

“The hand that rocks the cradle also carries a machine gun.”

GENOME VALLEY

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- Agni, Leader of the Valkyries

The year was 2920 A.D. The ever graceful, life-sustaining and highly polluted Earth was still recovering from the devastation caused by The Great War, which was fought 400 years ago by men from different nations of the world, who claimed to be the children of God. This Great War proved to be a black hole that reversed the steadily advancing self-destructive quest of the human race towards Singularity, pushing mankind back to the stone ages, thereby postponing progress (temporarily) and also killing billions of innocent children, women and soldiers of various

nations and incapacitating a million more with the assistance of nuclear and bio weapons. As a result, the world's population dropped, almost overnight.

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The Brotherhood - an association of veterans from the Great War took control of the countries formerly known as India and China and called themselves the South Asian Union. Their backward attitudes and iron hand of control took people back to the stone ages. Under their reign, men ruled over everything and women were just dispensable tools in men's service. For 400 years they ruled over the union but not in their wildest imagination did they foresee the birth of the fire storm called Ruthra.

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Tommy Yeung woke up half-naked in a dull and dingy room which smelled of sewage and chlorine. He was seated on a chair with his hands and legs tied together and a linen cloth tied around his mouth.

After recovering from the initial shock, his logical mind began to look around the room for any sharp objects. He then paused for a moment. Maybe it was a dream? Or could it be the after effects of his hangover? He couldn't pinch himself, but he could try to push himself over from the chair and then maybe he would wake up on his comfortable single roomed apartment floor. So, he took a chance and tipped himself over. A loud thud reverberated throughout the vacant room as his face slammed into the ground. Ouch! It hurt. He was in deep shit!

A few minutes later, the door sprang open and seven girls dressed in black, with a variety of weapons in hand entered. They picked him up and made him sit upright. He yelled at them in Chinese and one of the girls- a slightly chubby, fair skinned girl with a high ponytail and the face of a baby, jarringly slapped him. He quit his tantrums instantaneously and gawked at her like a kid that just got smacked by his mommy.

Then, rage blackened out his momentary shock. What the ? A girl, the weaker sex had awakened the sleeping giant of manly ego within him. He

grit his teeth and glared at her, then involuntarily took a closer look at their weapons. Though they were the weaker sex, they also seemed deadly and one of them had the audacity to slap him - a policeman. *Be Patient Sir! some other time.*

Another darker yet equally, hot girl with a well toned body, sat on a chair placed before him. Her frizzy black hair hung loosely around her neck. "Obviously you must be wondering why you're here." she asked. "Well! We need you to call Zhang and tell him that you have found some women for his business and ask him where you can bring them."

Tommy 's thin eyebrows furrowed, "What? Who do you think you are? I am a policeman! Untie me and tell me where the girls are?"

The woman chuckled and turned her gaze towards her companions. The baby-faced girl who slapped him, said "We are in charge here! Now do as she says."

Tommy swallowed. His face white with fear. "I can't call him. He'll kill me if he knows that I set him up." he said.

The muscular woman sneered, as she said, "And you think we won't?" "You don't have a choice. Call him...now"

His lips trembled as he said, "All right, all right....I'll call".

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It was a silent night. The full moon illuminated the black sky which was scattered with tufts of greyish clouds. A cold wind blew across the modest settlement of warriors turned monks, which was located in old Assam between a village and a wild forest. The monks who had once been fierce warriors, had pledged never to resort to violence again. Karmegan was one such monk, who was resourceful and a wanderer like the clouds, as his name suggested. It was an hour past midnight. He was in deep meditation, when the sound of a crying baby disturbed his astral experience. His senses were jolted back into the physical world, so he took out his torch and proceeded into the

wilderness towards where the sound came from.

He tread upon bushes, overgrown weeds and wild grass, heading towards the sound of the crying baby. His eyes widened and his heartbeat rose violently at the sight of what he saw. There was a baby, completely naked, wrapped in a sheet of paper and left there in the harsh cold.

"What wrong did we do, Father? Why do they hate us so much?", a tender voice asked from behind him.

He recognized the voice at once; It was that of a girl he had rescued from certain death, from the hands of her own parents, for the crime of being born a girl. Since then he had raised and loved her as his own daughter and named her Ruthra.

What's wrong...? Sweetheart! You were both born as girls, the gravest of all sins, in this world run by men. He thought to himself as he brushed her hair gently. Then said "You've done nothing wrong, Come let's go home."

She walked along with him, trying to console the crying baby, unmindful of the tears running down her own cheeks.

Karmegan tried to find the whereabouts of the baby but failed, but by then Ruthra had grown attached to the baby and called her as her own sister.

"Father, we shall call her Thara. As we found her under the stars" she said one morning with a smile. There was a strong bond between the two girls. Having no other alternative he accepted the baby into his humble hut and simple life.

Unfortunately, over the course of the next few months, more and more female babies were found left in the wilderness of the forest. The villagers' guilt conscience didn't let them to suffocate and smother their girl babies. The falling economy and poverty were given as reasons for deserting the babies. For if they had the money they would have killed the unborn child in the womb of the mother itself, as scientific advancements had now made it possible to find the sex of the unborn child, thereby saving themselves of the hassles involved in disposal after the baby was born. So every family had a

male child and those that didn't have one were thought to be cursed.

But to a monk, the sex of a life or the benefits that it brought were immaterial. So with the help of his fellow monks he built a home for these deserted girls where they learned and grew in the wisdom and arts of self-defense and self-discipline that the monks had learnt.

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Ruthra grew up with Thara and other girls like her. Later when she grew up, she had come to know the real reason she and the other girls had been abandoned, the first spark lit up inside her.

One fine day, as a teenager she asked Karmegan, "Father if they don't want daughters then who will carry their sons?"

Karmegan only smiled in reply.

In a matter of the next twenty years she grew into an intelligent and vibrant young girl embracing both the warrior and the saint in Karmegan

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Girls became a rare commodity in the outside world. All praise was due to the endless list of reasons given by biological parents, the fathers especially, for girls' lack of use. The number of men in the world outweighed women in an unprecedented manner. Many of men remained bachelors as they were unable to find a woman who would meet their expectations as wife, while others resorted to molestation, gang rape and other sex related violence. They competed for women and became jealous of others who were able to find one.

If gems and diamonds were highly valued, and persons having them were considered rich before the Great War, it was women who replaced those gems and diamonds after The War.

Zhang was a heartless monster, and a shrewd businessman who wanted to make money out of every opportunity. His greed for money was so much more than his love for life.

"Go away you petty fool! do not bother me with trading gems, for I've found

a commodity that would give more profit than those lifeless beauties", he told a businessman who wanted him to smuggle a rare type of diamond from the ports of Cochin.

* * *

The sun called it a day and was in the process of sinking into the distant, purple and orange horizon when Ruthra who was sharpening Karmegan's favorite sword suddenly heard a loud thud followed by the rattling sound of steel. She sprang up from her seat and ran to the balcony to see what it was. What she saw made her stomach churn. There was a fleet of cars and fierce looking men standing inside their campus, each of them holding an Uzi, submachine gun in their hands.

A man, presumably the leader, got down from his Jeep. He was in his late thirties, tall and dressed in brown pants and leather coat which was unbuttoned to reveal his white tank top.

"Good evening, ladies," he said with a grin, looking at all the startled young girls. "I'm Zhang. I've come here with an offer. I know how hard it is to be rejected and to live a life without money and a real family. Today you have one lucky chance to change your fate. If you come with me you'll get a lot of money and proper care and maybe even get married into a rich family, which will not be possible if you continue to live in this 'home' with this wretched and dying breed of monks. Together we can help each other."

The silence that followed his speech was thick and hung heavily in the air.

He paused and then raised his Beretta Silver, shotgun and said "On the other hand if you are not cooperative, you leave me with no choice"

Karmegan and the other monks had gathered to form a wall in front of the businessman and his thugs who were making this obscene and immoral proposal to their daughters.

"You, worthless low life, leave my compound now or I will have to call the police", Karmegan said.

The businessman chuckled and said, "It was the police who gave me your address", and then without warning he fired at the old monk.

The bullet sliced the saint's white robe, cutting through his wrinkled and worn-out skin and exiting through his back, dyeing it a crimson red. The great warrior's body was hurled through the air from the impact and he fell several feet backwards, sprawled across the grass that he had pruned and maintained. He looked at the vast sky for a few seconds, extended his hand as though trying to touch it and then fell dead.

Ruthra's big eyes glistening with tears and rage were fixated on her father's body - the only man she had ever respected. She stood there gripping the rail of the balcony, frozen like a statue, unable to move.

"Throw them all in!", Zhang instructed his men. The other monks advanced towards the scavengers, knowing that they were heading towards their deaths, for they were taught never to flinch in a battlefield. Some of Ruthra's sisters valiantly fought back, thanks to the training that the monks had given them. Some, ran away in fear, as panic set in and some of them were shot, not to kill, for they were invaluable stock, but just below the knees, to temporarily incapacitate them. The monks though were not spared.

Ruthra wanted to set them ablaze. But she needed to be alive for that, armed with just a sword she would be easy prey for those jackals. So she didn't fight. But instead ran to save the other girls from those predators. She could only rescue six of her sisters along with Thara who was sleeping peacefully amidst all the ruckus. Then they retreated through the back gate of their home. It took two weeks for Ruthra and her sisters to corner Tommy Yeung, the cop who had helped the bastard.

* * *

Current day,

Ruthra, and her girls disguised themselves as fresh meat that had been newly captured, and got into the pickup truck along with Tommy. They

were headed to Zhang's warehouse – a place where the samples were stored, tested and shipped according to the requirements of the clients.

Four, two-legged watch dogs dressed in military style uniforms stood at the mouth of the warehouse. One of them stopped the pickup truck and peered in.

“Hey man!” said Tommy nervously.

The dog sniffed and jerked his head upwards as a gesture in response to him. “Chal” the guard grunted at the driver.

Though in the strict sense it was a warehouse, the place was actually like a fortress, infested with numerous two-legged and four-legged watch dogs.

Ruthra had a plan clearly mapped out in her head. Still, she cautiously surveyed the area like a rat, searching for all possible exits before making a move.

The pickup stopped. A stout woman in her mid forties opened the car and ushered them into the warehouse.

They walked past square chambers divided by glass walls, each occupied by girls of all ages, colours and sizes. The life in them was crushed, leaving them as mere walking dead.

Ruthra searched for her sisters in those depressing chambers in hopes of finding them but they were nowhere to be found.

Finally, the stout woman left them in a concrete room, the walls of which were stained with the blood of others like her.

After a few moments, Zhang entered the room leaving his personal bodyguard outside the door. He took his time and carefully observed what he thought was the newly acquired stock.

“What's your name darling?” he asked.

Ruthra moved swiftly like a cat, behind the businessman's back and put down the latch of the already closed door. The businessman was unaware that he was now locked inside the room with seven dangerous girls.

"My sister named me Thara but my friends call me by a different name."

Ruthra's eyebrows furrowed as her big, round eyes narrowed themselves into twin laser beams that glowed with hatred.

"I like Thara but what is it that your friends call you?" he asked

Thara's cheeks flushed. "My friends call me --", before she could complete her sentence, Ruthra pounced on him like cats in the wild do, making him lose balance and crash land on the hard floor. When he opened his eyes after the shock of the impact, she repeatedly punched his ugly, detestable nose, oblivious of the blood that oozed off it. Thara then stuffed his mouth with a dirty rag and said with a grin "They call me Black widow". Tommy stood there gawking at the scene unfolding before his eyes. Girls were supposed to be the weaker sex. Nobody, in their wildest dreams thought that they could assault a man like that.

Thara took a dagger from Tommy's socks which she had hidden there earlier. And placed it against Zhang's throat.

Ruthra panting heavily asked, "Where are the girls that you kidnapped from Karmegan's home?"

His lips curled, as he growled. "Tommy what's all this?"
Ruthra punched him again. "Answer me!"

"Is this all for them? You think you can save them from their fate?", he grunted.

"I don't know about theirs but for sure I know about yours" Ruthra said.

"You idiots! you're all gonna die. You think you can walk into my place and get out alive?"

Ruthra said, “Answer me now or else....”

Thara drew the dagger along his windpipe, the razor sharp shiny steel cut through his skin making a superficial cut. A few of drops of blood escaped as he wailed in agony.

“All right, all right... I’ll tell you. Look there is a guy named Adolf Nash; he said he needed a few girls to conduct a secret experiment. And so he took all the 25 girls from your camp with him.”

Ruthra’s air of authority dissipated and her posture stiffened as she said, “You swine! where are they now?”

“They are being held in a laboratory at Golaghat. But how do you intend to go there? My boys will have you dead before that.” he sneered.

"You can see for yourself how I escape", she said as she pulled him up. “Besides I can see that you have a lot of guns here”.

Thara’s eyes glowed, her bow-shaped lips parted ways and revealed her pearl white teeth. "I've always loved guns", she said.

Ruthra opened the door while Thara stuffed his mouth again with the dirty rag. “The boss wants you”, she said to the guard. He was dead before he knew what hit him.

Thara opened up all the cages in which the captive girls were held. The girls overjoyed at their newfound freedom thanked and joined their new sisters as they moved towards the exit. They then entered the room where the stock of guns and ammunition were stored.

Ruthra said to the girls, “Now is your chance to pay them back, make sure that you pay them back well”

The girls unleashed the beast that lurked within the dark abyss of their troubled souls, putting their tormentors into a deep slumber from which they would never wake up.

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The fleet of vans carrying Ruthra, her sisters and the girls whom they rescued at the warehouse, stopped approximately 500 meters away from the laboratory.

"The choice is yours" Ruthra told the girls, "To stand with us and fight for what is right or to re-join the society that did this to us"

There was a moment's silence, then a young, thin girl with bruises on her pale face said, "Count me in". Slowly, every girl joined them.

"Me and my sisters will go in first. You all come through the entrance at the back, after I give my signal" Ruthra said to the remaining girls.

"What is the signal?" the young, thin girl asked.

She clenched her jaws and said "There will be fire."

She led her sisters through the back of the tall compound wall. They easily infiltrated the outer perimeter of the eastern wing which was only lightly guarded. Then they climbed up the pipelines which ran from the basement to the terrace. It was a calculated risk comparatively safer than running into a hoard of guards. After a few minutes of intense searching, Ruthra found Dr.Nash's room. He was seated on a brown high backed cushion chair staring at the white computer screen in front of him.

Ruthra opened the balcony door of his office and silently slipped into his room like the wind, while her sisters waited at the end of the balcony for her signal. Once she got behind him, she stretched her elbow around his neck and pulled his head to her chin - The rear naked choke.

The scientist struggled to breathe, his eyes got watery as he tried to push her away but failed. Ruthra whistled. The other girls leapt into the room pointing their guns at the scientist and securing the door.

She said to him, "You'll die if you scream" and then she let her grip loosen a

bit.

"Where are the girls Zhang sent you?" she asked.

Dr. Nash gasped and deeply inhaled. He looked in plain horror at the valiant valkyries pointing guns at him.

"Don't kill me they are at the 9th floor" he gasped.

"Zhang said that you wanted them for a science experiment. What are you going to do to them?"

"I...I... can't tell you that..." He stammered.

Ruthra stepped forward and forced her dagger into his thigh. "Can you tell me now?" she asked.

He screamed in pain as blood oozed onto his grey pants.

"Arrghh... Okay, okay please don't hurt me. I'll tell you." he said breathing heavily.

"It's for **Project - Genome Valley**. The age old practice of killing female infants by our union's citizens; along with the numerous gender based abortions, have resulted in a sharp decline in the population of women. A recent population survey, taken by The Brotherhood has found that if this trend continues, the ratio of males to females will increase ten-fold. With the already rising number of sex-related crimes, they predict that in the future men may resort to more violent and terrorizing acts to get and protect the women they desire, thereby resulting in a lot of internal wars among the different sects, causing severe social distress. Numerous men will die which will threaten the strength of our army in the future. The Brotherhood, after hearing about my success with genetically engineered chimpanzees, approached me and asked if I could design female babies...."

"and...?" Ruthra asked, the fire growing inside her.

“I was eager to take my research to the next level, and the pay was good, so I agreed.”

She became a glowing ball of fire. These men never cared for female children; they cast them into the wild, leaving them to die, some fathers even heartlessly murdered their own babies while others aborted the foetus after determining the gender. Over the centuries they had killed millions of girl children and had brought this situation on themselves and even now instead of trying to take responsibility for their cruel actions, they were trying to find a solution by playing God. It was their foolish decision to interfere with Nature that had resulted in this situation and now they were doing the same thing again.

“What's happened to my sisters?” she asked.

“They are alive, we have artificially impregnated thirteen of them. The rest of the subjects were not in the right window of their menstrual cycle. The fetuses are grown in labs and, genetically modified to grow up as females. Along with that, specific genetic traits are installed in them. These babies can rewrite our evolution pattern. If this experiment succeeds then it will be enforced throughout the Union.” he gasped in pain.

“And your name will be engraved in the books of this male dominant authoritarian world, right?” she snarled at him.

Dr.Nash nodded nervously. She caught him by his collar and dragged him along with her.

She and her sisters crouched up the staircase killing every guard that attempted to stop them. Upon reaching the main door at the 9th floor, she kicked it open and there were her sisters, all put into a drugged state in order to keep them restrained. After gathering everyone to safety she set fire to the research lab, thereby signaling the other girls to enter. The girls broke in through the back entrance and invaded the lab. Even the undying fires of Hell were no match for the women in that building, for they were rabid with anger and burning with hatred .The war against The Brotherhood had begun.

Ruthra then left the campus along with the other girls and Dr.Nash. They took the fleet of vans and drove along the road leaving scores of men dead and wounded and wrecking havoc upon the lab.

"What's happened to Tommy and Zhang ", Dr.Nash asked

"Shouldn't you be more concerned about what will happen to you?", Thara asked.

"What will happen to me?", he asked anxiously.

Thara grinned and said "The same thing that happened to them".

She then turned to Ruthra and asked "Where to, Agni?"

Ruthra looked at her, paused for a moment and then said "Into the woods".

They all went back to the wild forest, the same place where they were all left to die when they were infants or toddlers. But this time not as helpless orphans rather, as warriors, prepared to fight the war for their rights.

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