

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## CAST

Wattpad supports writers and protects their rights. If you are seeing this message, it means we believe you are trying to make copies of this story without the permission of the rights holder.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## TRAILERS

Chitralekha Trailer:

Chitra's Home Trailer:

Delhi Trailer:

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 1. MONDAY BLUES

"Why do people ask 'What is it about?' as if a novel had to be about only one thing."~Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

### PART I

The white sheet of paper lying on the coffee table was full of words scribbled in black ink. The handwriting was cursive and stylish but half of the words were legible only to the woman who had written them in haste the previous night.

### FREEDOM OF SPEECH: WHAT IS THE LIMIT?

Freedom of speech is a right granted by the Indian Constitution and hence we use it to express our anger at a particularly nasty politician or that very politician uses it to say "girls get raped because they eat chow mein". However, now our sacred right to express ourselves feels threatened in the most shameless manner. The Modern Indian Paradox is a matrix event best represented by those who are getting arrested for voicing their opinions while that chow-mein-hating politician keeps blithering nonsense on national television.

Recently, a fellow netizen expressed—

However, the rest of the article had been scratched off with such fervour that not one

word could be read. A woman entered the room as the paper fluttered because of the warm breeze entering the room through open windows.

She was rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, wishing she could stay in bed just a little longer.

The woman had almond-shaped eyes and an adequate height by Indian standards. Her hair was tied in a bun and her nipples meekly standing against the white shirt she had worn to bed.

She looked at the article with a sour roll of her eyes before proceeding on to the kitchen where she opened the refrigerator.

The woman took out the leftovers from last night's meal—boiled rice and dal—and dumped them into a large bowl. Taking a spoon, she went back to the living room.

As she sat down, she eyed the sheet on the coffee table with contempt, as if it was the sheet's fault that she couldn't write the article.

Looking away, she picked up her phone and saw a text from her friend, Natasha Rao.

\*Chitra, we are meeting tonight at Layla's place instead of yours since Mala is out of town. We don't want to die from food poisoning that comes guaranteed with your cooking.

Chitra made a face and typed out a reply.

\*Ha ha so funny! Will meet there after work.

As she pressed send, Chitra bitterly noted how bland the dal was. She wondered when her maid, Mala, would come back from her leave. She had gone to her village for a few days to attend to her mother-in-law who had fallen sick.

After slurping down her miserable breakfast, Chitra balled up the article with much vigour and went to the bathroom to get ready.

While brushing her teeth, she noticed a new pimple near her nose that had conveniently popped up after a big bar of chocolate. Chitrlekha Menon, you are the definition of pathetic. Pimples and writer's block together. Wow!

Ignoring that mean voice in her head, she resumed brushing.

After precisely twenty-three minutes, Chitra was locking the front door with her trusted padlock. Her landlord hadn't quite converted to the ideology of modern locks fitted in doors despite her repeated attempts.

With a small backpack on her shoulder, she went down the two-floored building in which she lived only to be interrupted at the first floor where her landlord and his nosy wife lived.

"Chitra!" Of course, it was the nosy wife, Pallavi Sharma. She closed her eyes in dread.

No, no, no. Not today.

"Chitra, can you please look and tell me which blouse looks better with my sari? The contrasting black or the matching pink?"

She turned around slowly with a forced smile. "Good morning, Pallavi Auntie."

Unfortunately for Chitra, India had developed a unique culture of kissing the asses of one's landlords and landladies.

"Come on, tell me." Pallavi said, getting impatient. "I have to go for a kitty party this afternoon so which blouse will be better?"

"The black one." Chitra answered, thinking this was the best opportunity to broach the subject of locks.

Pallavi looked down at the two pieces of garment in contemplation. "Hmm, you are right. The pink one would look nice."

Chitra could barely stop herself from snorting in exasperation. "Pallavi Auntie, I wanted to talk to you about the locks. Your husband had told me —"

But the woman was already gone and now the family's sad dog had come out to greet the equally sad human at the doorstep, wagging its tail half-heartedly.

Chitra sighed and petted the dog. "You're not the only one who suffers under this family, Scooby. They could have at least come up with a more original name for you."

Bidding farewell to the dog, she went down the narrow staircase and on to the small street lined with cars. Delhi had a huge parking problem. Neighbours squabbling over parking spaces had become a daily affair, almost charming to her now. Almost.

Chitra got in her tiny Nissan Micra and glanced at the rear-view mirror to see her face, clear of makeup except eyeliner. She wished the hot weather was a little more relenting so she could put on at least some basic products. However, even moisturizer made her feel sweaty today.

As she drove through the noisy and fuming traffic of the city, her phone buzzed. She looked down to see that it was Arjun, a fellow editor, who was calling her.

He was currently writing a cover story on five interesting personalities which were a part of NGOs, the unsung heroes of Indian society battling social evils. Chitra was supposed to observe these interviews as part of an office exercise in which editors would give feedback to each other and improve their craft.

She picked up the phone and held it with one hand while her other hand was on the steering wheel.

"Arjun, I am driving." Chitra said, aware of the fact that she would soon need to change gears.

"Well, drive faster. The fifth guy we wanted to interview for the cover story is already

here." Arjun said, ruffling some papers in the background. "What's his name...yes, Zahir Hosain."

It's in English (with a little bit Hindi):

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 2. HOSAIN

"Friendship is everything. Friendship is more than talent. It is more than government. It is almost the equal of family."~Mario Puzo, The Godfather

Chitra took her small leather backpack and phone from the passenger seat and hurried into her office building.

The office of Delhi Belly always rang with happiness. The employees of the magazine worked together on long wooden tables which were cluttered with papers, photographs, illustrations and writing instruments of every sort. Ubiquitous balls of paper thrown away in anger or frustration was the fashion here.

The only people who had their private offices were Chitra, Arjun, Zia and Tara, the executive editor. But even they didn't work in their offices unless conducting interviews or private business.

Chitra climbed the stairs to the second floor and went straight to Arjun's small office that was right next to hers.

The office was silent, but Chitra knew it was only a matter of time before a healthy noise would fill the floor. It was still early, and everyone was just waking up, armed with their mugs of cheap instant coffee.

Through the glass window, Chitra saw that a young man in a comfortably loose white linen shirt and jeans was sitting across Arjun, laughing.

She pushed the door open and entered.

The man got up in courtesy for her and the first thing Chitra noticed was that his wavy hair had been cut short; a grave loss in her opinion. His skin was a beautiful brown, not the tan kind but one which you are born with. A pair of trendy sunglasses rested in his shirt pocket.

She introduced herself with a polite smile. "Good morning, Mr. Hosain. I am Chitrlekha Menon and I am here to observe your interview."

He spoke in a deep, calm voice. "Pleased to meet you. And I would be grateful if you called me Zahir. Let's reserve Mr. Hosain for my old age days."

Chitra grinned. "As you wish. Arjun has told me about you and I must say, all of us at the office are really looking forward to this cover story. It truly encapsulates what the brand

of Delhi Belly stands for."

"I hadn't been made aware that Indian media was still clinging onto its last sliver of integrity until Arjun called me up; I am honoured to be here." Zahir's lip curled in amusement.

Zesty.

Chitra, however, didn't falter. "I will take that as a compliment."

"Who said it wasn't meant to be?"

Chitra raised an eyebrow in mock disbelief.

Arjun interrupted their tête-à-tête. "Chitra was originally meant to be here for observation, just as part of an exercise to assess our colleagues and give feedback. However, I would rather that she also participate as a co-interviewer."

Chitra's head snapped to look at Arjun. "But I haven't prepared anything."

"Come on." Arjun pleaded. "It will be fun. Just ask about whatever interests you. It's better than you sitting silently like a creep."

Chitra opened her mouth to argue but she caught the challenging glint in Zahir's eye which prompted her to end up saying, "Fine."

"So, let's start then." Arjun said, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. "Zahir, would you mind if the interview was audio-recorded? It will be for my own personal reference."

THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

### 3. THE FIRST MOVE

"But what if he's waiting for you to start talking to him?"~Anonymous

Chitra rang the doorbell of Alia's apartment, panting. She was sweating and desperately wanted to lie down. But Layla, who was next to her, didn't even have the decency to look winded after their jog. Alia opened the door and let them in.

Chitra went straight to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. She took out a bottle of water and started gulping its contents down so fast that half of it was spilling on her shirt but she didn't care.

Then she went to the living room and collapsed into a squishy armchair. Alia, Rya and Natasha were also there, watching her with amused grins.

"You did very well today." Layla smiled in appreciation and patted Chitra on her back.

"Oh God." Chitra rasped. "I hate you, Layla. Remind me to never go for a jog with you."

Continue this workout and within two months, you won't be skinny and all bones." Layla said, unperturbed by Chitra's words. "Your body will be toned and healthy."

"What's wrong with being skinny?" Natasha asked. "I would love to be skinny."

"Well, stop drinking beer and eating Haldiram's Bhujia all the time." Layla said with exasperation.

"Layla is crazy." Chitra told Alia. "She dragged me all over the park in the name of encouragement. She literally held my arm the entire time to prevent me from stopping!"

"Well, your stamina is pitiful." Layla snapped. She picked an apple from the fruit bowl on the dining table and started eating it.

Her phone buzzed and she looked down with a frown but didn't say anything.

"What happened?" Natasha asked finally.

"Nothing." Layla mumbled after a moment of silence. "Ryan wants to go away for the weekend. With me. He says that we should spend more time together."

"That is great news!" Rya said.

"What's wrong?" Chitra asked when Layla didn't utter a word.

"Nothing." Layla said. "Just a little surprised."

"Well, I think you should take a shower and change your clothes." Alia said. "You are too sweaty and a shower will let you mull things over."

Layla got up and went to the bathroom, clutching her gym bag. She looked fazed for some reason.

"I am glad they are trying to make their marriage work." Natasha said and everyone nodded silently.

\*\*\*\*\*

Chitra got out of her bathroom with a towel wrapped around her body. Shaving her arms and legs had taken too much of her limited time. She got dressed quickly, keeping a close watch on the clock on the wall which was warning her to hurry up.

While going down the staircase, praying real hard for smooth traffic, she once again bumped into Pallavi Sharma.

"Good evening, Auntie." Chitra smiled on the outside but groaned on the inside. She knew very well what was coming.

Pallavi Sharma eyed her up and down without any shame as if she were some fashion critic, her eyebrow raised. Chitra felt conscious of her bare skin that was showing.

"Chitra, what are you wearing?" She scolded like a matron. "I just read in the papers a few

days ago about this girl who got molested on the street. If this happens in broad daylight, I can't imagine what they do to girls at night, especially dressed the way you are!"

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

### 4. WEASLEY TO TRUMP

"Important encounters are planned by the souls long before the bodies see each other." ~Paulo Coelho

"Hello," Chitra said, tucking her jet black hair behind her ear.

Zahir looked up from his phone and his lips curved upwards in a smile at the sight of her. Chitra noticed that he was wearing a black shirt buttoned up all the way up and somehow, a mental picture of those hipster boys on Tumblr cropped up in her mind.

A part of her itched to open that top button even though she found it very cute. It was the same part of her that left the house in a mess and Mala frustrated every morning when going for work.

"Hi, Chitra." He got up. "I didn't know you were going to be here."

"Oh well, here I am," Chitra said.

Her eye fell on a man sitting not too far with a woman. He was subtly trying to flex his muscles in front of the girl. Zahir followed her line of sight and chuckled.

"Tell me, do you guys really think girls fall for that? Just show your biceps and the girl will jump into bed with you in a heartbeat." Chitra said with sarcasm.

"Well, not girls like you but there are some who look for that. Good looks and ripped muscles." Zahir said in a rather matter-of-factly way.

Chitra narrowed her eyes at him. "What do you mean, girls like me?"

"You know what I mean." Zahir said, waving his hand away in explanation. "You were sitting with the best-looking guy here. But instead of flirting back, you shook him off and came here to talk to me."

Chitra ignored his observation on purpose. "You told me you didn't know I was here."

Zahir looked as if he were caught off-guard and didn't speak for a moment before admitting. "I had seen you before you approached me."

Chitra opened her mouth to press him why he had pretended so but perhaps Zahir had anticipated that because he said abruptly, "I think some new snacks have just been served. Let's go see."

They walked to the table through a throng of people and sure enough, the table now held

nachos, chicken wings, hot dogs and doughnuts.

Zahir picked up some nachos and Chitra took a doughnut. As she bit into the sweet circle of heavenly pleasure, she spotted Kabir who was searching for her.

Chitra turned to Zahir. "Can we please hide somewhere? I really don't want to deal with Kabir right now."

"Where?" Zahir asked, bewildered by her sudden request.

Chitra grabbed his wrist and led him to the first door she could reach. She turned the doorknob and got in, Zahir following her.

The room was very tiny and square in shape. There were old, malfunctioning objects, broken appliances and cleaning supplies and brooms all over the room. A huge black trunk had been pushed against the northern wall.

"This must be a store room." Chitra whispered. "I've never been here."

"Why are you whispering?" Zahir asked, not bothering to lower his voice. "It's not like he will come looking for you in the store room."

He went over, sat down on the trunk and patted the spot next to him, asking Chitra wordlessly to come sit next to him. She did. They both ate the nachos and the doughnut in silence.

"So why exactly are you hiding from this Kabir?" Zahir asked when the food had been consumed.

"Well, I don't want to sound like a stereotypical Delhi girl but I believe he is hitting on me." Chitra answered as she pulled her legs up and sat cross-legged. She always found sitting like this very comfortable.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 5. THE BIG O TO MYSELF

"Hesitation increases in relation to risk in equal proportion to age."~Ernest Hemingway

The small bed was as comfortable as ever and the air conditioner which had been fitted into the window was working noisily as usual.

An alarm clock ticked at its slow pace, the small hand pointing at the blue-coloured seven.

Crumpled white linen curtains had been pulled to the sides, providing a view of the rainfall. Chitra looked at the rain droplets gliding down the smooth glass with a keen disinterest.

Feeling that it was time to get out of bed, she sat up and looked down to see that she was



still wearing the crop top from last night but not the midi skirt. It was lying on the stone floor.

The events of the party were swirling around in her mind. Her lips had brushed against Zahir's. He had drawn closer.

She had put her hands on his chest.

He had drawn ever closer.

His lips had grazed her jawline.

Zahir had asked in the softest whisper if he may kiss her.

Her hands trembling, she had slowly nodded.

His lips had started moving upwards, toward her own.

But then the door swung open with a loud bang and they had jumped apart, as if caught red-handed. A drunk man had arrived on the scene of the said crime and she had fled, as guilty as an offender.

Chitralekha had never been more embarrassed, never been more that foolish. She clapped her hand on her forehead and sighed.

Chitra would probably never see him again but she could not forgive herself for being so unethical. She was about to help with an article on him the very next day!

She got out of bed and bathed before sitting down to work. But as soon as Chitra had settled down, the doorbell rang. She groaned and opened the door to see that it was Mala.

"Mala, please make some breakfast. I am starving."

"What do you want to eat, didi? Fried eggs, poha, paratha, toasties?"

"Toasties." Chitra answered happily. Mala's toasties were to die for, in Chitra's opinion.

Mala went to the kitchen and Chitra got down to work. She had worked for about half an hour when Mala came and served breakfast—toasties and cutting chai—along with a copy of Delhi Belly's latest issue.

Chitra thanked her with gratitude and checked out the magazine to make sure everything was the way it was supposed to be before getting back to work.

Meanwhile, Mala cleaned the entire house, did Chitra's laundry, cooked lunch for one person but dinner for five, since Chitra's friends were coming over. Finally, she called out to Chitra, "Didi, I am going. All the work has been done."

"Thank you, Mala!"

Chitra closed the Word document and opened Facebook. The girls had tagged her on some posts. She spent a few minutes responding with apt replies before checking her feed.

There was a listicle, Ten Ways to Spruce Up Your Living Room Without Spending Big Bucks and another headed Forty Nine Movies You Must Watch Before You Die and the next one, Modi is so Gangsta, click to see.

Chitra saw that Arjun had posted pictures of the party. She went through some of them before spotting herself in one of them. There were a few pictures of her and Kabir.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 6. ELECTRIC

"A person is a fool to become a writer. His only compensation is absolute freedom. He has no master except his own soul, and that, I am sure, is why he does it."~Roald Dahl

Chitra sat in her armchair with a notebook and a pencil on Saturday morning. She thought for a moment before starting to write.

## OFFENCE: THE NATIONAL PASTIME OF INDIA

In recent times, all of us have heard the word 'offence' repeatedly on TV debates or in newspapers. It is used when people want to protest against those who consume beef or comedians who dare to speak the bitter truth. Of course, everyone possesses the right to be offended but is it right when someone uses this term just to further their rigorous propaganda that includes unreasonable bans and moral policing?

Our country has spent a lot of time and energy in the past few months trying to define the term offence. However, despite all these efforts, we still never use that word in the right context. If someone refuses to rent you houseroom because of the fact that you are Muslim, that is offensive. But if someone tries to talk about sex education to young teenagers, you really shouldn't go running to the police station to report this 'vulgarity'.

Chitra stopped writing and examined the words she had just put on paper. They looked alright but it just felt like one big rant to Chitra. She felt that she had to veil her words better and the structure of the article was no good.

She tore that sheet out of the notebook and threw it onto the floor.

## I EAT BEEF AND NO ONE CAN STOP ME

This title looked bold but it felt a little more like sensationalism. Furthermore, she didn't really eat beef or any other meats for that matter. So she chose another heading and got down to work.

After three hours of writing and re-writing, Chitra surveyed her work. There were too many scratches and words had been squeezed in between sentences in every line. Despite all that clutter, Chitra knew immediately that she hadn't achieved anything. Nothing she wrote these days was of any good.

\*\*\*\*\*

On Sunday morning, Chitra nervously picked up her phone and texted Zahir.

\*Hi, would you like to have lunch with me this afternoon?

His reply came after five minutes.

\*Yes, of course. Where do you want to meet?

Chitra texted out a response as quickly as her fingers would allow her.

\*My place. The address is N-269, Jayati Nagar.

\*At what time should I be there?

\*At one o'clock?

\*See you later then.

Chitra glanced up at the clock. It was already eleven o'clock. She went to the kitchen to check what Mala had cooked for lunch and sighed with relief to see coconut rice. That would make for a good meal.

To distract herself from thinking about Zahir's arrival, she went to her bedroom to get a novel from her bookshelf. This bookshelf was so huge that it covered an entire wall, from ceiling to floor.

But seeing that it was all messed up, she decided to arrange the books properly before Zahir came.

It was the sound of a doorbell that brought her back two hours later. Her eyes widened and she knew that Zahir had arrived. She got up and fixed her bra and hair before opening the front door.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 7. HIS TOUCH

"I think the concept of virginity was created by men who thought their penises were so important that it changes who a woman is."~Unknown/Anonymous

Chitra watched with impatience as Zahir unbuttoned his shirt. She reached out to touch his chest. He kissed her briefly and then unbuckled his brown belt and threw it on the floor, followed by his shoes and socks.

She herself was tucking her shirt out of her high-waisted jeans.

"Let me." Zahir said.

Chitra lifted her hips upward and Zahir peeled the jeans off her legs. He took off her shirt

as well.

She was now lying only in her lingerie. Zahir's eyes had lit up with passion as he started to kiss her throat.

He slowly progressed southward and by the time his lips were just inches above her bra, he was biting and leaving angry red marks on her skin. She clutched the bed sheets with desperation.

"Open your bra."

Chitra complied and the bra joined the rest of their clothing on the floor. She wrapped her legs around his waist as his mouth licked and bit at the skin of her breasts while his hand fondled the other breast.

But then suddenly, just when she thought she couldn't hold it longer, he stopped touching her. The wet tongue, the sharp teeth and that exploring hand were all gone, replaced by cold air.

Zahir was standing on the floor again. Chitra was about to complain when she realized that he was taking his pants off.

He was just wearing his plain black boxers now. Leaning down again, his body hovering above hers like it had done a few moments ago.

But he didn't touch her breasts now. He simply looked into her eyes. Chitra could feel his hardness against her sex.

"What?" Chitra asked, nonplussed by the sudden change in his behaviour.

"I had never imagined the day you had interviewed me that I would be lying in a bed with you like this," he whispered.

"Me neither. But that's life for you. Unexpected."

She kissed the top of his nose tenderly and ran her fingers through his hair.

Zahir got off her and landed beside her. They both lied on their sides, facing each other. Zahir moved so that Chitra's head rested on his forearm.

She wrapped her arms around his torso and he pulled her to his chest.

"I want to take it slow with you." Zahir murmured. "I want to show you that this is about more than sex for me."

"Yet I am lying here with you in nothing but my panties," Chitra commented wryly, wriggling out of his grasp to look at his face.

"You are too hard to resist." Zahir sighed.

There was a contemplative silence which was broken ultimately by Zahir. "I am guessing here you are not a virgin so—"

"Let me guess, you like to fuck only virgins?" Chitra said sharply, withdrawing from his embrace.

Zahir seemed undisturbed by her foul language. He said in a calm voice, "You didn't let me finish. I just wanted to ask about your first time."

Chitra seemed at a loss for words. Zahir opened his arms, inviting her back.

She sheepishly went back to him and apologized. "I am sorry. It's just that I hate those men who only want to have relations with virgins."

"I understand." Zahir smoothed her hair in comfort.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

# 8. A STORMY NIGHT

"Is love this misguided need to have you beside me most of the time? Is love this safety I feel in our silences? Is it this belonging, this completeness?" ~Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The sky was the colour of inky blackness and even in the night, the dark clouds were visible. It was raining heavily and no one was on the streets if they could help it. This was a nasty storm that made the trees shake.

The lightning was occasional, the thunder frequent and the gales continuous.

During this first storm of the monsoon season, Chitra was in the relative safety and warmth of her home in the company of Zahir Hosain. They were sitting on a large navy blue rug in the living room, curled up in a thin blanket.

"You will really like this book." Chitra said.

"What is it called?"

"Twilight in Delhi." Chitra replied. "Once you read it, you will understand exactly why I like Indian authors."

The sky roared again and lightning could be seen from a window for a split second.

"The weather is getting worse," Zahir muttered.

"You must stay the night. It isn't safe to drive tonight."

"I suppose. Do you want to go to bed?" He gently asked.

She shook her head and snuggled against his chest, her ear placed on his heart. He sipped hot tea from a brown mug and told her anecdotes from his childhood.

Since they were already on the topic, Chitra looked up at him and asked softly, "Zahir, if I

may ask, how did your parents die?"

Zahir stilled for a moment before forcing himself to relax. "My family is from Bengal, that's where our zamindari lands were. They both died during a malaria epidemic as did my grandmother. Dada Jaan says that the epidemic had wiped out in bulk that year but I have no memory of it. I was only two years old."

"They all died within the same year?" Chitra asked in shock, unable to even fathom the toll that must have taken on the old man, his entire family dead except for an infant for whom he was now responsible.

"My father and my grandmother passed away in the first year but my mother was sick for months. She died in the first month of the next year. After finishing their last rites, Dada Jaan brought me to Allahabad, where some of our relatives lived so it wouldn't feel so lonely to him."

Zahir didn't sound melancholic and neither did it appear to Chitra that he was trying to hide his feelings. It just seemed like he had come to terms with the pain of that loss long ago.

"I wish we could have grown up together." Chitra whispered. "I think we would have understood each other as children."

"I would have liked that." His lips brushed against hers lightly as they moved. "I never really believed in saving yourself till marriage or for a special someone but now I wish I had saved myself for you. I want all of me to be there for you to consume."

Chitra finally kissed him, conveying all her feelings through that kiss. Her newfound, absolute need for him could not be expressed in words.

They sat in silence, with Zahir's head resting on her shoulder and her hand entwined in his. Both of them were lost in their own reveries, trying to make sense of their love for each other.

After an hour or so, they decided to retire to bed. They brushed their teeth together after Chitra had given him a new toothbrush. She changed into the white shirt she always wore to bed and came out of the bathroom to find Zahir stripping down to his boxer briefs.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 9. CONDOM CRISIS

"The wound is the place where the Light enters you."~Rumi

Chitra sat in Alia's bedroom as her friend hustled about, trying to make it as neat as possible. Natasha was sitting in an armchair and eating her usual Haldiram's Bhujia with beer.

"Aren't Rya and Layla coming?" Chitra asked as she toyed with a large silver earring Alia

had just found under her bed.

"No, Layla had work in the office and Rya has gone to Ladakh for a few days," Natasha said.

"You know you could help me." Alia grumbled as she dusted some crumbs off her nightstand.

"We could." Natasha agreed but didn't move a muscle. She just munched as Alia glared at her.

"Why are you cleaning anyway?" Chitra asked. "I don't remember you being a neat freak."

"She isn't but her potential boyfriend is," Natasha said as she grabbed the TV remote and switched on the television. She started flipping through channels with boredom.

"Potential boyfriend?" Chitra questioned.

"I just met a guy, Rishab Wadhwan, and we hit it off fairly well." Alia explained as she dumped a lot of papers into a bin. "I guess we are going out but we haven't made it official. Hopefully, by tonight we will."

"Good luck," Chitra said.

"Thanks. Rishab isn't—"

"Do you not have any news channels?" Natasha exclaimed, cutting Alia off.

"I don't watch them so I stopped paying for them." Alia said. "Not everyone is a corporate lawyer here, you know?"

"Don't give me that bullshit." Natasha snapped. "I don't know what kind of hooliganism is this, no news channels on TV."

Alia ignored Natasha and continued talking to Chitra. "Rishab isn't exactly what I usually go for."

"What do you mean?" Chitra asked as Natasha settled on Comedy Central.

"Well, he is a bit of a geek. He loves chemistry and is doing a PhD in it," Alia said, "But it's interesting really. You should hear him explain things. He's so fascinated by it all that you start getting fascinated by just hearing him talk about it."

"It sounds like you guys are made for each other." Chitra smiled and Natasha got up to go to the bathroom.

"You know once he got an erection just by looking at me in a short skirt." Alia laughed. "It was very cute."

"Are you guys..." Chitra trailed off.

"No, not until now," Alia said, "We just kissed twice. I met him only two weeks ago."

Chitra thought about how quickly her and Zahir had proceeded to the bed compared to Alia and Rishab. Should we have waited?

Alia who had been observing Chitra the entire time, covered her mouth with her hand in surprise. "You did it with Zahir!"

Natasha had just come back and grinned at Chitra slyly. "Nice."

"When did this happen?" Alia demanded.

"Three days ago." Chitra answered.

Alia understood Chitra's concern immediately. To console her friend, Alia said, "Don't worry. Rishab takes a lot of time getting comfortable with people so don't compare your situation with mine."

Chitra nodded and Natasha asked, "How was he in bed?"

Chitra gave a mysterious smile that said more than enough.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

# 10. THE OTHER ONE

"Strong women wear their pain like they do stilettos. No matter how much it hurts, all you see is the beauty of it."~Unknown

Chitra was in the bathroom at seven o'clock the next morning. Her eyes were closed to enjoy the hot water to the fullest.

As she massaged her scalp to relieve all the stress, she heard the bathroom door open. Chitra didn't have to look to see who it was.

He stepped naked into the shower and stood right behind her, their bodies touching. She wanted to lean into him but resisted the urge. His hand removed the wet hair from her shoulder and he started placing small kisses, slowly going up to her neck.

"I didn't know that we had solved things out for you to do this." Chitra commented with dryness.

"I have solved it for us." Zahir said.

"Oh? How magnanimous of you." Chitra said sarcastically.

"We are both getting tested for STDs today after we pick up your dress."

Chitra realized that this indeed was the solution. But she didn't want to acknowledge that



he was the one who came up with it. Not yet.

She changed the topic. "I didn't like that you were so upset at my insistence for a condom, even though it was just a blowjob. Protection comes first."

"I understand." Zahir took a deep breath. "But we are together and I need to feel your love on my skin—at least for oral. Perhaps this medical test will put the issue to rest."

With that, he left the bathroom and Chitra stood there alone.

After a couple of minutes, she came out too, with a towel wrapped around her body. She got dressed in haste and hoped her hair would dry. It wasn't too long, barely reaching her shoulders.

She came out to see Zahir sitting in the living room, dressed to leave. Car keys were dangling from his hand.

He asked. "Ready?"

When they were getting into the car, it struck Chitra that he couldn't have bought a black SUV with a teacher's salary.

Zahir seemed to have read her thoughts for he said, "I blew the last of my inheritance from Dada Jaan on the car."

"Such a guy thing to do." Chitra teased.

And just like that, the ease between them was back, as if it had never left.

They listened to soulful music as Zahir drove through the city, humming under his breath.

\*\*\*\*\*

Chitra was looking at herself apprehensively in the mirror. She never felt comfortable wearing dresses, especially one which her sister, Chandralekha, had bought for her on a trip to Paris.

Coming back to reality, she saw Zahir in the reflection of the mirror.

"You look beautiful." He said softly, kissing the nape of her neck.

"Yeah." She said but then sighed. "I think I will change. I don't like these dresses."

"Come on, this one really suits you."

"It does?" Chitra asked with doubt, tilting her head to examine her reflection.

"Of course." Zahir beamed. "Now are you ready to go or should we proceed to discuss if your shoes go with the dress?"

THE LOVE RIOTS

## 11. AFTERMATH

"But Alice, this is not Wonderland."~Alice in Wonderland

Zahir opened the door and stepped back to allow Chitra to enter. She walked past him quickly and headed straight to the bedroom.

Without bothering to close the door, she stripped down from that dress she hated so much and looked for her clothes. She put on a pair of cotton shorts and a t-shirt.

When Chitra was stuffing the dress back into her bag, she saw Zahir standing at the door, observing her.

"Give me my phone." She demanded.

He took it out from his pocket and handed it over to her. Chitra sat down on a chair, tired from the events of the evening, and looked to see if there were any calls or messages. Alia had called her thrice but now was not the time to call back.

There was a fight to be had.

Chitra closed her eyes and massaged her temples when she heard Zahir croak, "Chitra, say something please. You have been so quiet since we left that place."

His sheer confusion and the naive look on his face irritated her to the core. "Zahir what was the point of taking me there without telling me about the history you had with her? What is wrong with you? Did it never occur to you that I might have wanted to know that you had slept with her?!"

Chitra saw that her phone was vibrating. Alia was calling again.

"I just—"

Before he could say anything, she cut him short. "And what about the whole anal sex thing that was going on? Are you into that? Do you expect me to be into that—us having anal sex because it isn't something I want to do."

Zahir knew better than to interrupt her rant so they marinated in tense silence for a while as thoughts churned in Chitra's head. The need to fight with him bubbled up her throat before she finally spat it out.

"I don't know why men are so stupid! You used to always act like a saint, as if you had never touched a drop of alcohol. What the hell happened to that, huh?"

Zahir finally snapped. "Chitra, I was experimenting before realizing what path I wanted to follow instead of blindly following anything. The drinking, anal sex, it was all part of experimentation. I think I am allowed to do that!"

Chitra stood up and said furiously, "Oh don't you take that tone with me, especially right

now. How would you feel if I didn't tell you anything and took you to dinner at my friend's place who it turns out was dying to be with me and had also previously fucked me in the ass?!"

"There's no need to shout!" Zahir screamed even more loudly.

Chitra's phone was vibrating again. "Oh for God's sake! What is so important?!"

She grabbed the phone and said before Alia could say anything, "Please tell me someone has died."

"Not dead, but missing."

\*\*\*\*\*

Layla's living room was heavy with tension. Natasha was pacing to and fro, calling Layla even though she wasn't picking up. Rya, Alia and Zahir were discussing something in anxious, low whispers. Meanwhile, Chitra was glaring at Ryan who was booking a flight.

"Wait, so take me through this again." Chitra said in general to no one. "This piece of shit, Ryan, told Layla that he had cheated on her and she ran out. It's been nine hours since then and she has not returned. Right?"

"Right." Alia confirmed.

Chitra turned to Ryan and said, "I thought things were improving. You two were going on romantic getaways. What happened to that?"

THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 12. HIS FRIENDS

"Anger and jealousy can no more bear to lose sight of their objects than love." ~George Eliot

Chitra was waiting patiently at the reception of Inaayat's office for Zahir. His car had broken down so Chitra had come to pick him up from work.

The receptionist had told her that he had some unexpected company so perhaps that is why he was taking so long.

She unlocked her phone and opened Instagram to pass the time.

"Ah yes, definitely."

Chitra looked up to see that Zahir had come, accompanied by two men and a woman.

"Chitra!" Zahir smiled when he spotted her. "I didn't realize you had come. Why didn't you call?"

"Um..."

He hugged her with affection before introducing her to the three people. "This is Chitra. Chitra, these are my friends."

The woman said warmly, "I am Zoya. Zahir and I went to the same school."

Chitra looked at Zoya and couldn't help but feel worried for the woman. She was highly malnourished, possibly suffering from anorexia. Her bones were jutting out of her thin flesh.

"All four of us did," the man in the sharp, grey suit said, "I am Junaid Raza."

"Chitralekha Menon but call me Chitra." She said as she shook hands with Junaid.

"Junaid is formal as fuck so I apologize on his behalf." The other man joked.

Junaid gave him an exasperated look and said, "This is Anurag Roy. He likes to joke too much."

Anurag gave Junaid a mocking bow.

Zoya rolled her eyes at the two of them and turned to Chitra. "We were just going for a lunch. If you are free, please join us. I would love to get to know you."

"Yeah, we are going to this great restaurant I have heard a lot about." Anurag said. "You should come."

Chitra turned to Zahir to gauge his reaction to this. He shrugged, indicating it was completely up to her.

Chitra said with a bright smile. "Okay, let's go."

\*\*\*\*\*

"It is quite admirable that you have been friends with each other for such a long time. I don't even know where my school friends are today." Chitra said as she pulled the cotton napkin on her lap at the restaurant table.

"I know," Zahir said, "That would have happened to us as well had it not been for Anurag and Zoya. They keep forcing us to meet, making plans."

"Regardless of how busy our schedules could be," Junaid added in a disgruntled tone.

Zoya said to Chitra, "And yet they are the most ungrateful little pieces of shit."

Chitra smiled and the waiter came to get their orders.

When the menus had been closed and the orders noted down, Anurag said, "So, is this serious?"

"What is?" Zahir asked in confusion.

"Your relationship with Chitra," Anurag said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Of course it is." Junaid snapped. "When has Zahir been in a casual relationship? He isn't exactly the type to have one night stands."

Chitra exchanged a discreet look with Zahir at the mention of one night stands.

"Yes, it is serious." Zahir answered, eager to look away from Chitra. "But why are you asking?"

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

# 13. ANGER, UNWARRANTED

"And it's wrong of you to think that love leaves room for nothing else. It's possible to love something and still condescend to it."~Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Zahir said sullenly, "I got the results of our medical tests for STDs on my email."

"And?"

"All clear. I have forwarded the mail to you if you want to look."

"Thank you."

That was all they said in the car.

When they finally entered Zahir's house, he went straight to the bedroom. Chitra wondered if she should follow him.

She just stood there for a solid ten minutes, not knowing what to do with herself.

Eventually, she plucked the courage and went into the bedroom. Zahir was standing in front of an open window, with his back to her.

A chilly wind entered the room through the window. The weather was changing for the better, taking away all the humidity that hung heavily. However, now the air had a cold bite to it.

Zahir turned to look at Chitra with blank, dark eyes. He said in a soft, menacing voice, "Come here."

Chitra was almost scared as she walked that simple distance of five yards to him. When she came to stand in front of him, he pulled her to his chest.

Without wasting any time, he kissed her roughly and cupped her sex, which sent a delicious shiver down her back.

Zahir's hand slipped into her pants. He started violently rubbing her clitoris and it didn't take long for Chitra to come. She slumped against his shoulder, her breath heavy.

"Zahir, what — "

Suddenly two fingers went inside her and Chitra gasped with surprise. He whispered seductively, "So wet, so ready."

Chitra couldn't respond and closed her eyes to feel.

"Did you get this wet by flirting with Anurag?"

Chitra snapped her eyes open and said, "What?"

Zahir persisted. "Did you?"

Offended by his question, she grabbed his hand and pushed it away. Chitra tried to turn away from him to compose herself but he grabbed her arm and twisted it behind her back.

She screamed with pain as he reeled her back to him. "What are you doing?!"

"Answer me." He said in a voice of forced calm.

"Let me go!"

He didn't say anything but twisted her arm a little more. Her eyes welled with tears when she finally said, "No! No!"

He thankfully let it go. Chitra backed into a corner of the room, rubbing her wrist.

"What is wrong with you?" She shouted.

"Me?" Zahir seethed. "What's wrong with you? You were flirting with my best friend right in front of me."

Chitra's temper shot up and impulsively she charged at him, pushing him so hard that he fell.

"I wasn't flirting for God's sake!"

Zahir got up. "Oh yeah? Then why were you — "

Chitra cut him off by kissing him, just to shut him up. It all happened so fast in a hurried blur that she didn't even realize it before she was under him, naked.

She could sense that this was not going to be lovemaking. It would be an angry, selfish fuck.

Every move he made was not for her pleasure. It was for his own.

Zahir tugged at her hair, bit her skin hard and didn't care about being gentle—he was thrusting into her with a brutal force.

He didn't wait for her to reach her orgasm like he usually did. He stopped after pouring himself into the condom and rolled off her.

Chitra stared at the ceiling, trying to comprehend exactly what she had just consented to.

What is wrong with me? How the fuck did I end up sleeping with someone just after he manhandled me? What kind of a woman am I?

A strange voice with unknown origins echoed in her head. Weak. You're a weak woman.

Another gleefully evil voice chirped, Hypocritical too—chanting about feminism in your articles but then coming home only to allow a man to abuse you in the bedroom.

The tears she had earlier not allowed to escape from her eyes now freely rolled down her cheeks.

Zahir tried to get out of bed but his legs gave out and he collapsed on the stone floor. He was shaking violently and broke into a fit of ugly sobs.

Looking at him, disgust and self-loathing coursed through her body so much so that she couldn't bear to lie in his bed any longer. She put on her clothes as fast as she could and ran out of the apartment like a rat.

\*\*\*\*\*

Chitra opened the door of her apartment and took off her shoes and coat.

"Chitra?" A voice called out.

Layla emerged from the living room, looking a little unsure of herself.

Chitra rubbed her eyes quickly so Layla couldn't see she had been crying. "Hey, what are you doing here?"

When Layla had returned after her little Houdini act, she had requested for some private time with Ryan to talk about the divorce she was going to file. So seeing Layla here made Chitra a little worried.

"Where's Ryan?"

"Have you been crying?" Layla asked, now observing Chitra's face.

"I asked first."

"Ryan is at his parents' place." Layla answered. "He is a little disturbed."

"Oh." Chitra put her keys down.

"So I thought I will visit you. Your hiding place for the emergency key is terrible, by the way. Under a potted plant, seriously? Yeah, so I let myself in."

"Good. You are welcome here anytime."

"Thanks. So, why were you crying?"

Chitra tried to hide her face from Layla as she put down the keys. "Nothing. Just a little fight I had with Zahir. Don't worry about it."

She didn't want to burden her friend with her problems when she had a big divorce ahead of her. Layla raised an eyebrow of doubt at Chitra's lie but let it go.

"How about I make some tea and we can watch Koffee with Karan together? We really need a break from these men."

That, Chitra agreed with.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

# 14. RESPECT

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads only lives once." ~George R. R. Martin

Chitra was sitting on the terrace of her office building, looking at the variety of messages Zahir had sent her in the past few weeks. There were a lot of calls too, mostly made in the evening or night when he was free. But some were also made at abrupt times like three in the morning or middle of the day when he was surely teaching.

Sometimes when she would be scrolling through posts on her phone, it would start ringing and she would have to wait for the call to end before she could resume.

Zahir came to her house every other evening. But she wouldn't answer, just sitting and listening to him knock for hours, calling out to her.

The last time he had come, Arun Sharma had requested for him to leave and never return unless he was invited. Chitra had thanked him mentally and later in person.

Over their separation, the infamous Delhi smog, which marked the arrival of winter, had settled over the city. Chitra had already taken her woollens out of storage a few days ago.

Lately, she had been struggling more than usual with her writer's block. Even Tara had noticed that Chitra hadn't written anything for weeks and had set a deadline for her. Chitra blamed this fight with Zahir for the worsening of her writer's block.

She idly traced one of his crimson marks on her neck, which had almost faded, as she read Zahir's latest message.

\*Are you breaking up with me? If not, then come to 32/45, Sector 21, Daryaganj tomorrow at 7PM. I have something to show you.

\*\*\*\*\*



Throughout the car ride, Chitra contemplated going back home. She even turned the car a couple of times but didn't go home.

To tackle her anxiety, she put on the radio and sang out loud, tapping her fingers on the steering wheel.

An hour later, she entered the Daryaganj area and parked the car on the outskirts. It was so crowded that taking a car through its roads would be pure stupidity.

So she set out on foot to the address Zahir had given her. The wafting smell of chaat and jalebis hit her senses and lights from the little bookshops twinkled in her eyes.

Daryaganj was a vicinity in Delhi that was renowned for its many publishing houses and bookshops. The huge market had thousands of people visiting it every day and the streets were always full of moving crowds.

It was a book lover's paradise for here you could find the cheapest copies of celebrated novels, thin poetry books and obscure books written on even more obscure topics. Any book, really.

By asking around for the address, she was directed to the second floor of an old building by a particularly rickety and narrow staircase.

At last, she stood in front of what looked like a bookstore.

When she pushed the heavy door to get in, Chitra saw that this one was very old. The old fashioned high walls were covered with bookshelves, much like the bookshelf in her house but many more in number.

There were so many books here that the shelves couldn't hold all of them. Piles of books, which varied in height, littered the wooden floor. The air was dusty and the smell of degenerating paper dominated it, the kind of smell put in candles.

"You came." Zahir emerged from the shadows.

"Why did you bring me to this bookstore?" She asked, ignoring his statement.

THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 15. HER FAMILY

"The course of true love never did run smooth."~William Shakespeare

Precisely hundred and forty-nine days later, Chitra was standing with a group of ladies of her own age at her mother's party, half-listening to them fawn over a new exclusive French perfume.

The lawns were lined with tall trees and green creepers decorated the white fence. Well-dressed men and women were mingling with each other, holding glasses of wine and

eating spectacular appetizers.

Waiters moved through the throngs of people swiftly, refreshing drinks and serving snacks. A band of seven people was playing a melodious tune in a corner and the air was full of laughter and cackle.

Zahir meanwhile was standing at the other end of the lawn, talking with a middle-aged man. Chitra drank her cocktail in one gulp and excused herself from the group to head over to Zahir.

Chitra recognized the man as Ashok Gupta, a business associate of her father's.

"Mr. Gupta, how are you?" She said briskly as she slipped her arm into Zahir's.

"Fine, very fine indeed," said the potbellied man who was dressed in his very best, "I didn't realize you knew this young man here. Pardon me but I didn't catch your name."

"Zahir Hosain." Zahir said politely and drew Chitra closer to him.

"We are in a relationship, actually." Chitra said casually as she took a glass of white wine from a passing waiter.

"Oh? See, Chitra, that is why you must come around more often." Gupta said. "We have no idea about the ongoings of your life."

"A few surprises here and there never hurt," Chitra replied with a cryptic smile.

Gupta laughed and shook his head muttering under his breath that sounded a whole lot like, "Typical Chitra."

"Well, it was refreshing to hear such honest opinions rather than those diplomatic ones," Gupta said to Zahir, "But I must get going now."

"Of course." Zahir smiled and Gupta scurried away.

"What honest opinions were you offering him?" Chitra questioned with a hint of amusement.

"Something about politics," Zahir replied vaguely, "Do you know where the washrooms are?"

Chitra directed him and he left her sipping wine while listening to the music.

She felt a tap on her shoulder and turned around to see her father, Aditya Menon.

"Hello," she greeted pleasantly. Out of all her family members, Chitra got along with her father the best. They had their differences and fights but they also had an ease with each other.

"Come with me to my office," he said, not in the mood to exchange pleasantries at the moment.

"Why?"

"I have to discuss something with you in private."

Standing in her father's office, she noticed that there was a lot of oak wood and leather in this room, tastefully done. "Did Ma refurbish your office?"

"Yes, your mother is quite idle these days. Sit down," he said as he seated himself on the leather couch.

Chitra obeyed and waited for him to tell her exactly what was going on.

Her father thought for a moment before finally saying, "I have a proposition for you."

'What proposition?"

THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

## 16. AN ANGRY MUSLIM

"Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair."~G. K. Chesterton

On Saturday morning, Chitra was sleeping soundly in her bed. It was a cloudy sky that morning so the sun had not yet come out. The grey clouds loomed over the city, threatening to let loose of their moisture.

She felt a pair of lips place small kisses along her jaw so lovingly that she would have melted if she had been awake. But now, Chitra just felt annoyed at the person disturbing her precious sleep.

"Zahir." She drawled his name out long without opening her eyes. "Let me sleep."

Chitra turned to the other side and covered her face with the blanket.

"Wake up." Zahir murmured. "Let's have sex."

"I don't wanna." Chitra whined childishly.

Zahir spooned her from behind and pulled the blanket down to kiss her bare shoulder.

Damn the winters that make cuddling under blankets even more delicious!

She turned around to face him. "Fine but you know the rule: no kissing before brushing our teeth."

Zahir's hand slipped inside her panties. "I promise."

"Come on, I just need a quickie," Chitra rasped.

"Yes, ma'am."

Chitra's giggle was cut short when Zahir entered her.

After a few minutes, they collapsed on the bed together. Chitra, however, wasn't satisfied.

So she spread her legs and started rubbing her clitoris.

Zahir pushed himself up on his arm and observed her masturbate with a keen, lustful eye.

She closed her eyes and felt a hot breath fan across her skin, his lips close but not quite touching. His voice murmured in her ear, whispering the dirtiest words.

A desperation took over so Chitra started moving her fingers at a faster pace, almost in a frenzy.

Zahir's last sentence, which was the dirtiest, produced a visual that was so strong that it proved to be the final push.

Her entire body stiffened and her eyes were fixated on the white ceiling as pleasure coursed through her body.

When she had relaxed, Chitra scooped out her wetness and held it up for Zahir. "Want a taste?"

"Gladly." He gave her a sinister smile and sucked her finger hard, looking intently into her eyes.

Chitra's face heated up from his gaze but thankfully he broke the intense moment by exclaiming, "God that was so fucking hot! I think I will go down to get an energy drink so we can have another go."

"Will you make me orgasm this time or will I have to do it myself?" Chitra teased.

Zahir leaned in and whispered, "Oh sweetheart, you are going to get the mother of all orgasms."

He made her hair stand up but she was not one to back down. She leaned in even closer and said, "You think you will be able to get it up for me, old man?"

His sharp teeth bit down on her nipple in response to her playful insult. "You just watch, woman. You will be begging me by the end of it."

"Ha!" She snorted as she fell back on the pillow. "We will see about that."

Zahir dressed up and grabbed his wallet. "I'll be back in a second."

Chitra nodded, her eyes already closed for sleep to wash over.

\*\*\*\*\*

Chitra woke up suddenly to the sound of the front door slamming a little too hard.

Actually, very hard.

She rushed out of the room and saw Zahir grab a crystal figurine from the coffee table and throw it against the wall in anger.

"Zahir!" Chitra shrieked as shards of broken glass bounced back from the wall.

He turned around to look at her, his chest heaving.

"What are you doing?" Chitra shouted.

"I met your landlord's wife on the way here," he said.

"And what could she have possibly said that makes you smash my things like that?" Chitra demanded furiously.

"She told me that you are an innocent soul who doesn't deserve a bastard like me." Zahir replied, fury still dancing in his eyes. "She thinks I am out to change the religion of Hindu girls by seducing them—that I am a love jihadist."

Zahir had spat out the phrase 'love jihadist' as if it were the most vile poison that contaminated his very being.

Chitra looked at Zahir, dumbstruck. She didn't say anything.

"I am sick of this bullshit, Chitra!" Zahir shouted, further aggravated by her unusual silence. "They have already doubted my every intention, why must they also doubt my love for you?"

She padded over to Zahir apprehensively before hugging him tightly. Chitra rubbed his back to provide him some comfort and he slowly calmed down in her arms.

Finally, he tore himself from her embrace and said quietly, "Let's go to my apartment for a few days."

Chitra nodded. "Let me just pack my things."

As Chitra was taking out clothes from her armoire, she wondered if Zahir and her would have to face comments like these for the rest of their days together.

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

# 17. PUSHED AWAY

"It's all fun and games until feelings show up to the playground."~Erin Van Vuren

Chitra and Zahir went down the staircase and out of the building to where Zahir's car was parked.

He dropped his car keys in her palm without a word and went to the passenger side.

Chitra said, "Hey, I forgot some papers I needed for the next issue of the magazine. I will just quickly go and get them, okay?"

Zahir nodded mutely before sitting in the passenger seat. Chitra dumped her bag in the back of the car and went back into the three-floored building in which she lived.

But instead of going to the third floor, Chitra went to the first floor and rang the bell of Arjun and Pallavi Sharma's home.

Pallavi Sharma looked pleasantly surprised to see Chitra, "Hello, beta."

"Hello. Could I please have a word with you?" Chitra said in a stiffly formal way.

Pallavi nodded, stepping aside to allow Chitra to enter.

However, Chitra remained rooted to her spot on the doormat. She said, "I know you and Arun Uncle have always treated me like crap. I accepted that within my first few weeks here. Over all these years, I took all your casually nasty comments but this? I cannot take this in silence. You don't get to say zilch to Zahir."

Pallavi said, "Beta, I just think that he is not—"

"No." Chitra cut her off. "He loves me and I love him. Nothing else matters other than that, certainly not your opinion."

With that, Chitra turned sharply on her heel and went back to the car.

"Did you get the papers?" Zahir asked when she got in.

"Oh, no." Chitra lied. "I think I forgot them at the office. I will get them on Monday."

"Okay."

Chitra drove through the roads jammed with traffic in silence as Zahir stared out of the window, his eyes unfocused.

"So, what do you think I should wear for tonight?" Chitra asked brightly. Zoya had invited them to a night club tonight.

In reality, she didn't care about what she was going to wear but anything was better than this unhappily pensive Zahir.

"Chitra, don't force yourself to make conversation with me," Zahir said without looking at her.

After that, neither of them said a word the entire time.

When they had reached his home, Chitra put her bag down. "Do you mind if I hang my clothes up in your cupboard?"

"No, go ahead." He replied. "I have to go to the NGO office in half an hour. I won't be able to come back here in time for us to go the club together. Would you mind going alone? I will join you guys later."

Chitra stared at Zahir with an open mouth, knowing fully well that he was lying. But what irked her was that he didn't even bother to cover up.

"Why don't you just say that you don't want to be near me?" Chitra said icily.

Zahir ignored what she had said and put his car keys in her hand. "Take my car when you leave. I can go to the office by metro."

"I don't want to take—"

But he had turned and left.

Chitra felt anger. Why was he acting like that? She wanted to beat some sense into Zahir so badly!

## THE LOVE RIOTS

by DelhiBelly

# 18. (IM)PERFECT LOVE

"The difference between sex and love is that sex relieves tension and love causes it."~Woody Allen

Just to piss Zahir off, Chitra went to the club by an Uber and not his car.

Sitting in the cab, her mind eventually shifted to Zahir. Again, her boyfriend was consuming her thoughts, dominating them.

I have single-handedly put the Bechdel test to shame.

After sitting for almost an hour in the car, Chitra finally reached her destination and found Zoya and Junaid waiting outside the club, talking to each other.

Stepping out of the heated car, Chitra immediately felt the cold hit her hard. Perhaps wearing this short dress was a wrong choice for more than one reason. She clung to her jacket with shivering fingers as she approached Zahir's friends.

"Hi, Chitra," Zoya said, looking truly delighted to see her, "You look gorgeous."

Chitra highly doubted that. She felt like she just needed a pole to complete the outfit.

Junaid said, "Let's go inside."

"We can't just go inside like that," Chitra said, "There is a line."

Zoya laughed, "One thing you need to know about Junaid is that he never waits in lines."

This reminded Chitra of her sister who was always cutting lines with her money but she kept quiet.

So, the three of them entered the club. Chitra was glad to be inside because it was warmer but as she looked around, this club looked quite shady to her.

"Zoya, this is such a cheap place," Junaid said with a look of disgust, "We should have gone to the night club I suggested."

"Yes, and get bored," Zoya said, "This place is way better, thank you very much."

He gave Chitra an exasperated look. "Zoya hates it when I take her to one of the classier clubs of Delhi."

"It's not just me." Zoya protested. "Zahir and Anurag hate it there as well."

"Yeah, we'll see how much you love this place when you get molested." Junaid muttered.

There was a sufficient amount of people dancing on the floor but a few of them were in the seating area, drinking and talking.

The lights flickered on and off, leaving Chitra in a different coloured light each second—blue one moment, green the next and then pink. The music was so loud that Chitra could feel it vibrate inside her chest.

"Ladies, what drinks would you like to have?" Junaid asked loudly so he could be heard. Chitra asked for a beer.

"Let's go sit till the time Zahir and Anurag come," Zoya said in Chitra's ear. "They must be stuck in traffic."

So they went to sit on one of the leather sofas in the seating area and Chitra asked, "Are Zahir and Anurag coming together?"

"Yeah," Zoya said, "Zahir said that you had his car and that he was at the office or something. So he asked Anurag to pick him up on the way. Didn't you know?"

"Oh, I didn't get a chance to talk to Zahir today." Chitra lied. "Too busy with work."

"I have been very busy too." Zoya sighed. "My boss is hellbent on squeezing every ounce of happiness out of my body. I fell asleep in my office yesterday while doing work and I swear I saw a look of pity in the janitor's eyes in the morning."

Junaid came back and handed Chitra a beer.

Her phone buzzed with a text and she looked down to see that it was from Zahir.\*I love you. ~Z