

CHETAN BHAGAT



2 *states*
the story of my marriage

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THIS
EBOOK
IS
EXCLUSIVELY
MADE
BY
BOMBAYBOY4U_2005
&
PERFECTBLUE
FOR
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
~GREETINGS
TO~
BG
MTB
&
ALL
DBBRG
MEMBERS
DA
XCLUSIVES
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
2
STATES
THE
STORY
OF
MY
MARRIAGE

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
LOVE
MARRIAGES
AROUND
THE
WORLD
ARE
SIMPLE:
BOY
LOVES
GIRL.
GIRL
LOVES
BOY.
THEY
GET
MARRIED.
IN
INDIA,
THERE
ARE
A
FEW
MORE
STEPS:
BOY
LOVES
GIRL.
GIRL
LOVES
BOY.
GIRL'S
FAMILY
HAS
TO
LOVE
BOY.
BOY'S
FAMILY
HAS
TO
LOVE

GIRL.
GIRL'S
FAMILY
HAS
TO
LOVE
BOY'S
FAMILY.
BOY'S
FAMILY
HAS
TO
LOVE
GIRL'S
FAMILY.
GIRL
AND
BOY
STILL
LOVE
EACH
OTHER.
THEY
GET
MARRIED.
WELCOME
TO
2
STATES,
A
STORY
ABOUT
KRISH
AND
ANANYA.
THEY
ARE
FROM
TWO
DIFFERENT
STATES
OF
INDIA,
DEEPLY

IN
LOVE
AND
WANT
TO
GET
MARRIED.
OF
COURSE,
THEIR
PARENTS
DON'T
AGREE.
TO
CONVERT
THEIR
LOVE
STORY
INTO
A
LOVE
MARRIAGE,
THE
COUPLE
HAVE
A
TOUGH
BATTLE
IN
FRONT
OF
THEM.
FOR
IT
IS
EASY
TO
FIGHT
AND
REBEL,
BUT
IT
IS
MUCH

HARDER
TO
CONVINCE.
WILL
THEY
MAKE
IT?
FROM
THE
AUTHOR
OF
BLOCKBUSTERS
FIVE
POINT
SOMEONE,
ONE
NIGHT
@
THE
CALL
CENTER
AND
THE
3
MISTAKES
OF
MY
LIFE,
COMES
ANOTHER
WITTY
TALE
ABOUT
INTER-COMMUNITY
MARRIAGES
IN
MODERN
INDIA.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THIS
MAY
BE
THE
FIRST
TIME
IN
THE
HISTORY
OF
BOOKS,
BUT
HERE
GOES:
DEDICATED
TO
MY
IN-LAWS*
*WHICH
DOES
NOT
MEAN
I
AM
HENPECKED,
UNDER
HER
THUMB
OR
NOT
MAN
ENOUGH

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

PROLOGUE

"WHY

AM

I

REFERRED

HERE?

I

DON'T

HAVE

A

PROBLEM,"

I

SAID.

SHE

DIDN'T

REACT.

JUST

GESTURED

THAT

I

REMOVE

MY

SHOES

AND

TAKE

THE

COUCH.

SHE

HAD

AN

OFFICE

LIKE

ANY

OTHER

DOCTOR'S,

MINUS

THE

SMELLS

AND

COLD,

DANGEROUS

INSTRUMENTS.

SHE
WAITED
FOR
ME
TO
TALK
MORE.

I
HESITATED
AND
SPOKE
AGAIN.

"I'M
SURE
PEOPLE
COME
HERE
WITH
BIG,
INSURMOUNTABLE
PROBLEMS.

GIRLFRIENDS
DUMP
THEIR
BOYFRIENDS
EVERYDAY.

HARDLY
THE
REASON
TO
SEE

A
SHRINK,
RIGHT?

WHAT
AM

I,
A
PSYCHO?"

"NO,

I
AM
THE

PSYCHO.
PSYCHOTHERAPIST
TO
BE
PRECISE.
IF
YOU
DON'T
MIND,
I
PREFER
THAT
TO
SHRINK,"
SHE
SAID.
"SORRY,"
I
SAID.
"IT'S
OK,"
SHE
SAID
AND
RECLINED
ON
HER
CHAIR.
NO
MORE
THAN
THIRTY,
SHE
SEEMED
YOUNG
FOR
A
SHRINK,
SORRY,
PSYCHOTHERAPIST.
CERTIFICATES
FROM
TOP
US

UNIVERSITIES
ADORNED
THE
WALLS
LIKE
TIGER
HEADS
IN
A
HUNTER'S
HOME.
YES,
ANOTHER
SOUTH
INDIAN
HAD
CONQUERED
THE
WORLD
OF
ACADEMICS.
DR.
NEETA
IYER,
VALEDICTORIAN,
VASSAR
COLLEGE.
"I
CHARGE
FIVE
HUNDRED
RUPEES
PER
HOUR,"
SHE
SAID.
"STARE
AT
THE
WALLS
OR
TALK.
I'M
COOL

EITHER
WAY.”

I
HAD
SPENT
TWELVE
MINUTES,
OR
A
HUNDRED
BUCKS,
WITHOUT
GETTING
ANYWHERE.

I
WONDERED
IF
SHE
WOULD
ACCEPT
A
PARTIAL
PAYMENT
AND
LET
ME
LEAVE.

“DR.
IYER...”

“NEETA
IS
FINE,”
SHE
SAID.

“OK,
NEETA,

I
DON'T
THINK
MY
PROBLEM
WARRANTS
THIS.

I

DON'T
KNOW
WHY
DR.
RAMACHANDRAN
SENT
ME
HERE."
SHE
PICKED
MY
FILE
FROM
HER
DESK.
"LET'S
SEE.
THIS
IS
DR.
RAM'S
BRIEF
TO
ME

—
PATIENT
HAS
SLEEP
DEPRIVATION,
HAS
CUT
OFF
HUMAN
CONTACT
FOR
A
WEEK,
REFUSES
TO
EAT,
HAS
GOOGLE-SEARCHED
ON
BEST

WAYS
TO
COMMIT
SUICIDE.”
SHE
PAUSED
AND
LOOKED
AT
ME
WITH
RAISED
EYEBROWS.

“I
GOOGLE
FOR
ALL
SORTS
OF
STUFF,”
I
MUMBLED,
“DON’T
YOU?”
“THE
REPORT
SAYS
THE
MERE
MENTION
OF
HER
NAME,
HER
NEIGHBOURHOOD
OR
ANY
ASSOCIATION,
LIKE
HER
FAVOURITE
DISH,
BRINGS
OUT

UNPREDICTABLE
EMOTIONS
RANGING
FROM
TEARS
TO
RAGE
TO
FRUSTRATION.”

“I
HAD
A
BREAK-UP.
WHAT
DO
YOU
EXPECT?”

I
WAS
IRRITATED.
“SURE,
WITH
ANANYA
WHO
STAYS
IN
MYLAPORE.
WHAT’S
HER
FAVOURITE
DISH?
CURD
RICE?”

I
SAT
UP
STRAIGHT.
“DON’T,”

I
SAID
WEAKLY
AND
FELT
A

LUMP
IN
MY
THROAT.
I
FOUGHT
BACK
TEARS.
“DON’T,”
I
SAID
AGAIN.
“DON’T
WHAT?”
NEETA
EGGED
ME
ON,
“MINOR
PROBLEM,
ISN’T
IT?”
“FUCK
MINOR.
IT’S
KILLING
ME.”
I
STOOD
AGITATEDLY.
“DO
YOU
SOUTH
INDIANS
EVEN
KNOW
WHAT
EMOTIONS
ARE
ALL
ABOUT?”
“I’LL
IGNORE
THE

RACIST
COMMENT.
YOU
CAN
STAND
AND
TALK,
BUT
IF
IT
IS
A
LONG
STORY,
TAKE
THE
COUCH.
I
WANT
IT
ALL,"
SHE
SAID.
I
BROKE
INTO
TEARS.
"WHY
DID
THIS
HAPPEN
TO
ME?"
I
SOBBED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
SHE
PASSED
ME
A
TISSUE.
“WHERE
DO
I
BEGIN?”
I
SAID
AND
SAT
GINGERLY
ON
THE
COUCH.
“WHERE
ALL
LOVE
STORIES
BEGIN.
FROM
WHEN
YOU
MET
HER
THE
FIRST
TIME,”
SHE
SAID.
SHE
DREW
THE
CURTAINS
AND
SWITCHED
ON
THE
AIR-CONDITIONER.

I
BEGAN
TO
TALK
AND
GET
MY
MONEY'S
WORTH.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ACT
1:
AHMEDABAD

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

1
SHE
STOOD
TWO
PLACES
AHEAD
OF
ME
IN
THE
LUNCH
LINE
AT
THE
IIMA
MESS.

I
CHECKED
HER
OUT
FROM
THE
CORNER
OF
MY
EYE,
WONDERING
WHAT
THE
BIG
FUSS
ABOUT
THIS
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRL
WAS.
HER
WAIST-LENGTH
HAIR
RIPPLED

AS
SHE
TAPPED
THE
STEEL
PLATE
WITH
HER
FINGERS
LIKE
A
FAMISHED
REFUGEE.

I
NOTICED
THREE
BLACK
THREADS
ON
THE
BACK
OF
HER
FAIR
NECK.
SOMEONE
HAD
DECIDED
TO
ACCESSORIZE
IN
THE
MOST
ACADEMICALLY-ORIENTED
B-SCHOOL
IN
THE
COUNTRY.

'ANANYA
SWAMINATHAN---BEST
GIRL
IN
THE
FRESHER

BATCH,'
SENIORS
HAS
ALREADY
ANOINTED
HER
ON
THE
DORM
BOARD.
WE
HAD
ONLY
TWENTY
GIRLS
IN
A
BATCH
OF
TWO
HUNDRED.
GOOD-
LOOKING
ONES
WERE
RARE;
GIRLS
DON'T
GET
SELECTED
TO
IIM
FOR
THEIR
LOOKS.
THEY
GET
IN
BECAUSE
THEY
CAN
SOLVE
MATHEMATICAL
PROBLEMS

FASTER
THAN
99.99%
OF
INDIA'S
POPULATION
AND
CRACK
THE
CAT.
MOST
IIM
GIRLS
ARE
ABOVE
SHALLOW
THINGS
LIKE
MAKE-
UP,
FITTING
CLOTHES,
CONTACT
LENSES,
REMOVAL
OF
FACIAL
HAIR,
BODY
ODOUR
AND
FEMININE
CHARM.
GIRLS
LIKE
ANANYA,
IF
AND
WHEN
THEY
ARRIVE
BY
FREAK
CHANCE,

BECOME
INSTANT
PIN-UPS
IN
OUT
TESTOSTERONE-CHARGED,
ESTROGEN-STARVED
CAMPUS.

I
IMAGINED
MS
SWAMINATHAN
HAD
RECEIVED
MORE
MALE
ATTENTION
IN
THE
LAST
WEEK
THAN
SHE
HAD
IN
HER
ENTIRE
LIFE.
THUS,

I
ASSUMED
SHE'D
BE
OBNOXIOUS
AND
DECIDED
TO
IGNORE
HER.
THE
STUDENTS
INCHED
FORWARD
ON

AUTO-PILOT.
THE
BORED
KITCHEN
STAFF
COULDN'T
CARE
IF
THEY
WERE
SERVING
PRISONERS
OR
FUTURE
CEOS.
THEY
TOSSED
ONE
LADLE
OF
YELLOW
STUFF
AFTER
ANOTHER
INTO
PLATES.
OF
COURSE,
MS
BEST
GIRL
NEEDED
THE
SPOTLIGHT.
'THAT'S
NOT
RASAM.
WHATEVER
IT
IS,
IT'S
DEFINITELY
NOT
RASAM.

AND
WHAT'S
THAT,
THE
DARK
YELLOW
STUFF?'
'SAMBHAR,'
THE
MESS
WORKER
GROWLED.
'EEW,
LOOKS
DISGUSTING!
HOW
DID
YOU
MAKE
IT?'
SHE
ASKED.
'YOU
WANT
OR
NOT?'
THE
MESS
WORKER
SAID,
MORE
INTERESTED
IN
WRAPPING
UP
LUNCH
THAN
DISCUSSING
RECIPES.
WHILE
OUR
LADY
DECIDED,
THE

TWO
BOYS
BETWEEN
US
BANGED
THEIR
PLATES
ON
THE
COUNTER.
THEY
TOOK
THE
FOOD
WITHOUT
EDITORIALS
ABOUT
IT
AND
LEFT.
I
CAME
UP
RIGHT
BEHIND
HER.
I
STOLE
A
SIDEWAYS
GLANCE
-
DEFINITELY
ABOVE
AVERAGE.
ACTUALLY,
WELL
ABOVE
AVERAGE.
IN
FACT,
OUTLIER
BY
IIMA

STANDARDS.

SHE

HAD

PERFECT

FEATURES,

WITH

EYES,

NOSE,

LIPS

AND

EARS

THE

RIGHT

SIZE

AND

IN

THE

RIGHT

PLACES.

THAT

IS

ALL

IT

TAKES

TO

MAKE

PEOPLE

BEAUTIFUL-

NORMAL

BODY

PARTS

-

YET

WHY

DOES

NATURE

MESS

IS

UP

SO

MANY

TIMES?

HER

TINY

BLUE
BINDI
MATCHED
HER
SKY-
BLUE
AND
WHITE
SLAWAR
KAMEEZ.
SHE
LOOKED
LIKE
SRIDEVI'S
SMARTER
COUSIN,
IF
THERE
IS
SUCH
A
POSSIBILITY.
THE
MESS
WORKER
DUMPED
A
YELLOW
LUMP
ON
MY
PLATE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'EXCUSE
ME,
I'M
BEFORE
HIM,'
SHE
SAID
TO
THE
MESS
WORKER,
PINNING
HIM
DOWN
WITH
HER
LARGE,
CONFIDENT
EYES.
'WHAT
YOU
WANT?'
THE
MESS
WORKER
SAID
IN
A
HEAVY
SOUTH
INDIAN
ACCENT.
'YOU
CALLING
RASAM
NOT
RASAM.
YOU
MAKE
FACE
WHEN

YOU
SEE
MY
SAMBHAR.
I
FEED
HUNDRED
PEOPLE.
THEY
NO
COMPLAIN.'
'AND
THAT
IS
WHY
YOU
DON'T
IMPROVE.
MAYBE
THEY
SHOULD
COMPLAIN,'
SHE
SAID.
THE
MESS
WORKER
DROPPED
THE
LADLE
IN
THE
SAMBHAR
VESSEL
AND
THREW
UP
HIS
HANDS.
'YOU
WANT
COMPLAIN?
GO
TO

MESS
MANAGER
AND
COMPLAIN....SEE
WHAT
STUDENT
COMING
TO
THESE
DAYS,'
THE
MESS
WORKER
TURNED
TO
ME
SEEKING
SYMPATHY.

I
ALMOST
NODDED.
SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME.

'CAN
YOU
EAT
THIS
STUFF?'
SHE
WANTED
TO
KNOW.

'TRY
IT.'

I
TOOK
A
SPOONFUL
OF
SAMBHAR.
WARM
AND

SALTY,
NOT
GOURMET
STUFF,
BUT
EDIBLE
IN
A
NO-CHOICE
KIND
OF
WAY.

I
COULD
EAT
IT
FOR
LUNCH;

I
HAD
STAYED
IN
A
HOSTEL
FOR
FOUR
YEARS.
HOWEVER,

I
SAW
HER
FACE,
NOW
PRETTIER
WITH
A
HINT
OF
PINK.

I
COMPARED
HER
TO
THE

FIFTY-YEAR
OLD
MESS
WORKER.
HE
WORE
A
LUNGI
AND
HAD
VISIBLE
GREY
HAIR
ON
HIS
CHEST.
WHEN
IN
DOUBT,
THE
PRETTY
GIRL
IS
ALWAYS
RIGHT.
'IT'S
DISGUSTING,'
I
SAID.
'SEE,'
SHE
SAID
WITH
CHILDLIKE
GLEE.
THE
MESS
WORKER
GLARED
AT
ME.
'BUT
I
CAN

DEVELOP
A
TASTE
FOR
IT,'
I
ADDED
IN
A
LAME
ATTEMPT
TO
SOOTHE
HIM.
THE
MESS
WORKER
GRUNTED
AND
TOSSED
A
MOUND
OF
RICE
ON
MY
PLATE.
'PICK
SOMETHING
YOU
LIKE,'
I
SAID
TO
HER,
AVOIDING
EYE
CONTACT.
THE
WHOLE
CAMPUS
HAD
STARED
AT

HER
IN
THE
PAST
FEW
DAYS.
I
HAD
TO
APPEAR
DIFFERENT.
'GIVE
ME
THE
RASGULLAS,'
SHE
POINTED
TO
THE
DESSERT.
'THAT
IS
AFTER
YOU
FINISH
MEAL,'
THE
MESS
WORKER
SAID.
'WHO
ARE
YOU?
MY
MOTHER?
I
AM
FINISHED.
GIVE
ME
TWO
RASGULLAS,'
SHE
INSISTED.

'ONLY
ONE
PER
STUDENT,'
HE
SAID
AS
HE
PLACED
A
KATORI
WITH
ONE
SWEET
ON
HER
PLATE.
'OH,
COME
ON,
THERE
ARE
NO
LIMITS
ON
THIS
DISGUSTING
SAMBHAR
BUT
ONLY
ONE
OF
WHAT
IS
EDIBLE,'
SHE
SAID.
THE
LINE
GREW
BEHIND
US.
THE
BOYS

IN
LINE
DIDN'T
MIND.
THEY
HAD
A
CHANCE
TO
LEGITIMATELY
STARE
AT
THE
BEST-LOOKING
GIRL
OF
THE
BATCH.
'GIVE
MINE
TO
HER,'
I
SAID
AND
REGRETTED
IT
IMMEDIATELY.
SHE'LL
NEVER
DATE
YOU,
IT
IS
A
RASGULLA
DOWN
THE
DRAIN,
I
SCOLDED
MYSELF.
'I
GIVE

TO
YOU,'
THE
MESS
WORKER
SAID
VIRTUOUSLY
AS
HE
PLACED
THE
DESSERT
ON
MY

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
PLATE.
I
PASSED
MY
KATORI
TO
HER.
SHE
TOOK
THE
TWO
RASGULLAS
AND
MOVED
OUT
OF
THE
LINE.
OK
BUDDY,
PRETTY
GIRL
GOES
HER
WAY,
RASGULLA-LESS
LOSER
GOES
ANOTHER.
FIND
A
CORNER
TO
SIT,
I
SAID
TO
MYSELF.
SHE
TURNED
TO

ME.
SHE
DIDN'T
ASK
ME
TO
SIT
WITH
HER,
BUT
SHE
LOOKED
LIKE
SHE
WOULDN'T
MIND
IF
I
DID.
SHE
POINTED
TO
A
TABLE
WITH
A
LITTLE
FINGER
WHERE
WE
SAT
DOWN
OPPOSITE
EACH
OTHER.
THE
ENTIRE
MESS
STARED
AT
US,
WONDERING
WHAT
I

HAD
DONE
TO
MERIT
SITTING
WITH
HER.

I
HAVE
MADE
A
HUGE
SACRIFICE

-
MY
DESSERT

-
I
WANTED
TO
TELL
THEM.

'I'M
KRISH,'

I
SAID,
DOODLING
IN
THE
SAMBHAR
WITH
MY
SPOON.

'I'M
ANANYA.
YUK
ISN'T
IT?'

SHE
SAID
AS

I
GRIMACED
AT

THE
FOOD'S
TASTE.
'I'M
USED
TO
HOSTEL
FOOD,'
I
SHRUGGED.
'I'VE
HAD
WORSE.'
'HARD
TO
IMAGINE
WORSE,'
SHE
SAID.
I
COUGHED
AS
I
BIT
ON
A
GREEN
CHILI.
SHE
HAD
A
WATER
JUG
NEXT
TO
HER.
SHE
LIFTED
THE
JUG,
LEANED
FORWARD
AND
POURED

WATER
FOR
ME.
A
COLLECTIVE
SIGH
RAN
THROUGH
THE
MESS.
WE
HAD
BECOME
EVERYONE'S
MATINEE
SHOW.
SHE
FINISHED
HER
TWO
DESSERTS
IN
FOUR
BITES.
'I'M
STILL
HUNGRY.
I
DIDN'T
EVEN
HAVE
BREAKFAST.'
'HUNGER
OR
TASTELESS
FOOD,
HOSTEL
LIFE
IS
ABOUT
WHATEVER
IS
EASIER
TO

DEAL
WITH,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
WANT
TO
GO
OUT?
I'M
SURE
THE
CITY
HAS
DECENT
RESTAURANTS,'
SHE
SAID.
'NOW?'
WE
HAD
A
CLASS
IN
ONE
HOUR.
BUT
MS
BEST
GIRL
HAD
ASKED
ME
OUT,
EVEN
THOUGH
FOR
HER
OWN
STOMACH.
AND
AS
EVERYONE
KNOWS,

FEMALE
CLASSMATES
ALWAYS
COME
BEFORE
CLASS.
'DON'T
TELL
ME
YOU
ARE
DYING
TO
ATTEND
THE
LECTURE,"
SHE
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP,
DARING
ME.
I
SPOONED
IN
SOME
RICE.
SHE
STAMPED
HER
FOOT.
'LEAVE
THAT
DISGUSTING
STUFF.'
FOUR
HUNDRED
EYES
FOLLOWED
US
AS
I
WALKED

OUT
OF
THE
MESS
WITH
MS
ANANYA
SWAMINATHAN,
RATED
THE
BEST
GIRL
BY
POPULAR
VOTE
IN
IIMA.
'DO
YOU
LIKE
CHICKEN?'
THE
MENU
RESTED
ON
HER
NOSE
AS
SHE
SPOKE.
WE
HAD

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
COME
TO
TOPAZ,
A
BASIC,
SOULLESS
BUT
AIR-CONDITIONED
RESTAURANT
HALF
A
KILOMETER
FROM
CAMPUS.
LIKE
ALL
MID-RANGE
INDIAN
RESTAURANTS,
IT
PLAYED
BORING
INSTRUMENTAL
VERSIONS
OF
OLD
HINDI
SONGS
AND
SERVED
LITTLE
MARINATED
ONIONS
ON
THE
TABLE.
'I
THOUGHT
AHMEDABAD
WAS
VEGETARIAN,'

I
SAID.
'PLEASE,
I'D
DIE
HERE
THEN.'
SHE
TURNED
TO
THE
WAITER
AND
ORDERED
HALF
A
TANDOORI
CHICKEN
WITH
ROOMALI
ROTIS.
'DO
YOU
HAVE
BEER?'
SHE
ASKED
THE
WAITER.
THE
WAITER
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD
IN
HORROR
AND
LEFT.
'WE
ARE
IN
GUJARAT,
THERE
IS

PROHIBITION
HERE,'
I
SAID.
'WHY?'
'GANDHIJI'S
BIRTHPLACE,'
I
SAID
'BUT
GANDHIJI
WON
US
FREEDOM,'
SHE
SAID,
PLAYING
WITH
THE
LITTLE
ONIONS.
'WHAT'S
THE
POINT
OF
GETTING
PEOPLE
FREE
ONLY
TO
PUT
RESTRICTIONS
ON
THEM?'
'POINT,'
I
SAID.
'SO,
YOU
ARE
AN
EXPERT
ON
RASAM

AND
SAMBHAR.
ARE
YOU
A
SOUTH
INDIAN?’
‘TAMILIAN,
PLEASE
BE
PRECISE.
IN
FACT,
TAMIL
BRAHMIN,
WHICH
IS
WAY
DIFFERENT
FROM
TAMILIANS.
NEVER
FORGET
THAT.’
SHE
LEANED
BACK
AS
THE
WAITER
SERVED
OUR
MEAL.
SHE
TORE
A
CHICKEN
LEG
WITH
HER
TEETH.
‘AND
HOW
EXACTLY

ARE
TAMIL
BRAHMINS
DIFFERENT?'

'WELL,
FOR
ONE
THING,
NO
MEAT
AND
NO
DRINKING,'

SHE
SAID
AS
SHE
GESTURED

A
CROSS
WITH
T

HE
CHICKEN
LEG.

'ABSOLUTELY,'

I
SAID.
SHE
LAUGHED.

'I
DIDN'T
SAY

I
AM
A
PRACTISING
TAM
BRAHM.

BUT
YOU
SHOULD
KNOW
THAT

I
AM
BORN
INTO
THE
PUREST
OF
PURE
UPPER
CASTE
COMMUNITIES
EVER
CREATED.
WHAT
ABOUT
YOU,
COMMONER?’

‘I
AM
A
PUNJABI,
THOUGH

I
NEVER
LIVED
IN
PUNJAB.

I
GREW
UP
IN
DELHI.

AND
I
HAVE
NO
IDEA
ABOUT
MY
CASTE,
BUT
WE
DO
EAT

CHICKEN.
AND
I
CAN
DIGEST
BAD
SAMBHAR
BETTER
THAN
TAMIL
BRAHMINS,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
FUNNY,'
SHE
SAID,
TAPPING
MY
HAND.
I
LIKED
THE
TAP.
'SO
WHERE
DID
YOU
STAY
IN
HOSTEL
BEFORE?'
SHE
SAID.
'PLEASE
DON'T
SAY
IIT,
YOU
ARE
DOING
PRETTY
WELL

SO
FAR.'
'WHAT'S
WRONG
WITH
IIT?'
'NOTHING,
ARE
YOU
FROM
THERE?'
SHE
SIPPED
WATER.
'YES,
FROM
IIT
DELHI.
IS
THAT
A
PROBLEM?'
'NO,'
SHE
SMILED,
'NOT
YET.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'EXCUSE
ME?'
I
SAID.
HER
SMUGNESS
HAD
REACHED
IRRITATING
LEVELS.
'NOTHING,'
SHE
SAID.
WE
STAYED
QUIET.
'WHAT'S
THE
DEAL?
SOMEONE
FROM
IIT
BROKE
YOUR
HEART?'
SHE
LAUGHED.
'NO,
ON
THE
CONTRARY.
I
SEEM
TO
HAVE
BROKEN
SOME,
FOR
NO
FAULT
OF

MY
OWN.'
'CARE
TO
EXPLAIN?'
'DON'T
TELL
ANYONE,
BUT
IN
THE
PAST
ONE
WEEK
THAT
I'VE
BEEN
HERE,
I'VE
HAD
TEN
PROPOSALS.
ALL
FROM
INITIANS.'
I
MENTALLY
KICKED
MYSELF.
MY
GUESS
WAS
RIGHT;
SHE
WAS
GETTING
A
LOT
OF
ATTENTION.
I
ONLY
WISHED
IT

WASN'T
FROM
MY
OWN
PEOPLE.
'PROPOSALS
FOR
WHAT?'
'THE
USUAL,
TO
GO
OUT,
BE
FRIENDS
AND
STUFF.
OH,
AND
ONE
GUY
FROM
IIT
CHENNAI
PROPOSED
MARRIAGE!'
'SERIOUS?'
'YES,
HE
SAID
THIS
PAST
WEEK
HAS
BEEN
MOMENTOUS
FOR
HIM.
HE
JOINED
IIMA,
AND
NOW
HE

HAS
FOUND
HIS
WIFE
IN
ME.
I
MAY
BE
WRONG,
BUT
I
THINK
HE
HAD
SOME
JEWELLERY
ON
HIM.'
I
SMACKED
MY
FOREHEAD.
NO,
MY
COLLEGEMATES
CAN'T
BE
DOING
THIS,
WHATEVER
THE
DEPRIVATION.
'SO,
YOU
UNDERSTAND
MY
CONCERN
ABOUT
YOU
BEING
FROM
IIT,'
SHE

SAID,
PICKING
UP
A
CHICKEN
BREAST
NEXT.
'OH,
SO
IT
IS
A
NATURAL
REACTION.
IF
I
AM
FROM
IIT,
I
HAVE
TO
PROPOSE
TO
YOU
WITHIN
TEN
MINUTES?'
'I
DIDN'T
SAY
THAT.'
'YOU
IMPLIED
THAT.'
'I'M
SORRY.'
'IT'S
OK.
I
EXPECTED
YOU
TO
BE

LIKE
THIS.
LET
ME
GUESS-
ONLY
CHILD,
RICH
PARENTS?’
‘WRONG,
WRONG.
I
HAVE
A
YOUNGER
BROTHER.
AND
MY
FATHER
WORKS
IN
BANK
OF
BARODA
IN
CHENNAI.
SORRY,
YOU
EXPECTED
ME
TO
BE
LIKE
WHAT?’
‘SOME
GIRLS
CANNOT
HANDLE
ATTENTION.
TWO
DAYS
OF
POPULARITY
AND

EVERY
GUY
IN
COLLEGE
SHOULD
BOW
TO
YOU.'
'THAT'S
NOT
TRUE.
DIDN'T
I
COME
OUT
WITH
YOU?'
SHE
NEATLY
TRANSFERRED
THE
BARE
BONES
OF
THE
CHICKEN
ON
TO
ANOTHER
PLATE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'OH,
THAT'S
HUGE.
COMING
OUT
WITH
A
COMMONER
LIKE
ME.
HOW
MUCH
IS
THE
BILL?
I'LL
PAY
MY
SHARE
AND
LEAVE.'

I
STOOD
UP.
'HEY,'
SHE
SAID.
'WHAT?'
'I'M
SORRY.
PLEASE
SIT
DOWN.'

I
HAD
LOST
INTEREST
IN
THE
CONVERSATION
ANYWAY.

IF
THERE
IS
NOTHING
AS
ATTRACTIVE
AS
A
PRETTY
GIRL,
THERE'S
NOTHING
AS
REPULSIVE
AS
A
COCKY
CHICK.
I
SAT
BACK
AND
FOCUSED
ON
THE
FOOD
AND
THE
IRRITATING
INSTRUMENTAL
MUSIC
FOR
THE
NEXT
TEN
MINUTES.
I
IGNORED
THE
BRAHMIN
WHO
STEREOTYPED
MY
COLLEGEMATES.

'ARE
WE
OK
NOW?'
SHE
SMILED
HESITANTLY.

'WHY
DID
YOU
COME
OUT
WITH
ME?
TO
TAKE
YOUR
SCORE
TO
ELEVEN?'

'YOU
REALLY
WANT
TO
KNOW?'

'YES.'

'I
NEED
SOME
FRIENDS
HERE.

AND
YOU
SEEMED
LIKE
A
SAFE-ZONE
GUY.
LIKE
THE
KIND
OF
GUY
WHO

COULD
JUST
BE
FRIENDS
WITH
A
GIRL,
RIGHT?'
ABSOLUTELY
NOT,
I
THOUGHT.
WHY
WOULD
ANY
GUY
WANT
TO
BE
ONLY
FRIENDS
WITH
A
GIRL?
IT'S
LIKE
AGREEING
TO
BE
NEAR
A
CHOCOLATE
CAKE
AND
NEVER
EAT
IT.
IT'S
LIKE
SITTING
IN
A
RACING
CAR

BUT
NOT
DRIVING
IT.
ONLY
WIMPS
DO
THAT.
'I'M
NOT
SO
SURE,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
CAN
HANDLE
IT.
I
TOLD
YOU
ABOUT
THE
PROPOSALS
BECAUSE
YOU
CAN
SEE
HOW
STUPID
THEY
ARE.'
'THEY
ARE
NOT
STUPID.
THEY
ARE
INITIANS.
THEY
JUST
DON'T
KNOW
HOW

TO
TALK
TO
WOMEN
YET,'
I
SAID.
'WHATEVER.
BUT
YOU
DO.
AND
I'D
LIKE
TO
BE
FRIENDS
WITH
YOU.
JUST
FRIENDS,
OK?'
SHE
EXTENDED
HER
HAND.
I
GAVE
HER
A
LIMP
HANDSHAKE.
'LET'S
SHARE,
SIXTY
EACH,'
SHE
SAID
AS
THE
BILL
ARRIVED.
THAT'S
RIGHT,

'JUST
FRIENDS'
SHARE
BILLS.

I
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
BE
JUST
FRIENDS
WITH
HER.
AND

I
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
BE
THE
ELEVENTH
MARTYR.

I
PAID
MY
SHARE
AND
CAME
BACK
TO
CAMPUS.

I
HAD
NO
INTEREST
IN
MEETING
MY
JUST
FRIEND
ANYTIME
AGAIN
SOON.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
2
'YOU
OK?'
I
SAID
GOING
UP
TO
MY
JUST
FRIEND.
SHE
REMAINED
IN
HER
SEAT
AS
HER
TEARS
RE-EMERGED.
THE
LAST
LECTURE
HAD
ENDED
AND
THE
CLASSROOM
WAS
EMPTY.
I
HADN'T
SPOKEN
MUCH
TO
ANANYA
AFTER
OUR
LUNCH
LAST
WEEK.

PRETTY
GIRLS
BEHAVE
BEST
WHEN
YOU
IGNORE
THEM.
(OF
COURSE,
THEY
HAVE
TO
KNOW
YOU
ARE
IGNORING
THEM,
FOR
OTHERWISE
THEY
MAY
NOT
EVEN
KNOW
YOU
EXIST.)
BUT
TODAY
I
HAD
TO
TALK
TO
HER.
SHE
HAD
CRIED
IN
THE
CLASS.
WE
HAD
AUDITORIUM-

STYLE
CLASSROOMS
WITH
SEMI-CIRCULAR
ROWS,
SO
EVERYONE
COULD
SEE
EVERYONE.
STUDENTS
SAT
IN
ALPHABETICAL
ORDER.
ANANYA,
LIKE
ALL
KIDS
DOOMED
WITH
NAMES
STARTING
WITH
THE
LETTER
A,
SAT
IN
THE
FIRST
ROW
ON
THE
LEFT
SIDE.
SHE
SAT
BETWEEN
ANKUR
AND
ADITYA,
BOTH
IITIANS

WHO
HAD
ALREADY
PROPOSED
TO
HER
WITHOUT
CONSIDERING
THE
EMBARRASSMENT
OF
BEING
REJECTED
AND
THEN
SITTING
NEXT
TO
THE
REJECTION
FOR
THE
WHOLE
YEAR.

I
SAT
IN
THE
THIRD
ROW,
BETWEEN
KANYASHREE,
WHO
TOOK
NOTES
LIKE
A
DILIGENT
COURT
TRANSCRIPTER,
AND
FIVE
MOHITS,
WHO

HAD
COME
FROM
DIFFERENT
PARTS
OF
INDIA.
BUT
NEITHER
ANKUR,
NOR
KANYASHREE,
NOR
THE
FIVE
MOHITS
HAD
NOTICED
ANANYA'S
TEARS.
ONLY
I
HAD
CAUGHT
HER
WIPING
HER
EYE
WITH
A
YELLOW
DUPATTA
THAT
HAD
LITTLE
BELLS
AT
ITS
ENDS
THAT
TINKLED
WHENEVER
SHE
MOVED.

IN
THE
PAST
WEEK,
I
HAD
LIMITED
MY
COMMUNICATION
WITH
ANANYA
TO
CURSORY
GREETINGS
EVERY
MORNING
AND
A
CASUAL
WAVE
AT
THE
END
OF
THE
DAY.
DURING
CLASSES
WE
HAD
TO
PAY
ATTENTION
TO
THE
TEACHERS
WE
HAD
MARKS
FOR
CLASS
PARTICIPATION-
SAYING
SOMETHING

THAT
SOUNDS
INTELLIGENT.
MOST
IITIANS
NEVER
SPOKE
WHILE
PEOPLE
FROM
NON-SCIENCE
BACKGROUNDS
SPOKE
NON-STOP.
TWENTY-THREE
MINUTES
INTO
THE
MICROECONOMICS
CLASS,
THE
PROFESSOR
DREW
AN
L-
SHAPED
UTILITY
CURVE
ON
THE
BLACKBOARD.
HE
ADMIRERD
HIS
CURVE
FOR
TEN
SECONDS
AND
THEN
TURNED
TO
THE
CLASS.

'HOW
MANY
ECONOMICS
GRADUATES
HERE?'
ASKED
PROF
CHATTERJEE,
A
TWO-DECADE
IIMA
VETERAN.
FIFTEEN
STUDENTS
OUT
OF
THE
SEVENTY
STUDENTS
IN
SECTION
A
RAISED
THEIR
HANDS,
ANANYA
INCLUDED.
CHATTERJEE
TURNED
TO
HER.
'YOU
RECOGNISE
THE
CURVE,
MS
SWAMINATHAN?'
HE
READ
HER
NAME
FROM
THE
NAMEPLATE

IN
FRONT.
'THE
BASIC
MARGINAL
UTILITY
CURVE,
SIR,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'SO,
MS
SWAMINATHAN,
HOW
WOULD
YOU
REPRESENT
THAT
CURVE
MATHEMATICALLY?'
ANANYA
STOOD
UP,
HER
EYES
EXPLAINING
CLEARLY
THAT
SHE
HAD
NO
CLUE.
THE
REMAINING
FOURTEEN
ECONOMICS
GRADUATES
LOWERED
THEIR
HANDS.
'YES,
MS
SWAMINATHAN?'
CHATTERJEE

SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANANYA
CLUTCHED
THE
TRINKETS
ON
HER
DUPATTA
SO
THEY
DIDN'T
MAKE
A
NOISE
AS
SHE
SPOKE.
'SIR,
THAT
CURVE
SHOWS
DIFFERENT
BUNDLES
OF
GOODS
BETWEEN
WHICH
A
CONSUMER
IS
INDIFFERENT.
THAT
IS,
AT
EACH
POINT
ON
THE
CURVE,
THE
CONSUMER
HAS

EQUAL
PREFERENCE
FOR
ONE
BUNDLE
OVER
ANOTHER.’
‘THAT’S
NOT
MY
QUESTION.
WHAT
IS
THE
MATHEMATICAL
FORMULA?’
‘I
DON’T
KNOW
THAT.
IN
ANY
CASE,
THIS
IS
ONLY
A
CONCEPT.’
‘BUT
DO
YOU
KNOW
IT?’
‘NO.
BUT
I
CAN’T
THINK
OF
ANY
REAL
LIFE
SITUATION
WHERE

A
MATHEMATICAL
FORMULA
LIKE
THIS
WOULD
WORK,'
ANANYA
SAID.
PROF
RAISED
HIS
HAND
TO
INTERRUPT
HER.
'SHSH....'
HE
GAVE
A
SINISTER
SMILE.
'NOTICE,
CLASS,
NOTICE.
THIS
IS
THE
STATE
OF
ECONOMICS
EDUCATION
IN
OUR
COUNTRY.
TOP
GRADUATES
DON'T
KNOW
THE
BASICS.
AND
THEN
THEY

ASK

—

WHY

IS

INDIA

ECONOMICALLY

BACKWARD?’

PROF

EMPHATICALLY

DROPPED

THE

CHALK

ON

HIS

TABLE

TO

CONCLUDE

HIS

POINT.

HE

HAD

SOLVED

WHAT

HAD

DUMBFOUNDED

POLICYMAKERS

FOR

DECADES.

ANANYA

SWAMINATHAN

WAS

THE

REASON

FOR

INDIA’S

BACKWARDNESS.

ANANYA

HUNG

HER

HEAD

IN

SHAME.

A

FEW

IITIANS
BRIGHTENED
UP.
MICROECONOMICS
WAS
AN
ELECTIVE
COURSE
IN
IIT
AND
THOSE
WHO
HAD
DONE
IT
KNEW
THE
FORMULA.
THEY
WERE
ITCHING
TO
SHOW
OFF.
'ANYONE
KNOWS?'
PROF
ASKED
AND
ANKUR
RAISED
HIS
HAND.
'YES,
TELL
US.
MS
SWAMINATHAN,
YOU
SHOULD
TALK
TO
YOUR

NEIGHBOURS
MORE.
AND
NEXT
TIME,
DON'T
RAISE
YOUR
HAND
IF
I
ASK
FOR
MICROECONOMICS
GRADUATES.'
PROF
SAID.
HE
WENT
TO
THE
BOARD
TO
WRITE
LOTS
OF
GREEK
SYMBOLS
AND
CALCULUS
EQUATIONS.
THE
COURSE
STARTED
WITH
CUTE
LITTLE
THINGS
LIKE
HOW
MANY
PEOPLE
CHOOSE
BETWEEN

TEA
AND
BISCUITS.
IT
HAD
MOVED
ON
TO
SCARY
EQUATIONS
THAT
WOULD
DOMINATE
EXAMS.
THE
CLASS
TOOK
MAD
NOTES.
KANYASHREE
WROTE
SO
HARD
I
COULD
FEEL
THE
SEISMIC
VIBRATIONS
FROM
HER
PEN'S
NIB.
I
STOLE
A
GLANCE
AT
ANANYA.
AS
A
SMUG
ANKUR
SAW

HIS
WORDS
INSCRIBED
ON
THE
BOARD,
ANANYA'S
LEFT
HAND'S
FINGERS
SCRUNCHED
UP
HER
YELLOW
DUPATTA.
SHE
MOVED
HER
LEFT
HAND
TO
HER
FACE
EVEN
AS
SHE
CONTINUED
TO
WRITE
WITH
HER
RIGHT.
IN
SUBTLE
MOVEMENTS,
SHE
DABBED
AT
HER
TEARS.
MAYBE
MS
BEST
GIRL

HAD
A
HEART,
I
THOUGHT.
AND
MAYBE
I
SHOULD
CUT
OUT
MY
STUDIED
IGNORANCE
STRATEGY
AND
TALK
TO
HER
AFTER
CLASS.
'YOU
OK?'
I
SAID
AGAIN.
SHE
NODDED
WHILE
CONTINUING
TO
WIPE
HER
TEARS.
SHE
FIXED
HER
GAZE
DOWN.
'I
MISS
TOPAZ,'
I
SAID

TO
CHANGE
THE
TOPIC.
'I'VE
NEVER
BEEN
SO
HUMILIATED,'
SHE
SAID.
'NOBODY
CARES.
ALL
PROFESSORS
ARE
ASSHOLES.
THAT'S
THE
UNIVERSAL
TRUTH,'
I

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
OFFERED.
'AT
LEAST
WHERE
I
COME
FROM.'
'YOU
WANT
TO
SEE
MY
ECONOMICS
DEGREE?
I'LL
SHOW
YOU
MY
GRADES.'
'NO,'
I
SAID.
'I
CAME
THIRD
IN
THE
ENTIRE
DELHI
UNIVERSITY.
THESE
WANNABE
ENGINEER
PROFS
HAVE
TURNED
ECONOMICS
FROM
PERFECTLY
FINE
LIBERAL

ARTS
SUBJECT
TO
THIS
GREEK
SYMBOL
JUNKYARD,'
SHE
SAID
AS
SHE
POINTED
TO
THE
FORMULAE
ON
THE
BOARD.
I
KEPT
SILENT.
'YOU
ARE
FROM
IIT.
YOU
PROBABLY
LOVE
THESE
EQUATIONS,'
SHE
SAID
AND
LOOKED
UP
AT
ME.
DESPITE
HER
TEARS,
SHE
STILL
LOOKED
PRETTY.

I
LOOKED
AT
THE
BLACKBOARD.

YES,
I
DID
HAVE
A
FONDNESS
FOR
ALGEBRA.

IT'S
NOTHING
TO
BE
ASHAMED
OF.

YET,
THIS
WASN'T
THE
TIME.

'NO,
I
AM
NOT
A
BIG
FAN.
GREEK
SYMBOLS
DO
TAKE
THE
FUN
OUT
OF
ANY
SUBJECT.'
'EXACTLY,
BUT
THESE

PROFS
DON'T
THINK
SO.
THEY
WILL
HAVE
THESE
EQUATIONS
IN
THE
TEST
NEXT
WEEK.
I
AM
GOING
TO
FLUNK.
AND
HE
IS
GOING
TO
TURN
ME
INTO
THIS
SPECIMEN
OF
THE
EDUCATED
BUT
CLUELESS
INDIAN
STUDENT.
I
BET
I
AM
THE
STAFF-ROOM
DISCUSSION
RIGHT

NOW.'
'THEY
ARE
ALL
FRUSTRATED,'
I
SAID.
'WE
ARE
HALF
THEIR
AGE
BUT
WILL
EARN
TWICE
AS
THEM
IN
TWO
YEARS.
WOULDN'T
YOU
HATE
AN
ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD
IF
HE
EARNED
DOUBLE?'
SHE
SMILED.
'YOU
NEED
TO
HANG
THAT
DUPATTA
OUT
TO
DRY,'
I
SAID.
SHE

SMILED
SOME
MORE.
WE
WALKED
OUT
OF
THE
CLASS.
WE
DECIDED
TO
SKIP
LUNCH
AND
HAVE
TEA
AND
OMELETTE
AT
THE
ROADSIDE
RAMBHAI
OUTSIDE
CAMPUS.
'HE
IS
GOING
TO
SCREW
ME
IN
MICROECONOMICS.
HE'S
PROBABLY
CIRCLED
MY
NAME
AND
PUT
A
D
IN
FRONT

OF
IT
ALREADY,'
SHE
SAID,
NESTLING
THE
HOT
GLASS
OF
TEA
IN
HER
DUPATTA
FOLDS
FOR
INSULATION.
'DON'T
FREAK
OUT.
LISTEN,
YOU
CAN
STUDY
WITH
ME.
I
DON'T
LIKE
THESE
EQUATIONS,
BUT
I
AM
GOOD
AT
THEM.
THAT'S
ALL
WE
DID
AT
IIT
FOR

FOUR
YEARS.'
SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME
FOR
A
FEW
SECONDS.
'HEY,
I
HAVE
NO
INTEREST
IN
BEING
NUMBER
ELEVEN.
THIS
IS
PURELY
FOR
STUDY
REASONS.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
SHE
LAUGHED.
'ACTUALLY,
THE
SCORE
IS
THIRTEEN
NOW.'
'IITIANS?'
'NO,
THIS
TIME
FORM
NIT.
THEY
ARE
CATCHING
UP.'
'I
KNOW,
WE
ARE
LOSING
OUR
EDGE.
WHATEVER,
I
DON'T
WANT
TO
BE
NUMBER
FOURTEEN.
I
THOUGHT
I
COULD
TEACH
YOU.....
SHE
INTERRUPTED

ME,
'I
CAN'T
LEARN
ECONOMICS
FROM
YOU.
I
AM
A
UNIVERSITY
TOPPER
IN
ECONOMICS.
YOU
ARE
AN
ENGINEER.'
'THEN
GOOD
LUCK,'
I
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP
TO
PAY.
'I
DIDN'T
SAY
THAT.
I
SAID
YOU
CAN'T
TEACH
ME.
BUT
WE
CAN
STUDY
TOGETHER.'
I

LOOKED
AT
HER.
SHE
LOOKED
NICE,
AND
I
COULDN'T
BLAME
THE
THIRTEEN
GUYS
FOR
TRYING.
'MY
ROOM
AT
EIGHT?
EVER
BEEN
TO
THE
GIRL'S
DORM?'
'THERE
IS
A
FIRST
TIME
FOR
EVERYTHING,'
I
SAID.
'COOL,
CARRY
LOTS
OF
BOOKS
TO
MAKE
IT
CLEAR
WHAT

YOU
ARE
THERE
FOR,
ANANYA
ADVISED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
3
I
REACHED
THE
GIRL'S
DORM
AT
8
P.M.
I
CARRIED
THE
WEEK'S
CASE
MATERIALS,
THE
SIZE
OF
SIX
TELEPHONE
DIRECTORIES.
I
KNOCKED
AT
HER
DOOR.
'ONE
SECOND,
I
AM
CHANGING,'
HER
MUFFLED
SCREAM
CAME
FROM
INSIDE.
AFTER
THREE
HUNDRED
SECONDS,

SHE
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
SHE
WORE
A
RED
AND
WHITE
TRACKSUIT.
'SORRY,'
SHE
SAID
AS
SHE
TIED
UP
HER
HAIR
IN
A
BUN.
'COME
IN.
WE'D
BETTER
START,
THERE
IS
SO
MUCH
TO
DO.'
SHE
GAVE
ME
HER
STUDY
CHAIR
AND
SAT
ON
HER

BED.
THE
RUST-COLOURED
BED-SHEET
MATCHED
THE
EXPOSED
BRICK
WALLS.
SHE
HAD
MADE
A
NOTICE
BOARD
OUT
OF
CHART
PAPER
AND
STUCK
FAMILY
PICTURES
ALL
OVER.
'SEE,
THAT'S
MY
FAMILY.
THAT'S
MY
DAD.
HE
IS
SO
CUTE,'
SHE
SAID.
I
LOOKED
CAREFULLY.
A
MIDDLE-AGED
MAN

WITH
NEATLY
COMBED
HAIR
RATIONED
HIS
GRIN.
HE
WORE
A
HALF-SLEEVE
SHIRT
WITH
A
DHOTI
IN
MOST
OF
THE
PICTURES.
HE
LOOKED
LIKE
THE
NEIGHBOR
WHO
STOPS
YOU
FROM
PLAYING
LOUD
MUSIC.
NO,
NOTHING
CUTE
ABOUT
HIM.
I
SCANNED
THE
REMAINING
PICTURES
TAKEN
ON

FESTIVALS,
WEDDINGS
AND
BIRTHDAYS.
IN
ONE,
ANANYA'S
WHOLE
FAMILY
STOOD
TO
ATTENTION
AT
THE
BEACH.
YOU
COULD
ALMOST
HEAR
THE
NATIONAL
ANTHEM.
'THAT'S
MARINA
BEACH
IN
CHENNAI.
DO
YOU
KNOW
IT
IS
THE
SECOND
LARGEST
CITY
BEACH
IN
THE
WORLD?'
I
SAW
HER
BROTHER,

AROUND
FOURTEEN
YEARS
OF
AGE.
THE
OILED
HAIR,
GEEKY
FACE
AND
SPECTACLES
MADE
HIM
LOOK
LIKE
AN
ITALIAN
EMBRYO.
HIS
LACK
OF
INTEREST
IN
THE
WORLD
EXPRESSION
TOLD
ME
HE
WOULD
MAKE
IT.
'AND
THAT'S
MOM?'
I
QUIZZED.
ANANYA
NODDED.
ANANYA'S
BROTHER
AND
FATHER

STILL
SEEMED
MILD
COMPARED
TO
HER
MOTHER.
EVEN
IN
PICTURES
SHE
HAD
A
GLUM
EXPRESSION
THAT
MADE
YOU
WONDER
WHAT
DID
YOU
DO
WRONG.
SHE
REMINDED
ME
OF
THE
STRICTEST
TEACHERS
I
EVER
HAD
IN
SCHOOL.
I
IMMEDIATELY
FELT
GUILTY
ABOUT
BEING
IN
HER

DAUGHTER'S
ROOM.
MY
HANDS
TINGLED
AS
I
ALMOST
EXPECTED
HER
TO
JUMP
OUT
OF
THE
PICTURE
AND
SLAP
ME
WITH
A
RULER.
'MOM
AND
I,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
KNEELED
ON
THE
BED
AND
SIGHED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT?'
I
LOOKED
AT
A
WEDDING
PICTURE
OF
HER
RELATIVES.
GIVEN
THE
DUSKY
COMPLEXION,
EVERYONE'S
TEETH
SHONE
EXTRA
WHITE.
ALL
OLD
WOMEN
WORE
AS
MUCH
GOLD
AS
THEIR
BODIES
COULD
CARRY
AND
SILK
SARIS
SHINY
AS
ROAD
REFLECTORS.
'NOTHING,
I
WISH

I
GOT
ALONG
BETTER
WITH
HER,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'HEY,
YOU
HAVE
PICTURES
OF
YOUR
FAMILY?'

I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.
MY
FAMILY
WAS
TOO
DISORGANIZED
TO
EVER
PAUSE
AND
POSE
AT
THE
RIGHT
MOMENT.

I
DON'T
THINK
WE
EVEN
HAD
A
CAMERA.
'WHO
IS
THERE

IN
YOUR
FAMILY?’
SHE
SIFTED
THROUGH
THE
CASE
MATERIALS
TO
TAKE
OUT
THE
ECONOMICS
NOTES.
‘MOM,
DAD
AND
ME.
THAT’S
IT,’
I
SAID.
‘TELL
ME
MORE.
WHAT
DO
THEY
DO?
WHO
ARE
YOU
CLOSE
TO?’
‘WE
MET
TO
STUDY,’
I
POINTED
OUT
AND
PATED

THE
MICROECONOMICS
BOOKLET.

"OF
COURSE,
WE
WILL.

I
ONLY
ASKED
TO
MAKE
CONVERSATION.

DON'T
TELL
ME

IF
YOU
DON'T
WANT

TO,'
SHE
SAID
AND
BATTED
HER
EYELIDS.

HOW
CAN
SUCH
SCARY
LOOKING
PARENTS
CREATE
SOMETHING

SO
CUTE?

'OK,
I'LL
ANSWER.

BUT
AFTER
THAT,
WE

STUDY.
NO
GOSSIP
FOR
AN
HOUR,'
I
WARNED.
'SURE,
I
ALREADY
HAVE
MY
BOOK
OPEN,'
SHE
SAID
AND
SAT
ON
THE
BED
CROSS-LEGGED.
'OK,
MY
MOTHER
IS
A
HOUSEWIFE.
I
AM
CLOSE
TO
HER,
BUT
NOT
HUGELY
CLOSE.
THAT
REMINDS
ME,
I
HAVE
TO

CALL
HER.
I'LL
GO
TO
THE
STD
BOOTH
LATER.'
'AND
DAD?
I
AM
SUPER
CLOSE
TO
MINE.'
'LET'S
STUDY,'
I
SAID
AND
OPENED
THE
BOOKS.
'YOU
AREN'T
CLOSE
TO
YOUR
FATHER?'
'YOU
WANT
TO
FLUNK?'
'SHSH,'
SHE
AGREED
AND
COVERED
HER
LIPS
WITH
A

FINGER.
WE
STUDIED
FOR
THE
NEXT
TWO
HOURS
IN
SILENCE.
SHE
WOULD
LOOK
UP
SOMETIMES
AND
DO
POINTLESS
THINGS
LIKE
CHANGING
HER
PILLOW
COVER
OR
RE-ADJUSTING
HER
STUDY
LAMP.
I
IGNORED
ALL
THAT.
I
HAD
WASTED
ENOUGH
OF
MY
INITIAL
YEARS
AT
IIT.
MOST

LIKELY
DUE
TO
A
CAT
COMPUTATION
ERROR,
I
HAD
ANOTHER
CHANCE
AT
IIMA.
I
WANTED
TO
MAKE
IT
COUNT.
'WOW,
YOU
CAN
REALLY
CONCENTRATE,'
SHE
SAID
AFTER
AN
HOUR.
'IT'S
TEN.
STD
CALLS
ARE
CHEAP
NOW.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'OH
YES,
I
BETTER
GO,'
I
SAID.
'I'LL
COME
WITH
YOU.
I'LL
CALL
HOME
TOO,'
SHE
SAID
AND
SKIPPED
OFF
THE
BED
TO
WEAR
HER
SLIPPERS.
'SERI,
SERI,
SERI
AMMA.....SERI!'
SHE
SAID,
EACH
SERI
INCREASING
IN
PITCH,
VOLUME
AND
FRUSTRATION.
SHE

HAD
CALLED
HOME.
MANY
STUDENTS
HAD
LINED
UP
TO
MAKE
CHEAP
CALLS
AT
THE
STD
BOOTH,
A
FIVE-MINUTE
WALK
FROM
CAMPUS.
MOST
CARRIED
THEIR
MICROECONOMICS
NOTES.
I
HELPED
ANANYA
WITH
SMALL
CHANGE
AFTER
HER
CALL.
'IS
HE
DATING
HER?'
I
OVERHEARD
A
STUDENT
WHISPER

TO
ANOTHER.
'I
DON'T
THINK
SO,
SHE
TREATS
HIM
LIKE
A
BROTHER,'
HIS
FRIEND
GUFFAWED.
I
IGNORED
THE
COMMENT
AND
WENT
INTO
THE
BOOTH.
'EVERY
GIRL
WANTS
AN
IIT
BROTHER,
BIG
HELP
IN
QUANT
SUBJECTS,'
THE
FIRST
STUDENT
SAID
AS
SEVERAL
PEOPLE
AROUND
THEM

LAUGHED.

I

CONTROLLED

MY

URGE

TO

SNAP

BACK

AT

THEM

AND

DIALED

HOME.

'HELLO?'

MY

FATHER'S

VOICE

CAME

AFTER

FOUR

RINGS.

I

KEPT

SILENT.

THE

METER

STARTED

TO

CLICK.

'HELLO?

HELLO?'

MY

FATHER

CONTINUED

TO

SPEAK.

I

KEPT

THE

PHONE

DOWN.

THE

PRINTER

CHURNED

OUT
THE
BILL.
'MISSED
CONNECTION,
YOU
HAVE
TO
PAY,'
THE
SHOPKEEPER
SAID.

I
NODDED
AND
DIALED
AGAIN.
THIS
TIME
MY
MOTHER
PICKED
UP.

'MOM,'
I
SCREAMED.

'I
TOLD
YOU
TO
BE
NEAR
THE
PHONE
AFTER
TEN.'

'I'M
SORRY.

I
WAS
IN
THE
KITCHEN.
HE

WANTED
TO
TALK
TO
YOU,
SO
HE
PICKED
UP.
SAY
HELLO
TO
HIM
FIRST
AND
THEN
ASK
HIM
FOR
ME.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I'M
NOT
INTERESTED.'
'OK,
LEAVE
THAT.
HOW
ARE
YOU
DOING?
HOW
IS
THE
PLACE?'
'IT'S
FINE.
BUT
THEY
MAKE
YOU
CRAM
EVEN
MORE
THAN
IN
THE
PREVIOUS
COLLEGE.'
'HOW
IS
THE
FOOD?'
'TERRIBLE.
I
AM
IN
A
HOSTEL.
WHAT
DO
YOU

EXPECT?'

'I'M
GOING
TO
SEND
SOME
PICKLE.'

'THE
CITY
HAS
GOOD
RESTAURANTS.'

'THEY
HAVE
CHICKEN?'

SHE
ASKED,
HER
VOICE
WORRIED
AS
IF
SHE
HAD
ASKED
ABOUT
BASIC
AMENITIES
LIKE
POWER
AND
WATER.

'IN
A
FEW
PLACES.'

'FMS
WAS
GOOD
ENOUGH.

I
DON'T
KNOW
WHY

YOU
HAD
TO
LEAVE
DELHI.'
'MOM,
I
AM
NOT
GOING
TO
MAKE
MY
CAREER
CHOICES
BASED
ON
THE
AVAILABILITY
OF
CHICKEN,'
I
SAID
AND
LOOKED
AT
THE
METER.
I
HAD
SPENT
EIGHTEEN
BUCKS.
"I'LL
HANG
UP
NOW.'
'TELL
ME
SOMETHING
MORE
NO.
DID
YOU

MAKE
ANY
FRIENDS?’
‘NOT
REALLY,
SORT
OF....’

I
LOOKED
AT
ANANYA’S
FACE
OUTSIDE
THE
BOOTH.
SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME
AND
SMILED.

‘WHO?
WHAT’S
THEIR
NAME?’
‘AN...ANANT.’
‘PUNJABI?’
‘MOM!’
‘I’M
SORRY.

I
JUST
THOUGHT
YOU
COULD
HAVE
A
FRIEND
WHO
LIKES
THE
SAME
FOOD.
ITS

OK.
WE
ARE
VERY
MODERN.
DON'T
YOU
KNOW?'
'YEAH
RIGHT.
I'LL
CATCH
YOU
LATER.
I
HAVE
A
TEST
TOMORROW.'
'OH,
REALLY?
PRAY
BEFORE
THE
EXAM,
OK?'
'SURE,
LET
ME
FINISH
STUDYING
FIRST.'
I
HUNG
UP
AND
PAID
TWENTY-FIVE
BUCKS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHY
DID
YOU
HANG
UP
THE
FIRST
TIME?
YOUR
DAD
PICKED,
RIGHT?'
ANANYA
ASKED
AS
WE
WALKED
BACK.
I
STOPPED
IN
MY
TRACKS.
'HOW
DO
YOU
KNOW?'
'I
GUESSED.
I
DO
IT
WITH
MOM
WHEN
I'M
ANGRY
WITH
HER.
WE
DON'T

HANG
UP;
WE
JUST
STAY
ON
THE
LINE
AND
KEEP
SILENT.'
'AND
PAY?'
'YES.
PRETTY
EXPENSIVE
WAY
TO
LET
EACH
OTHER
KNOW
WE
ARE
UPSET.
ONLY
SOMETIMES
THOUGH.'
'I
NEVER
SPEAK
TO
MY
FATHER,'
I
SAID.
'WHY?'
ANANYA
LOOKED
AT
ME.
'LONG
STORY.
NOT

FOR
TONIGHT.
OR
ANY
NIGHT.
I'D
LIKE
TO
KEEP
IT
TO
MYSELF.'
'SURE,'
SHE
SAID.
WE
WALKED
FOR
A
MOMENT
IN
SILENCE
BEFORE
SHE
SPOKE
AGAIN.
'SO
YOUR
PARENTS
HAVE
BIG
EXPECTATIONS
FROM
YOU?
WHICH
JOB
ARE
YOU
GOING
TO
TAKE?
FINANCE?
MARKETING?
IT?'

'NEITHER
OF
THOSE,'
I
SAID.
'THOUGH
I
WILL
TAKE
UP
A
JOB
FOR
THE
MONEY
FIRST.'
'SO
WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT
TO
BE?
LIKE
REALLY?'
SHE
LOOKED
RIGHT
INTO
MY
EYES.
I
COULDN'T
LIE.
'I
WANT
TO
BE
A
WRITER?'
I
SAID.
I
EXPECTED

HER
TO
FLIP
OUT
AND
LAUGH.
BUT
SHE
DIDN'T.
SHE
NODDED
AND
CONTINUED
TO
WALK.
'WHAT
KIND
OF
WRITER?'
SHE
SAID.
'SOMEONE
WHO
TELLS
STORIES
THAT
ARE
FUN
BUT
BRING
ABOUT
CHANGE
TOO.
THE
PEN'S
MIGHTIER
THAN
THE
SWORD,
ONE
OF
THE
FIRST
PROVERBS

WE
LEARN'T,
ISN'T
IT?'
SHE
NODDED.
'SOUNDS
RIDICULOUS?'
'NO,
NOT
REALLY,'
SHE
SAID.
'HOW
ABOUT
YOU?
WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT
TO
BE?'
SHE
LAUGHED.
'WELL,
I
DON'T
KNOW.
MY
MOTHER
ALREADY
FEELS
I'M
TOO
AMBITIOUS
AND
INDEPENDENT.
SO
I
AM
TRYING
NOT
TO
THINK

TOO
FAR.
AS
OF
NOW,
I
JUST
WANT
TO
DO

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
OK
IN
MY
QUIZ
AND
MAKE
MY
MOTHER
HAPPY.
BOTH
ARE
INCREDIBLY
DIFFICULT
THOUGH,'
SHE
SAID.
WE
REACHED
HER
ROOM
AND
PRACTISED
NUMERICAL
FOR
THE
NEXT
TWO
HOURS.
'I
AM
SO
GLAD
YOU
ARE
HERE.
I'D
NEVER
BE
ABLE
TO
CRACK

THESE,'
SHE
SAID
AFTER
I
SOLVED
A
TRICKY
ONE
FOR
HER.
'YOU
ARE
NOT
USING
ME,
ARE
YOU?'
'EXCUSE
ME?'
'LIKE
YOU
ARE
FRIENDS
WITH
ME
BECAUSE
I
AM
FROM
IIT?
SO
I
CAN
HELP
YOU
WITH
THE
QUANT
SUBJECTS.'
'ARE
YOU
KIDDING
ME?'

SHE
LOOKED
SHOCKED.

'I
DON'T
WANT
TO
BE
THE
IIT
BROTHER,'

I
SAID.
'WHAT?
WHATEVER
THAT

IS,
YOU
ARE
NOT.

WE
ARE
FRIENDS,
RIGHT?'

SHE
EXTENDED
HER
HAND.

I
LOOKED
INTO
HER
EYES.

NO,
THOSE
EYES
COULDN'T
USE
ANYONE.

'GOOD
NIGHT,'

I
SAID
AND

SHOOK
HER
HAND.
'HEY
KRISH,'
SHE
SAID
AS
I
TURNED
TO
LEAVE.
'WHAT?'
'THE
STUFF
YOU
SAID,
ABOUT
BEING
A
WRITER
WHO
BRINGS
ABOUT
CHANGE.
IT
IS
REALLY
COOL.
I
MEAN
IT,'
SHE
SAID.
I
SMILED.
'GOOD
NIGHT,'
SHE
SAID
AND
SHUT
HER
DOOR.

A
FEW
SLEEPLESS
GIRLS
WANDERED
IN
THE
DORM
WITH
THEIR
NOTES.
THEY
GAVE
ME
SUSPICIOUS
LOOKS.

'I
ONLY
CAME
TO
STUDY,'

I
SAID
AND
WALKED
OUT
OF
THE
DORM
FAST.

I
DON'T
KNOW
WHY

I
FELT
THE
NEED
TO
GIVE
AN
EXPLANATION.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
4
SHE
CAME
OUT
OF
THE
RESEARCH
ASSISTANT'S
ROOM
WITH
HER
MICROECONOMICS
QUIZ
RESULTS.
SHE
WALKED
PAST
THE
QUEUED
UP
STUDENTS
TOWARD
ME.
BY
THIS
TIME,
EVERYONE
ON
CAMPUS
KNEW
OF
HER
FRIENDSHIP,
OR
AS
SOMEONE
WOULD
SAY,
SIBLINGSHIP,
WITH
ME.

SHE
WORE
DENIM
SHORTS
AND
A
PINK
T-SHIRT,
DRAWING
EXTRA
LONG
GLANCES
FROM
THE
BOYS
FROM
ENGINEERING
COLLEGES.
'B-PLUS,
PEOPLE
SAY
IT
IS
A
GOOD
GRADE,'
SHE
SAID,
HOLDING
UP
HER
ANSWER
SHEET.
'YOUR
SHORTS
ARE
TOO
SHORT,'
I
SAID.
'SHOW
ME
YOUR
GRADE,'

SHE
SAID,
SNATCHING
MY
PAPER.
'A
MINUS,
WOW,
YOU
CRACKED
AN
A-MINUS!'
I
DIDN'T
REACT.
WE
WALKED
BACK
TOWARDS
OUR
DORMS.
'YOU
CANNOT
SCORE
MORE
THAN
ME
IN
ECONOMICS,
I
DON'T
BELIEVE
THIS,'
SHE
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
A
MECHANICAL
ENGINEER.
I
AM
A
UNIVERSITY

GOLD
MEDALIST
IN
THE
SUBJECT.'
'SHOW
THE
MEDAL
TO
PROF
CHATTERJEE,'
I
SAID
IN
A
SERIOUS
TONE.
'HEY,
YOU
OK?'
I
KEPT
QUIET.
'ANYWAY,
I
OWE
YOU
A
TREAT.
YOUR
NUMERICAL
SAVED
ME.
ARE
YOU
HUNGRY?'
I
NODDED.
PEOPLE
WHO
LIVE
IN
HOSTELS
ARE

ALWAYS
HUNGRY.
'LET'S
GO
TO
RAMBHAI,'
SHE
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
NOT
COMING
TO
RAMBHAI
LIKE
THIS,'
I
SAID.
'LIKE
WHAT?'
'LIKE
IN
THESE
SHORTS,'
I
SAID.
'EXCUSE
ME.
IS
IT
A
DELHI
THING
OR
A
PUNJABI
THING?
CONTROLLING
WHAT
WOMEN
WEAR?'
'IT
IS
A

COMMON
SENSE
THING.
IT
IS
OUTSIDE
CAMPUS.
PEOPLE
STARE,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'ENOUGH
PEOPLE
STARE
WITHIN
CAMPUS.
I'M
FINE,
LET'S
GO,'
SHE
SAID
AND
WALKED
TOWARDS
THE
CAMPUS
GATES.
'I
DON'T
NEED
A
TREAT.
IT'S
FINE,'
I
SAID,
TURNING
IN
THE
OPPOSITE
DIRECTION
TOWARDS
MY
DORM.
'ARE
YOU
SERIOUS?
YOU
ARE
NOT
COMING?'

SHE
CALLED
FROM
BEHIND.

I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.

'UP
TO
YOU.'

I
IGNORED
HER
AND
CONTINUED
TO
WALK.

'ARE
YOU
GOING
TO
COME
FOR
THE
STUDY
SESSION
TONIGHT?'

I
SHRUGGED
TO
SIGNIFY
'WHATEVER'.

'ANY
DRESS
CODE
FOR
ME?'

SHE
SAID.

'YOU
ARE
NOT
MY

GIRLFRIEND.
WEAR
WHATEVER.
WHAT
DO
I
CARE?’
I
SAID.
WE
DIDN’T
TALK
ABOUT
THE
AFTERNOON
EPISODE
WHEN
I
CAME
TO
HER
ROOM
IN
THE
EVENING.
SHE
HAD
CHANGED
INTO
BLACK
TRACK
PANTS
AND
AN
OVERSIZED
FULL-SLEEVE
BLACK
T-SHIRT.
SHE
WAS
COVERED
UP
ENOUGH
TO

GO
FOR
A
WALK
IN
AFGHANISTAN.

I
KIND
OF
MISSED
HER
SHORTS,
BUT

I
HAD
BROUGHT
IT
UPON
MYSELF.

I
OPENED
THE
MARKETING
CASE
THAT
WE
HAD
TO
PREPARE
FOR
THE
NEXT
DAY.

'NIRDOSH

—
NICOTINE-FREE-CIGARETTES,'

I
READ
OUT
THE
TITLE.

'WHO
THE
FUCK

WANTS
THAT?

I
FEEL
LIKE
A
REAL
SMOKE,'
SHE
SAID.

I
GAVE
HER
A
DIRTY
LOOK.
'WHAT?
AM

I
NOT
ALLOWED
TO
USE
THE
F
WORDS?

OR
IS
IT
THAT

I
EXPRESSED
A
DESIRE
TO
SMOKE?'

'WHAT
ARE
YOU
TRYING
TO
PROVE?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NOTHING.

I
WANT
YOU
TO
CONSIDER
THE
POSSIBILITY
THAT
WOMEN
ARE
INTELLIGENT
HUMAN
BEINGS.
AND
INTELLIGENT
PEOPLE
DON'T
LIKE
TO
BE
TOLD
WHAT
TO
WEAR
OR
DO,
ESPECIALLY
WHEN
THEY
ARE
ADULTS.
DOES
THAT
MAKE
ANY
SENSE
TO
YOU?'
'DON'T
BE

OVER-SMART,'

I

SAID.

'DON'T

PATRONIZE

ME,'

SHE

SAID.

'THERE

ARE

OTHER

WAYS

TO

ATTRACT

ATTENTION

THAN

BY

WEARING

LESS

CLOTHES,'

I

SAID.

'I

DIDN'T

DO

IT

TO

ATTRACT

ATTENTION.

I

WEAR

SHORTS

BECAUSE

I

LIKE

TO

WEAR

SHORTS.'

'CAN

WE

STUDY?'

I

OPENED

THE

CASE
AGAIN.
WE
KEPT
QUIET
FOR
HALF
AN
HOUR
AND
IMMERSED
OURSELVES
IN
OUR
BOOKS.
'I
WASN'T
TRYING
TO
ATTRACT
ATTENTION,'
SHE
SAID
AGAIN,
LOOKING
UP
FROM
HER
BOOKS.
'IT
DOESN'T
MATTER
TO
ME,'
I
SAID.
'ARE
YOU
JEALOUS?'
'ARE
YOU
KIDDING
ME?'
I

SLAMMED
MY
BOOK
SHUT.
'NO,
JUST
CHECKING.
LET'S
STUDY.'
SHE
TURNED
BACK
TO
HER
BOOKS,
A
SMILE
ON
HER
FACE.
I
THREW
THE
PILLOW
AT
HER.
SHE
LAUGHED
AND
SLAMMED
IT
ON
MY
HEAD.
I
REALISED
THIS
WAS
THE
FIRST
CONTACT
SPORT
I
HAD

PLAYED
WITH
HER
APART
FROM
SHAKING
HANDS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
5
WE
STUDIED
TOGETHER
EVERY
DAY
FOR
THE
NEXT
MONTH.
EVEN
THOUGH
I
PRETENDED
TO
BE
FINE
WITH
THE
'JUST
FRIENDS'
THING,
IT
WAS
KILLING
ME.
EVERY
TIME
I
LOOKED
UP
FROM
MY
BOOKS,
I
SAW
HER
FACE.
EVERY
TIME
I

SAW
HER,
I
WANTED
TO
GRAB
HER
FACE
AND
KISS
HER.
THE
ONLY
WAY
I
COULD
FOCUS
WAS
BY
IMAGINING
THAT
PROF
CHATTERJEE
WAS
IN
OUR
ROOM.
EVEN
OUTSIDE
THE
STUDY
SESSIONS,
IT
WASN'T
EASY.
EVERY
TIME
I
SAW
A
GUY
TALK
TO
HER

OR
LAUGH
WITH
HER,
A
HOT
FLUSH
STARTED
FROM
MY
STOMACH
AND
REACHED
MY
FACE.
SOMETIMES,
SHE
WOULD
TELL
ME
HOW
FUNNY
SOME
GUY
IN
SECTION
A
WAS
OR
HOW
CUTE
SOME
GUY
IN
SECTION
B
WAS
AND
I
WANTED
TO
GO
WITH
A

MACHINE
GUN
AND
SHOOT
THE
RESPECTIVE
GUYS
IN
SECTIONS
A
AND
B.
'WHAT?
THEY
SHOULD
GO
FULL
ON
WITH
THE
ADVERTISING
CAMPAIGN,
RIGHT?'
SHE
REFERRED
TO
THE
MARKETING
CASE.
I
HAD
BEEN
STARING
AT
HER
LIPS,
RESEARCHING
WAYS
OF
KISSING
HER.
'HUH?
YES,
I

AGREE
WITH
YOU,'
I
SAID.
'YOUR
MIND
IS
ELSEWHERE.
WHAT
ARE
YOU
THINKING
OF
RIGHT
NOW?'
SHE
SNAPPED
HER
FINGERS.
'NOTHING,
SORRY,
I
WAS
THINKING
HOW.....HOW
INSIGHTFUL
YOU
ARE
IN
MARKETING.'
'THANK
YOU,'
SHE
SMILED,
BELIEVING
ME.
'YES,
I
LIKE
THIS
SUBJECT.
I
THINK

I
WILL
BE
GOOD
AT
A
MARKETING
JOB.
SO

I
WILL
GO
WITH
THIS
RECOMMENDATION
TOMORROW.'

WE
FINISHED
THE
CASE
AT
MIDNIGHT.

I
STOOD
UP
TO
LEAVE.

'TEA?'

SHE
SAID,
SUGGESTING

WE
GO
TO
RAMBHAI.

'NO.

I
CAN'T
FALL
ASLEEP
THEN,'

I
SAID.
'MAGGI?

I
WILL
MAKE
IT
IN
THE
PANTRY
UPSTAIRS.'
'NO,
I'D
BETTER
GO,'
SHE
CAME
TO
THE
DOOR
WITH
ME.
'YOU
ARE
SO
SERIOUS
THESE
DAYS.
WHAT
DO
YOU
KEEP
THINKING
ABOUT?
GRADES?'
'I
CAN'T
STUDY
WITH
YOU
ANY
LONGER,'
I
BLURTED
OUT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT?'
SHE
SAID
SURPRISED.
'WE'VE
FIGURED
OUT
A
RHYTHM
FOR
OURSELVES.
WE
DON'T
NEED
TO
STUDY
TOGETHER
ANYMORE.'
'YEAH,
BUT
WE
LIKE
TO
STUDY
TOGETHER,
AT
LEAST
I
DO....WHAT'S
UP?
DID
I
DO
ANYTHING
WRONG?'
'IT'S
NOT
YOU.
IT'S
ME,'
I

SAID.
'DON'T
DO
AN
"IT'S
NOT
YOU,
IT'S
ME"
ON
ME,'
ANANYA
SCREAMED.
HER
LOUD
VOICE
WOKE
UP
A
GIRL
IN
THE
NEXT
ROOM
WHO
SWITCHED
ON
HER
LIGHT.
'WE
ARE
NOT
DATING,
OK?
STOP
BEHAVING
LIKE
WE
ARE
HAVING
A
BREAK-UP,'
I
WHISPERED.

'AND
GO
TO
SLEEP.
THERE'S
A
QUIZ
TOMORROW.'

I
DIDN'T
SPEAK
TO
HER
IN
THE
CLASS
THE
NEXT
DAY.
SHE
CAME
UP
TO
ME
TWICE,
ONCE
TO
RETURN
MY
PEN
THAT

I
HAD
LEFT
IN
HER
ROOM
AND
ANOTHER
TIME
DURING
THE
MID-MORNING
BREAK

TO
ASK
ME
IF
I
WANTED
TO
GO
FOR
TEA.
ONCE
YOU
START
LIKING
SOMEONE,
THEIR
MERE
PRESENCE
EVOKES
A
WARM
FEELING
IN
YOU.
I
FOUGHT
THE
FEELING
BEFORE
IT
TOOK
CONTROL
OF
ME.
'I'D
RATHER
READ
UP
FOR
THE
NEXT
CLASS.
YOU
GO

HAVE
TEA,'
I
SAID.
SHE
DIDN'T
INSIST
AS
SHE
LEFT
THE
ROOM.
SHE
HAD
WORN
A
LONG
MAROON
SKIRT
AND
A
LIGHT
BROWN
TOP.
I
WISH
SHE'D
TURN
BACK
AND
LOOK
AT
ME.
BUT
SHE
DIDN'T.
SHE
JOINED
HER
DORM-MATES
AND
WENT
OUT
FOR

TEA.

I

DODGED

HER

FOR

THE

NEXT

FIVE

DAYS.

I

CAME

LATE

TO

CLASS

AND

LEFT

FIRST

SO

THERE

WAS

NO

TIME

FOR

GREETINGS.

‘YOU

ARE

NOT

TALKING

TO

HER?’

THE

MOHIT

RIGHT

NEXT

TO

ME

ASKED

WHILE

THE

OTHER

FOUR

CRANED

THEIR

NECKS

TO
LISTEN.
EVEN
KANYASHREE
PAUSED
FROM
HER
FRANTIC
NOTE-
TAKING
AND
TURNED
HER
PROFILE
TEN-DEGREES
TOWARDS
ME.
'YOU
SEEM
QUITE
CONCERNED?'
I
SAID
AND
EVERYONE
PROMPTLY
BACKED
OFF.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

6
ANANYA
KNOCKED
AT
MY
DOOR
AT
NINE
IN
THE
NIGHT.

I
HAD
JUST
SAT
DOWN
TO
STUDY
AFTER
DINNER.
GIRLS
RARELY
VISITED
BOYS'
DORMS.
SHE
HAD
COME
TO
MY
ROOM
ONLY
ONCE
BEFORE.

IT
HAD
EXCITED
MY
DORM-MATES
INTO
AN

IMPROMPTU
FRISBEE
MATCH
SET
TO
LOUD
MUSIC
IN
THE
DORM
CORRIDOR.
'SHE
REMINDS
ME
OF
BHAGYASHREE,'
ONE
OF
THE
BOYS
HAD
SCREAMED
OUTSIDE
OUR
ROOM.
EVEN
I
COULDN'T
RESIST
A
SMILE.
HE
WENT
ON
TO
PLAY
A
SONG
FROM
MAINE
PYAR
KIYA
THAT
URGED

A
PIGEON
TO
PLAY
POSTMAN.
'THAT'S
IT.
WE
ARE
NEVER
STUDYING
AT
YOUR
DORM
AGAIN,'
SHE
HAD
FUMED
AS
SHE
PACKED
HER
BOOKS.
SHE
OPENED
THE
DOOR
TO
EIGHT
BOYS
PLAYING
FRISBEE
IN
THE
CORRIDOR.
'FOR
THE
RECORD,
I
HATE
BHAGYASHREE,'
SHE
HAD
SAID

AND
STORMED
OFF.
BUT
HERE
SHE
WAS
AGAIN.
AND
THE
FIRMNESS
IN
HER
STEP
MEANT
MY
DORM-MATES
DIDN'T
ACT
LIKE
NEANDERTHALS
AND
HAD
DISAPPEARED
INTO
THEIR
ROOMS.
I
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
SHE
STOOD
THERE,
WEARING
THE
BLUE
AND
WHITE
SALWAR
KAMEEZ
THAT
SHE
WORE

THE
FIRST
TIME
I
SAW
HER.
WHEN
YOU
ARE
IN
CAMPUS,
YOU
CAN
FIGURE
OUT
A
PATTERN
IN
PEOPLE'S
CLOTHES.
HER
BLUE
SALWAR
KAMEEZ
REPEATED
ITSELF
EVERY
THREE
WEEKS.
SHE
HAD
BROUGHT
TWO
FROOTIS
WITH
HER.
'CAN
I
COME
IN?
CAN
I
DISTRACT
THE

SCHOLAR
FOR
TEN
MINUTES
FROM
HIS
STUDIES?’
UNLIKE
HER
ROOM,
THERE
WAS
NO
AESTHETIC
APPEAL
TO
MINE.
I
HAD
LEFT
THE
RED
BRICKS
BARE,
AND
THEY
LOOKED
LIKE
PRISON
WALLS.
MY
ORIGINALLY
WHITE
BED-SHEET
HAD
TURNED
GREY
AFTER
BEING
WASHED
IN
ACID
IN
THE

IIT
HOSTELS.
MY
DESK
ONLY
HAD
BOOKS,
UNLIKE
ANANYA'S
WHO
ALWAYS
HAD
CUT
FLOWERS
FROM
CAMPUS
LAWNS
OR
ARTY
INCENSE
HOLDERS
OR
OTHER
OBJECTS
THAT
MEN
NEVER
PUT
ON
THEIR
SHOPPING
LISTS.
'WAIT,'
IS
AID.
I
TURNED
AROUND
TO
DO
A
QUICK
SCAN.
NO,

THERE
WAS
NO
UNDERWEAR
OR
SMELLY
SOCKS
OR
PORN
MAGAZINES
OR
OLD
RAZOR
BLADES
IN
SIGHT.

I
HELD
THE
DOOR
OPEN.
'MUGGING
AWAY?'
SHE
ASKED
AS
SHE
SAT
ON
THE
BED.
'NO
CHOICE.'

I
PULLED
BACK
MY
STUDY
CHAIR.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOUR
GRADES
WILL
IMPROVE
AS
YOU
DON'T
STUDY
WITH
ME
ANYMORE.'
'IT'S
NOTHING
LIKE
THAT,'
I
SAID.
'THEN,
WHAT
IS
THE
MATTER?
WHAT
IS
THIS
CHILDISH
BEHAVIOR?
LIKE
YOU
DON'T
EVEN
ACKNOWLEDGE
ME
IN
CLASS.'
I
LOOKED
AWAY
FROM
HER.
'EYE

CONTACT
PLEASE.'
I
LOOKED
AT
HER.
I
HAD
MISSED
HER
SO
MUCH
I
WANTED
TO
LOCK
MY
ROOM
AND
NEVER
LET
HER
GO.
'I
CAN'T,'
I
SAID.
'CAN'T
WHAT?'
'I
CAN'T
BE
JUST
FRIENDS.
I'M
SURE
SOME
GUYS
CAN
BE
FRIENDS
WITH
GIRLS.
I

CAN'T.
NOT
WITH
YOU.'
'WHAT?'
SHE
SAT
UP
STRAIGHT.
'I
KNOW
YOU
ARE
OUT
OF
MY
LEAGUE
AND
I
DON'T
DESERVE
YOU
AND
WHATEVER
SO
SPARE
ME
ALL
THAT
AND....'
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?'
SHE
SOUNDED
CONFUSED.
'FORGET
IT.
THANKS
FOR
THE
FROOTI,'

I
SAID.
I
TOOK
A
LONG,
GURGLING
SIP
TO
FINISH
THE
DRINK.
I
SLAMMED
THE
TETRAPACK
ON
THE
TABLE
LIKE
A
RETRO
HINDI
FILM
HERO
WHO
TAKES
THE
LAST
SIP
OF
HIS
VAT69.
YES,
LEAVE
ME
ALONE
AS
I
DROWN
MY
SUFFERING
IN
MANGO

JUICE,
I
THOUGHT.
'HEY.'
SHE
TOUCHED
MY
SHOULDER.
'DON'T
PUT
YOUR
HAND
ON
MY
SHOULDER,'
I
SAID
AS
HER
TOUCH
SENT
TINGLES
DOWN
THE
BACK
OF
MY
NECK.
'OK,
PEACE.'
SHE
MOVED
HER
HAND
AWAY.
'BUT
THIS
IS
SORT
OF
NOT
FAIR.
WE
HAD

A
DEAL.'
'SCREW
THE
DEAL,'
I
SAID
AS
I
CRUMPLED
THE
FROOTI
CARTON
AND
THREW
IT
IN
MY
DUSTBIN.
WE
EXCHANGED
GLANCES,
SILENT
FOR
A
MINUTE.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT?'
SHE
ASKED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
WANT
US
TO
BE
A
COUPLE,'
I
SAID.
'AND
THIS
IS
NOT
A
PROPOSAL.
I
AM
NOT
MR.
FOURTEEN.'
SHE
STARED
AT
ME.
I
STARED
BACK,
TO
SHOW
I
WAS
UNFAZED.
'IF
THIS
ISN'T
A
PROPOSAL,
WHAT
IS
IT?'
'YOU

HAVE
COME
TO
MY
ROOM.
YOU
ASKED
ME
WHAT
I
WANT.
IT'S
DIFFERENT.'
'BUT
YOU
WANT
US
TO
BE
A
COUPLE.'
HER
VOICE
WAS
STILL
DEFIANT.
I
NODDED.
'WE
USED
TO
PRACTICALLY
BE
A
COUPLE,
STUDYING
TOGETHER,
GOING
TO
THE
STD
BOOTH
TOGETHER,
HAVING

MEALS
IN
THE
MESS
TOGETHER.'

'ALL
THAT
STUFF
YOU
CAN
DO
WITH
ANYONE,'

I
SAID.

'YOU
AREN'T
MAKING
ANY
SENSE,'
SHE
SAID.

'OK,
I
WILL
EXPLAIN
IT,'

I
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP.

'I
WILL
EXPLAIN
IT
SO
IT
MAKES
SENSE.
TO
SIT
AND
STUDY

WITH
YOU
IS
AN
EXERCISE
IN
DOUBLE
SELF-CONTROL.
FIRST
I
HAVE
TO
FORCE
MYSELF
TO
PAY
ATTENTION
TO
THESE
BORING
CASES.
SECOND,
I
HAVE
TO
AVOID
LOOKING
AT
YOUR
FACE
AS
MUCH
AS
POSSIBLE
BECAUSE
WHEN
I
LOOK
AT
YOUR
FACE,
ALL
I
WANT

TO
DO
IS
KISS
YOU.
BUT
WE
HAVE
THIS
STUPID
JUST-FRIENDS
DEAL
AND
YOU
ARE
ALL
COOL
ABOUT
IT
AND
SO
THAT
LEAVES
ME
WHIPPING
MY
MIND
TO
STUDY
NICOTINE-FREE
CIGARETTES
AND
NOT
THINK
ABOUT
YOUR
LIPS
AND
THE
LITTLE
MOLE
THAT
IS
THERE

BELOW
THE
LOWER
ONE.'
'YOU
NOTICED
THAT
MOLE?
IT'S
TINY.'
SHE
TOUCHED
IT.
'IT
MAY
BE
TINY,
BUT
IT
AT
LEAST
HAS
A
FIFTY
PERCENT
MARKET
SHARE
IN
TERMS
OF
MY
MIND-SPACE.
BUT
HEY,
I
AM
JUST
A
FRIEND.
I
DON'T
GET
THE
MOLE.

I
ONLY
GET
THE
FULL
STOPS.'
SHE
LAUGHED.
'I
AM
NOT
BEING
FUNNY.
YOU
GIRLS
DON'T
KNOW
WHAT
IT
IS
LIKE
TO
BE
A
GUY.'
'THOSE
LIPS
TALK
A
LOT.
YOURS
I
MEAN,'
SHE
SAID.
I
FROZE.
MS
SWAMINATHAN
DIDN'T
AS
SHE
CAME
CLOSE

TO
ME.
IN
A
SECOND,
HER
FROOTI-LACED
LIPS
WERE
ON
MINE.
WE
KISSED
FOR
THREE
SECONDS.
'AND
NOW,
BEFORE
I
REALIZE
THE
STUPIDITY
OF
WHAT
I
HAVE
DONE,
I
AM
OUT
OF
HERE,'
SHE
SAID
AND
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
I
WAS
TOO
DUMBSTRUCK
TO

MOVE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
FOUR
BOYS
FROM
MY
DORM
REMOVED
THEIR
EARS
FROM
THE
DOOR
AS
ANANYA
PUSHED
THE
DOOR
OPEN.
'WE
WERE
JUST
LOCATING
OUR
FRISBEE,'
ONE
OF
THE
FOUR
BOYS
SAID.
'IT
WON'T
BE
IN
THIS
ROOM.
THIS
BOY
ONLY
LIKES
TO
STUDY,;

SHE
SAID
AND
WALKED
OUT
OF
MY
DORM.
I
DIDN'T
MOVE
AN
INCH
FOR
FIVE
MINUTES.
THE
REMAINING
THREE
MINUTES
WERE
SPENT
REALIZING
THAT
THE
HOTTEST
GIRL
IN
THE
CAMPUS
HAD
KISSED
ME.
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
WHAT
I'D
DONE
RIGHT.
BUT
I
DIDN'T
CARE.

MAYBE
SHE
HAD
MISSED
ME
TOO.
MAYBE
IT
WASN'T
SUCH
A
BIG
DEAL
FOR
HER.
MAYBE
I
WAS
JUST
IMAGINING
THIS
AND
THIS
HADN'T
REALLY
HAPPENED.
MAYBE
I
SHOULD
STOP
DREAMING
LIKE
AN
IDIOT
AND
RUN
TO
HER
ROOM.
MAYBE
I
SHOULDN'T,
AS
I

HAD
NO
IDEA
WHAT
TO
DO
WHEN
I
MEET
HER.
MAYBE
I
SHOULD
LET
A
NIGHT
PASS
AND
TALK
TO
HER
IN
CLASS
TOMORROW.
'DON'T
KEEP
MENTIONING
IT,'
SHE
SAID
AS
THE
SAME
LIPS
THAT
WERE
ON
MINE
THIRTEEN
HOURS
AND
TWENTY-TWO
MINUTES
AGO

SIPPED
TEA
DURING
CLASS
BREAK.

'YES,
SURE,
OK....'

I
HAD
ALREADY
THANKED
HER
SEVEN
TIMES.

I
CHANGED
THE
TOPIC.

'THE
NORMAL
DISTRIBUTION
IS
TOTALLY
OVERRATED,'

I
SAID,
REFERRING
TO
THE
STATISTICS
CLASS
WE
HAD
ATTENDED.

'AND
DON'T
EXPECT
MORE,'
ANANYA
SAID.

'MORE
WHAT?'

I

SAID.
SHE
HAD
BROUGHT
THE
TOPIC
BACK
NOW.
'MORE
MEANING
NOT
ANYMORE.
NOW,
JUST
BACK
TO
WHAT
YOU
SAID
ABOUT
THE
NORMAL
CURVE,'
SHE
SAID.
'SORRY,
ONLY
ONE
CLARIFICATION.
BY
MORE
YOU
MEAN
NO
MORE
KISSES
OR
NO
MORE
THAN
KISSING?'
'CAN
YOU
STOP

IT?
WE
ARE
IN
THE
MIDDLE
OF
A
CLASS.'
'BUT
I
AM
IN
THE
MIDDLE
OF
A
LIFE
CRISIS.
PLEASE
TELL
ME.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'IS
THAT
ALL
YOU
GUYS
THINK
ABOUT?
WE
HAVE
TO
STUDY
ALL
THESE
NORMAL
CURVE
PROBLEMS
TONIGHT.'

I
LOOKED
AT
HER
AND
SMILED.

'ANY
JOKES
ABOUT
CURVES
AND

I
WILL
KILL
YOU,'
SHE
PROMISED
AS
THE
BELL
RANG
FOR
CLASS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
7

NEEDLESS
TO
SAY,
ONE
THING
LED
TO
ANOTHER
AND
WITHIN
TWO
WEEKS
WE
HAD
SEX.
YOU
PUT
A
BOY
AND
GIRL
IN
A
ROOM
FOR
A
WEEK
AND
LOTS
OF
BORING
BOOKS,
AND
SPARKS
ARE
SURE
TO
FLY.
'THIS
IS

MY
FIRST
TIME,'
SHE
SAID
AFTER
WE
DID
IT
AND
POINTED
TO
HER
MOTHER'S
PICTURE
ON
THE
WALL.
'AND
IF
SHE
FINDS
OUT,
SHE
WILL
FLIP.'
'WE
SHOULD
COVER
THESE
PICTURES
WHEN
WE
DO
IT.
THEY
FREAK
ME
OUT,'
I
SAID,
SCANNING
HER
FAMILY

MEMBERS.
SHE
LAUGHED.
'WAS
THIS
YOUR
FIRST
TIME?'
'I'D
RATHER
NOT
TALK
ABOUT
IT,'
I
SAID.
'DID
YOU
HAVE
A
GIRLFRIEND
IN
IIT?'
SHE
SAT
UP
TO
WEAR
HER
TOP.
I
KEPT
QUIET.
'DID
YOU
HAVE
SEX
WITH
A
GUY?'
ANANYA
ASKED
EYEBROWS
UP.

'NO,'
I
SCREAMED
AND
SAT
UP.
'ARE
YOU
STUPID?
YOU,
OF
ALL
PEOPLE,
ARE
ASKING
ME
IF
I
AM
GAY.'
'I
HEARD
THEY
MAKE
YOU
DO
ALL
SORTS
OF
STUFF
IN
RAGGING.'
'NO,
IT
WASN'T
THAT
BAD.
I
HAD
A
GIRLFRIEND.'
'REALLY?'
SHE
BLINKED.

'HOW
COME
YOU
NEVER
TOLD
ME!'

'I
DON'T
WANT
TO
TALK
ABOUT
IT.

IT'S
OVER.

IT
ENDED
WHEN

I
LEFT
COLLEGE,
TWO
YEARS
AGO.'

'WHY?

WHO
WAS
SHE?

A
STUDENT?'

'PROF'S
DAUGHTER.'

'MY,
MY,
MY!

WE
HAVE

A
STUD
HERE.'

THEN,

'PRETTY?
PRETTIER
THAN

ME?’
I
LOOKED
AT
ANANYA.
WHY
DO
WOMEN
SIZE
EACH
OTHER
UP
IN
LOOKS
SO
MUCH?
‘SIMILAR,
THOUGH
YOU
ARE
MUCH
SMARTER,’
I
SAID.
‘SIMILAR?’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'OK,
YOU
ARE
BETTER
LOOKING,'
I
SAID.
THE
GIRL
WHO
ASKS
THE
QUESTION
IS
THE
BETTER
LOOKING
ONE,
ALWAYS.
'THANK
YOU,'
SHE
SAID
AS
SHE
STEPPED
OFF
THE
BED
TO
WEAR
HER
TRACK
PANTS.
'WHY
DID
IT
END?'
'I
SORT
OF

HAD
A
DEAL
WITH
HER
FATHER.'
'FATHER?
WHAT,
HE
BOUGHT
YOU
OUT?
GAVE
YOU
A
BLANK
CHEQUE
LIKE
IN
FILMS?'
SHE
LAUGHED.
'NO,
HE
LET
ME
HAVE
MY
DEGREE
ON
TIME.
BECAUSE
OF
WHICH
I
AM
HERE.
BUT
THE
IMPLICIT
DEAL
WAS,
DON'T
PUSH

IT.
DON'T
DREAM
OF
BEING
FAMILY.
THERE
WAS
NO
FUTURE,
SO
IT
DIED.'
MY
THROAT
CLOSED
UP
AS
I
THOUGHT
ABOUT
MY
PREVIOUS
GIRLFRIEND.
SOMEHOW,
IT
NEVER
REALLY
GETS
OVER
WITH
AN
EX.
YOU
MERELY
LEARN
TO
PUSH
THEIR
THOUGHTS
ASIDE.
UNLESS
SOMEONE
PRODS

YOUR
BRAIN
AGAIN
TO
THINK
OF
THEM.
'CAN
WE
LEAVE
IT
NOW?'
'WHERE
IS
SHE
NOW?
CAMPUS?'
'NO,
FATHER
WENT
TO
THE
US
TO
A
SENIOR
FACULTY
POST
IN
MIT.
SHE
FOUND
A
GEEKY
GUY
OF
THE
SAME
COMMUNITY.
ENGAGED
IN
SIX
MONTHS,
MARRIED

IN
A
YEAR.
REST
I
DON'T
KNOW.
NOW,
EVEN
THOUGH
WE
WERE
NAKED
A
FEW
MOMENTS
AGO,
I
DO
THINK
I
CAN
MAKE
A
CASE
FOR
INVASION
OF
PRIVACY.'
'WELL,
IT
AFFECTS
ME.
IN
CASE
YOU
ARE
STILL
INVOLVED
WITH
HER.'
'I'M
NOT.
IT

TOOK
ME
A
LONG
TIME
TO
GET
OVER
HER,
BUT
I
AM
NOT
INVOLVED
ANYMORE.'
'DID
YOU
LOVE
HER?'
'YES.
AND
I
FEEL
SICK
I
DIDN'T
HAVE
THE
COURAGE
TO
FIGHT
HER
FATHER.
AND
NO
MORE
TALK
ABOUT
HER
PLEASE,'
I
SAID.
MY
EX-GIRLFRIEND

AND
MY
FATHER
WERE
OFF-LIMIT
TOPICS.
'ONE
LAST
QUESTION.
IS
SHE
SOUTH
INDIAN?'
'HOW
DO
YOU
KNOW?'
'YOU
MENTIONED
IIT,
MIT,
GEEKY
SOFTWARE
PROGRAMMER,
IT
WASN'T
THAT
HARD.'
I
LAUGHED.
'MY
PARENTS
ARE
PRETTY
CONSERVATIVE
TOO,'
SHE
SAID,
SWITCHING
ON
HER
ELECTRIC
KETTLE.
'WE

HAVEN'T
PLANNED
TO
GET
MARRIED
YET.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
SHE
STARED
AT
ME.
I
WONDERED
IF
I
HAD
SAID
THE
WRONG
THING.
I
WAS
BEING
FACTUAL.
'YOU
ARE
RIGHT.
WE
ARE
JUST
FRIENDS
WITH
BENEFITS,
RIGHT?
OR
WHAT
IS
IT?
FUCK
BUDDIES?'
SHE
LOOKED
UPSET.
IT
IS
AMAZING
HOW
THE

VULNERABILITY
IN
A
RELATIONSHIP
SHIFTS
FROM
THE
GUY
TO
THE
GIRL
AFTER
YOU'VE
HAD
SEX.
'HEY,
WE.....'
BUT
SHE
INTERRUPTED
ME.
'SORRY,
I
AM
FREAKING
OUT.
HAVE
TEA.'
SHE
PASSED
ME
A
CUP.
I
TWIDDLED
WITH
THE
HANDLE
FOR
TWO
MINUTES.
DESPITE
THE
SEXUAL

POSSIBILITIES,
WE
STILL
HAD
TO
STUDY.
'SHOULD
WE
OPEN
THE
HR
CASE?
IT
IS
ABOUT
A
STRIKE
IN
A
HOTEL,'
I
SAID
AS
I
OPENED
MY
FOLDER.
SHE
NODDED
WITHOUT
EYE
CONTACT.
I
RACKED
MY
BRAIN
HARD
ON
WHAT
I
COULD
SAY
THAT
COULD

MAKE
HER
FEEL
BETTER.

'I
LOVE
YOU,'

I
SAID.
SHE
CAREFULLY
CLOSED
HER
CASE
MATERIALS
AND
LOOKED

UP
AT
ME.
'MEAN

IT?
SHE
SAID,
HER
EYES
WET.

'YES,'

I
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
NOT
JUST
SAYING
IT
SO
YOU
CAN
HAVE
SEX
WITH
ME
AGAIN?'

'NO.
BUT
ARE
YOU
SAYING
THAT....'

'I
AM
NOT
SAYING
ANYTHING.
IS
THAT
ALL
YOU
THINK
ABOUT?'

'WE
STUDY
TOGETHER,
EAT
TOGETHER,
GO
OUT
TOGETHER,
SIT
IN
CLASS
LOOKING
AT
EACH
OTHER
ALL
DAY,
THE
ONLY
TIME
WE
ARE
APART
IS
WHEN
I
HAVE

TO
GO
TO
SLEEP
OR
WHEN
I
HAVE
TO
USE
THE
TOILET.
SO,'
I
PAUSED.
'SO
WHAT?'
'I
LOVE
YOU
DAMN
IT!
DON'T
YOU
GET
IT?'
I
YELLED.
'THAT'S
BETTER.
NOW
YOU
SOUND
CONVINCING.'
SHE
SMILED.
'AND
YOU?'
I
ASKED.
'I'M
GOING
TO
THINK

ABOUT
IT.'
'EXCUSE
ME?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WELL,
I
COULD
BE
ONLY
USING
YOU
FOR
SEX,'
SHE
SAID.
'EXCUSE
ME?'
I
SAID,
THIS
TIME
LOUDER.
SHE
LAUGHED.
I
THREW
A
PILLOW
AT
HER.
'I
TOLD
YOU.
I
HAVE
TO
THINK
ABOUT
IT.'
EVEN
THOUGH
SHE
NEVER
SAID
'I

LOVE
YOU',
MS
SWAMINATHAN
MOVED
IN
WITH
ME.
I
HAD
FREAKED
OUT
ABOUT
THE
IDEA
WHEN
SHE
ARRIVED
AT
MY
ROOM
ONE
DAY
WITH
A
BACKPACK
FOR
OVERNIGHT
CLOTHES.
I'D
HAVE
MUCH
PREFERRED
HER
PLACE,
AS
I
DIDN'T
WANT
HER
TO
BE
THE
ONLY

WOMAN
IN
THE
DORM
WITH
TWENTY
TESTOSTERONE-CHARGED
MEN.
STILL,
IT
WAS
KIND
OF
NICE.
SHE
BROUGHT
HER
ELECTRIC
KETTLE,
SWEET
SMILE
AND
MAGI-
MAKING
ABILITIES
WITH
HER.
WHILE
WE
USED
TO
STUDY
TOGETHER
EARLIER,
NOW
THERE
WAS
EVEN
MORE
DISCIPLINE.
WHEN
A
WOMAN
COMES

INTO
YOUR
LIFE,
THINGS
ORGANIZE
THEMSELVES.
WE
WOKE
UP
IN
THE
MORNING,
SHE
HALF
AN
HOUR
EARLIER
THAN
ME.
SHE
WOULD
RUSH
TO
HER
DORM
A
HUNDRED
METRES
AWAY
AND
BATHE
THERE.
I'D
GET
READY
AND
MEET
HER
AT
THE
MESS
FOR
BREAKFAST.
'THIS

IS
YOUR
ASSIGNMENT
AND
THIS
IS
MY
QUANT
WORKSHEET.'
SHE'D
TAKE
OUT
THE
STACK
OF
WORK
FROM
LAST
NIGHT
AND
DIVIDE
IT
IN
THE
MESS.
WE'D
GO
TO
CLASS
TOGETHER,
AND
IF
KANYASHREE
WAS
IN
A
GOOD
MOOD,
SHE'D
SWITCH
PLACES
WITH
ANANYA
FOR

A
DAY.
OTHERWISE,
WE'D
TAKE
OUR
ORIGINAL
SEATS
AND
STARE
AT
EACH
OTHER
THROUGH
CLASS.
THE
FIVE
MOHITS
WERE
QUITE
AMUSED
AT
FIRST,
BUT
LATER
ADJUSTED
QUITE
WELL
AND
TURNED
TO
CHECK
US
OUT
ONLY
WHEN
THE
LECTURE
GOT
BORING.
IN
FACT,
HER
MOVING

IN
WITH
ME
CREATED
A
MINI
SCANDAL.
LIKE
IT
ALWAYS
HAPPENS,
I
EARNED
THE
TAG
OF
A
STUD.
AND
SHE
EARNED
TAGS
RANGING
FROM
STUPIDLY-IN-LOVE
TO
SLUT.
BUT
IT
DIDN'T
MATTER
TO
HER
AS
MAYBE
SHE
WAS
STUPIDLY
IN
LOVE.
EVERY
DAY
IN
CLASS,

SHE
WOULD
PASS
ME
A
NOTE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
MISS
YOU.
CAN'T
WAIT
TO
CUDDLE
WITH
YOU
AFTER
CLASS,'
IT
SAID,
AND
IT
CAME
TO
ME
VIA
ANKUR,
BIPIN,
BHUPIN,
TEN
OTHER
STUDENTS
AND
KANYASHREE.
WE
LIVED
WITH
EACH
OTHER,
YET
SHE
MISSED
ME
IN
CLASS
FROM
SIX
ROWS

AWAY.
'STOP
SENDING
SUCH
NOTES
IN
CLASS.
PEOPLE
WILL
OPEN
THEM,'
I
WARNED.
'YOU
ARE
NO
FUN,'
SHE
REPLIED
WITH
SEVERAL
SAD
SMILES.
BIPIN
SMILED
AS
HE
PASSED
THE
NOTE.
OK,
SO
SOMEONE
HAD
ENTERTAINMENT
IN
CLASS.
'YOU
ARE
A
WHISKER
AWAY
FROM
BEING

IN
THE
TOP
TEN.
ONE
MORE
A
IN
THE
STATISTICS
FINAL
EXAM
AND
YOU
ARE
THERE,'
SHE
SAID
ONE
NIGHT
THREE
MONTHS
AFTER
SHE
HAD
MOVED
IN
WITH
ME.
'I
CAN'T
BELIEVE
I'M
STUDYING
SO
MUCH.
IN
IIT,
ALL
WE'D
DO
IS
CHAT
ALL

NIGHT.'
I
SWITCHED
OFF
THE
LIGHTS.
'WE
COULD
CHAT
ALL
NIGHT,'
SHE
SAID
AS
WE
TUCKED
UNDER
THE
QUILT
TOGETHER.
'ABOUT
WHAT?
AND
WHY?
WE
ARE
WITH
EACH
OTHER
ALL
THE
TIME.
WHY
SACRIFICE
SLEEP?'
'STILL,
WE
COULD
TALK.
FUTURE
PLANS
AND
STUFF.'
THE

WORD
'FUTURE'
AND
FEMALES
IS
A
DANGEROUS
COMBINATION.
STILL,
IN
BUSINESS
SCHOOL
FUTURE
COULD
MERELY
MEAN
PLACEMENT.
'WE'VE
GOOD
GRADES.
YOU'LL
EASILY
GET
HLL.
IT
IS
THE
BEST
MARKETING
JOB,
RIGHT?
AND
I'LL
GO
FOR
WPM.'
'WPM?'
'WHOEVER
PAYS
MORE,
SO
I
CAN
SAVE

AS
MUCH
MONEY
AS
FAST
AS
POSSIBLE,'
I
GRINNED.
'YOU
STILL
SERIOUS
ABOUT
BECOMING
A
WRITER,
RIGHT?'
SHE
RAN
HER
FINGERS
THROUGH
MY
HAIR.
'YES
BUT
I'M
STILL
WONDERING
WHAT
I'D
WRITE
ABOUT,'
I
YAWNED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'ABOUT
ANYTHING.
LIKE
THAT
GIRLFRIEND
OF
YOURS.'
'ANANYA,
WE
HAD
A
PACT.
WE
WILL
NOT
TALK
ABOUT
MY
EX-GIRLFRIEND
AGAIN.'
'SORRY,
SORRY.
YOU
SAID
YOU
HAD
A
DEAL
WITH
THE
PROF
FOR
GRADES,
SO
I
THOUGHT
MAYBE
IT
WILL
MAKE
AN

INTERESTING
STORY.'
'GOOD
NIGHT,
MY
STRATEGIST.'
I
KISSED
HER
AND
LAY
DOWN.
'I
LOVE
YOU,'
SHE
SAID.
'MEAN
IT?'
'YES.'
'HOW
COME
YOU
SAID
IT
NOW?'
'I
THINK
ABOUT
IT
A
LOT.
I
ONLY
ARTICULATED
IT
NOW.
GOOD
NIGHT,'
SHE
SAID.
ONE-AND
-A-HALF
YEARS

LATER
'TELL
ME
YOUR
THOUGHTS.
DON'T
YOU
LIKE
TO
TALK
AFTER
MAKING
LOVE?'
ACTUALLY,
I
PREFER
TO
LOOK
AT
THE
FAN
ABOVE.
OR
DRIFT
INTO
A
NAP.
WHY
DO
WOMEN
WANT
TO
TALK
ALL
THE
TIME?
WE
WERE
IN
MY
ROOM.
WE
WERE
SNUGLY

WRAPPED
UP
ON
A
CLOUDY,
WINDER
AFTERNOON.
'I
LOVE
TO
TALK,'
I
SAID
CAREFULLY.
'DO
YOU
HAVE
SOMETHING
IN
MIND?'
'IT'S
ONE
WEEK
TO
PLACEMENT
AND
I'M
NERVOUS,'
SHE
SAID.
'DON'T
WORRY,
EVERY
COMPANY
HAS
SHORT-LISTED
YOU.
YOU
WILL
HIT
T
HE
JACKPOT.'
'I'M

NOT
NERVOUS
ABOUT
RECEIVING
A
JOB
OFFER.
WHAT
AFTER
THAT?’
‘AFTER
THAT?
FINALLY,
WE
WILL
HAVE
MONEY
IN
THE
BANK.
NO
MORE
SCRIMPING
WHILE
ORDERING
IN
RESTAURANTS,
NO
MORE
FRONT
ROW
SEATS
IN
THEATRES,
NO
MORE
SECOND-
CLASS
TRAIN
TRAVEL.
COLLEGE
IS
FUN,
BUT

SORRY,
I'VE
HAD
MY
SHARE
OF
SLUMMING
IT.
IMAGINE,
YOU
CAN
SHOP
EVERY
MONTH!'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'I
DON'T
LIKE
SHOPPING.'
'FINE,
YOU
CAN
SAVE
THE
MONEY.
OR
TRAVEL
TO
EXOTIC
PLACES.'
HER
FACE
TURNED
MORE
THOUGHTFUL.
'YOU
OK?'
I
ASKED.
'DO
YOU
REALIZE
WE
LEAVE
CAMPUS
IN
FOUR
WEEKS?'
'GOOD
RIDDANCE.
NO
MORE
MUGGING
AND
GRADES,
HOPEFULLY

FOR
LIFE,'
I
SAID.
HER
VOICE
DROPPED
AN
OCTAVE.
'WHAT
ABOUT
US?'
'ABOUT
US
WHAT?'
I
ASKED
WITH
AN
IDIOTIC,
CONFUSED
EXPRESSION
EXCLUSIVE
TO
MEN
WHEN
THEY
HAVE
TO
GET
ALL
MEANINGFUL
WITH
WOMEN.
SHE
SAT
UP
AND
WORE
HER
TOP.
SHE
STEPPED
OFF

THE
BED
TO
WEAR
THE
REST
OF
HER
CLOTHES.
DESPITE
THE
SERIOUS
MOOD,
I
COULDN'T
HELP
BUT
NOTICE
HOW
WONDERFUL
WOMEN
LOOKED
WHEN
THEY
CHANGE.
'I'M
GOING
TO
MY
ROOM.
ENJOY
YOUR
NAP,'
SHE
SAID.
'HEY,'
I
EXTENDED
MY
ARM
AND
STOPPED
HER.
'WHAT'S

UP?
I
AM
TALKING,
NO?’
‘BUT
LIKE
A
DORK.
WE
COULD
BE
IN
DIFFERENT
CITIES
IN
FOUR
WEEKS.
IT
WILL
NEVER
BE
LIKE
THIS
AGAIN.’
‘WHAT
DO
YOU
MEAN
NEVER?’
I
SAID,
MY
MOUTH
OPEN.
‘WEAR
YOUR
CLOTHES
FIRST.
I
WANT
TO
HAVE
A

SERIOUS
DISCUSSION.'
SHE
KEPT
QUIET
UNTIL
I
FINISHED
DRESSING.
WE
SAT
ACROSS,
CROSS-LEGGED
ON
THE
BED.
'HERE
IS
THE
DEAL,'
I
SAID,
COLLECTING
MY
THOUGHTS.
'YOU
ARE
THE
CAREER
FOCUSED
ONE,
I
AM
DOING
IT
FOR
THE
MONEY.
SO,
I
WILL
TRY
TO
GET

A
JOB
IN
THE
SAME
CITY
AS
YOU.
BUT
THE
ISSUE
IS,
WE
DON'T
KNOW
WHICH
CITY
YOU
WILL
BE
IN.
SO
HOW
CAN
I
DO
ANYTHING
ABOUT
IT
NOW?'
'AND
WHAT
WILL
YOU
DO
NEXT
WEEK?
WE
ARE
ALL
GOING
TO
GET
PLACED

AROUND
THE
SAME
TIME.
YOU
CAN'T
WAIT
FOR
ME
TO
GET
A
JOB.'
'SO
LET
FATE
PLAY
OUT,'
I
SAID.
'AND
WHAT
ABOUT
OUR
FUTURE?
OR
SORRY,
I
SHOULD
ASK,
IS
THERE
A
FUTURE?'
'I
CAN'T
REALLY
TALK
ABOUT
THAT
NOW,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'OH
REALLY,
CAN
YOU
GIVE
ME
A
TIME
IN
THE
FUTURE
WHEN
WE
CAN
TALK
ABOUT
THE
FUTURE?'

I
KEPT
QUIET.
'FORGET
IT,
I'M
LEAVING,'
SHE
SAID
AND
MADE
FOR
THE
DOOR.

'I
NEED
TIME
TO
THINK,'

I
SAID.
'TWO
YEARS

ARE
NOT
ENOUGH?’
I
KEPT
QUIET.
‘YOU
KNOW
IT
BAFFLES
ME,’
ANANYA
SAID,
‘HOW
YOU
MEN
NEED
SO
MUCH
TIME
TO
THINK
ABOUT
COMMITMENT,
BUT
HOW
YOU
NEED
NO
TIME
AT
ALL
TO
DECIDE
WHEN
YOU
HAVE
TO
SLEEP
WITH
THE
GIRL.’
‘ANANYA,’
I

BEGAN
ONLY
TO
HEAR
THE
DOOR
SLAM
SHUT.
'YOU'LL
BE
FINE,'
SHE
TOLD
ME
FOR
THE
FIFTH
TIME.
WE
TOOK
A
FOUR-KILOMETRE
WALK
OUTSIDE
CAMPUS
TO
REACH
NAVRANGPURA.
I
WANTED
TO
BE
AS
FAR
FROM
THE
MADNESS
AS
POSSIBLE.
DAY
ZERO,
OR
THE
FIRST

DAY
OF
PLACEMENT,
HAD
ENDED
AND
I
HADN'T
GOT
A
JOB.
'I
THOUGHT
WITH
MY
GRADES
I
WILL
CRACK
DAY
ZERO,'
I
SAID.
'WHO
CARES?
THERE'RE
SIX
MORE
DAYS
LEFT
FOR
PLACEMENTS,'
SHE
SAID.
WE
STOPPED
AT
A
ROADSIDE
VENDOR
FOR
PAO-BHAJI.
SHE
ORDERED

TWO
PLATES
WITH
LESS
BUTTER.
'YOU
WILL
BE
FINE.
SEE,
MARKETING
COMPANIES
DON'T
EVEN
START
UNTIL
TOMORROW.
I
HAVE
MY
BIG
HLL
INTERVIEW.
I'M
NOT
STRESSED.'
'YOU'LL
GET
IN.
I
CAN'T
THINK
OF
A
SINGLE
COMPANY
WHO
CAN
SAY
NO
TO
YOU,'
I
SAID.

SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME
AND
SMILED.
'YOU
DO
REALIZE
THAT
NOT
EVERYONE
IS
IN
LOVE
WITH
ME.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
HAVE
GOOD
GRADES
AND
A
PASSION
FOR
MARKETING.
YOU
ARE
SO
HLL,
I
CAN
SEE
IT
ON
YOUR
FACE.'
'YOU
HAVE
TWO
MORE
BANKS
TOMORROW.'
'I
WANT
CITIBANK,'
I
SAID.
'I
SHOULD
HAVE
BETTER
ANSWERS
THAN
"I
LIKE
THE
MONEY".

I
NEED
TO
LIE
BETTER
IN
INTERVIEWS.'
THE
WAITER
SERVED
US.
SHE
BROKE
A
PIECE
OF
THE
PAO
AND
FED
ME.
'BUT
THAT'S
THE
ONLY
REASON
WHY
ANYONE
WOULD
WORK
IN
A
BANK,
RIGHT?'
'YES,
BUT
THE
INTERVIEWERS
LIKE
TO
BELIEVE
THEY
ARE
DOING

SOMETHING
MEANINGFUL.
LIKE
THEY
WORK
FOR
THE
MOTHER
TERESA
FOUNDATION
OR
SOMETHING.'
'WELL
YOU
SHOULD
SAY
THIS

—
I
WANT
CITIBANK
AS
I
WANT
INDIANS
TO
HAVE
ACCESS
TO
WORLD-CLASS
FINANCIAL
SERVICES.
AND
USE
WORDS
LIKE
“ENORMOUS
GROWTHS”
AND
“STRATEGIC
POTENTIAL”,’
SHE
SAID.
‘I

HAVE
TO
SAY
ALL
THAT
WITHOUT
THROWING
UP?’
‘AND
REMEMBER,
THE
CITY
NEVER
SLEEPS.
SO
SAY
YOU
WILL
WORK
HARD,’
SHE
SAID.
‘I
CAN’T
LIE
THAT
MUCH,’
I
SAID.
SHE
LAUGHED
AS
SHE
WIPED
A
BIT
OF
BHAJI
OFF
THE
CORNER
OF
MY
MOUTH.

I
THOUGHT
HOW
LUCKY
I
WAS
TO
HAVE
HER.
SHE
COULD
BE
RUNNING
HLL
IN
A
FEW
YEARS,
BUT
TODAY
HER
PRIORITY
WAS
TO
WIPE
BHAJI
OFF
MY
STUPID
FACE.
GUILT
KNOTTED
WITHIN
ME.
SHE
DESERVED
AN
ANSWER
ABOUT
THE
FUTURE.
DO
IT,
LOSER,

I
TOLD
MYSELF.
DO
IT
NOW.
EVEN
IF
IT
IS
A
MAKESHIFT
PAO
BHAJI
STALL
IN
NAVRANGPURA.

I
GATHERED
THE
COURAGE
TO
SPEAK.
'WHAT?
YOU
WANT
TO
SAY
SOMETHING?'
'DO
YOU
WANT
MORE
PAO?'

I
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
THIRD,'
A
FIRST-YEAR
STUDENT
VOLUNTEER
WHO

ASSISTED
IN
PLACEMENTS
TOLD
ME.
I
SAT
ON
A
STOOL
WITH
SEVEN
OTHER
CANDIDATES
OUTSIDE
THE
INTERVIEW
ROOM.
WE
RESEMBLED
PATIENTS
AT
A
DENTIST'S
CLINIC,
ONLY
MORE
STRESSED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
HLL
INTERVIEWS
WERE
ON
IN
THE
ROOM
ACROSS
ME.
ANANYA
HAD
MOVED
UP
ALL
THE
ROUNDS
AND
NOW
WAITED
TO
BE
CALLED
ONE
LAST
TIME.
I
REFLECTED
ON
WHAT
HAD
GONE
WRONG
ON
DAY
ZERO.
OK,
I
ONLY
WANTED
A

JOB
FOR
THE
MONEY,
BUT
I
HAD
HIDDEN
THAT
WHEN
THEY
SPOKE
TO
ME.
THEN
WHY
DID
I
SCREW
UP
WITH
FIVE
BANKS
YESTERDAY?
WHAT
IF
CITI
ALSO
SCREWS
ME?
I
THOUGHT.
SWEAT
BEADS
POPPED
ON
MY
FOREHEAD.
WAS
IT
DESTINY
LEADING
ME
TO

DOOM
AFTER
ALL
THESE
DEGREES
AND
GRADES?
IS
GOD
NOT
ON
MY
SIDE?
I
WONDERED
IF
I
HAD
GIVEN
ANY
REASON
TO
GOD
NOT
TO
BE
ON
MY
SIDE.
I
SAW
THE
HLL
ROOM
FROM
A
DISTANCE.
ANANYA
STOOD
OUTSIDE,
LOOKING
BEAUTIFUL
IN
A

PEACOCK
BLUE
SARI.
MAYBE
GOD
WILL
NOT
LET
ME
DECIDE
MY
FUTURE
UNLESS
I
GIVE
HER
CLARITY
ON
HER
FUTURE.
'KRISH
MALHOTRA,'
THE
STUDENT
VOLUNTEER
CALLED
MY
NAME.
I
OFFERED
MENTAL
PRAYERS
AND
STOOD
UP.
I
CHECKED
MY
TIE
KNOT
AND
SHIRT
COLLARS.
REMEMBER

YOU
NEED
THIS
JOB,
I
TOLD
MYSELF.
BANKS
PAY
DOUBLE,
I
COULD
QUIT
A
CORPORATE
CAREER
TWICE
AS
FAST
TO
DO
WHATEVER
I
WANTED
TO.
I
BREATHED
IN
DEEPLY
AND
EXHALED.
'WELCOME,
TAKE
YOU
SEAT,'
A
MAN
IN
AN
IMPECCABLE
BLACK
SUIT
SPOKE
FROM

HIS
CHAIR.
HE
WAS
RICH
ENOUGH
TO
WEAR
A
ROLEX
WATCH
AND
OBNOXIOUS
ENOUGH
NOT
TO
LOOK
AT
ME
WHILE
HE
ADDRESSED
ME.
HE
RIFLED
THROUGH
A
PILE
OF
RESUMES
TO
FIND
MINE.
'GOOD
AFTERNOON.'
I
EXTENDED
MY
HAND.
I
FLEXED
MY
FOREARM
MUSCLES

AS
PEOPLE
SAY
A
TIGHT
HANDSHAKE
IS
A
SIGN
OF
CONFIDENCE
AND
WORLD
DOMINATION.
'RAHUL
AHUJA,
MANAGING
DIRECTOR,
CORPORATE
FINANCE,'
HE
SAID
AND
SHOOK
HANDS
WITH
ME.
HE
POINTED
TO
HIS
COLLEAGUE
ON
THE
RIGHT.
'AND
THIS
IS
DEVESH
SHARMA,
VICE-PRESIDENT
IN
HR.'

I

LOOKED
AT
DEVESH,
A
THIRTY-YEAR-OLD
EXECUTIVE
WITH
THE
TIMIDITY
OF
A
THREE-YEAR-
OLD.
HE
CAME
ACROSS
AS
SOMEONE
WHO
COULD
BE
KICKED
AROUND
DESPITE
BEING
CALLED
VICE-PRESIDENT.
ANYWAY,
I'D
HEARD
CITIBANK
HAD
FOUR
HUNDRED
VICE-
PRESIDENTS
TO
ACCOMMODATE
CAREERS
AND
EGOS
OF
HUNDREDS
OF

NEW
MBAS
THAT
JOINED
EVERY
YEAR.
OF
COURSE,
IT
TOOK
AWAY
THE
RELEVANCE
OF
THE
TITLE
BUT
AT
LEAST
IT
GAVE
YOU
A
GOOD
INTRODUCTION.
RAHUL
SIGNALED
DEVESH
TO
START.
'SO
KRISH,
I
NOTICE
YOU
HAVE
POOR
GRADES
IN
YOUR
UNDERGRAD,'
DEVESH
SPOKE
IN

A
VOICE
SO
EFFEMINATE,
HE'D
BE
THE
OBVIOUS
CHOICE
FOR
FEMALE
LEADS
IN
COLLEGE
PLAYS.
'YOU
ARE
PRETTY
OBSERVANT,'
I
SAID.
'EXCUSE
ME?'
DEVESH
SAID,
SURPRISED.
CUT
THE
WISECRACKS,
I
TOLD
MYSELF.
'NOTHING,'
I
CLEARED
MY
THROAT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SO,
WHAT
HAPPENED?'
A
GIRLFRIEND,
FUN-LOVING
FRIENDS,
ALCOHOL,
GRASS
AND
CRAP
PROFS
HAPPENED,
I
WANTED
TO
SAY.
BUT
ANANYA
HAD
TOLD
ME
THE
RIGHT
ANSWER.
'ACTUALLY,
MR.
SHARMA,'
I
SAID,
EMPHASIZING
HIS
NAME
SO
HE
FELT
GOOD,
'WHEN
I
ENTERED
IIT,

I
DIDN'T
REALIZE
THE
RIGOURS
DEMANDED
BY
THE
SYSTEM.
AND
ONCE
YOU
HAVE
A
BAD
START,
DUE
TO
RELATIVE
GRADING,
IT
IS
QUITE
HARD
TO
COME
BACK.

I
DID
GET
GOOD
GRADES
IN
THE
LAST
SEMESTER
AND
MY
IIMA
GRADES
ARE
GOOD.
SO,
AS

YOU
CAN
SEE,
I'VE
MADE
UP.'
THERE
WERE
TWENTY
MINUTES
OF
STUPID
QUESTIONS
LIKE
'WILL
CREDIT
CARDS
GROW
IN
INDIA?'
OR
'CAN
INDIA
IMPROVE
ITS
BANKING
SERVICES?'
WHERE
YOU
EASILY
ANSWER
WHAT
THEY
WANT
TO
HEAR
(YES,
THEY
WILL
GROW
AND,
YES,
INDIA
CAN

IMPROVE
HEAPS).
FINALLY,
THEY
ASKED
THE
BIG
QUESTION,
'WHY
CITIBANK?'
I
WANT
CITIBANK
BECAUSE
NONE
OF
THE
OTHER
FIVE
BANKS
WORKED
OUT.
I
SUCKED
IN
MY
BREATH
ALONG
WITH
MY
STUPID
THOUGHTS.
BS
TIME,
BUDDY,
I
THOUGHT,
THE
TEN
SECONDS
THAT
WILL
DETERMINE
YOUR

CAREER
START
NOW.
'MR
AHUJA,
THE
QUESTION
IS
NOT
WHY
CITI.
THE
REAL
QUESTION
IS
WHY
WOULD
ANY
AMBITIOUS
YOUNG
PERSON
WANT
TO
GO
ANYWHERE
ELSE?
IT
IS
THE
BIGGEST
PRIVATE
BANK
IN
THE
WORLD,
IT
HAS
A
GREAT
REPUTATION,
IT
IS
COMMITTED
TO

INDIA,
AND
THERE
ARE
OPPORTUNITIES
IN
ALMOST
EVERY
AREA
OF
THE
BANK.
IT
IS
NOT
A
BANK,
IT
IS
A
GROWTH
MACHINE.'
I
PAUSED
TO
SEE
IF
I
HAD
GONE
OVER
THE
TOP.
BUT
RAHUL
LISTENED
WITH
RAPT
ATTENTION
AND
DEVESH
NODDED.
YES,
THEY

WERE
FALLING
FOR
IT.
'AND,
ULTIMATELY
THE
BIGGEST
REASON
IS,
RAHUL,'
I
SAID,
SWITCHING
TO
THE
FIRST
NAME
TO
SHOW
MY
CLOSENESS
TO
HIM,
'I
REALLY
WANT
TO
WORK
WITH
PEOPLE
I
LOOK
UP
TO.
WHEN
I
SEE
YOU,
I
WANT
TO
BE
YOU.

AND
CITI
GIVES
ME
A
SHOT
AT
IT.'
RAHUL
FLUSHED
WITH
PRIDE.
'HOW...I
MEAN,
HOW
DO
YOU
KNOW
YOU
WANT
TO
BE
ME?'
NO
MATTER
HOW
ACCOMPLISHED
PEOPLE
GET,
THEY
DON'T
STOP
FISHING
FOR
COMPLIMENTS.
'I
SAW
YOU
AT
THE
PRE-PLACEMENT
TALK.
I'VE
ATTENDED

DOZENS
OF
TALKS,
BUT
THE
WAY
YOU
PRESENTED
SHOWED
MORE
THOUGHT
CLARITY
THAN
ANYONE
ELSE.
I
THINK
IT
IS
A
CITIBANK
THING.
YOU
PEOPLE
HAVE
A
DIFFERENT
CONFIDENCE.
RIGHT,
DEVESH?’
DEVESH
LOOKED
AT
ME,
PERPLEXED.
‘ACTUALLY,
WE
AT
HUMAN
RESOURCES
PICK
THE
BEST
TALENT,’

HE
PARROTED,
PROBABLY
FROM
A
MANUAL.
'HR
DOES
NOTHING.
I
PERSONALLY
PICK
EVERYONE
FOR
THE
JOB,'
RAHUL
SAID
AS
THE
TWO
JOSTLED
FOR
MY
ATTENTION.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'IT
SHOWS,'

I
SAID.
RAHUL
PUSHED
BACK
HIS
CHAIR
AND
STOOD
UP.

'LISTEN
KRISH,
I
LIKE
YOU.
SO
BETWEEN
US,
LET
ME
BE
HONEST.

WE
ARE
MOSTLY
DONE
WITH
THE
RECRUITMENT
AND
HAVE
ONLY
ONE
PLACE
LEFT.
BUT
WE
HAVE
INTERNAL

CRITERIA;
WE
NEED
SEVEN-POINT
GRADE
IN
UNDERGRAD
TO
TAKE
NEW
RECRUITS.’
FUCK.
MY
PAST
SINS
WOULD
NOT
LET
GO
OF
ME.
MAYBE
THAT
IS
WHY
THE
FIVE
BANKS
HAD
REJECTED
ME.
“AND
THIS
MISSED
SEMESTER....’
HE
TAPPED
MY
UNDERGRAD
GRADE
SHEETE.
‘RESEARCH
SEMESTER,
SIR’

I
CORRECTED.
'I
DON'T
KNOW
ABOUT
THAT.
DEVESH?'
DEVESH,
LIKE
ANYONE
WHO
WORKS
IN
HR,
HAD
NEVER
TAKEN
A
REAL
DECISION
IN
HIS
LIFE.
'IT'S
A
BUSINESS
CALL,
SIR,'
HE
SAID.
'I
HEAD
MY
BUSINESS,'
RAHUL
SAID.
'YES,
BUT
YOU
MAY
WANT
TO
TALK

TO
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER,'
DEVESH
SAID,
SCARED
TO
MAKE
A
SUGGESTION.
'I'M
SENIOR
TO
HIM.
I
CAME
FROM
NEW
YORK.
HE'S
JUST
CONNECTED
SO
HE
BECAME
COUNTRY
MANAGER.
YOU
KNOW
THAT,
RIGHT?'
'SIR,
BUT
GRADE-WISE....'
DEVESH
PAUSED
AND
BOTH
OF
THEM
LOOKED
AT
ME.

'CAN
YOU
GIVE
US
FIVE
MINUTES?'
RAHUL
ASKED.
'SURE,
I'LL
WAIT
OUTSIDE,'
I
OBLIGED
WITH
AN
INGRATIATING
GRIN.
'THANKS,
WE'LL
CALL
YOU
IN
AGAIN.
SO,
DON'T
SEND
THE
NEXT
CANDIDATE.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
8

I
STEPPED
OUT
OF
THE
CITI
INTERVIEW
ROOM.

I
SCANNED
THE
LIST
OF
REMAINING
COMPANIES
ON
THE
NOTICE
BOARD.
EVERYONE
ELSE
PAID
HALF
OF
CITIBANK.

I
FOUND
AN
EMPTY
STOOL
TO
SIT
ON
AND
CLOSED
MY
EYES
TO
PRAY.
GOD

APPEARED
IN
FRONT
OF
ME.
'HELLO
GOD,'
I
SAID,
'I'VE
NOT
SAID
ONE
TRUE
THING
IN
THAT
INTERVIEW
TODAY.
BUT
I
WANT
THE
JOB,
PLEASE.'
'THEY
DON'T
WANT
TO
HEAR
THE
TRUTH.
SO,
THAT'S
OK,'
GOD
SAID.
'BUT
THAT'S
NOT
WHAT
YOU
SHOULD
BE

WORRIED
ABOUT.'
'THEN
WHAT?'
'YOU
HAVE
LIVED
WITH
A
GIRL
FOR
TWO
YEARS.'
'I
LOVE
HER,
GOD,'
I
SAID.
'LOVE
IS
NOT
ENOUGH.
YOU
KNOW
WHAT
YOU
HAVE
TO
DO.'
'I
WILL,
I
JUST
NEED
TIME.'
'YOU
ARE
WELL
PAST
YOUR
TIME.
IN
FOUR

MINUTES,
I
COULD
LET
YOUR
LAST
BANK
JOB
SLIP
AWAY,'
GOD
SAID.
'NO
GOD,
I
WANT
CITIBANK.'
'I
WANT
YOU
TO
DO
THE
RIGHT
THING
FIRST.'
'HOW?'
I
OPENED
MY
EYES.
I
LOOKED
AT
THE
HLL
ROOM.
ANANYA
HAD
GONE
INSIDE
THE
ROOM.
I

CLOSED
MY
EYES
AGAIN.
'HOW?'
I
REPEATED.
'SHE
IS
IN
AN
INTERVIEW.
I
PROMISE
TO
DO
IT
AFTER
I
GET
MY
CITIBANK
JOB.'
'I
DON'T
TRUST
YOU.
ANYWAY,
UPTO
YOU.
YOU
DON'T
LISTEN
TO
ME,
I
DON'T
LISTEN
TO
YOU,'
GOD
SAID.
I
OPENED

MY
EYES.
I
HAD
THREE
MINUTES.
ANANYA
WOULD
KILL
ME
IF
I
WENT
INSIDE
THE
ROOM.
BUT
A
VOICE
INSIDE
TOLD
ME
THAT
IF
I
DIDN'T
GO
TO
HER,
THE
CITI
COUNTRY
MANAGER
OR
RAHUL
OR
DEVESH
COULD
DECIDE
AGAINST
ME.
OF
COURSE,
MY

RATIONAL
MIND
KNEW
I
WAS
BEING
COMPLETELY
MORONIC.
BOTH
THE
EVENTS
WERE
NOT
CONNECTED.
BUT
THERE
IS
ONLY
SO
MUCH
OUR
RATIONAL
MIND
KNOWS.
MAYBE,
EVENTS
AND
KARMA
ARE
CONNECTED.
I
RAN
TO
THE
HLL
ROOM.
'EXCUSE
ME,'
THE
VOLUNTEER
ON
THE
DOOR
SAID,

BLOCKING
ME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
NEED
TO
GO
INSIDE,'
I
SAID,
'URGENT.'
'THERE'S
AN
INTER....'
I
FORCED
MY
WAY
INSIDE.
HLL
WAS
CONDUCTING
ITS
FINAL
INTERVIEWS
IN
ONE
OF
THE
CLASSROOMS.
THE
COMPANY
STAFF
SAT
IN
THE
FRONT
ROW
OF
THE
CLASS
WHILE
THE
CANDIDATE

SAT
IN
THE
PROF'S
CHAIR.
ANANYA
FACED
A
PANEL
OF
FIVE
ELDERLY
PEOPLE
IN
THE
ROOM.
SHE
WAS
MOVING
HER
HANDS
IN
AN
ANIMATED
MANNER
AS
SHE
SPOKE.
'THE
RURAL
MARKET
DOESN'T
NEED
DIFFERENT
PRODUCTS.
THEY
NEED
AFFORDABILITY....'
SHE
STOPPED
MID-SENTENCE
UPON
NOTICING
ME.

HER
EYEBROWS
ELEVATED
IN
SHOCK
AND
STAYED
THERE.
'YES?'

A
SIXTYISH-YEAR-OLD
GENTLEMAN
TURNED
TO
ME.
ANANYA'S
FACE
TURNED
PINK,
THEN
RED.
THE
COLOUR
COORDINATION
CAME
FROM
EMBARRASSMENT
AND
ANGER,
RESPECTIVELY.

'I
NEED
TO
TALK
TO
HER,'
I
SAID
SLOWLY,
SCANNING
EVERYONE
IN
THE
ROOM.

'CAN'T
IT
WAIT?'
THE
OLD
GENTLEMAN
ASKED.
'SHE
IS
HAVING
HER
FINAL
INTERVIEW.
ALL
OUR
SENIOR
MANAGEMENT
IS
HERE.'
'ACTUALLY,
IT
CAN'T,'
I
SAID.
'EVERYTHING
OK?'
ANOTHER
PANELIST
SAID.
'YES,
I
ONLY
NEED
A
MINUTE,'
I
SAID
AND
SIGNALLED
TO
ANANYA
TO
COME
OUT.

'WHAT?
JUST
TELL
ME
HERE,'
SHE
SAID,
THROWING
ME
A
DIRTY
LOOK.
I
SAW
THE
PANEL'S
CONFUSED
EXPRESSION.
I
WENT
UP
TO
ANANYA.
'WHAT?'
SHE
WHISPERED,'
ARE
YOU
MAD?'
I
KNELT
DOWN
NEXT
TO
HER,
MY
MOUTH
CLOSE
TO
HER
EAR.
'SORRY,
HOW
IS

IT
GOING?’
I
WHISPERED.
‘KRISH
MALHOTRA,
THIS
BETTER
BE
IMPORTANT.
WHAT’S
UP?’
SHE
WHISPERED,
LOUD
ENOUGH
FOR
THE
PANEL
TO
HEAR.
‘ANANYA
SWAMINATHAN,
I,
KRISH
MALHOTRA,
AM
DEEPLY
IN
LOVE
WITH
YOU
AND
WANT
TO
BE
WITH
YOU
ALWAYS.
APART
FROM
WHERE
WE
GO

TO
OFFICE,
OF
COURSE.
WILL
YOU
MARRY
ME?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANANYA'S
MOUTH
FELL
OPEN.
SHE
ALTERNATED
HER
GLANCE
BETWEEN
THE
PANEL
AND
ME.
"KRISH,'
SHE
SAID.
SHE
TRIED
HARD
BUT
A
TEAR
SLIPPED
OUT
OF
HER
CAREFULLY
EYE-
LINED
EYES.
'EVERYTHING
OK?'
ONE
PANEL
MEMBER
ASKED
AS
HE
NOTICED
ANANYA'S
RESTLESSNESS.

'IT'S
NOT
BAD
NEWS,
I
HOPE.'
ANANYA
SHOOK
HER
HEAD
AS
SHE
TOOK
A
SIP
FROM
THE
GLASS
OF
WATER
IN
FRONT
OF
HER.
'NO,
IT'S
NOT
BAD
NEWS
AT
ALL.
IT'S
GOOD.'
'ANANYA,'
I
WHISPERED
AGAIN.
MY
KNEES
HURT
AS
THEY
RUBBED
AGAINST

THE
ROUGH
CLASSROOM
FLOOR.
'WHAT
NOW?'
'IS
THAT
A
YES?
WILL
YOU
BE
WITH
ME,
ALWAYS?'
I
ASKED.
SHE
TIGHTENED
HER
LIPS
TO
HIDE
A
LAUGH.
'YES,
YOU
IDIOT.
I
WILL
BE
WITH
YOU.
JUST
NOT
RIGHT
NOW.
SO,
GO!'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

9

'WOW,
THIS
FEELS
SPECIAL,'
ANANYA
SAID.
SHE
OPENED
HER
HLL
OFFER
LETTER
FOR
THE
THIRD
TIME
AT
RAMBHAI'S.

I
HAD
COLLECTED
MINE
FROM
CITIBANK
THE
DAY
BEFORE
AND,
AFTER
CONFIRMING
THE
SALARY,
HAD
DUMPED
IT
IN
MY
CUPBOARD.
'IT'S
AN

INVITATION
TO
BE
A
SLAVE,
DON'T
GET
SO
EXCITED,'
I
SAID
AS
I
ORDERED
A
SAMOSA
SANDWICH.
'AW,
DON'T
BE
MORBID.
THEY
ARE
THRILLED
ABOUT
HIRING
ME.
HLL
HAS
A
SERIOUS
SOUTH
INDIA
STRATEGY.'
RAMBHAI'S
MINIONS
SERVED
US
TEA.
DURING
PLACEMENT
TIME,
TIPS
PEAKED

FOR
THEM.
'DO
YOU
GO
TO
SCHOOL?'
ANANYA
ASKED
THE
THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD
BOY
WHO
SERVED
US.
'YES,
RAMBHAI
SENDS
ME,'
THE
BOY
SAID.
'GOOD,
BECAUSE
IF
HE
DOESN'T,
REPORT
HIM
TO
THE
POLICE,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
GAVE
THE
BOY
A
FIFTY
RUPEE
NOTE.
'THEY
WILL

POST
YOU
IN
SOUTH
INDIA,'
IS
AID,
'IN
ONE
OF
THOSE
UNPRONOUNCEABLE
PLACES
WITHOUT
AN
STD
CODE.'
'NO,
THEY
WON'T.
AND
IF
THEY
DO,
MY
HUSBAND
WILL
COME
AND
RESCUE
ME.'
SHE
WINKED.
'ANANYA,
YOU
DON'T
GET
IT.
WE
HAVE
DECIDED
TO
GET
MARRIED.

OUR
PARENTS
HAVEN'T
APPROVED

—

YET,'
I
REMINDED
HER.
'C'MON,
MINE
ARE
A
BIT
CONSERVATIVE.
BUT
WE
ARE
THEIR
OVERACHIEVING
CHILDREN,
THE
ULTIMATE
MIDDLE-CLASS
FANTASY
KIDS.
WHY
WOULD
THEY
HAVE
AN
ISSUE?'
'BECAUSE
THEY
ARE
PARENTS.
FROM
BISCUITS
TO
BRIDES,
IF
THERE
IS
ANYTHING

THEIR
CHILDREN
REALLY
WANT,
PARENTS
HAVE
A
PROBLEM,'
I
SAID.
'YOUR
PARENTS
WILL
HAVE
A
PROBLEM
WITH
ME?'
ANANYA
PULLED
HER
HAIR
BACK
TO
TIE
IT
IN
A
LOOSE
BUN.
SHE
CLENCHED
A
PIN
IN
THE
MIDDLE
OF
HER
TEETH.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THEY'D
HAVE
A
PROBLEM
WITH
ANYONE
I
CHOOSE.
AND
YOU
ARE
SOUTH
INDIAN,
WHICH
DOESN'T
HELP
AT
ALL.
OK,
IT'S
NOT
AS
BAD
AS
MARRYING
SOMEONE
FROM
ANOTHER
RELIGION.
BUT
PRETTY
CLOSE.
'BUT
I
ALSO
ACED
MY
COLLEGE.
I
HAVE
AN

MBA
FROM
IIMA
AND
WORK
FOR
HLL.
AND
SORRY
TO
BRAG,
BUT
I
AM
KIND
OF
PRETTY.'
'IRRELEVANT.
YOU
ARE
TAMILIAN.
I
AM
PUNJABI.'
ANANYA
FOLDED
HER
OFFER
LETTER
AND
REARRANGED
THINGS
IN
HER
BAG.
'WHAT?
SAY
SOMETHING?'
'CAN'T
BE
PART
OF
THIS
BACKWARD

CONVERSATION,'

SHE

SAID.

'PLEASE,

DISCUSS

YOUR

WOES

WITH

THE

PUNJABI

BRETHREN.'

SHE

STOOD

UP

TO

LEAVE.

I

TUGGED

HER

DOWN

BY

HER

HAND.

'C'MON

ANANYA,

AREN'T

YOUR

PARENTS

GOING

TO

FLIP

OUT

WHEN

THEY

FIND

OUT

YOU

HAVE

A

PUNJABI

BOYFRIEND?'

'NO,

I

DON'T

THINK
SO.'
'HAVE
YOU
TOLD
THEM?'
'NO.'
'WHY?'
'WAITING
FOR
THE
APPROPRIATE
TIME.
THE
CONVOCAATION
IS
IN
TWO
WEEKS.
THEY'LL
BE
HERE,
I
WILL
INTRODUCE
YOU.
TELL
THEM
WHAT
YOU
HAVE
DONE
IN
LIFE,
NOT
WHERE
YOUR
ANCESTORS
WERE
BORN.
THEY
CAN
MEET
YOUR

PARENTS.
THEY
ARE
COMING,
RIGHT?'

'MY
MOTHER,
YES.

FATHER,
I

DON'T
KNOW.'

'WHAT'S
THE
DEAL?'

'LET'S
NOT
TALK
ABOUT
IT.'

'YOU
WON'T
TELL
YOUR
FUTURE
WIFE?

HAVE
YOU
INVITED
HIM?'

'NO.'

SHE
STOOD
UP,

I
FOLLOWED
SUIT.

'LET'S
GO
TO
THE
STD
BOOTH,'
SHE

SAID.
'NOW?'
'THIS
STRONG
AND
SILENT
WARFARE
BETWEEN
YOU
AND
YOUR
DAD
IS
BECOMING
TOO
MUCH.'

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'IT'S

PEAK

HOUR

RATES.'

'I

DON'T

CARE.'

WE

WALKED

TO

THE

STD

BOOTH

NEAR

VIJAY

CHAR

RASTA.

I

CALLED

HOME.

'HI,

MOM,

IT

IS

ME.'

'KRISH,

WE

SHOULD

BOOK

TICKETS.

I

AM

COMING,

SHIPRA

MASI

WANTS

TO

COME,

RAJJI

MAMA

AND

KAMLA
AUNTY,
TOO.'
'MOM,
IS
DAD
COMING?'
'NO,'
SHE
SAID
AND
FELL
SILENT.
'IT'S
MY
CONVOCATION,'
I
SAID.
'HE
SAID
HE
HAS
WORK.'
'HE'S
RETIRED.
WHAT
WORK?'
THE
METER
RODE
UP
TWENTY
RUPEES.
'YOU
TALK
TO
HIM,
HE
EXPECTS
A
PERSONAL
INVITATION,'
MY
MOTHER

SAID.

'I
WON'T.
DOESN'T
HE
WANT
TO
COME
BY
HIMSELF?'

'NO,
WHY
DON'T
YOU
ASK
HIM
TO?'
SHE
PREPARED
TO
PUT
ME
ON
HOLD.
'MOM,
NO.

I
DON'T
WANT
TO
CALL
HIM
IF
HE
DOESN'T
WANT
TO
COME.'

'FINE.
CAN
MASI
AND
MAMA
COME?'

'DON'T
GET
ANY
RELATIVES,'
I
PLEADED.
'WHY?
THEY
LOVE
YOU
SO
MUCH.
THEY
WANT
TO
SEE
YOU....'
'I
WANT
YOU
TO
MEET
SOMEONE,
MOM.'
'WHO?'
'YOU'LL
FIND
OUT,'
I
SAID.
I
CAME
OUT
OF
THE
BOOTH.
ANANYA
AND
I
WALKED
BACK.
WHICH
FATHER
NEEDS

AN
INVITATION
FROM
HIS
SON
TO
ATTEND
HIS
CONVOCATION?
SCREW
HIM,
I
SAID
TO
MYSELF.
'YOU
INVITED
HIM?'
ANANYA
ASKED.
'DAD'S
NOT
COMING,'
I
SAID.
'WHY?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WE
HAVE
NO
RELATIONSHIP,
ANANYA.
DON'T
TRY
TO
FIX
IT
EVER.
OK?'
'WHAT
HAPPENED
THOUGH?'
'I
DON'T
WANT
TO
TALK
ABOUT
IT.'
'STANDARD
ANSWER.'
'YOURS
WAS
A
STANDARD
QUESTION.'
'YOU
DO
CARE
FOR
HIM.
YOU
ARE
UPSET.'
'I'M
UPSET
ABOUT
PAYING

PEAK
HOUR
RATES.
NOW
LISTEN,
I'VE
FENDED
OFF
MY
AUNTS
WITH
GREAT
DIFFICULTY.
IT'S
ONLY
MY
MOM.
YOU
HAVE
A
PLAN,
RIGHT?'
SHE
SKIPPED
AHEAD
OF
ME.
'LET'S
MAKE
IT
A
GREAT
FIRST
MEETING
OF
THE
FAMILIES.
WE
SHOULD
DO
SOMETHING
FUN
TOGETHER.'
'LIKE

SHOOT
EACH
OTHER?’
‘SHUT
UP.
IT’LL
BE
FINE.
THEY’D
LOVE
IT
THAT
MY
BOYFRIEND
IS
FROM
IIT.’
‘THEY
WON’T
ASK
MY
GRADES,
RIGHT?’
‘THEY
MIGHT.
BUT
WHO
CARES,
YOU
WILL
BE
IN
CITIBANK.
LISTEN,
WE
ORGANIZE
AN
OUTING
FOR
THEM?’
‘I
AM
NOT
SO

SURE
IF
OUR
FAMILIES
WOULD
LIKE
TO
SPEND
SO
MUCH
TIME
TOGETHER.'
'OF
COURSE,
THEY
WOULD.
YOU
LEAVE
IT
TO
ME.
YOUR
MOM
WILL
LOVE
ME
MORE
THAN
YOU
AFTER
THIS,'
SHE
SAID
AS
WE
REACHED
THE
CAMPUS
GATES.
I
RECEIVED
MY
MOTHER
AT

THE
AHMEDABAD
RAILWAY
STATION
A
DAY
BEFORE
THE
CONVOCATION.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
FLEW
DOWN,
HER
FATHER
USING
HIS
LTC
THAT
ALLOWED
HIM
TO
FLY
ONCE
EVERY
FOUR
YEARS.
MY
MOTHER
ARRIVED
WITH
TWO
SUITCASES.
ONE
HAD
HER
CLOTHES
AND
THE
OTHER
CONTAINED
MITHAI
BOXES
SOURCED

FROM
VARIOUS
SHOPS
IN
DELHI.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I'M
IN
COLLEGE
FOR
FIVE
MORE
DAYS.
WHY
SO
MANY
SWEETS?'
I
ASKED
IN
THE
AUTO
BACK
TO
CAMPUS.
'WE
WILL
EAT
THEM,
NO?
AND
WE
MIGHT
MEET
PEOPLE.
THEY
WILL
SAY
HER
SON
IS
GRADUATING
AND
SHE
HAS
NOTHING
TO

OFFER

US.

I

ALMOST
BROUGHT
PACKED
MEALS.

I

DON'T
WANT
TO
EAT
THE
GUJARATI
DAAL
WITH
SUGAR.

IS

IT

REALLY
SWEET?'

'IT'S

NOT

THAT

SWEET.

ANYWAY,

I

WANT
YOU
TO
MEET
SOMEONE,
MOM,'

I

SAID
AS
THE
AUTO
STRUGGLED
TO
PENETRATE
THE
NARROW
LANES

NEAR
THE
RAILWAY
STATION.
'WHO?'
'THERE'S
THIS
GIRL,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
HAVE
A
GIRLFRIEND?
GIRLFRIEND?'
SHE
ASKED
AS
IF
I
HAD
CONTACTED
AIDS.
'A
GOOD
FRIEND,'
I
SAID
TO
CALM
HER
DOWN.
'GOOD
FRIEND?
WHAT,
YOU
HAVE
BAD
FRIENDS
ALSO?'
'NO,
MOM.
WE
USED

TO
STUDY
TOGETHER.
WE
DID
A
LOT
OF
PROJECTS
TOGETHER.'
'OK.
DID
SHE
GET
A
JOB?'
'YES,
IN
HLL.
IT'S
A
GOOD
JOB.'
'HLL?'
'THE
COMPANY
THAT
MAKES
SURF.
AND
RIN
AND
LIFEBUOY
AND
KISSAN
SAUCE.'
I
NAMED
PRODUCTS,
HOPING
THAT
ONE
OF
THEM

WOULD
IMPRESS
HER.
'KISSAN
JAMS
ALSO?'
SHE
ASKED
AFTER
THINKING
FOR
THIRTY
SECONDS.
'YES.
SHE
IS
IN
MARKETING.
IT'S
THE
MOST
PRESTIGIOUS
MARKETING
JOB.'
'SHE
WILL
GET
FREE
JAMS
THEN?'
'I
GUESS,'
I
SAID,
WONDERING
HOW
TO
BRING
THE
CONVERSATION
BACK
ON
TRACK.
'BUT

THAT'S
NOT
THE
POINT.'
'YES,
IT'S
NOT.
SO,
SHOULD
WE
STOP
FOR
LUNCH
BEFORE
WE
GO
TO
YOUR
COLLEGE
OR
DO
WE
EAT
IN
COLLEGE?
BHAIIYA,
ANY
GOOD
RESTAURANTS
HERE?'
SHE
ADDRESSED
THE
AUTO
DRIVER.
'MOM,
STOP.
I
AM
TALKING
ABOUT
SOMETHING
IMPORTANT.'
BUT

MY
MOTHER
SAID,
'THESE
AUTO
DRIVERS
ALWAYS
KNOW
GOOD
PLACES.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'STOPPING
IS
EXTRA,
MADAM,'
THE
AUTO
DRIVER
SAID,
IGNORING
ME
ALONG
WITH
EVERY
SPEED-BREAKER
ON
THE
ROAD.
'WHAT?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
I
CONTINUED
TO
STARE
AT
HER
TO
GET
HER
ATTENTION.
'HER
NAME
IS
ANANYA.
HER
PARENTS
ARE
ALSO
HERE.

I
WANT
YOU
TO
MEET
THEM
AND
BE
NICE
TO
THEM.'

'I
WILL
MEET
WHOEVER
YOU
WANT
ME
TO
MEET.

AND
WHEN
AM

I
NOT
NICE?
WE
ARE
NICE
PEOPLE
ONLY.'

'MOM.....'

I
SAID
BEFORE
SHE
INTERRUPTED
ME.

'LET'S
TAKE
SOME
NICE
BISCUITS
ON

THE
WAY.
THEY
ARE
GOOD
WITH
TEA.'
'MOM,'
I
SCREAMED.
'THIS
IS
WHAT
I
DON'T
WANT.
I
WANT
YOU
TO
MEET
THEM
PROPERLY
AND
NOT
OBSESS
ABOUT
MEALS
OR
SNACKS
OR
TEA
OR
WHATEVER.
THEY
SHOULD
HAVE
A
GOOD
IMPRESSION.'
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
ME

A
DIRTY
LOOK.
I
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
'BHAIYA,
TURN
THE
AUTO.
I
AM
GOING
BACK,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'ONE,
I
COME
ALL
THE
WAY
FROM
DELHI
TO
ATTEND
YOUR
CONVOCATION,
GET
MITHAI
FROM
FOUR
DIFFERENT
SHOPS,
AND
NOW
I
CAN'T
MAKE
A
GOOD
IMPRESSION.
IT'S

OK,
IF
WE
CAN'T
MAKE
A
GOOD
IMPRESSION
THEN
WE
WON'T
COME.'
MY
MOTHER
KEPT
MUMBLING
TO
HERSELF.
SHE
HAD
OFFICIALLY
ENTERED
HER
DRAMA
MODE.
THE
DRIVER
STOPPED
THE
AUTO.
'WHAT?
WHY
HAVE
YOU
STOPPED?'
I
ASKED,
EXASPERATED.
'MADAM
IS
TELLING
ME
TO
TURN

BACK.'
'MOM,'
I
SAID
AS
SHE
CONTINUED
TO
SULK.
'SO,
YOU
REMEMBER
I
AM
YOUR
MOTHER?
I
THOUGHT
YOU
ONLY
CARED
ABOUT
YOUR
FRIEND'S
PARENTS?'
ANGER
FILLED
MY
MOTHER'S
VOICE.
I
HAD
TO
TAKE
EMERGENCY
MEASURES.
'THERE
IS
AN
EXCELLENT
PAO-BHAJI
PLACE
ROUND
THE

CORNER.
BHAIYA,
JUST
TAKE
US
TO
LAW
GARDEN.'
'I'M
NOT
HUNGRY,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'ONLY
FOR
TASTING,'
I
SAID.
I
TAPPED
THE
AUTO
DRIVER
ON
HIS
SHOULDER.
THE
DRIVER
TURNED
TOWARDS
LAW
GARDEN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
ORDERED
PANEER
PAO-BHAJI
WITH
EXTRA
BUTTER
AND
LASSI
ON
THE
SIDE.
NOTHING
SOOTHES
AN
UPSET
PUNJABI
LIKE
DAIRY
PRODUCTS.
'WHO
IS
THIS
GIRL?'
SHE
ASKED
AFTER
FINISHING
THE
LASSI.
'NOBODY
IMPORTANT.
SHE
WANTED
TO
MEET
YOU
AFTER
I
TOLD
HER

HOW
MUCH
TROUBLE
YOU
TOOK
TO
BRING
ME
UP
BECAUSE
OF
DAD,'
I
LIED.
MAYBE
IT
WAS
THE
EXTRA
BUTTER
OR
MY
WORDS.
MY
MOTHER
CALMED
DOWN.
'YOU
TOLD
HER
EVERYTHING?'
SHE
ASKED.
'NO,
ONLY
A
LITTLE.
ALSO,
HER
PARENTS
MAY
BE
A
BIT

FORMAL.
THAT'S
WHY
I
SPOKE
ABOUT
MAKING
A
GOOD
IMPRESSION.
OTHERWISE,
WHO
WOULDN'T
LOVE
TO
MEET
YOU?'
'WHAT
DO
GUJARATIS
EAT
FOR
DESSERT?
OR
DO
THEY
PUT
ALL
THE
SUGAR
IN
THEIR
FOOD?
MY
MOTHER
PICKED
UP
THE
MENU
AGAIN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
10
THE
NEXT
MORNING,
TWO
HUNDRED
FRESH
MBA
GRADUATES
AND
THEIR
INSANELY
PROUD
PARENTS
SAT
IN
THE
LOUIS
KAHN
PLAZA
LAWNS
FOR
THE
CONVOCATION.
THE
CIEF
GUEST,
A
THIRD
GENERATION
SILVER-SPOON-AT-BIRTH
INDUSTRIALIST,
TOLD
STUDENTS
TO
WORK
HARD
AND
COME
TO
THE

TOP.
HE
ALSO
HAD
THE
TOUGH
JOB
OF
HANDLING
OUT
DEGREES
AND
POSING
FOR
PICTURES
WITH
TWO
HUNDRED
STUDENTS.
TODAY,
WE
HAD
TO
COLLECT
OUR
POST-
GRADUATE
DIPLOMA
IN
MANAGEMENT,
A
TICKET
TO
A
LIFETIME
OF
OVERPAID
JOBS.
ANANYA
WANTED
EVERYTHING
TO
BE
PERFECT.

SHE
HAD
REACHED
THE
VENUE
HALF
AN
HOUR
EARLIER
TO
SECURE
SIX
SEATS
FOR
HER
FAMILY
AND
MINE.
MY
MOTHER
WORE
HER
BEST
SARI.
I
WORE
GRADUATION
ROBES
RENTED
FOR
THIRTY
BUCKS.
'MOM,
THIS
IS
ANANYA.
ANANYA,
MY
MOTHER,'
I
SAID
WHEN
WE
REACHED

THE
PREMISES.
ANANYA
EXTENDED
HER
ARM
TO
SHAKE
MY
MOTHER'S
HAND.
MY
MOTHER
LOOKED
SHOCKED.
WHILE
ANANYA
TOUCHING
HER
FEET
WOULD
BE
TOO
MUCH,
I
FELT
ANANYA
SHOULD
HAVE
STUCK
TO
A
NAMASTE.
ANYTHING
MODERN
DOESN'T
GO
DOWN
WELL
WITH
PARENTS.
'HELLO,
AUNTY.
I

HAVE
HEARD
SO
MUCH
ABOUT
YOU,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'ACTUALLY,
SINCE
I
HAVE
ARRIVED
I
AM
ONLY
HEARING
ABOUT
YOU.'
MY
MOTHER
SMILED,
MAKING
IT
DIFFICULT
TO
SPOT
THE
SARCASM.
'LET'S
SIT
DOWN.
ANANYA,
WHERE
IS
YOUR
FAMILY?'
I
ASKED
AS
WE
SAT
DOWN.
'MY

MOTHER
TAKES
FOREVER
TO
PUT
ON
HER
SARI.
I
CAME
FIRST
TO
GET
GOOD
SEATS.'
ANANYA
WORE
THE
SAME
PEACOCK
BLUE
SARI
THAT
SHE
WORE
TO
HER
HLL
INTERVIEW.
SHE
CAUGHT
ME
STARING
AND
BLEW
A
KISS.
FORTUNATELY,
MY
MOTHER
DIDN'T
NOTICE.
I
SHOOK

MY
HEAD,
BESEECHING
ANANYA
TO
MAINTAIN
DECORUM.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
ARRIVED
TEN
MINUTES
LATER.
HER
FATHER
WORE
A
CRISP
WHITE
SHIRT,
LIKE
THE
ONE
IN
DETERGENT
ADS.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
WALKED
BEHIND
IN
A
GLITTERY
HAZE.
HER
MAGENTA
AND
GOLD
KANJEEVARAM
SARI
COULD
BE
NOTICED
FROM

ANY
CORNER
OF
THE
LAWN.
SHE
LOOKED
AS
IF
SHE
HAD
FALLEN
INTO
A
DRUM
OF
GOLDEN
PAINT.
BEHIND
HER
WALKED
A
FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD
BOY
WITH
SPECTACLES;
A
MINIATURE
VERSION
OF
MBA
MEN
WHO
WOULD
GET
A
DEGREE
THIS
EVENING.
'HELLO
MOM,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND

STOOD
UP,
HER
VOICE
HER
CHEERFUL
BEST.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SAFETY
PIN
ILLA
SOMETHING
SOMETHING,'
HER
MOTHER
REPLIED.
MOTHER
AND
DAUGHTER
LAPSED
INTO
TAMIL.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
TOOK
OUT
HIS
CAMERA
AND
STARTED
TAKING
RANDOM
PICTURES
OF
EVERYTHING
AROUND
US
-
THE
LAWNS,
THE
STAGE,
THE
CHAIRS,
THE
MIKES.
LITTLE
BROTHER
DIDN'T

HAVE
MUCH
TO
DO
BUT
LOOKED
UNCOMFORTABLE
IN
HIS
NEW
BUTTON-DOWN
COLLAR
SHIRT.
MY
MOTHER
HEARD
THEM
TALK
AND
HER
MOUTH
FELL
OPEN.
I
WHISPERED,
'GET
UP.
LET
US
INTRODUCE
OURSELVES.'
'THEY
ARE
MADRASI?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED,
SHOCKED.
'SHSH,
TAMILIAN,'
I
SAID.
'TAMILIAN?'
MY

MOTHER
ECHOED
EVEN
AS
ANANYA
CONTINUED
THE
INTRODUCTIONS.
'MOM,
THIS
IS
KRISH,
AND
THIS
IS
KRISH'S
MOTHER.'
"HELLO,"
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID,
LOOKING
JUST
AS
STUNNED
AS
MY
MOTHER.
'ISN'T
THIS
COOL?
OUR
FAMILIES
MEETING
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME,'
ANANYA
COOED
EVEN
AS
EVERYONE
IGNORED

HER.
'KRISH'S
FATHER
HAS
NOT
COME?'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
ASKED.
'HE
IS
NOT
WELL,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
HER
VOICE
BUTTER-SOFT.
'HE
IS
A
HEART
PATIENT.
ADVISED
NOT
TO
TRAVEL.'
MY
MOTHER
FAKED
IT
SO
WELL,
EVEN
I
FELT
LIKE
SYMPATHIZING
WITH
HER.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
GAVE

UNDERSTANDING
NODS.
THEY
WHISPERED
TO
EACH
OTHER
IN
TAMIL
AS
THEY
TOOK
THEIR
PLACES.
'I
BETTER
GO,
I'M
ONE
OF
THE
FIRST
ONES.'
ANANYA
GIGGLED
AND
RAN
UP
TO
JOIN
THE
LINE
OF
STUDENTS.
I
SAT
SANDWICHED
BETWEEN
MY
MOTHER
ON
ONE
SIDE
AND

ANANYA'S
MOTHER
ON
THE
OTHER.
'YOU
WANT
TO
SIT
NEXT
TO
ANANYA'S
MOTHER?'
I
ASKED
MY
MOTHER.
'WHY?
WHO
ARE
THESE
PEOPLE?'
SHE
FROWNED.
'DON'T
PANIC,
MOM.
I
SAID
IT
BECAUSE
I
HAVE
TO
JOIN
THAT
LINE
SOON.'
'THEN
GO.
I
HAVE
COME
TO

SEE
YOU,
NOT
SIT
NEXT
TO
MADRASIS.
NOW
LET
ME
WATCH,'
SHE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
CHIEF
GUEST
STARTED
THE
DIPLOMA
DISTRIBUTION.
THE
AUDIENCE
BROKE
INTO
CONTINUOUS
APPLAUSE
FOR
THE
INITIAL
STUDENTS.
THEN
THEY
GOT
TIRED
AND
WENT
BACK
TO
FANNING
THEMSELVES
WITH
THE
CONVOCAATION
BROCHURES.
'GET
TO
KNOW
THEM.
WE'LL
PROBABLY
GO
FOR
LUNCH
TOGETHER,'

I
SAID.
'YOU
GO
FOR
LUNCH
WITH
THEM.

I
CAN
EAT
ALONE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'MOM....'

I
SAID
AS
THE
ANNOUNCER
READ
OUT
ANANYA'S
NAME.
ANANYA
WALKED
ON
THE
STAGE,
PROBABLY
THE
ONLY
STUDENT
WHOSE
PICTURE
WAS
WORTH
TAKING.

I
STOOD
UP
AND
APPLAUDED.

MY
MOTHER
GAVE
ME
A
DIRTY
LOOK.
'SIT.
EVEN
HER
PARENTS
ARE
NOT
STANDING.'
MAYBE
THEY
DON'T
LOVE
HER
LIKE
I
DO,
I
WANTED
TO
SAY
BUT
DIDN'T.
I
SAT
DOWN.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
CLAPPED
GENTLY,
CRANING
THEIR
NECKS
TO
GET
A
BETTER
VIEW.
ANANYA'S

MOTHER
LOOKED
AT
ME
WITH
SUSPICION.
I
REALIZED
THAT
I
HADN'T
YET
SPOKEN
TO
HER.
START
A
CONVERSATION,
YOU
IDIOT,
I
THOUGHT.
'YOUR
DAUGHTER
IS
SUCH
A
STAR.
YOU
MUST
BE
SO
PROUD,'
I
SAID.
'WE
ARE
USED
TO
IT.
SHE
ALWAYS
DID
WELL

IN
SCHOOL,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
REPLIED.
I
TRIED
HER
FATHER.
'HOW
LONG
ARE
YOU
HERE
FOR,
UNCLE?'
UNCLE
LOOKED
UP
AND
DOWN
AT
ME
AS
IF
I
HAD
QUESTIONED
HIM
ABOUT
HIS
SECRET
PERSONAL
FANTASIES.
'WE
LEAVE
DAY
AFTER.
WHY?'
HE
SAID.
SOME
WHYS
HAVE

NO
ANSWER,
APART
FROM
THE
FACT
THAT
I
WAS
TRYING
TO
MAKE
SMALL
TALK.
'NOTHING,
ANANYA
AND
I
WERE
WONDERING
IF
YOU
WANTED
TO
SEE
THE
CITY.
WE
CAN
SHARE
A
CAR,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAT
BETWEEN
US
AND
LISTENED
TO
EVERY
WORD.

SHE
SPOKE
TO
HER
HUSBAND
IN
TAMIL.
'SOMETHING
SOMETHING
GANDHI
ASHRAM
SOMETHING
RECOMMEND
SOMETHING.'
'GANDHI
ASHRAM
IS
NICE.
MY
MOTHER
ALSO
WANTS
TO
SEE
IT.'
I
SAID.
'WHAT?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
FROM
HER
SEAT.
'DON'T
YOU
HAVE
TO
GO
ON
STAGE,
KRISH?
YOUR
TURN

IS
COMING.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,'
I
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP.
GANDHI
ASHRAM
WOULD
BE
A
GOOD
START
FOR
THE
FAMILIES.
HE
STOOD
FOR
PEACE
AND
NATIONAL
INTEGRATION,
MAYBE
THAT
COULD
INSPIRE
US
ALL.
'THEN
GO,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WAIT,'
I
SAID
AND
BENT
TO
TOUCH

HER
FEET.
'THANK
GOD,
YOU
REMEMBERED.

I
THOUGHT
YOU
WERE
GOING
TO
TOUCH
ANANYA'S
MOTHER'S
FEET,'
SHE
SAID.

MY
MOTHER
SAID
IT
LOUD
ENOUGH
FOR
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
TO
HEAR.
THEY
EXCHANGED
COLD
GLANCES
THAT
COULD
BE
SET
TO
THE
BACKDROP
OF
AK-47
BULLETS
BEING

FIRED.
SURELY,
IT
WOULD
TAKE
A
MOHANDAS
KARAMCHAND
GANDHI
TO
MAKE
THEM
GET
ALONG.
'MOM,
CONTROL,'
I
WHISPERED
TO
HER
AS
I
TURNED
TO
LEAVE.
'I
AM
UNDER
CONTROL.
THESE
SOUTH
INDIANS
DON'T
KNOW
HOW
TO
CONTROL
THEIR
DAUGHTERS.
FROM
HEMA
MALINI
TO
SRIDEVI,

ALL
OF
THEM
TRYING
TO
CATCH
PUNJABI
MEN.'
MY
MOTHER
HAD
SPOKEN
SO
LOUD
THAT
THE
ENTIRE
ROW
HEARD
HER.
FOR
A
FEW
MOMENTS,
PEOPLE'S
ATTENTION
SHIFTED
FROM
THE
CONVOCATION
CEREMONY
TO
US.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
ELBOWED
HER
HUSBAND.
THEY
STOOD
UP,
PULLED
UP
ANANYA'S

SCRAWNY
BROTHER
BETWEEN
THEM
AND
FOUND
SOME
EMPTY
SEATS
FIVE
ROWS
AWAY.
'MOM,
WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING?'
I
STRUGGLED
TO
BALANCE
THE
GRADUATION
CAP
ON
MY
HEAD.
'KANYASHREE
BANERJEE,'
THE
ANNOUNCER
SAID
OVER
THE
MIKE
AND
I
REALISED
I
WAS
HORRIBLY
LATE.
I
HAD

MISSED
MY
LAST
CONVOCAATION
AS
I
HAD
OVERSLEPT.
I
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
MISS
IT
THIS
TIME.
'WHAT
HAVE
I
SAID?
IT'S
A
FACT,'
MY
MOM
SAID,
TALKING
TO
ME
BUT
ADDRESSING
EVERYONE
WHO
HAD
TUNED
INTO
OUR
CONVERSATION
THAT
BEAT
THE
BORING
DEGREE
DISTRIBUTION

HOLLOW
ANY
DAY.
'KRISH....'
I
HEARD
MY
NAME
AND
RAN
UP.
THE
FIVE
MOHITS
WERE
WAITING
NEAR
THE
STAGE.
I
SMILED
AT
THEM
AS
I
CLIMBED
THE
STEPS
TO
THE
STAGE.
THE
CHIEF
GUEST
GAVE
ME
MY
DIPLOMA.
MY
MOTHER
WAS
STANDING
AND
CLAPPING.

'I
LOVE
YOU,'
SHE
SCREAMED.

I
SMILED
BACK
AT
HER.
FOR
THE
LAST
TEN
YEARS
MY
FATHER
HAD
TOLD
HER
THAT
HER
SON
WOULD
GET
NOWHERE
IN
LIFE.

I
HELD
UP
MY
DIPLOMA
HIGH
AND
LOOKED
UP
TO
THANK
GOD.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'MOVE,
THE
NEXT
STUDENT
HAS
TO
COME,'
THE
ANNOUNCER
SAID
AS
I
EMOTIONALLY
THANKED
THE
CHIEF
GUEST
AGAIN
AND
AGAIN.
AS
I
WALKED
DOWN
THE
STEPS,
I
SAW
ANANYA'S
PARENTS.
THEY
HAD
NOT
APPLAUDED
OR
EVEN
REACTED
TO
MY
BEING
ON

THE
STAGE.
I
CAME
BACK
TOWARDS
MY
SEAT.
ANANYA
STOOD
AT
OUR
ROW'S
ENTRANCE,
LOOKING
LOST.
'I
STAYED
BACK
TO
GET
SOME
PICTURES
WITH
FRIENDS.
WHERE
ARE
MY
PARENTS?'
'FIVE
ROWS
BEHIND,'
I
SAID.
'WHY?
WHAT
HAPPENED?'
'NOTHING.
THEY
WANTED
A
BETTER
VIEW,'
I

SAID.
'I'VE
BOOKED
THE
CAR.
WE
ARE
ALL
GOING
AFTERWARDS,
RIGHT?'
'GO
TO
YOUR
PARENTS,
ANANYA,'
I
SAID
FIRMLY
AS
I
SAW
MY
MOTHER
STARING
AT
ME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
11
'WE'VE
ALREADY
PAID
FOR
THE
TAXI,'
I
SAID.
'SO,
YOU
CAN
PRETEND
TO
GET
ALONG.
SEE
IT
AS
A
BUDGET
EXERCISE.'
MY
MOTHER
AND
I
WALKED
TOWARDS
THE
TAXI
STAND
OUTSIDE
CAMPUS.
SHE
HAD
NO
INCLINATION
TO
SEE
WHERE
MR

GANDHI
LIVED.
THE
SABARMATI
ASHRAM,
ON
THE
OUTSKIRTS
OF
THE
CITY,
WAS
A
KEY
TOURIST
ATTRACTION.
ANANYA
HAD
GOT
LUNCH
PACKED
IN
LITTLE
PACKETS
FROM
TOPAZ.
ACCORDING
TO
HER,
IT
WOULD
BE
A
KODAK
MOMENT
TO
PICNIC
SOMEWHERE
BY
THE
SABARMATI
RIVER.
OF
COURSE,

SHE
HAD
NO
IDEA
ABOUT
HER
MISSED
KODAK
MOMENT
WHEN
MY
MOTHER
HAD
MADE
INSIGHTFUL
COMMENTS
ABOUT
CERTAIN
SOUTH
INDIAN
ACTRESSES.
'WE
HAD
BOOKED
A
QUALIS,'
I
TOLD
THE
DRIVER
WHO
STOOD
NEXT
TO
AN
INDICA.
ANANYA
AND
HER
FAMILY
WERE
ALREADY
AT
THE

TAXI
STAND.
HER
MOTHER
LOOKED
LIKE
SHE
HAD
JUST
FINISHED
A
GRUMBLE
SESSION,
MAYBE
HER
NATURAL
EXPRESSION.
'THE
QUALIS
IS
ON
ELECTION
DUTY.
WE
ONLY
HAVE
THIS.'
THE
DRIVER
CRUSHED
TOBACCO
IN
HIS
PALM.
'HOW
CAN
WE
ALL
FIT
IN?'
I
WONDERED.
'WE
TAKE

DOUBLE
THE
PASSENGERS,
SQUEEZE
IN,'
THE
DRIVER
SAID.
'LET'S
TAKE
AN
AUTO,'
I
SAID.
'I'M
NOT
TAKING
AN
AUTO,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
SHE
SLID
INTO
THE
BACKSEAT.
'YOU
CAN
SIT
IN
FRONT
AND
MAKE
MADAM
SIT
IN
YOUR
LAP,'
THE
DRIVER
POINTED
ANANYA

TO
ME.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
GAVE
THE
DRIVER
A
GLARE
STRONG
ENOUGH
TO
SILENCE
HIM
FOR
THE
REST
OF
THE
DAY.
'MOM,
CAN
YOU
TAKE
AN
AUTO?'
ANANYA
REQUESTED
HER
MOTHER.
'WHY,
WE
HAVE
ALSO
PAID
FOR
THIS,'
SHE
SAID.
'SOMETHING
SOMETHING
ILLA
ILLA!'
'SERI,

SERI,
AMMA,'
ANANYA
SAID.
WE
FINALLY
ARRIVED
AT
AN
ARRANGEMENT.
ANANYA'S
DAD
SAT
IN
FRONT
WITH
ANANYA
IN
HIS
LAP.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAT
BEHIND
WITH
HER
SON
IN
HER
LAP.
MY
MOTHER
HAD

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ALREADY
TAKEN
A
WINDOW
SEAT
BEHIND
THE
DRIVER.
I
SQUISHED
MYSELF
BETWEEN
THE
TWO
LADIES
IN
THE
MIDDLE.
THE
SABARMATI
ASHRAM
IS
EIGHT
KILOMETERS
AWAY
FROM
CAMPUS.
THE
TWENTY-
MINUTE
DRIVE
FELT
LIKE
AN
HOUR
DUE
TO
THE
SILENCE.
ANANYA
TRIED

TO
MAKE
CONVERSATION
WITH
HER
PARENTS.
THEY
PRETENDED
NOT
TO
HEAR
HER
AS
THEY
KEPT
THEIR
HEADS
OUT
OF
THE
WINDOWS.
MY
MOTHER
TOOK
OUT
A
PACKET
OF
NICE
BISCUITS
AND
STARTED
EATING
THEM
WITHOUT
OFFERING
THEM
TO
ANYONE.
SHE
TOOK
ONE
BISCUIT
AND

PUT
IT
IN
MY
MOUTH,
TO
ASSERT
MATERNAL
RIGHTS
ON
ME.
OF
COURSE,
I
COULDN'T
REFUSE.
'WHY
IS
EVERYONE
SO
SILENT,'
ANANYA
SAID
TO
ME
AS
WE
WENT
TO
THE
TICKET
COUNTER
AT
THE
ASHRAM.
'MY
MOTHER
MADE
A
SILLY
COMMENT
AT
THE
CONVOCAATION,'

I
SAID,
HOPING
ANANYA
WON'T
SEEK
DETAILS.
'WHAT
DID
SHE
SAY?'
ANANYA
ASKED
AS
SHE
FISHED
FOR
THE
REQUIRED
AMOUNT
OF
MONEY
FOR
SIX
TICKETS.
'IT'S
NOT
IMPORTANT.
BUT
YOUR
PARENTS
LEFT
AFTER
THAT.'
'WHAT
EXACTLY
DID
SHE
SAY?'
ANANYA
PERSISTED.
'NOTHING,
SOMETHING
ABOUT

SOUTH
INDIAN
WOMEN
BEING
LOOSE
OR
SOMETHING.
NO
BIG
DEAL.'
'WHAT?'
ANANYA
LOOKED
AT
ME,
SHOCKED.
'I
DIDN'T
SAY
IT.
SHE
DID.
SILLY
COMMENT,
IGNORE
IT.'
'I
DON'T
KNOW
WHAT
TO
SAY,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'NOTHING.
LET'S
GET
EVERYONE
TALKING
AGAIN,'
I
SAID
AS
WE

WALKED
TO
THE
MAIN
ENTRANCE.
WE
CAME
INSIDE
THE
ASHRAM.
GANDHI
LIVED
HERE
FROM
1915
TO
1930.
THE
FAMOUS
SALT
MARCH
STARTED
FROM
THIS
ASHRAM.
ANANYA
APPOINTED
A
GUIDE,
FOR
NO
OTHER

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

REASON
THAN
TO
KEEP
EVERYONE
WALKING
TOGETHER.

WE
PASSED
THE
EXHIBITS

—
VARIOUS
PICTURES,
PAINTINGS,
LETTERS
AND
ARTICLES
OF
GANDHI.

'AND
WHEN
MR.
GANDHI
LEFT
IN
1930
FOR
THE
DANDI
MARCH,
HE
VOWED
NEVER
TO
RETURN
TO
THE
ASHRAM
UNTIL
INDIA

WON
ITS
INDEPENDENCE,'
THE
GUIDE
SAID
IN
A
PRACTICED
VOICE.
'AND
HE
DIDN'T
AFTER
THAT
DAY.'
'DID
HE
COME
BACK
AFTER
INDIA
BECAME
FREE?'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
WANTED
TO
KNOW.
'ALAS,'
THE
GUIDE
SIGHED,
'HE
COULDN'T.
HE
WAS
SHOT
DEAD
WITHIN
SIX
MONTHS
OF
INDEPENDENCE.'

MY
MOTHER,
NOT
TO
BE
LEFT
BEHIND
IN
ASKING
OF
QUESTIONS,
TURNED
TO
THE
GUIDE.
'WHY
IS
IT
CALLED
DANDI
MARCH?
BECAUSE
HE
CARRIED
A
STICK?'
THE
GUIDE
LAUGHED.
LIKE
ALL
HIS
MANNERISMS,
HIS
LAUGH
WAS
DRAMATIC,
TOO.
'HOW
LITTLE
WE
KNOW
ABOUT
THE

GREATEST
MAN
IN
INDIA.
NO
MADAM,
DANDI
IS
THE
NAME
OF
A
PLACE,
FIVE
HUNDRED
KILOMETERS
AWAY
FROM
HERE.'
THE
GUIDE
TOOK
US
TO
AN
EXHIBIT
OF
THE
MAP
AND
POINTED
TO
THE
COASTAL
TOWN.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
TURNED
TO
HER
FATHER
AND
SPOKE
IN

TAMIL.
'SOMETHING
SOMETHING
ILLA
KNOWLEDGE
PUNJABI
PEOPLE
SOMETHING.'
'SERI,
SERI,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID
IN
A
CURSORY
MANNER,
ENGROSSED
IN
THE
MAP.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
CONTINUED.
'INTELLECTUALLY,
CULTURALLY
ZERO.
SOMETHING
SOMETHING
CRASS
UNEDUCATED
SOMETHING.'
I
DON'T
KNOW
IF
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
REALISED
HER
USE
OF
THE
FEW

ENGLISH
WORDS,
OR
MAYBE
SHE
PLANTED
THEM
INTENTIONALLY.
SHE
HAD
MADE
HER
COMEBACK.
MY
MOTHER
HEARD
HER
AND
LOOKED
AT
ME.
THE
GUIDE
LOOKED
WORRIED
AS
HIS
TIP
WAS
IN
DANGER.
'SO,
YOU
SEE,
GANDHIJI
STRONGLY
BELIEVED
THAT
ALL
INDIANS
ARE
ONE.
ANYWAY,
LET

US
NOW
SEE
GANDHIJI'S
PERSONAL
BELONGINGS.
THIS
WAY,
PLEASE.'
THE
GUIDE
SAID,
BREAKING
THE
ANTARCTIC
GLANCES
BETWEEN
THE
TWO
MOTHERS.
WE
SAT
DOWN
FOR
LUNCH
UNDER
A
TREE
IN
THE
ASHRAM
COMPLEX,
LOOKING
LIKE
WE
WERE
ON
DEATH
ROW.
EVERYONE
ATE
IN
SILENCE
AS

ANANYA
DROPPED
THE
NEWS.
'WE
LIKE
EACH
OTHER.'
EVERYONE
LOOKED
AT
EACH
OTHER
IN
CONFUSION.
MOST
PEOPLE
DID
NOT
LIKE
EACH
OTHER
IN
THIS
GROUP.
'KRISH
AND
I,
WE
LIKE
EACH
OTHER,'
ANANYA
SMILED.
'I
TOLD
YOU.
I
SMELLED
SOMETHING
FISHY.....'
MY
MOTHER
TORE

HER
CHAPATTI.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'THERE'S
NOTHING
FISHY.
THERE'S
NOTHING
TO
BE
WORRIED
ABOUT.
WE
JUST
WANTED
TO
SHARE
OUR
HAPPINESS.

WE
ARE
JUST
TWO
PEOPLE
IN
LOVE,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
HER
MOTHER
INTERRUPTED
HER.

'SHUT
UP,
ANANYA!'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
GLARED
AT
HER.

I
WONDERED
IF

SHE
WOULD
SLAP
HER.
AND
I
WONDERED
IF
ANANYA
WOULD
OFFER
HER
SECOND
CHEEK
CONSIDERING
WE
WERE
IN
GANDHI'S
ASHRAM.
'THIS
IS
WHAT
I
MEANT
WHEN
I
SAID
ABOUT
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRLS.
THERE
ARE
SO
MANY
CASES
IN
DELHI
ONLY,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
ITCHING

TO
SLAM
ANANYA'S
MOM
AGAIN.
'MOM,
CHILL,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT
HAVE
I
SAID?
DID
I
SAY
ANYTHING?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
'GET
UP,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
TO
HER
HUSBAND.
LIKE
A
TV
RESPONDING
TO
A
REMOTE,
HE
STOOD.
ANANYA'S
BROTHER
FOLLOWED.
'WE
WILL
TAKE
AN

AUTO
BACK,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
ANANYA
SAT
UNDER
THE
TREE,
PERPLEXED.
'NOW
YOU
WILL
STAY
WITH
THEM?'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
ASKED.
'MOM,
PLEASE!'
ANANYA
SOUNDED
CLOSE
TO
TEARS.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
TUGGED
AT
ANANYA
AND
PULLED
HER
AWAY.
THE
GUIDE
NOTICED
THEM
LEAVE
AND
LOOKED
PUZZLED.

I
PAID
HIM
OFF
AND
CAME
BACK
TO
MY
MOTHER.
SHE
FINISHED
THE
LAST
FEW
SPOONS
OF
TOPAZ'S
PANEER
TIKKA
MASALA
UNDER
THE
TREE.
'THEY
ARE
GONE,'
I
SAID.
'GOOD.
THERE'LL
BE
MORE
SPACE
IN
THE
CAR,'
SHE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ACT
2:
DELHI

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
12

'WHAT
ARE
YOU
READING
WITH
SUCH
CONCENTRATION?'

MY
MOTHER
ASKED
AS
SHE
CHOPPED
BHINDI
ON
THE
DINING
TABLE.

'IT'S
THE
CITIBANK
NEW
EMPLOYEE
FORM.

I
HAVE
TO
FILL
FIFTY
PAGES.
THEY
WANT
TO
KNOW
EVERYTHING,
LIKE
WHERE
WAS
YOUR
MOTHER

BORN.'
'ON
THE
WAY
FROM
LAHORE
TO
DELHI.
YOUR
GRANDMOTHER
DELIVERED
ME
IN
A
MAKESHIFT
TENT
NEAR
PUNJABI
BAGH.'
'I'LL
WRITE
DELHI,'
I
SAID.
I
HAD
COME
HOME
FOR
THE
TWO-MONTH
BREAK
BEFORE
JOINING
CITIBANK.
EVEN
IN
APRIL,
DELHI
TEMPERATURE
HAD
ALREADY
CROSSED
FORTY

DEGREE
CENTIGRADE.
THERE
WASN'T
MUCH
TO
DO,
APART
FROM
CALLING
ANANYA
ONCE
A
DAY
OR
WAITING
FOR
HER
CALL.
I
SAT
WITH
MY
MOTHER
AS
SHE
PREPARED
LUNCH.
MY
FATHER
WASN'T
HOME,
NOBODY
REALLY
SURE
OR
CARING
ABOUT
WHERE
HE
WAS.
'IS
THIS
THE

FORM
WHERE
YOU
FILL
YOUR
LOCATION
PREFERENCE?’
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
I
LOOKED
AT
HER
HANDS,
A
LITTLE
MORE
WRINKLED
THEN
BEFORE
I
LEFT
TO
JOIN
COLLEGE.
SHE
CUT
THE
TOP
AND
TAIL
OF
A
BHINDI
AND
SLIT
IT
IN
THE
MIDDLE.
‘YES,’
I
SAID.

'YOU
CHOSE
DELHI,
RIGHT?'

I
KEPT
QUIET.
'WHAT?'

'YES
I
WILL,'

I
SAID.
THE
PHONE
RANG.

I
RUSHED
TO
PICK
IT
UP.

IT
WAS
SUNDAY
AND
CHEAPER
STD
RATES
MEANT
ANANYA
WOULD
CALL
AT
NOON.

'HI,
MY
HONEYBUNCH,'
ANANYA
SAID.

'OBVIOUSLY,
YOUR
MOTHER
IS

NOT
AROUND,'
I
SAID.
I
SPOKE
IN
A
LOW
VOLUME
AS
MY
OWN
MOTHER
KEPT
HER
EYES
ON
THE
BHINDI
BUT
EARS
ON
ME.
'OF
COURSE
NOT.
SHE'S
GONE
TO
BUY
STUFF
FOR
VARSHA
PORUPU
PUJA
TOMORROW.'

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'VARSHA

WHAT?'

'VARSHA

PORUPU,

TAMIL

NEW

YEAR.

DON'T

YOU

GUYS

KNOW?'

'UH,

YES

OF

COURSE,

HAPPY

NEW

YEAR,'

I

SAID.

'AND

HAVE

YOU

SENT

IN

YOUR

CITIBANK

FORM

YET?'

'NO,

HAVE

TO

FILL

A

FEW

FINAL

ITEMS,'

I

SAID.

'YOU'VE

GIVEN

CHENNAI
AS
YOUR
TOP
LOCATION
CHOICE?’
‘I
WILL....WAIT.’
I
PICKED
UP
THE
PHONE
AND
WENT
AS
FAR
FROM
MY
MOTHER
AS
THE
CURLY
LANDLINE
WIRE
ALLOWED
ME.
‘MY
MOTHER
EXPECTS
ME
TO
PUT
DELHI,’
I
WHISPERED.
‘AND
WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT?
HLL
HAS
PLACED

ME
IN
CHENNAI.

I
TOLD
YOU
WEEKS
AGO.
HOW
ARE
WE
GOING
TO
MAKE
THIS
WORK?’

‘WE
WILL.
BUT
IF

I
COME
TO
CHENNAI,
SHE’LL
KNOW

IT
IS
FOR
YOU.’

‘FINE,
THEN
TELL
HER
THAT.’

‘HOW?’

‘I
DON’T
KNOW.

THEY
DIDN’T
GIVE
ME
A

CHOICE,
ELSE
I
WOULD
HAVE
COME
TO
DELHI.
I
MISS
YOU
SWEETS,
A
LOT.
PLEASE,
BABY,
COME
SOON.'
'I'M
SOMEONE
ELSE'S
BABY
TOO,
QUITE
LITERALLY.
AND
SHE
IS
WATCHING
ME,
SO
I
BETTER
HANG
UP.'
'PLEASE
SAY
"I
LOVE
YOU".'
'I
DO.'
'NO,
SAY

IT
NICELY.'
'ANANYA!'
'JUST
ONCE.
THE
THREE
WORDS
TOGETHER.'
I
LOOKED
AT
MY
MOTHER.
SHE
PICKED
UP
THE
LAST
BUNCH
OF
BHINDIS
AND
WIPED
THEM
WITH
A
WET
CLOTH.
HER
SHINY
KNIFE,
SYMBOLIC
OF
HER
CURRENT
POSITION
IN
MY
LOVE
STORY,
GLEAMED
IN
THE

AFTERNOON
LIGHT.
'MOVIES
I
LOVE.
YOU
SHOULD
SEE
THEM,
TOO.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'AWW,
THAT'S
NOT
FAIR,'
ANANYA
MOCK-CRIED
AT
THE
OTHER
END.
'BYE,'
I
SAID.
'OK,
LOVE
YOU.
BYE,'
SHE
ENDED
THE
CALL.
I
CAME
BACK
TO
THE
DINING
TABLE.
OUT
OF
GUILT,
I
PICKED
UP
A
FEW
BHINDIS
AND
STARTED
WIPING
THEM

WITH
A
CLOTH.
'MADRASI
GIRL?'
'ANANYA,'
I
SAID.
'STAY
AWAY
FROM
HER.
THEY
BRAINWASH,
THESE
PEOPLE.'
'MOM,
I
LIKE
HER.
IN
FACT,
I
LOVE
HER.'
'SEE,
I
TOLD
YOU.
THEY
TRAP
YOU,'
MY
MOTHER
DECLARED.
'NOBODY
HAS
TRAPPED
ME,
MOM,'
I
SAID
AS
I

THWACKED
A
BHINDI
ON
THE
TABLE.
'SHE
IS
A
NICE
GIRL.
SHE
IS
SMART,
INTELLIGENT,
GOOD-LOOKING.
SHE
HAS
A
GOOD
JOB.
WHY
WOULD
SHE
NEED
TO
TRAP
ANYONE?'
'THEY
LIKE
NORTH
INDIAN
MEN.'
'WHY?
WHAT'S
SO
SPECIAL
ABOUT
NORTH
INDIAN
MEN?'
'NORTH
INDIANS
ARE

FAIRER.
THE
TAMILIANS
HAVE
A
COMPLEX.'

A
COMPLEXION,
COMPLEX?'

I
CHUCKLED.

'YES,
HUGE,'

MY
MOTHER
SAID.

'MOM,
SHE
WENT
TO
IIMA,
SHE
IS
ONE
OF
THE
SMARTEST
GIRLS
IN
INDIA.
WHAT
ARE
YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?
AND
NOT
THAT
IT
MATTERS,
BUT
YOU
HAVE
SEEN

HER.
SHE
IS
FAIRER
THAN
ME.'
'THE
FAIR
ONES
ARE
THE
MOST
DANGEROUS.
SRIDEVI
AND
HEMA
MALINI.'
'MOM,
STOP
COMPARING
ANANYA
TO
SRIDEVI
AND
HEMA
MALINI,'
I
SCREAMED
AND
PUSHED
THE
BHINDI
BOWL
ON
THE
TABLE
ASIDE
WITH
MY
ARM.
THE
BOWL
PUSHED
THE

KNIFE,
WHICH
IN
TURN
RAMMED
AGAINST
MY
MOTHER'S
FINGERS.
SHE
WINCED
IN
PAIN
AS
DROPS
OF
BLOOD
FLOODED
HER
RIGHT
INDEX
FINGERS.
'MOM,
I
AM
SO
SORRY,'
I
SAID.
'I
AM
SO
SORRY.'
'IT'S
OK.
KILL
ME.
KILL
ME
FOR
THIS
GIRL,'
SHE
WAILED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'MOM,
I
AM
NOT.....'
A
DROP
OF
BLOOD
FELL
ON
MY
CITIBANK
FORM.
NOW
WOULD
BE
THE
TIME
TO
BETRAY
YOUR
MOTHER,
YOU
IDIOT,
I
THOUGHT.
'I
AM
GOING
TO
WRITE
DELHI,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT?'
'NOTHING.
WHERE
ARE
THE
BAND-AIDS?
DON'T

WORRY,
I
WILL
COOK
THE
BHINDI.
GIVE
ME
THE
MASALA.'
I
BANDAGED
MY
MOTHER
AND
HAD
HER
RECLINE
ON
THE
SOFA.
I
SWITCHED
ON
THE
TV.
I
TRIED
TO
FIND
A
CHANNEL
WITH
A
SOAP
OPERA
THAT
DIDN'T
SHOW
CHILDREN
DISRESPECTING
THEIR
PARENTS.
I

FILLED
EACH
BHINDI
WITH
MASALA
OVER
THE
NEXT
HOUR.
'DO
YOU
KNOW
HOW
TO
SWITCH
ON
THE
GAS?'
SHE
SCREAMED
FROM
THE
LIVING
ROOM
AS
I
HUNTED
FOR
MATCHES
IN
THE
KITCHEN.
'I
DO.
DON'T
WORRY.'
'I
CAN
SHOW
YOU
PUNJABI
GIRLS
FAIR
AS

MILK,'
SHE
SAID,
HER
VOLUME
LOUDER
THAN
THE
TV.
I
IGNORED
HER
AS
I
CHECKED
THE
CUPBOARD
FOR
A
VESSEL.
'SHOULD
WE
GIVE
A
MATRIMONIAL
AD?
VERMA
AUNTY
DOWNSTAIRS
GAVE
IT;
SHE
GOT
FIFTY
RESPONSES
EVEN
THOUGH
HER
SON
IS
FROM
DONATION
COLLEGE.
YOU

WILL
GET
FIVE
HUNDRED,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'LET
IT
BE,
MOM,'
I
SAID.
I
IGNITED
THE
STOVE
AND
KEPT
THE
PAN
OVER
IT.
I
POURED
COOKING
OIL
AND
OPENED
THE
DRAWERS
TO
FIND
CUMIN
SEEDS.
IT
WAS
KEPT
IN
THE
SAME
PLACE
AS
WHEN

I
LEFT
HOME
FOR
COLLEGE
OVER
SEVEN
YEARS
AGO.
'ACTUALLY,
I
HAVE
A
GIRL
IN
MIND.
YOU
HAVE
SEEN
PAMMI
AUNTY'S
DAUGHTER?'
'NO.
AND
I
DON'T
WANT
TO,'
I
SAID.
'WAIT,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
A
NEW
WAVE
OF
ENERGY
WAS
UNLEASHED
WITHIN
HER.

I
HEARD
HER
OPEN
THE
GODREJ
CUPBOARD
IN
HER
BEDROOM.
SHE
BROUGHT
A
WEDDING
ALBUM
TO
THE
KITCHEN.
'LOWER
THE
FLAME,
YOU'LL
BURN
IT.
AND
WHY
HAVEN'T
YOU
SWITCHED
ON
THE
EXHAUST?'
SHE
SNATCHED
THE
LADLE
FROM
ME
AND
TOOK
CONTROL
OF
THE
STOVE.

SHE
STIRRED
THE
BHINDI
WITH
VIGOUR
AS
SHE
SPOKE
AGAIN.
'OPEN
THIS
ALBUM.
SEE
THE
GIRL
DANCING
IN
THE
BARAAT
NEXT
TO
THE
HORSE.
SHE
IS
WEARING
A
PINK
LEHNGA.'
'MOM,'
I
PROTESTED.
'LISTEN
TO
ME
ALSO
SOMETIMES.
DIDN'T
I
MEET
JAYALALITHA'S
FAMILY
ON

YOUR
REQUEST?’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT?'
'NOTHING,
SEE
THE
PICTURE.'
I
OPENED
THE
ALBUM.
IT
WAS
MY
SECOND
COUSIN
DINKI'S
WEDDING
TO
DEEPU.
THE
FIRST
FIVE
PAGES
OF
THE
ALBUM
WERE
FILLED
WITH
FACE
SHOTS
OF
THE
BOY
AND
GIRL
IN
VARIOUS
KALEIDOSCOPIC
COMBINATIONS
AND
ENCLOSED

BY
HEART-FILLED
FRAMES.

I
FLIPPED
THROUGH
THE
ALBUM
AND
CAME
TO
THE
PICTURES
WITH
THE
HORSE.

I
SAW
A
GIRL
IN
PINK
LEHNGA,
HER
FACE
BARELY
VISIBLE
UNDER
A
LOT
OF
HAIR.
SHE
WAS
IN
THE
MIDDLE
OF
A
DANCE
STEP
WITH
HER
HANDS

HELD
HIGH
AND
INDEX
FINGERS
POINTING
UP.
'ISN'T
SHE
PRETTY?'
MY
MOTHER
SWITCHED
ON
THE
OTHER
GAS
STOVE
AND
PUT
A
TAWA
ON
IT
TO
MAKE
ROTIS.
SHE
TOOK
OUT
A
ROLLING
PIN
AND
DOUGH.
'I
CAN'T
MAKE
OUT,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
SHOULD
MEET

HER.
AND
HERE,
KEEP
STIRRING
THE
BHINDI
WHILE
I
MAKE
THE
ROTIS,'
SHE
HANDED
ME
THE
LADLE.
'I
DON'T
WANT
TO
MEET
ANYONE.'
'ONLY
ONCE.'
'WHAT'S
SO
SPECIAL
ABOUT
HER?'
'THEY
HAVE
SIX
PETROL
PUMPS.'
'WHAT?'
'HER
FATHER.
HE
HAS
SIX
PETROL
PUMPS.
AND

THE
BEST
PART
IS,
THEY
HAVE
ONLY
TWO
DAUGHTERS.
SO
EACH
SON-IN-LAW
WILL
GET
THREE,
JUST
IMAGINE.'
'WHAT?'
I
SAID
AS
I
IMAGINED
MYSELF
SITTING
IN
A
GAS
STATION.
'YES,
THEY
ARE
VERY
RICH.
PETROL
PUMPS
SELL
IN
CASH.
LOTS
OF
BLACK
MONEY.'
'AND

WHAT
DOES
THE
GIRL
DO?
IS
SHE
EDUCATED?’
‘SHE
IS
DOING
SOMETHING.
THESE
DAYS
YOU
CAN
DO
GRADUATION
BY
CORRESPONDENCE
ALSO.’
‘OH,
SO
SHE
IS
NOT
EVEN
GOING
TO
COLLEGE?’
‘COLLEGE
DEGREES
YOU
CAN
GET
EASILY.
THEY
ARE
QUITE
RICH.’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'MOM,
THAT'S
NOT
THE
POINT.
I
CAN'T
BELIEVE
YOU
ARE
GOING
TO
MARRY
ME
TO
A
TWELFTH
PASS....OH,
FORGET
IT.
PUT
THIS
ALBUM
AWAY.
AND
ARE
THE
ROTIS
DONE?
I
AM
HUNGRY.'
'WE
CAN
GET
AN
EDUCATED
PUNJABI
GIRL.'
'NO,
I

DON'T
LIKE
ANY
PUNJABI
GIRL.'
'YOUR
MOTHER
IS
A
PUNJABI,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
IN
AN
UPSET
TONE.
'THAT'S
NOT
THE
POINT,
MOM,'
I
SAID
AND
OPENED
THE
FRIDGE
TO
TAKE
OUT
CURD.
'I
DON'T
WANT
ANY
OTHER
GIRL.
I
HAVE
A
GIRLFRIEND.'
'YOU'LL
MARRY

THAT
MADRASI
GIRL?’
MY
MOTHER
ASKED,
SERIOUSLY
SHOCKED
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME
SINCE
SHE
FOUND
OUT
ABOUT
ANANYA.
‘I
WANT
TO.
IN
TIME,
OF
COURSE.’
MY
MOTHER
SLAPPED
A
ROTI
ON
THE
TAWA
AND
THEN
SLAPPED
HER
FOREHEAD.
‘LET’S
EAT,’
I
SAID,
IGNORING
HER

DEMONSTRATIONS
OF
DISAPPOINTMENT.
WE
PLACED
THE
FOOD
ON
THE
LIVING-ROOM
COFFEE
TABLE
AND
SAT
DOWN
IN
FRONT
OF
THE
TV.
THE
DOORBELL
RANG
TWICE.
'OH
NO,
IT'S
YOUR
FATHER,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'SWITCH
OFF
THE
TV.'
'IT'S
OK,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
ME

A
STERN
GLANCE.
I
RELUCTANTLY
SHUT
THE
TELEVISION.
MY
MOTHER
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
MY
FATHER
CAME
INSIDE
AND
LOOKED
AT
ME.
I
TURNED
AWAY
AND
CAME
BACK
TO
THE
TABLE.
'LUNCH?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
MY
FATHER
DID
NOT
ANSWER.
HE
CAME
TO
THE
DINING

TABLE
AND
EXAMINED
THE
FOOD.
'YOU
CALL
THIS
FOOD?'
HE
SAID.
I
GLARED
AT
HIM.
'IT
TOOK
MOM
THREE
HOURS
TO
MAKE
IT,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
TOOK
OUT
A
PLATE
FOR
HIM.
'I
DON'T
WANT
TO
EAT
THIS,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'WHY
DON'T

YOU
SAY
YOU'VE
ALREADY
EATEN
AND
COME?'
I
BUTTED
IN
AGAIN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
MY
FATHER
STARED
AT
ME
AND
TURNED
TO
MY
MOTHER.
'THIS
IS
THE
RESULT
OF
YOUR
UPBRINGING.
ALL
THE
DEGREES
CAN
GO
TO
THE
DUSTBIN.
YOU
ONLY
HAVE
THIS
AT
THE
END.'
THIS,
AND
A
JOB
AT
CITIBANK
THAT
PAYS
ME

THREE
TIMES
AT
THE
START
THAN
WHAT
YOU
EVER
EARNED
IN
YOUR
LIFE,
I
WANTED
TO
SAY
BUT
DIDN'T.
I
PULLED
THE
CITIBANK
FORM
CLOSE
TO
ME.
MY
FATHER
WENT
AND
TOUCHED
THE
TV
TOP.
'IT'S
HOT.
WHO
WATCHED
TV?'
'I
DID.
ANY
PROBLEM?'

I
SAID.
'I
HOPE
YOU
LEAVE
HOME
SOON,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.

I
HOPE
YOU
LEAVE
THIS
WORLD
SOON,

I
RESPONDED
MENTALLY
AS

I
TOOK
MY
PLATE
AND
LEFT
THE
ROOM.

I
LAY
DOWN
IN
BED
AT
NIGHT,
WAITING
TO
FALL
ASLEEP.

MY
MIND
OSCILLATED

BETWEEN
WONDERFUL
THOUGHTS
OF
ANANYA'S
HAIR
AS
THEY
BRUSHED
AGAINST
MY
FACE
WHEN
WE
SLEPT
IN
CAMPUS
AND
THE
ARGUMENT
WITH
MY
FATHER
THIS
AFTERNOON.
MY
MOTHER
CAME
TO
MY
ROOM
AND
SWITCHED
ON
THE
LIGHT.
'I'VE
FIXED
THE
MEETING.
WE'LL
GO
TO
PAMMI

AUNTY'S
PLACE
DAY
AFTER
TOMORROW.'
'MOM,
I
DON'T.....'
'DON'T
WORRY,
I'VE
TOLD
THEM
WE
ARE
COMING
FOR
TEA.
LET
ME
SHOW
YOU
OFF
A
LITTLE.
YOU
WAIT
AND
SEE,
THEY
WILL
ASK
ME
FIRST.'
'I
AM
NOT
INTERESTED,'
I
SAT
UP
ON
MY
BED.

'COME
FOR
THE
SNACKS.
THEY
ARE
VERY
RICH.
EVEN
FOR
ORDINARY
GUESTS
THEY
GIVE
DRY
FRUITS.'
'MOM,
WHY
SHOULD
I
COME,
REALLY?'
'BECAUSE
IT
WILL
MAKE
ME
HAPPY.
IS
THAT
REASON
ENOUGH?'
SHE
SAID
AND
I
NOTICED
HER
WRINKLED
HAND
WITH
THE
BANDAGE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'OK,'
I
SHRUGGED
AND
SLID
BACK
INTO
BED.
'NOW
LET
ME
SLEEP.'
'EXCELLENT,'
SHE
SAID
AND
SWITCHED
OFF
THE
LIGHTS
AS
SHE
LEFT
THE
ROOM.
I
ALLOWED
MY
MIND
TO
BE
TRAPPED
AGAIN
BY
THOUGHTS
OF
MY
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRL.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
13
PAMMI
AUNTY
LIVED
IN
PITAMPURA,
A
HARDCORE
PUNJABI
NEIGHBOURHOOD.
EACH
LANE
IN
THIS
AREA
HAS
MORE
MARBLE
THAN
THE
TAJ
MAHAL.
EVERY
STREET
SMELLS
OF
TOMATOES
COOKING
WITH
PANEER.
WE
TOOK
AN
AUTO
AS
MY
FATHER
NEVER
ALLOWED
US
TO

TAKE
THE
CAR.
MY
MOTHER
TOLD
THE
AUTO
DRIVER
TO
STOP
A
FEW
HOUSES
AWAY.
WE
COULDN'T
TELL
PAMMI
AUNTY
WE
HADN'T
COME
BY
CAR.
'HE
HAD
A
MEETING,
HE
DROPPED
US
OUTSIDE
AND
LEFT,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
PAMMI
AUNTY
CAME
TO
GREET

US
AT
THE
DOOR.
'HE
SHOULD
HAVE
COME
FOR
A
COLD
DRINK
AT
LEAST,'
PAMMI
AUNTY
SAID
AND
ESCORTED
US
IN.
PAMMI
AUNTY'S
WEIGHT
ROUGHLY
MATCHED
THE
DECADE
SHE
LIVED
IN,
AND
THAT
CORRELATION
HAD
CONTINUED
INTO
THE
CURRENT
NINETIES.
PAMMI
AUNTY
HAD
BEEN

MS
CHANDIGARH
THIRTY-SEVEN
YEARS
AGO.
A
RICH
BUSINESSMAN
SNAPPED
HER
SOON
AFTER
THE
TITLE
AND
GAVE
HER
A
LIFE
OF
EXTRA
LUXURY
AND
EXTRA
CALORIES.
NOW,
SHE
WEIGHED
MORE
THAN
THE
THREE
FINALISTS
PUT
TOGETHER.
WE
WALKED
TO
FIVE
STEPS
TO
GET
TO
THEIR

LIVING
ROOM.
PAMMI
AUNTY
HAD
DIFFICULTY
CLIMBING
THEM.
'MY
KNEES,'
SHE
MUMBLED
AS
SHE
TOOK
THE
LAST
STEP.
'YOU
ARE
GOING
FOR
MORNING
WALK
NOWADAYS?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
'WHERE
KAVITA-JI,
IT
IS
SO
HOT.
PLUS,
I
HAVE
SATSANG
IN
THE
MORNING.
SIT,'
PAMMI
AUNTY

SAID
AS
SHE
TOLD
HER
MAID
TO
GET
KHUS
SHARBAT.
WE
SANK
INTO
A
RED
VELVET
SOFA
WITH
A
TWO-FEET
DEEP
SPONGE
BASE.
'ACTUALLY,
EVEN
IF
YOU
WALK
TO
SATSANG,
IT
CAN
BE
GOOD
EXERCISE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'SIX
CARS,
KAVITA-JI.
DRIVERS
SITTING
USELESS.

HOW
TO
WALK?’
PAMMI
AUNTY
ASKED.
SHE
HAD
DEMONSTRATED
A
FINE
PUNJABI
SKILL

—
OF
SHOWING
OFF
HER
WEALTH
AS
PART
OF
AN
INNOCENT
CONVERSATION.
MY
MOTHER
TURNED
TO
ME
TO
REPEAT
HER
COMMENT.
‘SIX
CARS?
KRISH,
YOU
HEARD,
THEY
HAVE
SIX
CARS.’
I

DIDN'T
KNOW
HOW
TO
RESPOND.
MAYBE
I
WAS
SUPPOSED
TO
APPLAUD.
'WHICH
ONES?'
I
SAID,
ONLY
BECAUSE
THEY
KEPT
STARING
AT
ME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
DON'T
KNOW.
MY
HUSBAND
KNOWS.
JUST
LAST
WEEK
HE
BOUGHT
A
HONDA.'
'HOW
MUCH
FOR?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
IT
IS
ALMOST
COURTEOUS
AMONG
PUNJABIS
TO
ENCOURAGE
SOMEONE
WHO
IS
FLAUNTING
HIS
WEALTH
TO
BRAG
SOME
MORE.
'SEVEN
LAKH,
PLUS
STEREO

CHANGED
FOR
THIRTY
THOUSAND,'
PAMMI
AUNTY
SAID.
'WOW!'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'HE
HAS
ALSO
GOT
A
JOB
WITH
CITIBANK,
FOUR
LAKH
A
YEAR.'
TO
A
NON-PUNJABI,
MY
MOTHER'S
COMMENT
WOULD
BE
CONSIDERED
A
NON-SEQUITUR.
TO
A
PUNJABI,
IT
IS
PERFECT
CONTINUATION.
WE
ARE
TALKING

ABOUT
LAKH,
AFTER
ALL.
'GOOD.
YOUR
SON
HAS
TURNED
OUT
BRIGHT,'
SHE
SAID.
I
GUESS
TO
BE
RICH
IS
TO
BE
BRIGHT,
AS
SHE
DIDN'T
ASK
FOR
MY
IQ.
'YOUR
BLESSINGS,
PAMMI-JI,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'NO,
NO,'
PAMMI
AUNTY
SAID
AS
SHE
GLOATED
OVER

HER
POSSIBLE
ROLE
IN
MY
BAGGING
THE
JOB.
WE
HAD
SMILED
AT
EACH
OTHER
FOR
ANOTHER
MINUTE
WHEN
PAMMI
AUNTY
SPOKE
AGAIN.
'DRY
FRUITS?'
'NO,
NO,
PAMMI-JI,
WHAT
FORMALITIES
YOU
ARE
GETTING
INTO?'
MY
MOTHER
DEMURRED.
'RANI,
GET
CASHEWS
AND
THOSE
DUBAI
DATES,'
PAMMI-JI

SCREAMED.
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
A
MINI
NOD
IN
APPRECIATION
OF
THE
INTERNATIONAL
NUTS.
'WHERE'S
OUR
DOLLY?'
MY
MOTHER
INQUIRED,
CLAIMING
THE
HEIRESS
OF
THREE
GAS
STATIONS
AS
HERS
WITHOUT
HESITATION.
'HERE
ONLY,
DOLLY!'
PAMMI
AUNTY
SCREAMED
HARD
TO
REACH
THE
UPPER
FLOORS
OF
THE

HYDROCARBON-FUNDED
MANSION.
THE
SERVANTS
WERE
SUMMONED
TO
CALL
DOLLY
DOWNSTAIRS.
'SHE
TAKES
FOREVER
TO
HAVE
A
BATH
AND
GET
READY,'
PAMMI
AUNTY
SAID
IN
MOCK
ANGER,
AS
SHE
TOOK
A
FISTFUL
OF
CASHEWS
AND
FORCED
THEM
IN
MY
HANDS.
'DON'T
STOP
OUR
DAUGHTER
FROM

LOOKING
BEAUTIFUL,
PAMMI-JI,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
YES,
DOLLY
WAS
ALREADY
OURS.
'WHO
KNOWS
JI
ABOUT
WHOSE
DAUGHTER
SHE
WILL
BECOME?
WE
ONLY
HAVE
TWO
GIRLS,
EVERYTHING
IS
THEIRS,'
PAMMI
SAID
AND
SPREAD
HER
ARMS
TO
SHOW
EVERYTHING.
YES,
THE
SOFAS,
HIDEOUS
MARBLE
COFFEE
TABLES,

CURIOS,
FANS,
AIR
CONDITIONERS

—
EVERYTHING
BELONGED
TO
THE
DAUGHTERS
AND
THEIR
FUTURE
HUSBANDS.

I
HAVE
TO
SAY,
FOR

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

A
SECOND
THE
THOUGHT
OF
OWNING
HALF
THIS
HOUSE
MADE
ME
WONDER
IF
MY
MOTHER
WAS
RIGHT.
BUT
THE
NEXT
SECOND
THE
THOUGHT
OF
LOSING
ANANYA
CAME
TO
ME.
NO,
I
WOULDN'T
GIVE
UP
ANANYA
FOR
ALL
THE
CASHEWS
AND
CASH

IN
THE
WORLD.
IF
ONLY
PAMMI
AUNTY
ALLOWED
ME
TO
LIVE
IN
THIS
HOUSE
WITH
ANANYA.
DOLLY
CAME
SCURRYING
DOWN
THE
STEPS
WITH
HER
PERFUME
REACHING
US
THREE
SECONDS
BEFORE
HER.
'HELLO
AUNTI-JI,'
DOLLY
SAID
AND
WENT
ON
TO
GIVE
MY
MOTHER
A
TIGHT

HUG.
'HOW
BEAUTIFUL
OUR
DAUGHTER
HAS
BECOME!'
MY
MOTHER
EXCLAIMED.
DOLLY
AND
I
GREETED
EACH
OTHER
WITH
SLIGHT
NODS.
SHE
WORE
A
WINE-RED
SLAWAR
KAMEEZ
WITH
VERTICAL
GOLD
STRIPES
SUNNING
DOWN
IT.
SHE
WAS
ABNORMALLY
WHITE,
AND
MY
MOTHER
WAS
RIGHT;
SHE
DID
REMIND

ME
OF
MILK.
SHE
SUCKED
IN
HER
STOMACH
A
LITTLE,
THOUGH
SHE
WASN'T
FAT.
HER
AMPLE
BOSOM
MATCHED
PAMMI
AUNTY'S
AND
IT
MADE
ME
WONDER
HOW
THESE
WOMEN
WOULD
EVEN
WEAN
THEIR
CHILDREN
OFF
WITHOUT
SUFFOCATING
THEM.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING
THESE
DAYS,
DOLLY?'

MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
'BA
PASS,
AUNTY,
CORRESPONDENCE.'
'YOU
ARE
ALSO
DOING
COMPUTER
COURSE,
TELL
THAT,'
PAMMI
AUNTY
SAID
AND
TURNED
TO
MY
MOTHER,
'I'LL
GET
MORE
SNACKS?'
DOLLY
TRIED
TO
SAY
SOMETHING
BUT
WAS
IGNORED
AS
WE
HAD
MOVED
ON
TO
THE
INTERESTING
TOPIC

OF
FOOD.
'NO,
PAMMI-JI.
THIS
IS
ENOUGH,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
OBVIOUSLY
DARING
HER
TO
SERVE
US
MORE.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
SAYING?
YOU
HAVEN'T
COME
AT
MEAL
TIME,
SO
I
JUST
ARRANGED
SOME
HEAVY
SNACKS.
RAJU,
GET
THE
SNACKS.
AND
GET
BOTH
THE
RED
AND

GREEN
CHUTNEYS!’
SHE
SHRIEKED
TO
HER
SERVANT.
RAJU
AND
ANOTHER
SERVANT
BROUGHT
IN
A
GIGANTIC
TRAY
WITH
SAMOSAS,
JALEBIS,
CHOLE
BHATURE,
MILK
CAKE,
KACHORIS
AND,
OF
COURSE,
THE
RED
AND
GREEN
CHUTNEYS.
TWENTY
THOUSAND
CALORIES
WERE
PLONKED
ON
THE
TABLE.
‘YOU
SHOULDN’T
HAVE!’
MY

MOTHER
SAID
AS
SHE
SIGNALLED
THE
SERVANT
TO
PASS
THE
JALEBIS.
'NOTHING
JI,
JUST
FOR
TASTING.
YOU
SHOULD
HAVE
COME
FOR
DINNER.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
I
FELT
I
WOULD
COME
ACROSS
AS
A
RETARD
IF
I
DIDN'T
TALK
TO
DOLLY
NOW.
'WHAT
COMPUTER
COURSE
ARE
YOU
DOING?'
'MICROSOFT
WORD,
POWER
POINT,
EMAIL,
I
DON'T
KNOW,
JUST
STARTED.
LOOKS
QUITE
HI-
FI.'
'SURE,
IT
DOES
SOUND
LIKE

A
CHALLENGING
PROGRAMME,'
I
SAID,
AND
INSTANTLY
FELT
GUILTY
FOR
MY
SARCASM.
'MY
FRIENDS
ARE
DOING
IT,
SO
I
JOINED.
IF
IT
IS
TOO
DIFFICULT,
I'LL
STOP.
YOU
KNOW
ALL
THESE
THINGS,
NO?'
'SORT
OF,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
AND
PAMMI
AUNTY
HAD
STOPPED

TALKING
THE
MOMENT
DOLLY
AND
I
BEGAN
A
CONVERSATION.
DOLLY
AND
I
BECAME
QUIET
AS
WE
NOTICED
THEM
STARING
AT
US.
'IT'S
OK.
KEEP
TALKING,'
MY
MOTHER
BEAMED
AND
LOOKED
AT
PAMMI-JI.
BOTH
OF
THEM
GAVE
EACH
OTHER
A
SLY
GRIN.
THEY
WINKED
AT

EACH
OTHER
AND
THEN
FOLDED
THEIR
HANDS
AND
LOOKED
UP
TO
THANK
GOD.
DOLLY
LOOKED
AT
MY
MOTHER
AND
SMILED.
'AUNTY-JI
TEA?'
SHE
ASKED.
'NO
JI,
WE
DON'T
MAKE
OUR
DAUGHTERS
WORK,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
THE
WORK
IN
THIS
CASE
BEING
SCREAMING
AT
THE

SERVANT.
'RAJU,
GET
TEA,'
DOLLY
EXERTED
HERSELF
AND
EARNED
AFFECTIONATE
GLANCES
FROM
MY
MOTHER.
WHY
COULDN'T
MY
MOTHER
GIVE
ANANYA
ONE,
JUST
ONE,
GLANCE
LIKE
THAT?
'SON,
TEA?'
PAMMI
AUNTY
OFFERED
ME.
I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.
'YOU
YOUNG
PEOPLE
HAVE
COFFEE,
I
KNOW.
SHOULD

WE
GET
COFFEE?
OR
WAIT,
WHAT
IS
THAT
NEW
PLACE
AT
THE
DISTRICT
CENTRE,
DOLLY?
WHERE
THEY
SELL
THAT
EXPENSIVE
COFFEE?
BARSAAT?’
‘BARISTA,
MOM.’
DOLLY
SWITCHED
TO
A
MORE
ANGLICIZED
ACCENT
WHEN
ASKED
TO
DESCRIBE
SOMETHING
TRENDY.
‘YES,
THAT.
TAKE
HIS
THERE
IN
THE

HONDA.
SEE
JI,
WE
ARE
QUITE
MODERN
ACTUALLY,'
SHE
SAID
TO
MY
MOTHER.
'MODERN
IS
GOOD
JI.
WE
ARE
ALSO
NOT
OLD-FASHIONED.
GO
KRISH,
ENJOY,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
OF
COURSE,
HATING
TAMILIANS
IS
NOT
OLD-FASHIONED
AT
ALL.
I
STOOD
UP
TO
PARTLY
ENJOY
MYSELF

WITH
DOLLY,
BUT
MAINLY
TO
GET
AWAY
FROM
HERE
AND
RIDE
IN
THE
NEW
HONDA.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'COME
HERE,
DOLLY,'
PAMMI-JI
SAID
AND
DID
THE
UNTHINKABLE.
SHE
SLID
A
HAND
INTO
HER
BOSOM
ATM
AND
PULLED
OUT
A
WAD
OF
NOTES.
I
WONDERED
IF
PAMMI
AUNTY'S
CLEAVAGE
ALSO
CONTAINED
CREDIT
CARDS.
DOLLY
TOOK
THE
WAD
AND
PUT
IT

IN
HER
GOLDEN
HANDBAG
WITHOUT
COUNTING
IT.
SHE
SCREAMED
AT
THE
SERVANTS
TO
SCREAM
AT
THE
DRIVER
TO
SCREAM
AT
THE
SECURITY
GUARD
TO
OPEN
THE
GATE
SO
THE
HONDA
COULD
BE
TAKEN
OUT.
WE
REACHED
THE
DISTRICT
CENTRE,
A
GHETTO
OF
SALWAR-KAMEEZ
SHOPS,

BEAUTY
PARLOURS
AND
STD
BOOTHES.
DOLLY
INSISTED
ON
GOING
TO
HER
FAVOURITE
CLOTHES
BOUTIQUE.

I
WATCHED
HER
CHOOSE
CLOTHES
FOR
HALF
AN
HOUR.

I
WONDERED
IF
IT
WOULD
BE
APPROPRIATE
TO
CALL
ANANYA
FORM
ONE
OF
THE
STD
BOOTHES.

I
DROPPED
THE
IDEA
AND

HUNG
AROUND
THE
SHOP,
WATCHING
PUNJABI
MOTHERS
AND
DAUGHTERS
BUY
SALWAR
KAMEEZES
BY
THE
DOZEN.
THE
DAUGHTERS
WERE
ALL
THIN
AND
THE
MOTHERS
WERE
ALL
FAT.
THE
BOUTIQUE
SPECIALISED
IN
THESE
EXTREME
SIZES.
'HEALTHY
FIGURE
RANGE
IS
THERE,'
ONE
SALESMAN
SAID
AS
HE
POINTED

A
MOTHER
TO
THE
RIGHT
DIRECTION.
DOLLY
FINISHED
HER
SHOPPING
AND
PAID
FOR
THREE
NEW
SUITS
WITH
HER
WAD
OF
NOTES.
'YOU
LIKE
THESE?'
SHE
ASKED,
OPENING
HER
BAG.
'NICE,'
I
SAID
AS
WE
ENTERED
BARISTA.
THE
AIR-CONDITIONING
AND
SOOTHING
MUSIC
WERE
A
RESPITE

FROM
THE
BLAZING
FORTY-DEGREE
SUN
OUTSIDE.
'ONE
COLD
COFFEE
WITH
ICE-CREAM,'
DOLLY
SAID.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT?'
I
ORDERED
THE
SAME
AND
WE
SAT
ON
THE
COUCH,
SITTING
AS
FAR
APART
AS
POSSIBLE.
WE
MUTELY
STARED
AT
THE
MUSIC
CHANNEL
ON
THE
TELEVISION
IN

FRONT
OF
US.
'I'VE
NEVER
SPOKEN
TO
AN
IIITIAN
BEFORE,'
SHE
SAID
AFTER
SOME
TIME.
'YOU
ARE
NOT
MISSING
MUCH,'
I
SAID.
SHE
SHIFTED
IN
HER
SEAT.
HER
CLOTHES
BAG
FELL
DOWN.
SHE
LIFTED
IT
BACK
UP.
'SORRY,
I
GET
NERVOUS
IN
FRONT
OF

HI-FI
PEOPLE,'
SHE
SAID.
'DON'T
BE,'
I
SAID.
'ENJOY
YOUR
COFFEE.'
'YOU
HAVE
A
GIRLFRIEND,
NO?
SOUTH
INDIAN?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT?'
I
JUMPED
OFF
MY
SEAT.
'WHO
TOLD
YOU?'
'KITTU
TOLD
ME,'
SHE
SAID.
KITTU
WAS
MY
FIRST
COUSIN
AND
SHIPRA
MASI'S
DAUGHTER.
KITTU'S
FATHER
WAS
PAMMI
AUNTY'S
COUSIN.
IN
SOME
SENSE,
DOLLY
WAS
MY
THIRD
OR
FOURTH
COUSIN,
THOUGH
WE

WEREN'T
RELATED
BY
BLOOD.
'KITTU?
HOW
DID
SHE
KNOW?'
'SHIPRA
MASI
MUST
HAVE
TOLD
HER.
AND
YOUR
MOTHER
MUST
HAVE
TOLD
SHIPRA
MASI.'
'AND
NOW
THE
WHOLE
CLAN
KNOWS,'
I
GUESSED.
'SORT
OF.'
'WHAT
ELSE
DO
YOU
KNOW
ABOUT
HER?'
'NOTHING,'
DOLLY
SAID
AS

HER
EYES
SHIFTED
AROUND.
'TELL
ME.'
'OH,
SOME
STUFF.
THAT
SHE
IS
VERY
AGGRESSIVE
AND
CLEVER
AND
HAS
YOU
TOTALLY
UNDER
CONTROL.
BUT
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRLS
ARE
LIKE
THAT,
NO?'
'DO
YOU
KNOW
ANY
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRLS?'
'NO,'
DOLLY
SAID
AS
SHE
TWIRLED
HER

STRAW.
'SORRY,
I
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
TELL
YOU.
YOU
GUYS
SERIOUS
OR
IS
IT
JUST
TIME-PASS?'
I
TRIED
TO
CURB
MY
ANGER.
'WHAT
ABOUT
YOU?
YOU
HAVE
A
BOYFRIEND?'
'NO,
NO.
NEVER,'
SHE
SWORE.
'NOT
EVEN
TIME-PASS?'
SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME.
I
SMILED
TO

SHOW
FRIENDLINESS.
'JUST
ONE
COLONY
GUY.
DON'T
TELL
MY
MOM,
PLEASE.
OR
YOUR
MOTHER,
OR
EVEN
KITTU.'
'I
WON.'
'HE
SENT
ME
A
TEDDY
BEAR
ON
VALENTINE'S
DAY.'
'CUTE,'
I
SAID.
'HAVE
YOU
KISSED
ANYONE?'
SHE
ASKED.
'LIKE
THIS
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRL.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
THOUGHT
HARD
ABOUT
HOW

I
SHOULD
ANSWER
HER
QUESTION
WITHOUT
SAYING
THE
TRUTH,
THAT

I
LOVED
WITH
ANANYA
IN
ONE
TINY
HOSTEL
ROOM
FOR
TWO
YEARS.

'NO,'
I
SAID.
'OK,
BECAUSE
THIS
GUY
IS
INSISTING

I
KISS
HIM.
BUT
I

DON'T
WANT
TO
GET
PREGNANT.'
'HOW
DID
YOU
MEET
HIM?'
'IT'S
A
VERY
SWEET
STORY.
HE
CALLED
A
WRONG
NUMBER
AT
MY
HOME
ONE
DAY.
AND
WE
STARTED
TALKING.
I'VE
ONLY
MET
HIM
ONCE.'
'YOU
ARE
SEEING
SOMEONE
WHO
CALLED
A
WRONG
NUMBER?'
'HE'S

NOT
MY
BOYFRIEND
YET.
BUT
YOU
KNOW
I
HAVE
A
DIDI
IN
LUDHIANA
WHO
MARRIED
A
GUY
WHO
CALLED
HER
AS
A
WRONG
NUMBER.
THEY
HAVE
TWO
KIDS
NOW.'
'WOW,'
I
SAID.
I
WONDERED
IF
I
SHOULD
GULP
MY
COFFEE
DOWN
SO
WE
COULD

LEAVE
SOONER.
'DO
YOU
LIKE
ME?'
DOLLY
ASKED.
'WHAT?'
'YOU
KNOW
WHY
WE
HAVE
BEEN
SENT
HERE,
RIGHT?
FOR
MATCH-MAKING.'
'DOLLY,
I
CAN'T
MARRY
ANYONE
BUT
ANANYA.'
'OH,
THAT'S
HER
NAME.
NICE
NAME.'
'THANKS,
AND
SHE
IS
NICE,
TOO.
AND
I
AM
INVOLVED.
I

AM
SORRY
MY
MOTHER
DRAGGED
ME
INTO
THIS.'
'BUT
YOU
SAID
YOU
HAVEN'T
EVEN
KISSED
HER.'
'I
LIED.
WE
LIVED
TOGETHER
FOR
TWO
YEARS.
BUT
PLEASE
DON'T
TELL
ANYONE
THIS.'
'LIVED
TOGETHER?'
HER
EYEBROWS
PEAKED.
'LIKE
TOGETHER?
YOU
MEAN,
YOU
HAVE
DONE
EVERYTHING?'
'THAT'S

NOT
IMPORTANT.
I
ONLY
TOLD
YOU
SO
YOU
DON'T
FEEL
BAD
ABOUT
MY
LACK
OF
INTEREST
IN
YOU.'
'TWO
YEARS?
SHE
DIDN'T
GET
PREGNANT?'
'DOLLY,
STOP.
THANKS
FOR
THE
COFFEE.'
'I
CAN
MAKE
YOU
FORGET
HER,'
DOLLY
SAID
AS
SHE
OPENED
OUT
HER
WAIST

LENGTH
HAIR.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT?'
'I
KNOW
WHAT
GUYS
WANT.'
'YOU
DON'T.
AND
TRY
TO
STAY
AWAY
FROM
WRONG
NUMBERS.'
WE
LEFT
BARISTA
AND
DROVE
BACK
IN
HER
SPACIOUS
HONDA.
I
REALISED
THIS
HONDA
COULD
BE
MINE
IF
ONLY
I
DIDN'T
BELIEVE
IN
STUPID
THINGS

LIKE
LOVE.
'WHAT
SHOULD
I
TELL
MY
MOTHER?
DOLLY
ASKED.
'SAY
YOU
DIDN'T
LIKE
ME.'
'WHY?
SHE'LL
ASK.'
'IT'S
EASY
TO
SLAM
AN
INITIAN
DOWN.
SAY
I
AM
A
GEEK,
BORING,
LECHEROUS,
WHATEVER,'
I
SAID.
'SHE
DOESN'T
UNDERSTAND
ALL
THAT,'
DOLLY
SAID.
'OK,
TELL

HER
KRISH
HAS
NO
PLANS
TO
CONTINUE
IN
THE
BANK.
HE'LL
QUIT
IN
A
FEW
YEARS
TO
BE
A
WRITER.'
'WRITER?'
'YES.'
'YOU
ARE
TOO
HI-FI
FOR
ME,'
SHE
SAID
AS
WE
REACHED
HER
HOUSE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

14

'I

CAN'T
BELIEVE

YOU

SAID

NO

TO

DOLLY,'

MY

MOTHER

SAID.

'THERE

HAS

TO

BE

A

REASON,

NO?'

SHE

HAD

BROUGHT

UP

THE

TOPIC

FOR

THE

TWENTIETH

TIME

THREE

DAYS

LATER.

MY

FATHER

DIDN'T

COME

HOME

UNTIL

LATE

SO

MY

MOTHER
HAD
TAKEN
THE
RISK
AND
INVITED
HER
SISTER
HOME
FOR
LUNCH.
SOME
INDIAN
MEN
CANNOT
STAND
ANY
HAPPINESS
IN
THEIR
WIVES'
LIVES,
WHICH
INCLUDES
HER
MEETING
HER
SIBLINGS.
'PAMMI
IS
BUYING
ONE
MORE
HOUSE
IN
THE
NEXT
LANE.
SHE
TOLD
ME
IT
IS

FOR
HER
DAUGHTER,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID,
RUBBING
SALT
INTO
MY
MOTHER'S
WOUNDS.
MY
MOTHER
HUNG
HER
HEAD
LOW.
'YOU
ARE
MAKING
THE
SAME
MISTAKE
AGAIN.
YOU
CHOSE
AN
ARMY
PERSON
FOR
YOUR
OWN
MARRIAGE.
YOU
SAID
THEY
ARE
SACRIFICING
PEOPLE.
WE
HAVE
SEEN
HOW

MUCH.
YOU
HAVE
SPENT
YOUR
WHOLE
LIFE
IN
MISERY
AND
POVERTY.'
MY
MOTHER
NODDED
AS
SHE
ACCEPTED
HER
ELDER
SISTER'S
OBSERVATION.
SHIPRA
MASI
HAD
MARRIED
RICH.
HER
HUSBAND,
A
SANITARY-FITTINGS
BUSINESSMAN,
HAD
STRUCK
GOLD
BUILDING
TOILETS.
MY
MOTHER
HAD
VALUED
STUPID
THINGS
LIKE
VIRTUE,

EDUCATION
AND
NATURE
OF
PROFESSION,
AND
SUFFERED.
AND
ACCORDING
TO
SHIPRA
MASI,
I
PLANNED
TO
DO
THE
SAME.
'HOW
MUCH
WILL
THAT
MADRASIN
EARN?'
SHIPRA
MASI
INQUIRED.
'DOLLY
WOULD
HAVE
FILLED
YOUR
HOUSE.
WHEN
WAS
THE
LAST
TIME
YOU
BOUGHT
ANYTHING
NEW?
LOOK,
EVEN

YOUR
DINING
TABLE
SHAKES.’
SHIPRA
MASI
BANGED
ON
THE
DINING
TABLE
AND
ITS
LEGS
WOBBLED.

I
PRESSED
THE
TOP
WITH
MY
PALM
TO
NEUTRALIZE
HER
JERKS.

‘I
SAY,
MEET
PAMMI
ONCE
AGAIN
AND
CLOSE
IT,’
SHIPRA
MASI
SUGGESTED.
‘WHAT
ARE
YOU
THINKING?’
SHE
SAID

AFTER
A
MINUTE.
'DO
YOU
KNOW
PAMMI
BOUGHT
THE
PHONE,
THE
ONE
YOU
CAN
WALK
AROUND
WITH
EVERYWHERE?'
'CORDLESS....'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'NOT
CORDLESS,
THE
NEW
COSTING
TWENTY
THOUSAND
RUPEES.
YOU
CAN
TAKE
IT
ALL
OVER
DELHI.
PASS
ME
THE
PICKLE,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.

SHE
ATE
UP
FAST
TO
CATCH
UP
THE
LOST
TIME
SHE
SPENT
ON
HER
MONOLOGUE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
CELL-PHONES
HAD
RECENTLY
ARRIVED
IN
INDIA.
A
MINUTE'S
TALKTIME
COST
MORE
THAN
A
LITRE
OF
PETROL.
NEEDLESS
TO
SAY,
IT
WAS
THE
NEWEST
PUNJABI
FLAUNT
TOY
IN
DELHI.
'AND
WHAT
IS
THIS
WRITER
THING?
DOLLY
SAID
YOU
WILL
LEAVE
THE
BANK

TO
BE
A
WRITER
ONE
DAY.'
'WHAT?'
MY
MOTHER
GASPED.
'IN
TIME,
AFTER
I
HAVE
SAVED
SOME
MONEY,'
I
SAID
AND
PICKED
UP
MY
PLATE
TO
GO
TO
THE
KITCHEN.
'THIS
IS
WHAT
HAPPENS
IF
YOU
EDUCATE
CHILDREN
TOO
MUCH,'
MY
MASI
SAID.
'I

HAVE
NO
IDEA
OF
HIM
BECOMING
A
WRITER.
WHEN
DID
THIS
START?’
MY
MOTHER
TURNED
TO
ME
AS
I
RETURNED
FROM
THE
KITCHEN.
‘THE
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRL
MUST
HAVE
TOLD
HIM.
THEY
LOVE
BOOKS,’
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
I
BANGED
MY
FIST
ON
THE
TABLE.

THE
LEGS
WOBBLED.
MAYBE
WE
DID
NEED
TO
CHANGE
IT.
'NOBODY
ASKED
ME
TO
BE
A
WRITER.
ANYWAY,
IT
IS
NONE
OF
YOUR
BUSINESS,
SHIPRA
MASI.'
'LOOK
AT
HIM,
THESE
BLACK
PEOPLE
HAVE
DONE
THEIR
BLACK
MAGIC,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
'DON'T
BE
FOOLISH,
KAVITA,

TELL
PAMMI
HE
WILL
REMAIN
IN
CITIBANK
AND
MAKE
A
LOT
OF
MONEY.
GET
HIS
PRICE
PROPERLY.'
I
GLARED
AT
EVERYONE
AT
THE
TABLE,
WENT
TO
THE
LIVING-ROOM
SOFA
AND
PICKED
UP
THE
NEWSPAPER.
THE
MATRIMONIAL
PAGE
OPENED
OUT.
I
THREW
IT
IN
DISGUST.

'LET'S
LOOK
AT
SOME
EDUCATED
GIRLS.
YOU
WANT
TO
SEE
EDUCATED
GIRLS?'
MY
MOTHER
THREW
A
PACIFIER
AT
ME.
'I
HAVE
AN
EDUCATED
GIRL.
I
LIKE
HER.
SHE
HAS
A
JOB,
SHE
IS
PRETTY,
DECENT,
HARD-
WORKING
AND
HAS
A
LOT
OF
INTEGRITY.
WHAT

IS
YOUR
PROBLEM?’
‘SON,’
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID,
HER
VOICE
SOFT
FOR
RECONCILIATION,
‘THAT
IS
ALL
FINE.
BUT
HOW
CAN
WE
MARRY
MADRASIS?
TOMORROW
YOUR
COUSINS
WILL
WANT
TO
MARRY
A
GUJARATI.’
‘OR
ASSAMESE?’
MY
MOTHER
ADDED.
‘MY
GOD!’
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
‘SO
WHAT?
AREN’T

THEY
ALL
INDIANS?
CAN'T
THEY
BE
GOOD
HUMAN
BEINGS?'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
SHIPRA
MASI
TURNED
TO
MY
MOTHER.
'YOUR
SON
IS
GONE.
I
AM
SORRY,
BUT
THIS
BOY
BELONGS
TO
JAYALALITHA
NOW.'
THE
BELL
RANG
TWICE.
PANIC
SPREAD
IN
THE
HOUSE
AS
MY
FATHER
HAD
ARRIVED
EARLIER
THAN
USUAL.
I
NEVER
WELCOME
MY

FATHER
HOME.
HOWEVER,
I
WAS
HAPPY
AS
IT
MEANT
SHIPRA
MASI
WOULD
LEAVE
NOW.
'HELLO
JIJA-JI,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
AS
MY
FATHER
ENTERED
THE
HOUSE.
MY
FATHER
DIDN'T
ANSWER.
HE
PICKED
UP
THE
NEWSPAPER
THROWN
ON
THE
FLOOR
AND
FOLDED
IT.
'I
SAID
HELLO

JIIA-JI,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
AND
SMILED.
SHE
DIDN'T
GIVE
UP
EASILY.
'I
LIKE
YOUR
GOODBYE
MORE
THAN
HELLO,'
MY
FATHER
REPLIED.
NO
ONE
CAN
BEAT
HIM
IN
THE
ASSHOLE
STAKES.
'MY
SISTER
HAS
INVITED
ME,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
'USELESS
PEOPLE
INVITE
USELESS
PEOPLE,'
MY

FATHER
SAID.
SHIPRA
MASI
TURNED
TO
MY
MOTHER.
'I
DON'T
COME
HERE
TO
GET
INSULTED.
ONLY
YOU
CAN
BEAR
HIM.
THE
WORST
DECISION
OF
YOUR
LIFE,'
SHIPRA
MASI
MUMBLED
AS
SHE
PACKED
HER
HANDBAG
TO
LEAVE.
'I
WOULD
APPRECIATE
IT
IF
YOU
DON'T
INTERFERE

IN
OUR
FAMILY
MATTERS,'
MY
FATHER
SAID
AND
GAVE
HER
A
BROWN
BAG.
IT
WAS
MITHAI
SHIPRA
MASI
HAD
BROUGHT
FOR
US.
THEY
EXCHANGED
GLARES.
'TAKE
IT
OR
I
WILL
THROW
IT
IN
THE
DUSTBIN,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
I
STOOD
UP
TO
ARGUE.
MY

MOTHER
SIGNALLED
ME
TO
BACK
OFF.
SHIPRA
MASI
REACHED
THE
MAIN
DOOR.
I
CAME
WITH
HER
TO
SHUT
IT.
I
TOUCHED
HER
FEET,
MORE
OUT
OF
RITUAL
THAN
RESPECT.
'SON,
NOW
DON'T
MAKE
FOOLISH
DECISIONS
LIKE
YOUR
MOTHER.
MARRY
A
GOOD
PUNJABI
GIRL
BEFORE

THEY
FIND
OUT
ABOUT
YOUR
FATHER.
DOLLY
IS
GOOD.'
MY
FATHER'S
EARS
ARE
AS
SHARP
AS
HIS
TONGUE.
'WHAT
IS
GOING
ON?
WHO
IS
DOLLY?'
MY
FATHER
SHOUTED.
SHIPRA
MASI
SHUT
THE
DOOR
AND
LEFT.
NOBODY
ANSWERED.
'ARE
YOU
SEEING
GIRLS?'
MY
FATHER
DEMANDED

OF
MY
MOTHER.
MY
MOTHER
KEPT
QUIET.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'DID
YOU
SEE
A
GIRL?'
'YES,'
I
SAID.
I
WAS
KIND
OF
GLAD
I
DID,
JUST
TO
PISS
HIM
OFF.
'I
WILL.....'
HE
SCREAMED
AT
MY
MOTHER,
LIFTING
HIS
HAND.
'DON'T
EVEN
FUCKING
THINK
ABOUT
IT!'
I
CAME
CLOSE
TO
HIM.

'IN
THIS
HOUSE,
I
MAKE
THE
DECISIONS,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
HE
PICKED
UP
A
CRYSTAL
GLASS
AND
SMASHED
IT
ON
THE
FLOOR.
THE
VIOLENCE
INTENDED
AT
MY
MOTHER
HAD
TO
COME
OUT
SOMEHOW.
'YOU
SURE
SEEM
MATURE
ENOUGH
TO
TAKE
THEM,'
I
SAID
AND

MOVED
TOWARDS
KITCHEN.
'DON'T
WALK
BAREFOOT,'
MY
MOTHER
CALLED
OUT.
SHE
BENT
TO
PICK
UP
THE
SPLINTERED
SHARDS.
ANGER
SEETHED
WITHIN
ME.
NOT
ONLY
AT
MY
FATHER
BUT
ALSO
MY
MOTHER;
HOW
COULD
SHE
LET
HIM
GET
AWAY
WITH
THIS
AND
START
CLEANING
UP

CALMLY?

'I
DON'T
KNOW
WHY

I
COME
TO
THIS
HOUSE,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.

'I
WAS
THINKING
THE
SAME
THING,'

I
SAID.
'BASTARD,
MIND
IT!'

HE
SHOUTED
AT
ME
LIKE
HE
DID
AT
HIS
ARMY
JAWANS
TEN
YEARS
AGO.

'KRISH,
GO
TO
THE
OTHER
ROOM,'

MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'HE
CAN'T
BE
MY
SON.
NOBODY
TALKS
TO
THEIR
FATHER
LIKE
THIS.'
'AND
NO
FATHER
BEHAVES
LIKE
THIS,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
PUSHED
ME
TOWARDS
THE
BEDROOM.
MY
FATHER
LOOKED
AROUND
FOR
NEW
THINGS
TO
SHOUT
AT
OR
BREAK.
HE
COULDN'T

FIND
MUCH.
HE
TURNED
AROUND
AND
WALKED
OUT.
THE
LOUD
SOUND
OF
THE
DOOR
BANGING
SHUT
SENT
A
SIGH
OF
RELIEF
THROUGH
THE
WHOLE
HOUSE.
MY
MOTHER
CAME
TO
MY
ROOM
AFTER
CLEANING
UP
THE
GLASS
IN
THE
LIVING
AREA.
SHE
CAME
AND
SAT

NEXT
TO
ME
ON
THE
BED.
I
DIDN'T
LOOK
AT
HER.
SHE
HELD
MY
CHIN
AND
TURNED
MY
FACE
TOWARDS
HER.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
LET
HIM
DO
THIS,
SO
HE
DOES
IT.
WHY
DID
YOU
HAVE
TO
START
CLEANING
UP?'
I
SULKED.
'BECAUSE
HE'LL
BREAK
THE
OTHER
GLASSES,
TOO.
AND
THEN
WE
WILL
HAVE
NO
MORE
GLASSES
LEFT
FOR
GUESTS,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'DON'T

WORRY.

I

CAN
MANAGE
HIM.'

I

LOOKED
AT
MY
MOTHER,
A
TEAR
ROLLED
DOWN
HER
EYE.

I

FLT
MY
EYES
TURN
WET,
TOO.
'YOU
HAVE
TO
LEAVE
HIM,'

I

SAID
AFTER
WE
COMPOSED
OURSELVES.

'IT'S
NOT
THAT
SIMPLE,'
SHE
SAID.

'I

WILL
EARN
NOW,'

I
SAID.
'I
AM
FINE.
NINETY
PERCENT
OF
THE
TIME
HE
IS
NOT
EVEN
HERE.
HE
GOES
TO
HIS
ARMY
MESS,
HE
VISITS
HIS
PARTNERS
WITH
WHOM
HE
TRIES
HIS
HAREBRAINED
BUSINESS
SCHEMES.'
'WHAT?
LIKE
THAT
SECURITY
AGENCY?'
I
SCOFFED.
'YES,
BUT
HE
PICKS

UP
FIGHTS
WITH
CUSTOMERS
AT
THE
FIRST
MEETING.
DOESN'T
EXACTLY
MAKE
THEM
FEEL
SAFE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
I
LAUGHED.
'I
CAN
HANDLE
HIM.
IT
IS
YOU
WHO
GETS
ANGRY
AND
FIGHTS
WITH
HIM,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'HE
STARTS
IT.
WHAT
WAS
THE
NEED
TO

INSULT
SHIPRA
MASI?’
‘HE
WON’T
CHANGE.
SHIPRA
IS
USED
TO
HIM.
I
WORRY
HOW
YOU
WILL
STAY
WITH
HIM
WHEN
YOU
WORK
IN
DELHI.
MAYBE
YOU
SHOULD
TAKE
THE
COMPANY
ACCOMMODATION.’
‘OR
MAYBE
I
SHOULD
NOT
BE
IN
DELHI.’
‘WHAT
ARE
YOU
SAYING?’
‘I

CAN'T
STAND
HIM.'

'WHERE
ARE
YOU
PLANNING
TO
GO?'

'I
DON'T
KNOW,
MOM.
I
CAN
ONLY
GIVE
A
PREFERENCE
TO
CITIBANK.
IT'S
NO
GUARANTEE.
PLUS,
YOU
GET
POSTED
OUT
AFTER
TWO
YEARS.'

'YOU
CHOSE
DELHI,
NO?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
DIDN'T
ANSWER.
SOMEHOW
THE
THOUGHT
OF
BEING
IN
DELHI
AND
SEEING
DITZY
PUNJABI
GIRLS
BY
DAY
AND
DAD
AT
NIGHT
DIDN'T
SEEM
TERRIBLY
EXCITING.
'YOU
COME
WITH
ME
WHEREVER
I
GO,'
I
SAID.
'WHERE?
I
CAN'T
LEAVE
DELHI.
ALL
MY

RELATIVES
ARE
HERE.
YOU
WILL
BE
IN
OFFICE
ALL
DAY.
WHAT
WILL
I
DO
IN
A
NEW
CITY?’
;I
WANT
TO
GO
TO
CHENNAI,’
I
SAID.
‘OH
GOD!’
MY
MOTHER’S
MELLOW
MOOD
SHIFTED
GEARS
TO
OVERDRIVE.
SHE
GOT
UP
FROM
THE
BED.
‘I
FIND

THIS
HARDER
TO
DEAL
WITH
THAN
YOUR
FATHER.
ARE
YOU
MAD?’
‘NO,
I
LIKE
ANANYA.
I
WANT
TO
GIVE
OUR
RELATIONSHIP
A
SHOT.’
‘YOU’LL
BECOME
A
MADRASI?’
‘I
AM
NOT
BECOMING.
I’M
ONLY
GOING
THERE
TO
LIVE.
AND
CITIBANK
TRANSFERS
YOU
IN
TWO
YEARS.’

'I
SHOULD
MEET
AN
ASTROLOGER.

I
DON'T
KNOW
WHAT
PHASE
YOU
ARE
GOING
THROUGH.'

'THERE
IS
NO
PHASE.

I
LOVE
SOMEONE.'

'LOVE
IS
NOTHING,
SON,'

MY
MOTHER
PATTED
MY
CHEEK
AND
LEFT
THE
ROOM.

I
DIDN'T
SUBMIT
THE
CITIBANK
FORM
UNTIL
THE
LAST
DATE.

I
KEPT
TAKING
MY
PEN
TO
THE
'LOCATION
PREFERENCE'
QUESTION.

IT
HAD
ASKED
FOR
THREE
CHOICES
IN
ORDER.

I
COULDN'T
FILL
IT.

'YOU'VE
SENT
YOUR
FORM?'
ANANYA
ASKED
ON
THE
PHONE.

'I
WILL.
ALMOST
READY,'

I
SAID
'ARE
YOU
CRAZY?

IT
IS
THE
LAST

DAY.
YOU
PUT
CHENNAI,
RIGHT?’
‘YEAH,’
I
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP.
I
GAVE
ONE
FINAL
GLANCE
AT
THE
FORM.
I
LOOKED
AT
GOD
ABOVE
AND
ASKED
HIM
TO
DECIDE
MY
LOVE-LIFE.
I
FILLED
UP
THE
FORM:

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

LOCATION

PREFERENCE:

1.

CHENNAI

OR

DELHI

(EQUAL

PREFERENCE)

2.

—

3.

—

I

SEALED

THE

FORM

AND

DROPPED

IT

OFF

AT

THE

BANK

BRANCH.

IN

MY

BED

I

OPENED

ANANYA'S

LETTER

FROM

LAST

WEEK.

I

READ

IT

EVERY

NIGHT

BEFORE

GOING

TO
BED.
HELLO
MY
PUNJABI
HUNK,
MISS
ME?
I
DO.
I
MISS
OUR
CUDDLES,
I
MISS
OUR
WALKS
IN
CAMPUS,
I
MISS
STUDYING
TOGETHER
AND
THEN
GOING
FOR
MIDNIGHT
CHAI,
I
MISS
RUNNING
TO
MY
DORM
EVERY
MORNING
TO
BRUSH
MY
TEETH,
I
MISS

EATING
PAO-BHAJI
ON
THE
CHAR
RASTA
WITH
YOU,
I
MISS
PLAYING
FOOTSIE
IN
THE
LIBRARY,
I
MISS
THE
GLANCES
WE
STOLE
IN
THE
CLASS,
I
MISS
MY
BAD
GRADES
AND
THE
TEARS
AFTERWARDS
THAT
YOU
WIPED,
I
MISS
HOW
YOU
USED
TO
WATCH
ME

PUT
EYE-LINER,
I
MISS.....OH,
YOU
GET
THE
DRIFT,
I
MISS
YOU
LIKE
HELL.
MEANWHILE,
I
AM
FINE
IN
CHENNAI.
MY
MOTHER
IS
AT
HER
NEUROTIC
BEST,
MY
FATHER
IS
QUIET
AS
USUAL
AND
MY
BROTHER
ALWAYS
HAS
A
BOOK
THAT
SAYS
PHYSICS,
CHEMISTRY
OR

MATHS
ON
THE
COVER.
IN
OTHER
WORDS,
THINGS
ARE
NORMAL.
I
MENTIONED
YOU
AGAIN
TO
MY
MOTHER.
SHE
CALLED
A
PRIEST
HOME
WHO
GAVE
ME
A
PENDANT
TO
MAKE
ME
FORGER
YOU.
WOW,
I
NEVER
THOUGHT
THEY'D
REACT
TO
YOU
LIKE
THIS.
WELL,
IT

IS
GOING
TO
TAKE
MORE
THAN
A
PENDANT
TO
FORGET
YOU,
BUT
FOR
GOOD
MEASURE
I
TOSSED
IT
INTO
THE
BAY
OF
BENGAL
ON
MARINA
BEACH.
I
HAVEN'T
MENTIONED
YOU
SINCE,
BECAUSE
I
KNOW
YOU
WILL
COME
TO
CHENNAI
AND
CHARM
THEM
YOURSELF

—

JUST
AS
YOU
CHARMED
ME.
BYE,
MY
LOVE,
ANANYA.
PS:
OH
DID
I
MENTION,
I
MISS
THE
SEX
TOO.
I
READ
THE
LETTER
TEN
TIMES.
I
READ
THE
LAST
SENTENCE
A
HUNDRED
TIMES.
I
WANTED
TO
BE
WITH
HER
RIGHT
THAT
MOMENT.
I
REALISED

I
COULD
HAVE
WRITTEN
'CHENNAI'
IN
THE
FORM
BUT
I
HAD
PLAYED
ROULETTE
WITH
MY
LOVE-LIFE
DUE
TO
SOME
VAGUE
SENSE
OF
RESPONSIBILITY
AND
GUILT
TOWARDS
HOME.
I
WONDERED
IF
CITI
WOULD
NEED
MORE
PEOPLE
IN
DELHI
AS
THIS
IS
WHERE
ALL
THE
MONEY

IS.
AFTER
ALL,
A
PUNJABI
IS
FAR
MORE
LIKELY
TO

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WANT
FOREIGN
BANK
ACCOUNTS
THAN
A
TAMILIAN.
AND
I
AM
A
PUNJABI,
SO
THEY
WOULD
GIVE
ME
DELHI.
SOMETHING
YELPED
INSIDE
ME.
I
READ
THE
LETTER
AGAIN
AND
AGAIN
UNTIL
I
FELL
ASLEEP.
ONE
WEEK
LATER,
I
RECEIVED
A
CALL
AT

HOME.
MOTHER
PICKED
IT
UP
AND
SAID
IT
WAS
FROM
A
GUY
WHO
SOUNDED
LIKE
A
GIRL.
'HELLO?'
I
SAID.
'HI
KRISH,
IT'S
DEVESH
FROM
CITI
HR.'
'OH,
HI
DEVESH.
HOW
ARE
YOU?'
'GOOD,
I
JUST
WANTED
TO
GIVE
YOU
YOUR
JOINING
DATE
AND

LOCATION.'

MY

HEART

STARTED

TO

BEAT

FAST.

'YES,'

I

SAID,

EXCITED

AND

NERVOUS.

'SO

YOU

START

ON

JUNE

1.'

'OK.'

'AND

WE

ARE

PLACING

YOU

IN

CHENNAI.'

IMAGINARY

FIREWORKS

EXPLODED

ALL

OVER

THE

DELHI

SKY.

I

FELT

REAL

LOVE

FOR

DEVESH,

THE

HR

DEPARTMENT

AND
CITIBANK
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME
IN
MY
LIFE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ACT
3:
CHENNAI

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
15
MY
FLIGHT
LANDED
IN
CHENNAI
AT
7
P.M.
WE
HAD
A
SIX-HOUR
DELAY
IN
DELHI
BECAUSE
A
PSYCHO
CALLED
THE
AIRPORT
AND
SAID
THE
PLANE
HAD
A
BOMB.
MY
BAG
TOOK
ANOTHER
HOUR
TO
ARRIVE
ON
THE
CONVEYOR
BELT.
AS

I
WAITED,
I
LOOKED
AT
THE
PEOPLE
AROUND
ME.
THE
FIRST
THING
I
NOTICED,
EXCUSE
MY
SHALLOWNESS
WAS
THAT
ALMOST
NINETY
PERCENT
OF
THE
PEOPLE
WERE
DARK
COMPLEXIONED.
OF
THESE
NINETY
PERCENT,
EIGHTY
PERCENT
HAD
DABBED
TALCUM
THAT
GAVE
THEM
A
GREY
SKIN
TONE.

I
UNDERSTOOD
WHY
FAIR
&
LOVELY
WAS
INVENTED.

I
COULDN'T
UNDERSTAND
WHY
PEOPLE
WANTED
TO
BE
FAIR
SO
BAD.
MOST
WOMEN
AT
THE
CONVEYOR
BELT
LOOKED
LIKE
ANANYA'S
MOTHER;

I
COULDN'T
TELL
ONE
FROM
THE
OTHER.
THEY
ALL
WORE
TONES
OF
GOLD,
BUT
SOMEHOW

IT
LOOKED
MORE
UNDERSTATED
THAN
PAMMI
AUNTY'S
NECKLACES
THAT
HAD
PRECIOUS
STONES
AND
PEARLS
HANGING
FROM
THEM
LIKE
SHAPELESS
DRY
FRUITS.

I
CAME
OUT
OF
THE
AIRPORT.

I
HAD
TO
FIND
AN
AUTO
TO
GO
TO
MY
CHUMMERY.

I
FUMBLLED
THROUGH
MY
POCKETS
TO

FIND
THE
SLIP
OF
PAPER
WITH
MY
NEW
ADDRESS.

I
COULDN'T
FIND
THEM
IN
MY
JEANS
AND
ALMOST
PANICKED.

I
DIDN'T
KNOW
ANY
PLACE
IN
CHENNAI
EXCEPT
T.
NAGAR.
AND

I
KNEW
T.
NAGAR
AS

I
TOOK
BRILLIANT
TUTORIALS
ONCE
UPON
A
TIME.
SOMEHOW,

I
DIDN'T
THINK
THEY'D
SHELTER
ONE
OF
THEIR
LAKH
OF
STUDENTS
FROM
EIGHT
YEARS
AGO.

I
OPENED
MY
WALLET
AND
FOUND
MY
ADDRESS.

I
HEAVED
A
SIGH
OF
RELIEF.

I
CAME
TO
THE
AUTO
STAND.
FOUR
DRIVERS
ARGUED
WITH
EACH
OTHER
OVER
THE
NEXT

PASSENGER.

'ENGA?'

ONE

DRIVER

PUSHED

BACK

THREE

DRIVERS

AND

ASKED

ME.

'ENGA

HOTEL?'

'NO

HOTEL,'

I

SAID

AND

TOOK

OUT

MY

WALLET.

I

OPENED

IT

AND

THE

DRIVERS

SAW

THE

TEN

HUNDRED-RUPEE

NOTES

MY

MOTHER

HAD

GIVEN

ME

BEFORE

LEAVING

DELHI.

HE

SMACKED

HIS

LIPS.

I
PULLED
OUT
THE
SLIP
WITH
THE
ADDRESS.
'ENGLISH
ILLA,'
HE
SAID.

I
LOOKED
AROUND.
NO
ONE
PROFICIENT
IN
ENGLISH
SEEMED
VISIBLE.

I
READ
THE
ADDRESS.
'NUNG-BA-KA-MA-MA?'

I
SAID.
'NUNGAMBAKKAM?'
THE
DRIVER
LAUGHED
AS
IF
IT
WAS
THE
EASIEST
WORD
TO
SAY
IN

THE
WORLD.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YEAH,'
I
SAID
AND
REMEMBERED
A
LANDMARK
DEVESH
HAD
TOLD
ME.
'NEAR
LOYOLA
COLLEGE.
YOU
KNOW
LOYOLA
COLLEGE.'
'SERI,
SERI,'
THE
DRIVER
SAID.
MY
STAY
WITH
ANANYA
HAD
TOLD
ME
THAT
'SERI'
MEANT
AN
AMIABLE
TAMILIAN.
I
LOADED
THE
LUGGAGE.
'METER?'

HE
LAUGHED
AGAIN
AS
IF
I
HAD
MADE
A
BAWDY
JOKE.
'WHAT?'
I
TAPPED
THE
METER.
'METER
ILLA,'
THE
DRIVER
SAID
LOUDLY,
HIS
PERSONALITY
TAKING
ON
A
MORE
AGGRESSIVE
FORM
AS
HE
LEFT
THE
AIRPORT.
'HOW
MUCH?'
I
ASKED.
'EDHUVUM,'
HE
SAID.
'I
DON'T

UNDERSTAND.

STOP,
HOW
MUCH?’

HE
DIDN’T
STOP
OR
ANSWER.

I
TAPPED
HIS
SHOULDER.

HE
LOOKED
BACK.

I
PLAYED
DUMB
CHARADE
WITH
HIM,
ACTING
OUT
‘HOW
MUCH
MONEY,
DUDE?’

HE
CONTINUED
TO
DRIVE.

AFTER
TEN
SECONDS

HE
RAISED
HIS
RIGHT
PALM
AND
STRETCHED
OUT
HIS

FIVE
FINGERS
WIDE.
'FIVE
WHAT?'
HE
FLASHED
HIS
FINGERS
AGAIN.
'FIFTY?'
HE
NODDED.
'OK,'
I
SAID.
HE
UNDERSTOOD
THIS
WORD.
'VOKAY,'
HE
SAID
AND
EXTENDED
HIS
HAND
FOR
A
HANDSHAKE.
I
SHOOK
HIS
HAND.
HE
LAUGHED
AND
ZOOMED
OFF
INTO
THE
CHENNAI
SUNSET.
I

SAW
THE
CITY.
IT
HAD
THE
USUAL
INDIAN
ELEMENTS
LIKE
AUTOS,
PACKED
PUBLIC
BUSES,
HASSLED
TRAFFIC
COPS
AND
TINY
SHOPS
THAT
SOLD
GROCERIES,
FRUITS,
UTENSILS,
CLOTHES
OR
NOVELTY
ITEMS.
HOWEVER,
IT
DID
FEEL
DIFFERENT.
FIRST,
THE
SIGN
IN
EVERY
SHOP
WAS
IN
TAMIL.
THE

TAMIL
FONT
RESEMBLES
THOSE
OPTICAL
ILLUSION
PUZZLES
THAT
GIVE
YOU
A
HEADACHE
IF
YOU
STARE
AT
THEM
LONG
ENOUGH.
TAMIL
WOMEN,
ALL
OF
THEM,
WEAR
FLOWERS
IN
THEIR
HAIR.
TAMIL
MEN
DON'T
BELIEVE
IN
PANTS
AND
WEAR
LUNGIS
EVEN
IN
SHOPPING
DISTRICTS.
THE
CITY

IS
FILLED
WITH
FILM
POSTERS.
THE
HEROES'
PICTURES
MAKE

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
YOU
FEEL
EVEN
YOUR
UNCLES
CAN
BE
MOVIE
STARS.
THE
HEROES
ARE
FAT,
BALDING,
HAVE
THICK
MOUSTACHES
AND
THE
HEROINE
NEXT
TO
THEM
IS
A
RAVISHING
BEAUTY.
MAYBE
MY
MOTHER
HAD
A
POINT
IN
SAYING
THAT
TAMIL
WOMEN
HAVE
A
THING

FOR
NORTH
INDIAN
MEN.
'HEY,
THAT'S
IIT?'
THE
AUTO
DRIVER
SAID
A
WORD
WHICH
WOULD
HAVE
LED
TO
TROUBLE
IF
HE
HAD
SPOKEN
IT
IN
DELHI.
I
LOOKED
AT
THE
CAMPUS
WALL
THAT
LASTED
FOR
OVER
A
KILOMETRE.
THE
DRIVER
RECITED
THE
NAMES
OF

NEIGHBOURHOODS

AS

WE

PASSED

THEM

—

ADYAT,

SAIDAPET,

MAMBALAM

AND

OTHER

UNPRONOUNCEABLE

NAMES

SO

LONG

THEY

WOULDN'T

FIT

ON

AN

ENTIRE

ROW

OF

SCRABBLE.

I

FELT

BAD

FOR

RESIDENTS

OF

THESE

AREAS

AS

THEY'D

WASTE

SO

MUCH

OF

THEIR

TIME

FILLING

THE

ADDRESS

COLUMNS

IN
FORMS.
WE
PASSED
A
GIANT,
FIFTY-FEET-TALL
POSTER
AS
WE
ENTERED
NUNGAMBAKKAM.
THE
DRIVER
STOPPED
THE
AUTO.
HE
CRANED
HIS
NECK
OUT
OF
THE
AUTO
AND
FOLDED
HIS
HANDS.
'WHAT?'
I
GESTURED.
'THALAIVAR,'
HE
SAID,
POINTING
TO
THE
POSTER.
I
LOOKED
OUT.
THE
POSTER

WAS
FOR
A
MOVIE
CALLED
PADAYAPPA.

I
SAW
THE
ACTORS
AND
RECOGNISED
ONLY
ONE.

'RAJNIKANT?'

THE
AUTO
DRIVER
BROKE
INTO

A
HUGE
GRIN.

I
HAD
RECOGNISED
AT
LEAST
ON
LANDMARK
IN
THE
CITY.

HE
DROVE
INTO
THE
LEAFY
LANES
OF
NUNGAMBAKKAM
TILL
WE
REACHED

LOYOLA
COLLEGE.

I

ASKED
A
FEW
LOCAL
RESIDENTS
FOR
CHINAPPA
TOWERS
AND
THEY
POINTED
US
TO
THE
RIGHT
BUILDING.

I

STEPPED
OUT
OF
THE
AUTO
AND
GAVE
THE
DRIVER
A
HUNDRED-RUPEE
NOTE.

I

WONDERED
IF
I
SHOULD
GIVE
HIM
A
TEN-RUPEE
TIP
FOR
HIS

FRIENDLINESS.

‘ANJU,’

THE

DRIVER

SAID

AND

OPENED

HIS

PALM

AGAIN.

I

REMAINED

PUZZLED

AND

REALISED

IT

WHEN

HE

GESTURED

THREE

TIMES.

‘YOU

WANT

FIVE

HUNDRED?

ARE

YOU

MAD?’

‘ILLA

MAD,’

THE

DRIVER

SAID,

BLOCKING

THE

AUTO

TO

PREVENT

ME

FROM

TAKING

OUT

THE

LUGGAGE.

I
LOOKED
AT
THE
DESOLATE
STREET.
IT
WAS
ONLY
NINE
BUT
FELT
LIKE
TWO
IN
THE
MORNING
IN
THE
QUIET
LANE.
TWO
AUTOS
PASSED
US
BY.
MY
DRIVER
STOPPED
THEM.
ONE
OF
THE
AUTOS
HAD
TWO
DRIVERS,
BOTH
SITTING
IN
FRONT.
THE
FOUR
OF

THEM
SPOKE
TO
EACH
OTHER
IN
TAMIL,
THEIR
VOICES
TURNING
LOUDER.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
“FIVE
HUNDRED,’
ONE
DRIVER
WHO
SPOKE
A
BIT
OF
ENGLISH
TURNED
TO
ME.
“NO
FIVE
HUNDRED.
FIFTY,’
I
SAID.
‘AI,’
ANOTHER
DRIVER
SCREAMED.
THE
FOUR
OF
THEM
SURROUNDED
ME
LIKE
BADDIES
FORM
A
LOW-BUDGET
KOLLYWOOD
FILM.
“WHAT?
JUST
GIVE
ME
MY

LUGGAGE
AND
LET
ME
GO,'
I
SAID.
'ILLA
LUGGAGE.
PAYMENT...MAKE...YOU,'
THE
SHAKESPEARE
AMONG
THEM
SPOKE
TO
ME.
THEY
STARTED
MOVING
AROUND
ME
SLOWLY.
I
WONDERED
WHY
ON
EARTH
DIDN'T
I
CHOOSE
TO
WORK
IN
AN
AIR-CONDITIONED
OFFICE
IN
DELHI
WHEN
I
HAD
THE
CHANCE.

'LET'S
GO
TO
THE
POLICE
STATION,'
I
SAID,
MUSTERING
UP
MY
PUNJABI
BLOOD
TO
BE
DEFIANT.
'ILLA
POLICE,'
SCREAMED
MY
DRIVER,
WHO
HAD
SHAKEN
HANDS
WITH
ME
JUST
TWENTY
MINUTES
AGO.
'THIS
CHENNAI...HERE
POLICE
IS
MY
POLICE...THIS
NO
NORTH
INDIA...ILLA
POLICE,
ENNODA
POOLA
COMBUDA,'

THE
ENGLISH-SPEAKING
DRIVER
SAID.
THEIR
WHITE
TEETH
GLISTENED
IN
THE
NIGHT.
ANY
IMPRESSIONS
OF
TAMIL
MEN
BEING
TIMID
(INFLUENCED
BY
ANANYA'S
FATHER)
EVAPORATED
AS
I
FELT
A
DRIVER
TAP
MY
BACK.
'FUCK,'
I
SAID
AS
I
NOTICED
ONE
OF
THE
DRIVERS
TAKE
OUT
SOMETHING

FROM
HIS
POCKET.
LUCKILY,
IT
WASN'T
A
KNIFE
BUT
A
PACK
OF
MATCHES
AND
CIGARETTES.
HE
LIT
ONE
IN
STYLE,
INFLUENCED
BY
TOO
MANY
TAMIL
MOVIES.
I
LOOKED
DOWN
THE
STREET,
FOR
ANYBODY,
ANYONE
WHO
WOULD
GET
ME
OUT
OF
THIS
MESS.
ONE
MAN

CAME
OUT
OF
THE
NEXT
BUILDING.

I
SAW
HIM
AND
COULDN'T
BELIEVE
IT.

HE
HAD
A
TURBAN

—
A
SARDAR-JI
IN
CHENNAI
WAS
AKIN
TO
SPOTTING
A
POLAR
BEAR
IN
DELHI.

HE
HAD
COME
OUT
TO
PLACE
A
COVER
ON
HIS
CAR.
TINGLES
OF

RELIEF
RAN
DOWN
MY
SPINE.
KRISHNA
HAD
COME
TO
SAVE
DRAUPADI.
'UNCLE!'
I
SHOUTED
AS
LOUDLY
AS
I
COULD.
UNCLE
LOOKED
AT
ME.
HE
SAW
ME
SURROUNDED
BY
THE
AUTOS
AND
UNDERSTOOD
THE
SITUATION.
HE
CAME
TOWARDS
US.
THE
DRIVERS
TURNED,
READY
TO
TAKE

HIM
ON
AS
WELL.
'ENNA?'
THE
UNCLE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
DRIVERS
GAVE
THEIR
VERSION
OF
THE
STORY
TO
HIM.
UNCLE
SPOKE
TO
THEM
IN
FLUENT
TAMIL.
IT
IS
FASCINATING
TO
SEE
A
SARDAR-JI
SPEAK
IN
TAMIL.
LIKE
SUN
TV'S
MERGER
WITH
ALPHA
TV.
'WHERE
ARE
YOU
COMING
FROM?'
HE
SAID.

'AIRPORT.'
'AIRPORT
CANNOT
BE
FIVE
HUNDRED
RUPEES.
HUNDRED
MAXIMUM,'
HE
SAID.
THE
FOUR
DRIVERS
STARTED
SPEAKING
SIMULTANEOUSLY
WITH
LOTS
OF
'ILLAS'.
HOWEVER,
THEY
HAD
SOFTENED
A
LITTLE
DUE
TO
UNCLE'S
TAMIL.
AFTER
FIVE
MINUTES,
WE
SETTLED
FOR
A
HUNDRED
BUCKS
AND
DISGUSTED
GLANCES
FROM

THE
DRIVERS.
MY
DRIVER
TOOK
OUT
MY
LUGGAGE
AND
DUMPED
IT
ON
THE
STREET
AS
HE
SPED
OFF.
'THANKS,
UNCLE,'
I
SAID.
'YOU'VE
LIVED
IN
CHENNAI
LONG?'
'TOO
LONG.
PLEASE
DON'T
STAY
AS
LONG
AS
ME,'
UNCLE
SAID
AS
HE
HELPED
ME
WITH
MY

LUGGAGE
TO
THE
LIFT.
'PUNJABI?'
I
NODDED.
'COME
HOME
IF
YOU
NEED
A
DRINK
OR
CHICKEN.
BE
CAREFUL,
YOUR
BUILDING
IS
VEGETARIAN.
NO
ALCOHOL
ALSO.'
'REALLY?'
'YES,
PEOPLE
HERE
ARE
LIKE
THAT.
FOR
THEM,
ANYTHING
FUN
COMES
WITH
GUILT,'
HE
SAID
AS
THE
LIFT

DOORS
SHUT.
I
RANG
THE
CHUMMERY
DOORBELL.
IT
WAS
TEN
O'CLOCK.
A
SLEEPY
GUY
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
THE
APARTMENT
WAS
COMPLETELY
DARK.
'HI,'
I
SAID.
KRISH
FROM
DELHI.
I
AM
IN
CONSUMER
FINANCE.'
'HUH?'
THE
GUY
SAID.
'OH,
YOU
ARE
THAT
GUY.
THE
ONLY

NORTH
INDIAN
TRAINEE
IN
CITIBANK
CHENNAI.
COME
IN,
YOU
ARE
SO
LATE.'
'FLIGHT
DELAY,'
I
SAID
AS
I
CAME
INTO
THE
ROOM.
HE
SWITCHED
ON
THE
DRAWING-ROOM
LIGHT.
'I
AM
RAMANUJAN,
FROM
IIMB,'
HE
SAID.
I
LOOKED
AT
HIM.
EVEN
JUST
OUT
OF
THE

BED,
HIS
HAIR
WAS
OILY
AND
COMBED.
HE
LOOKED
LIKE
SOMEONE
WHO
WOULD
DO
WELL
AT
A
BANK.
WITH
MY
HARRIED
LOOK
AFTER
THE
SCUFFLE
WITH
THE
AUTO
DRIVERS,
I
LOOKED
LIKE
SOMEONE
WHO
COULDN'T
EVEN
OPEN
A
BANK
ACCOUNT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THAT'S
SENDIL'S
ROOM,
AND
THAT'S
APPALINGAM'S.'
HE
POINTED
ME
TO
MY
ROOM.
'ANYTHING
TO
EAT
IN
THE
HOUSE?'
I
SAID.
'I
DON'T
KNOW,'
HE
SAID
AND
OPENED
THE
FRIDGE.
'THERE
IS
SOME
CURD
RICE.'
HE
TOOK
OUT
THE
BOWL.
IT
DIDN'T

LOOK
LIKE
A
DISH.
IT
LOOKED
LIKE
RICE
HAD
ACCIDENTLY
FALLEN
INTO
THE
CURD.
'ANYTHING
ELSE?
ANY
RESTAURANT
OPEN
NEARBY?'
HE
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD
AS
HE
PICKED
UP
TWO
ENVELOPES
AND
PASSED
THEM
TO
ME.
'HERE,
SOME
LETTERS
FOR
YOU.
THE
SERVANT
SAID
A

GIRL
HAD
COME
TO
SEE
YOU.'

I
LOOKED
AT
THE
LETTER.
ONE
WAS
THE
WELCOME
LETTER
FROM
CITIBANK.

THE
SECOND
ENVELOPE
HAD
ANANYA'S
HANDWRITING
ON
IT.

I
LOOKED
AT
THE
CURD
RICE
AGAIN
AND
TRIED
TO
IMAGINE
IT
AS
SOMETHING
YUMMY
BUT
I
COULDN'T

GATHER
THE
COURAGE
TO
EAT
IT.
I
CAME
TO
MY
ROOM
AND
LAY
DOWN
ON
THE
BED.
RAMANUJAN
SHUT
THE
LIGHTS
IN
THE
REST
OF
THE
HOUSE
AND
WENT
BACK
TO
SLEEP.
'SHOULD
WE
WAKE
YOU
UP?'
HE
HAD
ASKED
BEFORE
GOING
TO
HIS

ROOM.
'WHAT
TIME
IS
OFFICE?'
'NINE,
BUT
TRAINEES
ARE
EXPECTED
TO
BE
THERE
BY
EIGHT.
WE
TARGET
SEVEN-THIRTY.
WE
WAKE
UP
AT
FIVE.'
I
THOUGHT
ABOUT
MY
LAST
TWO
MONTHS
IN
DELHI,
WHEN
WAKING
UP
AT
NINE
WAS
AN
EARLY
START.
'IS
THERE
EVEN

DAYLIGHT
AT
FIVE?'
'ALMOST.
WE'LL
WAKE
YOU
UP.
GOOD
NIGHT.'
I
CLOSED
MY
DOOR
AND
OPENED
ANANYA'S
LETTER.
HEY
CHENNAI
BOY,
I
CAME
TO
SEE
YOU,
BUT
YOU
HADN'T
ARRIVED
IN
THE
AFTERNOON
AS
YOU
TOLD
ME.
ANYWAYS,
I
CAN'T
WAIT
ANY
LONGER
AS

MOM
THINKS
I
AM
WITH
FRIENDS
AT
THE
RADHA
SILKS
SHOP.
I
HAVE
TO
BE
BACK.
ANYWAY
THERE
IS
A
BIT
OF
DRAMA
AT
HOME
BUT
I
DON'T
WANT
TO
GET
INTO
THAT
NOW.
DON'T
WORRY,
WE
SHALL
MEET
SOON.
YOUR
OFFICE
IS
IN

ANNA
SALAI,
NOT
FAR
FROM
MINE.
HOWEVER,
HLL
IS
MAKING
ME
TRAVEL
A
LOT
ALL
OVER
THE
STATE.
I
HAVE
TO
SELL
TOMATO
KETCHUP.
HARD,
CONSIDERING
IT
HAS
NO
TAMARIND
OR
COCONUT
IN
IT!

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
I'LL
LEAVE
NOW.
GUESS
WHAT,
I
AM
WEARING
JASMINE
FLOWERS
IN
MY
HAIR
TODAY!
IT
HELPS
TO
HAVE
A
TRADITIONAL
LOOK
IN
THE
INTERIORS.
I
BROKE
A
FEW
PETALS
AND
HAVE
INCLUDED
THEM
IN
THIS
LETTER.
HOPE
THEY
REMIND
YOU
OF

ME.
LOVE
AND
KISSES,
ANANYA.
I
OPENED
THE
FOLDS
OF
THE
LETTER.
JASMINE
PETALS
FELL
INTO
MY
LAP.
THEY
FELT
SOFT
AND
SMELT
WONDERFUL.
IT
WAS
THE
ONLY
THING
ABOUT
THIS
DAY
THAT
MADE
ME
HAPPY.
IT
REMINDED
ME
WHY
I
WAS
HERE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
16
IT
IS
BAD
NEWS
WHEN
YOU
HATE
YOUR
JOB
IN
THE
FIRST
HOUR
OF
THE
FIRST
DAY
OF
OFFICE.
IT
ISN'T
LIKE
CITIBANK
DID
ANYTHING
TO
PISS
ME
OFF.
IN
FACT,
THEY
TRIED
THEIR
BEST
TO
MAKE
ME
FEEL
AT

HOME.
I
ALREADY
HAD
AN
ASSIGNED
CUBICLE
AND
COMPUTER.
MY
FIRST
STINT
INVOLVED
WORKING
IN
A
GROUP
THAT
SERVED
'PRIORITY
BANKING'
CLIENTS,
A
POLITICALLY
CORRECT
TERM
TO
ADDRESS
'STINKING
RICH'
CUSTOMERS.
THERE
IS
LITTLE
A
CUSTOMER
NEEDED
TO
DO
TO
BECOME
PRIORITY
EXCEPT
WAVE

BUNDLES
OF
CASH
AT
US.
PRIORITY
CUSTOMERS
RECEIVED
SPECIAL
SERVICE,
WHICH
INCLUDED
SOFAS
FOR
WAITING
AREAS
INSTEAD
OF
CHAIRS,
FREE
TEA
WHILE
THE
BANK
REPRESENTATIVE
DISCUSSED
NEW
WAYS
TO
NIBBLE...OOPS
SORRY,
INVEST
CLIENTS'
MONEY.
AND
THE
BIGGEST
TOUTED
PERK
WAS
YOU
WOULD
GET
DIRECT

ACCESS
TO
YOUR
CUSTOMER
SERVICE
MANAGERS.
THESE
WERE
SUPPOSED
TO
BE
FINANCIAL
WIZARDS
FROM
THE
TOP
MBA
SCHOOLS
WHO
WOULD
TAKE
YOUR
FINANCIAL
STRATEGY
TO
A
WHOLE
NEW
LEVEL.
YES,
THAT
WOULD
BE
ME.
OF
COURSE,
WE
NEVER
MENTIONED
THAT
YOUR
CUSTOMER
SERVICE
MANAGER

COULD
HATE
HIS
JOB,
DO
IT
ONLY
FOR
THE
MONEY
AND
WOULD
HAVE
COME
TO
THE
CITY
ONLY
BECAUSE
HIS
GIRLFRIEND
WAS
HERE.
I
HAD
TO
SUPERVISE
EIGHT
BANK
REPRESENTATIVES.
THE
BANK
REPRESENTATIVES
WERE
YOUNGER,
TYPICALLY
GRADUATES
OR
MBAS
FROM
NON-BLUE-BLOODED
INSTITUTIONS.
AND
I,

BEING
FROM
AN
IIM
AND
THEREFORE
INJECTED
WITH
A
SENSE
OF
ENTITLEMENT
FOR
LIFE,
WOULD
OBVIOUSLY
BE
ABOVE
THEM.

I
DIDN'T
SPEAK
TAMIL
OR
KNOW
ANYTHING
ABOUT
BANKING,
BUT

I
HAD
TO
PRETEND

I
KNEW
WHAT
I
WAS
DOING.

AT
LEAST
TO
MY
BOSS

BALAKRISHNAN
OR
BALA.
'WELCOME
TO
THE
FAMILY,'
HE
SAID
AS
WE
SHOOK
HANDS.
I
WONDERED
IF
HE
WAS
RELATED
TO
ANANYA.
'FAMILY?'
'THE
CITIBANK
FAMILY.
AND
OF
COURSE,
THE
PRIORITY
BANKING
FAMILY.
YOU
ARE
SO
LUCKY.
NEW
MBAS
WOULD
DIE
TO
GET
A
CHANCE

TO
START
STRAIGHT
IN
THIS
GROUP.'

I
SMILED.

'ARE
YOU
EXCITED,
YOUNG
MAN?'

BALA
ASKED
IN

A
HIGH-PITCHED
VOICE.

'SUPER-EXCITED,'

I
SAID,
WONDERING
IF

THEY'D
LET

ME
LEAVE
EARLY

AS
IT
WAS

MY
FIRST
DAY.

HE
TOOK
ME

TO
THE
PRIORITY
BANKING
AREA.

EIGHT

REPS,
FOUR
GUYS
AND
FOUR
GIRLS
READ
RESEARCH
REPORTS
AND
TIPS
FROM
VARIOUS
DEPARTMENTS
ON
WHAT
THEY
COULD
SEE

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
TODAY.
I
MET
EVERYONE
THOUGH
I
FORGOT
THEIR
SIMILAR
SOUNDING
SOUTH
INDIAN
NAMES
THE
MINUTE
II
HEARD
THEM.
'CUSTOMERS
START
COMING
IN
AT
TEN,
TWO
HOURS
FROM
NOW,'
BALA
SAID.
'AND
THAT
IS
WHEN
THE
BATTLE
BEGINS.
WE
BELIEVE
TRAINEES
LEARN

BEST
BY
FACING
ACTION.
READY
FOR
WAR?’
I
LOOKED
AT
HIM.
I
COULD
TELL
HE
WAS
A
CITIBANK
LIFER.
AT
FORTY,
HE
HAD
PROBABLY
SPENT
TWENTY
YEARS
ALREADY
IN
THE
BANK.
‘READY?
ANY
QUESTIONS,
CHAMP?’
BALA
ASKED
AGAIN.
‘YEAH,
WHAT
EXACTLY
AM
I
SUPPOSED

TO
DO?’
BALA
THREW
ME
THE
FIRST
OF
HIS
MANY
DISAPPOINTED
LOOKS
AT
ME.
HE
ASKED
A
REP
FOR
THE
DAILY
RESEARCH
REPORTS.
‘TWO
THINGS
YOU
NEED
TO
DO,
ACTUALLY
THREE,’
BALA
SAID
AS
HE
TOOK
ME
TO
MY
DESK.
‘ONE,
READ
THESE
REPORTS

EVERYDAY
AND
SEE
IF
YOU
CAN
RECOMMEND
ANY
INVESTMENTS
TO
THE
CLIENTS.
LIKE
LOOK
AT
THIS.'
HE
PULLED
OUT
A
REPORT
FROM
THE
EQUITIES
GROUP.
IT
RECOMMENDED
SHARES
OF
INTERNET
COMPANIES
AS
THEIR
VALUES
HAD
DROPPED
BY
HALF.
'BUT
ISN'T
THE
DOT
COM
BUBBLE

BURSTING?’

I

ASKED.

‘THESE

COMPANIES

WOULD

NEVER

MAKE

MONEY.’

BALA

LOOKED

AT

ME

LIKE

I

HAD

SPOKEN

TO

HIM

IN

PURE

PUNJABI.

‘SEE,

OUR

RESEARCH

HAS

GIVEN

A

BUY

HERE.

THIS

IS

CITIBANK’S

OFFICIAL

RESEARCH,’

BALA

SPOKE

LIKE

HE

WAS

QUOTING

FROM

THE

BIBLE.

OFFICIAL
RESEARCH
WAS
PROBABLY
WRITTEN
BY
HUNG-OVER
MBA
THREE
YEARS
OUT
OF
BUSINESS
SCHOOL.
'FINE,
WHAT
ELSE?'
'THE
SECOND
IMPORTANT
JOB
IS
TO
DEVELOP
A
RELATIONSHIP.
TAMILIANS
LOVE
EDUCATED
PEOPLE.
YOU,
BEING
FROM
IIT
AND
IIM,
MUST
DEVELOP
A
RELATIONSHIP
WITH
THEM.'
I
NODDED.

I
WAS
THE
ENDANGERED
SPECIES
IN
THE
PRIORITY-BANKING
ZOO
THAT
CUSTOMERS
COULD
COME
THROW
BANANAS
AT.
'NOW,
IT
IS
GOING
TO
BE
HARD
FOR
YOU
AS
YOU
ARE...'
BALA
PAUSED
AS
IF
HE
CAME
TO
A
SWEAR
WORD
IN
THE
CONVERSATION.
'PUNJABI?'
'YES,
BUT

CAN
YOU
BEFRIEND
TAMILIANS?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
AM
TRYING
TO.
I
HAVE
TO,'
I
SAID,
WONDERING
WHERE
I
COULD
CALL
ANANYA
APART
FROM
HER
HOME
NUMBER.
IF
ONLY
THESE
DAMN
CELL-PHONE
PRICES
WOULD
DROP
FAST.
'GOOD.
AND
THE
LAST
THING
IS,'
BALA
MOVED
FORWARD
TO
WHISPER,
'THESE

REPS
ARE
QUITE
LAZY.
KEEP
AN
EYE
ON
THEM.
ANYONE
NOT
DOING
THEIR
JOB,
TELL
ME.'
HE
WINKED
AT
ME
AND
STOOD
UP
TO
LEAVE.
'AND
COME
TO
OFFICE
EARLY.'
'I
CAME
AT
SEVEN-THIRTY.
ISN'T
THE
OFFICIAL
TIME
NINE?'
'YES,
BUT
WHEN
I
WAS

YOUR
LEVEL,
I
CAME
AT
SEVEN.
IF
YOU
WANT
TO
BE
LIKE
ME,
WAKE
UP,
SOLDIER,'
BALA
SAID
AND
LAUGHED
AT
HIS
OWN
JOKE.
THE
TAMIL
SENSE
OF
HUMOUR,
IF
THERE
IS
ANY,
IS
REALLY
AN
ACQUIRED
TASTE.
I
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
BE
LIKE

HIM.

I
DIDN'T
EVEN
WANT
TO
BE
HERE.

I
TOOK
A
DEEP
BREATH
AFTER
HE
LEFT
AND
MEDITATED
ON
MY
SALARY
PACKAGE.

YOU
ARE
DOING
IT
FOR
THE
MONEY,

I
TOLD
MYSELF.

FOUR
LAKH
A
YEAR,
THAT
IS
THIRTY-THREE
THOUSAND

A
MONTH,
I
CHANTED

THE
MANTRA
IN
MY
HEAD.
MY
FATHER
HAD
WORKED
IN
THE
ARMY
FOR
THIRTY
YEARS
AND
STILL
NEVER
EARNED
HALF
AS
MUCH.
I
HAD
TO
PUSH
BUBBLE
STOCKS
AND
THE
CASH
WOULD
BE
MINE.
LIFE
ISN'T
SO
BAD,
I
SAID
TO
MYSELF.
'SIR,
CAN

I
GO
TO
THE
TOILET?’
ONE
FEMALE
REP
CAME
TO
ME.
‘WHAT?’
SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME,
WAITING
FOR
PERMISSION.
‘WHAT’S
YOUR
NAME?’
‘SRI.’
‘WHERE
ARE
YOU
FROM?’
‘COIMBATORE,’
SHE
SAID,
ADJUSTING
HER
OVERSIZED
SPECTACLES
WITH
COCKROACH-
COLOURED
BORDERS.
FASHION
IS
NOT
A
CHENNAI
HALLMARK.

'YOU
WENT
TO
COLLEGE?'

'YES
SIR.
COIMBATORE
UNIVERSITY,
DISTINCTION,
SIR.'

'GOOD.
THEN
WHY
ARE
YOU
ASKING
ME
FOR
PERMISSION?'

'JUST
LIKE
THAT,
SIR.'
SHE
SAID.

'NO
ONE
NEEDS
TO
ASK
ME
PERMISSION
FOR
GOING
TO
THE
TOILET,'

I
SAID.
'THANK
YOU,
SIR.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
I
READ
REPORTS
FOR
THE
NEXT
TWO
HOURS.
EACH
ONE
HAD
FINANCIAL
MODELS
DONE
MY
OVERENTHUSIASTIC
MBAS
WHO
WERE
MORE
KEEN
TO
SOLVE
EQUATIONS
THAN
TO
QUESTION
WHAT
THEY
WERE
DOING.
ONE
TABLE
COMPARED
VALUE
OF
INTERNET
COMPANIES
WITH
THE
NUMBER

OF
VISITORS
TO
THE
SITE.
THE
RECOMMENDED
COMPANY
HAD
THE
LOWEST
VALUE
TO
EYEBALL
RATIO,
A
TRENDY
TERM
INVENTED
BY
THE
ANALYST.
HENCE,
BUY!
SCREAMED
THE
REPORT.
OF
COURSE,
THE
ANALYST
NEVER
QUESTIONED
THAT
NONE
OF
THE
SITE
VISITORS
EVER
PAID
ANY
MONEY
TO

THE
INTERNET
COMPANY.
'IT
IS
TRADING
CHEAP
ON
EVERY
MULTIPLE
CONCEIVABLE!'
THE
REPORT
SAID,
COMPLETE
WITH
THE
EXCLAMATION
MARK.
'SIR,
MY
CUSTOMER
IS
HERE.
CAN
I
BRING
THEM
TO
YOU?'
SRI
REQUESTED
WELL
AFTER
HER
RETURN
FROM
THE
TOILET.
'SURE,'
I
SAID.
'SIR,
THIS

IS
MS
SREENIVAS,'
SRI
SAID.
A
FIFTY-YEAR-OLD
LADY
WITH
GOLD
BANGLES
THICKER
THAN
HANDCUFFS
CAME
TO
MY
CUBICLE.
WE
MOVED
TO
THE
SOFA
AREA,
TO
GIVE
A
MORE
PERSONAL,
LIVING
ROOM
FEEL
AS
WE
ROBBED
THE
CUSTOMER.
'YOU
ARE
FROM
IIT?'
SHE
PEERED
AT

ME.
'YES,'
I
SAID
EVEN
AS
I
READIED
MY
PITCH
ABOUT
WHICH
LOSS-MAKING
COMPANY
TO
BUY.
'EVEN
MY
GRANDSON
IS
PREPARING
FOR
IT,'
SHE
SAID.
SHE
HAD
DARK
HAIR,
WITH
OIL
THAT
MADE
IT
SHINE
MORE.
'YOU
DON'T
LOOK
OLD
ENOUGH
TO
HAVE
A

GRANDSON
PREPARING
FOR
IIT,'
I
SAID.
MS
SREENIVAS
SMILED.
SRI
SMILED
BACK
AT
HER.
YES,
WE
HAD
LAID
THE
MOUSETRAP
AND
THE
CHEESE.
WALK
IN,
BABY.
'OH
NO,
I
AM
AN
OLD
LADY.
HE
IS
ONLY
IN
CLASS
SIX
THOUGH.'
'HOW
MUCH
IS
MADAM'S

BALANCE?’

I

ASKED.

‘ONE

CRORE

AND

TWENTY

LAKH,

SIR,’

SRI

SUPPLIED.

I

IMAGINED

THE

NUMBER

IN

MY

HEAD;

I’D

NEED

TO

WORK

IN

THIS

JOB

FOR

THIRTY

YEARS

TO

GET

THERE.

IT

ALMOST

FELT

RIGHT

TO

PART

HER

FROM

HER

MONEY.

‘MADAM,

HAVE

YOU

INVESTED
IN
ANY
STOCKS?
INTERNET
STOCKS
ARE
CHEAP
THESE
DAYS,'
I
SAID.
MS
SREENIVAS
GAVE
ME
A
WORRIED
LOOK.
'STOCKS?
NEVER.
AND
MY
SON
WORKS
IN
AN
INTERNET
COMPANY
ABROAD.
HE
SAID
THEY
MIGHT
CLOSE
DOWN.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THAT'S
USA,
MADAM.
THIS
IS
INDIA,
WE
HAVE
ONE
BILLION
POPULATION,
OR
TWO
BILLION
EYEBALLS.
IMAGINE
THE
POTENTIAL
OF
THE
INTERNET.
AND
WE
HAVE
A
MUTUAL
FUND,
SO
YOU
DON'T
HAVE
TO
INVEST
IN
ANY
ONE
COMPANY.'
WE
CAJOLED
MS
SREENIVAS

FOR
FIVE
MINUTES.
I
THREW
IN
A
LOT
OF
MBA
TERMS
LIKE
STRATEGIC
ADVANTAGE,
BOTTOM-LINE
VS.
TOP
LINE,
TOP
DOWN
VS.
BOTTOM
UP
AND
IT
MADE
ME
SOUND
VERY
INTELLIGENT.
MS
SREENIVAS
AND
SRI
NODDED
AT
WHATEVER
I
SAID.
ULTIMATELY,
MS
SREENIVAS
AGREED
TO

NIBBLE
AT
TOXIC
WASTE.
'LET'S
START
WITH
TEN
LAKH,'
I
SAID
TO
CLOSE
THE
CASE.
'FIVE.
PLEASE,
FIVE,'
MS
SREENIVAS
PLEADED
WITH
US
ON
HOW
TO
USE
HER
OWN
MONEY.
I
SETTLED
AT
FIVE
AND
SRI
WAS
ECSTATIC,
I
HAD
BECOME
THEIR
FAVOURITE
CUSTOMER

SERVICE
MANAGER.
BALA
TOOK
ME
OUT
FOR
LUNCH
AT
SANGEETHA'S,
A
DOSA
RESTAURANT.
'WHAT
DOSAS
DO
YOU
HAVE?'
I
ASKED
THE
WAITER.
'WE
HAVE
EIGHTY-FIVE
KINDS,'
THE
WAITER
POINTED
TO
THE
BOARD.
EVERY
STUFFING
IMAGINABLE
TO
MAN
WAS
AVAILABLE
IN
DOSA
FORM.
'TRY
THE

SPINACH
DOSA.
AND
THE
SWEET
BANANA
DOSA,'
BALA
SAID
AS
HE
SMILED
AT
ME
LIKE
THE
FATHER
I
NEVER
HAD.
'SO,
HOW
DOES
IT
FEEL,
TO
GET
YOUR
FIRST
INVESTMENT?
HEART
PUMPING?'
MY
HEART
DIDN'T
PUMP.
IT
ONLY
ACHED.
I'D
BEEN
IN
CHENNAI
FOR

FIFTEEN
HOURS
AND
HAD
NOT
SPOKEN
TO
ANANYA
YET.

I
WANTED
TO
BUY
A
CELL-PHONE
AS
SOON
AS
POSSIBLE.

WAIT,
I'D
NEED
TWO.

'I
SEE
MYSELF
IN
YOU.

YOU
ARE
LIKE
ME,'

BALA
SAID
AS
HE
DUNKED
HIS
FIRST
PIECE
OF
DOSA
IN
SAMBHAR.

I
HAD
NO
CLUE
HOW
HE
REACHED
THAT
CONCLUSION.

I
HAD
ANANYA'S
HOME
LANDLINE
NUMBER.

BUT,
SHE
DIDN'T
REACH
HOME
UNTIL
SEVEN.

SHE
HAD
A
SALES
FIELD
JOB
SO
NO
FIXED
OFFICE
NUMBER
AS
WELL.

I
REMEMBERED
HOW
WE'D
FINISH
LUNCH
IN
CAMPUS
AND

SNUGGLE
UP
FOR
OUR
AFTERNOON
NAP.
IT
IS
OFFICIAL,
LIFE
AFTER
COLLEGE
SUCKS.
'ISN'T
THIS
FUN?'
BALA
SAID.
'I
GET
A
RUSH
EVERY
TIME
I
COME
TO
THE
BANK.
AND
IT
IS
TWENTY
YEARS.
WOW,
I
STILL
REMEMBER
THE
DAY
MY
BOSS
FIRST
TOOK

ME
OUT
FOR
LUNCH.
HEY,
WHAT
ARE
YOU
THINKING?
STOP
WORK
THOUGHTS
NOW.
IT
IS
LUNCH-TIME.
'OF
COURSE,'
I
SAID
AND
COLLECTED
MYSELF.
'HOW
FAR
IS
HLL
OFFICE
FROM
HERE?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHY?
YOU
HAVE
A
POTENTIAL
CLIENT?'
BALA
ASKED
AS
IF
THE
ONLY
REASON
PEOPLE
EXISTED
WAS
TO
BECOME
PRIORITY
BANKING
CUSTOMERS.
'POSSIBLY,'
I
SAID.
ONE
GOOD
THING
ABOUT
BANKING
IS
THAT
YOU
DON'T
FEEL
BAD
ABOUT
LYING
AT
ALL.
'IT
IS

IN
NUNGAMBAKKAM.
APEX
PLAZA,'
HE
SAID.
THE
WAITER
RELOADED
OUR
SAMBHAR
AND
DELIVERED
THE
BANANA
DOSA.
THE
LATTER
TASTED
LIKE
A
PANCAKE,
AND
I
HAVE
TO
SAY,
WASN'T
BAD
AT
ALL.
'OH,
THAT'S
WHERE
I
AM
STAYING,
RIGHT?'
'YES,
THE
CITI
CHUMMERY.
MY
FIRST

HOME
TOO,'
HE
LEANED
FORWARD
AND
PATTED
MY
BACK.
I
SUPPOSE
I
HAD
A
GOOD
BOSS.
I
SHOULD
HAVE
FELT
HAPPY
BUT
DIDN'T.
I
WONDERED
IF
I
SHOULD
CALL
HLL
FIRST
OR
STRAIGHT
LAND
UP
THERE.
I
CAME
BACK
TO
MY
DESK
IN
THE

AFTERNOON.

I
MET
SOME
CUSTOMERS,
BUT
MOST
OF
THEM
DIDN'T
HAVE
TIME
TO
STAY
LONG.

MS
SREENIVAS
HAD
GIVEN
ME
A
LUCKY
BREAK,
BUT
IT
WASN'T
THAT
EASY
TO
WOO
CONSERVATIVE
TAMILIANS,
AFTER
ALL.
'FIXED
DEPOSIT.

I
LIKE
FIXED
DEPOSIT,'
ONE
CUSTOMER
TOLD
ME

WHEN
I
ASKED
HIM
FOR
HIS
INVESTMENT
PREFERENCES.
AT
THREE
IN
THE
AFTERNOON,
I
HAD
A
CALL.
'IT
IS
FOR
YOU,
SIR,'
SRI
SAID
AS
SHE
TRANSFERRED
THE
LINE
TO
MY
EXTENSION.
'HI,
I'D
LIKE
TO
OPEN
A
PRIORITY
ACCOUNT,
WITH
MY
HOT-SHOT
SEXY

BANKER.'
'ANANYA?'
I
SAID,
MY
VOICE
BURSTING
WITH
HAPPINESS,
'WHERE
ARE
YOU?
WHEN
ARE
WE
MEETING?
SHOULD
I
COME
TO
HLL?
I
AM
SORRY
MY
FLIGHT...'
'EASY,
EASY.
I
AM
IN
KANCHEEPURAM.'
'WHERE'S
THAT?'
'THREE
HOURS
FROM
CHENNAI.
I'LL
HEAD
BACK
SOON.
WHY
DON'T

YOU
COME
HOME
FOR
DINNER?’
‘HOME?
YOUR
HOME?
WITH
YOUR
MOM
AND
DAD?’
‘YES,
WHY
NOT?
YOU
HAVE
TO
KNOW
THEM
ANYWAY.
MOM’S
A
LITTLE
LOW
THESE
DAYS,
BUT
THAT
IS
OK.’
‘WHY
IS
SHE
LOW?
BECAUSE
OF
US?’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'NO,
SHE
FINDS
OTHER
REASONS
TO
BE
MISERABLE.

LUCKILY,
THIS
TIME
IT
HAS
NOTHING
TO
DO
WITH
ME.'

'ANANYA,
LET'S
GO
OUT,
OK?'

'I
CAN'T
TODAY.
MY
AUNT
IS
VISITING
FROM
CANADA.
COME
AT
EIGHT.'

SHE
GAVE
ME
HER
ADDRESS.

I

NOTED
IT
DOWN
AFTER
MAKING
HER
SPELL
IT
THRICE.
'SEE
YOU
IN
FIVE
HOURS,'
SHE
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP.

I
STARED
AT
THE
WATCH,
HOPING
IT
WOULD
MOVE
FASTER.
THE
REPS
LEFT
AT
SIX,
AND
AS
CITI'S
GREAT
CULTURE
GOES,
MBAS
NEVER
LEFT
UNTIL

EIGHT.

I
KILLED
TIME
READING
REPORTS
ON
THE
INDIAN
ECONOMY.

SMART
PEOPLE
HAD
WRITTEN
THEM,
AND
THEY
MADE
GDP
FORECASTS
FOR
THE
NEXT
TEN
YEARS
WITH
CONFIDENCE
THAT
HIS
THE
BASIC
FACT

—
HOW
CAN
YOU
REALLY
TELL,
DUDE?
AT
SEVEN-THIRTY
I
STOOD
UP

TO
LEAVE.
BALA
CAME
TOWARDS
ME.
“LEAVING?”
HE
ASKED,
PUZZLED
AS
IF
I
HAD
PLANNED
TO
TAKE
A
HALF
DAY.
‘YEAH,’
I
SAID.
‘NOT
MUCH
TO
DO.’
‘ONE
TIP,
NEVER
LEAVE
BEFORE
YOUR
BOSS,’
HE
SAID
AND
WINKED
AT
ME.
HE
LAUGHED,
AND
I

DIDN'T
FIND
IT
FUNNY
AT
ALL.

I
WANT
TO
SEE
WHAT
A
TAMIL
JOKE
BOOK
LOOKS
LIKE.
'WHAT
TIME
DO
YOU
LEAVE?'

I
SAID,
TIRED.
'SOON,
ACTUALLY
LET
ME
CALL
IT
A
DAY.
KUSUM
WILL
BE
WAITING.
YOU
WANT
TO
COME
HOME
FOR
DINNER?'

'NO,
THANKS,'
I
SAID.
HE
GAVE
ME
THE
SECOND
DISAPPOINTED
LOOK.

'I
HAVE
TO
GO
SOMEWHERE,
DISTANT
RELATIVES,'

I
SAID.
'OH,'
HE
SAID,
HIS
VOICE
STILL
A
LITTLE
SAD.

I
AM
SORRY
DUDE,
I
AM
NOT
HANDING
YOU
THE
REMOTE
OF
MY
LIFE
BECAUSE

YOU
ARE
MY
BOSS,
I
THOUGHT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
17
'SWAMINATHAN',
THE
NAME
PLATE
OF
ANANYA'S
SMALL
STANDALONE
HOUSE
PROCLAIMED
IN
ARCHED
LETTERS.
I
PRESSED
THE
DOORBELL
EVEN
AS
A
BUZZING
GRINDER
DROWNED
THE
RING.
'YES?'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
OPENED
THE
DOOR
WITH
A
PUZZLED
EXPRESSION.
I
BET
HE
RECOGNISED
ME

BUT
FEIGNED
IGNORANCE
TO
RATTLE
ME.
HE
WORE
A
HALF-SLEEVE
WHITE
VEST
WITH
A
FRONT
POCKET
AND
A
CHECKED
BLUE
AND
WHITE
LUNGI.
'KRISH,
SIR,
ANANYA'S
FRIEND,'
I
SAID.
FOR
NO
PARTICULAR
REASON,
FEAR
MAKES
ME
ADDRESS
PEOPLE
AS
SIR.
I
HAD
BROUGHT
A

GIFT
PACK
OF
BISCUITS,
AS
MY
PUNJABI
SENSIBILITIES
HAD
TAUGHT
ME
TO
NEVER
GO
TO
SOMEONE'S
HOUSE
WITHOUT
AT
LEAST
AS
MANY
CALORIES
AS
YOU
WOULD
CONSUME
THERE.
'OH,
COME
IN,'
HE
SAID
AFTER
I
REINTRODUCED
MYSELF.
I
STEPPED
INSIDE
AND
HANDED
HIM
THE

GIFT
PACK.
'SHOES!'
HE
SAID
IN
A
STERN
VOICE
WHEN
I
HAD
EXPECTED
'THANKS'.
'WHAT?'
I
SAID.
HE
POINTED
AT
THE
SHOE
RACK
OUTSIDE
THE
HOUSE.
I
REMOVED
MY
SHOES
AND
CHECKED
MY
SOCKS
FOR
SMELLS
AND
HOLES.
I
DECIDED
TO
TAKE
THEM
OFF

TOO,
I
WENT
INSIDE.
'DON'T
STEP
ON
THE
RANGOLI,'
HE
WARNED.
I
LOOKED
DOWN.
MY
RIGHT
FOOT
RESTED
ON
A
RICE
FLOUR
FLOWER
PATTERN.
'SORRY,
I
AM
REALLY
SORRY,
SIR,'
I
SAID
AND
BENT
DOWN
TO
REPAIR
THE
PATTERN.
'IT'S
OK.
IT
CAN'T
BE

FIXED
NOW,'
HE
SAID
AND
USHERED
ME
INTO
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
THE
LONG
RECTANGULAR
ROOM
LOOKED
LIKE
WHAT
WOULD
BE
LEFT
IF
A
PUNJABI
DRAWING
WAS
ROBBED.
THE
SOFAS
WERE
SIMPLE,
WITH
CUSHIONS
THINNER
THAN
INDIAN
RAILWAYS
SLEEPERS
HAD
AND
FROM
THE
OPPOSITE
OF

THE
DECADENT
RED
VELVET
SOFAS
PAMMI
AUNTY.
THE
WALLS
HAD
A
PALE
GREEN
DITEMPER
FINISH.
THERE
WERE
PICTURES
OF
VARIOUS
SOUTH
INDIAN
GODS
ALL
AROUND
THE
ROOM.
THE
DINING
AREA
HAD
FLOOR
SEATING.
AT
ONE
CORNER,
THERE
WAS
A
DAYBED
WITH
A
TAMBURA
(WHICH

LOOKS
LIKE
A
SITAR)
KEPT
ON
IT.
AN
OLD
MAN
SAT
THERE.
I
WONDERED
IF
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
WERE
COOL
ENOUGH
TO
ARRANGE
LIVE
MUSIC
FOR
DINNER.
'SIT,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID,
POINTING
AT
THE
SOFA.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WE
SAT
OPPOSITE
EACH
OTHER
AS
I
FACED
ANANYA'S
DAD
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME
IN
MY
LIFE.
I
STRAINED
MY
BRAIN
HARD
FOR
A
SUITABLE
TOPIC.
'NICE
PLACE,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT
IS
NICE?
NO
WATER
IN
THIS
AREA,'
UNCLE
SAID
AS

HE
PICKED
UP
A
NEWSPAPER.
I
HUNG
MY
HEAD,
AS
IF
TO
APOLOGISE
FOR
THE
WATER
PROBLEM
IN
MYLAPORE.
UNCLE
OPENED
THE
NEWSPAPER,
WHICH
BLOCKED
HIS
FACE
FROM
MINE.
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
IF
IT
WAS
INTENTIONAL.
I
KEPT
QUIET
AND
TURNED
TO
THE
MAN

WITH
THE
TAMBURA.

I
SMILED,
BUT
HE
DIDN'T
REACT.
THE
HOUSE
HAD
AN
EERIE
SILENCE.

A
PUNJABI
HOUSE
IS
NEVER
THIS
SILENT
EVEN
WHEN
PEOPLE
SLEEP
AT
NIGHT.

I
BENT
FORWARD
TO
SEE
IF
UNCLE
WAS
READING
THE
PAPER
OR
AVOIDING
ME.
HE
HAD

OPENED
THE
EDITORIAL
PAGE
OF
THE
HINDU.
HE
READ
AN
OPINION
PIECE
ABOUT
AIADMK
ASKING
THE
GOVERNMENT
TO
DO
AN
ENQUIRY
ON
THE
DEFENSE
MINISTER
WHO
HAD
SACKED
THE
NAVAL
CHIEF.
IT
WAS
HEAVY-DUTY
STUFF.
NO
ONE
IN
MY
FAMILY,
CORRECTION,
NO
ONE
IN

MY
EXTENDED
CLAN
EVER
READ
EDITORIAL
PAGES
OF
NEWSPAPERS,
LET
ALONE
ARTICLES
ABOUT
AIADMK.
UNCLE
CAUGHT
ME
PEEKING
OVER
HIM
AND
GRUNTED,
'WHAT?'
'NOTHING,'
I
SAID.
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
WHY
I
FELT
SO
GUILTY.
UNCLE
CONTINUED
TO
READ
FOR
FIVE
MINUTES.
I
HAD
AN

OPPORTUNITY
TO
SPEAK
AGAIN
WHEN
HE
TURNED
THE
PAGE.
'NO
ONE
IS
AT
HOME,
SIR?'
'WHERE
WILL
THEY
GO?'
'I
CAN'T
SEE
ANYONE.'
'COOKING.
CAN'T
YOU
HEAR
THE
GRINDER?'
HE
SAID.
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
IF
ANANYA'S
FATHER
WAS
NATURALLY
LIKE
THIS
OR
EXTRA
GRUMPY

TODAY.
MAYBE
HE
IS
PISSSED
ABOUT
ME
BEING
HERE,
I
THOUGHT.
'YOU
WANT
WATER?'
HE
SAID.
'NO
SIR,'
I
SAID.
'WHY?
WHY
YOU
DON'T
WANT
WATER?'
I
DIDN'T
HAVE
AN
ANSWER
EXCEPT
THAT
I
FELT
SCARED
AND
WEIRD
IN
THIS
HOUSE.
'OK,
GIVE
ME

WATER,'
I
SAID.
'RADHA,'
UNCLE
SCREAMED.
'TANNI!'
'IS
THAT
ANANYA'S
GRANDFATHER,'
I
SAID,
POINTING
TO
THE
OLD
MAN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NO,'
HE
SAID.
I
REALISED
ANANYA'S
FATHER
ANSWERED
EXACTLY
WHAT
WAS
ASKED.
'WHO
IS
HE?'
I
ASKED
SLOWLY.
'IT'S
RADHA'S
CARNATIC
MUSIC
TEACHER
WHO
CAME
TO
SEE
HER.
BUT
SHE
IS
BUSY
IN
THE
KITCHEN
MAKING
DINNER
FOR
YOU.
NOW
WHAT

TO
DO?’
I
NODDED.
ANANYA’S
MOTHER
CAME
IN
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
SHE
HELD
A
TRAY
WITH
A
GLASS
OF
WATER
AND
A
PLATE
OF
SAVOURIES.
THE
SPIRAL-SHAPED,
BROWN-COLOURED
SNACKS
RESEMBLED
FOSSILISED
SNAKES.
‘HELLO,
AUNTY,’
I
STOOD
UP.
‘HELLO,
KRISH,’
SHE
SAID.
‘I
AM
SORRY

I
CAME
AT
THE
WRONG
TIME,'
I
SAID,
LOOKING
AT
THE
TEACHER.
'IT'S
OK.
ANANYA
INVITED
YOU.
AND
SHE
HAS
A
HABIT
OF
NOT
CONSULTING
ME,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
'AUNTY,
WE
CAN
ALL
GO
OUT,'
I
SAID.
'IT'S
OK.
FOOD
IS
ALMOST
READY,'
SHE

SAID
AND
TURNED
TO
HER
HUSBAND.
'GIVE
ME
HALF
AN
HOUR
WITH
GURUJI.'
SHE
WENT
UP
TO
GURUJI
AND
TOUCHED
HIS
FEET.
THE
GURUJI
BLESSED
HER.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
PICKED
UP
THE
TAMBURA
AND
THEY
LEFT
THE
ROOM.
'SO,
CITIBANK
PLACED
YOU
IN
CHENNAI?'
UNCLE

SAID,
INITIATING
CONVERSATION
WITH
ME
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME.
'YES,
SIR'

I
SAID.
ANANYA
HAD
TOLD
HIM
THE
BANK
TRANSFERRED
ME.

'WHY
DO
THEY
SEND
NORTH
INDIANS
HERE?'

'I
DON'T
KNOW,
SIR.'

'USELESS
BUGGERS,'
HE
MUMBLED
AND
BURIED
HIMSELF
IN
HIS
NEWSPAPER
AGAIN.

I

CLEARED
MY
THROAT
AND
FINALLY
GATHERED
THE
COURAGE
TO
ASK.
'WHERE'S
ANANYA?'
UNCLE
LOOKED
UP
IN
SHOCK
AS
IF
I
HAD
ASKED
HIM
WHERE
HE
KEPT
HIS
PORN
COLLECTION.
'SHE
HAD
GONE
FOR
A
BATH.
SHE
WILL
COME
AFTER
EVENING
PRAYERS.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
NODDED.
ANANYA
NEVER
DID
ANY
EVENING
PRAYERS
IN
AHMEDABAD.

I
HEARD
NOISES
FROM
THE
OTHER
ROOM.
THEY
SOUNDED
LIKE
LONG
WAILS,
AS
IF
SOMEONE
WAS
BEING
SLOWLY
STRANGLED.

I
LOOKED
PUZZLED
AND
UNCLE
LOOKED
AT
ME.
'CARNATIC
MUSIC,'
UNCLE
SAID.

'YOU
KNOW?'

I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.

'THEN
WHAT
DO
YOU
KNOW?'

HE
ASKED
AND
SANK
INTO
THE
HINDU
WAITING
FOR
ME
TO
RESPOND.

I
HAD
AN
URGE
TO
RUN
OUT
OF
THE
HOUSE.

WHAT
THE
FUCK
AM

I
DOING
HERE
IN
THIS
PSYCHO
HOME?

I
HEARD
FOOTSTEPS
OUTSIDE.
'SORRY,'
ANANYA
SAID,
COMING
IN.

I
TURNED
TO
LOOK
AT
HER.

I
WAS
SEEING
HER
AFTER
TWO
MONTHS.
SHE
WORE
A
CREAM-
COLOURED
COTTON
SARI
WITH
A
THIN
GOLD
BORDER.
SHE
SEEMED
PRETTIER
THAN
I
LAST
SAW
HER.
I
WANTED

TO
GRAB
HER
AND
PLANT
THE
BIGGEST
KISS
ON
HER
LIPS
EVER.
OF
COURSE,
THINGS
HAD
TO
BE
DIFFERENT
WITH
MR
HINDU-ADDICT
GRUMPYSWAMI
IN
FRONT
OF
ME.
'HI
ANANYA,
GOOD
TO
SEE
YOU,'
I
GREETED
HER
LIKE
A
COLLEAGUE
AT
WORK.
I
KEPT
MY

HANDS
CLOSE
TO
MY
BODY.
'WHAT?
GIVE
ME
A
HUG,'
SHE
SAID
AND
UNCLE
FINALLY
LOST
INTEREST
IN
THE
HINDU.
'SIT
HERE,
ANANYA,'
HE
SAID
AND
CAREFULLY
FOLDED
THE
NEWSPAPER
LIKE
HE
WOULD
READ
IT
AGAIN
EVERY
DAY
FOR
THE
REST
OF
HIS
LIFE.

'HI
DAD,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
KISSED
HER
FATHER
ON
THE
CHEEK.
I
FELT
JEALOUS.
'OH,
MOM
IS
SINGING,'
SHE
SAID,
UPON
HEARING
HER
MOTHER
SHRIEK
AGAIN.
'YES,
FINALLY,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
'CAN
YOU
TELL
THE
RAGA?'
ANANYA
CLOSED
HER
EYES
TO
LISTEN.
SHE
LOOKED

BEAUTIFUL
BUT
I
HAD
TO
LOOK
AWAY
AS
UNCLE
EYED
EVERY
MOVE
OF
MINE.
'IT'S
MALHAR,
DEFINITELY
MALHAR,'
SHE
SAID.
UNCLE
NODDED
HIS
HEAD
IN
APPRECIATION.
'HOW
MANY
RAGAS
ARE
THERE?'
I
ASKED,
TRYING
TO
FIT
IN.
'A
THOUSAND,
YEAH
DAD?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'AT

LEAST.
YOU
DON'T
LISTEN
TO
CARNATIC
MUSIC?'
UNCLE
SAID
TO
ME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NOT
MUCH,
BUT
IT
IS
KIND
OF
NICE,'
I
SAID.
OF
COURSE,
SAYING
I
HAVE
NO
FUCKING
CLUE
WHAT
YOU
ARE
TALKING
ABOUT
DIDN'T
SEEM
QUITE
RIGHT.
'MOM
WON
TWO
CHAMPIONSHIPS
AT
THE
TAMIL
SANGAM
IN
KOLKATA
WHEN
DAD
WAS
POSTED

THERE,'
ANANYA
SAID,
HER
VOICE
PROUD.
'BUT
SHE
HAS
STOPPED
SINGING
SINCE
WE
CAME
TO
CHENNAI,'
UNCLE
SAID
AND
THREW
UP
HIS
HANDS.
'WHY?'
I
SAID.
'VARIOUS
REASONS,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
GESTURED
AT
ME
TO
CHANGE
THE
TOPIC.
'YOUR
AUNT
IS
HERE?'
I
ASKED.

'YES,
SHOBHA
ATHAI
IS
IN
THE
KITCHEN.
SHE
IS
DAD'S
ELDER
SISTER.'
I
PRAYED
SHOBHA
AUNTY
DIDN'T
HAVE
A
PERSONALITY
LIKE
HER
BROTHER'S.
SILENCE
FELL
IN
THE
ROOM.
I
PICKED
UP
A
SNACK
TO
EAT
IT.
EVERY
CRUNCH
WOULD
BE
CLEARLY
IN
THE
ROOM.

I
HAD
TO
KEEP
THE
CONVERSATION
GOING.

I
HAD
READ
A
BOOK
ON
MAKING
FRIENDS
A
WHILE
AGO.

IT
SAID
TAKE
AN
INTEREST
IN
PEOPLE'S
WORK
AND
KEEP
BRINGING
THEIR
NAME
INTO
THE
CONVERSATION.

'SO,
YOU
HAVE
WORKED
ALL
OVER
INDIA,
MR
SWAMINATHAN?'

I

SAID.
'A
FEW
PLACES,
UNTIL
I
BECAME
STUCK
HERE,'
HE
SAID.
'STUCK?
I
THOUGHT
YOU
LIKE
CHENNAI,
YOUR
HOMETOWN,'
I
SAID.
UNCLE
GAVE
ME
A
DIRTY
LOOK.
I
WONDERED
IF
I
HAD
SAID
SOMETHING
INAPPROPRIATE.
'I'LL
GET
SHOBHA.
LET'S
EAT
DINNER
SOON,'
UNCLE
SAID

AND
LEFT
THE
ROOM.

I
WANTED
TO
ASK
ANANYA
ABOUT
HER
FATHER,
BUT

I
WANTED
TO
GRAB
HER
FIRST.

'DON'T,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
SENSED
MY
INTENTIONS.

'WHAT?'

'DON'T
MOVE.

KEEP
A
THREE-FEET
DISTANCE,'

SHE
SAID.

'ARE
YOU
MAD?
THERE
IS
NO
ONE
HERE.'

'NOT
HERE?
MY
MOTHER
IS
SINGING
IN
THE
NEXT
ROOM
FOR
GOD'S
SAKE.'
'THAT'S
SINGING?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SHUT
UP,'
SHE
GIGGLED.
'AND
I'D
SUGGEST
YOU
LEARN
A
BIT
OF
CARNATIC
MUSIC.
NO,
STOP,
DON'T
GET
OFF
THE
SOFA.'
SHE
GAVE
ME
A
FLYING
KISS
AND
I
SUBSIDED
BACK
INTO
THE
SOFA.
'DAD
IS
HAVING
A
BAD
MONTH
AT

THE
BANK,'
ANANYA
WHISPERED.

'HE
GOT
PASSED
OVER
FOR
PROMOTION.

HE
DESERVED
TO
HEAD
BANK
OF
BARODA
FOR
HIS
DISTRICT
BUT
DIRTY
POLITICS
HAPPENED.

AND
HE
HATES
POLITICS.'

I
DIDN'T
MENTION
THE
INTEREST
WITH
WHICH
HE
READ
THE
AIADMK
ARTICLE.

'WHERE
IS
YOUR
BROTHER?'

'HE
SLEPT
ALREADY.
HE
WAKES
UP
EARLY
TO
STUDY.'
WE
HEARD
FOOTSTEPS.
'BE
CAREFUL
WITH
SHOBHA
AUNTY.
SPEAK
MINIMUM,'
SHE
SAID.
'WHY?'
I
SAID
AS
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
CAME
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM
AGAIN.
SHE
AND
HER
GURU
WALKED
TOWARDS
THE
MAIN
DOOR.
AUNTY
HAD

A
DISAPPOINTED
EXPRESSION.
'ILLA
PRACTICE?'
THE
GURU
MUMBLED
AS
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SPOKE
TO
HIM
IN
TAMIL.
THE
GURU
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD
AND
LEFT.
'WHAT?'
ANANYA
ASKED
HER.
'NOTHING.
WHERE
IS
YOUR
APPA
AND
ATHAI?
LET'S
EAT,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
IN
A
SERIOUS
TONE.
ANANYA'S

FATHER
AND
AUNT
CAME
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
THEY
CARRIED
MORE
DISHES
THAN
THEIR
ARMS
WERE
DESIGNED
FOR.

I
STOOD
UP
TO
HELP.
'HELLO
AUNTY,
CAN
I
TAKE
SOMETHING!'
'WASH
YOUR
HANDS,'
UNCLE
TOLD
ME
AND
POINTED
ME
TO
THE
KITCHEN.
WE
SAT
ON

THE
FLOOR
FOR
DINNER.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
PASSED
ME
A
BANANA
LEAF.
I
WONDERED
IF
I
HAD
TO
EAT
IT
OR
WIPE
MY
HANDS
WITH
IT.
'PLACE
IT
DOWN,
IT
IS
THE
PLATE,'
ANANYA
WHISPERED.
'RADHA,'
SHOBHA
AUNTY
SAID
IN
A
STERN
VOICE
AS
SHE

POINTED
TO
HER
BANANA
LEAF.
IT
HAD
SPECKS
OF
DIRT
ON
ONE
SIDE.
'OH,
SORRY,
SORRY,'
RADHA
AUNTY
SAID
AND
REPLACED
IT.
IT
WASN'T
DIFFERENT
FROM
SHIPRA
MASI
FINDING
FAULTS
WITH
MY
MOTHER.
PSYCHO
RELATIVES
ARE
CONSTANT
ACROSS
CULTURES.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
FOLLOWED
ANANYA
AS
SHE
LOADED
HER
PLATE
WITH
RICE,
SAMBHAR,
FUNNY-LOOKING
VEGETABLES
AND
TWO
KINDS
OF
BROWN
POWDERS.
'WHAT'S
THIS?'

I
ASKED.
'GUNPOWDER,
TRY
IT,'
SHE
SAID.

I
TASTED
IT.
IT
FELT
LIKE
SAWDUST
MIXED
WITH
CHILLIES.
'YUMMY,
NO?'

I

NODDED
AT
ANANYA.
EVERYONE
FIRST
KEPT
NEAT
LITTLE
LUMPS
OF
DISHES
ON
THEIR
BANANA
LEAF.
SOON
THEY
MIXED
IT
INTO
A
SLURRY
HEAP.
'MIX
MORE,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
I
TRIED
TO
COPY
MY
IN-LAWS-TO-BE.
'YOU
ARE
ANANYA'S
CLASSMATE?'
SHOBHA
AUNTY
SPOKE
FOR
THE
FIRST

TIME.
'YES,
AT
IIM,'
I
SAID.
'IIT
STUDENT?'
I
NODDED.
ANANYA
HAD
TOLD
ME
THAT
MY
IIT
TAG
WAS
THE
ONLY
SILVER
LINING
IN
MY
OTHERWISE
OUTCAST
STATUS
IN
THEIR
FAMILY.
'SUSHILA'S
COUSIN
IS
ALSO
FROM
IIT.
RADHA,
I
TOLD
YOU,
NO?
HARISH
LIVES

IN
SAN
FRANCISCO.’
‘WHICH
BATCH?’
I
ASKED.
‘IIT
MADRAS,
NOT
YOUR
COLLEGE,’
SHOBHA
AUNTY
SAID,
PISSSED
OFF
AT
BEING
INTERRUPTED.
I
KEPT
QUIET
AND
LOOKED
AT
THE
VARIOUS
VEGETABLES,
TRYING
TO
RECOGNIZE
THEM.
I
SAID
HELLO
TO
BEANS
AND
CABBAGE.
‘HARISH’S
PARENTS
WANT
TO

GET
HIM
MARRIED.
YOU
HAVE
ANANYA'S
NAKSHTRAM?'
SHOBHA
AUNTY
SAID.
'NO,
NOT
YET,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHAT,
SWAMI?
YOUR
WIFE
IS
NOT
INTERESTED
IN
FINDING
A
GOOD
SON-IN-LAW?'
I
COULDN'T
BELIEVE
THEY
WERE
DISCUSSING
ALL
THIS
IN
MY
PRESENCE.
'CAN
YOU
PASS
THE
RICE?'

I
SAID,
HOPING
TO
STEER
THE
CONVERSATION
ELSEWHERE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'RADHA,
YOU
MUST
LISTEN
TO
SHOBHA.
SHE
KNOWS
BEST,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
INDIAN
MEN
SLAM
THEIR
WIVES
FOR
THEIR
SISTERS
WITH
ZERO
HESITATION.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
NODDED
AS
SHOBHA
AUNTY
STARTED
TO
DISCOURSE
IN
TAMIL.
ANANYA'S
DAD
AND
MOTHER
ALSO
RESPONDED
IN

TAMIL.
IT
WAS
IRRITATING
TO
WATCH
A
REGIONAL
LANGUAGE
MOVIE
IN
FRONT
OF
ME.
AFTER
FIVE
MINUTES
I
SPOKE
AGAIN.
'EXCUSE
ME?'
'WHAT?'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
'CAN
YOU
SPEAK
IN
ENGLISH?
I
CAN'T
FOLLOW
THE
CONVERSATION,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA
LOOKED
AT
ME,
SHOCKED.
BACK

OFF,
HER
EYES
SAID.
'THEN
LEARN
TAMIL,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
'YES
SIR,'
I
SAID
MEEKLY.
'ANYWAY,
THIS
DOESN'T
CONCERN
YOU,'
HE
ADDED.
I
NODDED.
I
HEARD
VARIOUS
TECHNOLOGY
COMPANIES'
THE
BOYS'
NAMES.
I
FELT
LIKE
UPTURNING
MY
BANANA
LEAF
ON
SHOBHA
AUNTY'S
FACE.
I

LEFT
SOON
AFTER
DINNER.
ANANYA
CAME
OUTSIDE
TO
HELP
ME
GET
AN
AUTO.
ANANYA
HELD
MY
ARM
AS
WE
CAME
ON
THE
DESOLATE
STREET.
'I
AM
NOT
TALKING
TO
YOU,'
I
SAID
AND
EXTRACTED
MY
HAND
FROM
HER.
'WHAT?'
SHE
SAID.
WE
PASSED
BY

A
BUNGALOW
WITH
COCONUT
TREES
IN
THE
GARDEN.
'THEY
ARE
PLANNING
YOUR
MARRIAGE.
WHAT
THE
HELL
IS
NAKSHTRAM?'
I
SAID.
'IT'S
THE
ASTROLOGICAL
CHART.
THEY
ARE
FANTASIZING.
I
AM
NOT
GETTING
MARRIED
TO
ANYONE
ELSE
BUT
YOU.'
SHE
HELD
UP
MY
HAND
AND
KISSED

IT.
I
EXTRACTED
IT
AGAIN.
I
HAILED
AN
AUTO.
ANANYA
WOULD
HAVE
TO
NEGOTIATE
WITH
HIM
IN
TAMIL
ELSE
I'D
HAVE
TO
PAY
DOUBLE.
'HOW
AM
I
GOING
TO
WIN
THEM
OVER?
IT
IS
IMPOSSIBLE
TO
GET
THROUGH.
SITTING
WITH
YOUR
FATHER
IS
LIKE

BEING
CALLED
TO
THE
PRINCIPAL'S
OFFICE.'
ANANYA
LAUGHED.
'IT'S
NOT
FUNNY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'IT
IS
A
LITTLE.
WHAT
ABOUT
MY
MOM?'
'I
USED
TO
BE
SCARED
OF
HER
PICTURES
IN
CAMPUS.
FORGET
HER
IN
REAL
LIFE!
HER
LOOKS
ALONE
KILL
ME.'
'HER
PICTURES
SCARED
YOU?'
'YES,
THAT
IS
WHY
I
NEVER
WANTED
TO
MAKE

LOVE
IN
YOUR
ROOM.
I'D
NOTICE
YOUR
MOTHER'S
PICTURES
AND
CHILLS
RAN
DOWN
MY
SPINE.
I'D
IMAGINE
HER
SAYING,
WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING
WITH
MY
DAUGHTER?'
ANANYA
LAUGHED
AGAIN.
'IF
WE
WEREN'T
IN
MYLAPORE,
I'D
HAVE
KISSED
YOU.
YOU
ARE
SO
CUTE,'
SHE
SAID.

'CUT
IT
OUT,
ANANYA,
WHAT
IS
OUR
PLAN?
WILL
YOU
SPEAK
TO
YOUR
MOTHER?'
'MOM'S
STRESSED
OUT.
HER
CARNATIC
TEACHER
REFUSED
TO
TEACH
HER.'
'WHY?'
'I'LL
TELL
YOU
LATER.'
'CAN
WE
MEET
TOMORROW?
OUTSIDE,
PLEASE,'
I
SAID.
'MEET
ME
AT
MARINA
BEACH
AT
SIX,'

SHE
SAID.
'I
CAN'T
DO
SIX.
MY
EXTRA-CARING
BOSS
BALA
LEAVES
AT
EIGHT.'
'I
DIDN'T
SAY
EVENING.'
'SIX
IN
THE
MORNING?'
I
GULPED.
ANANYA
HAD
ALREADY
TURNED
TO
THE
AUTO
DRIVER.
'NUNGAMBAKKAM,
TWENTY
RUPEES,
EXTRA
ILLAI,
OK?'
SHE
TOLD
HIM.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
18
THE
BEAUTIFUL
SUNRISE
AT
MARINA
BEACH
COMPENSATED
FOR
THE
5
A.M.
WAKE
UP
CALL.
HUNDREDS
OF
PEOPLE
TOOK
A
MORNING
WALK
ALONG
THE
SEASHORE
WHICH
RAN
DOWN
MILES.
'DO
YOU
KNOW
THIS
IS
THE
BIGGEST
CITY
BEACH
IN
ASIA?'
ANANYA

ASKED
AS
SHE
MET
ME
AT
THE
POLICE
HEADQUARTERS
BUILDING.
'YOU'VE
TOLD
ME,'
I
SAID.
'WHY
ARE
YOU
IN
FORMALS?'
'I
GO
STRAIGHT
TO
WORK.
TRAINEES
ARE
EXPECTED
TO
BE
THERE
AT
SEVEN-THIRTY,'
I
SAID,
REMOVING
MY
SHOES
AND
FOLDING
MY
PANTS
UP
TO

WALK
ALONG
THE
BEACH.
'TO
DO
WHAT?'
'TO
SUCK
UP
TO
THE
BOSS,
WHO
IF
YOU
DO
A
GOOD
JOB
WILL
PROMOTE
YOU
TO
THE
NEXT
LEVEL
OF
SUCKING
UP.
WELCOME
TO
CORPORATE
LIFE,'
I
SAID.
'I
AM
NOT
FACING
IT
YET.
I
HAVE

TO
SELL
A
THOUSAND
BOTTLES
OF
KETCHUP
EVERY
WEEK.

I
AM
SO
BEHIND
MY
TARGETS.'
'YOU'D
BETTER
KETCH-UP
FAST,'

I
SAID.
'FUNNY,'
SHE
SAID
AND
PUNCHED
ME.

ANANYA
SAW
A
MAN
WITH
A
BICYCLE.

HE
CARRIED
A
BASKET
FULL
OF
IDLIS.
'BREAKFAST?'
SHE
OFFERED.

'DON'T
THEY
HAVE
TOAST?'
'DON'T
GRUMBLE,'
SHE
SAID.
WE
TOOK
FOUR
IDLIS
AND
SAT
ON
A
BENCH
FACING
THE
WATER.
SHE
SPOKE
ABOUT
HER
MOTHER.
'GURUJI
DIDN'T
ACCEPT
MOM.
HE
FELT
SHE
ISN'T
DEDICATED
ENOUGH.'
'BUT
ISN'T
SHE
REALLY
GOOD?'
I
ASKED,
NOT
THAT

I
COULD
TELL
FROM
THE
SHRILL
CRIES
I
HEARD
LAST
NIGHT.
'SHE
ISN'T
GOOD
ENOUGH
BY
CHENNAI
STANDARDS.
DAD
USED
TO
BE
POSTED
IN
TOWNS
OUTSIDE
TAMIL
NADU.
MOM
BECAME
A
STAR
IN
THE
TAMILIAN
COMMUNITY
THERE.
HERE,
SHE
IS
JUST
OK.
CHENNAI'S
CARNATIC

MUSIC
SCENE
IS
AT
A
DIFFERENT
LEVEL.'
I
NODDED
AS
IF
I
UNDERSTOOD.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'MY
PARENTS
CAME
TO
CHENNAI
WITH
GREAT
ENTHUSIASM.
BUT
NOW
DAD
LOST
HIS
PROMOTION.
PESKY
RELATIVES
VISIT
US
ALL
THE
TIME.
AMIDST
ALL
THIS,
THEIR
DAUGHTER
WANTS
TO
IMPOSE
A
NON-BRAHMIN,
NON-TAMIL,
PUNJABI
BOY
ON
THEM.
OF
COURSE,
THEY
WILL
FREAK

OUT.
WE
HAVE
TO
BE
PATIENT.
I
LOVE
THEM,
TOO,
KRISH,'
SHE
SAID
AND
PAUSED
FOR
BREATH.
A
GENTLE
BREEZE
BLEW
ON
OUR
FACES.
SHE
LAID
HER
HEAD
ON
MY
LEFT
SHOULDER.
I
STROKED
HER
HAIR.
THE
SUN
EMERGED
OUT
OF
THE
BAY
OF

BENGAL,
A
SOFT
RED
AT
FIRST,
TURNING
INTO
A
WARMER
ORANGE.
I
PUT
MY
ARM
AROUND
ANANYA.
IN
MY
TIE
AND
FORMAL
PANTS,
I
LOOKED
LIKE
A
SALESMAN
WITH
NO
PLACE
TO
TAKE
HIS
GIRLFRIEND
TO
MAKE
OUT.
'THERE
IS
ONLY
ONE
WAY
YOU

CAN
GET
REGULAR
ACCESS
TO
MY
HOME,'
ANANYA
SAID
AFTER
STARING
AT
THE
HORIZON
FOR
A
MINUTE.
'WHAT?'
'IIT
TUITIONS
FOR
MY
BROTHER.
THEY'D
ACCEPT
ANYTHING
FOR
THAT,'
SHE
SAID.
I
LET
GO
OF
HER
AND
SAT
UP
STRAIGHT.
'ARE
YOU
CRAZY?'
I
PREPARED

FOR
THE
IIT
EXAM
EIGHT
YEARS
AGO.

I
CAN'T
TEACH
HIM.'

'I'M
SURE
YOU
CAN
REVISE
SOME
NOTES
AND
HELP
HIM.

MY
PARENTS
HAVE
TO
GET
COMFORTABLE
WITH
YOU.

ONLY
THEN
CAN

I
ASK
THEM
TO
SERIOUSLY
CONSIDER
YOU.'

I
DIPPED
MY
IDLI
INTO

COCONUT
CHUTNEY
AND
ATE
IT.
I
MISSED
MY
MOTHER'S
HOT
PARANTHAS
AT
BREAKFAST.
'DO
YOU
LOVE
ME?'
SHE
WIPED
A
BIT
OF
CHUTNEY
FROM
MY
LIPS.
I
KISSED
HER.
I
WAS
KISSING
HER
AFTER
TWO
MONTHS.
I
DIDN'T
RELEASE
HER
FOR
A
MINUTE.
I'D

REVISE
IIT
CHEMISTRY
FOR
THIS
CHEMISTRY
ANY
DAY.

‘AI!’

A
HOARSE
VOICE
SCREAMED
BEHIND
US.

I
TURNED
AROUND.

A
POT-BELLIED
TAMILIAN
COP,
LOOKING
MORE
VILLAIN
THAN
POLICE,
WALKED
FAST
TOWARDS
US.

‘WHAT
IS
THIS?’

HE
SAID
AND
SLAMMED
HIS
STICK
ON
THE
BENCH.
BOTH

OF
US
SPRANG
UP.
ANANYA
HID
BEHIND
ME.
'OH
FUCK,'
SHE
SAID.
'GET
RID
OF
HIM.'
THE
COP
SCREAMED
AT
ME
IN
TAMIL.
HELPLESS,
I
ASKED
ANANYA
TO
TRANSLATE.
'HE
WANTS
TO
TAKE
US
TO
THE
POLICE
STATION.
HE
IS
SAYING
WE
HAVE
SOME

NERVE
DOING
ALL
THIS
OUTSIDE
POLICE
HEADQUARTERS.'
'WHY
DO
THEY
HAVE
POLICE
HEADQUARTERS
OPPOSITE
A
BEACH?'
I
ASKED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SHUT
UP
AND
PAY
HIM
OFF,'
SHE
WHISPERED.
I
TOOK
OUT
MY
WALLET
AND
TOOK
OUT
TWENTY
BUCKS.
'ILLA
ILLA...'
THE
COP
CONTINUED
TO
SHOUT
AND
GRABBED
MY
ARMS.
I
TOOK
OUT
A
FIFTY.
HE
LOOKED
AT
ME
AND
ANANYA.
'WARNING,'

THE
COP
SAID
AS
HE
TOOK
THE
NOTE.
ANANYA
LAUGHED
AFTER
THE
COP
LEFT
US.
'IT'S
NOT
FUNNY,'
I
SAID
AS
I
WORE
MY
SHOES
AGAIN
AND
STRAIGHTENED
MY
PANTS.
'CAN
WE
MEET
AT
MY
CHUMMERY,
PLEASE?'
'IN
A
WHILE.
I
TRAVEL
OUT
OF

CHENNAI
EVERYDAY
AND
COME
BACK
LATE,'
SHE
SAID.
'WEEKEND?'
'I'LL
TRY,'
SHE
SAID.
'YOU
WILL
FEED
ME
CHICKEN?
I'M
DYING
TO
HAVE
NON-VEG.
AND
GET
BEER,
TOO.'
'OK,'
I
PROMISED.
MY
BUILDING
HAD
VEGETARIAN-ONLY
RULES,
BUT
SURELY
THEY
WOULDN'T
NOTICE
IF
I
BROUGHT
SOMETHING

READYMADE
FROM
OUTSIDE.
WE
SAT
IN
OUR
RESPECTIVE
AUTOS.
SHE
SPOKE
TO
ME
FROM
HER
SIDE
WINDOW.
'AND
I'LL
SPEAK
TO
MY
PARENTS
ABOUT
THE
TUITIONS.
TWICE
A
WEEK
AT
FIVE?'
'FIVE
IN
THE
MORNING?'
WHY
IS
EVERYONE
SO
EAGER
TO
WAKE
UP
IN

THIS
TOWN!
'THAT'S
WHEN
EVERYONE
GOES
FOR
TUITIONS,'
SHE
SAID
AND
SPED
OFF.
I
HAD
TO
WAIT
FOR
TWO
MISERABLE
WEEKS
IN
CHENNAI
UNTIL
ANANYA
FINALLY
DECIDED
TO
VISIT
MY
CHUMMERY
FOR
LUNCH
ONE
SATURDAY.
ONE
WEEKEND
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
FELL
ILL
AND
ANANYA
HAD

TO
COOK
FOR
THE
FAMILY,
COURTESY
A
GUILT
TRIP
FROM
HER
MOTHER.
THE
FOOD
DID
NOT
COME
OUT
RIGHT,
AS
ANANYA'S
CULINARY
EXPERIENCE
IS
LIMITED
TO
MAKING
MAGGI
IN
MY
ROOM
AND
MAKING
PAPADS
WITH
A
CLOTHES
IRON
(YES,
IT
WORKS).
THIS
LED
TO

ANOTHER
GUILT
TRIP
FROM
SHOBHA
AUNTY
TO
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
WHO
BLAMED
HER
FOR
NOT
BRINGING
UP
HER
DAUGHTER
RIGHT.
THE
GUILT
TRIP
PERCOLATED
DOWN
TO
ANANYA,
WHO
HAD
TO
TAKE
SHOBHA
AUNTY
JEWELLERY
AND
SARI
SHOPPING
THE
NEXT
WEEKEND.
MEANWHILE,
I
HAD
VISITED
BRILLIANT

TUTORIALS
AND
BOUGHT
IIT
EXAM
GUIDES.
I
COULDN'T
BELIEVE
HOW
TOUGH
THE
COURSE
MATERIALS
WERE.
THE
ONLY
REASON
I
MANAGED

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
TO
STUDY
THEM
IN
THE
PAST
WAS
BECAUSE
THAT
DISTRACTED
ME
FROM
MY
PARENTS'
FIGHTS.
I
REVISED
CHEMISTRY
TO
PREPARE
FOR
MY
FIRST
CLASS.
I
ALSO
WENT
TO
MY
SARDAR-JI
NEIGHBOR
TO
FIND
OUT
THE
BEST
WAY
TO
PROCURE
CHICKEN
AND

BEERS.
“WHO
IS
COMING?
PUNJABI
FRIENDS?’
HE
ASKED.
‘WORK
PEOPLE,’
I
SAID,
TO
STOP
HIM
FROM
INVITING
HIMSELF.
‘BE
CAREFUL
WHEN
YOU
TAKE
IT
UP
IN
THE
LIFT,’
HE
SAID.
AS
HE
TOLD
ME,
I
WENT
TO
THE
DELHI
DHABHA
IN
NUNGAMBAKKAM,
LESS
THAN

A
KILOMETRE
FROM
MY
HOUSE.

I
TRIPLE-PACKED
THE
TANDOORI
CHICKEN
SO
NO
SMELL
CAME
OUT.

I
WENT
TO
THE
GOVERNMENT-APPROVED
LIQUOR
SHOP,
WHERE
THEY
HAD
TROUBLE
ESTABLISHING
MY
AGE.

'ARE
YOU
OVER
TWENTY-FIVE?'

'NO,
BUT
WILL
BE
SOON,'

I
SAID.
'THEN
WE
CAN'T
GIVE

YOU,'
THE
SHOPKEEPER
SAID.
'EVEN
IF
I
PAY
TEN
BUCKS
EXTRA
A
BOTTLE?'
IT
IS
AMAZING
HOW
MONEY
RELAXES
RULES
AROUND
THE
COUNTRY.
THE
SHOPKEEPER
PACKED
THE
THREE
BOTTLES
IN
BROWN
PAPER,
AND
I
FURTHER
PLACED
THEM
IN
A
PLASTIC
BAG,
SO
ONE
COULDN'T

MAKE
OUT
THE
SHAPE.
'WHAT'S
IN
IT?'
THE
LIFTMAN
ASKED
ME
AS
THE
BOTTLES
TOUCHED
THE
GROUND
NOISILY
WHEN
I
PLACED
THE
PACKET
ON
THE
FLOOR.
'LEMON
SQUASH,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
SHOULD
HAVE
COCONUT
WATER
INSTEAD,'
THE
LIFTMAN
SAID.
I
NODDED
AND
REACHED
MY

APARTMENT.
RAMANUJAN
SAW
ME
PLACE
THE
BOTTLES
IN
THE
FRIDGE.
“WHAT’S
THAT?”
HE
WORE
A
LUNGI
AND
NOTHING
ON
TOP
APART
FROM
A
WHITE
THREAD
AROUND
HIS
SHOULDERS.
‘BEER,’
I
SAID.
‘DUDE,
YOU
CAN’T
GET
ALCOHOL
IN
THIS
BUILDING,’
HE
SAID.
‘MY
GIRLFRIEND
IS

VISITING
ME.
SHE
LIKES
IT,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
HAVE
A
GIRLFRIEND?'
RAMANUJAN
REPEATED
LIKE
I
HAD
TEN
WIVES.
NONE
OF
MY
FLATMATES
HAD
A
GIRLFRIEND.
THEY
WERE
ALL
QUALIFIED,
WELL-PAID
TAMIL
CITIBANKERS
WHO
PLANNED
TO
BE
AUCTIONED
OFF
SOON
BY
THEIR
PARENTS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,
FROM
COLLEGE,'
I
SAID.
MY
OTHER
ROOMMATES
CAME
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
NONE
OF
THEM
WORE
SHIRTS.
I
SHUT
THE
FRIDGE
TO
AVOID
FURTHER
CONVERSATION
ON
THE
BEVERAGES.
'SHE
IS
VISITING
CHENNAI?
SENDIL
SAID.
'WILL
SHE
STAY
HERE?
SHE
CAN'T

STAY
HERE,'
APPALINGAM
SAID.
'SHE
LIVES
IN
CHENNAI,'
I
SAID.
THE
BOYS
LOOKED
AT
EACH
OTHER
AS
TO
WHO
WOULD
ASK
THE
BELL-THE-CAT
QUESTION.
'TAMILIAN?'
RAMANUJAN
ASKED.
'YES,'
I
SAID,
'TAMIL
BRAHMIN.'
I
ADDED
THE
LAST
TWO
WORDS
TO
LET
THEM
ABSORB
THE
SHOCK

AT
ONCE.
'WOW!'
ALL
OF
THEM
SAID
IN
UNISON.
'SHE
DRINKS
BEER?'
RAMANUJAN
SAID.
'YES,'
I
SAID
AND
UPTURNED
THE
CHICKEN
INTO
A
BOWL.
'AND
CHICKEN?
WHAT
KIND
OF
BRAHMIN
IS
THIS?'
SENDIL
SAID.
'AND
DUDE,
DON'T
GET
NON-VEG
IN
THIS
HOUSE.'
'IT'S
MY

HOUSE,
TOO,'
I
SAID.
'BUT
RULES
ARE
RULES,'
HE
SAID.
PEOPLE
IN
THIS
CITY
LOVED
RULES,
OR
RATHER
LOVED
TO
FOLLOW
RULES.
EXCEPT
IF
YOU
ARE
A
COP
OR
A
LIQUOR
SHOP
ATTENDANT
OR
AN
AUTO
DRIVER.
'LET
IT
BE,
SENDIL,'
RAMANUJAN
SAID.
'THANKS,'

I
SAID
AND
PLACED
THE
CHICKEN
IN
THE
FRIDGE.
'AND
GUYS,
PLEASE
WEAR
SHIRTS
WHEN
SHE
IS
HERE.'
ANANYA
CAME
TO
MY
PLACE
AT
TWO
O'CLOCK.

I
GREETED
HER
POLITELY
IN
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
MY
FLATMATES
EXCHANGED
SHY
GLANCES
WITH
EACH
OTHER
AS
SHE

GREETED
THEM.
SENDIL
SPOKE
TO
HER
IN
TAMIL.
TAMILIANS
LOVE
TO
IRRITATE
NON-TAMIL
SPEAKERS
BY
SPEAKING
ONLY
IN
TAMIL
IN
FRONT
OF
THEM.
THIS
IS
THE
ONLY
SILENT
REBELLION
IN
THEIR
OTHERWISE
REPRESSED,
DOCILE
PERSONALITY.
WHEN
SHE
FINALLY
ENTERED
MY
BEDROOM,
I
GRABBED
HER

FROM
BEHIND.
'CAN
W
EAT
FIRST?
I
HAVEN'T
HAD
CHICKEN
FOR
A
MONTH.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
HAVEN'T
HAD
SEX
FOR
FOUR
MONTHS,'
I
SAID,
BUT
SHE
WENT
OUT
AND
OPENED
THE
FRIDGE.
'YOU
HAVE
BEER
TOO.
SUPERB!'
SHE
PRAISED
AND
SHE
PULLED
OUT
A
BOTTLE.
SHE
OFFERED
IT
TO
MY
FLATMATES;
THEY
DECLINED.
WE
MOVED
THE

FOOD
AND
BEER
TO
MY
BEDROOM.

I
DIDN'T
WANT
MY
FRIENDS
OUTSIDE
TO
WITNESS
SIN
AS
WE
FINISHED

A
FULL
CHICKEN
AND
TWO
BEERS.

'AND
NOW
FOR
DESSERT,'

I
SAID
AND
CAME
CLOSE
TO
HER.

'IF
I
BURP,
DON'T
STOP
LOVING
ME,'
SHE
SAID

AS
HER
LIPS
CAME
CLOSE
TO
MINE.
I
BURPED.
SHE
SLAPPED
ME.
WE
KISSED
AND
KISSED
AND
KISSED
SOME
MORE.
OUR
LOVEMAKING
WAS
MORE
INTENSE,
NOT
ONLY
BECAUSE
WE
DID
IT
AFTER
A
LONG
TIME,
BUT
ALSO
BECAUSE
WE
WERE
DOING
IT
IN
THIS

STUCK-UP
CITY
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME.
'MR
CITIBANKER,
THERE
IS
NO
TRAIN
TO
CATCH.
SLOWER,
GENTLER
NEXT-TIME,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
WE
LAY
BACK.
I
SIGHED
AS
I
ENTERED
A
SEMI-TRANCE
STATE.
RAMANUJAN
PLAYED
TAMIL
MUSIC
OUTSIDE
THE
ROOM.
'WHAT,
SAY
SOMETHING?
MEN
JUST
WANT

SEX,'
SHE
SAID
AND
KICKED
MY
LEG.
'YEAH,
THAT'S
WHY
I'VE
AGREED
TO
TEACH
YOUR
BROTHER
AT
FIVE
IN
THE
MORNING.
YOU
WANT
TO
SEE
MY
CHEMISTRY
NOTES?'
I
SAT
UP,
WORE
MY
CLOTHES
AND
PULLED
OUT
TUTORIALS
FROM
THE
DRAWER.
'I
READ
THESE

FOR
FOUR
HOURS
LAST
NIGHT,'
I
SAID.
'SO
SWEET,'
SHE
SAID
AND
CAME
FORWARD
TO
KISS
MY
CHEEK.
'DON'T
WORRY.
MY
PARENTS
WILL
SOON
SEE
HOW
WONDERFUL
YOU
ARE.
AND
THEN
THEY
WILL
LOVE
YOU
LIKE
I
DO.'
'THEY'LL
SLEEP
WITH
ME?'
I
LAY

DOWN
NEXT
TO
HER.
SHE
ELBOWED
ME
IN
MY
STOMACH.
'THAT
HURT,'
I
SAID.
'GOOD.'
SHE
LOOKED
INTO
MY
EYES.
HER
GAZE
TURNED
SOFT.
'I
KNOW
THE
TUITIONS
ARE
HARD.
MY
PARENTS
ARE
WEIRD
PEOPLE.
YOU'LL
NOT
GIVE
UP,
RIGHT?'
'I
WON'T
GIVE
UP.'

I
STROKED
HER
HAIR.
'THIS
IS
SO
AMAZING,
THIS
INTIMACY.
ISN'T
IT
EVEN
BETTER
THAN
THE
SEX?'
'I'M
NOT
SO
SURE,'
I
SAID
AND
REACHED
A
HAND
TO
INCREASE
THE
FAN
SPEED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'WE
NEVER
TALK.
AT
HOME,
MY
MOM
AND
DAD,
THEY
HARDLY
TALK.
WE'LL
TALK
ABOUT
THE
NEWS,
THE
FOOD,
THE
WEATHER.
BUT
WE
NEVER
TALK
ABOUT
OUR
FEELINGS.

I
ONLY
DO
THAT
WITH
YOU,'
SHE
SAID.
I
KEPT
QUIET.
SHE
SAT

UP
TO
WEAR
HER
CLOTHES.
SHE
PICKED
UP
THE
PILLOWS
FROM
THE
FLOOR
AND
PLACED
THEM
BACK
ON
THE
BED.
I
PULLED
HER
ARM
AND
MADE
HER
SIT
DOWN
WITH
ME
AGAIN.
'HOW
COME
YOU
DON'T
ASK
ME
TO
RUN
AWAY
WITH
YOU?'
SHE

ASKED.

'YOU
WANT
ME
TO?
WHAT
IF

I
DID
ASK
YOU
TO
ELOPE?'

'I
WOULDN'T
KNOW
WHAT
TO
DO.

I
DON'T
WANT
TO
HURT
THEM.

I
ALREADY
HAVE
BY
CHOOSING

A
PUNJABI
MATE,
BUT

I
THINK
WE
CAN
WIN
THEM
OVER,

I
WANT
THEM

TO
SMILE
ON
OUR
WEDDING
DAY.
THAT'S
HOW
I
IMAGINED
MY
MARRIAGE
SINCE
I
WAS
A
CHILD.
WHAT
ABOUT
YOU?'
I
THOUGHT
FOR
A
MINUTE.
'I
DON'T
WANT
TO
ELOPE,'
I
SAID.
'WHY?'
'IT'S
TOO
EASY.
AND
THAT
DOESN'T
SERVE
THE
GREATER
PURPOSE.'
ANANYA

STEPPED
OFF
THE
BED
AND
BROUGHT
BACK
THE
LEFTOVERS.
SHE
TOOK
THE
CRUMBS
OF
CHICKEN
AND
ATE
THEM
AS
WE
TALKED.
'GREATER
PURPOSE?'
'YES,
THESE
STUPID
BIASES
AND
DISCRIMINATION
ARE
THE
REASON
OUR
COUNTRY
IS
SO
SCREWED
UP.
IT'S
TAMIL
FIRST,
INDIAN
LATER.
PUNJABI

FIRST,
INDIAN
LATER.
IT
HAS
TO
END.'
ANANYA
LOOKED
AT
ME.
'GO
ON,'
SHE
COAXED
MISCHIEVOUSLY.

I
CONTINUED,
'NATIONAL
ANTHEM,
NATIONAL
CURRENCY,
NATIONAL
TEAMS

—
WE
WON'T
MARRY
OUR
CHILDREN
OUTSIDE
OUR
STATE.
HOW
CAN
THIS
INTOLERANCE
BE
GOOD
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY?'
ANANYA
SMILED.

'IS
IT
THE
CHICKEN,
IS
IT
THE
BEER
OR
IS
IT
THE
SEX?
WHAT
HAS
CHARGED
YOU
UP
SO
MUCH?
FLATTER
ME
AND
SAY
IT
IS
THE
SEX.
C'MON
SAY
IT,'
SHE
SAID.
'I'M
SERIOUS
ANANYA.
THIS
BULLSHIT
MUST
END.'
'AND
HOW
ARE
WE

MAKING
IT
END?’
‘IMAGINE
OUR
KIDS.’
‘I
HAVE,
SEVERAL
TIMES.
I
WANT
THEM
TO
HAVE
MY
FACE.
ONLY
YOUR
EYES,’
SHE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'NOT
THAT,
THINK
ABOUT
THIS

-
THEY
WON'T
BE
TAMIL
OR
PUNJABI.
THEY
WILL
BE
INDIAN.
THEY
WILL
BE
ABOVE
ALL
THIS
NONSENSE.

IF
ALL
YOUNG
PEOPLE
MARRY
OUTSIDE
THEIR
COMMUNITY,
IT
IS
GOOD
FOR
THE
COUNTRY.
THAT
IS
THE
GREATER

PURPOSE.'

'OH,

SO

THE

REASON

YOU

SLEEP

WITH

ME

IS

FOR

THE

SAKE

OF

YOUR

COUNTRY,'

SHE

SAID.

'WELL,

IN

SOME

WAYS,

YES.'

I

SMILED

SHEEPISHLY.

SHE

TOOK

A

PILLOW

AND

LAUNCHED

AN

ATTACK

ON

MY

HEAD.

AND

THEN,

FOR

THE

SAKE

OF

MY

COUNTRY,
WE
MADE
LOVE
AGAIN.
'OPEN
UP,
KRISH,'
RAMANUJAN'S
WORRIED
VOICE
AND
LOUD
BANGS
ON
THE
DOOR
WOKE
ME
FROM
MY
NAP.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

19
ANANYA
WAS
SLEEPING
NEXT
TO
ME
AND
MY
HEAD
HURT
FROM
THE
BEER.
RAMANUJAN
CONTINUED
TO
SLAM
THE
DOOR.
'WHAT?'
I
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
'I'VE
BEEN
KNOCKING
FOR
FIVE
MINUTES,'
RAMANUJAN
SAID.
'COME
OUT,
THE
LANDLORD
IS
HERE.'
'LANDLORD?'
'YES,

BE
NICE
TO
HIM.
IT'S
THE
LAST
CHUMMERY
IN
NUNGAMBAKKAM.

I
DON'T
WANT
TO
BE
KICKED
OUT.'
'WHAT
HAPPENED?'

I
ASKED.
'COME
OUT
FIRST.'

I
SHUT
THE
DOOR
AND
WORE
THE
REST
OF
MY
CLOTHES.
'ANANYA,'

I
SAID.
'BABY,
I'M
SLEEPY,'
SHE
SAID,
TRYING

TO
PULL
ME
BACK
INTO
BED.
'MY
LANDLORD
IS
HERE,'
I
SAID.
SHE
DIDN'T
RESPOND
EVEN
THOUGH
I
SHOOK
HER
MANIACALLY.
'YOUR
APPA
IS
OUTSIDE,'
I
SAID.
SHE
SPRANG
UP
ON
THE
BED.
'WHAT?'
'COME
OUT.
MY
LANDLORD
IS
HERE,'
I
SAID.
I
WENT

TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
MY
FLATMATES
SAT
ON
THE
DINING
TABLE.
MR
PUNNU,
OUR
SIXTY-YEAR
OLD
LANDLORD,
GRAVELY
OCCUPIED
THE
LARGEST
CHAIR.
HIS
FACE
HAD
A
PERMANENTLY
TRAGIC
EXPRESSION.
I
SAT
NEXT
TO
HIM.
NO
ONE
SPOKE.
'HI
GUYS,'
ANANYA
CAME
OUT
AFTER
FIVE

MINUTES.
'YOU
WANT
TEA?
I'LL
MAKE
SOME.'
SHE
STARTED
TO
WALK
TOWARDS
THE
KITCHEN.
'ANANYA,
I
WILL
SEE
YOU
LATER,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANANYA
LOOKED
AT
ME,
SHOCKED.
SHE
TUNED
INTO
THE
MOOD
ON
THE
DINING
TABLE.
'I'LL
LEAVE
NOW.'
SHE
PICKED
UP
HER
BAG.
MR
PUNNU
STOOD
UP
AFTER
ANANYA
LEFT
THE
HOUSE.
HE
SNIFFED
HARD.
HE
PEEPED
INTO
MY
ROOM.
'CHICKEN?'
HE

FROWNED.

I

DIDN'T
RESPOND.

BEER
BOTTLES
LAY
ON
THE
BEDSIDE
TABLE.

'LADIES?'

HE
SAID.

'SHE
WORKS
IN
HLL,'

I

SAID,
HAVING
NO
CLUE
WHY

I

HAD
TO
MENTION
HER
CORPORATE
STATUS.

'CHICKEN,
BEER,
LADY
FRIENDS

-

WHAT
IS
GOING
ON
HERE?'

HE
SAID.
FUN,

I
WANTED
TO
SAY
BUT
DIDN'T.
THOSE
THREE
THINGS
ARE
WHAT
MEN
LIVE
FOR
ANYWAY.
EVERYONE
KEPT
QUIET.

I
WONDERED
WHO
HAD
SNEAKED.
MY
FLATMATES
WERE
NO
FRIEND
MATERIAL,
BUT
SOMEHOW

I
DIDN'T
EXPECT
THEM
TO
BE
SUCK
SCHMUCKS.
MAYBE
THE
WATCHMAN
DID
IT.

'I
DIDN'T
EXPECT
THIS
FROM
YOU
BOYS,'
PUNNU
SAID
IN
A
HEAVY
TAMIL
ACCENT.
'IT'S
MY
FAULT.
I
BROUGHT
THE
CHICKEN
AND
BEER
FOR
MY
GIRLFRIEND,'
I
SAID.
'GIRLFRIEND?'
PUNNU
SAID
AS
IF
I
SPOKE
IN
PURE
SANSKRIT.
'SHE
IS
MY
BATCH-MATE.
A
NICE

GIRL,'
I
SAID.
MR
PUNNU
DIDN'T
SEEM
IMPRESSED.
'SHE'S
TAMIL
BRAHMIN,'
I
SAID.
'AND
YOU?'
'PUNJABI,'
I
SAID
AND
MY
HEAD
HUNG
LOW
A
LITTLE
BY
DEFAULT.
'HOW
IS
SHE
A
NICE
GIRL
IF
SHE
IS
ROAMING
AROUND
WITH
YOU?'
MR
PUNNU
ASKED.
HE

HAD
A
VALID
POINT.
I
DECIDED
TO
CHANGE
THE
TOPIC.
'MR
PUNNU,
THIS
IS
NOT
A
BOARDING
SCHOOL.
WE
ARE
ALL
PROFESSIONALS
AND
WHAT
WE
DO
IN
OUR
OWN
HOME...'
MR
PUNNU
BANGED
HIS
FIST
ON
THE
TABLE.
'THIS
IS
MY
HOME,'
HE
POINTED

OUT.
'YES,
BUT
YOU
HAVE
LEASED
IT
TO
US.
TECHNICALLY,
WE
HAVE
A
RIGHT
TO
NOT
LET
YOU
INTO
THE
PROPERTY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
MR
PUNNU
LOOKED
AGHAUST.
RAMANUJAN
HAD
TO
SAVE
THE
SITUATION.
'HE
DOESN'T
KNOW,
MR
PUNNU.
HE
IS
NEW
HERE.
WE
SHOULD
HAVE
TOLD
HIM
IT
IS
A
VEG
BUILDING
AND
NO
ALCOHOL.'
'NOT
EVEN
A
DROP,'
MR
PUNNU
SAID.
"I
HAVE

NOT
TOUCHED
IT
ALL
MY
LIFE.'
MR
PUNNU
LOOKED
LIKE
HE
HAD
TOUCHED
NEITHER
WINE
NOR
A
WOMAN
ALL
HIS
LIFE,
BUT
BADLY
NEEDED
TO.
'APOLOGISE,'
RAMANUJAN
TOLD
ME.
I
GLANCED
AROUND.
TAMILS
GATHERED
AROUND
ME
LIKE
THE
LTTE.
I
HAD
NO
CHOICE.
'I'M

SORRY,'
I
SAID.
'NO
LADIES
FROM
NOW
ON.'
MR
PUNNU
WAGGED
A
FINGER.
'AND
BEER
AND
CHICKEN?'
I
SAID.
"THAT
WASN'T
ALLOWED
FROM
BEFORE
ANYWAY,'
SENDIL
SAID.
EVERYONE
AROUND
ME
NODDED
AS
THEY
FELT
THE
WARM
FUZZY
FEELING
OF
HAVING
SET
RULES
ON
HOW

TO
LIVE
THEIR
LIFE.
I
WONDERED
WHERE
I'D
TAKE
ANANYA
THE
NEXT
TIME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
20
'I
AM
GOOD
AT
CHEMISTRY.
I
NEED
HELP
IN
PHYSICS,'
MANJUNATH,
NERD-EMBRYO
AND
ANANYA'S
YOUNGER
BROTHER,
SPOKE
WITH
EH
ENERGY
OF
A
ROOSTER.
HIS
EYEBROWS
WENT
UP
AND
DOWN
AS
HE
SPOKE,
IN
SYNC
WITH
THE
THREE
ROWS
OF
ASH

ON
HIS
FOREHEAD.
I
HAD
COME
FOR
MY
FIRST
CLASS.
ANANYA
HAD
LEFT
FOR
MADURAI
THE
NIGHT
BEFORE
FOR
A
WEEKLONG
SALES
TRIP.
MY
HEAD
HURT
FROM
WAKING
UP
EARLY.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
HAD
SENT
COFFEE
TO
MANJU'S
ROOM.
IT
DIDN'T
HELP.
NEITHER
DID
THE

FACT
THAT
I
HAD
ONLY
READ
UP
CHEMISTRY.
“LET’S
REVISE
IT
ANYWAYS,’
I
SAID
AND
OPENED
MY
SHEETS.
‘HYDROCARBONS?’
HE
SAID
AS
HE
SAW
MY
NOTES.
‘I’VE
DONE
THIS
THEE
TIMES.’
I
OFFERED
HIM
A
PROBLEM
AND
HE
SOLVED
IT
IN
TWO
MINUTES.
I

TRIED
A
HARDER
ONE,
AND
HE
DID
IT
IN
THE
SAME
TIME.
A
TAPE
PLAYED
IN
THE
NEXT
ROOM.
IT
SOUNDED
LIKE
A
CHORUS
OF
WOMEN
MARCHING
TOWARDS
THE
ARMY.
'M.S.
SUBBULAXMI,'
MANJU
SAID,
NOTICING
MY
WORRIED
EXPRESSION.
'DEVOTIONAL
MUSIC.'
I
NODDED
AS
I

FLIPPED
THROUGH
THE
CHEMISTRY
BOOKS
TO
FIND
A
PROBLEM
CHALLENGING
ENOUGH
FOR
THE
LITTLE
EINSTEIN.
'EVERY
TAMILIAN
HOUSE
PLAYS
IT
IN
THE
MORNING.'
I
WONDERED
IF
ANANYA
WOULD
PLAY
IT
IN
OUR
HOUSE
AFTER
WE
GOT
MARRIED.
MY
MOTHER
WOULD
HAVE
SERIOUS
TRAUMA
WITH

THAT
SOUND.
THE
CHANTS
BECAME
STRONGER
WITH
EVERY
PASSING
MINUTE.
'WHAT
IS
IT
LIKE?'
HE
ASKED.
I
TOLD
HIM
ABOUT
MY
FORMER
COLLEGE,
FILTERING
OUT
ALL
THE
SPICY
BITS
THAT
OCCURRED
IN
MY
LIFE.
'I
WANT
TO
DO
AERONAUTICS,'
MANJU
SAID.
AT
HIS
AGE,

I
DIDN'T
EVEN
KNOW
THAT
WORD.
HE
TOOK
OUT
HIS
PHYSICS
TEXTBOOK
AFTER
AN
HOUR.
HE
GAVE
ME
A
PROBLEM
AND
I
ASKED
FOR
TIME
TO
SOLVE
IT.
HE
NODDED
AND
READ
THE
NEXT
CHAPTER.
THE
TUTOR
WAS
BEING
TUTORED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
PASSED
THE
REST
OF
THE
HOUR
LEARNING
PHYSICS
FROM
MANJU.

I
STOOD
UP
TO
LEAVE.

I
REACHED
THE
LIVING
ROOM
WHERE
ANANYA'S
DAD
WAS
MAKING
SLOW
LOVE
TO
THE
HINDU.

ANANYA
HAD
INSTRUCTED
ME
TO
SPEND
AS
MUCH
TIME
WITH

HER
FATHER
AS
POSSIBLE.

I
WAITED
FOR
TEN
MINUTES
UNTIL
HE
FINISHED
HIS
ARTICLE.
'YES?'
'NOTHING,'

I
SAID.
'I
FINISHED
THE
CLASS.'
'GOOD,'
HE
SAID
AND
FLIPPED
ANOTHER
PAGE.

'HOW'S
THE
BANK,
UNCLE?'
HE
GLANCED
UP
FROM
THE
NEWSPAPER,
SURPRISED.

'WHICH
BANK?'
'YOUR
BANK.'

I
CLEARED
MY
THROAT.
'HOW
IS
YOUR
JOB?'
'WHAT?'
HE
SAID,
STUMPED
BY
THE
STUPIDITY
OF
THE
QUESTION.
'WHAT
IS
THERE
IN
JOB?
JOB
IS
SAME.'
'YES,
SURE,'
I
SAID.
I
STOOD
FOR
ANOTHER
FIVE
MINUTES,
NOT
SURE
OF
WHAT
I
SHOULD
DO.
I

COULDN'T
COMPETE
WITH
THE
HINDU,
AND
A
FRESH
ONE
CAME
EVERY
DAY.
'I'LL
LEAVE
NOW,
UNCLE,'
I
SAID.
'OK,'
HE
SAID.
I
HAD
REACHED
THE
DOOR
WHEN
HE
CALLED
OUT,
'BREAKFAST?'
'I'LL
HAVE
IT
IN
THE
OFFICE.'
'WHERE
IS
YOUR
OFFICE?'
'ANNA
SALAI,'
I

SAID.
'THAT'S
ON
MY
WAY.
I
LEAVE
AT
EIGHT-THIRTY.
I
CAN
DROP
YOU,'
HE
SAID.
I
REALISED
EIGHT-THIRTY
WOULD
MEAN
I'D
REACH
AN
HOUR
LATER
THAN
MY
BOSS.
IT
DIDN'T
WORK
FOR
ME.
BUT
THE
LIFT
ALSO
MEANT
I
COULD
BE
IN
THIS
HOUSE

FOR
ANOTHER
TWO
HOURS
AND
BE
IN
THE
CAR
ALONE
WITH
MY
FATHER-IN-LAW-IN-COURTSHIP.
'THAT'S
PERFECT.
I
HAVE
TO
REACH
AT
THE
SAME
TIME,'
I
SAID.
'GOOD,'
HE
SAID
AND
WENT
BACK
TO
HIS
PAPER
AGAIN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WE
SAT
FOR
BREAKFAST
AT
SEVEN-THIRTY.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
WENT
TO
THE
TEMPLE
ROOM
TO
PRAY,
AND
CAME
BACK
WITH
THE
CUSTOMARY
THREE
GREY
STRIPES
ON
HIS
FOREHEAD.
I
WONDERED
IF
I
SHOULD
GO
PRAY
TOO,
BUT
WASN'T
SURE
HOW
I'D
EXPLAIN

THE
THREE
STRIPES
IN
OFFICE
ALONG
WITH
MY
LATENESS.
WE
HAD
IDLIS
FOR
BREAKFAST,
AND
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
PUT
FIFTY
OF
THEM
IN
FRONT
OF
US.
WE
ATE
QUIETLY.
ANANYA
HAD
TOLD
ME
THEY
NEVER
SPOKE
MUCH
ANYWAY.
THE
BEST
WAY
TO
FIT
IN
WAS

TO
NEVER
TALK.
'MORE
CHUTNEY?'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER'S
QUESTION
(AND
MY
SHAKING
MY
HEAD)
WAS
THE
ONLY
INSIGHTFUL
CONVERSATION
WE
HAD
DURING
THE
MEAL.
UNCLE
REVERSED
HIS
FIAT
FROM
THE
GARAGE.
HE
PEEKED
OUT
TO
LOOK
AT
ME
SEVERAL
TIMES.
I
WASN'T
SURE
IF
HE

WANTED
TO
AVOID
ME
OR
MAKE
A
DIRECT
HIT.
'SIT,'
UNCLE
SAID.
I
WENT
AROUND
THE
CAR
TO
SIT
NEXT
TO
HIM.
SITTING
WITH
MY
GIRLFRIEND'S
FATHER
IN
A
CAR
BROUGHT
TRAUMATIC
MEMORIES.
I
TOOK
DEEP
BREATHS.
THIS
IS
NOT
THE
SAME
SITUATION,
PLAY

COOL,
I
SAID
TO
MYSELF
SEVERAL
TIMES.
UNCLE
DROVE
AT
A
SPEED
OF
TEN
AN
HOUR,
AND
I
WONDERED
WHAT
REASON
I'D
GIVE
MY
BOSS
FOR
NOT
COMING
TO
OFFICE
TWO
HOURS
AGO.
AUTOS,
SCOOTERS
AND
EVEN
SOME
MANUAL-POWERED
VEHICLES
LIKE
RICKSHAWS
CAME
CLOSE

TO
OVERTAKING
US.

I
WANTED
TO
TALK
BUT
COULDN'T
THINK
OF
ANY
TROUBLE-FREE
TOPIC.

I
OPENED
MY
OFFICE
BAG
WITH
THE
DUBIOUS
'CITI
NEVER
SLEEPS'
LOGO
AND
TOOK
OUT
MY
RESEARCH
REPORTS
TO
READ.
DOT
COM
STOCKS
HAD
LOST
25%
LAST
WEEK.
THE
ANALYSTS

WHO
HAD
PREDICTED
THAT
THESE
STOCKS
WOULD
TRIPLE
EVERY
HOUR
NOW
CLAIMED
THE
MARKET
HAD
GONE
INTO
SELF-CORRECT
MODE.
SELF-CORRECT

—
IT
SOUNDED
SO
INTELLIGENT
AND
CLEVER
IT
SORT
OF
TOOK
OUT
THE
PAIN
AWAY
FROM
PEOPLE
WHO
HAD
LOST
THEIR
LIFE
SAVINGS.
IT

ALSO
MADE
YOU
SOUND
DUMB
IF
YOU'D
ASK
WHY
DIDN'T
THE
MARKET
SELF-CORRECT
EARLIER?
OR
THE
MORE
BASIC,
WHAT
THE
FUCK
DO
YOU
MEAN
BY
SELF-CORRECT
ANYWAY?
I
HAD
TWO
CLIENTS
WHO
HAD
LOST
TEN
LAKH
EACH
COMING
TO
VISIT
ME
TODAY.
WITH
MY

IIMA
DEGREE
I
HAD
TO
COME
UP
WITH
A
SLEIGHT
OF
HAND
TO
MAKE
THE
LOSSES
DISAPPEAR.
THE
CAR
CAME
TO
A
HALT
NEAR
A
RED
LIGHT.
'YOU
WROTE
THOSE
REPORTS?'
UNCLE
ASKED.
I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.
'IT'S
THE
RESEARCH
GROUP,'
I
SAID.
'THEN

WHAT
YOU
DO
AT
THE
BANK?'
HE
WAS
MORE
RHETORICAL.
'CUSTOMER
SERVICE,'
I
SAID,
NOT
SURE
HOW
ANYTHING
I
DID
WAS
SERVICE.
ASKING
PEOPLE
TO
GIVE
YOU
THEIR
MONEY
AND
SCRAPING
AWAY
AT
IT
WASN'T
SERVICE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'DO
YOU
KNOW
HOW
TO
WRITE
THOSE
REPORTS?'
HE
SAID.
THE
CARS
BEHIND
US
BEGAN
TO
HONK.
THE
FIAT
DIDN'T
START
INSTANTLY.
UNCLE
MADE
TWO
ATTEMPTS
IN
VAIN.
'ILLA
SERVICE
QUALITY,'
HE
CURSED
AT
HIS
CAR
AS
HE
PULLED
THE
CHOKE.

I
KEPT
THE
REPORTS
INSIDE
AS
I
BECAME
READY
TO
PUSH
THE
CAR.
FORTUNATELY,
THE
CAR
STARTED
AT
TH
E
THIRD
ATTEMPT.
'I
CAN
WRITE
THEM,
WHY?'
I
SAID,
ANSWERING
HIS
EARLIER
QUESTION.
'NOTHING.
STUPID
JOINT
VENTURE
MY
BANK
HAS
DONE.
NOW
THEY
WANT

US
TO
SUBMIT
A
BUSINESS
PLAN.
AND
THAT
GM
HAS
ASKED
ME.'
'I
CAN
HELP,'
I
SCREAMED
LIKE
A
BOY
SCOUT.
'RAASCAL,'
HE
SAID.
'HUH?'
'THAT
GM
VERMA.
IN
MY
THIRTY
YEARS
AT
THE
BANK
I
HAVEN'T
DONE
ANY
REPORT.
NOW
I
HAVE
TO

MAKE
A
PINPOINT
PRESENTATION
AS
WELL.'
'POWERPOINT
PRESENTATION?'
I
ASKED.
'YES,
THAT
ONE.
INTENTIONALLY
RASCAL
GAVE
ME
SOMETHING
I
DON'T
UNDERSTAND,'
UNCLE
SAID.
'I
CAN
HELP,'
I
SAID.
MAYBE
I
HAD
FOUND
A
WAY
TO
BOND
WITH
UNCLE.
'NO
NEED,'
UNCLE
SAID,
HIS
VOICE

SERIOUS.
HE
REALISED
HE
HAD
OPENED
UP
MORE
THAN
HE
SHOULD
HAVE.
'YOU
GET
OFF
HERE,'
UNCLE
SAID
AND
DROVE
TO
A
ROAD
CORNER.
'CITIBANK
IS
HARDLY
HUNDRED
METRES.'
I
STEPPED
OUT
OF
THE
CAR.
I
SAID
THANKS
THREE
TIMES
AND
WAVED
HIM
GOODBYE.

HE
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
HE
PUT
HIS
HAND
ON
THE
GEAR-SHIFT.
'DON'T
MEET
ANANYA
TOO
MUCH.
WE
ARE
SIMPLE
PEOPLE,
WE
DON'T
SAY
MUCH.
BUT
DON'T
SPOIL
HER
NAME
IN
OUR
COMMUNITY,'
HE
SAID.
'UNCLE,
BUT...'
'I
KNOW
YOU
ARE
CLASSMATES
AND
YOU
ARE
HELPING

MANJU.
WE
CAN
BE
GRATEFUL,
WE
CAN
FED
YOU,
BUT
WE
CAN'T
LET
ANANYA
MARRY
YOU.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
I
STOOD
AT
THE
TRAFFIC
INTERSECTION.
AUTOS
BLARED
THEIR
HORNS
AT
EACH
OTHER
AS
IF
IN
ANGRY
CONVERSATION.
IT
WAS
HARDLY
THE
PLACE
TO
CONVINCE
SOMEONE
ABOUT
THE
MOST
IMPORTANT
DECISION
OF
YOUR
LIFE.
'UNCLE,
BUT
...'
I
SAID
AGAIN.
UNCLE

FOLDED
HIS
HANDS
TO
BEFORE
PRESSING
THE
ACCELERATOR.
THE
CAR
STARTED
TO
MOVE.
FUCK,
HOW
DO
I
RESPOND
TO
FOLDED
HANDS?
I
THOUGHT.
UNCLE
DROVE
PAST
ME.
LIKE
A
DEFEATED
INSURANCE
SALESMAN,
I
LIFTED
MY
BAG
AND
WALKED
TOWARDS
THE
BANK.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
21
'WELCOME
SIR,
WELCOME
TO
STATE
BANK
OF
INDIA,'
BALA
SAID.
HIS
TONE
COULDN'T
HIDE
HIS
ANGER,
THEREBY
RUINING
THE
SARCASM
OF
HIS
LINES.
HE
SAT
ON
MY
DESK,
WAITING
FOR
THE
EXACT
JOYOUS
MOMENT
WHEN
HE
COULD
SQUASH
ME.
'I'M

REALLY
SORRY,
MY
AUTO
MET
WITH
AN
ACCIDENT,'
I
LIED.
"YOUR
CHUMMERY
SERVANT
SAID
YOU
LEFT
AT
FIVE,'
HE
SAID.
'YOU
CALLED
MY
CHUMMERY?
IT'S
ONLY
NINE.
ISN'T
THAT
THE
OFFICIAL
TIME
ANYWAY?'
'NO,
THIS
IS
CITIBANK.
NOT
A
PUBLIC
SECTOR
BANK,'
HE
SAID.

'SO,
PEOPLE
WHO
WORK
HERE
CANNOT
HAVE
LIFE,'
I
MUMBLED.
'WHAT?'
'NOTHING.
MS
SREENIVAS
IS
COMING
AT
TEN
TODAY,'
I
SAID.
'AND
YOU
HAVEN'T
PREPARED
FOR
IT.
HAVE
YOU
READ
THE
REPORTS?'
'YES,
I
HAVE.
BUT
THE
TRICKY
PART
IS
SHE
IS
DOWN
TEN

LAKH.
AND
THAT
IS
BECAUSE
SHE
BELIEVED
THESE
REPORTS.
SO
NO
MATTER
HOW
WELL
I
READ
THESE
REPORTS,
SHE
WON'T
TRUST
THEM.
CAN
I
SIT
ON
MY
CHAIR?'
I
ASKED.
BALA
STARED
AT
ME,
SHOCKED
BY
MY
DEFIANCE.
I
TOOK
MY
SEAT.
'YOU
TOLD

ME
TO
PUSH
THESE
STOCKS,'
I
SAID,
'AND
NOW
OUR
CLIENTS
ARE
DOWN.
MS
SREENIVAS
IS
AN
OLD
LADY.
SHE
WILL
PANIC.
I
WANT
YOU
TO
BE
PREPARED.'
'PREPARED
FOR
WHAT?'
'THAT
SHE,
AND
SOME
OTHER
CLIENTS
TOO,
COULD
MOVE
FUNDS
ELSEWHERE.'
'HOW?
HOW

CAN
THEY?
THIS
IS
CITIBANK,'
BALA
SAID.
'BECAUSE
EVEN
AS
THE
CITI
NEVER
SLEEPS,
WE
MAKE
OUR
CUSTOMERS
WEEP.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
MS
SREENIVAS'
PANIC
MODE
WAS
ENTERTAINING
ENOUGH
TO
ATTRACT
BANKERS
FROM
OTHER
GROUPS
TO
COME
TO
OUR
AREA.
FIRST,
SHE
SPOKE
TO
ME
IN
TAMIL
FOR
TWO
MINUTES.
WHEN
SHE
REALISED
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
THE
LANGUAGE,
SHE
SWITCHED
TO
ENGLISH.
'YOU,

YOU
SAID
THIS
WILL
DOUBLE.
IT'S
DOWN
SEVENTY
PERCENT-AA,'
MS
SREENIVAS
SAID.
'ACTUALLY
MADAM,
THE
MARKET
WENT
INTO
SELF-CORRECTION
MODE,'
I
SAID.
I
NOW
UNDERSTOOD
THE
PURPOSE
OF
COMPLEX
RESEARCH
TERMS.
THEY
DEFLECT
UNCOMFORTABLE
QUESTIONS
THAT
HAVE
NO
ANSWER.
'BUT,
I'VE
LOST
TEN
LAKH!'

SHE
SCREAMED.
'MADAM,
STOCK
MARKET
GOES
UP
AND
DOWN.
WE
DO
HAVE
SOME
OTHER
PRODUCTS
THAT
ARE
LESS
RISKY,'
I
SAID,
CAPITALIZING
ON
HER
MISERY
TO
SELL
MORE.
'FORGET
IT.
I
AM
DONE
WITH
CITIBANK.
I
TOLD
YOU
TO
DO
A
FIXED
DEPOSIT.
YOU

DIDN'T.
NOW
I
MOVE
MY
ACCOUNT
TO
VYSYA
BANK.'
MY
SALES
REP
BROUGHT
SEVERAL
SNACKS
AND
COLD
DRINKS
FOR
HER.
MS
SREENIVAS
DIDN'T
BUDGE.
'MADAM,
BUT
CITIBANK
IS
A
MUCH
BETTER
NAME
THAN
VYSYA,'
I
SAID.
'GIVE
ME
THE
ACCOUNT
CLOSING
DOCUMENTS,'
MS
SREENIVAS

SAID.
WE
HAD
NO
CHOICE.
FIRST
HOUR
IN
OFFICE,
STRIKE
ONE.
THE
TV
IN
THE
RECEPTION
SHOWED
THE
CNBC
CHANNEL.
INTERNET
STOCKS
HAD
LOST
ANOTHER
FIVE
PERCENT
THAT
DAY.
IN
THE
NEXT
TWO
WEEKS,
OUR
MOST
TRUSTING
CUSTOMERS,
HENCE
THE
MOST
GULLIBLE
ONES
TO

WHOM
WE
HAD
PEDDLED
COMPANIES
THAT
DID
NOTHING
MORE
THAN
MAKE
A
WEBSITE,
LOST
A
TOTAL
OF
TWO
CRORE.
MY
OWN
CUSTOMERS'
LOSSES
WERE
LIMITED
TO
THE
TWO
LADIES,
AS
I
COULD
NEVER
SELL
THOSE
COMPANIES
WELL
ANYWAY.
BALA,
HOWEVER,
WITH
HIS
EMPIRE
OF

SMART
PEOPLE
WHO
RIP
OFF
RICH
PEOPLE,
HAD
TO
ANSWER
COUNTRY
HEADQUARTERS
IN
MUMBAI.
'I
HAVE
SEVEN
COMPLAINTS,'
THE
COUNTRY
HEAD
OF
THE
CUSTOMER
SERVICE
GROUP
SAID
IN
A
CONFERENCE
CALL.
'SIR,
IT
IS
JUST
AN
OVERREACTION
TO
THE
VOLATILITY,'
BALA
SAID.
'DON'T
QUOTE

FROM
THE
RESEARCH
REPORT.
I'VE
READ
IT,'
THE
COUNTRY
HEAD
SAID.
THE
CALL
ENDED.
BALA'S
FACE
HAD
TURNED
PALE.
THE
BOSSES
HAD
DECIDED
TO
VISIT
THE
CHENNAI
BRANCH.
I
FIRST
THOUGHT
I
IMAGINED
IT,
BUT
IT
WAS
TRUE;
BALA
SHIVERED
A
LITTLE
AT
THE

NEWS.
MUMBAI
SAID
WE
SHOULDN'T
HAVE
MARKETED
INTERNET
STOCKS
TO

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
INDIVIDUAL
INVESTORS,
LET
ALONE
HOUSEWIVES,
IN
THE
FIRST
PLACE.
OF
COURSE,
THEY
NEVER
COMPLAINED
WHEN
THE
COMMISSION
KEPT
COMING
IN.
BUT
NOW
FIVE
CUSTOMERS
HAD
CLOSED
THEIR
ACCOUNTS
AND
ONE
CUSTOMER
HAD
SENT
A
LETTER
ALL
THE
WAY
TO
THE
CEO

OF
CITIBANK
IN
NEW
YORK.
AT
MY
WEEKLY
SALES
MEETING,
I
TOLD
MY
SALES
REPS
NOT
TO
SELL
CHENNAI
CUSTOMERS
ANYTHING
APART
FROM
FIXED
DEPOSITS,
GOLD
AND
SARIS.
'SIR,
WE
DON'T
SELL
SARIS,'
ONE
OF
MY
REPS
CLARIFIED.
'SORRY,
I
WAS
TRYING
TO
BE

FUNNY.
WE
DON'T
SELL
GOLD
EITHER,
RIGHT?'
'WE
DO.
GOLD-LINKED
DEPOSIT,
SIR,'
SHE
SAID.
YES,
I
DIDN'T
EVEN
KNOW
MY
GROUP'S
PRODUCTS.
ACTUALLY,
I
DIDN'T
EVEN
KNOW
WHY
I
WAS
DOING
THIS
JOB.
I
NODDED
AND
SMILED.
IN
CUSTOMER
SERVICE,
YOU
NEED
TO
SMILE

MORE
THAN
A
TOOTHPASTE
MODEL.

'IS
IT
TRUE
THAT
MS
SREENIVAS
LOST
TEN
LAKH?'
ANOTHER
OF
MY
LADY
CUSTOMERS
WALKED
INTO
THE
BANK.
SHE
CHUCKLED,
AND
SAT
CLOSE
TO
THE
SALES
REP
TO
GET
THE
FULL
LOWDOWN.
TOO
BAD
WE
COULDN'T
GIVE
HER
THE

DETAILS
DUE
TO
CONFIDENTIALITY
REASONS.
WE
COULDN'T
OFFER
RETURNS,
BUT
AT
LEAST
WE
COULD
HAVE
GIVEN
GOSSIP.
MAYBE
THAT
WOULD
LURE
CUSTOMERS.
'KRISH,
COME
HERE,'
BALA
CAME
TO
ME
LIKE
A
PETRIFIED
PUPPY
AT
SEVEN
IN
THE
EVENING.
I
HAD
PACKED
MY
'CITI
NEVER

SLEEPS'
BAG
TO
GO
BACK
HOME
AND
SLEEP.
WE
HAD
OUR
BOSSES
COMING
IN
TWO
DAYS.
I
HAD
SPENT
THE
LAST
TWO
NIGHTS
MAKING
PRESENTATIONS
FOR
THEM.
IT
WAS
THE
CRAPPIEST,
MOST
THANKLESS
JOB
IN
TAMIL
NADU.
NO
MATTER
HOW
WONDERFUL
I
MADE
MY

SLIDES,
THE
NUMBERS
WERE
SO
BAD,
WE'D
BE
SCREAMED
AT
ANYWAY.
LAST
NIGHT
I
HAD
REACHED
HOME
AT
THREE
AND
THEN
WOKE
UP
AGAIN
AT
FIVE
TO
REACH
BROTHER-IN
-LAW
DEAREST.
I
DIDN'T
WANT
BALA,
I
WANTED
A
PILLOW.
'BALA,
I
...'
I
STOPPED

MID-SENTENCE

AS

HE

HAD

ALREADY

TURNED

TOWARDS

HIS

CABIN,

EXPECTING

ME

TO

FOLLOW

HIM.

I

WENT

INTO

BALA'S

OFFICE.

HE

SHUT

THE

DOOR

SOFTLY

AS

POSSIBLE.

HE

DREW

THE

BLINDS

AND

PUT

THE

PHONE

OFF

THE

HOOK.

EITHER

HE

WANTS

TO

FIRE

ME

OR

MOLEST
ME,
I
THOUGH.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'HOW
IS
IT
GOING?'
HE
WHISPERED,
QUITE
UNNECESSARILY
AS
PEOPLE
HAD
ALREADY
LEFT
FOR
THE
DAY.
'FINE.
I
SENT
YOU
THE
PRESENTATION.
YOU
APPROVED,
RIGHT?'
I
SAID.
HE
HAD
GIVEN
ME
AN
OK
IN
THE
AFTERNOON.
THE
LAST
THING
I
WANTED

WAS
ANOTHER
NIGHT
OUT.
'YEAH,
THAT'S
FINE.
LISTEN
BUDDY,
I
NEED
A
FAVOUR
FROM
YOU.'
BALA
HAD
NEVER
CALLED
ME
BUDDY.
THE
ROOM
SMELT
COCONUTTY
AND
FISHY.
THE
COCONUT
CAME
FROM
BALA'S
HAIR,
THE
FISH
FROM
HIS
UNSPOKEN
INTENTION.
'WHAT
FAVOUR?'
I
ASKED
WITHOUT

SMILING.
'SEE
KRISH,
THIS
JOB,
MY
CAREER,
IT
IS
EVERYTHING
TO
ME.
I
HAVE
GIVEN
MY
LIFE
TO
THIS
BANK.'
I
NODDED.
COME
TO
THE
POINT,
BUDDY,
I
THOUGHT.
'AND
YOU,
AS
YOU
WILL
ADMIT,
AREN'T
INTO
IT
AS
MUCH
AS
ME.
DON'T
TAKE

IT
THE
WRONG
WAY.'
HE
WAS
HUNDRED
PERCENT
RIGHT.
BUT
WHEN
SOMEONE
TELLS
YOU
TO
NOT
TAKE
IT
THE
WRONG
WAY,
YOU
HAVE
TO
TAKE
IT
THE
WRONG
WAY.
BESIDES,
I
HAD
SPENT
THE
LAST
THREE
NIGHTS
WORKING
HARD
WITH
ONLY
ATM
GUARDS
FOR

COMPANY.

I
DESERVED
BETTER.

'THAT
IS
HUNDRED
PERCENT
FALSE,'

I
SAID.

'I'M
DYING
FROM
WORK.

I
DO
WHATEVER
YOU
WANT
ME
TO
DO.

I
SOLD
THAT
CRAP
INTERNET
...'

'EASY,
EASY,'
BALA
SHUSHED
ME.

'THERE
IS
NOBODY
HERE.
WE
ARE
NOT
PLANNING
A
JAMES

BOND
MISSION
THAT
WE
HAVE
TO
WHISPER,'
I
SAID.
CORPORATE
TYPES
LOVE
TO
PRETEND
THEIR
LIFE
IS
EXCITING.
THE
WHISPERS,
FIST-
PUMPING
AND
ANIMATED
HAD
GESTURES
ARE
ALL
DESIGNED
TO
LIFT
OUR
JOB
DESCRIPTION
FROM
WHAT
IT
REALLY
IS
-
THAT
OF
AN
OVERPAID

CLERK.
'I'M
NOT
DOUBTING
YOUR
HARD
WORK.
BUT
SEE,
IN
CORPORATE
LIFE,
WE
HAVE
TO
LOOK
AFTER
EACH
OTHER.'
'WHAT?
HOW?'
IF
HE
DIDN'T
COME
TO
THE
POINT
IN
TWO
SECONDS,
I
WOULD
SLAP
HIM.
IN
MY
IMAGINATION,
I
ALREADY
HAD.
'I
AM
YOUR

BOSS,
SO
I
CAN
LOOK
AFTER
YOU
ANYWAY.
BUT
TODAY
YOU
HAVE
A
CHANCE
TO
LOOK
AFTER
ME.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
KEPT
QUIET.
'THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
IS
COMING.
THEY
WILL
ASK
HOW
THE
INTERNET
STOCKS
SALES
TO
HOUSEWIVES
CAME
ABOUT.

I
HAVE
TO
TAKE
THE
HEAT
ANYWAY.
BUT
IF
YOU
COULD

...'
'COULD
WHAT?'

I
PROMPTED,
JUST
TO
MAKE
THE
SCUMBAG

SAY
IT.
HE
DIDN'T.
'YOU
WANT
ME
TO
TAKE
THE
BLAME?'
I
HAZARDED
A
GUESS.
HE
GAVE
A
BRIEF
NOD.
'WOW.
THAT'S
UNBELIEVABLE,
BALA.
I'M
A
TRAINEE.
WHY
WILL
THEY
BELIEVE
ME
ANYWAY?'
'YOU
ARE
FROM
IIMA.
IT
IS
CONCEIVABLE
YOU
HAD
A
BIG

SAY
FROM
EARLY
ON.'
'AND
IF
I
SAY
IT,
MY
CAREER
IS
FUCKED.'
'NO,
YOU
ARE
A
TRAINEE.
I
HAVE
TO
RECOMMEND
YOUR
PROMOTION.
CONSIDER
THAT
DONE
ANYWAY.
BUT
IF
I
AM
HELD
RESPONSIBLE,
I
DON'T
GET
A
PROMOTION,
EVER.'
'YOU
ARE
RESPONSIBLE,'
I

STARED
INTO
HIS
EYES.
'PLEASE
KRISH,'
BALA
SAID.
THE
BOSS-SUBORDINATE
RELATIONSHIP
HAD
CHANGED.
BALA
BEGGED
ME
FOR
HELP.
I
REALISED
THE
POWER
I
COULD
HOLD
OVER
HIM
IF
I
GAVE
IN.
I
COULD
COME
TO
OFFICE
LIKE
SANE
PEOPLE.
I
COULD
LEAVE
EARLY.
I

COULD
SNOOZE
AT
MY
DESK.
OK,
SO
MAYBE
MY
CAREER
AT
THE
CITI
OVERPAID
CLERKS'
CLUB
WOULD
GET
AFFECTED.
SO
WHAT?
I
COULD
HAVE
SAID
YES
THEN,
BUT
I
WANTED
HIM
TO
GROVEL
SOME
MORE.
I
KEPT
QUIET.
'THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
AS
IT
IS

DOESN'T
LIKE
ME.
HE
IS
NORTH
INDIAN.
HE
WILL
FORGIVE
YOU
BUT
NOT
ME,'
BALA
SAID.
I
WONDERED
IF
HE
WOULD
CRY.
I
COULD
HAVE
ENJOYED
THE
SHOW
LONGER
BUT
I
ALSO
WANTED
TO
GO
HOME
AND
REST.
'I'LL
SEE
WHAT
I
CAN
DO,'

I
STOOD
UP.
'IS
THAT
A
YES?'
BALA
SAID,
HIS
EYES
EXPECTANT.
'GOOD
NIGHT,
SIR,'
I
SAID,
EMPHASIZING
THE
LAST
WORD.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
22
MY
FATHER
NEVER
CALLS
ME.
I
HAVE
NO
IDEA
WHY
HE
DID
THAT
NIGHT.
I
HAVE
NO
IDEA
WHY
HE
DID
THAT
NIGHT.
I
WANTED
TO
SLEEP
BEFORE
THE
MISERY
OF
TUITION
AND
OFFICE
BEGAN
ALL
OVER
AGAIN.
BUT
AT

ELEVEN
THAT
NIGHT,
RAMANUJAN
KNOCKED
ON
THE
DOOR.
'WHAT?'
I
CALLED
OUT.
SINCE
THE
DAY
ANANYA
VISITED,
I
HARDLY
SPOKE
TO
MY
FLATMATES.
'THERE'S
A
CALL
FOR
YOU.'
'WHO
IS
IT?'
EVEN
ANANYA
NEVER
CALLED
ME
THIS
LATE.
'YOUR
FATHER.
CAN
YOU
ASK
HIM

NOT
TO
CALL
AT
THIS
HOUR?’
RAMANUJAN
YAWNED.

I
FROZE
AT
THE
MENTION
OF
MY
FATHER.

I
PRAYED
MY
MOTHER
WAS
OK.
WHY
WOULD
HE
CALL
ME?

‘HELLO?’
‘AM

I
SPEAKING
TO
MY
SON?’

I
FOUND
HIS
ADDRESSING
ME
AS
HIS
SON
STRANGE.
WE

HAD
NEVER
HAD
A
ONE-TO-ONE
CONVERSATION
FOR
THE
LAST
THREE
YEARS.
'IT'S
KRISH,'
I
SAID.
'THAT'S
MY
SON
ONLY,
NO?'
'IF
YOU
SAY
SO,'
I
SAID.
SILENCE
FOLLOWED
AS
TWO
STD
PULSES
PASSED.
'I'M
LISTENING,'
HE
SAID.
'TO
WHAT?'
'TO
WHATEVER
MY
SON
HAS

TO
SAY
TO
ME.'
'THERE
ISN'T
ANYTHING
LEFT
TO
SAY.
WHY
HAVE
YOU
CALLED
SO
LATE?'

I
SAID
IN
AN
ANGRY
VOICE.
'YOU
SENT
YOUR
MOTHER
YOUR
FIRST
SALARY
CHEQUE?'

'YES,'
I
SAID
AFTER
A
PAUSE.
'CONGRATULATIONS,'
HE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'IS
MOM
OK?
I
HOPE
YOU
ARE
NOT
CALLING
ME
FOR
SOME
GUILT
TRIP
OF
YOURS.
BECAUSE
IF
MOM
IS
NOT
OK
...'
I
SAID,
SEPARATING
MY
WORDS
WITH
PAUSES.
'YOUR
MOTHER
IS
FINE.
SHE
IS
PROUD
OF
YOU,'
HE
SAID.

'ANYTHING
ELSE?'

'HOW'S
LIFE?'

'IT'S
NONE
OF
YOUR
BUSINESS,'
I

SAID.

'IS
THIS
THE
WAY
TO
SPEAK
TO
YOUR
FATHER?'
HE
SHOUTED.

'I
DON'T
SPEAK
TO
YOU,'

I
SAID,
'IN
CASE
YOU
DIDN'T
NOTICE.'

'AND
I
AM
TRYING
TO
INCREASE
COMMUNICATION,'
HE
SAID,
HIS

VOICE
STILL
LOUD.
I
COULD
HAVE
HUNG
UP
THE
PHONE
RIGHT
THEN,
BUT
I
DIDN'T
WANT
HIM
TO
TAKE
HIS
ANGER
OUT
ON
MY
MOTHER.
I
KEPT
QUIET
AS
HE
RANTED
ABOUT
HOW
I
HAD
LET
HIM
DOWN
AS
A
SON.
HE
DIDN'T
SAY

ANYTHING
HE
HADN'T
IN
THE
LAST
TWENTY
YEARS.

I
ALSO
KNEW
THAT
ONCE
THE
MONOLOGUE
STARTED,
IT
WOULD
TAKE
A
WHILE
TO
STOP.

I
PUT
THE
PHONE
ON
THE
TABLE
AND
OPENED
THE
FRIDGE.

I
TOOK
OUT
AN
APPLE
AND
A
BOTTLE
OF
WATER.

I
WENT
TO
THE
KITCHEN,
CUT
THE
APPLE
INTO
LITTLE
PIECES
AND
CAME
BACK.
I
HAD
TWO
BITES
AND
DRANK
A
GLASS
OF
WATER.
SQUAWKS
CAME
FROM
THE
PHONE
RECEIVER.
AFTER
FINISHING
THE
APPLE,
I
PICKED
UP
THE
PHONE.
'YOU
HAVE
NO
QUALITIES
I

CAN
BE
PROUD
OF.
THESE
DEGREES
MEAN
NOTHING.
JUST
BECAUSE
YOU
SEND
YOU
MOTHER
MONEY,
YOU
THINK
YOU
CAN
BOSS
AROUND.
I
THINK
A
PERSON
LIKE
YOU
...'
HE
WAS
SAYING
WHEN
I
PUT
THE
PHONE
DOWN
AGAIN.
I
PICKED
IT
UP
AGAIN
AFTER

I
FINISHED
THE
APPLE.
'I
SAID,
ARE
YOU
LISTENING?'
HIS
VOICE
WAS
TREMBLING.
'I
AM,'
I
SAID.
'NOW
IT
IS
LATE.
YOUR
BILL
MUST
ALSO
BE
QUIET
HIGH.
MAY
I
GO
TO
SLEEP?'
'YOU
HAVE
NO
RESPECT.'
'YOU
SAID
THAT
ALREADY.
NOW,
CAN
WE

SLEEP?
GOOD
NIGHT,'
I
SAID.
'GOOD
NIGHT,'
HE
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP.
NO
MATTER
HOW
MAD
THEY
ARE,
ARMY
PEOPLE
STILL
BELIEVE
IN
COURTESIES.
I
AM
SURE
INDIAN
AND
PAKISTANI
OFFICERS
WISH
EACH
OTHER
BEFORE
THEY
BLOW
EACH
OTHER'S
BRAINS
OFF.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
CAME
BACK
TO
BED.
I
DIDN'T
WANT
MY
FATHER'S
CHAPTER
IN
MY
LIFE
AGAIN.
NO
FATHER
IS
BETTER
THAN
A
BAD
FATHER.
PLUS
RIGHT
NOW
I
HAD
TO
DEAL
WITH
ANOTHER
FATHER,
WHO
HAD
FOLDED
HIS
HANDS
TO
KEEP
ME

AWAY
FROM
A
DAUGHTER
I
SO
BADLY
WANTED
TO
BE
WITH.
AND
I
HAVE
BALA
AND
LOSER
FLATMATES
AND
PSYCHO
LANDLORD
AND
HORRIBLE
SAMBHAR
SMELLS
EVERYWHERE
IN
THIS
CITY.
A
DOZEN
RANDOM
THOUGHTS
SPILLED
OUT
IN
MY
BRAIN
RIGHT
BEFORE
GOING
TO
BED.
THESE

THOUGHTS
SWARM
AROUND
LIKE
CLUMSY
FISHES,
AND
MY
POOR
LITTLE
BRAIN
BEGGED

—
GUYS,
I
NEED
SOME
REST.
DO
YOU
MIND?
BUT
THE
THOUGHTS
DIDN'T
GO
AWAY.
EACH
FISH
HAD
AN
ATTENTION
DEFICIT
DISORDER.
THE
BALA
THOUGHT
SHOWED
VISIONS
OF
ME
JABBING
HIM
WITH

SOMETHING
SHARP.
THE
ANANYA'S
DAD
THOUGHT
MADE
ME
THINK
ABOUT
A
DOZEN
POST-FACTO
ONE
LINERS
I
COULD
HAVE
SAID
WHEN
UNCLE
FOLDED
HIS
HANDS
—
BUT
I
LOVE
HER,
SIR;
BUT
YOU
SHOULD
GET
TO
KNOW
ME,
UNCLE;
YOU
REALISE
WE
CAN
RUN
AWAY,

YOU
HINDU-READING
LOSER.
SOME
PEOPLE
ARE
LUCKY.
THEY
LIE
DOWN,
CLOSE
THEIR
EYES
AND
LIKE
THOSE
LIKE
THOSE
IMPORTED
DOLLS
YOUR
DUBAI
RELATIVES
GIVE
YOU,
GO
OFF
TO
SLEEP.
I
HAVE
TO
SHUT
FIFTY
CHANNELS
IN
MY
BRAIN,
ONE
CLICK
AT
A
TIME.
ONE

HOUR
LATER,
I
HAD
SHUT
THE
FINAL
THOUGHT
OF
HOW
I'D
ADMIT
I
TAUGHT
HOUSEWIVES
TO
PLAY
WITH
RADIOACTIVE
STOCKS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
23
'READY?'
BALA
JOLLIED
ME
WITH
COFFEE
IN
THE
MORNING.
YES,
MR
BALAKRISHNAN,
BRANCH
HEAD
OF
CUSTOMER
SERVICES,
BROUGHT
ME
COFFEE
IN
A
MUG.
TOO
BAD
HE
DIDN'T
CARRY
IT
IN
A
TRAY.
'DOESN'T
TAKE
MUCH
PREPARATION
TO
PRESENT
YOURSELF
AS

STUPID,'

I

SAID

AND

TOOK

THE

COFFEE.

I

NOTICED

THE

MUG

HAD

BECOME

WET

AT

THE

BOTTOM.

BALA

PICKED

UP

A

TISSUE

FROM

MY

DESK

FOR

ME.

I

COULD

GET

USED

TO

THIS,

I

THOUGHT.

WE

MET

IN

THE

CONFERENCE

ROOM

TWO

HOURS

LATER.

BALA
LOADED
UP
THE
PRESENTATION.
TRUE
TO
CHARACTER,
HE
HAD
REMOVED
MY
NAME
FROM
THE
TITLE
SLIDE.
LIKE
ALL
BANKING
PRESENTATIONS
IN
EVERY
DEPARTMENT
OF
EVERY
BANK
IN
INDIA,
IT
STARTED
WITH
THE
1991
LIBERALISATION
AND
HOW
IT
PRESENTS
TREMENDOUS
OPPORTUNITY
FOR
INDIA.
'AS

YOU
CAN
SEE,
THE
IT
SPACE
HAS
SEEN
TREMENDOUS
VOLATILITY
IN
THE
LAST
THREE
MONTHS,'
BALA
SAID,
POINTING
TO
A
GRAPH
THAT
ONLY
WENT
DOWN.
OUR
COUNTRY
HEAD,
ANIL
MATHUR,
HAD
COME
ON
THE
FIRST
FLIGHT
TO
CHENNAI.
HIS
DAY
HAD
STARTED
BAD
AS

HE
COULDN'T
GET
A
BUSINESS
CLASS
SEAT
LAST
MINUTE
AND
HAD
TO
RUB
SHOULDERS
WITH
THE
COMMON
PEOPLE.
HIS
GRUMPY
EXPRESSION
CONTINUED
TO
WORSEN
DURING
THE
PRESENTATION.
ANIL
WAS
FORTY
YEARS
OLD
AND
SEEN
AS
A
YOUNG
TURK
ON
HIS
WAY
UP.
CITI
THRIVED

ON
AND
LOVED
THE
START
SYSTEM.
PEOPLE
INTRODUCED
HIM
AS
'THIS
IS
ANIL,
MD.
HE
IS
A
STAR
PERFORMER.'
AGAIN,
THERE
IS
NOTHING
STARRY
TO
DO
IN
A
BANK
ANYWAY.
IT
IS
ANOTHER
THING
CITI
INVENTED
TO
REDUCE
THE
DULLNESS
OF
OUR
JOB.
HOWEVER,

WHEN
ANIL
ENTERED
THE
ROOM,
SOME
CHENNAI
BANKERS'
EYES
LIT
UP,
MUCH
LIKE
THE
AUTO
DRIVER
WHO
SAW
RAJNI'S
POSTER.
'AND
THAT
IN
SHORT,
HAS
LED
TO
THE
CIRCUMSTANCES
WE
ARE
IN
TODAY,'
BALA
SAID
AS
HE
ENDED
HIS
HOUR-LONG
SPEECH.
I
COULDN'T
BELIEVE

HE
TAGGED
HIS
TALK
THIS
SHORT.
ANIL
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
HE
LOOKED
AROUND
THE
ROOM.
CHENNAI
TRAINEES
AVOID
EYE
CONTACT
ANYWAY,
ESPECIALLY
WHEN
IT
COMES
TO
AUTHORITY.
HE
LOOKED
AT
BALA
AND
BALA
LOOKED
AT
ME.
I
NODDED;
I'D
BE
THE
SUICIDE
MISSION
TODAY.
ANIL'S

CELL-PHONE
RANG.
HE
TOOK
IT
OUT
OF
HIS
POCKET.
HIS
SECRETARY
HAD
CALLED
FROM
MUMBAI.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT
DO
YOU
MEAN
WAIT-LISTED
FOR
BUSINESS
CLASS?
I
AM
NOT
COMING
BACK
LIKE
I
DID
THIS
MORNING
SITTING
CRAMPED
WITH
THESE
MADRASIS.'
APART
FROM
ME
AND
ANIL,
EVERYONE
IN
THE
ROOM
WAS
OFFENDED.
HOWEVER,
SINCE
ANIL
IS
THE
BOSS,
EVERYBODY

SMILED
LIKE
IT
WAS
A
CUTE
ROMANTIC
JOKE.
ANIL
STOOD
UP
WITH
HIS
PHONE.
'AND
WHY
DO
I
HAVE
A
HONDA
CITY
TO
PICK
ME
UP?
TELL
THEM,
I
AM
ELIGIBLE
FOR
BMW
IF
THEY
DON'T
HAVE
MERCEDES
...
YES,
OF
COURSE,
I
AM.'

HE
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP
THE
PHONE.

HE
LET
OUT
A
HUGE
SIGH
AND
RUBBED
HIS
FACE.

IT
IS
A
TOUGH
LIFE
WHEN
YOU
HAVE
TO
FIGHT
FOR
BASIC
RIGHTS
EVERY
DAY.

'OK,
FOCUS,
FOCUS,'

HE
SAID
TO
HIMSELF
AND
EVERYONE
IN
THE
ROOM

STRAIGHTENED
THEIR
BACKS.
'SIR,
AS
I
WAS
SAYING
...'
BALA
STARTED
AGAIN.
ANIL
HAD
A
FLIGHT
BACK
IN
FOUR
HOURS.
I
GUESS
BALA
HOPED
IF
HE
KEPT
PRESENTING,
TIME
WOULD
RUN
OUT
FOR
ANIL
TO
ASK
TOUGH
QUESTIONS.
"BALA,
YOU
HAVE
SAID
A
LOT,'

ANIL
SAID.
'ALL
I
CARE
ABOUT
IS
WHY
HAVE
YOU
LOST
SEVEN
BIG
CUSTOMERS
IN
A
MONTH.
IN
EVERY
OTHER
MARKET
WE
HAVE
GROWN.'
ALL
OF
US
STUDIED
THE
FLOOR.
'TWO
CRORE?
HOW
CAN
RETAIL
CUSTOMERS
LOSE
TWO
CRORE?
THEY
COME
TO
SAVE
THEIR

MONEY
IN
THE
BANK,
NOT
LOSE
IT,'
ANIL
SAID.
SUCH
TRUISMS
HAD
LED
HIM
TO
BECOME
THE
STAR
IN
THE
JARGON-FILLED
BANK.
'SO,
WHOSE
BIG
IDEA
WAS
IT
TO
SELL
THESE
LADIES
NET
STOCKS?'
ANIL
ASKED.
'SIR,'
BALA
SAID
AND
LOOKED
AT
ME.
EVERYONE

TURNED
TO
ME.
I
HAD
BECOME
GUILTY
BY
COLLECTIVE
GAZE.
'YOU
ARE?'
ANIL
ASKED.
'KRISH,
SIR,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
FROM
CHENNAI?'
ANIL
SAID,
PUZZLED
AT
MY
ACCENT
THAT
DIDN'T
MATCH
THE
REST
OF
THE
TABLE.
'NO,
I'M
FROM
DELHI.'
'PUNJABI?'
I
NODDED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANIL
DIDN'T
ANSWER.
HE
JUST
LAUGHED.
THE
SADISTIC
LAUGH
OF
SEEING
A
FISH
OUT
OF
WATER
GASP
FOR
LIFE.
'WHAT
HAPPENED?
HR
SCREWED
UP?'
ANIL
SAID.
HIS
PHONE
RANG
AGAIN.
THE
SECRETARY
CONFIRMED
BUSINESS
CLASS
AND
A
BMW
PICKUP
AT
THE

AIRPORT.
ANIL
ASKED
HER
TO
MAKE
SURE
IT
IS
A
5-SERIES
AT
LEAST.
'REMEMBER
THE
TATA
TEA
DEAL
WE
DID
WITH
BANKAM?
I
CAME
BACK
WITH
THAT
IDIOT
MD
FROM
BANKAM
AND
THE
CAR
COMPANY
SENDS
ME
A
TOYOTA
AND
A
5-SERIES
FOR
HIM.

CAN
YOU
IMAGINE
WHAT
I
WENT
THROUGH?’
ANIL
EMPHASIZED
AGAIN.
THE
SECRETARY
CONFIRMED
SHE
WOULDN’T
MAKE
HIM
SLUM
IT
IN
A
CAR
THAT
COST
LESS
THAN
AN
APARTMENT.
CALMNESS
SPREAD
IN
THE
ROOM
AS
ANIL’S
MOOD
IMPROVED.
‘WHERE
WAS
I?’
ANIL
SAID
AND
LOOKED

AT
ME.
HE
LAUGHED
AGAIN.
'WHICH
COLLEGE
ARE
YOU
FROM?'
'IIMA,'
I
SAID.
'SALUTE,
SIR,'
ANIL
SAID
AND
MOCK-SALUTED
ME.
I
DIDN'T
BRAG
ABOUT
MY
COLLEGE,
YOU
ASSHOLE,
I
WANTED
TO
SAY.
HE
GOT
THE
NAME
OUT
OF
ME.
'I
WENT
TO
IIMC.
I

WAS
ON
THE
WAITLIST
FOR
IIMA
BUT
THEY
NEVER
CALLED
ME.

I
GUESS

I
AM
NOT
AS
SMART
AS
YOU,'
ANIL
SAID.

I
HAD
NO
CLUE
HOW
TO
ANSWER
THAT
QUESTION.

ANOTHER
TRAINEE

IN
THE
ROOM
WAS
FROM

IIMC
AND

HE
INTRODUCED
HIMSELF.

THEY

HI-FIVED
BEFORE
ANIL
TURNED
TO
ME
AGAIN.
'BUT
WHO
CARES,
I
BECAME
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
AND
MANY
OF
YOUR
IIMA
SENIORS
DIDN'T,'
ANIL
SAID
AND
WINKED
AT
ME.
OBVIOUSLY
YOU
STILL
CARE,
YOU
OBNOXIOUS,
INSECURE
PRICK,
I
SAID
TO
MYSELF
EVEN
AS
I
SMILED.

WHAT
WOULD
LIFE
BE
WITHOUT
MENTAL
DIALOGUE.

'SO,
YOU
HAD
THE
IDEA
OF
SELLING
INTERNET
STOCKS
TO
HOUSEWIVES?'

ANIL
ASKED
AFTER
HE
TOUCHED
DOWN
FROM
HIS
GLOAT-FLIGHT.

'AND
BALA,
YOU
DIDN'T
STOP
HIM.'

'SIR,
I
ALWAYS
TRY
TO
ENCOURAGE
YOUNG
TALENT.
PLUS,
IIMA,
I

THOUGHT
HE'D
KNOW,'
BALA
SAID,
PICKING
ON
ANIL'S
RESENTMENT
AGAINST
MY
BLUEST
OF
THE
BLUE-BLOODED
INSTITUTE.

'IIMA,
YEAH
RIGHT,'
ANIL
SAID.
'YOU
HAVE
COST
THE
BANK
MORE
BUSINESS
THAN
YOU
CAN
EVER
MAKE
BACK
IN
FIVE
YEARS.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
I
WONDERED
IF
I
SHOULD
CANCEL
MY
DEAL
WITH
BALA.
EVEN
THE
PERSONALIZED
COFFEE
DIDN'T
SEEM
WORTH
IT.
'WHAT
ABOUT
MONITORING?
BALA,
YOU
DIDN'T
MONITOR
WHEN
THE
LOSSES
STARTED?'
'I
WAS
GETTING
MORE
BUSINESS,
SIR,'
BALA
SAID.
WE
HAD
A
LUNCH-BREAK.

I
DIDN'T
JOIN
THE
GROUP.
ONE,
I
HAD
TO
PREPARE
FOR
IIT
TRIGONOMETRY
FOR
THE
CLASS
TOMORROW
WITH
BROTHER-IN-LAW.
TWO,
I
DIDN'T
NEED
ANY
MORE
SLAMMING.
AND
THREE,
THE
FOOD
WAS
SOUTH
INDIAN
SPECIAL,
WHICH
I
HAD
BEGUN
TO
HATE
BY
NOW
AND
I

WAS
SURE
ANIL
WOULD
TOO.
POST-LUNCH,
ANIL
WRAPPED
UP
THE
MEETING.

'I
WANT
GOOD
CUSTOMER
NUMBERS.
EITHER
BRING
THOSE
CUSTOMERS
BACK
OR
WIN
NEW
ONES,
I
DON'T
CARE.
AND
PLEASE
HAVE
BETTER
FOOD
NEXT
TIME.'

'WE
WILL,
SIR,
WE
ARE
WORKING
SUPER
HARD,'
BALA

SAID.
THE
OTHER
TRAINEES
NODDED.
APART
FROM
THE
IIMC
GUY,
THEY
HADN'T
SPOKEN
A
WORD
DURING
THE
MEETING.

'I
CAN
TELL
YOU
THIS
INTERNET
DEBACLE
WILL
LEAD
TO
LAYOFFS
ACROSS
THE
BANK.
AND
IF
WE
SEE
CHENNAI
AT
THE
BOTTOM,
LITERALLY
AND
FIGURATIVELY,
THERE

WILL
BE
LAYOFFS.'
ANIL
SAID
AND
HORROR
SHOWED
ON
ALL
FACES
AT
HIS
LAST
WORDS.
'AND
YOU,
HR
ERROR,'
ANIL
SAID
AND
TAPPED
MY
SHOULDER.
'YOU
NEED
TO
BUCK
UP
BIG
TIME.'
THE
BMW
CAME
TO
THE
BRANCH
TO
TAKE
ANIL
AND
OUR
ANXIETIES

AWAY.
BALA
CAME
TO
MY
DESK
AFTER
WE
HAD
COME
BACK
TO
OUR
SEATS.
'THANKS,
BUDDY.
I
OWE
YOU,'
HE
SAID.
'BIG
TIME,
BUDDY,
BIG
TIME,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
24

I
FIGURED
IT
MUST
BE
A
SPECIAL
OCCASION
WHEN

I
HEARD
EXCESSIVE
FRYING
SOUNDS
FROM
ANANYA'S
KITCHEN.

I
HAD
COMPLETED
TWO
MONTHS
OF
TUITIONS
AND
MANJU
HAD
BECOME
SMARTER
THAN
THE
KIDS
IN
THE
COMPLAN
AND
BOURNVITA
ADS.

I
COULD

BET
ONE
MONTH
OF
MY
AFTER-TAX,
PF
AND
HRA
ALARY
THAT
MANJU
WOULD
CRACK
IIT,
MEDICAL
OR
ANY
DRACONIAN
ENTRANCE
EXAM
KNOWN
TO
MAN.
MOST
OF
IT
WAS
HIS
OWN
WORK,
AND
MY
WAKING
UP
AT
FIVE
HAD
LITTLE
TO
DO
WITH
IT.
'WHAT'S

GOING
ON,'
I
SAID
AND
SNEEZED
TWICE.
THE
PUNGENT
SMELL
OF
BURNT
CHILLIES
FLARED
MY
NOSTRILS.
'SPECIAL
COOKING
FOR
SPECIAL
GUESTS,'
MANJU
SAID,
WHILE
CONTINUING
TO
SOLVE
HIS
PHYSICS
NUMERICAL.
'WHO?'
'HARISH,
FROM
THE
BAY
AREA,'
MANJU
SAID.
'HARISH
WHO?'
ANOTHER
FRYER
WENT
ON

THE
STOVE.
THIS
TIME
SMELLS
OF
MUSTARD,
CURRY
LEAVES
AND
ONIONS
REACHED
US.
IF
THIS
WAS
ONE
OF
THOSE
PRIZE-WINNING
INDIAN
NOVELS,
I'D
SPEND
TWO
PAGES
ON
HOW
WONDERFUL
THOSE
SMELLS
WERE.
HOWEVER,
THE
ONLY
REACTION
I
HAD
WAS
A
COUGHING
FIT
AND
TEARY

EYES.
'YOU
ARE
RHUMBA
SENSITIVE,'
MANJU
SAID
AND
LOOKED
UP
AT
ME
IN
DISGUST.
HE
STOOD
UP
AND
WENT
TO
THE
DOOR.
'SWITCH
ON
THE
EXHAUST
FAN,
AMMA,'
HE
SCREAMED
AND
SHUT
THE
DOOR.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
CONTINUED
TO
TACKLE
THE
CONTENTS
OF
THE
FRYER.

'OK,
YOU
GO
FOR
BATH.
THEY
WILL
COME
ANYTIME,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
AND
WENT
TO
MAX
VOLUME,
'ANANYA!
ARE
YOU
READY?'
'WHO
IS
HARISH?'
I
ASKED
AGAIN
AS
MANJU
REFUSED
TO
LOOK
UP
FROM
HIS
PROBLEM.
'THE
NAKSHATRAM
MATCHED
NO,
SO
THEY
ARE
HERE.

OK,
SO
G
IS
9.8
METRES
PER
SECOND
SQUARED
AND
THE
ROOT
OF
...'
MANJU
DRIFTED
OFF
TO
THE
WORLD
HE
KNEW
BEST,
LEAVING
ME
ALONE
TO
DEAL
WITH
MY
WORLD,
WHERE
A
BOY
WAS
COMING
TO
MEET
MY
GIRLFRIEND
TO
MAKE
HER
HIS

WIFE.

I

YANKED

MANJU'S

NOTEBOOK

FROM

HIM.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'AIYO,
WHAT?'
MANJU
LOOKED
AT
ME
SHOCKED.
'WHAT'S
THE
DEAL
WITH
HARISH.
TELL
ME
NOW
OR
I'LL
TELL
YOUR
MOTHER
YOU
WATCH
PORN,'
I
SAID.
MANJU
LOOKED
STUNNED.
'I
DON'T
WATCH
PORN,'
HE
SAID
IN
A
SCARED
VOICE.
'DON'T
LIE
TO

ME,'
I
SAID.
EVERY
BOY
WATCHES
PORN.
'ONLY
ONCE
I
S
...SAW
A
BLUE
FILM,
AT
MY
FRIEND'S
HOUSE,
BY
MISTAKE,'
HE
STUTTERED.
'HOW
CAN
YOU
WATCH
IT
BY
MISTAKE?'
'IT
BELONGED
TO
MY
FRIEND'S
DAD.
PLEASE
DON'T
TELL
AMMA.'
HIS
FACE,
EVEN
HIS

SPECTACLES
LOOKED
TERRIFIED.

I
CLOSED
THE
BOOKS.
'TELL
ME
ALL
ABOUT
HARISH.
HOW
DID
THIS
HAPPEN?'
MANJU
TOLD
ME
ABOUT
HARISH,
THE
POSTER
BOY
OF
THE
PERFECT
TAMILIAN
GROOM.
RADHA
AUNTY
HAD
PITCHED
HARISH
FOR
THE
LAST
TWO
YEARS.
HE
FIT
EVERY
CRITERIA
APPLIED

BY
INDIAN
PARENTS
TO
MAKE
HIM
A
WORTHWHILE
MATCH
FOR
ANANYA.
HE
WAS
TAMILIAN,
A
BRAHMIN
AND
AN
IYER
(AND
THOSE
ARE
THREE
SEPARATE
THINGS,
AND
NON-COMPLIANCE
IN
ANY
CAN
GET
YOU
DISQUALIFIED).
HE
HAD
STUDIED
IN
IIT
CHENNAI
AND
HAD
SCORED
A
GPA

OF
9.45
(YES,
IT
WAS
ADVERTISED
TO
THE
SWAMIS)'
HE
WENT
ON
TO
DO
AN
MS
WITH
FULL
SCHOLARSHIP
AND
NOW
WORKED
IN
CISCO
SYSTEMS,
AN
UPCOMING
SILICON
VALLEY
COMPANY.
HE
NEVER
DRANK
OR
ATE
MEAT
OR
SMOKED
(OR
HAD
FUN,
BY
EXTENSION)
AND

HAD
A
GOOD
KNOWLEDGE
OF
CARNATIC
MUSIC
AND
BHARATNATYAM.
HE
HAD
A
FULL
HALF-INCH-THICK
MOUSTACHE,
HIS
OWN
HOUSE
IN
THE
SAN
FRANCISCO
SUBURBS,
A
WHITE
HONDA
ACCORD
AND
STOCK
OPTIONS
THAT,
APART
FROM
THE
LAST
THREE
MONTHS,
HAD
DOUBLED
EVERY
TWELVE
MINUTES.
HE
EVEN

HAD
A
TELESCOPE
HE
USED
TO
SEE
GALAXIES
ON
THE
WEEKEND
(I
TOLD
YOU
HE
HAD
NO
FUN).
MANJU
WAS
MORE
EXCITED
AT
THE
PROSPECT
OF
SEEING
THE
TELESCOPE
AND
THOUGHT
IT
REASON
ENOUGH
FOR
HIS
SISTER
TO
MARRY
THAT
GUY.
'HE
SAID
YOU

CAN
ACTUALLY
SEE
THE
COLOURS
ON
THE
RINGS
OF
SATURN,'
MANJU
SAID,
EXCITED.
'YOU
SPOKE
TO
HIM?'
'HE
CALLED.
COUPLE
OF
TIMES,'
MANJU
SAID.
'ANANYA
SPOKE
TO
HIM?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'NO.
HE
USED
TO
CALL
WHEN
SHE
WASN'T
AT
HOME.
ANYWAY,
UNTIL
THE
NAKSHATRAM
MATCHES,
THE
BOY
AND
THE
GIRL
ARE
NOT
ALLOWED
TO
TALK.'
'NAKSHATRAM
WHAT?'
I
ASKED.
THE
LIST
OF
TAMILIAN
HOOPS
ONE
NEEDS
TO
JUMP
BEFORE
GETTING
MARRIED

SEEMED
INFINITE.
'HOROSCOPE.

IT
IS
A
MUST.
IF
THEY
DON'T
MATCH,
BOY
AND
GIRL'S
SIDE
DON'T
TALK.

BUT
THEY
HAVE
MATCHED
FOR
AKKA
AND
HIM.'

I
THOUGHT
ABOUT
MY
OWN
FAMILY.

THE
ONLY
NAKSHATRAM
WE
THINK
ABOUT
IS
THE
DIVISION
OF
PETROL
PUMPS
WHEN

WE
HAVE
TO
SEE
THE
GIRL.
'YOU
ARE
A
SCIENCE
WHIZ
KID
WHO
WANTS
TO
SEE
SATURN
RINGS.
AND
YOU
ACCEPT
THAT
PEOPLE
WHOSE
HOROSCOPES
DON'T
MATCH
SHOULDN'T
TALK?'
I
SAID.
'THAT'S
HOW
IT
IS
IN
OUR
CULTURE,'
MANJU
SAID,
HIS
HANDS
ITCHING
TO

GET
TO
HIS
WORKBOOK.

I
GAVE
HIM
BACK
HIS
NOTES.

‘AND
HE
IS
COMING
NOW?’

I
SAID.
‘YES,
FOR
BREAKFAST.
AND
PLEASE,
DON’T
SNATCH
MY
NOTEBOOK
AGAIN.’

‘I
AM
SORRY,’

I
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP.

I
WANTED
TO
HAVE
A
SHOWDOWN
WITH
ANANYA
ABOUT

THIS.
SURELY,
SHE'D
HAVE
KNOWN
A
BIT
MORE
ABOUT
HIS
VISIT.
BUT
FOR
NOW,
I
WANTED
TO
GET
OUT.
'BYE,
MANJU,'
I
SAID
AS
I
TURNED
TO
LEAVE.
'KRISH
BHAIYA,
CAN
I
ASK
YOU
ONE
THING?'
HE
SAID.
'WHAT?'
I
SAID.
'CAN
SOMETHING
BAD

HAPPEN
IF
YOU
WATCH
BLUE
FILMS?’
I
STARED
AT
HIM.
‘I
WON’T,
I
PROMISE,
I
JUST
WANTED
TO
KNOW,’
HE
SAID.
‘IF
YOU
JUST
WATCH
THEM?’
‘JUST
WATCHING
...AND,’
HE
SAID
AND
HESITATED,
‘AND
IF
YOU
DO
SOMETHING
ELSE
AFTERWARDS.’
‘WHY
DON’T
YOU
ASK

YOUR
APPA?’
‘AIYO,
WHAT
ARE
YOU
SAYING?’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
COULD
BECOME
BLIND,'
I
SAID
WITH
A
SERIOUS
FACE.
'REALLY?
HE
SAID,
'HOW
IS
THAT
POSSIBLE?'
'BE
CAREFUL,'
I
WINKED
AT
HIM
AND
LEFT.
"WELCOME,
WELCOME,'
GREETINGS
HAD
STARTED
AT
THE
ENTRANCE
EVEN
BEFORE
I
COULD
LEAVE
THE
HOUSE.
A

CROWD
HAD
GATHERED
AT
THE
MAIN
DOOR

—

ANANYA'S
DAD
AND
MOM,
SHOBHA
ATHAI,
THREE
OTHER
KANJEEVARAM-CLAD
AUNTIES
AND
TWO
RANDOM
UNCLES
IN
SAFARI
SUITS
BECAME
THE
WELCOME
PARTY.
THEY
RECEIVED
HARISH
LIKE
AN
ASTRONAUT
WHO
HAD
RETURNED
FROM
THE
FIRST
INDIAN
LUNAR
MISSION.

THE
ONLY
TIME
GROWN-UPS
GET
EXCITED
ABOUT
YOUNG
PEOPLE
IS
WHEN
YOUNG
PEOPLE
ARE
GETTING
MARRIED
AND
THE
OLD
PEOPLE
CONTROL
THE
PROCEEDINGS.

I
HAD
COME
TO
ANANYA'S
HOUSE
SEVERAL
TIMES,
AND
I
HAD
RECEIVED
A
WELCOME
NO
BETTER
THAN
THE
GUY
WHO
CAME

TO
COLLECT
THE
CABLE
BILL.
BUT
HARISH
HAD
IT
ALL.
AUNTIES
LOOKED
AT
HIM
LIKE
HE
WAS
A
CUDDLY
TWO-YEAR-OLD,
ONLY
HE
WAS
FIFTY
TIMES
THE
SIZE
AND
HAD
A
MOUSTACHE
THAT
COULD
SCARE
ANY
CUDDLY
TWO-
YEAR-OLD.
HE
WORE
SUNGLASSES,
QUITE
UNNECESSARY
AT

SEVEN
IN
THE
MORNING,
APART
FROM
SHOWING
OFF
HIS
SENSE
OF
MISPLACED
STYLE.
HE
HAD
COME
WITH
HIS
PARENTS,
A
SNUG
TAMILIAN
FAMILY
WHO
WALKED
INTO
THE
ROOM
WITH
THEIR
OVERACHIEVER
IN
SHADES.
FORTUNATELY,
HE
REMOVED
THEM
WHEN
HE
SAT
ON
THE
SOFA.
ANANYA'S

FATHER
NOTICED
ME
WITH
A
CONFUSED
EXPRESSION.
'UNCLE,
I
WAS
LEAVING,'
I
SAID.
'SORRY.
I
CAME
FOR
MANJU'S
TUITIONS.'
'HAD
BREAKFAST?'
HE
ASKED.
'NO,'
I
SAID.
'THEN
SIT,'
HE
SAID.
THE
FIRMNESS
IN
HIS
VOICE
MADE
ME
OBEY
INSTANTLY.
I
WANTED
TO
WRIGGLE
OUT

OF
IT,
BUT
A
PART
OF
ME
WANTED
TO
SEE
THE
DRAMA
UNFOLD.
UNCLE'S
ATTENTION
SHIFTED
TO
THE
NEW
GUESTS.
MAYBE
HE
HAD
MADE
ME
STAY
INTENTIONALLY.
I
PERCHED
IN
A
CORNER
CHAIR
LIKE
A
DOMESTIC
SERVANT
WHO
IS
SOMETIMES
ALLOWED
TO
WATCH
TV.

THE
TAXI
DRIVER
CAME
IN
TO
ASK
FOR
HIS
BILL
AND
HARISH'S
DAD
STEPPED
OUTSIDE
TO
SETTLE
IT.
THEY
COULDN'T
AGREE
ON
THE
PRICE
AND
THEIR
ARGUMENT
BEGAN
TO
HEAT
UP.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
HARISH'S
DAD
BARGAINED
FOR
THE
LAST
FIVE
RUPEES
EVEN
AS
HARISH'S
MOTHER
CASUALLY
MENTIONED
ANOTHER
OF
THEIR
SON'S
ACHIEVEMENT.
'MIT
CALLING
HIM,
REQUESTING
HIM
TO
DO
PH.D.
AT
THEIR
COLLEGE.'
ALL
THE
LADIES
IN
THE
ROOM
HAD
A
MINI
ORGASM.
MARBLE

FLOORING
IS
TO
A
PUNJABI
WHAT
A
FOREIGN
DEGREE
IS
TO
A
TAMILIAN.
'BUT
HIS
CISCO
BOSS
SAID,
NOTHING
DOING.
YOU
CANNOT
LEAVE
ME.'
HARISH'S
MOTHER
SAID.
HARISH
KEPT
A
CONSTANT
SMILE
DURING
THE
CONVERSATION.
MANJU
CAME
INTO
THE
ROOM
AND
CALLED
ME.
'WHAT?'

I
ASKED,
DREADING
ANOTHER
PHYSICS
PROBLEM.

I
WENT
INTO
HIS
ROOM.
ANANYA
SAT
ON
HIS
BED,
WEARING
A
STUNNING
PEACOCK
BLUE
SARI

—
THE
SAME
COLOUR
SHE
WORE
THE
DAY
I
HAD
PROPOSED
TO
HER.
'GO,
YOUR
GROOM
IS
WAITING,'
I
SAID.
'MANJU,
LEAVE

THE
ROOM,'
SHE
SAID.
MANJU
HAD
ALREADY
SAT
DOWN
TO
STUDY
AGAIN.
'AIYO,
WHERE
SHOULD
I
GO?'
'GO
AND
MEET
THE
GUESTS.
OR
HELP
AMMA
IN
THE
KITCHEN,'
ANANYA
SAID
IN
A
NO-
NONSENSE
WAY.
MANJU
WENT
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM
WITH
THE
PHYSICS

GUIDE.

I

TURNED

AWAY

FROM

ANANYA.

'I'M

SORRY,'

SHE

SAID.

'WHO

THE

FUCK

INVENTED

THE

WORD

SORRY?

HOW

CAN

THERE

BE

JUST

ONE

WORD

TO

ANSWER

FOR

ANYTHING

ONE

DOES.

TOMORROW

YOU

COULD

MARRY

MR

SUNGLASSES

OUTSIDE,

AND

THEN

SAY

SORRY.

WHAT

AM

I

SUPPOSED
TO
SAY?'
'DON'T
OVERREACT.

I
AM
DOING
IT
TO
FOB
OFF
SHOBHA
AUNTY.

I
STILL
HAVE
THE
FINAL
SAY.
I'LL
SAY
NO.'
'WHY
DIDN'T
YOU
TELL
ME?'
'BECAUSE
THIS
IS
NOT
IMPORTANT.

YOU
SAW
THE
PETROL
PUMP
GIRL,
DIDN'T
YOU?'
'BUT

I
TOLD

YOU
LATER.
AND
IT
WASN'T
A
FORMAL
THING.
MY
MOTHER
WENT
TO
VISIT
PAMMI
AUNTY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'AND
NEITHER
IS
THIS
FORMAL.
MY
PARENTS
SAID
HARISH
IS
ONLY
COMING
FOR
A
CASUAL
VISIT.'
OH,
SO
PEOPLE
MATCH
HOROSCOPES
CASUALLY?'
'IT
IS
THE
FIRST
STEP.
AND
SHOBHA
AUNTY
DID
IT.
KRISH,
LISTEN
...'
'ANANYA!'
A
TAMIL-ACCENTED
SCREAM
FILLED
THE

ROOM.

'I
LOVE
YOU,'

SHE
SAID,
'AND

I
HAVE
TO
GO
NOW.'

SHE
BRUSHED
PAST

ME
TO
THE
DOOR.

'WHY
ARE
YOU
WEARING
THIS
STUNNING
SARI?'

I
PLACED
MY
HAND
ON
THE
BOLT
TO
STOP
HER.

'BECAUSE
MY
MOTHER
CHOSE
IT
FOR
ME.
NOW,

CAN
I
GO
OR
DO
YOU
WANT
APPA
TO
COME
HERE?’
‘LET’S
ELOPE,’
I
SAID.
‘LET’S
NOT
GIVE
UP,’
SHE
STOOD
UP
ON
HER
TOES
TO
KISS
ME.
THE
TASTE
OF
STRAWBERRY
LIP-GLOSS
LINGERED
ON
M
LIPS.
I
CAME
OUTSIDE
AFTER
FIVE
MINUTES.
THE

HUBBUB
OVER
HARISH
HAD
SETTLED
DOWN
A
LITTLE.
THE
MEN
OPENED
THEIR
NEWSPAPERS.
THE
WOMEN
GAVE
EACH
OTHER
FORMAL
SMILES
LIKE
BALLET
DANCERS.
THE
GROOM
TOOK
OUT
HIS
LATEST
MOTOROLA
STARTAC
MOBILE
PHONE,
CHECKING
MESSAGES.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SERVED
HER
STANDARD
FOSSILISED
SNAKE
SNACKS.
NO

ONE
SPOKE
TO
EACH
OTHER.
IN
A
PUNJABI
HOME,
IF
A
SIMILAR
SILENCE
OCCURRED,
YOU
COULD
ASSUME
THAT
SOMETHING
TERRIBLE
HAS
HAPPENED

—
LIKE
SOMEONE
HAS
DIED
OR
THERE
IS
A
PROPERTY
DISPUTE
OR
SOMEONE
FORGOT
TO
PUT
BUTTER
IN
THE
BLACK
DAAL.
BUT

THIS
IS
ANANYA'S
HOME
PROTOCOL.
YOU
MEET
IN
AN
EXCITED
MANNER,
YOU
SERVE
BLAND
SNACKS
AND
YOU
OPEN
THE
NEWSPAPER
OR
EXCHANGE
DEAD
LOOKS.
MY
RE-ENTRY
MADE
EVERYONE
NOTICE
ME.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SEEMED
SURPRISED.
ANANYA
SAT
NEXT
TO
HER
AND
FACED
HARISH'S
PARENTS.
I

OCCUPIED
MY
CORNER
CHAIR.
'MANJU'S
TUTOR,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
EVERYONE
LOOKED
AT
ME,
THE
TUTOR
WHO
CAME
TO
TEACH
IN
A
CORPORATE
SUIT.
'HE
IS
ANANYA
AKKA'S
CLASSMATE,'
MANJU
SAID,
RESTORING
SOME
STATUS
TO
ME.
'YOU
ALSO
WENT
TO
IIMA?
I
HAVE
MANY
COLLEAGUES

WHO
ARE
YOUR
SENIORS,'
HARISH
SAID.
'REALLY?
THAT'S
NICE,'
I
SAID.
I
WANTED
TO
SHOVE
THE
SPIRAL
SNACKS
UP
HIS
MOUSTACHE-COVERED
NOSE,
BUT
I
KEPT
A
DIPLOMATIC
SMILE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SPOKE
TO
HARISH'S
FATHER
IN
TAMIL.
'SOMETHING
SOMETHING
CITIBANK
CHENNAI
POSTED
SOMETHING.
SOMETHING
SOMETHING
PUNJABI
FELLOW.'
EVERYONE
NODDED
AND
FELT
RELIEVED
AFTER
MY
CREDENTIALS
OF
BEING
A
PUNJABI
MADE
ME
A
SAFE
OUTSIDER.
'TALK,
ANANYA,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
WHISPERED
TO

HER.
'HOW
LONG
ARE
YOU
HERE
FOR?'
ANANYA
ASKED
AS
HER
BANGLES
JINGLED.
SHE
REALLY
DIDN'T
HAVE
TO
WEAR
THE
BANGLES.
'TWO
WEEKS.
THEN
I
HAVE
TO
GO
FOR
OUR
ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
TO
BALI,'
HE
SAID.
'BALI?'
ONE
OF
ANANYA'S
AUNTS
SAID.
'BALI
IS

AN
ISLAND
IN
INDONESIA,
AN
ARCHIPELAGO.
IT
IS
EIGHT
HOURS
FLYING
TIME
FROM
HERE
VIA
SINGAPORE,'
HARISH'S
MOTHER
SAID.
EVERYONE
NODDED
AS
THEY
ABSORBED
THE
LITTLE
NUGGET
OF
KNOWLEDGE
BEFORE
BREAKFAST.
ANANYA'S
FAMILY
LOVED
KNOWLEDGE,
IRRESPECTIVE
OF
WHETHER
THEY
EVER
USED
IT.
WE
MOVED

TO
THE
DINING
TABLE,
OR
RATHER
THE
DINING
FLOOR.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
HAD
ALREADY
KEPT
THE
BANANA
LEAVES.
I
FOUND
THEM
A
LITTLE
GREENER
THAN
USUAL,
PERHAPS
MY
JEALOUSY
REFLECTED
IN
THEM.
AUNTIES
LOADED
UP
HARISH'S
LEAF.
'THIS
IS
TOO
MUCH,'
HARISH
SAID,
POINTING
TO

THE
SIX
IDLIS
ON
HIS
LEAF.
'DOES
ANYONE
WANT
ONE?'
HE
PICKED
UP
AN
IDLI
AND
PLACED
IT
IN
ANANYA'S
LEAF.
'WOW!'
ALL
THE
AUNTIES
SCREAMED
IN
UNISON.
'SEE,
HOW
MUCH
CARE
HE
IS
TAKING
OF
HER
ALREADY.
YOU
ARE
SO
LUCKY,
ANANYA,'
AN

AUNT
SAID
AS
I
ALMOST
TORE
A
PIECE
OF
BANANA
LEAF
AND
ATE
IT.
I
SAW
THE
BOWL
OF
SAMBHAR
IN
THE
MIDDLE.
I
WONDERED
IF
I
SHOULD
PICK
IT
UP
AND
UPTURN
IT
ON
HARISH'S
HEAD.
SHE
CAN
TAKE
HER
OWN
IDLIS,
IDIOT,

WHY
DON'T
YOU
GO
DROWN
IN
BALI,
I
THOUGHT.
HARISH
THOUGHT
IT
REALLY
FUNNY
TO
SHIFT
EVERYTHING
HE
WAS
SERVED
TO
ANANYA.
HE
TRANSFERRED
PARTS
OF
UPMA,
PONGAL,
CHUTNEY
AND
BANANA
CHIPS
FROM
HIS
LEAF
TO
HERS.
REALLY
HARISH,
DID
ANYBODY
TEACH
YOU
NOT

TO
STRETCH
A
BAD
JOKE
TOO
FAR?
AND
ALL
YOU
AUNTS,
CAN
YOU
PLEASE
STOP
SNIGGERING
SO
AS
TO
NO
ENCOURAGE
THIS
MORON?

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WE
MUST
DECIDE
THE
DATE
KEEPING
IN
MIND
THE
US
HOLIDAY
CALENDAR,'
SHOBHA
AUNTY
SAID
AND
I
FELT
SHE
WAS
MOVING
WAY,
WAY
TOO
FAST.
'EASY,
AUNTY,
EASY,'
ANANYA
SAID.
THANKS,
ANANYA
MADAM,
THAT
IS
SO
NICE
OF
YOU
TO
FINALLY

IMPART
SOME
SENSE
TO
THESE
PEOPLE.
'YOU
OK?'
MANJU
OFFERED
AN
IDLI
TO
ME.
I
HAD
SPENT
TWO
MONTHS
WITH
HIM.
HE
COULD
SENSE
THE
TURMOIL
IN
ME.
'I'M
GOOD,'
I
SAID.
THE
BREAKFAST
CONTINUED.
AND
THEN
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
DID
SOMETHING
THAT
PALED
ALL

THE
IDLI-PASSING
AND
DATE-SETTING
COMMENTS.
SHE
BEGAN
TO
CRY.
'AMMA?'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
STOOD
UP
AND
CAME
TO
HER
MOTHER.
AMMA
SHOOK
HER
HEAD.
MANJU
LOOKED
AT
HER
BUT
DIDN'T
STOP
EATING.
THE
UNCLES
PRETENDED
NOTHING
HAD
HAPPENED.
'WHAT,
RADHA?'
SURUCHI
AUNTY
SAID

AS
SHE
PUT
A
HAND
ON
AMMA'S
SHOULDER.
'NOTHING,
I
AM
SO
HAPPY.
I
AM
CRYING
FOR
THAT,'
SHE
SAID
IN
SUCH
AN
EMOTIONAL
VOICE
EVEN
I
GOT
A
LUMP
IN
MY
THROAT.
ALL
THE
OTHER
AUNTS
HAD
MOIST
EYES.
HARISH'S
MOTHER
HUGGED
ANANYA'S

MOTHER.
I
LOOKED
AT
ANANYA.
SHE
ROLLED
HER
EYES.
'HOW
QUICKLY
OUR
CHILDREN
GROW
UP,'
ONE
AUNT
SAID,
IGNORING
THE
SMALL
FACT
THAT
WITH
THE
CHILDREN,
SHE'D
GROWN
INTO
AN
OLD
WOMAN,
TOO.
I'M
GOING
TO
GET
YOU
ALL,
I
WILL,
I
SWORE
TO

MYSELF
AS
I
WENT
TO
WASH
MY
HANDS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
25
'WHY
DON'T
YOU
TELL
THEM!
THIS
GRADUAL
STRATEGY
IS
OBVIOUSLY
NOT
WORKING,'
I
SAID
AS
I
OPENED
THE
MENU.
WE
HAD
COME
TO
AMETHYST,
A
CHARMING
TEAHOUSE
SET
IN
AN
OLD
COLONIAL
BUNGALOW.
IT
IS
ONE
OF
THE
FEW
REDEEMING

ASPECTS
OF
THE
CITY.
SET
IN
A
ONE-ACRE
PLOT,
THE
BUNGALOW
IS
ON
TWO
LEVELS.
OUTSIDE
THE
BUNGALOW
THERE
ARE
GRAND
VERANDAHS
WITH
CANE
FURNITURE
AND
POTTED
PLANTS
WITH
LARGE
LEAVES.
WAITERS
BRING
ECLECTIC
DRINKS
LIKE
JAMUN
ICED
TEA
AND
MINT
AND
GINGER
COOLERS

ALONG
WITH
EXPENSIVE
DISHES
WITH
FETA
CHEESE
IN
THEM.
IT
IS
A
FAVOURITE
HAUNT
OF
STYLISH
CHENNAI
LADIES
AND
COUPLES
SO
MADLY
IN
LOVE,
THEY
FEEL
A
HUNDRED
BUCKS
FOR
JAMUN
MIXED
WITH
SODA
WAS
OK.
'I'LL
HAVE
THE
JAMUN
ICED
AND
CHICKEN
SANDWICH,

AND
SOME
SCONES
AND
CREAM,
PLEASE.'
ANANYA
SAID.
'AND
SOME
WATER,
PLEASE,'
I
SAID
TO
THE
WAITER.
'STILL
OR
SPARKLING,
SIR?'
THE
WAITER
SAID.
'WHATEVER
YOU
HAD
A
BATH
WITH
THIS
MORNING,'
KRISH
SAID.
'SIR?'
THE
WAITER
SAID,
TAKEN
ABACK,
'TAP
WATER,
SIR.'
'SAME,

GET
ME
THAT,'
I
SAID.
'I
HAVE
TOLD
THEM,
OF
COURSE.
THEY
DON'T
AGREE,'
ANANYA
SAID,
AS
WE
REVERTED
TO
OUR
TOPIC.
'IS
MR
HARISH
HISTORY?'
'FINALLY,
THOUGH
IT
WILL
TAKE
TWO
YEARS
TO
MAKE
SHOBHA
ATHAI
OK
AGAIN.
SHE
IS
LIKE
—
TELL

ME
ONE
THING
WRONG
WITH
HARISH.'
'HE
CAN'T
GET
A
WOMAN
ON
HIS
OWN,'
I
SAID.
'SHUT
UP,
KRISH,'
ANANYA
LAUGHED.
'YOU
KNOW
HOW
I
FINALLY
CLOSED
IT?'
'DID
YOU
TELL
HIM
ABOUT
ME?'
'SORT
OF.'
'SORT
OF?'
I
SAID,
MY
VOICE
LOUD.
'I

AM
NOT
MR
SORT
OF.
I
AM
THE
GUY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YEAH,
BUT
I
CAN'T
TELL
HIM
EXACTLY.
HOW
WOULD
HE
FEEL?
MY
BOYFRIEND
SAT
WITH
ME
WHEN
HE
CAME
TO
SEE
ME.'
'IMAGINE
HOW
I
FELT.
ANYWAY,
WHAT
DID
YOU
TELL
HIM?'
'HE
ASKED
ME,
RATHER
HINTED,
ABOUT
MY
VIRGINITY.'
'HE

DID
NOT!
I
WILL
KILL
THAT
BASTARD,'
I
SAID,
MY
FACE
RED.
ANANYA
LAUGHED.
'JEALOUSY
IS
RATHER
ENJOYABLE
EMOTION
TO
WATCH,'
SHE
OBSERVED.
'FUNNY.'
'HE
JUST
SAID
...
WAIT
LET
ME
REMEMBER.
YES,
HE
SAID,
ARE
YOU
STILL
PURE
OR
SOMETHING,'
SHE
GIGGLED.
'WHAT

A
LOSER.
WHAT
IS
HE
LOOKING
FOR

—
GHEE?’
I
ASKED.
ANANYA
LAUGHED
UNCONTROLLABLY.

SHE
HELD
HER
STOMACH
AS
SHE
SPOKE.

‘WAIT,
YOU’LL
DIE
IF
I
TOLD
YOU
MY
RESPONSE.’

‘AND
THAT
IS?’

‘I
TOLD
HIM

—
HARISH,
IF
THERE
IS
AN
ENTRANCE
EXAM

FOR
VIRGINITY,
YOU
CAN
BE
SURE
I
WON'T
TOP
IT,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'YOU
DID
NOT!
AND
THEN?'
'AND
THEN
THE
CISCO
GUY
HUNG
UP
THE
PHONE.
NO
MORE
HARISH,
FINITE.
RADHA
AUNTY
SAID
NOW
HARISH
ALSO
DOESN'T
LIKE
ME.
YIPEE!'
THE
WAITER
BROUGHT
US

OUR
DRINKS.
THE
CONTENTS
LOOKED
LIKE
WATER
AFTER
YOU'VE
DIPPED
SEVERAL
PAINTBRUSHES
IN
IT.
THE
JAMUN
TEA
TASTED
DIFFERENT,
THOUGH
DIFFERENT
DOESN'T
TRANSLATE
INTO
NICE.
AMETHYST
IS
ABOUT
AMBIENCE,
NOT
NOURISHMENT.
'ANANYA,
WE
NEED
TO
BRING
THIS
TO
CLOSURE.
I'M
NOT
GETTING
TRACTION
WITH

YOUR
PARENTS.
MANJU
MAYBE,
BUT
OTHERS
BARELY
ACKNOWLEDGE
ME.'
'YOU
WILL.
IN
FACT,
THAT'S
WHY
I
CALLED
YOU
HERE
TODAY.
YOU
HAVE
A
CHANCE
TO
SCORE
WITH
DAD.'
'I
CAN'T.
I
TOLD
YOU
HE
FOLDED
HIS
HANDS
AT
ME.'
'HE
IS
DYING
DOING
HIS

PRESENTATION.

NO

ONE

IN

BANK

OF

BARODA

HAS

EVER

MADE

A

BUSINESS

PLAN.

HE

DOESN'T

KNOW

COMPUTERS.

IT

IS

CRAZY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
OFFERED
HELP.
HE
SAID
NO.'
'HE
WON'T
SAY
NO
NOW.
I
COULD
HELP
HIM
BUT
I
AM
TRAVELLING
MOST
OF
THE
TIME.
AND
IF
YOU
HELP
HIM,
IT
MAY
WORK.'
'MAY,
THE
KEY
WORD
IS
MAY.
CAN
BE
REPLACED
JUST

AS
EASILY
WITH
MAY
NOT,'
I
SAID.
'TRY,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
PLACED
HER
HANDS
ON
MINE.
IT
WAS
PROBABLY
THE
ONLY
RESTAURANT
IN
CHENNAI
SHE
WOULD
TRY
SUCH
A
STUNT.
HERE,
IT
LOOKED
SORT
OF
OK.
'FIRST
YOUR
BROTHER,
THEN
YOUR
FATHER.
IF
NOTHING

ELSE,
I'LL
BE
YOUR
FAMILY
TUTOR,'
I
SAID
AS
I
SIPPED
THE
LAST
FEW
DROPS
OF
MY
TEA.
'AND
MY
LOVER,'
ANANYA
WINKED.
'THANKS.
AND
WHAT
ABOUT
YOUR
MOTHER?
HOW
CAN
I
MAKE
HER
CRY
IN
HAPPINESS
LIKE
THE
PURITY-SEEKING
HARISH?'
ANANYA
THREW
UP

HER
HANDS.
'DON'T
ASK
ME
ABOUT
MOM,'
SHE
SAID.
'ONE,
SHE
GIVES
ME
A
GUILT
TRIP
ABOUT
HARISH
EVERYDAY.
AND
TWO,
CHENNAI
HAS
PUT
HER
IN
HER
PLACE
ABOUT
HER
CARNATIC
MUSIC
ABILITIES.
SHE
HAS
STOPPED
SINGING
ALTOGETHER.
AND
THAT
MAKES
HER
EVEN
MORE

MISERABLE,
WHICH
CREATES
HER
OWN
SELF-GUILT
TRIP,
WHICH
IS
THEN
TRANSFERRED
TO
ME
AND
THE
CYCLE
CONTINUES.
EVEN
I
CAN'T
HELP
HER
WITH
THIS.
WORK
ON
DAD
FOR
NOW.'
I
NODDED
AS
ANANYA
PAUSED
TO
CATCH
HER
BREATH.
'THANKS
FOR
BEARING
THIS,'
SHE
SAID

AND
FED
ME
A
SCONE
DIPPED
IN
CREAM.
I
LICKED
CREAM
OFF
HER
FINGERS.
LITTLE
THINGS
LIKE
THESE
KEPT
ME
GOING.
'EASY,
THIS
IS
A
PUBLIC
PLACE,'
SHE
SAID.
SHE
PULLED
HER
HAND
BACK
AS
THE
WAITER
ARRIVED
WITH
THE
BILL.
I
PAID
AND

LEFT
HIM
A
TIP
BIGGER
THAN
MY
DAILY
LUNCH
BUDGET.
'HEY,
YOU
WANT
TO
GO
DANCING?'
SHE
ASKED.
'DANCING?
YOU
HAVE
AN
EIGHT
O'CLOCK
CURFEW.
HOW
CAN
WE
GO
DANCING?'
'BECAUSE
IN
CHENNAI
WE
GO
DANCING
IN
THE
AFTERNOON.
LET'S
GO,
SHERATON
HAS
A

NICE
DJ.'
'AT
THREE
IN
THE
AFTERNOON?'
'YES,
EVERYBODY
GOES.
THEY
BANNED
NIGHTCLUBS,
SO
WE
HAVE
AFTERNOON
CLUBS.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WE
TOOK
AN
AUTO
TO
THE
SHERATON.
I
AM
NOT
KIDDING,
A
HUNDRED
YOUNGSTERS
IN
PARTY
CLOTHES
WAITED
OUTSIDE
IN
THE
SUNNY
COURTYARD.
THE
DISCO
OPENED
IN
TEN
MINUTES.
EVERYONE
WENT
INSIDE
AND
THE
LIGHTS
WERE
SWITCHED
OFF.
THE
BAR
STARTED

BUSINESS.
THE
DJ
PUT
ON
THE
LATEST
RAJNI
TAMIL
TRACK.
THE
CROWD
WENT
CRAZY
AS
EVERYONE
APART
FROM
ME
REGISTERED
THE
SONG.
ANANYA
MOVED
HER
BODY
TO
THE
MUSIC.
SHE
DANCED
EXTREMELY
WELL,
AS
DID
MOST
OTHERS
TRAINED
IN
BHARATNATYAM
WHILE
GROWING
UP.
'NAAN

ONNAI
KADALIKAREN,'
SHE
SAID
'I
LOVE
YOU'
IN
TAMIL.
I
TOOK
HER
IN
MY
ARMS.
I
LOOKED
AROUND
AT
THE
YOUNGSTERS,
DOING
WHAT
THEY
LOVED
DESPITE
EVERYONE
FROM
THEIR
PARENTS
TO
THE
GOVERNMENT
BANNING
THEM
FROM
DOING
SO.
YES,
IF
THERE
CAN
BE
AFTERNOON

DISCOS,
PUNJABIS
CAN
MARRY
TAMILIANS.
RULES,
AFTER
ALL,
ARE
ONLY
MADE
SO
YOU
CAN
WORK
AROUND
THEM.
'UNCLE,
ANANYA
TOLD
ME
YOU
ARE
HAVING
TROUBLE
WITH
YOUR
BUSINESS
PLAN.'
UNCLE
BRAKED
HIS
CAR
IN
SHOCK.
WE
NEVER
SPOKE
IN
THE
FIAT.
WE
HAD
A

RITUAL.

I
READ
MY
REPORTS,
HE
CURSED
THE
TRAFFIC
AND
THE
CITY
ROADS.

IN
TWENTY
MINUTES,
WE
REACHED
THE
TRAFFIC
SIGNAL
NEAR
THE
CITIBANK
WHERE
HE
DROPPED
ME.

I
THANKED
HIM,
HE
NODDED,
ALL
WITHOUT
EYE
CONTACT.
TODAY,
ONE
WEEK
AFTER
MY
AMETHYST
DATE,

I
HAD
MADE
MY
MOVE.
ANANYA
HAD
GONE
TO
THANJAVUR
ON
WORK
FOR
FIVE
DAYS,
AND
HER
MOTHER
JOINED
HER
ON
THE
TRIP
TO
SEE
THE
TEMPLES.
ANANYA
HAD
TOLD
ME
IT
WOULD
BE
THE
PERFECT
TIME
TO
OFFER
HELP.
HER
FATHER
WOULDN'T
SUSPECT

I
WANTED
TO
COME
HOME
FOR
ANANYA.
PLUS,
MORE
IMPORTANT,
HE
COULD
ACTUALLY
TAKE
HELP
FROM
ME
I
LOOKED
AROUND
AT
THE
YOUNGSTERS,
DOING
WHAT
THEY
LOVED
DESPITE
EVERYONE
FROM
THEIR
PARENTS
TO
THE
GOVERNMENT
BANNING
THEM
FROM
DOING
SO.
YES,
IF
THERE
CAN

BE
AFTERNOON
DISCOS,
PUNJABIS
CAN
MARRY
TAMILIANS.
RULES,
AFTER
ALL,
ARE
ONLY
MADE
SO
YOU
CAN
WORK
AROUND
THEM.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'UNCLE,
ANANYA
TOLD
ME
YOU
ARE
HAVING
TROUBLE
WITH
YOUR
BUSINESS
PLAN.'
UNCLE
BRAKED
HIS
CAR
IN
SHOCK.
WE
NEVER
SPOKE
IN
THE
FIAT.
WE
HAD
A
RITUAL.
I
READ
MY
REPORTS,
HE
CURSED
THE
TRAFFIC
AND
THE
CITY
ROADS.
IN

TWENTY
MINUTES,
WE
REACHED
THE
TRAFFIC
SIGNAL
NEAR
THE
CITIBANK
WHERE
HE
DROPPED
ME.
I
THANKED
HIM,
HE
NODDED,
ALL
WITHOUT
EYE
CONTACT.
TODAY,
ONE
WEEK
AFTER
MY
AMETHYST
DATE,
I
HAD
MADE
MY
MOVE.
ANANYA
HAD
GONE
TO
THANJAVUR
ON
WORK
FOR
FIVE

DAYS,
AND
HER
MOTHER
JOINED
HER
ON
THE
TRIP
TO
SEE
THE
TEMPLES.
ANANYA
HAD
TOLD
ME
IT
WOULD
BE
THE
PERFECT
TIME
TO
OFFER
HELP.
HER
FATHER
WOULDN'T
SUSPECT
I
WANTED
TO
COME
HOME
FOR
ANANYA.
PLUS,
MORE
IMPORTANT,
HE
COULD
ACTUALLY
TAKE

HELP
FROM
ME
AND
KEEP
FACE
AS
HIS
WIFE
AND
DAUGHTER
WON'T
BE
THERE
TO
WITNESS.
'WHY
IS
SHE
TELLING
YOU
ALL
THIS?'
HIS
HANDS
CLENCHED
ON
THE
STEERING
WHEEL.
'ACTUALLY,
I
HAD
HELPED
MY
BOSS
MAKE
A
BUSINESS
PLAN,'
I
LIED.
'REALLY?'
HIS

EXPRESSION
SOFTENED
AND
HE
LOOKED
AT
ME.
'MNC
BANKS
MAKE
PRESENTATIONS
ALL
THE
TIME,'
I
SAID.
UNCLE
RELEASED
THE
BRAKE
AS
THE
CAR
MOVED
AGAIN.
'DO
YOU
WANT
ME
TO
SIT
DOWN
WITH
YOU?'
I
OFFERED
AS
WE
REACHED
CLOSER
TO
THE
CITIBANK
SIGNAL.

'YOU
TAKE
TUITIONS
FOR
MANJU
ALREADY.
WHY
ARE
YOU
HELPING
US
SO
MUCH?'

I
THOUGHT
HARD
FOR
AN
ANSWER.

'I
DON'T
HAVE
ANYONE
IN
CHENNAI.
NO
OLD
FRIENDS,
NO
FAMILY,'

I
SAID.
HIS
EYEBROWS
WENT
UP
AT
THE
LAST
WORD.

'OF
COURSE,
YOU
ARE

ALSO
NOT
FAMILY,'
I
SAID
AND
HIS
FACE
RELAXED
AGAIN.
'BUT
IT
IS
NICE
TO
GO
TO
A
HOME.'
I
HAD
REACHED
MY
SIGNAL.
I
OPENED
THE
DOOR
SLOWLY,
TO
ALLOW
HIM
TIME
TO
RESPOND.
'IF
YOU
HAVE
TIME,
COME
IN
THE
EVENING.
I

WILL
SHOW
YOU
WHAT
I
HAVE
DONE.'
'OH,
OK,
I
WILL
COME
TONIGHT,'
I
SAID
AS
UNCLE
DROVE
OFF.
THE
FIAT
LEFT
BEHIND
A
FRESH
WAF
T
OF
CARBON
MONOXIDE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

26

'I

THINK

IT

IS

A

GREAT

IDEA,'

BALA

SAID.

WE

SAT

IN

OUR

PRIORITY

BANKING

GROUP

TEAM

MEETING.

MUMBAI

HAD

PROPOSED

A

'RAISE

SPIRITS'

DINNER

EVENT

FOR

OUR

PRIVATE

CLIENTS

ACROSS

INDIA.

DESPITE

THE

ECONOMIC

SLOWDOWN,

THEY

HAD

APPROVED,

THEY

HAD
APPROVED
A
BUDGET
FOR
ALL
MAJOR
CENTRES.
CHENNAI
NEEDED
IT
MOST,
GIVEN
THE
ADVENTURE
BANKING
WE
HAD
SUBJECTED
OUR
CLIENTS
TO.
'SO,
WE
NEED
TO
BRAINSTORM
ON
WHICH
EVENT
WILL
WORK
BEST
FOR
CHENNAI
CUSTOMERS,'
BALA
SAID.
'AN
ART
EXHIBITION,'
ONE
EXECUTIVE
SAID.

'AGAIN,
WE
ARE
SELLING
SOMETHING,'
ANOTHER
EXECUTIVE
SAID.

'THE
FOCUS
SHOULD
BE
ON
FUN.'

'A
FASHION
SHOW,'
SAID
THE
EARLIER
EXECUTIVE.

'TOO
BOLD
FOR
OUR
MARKET,'
CAME
THE
COUNTER
RESPONSE.

THE
DISCUSSION
CONTINUED
FOR
TEN
MINUTES.
ALL
IDEAS
FORM
MOVIE-NIGHT
TO
INVENTING
A
KOLLYWOOD

CELEBRITY
TO
CALLING
A
CHEF
TO
PREPARE
AN
EXOTIC
CUISINE
WERE
DISCUSSED.
HOWEVER,
FOR
SOME
REASON,
NONE
OF
THE
IDEAS
CLICKED.
I
FELT
QUITE
USELESS
HAVING
NOTHING
TO
SAY.
BUT
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
WHAT
WOULD
WORK
FOR
CHENNAI
CUSTOMERS
APART
FROM
GIVING
THEM
THEIR

MONEY
BACK.
'KRISH,
WHAT
DO
YOU
THINK?'
BALA
ASKED,
BREAKING
MY
DAYDREAM
OF
WALKING
HAND-IN-HAND
WITH
ANANYA
IN
A
PEACOCK
BLUE
SARI.
'HUH?'
I
SAID,
AND
REALISED
EVERYONE
HAD
TURNED
TO
ME.
'WOULD
YOU
LIKE
TO
CONTRIBUTE?'
BALA
SAID.
EVEN
THOUGH
HE
HAD
CUT

ME
SLACK,
ON
OCCASION
THE
REPRESSED
BOSS
IN
HIM
CAME
OUT.
'MUSIC,
HOW
ABOUT
MUSIC?
SAY
A
MUSICAL
NIGHT?'
I
SUGGESTED.
EXCITED
MURMURS
RAN
ACROSS
THE
ROOM.
FINALLY,
WE
HAD
AN
IDEA
WITHOUT
ANY
STRONG
NEGATIVE
OBJECTION.
HOWEVER,
WITHIN
MUSIC
THERE
WERE
A
DOZEN

IDEAS.
'KUTCHERI,
LET'S
DO
A
KUTCHERI,'
SAID
ONE.
'WHAT'S
THAT?'
I
SAID,
TURNING
TO
SARASWATI.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
SARASWATI
WAS
A
CONSERVATIVE
TAMILIAN
AGENT
WHO
SPOKE
ONLY
ONCE
A
YEAR
AND
NEVER
WAXED
HER
ARMS.
(I
ADMIT
THE
LATTER
POINT
IS
IRRELEVANT
BUT
IT
IS
HARD
NOT
TO
NOTICE
THESE
THINGS.)
'KUTCHERI
IS
A
CARNATIC
MUSIC
CONCERT,'
SARASWATI
MADE

HER
POINT
AND
DRIFTED
BACK
TO
BEING
PART
OF
THE
WALL.
'HEY,
I
THOUGHT
WE
WANTED
THE
EVENING
TO
BE
FUN,'
I
SAID.
'CARNATIC
MUSIC
CAN
BE
FUN,'
SAID
RAVI,
ANOTHER
SUPERVISOR.
YES,
AS
MUCH
FUN
AS
WAILING
BABIES
IN
A
CROWDED
TRAIN,
I

WANTED
TO
SAY
BUT
DIDN'T.
POLITICAL
CORRECTNESS
IS
A
NECESSITY
IN
CHENNAI,
ESPECIALLY
WHEN
EVERYONE
HATES
YOU
FOR
BEING
AN
OUTSIDER
ANYWAY.
I
TURNED
TO
BALA.
'WE
WANT
TO
RAISE
SPIRITS.
ISN'T
CARNATIC
MUSIC
TOO
SERIOUS?
WHY
NOT
HAVE
AN
EVENING
OF
POPULAR
MUSIC.

GOOD
POPULAR
MUSIC.'
'A.R.
RAHMAN,
CAN
WE
GET
A.R.
RAHMAN?'
SAID
ONE
PERSON.
'OR
ILAIYARAJA,'
SAID
ANOTHER.
BALA
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD
AND
WAVED
HIS
ARMS
TO
SAY
'NO'.
'WE
CAN'T
DO
SUCH
BIG
NAMES.
THE
BUDGET
IS
NOT
THAT
HIGH.
AND
THESE
PEOPLE
ATTRACT

THE
PRESS.
LAST
THING
YOU
WANT
IS
SOME
CUSTOMER
TELLING
THE
PRESS
ABOUT
THEIR
LOSSES
AND
US
WASTING
MONEY
ON
SUCH
CONCERTS.
MUMBAI
WILL
KILL
ME.'
AFTER
TWO
HOURS
OF
FURTHER
DELIBERATION
THAT
TOOK
US
TO
LUNCH
BREAK,
WE
MADE
A
FEW
DECISIONS
ABOUT

THE
EVENT.
THE
CONCERT
WOULD
BE
HELD
IN
FISHERMAN'S
COVE,
AN
UPMARKET
RESORT
ON
THE
CITY
OUTSKIRTS.
WE'D
HAVE
THREE
TO
FIVE
SINGERS
OF
REASONABLE
FAME,
PROVIDED
WE
KEPT
TO
THE
BUDGET
OF
TWO
LAKH.
'ALL
SET
THEN,'
BALA
SAID
AS
WE
ENDED
THE

MEETING
AT
SIX
IN
THE
EVENING.
I
REALISED
I
HAD
TO
LEAVE.
AFTER
ALL,
I
HAD
A
BIG
DATE
WITH
THE
BIG
DADDY
TONIGHT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
27
'SO,
THIS
IS
ALMOST
DONE?'
I
CLICKED
THROUGH
THE
SLIDES.
UNCLE
HAD
GIVEN
ME
A
CD
OF
HIS
WORK.
I
HAD
UPLOADED
IT
ON
MY
LAPTOP.
THE
UNFORMATTED
SLIDES
HAD
PARAGRAPHS
OF
TEXT,
NO
BULLET
POINTS
AND
FONT
SIZES
RANGING

FROM
EIGHT
TO
SEVENTY-TWO.

'YES,

I

SPENT
THREE
WEEKS

ON

IT,'

HE

SAID.

WE

SAT

AT

A

WORK-TABLE

IN

THE

LIVING

ROOM.

MANJU

STUDIED

INSIDE.

NO

ONE

ELSE

WAS

AT

HOME.

ANANYA'S

FATHER

AND

I

HUNCHED

CLOSE

TOGETHER

TO

SEE

THE

LAPTOP

SCREEN.

'THESE

HAVE
NO
FIGURES,
NO
CHARTS,
NO
SPECIFIC
POINTS
EVEN
...'
I
SAID,
TRYING
TO
BE
LESS
CRITICAL
BUT
TRUTHFUL
AS
WELL.
'FIGURES
ARE
HERE,'
UNCLE
SAID
AS
HE
OPENED
HIS
BRIEFCASE.
'I
STILL
HAVE
TO
LEARN
THAT
FEATURE
IN
POWERPOINT.'
HE
TOOK
OUT
THREE

THICK
FILES
WITH
DIRTY
BROWN
COVERS
AND
TWO
HUNDRED
SHEETS
EACH
INSIDE.
'WHAT'S
THIS?'
'OUR
LAST
YEAR
BUSINESS
DATA,'
HE
SAID.
'YOU
CAN'T
PUT
IT
ALL,'
I
SAID.
'WHEN
IS
THIS
DUE?'
'THAT
RASCAL
VERMA
WANTS
IT
IN
A
WEEK,'
UNCLE
SAID.
THE
RATE

AT
WHICH
ANANYA'S
DAD
WAS
GOING,
HE
COULDN'T
DELIVER
IT
IN
A
YEAR.
'ONE
WEEK?
THIS
IS
ONLY
PAST
PERFORMANCE
DATA.
DON'T
YOU
HAVE
TO
MAKE
A
PLAN
FOR
NEXT
YEAR?'
'I
WAS
GOING
TO
DO
THAT,
SOON.'
HE
SWALLOWED
HARD.
I
KEPT
MY

LEFT
ELBOW
ON
THE
TABLE
AND
MY
PALM
ON
MY
FOREHEAD.
I
FLIPPED
THROUGH
THE
SLIDES
IN
REVERSE
TO
REACH
THE
FRONT.
'WHAT?'
HE
SAID.
'ANYTHING
WRONG
IN
WHAT
I'VE
DONE?'
I
TURNED
TO
HIM
AND
GAVE
A
SLIGHT
SMILE.
'NO,
A
FEW
FINISHING

TOUCHES
LEFT,'
I
SAID.
'SO,
HOW
DO
WE
DO
IT?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'LET'S
START
BY
YOU
TELLING
ME
WHAT
EXACTLY
YOU
DO
AT
THE
BANK.
AND
THEN
TAKE
ME
THROUGH
THESE
FILES.'
I
SHUT
THE
LAPTOP.
FOR
THE
NEXT
THREE
HOURS
I
UNDERSTOOD
WHAT
A
DEPUTY
DISTRICT
MANAGER
DOES
AT
A
PUBLIC
SECTOR

BANK.
ACTUALLY,
THERE
IS
A
LOT
OF
WORK,
CONTRARY
TO
MY
BELIEF
THAT
GOVERNMENT
BANK
STAFF
DID
NOTHING.
HOWEVER,
A
LOT
OF
THE
WORK
IS
ABOUT
REPORTING,
APPROVALS
AND
MAINTAINING
CERTAIN
RECORDS.
IT
IS
MORE
BEAURAUCRACY
AND
LESS
BUSINESS.
I
YAWNED
AS
HE
FINISHED

EXPLAINING
HOW
THE
STAFF-RECRUITING
PROCESS
WORKS
IN
HIS
EGMORE
DISTRICT.

I
LOOKED
AT
THE
WALL
CLOCK.
IT
WAS
NINE-THIRTY.

'SORRY,
I
DIDN'T
EVEN
ASK
YOU
FOR
DINNER,'
MR
SWAMINATHAN
SAID.

'IT'S
OK,
KEEP
GOING.

I'LL
WASH
MY
FACE,'

I
SAID
AND
PULLED
BACK
MY

CHAIR.

I

CAME
BACK
FROM
THE
BATHROOM
AND
UNCLE
HAD
BROUGHT
TWO
STEEL
PLATES
AND
A
BOWL
OF
LEMON
RICE.

HE
PUT
THE
BOWL
IN
THE
MICROWAVE
TO
HEAT
THE
FOOD.

'SORRY,

I

CAN'T
GIVE
YOU
PROPER
DINNER
TONIGHT.

I

TOLD
THE
MAID
TO

MAKE
SOMETHING
SIMPLE,'
HE
SAID.
"IT'S
FINE,'
I
SAID
AS
I
TOOK
THE
PLATES
OFF
HIM.
I
WENT
TO
THE
KITCHEN.
I
PICKED
UP
THE
CURD
AND
WATER.
I
SAW
THE
SPOONS
BUT
DECIDED
NOT
TO
TAKE
THEM.
'MANJU?'
I
ASKED
AS
I
RETURNED

TO
THE
TABLE.
'HE
ATE
ALREADY.
HE
WAKES
UP
AT
FOUR
SO
HE
HAS
TO
SLEEP
NOW,'
UNCLE
SAID.
WE
ATE
IN
SILENCE.
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME
IN
THEIR
HOUSE,
I
FELT
WELCOME.
SURE,
THEY'D
GIVE
ME
BREAKFAST
AND
A
LIFT
TO
WORK
THREE

DAYS
A
WEEK.
HOWEVER,
TODAY
WAS
DIFFERENT.
UNCLE
REFILLED
MY
PLATE
WHEN
I
FINISHED
AND
POURED
WATER
FOR
ME.
WE
CONTINUED
TO
WORK
AFTER
DINNER
UNTIL
HE
COULDN'T
KEEP
HIS
EYES
OPEN.
'IT'S
ELEVEN-THIRTY,
I'D
BETTER
GO,'
I
SAID.
I
SHUT
DOWN
MY
LAPTOP

AND
STACKED
ALL
THE
PAPERS
TOGETHER.
'YES,'
UNCLE
SAID
AS
HE
LOOKED
AT
HIS
WATCH.
'I
DIDN'T
REALISE
THIS
WOULD
BE
SO
MUCH
WORK.'
I
CAME
TO
THE
DOOR
AND
OUTLINED
THE
AGENDA.
'HERE'S
THE
PLAN,'
I
SAID.
'TOMORROW
WE
MAKE
A
STRUCTURE,
SO

WE
AT
LEAST
HAVE
A
TITLE
FOR
ALL
FIFTY
SLIDES
THAT
NEED
TO
BE
THERE.
THE
NEXT
DAY
WE
WILL
PUT
THE
TEXT.
DAY
AFTER
WE
WILL
START
ON
THE
FIGURES
AND
CHARTS.'
WE
CAME
OUT
OF
THE
HOUSE.

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'IT'S

LATE.

I

WILL

DROP

YOU?'

UNCLE

SAID.

'NO,

THERE

ARE

AUTOS

ON

THE

MAIN

ROAD.

GOOD

NIGHT

UNCLE,

TELL

MANJU

I

WILL

SEE

HIM

DAY

AFTER.'

'THANK

YOU,

KRISH,'

UNCLE

SAID

AS

HE

WAVED

ME

GOODBYE.

'ANYTIME,'

I

SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
28

I
SPENT
THE
NEXT
THREE
EVENINGS
IN
THE
COMPANY
OF
MR
SWAMINATHAN.
THE
BANK
OF
BARODA
EGMORE
DISTRICT
BUSINESS
PLAN
HAD
BECOME
THE
FOCUS
OF
MY
LIFE.

I
BROUGHT
SOME
OF
UNCLE'S
WORK
TO
MY
OWN
OFFICE
AND
WORKED
ON

IT
IN
THE
AFTERNOON.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
WORKING
ON?'
BALA
SAID
AS
WE
MET
NEAR
THE
COMMON
OFFICE
PRINTER
WHERE
I
HAD
COME
TO
COLLECT
A
PRINTOUT
OF
UNCLE'S
PRESENTATION.
'PERSONAL
RESEARCH,'
I
SAID
AS
I
CLENCHED
HE
SHEETS
IN
MY
HAND
AND
RAN

BACK
TO
MY
DESK.
IT
IS
UNCANNY,
BUT
I
COULD
TELL
ANANYA'S
CALL
FROM
THE
PHONE
RING.
'HI
HOTTIE.
HOW
IS
IT
GOING?'
'DID
YOU
KNOW
BANK
OF
BARODA
HAD
NO
ATMS
FOUR
YEARS
AGO,
BUT
NOW
THERE
ARE
OVER
A
DOZEN
ATMS
IN

EGMORE
ALONE,'
I
SAID
AS
I
OPENED
THE
TWELFTH
SLIDE
OF
THE
PRESENTATION.
'WHAT?'
SHE
SAID.
'AND
IN
TWO
YEARS,
THERE
WILL
BE
THIRTY,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?'
'I
AM
WORKING
ON
YOUR
DAD'S
PRESENTATION,
IN
MY
OFFICE,'
I
SAID
AND

SWIVELED
MY
CHAIR
TO
TURN
AWAY
FROM
THE
MONITOR.
'THAT'S
WHY
YOU
ARE
SUCH
A
SWEETIE,'
SHE
SAID.
'I
AM
STEALING
A
TALENTED
MBA'S
TIME
PAID
FOR
BY
CITIBANK.
I
COULD
GO
TO
JAIL
FOR
THIS,'
I
SAID.
'HOW
EXCITING!
MY
LOVER
GOES
TO

JAIL
FOR
ME,'
SHE
CHUCKLED.
'MANJU
TOLD
ME
YOU
ARE
THERE
EVERY
EVENING
UNTIL
LATE.
AND
TODAY
YOU
TOOK
MANJU'S
MORNING
TUITIONS,
TOO.
TAKE
CARE
OF
YOURSELF.'
'I'M
FINE.
I
REST
IN
THE
OFFICE.
AND
THE
PRESENTATION
SHOULD
BE
DONE
TONIGHT.'
'COOL.
HOW'S
THE

**BONDING
WITH
APPA?'**

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WELL,
IT
IS
PRETTY
BUSINESS-LIKE.
BUT
LET'S
JUST
SAY,
I
SAW
HIM
SMILE.
I
BIT
A
WHOLE
CHILLI
AT
DINNER
AND
RAN
TO
THE
KITCHEN.
WHEN
I
RETURNED
HE
SMILED
FOR
THREE
WHOLE
SECONDS
AND
I
CREATED
IT.'
'WITH
MY
DADA,

THAT'S
HUGE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'HE
DIDN'T
SMILE
IN
ANY
OF
HIS
WEDDING
PICTURES.'
'WELL,
HE
HAD
TO
MARRY
YOUR
MOM,'
I
SAID.
'SHUT
UP,'
ANANYA
SAID.
THE
PEON
CAME
TO
ME
TO
SAY
BALA
HAD
TRIED
MY
EXTENSION
AND
COULDN'T
REACH.
I
TOLD
ANANYA

TO
HOLD
'WELL,
HE
HAD
TO
MARRY
YOUR
MOM,'
I
SAID.
'SHUT
UP,'
ANANYA
SAID.
THE
PEON
CAME
TO
ME
TO
SAY
BALA
HAD
TRIED
MY
EXTENSION
AND
COULDN'T
REACH.
I
TOLD
ANANYA
TO
HOLD.
'TELL
HIM
I
AM
WITH
A
PROSPECTIVE
NEW
CLIENT.

INVITING
THEM
TO
THE
CONCERT,'
I
SAID.
THE
PEON
NODDED
AND
LEFT.
'CONCERT?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'IT
IS
A
PRIVATE
CLIENT
EVENT.
AT
FISHERMAN'S
COVE,'
I
SAID.
'FISHERMAN'S
COVE
IS
NICE.
CAN
I
COME?'
SHE
SAID.
'ONLY
IF
YOU
HAVE
TEN
LAKH
TO
SPARE,'
I

SAID.
'SURE,
MY
HUSBAND
WILL
SEND
THE
CASH,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'YEAH,
RIGHT
AFTER
I
EXECUTE
MY
BANK
ROBBERY.
OK,
NOW
SHOULD
I
HUMOUR
YOU
OR
MAKE
SURE
YOUR
FATHER
DOESN'T
GET
LAUGHED
AT
IN
FIVE
DAYS?'
I
SAID.
'DADDY
FIRST,'
SHE
SAID.
'I
AM

BACK
IN
THREE
DAYS.'
'HOW
IS
THANJAVUR?'
'TEMPLES,
TAMILIANS
AND
A
TEMPERAMENTAL
MOTHER.
CARE?'
SHE
SAID.
'MAYBE
NEXT
TIME.
WHAT'S
CAUSING
THE
TEMPERAMENTALNESS?'
'ME,
ME
AND
ONLY
ME,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
LAUGHED,
'AS
IS
ALWAYS
THE
CASE.'
'REALLY?
WHAT'S
YOUR
CRIME
NOW?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'I
DON'T
HAVE
TIME
FOR
HER.
WHICH
IS
TRUE,
AS
I'M
ALL
OVER
THE
DISTRICT
IN
MEETINGS
THE
ENTIRE
DAY.
OF
COURSE,
SHE
ALSO
FEELS
SAYING
NO
TO
HARISH
IS
LIKE
DECLINING
THE
NOBEL
PRIZE.
AND
SO,
THAT'S
THE
DINNER
APPETIZER.

MAIN
COURSE
IS
A
LECTURE
ON
HOW
I'VE
ABUSED
MY
PRIVILEGE
OF
BEING
ALLOWED
TO
STUDY
FURTHER.
DESSERT
IS
USUALLY
TEARS.
I
HAVE
TO
GO
TO
PONDICHERRY
NEXT
WEEK.
NO
WAY
I
AM
TAKING
HER.'
'YOU
HAVE
TO
GO?'
'JUST
A
DAY
TRIP.'
'HEY,

ISN'T
FISHERMAN'S
COVE
ON
THE
WAY
TO
PONDICHERRY?'

I
ASKED.

'YES,
WHY?'

'GOOD,

I
SHOULD
TAKE
THE
INITIATIVE
AND
CHECK
OUT
THE
VENUE.

I'LL
COME
WITH
YOU
THAT
DAY,'

I
SAID.
ANYTHING
TO
GET
OUT
OF
OFFICE.

'OH,
COOL,'
SHE
SAID.

THE
PEON
CAME

AGAIN.

'YES,'

I

TURNED

TO

THE

PEON

AFTER

ASKING

ANANYA

TO

HOLD.

'SIR

IS

ASKING

WHICH

CLIENT?'

PEON

SAID.

I

LOOKED

AROUND.

OUTSIDE

THE

OFFICE

WINDOW

THERE

WERE

SEVERAL

HOARDINGS.

I

SAW

ONE

FOR

FIREWORKS.

'STANDARD

FIREWORKS,

SIVAKASI.

OK?'

I

SAID.

THE

PEON

NODDED.

'BYE
SWEETIE,
AM
I
DISTURBING
YOU?'
'YEAH,
BUT
WHAT
IS
LIFE
WITHOUT
BEING
DISTURBED
BY
THE
RIGHT
PEOPLE,'
I
SAID.
'THANK
YOU.
LOVE
YOU,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'I
LOVE
YOU,
TOO'
I
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP
THE
PHONE.
THE
PEON
STOOD
IN
FRONT
OF
ME,

HIS
EYES
BIG
AFTER
THE
LAST
LINE.
'WHY
ARE
YOU
STILL
HERE?'
I
SAID.
'SORRY,
SIR,'
THE
PEON
SAID
AND
LEFT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
LEFT
MY
OFFICE
EARLY
TO
FINISH
THE
PRESENTATION
AT
UNCLE'S
HOUSE.
WE
HAD
COME
TO
THE
END
WITH
ONLY
FINAL
FORMATTING
LEFT.

I
PASSED
A
CD
STORE
IN
MYLAPORE.
SOME
MUSIC
WOULD
BE
NICE
WHILE

I
COMPLETED
THE
PRESENTATION,
I

THOUGHT,

I

WENT

IN.

‘WHAT

YOU

WANT,

SIR?’

THE

SHOPKEEPER

SAID.

I

SCANNED

THE

SHELVES

FILLED

WITH

TAMIL

CDS

IN

PSYCHEDELIC

COVERS

RESEMBLING

CRIME

NOVELS.

‘WHAT

NON-TAMIL

CDS

DO

YOU

HAVE?’

I

ASKED.

HE

SHOOK

HIS

HEAD

IN

DISAPPOINTMENT.

‘NON-TAMIL

YOU

GO

TO

NUNGAMBAKKAM,

SIR.'
BUT
THE
SHOP
ATTENDANT
LOOKED
THROUGH
HIS
COLLECTION
TO
FIND
SOMETHING.
'OK
HERE,'
HE
SAID
AS
HE
TOOK
OUT
THREE
CDS.
THE
FIRST
CD
WAS
NON-STOP
HINDI
REMIXED
HITS.
IT
HAD
GIRLS
WITH
CLEAVAGE
ON
THE
COVER.
I
HAD
TO
REJECT
IT.
THE

SECOND
WAS
A
ROMANTIC
LOVE-SONGS
COLLECTION
THAT
HAD
A
HEART-SHAPED
COVER.
THE
THIRD
CD
WAS
NURSERY
RHYMES
IN
ENGLISH.
'GIVE
ME
THE
LOVE
SONGS,'
I
SAID.
THE
SHOPKEEPER
MADE
THE
BILL
AS
I
SCANNED
A
SECTION
ON
CARNATIC
MUSIC.
'ANY
GOOD
CARNATIC
MUSIC
CDS?'

I
SAID.
'GOOD
MEANING
WHAT,
SIR?'
HE
SAID
AS
HE
WRAPPED
MY
RED-COLOURED
CD.

I
LOOKED
AT
THE
CARNATIC
COVERS.
MOST
OF
THEM
HAD
MIDDLE-AGED
TAMILIAN
MEN
AND
WOMEN
ON
THEM.

'DO
YOU
HAVE
ANY
GREATEST
HITS
COLLECTION
IN
CARNATIC?'

I
SAID.
THE
SHOPKEEPER

LOOKED
PUZZLED.

I
THREW
UP
MY
HANDS
IN
DESPAIR.

'I
HAVE
NO
CLUE.

I
WANT
TO
GET
STARTED,'

I
SAID.
'NORTH
INDIAN?'
HE
SAID.

I
NODDED.
'THEN
WHY
YOU
WANT
TO
LEARN
CARNATIC
MUSIC?'

I
DIDN'T
ANSWER.
THE
SHOPKEEPER
GAVE
ME
TWO
CDS.
ONE

HAD
A
WOMAN
HOLDING
A
TAMBURA
ON
THE
COVER.
THE
OTHER
HAD
THE
PICTURE
OF
AN
OLD
MAN.
THE
ENTIRE
TEXT
WAS
IN
TAMIL.
I
FLIPPED
IT
AROUND.
'T.R.
SUBRAMANIAM
NICE,'
SAID
AN
ELDERLY
LADY
WHO
HAD
JUST
WALKED
INTO
THE
SHOP
AND
NOTICED

MY
CDS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YEAH,
MY
ALL-TIME
FAVOURITE,'
I
SAID
AS
I
KEPT
THE
CDS
IN
MY
BAG
AND
WALKED
OUT
OF
THE
SHOP.
I
REACHED
ANANYA'S
PLACE
AT
6.30.
UNCLE
ALREADY
SAT
AT
THE
TABLE.
HE
WORE
READING
GLASSES
AND
MADE
CORRECTIONS
ON
A

PRINTOUT
OF
THE
PRESENTATION.

HE
HAD
KEPT
HOT
VADAS
ON
THE
TABLE
WITH
RED,
GREEN
AND
WHITE
COLOURED
CHUTNEYS.

'TAKE
ONE.

IT
IS
A
FAMOUS
SHOP
NEAR
MY
OFFICE.

I
BROUGHT
THEM
FOR
YOU,'
UNCLE
SAID.

I
LOOKED
AT
HIM
AS
I
PICKED
UP

A
VADA.
WE
MADE
EYE
CONTACT
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME
EVER
SINCE
I
HAD
KNOWN
HIM.
I
NOTICED
THAT
IF
YOU
IGNORED
THE
WRINKLY
FACE
AND
THE
READING
GLASSES,
HE
HAD
THE
SAME
EYES
AS
ANANYA.
'SO
TODAY,
NO
MATTER
HOW
LATE
IT
GETS,

WE
FINISH
THIS,'
I
SAID
AS
I
OPENED
THE
FILE.
UNCLE
NODDED.
HE
PULLED
HIS
CHAIR
CLOSE
TO
MINE
TO
SEE
THE
SCREEN.
'OK,
SO
LET'S
GO
THROUGH
EACH
SLIDE.
I
WILL
FORMAT
AS
WE
GO
ALONG,'
I
SAID.
I
WENT
THROUGH
THE
FIRST

FIVE
SLIDES
IN
AN
HOUR.
'UNCLE,
DO
YOU
MIND
IF
I
PUT
SOME
MUSIC
ON?
THIS
FORMATTING
IS
QUITE
TEDIOUS,'
I
SAID.
I
OPENED
THE
CD
PLAYER
IN
MY
LAPTOP.
'PLAY
IT
ON
THE
STEREO,'
UNCLE
SAID
AND
POINTED
TO
THE
HI-FI
SYSTEM
KEPT

IN
THE
LIVING
ROOM
DISPLAY
CABINET.
I
TOO
OUT
THE
CDS
FROM
MY
OFFICE
BAG.
UNCLE
WALKED
UP
WITH
ME
TO
CONNECT
THE
SYSTEM.
HE
FIDDLED
WITH
THE
WIRES
AS
I
NOTICED
A
ONE-LITRE
UNOPENED
BOTTLE
OF
CHIVAS
REGAL
WHISKY
KEPT
NEXT
TO
THE

STEREO
SYSTEM.
I
TOOK
MY
CHANCES
AND
ASKED
HIM.
'YOU
LIKE
WHISKY?'
'NO,
JUST
A
LITTLE
PEG
SOMETIMES
WHEN
I
HAVE
A
COLD.
HARISH
GAVE
ME
THIS
BIG
BOTTLE.
IT
WILL
LAST
ME
YEARS,'
HE
SAID.
I
KEPT
QUIET.
'YOU
KNOW
HARISH?
THE
BOY

WHO
CAME
TO
SEE
ANANYA.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
NODDED.
'REALLY
GOOD
BOY,'
HE
SAID.
UNCLE
SWITCHED
THE
STEREO
ON.

I
GAVE
HIM
THE
HEART
SHAPED
CD
IN
MY
BAG.
UNCLE
TURNED
IT
AROUND
IN
HIS
HANDS
A
FEW
TIMES.
'THAT'S
ALL
THE
MYLAPORE
SHOP
HAD,'
I
SAID
IN

A
SHEEPISH
VOICE.
'WHAT
ARE
THE
OTHERS?'
I
SHOWED
HIM
THE
OTHER
TWO
CDS.
'T.R.
SUBRAMANIAM
AND
M.
S.
SHEELA?
WHO
DID
YOU
GET
THIS
FOR?'
'FOR
MYSELF.'
'YOU
UNDERSTAND
CARNATIC
MUSIC?'
'NO,
BUT
I
WANT
TO
LEARN.
I'VE
HEARD
IT
IS
THE
PUREST

FORM
OF
MUSIC,'
I
SAID.
UNCLE
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD.
I
WONDERED
IF
MY
REASON
HAD
NOT
COME
ACROSS
AS
REAL.
HE
PUT
THE
CDS
BACK
IN
MY
BAG.
'SOMETIMES,
I
WISH
I
HAD
NEVER
ENCOURAGED
RADHA
IN
CARNATIC
MUSIC.
IT
HAS
ONLY
GIVEN
HER

PAIN.'
I
NODDED,
NOT
SURE
OF
HOW
I
SHOULD
RESPOND.
UNCLE
WAS
TALKING
PERSONAL
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME.
IT
IS
AMAZING
HOW
MUCH
CLOSENESS
TWO
MEN
WITH
A
LAPTOP
IN
A
CLOSED
ROOM
CAN
ACHIEVE
IN
FIVE
DAYS.
WE
SAT
BACK
AT
THE
TABLE

AS
I
WORKED
ON
THE
SIXTH
SLIDE.
MANDY
MOORE'S
ROMANTIC
TRACK
FILLED
THE
ROOM.
I
WANNA
BE
WITH
YOU
IF
ONLY
FOR
THE
NIGHT
THE
LYRICS
WERE
A
LITTLE
ODD
FOR
A
WORK
DATE
BETWEEN
A
FIFTY-YEAR-OLD
TAMILIAN
AND
A
TWENTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD
PUNJABI
BOY,
BUT

BETTER
THAN
THE
SILENCE.

I
ENJOYED
PUTTING
THE
TEXTBOXES,
TABLES,
CHARTS
AND
LISTS
IN
THEIR
RIGHT
PLACE
AND
MAKING
EACH
SLIDE
LOOK
SLICK.
UNCLE
READ
EACH
POINT
AND
CHECKED
THE
FIGURES.

THE
SONG
CONTINUED.
TO
BE
ONE
WHO
IS
IN
YOUR
ARMS
WHO
HOLDS

YOU
TIGHT

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
CD
PLAYED
ITSELF
OVER
THREE
TIMES
BEFORE
I
REACHED
THE
HALFWAY
MARK.
WE
PAUSED
FOR
DINNER
AT
TEN.
UNCLE
WENT
TO
THE
KITCHEN
AND
CAME
BACK
WITH
TOMATO
RICE
IN
TWO
PLATES.
'YOU
MUST
BE
BORED
OF
SOUTH
INDIAN
FOOD?'

HE
SAID.
'NO,
I
AM
USED
TO
IT
NOW.
FEELS
LIKE
HOME
FOOD,'
I
SAID.
'GOOD,'
HE
SAID.
HE
WENT
TO
THE
DISPLAY
CABINET.
I
HAD
MADE
IT
TO
THE
CATEGORY
OF
'GOOD'
THOUGH
STILL
NOT
'REALLY
GOOD'
LIKE
HARISH,
I
THOUGHT.
'THE
PRESENTATION

IS
UNDER
CONTROL
NOW.
YOU
WANT
A
DRINK?’
UNCLE
SAID.
‘SURE,’
I
SAID.
UNCLE
TOOK
OUT
TWO
GLASSES
FROM
THE
CROCKERY
RACK
IN
THE
DISPLAY
CABINET.
HE
TOLD
ME
TO
GET
A
SPOON
AND
ICE
FORM
THE
KITCHEN.
HE
OPENED
THE
BOTTLE.
‘FIVE
SPOONS

FOR
ME
IS
ENOUGH,'
HE
SAID
AS
HE
MADE
HIS
DRINK.
'HOW
ABOUT
YOU?'
'WE
DON'T
USE
SPOON
TO
MEASURE
ALCOHOL,'
I
SAID.
I
WAS
A
LITTLE
AGITATED.
ONE
WEEK
OF
WORKING
MY
ASS
OFF
AND
STILL
HARISH
WAS
THE
'REALLY
GOOD'
BOY.
FUCK

YOU,
HARISH,
I
AM
GOING
TO
HAVE
YOUR
CHIVAS
REGAL.
I
POURED
THE
GOLDEN
COLOURED
LIQUID
FOUR
FINGERS
THICK.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING?'
HE
EXCLAIMED.
'MAKING
MYSELF
A
REAL
DRINK.
CHEERS,'
I
SAID
AND
LIFTED
MY
GLASS.
'ACTUALLY,
RADHA
STOPS
ME
FROM
HAVING
MORE,'

UNCLE
SAID
AND
TOOK
THE
BOTTLE
FROM
ME.
HE
TILTED
IT
AND
MADE
HIS
DRINK
LEVEL
WITH
MINE.
'CHEERS,'
HE
SAID,
'AND
THANK
YOU.
YOU
IITIAN
S ARE
VERY
SMART.
WHAT
A
PRESENTATION
YOU
HAVE
MADE.'
'YOU
ARE
WELCOME,'
I
SAID.
WE
FINISHED
OUR
DINNER

AND
FIRST
DRINK
BY
TEN-THIRTY.

I
BROUGHT
THE
WHISKY
BOTTLE
NEXT
TO
THE
LAPTOP.

I
POURED
A
SECOND
DRINK
FOR
MYSELF
AND
OFFERED
IT
TO
UNCLE.
HE
DIDN'T
DECLINE.
THE
SONG
CHANGED
TO
LAST
CHRISTMAS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
UNCLE
WENT
TO
THE
STEREO
AND
INCREASED
THE
VOLUME.
'I
GAVE
YOU
MY
HEART,'
UNCLE
SANG
IN
SYNC
WITH
THE
SONG
AND
SNAPPED
HIS
FINGER.
HE
CAME
BACK
AND
SAT
DOWN.
I
HAD
WITNESSED
AN
AMAZING
SIGHT.
A
TAMIL
BRAHMIN
HAD

SET
HIMSELF
FREE
PROBABLY
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME.
IF
I
DIDN'T
HAVE
THE
PRESENTATION
TO
MAKE,
I'D
HAVE
LOVED
TO
OBSERVE
HIM
MORE.
ALL
I
REMEMBER
IS
THAT
IN
THE
NEXT
TWO
HOURS
WE
REACHED
THE
LAST
SLIDE
AND
THE
ONE-THIRD
MARK
ON
THE

WHISKY
BOTTLE.
'AND
THANK
YOU,'
I
SAID
AS
I
READ
THE
LAST
SLIDE.
HERE
WE
GO,
IT
IS
DONE.'
I
SAVED
THE
FILE.
'SAVE
IT
TWICE,'
UNCLE
SAID.
I
SAVED
IT
AGAIN
AND
CHECKED
THE
TIME.
IT
WAS
1
A.M.
IN
THREE
HOURS,
MANJU

WOULD
WAKE
UP.
'ALL
READY
TO
PRESENT
IT?'
I
ASKED.
'PRESENT?
ME?
NO,
NO,
VERMA
WILL
PRESENT
THIS.
MY
JOB
WAS
TO
COMPLETE
THIS
AND
IT'S
DONE.'
'UNCLE,'
I
SAID
MY
VOICE
FIRMED
BY
THE
WHISKY,
'YOU
HAVE
TO
PRESENT.
WHAT'S
THE
POINT
OF

SLAVING
OVER
THIS
FOR
WEEKS
IF
YOU
DON'T
GET
TO
PRESENT.'
'I
HAVE
NEVER
OPERATED
THAT
PROJECTOR,'
UNCLE
SAID.
'THERE'S
NOTHING
TO
IT.
YOU
IT
WILL
SET
IT
UP.
AND
YOU
PRESS
THE
FORWARD
BUTTON
TO
MOVE
TO
THE
NEXT
SLIDE.'
'I
DON'T
KNOW.'

HE
TURNED
QUIET.
I
CLOSED
MY
LAPTOP
AND
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.
'THIS
IS
UNBELIEVABLE.
THE
PRESENTATION
IS
IN
SUCH
GOOD
SHAPE.
YOUR
COUNTRY
MANAGER
WILL
BE
THERE.
AND
ALL
YOU
WANT
TO
DO
IS
SIT
IN
A
CORNER.
VERMA
WILL
TAKE
ALL
THE
CREDIT.'

'REALLY?'
HE
SAID.
'THAT'S
WHAT
ALL
BOSSES
DO,
WITHOUT
EXCEPTION,'
I
SAID.
'BLOODY
NORTH
INDIAN
FELLOW,'
UNCLE
SAID.
I
STOOD
UP
TO
LEAVE.
'SLEEPY?'
HE
ASKED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NOT
AS
MUCH
AS
YOU.
YOU
SLEEP
AT
TEN,
RIGHT?'
I
SAID.
'THIS
HAS
WOKEN
ME
UP,'
UNCLE
SAID,
POINTING
ME
TO
HIS
DRINK.
'WANT
ANOTHER
ONE?'
'UNCLE,
I
HAVE
TO
FIND
AN
AUTO.
IT'S
LATE.'
'WHY
DON'T
YOU
JUST
STAY

HERE?’
HE
SAID.
‘EXCUSE
ME?’
I
SAID.
‘YES.
I’LL
GIVE
YOU
A
SET
OF
NIGHTCLOTHES.
MINE
SHOULD
FIT
YOU,’
HE
SAID.
I
HAD
PAST-LIFE
TRAUMA
OF
WEARING
MY
GIRLFRIEND’S
FATHER’S
CLOTHES.
THIS
CAN’T
BE
A
GOOD
IDEA,
I
THOUGHT.
BEFORE
I
COULD
RESPOND,
UNCLE

HAD
POURED
US
ANOTHER
ROUND
OF
DRINKS.

"CHANGE
THE
MUSIC
IF
YOU
WANT,'
HE
SAID.

I
RIFLED
THROUGH
ANANYA'S
TAPES
IN
THE
DRAWER.

I
FOUND
A
PINK
FLOYD
ALBUM
AND
COULDN'T
RESIST.
THE
ALCOHOL
DEMANDED
FLOYD.

THE
LONG,
TRIPPY
OPENING
NOTE
OF
SHINE
ON

YOU
CRAZY
DIAMOND
PLAYED
IN
THE
ROOM.
UNCLE
TAPPED
A
FOOT
GENTLY
TO
THE
SLOW
BEATS.
I
WONDERED
IF
HE
WOULD
BE
ABLE
TO
HANDLE
SO
MUCH
ALCOHOL.
I
LONGED
TO
SMOKE.
NO,
DON'T
THINK
ABOUT
SMOKING,
MY
MIND
ADVISED.
DON'T
THINK
ABOUT
BEING

WITH
ANANYA.
THINK
ABOUT
THE
WORST-CASE
EMERGENCY
PLAN.
WHAT
IF
UNCLE
THREW
UP
OR
FAINTED?
HOW
DO
YOU
CALL
AN
AMBULANCE
IN
CHENNAI?
HOW
WOULD
YOU
EXPLAIN
IT
TO
ANANYA'S
MOTHER?
HOWEVER,
UNCLE
SEEMED
TO
BE
HAVING
A
GOOD
TIME.
HE
SAT
ON
THE

SOFA,
AND
PUT
HIS
LEGS
ON
THE
TABLE.
'ONE
THING
VERMA
TOLD
ME
I
WILL
NEVER
FORGET,'
HE
SAID.
I
NODDED.
VERMA
SAID,
'SWAMINATHAN,
DO
YOU
KNOW
WHY
THEY
MAKE
YOU
DEPUTY
GM
AND
SENT
ME
TO
BECOME
GM?''
'WHY?'
I
SAID,
TOO
DRUNK

TO
SHOW
RESTRAINT.
'HE
SAID
IT
WAS
BECAUSE
SOUTH
INDIANS
ARE
TOP
CLASS
NUMBER
TWO
OFFICERS,
BUT
HORRIBLE
IN
NUMBER
ONE
POSITIONS.'
UNCLE
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD
AS
HE
TOOK
A
BIG
SIP.
EVEN
IN
HIS
DRUNKENNESS,
I
COULD
SEE
HIS
PAIN.
I
DIDN'T
KNOW

WHAT
TO
SAY.
'DO
YOU
AGREE?'
HE
ASKED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'OH,
I
DON'T
KNOW.
MY
BOSS
IS
SOUTH
INDIAN,'
I
SAID.
'YES,
BUT
YOU
HAVE
JUST
STARTED.
MAYBE
HE
IS
RIGHT.
WE
HATE
THE
LIMELIGHT.
I
KNOW
I
SHOULD
PRESENT
THIS,
BUT
I
DON'T
WANT
TO.'
'WHY?'
'BECAUSE
KNOWLEDGE
IS
NOT

FOR
SHOWING
OFF.

IF
I
DO
GOOD
WORK,
PEOPLE
SHOULD
NOTICE
ME.

I
CANNOT
GO
SELL
MYSELF
LIKE
THAT
SHAMELESS
VERMA.'

I
NODDED,
MORE
TO
TELL
HIM

I
LISTENED
THAN
IN
AGREEMENT.
THERE

IS
NO
BETTER
SOURCE
OF
WISDOM
THAN
TWO
DRUNK
MEN.

'RIGHT?'

'DEPENDS.'

I

SAID.

'ON
WHAT?'

'DID
YOU
FEEL
BAD
WHEN
THEY
DIDN'T
MAKE
YOU
GM?'

I

SAID.
UNCLE
LOOKED
AT
ME
FOR
A
FEW
SECONDS.
HE
LEANED
FORWARD
FROM
THE
SOFA
TO
COME
NEAR
ME.

'LET
ME
TELL
YOU
ONE
THING.
WHAT
IS
YOUR

NAME?’
HE
SAID.
OBVIOUSLY,
I
WAS
NOT
ANYWHERE
CLOSE
TO
GETTING
CLOSE
TO
HIM.
‘KRISH,’
I
SAID.
‘OF
COURSE,
SORRY,
THIS
WHISKY

...
ANYWAY,
KRISH,
I
HAD
OFFERS.
TEN
YEARS
BACK
I
HAD
OFFERS
FROM
MULTINATIONAL
BANKS.
BUT
I
STAYED
LOYAL
TO
MY
BANK.

AND
I
WAS
PATIENT
TO
GET
MY
TURN
TO
BE
GM.
NOW,
I
HAVE
FIVE
YEARS
TO
RETIRE
AND
THEY
SEND
THIS
RASCAL
NORTH
INDIAN.'
'YOU
DID
FEEL
BAD,'
I
SAID.
'I
STILL
FEEL
HORRIBLE.
I
HAVEN'T
EVEN
TOLD
THIS
TO
MY
WIFE.
I

AM
DRINKING
TOO
MUCH,'
HE
SAID.
'IT'S
OK.
THE
POINT
IS,
IF
YOU
FEEL
HORRIBLE
THEN
YOU
NEED
TO
DO
WHAT
IT
TAKES
TO
GET
TO
BE
NUMBER
ONE.
AND....'
I
STOPPED
MYSELF.
'WHAT?
SAY
IT,'
HE
SAID.
'AND
IF
YOU
DON'T
HAVE
MARKETING

SKILLS,
THEN
BETTER
ADMIT
THAT
THAN
TAKE
A
MORAL
HIGH
GROUND
ABOUT
KNOWLEDGE.
YOU'VE
DONE
GOOD
WORK,
LET
THE
WORLD
KNOW.
WHAT
THE
HELL
IS
CHEAP
OR
SHAMELESS
ABOUT
THAT?'
UNCLE
DIDN'T
RESPOND.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I'M
SORRY,'
I
SAID,
COMPOSING
MYSELF.
'NO,
YOU
ARE
RIGHT.
I
AM
USELESS,'
HE
SAID,
HIS
VOICE
QUIVERING.
I
BECAME
WORRIED
HE'D
CRY.
'I
DIDN'T
SAY
THAT.
WE
MADE
THIS,
RIGHT?'
I
POINTED
TO
MY
LAPTOP.
'YOU
THINK
I
SHOULD
PRESENT?

WILL
I
BE
ABLE
TO?’
HE
ASKED.
‘YOU
WILL
KICK
ASS,’
I
SAID.
‘WHAT?’
‘SORRY,
I
SAID
YOU
NEED
ICE?’
HE
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD.
‘YOU’LL
BE
FINE.
TELL
VERMA
YOU
WILL
PRESENT
THIS.
DON’T
GIVE
HIM
A
COPY.’
‘I’LL
FIGHT
WITH
HIM?’
‘YES,
IF

YOU
CALL
IT
THAT,'
I
SAID.
'AND
MAKE
SURE
FROM
NOW
ON,
PEOPLE
KNOW
ABOUT
THE
WORK
YOU
DO.
LOOK
AT
BALA,
MY
BOSS.
HE
COPIES
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
ON
EVERYTHING.
BALA
BRIEFED
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
ABOUT
THE
FOOD
MENU
FOR
THIS
STUPID
LOCAL

CONCERT
WE
ARE
HAVING
NEXT
MONTH.
YOU
DEFINITELY
HAVE
TO
GET
NOTICED,
YOU
DON'T
HAVE
TO
WORK.
THAT'S
HOW
CORPORATES
WORK,
EVERYONE
KNOWS
IT.'
UNCLE
NODDED
AND
FELL
DEEP
IN
THOUGHT.
I
CHECKED
THE
TIME:
2
A.M.
I
COULDN'T
CONTROL
A
YAWN.
'OK,
WE

SHOULD
GO
TO
BED,'
UNCLE
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP.
'WAIT.'
HE
CAME
BACK
WITH
A
LUNGI
AND
A
VEST.
'HERE,
WILL
THIS
DO?'
YOU
GOT
TO
BE
KIDDING
ME,
I
WANTED
TO
SAY,
BUT
SAID,
'PERFECT.'
UNCLE
SHOWED
ME
THE
GUESTROOM.
I
SAT
DOWN

ON
THE
BED
WITH
THE
NIGHTCLOTHES
IN
MY
LAP.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT
TO
BE?
MD
AT
CITIBANK?'
UNCLE
ASKED
ME
AS
HE
REACHED
THE
DOOR
TO
LEAVE
MY
ROOM.
'A
WRITER,'
I
SAID.
'EXCUSE
ME,'
HE
SAID
AND
HIS
TIRED
BODY
BECAME
ALERT

AGAIN.
'MD,
COUNTRY
MANAGER,
I
DON'T
CARE,
IT'S
NOT
ME,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
“WILL
YOU
LEAVE
THE
BANK?’
‘NOT
IMMEDIATELY.
I’LL
SAVE
FOR
A
COUPLE
OF
YEARS
FIRST.’
‘AND
AFTER
THAT?
WHAT
ABOUT
YOUR
PARENTS?
ARE
THEY
OK
WITH
THIS?’
‘WE’LL
SEE.
YOU
SHOULD
SLEEP,
UNCLE.
YOU
HAVE
A
PRESENTATION
TO
MAKE
TOMORROW,’
I

SAID.
UNCLE
SWITCHED
OFF
T
HE
MAIN
LIGHT
AND
LEFT.
I
WENT
TO
THE
BATHROOM
AND
STRUGGLED
WITH
MY
LUNGI.
FINALLY,
I
USED
A
BELT
TO
TIE
IT
AROUND
MY
WAIST
AND
LAY
DOWN
IN
BED.
MY
BACK
WAS
RESTING
AFTER
EIGHTEEN
HOURS;
I

LET
OUT
A
SIGH
OF
RELIEF.
UNCLE
KNOCKED
ON
MY
DOOR.
HE
CAME
INSIDE
AND
SWITCHED
ON
THE
LIGHT
AGAIN.
I
SAT
UP
ON
THE
BED
IN
ONE
JERK.
'WHAT?'
'WATER,'
UNCLE
SAID
AS
HE
LEFT
A
BOTTLE
NEXT
TO
MY
BED.
'DRINK
UP,

OR
YOU
WILL
HAVE
A
HEADACHE
IN
THE
OFFICE
TOMORROW.'
'THANKS,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
OK
WITH
THAT
LUNGI?
YOU
NEED
HELP?'
'NO,
I
AM
FINE,'
I
SAID
AND
CLUTCHED
MY
BELT
AND
MODESTY
CLOSE
TO
MYSELF.
'GOOD
NIGHT,'
UNCLE
SAID
AS
HE
SWITCHED
OFF

THE
LIGHT
AGAIN.
'GOOD
NIGHT,
SIR,'
I
SAID
AND
CURSED
MYSELF
FOR
THE
NEXT
TEN
MINUTES
FOR
CALLING
HIM
SIR.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
29
'THREE
LAKH!'
BALA
FLIPPED
DURING
THE
CONCERT
STEERING
COMMITTEE
MEETING.
YES,
ONE
OF
THE
GREAT
VALUE
ADDITIONS
FROM
BALA
IS
TO
MAKE
EVERYTHING
SOUND
IMPORTANT.
HE
CREATED
THE
CSC,
OR
THE
CONCERT
STEERING
COMMITTEE.
IT
SOUNDED
SO
IMPORTANT,
I
COULD

ALMOST
PUT
IT
IN
MY
RESUME.
BUT
RIGHT
NOW,
WE
HAD
A
PROBLEM.
EVERYONE
KEPT
SILENT
AS
THE
PERSON
IN
CHARGE
OF
THE
SINGERS
GAVE
HER
REPORT.
'YOU
WANT
THREE
CELEBRITY
SINGERS,
SIR,'
SAID
MADHAVI,
A
FAT
AGENT
WITH
SPECTACLES
WHO
LOOKED
LIKE
A

CROSS
BETWEEN
A
SCHOOL
PREFECT
AND
AN
ICU
NURSE.
'BUT
HOW
CAN
THEY
GET
PAID
SO
MUCH?'
BALA
SAID.
SOMEHOW,
BALA
FELT
ONLY
HE
DESERVED
A
JOB
THAT
PAID
FAR
IN
EXCESS
OF
THE
WORK
INVOLVED.
'THEY
COME
WITH
A
BAND,
SIR,
AND
BACK-UP

SINGERS,'
MADHAVI
SAID.
EVERYONE
IN
THE
ROOM
NODDED.
BALA
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD.
'WHY
DO
WE
NEED
BACK-UP
SINGERS?
THE
MAIN
ONES
WILL
CRASH
OR
SOMETHING?'
NOBODY
LAUGHED.
'BACK-UP
MEANS
CHORUS,
SIR,'
MADHAVI
SAID.
BALA
REMAINED
UNIMPRESSED.
'CHORUS
ARE
THOSE
PEOPLE
WHO
SAY
AA
AA

AA
IN
LOVE
SONGS,
SIR,'
SAID
RENUKA,
ANOTHER
AGENT.
'I
KNOW
WHAT
CHORUS
IS,'
BALA
SAID
AS
HE
BANGED
HIS
FIST
ON
THE
TABLE.
'BUT
THIS
IS
TOO
MUCH.'
'WE
CAN
CUT
THE
FOOD,'
SAID
ONE
AGENT.
HE
GOT
MORE
DIRTY
LOOKS
THAN
AN

EVE-
TEASER
IN
A
BUS.
HE
RETRACTED
HIS
SUGGESTION.
'WHY
DON'T
WE
GET
SOME
LESSER
KNOWN
SINGERS?'
I
ASKED.
'BUT
THIS
IS
A
CITIBANK
EVENT.
IF
WE
GET
B-GRADE
SINGERS
AND
TOMORROW
HSBC
DOES
AN
EVENT
WITH
A-GRADE
SINGERS,
WE
ARE
SCREWED,'
BALA
SAID.

'SIR,
THE
VENUE....'
ONE
AGENT
WHO
HAD
NEVER
SPOKEN
IN
A
MEETING
IN
HIS
ENTIRE
CAREER
WAS
SHOT
DOWN
IN
MID-SENTENCE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'HAS
TO
BE
FIVE-STAR,'
BALA
SAID.
'WHO
IS
THE
TOP
SINGER
OF
THE
THREE?'
I
SAID.
'HARIHARAN,'
SAID
ONE
AGENT.
'NO,
IT
IS
S.P.
BALASUBRAMANIAM,'
SAID
ANOTHER.
WAR
BROKE
OUT
BETWEEN
THE
NORMALLY
PEACEFUL
TAMILIANS.
WHEN
IT
CAME
TO
MUSIC,
THEY

COULD
KILL.
'NO
MATCH,
HARI
IS
NO
MATCH
FOR
SP,'
MADHAVI
SHOUTED
EMOTIONALLY.
'SUCHITRA?
YOU
FORGOT
SUCHITRA?'
ANOTHER
AGENT
SAID.
BALA
STOOD
UP.
LIKE
ALL
CORPORATE
MEETINGS
WORLDWIDE,
EVEN
THIS
ONE
HAD
ENDED
WITHOUT
A
CONCLUSION.
'ALL
I
AM
SAYING
IS,
WE
CAN'T
AFFORD

TO
PAY
THIS
MUCH.
THE
VENUE,
FOOD
AND
ADVERTISING
ARE
ALREADY
COSTING
FOUR
LAKH,'
BALA
SAID.
'ADVERTISING?'

I
ASKED.
'WE
ARE
GIVING
A
HALF-PAGE
AD
IN
THE
HINDU,'
BALA
SAID.
THE
AGENTS
CLOSED
THEIR
FILES
TO
LEAVE.
'ISN'T
IT
AN
INVITATION-ONLY
EVENT?'

I
SAID.

'EXACTLY,
THE
AD
WILL
SAY
SO.
ONLY
OUR
CUSTOMERS
WILL
HAVE
THE
INVITES.
HOWEVER,
THE
AD
WILL
ENSURE
THEIR
FRIENDS
AND
RELATIVES
FEEL
JEALOUS.'
'THAT'S
THE
CITI
ADVANTAGE,'
I
SAID.
'EXACTLY.'
BALA
PATTED
MY
BACK.
'SO,
DAD'S
HAPPY,
HUH?'
I
QUIZZED
ANANYA
INSIDE
THE

AUTO.
'YOU
BET.
DAD
ONLY
TALKS
ABOUT
THE
PRESENTATION
AT
DINNER
EVERY
DAY.
AND
NOW
HE'S
IN
DELHI,
TO
MAKE
THE
SAME
PRESENTATION
IN
HEAD
OFFICE.
CAN
YOU
BELIEVE
IT?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WOW!'
I
SAID
AS
WE
REACHED
OUR
DESTINATION.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

WE
HAD
COME
TO
RATNA
STORES
IN
T.
NAGAR
TO
BUY
STEEL
PLATES
FOR
MY
CHUMMERY.

I
NEEDED
FOUR,
THIS
PLACE
HAD
FOUR
MILLION
OF
THEM.
SERIOUSLY,
EVERY
WALL,
ROOF,
CORNER,
SHELF
AND
RACK
OVER
TWO
FLOORS
WAS
COVERED
WITH
SHINY

STEEL
UTENSILS.
IF
DIRECT
SUNLIGHT
FELL
IN
THE
STORE,
YOU
COULD
BURN
LIKE
AN
ANT
UNDER
A
MAGNIFYING
GLASS.
I
WONDERED
HOW
THE
STORE
KEPT
TRACK
OF
ITS
INVENTORY.
'HOW
DO
YOU
EVER
CHOOSE?'
I
SAID
TO
ANANYA
AS
WE
NEARED
THE
PLATES
SECTION.

ANANYA
DEMONSTRATED
THE
DESIRED
WIDTH
WITH
HER
HANDS
TO
ONE
OF
THE
ATTENDANTS.
'SERIOUSLY,
THANKS
FOR
HELPING
DAD.
I
THINK
HE
LIKES
YOU
NOW,'
SHE
SAID.
'NOT
AS
MUCH
AS
HE
LIKES
HARISH.
I
DRANK
HIS
WHISKY
THOUGH.'
'WHAT?'
ANANYA
SAID.
I
TOLD
ANANYA

ABOUT
OUR
DRINKS
SESSION.
'YOU
WORE
HIS
WHAT
TO
BED?'
SHE
SAID,
SHOCKED
AT
THE
END
OF
MY
STORY.
'LUNGI,'
I
SAID
AS
I
PAID
AT
THE
CASHIER'S
COUNTER.
'WHAT'S
SO
SURPRISING?
IT
IS
QUITE
COMFORTABLE.'
ANANYA
RAISED
HER
EYEBROWS.
'I
DID
IT
FOR

YOU.'
I
LOOKED
INTO
HER
EYES.
SHE
MOVED
FORWARD
AND
EVEN
THOUGH
ONE
COULD
SEE
OUR
REFLECTION
IN
FIVE
HUNDRED
FRYING
PANS
AROUND
US,
SHE
KISSED
ME.
ALL
THE
TAMILIAN
HOUSEWIVES
IN
THE
STORE
TURNED
TO
US
IN
SHOCK.
'ANANYA,'
A
LADY'S
VOICE
CAME

FROM
BEHIND
US.
ANANYA
TURNED
AROUND.
'FUCK,
CHITRA
AUNTY,'
ANANYA
SAID,
LIFTING
A
LARGE
STEEL
TRAY
TO
HIDE
HER
FACE.
IT
WAS
TOO
LATE
AS
THE
WOMAN
HAD
STARTED
TO
COME
TOWARDS
US.
'CHITRA
WHO?'
I
SAID.
'CHITRA
AUNTY
LIVES
IN
MY
LANE.
SHE

SINGS
CARNATIC
MUSIC,
WITH
MY
MOTHER,'
ANANYA
SAID
FROM
BEHIND
THE
TRAY.
'I
BOUGHT
CARNATIC
MUSIC
CDS,
TOO,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT?'
SHE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NEVER
MIND,
HELLO
AUNTY,'
I
SAID
AS
CHITRA
AUNTY
CAME
NEXT
TO
US.
'KRISH,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'COLLEAGUE.'
'REALLY,
WHAT
KIND
OF
COLLEAGUE?'
CHITRA
AUNTY
ASKED
BOSSILY.
'I
HAVE
TO
GO,'
I
SAID
AND
LIFTED
MY
PLATES.
'WE
NEED
THESE
BEFORE
DINNER.'

ANANYA
CALLED
ME
LATE
AT
NIGHT,
AFTER
I
HAD
EATEN
IN
THE
NEW
STEEL
PLATES.
'ALL
OK?'
I
SAID.
'SORT
OF,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'SHE
IS
GOING
TO
TELL
MY
MOTHER.
THEY
HAVE
THIS
RIVALRY
ANYWAY.
GURUJI
ACCEPTED
HER
BUT
NOT
MY
MOTHER.'
'AND
THEN?'

'NOTHING,
I'LL
TELL
MY
MOTHER
SHE
IS
EXAGGERATING.
AM
I
MAD
ENOUGH
TO
SMOOCH
SOMEONE
IN
RATNA
STORES?'
SHE
SAID.
'YOU
ARE,'
I
LAUGHED.
'YES,
BUT
ONLY
YOU
KNOW
THAT.'
'I
DON'T
WANT
TO
RUIN
WHAT
I'VE
BUILT
WITH
YOUR
DAD,'
I
SAID.
'IT'S

MOM
YOU
HAVE
TO
WORRY
ABOUT
NOW.
MANJU
AND
DAD
ARE
OK.'
'HOW?'
'I
DON'T
KNOW.
I
TOLD
HER
YOU
ARE
COMING
OVER
FOR
DINNER
TOMORROW.'
'WHY?'
'THE
STATED
REASON
IS
TO
THANK
YOU
FOR
HELPING
DAD.
WE
CAN
TELL
HER
ABOUT
OUR
VISIT

TO
RATNA
STORES
BEFORE
CHITRA
AUNTY.
OF
COURSE,
WE'LL
SKIP
A
FEW
BITS.'
'YOU
SHOULDN'T
HAVE
KISSED
ME
THERE.
WHY
DID
YOU
DO
IT?'
'BECAUSE
I
COULDN'T
HELP
IT,
YOU
ARE
IRRESISTIBLE
SOMETIMES,'
ANANYA
SAID.
MY
HEART
STOPPED
FOR
A
SECOND
AT
ANANYA'S
RESPONSE.

ALRIGHT
MRS
SWAMINATHAN,
IF
YOUR
DAUGHTER
CAN'T
RESIST
ME,
THERE
IS
NO
WAY
YOU
CAN
EITHER.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
30
'EXCELLENT
PRESENTATION,
THAT
IS
WHAT
THE
BOARD
TOLD
DAD
IN
DELHI.
NOW
THEY'VE
ASKED
ALL
ZONAL
OFFICES
TO
MAKE
SIMILAR
ONES,'
ANANYA
SAID
IN
AN
EXCITED
VOICE.
WE
SAT
ON
THE
FLOOR
FOR
DINNER.
ANANYA'S
MOM
KEPT
QUIET
AS
SHE

STIRRED
A
BOWL
OF
RASAM.
SHE
OFFERED
IT
TO
ME
WITHOUT
A
WORD.
'YOU
OK,
MOM?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'DID
YOU
GO
TO
RATNA
STORES
WITH
HIM?'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID,
POINTING
TO
ME.
'OH
SHIT,
CHITRA
AUNTY
HAD
TO
TELL
YOU
THE
NEXT
MORNING,'
ANANYA

SAID,
HER
HAND
BUSY
MIXING
THE
RICE
AND
DAAL.
'AKKA,
DON'T
USE
BAD
WORDS
AT
THE
DINNER
TABLE,'
MANJU
SAID.
'MANJU,
YOU
EAT.
I
AM
TALKING
TO
MOM
HERE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'HE'S
RIGHT.
WE
DON'T
TALK
LIKE
THAT
IN
THIS
HOUSE.
WE
DON'T
DO

THE
THINGS
YOU
DO
EITHER,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
AS
SHE
VENTED
SOME
OF
THE
ANGER
ON
THE
RICE
IN
HER
LEAF.
SHE
MASHED
AND
SMASHED
IT
WITH
ALL
THE
VEGETABLES
EXTRA
HARD.
'WHAT
HAVE
I
DONE,
MOM?
KRISH
WANTED
STEEL
PLATES.
HOW
WOULD
HE

KNOW
WHERE
TO
GO?
I
TOOK
HIM
TO
RATNA
STORES.'
'AND
YOU
DO
CHEAP
THINGS
IN
THE
STORE?'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHAT
CHEAP
THINGS,
MOM?'
MANJU
SAID.
'MANJU,
CAN
YOU
LEAVE
THE
ROOM?
GO
READ
YOU
PHYSICS
BOOK,'
ANANYA
BADE.
'BUT
I'VE
ALREADY
REVISED

PHYSICS
TODAY,'
MANJU
SAID.
'THEN
STUDY
MATHS
OR
CHEMISTRY,
FOR
GOD'S
SAKE.
GO.'
ANANYA'S
STERN
GLANCE
DID
THE
TRICK.
MANJU
PICKED
UP
HIS
BANANA
LEAF
AND
TOOK
IT
TO
HIS
ROOM.
'SOMETHING
SOMETHING
CHEAP
SOMETHING.....'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
AS
ANANYA
INTERRUPTED
HER.
'MOM,
KRISH

DOESN'T
UNDERSTAND
TAMIL.
PLEASE,
SPEAK
IN
ENGLISH,'
ANANYA
SAID.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
GATHERED
HERSELF
AND
SPOKE
AGAIN.
'WHY
ARE
YOU
SENDING
YOUR
BROTHER
AWAY,
WHEN
YOU
ARE
READY
TO
BE
CHEAP
IN
PUBLIC?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
DIDN'T
DO
ANYTHING
CHEAP.'
'CHITRA
IS
LYING?'
'I
GAVE
HIM
A
LITTLE
KISS.'
'KISSING!'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
AS
IF
ANANYA
HAD
MENTIONED
US
SNORTING
DRUGS.
'MOM,
STOP
HYPERVENTILATING.
HE
IS
MY
BOYFRIEND.
YOU
UNDERSTAND?'
'YOU
ARE
MY
DAUGHTER,
DO
YOU

UNDERSTAND?

YOU

ARE

SPOILING

OUR

NAME

IN

THE

COMMUNITY,

DO

YOU

UNDERSTAND?

I

BROUGHT

YOU

UP,

EDUCATED

YOU,

MADE

SACRIFICES

FOR

YOU,

DO

YOU

UNDERSTAND?'

I

DON'T

KNOW

IF

MOTHER

AND

DAUGHTER

UNDERSTOOD

ANYTHING,

BUT

I

UNDERSTOOD

IT

WAS

TIME

FOR

ME

TO

GO.

I
STOOD
UP.
'WHERE
ARE
YOU
GOING?'
ANANYA
DEMANDED
OF
ME.
'TO
WASH
MY
HANDS,'
I
SAID,
SHOWING
HER
MY
CURD-FILLED
HANDS
AS
PROOF.
'EVEN
MY
HANDS
ARE
MESSY.
STAY
WITH
ME,'
ANANYA
ORDERED.
'YOU
DON'T
KNOW
WHAT
I
HAVE
TO
BEAR
BECAUSE
OF

YOU,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
IN
ONE
MOVEMENT
SHE
STOOD
UP,
GATHERED
HER
LEAF
AND
COMPOSURE
AND
LEFT
THE
ROOM.
ANANYA
LET
OUT
A
HUGE
SIGH.
'I
LIKED
THE
RASAM,
NICE
AND
TANGY,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
SAID
YOU
OWE
ME
BIG
TIME,'
I
SAID.
I

SAT
IN
BALA'S
OFFICE.
HE
KEPT
BOTH
HIS
ELBOWS
ON
THE
DESK
AND
RAN
ALL
TEN
FINGERS
THROUGH
HIS
OILY
HAIR.
'BUT
HOW
CAN
I?'
BALA
SAID.
'YOU
SAID
YOU
ARE
OVER
BUDGET.
I
HAVE
A
SINGER
FOR
YOU,
FREE.'
I
PLAYED
WITH
THE

PAPERWEIGHT
IN
HIS
OFFICE.
ALONE
WITH
HIM,
I
BEHAVED
HIS
EQUAL.
'WHO?'
HE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'RADHA
SWAMINATHAN,
UPCOMING
SINGER.'
'REALLY?
NEVER
HEARD
OF
HER,'
BALA
SAID.
'SHE
IS
STILL
IN
THE
UNDERGROUND
SCENE.
SHE
HAS
TRAINED
IN
CARNATIC
MUSIC.'
'BUT
THIS
IS
A
POPULAR
CONCERT.
WE'LL
HAVE
DANCERS
TO
COMPLEMENT
THE
SINGERS.'
'BALA,
POPULAR
MUSIC
IS

CAKEWALK
FOR
CARNATIC
SINGERS.
YOU
KNOW
THAT.'
'IS
SHE
GOOD?
HAVE
YOU
HEARD
HER
SING?'
'SORT
OF.'
'SORT
OF?'
'YES,
I
HAVE.
IT'LL
BE
FINE.
PLUS
YOU
HAVE
HARIHARAN
AND
S.P.,
CAN'T
GO
TOO
WRONG.'
BALA
STOOD
UP
AND
WALKED
TOWARDS
HIS
WINDOW.
'IS

SHE
HOT?'
BALA
SAID,
'LIKE
GOOD-LOOKING?'
'SHE
IS
MY
GIRLFRIEND'S
MOTHER.
I
FIND
THE
DAUGHTER
PRETTY.'
'WHAT?'
'I
HAVE
TO
DO
THIS
BALA.
I
AM
HITTING
ALL-TIME
LOW
WITH
HER.
IF
I
DON'T
DO
SOMETHING
DRASTIC,
I
CAN
KISS
MY
GIRL
GOODBYE
FOREVER.
THEY'VE

GOT
A
CISCO
GUY
LINED
UP,
PURE
AS
FRESH
COCONUT
OIL.'
'YOUR
GIRLFRIEND
IS
TAMILIAN?'
YES,
BRAHMIN,
SO
YOU
CAN
DEAL
WITH
IT
FOR
ONCE.'
'IYENGER
OR....'
'IYER,
DOES
IT
MATTER?'
'NO,'
BALA
SAID
AND
CAME
BACK
TO
HIS
SEAT.
'NOW
I
KNOW
WHY

YOU
CAME
TO
CHENNAI.'
'APART
FROM
THE
FACT
THAT
I
WAS
DYING
TO
WORK
WITH
A
FINANCIAL
WIZARD
LIKE
YOU,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT?'
'NOTHING,
NOW,
ARE
YOU
DOING
IT?'
'WHAT?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'FINALISING
THE
SINGERS,
HARIHARAN,
S.P.
AND
THE
NEW
TALENT
RADHA.'
'WHAT
WILL
THE
AGENTS
SAY?
WE
HAVE
A
COMMITTEE.'
'EVERYONE
IN
THE
COMMITTEE
WORKS
FOR
YOU.
THEY
ARE
YOUR
DRONES.'
'BUT
STILL,'
BALA
SAID,
IN
DEEP
THOUGHT.
'YOU
DECIDE,'
I
SIGHED.

'I
HAVE
WORK.
I
HAVEN'T
CLEANED
UP
MY
MAILBOX
IN
AGES.
I
STILL
HAVE
THOSE
EMAILS
OF
YOURS
ASKING
ME
TO
PUSH
THOSE
INTERNET
STOCKS,
I
SHOULD
DELETE
THEM,
RIGHT?'
BALA
STARED
AT
ME
AS
I
TURNED
TO
LEAVE.
'LOOK,
IT
IS
NOT
PERSONAL,'

I
SAID,
'BUT
THIS
IS
ABOUT
MY
FUTURE
KIDS.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
31
'AUNTY,
MAY
I
COME
IN?'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
LOOKED
AT
ME
THROUGH
THE
MESH
DOOR
WITH
SLEEPY
EYES.
SHE
WORE
A
NIGHTIE;
I
HAD
DISTURBED
HER
AFTERNOON
NAP.
I
HAD
TOLD
MY
AGENTS
I
WOULD
BE
OUT
FOR
A

LATE
LUNCH.
BEFORE
COMING
TO
THEIR
HOUSE,
I
STOPPED
AT
GRAND
SWEETS
AND
PACKED
TWO
KILOS
OF
MYSORE
PAK.
AUNTY
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
I
CAME
INSIDE.
SHE
WENT
INSIDE
TO
CHANGE
HER
CLOTHES.
I
FLIPPED
THROUGH
THE
HINDU
UTIL
SHE
RETURNED.
'UNCLE'S
BACK?'
I

ASKED.
'HE
CAME
LAST
NIGHT.'
SHE
YAWNED.
'BUT
HE
IS
IN
OFFICE
NOW.'
'SORRY
TO
WAKE
YOU
UP,'
I
SAID
AND
PASSED
HER
THE
BOX
OF
SWEETS.
'WHAT'S
THIS?'
'I
WANTED
TO
APOLOGISE
FOR
THE
DINNER
THAT
NIGHT.'
AUNTY
KEPT
QUIET
AND
LOOKED
AT

THE
COFFEE
TABLE.

'I
AM
SORRY
ABOUT
THE
RATNA
STORES
INCIDENT.

I
ASSURE
YOU,
NOTHING
CHEAP
HAPPENED,'

I
SAID.
'CHITRA
IS
A
LOUDMOUTH,'
SHE
RESPONDED.

'SHE
WOULD
HAVE
TOLD
THE
WHOLE
OF
MYLAPORE
BY
NOW.'

'I
CAN
UNDERSTAND.
WE
HAVE
PEOPLE
LIKE
THAT
IN

PUNJABIS
AS
WELL.
PEOPLE
WHO
LOVE
TO
INTERFERE
IN
OTHER
PEOPLE'S
LIVES.'
AUNTY
IGNORED
ME.
SHE
WENT
INSIDE
TO
KEEP
THE
SWEETS
IN
THE
FRIDGE.
SHE
CAME
BACK
WITH
A
GLASS
OF
WATER
AND
THEIR
FAMILY
DISH
OF
HARD,
BRITTLE
SPIRALS
THAT
DIDN'T
TASTE

OF
ANYTHING.
I
TOOK
ONE.
MY
TOOTH
HURT
AS
I
TRIED
TO
BITE
IT.
I
TOOK
THE
SPIRAL
OUT
OF
MY
MOUTH
AND
FAKED
I
HAD
TAKEN
A
BITE
BY
PRETENDING
TO
CHEW.
WE
HAD
AN
AWKWARD
MINUTE
OF
SILENCE.
'AUNTY,
I
WNTED
TO

SHOW
YOU
THIS,'
I
SAID
AND
OPENED
MY
BAG.
I
TOOK
OUT
THE
CARNATIC
MUSIC
CDS
AND
GAVE
THEM
TO
HER.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'T.S.
SUBRAMANIUM?
WHOSE
IS
IT?
'MINE.'
'WHAT?'
'I'M
TRYING
TO
DEVELOP
A
TASTE.
I'M
LEARNING
,
BUT
IT'S
HARD.
THERE'S
THE
SWARA,
THE
RAGA,
THE
SHRUTI.'
'YOU
KNOW
ABOUT
SHRUTI?'
'ONLY
THE
BASICS.
I
AM
NOT
AN
EXPERT
LIKE
YOU.'
SHE

RETURNED
MY
CDS
AND
GAVE
A
WRY
SMILE.
'IN
CHENNAI
I
AM
A
NOBODY.
EVEN
CHITRA
IS
BETTER
THAN
ME.
THOUGH
PEOPLE
SAY
SHE
KNOWS
THE
CORPORATOR
OF
CHENNAI,
WHO
ASKED
GURUJI
TO
TAKE
HER
ON.
THE
CORPORATOR
IS
IN
CHARGE
OF
THE
KUTCHERI

VENUES,
SO
GURUJI
HAD
TO
OBLIGE
HER.
CAN
YOU
IMAGINE
HOW
SHALLOW
SHE
IS?’
‘THERE
HAVE
OT
BE
OTHER
GURUS,’
I
SAID.
‘I
WAS
READY
FOR
AN
ADVANCED
ONE.
ANYWAY,
I
AM
SORRY
I
OVERREACTED
THAT
DAY.’
‘NO,
NO,
YOU
DON’T
HAAVE
TO
SPOLOGISE.

I
CAME
OUT
TO APOLOGISE.
AND
FOR
A
LITTLE
REQUEST.'
'REQUEST?
WHAT
ARE
YOU
REQUESTING
ME?
YOU
YOUNG
PEOPLE
DO
WHATEVER
YOU
WANT,
ANYWAY.'
'NOT THIS
ISN'T
ABOUT
ANANYA
AND
ME.
THIS
IS
ABOUT
OUR
CITIBANK
CONCERT.'
OVER
THE
NEXT
HALF
AN
HOUR
I
EXPLAINED
THE

UPCOMING
EVENT.
I
TOLD
HER
ABOUT
THE
FISHERMAN'S
COVE
VENUE,
THE
WHO'S
WHO
OF
CHENNAI
THAT
WE
EXPECTED
TO
BE
PRESENT,
THE
POPULAR
MUSIC
CONCERT
FOR
TWO
HOURS
DIVIDED
BETWEEN
THREE
SINGERS,
AND
THAT
I
WANTED
HER
TO
BE
ONE
OF
THEM.
'ME?'
SHE

ECHOED,
SHOCKED.
'YES,'
I
SAID.
'I'VE
NEVER
SUNG
POPULAR
MUSIC,'
SHE
SAID.
'YOU
HAVE
A
TRAINED
VOICE.
SWITCH
ON
MTV
AND
SEE
THE
LATEST
CHARTBUSTERS.
THREE
KOLLYWOOD,
THREE
BOLLYWOOD.
YOU
ARE
DONE.'
'WHY
ME?'
SHE
ASKED,
STILL
BEWILDERED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'ACTUALLY,
WE
ARE
DESPERATE.
WE
NEED
THREE
SINGERS
AND
WE
FOUND
ONLY
TWO.
MY
BOSS
GAVE
ME
THE
JOB
OF
FINDING
THE
THIRD
SINGER.
SO,
MY
APPRAISAL
DEPENDS
ON
YOU.'
'WHO
ARE
THE
OTHER
TWO
SINGERS?'
'THEY
ARE
A
BIT
KNOWN.

SO,
THE
THIRD
ONE
HAS
TO
BE
FRESH
TO
BALANCE
THINGS
OUT.'
'WHO?'
'HARIHARAN
AND
S.P.
BALASUBRAMANIAM,'
I
SAID.
AUNTY'S
MOUTH
FELL
OPEN.
SHE
STOOD
UP
AND
LEFT
THE
ROOM.
I
FOLLOWED
HER
INTO
THE
KITCHEN.
'AUNTY,
IT
IS
NO
BIG
DEAL.
IT
ISN'T

A
PUBLIC
CONCERT.'
AUNTY
ANSWERD
BY
PLACING A
FRYING
PAN
ON
THE
STOVE
AND
POURING
OIL
IN
IT.
ONCE
THE
OIL
HEATED
UP,
SHE
TOSSED
IN
MUSTARD
SEEDS
AND
CURRY
LEAVES.
A
PUNGENT
SMELL
FILLED
THE
KITCHEN.
I
COUGHED
TWICE.
'SEE,
THIS
IS
WHAT
I

DO
ALL
DAY.
I
COOK,
I
DON'T
PERFORM.
I
AM
AN
AMATEUR.
I
CAN'T
EVEN
SIT
IN
FRONT
OF
HARIHARAN
AND
S.P.,
LET
ALONE
SHARE
THE
SAME
STAGE.'
'IT'S
FUN
NIGHT,
NOT
A
COMPETITION.
THEY
SING
AFTER
YOU.'
SHE
TOSSED
CHOPPED
ONIONS
IN
THE

PAN.
MY
EYES
BURNED
ALONG
WITH
MY
THROAT.
“AUNTY,
HAVE
YOU
EVER
PERFORMED
ON
STAGE
BEFORE?’
‘NO.
OK,
YES,
A
COUPLE
OF
TIMES
IN
THE
TAMIL
SANGAM
EVENTS
WHERE
ANANYA’S
FATHER
WAS
POSTED.
BUT
HIS,
FIVE-STAR
HOTEL,
HIGH-SOCIETY,
HARIHARAN....YOU’VE
GOT
HARIHARAN,
WHY
DO
YOU

NEED
ME?’
‘ONLY
PROFESSIONALS
WILL
MAKE
IT
TOO
COMMERCIAL.
WE
WANT
TO
GIVE
OUR
CLIENTS
A
FAMILY
FEEL.
A
CASUAL
VIBE
WILL
BE
NICE,’
I
SAID.
AUNTY
SHOOK
HER
HEAD.
I
CONTINUED
TO
CONVINCE
HER
UNTIL
SHE
HAD
PREPARED
THE
EVENING
DINNER
OF
TOMATO

RASAM,
LEMON
RICE
AND
FRIED
BHINDI.

I
HAD
FOLLOWED
THE
RECIPE
AND
COULD
NOW
MAKE
RASAM
FROM
SCRATCH.
HOWEVER,

I
STILL
DIDN'T
HAVE
HER
ON
BOARD.

'WHY
ARE
YOU
DOING
THIS?

I
ACCEPTED
YOU
APOLOGY,
DIDN'T
I?'

'THAT'S
NOT
WHY

I
AM
DOING
IT.'

'THEN
WHY?'
SHE
COVERED
THE
DISHES
WITH
PLATES.

'I
AM
DOING
THIS
BECAUSE
I
THINK
YOU
ARE
A
GOOD
SINGER.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'HOW
DO
YOU
KNOW
THAT?'
'BECAUSE
ANANYA
TOLD
ME.
SHE
ALSO
SAID
YOU'VE
TRAINED
ALL
YOUR
LIFE.
AND
I
BELIEVE
HER.'
SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME.
'DON'T
TELL
ME
THE
IDEA
DOESN'T
EXCITE
YOU.
NOT
EVEN
A
LITTLE?'
I
SAID
AS
WE

CAME
BACK
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
'OF
COURSE,
IT
IS
A
HUGE
HONOUR,
BUT
I
CAN'T.'
'DON'T
SAY
YOU
CAN'T.
C'MON,
WE
WILL
KEEP
IT
A
SURPRISE.
WE
WON'T
TELL
UNCLE.
WE
WON'T
EVEN
TELL
ANANYA
IF
YOU
WANT.
WE
SAT
DOWN
ON
THE

SOFA.
I
NOTICED
THE
WHISKY
BOTTLE,
THE
LEVEL
WAS
THE
SAME
AS
I
HAD
LEFT
IT.
'OK,
HERE
IS
THE
DEAL.
YOU
GIVE
A
TENTATIVE
YES
NOW.
YOU
PREPARE
THE
SONGS
WHEN
ANANYA
AND
UNCLE
ARE
NOT
AT
HOME.
IF
ON
THE
DAY
OF

THE
CONCERT,
YOU
WANT
TO
BACK
OUT,
LET
ME
KNOW
THE
NIGHT
BEFORE
AND
I
WILL
MANAGE.
IF
NOT,
GIVE
IT
A
SHOT.
DEAL?’
‘I
WILL
CHICKEN
OUT
AT
THE
END,’
SHE
PROMISED.
‘I’LL
TAKE
THE
CHANCE.
PLEASE,’
I
SAID.
SHE
TOOK
TEN
SECONDS,

BUT
SHE
GAVE

A
BRIEF
NOD
AT
THE
END.

I
SPRANG
UP
THE
SOFA
IN
EXCITEMENT.

'COOL,
YOUR
PRACTICE
STARTS
NOW,'

I
SAID
AND
PICKED
UP
THE
REMOTE
AND
PUT
ON
MTV.

'WHAT
ARE
THESE
SONGS?'

SHE
SAID
AS
THE
SCREEN
SHOWED
TWO
HUNDRED

SOUTH
INDIAN
DANCERS
DANCING
ON
THE
GREAT
WALL
OF
CHINA.
'I'LL
LET
YOU
FIGURE
IT
OUT.
AND
NOW,
I
BETTER
GO
TO
WORK,'
I
SAID,
'THE
CITY
NEVER
SLEEPS,
BUT
THE
CITY
SHOULDN'T
BUNK
OFFICE,
TOO.'
I
FIST-PUMPED
AS
I
LEFT
ANANYA'S
HOUSE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

32
PEOPLE
CLOSE
TO
YOU
HAVE
THE
POWER
TO
DISTURB
YOU
THE
MOST.

I
SHOULD
HAVE
TORN
MY
FATHER'S
LETTER.

I
ENDED
UP
READING
IT
THRICE.
SON,

I
AM
OMITTING
THE
'DEAR'
AS

I
AM
NOT
SURE

I
CAN
ADDRESS
YOU

AS
THAT
ANYMORE.

I
KNEW
YOU
ARE
ON
THE
WRONG
PATH
THE
DAY
YOU
LOST
RESPECT
FOR
YOUR
FATHER.

I
AM
SURE
YOU
REMEMBER
THAT
DAY.
YOU
HAVE
BROKEN
ALL
CONTACT
WITH
ME
SINCE.

I
HAVE
LEARNT
YOU
ARE
INVOLVED
WITH
A
GIRL
IN

CHENNAI.

I

DON'T

KNOW

THE

DETAILS.

I

CAN

ONLY

DEDUCE

SO

MUCH

FROM

YOUR

MOTHER'S

CONVERSATIONS

WITH

HER

USELESS

RELATIVES.

WE

SHOULD

CHOOSE

THE

GIRL

FOR

YOU,

NOT

YOU.

FOR

YOU

ARE

ON

THE

PATH

TO

BECOMING

A

MAN

OF

LOW

CHARACTER.

SUCH

ARE

THE
VALUES
GIVEN
TO
YOU
BY
YOUR
MOTHER
AND
HER
SIBLINGS
THAT
YOU
MAY
NOT
EVEN
KNOW
HOW
DISGRACEFUL
YOUR
ACTIONS
ARE.
THAT
YOU
CHOSE
TO
HIDE
YOUR
ACTIONS
FROM
ME
ONLY
REINFORCES
THAT
AT
SOME
LEVEL
YOU
ARE
ASHAMED
OF
THEM
AS
WELL.

UNFORTUNATELY,
YOUR
FATHER
I
CHANGED
MY
SLEEPING
POSITION
FOR
THE
TENTH
TIME.

I
WANTED
TO
SLEEP,
BUT
FELT
MORE
ALERT
THAN
ANYTIME
IN
OFFICE.
FORGET
IT,
HE
ONLY
WANTS
TO
PROVOKE
YOU,

I
SAID
TO
MYSELF
AGAIN.
GO
TO
SLEEP,
NOW!

—
I
SCOLDED

MYSELF.
THE
FUNNY
THING
ABOUT
SLEEP
IS
YOU
CAN'T
INSTRUCT
IT
TO
HAPPEN.
YOUR
MIND
KNOWS
THE
FACTS
AND
REPEATS
THEM
TO
YOU

—
IT
IS
LATE,
ONLY
FIVE
HOURS
WHEN
YOU
HAVE
TO
WAKE
UP
AGAIN,
YOU
NEED
REST.
YOUR
MIND
ALSO
HAS

A
MILLION
OPTIONS
ON
WHAT
IT
CAN
THINK
ABOUT;
STARS
IN
THE
CLEAR
MOONLESS
SKY,
THE
BEAUTIFUL
FLOWERS
AT
THE
NUNGAMBAKKAM
FLOWER
SHOP,
THE
SMELL
OF
INCENSE
IN
ANANYA'S
HOUSE,
YOUR
BEST
BIRTHDAY
PARTY.
THERE
ARE
POSITIVE
THOUGHTS
SOMEWHERE
IN
PEOPLE'S
HEADS
ALL
THE

TIME.
BUT
SOMEHOW,
EVEN
ONE
NEGATIVE
THOUGHT
WILL
CROWD
THEM
OUT.
MAYBE
IT
IS
AN
EVOLUTIONARY
MECHANISM
SO
WE
CAN
FOCUS
ON
THE
PROBLEM
AT
HAND
RATHER
THAN
REJOICE
IN
ALL
THINGS
WONDERFUL.
BUT
IT
MAKES
LIFE
A
BITCH,
AS
GOOD
MEMORIES
HAVE
TO

MAKE
SPACE
FOR
THE
NEXT
PAIN

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
IN
THE
NECK
ITEM.
AND
WHAT
DOES
ONE
GAIN
BY
LOSING
SLEEP?
I
HOPE
OUR
GENES
MUTATE
ASAP
SO
WE
CAN
EVOLVE
OUT
OF
THIS.
MEMORIES
OF
THAT
DAY
MY
FATHER
REFERRED
TO
KEPT
COMING
BACK.
WHAT
DRAMA
IS
HE
GOING

TO
DO
WHEN
I
TELL
HIM
ABOUT
MY
MARRIAGE
PLANS?
I
THOUGHT.
GO
TO
SLEEP,
IDIOT,
ONLY
FOUR
HOURS
TO
WAKE
UP,
MY
MIND
SCOLDED
ME.
MY
BRAIN
REFUSED
TO
RELAX.
I
SPRANG
OUT
OF
THE
BED
AT
TWO
AND
CALLED
HOME.
'HELLO?'
MY

MOTHER
SAID
IN
A
SLEEPY
VOICE.
'SORRY,
IT
IS
ME.'
'KRISH?
EVERYTHING
OK?'
SHE
SOUNDED
PANICKED.
'YES,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT
HAPPENED?'
'DAD
SENT
ME
A
LETTER.
I'M
QUITE
DISTURBED.'
'OH,
REALLY?
WHAT
DID
IT
SAY?'
'NOT
IMPORTANT.
HE
KNOWS
ABOUT
ANANYA.'
'YOUR
FRIEND,
NO?

YES,
SO
WHAT?'
'MOM,
SHE
IS
NOT
JUST
A
FRIEND.
I
WANT
TO
MARRY
HER.'
'OH
KRISH,
DON'T
START
THIS
SO
LATE
AT
NIGHT.
A
GIRLFRIEND
IS
FINE,
DO
WHATEVER
YOU
WANT
IN
CHENNAI.
BUT
WHY
ARE
YOU
FORCING
HER
ON
US?'
'I
AM

NOT
IMPOSING.
I
AM
TELLING
YOU
ABOUT
MY
CHOICE
OF
LIFE
PARTNER,'
I
SAID,
MY
VOICE
LOUD.
'STOP
SCREAMING.'
'I'M
SORRY.'
'IF
YOU
HAVE
THE
GUTS,
SHOUT
AT
YOUR
FATHER.'
'I
DON'T
SPEAK
TO
HIM
AT
ALL.
YOU
KNOW
I
DON'T
CARE.'
'THEN
WHY

IS
THAT
LETTER
BOTHERING
YOU?'

I
KEPT
SILENT.
'HELLO?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AFTER
FIVE
SECONDS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I'M
HERE,'
I
SAID,
MY
VOICE
SOFT.
'ARE
YOU
OK?'
I
HELD
BACK
MY
TEARS
AS
I
SPOKE.
'I'M
LONELY,
MOM.
I
DON'T
NEED
THIS
FORM
DAD.'
'TEAR
THE
LETTER
AND
THROW
IT.'
'I
AM
BATTLING
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
HERE
ANYWAY.
THIS

IS
SUCH
A
STRANGE
CITY,
I
AM
WELCOME
NOWHERE.
AND
NOW
YOU
THINK
I
AM
IMPOSING
ON
YOU,'
I
SAID
AND
COULDN'T
CONTROL
MYSELF.
I
HELD
THE
PHONE
TIGHT
AND
CRIED.
'STOP
KRISH,
DON'T,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
I
COMPOSED
MYSELF
AND
USED
MY
LEFT

LEG
TO
OPEN
THE
FRIDGE.

I
TOOK
OUT
A
BOTTLE
OF
WATER
AND
DRANK
IT.

‘WHAT
DO

I
DO?’

I
SAID
AFTER

I
REGAINED
COMPOSURE.

‘COME
BACK.

WHY
DON’T
YOU
APPLY
FOR

A
TRANSFER
BACK
TO
DELHI?’

‘I
ONLY
CAME
HERE
SIX
MONTHS
AGO.’

'SAY
YOU
HAVE
FAMILY
ISSUES.
TELL
THEM

I
AM
SICK.'
'MOM,
PLEASE.'

'LEAVE
YOUR
JOB
IF
YOU
HAVE
TO.
WE'LL
FIND
ANOTHER
ONE.

THERE
IS
A
CANARA
BANK
RIGHT
ACROSS
OUR
HOUSE.'

'MOM,
I'M
IN
CITIBANK.
IT
IS
AN
MNC.'

'FINE,
WE
WILL
LOOK

FOR
A
MULTINATIONAL.
SWEAR
ON
ME
YOU
WILL
ASK
FOR
A
TRANSFER.
DON'T
BE
TRAPPED
IN
THE
CITY
WITH
HORRIBLE
BLACK
PEOPLE.'
'MOM,
THEY
ARE
NOT
ALL
BAD.'
'I
DON'T
CARE.
APPLY
FOR
A
TRANSFER
OR
I
WILL
SEND
A
LETTER
TO
YOUR
BOSS.

I
WILL
SAY
I
AM
AN
OLD
WOMAN
AND
YOU
HAVE
TO
CONSIDER
MY
PLEA
ON
HUMANITARIAN
GROUNDS.'
'MOM,
SWEAR
ON
ME
YOU
WILL
NEVER
DO
ANYTHING
LIKE
THAT,'
I
SAID
AND
SMILED
AT
HER
CHOICE
OF
WORDS
INSPIRED
BY
INDIAN
GOVERNMENT
OFFICES.
'THEN

YOU
DO
IT.'
'I
WILL,
MOM.
I
HAVE
TO
FINISH
A
FEW
THINGS
FIRST.
I
AM
ALMOST
THERE,'
I
SAID
AND
REGAINED
MY
COMPOSURE.
'OK,
YOU
FINE
NOW?'
SHE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,
I
AM
GOOD.'
'GOOD.
AND
DON'T
TAKE
ANY
NONSENSE
FROM
THESE
MADRASIS,
GIVE
IT
BACK
TO
THEM.
THEY
GET
SCARED
FAST.'
'OK,
MOM.'
'AND
DON'T
GET
SERIOUS
ABOUT
THAT
GIRL.'
ALREADY
TOO
LATE
FOR
THAT,
MOM,
I
THOUGHT.
'GOOD
NIGHT,

MOM,'
I
SAID.
'I
LOVE
YOU.
GOOD
NIGHT,'
SHE
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP.
I
CAME
BACK
TO
MY
BED
AND
TOSSED
THE
LETTER
IN
THE
BIN.
I
FELT
LIGHT
AFTER
SPEAKING
TO
MY
MOTHER
AND
DRIFTED
OFF
TO
SLEEP
IN
FIVE
MINUTES.
WHAT
WOULD

THE
WORLD
BE
WITHOUT
MOTHERS?

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
33
'BIKE?'
ANANYA
BEAMED
WHEN
I
WENT
TO
PICK
HER
UP
ON
A
BLACK
YAMAHA
RX
100.
'BALA'S,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA
SAT
PILLION
IN
A
MAROON
SALWAR
KAMEEZ,
USING
HER
WHITE
DUPATTA
TO
COVER
HER
HEAD
AND
FACE.
SHE
LOOKED
LIKE

A
MEMBER
OF
VEERAPPAN'S
GANG.
PONDICHERRY
IS
A
HUNDRED
AND
FORTY
KILOMETRES
AWAY
FROM
CHENNAI,
DOWN
THE
EAST
COAST
ROAD,
OR
ECR,
RUNNING
ALONG
THE
BAY
OF
BENGAL.
FISHERMAN'S
COVE
FALLS
ON
THE
WAY,
TWENTY
KILOMETRES
OUTSIDE
CHENNAI
CITY.
WE
LEFT
ANANYA'S
OFFICE
AT

ANNA
SALAI.
SHE
SAT
BEHIND
ME
AND
HELD
THE
SIDEBARS
TIGHT.
BY
THE
TIME
WE
LEFT
THE
CITY
AT
LATTICE
BRIDGE
ROAD,
SHE
SWITCHED
FROM
GRIPPING
THE
SIDEBARS
TO
MY
SHOULDERS.
WE
TOOK
THE
OLD
MAHABALIPURAM
ROAD,
WHICH
LED
US
TO
ECR.
'THIS
IS

BEAUTIFUL,'
I
SAID
AS
THE
SEA
BECAME
VISIBLE.
'I
TOLD
YOU.'
ANANYA
PLANTED
A
KISS
ON
THE
BACK
OF
MY
NECK.
WE
HALTED
AT
FISHERMAN'S
COVE
WHERE
I
MET
THE
CATERING
MANAGER
BRIEFLY.
EVERYTHING
SEEMED
UNDER
CONTROL
FOR
THE
CITIBANK
EVENT.
WE
LEFT
THE

RESORT
AND
CAME
ON
THE
ECR
AGAIN.
AN
HOUR
OF
DRIVING
LATER,
WE
PASSED
MAHABALIPURAM.
IT
HAD
STUNNING
ROCK-CUT
TEMPLES
NEXT
TO
THE
SEA.
'WOW,
THESE
ARE
AMAZING
TEMPLES,'
I
SAID
AS
THE
WIND
SWEPT
BACK
MY
HAIR.
THE
ECR
ENDED
AN
HOUR
AFTER

MAHABALIPURAM.

THE
ROADS
BECAME
NARROWER.

WE
PASSED
SEVERAL
LITTLE
TOWNS
WITH
LONG
NAMES
AND
SPRAWLING
PADDY
FIELDS.

AT
A
FEW
PLACES,
I
HAD
TO
STOP
TO
MAKE
WAY
FOR
BULLOCK
CARTS,
VILLAGE
SCHOOL
KIDS
AND
GOATHERDS.

WE
REACHED
PONDICHERRY
AROUND
NOON,
AND
MY
FIRST

REACTION
WAS
DISAPPOINTMENT.
'THIS
IS
IT?'
I
ASKED
AS
I
REACHED
THE
MAIN
CHOWK
IN
THE
TOWN.
IT
WAS
LIKE
ANY
OTHER
SMALL
TOWN
IN
INDIA,
DUSTY
AND
NOISY
WITH
COLA
AD
SIGNS
PAINTED
ON
UNEVEN
WALLS.
'THE
NICE
PART
IS
INSIDE,
THE
FRENCH

QUARTER
AND
THE
AUROBINDO
ASHRAM,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
I
NEGOTIATED
A
SHARP
BEND
IN
THE
ROAD
ALONG
WITH
FIFTY
OTHER
TWO-
WHEELERS
AND
FOUR
TRUCKS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
ONLY
FRENCH
I
SAW
WAS
AN
UNDERWEAR
BILLBOARD
WITH
THE
BRAND
FRENCHIE.
'DROP
ME
HERE,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
WE
PASSED
CUDDALORE
ROAD,
WHERE
HLL
HAS
ONE
OF
ITS
FACTORIES.
I
HAD
THREE
HOURS
TO
KILL
IN
THIS
MALGUDI
TOWN
AS

ANANYA
HAD
AN
EXTENDED
LUNCH
MEETING.

WE
HAD
AGREED
TO
MEET
AT
THE
L'ORIENT
HOTEL
AT
FOUR
FOR
COFFEE.

I
DROVE
OUT
OF
THE
FACTORY
COMPOUND
AND
FOLLOWED
THE
SIGNS
TO
THE
AUROBINDO
ASHRAM
ON
RUE
DE
LA
MARINE.
THE
ASHRAM
BUILDING
RESEMBLED
A

QUIET
HOSTEL
BY
THE
SEA.
I
CAME
TO
THE
RECEPTION.
MORE
FOREIGNERS
THAN
INDIAN
THRONGED
THE
ASHRAM
LOBBY.
A
FORTY-YEAR
OLD
WESTERN
WOMAN
IN
A
SARI
AND
BEADED
NECKLACE
SAT
AT
THE
COUNTER.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
LOOKING
FOR?'
SHE
ASKED
ME.
MAYBE,
BECAUSE
I

WAS
IN
AN
ASHRAM,
OR
BECAUSE
THE
WAY
SHE
SAID
IT,
I
SUSPECTED
DEEPER
MEANING
IN
HER
QUESTION.
I
LOOKED
AT
HER.
SHE
HAD
BLUE
EYES
WITH
WRINKLES
AROUND
THEM.
'I'VE
COME
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME,'
I
CONFESSED.
SHE
GAVE
ME
ASHRAM
BROCHURE.
ANOTHER

PERSON
CAME
AND
BOUGHT
MEAL
TICKETS.
'CAN
I
GET
LUNCH
HERE?'
I
ASKED.
'YES,
AT
THE
ASHRAM
DINING
HALL,'
SHE
SAID
AND
SHOWED
ME
THE
COUPON
BOOKLET.
I
BOUGHT
ONE
FOR
MYSELF.
'COME,
I'M
GOING
THERE,'
SHE
SAID,
WALKING
OUT
WITH
ME
FROM
THE

RECEPTION.

WE

WALKED

ALONG

A

LANE

ADJACENT

TO

THE

ASHRAM.

THE

DINING

HALL

WAS

HALF

A

KILOMETRE

AWAY.

SHE

TOLD

ME

HER

NAME

WAS

DIANA

AND

THAT

SHE

CAME

FROM

FINLAND.

A

FORMER

LAWYER,

SHE

NOW

FOUND

MORE

SATISFACTION

AS

A

VOLUNTEER

AT

THE

ASHRAM
THAN
HELPING
NOKIA
SECURE
PATENTS.
'ARE
YOU
A
SEEKER
OR
HERE
AS
A
TOURIST?'
SHE
HANDED
ME
MY
COUPON.
'SEEKER?'
'YES,
IF
YOU
WISH
TO
SEEK
YOUR
PATH.
OR
IF
YOU
SEEK
ANSWERS
TO
A
SPECIFIC
PROBLEM.'
'FRANKLY,
I
CAME
WITH
A
FRIEND

WHO
HAD
SOME
WORK
HERE.
I
WANTED
A
DAY
AWAY
FROM
OFFICE.'
DIANA
LAUGHED.
WE
REACHED
THE
DINING
HALL
AND
PICKED
OUR
STAINLESS
STEEL
PLATES.
WE
ENTERED
THE
EATING
AREA
WHERE
EVERYONE
SAT
ON
THE
FLOOR.
LUNCH
WAS
SIMPLE
—
ORGANIC
BROWN
RICE,
YELLOW

DAAL
AND
A
CARROT
AND
PEAS
SUBZI.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'OK,
SO
I
SEEK
AN
ANSWER.
HOW
DO
I
GET
IT?'
'WELL
THE
ANSWERS
ARE
WITHIN
US.
PEOPLE
STAY
IN
THE
ASHRAM
FOR
A
FEW
WEEKS
TO
INTROSPECT,
THEY
ATTEND
SATSANG
AND
ASK
QUESTIONS
OF
ONE
OF
THE
GURUS.
HOW
MUCH

TIME
DO
YOU
HAVE?’
‘I
NEED
TO
MEET
MY
GIRLFRIEND
FOR
COFFEE
IN
TWO
HOURS.
THEN
HEAD
BACK
TO
CHENNAI.’
DIANA
SMILED
AND
SHOOK
HER
HEAD.
‘THAT’S
A
PRETTY
STIFF
DEADLINE
TO
SORT
OUT
LIFE’S
UNRESOLVED
ANSWERS.’
‘MAYBE
I
SHOULDN’T
EVEN
TRY
THEN,’
I

SAID.
'WAIT,
SEE
THE
GENTLEMAN
THERE,'
SHE
SAID
AND
POINTED
TO
A
SEVENTY-YEAR-OLD
MAN
IN
WHITE
ROBES
WHO
SAT
TWO
ROWS
AHEAD
OF
US.
'HE
IS
A
GURU.
MAYBE
I
CAN
INTRODUCE
TO
HIM.'
'NO,
NO,
PLEASE
DON'T,'
I
SAID.
'WHY
NOT?
IF
HE

IS
BUSY,
HE
WILL
SAY
NO.'
'PRANAM
GURUJI,'
DIANA
SAID
AND
TOUCHED
HIS
FEET.
I
FOLLOWED
SUIT
AND
HE
BLESSED
US.
'GURUJI,
THIS
IS
MY
FRIEND.
HIS
NAME
IS,'
DIANA
SAID
AND
PAUSED.
'KRISH.'
'YES,
HE
HAS
ONLY
TWO
HOURS.
BUT
HE
WANTED
TO

SEEK
ANSWERS
TO
SOME
PROBLEMS,'
DIANA
SAID.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
HAVE
TO
DO
IN
TWO
HOURS?'
GURUJI
ASKED,
HIS
VOICE
CALM.
'HE
HAS
TO
MEET
HIS
GIRLFRIEND,'
DIANA
SAID,
EXCITEDLY
STRESSING
ON
THE
LAST
WORD.
'AND
SURELY,
THE
GIRLFRIEND
IS
MORE
IMPORTANT
THAN
THE

PROBLEM,'
GURUJI
SMILED.
'ACTUALLY,
SHE
IS
THE
PROBLEM,'
I
SAID.
DIANA
THREW
ME
A
PUZZLED
LOOK.
'NOT
HER.
BUT
HER
FAMILY,'
I
SAID.
'IT'S
OK.
I
KNOW
IT
IS
VERY
LITTLE
TIME.'
'SEND
HIM
TO
MY
HOUSE
IN
FIFTEEN
MINUTES,'
GURUJI
SAID
AND
LEFT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

34

I
HOVERED
AT
THE
OPEN
DOOR
OF
GURUJI'S
HOUSE
BEFORE
WALKING
IN.

'COME
IN,
KRISH,'
GURUJI
SAID.

HE
SAT
ON
A
DAY-BED
IN
HIS
LIVING
ROOM.

I
HAD
THOUGHT
I'D
BE
ROAMING
AROUND
FRENCH
CAFES
IN
PONDICHERRY.

I
HAD
NO

IDEA
I'D
END
UP
IN
A
GURU'S
HOUSE.
THE
TINY
HOUSE
HAD
SPARSE
WOODEN
FURNITURE.
'YOU
MAY
FIND
IT
STRANGE
TO
BE
HERE.
BUT
I'D
LIKE
TO
THINK
WE
WERE
DESTINED
TO
MEET,'
GURUJI
SAID.
'DO
YOU
READ
MINDS?'
I
WANTED
TO
KNOW.
'I

READ
PEOPLE.
YOUR
NERVOUSNESS
IS
OBVIOUS.
SIT,'
HE
SAID
AND
STROKED
HIS
WHITE
BEARD.
I
SAT
CROSS-LEGGED
ON
THE
FLOOR,
FACING
HIM.
'WHAT
IS
BOTHERING
YOU?'
'MY
GIRLFRIEND
IS
TAMILIAN,
I
AM
PUNJABI.
OUR
FAMILIES
ARE
AGAINST
OUR
MARRIAGE.
I
AM
DOING
WHATEVER
I

CAN,
BUT
IT
IS
STRESSFUL.'
'HMMM,'
GURUJI
SAID.
'CLOSE
YOUR
EYES
AND
SPEAK
WHATEVER
COMES
TO
MIND.'
'I
LOVE
HER,'
I
SAID,
'AND
WE
MAKE
EACH
OTHER
HAPPY.
BUT
IF
OUR
HAPPINESS
MAKES
SO
MANY
PEOPLE
UNHAPPY,
IS
IT
THE
RIGHT
THING
TO
DO?'

I
RAMBLED
FOR
SOME
MORE
TIME;
GURUJI
DIDN'T
MAKE
ANY
SOUND.
SINCE
MY
EYES
WERE
CLOSED,
I
HAD
NO
IDEA
IF
HE
WAS
EVEN
AROUND
ANYMORE.
'SHE
IS
MY
FUTURE,'
I
CONCLUDED.
'IS
THAT
ALL?'
'YOU
ARE
THERE?'
I
COUNTERED.
'ARE
YOU
SURE
THIS

IS
THE
ONLY
PROBLEM
THAT
IS
BOTHERING
YOU?’
‘WHAT
DO
YOU
MEAN?’
‘THERE
IS
A
LOT
OF
...
PAIN
IN
YOU,
UNRESOLVED
ISSUES.
BEFORE
YOU
BUILD
A
FUTURE,
YOU
MUST
FIX
THE
PAST.’
‘WHAT
ARE
YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?’
I
OPENED
MY
EYES.
GURUJI’S
EYES

WERE
SHUT.

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'CLOSE

YOUR

EYES,'

GURUJI

SAID.

'I

HAVE,'

I

SAID

AND

SHUT

THEM

AGAIN.

'WHAT

KEEPS

YOU

AWAKE

AT

NIGHT?'

I

KEPT

QUIET.

'DO

YOU

TAKE

A

LONG

TIME

TO

GO

TO

SLEEP?'

HE

PROBED.

'YES,'

I

SAID.

"WHAT

KEPT

YOU

AWAKE

LATELY?’
‘VARIOUS
THINGS.
THERE
IS
WORK,
WHICH
I
AM
NOT
EXACTLY
EXITED
ABOUT.
THERE’S
UNCERTAINTY
ABOUT
ANANYA.
THERE’S
MY
FATHER.’
‘WHAT
ABOUT
YOUR
FATHER?’
‘IT’S
COMPLICATED,’
I
SAID.
‘AND
A
HEAVY
LOAD,
ISN’T
IT?’
I
SIGHED
DEEPLY.
‘LET
IT
GO,’
GURUJI
SAID.
‘I
CAN’T.

I
DON'T
WANT
TO.

I
HAVEN'T
EVEN
TALKED
ABOUT
IT.'

'I'M
LISTENING,'
GURUJI
SAID.

HE
BENT
FORWARD
AND
PLACED
HIS
PALM
ON
MY
HEAD.

I
FELT
A
NEW
LIGHTNESS.

I
FELT
TRANSPORTED
TO
ANOTHER
WORLD.

IT
WAS
AS
IF
MY
SOUL
HAD
DISOWNED
MY

BODY.
'GURUJI,
DON'T
MAKE
ME
DO
IT,'
I
BEGGED,
NOT
WISHING
TO
REVISIT
THE
PAIN
THAT
AWAITED
ME.
'GO
ON,
I'M
LISTENING.'
GURUJI
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

35
THREE
YEARS
AGO
MY
FATHER
CAME
HOME
AT
MIDNIGHT.

I
HAD
WAITED
FOR
HOURS.

I
DIDN'T
HAVE
TIME,
I
HAD
TO
TALK
TO
HIM
TONIGHT.

HE
REFUSED
DINNER
WITH
A
WAVE
OF
HIS
HAND
AND
SAT
ON
THE
LIVING
ROOM

SOFA
TO
TAKE
OFF
HIS
SHOES.
'DAD?'
I
SAID,
MY
VOICE
LOW,
I
WORE
SHORTS
AND
A
WHITE
T-SHIRT.
THE
T-SHIRT
HAD
A
TINY
HOLE
AT
THE
SHOULDER.
'WHAT?'
HE
TURNED
TO
ME.
'IS
THIS
WHAT
YOU
WEAR
AT
HOME?'
'THESE
ARE
MY
NIGHTCLOTHES,'

I
SAID.
'YOU
DON'T
HAVE
PROPER
NIGHTCLOTHES?'

I
CHANGED
THE
TOPIC.

'DAD,
I
WANT
TO
TALK
ABOUT
SOMETHING.'
'WHAT?'

'I
LIKE
A
GIRL.'
'OBVIOUSLY,
YOU
HAVE
TIME
TO
WASTE,'

HE
SAID.
'IT'S
NOT
LIKE
THAT.
SHE
IS
A
NICE
GIRL.
AN
IIT
PROFESSOR'S
DAUGHTER.'

'OH,
SO
NOW
WE
KNOW
WHAT
YOU
DID
AT
IIT.'
'I'VE
GRADUATED.
I
HAVE
A
JOB.
I'M
PREPARING
FOR
MBA.
WHAT'S
THE
PROBLEM?'
'I
DON'T
HAVE
A
PROBLEM.
YOU
WANTED
TO
TALK,'
HE
SAID,
NOT
LOOKING
AT
ME.
'THE
GIRL'S
FATHER
IS
TAKING
HER

ABROAD.
THEY'LL
GET
HER
ENGAGED
TO
SOMEONE
ELSE.'
'OH,
SO
HER
FATHER
DOESN'T
APPROVE
OF
IT.'
'NO.'
'WHY?'
I
LOOKED
AT
THE
FLOOR.
'WE
HAD
SOME
ISSUES
WITH
HIM,
ME
AND
MY
FRIENDS.'
'WHAT
ISSUES?
DISCIPLINARY
ISSUES?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,'
I
SAID.
'SHOCKING.
THE
SON
OF
AN
ARMY
OFFICER
HAS
DISCIPLINARY
ISSUES.
ALL
THE
REPUTATION
I
HAVE
BUILT,
YOU'LL
DESTROY
IT.'
'THOSE
ISSUES
ARE
HISTORY
NOW.'
'THEN
WHY
DOES
HE
HAVE
A
PROBLEM?
DOES
YOUR
MOTHER
KNOW
ABOUT
THIS?'
'YES,'

I
SAID.
'WHY
HASN'T
SHE
TOLD
ME?
KAVITA!'
MY
FATHER
SCREAMED.
MY
MOTHER
CAME
TO
THE
ROOM,
WOKEN
FROM
A
DEEP
SLEEP.
'WHAT
HAPPENED?'
'WHY
WAS
I
NOT
INFORMED
ABOUT
THIS
GIRL
EARLIER?'
MY
FATHER
SCREAMED.
'HE
TOLD
ME
ONLY
A
FEW
WEEKS
AGO,'

MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'AND
YOU
HID
IT
FROM
ME,
BITCH,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'DON'T
TALK
TO
MOM
LIKE
THAT,'
I
SAID
IN
REFLEX.
I
WOULD
HAVE
SAID
MORE,
BUT
I
NEED
HIM
TODAY.
MY
MOTHER
BROKE
INTO
TEARS.
THIS
WASN'T
GOING
WELL
AT
ALL.

'DAD,
PLEASE.
I
WANT
YOUR
COOPERATION.
IF
YOU
MEET
HER
FATHER,
HE
MAY
RECONSIDER.'
'WHY
SHOULD
I
MEET
ANYONE?'
HE
SAID.
'BECAUSE
I
LOVE
HER.
AND
I
DON'T
WANT
HER
TO
GO
AWAY.'
'YOU
ARE
DISTRACTED,
NOT
IN
LOVE.'
'LEAVE
IT,
KRISH,
HE
WON'T

LISTEN.
SEE
HOW
HE
TALKS
TO
ME.
YOU
DON'T
KNOW
HOW
I
LIVED
WHEN
YOU
WERE
IN
HOSTEL.'
MY
FATHER
LUNGED
MENACINGLY
TOWARDS
MY
MOTHER.
HE
RAISED
A
HAND
TO
HIT
HER.
I
PULLED
MY
MOTHER
BEHIND
ME.
'DON'T,'
I
SAID.
'WHO
DO
YOU

THINK
YOU
ARE?’
HE
SLAPPED
ME
HARD
ON
MY
RIGHT
CHEEK.

I
SAT
DOWN
ON
THE
DINING
ROOM
CHAIR.

‘LEAVE
US
AND
GO.
WHY
DO
YOU
EVEN
COME
BACK?’

MY
MOTHER
FOLDED
HER
HANDS
AT
HIM.

‘DON’T
BEG,
MOM,’

I
SAID,
FIGHTING
A
LUMP

IN
MY
THROAT.
MY
FATHER
HAD
MADE
FUN
OF
ME
EARLIER
FOR
CRYING.
TO
HIM,
ONLY
WEAK
MEN
CRIED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
“LOOK
AT
HIS
VOICE,
LIKE
A
GIRL’S,’
MY
FATHER
MOCKED.
HE
GAVE
ME
A
DISGUSTED
GLANCE
AND
WENT
TO
THE
BATHROOM
TO
CHANGE.
‘GO
TO
SLEEP,
SON,’
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
‘HE
IS
SENDING
HER
AWAY
NEXT
WEEK,’
I
SAID.
‘WHAT
GIRL

HAVE
YOU
INVOLVED
YOURSELF
WITH?
YOU
ARE
SO
YOUNG,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'I
AM
NOT
MARRYING
HER
TOMORROW.'
'IS
SHE
PUNJABI?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
'NO,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT?'
SHE
SAID,
SHOCKED
AS
IF
I'D
SUGGESTED
SHE
WASN'T
HUMAN.
'WILL
YOU
MEET
HER
FATHER,
ONCE?'

MY
FATHER
CAME
OUT
OF
THE
BATHROOM.
HE
HAD
HEARD
MY
LAST
SENTENCE,
'DON'T
YOU
DARE
GO
ANYWHERE,
KAVITA,'
MY
FATHER
SAID,
HIS
EYES
WILD.
I
STARED
BACK
AT
HIM.
'GO
TO
YOUR
ROOM,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
I
CAME
BACK
TO
MY
BED.
I

HEARD
NOISES
IN
MY
PARENT'S
ROOM.
I
COULDN'T
SLEEP.
I
WOKE
UP
AND
CAME
TOWARDS
THEIR
ROOM.
I'D
HEARD
ENOUGH
ARGUMENTS
OF
MY
PARENTS
THROUGHOUT
MY
LIFE
TO
CARE,
BUT
I
PLACED
MY
EAR
AT
THE
DOOR,
ANYWAY.
"HE
IS
GROWING
UP,'
MY
MOTHER

SAID.
'WITH
ALL
THE
WRONG
VALUES.
WHAT
DOES
HE
KNOW
ABOUT
THIS
GIRL?
HE
IS
MY
SON,
HE
IS
FROM
IIT,
SEE
WHAT
DEAL
I
GET
FOR
HIM
AT
THE
RIGHT
TIME.'
THERE
IT
WAS,
FOR
ALL
MY
FATHER'S
PRINCIPLES,
I
WAS
HIS
TROPHY

TO
BE
SOLD
IN
THE
MARKET
TO
THE
HIGHEST
BIDDER.
'YOU
ARE
RESPONSIBLE
FOR
BRINGING
HIM
UP
LIKE
THIS,'
MY
FATHER
SCREAMED
AT
MY
MOTHER.
I
HEARD
THE
SOUND
OF
A
GLASS
BEING
SMASHED
AGAINST
THE
WALL.
'WHAT
HAVE
I
DONE?
I
DIDN'T
EVEN

KNOW
ABOUT
THIS
GIRL.....'
SLAP

...
SLAP

...
MY
FATHER
INTERRUPTED
MY
MOTHER.

I
BANGED
THE
DOOR
OPEN
AS

I
HEARD
A
FEW
MORE
SLAPS.

I
SAW
MY
MOTHER'S
HAND
COVERING
HER
FACE.

A
PIECE
OF
GLASS
HAD
CUT
HER
FOREARM.
MY
FATHER
TURNED

TO
ME.
“DON’T
YOU
HAVE
ANY
MANNERS?
CAN’T
YOU
KNOCK?’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
DON'T
TEACH
ME
MANNERS,'
I
SAID.
'GO
AWAY,'
HE
SAID.
I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.
I
SAW
THE
TEARS
ON
MY
MOTHER'S
FACE.
MY
FACE
BURNED
WITH
RAGE.
SHE
HAD
LIVED
WITH
THIS
FOR
TWENTY-FIVE
YEARS.
I
DID
KNOW
WHY

—

TO
BRING
ME
UP;
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
HOW
SHE
DID
IT.
MY
FATHER
LIFTED
HIS
HAND
TO
HIT
ME.
AUTOMATICALLY,
I
GRABBED
HIS
WRIST
TIGHT.
'OH,
NOW
YOU
ARE
GOING
TO
RAISE
YOUR
HAND
AGAINST
YOUR
OWN
FATHER,'
HE
SAID.
I
TWISTED
HIS
ARM.

'LEAVE
HIM,
HE
WON'T
CHANGE,'
MY
MOTHER
PANTED.
I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD
AT
HER,
MY
EYES
STARING
RIGHT
INTO
HIS.
I
SLAPPED
HIS
FACE
ONCE,
TWICE,
THEN
I
ROLLED
MY
HAND
INTO
A
FIST
AND
PUNCHED
HIS
FACE.
MY
FATHER
WENT
INTO
A
STATE

OF
SHOCK,
HE
COULDN'T
FIGHT
BACK.
HE
DIDN'T
EXPECT
THIS;
ALL
MY
CHILDHOOD
I'D
MERELY
SUFFERED
HIS
DOMINANCE.
TODAY,
IT
WASN'T
JUST
ABOUT
THE
BROKEN
GLASS.
IT
WASN'T
ONLY
THAT
THE
GIRL
I
LOVED
WOULD
BE
GONE.
IT
WAS
A
REACTION
TO
TWO
DECADES

OF
ABUSE.
OR
THAT'S
HOW
I
DEFENDED
IT
TO
MYSELF.
FOR
HOW
ELSE
DO
YOU
JUSTIFY
HITTING
YOUR
OWN
FATHER?
AT
THAT
MOMENT
I
COULDN'T
STOP.
I
PUNCHED
HIS
HEAD
UNTIL
HE
COLLAPSED
ON
THE
FLOOR.
I
COULDN'T
REMEMBER
THE
LAST
TIME
I
REVELED

IN
VIOLENCE
LIKE
THIS.

I
WAS
A
STUDIOUS
CHILD
WHO
STAYED
WITH
HIS
BOOKS
ALL
HIS
LIFE.

TODAY,

I
WAS
LUCKY
THERE
WASN'T

A
GUN
AT
HOME.

THIS
INSANITY
PASSED
AFTER
FIVE
MINUTES.

MY
FATHER
DIDN'T
MAKE
EYE
CONTACT
WITH
ME.

HE
SAT
ON

THE
FLOOR,
AND
MASSAGED
THE
ARM
I
HAD
TWISTED.
HE
STARED
AT
MY
MOTHER,
WITH
A
'SEE,
I
TOLD
YOU'
EXPRESSION.
MY
MOTHER
SAT
ON
THE
BED,
FIGHTING
BACK
HER
EMOTIONS.
WE
LOOKED
AT
EACH
OTHER.
WE
WERE
A
FAMILY,
BUT
PRETTY
SCREWED
UP

AS
THEY
COME.
I
TOOK
A
BROOM
AND
SWEPT
THE
BROKEN
GLASS
INTO
A
NEWSPAPER
SHEET.
I
LOOKED
AT
MY
FATHER
AND
VOWED
NEVER
TO
SPEAK
TO
HIM
AGAIN.
I
PICKED
UP
THE
NEWSPAPER
WITH
THE
GLASS
PIECES
AND
LEFT
THE
ROOM.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
36
'THAT'S
IT,
GURUJI,'
I
SAID,
TEARS
NOW
DRY
ON
MY
FACE.
'I'VE
NEVER
SHARED
SO
MUCH
WITH
ANYONE.'
THE
SOUND
OF
THE
SEA
COULD
BE
HEARD,
THE
WAVES
ASYMMETRICAL
TO
MY
TUMULTUOUS
THOUGHTS.
'OPEN
YOUR
EYES,'
GURUJI
SAID.
I
LIFTED

MY
EYELIDS
SLOWLY.
'COME,
WE
WILL
GO
TO
THE
BALCONY
BEHIND,'
GURUJI
SAID.
I
FOLLOWED
HIM
TO
A
TERRACE
IN
THE
REAR
OF
THE
HOUSE.
THE
SEA
BREEZE
FELT
COOL
EVEN
IN
THE
HOT
SUN.
I
SAT
ON
ONE
OF
THE
TWO
STOOLS
KEPT

OUTSIDE.
HE
WENT
INSIDE
AND
CAME
BACK
WITH
TWO
GLASSES
AND
A
BOOK.
'IT'S
COCONUT
WATER.
AND
THIS
IS
THE
GITA.
YOU'VE
HEARD
ABOUT
THE
GITA?'
'YES,'
I
SAID,
'SORT
OF.'
I
TOOK
A
SIP
OF
THE
COCONUT
WATER.
'WHAT
HAVE
YOU
HEARD?'
'LIKE

IT
IS
THE
ULTIMATE
BOOK.
IT
HAS
ALL
OF
LIFE'S
WISDOM.
YOU
HAVE
TO
WORK
AND
NOT
WORRY
ABOUT
THE
REWARD.
RIGHT?'
'HAVE
YOU
READ
IT?'
'PARTS
OF
IT.
IT'S
NICE,
BUT
A
LITTLE....'
'BORING?'
'ACTUALLY,
NO,
NOT
BORING.
HARD
TO
FOLLOW
AND
APPLY

EVERYTHING.'

'I'LL
GIVE
YOU
JUST
ONE
WORD
TO
APPLY
IN
YOUR
LIFE.'

'WHAT?'

'FORGIVENESS.'

'MEANING?

YOU
WANT
ME
TO
FORGIVE
MY
FATHER?

I
CAN'T.'

'WHY
NOT?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'BECAUSE
WHAT
HE
DID
WAS
SO
WRONG.
HE
HAS
RUINED
MY
MOTHER'S
LIFE.
HE
HAS
NEVER
LOVED
ME.'
'I
AM
NOT
SAYING
HE
DID
THE
RIGHT
THING.
I
AM
ASKING
YOU
TO
FORGIVE
HIM.'
'WHY?'
'FOR
YOU.
FORGIVING
DOESN'T
MAKE
THE

PERSON
WHO
HURT
YOU
FEEL
BETTER,
IT
MAKES
YOU
FEEL
BETTER.’
I
PONDERED
OVER
HIS
WORDS.
‘CLOSE
YOUR
EYES
AGAIN,’
GURUJI
SAID.
‘IMAGINE
YOU
HAVE
BAGS
ON
YOUR
HEAD.
THEY
ARE
BAGS
OF
ANGER,
PAIN
AND
LOSS.
HOW
DO
THEY
FEEL?’
‘HEAVY,’
I
SIGHED.

'REMOVE
THEM
FROM
YOUR
HEAD
ONE
BY
ONE,'
GURUJI
SAID.
'IMAGINE
YOU
ARE
WEARING
A
THICK
CLOAK
THAT
IS
WEARING
YOU
DOWN.
PARDON
THE
HURT
OTHERS
HAVE
CAUSED
YOU.
WHAT
THEY
DID
IS
PAST.
WHAT
IS
BOTHERING
YOU
TODAY
ARE
YOUR
CURRENT
FEELINGS
THAT

COME
FROM
THIS
LOAD.
LET
IT
GO.'
STRANGE
AS
GURUJI'S
METAPHORS
WERE,
I
FELT
COMPELLED
TO
OBEY
THE
IMAGERY
IN
MY
MIND.
MY
HEAD
FELT
LIGHTER.
'AND
SURRENDER
TO
GOD,'
HE
WENT
ON.
'YOU
DON'T
CONTROL
ANYTHING
OR
ANYONE.'
'I
DON'T
UNDERSTAND,'
I
SAID.

'DO
YOU
CONTROL
YOUR
LIFE?
YOUR
LIFE
DEPENDS
ON
SO
MANY
INTERNAL
ORGANS
FUNCTIONING
RIGHT.
YOU
HAVE
NO
CONTROL
ON
THEM.
IF
YOUR
LUNGS
DON'T
COOPERATE,
IF
YOUR
KIDNEYS
FAIL,
IF
YOUR
HEART
STOPS,
IT
IS
ALL
OVER.
YOU'LL
DROP
DEAD
NOW.
GOD
HAS

CHOSEN
TO
GIVE
YOU
THE
GIFT
OF
LIFE,
SURRENDER
TO
HIM.'
HE
KEPT
ME
IN
MEDITATION
FOR
THE
NEXT
FEW
MINUTES.
'AND
NOW,
YOU
ARE
FREE
TO
GO,'
GURUJI
SMILED.
I
OPENED
MY
EYES.
THE
SHARP
AFTERNOON
SUN
SHONE
ON
GURUJI'S
FACE.
HE
WENT

INSIDE
AND
BROUGHT
A
SMALL
CUP
WITH
GREY
ASK.
HE
DIPPED
HIS
INDEX
FINGER
IN
THE
ASH
AND
MARKED
MY
FOREHEAD.
'THANK
YOU'
I
SAID
AS
HE
BLESSED
ME
WITH
HIS
HAND
ON
MY
HEAD.
'YOU
ARE
WELCOME,'
HE
SAID.
'ANYTHING
ELSE
I
CAN

HELP
YOU
WITH?'
'YES,
WHICH
WAY
IS
HOTEL
L'ORIENT?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'OH
THAT,'
GURUJI
LAUGHED,
'IT
IS
ON
RUE
ROMAIN
ROLLAND.
ONE
KILOMETRE
FROM
HERE.'
I
REACHED
L'ORIENT
AT
FOUR.
ANANYA
WAS
WAITING
AT
THE
ENTRANCE.
THE
HOTEL
IS
A
RENOVATED
HERITAGE
BUILDING
AND
WAS
ORIGINALLY
THE
EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT
OFFICE
WHEN
THE

FRENCH
HAD
COLONISED
PONDICHERRY.
NOW
A
TEN-ROOM
BOUTIQUE
PROPERTY,
IT
HAD
A
SMALL
RESTAURANT
IN
THE
INDOOR
OPEN
PATIO.
WE
ORDERED
COFFEE
AND
A
SLICE
OF
GINGER
CAKE
WITH
CUSTARD
SAUCE.
'ISN'T
THIS
PLACE
LOVELY?'
ANANYA
BREATHED
IN
DEEPLY.
I
NODDED,
STILL
DEEP
IN

THOUGH.
'SO,
TELL
ME,
WHAT
DID
YOU
DO?
AND
WHAT'S
WITH
THE
TILAK
ON
YOUR
FOREHEAD?'
'I
HIT
MY
FATHER.'
'WHAT?'
'A
LONG
TIME
AGO.
REMEMBER,
HOW
I
WOULD
ALWAYS
AVOID
TALKING
ABOUT
MY
FATHER
IN
CAMPUS?'
'YES,
AND
I
NEVER
PUSHED
AFTER
THAT,'

SHE
SAID.
'BUT
WHAT
ARE
YOU
SAYING?'
I
REPEATED
THE
STORY
OF
THAT
NIGHT.
SHE
LOOKED
AT
ME,
AWESTRUCK
'OH
DEAR,
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
YOUR
PARENTS
WERE
LIKE
THIS.'
'I
NVEVER
TOLD
YOU.
IT'S
FINE.'
'ARE
YOU
OK?'
SHE
SAID
AND
MOVED
HER
HAND

FORWARD
TO
HOLD
ME.
'YES,
I
AM
FINE.
AND
I
MET
A
GURUJI,
WHO
GAVE
ME
GOOD
ADVICE.'
'WHAT?
WHO
GURUJI,
WHAT
ADVICE?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'I
DON'T
KNOW
THE
GURUJI.
IT
DOESN'T
MATTER.
SOMETIMES
IN
YOUR
LIFE
YOU
JUST
MEET
SOMEONE
OR
HEAR
SOMETHING

THAT
NUDGES
YOU
ON
THE
RIGHT
PATH.
AND
THAT
BECOMES
THE
BEST
ADVICE.
IT
COULD
JUST
BE
A
BIT
OF
COMMON
SENSE
SAID
IN
A
WAY
THAT
RESONATES
WITH
SOMETHING
IN
YOU.
IT'S
NOTHING
NEW,
BUT
BECAUSE
IT
CONNECTS
WITH
YOU
IT
HOLDS
MEANING

FOR
YOU.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

I
EXPLAINED
WITH
SUCH
INTENSITY,
ANANYA
BECAME
CONCERNED.

'ARE
YOU
OK,
BABY?

I
SHOULDN'T
HAVE
LEFT
YOU.'

'I'M
FINE.

I'M
GLAD

I
HAD
TIME.

I
FEEL
BETTER.'

'I
LOVE
YOU,'
SHE
SAID,
BRUSHING
FLOPPY
HAIR
OFF
MY
FACE.

'I
LOVE
YOU,

TOO,'
I
SAID
AND
CLASPED
HER
HAND
TIGHT.
OUR
ORDER
ARRIVED,
SHE
CUT
THE
CAKE
IN
TWO
PIECES
AND
PASSED
MY
HALF
TO
ME.
I
WANTED
TO
CHANGE
THE
TOPIC.
SHE
READ
MY
MIND.
'SO,
TELL
ME
ABOUT
THIS
CITIBANK
EVENT.
THERE
IS
A

CONCERT?’

‘YES,’

I

SAID,

‘ONLY

FOR

CLIENTS

THOUGH.’

‘DO

I

GET

TO

COME?’

‘OF

COURSE,

I’LL

GET

PASSES

FOR

YOUR

FAMILY.’

‘WHO

IS

PERFORMING?’

‘S.P.

BALASUBRAMANIAM,

HARIHARAN

AND....’

I

PAUSED.

‘WOW,

THOSE

ARE

BIG

NAMES.

WHO

ELSE?’

‘SOME

NEW

SINGER.’

‘COOL,

I’M

SURE

MOM

AND
DAD
WILL
LOVE
TO
COME.'

I
NODDED.

I
SPOKE
AFTER
A
FEW
MORE
SIPS
OF
COFFEE.

'I'VE
TRIED
ENOUGH,
ANANYA.

I
WANT
TO
GO
BACK.'

I
TOLD
HER
ABOUT
MY
CONVERSATION
WITH
MY
MOTHER
ABOUT
TRANSFERRING
BACK
TO
DELHI.

'WHAT
DO
YOU
MEAN?'

SHE
SAID,
WIPING
MY
MILK
MOUSTACHE.

'I
CAN'T
WORK
IN
CHENNAI
FOREVER.

I'LL
GIVE
IT
A
FEW
MORE
WEEKS,
AND
THEN
I'LL
TELL
YOUR
PARENTS
TO
TAKE
A
CALL
ON
ME.'

'WEEKS?
WHAT
IF
THEY
SAY
NO?'

'THEN
WE'LL
SEE.

I'VE
SURRENDERED
EVERYTHING
TO

GOD
ANYWAY.'

'WHAT?'

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'NOTHING,

LET'S

GO.

I

WANT

TO

HIT

THE

ROAD

WHILE

THERE'S

STILL

LIGHT.'

I

PICKED

UP

MY

HELMET.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

37
'AUNTY,
SORRY
TO
BOTHER
YOU,
BUT
THE
CONCERT
IS
NEXT
WEEK,'

I
SAID
OVER
THE
PHONE.
I
HAD
CALLED
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
FROM
MY
OFFICE
IN
THE
AFTERNOON.

I
HAD
THE
DESIGN
OF
THE
NEWSPAPER
AD
IN
MY
HAND.
CITIBANK
PRIORITY

BANKING
IS
PLEASED
TO
INVITE
ITS
CLIENTS
TO
AN
ENCHANTING
MUSICAL
EVENING
AT
FISHERMAN'S
COVE
FEATURING
MAESTROS:
S.P.
BALASUBRAMANIAM
HARIHARAN
AND
NEW
TALENT,
RADHA
THE
CONCERT
WILL
BE
FOLLOWED
BY
DINNER.
BY
INVITATION
ONLY.
(FOR
PASSES,
CONTACT
YOUR
CUSTOMER
REP
OR
ANY
OF
THE

BRANCHES.)

NOTE:

NEW

ACCOUNT

HOLDERS

WHO

OPEN

AN

ACCOUNT

BEFORE

THE

CONCERT

WILL

ALSO

GET

INVITES.

I

HATED

THE

LAST

LINE

AS

IT

WAS

TOO

BLATANT.

HOWEVER,

BALA

INSISTED

ON

IT.

'HELLO,

AUNTY?

YOU

THERE?'

I

SAID.

'WHAT

HAVE

YOU

TRAPPED

ME

IN?'

ANANYA'S

MOTHER
WAILED.
'YOU
ARE
PRACTICING,
RIGHT?'
'YES,
BUT....'
'BUT
WHAT?
HAVE
YOU
DONE
ANY
KAHO
NA
PYAAR
HAI
SONGS?
THOSE
ARE
HOT,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,
I
HAVE.
FILM
SONGS
ARE
EASY.
IT
IS
...
MY
CONFIDENCE.'
'YOU'LL
BE
FINE.
I
AM
SENDING
THE
AD
TO
THE
NEWSPAPER
TODAY.
YOUR
NAME
IS
IN
IT,
WITHOUT
SURNAME
AS
YOU
INSISTED.
IT
WILL
COME
ON
SUNDAY,
THE
DAY

OF
THE
CONCERT.'
'DON'T,
DON'T
PUT
MY
NAME.
WHAT
IF
I
DECIDE
NOT
TO
COME?'
SHE
ASKED
WITH
A
TOUCH
OF
PANIC.
'IT'S
FINE.
THERE
ARE
PLENTY
OF
RADHAS
IN
CHENNAI.
NOBODY
WILL
KNOW
WHICH
ONE
DID
NOT
SHOW
UP,'
I
SAID.
'I'LL
LET

YOU
DOWN,'
SHE
SAID.
'YOU
WON'T.'
I
SAID.
'UNTIL
WHEN
CAN
YOU
REMOVE
MY
NAME
FROM
THE
AD?'
'SATURDAY.
DON'T
THINK
LIKE
THAT,
PLEASE,'
I
SAID.
'OK,
STILL
WANTED
TO
CHECK,'
SHE
SAID.
'FINE,
AND
PRACTICE
THE
EK
PAL
KA
JEENA
SONG.
IT
IS

NUMBER
ONE
ON
THE
CHARTS,'
I
SAID.
'I
SAID
TAKE
MY
NAME
OUT,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
CALLED
ME
ON
SUNDAY
MORNING
AT
6
A.M.
'YOU
SAW
THE
AD
ALREADY?'
I
RUBBED
MY
EYES.
I
PICKED
UP
THE
HINDU
FROM
UNDER
THE
CHUMMERY
ENTRANCE
DOOR.
I

OPENED
METROPLUS,
THE
SUNDAY
SUPPLEMENT.

'YES,'
SHE
WHISPERED.

'WHAT
IS
THIS?'

SHE
HAD
CALLED
WHEN
UNCLE
HAD
GONE
FOR

A
BATH.
ANANYA
HADN'T
WOKEN

UP
AND
MANJU
HUDDLED
IN
HIS
ROOM
WITH
HIS
BEST
FRIENDS

—
PHYSICS,
CHEMISTRY
AND
MATHS.

'I
COULDN'T
DO
IT,'

I
SAID,
AND
MADE
UP
A
STORY.
'THE
NEWSPAPER
TOLD
ME
METROPLUS
GOES
TO
PRESS
TWO
DAYS
BEFORE.
ONLY
THE
MAIN
PAPER
CAN
BE
CHANGED
UNTIL
THE
NIGHT
BEFORE.'
'SO,
WHAT
ARE
WE
GOING
TO
DO
NOW?'
SHE
HAD
CALLED
ME
THE
PREVIOUS
MORNING

TO
GET
HER
NAME
REMOVED.
HOWEVER,
I
NEVER
CALLED
THE
NEWSPAPER
TO
CHANGE
THE
AD
WORDINGS.
'NOTHING,
WE'LL
JUST
SAY
RADHA
FELL
ILL,'
I
SAID.
SHE
KEPT
SILENT.
'WON'T
IT
MAKE
YOU
LOOK
BAD?'
SHE
ENQUIRED
AFTER
A
PAUSE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YEAH,
WON'T
BE
THE
FIRST
TIME
THOUGH.
I'LL
MANAGE.
ANYWAY,
ALL
OF
YOU
WILL
COME
FOR
THE
CONCERT,
RIGHT?'
I
SAID.
'OK
LISTEN,
IF
I
DO
HAVE
TO
PERFORM,
WHERE
AND
WHEN
DO
I
HAVE
TO
REPORT?'
MY
HEART
STARTED
TO

BEAT
FAST.
SHE
WAS
GOING
TO
DO
IT.
'AUNTY,
EVERYTHING
IS
WELL
ORGANISED.
WE
HAVE
A
ROOM
NEXT
TO
THE
CONCERT
GARDEN
THAT
WILL
ACT
AS
THE
GREENROOM.
COME
THERE
THREE
HOURS
EARLY,
BY
FOUR.
OK?'
'YES,'
SHE
SAID.
'THANKS,
AUNTY,'
I
SAID.
'I

SHOULD
THANK
YOU.

I
HAVEN'T
TOLD
ANYONE
AT
HOME
YET.'

'GOOD,
MAKE
AN
EXCUSE
AND
LEAVE
THE
HOUSE.
SEE
YOU.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
38
'WHICH
ONE
SHOULD
I
WEAR?'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
ASKED,
SITTING
ON
THE
KING-SIZE
BED
OF
THE
COTTAGE
WE
HAD
CONVERTED
INTO
A
GREENROOM.
THE
MAKE-UP
ARTISTS,
SOUND
ENGINEERS
AND
THE
STAFF
OF
HARIHARAN
AND
S.P.
HAD
ALREADY
ARRIVED.
THE
MAIN
SINGERS

WOULD
COME
ONLY
AT
THE
LAST
MINUTE.
HOWEVER,
RADHA
HAD
COME
EARLY
AND
LAID
OUT
THREE
KANJEEVARAM
SILK
SARIS
FOR
ME
TO
CHOOSE
FROM.
'THEY
ARE
ALL
BEAUTIFUL,'
I
SAID.
THE
FIRST
WAS
PURPLE
AND
GOLD,
THE
SECOND
YELLOW
AND
GOLD
AND
THE
THIRD

ORANGE
AND
GOLD.
'TOUCH-UP,
MADAM?'
THE
MAKE-UP
MAN
CAME
TOWARDS
ANANYA'S
MOTHER.
'I
SHOULD
LEAVE
THE
ROOM,'
I
SAID.
EVEN
THOUGH
WE
HAD
HALF
A
DOZEN
PEOPLE
AROUND,
I
FELT
AWKWARD
WATCHING
MY
POTENTIAL
MOTHER-IN-LAW
APPLYING
MASCARA.
'I'M
SO
TENSE,
I
CAN'T
CHOOSE,'
SHE

SAID,
WIPING
SWEAT
OFF
HER
FOREHEAD.
THE
MAKE-UP
MAN
APPLIED
FOUNDATION
ON
ANANYA'S
MOTHER'S
CHEEKS.
I
TRIED
NOT
TO
LOOK.
'TAKE
THE
ORANGE,
NICE
AND
BRIGHT.'
'THAT'S
MY
WEDDING
SARI.
I'VE
HARDLY
WORN
IT
SINCE
THAT
DAY.'
'TONIGHT'S
QUITE
SPECIAL,
TOO.'
THE
MAKE-UP
MAN

SPRAYED
WATER
ON
HER
FOREHEAD
AND
WIPE
D IT.
'I'LL
BE
OUTSIDE.
I'LL
SEE
YOU
ON
STAGE.'
SHE
CLOSED
HER
EYES
AND
FOLDED
HER
HANDS
TO
PRAY.
I
CAME
OUTSIDE
AND
CHECKED
THE
FOOD
ARRANGEMENTS.
I
CALLED
ANANYA
AT
SIX
TO
MAKE
SURE
THEY
LEFT

ON
TIME.
'YOU
ARE
GOING
TO
KILL
ME,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WHY?'
I
SAID.
'MOM
IS
NOT
COMING.'
'WHY?'
I
SAID,
CAREFUL
TO
SOUND
UPSET.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SHE
SAID
MY
GRANDMOTHER
FELL
ILL
IN
THIRUKUDAYUR.
SHE
LEFT
AFTER
LUNCH.'
'WHERE
IS
THIRUKUDAYUR?'
'SIX
HOURS
FORM
CHENNAI.
SHE
WON'T
BE
ABLE
TO
MAKE
IT.'
'WHAT
ABOUT
YOU
GUYS?'
'WE
ARE
ALMOST
READY.
I
WANTED
TO
WEAR
MY
MOM'S
NICE

ORANGE
KANJEEVARAM
SARI
BUT
I
CAN'T
FIND
IT.
I
HOPE
SHE
HAS
NOT
LOST
IT.
SHE
WOULDN'T
TAKE
IT
WITH
HER,
HARDLY
THE
OCCASION.'
'LEAVE
SOON,
ANANYA,
I
CAN'T
PROMISE
GOOD
SEATS
OTHERWISE,'
I
SAID.
'OK,
OK,
BYE,'
SHE
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP.
BALA

ARRIVED
AT
6:30
WITH
ANIL
MATHUR,
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER.
ANIL
HAD
FLOWN
DOWN
FROM
MUMBAI.
BALA
HAD
ENSURED
THAT
A
MERCEDES
BROUGHT
ANIL
STRAIGHT
TO
THE
VENUE.
BALA
TAILED
HIM
LIKE
A
TAMIL
VILLAIN'S
SIDEKICK,
SHOWING
HIM
THE
ARRANGEMENTS
AND
TAKING
CREDIT
FOR
THE

ENTIRE
EVENT.
'AND
THIS
IS
THE
BAR.
AND
SEE
THE
CITIBANK
BANNER
BEHIND.
I
PUT
A
BIG
AD
IN
THE
HINDU
TODAY.
NUMBER
ONE
NEWSPAPER
HERE,'
BALA
SAID.
I
GREETED
BALA.
HE
IGNORED
ME
AND
CONTINUED
TO
WALK.
'HEY,
YOU
ARE
THE
INTERNET
FIASCO

GUY,'
ANIL
NOTICED
ME.
'GOOD
EVENING,
SIR,'
I
SAID.
I
HAD
BECOME
THE
POSTER
BOY
FOR
LOSERDOM
IN
THE
BANK.
'AREN'T
YOU
THE
ONLY
PUNJABI
STUCK
HERE?'
HE
LAUGHED.
'I
THINK
THAT'S
ENOUGH
PUNISHMENT.
NO,
BALA?'
BALA
GUFFAWED,
EVEN
THOUGH
THE
JOKE
WAS
ON

HIM,
RATHER
HIS
CITY.
'LOOKING
TO
MOVE
BACK?'
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
SAID.
'I'LL
TALK
TO
YOU
ABOUT
IT,
SIR,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
LET
ME
KNOW
FIRST,'
BALA
FINALLY
ACKNOWLEDGED
ME.
'I'LL
HELP
HIM,
SIR.'
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
PATTED
MY
SHOULDER
AND
WALKED
AWAY.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANANYA
ARRIVED
WITH
HER
FATHER
AND
BROTHER
AT
7.15.
'ARE
WE
LATE?'
SHE
ASKED
BREATHLESSLY.
SHE
WORE
A
PEACH
CHIFFON
SARI
WITH
A
SKINNY
SILVER
BORDER.
SHE
HAD
ACCESSORISED
WITH
A
SILVER
NECKLACE
AND
MATCHING
EARRINGS.
'YES,
BUT
THE
CONCERT
HASN'T

STARTED
YET.
COME,'
I
SAID.
I
LED
THEM
TO
ONE
OF
THE
SEVERAL
ROUND
TABLES
LAID
OUT
IN
THE
GARDEN.
I
CHOSE
ONE
NEAR
THE
STAGE.
'FOOD
IS
THAT
SIDE,
AND
UNCLE,
THE
BAR
IS
THAT
WAY,'
I
SAID.
'I
DON'T
DRINK,'
UNCLE
SAID,

LOOKING
AT
ANANYA.
'SURE.'
I
SAID.
CLIENTS
FILLED
EACH
OF
THE
TEN
SEATS
ON
ALL
EIGHTEEN
TABLES.
ONE
OR
TWO
BANK
AGENTS
SAT
AT
EVERY
TABLE,
COMPRISING
PRIMARILY
OF
JUNIOR
CHENNAI
CITIBANKERS.
BALA
AND
THE
COUNTRY
MANAGER
HAD
A
SEPARATE
TABLE
WITH
THE
BIGGEST

CLIENTS,
THOSE
WITH
ASSETS
OF
FIVE
CRORE
OR
MORE.
I
FELT
SORRY
FOR
THESE
CLIENTS.
FRANKLY,
I'D
RATHER
NOT
BE
RICH
THAN
FACE
THE
AGONY
OF
HAVING
DINNER
WITH
SENIOR
BANKERS.
THE
LIGHTS
DIMMED
AT
7.30.
CONVERSATIONS
STOPPED
AT
THE
ROUND
TABLES
AS
BALA

CAME
ON
STAGE.
HE
WORE
A
SHINY
CREAM
SILK
SHIRT
UNDER
HIS
SUIT
AND
RESEMBLED
A
PIMP
IN
TRAINING.
'WELCOME
EVERYONE,
WHAT
A
DELIGHTFUL
EVENING!
I
AM
BALA,
REGIONAL
MANAGER
FOR
THE
PRIORITY
BANKING
GROUP,'
HE
SAID
AND
WIPE
D
THE
SWEAT
OFF
HIS
FACE.

'YOUR
BOSS?'
ANANYA
WHISPERED
TO
ME.
I
NODDED.
'WHAT'S
WITH
THE
SHIRT?'
'SHSH,'
I
SAID.
MANJU
AND
ANANYA'S
FATHER
LISTENED
TO
BALA
WITH
FULL
ATTENTION.
'I
WANT
TO
WELCOME
SOMEONE
SPECIAL,'
BALA
SAID.
THE
CROWD
CHEERED
AS
THEY
EXPECTED
HARIHARAN
OR
S.P
TO
TAKE

THE
STAGE.
'PLEASE
WELCOME
MR
ANIL
MATHUR,
COUNTRY
MANAGER
AND
MD,
CITIBANK
INDIA,'
THE
CROWD
LET
OUT
A
COLLECTIVE
SIGH
OF
DISAPPOINTMENT.
ANIL
CAME
ON
STAGE
AND
REALISED
THAT
NO
ONE
CARED
ABOUT
HIM.
HE
ATTEMPTED
A
JOKE.
'HELLO
EVERYONE,
WHO
WOULD
HAVE
THOUGHT

SOME
OF
OUR
BIGGEST
CLIENTS
WILL
COME
FROM
THE
LAND
OF
DOSAS
AND
IDLIS?’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
CROWD
FELL
SO
SILENT,
YOU
COULD
HEAR
THE
WAVES
ON
THE
ADJACENT
BEACH.
ANANYA
LOOKED
AT
ME
SHOCKED.
I
SHRUGGED
MY
SHOULDERS.
I
HAD
NO
CONTROL
OVER
THIS.
ANIL
REALISED
THE
JOKE
DIDN'T
WORK
AND
ATTEMPTED
A
RESCUE.
'YOU
SEE

IN
BOMBAY,
IDLI
AND
DOSA
ARE
SEEN
AS
SIMPLE
SNACKS,'
ANIL
SAID.
'HE'S
DIGGING
HIMSELF
IN
DEEPER,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'YES,
LUCKILY
HE
HAS
ONLY
FIVE
MINUTES.'
ANIL
REALISED
HIS
SENSE
OF
HUMOUR
ONLY
WORKED
WITH
PEOPLE
WHO
WORKED
UNDER
HIM.
HE
SWITCHED
TO
WHAT

BANKERS
DO
BEST,
PRESENT
BORING
POWERPOINT
SLIDES
WITH
GROWING
BAR
CHARTS.
'SO
YOU
SEE,
WHEN
WE
CAME
TO
CHENNAI,
WE
STARTED
WITH
A
TINY
FOOTPRINT
AND
NOW
WE
ARE
A
GIANT.
FROM
A
MINI
IDLI
WE
HAVE
BECOME
A
PAPER
DOSA,'
ANIL
SAID,
GESTURING

WITH
HIS
HANDS
TO
SHOW
THE
RELATIVE
SIZES
OF
THE
TWO
DISHES.
'PLEASE,
SOMEONE
STOP
HIM,'
ANANYA
GROANED.
'WE
CAN'T.
HE
IS
THE
BOSS,'
I
SAID.
ANIL
FINISHED
HIS
SPEECH
AND
THE
STAFF
APPLAUDED
HARD.
THE
CLIENTS
WAITED
IN
PAIN
AS
TWO
CLUELESS
BUT

CONFIDENT
RESEARCH
ANALYSTS
SPOKE
ABOUT
GLOBAL
CORPORATE
OUTLOOK
FOR
THE
NEXT
TEN
YEARS.
'IF
WE
ASSUME
A
SEVEN
PERCENT
GDP
GROWTH
RATE,
THE
PICTURE
IS
LIKE
THIS,'
THE
ANALYST
SAID.
NOBODY
QUESTIONED
HOW
THE
SEVEN
PERCENT
ASSUMPTION
CAME
ABOUT,
BUT
AFTER
THAT,
THE
ANALYST

HAD
ENOUGH
CHARTS
TO
SHOW
WHAT
HAPPENS
IF
THE
GROWTH
RATE
IS
INDEED
SEVEN
PERCENT.
WE
ENDED
THE
PRESENTATIONS
AT
8.30
PEOPLE
STARTED
TO
GET
RESTLESS
AS
BALA
CAME
ON
STAGE
AGAIN.
'NOT
ANOTHER
BANKER,'
YOU
COULD
ALMOST
HEAR
THEM
THINK.
'AND
NOW,
FOR

THE
MUSIC
CONCERT
WE
HAVE
A
SEPARATE
MC,
MISS
T.S.
SMITHA,'
BALA
SAID.
THE
CROWD
APPLAUDED
AS
THE
EXTRA
BUSTY
SMITHA
CAME
ON
THE
STAGE.
SHE
WORE
A
LOW-CUT
BLOUSE,
A
TAD
TOO
DEEP
FOR
CITIBANK
SENSIBILITIES.
'WELCOME,
LADIES
AND
GENTLEMEN,'
SMITHA
SAID,
HOLDING

THE
MIKE
IN
HER
HAND.
'ARE
YOU
HAVING
A
GOOD
TIME?'
NOBODY
RESPONDED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT
IS
SHE
WEARING?'
ANANYA
SAID.
OUR
WHOLE
TABLE
HEARD
AND
SNIGGERED.
'IT
IS
A
LITTLE
PROVOCATIVE,
I
ADMIT,'
I
SAID.
'HER
CLEAVAGE
IS
SO
BIG,
SHE
CAN
USE
IT
TO
HOLD
THE
MIKE.
HANDS-FREE,'
ANANYA
WHISPERED
TO
ME.
'SHUT
UP,

ANANYA,'
I
SAID,
SUPPRESSING
A
SMILE.
'WE
HAVE
THREE
TALENTED
SINGERS
TONIGHT,'
SMITHA
SAID.
MY
HEART
BEAT
FAST.
'WE
ARE
ALL,
OF
COURSE,
WAITING
FOR
THE
MAESTROS.
BUT
THE
FIRST
SINGER
IS
THE
NEW,
VERY
TALENTED,
RADHA.
PLEASE
WELCOME
HER
ON
STAGE.'
THE
CROWD

APPLAUDED
AS
I
CRANED
MY
NECK
TO
SEE
THE
STAGE.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
ARRIVED
ON
STAGE
IN
THE
ORANGE
SARI.
'IT'S
MOM,'
MANJU
NOTICED
FIRST
AS
HE
STOOD
UP.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

39

'WHAT?'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
STOOD
UP
AS
WELL.
ANANYA
LOOKED
AT
THE
STAGE
AND
THEN
ME
IN
QUICK
SUCCESSION.
'KRISH,
WHAT
IS....'
'SHSH,
PAY
ATTENTION,'
I
PLACED
A
FINGER
ON
MY
LIPS.
RADHA
TOOK
THE
MIKE.
'MOM!'
MANJU
SCREAMED.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER

LOOKED
TOWARDS
US
AND
SMILED.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
GOING
TO
SING
FOR
US
FIRST,
RADHA?'
SMITHA
ASKED
COYLY.
'EK
PAL
KA
JEENA
FROM
KAHO
NA
PYAAR
HAI,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
ANSWERED
SHYLY.
THE
CROWD
ROARED
AND
CLAPPED
AS
INTRODUCTORY
MUSIC
BEGAN
FOR
THE
SONG.
RADHA

AUNTY
SANG
WELL;
I
NOTICED
SEVERAL
CLIENTS
TAP
THEIR
FEET
OR
NOD
THEIR
HEADS
TO
THE
MUSIC.
TAMILIANS
CAN
TELL
GOOD
SINGERS
FROM
BAD,
LIKE
PUNJABIS
CAN
JUDGE
BUTTER
CHICKEN
IN
A
JIFFY.
NOBODY
IN
THE
AUDIENCE
LOOKED
DISAPPROVING.
'HOW
DID
RADHA
COME
HERE?'

ANANYA'S
FATHER
SPOKE
AFTER
RECOVERING
FROM
THE
SHOCK.
'OBVIOUSLY,
KRISH
ARRANGED
IT,
DAD.
CAN'T
YOU
GUESS?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'SHE
NEVER
TOLD
ME,'
UNCLE
SAID.
BUT
HIS
EYES
GLINTED
WITH
PRIDE.
'MOM
IS
SINGING
SO
WELL,'
ANANYA
SAID
TO
MANJU,
WHO
NODDED
AND
REACHED
OUT

FOR
THE
VARIOUS
SNACKS
FERRIED
BY
WAITERS.
ANANYA
BENT
FORWARD
AND
KISSED
ME
ON
MY
CHEEK.
HER
FATHER
DIDN'T
NOTICE,
AS
HIS
EYES
WERE
TRANSFIXED
ON
STAGE.
A
FEW
AGENTS
DID,
AND
I
SMILED
IN
EMBARRASSMENT.
'ANANYA,
THIS
IS
AN
OFFICE
EVENT,'
I
WHISPERED.

'OF
COURSE,
THAT'S
WHY
MY
MOTHER
IS
ON
STAGE,'
SHE
SAID
AS
SHE
PLAYED
FOOTSIE
WITH
ME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
HER
MOTHER
SWITCHED
TO
THE
LATEST
TAMIL
HIT
NUMBER
FROM
RAJNI'S
MOVIE.
THE
CROWD'S
EXCITEMENT
ROSE
FURTHER.
THE
SONG
WAS
A
SLOW
BALLAD,
AND
REQUIRED
A
LOT
OF
VOICE
MODULATION.
CLAPS
RAN
THROUGH
THE
CROWD
AS
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
MANEUVERED
A
TOUGH

RANGE
OF
NOTES.
'LOVELY,
BEAUTIFUL!'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID
IN
REFLEX
AS
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SWITCHED
THREE
OCTAVES
IN
ONE
LINE.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SANG
FOUR
MORE
SONGS
TO
FINISH
HER
ACT.
EACH
SONG
ENDED
WITH
ENTHUSIASTIC
APPLAUSE.
SMITHA
CAME
ON
STAGE
AGAIN.
'THAT
WAS
WONDERFUL,
RADHA.

AND
BEFORE
YOU
LEAVE,
I'D
LIKE
TO
INVITE
THE
NEXT
SINGER,
MR
S.P.
BALASUBRAMANIAM,
WHO
HAS
A
FEW
WORDS
TO
SAY
ABOUT
YOU.'
THE
CROWD
ROSE
TO
ITS
FEET
AND
APPLAUDED
AS
ONE
OF
SOUTH
INDIA'S
GREATEST
SINGERS
TOOK
THE
STAGE.
RADHA
AUNTY
FOLDED

HER
HANDS
AND
BOWED
TO
HIM.
S.P.
SAID,
'GOOD
EVENING,
CHENNAI,
AND
THANK
YOU,
CITIBANK.
BEFORE
I
BEGIN,
I
WANT
TO
PRAISE
RADHA
FOR
HER
WONDERFUL
SINGING.
THE
SONGS
WERE
POPULAR,
BUT
I
CAN
SEE
SHE
HAS
A
STRONG
CLASSICAL
BASE.
DO
YOU
SING

OFTEN,
RADHA?’
‘NO,
FIRST
TIME
LIKE
THIS.’
‘WELL,
YOU
SHOULD
SING
MORE.
SHOULDN’T
SHE,
CHENNAI?’
EVERYONE
BANGED
THEIR
TABLES
IN
SUPPORT.
ANANYA’S
MOTHER
BOWED
TO
EVERYONE.
AS
SHE
STRAIGHTENED,
HER
EYES
WERE
FILLED
WITH
TEARS.
‘SO,
YOU
WILL?’
S.P.
SAID
AS
HE
POINTED
THE

MIKE
TO
RADHA.
'YES,
I
WILL.
ALSO,
SIR,
I
WANT
TO
SAY
THAT
TODAY
IS
THE
HAPPIEST
DAY
OF
MY
LIFE.
I'VE
SHARED
THE
STAGE
WITH
YOU.'
THE
CROWD
CLAPPED.
RADHA
AUNTY
FOUGHT
BACK
TEARS
AS
SHE
LEFT
THE
DAIS.
'AND
I
THOUGHT
HER

HAPPIEST
DAY
WAS
THE
DAY
I
WAS
BORN,'
ANANYA
MUTTERED
AS
SHE
CONTINUED
TO
CLAP.
THE
EVENING
PROGRESSED
WITH
S.P.
AND
HARIHARAN
CASTING
THEIR
SPELL
ON
THE
CROWD.
FOR
EVERYONE
ELSE,
THE
MAIN
ACT
HAD
JUST
BEGUN.
FOR
ME
AND
ANANYA'S
FAMILY,
THE
MAIN

ACT
WAS
OVER.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
JOINED
US
AT
THE
TABLE
AFTER
TEN
MINUTES.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
WERE
WONDERFUL,'
A
LADY
AT
THE
NEXT
TABLE
SAID
TO
ANANYA'S
MOTHER.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
EXCHANGED
SHY
GLANCES
WITH
HIS
WIFE.
S.P.
SANG
TERE
MERE
BEECH
MEIN
FROM
EK
DUJE
KE
LIYE.
I
LOOKED
AT
ANANYA.
OUR
STRUGGLE
RESEMBLED
THAT
FILM'S

STORY.

I
ONLY
HOPED
OUR
END
WOULDN'T
RESEMBLE
THAT
MOVIE'S
CLIMAX.

AN
HOUR
INTO
THE
CONCERT,
BALA
CAME
TO
MY
TABLE.
'KRISH,
COME
WITH
ME.

I
WANT
YOU
TO
MEET
MR
MURUGUPPA,
FAMOUS
JEWELER,'

BALA
SAID.
'WHAT?'

I
SAID.
'COME,
HE
WANTS
TO
OPEN

A
TEN-CRORE
ACCOUNT.
GIVE
HIM
SOME
BULL
ON
CITI.
I
HAVE
TO
DROP
ANIL
AT
THE
AIRPORT.’
‘SIR,
I
HAVE
GUESTS,’
I
SAID
AS
ANANYA
NOTICED
MY
DILEMMA.
‘IT’S
FINE,
WE
WILL
MANAGE.
DINNER’S
OVER
THERE,
RIGHT?’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘OH,
SO
SHE
IS
THE

ONE?’
BALA
SAID
AND
TURNED
TO
ANANYA.
‘TAMIL
TERIA?’
‘LET’S
GO,
BALA,’
I
SAID.
I
MET
MR
MURUGUPPA,
A
FAT,
JOVIAL,
FIFTY-YEAR-OLD.
‘PUNJABI?
TAMIL
ILLE?’
HE
SAID
AND
GAVE
ME
HIS
CARD.
‘NO.
SO
YOU
ARE
THE
JEWELLERY
KING?’
‘WHAT
KING?
EMPEROR!
WE
ARE

THE
BIGGEST
IN
CHENNAI.'
'SIR
REGARDING
YOUR
ACCOUNT,'
I
SAID
AS
I
NOTICED
ANANYA'S
FAMILY
FROM
A
DISTANCE.
THEY
LAUGHED
TOGETHER
OVER
DINNER.
SEVERAL
PEOPLE
CAME
UP
TO
CONGRATULATE
ANANYA'S
MOTHER.
THE
TIME
TO
STRIKE
WAS
NOT
FAR
AWAY.
'MR
MURUGUPPA,
ACTUALLY,
I
MAY

NEED
SOME
JEWELLERY
MYSELF,'
I
SAID
AS
I
LED
HIM
TO
THE
DINNER
TABLE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
40
'OH,
TRUST
ME,
SHE
IS
ON
A
DIFFERENT
PLANET
SINCE
THAT
DAY.
NO
NEED
FOR
DINNER
TO
THANK
HER,'
ANANYA
SAID
OVER
THE
PHONE.
WE
WERE
IN
OUR
RESPECTIVE
OFFICES.
I
HAD
JUST
INVITED
ANANYA'S
FAMILY
FOR
DINNER.
'BUT
WE

DIDN'T
EVEN
PAY
HER
FOR
THE
CONCERT.
THAT'S
THE
LEAST
I
CAN
DO,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
HAVE
DONE
A
LOT,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'TRUST
ME,
THE
DINNER
IS
IMPORTANT,'
I
SAID.
'REALLY?
WHAT'S
UP?'
'YOU'LL
FIND
OUT
NEXT
FRIDAY
AT
RAINTREE.
SEE
YOU
ALL
AT

EIGHT,'
I
SAID.
THE
RAINTREE
RESTAURANT
IS
LOCATED
IN
THE
TAJ
CONNEMARA
HOTEL,
ON
BINNY
ROAD
OFF
ANNA
SALAI.
THE
OUTDOOR
RESTAURANT
IS
SNUG
UNDER
A
CANOPY
OF
TREES
OF
THE
SAME
NAME.
FAIRYLIGHTS
ADORN
THE
BRANCHES
OF
THE
TREES
AND
CANDLES
LIGHT
UP

THE
TABLES.
APART
FROM
AMETHYST,
IT
IS
ONE
OTHER
OASIS
IN
THE
CITY.

I
SAT
WITH
ANANYA'S
FAMILY
AT
ONE
OF
THE
OUTDOOR
TABLES,
MY
TROUSER
POCKETS
HEAVY.

'THIS
IS
STUNNING,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
LOOKED
UP
AT
THE
LITTLE
LIGHTS.
SHE
WORE
A

WHITE
FITTED
DRESS
WITH
SEQUINS
THAT
REFLECTED
IN
THE
SEMI-DARKNESS.

'YOU'VE
NEVER
COME
HERE
BEFORE?'

I
SAID.
'NO
WE
HAVEN'T.
RIGHT,
DAD?'

UNCLE
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD
EVEN
AS
HE
ADMIRERD
THE
FOLIAGE
RIGHT
ABOVE
US.

UNIFORMED
WAITERS
SERVED
US
A
WELCOME
DRINK
OF
COCONUT

WATER
WITH
FRESH
MINT.
THEY
LEFT
THE
MENU
CARDS
ON
OUR
TABLES.
THE
RESTAURANT
SPECIALISES
IN
CHETTINAD
FOOD,
NAMED
AFTER
A
REGION
SOUTH
OF
TAMIL
NADU.
THE
CUISINE
IS
KNOWN
FOR
ITS
INTENSE
SPICES
AND
FLAVOURS,
ALONG
WITH
A
LARGE
RANGE
OF
NON-VEGETARIAN
PREPARATIONS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SIR,
FOR
COCKTAILS,
I'D
RECOMMEND
KOTHAMALLI
MARY,'
THE
WAITER
SAID.
'KOTHA-WHAT?'
I
ASKED.
'IT
IS
LIKE
A
BLOODY
MARY,
SIR,
TOMATO
JUICE
AND
VODKA,
BUT
WITH
CHETTINAD
SPICES.'
I
LOOKED
AT
UNCLE.
HE
LOOKED
RELUCTANT
TO
NOD
FOR
ALCOHOL
IN
FRONT

OF
HIS
WIFE.

'I
WANT
ONE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
GAVE
HER

A
SHARP
LOOK.

'C'MON,
JUST
ONE
COCKTAIL,'
ANANYA
SAID.

I
OPENED
THE
MENU.

I
COULDN'T
PRONOUNCE
THE
TONGUE-TWISTER
NAMES

OF
THE
DISHES.
SPECIALS
INCLUDED
KURUVAPILLAI
YEAR
AND
KOZHI
MELAGU
CHETTINAD.

I
DIDN'T

BOTHER
READING
THE
REST.
'YOU
KNOW
THIS
FOOD
BETTER,
PLEASE
ORDER,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
LOOKED
AT
THE
MENU
SEVERAL
TIMES.
'IT'S
TOO
EXPENSIVE,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
'IT'S
FINE,'
I
SAID.
'ANANYA,
PLEASE.'
ANANYA
TOOK
THE
MENU
AND
ORDERED
FOR
EVERYONE.
WE
ORDERED
KOZHAKATTAI,

MASALA
PANIYARAM,
ADIKOOZH,
KANDHARAPPAM,
SEEYAM
AND
ATHIRASAM.
OF
COURSE,
I
HAD
NO
CLUE
WHAT
WENT
INTO
THOSE
DISHES;
I
FIGURED
AT
LEAST
ONE
OF
THEM
WOULD
BE
EDIBLE.
THE
WAITER
ALSO
SUGGESTED
WE
ORDER
IDIYAPPAM,
RICE
NOODLES
BUNCHED
UP
LIKE
A
BIRD'S
NEST.
'HOW

IS
THE
IIT
PREPARATION,
MANJU?’

I
ASKED
AFTER
THE
WAITER
LEFT.

‘GOOD,

I
CAME
TENTH
IN
THE
MYLAPORE
MOCK
IIT
TEST,’
MANJU
SAID.

I
NODDED.

‘SO,
ANY
MORE
SINGING
OFFERS?’

I
SAID
TO
AUNTY.
AUNTY
SMILED.
‘DON’T
EMBARRASS
ME.
BUT

I
DID
FIND
ANOTHER

GURUJI
WHO
HAS
A
MODERN
APPROACH
TO
CARNATIC
MUSIC.'
I
TURNED
TO
ANANYA'S
DAD.
'HOW'S
THE
BANK,
UNCLE?'
'GOOD,
YOUR
PRESENTATION
IS
STILL
BEING
TALKED
ABOUT.'
THE
FOOD
ARRIVED;
SPICY,
TANGY
AND
DELICIOUS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THIS
IS
GREAT,'
I
SAID
AS
I
HAD
THE
MASALA
PANIYARAM,
A
TASTIER
COUSIN
OF
THE
IDLI
AND
SHAPED
LIKE
A
BALL.
THE
RAINTREE
STAFF
BROUGHT
A
TROLLEY
WITH
TEN
CHUTNEYS
TO
CHOOSE
FROM.
'I
SWEAR,
DELHI
NEEDS
TO
TASTE
THIS.

WE
HAVEN'T
GONE
PAST
THE
PANEER
MASALA
DOSA
YET,'
I
SAID
AS
I
TOOK
A
SPOONFUL
OF
THE
TOMATO
TAMARIND
CURRY
WITH
IDIYAPPAMS.
'YOU
LIKE
IT?
I
CAN
MAKE
IT
AT
HOME,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
I
REALISED
THAT
THE
RIGHT
MOMENT
WAS
NEAR.
MAYBE

AT
DESSERT,
I
TOLD
MYSELF.
WE
SCANNED
THE
DESSERT
MENU.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
CHOSE
A
COCONUT
ICE-CREAM.
THE
DEEP
LOVE
FOR
THIS
FRUIT
AMONG
SOUTH
INDIANS
IS
INEXPLICABLE.
THE
ICE-CREAM
ARRIVED
IN
AN
ACTUAL
GREEN
COCONUT
SHELL.
'SUPERB,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID,
A
SIGNAL
I
TOOK

AS
READY
GET-SET,
GO.
'I
WANT
TO
TALK
ABOUT
SOMETHING
IMPORTANT,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
LOOKED
UP
FROM
HIS
ICE-CREAM.
'IF
IT
IS
OK?'
I
AMENDED.
UNCLE
NODDED.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
LOOKED
AT
ANANYA
AND
ME.
'MANJU,
YOU
TOO,'
I
SAID.
HE
KEPT
HIS
FACE

SO
CLOSE
TO
THE
ICE-CREAM
BOWL,
HIS
SPECTACLES
WERE
SMEARED.

I
HAD
EVERYONE'S
ATTENTION.
'HI,'

I
CLEARED
MY
THROAT.

'UNCLE,
AUNTY,
MANJU,

I
CAME
HERE
SIX
MONTHS
AGO.

IT
IS
NO
SECRET
WHY

I
CHOSE
CHENNAI
AS
MY
FIRST
POSTING.

HOWEVER,
I
CANNOT
STAY

HERE
FOREVER.
I
MET
ANANYA
ALMOST
THREE
YEARS
AGO,
AND
APART
FROM
OUR
FIRST
FIGHT,
I'VE
LOVED
HER
EVERY
DAY
SINCE
THAT
DAY.'
ANANYA
TOOK
MY
HAND
IN
HERS
FROM
UNDER
THE
TABLE.
'AND
WE
THOUGHT
OUR
LOVE
IS
ENOUGH
REASON
FOR
US
TO

GET
MARRIED.
WE
THOUGHT
OUR
PARENTS
WILL
MEET
AT
THE
CONVOCAATION
AND
THINGS
WILL
BE
SMOOTH.
WELL,
WE
WERE
WRONG.'
THE
WAITER
CAME
TO
COLLECT
THE
ICE-CREAM
PLATES.
I
TOLD
HIM
TO
COME
FIVE
MINUTES
LATER.
'WE
COULD
HAVE
RUN
AWAY.
WE
COULD
HAVE

FORCED
OUR
DECISION
ON
YOU.
HOWEVER,
ANANYA
TOLD
ME
SHE
HAD
THIS
DREAM
OF
BOTH
SETS
OF
PARENTS
SMILING
ON
OUR

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WEDDING
DAY.
AND
SO,
I
WANT
TO
SEE
IF
WE
CAN
DO
THAT.
ALSO,
I
DIDN'T
THINK
WE
HAD
DONE
ANYTHING
WRONG
THAT
WE
HAD
TO
RUN
AWAY.'
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
KEPT
A
DEADLY
SILENCE.
EITHER
THEY
WERE
LISTENING
CAREFULLY
OR
THE

ICE-CREAM
HAD
BEEN
TOO
COLD.
'AND
EVER
SINCE
I
CAME
TO
CHENNAI,
I
HAVE
TRIED
TO
BE
ACCEPTED
BY
YOU.
I
DON'T
EXPECT
YOU
TO
LOVE
ME
LIKE
YOU
DO
HARISH,
BUT
AT
LEAST
YOU
CAN
ACCEPT
ME.'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
WANTED
TO
TALK.
I

SIGNALED
HER
TO
WAIT.
'AND
WHILE
YOU
MAY
NOT
LOVE
ME,
I
DON'T
WANT
YOU
TO
MERELY
TOLERATE
ME
EITHER.
SOMEWHERE
IN
THE
MIDDLE
LIES
THE
ACCEPTANCE
I
AM
TALKING
ABOUT.'
I
SLID
MY
RIGHT
HAND
INSIDE
MY
TROUSER
POCKET
AND
COLLECTED
THE
FOUR

MINI
BOXES
WITH
MY
FINGERS.
'KEEPING
ALL
THAT
IN
MIND,
CONSIDERING
YOUR
DAUGHTER'S
HAPPINESS
AND
TAKING
A
VIEW
OF
WHAT
YOU
KNOW
OF
ME,'
I
SAID
AND
PAUSED
TO
BREATHE.
I
TOOK
OUT
THE
FOUR
LITTLE
RED
BOXES
AND
KEPT
THEM
ON
THE
TABLE.

THE
BOXES
SAID
“MURUGUPPA
JEWELLERS’
ON
TOP.

I
OPENED
THE
FOUR
BOXES.
EACH
HAD
A
GOLD
RING.

I
STOOD
UP
FROM
MY
CHAIR
AND
KNEELED
ON
THE
FLOOR.

‘I,
KRISH
MALHOTRA,
WOULD
LIKE
TO
PROPOSE
TO
ALL
OF
YOU.
WILL
ALL
OF
YOU
MARRY

ME?’
I
SAID
AND
HELD
THE
FOUR
BOXES
IN
MY
PALM.
ANANYA’S
PARENTS
LOOKED
AT
HER
AND
ME
IN
QUICK
SUCCESSION.
MANJU’S
MOUTH
WAS
OPEN,
THE
COCONUT
ICE-CREAM
VERY
VISIBLE
INSIDE.
ANANYA’S
FATHER
GESTURED
TO
ANANYA
ON
WHAT
TO
DO.
‘AFTER
YOU,
MOM
AND

DAD,'
ANANYA
SAID,
'AND
MANJU,
YOU
TOO.'
MANJU
PICKED
UP
HIS
BOX.
'NICE,
REAL
GOLD?'
HE
ASKED.
I
NODDED.
'ARGENTUM,
ATOMIC
NUMBER
SEVENTY-NINE,'
MANJU
SAID
AS
HE
HELD
THE
RING
INHIS
HAND.
'UNCLE?'
I
PROMPTED.
MY
KNEES
HAD
STARTED
TO
HURT
ON
THE
CONCRETE

FLOOR.
'IF
YOU
PROMISE
TO
TAKE
CARE
OF
MY
DAUGHTER,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID,
'THEN
IT
IS
A
YES
FROM
ME.'
HE
BENT
FORWARD
AND
PICKED
UP
HIS
BOX.
ANANYA
HUGGED
HER
FATHER.
'THANKS,
DAD,'
SHE
SAID,
'I
LOVE
YOU.'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
BLESSED
HER
WITH

A
HAND
ON
HER
HEAD.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID,
'IT
IS
NOT
THAT
WE
DON'T
LIKE
YOU.
BUT
OUR
COMMUNITIES....'
MOM,
C'MON,'
ANANYA
INTERRUPTED
HER.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
TOOK
A
MINUTE
TO
RESPOND.
'I
KNOW
HE
WILL
TAKE
CARE
OF
YOU.
BUT
WILL
KRISH'S
PARENTS
TREAT
MY
DAUGHTER

WITH
RESPECT?’
‘WE’LL
WORK
ON
THAT,
TOO,’
I
SAID,
AWARE
ANOTHER
CHALLENGE
AWAITED
ME
IN
DELHI.
‘IF
THEY
DO,
THEN?’
‘THEN
IT
IS
A
YES
FORM
ME,’
ANANYA’S
MOTHER
SAID.
‘YAY!’
ANANYA
CHEERED.
AUNTY
TOOK
HER
RING
AND
ANANYA
PLANTED
A
KISS
ON
HER

MOTHER'S
FOREHEAD.
'AKKA,
YOU
HAVEN'T
PICKED
YOURS,'
MANJU
SAID
AS
THE
MOTHER-DAUGHTER
AFFECTION
CONTINUED.
WHEN
THEY
SEPARATED,
BOTH
HAD
TEARS
IN
THEIR
EYES.
'OH,
OF
COURSE,
WHERE
IS
IT?'
ANANYA
PICKED
UP
HER
RING.
I
CAME
BACK
TO
MY
SEAT.
'SIR,
DID
YOU
ENJOY

YOUR
MEAL?’
THE
WAITER
SAID
AS
HE
CLEARED
THE
PLATES.
‘YOU
BET
I
DID,’
I
SAID,
TIPPING
HIM
MORE
THAN
THE
BILL
THAT
NIGHT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
41
'I
WILL
MISS
YOU,'
BALA
SAID
AS
HE
HANDED
ME
MY
TRANSFER
PAPERS
IN
HIS
OFFICE.
'I
WISH
I
COULD
SAY
THE
SAME,'
I
SAID.
BALA'S
CHIN
DROPPED.
'I
AM
KIDDING,
CHEER
UP.
I
WON'T
BE
THERE
TO
BLACKMAIL
YOU

ANYMORE,'
I
SAID.
BALA
HAD
AGREED
TO
MAKE
MY
CASE
WITH
ANIL
MATHUR
FOR
THE
SAME
REASON.
MY
TRANSFER
TO
DELHI
TOOK
TWO
MONTHS
TO
EXECUTE.
I
WANTED
TO
BE
HOME
SOON.
AFTER
ALL,
I
HAD
FINISHED
MY
CHENNAI
JOB.
OF
COURSE,
WE
HAD

A
FEW
MORE
BATTLES
TO
WIN.
ANANYA
WOULD
HAVE
TO
DEAL
WITH
THE
FULL
FORCE
OF
PUNJABINESS.
HOWEVER,
LIFE
IS
BEST
DEALT
WITH
ONE
DISASTER
AT
A
TIME.
OPERATION
DELHI
WOULD
HAVE
TO
BE
QUICK.
ANANYA
CONVINCED
HER
BOSSES
TO
SEND
HER
TO
DELHI

FOR
A
WEEK.
AFTER
ALL,
EVERY
HLL
MANAGER
MUST
HAVE
NORTH
INDIA
EXPOSURE,
ANANYA
HAD
ARGUED.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
CAME
TO
DROP
US
AT
T
HE
AIRPORT.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
WORRIED
ABOUT
DELHI,
GIVEN
ITS
STATUS
AS
THE
WORLDWIDE
CAPITAL
OF
EVE-TEASING.
'MOM,
THE
HLL
GUEST-HOUSE

IS
SAFE.
I
WON'T
BE
OUT
MUCH,'
ANANYA
SAID.
ANANYA'S
DAD
HAD
HIS
WON
CONCERNS.
'REMEMBER,
WE
HAVE
SAID
YES.
BUT
YOU
ARE
NOT
MARRIED
YET.
DON'T
EMBARRASS
US,'
UNCLE
SAID
TO
ME
AS
HE
BID
US
GOODBYE.
'OF
COURSE,
UNCLE,'
I
SAID,
TRYING

TO
FIGURE
OUT
WHAT
HE
MEANT.
NO
SEX,
I
GUESS.
ANANYA
AND
I
WENT
INSIDE
THE
TERMINAL.
SHE
GRABBED
MY
ARM
AS
HER
PARENTS
MELTED
OUT
OF
SIGHT.
THE
FLIGHT
TOOK
OFF.
I
BROUGHT
OUT
MY
NOTEBOOK
TO
EXPLAIN
THE
NEXT
STAGE
TO
ANANYA

—
OPERATION
DELHI.
'SO,
I
HAVE
TO
AGREE
WITH
YOUR
MOM,
WHATEVER
SHE
SAYS.
LIKE
WHATEVER,'
ANANYA
SAID,
TWENTY
MINUTES
INTO
THE
FLIGHT
AND
THIRTY
THOUSAND
FEET
HIGH
IN
THE
SKY.
THE
PLANE
PASSED
THROUGH
AN
AREA
OF
TURBULENCE.
'YES,
NEVER
DISAGREE,'
I
SAID,

TIGHTENING
MY
SEAT-BELT,
'AND
THE
TIMING
OF
YOUR
TRIP
COULD
NOT
BE
BETTER.
MY
COUSIN
SISTER
MINTI
IS
GETTING
MARRIED
NEXT
WEEK.
YOU'LL
COME
TO
THE
WEDDING,
MEET
EVERYONE,
BINGO,
DONE.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ANANYA
LIFTED
THE
ARMREST
TO
HOLD
MY
ARM
TIGHT.
'I'M
SURE
I'LL
BE
FINE
WITH
YOU.'
'SEE,
YOU
HAVE
TO
WIN
OVER
MY
MOTHER.
MY
FATHER
WON'T
AGREE
EVER,
SO
HE
IS
NOT
PART
OF
THE
EQUATION.
MAKE
MOM
HAPPY,
OK?'

'LOWER
THE
ARMREST,
IT
IS
NOT
SAFE,'
THE
FLIGHT
ATTENDED
SAID
IN
A
STRICT
VOICE
AS
SHE
PASSED
THE
AISLE.
WHEN
YOU
ARE
PART
OF
A
COUPLE,
YOU
DON'T
REALISE
HOW
CHEESY
YOUR
AFFECTIONS
ARE
TO
THE
OUTSIDE
WORLD.
'WHO
DOES
SHE
THINK
SHE

IS?’
ANANYA
HUFFED.
‘MY
MOTHER?’
‘NO,
THE
AIRHOSTESS.
WHAT’S
WITH
THE
THICK
RED
LIPSTICK?
IS
SHE
A
FLIGHT
ATTENDANT
OR
AN
ITEM
GIRL?’
I
DON’T
KNOW
WHY
WOMEN
LOVE
COMMENTING
ON
OTHER
WOMEN’S
APPEARANCES.
I
NEVER
NOTICED
THE
BALD
MAN
NEXT
TO
ME,
WHO

SNORES
THROUGH
THE
FLIGHT.
'FOCUS,
ANANYA.
YOU
ARE
DEALING
WITH
A
PUNJABI
MOTHER-IN-LAW
HERE.
YOU
HAVE
NEVER
SEEN
ANYTHING
LIKE
THIS,'
I
SAID.
'CAN'T
WAIT,'
ANANYA
SAID,
SARCASM
DRIPPING
FROM
HER
MOUTH
LIKE
THE
AIRHOSTESS'S
LIPSTICK.

**DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ACT
4:
DELHI
RELOADED**

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
42
'LET
GO
OF
MY
ELBOW,'
I
SAID.
'WHY?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'I
SEE
MY
MOTHER.'
MOTHER
WAITED
AT
THE
ARRIVAL
AREA.
SHE
STOOD
AMONG
TEN
THOUSAND
DRIVERS
HOLDING
PLACARDS
WITH
EVERY
PUNJABI
NAME
POSSIBLE.
THERE
WERE
NO
MORE
VENKATS
AND
RAMASWAMIS,

ONLY
ARORAS
AND
KHANNAS.
WHEN
PEOPLE
LAND
AT
CHENNAI
AIRPORT,
THEY
EXCHANGE
SMILES
AND
PROCEED
GENTLY
TO
THE
CAR
PARK.
AT
DELHI,
THERE
IS
A
TRAFFIC
JAM
OF
PEOPLE
TRYING
TO
HUG
EACH
OTHER
TO
DEATH.
MY
MOTHER
HUGGED
ME
TIGHT,
AND
EVEN
THOUGH

IT
WAS
OVER
THE
TOP,
I
LIKED
IT.
NO
ONE
HAD
HUGGED
ME
LIKE
THAT
IN
CHENNAI
FOR
THE
LAST
SIX
MONTHS
(APART
FROM
ANANYA,
OF
COURSE,
BUT
THAT'S
A
DIFFERENT
CATEGORY
OF
AFFECTION).
WE
WALKED
TOWARDS
THE
AUTO
STAND.
ANANYA
GREETED
MY
MOTHER

BUT
IT
WENT
UNNOTICED.
'YOU
ARE?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED
ME
THE
MOST
IMPORTANT
QUESTION.
I
NODDED.
'WHAT
DID
THEY
SERVE?'
I
NOTICED
SHE
WAS
IGNORING
ANANYA
COMPLETELY.
'PANEER
MASALA
AND
RICE,'
I
SAID.
'MOM,
YOU'VE
MET
ANANYA,
REMEMBER?'
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
ANANYA
A
FAKE

SMILE
AND
TURNED
BACK
TO
ME.
'NO
ROTIS?'
'MOM,
ANANYA
HAS
A
ONE-WEEK
STINT
IN
HER
DELHI
OFFICE.'
'WHERE
WILL
SHE
STAY?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
HER
VOICE
CONCERNED.
'AT
THE
COMPANY
GUEST-HOUSE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'YES,
BUT
SHE
ONLY
JOINS
THEM
DAY
AFTER,
ON
MONDAY.

I
THOUGHT
IT
WILL
BE
A
GOOD
IDEA
IF
SHE
CAME
HOME
FOR
THE
WEEKEND.'
'WHOSE
HOME?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED,
AGHAUST.
'OUR
HOME,'
I
SAID.
I
REMOVED
MY
BAGS
FROM
THE
TROLLEY
AT
THE
AUTO
STAND.
MY
MOTHER
TURNED
SILENT.
I
PAID
THE
MONEY

AT
THE
PRE-PAID
STAND.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WE
FIT
OURSELVES
AND
OUR
BAGS
INTO
THE
AUTO.
I
SAT
IN
THE
MIDDLE,
WITH
ANANYA
ON
MY
RIGHT
AND
MY
MOTHER
ON
THE
LEFT.
'ALL
SET
FOR
MINTI'S
WEDDING?'
I
SAID.
'WHAT
A
BOY
MINTI
IS
GOING
TO
MARRY!'
MY

MOTHER
SAID.
'REALLY?
IS
HE
GOOD?'
I
SAID.
'OH
YES,
SO
GOOD-LOOKING.
WHITE
AS
MILK,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
'AND
GUESS
THE
BUDGET
OF
THE
WEDDING?'
I
SHRUGGED.
'RAJJI
MAMA
IS
SPENDING
FIVE
LAKH
ON
THE
PARTIES
ALONE.
PLUS
THEY
HAVE
A
BIG
SURPRISE
GIFT

FOR
THE
BOY
FOR
THE
SAGAN.'
'WHAT'S
THE
BOY'S
NAME?'
I
SAID.
ANANYA
DIDN'T
PARTICIPATE
IN
THE
CONVERSATION.
SHE
TURNED
HER
FACE
TO
THE
SCENERY
OUTSIDE.
HER
HAIR
BLEW
IN
THE
BREEZE
AND
A
FEW
STRANDS
CARESSED
MY
FACE.
'I
FORGET
HIS
REAL
NAME,

BUT
EVERYBODY
CALLS
HIM
DUKE.'
'DUKE?
LIKE
BRITISH
ROYALTY
DUKE?'
I
SAID.
'YES,
HE
IS
AN
ENGINEER
FROM
A
DONATION
COLLEGE.
NOW
HE
WORKS
IN
ESCORTS
SOFTWARE.
AND
HIS
PARENTS
ARE
SO
NICE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'EVERY
OCCASION
THEY
HAVE
MET
YOUR
MAMA-JI,
THEY

BRING
SOMETHING
FOR
ME.
THEY'VE
ALREADY
GIVEN
ME
THREE
SARIS.'
'AMAZING,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
SHOULD
SEE
HOW
THEY
GIVE
RESPECT.
THE
BOY
TOUCHES
MY
FEET
EVERY
TIME
HE
MEETS
ME.'
I
NODDED.
I
WANTED
TO
END
THE
TOPIC.
BUT
MY
MOTHER
WAS
IN
FULL

FORM.

'I
ASKED
RAJJI
MAMA
WHY
HE
IS
SPENDING
SO
MUCH.

YOU
KNOW
WHAT
HE
SAID?'

'WHAT?'

'HE
SAID
"DIDI,
WHERE
DO
YOU
GET
GOOD
BOYS
THESE
DAYS?"

SO,
I
SAID,
IF
DUKE
IS
GETTING
THIS,
WHAT
WILL
KRISH
GET?'

I
KEPT
QUIET.
MY

MOTHER
CONTINUED
ANYWAY.
'HE
SAID
IF
DUKE'S
BUDGET
IS
FIVE
LAKHS,
YOURS
SHOULD
BE
TEN
LAKHS,
GIFTS
SEPARATE.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THANKS
FOR
PRICING
ME,'
I
SAID.
'I
AM
JUST
SAYING....'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
WE
REMAINED
SILENT
FOR
THE
NEXT
FIVE
MINUTES.
MY
MOTHER
SHIFTED
IN
HER
SEAT
DUE
TO
LACK
OF
SPACE.
'YOU
COULD
HAVE
BOOKED
A
CAR.
I
WOULD
HAVE

PAID,'
I
SAID.
'I
DIDN'T
KNOW
YOU'LL
BRING
EXTRA
LUGGAGE
FROM
CHENNAI,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
I
SHOWED
ANANYA
THE
GUEST-ROOM.
SHE
KEPT
QUIET
AS
SHE
TOOK
OUT
FRESH
CLOTHES
TO
TAKE
INTO
THE
BATHROOM.
'HEY,
I'M
SORRY
ABOUT
MY
MOTHER.
SHE'S
ALL
TALK.
GOOD

AT
HEART.'
'EVEN
MURDERERS
ARE
GOOD
AT
HEART.
I
THOUGHT
YOU
HAD
TOLD
HER
ABOUT
MY
COMING.'
'I
WANTED
TO
GIVE
HER
A
SURPRISE,'
I
SAID.
'FUCK
OFF,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
PUSHED
ME
OUT
OF
THE
ROOM.
MY
FATHER
HAD
GONE
FOR
A

BUSINESS
MEETING.
EVER
SINCE
HE
LEFT
THE
ARMY,
HE
HAD
TRIED
DIFFERENT
VENTURES.
THESE
INCLUDED
A
PROPERTY
DEALERSHIP,
A
SECURITY
AGENCY
AND
A
FREIGHT
FORWARDING
AGENCY.
NONE
OF
THEM
WORKED.
ACCORDING
TO
HIM,
UNSCRUPULOUS
PARTNERS
OR
CORRUPT
OFFICIALS
HAD
LED
TO
THEIR
FAILURE.
ACCORDING

TO
ME,
IT
WAS
HIS
SHORT
TEMPER
AND
INABILITY
TO
COME
OUT
OF
HIS
ARMY
OFFICER
MODE.
WHEN
YOU
ARE
USED
TO
A
HUNDRED
PEOPLE
SALUTING
YOU
EVERY
DAY,
IT
IS
DIFFICULT
TO
SUCK
UP
TO
UNEDUCATED
BUILDERS
TO
ALLOW
YOU
TO
SELL
THEIR

HOUSE.
HOWEVER,
MY
FATHER
KEPT
JUMPING
FROM
ONE
DISASTER
TO
THE
NEXT,
WHICH
KEPT
HIM
OUT
OF
THE
HOUSE
MOST
OF
THE
TIMES.
SOME
EVEN
SAID
HE
HAD
A
MISTRESS
SOMEWHERE,
THOUGH
I
DOUBT
ANOTHER
WOMAN
COULD
SURVIVE
HIM.
ANANYA
HADN'T
LEFT
HER
ROOM

EVER
SINCE
SHE
CAME.
MY
MOTHER
WENT
FOR
HER
EVENING
STROLL
AT
6
P.M.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING
INSIDE?
COME
OUT,
MOM'S
GONE
FOR
A
WALK.'
SHE
OPENED
THE
DOOR,
HER
FACE
STILL
UPSET.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SHOULD
WE
MAKE
LOVE?'
I
WINKED
AT
HER.
'DON'T
TEST
YOUR
LUCK,
MR
MALHOTRA,
I
SHALL
TURN
VIOLENT.'
SHE
PUSHED
ME
ASIDE
AND
CAME
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
SHE
SWITCHED
ON
THE
TV.
'WHAT'S
WITH
THIS
ATTITUDE,
ANANYA?
YOU
ARE
SUPPOSED

TO
WIN
MY
FOLKS
OVER,'
I
SAID.
'YOU
CAN
WIN
OVER
NORMAL
PEOPLE.
NOT
RUDE,
INSENSITIVE
PEOPLE
WHO
INSULT
GUESTS,'
SHE
SAID.
'SO
YOU
WILL
STAY
INSIDE
THAT
ROOM
AND
SULK?'
I
SWITCHED
THE
TV
OFF.
'I
DON'T
KNOW
WHAT
TO
DO,'
SHE
SAID.

'IF
YOU
LISTEN
TO
ME,
YOU
WILL
BE
ABLE
TO
NAVIGATE
HER.'

'I
AM
ALL
EARS,'
SHE
SAID
DRYLY.
'DINNER,'

I
SAID.
'DINNER
WHAT?
DO
YOU
GUYS
TALK
ANYTHING
BUT
FOOD?
WHAT
WAS
THAT?
SHE
ASKED
WHAT
THEY
SERVED
US
ON
THE
PLANE?
LIKE

THE
FIRST
THING
WHEN
YOU
LANDED.'

I
OPENED
THE
FRIDGE
AND
TOOK
OUT
TWO
FROOTIS.

I
GAVE
HER
ONE.
'SHE
IS
GOING
TO
COME
BACK
FROM
HER
WALK
AND
PREPARE
DINNER.

OFFER
TO
HELP
HER,
IT
IS
A
GOOD
START.'

'HELP
HER?'

SHE
POKED

A
STRAW
INTO
THE
FROOTI
WITH
MORE
FORCE
THAN
NECESSARY.
'YOU
KNOW,
MAKE
A
DISH
OR
TWO.
OR
IF
YOU
WANT
TO
BOWL
HER
OVER,
MAKE
THE
DINNER
TONIGHT.'
'WHAT?
ARE
YOU
CRAZY,
I'VE
NEVER
MADE
FULL
DINNER.'
'REALLY?'
I
SLURPED
NOISILY
AT
MY

DRINK.
'DON'T
"REALLY"
ME.
DID
YOU
EVER
LEARN
TO
COOK?'
'NO,
BUT
I
STUDIED
ALL
THE
TIME.'
'I
WENT
TO
LIMA,
TOO.'
'YEAH
BUT,'
I
SAID
AND
PAUSED.
'YEAH
BUT,
WHAT?
I
AM
A
GIRL,
SO
TOUGH
LUCK,
BABY.
THERE'S
THE
KITCHEN,'
SHE
SAID

AND
TOSSED
THE
FROOTI
CARTON
ON
THE
TABLE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'ANANYA,
I
AM
SUGGESTING
WAYS
TO
WIN
OVER
MY
MOTHER.
YOU
SAID
YOU
WILL
DO
WHATEVER
IT
TAKES.'
'FINE,
CAN
I
HAVE
ANOTHER
FROOTI?
I
AM
FAMISHED.'
I
GAVE
ANANYA
ANOTHER
TETRAPACK.
THE
DOORBELL
RANG.
ANANYA
STOOD
UP
TOO
GO
TO

HER
ROOM.
'STAY,'
I
SAID
AS
I
OPENED
THE
DOOR.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

43
MY
MOTHER
CAME
BACK
WITH
TWO
PLASTIC
BAGS
FULL
OF
VEGETABLES.

I
HELPED
HER
CARRY
THEM
INTO
THE
KITCHEN.
SHE
OPENED
THE
FRIDGE
TO
KEEP
THE
VEGETABLES
INSIDE.

'WHO
HAD
THE
FROOTIS?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.

'I
HAD
ONE.
AND
ANANYA

ALSO.'
'THREE
FROOTIS
ARE
MISSING.
SHE
HAD
TWO?'
SHE
SAID.
I
KEPT
QUIET.
WE
CAME
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
MY
MOTHER
BROUGHT
A
GIANT
CAULIFLOWER,
A
PLATE
AND
A
KNIFE
WITH
HER.
SHE
STARTED
CUTTING
LITTLE
FLORETS
WITH
THE
KNIFE,
USING
HER
THUMB
AS

A
BASE.
'AUNTY,
CAN
I
HELP?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WITH?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WITH
DINNER,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'YEAH,
MOM,
WHY
DON'T
YOU
LET
ANANYA
MAKE
DINNER
TODAY?'
I
SUGGESTED
WITH
A
HEAVY
SMILE.
ANANYA
GLARED
AT
ME.
TO
HELP
IS
ONE
THING,
TO
PREPARE
A

WHOLE
MEAL
ANOTHER.
STILL,
IF
ANANYA
HAD
TO
MAKE
AN
IMPRESSION,
SHE
HAD
TO
MORE
THAN
WASH
THE
VEGETABLES.
MY
MOTHER
LOOKED
AT
ANANYA.
'SURE,
AUNTY,
WHY
NOT?
IT
WILL
BE
FUN,'
ANANYA
SAID.
MOM
SHRUGGED
AND
PASSED
THE
PLATE
TO
ANANYA.
'KRISH
LIKES

GOBI
ALOO.
I
THOUGHT
WE
WILL
ALSO
MAKE
BLACK
DAAL,
BHINDI,
RAITA
AND
SALAD.
NOTHING
MUCH,
SIMPLE
DINNER.
'MOM,'
I
SAID,
TO
STOP
HER
FROM
INCREASING
THE
MENU.
'THE
DRY
ATTA
IS
IN
THE
DRUM
BELOW
THE
GAS
STOVE.
KNEAD
SOME
FOR
THE
ROTIS,'

MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'YES,
KRISH?'
'NOTHING.
YOU
WANT
TO
COOK
TOGETHER
SO
IT
IS
FASTER?'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'SHE
CAN
MAKE
IT
IF
SHE
WANTS
TO.

I
AM
NOT
THAT
HUNGRY.
LET
IT
TAKE
TIME,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AND
SWITCHED
ON
THE
TV.

ANANYA
CRADLED
THE
CAULIFLOWER
IN
HER
LAP
LIKE
A
NEWBORN
CHILD.
SHE
COULDN'T
CUT
IT
LIKE

A
PRO,
WITH
THE
KNIFE
AND
THUMB
ACTION.
SHE
CUT
FLORETS
ONE
AT
A
TIME,
USING
THE
KNIFE
LIKE
A
SAW.
MY
MOTHER
SNIGGERED.
I
GAVE
HER
A
DIRTY
LOOK.
'I
HAVE
A
HEADACHE.
I'LL
REST
IN
MY
ROOM.
CALL
ME
WHEN
DINNER
IS

READY,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AND
LEFT.
'ANANYA,
YOU
WANT
HELP?'
I
SAID.
'LEAVE
ME
ALONE,'
ANANYA
SAID,
HER
GAZE
DEEP
INTO
THE
CAULIFLOWER.
'USE
YOUR
THUMB,
LIKE
THIS,'
I
SAID
AND
MOCKED
THE
ACTION
WITH
MY
HAND.
ANANYA
TRIED.
TWO
FLORETS
LATER,
SHE
CUT

HERSELF.
'OUCH!'
SHE
SCREAMED.
'WHAT
HAPPENED?'
'NOTHING,'
SHE
SNIFFED.
'NOTHING,
GO
REST
WITH
YOUR
MOTHER.'
'IS
THAT
BLOOD?'
I
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
HURT!'
'IT'S
OK.
I
SAID
I
WILL
DO
WHAT
IT
TAKES.
WHAT'S
A
LITTLE
BLOOD?'
'THIS
CUT
IS
NOT
MY
MOTHER'S
FAULT,'

I
SAID.
'SHUT
UP
AND
GET
ME
A
BAND-AID.
AND
BRING
THE
BHINDI
FROM
THE
FRIDGE,'
SHE
SAID.
AN
HOUR
LATER
WE
HAD
CUT
THE
GOBI,
BHINDI,
ONIONS,
GARLIC,
GINGER,
TOMATOES,
CUCUMBER
AND
GREEN
CHILLIES
REQUIRED
FOR
THE
VARIOUS
DISHES.
UNTIL
YOU
DO
IT

YOURSELF,
YOU
DON'T
REALISE
THE
EFFORT
YOUR
MOTHER
PUTS
INTO
EVERY
MEAL.
WE
WENT
TO
THE
KITCHEN.
I
TOOK
OUT
THE
ATTA
IN
A
BOWL.
'I
HAVE
NO
CLUE
HOW
TO
KNEAD
THIS,'
SHE
SAID.
'IT'S
OK,
I'VE
SEEN
MY
MOTHER
DO
IT.
LET

ME
TRY,'
I
SAID
AND
POURED
WATER
INTO
THE
BOWL.
'AND
YOU
FRY
THE
ONIONS
IN
...THIS?'
ANANYA
PULLED
OUT
A
KADHAI
FROM
THE
UTENSIL
SHELF.
'YES,
PLEASE,'
I
SAID
AND
SWITCHED
ON
THE
GAS.
I
OPENED
THE
BOX
OF
SPICES.
SHE
DIDN'T
KNOW

HOW
TO
USE
THEM.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'REMEMBER
THE
FIVE
CONSTANT
SPICES
IN
EVERY
PUNJABI
DISH
—
SALT,
TURMERIC,
RED
CHILLIES,
CORIANDER
POWDER
AND
GARAM
MASALA,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA
COOKED
THE
VEGETABLES
WHILE
I
WORKED
THE
ATTA.
I
HAD
TO
REFILL
THE
ATTA
TWICE
DUE
TO
TOO
MUCH

STICKINESS.

A
PUNGENT
SMOKE
ROSE
IN
THE
KITCHEN.
BOTH
OF
US
HAD
A
COUGHING
FIT.

‘WHAT
DID
YOU
DO?’

I
SAID.
‘I

...
DON’T

...
KNOW.’
ANANYA
COUGHED
UNCONTROLLABLY.

MY
MOTHER
CAME
INTO
THE
KITCHEN.

‘WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING?’

SHE
RAN
TO
THE
STOVE

AND
LOWERED
THE
FLAME.

'WHO
COOKS
ON
SUCH
A
HIGH
FLAME?
SEE,
THE
SPICES
HAVE
BURNT.'
ANANYA
BACKED
OFF
FROM
THE
STOVE.

'AND
YOU?
WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING
HERE?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.

'I

...

I
CAME
HERE
BECAUSE
OF
THE
BURNING
SMELL,'

I
SAID.

'AND
YOU
HANDS
FELL
INTO
THE
ATTA?'
SHE
SAID,
POINTING
TO
MY
DOUGH-SMEARED
PALMS
AND
FINGERS.

I
KEPT
QUIET.
'SEE,
THIS
IS
HOW
SHE
WILL
USE
YOU
AFTER
MARRIAGE.

SHE
CAN'T
EVEN
MAKE
ROTIS.'
ANANYA
EXITED
THE
KITCHEN.

I
WANTED
TO
GO
AFTER
HER,

BUT
WITH
MOM
PRESENT,
IT
DIDN'T
SEEM
LIKE
A
GOOD
IDEA.
I
THREW
UP
MY
ATTA-FILLED
HANDS
IN
DESPAIR.
'SHE
IS
SOUTH
INDIAN,
MOM,
HOW
CAN
YOU
EXPECT
HER
TO....'
'YOU
SAID
SHE
WANTS
TO
MAKE
DINNER.
PK,
TELL
HER
TO
MAKE
DOSAS
IF

SHE
WANTS.
CAN
SHE
MAKE
DOSAS?’
‘YEAH,
I
AM
SURE.
BUT
YOU
NEED
A
GRINDER....’
ANANYA
CAME
BACK
INTO
THE
KITCHEN.
‘NO,
AUNTY,
I
CAN’T
MAKE
DOSAS,’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘AND
I
CAN’T
MAKE
A
ROTI
EITHER.
IN
FACT,
I
AM
TERRIBLE
AT
COOKING
ANYTHING.’

'APART
FROM
COOKING
SCHEMES
TO
TRAP
MY
BOY,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
THEY
EXCHANGED
BATTLEFIELD
LOOKS,
ANANYA
LEFT
THE
KITCHEN
IN
DISGUST.
'MOM!'
I
SAID
IN
FRUSTRATION.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT?
WHAT
ELSE
IS
THIS?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
UNDER
HER
SPELL.
YOU
BRING
HER
HOME.
YOU
KNEAD
ATTA
FOR
HER.
YOU
GIVE
HER
TWO
FROOTIS
I
HAD
BROUGHT
FOR
GUESTS.
YOU
ARE
SO
WORRIED
ABOUT
HER.
WHAT
ABOUT
ME?'

'WHAT
ABOUT
YOU,
MOM?'

'WHAT
IS
SHE
DOING
HERE?'

'MOM,
SHE
CAN
HEAR
YOU.'

'SEE,
YOU
ONLY
CARE
ABOUT
HER.

GO,
BE
WITH
HER.'

MY
MOTHER
REARRANGED
THE
PLATES
IN
THE
KITCHEN.

SHE
THREW
THE
OLD
SPICE
MIXTURE
AND
MADE
A
NEW
ONE
AS

I
LEFT.
'GET
ME
TO
THE
GUEST-HOUSE.

I
WANT
TO
LEAVE,'
ANANYA
SAID,
HER
FACE
WET
WITH
TEARS.

'NO,'
I
SAID
AND
WIPED
HER
TEARS.
'NO,
YOU
CAN'T.'

'I
CAN'T
DO
THIS,'
SHE
SAID.

'I
THOUGHT
CONVINCING
MY
PARENTS
WOULD
BE
ENOUGH.
YOU
SAID

YOUR
MOTHER
IS
SWEET.
SWEET?
IF
YOUR
MOM
IS
SWEET,
THEN
HITLER
IS
A
CUDDLY
TOY.'
'TAKE
A
SHOWER,
ANANYA,'
I
SAID.
'LET'S
ALL
EAT
DINNER
TOGETHER.'
WE
SAT
DOWN
FOR
DINNER.
MY
MOTHER
SERVED
ME.
ANANYA
TOOK
THE
FOOD
HERSELF.
I
CHOSE
THE

TOPIC.
'WHAT
ARE
THE
IMPORTANT
CEREMONIES
FOR
MINTI'S
WEDDING?'
'I
HAVE
TO
GO
EVERY
DAY,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
CHEWING
HER
FOOD.
'THERE
IS
A
PUJA,
THEN
A
SANGEET.
OF
COURSE,
THE
IMPORTANT
ONES
ARE
THE
SAGAN
AND
THE
MARRIAGE,
NEXT
FRIDAY
AND
SUNDAY.
YOU'LL

COME,
NO?’
‘SAGAN
AND
MARRIAGE,
OF
COURSE.
I’LL
BRING
ANANYA,
TOO.’
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
ME
A
DIRTY
LOOK.
SHE
DIDN’T
WANT
TO
TALK
ABOUT
IT
WITH
ANANYA
PRESENT.
‘DON’T
AVOID
THE
TOPIC,
MOM.
I’VE
BROUGHT
ANANYA
HERE
SO
YOU
AND
THE
FAMILY
GET
TO

KNOW
HER.'
'I
ALREADY
KNOW
SHE
CAN'T
COOK
DINNER,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'I'M
SORRY,
AUNTY,'
ANANYA
SAID.
I
DIDN'T
EXPECT
IT
BUT
FELT
RELIEVED
THAT
ANANYA
APOLOGISED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'IT'S
FINE,
YOU
MODERN
GIRLS
ARE
LIKE
THIS.
THAT
IS
WHY
I
WANT
KRISH
TO
MARRY....'
'MOM,
I
WANT
TO
MARRY
ANANYA,'
I
SAID,
'IN
CASE
IT
IS
NOT
CLEAR.'
MY
MOTHER
PLACED
THE
PIECE
OF
ROTI
BACK
ON
HER
PLATE

AND
PUSHED
THE
CHAIR
BACK
TO
GET
UP.
'MOM,
PLEASE
WAIT.
I
WANT
TO
TALK,'
I
SAID.
'WHY
SHOULD
I
TALK?
YOU
WILL
DO
WHATEVER
YOU
WANT
ANYWAY.
GO
TO
THE
TEMPLE
RIGHT
NOW
AND
GET
MARRIED.'
'AUNTY,
WE
WANT
YOU
TO
BE
HAPPY

ABOUT
IT,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WELL,
I
AM
NOT.
YOU
CAN'T
FORCE
ME
TO
BE
HAPPY.
EVERYONE
IS
PRAISING
MINTI'S
MOTHER
FOR
HER
CHOICE.
I'VE
SUFFERED
FOR
YEARS
TO
BRING
MY
SON
UP.
WHY
CAN'T
I
HAVE
THE
SAME
HAPPINESS?
I
WANT
A
LAVISH
WEDDING,

I
WANT
THE
GIRL'S
PARENTS
TO
RESPECT
ME,
I
WANT
THE
GIRL
TO
BE
APPROVED
OF
BY
MY
BROTHERS
AND
SISTERS.'
'THEY
WILL
LIKE
ANANYA!
SHE
IS
INTELLIGENT,
EDUCATED....'
'SHE
IS
SOUTH
INDIAN,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
CUTTING
ME.
'SO
WHAT?
LET'S
SEE
WHAT
YOUR

BROTHERS
AND
SISTERS
SAY
ABOUT
ANANYA.
THIS
WEDDING
IS
A
PERFECT
EXCUSE.'
'AND
WHO
WILL
I
SAY
SHE
IS?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED
GRIMLY.
'SAY
SHE
IS
KRISH'S
CLASSMATE
WHO'S
NEVER
SEEN
A
PUNJABI
MARRIAGE
CEREMONY
AND
WANTED
TO
COME,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
KEPT

QUIET.
SHE
PICKED
UP
HER
ROTI
AND
BEGAN
TO
EAT
AGAIN.
'AUNTY,
I
AM
SORRY
I
CAME
UNANNOUNCED.
I
THOUGHT
KRISH
HAD
TOLD
YOU.'
'HE
NEVER
TELLS
ME
ANYTHING.
HE
IS
SO
CARELESS,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'I
AGREE,
HE
DOESN'T
COMMUNICATE
WELL,'
ANANYA
SAID.

'SEE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
TO
ME.
EVEN
THOUGH
THEY
WERE
GANGING
UP
AGAINST
ME,
I
LET
IT
PASS.
I
WANTED
THEM
TO
BOND
IN
ANY
WAY
POSSIBLE.
'THE
DAAL
IS
EXCELLENT,
AUNTY,
YOU
MUST
TEACH
ME
HOW
TO
MAKE
IT,'
ANANYA
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THEN
WHY
ARE
YOU
EATING
LIKE
A
SQUIRREL?
TAKE
A
PROPER
HELPING,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'I'LL
SPEAK
TO
MINTI,'
I
PUT
IN.
'I'M
SURE
SHE
WILL
HAVE
NO
PROBLEM
IF
I
BRING
A
FRIEND.'
'ONLY
AS
A
FRIEND,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.

'THANKS,
MOM,'
I
SAID
AND
HUGGED
HER.
'YOUR
DAD
NEVER
GAVE
ME
ANYTHING.
YOU
DON'T
DEPRIVE
ME
OF
WHAT
I
DESERVE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHERE'S
UNCLE?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WHO
KNOWS?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'HE'LL
BE
BACK
LATE.
YOU'LL
SEE
HIM
IN
THE
MORNING.
YOU

ARE
SLEEPING
IN
THE
GUEST-ROOM
AND
KRISH
IN
HIS
ROOM,
RIGHT?’
‘OF
COURSE,
MOM,’
I
SAID,
‘HOW
ELSE?’
MY
MOTHER
FINISHED
DINNER.
ANANYA
OFFERED
TO
DO
THE
DISHES.
MY
MOTHER
SAID
THE
MAID
WOULD
ARRIVE
IN
THE
MORNING
BUT
ANANYA
INSISTED.
MY
MOTHER
WENT

TO
HER
ROOM.
'OK,
MISS
BRAND
MANAGER,
YOU
SURE
YOU
DON'T
NEED
HELP?'
I
SAID
AS
I
LEANED
AGAINST
THE
KITCHEN
WALL.
ANANYA
APPLIED
VIM
ON
THE
DISHES
WITH
A
WIRE
MESH.
'NO,
I
DON'T
WANT
TO
BE
ACCUSED
OF
TRAPPING
THE
PRINCE
OF

PUNJAB
AGAIN,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
MERCILESSLY
SCRUBBED
A
KADHAI.
'LET
ME
DRY
THE
DISHES,'
I
OFFERED.
'GO
AWAY,
I
BEG
YOU,'
SHE
SAID
AS
SHE
PUSHED
ME
OUT
OF
THE
KITCHEN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
44
'GOOD
MORNING

,
'UNCLE,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
CAME
INTO
THE
LIVING
ROOM
IN
HER
NIGHT-SUIT.
IT
WAS
SEVEN-THIRTY
IN
THE
MORNING.
MY
FATHER,
BOUND
TO
HIS
ARMY
HABIT,
HAD
SHOWERED
AND
CHANGED.
HE
LOOKED
UP
FROM
HIS
NEWSPAPER.
HE

DIDN'T
RESPOND.
'I'M
ANANYA,
KRISH'S
FRIEND.'
'GOOD,'
MY
FATHER
SAID
AND
WENT
BACK
TO
HIS
NEWSPAPER.
HE
KEPT
CALM.
I
KNEW
HE'D
BLOW
HIS
LID
WHEN
ANANYA
LEFT.
I
CAME
TO
THE
LIVING
ROOM
AND
IGNORED
HIM.
'ANANYA,
GET
READY.
WE
SHOULD
LEAVE
BEFORE

THE
PEAK-HOUR
TRAFFIC.'

'WHERE
ARE
YOU
GOING?'

MY
FATHER
SAID.

I
DIDN'T
ANSWER.

MY
FATHER
STOOD

UP
AND
WENT

TO
THE
KITCHEN.

'IS
THIS
THE
WAY
TO
BEHAVE?'

I
HEARD
HIM
SCREAM

AT
MY
MOTHER.

'WHAT
HAPPENED?'

MY
MOTHER
SAID

AS

I
KEPT
ONE

EAR
TO
THE
KITCHEN.
'I
ASKED
HIM
WHERE
IS
HE
GOING,
HE
DIDN'T
ANSWER.
AND
WHO
IS
THAT
GIRL?'
'HE
IS
GOING
TO
DROP
ANANYA
TO
HER
GUEST-HOUSE
AND
GO
TO
OFFICE.
WHY?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHY
CAN'T
HE
SAY
IT?
AND
WHY
DIDN'T

YOU
TELL
ME
WE
WILL
HAVE
A
VISITOR
IN
THE
HOUSE.'
'I
DIDN'T
KNOW,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'YOU
ARE
LYING
AGAIN,'
MY
FATHER
SCREAMED.
ANANYA
LOOKED
TERRIFIED.
'WELCOME
TO
MY
WORLD,'
I
SAID,
'NOW
LET'S
GET
THE
HELL
OUT
OF
HERE.'
I
CAME
HOME

FROM
WORK
AND
FOUND
DEADLY
SILENCE
IN
THE
HOUSE.
OBVIOUSLY,
MY
FATHER
WAS
HOME.
HE
SAT
AT
THE
DINING
TABLE
WITH
MY
MOTHER.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'KRISH,
YOUR
FATHER
WANTS
TO
TALK
TO
YOU,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'TELL
HIM,
I
DON'T
WANT
TO,'
I
SAID.
'HE
SAID
HE
WON'T
COME
FOR
MINTI'S
WEDDING
IF
YOU
DON'T
SPEAK
TO
HIM,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
WEDDINGS
ON
MY
MOTHER'S
SIDE

OF
THE
FAMILY
WERE
WHEN
WE
NEEDED
MY
FATHER
THE
MOST.
MY
MOTHER
WANTED
TO
PORTRAY
A
SENSE
OF
NORMALCY.
IF
MY
FATHER
SHOWED
HIS
FACE,
IT
PREVENTED
TONGUES
WAGGING
FOR
WEEKS.
I
HAD
NO
CHOICE.
I
WENT
AND
SAT
OPPOSITE
HIM.
'SO,
NOW

THAT
YOU
HAVE
RESORTED
TO
BLACKMAIL,
WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT
TO
TALK
ABOUT?’

I
SAID.
‘IT’S
NOT
BLACKMAIL.
WHEN
MY
FAMILY
DOESN’T
TALK
TO
ME,
WHY
SHOULD
I....’

HE
SAID.
‘WHATEVER.
WHAT
IS
IT?’

I
SAID.
‘WHO
IS
THAT
GIRL?’
‘ANANYA
SWAMINATHAN,’
‘HOW
DO

YOU
KNOW
HER?’
‘SHE
IS
A
CLASSMATE
FROM
COLLEGE
AND
MY
GIRLFRIEND.’
‘SEE
KAVITA,’
MY
FATHER
SAID,
‘AND
YOU
SAID
SHE
IS
ONLY
A
FRIEND.’
‘YOU
TALK
TO
ME,
WHY
DO
YOU
HAVE
TO
TAKE
IT
OUT
ON
HER,’
I
SAID.
‘WHAT
IS
THE

PURPOSE
OF
HER
VISIT
HERE?’
MY
FATHER
SAID.
‘SHE
CAME
ON
A
WORK
ASSIGNMENT.
MINTI
INVITED
HER
TO
THE
WEDDING.
DO
YOU
HAVE
A
PROBLEM?’
‘YOU
WILL
NOT
CHOOSE
A
GIRL
FOR
MARRIAGE.
I
WILL
CHOOSE
FOR
YOU,’
MY
FATHER
SAID.
‘YOU
WANT
TO

SELL
ME.
AND
WHILE
YOU
ARE
OUT
THERE
NEGOTIATING
ME,
WHAT'S
MY
GOING
RATE?'
'KAVITA,
THIS
BOY....'
'THIS
BOY
IS
RIGHT
HERE.
TALK
TO
ME.'
'I
AM
NOT
COMING
FOR
MINTI'S
WEDDING,'
MY
FATHER
ANNOUNCED.
'PLEASE,
DON'T
DO
THAT.
KRISH,
TALK
PROPERLY,'
MY
MOTHER

PLEADED.
'NO
MOM,
WE
WON'T
TAKE
HIM.
WE'LL
TELL
THEM
HE
IS
SICK,
MENTALLY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WATCH
YOUR
MOUTH,'
MY
FATHER
SAID
AND
RAISED
HIS
HAND.
'I
DARE
YOU,'
I
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP.
I
WENT
TO
MY
ROOM
BUT
COULD
HEAR
THEM.
'I
WON'T
COME
FOR
THE
WEDDING,
KAVITA,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
THE
SOUND
OF
A

CLATTERING
PLATE,
PRESUMABLY
SHOVED
AWAY
ON
THE
DINING
TABLE.
'DO
WHATEVER
YOU
WANT,
ALL
OF
YOU,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
I
LAY
IN
BED,
I
WONDERED
WHY
WE
EVEN
STAYED
TOGETHER
AS
A
FAMILY.
I
NEVER
THOUGHT
I
WOULD,
BUT
I
MISSED
CHENNAI.
SURE,
PEOPLE

THERE
DIDN'T
REALLY
CONNECT
WITH
ME,
BUT
AT
LEAST
NOBODY
COULD
JAB
MY
INSIDES.
I
THOUGHT
OF
CALLING
ANANYA
BUT
I
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
DUMP
MY
MOOD
ON
HER.
QUESTIONS
DARTED
IN
MY
MIND.
AM
I
EVEN
DOING
THE
RIGHT
THING
BY
BRINGING
ANANYA

INTO
THIS
FAMILY?
WHAT
IMPRESSION
WILL
SHE
HAVE
OF
ME?
WILL
SHE
CHANGE
HER
MIND
ABOUT
ME?
WATCHING
MY
MIND'S
STUPID
DAILY
PRE-SLEEP
THOUGHT
DANCE,
I
TOSSED
AND
TURNED
IN
BED
ALL
NIGHT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

45

MINTI'S
WEDDING
CEREMONY
TOOK
PLACE
AT
THE
TAJ
PALACE
HOTEL
IN
DHAULA
KUAN.
FRANKLY,
IT
WAS
A
BIG
DEAL
FOR
OUR
CLAN.
WE
HAD
SEEN
SOME
OVER
THE
TOP
WEDDINGS,
BUT
NEVER
BEFORE
DID
AN
ENGAGEMENT
CEREMONY
HAPPEN
AT
A

TOP
END
FIVE-STAR
HOTEL.
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
TAKEN
HIS
ONE-UPMANSHIP
AMONG
THE
RELATIVES
RIGHT
TO
THE
TOP
BY
BOOKING
THE
TAJ.
THE
BANQUET
HALL
ENTRANCE
HAD
A
SIGN.
THE
TALREJAS
WELCOME
YOU
TO
SAGAN
CEREMONY
OF
THEIR:
MOST
LOVELY
DAUGHTER
MANORAMA
(MINTI)
WITH
DASHING

GENTLEMAN
DHARAMVEER
(DUKE),
B.
TECH
'DON'T
LAUGH,'
I
SAID
TO
ANANYA,
SUPPRESSING
MY
OWN
SMILE.
'I
CAN'T
HELP
IT,'
SHE
GRINNED.
SHE
ADJUSTED
THE
DRAPE
OF
HER
BOTTLE
GREEN
AND
GOLD
SARI
FOR
THE
FIFTH
TIME.
'WELCOME-JI,
WELCOME,'
RAJJI
MAMA
GAVE
MY
MOTHER
AND

ME
HUGS
IN
QUICK
SUCCESSION.
WE
CAME
INSIDE
THE
BANQUET
HALL,
WHICH
HELD
TWO
HUNDRED
PEOPLE.
THE
MAIN
STAGE
HAD
TWO
ORNATE
CHAIRS
STOLEN
FROM
A
KING'S
PALACE.
ALONGSIDE,
THERE
WERE
SEVENTY-FIVE
BOXES
OF
SWEETS
AND
FIVE
GIANT
BASKETS
OF
FRUITS.
MOST
OF
THE

WOMEN
STOOD
AT
THE
CHAAT
AND
JUICE
COUNTER.

ALL
THE
MEN
STOOD
AT
THE
BAR.

I
HELPED
MY
FEMALE
COUSINS
ACCESS
VODKA
BY
GIVING
THEM
MY
GLASS,
WHICH
THEY
POURED
INTO
THEIR
JUICE.

'SO,
THERE
IS
RAJJI
MAMA,
LAPPA
MAMA,
SHIPRA
MASI
AND

YOUR
MOTHER

—

IN
THAT
ORDER,
RIGHT?’
ANANYA
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,
AND
SINCE
MY
MOTHER
IS
THE
YOUNGEST,
SHE
NEEDS
VALIDATION
FROM
ALL
OF
THEM
TO
DO
ANYTHING
IN
LIFE,'
I
SAID.
'FINE,
LET
ME
UNDERSTAND
FIRST.
MINTI
AND
ROHAN
ARE
RAJJI
MAMA'S
CHILDREN,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
TOOK
OUT
A
NOTEPAD.

'AND
WHO
IS
THE
GIRL
YOU
GAVE
THE
VODKA
TO?'
'THAT'S
TINKI,
AND
SHE
HAS
A
YOUNGER
SISTER
NIKKI,
BOTH
IN
COLLEGE.
THEY
ARE
LAPPA
MAMA'S
CHILDREN.
AND
SHIPRA
MASI
HAS
A
SON
AND
A
DAUGHTER,
BITTU
AND
KITTU.
THAT'S
IT,
MY
MOM
ONLY

HAS
ME.'
'OK,
OK,'
ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
FINISHED
TAKING
NOTES.
'KRISH,
COME
HERE,'
MY
MOTHER
SCREAMED.
SHE
STOOD
NEXT
TO
THE
STAGE.
'LET'S
GO,'
I
SAID
AND
PULLED
ANANYA'S
HAND.
ANANYA
HESITATED
AT
FIRST,
BUT
CAME
ALONG.
MY
MOTHER
SAT
WITH
AN
EIGHTY-YEAR-

OLD
LADY
WHO
WORE
A
GOLD
NECKLACE.
IT
HAD
A
PENDANT
BIGGER
THAN
THE
OLYMPIC
GOLD
MEDAL.
'SHE
IS
SWARAN
AUNTY,
MY
MASI,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
MY
GRANDMOTHER
HAD
DIED
A
COUPLE
OF
YEARS
AGO.
SWARAN
AUNTY
WAS
THE
SENIOR-
MOST
FAMILY
MEMBER
WHO

WAS
BROUGHT
OUT
AT
WEDDINGS
AND
OTHER
AUSPICIOUS
OCCASIONS
TO
BLESS
EVERYONE.

I
BENT
FORWARD
TO
TOUCH
HER
FEET.

I
SIGNALED
AND
ANANYA
FOLLOWED.

‘KAVITA,
TERI
NOO
HAI?’
SWARAN
AUNTY
SAID
IN
PUNJABI,
ASKING
IF
ANANYA
WAS
MY
MOTHER’S
DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.
MY
MOTHER
EXPLAINED
SHE

WAS
A
FRIEND.
'WHAT
IS
FRIEND?'
SWARAN
AUNTY
ASKED
ME.
'AUNTY,
YOU
NEED
CHAAT?'
I
COUNTERED.
'YES,
NOBODY
IS
GETTING
ME
ANYTHING,'
SHE
COMPLAINED.
I
RETURNED
WITH
A
PLATE
OF
CHAAT.
ANANYA
SAT
NEXT
TO
SWARAN
AUNTY
AND
MY
MOTHER.
'SHE
IS
MADRASI?'
SWARAN

AUNTY
SAID
IN
A
VOICE
LOUD
ENOUGH
TO
BELIE
HER
AGE.
'TAMILIAN,'
ANANYA
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'BUT
SHE
IS
FAIR
COMPLEXIONED?'
SWARAN
AUNTY
SAID,
GENUINELY
CONFUSED.
FOR
HER
YEARS,
HER
EYESIGHT
WASN'T
BAD
AT
ALL.
SHIPRA
MASI
PASSED
BY,
LOOKING
EXPENSIVE.
EVERYTHING
SHE
WORE
—
CLOTHES,
JEWELLERY,
HANDBAG
AND
SHOES
—
CONTAINED
REAL
GOLD
OF
VARYING
PROPORTIONS.

'SHIPRA,
SEE
THIS,
A
GORI
MADRASIN,'
SWARAN
AUNTY
SCREAMED.
'HELLO
KAVITA,
HOW
ARE
YOU
KRISH?'
'FINE
AUNTY,
MEET
MY
FRIEND,
ANANYA,'
'OH,
WE
ALL
KNOW
WHAT
KIND
OF
FRIEND.
YES,
SHE
IS
FAIR.'
SHIPRA
MASI
CALLED
FOR
RAJJI
MAMA
AND
LAPPA
MAMA'S
WIVES,
KAMLA

AND
RAJNI,
RESPECTIVELY.
'COME,
SEE
KRISH'S
FRIEND.
THE
MADRASIN
KAVITA
TOLD
US
ABOUT,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SHRIEKED.
RAJNI
AUNTY
AND
KAMLA
AUNTY
CAME
OVER.
WE
EXCHANGED
POLITE
GREETINGS.
MY
MOTHER
EXPLAINED
HOW
MY
FATHER
HAD
VIRAL
FEVER
SO
HE
COULDN'T
COME.
EVERYONE
KNEW
THE
TRUTH

BUT
NODDED
IN
TOTAL
SUPPORT.
SHIPRA
MASI
EVEN
SUGGESTED
SOME
MEDICINES.
'ANANYA
SWAMINATHAN,
AUNTY,'
ANANYA
REPEATED
HER
NAME
TO
KAMLA
MAMI
AS
SHE
HADN'T
CAUGHT
IT
THE
FIRST
TIME.
'YOU
ARE
SO
FAIR.
ARE
YOU
HUNDRED
PERCENT
SOUTH
INDIAN?'
KAMLA
MAMI
ASKED.
SHE
IS

ALSO
AN
IIMA
PASS
OUT
AND
A
BRAND
MANAGER
AT
HLL,
I
WANTED
TO
SAY.
BUT
THOSE
ARE
THINGS
YOU
DISCUSS
IN
CHENNAI,
NOT
AT
THE
TAJ
PALACE,
DELHI,
DURING
THE
TALREJA'S
SAGAN
CEREMONY.
'BY
SOUTH
INDIAN
STANDARDS,
SHE
IS
QUITE
PRETTY,'
SHIPRA
MASI

ADDED
INSIGHT.
'I
KNOW,
OTHERWISE
HOW
BLACK
AND
UGLY
THEY
ARE,'
KAMLA
MAMI
SAID.
EVERYONE
LAUGHED,
APART
FROM
ANANYA.
SHE
HAD
BRAVED
A
SMILE
ALL
ALONG,
BUT
IT
DISAPPEARED.
I
MOVED
NEXT
TO
HER
AND
GENTLY
PATTED
HER
BACK.
I
DIDN'T
WANT
HER
TO

REACT.
SMILE
LIKE
A
DITZ
AND
YOUR
CHANCES
OF
BEING
ACCEPTED
WILL
IMPROVE.
SOMETIMES,
LOVE
IS
TESTED
IN
STRANGE
WAYS.
'THE
BOY'S
SIDE
HAS
COME!'
KITTU,
MY
YOUNGEST
COUSIN,
CAME
RUNNING
INSIDE
LIKE
AMITABH
BACHCHAN
HAD
LOST
HIS
WAY
AND
RUNG
THE
DOORBELL.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'LET'S
GO,
LET'S
GO,'
KAMLA
MAMI
HAULED
UP
ALL
THE
LADIES.
THE
LADIES
DEPOSITED
THEIR
GOLD
SEQUINED
BAGS
WITH
SWARAN
AUNTY.
HER
IMMOBILITY
MADE
HER
AN
IDEAL
CLOAKROOM.
'SO,
WHAT
IS
THE
SURPRISE
GIFT?'
MY
MOTHER
EGGED
ON
KAMLA
AUNTY.
'YOU

WILL
SEE
IT
SOON-JI.
BUT
THE
EXPENSE
HAS
BROKEN
OUR
BACK.
MINTI'S
DADDY
HAD
TO
TAKE
A
LOAN.'
'IT'S
OK,
YOU
HAVE
ONLY
ONE
DAUGHTER,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
AS
ALL
OF
THEM
WALKED
OUT.
ANANYA
LET
OUT
A
HUGE
SIGH
AFTER
THE
PUNJABI
AUNTY

GANG
LEFT.
'YOU
OK?'

I
SAID.
'NO,
LET
ME
GUESS.
YOU
ARE
NOT
OK.'

'I
NEED
A
DRINK,
LET'S
GO
TO
THE
BAR,'
ANANYA
SAID.

'BUT
STAY
A
FEW
STEPS
AWAY.

I'LL
ORDER
THE
DRINK,'

I
SAID.
WE
REACHED
THE
BAR.
TINKI
AND
NIKKI

CAME
RUNNING
TO
ME,
THEIR
LEHNGAS
LIFTED
UP
TO
THEIR
ANKLES
WITH
THEIR
HANDS.
'KRISH
BHAIYA,
GET
A
FULL
GLASS
OF
NEAT
VODKA.
MY
FRIENDS
FROM
COLLEGE
HAVE
COME.'
'WHY
CAN'T
THE
GIRLS
TAKE
DRINKS
THEMSELVES?'
ANANYA
ASKED.
TINKI
AND
NIKKI
TURNED
TO
ANANYA,

PUZZLED.
AT
NINETEEN
AND
SEVENTEEN,
THEY
LOOKED
OVERDRESSED
IN
THEIR
DESIGNER
CLOTHES.
'TINKI,
NIKKI,
THIS
IS
ANANYA,'
I
SAID.
'OH,
YOU
ARE
THE
ONE,'
TINKI
EXCLAIMED.
'THE
ONE
WHO?'
I
SAID.
'SHE
IS
YOUR
GIRLFRIEND,
NO,
KRISH
BHAIIYA?'
NIKKI
SAID.
I
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
'YOU

ARE
BLUSHING,'
TINKI
SAID,
AND
TURNED
TO
ANANYA.
'I
LOVE
YOUR
EARRINGS.
WHERE
DID
YOU
GET
THEM
FROM?'
'COIMBATORE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WHERE
IS
THAT?'
TINKI
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'TAMIL
NADU,
THAT
IS
WHERE
I
COME
FROM,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'STUPID,
DIDN'T
YOU
READ
IT
IN
GEOGRAPHY?'
NIKKI
SCOLDED
HER
SISTER
AND
TURNED
TO
ME,
'YOUR
GIRLFRIEND
IS
SO
PRETTY.
AND
HER
SARI
IS
ALSO
SO
BEAUTIFUL.'
'THANKS,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'BOTH

OF
YOU
LOOK
GREAT.

I
WANT
A
LEHNGA
LIKE
THAT.'

I
TOOK
A
FULL
GLASS
OF
VODKA
FROM
THE
BAR
AND
POURED
IT
INTO
THREE
GLASSES.

I
TOPPED
THE
DRINKS
WITH
SPRITE
AND
BROUGHT
IT
FOR
THE
GIRLS.

'I
DON'T
DRINK.
IT'S
ONLY
FOR

THE
DJ
LATER,'
TINKI
CLARIFIED.
'ANYWAY
I
AM
EIGHTEEN
NOW.'
'YOU
WENT
TO
IIMA,
NO?
YOU
MUST
BE
SO
INTELLIGENT.
CAN
GIRLS
GET
INTO
IIM?
NIKKI
SAID.
'OF
COURSE,
WHY
NOT?
WHAT'S
IT
GOT
TO
DO
WITH
BEING
A
GIRL,'
ANANYA
SAID.
I
STEPPED

AWAY
FROM
THEM.
THE
GIRLS
TALKED
FOR
THE
NEXT
TEN
MINUTES.
IF
NOTHING
ELSE,
ANANYA
HAD
BONDED
WITH
THE
YOUNGER
SET
OF
MY
FAMILY.
WHY
WAS
IT
SO
MUCH
HARDER
TO
WIN
OVER
THE
OLDER
GENERATION?
'WHERE
ARE
YOU?'
MY
MOTHER'S
ANGRY
VOICE
CUT

INTO
MY
MUSINGS.
'THE
CEREMONY
IS
ABOUT
TO
START.'
I
COLLECTED
THE
GIRLS
AND
WE
WENT
TO
THE
STAGE.
MINTI
SAT
ON
THE
FLOOR
OF
THE
STAGE
WITH
DUKE
IN
FRONT
OF
HER.
A
PRIEST
SAT
ALONGSIDE.
AS
MY
AUNTS
WOULD
SAY,
DUKE
WAS

ON
THE
HEALTHIER
SIDE.
'HE
IS
FAT,'
ANANYA
SAID
FLATLY.
'SHUT
UP,
SOMEONE
WILL
HEAR
YOU,'
I
SAID.
'OH,
PEOPLE
REALLY
ARE
CAREFUL
ABOUT
WHAT
THEY
SAY
AROUND
HERE,'
ANANYA
SAID,
SARCASM
SHIMMERING
IN
HER
WORDS
LIKE
THE
SEQUINS
IN
HER
BLOUSE.
'C'MON
ANANYA,

THEY
ARE
NOT
EVEN
AWARE
THEY
ARE
BEING
OFFENSIVE.
YOU
WILL
LIKE
THEM
ONCE
YOU
KNOW
THEM.'
'PLEASE,
I
LIKE
YOUR
COUSINS,
LET
ME
BE
WITH
THEM,'
ANANYA
SAID,
HER
VOICE
DEFIANT
FROM
THE
VODKA.
'WE
LIKE
HER,'
NIKKI
AND
TINKI
CERTIFIED
AS
THEY

GAVE
ANANYA
A
HUG.
JUST
LIKE
MEN,
WOMEN
TOO
BECOME
FRIENDLIER
AFTER
ALCOHOL.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
DUKE
WAS
INDEED
FAIR
AS
MILK.
THE
CHUBBY
CHEEKS
AND
FAIR
COMPLEXION
MADE
HIM
LOOK
LIKE
A
SOLELY
CERELAC-FED
ADULT.
HE
WORE
A
SHINY
MAROON
KURTA,
OF
PROBABLY
THE
SAME
FABRIC
AS
ONE
OF
ANANYA'S
MOM'S
SARIS.
DAMN,
I
WAS
REMEMBERING

ANANYA'S
MOTHER
HERE.
FOCUS,
I
SAID
TO
MYSELF.
MINTI
WORE
AN
ORANGE
LEHNGA
STUDDED
WITH
SWAROVSKI
CRYSTALS
AND
OTHER
PRECIOUS
STONES.
ACCORDING
TO
MY
MOTHER,
IT
COST
TWENTY
THOUSAND
RUPEES,
WHILE
THE
WEDDING
SARI
HAD
COST
THIRTY
THOUSAND.
TEN
PERCENT
OF
THE
WEDDING
BUDGET

IS
BRIDAL
COSTUMES,
MY
BRAIN
MADE
A
USELESS
CALCULATION.
THE
PRIEST
CHANTED
MANTRAS.
MINTI
GESTURED
AT
HER
COUSINS
TO
ASK
IF
SHE
LOOKED
FINE.
NIKKI
PUT
HER
RIGHT
THUMB
TIP
AND
INDEX
FINGER
TIP
TOGETHER
TO
SIGNIFY
SHE
LOOKED
FAB.
NIKKI
ALSO
PUT
HER

RIGHT
MIDDLE
FINGER
ON
HER
FOREHEAD
TO
SHOW
MINTI
SHE
NEEDED
TO
ADJUST
HER
BINDI.
MINTI
FOLLOWED
THE
INSTRUCTIONS
AND
FIXED
HER
BINDI
WITH
THE
LEFT
HAND
EVEN
AS
THE
PRIEST
TIED
A
THREAD
ON
HER
RIGHT.
I
LEARNED
THREE
FACTS
ABOUT
WOMEN:
A)

THEY
NEVER
LOSE
TRACK
OF
HOW
THEY
LOOK;
B)
THEY
HELP
EACH
OTHER
OUT
BY
GIVING
INSTRUCTIONS
IN
ANY
WAY
POSSIBLE;
AND
C)
THEY
CAN
MULTI-TASK.
OF
COURSE,
MY
MIND
COULDN'T
FOCUS
ON
THE
CEREMONY.
I
THOUGHT
OF
WAYS
TO
MAKE
MY
FAMILY
LIKE

ANANYA.
DUKE
PULLED
OUT
AN
ENGAGEMENT
RING
FROM
HIS
KURTA
POCKET.
HE
DISPLAYED
IT
FOR
THE
CAMERAS.
A
COLLECTIVE
SIGH
RAN
ACROSS
THE
WOMEN
AS
THEY
REALISED
IT
WAS
A
SOLITAIRE.
'ONE-AND-A-HALF-CARATS
AT
LEAST,'
SHIPRA
MASI
CURATED
IT
IMMEDIATELY.
DUKE
PUT
THE
RING
ON

MINTI'S
FINGER
AND
EVERYONE
CLAPPED.
MINTI
GAVE
A
SHY
SMILE
AS
SHE
BROUGHT
OUT
A
RING,
A
SIMPLE
GOLD
BAND
FOR
DUKE.
SHE
PUT
THE
RING
ON
HIM.
'SHE
LOOKS
SO
SWEET,'
TINKI
SAID
AND
THE
TWO
SISTERS
GAVE
EACH
OTHER
HUGS,
THEIR
EYES

WET.
WOMEN
HAVE
SURPLUS
EMOTIONS
AND
THEY
DON'T
NEED
A
BIG
TRIGGER
TO
SPILL
THEM
OUT.
DUKE'S
FAMILY
WAITED
AFTER
THE
RING
CEREMONY
IN
ANTICIPATION.
RAJJI
MAMA
TOOK
OUT
A
LITTLE
BOX
FROM
HIS
SHIRT
POCKET.
HE
PASSED
IT
ON
TO
DUKE.
DUKE
REFUSED

THREE
TIMES.
RAJJI
MAMA
INSISTED
UNTIL
DUKE
ACCEPTED
IT.
DUKE
OPENED
THE
BLACK
BOX.
IT
HAD
A
KEY
WITH
THE
HYUNDAI
MOTORS
SIGN
ON
IT.
THIS
TIME
THE
WOMEN
AND
MEN
GAVE
OUT
A
COLLECTIVE
SIGH.
YES,
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
OUTDONE
THE
SOLITAIRE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THEY'VE
GIVEN
A
CAR,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID,
TO
MAKE
IT
CLEAR
IN
CASE
SOMEBODY
HADN'T
GOT
IT.
GROWN-UPS
FROM
BOTH
SIDES
OPENED
THEIR
RESPECTIVE
SWEET
BOXES
AND
FORCE-FED
THE
OTHER
FAMILY.
ALL
OF
US
WENT
ON
STAGE
ONE
BY
ONE
AND

CONGRATULATED
THE
COUPLE.
MINTI'S
PARENTS
GAVE
GIFTS
TO
ALL
OF
DUKE'S
UNCLES
AND
AUNTS.
DUKE'S
PARENTS
RETURNED
THE
FAVOUR.
MY
MOTHER
AND
SHIPRA
MASI
RECEIVED
A
SARI
EACH.
'SHOW
ME
YOURS,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
TO
MY
MOTHER.
FORTUNATELY,
THEY
FOUND
THEM
SIMILAR.
DUKE'S
PARENTS

COULD
NOT
BE
ACCUSED
OF
AUNT
FAVOUITISM.
RAJJI
MAMA
GLOATED
AFTER
EVERYONE
COMPLIMENTED
HIM
ON
THE
MASTERSTROKE
GIFT.
'UNCLE,
START
THE
DJ,'
NIKKI
SAID
TO
RAJJI
MAMA.
RAJJI
MAMA
NODDED
TOWARDS
THE
DANCE
FLOOR.
DJ
PUSSYCATS
FROM
RAJOURI
GARDEN
COMPRISED
OF
TWO
FAT
SURDS

WHO
HAD
WAITED
HOURS
FOR
THAT
SIGNAL.
THEY
STARTED
WITH
DHOL
BEATS.
ALL
THE
YOUNGER
COUSINS
HIT
THE
DANCE
FLOOR.
THE
UNCLES
NEEDED
A
FEW
MORE
PEGS
AND
THE
AUNTIES
NEEDED
A
FEW
MORE
ELBOW
PULLS
FROM
THE
YOUNGER
KIDS
TO
COME
AND
GROOVE.

'THEY
GAVE
A
CAR?'
ANANYA
SAID
IN
SHOCKED
VOICE
EVEN
AS
NIKKI
DRAGGED
HER
TOWARDS
THE
DANCE
FLOOR.
'YEAH,
A
SILVER
SANTRO,'
NIKKI
SAID,
'COME
NO,
DIDI.'
ANANYA
WENT
WITH
THE
GIRLS.
HER
YEARS
OF
BHARATNATYAM
TRAINING
MADE
HER
THE
BEST
PERFORMER
ON
THE

FLOOR.
SHE
PICKED
UP
THE
PUNJABI
STEPS
FAST
AND
EVEN
TAUGHT
MY
COUSINS
A
FEW
IMPROVISED
MOVES.
SHE
LOOKED
BEAUTIFUL
IN
HER
DARK
GREEN
KANJEEVARAM

.
LIKE
AN
IDIOT,
I
FELL
IN
LOVE
WITH
HER
ALL
OVER
AGAIN.
'HAVE
YOU
EATEN
DINNER?'
MY
MOTHER

CAME
UP
NEXT
TO
ME.
'ER
...NO,'
I
SAID,
PEELING
MY
EYES
AWAY
FROM
THE
FLOOR.
'THEN
EAT
FAST,
WE
WON'T
GET
AN
AUTO
HOME,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WE
WILL
BUY
A
CAR
SOON,'
I
SAID.
'LIKE
YOUR
FATHER
WILL
LET
US
HAVE
ONE.

ANYWAY,
WHY
SHOULD
WE
TAKE?
KAMLA
SAID
WE
SHOULDN'T
BUY
ANYTHING
MAJOR
UNTIL
YOU
GET
MARRIED.
WE
DON'T
WANT
DUPLICATE
ITEMS.'
'MOM,'
I
PROTESTED.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'GO
FAST,
THE
PANEER
WILL
GET
OVER.
AND
TELL
YOUR
FRIEND
TO
EAT.'
I
WAVED
AT
ANANYA
TO
COME
EAT
WITH
ME.
SHE
PANTED
AS
SHE
WALKED
WITH
ME
TO
THE
BUFFET.
I
PUT
BLACK
DAAL,
SHAHI
PANEER
AND
ROTIS
ON

MY
PLATE.
ANANYA
TOOK
YELLOW
DAAL
AND
RICE.
'THAT'S
IT?'
'THAT'S
ALL
I
LIKE,'
SHE
SAID.
THERE
WAS
A
COMMOTION
AT
THE
BAR.
DUKE
AND
HIS
FRIENDS
WERE
FIGHTING
WITH
THE
BARTENDER.
'WHAT
HAPPENED?'
I
ASKED.
'THEY
ARE
NOT
MAKING
THE
PEGS
LARGE
ENOUGH.

DUKE'S
FRIENDS
ARE
UPSET,'
AN
ONLOOKER
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
INTERVENED.
THE
HOTEL
STAFF
HAD
FORESEEN
THAT
THE
WHISKY
MAY
RUN
OUT
AND
SO
HAD
STARTED
DOLING
OUT
SMALLER
QUANTITIES.
THERE
WERE
NO
EXTRA
BOTTLES
OF
THAT
BRAND
EVEN
IN
THE
HOTEL.
RAJJI
MAMA
TOOK

OUT
A
WAD
OF
NOTES
AND
GAVE
IT
TO
THE
HOTEL
STAFF.
A
WAITER
WAS
SENT
TO
THE
DELHI
BORDER
TO
FETCH
THE
WHISKY.
LIKE
ALWAYS,
MONEY
SOOTHED
NERVES
AND
EVERYONE
BECAME
CHEERFUL
AGAIN.
'THIS
IS
A
WEDDING?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'OF
COURSE,
THAT'S
HOW

ALL
WEDDINGS
ARE.
WHY,
YOUR
SIDE
HAS
IT
DIFFERENT?’
I
SAID.
‘YOU
BET,’
ANANYA
SAID.
WE
BADE
GOODBYES
TO
RAJJI
MAMA
AND
KAMLA
AUNTY.
AS
I
WALKED
OUT
WITH
MY
MOTHER
AND
ANANYA,
SHIPRA
MASI
CALLED
ME.
‘YES,
AUNTY,’
I
SAID.
‘LISTEN,
YOU
ARE

OUR
FAMILY'S
PRIDE.
DON'T
DO
ANYTHING
STUPID.
THESE
MADRASIS
HAVE
LAID
A
TRAP
FOR
YOU.'
'GOOD
NIGHT,
AUNTY,'
I
SAID.
'SEE,
I
AM
SAYING
IT
FOR
YOUR
BENEFIT.
YOUR
MOTHER
HAS
SUFFERED,
MAKE
HER
HAPPY.
YOU
CAN
GET
GIRLS
WHO
WILL
FILL
YOUR
HOUSE

WITH
GIFTS.'
I
BENT
DOWN.
IF
ALL
ELSE
FAILS
WITH
KIN,
TOUCH
FEET.
'WHAT
DID
SHIPRA
MASI
SAY?'
ANANYA
ASKED
ME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SHE
SAID
TO
MAKE
SURE
ANANYA
IS
DROPPED
HOME
SAFE,'
I
SAID
AS
I
STOPPED
AN
AUTO.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
46
I
MET
ANANYA
AT
PUNJABI
BY
NATURE
IN
VASANT
VIHAR.
I
SHOULD
HAVE
THOUGHT
OF
A
BETTER-NAMED
VENUE,
GIVEN
HER
CURRENT
MENTAL
STATE.
HOWEVER,
THE
LOCATION
WAS
CONVENIENT
AND
THE
FOOD
EXCELLENT.
'WHAT
IS
THE
POINT
OF
ME
ATTENDING
THESE

FAMILY
EVENTS,
I
FEEL
SO
AWKWARD,'
ANANYA
BEGAN.
'IT'S
ONE
MORE
CEREMONY
—
THE
ACTUAL
WEDDING.
DON'T
WORRY,
TOMORROW
MY
AUNTS
WILL
BE
MORE
USED
TO
YOU.
ONCE
MY
MOTHER
SEES
THEM
ACCEPTING
YOU,
SHE
IS
MORE
LIKELY
TO
SAY
YES.'
'I
THINK
SHE

WANTS
A
SET
OF
CAR
KEYS
MORE
THAN
ANYONE'S
APPROVAL,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'NO,
MY
MOTHER
IS
NOT
LIKE
THAT.
SHE
DOESN'T
WANT
THE
CAR,
BUT
SHE
WANTS
HER
SIBLINGS
TO
APPRECIATE
SHE
MANAGED
A
CAR.
GET
IT?'
'NOT
REALLY,'
ANANYA
SHOOK
HER
HEAD.
THE

WAITER
CAME
TO
TAKE
THE
ORDER.
WE
ORDERED
ONE
PARANTHAS,
WHICH
CAME
WITH
ENOUGH
BUTTER
TO
STOP
YOUR
HEART
INSTANTLY.
WE
ATE
DINNER
AS
WE
CONTEMPLATED
OUR
NEXT
MOVE.
'SIR,
WOULD
YOU
LIKE
TO
TRY
OUR
GOLGAPPAS
WITH
VODKA?'
THE
WAITER
SAID.
'WHAT?'
ANANYA

SAID.
'NO
THANKS,'
I
TOLD
THE
WAITER
AND
TURNED
TO
ANANYA.
'IT
IS
A
GIMMICK.
TRUST
ME,
PUNJABIS
DON'T
DO
THAT
ON
A
REGULAR
BASIS.'
'I
AM
GOING
BACK
TO
CHENNAI
IN
TWO
DAYS,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'I
KNOW.
BUT
I
WILL
SPEAK
TO
MOM,

MAYBE
EVEN
MY
UNCLES,
AFTER
THE
WEDDING.

I
WANT
TO
LOCK
THIS
IN,'

I
SAID.
'WHAT
ABOUT
YOUR
DAD?'
ANANYA
SAID.

'HE
WON'T
AGREE.
WE'LL
HAVE
THE
WEDDING
WITHOUT
HIM.

AREN'T
MOM'S
SIDE
RELATIVES
ENOUGH?'

'THEY
ARE
MORE
THAN
ENOUGH.
EACH
TALKS
MORE
THAN

TEN
OF
MY
RELATIVES.
STILL.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'ANANYA,
YOU
CAN'T
GET
EVERYTHING
IN
LIFE.
YOUR
PARENTS,
MY
MOM,
RELATIVES
—
WE
HAVE
ENOUGH
BLESSINGS.
MY
FATHER
IS
NOT
REQUIRED.'
'YOU
SHOULD
TALK
TO
HIM
THOUGH.
HE'S
YOUR
FATHER,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'ISN'T
THE
FOOD
GREAT?'
I
SAID
AS
I

RUBBED
BUTTER
ON
MY
PARANTHAS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
47
MINTI'S
FINAL
WEDDING
CEREMONY
GAVE
NEW
MEANING
TO
THE
EXPRESSION
OVER
THE
TOP.
REAL
ELEPHANTS
AND
ICE
SCULPTURE
FAIRIES
GREETED
US
AT
THE
ENTRANCE.
THE
BOY'S
SIDE
HAD
NOT
YET
ARRIVED.
PATIENT
USHERS
WAITED
WITH
TRAYS
OF
FLOWER
PETALS.
WE

SHUFFLED
THROUGH
LANDSCAPED
GARDENS
WITH
TWO
DOZEN
DOLPHIN-SHAPED
FOUNTAINS
TO
REACH
THE
MAIN
PARTY
AREA.
THE
CATERER
HAD
CHOSEN
A
WORLD
THEME.
FOOD
STALLS
SERVED
EIGHT
CUISINES

—
PUNJABI,
CHINESE,
HOME-STYLE
INDIAN,
THAI,
ITALIAN,
MEXICAN,
GOAN
AND
LEBANESE

—
WITH
AT
LEAST
FIVE
ITEMS

IN
EACH
GENRE.
APART
FROM
THESE,
THERE
WERE
TWO
CHAAT
STALLS

—
ONE
FOR
REGULAR
EATERS
AND
OTHER
FOR
HEALTH-
CONSCIOUS
GUESTS.

THE
REGULAR
COUNTER
SERVED
SAMOSAS
AND
TIKKIS,
WHILE
THE
HEALTH
COUNTER
HAD
SPROUTS-STUFFED
GOLGAPPAS.

MY
AUNTS
TOOK
BOTH,
ONE
FOR
THE
TASTE

ANOTHER
FOR
HEALTH.
THERE
WERE
TWO
BARS.
THE
FIRST
BAR
HAD
A
GIANT
JOHNNY
WALKER
BLACK
LABEL
MAGNUM
CASK.
ALL
UNCLES
CONGREGATED
HERE
AND
WAITERS
KEPT
BRINGING
IN
A
REGULAR
SUPPLY
OF
PANEER
TIKKAS
AND
HARA
BHARA
KABABS.
THE
SECOND
BAR
WAS
THE
MOCKTAIL

BAR,
NICKNAMED
THE
LADIES
BAR.
IT
HAD
A
LARGE
DISPLAY
SHELF
WITH
TWO
DOZEN
GLASSES
OF
DIFFERENT
SHAPES
AND
FILLED
WITH
PSYCHEDELIC
FRUIT
DRINKS.
'BEAUTIFUL,
RAJJI,
YOU
HAVE
HELD
THE
FAMILY
NAME
HIGH,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
ADMIRING
THE
FLOWER
ARRANGEMENTS
ON
THE
BRIDAL
STAGE.

'THESE
ORCHIDS
HAVE
COME
FROM
THAILAND.
JUST
LANDED
TWO
HOURS
AGO
FROM
BANGKOK,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.
'FIFTY
THOUSAND
IS
JUST
THE
FLOWERS
BILL'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
WE
RAISED
OUR
EYEBROWS
TO
EXPRESS
SUITABLE
AWE.
MY
COUSIN
ROHAN
CAME
RUNNING
IN
TO
TELL
US
THAT

THE
BARAAT
HAD
ARRIVED.
WE
WENT
OUTSIDE
AND
STOOD
NEXT
TO
THE
ELEPHANTS
TO
RECEIVE
THEM.
ROHAN
GAVE
ME
A
PINK
TURBAN,
SOMETHING
ALL
BROTHERS
AND
CLOSE
MALE
RELATIVES
WORE
TO
RECEIVE
THE
GROOM.
'YOU
LOOK
CUTE,'
ANANYA
GRINNED.
ALL
TURBANED
MEN
POSED
FOR

PICTURES
WITH
THEIR
EQUIVALENT
COUNTERPARTS
FROM
DUKE'S
SIDE.

I
HAD
A
PICTURE
CLICKED
WITH
PRINCE,
DUKE'S
COUSIN.
MINTI'S
FATHER
GRINNED
AS
HE
HUGGED
DUKE'S
FATHER
FOR
A
PICTURE.
DUKE'S
FATHER
FROWNED.

'WHY
IS
THE
BOY'S
FATHER
SO
SERIOUS?'
ANANYA
SAID.

'MAYBE
HE
IS
HUNGRY,'

I
SAID.
WE
SOON
FOUND
OUT
I
WAS
WRONG.
DUKE'S
FAMILY
DID
COME
INSIDE
AND
SAT
ON
THE
SOFAS.
HOWEVER,
THEY
REFUSED
TO
TOUCH
ANYTHING
TO
EAT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'ONE
COLD
DRINK-JI,'
KAMLA
MAMI
BEGGED
DUKE'S
MOTHER,
WHO
SHOOK
HER
HEAD.
"WE
ARE
NOT
HUNGRY,'
DUKE'S
FATHER
SAID.
DUKE,
HIS
PARENTS
AND
A
DOZEN
CLOSE
RELATIVES
SAT
ON
THE
SOFAS
NEXT
TO
THE
STAGE.
HALF
A
DOZEN
WAITERS
STOOD
BY

WITH
TRAYS
BUT
THE
BOY'S
SIDE
ATE
NOTHING.
'THE
SNACKS
ARE
NOT
HOT,
GO
GET
FRESH
ONES,'
MINTI'S
FATHER
SCREAMED
AT
THE
WAITERS.
HIS
ANGER
WAS
MISPLACED.
THE
BOY'S
FAMILY
HAD
NOT
REFUSED
FOOD
BECAUSE
OF
ITS
TEMPERATURE.
'ASK
WHAT'S
THE
MATTER.
SOMETHING
IS

WRONG,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
'WHO
WILL
ASK?'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.
'THEY
ARE
NOT
SAYING
ANYTHING.'
KAMLA
AUNTY
WORE
A
WORRIED
EXPRESSION.
TEN
MINUTES
PASSED.
'WHAT'S
GOING
ON?'
ANANYA
SAID.
I
SHRUGGED.
SHIPRA
MASI
TOLD
THE
YOUNGER
COUSINS
TO
MOVE
BACK.
SHE
FOLDED
HER
HANDS

AND
WENT
TO
DUKE'S
FATHER.
HE
LOOKED
THE
OTHER
WAY.
ANANYA
AND
I
STEPPED
BACK
A
FEW
METRES.
WE
COULD
SEE
THE
ELDERS
BUT
NOT
HEAR
THEM.
MY
MOTHER
AND
HER
TWO
BROTHERS
FOLDED
THEIR
HANDS
IN
FRONT
OF
DUKE'S
PARENTS.
LIKE
A
LANDLESS

FARMER,
THEY
WAITED
FOR
THE
FEUDAL
LORDS
TO
RESPOND.

A
FEW
MINUTES
LATER,
ONE
OF
DUKE'S
AUNTS
SPOKE
TO
MY
MOTHER.
MY
MOTHER
NODDED
AS
SHE
LISTENED
CAREFULLY.
AFTER
DUKE'S
AUNT
FINISHED,
MY
MOTHER
CAME
BACK
TO
HUDDLE
WITH
HER
SIBLINGS.
'THIS
IS
TOO

MUCH
DRAMA.

I
HAVE
TO
KNOW
WHAT'S
GOING
ON,'
ANANYA
SAID.

I
PULLED
MY
MOTHER
ASIDE.
'IT'S
THE
SANTRO,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.

'WHAT?
IT
DOESN'T
START?'
'BE
SERIOUS,
KRISH.'
'SORRY,
WHAT
HAPPENED?'

'SOME
MISUNDERSTANDING
HAS
OCCURRED.
WHEN
RAJJI
GAVE
THE
HYUNDAI
KEYS,
DUKE'S
PARENTS

THOUGHT
IT
WAS
HYUNDAI
ACCENT.
BUT
IT
WAS
A
HYUNDAI
SANTRO.
ACCENT
COSTS
FIVE
LAKH,
SANTRO
ONLY
THREE
LAKH.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
THOUGHT
IT
WAS
A
GIFT,'
ANANYA
SAID.
IF
MY
MOTHER
FOUND
ANANYA'S
ENTRY
INTO
THE
FAMILY
CONVERSATION
ODD,
SHE
WAS
TOO
PREOCCUPIED
TO
DWELL
ON
IT.
'YEAH,
WASN'T
IT
A
SURPRISE?'
I
SAID.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
THINK
THIS
IS
KRISH?

A
BIRTHDAY
PARTY?
EVERYONE
KNOWS
THE
SURPRISE.
DUKE'S
PARENTS
HAD
ALREADY
ANNOUNCED
THE
ACCENT
TO
THEIR
FAMILY.
THEY
ARE
FEELING
INSULTED
AND
CHEATED.'
IT
IS
AMAZING
HOW
PEOPLE
CAN
FEEL
INSULTED
EVEN
AFTER
BEING
WELCOMED
BY
ELEPHANTS.
'NOW
WHAT?'
I
SAID.
'NOTHING,
THEY
ARE

SAYING
NO
WEDDING
UNTIL
RAJJI
CHANGES
THE
CAR.'
'CAN
HE?'
I
SAID.
'HE
IS
ALREADY
BROKE
DOING
THIS
WEDDING.
BUT
WHAT
CHOICE
DOES
HE
HAVE?
HE
HAS
PROMISED
THEM
HE
WILL.'
'THEN
WHY
ARE
THEY
SITTING
THERE
WITH
SULLEN
FACES?'
I
SAID.
'THEY
WANT

A
GUARANTEE.
DUKE'S
FATHER
WANTS
THE
DIFFERENCE
IN
CASH
RIGHT
NOW.'
'NOW?'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
EYEBROWS
WENT
UP
AND
STAYED
THERE
AS
SHE
DIDN'T
KNOW
HOW
TO
REACT.
SHIPRA
MASI
CALLED
MY
MOTHER
AGAIN
AND
THE
ELDERS
HELD
ANIMATED
DISCUSSIONS.
'IS
THIS
FOR
REAL?

I
AM
SO
PISSSED
OFF,'
ANANYA
SAID.

'I
AM
AS
STUNNED
BY
IT
AS
YOU,'

I
SAID.
WE
WENT
TO
THE
LADIES
BAR.

I
ORDERED
TWO
MOCKTAIL
DAIQUIRIS.
'WHAT
ARE
THEY
DISCUSSING?
WHY
DON'T
THEY
CALL
THE
POLICE?'

ANANYA
SAID.
'ANANYA,'
I
SAID,
'ARE

YOU
STUPID?’
I
HANDED
HER
A
GLASS.
‘NO,
I
WANT
TO
SEND
SOME
CRIMINALS
TO
JAIL.
IS
THAT
STUPID?’
‘YEAH,
IF
YOU
CARE
ABOUT
MINTI’S
REPUTATION.
PLUS,
WHAT
ABOUT
ALL
THEY’VE
SPENT?’
I
POINTED
TO
THE
VARIOUS
STALLS.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'OH,
AND
NOTHING
ABOUT
THE
LITTLE
FACT
THAT
YOUR
SISTER
IS
GOING
TO
MARRY
INTO
A
FAMILY
OF
TOTAL
JERKS.'
'THIS
KIND
OF
STUFF
HAPPENS.
THE
ELDERS
WILL
RESOLVE
IT,'
I
SAID.
'WE
SHOULD
BE
WITH
THE
FAMILY
AT
THIS
TIME,'

ANANYA
SAID
AS
SHE
KEPT
HER
GLASS
DOWN.
WE
MOVED
BACK
TO
DRAMA
VENUE.
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
PLACED
HIS
PINK
TURBAN
AT
DUKE'S
PARENTS'
FEET.
THEY
IGNORED
HIM.
HE
OFFERED
A
CHEQUE,
DUKE'S
PARENTS
REFUSED
IT.
RAJJI
MAMA
CALLED
HIS
FRIENDS
FOR
CASH.
NO

ONE
COULD
COME
UP
WITH
SUCH
A
LARGE
AMOUNT
AT
SUCH
A
SHORT
NOTICE.
MEANWHILE,
NEW
GUESTS
WERE
ARRIVING
AT
THE
PARTY.
WITH
THEM,
RAJJI
MAMA
HIS
HIS
STRESS
AND
SMILED
AND
HUGGED
ALL
OF
THEM.
MEANWHILE,
THE
LADIES
CAME
UP
WITH
A
BIZARRE

PLAN.
'QUICK,
KAVITA,
TAKE
YOUR
JEWELLERY
OFF,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
AND
REMOVED
HER
OWN
NECKLACE.
MY
MOTHER
STRUGGLED
TO
REMOVE
HER
BANGLES.
KAMLA
AND
RAJNI
MAMI
TOOK
OFF
THEIR
JEWELLERY
SETS
AS
WELL.
SHIPRA
MASI
PUT
ALL
THE
ORNAMENTS
IN
A
PLASTIC
BAG
AND

GAVE
IT
TO
RAJJI
MAMA.
'GIVE
THIS
TO
THEM.
TELL
THEM
TO
KEEP
IT
UNTIL
THE
CAR
IS
REPLACED,'
SHE
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
FELL
ON
SHIPRA
MASI'S
FEET.
'ARE
YOU
MAD?
YOU
ARE
MY
LITTLE
BROTHER.
MINTI
IS
OUR
DAUGHTER,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
ALL

HER
SIBLINGS
BROKE
INTO
TEARS.
DUKE'S
FATHER,
STILL
SOFA-BOUND
KEPT
LOOKING
AT
US
FROM
THE
CORNER
OF
HIS
EYE.
'NOW
GO,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
'I'LL
CHECK
WITH
THEM
FIRST,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.
HE
WENT
UP
TO
DUKE'S
FATHER.
'I
CAN'T
BELIEVE
THIS,'
ANANYA
SAID.

'SHSH,
EVERYTHING
WILL
BE
NORMAL
SOON,'
I
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
RETURNED
AFTER
MEETING
DUKE'S
PARENTS.
'SHIPRA
DIDI,
THEY'VE
AGREED
TO
KEEP
THE
EXTRA
JEWELLERY
AS
SECURITY,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
COLLECTED
THE
BAG
FROM
SHIPRA
MASI.
'UNCLE,
WAIT,'
ANANYA
SAID.
ALL
EYES
TURNED

TO
HER.
THIS
ISN'T
YOUR
BUSINESS,
I
WANTED
TO
TELL
ANANYA.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'MAY
I
SUGGEST
SOMETHING,'
ANANYA
SAID,
'BEFORE
YOU
GIVE
IT
TO
THEM,
RAJJI
MAMA.'
'WHAT?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
TO
ANANYA,
SURPRISED.
'AUNTY,
YOU
ELDERS
HAVE
HAD
SO
MANY
MEETINGS
TO
RESOLVE
THIS.
CAN
THE
YOUNGER
COUSINS
TALK
TO
DUKE?'
ANANYA
SAID.

“ANANYA,
THIS
MATTER
CONCERNS
GROWN-UPS,’
I
SAID.
‘IT’S
DUKE’S
MARRIAGE.
WE
SHOULD
HAVE
A
WORD
WITH
HIM,’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘WHEN
THE
JEWELLERY
IS
READY,
THEN
WHY?’
KAMLA
MAMI
SAID.
‘PLEASE
UNCLE,
SHIPRA
MASI,
PLEASE.
WHAT’S
THE
HARM?’
ANANYA
SAID.
SHIPRA
MASI
SIGHED
HER
CONSENT.

TINKI,
NIKKI,
ROHAN,
KITTU,
BITTU
AND
US
SAT
IN
A
SEPARATE
GROUP
OF
CHAIRS
TEN
METRES
AWAY
FROM
THE
GROWN-UPS.
ANANYA
WALKED
UP
TO
DUKE'S
SIDE
OF
THE
FAMILY
AND
IDENTIFIED
A
TWENTY-YEAR-OLD
BOY.
'ARE
YOU
DUKE'S
COUSIN?'
'YES,
MYSELF
PRANJAL,'
HE
SAID.
'GOOD,

CAN
YOU
COLLECT
ALL
DUKE'S
COUSINS
AND
BRING
THEM
TO
MINTI'S
COUSINS
OVER
THERE,'
ANANYA
SAID,
POINTING
TO
OUR
GROUP.
'WHAT'S
GOING
ON?'
DUKE'S
FATHER
SAID.
'UNCLE,
THE
YOUNGER
PEOPLE
WANT
TO
HAVE
A
MEETING.
C'MON,
PRANJAL,
ROUND
THEM
UP
FAST,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WHO

IS
THIS
GIRL?’
DUKE’S
MOTHER
SAID.
‘I’M
THEIR
FAMILY
FRIEND,’
ANANYA
SAID
AND
TURNED
TO
THE
GROOM,
‘DUKE,
CAN
YOU
JOIN
US?’
DUKE
GAVE
ANANYA
A
PUZZLED
LOOK.
ANANYA
CONTINUED
TO
STARE
AT
DUKE
UNTIL
HE
BECAME
UNCOMFORTABLE
AND
STOOD
UP.
SHE
ASKED
HIM

TO
FOLLOW
HER.
'KRISH,
CALL
MINTI
HERE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'MINTI?'
I
SQUEAKED.
'I'LL
GET
HER,'
TINKI
SAID
AND
RAN
INSIDE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
48
WE
MADE
A
CIRCLE
OF
A
DOZEN
YOUNGER
COUSINS
ALONG
WITH
MINTI
AND
DUKE.
THE
ELDERS
GAVE
US
A
SUSPICIOUS
LOOKS
FROM
FAR,
KEEN
TO
KNOW
WHAT
WAS
GOING
ON
BUT
ANANYA
MADE
SURE
ALL
YOUNGER
COUSINS
HAD
THEIR
BACKS

TO
THE
ELDERS.
'WE
SHOULDN'T
HAVE
ALLOWED
THIS,'
DUKE'S
MOTHER
SAID.
'OF
COURSEJI,
TWO
MINUTESJI,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID,
AGREEING
TO
EVERYTHING
DUKE'S
PARENTS
SAID.
'HELLO
EVERYONE,'
ANANYA
STOOD
UP
TO
ADDRESS
THE
COUSINS.
I
SAT
NEXT
TO
HER.
EVERYONE
RETURNED
A
MEEK
'HI'
IN

RESPONSE.
'DO
YOU
THINK
WHAT
IS
HAPPENING
HERE
IS
RIGHT?'
ANANYA
SAID.
DUKE
AND
HIS
COUSINS
LOOKED
DOWN,
AVOIDING
EYE
CONTACT.
MY
COUSINS
HUDDLED
NEXT
TO
MINTI,
TRYING
TO
KEEP
HER
CALM.
RAJJI
MAMA
AND
KAMLA
MAMI
GAVE
HELPLESS
LOOKS
TO
DIKE'S
PARENTS
AS

ALL
OF
THEM
WANTED
TO
PEEK
INTO
ANANYA'S
CONFERENCE.

SHIPRA
MASI
WALKED
OVER
TO
THE
YOUNGER
SET.

'WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING?'

SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
TO
ANANYA,
'MINTI'S
LIFE
WILL
BE
RUINED
IF
THEY
LEAVE.'

'I
THINK
HER
LIFE
WOULD
BE
RUINED
IF
THEY
STAY.'

AUNTY,
PLEASE
GIVE
US
SOME
PRIVACY.
YOU
MAKE
SURE
DUKE'S
PARENTS
STAY
PUT,'
ANANYA
SAID.
AS
SHIPRA
MASI
LEFT,
ANANYA
TURNED
TO
DUKE,
'YES,
YOU.
STAND
UP
IF
YOU
CAN.'
DUKE
STOOD
UP.
HE
WAS
SIX
INCHES
TALLER
THAN
ANANYA
AND
TWICE
HER
WEIGHT.

OF
COURSE,
THESE
ANATOMICAL
FACTS
DIDN'T
REGISTER
WITH
MY
MAD
GIRLFRIEND.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
DO,
DUKE?'
ANANYA
ASKED.
'I
AM
A
SOFTWARE
ENGINEER,'
HE
SAID.
'HOW
MUCH
DO
YOU
MAKE?'
ANANYA
SAID.
DUKE
KEPT
QUIET.
'TELL
ME,'
ANANYA
SAID
IN
A
LOUD
VOICE.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'TEN
THOUSAND
A
MONTH,'
HE
SAID,
IN
A
HEAVY
PUNJABI
ACCENT.
'GREAT,
I
MAKE
TWENTY-FIVE
THOUSAND.
STILL,
CAN
YOU
TELL
ME
WHAT
HAVE
YOU
DONE
TO
DESERVE
A
WEDDING
LIKE
THIS?
WHAT
HAVE
YOU
DONE
TO
DESERVE
A
CAR
TO
BE

GIFTED
TO
YOU?’
‘I,
I
AM
THE
B

...
BOY’S
SIDE,’
DUKE
STAMMERED.

‘SO?
HAVE
YOU
SEEN
MINTI?’
ANANYA
SAID.
DUKE
NODDED.

‘YOU
ARE
HAVING
AN
ARRANGED
MARRIAGE.
THAT
IS
WHY
YOU
ARE
GETTING
A
GIRL
LIKE
HER.
IF
YOU
HAD
TO
WOO
HER,

CAN
YOU
EVEN
IN
YOUR
DREAMS
HAVE
A
GIRLFRIEND
LIKE
HER?’
DUKE
KEPT
QUIET
AS
HE
SHIFTED
HIS
LARGENESS
FROM
ONE
LEG
TO
THE
OTHER.
‘WHAT?’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘THIS
IS
TOO
MUCH,’
DUKE
SAID.
‘I
AM
TOO
MUCH,’
ANANYA
AGREED
AND
GAVE
DUKE
A

BHARATNATYAM-STYLE

GLARE.

SHE

SPOKE

AGAIN.

'DO

YOU

KNOW

WHAT

MINTI'S

PARENTS

HAD

TO

GO

THROUGH

TO

DO

THIS

WEDDING

FOR

YOU?

THAT

CAR

COST

TWO

AND

HALF

YEARS

OF

YOUR

SALARY,

MR

DUKE!

THESE

TWO

PARTIES

HAVE

THROWN

HIM

INTO

DEBT.

NOW

YOU

WANT

AN
ACCENT?
IT
WON'T
BE
YOUR
ACCENT,
IT
WILL
BE
WHAT
YOU
MANAGED
TO
WRENCH
OUT
OF
A
HELPLESS
FATHER,
WHO
DIDN'T
WANT
A
DRAMA
AT
HIS
DAUGHTER'S
WEDDING
TO
TURN
INTO
A
SCANDAL.'
IT
WAS
TOO
MANY
WORDS
FOR
DUKE
TO
PROCESS
AT

ONE
GO.
HE
WAS
STUNNED,
LIKE
THE
REST
OF
THE
COUSINS,
MORE
BY
ANANYA'S
CONFIDENCE
AND
FLUENT
ENGLISH
THAN
WHAT
SHE
WAS
SAYING.
'SIT
DOWN,'
ANANYA
SAID.
DUKE
COMPLIED
INSTANTLY.
ANANYA
TURNED
TO
EVERYONE.
'LISTEN,
ALL
BROTHERS
AND
SISTERS
OF
DUKE,
THERE
ISN'T
GOING

TO
BE
ANY
ACCENT.
THE
ELDERS
HAVE
SHOWN
THEIR
TRUE
COLOURS,
NOW
IT
IS
DOWN
TO
DUKE
AND
ALL
OF
YOU.
IF
HE
WANTS
TO
TAKE
MINTI
WITH
RESPECT,
HE
SHOULD
SAY
SO.
IF
HE
DOESN'T,
THEN
HE
IS
JUST
A
SCHMUCK
AND
WE

DON'T
WANT
THE
WEDDING.'
'ANANYA
BETA....'
RAJJI
MAMA
CAME
TO
US
AS
THE
YOUNGSTERS'
MEETING
HAD
GONE
FOR
TOO
LONG.
'ALMOST
DONE,
UNCLE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'FIVE
MINUTES,
DUKE.
MAKE
UP
YOUR
MIND.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
EVERYONE
FELL
SILENT
AS
ANANYA
SWAMINATHAN,
BRAND
MANAGER
HLL,
MBA,
RATED
BEST
GIRL
BY
POPULAR
VOTE
AT
IIMA
AND
RATED
BEST
GIRLFRIEND
BY
MY
OWN
VOTE,
FORCED
THE
YOUNGER
GENERATION
IN
DUKE'S
FAMILY
TO
THINK.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
49
THE
COUSINS
FELL
SILENT
AS
SECONDS
TICKED
PAST.
DUKE
WANTED
TO
SAY
SOMETHING,
BUT
HE
NOTICED
HIS
PARENTS'
SOUR
FACES
FROM
FAR
AND
KEPT
QUIET.
HE
HUDDLED
WITH
HIS
OWN
COUSINS
AS
THEY
EXCHANGED
WHISPERS
WITH
EACH
OTHER.
HE
STOOD

UP
AGAIN
AND
SPOKE
TO
ANANYA
AFTER
FOUR
MINUTES.
'EXCUSE
ME,
MADAM,'
DUKE
SAID.
'I'M
ANANYA.
WHAT?'
'CAN
WE
GO
TO
THE
GROWN-UPS?
I
WANT
TO
TALK
TO
MY
MOTHER.'
'ABOUT
WHAT?'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
BLOCKED
HIM.
'WHY
ARE
YOU
SO
DOMINATING?
LET
ME

GO.'
'LET'S
ALL
GO,'
ANANYA
SAID.
ALL
THE
COUSINS
STOOD
UP
FROM
THEIR
CHAIRS.
WE
WALKED
UP
TO
THE
GROWN-UPS.
DUKE
WENT
TO
HIS
MOTHER.
'MUMMY,
I
WANT
TO
MARRY
MINTI.'
DUKE'S
MOTHER
GAVE
HER
SON
A
SHOCKED
LOOK.
'BUT
THEY
HAVE
BETRAYED
US,

BETA,'
DUKE'S
FATHER
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
DIVED
TOWARDS
THEIR
FEET
AGAIN.
ANANYA
STOPPED
HIM.
'DADDY,
I
HAVE
KEPT
QUIET
FOR
SO
LONG,
NO?
EVERYTHING
YOU
HAVE
DECIDED.
NOW
WHATEVER
IT
IS,
DON'T
SPOIL
MY
MARRIAGE.'
'BETA,
BUT
HEY
PROMISED
US,'
DUKE'S
MOTHER
SAID.
'MUMMY,

ENOUGH!
AND
WHY
THIS
DRAMA
OF
KEEPING
THEIR
JEWELLERY?
WHAT
DO
YOU
THINK?
I
CAN'T
BUY
MY
OWN
CAR?'
'FIVE
MINUTES
ARE
OVER,'
ANANYA
SAID,
'SHOULD
WE
PACK
UP
OR....'
'WHAT
KIND
OF
A
GIRL
ARE
YOU?
YOU
ARE
NOT
EVEN
GIVING
ME
TIME

TO
CONVINCE,'
DUKE
SAID
TO
ANANYA.
ONE
OF
DUKE'S
UNCLES
STOOD
UP.
'LET'S
START-JI.
WE
CAN'T
SPOIL
OUR
CHILDREN'S
HAPPY
DAY.
WE
ARE
ALREADY
LATE
FOR
THE
JAIMALA
CEREMONY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'ARE
THEY
OK?'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID,
LOOKING
AT
DUKE'S
PARENTS.
'DON'T
WORRY,
MISUNDERSTANDINGS
HAPPEN.
WE
DON'T
HAVE
TO
SPOIL
A
LIFELONG
RELATIONSHIP,'
DUKE'S
UNCLE
SAID
AS
HE
SIGNALLED
FOR
ALL
OTHERS
TO
STAND
UP.
'EVERYONE
,
PLEASE
ENJOY
THE
SNACKS,'
DUKE

SAID.
IT
WAS
ENOUGH
CUE
FOR
HIS
RELATIVES
TO
JUMP
AT
THE
WAITERS.
IT
IS
CRUEL
TO
KEEP
PUNJABIS
AWAY
FROM
THEIR
FOOD
AT
A
WEDDING,
ESPECIALLY
WHEN
MOST
OF
THEM
HAD
NO
STAKE
IN
THE
CAR
ANYWAY.
OUR
SIDE
OF
THE
FAMILY
HUGGED

DUKE'S
PARENTS.
THEY
DIDN'T
HUG
BACK,
BUT
AT
LEAST
THEY
DIDN'T
PUSH
US
AWAY.
RAJJI
MAMA
BROUGHT
A
BOX
OF
MITHAI
AND
FED
DUKE'S
PARENTS
A
PIECE
EACH
IN
THEIR
MOUTHS.
THE
SUGAR
RUSH
IMPROVED
THEIR
EXPRESSION.
THE
DJ
STARTED
THE
MUSIC.
THE
WEDDING

WAS
BACK
ON.
ONE
GIRL
STOOD
BACK
UNTIL
EVERYONE
VACATED
THEIR
SOFAS
AND
WENT
TO
THE
STAGE.
IT
WAS
THE
SOUTH
INDIAN
GIRL
WHO
HAD
COME
WITH
ME
ALL
THE
WAY
FORM
CHENNAI.
'WHAT
DID
SHE
SAY
TO
HIM?'
SHIPRA
MASI
ASKED
ME.
SHE

TOOK
HER
BAG
BACK
AND
REDISTRIBUTED
THE
ORNAMENTS.

I
SHRUGGED
MY
SHOULDERS.

'VERY
WISE
GIRL,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
GAVE
ANANYA
A
HUG.

'THANK
YOU,
BETA.
YOU
KEPT
OUR
IZZAT.'

'BUT
TELL
ME
ONE
THING,
YOU
EARN
TWENTY-FIVE
THOUSAND?'

RAJNI
AUNTY
ASKED
THE
QUESTION
EVERYONE
WANTED

TO
ASK.
MY
MOTHER
CAME
AND
GAVE
ANANYA
A
SMILING
NOD.
EVEN
THOUGH
MY
MOTHER
DIDN'T
SAY
ANYTHING,
I
KNEW
IT
MEANT
A
LOT.
'SHE'S
NOT
THAT
BAD,'
SHIPRA
MASI
TOLD
MY
MOTHER
DURING
JAIMALA.
'YOU'VE
SCORED
GIRL,
YOU
KNOW
YOU
HAVE,'
I
SAID

TO
ANANYA
AS
WE
TOSSED
FLOWER
PETALS
ON
DUKE
AND
MINTI.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
50
'SO,
MOM,'
I
SAID,
'AS
I
WAS
SAYING.'
WE
WERE
IN
THE
KITCHEN.
'YOU'VE
SAID
THAT
FOUR
TIMES.
DO
YOU
ACTUALLY
HAVE
SOMETHING
TO
SAY!'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
SHE
REMOVED
BOILING
TEA
FROM
THE
STOVE.
'ANANYA
LEAVES
TOMORROW,'
I
SAID.

'OK,'
SHE
SAID.
SHE
PASSED
ME
A
CUP
OF
TEA.
'I
CALLED
HER
HOME
TO
MEET
US
BEFORE
SHE
LEFT.'
'AND,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WE'D
LIKE
TO
KNOW
YOUR
DECISION,'
I
SAID.
'IT'S
YOUR
DECISION,'
SHE
SAID.
'OK,
YOUR
OPINION,
WHICH
IS
IMPORTANT
FOR

ME
AND
TO
MAKE
MY
DECISION.'
'UFF,
YOU
AND
YOUR
MBA
TERMS,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
ANANYA
CAME
HOME
IN
THE
AFTERNOON.
MY
MOTHER
CUT
A
MELON
AS
WE
SAT
AT
THE
DINING
TABLE.
'SO
MOM,
THE
UNTHINKABLE
HAPPENED.
YOUR
RELATIVES
LIKE
ANANYA.
NOW,
DO

I
HAVE
YOUR
PERMISSION
TO
MARRY
HER?’
‘YOU
DON’T
NEED
MY
PERMISSION,’
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
PASSING
ME
MELON
SLICES.
‘NOT
PERMISSION,
APPROVAL.
DO
WE
HAVE
YOUR
APPROVAL?’
I
SAID.
SHE
GAVE
A
FEW
SLICES
OF
FRUIT
TO
ANANYA.
‘IS
THAT
A
YES?’
I
SAID.

'KAMLA
AUNTY
AND
RAJJI
MAMA
ARE
QUITE
FOND
OF
HER,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'DO
YOU
LIKE
ME,
AUNTY?
TELL
ME
IF
YOU
ARE
NOT
CONVINCED,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'OF
COURSE,
I
DO,
BETA,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
HER
HAND
ON
ANANYA'S
HEAD.
'BUT
THERE
ARE
OTHER

PEOPLE
TOO,
YOUR
SIDE
OF
THE
FAMILY.'

'MY
FAMILY
LIKES
KRISH
A
LOT!'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,
BUT
WHAT
ABOUT
THE
FAMILIES
LIKING
EACH
OTHER?
YOU
TWO
MAY
BE
HAPPY,
BUT
WE
ADULTS
HAVE
TO
GET
ALONG
WITH
THE
ADULTS
FROM
YOUR
SIDE.
YOU
REMEMBER
SABARMATI
ASHRAM?'
'BE
PATIENT,
MOM.
OVER
TIME,
THE
FAMILIES
WILL
GET
CLOSE,'

I
SAID.
ANANYA
BROUGHT
UP
THE
TOPIC
OF
MY
FATHER
ONE
LAST
TIME
BEFORE
SHE
LEFT.
'KRISH'S
DAD
WON'T
AGREE?'
ANANYA
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
A
WRY
SMILE.
'HE
WON'T
LET
US
WATCH
TV,
FORGET
KRISH
CHOOSING
HIS
BRIDE.
IT'S
FINE,
MY
SIBLINGS
ARE

ENOUGH.
OTHERWISE,
IT
WILL
NEVER
HAPPEN,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
ANANYA
NODDED.
MY
MOTHER
WENT
TO
HER
ROOM
AND
RETURNED
WITH
TWO
GOLD
BANGLES.
'NO
AUNTY,'
ANANYA
SAID,
EVEN
AS
MY
MOTHER
SHOVED
IT
DOWN
HER
WRISTS
AND
KISSED
HER
HEAD.
HAPPINESS
FLOATED
LIKE
ROSE

PETALS
IN
THE
AIR
AND
I
IMAGINED
FIST
PUMPING
MY
HAND
THREE
TIMES

~
'SO
WHAT'S
THE
NEXT
STEP?
THE
WEDDING
DATE?'
ANANYA
AND
I
WERE
ON
OUR
LONG-DISTANCE
CALL
FROM
OUR
RESPECTIVE
OFFICES.
'YOU
KNOW
YOUR
MOTHER
IS
RIGHT,
THERE
IS
A
GAP

HERE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WHAT
GAP?'
I
SAID.
'MY
PARENTS
LIKE
YOU.
YOUR
MOTHER
LIKES
ME.
WHAT
ABOUT
THEM
LIKING
EACH
OTHER?
REMEMBER
THE
AHMEDABAD
DISASTER?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'YEAH
BUT,'
I
SAID.
'OH
MAN,
I
THOUGHT
WE
WERE
DONE.'
'NO,
THE
TWO
FAMILIES
HAVE
TO

UNITE.
TRUST
ME,
IT
WILL
BE
WORTH
IS.
WE
SHOULD
MAKE
THEM
MEET,'
I
SAID.
'WHERE?
I'LL
COME
TO
CHENNAI
WITH
MY
MOTHER?'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NO,
LET'S
GO
TO
A
NEUTRAL
VENUE
WITHOUT
RELATIVES.'
'GOOD
POINT.
LET
ME
ORGANISE
SOMETHING,'
I
ENDED
THE
CALL.
I
WENT
BACK
TO
WORK.
I
DIDN'T
HAVE
A
FIXED
DIVISION
OR
BOSS
IN
CITIBANK
DELHI
YET.
I
FLOATED
BETWEEN
DEPARTMENTS,
PRETENDING

TO
BE
USEFUL.
I
HAD
A
TEMPORARY
STINT
IN
THE
CREDIT
CARDS
DIVISION.
I
HAD
TO
COME
UP
WITH
A
CREDIT
CARD
PROMOTION
PLAN,
SOMETHING
I
HAD
NO
INTEREST
OR
EXPERTISE
IN.
I
OPENED
THE
EXISTING
BROCHURE
OF
OFFERS
FOR
OUR
CREDIT
CARD
CUSTOMERS.

WE
HAD
A
SPECIAL
DEAL
ON
A
PACKAGE
TO
GOA.

I
PICKED
UP
THE
PHONE
AND
CALLED
ANANYA
AGAIN.

'GOA,'

I
SAID.

'LET'S
ALL
GO
TO
GOA.

NOTHING
LIKE
THE
SEA,
SUN
AND
SAND
TO
MAKE
THE
TWO
FAMILIES
BOND.

PLUS,
IT
WILL
BE

FUN
FOR
US,
TOO.
WHAT
SAY,
NEXT
MONTH?’
‘IT
WON’T
BE
CHEAP,’
SHE
SAID.
‘ISN’T
LOVE
THE
BEST
INVESTMENT?’
I
SAID
AND
FUMBLED
THROUGH
MY
CARDS
TO
CALL
THE
TRAVEL
AGENT.

DX

@

WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

ACT

5:

GOA

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

51

'I
AM
TELLING
YOU
NOW
ONLY.

I
DON'T
LIKE
HER
MOTHER

—
ARROGANT
WOMAN,'
MY
MOM
SAID
AS
WE
WAITED
AT
THE
TAXI
STAND.
MY
MOTHER
AND

I
LANDED
AT
THE
DABOLIM
AIRPORT
IN
GOA
TWO
HOURS
BEFORE
ANANYA
AND

HER
PARENTS
DID.
I
HAD
TRIED
TO
TIME
THE
FLIGHTS
AS
CLOSE
AS
POSSIBLE.
'IT'S
NOT
ARROGANCE.
THEY
ARE
QUIET
PEOPLE,'
I
SAID.
'DON'T
BE
UNDER
THEIR
SPELL,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'I'M
NOT.
OK,
HERE
THEY
COME,
REMEMBER
TO
SMILE,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS

CAME
FACE
TO
FACE
WITH
MY
MOTHER
FOR
THE
SECOND
TIME.
'HELLO
KAVITA-JI,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
THEY
EXCHANGED
GREETINGS,
NOT
WARM
AND
CUDDLY
LIKE
DELHI
AIRPORTS,
BUT
NOT
COMPLETELY
ICE-COLD
EITHER.
I
HAD
HIRED
A
QUALIS.
I
HELPED
THE
DRIVER
LOAD
ANANYA'S
BAGS
INTO

THE
CAR.
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
ME
A
PUZZLED
LOOK.
'WHAT?'
I
SAID.
SHE
SHOOK
HER
HEAD.
I
SAT
IN
FRONT.
ANANYA'S
FAMILY
TOOK
THE
MIDDLE
SEAT.
'OH,
I'LL
SIT
AT
THE
BACK,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'OK,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
I
REALISED
THE
FAUX
PAS.

'NO,
MOM,
I
WILL
TAKE
THE
BACKSEAT,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
DECLINED
AS
SHE
HAD
ALREADY
TAKEN
HER
PLACE.
'PARK
HYATT,'
I
SAID.
THE
DRIVER
TURNED
THE
CAR
TOWARDS
SOUTH
GOA.
MY
MOTHER
TOOK
OUT
A
PLASTIC
PACKET
FROM
HER
BAG.
'HERE,
FOR
YOU,'

MY
MOTHER
SAID
AND
PASSES
A
SARI
TO
ANANYA'S
MOTHER.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
TURNED
AROUND
AND
TOOK
THE
PACKET.
'THANK
YOU,'
SHE
SAID.
'IT'S
TUSSAR
SILK,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
'I
BOUGHT
IT
FROM
THE
ASSAM
EMPORIUM.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SILK
IS
VERY
POPULAR
IN
THE
SOUTH
ALSO,
WE
HAVE
KANJEEVARAM
SARIS,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
AND
SHE
KEPT
THE
SARI
IN
HER
BAG.
WE
DIDN'T
SPEAK
MUCH
UNTIL
WE
REACHED
THE
RESORT.
HOTEL
STAFF
RECEIVED
US
WITH
A
GARLAND
OF
FLOWERS

AND
A
FRUIT-PUNCH
WELCOME
DRINK.
NONE
OF
US
HAD
EVER
STAYED
IN
A
FIVE-STAR
HOTEL.
'ISN'T
THIS
EXPENSIVE?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'THEY
GAVE
ME
A
DEAL.
I
PROMISED
I'LL
GET
CITIBANK
TO
DO
THEIR
ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
HERE,'
I
SAID.
'WELCOME,
MR
KRISH,
WE
HAVE

TWO
GARDEN
VIEW
ROOMS
BOOKED
FOR
YOU,'
THE
RECEPTIONIST
SAID.
'AND
I
HAVE
SOME
GOOD
NEWS.
ONE
OF
THE
ROOMS,
WE
ARE
OFFERING
AN
UPGRADE
TO
A
LARGER,
SEA-VIEW
ROOM.'
'WOW,'
ANANYA
SAID,
'I'VE
NEVER
STAYED
IN
A
SEA-VIEW
ROOM.'
OF
COURSE,
ANANYA
AND

I
WEREN'T
STAYING
TOGETHER.

I
WAS
TO
SHARE
A
ROOM
WITH
MY
MOTHER
WHILE
ANANYA
WOULD
BE
WITH
HER
PARENTS.

AND
SINCE
THEY
WERE
THREE
OF
THEM,

I
MADE
THE
CHOICE.
'ANANYA,
YOUR
FAMILY
CAN
TAKE
THE
LARGER
ROOM.
MOM
AND
I
WILL
TAKE

THE
OTHER
ONE,'
I
SAID.
THE
BELL-BOYS
CARRIED
THE
LUGGAGE
TO
OUR
ROOM.
'NICE
PLACE,
NO?'
I
SAID
TO
MY
MOTHER
AS
WE
PASSED
A
FLOWER
GARDEN.
MY
MOTHER
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
'EVERYTHING
OK?'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
GAVE
A
BRIEF
NOD.
SHE
KEPT
QUIET

UNTIL
WE
HAD
REACHED
THE
ROOM.
'THEY
ARE
VERY
RUDE
PEOPLE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHO?
THE
HOTEL
STAFF?'
I
SAID
AS
I
OPENED
THE
CURTAINS
TO
SEE
THE
GARDEN
VIEW.
'SHUT
UP,
THESE
PEOPLE
YOU
WANT
TO
MAKE
YOUR
IN-LAWS.
ARE
THEY
IN-LAWS?
THEY

ARE
MAKING
THEIR
SON-IN-LAW
PICK
UP
LUGGAGE?’
‘HUH?
WHEN?’
I
ASKED.
‘AT
THE
AIRPORT.
YOU
DON’T
EVEN
REALISE
YOU
HAVE
BECOME
THEIR
SERVANT?’
‘I....’
I
SAID,
SEARCHING
FOR
A
RESPONSE,
‘I
WANTED
TO
HELP.’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NONSENSE,
AND
WHY
DID
THEY
TAKE
THE
SEA-VIEW
ROOM?
WE
ARE
THE
BOY'S
SIDE.'
'THEY
ARE
MORE
PEOPLE.
BESIDES,
DO
YOU
CARE?
ISN'T
THE
GARDEN
PRETTY?'
'WHATEVER,
HAVE
YOU
NOTICED
THEIR
BIGGEST
BLUNDER?'
SHE
SAID.
'WHAT?'
'THEY
DIDN'T
GET
ANYTHING.
I

GAVE
THEIR
DAUGHTER
TWO
BANGLES.
THEY
SHOULD
HAVE
SOME
SHAME.'
IN
PUNJABI
TERMS,
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
HAD
COMMITTED
A
COGNIZABLE
OFFENCE.
YOU
DON'T
MEET
THE
BOY'S
SIDE
EMPTY-HANDED.
EVER.
'AND
I
GAVE
HER
A
SILK
SARI
FOR
TWO
THOUSAND
BUCKS.
SHE
DIDN'T
EVEN
APPRECIATE
IT.'

'SHE
DID.'
'NO,
SHE
WAS
BRAGGING
ABOUT
HER
SOUTH
SARIS,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
THIS
IS
ONE
OF
THE
HUGE
DOWNSIDES
OF
GETTING
MARRIED.
A
GUY
HAS
TO
GET
INVOLVED
IN
DISCUSSION
ABOUT
SARIS
AND
GOLD.
'MOM,
WE
HAVE
COME
HERE
TO
GET
TO
KNOW

THEM.
DON'T
PRE-JUDGE,
PLEASE.
AND
NOW,
GET
READY
FOR
DINNER.'
'YOU
WILL
TAKE
THEIR
SIDE
ONLY.
YOU
ARE
TRAPPED.'
SHE
MUTTERED.
'STUPID
BOY,
DOESN'T
KNOW
HIS
OWN
VALUE.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
52
FEW
THINGS
BRING
OUT
THE
DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN
PUNJABIS
AND
TAMILIANS
THAN
BUFFET
MEALS.
TAMILIANS
SEE
IT
LIKE
ANY
OTHER
MEAL.
THEY
WILL
LOAD
UP
ON
WHITE
RICE
FIRST,
FOLLOWED
BY
DAAL
AND
CURDS
AND
ANYTHING
THAT
HAS
LITTLE
DOTS
OF

MUSTARD,
COCONUT
OR
CURRY
LEAVES.
FOR
PUNJABIS,
FOOD
TRIGGERS
AN
EMOTIONAL
RESPONSE,
LIKE
SAY
MUSIC.
AND
THE
ARRAY
OF
DISHES
AVAILABLE
IN
A
BUFFET
IS
AKIN
TO
THE
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA.
THE
IDEA
IS
YOU
LOAD
AS
MANY
CALORIES
AS
POSSIBLE
ONTO
ONE
PLATE,
AS

MOST
PARTY
CATERERS
CHARGED
BASED
ON
THE
NUMBER
OF
PLATES
USED.
ALSO,
LIKE
MY
MOTHER
EXPLAINED
SINCE
CHILDHOOD,
NEVER
TAKE
A
DISH
THAT
IS
EASILY
PREPARED
AT
HOME
OR
WHOSE
INGREDIENTS
ARE
CHEAP.
SO,
NO
YELLOW
DAAL,
BORING
GOBI
ALOO
OR
GREEN
SALAD.
THE

FOCUS
IS
ON
THE
CHICKEN,
DISHES
WITH
DRY
FRUITS
IN
THEM
AND
EXOTIC
DESSERTS.
'YOU
CAN
TAKE
MORE
THAN
ONE
PLATE
HERE,
MOM,'
I
SAID
AS
SHE
TOSSED
THREE
SERVINGS
OF
BUTTER
CHICKEN
FOR
ME.
'REALLY?
NO
EXTRA
CHARGE?'
SHE
SAID.
WE
RETURNED
TO

OUR
TABLE.
'YOU
ARE
HAVING
RICE?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
SHE
SAW
THE
OTHERS'
PLATES.
THEY
NODDED
AS
THEY
ATE
WITH
SPOONS.
THEIR
FINGERS
ITCHED
TO
FEEL
THE
SQUISHY
TEXTURE
OF
RICE
MIXED
WITH
CURD
AND
DAAL.
ANANYA
HAD
MADE
THEM
CURB
THEIR
PRIMAL

INSTINCTS
TO
PREVENT
SHOCKING
MY
MOTHER.
'CHICKEN
IS
TOO
GOOD.
DID
YOU
TRY?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AND
LIFTED
UP
A
PIECE
TO
OFFER
THEM.
'WE
ARE
VEGETARIAN,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
COLDLY,
EVEN
AS
THE
CHICKEN
LEG
HUNG
MID-AIR.
'OH,'
MOTHER
SAID.
'IT'S
OK,
AUNTY,

I
WILL
TRY
IT.'
ANANYA
SAID.
WE
ATE
IN
MUCH
SILENCE
WITH
ONLY
OUR
CHEWING
MAKING
A
SOUND.
'AMMA,
SOMETHING
SOMETHING,'
ANANYA
WHISPERED
IN
TAMIL,
EGGING
HER
ON
TO
TALK.
'YOUR
HUSBAND
DIDN'T
COME?'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'NO,
HE
IS
NOT
WELL.
DOCTOR
HAS
TOLD
HIM
NOT
TO
TRAVEL
BY
AIR,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'THERE
IS
A
TRAIN
TO
GOA
FROM
DELHI,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SUPPLIED.
ANANYA
GAVE
HER
FATHER
A
GLANCE,
MAKING
HIM
RETURN
TO
HIS
FOOD.
'WE

DON'T
TRAVEL
BY
TRAIN,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
LYING
OF
COURSE.

I
HAVE
NO
IDEA
WHY.
SHE
CONTINUED,
'ACTUALLY,
PUNJABIS
ARE
QUITE
LARGE-HEARTED
PEOPLE.

WE
LIKE
TO
LIVE
WELL.
WHEN
WE
MEET
PEOPLE,
WE
GIVE
THEM
NICE
GIFTS.'
'MOM,
DO
YOU
WANT
DESSERT?
THERE
IS

MANGO
ICE-CREAM,'
I
SAID.
SHE
IGNORED
ME.
'YEAH,
WE
NEVER
MEET
ANYONE
EMPTY-HANDED.
OH
AND
MEETING
THE
BOY'S
SIDE
EMPTY-HANDED
IS
UNTHINKABLE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
I
GENTLY
STAMPED
HER
FOOT.
'OK,
I'VE
BOOKED
A
CAR
FOR
SIGHTSEEING
TOMORROW.
PLEASE
BE
IN
THE
COFFEE

SHOP
BY
SEVEN,'
I
SAID.
'ILLA
SIGHTSEEING,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
MUMBLED.
'SURE,
WE'LL
BE
THERE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
ANANYA
AND
I
MET
FOR
A
WALK
POST-DINNER
AT
PARK
HYATT'S
PRIVATE
BEACH.
'MY
PARENTS
ARE
UPSET,'
ANANYA
SAID,
'YOUR
MOTHER
SHOULD
LEARN
TO
TALK.'
THE
WAVES
SPLASHED

THE
SHORE
AS
MANY
TOURIST
COUPLES
WALKED
HAND-IN-HAND
IN
FRONT
OF
US.
I
BET
THEY
WEREN'T
DISCUSSING
THE
MOOD
SWINGS
OF
THEIR
FUTURE
IN-LAWS.
'YOUR
PARENTS
SHOULD
KNOW
HOW
TO
BEHAVE,'
I
SAID.
THERE
WE
WERE,
AT
ONE
OF
THE
MOST
ROMANTIC
LOCATIONS
IN

INDIA,
HAVING
OUR
FIRST
MARITAL
DISCORD.
IN
AN
INDIAN
LOVE
MARRIAGE,
BY
THE
TIME
EVERYONE
GETS
ON
BOARD,
ONE
WONDERS
IF
THERE
IS
ANY
LOVE
LEFT.
'HOW
CAN
THEY
BEHAVE
BETTER?'
SHE
SAID.
'I
WILL
TELL
YOU.
BUT
YOU
MUST
DO
EXACTLY
AS
I

SAID,'
I
SAID.
'IF
IT
IS
REASONABLE,'
SAID
MY
SENSIBLE
GIRLFRIEND.
'STEP
ONE,
BUY
MY
MOTHER
AN
EXPENSIVE
GIFT.'
'REALLY?'
'YES,
STEP
TWO,
WHEN
WE
GO
OUT
IN
GOA
TOMORROW,
ALWAYS
OFFER
TO
PAY.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'EVERYWHERE?'
'YES,
AT
RESTAURANTS,
TO
TAXIS
OR
ANYWHERE
ELSE.
AND
WHEN
YOU
OFFER,
SHE
WILL
SAY
NO.
BUT
INSIST,
IF
NEEDED,
SNATCH
HER
PURSE
TO
PREVENT
HER
FROM
PAYING.
IN
PUNJABI,
THIS
IS
CONSIDERED
OK,
EVEN
AFFECTIONATE.'
ANANYA'S
JAW
WENT
SLACK.

'STEP
THREE,
NEVER
LET
ME
DO
ANY
WORK
WHEN
EVERYONE'S
AROUND.
FOR
EXAMPLE,
AT
THE
BREAKFAST
TABLE,
TELL
YOUR
MOTHER
TO
BRING
TOAST
FOR
ME.'
SHE
SNORTED.
'THAT'S
WHAT
MY
MOM
EXPECTS.
DO
IT,'
I
SAID.
HER
FACE
LOOKED
DEFIANT.
'I
BEG
YOU,'
I

SAID.
'ANYTHING
ELSE?'
SHE
SAID.
'YES,
STEP
FOUR
IS
TO
MAKE
LOVE
TO
ME
ON
THE
BEACH.'
'NICE
TRY,
PRETTY
PUNJABI
BOY.
BUT
SORRY,
NOTHING'S
HAPPENING
UNTIL
WE
CROSS
THE
FINISH
LINE
NOW.'
'ANANYA,
C'MON,'
I
COAXED.
'WE
HAVE
TO
FIX
THE
FAMILY
SITUATION.

I'M
TOO
TENSE
TO
THINK
OF
ANYTHING
ELSE,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'OK,
IF
TOMORROW
GOES
WELL,
THEN
CAN
WE
DO
IT
ON
THE
BEACH?
WE
WILL
CALL
IT
OPERATION
BEACH
PASSION.'
'WE'LL
SEE.
BEACH
PASSION,'
SHE
SMILED
AND
SMACKED
MY
HEAD.
'LET'S
GO
BACK,
MY

DAD
IS
WAITING
FOR
ME.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
DAY
TOUR
OF
GOA
WENT
OFF
WITHOUT
FIREWORKS,
MAINLY
DUE
TO
THE
PRESENCE
OF
A
FRIENDLY
GOAN
TOUR
GUIDE.
WE
WENT
TO
BOM
JESUS
BASILICA,
THE
OLDEST
CHURCH
IN
GOA.
'LIGHT
A
CANDLE
WITH
SOMEONE
YOU
LOVE,'
THE
GUIDE
SAID.

I
HAD
TO
CHOOSE
BETWEEN
ANANYA
AND
MY
MOTHER.
GIVEN
THE
SENSITIVITY
OF
THE
TRIP,
I
WENT
WITH
THE
LATTER.
WE
ALSO
VISITED
DONA
PAULA,
THE
CLIMAX
LOCATION
FOR
THE
MOVIE
EK
DUJE
KE
LIYE.
"FAMOUS
MOVIE
SHOT
HERE.
NORTH
INDIAN
BOY,
SOUTH
INDIAN

GIRL.
DIFFICULT
TO
GET
ALONG,
SO
THEY
DIE,'
THE
GUIDE
SAID.
'WHAT
ELSE
COULD
HAVE
HAPPENED?'
MY
MOTHER
SMIRKED.
I
LET
IT
PASS.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
STAYED
BACK
IN
PANJIM
FOR
SHOPPING.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
53
WE
MET
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
AT
DINNER.
ALL
BUFFET
MEALS
AT
PARK
HYATT
WERE
PAID
FOR
AS
PART
OF
THE
PACKAGE.
THEY
CAME
TO
THE
COFFEE
SHOP
WITH
THREE
BROWN
BAGS.
'KAVITA-JI,
THIS
IS
FOR
YOU,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
PASSED
THE
BAGS

TO
MY
MOTHER.
'NO,
NO,
WHAT
IS
THE
NEED?'
MY
MOTHER
SIMPERED
AS
SHE
TOOK
THE
GIFTS.
THE
FIRST
BAG
HAD
THREE
SARIS.
THE
SECOND
BAG
HAD
FOUR
SHIRTS
FOR
ME.
THE
THIRD
BAG
CONTAINED
SWEETS,
SAVOURY
SNACKS
AND
GOAN
CASHEWS.
I
CRUISED
THE

BUFFET
COUNTERS
WITH
ANANYA.
'ENOUGH
OR
DOES
SHE
WANT
MORE?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'IT'S
COOL.
THIS
IS
EXACTLY
WHAT
WORKS,'
I
REASSURED
HER.
ALL
OF
US
SAT
AT
THE
TABLE
AND
ATE
IN
SILENCE.
I
ALWAYS
FOUND
IT
SCARY
TO
EAT
WITH
ANANYA'S
FAMILY,
WHO

ATE
THEIR
MEALS
AS
IF
IN
MOURNING.
IF
I
FOUND
THE
LACK
OF
CONVERSATION
AWKWARD,
MY
MOTHER
HATED
IT.
SHE
SHIFTED
IN
HER
SEAT
SEVERAL
TIMES.
THE
ONLY
SOUND
WAS
CUTLERY
CLANGING
ON
THE
PLATES.
MY
MOTHER
SPOKE
AFTER
FIVE
MINUTES.
'SEE,
HOW
TIMES

HAVE
CHANGED.
OUR
KIDS
DECIDE,
AND
WE
HAVE
TO
MEET
EACH
OTHER.'
'YES,
INITIALLY
WE
HAD
A
BIG
SHOCK.
BUT
KRISH
LIVED
IN
CHENNAI
FOR
SIX
MONTHS.
ONCE
WE
KNEW
HIM,
WE
WERE
OK,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
IN
HER
NATURALLY
STERN
VOICE.
'WHAT
OK?

YOU
MUST
BE
JUMPING
WITH
JOY
INSIDE.
WHERE
WOULD
YOU
FIND
SUCH
A
QUALIFIED
BOY
LIKE
HIM?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
I
PRAYED
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
WOULDN'T
BITE
AT
THE
BAIT.
OF
COURSE,
SHE
DID.
'ACTUALLY,
WE
DO
GET
QUALIFIED
BOYS.
TAMILS
VALUE
EDUCATION
A
LOT.

ALL
HER
UNCLES
ARE
ENGINEERS
OR
DOCTORS.
ANANYA
HAD
MANY
MATCHES
FROM
THE
USA.'
'YEAH,
BUT
THEY
MUST
BE
ALL
DARK
BOYS.
WERE
THERE
ANY
AS
FAIR
AS
KRISH?
LOOKS-
WISE
YOU
CANNOT
MATCH
PUNJABIS,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
WITHOUT
ANY
APPARENT
VICIOUSNESS
IN
HER

VOICE.

I

ALMOST

CHOKED

ON

THE

SPAGHETTI

IN

MY

MOUTH.

'MOM,

THEY

CHANGED

DESSERT

TODAY,'

I

COUGHED,

'DO

YOU

LIKE

BREAD

PUDDING?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'AND
MY
BROTHERS
ARE
ALSO
DOING
WELL,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'ASK
ANANYA
WHAT
A
WEDDING
SHE
HAS
ATTENDED.
THEY
GAVE
A
SANTRO
TO
THE
GROOM.
YOU
MAY
HAVE
LANDED
MY
SON,
BUT
IT
DOESN'T
MEAN
HE
HAS
NO
VALUE.'
ANANYA
IMITATED

A
STUNNED
GOLDFISH
WHILE
I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD
TO
DENY
RESPONSIBILITY
FOR
THAT
STATEMENT.
'WE
HAVEN'T
TRAPPED
ANYONE,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID
FINALLY.
'HE
USED
TO
KEEP
COMING
TO
OUR
HOUSE.
W
ARE
DECENT
PEOPLE
SO
WE
COULDN'T
SAY
NO.'
'MOM,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'WHY
SHOULD

I
BE
QUIET
AND
GET
FALSELY
ACCUSED?
WE
HAVEN'T
TRAPPED
ANYONE.
AREN'T
WE
SUFFERING?
WE
ALL
KNOW
KRISH'S
FATHER
IS
AGAINST
THIS.
OUR
RELATIVES
WILL
ASK.
STILL
WE
ARE
ACCEPTING
IT,'
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
ACCEPTING?
YOU
DON'T
EVEN
DESERVE
MY
BOY,'

MY
MOTHER
SAID,
HER
VOICE
NICE
AND
LOUD.
'PLEASE
DON'T
SHOUT.
WE
ARE
EDUCATED
PEOPLE,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
ARE
YOU
SAYING
WE
ARE
NOT
EDUCATED?'
MY
MOTHER
CHALLENGED.
'HE
MEANT
"WE"
AS
IN
ALL
OF
US,
RIGHT,
UNCLE?
WE
ARE
ALL
EDUCATED,'
I
HASTILY

PUT
IN.
'WILL
YOU
CONTINUE
TO
TAKE
THEIR
SIDE
AND
CLAP
WHILE
YOUR
MOTHER
GETS
HUMILIATED?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
'NO
MOM,'
I
SAID,
WONDERING
IF
I
HAD
TAKEN
SIDES.
'I
WON'T.'
ANANYA'S
FAMILY
SPOKE
TO
EACH
OTHER
IN
TAMIL.
UNCLE
LOOKED
ESPECIALLY
DISTRESSED
AS

HE
TOOK
SHORT,
JERKY
BREATHS.
'MY
FATHER
IS
NOT
WELL.
WE
WILL
GO
BACK
TO
OUR
ROOM,'
ANANYA
SAID.
I
LOOKED
AT
HIM
IN
ALARM.
"KRISH,
WE
WILL
SEE
YOU
LATER,'
ANANYA
ADDED.
'MOM,'
I
SAID
IN
PROTEST
AFTER
THEY
LEFT.
'WHAT?
IS
THERE

BREAD
PUDDING?
LET'S
GET
SOME,'
SHE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
MY
MOTHER
AND
I
CAME
BACK
TO
OUR
ROOM.
SHE
PRETENDED
NOTHING
HAD
HAPPENED.
'HOW
DOES
THIS
REMOTE
WORK?
I
WANT
TO
WATCH
MY
SERIAL,'
SHE
SAID.
'MOM,
YOU
COULD
HAVE
BEHAVED
BETTER
THERE,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
DIDN'T
ANSWER
IN

WORDS.
SHE
RESPONDED
IN
NUCLEAR
WEAPONS.
TEARS
ROLLED
DOWN
HER
CHEEKS.
'OH
PLEASE,'
I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
SHE
SWITCHED
TO
HER
FAVOURITE
SOAP
WHERE
A
SON
WAS
THROWING
HIS
OLD
PARENTS
OUT
OF
HIS
HOUSE.
SHE
CRIED
ALONG
WITH
THE
TV
PARENTS,

CORRELATING
THEIR
SITUATION
TO
HERS.
YEAH
RIGHT,
SHE
WAS
STAYING
IN
PARK
HYATT
AND
ATE
FOUR
KINDS
OF
ICE-CREAM
AND
BREAD
PUDDING
FOR
DESSERT.
BUT,
OF
COURSE,
ALL
SONS
ARE
VILLAINS
PLAYING
INTO
THE
HANDS
OF
THEIR
WIVES.
'WE
CAN'T
HAVE
A
CONVERSATION
IF

YOU
WATCH
THIS
STUPID
SERIAL,'
I
SAID.
'THIS
IS
NOT
STUPID.
THIS
IS
HUNDRED
PERCENT
REALITY,'
SHE
RETORTED.
I
SWITCHED
OFF
THE
TV.
MY
MOTHER
FOLDED
HER
HANDS.
'PLEASE
HAVE
MERCY
ON
ME,'
SHE
SAID,
'DON'T
SUBJECT
ME
TO
THIS.'
THE
DOORBELL
RANG.
I

OPENED
THE
DOOR.
ANANYA
STOOD
THERE,
HER
FACE
EQUALLY
WREATHED
IN
EARS.
WHEN
ESTROGEN
ATTACKS
YOU
ON
ALL
SIDES,
THERE
IS
NOT
MUCH
YOU
CAN
DO.
'WHAT
HAPPENED?'
I
SAID.
'DAD'S
CHEST
IS
HURTING,'
ANANYA
SAID,
FIGHTING
BACK
HER
SOBS.
'SHOULD
I
CALL
A

DOCTOR?’

I

SAID.

‘NO,

HE

IS

FINE

NOW.

BUT

SOMETHING

ELSE

CAN

HELP.’

‘WHAT?’

I

SAID.

‘IS

YOUR

MOM

INSIDE?

CAN

I

TALK

TO

HER?’

SHE

SAID.

‘SURE,’

I

STEPPED

BACK.

ANANYA

CAME

IN

AND

TOLD

MY

MOTHER

WHO

WAS

SITTING

ON

THE

BED.

'AUNTY,
I
THINK
YOU
SHOULD
APOLOGISE
TO
MY
PARENTS.'
'YES
IT
IS
ALWAYS
MY
FAULT,'
MY
MOTHER
MOCKED,
LOOKING
AT
ME
FOR
SUPPORT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'AUNTY,
PLEASE
DON'T
GENERALIZE.
WE
SPENT
FOUR
HOURS
IN
PANJIM
TODAY
BUYING
GIFTS
FOR
YOU.
MY
PARENTS
DID
WHATEVER
KRISH
ASKED
US
TO
DO.'
'WHAT?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
AUNTY,
YOU
HAVE
INSULTED
THEM.
THEY
HAVE
NOT
TRAPPED
ANYONE.
THEY
WERE
DEAD

AGAINST
KRISH
TO
BEGIN
WITH.
AND
NOW
THEY
HAVE
ACCEPTED
HIM,
THEY'D
LIKE
SOME
DIGNITY.'
'I
AM
NOT.....'
MY
MOTHER
STARTED
TO
TALK.
'OK,
ENOUGH,'
I
SAID.
BOTH
THE
WOMEN
TURNED
TO
ME.
'GET
YOUR
PARENTS
HERE,'
I
SAID,
'LET'S
TALK
THIS
STRAIGHT.
EVERYONE

HAS
HURT
EVERYONE.'
'NO
KRISH,
TODAY
MY
PARENTS
DIDN'T
DO
ANYTHING,'
ANANYA
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
WENT
INTO
THE
BATHROOM.
'ANANYA,
TRY
AND
UNDERSTAND,'
I
WHISPERED.
'YOU
PUSH
MY
MOTHER
INTO
A
CORNER,
IT
WILL
GET
WORSE.
LET'S
MAKE
IT
A
MUTUAL
APOLOGY.'
I
WALKED

ANANYA
TO
THE
DOOR.

'I
DON'T
LIKE
THIS,'
ANANYA
SAID

AT
THE
DOOR.

'BRING
EVERYONE
HERE,
PLEASE,'

I
SAID.

I
CAME
BACK
INTO
THE
ROOM.

MY
MOTHER
HAD
WASHED
HER
FACE.

'I'VE
CALLED
ALL
OF
THEM
HERE.

LET'S
HAVE
A
FRANK
TALK,'

I
SAID.

SHE
KEPT
QUIET.
'WHAT'S
UP,
MOM?
SAY
SOMETHING,'
I
SAID.
I
WANTED
MY
MOTHER
TO
VENT
OUT
BEFORE
ANANYA
ARRIVED
WITH
HER
PARENTS.
'YOU
SAW
ANANYA?
HAVE
YOU
SEEN
ANY
GIRL
TALK
TO
HER
MOTHER-IN-LAW
LIKE
THAT?'
MY
MOTHER
DEMANDED.
'SHE
IS
A
LITTLE

FEMINIST
TYPE,
I
ADMIT,'
I
SAID.
'SHE
IS
TELLING
ME
TO
APOLOGISE.
CAN
YOU
IMAGINE
MINTI
TALKING
TO
DUKE'S
MOTHER
LIKE
THAT?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'SHE
IS
DIFFERENT.
SHE
IS
CONFIDENT,
INDEPENDENT
AND
INTELLIGENT.
BUT
SHE
IS
CARING
AND
SENSITIVE
TOO.'
'SHE
IS
TOO
INTELLIGENT
TO
BE
A
GOOD
DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.'
I
HAD
NO
CLUE
HOW
TO
RESPOND
TO
THAT,
BUT
I
HAD
TO
CALM
HER.
'SHE

ISN'T
THAT
INTELLIGENT,
MOM,'
I
ASSURED
HER.
'SHE
DID
ECONOMICS,
BUT
I
BEAT
HER
IN
THAT
SUBJECT.'
'WE
DON'T
HAVE
BAHUS
IN
PUNJABIS
LIKE
THAT,
NO
MATTER
HOW
HIGH-PROFILE.
WE
KEEP
THEM
STRAIGHT,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'SO
WE
WILL
TOO,'
I
SAID
TO
PACIFY

HER.
'SHE
IS
OUT
OF
CONTROL.'
'MOM,
SHE
IS
HERE
WITH
HER
PARENTS
HERE.
BUT
I
AM
MARRYING
ONLY
HER;
ONCE
SHE
COMES
TO
OUR
HOUSE,
WE
CAN
CONTROL
HER.
YOU
ONLY
SAY,
NO,
THAT
SOUTH
INDIANS
ARE
DOCILE
AND
SCARED,'
I
SAID
WHATEVER

MY
MOTHER
NEEDED
TO
HEAR.
'I
DON'T
WANT
MY
DAUGHTER-IN-LAW
TO
RAISE
HER
VOICE
OR
ANSWER
ME
BACK.
SHE
HAS
TO
BE
UNDER
MY
THUMB.'
'FINE,
MAKE
HER
TOE
THE
LINE.'
I
SAID,
'BUT
BE
NORMAL
NOW.'
'I
HEARD
THAT,'
ANANYA
SAID,
HER
FACE

RED.
ANANYA
STOOD
THERE
WITH
HER
PARENTS.
DAMN,
I
HADN'T
SHUT
THE
DOOR
AFTER
ANANYA
LEFT.
'ANANYA?
I
DIDN'T
REALISE
YOU
WERE
HERE,'
I
SAID.
'AND
I
DIDN'T
REALISE
WHAT
I
WAS
DOING.
SO,
I
WILL
BE
TAUGHT
TO
TOE
THE
LINE
AFTER
MARRIAGE.

WELL
DONE,
KRISH,
IT'S
NOT
JUST
YOUR
MOTHER,
IT
IS
YOU
AS
WELL,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'ANANYA,
I....'
BOTH
WOMEN
STARED
AT
ME
WITH
TEAR-READY
EYES,
READY
TO
SHOOT
THEIR
ULTIMATE
EMOTIONAL
LASER
WEAPONS.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
TAPPED
HIS
WIFE'S
SHOULDERS,
SIGNALING
DEPARTURE.
'I
TOLD
MY

PARENTS
YOUR
MOTHER
WILL
APOLOGISE.
BUT
YOU
GUYS
ARE
MAKING
BIGGER
PLANS,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
WALKED
OUT
OF
THE
ROOM
WITH
HER
PARENTS.
I
RAN
OUT
AND
CAUGHT
UP
WITH
ANANYA.
"WAIT,
WHERE
ARE
YOU
GOING?'
'WE'RE
DONE,'
SHE
SAID,
HER
WORDS
FIRM
DESPITE

THE
WOBBLY
VOICE.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
MEAN?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'IT'S
OVER,'
ANANYA
CLARIFIED,
'BETWEEN
YOU
AND
ME.'
'ARE
YOU
BREAKING
UP
WITH
ME?
WHAT?
ANANYA,
ARE
YOU
CRAZY?
I
WAS
MANIPULATING
HER
SO
SHE'D
CALM
DOWN.'
'I
HATE
MANIPULATIONS,
KRISH,
AND
I
HATE
MANIPULATORS
EVEN
MORE,'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
BROKE

INTO
TEARS.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
CAME
TOWARDS
US
AND
HELD
ANANYA'S
HAND.
'IT'S
NOT
ABOUT
COMMUNITIES.
IT'S
ABOUT
THE
KIND
OF
PEOPLE
WE
WANT
TO
BE
WITH,'
HE
SAID.
I
STOOD
ALONE
IN
THE
CORRIDOR
AS
ANANYA'S
FAMILY
WALKED
AWAY
AND
THE
GROUND
TILTED
AROUND

MY
FEET.
NEEDLESS
TO
SAY,
OPERATION
BEACH
PASSION
WAS
NOT
EXECUTED
THAT
NIGHT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
FINAL
ACT:
DELHI
&
CHENNAI
&
DELHI
&
CHENNAI

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

54

I

TURNED
WORKAHOLIC
AFTER
GOA,
SPENDING
FOURTEEN
MANIACAL
HOURS

A

DAY

IN

THE

OFFICE.

I

EVEN

BOUGHT

THE

COMPANY

LAPTOP

HOME

TO

SLOG

MORE.

I

ACHIEVED

TWICE

MY

WORK

TARGETS,

I

DIDN'T

SOCIALISE,

I

DIDN'T

SEE

MOVIES

AND

I

STOPPED

GOING
TO
RESTAURANTS.
'YOU
HAVE
A
GREAT
FUTURE,'
RANNVIJAY,
MY
NEW
BOSS,
TOLD
ME.
WHEN
CITIBANK
SEES
A
GREAT
FUTURE
IN
YOU,
IT
MEANS
YOU
HAVE
NO
LIFE
AT
PRESENT.
'THANKS,
RANNVIJAY,'
I
SAID.
'THOUGH
YOU
COULD
DO
WITH
A
SHAVE.
WHAT'S
WITH
THE

NEW
LOOK?
GROWING
A
BEARD?
AND
YOU
LOOK
WEAK....
TAKE
CARE
OF
YOUR
HEALTH.'

I
HAD
TRIED
TO
CALL
ANANYA
SEVERAL
TIMES
AFTER
MY
RETURN.
HER
PARENTS
WOULD
NOT
PASS
HER
THE
PHONE
IF

I
CALLED
HOME.
IN
HER
OFFICE,
THE
RECEPTIONIST
WOULD
TELL

ME
SHE
WAS
IN
A
MEETING.
WHEN
I
DID
REACH
HER,
SHE'D
MAKE
AN
EXCUSE
AND
NOT
CONVERSE.
ANANYA
HAD
A
CELL-PHONE
NOW,
BUT
SHE
STOPPED
TAKING
ANY
CALLS
FROM
DELHI.
ONE
DAY
I
HAD
A
VISITOR
IN
OFFICE
FROM
CITIBANK
MUMBAI.
I
REQUESTED

HIM
FOR
HIS
PHONE
TO
MAKE
A
CALL.
'HELLO,'
ANANYA
PICKED
UP
THE
PHONE.

'HI,
DON'T
HANG
UP.
IT'S
ME,
,

I
SAID.
'KRISH,
PLEASE...WHOSE
PHONE
IS
THIS?'

'A
COLLEAGUE
FROM
THE
MUMBAI
OFFICE.
LISTEN,

I
AM
SORRY,
FOR
THE
TENTH
TIME.
YOUR
RECEPTIONIST

WILL
HAVE
A
COUNT
OF
MY
EARLIER
ATTEMPTS.'
'KRISH,
THIS
ISN'T
ABOUT
AN
APOLOGY.'
'THEN
STOP
SULKING.'
'I
AM
NOT
SULKING;
I
AM
DOING
WHAT
MAXIMISES
EVERYONE'S
HAPPINESS
IN
THE
LONG
TERM.'
I
SCRATCHED
MY
HEAD
TO
RESPOND
TO
HER
CORPORATE-VISION
TYPE
ANSWER.
'WHAT

ABOUT
YOU
AND
ME?’
‘FOR
MY
OWN
SAKE,
I
CAN’T
LET
MAKE
MY
PARENTS
FEEL
SMALL.’
‘DON’T
YOU
MISS
ME?’
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
SHE
KEPT
SILENT.
I
CHECKED
THE
PHONE;
I
HAD
SPENT
FOUR
MINUTES
ON
THE
CALL.
MY
COLLEAGUE
GAVE
ME
PUZZLED
LOOKS
AS
TO
WHY
I
HAD
TO
USE
HIS
PHONE.
'ANANYA?
I
SAID,
DO
YOU
MISS
ME?'
'WHAT'S
THE
POINT?
SAY,

I
FORGIVE
YOU,
WHAT
WILL
CHANGE?
WILL
YOUR
MOTHER
CHANGE?
WILL
HER
BIAS
TOWARDS
ME,
TOWARDS
SOUTH
INDIANS,
TOWARDS
THE
GIRL'S
CHANGE?'
'SHE
IS
GOOD
AT
HEART,
ANANYA.
BELIEVE
ME
SHE
IS,
,

I
SAID.
'OH
REALLY,
WHY
DON'T
YOU
HAVE
HER
APOLOGISE
TO

MY
PARENTS
THEN?’
SHE
SAID.
IT
WAS
MY
TURN
TO
STAY
SILENT.
‘SEE,’
SHE
SAID.
‘SHE
IS
SENSITIVE
ABOUT
EVERYTHING
RIGHT
NOW.’
‘NO,
SHE
HAS
A
CHIP
ON
HER
SHOULDER
ABOUT
BEING
FROM
THE
GROOM’S
SIDE.’
I
LET
OUT
A
SIGH.
‘ANANYA,
WHAT
HAPPENED

TO
OUR
PLANS
TO
ELOPE?
RUN
AWAY
WITH
ME,'
I
SAID.
'AND
GO
WHERE?
TO
MY
CARING,
NURTURING
MOTHER-IN-LAW?'
ANANYA
SAID,
'NO,
I
WANT
TO
MARRY
WHERE
MY
PARENTS
ARE
TREATED
AS
EQUALS.'
'YOU
SHOULD
HAVE
BEEN
BORN
AS
A
BOY,'
I
SAID.
'THAT'S

SO
SEXIST,
I
WOULD
HAVE
HUNG
UP
IF
I
DIDN'T
CARE
FOR
YOU.'
'DO
YOU
CARE
OR
NOT
?
DON'T
YOU
LOVE
ME?
ISN'T
OUR
LOVE
ABOVE
EVERYTHING?'
'DON'T
ASK
IMPRACTICAL
QUESTIONS,'
SHE
SAID,
HER
VOICE
HEAVY.
'CAN
I
DO
ANYTHING?
ANYTHING?'
I
SAID

DESPERATELY.

'DON'T

CALL

ME

AGAIN.

HELP

ME

GET

OVER

THIS,'

SHE

SAID.

'I

LOVE

YOU,'

I

SAID.

'BYE,

KRISH.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
I
CAME
HOME
AND
SAT
DOWN
IN
FRONT
OF
THE
TV.
FOR
DYSFUNCTIONAL
FAMILIES,
TELEVISION
IS
THE
BIGGEST
BOON.
WITHOUT
THIS
ELECTRONIC
GLUE,
MILLIONS
OF
INDIAN
FAMILIES
WILL
FALL
APART.
THE
MUSIC
CHANNELS
SHOWED
SONGS
OF
EVERLASTING
LOVE.
THE
COUPLES
SEEMED

INSANELY
HAPPY.
PERHAPS,
THEY
WERE
ALL
FROM
THE
SAME
STATE,
RELIGION,
CASTE
AND
CULTURE
AND
THEIR
PARENTS
WERE
COMPLETELY
IN
SYNC
WITH
EACH
OTHER.
OTHERWISE,
HOW
CAN
YOU
FALL
IN
LOVE
IN
INDIA?
SOME
GROWN-UPS
IN
YOUR
HOUSE
ARE
BOUND
TO
GET
PISSSED
OFF.

MY
MOTHER
DIDN'T
TALK
ABOUT
GOA
OR
SHOW
ANY
SIGNS
OF
REMORSE.
SHE
DID
FEEL
A
LITTLE
GUILTY
ABOUT
MY
LOW
MOOD;
HER
PENANCE
CONSISTED
OF
COOKING
PANEER
DISHES
EVERYDAY.
'I'VE
MADE
PANEER
BHURJI.
YOU'LL
HAVE
PARANTHAS
WITH
IT?'
SHE
SAID.
I
DIDN'T
RESPOND.

SHE
TOOK
MY
LACK
OF
PROTEST
FOR
A
YES.
SHE
RETURNED
WITH
DINNER
WITH
TWENTY
MINUTES.
'YOU
WANT
WHITE
BUTTER?'
MY
MOTHER
ASKED.
I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.
'TOO
MUCH
WORK
IN
OFFICE?
THERE
IS
A
CANARA
BANK
NEAR
OUR
HOUSE.
SHOULD
I
TALK
TO

THE
MANAGER
FOR
A
JOB?’
‘NO,
OFFICE
IS
OK,’
I
SAID.
I
TRIED
TO
EAT,
BUT
COULDN’T.
I
HAD
NOT
EATEN
ANYTHING
FOR
THREE
DAYS.
I
HID
THE
PARANTHAS
IN
MY
LAPTOP
BAG
WHEN
SHE
WASN’T
LOOKING.
‘SHIPRA
MASI
HAD
RECOMMENDED
ANOTHER
GIRL.
THEY

HAVE
BUNGALOW
IN
SHALIMAR
BAGH.
WOULD
YOU
LIKE
TO
SEE
HER?’
SHE
SAID.

I
STARED
AT
MY
MOTHER.
‘WHAT?’

SHE
SAID.
‘I’LL
MARRY
HER.
NO
NEED
TO
SEE
HER.
FINE?’

I
SAID.
‘KRISH,
DON’T
SAY
LIKE
THAT.
WHEN
HAVE
I
FORCED
YOU?’

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'WHAT
IS
THE
POINT
OF
ME
SEEING
THESE
GIRLS?
WHAT
AM
I
SUPPOSED
TO
CHECK
OUT
IN
ONE
HOUR?
HER
COMPLEXION?
FIGURE

—
FAT
OR
SLIM?
IS
THE
MARBLE
IN
HER
HOME
REAL?
NONE
OF
THIS
MATTERS
WHEN
YOU
HAVE
TO

SPEND
YOUR
LIFE
WITH
THE
PERSON,
SO
MIGHT
AS
WELL
SAVE
TIME.
THE
PARENTS
SHOULD
DO
THE
MEETING.
WHOEVER
MASSAGES
YOUR
EGO
MORE,
SAY
YES.'
'WHAT
HAPPENED
TO
YOU?
THESE
MULTINATIONALS
ARE
SUCKING
YOUR
BLOOD,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'CAN
YOU
APOLOGIZE
TO
ANANYA'S
PARENTS?'

I
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
DIDN'T
RESPOND.

SHE
STOOD
UP
FROM
THE
SOFA
AND
WENT
INTO
THE
KITCHEN.

I
FOLLOWED
HER
'WHY
CAN'T
YOU
DO
IT?'

I
SAID.
SHE
DIDN'T
ANSWER
ME.
SHE
DABBED
AT
DISHWASHING
DETERGENT
WITH
A
SPONGE
AND
SCRUBBED
THE
UTENSILS.
SHE

ADDRESSED
AN
IMAGINARY
AUDIENCE:
'FIRST
A
USELESS
HUSBAND,
NOW
A
USELESS
SON.
I
HAD
THOUGHT,
AFTER
MY
SON'S
MARRIAGE.
I
WILL
GET
RESPECT.
I
SAID
YES
TO
HIS
CHOICE
OF
GIRL,
BUT
AT
LEAST
BEHAVE
LIKE
THE
GIRL'S
SIDE.
NOW
HE
WANTS
ME
TO

FALL
AT
THEIR
FEET.
WHAT
IS
SO
GREAT
ABOUT
THIS
GIRL?
SHIPRA
IS
RIGHT,
EVERYONE
IS
SELFISH.'
'STOP
IT,
MOM,
I
AM
NOT
TELLING
YOU
TO
GROVEL.
YOU
CAN
APOLOGIZE
OVER
THE
PHONE.'
'APOLOGIZE
FOR
WHAT?
IS
IT
WRONG
TO
EXPECT
WHAT
IS
DUE

TO
ME?
DIDN'T
I
LOOK
AFTER
YOUR
GRANDMOTHER
UNTIL
SHE
DIED?'
'DIDN'T
ANANYA
HELP
SET
DUKE'S
FAMILY
RIGHT?
DIDN'T
YOU
SAY
YES
THEN?'
'I
WAS
WRONG.
I
HADN'T
MET
HER
PARENTS
THEN.
I'VE
NEVER
MET
SUCH
A
DRY
BREED
OF
PEOPLE.
LOOK
AT
HOW

THEY
EAT
DINNER,
LIKE
IT
IS
A
PUNISHMENT.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER

—
DOES
SHE
EVER
LAUGH?
DARK
FROM
OUTSIDE,
DARK
FROM
INSIDE.'
THE
DOORBELL
RANG.
MY
FATHER
HAD
COME
BACK
FROM
ANOTHER
OF
HIS
LACKLUSTURE
BUSINESS
VENTURES.
I
SWITCHED
OFF
THE
TV
AND
OPENED
THE

DOOR.

I
HAD
TOLD
HIM
THE
PARTIAL
TRUTH
ABOUT
GOA.

I
HAD
SAID
THERE
WAS
AN
OFFICE
CONFERENCE
THERE
AND
THAT
I

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WAS
TAKING
MOM
ALONG.
I
HAD
BECOME
QUIET
AFTER
MY
RETURN
AND
DIDN'T
EVEN
BOTHER
TO
FIGHT
WITH
HIM
ANYMORE.
HE
CAME
INSIDE
AND
NOTICED
THE
SILENCE
BETWEEN
MY
MOTHER
AND
ME.
THERE
WERE
SEVERAL
EVENINGS
THESE
DAYS
AT
HOME
WHEN

NO
ONE
SPOKE
TO
ANYONE.
'HAVE
YOU
DECIDED
TO
STOP
TALKING
TO
YOUR
MOTHER,
TOO?'
MY
FATHER
ASKED
AS
HE
SAT
ON
THE
SOFA
AND
REMOVED
HIS
SHOES.
IT'S
NONE
OF
YOUR
BUSINESS,
WOULD
HAVE
BEEN
MY
USUAL
RESPONSE.
BUT
I
HAD
FOUGHT
ENOUGH

WITH
THE
WORLD.
ANOTHER
ARGUMENT
WOULDN'T
HAVE
YIELDED
ANYTHING.
'WE'LL
BE
FINE,'
I
SAID.
I
WISHED
MY
MOTHER
WOULD
BRING
HIS
DINNER
SOON.
'ARE
YOU
NOT
ENJOYING
YOUR
JOB?'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'THE
JOB
IS
GOOD.
THEY
SAID
I'VE
A
GREAT
FUTURE,'
I
SAID.

I
DON'T
KNOW
WHY
I
SAID
THE
LAST
LINE.
SOMEHOW,
I
FELT
THE
NEED
TO
TELL
MY
FATHER
I
WAS
DOING
WELL.
'WHY
ARE
YOU
UPSET
WITH
YOUR
MOTHER?'
HE
SAID.
OK,
IT
WAS
ENOUGH.
'IT'S
NONE
OF
YOUR
BUSINESS,'
I
SAID.
'ARE
YOU

TELLING
ME
MY
OWN
FAMILY
IS
NOT
MY
BUSINESS?'
HE
SAID.
'DAD,
ENOUGH.
I
AM
TOO
TIRED
TO
ARGUE.'
MY
MOTHER
BROUGHT
HIM
DINNER
AND
I
WENT
BACK
TO
MY
ROOM.
I
TOOK
OUT
ANANYA'S
PICTURES.
I
TOSSED
AND
TURNED
IN
BED
WONDERING
WHAT

TO
DO
NEXT.
WHEN
YOU
CAN'T
SLEEP,
YOUR
MIND
COMES
UP
WITH
WEIRD
SCHEMES.
I
COULDN'T
DO
IT
OVER
THE
PHONE.
I
HAD
TO
GO
IN
PERSON
TO
DO
IT.
I
WOKE
UP
AT
FOUR
AND
TOOK
A
SHOWER.
'YOU
ARE
GOING
TO
OFFICE

NOW?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
SHE
HEARD
ME
GET
READY.
'I
HAVE
A
PRESENTATION,
I'LL
BE
BACK
LATE,'
I
SAID.
I
TOOK
AN
AUTO
TO
THE
AIRPORT.
I
PLONKED
A
MONTH'S
SALARY
TO
TAKE
MY
CROSS-
COUNTRY
JOYRIDE.
'SAME
DAY
RETURN
TRIP
TO
CHENNAI

PLEASE.'
I
SAID
AT
THE
INDIAN
AIRLINES
COUNTER.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
55
CHENNAI
SEEMED
EMBARRASSINGLY
FAMILIAR
ON
MY
SECOND
TRIP.
I
COULD
THROW
IN
TAMIL
TERMS
AND
NEGOTIATE
WITH
AUTOS.
I
KNEW
THE
MAIN
ROADS.
I
REACHED
ANANYA'S
OFFICE
AT
ELEVEN.
'HI,
I'M
KRISH,'
I
SAID
TO
THE
RECEPTIONIST.
'OH,
THAT
KRISH,'

SHE
SAID
AND
CALLED
ANANYA.
ANANYA
CAME
OUT.
I
OPENED
MY
ARMS
TO
EMBRACE
HER,
BUT
SHE
SHOOK
HANDS.
'I
CAME
FOR
THE
DAY,'
I
SAID,
AS
WE
SAT
IN
THE
HLL
CAFETERIA.
'YOU
SHOULDN'T
HAVE,'
SHE
SAID.
'WHAT'S
WITH
THE
UNSHAVEN
LOOK?
AND

WHY
DO
YOU
SEEM
SO
WEAK?
ARE
YOU
SICK?’
‘I
WANT
TO
MEET
YOUR
PARENTS,’
I
SAID.
‘THERE
IS
NO
USE.
NO
MATTER
HOW
CHARMING
YOU
ARE,
THEY
DON’T
TRUST
YOU
ANYMORE,’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘DO
YOU
TRUST
ME?’
‘IRRELEVANT,’
SHE
SAID.
‘I’LL
GO
TO

YOUR
PLACE,'
I
SAID.
'DON'T,
HARISH'S
PARENTS
ARE
IN
TOWN.
THEY
WILL
VISIT
MY
PARENTS
TODAY.'
I
TOOK
A
DEEP
BREATH
TO
KEEP
MY
TEMPER
IN
CONTROL.
'AT
LEAST
SPEND
THE
DAY
WITH
ME,'
I
SAID.
'I
CAN'T.
I
HAVE
WORK.
BESIDES,
IT
IS

NOT
GOOD
FOR
MY
PARENTS'
REPUTATION.'
BLOOD
RUSHED
UP
MY
FACE.
'WHAT
REPUTATION?
WHAT
ABOUT
AHMEDABAD?
WHAT
ABOUT
WHEN
YOU'D
LIE
TO
THEM
TO
MEET
ME
IN
CHENNAI?
WHAT
ABOUT
RATNA
STORES?'
MY
VOICE
WAS
AS
LOUD
AS
MY
BODY
WAS
TIRED.
SHE
STOOD

UP.
'PLEASE
DON'T
CREATE
A
SCENE
AT
MY
WORKPLACE.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'PLEASE
DON'T
PLAY
WITH
MY
LIFE.'
'I'M
NOT
DOING
ANYTHING!
BE
STRONG,
MOVE
ON,'
SHE
SAID.
'IT'S
NOT
EASY
FOR
ME.
SO
PLEASE,
LET
ME
BE.'
SHE
WENT
BACK
TO
HER
OFFICE,
LEAVING
ME
STILL
SITTING
THERE
BURNING
WITH
FATIGUE
AND

FURY.

I
HADN'T
SHAVED
FOR
TEN
DAYS.

OTHER
GIRLS
IN
THE
CAFETERIA
STAYED
AWAY
FROM
ME.

I
RESEMBLED
A
KOLLYWOOD
VILLAIN
WHO
COULD
RAPE
ANYONE
ANYWHERE
ANYTIME.

MY
FLIGHT
DIDN'T
LEAVE
UNTIL
THE
EVENING.

I
HAD
HALF
A
DAY
AND
NO
MONEY
TO
SPEND.

LIKE
A
TOTAL
LOSER,
I
DECIDED
TO
GO
TO
CITIBANK
AND
VISIT
BALA.
'KRISH!'
BALA
SAID,
SHOCKED
AT
MY
PRESENCE
AND
APPEARANCE.
'HI,
HOW
IS
THE
CHAMPION
OF
THE
SOUTH?'
'I'M
FINE,
BUT
YOU
LOOK
FUCKED,'
HE
SAID,
'I
AM,'
I
SAID
AND
SLUMPED

IN
FRONT
OF
HIM.
BALA
ORDERED
COFFEE
FOR
BOTH
OF
US.
HE
PULLED
HIS
CHAIR
FORWARD,
EAGER
TO
HEAR
GOSSIP
FROM
THE
OTHER
OFFICE.
'IS
CITI
DELHI
SCREWING
YOU?
DON'T
TELL
ME
YOU
WANT
TO
COME
BACK.'
'FUCK
OFF
BALA,
YOU
THINK
CITIBANK
CAN

GET
THE
BETTER
OF
ME?’
I
SAID.
‘SOMEONE
CLEARLY
HAS.
BOY,
YOUR
EYES.
DO
YOU
HAVE
CONJUNCTIVITIS?’
I
SHOOK
MY
HEAD.
HE
TOUCHED
MY
ARM.
‘DUDE
YOU
HAVE
HIGH
FEVER.
DO
YOU
WANT
TO
SEE
A
DOC?’
‘I
WANT
A
DRINK.
CAN
YOU
GET

ME
A
DRINK?’
I
SAID.
‘NOW?
IT
IS
NOT
EVEN
LUNCHTIME.’
MY
STOMACH
ROILED
AND
I
RETCHED.
THANKFULLY,
NOTHING
CAME
OUT
AND
BALA’S
OFFICE
COULD
MAINTAIN
ITS
PRE-ME
CONDITIONS.
‘YOU
ARE
SICK.
MY
COUSIN
IS
A
DOCTOR,
I’LL
CALL
HIM.
HE
WORKS
IN
CITY

HOSPITAL
ON

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
NEXT
STREET.'
'WHAT
DO
GIRLS
THINK?
WE
CAN'T
LIVE
WITHOUT
THEM?'
I
MUTTERED.
I
COULDN'T
BELIEVE
I
WAS
VENTING
OUT
TO
BALA.
BUT
I
NEEDED
SOMEONE,
ANYONE.
BALA
DROPPED
ME
AT
THE
CLINIC
RUN
BY
HIS
COUSIN,
DR
RAMACHANDRAN
OR

DR
RAM.
DR
RAM
HAD
RETURNED
FROM
THE
US
TWO
YEARS
AGO
AFTER
BEING
A
GENERAL
SURGEON,
WORKING
ON
CANCER
RESEARCH
AND
COLLECTING
SEVERAL
TOP
DEGREES.
HE
TOLD
ME
TO
GO
TO
THE
EXAMINATION
BED
AS
HE
COLLECTED
HIS
INSTRUMENTS.
'I'LL
SEE
YOU
LATER

THEN,'
BALA
SAID.
'YOU
SOUTH
INDIANS
HAVE
TOO
MUCH
BRAIN
BUT
TOO
LITTLE
HEART,'

I
SAID
TO
BALA
AS
HE
LEFT.

'I
HEARD
THAT,'

DR
RAM
SAID
AS
HE
CAME
TO
ME.

HE
PUT
A
COLD
STETHOSCOPE
ON
MY
CHEST.

'SO,
THIS
IS
A

SITUATION
INVOLVING
A
GIRL?
DR
RAM
ASKED.
'WHAT
GIRL?'
'WHEN
DID
YOU
EAT
LAST?'
HE
SAID.
'I
DON'T
REMEMBER,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT'S
THAT
SMELL?'
THE
DOC
SAID.
HE
SNIFFED
HIS
WAY
TO
MY
LAPTOP
BAG.
STALE
PARANTHAS
STANK
UP
THE
ROOM.
'WHAT'S
THIS?'
'LAST

NIGHT'S
DINNER,'
I
SAID.
'OH
MY
LAPTOP,
I
HOPE
IT
IS
OK.'
I
OPENED
MY
LAPTOP
AND
SWITCHED
THE
POWER
ON.
IT
WORKED
FINE.
'CAN
I
SEE
IT?'
DR
RAM
SAID,
POINTING
TO
MY
COMPUTER.
'YES
SURE,
ARE
YOU
LOOKING
TO
BUY
ONE?'
I

SAID.
HE
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
HE
SPENT
FIVE
MINUTES
AT
MY
COMPUTER
AND
GAVE
IT
BACK
TO
ME.
'WHAT?'
'YOU
SHOULD
REST
AND
EAT
FOOD
FOR
SURE.
BUT
YOU
ALSO
NEED
TO
SEE
A
PSYCHIATRIST.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'WHAT?
WHY?'
I
SAID.
SURE,
I
AM
BIT
OF
PSYCHO,
BUT
I
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
MAKE
IT
OFFICIAL.
'WHAT
IS
THE
NAME
OF
THE
GIRL?'
DR
RAM
SAID.
'WHAT
GIRL?
I
DON'T
LIKE
GIRLS.'
'BALA
SAID
SHE
IS
TAMILIAN.
ANANYA
SWAMINATHAN

WHO
STAYS
IN
MYLAPORE,
RIGHT?’
HE
SAID.
‘I
DON’T
LIKE
TAMILIANS,’
I
SCREAMED.
‘AND
DON’T
MENTION
HER
NAME
OR
NEIGHBORHOOD.’
‘GOOD,
BECAUSE
THE
PSYCHIATRIST
I
AM
REFERRING
YOU
TO
IS
A
TAMILIAN
GIRL.
DR
IYER
IS
UPSTAIRS.
PLEASE
GO
NOW.’
‘DOCTOR,
I
HAVE
TO

CATCH
A
FLIGHT.
I
AM
FINE.'
I
PUSHED
MYSELF
OFF
THE
BED.
MY
LEGS
FELT
AS
IF
THE
BLOOD
HAD
DRAINED
FROM
THEM.
I
COULDN'T
BALANCE.
I
FELL
ON
THE
FLOOR.
DR
RAM
HELPED
ME
BACK
UP.
'WHAT
PROBLEM
DO
I
HAVE?'
I
SAID,

WORRIED
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME
ABOUT
MY
ILLNESS.
HE
HANDED
ME
THE
SPECIALIST
REFERRAL
LETTER
AS
HE
SPOKE
AGAIN.
'THERE'S
NO
PRECISE
MEDICAL
TERM.
BUT
SOME
WOULD
REFER
TO
IT
AS
THE
EARLY
SIGNS
OF
A
NERVOUS
BREAKDOWN.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
56
'SO,
THAT'S
IT,
I'VE
TOLD
YOU
EVERYTHING.'
I
SAID.
DR
NEETA
IYER
BROKE
INTO
LAUGHTER
AS
I
FINISHED
MY
STORY.
'THIS
IS
INSANE.
YOU
FIND
COMEDY
IN
MY
TRAGEDY?'
I
WAS
MIFFED.
SHE
DIDN'T
STOP
LAUGHING.
'I'M
PAYING
YOU
TO

TREAT
ME,'
I
SAID
AND
CHECKED
THE
TIME.
'AND
I
HAD
TO
LEAVE
FOR
THE
AIRPORT
IN
TWENTY
MINUTES.'
IT
DAWNED
ON
ME
THAT
I
HAD
SPOKEN
TO
HER
FOR
FOUR
HOURS.
I
HAD
NO
MONEY
FOR
THIS
EXTRAVAGANCE.
'SORRY,'
SHE
SAID,
'YOU
REMINDED

ME
OF
MY
FIRST
BOYFRIEND.
HE
WAS
NORTH
INDIAN.
'YOU
DIDN'T
MARRY
HIM?'
'HE
DIDN'T
WANT
TO
COMMIT,'
SHE
SHOOK
HER
HEAD.
'OH,
SORRY,'
I
SAID.
'IT'S
OK.
I'M
OVER
IT.'
'OF
COURSE
YOU
ARE,
YOU
ARE
A
THERAPIST.
YOU
SHOULD
BE
ABLE
TO

CURE
YOURSELF,
IF
NOTHING
ELSE.'
SHE
WALKED
TO
THE
WINDOW.
'AH
KRISH,
IT
DOESN'T
WORK
LIKE
THAT.
A
BROKEN
HEART
IS
THE
HARDEST
TO
REPAIR.'
I
SIGHED.
'DO
YOU
ACCEPT
CITIBANK
CREDIT
CARDS?'
I
OPENED
MY
WALLET.
'IT'S
FINE,
SEND
ME
A
CHEQUE
LATER,'

SHE
SAID.
'YOU
SHOULD
HAVE
ELOPED.'
'WE
THOUGHT
WE
WILL
WIN
OUR
PARENTS
OVER.
WHERE'S
THE
JOY
OF
GETTING
MARRIED
IF
YOUR
PARENTS
WON'T
SMILE
ON
YOUR
WEDDING
DAY?'
I
SAID.
SHE
CAME
TO
ME
AND
PATTED
MY
SHOULDER.
'YOU
HAVE
TO
LEAVE.
SO,

WHAT
DO
I
DO
NOW?
DO
YOU
WANT
PILLS?'
SHE
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
MEAN
ANTI-DEPRESSANTS?
AREN'T
THEY
BAD
FOR
YOU?'
'YEAH
BUT
DEPENDS
ON
HOW
BAD
YOU
FEEL
RIGHT
NOW.
I
DON'T
WANT
YOU
GOOGLING
FOR
SUICIDE
RECIPES.'
'I
WON'T,'
I
SAID,
'I'LL
PROBABLY
WITHER
AWAY
ANYWAY.
IS
THERE
ANOTHER
OPTION
APART
FROM

PILLS?’
‘THERE’S
THERAPY,
SESSIONS
LIKE
THIS.
IT
TAKES
A
FEW
MONTHS
THOUGH.
I
CAN
TRY
AND
FIND
A
THERAPIST
FOR
YOU
IN
DELHI.’
‘NO,
IF
MY
PUNJABI
FAMILY
FINDS
OUT,
I’M
DONE.
THEY’LL
SAY
I
AM
MENTAL
OR
SOMETHING.’
‘YOU’RE
NOT.
BUT
YOU
KNOW,

THERE
IS
ONE
THING
YOU
CAN
TRY
YOURSELF.'
'WHAT?'
'WHEN
YOU
TOLD
ME
YOUR
STORY,
WHY
DID
YOU
MENTION
THAT
EPISODE
WITH
GURUJI?'
'AT
THE
AUROBINDO
ASHRAM?'
'YES,
IT
DIDN'T
REALLY
HAVE
A
CONNECTION
WITH
ANANYA
OR
HER
PARENTS.
BUT
YOU
REMEMBER
EVERYTHING
HE

SAID.'
'YES
ABOUT
FORGIVENESS.'

'YES,
MAYBE
IT
HAD
SOME
SIGNIFICANCE,'
SHE
SAID.

I
KEPT
QUIET.
THE
CLOCK
IN
HER
ROOM
TOLD
ME
IT
WAS
TIME
FOR
MY
RETURN
JOURNEY.

I
TOOK
HER
LEAVE.
'AIRPORT,
VEGAMAA,'

I
SAID
AS
I
HAILED
AN
AUTO.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
57

I
KNEW
I
HAD
TO
EAT,
MY
BRAIN
KNEW
THIS,
BUT
MY
BODY
WOULDN'T
HEAR
OF
IT.
THE
DAY
AFTER
RETURNING
FROM
CHENNAI,
I
ONLY
HAD
SOUP
AT
OFFICE;
AT
HOME
I
PRETENDED
I'D
ALREADY
HAD
DINNER.
MY
MOTHER
ASKED

ME
WHEN
I
WANTED
TO
SHAVE.
SHE
WANTED
TO
SCHEDULE
A
MEETING
WITH
A
NEW
GIRL.
I
TOLD
HER
I
HAD
DECIDED
TO
KEEP
A
BEARD
FOR
THE
REST
OF
MY
LIFE.
SHE
MADE
A
FACE
AND
LEFT
THE
ROOM.
MY
FATHER
CAME
HOME

AT
TEN.
HE
LOOKED
EXTRA
TIRED.
HIS
NORMALLY
TUCKED
IN
SHIRT
WAS
OUT,
AND
HIS
HAIR
WASN'T
NEATLY
COMBED
AS
USUAL.
HE
SAT
IN
FRONT
OF
ME.
'I'VE
EATEN
DINNER'
HE
TOLD
MY
MOTHER.
'I
DON'T
KNOW
WHY
I
EVEN
COOK,'
MY
MOTHER
GRUMBLED

AS
SHE
LEFT
THE
ROOM.

'YOU
CAME
BACK
LATE
LAST
NIGHT,'
MY
FATHER
SAID
TO
ME.

I
HAD
REACHED
HOME
ONLY
AT
THE
MIDNIGHT
FROM
THE
AIRPORT.

'I
HAD
TO
WORK
LATE,'
I
SAID.
'EVERYTHING
OK?'

HE
SAID.

I
NODDED.

'I
HAD
A
REALLY

BAD
DAY,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'MY
PENSION
PAPERS
ARE
STUCK
IN
GOVERNMENT
OFFICES.
BLOODY
LAZY
BUGGERS.'
I
NODDED
WITHOUT
PAYING
ATTENTION.
MY
THOUGHTS
WERE
ALL
OVER
THE
PLACE,
BUT
NONE
IN
HIS
DEPARTMENT.
I
FELT
IMMENSE
LONGING
AND
LOATHING
FOR
ANANYA
AT
THE
SAME

TIME.
I
FELT
RESENTMENT
TOWARDS
MY
MOTHER.
MY
OWN
PROBLEMS,
AT
LEAST
IN
MY
MIND,
WERE
FAR
BIGGER
THAN
SOME
RETIREMENT
FILES
STUCK
IN
A
GOVERNMENT
OFFICE.
'NOW
THEY
HAVE
ASKED
ME
TO
SUBMIT
THREE
DIFFERENT
LETTERS.
I
HAVE
TO
GET
THEM
TYPED
TOMORROW,'

MY
FATHER
SAID.
WHEN
MY
FATHER
HAD
TO
SUFFER,
HE
FORGOT
HIS
OWN
VOCATION

—
OF
MAKING
OTHERS
SUFFER.
HE
HADN'T
SHOUTED
ONCE
SINCE
HE
HAD
COME
HOME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'DO
YOU
KNOW
A
PLACE
WHERE
I
CAN
GET
LETTERS
TYPED?
YOU
HAVE
A
COMPUTER,
NO?'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'YES,
I
DO,'
I
SAID.
MY
FATHER
CONTINUED
TO
LOOK
AT
ME
EXPECTANTLY.
'OK,
I'LL
TYPE
THEM
NOW
AND
GET
A
PRINTOUT

FROM
OFFICE
TOMORROW,'

I

SAID.

I

ANYWAY
WANTED
MORE
WORK
TO
DISTRACT
MYSELF.

I

OPENED
MY
LAPTOP.

'THANK
YOU,'

HE
SAID,
WORDS

WE
DID
NOT
KNOW
LIVED
INSIDE
OF
HIM.

I

WROTE
HIS
THREE
APPLICATIONS
IN
THE
NEXT
THIRTY
MINUTES.

'HOW'S
YOUR
FRIEND?

HE

SAID
TO
ME.
'WHICH
FRIEND?'
I
SAID.
'THE
GIRL
WHO
CAME
FROM
CHENNAI
TO
ATTEND
THE
WEDDING,'
HE
SAID.
THE
MENTION
OF
ANANYA
WAS
ENOUGH
TO
STIR
UP
MY
EMOTIONS.
I
FELT
LIKE
SOMEONE
HAD
PUNCHED
ME
BACK
IN
THE
STOMACH.
MAYBE
I
SHOULD

TAKE
THOSE
ANTI-DEPRESSION
PILLS,

I
THOUGHT.

'I
DON'T
KNOW.
MUST
BE
FINE,'

I
SAID
AFTER
A
MINUTE'S
PAUSE.

'YOU
ARE
NOT
IN
TOUCH
WITH
HER?'

'EVERYONE
HAD
BUSY
LIVES,
DAD,'

I
DISMISSED.

'YOUR
LETTERS
ARE
DONE.

I'LL
GET
A
PRINTOUT
TOMORROW.'

I
SHUT
DOWN

MY
COMPUTER.
'IT
IS
GOOD
THAT
WE
TALK
SOMETIMES,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'GOOD
NIGHT,
DAD'
I
SAID
AND
LEFT
FOR
MY
ROOM.
I
LAY
IN
BED
AND
THAT
IS
WHEN
THE
DEPRESSION
HIT
ME
FULL
FORCE.
DR
IYER
WAS
RIGHT,
NO
PILL
COULD
BE

AS
BAD
FOR
ME
AS
I
FELT
RIGHT
NOW.
I
LAY
MOTIONLESS.
I
FELT
LIKE
I'D
NEVER
BE
ABLE
TO
GET
OUT
OF
BED
AGAIN.
I
THOUGHT
OF
EVERY
PERSON
IN
MY
LIFE.
ONE
BY
ONE,
I
CONVINCED
MYSELF
HOW
EACH
OF
THEM
HATED

ME.
IF
I
WERE
GONE
TOMORROW,
THEY'D
ALL
BE
HAPPIER.
AND
CONSIDERING
HOW
CRAPPY
I
FELT,
THERE
WAS
NO
REASON
FOR
ME
TO
STICK
AROUND
ANYWAY.
I
HAD
NO
ONE
I
COULD
TALK
TO
ABOUT
MY
SITUATION,
EXCEPT
FIVE
HUNDRED
BUCKS
AN
HOUR.
I

HATED
MONEY,
I
HATED
CITIBANK,
I
HATED
MY
JOB
AND
I

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
HATED
ALL
HUMAN
BEINGS
ON
EARTH.
CALM
DOWN,
KRISH,
THIS
IS
GOING
TO
PASS,
I
TOLD
MYSELF.
THIS
WAS
THE
SENSIBLE
ME
TALKING.
NO
BABY,
THIS
TIME
YOU
ARE
SO
FUCKED.
THIS
IS
HOW
YOU
WILL
FEEL
FOR
THE
REST
OF

YOUR
LIFE,
THE
FREAKED-OUT
ME
SAID.
THAT'S
NONSENSE.
WHATEVER
CRAP
HAPPENS
IN
LIFE,
TONE
GETS
USED
TO
IT.
YOU
AREN'T
THE
FIRST
GUY
FACING
A
BREAK-UP,
SENSIBLE-ME
SAID.
YES,
BUT
NOBODY
LOVES
THE
WAY
I
DO.
SO,
NOBODY
FEELS
AS
HURT
AS
I
DO,

FREAKED-OUT
ME
SAID.
YEAH,
RIGHT,
SENSIBLE-ME
SAID
AND
YAWNED,
CAN
WE
SLEEP?
YOU
KNOW
YOU
NEED
TO.
ARE
YOU
CRAZY?
HOW
CAN
YOU
SLEEP
WHEN
WE
CAN
STAY
UP
ALL
NIGHT
AND
WORRY
ABOUT
THIS
THE
FREAKED-OUT
ME
SAID.
THE
WORLD'S
MOST
SENSIBLE
PERSON

AND
THE
BIGGEST
IDIOT
BOTH
STAY
WITHIN
US.
THE
WORST
PART
IS,
YOU
CAN'T
EVEN
TELL
WHO
IS
WHO.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

58

'WHERE'S
DAD?'

I
ASKED
MY
MOTHER,
'HE
HASN'T
TOLD
ME
HOW
MANY
COPIES
HE
WANTS.'
THOUGH

I
SAT
FOR
BREAKFAST
BEFORE
GOING
TO
OFFICE,

I
DRANK
ONLY
A
GLASS
OF
MILK.
SOLIDS
WERE
STILL
INDIGESTIBLE.

I
WANTED
TO
RUSH
TO

WORK
AND
OCCUPY
MY
MIND
BEFORE
IT
SANK
INTO
ITS
BLACK-HOLE
HELL
AGAIN.
'MORNING
WALK,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHY
DOESN'T
HE
KEEP
A
MOBILE?'
I
SAID
AS
I
WORE
MY
SHOES
TO
LEAVE
FOR
OFFICE.
'GET
FOUR
COPIES
OF
EACH,
WORST
CASE,'
MY
MOTHER

SAID.
IT
WASN'T
A
BIG
DEAL.
HOWEVER,
IT
DIDN'T
TAKE
A
LOT
TO
PISS
ME
OFF
THESE
DAYS.
'LIKE
I
HAVE
NOTHING
BETTER
TO
DO
IN
OFFICE,'
I
SAID.
'ALL
YOU
GRUMPY
PEOPLE
IN
THE
HOUSE,
PLEASE
LEAVE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AND
FOLDED
HER

HANDS.

'I
DON'T
KNOW
WHEN
YOU
WILL
FORGET
HER.'

'I
DON'T
KNOW
WHEN
YOU'LL
END
YOUR
DRAMA,'

I
SAID.
'THIS
GIRL....'
MY
MOTHER
STARTED.
'BYE,'

I
SAID
HURRIEDLY
AND
SPRINTED
OUT
OF
THE
HOUSE.

I
CAME
LATE
AT
NIGHT.

I
HAD
STUCK
TO
JUICE

AND
MILK
ALL
DAY.
'AGAIN
NO
DINNER?
WHERE
ARE
YOU
EATING
THESE
DAYS,
AND
LOOK
AT
YOU,
SO
WEAK.
AND
PLEASE
SHAVE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'IS
DAD
BACK?'
I
SAID,
'HERE
ARE
HIS
PAPERS.'
I
TOOK
OUT
THE
PRINTOUTS
AND
KEPT
THEM
ON
THE

TABLE.
MY
MOTHER
SHOOK
HER
HEAD
AND
TOLD
ME
THAT
HE
HADN'T
COME
ALL
DAY.
'PLEASE,
GIVE
THESE
TO
HIM,'
I
SAID.
I
WENT
TO
MY
ROOM
AND
LAY
DOWN
IN
BED.
SCARED
OF
BLACK-HOLE
LAND,
I
KEPT
THE

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
LIGHTS
ON.
I
READ
THE
NEWSPAPER,
PAYING
EXTRA
ATTENTION
TO
EACH
ARTICLE
TO
KEEP
MY
MIND
BUSY.
AN
ITEM
GIRL
WITH
HER
PICTURE
IN
A
BIKINI
SAID
SHE
WANTED
TO
BE
TAKEN
SERIOUSLY.
I
FOUND
HER
REQUEST
QUITE
REASONABLE.
MY
FATHER

RETURNED
AT
MIDNIGHT.
'YOU
THINK
THIS
IS
A
HOTEL?'
I
SAID
AS
I
OPENED
THE
DOOR.
I
HADN'T
FOUGHT
WITH
HIM
FOR
WEEKS,
SO
IT
WAS
ABOUT
TIME
ANYWAY.
MY
FATHER
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
'HERE
ARE
YOUR
PRINTOUTS.
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
HOW
MANY
COPIES
YOU'D

NEED.'
'THANKS,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'WHERE
DO
YOU
GO
SO
LATE?
YOUR
REAL
ESTATE
AGENCY
WORK
CAN'T
TAKE
THIS
LONG,'
I
SAID.
'I
AM
NOT
ANSWERABLE
TO
YOU,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'AND
THAT
IS
WHY
WE
ARE
AN
OFFICIALLY
FUCKED-UP
FAMILY,'
I
SAID.
I

CAME
BACK
TO
MY
ROOM.
I
SLAMMED
THE
DOOR
SHUT
AS
I
PREPARED
FOR
ANOTHER
NIGHT
WITH
THE
DEVILS
IN
MY
HEAD.
I
PROMISED
MYSELF
TO
CALL
DR
IYER
IN
THE
MORNING
AND
GET
A
PRESCRIPTION
FOR
THOSE
HAPPY
DRUGS.
FUCK
THE
SIDE
EFFECTS,

I
COULDN'T
TAKE
THE
MIND
MONSTERS
ANYMORE.

I
FELL
SEMI-ASLEEP
AT
THREE
IN
THE
NIGHT.
PERSISTENT
RINGS
WOKE
ME
UP.

I
CHECKED
MY
WATCH;
5
A.M.
WHO
THE
HELL
WAS
CALLING
AT
THIS
HOUR?

I
WOKE
UP
GROGGY
WITH
A
HEADACHE
ALREADY
IN
PLACE.

I
REACHED
THE
LIVING
ROOM.
I
PICKED
UP
THE
PHONE,
READY
TO
SCREAM
AT
THE
MILKMAN
OR
WHOEVER
ELSE
FELT
IT
WAS
OK
TO
CALL
NOW.
'HELLO,'
A
FEMALE
VOICE
SAID.
'ANANYA?'
I
SAID.
I
KNEW
THAT
VOICE
TOO
WELL.
'THANKS
SWEETIE,
THANK
YOU

SO
MUCH,'
ANANYA
SAID.
HAD
SHE
DIALED
THE
RIGHT
NUMBER?
'WHAT?'
I
SAID,
STILL
NOT
FULLY
IN
MY
SENSES.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
FIXED
EVERYTHING.
THANK
YOU
SO
MUCH,'
SHE
SAID,
HER
VOICE
SUPER-EXCITED.
'WHAT
DID
I
DO?'
I
BLINKED
SLEEPILY.
'DON'T
PRETEND!
YOU
SHOULD
HAVE
AT
LEAST
TOLD
ME.'
'TOLD
YOU
WHAT?'
'THAT
YOUR
DAD
IS
COMING
UP
TO
CHENNAI,'
ANANYA
SAID.

'WHAT?'

I

SAID

AND

WOKE

UP

IN

AN

INSTANT.

'STOP

BEHAVING

LIKE

A

DUMBO.

HE

SPENT

SEVEN

HOURS

WITH

MY

PARENTS

YESTERDAY.

HE

ASSURED

THEM

THAT

I

WOULD

BE

TREATED

LIKE

A

DAUGHTER

AND

APOLOGISED

FOR

ANY

PAST

MISGIVINGS.'

'MY

DAD?'

I

TRIED

FOR

CLARIFICATION.

'YEAH,
MY
PARENTS
FEEL
SO
MUCH
BETTER
AFTER
MEETING
HIM.
IN
FACT,
THEY
ASKED
ME
IF
I
HAVE
A
DATE
IN
MIND.
CAN
YOU
IMAGINE?'
ANANYA
SPOKE
SO
FAST,
IT
WAS
HARD
TO
CATCH
HER
WORDS.
'HUH,
REALLY?'
I
SAID.
'OH
WAKE
UP

PROPERLY
AND
CALL
ME.
I
LOVE
YOU,
BABY.
SORRY
ABOUT
THE
DAY
BEFORE,
I'D
BEEN
SO
DISTURBED.'
'ME
TOO,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT?
YOU
TOO
LOVE
ME
OR
YOU
TOO
ARE
DISTURBED.'
'BOTH,'
I
SAID,
'BUT
WAIT,
MY
DAD
CAME
TO
YOUR
HOUSE?'
'YOU
SERIOUSLY

DIDN'T
KNOW.'
'NO,'
I
SAID.
'WOW,'
SHE
SAID,
'PLEASE
THANK
HIM
FROM
MY
SIDE.'
I
WENT
TO
MY
PARENTS'
ROOM.
THEY
WERE
STILL
ASLEEP.
I
DON'T
KNOW
WHY,
BUT
I
DID
A
TOTALLY
SAPPY
THING.
I
SLID
RIGHT
INTO
THE
MIDDLE
AND
PUT
AN

ARM
AROUND
THEM
BOTH.

IN
A
MINUTE,
I
WAS
FAST
ASLEEP.

I
WOKE
UP
FIVE
HOURS
LATER,
AT
TEN.

MY
PARENTS
WERE
NOT
IN
THE
ROOM.

I
SPRANG
OUT

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
OF
BED,
PANICKING
AT
HOW
LATE
I
WAS
FOR
OFFICE.
I
CAME
OUTSIDE.
'WHERE'S
DAD?'
I
SAID
AS
I
SAW
MY
MOTHER.
'IN
THE
BALCONY,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
MY
FATHER
SAT
ON
A
CHAIR,
DIGGING
UP
MUD
IN
ONE
OF
THE

FLOWER
POTS.
HE
SAW
ME
BUT
KEPT
QUIET.
I
WONDERED
WHAT
I
SHOULD
SAY
TO
HIM.
I
PICKED
UP
ANOTHER
SPADE
AND
STARTED
DIGGING
WITH
HIM.
'DAD,
YOU
WENT
TO
CHENNAI?'
'NEWS
TRAVELS
FAST,'
HE
SAID.
HE
DIDN'T
LOOK
UP
FROM
THE
FLOWER
POT.

'WHY?

I

MEAN,

HOW

COME?'

'MY

SON

NEEDED

HELP,'

MY

FATHER

SAID

AS

HE

PULLED

OUT

THE

WEEDS

FROM

THE

SOIL.

HIS

VOICE

HAD

BEEN

PLAIN,

YET

I

FELT

A

LUMP

IN

MY

THROAT.

HE

PLACED

A

SAPLING

IN

THE

POT

AND

PUT

FRESHLY

DUG
MUD
AROUND
IT.

I
CAME
AND
SAT
NEXT
TO
HIM
AND
PRESSED
THE
SOIL
WITH
MY
THUMB.

'HOW
DID
YOU
KNOW?'

I
SAID.
HIS
EYES
MET
MINE,
HE
SAID,
'BECAUSE

I
AM
YOUR
FATHER.

A
BAD
FATHER,
BUT

I
AM
STILL
YOUR
FATHER.'

HE
CONTINUED,
'AND
EVEN
THOUGH
YOU
FEEL
I
HAVE
LET
YOU
DOWN
IN
THE
PAST,
I
FELT
I
SHOULD
DO
MY
BIT
THIS
TIME.
A
LIFE
PARTNER
IS
IMPORTANT.
ANANYA
IS
A
NICE
GIRL.
YOU
SHOULDN'T
LOSE
HER.'
'THANKS,
DAD,'
I
SAID,
FIGHTING
BACK

TEARS.
'YOU'RE
WELCOME,'
HE
SAID.
HE
GAVE
ME
A
HUG.
'I'M
NOT
PERFECT.
BUT
DON'T
DEPRIVE
ME
OF
MY
SON
IN
MY
FINAL
YEARS,'
HE
SAID.
I
HUGGED
HIM
BACK.
TEARS
SLIPPED
OUT
AS
I
LET
GO
OF
ANY
SELF-CONTROL.
THE
WORLD
CELEBRATES
CHILDREN

AND
THEIR
MOTHER,
BUT
WE
NEED
FATHERS
TOO.

I
CLOSED
MY
EYES.

I
REMEMBERED
GURUJI.

I
STOOD
ON
TOP
OF
A
GREEN
MOUNTAIN,
WATCHING
A
BEAUTIFUL
SUNRISE.

AS
I
HELD
MY
FATHER,
THE
HEAVY
CLOAK
FELL
OFF,
MAKING
ME
FEEL
LIGHT
AGAIN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
WON'T
COME
FOR
THE
WEDDING
THOUGH,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'WHY?'
I
SAID
SURPRISED.
'YOUR
MOTHER
WON'T
GO
WITHOUT
HER
RELATIVES.
I
DON'T
KNOW
WHAT
I
WILL
DO
THERE
IF
THEY
ARE
THERE.'
'YOU
WON'T
COME
FOR
YOUR
OWN
SON'S
WEDDING?'

I
SAID.
'ANANYA
IS
COMING
TO
OUR
HOME
ONLY,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
I
FELT
TOO
MUCH
GRATITUDE
TOWARDS
HIM
AT
THAT
MOMENT
TO
BE
MAD
AT
HIM.
'YOU
HAVE
TO
COME.
I'M
LATE
FOR
WORK,
BUT
I'LL
CONVINCE
YOU
LATER,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
59
'LIKE
I
SAID,
MUCH
SIMPLER
FOR
US
IF
YOU
GET
YOUR
RELATIVES
TO
CHENNAI,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'HOW
DO
I
GET
THEM
ALL?
I
CAN'T
AFFORD
SO
MANY
AIR
TICKETS,'
I
SAID.
WE
WERE
ON
OUR
COUNTLESS
PRE-NUPTIAL
CALLS.
'THEY
WON'T

FLY
DOWN
THEMSELVES?’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘ARE
YOU
CRAZY?
WE
HAVE
TO
TAKE
CARE
OF
THE
BARAAT,
UNTIL
THEY
REACH
YOU,
OF
COURSE.’
‘ONLY
YOU
UNDERSTAND
THESE
PUNJABI
CUSTOMS,’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘YOU’D
BETTER
TOO,’
I
SAID.
‘IT’S
A
TAMIL
STYLE
WEDDING,’
ANANYA
SAID.
‘WHAT?’
I

SAID.
'YEAH,
WHAT
ELSE
DO
YOU
EXPECT
IN
CHENNAI?
ANYWAY,
WON'T
YOUR
RELATIVES
LIKE
TO
SEE
SOMETHING
DIFFERENT?'
'ACTUALLY,
NO,'
I
SAID.
'WE'LL
SEE,
AND
YOU
CAN
TAKE
THE
TRAIN
TO
CHENNAI.
THE
RAJDHANI
EXPRESS
TAKES
TWENTY-EIGHT
HOURS.'
'THAT'S
A
LONG
RIDE
WITH
RELATIVES,'

I
SAID.
'YOU'VE
WAITED
SO
LONG
FOR
THIS,
WHAT'S
ANOTHER
DAY?'
ANANYA
SAID
AND
ENDED
THE
CALL.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
REALLY
WON'T
COME?
I
HAVE
YOUR
TICKETS.'
MY
FATHER
KEPT
SILENT.
MY
MOTHER
SAT
NEXT
TO
ME
AT
THE
DINING
TABLE.
'WHY
DOES
IT
HAVE
TO
BE
A
CHOICE?
WHY
CAN'T
MOM
GET
HER
RELATIVES
AND
YOU
COME
AS
WELL?'

I
SAID.
WHY
CAN'T
WE
BE
A
NORMAL
FAMILY
FOR
ONCE?
I
THOUGHT.
I
GUESS
THERE
ARE
NO
NORMAL
FAMILIES
IN
THE
WORLD.
EVERYONE
IS
A
PSYCHO,
AND
THE
AVERAGE
OF
ALL
PSYCHOS
IS
WHAT
WE
CALL
NORMAL.
'HE
FEELS
THEY
HAVE
INSULTED
HIM

IN
THE
PAST,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'AND
HE
HASN'T
INSULTED
THEM?'
I
SAID,
'ANYWAY,
WHAT
DOES
IT
HAVE
TO
DO
WITH
MY
WEDDING?
DAD,
SAY
SOMETHING.'
'YOU
HAVE
MY
BLESSINGS.
DON'T
EXPECT
MY
PRESENCE,'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
'HIS
DRAMA
NEVER
ENDS,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.

'HE
HIMSELF
WENT
TO
CHENNAI
AND
SAID
YES
TO
MADRASIS.
THIS
WOULDN'T
EVEN
HAVE
HAPPENED
OTHERWISE.
NOW
WHEN
EVERYONE
IN
MY
FAMILY
IS
WAITING
FOR
THE
WEDDING,
HE
STOPS
THEM.
WHY?
BECAUSE
HE
CAN'T
SEE
THEM
HAPPY.
MOST
OF
ALL,
HE
DOESN'T
WANT
TO

SEE
ME
HAPPY.'
SHE
THEN
BROKE
INTO
TEARS.
'IS
THAT
THE
CASE,
DAD?'
'NO,
I'VE
GIVEN
YOU
A
CHOICE,'
HE
SAID.
'WHICH
SON
WILL
NOT
WANT
HIS
FATHER
TO
COME?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
'THIS
IS
NOT
A
CHOICE.
THIS
IS
BLACKMAIL.'
'WHATEVER
YOU
WANT

TO
CALL
IT.
IF
THIS
WEDDING
IS
HAPPENING
BECAUSE
OF
ME,
THEN
I
SHOULD
GET
TO
CHOOSE
THE
GUESTS.'
'NO
DAD,'
I
SAID,
'MOM
HAS
EQUAL
RIGHTS,
TOO.
UNFORTUNATELY,
I
BELONG
TO
BOTH
OF
YOU.'
'SO,
YOU
DECIDE'
MY
FATHER
SAID.
MY
MOTHER
AND

DAD
LOOKED
AT
ME.

I
PACED
UP
AND
DOWN
THE
ROOM
FOR
TEN
MINUTES.

'DAD,
MOM'S
FAMILY
HAS
TO
COME.
YOU
DO
WHAT
YOU
HAVE
TO
DO,'

I
SAID
AND
LEFT
THE

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
ROOM.
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
ARRANGED
A
TWO-MAN
DHOLAK
BAND
AT
THE
HAZRAT
NIZAMUDDIN
STATION.
I
HELPED
LOCATE
THE
THIRTY-SEVEN
II-TIER
AC
BERTHS
RESERVED
FOR
MY
RELATIVES
IN
THE
RAJDHANI
EXPRESS
COMPARTMENT.
TWO
OF
MY
MOTHER'S
COUSINS
HAD
DECIDED
TO
JOIN
AT

THE
LAST
MINUTE
AND
WE
HAD
TO
ACCOMMODATE
THEM
AS
WELL.
MY
MOTHER
MADE
UP
A
WONDERFUL
STORY
ABOUT
MY
FATHER'S
VIRAL
FEVER
THAT
WOULD
BE
MALARIA.
EVERYONE
KNEW
THE
REALITY,
AND
APART
FROM
THE
AWKWARDNESS
OF
FIBBING
TO
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
AGAIN,
PEOPLE
WERE

RELIEVED,
AS
MY
DAD
EQUALED
TO
NO
FUN.

'YOU
CAN'T
TALK
HALF
THE
THINGS
WHEN
YOUR
HUSBAND
IS
HERE,'

AS
SHIPRA
MASI
TOLD
MY
MOTHER.

I
STOOD
INSIDE
THE
BOGIE,
MATCHING
EVERYONE'S
TICKET
TO
THEIR
BERTH.

RAJJI
MAMA
DRAGGED
ME
OUT.
'YOU
HAVE
TO

DANCE
A
LITTLE,
NO?
THIS
IS
THAT
BARAAT
LEAVING,'
HE
SAID.
AT
FOUR
IN
THE
AFTERNOON,
HUNDREDS
OF
BORED
PASSENGERS
ON
THE
PLATFORM
WATCHED
THE
FREE
ENTERTAINMENT
PROVIDED
BY
OUR
FAMILY.
THE
DHOLAK
MEN
JOGGED
ALONG
THE
TRAIN
AND
ARGUED
WITH
MAMA
OVER
THE

PAYMENT.
THEY
COULDN'T
SQUEEZE
MUCH
OUT
OF
HIM
AS
THE
TRAIN
HAS
PICKED
UP
SPEED.
I
CAME
INSIDE
MY
COMPARTMENT,
WHICH
THE
LADIES
HAD
TURNED
INTO
A
SARI
SHOP.
THE
ENTIRE
LOWER
BERTHS
WERE
FILLED
WITH
THE
DRESSES
EVERYONE
PLANNED
TO
WEAR
FOR
EACH

OF
THE
FUNCTIONS.
'THIS
IS
BEAUTIFUL,'
MY
SEVENTY-YEAR-OLD
DISTANT
AUNT
SAID
AS
SHE
FONDLED
A
MAGENTA
SARI
WITH
REAL
GOLD-WORK.
WOMEN
NEVER
GET
TOO
OLD
FOR
ADMIRING
SARIS.
MY
YOUNGER
COUSINS
HAD
TAKEN
OVER
THE
NEXT
COMPARTMENT.
THE
GIRLS
HAD
THEIR
MAKE-UP
KITS
OPEN.

THEY
DISCUSSED
SHARING
THE
MASCARAS.

I
SEE
WHY
WHOLE
FAMILIES
GET
EXCITED
ABOUT
A
WEDDING;
THERE'S
SOMETHING
IN
IT
FOR
EVERYONE.

I
CAME
OUTSIDE
TO
STAND
AT
THE
COMPARTMENT
DOOR.
THE
TRAIN
WHIZZED
PAST
AGRA,
GWALIOR
AND
JHANSI
OVER
THE
NEXT
FEW
HOURS.
I

STILL
HAD
A
DAY
TO
GO
AS
THE
TRAIN
TRAVERSED
THROUGH
THIS
HUGE
COUNTRY,
CUTTING
THROUGH
STATES
I
HAD
BATTLED
FOR
THE
LAST
YEAR.
THESE
STATES
MAKE
UP
OUR
NATION.
THESE
STATES
ALSO
DIVIDE
OUR
NATION.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
AND
IN
SOME
CASES,
THESE
STATES
PLAY
HAVOC
IN
OUR
LOVE
LIVES.
I
CAME
INSIDE
WHEN
THE
TRAIN
REACHED
BHOPAL
AT
DINNERTIME.
MY
RELATIVES
COULDN'T
CONTAIN
THEIR
EXCITEMENT
THAT
RAJDHANI
EXPRESS
OFFERED
FREE
MEALS.
'TAKE
NON-VEG,
THE
MADRASIS
WON'T
GIVE
YOU

ANY,'
SHIPRA
MASI
ADVISED
EVERYONE.
'OK
AUNTY,
FOR
THE
NEXT
THREE
DAYS,
THERE
ARE
NO
MADRASIS,
ONLY
TAMILIANS,'
I
SAID.
SHIPRA
MASI
SEPARATED
THE
FOIL
FROM
HER
CHICKEN.
'YES,
YES,
I
KNOW.
TAMIL
NADU
IS
A
STATE.
BUT
WE
ARE
GOING
TO
MADRAS
ONLY,

NO?
WHY
DOES
THE
TICKET
SAY
CHENNAI?’
‘IT’S
THE
SAME.
LIKE
DELHI
AND
DILLI,’
KAMLA
MAMI
SAID
AS
SHE
SLURPED
HER
CHICKEN
SWEET
CORN
SOUP.
‘IS
IT
TRUE
THEIR
CHIEF
MINISTER
IS
AN
EX-FILM
HEROINE?’
MY
MOTHER’S
COUSIN
SAID.
‘YES-JI,’
ANOTHER
AUNT
SAID,
‘THESE

SOUTH
INDIAN
WOMEN
ARE
QUITE
CLEVER.'
'GOD
HAS
GIVEN
THEM
A
BRAIN,
NOTHING
ELSE,'
CAME
ANOTHER
LOOSE
COMMENT
AND
I
CONSIDERED
JUMPING
OFF
THE
TRAIN.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
60
ANANYA'S
FATHER
CHECKED
MY
CLAN
INTO
TWENTY
ROOMS
AT
THE
SANGEETHA
RESIDENCY
IN
MYLAPORE.
THE
ROOMS
WERE
BASIC,
BUT
CLEAN
AND
AIR-CONDITIONED.
'WHAT
HAPPENED
TO
YOUR
FATHER?
WE
JUST
MET
HIM,'
HE
ASKED.
'IT'S
A
VIRAL
FEVER
THAT
COULD
BECOME

MALARIA,'

I

SAID.

'IS

THAT

POSSIBLE?'

'IT

HAPPENS

IN

DELHI.

ANYWAY,

WHAT'S

THE

SCHEDULE?'

I

REGULATED

THE

CONVERSATION.

'WE

HAVE

A

PUJA

TOMORROW

AFTERNOON

AND

ANOTHER

ONE

IN

THE

EVENING.

THE

WEDDING

MUHURTAM

WILL

BE

IN

THE

MORNING

DAY

AFTER

TOMORROW,'

HE

SAID.

'UNCLE,

WHAT
ABOUT
A
DJ?
THERE
IS
NO
PARTY?’
I
WAS
AGHAST
FOR
MY
KITH
AND
KIN.
‘WE
HAVE
A
RECEPTION
PARTY
DAY
AFTER
EVENING.
HAVE
YOUR
FUN
THERE,’
HE
SAID
AND
TURNED
TO
MY
MOTHER,
‘KAVITA
JEE,
SHIPRA
JEE,
CAN
I
TALK
TO
YOU

FOR
A
SECOND?’
MY
MOTHER,
SHIPRA
MASI
AND
ANANYA’S
FATHER
STEPPED
AWAY
FROM
ME
AND
OTHER
RELATIVES.
THEY
SPOKE
FOR
FIVE
MINUTES.
MY
MOTHER
REJOINED
ME.
SHIPRA
MASI
WENT
TO
THE
RECEPTION
TO
COLLECT
HER
KEYS.
‘WHAT?’
I
SAID
AS
WE
CLIMBED
UP
THE

STEPS
TOWARDS
OUR
HOTEL
ROOMS.
'NOTHING,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'IT'S
MY
MARRIAGE.
I
DESERVE
TO
KNOW.'
'THEY
ASKED
ME
IF
I
WANTED
A
SPECIAL
GIFT,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
PERHAPS,
ANANYA
HAD
RECOUNTED
MINTI'S
WEDDING
TO
HER
PARENTS.
'AND?
WHAT
DID
YOU
SAY?'
I
SAID,

EYEING
MY
MOTHER
WITH
SUSPICISION.
'DON'T
TALK
TO
ME
IN
THAT
VOICE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'WHAT
EXACTLY
DID
YOU
SAY,
MOM?'
I
SAID,
MY
TONE
WORSE,
'WHAT?
DID
YOU
SEND
HIM
TO
BUY
A
CAR
OR
SPLIT
ACS
OR
WHAT
?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'THAT'S
WHAT
YOU
THINK
OF
ME.
DON'T
YOU?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID
AS
WE
REACHED
THE
FIRST
FLOOR.
SHE
PAUSED
TO
CATCH
HER
BREATH.
SHIPRA
MASI'S
EXPENSIVE
SANDALS
COULD
BE
HEARD
FOUR
SECONDS
BEFORE
SHE
ARRIVED
THE
FIRST
FLOOR.
'SEE
THIS
STUPID

SISTER
OF
MINE.
SHE
SAID
NO
TO
ANY
BIG
GIFTS,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
TO
ME.
'YOU
DID?'
I
SAID
TO
MY
MOTHER.
MY
MOTHER
LOOKED
AT
ME.
'YOU
WILL
NEVER
UNDERSTAND
HOW
MUCH
I
LOVE
YOU,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
I
HUNG
MY
HEAD
IN

SHAME.
MY
MOTHER
SMACKED
THE
BACK
OF
MY
HEAD.

I
DESERVED
A
SLAP.
SHIPRA
MASI
WAVED
HER
HANDS
AS
SHE
SPOKE.

'YOU
AND
YOUR
MOTHER,
BOTH
THE
SAME

—
IMPRACTICAL.

SHE
TELLS
HIM,

"I
SENT
MY
SON
TO
DO
ONE
MBA,

I
AM
GETTING

TWO
MBAS
IN
RETURN.
ANANYA
IS
THE
BEST
GIFT,"'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID,
'OK,
SHE
EARNES
A
LOT,
BUT
KAVITA,
WHY
SAY
NO
IF
SOMEONE
IS
READY
TO
GIVE.
WHY
NOT
GRAB
IT.'
'BECAUSE
WE
ARE
NOT
THAT
KIND
OF
PEOPLE,
SHIPRA
MASI,'
I
SAID

AND
GAVE
MY
MOTHER
A
HUG,
'SHE
IS
ALL
TALK.
BUT
SHE
CAN
NEVER
BEHAVE
LIKE
DUKE'S
MOTHER.
NEVER,'
I
SAID.
I
CAME
INTO
MY
HOTEL
ROOM
WHERE
TEN
COUSINS,
SIX
AUNTS
AND
FOUR
UNCLES
SAT
ON
MY
BED.
I
SAT
ON
THE
FLOOR

AS
SPACE
WAS
AT
A
PREMIUM.
WE
HAD
TWENTY
ROOMS
TO
CHOOSE
FROM,
BUT
MY
RELATIVES
WOULD
RATHER
BE
CRAMPED
TOGETHER
THAN
MISS
OUT
ON
JUICY
GOSSIP
SESSION.
THE
YOUNGER
COUSINS
BATTLED
FOR
THE
TV
REMOTE.
I
REPEATED
THE
SCHEDULE
TO
MY
AUNTS.
'THEY

ARE
BIG
BORES.
HOW
CAN
THEY
DO
PUJA
THE
WHOLE
DAY?’
KAMLA
MAMI
SAID.
‘THEY
DON’T
EVEN
HAVE
SANGEET?’
MY
MOTHER
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'I
THINK
THEY
ARE
TRYING
TO
SAVE
MONEY,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
'WHAT
LANGUAGE
WILL
THE
PUJAS
BE
IN?
MADRASI?
ANOTHER
AUNT
SAID.
'TAMIL,
MAYBE
SANSKRIT,'
I
SAID.
'I
AM
NOT
COMING,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
I
GLARED
AT
MY
MOTHER.
'WHERE
DO

WE
EAT?’
AN
AUNT
EXPRESSED
EVERYONE’S
CONCERN.
‘THE
MEALS
ARE
IN
THE
DINING
HALL
AT
THE
WEDDING
VENUE.
LET’S
GO
TO
BED,
WE
HAVE
TO
WAKE
UP
EARLY,’
I
SAID.
WE
HAD
PLANNED
TO
MEET
IN
THE
HOTEL
LOBBY
AT
SEVEN-THIRTY
IN
THE
MORNING.

WE
ONLY
LEFT
AT
NINE.
'WHAT
IS
THE
ADDRESS?'

RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.

I
TOOK
OUT
THE
PIECE
OF
PAPER
ANANYA'S
DAD
HAD
GIVEN
ME.

'I
CAN'T
READ
THIS,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.

I
TOOK
THE
PAPER
BACK.

IT
SAID:
ARULMIGU
KAPALEESWARAR
KARPAGAMBAL
THIRUMANA
MANDAPAM
16,

VENKATESA
AGRAHARAM
STREET,
MYLAPORE,
CHENNAI
AFTER
THREE
ATTEMPTS
OF
READING
IT,
I
HAD
A
HEADACHE.
I
COUNTED
THE
LETTERS,
MY
WEDDING
VENUE
HAD
FIFTY
ALPHABETS
IN
IT.
DELHI
NEVER
GETS
THIS
COMPLICATED.
ONE
OF
MY
OLDER
COUSINS
HAD
HER
WEDDING
IN
BATRA
BANQUETS,
ANOTHER

ONE
IN
BAWA
HALL.
WE
STRUGGLED
FOR
TWENTY
MINUTES
ON
THE
STREETS
OF
MYLAPORE
BEFORE
WE
REACHED
THE
VENUE.
FORTUNATELY,
THE
LOCALS
HAD
ABBREVIATED
THE
NAME
OF
THE
PLACE
TO
AKKT
MANDAPAM.
FROM
ACTORS
TO
POLITICAL
PARTIES
TO
WEDDING
HALLS,
TAMILIANS
LOVE
TO
KEEP

COMPLICATED
NAMES
FIRST
AND
THEN
MAKE
ACRONYMS
FOR
THE
SAME.
'WHAT
DO
YOU
MEAN
BREAKFAST
IS
FINISHED?'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
'ILLA,
ILLA,'
A
POT-BELLIED,
DARK-COMPLEXIONED,
HIRSUTE
CHEF
SAID
AND
SHOOK
HIS
HAND.
HE
WORE
A
LUNGI
AND
A
CHEF'S
CAP.
IF
HE
WORE
THE

CAP
NO
PREVENT
HAIR
IN
THE
FOOD,

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
HE
NEEDED
A
BODY
SHEATH,
GIVEN
HIS
HAIRY
ARMS
AND
CHEST.
'ORUNIMISHUM,'
I
SAID
'WHAT
HAPPENED?'
'YOUR
SON
SPEAKS
TAMIL?'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
TO
MY
MOTHER.
MY
MOTHER
ROLLED
HER
EYES.
'NO,
I
DON'T.
IT'S
A
COMMON
WORD
FOR
WAIT
A

SECOND,'
I
SAID.
'NOW
HE
BELONGS
TO
THEM.
THEY'LL
MAKE
HIM
DO
ANYTHING,'
MY
MOTHER
LAMENTED
LOUDLY.
'MOM,
PLEASE.
LET
ME
RESOLVE
THIS,'
I
SAID.
'WHAT
WILL
YOU
RESOLVE?
THEY
WILL
MAKE
US
COOK
FOOD
ALSO,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
'EVERYBODY,
PLEASE
SIT
IN
THE

DINING
HALL,'
I
SAID
THEN
TURNED
TO
THE
CHEF.
'CAN'T
YOU
MAKE
SOMETHING?'
'WHO
WILL
MAKE
TIFFIN
THEN?
WE
HAVE
TO
SERVE
IT
AT
ELEVEN,'
THE
CHEF
SAID.
I
CHECKED
MY
WATCH.
IT
WAS
NINE-THIRTY.
MY
FAMILY
WOULD
HAVE
MEDICAL
EMERGENCIES
IF
KEPT
HUNGRY

FOR
THAT
LONG.
'WE
WANT
SOMETHING
NOW,'
I
SAID,
'ANYTHING
QUICK.'
'WHAT
ABOUT
TIFFIN?'
THE
CHEF
SAID.
'WE
DON'T
WANT
TIFFIN.
WE'LL
ONLY
COME
BACK
FOR
LUNCH
LATER.'
'GIRL'S
SIDE
WANTS
TIFFIN.
THEY
CAME
FOR
BREAKFAST
AT
6.30,'
THE
CHEF
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
CAME

UP
TO
ME.
'BRIBE
HIM,'
HE
WHISPERED.

I
THOUGHT
ABOUT
THE
ETHICS
OF
BRIBING
AT
MY
OWN
WEDDING
TO
FEED
MYSELF.

'WOKAY,
I
GO
NOW,
I
AM
BUSY,'
THE
CHEF
SAID
AND
MUMBLED
TO
HIMSELF,
'PUNDAI
MAGANEY,
THAAYOLI
KODHI.'

'ANNA,
WAIT,'

I
SAID.
THE

CHEF
LOOKED
AT
ME
IN
AMAZEMENT.
HOW
CAN
A
PERSON
WITH
A
HEAVY
DELHI
ACCENT
TOSS
IN
A
TAMIL
WORD
OR
TWO?

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
I
KEPT
A
HUNDRED-RUPEE
NOTE
IN
MY
HAND
AND
SHOOK
HANDS
WITH
HIM.
PERPLEXED,
HE
EXAMINED
THE
CURRENCY.
'WE
ARE
GIVING
YOU
OUT
OF
HAPPINESS,'
MY
UNCLE
SAID.
'I
CAN
MAKE
UPMA
FAST,'
THE
CHEF
SAID.
'WHAT
IS
UPMA?'
MY
UNCLE

SAID.
'SALTY
HALWA.
NO,
NOT
UPMA.
CAN
YOU
MAKE
DOSAS?'

I
SAID.
'FOR
DOSA
ONE
BY
ONE
MAKING
NO
STAFF
NOW.
THEN
LUNCH
ALSO
DELAYED,'
THE
CHEF
SAID
MOURNFULLY.
WE
SETTLED
ON
IDLIS.
THERE
WOULD
BE
NO
SAMBHAR.
HOWEVER,
THE
CHEF
HAD
DRUM
FULL

OF
COCONUT
CHUTNEY,
ENOUGH
TO
PAVE
ROADS
WITH.
MY
FAMILY
SAT
IN
THE
DINING
HALL
AS
SERVERS
PLACED
BANANA
LEAVES
IN
FRONT
OF
THEM.
'WE
HAVE
TO
EAT
LEAVES?'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID,
'

WHAT
ARE
WE?
COWS?'
'IT'S
THE
PLATE,'
I
SAID,
'AND
THERE

IS
NO
CUTLERY.'
'THEY
HAVE
HARDLY
ANY
EXPENSE
IN
WEDDINGS,
HOW
LUCKY,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID.
FORTY
OF
US
CONSUMED
AT
LEAST
TWO
HUNDRED
IDLIS.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
CAME
WHEN
WE
HAD
FINISHED.
'THERE
WASN'T
BREAKFAST?
I
AM
SORRY,'
HE
SAID.
'IT'S
FINE,'
I
SAID,
'WE

CAME
LATE.'
'HELLO,
KAVITA-JI,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID
WITH
FOLDED
HANDS,
AS
PER
ANANYA'S
INSTRUCTIONS.
HE
TOOK
THE
BUCKET
OF
IDLI
FROM
THE
SERVERS
AND
SERVED
ONE
TO
MY
MOTHER.
'HELLO,'
MY
MOTHER
RESPONDED,
A
HINT
OF
PRIDE
IN
HER
VOICE
AS
HER
SIBILINGS
SAW

HER
BEING
SERVED
BY
THE
GIRL'S
FATHER.
THIS
IS
WHAT
GROWN-UPS
LIVE
FOR
ANYWAY,
CONSIDERING
THEY
HAVE
SO
LITTLE
FUN
OTHERWISE.
'HOW'S
KRISH'S
FATHER
FEELING
NOW?'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID
NEXT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'HE'S
BETTER,
HE
HAD
SOUP
LAST
NIGHT
AND
PORRIDGE
IN
THE
MORNING.

HE
IS
TAKING
REST
NOW.
HE
SENDS
HIS
REGARDS,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.

ANANYA'S
FATHER
NODDED
IN
CONCERN.
'WHAT
ARE
THE
CEREMONIES
TODAY,
UNCLE?'

I
ASKED
FOR
MY
RELATIVES
BENEFIT.

'FIRST
WE
HAVE
THE
VRUTHAM,
THE
WEDDING
INVITATION
PRAYERS.
WE
ALSO
HAVE
NISCHAYATHARTHAM,
THE
FORMAL
ENGAGEMENT
CEREMONY
WHERE
WE
SET
THE
AUSPICIOUS
TIME
FOR
THE
WEDDING
AND
GIVE
GIFTS
TO
CLOSE
RELATIVES,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
MY
AUNTS
ONLY
PAID
ATTENTION
TO
THE
LAST
FOUR

WORDS.
WE
CAME
TO
THE
MAIN
HALL,
THE
CENTER
OF
ACTION
FOR
THE
NEXT
TWO
DAYS.
EVERY
CEREMONY
OF
MY
WEDDING
TOOK
PLACE
IN
THIS
ROOM.
IN
THE
MIDDLE
OF
THE
HALL,
THERE
WAS
FIRE
URN,
NOT
TOO
DIFFERENT
FROM
PUNJABI
WEDDINGS.
HOWEVER,
IN

OUR
WEDDINGS
PEOPLE
ONLY
CAME
AROUND
THE
FIRE
AFTER
EATING
THEIR
DINNER
AND
DESSERT.
HERE,
EVERYONE
LIVED
AROUND
THE
FIRE.
I
SAT
DOWN
ON
THE
FLOOR.
FOUR
PRIESTS
STARTED
THE
MANTRAS.
CLOSE
RELATIVES
SAT
ON
THE
FLOOR
WHILE
DISTANT
AND
ARTHRITIC
ONES
SAT
ON

CHAIRS
IN
THE
BACK
ROWS.
THE
PRIESTS
AT
THE
VRUTHAM
CHANTED
SO
LOUD,
IT
SCARED
SOME
OF
MY
LITTLE
COUSINS
INTO
CRYING
AND
MADE
IT
IMPOSSIBLE
TO
TALK.
MY
AUNTS
BEHIND
ME
SHIFTED
THEIR
POSITIONS
SEVERAL
TIMES.
'SHOULD
WE
DO
A
CITY
TOUR
LATER?'

KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID.
'WHAT
IS
THERE
TO
SEE
IN
CHENNAI?
IF
YOU
WANT
TO
SEE
MADRASIS,
THERE
ARE
ENOUGH
IN
THIS
ROOM,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
I
SAW
ANANYA'S
RELATIVES.
I
RECOGNIZED
FEW
AUNTS.
THE
YOUNGER
COUSINS
HAD
COME
DOWN
FROM
ABROAD.
THEY
SAT
IN

TRADITIONAL
TAMIL
ATTIRE,
CLUTCHING
THEIR
MINERAL
WATER
BOTTLES.
'ANANYA
DIDI,'
MINTI
SAID
AS
ANANYA
CAME
INSIDE.
SHE
WORE
A
MAROON
KANJEEVARAM
SARI
WITH
A
MUSTARD
YELLOW-GOLD
BORDER.
HER
TIGHTLY
BRAIDED
HAIR
MADE
HER
LOOK
LIKE
A
CUTE
SCHOOLGIRL.
HER
FACE
HAD
MAKE
UP,
AND

ANANYA
LOOKED
PRETTIER
THAN
ANY
GIRL
ON
ANY
TAMIL
FILM
POSTER
EVERY
MADE.
HER
EYES
LOOKED
DEEP,
DUE
TO
KAAJAL
AROUND
IT.
FOR
A
FEW
SECONDS
I
COULDN'T
RECOGNIZE
HER
AS
MY
ANANYA.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
WAS
THIS
THE
SAME
GIRL
I
MET
IN
THE
MESS
LINE
FIGHTING
FOR
SAMBHAR?
OUR
EYES
MET
BRIEFLY.
SHE
GAVE
ME
A
LITTLE
SMILE,
ENQUIRING
ON
HOW
SHE
LOOKED.
I
NODDED,
YES
SHE
LOOKED
MORE
BEAUTIFUL
THAN
SHE
EVER
HAD.
THE

PRAYERS
CONTINUED
FOR
ANOTHER
HOUR.
SMOKE
FILLED
THE
ROOM.
THE
PRIESTS
KEPT
ADDING
TWIGS
AND
SPOONFULS
OF
GHEE
TO
THE
FIRE.
ANANYA
AND
I
EXCHANGED
GLANCES
AND
SMILED
SEVERAL
TIMES.
WAS
IT
REALLY
HAPPENING?
WAS
I
FINALLY
GETTING
MARRIED,
WITH
CONSENT
FROM
EVERYONE
I

SHARED
MY
DNA
WITH?
THE
PRIEST
ASKED
FOR
MY
FATHER.
MY
MOTHER
TOLD
HIM
HE
WAS
UNWELL.
I
THOUGHT
OF
DAD
AGAIN.
WHY
ARE
ADULTS
SO
STUCK
UP?
'WHAT'S
YOUR
GRANDPARENTS'
VILLAGE?'
ANANYA'S
DAD
ASKED
ME.
THERE
PRIESTS
REQUIRED
IT
FOR
THE
NISCHAYATHARTHAM
CEREMONY.

I
HAD
NO
IDEA.

I
TURNED
TO
MY
MOTHER.

SHE
TURNED
TO
MY
AUNTS.

MY
AUNTS
DEBATED
WHAT
ANSWER
TO
GIVE
THEM.

'LAHORE,'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
AFTER
THEIR
DISCUSSION.

'LAHORE
IN
PAKISTAN?'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.

HE
SEEMED
WORRIED;

I
WAS
SCARED
HE'D
CHANGE
HIS

MIND
AGAIN.
'MY
GRANDPARENTS
HAD
COME
TO
DELHI
AFTER
THE
PARTITION,'
I
EXPLAINED
TO
HIM.
HE
NODDED.
'UNCLE,
WHEN
IS
THE
MARRIAGE
DONE?
LIKE
IT
IS
IRREVERSIBLE
AND
NO
ONE
CAN
OBJECT
TO
IT
AFTERWARDS?'
'WHAT
DO
YOU
MEAN?'
HE
SAID.
'NOTHING,'
I
SAID

AS
THE
PRIEST
CALLED
ME
TO
MAKE
A
DONATION.
I
GAVE
HIM
A
HUNDRED-RUPEE
NOTE.
HE
DECLINED
IT
WITH
FULL
FERVOR.
'DON'T
GIVE
HIM
DIRECTLY,
PUT
IT
IN
THE
THAMBOOLAM,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID,
REFERRING
TO
THE
PUJA
PLATES.
I
PLACED
THE
MONEY
IN
THE

PLATE.
I
DECORATED
IT
WITH
A
BANANA,
PAAN
LEAVES
AND

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
BETEL
NUT.
I
OFFERED
IT
AGAIN
AND
THE
PRIEST
ACCEPTED
IT.
HE
ANNOUNCED
THE
WEDDING
DETAILS
-
THE
NON-ABBREVIATED
NAME
OF
THE
VENUE,
THE
LAGNAM,
THE
STAR
AND
TOMORROW'S
DATE.
'SIX-THIRTY
MUHURTAM,'
THE
PRIEST
SAID.
'IN
THE
MORNING?'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID,

SHOCKED.
ANANYA'S
RELATIVES
CONGRATULATED
EACH
OTHER
ON
THE
FORMAL
SETTING
OF
THE
TIME.
MY
RELATIVES
WERE
AGHAST.
'THIS
IS
A
WEDDING
OR
A
TORTURE?
IT'S
LIKE
CATCHING
AN
EARLY
MORNING
FLIGHT,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID.
FORTUNATELY,
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
CALMED
THE
LADIES
BY
BRINGING
IN
TEN

BAGS
FULL
OF
GIFTS.
'MRS
KAMLA,'
SHE
ANNOUNCED,
READING
OUT
FROM
THE
FIRST
BAG.
EACH
GIFT
HAD
THE
RECEIVER'S
NAME,
RELATIONSHIP
WITH
ME
AND
A
CODE
WORD
FOR
WHAT
WAS
INSIDE.
'ME,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID
AND
RAISED
HER
HAND
LIKE
A
CHILD
MARKING
ATTENDANCE

IN
CLASS.
THERE'S
SOMETHING
ABOUT
PRESENTS
THAT
TURNS
EVERYONE
INTO
KIDS.
'WE'LL
OPEN
THEM
IN
OUR
HOTEL,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
AFTER
THE
END
OF
THE
PRIZE
DISTRIBUTION
CEREMONY.
'AND
NOW,
WE
WILL
HAVE
LUNCH,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID,
INVITING
US
ALL
TO
THE
DINING
HALL

TO
A
MEAL
OF
RICE,
SAMBHAR,
RASAM,
VEGETABLES,
CURD
AND
PAYASAM.
'WE'RE
TRAPPED.
NO
PANEER
HERE,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID
AS
WE
MOVED
TO
THE
PANEER-
LESS
DINING
HALL.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
61
'SO
WHAT'S
THE
PLAN
FOR
TONIGHT?'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID
AFTER
WE
CAME
BACK
TO
THE
HOTEL.
'THERE
IS
DINNER
AT
THE
DINING
HALL
AT
EIGHT,'
I
SAID.
'PLEASE,
I
CAN'T
HAVE
ANY
MORE
RICE,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID.
THE
LADIES
HAD

OPENED
THEIR
KANJEEVARAM
SARI
GIFTS.
I
HAD
TOLD
ANANYA
TO
LEAVE
THE
PRICE
TAGS
ON.
MY
RELATIVES
PRAISED
ANANYA
A
LITTLE
MORE
AS
THEY
NOTICED
EACH
SARI
COST
THREE
THOUSAND
BUCKS.
'WHAT'S
AFTER
DINNER?'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.
'THE
MUHURTAM
IS
SIX-THIRTY.
LET'S
SLEEP
EARLY.'

'SEE
KAVITA,
HOW
YOUR
SON
HAS
BECOME
A
MADRASI,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID
AND
EVERYONE
LAUGHED
LIKE
SHE
HAD
CRACKED
THE
BEST
JOKE
IN
THE
WORLD.
I
MADE
A
FACE.
'HOW
CAN
WE
SLEEP
EARLY?
IT
IS
YOUR
WEDDING,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
PULLED
MY
CHEEKS.
'SO,

WHAT
DO
YOU
WANT
TO
DO?’
I
SAID.
‘WE’LL
ORGANIZE
A
PARTY.
MINTI’S
DADDY,
COME
LET’S
GO,’
KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID
AND
THEY
WENT
OUT.
‘AND
YOU
GO
THE
BEAUTY
PARLOUR
TO
GET
A
FACIAL,’
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
‘ME?’
‘YES,
BUT
BE
CAREFUL.
THE
BEAUTY

PARLOURS
CAN
MAKE
YOU
BLACK,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
AND
MY
CLAN
FOUND
ANOTHER
REASON
TO
GUFFAW
LIKE
PUNJABIS
CAN.

I
CAN'T
REALLY
CALL
THE
PARTY
RAJJI
MAMA
ORGANIZED
FOR
ME
AS
A
BACHELOR'S
PARTY,
ESPECIALLY
SINCE
ALL
MY
AUNTS
WERE
PRESENT.
HOWEVER,
THE
MAKESHIFT

ARRANGEMENTS
GAVE
IT
A
SINGLE-GUY-BASH
FEEL.
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
COME
BACK
WITH
TWO
BOTTLES
OF
WHISKY,
ONE
BOTTLE
OF
VODKA
AND
A
CRATE
OF
BEER.
KAMLA
AUNTY
ALSO
BROUGHT
CHIPS
AND
JUICE
FOR
THE
LADIES.
'LET
THE
LADIES
ALSO
HAVE
A
DRINK
TONIGHT,'
RAJJI

MAMA
PROCLAIMED
AS
MANY

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
AUNTIES
FEIGNED
HORROR.
MY
COUSINS
HAD
ALREADY
BOOKED
THE
VODKA
BOTTLE.
'ICE,'
RAJJI
MAMA
TOLD
A
WAITER
AT
THE
HOTEL
AND
GAVE
HIM
HUNDRED
BUCKS.
HE
RETURNED
WITH
A
BUCKETFUL.
'YOU
HAVE
A
MUSIC
SYSTEM?'
RAJJI
MAMA
ASKED
THE
WAITER.
THE

WAITER
AGREED
TO
BORROW
ONE
FROM
HIS
FRIEND
FOR
ANOTHER
HUNDRED
BUCKS.
THE
CHOICE
OF
MUSIC
WAS
A
CHALLENGE
THOUGH,
AND
WE
HAD
TO
LIMIT
OURSELVES
TO
THE
SOUNDTRACKS
OF
THE
MOVIES
ROJA
AND
GENTLEMAN.
THE
LYRICS
WERE
TAMIL
BUT
AT
LEAST
THE
TUNES

WERE
FAMILIAR.
'AFTER
TWO
DRINKS,
YOU
WILL
BE
ABLE
TO
UNDERSTAND
THE
TAMIL
WORDS
ALSO,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID.
THE
MEN
TOOK
ROOM
301,
MY
ROOM.
THE
WOMEN
WENT
TO
302,
WHILE
THE
TEENAGE
AND
YOUNG
COUSINS
WERE
IN
303.
THE
UNDER-THIRTEENS
STAYED
IN
304,

WATCHING
CARTOON
CHANNELS
ON
CABLETV.
THE
UNDER-FIVES
AND
OVER
SEVENTY-FIVES
WERE
COOPED
UP
IN
305,
THE
LATTER
BABYSITTING
THE
FORMER.
RAJJI
MAMA
KEPT
SHUTTLLING
FROM
301
TO
302,
TO
GOSSIP
WITH
THE
LADIES
AND
DISCUSS
STOCKS
AND
REAL
ESTATE
WITH
THE
MEN
IN
301.

'IT'S
ELEVEN,'
I
REMINDED
MY
RELATIVES,
'WE
SHOULD
SLEEP,'
'OH,
SHUT
UP,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID
AND
HUGGED
ME
HAPPILY.
'IF
WE
SLEEP
NOW,
WE
WON'T
WAKE
UP
AT
ALL.
LET'S
KEEP
GOING
UNTIL
MORNING.'
THE
PARTY
CONTINUED
AND
ROOMS
301,302
AND
303
TURNED
INTO

DISCOS.
THE
INDIAN
SOUNDTRACK
WAS
PLAYED
FIVE
TIMES.

I
REALIZED
IF
MY
RELATIVES
DIDN'T
SLEEP,
WE
MAY
NEVER
MAKE
IT
TO
THE
WEDDING.

I
WENT
DOWN
TO
THE
LOBBY
AT
HALF
PAST
MIDNIGHT.

'CALL
THE
COPS,'

I
TOLD
THE
FRONT
DESK.
'WHAT?'
THE
MANAGER

SAID,
'YOU
ARE
THE
GROOM.'
'YES,
AND
I
HAVE
A
SIX-THIRTY
MUHURTHAM.
I
NEED
TO
BE
THERE
AT
FIVE
WITH
ALL
OF
THEM.
THERE
ARE
IN
NO
MOOD
TO
REST.'
THE
MANAGER
LAUGHED.
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
BRIBED
HIM
WELL.
'DON'T
WORRY,
SIR,
I
WILL

STOP
THEM
IN
HALF
AN
HOUR.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

A
CAR
STOPPED
OUTSIDE
THE
HOTEL
JUST
THEN
AND
A
PERSON
STEPPED
OUT.
EVEN
IN
THE
DARKNESS

I
COULD
TELL
WHO
IT
WAS.
I
IMMEDIATELY
SPRINTED
UP
THE
STAIRS,
MY
HEART
BEATING
FAST.
RAJJI
MAMA
WAS
CLOSE-DANCING
WITH
KAMLA
AUNTY
IN

302
TO
A
SAD
SONG
FROM
ROJA.
'MY
DAD'S
HERE,'
I
ANNOUNCED.
IN
TWO
MINUTES
FLAT,
OUR
NIGHTCLUBS
SHUT
DOWN
AS
IF
THERE
WAS
A
POLICE
RAID.
EVERYONE
WENT
INTO
THEIR
ROOMS
TO
SLEEP.
THE
CORRIDOR
WAS
STARK
SILENT
AS
MY
DAD
CLIMBED
UP

TO
THE
THIRD
FLOOR.
'DAD,'
I
SAID.
WE
LOOKED
AT
EACH
OTHER
FOR
A
FEW
SECONDS.
HE
HAD
DECIDED
TO
COME,
AFTER
ALL.
I
COULDN'T
THINK
BEYOND
THAT
FACT.
I
DIDN'T
PUSH
HIM
FOR
A
REASON
EITHER.
HE
WAS
LIKE
ME;
WE
INDIAN
MEN

DON'T
DO
EMOTIONS
TOO
WELL.
'YOU
HAVEN'T
SLEPT?
AREN'T
YOU
GETTING
MARRIED
IN
A
FEW
HOURS?'
HE
ASKED
MILDLY.
I
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
HE
WALKED
TOWARDS
301.
I
STOPPED
HIM.
THE
LAST
THING
I
WANTED
HIM
TO
SEE
WAS
THE
DEBAUCHERY
OF
MY
MATERNAL
UNCLES.

'THERE
ARE
MORE
ROOMS
UPSTAIRS.
THIS
ONE
NEEDS
REPAIRS,'

I
SAID
AND
TOOK
HIM
TO
THE
NEXT
FLOOR.

I
LEFT
HIM
THERE
TO
CHANGE.

MY
MOTHER
WAS
IN
301,
TRYING
TO
CLEAN
IT
AS
FAST
AS
POSSIBLE.

'IT'S
FINE,
HE
IS
UPSTAIRS,'
I
SAID.

'WHAT'S
HE
DOING
HERE?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID,
'HE'S
COME
TO
CREATE
TROUBLE?'
'NO,'
I
SAID,
'HE'S
FINE.
HE
CAME
TO
ATTEND
MY
WEDDING.'
'NOW?
HE
HAS
COME
NOW?'
'IT'S
OK,
MOM,
YOU
GO
TO
BED.
I'LL
TELL
HIM
YOU
ARE
ASLEEP,'
I
SAID
I

KISSED
MY
MOTHER
ON
THE
CHEEK
AND
WENT
UP.
MY
FATHER
HAD
CHANGED
INTO
A
WHITE
KURTA
PAJAMA.
'THANK
YOU,
DAD,'
I
SAID.
'DON'T
BE
SILLY,'
HE
SAID.
'WHERE'S
YOUR
MOTHER?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'EVERYONE
SLEPT
EARLY.
WE
HAVE
TO
WAKE
UP
AT
FOUR,'
I
SAID.
'OH,
I'M
KEEPING
YOU
UP.
ARE
YOU
SLEEPING
HERE?'
I
NODDED
AND
SWITCHED
OFF
THE
LIGHTS.
I
LAY
DOWN
NEXT
TO
ONLY
HIM,
PROBABLY
FOR
THE
FIRST
TIME
IN

TWENTY
YEARS.

'I
LOVE
YOU,
SON,'
HE
SAID,
HIS
EYES
CLOSED.

I
CHOKED
UP.

THE
WORDS
MEANT
AS
MUCH
AS
TO
ME
AS
WHEN
ANANYA
HAD
SAID
THEM
THE
FIRST
TIME.

'I
LOVE
YOU
TOO,'
I
SAID,
AND
WONDERED
WHICH
LOVE
STORY
I
WAS

REALLY
CHASING
ANYWAY.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
62

I
HAD
TO
POUR
MUGFULS
OF
WATER
OVER
THEIR
FACE
TO
WAKE
UP
MY
RELATIVES.
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
A
SEVERE
HANGOVER.

I
HAD
SLEPT
ONLY
THREE
HOURS
AND
HAD
A
SPLITTING
HEADACHE.
WE
ASKED
ROOM
SERVICE
FOR
TRIPLE
STRENGTH
COFFEE.

'THIS
IS
INHUMAN,
HOW
CAN
THEY
GET
MARRIED
AT
THIS
TIME?'
MY
MOTHER
SAID.
SHE
OPENED
HER
SUITCASE
TO
TAKE
OUT
HER
NEW
SARI
FOR
THE
OCCASION.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
HAD
SENT
A
BUS
TO
OUR
HOTEL
FOR
THE
TWO-HUNDRED-METRE
JOURNEY.
I
WAITED
OUTSIDE
WHILE

EVERY
FEMALE
IN
MY
CLAN
BLOW-DRIED
HAIR
AND
APPLIED
LIPSTICK.
PANIC
CALLS
STARTED
AT
FIVE-FIFTEEN.
'THE
PRIESTS
HAD
LIT
THE
FIRE.
CHANTS
HAVE
BEGUN,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID.
'TWO
MORE
OLD
LADIES,
COMING
REAL
SOON,'
I
SAID
AND
HUNG
UP
THE
PHONE.
WE
REACHED
THE

MANDAPAM
AT
FIVE-THIRTY.
ANANYA'S
RELATIVES
HAD
ALREADY
TAKEN
THE
BEST
SEATS.
I
WADED
THROUGH
THEM
TO
SIT
IN
FRONT
OF
THE
PRIESTS.
'THE
MOTHER
SITS
HERE,'
THE
PRIEST
SAID,'
AND
IF
THE
FATHER
IS
NOT
THERE
THEN
A
SENIOR
MALE
RELATIVE...'
'MY
FATHER
IS

HERE,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
SPRANG
UP
FROM
THEIR
SEATS.
'WELCOME,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID,
'HOW
IS
YOUR
FEVER?'
'WHAT
FEVER?'
MY
FATHER
SAID
AS
HE
TOOK
HIS
PLACE.
THE
PRIESTS
CONTINUED
THEIR
FERVENT
CHANTS.
RAJJI
MAMA
PASSED
ON
SARIDON
STRIPS
AS
EVERYONE
WITH
A

HANGOVER
TOOK
A
PILL.
ANANYA'S
UNCLES
PASSED
COPIES
OF
THE
HINDU
TO
EACH
OTHER
AS
THEY
CONTINUED
TO
GATHER
KNOWLEDGE
THROUGH
THE
WEDDING.
'COME,
KRISH,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID
AFTER
FIVE
MINUTES
OF
PRAYERS.
'WHAT?'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YOU
HAVE
TO
CHANGE.
I
AM
SUPPOSED
TO
HELP
YOU'
HE
SAID
MATTER-OF-FACTLY.
I
HAD
WORN
A
NEW
RUST-COLORED
SILK
KURTA
PAJAMA
MY
MOTHER
HAD
BOUGHT
FOR
ME.
'THIS
DOESN'T
WORK?'
I
SAID.
ANANYA
GIGGLED.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SHOOK
HIS
HEAD
AND

STOOD
UP.
I
FOLLOWED
HIM
TO
THE
ROOM
NEXT
TO
THE
MAIN
HALL.
HE
OMINOUSLY
BOLTED
THE
DOOR.
'TAKE
OFF
YOUR
CLOTHES,'
HE
SAID.
'WHAT?'
I
SAID
AS
HE
FINGERED
MY
KURTA'S
HEM
TO
HELP
ME
TAKE
IT
OFF.
'I
WILL
DO
IT
MYSELF,'

I
SAID
HASTILY.
I
REMOVED
MY
KURTA.
'PAJAMA
ALSO,'
HE
SAID,
REMINDING
ME
OF
MY
COLLEGE
RAGGING
DAYS.
'IS
THIS
NECESSARY?'
I
SNAPPED,
WONDERING
IF
MY
STRIP-TEASE
WOULD
MAKE
THE
MANTRAS
MORE
EFFECTIVE.
HE
DIDN'T
RESPOND.
HIS
HANDS
WERE
ABOUT
TO
REACH
MY
PAJAMA

CORD
WHEN
I
DECIDED
TO
GET
RID
OF
MY
MODESTY
MYSELF.

I
HAD
WORN
A
WHITE
UNDERWEAR
WITH
MICKEY
MOUSES
PRANCING
ALL
OVER
IT.

‘WHY
ARE
YOU
WEARING...
THIS?’”

I
HAD
BROUGHT
A
PACK
OF
SIX
DISNEY-THEMED
UNDERWEAR.
CONSIDERING

I
WAS
GOING
TO
GET

MARRIED
AND
ANANYA
LIKE
CARTOON
CHARACTERS,
I
HAD
THOUGHT
SHE'D
FIND
IT
CUTE.
OF
COURSE,
I
COULDN'T
GIVE
THIS
REASON
TO
MY
FUTURE
FATHER-IN-LAW.
'HOW
WAS
I
TO
KNOW
IT
WILL
BE
ON
DISPLAY?'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
DAD
HAD
WORRIED
EXPRESSION.
'WHY,
WHAT'S
WRONG?'

I
SAID.
'YOU
HAVE
TO
WEAR
THIS
VESHTI,'
ANANYA'S
DAD
SAID
AND
GAVE
TO
ME
A
TRANSLUCENT
CREAM-COLORED
LUNGI.
IT
RESEMBLED
THE
BATHING
DRESS
WORN
BY
MANDAKINI
IN
RAM
TERI
GANGA
MAILI.
'I
HAVE
TO
WEAR
THIS?
HOW?'
I
HELD
IT
UP.
THE
EARLY

MORNING
RAYS
CAME
RIGHT
THROUGH
IT.
'COME,
I'LL
SHOW
YOU,'
ANANYA'S
DAD
SAID,
AND
HORROR
OF
HORRORS,
TUCKED
HALF
HIS

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
HAND
INTO
MY
UNDERWEAR.
I
WONDERED
IF
A
GROOM
CAN
SUE
HIS
FATHER-IN-LAW
FOR
MOLESTATION.
'PLEASE,
LET
ME
TRY
FIRST,'
I
SAID.
OF
COURSE,
OUT
OF
NERVOUSNESS
I
COULDN'T
FOCUS.
THE
VESHTI
KEPT
SLIPPING
AND
I
STOOD
THERE
IN
MY
MICKEY

MOUSE
UNDERWEAR,
ALMOST
IN
TEARS.
'ALLOW
ME,
IT
WILL
TAKE
ONLY
A
MINUTE,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
SAID
GENTLY,
LIKE
A
DOCTOR
CONVINCING
A
KID
FOR
AN
INJECTION.
I
CLOSED
MY
EYES.
THIS
IS
THE
ABSOLUTE
LAST,
LAST
HUMILIATION
I
WILL
GO
THROUGH
TO
GET
THE

LOVE
OF
MY
LIFE,
I
THOUGHT.

A
FEW
HOURS
MORE
AND
THIS
WILL
BE
OVER.
UNCLE'S
HAND
CAME
CLOSE
FOR
COMFORT
AS
HE
TRIED
TO
ENSURE
A
SNUG
FIT.
SOME
SAY
THIS
CEREMONY
IS
DESIGNED
TO
ENSURE
THAT
THE
GROOM
HAS
HIS
EQUIPMENT
IN

PLACE.
WELL,
HE
SURELY
DID
A
GOOD
JOB
FINDING
OUT.
'ARE
WE
DONE?'
I
SAID
AS
UNCLE
ADJUSTED
THE
FINAL
PLEATS.
I
SAW
MYSELF
IN
THE
MIRROR.
MY
FIRST
TOPLESS
MEETING
WITH
THE
WORLD
WAS
ABOUT
TO
TAKE
PLACE.
LITTLE
MICKEY
MOUSES
WERE
GRINNING

THROUGH
MY
TRANSLUCENT
VESHTI.
OK,
IT
IS
ONLY
FOR
A
LITTLE
WHILE
MORE,
I
TOLD
MYSELF.
'SEE,
NOW
ALL
YOUR
WEDDING
PICTURES
WILL
HAVE
MICKEY
MOUSE,'
UNCLE
SAID,
CONFIRMING
THAT
MY
HUMILIATION
WOULD
CONTINUE
FOR
THE
REST
OF
MY
LIFE.
'DO
YOU
WANT
TO

CHANGE
YOUR
UNDERWEAR?
YOU
CAN
WEAR
MINE.
SHOULD
WE
EXCHANGE?
HE
ASKED.
I
LOOKED
AT
HIM,
WONDERING
IF
HE
ACTUALLY
SAID
WHAT
HE
JUST
SAID.
'LET'S
GO.
I
HAVE
TO
GET
MARRIED.'
WE
CAME
OUTSIDE
AND
MY
COUSINS
BURST
INTO
LAUGHTER
WHEN
THEY
SAW

ME.
'MICKEY
MOUSE,'
MY
FIVE-YEAR-OLD
COUSIN
SCREAMED,
ENSURING
THAT
ALL
GUESTS
WOULD
NOW
FREELY
SPOT
IT.
ANANYA
SAT
IN
A
GORGEOUS
NINE-YARD
DARK
SILK
SARI.
SHE
WORE
DIAMOND
AND
GOLD
NECKLACES.
SHE
LOOKED
LIKE
AN
ACCESSIBLE
GODDESS.
'WHAT'S
WITH
THE
UNDERWEAR?'
SHE
WHISPERED
TO

ME.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

'I
BOUGHT
IT
FOR
YOU

....
I
MEAN
US,'
I
SAID.
'EXCUSE
ME?'
SHE
SAID
AS
THE
PRIEST
SCOLDED
US
FOR
TALKING
AND
ASKED
TO
FOCUS
ON
THE
PRAYERS.
SOMEONE
TIED
A
SCARF
OVER
MY
EYES
SO
I
COULDN'T
SEE
ANYTHING

FOR
TEN
MINUTES
AS
PRAYERS
CONTINUED.
IT
COULD
BE
THE
PUNISHMENT
FOR
TALKING
TO
THE
BRIDE
DURING
THE
WEDDING,
BUT
NO
ONE
EXPLAINED
WHY.
PRAYERS
CONTINUED
EVEN
AFTER
THE
SCARF
WAS
REMOVED.
'OK,
NOW
YOU
GO
FOR
KASHI
YATRA,'
THE
PRIEST
SAID
AFTER
AN

HOUR.
HE
GAVE
ME
AN
UMBRELLA
AND
A
COPY
OF
THE
GITA.
'WHAT'S
THAT?'
I
SAID.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
GAVE
ME
THE
DETAILS.
I
HAD
TO
STAND
UP
AND
ANNOUNCE
I
WASN'T
INTERESTED
IN
THE
WEDDING
AND
WAS
GOING
TO
KASHI,
OR
VARANASI,
TO
BECOME

A
SADHU.
I
DIDN'T
KNOW
WHY
THEY
GAVE
ME
AN
UMBRELLA,
BUT
I
HAD
TO
OPEN
IT
AND
PLACE
IT
OVER
MY
HEAD
AS
I
WALKED
OUT.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
WOULD
COME
AFTER
ME
AND
CONVINCE
ME
THAT
I
SHOULD
MARRY
HIS
DAUGHTER
INSTEAD.
I

DECIDED
TO
DO
AN
EXTRA
GOOD
JOB
WITH
THIS
CEREMONY,
ESPECIALLY
AS
I
HAD
MESSED
UP
WITH
THE
VESHTI.
I
STOOD
UP,
GAVE
ANANYA'S
PARENTS
A
DISGUSTED
LOOK
AND
SPRINTED
OUT
OF
THE
HALL.
ANANYA'S
FATHER
FOLLOWED
ME
BUT
I
WALKED
WAY
FASTER
THAN

HIM.

I
CAME
TO
THE
MAIN
ROAD
OUTSIDE
THE
HALL.

I
WALKED
ON
TO
THE
STREET.

AN
AUTI
SAW
ME
AND
CAME
NEAR
ME.

'WHERE,
WHERE?

HE
SAID,
HIS
ENGINE
STILL
SPUTTERING
IN
FIRST
GEAR.

'KASHI,'

I
SAID.
'KASHI
WHERE?'

HE
SAID.
'VARANASI,
IN

U.P.,'

I

SAID.

'CENTRAL
STATION?

SEVENTY

RUPEES,

SIR,'

HE

SAID.

I

TURNED

OVER

AND

SAW

ANANYA'S

DAD

TWENTY

METRES

BEHIND

ME.

WELL,

YOU

ONLY

GET

MARRIED

ONCE,

SO

I

DECIDED

TO

DO

THE

BEST

KASHI

YATRA

CEREMONY

EVER.

I

SAT

INSIDE

THE

AUTO.

THE

AUTO
SPED
OFF.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'HEY,'
ANANYA'S
DAD
SCREAMED
AT
FULL
VOLUME.
'WHO'S
THAT?'
THE
AUTO
DRIVER
SAID.
'NOTHING,'
I
SAID,
'STOP.'
I
CAME
OUT
OF
THE
AUTO,
ANANYA'S
FATHER
CAME
RUNNING
TO
ME.
'WHAT
ARE
YOU
DOING?'
HE
SAID,
PANTING
AFTER
THE
JOG.
'GOING
TO

KASHI,'
I
SAID
AND
SMILED,
'YOU
DIDN'T
TELL
ME
WHEN
TO
STOP.'
HE
GRABBED
MY
ARM
TIGHT.
'COME
INSIDE,'
HE
SAID,
DRAGGING
ME
TOWARDS
THE
MANDAPAM.
'HEY,
AREN'T
YOU
SUPPOSED
TO
CONVINCE
ME?'
I
SAID.
WE
HAD
SOME
MORE
TAMIL
CEREMONIES.
WE
HAD
MAALAI

MAATRAL,
WHICH
INVOLVED
AN
EXCHANGE
OF
GARLANDS
LIKE
THE
PUNJABI
JAIMALA.
HOWEVER,
ANANYA'S
RELATIVES
LIFTED
HER
HIGH,
MAKING
IT
DIFFICULT
FOR
ME
TO
REACH
HER
HEAD.
MY
OWN
RELATIVES
TOOK
A
WHILE
TO
REALISE
THAT
IT
WAS
ONLY
A
GAME
AND
ALMOST
GOT
INTO

A
FIGHT
WITH
ONE
OF
ANANYA'S
UNCLES.
AFTER
THAT,
WE
HAD
OONJAL
WHERE
ANANYA
AND
I
SAT
ON
A
SWING
AS
HER
RELATIVES
FED
US
SMALL
PIECES
OF
BANANA
SOAKED
IN
MILK.
FINALLY,
WE
CAME
BACK
TO
SIT
AROUND
THE
FIRE.
ANANYA
SAT
ON

HER
FATHER'S
LAP
FOR
THE
FINAL
KANYADAAN.
'YES,'
I
WHISPERED
TO
MYSELF,
'IT'S
ALMOST
OVER.'
ANANYA
AND
I
HELD
A
COCONUT
DIPPED
IN
TURMERIC.
ANANYA'S
MOTHER
POURED
WATER
OVER
IT.
ANANYA
COULDN'T
HOLD
BACK
HER
TEARS,
SITTING
IN
HER
FATHER'S
LAP.
I
TIED
A

GOLD
NECKLACE
WITH
A
FLAT
RECTANGULAR
PENDANT
AROUND
HER
NECK,
CALLED
THE
TAALI,
IN
THE
MANGALYADHARANAM.
THE
PRIESTS
TOLD
US
TO
STAND
UP
FOR
THE
SAPTAPATHI,
OR
THE
SEVEN
SACRED
STEPS.
ANANYA'S
SARI
AND
MY
VESHTI
WERE
CONNECTED
IN
A
KNOT
AND
HELD
HANDS.

I
HAD
FELT
HER
TOUCH
AFTER
MONTHS.

'ARE
YOU
OK?'

I
SAID
AS
SHE
SNIFFED.

'YOU
ARE
NOT
A
GIRL,
YOU
WON'T
UNDERSTAND,'

ANANYA
SAID,
AND

THUS
BEGAN

A
LIFETIME
OF

'YOU
WON'T
UNDERSTAND'
STATEMENTS

MARRIED

MEN
HAVE

TO
ENDURE

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
EVERYDAY.

I
PLACED
MY
FEET
UNDER
ANANYA'S
FEET
AND
HELPED
HER
TAKE
SEVEN
STEPS
AROUND
FIRE.

I
SLIPPED
SILVER
RINGS
ONTO
HER
TOES.
EVERYONE
CLAPPED
AS

I
CAME
BACK
UP.
'WHAT?'

I
SAID.
'IT'S
OVER,
NOW
GO
AROUND
THE
ROOM
AND

TAKE
BLESSINGS
FROM
EVERYONE,'
THE
HEAD
PRIEST
SAID.
I
LOOKED
AT
MR
SWAMI
AND
HIS
WIFE.
THEY
WERE
NO
LONGER
ANANYA'S
PARENTS.
THEY
WERE
MY
IN-LAWS.
I
HAD
DONE
IT.
THE
TWO
STATES
HAD
BECOME
ONE.
'DO
NAMASKARAM,'
THE
PRIEST
INSTRUCTED
US.
ANANYA
AND

I
LAY
FULLY
FLAT
ON
THE
GROUND
IN
FRONT
OF
EVERY
ELDER
RELATIVE
TO
BLESS
US.
IT
IS
THE
ONLY
WEDDING
RITUAL
IN
THE
WORLD
THAT
INVOLVES
A
WORKOUT.
'MY
BLESSINGS
ARE
ALWAYS
WITH
YOU,'
MY
FATHER
SAID
AS
HE
STOPPED
US
FROM
LYING

DOWN
FULLY
IN
FRONT
OF
HIM.
'GOD
BLESS
YOU,'
SHIPRA
MASI
SAID
AS
I
LAY
DOWN
IN
FRONT
OF
HER,
'BUT
I'M
SLEEPY.
LET'S
GO
BACK
TO
THE
HOTEL.'

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
63
'HE
HAS
A
SPEECH?'
I
SAID.
ANANYA
AND
I
SAT
ON
REGAL
CHAIRS
AT
THE
VENUE
OF
OUR
RECEPTION.
AT
LEAST
THIS
FUNCTION
FELT
FAMILIAR
TO
MY
RELATIVES
AS
THEY
SAW
FOOD
STALLS
IN
THE
OPEN
GARDEN.
WE
WERE
AT

THE
MADRAS
BOAT
CLUB.
COLOURED
LIGHTS
TWINED
AROUND
THE
TREES;
THE
LAKESIDE
VENUE
WAS
A
WELCOME
CHANGE
FROM
THE
UNPRONOUNCEABLE
SMOKE-FILLED
MANDAPAM.
'YEAH,
HE
WANTED
TO
DO
A
POWERPOINT,
BUT
I
STOPPED
HIM.
HE
EVEN
CAME
TO
THE
HOTEL
TO
SHOW
THE
SPEECH
TO

YOU.'
'WHEN?'
I
SAID,
'I
WAS
THERE
ONLY.'
'SLEEPING
ALL
DAY,'
ANANYA
SAID.
'HE
ONLY
HEARD
SNORES.'
'YOU
DIDN'T
SLEEP?'
I
SAID.
'NO
WAY,
WE
HAVE
SO
MANY
OUT
OF
TOWN
GUESTS.
I
HAVEN'T
SLEPT
FOR
THE
LAST
TWO
DAYS.'
'SO,
HOW
DO
YOU

MANAGE
TO
LOOK
SO
BEAUTIFUL?’
I
SAID.
SHE
BLUSHED.
IT
MATCHED
HER
CLOTHES.
SHE
WORE
A
PINK
LEHNGA
WITH
HEAVY
GOLD
AND
SILVER
EMBROIDERY
FOR
THE
EVENING,
A
SURPRISE
FOR
MY
RELATIVES
AND
A
BIT
OF
SHOCK
FOR
HER
OWN
AUNTS.
HOWEVER,
IT
WAS

TOO
LATE
AND
ANANYA
WAS
ALREADY
MARRIED

—
TO
ME.
SCREW
YOU,
PURE
HARISH,
I
THOUGHT,
THOUGH
I
CURSED
MYSELF
FOR
THINKING
OF
HIM
AT
ALL.

‘CONGRATULATIONS,’
SOME
RANDOM
PERSON
CAME
TO
THE
STAGE
TO
MEET
US
AND
WE
SMILED
FOR
PICTURES
FOR
THE

HUNDREDTH
TIME.
DINNER
DID
HAVE
NORTH
INDIAN
CHOICES,
BUT
THE
FLAVOURS
WERE
A
BIT
OFF.
'THEY'VE
MADE
GOBI
AALOO
WITH
COCONUT
OIL,'
MINTI
COMPLAINED.
'WE
ARE
ALL
GOING
BACK
TOMORROW,'
I
SAID.
'YOU'LL
HAVE
YOUR
PARANTHAS
SOON.
NOW
DON'T
MAKE
A
FACE
AND
EAT

ICE-CREAM.'
'WHEN
ARE
WE
CUTTING
THE
CAKE?'
ONE
OF
MY
YOUNGER
COUSINS
SAID,
POINTING
TO

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
THE
EGGLESS
CAKE
KEPT
IN
THE
MIDDLE
OF
THE
GARDEN.
NEXT
TO
THE
CAKE,
THERE
WAS
A
DAIS
WITH
CHAIRS
AROUND
IT.
A
WAITER
RANG
A
HAND-BELL,
ANNOUNCING
THE
SPEECH
AND
CAKE-CUTTING
CEREMONY.
RELATIVES
CAME
AROUND
AND
SAT
ON
CHAIRS.
THE

TAMILIANS
AND
PUNJABIS
LOOKED
AT
EACH
OTHER.
PEOPLE
HAD
NOT
COME
TO
ATTEND
THE
WEDDING,
THEY
HAD
COME
TO
A
LIVE
HUMAN
MUSEUM
OF
THE
OTHER
COMMUNITY.
'BUT
WHEN
WILL
THE
DJ
START?'
MY
COUSIN
SAID.
'PATIENCE,'
I
SAID.
ANANYA
AND
I
STOOD
NEXT

TO
THE
CAKE.
ANANYA
TOOK
THE
MIKE
TO
SPEAK
FIRST.
'THANK
YOU
EVERYONE
FOR
COMING
HERE.
I
AM
SO
GRATEFUL
TO
ALL
OF
YOU
THAT
YOU
DECIDED
TO
SHARE
OUR
HAPPINESS.
YES,
OURS
IS
QUITE
A
DIFFERENT
WEDDING,
AND
IT
HAS
TAKEN
US
A

WHILE
TO
GET
HERE,
MAKING
IT
ALL
THE
MORE
SPECIAL.
I'D
LIKE
MY
AMAZING
FATHER
TO
SHARE
A
FEW
WORDS
WITH
YOU.'
ANANAY
CLAPPED
AND
THE
REST
OF
THE
CROWD
APPLAUDED
AS
WELL.
MY
FATHER
AND
MOTHER
SAT
TOGETHER
WITH
A
SMILE
ON
THEIR

FACE.
AT
LEAST
FOR
TONIGHT,
THEY'D
DECIDED
TO
GET
ALONG.
'HELLO,
EVERYONE,'
ANANYA'S
DAD
SAID,
'I'D
LIKE
SOMEONE
FROM
THE
BOY'S
SIDE
LATER
TO
SAY
A
FEW
WORDS
AS
WELL.'
HE
LOOKED
AT
MY
FATHER.
MY
FATHER
FOLDED
HIS
HANDS
TO
SAY
NO.
'I'LL

TALK,'
RAJJI
MAMA
SAID
AND
RAISED
HIS
HAND.
HE
HAD
OBVIOUSLY
FOUND
THE
BOAT
CLUB
BAR.
'WELCOME
EVERYONE,'
ANANYA'S
FATHER
STARTED,
'I
NEVER
LIKED
GIVING
SPEECHES.
HOWEVER,
IN
THE
LAST
YEAR,
HELPED
BY
MY
SON-IN-LAW,
I'VE
GAINED
THE
CONFIDENCE
TO
TALK
IN
PUBLIC.'
EVERYONE

TURNED
TO
LOOK
AT
ME.
OK,
MAKING
OFFICE
PRESENTATIONS
IS
ONE
THING,
CONFESSIONALS
IN
FRONT
OF
YOUR
COMMUNITY
AUTE
ANOTHER.
I
HOPED
HE
KNEW
WHAT
HE
WAS
DOING.
'I
KNOW
THE
NUMBER
ONE
TOPIC
ALL
OF
YOU
HAVE
DISCUSSED
IN
THIS
PARTY
—
WHY

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
SWAMI
MARRYING
HIS
DAUGHTER
TO
A
NORTH
INDIAN
FELLOW?
I
KNOW
IT,
AS
WE
WOULD
HAVE
DONE
THE
SAME.
SNIGGERS
RAN
THROUGH
THE
CROWD.
'IN
FACT,
WHEN
ANANYA
FIRST
TOLD
US
ABOUT
KRISH,
WE
WERE
QUITE
UPSET.
AS
ALL
TAMILIANS
KNOW,

WE
ARE
SO
PROUD
OF
OUR
OWN
CULTURE.
WE
ALSO
THOUGHT
OUR
DAUGHTER
IS
ONE
IN
MILLION,
SHE
WILL
GET
THE
BEST
OF
BOYS
IN
OUR
OWN
COMMUNITY.
WHY
MUST
SHE
GO
FOR
A
PUNJABI
BOY?'
EVERYONE
WHO
WORE
A
KANJEEVARAM
SARI
INT
THE

CROWD
NODDED.
THE
PUNJABIS
KEPT
A
STRAIGHT
FACE.
'WE
DID
OUR
BEST
TO
DISCOURAGE
HER.
WE
DIDN'T
TRAT
KRISH
WELL
EVEN
THOUGH
HE
MOVED
TO
CHENNAI
FOR
US.
WE
EVEN
SHOWED
HER
TAMIL
BOYS.
BUT
YOU
KNOW
KIDS
OF
TODAY,
THEY
DO
WHAT
THEY

WANT
TO
DO.'
THIS
TIME
ALL
GAVE
UNDERSTANDING
NODS.
'SO
WHY
DO
PARENTS
OBJECT
TO
THIS?'
HE
SAID
AND
ADJUSTED
HIS
GLASSES.
'IT
IS
NOT
ONLY
ABOUT
ANOTHER
COMMUNITY.
IT
IS
THE
FACT
YOUR
DAUGHTER
HAS
FOUND
A
BOY
HERSELF.
WE
AS
PARENTS
FEEL

DISOBEYED,
LEFT
OUT
AND
DISAPPOINTED.
WE
BRING
OUR
CHILDREN
UP
FROM
BABIES
TO
ADULTS,
HOW
CAN
THEY
IGNORE
US
LIKE
THIS?
ALL
OUR
FRUSTRATION
COMES
OUT
IN
ANGER.
HOW
MUCH
WE
HATE
LOVE
MARRIAGES,
ISN'T
IT?'
ANANYA'S
AUNTS
SMILED.
'BUT
WE
FORGET
THAT
THIS

HAS
HAPPENED
BECAUSE
YOUR
CHILD
HAD
LOVE
TO
GIVE
TO
SOMEONE
IN
THIS
WORLD.
IS
THAT
SUCH
A
BAD
THING?
WHERE
DID
THE
CHILD
LEARN
TO
LOVE?
FROM
US,
AFTER
ALL,
THE
PERSON
THEY
LOVED
FIRST
IS
YOU.'
ANANYA
CLASPED
MY
ARM
AND
CLENCHED

IT
TIGHT.
THE
CROWD
LISTEND
WITH
FULL
ATTENTION.
'ACTUALLY,
THE
CHOICE
IS
SIMPLE.
WHEN
YOUR
CHILD
DECIDED
TO
LOVE
A
NEW
PERSON,
YOU
CAN
EITHER
SEE
IT
AS
A
CHANCE
TO
HATE
SOME
PEOPLE
—
THE
PERSON
THEY
CHOOSE
AND
THEIR
FAMILIES.
WHICH
IS

WHAT
WE
DID
FOR
A
WHILE.
HOWEVER,
YOU
CAN
ALSO
SEE
IT
AS
A
CHANCE
TO
LOVE
SOME
MORE
PEOPLE.
AND
SINCE
WHEN
DID
LOVING
MORE
PEOPLE

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
BECOME
A
BAD
THING?’
HE
PAUSED
TO
HAVE
A
GLASS
OF
WATER
AND
CONTINUED.
‘YES,
THE
TAMILIAN
IN
ME
IS
A
LITTLE
DISAPPOINTED.
BUT
THE
INDIAN
IN
ME
IS
QUITE
HAPPY.
AND
MORE
THEN
ANYTHING,
THE
HUMAN
BEING
IN
ME
IS

HAPPY.
AFTER
ALL,
WE'VE
DECIDED
TO
USE
THIS
OPPORTUNITY
TO
CREATE
MORE
LOVED
ONES
FOR
OURSELVES.'
WHEN
HE
KEPT
THE
MIKE
DOWN,
ANANYA
HUGGED
HIM
HARD.
THE
CROWD
BURST
INTO
APPLAUSE.
ANANYA
AND
I
CUT
THE
CAKE
THROUGH
THE
RESOUNDING
CLAPS.
WE
FED
EACH

OTHER
AND
OUR
RESPECTIVE
IN-LAWS
A
PIECE.
THE
CAMERAMAN
GATHERED
BOTH
SETS
OF
PARENTS
FOR
A
PICTURE.
'ANANYA,
SEE,
BOTH
OUR
PARENTS.
THEY
ARE
SMILING,'
I
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
STOOD
UP
AND
CAME
TO
THE
MIKE
FOR
HIS
SPEECH.
'STOP
MINTI'S
DADDY,
HE
HAS

HAD
SIX
PEGS,'
KAMLA
AUNTY
SAID.
RAJJI
MAMA
TOOK
THE
MIKE
AND
RAISED
HIS
HANDS.
'LADIES
AND
GENTLEMAN,'
HE
SAID.
I
WENT
UP
TO
HIM.
'RAJJI
MAMA,
ENOUGH.
YOU
ARE
TOO
COOL
TO
MAKE
BORING
SPEECHES,'
I
WHISPERED
IN
HIS
EAR.
'REALLY?
WE
SHOULD

ANSWER
THEM,
NO?’
HE
SAID.
‘IT’S
NOT
A
COMPETITION,’
I
SAID.
HE
SAID
INTO
THE
MIKE,
‘LADIES
AND
GENTLEMEN
OF
TAMIL
NADU,
THANK
YOU
VERY
MUCH.
NOW
WE
INVITE
YOU
TO
SOME
PUNJABI-STYLE
DANCING
WITH
THE
DJ
AT
THE
BACKSIDE.’
MY
COUSINS
FLEW
OFF

THEIR
CHAIRS
AND
SURGED
TOWARDS
THE
DANCE
FLOOR.
THE
SONG
COLLECTION
WAS
A
MIXTURE
OF
TAMIL
AND
HINDI
FILM
MUSIC.
THEY
HAD
ONE
PUNJABI
MUSIC
CD,
WHICH
RAJJI
MAMA
HAD
INSTRUCTED
TO
PLAY
IN
A
LOOP.
MY
FAMILY
DOMINATED
THE
DANCE
FLOOR,
BUT
ANANYA

URGED
HER
AUNTS
AND
UNCLES
TO
JOIN
IN
AS
WELL.

I
GUESS
THEY
WERE
MY
FAMILY
TOO
NOW.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
RAJJI
MAMA
AVOIDED
A
BAD
FALL
WHILE
TRYING
A
PARTICULARLY
DIFFICULT
BHANGRA-BREAK
DANCE
FUSION
STEP
TO
IMPRESS
MY
NEW
RELATIVES.
MY
COUSINS
PUSHED
ME
AND
ANANYA
TOGETHER
FOR
A
CLOSE
DANCE.
I
HELD
ANANYA
TO
ME
AS
WE
MOVED
ON
THE

DANCE
FLOOR.
'ANANYA,'
I
WHISPERED
IN
HER
EAR.
'WHAT?'
SHE
SAID
SOFTLY.
'I
LOVE
YOU
AND
YOUR
FATHER
AND
YOUR
MOTHER
AND
YOUR
BROTHER
AND
YOUR
RELATIVES,'
I
SAID.
'I
LOVE
YOU
AND
YOUR
CLAN,
TOO,'
SHE
SAID.
WE
KISSED
AS
TAMILS
AND
PUNJABIS

DANCED
AROUND
US.
'SO,
THE
SELF-IMPOSED
EXILE
IS
OVER
NOW?
YOU
SAID
WE'LL
ONLY
DO
IT
WHEN
WE
CROSS
THE
FINISH
LINE,'
I
SAID.
'IS
THAT
ALL
YOU
MEN
THINK
ABOUT?'
SHE
SAID.
'ONLY
FOR
THE
SAKE
OF
UNITING
THE
NATION,'
I
SAID.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM

EPILOGUE

A
COUPLE
OF
YEARS
LATER
'DO

I
HAVE
TO
BE
HERE?'

I
ASKED
ANANYA
WHO
LAY
IN
THE
DELIVERY
ROOM.

A
CURTAIN
SPREAD
MID-WAY
ACROSS
THE
BED
SEPARATED
HER
LOWER
AND
UPPER
BODY.

THE
DOCTORS
HAD
GIVEN
HER
A
HALF-BODY

ANESTHETIC,
WHICH
ENABLED
HER
TO
STAY
AWAKE
DURING
C-SECTION.

A
TEAM
OF
SPECIALISTS
HID
BEHIND
THE
CURTAIN
CUTTING
UP
HER
STOMACH.

'HE
HAS
A
KNIFE,'
I
SAID,
PEEPING
AT
THE
DOCTORS.

MY
HEAD
FELT
DIZZY.
'DON'T
FREAK
ME
OUT.
TALK
ABOUT
SOMETHING
ELSE,'
SHE

SAID.
'HOW'S
THE
BOOK
GOING?'
'WELL,
THE
FIFTH
PUBLISHER
REJECTED
IT
YESTERDAY,'
I
SAID
AND
STOOD
UP
AGAIN
TO
TAKE
A
PEEK.
'AT
LEAST
I
CAN
GO
TO
THE
SIXTH
ONE
NOW
...
WOW,
THERE
IS
BLOOD.'
'SIT
DOWN
IF
YOU
CAN'T
HANDLE
THE

SIGHT,
AND
STOP
BEING
SO
SCARED.
I
CAN'T
FEEL
A
THING
BECAUSE
OF
THE
EPIDURAL,'
SHE
SAID.
THE
DOCTOR
HAD
RECOMMENDED
A
CAESARIAN
WITHOUT
GENERAL
ANESTHESIA.
'IF
ONLY
YOU
COULD
SEE.'
I
SAID,
'WOW,
I
SEE
A
LEG.
IT'S
LIKE
ALIENS
3.'
'SHUT
UP,'

SHE
SAID.
'HEY,
IT'S
A
BOY,'
I
SAID.
'DOES
HE
LOOK
LIKE
ME?'
'I
DON'T
KNOW.
I
HAVEN'T
SEEN
THE
FACE
YET.
I'VE
ONLY
SEEN
THE
YOU-KNOW-WHAT.'
THE
DOCTOR
TOOK
OUT
THE
WHOLE
BABY.
'THANK
YOU,
DOCTOR,
THANK
YOU
SO
MUCH,'
I
SAID
EMOTIONALLY

AND
MOVED
TO
SHAKE
HIS
HAND.
'WAIT,'
THE
DOCTOR
SAID
THROUGH
HIS
MASKED
FACE.
'WHAT?'
ANANYA
SAID.
'I
DON'T
KNOW,'
SAID.
'OH
WAIT,
THERE'S
ANOTHER
LEG.
WOW,
THERE'S
ANOTHER
BOY.'
'TWINS?'
SHE
SAID
IN
DISBELIEF,
LOOKING
READY
TO
FAINT.

DX
@
WWW.DESIBBRG.COM
'YES,'
THE
DOCTOR
SAID.
'CONGRATULATIONS.'
THE
NURSE
CLEANED
UP
THE
TWO
BABIES
AND
GAVE
THEM
TO
ME.
'BE
CAREFUL,'
SHE
SAID
AS
I
TOOK
ONE
IN
EACH
ARM.
'YOU
ARE
FROM
TWO
DIFFERENT
STATES,
RIGHT?
SO,
WHAT
WILL
BE
THEIR
STATE?'

THE
NURSE
SAID
AND
CHUCKLED.
'THEY'LL
BE
FROM
A
STATE
CALLED
INDIA,'
I
SAID.
THE
END