kettle on for tea.

Something was not quite right – he rushed to her bedroom. The room was bare...Maya had taken all her luggage with her.

‘What the fuck...what’s with these women? And we had such a grand time last night...was that a farewell fuck or what?’ he idly scratched his pubis and stared out the window.

#

The car spluttered and coasted to a halt. Tanya kept engaging the starter, but nothing happened. She swore loudly and thumped the steering wheel in frustration.

“Bloody car – and it’s supposed to be new....fuck!”

Maya just looked on helplessly not knowing how she could help.

“I suppose we’ll just have to wait and sleep till someone comes along or until its morning.”

About then they noticed a car coming along quite slowly from the opposite direction. Tanya got out on to the road and waved her torch. The car came to a shuddering halt abreast her stalled car and five bleary eyed drunken youths stumbled out. Their eyes cleared slowly and soon a leer replaced the vacant look. Tanya realized it was a mistake to have waved them down for they could not possibly be of any help; more likely a hindrance or likely a danger. She waved them on saying she would be O.K.

but the lads only stepped closer peering at her face and checking her figure gaping closely at her breasts in the reflected glow from the headlights. Then somebody spotted Maya in the car. She looked fresh, young, and virgin like. Boy, their leer said, this is jackpot and they pulled her screaming from the car. There were immediately six pairs of hands fondling her; her breasts, her butt, and her front between the legs. She was lifted screaming in terror, kicking and flaying her arms to no avail.

“Oh shit!” Tanya exploded, “Leave her alone!” She yelled and waded in kicking them as hard as she could. But they were in a frenzy and her kick did nothing. By now they had torn her blouse and ripped off her bra and fought her to the ground.

“Shit, shit, shit!” Tanya screamed. She backed a few steps, put her hands together and concentrated... she hated being forced to do this. She pointed her finger at one boy in the melee and a blue streak hit him midriff. He screamed and two of them fell to the ground twitching and groaning loudly. Another streak from her finger hit another boy who also screamed loudly and fell to the ground squirming and jerking. Two boys holding Maya down saw what happened. There was instant terror in them and they ran quickly, stumbling and falling. Others hauled their friends, by the hair, off Maya. They huddled together cowering and trembling, eyes wide with fright and horror as they quickly switched looking between their friends squirming on the ground and the woman with the ray gun.

“Get out of here,” screamed Tanya, “and take those apoplectic louts with you. And keep your mouths shut about this or I’ll come after you. I really will and then what is left of you could be in the slammer hospital for a very long time.”

The boys sobered up fast cowering with fright and dragged and bundled their inert friends into the car and took off quickly, craning and twisting their necks back to take a last frightened look at the now receding scene where that screaming witch stood arms akimbo..

Tanya held a trembling Maya firmly and walked her to the car; she helped her change and put on a fresh blouse and bra from her trunk. Maya was still shaking and bewildered. “How?” she asked, “Did you chase those horrible boys away?”

“It’s a long story...let’s just say I managed to kick them hard...hard enough to hurt them and make them flee.”

“But...but...I saw bright lights...?”

“That was probably when they punched you in the head.”

Something told Maya to let it go. She was certain she saw a bolt of blue lightning shoot from her fingers. My God! There was nothing, no amount of screaming or threats that could have deterred

the boys when they had reached that extreme state of excitement that she saw them in. It had to be something that superseded their sexuality. An almost impossible call.

Ten days later Maya returned home and found a very bewildered Mandeep who kept very quiet, sat outside on a broken packing case and followed her with his eyes. He held an unopened can of beer in his hand which he planned to open and gulp down as he had been doing over the last ten days. The only way to smother his curiosity and live with the vagaries of women was to be in a state of total *'uncare'*.

He then on lived with her. But, on the third day, she had dragged him, reluctant and mute to a skinny, rapidly chanting pundit sitting crossed legged and shirtless in front of a roadside brick temple. He sprinkled some water and a few wilted marigold flowers on him and then ,a half hour later turned smiling and advised them the marriage had been blessed and successfully solemnized in heaven and received there favorably. He now asked payment of a hundred Rupees.

For the next five days Mandeep did not let a drop pass his lips, for he wanted to work out how his wife, who had, that drunken night ten days ago, given off her charms freely to him, but had later turned out physically and medically virgin again and whom he dutifully deflowered again on their wedding night? Now he waited to see if she would re-grow a hymen and become a virgin again, and would he then be required to rip her virginity again. He wasn't complaining, just bewildered.

*

Chapter 31

Tanya and Sam

Her wild streak had sobered. His ardor had cooled to deep affection and care. She could still move pots and pans round by pointing at them and deliver a nasty sting to his derriere to keep him in line.

Mandeep and Maya

He reluctantly accepted that Maya would not grow any more hymens so he, with some sadness and disappointment abandoned his vigil.

He ventured infrequently to visit Roomi to delight in the company of his two off-springs, his son and daughter, and whilst there, eagerly scoff off a glass or two of red wine to mellow, he claimed, the company of that pompous oaf, Gulprasad.

Maya, always managed to adroitly and subtly intrude her body in between Roomi and Mandeep especially when after a generous intake of red wine, those carefree hands started to linger repeatedly on one other's body, caressing, stroking, and squeezing

Gulprasad tolerated Mandeep's theatrics as long as it was in private. He hoped he would have a child with Maya – that would allow him to get rid of Mandeep and concentrate on the child from his legally wedded wife.

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