

THE UNREVEALED SECRETS, BURIED IN ANCIENT TIME

MONICA

THE 1/4TH MYSTERY OF INDIA

PART -1

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Monica:
The 1/4th Mystery of India

Chapter 1



Italy, 1918

The girl with the captivating greenish-blue eyes, Giovanna Bellucci, had always harbored a cherished

dream: to witness the majestic Tower Bridge of London alongside her beloved parents. This vision remained a distant fantasy until the shattering reality of her parents' divorce. Tragedy struck further when one day she lost her mother too. Amidst these major crises and facing a precarious condition, Giovanna Bellucci inadvertently stepped onto a path that would lead her towards becoming the next celebrated supermodel.

{“But dreams are fragile things.

That same year, her father walked away—

a quiet signature on cold paper.

Her mother, grief-laced and fading,

followed soon after into the arms of silence.

Left in the ruins of a golden world,

Giovanna did not cry.

She rose.

A fallen angel among marble halls,

she stepped away from scandal and spotlight,

from champagne smiles and whispered expectations,

choosing instead the harsh light of survival.

They called her beauty divine.

She called it a prison.

And when the glimmer of the catwalk faded,

the theatre called—
though she knew nothing of stage or script,
only that pretending might hurt less than
remembering.

Then came Dr. Mathur,
a healer from the East,
bearing no cure but understanding.

“Come,” he said,
“see the world through another’s words.”

She agreed—
if only to breathe someone else’s air for an evening.
And there, beneath the chandeliers of La Scala,
she met him” . . . }

Her striking looks captivated many, inspiring aspirations to emulate her rise to the top. However, fame held no allure for Giovanna, unlike her parents. Growing up in a privileged and renowned society, she felt like a pawn, her freedoms constrained by rigid protocols.

In her burgeoning modeling career, facing financial constraints, she reluctantly agreed to explore theater work, despite possessing no prior knowledge of the craft. Determined to learn, she resolved to first immerse herself in live performances before even considering acting. Meanwhile, across continents in Vienna, Austria, Dr. Mathur, an Indian physician, was diligently searching for

his patient, Giovanna. He held the key to alleviating her deep-seated pain. Dr. Mathur earnestly persuaded Giovanna to attend his friend's upcoming theater performance, an invitation she readily accepted, her desire to experience the theater outweighing her reservations. It was at this event that Dr. Mathur introduced Giovanna to a man named Amar, vaguely mentioning him as a friend whose full name momentarily escaped him.



Their encounter blossomed in the illustrious setting of Italy's renowned Teatro alla Scala. Initially mistaking him for an Italian, a brief conversation revealed his true origins, drawing them closer. When she finally inquired about his name, he replied with a resonant "Amar! Amar Tiwari."

The richness of his tone caused Giovanna to momentarily swoon. Recovering, she exclaimed, "Where are you from? You don't look Italian!" His confirmation that he hailed from India solidified her realization.



Undeniably, Giovanna's radiant beauty and Amar's captivating charm fostered a strong connection that quickly transcended mere friendship. Giovanna found an unparalleled sense of security and comfort in Amar's presence, leading her to contemplate abandoning her modeling aspirations to become his wife. On the other hand, Amar Tiwari found himself increasingly consumed by his burgeoning love for Giovanna, his responsibilities towards a secret mission fading into the background.

“Mission to discover a person and handed him a box”

He confessed, "I want to live my entire life with you, and so I want to die in your arms." Giovanna immediately silenced him, her emotions overflowing as she embraced him tightly, replying, "If that time comes, I'll die before you."



In the gentle warmth of mid-April, their love culminated in marriage. Soon, they eagerly anticipated the arrival of their first child, a daughter. Both Giovanna and Amar were determined to bestow upon her a meaningful name. However, days turned into weeks, and they remained undecided. It was then that Amar remembered a dear Persian friend, Zafaar, a celebrated Sufi and writer known for his wisdom. He confided in Zafaar, seeking his

gentle guidance. Knowing his friend's unwavering support, Amar made elaborate preparations to welcome him.



Zafaar, the esteemed Persian Sufi writer, felt privileged to accept the invitation from his cherished friend Amar, whose kindness had saved his life on more than one occasion. Immersed in the pure melodies of music and the harmonious chirping of birds, Zafaar observed Amar's profound affection for Giovanna, understanding the depth of their bond. Approaching the newborn child, he tenderly lifted her, held her aloft, and proclaimed, "MONICA! 'EK PAAK LADKI'."



Monica, he declared, meaning "a pure child."

{“There was no book to say that name meant purity.
But when Zafaar spoke,
even silence bowed
And so she was Monica.
Born of sorrow, made from stars.
A name whispered like a prayer
across generations”}

While the etymology of the name Monica doesn't universally signify "pure child," Zafaar's pronouncement, spoken with conviction, carried a special meaning for the family, though it caused a slight ripple of surprise.



Chapter 2



Mr. Vijayendra Mehta, a prominent businessman and a respected social figure in London, held a deep affection for his fellow countrymen, the Indians. One day, a business meeting took him to Italy. While waiting for his clients at a quaint coffee shop, as a coffee attainer or a Barista from Italy, Amar noticed Vijayendra sitting alone, and remembering it was his daughter Monica's birthday, he sent over a complimentary coffee. Touched by the gesture, Vijayendra rose with heartfelt gratitude and asked Amar to join him with a conversation. Their conversation flowed effortlessly, as if they were long-lost friends reunited after decades. Within a single day, a strong bond of friendship formed between them. Amar expressed his desire to visit London one day and witness its iconic Tower Bridge with his family. Amar's wife, Giovanna, and Vijayendra shared a fondness for the newly launched "Barista" coffee shop, and felt like home when Amar offered him a coffee on the occasion for his daughter's birthday. The Coffee which Amar personally did not like much.

Vijayendra promised Amar to connect whenever he visited Italy and extended a reciprocal invitation: "You must come to my place once with your entire family." Over the course of a year, Vijayendra visited Italy seven times, but his busy schedule never allowed him to meet Amar's

family. His encounters were always with Amar alone, their bond deepening into a strong brotherhood.

Amar and Vijayendra shared almost every aspect of their lives, including Amar's daughter's dream of seeing the Tower Bridge. Vijayendra wholeheartedly promised to take her one day. A year of close friendship passed, and another of Monica's birthdays approached. This time, Vijayendra's visit wasn't solely for business; he came specifically to meet Amar and his family in person. He initially suggested that Amar come directly to the coffee shop with his wife and daughter, but Giovanna declined, unwilling to disrupt Monica's school day. "Even though we are eager to meet your best friend," she insisted, "it will have to be after Monica's school." She urged him to come to their house, but Vijayendra proposed meeting outside Monica's school instead. Having agreed, Vijayendra went to purchase three thoughtful gifts, one for each of them.

Meanwhile, Monica's classes concluded, and she sat patiently on a bench, awaiting her parents' arrival. On the other side of the city, Amar and Giovanna were on their way to pick her up.

{“Monica’s class ended. She waited on the school bench—swinging her legs, clutching her little bag, watching the sun stretch across cobbled streets. But soon, the calm was shattered.

Screams.

Smoke.

Panic like wildfire.

A sudden blast.

World War II had arrived like a curse.

People ran. Buses burned. The sky filled with fear.

And then—Monica saw it.

A car, twisted and scorched. Her toy, lying beside it.
Her parents' clothes, unmistakable.

"Mama! Papa!"

She whispered.

Then shouted.

Then screamed.

Sometimes with voice, sometimes just bree'th

"Mama... Papa..."}
}

Suddenly, chaos erupted. Screams filled the air, and public transport burned amidst the confusion. Monica was bewildered by the unfolding events. Taking a few more steps, her heart leaped with terror as she saw another car engulfed in flames. She instinctively knew it was her parents' vehicle, recognizing its make, the remnants of their clothing, and her beloved toy inside.

"Mama! Papa!" The words escaped her lips, a desperate mantra repeated sometimes softly, sometimes brokenly, a silent scream, but always "Mama Papa!"

Just then, Vijayendra arrived at the scene. His sharp eyes quickly grasped the horrific situation and recognized his dear friend Amar by his distinctive ruby ring. A wave of nausea washed over him as he understood Monica's profound pain, a pain he knew all too well, having lost his own mother in the devastation of World War I. Both Vijayendra and Monica fought valiantly to control their overwhelming emotions, their inner turmoil evident on their faces. Monica recognized him as her father's friend, Mr. Vijayender Uncle from London. Vijayender yearned to embrace Monica, to offer solace, but an invisible barrier held him back. He tried, but couldn't bring himself to intrude on her raw grief. Both were consumed by immense sorrow and a sense of profound loss, yet they instinctively tried to offer each other a semblance of comfort. Vijayendra gently took Monica's hand, leading her away from the horrifying scene. Monica, with a child's intuitive understanding, went with him. The image of her parents' burning car receding into the distance was a pain that would forever be etched in her memory.

Vijayendra took her with him, but a wave of uncertainty washed over him. Who would care for this child now? He knew there was no one readily available to assume such a responsibility. He contacted Giovanna's parents, but her father coldly refused to accept Monica, and her mother was gone. Amar, an orphan himself, had only one close friend in Sialkot, India - Diwan Singh - whom Vijayendra was familiar with because of Amar's stories. He tried desperately to reach Diwan Singh, only to learn the

devastating news that he was imprisoned in the Cellular Jail. Despairingly, Vijayendra resolved to care for Monica himself. Monica, silent and numb, accepted his decision. She knew she had lost almost everything that mattered to her. Her simple dream of sharing a joyful moment with her dad, standing on the Tower Bridge in London, watching her mother pose for a photograph, now lay shattered. All she had ever wished for was a peaceful life with her parents. She knew little of Indian culture, but her father had instilled in her a sense of pride and dignity, qualities he always said were inherent in every Indian woman.

She deeply missed her father's loving care, a void she felt acutely despite the kindness of those around her. Amar's presence, his unique aura, and his boundless love for his daughter were distinct. She knew the countless ways her father tried to bring her happiness, but the one thing she yearned for most was a simple, tight hug from him.

Vijayendra understood the child's utter loneliness, the absence of anyone else to shoulder her care. Sitting quietly, Monica would often imagine her parents calling her name, a hopeful expectation that would inevitably crash against the harsh reality.

London, too, was grappling with the aftermath of the World War, and Vijayendra's loved ones urged him to leave the city and return to India for safety. He finally decided to journey back to his homeland with his son, Som and the orphaned Monica.

{“He made the decision.

To return home.

To India.

To a new chapter,

where grief might one day turn into grace,

and the memory of two burning souls

might light a path forward for the living”}



Chapter 3



He arrived at his sprawling bungalow in New Delhi, India, only to find a constant stream of visitors paying their respects to his father. His initial concern was that his father might be unwell, and he rushed inside, leaving Som and Monica momentarily behind. Relief washed over him as he found his father in good health, the numerous guests simply acknowledging his prominent social standing within their community.

He then brought Som and Monica into the house, instructing Som to stay with Monica in his room while he spoke with his father. Within moments, his father inquired about the young girl. "Who is this pretty girl with you?" Monica felt an immediate sense of comfort upon hearing these kind words from Vijayendra's father.

Vijayendra explained the tragic circumstances, recounting the car accident that claimed the lives of his close friend and his wife during the war. Then, with a decisive tone, he declared, "So from now on, 'She is my Child'."

These words resonated deeply within Monica, easing a significant portion of her pain. A sense of peace washed over her, and she instinctively approached Vijayendra's father, bowing down in a gesture of respect, a custom she

knew was prevalent among Indians towards their elders. Vijayendra's father was deeply touched by her understanding of their culture, his heart swelling with happiness as he offered her his blessings.

Vijayendra then called for Madhu Bai, the nanny who had cared for him since childhood and who had recently returned to look after Som, who had lost his own mother at a young age.

Som rarely shared his emotions with anyone, confiding only occasionally in Madhu Bai. He was an introverted and composed individual, avoiding drama and speaking sparingly, even to his father. Yet, his love for his family, their values, close friends, and even the household staff was profound. He treated everyone with utmost politeness and was always ready to offer help when needed. His words were few but carried weight. Even Madhu Bai rarely disturbed him, as he managed his affairs meticulously – his clothes, his meals, his belongings – leaving no room for argument or unnecessary communication. He was perpetually occupied with his work, studies, and music, silently cherishing the memories of his mother, a grief he concealed from everyone. Not a day passed without him missing her, sometimes shedding quiet tears while gazing at her photograph, which he always kept tucked away in a book.

Although he misses his mother everyday, he even never missed a single day on writing notes on futuristic ideas, human problems, human behaviour and more of his

quotations. The 2 most special quotations that he never forgets in his life is from his mother, who felt so dejected by his father's company and her loneliness thought him to be stronger than ever. Her mother's beautiful quotes, which Som cannot forget as

1. {"Every Pure Relation once has to live apart"}

Because she loved her husband, Som's father so much that she even bared to live without him. And

2. {"The Word itself says that we are 'A-PART' when we are apart"}

This is because she always knew that Vijayendra never did anything wrong to her and always wanted a good life and a healthy family. Despite Vijayendra having behaved strangely many times, she always thinks that no matter what, our routes are different but destiny is always the same.

On the other hand, Som was very smart and intelligent, and he created many easy tasks for highly difficult situations. His intelligence was not limited to certain goals but what he created only he knew. He hardly shares his knowledge with others.

Madhu Bai led Monica to one of the guest rooms, instructing her to settle in and assuring her that she would be in the kitchen until 7 pm should Monica need anything. Monica's simple "yes, okay" felt curt to Madhu Bai, who left the room with a pointed look. Within a few hours, Vijayendra emerged from his room, refreshed and ready to

head out to his workplace and meet friends, but his father stopped him. He sat beside his father and inquired about the constant stream of visitors, their urgent pleas for them to leave the place. His father dismissed them as well-wishers, concerned for his safety and security. Confused, Vijayendra questioned why his safety was suddenly a concern.

His father revealed their vulnerability and the urgent need to relocate, fearing potential attacks from any direction. At first Vijayendra wanted to ask his father about the danger. Though he knows nothing to worry but still he believes his father as his father have a tremendous knowledge of the future. Whatever he predicts, will always happen. One day or the day after but it will happen.

He emphasized the small number of their community members and the widespread advice to leave with Vijayendra and Som. However, his father's resolve was firm: he would not abandon his people; they must come with him. Vijayendra understood the potential dangers of the ongoing world war and its possible impact on his family's well-being. He assured his father that he was willing to go anywhere with him but sought to know their destination. His father replied cryptically that they would journey to his favorite place, a property he had acquired that year. Vijayendra was taken aback. "You bought land? But where?" His father chuckled, a hint of amusement in his eyes, and exclaimed, "Huh! Taapu!" (Island).

"An Island?" Vijayendra repeated in disbelief. "But where?"

"A place very near to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands."

Vijayendra was stunned, struggling to comprehend his father's words, yet a sense of destiny seemed to be guiding them. He agreed to the move, telling his father, "Whatever you decide!" His father responded with a knowing "Huh! I had already decided and was about to call you this month, but you surprisingly arrived before. I'm happy you came, but even if your answer had been no, we were still going to that Island." A serious Vijayendra looked into his father's eyes and asked, "So, what's the problem?"

His father's reply was simple: "Our people! I want to take all of them with us." Vijayendra exclaimed, "Pitaji! (Dad) That's impossible! We cannot take these many people with us." His father's face hardened with determination. "I said what I said."

Knowing his father's unwavering nature, Vijayendra decided to persuade their community members, assuring them that he would take care of their needs. Within their community, Vijayendra's wealth and influence were well-known, and his word carried significant weight.

Initially, only a small number of people agreed to leave everything behind and join them. Vijayendra knew his father might object to such a small group, but he still tried to reason with him. To his utter surprise, his father readily agreed to take only those who were willing. Vijayendra was

left speechless, his life feeling like a rapid succession of shocks. He finally relinquished control and placed his trust in his father's decisions.

His father engaged with numerous officials and, after considerable effort, secured passage to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. A sense of relief washed over everyone, including Vijayendra, as they finally reached the islands. But his father's next words were unexpected: "Huh! The picnic has just started. We have to reach another Island." Vijayendra was dumbfounded. "Pitaji (father), where is the actual place? Is it on this island?" His father replied, "Yes! and no!"

"The place lies in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, but the island is separated."

"What is the place called?" Vijayendra asked.

His father replied, "Bhogua! A remote Island of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. We are moving to South Bhogua for the rest of our lives. We are going to an island where some people once lived, but today it is completely remote, and no one resides there except for a haunted house."

No one was afraid, and no one cared about a haunted house on a distant island.



Vijayendra invested significant effort in building a school and a hospital on the island, along with several houses for their community. Everything was gradually falling into place, just as his father had envisioned. Even Vijayendra felt a sense of joy seeing his father so content.

He established the school in an old bungalow, the same path leading to the ominous haunted house. As days turned into weeks, Monica grew accustomed to living with Vijayendra, diligently assisting him with his household responsibilities. She managed her tasks efficiently and even took on Som's pending work in her spare time. Though they rarely spoke, an unspoken understanding existed between them. Sometimes, Vijayendra showed Monica more affection than his own son, Som, but Som remained indifferent, devoid of any jealousy. He was always engrossed in his work, maintaining a calm demeanor, with little time for socializing. His love for his deceased mother was so profound that he seemed not to notice whether his father favored him or not.

Vijayendra's active social life caused his mother considerable anxiety and depression, a burden she struggled to bear. She once told Som, "Never love someone so desperately that you cannot live without them." Then, she uttered a poignant quote:

{ "Every pure relation once has to live apart." }

Som never forgot these words. Whenever he witnessed close relationships, his mother's words echoed in his mind, causing him to maintain a distance from people, including his own father.

Here, everything in Dadaji's world functioned exactly as he desired. He even had the full, silent support of the government.

something his son could never truly understand. It often left people stunned. Despite his own wealth and influence, he (Vijandra) found his father's reach and power far greater than his own.

Monica's presence in Som's family was something deeply valuable, her loyalty unspoken, yet unwavering.

Yet, interestingly, she and Som had never really shared a meaningful conversation.

One day, however, something changed.

Monica came back from school looking unwell, tired, pale, and clearly not in her best state. She had skipped breakfast and had forced herself through the day with a feverish body and messy hair. When she walked in, her appearance made Som and his friends laugh out loud not out of cruelty, but in sheer, boyish amusement. Monica, already low on energy, didn't react. She simply frowned and walked straight to her room.

Something about that moment struck Som.

Moments later, concerned, he quietly followed her and peeked into her room. She hadn't even removed her school bag. Slumped in the chair, she had already fallen asleep. Silently, Som walked over, gently lifted the bag off her shoulder, and helped her lie down on the bed. He called Radha Bai to keep an eye on her, then quickly made his way to the kitchen.

He decided to make her soup – the same comforting kind his mother had once taught him. A recipe from childhood, full of warmth and memory.

When Monica woke up, disoriented and weak, he offered her a bowl of hot soup. She didn't refuse.

{“With the very first sip, she froze. The taste... It was exactly like the one her mother, Giovanna, used to make for her when she was ill. She didn't know how to react. A tear escaped before she quickly wiped it away.”}

Som noticed, but said nothing.

From that day on, something changed between them. Som began taking extra care of her – quietly, without fuss – and Monica, in turn, began to trust him. His presence started to feel safe, familiar. She opened up. And Som, despite his socially vibrant nature, found something calming in her quiet company.

They didn't realize it, but the sweet beginning of a love story had quietly taken root.

For them, no space was truly private anymore – not the school, not the house, not even the small paths they walked daily. Everything around them felt like it belonged to both of them now.

One day, in a moment of shared frustration and laughter, they stood near the so-called "haunted house" – a place everyone in the village avoided. Monica looked at it and smiled playfully.

Som grinned and teased, “Are you scared of ghosts?”

She chuckled. “Are you?”

“If you're not comfortable,” she offered mock-seriously, “I'll find another idea.”

Som scoffed. "Oh please. Who was the one who ran out screaming last time?"

Monica smirked. "Challenge accepted."

And just like that, the haunted house became their secret refuge – a place where no one disturbed them. They began visiting often, always returning home before 5:30 or 6 PM.

But they had never dared to stay past sunset.

Even at home, Monica and Som invented games no one had ever played before. Som, with his remarkable intelligence and quick wit, always managed to create challenges that went far beyond anyone's expectations.

One afternoon, while they were sprawled across the living room floor, Monica leaned closer with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"If you're really as smart as you think," she teased, "I dare you to answer a question. On your own. No help from anyone."

Som straightened up dramatically, saluting like a navy officer.

"Yes, ma'am!" he said in mock seriousness. "But what if I lose?"

"Then," Monica grinned, "you'll have to admit that the girl sitting next to you is far more intelligent than you are."

“Challenge accepted!” Som declared without hesitation.

Monica began:

“You are in a large room with seven doors. How many ways do you have to connect with the outer world beyond that room?”

At first, Som laughed outright. “That’s easy—seven!”

But almost instantly, suspicion crept in.

“This must be a trick question,” he muttered. “Maybe... six?” Then after another pause: “Or five? Or... maybe only one?” He frowned, reconsidering each possibility.

“There must be at least one locked door,” he reasoned, “so it can’t be seven.”

He went over the answers again and again, but the uncertainty only grew. Finally, he settled back on seven—still unconvinced—and threw up his hands in defeat.

“All right, I give up. What’s the answer?”

Monica’s smile widened. “It’s simple. Fourteen.”

“Fourteen?” Som blinked—then his eyes lit with understanding.

“Yes,” she explained. “Seven doors connect you from inside the room to the outer world. And those same seven doors also connect the outer world back into the room. Seven plus seven—fourteen ways.”

Meanwhile, Vijayendra, having quietly observed the blossoming bond between Som and Monica, felt a storm of emotions. To him, this wasn't love. It was a distraction, a childish drama.

He said nothing to Som. But inside, anger brewed.

That night, he couldn't sleep. The room was quiet, but his thoughts were loud thoughts drifting to a memory from just a few months earlier, when he'd heard a radio report about London recovering from the devastation of World War II.

By dawn, his decision was made.

He would send Som to London, to an old friend's home for further studies. Far away from Monica. Far away from distractions. It was sudden, but final.

Som, ever obedient and non-confrontational, didn't argue. Without a second thought, he agreed.

Within days, Vijayendra sent him to India, from where he would depart directly to London. The preparations were swift.

Som was leaving.

And neither Monica... nor Som... had time to process what this goodbye really meant.



Chapter 4



London, 1948

Som's new life in London began quietly. He had come for higher studies, thanks to the help of Vijayendra and his old friend Surajlal Singh. Som would be staying with Suraj's son, Makhanelal Singh — who preferred to be called by a more modern nickname: "Makki."

When they first met, Som looked a little puzzled. "Makki? Like the Hindi word for fly?"

Makki laughed. "No, no — not makhi, the insect! Just Makki — more like Mack or Mickey in English."

Som gave a small smile. It felt strange at first, but he got used to it.

Makki was full of life — loud, energetic, dramatic, and sometimes overwhelming. He talked a lot, laughed loudly, and had a flair for being the center of attention. Som, in contrast, was quiet, thoughtful, and kept to himself. Still, something about Makki felt familiar, like a warm wind blowing into a cold room. The two quickly became close friends.

They attended university during the day and explored London by night. Makki took Som to pubs, concerts, even

poetry nights – things Som would never have dared to try alone. Their fathers never stopped them or set too many rules; both young men had the freedom to discover life their own way.

Som tried to keep Makki out of trouble, acting like the cautious one, reminding him not to overdo things. But over time, Som realized something important – Makki never crossed the line. He lived fully, yes, but always with a quiet respect for boundaries. That made Som admire him more. It also made him slowly let go of his own fears.

Interestingly, both fathers had secret wishes. Makki's father once told someone, "I wish my son had Som's discipline." And Vijayendra would sometimes say, "I hope Som learns to enjoy life like Makki."

Though different in many ways, they balanced each other well. They gave each other space and respect, and that made their friendship stronger.

Eventually, Som stopped thinking so much about home. Even Monica became a soft, faraway memory – like a song you once loved but haven't heard in a while.

Then came the day they finished college.

Makki, as always, wanted to celebrate. "Let's drive down the best route in the city," he said excitedly. "Marks don't matter. You'll probably get a ninety. I'll get sixty, if I'm lucky. Today, let me drive – like a wild man!"

Som hesitated but finally agreed.

That drive changed everything.

There was a terrible accident.

Som got away with minor injuries. He was back on his feet in a week. But Makki was badly hurt. The doctor ordered complete rest for three months. For a boy like Makki, full of energy and movement, lying still in bed was like a prison.

When Som visited him, Makki's eyes were quiet. He whispered, "I'm not sad for myself. I'm sad for you. I risked your life."

Som held his hand. "You gave me something special, Makki – the feeling of being a child again. For laughing without fear. But remember this – even joy needs balance. Life isn't about extremes. Learn to live in the middle. That's where peace is."

As Som left Makki's room that day, something inside him shifted. The closeness he had with Makki reminded him of something – or someone. Suddenly, Monica's memory came back, strong and real.

A few days later, while walking through a busy market, Som saw something in a shop window – a pair of old binoculars. He stopped, frozen.

He remembered Bhogua. The haunted house. The secret games. The times he and Monica had pretended to spy from far away. The laughter. The silence. The closeness.



Without thinking, he went inside and bought the binoculars.

That night, he told his uncle Surendra Singh that he was leaving. He had to go back to India. Back to Bhogua. Back to Monica.

He didn't even say goodbye to Makki. He just packed and left, his heart pounding with fear, guilt, hope – and something he didn't want to name yet.

Days later, as the ship neared Bhogua, something didn't feel right. He couldn't explain it, but he felt... unsettled.

Back on the island, Vijayendra had gone to inspect the old haunted house – a place people avoided, full of ghost stories. He planned to tear it down.

But inside, he found Monica.

"What are you doing here?" he asked sharply. "Do you know what this place is?"

Monica looked calm. "Uncle, Som and I used to come here all the time. It's not haunted. It's beautiful."

Vijayendra frowned. "Som? You both...?"

"Yes," she said simply.

Then, for reasons he himself couldn't understand – maybe fear, maybe shame, maybe something deeper – Vijayendra slapped her.

Meanwhile, Som was still on the ship, restless. He felt something terrible had happened. A tear slid from his eye as he slept.

As soon as he landed, he ran.

He searched everywhere. Monica wasn't at home. He took out the binoculars and scanned the jungle, the hills, and the haunted house.

And then... he saw her.

She was lying there. Not moving.

He ran. Faster than he ever had. When he reached her, his world shattered.

She was gone.

Something was wrong – very wrong.



Chapter 5



Monica's Death

The silence that followed Monica's death was not peaceful – it was loud, like a scream buried under layers of fear. The kind of silence that makes your bones feel cold. When Som found her inside that abandoned house, every thread of his being came undone. His breath caught in his throat, his heart pounding as if it wanted to break free from his chest.

She lay still – her body limp, her skin pale, her dress torn. Som couldn't believe what his eyes were seeing. His hands trembled as he knelt beside her. His lips parted but no sound came. It was as if the very life had been sucked out of him, too. His forehead glistened with sweat, and a single nerve on it bulged visibly, twitching with every ounce of grief and rage rising inside him.

Two of their close friends, who had come running after hearing his scream, entered the haunted house. They saw Som sitting on the floor, his arms around Monica, his face devoid of expression – a disturbing calm. They didn't ask questions. They understood. One of them pulled Som up gently while the other helped cover Monica's body with a shawl. Not a word was spoken. Everything had already been said in their silence.

{“Friends rushed to his side,
shaken but aware.

They gathered around him
not with words,
but with the quiet
understanding of grief.

Som sat still.

Unmoving. Unflinching.

A storm behind his eyes,
but not a ripple on his face”}

But deep in Som’s eyes, something had changed.

He wasn’t just grieving. He was watching.

And he was remembering.

The villagers came, whispering among themselves, keeping a calculated distance from the body and from Som. No one dared ask what had happened. No one cried. No one expressed shock. It was as if they had seen it coming – or worse, knew something they weren’t saying. They immediately began arranging for the cremation. Too quickly.

Som’s mind screamed in protest. Something wasn’t right. Her death didn’t feel like a natural one. There were bruises on her arms. Her dress was torn in places, and her skin carried strange marks that didn’t match any ordinary

accident or fall. Something inside him whispered again and again — this was not just death. This was murder.

He couldn't let it go.

Without saying a word to anyone, he walked away from the site and pulled out an old notebook from his bag. Inside was a list of trusted contacts. Among them was the name: Aryan Calcutta. He asked his friend for help as he was in big trouble. Aryan took no time and connected with his elder brother Rajiv, a man known for his sharp mind, sharp tongue, and unshakable will — a high-ranking CID officer who had solved impossible cases.

Som didn't wait. He made the call.

Within a week, Rajiv had arrived by boat to the remote island. The moment he saw Som, he rushed forward and hugged him tightly. "I'm here," he said firmly. "We will find out the truth."

Rajiv was briefed on everything. Som took him to the haunted house — now empty, now colder than before. Rajiv's face grew serious as he looked around. "We'll start here."

Rajiv moved with the precision of a hawk.

Som clenched his fists. "Whoever did this... If I find, mercy won't be an option."

But days passed. And nothing came. No leads, no suspects, no new voices.

That's when Rajiv spoke a terrifying thought out loud. "Either they all know who did it... or we're missing something that's hiding in plain sight."

The same evening, while walking past the haunted house, a sound echoed through the trees. It was a long, low howl — not quite human, not quite animal, and more like a siren.

Rajiv froze. "What the hell was that?"

Som looked up slowly. "That sound... it comes once a month."

Rajiv's brows narrowed. "Have you followed it before?"

"No. But tonight... let's find out."

Rajiv advised Som to stay behind. "It's too dark. You should rest."

But Som looked him in the eye. "Even if death is waiting out there, I'm not afraid. I've already lost everything. But I won't lose my soul by hiding."

Som shook his head. "I won't harm a creature of God. I'll face the truth with my bare hands if I must."

They set off, into the jungle that wrapped around the island like a green serpent. The sound had stopped now, leaving only the rustle of leaves and the occasional cry of a bird. They walked for hours, light in hand, hearts racing.

But the forest gave them nothing. No movement. No creatures. No clue.

“That sound,” Rajiv muttered, “was no animal. There’s something else... maybe mechanical? Or planned?”

As they returned, something caught Rajiv’s eye. A white rope, coiled neatly near a tree, gleamed in the moonlight.

Som shrugged. “It’s just rope. Could belong to anyone.”

Rajiv picked it up. “No dirt. No wear. This was dropped today.”

“Who would come this deep?” Som asked, frowning. “Even villagers avoid this path.”

Rajiv didn’t answer. But something in his eyes said he was thinking hard.

They spent the night in the haunted house. Exhausted, they drifted into uneasy sleep – until Rajiv suddenly woke at 3 AM.

A branch snapped. A deep creak echoed nearby.

He looked out the window.

And saw a tree move.

Not from the wind. Not from any natural cause.

It twisted slowly, like a hinge. Then froze.

“Bingo,” he whispered.

Rajiv jumped to his feet and shook Som awake. “Come! Now!”

But by the time they reached it, the tree stood still again.

Rajiv touched its base. "This isn't nature. There's a mechanism."

And then, on the soft earth, they saw them: footprints.

But these weren't normal. The feet were turned slightly inward — pigeon-toed. And the steps were light, small, and ended abruptly.

Som stared. "What if... people are living here? Not from our village. Not known to us. Tribals? Hidden tribes?"

Rajiv nodded slowly. "And what if Monica saw something she wasn't supposed to?"

That theory stung like a knife. Monica... silenced because she saw too much?

"We need proof," Rajiv said. "Not guesses. So we wait."

The next few days passed in silence. Rajiv remained on the island for eleven days — one day over his sanctioned leave. Then the summons came. He had to go back.

Before leaving, he hugged Som one last time. "Call me anytime. I'll return in a heartbeat."

Som looked down, barely speaking.

Rajiv wiped his eyes. "I'm crying not for failure. But because I've met someone like you. You're brave, kind,

pure – and you don't even know it. Don't lose that. Not to take revenge. Not to grief."

They embraced like brothers.

After Rajiv left, Som changed. Not outwardly – he resumed helping his grandfather, working with the community, smiling when required. But inside, he was hunting.

He returned to the mysterious tree and tied nearly invisible threads around it, marking its position carefully. Then he hid in a spot with a clear view, waiting, watching.

Three days passed. Nothing.

But on the fourth day, the thread snapped.

The tree had moved again.

The real hunt had begun.



Chapter 6



The Moving Tree

The tree moved.

It shifted from its place with an eerie grace, only to return as though it had never stirred.

It was the same cursed day—the same day he always heard that chilling, siren-like noise, a sound that echoed once every month like a ghostly reminder.

By now, he understood: the noise and the moving tree were not coincidences.

Something, or someone, was orchestrating this.

Maybe it was a hidden tribe.

Maybe it was criminals, using the legend of the "haunted house" to scare intruders away.

One thing he knew for sure: he had never once seen an actual ghost in that house.

No figures cloaked in white, no phantom lights.

Only silence—and that single, deliberate noise.

The truth clawed at his mind: someone was hiding something beneath this house of shadows.

If not the killer of Monica, then surely someone who knew the truth.

Only they had reason to remain after her death—and only they had reason to fear discovery.

Frustration burned through him as he stared at the tree.

The tree, the signal and the sentinel.

He remembered vividly—the tree always shifted after the siren noise, as if some unseen hand beckoned the living and the dead alike.

Without waiting another moment, he started digging furiously at its roots.

He tried to move the tree itself—it stood stubborn, immovable as a tombstone.

Sweat dripping, heart hammering, he dug until the earth began to soften.

With shaking hands, he clawed at the loosened soil, pulling it away with a desperate energy.

Soon, a hollow opened before him.

In the dim moonlight, he saw them.

People. Covered head to toe, their bodies hidden beneath thick garments, gathered around in a strange, ritualistic circle.

Their voices murmured in a language he could not understand, a rhythm low and feverish.

He hid in the shadows, silent, unseen.

Two agonizing hours passed.

Then—the sound again—the siren song, and the tree groaned as if mourning.

He watched them slowly emerge from the earth, slipping like wraiths into the haunted house.

He followed.

But once inside, they had vanished into the yawning dark.

Gone—like mist swallowed by night.

Yet one truth stood sharp and clear:

The murderer of Monica, the desecrator of innocence, was among them.

But he could not act—not yet.

He could not risk the lives of those he loved by moving too soon.

So he waited.

A whole month passed.

Thirty long days of pretending to be normal, of smiling, of hiding the storm that raged within him.

And when the cursed day returned, he was ready.

Rajiv had armed him with tear gas.

He had laid traps—scattered “kaante” (sharp thorns) along the path from the tree to the house, laid pins and nets, all the clever tricks of desperate men.

But that night, there was no siren call.

No movement of the tree.

No shifting of Earth.

Only silence.

At first, he thought perhaps they had simply not come.

But when he approached the site, he was stunned—everything he had arranged had vanished without a trace.

No thorns, no nets, no tools.

Nothing.

It was as if the ground had swallowed them, erasing his preparations as neatly as brushing away a footprint in sand.

Someone was watching him.

Following him.

The predator knew the hunter was closing in.

Broken-hearted, he returned home.

There, he found his grandfather, sitting peacefully on the sofa, as though the world itself were not burning.

"How can you sit there so calmly?" he demanded.
"When your grandson is drowning in darkness?"

How can you be so at peace when Monica—who lived under your roof—was murdered?

How can you be so content to hide while our country is in peril?"

Tears filled his eyes as he spoke, voice shaking with rage and grief.

"And I know," he said bitterly, "that I am not truly your grandson. Blood does not tie us together. But even animals grow attached to those they live with. You raised my father as your own... Am I so much less?"

His grandfather looked up slowly, his expression unreadable.

"Who told you," he asked quietly, "that you are not my real grandson?"

Som clenched his fists.

"I overheard you. In London. Speaking with a stranger. At the underground station.

You took something from him—a box, hidden under a cloth—and hugged him like he was your own son.

I heard you say... You wanted your real grandchild, not someone like me."

For a moment, there was only silence between them.

Som, unable to hold back any longer, broke down.

"I forgive you," he wept, "even if you never loved me.

But today, I mind it—because you sit there, unmoved, while a murderer roams free among us!"

His grandfather, voice thick with emotion, said at last,

"My dearest child... my angel... my leader... you are exactly like your mother."

Those words struck Som like a lightning bolt.

Exactly like my mother?

"You are exactly like your mother, Shitija," his grandfather said.

"Kshitija?" Som gasped. "My mother's name is Avantika!

You don't even know her name?!"

The old man shook his head slowly.

"No, my child. Your real mother was Shitija.

Today, you will learn everything.

Today, the truth will be yours."

Som's world crumbled around him.

The foundations of his identity cracked and fell.

"My whole life..." he whispered. "A lie?

You are not my real grandfather.

Revati was not my real mother.

Everything I believed in... everything I loved... was false."

For the first time in his life, Som cried—not the silent weeping of grief, but the deep, shattering sobs of a heart broken beyond repair.

He had not cried when his mother died.

He had not cried when Monica died in his arms.

But today, the strongest boy had fallen.

He locked himself away, drowning in sorrow.

His grandfather did not disturb him, though he longed to.

Som decided he would leave.

He packed silently, preparing to return to India, to flee this house of lies.

But as he stood there, suitcase in hand, a voice came from behind the door:

"You will not leave this house."

It was an order, not a request.

"You are not sheltered here as a guest," his grandfather continued.

"This is your house.

Everything here belongs to you.

Even I do."

Som stood frozen, astonished.

How had he known his thoughts?

Had he guessed—or something deeper?

"You help strangers," Som accused, "but you left your own son behind!

What kind of man are you?"

And then, softly:

"What if your mother asked you to stay?" his grandfather whispered.

"What if Monica herself asked you to stay?"

Som stared at him, uncomprehending.

Before he could react, his grandfather stepped closer and placed a firm hand on his head.

In that moment, Som was pulled into visions—visions so vivid, so searing, they could not be dreams.



He saw his mother.

He saw Monica.

He lived a lifetime in seconds.

And then he collapsed, fainting onto his knees, gasping for breath, his body drenched in sweat.

When he awoke, he had been asleep for thirteen long hours.

Confused, he stumbled into the living room, where his grandfather sat calmly reading the newspaper.

Without looking up, the old man said from behind his half-glasses:

"No, Som.

What you saw was not a dream.

It was the truth.

And there is still so much more for you to learn."



Chapter 7



Grandfather's Oath

The moment had arrived. Som, yearning for truth, pressed his grandfather for answers. The old man, sensing his grandson's need, began his long-awaited explanation.

"From the very beginning, Som," his grandfather affirmed, "you must understand the fundamental truths of your life: your true mother, your true father, and your true grandfather."

Som, listening intently, was struck by his grandfather's words. "My grandfather?" he questioned, a tremor of disbelief in his voice. "Is he still alive?"

"Yes, my child," the reply came, "I am your paternal grandfather, your Nana."

A wave of betrayal washed over Som. "You've lied to me about everything? Why this deception, this rearrangement of our family? Are we even a family? Who is my mother? Why the lies?"

His grandfather responded with a solemn tone, "To truly know yourself, you must first understand certain things - ancient secrets, carefully guarded for centuries."

"I trust nothing and no one," Som declared, his voice raw with emotion. "Just tell me about my mother. I care nothing for your family's history or mysteries. I was happy with her in our small home. Your business, your empire, your fame – they are killing me, just as they are killing her."

The grandfather reached out, a gesture of comfort, intending to soothe Som's distress. Yet, he hesitated. To alter Som's mind might prevent him from undertaking the crucial oath. Withdrawing his hand, he remained calm, allowing Som time to process his turmoil.

Another day passed, and Som's desire to know about his mother intensified, warring with his resentment towards his grandfather. He retreated into silence, refusing food, his heart heavy with unspoken pain. He lay on the cold floor of his room instead of his bed. The grandfather entered quietly, observing the unusual scene. "Som is not on his bed... no wood touches his body," he murmured, removing his spectacles. He hurried to Som's side, retrieved his mother's photograph, and returned to his own room.

Hours later, Som entered his grandfather's room, an apology etched on his face. He sat on the floor beside the old man. "Dear Grandfather," he began, his voice softened, "please tell me everything I need to know about our family."

"My dear son," his grandfather responded, his gaze gentle, "since you ask, I will tell you everything. However, some truths are revealed only to a select few. If I share these with you, you must swear never to divulge them to anyone."

Absolutely no one. This oath must be taken in the presence of the sacred fire."

"I am ready to swear anywhere, without question," Som affirmed. "Just tell me everything. I will listen from the beginning."

His grandfather then led Som to a place where the image of a moving tree already lingered in his grandson's mind.

Som feigned ignorance, though the sight of the place sent a jolt of recognition through him.

Whispering ancient words, his grandfather placed a hand over Som's eyes, ostensibly to shield him from the moving tree. But Som already knew of it. His confusion lay not in the tree itself, nor in his grandfather's manipulation, but in the pretense. His grandfather hadn't closed his hand tightly, almost inviting Som to see if the tree moved. Som, however, remained impassive, playing along. It seemed his grandfather wasn't trying to hide the tree, but rather observing certain protocols.

"If you see the tree move prematurely," his grandfather explained, "you risk losing your sight. Only after taking the oath within its presence will you be able to clearly perceive its movement and even command it to navigate the sectors."

"What kind of oath was that, Grandfather?" Som inquired.

"Wait," the old man replied, turning to oversee preparations with the help of others. Som watched as they moved deeper into the space. He noticed the familiar attire of the figures – the same concealing jute-like gowns and rope belts he had seen with Rajiv that night, leaving only small palms visible. The hooded garments obscured their faces, revealing only their eyes.

A flicker of fear touched Som. "Are you all the same people who were here when my Monica died? I saw you all in these clothes before." No one answered. Confused, Som wondered if they understood him. His grandfather returned, gesturing for him to sit as he began the rituals.

Minutes passed, filled with hushed mantras. Then, his grandfather instructed Som to offer his blood into the fire pot. Despite a rising anger, Som meticulously followed each instruction, concealing his emotions. He pricked his finger, letting his blood fall into the flames, and took the oath.

"Repeat after me," his grandfather commanded. As Som echoed the ancient phrases, his grandfather took his hand and held it over the flickering flames. "Swear that you will never reveal anything we do, anything we perform in this hidden world. You cannot disclose the secrets of this realm to the outside world."

A sudden thought flashed through Som's mind: What if I break the oath, or if it Å? As if reading his very thoughts, his grandfather's voice sharpened. "No! Do not even think of it. This is not a game. You risk everything – your loved ones, your body, your very soul."

A chilling realization dawned on Som. His grandfather had indeed read his mind. Simultaneously, a desire to possess that same ability ignited within him. "I want to be like you," Som declared.

His grandfather smiled knowingly. "Yes, my son. All of this... it is for you and your future."



Chapter 8



Som's grandfather grew concerned seeing Som's overflowing excitement about the powers he hadn't even fully received yet. The abilities Som dreamed of—his grandfather had spent years mastering them through immense struggle, intense prayers, and dedication. He feared that Som's eagerness might turn into recklessness. The boy might one day reveal the secrets of their hidden world to outsiders.

But Som's excitement didn't last long.

"I've taken an oath not to reveal your secret world, Dadaji. The place where you live... secretly. But what now?" Som asked, his voice serious. "What more do I need to know? Why do you all live in hiding? Are the people living here the same ones who used to live with us before? The ones you brought to this island?"

Just then, Som noticed a strange creature—one he had never seen before. It was being kept as a pet by one of the men nearby.

"What is this animal?" he asked, puzzled.

As soon as he spoke, the animal let out a sound—a deep, echoing vocalization that startled him. It sounded

exactly like the eerie siren he had been hearing every Amavasya (new moon night) since coming to the island.

A chill ran down his spine.

“Could one of these people... or all of them... be involved in Monica’s death?” he wondered. His excitement turned to grief and frustration. He had come no closer to solving her case.

Just then, his grandfather entered the room.

“That animal is an Indri lemur,” he said calmly. “A breed of monkey. It’s the one whose cry echoes through this island every Amavasya. We use its call during rituals.”

Som looked up sharply. “So... no one from your disciples killed Monica?”

His grandfather nodded solemnly. “None of my disciples, Som. They are loyal to me. They trust my guidance. And now, I will guide you. I will help you find Monica’s murderer.”

“Murderers?” Som repeated. “How can you be sure there’s more than one?”

“There could be one... or more. Who knows?” his grandfather said. He placed a firm but gentle hand on Som’s head. “But we will find out. I promise. Just cooperate with me, follow what I say. Will you?”

Som hesitated, then slowly nodded. Doubts still clouded his mind.

That night, as he lay on his bed, hundreds of questions raced through his thoughts. None brought clarity. At dawn, a knock at his door startled him.

It was his grandfather.

“Get ready,” he whispered. “We are going to the jungle, near the moving tree. And make sure Radha Bai and Shyamlal don’t see you leave.”

Four people set out, including Som and his grandfather. Among them, there were two men Som had barely spoken to, even though they were neighbors on the island. Now, he began observing them closely. One carried a strange bag—something hidden within. The other seemed to be secretly guarding the box from Dadaji’s room. Som instantly sensed something off.

“Why are only the four of us here?” Som asked.

“We’re here to open the tree,” his grandfather explained. “There are mantras to chant. But be careful. If you open the tree more than once, it may never respond again. We could be trapped for thirty days. You may cut branches, dig the soil, but never force it open.”

Som blinked. “I’ve already dug near the tree... before.”

His grandfather turned sharply. “You did? When? What did you see?”

Som explained, “I heard the lemur’s cry while searching for Monica’s killer. I came here and saw you all... performing some ritual, I think?”

His grandfather went pale. “That’s not possible. This tree—it’s protected. From the outside, you cannot see anything inside, even when it opens. We’ve tested it. You shouldn’t have seen anything.”

“But I did, Dadaji.”

His grandfather sighed, eyes filled with worry. “There is more for you to learn. I haven’t even told you about your mother yet. But I brought you here to answer your questions, one at a time. If you follow me, perform the rituals, we’ll find Monica’s killer.”

He handed Som a small pouch filled with ash-like sand.

“Repeat after me,” he said, and began chanting a strange mantra:

“Kaake kune kanne na vi khanne

Dove sharle da *** ***** **** *****

Ziyaad harle tvo tvo ch: ***** **** *****

Firrzo dee glam te vich ta kre halam:”

The words were foreign—nothing Som had ever heard before, not in Sanskrit or in any shloka he’d learned. Despite being raised in London, he had deep knowledge of his roots. But this chant was alien. It included sounds like za and fa—phonetics absent from traditional Sanskrit.

“You’ve impressed the Lord,” his grandfather said. “He will show you the path.”

“Which God?” Som asked, bewildered.

“I’ll tell you,” said his grandfather. “But first, rest.”

Som nodded, still confused. After bathing to clear his discomfort, he lay down again, thinking:

What kind of mantra was that? What God have I just pleased? There’s no ‘za’ or ‘fa’ in Sanskrit. Then who is this Lord?

His thoughts were interrupted as his grandfather returned to his home and sat beside him.

“Son,” he said gently, “you are now equal to me. After so many years, I finally feel honored to sit with you like this.”

Som smiled faintly. “Dadaji—”

“Don’t ask anything now,” his grandfather interrupted. “Let me tell you a story. After that, you decide what you want to do.”

Som didn’t want to listen—but he had no choice. He had to stay calm.

Meanwhile, his grandfather called Radha Bai and Shyamlal and asked them to tend to the garden, keeping them out of earshot.

Then he looked at Som and said, “Now... listen to this story carefully. And then, choose your path.”



Chapter 9



The Weapons of the Forgotten Gods – Part 1

The night was silent, but Som's mind roared with questions. The wind rustled the leaves beyond the wooden windows, carrying the scent of salt and time, as if the ocean itself had inhaled centuries and now whispered forgotten stories into the darkness.

Inside the dimly lit hut, his grandfather sat cross-legged, a deep calm on his face and an unreadable fire in his eyes. Som sat in front of him, arms folded, eyes cautious but open. A small copper lamp burned between them, casting dancing shadows on the mud walls—shadows that looked, for a moment, like warriors mid-battle.

“I told you”, said the old man, his voice low and deliberate, “that I would tell you a story. But what I am about to share is more than a story. It is our burden. Our oath. Our legacy.”

Som did not interrupt. He didn't have to. Something in the air had shifted. It was the same feeling he once had when he stood in the British Museum in London, gazing at relics of forgotten dynasties—except now, the relics were real, and the secrets were his family's.

The grandfather placed a small pouch on the floor. A single grain of black ash spilled from its mouth.

“This,” he said, “is not soil. This is the residue of power. Burnt power. Left behind from weapons that once shook the heavens.”

Som leaned forward.

“Where do I begin?” said the old man, his gaze distant, lost in centuries.

“Maybe with the first weapon ever known to our world—the Trishul.”



Chapter 10



The Weapons of the Forgotten Gods – Part Two:

War of the Devas & Asuras

The grandfather leaned back, his fingers tracing invisible patterns in the air—symbols older than writing, older even than gods carved in stone.

“Where there is light, there must be shadow,” he said gravely. “And where there are gods, there are those who rise against them—the Asuras.”

Som listened intently. The oil lamp between them flickered, casting golden light over a truth more ancient than memory.



The Asuras, powerful beings born of ambition and pride, once roamed the heavens and the earth. They were not demons at first. No. They were brothers of the gods—children of Brahma, just like the Devas. But their hearts grew greedy. They desired Amrit, the nectar of immortality, and the thrones of the heavens.

When the great Samudra Manthan, the Churning of the Ocean, took place, both Devas and Asuras joined hands

to churn the cosmic ocean. From that churn came the most powerful weapons and relics the world has ever known:

Kaustubha, the radiant gem.

Sharanga, Vishnu's great bow.

Airavata, Indra's white elephant.

Kamdhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow.

And Amrit, the nectar of eternal life.

"But the gods tricked the Asuras," the grandfather said with a sad smile. "They used Mohini, the female avatar of Vishnu, to steal the Amrit."

From that moment, the skies bled war.

~

The Asuras built their own arsenals—dark astras of destruction. They summoned weapons not from divinity, but from rage and black magic.

Tarakasura, slayer of gods, wielded a spear dipped in time-stopping venom.

Mahishasura had a trident cursed by the fallen sage Vrishabha, which could pierce divine protection.

Shumbha and Nishumbha, brothers of bloodlust, fought with axes that devoured light.

Raktabīja, the demon who bled clones from every wound, was armed with daggers that multiplied the moment they struck.

To counter such evil, the gods had no choice but to empower mortals.

“That is when divine weapons were gifted to kings, warriors, and sages,” the grandfather said. “The age of heroes began.”

~

Rama, the avatar of Vishnu, wielded the Kodanda bow, gifted by Sage Vishwamitra. His arrows, empowered by mantra, could split mountains. He used them to slay demons like Maricha, Subahu, and finally Ravana, whose own palace was filled with weapons gathered from every corner of the underworld.

Ravana’s chariot—the Pushpak Vimana—was not his creation. It once belonged to Kubera, god of wealth. But Ravana stole it in battle, just like he stole power, women, and kingdoms.

“The Pushpak still exists,” whispered the grandfather. “But not where people look.”

Som’s heart thumped.

~

Then came Surya Putra Karna, the tragic hero.

“Karna’s Kavach and Kundal were not made—they were born with him,” said the grandfather, voice almost trembling with reverence. “Gifts of the sun god himself. They made him invincible.”

But for that very reason, they were taken.

Lord Indra, in disguise, begged Karna to give them up. And Karna, ever generous, did so. “That was the beginning of his end,” the grandfather said solemnly.

“Where are they now?” Som whispered.

His grandfather’s eyes grew distant. “In a vault beneath stone, in a hall where no voice echoes. You’ll see.”

~

From the time of Karna and Arjuna, the age of Astra warfare reached its zenith.

Brahmastra, created by Brahma himself, could destroy entire cities. Only the worthiest could summon it. Only the gods could withstand it.

Pashupatastra, weapon of Shiva, required absolute surrender to summon. None could survive its wrath—not even gods, if turned against them.

Narayanastra, from Vishnu, would attack automatically anyone who fought back—but would spare those who surrendered.

“These weapons weren’t just tools,” said the grandfather. “They were judgments.”

~

And yet, they vanished.

One by one, these god-gifted weapons were either lost in wars... or hidden.

“Not destroyed?” Som asked.

“No. Nothing divine can be destroyed. But they can be broken. Buried. Forgotten.”

The grandfather’s eyes glinted. “And some were... stolen.”

Som’s spine stiffened.

“Yes,” the old man said. “Even before the British, even before the Mughals, thieves walked this land—kings who wore crowns but bowed to greed.”

In the 12th and 13th centuries, as kingdoms fell and Nalanda University burned, scrolls containing rituals, mantras, and maps to ancient relics were lost—or taken.

“But before the last flame was extinguished,” said the grandfather, “my ancestors rescued what they could.”

~

“They built a vault—a monument beneath the ocean, carved into a forgotten island near the Arabian Sea. A castle not of kings, but of keepers.”

That place, Som realized, was real.

“Is that where you keep—”

“Everything,” the grandfather interrupted. “From Karna’s armor, to Surpanakha’s bangles. From Shakuni’s cursed dice to Ashwatthama’s dagger. Even feathers of Garuda, the mount of Vishnu, and fragments of Paras Mani, the stone that turns anything into gold.”

Som sat back, overwhelmed.

“And now,” said the grandfather softly, “this island... it calls to you.”

Part Three: The Forbidden Vault & the Protectors of Time

The oil lamp’s flame danced like a restless spirit as Som’s grandfather stood. His gaze was firm, the weight of centuries pressing behind his words.

“Som... that monument beneath the Arabian Sea is not just a museum,” he said. “It is a living vault. A sacred prison. A time capsule.”

Som, still processing everything, asked cautiously, “Who built it?”

His grandfather’s voice turned reverent. “The vault was constructed not by men alone—but by sages, architects, and beings beyond this world. Yakshas, Nagas, even some rogue Asuras who betrayed their kind... they joined hands under divine command. Because the universe needed balance.”

~

The Castle of Forgotten Fire

The structure is known among Som’s grandfather’s secret order as:

> “Agni-Shilaa Mandir” – The Temple of the Fire-Stone

Built in 1287 BC, it lies beneath a camouflaged isle, accessible only once every Amavasya, the no-moon night,

through a celestial alignment. “We call it the Vault of Time,” his grandfather said, “because once you enter, time bends. You may spend an hour and return to find a week has passed... or vice versa.”

Inside the vault:

Seven concentric circles of rooms.

Each circle is guarded by one of seven Protectors, each representing an ancient element:

Agni (Fire)

Vayu (Air)

Jal (Water)

Bhoomi (Earth)

Aakash (Sky)

Chhaya (Shadow)

Samay (Time)

“These protectors are not always human,” the grandfather warned. “One is blind. One never speaks. One appears only as a shadow. One tests your bloodline. Another asks riddles no man can answer without losing something.”

Som’s hands clenched unconsciously.

~

The Council of Guardians

Som’s grandfather then spoke of his community.

“We are known as the Agnivansha Rakshaks—The Fire-Born Guardians.”

Trained in mantra science, ancient astronomy, decoding lost scripts, and sacred warfare, they lived hidden lives. Farmers, healers, fishermen... some even beggars. But at every generation, a few among them took the vow of silence and lived in utter secrecy, guarding relics hidden across India—from Badrinath to Bharatpur, from Dwarka to the ruins of Takshashila.

“And I was chosen,” the grandfather said, “because I once... entered the vault and came back alive.”

~

The Inner Chamber: Weapons Not to Be Named

In the innermost sanctum of the monument, encased in layered protection and elemental barriers, lay the forbidden weapons:

Trinetra Shakti — a spear tip that once adorned Shiva’s third eye.

Shakti Astra — the weapon Devi Durga used against Mahishasura.

Vaishnavastra — the energy bolt of Vishnu.

Shakuni’s Paasas — the cursed dice that bend fate itself.

Bhramasheersha Astra — said to be a refined, tenfold deadlier version of the Brahmastra.

A ring once worn by Rishi Parashurama, said to still hum with the energy of a hundred Yugas.

“But these cannot be touched, Som,” the grandfather warned. “Unless the vault chooses you.”

~

A Prophecy Left Behind

From a burnt scroll recovered after the fall of Nalanda, his grandfather recited a half-decayed verse:

> “In the child of fire and shadow,
Whose mother was silence, whose father was pain,
He shall open what no time remembers,
And awaken that which sleeps beneath the rain.”

“You,” his grandfather whispered, “are the child of both fire... and shadow.”

Som was stunned.

“My mother...” he began.

The grandfather nodded slowly. “She was once one of us.”

~

Shocked, silent, overwhelmed—Som stood up, his breath short.

“How do I know this isn’t just another story?”

The grandfather gave him a small copper amulet—delicately carved with a seven-petaled lotus. “Hold this

against your palm when we reach the monument. If the petals glow, you are chosen.”

The Journey to the Vault & the Test of the Elements

The morning sun over the island cast a golden shimmer across the trees, but Som felt no warmth. His mind was ablaze with thoughts. His heart carried the burden of Monica’s murder, his mother’s hidden identity, and now the realization that he might be tied to a secret older than empires.



Chapter 11



The Breaking Point

The oil lamp swayed slightly with the breeze that found its way in through the carved wooden window. Shadows danced across the room filled with ancient scriptures, dusty scrolls, cracked leather-bound books, and symbols Som had never seen before. The room smelt of age—earth, salt, oil, and time. But Som wasn't looking at any of that. He was looking at the man who sat across from him—the one who used to tell bedtime stories, who held his hand when he learned to walk, who lifted him onto his shoulders during temple festivals. The man who now felt like a stranger wrapped in secrets.

Dadaji's voice was slow and deliberate, his tone calm but steady, unfolding tales of a forgotten age. Of relics blessed and cursed. Of ancient tantras. Of the ocean's heart and the beings that protected it.

But Som couldn't take it anymore. Something in him snapped.

"Dadaji, bas karo. Enough," Som said, his voice shaking—not from fear, but frustration. "I didn't come here to become part of some myth. I didn't come to fulfill

destiny. I came to find answers. I came for Monica. My Monica.”

Dadaji looked up. His eyes, once gentle and wise, had turned into something unreadable.

“I have sat here and listened to stories that sound like dreams. But this isn’t a story, Dadaji. She was real. Her smile, her laughter, her dreams... real. And now she’s dead. And I won’t be part of anything that doesn’t help me get justice.”

The last word echoed. Justice.

There was a pause. Dadaji didn’t speak. His silence was more terrifying than words.

Som stood abruptly. “I’m leaving.”

He walked briskly toward the exit. The ornate door loomed just ahead—freedom. But the moment he touched the doorknob, his breath hitched. His arm locked in place. His legs stiffened like stone. He tried to move, tried to turn, but it was like his body was no longer his own.

“Wh-what’s happening?!” he shouted. “Let me go!”

Dadaji stood slowly, the hem of his white cotton kurta sweeping against the marble floor. “Your soul has sealed itself, beta. You bound yourself to this house the moment you entered it. This isn’t my doing. This is the will of something older.”

Som struggled. Sweat beaded on his forehead. His heart thundered.

“You’ve cursed me!” he growled. “You and your black magic. You’re mad. You think this is divine? This is cruelty!”

“You think too small,” Dadaji said, his voice barely above a whisper. “You see pain. I see legacy. You see loss. I see a beginning.”

Som collapsed to the floor as the force slowly released him. He gasped for air, clutching his chest.

“I don’t want to be part of this,” he muttered, eyes moist. “I just want to know who killed her.”

Dadaji crouched beside him. “And you will. But not like this. Not with anger, or doubt. Only with clarity. This is bigger than vengeance, Som. Bigger than love. It’s about balance. And yes... it begins with truth.”

Som looked up. “Then give me the truth. No stories. No riddles. Just truth.”

Dadaji stood. “Very well. Come.”

He led Som through a narrow hallway lined with oil lamps. At the end was a carved stone door. It opened into a library older than any place Som had ever seen. Dust hung in the air like history refusing to rest. A giant mural covered the far wall—of a castle rising from a stormy sea, and strange, glowing eyes watched from the trees.

“This is what we protect,” Dadaji said, standing before the mural.

Som stared. “What is it?”

“A castle,” Dadaji replied. “Hidden beneath this ocean. A sentient entity. It awakens once every forty-one years. It cannot be summoned by man. Only by one creature: Indri.”

Som turned to him, confused. “Indri? You mean the cries I hear on Amavasya and Poornima?”

“Yes,” Dadaji said. “What you thought was myth is alive. The sound is not the wind. It’s a call. A warning. A reminder that what sleeps below is never fully asleep.”

That evening, Dadaji took him to the edge of the forest. There, under the moonlight, Som saw them for the first time.

Dozens of lemur-like creatures stood among the trees. Not ordinary lemurs—these had leaner frames, haunting orange eyes, elongated limbs, and a presence that felt... intelligent. Ancient. They didn’t move. They just watched him. As if they were judging. Measuring.

“They’ve never gathered like this,” Dadaji whispered. “They sense change.”

Then it happened.

All at once, the Indri howled. A high-pitched, echoing wail that pierced the air like a blade. The ground beneath them trembled. The ocean roared louder, and even the trees bent slightly in submission.

That night, no one on the island slept. Not even Dadaji.

The next morning, Som entered his grandfather's room. The old man sat quietly, polishing an old pen with a cloth.

"I'm looking for a pen," Som said flatly.

Dadaji didn't look up. "A pen?"

"Yes," Som said. "Radha Bai thought it was yours. She said she placed it here. But it was mine. It's... important."

Dadaji didn't move. He simply said, "Come. Sit."

Som sat on the wooden stool near the foot of the bed. Lower than Dadaji's bed, out of respect. He had done it since he was a boy.

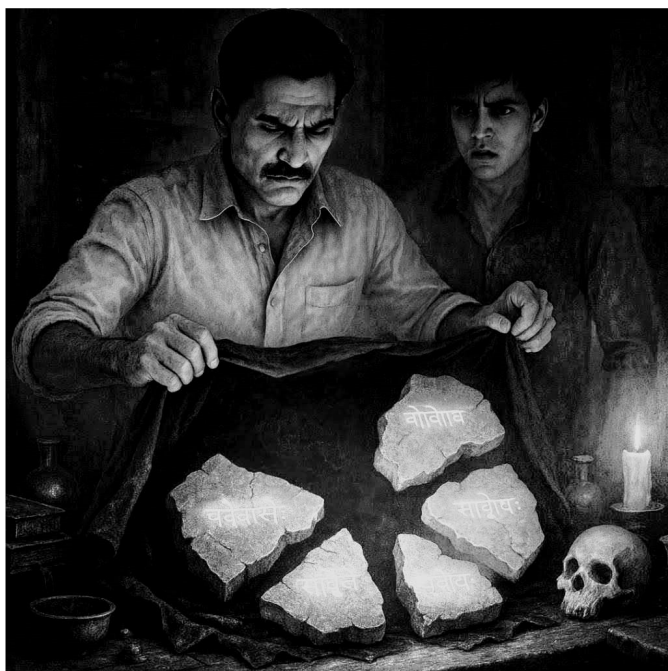
Dadaji reached under the bed and pulled out a velvet-wrapped box. Inside lay a dull gray stone tablet, etched with symbols that shimmered faintly even in low light.

"You want to know what I took from that man on the streets of London?" Dadaji asked. "What I've hidden from everyone—even your father?"

Som nodded.

"This," Dadaji said, lifting the tablet, "was entrusted to me by a man who, like you, wanted nothing more than to live with the woman he loved. He chose love over duty. But destiny doesn't care for choices."

Som leaned forward.



“This tablet is a key. It opens the gates to the Castle of Shadows beneath the Arabian Sea. The castle that only rises when Indri calls it. And inside...”

“What’s inside?” Som asked.

“Relics,” Dadaji said. “Some of divine origin. Others... not. The kavach and kundal of Karna. The teeth of Narakasura. The black bangle of Surpanakha. The original dice of Shakuni. And many more. These items were not accepted back into the divine realms after the great wars. They are considered dangerous—too dangerous. And so they were hidden. Sealed. Buried.”

Som’s breath caught.

“And you’re guarding them?”

“Yes,” Dadaji said. “Our lineage was chosen centuries ago. Every generation, one member must protect the knowledge. The power. And now, it is your turn.”

Som stood. “And if I refuse?”

“You can,” Dadaji said. “But the relics will still rise. Someone else will claim them. Perhaps not for good.”

Som turned to leave.

“Wait,” Dadaji called. “There’s more.”

Som turned.

“You came for Monica’s justice. And you shall have it. But her death... it is not disconnected from this. She saw something she wasn’t meant to. She discovered a part of this island that had been hidden for centuries. Her death was not random, Som. It was... necessary. For them.”

“Who are ‘they’?” Som asked.

Dadaji looked down.

“You will find out. But only if you walk this path.”

Som stared at him for a long time. Then, finally, he said: “Teach me. I’ll learn. But on one condition—you tell me everything. No riddles. No legends. Truth.”

Dadaji nodded.

And the flames in the oil lamp flickered once more.



Chapter 12



The final relic.

Out of nowhere, someone with hidden identity came and gave the final relic- the seventh relic to Dadaji.

People from the bhouga island, especially the one who are the secret army of dadaji tried harder to know who was the person who gave the final relic.

Now Dadaji is shocked and investigates the situation. The strange person He only replied to all the Dadaji's questions, "Once you saved me, now I've saved you" "Now im free from all the restrictions, now I can live without fear".

Listening to this Dadaji felt ashamed and quiet. Som said everything but couldn't stop the person to stay though he wanted to stop him. Here Dadaji felt embarrassed as may be once he may have even tortured him. He recalls all his past life but couldn't understand when he harmed him or put him in that situation.

Although Dadaji was very happy internally but due to the presence of everyone including Som he didn't express his happiness. But an act of true victory and glory can easily be seen on his Dadaji s face.

Here Som demanded that we will first identify who is the killer of Monica. Suddenly Dadaji interrupted and said with happiness that we will first open the gate of the ocean. Then suddenly saw Som's sad and aggressive face he knew that he did hurt him with his words. So, covering up the situation he said, "Som once we open the gate of the ocean, we will bring Monica and your mother back to this world. There are so many weapons, occult treasures, ancient mantras and boons that we can achieve with no time. We will bring both Monica and your mother together."

Som asked Dadaji, "How we can open the gates of the ocean and where are the gates? And wha..." again suddenly Dadaji interrupts him and says Som my son today we have tried a lot and we have to do so many things together. Now it's too late for the conversation. Allow me to tell you each and everything completely from starting to the end but only tomorrow. Till now you please sleep well. Let me also relax and be fit and fine so that I can help you tomorrow to your final destination.

With those words he came to his room and pretended to sleep. But Dadaji is Dadaji. In a few minutes he came out of his room with the seven relics. There is no mantra for the gates to come.

In fact, there is nothing as a gate towards the ocean. But there is a temple-like fort inside the Arabian Sea. And it opens only in forty-one years or with the indri's voice, which has a different noise than the regular one. And there is only one Indri Lemur in the world at every time before

one dies. This Dadaji found that INDRI when that indri saw Som for the first time, he shouted the difference. Dadaji suddenly ordered to shut that big Indri mouth and take him inside the deep cave.

Their Som didn't notice that but happened

With the help of the evil mind of Dadaji.

Sad but now Dadaji can open the way and call the temple of occults from deep sea/ocean to come live up at the ocean. Dadaji also knew the INDRI would sound only if the temple was nearby.

It took more than 10 days to reach the Arabian sea from the Andaman and Nicobar island but still a myth cannot be explained how Dadaji came to the main center of the temple in hours. There are not just relics in this world but there are seven different portals in this world. Each portal works differently. And Dadaji is the only man in this world who knows the four main portals.

The smallest portal in this world is from South Bhougha of Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Center of the Arabian Sea.

They are almost near the temple. Slow boat speed, slow noise, deep breaths, fresh cool air as they are saying to keep calm and listen to the music from the ocean which water creates. The big giant INDRI opens his eyes at the least and is shaken a little. Relaxed and comfortable himself and stands like he is giving someone great respect. Staring at the sky is about to make a noise. A noise which INDRI

lemur doesn't make usually. The only second noise an INDRI make in every forty-one years and he tuned the voice. He shouted while watching the sky. Shouted again. And again.

3 times he shouted and nothing happened. Dadaji waited for 3 minutes and said nothing. Only this is becoming the increase of silence continues. The deep and deep silence. And suddenly water is flowing in all the direction as something is emerging from the ocean. Something very, very, big emerged from the ocean and Dadaji felt the happiness of the temple. He first whispered then shouted the time has come and I've waited for hundred years.

The temple is emerging from the ocean. The largest temple in the world with each side, is just flowing like a lake. Too many creatures came with the temple, too many died in no time. Some went down by diving, some by the flow of water and 1 just flew like a bird. There was no such wonderful place on earth at that time and Dadaji and two others witnessed. But the INDRI lemur is not watching the temple. In fact, he is showing his back to the temple as he doesn't want to see it. The lemur's look so sad and depressed that Dadaji did not notice. And suddenly, when the temple emerged completely on the very ocean the INDRI lemur dived into the water and didn't come back. It looks like he did this for a purpose. And he felt very sad that he knew it was his last breath.

Before Dadaji can enter the temple, he told his disciple to reach to the edge side of the temple as if one side of the temple glows it will turn the entire temple into a lighting house without any fire or lamp.

Everything was perfect until Dadaji saw Som was watching everything from the back.



Chapter 13



Dadaji and his disciples appeared almost instantly, vanishing from the deep jungles of Bhogua in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and reappearing in the very heart of the Arabian Sea. The shift happened within mere seconds, for they traveled not by ordinary means, but through a secret portal.

This portal was no ordinary doorway—it was a hidden passage between worlds, one that Dadaji had guarded for centuries. Few even knew of its existence. Only he, and a handful of his most trusted disciples, held the knowledge of these secret gates.

Far away, on the other side, Som stirred. A faint voice, soft yet persistent, called out his name. The voice grew closer, more familiar, until his heart recognized it.

It was Monica.

Though her body was no longer alive, her soul had returned—drawn back not by chance, but with purpose. She had come to protect Som, to guide him, and to reveal truths he had never imagined. Her presence shimmered like a fragile flame, yet her words carried a force stronger than any storm.

“Som,” she whispered, “I have been fighting for you. Dadaji has been trying to pull you under his spell, to bind you with his black magic. He wants you to become his disciple. He seeks to control your mind and spirit. But I could not let that happen. I tried everything to distract you from his hypnosis. I even veiled the truth of my death from you—because your love for me was too powerful. But now, I cannot hide any longer. You must know everything.”

Her voice trembled with urgency, yet there was warmth in her tone.

“There is no time left. Wake up and follow Dadaji. But listen carefully—he must not see you, he must not hear you. And most importantly, wherever he goes, you must follow the same path. Only then will you learn the truth. But remember, Som... I cannot guide you there. I am also new to this path, and even I do not know what lies ahead.”

Som’s chest tightened with fear. “What path are you talking about? I feel uneasy... nervous... This doesn’t feel like any ordinary way. Is it even safe? Monica, I trust you more than my own life, but this feels... dangerous.”

Monica placed her hand gently upon him, though she was only a soul. “If you trust me, then know this—I will never abandon you. I would never leave you alone in such a storm. But before you follow him, you must understand one truth.”

Her voice lowered, grave and serious.

“Dadaji is about to open a portal—one that leads from this island into another ocean. That path is far too deep, too dangerous, and impossible to return from. Only he can pass through freely. For others, it is a risk beyond measure.”

“Portals? What portals?” Som asked, his eyes wide with confusion.

“I cannot explain everything now,” Monica said quickly. “But trust me. Follow him at once.”

Without another thought, Som obeyed. He ran swiftly, hiding in the shadows, keeping his eyes on Dadaji. He watched as the old sage raised his hands and whispered an incantation. Before Som’s eyes, an ancient tree shifted and moved aside, revealing a hidden path.

Dadaji and his disciples stepped into the tree and vanished. But their journey did not end there. The secret passage led them to the other side of a towering mountain, back in Bhogua once again. There, Dadaji traced patterns with his hands—on bark, on stone, and on the earth itself. Every step was counted, every symbol placed with precision.

Finally, he pushed a wooden boat forward. But instead of sliding upon water, the boat rose into the air. Before them shimmered, what seemed like an empty space—yet as soon as they stepped toward it, they disappeared.

It was another portal. A hidden door that no one in the world knew of—except Dadaji.

But Som had seen it all. He had followed silently, copying every movement, every step. And when Dadaji and his disciples vanished, Som did the same.

Moments later, Monica appeared beside him once more. Her presence felt stronger now.

“Even I can enter the portal now,” she said softly.

Som blinked in confusion. “What do you mean? What stopped you before? Why now?”

Monica only smiled, her eyes holding secrets she wasn’t ready to share. “That... is a long story.”

“Tell me now,” Som demanded, his voice tight with fear. “Tell me before I die. Because I don’t think I can survive this.”

He was trembling, though he tried to hide it.

Monica placed her hand on his shoulder. “Wait. Let Dadaji go first. Give it two, three minutes. Then you can follow. Or... I will go before you.”

“No,” Som said firmly.

She hesitated. “I have been through this before but—”

“But what?” Som pressed.

Monica paused. Then shook her head. “Nothing. Just wait. I will be back in a moment.”

Before Som could stop her, she ran forward into the shimmering space. The portal flared open for an instant—and like a spark vanishing into darkness, Monica was gone.

A heartbeat later, she returned, her voice urgent. "Now. It is safe. Enter now!"

Som took a deep breath. His hands trembled, but he steadied himself. He turned to his own small handmade boat, the one he had crafted with his own skill and faith. He pushed it forward, his eyes fixed on the portal ahead.

And then—he entered.

Som blinked rapidly, his voice trembling.

"What...? Am I alive? What have I just seen? What did I just witness?"

Before he could say another word, Monica pressed a finger to her lips, silencing him. Her eyes shone with urgency.

With a gentle motion of her hand, she summoned her hidden strength. The small boat lifted soundlessly, as though carried by invisible wings. It glided above the glowing current without making the slightest ripple or noise.

"Not a sound," Monica whispered. "If Dadaji notices us, everything will be lost."

Som swallowed hard, his heart hammering.

Meanwhile, the corridor around them stirred. One after another, new portals flickered open—strange and shifting, as if someone else were controlling them from beyond. These were not like the steady gates Som had seen before; they writhed, changed shape, and pulsed with a living energy.

Monica's gaze traveled farther than Som's eyes could reach. Her spirit vision pierced the distance, revealing what lay beyond.

"Look," she whispered softly. "Others have come."

Through the shimmering expanse, figures appeared—people gathering at the far edge of the sea. Some had come simply to witness the impossible: the sudden rise of a grand temple, breaking free from the ocean's depths. Others lingered in shadows, not to marvel but to spy, to see who dared to enter the sacred fortress known as Durgh-Kottam.

Som gasped as he saw the impossible unfold. From the depths of the ocean, stone towers rose, dripping with saltwater, their carvings glowing faintly under the dim light. It was not built by mortal hands in that moment—it had emerged, called forth by Dadaji's command.

But the sight carried sorrow. The sea, in its rage, claimed a life in return. The indri—a great spirit of the ocean—had risen, dipped back into the waters, and in the process, demanded a sacrifice. Som's eyes widened as he realized what had happened.

"Dadaji... he gave his own life force to raise this temple," Som whispered in shock.

Yet Dadaji stood firm, his disciples around him, as if nothing had shaken their path.

Monica, however, was not looking at the temple. She had fixed her gaze on the distant watchers. Hidden behind

veils of illusion, they tried to cloak themselves. But Monica could see through their disguises.

Their eyes burned—not with awe, but with fury. Envy. Hatred. Silent rage that cut deeper than any sword.

Som followed her gaze, but to him there was only mist. He could not see what she saw. “What is it? Who are they?” he asked nervously.



Monica did not answer. She remained calm, still, her face serene even as shadows of anger flickered in the distance.

“They are watching,” she finally whispered, her tone steady. “But they cannot yet touch us.”

And so, she remained silent, her spirit unwavering—calmly watching the watchers.

Som turned to Monica, whispering urgently, “What did you see? Did you notice something?”

Her eyes narrowed, distant, as though she was still gazing beyond the veil. “Not something... much. Too much.”

“Is it true?” Som asked nervously.

Monica’s voice grew heavy with unease. “I cannot name what Dadaji has summoned from these dark waters. But I do not feel safe. Neither you nor he are safe here. Eyes are upon us, Som—so many eyes. They’re not only watching him... I can feel them on me as well.”

Her words unsettled him. “Is it so? Don’t say that—you’re scaring me.”

But Monica only pointed upward, her face pale. “People are arriving from every direction. Some even descend from the skies... I can scarcely believe my own eyes.”

Before Som could reply, Dadaji appeared before him. His sudden presence froze the air.

“How did you come here?” the old sage asked, his voice calm yet piercing. “Did you follow me? Did you use the portal?”

Som’s throat tightened. His answer stumbled out in a trembling voice. “Y–yes... yes, Dadaji.”

The elder’s expression remained unreadable—calm, strange, and deeply serious, as though his mind was working through some hidden calculation.

“How did you pass through so easily?” he pressed. “Did someone guide you? Is there anything you wish to confess?”

Monica’s voice echoed in Som’s mind: “Do not reveal anything. Just go with the flow.”

“No, Dadaji!” Som blurted. “I only followed you. I saw you from behind... I just wanted to make sure you were safe. That’s all.”

Dadaji’s eyes narrowed. “And this boat? Where did you get it?”

Before Som could answer, the sea roared. From the towering temple that had risen out of the ocean, colossal creatures plunged down into the waters. Waves crashed violently, shaking the very air, silencing their words.

When the waters settled, Dadaji’s voice returned, low and commanding.



“You must enter the gates,” he said. “Inside, you will find a red gate. Beyond it lies a red box wrapped in red cloth. Within it—what I seek.”

Som’s breath caught, but Dadaji leaned closer, whispering an ancient mantra into his ear. The words were old, powerful, heavy with a force Som barely understood.

Then, handing him a stone tablet etched with symbols, he said,

“Speak this mantra twice before the red gate. Do not stray. Do not be tempted. This temple is filled with countless doors. Enter none but the red one. Do not touch the weapons, the relics, the kavachas, nor any treasure of metal or stone. If you hear a woman’s voice—or even mine—do not answer. All of it may be an illusion. Remember only this: find the red gate, speak the mantra, and bring me the stone.”

Som’s hands trembled as he took the tablet. His eyes instinctively sought Monica. She stood beside him, her gaze steady, but her silence carried more weight than words.

Som’s heart pounded. His look toward her said everything: What should I do now?

Monica raised her hand, stopping Som just as he prepared to step forward.

“Wait,” she whispered urgently. “Ask him—ask your grandfather why he wants that stone. And why must it be you who enters this temple.”

Som hesitated but obeyed. Turning to Dadaji, he asked, “Why, Dadaji? Why do you need this stone? And why only me?”

The old sage’s expression remained still, his eyes deep with secrets. “We don’t have enough time,” he replied firmly. “Bring me the stone first, and I will tell you everything. The whole story will be yours.”

“Another story, Dadaji?” Som muttered, suspicious yet nervous.

Monica leaned closer to him, her voice low and urgent. “Tell him this—tell him the seventh relic is not real. That it was made by someone else.”

Som swallowed and repeated her words. “The seventh relic... It’s not real. It was crafted by someone.”

The effect was instant.

Dadaji’s calm broke. In a swift, almost violent motion, he snatched the stone tablet from Som’s lap, clutching it like a thief protecting stolen treasure. His eyes burned as he studied the carvings with trembling fingers.

“Who told you this?” His voice thundered like a storm. “Who told you the seventh relic is false? Who dares feed you such knowledge? Speak! Who is your source?”

Som froze under his grandfather’s fury. But before he could open his mouth, Monica’s voice whispered sharply inside him: “If you reveal me, you’ll never see me again. Tell him it was your own intuition—that you felt it in your spirit.”

Som obeyed. His voice shook but carried conviction. “I don’t know who told me... I only felt it. Something inside me said the seventh relic isn’t real.”

Dadaji’s face stiffened. His anger faded into disbelief, then slowly shifted into grim recognition. “Perhaps you are right... This may not be a true relic. If so, then even this

mantra..." He looked down at the tablet, his voice trailing off. "It may not be the correct one."

Before Som could question him further, the heavens cracked open. A terrible sound—like the very sky tearing apart—shook the air.

Lightning without light. Thunder without clouds. A sound so unnatural that Som felt it in his bones.

Dadaji's eyes widened. He understood at once. There was no time.

Without hesitation, he reached into his robes, drew a pinch of fine powder, and cast it into the air. The dust shimmered, and a faint outline of a portal flickered before them.

"Quickly," he ordered. But his head turned repeatedly, watching the shadows behind them. It was clear—he feared being followed.

Meanwhile, Monica had already darted away, her soul moving swifter than the wind. She shot forward like a streak of light, vanishing into the distance to scout the hidden figures that lingered far beyond sight. Her speed was unnatural, like a rocket splitting through the air.

Som's eyes followed her, his lips parted as if to call her back, but no sound came. Fear gripped him.

The boat rocked violently as the portal opened wide. Som and Dadaji crossed into its pull. A moment later, the light swallowed them whole.

When they emerged, they were no longer at sea. They fell through open air, crashing down toward the dense jungles of Bhogua Island once more. The force of their descent shook Som's breath away, and the world spun into chaos.

The fall was brutal. Som lost consciousness before he even hit the ground.

When his eyes fluttered open, the world was spinning—the damp sand of Bhogua Island beneath him, the crash of waves in the distance. His head ached, his body bruised.

Around him, everyone lay scattered, unconscious. Even Dadaji had fallen, his chest barely rising with breath. Only one other man, groaning in pain, had awakened near Som.

Som's first instinct was to search. His eyes darted in every direction. The shore. The trees. The horizon. But Monica was nowhere. Not a trace. Not even the faint glow of her presence.

Confusion gripped him. Did she ever need the portal at all? Was she bound by its pull—or free of it? The thought unsettled him, as though he had been left behind in a game he could not understand.

Shaking the doubts away, Som turned toward his grandfather. Dadaji was still motionless, about to stir awake. Som and the other survivor bent down to lift him. For the first time in his life, Som did not treat his

grandfather with the gentleness he always had. He hoisted him up roughly, almost with disdain, anger flooding his voice.

“If you hide even one more thing from me,” Som spat, “I’ll never believe you again. Not in this life.”

Dadaji coughed, his frail body trembling under Som’s grip. But Som did not soften. His anger was sharper than compassion.

The old man’s weary eyes caught the fire in Som’s gaze, and he understood. He said quietly, “Let us reach home first. Then we will talk.”

The group split on the island’s edge. Two men walked to the right, carrying the half-conscious body of their companion. Som and Dadaji went left, through the shadow of the trees, disappearing into the dense path that led toward home.

Even then, Som’s eyes scanned the forest edge, half-hoping Monica would appear from behind the trees. But she did not. The emptiness stung him more than he cared to admit. With a heavy heart, he returned his focus to Dadaji.

Inside the hut, the silence deepened. Som sat near his grandfather, not speaking, only glaring—his anger wordless but heavy, like a storm waiting to break. The silence stretched so far that the only sound was Som’s uneven breathing, his sniffing sharp in the stillness.

Finally, Dadaji raised his head. His voice was low but steady.

“Son, there are so many things I must share with you. But this is not the time. And yet... I will still tell you some of my truths.”

Som did not move, his eyes locked but his expression cold.

“As you already know, our family is guardians—keepers of temples, of weapons, of occult relics. But there is more. I am not allowed to enter the temple itself.”

“Why?” Som snapped, his voice carrying no curiosity—only bitterness.

Dadaji sighed deeply. “That is... a long story.”

“Leave it, then,” Som cut him short, his words sharp. “Just tell me—what was that portal we entered?”

The question hung in the air.

Instead of answering, Dadaji looked at him with sorrow. “Are you angry with me, Som?”

Som did not reply. His silence was louder than any words.

Finally, he rose, turned his back, and walked to his room. He sat heavily on a chair, staring into the night, his thoughts racing. His heart burned with disappointment—at Dadaji, at the secrets, at Monica’s absence.

And so he sat alone, planning his next move.

That night weighed heavier than any before.

Som had fallen asleep on the chair, his arms crossed, his head tilted back against the wall. Even in sleep, the tension on his face remained—the stubborn anger of a boy betrayed by trust.

Dadaji stepped quietly into the room. For a long moment, he simply stood there, watching his grandson. His old hands trembled slightly, not from weakness, but from the burden of secrets too long kept.

He lowered himself onto the edge of the bed, his eyes never leaving Som. The boy breathed slowly, deeply—lost in a restless dream.

“Som...” Dadaji whispered, though he knew his words would not be heard.

He waited, as though hoping his grandson might stir, might wake, might demand the truth once more. But Som remained motionless.

At last, Dadaji sighed. The decision was made. Tomorrow, there would be no more silence, no more half-told stories. The weight he carried had to pass on, even if it shattered everything.

“I will tell you everything,” he murmured to the sleeping boy, his voice trembling between guilt and resolve.

The oil lamp flickered, shadows dancing across the walls. Dadaji sat there through the night, keeping vigil by Som’s side, the truth finally pressing against his lips, waiting for the dawn.

Hours passed before Som's eyes finally opened. He woke up from the chair with a start and rushed straight to Dadaji's room. But Dadaji wasn't there. Not just from the room — he was nowhere on the entire island.

Som searched everywhere, growing restless, until his mind nearly broke with frustration. Exhausted and weak, he sat for his meal, hoping at least food would calm his nerves.

But the moment he touched his plate, something strange happened. A sudden wind flowed in through the window, shaking the dining table. The vibrations startled him, but what truly froze his heart was a faint whisper carried by that wind:

“Soo...nuuu...”

Som stopped eating. His breath quickened.

Again, the voice came, slightly louder, trembling with emotion:

“Som... beta...”

And then, almost clearly —

“I think you are able to hear my voice... I am... your mother. Your real mother.”

Tears welled up in Som's eyes. He cried like a child. He wasn't afraid, not even for a moment — because deep inside, he knew. It was her. His biological mother.

His heartbeat pounded so strongly that even the voice said softly:

“Beta... I can’t hear your words, but I can feel your heartbeat.”

Som sobbed and whispered, “Yes, Mamma... yes, Mamma...” He repeated it twice, hoping she would hear.

But she couldn’t.

Instead, her voice continued, urgent and strained:

“I feel you can hear me. Listen carefully – I don’t have much time. Don’t trust a single word that old man says. He is not trustworthy. Don’t go anywhere he takes you. Don’t touch his powders or bhasma. Don’t let him touch your forehead or your head. Don’t look into his eyes for too long. Don’t talk to him continuously. Never bring him what he demands.”

Som’s heart raced. At that moment, he understood: Dadaji was not who he appeared to be.

Her voice grew fainter, but urgent:

“Whenever you get the chance, find

The ‘Neelakurinji flower’ from the Nilgiri hills. Then take one stone from the Nilgiri mountain and put it together with you always. Never let him know you have it. My child... I wish I could give you the love you deserve. And that child Monica... she is so pure. I pray that in another life, we may all be together. Always remember – your mother loves you. Stay safe.”

“Don’t go, Mamma!” Som cried, pounding the table. “Don’t go, Mamma... don’t go...” He shouted it four times,

breaking down like a helpless boy. His tears streamed as he stood, punched the dining table, and stormed into his room.

Radha Bai, the maid, heard the commotion and followed him. She called softly:

“Bittu...” – the name she lovingly used for him. “Bittu, open the door and talk to me.”

From inside, Som shouted, “Radha Bai, go! I’m fine.”

But she didn’t leave. She heard his weeping from behind the door. Standing there, she whispered again, using the name from his childhood:

“Bittu Baba... I must tell you something. Something Dadaji never allowed me to say.”

The moment Som heard those words, his tears stopped. His instincts told him – Radha Bai knew the truth about Dadaji.

He flung open the door and demanded, “Tell me where he is! Tell me his plans! Who is he really? What are his powers? Is he a tantrik?”

Radha Bai raised her hands, trembling. “Baba, please... calm down. I don’t know if he is a tantrik or something worse. But he is not who he pretends to be. He acts kindly in front of others, but he manipulates minds. He knows how to hypnotize people... and he is dangerous.”

Som’s eyes blazed. “No, Radha Bai. I want to know everything he has done – and everything he can do.”

Her voice dropped low, filled with fear. “Som Baba, don’t get involved in his dark business. He is more powerful than we can imagine. He controls even your father. If we step into his world, we may only destroy ourselves. Instead... focus on your mother.”

Som froze. Shock spread across his face. Did she know he had just spoken to his mother’s spirit?

Before he could ask, Radha Bai whispered:

“Som Baba, I don’t have much time. He may return any moment. But know this – your mother... is still alive. He has kept her hidden somewhere in a remote place in the Himalayas - Uttrakhand, India.”

Baba, I don't know the exact name, but I read that name in ‘The Hindu’ newspaper.

Radha Bai’s voice trembled as she spoke.

“Yes... your mother is still alive. Your Dadaji kept her imprisoned. I do not know the exact place, but it is somewhere in the Himalayas.”

“The Himalayas?” Som’s eyes widened, his voice rising with urgency.

“Where in the Himalayas, Radha Bai? Tell me where!” He asked again, more desperately.

“Baba, I don’t remember the exact name... but I once saw it printed in an Indian newspaper,” she whispered.

Som shook his head in disbelief.

“Radha Bai, I understand you don’t recall the exact place where he kept my mother. But tell me — how can I possibly find that newspaper here? We are stranded on a remote island, far from India. And even if I could find it, how would I know the exact date of the paper you read?”

Her face lit with sudden memory.

“We can find it, Baba! We can! That newspaper is in a trunk at our old house. Do you remember the day you returned from London? Your Dadaji already knew you were coming, and that same day he told me to recover many things from the house. Among them was that newspaper. He said it was of no use anymore and asked me to burn it or throw it away. But I kept it safely, using it at the bottom of your trunks, beneath your toys.”

Som froze. His voice sharpened with suspicion.

“Radha Bai... I am one hundred percent sure that no one — not even Dadaji — was told about my return from London. How did he know we were coming?”

Radha Bai lowered her eyes. “Forget it, Baba... there is no time left to think of that now.”

But Som wasn’t finished. “Wait. Tell me, what else do you remember, Radha Bai?”

She shook her head, her hands trembling. “Only this much, Som Baba.”

Som stared at her in surprise. “Som Baba? You have never called me by that name before.”

Her lips quivered, and her whole body shook with unease. Som noticed it and gently placed his hand on hers.

“Relax, Radha Bai. Go and rest. I’ll manage the rest.”

Som waited until evening, but still, Dadaji had not returned home. The silence of the island grew heavier with every passing hour, and finally, Som made up his mind. He would leave for their old house in Delhi, India – the place where answers might still be hiding.

He called upon his friend for help. Before departing, he gave strict instructions.

“Listen carefully,” Som said. “When Dadaji returns, do not tell him anything about where I’ve gone. If he asks, you must say you last saw me heading toward the haunted house. Tell him I said I would come back only when I feel fresh and normal. Tell this same thing to anyone who asks about me. Nothing more, nothing less.”

His friend nodded. “I will say exactly what you told me.”

Som lowered his voice, his eyes sharp with caution.

“I may fall into great danger if Dadaji’s secret agents, or even the British, catch me. I will have to hide my identity. If something happens, and you need to reach me, remember – I will not be Som anymore. I will carry another name.”

“What name?” his friend asked.

After a moment of thought, Som replied, "Call me Vishwanath Sharma if you need to search for me."

His friend frowned. "I don't like it. What if I forget? Or what if there are dozens of Vishwanath Sharmas out there? How will I know it's you?"

Som paused, then smiled faintly. "You're right. It must be something unique."

He thought deeply for a few minutes. Then suddenly his eyes lit up with an idea.

"Unos," he said firmly.

His friend laughed. "Unos? What kind of name is that?"

"Don't laugh," Som snapped gently. "I'm serious. Think about it – it is still my name, but reversed. Som becomes unoS. That way, no one else will have it."

His friend blinked, then smiled. "Correct. I understand now. Unos it is."

Som tried the sound of it aloud. "Unos... Unos Mathew."

His friend chuckled again. "First Sharma, now Mathew? Why Mathew?"

"Because it makes me sound foreign," Som explained. "If I am to fool others, I must not look like a native. I need to be someone unrecognizable."

From his trunk, Som carefully picked out the clothes he had worn in London – a fine coat, trousers, polished shoes, and a hat gifted to him by his friend Makki Singh. He dressed swiftly.

When his friend looked at him, his eyes widened in surprise.

“Wow! You look different. Not from our country at all.”

“That’s exactly what I want,” Som said, adjusting the hat.

Before leaving, he gave his friend one final warning.

“Help me get off this island quickly. And remember – never reveal the true route I take. Do not ever say I went through Visakhapatnam. Even if the time comes when you must tell, say only this: He promised to inform me once he reached West Bengal. Nothing more.”

His friend placed a hand on his shoulder. “I understand.”

With that, Som – now Unos Mathew – slipped away from the island’s shores. The wind carried him forward, across waters and lands, until the lights of New Delhi awaited him, holding both danger and destiny.



Chapter 14



Return to Delhi, India.

Som first reached Visakhapatnam, planning to travel straight to Delhi. But as he prepared to continue his journey, a sudden memory struck him — his mother’s voice, soft yet firm, echoing in his heart:

“Whenever you get the chance, keep the Nilgiri stone with you... always.”

Som could not ignore those words. They were not just a memory — they felt like a command. Without hesitation, he changed his plans. Instead of Delhi, he set his path toward the Nilgiri Mountains in Tamil Nadu, the place his mother had once spoken of.

South India was a new world to him. He was raw, unfamiliar, a stranger to its lands and people. Still, determination guided his steps. After an exhausting day of travel, Som reached the station near Nilgiris. Fatigue weighed heavily on his shoulders, but his will kept him standing.

That night, he sat quietly at the station, waiting. The air was damp and cool, filled with the distant scent of soil after rain. Around him, the station buzzed with the sounds

of vendors, tired travelers, and the occasional whistle of a train cutting through the silence.

By dawn, Som woke from his brief rest, washed himself quickly, and set out. His eyes, though weary, held a fire. He began the search for the Nilgiri Mountains – the legendary Blue Mountains, wrapped in mist, mystery, and perhaps, the answers his destiny demanded.

Som had always imagined Nilgiri Mountain as a single towering peak. But when he arrived, he found something far greater—an entire chain of mountains spreading across three states, massive and endless. The sight overwhelmed him. Exhausted from travel, he checked into a small lodge, ignoring the riots and political movements echoing across India. For Som, only rest mattered.

When he woke up later and had lunch, the locals spoke of Nilgiri's beauty. They told him about a rare flower that bloomed there—some swore it blossomed once in twelve years, others said once a decade, and one even claimed once in a century. The mystery only deepened Som's curiosity.

He was determined to take a stone from the mountain. Why had his mother asked him to keep a Nilgiri stone with him always? At first, it seemed easy—just to pick up a pebble. But he couldn't shake the feeling that there was something special about the stone she meant. Did she have a specific one in mind? He searched for his memory, but instead, thoughts of Monica came flooding back.

“Where is she, when I need her the most?” he whispered, his chest tightening. For the first time, he let his tears fall.

Just then, chaos erupted. A group of men boarded his bus, demanding names and castes, checking surnames one by one. Fear gripped Som—Were they searching for him? A man ahead of him gave his name: “Dada Bhai Gandhi.” The officers froze, whispered among themselves, and told the crowd to report if they ever came across that name again. Som barely understood, but it was enough to shake him deeply.

Wasting no time, he grabbed several stones—five, from different parts of the mountain—in case he chose the wrong one. Then he fled, taking three different trains across India. Two days later, exhausted and broken, Som stumbled into Old Delhi Station. His face was pale, his body weak, and he fainted on the ground.

A passerby rushed to help. He splashed water on Som’s face and studied him closely. Then Som opened his eyes.

“Rajiv Bhaiyya...” he whispered.

Rajiv froze, stunned. The moment he heard his name in Som’s voice, memories returned—his brother’s childhood friend, the boy he hadn’t seen in years, was lying before him.

Rajiv pulled him close. “Why have you come to Delhi? What happened to you?” His tone was not professional, not distant, but protective, like a true elder brother.

Som struggled to explain, and Rajiv grew stern. "Look at what you've done to yourself. All for love? She's gone, Som. Accept it. This is not your age for such madness."

But Som interrupted, almost pleading. "Bhai, you're mistaken. This isn't about Monica. I came for my mother."

Rajiv's eyes softened. He listened quietly as Som explained everything from the day they lost contact. By the end, Rajiv placed a hand on his shoulder. "Forgive me, Som. Stay with me while you're here in Delhi. If this is about your mother, then I'll help you."

Som shook his head. "No, Brother, I've troubled you enough."

Rajiv snapped. "Silence. I am your elder brother. This is not a request—it's an order. And besides... give me one more chance. Last time I failed you, but not now. This is my city. I have contacts, influence. Let me help."

Som finally agreed. That night, over dinner, they laughed about their childhood and the mischievous mistakes of their old friend Aryan. For a moment, Som felt like he was home.

But Rajiv had his own burden. For weeks, he had been investigating a strange case: an abandoned house that glowed with unnatural light. People who entered the house had gone missing, leaving no trace. Officials had forbidden him from pursuing the matter, but Rajiv felt personal responsibility. His late wife's father had once been connected to that very house.

He looked at Som, sleeping peacefully after days of hardship. For now, he has said nothing. Tomorrow, he will return to that house. And tomorrow, Som's journey in Delhi will take a darker turn.

Som tried to close his eyes and surrender to sleep, but slumber would not come. His mind was restless, tangled in a web of worries. The more he struggled, the heavier the silence of the room became. Irritation crept in; he tossed from side to side, hoping for relief.

At last, weariness of a different kind overtook him—not of the body, but of the heart. He sat upright, staring into the dim shadows around him. If sleep would not claim him, then perhaps the night itself had something else in store.

Quietly, with a sudden resolve, Som rose from his bed. He dressed, his hands moving with a strange urgency, and without another thought he stepped out into the night. The streets lay heavy with silence, but his destination was clear. That night, he set out toward his old home—drawn by memories, by restlessness, and by something he could not yet name.

Som reached his old house, and the moment his eyes fell upon it, a strange unease stirred in him. Though the house stood in silence, he felt the uncanny weight of presence inside, as if someone unseen lived there. The walls seemed to breathe, quietly, without a sound.

But urgency left him no time for fear. Pushing aside the odd sensation, he stepped into the house. Memories

rushed to him—echoes of his childhood, laughter once woven into these walls. For a moment, he felt the sweetness of the past brushing against his heart.

Without wasting another breath, Som climbed the creaking stairs. He was searching for the old iron chest that had been hidden for years. When he finally found it, half-buried under dust, his hands trembled. He wiped it clean and unlatched it. Inside lay relics of his boyhood—his forgotten toys.

He smiled, warmth softening the heaviness of the night. One toy filled him with such joy that he slipped it carefully into his bag, as though carrying a piece of his lost innocence with him.

At the bottom of the chest, his eyes caught sight of a folded newspaper. Something about it tugged at his suspicion. Could this be the one? He lifted it with one hand while his other hand continued to rummage, searching for more clues—another paper, another sign.

And then—suddenly—something snatched the newspaper from his grasp.

Startled, Som's heart pounded. His head jerked upward, but in his panic, he rose too quickly. His skull struck hard against the wooden frame of the bed above. A sharp pain flashed—and the world around him collapsed into darkness.



Chapter 15



The secrets of Vibhooti

When Som awoke, the world was dim and heavy. His wrists burned, the coarse rope had bound him tightly to the

very bed he had struck his head upon. Panic surged through him as his eyes darted across the room. His bag lay open on the floor, completely empty. The stones, the toy, the paper—everything was gone.

And in that moment, a chilling realization struck him: Dadaji... he is here.

Rage boiled within him. He cursed himself for ignoring the signs—for dismissing the strange presence he had sensed in his house. How could I have been so blind? Shame burned, but anger burned hotter. To him, it felt as though the entire game had ended before it truly began.

The hinges groaned softly as the door creaked open. A figure entered, moving slowly, deliberately, and then stopped to look directly at him.

Som's voice thundered in defiance.

"I am not afraid of you! Go—call your master. Bring that old man to me. Does he think I will remain in the dark forever? I am not the kind you can silence!"

His words, sharp and fierce, echoed in the small room. The figure stepped closer, unshaken by Som's rage. Som glared, his chest heaving, but then—something shifted. He began to sense no threat, no intent to harm. His voice, once loud, slowly dimmed, like a fire losing its fuel.

He stared harder at the stranger, searching for answers in his face. Confusion gnawed at him until suddenly the man broke the silence.

"Tell me... are you Ashlesha's son?"

The name struck Som like a blade through the fog. His breath caught. His anger froze. For the first time that night, fear was not of the ropes or the shadows—but of the truth that might follow.

Confused and trembling, Som finally managed to speak.

“Yes... yes, I am. But how do you know? How could you be certain I am Ashlesha’s son?”

The stranger, still untying the ropes from Som’s hands, gave a faint smile.

“I saw the stones in your bag. When your mother first learned of Nilgiri’s power, she too carried three, four stones back with her. Just as you have done.”

Som frowned, rubbing his sore wrists. “But how can you be so sure? These are just ordinary rocks from Nilgiri Mountain. They look like any other stone. How can you name them Nilgiri stones?”

The man’s smile sharpened, touched with mystery.

“Because you entered this house unhindered. You walked through its illusions, climbed its stairs, opened that chest—all without being deceived. Our art failed before two kinds of stones. Two alone. One is the Nilgiri stone. The other... was known only to your mother and your grandfather. And now, with your mother gone, that secret is lost forever. As for your grandfather—” he chuckled dryly—“getting him to reveal anything is like trying to snatch food from a lion’s mouth.”

He pushed a glass of water toward Som and gestured for him to drink. Respectfully, he handed Som back his bag.

“I’ve been held in this house for years,” the man continued. “Your grandfather bound me here. He swore me to oaths and sealed me in chains of mantras. My family—my blood—are trapped because of him. Until now, I have obeyed, for disobedience would mean their destruction.”

Som’s eyes widened. “Trapped? What do you mean? Does he... torture them?”

The man shook his head. “Not torture. Your grandfather is neither as wicked as some believe, nor as righteous as others think. He walks between. But understand this—he has bartered loyalty in exchange for my family’s safety. If I betray him, they perish.”

Som leaned forward, his voice taut. “But you’ve already betrayed him. You’ve sheltered me, given me refuge. Isn’t this the greatest betrayal of all?”

The man’s smile returned, this time edged with quiet defiance.

“That old man can do me no harm. No matter how many times I break his will, he cannot end me. But I—oh, I can destroy much of what he holds. Your grandfather stands alone. Against him, we are an army.”

Som’s brow furrowed. “Then why have you not gone to the authorities? Filed complaints? Stood against him in

the open? How can a man so dangerous, so feared, walk freely in society?"

The man's eyes darkened. "There are truths you are not ready to hear. All will be told, but not here, not now. You must leave this house. At once. That old man—your grandfather—he will return any moment."

Som's breath caught. "How do you know he is coming?"

"I felt it when he left Bhogua," the man replied. "The ground trembled with his departure. His return will not be quiet."

Som's heart raced. "You... you know about Bhogua too?"

"Yes, I know about Bhogua," Som admitted, his voice low but firm. "It was my grandfather who created it—like a hidden island cut away from the world."

The man nodded slowly. "You are right. And I can reveal all his secrets to you. But not now. You must leave this place at once. That old man will be here any moment."

He leaned closer, his eyes glinting with urgency. "Were you searching for this newspaper? Tell me what you want from it. But remember—you cannot take it with you. That old man is clever beyond measure. He will know."

Som's breath quickened. "There is a name in it," he confessed. "My maid once tried to tell me. She didn't know the place clearly—she thought it was somewhere in the

Himalayas, but she couldn't remember the exact name. She is simple, uneducated. She only knew that this paper held the truth. My grandfather ordered her to tear it apart, but she couldn't. Instead, Radha Bai hid it here, in this trunk."

The man's expression softened. "Radha Bai is one of us. But she is bound, forced into silence for the sake of her son. All of us—slaves under your grandfather's grip." He sighed, his voice both heavy and reassuring. "Do not worry. I know what Radha Bai was trying to tell you. Meet me tomorrow evening, at seven o'clock, near Jantar Mantar. There is much you need to hear."

He gestured toward the door, urging Som to leave quickly. As Som stepped into the dark corridor, the man turned back into the room.

From a small pouch, he pulled a pinch of sacred powder—vibhooti. At first, it glowed a deep blue, but as he whispered an incantation, the grains shifted color, turning from grey to the darkest black. With solemn precision, he cast the powder into the air. It swirled, thick and heavy, filling every corner of the room like shadows come alive.



Chapter 16



Jantar Mantar, Delhi.

That night, when Som returned home, he found Rajiv Bhai arriving at the same time. Startled, Som quickly pretended as though he had only stepped out for a walk.

Rajiv noticed him and asked, “What are you doing here so late at night?”

“I was just... walking,” Som replied casually.

“With a bag?” Rajiv’s sharp eyes caught the detail.

Som froze, fear flickering across his face. But Rajiv laughed softly. “Relax, yaar. Don’t be so scared. Just promise me one thing, don’t leave without telling me.” With that, Rajiv walked inside, leaving Som slightly relieved yet restless.

The next morning, Som woke early, determined to plan everything for the day. Rajiv was not in his room; he had already gone for his usual jog. By the time Som entered the dining area, breakfast had been prepared. Some of Rajiv’s companions, curious about the unfamiliar face, asked Som who he was and where he had come from.

“My name is Unos Mathew,” Som replied without hesitation.

The men exchanged glances. “From where?”

“London,” Som answered with a smile. “I love India—it fascinates me. I’m here to explore.”

Rajiv entered just in time to overhear, his gaze sharp and questioning. After breakfast, he drew Som aside. “Why did you lie about your name?” he demanded.

Before Rajiv could press further, Som broke down and confessed. “I’ll tell you the truth. Last night, I went back to our old house... and I met someone there. Someone who already knew me.”

Rajiv frowned deeply. "Som, there was no one there. You were talking to yourself, as if to a shadow. I saw you. I was with you. You went inside, but when you returned, you didn't even acknowledge me. You came straight home."

A chill ran down Som's spine. "How... how do you know this? Were you following me?"

Rajiv shook his head slowly. "No, Som. I was right there with you. But you weren't speaking to me... or to anyone real."

Confusion consumed him. Som's voice broke as he cried, "I am not mad, bhaiyya. I am fine. Please, believe me."

Rajiv placed a hand on his shoulder. "I do believe you. But you need rest. You haven't healed since Monica... You're still carrying her shadow. That pain is haunting you."

Tears burned in Som's eyes. "No, bhaiyya. I am not broken."

Rajiv sighed, concerned. "Alright. Then promise me this—rest. Share your burden with me. I've already called a doctor. Dr. Ramakanth will be here soon."

The name struck Som like a thunderbolt. Dr. Ramakanth... if he recognizes me, everything will fall apart. Panic surged through him. He could not risk it.

As soon as Rajiv stepped out of the room, Som made up his mind. Without a word, he slipped away, leaving the house behind.

By evening, around six o'clock, he was already on his way to Jantar Mantar. His heart pounded as questions flooded his mind. What if this is a trap? What if that man is loyal to Dadaji? What if he tries to kill me?

A thousand doubts tangled his thoughts. And just as he was about to reach Jantar Mantar, fear gripped him so tightly that he stopped.

Instead of walking forward, Som turned away. His steps carried him in the opposite direction. The secrets of the evening would remain hidden, for Som chose not to arrive.

As Som turned back, trying to escape the pull of Jantar Mantar, a figure emerged from the shadows ahead. It was the same man he had seen the night before.

"Where are you going?" the stranger asked, his voice calm yet heavy, as though it carried secrets Som wasn't ready to hear.

Som froze. Who is he? Does he know me? Has he recognized me already? Thoughts collided inside his mind, but before he could gather himself, the man leaned closer and said,

"Don't you recognize me? Last night... I bound you. Have you forgotten already?"

A crooked smile stretched across his face, mocking and unsettling.

Som forced a shaky grin, trying to mask his fear. "I... I don't know you. You must be mistaken."

The man's eyes glimmered strangely. "Yesterday, I may have seemed different. Today, I stand before you as I truly am. I even brought the newspaper for you."

He held it out, almost casually. And in that moment, Som understood—this was no ordinary encounter. The man wasn't lying. He was the same one. The pieces of memory clicked together in Som's mind, and a chill ran down his spine.

Before Som could say anything more, the man interrupted,

"Will you stand here in the middle of the road and talk about everything? Come inside. There is much I must tell you."

Without asking too many questions, without thinking too much, Som followed him. After a few steps, he suddenly stopped and asked,

"What if this too is just another illusion?"

The man turned swiftly, his eyes steady.

"If it were an illusion, you wouldn't even get the chance to doubt it."

Those words struck deep. Som realized this man might be genuine. His worry loosened, his breath grew calmer.

“Come,” the man said. “Inside Jantar Mantar. There are things I must show you... and truths I must reveal.”

As they entered, something strange happened. The man’s face slowly shifted, his features bending until he appeared exactly like the figure Som had seen the previous night.

“Now,” he asked, standing tall before him, “do you recognize me?”

Som, without speaking, nodded silently—his eyes wide with acceptance.

The man drew closer, his voice grave.

“Listen to me carefully, Som. Your grandfather is no ordinary man. He is the most dangerous being alive. Even his solitude is a curse upon this world. Imagine, then—if he were to form a team?”

Som swallowed, unease pricking at him.

“The entire world?” he asked. “How can someone do all that with just small tricks of black magic?”

The man’s tone sharpened.

“Small tricks? Do not insult him so. That old man is no petty sorcerer. The world suffers because of his hunger, his powers. You must understand what I tell you now, or everything will be lost.”

He paused, then continued:

“This earth holds seven portals. Gateways between places, even between times. Ordinary people cannot see them, nor can they enter easily.”

Som’s eyes widened. He understood every word, for he had already seen and felt such things himself.

The man studied him. “You believe me, don’t you, Som? Or do you still think this is a joke?”

“No, sir,” Som replied quickly. Then hesitated. “But all this time, I haven’t even asked your name. What should I call you?”

The man’s expression hardened.

“For now, my name must remain unknown to you.”

Som nodded. “Very well. But I believe you—because I too once stepped through a portal. On a strange island in the Andamans... I found myself in the middle of the sea.”

The man’s eyes sharpened at once.

“Then it’s true. Your grandfather has discovered another portal.”

“Another portal?” Som repeated.

“Yes, Som. Your grandfather already knew of three portals. The rest—he hunted for them tirelessly. But now... now I realize he has found the fourth as well.”

“What if,” the man said darkly, “your grandfather already knows of all the portals? That, Som... is not a good sign at all.”

Som frowned, his voice steady but filled with doubt.

“What is inside these portals? What makes them so dangerous?”

The man shook his head. “Before you learn about the portals, you must first learn about your grandfather. Som... your grandfather does not belong to this time. He has walked this earth for nearly seven... perhaps nine hundred years.”

Som’s eyes widened in disbelief. He took a step back, shaking his head.

“No... I don’t believe this. This is too much. Too impossible.”

The man’s gaze did not waver. His tone carried both warning and sorrow.

“Impossible? You only say that because you do not yet know the depths of his truth. The portals are dangerous, yes—but the one who seeks to command them is far more dangerous than the portals themselves.”

“That man has witnessed centuries pass before his eyes,” the stranger said gravely.

“He saw the Mughals rise and fall... he saw the British conquer and leave. How old he truly is, even I cannot tell. But one thing I know for certain—his death is written. He does not possess the gift of immortality.”

Som’s eyes narrowed with confusion.

“But how? How can someone live for six... seven hundred years?”

“A boon!” the man thundered.

“A boon?” Som echoed, stunned.

“Yes, a boon,” the man repeated, his voice sharp.

“I do not know every detail... but I know this much: a great sage once placed his hand upon your grandfather’s head. And your grandfather made an enemy of a man far darker and more dangerous than any who has walked this world. In his obsession with the Seven Portals, he even invited the wrath of those who should never be crossed. His hunger, his madness—it only grew.”

The man’s voice grew heavier, almost like a chant.

“Your grandfather’s grandfather was a sage, a man of immense knowledge. It was from him that your grandfather first tasted wisdom. But instead of nurturing it, he twisted it. That sage, once pleased Lord Brahma himself, and from Brahma he received secret knowledge. Knowledge that passed down to your grandfather. And one day, through cunning and trickery, your Dadaji trapped even Brahma in his words. He asked for a boon—that his death could only occur in a specific moment, in a specific place, at the hands of a specific person, and many more. I even heard about a flower for his death cause. Not an ordinary flower but again a specific one. He wove so many conditions into the request that even Brahma himself was caught.”

Som’s heartbeat quickened. “And Brahma granted it?”

“Yes,” the man nodded slowly. “Brahma granted the boon. But... he bound it with a condition.

Condition? Som asked?

Yes! Condition. To preserve the truth from any mankind god never wanted to give boons to people who can misuse them. But if even “Demons” perform all the rituals perfectly then the God or deities must have to come and give their disciples that boon.

A condition that must be set to check whether a person is capable of handling the given boon or power.

Som’s voice trembled with urgency.

“Sir, how do you know all this? Do you... do you already know my grandfather?”

The man’s eyes flickered, half-truth, half-shadow.

“Yes... and no.”

“What kind of answer is that?” Som pressed.

“I know much about your grandfather,” the man replied, “yet I have never seen him. And he has never seen me.”

Som leaned closer, desperate.

“Then tell me! Who is this ‘specific person’? Which flower? Which time, which place? I want to know everything.”

The man paused, then spoke with quiet weight.

“That... I do not know. Perhaps your mother did. Perhaps she carried pieces of the secret. As for the stone... the Nilgiri stone you carry—it might be a part of it. Or it might not. I cannot say.”

But one thing I can say,

“Your grandfather, Som... is the most dangerous man alive.”

The voice carried sharp bitterness, as though it had been poisoned by old grudges.

“People used to say that whoever dared to stand against him was the deadliest of all. But the truth is, Som, your grandfather— that old man— he is venom itself.”

Som frowned. If that is true, he thought, then where had he been wandering all these years? And why has his skin, his hair, his body... never changed? No matter how strong a man is, after a hundred years, wrinkles must appear, must they not?

Before Som could finish, the man cut him off.

“Twenty-eight years.”

Som fell silent, his eyes fixed on the man in bewilderment.

“For twenty-eight years,” the stranger continued, “your grandfather can live without adding even a single day to his life. Twenty-eight years unchanged... but to achieve this, he must defy Time itself.”

Som listened; his breath unsteady.

“It is not easy,” the man said darkly. “For him to remain the same for twenty-eight years—it comes at a price.”

Som’s voice trembled. “But if this has been happening for so long... why has no one ever suspected him?”

“Suspicion?” The man let out a bitter laugh.

“Your grandfather is cunning beyond measure. He stages his own death, again and again, so that three generations forget him completely.”

“Three generations? How?” Som asked, his voice almost a whisper.

“Among the seven portals,” the man explained, “there is one—just one—one that locks his twenty-eight years in place. But with that lock comes a curse. His fifty-six years of life are hurled forward in time.”

“I don’t understand,” Som said.

“Imagine,” the man leaned closer, his voice almost serpentine, “if your grandfather stepped into that portal in the year 1900... he would reappear in 1956. And until 1984, he would remain exactly as he was in 1900—unchanged, untouched by age.”

Som staggered back, his mind spinning.

“My God... how could he deceive the world for centuries like this? Laws existed in every age—kings, empires, governments. How did he manage to outlive them all, hidden in plain sight? My head... it can’t make sense of this.”

“And if these portals hold such power,” Som asked, his voice carrying both wonder and suspicion, “then why has no one ever sealed them? Why has the world remained blind to their existence?”

The man let out a dry laugh, one that seemed older than his body. “Blind? No, Som. Not blind. Many know of them. Wandering naga babas, wandering Bhikshuk, reclusive saints, and a handful of ancient ones whose ancestors bound fragments of their strength into their very blood. Knowledge exists—buried, hidden, carried in silence.”

Som leaned forward, searching for his face. “And yet my grandfather walks free? If such truths are known, why has no one ever stopped him?”

The man’s gaze grew sharp, his words heavy like iron. “Remember this, Som—no matter what strength your grandfather gathers, no matter how many years he steals from time, his death is certain. Power may delay it, but it cannot erase it. Mortality is a debt even he must one day pay.”

A strange unease crawled through Som’s chest. He studied the man with narrowing eyes, as if trying to peel back the mask he wore. Why such hatred? Why such fire in his words whenever he speaks of Dadaji? Who truly is this man?

Finally, unable to contain the storm within, Som straightened his voice and said with an unshakable firmness:

“Sir!”

The word lingered in the air, heavy and deliberate. Som paused, then continued, almost pleading, “Please... tell me your name.”

The man inhaled deeply, as though summoning courage from the very earth. He opened his lips, ready at last to surrender his truth. For a heartbeat, Som could feel the name rising like a secret meant to shatter the silence of centuries.

But in that very instant, hesitation struck. The man’s mouth closed, his eyes flickered with restraint. Som understood—he wanted to speak, yet fear, or perhaps destiny, kept him bound.

And then, just as the first syllable left his lips, Som’s grip loosened. His bag slipped from his lap and fell with a dull thud to the ground, startling him, breaking the fragile moment into fragments.



Chapter 17



[The Name That Shook the Silence]

The man's voice carried a strange weight, as if he were lifting stones from his soul.

“Som,” he said, “before you know my name, understand this. I do not know the full measure of the mind you have inherited, nor the destiny that shadows you. But one thing I do know—you are stronger than you realize. And strength must be guided, not wasted. Only if you think upon my words with care will they serve you.”

Som did not waver. His eyes sharpened, his tone grew firm. "Enough. Tell me your name."

The man turned his gaze away, as though afraid his eyes might betray him. And then, with a voice heavy with memories too old to carry, he spoke:

“My name... is Vijayendra Mehta.”

For a moment, the world itself seemed to pause. Som's bag slipped from his lap and thudded against the floor. The name meant nothing to him, yet it carried an echo that shook his chest. He bent down, picked up the bag, and walked a few steps away. His voice trembled between anger and disbelief.

“If this is some kind of joke,” Som said, his face darkening, “I do not like such games. Please leave me alone. I need time... I need to rest.”

But the man’s words chased him like shadows.

“Som, listen to me. Your grandfather is here—yes, in Delhi, under this very sky. He may remain for only a few days. Whatever happens, leave Delhi. Do not linger.”

Som froze, his confusion deepening.

“And if fate allows,” the man continued, “seek another Vijayendra Mehta. You will find him at the Jim Corbett National Museum.”

“Another... Vijayendra Mehta?” Som’s voice rose, laced with anger, suspicion, and bewilderment.

“That is not his true name,” the man said quietly. “But remember this—whatever happens, do not call him Hari Das Singh Sisodiya until you are certain of him. Do not speak it aloud until he meets you in solitude. That name will unlock truths you are not ready for—and if spoken carelessly, it will endanger both your lives.”

His tone grew fierce, almost desperate.

“And Som—guard that name as though it were fire. Let no ear but yours hear it. Not a single soul.”

The room seemed to fall into silence, broken only by Som’s own breathing.

Then, almost tenderly, the man added, “It is time for me to go. It is late. The rest, another will explain. Take care, my son.”

With those words, he turned and vanished into the night, leaving behind only echoes of his warning.

Som stood rooted in place, his thoughts in turmoil. What was the truth? What was deception? Remaining here would yield no answers. And then, like a jolt, he realized—the folded newspaper he had been carrying lay forgotten in the man’s bag. His only clue, gone.

His pockets were nearly empty, his stomach hollow, his strength fading. Yet something within him refused to surrender. Stumbling through strange streets, gathering small means however he could, Som pressed on.

And after days of hardship and restless wandering, he finally reached the gates of the Jim Corbett National Museum—where destiny waited to carve its next shape.

The long road wore Som down. His feet blistered, his pockets empty, his stomach hollow. He felt foolish, painfully foolish haunted by his own failures. Everywhere I go, I leave things unfinished, he thought. One name I could not hold on to, one newspaper I could not protect. And now, with no money, no food, no contacts, no anchors, here I am chasing shadows.

Yet the echo of “Vijayendra Mehta” pulled him like a thread of fate. Worn and weary, he wandered until he reached the outskirts of an ancient house, half home and

half temple. It was here, he had been told, that the man he sought might be found.

Som took a cautious step forward, when suddenly—

A hand fell upon his shoulder.

But it was no ordinary grip. Som barely felt the weight of it, as if the touch was more shadow than flesh. He spun around sharply, his heart hammering.

A rough voice, edged with suspicion, demanded, “Who are you? Why do you seek Vijayendra Mehta? Who sent you?”

“I must meet him,” Som replied firmly, though his voice carried exhaustion. “I have things to ask of him.”

“What things?” the man pressed, his eyes narrowing.

“I will tell only him.”

The stranger scoffed. “Tell me what you came for. I am Vijayendra Mehta. Speak now, or turn back.”

Som’s chest tightened. “No,” he said with quiet resolve. “I wish only to meet him. Please... let me pass.”

The man’s voice hardened. “That house is mine. If you wish to enter, speak your truth here—or leave. I mean I do not even know you.”

Som studied him closely. Something felt wrong. His words, his manner, the harshness in his tone—he tricked him and spoke

“Are you truly Vijayendra Mehta?” Som asked.

“Yes,” the man snapped, irritation flashing. “I’ve told you twice already. Will you keep asking like a fool?”

“No,” Som murmured, shaking his head. “You cannot be.”

The man froze, taken aback. “And how would you know that? You don’t even know him.”

Som straightened his back, finding a thread of courage. “Because the one who sent me told me Vijayendra Mehta is a man of a calm nature, a man of grace, one from a respected house. And you—” Som’s eyes hardened—“you are none of these.”

A flicker of doubt flashed in the stranger’s eyes. He recovered quickly and said, “If you are to step inside, you must first wear the vibhuti—ash of purity. Without it, no guest may meet our guru.”

Som’s lips curved into a wry smile. “Vibhuti?” he said softly. “I am well-accustomed to such ashes. Spread it over me if you wish.”

The man frowned. “Not over you. Only upon your forehead.”

At that, Som’s words—spread it upon me—echoed back to the man with a sting of recognition. This boy knows something... or someone. His suspicion turned to curiosity. Without another word, he allowed Som to step inside.

The old house smelled of sandalwood and smoke. Once seated, Som was treated with courtesy, offered water,

food, and the comfort of cushions. Slowly, the stranger's harshness melted into an elaborate act. He set before Som astrological charts, beads, and stars drawn in ink, arranging them as though he were a sage.

"Now, child," the man said smoothly, "tell me. Who sent you? And what is it you wish to know? Speak of your future—wealth, love, family, fate—I can tell you all."

Som's heart wrestled with doubt. Was this an oracle, or a fraud? His mind whispered warnings, but his tired body leaned toward belief. "Are you truly Vijayendra Mehta?" he asked again, one last plea for truth.

The man smiled. "Yes, child. I am he. Now, tell me... what is it you wish to know?"

Som's head swam. The questions he carried, the lies he suspected, the weight of his journey—they pressed against his skull. Either this man is lying... or I have walked into the wrong fate entirely.

And before he could decide, darkness claimed him. Som slumped forward, unconscious at the feet of the false oracle.

The Weight of Forgotten Names

When Som regained consciousness, he found himself lying in a quiet corner, carefully laid upon a soft mat. His head was wrapped with a bandage, his body covered with a thin sheet for comfort. The care startled him. If these people meant harm, he thought, why would they tend to me so gently?

The room was hushed, the others sent away. Only the man remained, seated before him, his eyes grave but softened by a strange concern.

“What happened, son?” he asked quietly. “How are you feeling? Why did you collapse so suddenly? By your appearance, you seem to be from a good family... yet you arrive here in such broken condition?”

Som sat up slowly, his heart still restless. “I came here searching for someone. Perhaps it is you—or perhaps not. I do not know. But now I have neither money nor the means to move forward. That is why... I must ask you plainly.”

The man nodded. “Ask then, my son. Whatever you wish to know, speak.”

He leaned closer, his tone sharpening like a blade. “You must surely know my daughter, Ashlesha.”

The name struck Som like a stone to the chest. He stared in stunned silence, his mind spinning. How did he know?

The man did not wait for an answer. “Your words betrayed you—the way you called the sacred ash ‘bhasma’ instead of vibhooti, the way it held no power over you. And from your bag, I found the Nilgiri stone. Only six of us across all of Bharat know its significance. The five of us meet from time to time, share what must be shared. But for years... no news of Ashlesha has reached me. You must be here for her. Is that not so?”

Som swallowed hard. "Tell me truthfully—are you the one called Hari Das Singh Sisodiya?"

At that, the man rose to his feet. His eyes flashed with both fear and authority. "Who told you that name?"

His sudden intensity frightened Som. For a moment, he shrank back, but then the man's voice softened, desperate, almost pleading:

"Tell me, child. Who gave you that name? Whoever it was... they must be in great danger. Do not delay—give me their name."

Som shook his head, trembling. "How can I tell you when even I do not understand? He told me his name was Vijayendra Mehta. And my father, too, bore that same name. I am lost in this web of names, I do not know what to believe."

The man's voice lowered, steady but urgent. "Your father's name is Vijayendra Mehta? Then tell me, what is your mother's name?"

"My mother..." Som's voice cracked. "I was told all my life that her name was Revati. But I get to know this year that her name was Ashlesha. you speak as though Ashlesha were my mother. If that is true—if everything I have known is false—then what am I to believe? My mind is breaking... I can take no more..." His words dissolved into tears, hot and helpless.

The man's face softened at once. In Som's grief, he recognized the truth. He saw the pieces falling into place.

“Son,” he said gently, “if you allow me, I can look into your past. With your permission, I may find what we both seek.”

Som wiped his eyes. “What do you mean? How could you possibly do that?”

“When one peers into another’s past, the soul itself must grant consent,” the man explained gravely. “With your permission, I can see what must be seen, and you too will share the vision. Without consent, it is forbidden—against all law and balance—and its consequences are dire.

Hearing this, Som’s heart steadied. He speaks truth... such caution cannot be falsehood. Yet something within him resisted. He did not wish to uncover what he was not ready to know.

The man smiled kindly. “Do not despair. For now, rest. Eat. Spend some time among my zoo companions—you will find comfort with them. When you are ready to rise above your pain, then come to me. Until then, remember one thing—”

Som interrupted, his tone bitter with fatigue, “Yes, I know. Your name must not leave my lips.”

For a moment, the man did not know whether to laugh or sigh. He only smiled faintly. Poor boy. Too many names, too many riddles... no wonder he is weary.

And so, he led Som outside, into the courtyard where his animals grazed and played. “Go, spend some time with

them,” he said softly. “They will not ask your name, nor remind you of mine.”

And for the first time in days, Som felt the stirrings of quiet—not answers, but a fragile peace.



Chapter 18



The unfold truth

By now, Som's mood had brightened considerably. Watching the animals around him brought him immense joy—a sense of comfort, as though he were at home. The creatures themselves exhibited no fear of him; instead, they approached him with gentle curiosity. Observing this, Vijendera Mehta—who, in truth, was the heir of the Sisodiya lineage—felt a deep satisfaction, realizing that Som was beginning to heal.

As Som played and interacted with the animals, it became clear to everyone present that his heart was pure. This realization seemed to demand acknowledgment of the truth: here was a boy whose intentions were untainted, whose spirit was sincere.

Immersed in the company of these beings, Som experienced profound relaxation, a clarity that allowed him to comprehend the nature of the world and the triviality of worldly worries. Among the animals, he understood that his thoughts—whether restless or anxious—were neither futile nor necessary. They were simply a part of his life's journey. The harmony he found with the park's creatures made him ponder that, perhaps, the life of animals was richer than that of humans: no deceit, no hypocrisy, no

pretense, no meaningless anxieties—just pure, unburdened existence, each living being content in its own space.

In the midst of this serenity, a call came from the temple house, summoning Som for a meal. Initially reluctant, he eventually went after repeated invitations. Eating the food brought him further delight—he remarked that the meal was exquisitely delicious. During the meal, Som spoke little, and those waiting patiently for him sensed his reflective state. When asked whether he wished to go back to the park, Som responded:

“I want to understand everything, to know everything—but not with such restless curiosity that I torment myself in pursuit of it. Give me some time, and I shall return shortly.”

And soon, he did return, sitting humbly before the guru, who asked him to speak. Som explained:

“I was with the animals, communicating with them as best I could. They are wise enough to sense sorrow or joy. I went back to show them that I am now truly happy, free of worry. And soon, I shall meet them all again.”

Hearing this, the guru sat down beside Som and said:

“You are extraordinary. There is something in you that is rare, something unseen in others. I do not doubt your understanding. You deserve to know everything meant for you.”

He continued:

“First, you must learn about the real Vijendera Mehta—the one you met in your ancestral home. He is in prison, the same prison where your grandfather once resided. Your grandfather, as you know, was formidable, but you must understand his past—his deeds, his age, and his journey. Only then will you be able to understand my story as well.”

Som’s eagerness shone through: “I am ready to know everything. Tell me whatever you can.”

The guru asked, “Do you know about the seven divine sons of Brahma?”

“Are you referring to the Saptarishi?” Som asked, intrigued.

“Exactly,” the guru replied, smiling. “One of these sages, Rishi Kashyap, was instructed by Brahma that after the great war of the Mahabharata, humanity and mankind would face a tremendous upheaval. To restore balance to Earth and preserve human dignity, Rishi Kashyap was sent back to Earth. But the world at that time was far from harmonious. Acting hastily, without Brahma’s explicit command, he left one of his children on Earth to fulfill various tasks. Brahma, displeased with this impulsive decision, commanded Kashyap to remain on Earth until his progeny had matured sufficiently to accomplish their destinies.

“By the time Rishi Kashyap returned, he realized his oversight—the first child had already grown. Without

hesitation, he gave birth to another, this time guiding it carefully to ensure it could act for the welfare of Earth. Yet, as centuries passed and society evolved, not all of Kashyap's children were born with noble intentions. Among these descendants was your grandfather, born nearly 5,090 years ago. By then, Rishi Kashyap had visited Earth twice, the balance of the world partly maintained by his efforts and partly disrupted by the actions of kings. Yet calamities, deception, and betrayal continued to shake kingdoms, troubling the sage immensely. He passed on all his wisdom to his progeny, instructing them to complete their earthly duties swiftly and then merge back into the cosmic essence.

“All was progressing according to divine timing—until your grandfather was born. By then, his father had renounced worldly life. Your grandfather had many siblings, yet none received as much focus or attention as he did.

Despite having thirty-six brothers and five sisters, he often found himself alone. Yet, he remained relentless in his pursuit of knowledge, always learning from others and expanding his own wisdom. After losing his mother, he dedicated himself to the austere practices of Rishi Kashyap. He was pleased by his devotion, Rishi Kashyap said to him,

“Son, you have brought me joy. I grant you this boon: you shall never fail in your endeavors. Whatever you undertake will be fulfilled. Tathastu.”

Then, he departed.

A deep anguish gripped his heart—he felt as though he had neither kin on Earth nor anyone to care for him. Overwhelmed by this solitude, he even contemplated abandoning his mortal form, yet his heart desired life. His paternal lineage blessed him, assuring that his heart's true wishes would manifest. Every attempt he made to relinquish life was thwarted, as if some unseen force restrained him. Slowly, he came to understand that Rishi Kashyap's boon would not fail; because his heart desired life, he could not succeed in surrendering his body.

Now, his heart spoke with determination: he would seek the most precious thing in the world, something that would grant him unparalleled strength, wealth, and reverence. With such power, all would honor him, obey him, and look to him as supreme.

Curious, Som interjected, "May I know his name? What was he called at that time?"

The guru replied,

"I spent my entire life trying to learn about that individual. But he himself never wished to reveal his name to anyone. Even I do not know his initial name."

Som simply nodded, understanding, and remained silent.

Then, the guru continued the story from that point:

"Your grandfather now desired love, respect, wealth, and power—but where could he obtain them? He sought to please Brahma himself. For the first time in this age,

Brahma personally came to Earth solely for your grandfather. Summoning Brahma to Earth in the age of Kali was impossible, yet through Rishi Kashyap's boon, your grandfather performed the rituals flawlessly, leaving no obstacle in his path. Brahma himself had to come.

Standing before Brahma, your grandfather could hardly believe it. He pondered deeply, unsure what boon to ask for. After much contemplation, Brahma spoke:

"Son, come tomorrow at this same hour and place. I shall grant you the boon of your choice."

Your grandfather could have asked for almost anything, yet his desires only grew. He could not sleep that night, restless with anticipation. Immortality was beyond his reach; wealth and power could be taken from him. Now, he resolved to learn from all past mistakes, understanding that death was inevitable. "What if I could outmaneuver death? What if it could occur on my terms?"

After much reflection, the next day he stood at the appointed place, awaiting Brahma. Time passed, and he began to doubt—what boon should he request? Brahma, concerned yet patient, finally appeared at the exact moment, asking,

"Son, have you decided what boon you wish to receive?"

Your grandfather said, "Yes, Lord, I have decided what I desire."

"So tell me, child," Brahma asked.

Your grandfather replied, “I want control over my own death. I wish to be immortal. I wish to live a very long life.”

Brahma said, “Immortality is forbidden, my son. Ask for something else.”

Your grandfather, undeterred, questioned, “Then why are others on this Earth immortal? Why do Hanuman, Vibhishan, Ashwathama, and others still live?”

Brahma replied firmly, “Enough of lamenting, my son. I have told you, I cannot grant the boon of immortality. Those you mention are present on Earth only to fulfill specific tasks assigned to them. They exist as long as their duties remain incomplete.”

Your grandfather, resolute, responded:

“Then, Lord, grant me this: let my death occur only when I get the weapons of one hundred deities; when the flower that blooms in a century is besides me; when the double-edged stones of the Earth are mine; when Ashwathama himself has inscribed my death in his hands; when Vibhishan stands beside me; when Makardwaj, the son of Hanuman whom the Varuna the water deity, who protected him, stands with me; and when Hanuman himself is by my side. Let my death occur only when the winds from the four corners of the Earth converge for me; when Lord Vishnu, in his hundredth human incarnation, determines my end; when the greatest powers of good and evil unite with me; when two stars accompany me; and

when many of my sons are near me. Only then, Lord, shall I accept death.”

For centuries, he had been deceiving people—tricking kings and entire kingdoms for his own benefit. And one day, as he was experimenting with his powers, a time portal was inadvertently created—a portal capable of controlling not just time, but distance, speed, and even the span of centuries.

Your grandfather had no idea what had transpired, only that he had discovered something no one in the world even knew existed. Using the portal, he advanced himself fifty-six years into the future.

Som said, “Yes, I know about this. And he remained exactly as he was for twenty-eight years after arriving in the fifty-sixth year.”

The guru nodded. “Indeed, that is correct.”

Arriving fifty-six years ahead and encountering nearly all his siblings brought your grandfather immense suffering. Frustrated and disheartened by the obstacles he faced, he devoted himself tirelessly to rectifying his mistakes, returning once again to the austerity of Brahma. Yet, his growing pride and desires prevented the rituals from being completed. In time, he abandoned strict discipline, choosing instead to follow only what he truly desired.

One day, while experimenting in this way, he inadvertently created another portal—a portal that led

directly into the greatest prison of Raksha in the world. Fear gripped him at the thought of the portals and the power they represented, yet strange voices began emanating from it. Days passed, and your grandfather could neither understand the source nor close the portal. Disturbed and uncertain, he wished to leave, yet his heart compelled him to stay. Though he tried to resist, he could not move away.

And then, one day, as he pondered his next move, the voices began to call—almost as if someone were calling his name. Despite an overwhelming sense of fear, your grandfather could not tear himself from the portal. Gradually, the voices began to hypnotize him, drawing him deeper into their mysterious allure. And then, one day...

While he lingered near the portal, it spoke of a stone with the power to transform iron into gold.

Though unwilling, your grandfather could not ignore the words that came from the portal. The more he listened, the more alluring they became. Suspicion gnawed at him, yet curiosity compelled him to investigate. Could such a stone truly exist?

And as the portal had revealed, it was indeed true. A stone known as the Paras Stone did exist upon the Earth—though hidden away in the possession of one unknown man. Determined, your grandfather devoted every ounce of his energy to seeking it.

At last, exhausted, he cried out to the portal, “Then tell me—what should I do?”

But no voice came in reply. Silence pressed in from all sides. He longed to step through the portal, to venture inside. Just as he resolved to do so, voices erupted once more urgently, commanding:

“Stop. You are not yet ready. Stop, you cannot pass through. Stop—this will break the order of the universe!”

Countless voices, each different yet speaking as one, echoed around him. The atmosphere grew heavy, charged, until suddenly, from above, a brilliant light descended, striking the portal with blinding force. It was as though an explosion had taken place.

Under that light, the portal began to shrink, resisting fiercely, as if alive and unwilling to surrender. Yet the brilliance from above was too great. The portal weakened, compressing itself into a smaller and smaller form, until it remained only as a diminished fragment of its former self. Still, even in that tiny form, it seemed alive breathing, resisting, conscious.

And slowly, the light from above began to fade, leaving behind a trembling hush.

Your grandfather understood well enough that the portal was not safe. And yet, he could not turn away from its whispers. He listened—always.

In his hunger for power, he blurred the line between vibhuti, the sacred ash of the divine, and bhasma, the residue of destruction. What was once holy, he rendered vulnerable. It was your grandfather who twisted the sanctity

of vibhuti, turning it into a tool of dark tantra, bending rituals toward a terrifying path.

With the strength of that portal and the power of his penance, he stirred upheaval across kingdoms. Dynasties fell, empires collapsed. If a ruler stood in his way, if a kingdom dared to hinder his search for the Paras Stone, your grandfather toppled their thrones with a flick of fate. At times he wore one name, at times another, deceiving never caught, never cornered.

Then came the faint backing of the Nanda dynasty, and with it, a new figure stepped into the story: Chanakya.

Your grandfather had battled mighty demons, yet even he could not slip past the sharp net of Chanakya's strategies. Consumed with wrath, he swore he would destroy Chanakya utterly—for it was he who shook the very foundation of the Nanda rule. But by the time your grandfather reached him, Chanakya had already raised Chandragupta Maurya to the throne.

From the reign of Chandragupta, the kingdoms began to change. Movement from one realm to another became perilous. For your grandfather, it demanded relentless effort, and if caught, the punishments were severe.

When he confided this struggle to the portal, it gave no reply. Two... three days passed in silence. Then, one day, it called his name again—not only his name, but with it came a gift.

“What gift, Guruji?” Som asked eagerly.

“A box,” Guruji answered gravely. “A strange metallic chest, unlike anything known on Earth. Even I do not even know its origin. But after receiving it, your grandfather became... unstoppable. No force could defeat him. Whatever lay hidden inside that box—it changed the course of his life forever.”

From then on, the portal bound him tighter and tighter. Without even realizing it, your grandfather had created not one, but seven portals in total. Each one is a doorway to unfathomable realms. With their power, he began accomplishing every task with terrifying ease.

And yet, whenever he drew close to the Paras Stone, someone would always arrive before him. The stone would be moved, hidden, sometimes even destroyed. Again and again, his quest was thwarted.

Thus, your grandfather’s life became a ceaseless struggle—driven by greed, chained by the portal’s unseen power, unable to break free, unable to rest.



Chapter 19



The world's most precious stone found.

During the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, your grandfather still managed to slip through unnoticed. But by the time the rule of Emperor Ashoka arrived, whispers of his mysterious existence had begun to spread.

In Ashoka's empire, greater powers already roamed the Earth—some had mastered lightning, some displayed speeds beyond anything man had ever witnessed. Against such wonders, your grandfather did not draw much attention. Yet, the Emperor came to know of his shadowed presence.

Ashoka sought to gather every force of knowledge under one banner. He summoned saints and sages from across the land. The wise men spoke with a single voice:

“If the full knowledge of the Brahmins were to spill unchecked into the world, devastation would be inevitable.”

The emperor asked, “Then what must be done?”

But their demands were steep, almost unbearable. Ashoka believed knowledge was not merely privilege—it was hunger, yearning, and destiny itself. He proclaimed:

“If one truly seeks wisdom, then wisdom itself will seek him. It is not for us to cage knowledge.”

Without speaking further, Ashoka conceived a daring plan: to gather all knowledge of the world and divide it with balance. He chose twenty of his most loyal scholars to form a secret order. Their charge was clear—if anyone broke the law of silence, death would be the only sentence.

The Emperor knew well that death alone cannot deter men of power. So, he appointed four guardians, whose sole purpose was to watch the order, not to partake in it.

When all knowledge was finally assembled, the scholars began debating how to divide it.

In twenty parts, it felt scattered.

In six parts, it was crowded, forced, and misaligned.

In ten divisions, balance seemed near—but still incomplete.

In eight, the knowledge aligned perfectly... but only if the arts—music, dance, rhythm—were cast aside.

Ashoka asked gravely: “Should the wisdom of art be removed?”

Nineteen of the twenty scholars said yes. Only one man said no.

The lone dissenter was ridiculed, mocked as a fool. “What is music compared to the sciences? What is dance compared to weapons?” they jeered. One sneered, “Go put on anklets and dance for us, then we will give you a share.”

But the man stood firm. “Grant me time, O King,” he said. “Let me show you what the knowledge of the arts truly means. Organize a grand feast, invite us all—and let your guards be present as well, for your protection.”

The Emperor agreed, smiling faintly at the strange request. He ordered a magnificent banquet; food prepared with utmost care. At the same time, the man asked the king for chains and locks, which, amused, Ashoka provided without hesitation.

During the feast, the man was mocked again. “Did you also cook the food yourself?” one laughed.

The man simply bowed his head and replied: “Yes. The feast you taste tonight is mine.”

At once, silence fell. The food was beyond exquisite flavors that stirred the soul, melodies of taste that no tongue had ever known. The emperor and his men, humbled, lowered their eyes in quiet shame.

The emperor leaned forward and spoke softly to the Brahmin:

“This feast has filled my heart with joy, but tell me—how can I grant the art of food and music a place equal to the loftiest sciences?”

The Brahmin smiled gently. “O King, do not worry. What you have tasted today is but the smallest beginning. Place this within your right ear, and prepare yourself for the true delight of what is to come.”

He handed the emperor a small tuft of cotton, soaked in a fragrant, rare oil. The Emperor obeyed and placed it within his ear. Then, rising with a commanding voice, the Brahmin declared:

“If the feast is complete, let us now celebrate with music and dance!”

The court erupted in agreement. Laughter and cheer filled the hall as nobles and soldiers alike settled comfortably in their places. Soon, dancers appeared—graceful maidens who swayed and spun with such allure that every eye was captured, every heart enthralled. Their rhythm was joined by music, a melody so divine that no one in the royal court had ever heard such sound before.

The emperor smiled, pleased, though doubt still lingered in his heart. If I honor the art of music with equal weight, will my scholars not resent me? Still, he remained, bound to witness, and let the joy of the performance wash over him.

Then, the mysterious Brahmin called forth his special singers. They entered with their faces veiled, positioning themselves silently among the gathering. All assumed they had come to sing—and indeed, they began.

At first, their voices were soothing, bringing a strange calmness to the mind. Then, as the dancers quietly withdrew, the song deepened. Notes so pure, so resonant, filled the chamber, each tone sharper than crystal, each word echoing with divine beauty. The music lifted, shifted,

grew powerful, as if the very sound of creation itself had entered the room.

One by one, all who listened slipped into slumber. Gentle at first, then deeper, heavier—until every courtier, every guard, and even Emperor Ashoka himself, fell into a profound sleep.

When silence reigned, the Brahmin moved swiftly. With the chains and locks given earlier, he bound them all—hands and feet shackled, ankles weighed down. Even the Emperor was not spared; a lock was placed ceremoniously at his very feet.

Then, bowing humbly, he dismissed the singers with gratitude.

With a mere touch, he stirred the emperor awake. Ashoka opened his eyes to behold a strange sight: the entire court bound in chains, every man sleeping under the spell, locks glimmering in the torchlight.

The emperor laughed, astonished. “You have captured my heart. You have shown the might of music in a way no weapon could. Speak—what is it you desire? For whatever you ask, I shall grant.”

The Brahmin replied:

“O King, you have now seen with your own eyes—music is no ordinary art. This display is but ten percent of its true power. Imagine, then, when the full ninety percent awakens in the world. One day, a man will be born whose voice alone shall melt stone. That is the destiny of this art.

If music is not honored, it shall wither and die. Tell me, is such a power not as dangerous and divine as any other knowledge?

Ashoka bowed his head. "Indeed, Munivar. Music is as potent as any weapon or wisdom we hold. Henceforth, I shall not divide knowledge into eight parts, but into nine."

Thus, were born the Nine Unknown Powers of Ashoka. Each division was preserved with utmost secrecy, each power placed under the guardianship of carefully chosen men. Together, the nineteen scholars vowed to safeguard eight of them, while the arts—the most misunderstood, the most underestimated—were entrusted entirely to the lone Brahmin.

These Nine Unknown labored in silence, seeking only the purest of seekers, protecting wisdom from falling into the wrong hands. Only they—and your grandfather—knew of their existence.

But your grandfather was relentless. He hunted them, one by one, seeking their secrets. Whenever he drew close, the guardians resisted him with fierce training granted by Ashoka himself. None yielded their knowledge; many fell under your grandfather's wrath.

Eventually, the Nine learned of his obsession with the Paras Stone. Together, they wove a mantra that locked its power—binding the stone so that it could no longer turn iron into gold.

They broke the lock into seven fragments, casting each into a different corner of the world.

Som's eyes lit up. "The stone's table was shattered into seven pieces, scattered across the Earth—isn't that, right?"

Guruji smiled. "Ah, Som, so you know of this already? Tell me, how?"

Som lowered his voice. "My grandfather once told me a part of it... but not the mantra, nor the truth of the Nine Unknown. Please, Guruji, tell me what happened next."

Guruji's voice grew heavier as he continued:

"Your grandfather's soul burned with rage when he learned that the Paras Stone had been locked. The fire of obsession consumed him. Frustration clouded his judgment, and he began to make grave mistakes. He ignored even the voices that came from the portal itself—voices of power, voices of warning."

In his fury, he silenced the dark whispers as if he had known for centuries how to shut such portals. With anger in his veins, he dismissed those shadowy forces as though they were meaningless, powerless, unworthy of him.

And then he set out—alone, unyielding—to recover all the relics. Each piece was a shard of the mantra that once sealed the stone. Seven fragments in total, scattered across the Earth.

Centuries passed, yet your grandfather endured, deceiving, manipulating, and snatching the relics through

cunning and betrayal. At last, only two pieces remained. One of these was in the hands of the most trusted guardian of the Nine Unknown—the Keeper of the Arts.

This guardian was gentle by nature, a soul who trusted too easily. When your grandfather discovered this weakness, he erased every trace of his identity, covered his tracks, and pursued him relentlessly.

At last, he found the Guardian of the Arts.

By living among him, learning his craft, and watching his ways, your grandfather began to act like an ordinary man. He grew fond of music—so fond that he was enchanted. In the rhythm of songs and the beauty of dance, he discovered something he had never felt before. In the court of arts, free of rules and fears, he fell in love with a maiden who danced with divine grace.

There, in the realm of music and freedom, he tasted peace.

But one day, in conversation, the Guardian of the Arts revealed a prophecy:

A time would come when a singer would be born whose voice could shake the heavens. The clouds would thunder at his call, the weather itself would bend, stone would melt before his tone—and even the Paras Stone would awaken once more.

Hearing this, your grandfather grew calm. A strange stillness took hold of him, as though the fire in his heart had cooled.

He turned to the Guardian.

“Tell me, Guruji, when will this man come?”

The Master of Arts smiled faintly.

“Child, how can we know? Who among us will live to see such centuries? Yet the scriptures hint—in the Bhavishya Purana—that the time is not far. Perhaps within a few ages, perhaps within a few years. He will be a servant of the Lord, and his very name shall be bound to divine service. When he arrives, the world will know.”

From that moment, your grandfather’s quest changed. He now sought not only the relics but also the chosen one foretold by prophecy.

The sixth relic proved the most difficult. No matter how he tried, your grandfather could not find where the fragment had been hidden.

In anger, he threatened the Guardian’s life. Trembling, the man confessed:

“I hid the stone in a forest, behind a great tree. Come, I shall show you.”

Fear forced him to guide your grandfather. At the tree, with a voice so powerful it bent nature itself, he sang—and the mighty trunk moved aside, revealing what lay beyond.

Som, listening to the tale, gasped.

“Wait—that tree... is it not the very same tree my grandfather once moved?”

Guruji nodded gravely. “Yes, Som. It is the same.”

“But that tree... it stands today on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands!”

Again, Guruji nodded. “Indeed. It was your grandfather who transplanted it there.”

The tale continued.

As the Guardian lifted the stone and cast it back into the hollow where the tree once stood, a portal burst open. Before your grandfather’s astonished eyes, the fragment vanished into another realm.

He realized, with dread, that the Guardian too held knowledge of the portals. And before your grandfather could act—before he could strike, or question—the Guardian shifted the very location of the portal.

For the first time, your grandfather saw the impossible: that the place of a portal could be changed.

Shaken, enraged, and desperate, he bound the Guardian’s mouth with cloth and shackled him, vowing not to let him escape.

In fury, your grandfather dragged the Guardian back to his hidden lair. His mind churned in restless doubt: Should I kill him? How does he know of the portals? Could he know about me as well?

The Guardian, calm as the still waters of a deep lake, broke the silence.

“Do not mutter to yourself. We hold knowledge of telekinesis, healing, teleportation, and countless other arts. We are connected, and from time to time we gather. From your words, I feared you might be after my relic.”

Your grandfather’s voice thundered:

“I can take your relic whenever I wish. But tell me—where did you learn of the portal? And how did you move that tree with nothing but your voice?”

The man from the Nine Unknown did not flinch. He remained silent, his expression unshaken, and slipped into meditation as though nothing in the world could disturb him.

Enraged, your grandfather unleashed his own hidden power. With a force unknown even to himself, he expanded the portal, its edges tearing open like a wound.

At once, the Guardian’s eyes snapped open. He understood—this was no ordinary portal. Something vast, something dreadful stirred behind it. He tried to reach out, to connect with one of the other Nine, but instead, voices rose from within the darkness. Voices that made even him tremble.

Your grandfather’s threat echoed through the chamber:

“If you do not tell me the truth, I will cast you into this abyss.”

Fear finally broke the Guardian's silence. He confessed that he had shifted the relic's location.

"The stone is hidden now somewhere in the world—I no longer know where. Even if I move the portal again, the place will never be as it was."

Your grandfather demanded, "Show me this knowledge!"

But from the depths of the shadowed portal came a chilling reply:

"Not now. The time is not yet right."

Your grandfather snarled, silenced the Guardian, and shrank the portal once more.

From within came another terrible voice:

"Do this again, and I will not spare you. Remember this."

Furious, your grandfather roared back, "Be silent!" And with sheer force of will, he crushed the voice into silence.

From that day forward, the world whispered that your grandfather was the most dangerous man alive—more feared than even the voices that dwelled within the portals.

Som, listening wide-eyed, turned to Guruji.

"Tell me truly—who is stronger? My grandfather, or the power within the portals?"

Guruji's voice was steady, timeless.

“Child, the greatest power belongs only to the One whom we call God. Those bound by karma, whether your grandfather or the voices, will one day fall. Their strength is fleeting. Divine will is eternal.”

Som lowered his gaze. “You are right, Guruji.”

“And what happened next?” he asked softly.

Guruji’s eyes darkened as he continued:

“Your grandfather stripped the Guardian of his powers—his ashes of strength, his hypnotic sway, every gift that had made him formidable. Weakened, the Guardian was left hollow, while your grandfather grew stronger still. He raised a dwelling for himself upon the portal that opened in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.”

When the remaining Eight Unknown learned of this betrayal, they combined their might and set out to hunt him down. But your grandfather had already bent time itself to his will. With a cunning beyond measure, he slipped from their grasp—leaping fifty-six years into the future.”

Yet the Nine Unknown did not surrender. Together, they forged a protective mantle—an invisible armor through which every surge of your grandfather’s power could be tracked. It became necessary to spread knowledge across the world, to awaken humanity before his darkness consumed all.

They vowed: The world must be educated. Technology, science, geopolitics, astronomy, every sacred discipline—we must place them in human hands.

But there was resistance. Certain Brahmins opposed them fiercely, unwilling to see secrets unveiled. Yet against them all stood one man—your grandfather—whose shadow loomed heavier than armies.

In those days, the masses lived blindly. When calamities struck, they saw only fate, not the cause. And so, the heirs of the Nine Unknown swore a vow: Whosoever misuses knowledge, we shall punish. But the people must be awakened.

Soon knowledge bursts forth like a storm, racing to every corner of the earth. Science and wisdom flowered, and the words of the Nine proved true.

But with enlightenment came imbalance. As the people grew aware, your grandfather's powers waned. His portals began to fade. The air itself shifted. Rain fell for the first time upon barren lands. It was as though nature whispered of renewal.

And yet, the blessing became a curse. For with knowledge came weapons. It was as if monkeys had been given guns. Fools mistook themselves for the wise, and those with arms sought to rule.

In that shift, not only your grandfather weakened, but even we did—the Nine of us —felt our strength wither.

Som's breath caught.

“We?” he asked in shock.

Guruji’s eyes, once calm, flickered with sorrow.

“Yes, my child. I... am one of the Nine Unknown, chosen in the time of Emperor Ashoka.”

The words had barely escaped his lips when blood welled from his mouth. Som leapt forward in alarm.

“Guruji! What has happened? Let me fetch water!”

But Guruji raised a trembling hand, urging him to sit.

“No, child... this is only a warning. A trailer of what awaits. By revealing myself to you, I have broken the vow. If word of me spreads through you, my death will be inevitable. Do not tell anyone what I have confessed.”

“Never, Guruji,” Som whispered fiercely.

The old man smiled faintly.

“Good. Remember, the wheel of fate turns with or without your grandfather’s hand. Kingdoms rise and fall, revolutions ignite, and worlds reshape—often without their shadow guiding them. He is like a serpent in a burrow, hiding from the light, waiting for the moment to strike again.”

Stumbling yet unbroken, your grandfather did not surrender. He unearthed the sixth relic after tireless searching. But soon, an even greater revelation struck him like lightning—Ashwatthama himself possessed the Paras Stone.

At first, fear chained his heart. The thought of standing before a warrior as eternal and dreadful as Ashwatthama filled him with dread. Yet another thought followed swiftly—Would Ashwatthama even recognize him after all these centuries?

So, he went.

In the dusty courtyards of a temple marketplace, they met. Ashwatthama, with his torn skin, weary body, and wounds that spoke of centuries of torment, stood silent. His very presence radiated strength, even in his broken state. Without uttering a word, he handed the Paras Stone to your grandfather. Then, without explanation, he walked away to offer water at Shiva's shrine—and vanished like a ghost swallowed by the earth.

Your grandfather searched, but Ashwatthama was nowhere to be found. Still, the stone glittered in his palm like the whole world's treasure. Overjoyed, he rushed to test it. He pressed it against iron—but nothing. Not a flicker of transformation. His face sank in disbelief. A mere stone?

But then memory struck him—The Paras Stone is locked. It requires the seventh relic to awaken.

Thus began his mad hunt for the seventh relic. His search led him to whispers of Tansen, the voice so divine that thunderclouds would gather at his song.

Your grandfather became consumed, wandering like a lunatic, seeking Tansen. More than once, villagers caught him and dismissed him as a madman, letting him go. At

times, even the mysterious portal—though he loathed it—seemed to guide his steps, as if it too desired your grandfather to wield greater power, to unite with the Paras Stone’s might.

One day, by sheer chance, he bathed in a quiet lake, trying to drown his exhaustion. Then—a sound. A voice more celestial than he had ever known, even surpassing the fabled Tansen. The melody froze his limbs. Chains rattled nearby—Mughal elephants, bound in iron, trudged past the lake. At the song’s echo, their chains turned to gold.

Your grandfather trembled. Should he chase this heavenly voice, or dive to recover the Paras Stone, which had slipped from his hand into the waters, even kicked away by the elephants? He chose the stone, clutching it close, and fled quietly into the forest shadows, evading the Mughal guards.

Later, he learned the truth—the voice belonged not to Tansen, but to Haridas, Tansen’s guru, who never let mortals hear his full song.

Haridas saw through your grandfather’s intent at once. After repeated pleas, he said, “Not today. But tomorrow, I shall give you what you seek.” Inwardly, Haridas knew his divine voice could never be hidden nor diminished, and if misused, its consequences would be dire. So he devised a plan.

He summoned Tansen and whispered, “Tomorrow, a man shall come, one I cannot sing for. Whatever he says, I

will nod, but my raag I will not offer. Instead, you shall hide behind the tree, and when I speak, you will sing. Let him believe it is my voice.”

The next day arrived. Your grandfather returned, burning with anticipation. Haridas gestured: “Wait there. Do not step closer.” Reluctantly, your grandfather obeyed.

Then Haridas folded his hands, invoking his deity, and said softly, “Close your eyes. My song is not meant for open eyes. If you disobey, you may faint.”

Your grandfather, trembling with desire, placed the iron knife upon the Paras Stone and shut his eyes. And then—it began.

From behind the tree, Tansen’s voice rose, cascading raags and surs, weaving intoxication into the air. Your grandfather felt himself sinking into the ocean of music. Yet repeatedly, he cracked his eyes open to check the knife and the stone—still unchanged.

The music soared. The knife remained dull. Frustration began to poison him. Then Haridas subtly signaled Tansen to stop. Silence fell.

“May I open my eyes now?” your grandfather asked.

“Yes,” Haridas replied. “What did you feel?”

“Nothing,” your grandfather muttered. “The tune was not to my liking. Perhaps another will do. Sing again.”

Haridas, with a calm smile, answered: “Very well. Close your eyes once more, and I shall sing differently.”

But your grandfather, now impatient, shook his head. “No. Enough. I must leave. Your voice is indeed divine—but my path lies elsewhere.”

And thus, he walked away, the Paras Stone still lifeless in his grasp, while the secret of unlocking it slipped yet again from his reach.

Haridasji understood at once—the Paras Stone had already fallen into your grandfather’s hands. Yet he chose not to share this revelation even with his disciple, Tansen.

“Guruji,” Tansen asked softly, “why did you treat him so coldly? Why deny him your song?”

Haridas sighed. “Because, my child, he was a man of darkness.”

“But Guruji,” Tansen pressed further, “if it is a sin to let the wicked hear music, then should I, too, restrict my voice only to the righteous?”

Haridas shook his head gently. “No, that was not my meaning. He sought to force my music from me, against my will. And when the heart resists, it matters little whether the listener is a saint or a sinner—the song must not be given. It was not purity or sin that guided me, but simply my own choice. Music without will is no music at all.”

Tansen bowed, silent.

Meanwhile, your grandfather’s blood boiled. Anger consumed him—anger at Haridas, at Tansen, at the elusive

relic, at fate itself. In his fury, he hurled wooden logs, one after another, into the portal.

At first, the sight of the portal swallowing them made him recoil in fear. He stood frozen, ears straining for the voices that usually emerged from that strange void. But none came.

He waited. Nothing.

What else may crawl out of this cursed gate? he wondered. But still, nothing. Relief trickled into him—but suspicion never left.

Driven by dread, he tried to shrink the portal, to seal it, to bend its power into submission. But no effort bore fruit. Neither would it close, nor could he bring himself to rest beside it.

Thus, days Passed. He grew accustomed to sleeping far from its glow, avoiding its whispers like one avoids the serpent's den. The portal had become his shadow—yet also his fear.

It was no longer power he saw in it, but the terror of a human heart that longed simply to be free.

One day, the portal quietly shifted. Its edges stretched just a little, and a soft light began to grow around it. Even from far away, he stopped walking. Something about the portal felt differently almost as if it wanted to call out to him.

Then, something rolled out of it, a damp piece of wood, spinning as it fall and landing close to his feet. The

moment he saw its strange texture, he threw it away without thinking. The impact had startled him so much that he didn't look back at the stick or the portal. He just tried to calm down himself.

The stick, now lying on the ground, looked odd., half-wet, half-dry, its surface almost jelly-like, shifting between many colors. It felt less like a simple stick and more like a weapon from some unknown world.

After it came out, the portal's glow returned to normal. Then it shrank again smaller than ever.

And near the strange stick, a thin line of smoke began to rise... slowly, quietly, as if the wood carried some memory of where it had come from.

