

BEDTIME STORYWALLAH

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PREFACE

The Architecture of Desire

The human heart is a sprawling estate of hidden rooms, many of which are kept under lock and key, shielded from the clinical glare of societal judgment. "BEDTIME STORYWALLAH" is an invitation to walk through these rooms. It is a collection that refuses to look away, serving as a vibrant, sometimes poignant, and always honest exploration of the many shades of Indian sexuality. Across these ten narratives, we witness the "coming out of the closet" in its most diverse forms—not just as a declaration of identity, but as an unveiling of the fantasies, unrealized desires, and simple pleasures that pulse beneath the surface of everyday life. The stories captured here offer a rare peek-a-boo into the hidden lives of Indians, traversing landscapes from the humid fields of Palakkad to the neon-lit high-rises of Dubai.

We see sexuality as:

A Tactical Escape: In the cramped quarters of a railway colony, a young couple turns the thundering roar of the Jammu Tavi into a sonic sanctuary for their intimacy.

A Form of Healing: Through the visionary work of Jailakshmi and her "Sambandham" movement, we see the dismantling of Victorian shame in favour of a "Right to Joy" and body autonomy.

A Tool of Survival and Identity: Shail's journey from a scarred childhood in Uttarpara to standing tall in a vibrant pink sari reminds us that the struggle to be seen as one's true self is a war won with quiet, fierce dignity.

A Mirror of Incompatibility: The forced proximity of a 45-day lockdown strips away the veneer of a one-night stand, proving that physical attraction can be a fragile bridge when built on deception.

A Defiance of Age: Shekhar and Saujanya's "Love Guru" saga reminds us that passion does not have an expiry date, even when the world attempts to weaponize privacy against those who refuse to be "seniors" by the book.

A Playground of Roleplay: Whether it is a "domestic help" cleaning more than just ceiling fans or a "driver" taking a shortcut to a farmhouse, these stories celebrate the theatricality of desire within the bounds of marriage.

From the protective fury of a schoolgirl shielding her friend to the "Neyiappam Effect" that defies government mandates, these tales are more than just erotica. They are coming-of-age tales for all ages, mapping the moments where the individual finally drops the script written by others.

"Bedtime Storywallah " does not seek to provide answers, but to turn on the lights. It is a testament to the fact that when we stop treating our hearts like dark rooms and start treating them like sunlit courtyards, we find a world that is finally, beautifully, made for each other.

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STORY 1



THE DRESS CHANGE

She placed the step ladder beneath the first ceiling fan in the living room, closer to Shubham's prized possession, a heavy duty foldable bar unit made of solid rosewood. The bar table featured a beautiful Buddha Idol on the top and two cases that held 72 of his collected miniature bottles of the best alcohol brands from around the world bought over 13 years of travel to various places. The wall behind the bar table had a handmade Ceramic Plate crafted in Romania and flicked from an upscale retro lounge bar in Dubai fitted between two hooks, and accentuated by a lamp above it.

Shubham seated on his living room L-shaped 5 seater sofa was reading the newspaper when the presence of the domestic help alerted him to take his eyes off TV artist Shewta Tiwari's bikini pictures from her Phuket Vacation published in the Bombay Times. "Was she watching?" was his first reaction, and in an attempt to cover up his guilt, he engaged in a conversation with her.

"You can leave the fan cleaning for later Shobha, maybe another day!" He suggested.

"But Mam's specifically mentioned it for today, in presence of Sir, she said repeatedly, so that you know that how much of cleaning work happens at home" she quickly replied.

"Well I'm a bit of cleanliness freak but not as much as your madam makes me look like. Besides one the legs of the ladders is weak... I just don't want you to fall off and get hurt" Shubham voiced in concern.

“You are so kind Sir, who otherwise cares for our safety and well-being. Don’t worry it’s just a two minute job and I’ll be done soon” she reassured.

Shobha climbed three levels of the ladder to reach up to the fan but that was not enough. She needed to be up on the lander to be able to reach up to the ceiling from where sweeping and wiping would become easy. She lifted up her saree to her waist and tucked it into her waist and clutching the broom in one arm she started to climb. Shubham looked at her and decided to be close to the ladder to hold it firm. He asked her to give the broom to him and then climb up to the top.

She obliged and began on her way up. Shubham looked up and his eyes fell on her shapely long legs. Shobha was taller than an average Indian Woman and had a wheatish complexion. Her skin had a certain shine and her legs were silky smooth with no sight of hair. Does she wax regularly, Shubham’s mind pondered. As she went up the 4th rung, she looked down and asked Shubham for the broom. He handed it over to her and his eyes went to catch a glimpse of her partially revealing navel. As she picked up the broom from his hands, he could see her looking towards him and saying.

“Don’t look up for the next few minutes, dust can get into your eyes”

Shubham roving eye came to a standstill meeting her and 180 degrees up. He nodded in affirmation as Shobha stretched her arms to broom off the dust from the first blade she could reach. As she did that her blouse shifted up giving a peek of her under boob. Looked like she had once again chosen not to cage her assets inside a bra.

“Look down Sirji” the voice came and Shubham instantly shifted his gaze to the floor. He could feel tufts of dust come down and settle in his hair. Shobha deftly moved her hands to the other wings and in a minute all the dust was swept to the floor.

"Oh my god, you have dust in your hair Sir" she said as she began to laugh.

"If this ordeal is over, I can go and have my bath" Shubham said.

"Yes you can do that, I'll sweep up the living room and then at last clean your bedroom and bathroom" She replied.

Shubham quickly made up his way to the bathroom. He felt his groin and noticed that he had got a hard on. He opened his bathroom cabinet and took out his Muse Jack, massager, removed his shorts and underwear and fixed the Silicone Rubber Self Pleasure machine over his hard penis and switched on the vibrator. For the next five minutes he indulged in pleasuring himself to a hand job. While at it, he heard the door open and someone walk in. He turned around to see Shobha inside the bathroom. Her eyes transfixed at the equipment.

She fumbled and said, *"I had come to take the bottle of floor cleaner... didn't know you were here, no sound of the shower"*. Shubham noticed how Shobha was staring at his equipment. He cleared his throat and said,

"Well I must say that you are very beautiful and today I just..."

"You don't need to explain Sir, I understand that Mam's away since a week and it must be difficult. Besides you are a kind and caring person... you be relaxed and let me help you with this..." She said.

Shubham took his place on the toilet seat and she took control over his joy stick deftly removing the jack from his rigid penis. She wrapped her hands around it, one hand cupping the testicles and the other the penile head and massaged them tenderly. She then brought her head down and took his entire 14 centimetre member into the mouth rolling her tongue over the skin. Barely a minute into the act Shubham couldn't control himself and ejaculated into her mouth. She spat it out over his erect penis and moved her hands to lubricate it with his semen.

"Sirji was there a train to catch?" She asked him teasingly.

"I'm sorry... It happened so fast couldn't control..." Shubham said visibly embarrassed.

"It's okay, we have all the time in the world, first let me clean you up" said Shobha

She used the jet spray to wash his penis and using soap cleaned away the semen and used the tissue paper to dry it.

"Now sit down on the floor while I give you a bath" she said, drawing the bucket close to her.

"Wait I prefer the shower" said Shubham pulling her close to him and holding her in a tight embrace.

"But what about my clothes..." She protested.

"You are just about Madam's size, I'm sure there's plenty in her cupboard you can pick up, I'll be honoured to do the trials".

Saying this Shubham began to disrobe her of her saree. His eyes fixed at the sight of her navel. He put his finger into it and explored its depth. With his other hand he turned on the shower knob and pulled her in. Shubham removed his vest while she still had her white blouse and petticoat. He removed her drenched white blouse to reveal her ample breasts, her nipples pressing against his chest. He locked his mouth in hers and they both kissed passionately. He cupped her wet buttocks and held his stiffening penis up her legs. Shobha undid her petticoat strings and the garment then dropped on the floor to reveal her long silk as smooth legs.

Shubham couldn't help notice her hairless pit and licked his lips in anticipation. He slid down kissing her nape, her midriff moving down to tickle her navel with this tongue and getting further down. Shobha lifted her feet and placed in over the toilet seat. Shubham now down on his knees placed his face into her inner thigh licking her deftly and his tongue moving into her shaved pussy. He pushed his tongue in digging into her pleasure zones allowing the flowing water to play the role of a lubricant as

he poked and probed into the different layers of her clitoris. He now had more than half of his tongue into it.

Shobha loved every moment of it and moaned all along acknowledging her pleasure while holding his face tight between her things. Shubham was an expert down under and stuck to his journey to reach her G spot. He used his left hand to cup her breast gently moving his fingers round the nipple as if tuning her radio to catch a frequency. The moaning heightened and that prepared Shubham for his final act of putting the middle finger of his right hand into her vagina activating his vibrating ring round the finger to bore through the eyes insides sending sharp pulses of vibrations that caused her to experience a heightened orgasm. And as he felt her sticky juices in , he rose to shove in his erect penis driving her up in the air both moving in a rhythmic upward motion. His ring vibrator continued to pleasure her erroneous zones from her inside things to her buttocks right up her spine to behind her ears.

“Tear me open, faster” she moaned at in pleasure as Shubham moved deeper and deeper causing his member to cause a volcanic outburst. With seconds her floodgates burst open too and they both went with the flow and energy gradually coming to a halt. The shower hitting their head added to the pleasure.

Shobha whispered in his ears *“Soap me with your best smelling liquid soap Sirji”*

“Vanilla & Cream it will be...” he said taking out the bottle of the body shop bathing essence. The next 15 minutes he spend soaping every part of her body in a creamy vanilla lather. She obliged in return by soaping him with his favourite Neroli. After a leisurely shower from head to toe they both dried each other and Shubham carried Shobha in his arms and gently placed her over the bed.

“Time for some moisturising cream” he said and fetched his wife’s moisturiser mist and sprayed it all over her body. He then picked from his wife’s prized lingerie collection and picked a

caricatured bummer bra and panty set for her to wear with an extra-long tee that said “Made for Each Other”

As she was dressed up by Shubham she admired herself in the full size dresser mirror and asked, *“What does this mean pointing to the quote on the tee?”*

Shubham cleared his throat and started humming SP Balasubramanian crooning “We are made for each other samjhe” from Ek Duj Ke Liye.

They continued to kiss each other till the sounds of the doorbell rang loud.

“Hope it’s not Madam, you said she’s not expected for a week.” Shobha whispered into Shubham’s ears.

“Role play over Mam. Time to play Shubham & Shruti. Original Husband & Wife.” Shubham whispered back.

“Next time you play the part of Ritwik our driver” she said. The camera showed a young woman entering the home using the spare key kept under the blooming lotus pot. She steps in to notice dust on the floor, the ceiling floor looking spotlessly clean and the ladder under it.

“Kya Madam aaj mere hisse ka kaam aapne kar dala” the domestic help asked.

“Your saab said, Shobha kitna kaam kar leti hai. Aaj kuch uska kaam tum karlo to bus maine kar liya” Shruthi answered.

“Sir ka dil bahut accha hai Mam warna humare baare mein kaun sochta hai” Shobha said.

Shubham meanwhile came from his bathroom dressed in a bummer tee and shorts. He looked hard at her and wondered, “Would she be as good playing Shruti’s role...”

END OF STORY 1

STORY 2



THE TWO MINUTE EXPRESS

Vishwa and Meenakshi had been married for twenty-three days and had yet to achieve a single moment of uninterrupted, unselfconscious intimacy. Their room—ten feet by twelve feet, in the Matunga railway quarters—served as the main sleeping space for eight people. They occupied the single rickety four-poster bed, an heirloom of his wife's family, while his mother-in-law (Amma), his grandfather-in-law (Thatha), two cousins, and two brothers-in-law (all six feet or more) lay on sleeping mats below. The floor space was so tight that if Karthik, the heaviest brother-in-law, rolled over, his elbow nudged the trunk of the bed, triggering a minor seismic event.

The bed itself was the first, most vocal enemy. Crafted from ancient teak, every spring, joint, and tenon cried out in protest at the slightest weight shift, producing a sound akin to a frightened parrot trapped inside a rusty saw mill. To them, the bed was a moral compass, broadcasting their most private thoughts to the collective judgment of the household. Their initial attempts at a normal married life were met with hilarious, immediate failure, each one teaching them a painful lesson in public acoustics.

Midday Malfunction

It was 11:30 AM on a Sunday. A rare, golden window. Amma had corralled the entire floor-squad—Thatha, the cousins, and the brothers-in-law—to see the new Tamil Matinee Show at Aurora, a mission that had required Vishwa to donate a significant portion

of his first month's salary. Everyone was supposed to be gone for at least three hours. Vishwa viewed this as a god-sent opportunity. The air in the room, usually thick with the scent of seven other people, was now his alone. He started to think aloud, a low hum of nervous excitement, as to how he would maximize this opportunity.

Meenakshi, fresh from completing all the morning cleaning and cooking duties, was drying her hair in front of the Godrej Steel Cupboard that had a full-length mirror. She was in a simple cotton saree, the fabric clinging slightly to her still-damp skin. Vishwa noticed beads of water shimmering on her back and the smooth, dark curve of her neck. The moment felt right—romantic, unhurried, and safe.

He reasoned that instead of pouncing like a hungry predator, it would be right and romantic if he could fix a few strings of Malliaga Poo (Jasmine Strings) in her long, jet-black hair. He looked around the room and found a fresh string already strung on the photo of Lord Murugan.

Vishwa hesitated for only a second, putting his hands up in a silent prayer of apology and guilt, and removed the flowers. He tiptoed—a pointless exercise given the chaos about to ensue—to stand behind Meenakshi, who was vigorously drying her hair with a small torthu mundu (towel).

As she rose to face the mirror, she saw Vishwa standing behind her with the string of jasmine.

"You got this for me, Vichu?" she asked, a soft surprise in her eyes.

"Well, actually no, I just picked it from Lord Murugan's photo. It actually suits you better," he mumbled, trying to string it into her hair.

Meenakshi turned to face him, a playful scandal colouring her expression. *"Aiyoo Karmam! Whoever plucks a garland meant for God?"* she asked.

“Well, if you say so, I’ll put it back,” said Vishwa innocently, making a move toward the photo.

“Well, that won’t be necessary, go ahead and string it,” she directed, pulling him gently back. Vishwa tried to secure the stringed jasmine into the thick mop of her hair, but in vain.

“You need to secure it with a hair clip, dear husband,” she teased him. She picked up a hairbrush and gently brushed her hair in the front, the movement revealing the full, lovely expanse of her back. Vishwa’s eyes spotted a few drops of water near her spine. He gently grabbed her from behind, pulling her soft body against his chest, and slowly started to kiss her back, sucking each droplet of water like a desert traveller finding an oasis.

Meenakshi whispered, her breath catching, *“I hope the door’s locked.”*

“They all are gone to watch the Matinee,” he reassured her.

“And what about our rickety bed? Lest it disturbs the neighbours?” she enquired.

“With a local train passing by every minute, who’s ever going to hear that?” He reasoned, the promise of the 11:30 AM slow local providing a sense of security.

“Great, so I give you the green flag,” she giggled, turning her body fully towards Vishwa.

The heavy, metallic clanging of an oncoming fast local provided the cue for Vishwa to hold her in a tight embrace. His ribs felt her petite breasts. He kissed her on her forehead, then her eyes, her cheeks, slowly moving to her open lips. She opened out her tongue, and the couple engaged in a passionate kiss that lasted as long as the time it took for the fast train to roll out of their periphery. As the sounds dimmed, they could hear only their own breathing and the wet, urgent sounds of their kissing.

Meenakshi quickly removed Vishwa’s pure white cotton Baniyan (vest) and chucked it over the footboard. Her hands

reached for his white Mundu (dhoti), and in a second, it fell down to the floor. Vishwa, seeing her standing there in just her bra and saree, got completely besotted and quickly went on to unstrap her bra when a sharp, insistent rapping started at the door.

"Meee-naaak-shii! Open the door! Thatha needs his spectacles from the cupboard!"

Amma's voice, a high-pitched demand that sounded far too close to the bedroom for comfort, pierced the thin wood.

Vishwa collapsed onto the mattress in sheer defeat, which emitted a tortured, six-second KRAAAAAAK-THUNK noise that perfectly punctuated Amma's command. *"Sorry, Amma! Changing!"* Meenakshi called back, eyes wide and sparkling with suppressed laughter, pulling her blouse back on with lightning speed.

Vishwa sighed, running a hand through his hair. *"Signal: Red. Track: Blocked. Looks like our Engine stays idling, Meena. Maximum speed achieved: 15 seconds."*

Attempt 2: The Midnight Miscalculation

Their second attempt was a lesson in the unpredictable nature of human biology. Vishwa thought he had timed it perfectly around 1:00 AM. The house was deep in a post-dinner, pre-dawn slumber; the only sound was the distant, rhythmic clatter of trains being shunted far down the yard. He reached for Meenakshi, pulling her close.

Meenakshi, still wary of the bed's betrayal, guided his hand to her waist, signalling a gentle, slow approach. They lay there, two spies in their own marriage, listening to the various breaths below them. Amma's light flutter, the cousins' steady whoosh. All clear.

Vishwa began to trace the curve of her collarbone with his lips. He lifted himself onto an elbow, the bed responding with a soft, nervous "Skeeeeee... skeeeeee..." Suddenly, Thatha, who slept

directly beneath the bed, began a loud, gravelly, hacking cough that lasted a full minute. It wasn't just a cough; it was a deep, resonant, rattling explosion that seemed to vibrate the very springs beneath Vishwa's hips.

They froze. Vishwa held his breath, rigid with frustration, hovering a mere inch above his wife. When the cough finally subsided, it was immediately replaced by the high-volume, continuous sound of Brother-in-law Karthik's heavy, wheezing snore. Karthik was a legend in the household; his snores were said to be loud enough to vibrate the dosa cooking in the kitchen downstairs. This particular snore sounded less like sleep and more like an industrial vacuum cleaner struggling to ingest a pillow.

Meenakshi gently nudged Vishwa away, her eyes glistening with resignation.

"Shh! Thatha is still in the Control Cabin, and Karthik is the full siren! We cannot risk derailing the whole household, Vis. Too much cargo below us. We'll be discovered by the sheer volume."

Vishwa rolled back onto his side, staring bitterly at the ceiling. The silence from the floor below was gone, replaced by the symphony of slumber. They had missed their window again, blocked by a coughing Thatha and a snoring Karthik. The marriage felt less like romance and more like an endless, frustrating wait on a railway platform where all the trains were delayed.

Attempt 3: The Ganga Snanam Fiasco

Their failure to secure nightly privacy led them to the most audacious plan yet: the "Ganga Snanam" of desperation. The house's small, windowless bathroom was considered the only truly soundproof room. Every morning, the extended family queued up after the sacred 4:30 AM water supply came on for the town. This meant the first 15 minutes were peak-demand for the toilet, but the time between 4:45 AM and 5:30 AM often offered a small, steam-filled window of opportunity.

"It's soundproof, it's humid, and everyone is either meditating or waiting for the toilet," Vishwa whispered one evening, his eyes gleaming with mad inspiration. "A quick, shared bath. The Ganga Snanam."

The next morning, at 4:45 AM, Meenakshi slipped into the bathroom, locking the ancient bolt with a click that sounded deafeningly loud in the pre-dawn stillness. Vishwa followed moments later, a fugitive entering his own bathroom. The tension was exquisite. The tiny room instantly steamed up, muffling the sounds of the household beginning to stir. Meenakshi was already standing beneath the weak, blessed spray of the showerhead, her skin glowing in the damp light filtering under the door. Vishwa stood pressed against the door, listening. *"All clear,"* he mouthed.

They moved quickly. The water pressure was low, a thin, gentle rain that seemed to encourage the intimacy rather than rush it. The air was heavy with steam, the scent of expensive Mysore Sandal soap, and the heady, dangerous feeling of stolen privacy. Their hands met, soaping each other's shoulders with the concentrated care of people who have been starved of simple human touch. The goal was speed, but the environment was too perfect. The steam, the sound of the running water acting as a white-noise cloak, and the shared thrill of their rebellion created an intoxicating bubble.

Vishwa's focus was entirely on Meenakshi's laughter, which she had to cup her hand over to silence. He was lifting her off the ground, pinning her gently against the cool, damp tiles, enjoying the absolute, temporary freedom of being husband and wife without the fear of a creak. Then, without warning, the thin, precious stream of water from the showerhead dwindled to a cough, then a desperate drip, and finally, stopped entirely.

Silence.

The noise of the household instantly became sharp and clear. They heard Amma's voice calling for coffee. They heard the grinding of the wet grinder in the kitchen. They stood, chest-to-

chest, completely covered from neck to ankle in a dense, blinding layer of sandalwood-scented lather.

"The... the main supply," Vishwa stammered, his voice choked with soap. *"It's off."*

Meenakshi looked down at her hands, which were indistinguishable from two soapy, white rubber gloves. *"We are entirely covered in film, Vishwa. We look like a pair of poorly cast ghosts."*

The next five minutes were a frantic, humiliating comedy. They stumbled to the large, plastic drum in the corner—the family's emergency water reserve, meant for drinking, cooking, and the entire morning ablutions of the elderly. They rinsed in painful, tiny increments, counting every drop. When they finally emerged, red-faced and damp, they had used nearly three-quarters of the emergency drum.

Thatha was waiting in the hallway, eyes narrowed, staring at the growing puddle of sweet-smelling, soapy water that was now creeping toward the kitchen. He didn't say a word about the water. He simply looked them up and down, took in their panicked, damp expressions and the tell-tale scent of high-quality Sandalwood, and then walked slowly into the bathroom.

He returned, shaking his head. "The water pressure is a precious resource, Vishwa. Not a water park. You have left us with less water than a sparrow's birdbath for the entire morning pooja. I suppose we all smell of Mysore Sandal today. A costly bath, my boy. A very costly bath."

The Discovery: Brahma Muhurat and the Sonic Buffer

It was Meenakshi who noticed the pattern. She was a light sleeper, often awake before 5:00 AM, silently reciting prayers—the traditional Brahma Muhurat time, the hour of the creator, meant for reflection and study.

One day, while Vishwa was soundly asleep, she felt the floor vibrate. A thunderous, ground-shaking roar began, drowning out the world. She sat up, realizing the noise was not the usual local train but something heavy, fast, and continuous. She looked at the clock: 5:28 AM.

She nudged Vishwa awake. *"Listen!"*

"Is the roof falling?" he mumbled.

"No, that is the Jammu Tavi. The longest run in India, arriving at CST. Hear it? The whole line is shaking. Full acoustic cover."

As the massive engine roared past, a second, sharper sound began to emerge from the northern line: the distinct, high-pitched horn of a superfast service.

"And that," Vishwa whispered, his eyes widening in realization, *"is the Rajdhani, flying out to New Delhi. They cross lines exactly here. Two high-speed trains. Two minutes of pure, beautiful noise."*

This, they decided, was their time. The hour of the creator would now be the hour of creation.

The Two-Minute Express

At 5:27 AM on the twenty-fourth day, Vishwa was already awake, adrenaline sharp and electric. Meenakshi lay beside him, her thick, dark hair fanned out on the pillow. She was built for comfort, her body curving like a perfect, well-maintained railway Tender, ready to receive the Coal.

"Gauge check," Vishwa whispered, his fingers tracing the curve of her hip beneath the thin sheet.

Meenakshi shivered, her breath hitching. *"Gauge clear. Boiler pressure is high, Vis. We are waiting for the Signal."*

RUMBLE-RUMBLE-RUMBLE.

At 5:28:15, the Jammu Tavi hit the nearest track. The cacophony was immediate and overwhelming. The floor, the walls, the bed, and their very teeth vibrated with the continuous, deep roar of massive iron and steel. They moved instantly. There was no time for preamble. Their mouths met in a desperate, silenced kiss, the urgency of their situation fueling their desire. Vishwa braced his hands on the teak frame, attempting to absorb the inevitable noise of the bed. KREEEEEEEK. KRAK. A loud, piercing squeak escaped the footboard. Below them, Thatha stirred and made a low humming sound, but the sound was swallowed whole by the Jammu Tavi's monstrous passage.

Meenakshi let out a small, muffled gasp of relief, a sound Vishwa tasted on her lips. She twisted, pulling his hips closer, her legs tangling with his. *"Full throttle, Vis!"* she whispered, her voice barely audible even to him. *"The Crossing is starting!"*

The Rajdhani's distinct, high-speed WHOOSH began, accompanied by a sustained, echoing horn blast that was pure aural oblivion. This was their two minutes. They surrendered to the rush, moving with a desperate, synchronized speed. The bed hammered against the floor, screaming its secrets to the empty air, but the train was louder. Vishwa leaned down, covering Meenakshi's mouth with his, stifling a cry that was already lost in the metallic shriek of the wheels.

The heat, the friction, the sheer terror of being caught—it all condensed into a blinding, magnificent pressure. The world was nothing but the rhythmic piston-rod thrust and the roaring metal outside. In the height of their moment, the Rajdhani's horn gave one final, glorious salute before its sound began to recede, stretching thinner, weaker, faster.

CLACK-CLACK... clack.

At precisely 5:31 AM, Vishwa froze, mid-motion, his breath catching in his throat, just as the last carriage clicked past.

Silence.

It descended like a heavy, suffocating wool blanket. The only sounds left were the high-pitched, ringing silence in their own ears and the steady, wet, open-mouthed snore of Karthik, who hadn't moved an inch. Vishwa rested his forehead on Meenakshi's, both of them gasping soundlessly, their bodies slick with sweat. Meenakshi traced the outline of his jaw, a triumphant, exhausted smile playing on her lips. *"Perfect Schedule. We finished the run."*

The Ultimate Derailment

For weeks, the Two-Minute Express at 5:28 AM became their sacred, frantic, and reliable ritual. They would endure the public failures of the day knowing they had their private, sonic window. However, a week before their six-month anniversary, the railways introduced an unexpected schedule change. The Rajdhani was delayed by one hour, meaning the thundering Jammu Tavi would now pass alone, its acoustic buffer entirely absent.

At 11:30 PM, they attempted a desperate return to the night-time routine, hoping that six months of constant oiling and stuffing had magically silenced the bed. Vishwa pulled Meenakshi to him. She moved with practiced caution, her muscles trained by months of rigidity. They achieved a beautiful, slow, quiet five minutes of tentative affection. They were experts now, moving with the precision of neurosurgeons.

They let out a collective, silent sigh of relief. They had done it! Then, Vishwa shifted his weight slightly to adjust the pillow beneath Meenakshi's head, a movement so slight it shouldn't have mattered. But the old teak, under constant stress, finally rebelled against this sudden, arrogant display of comfort.

With a sound like a splitting ship and a thousand rusty hinges giving way at once, the central support beam snapped. The bed did not creak; it imploded. The mattress folded violently in the middle, pitching the newlyweds into a sudden, deep V-shape. The noise was apocalyptic. It was followed instantly by the sound of a small, hidden arsenal of noise-dampening materials (the

tennis ball, a stack of old magazines, and the heavy leather belt Vishwa used to brace the frame) scattering and clattering across the wooden floor.

An instantaneous, ringing silence fell over the house.

Then, from the darkness just inches from their collapsed bed, came the low, rumbling chuckle of Thatha. He sat up, leaning on the doorframe, adjusting his spectacles. *"Vishwa, my boy! I told you to wait for the proper signal! You were trying to run the whole route on a local engine! That rickety thing couldn't handle the high-speed load."*

The house erupted. Lights flipped on. Relatives poured in, laughing at the sight of the couple trapped in the ruins of their martial vessel, now exposed, surrounded by pillows, springs, and the debris of their secret life. Their secret was shattered, replaced by an overwhelming, roaring wave of family amusement.

The Twin Terminus

Nine months later, the family gathered in the hospital, no longer laughing at the ruined bed, but celebrating. Meenakshi had given birth, not to one baby, but to twin boys. As Vishwa held the two tiny bundles, Thatha stepped forward, a triumphant, mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"Aha!" he declared, puffing out his chest. "I knew the bed's final act was a prophecy! Two babies, just like our two great sound-buffer trains! We must name them appropriately, after the defining noise of your first year of marriage!" Vishwa and Meenakshi, exhausted but ecstatic, exchanged amused glances, knowing what was coming.

Thatha ceremoniously lifted the two boys. "Welcome to the world, 'Tavi'—for the mighty Jammu Tavi that was the deep, solid rumble—and 'Raj'—for the magnificent Rajdhani that was the quick, loud, high-speed whistle!

Let's hope these two are quieter than the originals!"

END OF STORY 2

STORY 3



GOKULDHAM- AN ELEVEN MONTH RAS LEELA

My name is Mohan. This story is of the time when I was 23, living in an allotted bedroom with attached toilet as a paying guest of a South Indian Family, comprising of an elderly lady who after her husband's death managed a family of herself and a daughter, with the pension fund of her late husband supplemented by a home delivery catering service. My room was a part of a self-contained society of over a seventy four storey buildings in Thane, home to a population of 5000+ populous. My 11-month quest for an 'Sales Manager' job had yielded nothing but firm rejections. While the other bachelors in my building scrambled off to their early shifts at corporate parks, I was left behind, a stationary observer in a city built on momentum.

But 1993 was not just any year for unemployment. It was the year the Indian Cable TV revolution hit critical mass. Our neighbourhood, once dominated by the sound of devotional music and cricket commentary, was now vibrating with the melodramatic intensity of Ridge Forrester's love triangles on The Bold and the Beautiful and the sun-drenched, slow-motion runs of the Baywatch crew. The middle-class, formerly content with Doordarshan's moralizing, was seeing an entirely new landscape of desire. And I, the unemployed observer, was uniquely positioned to watch that landscape transform my gated community into a secret playground.

Of Cables, Connections & Pocket Money

The lifeline of Gokuldhham was the cable network that ran across 600+ homes. One that provided to as much as 40+ Channels that included everything from News to Sports, Music, Family Entertainment, WWF, Cartoons, Movie Channels and Regional Language Entertainment. A monthly fee of enjoying all these channels came at a princely 150 bucks a month. In an era of no digital payment and not even a bank to bank transfer, cash collection from home to home was the only way out and that involved employing a team. But then the Cable Owner Mr Mittal found an ingenious way of getting college going kids and unemployed people like me to partake in the Monthly Fee Collection from each home and take home ₹25 from every home as our pocket money. Those 11 months of unemployment saw me making a decent ₹ 200 per building and a generous 2000 bucks on completion of my allotted 10 buildings. We were a team of 7 collectors. Of the 2000 bucks Rs 1200 would go to my landlady for the room and two meals. Lunch & Dinner. The balance came handy for drinks and smokes and the rare travel for an interview. I was surviving well without having to borrow money from my family.

The Soft Opening of the Closet

Gokuldhham had always appeared to be a bastion of respectability: men in safari suits, women in starched cotton sarees, children memorizing multiplication tables. But the television was a slow-acting cultural poison, a key that unlocked a thousand hidden desires. I noticed the changes subtly at first. Mrs. Kamat from the third floor, known for her rotund figure with generous buns, suddenly started wearing a crimson shade of lipstick that felt imported. The women's traditional Kitty Groups—once forums for discussing recipes and tuition fees—started meeting later, the chatter punctuated by nervous, high-pitched giggles that felt distinctly adult. I overheard a fragment of a conversation about a character on B&B—"Brooke is so strong, imagine having the confidence to tell your husband you need

more”—and it wasn’t spoken with disapproval; it was spoken with envy.

My days were spent reading the newspaper and applying for jobs. My evenings were spent at the community Bhasker Anna’s Hotel sipping tea and smoking cigarettes, watching the life go by. I realized that my unemployment had given me the most valuable asset in this community: time and invisibility. I was the anomaly, the boy who life wasn’t scheduled to catch the 7:38 Fast Local to work, to be in the waiting for the bus to arrive to take you the railway station and back. My eyes were trained to spot a story, ears intent to eavesdrop on conversations. I was one amongst the many housewives of Gokuldham who had their very own 9-5 life quite different from the 9-5 life lead by their husbands .

The catalyst for my induction to this adventure was Dipti Sanyal, the wife of a successful shipping executive. Dipti was about 38, beautifully maintained, and had a perpetual, knowing smile that made me feel like an amateur. She lived on the fourth floor of my building. One afternoon, she cornered me near the lift.

“Mohan, I see you are always home and alone. Such a smart young man should make friends and money” she said, her voice low and husky. “I need a very discrete job done. My husband has a collection of—ahem—foreign magazines, sensitive business documents, you understand. They need to be neatly catalogued and moved to a storage unit outside Thane. It requires absolute silence and discretion. I will pay cash.”

The next day I showed up at her place at dot 11:00 am. Her hall had a big frame showcasing Marilyn Monroe in her infamous white dress blown away by the wind revealing her hot white pants. I stood by the frame looking at her in awe.

“It’s a shot from the film the 1955 film *The Seven Year Itch*, directed by Billy Wilder. The image of her above a windy subway grating has been described as one of the most iconic images of the 20th century” said Dipti.

As I looked back, I saw Dipti. Her little black dress accentuated a slender frame. Her face neatly held in a bob of hair, kind of 60s Sharmila Tagore, an evening in Paris. Holding a cigarette between her lips she had the looks of a classy affluent lady who was well read and had fine tastes. “I’ve never entered the Kitchen and my maid decided not to turn up. So I can’t serve you coffee or tea. But definitely a gin & tonic, if you like”. She said. I so wanted to say yes but held myself. “I don’t drink at work, and I’m very keen to start right away” I asserted. She asked me to follow her into a room that had a very large wall-to-wall custom made cupboard.

They held a collection of over 100 books, piles and piles of foreign magazines and 10 rows of Video Cassettes. The ‘foreign magazines’ were collections of “Playboy” “Penthouse” “Hustler” and “Oui”. The video cassette collection was the biggest of its kind. Soft to hard core porn. All shipped from the USA. The job was take stock of the magazine inventory, create a register that had a name building number date of hire and return. Same with the Video Collection. But it involved quality checking, to see if the video quality was good and to eliminate cassettes who had aged and were of a bad quality. This meant being stay-put at her place for at least 5 working days. We settled for 9am - 5pm with an hours lunch break where I would come to my PG home to eat my South Indian Meal. The payment was generous, almost a month’s rent.

Dipti watched me work, bringing me a lemon soda. On the last day, as I finished through the entire inventory, she sat on the edge of the sofa, her saree draped with calculated carelessness. “Mohan,” she said, resting a manicured hand lightly on my wrist. “You are observant. You don’t judge. And you are here. That is a rare combination in Gokuldham.” She leaned closer, and the perfume she wore—expensive, European—was overwhelming. “The Kitty Group ladies... we need more than just recipes and gossips these days. We need company that understands the speed of American desire, not the slow speed of Indian patience. We call it... The Exchange.”

“But Dipti, I’m unaware of how to go about all these things. I mean I’m yet to...” I confessed nervously. “Your champagne has not been uncorked yet... that’s surprising. Great we start training from tomorrow. Between 2-5 pm. Be a good student and I bet the degree you earn at the end of it won’t be like the one gathering dust”

The Executive Trainee of Desire

That night sleep eluded me completely. I was both nervous and excited fantasizing about my first sexual encounter, that too with a 38 year old woman. Just the very thought of it made me go stiff between my legs. I chose to quickly hit the bathroom and relieve myself with a pleasurable hand job. Within minutes the champagne was uncorked. After a cold shower, I tucked myself in bed and went to sleep. The next day morning I spent more time in front of the mirror. Cleaning my face with soap thoroughly. Brushing my teeth and tongue vigorously. Spraying myself with extra cologne. All in anticipation of the afternoon. I chose to skip my lunch lest it made me full and lethargic.

At prompt 2 PM I rang the doorbell of Dipti Sanyal. The door was opened by her maid and that was like a complete anticlimax. She asked me to come inside and sit in the living room. “Madam Bathroom mein hai” was her indifferent remark. As I took my place on the sofa, the maid went into the kitchen to do the dishes. A few minutes later, she announced the completion of her chores and bid goodbye closing the door with a loud thud. The silence in the room was making me even more nervous. Minutes later I could hear Dipti’s voice, “Drop your clothes and come right in. Your first lesson begins here”.

My first encounter was a special one. Baptism by water. It was the first time I had seen a woman naked. My heart felt heavy and my breathing fast. Dipti put me at ease holding my hands and guiding it over her petite body. She said, “Women come in all shapes and sizes. But they all have the same pleasure zones. Some need to be touched, some stroked, some places to be kissed and

licked. And some to be grabbed and bitten. The day you get familiar with which parts warrants what, things will be easy. Go slow, go gentle, and go with the flow watching her reactions to your every move. Read her reactions, ask her for approval. Orchestrate it like a long musical symphony that rhythmically builds into a crescendo. It always her pleasure first.”

The next one hour was putting the theory to practice. At first I couldn't hold on to myself and came barely minutes into foreplay. She helped me relax and start over all again and then I got into the grip of things. Her bathroom not that big, the standard Mumbai Size. But she did guide me to enter into her from behind and the crescendo did happen. An encore on demand took place in her well-appointed bedroom.

The next 6 days were spent reading erotica, watching blue and trying out new ways of pleasuring each other. 3 hours felt less. That Saturday was supposed to be my surprise first test. “Be prepared for the worst” was her warning.

The Chief Entertainment Officer

My test and first ‘assignment’ was with a woman named Sadhana, whose husband, a bank manager, spent 14 hours a day chasing FD targets. She was lonely, curious, and explicitly told me she wanted to feel “like they do on Baywatch—free.” It began with a visit to her flat, where she insisted on watching an episode of *The Bold and the Beautiful* with me. The tension between the characters on screen—the stolen glances, the passionate declarations in luxury settings—was a mirror to the stifled longing in her own life. I was awkward, still the 22-year-old boy, but Sadhana was patient. She didn't want aggression; she wanted connection and validation. As the television buzzed with Steffi Forrester's latest scheme, Sadhana guided my hands, teaching me what her husband had forgotten—or perhaps, never learned—to provide. The greatest thrill was the taboo of the middle-class setting. We were not in a five-star hotel. We were in a small, well-furnished living room, separated from her daughter's bedroom by

a thin wall and the silent knowledge that the bank manager would be home by 7:30 PM. The risk was the oxygen of the experience. My first outing lasted a good 4 hours. At the end of it I knew that I had passed my test with flying colours. As I prepared to leave she handed me over an envelope asking me to hand it over to Diptiji. I promptly reached Dipti's home and handed over the packet to her.

She ushered me in, asked me for a Gin & Tonic. That day I didn't refuse. She opened the packet I had given her. There was money in it. A thick wad of ₹100 fresh from the mint, untouched. Your 4 hours were worth Rs 10,000. I take my training fee ₹ 5000 and split the rest into half. Me for giving you the job and you for doing it well. I couldn't believe that I actually was carrying home ₹ 2500 which in those days were not even a month's salary.

Excitedly I reached my PG Home opened the main door to find nobody in the living room. I guessed that the landlady must have gone down to the market. I went to open the door of my room and was surprised to find my landlady's youngest daughter Rupa. She had stepped out of my bathroom after a shower and was drying up in my room wearing nothing. Seeing me come all of a sudden alarmed her and she ran inside my bathroom locking herself. I found her set of fresh clothes lying by my bed table. "I'm Sorry, I had no idea that you would be inside my room, that's why I didn't even bother to lock" I apologised instantly. "Well the geyser in our bathroom blew, so I chose to come here. Didn't expect you though" she said.

After a few seconds of an uncomfortable silence I began, "Your clothes by the bedside, you would need it right, I'll get them to the door, you can take them and change inside". "Yes please that would be nice" she said. As I picked up her clothes, my eyes instinctively went to her neutral brown bra. The label read Lovable. I smiled instinctively as the images of her without a stitch played in my mind. She was all a 18 year old would be. Fair skinned, Small Breasts and long hair that way all the way down to her tight buns. "Hello, are you there?" She asked and I quickly

got back to my present and quickly handed over her clothes. In less than a minute she went darting out of my room, her face flushed in embarrassment.

The Full Schedule

As weeks turned into months, my reputation grew solely through Dipti's network. My unemployment was a blessing; it was an open calendar. I was no longer a Companion to one; I became the discreet assistant to the community's silent sexual revolution. My weekdays were full, a client a day strictly between 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm. I still gave Mittal Uncle the first 2 days of the month for his Cable Connection. That way I could continue to keep my rapport with the men in the homes offering them from Aditi's collection of erotica magazines and Video Cassettes. Every rental earned me a 50% commission. All deliveries made in discreet brown envelopes. The men were excited to get new toys. As their appetite increased so did their sex drive went on an overdrive. Their wives were amazed at their husbands new found confidence. It was a win-win.

My earnings touched in excess of 10 K a month. The Exchange was doing better than the BSE & NSE put together. Meanwhile my landlady started to get curious about what kind of job did I do. I told her that I was an investment agent for the local bank in Gokuldhram who helped gather fixed deposit investments for the bank. And that required me to go door-to-door to various residences.

Her curiosity didn't end and she probed me further of my everyday visits to Dipti's house. I told her that I was a commission agent for her Husband's import-export business and traded in multiple things required here from USA, books, perfumes, movie cassettes etc not being specific of which ones. That kept her at bay. I also offered her a 300 buck increment in her home getting her permission to get me an additional TV set in my room which she happily complied.

My evening dinner was brought to my room by her daughter Rupa. She worked as a front door receptionist for a company in Thane and her office timings were from 10:00 am - 6:00 pm. She would be back home by 7:00 pm and glued to her TV set. The lights went off prompt at 10:30 pm. I respected their timelines and slept early too.

My work had its fair share of exhaustion as perfection was expected by every client. The most demanding being Mrs Jha who wanted action in every room beginning from the Kitchen, then living room dining table, the bathroom shower and finally on her master bed. Her sounds were theatrical and many a times her pleasured moans so loud that I would wonder if it would make the neighbours wake up from their siesta. Luckily her immediate neighbours were a couple where both the husband and wife worked for a living. The only afternoons they got to enjoy were Sundays. And as per the Spice News Channel managed by Mrs Jha, that afternoon were when their pleasure decibels would travel to hers and that got Mr Jha all charged to give his best.

New Year's Eve. Akshay Kumar Meets Shilpa Shetty at our Terrace.

My job taught me a lot for a 23 Year Old. I was learning more about human nature, psychology, and passion in this clubhouse than I ever would have in a cubicle. The month of Decembers were when parties were rife. Most uncles wanted me to come over for drinks. Many amongst them were whose wives were my clients. But by then I had managed to handle both clients with thorough professionalism. Some of the drinking sessions used to go on till midnight post which I could not dream of getting back to my room. Thankfully Dipti offered me a spare key and I could sleep over at their house. After all we were partners in crime. It was one December night when she and me were watching the Sun TV midnight masala, that aired erotic songs from Tamil Movies. She egged me to prove my Tamilian streak by asking me to perform to the raunchy dance numbers. I would happily oblige. Those days most music channels aired film songs

from new Bollywood releases. One song “Chura ke Dil Mera Goriya Chali” that was a rage featured Akshay Kumar & Shilpa Shetty gyrating on the beach. The lyrics of the song were profound, but for the hero that didn’t matter. All he was obsessed was giving hard pelvic thrusts that seemed so out of context, but made great viewing. Dipti insisted that I emulate his steps to perfection and that would be my performance for the New Year’s Bash at our terrace. She had already made a short list of the families and arrangements for catering were also taken care of.

That night the terrace of our building wore a completely new look. A guest list that featured prominent people from the society were dressed to kill. Most men and their wives were familiar to me. I had got myself a special Park Avenue Blazer that I wore over my blue denim and white shirt.

A buffet counter spread had the best Parsi Mutton Cutlets, Minced Cocktail Samosas, Spring Rolls and the works. I was not a big time food guy then and therefore held on to my Vodka and Lime looking around the crowd that was busy indulging in the food and drinks. At a corner near the Water Tank a lady in a black chiffon saree and a sleeveless blouse stood looking lost. I had not seen her before. I decided that to give her company and soon stood by her side. “The streets look so bright and happy isn’t it?”. She turned to face me and asked, “And you are?” I quickly gathered my wits and said, “Mohan Arulraj, but you can skip the surname”

“I’m Neelima, wife of Sushil, he is a leading pediatrician and has a small clinic in Thane” she introduced herself. “I’m 22, and single. So I guess my chances of interacting with you Doctor Husband is far and few, unless like on an occasion like this. But Neelima I would love to know more about you. What you do, your interests...”

Neelima was doctor, but of a different kind. She had her PhD in Literature and wrote short stories and poems. Her desire was to get her work published. She wanted to teach, but Sushil didn’t approve of that and wanted her to be home, being a good wife. Neelima was a loner, had very few friends in the society, she was

hardly seen. Even for groceries. Sushil controlled her life to the minutest detail. Today was an exception as Dipti had personally request Dr. Sushil to come to the party.

“So where the lucky man” I asked.

“Well he dropped me here and had to leave urgently to the clinic for a case. Should be back whenever he’s done” she answered.

Neelima beautiful face hid her inside. A person who was lonely, suppressed and wanting to break free. You could actually see the melancholy when she smiled. It was a half-smile. I wondered what would make her laugh. I got her a vodka lime and asked her to join the dance floor. She hesitated saying that she wasn’t much of a dancer. But I said I could teach her and after a lot of persistence she obliged. The DJ was playing the best of 80s English POP music and we got into the crowd doing their own thing.

And then the music changed to slow romantic. Richard Marx “Everything I Do” brought me close as I held her left hand into mine and the other on her waist. She rested her hand on my shoulder and we danced looking eye in eye. It was like a who blinks first match. Her perfume had a high note of Vanilla that was so inviting. “Your perfume’s really nice” I whispered in her ears. “Estee Lauder Pink... imported through Dipti” she replied “You smell like my dad” she continued. “I prefer Old Spice, it’s got that man smell” I replied. She gave a half smile. The DJ changed gears and announced the last hour before midnight was dedicated to Bollywood and it began with the raging “Churake Dil Mera, Goriya Chali”

I didn’t know what got into me that moment. Instinctively matching Akshay’s gyrations inviting Neelima to imitate me. She tried and it wasn’t working. She was laughing at her futile attempts. Her face was radiant. Happy as a child. I egged her to keep trying and the next 4 minutes the whole crowd was applauding us on our performance, which ended with me tossing my

blazer over and taking a leap to land under feet taking her hands and kissing them. That marked the end of our performance.

Neelima who was looking very happy suddenly went pale spotting her husband in the Crowd. He had a frown of disapproval. I could sense the tension and walked up to him and introduced myself.

“I’m Mohan, Neelima’s been speaking very high about you. All praises. You are really a lucky Man Dr. Sushil”

Dr. Sushil looked at me, gave a half smile. I quickly asked him for his poison and got him and Neelima a round of drinks.

Dipti who was doing her best networking quickly asked me to come by and the next half an hour I was being introduced to a whole set of men and women.

Then before midnight lights went off for a good ten seconds followed by fireworks in the sky and cheers of Happy New Year.

Dipti was the one around me and I gave a her hug and kiss.

“I’ll see you in my room in a while young man. Keep your batteries charged” she said.

I was trying to spot Neelima in the crowd and couldn’t see her. But Sushil was sighted amongst some young men having an intense conversation. I casually went around the Water Tank to see Neelima smoking alone. I went to her and said, “Happy New Year”. She turned back to face me. Her face which had gone back to a half smile was now beaming again.

“I want to read some of your writings, let me know when I can come over. to your home.” I asked.

“Today by 11:00 am. After Sushil leaves for his Clinic.

“Oh Sure, And you promise to keep smiling like this. That half smile doesn’t suit you at all.”

She stubbed her cigarette ruffled my hair and nodded in agreement. “Thanks for making me dance” she said and went back

in the crowd. After all guests left, I walked up to Dipti's home. The Doors were open. On the table was a note, "Shower up and show up at the bed".

It was 2:00 am and I was tired as hell. But her orders couldn't be disobeyed and I let myself under a cold shower for a good 15 minutes. The cold water shocked my brains but warmed up my body. And in bed, the warmth stoked into a fire as we both engaged in passionate sex. Only this time I wasn't mentally with Dipti but was imagining Neelima under me.

Happy New Year

The first rays of the January sun came through Dipti's bedroom at around 7:30 am. I woke up to be reminded of my date with Neelima. I looked at my watch and decided that it was time to return back home and her ready. Dipti was snoring and I didn't have the heart to wake her up. Left a note for her that said, "Request for a day off Mam" will resume work tomorrow!

I tiptoed got into my clothes and walked a floor down to my PG accommodation. I rang the bell and was greeted by Rupa, dressed in a red & mustard silk saree, her hair neatly tied with a heap of marigold, the scent of which was overpowering.

"Happy New Year Mohan!" She wished me. I wished her back and enquired about her mom, to understand that she had gone to Mahalaxmi temple to seek blessings and will do her temple rounds with friends only to return at evening. It was Rupa's turn to manage the Kitchen and the day's order. And so she had to have an early bath and get into the kitchen with a pure mind and soul.

"You have a bath and I'll fix you a nice breakfast with filter coffee" she said and went into the Kitchen. Rupa was that beautiful next door girl who could be the perfect one to romance for a 23 year old like me. She rose up to my chest, was really fair and slender and petite. And today in a saree she looked even more attractive.

My thoughts wandered and then came back to Neelima. Our one-on-one encounter was just a few hours away and I should be prepared for that. So I got into the shower for a quick bath and sprayed myself with a whole lot of Old Spice. I chose a white see through Kurta paired with my blue denim and Kolhapuri Chappals, left my hair wet and frizzled to look untidy. As I was admiring myself, Rupa came into the room with a plate of Upma made in Ghee and a cup of filter coffee.

I was hungry like a wolf and finished it in no time. Rupa stayed all along watching me lick the plate.... "Looks like you could do with some more Upma" she asked. I said yes instantly. The next plate was eaten like a civilised human.

"Look it's not my business to probe into your life, but the lady Dipti Sanyal living above doesn't have a good reputation" she began. "And why do you say that, because of the way she looks and conducts herself?" I defended.

"She preys on boys who are young, half her age, kind of a sex maniac. She's messed up some many young lives. My brother Balu was one of her victims. So much so that to escape her he had to leave our family, never to come back. He left behind a letter saying not to look out for him...." I could see tears rolling down Rupa's eyes.

I hugged her in my arms and kissed her forehead. Then wiping her tears with my fingers, I gently put her hair behind her ears. "I'm sorry to know about what happened to your brother, but our relationship is strictly professional and business and it will always remain to be" I replied.

"We'll all till the time you are with her. The day you want to go free everything will change. Like it happened for Balu. And I really don't want anything to happen to you" she reasoned.

I kissed her hands and said, "I'll take care of myself, and thanks for being so concerned about me. Here's to our new beginning as friends?" I asked.

"Yes" she nodded. In the next 30 minutes I was ready for my first date of the year. Neelima Sushil Panjare.

At least that was what the name read on the name plate.

The First Day, The First Show

I pressed the doorbell of the Panjare residence, and it released the mechanical chirping of cuckoos. It felt odd—not the kind of sound you'd expect in the home of a serious paediatrician and his equally serious, literary wife. Urmila, the maid, opened the door and ushered me into the living room. As I waited, I surveyed the space. One look told me this belonged to someone with severe OCD. Everything was prim, proper, and devoid of casualness. It felt like a showroom, not a home that was actually lived in. I hesitated before plonking myself into the imported leather recliner, but eventually, I gave in to the luxury.

Then, Neelima stepped in. She was wearing a simple white khadi saree with a Warli-painted border and a deep-back black blouse. Her hair was tied in a soft bun with a wet towel; it was evident she had just finished a leisurely bath.

"How hungry are you?" she asked.

"Honestly, I had breakfast at home," I confessed, "but I still have some space for your special Kande Pohe."

"Oh, I can't cook to save my life," she admitted with a small smile, "but I promise Urmila makes the best in the world."

"While it's in the making, can I see your library?" I asked excitedly.

We retreated into her well-appointed study. The smell of tempering curry leaves and the domestic hum of the kitchen felt a world away from the neon-lit artifice of the night before. But as I stepped closer to the bookshelf, the casual intimacy shattered.

Neelima reached for a collection of Kamala Das poetry on the top shelf. As her saree shifted, the fabric pulled tight against her back. There, blooming like an ugly violet flower against her

fair skin, was a distinct, rectangular bruise—the unmistakable mark of a hand or a belt.

"Neelima," my voice felt like a low anchor in the quiet room.

She froze. She didn't turn around, but her shoulders slumped, the defiant "literary" posture vanishing.

"He doesn't like it when I'm perceived," she whispered, her voice brittle. "Last night, for four minutes, you made everyone perceive me. You made me visible, Mohan. To Sushil, visibility is a sin for a wife."

I didn't offer a platitude. I didn't say it would be okay. Instead, I reached out, my fingertips hovering just a fraction of an inch from the bruise. The heat radiating from her skin was palpable.

"I didn't just make you visible," I said, my voice dropping to a register of raw honesty. "I saw you. There's a difference."

Neelima finally turned. Her "half-smile" was gone, replaced by a trembling vulnerability. The silence of the apartment—the same silence Dipti Sanyal used as a canvas for lust—felt different here. It felt like a sanctuary under siege.

"Urmila is leaving," she breathed.

The front door clicked shut. The apartment settled into a heavy, expectant stillness. I took the book from her hand and placed it on the desk. I didn't use the "theories" Dipti had taught me—the zones to stroke or the rhythm to build. Neelima wasn't a client. She was a mirror.

I gently untied the knot of her hair, letting the damp waves fall over the bruise, veiling the evidence of Sushil's cruelty.

"You asked me to read your writing," I said, my face inches from hers. "But your body is already telling the most honest story I've ever heard."

Neelima let out a jagged breath and collapsed into me. It wasn't a practiced embrace; it was the desperate cling of a

drowning person finding a life raft. When I finally kissed her, it wasn't the "crescendo" Dipti had described. It was slow, tasting of the gin from the night before and the salt of the tears she hadn't let fall.

In the filtered light of that New Year's afternoon, the intimacy was quiet and profound. There were no theatrical moans, only the synchronized rhythm of two people finally dropping their scripts. Later, as we lay entangled, the scent of the cold, forgotten Kande Pohe drifted from the dining room. Neelima traced the line of my jaw.

"Sushil thinks he owns my silence," she whispered.

I kissed her forehead, the Old Spice on my skin mingling with her vanilla perfume. "Then let's give him a library of secrets he'll never be able to read."

The Perverse Penalty

As I walked back to my room later that evening, passing Rupa in the hallway, the weight of the "Eleven-Month Ras Leela" felt different. I was no longer a "Trainee of Desire." I had found a reason to stay, and a reason to leave it all behind.

But the January sun soon felt like a spotlight on my growing dread. News in Gokuldham travelled like a fever, and Dipti Sanyal's ears were tuned to every frequency. Two days later, I entered her apartment. It smelled of floor cleaner and cold, calculated rage. Dipti sat in her velvet chair, a glass of gin in her hand.

"You've been busy, Mohan," she said, her voice a dangerous purr. "I thought I was training a professional. Instead, I find I've been sponsoring a charity."

The blood drained from my face. "Dipti, it wasn't an 'assignment.'"

"Exactly!" she slammed her glass down. "She is a client's wife. You went behind my back and offered for free what I taught you to monetize. You broke the brand."

"I'll pay you," I stammered. "Deduct the full ten thousand from my commission. Just let this go."

Dipti stood up, eyes flashing with perverse amusement. "You think you can buy your way out? I own the copyright to every move you make. If you want to play 'service provider' for free, let's see how generous you really are."

She called out, "Kamla! Come here!"

Kamla, her 40-year-old maid, emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her faded saree.

"Mohan wants to offer free services," Dipti sneered. "And since you work so hard, Kamla, I've decided you deserve a New Year's bonus. Right here. In front of me."

I felt a wave of nausea. "Dipti, please. This is disgusting."

"Strip," she barked. "Or I go to Dr. Sushil tonight and tell him exactly what his wife was doing on New Year's Day. Imagine what his belt would do to her then."

The threat to Neelima was the anchor that dragged me down. With trembling hands, I began to undress. Kamla stood frozen, a mix of fear and a strange hunger in her eyes.

The act was a blur of humiliation. Dipti sat there, lighting a cigarette, watching us like a scientist. "Work, Mohan," she commanded.

I shut my eyes, trying to conjure Neelima's face, but all I could see was Dipti's sneer. A dark shift happened inside me. Shame curdled into a blinding, white-hot rage—not at Kamla, but at the world that had made me a pawn. I became a machine of pure anger. I grabbed Kamla with a ferocity that made Dipti's eyebrows arch. This was a punishing assault. I poured every

ounce of my hatred for Dipti and my fear for Neelima into every thrust.

Kamla, initially terrified, responded to the intensity. She had never been touched with such frantic power. When it was over, I collapsed on the cool tiles, gasping. Kamla gathered her clothes and vanished.

Dipti walked over and patted my cheek—a gesture that felt like a brand. "That was... impressive. Your best work yet. But never forget: the body belongs to me. You have an appointment tomorrow at 2:00 PM. Don't be late."

The Architect of Ruin

That humiliation didn't break me; it cauterized me. Information became my only currency. Over the next three months, I became a ghost in the machine. I accepted every assignment, but I was now a forensic auditor of the community's sins. I duplicated Dipti's registers—the clients, the bribes, the specific kinks.

My most explosive discovery came from Neelima. She confessed that Dr. Sushil's "urgent clinic visits" were actually rendezvous with young men supplied by Dipti. Dipti was a blackmailer, holding the keys to the Doctor's social suicide.

I didn't go to the local station. I went to the top: Jairaj Bhagat, the new Police Commissioner. We met in an Irani café. I laid out the ledger.

"I want protection, Sir," I said. "And keep Neelima's name out of it. She's a victim."

Bhagat, sensing a career-defining headline, leaned in. "Give me the Doctor, the Cable King, and the Sanyal woman, and you walk away free." The raid happened at 3:00 PM on a Tuesday. The gates of Gokuldharm were breached by police jeeps. Dipti was led out in handcuffs, her elegance replaced by the eyes of a trapped animal. The news cycle was relentless: "Sins of the Suburbs."

But the law's protection didn't extend to the fury of the community. A week later, as I walked toward Thane station, I was intercepted by goons hired by the "victimized" husbands. They broke my ribs and my jaw, leaving me for dead in a muddy alleyway.

Epilogue: The Storyteller

I woke up in a government hospital, my body a map of bandages. Only one person remained: Rupa. She sat by my bed every day with South Indian meals. She didn't ask questions. She just held my hand. "We can't stay here, Rupa," I rasped through my wired jaw. "Then we leave," she said. "I've saved my salary. We go where nobody knows the name Mohan."

Dubai, 2026.

The desert sun is white and white-hot, unlike the humid heat of Thane. I adjusted my tie as I walked into my office on Sheikh Zayed Road. I am a Creative Director now, known for campaigns that understand the hidden longings of the masses. I returned home to our apartment in the Marina. The aroma of fried onions filled the air—Rupa's "Home Chef" business is the talk of the city. My two kids raced to the door to hug me.

That night, after they were asleep, I sat on my balcony overlooking the Persian Gulf. I opened a fresh notebook. I had spent decades trying to forget those eleven months, but I realized the trauma gave me a gift: the ability to see the truth behind the starched sarees.

I picked up my pen and wrote the first line of my first book.

END OF STORY 3

STORY 4



EMERGENCY & NEYIAPPAMS

The afternoon sun in Palakkad does not merely shine; it settles upon the land like a heavy, golden blanket, thick with the scent of drying hay and damp earth. In the village of Malampuzha, the Venugopalan ancestral home—a sprawling Nalukettu with weathered teak pillars and a central courtyard that breathed with the rhythm of the seasons—stood as a monument to landed prestige.

Venugopal, known to the village as Venu, was the master of this domain. He was a man of the earth, his skin bronzed to the colour of polished mahogany from hours spent supervising the harvest of his vast paddy fields. His inheritance was not merely a deed, but a living, breathing ecosystem of coconut groves that swayed like emerald fans against the Western Ghats, and jackfruit trees so heavy with fruit they seemed to groan under the weight of their own sweetness. Venu was a man of immense appetites. He possessed a vitality that seemed drawn directly from the fertile soil he trod upon. While he was a respected landlord, his true kingdom lay within the thick stone walls of his home, governed by his wife, Pramila.

Pramila was the quintessence of the Palakkad housewife of the 1970s—industrious, soft-spoken, and possessed of a quiet strength that kept the gears of the large joint family grinding smoothly. To the elders, she was the dutiful daughter-in-law who ensured the brass lamps were lit at dusk. To Venu, she was the

vessel of his deepest desires, a woman whose patience was as boundless as his demands.

The Origin of an Obsession

Venu's nature had been forged in the sensory richness of his childhood. There was a legendary anecdote in the family, often whispered by aunts during weddings, about the summer Venu turned one. A severe bout of conjunctivitis had turned his eyes into angry, swollen slits. In those days, traditional wisdom bypassed the pharmacy.

Shyamala Chechi, a neighbour and a distant cousin who was then nursing her own infant, was summoned. Venu, a squalling, feverish toddler, was pressed against her bounteous, lactating bosom. As she expressed her milk directly into his stinging eyes—a cooling, medicinal balm. The child's crying stopped instantly. His tiny hands had instinctively clamped onto her breast with a grip so fierce and possessive it became a village punchline. "That one won't let go of what he loves," Shyamala had laughed years later, advising a young Venu on his wedding eve. She had leaned in, smelling of sandalwood and breast milk, and whispered, "Be gentle with Pramila, Venu. A woman's body is a temple, not a battlefield."

The Gaze of the Landlord

Long before he took over the management of the estate, Venu accompanied his father, the elder Venugopalan, on "surveys" of the family's emerald-green holdings. While the father's eyes were keen on the irrigation channels and the health of the saplings, the teenage Venu's gaze was fixed elsewhere. During the transplanting season, the fields were filled with women from the local labour colonies. They worked bent double, their sarees tucked high, wading through the knee-deep slush. In the sweltering heat, their blouses would be drenched with sweat, clinging to their forms like a second skin. Venu would stand on the bunds, ostensibly checking the alignment of the rows, but his

eyes were devouring the deep cleavages revealed by their hunched postures. He watched the rhythmic sway of their bodies as they plunged the seedlings into the mud, the sight of a stray drop of sweat disappearing into the shadows of an ample bosom sending a jolt through his young frame. To him, the fertility of the soil was inseparable from the perceived fertility of the women who worked it.

The Pathayapura Rituals

Pramila, a woman of infinite patience, bore these "occupational hazards" of being Venu's wife with a quiet, knowing smile. She knew her husband was a man of the earth, governed by cycles of hunger and harvest. The Pathayapura (the granary) remained their most sacred, and scandalous, sanctuary. The room was a fortress of wood and shadow, housing the massive Pathayam—the giant wooden bins filled with unpolished Matta rice.

In the height of their physical intimacy, Venu had developed a fetish that was the talk of the invisible spirits of the house. He would have Pramila lie upon the smooth, cool floor of the granary. Taking a heavy brass Para (a traditional measuring vessel), he would fill it with the rough, red-hued grains and cascade them over her breasts. The sensation of the hundreds of tiny, hard grains rolling over her sensitive skin, settling in the valley of her chest, would elicit a low moan from her that drove Venu to a state of primal possession. He saw her as the ultimate harvest—a goddess of plenty being anointed by the very grain that fed his ancestors.

The "evidence" was a constant source of embarrassment for Pramila. The next morning, as she moved through the house to perform her chores, stray grains of rice would occasionally fall from the folds of her clothing or even her hair. His mother, a hawk-eyed matriarch, would often find these grains scattered near the kitchen hearth or the puja room.

"It seems the rats in the granary are getting bolder," the old woman would say loudly, casting a piercing look at Pramila's blushing face. "They are carrying the rice all the way to the bedroom now!"

The Art of the Neyiappam

If the Pathayapura was the site of their passion, the kitchen was the site of their communion. And at the heart of that communion was the Neyiappam.

Pramila had mastered the art like no one else. She used the finest rice flour, aged jaggery melted into a dark, viscous syrup, and small, overripe Palayankodan bananas mashed into a smooth paste. The secret, she knew, was the hint of crushed cardamom and the crunch of fried coconut bits.

She would fry them in pure, golden ghee in a heavy iron Appakkara. The sound of the batter hitting the hot fat—a sharp, rhythmic sizzle—was the dinner bell for the household.

Venu's eldest son, Unni, was the primary beneficiary of these treats. He would wait by the kitchen door, his eyes wide as Pramila stacked the soft, fluffy balls into a massive steel dabba. To prevent the boy from eating himself sick, Pramila would hide the tin in the high lofts or behind the sacks of tamarind.

But the family joke was that these Neyiappams weren't just snacks; they were the fuel for Venu's libido. The combination of ghee, iron-rich jaggery, and the sheer sweetness seemed to act as a potent aphrodisiac. After a Sunday tea involving a dozen of these treats, Venu would look at Pramila with a fire in his eyes that made her heart race and her cheeks flush.

The Emergency and the "Closed Factory"

By the mid-70s, the house was already teeming with four children. The youngest three were daughters, born in such quick succession that the household felt like a perpetual nursery. The political climate of India was shifting; Sanjay Gandhi's

sterilization drives were being implemented with a fervour that bordered on the fanatical. The local District Medical Officer, a friend of the family, had been putting pressure on Venu. "You are an influential landlord, Venu. If you do it, the whole village will follow. Lead by example!"

Venu, feeling a rare moment of responsibility—and perhaps tired of the logistical nightmare of sneaking around with four toddlers in the house—agreed. He underwent the vasectomy at the government hospital in Malampuzha. The "incentive" package was a sign of the times: a cash payment, a certificate, a large tin of high-grade ghee, and two dozen yellow "Robusta" bananas.

The Power of the Neyiappam

Pramila, ever the dutiful wife, was overjoyed. For the first time in her married life, the fear of another pregnancy was lifted. To celebrate, she decided to make Venu's absolute favourite: Neyiappams. She spent the afternoon in the kitchen, her hands stained with the dark brown of the jaggery syrup. She mashed the government-issued bananas into a pulp, mixed them with roasted rice flour, and seasoned the batter with black sesame and cardamom.

The kitchen was filled with the intoxicating aroma of frying ghee. As each appam turned a deep, golden mahogany, she stacked them in a towering heap inside a massive steel dabba. Sunday tea was a feast. Venu, feeling a sense of renewed freedom, indulged. He ate twelve of the soft, spongy balls in one sitting, the ghee-laden sweets acting like a high-octane fuel on his already potent constitution. That night, the "abstinence" imposed by the surgery was broken. With the "factory closed," they didn't even bother with the granary; they reclaimed their own bed with a ferocity that shook the heavy teak frames.

The Shoddy Job

Three months later, the village gossip mill received its greatest gift. The "shoddy job" performed by the overworked government doctors became a legend that eclipsed even the stories of Venu's rice-throwing antics. Pramila was pregnant for the fifth time. The news spread through Malampuzha like wildfire—the landlord who was paid by the government to stop, but was propelled by his wife's Neyiappams to keep going.

The news of Pramila's fifth pregnancy hit the village of Malampuzha faster than the monsoon winds hitting the Western Ghats. At the local tea shop—a rickety wooden structure tucked under a massive banyan tree—the morning assembly of elders was in session. The air was thick with the smell of "Strong Tea," steaming Parippu Vadas, and the pungent tobacco of hand-rolled beedis.

The Tea Shop Tribunal

Nair (The retired Postmaster):

(Adjusting his thick glasses and snapping the morning newspaper)
"I tell you, this Emergency is a farce! First, they tell us the trains will run on time. Then, they tell us the population will stop growing. And now? Look at our Landlord Venu. The man is a walking contradiction to the Central Government!"

Kurup (A cynical coconut farmer):

(Chuckling as he dunks a rusk into his tea) "Arre, Postmaster-re, don't blame the Government. Blame the 'Incentive.' I saw Venu walking home that day with a tin of ghee so large it could lubricate a steam engine. What did they expect? You give a bull a sack of high-grade grain and then tell him not to look at the cows?"

Raghavan (The village gossip, leaning in):

"It wasn't just the ghee, Kurup-etta. It was the bananas. Two dozen yellow Robustas! And you know Pramila. That woman doesn't

just cook; she performs sorcery. She turned that 'Family Planning' kit into a mountain of Neyiappams. My wife says the smell of that frying ghee reached all the way to the temple tank."

Nair:

"But the operation! The DMO himself signed the certificate. 'National Contribution,' it said. Venu was practically a martyr for the nation for exactly one week."

Kurup: (Wiping froth from his mustache)

"Martyr? Venu? The man has the constitution of a rogue elephant. I heard from the hospital peon that the junior doctor was so rushed to meet Sanjay Gandhi's quota that he probably just tied a loose knot and called it a day. He didn't account for the 'Neyiappam Effect.' Those sweets are like gunpowder in Venu's blood."

Raghavan: (Whispering)

"They say the night after he ate the whole dabba, the house was shaking. The old mother thought it was an earthquake starting in the Pathayapura. She went to check and found a trail of unpolished rice leading from the granary to the kitchen."

Nair:

"Rice? Why rice?"

Kurup:

"Because Venu is a romantic, Postmaster! He likes to see the harvest before he sows the seed. He's been like that since he was a boy clutching onto Shyamala Chechi. He doesn't just want a wife; he wants a goddess of abundance. And Pramila, poor soul, is too 'abundant' for her own good."

Raghavan:

"The DMO is refusing to go back to the house. He's terrified Venu will ask for a refund on the ghee. But the funniest part? Venu isn't even embarrassed. He's walking around the paddy fields today with his chest

out, looking at the laborers like he's personally responsible for the fertility of the entire district."

Nair: (Sighing and folding his paper)

"Well, the Emergency might be a dark time for India, but in the Venugopalan household, the lights are clearly staying on all night. Guruvayoor Appan has a sense of humor, I'll give Him that."

Kurup:

"It's not the Appan in the temple, Nair-etta. It's the Appam in the kitchen. That's the true power in Malampuzha."

The Final Flourish

The fifth child, born nine months later, was a boy with eyes as bright as Venu's and a temperament as sweet as Pramila's jaggery syrup. They named him Guruvayoorappan, but the village—and eventually the family—only ever called him "Neyiappam." Venu continued his "surveys" of the fields, his eyes never losing their sharp, appreciative glint for a well-filled blouse. And Pramila continued to hide the steel dabba, though she always knew exactly where to find it when she wanted to see that particular fire rekindled in her husband's eyes.

To ensure the legend of the Venugopalan household survives for generations, here is the secret behind the "miracle" snack. It is said that the ratio of jaggery to ghee in this recipe is precisely calibrated to bypass any medical intervention known to man.

END OF STORY 4

STORY 5



TAMILNADU STATE V/S SAMBANDHAM

The air in the Chennai High Court was thick, not just with the humid salt-heavy breeze of the Bay of Bengal, but with the suffocating weight of a nation's morality. Outside the massive Gothic gates, the Rajaji Salai was a sea of placards. On one side, saffron and white banners screamed for the "preservation of Vedic values"; on the other, youth activists and feminist collectives held posters of a lotus intertwined with a human touch, the logo of Sambandham.

Inside Courtroom Number 4, Justice C.M. Ramaswamy adjusted his spectacles. He was a man carved from old wood—stoic, traditional, and nearing retirement. Before him stood Padmanabhan "Paddy" Suresh, a prosecutor whose voice carried the thunder of a self-appointed moral guardian.

"My Lord," Paddy began, slapping an eleven-page document onto the mahogany dais. "This is not about 'wellness.' This is about the systematic erosion of the Indian family unit. Jailakshmi Amma has not built a clinic; she has built a high-tech sodom and gomorrah. Under the guise of 'therapy,' she has commodified the most sacred bond of human existence."

In the dock sat Jailakshmi. At sixty-five, she wore a crisp, ivory Kanchipuram silk saree, her silver hair coiled into a neat bun adorned with a single string of jasmine. She didn't look like a madam; she looked like everyone's favorite aunt. Her eyes,

however, weren't looking at the judge. They were looking through the walls, back to 1974.

Flashback: The House of Seven Brothers

The Coimbatore heat of the seventies was different—it was dry, smelling of red earth and spinning mills. Jailakshmi had entered the massive ancestral Tharavad as a nineteen-year-old bride, married to the eldest of eight brothers. The house was a labyrinth of corridors and unspoken tensions. Within three years, a factory accident left her a widow at twenty-two. In that era, a childless widow was expected to fade into the grey shadows of the kitchen. But Jailakshmi was observant. She saw her brothers-in-law struggling with suppressed desires, her sisters-in-law crying in the bathing sheds because their husbands knew nothing of a woman's body beyond procreation.

It started with her youngest brother-in-law, a boy of eighteen, trembling with shame over "nocturnal emissions" he thought were a deadly disease. Jailakshmi, who had spent her brief marriage reading her late husband's hidden collection of medical texts and ancient translated scrolls, didn't shun him. She spoke to him. She taught him that his body was not a temple of guilt, but an instrument of nature.

The Courtroom Battle: Friday Morning

"Incest!" Paddy roared, pointing a trembling finger at Jailakshmi. "The prosecution has evidence that this woman began her 'career' by corrupting her own household. She turned a grieving home into a laboratory of filth!"

Sindhu Ganesan, the defense counsel, rose calmly. She was thirty years younger than Paddy, representing the new India. "Correction, My Lord. She turned a house of repression into a house of healing. My client didn't 'corrupt' her family; she saved them from the trauma of ignorance. If she counselled her kin, it was out of a duty of care that the State failed to provide through education."

“Education?” Paddy sneered. “She charges five thousand rupees an hour for 'tactile sensory therapy.' That’s a euphemism for prostitution, My Lord!”

“It is a euphemism for Prana,” Sindhu countered. “She employs trained therapists who understand the physiological and psychological blocks that lead to sexual dysfunction. Is a surgeon a murderer because he uses a knife? No. Then why is a sexual surrogate a criminal for using the body to heal the mind?”

Flashback: The Birth of Sambandham

By the late nineties, the "family secret" had spread through hushed whispers in Coimbatore’s elite circles. Jailakshmi had moved to Chennai, realizing that the urban sprawl was lonelier than the village. She saw men destroyed by the burgeoning porn industry—men who expected women to be plastic dolls—and women who felt like broken appliances.

She opened Sambandham (The Connection). It wasn't a brothel. It was a serene villa in Adyar, filled with the scent of sandalwood and the sound of trickling water.

The turning point was her nephew, Karthik. A brilliant engineer, he was on the verge of divorce because he was terrified of intimacy. Jailakshmi sat him down in her study.

“Karthik,” she had said, her voice like velvet, “Why do we study Physics? To understand the laws of the universe. Why do we study Chemistry? To understand the reactions of elements. But when it comes to the most complex chemistry of all—the human touch—you think you should just ‘know’ it? Ignorance isn't virtue, child. It’s a handicap.”

She introduced him to a surrogate—a woman trained in psychology and ancient Kerala massage techniques. Not to "have sex," but to learn the geography of empathy. Six months later, Karthik’s marriage was saved. He didn't just find a partner; he found his own humanity.

The Witnesses: Saturday

The trial moved into its second gruelling day. The nation was glued to the live-tweets. Every news channel had a split-screen: a priest on one side, a sexologist on the other.

Sindhu Ganesan called her witnesses.

A retired Army Colonel stood up. "I had PTSD," he whispered into the mic. "I couldn't touch my wife without shaking. The doctors gave me pills that made me a zombie. Amma's therapists taught me how to breathe again. They taught me that my body wasn't just a weapon."

A young woman, a software lead, followed. "I was told sex was a sin for 'good girls.' I was numb. Sambandham gave me my body back. They didn't sell me a service; they sold me my own identity."

Paddy tried to tear them down. "And did you pay? Did money change hands for this 'identity'?"

"Yes," she replied defiantly. "Just as I pay my therapist and my cardiologist."

The courtroom was hushed as Sindhu Ganesan, Jailakshmi's defense, called for a brief recess to submit a new set of depositions. These weren't just character certificates; they were the blueprints of a social revolution. Jailakshmi sat in the dock, the silver of her hair catching the morning light, her mind wandering back to the humid May of 1998—the year she launched the "Summer of Self."

The Summer of Self: Rewriting the Puberty Narrative

In a rented community hall in R.A. Puram, Jailakshmi had gathered forty teenagers—boys and girls sat on opposite sides of the aisle, their faces a mask of terror and giggling bravado. The air conditioner hummed, but the atmosphere was stifling with the weight of "The Unspeakable."

Jailakshmi walked to the center of the room. She didn't carry a biology textbook with clinical, cold diagrams of Fallopian tubes or ductal systems. Instead, she brought mirrors and clay.

"You are told your body is a temple," she had started, her voice a calm anchor. "But you are never given the keys. You are told that the changes you feel—the sudden heat, the dreams, the dampness—are things to be hidden. I am here to tell you they are the music of your existence."

She broke the students into groups, a radical move in an era of strict gender segregation. She explained the endocrine system not as a series of chemical reactions, but as an awakening.

"When a girl bleeds, she is not 'unclean'; she is powerful," Jailakshmi said, looking at a trembling fourteen-year-old in the eye. "And when a boy feels a surge he cannot control, he is not a 'pervert'; he is a vessel of life."

The most controversial session was the one on "The Solo Journey." In a culture where self-pleasure was equated with blindness or moral decay, Jailakshmi spoke of it as a biological safety valve.

"If you do not know the map of your own joy," she whispered to the rapt class, "how can you ever guide another person through it? Exploring yourself is the first act of consent. It is saying: I own this body, and I understand its language."

By the end of that summer, those forty teenagers didn't just understand sex; they understood autonomy. They walked out with their shoulders back, the shame that usually dogs adolescence replaced by a quiet, informed dignity.

The ACP's Submission: The Lion in the Bedroom

Back in the present, the prosecution attempted to paint Sambandham as a den of vice that corrupted public servants. Paddy Suresh brought up a confidential file. "We have records of high-ranking police officials frequenting this establishment. Is this not a clear case of bribery through carnal means?"

Sindhu Ganesan smiled. It was a sharp, predatory smile. "My Lord, I would like to present the voluntary testimony of ACP Anirudh (name changed for privacy), one of the most decorated officers in the Chennai Police."

A man in a crisp civilian suit walked to the witness stand. He was broad-shouldered, with a moustache that commanded respect, but his eyes were soft.

"Three years ago," the ACP began, his voice echoing in the rafters, "I was a lion on the streets and a ghost in my own home. I could lead a raid on a gang hideout, but I couldn't look my wife, Meena, in the eye after the lights went out."

The courtroom was deathly still. A high-ranking cop admitting to sexual inadequacy was unheard of in the hyper-masculine corridors of Indian power.

"I suffered from what the doctors called 'performance anxiety' rooted in years of stress and a total lack of education. I thought intimacy was a chore to be completed quickly. It led to resentment. Meena felt unloved; I felt like a failure. We were on the verge of a silent divorce."

He recounted how he had walked into Sambandham undercover, intending to shut it down. Instead, he met Jailakshmi.

"She didn't offer me a girl," the ACP said, glancing at Paddy. "She offered me a chair and a conversation. She told me, 'Anirudh, you are trying to win a race that doesn't have a finish line.' She insisted on joint counselling."

For six months, the ACP and his wife attended sessions. They were taught "Sensate Focus"—a technique where they rediscovered the skin's sensitivity without the pressure of the 'final act.' They were taught that intimacy was a conversation, not a conquest.

"Jailakshmi Amma saved my marriage," the ACP concluded, his voice thick with emotion. "She didn't just give me my confidence back; she gave me my wife back. If providing the

education the State failed to give us is a crime, then every happily married couple in this city is an accomplice."

The Echo of Nobility

As the ACP stepped down, the narrative in the courtroom shifted. It was no longer a trial about a "brothel." It was a trial about the Right to Joy.

The stories of the teenagers from the 90s—now grown adults with healthy relationships—and the high-ranking officers who found healing in her halls, built a fortress around Jailakshmi. She wasn't a purveyor of flesh; she was a gardener of the soul, pruning away the thorns of Victorian shame to let the natural human spirit bloom.

Paddy Suresh looked at his eleven-page closing argument. For the first time, the ink seemed to have lost its sting.

The Weekend of the Soul

Justice Ramaswamy adjourned the court for the weekend. The verdict was due Monday. The Judge's chambers were a sanctuary of leather-bound books and the scent of old paper. Justice C.M. Ramaswamy sat in his high-backed chair, the ceiling fan rhythmically slicing through the heavy afternoon silence. On his desk lay two things: the penal code and a handwritten letter from his daughter-in-law, delivered to him by his son earlier that morning.

He read the letter again. "Appa, for three years, Arvind and I lived like polite roommates in a cold museum. We loved each other, but we were starving in silence. Sambandham didn't give us a 'service'; they gave us a language. They taught us that our bodies weren't sources of shame, but the very earth from which our love grows."

The Sunday Reflection:

The Conflict of India & Bharat

Ramaswamy looked out the window at the Gulmohar tree, its red flowers defiant against the heat. He thought of his own youth—the mechanical, almost clinical approach to marriage, the awkward silences, the "duty" of it all. He had been a man of the law for forty years, but he realized he had been a stranger to the law of his own skin. He picked up a medical journal that Sindhu had submitted as evidence. It detailed the

Human Sexual Response Cycle, a diagram that seemed more like a map of the soul than a biological chart. He traced the lines. He thought of the ACP's testimony. A man trained to be a "protector" of the state was unable to protect his own intimacy until Jailakshmi showed him how. He thought of the teenagers in the 90s, who were taught that "self-pleasure" was a biological reality rather than a moral stain.

"If the law forbids the cure," Ramaswamy whispered to the empty room, "then the law is the disease."

The Final Monday:

The Verdict of the Century

The courtroom was packed to the rafters. Even the corridors were overflowing. When Justice Ramaswamy entered, the rustle of black robes sounded like the wings of a giant bird. He didn't look at the lawyers. He looked directly at Jailakshmi.

"The State," he began, his voice surprisingly gentle, "sees a brothel. But the evidence sees a school. The State sees 'immoral traffic,' but the testimonies see a bridge over a river of loneliness."

He paused, adjusting his spectacles.

"We have heard from the youth who were taught to respect their own growth. We have heard from a high-ranking officer of

the law who found his humanity in a clinic the State wishes to burn down. These are not the stories of victims of a crime; these are the stories of citizens reclaimed from the shadows of ignorance.”

Paddy Suresh stood up to protest, but the Judge raised a hand, silencing him instantly.

“India gave the world the Kamasutra, not as a book of lust, but as a treatise on the art of living. Somewhere in our history, we traded our wisdom for a borrowed, Victorian shame. We began to treat the most natural of human connections as a secret to be kept in the dark. And in the dark, things rot. Jailakshmi Amma simply turned on the lights.”

He picked up his gavel.

“The court finds that Sambandham is an essential institution of social reform. Its methods, while unconventional, address a profound public health crisis—the crisis of sexual illiteracy. The charges of 'running a brothel' are dismissed. Furthermore, this court recommends that the State look into integrating the 'Sambandham Model' of body awareness into the public education curriculum.”

THWACK.

The sound of the gavel hitting the wood was the sound of a door opening.

The Exit:

A Nation Out of the Closet

As Jailakshmi walked down the steps of the High Court, the crowd didn't just cheer; they reached out to touch her hand as if she were a saint. The ACP stood at the bottom of the stairs, saluting her—not as a police officer to a citizen, but as a man to his teacher.

The news cameras flashed. The headline that evening across every digital screen in India read:

"THE END OF SHAME: SAMBANDHAM WINS."

Jailakshmi got into her car. As the city of Chennai buzzed around her, vibrant and finally breathing a little easier, she closed her eyes. She thought of the little girl she once was in Coimbatore, staring at the red earth and wondering why the world was so quiet about the things that mattered most.

The Architecture of Intimacy.

The "Manifesto of Sambandham" was not just a document; it became the "Green Book" of the New Indian Renaissance. Originally typed on a weathered Remington in a small office in Adyar, it was later bound in silk and found on the nightstands of newlyweds, the desks of psychologists, and even in the bags of the very police officers who once sought to burn it.

As Jailakshmi sat in the quiet of her garden the evening after the verdict, she looked at the final draft.

The Manifesto of Sambandham

The Ten Pillars

The Body is a Map, Not a Secret

Education begins with the geography of the self. We teach that every nerve ending is a syllable in a language the soul speaks. To be ignorant of one's own body is to live in a house and never walk through the rooms.

Pleasure is a Biological Right

Just as the tongue is designed for taste and the ear for music, the human nervous system is designed for pleasure. We destigmatize the "Solo Journey." Self-knowledge is the foundation of consent; if you do not know what you like, you cannot tell a partner what you need.

The Fallacy of "Natural" Instinct

We reject the myth that intimacy is an "instinct" that requires no training. Physics requires study; art requires practice. We provide the "Prac-Lab" for the most complex chemistry known to man.

The Sanctity of the Surrogate

Our therapists are not "workers of the night," but "guides of the light." They are trained in the Sensate Focus technique—a graduated system of touch that moves from non-sexual connection to full intimacy, breaking the cycle of performance anxiety.

The Death of Performance

In Sambandham, there is no "goal." There is only "presence." We teach men that they are not machines and women that they are not mirrors. We replace the "race to the finish" with the "joy of the journey."

The Hormonal Symphony

We educate the youth on the Endocrine Transition. When a teenager understands the surge of testosterone or the ebb of oestrogen as a biological symphony, the shame of "impure thoughts" vanishes, replaced by a healthy curiosity.

The Reclaiming of the Vaishya Wisdom

We honour the ancient Indian tradition where the Ganika and Vaishya were scholars of the arts and the erotic. We are not creating something new; we are recovering what was stolen by colonial puritanism.

The Consent of the Soul

True intimacy cannot exist without absolute autonomy. We teach that "No" is a complete sentence and "Yes" is a sacred contract.

Healing the Traumatized

For those broken by the world—survivors of assault, veterans with PTSD, or the elderly forgotten by society—we offer a sanctuary where touch is used as a medicine to re-knit the nervous system.

The Final Goal: Connection (Sambandham)

The end of our teaching is not sex. It is Connection. We aim to create a society where two people can stand before each other, stripped of shame, fully aware of their power, and truly, deeply seen.

The Legacy

Within a year of the verdict, "Sambandham Centers" opened in Bangalore, Mumbai, and Delhi. The ACP who testified became the head of a new "Sensitivity Division" within the National Police Academy, using Jailakshmi's principles to train officers in handling domestic disputes and sexual crimes with empathy rather than bias.

Jailakshmi Amma never took a title. When asked if she was a revolutionary, she simply smiled and said, "I am just a grandmother who got tired of watching her children cry in the dark."

The closet was gone. The lights were on. And for the first time in centuries, India was learning to love out loud.

The implementation of the "Sambandham Curriculum" began not in a clinic, but in the sun-drenched halls of Government Higher Secondary School, Chennai. The air was electric, a mixture of ancestral hesitation and the frantic heartbeat of a generation ready to stop whispering.

Entering Classroom 10-C was Vikram, a thirty-year-old former athlete who had been trained personally by Jailakshmi. He didn't carry a cane or a stack of moral science books. He carried a small, pulsing anatomical model and a simple white board.

The First Lesson: The Chemistry of Change

The boys sat on the left, legs bouncing nervously; the girls on the right, some hiding behind their dupattas. They expected a lecture on "biological functions" or, worse, a stern warning about the "dangers of attraction."

Vikram turned to the board and wrote one word in bold, Tamil and English:

URIMAI (RIGHT).

"Most teachers come in here to tell you what not to do," Vikram began, leaning against the teacher's desk. "I'm here to tell you what your body is actually doing. Because if you don't understand the engine, you're going to crash the car."

He pointed to a diagram he projected onto the wall—not a grainy black-and-white sketch, but a vibrant, color-coded map of the brain's signalling system.

"When your voice cracks, or when your skin breaks out, or when you feel a sudden, confusing surge of heat when someone walks by—that isn't a sin," Vikram said, his voice dropping to a supportive baritone. "That is your Hypothalamus sending a high-speed telegram to your body. It's saying: 'Welcome to the rest of your life.'"

Breaking the Silence on the "Self"

A hand went up in the back. A boy, barely fifteen, whispered, "Sir... they say if we... if we touch ourselves... we go weak. Or blind."

The room went deathly silent. This was the moment of truth.

Vikram smiled, a gentle, brotherly expression. "That is a lie used to control you through fear. Your body produces energy. Sometimes, that energy needs a release valve. Exploring your own sensations is how you learn where your boundaries are. It's

how you learn to respect yourself so that one day, you can respect a partner."

He then turned to the girls. "And for you, understanding your cycle isn't about 'those five days of impurity.' It's about the four phases of your power."

"When you understand why you feel creative one week and tired the next, you stop being a victim of your biology. You become the master of it."

The Transformation

By the end of the forty-minute session, the "wall" in the middle of the room had melted. The students weren't looking at the floor anymore; they were looking at each other with a newfound, quiet respect.

The Principal, a traditional woman who had initially opposed the curriculum, stood at the door. She saw a young girl approach Vikram to ask a question about menstrual cramps without shielding her face in shame. She saw a boy shaking Vikram's hand, his posture suddenly upright, the "hunched shoulders of guilt" finally straightened.

This was the nobility Jailakshmi had fought for in court. It wasn't about the act; it was about the Individual.

The Ripple Effect: A New Social Fabric

As the "Sambandham Teachers" spread across the state, the statistics began to shift.

Reported cases of street harassment dropped, as young men viewed women as human beings with shared biological realities rather than "objects of mystery."

Teenage anxiety levels plummeted, replaced by a clinical and healthy understanding of puberty.

The "Silent Marriages" of the next generation were being prevented in the classroom, before they even began.

Jailakshmi Amma's victory wasn't just a legal acquittal; it was the birth of a more honest India. The nation had finally stopped treating its heart like a dark room and started treating it like a sunlit courtyard.

END OF STORY 5

STORY 6



TRAPPED

The Last shot at Colaba

The air in The Social Colaba was thick with the scent of expensive gin, burnt garlic fries, and the desperate energy of a city about to hold its breath. It was Saturday night, March 21st. Manish Maheshwari sat at the long wooden bar, his suitcase already tucked into the hotel cloakroom across the street. He was thirty-two, a man of crisp linen shirts and a structured life in Jaipur. The scion of a prosperous Sweet Maker Family, famous for their Ghewar, Manish was enjoying his poison, unknown to his family. To him, Mumbai was a business stop—a place of fast meetings, fast shots and faster taxis. He was flying home tomorrow morning.

A few tables ahead of him was Shivangi Bhaskar. She was nursing a whiskey sour, her thumb flying across her phone screen, replying to Slack messages from her Bangalore tech firm. She was twenty-eight, dressed in a silk camisole and distressed denim, looking like she belonged to the neon lights. Their eyes met in the mirror behind the bar. A smirk, a shared groan at a bad Bollywood remix, and then the conversation.

"Last night in the city?" Manish asked, his voice a steady baritone.

"Last flight out tomorrow," she replied. *"If the world doesn't end first"*

The chemistry was instant—a chemical reaction fuelled by the looming uncertainty of the "COVID Virus" outbreak in India. They didn't want discuss the prospect of the world coming to an end; they wanted a distraction. But eventually the conversation came back to it.

"You think this virus thing is capable of bringing the world to a standstill" Shivangi asked as they order for a round of Tequila Shots.

"Alcohol kills the virus, so as long as were shooting them down with these we will survive" remarked Manish

"If today was the last night on earth, how would you have chosen to live it?" asked Shivangi chasing her last shot

"Asking you if you help me change my status Manish Maheshwari. Died Virgin" He replied.

By midnight, they were stumbling into the lobby of his hotel, the salt air of the Arabian Sea clinging to their skin.

They checked-in Room 402. Minutes later they checked-into each other.

"You don't seem a bit of a virgin..." she exclaimed in ecstasy as they climaxed together.

"The world's also not going to end so soon" He replied kissing her sweet mouth.

The Sunday Staycation

The sun crawled through the heavy hotel curtains at 10:00 AM. Shivangi reached for her phone to book an Uber back to her hotel in Vile Parle, but the screen was a wall of notifications.

JANATA CURFEW BEGINS. ALL MOVEMENTS SUSPENDED.

"Manish," she nudged him. *"The news... everything is shut. Like, everything."*

Manish groaned, squinting at the TV. The scroll at the bottom of the news channel was relentless. No cabs. No trains. No flights.

"It's just a trial run," Manish said, pulling her back down into the mess of white sheets. *"One day of staying in? I think I can handle that with you."*

The fear hadn't set in yet. It felt like a snow day in a country that never saw snow. They treated the bed like a playground. They explored each other under the sheets turning the small area into a private den. They fed each other the last of the mini-bar chocolates for breakfast. It was careless, carnal, and easy.

The world outside was holding its breath, but inside Room 402, the only sound that morning was the rhythmic thud of the headboard against the wall. And moans and groans from Shivangi & Manish.

Towards lunch time Manish's phone started to ring. It was his father trying to reach out on a video call. Manish didn't have a stitch on him and besides him was Shivani his equal. He instinctively cut the phone sending him a message, low battery will call back and went on to switch off his phone. He had time on hand to orchestrate a plan for himself.

Meanwhile Shivani woke up slipping on Manish's over-sized linen shirt that did well to cover her vitals, yet revealing her endowed figure against the sunlight. She reached out to her mobile that was already dead. She pulled her charger from her tote bag and plugged it into her android waiting for the battery to resurrect her Samsung. In minutes she could see about 47 messages all from a single person. Shivam, her boss.

She nervously ran her fingers through her hair reading the content in sequence. It started with a voice of concern of "Rise & Shine Baby" and ending at "you need to call me B*****h"

"Everything Ok" asked Manish.

“Ah the usual, a boss trying to be my father” she replied in a dismissive tone, *“And You?”*

“Well a concerned Father who insists on getting on video calls” replied Manish.

“Well we only need to reply to them if we like, after all it’s Curfew isn’t it?” said Shivangi trying to make things lighter.

“But we aren’t Janata, so let’s get back to some more action, under the shower this time” saying this Manish grabbed her from behind lifting her up and carrying her lean self in his arms into the shower. The mix of hot and cold water and the luxurious liquid soap was all it took to get them into yet another passionate round. Their 7th since they woke up.

Shiwangi stood by the bathroom mirror applying the tiny tube of cheap hotel moisturiser onto her skin.

“I don’t have spare inner-wears, this was supposed to be just a one night stand” Shivangi Rued.

“You’re right and mine’s still standing” Manish said biting into her ear lobes.

“You better behave, I also worried about myself, it’s all been too much unprotected although I’m in my safe cycle” Shivangi remarked

“Well you got 72 hours before you get to pop an i-pill, besides tomorrow morning we both will be free birds, getting back into our worlds with enough of great memories of a good time spent” said Manish

Back in the room, Manish lent her a boxer and his spare vest to Shivangi to wear. She looked even more irresistible in them. Calling room service, he spent the next 20 minutes cajoling the service personnel to see if could get in some chilled beer promising him an extra trip. Promptly the boy arrived with a cloth bag that had 6 bottles of Kingfisher Lager that could take them through the afternoon. He tipped him in cash and asked if he could smuggle some condoms and i- pill from a chemist. The

boy smiled ear to ear and said he would try. No curfew could deprive people of their right to booze and have sex (the right way).

"You really know how to charm your way" Shivangi asked.

"Well it's in our genes we are the sweet makers" Manish boasted.

He opened a bottle of beer and offered her, *"To the last our God's Planned Sunday"*

Shivangi took a swig from his and they both perched themselves on the bed which now seemed to be their favourite place.

The Logistics of a Cage

By Monday morning, the "trial" became the "truth." The Prime Minister's voice on the television turned the 24-hour curfew into a 21-day lockdown.

The gravity hit Shivangi first. *"Manish, my suitcase is at the hotel in Vile Parle. I have... nothing. I'm wearing your t-shirt and the same underwear from Saturday night."*

"And I have three shirts and two pairs of trousers," Manish realized, looking at his small carry-on.

The reality of immobility was absolute. No delivery apps were working for clothes. The hotel staff, now down to a skeleton crew, couldn't help. They spent four hours on an e-commerce site that was barely loading, frantically ordering "Essentials."

Three packs of cotton t-shirts and boxers for both. A bulk pack of condoms, added to the cart with a nervous laugh that didn't quite reach their eyes. The "Essentials" wouldn't arrive for days. For now, they were two strangers in a room, washing their only sets of clothes in the sink with hotel soap, hanging them over in the small apology of an balcony to dry.

Shivangi's hotel informed her that her luggage had been moved to the cloak-room as her closer to airport hotel was being

converted as a quarantine space admitting people experiencing symptoms and testing positive. They urged her to make her own arrangements to get it picked as there were no taxis or autos plying in the city.

Shivangi then decided to call her boss Shivam to know the further call. He greeted her with a host of expletives urging her to feel apologetic of her not calling. She coolly blamed the battery that had died upon her.

Shivam then went to lecture her on how as a minority esop holder her responsibilities during these times were vital and asked her to liaise with the HR to outline the work protocols for everyone. Login and logout times had to be fixed. Everyone was expected to be ready to come on Video Call when demanded and maintain the state and central governments health protocols and declare themselves virus free.

Barely did she get-off her phone she noticed Manish slip into the balcony speaking to someone on the mobile phone.

“Papa I’m fine and my hotel, trapped with many more guests who can’t move out of their rooms. The room service is trying to sterilise my room so I came out... network is pretty low. But don’t worry I’ll update you on things on a daily basis. Please don’t worry on my health, I’m alone and socially distanced, Our food is provided for and it’s all a matter of a few days... pls don’t panic and keep me abreast of things at our shop. You also stay safe and keep mom safe. I will call you whenever possible”

He returned to the room looked at Priyanka and said, *“Time to realise that Shit has indeed hit the ceiling. We need to plan our lives till this quarantine is called off.”*

“Do you have a plan?” She asked.

“Well it starts from taking care of ourselves, washing hands, eating right, drinking boiled water and dividing the room into two zones so that both of us can continue with our everyday work without obstructions and intrusions on each-others privacy” Manish went on.

"I'm an early riser and would like to spend the few hours meditating and doing my yoga, so would appreciate no distractions during that time. No TV, no reels on phone and no calls whatsoever. I also have a fetish for an orderly room, so no clothes or towels on bed. Clothes to dry strictly in the balcony and we take turns to do that, one set gets washed and dried on one day so that there is no overload in the balcony. All gadgets to be aligned at the work table and strictly no working from the bed. We also take turns to charge out stuff to optimum levels so that there are arguments on petty issues..."

Priyanka for once couldn't believe her ears. This man's words echoed exactly of Shivam, her boss with mutual benefits who was a control freak and dominated her both at work and their live-in home.

And just two nights earlier she had not only fallen for his boyish charms but hooked up and went all out with. The predicament of being stuck with two of the same kind over the next 14 days was something she wasn't prepared for and for once she started to wonder whether or not she had fallen into a trap.

Sex, Lies, and Deception

The masks didn't just come off; they were stripped away by the ringing of phones. Manish's phone was a constant siren. *"Yes, Papa. No, I'm alone. No, I haven't seen a soul."* He would pace the small balcony, his voice dropping into a respectful, subservient tone that made Shivangi's skin crawl. He was petrified. Every time she laughed or dropped a spoon, he would freeze, glaring at her with a finger to his lips, terrified his parents in Jaipur would hear the presence of a woman.

Shivangi was no better. She was tethered to her laptop, her face illuminated by the blue light of Zoom calls. *"We need to cut the budget by 40%!"* she yelled at her screen, her corporate persona sharp, cold, and demanding.

She saw Manish as a distraction; he saw her as a liability. The man who had been a passionate lover on Saturday was now a

"Yes-Man" to his family, and the woman who had been a wild dancer was now a ruthless marketing machine. They were lying to the world to keep their reputations, while the truth of their incompatibility began to leak out like a slow gas leak.

The hotel kitchen officially moved to a "Limited Menu": Dal Kichdi and white bread. By Day 10, the "breakfast in bed" was a memory. They were rationing their dwindling cash. Manish discovered a hidden talent for cooking Maggi in the hotel's electric water boiler—a messy, starchy process that left the room smelling like MSG and dampness.

The first real fight happened over a packet of biscuits.

"You ate the last one?" Shivangi asked, staring at the empty wrapper on the desk.

"I was hungry, Shivangi. I haven't had a proper meal in a week," Manish snapped.

"We're supposed to share! That's the rule!"

"The rule? We don't have rules! We're two people who had a one-night stand and got stuck in a nightmare!"

The silence that followed was louder than the argument. They looked at each other—unkempt, stressed, and trapped. The "honeymoon" wasn't just over; it had been incinerated. The physical attraction was still there, a flickering ember, but the person holding the match was someone they realized they didn't even like. The walls of Room 402 were no longer a sanctuary; they had become a mirror reflecting every jagged edge of their personalities. As the lockdown stretched from weeks into a month, the "Trapped" saga moved from physical frustration to a profound psychological war.

The Autopsy of an Affair

By Day 30, the silence in the room was louder than their shouting matches. They had reached a stage of "functional

hostility." They moved around each other like two planets sharing a dangerously small orbit, careful not to collide.

The intimacy that had once been their escape now felt like a chore. One night, after a brief, hollow encounter, Shivangi sat up and stared at the flickering TV.

"Do you even like me, Manish? Or am I just the only warm body in a fifty-mile radius?"

Manish stayed staring at the ceiling. *"I liked the girl at the bar. The one who danced to 'Proper Patola' and didn't care about quarterly projections. I don't know who this person is."*

"This person is real," she whispered. "The girl at the bar was a weekend trailer. This is the movie. And you? You're not the hero. You're just a boy who's terrified of his father's shadow."

They began to pick at each other's flaws with surgical precision. Manish found her ambition "tiresome"; Shivangi found his traditionalism "suffocating." They realized that if they had met under any other circumstances, they wouldn't have lasted past a second date. The calamity had forced a lifetime of relationship milestones—the first fight, the first shared bill, the first disappointment—into a few cramped weeks.

The Breaking Point

The news of the final 14-day extension broke Manish. He sat on the edge of the bed, his head in his hands. The "Essential" clothes they had ordered were now pillled and grey from sink-washing. The room smelled of antiseptic and lingering Maggi seasoning.

"I can't do this anymore," he choked out. "I'm losing my mind, Shivangi. My business in Jaipur is haemorrhaging money, my parents are suspicious, and I'm stuck here with someone who looks at me like I'm a bug under a microscope."

Shivangi didn't argue. She felt the same hollow ache. She missed the Bangalore rain, her chaotic office, and the ability to

walk more than ten steps in a straight line. They spent the final week in a state of mourning—not for their relationship, which was already dead, but for their lost sense of self. The deception was too heavy to carry. They were two survivors of a shipwreck, clinging to the same piece of wood, realizing they both wanted to swim in opposite directions.

The Opening of the gates

May 4th. The e-passes were finally issued. The "Movement Restricted" signs were replaced by "Proceed with Caution."

The morning of their departure was strangely clinical. There was no grand romantic climax. The sun was out, bright and uncaring, over the Colaba Causeway. Manish packed his three linen shirts—now wrinkled and yellowing. Shivangi folded her "essential" black t-shirts, her hands shaking slightly.

"My SUV is downstairs," Manish said, checking his phone. His voice was back to that steady, polite baritone he used with strangers.

"My cab to the airport is five minutes away," she replied.

They stood in the center of Room 402. The bed was made—the hotel staff would be back today to strip the sheets of their 45-day history.

"I hope you revive your family business in Jaipur," Shivangi said, a small, weary smile touching her lips.

"And I hope you hit your KPIs, Shivangi," Manish said. He reached out as if to hug her, then hesitated, settling for a stiff, awkward pat on the shoulder.

"We survived. That's something."

"We survived each other." she corrected him.

They walked out together. The lobby was bustling with masked men in PPE suits, spraying disinfectant. It felt like a

movie set. As they stepped onto the street, the heat of Mumbai hit them—a reminder of the world they had forgotten.

Manish's car pulled away first. He didn't look back. Shivangi watched the dust settle, then stepped into her cab. She opened her phone, went to her contacts, and hit 'Delete' on the name Manish-Social.

As the cab sped toward the Sea Link, she looked out at the ocean. The trap was open. The world was moving again. But as she inhaled the salty air, she realized she would never be the girl who danced at Social again. The 45 days had stripped them both down to the bone, leaving them free, but forever haunted by the stranger who knew their darkest secrets.

The Ghost in the Wardrobe (Jaipur, September 2020)

Manish stood in his walk-in closet in Jaipur, surrounded by the comforting scent of sandalwood and freshly laundered ethnic wear. His life had snapped back into its rigid grooves. He was the dutiful son again, overseeing the family's business, nodding during Sunday lunches, and discussing potential marriage alliances with "suitable" families.

He reached into the back of a drawer for a pair of gym shorts and pulled out a faded, grey cotton t-shirt. It was one of the "Essentials" they had ordered on Day 3 of the lockdown. It was cheap, pillied, and smelled faintly of the industrial detergent he'd used in the hotel sink.

For a second, the heat of the Jaipur afternoon vanished. He was back in Room 402. He could hear the hum of the faulty AC and the sharp, rhythmic tapping of Shivangi's fingernails on her laptop. He remembered the taste of the Maggi they'd shared out of a coffee mug and the way her face looked—exhausted and stripped of makeup—when she finally muted her fifth Zoom call of the day.

He realized then that no one in Jaipur really knew him. They knew the version of him that said "Yes, Papa." Only one person—a stranger currently 2,000 kilometres away—had seen him at his absolute worst: petty, terrified, and dishonest.

He didn't miss her. He didn't want to call her. But he couldn't bring himself to throw the shirt away. He folded it neatly and tucked it back into the darkness of the drawer. A souvenir of a version of himself he hoped never to meet again.

The Notification (Bangalore, October 2020)

Shivangi was sitting in her high-rise apartment in Whitefield, the Bangalore rain lashing against the floor-to-ceiling windows. She was back in her element—leading a team of twenty, her calendar a mosaic of color-coded meetings.

Her phone buzzed. It was an automated memory notification from her app: "One Year Ago Today." She swiped through. There she was, laughing at a bar in Indiranagar. Then, a photo she'd forgotten she took—a blurry shot of the sunrise over a deserted Marine Drive, taken from a hotel balcony. In the corner of the frame, Manish's reflection was visible in the glass. He was slumped in a chair, looking defeated.

She remembered the fight they had ten minutes after that photo was taken. Something about a misplaced charger.

Her finger hovered over the 'Delete' button. But then she stopped. She remembered the one night, around Day 25, when the Wi-Fi had cut out and they had sat on the floor, sharing a single bottle of lukewarm water, talking about their childhood fears. For those two hours, they hadn't been a "traditionalist" or a "corporate drone." They had just been two humans terrified of a microscopic virus. She closed the app.

She walked to her kitchen and put on a pot of water. As it began to boil, she found herself staring at the bubbles, thinking of how Manish used to make Maggi in that tiny hotel kettle. She smiled—a small, private thing.

They were strangers again. They had lied to their families, they had hated each other's habits, and they had fled the moment the doors opened. But in the quiet of her luxury apartment, Shivangi realized that the lockdown hadn't just trapped them; it had saved them from the illusion that they were the people they pretended to be.

The trap was gone, but the bars had left a permanent shadow.

END OF STORY 6

STORY 7



THE DAUGHTER OF UTTARPADA

The Pink Satin Sanctuary

The Banerjee household in Uttarpara was a place of heavy wooden furniture and heavier expectations. In the 1990s, the town breathed with a rhythmic, predictable monotony. Men worked in the local government offices, and boys played football in the mud until their knees were scraped raw.

But seven-year-old Shailesh was different. While the other boys shouted on the field, Shailesh was often found tucked away in the corner of the veranda, hidden behind the drying laundry. In his hands was a plastic doll, and in his heart was a secret. He had scavenged a scrap of pink satin from his mother's sewing kit—a vibrant, shocking pink that felt like a heartbeat.

"Why did Maa give me a boy who has no traits of being one?"

The voice of his father, Niranjan, would cut through the afternoon humidity. He stood at the doorway, his brow furrowed with a mixture of confusion and disgust. To Niranjan, masculinity was a rigid architecture—shoulders back, voice deep, interests grounded in the tangible.

Shailesh, with his soft movements and his preference for "feminine" colours, was a crack in that foundation.

"He's just a child, Niranjan," his mother would whisper, but she never looked Shailesh in the eye when she said it. She saw the way he draped her sarees around his small frame when the house

was empty. She saw the way he looked at her lipsticks with a hunger that wasn't about play, but about identity.

The Goddess and the Prize

The annual school fancy dress competition was the one day Shailesh felt he could breathe. While his classmates dressed as freedom fighters or tigers, Shailesh made a request that silenced the house: he wanted to be Goddess Durga.

His mother, perhaps out of a buried sense of guilt, spent hours preparing him. She painted his feet with thick, red alta and traced the third eye on his forehead with sandalwood paste. When she draped the red-and-white sari over him, Shailesh didn't feel like he was wearing a costume. He felt like he was finally wearing his own skin.

On stage, he didn't just stand; he radiated. He won the first prize, the golden trophy a heavy weight in his small hands. But the victory was short-lived. As he walked home, still in his makeup, a group of older boys blocked his path.

"Look at the Meye-chhele (girlish boy)," they jeered. "Winning prizes for being a girl because he can't be a man."

Shailesh clutched his trophy, but the gold felt like lead. He realized then that the world only allowed him to be a woman if it was a performance—never if it was the truth.

The Shadows of Uttarpura

Adolescence brought a sharpening of the knives. By the time he was fifteen, Shailesh's "girlish ways" were no longer seen as a childhood phase; they were treated as a moral failing. The school hallways became a gauntlet of whispers and shoves.

The isolation made him vulnerable.

The biology lab was at the far end of the school's east wing, a place that smelled of formaldehyde, dust, and the damp rot of monsoon-soaked wood. It was a room of glass jars containing

specimens suspended in yellowish liquid—hearts, fetuses, and uncoiling snakes—all frozen in a state of eternal, silent suffering.

Mr. Das didn't start with violence; he started with a terrifying, fatherly gentleness.

"The others, they are like the specimens in these jars, Shailesh," he would whisper, his hand resting heavily on the boy's shoulder as the sun set behind the Hooghly River. *"They are static. But you... you have a softness that the world hasn't hardened yet. Let me help you protect it."*

The abuse was a slow, calculated invasion. It began with "posture corrections" and "anatomical lessons" that lasted long after the school bells had stopped ringing. Shailesh, desperate for any adult who didn't look at him with his father's disappointment, stayed.

He sat on the tall wooden stools, his small legs dangling, as Mr. Das's tobacco-stained fingers traced the lines of his neck and chest under the guise of "checking his pulse" or "studying the skeletal frame."

The graphic reality was the coldness of it. Mr. Das would lock the heavy teak door, the click of the bolt sounding like a guillotine. He would force Shailesh to stand amidst the skeletons and the jars, stripping away the boy's clothes to "analyse the feminine curve of his hips." It was a clinical violation. The rough fabric of Mr. Das's trousers against Shailesh's skin, the smell of stale tea on his breath, and the way he would mutter, *"You're a girl, aren't you? This is what girls do for men,"* while his hands did things that made Shailesh want to claw his own skin off.

Shailesh would stare at a preserved butterfly pinned to a board on the wall, its wings a faded, dusty pink. He would imagine himself as that butterfly—pinned, beautiful, and dead.

The physical pain was sharp, a burning intrusion that left him limping back through the dark lanes of Uttarpara, but the psychological rot was deeper. Mr. Das had weaponized Shailesh's

own identity against him, making him feel that his desire to be a woman made him a natural victim.

When Shailesh finally left that room for the last time, he didn't just leave a teacher; he left a piece of his childhood innocence on that cold, stone floor, discarded like the cotton swabs Mr. Das used to clean the lab tables.

The abuse left Shailesh not just scarred, but hollowed out. He realized that Uttara was not a home; it was a predator's cage. The town that prayed to the Goddess every October was the same town that was slowly killing the girl living inside him.

The Neon Purgatory

With twenty rupees in his pocket and a stolen suitcase, Shailesh fled to Calcutta. The "City of Joy" was a chaotic, indifferent beast. He eventually found work at The Blue Lotus, a bar tucked away in the damp shadows near Park Street.

The air inside was a thick soup of cheap tobacco and the desperate sweat of men. By night, Shailesh became 'Shona'. He wore sequins that scratched his skin and heavy Kohl that ran down his face in the humid heat. He danced under a flickering pink spotlight, a caricature of femininity for men who didn't want to know his name.

But every rupee from the tips and the dancing was funnelled into a rusted biscuit tin hidden under his floorboard. By day, Shailesh lived a life of brutal frugality. He sought out clinics where the doctors spoke in clinical, detached tones about hormones and surgeries.

The transition was a lonely war. There were days of fever and nights of agonizing physical pain from the surgeries, with no mother to hold his hand. "I am not changing my body," he whispered to the cracked ceiling of his rented room. "I am simply bringing the girl inside out to breathe."

The House of the Zamindar

When the bandages finally came off, and the hormones had softened the angles of her face, Shailesh was gone. In her place stood Shail. She carried herself with a quiet, hard-won dignity.

She found work as a live-in caretaker for the Roy Chowdhurys, a family of old-world prestige living in a crumbling South Calcutta mansion. Her charge was the family's matriarch, Thakuma, a woman whose eyes were clouded by cataracts but whose soul was remarkably sharp.

It was here she met Rishi, the Zamindar's son. Rishi was a man of modern education and quiet temperament. He was drawn to Shail's silence—a silence that felt like a well of deep, hidden strength. They spent evenings in the library, discussing poetry and the changing face of Bengal. For the first time, Shail wasn't being looked at as a "performance." She was being seen as a woman.

The Bitter Unveiling

As the air grew crisp with the arrival of the Puja season, Rishi's intentions became clear. He spoke of marriage, of a future where Shail would no longer be a caretaker, but the heart of the home.

The guilt became a physical weight. On the eve of Navratri, in the dim light of the library, Shail stood before him.

"Rishi, you love a woman you do not fully know," she began. Her voice was steady, though her heart felt like a trapped bird. She told him everything—the "abused boy from Uttarpara," the 'Shona' of the bars, and the clinical coldness of the operating tables.

The silence that followed was jagged. Rishi retreated, his face a mask of shock. "You lied," he whispered. "Every touch, every look... it was built on a deception. I thought I knew you, but you're just a medical miracle I don't recognize."

He left her standing there, the ancestral portraits of the Roy Chowdhurys staring down at her with cold, judgmental eyes.

The Wisdom of the Blind

Rishi sought refuge in his grandmother's room, his anger boiling over. But Thakuma, sensing his presence, didn't wait for him to speak.

"You are a fool, Rishi," she croaked, her voice echoing in the marble room. "I have lived eighty years, and I have seen men born as kings act like cowards, and women born in wealth act like paupers. This girl... she has fought a war against the world just to exist. She didn't lie to you; she gave you the truth when she could have taken her secret to the grave."

She reached out, grabbing his wrist with surprising strength. *"Do you think a flower is less beautiful because it had to push through concrete to find the sun? If you let her go, you aren't protecting your 'honour', you are losing the only person in this house who actually knows the meaning of courage."*

The First Day of Pink

The morning of the first Navratri arrived. The dhaak drums sounded from the street, calling the Goddess home. Shail stood before the family's small shrine, dressed in a sari of vibrant, unapologetic pink—the colour of her childhood doll, the colour of her survival.

She offered pink roses and lotuses to the idol of Devi Shailputri, the daughter of the mountains.

"Shail."

She turned. Rishi was standing at the entrance of the shrine. The anger was gone, replaced by a quiet, fierce clarity. He walked toward her, taking a handful of the pink petals from the offering tray.

"Devi Shailputri is the peak of consciousness," Rishi said, his voice thick with emotion. "She is the one who chose her own path. Today, I don't want the woman I 'thought' you were. I want the woman who had the strength to become Shail."

He let the petals fall between them, a silent renewal of a vow. As the morning sun hit the pink silk of her sari, Shail finally felt the scars of Uttarpara fade. The 24-year battle was over. She wasn't just a girl playing with dolls anymore; she was the daughter of the mountain, standing tall in the light.

End Of Story 7

STORY 8



THE GUARDIANS OF THE BACKBENCH

The Shield and the Secret

The narrow lanes of Gwalior were a labyrinth of gossip and tradition, but for Radha and Simran, they were a playground. Their friendship wasn't a choice; it was a gravitational pull. While other girls played with dolls, Radha was busy climbing the gnarled neem trees, her eyes always scanning the ground to make sure Simran hadn't tripped on her own shoelaces.

The defining moment of their childhood bond occurred in the seventh grade. It was a sweltering Tuesday during a math double-period. Simran, always the diligent student, stood up to solve a geometry problem on the blackboard. A cruel titter erupted from the back row. A bright, unmistakable crimson stain had bloomed on the back of her white pleated skirt.

The boys began to hoot. One particularly nasty boy, Rohan, whispered loud enough for the whole class to hear, "Looks like Simran's leaking oil."

Simran froze, the chalk trembling in her hand, tears pricking her eyes. But before the teacher could intervene, Radha was a blur of motion. She didn't scream; she acted. She lunged across the aisle, grabbing Rohan by the collar of his shirt and dragging him toward the desk. With a strength born of pure protective fury, she slammed his face into the hard wood.

"You like blood, Rohan?" Radha hissed as the boy clutched his bleeding lip. "Now you've got more coming out of your mouth than she has on her skirt. Keep laughing, and I'll make sure you can't use that mouth to eat for a month."

The silence that followed was absolute. From that day on, Radha's school bag held a secret compartment. Alongside her geometry set and PT shoes, she carried a kit: two spare sanitary pads, a clean pair of knickers, and a dark dupatta. She became Simran's biological sentinel, tracking her cycles better than Simran did herself, always whispering, "It's been twenty-eight days, Sim. Wear the dark skirt today."

The Crimson Awakening (Holi)

The transition from friendship to lovers didn't happen with a conversation; it happened through the sensory explosion of Holi. The air in Gwalior was thick with the scent of wet earth and sandalwood.

The transition from the playful splashing of water to the heavy, silent air of the terrace was a threshold they crossed without a single word. The silver and purple dyes were stubborn, clinging to their skin like the societal expectations they were about to shed. As Radha's thumb traced the curve of Simran's collarbone, the rhythmic scrubbing slowed into a caress.

There was a terrifying magnetism in that moment. For eighteen years, they had been "Radha and Simran"—the shield and the heart. To move beyond that was to risk the only safety they had ever known. Radha felt a tremor in her own hands, a mix of adrenaline and a deep-seated fear that she might be misreading the silence.

But Simran didn't pull away. Instead, she leaned into the touch, her wet hair clinging to her neck, her eyes searching Radha's with a raw honesty. The "abnormality" of the act—the weight of Gwalior's judgment sitting just over the edge of the terrace wall—created a frantic, heartbeat-thumping tension.

They knew, in an abstract sense, that this was the "forbidden" path, but their bodies argued otherwise.

When their lips finally met, it wasn't the clumsy, forceful encounter often depicted in movies. It was a soft inquiry.

As they moved toward the small, shaded corner of the terrace, the initial awkwardness was quickly replaced by a profound sense of recognition. For a woman experiencing another woman for the first time, there is a sudden, breath-taking lack of mystery.

Radha didn't need to be told how to touch Simran's breasts or the soft hollow of her hips; she simply touched Simran the way she wished to be touched herself. It was an exploration of shared geography. Every curve Radha traced on Simran was a curve she possessed herself, creating a feedback loop of pleasure. If Radha's breath hitched when her hand brushed a certain way, she knew Simran's would, too.

In a world that usually defines sex through "giving" and "taking," or "active" and "passive," Radha and Simran found a middle ground that felt like a third dimension. There was no pressure to perform or to reach a specific "ending."

Their movements became a synchronized dance. Because they understood the nuances of female arousal—the way it builds like a slow tide rather than a sudden fire—they allowed themselves the luxury of time.

The "learning point" for them was the realization that their bodies were not mysteries to be solved, but echoes of one another. There was a unique comfort in the softness of skin against skin—a tactile harmony that removed the harshness often found in heterosexual "first times."

As the physical intimacy deepened, the "not normal" feeling began to evaporate. How could something that felt this intuitive, this safe, and this respectful be wrong?

When they finally lay still, the silver dye was mostly gone, replaced by the flush of new discovery. The heavy bells of the Gwalior temple rang out in the distance, marking the end of the day's festivities.

They lay wrapped in a single dry sheet, the terrace floor still cool beneath them. The tension had evolved from a nervous vibration into a solid, unbreakable bond. They had spent their lives protecting each other from the world; now, they had found a way to cherish each other in a way the world didn't yet understand.

"Everything is different now," Simran whispered into the crook of Radha's neck.

Radha tightened her grip, her voice steady and protective as ever. "No, Sim. Everything is finally exactly what it was meant to be."

This encounter wasn't just a physical act; it was their first declaration of independence. They had realized that while the city of Gwalior might see them as "bench mates," in the silence of their own company, they were the masters of a private, beautiful, and perfectly natural universe.

The Shadow of the Fire

The peace of their new discovery was short-lived. In 1998, the film 'Fire' was released, and Gwalior became a battlefield of ideologies. They stood on the periphery of a mob one afternoon, watching as a local theatre was vandalized. The protestors shouted about "Indian values" and "Western perversions."

Radha felt Simran's hand tremble beside her. She reached down and squeezed it, but only for a second, before pulling away as a group of men walked past. The message was clear: their love was a contraband item.

They began to develop a "public mask." They spoke to each other in the formal "Aap" when neighbours were near. They excelled in their studies with a desperate fervour, realizing that if

they were to survive, they needed to be indispensable to society. Radha trained until her feet bled to join the Police Force, while Simran buried herself in psychological journals, studying the very human mind that seemed so intent on rejecting them.

The Aligarh Sanctuary

The Aligarh years were a delicate balancing act of public performance and private truth. While their high boundary wall protected their intimacy, the world outside was constantly trying to pull them into traditional orbits. For two successful, attractive women in a university town, "singleness" was viewed by society not as a choice, but as a problem waiting to be solved.

Radha's reputation in the Aligarh Police was formidable. She was known for a clinical, unwavering efficiency that commanded respect in a male-dominated force. This efficiency brought her into the orbit of Vikram, the charming and persistent son of a prominent local industrialist.

Vikram's prized Mercedes-Benz had been hijacked at gunpoint on the highway. Within forty-eight hours, Radha had tracked the vehicle to a scrap yard in a neighbouring district, leading the raid herself and recovering the car without a scratch. To Vikram, Radha wasn't just an officer; she was a cinematic heroine. He began frequenting the station under the guise of "paperwork," bringing expensive sweets for the staff and eventually asking Radha out to dinner with a persistence that was difficult to rebuff without causing a diplomatic incident for the department.

Simran, meanwhile, was dealing with a different kind of persistence at the University. Dr. Animesh, a brilliant and soft-spoken Professor of History, had decided that Simran was the intellectual partner he had been searching for.

He didn't use power or wealth; he used vulnerability. He would leave rare manuscripts on her desk, invite her to co-author papers, and linger after faculty meetings to discuss the "loneliness

of the academic life." To the rest of the faculty, they were the "perfect match"—the psychologist and the historian.

The pressure reached a boiling point one weekend when both Vikram and Animesh, by sheer coincidence, pushed for a definitive answer. Radha and Simran realized that the "mask" was starting to suffocate them. They decided on a bold, risky move: a joint meeting.

They chose The Blue Door, a discreet, dimly lit restaurant on the outskirts of Aligarh known for its high-backed booths and privacy. Radha arrived in civilian clothes—a crisp linen shirt that hid her service weapon—and Simran wore a simple, elegant saree.

When Vikram and Animesh arrived, they were surprised to find each other there, and even more surprised to see the two women sitting side-by-side, their chairs slightly closer than "friends" usually sit.

"I asked for a date, Radha, not a double-date with a history professor," Vikram joked, though his eyes were wary.

Radha didn't smile. She looked at both men with the same steady gaze she used in interrogation rooms. *"We didn't bring you here to socialise. We brought you here because you are both good men, and you deserve a truth that we don't give to the rest of the world."*

Simran took a deep breath and reached across the table, interlacing her fingers with Radha's in plain view. The silence at the table was heavy, punctuated only by the distant clinking of cutlery.

For the next hour, the "tough cop" and the "quiet professor" laid out the map of their lives. They started from the beginning: the pigtails in Gwalior, the bloodstain on the school skirt, the protective fury of the seventh grade, and the crimson awakening of Holi.

They spoke about the terror of the Fire protests and the crushing weight of their parents' expectations. They explained

that their "singleness" wasn't a lack of options, but a commitment to a love that had already survived decades of silence.

Vikram, who had grown up in a world where everything could be bought, looked at their joined hands with a mixture of shock and dawning realization. *"So... the recovered Mercedes. You didn't do that to impress me. You did that because it's your job, and you wanted to get home to her?"*

"Exactly," Radha said.

Animesh was the first to soften. As a historian, he understood the weight of suppressed narratives. "I've spent months trying to find a way into your heart, Simran, never realizing the door was already locked from the inside. And honestly? Seeing how you two have stood by each other... it's more poetic than anything I've ever read."

The tension broke, not with a fight, but with a strange, fascinated curiosity. The men began asking questions—not out of malice, but out of a genuine desire to understand a bond so resilient. Vikram, usually the alpha male, found himself leaning in, impressed by Radha's courage to live such a dangerous truth while wearing a police uniform.

"I came here hoping to win a wife," Vikram said, raising his water glass. "But I think I'd much rather have a friend in the police force who can out-shoot and out-think me. And Simran, if anyone ever gives you trouble at the University, you tell them they have to answer to the Mittal family."

That night, the "tactical invasions" of the outside world gained two unexpected defenders. Vikram and Animesh became the "beards" for the couple—appearing at public functions when necessary to ward off other suitors, while in private, they became the only ones who truly knew that the house with the high boundary wall was not a residence of two roommates, but a monument to a lifelong love.

The Cost of Truth

The breaking point came when Simran's father presented her with a wedding invitation for a cousin, followed by a photo of a "highly suitable" engineer from Indore.

"We can't do this anymore," Radha said that night, her voice cracking.

The "Coming Out" was not a single moment, but a series of explosions. Radha's mother, a woman whose entire social standing was built on her daughter's prestigious job, could not process the "shame." She didn't scream; she simply stopped eating, her heart eventually giving out under the weight of her own disappointment. Radha buried her mother in a haze of grief, feeling like a murderer.

Simran's father was different. His anger was cold and structural. "You are dead to us," he told her as she stood on their porch in Gwalior. "We didn't raise a daughter; we raised a mistake." Simran left her childhood home with nothing but a suitcase and the searing memory of her father's back turned toward her.

Creation of Life (The IVF Journey)

The decision to have a child was their way of reclaiming their future. They went to Dr. Prabha, searching for a way to tie their lineages together.

"Reciprocal in vitro fertilization (IVF) enables both of you to participate in pregnancy. One of you can offer your eggs, which will be retrieved and fertilized by donated sperm in IVF. And the resulting embryo will be implanted into the other partner for pregnancy as a gestational carrier" explained Dr. Prabha to Radha & Simran. They both looked at each other, happy and at the same time nervous. This was not going to be an easy decision.

It was poetic justice: the child would have Radha's biological blueprint but would grow beneath Simran's heart. The process

was gruelling—the hormone injections that made Radha moody, the anxious waits for egg retrieval, and the ultimate joy when the embryo took hold in Simran's womb. As Simran's body changed, the old protective instinct in Radha went into overdrive. She was the seventh-grader again, carrying the spare pads, only now she was carrying prenatal vitamins and foot-soak basins.

The Grand Circle (The Godhbharai)

The baby shower was a defiant celebration of their "chosen family." They invited their colleagues, the students who looked up to Simran, and the officers who respected Radha.

But Simran's heart was still in Gwalior. Radha saw it in the way Simran looked at the empty chair she had reserved "just in case."

Radha's secret trip to Gwalior was her final act as Simran's protector. She didn't beg. She simply walked into Simran's father's house and placed the ultrasound photo on his table. "This is your blood," she said. "You can choose to be a grandfather, or you can choose to be a stranger. But you cannot choose to stop being her father."

When Simran's parents walked into the ceremony in Aligarh, the room froze. Her father, a man of iron-clad traditions, looked at his daughter—glowing, pregnant, and happy. He looked at Radha, who stood by her side like a sentinel.

He didn't offer a traditional blessing to a "son-in-law." Instead, he broke the binary entirely. He hugged Radha, his voice trembling.

"I was always in a dilemma of how to relate to you—as a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law. I was looking for a label, but I missed the person. Today, I realize I haven't gained a son; I've gained a second daughter. You've taken better care of her than any man ever could."

The story that began with a bloodstain on a school skirt ended with the promise of new life—a child who would grow up

knowing that "family" is not a role you are born into, but a sanctuary you build with the person who has always been your shield.

END OF STORY 8

STORY 9



THE LOVE GURUS

The Pact of 18 Till I Die

The silence in the 4BHK villa in Aundh was not the heavy, mourning silence of a house that had lost its life. It was the vibrating, expectant silence of a stage after the final curtain call, right before the crew begins to dismantle the set.

Shekhar stood in the center of the cavernous living room, his hands tucked into the pockets of his charcoal gym tracks. At fifty-five, his posture was better than it had been at thirty-five. The slouch of the "Investment Banker" years—the literal weight of managing other people's fortunes—had been ironed out by five years of dedicated CrossFit and a conscious shedding of corporate ego.

"The movers took the last of the mahogany sets," Saujanya said, stepping into the room. She was fifty, glowing in a way that defied the 'graceful aging' brochures. Her hair was cut into a sharp, asymmetrical bob, and her yoga-toned frame was draped in a simple linen shift. *"It looks so... big. Did we really need all this space to raise two kids?"*

"We didn't," Shekhar smiled, turning to her. *"We just thought we did. We were building a museum for a family that was always meant to fly away."*

Their son was a software architect in San Francisco; their daughter, a marine biologist in Auckland. The villa had been their anchor, but now, the anchor was being traded for a sail.

Shekhar pulled a sleek leather folder from his bag. This was his masterpiece. Not a stock portfolio, but a life portfolio. He called it the "Corpus of 18 Till I Die." By selling the villa and liquidating their secondary assets, they had secured a princely sum—a financial fortress that ensured they would never be a "burden" to their children.

"Everything is vested," he said, his voice dropping into that rhythmic, confident tone he once used to close multi-million dollar deals. *"The interest alone covers the assisted living cottage in the hills, our health premiums, and a global travel budget that would make a pilot blush. We aren't retiring, Saujanya. We are resigning from being 'Seniors'."*

Saujanya walked over and placed a hand on his chest. *"No more 'Mummy' and 'Papa' tags? Just for a little while?"*

"For the rest of the trip," Shekhar promised, kissing her forehead. *"In that cottage, and in every hotel we visit, we are just a live-in couple. No history, no legacy. Just us."*

The Goa Catalyst

The humidity of Goa in late October felt like a warm, wet silk sheet. They had checked into a boutique honeymooner's resort in Morjim, a place designed for people half their age. The receptionist had given them a polite, slightly confused smile when they checked in—a look that said 'How sweet, the grandparents are on a pilgrimage.'

If only she knew.

Their suite was a masterpiece of architectural voyeurism. The centrepiece wasn't the view of the Arabian Sea, but a massive, claw-footed white bathtub situated right at the foot of the king-sized bed.

"Shekhar, it's scandalous," Saujanya whispered, though she was already unbuttoning her travel shirt.

"It's biology," Shekhar countered. He had already popped the cork on a bottle of vintage Red Wine. He poured two generous glasses, the dark liquid catching the amber glow of the sunset through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

They drank quickly, the alcohol thinning the blood and thickening the desire. For years, their intimacy had been scheduled—a Sunday morning ritual between chores and calls to the kids. But here, with the sound of the waves crashing outside and the novelty of the room, the years seemed to peel away like old paint.

Shekhar reached into his duffel bag and pulled out a matte-black box with minimalist gold lettering: MUSE.

"What is that?" Saujanya asked, leaning against the bedpost, her eyes bright with wine and curiosity.

"A kit for explorers," Shekhar said. He began to lay the items out on the silk duvet. There were massagers that looked like pieces of modern art, bottles of cold-pressed sandalwood body oil, and a deck of cards. He picked up the top card and read it aloud: "Level 1: Describe a part of your partner's body you haven't complimented in a decade."

He didn't wait for her to answer. He picked up his Sony Alpha camera—the professional kit he had bought to replace his spreadsheets—and looked through the viewfinder.

"You're my first subject," he whispered. *"The world sees a 'senior.' I see a masterpiece."*

The night dissolved into a blur of soap suds and laughter. They ended up in the tub, playing like children, throwing handfuls of lavender-scented bubbles at each other until the floor was a treacherous, slippery mess. The "Muse" kit was no longer a gimmick; it was a key.

As the wine bottle ran dry, Shekhar captured a photo of naked Saujanya laughing, her head thrown back, a crown of

bubbles in her hair. It was the most honest photo he had ever taken. It was the first frame of a new, dangerous gallery.

The Global Odyssey

For the next eight months, the world became their playground. They were ghosts in the best possible way. In the cobblestone streets of Florence, they were the elegant Indian couple; in the neon heart of Tokyo, they were the adventurous tourists.

But beneath the surface of their sightseeing, a deeper exploration was happening.

Shekhar's photography had moved from landscapes to the intimate topography of his wife. Every hotel room became a studio. They experimented with the Muse kit's higher levels—the handcuffs, the silk eye masks, the progressive "to-do" lists. They were fulfilling fantasies they hadn't even dared to whisper in their thirties.

"We're finally old enough to not give a damn," Saujanya told him one night in Bangkok, as they prepared for a boat trip to the islands.

They ended up at James Bond Island, but while the crowds huddled around the famous limestone "nail" rock, Shekhar and Saujanya hired a private long-tail boat to take them to an isolated sea cave nearby.

Inside the cave, the light was ethereal, reflecting off the turquoise water onto the jagged ceiling. It was silent, save for the rhythmic drip of water. It was the ultimate "outdoor" fantasy. Shekhar set up his tripod on a flat rock, the camera's red light blinking steadily, recording their private revolution against the stalactites.

Later that evening, exhausted and glowing with a post-adrenal hum, they stopped at a bustling street-food market in Phuket. They sat on plastic stools, drinking cheap, crisp white wine and eating spicy pad Thai

It was only when the bill came that Shekhar felt the cold hand of dread clamp onto his heart.

"The bag," he said, his voice barely a whisper.

"What?" Saujanya asked, wiping sauce from her lip.

"The camera bag, Saujanya. It was right here, hooked to the chair."

He looked down. The plastic leg of the chair was bare. The bag—containing his Sony Alpha, three prime lenses, and the SD card containing every moment of their intimacy from the cave, the SUV in the Ghats, and the beach in Gokarna—was gone.

The revelry died instantly. The neon lights of the market suddenly felt blinding, harsh, and predatory.

The Viral Nightmare

The return to India was marked by a fragile silence. They had spent a week in Bangkok haunting police stations, offering rewards that moved from generous to desperate, and scouring the "grey markets" of MBK Center. The local cops had been dismissive—just another pair of tourists who had been too careless with their gear.

"It's just hardware, Shekhar," Saujanya had whispered on the flight back to Pune. *"The memories are in our heads. Let it go."*

Shekhar nodded, but he couldn't shake the image of that 128GB SD card. It wasn't just data; it was their vulnerability, digitized.

They settled back into their one-bedroom cottage in the assisted living community. It was a beautiful, manicured space called The Autumn Woods. For three months, life was peaceful. They hit the gym at 6:00 AM, Shekhar took up bird photography with a new (and strictly landscape-oriented) camera, and Saujanya began leading a "Graceful Movement" class for the other residents. They were the golden couple of the community.

The bubble burst on a Tuesday afternoon at the Phoenix Market city mall.

They were walking out of a high-end sports store when a group of three men in their early twenties stopped dead in their tracks. They whispered, nudged each other, and then one approached, holding out a smartphone.

"Excuse me," the young man said, his face a cocktail of smirk and genuine awe. *"Are you... the 'Cave Couple'?"*

Shekhar frowned. *"I beg your pardon?"*

"The legends! From PornTube!" another shouted, pulling up a video on his screen. *"Can we get an autograph? Seriously, sir, you're an inspiration. Fifty-plus and rocking it like a rockstar!"*

The world seemed to tilt. Shekhar looked at the screen. The thumbnail was unmistakable: the teal water of the Phuket cave, the jagged rocks, and Saujanya's silhouette, unmistakable and intimate. The title in bold, garish font read: "INDIAN ELDERS: THE CAVE SESSIONS (HD)."

"Get away from us," Shekhar hissed, his voice trembling. He grabbed Saujanya's hand and bolted for the parking lot.

Back in the safety of their cottage, the nightmare grew teeth. Shekhar opened his laptop, his fingers shaking so hard he could barely type. He didn't have to look far. On the world's largest adult hosting sites, they were trending. They weren't just a leaked video; they were a "Category."

"Senior Heat," "The Silver Goddess," "The CEO's Private Model." The comments sections were a battlefield of filth and twisted admiration. Thousands of views had turned into millions.

Then came the pings. The "Autumn Woods" residents' WhatsApp group, usually filled with diet tips and yoga invites, went deathly quiet. Then, a single link was posted by a retired Colonel, followed by a flurry of "Left the group" notifications.

The phone rang. It was their son, Ishaan, from San Francisco. His voice wasn't filled with concern; it was brittle with a cold, sharp fury.

"Dad? What the hell am I looking at? My colleagues... someone sent me a link as a 'joke' today. Do you have any idea what this does to us? To our name? Mom, are you there? How could you let him record that?"

Saujanya collapsed onto the sofa, her face ghostly pale. The "18 till we die" dream hadn't just ended; it had been set on fire and broadcast to the entire planet.

Sheetal and the Counter-Attack

For two weeks, they lived like prisoners. The curtains stayed drawn. The gym was a memory. The "Love-in Couple" had become a pair of ghosts.

That was until Sheetal walked through their door.

She was twenty-six, dressed in a sharp navy blazer, carrying a briefcase that looked too heavy for her slight frame. She was the daughter of one of Shekhar's old banking colleagues, a rising star in digital privacy law.

"I'm not here to judge you," Sheetal said, sitting across from them. She didn't look at them with the smirking curiosity of the boys at the mall or the moral disgust of their neighbours. *"I'm here because what happened to you is a digital assault. It's Section 66E of the IT Act—violation of privacy. And I'm going to help you burn the people who did this."*

"It's too late, Sheetal," Saujanya said, her voice hollow. *"The kids won't talk to us. The community wants us to move out. Our 'liberation' is a joke."*

"It's only a joke if you let them write the punchline," Sheetal countered. *"Right now, the narrative is that two 'dirty seniors' got caught. We need to change that. You aren't 'dirty.' You were two consenting adults in a private moment whose property was stolen and*

weaponized. We aren't just going after the thieves; we're going after the platforms."

The legal battle was a marathon of fire. Sheetal filed "John Doe" suits to identify the uploaders and sent "Cease and Desist" orders to international servers in Nicosia and Panama. But the real battle was in the Indian courts, where a conservative judge sat behind a bench, looking at the evidence with visible distaste.

"The defense claims," the opposing counsel argued in a packed courtroom, "that by recording these acts, the plaintiffs assumed the risk of them being seen. This isn't privacy; it's exhibitionism gone wrong."

Sheetal stood up, her voice ringing through the wood-panelled room. *"Your Honor, if a woman takes a shower in her own home and a thief records her through a vent, is she an exhibitionist? Age does not strip a citizen of their right to intimacy. My clients were promised a 'Second Innings.' Does that innings require them to be celibate to be respected?"*

The Podcast & The Verdict

The legal victory was partial—the videos were ordered to be delisted in India, and a small settlement was extracted from a local hosting site—but the social stain remained.

"We can't hide anymore," Shekhar told Saujanya one evening. "The court gave us 'justice,' but the world still thinks we should be ashamed."

They decided to do the one thing no one expected. They accepted an invitation to The Unfiltered Hour, a popular podcast hosted by a Gen-Z influencer.

The studio was small, dark, and filled with microphones.

"So," the host began, leaning in. "Shekhar, Saujanya... why did you do it? Why the toys? Why the recording?"

Shekhar looked at the camera. He didn't look like a victim. He looked like the man who had built a "Corpus of 18."

"Because we were told that after fifty, we should only be interested in spiritualism and grandchildren," Shekhar said. "We made a promise to live like we were eighteen until the day we died. That included our bodies. That included our passion. The only crime committed was the theft of our privacy. We aren't ashamed of our love. We are ashamed of a society that thinks love has an expiry date."

Saujanya leaned forward, her voice steady. *"To every woman watching this who thinks her beauty ends at menopause: it doesn't. Our 'Cave Session' wasn't for the world. It was for us. And if the world saw it, I hope they saw two people who still actually like each other after thirty years."*

The podcast went viral, but this time, the comments were different.

"The Love Gurus," one comment read. "I want to be them when I grow up," read another.

The "Cave Couple" tag was replaced. The media began calling them "The Love Gurus."

The Love Gurus

The talk show, Sexual Wellness with Shekhar & Saujanya, premiered six months later. It wasn't a "porn" show; it was a revolution. They sat on a comfortable sofa, discussing everything from communication and consent to the use of wellness kits like "Muse" for aging couples.

They had moved out of the assisted living community—not because they were forced, but because they had outgrown it. They bought a small apartment in North Goa, overlooking the very sea where their journey had begun.

Their son, Ishaan, eventually called. He didn't apologize—not yet—but he asked if they could fly the grandkids down for Christmas. It was a start.

On their 35th anniversary, Shekhar set up a tripod in their new bedroom. Saujanya looked at him, a playful glint in her eyes.

"Again, Shekhar? Haven't we learned?"

Shekhar walked over and turned the camera away from the bed, pointing it out toward the sunset over the Arabian Sea. He hit the 'Off' button.

"The world has seen enough," he whispered, pulling her close.

"This frame... this one is just for us."

The clock had finally turned back. And this time, they didn't need a recording to prove they were alive.

END OF STORY 9

STORY 10



THE DRIVER'S SEAT

The silver-grey sedan pulled into the shaded driveway of the Pune villa. Ritwik, dressed in a slightly oversized, crisp khaki safari shirt and dark trousers, stepped out of the driver's seat. He adjusted his local-brand aviators and checked his reflection in the window.

Shruti was waiting on the porch, draped in a delicate chiffon saree that caught the afternoon breeze.

"Tum aaj bhi late ho, Ritwik," she said, her voice dropping into a haughty, demanding tone.

"Gadi saaf kar raha tha, Ma'am," he replied, his voice shifting to a rougher, Marathi-accented Hindi. He hurried to open the rear door for her. "Traffic jam bhi tha Ganesh Mandir ke pass... Isi liye late ho Gaya... sorry madam"

Shruti slid into the backseat, the scent of her expensive perfume filling the cabin. As Ritwik closed the door and got back behind the wheel, he caught her eyes in the rear view mirror. "Farm house chalo" she instructed.

Instead of taking the "scheduled route" Ritwik took a sharp turn toward the outskirts.

"Kahan le jaa rahe ho? Yeh farmhouse wala road nahin hai?" Shruti asked, leaning forward so her breath hitched near his ear.

"Highway blocked hai Ma'am. Short cut," he muttered, his eyes lingering on her reflection. He purposely hit a small pothole,

causing the car to jolt. Shruti let out a soft cry as she was tossed slightly on the leather seat.

“Sambhal ke, marna nahi hai mujhe”

Shubham pulled the car over to a gravel path lined with thick gulmohar trees. He killed the engine. The silence of the countryside rushed in. He turned around in his seat, resting his arm on the headrest.

“Engine garam ho Gaya, use thanda karna padega”

Ritwik said, his voice dropping into a gravelly, local accent. He turned in the driver’s seat, his knees brushing against the gear console.

“Kis ka... gaadi ka ya phir tumhara, bahut time de dekh rahi hoon tumhe, road pe dhyaan kum aur rear view mein zyaada. Chahte kya ho...”

Shruti asked him bluntly.

“Wahi Jo aap mann hi mann chahti thi” teased Ritwik

Shruti didn't argue. She opened the back door and came over to the front. She climbed over the center console, her chiffon saree snagging briefly on the handbrake. The cramped space forced her body against his, her breasts pressing into his khaki safari shirt as she straddled his lap in the limited space of the driver's seat.

The steering wheel pressed into Rutwik’s back, but the friction of Shruti’s silk against his trousers made him forget the discomfort. He reached for the lever, reclining the seat as far as the back row would allow. The space was tight, a cocoon of leather and skin.

He didn't wait for permission. His hands moved to her waist, bunching up the delicate fabric of her saree. He found the knot of her petticoat and tugged. As the silk fell away, he gasped at the sight of lean legs in the golden light filtering through the tinted glass. The contrast of the delicate white lace against the rugged interior of the car driving him to an immediate, painful hardness.

“Ritwik...” she breathed, her fingers digging into his shoulders. “Car ki khidiki... koi dekh lega.”

“Koi nahi aayega yahan,” he muttered, his mouth finding the sensitive skin behind her ear.

“Waise bhi sheeshe tinted hai... agar kuch dikhega to bus ek rocking car”

He moved his hand between her thighs, his fingers navigating the narrow space between her legs and the dashboard. Shruti arched her back, her head hitting the sun visor as he found her already slick and wanting. The confined space heightened every sensation; there was nowhere to move but against him.

Shubham unzipped his dark trousers, the sound of the metal teeth sharp in the quiet cabin. He guided her hips, lifting her just enough so her head cleared the roof upholstery. With a sharp, breathless gasp, she lowered herself onto him.

The fit was tight, the angle steep. Because of the steering wheel, Shruti had to wrap her legs tightly around his waist, her heels digging into the leather of the seatback.

Every movement was a struggle against the architecture of the car, which only made the friction more intense. Shubham gripped her buttocks, his fingers pressing into the soft flesh as he thrust upward. The car’s suspension groaned rhythmically. Shruti’s moans were muffled against his neck, her hot breath smelling of the vanilla mints she always kept in the glove box.

He reached for the dashboard, his hand finding the controls. He turned the music up—a low, bass-heavy track that vibrated through the floorboards and into their bodies. He used his thumb to find her clitoris, pinning it against his pubic bone as they moved in a frantic, restricted dance.

“Aur Tez,” she hissed, her teeth grazing his shoulder.

“5th gear mein, Ritwik.”

The restricted space meant he couldn't reach his full depth, so he compensated with speed and pressure. He felt her internal muscles tighten, a volcanic clench that signaled her peak. She threw her head back, her hair brushing the ceiling light, as her body shuddered in a prolonged, silent scream. The intensity of her release triggered his own; he groaned, his body jolting as he spent himself deep inside her, the heat of their union fogging the windshield.

They stayed like that for a long time, hearts drumming against each other, the only sound the faint hiss of the AC. The interior of the car was a mess of tangled silk, discarded khaki, and the heavy, musky scent of sex.

Shubham reached out a lazy hand and wiped a circle into the fog on the windshield. Outside, the world was still, the gulmohar trees indifferent to the storm that had just passed inside the sedan.

“Huya thanda tumhara engine?” Shruti whispered, her voice returning to her natural, polished tone as she rested her chin on his chest.

Shubham smiled, stroking her damp hair. “Yes, Ma’am. But I think we’ve ruined the upholstery.”

She giggled, a sound that finally broke the tension of the roleplay. “Well done Shubham Now, drive me home politely like our Driver Ritwik would.”

As they rearranged their clothes and shifted back into their proper seats, they both were thinking what would be their next role play.

“Doctor Doctor” they both exclaimed in unison.

END OF STORY 10

